



love & squalor
spring 2020

Love & Squalor Spring 2020

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love & squalor
literary magazine

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Note from the Editors

Well this is certainly not how we thought this would go.

Obviously you do not need us to tell you what is currently happening in the world, Apple News interrupts my day plenty of times with grim estimates and sliding graph scales. It is all too easy to say that this is the “end of the world as we know it”, and hey, maybe that’s true. Maybe the world that we know is coming to an end, but maybe there is a brighter future on the other side.

But even the hope of a hypothetical “brighter future” doesn’t dull the sting of this particular moment. My time here at Sarah Lawrence has come to a premature end. It is a cruel, impossible thing to believe, but each time I put it in writing it cements itself a little bit more as my new reality. I’m back to living in my parents’ house (something 18 year old me swore I would never do), with bags of unpacked clothing and research that I do not have the means to continue with, and had to leave without saying my proper goodbyes to my friends, professors, and Bates Brunch.

In the midst of all this, we were unsure if we should (or could) publish this semester. With everything happening; job losses, having to move with little notice, loved ones becoming sick, and our collective isolation weighing on our psyches, it seemed impossible that this would come to fruition. It feels narcissistic to say that “we must publish our magazine, because art will save the world!” Really it’s food service workers, mail carriers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, sanitation workers, and all of the work being done to keep us all safe and healthy that will carry us all through this terrible moment. However, in publishing our little magazine (that has grown so much throughout my time here at Sarah Lawrence), we hope that for a second you can remember our community here on campus and that no matter what, we are here for you. In good and in bad, in sickness and in health, in love and in squalor, we will always have each other.

Thank you for everything.
With love and squalor,
Maddy and Elise

Mantras for Healing
Josie Pierce

1. I trust the path that I am on.
2. I feel I am, deep down, an excited person (excited by the look of the trees, the sky on this particular day, the way my feet feel).
3. I have more love to give.
4. I will continue to surprise myself in small and large ways.
5. I create each moment as it comes (I step into it, tilt my neck, play the music through my elbows).
6. I belong to myself before I belong to all others.
7. I make a mess out of an empty house, and this is an act of courage.
8. I close my eyes to pray: *thank you*. There is a story about a shepherd boy who knew no prayers only the alphabet, and so he spoke each letter slow and precious, and was heard.
9. I keep telling myself a story about myself, and the story is all I have. To be seen, I begin to speak, and again this is all we have. Life is a fight to stay open.
10. I matter in the most ordinary of ways.
11. I am doing the thing that is hardest for me, and so I am always victorious, always on the brink of celebration.
12. I have faith because I know no other way to be. I rise like the sun.

i was born into this place a bit of fire & a cancer
colette chien

i was born
a screech owl in the day, an angel after dark. never phased
with the stones of the recently birthed, miles or gem. i slept like

my creation was a translation, split syntax yet essence the same,
wrapped up in sheets dreaming of ascension or lost languages. i

ate like i already had teeth & screamed like it too. wisdom pulling at
the edges of my gut: i understand what that animal is, i know

his name, when a dog runs it's towards, when a cat does it's away.
i never thought that rubies fit july or my disposition, its color

violent like the earth after she was birthed. i wanted to be the sky
after she settled & reflected her breath with liquid salt. i wanted

to be my mother's ring & maybe her pet for awhile. she said we used to
be friends in past lives & lived where snow filled our lungs.

we lived where light won hide & seek but i still slept fine, always
snug under the ever-shift of celestial parts. we were friends away

where rubies are the same shade as the sky / & in a different place, i
suppose i may have cried instead of shrieked. the same day she

adopted my first word, distinguishable from a howl, was the day she
had her wisdom withdrawn from gums & placed in a metal dish. dizzy

& swollen she called her kitten *ike*, like the sound of her teeth
falling into foreign terrain. i never loved him because he wasn't

mine but he explained to me the difference of how we came into this
place. that when a human runs it's disparate, towards you & away.



