SLICED BREAD MAGAZINE

A collection of student art and writing at the University of Chicago
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January 2015
A failed attempt at a group photo.
DEAR READER,

“If you’ve ever read poetry with a feeling that it was your religion, your very life; if you’ve ever come suddenly upon the whiteness of a Venus in a dim, deep room; if you’ve ever felt music replacing your shabby soul with a new one of shining gold; if, in the early morning, you’ve Watched a bird with great white wings fly from the edge of the sea straight up into the rose-colored sun — if these things have happened to you and continue to happen till you’re left quite speechless with the wonder of it all, then you’ll understand our hope to bring them nearer to the common experience of the people who read us.”

-The Little Review, 1914

So wrote the editors of the first publication to serialize James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, as they fought the brutal Chicago winters. Over one hundred years later, we find ourselves suffering the same winds, fighting the same fight, finding solace in the same words of wonder and wisdom, but perhaps with a stronger sense of self-deprecating humor. Our publication is defined both by our passion for great art and our love of bread-related puns. We have been lucky enough to indulge both of those through this publication, and we couldn’t be happier to share the results.

Silliness aside, Sliced Bread has been committed to providing a platform for creative work of all kinds on campus since our founding, and we’re proud to continue publishing high quality work submitted by members of the University community. Every year, we receive shockingly funny comic strips, inspiring excerpts from novels, startlingly beautiful poems, and truly astounding visual art work. It is a privilege to include such a diverse range of creative work within our pages, and we remain committed to our perpetual ideal: if it can be printed on a page, we’ll review it.
Thus, it is with great excitement that we present our Spring 2015 issue to you, dear reader. This academic year marks our very first biannual publication schedule, which means more amazing work, more humor, more poetry, more stories of our world and of worlds fantastical and futuristic. This year was also the beginning of our collaboration with UChicago’s own student run podcast, The Vein. This product, a literary audio delight we’re calling The Bread Beat, was founded by Hadar Lazar who worked alongside Jared Simon and The Vein’s Paul Dillon. Thanks to the continued efforts of our members, Hadar Lazar and Jared Simon, we’ve released a literary podcast called The Bread Beat, to share our favorite pieces in a new audio medium.

Sliced Bread would not materialize each year without the hard work of our editorial board and staff, whom we would like to lavish with praise. We would like to recognize the layout committee for their tireless work, taking the raw materials of our submissions and organizing them into the elegant magazine you now hold. Additionally, we’d like to thank our author outreach committee for working with Sliced Bread’s submitters to polish accepted pieces; to our publicity committee for promoting our magazine to the campus community; to our event-planning committee for organizing the launch party for this magazine’s release. We’d also like to say thanks to our advisor, Derek Bundy, for his continued support of all our endeavors. This fall we welcomed eleven new members into our ranks, and this spring we will say goodbye to two others, Elizabeth Bynum and Jenzo DuQue. Although the faces sitting around the table may change slightly each year, we like to think we’re always true to our carbohydrate-based character.

We hope you’ll enjoy the ninth issue of Sliced Bread, the breadiest best yet.

Panivorously yours,
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COLD MOUTH BOIL ROAD POEM
ELIZABETH BYNUM

Here there are no seasons.
We get our nutrition
licking chili flakes
from our cold palms,
tonguing salt off driveways.

Here sometimes,
I’d like to make a cauldron of stew
And put us all in,
so at least we’d be together
and warm.

Here I am forever frigid,
am always kissing something new
mouthing myself into creation
into walking, so I can say,
All Roads were leading to this
until they led somewhere else.
DEPARTURE
ALLEN WU

This is how you have an adventure:

1. You sell all your worldly possessions, all your gadgets and clothes and books and albums, particularly those things you cared most about.

2. Under cover of night, when the stars have just begun their daily march against the city’s toxic glow, you arrange all those things you cannot sell – all those things too valuable to you to have value to anyone else – you build them into a delicate pyre beneath the fountain in the park two blocks down. There’s no need to set it afire; it’s always been burning.

3. You keep that one outfit you never wore, that you bought when you first resolved to dress yourself, much too late in life; the dusty cardigan and tweed pants and that T-shirt with the picture of Stalin with the most massive, angelic wings, that you didn’t understand then but now feel must mean something grand, profound, commensurate to your newfound determination to live. You uncover and learn to love this outfit that you never wore for fear that the entire world of people who were not your friend would no longer be your friend. You decide to wear it for the rest of your days.

5. You leave your apartment behind, you don’t lease it, you spare the next unfortunate resident for as long as you can the misery of those tight grey walls and the pervasive smell of dead sweat and the constant dread that the person you fear most will burst through your door and you will have nowhere to run. You could really use the money, but this quiet moment of unnoticed, unnoticeable virtue will serve as a currency all of its own, a precious rare lucre that pays your entry into the new, wild, wonderful world that now awaits you.

6. You didn’t expect much from all this, but reality has determinedly undermined even your meager expectations. But you suppose it’s appropriate, symbolic of how terrifyingly small your life really was despite how massive and scary it constantly seemed. This was a cairn you needed to visit before continuing on, paying your respects to those who traveled before you.

7. You take the pittance you’ve managed to scrape together by pawning your entire life up until this moment and tuck it carefully into the inner pocket of your cardigan. As little as you have, it barely fits. You have to pull at the edges of the
pocket, click the corners of the bills down the stitching. You’re thankful for at least this small comfort.

8. You lie in wait for the perfect conditions for departure. You wander the city, searching for the intersection beneath a bridge to sleep under, grocery store to stalk, and dessicated park to contemplate. When you find this signpost, you will know it’s time.

9. You visit the grocery store each day until they have a sale on pinto beans, then circle in for the kill. You buy cans of pinto beans until there are no more cans to buy, you buy a souvenir Coca-Cola can-opener that reminds you of those halcyon days when all the detritus and accounting of being alive were infinitely novel and exciting. These you pack carefully into your grocery cart and walk out, as if to in turn pack them into the car you don’t have, except you just leave, grocery cart and all. You’re finally ready to penetrate the depths of the city, the heart of it, to find the truth you once thought evident but now realize had evaded you all along.

10. That first night, the bruised, haggard sky above you, you feel the cold for the first time, the chill of the night air presses through the thin polyester of your cardigan, presses through the five dollars you have left of your entire life, becomes a blanket in itself, heavy and thorny but regal, with the absolute, ancient authority that’s forged only in the warmth of unbearable, endless suffering.

11. You twist open your first can of pinto beans with this shitty can-opener that you can already see begin to rust, and you tilt its treasure into your mouth, savoring the sandy, salty tastelessness, the total dryness that presses through the brine encasing the beans. You find that you enjoy them, and you feel powerful for that, that you can raise this desert to life.

12. You think of all the other things that you can do now that you could not do before.

13. You imagine the fame and fortune ahead of you when you find yourself, and the world finds you.

14. The chill digs its teeth in just a bit further.

Congratulations. You are having an adventure.
DANDELIONS
SARA MAILLACHERUVU

She liked the way that the dandelions felt. They were soft and empty, her breath sending them swimming into the sky. The colors, she thought, the colors and the feelings of those colors—some white orbs above greenish-purple stems, some barren seed heads, emptied, emaciated, colorless, some, some... Her mind raced through the field, inspecting each dandelion, each white orb, each stem, each vacant seed head. And she danced, aware that she never wanted to leave.

As the horizon darkened, she felt the air become blacker and the night become stronger. Everything—a box, a vast, limitless box that trapped her infinitely. She felt herself pulled away from the dandelions and pulled into them. They enmeshed her within their soft, cushiony arms, and they screamed at her to leave, that it wasn’t her place to be there. Her body hurt, stretched between these two extremes, confined underneath the heavy indigo sky. Pain throbbing in her bones, wrecking her nerves and her senses and her dignity, she allowed the dandelions to grow over her, above her, into her. And she felt good. And she felt bad. Damn them all, it hurt.

Hanging loosely in the night, the stars mocked her, glowing placidly, carelessly above her. Do you know, she whispered, do you know how this feels? And of course, they didn’t; how could they? She barely knew how she felt, and as to how to feel about how she felt, she hadn’t the faintest. She began to hear rustles, semblances of sounds slipping into the blackness. They were echoes of whispers, vibrations that breathed. It felt like a dream—no, it was a dream. Was it a dream? Was it a dream? she whispered. Her words didn’t feel like words as they left her mouth, as they pirouetted off of her tongue, and she wasn’t sure that they had even materialized. Was it a dream? Was it a dream?

Damn them all, the dandelions. She had nearly forgotten them amidst her uncertainty. But they pulled, they grasped, they demanded, they consumed. Dreams of a dream vanished, she felt the pain draw into her again. It’s autumn—it’s November, she whispered to herself, shouldn’t you be dead, curled up and dried in this godforsaken field? The field was a limitless wave of white and empty orbs, the night just as ceaseless. There was no end to the dandelions, to what they did—were doing—to her. There was no end to the blackness, the blankness. And she loved it and hated it and knew it was her way. There was no end to the dandelions. There was no end to the night. There was no end.
*There was no end,* she whispered. *Was it a dream. Was it a dream. No end.* And then, then she heard the stars reply, a long belated response to a question she’d never asked. Clusters of white sinister in the inky sky, they soothed words upon her, buried though she was in the field, invisible, eaten by the dandelions.

“You’re queen of the weeds.”

And so she was.
A BACKPACKER GETS ALL LATHERED UP
PAUL DILLON

I came across a sheep today,
Loping down the pilgrim road,
Singing Pete Seeger songs I thought appropriate, alone.

He gave a high baa,
Dug black hooves into the loam,
Turned blank crazy eye to me. I! Roamed.

And you ran across my mind that morning,
Slid down neurons, firing glory.
Not everyone gets to share that feeling with green mountains,
In time for the heather,
Playacting old stories.
OF THE DESERT
CASSANDRA VERHAEGEN

You tried to sweep the desert, cactus as broomstick;
left blood for coyotes instead.
When they found you sleeping in sun black and thick,
they licked your palms, silent, favoring sadness misled.

You awoke with the dawn and rolled over twice;
the sun and the moon by your bed.
When swaggering noon shook steam from the ice,
You rose and wandered ahead.

You ate of the hearts of the foes that you met,
leaving ghouls to take roost in your head;
the snakes prayed in circles for the ground to be wet,
while you watched the moon beg to be fed.

You wandered and whistled and smoked in the heat,
cigarettes smelling like dread.
You prayed to the frogs and the scruff of the weeds
that the dew may not find you dead.

You weren’t one to see a paradise
of the kind that your books had said.
Rather you preferred abstention from ice
and heat that would go to your head.
RESORT
JARED SIMON

Wave’s peaks  Baked feet
Sand speaks    Man creak
Butt cheeks    Slake teat
Dune seat     Babe sleep
May we       Say bye
Stay sea     Sea sighed
It’s not that she had a fear of flying. It was more a fear of the hypothetical, the What-Ifs that swarmed the cabin and stuffed themselves resolutely into the twin turbine engines under the wings. They had an annoying habit of lying dormant, those What-Ifs, at least until the very moment she settled in her seat—always, always by the window—and buckled her seatbelt. Then, suddenly, as if the metal catch were a trigger, the What-Ifs were there, springing out from behind her tray table like jack-in-the-boxes, rubbing their grubby little hands together with the conniving hedonism of fruit flies. It was easy to sink into those What-Ifs. Fortunately for Janice, in business class, it was also easy to order a scotch and soda.

But en route to New York from Rio, Janice Sanders was not in business class. She was in economy class, a pressurized purgatory where the seats were too close and too numerous and only reclined fourteen-and-a-half degrees backwards. And, if memory served her correctly, the FDA-“approved” inflight meals were typically the consistency of pig slop and of indeterminable origin. No, economy class was not for Janice, and if not for weather concerns that had kept her original flight to JFK grounded, she would already be in Minneapolis, or at least on the last leg of her connecting flight, a highball in hand.

No rest for the weary, she mused, nestling herself against the window.

Looking out over the runway, Janice thought of her daughter, Nathalie. Nathalie had been pregnant with her boyfriend’s child—a fact Janice avoided acknowledging as often as possible—and had gone into labor the previous day, several weeks ahead of schedule. Jeff, the father of Nathalie’s child, had not bothered to call Janice and tell her that his girlfriend’s water had broken. Instead he had sent Janice and other undisclosed recipients a mass text in the middle of the night from St. Mary’s in Minneapolis, where Nathalie was supposedly already in labor and had been for an hour.

With the late notice and flight cancellation taken into account, Janice was beginning to accept that she would not touch down in time to cut her first grandchild’s umbilical cord. What she could not accept was the idea of Jeff or his parents—uncultured, blue-collared, backwoodsy kind of folk—doing the honor in her stead. Janice knew none of them were the sharpest tools in the shed; to be frank, she could easily see Jeff’s mother, who was considered legally blind in thirty states and mentally retarded in eight more, somehow missing the cord and jabbing the baby like a stuck pig instead. No, Jeff and his family were not to be trusted with anything more than menial labor, and Janice decided there was no way they could cut the cord. But, on the other hand, she couldn’t stand the notion
of Nathalie's father—Janice's ex-husband—cutting the cord, either. He and Janice's divorce had been anything but cordial, and the fact he had remarried too quickly and started a second family—with a free-loving, God-renouncing, hemp-wearing bohemian, no less—still pained Janice to no end. She would have rather died than have him be involved with the birth of her grandchild. Besides, as Janice saw it, it was not his place to be there during the delivery, as he had a whole second batch of sticky-fingered spawn to look after, though his presence over Christmastime or the occasional Little League game seemed plausible. Perhaps not even Janice was completely welcome at the occasion, as she and Nathalie hadn't spoken much in recent months. But even in her muddled, anxious state of mind, Janice knew that the birth of her grandchild would be the beginning of something far larger than herself, something infinitely deeper and more meaningful than anything she'd ever experienced.

