SLICED BREAD MAGAZINE

A collection of student art and writing at the University of Chicago
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This past year, Nick Barnes, a 3rd year and long standing member of Sliced Bread, passed away. Nick joined Sliced Bread during fall quarter of his first year and was an important contributor to staff meetings and events for the entirety of his time on campus. There’s no good way to say goodbye to someone who left too early, and even for a group of people so immersed in the world of words, words fail to express what Nick meant to this magazine and to it’s members. All the same, it is with words that we try to make sense of Nick’s passing and recall the significance of his life.

“Nick was a valued member of the Sliced Bread staff. He will be missed for his intelligent and often incisive wit. Here’s to the tall guy with nice hair who never stopped talking. What a mensch!”
-Jimmy Garcia, Class of 2014
DEAR READERS,

The phrase that serves as our publication’s namesake (“The best thing since…”) is a tall order to live up to, but parallels our magazine’s lofty literary and artistic aspirations (we are joking, a little bit). From the beginning, Sliced Bread has provided a space for University of Chicago students to share their creative work, ranging from short stories and poems to visual art in all its incarnations. As the oldest literary magazine on campus we have had the opportunity to grow and evolve with the years, something we are excited to continue to do in the coming school year as well. A defining feature of our organization has always been our openness to change. Since our founding, we’ve experimented with different events, hosting Haiku competitions and poetry performances, often in collaboration with other student organizations. We’ve even changed the physical size of the magazine, presenting you with a lovely, travel sized version of your favorite pieces of bread. In the coming year, we are looking forward to continuing our evolution with an increased internet presence and a more extensive calendar of events on campus. This year, our publication is released alongside the arrival of new students on our campus, anticipating the return of many of our authors. How else should one start the year, except with lovely fresh bread, stories that breath, and poems that remind us of ‘the strength and pain of being young’? In these pages we hope to show our new fellow students the what and the why behind studying at University of Chicago, and to remind returning students of the beauty they themselves have wrought.
We would like to thank our fantastic staff for their work this year. Inevitably, the wonderful group of people that constitute our staff changes annually, just as our events and magazine dimensions change over time. This issue is a result of their enthusiasm for Sliced Bread (and also bread, because what’s a meeting without snacks?) as well as their dedication to a rigorous review process for the many submissions we receive. We discuss all of the student submissions we receive and vote on each one to select which pieces we will print. This democratic process ensures that every staff member has a voice and that we are confident in the high quality of the pieces we choose to print. We would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support we have received from Student Government; the advice and support of our advisor, Derek Bundy; and of course, our contributors, without whom we would have a magazine full of blank pages. Finally, we would like to especially thank our graduating seniors, Michael Coffer, Gabe Friedman, Jimmy Garcia, Julia Harper, Chris Kubik, and Alison Thumel, and wish them the best of luck in all of their future endeavours. We hope you enjoy the eighth issue of Sliced Bread, the tastiest yet.
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THE WASH
HANNAH O’GRADY

Pull in your clothes, Chicago.
Draw in the line, out to dry.
Not for the dust
The mills cover their mouths when they cough, now.
Not for the crooks
They don’t want your tablecloths or pantyhose.
Nor for the stray baseballs
That gather on your roof,
Where the marble-maze ends.
But everything is dry now, after all,
And a grey sky only pledges rain.
Bitter curled beneath the doormat but sweet stuck to the bottoms of our feet.

We spend our Sundays asunder:
octogenarians rolling cigarettes upon lace. It’s all maple and honey and silken smoke rings. Don’t you see? When we snuff out the stars, we are the oldest ones on earth. You be the mantelpiece and I’ll be the candlelight. It’s not a mask if you can still meet my eyes.

BALACLAVA
ALISON THUMEL

Bitter curled beneath the doormat but sweet stuck to the bottoms of our feet.

We spend our Sundays asunder:
octogenarians rolling cigarettes upon lace. It’s all maple and honey and silken smoke rings. Don’t you see? When we snuff out the stars, we are the oldest ones on earth. You be the mantelpiece and I’ll be the candlelight. It’s not a mask if you can still meet my eyes.
I.
I took the night bus home, seeking
a husband with a hundred head cattle,
good arms, and a five o’clock
shadow which lengthens in fall.
Good arms will build your children
a house and cleave the earth
to make you a grave. Good arms
don’t need you when you are gone,
or if you start scolding your children
by all the wrong names, or if
you get caught with the carpenter,
bent over the saw. Good arms
gather everything up in the night
and tell the others, “It couldn’t be my fault,
I’m a man with good, strong arms.”

II.
In daylight North American foxes
roam up to ten miles from the den.
What business does a fox have,
and ten miles from home?
I watched them from the kitchen sink,
chasing each others’ tails
while I polished the silver
and sharpened the knives.
Apart from foxes, I did not
have a great trip home.
The old rodeos were mechanized—
the cowboys got bored of horses.
My dog runs through the screen door,
still, though he’s two months dead.
Too soon, I think, for these antics.
III.
For his last meal François Mitterand asked for oysters, foie gras, ortelan—an endangered songbird caught young, drowned alive in brandy, roasted and bloated and eaten whole.
It takes fifteen minutes to eat the bird, from its tiny feathers to its downy heart.
I understood, but only after the first time I ate an apple and felt Eve's shame; I knew then exactly what I was innocent about.
I don't remember losing my virginity but it must have happened, at some point.

IV.
Incan child sacrifices were fattened up for years on meat and corn and cocaine leaves.
At your last meal they poured a little too much wine; asleep you were frozen peacefully into the side of a mountain.
When your curled form is found five hundred years from now you'll still have all your hair.
That's what I thought about while I drank vodka for the first time. It burned, but it flushed little feathers out of my braces.
V.
Your affections were spun from a series of soft pranks, cellophane across the toilet seat, saltpeter in the sugar bowl. At midnight, when I felt tallest, I met you in a hayfield with three matches in each hand. If you sank to the bottom of the sea I’d lace up lead shoes, and if you floated back up I’d build you a boat, homebound, from flotsam and the ribs I don’t need. Afterwards, I’d walk with you home from the harbor.

VI.
Whenever I go blind I go for walks in the woods. One night I could have sworn we almost made a family. By morning, I looked for you but found only a fur vest and a fox jaw. The weather called for clear skies, an afternoon sun cool and distant. But in my state I could not see the trunks for the trees, nor the trees for the leaving.
Nate Dogg woke me up through the radio. “Hope you ready for the next episode, Heyyyeyyyeyyyeyyyeyyy... smoke w@#$ everyday!” I wished that KMEL Jams would play the uncensored versions. It would have been nice to hear Nate Dogg say bitch or shit or dick or even ho. For the time being both the CDs that my mom made me buy and the radio stations that I listened to would remain clean; leaving all vulgarities and epithets to the imagination.

That morning I dined on a feast fit for a king, or maybe a prince whose Mom was out of town. Well Mom wasn’t exactly out of town, but she was away for the week. I needed to remember to call her to wish her a happy birthday. I poured myself a bowl of cinnamon toast crunch. The guy on the box looked the way that I envisioned Albert Einstein looking if he had become discouraged by his early academic struggles and taken up cooking instead of science. Chef Einstein. It had a nice ring to it. “E = cinnamon squares” he said in my head. I shoveled highly marketed cereal grains down my gullet, locked the door with the key that Mom had told me to guard with my life and made my way to Hamilton.

The Hamilton School for Boys was the place that San Franciscan parents had been sending their young boys for over 100 years to teach them manners, help them develop a strong work ethic, and propel them towards an Ivy. When I was procrastinating or messing up in class Mom always yelled, “James Anthony Rose do you want to go to an Ivy or not?” When Mom said stuff like that I always thought of a building with ivy growing
I shook Headmaster Wheeler’s hand, as I walked through the front door. He stood there every morning shaking hands and kissing wealthy donors’ behinds so that he could further increase the endowment. At least that’s what I had overheard Mom tell Aunt Linda on the phone. Principal Wheeler’s paper white hair screamed: I’m old and dignified. He was the headmaster. He called the shots. I wiped sweat from my forehead and shook his hand the way that I’d been taught: erect posture, deliberate extension of the right arm, strong eye contact, and a firm grip that didn’t linger.

“Better run Jim. You can still make it without a tardy slip,” he said.

“Biggie was better. He just had a smoother flow,” Parker McNally said.

“Let me set you straight homie,” Oliver Brown responded.

As much as everyone knew that they were going to go pro, Oliver was the member of my class who actually had a shot. He was above average height, above average athletic ability, and his tenacity on any playground was beyond belief. He was the best, plain and simple. He could already grab a 10-foot basketball rim as a sixth grader and he never lost—anything—not necessarily because his athletic prowess was superior to that of his opponents, which it usually was, but because he just wouldn’t let it happen. He was a menace on the court. Everyone at the rival boys schools hated him. We were 12; we should have been playing for fun; Oliver was not. He was working and he was winning. He wasn’t the strongest student, in fact he cheated on almost everything academic. He would call me most nights of the week asking me for answers to our math homework or asking me how I wrote the answers to our reflection questions for English. I was always surprised that he chose to call me. I didn’t consider myself the sharpest tool in the Hamilton shed either. Despite his devious scholarly undertakings Oliver Brown was probably my best friend at Hamilton. We played AAU tournament basketball together. We hung out between games in Sacramento, Oakland, Stockton and other not so far away lands. We had fun. His accomplishments on the hardwood had caused him to develop a mythology about himself. He genuinely believed that he was African American. He was far too powerful for anyone to second-guess him—even the real African Americans on our AAU team. People of all races called him O for short. No one would have ever guessed that Oliver would become the captain of the first Harvard basketball team to win the Ivy League title and gain an illustrious entry into the NCAA tournament, but he did and we were all surprised. What surprised us
playing on college basketball’s highest stage—we all saw that coming.

“Hold up.” Oliver paused to collect his thoughts on the matter. “Word Biggie had the more dope flow, but Pac’s message man. Pac’s message meant something and he was from the Bay.”

“How old are you kids again?” Mr. Openhoff, our English teacher asked. “Sixth graders just aren’t the way that sixth graders used to be. Regardless of age, you both can continue this conversation after class. As I was saying it’s imperative that you refrain from using ‘I’s and ‘you’s on your pre-SAT writing tests…” he trailed off.

French class was just down the hall so we got there faster than I could say sacre bleu, which means OMG in French for those not in the know. To be honest I wasn’t really in the know either. I used an English to French dictionary on most of my homeworks. When returning my assignments Ms. Stauffer would always say “James…wow…I really like what you’ve done with the language.” She wasn’t the most demanding teacher at Hamilton. There was Mr. Warner, who taught econ class and taught us the ins and outs of moving corporations overseas and Mr. Teeble, the Latin teacher, who made us translate Virgil passages and Mr. Openhoff, our English teacher, who had just graduated from Stanford and used such big words that I had to ask around to find out what our homework assignments were. Ms. Stauffer was new at Hamilton that year. My Mom said that she was a free spirit after meeting her during parent teacher conferences. I wasn’t sure what Mom meant at the time. If I had written it down on paper it would have sounded nice, but it sounded mean the way my Mom said it. Oliver told me that his parents saw Ms. Stauffer playing bongo drums in Golden Gate Park one weekend wearing a giant pink fur hat and a matching fur outfit. Maybe that’s what Mom meant by free spirit.

On the way into class my nose began tingling. I braced myself for a huge sneeze. I wondered if other people enjoyed sneezing as much as me. It just felt so good. It was like ejaculating out of my nose.

“Ah Choo!”

“A vos souhaits, James!” Ms. Stauffer said.

“What?” I said as I wiped away the stray snot and proceeded to transfer most of it to my pant leg in a sweeping motion that I hoped no one noticed. The snot blended in nicely with my Dockers.

“It means God bless you in French, James.” She sounded angry. “Oh,” I said as I walked to my seat.
After we all sat down and got quiet Zach Roy, the class clown/crazy person, raised his hand.

“Oui Zachary?” Ms. Stauffer said.

Zach said nothing, stood up, put his leg on the table, and let loose an insane fart.

“Zach go to Principal Wheeler’s office,” Ms. Stauffer said, making no effort to use even the slightest French accent.

French class was always fun because we never learned French. That day we played prison. Ms. Stauffer was the prisoner. After Zach left the room we all sat attentive in our chairs waiting. She went back to the file cabinet behind her desk to get some assignments that we called travail for some reason and we pounced. We all pushed our chairs towards her desk. She screamed as we stacked extra chairs on top of each other like Jenga pieces. She grabbed the phone at her desk and started dialing.

“You all have detention!” she screamed holding the phone next to her face.

“Haha!” we cackled in unison.

We were supposed to have snack time after French class, but someone brought the basket of muffins in early. Parker picked up a muffin and tossed it up and down in his hand. “Muffin baseball?” he asked. We pushed all of the desks and remaining chairs to the side so that we had a field to play on. We went to our positions. I was holding it down in left field. My brother from another mother, Oliver, was the batter and Parker was the pitcher. Parker tossed a banana muffin towards O. He smacked the tar out of it with his clasped hands. It hit a window in center field. Home run. O rounded the bases with his hands in the air like he had just won the World Series and had not just hit a baked good off of a plate glass window. Parker tossed another at, Ed, the next batter. He hit it towards a bookshelf down the third baseline. I gauged the muffin’s trajectory as I chased it down. I knew I wouldn’t be able to make the grab on foot. I dove on top of the desks, stretched out and cupped the muffin in my palm in my best imitation of an Andrew Jones web gem I’d seen on ESPN the previous night. I definitely had the best hands in the class. If a ball, of any sort, went skyward there was a good chance I’d catch it.

Mr. Wheeler threw the door open. His white hair was out of place and his face was bright red. He was a pot that had reached its boiling point. He teemed with outrage.
“What the hell is wrong with you kids! Everyone has detention and I’m calling all of your parents!” he yelled. He slammed the door. The room was silent.

After detention Oliver and I took poops and laughed about what had happened in French class. We also talked about our prepubescent lady friends who we’d be seeing later that night. The term like had developed an entirely new meaning. You could no longer like pepperoni pizza or like playing scrabble. These days like solely stood for that weird fluttery feeling in your stomach that you got when you saw a girl who intrigued you. I had dated this girl named Gabby for a few weeks, but recently decided to break up with her because she had man-hands. They just kind of weirded me out. I had no interest in walking down the street holding a hand bigger than my own. It didn’t make sense to be romantically interested in someone who could beat me in a game of mercy.