Annie Bingham

How to Hold a Screaming Child

Brynna Ververs

First you make yourself small. You crouch down to eye level, or you wriggle on your belly underneath the bed where he is hiding. Something inside you will want to be bigger, stand taller, but ignore it. If he scoots away, turns his back to you, say, I understand. Remember to be patient. This is hard, I know, when he is screaming, when his voice and his fingernails are scraping against you and he will not lie still, even when he is hurting you both. Ask, if he knows how to talk, if he wants to tell you about it. If he cannot, ask anyway. This is how he will someday learn to answer.

Do not stare at the tears streaking down his face, or the ruddy redness of his cheeks, his nose, his forehead. Do not feel helpless. That is not your job. Talk a little, a soft quiet voice. Say, I know it hurt when your brother pulled your hair. I know you are scared of the dog next door when it barks in the yard. I know you are small, that there is sometimes just too much, too many sensations, too many feelings inside your body. Smile, even if he is still screaming. Even if you want to curl your hands into fists.

Look in his eyes and tell him you want to know how he feels. Tell him the story of when you climbed that tree over the water at the lake, when your foot slipped out from underneath you and for one sickening, heart-stopping moment you could feel nothing in your grasping hands until you slapped against the surface of the water and sank and sank and sank. If he wails, pulls his onesie from his chest, hand him his binkie with the chenille penguin stitched onto it. If he tells you, this isn't like that at *all*, then nod. Say, you're probably right. Even if it hurts. If he lets you, begin to hold him. Little gestures. Stroke the hair from his face, hold his pudgy hand in yours and stroke the soft stretch of skin on the back of his hand with your thumb.

He will not work on your timetable. This is the difficult part. He will take a long time to stop yelling, stop opening his mouth in that pink gaping sob, and you will want to pull your hair from the roots and scream right back. You will crash through the water again and, because you have made yourself small, you will feel that same rush of fear that you have tried to forget, only you will remember it backwards, and it begins with you thrashing in that water, struggling to breathe, alone, alone, alone.

Try to remember differently. Sketch in a pair of hands to pull you out.

Then, if you can, pick him up. Hold him in your lap for a while. Cross your legs so he can fit into the divot like a seat. Curl your spine and your arms so you are a cocoon around him. If he's still screaming, do not let him turn around. Tell him, I'm here, I know, I'm here, rock him back and forth as he cries and cries and cries, and do not let him see that you are crying, too.

Notebook pages 29, 33, and 34
Maria Schreiner

What I Want for Christmas

- Sheer black tights
- Nice gel pens
- Flexible spine notebook
- Fleece black tights
- Burts bees
- Pore strips
- Tiny post-it notes

Humming mildly
Left ring fingernail painted black
Flipping, licking, sound of paper
Book slaps shut

What is underneath my nails?

1. Dirt
2. Ragged, flaky-looking pulls
3. The lining of a clementine
4. Bleach spatter
5. String triple-knotted

Monologue of an Atrophied Heart
Zab Tesler

It is difficult to imagine which part of me arrived first. i know little of my own anatomy. things that can't move learn to see, i'm supposed to believe, but when i look within myself all i see is the poreless orange-red of a cartoon heart. that can't be it, can it? all that there is or could be? / To this arm curling, clutching my hips: from where did your fingers grow? your palms? where do your veins lead back to? and was there something my hips were supposed to bend for? is that what you've been mourning? / I know i was not made from marble. i believe at least that i was grown like a baby—forming all at once in the time between seeing a cloud and deciding what animal it looks like, with bumps and curves appearing from the atoms into a predetermined fashion. / Forgive me if i say i love you. it reminds me of a heartbeat, something in the scansion, (*i love you*) and it'll have to do / Until my own returns. i wish people would stop telling me how much i'm supposed to beat / It makes sense to me—doesn't joy, like fear, make no sound? / Each version of you comes and goes with the flowers, curls beside me out of pity, but i won't complain, i'm not above that, / You have no idea, love. / I can't be left alone at night—i'd beat right out of my arteries—

Ruby Red Hot Pepper Strawberry Jam
Rachel Mikita

Deep in the womb of the fog, there's an island in a grey sea, with ruby red hot pepper strawberry jam on a buttery, flaky cracker, one for him and one for me. We plop them into our mouths, the salt hitting our tongues before the sweetness. I close my eyes and hum a little song it tastes so good. My lips are buttery, my fingers covered in crumbs, my taste buds more than satisfied, and there's cracker packed into my back molars. I open my eyes and smile at him, cracker still in my mouth. "Oh my god," I mumble out through salty sweet goodness. "I told you," he says in that way he always speaks when he loves how right he is about something. I look at the array of open jars in front of me, a red rooster manically chasing a berry across their labels. I pick out two of my favorites, Wild Maine Blueberry, and classic Strawberry Jam. Pine branches tap on the windows of the small shop.