A wail from the aisle coaxed Janice's gaze from the window. A harried woman bounced a sobbing, pigtailed girl in her arms, making no attempt to quiet her as they made their way to the back of the plane. Janice watched as fluid gushed from the child's every facial orifice and quietly, ardently hoped she was right.

Behind the spectacle, a dark-skinned man squeezed through the aisle and stowed his briefcase in the carry-on bin above Janice's seat. Her eyes grazed over his business suit but stopped short at the turban coiled around his head.

"Are you in 13B?" Janice asked the man, hoping that the answer was no.

He smiled politely and nodded, misinterpreting her curiosity for friendliness. He planted himself in the seat directly next to Janice. It was only when he did so that she noticed his size—broad-shouldered, with an ample girth—and she squirmed as to avoid touching her arm to his.

Janice hated this feeling of intimacy with strangers, the kind that forced her to make conversation even if it was the last thing she intended to do. But seat 13C's vacancy seemed to tantalize her, and something about its sterility, with its prepackaged blanket and dryer-sheet pillowcase, made her think of the delivery room at St. Mary's. And Janice would have rather kissed the man next to her than think about that.

The turbaned man was fiddling with his laptop. "What brought you to Rio?"

Janice was taken aback by his question, not expecting to be addressed, and she struggled to find her voice. "Well, it was the final destination of a cruise I went on with my girlfriends. And I'd heard it has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, so I came to check it out for myself."

He looked up. "And? Your verdict?"

Janice shrugged.

The turbaned man directed his eyes back to his laptop. Though she did
not really care, nor did she want to know, simple courtesy compelled Janice to return the favor. “And you? What brings you to Rio?”

“Business.”

“Ah.” Hence the business suit. However, his admission did not keep Janice from finding his wearing one on the plane unbearably pretentious. But she kept this to herself. “And where are you from?”

“Toronto.”

“Really?”

“I’ve lived there most of my life. But I was born in New Delhi.” He typed a passcode into his computer, eyes trained on the screen all the while.

_Pretentious, and rude_, too, Janice thought. She considered dropping the whole conversation, but something possessed her to add: “I’m actually on my way home to meet my new grandchild.”

This caught the man’s attention. His face erupted into a smile, a splash of white that matched his turban. “Oh really? Congratulations. You must be thrilled.”

Immediately Janice regretted sharing this personal information. Something about this man, this stranger, sharing in her grandmotherhood sat poorly with her, and she expected him to spend the rest of the flight peppering her with questions she, shamefully, did not know the answer to. _Is it a boy or a girl? What’s its name? Are there plans for any more grandchildren in the future?_ She was prepared to either plead the fifth or fib her way through all of them.

These worries piqued Janice’s desire to leave the plane, but just as she considered unbuckling her seatbelt and making a mad dash for the nearest exit, a voice interceded over the intercom and announced that the doors were closing.

“I guess no one is going to sit here,” her neighbor said, thumbing at the vacant 13C before moving one seat over.

The extra room was of some small relief, but not much, as Janice found that the nearer the plane drew to takeoff and landing, the more vocal the What-Ifs became. Indeed, what if the plane crashed into another on the runway? What if the plane took to the air with some fatal mechanical problem that slowly dissolved the engine throughout the flight? And, most pressing of all: What if the man next to her was a terrorist?

She shuddered and decided it was best to try to sleep for as long as possible before takeoff, perhaps even through takeoff, if she could help it. Yes, sleep was good; sleep was necessary. Propping the dryer-sheet pillow under her head, Janice dug in her travel purse, pulled out an eye mask, and stretched it over her face. Under the mask, the darkness was merciful. It was almost enough for her to forget that she was in economy class. Almost.

Janice recalled hearing somewhere—presumably from one of those medical daytime talk shows she had time to watch in retirement—that emptying
one’s mind of everything but the idea of sleep helped the brain actually fall asleep. And, in seat 13A, she found that if she focused enough on it, sleep sculpted itself into a form. On this occasion, sleep was a heavy thing which curled up between her eyes. It pressed itself down on the centered space between her eyebrows, right where one of those red dots would be on an Indian woman’s forehead. That is, if Janice were Indian, which she was not. Thankfully.

Janice jerked awake from a nightmare in which she was being thrashed about New Delhi on elephant-back. But even as she awoke and regained her bearings, the bumping did not stop. They were taking off, and the plane was skipping like a stone along the runway.

Her companion looked over, perhaps startled by her sudden movement. “It’s hard to sleep through takeoff,” he conceded. Janice, in turn, privately conceded that he had a way of stating the obvious.

She gripped her armrests, knuckles glowing white through her skin, until the plane was high, high in the air, tilting to the side to showcase one last view of Rio de Janeiro in the dying sun. Janice’s eyes traced Guanabara Bay’s rolling hills, as tempestuous as the neighboring sea. It pained her to admit it was beautiful, as it reminded her that she would probably never be able to experience the last leg of the luxurious transatlantic cruise which brought her there. She hadn’t even been able to make the pilgrimage to the foot of the monumental statue of Christ she’d yearned to see since she was a girl; seeing it on the skyline had been the only reason she’d really wanted to go to Rio. Janice’s Bible study group had pressed her to visit the venues for the 2016 Olympic Games while she was there, but she did not share their enthusiasm. After watching the overtly pagan ritual that was broadcast as the Vancouver games’ “Opening Ceremony” in 2010, Janice had sworn off the Olympics for good.

She had loved what little she’d seen of Rio, however, with its spade-like mountains and pristine beaches flanked by water almost too blue to be true. This was worth it, wasn’t it? Leaving a tropical Garden of Eden to see a grandchild that she already struggled to accept as her own, trying in vain to reach an umbilical cord that had already been snipped?

The plane bucked. Janice quietly crossed herself, sinking deeper and deeper in her seat.

Janice’s nerves were long shot by the time the flight crew arrived at Row 13, a cart in tow. She attempted to order a cocktail, only to learn from a snooty flight attendant that United’s economy class not only offered only beer or wine, but also made customers pay extra to order them. Janice reluctantly doled out some stray cash in her wallet for a glass of pinot that ended up tasting like watered-down antiseptic. She cringed on its way down. Bad wine. Bad wine had
to rank very highly on her list of least favorite things in the universe.

In times of trial, Janice had a way of making lists. It was a form of catharsis; the subject of the lists themselves didn’t matter. They could be lists of anything: Favorite *Real Housewives* Spinoffs, Things Overweight Women Should Not Wear, Men She Wished Nathalie Had Married (Instead of Jeff), and finally, her most deferred-to list, Forces of Evil Not Considered in the Holy Bible. Internally, she added bad wine to this list, ranking it somewhere between hip-hop and interracial marriage.

*It’s not sacrilegious if it’s true,* Janice thought, grimacing as she pushed the wine away. She figured there would be no point in staying awake to dwell on the sour taste in her mouth, so she ripped open the package enclosing her inflight blanket and resolutely wound its contents around herself, straightjacket-style—after all, the less she fidgeted, the easier it would be to fall asleep. She was sure of it. With one free arm, Janice pulled her sleep mask back over her eyes.

This time, once it finally arrived, sleep was a cliff and Janice Christ the Redeemer. She stood above the precipice, arms outstretched as though trying to engulf the entirety of Rio in them. But, instead of embracing the city, she simply let herself tilt forward and let gravity do the rest, hands splayed out at her sides. There was something satisfying about it—falling asleep in every sense.

Janice had finally done it, though she had no way of knowing for sure. She had been asleep for a whopping hour and a half when she felt a gentle shake on her shoulder.

It was the turbaned man in 13C. “The flight attendant is here. Do you want dinner?”

Janice could only shake her head, and if her eyelids had not been too heavy to glare at the man, she would have done so. What business did he have waking her up, and for what? Meatloaf surprise? For a “businessman,” the man from New Delhi certainly did not know his inflight etiquette. *All the more reason to be vigilant,* Janice thought. She peered at his turban out of the corner of her eye and wondered how many concealed weapons it could fit.

Useless. Janice sighed aloud, rolling her eyes to the ceiling. Now she could not go back to sleep; she could feel her last traces of drowsiness slipping away, like minnows from greedy fingers. Without sleep, Janice was left to grapple with the cruel processes of her brain, which had expanded from petty, hypothetical mind games to thoughts of Nathalie and the baby. It reminded Janice of the day Nathalie had told her she was pregnant with Jeff’s child. It had been the dead of August, marked by a brand of midwestern humidity so stifling that Janice had imagined even the water molecules in the air to be thick and bloated. Janice had already been sweating when Nathalie broke the news: that, yes, she was pregnant, and no, she and Jeff were not going to get married in time for the April delivery.
In fact, she had told Janice that she and Jeff had no immediate plans to get married at all.

And, as Janice’s world crumbled about her feet that day, indeed, what had she said to her daughter? Nathalie, once the light of her life, the Copernican center of her universe? Whatever she’d said, it had been within her rights as a mother and a Christian, though she could not recall her exact words while sitting in economy class seat 13A. Whatever it was, it had been the right thing to say, she was sure of it. But Nathalie had not called her since.

The plane began to jitter as though it were driving over a gravel road, and Janice recoiled, snapping from her reverie. A voice came over the intercom again. “Pardon us, folks. Just hitting some mild turbulence over the Atlantic. We’ll be keeping the seatbelt sign on until further notice.” Surely enough, just as the intercom clicked off, the seatbelt sign lit up, accompanied by a gentle musical tone.

*Mild* turbulence. When, in Janice’s experience, had the word “mild” ever truly lived up to its definition? It had earned a place on her working list of Least Favorite Words, which was only two words long; three, really, since the other was “Barack Obama.” “Mildly” spicy food, a “mild” altercation—she could think of no example in which the word wasn’t a euphemism for something far worse, and following this admission from the pilot, she expected Armageddon.

A warm, hearty smell tickled her nose, and she turned to look at the man next to her. Despite the jittering in the cabin, he was blithely eating what smelled and looked like a hearty stew. He began pouring dressing on a salad, colorful as a bouquet, in the bowl next to it. Ignoring the prickling in her stomach, Janice looked at his turban, then back at the stew, then back at his turban; surely his eating it broke some religious or moral code of his people. The assumption only fueled her budding visage of him as a wild-eyed infidel in plainclothes.

The plane rattled. The stew steamed. The turbaned man smacked his lips, once, and too loudly. Janice glowered and rolled over on her shoulder, yearning desperately for the world outside the window. She slid the mask over her eyes, and just like that, sleep became the flaws of the man next to her in 13C. Janice counted them, like sheep.

This time, Janice awoke not to the trembling of the plane, nor a hand on her shoulder, but to the dull pain of her forehead hitting the side of the cabin. The plane’s shaking had exacerbated tremendously, and the entire cabin seemed to be thrashing its contents around like helpless beads inside an airborne maraca. People all about her were wide awake and anxious, despite it being the wee hours of the morning in Rio, and a flight attendant beelined past her towards the front of the plane. Janice glanced up at the seatbelt sign. It remained staunchly illuminated.
“What’s going on?” she asked, more to herself than anyone else.

The turbaned man answered. “Not sure. I’ve never had turbulence this bad.” He wheeled around in his seat to check the rows behind him, and Janice did the same. Her heart chilled when she saw the same expression of panic on every passenger’s face, mouths agape with wordless horror. From the back of the plane, another flight attendant dashed by, coattails fluttering in her wake.

Without warning, Janice felt the plane plummet several meters before catching itself. Oxygen masks promptly burst from the overhead compartment, inciting a chorus of indignant and shocked cries from around the cabin. Even in the chaos, Janice pointedly noticed that the turbaned man remained collected and put on his mask as though he were demonstrating a safety procedure. As Janice’s shaking fingers fumbled to follow suit, a stray What-If took the opportunity to clamber atop a soapbox in her brain. *It’s happening,* it shrieked. *Just like I said. We’re going down, and he knows it.*

Janice watched a third flight attendant, proceeding more cautiously as to avoid being lurched into the air, crawl up the aisle. The What-If was right. Something was wrong.

The din on the plane crescendoed to a fever pitch. The varied chorus of voices quickened to match the rate of Janice’s breath, which was becoming shallower and shallower with each amusement park drop. Just as she was about to demand answers from a fourth flight attendant stumbling past Row 13, the musical tone sounded, then the static of the intercom.

“Cabin: prepare for impact.” There was a click and another cheery two-tone sign-off.

A frenzied cacophony erupted immediately—gasps, exclamations, manic shuffling of bags to find stowed-away cell phones, stifled sobs. But Janice, for once, was shocked into silence. So it was really happening, just as the What-Ifs foresaw. The plane was going down. Hadn’t that been what the pilot had said, after all, broadcast with the same nonchalance as a morning weather report?

Janice could understand preparing for impact. But how does one prepare for death? Women like her had their whole lives to figure that out. Janice only had a matter of seconds. Then, amidst the flurried storm inside her mind, a fleeting thought suddenly occurred to her with unearthly clarity: *I’m going to die in economy class.*

And, just like that, as her death materialized before her, as any fleeting chance of escape slipped out of Janice’s brain and out the cracks of the Boeing 747, Janice weaved her fingers together, ducked her head, and fervently began to pray.