Political ads lined the bathroom walls. It was election season at Hamilton. “Vote for Sam for class president, Lord Knows We did” was typed above a picture of the pope, a rabbi, and Gandhi. I was the current Sergeant at Arms of the sixth grade class and was well aware that I had fulfilled none of my promises voiced in my pre-election speech last year. I had assured monthly KFC sales, recurrent faculty vs. student dodge ball games, and an ongoing projection of NCAA basketball games in the lunchroom during March Madness. My lack of follow through was only beginning to burgeon. We changed into our nighttime clothes: button down shirts, ties, jackets, penny loafers, and the same pair of khakis from school. That night we had Midweeklies—a formal dance organized by people much older than us. We would get to kick it with some girls from the local all-girls schools which was cool, but we also would be forced to learn how to dance—ballroom style—which was not cool.

We left school and walked down to the Columbus deli. We both got what we always got: Jolt sodas, and little chunky bars. We imbibed our energy drinks and nibbled our candy on the sidewalk until Oliver’s au pair pulled up in one of his family’s Mercedes. Her name was Anita. Anita was a happy lady from Guatemala. She never seemed to get frustrated by our frequent debauchery. She made meals for Oliver and his brothers, did their laundry and drove them around. I wondered what Oliver’s parents were doing at that exact moment. I thought about how I needed to call Mom to wish her a happy birthday.
Oliver turned to me “This is how they round up the buffalo,” he said. I took his word for it. They walked around us counterclockwise, in a circle slightly bigger than our own. We just stood there. Being motionless made me nervous. Being motionless after a jolt soda and a chunky bar made me real nervous. The girls were wearing white gloves and dresses made for women much older than them. Women with fully developed breasts and fully developed senses of self and fully developed sources of income. I just stood there feeling naked despite all of my extra dress clothes. The flamboyant instructor clapped his hands together “alright girls, chop, chop, choose a partner?” He turned to his female counterpart, “awww they are so cute aren’t they?” unaware that he had failed to turn his headset microphone off. He reminded me of an Irish ginger version of Ricky Martin. One of the girls, who I had yet to meet and who I was certain I didn’t like, approached me with an outstretched glove.

We did the waltz. I didn’t know what I was doing. It didn’t matter. My right hand was situated on her back and my left hand clasped her glove in the air. She was warm, a little too warm, bordering on moist. She maintained a ceaseless smile that would have been her most becoming feature if her lime green braces hadn’t matched her blinding dress. She stared at my face and I tried not to make eye contact. A handful of girls and boys stood off to the side of the dance floor. They were supposed to be mingling, but there wasn’t much mingling going on.

I suddenly heard the sound of sixth grade flesh hitting sixth grade flesh—hard—coming from the back of the break area. The boys yelled. The girls screamed. Everybody crowded around. I had missed most of the action so I turned to Parker, who was still wearing his eye patch. It had surprised me earlier when Sarah, one of the more attractive girls in the ballroom, had approached Parker and asked him to waltz. Maybe girls dug eyepatches. I thought about where I could get an eye patch. Did they sell eye patches at Walgreens? What would my backstory be? Knife fight, definitely a knife fight. I heard myself saying, “You should see the other guy,” to a group of wide-eyed sixth grade babes in my head.

Parker told me that Gabe Bruno, a classmate of ours, had knifed a guy from Chester Hall. How weird. I had just been daydreaming about knife attacks and the subsequent swooning that would occur. I hated The Chester Hall School for Boys. They had changed the title of The Hamilton School for Boys on urban dictionary to The Hamilton School for Boy Toys. The definition that they inserted started like this: “The Hamilton School for Boy Toys is one of the finest gay boys schools in all of San Francisco. It is where all
elite San Franciscans send their young gay boys to learn gay ways from a
slew of the finest gay minds in the Bay Area.” God I hated them.
Parker went off somewhere to get a better angle on the action. I asked Ed,
who was diddling in the break area, what had happened. He said that a
Chester Hall kid sprayed some Binaca in O's eyes, which had prompted Gabe
to punch the kid in the face. Given the absence of blood I concluded that
Ed was the more reliable source. Gabe was a new kid at Hamilton trying to
prove himself. He was also a strong kid so punching someone in the face was
a good way for him to infiltrate the social graces of the sixth grade class. I
commended him internally.

They were escorting everyone out of the ballroom. As I stood on the
sidewalk I caught sight of a pay phone right across the street. Mom said I
was too young for a cell phone so I had become a bit of a pay phone connois-
seur in recent years. Pretty much everywhere I went I knew where a nearby
phone booth was located. This pay phone, across the street, caught me off
guard though. It was a large street with a tree-filled island in the middle. I
hadn't spent much time on the other side to date. It was mostly just Mid-
weeklies and then Oliver’s au pair gave me a ride home. Oliver was engaged
in the aftermath of his scuffle and I needed to call Mom to wish her a happy
birthday before the end of the night.

I tiptoed towards the street as cars whizzed by, my destination in
clear sight. I knew that if I timed my J-walk just right I could avoid traffic
and cross the street in a more timely fashion than those dim-witted street-
light spectators at the corner. I spotted Natalie on the opposite sidewalk
moving towards the same pay phone. She was a social butterfly, but my
stomach was typically devoid of butterflies when I saw her. She talked too
loud and too often, but her effervescence made her a perennial people per-
son, someone worthy of a position on her school’s own student government.

We made eye contact as I stepped up onto her side of the street. “Hey
James!” she yelled, with her arms out stretched for a hug. This was a new
phenomenon for me as well. Now that girls had entered the picture everyone
was constantly hugging each other. Hello hugs, goodbye hugs, intermittent
hugs displaying our general fondness for one another and hugs that seemed
to appear out of thin air. I hugged her back. Her eyes displayed a sharp blue
hue emphasized by a turquoise lady frock that made an exhibition of her
prospering mosquito bite bust.

“I need to like use the phone so that my Dad can like pick me up
before someone sprays breath freshener on me. Is it ok if I like make my call
first? What do you need it for?”
“Pretty much the same thing. You were here first. Go for it.”
“Thanks” she said as she smiled an unnaturally white smile.
I stood off to the side twiddling my thumbs while overhearing Natalie tell her father to come get her immediately and carry on a conversation about how she needed to go get another pedicure tomorrow because the one earlier today had not met her standards. Her toe-nail tirade eventually ended and she hung up.

“Thanks James!” She hugged me and gave me a kiss on the cheek before moving to the street corner.
I picked up the receiver, put my quarters in, dialed, and waited.
“San Francisco General Hospital.” An unfamiliar voice answered.
“This is James Rose. I’m calling to speak to my mom, Sandra Rose.”
“Oh, I’ll put you through to her room.”
I said nothing.
“Hello. This is Suzanna. May I ask who is calling?”
“This is James Rose.”
“Oh. Hello James. You must be Sandra’s son. I’m her new nurse. She just took her medicine and she’s fast asleep. Can I take a message?”
“Shit.” I whispered.
“Excuse me?” Suzanna said.
“Sorry. Nothing. Can you wake her up?”
“We’ve been having trouble getting her to sleep and she’s finally out. It’s best I not to wake her. Doctor’s orders.”
“Ok.”
“Can I take a message?”
“Tell her I called to wish her a happy birthday.”
DELI JAZZ
EZER SMITH

Listening to jazz:
the deli makes it hollow.
A part of the job,
same as the sandwich-grease,
the gnawing resignation barely
clinging to the cash register—
everyone grows to hate customers.

And when that fingerprint music
bounces off scrubbed tables (1000 1000 times,
1000 1000 swirling wet rags)
as meat, fat, sugar are repossessed
with fecklessness shocking only to us,
it is sandpaper for the sound;
no one notices.

Now weariness is here,
swapped for profit, anointed king
in its absence, and the band plays on:
jagged, flowing, beautiful, wraithlike
irreconcilable. Cleaning is not improvisation:
it's the 4-5-1 of a piece
no one cares if they're playing.

These players just want to finish,
to survive the onslaught of weird notes
and maybe play something easier...
Someday. Jazz is not for survival!
it is the dance of survivors,
a 1000 1000 deep-throated laughs,
the beatific marathoner’s smile
that taunts the ones wrung clean
by their heartbreak hill.
on Citation

JOSHUA SONNY HARRIS

Oh the Humanity! The fear itself that we ain’t got nothing new to say, Norway to say that nothing new. By the Trident of Neptune, it drives me crazy that the rhetorical prairie, the land of opportunity, is graphically and bibliographically settled. Cowboys of word coinage, an innovation intervention is called to order; thus, gather round people wherever you drone. Do not refudiate the charge I press against linguistical normalcy. Individual thought: cannot die. Bound dear

MLA, 7th Edition.
Herbert Morrison, on The Hindenburg, but not literally, because then he would have been dead
Franklin D. Roosevelt, on the only thing we have to fear, on his inauguration day. Clearly, he never encountered a Chicagoan squirrel, on his inauguration day or any other day.
Randy Newman, on Friendships between comical monsters
A Country, on the Barents Sea
Gum, on the underside of your desk
On thin ice, considering his neighbor Pluto just demoted. Pastor Martin Niemöller famously stated regarding the slippery slope of fascist dangers, “First they came for the communists, and I didn’t speak out because I wasn’t a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, but I didn’t speak out because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.” Such will be Neptune’s fall.
Fine Young Cannibals, on the London Records Label
Does this need to be cited?
The American Dream, on all of our lapels, in all of our hearts
On plenty of sitcoms. Choose 2: How I Met Your Mother, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia, Curb Your Enthusiasm.
Bill Clinton, on Monica Lewinsky, both literally, and pertaining to the definition of the verb “to be”
The Semicolon, on par with the “@” symbol, as the most underrated form of punctuation
Nietzsche, on the manner in which Zarathustra spoke
Bob Dylan, on drugs. Like, how else would he write such trippy music?
Sarah Palin, on top of her whole makey changey the English language thing
Suing, on questionable grounds, the American Dream, on all of our lapels, in all of our hearts
Italian cooking, on a popular new shape of pasta
Warren Harding, on even footing with the whole Sarahy Paliny Englishy language thingy
Six sided, on top of the monopoly board, sending you to that special Park Place
wabbit\textsuperscript{21}; abound are the boundless bounty\textsuperscript{22}. And re-bound\textsuperscript{23}, with incomprehensible jargon\textsuperscript{24}. Let the norm be relinquished\textsuperscript{25}, as the battle-cries\textsuperscript{26} sound, from atop the soapbox of papier-mâché\textsuperscript{27}, alternately\textsuperscript{28} constructed of the pages of MLA\textsuperscript{29}, 7th Edition and copies of anonymous\textsuperscript{30} poems found.

--Joshua Harris\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{21} Elmer Fudd, on the hunt

\textbf{22} Paper Towels, on your kitchen table, preparing to clean up after the antics of a 38 month old toddler who just decided that the family photo hanging on your wall depicting the extended family fishing trip to Bermuda proved better as a dart board than as a memory and I was about to scold him and tell him to go to his room without his supper, when I realized in fact that Timmy was right; that the family is the worst—thanks Aunt Vermouth and your little band of tipsy septuagenarian siblings, no I’m not pregnant with a second child—no, I’m just fat—but thanks for asking, yeah, Dave and I have been trying for another kid but I just can’t get pregnant and we’ve been seeing a counselor about it who just says that it’s my fault because I’m anxious and you know, I think I’m gonna throw some peas at your photo too, ya little witch. Screw you. Everyone knows those are fake teeth.

\textbf{23} Shaquille O’Neal, on free-throws “If you don’t succeed at first, well then we have something in common.”

\textbf{24} Sir A. H. Church, on the peculiar gravity of this precious gem stone

\textbf{25} A Yu-Gi-Oh! Card, on eBay for $2.99 free shipping buy it now no reserve from top seller infinite basement

\textbf{26} Inappropriate, on the battlefield. Crying is for lesser men. Also, crocheting, but that’s semi-possible to pimp

\textbf{27} Alternately, see instead. Or instead, see alternately. Also, see “Kramer Vs. Kramer”. Great movie about a schizophrenic wrestling comedian

\textbf{28} Major League Astrophysics, on a lengthy hibernation, thanks to the fact that this professional sport was only in season during the Cold War period. Yet another Olympic event that only the Soviet Satellites could win.

\textbf{29} Anonymous, on a great pedestal for the work he has done over the last few hundred years. Once a writer only inclined to Aphorisms, he sprouted out into the realm of plays as well. He may be best known for his all-too-schmaltzy poetry. However, most of his accolades serve to acknowledge the sheer, colossal body of his work.

\textbf{30} On a yacht to Rio, laughing his way to the banco. Y un poco embarazado.
UNDERNEATH
ELIZABETH BYNUM

in the effervescence that followed
the slow slither of time washing bricks made of stone, stolen earth
I saw nighttime unraveling in a pool of velvet ribbons,
junk cars and bottle caps rolling through seas of dishwater, starred with suds.
I witnessed the sculpting of cheeks on the shores of Iberia before dawn,
the purples hewn into clothes of the fortunate born.
I saw my own eyes reflected in translations of floral patterns,
portrayed by the many thousands weaving it into creation,
fabric artificially designed for skin made of cells.
(It’s the molecular shit that gets stuck in my mind these days)

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

from underneath my bed
the dark place where the dust of lovers’ skin would gather
You saw my feet, ashen and bone-drawn make contact with hardwood
toes taught flat by the tactile sensation of today.
You knew the desire to taste the salt that I am and
You testified to the changes of position as I dressed, marble faced
watching me move into new realms of fuchsia, awake.
You saw Your own eyes in my eyes and I saw nothing in Your eyes

Because You were under my bed.
Motherfucking creep.
THE PILL
ANGELA QIAN

When doctors finally released the pill to forget, people lined up in streets
from Moscow to L.A., waiting day after day,
so patient they could have been terra cotta, except
for grief which can’t be sculpted.
Who would have thought so many had so weary a heart?
“Hey, what’s your story, man?” the bohemian asks Wall Street,
who answers,
“Before the stock market crashed, a girl told me money didn’t matter.”
All along the sidewalks people are lighting street fires,
preparing to burn the memories they’ve held onto:
eight hundred origami cranes, the last one crumpled;
a faded Polaroid with five teeth-smiles still visible;
a red leather address book which, which almost doesn’t burn;

In the middle of New York there comes a cry:
“What are you doing here?”
“I came to forget you!”
Instead of pain, there is laughter, and “One last time, then,
remember that day when—”

Scientists shrugged before popping the pills themselves,
left empty except for a sensation they had forgotten
something perhaps important.
Wandering the streets, people looked dazed but happy,
spontaneously hugging strangers and saying,
“I could hold the sky!”
And I, spacious like an empty treasure-box,
walked home tripping on lost children’s shoes,
until on the way I met Mistake again and asked,
“Do you want to grab a coffee?”

not knowing what that tug at my heart
was supposed to warn.
LOT’S WIFE/TURNING
MARI COHEN

Not what she wants.
It’s what she needs.