A summer rain had turned into a fine mist, the whole green backyard jumping into life and color. I leap from the splintery back porch, my white sneakers getting whacked by the water heavy leaves of grass. My azure raincoat is pulled up over my head, and hangs down below my periwinkle shorts. It's beautifully crisp, the kind of air that's felt from when it first enters the nose until it pools in the lungs. I swing my legs as I walk, an empty tortilla bag in my hand as I make the fifty yard journey to the giant blueberry patch. I crouch down low to the brush to spy on the little berries. The ripe ones are the deepest blue, matte skin bright with water. The little ones are bright baby pink, so sharply distinct against the grass. And then the ones in the middle are deeply aching purple red. I start picking the biggest fattest juiciest ones. Plup, they snap from the stem. For every five I put in my tortilla bag, I eat two. They're taut, freshened by the afternoon rain. They taste like grass and sweetness and dew. They're small and subtle, and my favorite assortment of colors. I'm squatting in the patch, berry in mouth, and I look over at the porch and there he is, standing in the doorway, hands in his pockets smiling at me. I give him a big wave and hold up my harvest in my tortilla bag. Eyes all crinkled up, he gives me a slow wave back. It's a special kind of wave. It's an "I love you wave."

We walk down to the harbor, and I take in a deep big breath of the fishy seaweedy salty air. I love that smell. I wish I could carry it with me in my pocket, and take it out whenever I need to clear my lungs. The ocean flows right into town; we walk to the restaurant, which is bright and airy. We sit at a tall table, my feet swinging below my chair. When the waiter comes around, I order a blueberry soda, my latest blueberry obsession. As my bottle gets placed in front of me, he starts speaking oyster talk. Pemaquids, Glidden Points, Basket Islands, they all arrive on ice with cocktail sauce and vinegar. "You just slurp

it down,” he says as he drizzles one of the small ones with vinegar. I take one tentatively in my hands. The inside of the shell is bright and opalescent, a mixture of whites, blues, and pinks. The oyster itself is like a little white lung. Or a little white heart. I put the rough shell to my lips, the smell of the ocean hitting my nose, and I tip my head back, the oyster sliding across my tongue between my teeth. It tastes like the water, like the depths of the sea, like fish and seaweed and the salt that’s left on rocks when the tide goes out. “Wow,” I say to him. He has that twinkle in his eye, right again. I eat another, and another. It’s briny and wonderful.

Back at his house, I scour through the cupboards for a bread tin. My tortilla bag of blueberries is laying out on the counter, as is butter, brown sugar, flour, vanilla, and other bottles and boxes of sweet and salty things. I find one, tucked into other sheets and and pans, and I bring it out into the light of day. I carefully measure out flour and sugar, dumping them into a steel bowl. I crack in some eggs with one hand, and I look over to make sure he’s seen my skills. He has. He rolls his eyes at me in that way he does when he’s really impressed with me but knows I’m showing off. He’s horrible at cracking eggs. I fold in my blueberries, gently, handful by handful, with a spatula. The batter moves like a ribbon, flowing gently around the berries. I butter the tin, then pour in the batter, encouraging its migration into its new pan. I add a crumble topping, made up of brown sugar, butter, vanilla, and flour. I put it in the oven. Forty minutes go by cuddled up on the couch, talking about the strange painting of a young girl in his childhood living room. I hear a dinging. I slip on red oven mitts and pull open the oven door. A blast of hot air hits my face, melting the mascara on my eyelashes together. I put the bread out on the counter. It’s a little overbaked. We let it cool for a bit, then gently cut into it. A slice for him, a slice for me. I drop a pat of butter on both pieces. The crumble topping is crisp, the inside is soft and fluffy. He takes a bite and closes his eyes. “This is really good,” he says. I smile at him. “I told you so.”