*Dearest Lord Jesus Christ the Son Almighty, as a follower of You and Your Word, we both know that I have been the most loyal of servants in my brief time on Your planet. As my humble soul joins with Yours this day, I have but a few meager*
requests:

1. Keep the property from going to someone who won’t take care of it. Though Your House in Heaven is the only home I desire, I couldn’t be at peace if the house was sold to a couple like Phyllis and Lillian, who’d just put awful cat decorations everywhere. And I won’t even get into the idea of two women sleeping in the same bed, as I know it’s not polite prayer conversation. Please, Lord Jesus of Nazareth: not in my home.

2. I know I have sinned, but to be fair, I also know when I have been sinned against. I humbly implore You, Dearly Beloved Savior, to make sure my ex-husband doesn’t come to my funeral. He doesn’t deserve the satisfaction, and my soul—You bless it—doesn’t need the torment.

3. If the plane breaks up on impact, You-Who-is-Light-to-the-World, please let my body be ejected far, far from the cabin. If the man in 13C ends up having something to do with this, I don’t want my body to be associated with his in any way. Surely you understand this, Merciful Lord.

Finally, 4. As one last simple request, O God-in-The-Flesh: don’t let Nathalie cry too much when she hears the news. She needs to be strong for Jeff—as much as You know he tries my patience, Lord—and her little one. But maybe, if You can, let her name the baby after me in my memory. It would be the least she could do.

The nose of the plane jerked suddenly, sharply upwards. Janice squinted her eyes shut, finishing her prayer with the urgency and ardency of a trapped animal.

In Your Holy Revered and Benevolent Name Jesus Christ O Lord My God In Heaven—Amen.

And that was that. Janice expected to feel a colossal sense of relief, or at least closure as she concluded her prayer. But instead, she felt precisely what she had been dreading the whole time, dreading even more than the thought of the plane careening to the ground:

She felt nothing.

Then, just as suddenly, Janice felt everything all at once; there was a colossal whistling noise, like the sound of air being let out of the world’s largest balloon, and the most massive tremor yet shook the plane to its core. Janice’s world began to spin, and the voices around her took up their caterwauling anew, and then, and then—all was still.

The rest was a blur. The flight attendants emerged, wildly gesticulating, as light flooded the darkness of cabin. Janice was vaguely aware of a pair of hands from the seat next to hers jimmying her seatbelt loose and hoisting her to her feet, pulling her, trembling, down the aisle and towards the blinding light. It’s time, Janice thought.
The rocking of the raft was gentle—soothing, like a cradle. Though all relatively intact, the passengers of the United flight bound for John F. Kennedy International Airport had been reduced to dark, huddled masses aboard the 747’s small fleet of emergency slides. No passenger felt this reduction more than Janice, curled on the edge of a raft, shivering in spite of the inflight blanket spread over her shoulders by a thoughtful stranger. She was facing a seaside cityscape twinkling no more than a mile from the wreckage—some passengers in Janice’s raft claimed it was Miami, others Tampa Bay. In the next boat over, a man in piloting garb was lit only by the dim light from the shoreline, his arm wrapped protectively around the snot-drenched girl from earlier. Despite her sloppy cries, she seemed to be in one piece. The Armageddon had passed.

As her heartbeat began to tentatively slow, Janice steeled herself enough to turn back and look at the wreckage. The ditched Boeing was massive as ever, yet, something about it lying placidly in the Atlantic gave it an air of harmlessness, like an oversized tin can. It was no more than a plaything, bobbing there. But then again: who among them, huddled shivering and damp in the evacuation slides of the aircraft, was not?

These thoughts, however, never did occur to Janice. Instead, Janice was thinking of the umbilical cord, and somewhere, deep within the cobwebbed recesses of her maternal instinct, she felt the cord snap without her, the gap-toothed grins of Jeff’s family flashing in the 8mm reel of her imagination. She knew that the baby’s imagined delivery-room wail would play in the back of her mind on infinite loop for years to come—a soundtrack to her failure.

The propellor of a helicopter throbbed from somewhere behind the cityscape, followed by a second, then a third. As the passengers and crew drifted towards the dancing candlelights in the horizon, the turbaned man, feeling Janice quiver beside him, rested a comforting hand on her shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“It’s okay,” he assured her, as one would a child. “We’re all going to be okay, I promise; we’re all going to be okay.”

No, it’s not that Janice Sanders had a fear of flying. But she didn’t have to like it—just like the feeling of the turbaned man’s hand on her shoulder.
COMMENCE BEER UNIVERSE.
JARED SIMON

This is not the universe in which a mirthful friend of yours, whenever you so desire, is on the way over with a keg of the greatest, most delicious beer yet unknown to you.

No, this is the universe in which everything you touch turns to beer. Everything. This is no power for the doing of great deeds; this is nothing you can control. You are the instrument of the apocalypse, who alone can drink this yeasty juice, who alone can it sustain. You, as the last Earth-bit with a more or less fixed shape, will tumble, naked and blurry-eyed through the roiling cold one that will the planet become.

Suspended, sustained by singularity, you cannot die. You have produced, and now you shall consume. Enter oblivion. Eons, epochs, ages, and eternities slip you by, as you gulp. The insatiable center of a black hole, the blind spot at the bottom of a portly pupil, the heavy years flow into you.

Something brews in bloated bowels. Returning from acedia, you are dry now but for a light sweat that breaks along your back. Star light, too bright. You turn away from the center of your spin, but you cannot escape the waves washing over you. Thrash, and the waves caress. Gasp, and the waves enter. Rising and falling without up or down, coming and going without here or there, the orgiastic moans of all that is bombard you, the last remaining atom of history.

One cannot contain oneself. Fission—all forms of matter are released. The brimming cup flows forth, into fresh soil.
SESTINA FOR A CITY
MARI COHEN

It started when you moved into that neighborhood of the body. South of the center—the only rooms for rent these days—but your commuter train wheezes its arrival daily and the wind plus your dizzy contents come tearing out. Morning.

I had known you, a bit. Tight row of River North buildings bookended the mourning of my grandfather, ninth grade. Long before I left and un-left the neighborhood of grief. Saturday I wake up dizzy with tears in the fourth-floor bedroom and Jhon tries to pull me to his center. I can’t explain it’s got more to do with the wind change then anything. I hate to tell a doctor-in-training he can’t cure it. Just hold his hand on the Green Line train as it barrels away from morning that January Friday. *The goddam wind,* he and I and everybody are saying. Our first real date will need a neighborhood just two transfers away, a little beyond the center. As a child, I never knew you as a fabric that tears
you were a smooth marble, glow radiating five hour’s distance. Tears evaporated against your sidewalks. Trains carted in boxes of dolls and Hershey’s chocolate. At our centers, they told us, we were both American girls. Old you, hotel Starbucks in the morning, Chinatown on Christmas, the lazy Susan spinning spinning. I knew a neighborhood that looked like a round little world. Last Thursday I got winded shouting facts about inhalants, cocaine at the Englewood school and the wind sent nothing back from the slouching classroom. My voice fading, tearing, host teacher advised if they won’t listen don’t teach. How many new neighborhoods here? Your body, Jhon’s, my mind, of history. There aren’t enough trains to know all of you: how you fall while standing, how your mornings are your nights, how you fence off your gold center.

I’ll admit. I came here for my center, not yours. In spite of the wind, not because of it. I was asking for coffee from the college café, for my mornings to break pink and pretty on your silhouette. But my hiccupy tears are just my hiccupy tears. You’ll always cry louder, in the halt-screech of the trains, in your knuckle seams as you grip the neighborhood children, you, my new quilt of neighborhood squares, my overnight train where seams tear and stich up and the wind knocks them apart and morning comes, comes, comes in the center.
FLAT FEET
HANNAH SHEA

I ought to have been colors in a ditch.
I ought to have been dried out years
stacked at the edge of the backyard
for the deer to sniff.

Mother dear, I ought to be more like
your voice telling me to
“walk gently on the earth.”
Then these disappointing
leaves might fall more lightly,
I could stretch my
vowels into longer arms, and
maybe you would sleep better.

However, mother, my feet have high
arches from learning to walk on my toes
before learning how to quietly
spread myself,
and the leaves fall like they’re
heartsick for the ground this year.
Maybe if I hadn’t liked pumpkin pie so possessively, my sister wouldn’t have had to like apple so stubbornly. I wish you had dressed us both in blue so I would’ve grown six feet tall and had long legs and flat feet and she wouldn’t have felt so much smaller than me.

But if I didn’t walk so loudly, you wouldn’t know it was just me getting up to get a glass of water and not one of your nightmares. Heel-toe, heel-toe, heel-toe my way through your quartered heart to the kitchen.

I ought not to have survived this season so bare and upright with the deer crowded softly around me, listening to flat-booted feet shuffle through my crushed-up beginning.
A LETTER TO A SISTER EN ABSENTIA:
ELIZABETH BYNUM

Your name is a sticky sweet piece of taffy:
Molded, luxurious, caramelized syllables,
that tap the palate and tumble over teeth
as I call them, when I call them.

You may chastise me, sister,
when I give these words ink.
I've grown up
and blown away,
losing baby fat and roots, but
I forget that you are younger.

Do you remember the time
when I walked home alone
in the sickened swelter of summer
because my shoes were sticky?
You know the night I was so drunk I tumbled down my own stairs
    laughing,
    each thud,
    giggling the bruises into their first blossom?
The day I realized the world was three dimensional,
when the daffodils became shoots of divinity
flecking the refrigerated ground?
Or better,
when I got hit by that car on the Midway?
(no, not bad enough for a phone call).

Did I tell you I lost my phone?

Last night before getting in bed,
I put my foot through my own wall,
leaving a hole the shape of my sneaker,
leaning too hard outside my own door,
considering.
All my dreams were about waking up,
suddenly today,
a morning like this,
and sun finding passage
through all the windows.

I stepped into new illumination,
left a boy asleep in jersey sheets,
And with lightness of foot you know I do not possess,
Found myself underneath a wider roof.

But there, the world beyond my doorway had split
in two,
A dotted division of rain,
nature’s fanciful line break,
and to my great disappointment
no photograph could know what the almighty had wrought,
there on Kimbark, before 8 am on a Friday born impure.

When I woke though, we were still there
in my room with the windows;
a morning poorly written,
and I realized I had no idea where my phone was.

I recalled the flash of near-nuclear light
accompanying a text message
(1:41 a.m.)
but I’d forgone a reply in pursuit of kisses,
and since such time, the thing is lost to me.

When I cursed its absence,
you did not stir in the room next to mine,
or find my mess in early light,
sweet, caramel, congenial Caroline.
STORM
JASMINE MITHANI

brewing over head the cyclone swirls dipping down to touch the earth. flowing out among the fields, it gathers a rucksack of dust, billowing the weight behind it. I like to imagine the wind as joyful, happy, knit with pleasure as it licks the land. my view is clouded, bits of dust nicking my hips, offering up to the roaring heavens a sacrifice of blood to lurch the dregs of my cup out quenching the thirst of bringing new life into the fertile soil beneath my feet. my toes curl up into it, summoning it to me, and I stretch my vertebrae to the zenith, crying out to be exonerated from this life, one too dry and full of heat for me to grow. the storm circles around my brainy drain, attaching me to the worms, the trees burrowing me deeper than I have ever felt before and farther than I thought a little bit of precip could dig. quietly the rain hits me, sliding down my cheeks, soaking the hem of my dress. the sky opens above, violent; awakened water cleansing down Xanax to the world. yell your presence Zeus and purge me up into the clouds.
For Chekhov

They would meet on a country road, far away from the city and the suburbs. The road would be crusty and unpaved, with swelling fields hemming it in on both sides. The birds would dart back and forth like silent arrowheads in the thick of the sky. The scarecrows in the fields would greet him with floppy arms, impelled to cordiality by a corrective puff of wind. He would walk miles and miles to reach her, oh how he would walk, relishing the crunch of his boots in the dirt, relishing the way her body grew curves and depths as it rose up from the horizon to meet him like the light of a freight train. She would be his strawberry-freckled freight train, his rising light in a blue country dress. By the time they reached each other their faces would be smeared with smiles and tears. He would take her in his arms, press her hot mouth against his shoulder, and she would shudder in his arms and say,

“Oh, John, how I’ve missed you.”

He would tell her it was all right and then as she buried herself against him, his stately figure would assume the posture all strong men assume when they are comforting weak women: he would stand as straight as he could with both arms around her torso, hugging her head to his chest, his head erect and noble, staring out at the field in awkward disuse. And she would sob and sob into his strong chest, and he would tell her again and again that it was all right, that he was here now. She would keep sobbing, of course, that was the way she was, or rather, the way she would be, and for a long time he would listen, calm and content, as she pumped inarticulate passion up from her breast and out into the resounding country fields.

“It’s been so long,” he would say at length. His voice would be full and deep, yet measured.

“So long,” she would say.

“Since the last time I came to the farm,” he would say. “When we rode the horses.” “Mmm,” she would say. Her lips would slap up against the leather of his jerkin. Perhaps it would be a vest, or, if it were closer to autumn than spring, a woolen shirt. Whatever best befit the long journey he had to make through the vast, peeled-open country in which she lived. “I liked those horses,” she would add, coming back into language. “They were so strong. Like you.” Her hands would slide up to his torso. She would define with her touch the contours of his muscular body, and as she did so, he would be reminded of the thirty-mile days and the seventy-pound loads that had built those muscles and trained those muscles to carry themselves into her hands.

For he would have forged hundreds of miles, all without a penny in his
pocket, to reach her freckled face and pull her against his body on that country road. He would have heard from her only a few times a year, in scant letters that sometimes got lost in the post, but the scope of his love would have grown fast and fanatic in her absence, it would have filled up the gaps in the mountains and flooded the scope of the plains, and like a heart beating on bravely in the infinite dark, he would have stayed hers no matter how far they were pulled from each other.