That great magnet
dragging her
a compass needle
round her center
a home to land on.
A north.

Behind her now, the small
safe village. Ahead
a fleeting glimpse
of a burning city, eyes
bright with the reflection of
brimstone that crushes
streets she has memorized.

I’m coming, she thinks, as the
quiet tug of the future returns
and her eyes ablaze have had
enough and when you turn
you can turn back
she thinks.

I’m ready now, I’m coming, her salt-mouth
says sometime later to a husband whose
ears are miles away.
PINES
EZER SMITH

Instead of black, I chose a lovely green
the color of the hills you knew so well,
and of the darkening valley in between,
when all the sun had set and twilight fell.

I wove my way between the keening pines
their mourning but an echo of my own.
Their withered, arching trunks my mocking signs;
Each dying tree a seed that I had sown.

But was I standing in a clearing there?
Or was I standing where I thought I would?
When I looked up, the trees were only stairs,
but I refused to climb; I wished I could.

And I picked out your dress before you died:
when they put you to rest, the branches sighed.
FIRST
HADAR LAZAR

(There is no poetry inside of me.  
When my brother’s blood seeped through his skull,  
I heard its drip drip drip against the ground  
And felt every word I’ve ever known slip out of me.  
His blood cried out and I could not answer: Brother—)

People who say all men are born good  
Forget that kids don’t sing eulogies  
To all the blades of grass they rip from the root.

I did not mean to pluck you from your peace;  
It was just an instinct once I realized that I could.

I wondered what would happen if I took a stone to your head.  
I did not anticipate the way it will cave in—  
I know not why God gave me the power to kill.  
I did not ask for all this raw, this capacity to feel.

I uprooted you from your humanity  
And planted your body in my land.  
God saw my heart; it was barren as sand.

He said, “Walk the Earth.”

We wonder, we wander, we weep.  
We wonder, we wander, we weep.

But then I think of all the nights I  
Could not sleep thinking of how God  
Loved my brother for sacrificing some sheep—

And then I think that the true pattern is that  
We weep, we wonder, we wander,  
We weep, we wonder, we wander.  
My children—
I’m sorry that to your dictionary
I’ve added the word “murder.”
I’m sorry you put this word into practice.
I’m sorry that you have dictionaries,
Some book to define your actions.

I’m sorry that your actions are
Defined by some book.
The Book of Books.

That says there is one trajectory,
Straight towards a God.

I’ll tell you: it’s a cycle.
Because the true pattern is that
We weep, we wonder, we wander,
And then we weep again.
You dream that a headless, legless man with eyes and a mouth on his torso plays football at a prestigious east coast college. He sneaks under the legs of offensive linemen and brings down quarterbacks with ease. The dream ends before the mystery regarding his ability to see the field through his shoulder pads is answered.

You stand on the sidewalk in your green track pants and an old t-shirt inquiring about the presence of clothing on the dancers at the so-called Garden of Eden. “I just work the door man. I have no idea what happens in there,” says the bouncer with the technicolored skull tattoo on the skin encasing his own skull. If the permanent painting on his head isn’t a dead giveaway, his words verify the vacancy between his ears. “All I can tell you is that we have a 10 dollar cover before 10PM and it’s currently,” he pauses to check the time on his counterfeit Rolex, “5PM. So you are in luck.” He appears unaware that the stance of the sun bears any indication of the time of day.

Beads serve as doors at this particular titty-waving establishment, that you will soon redefine as a titty-flapping establishment. A mulatto stripper, carrying a bit more belly weight than the strippers you’ve seen in the movies, presents herself from behind the beads. “Ohh and he is sooo lucky to be here, isn’t he, Steve?” She says to the bouncer. “Because it’s myyy shift.” She enunciates slowly as she completes a 360 turn with her hands in the air. If covered in sparkles was your type, she would fit the bill. Sadly, for her at least, you are not on a quest to unearth the most bedazzled stripper in San Francisco. The purpose of your quest is still unclear, but her sparkles do little to incentivize the journey. She looks 37, but is probably 25. Evidently paying for one’s groceries in dollar bills is not life’s elixir. You pay the doorman and
and begin walking in.

The stripper slaps your butt as you move through the beaded doorway. “You got some legs. Huh?” she yells at a volume cultivated in a world in which speaking over blaring background music is ordinary.

“Yeah, I guess I do,” you say.

You are taken back to your sweat soaked summer in the Dartmouth weight room. “We are gonna be fast and physical this season Zubiak! With you in the backfield anything is possible!” Coach T, the rotund weightlifting coach, pats you on the back, “Destroy this lift! Move that bar like you’re gonna move through the Princeton linebackers! Can’t wait ‘til we get on the field Zub! It’s gonna be a pummel fest!” His voice loses its resonance as you take the barbell out of the rack, squat down, and stand up with such force that jumping through the ceiling seems possible. Your legs swell with tension under the load.

You could have played anywhere. You are the leading rusher in the history of California high school football. You are the best player ever to play at Piedmont High School. They retired your jersey when you were home for Thanksgiving. Florida, Alabama, Michigan, and USC all wanted you, but both your mother and father were members of Dartmouth’s first co-ed graduating class, so despite the ostensible options there was only one true option. You’ve always been a relatively talented student as well. It’s likely that you would have been admitted to Dartmouth if you had no intention of playing football. The head coach thought he was getting Punk’d when you called to tell him that you were committing.

You played as well as you were supposed to throughout the majority of your inaugural season. You led the Ivy-league in rushing up until the game against Brown. Brown was by far the worst team in the conference and you were expected to rest after racking up enough touchdowns to put the game out of reach. While returning a kick-off early in the second half you were surprised to be brought down by one of their diminutive special teams players. You attempted to bring yourself to your feet, but were immobilized by a sharp pain in your lower back. You were carted off on a stretcher.

Ever since the injury you’ve had a recurrent dream that you are breaking away from a group of opposing defenders when out of nowhere you are blindsided. You withstand the hit, but your head is jarred from your torso. It rolls across the field horizontally as your body continues moving downfield for a touchdown. Everyone in the dark green stadium
your name, Zubiak, Zubiak, Zubiak! As if your head was a superfluous entity that need not remain attached to your touchdown-manufacturing body.

You continued to experience sharp pains in your lower back whenever the team physician coaxed you into running on the field. The x-rays came back negative. The doctors said that it was all in your head. You began seeing a school administered psychiatrist, who was befuddled by your fictitious yet debilitating wound. She tried to teach you to visualize yourself as a healthy athlete, to envision yourself moving the way you did before your injury, the way you can move now if you believe you can. When you close your eyes all that you see is your headless body scoring touchdowns as the fans at Memorial Field chant your name. You don’t tell the psychiatrist about any of your dreams in fear that your coaches’ concern will climb to an undesirable height.

Today you flew home from Hanover for Christmas vacation, carrying no possessions other than your phone and wallet, and decided to take a full-scale vacation from everything. You told your mom and dad that you were staying a few extra days in Hanover to rehab and that you would take care of the flight details. They’re proud of you. They think that college is molding you into an accountable young adult. Your great aunt Magda sent a 1,000-dollar check to your dorm in November. She attached a note wishing you a happy 19th birthday, which was a nice gesture despite the fact that your birthday is in June. You assumed that she intended to send you 100-dollars instead of 1,000 but you opted to save the bounty for a rainy day (or a covert vacation). Aunt Magda lives in Chicago and just celebrated her own 107th birthday in the fall. She wore a shiny red dress. You saw the pictures on her Facebook page. You would be astonished that she has a Facebook page, but you have already allocated all of your Magda-centric astonishment to the fact that she was born in 1906 and is still breathing. Her apartment smells like lobster. Each time you visit she invariably tells you about the time your father drove her home when her husband was intoxicated. She always feels the need to inform you of your father’s godlike skills behind the wheel.

You grew up in Piedmont, California, a wealthy suburb adjacent Oakland (a largely treacherous neighborhood). When asked by non-Californians where they live, many Piedmontians frequently claim to live in Oakland, which is misleading. You prefer to say that you live in the Bay Area. It casts a wider net. A migrant, new to Piedmont, would likely believe that the ownership of two Mercedes is required in order for one to own a home.
and the migrant wouldn't be far off. Needless to say, your gentrified upbringing didn't include your attendance at strip clubs. Therefore 'The Garden of Eden' is the perfect place to begin your rebellious excursion away from your current predicament.

The AC is on high in 'The Garden of Eden'. You can’t imagine the strippers finding much solace in the frigidity. It keeps their nipples hard though, which is probably good for business. You are the only non-stripper in the club. You take a seat front and center. A fully African American woman, who appears to be quite a bit older than the girl who greeted you at the bead door, is dancing. She sits on the stage, leaning back, one hand gripping the brass pole, as she gyrates her exposed pelvis. She sticks her hand out and motions with two fingers for you to stand up. You do so. She pulls you in and begins rubbing herself on your leg. She has a tattoo that reads Big Rod on her drooping left breast. “Who’s Big Rod?” You ask. “Big mistake,” she says. She smells like she voted NO on prop deodorant. You return to your seat. As far as you know it’s courteous to tip strippers. You remove a few ones from your wallet and place them on the stage. The song ends, the woman collects your dollars, and a new girl with blood red hair walks out. She has studs in her cheeks, nose and belly button and a series of butterfly tattoos lining her spine. She’s staring at you. You suppose that there is no one else to stare at. She circles the stage momentarily, engages in a cat leap onto the pole, and begins climbing to the top. Her hair hangs down toward the stage. When she reaches the top, she latches her legs to it. She hangs hands free, removes her bra and throws it at you. Her athleticism alone warrants monetary reinforcement. You place a few more dollars on the stage.

The red head stands beside you after completing her time on the pole. You return her bra to her.

“Hi handsome. I’m Candice,” she says extending her hand for a handshake.

“I’m Charles,” you say as you extend your hand in reciprocity hoping that she doesn’t notice the moistness of your palms.

“You want a dance?” She asks.

The sparkly girl with the love handles is lying on stage now with her high heels reaching towards the ceiling.

“What’s that?” You ask.

She smiles acknowledging the prospect that it’s your first time in a club of the stripping variety. “If I was gonna give you lap dance. I’d take you over to one of those private booths,” she points to a series of somewhat
concealed enclosures with benches in them, akin to hockey penalty boxes with a bit of extra padding.

“Ohh I dunno. Do I have to pay?” you ask.

“Ha. Yeah. It’s 25 bucks per song. I’ll make it worth your while.” She winks. “For a little more we can go to the champagne room and make it even more worth your while.” You have never heard someone utter the phrase ‘even more worth your while’, but it seems as fitting an occasion as any. She moves in closer and cups her hand over your ear. “I’ll fuck you for a thousand bucks.” She whispers.

You have trouble determining a less inferior way to spend aunt Magda’s money. “I think I’ll pass for the time being, but thank you though.” You say.

She looks at you as if you just emitted a bellowing fart. “Your loss and who the fuck wears sweats to a strip club?” she says, before commencing the belligerent swivel of her hips that propels her toward the bead door in the back of the club.

You sit for a while longer watching the mulatto girl display her genitals before you evacuate. As you re-integrate yourself into the outside world you see two guys, about your age, moving down the street. One crouches down on his skateboard in a squat lower than any you have ever performed with a barbell and the other grips the handle of his Razor scooter loosely as he kicks himself forward. The one on the razor scooter turns to the one on the skateboard. “Where exactly are we going, Joe?” he asks.

Despite The Garden of Eden’s less than flattering ambiance, you have removed a thin layer of the country club cocoon that has gripped you since birth. You find yourself craving something more salutary, something more stable, something more sentimental. You text Taylor.

“Hey babe” 6:15PM

“Hey Charles. How are you? As much as it warms my heart to hear from you, we should really refrain from the flip employment of pet names for one another. I tend to catalogue terms like babe and baby as dating and pre-dating terms and as you know, we are no longer dating.” 6:18PM

“Dully noted. What r u up to right now?” 6:19PM

“I’m eating dinner in my lab. You’re lucky that I happen to be taking a break from my science. I normally leave my phone on airplane
mode when I’m working. Even when I forget I rarely let texts interfere with research. Also, could you try to text me in complete words? You know how much I hate the fact that our contemporaries opt to undermine the English language in order to salvage a few extra milliseconds, as if there is not already more than enough time in one’s day for porn, World of Warcraft, and reality TV.”

“Yes, of course. I apologize for the foe-words and thanks for responding. I know how important your science is to you. Do you think it’s possible that I could come down and stay with you for a bit? I’d love to spend some time in southern California.”

“Sure. As long as there’s no funny business. When were you thinking?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Wow. Ok. I did not even know that you were back from Hanover. I am really busy right now Charles.”

“I just need a place to stay for a few days. I won’t be a nuisance.”

“Ok. Fine. But you’ll be sleeping on the floor and I’ll be spending upwards of 10 hours in lab everyday.”

“No problem. I just need a place to stay.”

“Ok. Fine. Let me know when you get in.”

As far as you know, Taylor is the least permeable flotation device known to man. She’s a beautiful scientist who does beautiful science. Her big blue eyes are often encased in oversized reading glasses that somehow augment her appearance. Her hair is always tied behind her head to ensure that it doesn’t interfere with her work. As much as she may appear to be every schoolgirl fetishist’s dream, the fact of the matter is that she’s a genius, a phenomenon. Her fervor for her field never wavers. You and her were, as your mother put it, an item all throughout high school. She was renowned at a young age for her prowess as a patcher of ion channels. The technique,
known among biologists as patching, occurs when a cell's membrane is electrically polarized at a high potential in order to measure the movement of its ions. Taylor was able to patch multiple ion channels simultaneously as an eighth grader. The best guy in the world patches eight channels. The nerds in our class called her Patch Adams with alacrity, the remaining anti-geeks did not. Taylor was being offered admittance to four-year universities as a 13-year-old. Her parents opted to keep her on a conventional scholastic track so as to refrain from estranging her from her peers. She chose to attend Cal Tech after high school, because she believed that it was the elite university with the most vibrant weather and the least vibrant social life and therefore the least distractions.