Self Portrait as Snail Entrails
Ash Freeman

I taught myself how to sleep
without taking up space;
you tell me I'm good
at fucking. You know
it's a skill I perfected
when I learned I will only be loved
for the way my body caves and gives.

In your dreams,
you imagine me pressed against you
and in control.
In practice, you tell me your legs ache the next day
and you could never
do what I do. As you tell me this I wonder if you see me
as an empty shell,
like something a land snail left behind--
 I circle you slowly.

I brought myself into this
emptiness:
an old mason jar, a broken light bulb,
a dictionary
with every other word
blacked out.

Cow Porn
Evalena Labayen

I kneel on the back of a cow, both dead meat.
I knit my hands through the baby hair purring with decadence and ignorance.
Rings from Tiffany's, Columbia graduate, wedding band.
Both limp wounded animals.
Hair grows up my forearms turning red white and blue
Hovering on top of graveyards, Berlin Walls, primary colors.
Until suddenly I am the cow hide and the cow is an abstract art installation
Found in the modern art museum of Nice.
The artist's name is the same as the name of that cow.
Neither are known to me.

In porn there's something called the "money shot"
where the man cums on the girls face and her mouth is wide open, smiling, with her tongue sticking out
like a landing pad.
I'd rather have a gun pointed in my face than that dick.
Shoot me in the face with it and let my fluids burst all over your face.
Is the gun really pointed at me, submissive and sweaty and smiling?
Would my grandfather ever think his pistol would be tucked into my lace thong?
My cold, dangerous dick locked and loaded ready to whip out and fire.
Must though remember to cover my nipples. Those large pink unmanly lumps.
Mustn't forget what we are, even with the barrel of a pistol harshly pressing into my thigh.

I'm Mr. President. I am America keeping the top hat from covering my eyes with will power and a high
tilted head. My cigarettes are lit by gun shots. My back is coated by religion and my chest is bare. Look
not upon my face or find again that American dream of picnicing in the grass.
I will search for that paradise of sunlight and orange trees with pistol tucked into my thigh high stockings,
white and crisp and in no business of holding up the weight of my grandfather's violence.

The Peach Pit
o. captain

When I was ten, I choked on a peach pit. It slipped into my windpipe and settled in my left lung. None of the doctors could tell why I didn't breathe right. None of them believed me when I said the peach tree was growing.

“Plants need soil, sweetie,” the pediatrician told me.

No they don't, I thought. When I was ten, I believed that every time you swallowed water wrong it went into your lungs and stayed there. I thought the lungs were a little like the womb, slowly filling up with liquid. The perfect place for something to grow.

It's okay that they didn't believe me. People still don't believe me. But when I was ten and I told the doctors a peach tree was growing in my left lung, I was wrong. A peach tree wasn't growing in my lung. I had felt the moment the pit cracked, had felt *something* splash into the pool of water at the bottom of my breath. I felt the soft brush of something on my alveoli. Sometimes a sharp pinch, I thought it leaves, spreading branches.

I thought it was a tree until I was twenty and the creature that hatched from the peach pit clawed its way out of the womb of my lung. It didn't show up on the MRI, whatever it was. But the big hole in my lung did. The woman who did the stitching said she had never seen a tear like that before. I liked her. She told me after the surgery that, in the throes of the anesthetic, I had told her faerie stories. We went out for lunch a couple of times. The creature that hatched from the peach pit sat on my solar plexus and snapped at my heart through my ribcage.