“Mmm,” she would say again, “I missed your smell.” He would smile, still looking off into the distance, and think that he, too, had missed her smell, though he would not say so aloud. She would smell like the heather of a field and ruddy dust of a country road. She would turn and follow his gaze, and they would take in the whole scene together, the sifting heather and the big black crows, the sky above like a great blue bubble. “Do you remember when we ran together?” she would ask. “In the fields?”

“Of course,” he would say. “How could I forget? You looked so beautiful.” She would laugh and ruffle her hair, remembering how years before that day on that country road they had run together in the heath and the wheat until their bodies were red and exploding with joy, and then they had fallen down in the dirt and stripped off their clothes and she had rolled around in his dark, tall, strong body, and together they had burrowed deep down to where time could not touch. He would remember all of this, and he would smile.

“You don’t know how hard it’s been,” he would say to her, putting his hands around her waist and drawing her even closer. “Every day I thought about you. Sometimes I would see women in the corner of my eye, on the street or in the store, and for a fleeting moment I would think they were you, and I would whirl around to throw myself before their knees. But they were never you.” He would stare off into the distance again and blink his eyes. “Not even close. There’s nobody as beautiful.” He would kiss her. “As kind.” Another kiss. “As gentle and soft and beautiful and loving.” Another kiss. A single teardrop would fall from his cheek onto hers. They would shake against each other. “I never faltered. I never forgot about you.”

“I love you,” she would say, and she would seem to sway in his arms. He would cup her sunflower face in his coarse and capable hand and his eyes would find hers like hands find grass. “I love you,” she would say again. But something would be wrong. She would tremble in his arms like a loosened leaf.

“What is it?” he would say.

She would turn away, gazing out into the field. Love and fear would rush up in his heart like bawling dogs.

“I’m sorry,” she would say. “It was just so long...years, John...”

He would run his hands up and down her gooseflesh arms, saying her name, saying her name, she still loved him, she had to, he could feel it blooming
up out of her like a daisy on a country road, she was his, they were together again on the road in the world. He said her name and said her name.

“Baby,” he would say. “Come here.” But she would pull away.

“There’s someone else,” she would say, her voice trembling. “I’m sorry, John, but there’s someone else.”

“Who is he?” he would say. “Where did you meet him?”

“At the dance hall,” she would say. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what I was thinking ...”

“You just weren’t thinking. You just weren’t thinking of me.” He would hold her close and press his hands against the folds of her dress and feel the cold no feel the heat underneath her body, she would still be still warm and effusive with love and regret.

“No,” she would say, “no, John, I’m sorry.”

“What?”

“I was thinking of you, John, please, come here.” He would hold her. His eyes would mist up but he would blink hard and stare out at the field with the wobbling scarecrows. “I was thinking of you. I missed you so much, John, but he, he’s wonderful, he really is, like you, but, oh, I don’t know, just come here.”

But if that was the way it was, then he would not come to her, he would pull away and leave her to her own warm touch and beautiful earthy eyes. He would go to the edge of the country road and look out into the field with the daisies growing around his boots and he would wait for her to come to him.

“Please,” she would say, “it’s not that I don’t love you, but you were so far away, he was so close, and he’s ... well, John, I don’t know, he’s done so much for me, he’s been everything for me ...”

“I’m close,” he would say. “I’m here now. Doesn’t that count for anything. Will you have me back now. Can I still. Are we still.” He would stutter for a while, but then he would articulate himself better; his words would be cutting and diamond-bright, they would volley forth the full surge of his love and his heartbreak.

“I thought, John, I thought,” she would say. “I thought I could. I came out here, didn’t I? I love you, John, you saw, you saw how it was when I saw you, but I just don’t know anymore, baby—”

“Don’t call me baby,” he would say, not looking at her. His words would be granite.

“I do want you. I do love you.”

“You don’t. Go back to him, whoever he is.”

“It’s for the best, John,” she would say. No, she would not say that. She would say: “No, John, please, you’ve come so far, you’ve stared in the face of so much danger and hunger and misfortune, you’re so strong and wonderful it takes my breath away, and, honey, I do, I do want you, I want you to hold me for years and years, please, John, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”
But he would have none of it. He would lift up his feet and trample on
the dandelions and turn away. Her eyes would overflow with tears and she would
cower at the sight of his figure, high and dark like an ancient oak. She would cry
aloud, overcome by the force of her own betrayal, eaten alive by her own evil.

“I’m sorry, John,” she would say, “I had to move on, to bigger and better
things. With you, even when you were here, there was always this restlessness,
this dissatisfaction...well, you know how I am...but with him it’s all gone, he’s so
strong and tall, John, I’m sorry.” No, that was not what she would say, it would
be something more like “John, I’m sorry, you’re far stronger and taller than he
is, you satisfy me like no one else ever could, it’s only fate that’s tearing us apart,
I want so desperately to be with you because you fulfill me, you complete me.”
Yes, something like that, or maybe something like, “John, please take me with
you, take me back, I’ll do anything for you, I’d even kill him if that was what you
wanted, you’re so wonderful and tall and strong, John...”

But he would not take her back. Instead he would say something incisive
and true, something that would carve through her muscles and dry up the
marrow of her unfaithful bones, and he would set off down the country road
back to the place whence he had come. A dark thunderstorm would press over
the fields and the sky would darken swath by swath, as if across the great blue
ceiling fluorescent lights were powering down, one by one. The birds would skate
towards shelter overhead like cars buzzing over an interstate. From behind him,
she would call,

“You’ll never be half the man he is! He’s stronger, taller...you’re nothing
compared to him! I was never in love with you!”

John would hear this and raise his fist and slam it down onto the key-
board of his computer and the trees would shake and disappear and he would
slide down the country road across a hodgepodge of states and suburbs until at
last he was sucked up into the mouth of the office building where he worked,
where he sat, in a cubicle, eating leftover ziti. The walls in the cubicle were white;
he had tacked up protocol forms to the wall on his left and a calendar to the wall
on his right. In front of him was his computer, which had started beeping when
he struck it with his fist. He tried to quiet it down but found he could not, so in-
stead he held the power button until the whole thing sighed and went black. Steve
peered into his cubicle from next door.

“You all right there, buddy?” said Steve.
“Yeah, Steve, fine,” said John.
“ Heard a bang or something.”
“Just dropped something on my keyboard.”
“Really? Must’ve been heavy. What was it?” John looked around him.
“I don’t know,” he said.
“You don’t know?”
“A paperweight.”
“What paperweight?”
Steve was right: there was no paperweight in his cubicle. There were only the protocol forms, the calendar, and the computer. A stroke of fear thrilled through John's body. He had to think of something: Steve was his superior. He couldn't get caught smashing his keyboard. What if he had to pay for a new one? He looked down at the keyboard. He had not damaged it.

“I don't know,” said John. “My paperweight. You know.”
“Okay,” said Steve. “Sure. Whatever you say.” He wasn't paying attention or he didn't care. Anger flowed up John's spine like a thick river. He had made a fool of himself. Next time they were at the water cooler together Steve might be cold. His bonus might hang in the balance. He looked at his lifeless computer and shivered. He turned it back on and wiggled the mouse. The fluorescent lights above him did not flicker. The minutes of his break ticked by. He looked down at what he was wearing: a checkered shirt, poorly tucked in to his trustiest pair of slacks, which he had had since he had first started the job, which had been more than ten years ago. Since then, he had been promoted, twice. He had risen three floors in the office tower, which gave him a better view when he went to the water cooler. True, there were no fields to speak of: the view afforded by the eighth-floor window consisted of a half-dozen parking lots and a mess of ugly four-lane thoroughfares with traffic lights. Nor could one get a good look at the whole globe of the sky: the view was interrupted by other office towers rising from the asphalt like plastic carbuncles. But he had risen three floors and when you rose three floors, the windows got bigger and the cubicles got wider, so there was that. Steve had started on the second floor, like him, but he had risen to the eighth floor in seven years instead of eleven. When John finally got his office on the eighth floor, Steve had slapped him on the back and said, “What took you so long?!” John had not answered. Then at the office party three weeks later while John and Steve were both talking to Karen, who had been wearing a light blue dress cut low in the front, and who was single for a fact John knew, Steve had brought it up again, how long it had taken for John to reach the eighth floor, and Karen had laughed and let Steve get her another drink. Steve was married, John knew, or suspected, even though he didn't wear a wedding ring. That was just like him. John's computer had rumbled to life again. The pixels: they were fresh and bright like new-grown corn. He checked the time. There were only a few minutes left in his break. He could hear Steve clicking away already, probably still trying to get ahead so he could impress Karen at the next office party. Was Steve having an affair with Karen?

John opened his email client. He had no unread messages. Very well: his break could continue until Steve or Karen sent him something to take care of. Or he could go back to the Baxter account. But no, Marty had delegated that
to Steve. Hadn’t Karen told him that? He put his head in his hands; sorrow and confusion swung through him like rainstorms. He looked down at the open field of his half-eaten ziti, at his ringless fingers wobbling against the keyboard like scarecrows, at his mouse cord winding across the desk like a curvy country road. He stood up to stretch. Across the room, Jenny was looking up from her cubicle. They met eyes for a moment. She was pretty, but not as pretty as Karen. She was wearing a smart blue dress that fit well on her. Steve had called her “mediocre” when they had been drunk at the office party. Did Karen think Jenny was mediocre? John looked up at the fluorescent lights, strung across the room like a makeshift sky. Their whites turned to blues. The ceiling gave way and let a country sun shine through.

John met eyes with Jenny again. She winced at him. No, she smiled. It was hard to tell because he could not see all the way over the cubicle. But, no, of course she was smiling, she was smiling because she remembered what he remembered. He smiled back at her, standing up to his full height, absolutely able to see over the cubicle because he was tall and his legs were sturdy.

“Oh, John,” Jenny had said when they had chanced to meet on a country road somewhere far away from office parks and four-lane highways. “You’re so strong, and tall.” All the office towers had been razed and fields of wild heather had sprung up in their place. Yes, of course they remembered, they both remembered, she had put her arms around his sturdy torso and drawn herself close to his trunk. He had stared out at the endless country expanse, and what did you know, it had stared back at him. This had happened a long time ago, but the love between them had been real and passionate, the storm pressing down on them had dissolved or retreated, the birds had started to squawk with joy again like cars beeping their horns in celebration, no, more like birds exulting in the glories of a country road and a beautiful woman like Jenny, who had been beautiful but who had felt that he was even more beautiful than her.

“Oh, John,” the girl had said, “I just love this. I just love being out here on this country road with you. It’s even better than the tenth floor.” He had nodded and held her close and laughed a hearty laugh that made her shiver with delight. Goosebumps had bubbled up on her smooth skin and her cheeks had flushed pink with love. How they had loved each other then! How the girl had wanted him, John, and no other! How they had kissed and rambled together down that country road on their endless break, no, that endless journey, long ago but still so real. They had fallen down together among the corn and the dirt and he had dug into the girl with a farmer’s trowel, and as they had lay together and stared up at the uninterrupted sky he had known that from that moment onward, with her cloven to his side like a babe to its mother’s breast, he would always remember that day as the day a woman had cherished him for being tall and strong and sturdy.

SLICED BREAD MAGAZINE
FACES OF WAR
AUSTEN SMITH

A battered band of bleary men is seen
Upon a distant hill with trampled grass,
And though their swords and helmets gleam,
The paranoia of the town does pass

As would the rain upon a pane of glass.
The sentry sits and merely shakes his head;
He mutters to the plebs with shameless crass:
“You come back with your shield, or come back dead.”

But still! to flee from war yields less blood bled;
Although the men no vict’ry may possess,
The wives, with joy, have nothing more to dread,
So lift the gates; let them their men caress!

 Imagined faces quickly turn to naught.
The strangers roar; the small town is distraught.
ANT
ALEXANDRA LEVITAS

Intense
That’s why you said you like me.
And it was you who first used the word love.
Coward
I didn’t dare, though it was your first time, not mine.
Casual
Line up the girls.
That’s what you said you wanted.
Casual
And you knew right there and then:
I was too big of a bite to swallow,
too big of a bite
for a couple of condoms and a good conversation.
So line them up, boy,
squash them all like ants,
those little creatures even Einstein called the masters of altruism.
That’s what they said
on the Discovery Channel,
and I watched – a little girl –
how ants build bridges of their own bodies.
Intense
And which girl are you fucking now?
Don't tell her you love her, boy!
She might spit it right back at you.
Spit a chunk right back at you,
a chunk too big to swallow.
You don't want her to choke on your dick, do you?
How many ants do you think you squished on your way home today?
On the grass in the park,
on the hard sidewalk,
lost in the cracks of the sidewalk…
Yeah we all do it.
We all do it!
Casually
And I was ten when I lay on the grass,
stood up soon after with little angry bite marks up and down my arm.
But the black ones don't bite,
only the red ones do.
The Discovery Channel taught me that!
So line them up and squish them like ants, boy,
Line them up and fuck them like ants.
WENDIGO
WILL DART

I was always quick, and pretty scrappy for a little fucker. I had good hands and good balance. I was an OK tight end on the JV team, and a little better in the 200 meter. Later on I did some karate, and I was alright at that too. So I know what it feels like to be good at something, and to feel like you’re made of iron, and untouchable. I hadn’t really seen what I could do, then, and I don’t know that I ever did.