You were both perpetually busy, which helped facilitate your prolonged fondness for one another. When you were training she was hunched over a microscope in her lab at UC Berkeley. She did research there when the Piedmont facilities could no longer contain her ever-expanding scientific curiosity. To her, work-life balance means that her life should be comprised of balancing the different types of work that she has to do in the most efficacious manner possible. Extra hours in the weight room, film room, and on the training table were far from foreign to you. So you were one of her few contemporaries capable of empathizing with her ever-endeavoring disposition.

You know that Taylor is undermining her philosophical doctrine pertaining to romance in allowing you to stay with her. She believes that coital urges always reign supreme in encounters between parties of the opposite sex and that therefore platonic heterosexual relationships are nearly impossible to actualize.

A round bald man, who reminds you of Coach T, sits outside the entrance to the 4th street train station in San Francisco, strumming an electric harp. The real Coach T had no musical prowess beyond the trumpeting of his own mouth. His words a few weeks prior, “You guys like man-boobs? I didn’t think so! You’ll all develop a case of the cone tits if you stop training like I did,” were transmitted at a profound volume by the unlikely acoustics of the Big Green varsity weight room in Hanover. The mouth of the man’s nylon harp case littered with bills and coins, gaps at you, insinuating that others have fiscally blessed its polymers, yet you, for some reason unbeknownst to the nylon, withhold your commendation. You’ve enkindled enough of Aunt Magda’s money on entertainment for the day.

You descend a set of stairs so steep that you wonder why your youth wasn’t littered with more news of fatalities occurring in transit to the Bay
Area transit system. You approach the automated ticket machine, select Cal Tran Union Station (LA) as your destination, insert your money, and move to the tracks. You begin to brace yourself for a 14-hour train ride as the local trains rest in front of you briefly before continuing on. Finally your train, with the Cal Tran insignia arrives. You step aboard, take your seat, and your eyelids are drawn together with magnetic energy.

You dream that a blind stripper dances on the stage, tapping her white cane in a half-circle determining where the customers sit. Aside from the cane her visual impairment is impossible to discern. She hangs by her legs from the top of the pole. When you reach for your wallet you are reminded that you have no arms. You awake to a dirt-clad man staring at you inches away from your face. Countryside streaks by in the horizon existing beyond the strange man’s invasive positioning. He sticks his finger in your nose. You remain motionless. He pulls out a booger, lifts it in the air and examines it before placing it in his pocket. “Gold rush” he mutters as he walks off between the seats behind you.

You look out at the endless blue of the Pacific Ocean as you pass through Santa Barbara. The scenery moves by with swiftness much like the swiftness with which the stands and the grass and the other players once moved by you on the football field. There is something soothing about the instinctive nature of moving one’s body with rapidity or even simply having one’s body moved with rapidity. It elicits a sense that time and space are imperceptible. An interior stability enters the muscles in your lower back.

A dark skinned woman with a blond bob hair cut wearing a red tube top sidles by your aisle. You look up at her as she moves by. She looks back at you and smiles, revealing a dark space where her two front teeth should be. You look through her orthodontic void. She stares at you as she moves down the aisle and stumbles over a protruding briefcase. Her wig plummets from her head as she plunges toward the state sanctioned carpet. She quickly grabs her wig, places it back on her head and frantically adjusts it as she moves
through the door and onto the next train car.

You look out at the rows of wooden seats in Union Station strewn with sleeping homeless men and women, likely coming down from various highs and residing in various lows. You approach a small albino man with a thick frizzy flat top. He’s wearing a blue Cal Tran jump suit. “Excuse me sir. Which bus do I take to get to Pasadena?” You ask.

“Ahh cat shit!” He responds.

“What?” you say.

“I just stepped in a bunch of cat shit outside.” He says as he drags his boot on the train station tile. “My wife’s gonna kill me. I smell horrible.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. Could you direct me toward a bus that will take me to Pasadena?” You say.

“Don’t take a bus. Take a train kid.” He says with a grimace as he continues rubbing his boot against the tile.

“Which train? If you don’t mind me asking,” you say.

“Head to section seven. Right down there.” He points to a sign that reads #7 hanging from the ceiling down the corridor as he continues to scrape his shoe against the tile. “Have a good day kid.”

Once aboard the second and hopefully final train of the day you call Taylor.

“Hey Charles. You’re on the headset,” she says.

“What?” you say.

“I’m talking hands free right now and I’m not a person who suffers from an abundance of time!” she yells.

“Ok. Ok,” you say.

“Be brisk. I’m patching,” she says.

“Another day another ion channel,” you say.

“Now is not the time for parody Charles! I have a lot of flipping patching to do today!” she says.

“You can say fuck, we’re both adults,” you say.

“AAAAHHHH!” She yells. You move the phone away from my head. Your train neighbors stare at you as they overhear her suppressed shrieks being funneled from your phone.

You bring the phone back to your face, “Ok. Sorry. I’m on the train from Union Station heading to Pasadena.”

“Get off at the Lake stop. Keep yourself busy until six o’clock,” she says.

“What? That’s like eight hours from now,” you say.

“It is eight hours from now Charles…it is,” she says.
“Uh. Yeah,” you say.
“I warned you. Bye,” she hangs up.

You ascend another set of steep stairs and reach Lake Street. You have
eight hours to devote to your solo exploration of Pasadena, the home of the
Rose Bowl, which takes place in less than a month. You could be playing in
the Rose Bowl if your parents hadn’t exiled you to the Big Green demise of
your football career.

You enter a store near the train stop and stare at the cashier, who is
wearing a Harvard crimson hat.
“Can I help you?” he asks, not looking up from his issue of People
magazine with Kim Kardashian on the cover.
“Can I buy some cigarettes?” you ask.
“Uh yeah. We sell all kinds of cigarette. Where are you from kid,
outer space?” he says.
You stare back at him.
“That was a rhetorical question kid. What kind you want?” he asks.
You’ve never purchased cigarettes before, in fact you’ve never smoked
a cigarette before. No one would have ever let you smoke if you wanted to.
Everyone has always known that you’re a football star. In an effort not to ap-
pear too inane you select the first box in your line of sight.
“I’ll have a box of Marlboro Golds please,” you say.
“Alright Mr. Champagne.” He says turning around and grabbing the
cigarettes. “And I don’t know where you’re from, but we call them packs of
cigarettes out here.” He says ringing them up. “That’ll be $11.50,” he says.
You hand the money to the cashier.
“Oh and I need a lighter too. Sorry,” you say.
“Jesus kid. You need me to light it for you too? How about I hold
your dick while you take a fucking piss?” He asks.
You shake your head.
“I’m just messing with you kid. It’s been a rough day so far and I just
read that Ryan Gosling died,” he says.
“Oh wow that’s really sad. I used to watch his kids show. The one
where he was a ninja,” you say.
“I’m just fucking with you, kid. He didn’t die. I’m pissed because
my wife won’t go down on me. And what fucking TV show are you talking
about? I’ve never heard of that shit. You are definitely not from around here.”
He hands you the lighter. “Here kid take the lighter it’s on the house. Good
luck. I think you might need it.”
You peel back the foil lining the inside of the pack and pull out a
cigarette as you continue walking. You have to admit that you feel pretty cool holding the pack of tobacco-laden incendiaries. You light it and suck in, but there’s no smoke. You light it again, suck harder, and you’re on the tobacco train. Smoke emanates from your mouth as you move down the sidewalk.

A mother and daughter, both wearing equally short shorts and equally egregious amounts of mascara walk towards you.

“I can’t believe I drank an entire skinny girl latte,” the girl says to her mom.

“You can do a little bit more time on the treadmill tonight after improv class,” the mom says to the girl. The mom glowers at you. “Second hand smoke kills, jackass. You’re going to give us all cancer,” she says.

You avert your eyes from the pair.

“That guy is such a jackass.” The daughter says looking up at the mother as they pass by.

“That’s right dear. That man is a complete jackass because he smokes cigarettes and doesn’t care about his health or anyone else’s. Sing me that bar again. The one from ‘Annie Get Your Gun,’ the mother says as they move out of ears reach.

You take a deep inhale and a small piece of ash, carried by a rare gust of wind, flies into your eye. While unexpected and painful, the ash drifts into the atmosphere after a few blinks. You are startled by the sound of heavy breathing behind you. You quickly pray that the mascara-improv mom hasn’t started the Angry Mothers Against Tobacco Oxidizers Collision in the hope that she and her comrades could chase you down and burn you at the stake through some sort of smoke-free vaporization process.

The breathing turns into words, “Excuse me.”

You turn around and are greeted by a shirtless runner.

“Sorry,” you say. Once you move out of his way he continues to jog down the sidewalk.

You see the awning of a Brookstone store. You love Brookstone. You basically grew up in Brookstone. Every time your mother took you to the Piedmont Mall, you would head right for the massage chairs. You drop your cigarette on the sidewalk and head in. You take a seat in a leather massage chair situated in the middle of the store. A six-year-old is well on his way to being enveloped by the chair next to you. The rollers move up and down your spin. One of the Brookstone employees stands alone flying a remote control helicopter back and forth across the ceiling of the store. Another employee appears to be endeavoring to sell something.

“So is this just a box of sand?” the customer asks the employee as she...
sticks her hands into a small box, elevated for perusal purposes. 
“It’s called Sänd. It’s Swedish,” the employee responds in monotone. 
“What are its strong points? Other than the fact that it’s Swedish,” the customer asks. 
“It doesn’t stick to your hands, which is nice,” the employee responds. You sink into your chair as the customer and the Brookstone employee continue to discuss the intricacies of the sänd experience.

HOMERUN
CHRIS KUBIK

DiMaggio smacked one deep into right field and by the time the crowd quieted down he had come back from the war, having batted back grenades with the butt of his m one grand in news reels and front pages.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY
JOSHUA SONNY HARRIS

Your Facebook event made it abundantly clear it was (and is) your birthday. Perfect. I can rock a sundress or semi-formal men’s attire.

And came present time.
Perfect. I knew you played polo.
Shrugged my shoulders, #Yolo

I went out upon the greener pastures
Purchased in your name the most wonderful horse.
With a mane so golden, and head so divinely perched left
Her calves pulsated with sheer delight upon the approach of any anxious rider:
Young, or Old
Perfect.
Then I learned, nay. Water polo.
A cavalcade of depressive shock and dejection.
Nigh follows the inevitable equestrian question:
What good is a horse? Got a predilection?
Fuck.
One cannot play waterpolo with a horse. Nay, nay, nay.
Fuck fuck fuck.

So I killed the dear horse, most effortlessly
Blunt end of a shovel—there goes the filly.
To Apollo, my muse, a sacrificial plea
“Give me the power to write just one poem
That excuses the abuses of my rue-able gall!”

If I were a Wordsworth I’d title it long,
Detailing most presently historical circumstances, recent and gone, which preceded and informed the creation of this,
The proximity to notable bridges or foliage that might better enhance your understanding of the world of the story imparted.
But I’m not for that song;
I’m a purist.

Happy Birthday
Your horse is dead
On the bright side, though
He tasted delicious

Perfect.
Alison was not paying attention. She was wondering if she should let Jeff come over tonight and if she was the prettiest girl in her grade or not. Talia DiScavo would be pretty if she stopped dying her hair. All the girls thought Emily Stanwick was gorgeous but boys didn’t find her attractive. Olivia Henry was the only one who really even came close. She had a really big ass, if you were into that kind of thing. Alison worried that people were into that kind of thing. She picked a split end and frowned.

“Alison? Did you hear the question?”

Alison looked dully at Ms. Hines. She had not heard the question. She wondered if Ms. Hines was pregnant or just putting on weight. Her eyes narrowed. Maybe both.

“I don’t know?”

Ms. Hines answered her own question and Alison turned her attention to her nail beds, and then to her watch, and then to her nail beds again. Kaila Goelbecker had been the prettiest girl in the grade above but she died. Alison wasn’t sure who the hottest senior was anymore. The bell rang. Alison walked to her locker and thought more about The List.

The List had been released the second week of the school year for the past two years in a row and was now considered somewhat of a Lake Park High tradition. Jason Campbell, creator and distributor of The List, was now considered somewhat of a legend. He had been suspended the first two times and if he wrote another List it practically guaranteed expulsion. Everyone was looking forward to reading it.

The List ranked junior girls based on a composite score of face, body, and promiscuity. Some girls got nicknames like “The Sure Thing” or “Blue Balls” but for most girls Jason just gave numerical scores for each category and a short sexual history. You lost points for being too slutty or too prude and there was a scouting report at the end that mentioned some sophomores to watch out for. Some girls were left off the The List entirely. It was just a big joke, anyway, it doesn’t matter.

Alison put her books into her locker and slammed it. She was going to be number one. On principle she didn’t care about The List but there was no way Jason would rank anyone else first. Alison didn’t care, it was just fact. It wasn’t something she wanted, it was just something that would happen to her. Alison never did anything. Everything just happened to Alison.
Strictly speaking, there was no List. The second time Jason had made a List it had been a slow week in politics so it made the national news cycle and people were pissed. The community got together and had a bunch of human dignity workshops and seminars on respect. Some of the girls on the list got really into it and made t-shirts and shit with inspirational quotes on them about objectification.

Kaila Goelbecker hadn’t minded, or if she had she kept her mouth shut about it. You didn’t see Kaila Goelbecker on the news. She was everywhere else – Student Council President, Homecoming Queen, captain of the field hockey team – but she never complained. In fact, she had been on Jason’s dad’s boat before she drowned.

Alison remembered hearing the Friday before it happened that apparently Jason had invited Tricia Lippmann to hang out on his dad’s boat that weekend, which obviously meant he was inviting Kaila because she was Tricia’s best friend, and it was a big deal because apparently Kaila had agreed to go and it was the first time she had publicly acknowledged Jason since The List. The school board had spoken, the parents had spoken, numbers four, twelve, thirty, thirty-six, and forty-nine had spoken, but everyone wanted to know what Kaila Goelbecker thought. Kaila Goelbecker had spoken, and it was to say that she didn’t care. And that she would bring a six-pack of Miller Lite.