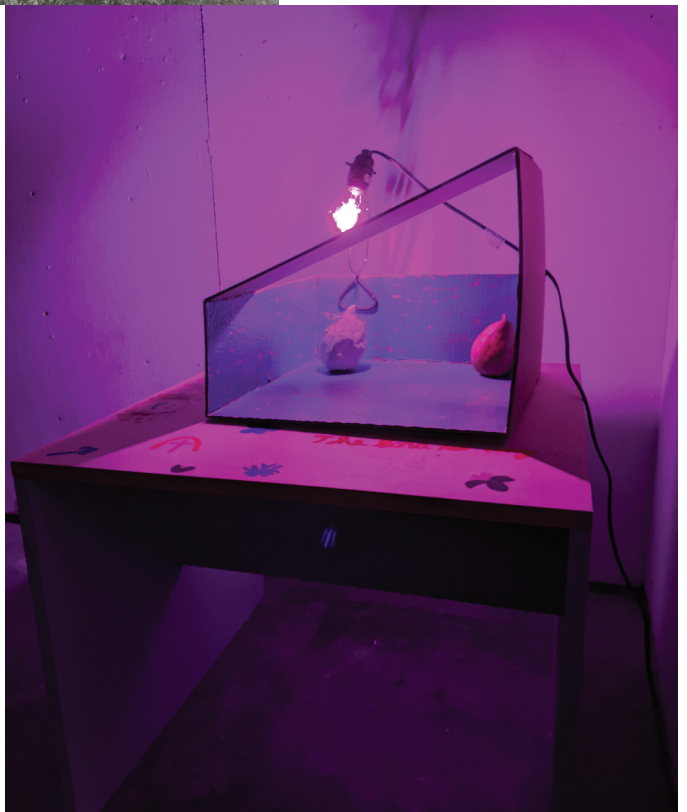
It gave up on that eventually and decided the meat of my leg was more interesting. It gnawed through the ball at the crown of my right femur and made a nest there. I carved my cane myself. The top of it I made look like the creature's head, or how I imagined its head looked. Eyes like a cat, face like a bird. Sharp spines. The palm of my hand smothered that face, day after day. It couldn't know I had done this, but each time its careless claws sliced through a ligament or tendon it felt like retribution.

When I was thirty it was big enough to dismantle my ribs. It dove past the heart and burrowed into my long-abused left lung. I swallowed water until I felt like I was drowning. It scabbled at the sides of my ribs, tried to find pur-

chase on my bronchioles. It drowned. I laughed, and red water came bubbling out of my mouth. I laughed as I spit up its body, as I hunched over the slop sink letting my lung drain all the way dry.



Anna Ostrowski



Calm in the Dark
Eliza Ferdinando

Cool light filtering in
silhouetting treetops and bare limbs
A faint gleam on glossy surfaces
Cool breeze and the gently humming fan
A faint gurgle
The smell of herbs and cedar drifting
Crisp sheets and a heavy comforter
The mysterious made familiar as eyes adjust

“From New York to Buffalo, and back again, with love”

Anna Ostrowski

Between December and January, I spent approximately 12 hours on Amtrak. The train always stops in Albany to refuel. As the smokers step off the train, to lean against the station poles and dip ashes into the air, I usually sit. Well, I *always* sit, and sneak glances out the window. A man in beige peacoat sips coffee slowly. The faint sound of suitcase wheels, scrolling across the pavement, is audible through the glass. I wonder why I never go stand on the platform. The comfort of my green vinyl seat, the pull-down tray, and the music droning in my headphones keeps me inside. A question passively crosses my mind: what is the use of sitting in an immobile train car? When the interior lights dim, and the train engine utters its final breaths, I feel as if this is the final frontier. Logically, I know the train will start up again soon. I still clutch the arm rest, willing the train into motion again. Existentially speaking, I am seated in an unmoving train, always asking myself how I ended up here.

Lists help. Here is everything I remember eating and drinking on the train:

- 1 can of coca cola
- 1 can of pringles
- water
- 1 banana
- 1 fig newton bar

The dining car is a luxurious feature of Amtrak. Stocked with ham sandwiches, coffee, mini charcuterie plates, and hummus, the dining car is reassuring in the event of an apocalypse. *Even if the train breaks down, at least we have snacks.* I always look for the dining car, regardless of whether I am hungry. Consumption, or imagined consumption, is a way of mourning the place I have left behind. Munching is meditative. Standing in the dining car, I remember the sensation of eating a meal with you. Before I stepped onto this train, which carried me away.