But my buddy Kyler was a freak. He was fearless and farm-boy strong, and by 9th grade we all knew never to challenge him to a race or an arm wrestling match or a pushup contest, or else risk getting our asses kicked. The kind of kid who’d pull handstands and huck backflips just for fun. He was like me, sort of, but a little taller, and with longer hair. His skin was that sandy color from too much time in the sun and a tiny bit of Indian blood. He had dirt under his fingernails. And he was always laughing; always had a big smile on his face, so that you had to wonder if he wasn’t playing it up a bit, or fucking with you, or just generally keeping shit to himself, even though he almost never was. Kyler wasn’t holding back.

He was my friend, my best friend, maybe, and you need friends like that for winters like we had. It’s bad where I’m from – far north in the U.P. – with heavy snow from October through April, and that can wear on you, and would probably drive you crazy if you had to do it alone. With some help and enough imagination you could usually get through it OK. The winter that came down in our junior year was different; the worst there’d ever been, everybody said so. It was special. You’d get back inside, but you couldn’t shake that chill. It sort of got into your bones, and then it was hard to get it out again.

I get a little cold, just thinking about it now. But that’s all I’ve got. The truth is that, years later, it’s still hard to figure: was it the cold that really fucked things up, or what came with it? You can’t blame the weather for everything; but then, maybe you can. There were lots of wrecks on the side of the road that year, lots of pipes frozen solid. Things got canceled, more often than not. Guys were punching each other in the parking lot outside the Christmas Dance, maybe because they liked the same girl, but probably for no reason at all. That winter my mom had something called “seasonal affective disorder.” She said it made her depressed, and so she had to sit under a bright light in her room for a few hours a day, which I thought was fucking hilarious. “Seasonal affective disorder” – SAD. That was funny at the time.

Anyway it’s boring, living on the moon like that, so me and Kyler had to find things to do after school and on weekends. We’d be out on the lake a lot, and
out in the woods: sledding, or tree bending, or hunting, or just fucking around in the dark. We'd build fires – big bonfires – and drink and tell each other Dogman stories, stories about kids disappearing in the woods, and old totem stories about demons and skinwalkers and pretty girls who'd drink your blood, just trying to scare each other. It wasn't hard. Sometimes we'd hear coyotes screaming in the hills. Wolves, once or twice. That'd send us running.

Kyler wasn't so great in school, and that winter he needed my help with just about everything. I'd be at his farm, explaining the French and Indian War or the quadratic equation or whatever, while Kyler rolled his cigarettes or messed around with Nicole, his sour Native girlfriend. She was cute. She smiled a lot, too; a good smile, even after meth tore it up a few years later. Everything was funny to her, and she liked to tease me in particular. She thought I was gay for a while, seeing as I'd been absolute shit with girls until then. She said that Kyler thought so, too, even though he said he tried to “always assume the best in people.” And he was usually right.

But for me and Kyler, that winter was also the Winter of Stupid Ideas. Drunk driving and drunk sledding, for sure, but also drunk shooting stuff, drunk setting shit on fire, drunk jumping off the roof and drunk running through bull pens. Once, while we were out drunk ice fishing, I wanted to try and swim between two boreholes, 15 feet from one to the other. It was January, and windy, and that's the kind of stunt that's so dumb it just makes you mad to even hear about it. You had to figure that neither of us would actually do it. Then Kyler was in the lake – I watched his body make the slow crawl, and saw the bubbles get trapped against the ice as he looked for the other hole. I was pretty sure he was gonna die, right then, and he might’ve, if I hadn’t stuck my hand in and yanked him through. He came out laughing.

“You gotta get in there, dude!”

I was in there for a while, feeling around in the black water under those two feet of ice. I could hold my breath forever; I was fine. That was the “mammalian diving reflex”, which I read about later. Apparently the cold changes your respiratory system—so you can survive longer underwater—and it was fucking cold down there, no problem. I saw Kyler’s shape standing up by the second hole, all foggy through the ice, and I wondered if he'd care if I never came up, wondered whether he'd gone down first thinking I couldn't do it, knowing I'd have to try, and that I wouldn't make it like he could. I could’ve let him drown. “Intrusive thoughts” – I read about those, too. I didn’t mean it; they just came to me right then. It was fucking cold down there.

Kyler hugged me when I got back up, and laughed. “Dude!” he said. “Nobody’s gonna believe we did that!”

People told that story for a long time afterward, and they didn’t always include me in it. I didn’t fight them about it. I didn’t need people to think I was
as stupid as Kyler must’ve been. I’d spent the time with him – hunting, fishing, digging up badgers and porcupines, watching the snow pile up on tree branches – so I knew what he was like inside. We’d been as close as kin since the first grade; people sometimes thought we were brothers, we were so similar. If there really was something else going on behind the permanent, shit-eating grin on Kyler’s face – or nothing – I was sure I’d seen it.

Then one Sunday, late in February, we’d gone out sledding under the power lines, and gone out for a long time, all the way to Brutus and back. It was great, while it lasted, flying through the trees together. We stopped halfway home, where a blizzard had knocked down a few of the wires. We’d need to find a way around. We talked for a while, catching our breath, watching the sun disappear behind the hills, before we had to turn on our headlights. Snow had started to come down quietly between us.

“Did you see that moose back there? That was fucking wild!”

“I know,” I said. We’d scared it; it came charging out of a grove a few miles back, furious, absolutely massive. “Crazy, those things just walking around out here.”

“Yeah. Weird shit.” We’d taken our helmets off, and Kyler was shaking his hair out, stretching his back and legs. He did a cartwheel, and then a messy front flip, tumbling in the snow. I tried it, too, and tackled him, and I could hardly feel the cold for it. By then it was dark as pitch out there, or darker.

Deer were fighting in the woods somewhere, and the sound of their antlers was ringing in the trees. Bang. Bang. Bang. Kyler was dangling a big gob of spit above my face.

“Cut it out, dude!” I said, squirming under him. “Seriously.”

“Hang on,” he said, and sucked it back up, but kept pinning me. I slipped my hand up and punched him. Hot blood came pouring out of his nose, dripping into the snow and onto my jacket, black under the lights of our ski-doos. He staggered back up.

“What the fuck, dude!” He looked at me over his hand, upset for maybe the first time since I’d known him.

“I meant it.” I said. I don’t know if I had meant it, really. I was freezing, and wanted to go home. “You’re fine,” I said. “Let’s just go.” I started to put my mask back on, and then my helmet.

“I think you broke my nose,” said Kyler. He was walking off down the hill, trying to stem the flow with a glove. I wondered. Kyler was never fragile – I’d seen him eat shit on his dirtbike a million times and spring back up again. Now he was hurt.

I picked up a snowball to chuck at him, just to snap him out of it. But first Kyler stood up straight, and there was a flash in the dark. For a second I saw his bones – just like in the cartoons – and his skull, grinning at me. Then he fell.
down stiff. The rest of his blood was pouring out of his head, black and boiling, burning a little river through the snow.

Afterward that’d be a story people told, one with a big moral at the end of it – “You should never snowmobile near downed power lines or you might get fried.” But it was still a freak accident. Could’ve happened to anyone. And nobody cast any kind of blame my way, or thought that I had anything to do with it. It didn’t seem like me. So I guess I was lucky, even if I did have to see his parents, talk a little at his funeral, talk forever about the coldest winter on record, the one where I lost my friend, the guy I knew best out of anybody else, and who knew me best, until then, that year when everything changed. Or I did.

I have this bear claw necklace that Kyler made for me as a birthday present, from a black bear he’d shot the year before. I don’t wear it much anymore, but Nicole liked to grab onto it while we fucked, that winter and afterward. It was good luck.

“Keeps the Wendigo away,” she said.
“What?” I asked. The wind was screaming outside.
“Bad spirit. It comes down from the hills on cold nights like this, getting into people. Turns you; messes you up. And it makes you hungry…” She bit into my shoulder.
“Ah.” Already I had a vision of the creature in my head. “It’s a monster, yeah? With sharp teeth and fur?”
“ Sometimes, yeah,” she said. “And then sometimes it looks just like anybody else. But it’s not.”
A MOMENT OF SILENCE BEFORE YOU SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE WONDERING WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN
ALLEN WU

claustrophobia is the great crown of adulthood, she says,
the great chisel that carves
open, infinite expanses into
toy soldiers marched into battle. The sun
crests the fence of treetops, and she
lights a cigarette she pins between her fingers,
not breathing, contemplating the smoke as it
spirals into the sky

the thought of all the life I’ve left unlived makes me want to kill myself, she says,
looking up toward
the great red sky, which looks alternately like
an infinite, pulsating hematoma and then like
a rose garden, where the roses have escaped
the burden of their earthly forms and become
spirals of beauty and pain and
symbols of how all things
good and bad
return to that abyss
time and she falls into her thoughts and
the reality underpinning them and
feels loved

the thought of all the life I’ve yet to live makes me want to kill myself, she says,
thinking of a tunnel
void of all sound and light and feeling save
constant vertigo and
the adrenaline that follows it,
the neverending feeling of
being in motion, worn lightly like
a favorite shawl passed down from grandmother to mother to
daughter or a royal cloak
threadbare from decades of prosperous rule, until what was once
terrifying and exhilarating
settles into numbness, and as the threads of the cloak come loose,
reaching out like tentacles into space,
all sensation bleeds
into the darkness

SLICED BREAD MAGAZINE
I don’t know what I want to do but I’m sad I haven’t done it, she says, imagining booking a flight back home and digging through the dust to which her parents consigned her past when she left home for good, forever, at last, and finding the broken music box her father had given her as a kid, when he still had hope for her, imagining shaking it until somehow it started again, until by total, infinitesimally small chance, all the circuitry and cogwork fell into place for one last hurrah, imagining the music that would be sad and wistful for her and her alone and just tinny and antiquated to everyone else, imagining the horrifying screech the box would shout when its last filament burned through and it halted forevermore, imagined feeling free

it used to be cute but now it’s just pathetic, she says, lifting her fingers up to her eyes, thin and pale and long, she fights the urge to break them, like she breaks all beautiful and fragile things, and imagines planting the bones with her fingerless hands, if she could still call them hands, shoveling the dirt into little bloody pyramids, ignoring the burning as the worms and fungi and death in the dirt tunnel into the aftermath, imagines a perfect white castle of bone and thin, pale flesh growing from these humble, devoutly proffered seeds

today won’t be the same, she says
I killed my God in a dream last night. It started with the usual dream absurdity; the sky was gray, a pigeon was hovering instead of flying, my mother was breastfeeding my little brother, and both of their heads were adorned with horns. Not a devil’s sort of horns, but those of a rhinoceros.

Anyway, this thing just popped out of nowhere. It was a small, sickly shrub with roots tangled into the shape of two little feet. As it spoke, its breathy voice caused its largest leaf to flap.

“You forgot about me today.”
I looked around, wondering if this thing was addressing me.
“Yes, you. You didn’t pray. I was waiting, but you forgot about me.”
“You can hear my prayers?”
“Yes.”
I tried to scan my brain for some ethereal creature that can listen to prayers. Yet I pray to one thing and one thing only. I looked at the thing with suspicion before asking the question I by no means wanted to hear the answer to.
“Are you God?”
It bowed its stems sheepishly, sensing my disappointment. Some leaves even appeared a little tinted with pink. It composed itself rather quickly, though, and hoisted itself up in attempted confidence.
“Yes.”
No. All my life I’ve been putting on dress shirts and ties to attend a room where scrolls are holy. You know what dress shirts and ties imply? Something important. Proms, weddings, funerals—you don’t tie the tie unless it’s something important.

Forget the tie. This thing made me wear one for years, but okay, forget the tie. It isn’t grasping how horrid this is. God is one. Adonai Echad. But in Hebrew, Elohim is in the plural. This is not a heretic implication. God is everywhere, in every molecule. He is one, but his presence is aplenty. I thought it’s something so grand it defies dimension.

This thing. It’s not scattered among all of space. No, it’s condensed into a little volume. One tiny, tiny thing I’ve been wearing ties for. I could step on it. Its leaves could be plucked so easily. I could tear it with my foot and its stems would loose their rigidity. In fact, after all the lies it told—
“No!”
It dodged my foot.
“Don’t hurt me! You’ve already made me so weak. I can’t handle a foot.”
“How have I made you weak?”
Tired, it rested itself along the length of a nearby tree.
“Your forgot to pray. You see, I-I photosynthesize. That’s how I nourish myself. But instead of sunlight, I use prayers. And without your prayers, I’ll die.”
I felt dizzy. Grandma jokingly insists that prayers are food for the soul. I thought she meant my soul.
“You used me.”
“That’s not how it is.”
“How else is it, then? I’m stupid. So stupid. And you sustain yourself by tricking others. Aren’t you ashamed?”
“That’s not how it is.”
I looked down at it, and it straightened its stems with conviction. Like a wise little shrub.
“What is it that you’re so upset about? I didn’t recite prayers while I washed my hands? I don’t recite it when I’m supposed to anyways. Only on the Shabbats I actually attend synagogue and feel guilty.”
“You went to synagogue last night and didn’t recite them. Why?”
“Why do you care? I never did them right anyways.”
“It’s not about an objective tradition. It’s about the tradition you set for yourself. You recite prayers when you are in a synagogue. But you didn’t last night. Something must have changed.”
Shut up. The hovering pigeon chirped, and I needed that to shut up too.
“Shut up.”
“Okay.”
“I don’t know.”
“Don’t know what changed?”
“Yes. Now shut up.”
It said nothing but kept itself turned to my direction. What can I say? Things felt off lately and when I went to synagogue they continued to feel off and I didn’t want to recite my prayers. Why bother? And what am I going to tell this thing? Something feels off? I don’t know what I even mean by off. It’s like…
It’s like I talk to people and things don’t feel quite right so I find an excuse to leave—need to go to the bathroom, get a drink of water—and then once I reach a new location I still feel equally out of place. I have too much body. I want to be nowhere or anywhere but I don’t want this body that is plainly somewhere, especially when all the somewheres in the world are just as off as the other somewheres.
So yeah, something’s different, and it’s not the good sort of different. And this shrub had no right asking about it.
“What happens if you receive too many prayers?”
“What do you mean?”
“What if I say a prayer out of context—where it doesn’t belong. Would
that be like too much sunlight? Would you dry up, wither, and die?”