“Alison! You are not going to believe what I heard in calc just now!”

Shut the fuck up, Libby.

“What, Libby?”

“Apparently Danny Wiechec saw an advanced copy of The List and apparently you’re number one.”

Alison walked next to Libby down the hall and stared blankly ahead. She searched inside herself for a reaction and found nothing. This felt like something that had already happened to her. She thought of Kaila Goelbecker, and then she thought that she probably wouldn’t tell Jeff he could come over tonight.

After school Alison had to makeup a quiz and then she had yearbook and then she had field hockey practice. Kaila dying had left a vacancy on the varsity team. Alison was now the starting varsity goalie. She had to make up a quiz because she had French first period this year and she had been running late this morning. It was on conjugating verbs in the imperfect.

Jeff texted her after practice but Alison didn’t answer. She felt oily and she didn’t want him to come over.

Jeff had been one of the things that had just happened to Alison. In
the summer before the seventh grade Alison had moved to Lake Park and it was one of the worst summers of her life. Nothing happened at all. But then one weekend it was the twelve hundred block of Linden Street’s block party and at that block party was Jeff. Jeff didn’t live on her block but in the summer before seventh grade his brother was friends with someone who did. Jeff asked her to be his girlfriend and Alison said she thought that would be fine. Alison has actually never clarified it since then that she is still his girlfriend but he calls her enough that she assumes she still is.

Jeff would be mad that she didn’t let him come over but she was about to spend the whole weekend with him. It was the last official weekend of summer so they were all going to Alison’s lake house in Door County and if Jeff wanted to have fun he’d be sweet to her no matter what she did, so she didn’t answer his messages. It was just how things were.

After school on Friday, Jeff picked her up in his Jeep. Libby, Jill Fillmore, and Jeff’s best friend Greg Yu were already in the backseat. Rachel Berzins, who was on varsity field hockey with Alison, was driving the other car. Jeff blasted a mix tape he had made for the occasion the whole way there and everyone made bets about how epic the weekend would or would not be, but Alison spent most of the drive thinking about Monday and The List.

They started drinking as soon as they got there. The boys went to the back porch to start grilling and the girls sat on the dock with their feet in the lake, passing around a bowl of gummy bears that had been soaked in vodka. Alison examined her reflection in the water and compared herself to the other girls. She knew she was prettier than all of them. They told her so, constantly.

“God, Alison, I’d kill for your legs.”
“Tha’ts what you look like with no makeup?”
“If I had abs like you I would walk around in a sports bra all day.”
She was more popular than them. She got better grades than them. Her parents made more money than their parents. Alison wondered if any of that really mattered. The conversation, which Alison had not been paying attention to, had run its natural course and faced with the possibility of silence so early in the weekend the other girls started talking about The List.

“Alison, I’m so jealous you already know what number you are. Not that we didn’t all already know you were number one. But still.”
“I heard that Jason told the water polo team that he takes this weekend into consideration. Like, he factors it in. Into your score. So, like, if you do something really slutty, your number could change.”
“He is such a dick.”
“It’s just a joke, anyway.”

It felt like a conversation that they had already had. Alison thought about whether or not Jason was a dick. She thought about how often she had been thinking about Jason and about his impending expulsion. Alison ate more gummy bears and thought of Kaila Goelbecker. The boys yelled that dinner was served.

After they ate, they all drank some more. Now that darkness was falling, they drank together. They drank constructively, with drinking games. Organized drinking made them so drunk that when Troy Bennett yelled that they should all go swim in the lake he was met with resounding enthusiasm.

Alison, like all teenagers raised amongst lake houses and yacht clubs, knew not to go into the lake after drinking and knew not to go into the lake after drinking at night. Through the racket of her friends and her own drunken fog she could hear her father’s voice in her head and she thought of Kaila Goelbecker.

Lake Park High took Kaila agreeing to day drink on Jason’s dad’s boat as her stamp of approval on The List. Girls who complained about The List couldn’t take a joke; obviously the list didn’t really matter but if you weren’t on the list oh my god, you might as well be invisible. But it’s just a joke. The List becoming validated just kind of happened, all at once. Like it had always been a fixture at Lake Park High. It was suddenly unclear whether the hot girls made The List because they were hot or if The List made girls hot because they were on The List. Where one started, the other ended.

Day drinking on Jason’s dad’s boat naturally progressed into swimming off the side of Jason’s dad’s boat. It was the peak of summer so it was hot, so hot that eventually everyone was goaded or pushed into the cool of Lake Michigan. It was, by anyone’s standards, epic. Except for that because everyone was in the lake, no one was on the boat, and apparently Jason didn’t anchor it or something so that without anyone noticing the boat kind of drifted away and all these kids were like stuck out in the middle of Lake Michigan, drunk and sunburnt.

Alison stood in the lawn and watched her friends strip down on the dock. It was dark. Alison loved going into the lake at night and just floating on her back, looking at stars. The lake felt so big and she felt so small, and it was so dark. She would lie like this for hours and she would blend into the dark of the lake and the sky. Where one started the other ended. Alison heard her father’s voice. The universe has a plan.

Alison watched them jump in in their underwear. They screamed
at first contact, early September water considerably cooler than early September air. It would look fantastic, beautiful tan teenagers jumping into a moonlit lake, if Alison weren’t so tired. She felt, continually, as if she had just dropped something. She listlessly walked toward the dock and the noise. Jeff and Jason were both on the lacrosse team together. Jason was a year older than Jeff. Alison would never be so crude as to tell Jason about her love life in order to get on The List. She didn’t care about The List. Things just happen to Alison. Alison can’t control what Jeff says in the locker room.

“Alison I swear to god get your ass in this lake!”

Alison was unclear on who had yelled this. She had reached the dock. There was something she was supposed to remember. Alison shivered. It was dark and cold. She hiccupsed and it tasted like cheap rum, in a bad way. Alison walked to the end of the dock because she wanted somewhere to go but felt confused as soon as she got there. Someone kept saying her name, like getting ripped from dreamless sleep when you wake up late for school and your parents are yelling at you and your alarm is going off, somewhere in the darkness of her brain.

She felt the cold water before she felt the arms around her, and she was submerged before she processed that Jeff had jumped off the dock and taken her with him. Alison never does anything. Things just happen to her. It’s just a joke. It was dark and cold.

It sounds so stupid, like how do you drown when it’s the middle of the day and you can see the boat and the shore and there are a million people around? Everyone was exhausted, sleepy drunk and heat sleepy, but they were all swimming back toward the boat together. No one even realized Kaila wasn’t. She hadn’t made a sound.

Alison figured she must have been about to say something before Jeff pulled her in because her mouth was open and everywhere her mind turned was lake water. She couldn’t remember what she had wanted to say. She felt lake water in her nose and throat when she tried to gasp and she felt how heavy her tank top and shorts suddenly seemed, how perfectly solid and there they suddenly felt against her skin. She felt lake water and then she felt the absence of Jeff.

Kaila Goelbecker was an excellent student. Kaila Goelbecker was a dedicated athlete. Kaila Goelbecker was a beautiful girl. Kaila Goelbecker was not even that drunk her friends said in a statement to the police or the coast guard or whatever. These things just happen. It could have happened to anyone. It’s happened before; it’ll happen again.

Her body seized when it realized what was going on, slower than
her brain. Her legs kicked, her arms thrashed. They connected with nothing, no muddy lake bottom between her toes, no cold air on her fingertips. She reached elsewhere, desperate. She blinked lake water, she screamed lake water, her fingers clawed at lake water. Everything felt loud and bright like standing up too quickly. Someone was saying her name.

“Kaila! Kaila!”

Alison coughed and inhaled. She cursed at Jeff.

“Lighten up, babe, it’s just a joke.”
THE COMPLETE ANIMAL
NATHANIEL SCHWARTZ

The complete animal
is bloated with instinct.
All its empty parts are filled up.

The complete animal
cannot describe itself.
It is born like that.

It is born dead like that—
like how a human being
who lives about sixty-seven years
and walks about three miles an hour
could spend its life walking the length of the equator
about seventy-one times,
and then, choking and spitting and vomiting itself up
find itself dead at home—
the complete animal is born like that,
but it goes nowhere in time too
and it changes less.

Would you call a river
waterlogged? I mean
the complete animal loves
the earth.
US, THINKING
MARI COHEN

Artificial intelligence systems
sometimes think themselves into insanity.
After our last, terse hug
I needed to see you
see us.
I worried I lost us, in Union Station,
in line for my sandwich and
glass-bottled iced tea. People kept
stopping me to tell me I’d dropped my receipts.
I pretended to care, bent to the grimy floor,
tucked slippery paper into my purse. I walked on.
Then I sat for hours on the bus, cocooned in exit
signs and wayward snow.
I sat behind the driver, occasionally
jolted by the crackle of his radio.
When I cried, I wondered
if he heard.
That one time Michael kept saying
you’re overthinking it.
I told him he was right but
I should’ve asked him how to stop,
how to paint clean the wall behind my filling eyes
that watched a solemn Chicago step backwards
as I was lulled into half-sleep by the highway.
WEST COAST SWING

ALISON THUMEL

This song is a shipwreck.
He sang it near the edge
of town. He sang it
on the hill where
ancient mothers
come to dance on Sunday afternoons.
I heard it on my way
to the market to select a few
choice plums. It grabbed
at my wrists as I smelled
the dark skins. Sweet bruises.
It hung about like a fog.
It whispered then roared.
Drivers searched for it
in their rearview mirrors.
It told me to make plum cake
with sugar glaze
so that I could lick my fingers
as the storm rolls in tomorrow.
The ancient mothers weep
when they hear it.
Their tears fall like carefully placed
toes in a West Coast Swing.
When we are too careful
we get the steps all wrong
and our faces all pale-streaked wet.
Can you hear it?
Can you hear it?
As I am eating my feelings with a tub of Jelly Bellies,
I stumble upon a shiny pink pebble and hold it up to the light.
I imagine the test tubes and taste tests,
the organic chemistry courses and nights of unrest,
and realize just how much work went into making one little piece of candy

taste exactly like another little piece of candy,
and that it’s still not quite right.

And while I should ponder what it means to be unique,
How the pink pebble should embrace an identity, an authentic self,
I’m moving onto a shiny red pebble, popping it in my mouth.
I squirm.
I cry:
“Oh! Cinnamon flavored jellybean that looks way too much like Strawberry,
Why the fuck do you exist?”
HELLO STRANGERS
WARREN SHEPRO

-February 2, 2111-
[2/14/2111 6:22:37] SuPerSistent: My name is said to be Diligence of House Patience
[2/14/2111 6:22:45] SuPerSistent: I built this transmitter to make your acquaintance
[2/14/2111 6:23:01] SuPerSistent: to bridge cultures across the interstellar void
[2/14/2111 6:23:09] SuPerSistent: I have enclosed instruction
[2/14/2111 6:23:25] SuPerSistent: of its twin, should you wish to call back
[2/14/2111 6:23:33] SuPerSistent: In a small red dwarf system I float in the black
[2/14/2111 6:23:41] SuPerSistent: ≈ 135,000 light-years from the galaxy’s core
[2/14/2111 6:23:49] SuPerSistent: (my “years” ≈ 2.7747 x (half-life of Thorium 234))

-March 21, 2111-
[3/21/2111 10:42:18] QuriousQuasar: I’m from the big yellow star system
[3/21/2111 10:42:24] QuriousQuasar: (or 110 of yours) away from you
[3/21/2111 10:42:34] QuriousQuasar sent: MapToEarth.mapdoc
[3/21/2111 10:42:36] QuriousQuasar: I thought we were alone in the universe

-March 24, 2152-

SLICED BREAD MAGAZINE
[3/24/2152 8:00:42] QuriousQuasar: Are you getting this?
[3/24/2152 8:00:45] QuriousQuasar: Is this a bad time?
[3/24/2152 8:01:37] QuriousQuasar: (Uh, do I have to answer in rhyme?)

-July 1, 2193-
[7/1/2193 14:15:12] WiseGuy: Sorry to be
[7/1/2193 14:15:17] WiseGuy: I am Diligence’s hatchling, and my name is
said
[7/1/2193 14:15:19] WiseGuy: to be Prudence, my House being the same;
[7/1/2193 14:15:27] WiseGuy: 10 of your years before you replied
[7/1/2193 14:15:30] WiseGuy: 92 years gone when this message will reach
you
[7/1/2193 14:15:35] WiseGuy: I only just found this exchange, and I be-
seech you
[7/1/2193 14:15:38] WiseGuy: I would still like to stay in touch

-July 15, 2193-
[7/15/2193 23:36:55] doorMatt: Uh, hey Prudence, I am Matteo
[7/15/2193 23:37:00] doorMatt: Same deal over here, yo __.
[7/15/2193 23:37:04] doorMatt: Lindsey passed last decade
[7/15/2193 23:37:08] doorMatt: I’m kinda thinkin this whole parade
[7/15/2193 23:37:12] doorMatt: of radio chatter over a 20-lightyear gap
[7/15/2193 23:37:16] doorMatt: with 40-year lag is some serious bullcrap =
/
[7/15/2193 23:37:19] doorMatt: Speed of light’s too friggin slow
[7/15/2193 23:37:23] doorMatt: Can we, like, do anything about that?