*

We sat outside, the first day we met, on a porch suspended in the sunlight. My memory is flooded with white light, and my skin feels slightly warmed. Drinking coffee with you, I believed that you brought it all: an unknowing author of light. Another day, you cooked us chili, warmth streaming from under the lid of the container. I cast a spell, unleashing my ghosts over everything. The living room filled with shadows. Another time, we shared a lemon poppy seed glazed donut at a market in the city. We looked for that donut later, hoping to relive the experience, but we never found it. It was the best donut I've ever had. Last night, we reached our hands into a box of Cheeze-Its, and I hoped you would never leave. I tried to eat slowly, savoring each salt particle on each tiny orange square. *As long as there are Cheeze-Its, our light will not go out.* I silently chanted, to God, or my grandmother: please, please, please, please.

*

I awakened, still wavering in the dining car. With apathy, I approached the attendant and asked for a can of coke. As I walked back to my seat, can of coke in soft hand, a dread feeling tickled my back. I crouched back into my seat. I pressed my head against the hard, slightly vibrating, window. Snow falling in Rochester. Then, amidst the whirling snowflakes, I saw a man covered in snow. His features were obscured by a thick coat of white. Standing like a pole, straight and erect, he stretched out his arms like a zombie. The cars in the intersection drove around him, avoiding. The man, an acute loner in the thick snow, welcomed me home.

Your Poems
William Shullenberger

I hear you at the far end of a rope bridge,
a fragile tether cast across dark waters,
each joint knotted and tested by your hands.
I secure it at the edge of the chasm,
I weave it in among hard half-exposed roots.
I yank, it yields; I trust my weight to it,
it gives, then holds, grows taut as I
begin to work my way across,
hand over hand, the whole design
jiggling precariously, buoying me out
over a silence still as pitch.



Annie Bingham

CANNED BUTTONS

Zoe Patterson

Note: This was written as an imitation of Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons. To give credit where credit is due: Stein supplied the style and I supplied the food.

BEANS AND RICE

Rising milk, a milk rising up, a milk that rises up and rolls its rivers down the silver rock, rise and hurry to wipe it down. Rise and hurry to pipe it down. Rice to rise and rock milk down into the rock. Rice up.

What is a milked beetle. What is a drowning milk. What is drowning a beetle. Beetles bubble and rice up.

RICE AND BEANS

It is a mocking stick, a pop and stick, popping stick. Mocked and made into clumps that stick. Stick slumps down rice up into mud. Mock the mud that rises on the beetle backs. Mock mud.

HOT SAUCE

It is a milked alarm clock.

film notes
Julianna Brown

She's on her way into town and texts—"let's get together later. it's been forever." They buy fast food and wander through Central Park. they sit & talk & picnic. She lays on her back to watch the sunset colors. He lays with his feet the other way, heads side by side. they kiss by turning towards each other spider-man style. Shoot from exactly above.

She had a drunk night and dances around all wild, getting into trouble and her friend is like wtf and she says "it doesn't matter. I'm not enough for him anyways so who cares?" But all happy-like so it's extra sad.

The River
Mikayla Clune

Through the darkness I can hear the murmur of a crowd. A litany of voices chattering, bubbling, exclaiming, whispering, calling. Always calling. A delicate mist prickles my skin in the formless dark. The water droplets kiss my face and make it feel foreign, like I am no longer in my body, but rather carrying it. I witness shape and color spring forth from the abyss. A crystalline blue river weaving through a long-forgotten valley, a dock leading out into its center. I can see no end to The River in either direction. The din of voices sing to me from the deep, all the more intense so close to their source. I turn to my somber guide and he directs my gaze to the place the dock meets the water, to find a giant cage hooked to a pulley system, and beside it a line of others, like me, who have been drawn here. It appears they've arrived without guidance, harrowed at the things they've seen on their journeys here. I don't know what happens to the people who do not embrace The River, who stand in the face of this power and in their hubris do not want to commune with it.

I begin to tremble at the prospect that I could turn back now, find the hallway I had stumbled down and escape into my previous ignorance. The Man grabs my hand and draws my mind back. In his touch, I feel a sense of peace surge like ice running in my veins—extinguishing an anxious fire I didn't know was burning. I think my heart will burst from pumping frost; I think I will cry tears hard as diamonds that will freeze to my cheeks. He lets go of my hand, and the ice recedes but the fire does not. I am painfully aware of it licking up the inside of my ribcage, inescapable. The message is clear—to abandon this opportunity is to embrace this suffering, never knowing if I will find the river again. It is my only hope.