It shrank back in worry.

“Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha-olam”

I picked up my pace as its leaves achieved a healthier green glow.

“asher kidishanu b’mitz’votav v’tzivanu”

Its leaves began to shrivel, and he emitted a croaked cry.

“al n’tilat yadayim.”

The stems began to sizzle, and it fell on its roots. Then it burst into flames.

I felt dizzy. I paced around its decomposing body for a while before sitting down and biting at my nails. Eventually, I woke up.

So here I am. Usually when I wake up it takes me a good fifteen minutes to convince myself to get out of bed. It’s so nice and warm, and I feel like the gooey cheese inside of a Hot Pocket. Today, however, my eyes barely have the opportunity to adjust to the sunlight before I shoot right out from under the covers.

I eat cheerios. As I pour in the milk, I remember: I killed my God in my dream last night. I add some blueberries to the cheerios.

An hour later I’m with our bio study group. Elaine, with her pretty eyes, sits next to me and gives me a small smile and says, “Hey.”

Sometimes when a girl says “Hey,” she doesn’t meet your eye and all it means is that she’s doing the minimum not to be rude. Sometimes a girl says “Hey” the way Elaine says “Hey.” What that means is that she wants to publically wear your sweater, and it’ll look too loose around her body, and everyone will know the sweater is not hers and that she’s yours.

So I say, “Hey.”

Afterwards, I go to lab.

I think I could categorize the majority of my lab work as using pipettes under a sterilized hood. I described my project to my uncle once, a researcher, and explained that studying the effects of anti-inflammatory drugs on flies is useful because inflammation catalyzes neurodegenerative disease. He nodded with approval until his five-year-old started crying.

Of course my uncle dropped everything and asked, “What’s wrong, Peter?”

The blotchy-faced, plump kid replied, “He kills flies!”

My uncle looked at his son for a moment and then explained that the use of animals in experimentation is necessary to come up with discoveries fast enough to help people.

And here I am using pipettes under a hood, killing flies for the common good. Thing is, I sometimes kill flies for the non-common good. I don’t like to, but they keep buzzing and buzzing and buzzing around my head after I wave
them away so many times and then just BAM!

Last night I nearly squished God before using misplaced prayers to kill him. All of a sudden, I imagine how, like a bug, goo would have oozed out of him. I wince and continue killing flies.

Like all days, there is an end in which I’m in bed. I can’t sleep. It is one, two, three, four in the morning.

I’m under a tree beneath a gray sky, and I want to get up but I can’t. I am picking at my nails. After some time I see the grass moving. From between the long strands, the shrub emerges. He sits next to me, and after a while, it says, “It’s alright.”

I pull at my hair.

“I know you feel bad and that you have a hard time apologizing. And so I am telling you: it’s alright.”

I look at my nails, “Did it hurt?”

“Well, it didn’t tickle. But don’t worry about my health. I am God.”

I look at it, “I am sorry. It’s just... I had a hard time believing that, you know...”

“This is all there is?”

“Yes. It was stupid. I just... I was angry. I thought God would have less of a body. Would be less like me.”

I felt its leaf brush my shoulder as it breathed, “Why less like you? You’re fine. What’s eating at you?”

I don’t want him asking about me again. Instead, I peep, “Do flies have souls?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, damn.”

I get up and pace around, “Why do you make them like that, then?”

“Make them like what?”

“Tiny and buzzing.”

“Stop complaining. Why aren’t you asking out Elaine?”

“What?”

“Why aren’t you asking out Elaine?”

“Why are you asking me about this? If you’re God, shouldn’t we be talking about where souls go after death or why there is death at all or why there is evil in the world or some kind of universal truth?”

“Stop being pathetic.”

I looked at the shrub. It barely reached my knees, and it was looking down at me.

“When you go to bed at night, and you lie there staring blankly at your ceiling before reality fades into sleep, is it universal truth you are after? Or is it Elaine?”

I look at him, “Don’t undermine me. I do think about souls and death.
and—"

“You think about those things in the context of flies and girls.”
I laugh. “Well that’s just ridiculous, isn’t it? That I have to murder flies
everyday minus weekends to reach some universal truth.”
“Would you like me to just tell you, instead?”
“What?”
“I could tell you the truth. I could point you toward the right direction.”
Oh, God. This is the offer beyond all offers. I might never encounter
another like it again.

I unhinge my jaw but find it difficult to push words out. Eventually I ask,
“Um, are you allowed to do that?”

The shrub sighs, “Listen, this is not genuine. I’ve been trying hard to be
patient with you but you really need to sort your stuff out. No need to pray. I’ll
call you sometime.”

Before I know it, sunlight bathes my room. I blink my eyes and wait for
them to gain focus.
LOVER LITE
PAUL DILLON

I felt a nagging below my navel;
A mushroom welling—a bad bubbling.
It was something I ate, the result
Of too much of you! Though that could easily be confused
With too much coffee and beer and mixed greens.

I myself made the same mistake, but then ginger tea didn't help.
It takes twenty minutes for the brain to get a message from the stomach.
I, impatient, wait for it to get that message, so I can finally stop
Feeding on obvious lite illusions,
Eating Love Cheetos and pretending they will fill me up—
Knowing they would not. For now it's all Drakes Cakes,
Farting through the nights, and crying days.
Waldo looks up from the sink, finds himself face to face with a pair of bloodshot, trembling eyes. Everything is out of focus. He turns the faucet, throws some water on his face, trying to clear his thoughts; wonders when he started looking so old. The lines on his face etched like canyons in a dry, bleak landscape. Grey had almost come to overshadow the brown on his head, creeping in like a parasitic phantom. Reaching for his glasses, he recalls a past visit to a psychiatrist. Which one was it? There were so many he had lost count. It didn’t really matter, he supposed.

“We need to discover the root of all this stress”, the faceless man said.
“Tell me again how all of this started?”
“I-I don’t know. I’m not even sure when it first happened, honestly. I lived a normal life once, I’m certain of it.” Waldo eyed the room anxiously. His nails, bitten down to nubs, were pecking one another. “But now… every time I go out, every time I step outside, I get the feeling that I’m being watched. No, worse than that, the feeling that I’m being searched for. I’ve felt it since as long as I can remember, although that’s not saying much.”

“Come now, Waldo, surely there is something of your past, your childhood, that you can remember.”
“I’ve tried! I have, honestly. All the days just melt together now. I can recall bits and pieces, snapshots of memories, but that’s all. It’s almost as if I never had a childhood, like I just came into existence one day. Poof!” He chuckled as he gesticulated wildly. “Just like that!”

The man wiped his glasses clean with the edge of his shirt before speaking. Waldo found himself lost in the circular pattern, drawing comfort from the clockwork-like repetition. “So what do you do, exactly, in response to these intense feelings of paranoia? Waldo?”

“Huh? Sorry, what was that?” He was dragged back into reality.
“I was asking how you respond to all of this paranoia and stress, how do you cope with it all?”
“I run.”
“You run?”
“I just keep moving. Never stay in one place for more than a day or so. I’ve been to so many places now I could write a worldwide travel guide. Beaches, ski slopes, safaris, and always with a crowd. That’s important, you know, a crowd. Helps me to fade away, just one face in a sea of people. But everywhere I go that feeling eventually comes back to me, that someone is searching for me. I don’t know what will happen if they ever find me, and I don’t plan on finding out.”
“Have you ever tried to just blend into the world, make yourself anonymous? Starting with, perhaps, the outfit?”
“What are you talking about?” asked Waldo.
“Come now, I could spot you a mile away in that red and white striped getup. It’s cartoonish, and filthy. Looks as though you haven’t changed in weeks.”
Waldo looked down at himself, then back up to the doctor.
“I don’t understand.” He said, confused. “I’m just wearing a normal outfit. Jeans and a t-shirt.”
“Hmm…” The psychiatrist scribbled fiercely on his notepad, occasionally glancing up to study Waldo. “I’d like to run some tests…”

The scene faded. All of the visits eventually boiled down to the same thing. Waldo was insane. Waldo had extreme paranoia. Waldo was schizophrenic. He’d been diagnosed with so many disorders that he had given up trying to figure out which was which. None of it meant anything. None of it changed the truth: that someone, or something, was after him.

He felt a change in the room: a slight chill, a change in humidity or air pressure, something subtle but unmistakable. He was used to it now, had come to always expect it. Sighing, Waldo walked towards the door, having no belongings other than the clothes on his body. Speeding up, by the time he made it to the front desk he was damp with sweat.

“Good morning, sir!” The receptionist said, beaming. “What can I help you with today?”
Waldo fumbled for his room key, tossed it clumsily onto the counter, eyeing the exit doors, his foot tapping impatiently.
“Checking out, are we?” The young man working the front desk continued to smile widely. His mustard yellow uniform looked freshly ironed, his hair combed, his face shaved. “I hope you enjoyed your stay! If you would like to fill out this survey rating your experience here, I would really appreciate it! And you get free breakfast with your next visit, too!”
Waldo seemed to be turning something over in his head. “What am I wearing?” The words were not sarcastic, nor joking, but had a serious inquisition that jarred the receptionist.
“Sir?”
“You heard me just fine, boy.” Waldo stared coldly into his eyes. It was the boy’s turn to sweat. For the first time, his smile faltered.
“Umm, some sort of, uh, striped outfit? Maybe red and white it’s hard to-”
Waldo was already walking away. He didn’t understand. He had changed outfits in the room. He was sure of it.
It was time to move. Waldo was in line at the airport, waiting for his turn to be groped by a stranger. He began to wonder how much longer he could keep it up. Alone with nothing to live for, what was the point? He eventually made his way to a seat outside the loading bay.

His eyes downcast, he watched his feet tap impatiently, beyond his control. Something caught his attention, out of the corner of his eye: a pair of black high heels caught in the same rhythm. He drew his gaze up, slowly, not wanting to draw any attention to himself. Following the trail of a long red overcoat, he eventually reached the brim of a matching red hat, pushed down so as to cover the wearer’s eyes. Upon closer inspection he noted the grime on the outfit, the dirt of countless cities and lands.

She looked up at him. Waldo quickly averted his gaze, but it was too late. She had seen him looking, noting. Well aware of the eyes glued on him, Waldo willed his gaze to match hers. He thought she looked older than she really was. Thought he saw something familiar in those eyes.

“Travel much?” he asked, nervously.
“You have no idea,” she replied.
“Try me,” he laughed. Not a forced laugh, nor a cynical one, but with genuine feeling. He had almost forgotten the sound. “I’m Waldo, and you are?”
“Carmen. Carmen Sandiego.”
WHY I AM NOT AFRAID OF THE DARK
(ALTERNATIVELY; A PSEUDO-SESTINA)
ROSEMARIE HO

It starts with the dark — it always does —
Poised, a tango against the
Orangette tables, kettles, teapots
Syncopated to the beat of the moon,
The howl, the jaguar of the when-no-morn.
Momma would rise, an effort, a silent
Word in the stutterless wind.
How now, she'd ask in her verbs,
How now, where'd her answers go?
And the dark, the mooning would creep rat-tit-tat in its unnamed-loved way,
Absurdity of Nature, wherefore you come?
Momma's gon buy me a mockingbird.
And she'd sing light lickety-split, repose,
Tango the teakettle and do know
The answers will come, they always do,
Little one bend to Poseidon now.

But it's two am and the dark's not come
Yet, as far as the almanac shows.
I don't know what love is, do you?
Rat-tit-tat goes the computer keys — go!
Music comes a-waltzing die-down the slope;
No one's an arpeggio in the when-no-morn.
I'm as blind as a bat, don't you know?
Momma chases, an effort, a sound,
There ain't a ship that could hold a nickel.
Though wither-who-pumas prowl for your hearts,
I fear not, for I have a start —
Momma's gon buy me a mockingbird.
And she'd sing light lickety-split, repose,
Tango the teakettle and do show
Daughter the way I did not go,
Be proud as jaguar virtuoso in the night.
At the string-end we’re all scared;
No amount of syncopation could keep us close.
Creeping rat-tit-tat tangos only have so far to go,
We’re all mooning, no-effort teakettles.
But Momma, she sings silent loud profound,
She carried me from the when-no-morn to the slope.
No gambling man will I ever be,
But I’m betting on ships that bear more than just dimes —
Holy God, if you’re listening, hear mine.
Quench the sags in her patent leather skin,
Lit the orangette-sun that burnt within,
And she will lay down and rest,
Light lickety-split repose,
Stop the tango but not her toes;
A mockingbird’s far too little to hold
All the questions and answers she’ll always know.

So let Momma sleep, and her quiet breathing keep me awake,
And she’ll ship me away from this sorry state,
When she wakes up I’ll only then sleep.
And we’ll lap up starlight, candles, flaming wonders,
Until the world gives up the dark.