-May 11, 2234-
[5/11/2234 1:52:45] the_giving_vein: I am Charity of House Patience
[5/11/2234 1:52:49] the_giving_vein: we are in agreement on the matter of
the lag
[5/11/2234 1:52:50] the_giving_vein: also
[5/11/2234 1:52:54] the_giving_vein: you can talk in free verse, it’s fine
[5/11/2234 1:52:58] the_giving_vein: the rhyming is just a cultural thing
for us

5/11/2234 1:52:59 the_giving_vein: we didn’t mean to make you
5/11/2234 1:53:03 the_giving_vein: embarrass yourselves or anything
5/11/2234 1:53:05 the_giving_vein: so sorry about that : P
5/11/2234 1:53:09 the_giving_vein: anyway
5/11/2234 1:53:13 the_giving_vein: do you have faster-than-light travel yet?
5/11/2234 1:53:17 the_giving_vein: maybe we could meet up ; )

-May 14, 2234-
5/14/2234 6:17:03 childOfSchwarzs: Hello Charity
5/14/2234 6:17:06 childOfSchwarzs: I’m Jennifer
5/14/2234 6:17:09 childOfSchwarzs: Sorry but no : (
5/14/2234 6:17:12 childOfSchwarzs: We only just figured out antimatter rockets
5/14/2234 6:17:15 childOfSchwarzs: not even good for subluminal travel
5/14/2234 6:17:18 childOfSchwarzs: not across interstellar distances, anyway > _>
5/14/2234 6:17:21 childOfSchwarzs: we’ll see how our propulsion tech improves

-December 3, 2275-
12/3/2275 11:27:38 the_giving_vein: still Charity here this time
12/3/2275 11:27:41 the_giving_vein: though I am sure this will be my last message
12/3/2275 11:27:44 the_giving_vein: I am very old
12/3/2275 11:27:45 the_giving_vein: you are fortunate to have gas giants nearby
12/3/2275 11:27:48 the_giving_vein: they must make the acquisition of antimatter
12/3/2275 11:27:51 the_giving_vein: substantially easier - _-
12/3/2275 11:27:55 the_giving_vein: we are still running mostly on fusion over here
12/3/2275 13:50:45 e-Motion: hi charity
12/3/2275 13:50:49 e-Motion: maybe we should ask around
12/3/2275 13:50:52 e-Motion: i mean if there are 2 of us this close together
e-Motion: odds of intelligent life emerging can't be that remote

e-Motion: must be others nearby right?
e-Motion: maybe one of them will have ftl travel

e-Motion: like wormholes or something? : ?

-September 22, 2316-

FractallyNestedModeration: Hello Ed
FractallyNestedModeration: I am Temperance
FractallyNestedModeration: Good idea
FractallyNestedModeration: I think we've found someone! : D
FractallyNestedModeration: So hang on one sec
FractallyNestedModeration: we're sending you
FractallyNestedModeration: their nearest system's coordinates
FractallyNestedModeration sent: SignalSource.map-doc
FractallyNestedModeration: there you go, feel free to listen in

(p)IRATE: ALL SHALL FALL BEFORE THE EMPIRE D : <
(p)IRATE: GLORY AND BLOOD!
(p)IRATE: BLOOD AND GLORY! : >: O
FractallyNestedModeration: can't translate what they're saying yet
FractallyNestedModeration: but they seem friendly enough

e-Motion: what
e-Motion: shit
e-Motion: no
e-Motion: wait
e-Motion: temperance?

-September 22, 2357-
e-Motion: Temperance?

-September 22, 2397-
e-Motion: ...anybody?
-September 22, 2437-
[9/22/2437 7:00:00] e-Motion: …
[9/22/2437 7:00:30] e-Motion: :'-(

WHERE I WENT WRONG
ALISON THUMEL

They said I grew up with a penchant for the grotesque. It was common knowledge, like the way fingernails curl onward after you die. They were amazed at how I could coo the ghosts into pillow cases and julienne ladyfingers for dessert. I won the spelling bee with g-a-l-l-o-w-s. They wrote on my mid-year report cards that my black dresses always fell below my fingertips. My middle name was Dolores. When the rains came hard in June I would scoop sodden creatures from storm drains and train them for my private circus.
I befriended the exterminator, who called himself Carl and informed me of his Aquarius nature and that the rats in my walls were leisurely consuming the German cockroaches beneath my baseboards. (The latter had wings and were therefore easier to kill, as they reproduced every twelve weeks.) I too was a water sign and asked how it was that the blue tea bags he cradled would poison my symbiotic vermin. Sometimes it is better to ask the questions everyone shies from because if not your walls may be full of rats and your head full of nothing more than the rattling of chitin wings.
PIECES OF DEAD PRESIDENTS
NEAL JOCHMANN

for Halley Young, who said it best, and first.
Trying not to be crude.

I dare not venture a guess,
Put one forward into a dark place,
A cave perhaps, looking for figures
Shadowy
And serene--
Dare not try and say
that “this is why fathers chuckle
at introducing
To their child
the yellow snow.”

I’ll concede that the world--
not all natural things,
as we first make a world out to be
In writing--
Where so little is a sentence--
Of life
Or death, no--
nothing that severe--
The death masks worn
By the tall judgmental--
Who may, for example, fold up a bridge
So a boat can pass, maybe--
Oh no.
a boat full of prisoners--
That this world discolors the snow,
I’ll concede--
My world so defined.

There is a kind I’ll eat
And a kind that I won’t--
Any kind that has lain for days
in gravity and ice-cold--

Though occasionally

wind comes, blowing it miles away

into whiteness again--

In a new town

of cold people--

People who, with proper exposure,

can relearn the purity

of a sideways shower--

Though I love the black dogs

With more hearts than I have,

and spend all day pretending

to hold their leather leash, I--

Teaser fashioning words given to me

in droplets, prizing--

By their careful displacement--

sentence--

or non-sentence--

making,

I do not want to eat the snow

that has lain days in the gravity

and ice-cold and seen black dogs pass--

presumably relieving themselves

of death

(I am presuming that discoloration

of the fallen thing is another fall for it)--

Just as,

in years past,

I have not wished to be threatened

with having my throat cut.

Trying not to be crude, I use

a few too many words--

Words I couldn’t know the first time

it snowed--

a miracle in a balmy place,
Tennessee, a mature and restless place indeed
and often warm—

As my father photographed us
fashioning men from the stuff
as though we knew it all—
The pictures on film,
which is a burning of thin things—

Contrast these
with the tall, judging and
incidentally
bridge-controlling ones—

Of which my father—
his hair plentiful
as long as I conceded
I had none myself—

At least none of the same color—
His oak-and-rubber smelling boots
and wooden-toothed smile

(We might, for the essay’s purposes
Call him George Washington,
whether the real teeth were from wood
or goat
or genuine grin in the end—

A burning of film my father undertook
to birth marks I’ve
no real
reason to fear—

But we knew none of it because—

And this is no one’s fault
but the plateau’s or the forest’s—

Tennessee snow was the type
that turned up ‘cause the wind blew
With force from northern lakes.

In the ice lining the walk
and the hard snow above it—
I see strata of edible things—
because I am not yet grown,
nor do I plan on growing—
Things edible indeed but only
roughly
advisable to sink some teeth into.

I laugh at the dogs
marking this place
like they know it all
like we knew it all—

Nostalgia
and a copper-penny smell—
the search for treasure
in a downcast
and darkened thing—

And how much is it anyway?
Laughing at black bad-luck dogs.

In from severity and snow
I come to eat
And ask the players at dinner—
every one of them my age—

To regale me—
joke and joust—
with what I don’t know.

The most gorgeous girl in the world says that
“she often wonders if there are particles
of distant planets or dead presidents
or Tennessee in her—
If that’s all she is, since everything
has to come
from some where”

And as she speaks snot steals from her nose.
UNTITLED
AUSTIN SARFAN

mist white heat bare
borne locus heartchaffed wheat
work scraps dust fires gone rising
rising angel rising dust rising fires gone wind
pieces wind pieces angel
pieces all pieces all
angel gone wind gone night’s blaze
blaze fires’ wet blue light
blaze bond blue light
blaze bond white rock blaze bond white light blaze
the symbol the symbol the symbol the haze
THE CHEMICAL PROPERTIES OF AN AFTERNOON RAIN
FELICITY DEISS

that first sip of bourbon smells like my father
wet denim is moss-sweet and cool

gum chewed too long tastes thick like incense
at a catholic mass

  in nomine padre et filius et spiritus sancti

the rain honeycombs on these windows as well as it did
on the stained glass cathedral

the quick taste of coffee on forbidden lips
and bird-song leather

  is the part of religion I cannot forget
“One hermaphrodite, two hermaphrodites, three hermaphrodites, four hermaphrodites, five hermaphrodites.” A frail brown haired girl hunched over her microscope counting fern cells through a thick New Jersey accent.

I stopped listening as I strolled between the rows of students sitting in front of their laboratory counter spaces. My students were cataloguing *C. richardii prothalus* cells by sex. Some kids, who may or may not have been high on ether, asked Erica, the other TA, how to appropriately wrap the power cord around their microscope. I had always been impressed by how well she wore her nose ring. I raised my hand for a high five as I walked by.

“A little sweaty huh?” she said in an oddly flirtatious way while moving so close to me that our faces almost touched. She was far too vivacious to be a biology enthusiast.

“Who are you the sweat police?” I said, scooting away and slamming a nearby table leaving a moist imprint.

I continued to sloth through the lab hoping that an ambitious pre-med freshman kid wouldn’t ask me a question that required genuine thought. The lab smelled like nothing. It would have been wonderful to attach a smell to the lab. Something distinctive. No matter how grotesque. I longed for a smell. Alas, various high-powered cleaning products had washed away that wish. There was nothing left but white walls, white counters, stupid stools, and stupid freshmen. The lab was soulless and smellless. I overheard Professor Smith talking with two befuddled students sitting by
a dissecting scope. “There are lots of things that we have in our pockets that we can play with here,” he said. He had a knack for transforming encouraging phrases into innuendos. Or was he transforming innuendos into encouraging phrases. Who knew? I enjoyed watching the students stare blankly at him as he continued to ramble about the intricacies of their microscope. The students handed me their lab write-ups on their way out. I could feel their failure through my sweaty hands. I knew I would be giving them the grades they deserved—bad ones. When everyone was gone I stowed their degenerate lab reports in my knapsack and left.

Once outside I got a call from Dad.
I looked around to make sure no one was listening.
“I didn’t get in,” I said.
“You have the interview tomorrow and if that falls through you’ll start looking for lab jobs,” he said.

I paused. Why had I only applied to three dentistry schools? Because I was gifted. Because I worked hard. Because I was intelligent.

“Are you there Sam? God. Technology. Why can’t Cingular Wireless provide us with a…”
I cut off his rant, “What if I don’t want to do it anymore?”
“Oh good you’re still there. What?” he said.
“I don’t want to stay here. I’m not enjoying what I’m studying. I think that I’d like to do something more creative,” I said.
“Dentistry can be creative,” he said.
“Nope. No way. Creativity is like pornography, you know it when you see it,” I said.

“So porn. You want to do porn?” He asked.
“I want to do something fun. Biology is a chore. It’s laborious,” I said.
“Labor is supposed to be laborious. Sam. If it’s fun it’s a hobby. Dentistry, now that’s a job,” he said.

“Nobody flosses anymore Dad. It’s a lost cause,” I said.
“So you want me to keep paying for all your shit? Huh? Go with porn. You might make money in porn,” he said.

The call cut out for real. He was right. Who was I kidding? I had been groomed to be a doctor my whole life. They had groomed me ever since sending me to The Hamilton School For Boys when I was 5. I could change lives, but I couldn’t change the fact that I had no zeal. Not an ounce of zeal. How does one accrue zeal? Can you steal zeal? Is there someone on campus who could deal me some zeal? They could deal me a lot of stuff. Zeal they
could not deal. Great professors and other researchers often overflowed with enthusiasm as they spoke at conferences. A couple of years ago I had hoped that I would come to a point where I felt that way too. Dad called back. I let it ring and continued walking home. I saw a little blonde runner displaying a welcoming smile as she headed toward me. I put my hand up for a high five. She ducked away like I was trying to hit her. She scowled at me as she scurried off. In hindsight, the smile might have been an exercise-induced grimace. Before I knew it I was half a block away from my apartment. The lights were on.

The lights were always on. Victor was a tornado of consumption and cataclysmic electricity bills. I would often come home and find that “Workaholics,” or some equally asinine show was playing on the TV, weird electronic music was emanating from his vacant room, every light and every fan in the house was on, yet Victor would be nowhere to be found. We had been lab partners our freshman year. Like many others in Bio 101 he promptly gave up his parents’ medical dreams so that he could spend more of his time and more of his trust fund self-medicating. Now he always appears to be dreaming.

I used to do drugs with him when I was down to clown. When I smoked with him I always lost my phone or my wallet or my keys or my wits or my dignity or something even more important like my time. Coming to the realization that drugs were bad made me feel mature despite the fact that I had been beaten over the head with that sentiment since coming out of the womb.

One weekend, a few months ago, I went to New Orleans for a conference. I came home to find that Victor had turned our oversized storage closet into a drug den. He had lined the walls with Bob Marley and Jimi Hendrix posters and one Big Lebowski poster. Victor loved “The Big Lebowski.” Sophomore year he refused to drink anything that wasn’t a white Russian. When offered a beer he would say “Dude…come on. What the fuck?” He had placed a thin tempurpedic mattress and a few pillows on the floor. He also lined the inside of the closet with Christmas lights. I decided to call it “The Panic Room.” The irony always made me smile. Anyone who ever made their way into the panic room was far too sedated to be panicked by anything.

I reached the door to the apartment, opened it and entered the kitchen. Victor was home. He and four other acquaintances of mine sat in a pow-wow formation on the living room floor. The TV was serving an ambient role tonight. They all cackled as they stared off in different directions.
Blue foam dripped from their collective mouths. “What the fuck is that shit in your mouths’?” I tried to yell, but it came out softer than I’d anticipated. “What?” Victor said without looking in my direction. “What’s in your mouth?” I said. “We are having a gum chewing contest!” yelled Vinnie—the acquaintance with whom I was most acquainted. I went to my room and removed my backpack.

I returned to my spot in the kitchen and spied on Victor and his friends. They danced around a microwave placed on our plastic dining table. It was as if they were taking part in some sort of Neolithic spiritual ceremony that brought their frozen feast back from its mummified abyss. This ritual concluded the way that it always did—hot pockets for all. They each proceeded to spit out their mammoth wads of blue gum one at a time while lining up to radiate their frozen treats. “Ah Fuck!!” Vinnie bellowed as he burnt his tongue on a premature hot pocket.

I opened the fridge. Pizza. Yes! Joy! Happiness! Wonder! Pizza free from the constraints of a breaded covering that concealed its true identity. It had mushrooms on it. Victor always ordered mushroom pizza. I took my first cold bite with most of my head still inside the refrigerator, closed the door with my slice in hand and turned around. Victor was standing a foot away from me. His pupils were saucers. He smiled so hard that I thought he might hurt his face. “We took mushrooms,” he said.

I stared at him and nodded connoting my comprehension of the situation. He smiled less hard and returned to his position on the living room floor.