The withered Man in Black leads me to the gnarled metal cage and I step in with ease. His presence seems to frighten the others, but when he beacons for them to enter, none of them dare refuse. Finally, five of us stand shoulder to shoulder wrapped in this iron ribcage, dangling over The River. The current grows faster in spurts, until the rising and falling water looks like a heaving chest. One of the women on my left begins to cry. She yells that she's not ready to die and she doesn't want to go. A man on my right is counting backwards from ten. We inch closer to breaching the water, the mist rising from it sizzling on my skin. I can hear my own bones crackling like wood in the fire. The river has no eyes, but it sees into my soul, and it desires me—It desires us. The voices contained within are still calling to me and I feel that I am one of them, we're kindred and were always meant to be together, to be one. My cheeks are wet

with what my heart confesses are tears of joy. I reach out for the screaming woman's hand and she acquiesces to my gentle, feverish touch. I look deeply into her eyes. "It's almost over," I choke out with a smile. She starts to scream as the ropes selfishly holding me aloft from this baptism give way. 3...2...1....

hamlet 3.1

Brig

today i realized that someone could read Mary
Oliver at the dead poet's slam; my heart
broke.

today i touched my ear and i
felt the pimple-- you know
the one-- (it hurts so
bad) and i realized,
i don't know
who's going to pop it; my
heart broke.

i have always believed that love exists in mundanity
i now realize that the same is true of heartbreak

Can We Reschedule? Something's Come Up
Hazel Pritchard

I've graduated from rom-coms, and now I'm watching reality TV shows. You know the type—white Atlantian dramatics looking for love because they're passing 35 and thought *for sure* they'd be married by now. Or maybe they have other reasons, who knows? Whatever their motives, I hate them and I pity them and I kinda hope it all works out okay, even though I know it won't. One of them, blonde, nasal, with a wine glass always in her hand, sort of reminds me of me. She's my least favorite. She washes in and out of commitment, and I roll my eyes at the screen. *Pick one!* I think of the last fight my ex and I had. Flip-flopper. You don't know what you want.

I go on a date with a boy from Australia. His left canine is longer than the other, and I think it's cute, so I try to make him laugh. I do make him laugh. I think I like him and I know he likes me, but most of all I like the fact that he's leaving the country in a few days and I'll never see him again. It's very freeing. I see him twice, he spends the night twice, and at six in the morning I kiss him goodbye and don't look back.

The blonde one—alcoholic?—is still wishy-washy. She drinks too much and tries to pick a fight, apologizes in the morning. Her house, on my laptop screen at least, seems big. I wonder what it's like being filmed almost non-stop for two weeks. Has she been wearing fake eyelashes almost non-stop for two weeks? My phone buzzes (a text from Wales). Hey, it says. What's new? I passed by someone on the street who smelled like you earlier today. Same perfume? Anyway, it gave me goosebumps.

The TV show is still playing, episode six, but I'm not paying attention. I'm thinking about long canines. I told him I wrote stories, sometimes, and he asked if he could read any. Would I want him to read something? Would I want him to read *this*?

We're reading *Paradise Lost* in class, and I liked the idea better than the poem. Sorry—*epic*. After class, my friend tells me she thinks that Eve was the first lesbian, and that's why she preferred looking at her own reflection. I'm not quite convinced. She just wanted to be left alone, I think, without Adam tagging along always. She just preferred her own company, and I feel bad for both of them, Adam and Eve. The Garden seems lonely and crowded at the same time.

I reschedule a date. I reschedule again. I cancel because a) he's too far, b) I'm sick, c) I have homework to do, d) I'm graduating in a few months so what's the point? and e) he didn't seem that interesting anyway. My paper doesn't take as long to write as I thought it would. Bored, I open Tinder.