Lickety-split light, done their repose —
Fill the when-no-morn up with Momma’s soul.
We didn’t know there was anything wrong with her, at first. She acted like the rest of us. She seemed normal. She ate a turkey sandwich at lunch, from a crinkly paper bag with her name scrawled on the front. Sometimes she forgot her homework. On the playground she raced us for the swings. We pushed her and shoved her like one of our own. Once she fell and scraped her knee and grinned as the nurse patched her up. We wouldn’t have pushed her, if we had known. But we didn’t know.

Then one day we were sitting in class. We were doing algebra worksheets, timed multiplication tables. We hated those worksheets. Our fingers were slick with anxiety. All of our heads were bent over our desks, in concentration. Even hers. The timer was ticking. We heard her body smack when it hit the linoleum. It sounded like the thwack of a fish when it’s thrown onto the deck of a boat. She flipped around like she wanted to jump back to sea. We lifted our heads and gaped, uncertain. Mr. Brockway ran over to her. He told us to stay away. He pulled out his phone and punched in some numbers while watching her. A thin foam was seeping from her mouth. Like the white foam edge on a wave when it bubbles up to shore. The timer dinged. Our worksheets were still half empty. We were a little glad that it had dinged.

Ms. Stein came and took us away. By that time she had stopped flopping. She was very, very still. We went to the gym and tried to play some basketball. Outside we heard the approach of ambulance sirens. Through the small windows in the gym doors we saw a stretcher roll past. We stopped playing. The hollow thud of the ball was too familiar.

Three days later she was back in class. She pretended like nothing had happened. She ate the same lunch. She turned in her math worksheet. On the playground she ran to the swings. But we stayed at the monkey bars. She didn’t swing very high. After recess, she sat at her desk and put her head down. She didn’t say much that day. Or the day after that. After a while, she stopped speaking altogether. Mr. Brockway seemed concerned. We were relieved. She faded into the walls, and we didn’t have to pretend like she was one of us anymore.
1PM AGAIN
WU YINGJU

The city cast
A humid spell
A bifurcate stage

For her I built
A dubious tale
A covalent bed

Our language cued
A picayune
A colorwheel

I dreamt on her
A supine wave
A voltaic grin

She sent for me
A cordial spray
A serrated sough

EACH MORNING
JO BRILL

Each morning I brush
Eraser crumbs from the bed,
For mistakes were made.
WASTE PAPER BIN
KATHY T. Y. ZHOU

A hand, dimly lit, strokes downward in a smooth, clean sweep, descending the neck and the spine. The hand's owner, motionless, is shadowed in black light. He stares dismally at the pale figure crouched below his fingers. It was perhaps the size of the palm and is balled like a fist. It has a human head, a human face. It looks remarkably like him. In fact, he is sure it is him. A miniature identical, a replica so dainty that, was his hand to cave downward around it, the figure would be enveloped in a darkness more absolute and pressing than the already present gloom. He muses fondly at the prospect.

Again, the hand strokes downward. First the hair, the neck, then the top of the spine. The hand twitches involuntarily, as if hesitating, but is nevertheless driven on by full, perverse intensions of its owner's subliminal mind.

Crick. The head folds forward in an awkward manner, hanging limply from the spine. The figure, chin to chest, is as if resting deeply. The hand's owner stares down but does not see. His gaze hangs dismissively in the air, like flecks of dust floating arbitrarily in the dim.

The hand moves further down, tracing the spine. Crick. The figure sags further forward. Twitch, crick, crack. The head folds into the stomach, disfigured. The hand continues, faster and more eager. It feels for every joint, every length of bone, encouraged by the twitch, the crick, and the crack. The figure rolls over and under, lolls forward and sideways. It tumbles, slides, and falls.

In the end, the hand slows. The final cricks sound like kernels of corn, long overdue, finally popping in the oven. The small explosions space, and eventually cease. As does the hand.

The gaze of the hand's owner jerks out of focus, perhaps an indication of his sudden reentrance into the conscious and the real. The hand picks up the figure, folded and crumpled, sagged and undone, and tosses it into the waste paper bin.

Another idea, scrapped.
DISSOLUTION
MICHAEL JIA

I broke the chair and
Split the chain. I spilt your image
across a naked flame. I drew all
Over the bathroom mirror,
Gave myself cheekbones and a beard,
A new face for your pleasure.
I —

It was Thursday.
Departure. Dissolution.
“I can't show you to the door.”
I rose. You turned. A half-formed phrase
Broke like a half-formed wave.
The door put 3 inches between us,
So much more than the millimetre
Flesh of our diffuse ventricles, the
Pulsating, rhythmic chambers that had
Tangled us like copper threads of defiant cable.

Utterances of an exhale:
“I’ll collect the shards that
You discard. I’ll quench the thirst
I have for words. I’ll forget this room,
Drowning in afternoon amber —
Hell, I’ll forget everything.”
Like I didn’t remember

That once I fled back to you,
Torn and sick and drunk and done,
So I could cast your face in time and
Hear you sing with my shaken spine.
A moth — I fluttered to your sun,
And when I returned

The headboard of your bed
Was framed with colored lights.
THE BAHAI’I TEMPLE
LILLIAN SELONICK

Marianne was always bigger than everyone else: she was tall and had more than the acceptable amount of baby fat, its distribution distressingly unwomanly. It was one of those unnervingly warm days that sometimes came in the midst of the glacially slow thaw of a Midwest March. The day before, the temperature had hovered just above freezing; that afternoon it was 80 at O’Hare and cooler by the Lake. Marianne walked home from Haven Middle School with Adrian, a small, asthmatic boy with crooked teeth, an artist mother, and boundless charisma. She was dressed for the chill—bell-bottom jeans, knit sweater over a thin tank top, windbreaker, knit cap.

She draped the jacket over her arm and pushed the sleeves of her sweater up over her elbows. Three blocks from school, the sweating became intolerable. Marianne stripped off her second to last layer and stuffed it into her uncool backpack, over her trapper-keeper and geometry textbook. She was left with the tank top hugging her padded polka dot bra and the bits of tummy that spilled over the top of her jeans. She felt certain that Adrian could see the shadow her belly button made through the cotton-rayon-spandex blend. She shifted her weight and set her forearm across her ribcage, obscuring her belly with the windbreaker. OK.

“Damn, I hate fitness testing days,” said Adrian, hooking his thumbs into his backpack straps.
“Seriously,” said Marianne, “What does the President care about how many push-ups I can do?” She had stopped at six.

They took a meandering path, neither of them particularly eager to go home, driven by the aimless compulsion of suburban eighth graders to explore the familiar streets and parks of their hometown.
“I mean, I may not be fit in the conventional ways that the state of Illinois and Mr. McMurdo think I should be strong in,” said Adrian. “But I’ve got, like, agility and stealth.”

Marianne dragged her hand across the hesitant foliage of a hedge bush. They had passed the limited commercial district on Central and made their way to the residential oasis along Linden. They were taking the long way home, the road that led past the golf course, over the river.
“Stealth?” said Marianne. “Yeah fucking right. You can hardly ditch gym without getting caught.”

Marianne had recently introduced the F-word into her vocabulary. It sounded stilted and unnatural coming off her blushing tongue.
“I have the grace and stealth of a leopard. You just haven’t seen me in action. I am always…ready…to…pounce!” he said, and launched into an
airborne somersault over a heavy, waist-high chain that hung close to the sidewalk. The chain was suspended between a high fence and an ineffectual, free-standing wooden gate. A crude Do Not Enter sign hung from the chain, standing sentry over a little forgotten plot of vacant land just before the bridge.

It was the kind of lot that turned into a sea of gold in June and a field of ivory foam in July. Marianne had harvested dandelions at every stage of the dandelion life cycle from this little field. She plucked the vibrant gold blooms and then carefully removed each petal, inspecting the stamen, the style, the stigma. She derived the most satisfaction from her dissections of dandelions in their chimerical middle age—after the tender petals had shriveled and begun to draw themselves back together to form another, ghostly bud. She picked them when the metamorphosis was just beginning, when the dying petals were still visible above the bulb, like a tassel of corn silk attesting to the richness of the fruit within the husk. But this wrinkled bud bore no fruit, no life-sustaining flesh or skin or root. It would open, a few days later, to spill a globe of winged seed into the acquiescent arms of the wind. Marianne aborted the emergence of this second coming, tearing at the sepal and uprooting clusters of wilting petals to discover the snowy down within, waiting to be born. At the center of the flower, in the middle of its transformation, the ivory floss was packed tight. Prying apart the bud with her thumbnails, Marianne could extract the entire nugget of white fluff and seeds. It was dense, velvety, and damp to the touch, a mass of plant fiber that seemed so alive and so unlike the ectoplasmic material that, given an undisturbed life cycle, carried its precious cargo of seed to other fields.

Adrian had not accounted for the additional inertial presence of his backpack as he completed his somersault. The eccentricity of its trajectory destabilized the arc of his gymnastic antic and he found himself flung head over heels for an unexpected extra half turn. Marianne lost herself to the giggles, manic chuckles that rippled all the loose flesh in her awkward peaks and valleys. Adrian resurfaced with grass stains on his knees and a bloodied lip embedded with a few bits of gravel. His face was soft with surprise for a moment as he processed the physics of the past five seconds. He, too, was overcome by a gasping, wheezing laughter.

Marianne swung a leg over the rusted parabola of the chain. Once she had crawled under that chain, against her mother’s wishes. “There’s probably broken glass there,” she had said.

“Here,” said Marianne, squatting to inspect her fallen comrade. “You’re bleeding.”

She brushed the gravel off of Adrian’s face and dabbed at the slow welling blood with the lining of her jacket.

“Hey,” said Adrian, “maybe I’ll get a scar!” He grinned.

Marianne’s ankles started to quake, so she rocked backwards to sit on the
ground. She crossed her legs in front of her and rested her weight on her hands, planted behind her hips. She wondered if Adrian saw her double chin from this angle.

“Say, have you ever gone below the bridge?” said Adrian, shaking the brown crumbs of a leaf from his earlobe-length hair with studied nonchalance. Marianne's face got hot and the sound of her own voice grew distant as she realized what Adrian was proposing.

“Just once,” she said, “For like two minutes.”

“Yeah, me too,” he said. He sprang up to his feet. “C’mon, let’s go see the graffiti!”

They found the hole in the tetanoid chain-link fence that half-heartedly guarded the canal. They waited for an ersatz purple minivan to pass by, checking the windows of nearby houses for hostile faces. Marianne wondered what she would tell the police if someone reported them. Adrian slipped through easily. Marianne felt the rusted fingers of the broken fence sink a few centimeters into the soft flesh of her belly as she squeezed through. She wondered how long ago someone took a wire cutter to that fence, and where those pioneering kids were now. They probably had jobs and kids of their own, but Marianne preferred to encase them in hippocampal amber, imagining them as mythic heroes, perpetually sixteen and out past curfew. They, newly pubescent and not presuming to hope to become legendary, made their way through the narrow wood that separated the empty lot from the banks of the river. The trees and underbrush occupied an area about fifteen feet wide, the last ten feet or so following a steep grade down to the water. When Marianne looked back up through the trees, she was met with the unsettling illusion that the trees went on forever.

Marianne and Adrian slipped and skidded down, clutching at thin trunks that yielded too easily to their weight. Marianne struggled to gain her footing. Soon they were through the trees and the slick soil gave way to coarse pale gravel. They ducked under the dank shelter of the bridge and surveyed its steel-trestled underbelly with awe. The sunbaked asphalt above seemed a world away. Decades of graffiti, most of it uninventive angular lettering, were layered on the concrete wall where the bridge met the road. Some more ambitious artists created cartoon Buddhas or original characters, faces delicately shaded, wall-eyed, smoking joints. The steel of the structure itself was similarly festooned. The flaking beams were heavy with paint near the wall, where Marianne had to duck to stay clear of them, but towards the center of the bridge, as the ground dropped down to meet the water, the density of images thinned out quickly. The bridge was not long and Adrian and Marianne could clearly see the symmetry of the graffiti across the canal.

A mile northeast of the Linden Avenue bridge stands the Bahai’i Temple, a towering ivory structure that resembles the Capitol dome, had it been intricate-
ly carved by the architects of the Hagia Sophia. It has the shape of a layer wedding cake, or a papal mitre. It is a magnificent building, adorned with carvings borrowed from the iconography of many religions. It could be described as having a distinctly Byzantine aesthetic, were it not completely white. The Temple and its impeccably maintained gardens are open to the public in accordance with the Bahai'i faith, which maintains that all monotheistic religions are simply different faces of the same God.

Marianne had been inside the Temple three times, twice on field trips in elementary school. The delicate, soaring vaulted interior was even more breathtaking than its impressive facade. It had enough power to keep fifteen 10-year-olds quiet and respectful. Generally, the Bahai’i Temple is described using a heady combination of descriptors belonging to various cultures and time periods. For Marianne, who saw the Temple before she ever heard of the Taj Mahal or Byzantium, all architectural art came after the Bahai’i Temple. It was her personal Ur-Temple. The Temple did not look like a mixture of other religious buildings—instead, all cathedrals, mosques, synagogues, and palaces resembled the Temple.

Marianne surveyed the magnificent decay and the rainbow of colors gracing this space beneath the bridge with the same wonder with which she contemplated the great vaulted dome from a spot directly under its apex. Recently, Marianne had rejected the existence of God and dismissed all organized religion, but she never lost her reverence for holy places. God was dead; still, something so beautiful as the Bahai’i Temple was sacred, in the way that the old Chicago Public Library building with its mosaic dedications to Homer and Donne was sacred.