I continued to eat my pizza in the kitchen, too weary to interact with the mushroom bandits who had taken over the apartment. After swallowing my last bite, I took a look at the television screen. A midget jumped out of a swimming pool filled with packing peanuts and emitted a bellowing fart. “That was mushroom pizza dude,” Victor said nonchalantly. “Like psychedelic mushrooms. You know. The kind that spins you around a little.” His words cut through the room with more force than that famous television midget had cut the proverbial cheese with. He looked serious. Victor almost never looked serious. I was petrified. My night of relaxation before my upcoming interview had turned into a fan that had shit on it. “What do I do?” I yelled. “I’ve never taken these.”
“Come chill man. It’ll be a good time,” he said. Jeffy, a thespian, who was sitting on the floor beside Victor, stood up and began to rap:

“Uhhh it’s the ten mushroom commandments.

Rule numero uno: never let no one know

What you took, He might be a ho. He might tell the popo

They lay ya’ on the granite. You’d be a bandit. A felon. Go to hell an’ never come back an’…

Seven: this rule is so underrated
Keep your family and hallucinogens completely separated
They don’t mix like two dicks and no bitch
Find yourself in serious shit…”

I became warm and tingly all over. Sweat started pouring from all of my pores. I took my shirt off. Victor took his shirt off too. He had a girlfriend, but I always suspected that he played for the other team. When we watched football together he would say stuff like: “Adrian Peterson just has one of those football bodies. He has a great football body.”

I went to the bathroom. Peeing was weird. I felt the warmth emanating from my body. Urinating had become a novel activity—something to write home about. I envisioned dad’s unsavory response to my expository essay on the intricacies of the urinary experience while tripping on psychedelic mushrooms.

I stared into the mirror until my face went blurry. I couldn’t tell whether my eyelids were moving closer together or I was going blind. Vinnie popped up next to me.

“Come here you fuzzy little man peach!” He screamed en route to a bear hug. “What have you been doing in here?” He started rubbing my head and messing up my hair.

“I sort of spaced out for a couple minutes,” I said. “Ha! More like a couple hours!” He said.

I walked back into the living room to find the couch mats scattered and toilet paper draped over almost everything and everyone. Jeffy was curled up in a ball on the cushion-less couch engulfed in a toilet paper cocoon. I sat down next to him. He told me that he had become the couch. I tried not to listen. He explained to me the process by which he was made. He came into existence in the form of a million microfibers and was meticulously pieced together in a factory. Then groped by moving crews multiple times. He had been stationed in this room for over a year.
Victor was lying face down in the panic room with the door open in his underwear. A guy who I thought was named Max, but was actually named Steve got up from what appeared to be a power nap. He shook Victor.

“Victor are you ok?” He said.

Victor looked up with tears streaming down his face.

“What’s wrong Victor?” He said.

“Sad stuff man. Sad stuff.” Victor said.

I felt blissful and exhausted at the same time. I got up from the couch that Jeffy thought he was and went to my room. The drug din that is often indicative of a drug den had subsided. I felt a wonderful sense of calm as I collapsed on my bed, reached for my alarm, and set it for 8:00AM. I thought about what it would be like to be a bed. What it would be like to be stationed at Bed Bath and Beyond with kids jumping on me and old people stumbling over me and employees vacuuming me and fluffing my pillows.

Bzzzz! Bzzzz! Bzzzz! I woke up in a haze, went to the bathroom, and looked in the mirror. The skin around my eyes was puffy and my hair stood up in a fauxhawk. I felt, achy, nauseous, and tired. I felt soulless like my lab. It was the big day that I considered not so big. The interview that would determine whether or not I got my dentistry degree from my alma mater that I was excited about escaping.

The interviewer asked me why I would be a good fit for the dentistry school. She asked me what I felt was the most important thing that I had learned as a bio major. She asked me how I felt about my own dental hygiene. I stood up and left the room. “The bathroom is down the hall to the left. Hurry back! I have a lot more to ask you about your affinity for teeth!” she said.

I left the building. A girl in a lab coat, who bore a striking resemblance to Erica, was walking toward me. I stuck my hand up for a high five. She ducked. Maybe high-fives wasn’t my thing. I took a deep breath in. It smelled wonderful outside.
UNTITLED
LEAH VON ESSEN

The girl disappeared one day
on the inside
just like you had

one day you spoke to her and she smiled but
her eyes held just
ambivalence or maybe hurt
or maybe they did sparkle
but it didn’t seem real

and you wonder what did I do wrong?
(and the answer is just enough)
and as you talk she nods and glances away
as if to say
I only sort of care
and she isn’t thinking of hurt or you or her
she has disappeared
but only inside

but it is bigger there.

and you wonder feverishly what you’ve done
and what has changed
(the answer is nothing)
and what has grown
(the answer is nothing but her)
and you wonder why she would ever
look this indifferent to you
inside
as she sips her coffee—when did that start?—
and spins her new earring—when did she get that?—
and shakes her new hair—did I see those pictures?—
and she excuses herself—she came to read—
does that mean she cares more about the books than you?
   (the answer is maybe)

and you wonder as you walk out when she got mean
   (the answer is never)
and who taught her to be so confident
   (the answer is someone else)
and the final question, from who she learned
to sting and bite and speak one thing while meaning the other
and always smile but never care
   (the answer, which you can’t think up, is You.)
METAMORPHOSES
ANGELA QIAN

I was a riverborn pebble, a wild flowerseedling,
You are no wind, no force of the earth.
Will you come with the battering rams of Rome,
or the dissonant violin of Nero?

Leaning over the greening bridge, arms folded across the railing to see the water so Pacific blue, there lies the boat, not gray as in the fairytales, and bearing no passengers... nor me, me, me.

I dreamed I was growth, a tender vine, a climbing rose sunk into the muscle of the heart. I was root, I was stone, I was the fossil of a fish. Bronze used to mean lasting, then it was gold, then carbon.
I was a pigment flake off the hair of a brush.
We would have stayed in bed forever
if we wanted to,
lying while the fan beat overhead with its
blades like a guillotine.

The lights slowly flicker too, sometimes,
and I remember I
joked
the room was haunted—

and maybe it was, but
with you in my arms
I was being sung to sleep softly
Death's soothing lullaby:

“Like rats in the walls,
it all whispers, fades away.
Even water runs.”
I wake thinking of a girl
I am not sure she still can walk

Outside these dreams
Drawn up by dreamthreads

Like silver puppet strings
To dance for me at night

I have not wanted her now
In ten red months

In the daytime she lives
In stories plucked from my tongue

Not like ripe fruits but rather
Pulling splinters from under nails

But at night she stabs into
That safe warm space behind

My eyelids and this morning
I close my lids and let

The sun seep through
Pink and veins and flesh

Out these brief pulses
Today I will let her stay

***

I think this morning about the dream I had where I was in her house
but it was not her house
and I lay on the bed that was not her bed
with a morbid wilting floral pattern
and she stood at the window, backlit, haloed like the peak
of a solar eclipse.
She recited acronyms and I interpreted
silently, making a sign for swimming
in a bottomless pool.

On the beside table, a book of gray faces,
with ink-black lips contorted in convex grins, trapped
between funhouse mirrors.

It was two days after the fact and a day before.
The sky outside was birdless. I made a sign for April
brimming at the windowpane.

***

In the dreams I cannot speak
Or she cannot hear me

I do not think we shall ever speak
Again I reach to show her my palms

Which hold a few words
Like small round stones

***

The gesture is an index finger pointed toward the forehead, as if pointing to
the brain, then a movement of the hand upward and outward while flexing
the finger twice. The gesture is dipping in, pulling her from this dream with
a crooked finger, like fishing reeds from a fast-flowing river. I miss once. I
miss once, never again.

***

Gather round, I’ll tell you a story of the year I thought I had gone insane.
No, don’t worry, I’ll be brief. I’ll place all my characters in a lineup with

SLICED BREAD MAGAZINE
laminated numbers in their hands. Here are my charts. Here is a weighted hat that keeps my head screwed on. Here are my rubber shoes. Here is the jug I keep by my bed to spit my fever dreams into like watermelon seeds. My doctor whispers that it is good to write these things down, to sift those dreams from the pulpy pink of what they tell me happened in the intervals between the hurried heartbeats of those months.

***

I fell hard one spring
when slick puddles
and libidinous critters
made things go down easy.
We dropped acid under Orion
and wore out the heels
of our sneakers hitchhiking
within the city limits.
They thought we were sisters
when we peroxided our locks
and patched our jackets
with bits of each other’s
mother’s quilts. When
she taught me how to jitterbug
I did not doubt it was love.

***

On Tuesdays I visit Dr. Pearl.
I have written it here in my little pink book.
Today is Tuesday.
The forecast says snow
and out the window I can see
it has already started.

At the edge of the bed I put on my boots
and gather my bundle of papers
and my little pink book. I will hand
my writing for this week to Dr. Pearl
and he will make a constellation of lines
that trace orbits around my words
in heavy red pen.
He will tell me I need to write more

about me or more about her or less about both.
Today is Tuesday.
The buses will all run along in a neat line.

The radio in the kitchen is buzzing
and singing something about a rise in the price of melons.
The ground rose up and swallowed
a house in Kansas. I am not angry

this morning, so I will eat
a soft-boiled egg tapped with a little spoon
then wipe the yellow from my lips
with a white linen cloth.

***

All summer long we cheated
fate. We survived on watermelon
rinds and pine nuts and only drank
tap water. During our month
in New England, we set unboiled lobsters
free in the Bay and read too much
Poe. I told my parents
I was aboard a fishing boat to learn
how work with my hands. The beauty
of it was that in summer all the people
ride up the coast in a caravan
to have a grand picnic in Cape Cod.
We were not invited, so we stole
Adirondacks from a front porch
and went to watch whales spitting
offshore. I kept all our papers
in a rubber clutch—tax returns
and our passports in case
Canada invaded. I knew this
could not last. Winter came.

***

Dr. Pearl writes notes. Sometimes I grow quiet in moving my mouth about my days. There is no trauma there. Sometimes I bite my tongue. Did you dream of her? Tell me do you dream in color, do you feel warmth, does your mouth taste of sour grapes? In the Freudian sense, you should worry more about your teeth. Lie down. Here is a book to keep balanced on your forehead. *Interpretation of Dreams*. I think you can appreciate the irony. You really must stop rereading Nabokov. It will strain your eyes.

***

I dreamed again of her
in photo negative,
her, inverted, like I’ve developed
her all wrong, skin darkened
to indigo hues. She crept along
on shadow toes, weightless.
*A detachment of the soul
from the fetters of matter.*

She hovered above my headboard.
*The liberation of the spirit
from the pressure
of external nature,
realizations of wishes.*

The image wavered.
There she was shucking silk
into a paper bag. There
she was, seen backwards
through a telescope.
There I was, floating, body
spread, water rainbowed
in rings around me.
At dawn, the water cracked
like a mirror. *The way in which,*
on awakening, our thoughts
thrust it aside as something bizarre:

we do not know
the meaning of enough.

***

I know a few things
about interpretation.
I knew the rhythm
of her boots beating up
wooden stairs and the clammy tremble
tumbling down her spine at night
that meant another nightmare.

In August when morning
doves lay still,
I joked that hope
was a thing with feathers,
but she rustled them
into black plastic and said no,
this only meant a change to come.

When she asked me to read
our cards, did she know the answer?
The Queen of Cups, can be poetic
when upright but fickle
when inverted. I know
the clammy itch at my wrists
on a clear August afternoon
before dark curtains drop.

***

The Tower stands at a rocky cliff. Waves crash below. It is struck by a lightening bolt. As its walls crumble, a figure falls. The Fool helped build this
tower. As the Fool ascends to the top she feels that she has left her old self, has become grander. As lightening strikes, however, she sees she is not at all. Standing among the rubble, the Fool feels shaken, but a sense of clarity has opened up. Her lies have crumbled. The foundations remain, and they are true. She can rebuild herself.

***

Two nights before she told me about her mother, who shrunk and shrunk, who became a doll with eyes that blinked when she lay down, who never ever spoke.

***

Two days later, here is, a doll in a white-draped bed. They have dressed her up in a gown. Her fingers are quivering doves.

Did I mention how I did not know her given name, how the nurse surveyed shining eyes, before guiding me by the wrist through a whirl of steel doors.

Did I mention how I couldn’t look at her hands,

  (my eyes to her eyes, her eyes to her hands),
how they grasped at one another as on a ship railing, reeling out at sea?
She held on to not float away, balloon on intravenous tethers.

***

The sign for the diagnosis bends the middle fingers forward at the large knuckle. It can but doesn’t have to touch the body. Use a single straight-down movement and an appropriately sad facial expression. The sign bows the middle fingers forward in prayer, prostrate against the chest. The hands move straight down, as if stripping the word from across the heart.

***
I think of her as two years before.
We consumed two pounds of strawberries
from balsa wood baskets in summer outside Monterey.
The ships had gone out
and come back in. When we sat up, wiped the sweet red grins
from our lips, gathered the scattered green heads
in the ebbing glow, we went home
and under blankets like sails, I helped her take off her skin
and hang it from the bedpost to dry.

I think of her as two years before.
The ships had gone out
and come back in, like a deep breath
in sleep,
not strained, nor forced down like before
diving, like feasting at a last meal.

***

She told me she was contagious but they did not place her behind a wall of
glass, not like an aquarium, not like a museum exhibit. She was in a little
curtain-walled room with a telephone and a paper cup. A woman sat watch-
ing her with a clipboard, making a note each time she blinked. She told me
it was the first time she did not feel alone. Later they took her to a pretty
stone house with woods nearby. She spent her days writing letters and eat-
ing food off plastic trays. The doors locked from the outside.

***

I have finished the bottle
of pink pills from Dr. Pearl.

They kept me neat and happy.
I drank milk with every meal

and stopped consuming pears.
He says results of the precautionary measures and the quarantine are satisfactory. I have not wanted her in ten red months.

The letters have stopped crinkling into my letterbox.

It will soon be Tuesday again.
At 5:27 AM Jorge Escobedo sits at his kitchen table sporting half a frothy beard of shaving cream and red striped boxers. On the other side of the door I can see that he dines with the usual companions. Spread out in front of him is a squadron of stained mugs, varying in size and color. Coffee, the kind you microwave. My nostrils are tickled by a whisper rising from his ashtray. The ashtray, the one his dearly departed mother molded during her binges at the Y. He takes a slow drag from the last of his Luckies and then suspends a blue-veined hand over the mouths of the mugs. Each contains a meticulously calculated ratio of milk to sugar. Many a morning I have arrived to find Jorge’s pristine nails pinching motes into the blackness of his insomnia. Today he elects and then caresses a white mug. It says number one dad on it, or some such.