A year from that day, a 27-year-old who sold pot and pills to her new friends from high school would pull his car over to the side of the anachronistically brick-paved street that marked the southern border of the Bahai’i gardens, run a hand through his hair, stringy and slick from a two day cocaine binge, and guide Marianne’s hand to the crotch of his sweatpants, grotesquely distended by a tumescence inspired by the precocious and confused 13 year old’s chemical impairment; and then he would instruct her to crank the passenger seat all the way back and then would clamber over the console like an animated scarecrow to place his bony knees between her gym shoes and lead the shaky, wriggling effort to bring her jeans (mid-rise, mid-wash, boot cut) and her striped cotton panties down below her knees, past the dimpled thighs that squished together when she sat and sweated and chafed in the summertime, and then would bring his mouth to her labia majora, clothed in the coarse untended dark hairs that were so unlike the soft feathery down that Marianne believed she was supposed to possess; his breath was hot but she was cold and his thick saliva on her clitoris felt like an invasive foreign object, and then she felt nothing, only it was different from nothing, because it was like wearing a thin raincoat in a downpour, feeling the oppressive impact of countless raindrops but not the relief of wetness, as his
broad tongue delivered the blows without sensation; Marianne would watch his head between her legs illuminated in cold unrelenting detail by the grey-pink light that came from every direction at once in the springtime’s early pre-dawn and feel very sober, in spite of the green Louis Vuitton logo-stamped ecstasy tablet and the ritual of smoking from blown glass pipes and a jerry-rigged bong (7-UP bottle, emptied plastic pen tube, tin foil) under the bridge on Linden Avenue with upperclassmen armed with a trash bag full of spray paint, and he had taken pink and black and painted a cartoon face, at which she exclaimed with delight, I recognize that! I didn’t know that was you! I think that looks really cool! and to which he replied Aw thanks sweetie, it means a lot to me that you like my art; the high school friends who would all leave one by one until it was just her and him sitting on the floor of his wife’s kitchen and she would slide closer to him on the sticky linoleum, hoping that he liked her, hoping that he would kiss her, the desire to be liked and to be kissed the only clear thoughts that would push their way up beyond the foggy neural cacophony; but then they would hear the birds start chirping outside the window letting in that cold gray light, so he would say I guess I better take you home, and she would tell him where she lived with her mother and father and older sister, who was a Nice Girl, and she wouldn’t know where his house was, so she would get into his car with stoned complacency and trust that he would find the way, and he would, and then he would pull over on the brick road four blocks away from her house and turn off the engine, and he would not kiss her.

After, he would light a Newport and hand her a Newport and a lighter and start the car. As she was slipping back into her softly snoring house, into her cold bed, she would hope that he still liked her, and that she hadn’t messed up too bad. The sun would rise over Lake Michigan and as she drifted towards a light sleep, she would marvel at how much the spot under the bridge had changed in a year.

Marianne and Adrian took inventory of their surroundings. The gravel was littered with crushed cans of beer and pop, bottle caps, spray paint nozzles, empty spray paint bottles and empty lighters. The kids inspected each specimen of the latter two, shaking them next to ears attuned to the hollow swishing beloved by scavengers such as they. Nothing promising was found, save for a clear yellow plastic lighter that was at least a quarter full of fluid. Adrian made the discovery. It had rolled — or been tossed — further down the pebbly slope than Marianne wished to go. She knew that the river was, in fact, not a river; the body of water that meandered through the North Shore suburbs was the Chicago Canal, a sewage system that fed into the Chicago River on its way to St. Louis. Some Baby Boomers with delusions of rugged living even fished in the Canal, but Marianne was wary of any ecosystem that thrived in the city’s effluent. Some summer days, after a heavy rain, the canal diffused a mildly
nauseous presence that settled over an area within three blocks of its banks. Today, the only odor was the mixture of old paint, new paint, stale beer, and the inoffensive laundry-water smell that the canal was offering on that sunny day. Nevertheless, she kept eight feet between herself and the canal on principle.

Adrian was dipping a Converse-clad toe in the water, drawing semicircles on the surface of the slow moving water with the sole of his shoe. He tried to skip a Snapple bottle cap across the water with minimal success. He leaned out and squinted up at the graffiti under the bridge, endangering his center of gravity.

“Hey! Guess what I found!” Marianne called.

Adrian took a few steps back, away from the opaque green water, kicking little rocks that produced ripples of unsettling viscosity.

“What?” he said, watching the interference of the ripples.

Marianne smiled. “Guess.”

Adrian squinted and studied her face, chewing his lip.

“Umm. It’s a dead body, left here by the Outfit! No, wait,” he said, and threw his arms in the air. “It’s a suitcase full of cocaine!”

Marianne rolled her eyes. “You’re close,” she said, and reached up into a nook carved out of the concrete where the steel beams met the street. Adrian’s eyes widened.

“No way!” he said. “Is there anything — are there any left?”

Marianne flipped the top open, pushed the foil aside with clumsy fingers, and smiled. “There are seven left,” she said.

Seven menthol cigarettes. A mixture of terror and joy rose and expanded in their chests. It was an unspeakably rich bounty, a promise of a new kind of life, a different identity: cool confidence and late-night rendezvous with danger in the streets of Evanston.

“Where’s that yellow lighter?” she asked, drawing one long ivory cigarette from the box. He brought it to her, and they both sat down on the cement ledge at the top of the gravel slope. The bridge was close above their heads now. She pursed her lips and inserted the filter. Was it supposed to go in the middle, or to the side of her mouth? She tried to picture Marlon Brando lighting a cigarette, but was unable to conjure the appropriate reel.

Marianne stuck the tip of the cigarette into the flame and hesitated. She pulled at it and then sputtered as smoke poured from her lips and two tiny tendrils escaped her nostrils. As she dropped the lighter, coughing, her eyes watered: painful, delicious. Adrian asked if she was okay, but she was already taking another drag. This time, she got the smoke into her lungs before she started coughing.

“Here, you try,” she said, holding the Newport out. “It kinda burns.”

It took them twenty minutes to smoke the cigarette.
DO YOU REALLY LIKE THE TASTE OF PBR?
JAKE BITTLE

From cans you suck the wheaty floss
And slide and stick on hardwood floors;
Your terrors talk like bitter moss,
Your conscience dwindles by the door.
When Blackfence comes to bear you out
Your heart like metal crumples fast;
The fridge is caulked with yeast and grout;
Your lover mans a crippled mast.
In cockish morn you shall not dwell
But rather like a bat belay
Back down to your palatial well
Where unto beerish gods you’ll pray
And, moaning, gulp the pickled lye
And foam up drunk of heart, and die.
It could only be this way.

This is the only way it could be.
Only this way could be it.

Only this way could it be.

This way only it could be.

It could be this way only.

Only way this could be it.

This only be could way it.
FRIENDS WHO ARE STRANGERS
NATHANIEL SCHWARTZ

All my friends
know each other:
they see me at the same time
which puts me together

like a union of voices
composite but straining:
a choir of throat-singers
inhaling itself.

My friends all take roles
in each other’s stories
and the stories I tell of them
always situate everyone

in precise relation
to the one who’s the subject
and the ones who were only
observing through windows
or shades: lives are public
pried open like a cavity
in the chest of a body
laid flat on a gurney

leaking lymph on itself
being pressed on too firmly:
a composite is always
in fragile arrangement.

I want friends who are strangers
to each other:
tiny little points
whose lights don't reach.
I want to tell each one
about his double
and for him to hear me
like he hears fiction:

sitting rapt
and unbelieving
but pretending to himself
and being moved for it.
HEADLIGHT
JASMINE MITHANI

when I met you, I saw one headlight:
a singular blindness
too dazzling for me to notice
the shadows cast in your peripherals.

even now,
when I drive over highways as wide as countries,
I blink back to you
every time I see a broken bulb appear
in my rearview mirror.
The pages you have just thumbed through could not have been brought together without the time and effort of our dedicated staff. In honor of all of their hardwork and poetic perception, we dedicate these last pages to their wit and wisdom.

Though we do pride ourselves on our bread puns, they are by no means the only form of wordplay we engage in. Knowing that intense academic work can often be intimidating, this year we decided to turn intimidating into intriguing, and thus asked out staff: tell us your absurd, imaginary thesis title.

**DANIEL ORTIZ**
On the Works and Thought of Ibid.: The Most Influential and Versatile Writer of His Time.

**STEVEN HERNANDEZ**
Deciphering Alluring Discordance: The Existence of Gap and its Place in Konataist Moe Hierarchy

**ROBERT SORRELL**
Seven Shades of Sriracha: A Filmic Exploration of the Ethics and Aesthetics of Hot Sauce in Seven Acts

**JASMINE MITHANI**
Aliens, Matriarchy, and Lesbians, Oh My! How the Second Wave Feminists Took Back Science Fiction
MAINAI WACHIRA
On Anguish Logics: A Study of the Formal Deductive Systems of Angst-y and Otherwise Incommunicably Tortured College Students

EZER SMITH
Fowl Play: Chickens Through History as an Instrument of Control

SARA MAILLACHERUVU
Chia Pets and Modern Theology: The Universal Truths Unlocked by the Furry Plant

SYDNEY HARRIS
“So if you’re from Africa... why are you white?”: The Historical and Contemporary Implications of the Mass Cultural Reproduction of a Monolithic African Identity

JARED SIMON
On Greenliness and Cleanliness: An Ex-cursive Exploration of (Un)Alienation, Recumbency, and Rumination on the Anthropogenic Grassland

CHARLOTTE VON DE BUR
Make Merye and Do Daliaunce: The Chaucerian Dimensions of Bar Night and the Morning After

LUCIA LU
Commodore Toadette: Post-Gender Feminism in Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker

SPRING 2015
HADAR LAZAR
Look at my fancy physics toys! :D

JOHN ANDERSON LUTZ
Crimea River: Toward a Deeper Understanding of “Sadimir Poutin” and the Role of Weeping in Russian Political Life

LEAH VON ESSEN
Hemingway Would Have Wanted Me to Be Drunk and in Spain: Why I Refuse to Write a BA on The Sun Also Rises

JACK WANBERG
Loving Sosa: Chief Keef and the New American Dream

JULIAN SPERGEL
Climate-Induced Increase in Antarctic Glaciers’ Basal Lubrication: So Cold, So Slippery

JAKE KAUFMAN
Surely You Must Be Joking: A Critique of the Rhetoric of Truth as Framed Through a Narratological Study of the Tenth Episode of Ulysses

JENZO DUQUE
How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb: History of the Enema and its impact on American Slapstick Cinema
ELIZABETH BYNUM
Caroline: A case study on “the reason for the word bitch”, as explained through the narratology of Andre 3000 and Big Boi

TASNIM RAHMAN
“Too Big, Too Wide”: The Beyonce-Kanye Dialectic of Radical Self-Love Through the Lens of Ego

SOPHIA CHUN
346 Pages of Ignoring Anything That Contradicts My Theory

ANNA CHRISTENSEN
The Radium Craze Killed my Unborn Child: Marxist Narratives of the Miracle Poison

LILY ZHAO
A Survey of the Effects of Consuming Organo-metallic Compounds and the Development of Superhuman abilities

SYDELLE KEISLER
The Windy City: An Ethnographic Survey of Flatulence in Chicago

KRISTIN ZODROW
My Super Dark Twisted Fantasy Novel

ISABEL OCHOA-GOLD
An Investigation of the Recent Rise in Obesity and Mental Cretinism in Yo’ Momma
WHAT THE BREADITORS BAKE:
SLOW COOKER PUMPERNICKEL BREAD

Ingredients:
1 teaspoon sugar
1 1/3 warm water
1 envelope active dry yeast
1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
2 cups rye flour, separated
2 tablespoons molasses
2 tablespoons cooking oil
2 tablespoons cocoa
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons caraway seeds

Directions:
1. Stir sugar into warm water in large bowl and sprinkle yeast on top.
2. Let stand for 10 minutes then stir to dissolve the yeast.
3. Add the all-purpose flour, 1 cup of the rye flour, molasses, oil, cocoa, salt and caraway seeds and beat on low to moisten.
4. Stir in the remaining 1 cup of rye flour.
5. Grease the bottom of a 3 1/2 quart slow cooker, and place the dough inside.
6. Place 5 paper towels between the top of the slow cooker and the lid.
7. Put a wooden match or another thin object between the paper towels and the lid to allow some steam to escape.
8. Cook on ‘high’ for 2 hours, careful not to move the lid while baking.
9. Loosen sides with knife and let cool on a rack.
10. Serve with hearty stew, smoked fish, or cheese.

Adapted from ‘Crock Pot Pumpernickel Bread’ from Food.com
APPLE CIDER MINI MUFFINS

Ingredients:
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ginger
3/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/3 cup brown sugar
1 cup apple cider
1 apple, finely diced - optional; if using, reduce cider to 1/2 cup
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 tablespoons butter, melted

For coating:
4 tablespoons butter, melted
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Spray mini-muffin pans with non-stick spray. Do not use liners.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg. Add brown sugar.
3. In a second bowl, mix the cider, egg, vanilla, melted butter, and diced apple if using.
4. Add wet to dry ingredients and gently fold until all the flour is incorporated.
5. Divide evenly between muffin tins, about 2/3 full.
6. Bake for 8-10 minutes.
7. Melt the butter in a bowl. In a shallow dish, whisk together the sugar and cinnamon.
8. Once the muffins are done baking, let cool briefly, then remove from tin. Roll in butter, then roll in the cinnamon-sugar mixture. Transfer to plate to serve.

Adapted from ‘Apple Cider Mini Muffins’ by Anna Markow, published on SeriousEats.com
This magazine is entirely free, and always will be.