“You have to feel out the difference a grain makes,” the man exhales each time he catches me inspecting.

Do you hear that? It is silence. Around the corner an ambulance runs past screaming. The windows do not blink. That is because Jorge lives alone in his one bedroom apartment above the small but relatively pleasant hair salon he runs on Clark Street. The business has done well thanks to the reputation. The Queen of Boys Town, they call him. It helps that he dresses in full regalia, prancing his lanky limbs around the court of his shop as though ready to send for the guards at a moments notice. You would think he was a conductor, the way he gracefully moves his baton between hair follicles to the keys of Beethoven. In spite of his gay disposition, he takes haircutting rather seriously, so I manage to look past it. Moreover, in my presence he curbs his enthusiasm.

“Jorge let me in,” I bark over the howling gusts while tightening my scarf. “It’s cold and my joints ache.”

I am early this year because it is fun to keep him on his toes. He has never denied me, least of all on my birthday. Startled, Jorge stands up abruptly and the scraping of a chair creaks on the other side of the door. A mug shatters on the floor as he hurries to greet me. Poor boy. He sputters like a leaky faucet while trying to maintain his composure.

“J-just a m-minute, sir.”

“You wouldn’t leave an old man out in the wind, would you?”

“Of course not, Mr. Arjona,” he sighs as he unlocks the door and
guides my cane into his hallway.

He offers to take my coat but I insist on hanging it myself. The pungent remains of his morning smoke and coffee projects have stuck to his hands and my niece will assume that I have taken to tabagie again. Jorge begins to say something, but the ashes of his breakfast irritate my cough. Immediately, he hobbles to the kitchen, dragging the foot that tried to catch the suicidal mug. I can hear his apologies through my shut eyelids. Bent over in a fit, I wheeze against the radiator while a cabinet opens in the kitchen. He intends to bury the ashtray; probably among dirty porcelain, empty take-out boxes, and memories. I recover, only to knead dust on my fingers from where I gripped the metal. His mother never would have approved.

Jorge and his mother Angela pled asylum in the early 80’s during the rise of the Cali Cartel. His father Luis Escobedo was the childhood friend of the Orejuela brothers—on Sundays the boys would come over after mass in their polished shoes and pressed slacks for lunch. They ate cheesy arepas with panela water to guzzle down their entitled lips. Those delights were Jorge’s grandmother’s specialty. The brothers’ specialty was kidnapping, something that the scars on Luis’ knuckles explained better than any of their late night stories. As for how Angela was eventually brought into their world, I cannot really say. “Women are for loving, not for understanding,” Luis used to explain to his son.

The cruel irony of course was that Jorge did not love women but he surely understood them. If his father were to watch his son’s drag rendition of Cher on New Year’s Eve, he probably would have disowned him. That, or looped him in with the other discardables cleansed by the Cartel in pursuit of their beautiful Cali. Today, Jorge has embraced his blue blood status but still dabbles with the cocaine playground he grew up in.

***

“Jorge, you have stopped cutting.”

I am seated in his bedroom on the Barcelona chair he reserves for private appointments. The first time he sat me here a shiver ran through my knees. I could feel the warmth of some of his more intimate appointments—a mosaic I could not shake from my mind as the sticky leather pressed against my back. That morning I shifted my weight constantly. He has since acquired a separate chair for me, at my request.

“I am sorry, Mr. Arjona. My head is in the clouds.”

“Please continue.”

The rhythm of his scissor snips and comb strokes fill the room. A ray of sunlight slowly crawls up my thigh as the city begins to stretch its legs. I
keep my eyes closed, above all else so as not to startle him during his work. Little flakes of my ivory locks pepper his hardwood floor as he gives shape to my head. After a few minutes, his spongy hands lather my face with shaving cream. He takes extra care with the worn flesh that dangles from my cheeks.

“You are quiet this morning, sir.”

“It’s not everyday that a man finds himself in my shoes,” I respond.

“One hundred years is quite a feat, sir.”

In my ear drum the straight blade seductively croaks. Jorge’s firm wrist applies the appropriate amount of pressure against my skin. He is an artist with a razor, a genius with the grind. How many landscapes has the youth sculpted? He memorizes the geography of every face. Not even the Colombian lightening flowing through his blood can break his concentration. He quickly arrives to my jugular, where he elegantly slides the cutting-edge along the length of my throat. I swallow bitterly to tempt him.

“And of what have you been thinking?” he asks, more for himself than for me.

“Mostly of Gaitán and el Bogotazo.”

Jorge is guiding the blade along the other side of my neck and stops short. In the kitchen a naked bulb purrs.

“And what of Gaitán?”

“Oh you know, this and that; liberals and conservatives; communists and oligarchs; the bread and butter of my youth.”

He scratches my bristles once more.

“Father told me you participated in the riots.”

My ribs strain as I inhale. “I still remember the silence of the static; the echo of the stillness just after the radio announcement. We were at a café enjoying lunch when Gaitán was murdered. For five minutes Colombia stood still.”

“Did the people really take arms?”

“Imagine men in three piece suits and bowler hats with machetes pointed toward a blood-orange sky. The city was a warzone; I couldn’t walk to work without slipping on empty cartridges. For months that was my life. Bogotá’s scorched streets still haunt me in my nightmares, even after the loss of my vision.”

My throat feels irritated as he quickly grazes the remainder of my stubble. The aftershave he smacks on brings tears to my milky eyes, though I can disguise this as overwhelming emotion. I have grown accustomed to our routine, but still I cannot help the shortage of breath, the punch to the gut that is a clean-shaven face. He offers me his shoulder but I prefer the loyal
intuition of my cane. I have committed the layout of the apartment to memory.

“I often wonder what he could have done if he were allowed to live,” I whisper on my way to the kitchen.

“Father said he was a symbol, nothing more.”

“Your father was a bastard who knew nothing about politics.”

In the bedroom the floorboards creak under the weight of his sweeping. I pray he can differentiate my hair from his sugar from his grams. The coffee battalion rests patiently on the table and I turn off the light because it serves no purpose. The only sound in the apartment is his aggressive broom. I fondle a package of powder on the counter top and graze a bit with my tongue. This one is the sugar.

Do you hear that? It is silence. Around the corner an ambulance runs past screaming. The windows close their eyelids. That is because Jorge and I sit uncomfortably in his one bedroom apartment above the small but relatively pleasant hair salon he runs on Clark Street. How does one articulate a year in minutes? No amount of ‘how are yous’, ‘have you been busys’, or coffee cups can fill the void between us. Every movement the boy makes is deafening. The way he stirs that spoon in his mug; the gentle but impatient vibration of his toes on the floor. There is a language that only tissue speaks. I finish the last of my coffee and clear my throat. Jorge understands.

“How much do I owe you,” I ask as I stand.

“There is no need to pay, sir. Let alone on this special occasion.”

“Charity will not be necessary. How much?” He bites his lower lip. I glare. “Five is fine. Consider it a gift. Family discount and all that.”

I shake my freshly trimmed head in disagreement. The last time I saw Jorge’s face he was a child and over the course of the last ten years any image of him in my mind has faded away. Suddenly, his body heat stands between the door and me. He carefully embraces me, and for the first time I can feel how feeble his frame is, how little he eats. His shirt clings desperately to his sweaty chest and his bones stab mine. I am holding a skeleton of a man, who at half my age is twice as worn. And though he cannot cry, the rattle of his lungs explains better than any of his late night stories. Silence.

“It doesn’t matter anymore,” I coo into his hair. “He is dead.”

We break apart and I move steadily toward the door, stopping to grab my coat and scarf. The scent of Jorge has stuck and somewhere along my nape loose hairs nip me. I slip five dollars into his pocket and turn to grip the doorknob.

“Happy Birthday, Grandfather.”

“Thank you, Jorge.”
TEA AND A SHIRT
EZER SMITH

Consciousness is a blue and white striped shirt with the sleeves rolled up just a little, not all the way, hanging on the back of my chair, as if the chair is wearing the shirt—and if it is, it needs to start drinking chocolate milk and working out because it'll never get a girlfriend with those skinny arms.

Shadow is cold mint tea—but still sweet, and I can't tell if the sweetness makes it darker, denser, makes it smell a little like nicotine for some reason; maybe all leaves smell that way, and my big Jewish nose is finally being useful—though I just wish the tea was hot again so the mint could soothe my aching throat.

Chaos is mint tea on a beautiful blue and white striped shirt, I keep asking myself, "Why did you let it steep so long?" as if that, not my mannequin hand, was the reason for the big brown sepia amoeba down my back, and before my mom hands me paper towels I wonder if I should do the Zen thing and just watch and let sweet mint trickle into my bedroom's stale air, especially because I needed a new cup of tea anyway.
## ICELANDIC THUNDER BREAD

**Prep Time:** 20 minutes  
**Cook Time:** 4 hours  
**Total Time:** 4 hours, 20 minutes

**Ingredients:**
- 2 1/2 cups rye flour
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 heaping tbsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 cup milk, scalded and slightly cooled
- 1 Tbsp. molasses
- 2 cups (approx.) hot water

Whisk together the dry ingredients in a large bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer. Mix in the brown sugar. Stir the molasses into the warm milk until it dissolves, then slowly stir milk into the dry ingredients (Note: The dough hook of a mixer works great for this). Knead the dough until it is shiny and all the flour is incorporated. Divide into two sections.

Butter the insides of two tin cans (at least 19 ounces each – watch out for sharp edges) or of two ceramic bowls or ramekins, each one large enough to hold 1 1/2 cups of batter (Important: The dough will rise while cooking, and so whichever molds you use should only be filled 2/3 below the top edge).

Tent the molds with aluminum foil, leaving about an inch of air space for the bread to rise inside as it cooks. Secure the edges of the foil tightly around the rims of the molds with twine or rubber bands.

Place the molds in your slow cooker (rest cans, if using, on a trivet or canning jar lid inside the cooker to help the steam circulate). Pour in enough hot water to cover the lower half of the molds (about two cups).

Put the lid on the cooker and raise heat to high. Allow to simmer for 4 hours, checking occasionally to ensure that the water hasn’t boiled out.

Remove bread and serve immediately with butter, cold pickled herring, lamb pate, cold meats, or cheese.

**Yield:** Two 1-pound loaves of Icelandic rugbrauð.

*Originally found at scandinavianfood.about.com*
...MORE BREAD

THE EASIEST BEST BANANA BREAD

INGREDIENTS:
• 2-3 very ripe bananas (4 if you want this to be good)
• 1/3 cup melted butter
• 3/4 cup sugar
• 1 egg beaten
• 1 tsp. vanilla extract
• 1 tsp. baking soda
• Pinch of salt
• 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
• Optional: cinnamon, nutmeg, almond extract
• Optional but highly recommended: chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C), and butter a 4x8-inch loaf pan.

In a large mixing bowl, mash the ripe bananas with a fork. Use a wooden spoon to stir the melted butter into the mashed bananas.

Mix in the baking soda and salt. Stir in the sugar, beaten egg, and vanilla extract. Mix in the flour.

Pour the batter into your prepared loaf pan. Bake for 1 hour to 1 hour 10 minutes at 350°F (175°C), or until a tester inserted into the center comes out clean.

Originally found at simply recipes.com
CRUMBS

This magazine could not have been possible without the time and effort of our dedicated staff. Thus, we would like to dedicate a few pages to the people who poured blood, sweat and papercuts into making this fabulous magazine you are holding in your hands.

Here at Sliced Bread, we pride ourselves on originality. Each year we come up with a question for all of our members to answer in order to dig deep into the depths of each others’ consciousness. This year we posed the following: What color crayon is your soul, and how do you pronounce that gosh-darned word?

ALISON THUMEL
Color: Aqua
Pronounced: “cray-ahn”

CHRIS KUBIK
Color: Meadow
Pronounced: “Crayawn.”

EZER SMITH
Color: somewhere on the spectrum between straight-up, old-fashioned blue and midnight blue, depending on the day
Pronounced: “Cray + on,” like it’s spelled for god’s sake.

GABE FRIEDMAN
Color: Aqua Marine
Pronounced: “Kray - on,” not to be confused with one Creon, king of Thebes in the Oedipus myths.
HADAR LAZAR
Color: Red. I’m basic.
Pronounced: Cray-on. Again, basic.

ISABEL OCHOA GOLD
Color: Fern
Pronounced: Cray-oon.

JAKE KAUFMAN
Color: Wild Blue Yonder
Pronounced: Like “crown.”

JANE TUSZYNSKI
Color: Indigo
Pronounced: Crayon.

JARED SIMON
Color: Cerulean Frost
Pronounced: k^hra(ih)n. Starts with an aspirated “k” and almost rhymes perfectly with “tan,” but the ghost of the “yo” sound haunts— albeit timidly— the way to the “n.”

JASMINE MITHANI
Color: White, that one color we always threw away because it was useless.
Pronounced: Phonetically, you savages.
**JENZO DUQUE**
Color: Crimson
Pronounced: Creon, Ruler of Thebes, only with a long ‘a’ sound instead of an ‘e.’

**JIMMY GARCIA**
Color: Pivo Gold
Pronounced: Cran as in ‘cranberry’

**JULIA HARPER**
Color: Chartreuse
Pronounced: ‘Craaaaain’

**JULIAN SPERGEL**
Color: Glacial Azure
Pronounced: “Kray-yawn.”

**LEAH VON ESSEN**
Color: Midnight Blue
Pronounced: “Craaan.” I don’t know how to write it in proper grammatical terms but I have that good New Jersey girl “eyy” instead of “ahh” in there.

**LILY ZHAO**
Color: Orange with Twinkling Turquoise
Pronounced: “Can I just use like an emoji?”

**ELIZABETH BYNUM**
Color: Seafoam Green.
Pronounced: “Kraan,” because who has time for two syllables?
LUCIA LU
Color: Maroon with Glitzy Gold
Pronounced: Rhymes with “ran.”

MICHAEL COFFER
Color: Eigengrau
Pronounced: it should be pronounced correctly

ROBERT SORRELL
Color: The wonderful and beguiling “Metallic Seaweed”
Pronounced: “Crann,” like it only has one vowel and one syllable.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ
Color: Periwinkle
Pronounced: /ˈkrā,än/

SYDELLE KEISLER
Color: Shocking Pink
Pronounced: “Craan.”