I only have one more episode left—finale!—but I don't watch it. Instead, I scroll through action movies until I find one—funny and messy and with actors I like—to watch. There's absolutely no romance plot at all.

valentines from mom
Maddie Mertsh

my mom sent me so much candy/ this one four/ valentines day/ this thought
alone scares me/ oh love oh love/ how I wish I could give you all this candy/ I
just want love/ because of that I'll put all of this in my body/ but then I won't
get love/ my mother told me this as she says not what she does/ I'm scared of
all the extra chocolate she had to send/ I want her love I would only ever give it
boundary less/ I need to throw part of me away/ these chocolates I could give
them to time/ but it's after me and my mom/ habitually/ oh my I'll just eat
one to stop crying about her/ and another woman who takes the pain away/
by letting me think about her sometimes too whether it's all the chocolate I ate
without stopping or all the chocolate I gave without stopping/ love love's op-
posites/ you want it stopped/ thank you distractions I love you I think/ about
you to stop crying/ but you get distracted now I'm crying again/ throw away
the chocolate in the most expensive heart shaped box my mom could ever af-
ford/ I'm filled with her/ I wanna stick my fingers down my throat and throw
it up for her/ mom you the biggest and sweetest heart/ don't let it stop because
your love for hearts freezes you/ I see it don't send me candy/ I can't handle
thinking about what it means to you because I know what it means to me/
please when I eat my mouth loves every second/ every time I eat I think about
dying

A Compilation of Fortune Cookies (Gathered from the Absurd Amount of Times I
have Ordered Takeout from the Great Wall in Yonkers)
Brynna Ververs

Romance comes to life this year in a very unusual sort of way.

Right now there's an energy pushing you in a new direction.

Listen to life, and you will hear the voice of life crying, Be!

A ship in harbor is not safe, but that's not why ships are built.

Life is not a problem to be solved, but rather a mystery to be solved.

The thing in us we fear just wants our love.

Adversity is the parent of virtue.

The mighty oak was once a little nut that stood its ground.

There are many ways you can be hurtful, but only one way to heal. That is through love.

Your ability to love will help a child in need.

It's the roving bee that gathers honey.

When one must, one can.

When the moment comes, take the last one from the left.

You are almost there.

Untitled (?)
Maddy Broderick

When my grandmother died in December I bought *Crime and Punishment* and I still haven't read it. I figured I was due for a long, Russian novel, and my religion professor told me Tolstoy was as good as it got, but I liked Dostoyevsky so much when I was 18, so I bought that instead.

When I was still going to therapy (what I now deem an "exercise in narcissism", but I know I have bad takes) I would make spreadsheets to make sure that I would talk about the things that I thought were important and not leave anything out. Sometimes I would lie just so the pieces connected a little bit more, and sometimes I would tell the truth, but either way, I don't think it worked very well. I'm still crazy, but it's better to be crazy and have an extra \$50 a week.

I wonder if journaling (if you can call this journaling and not just procrastinating) is like making a spreadsheet for your therapist but instead of a middle aged Jewish woman it's your college campus. Or yourself. Or the historians that you imagine will find this in 250 years and put it in a museum somewhere and kids will do projects on you and try to construct who you were, what you did, how many times you broke up with your boyfriend on impulse, etc.

I keep having this vision of my skin stretched out against the window. My skin is glowing pink the way it did when I was little and I used a flashlight to read under my covers and pressed it against my hand when I heard my dad's car in the driveway. Just like that, only my whole spine is strung up along the window like a rod that my skin is hanging from, tight and empty.

These are the kinds of things I wouldn't tell my therapist.

After My Grandfather's Death
Ash Freeman

I.

I think every funeral home smells
the same: lilies soaked in bug spray, tissues coated
in condolences. Don't hug me, I'll cry.
That morning I put on mascara for an aesthetic
motivation to stay solemn. I hid in the bathroom,
the walls an antiseptic white.
The casket was open and my grandfather had fossilized.

II.

If you leave your hair out for a bird,
they'll turn it into a nest. Magpies hold
ceremonies for their dead and lay grass wreaths
by their bodies. My family and I stood in a dimly lit room
in the back of the church and watched
as veterans tossed plastic poppies into the casket.
My mom squeezed my hand and told me
I was his favorite granddaughter.
I hung my head to avoid the mourning people
taking photos of us. It's all in bad taste.
They reached for my grandmother's hands (she took them).
I live in pigeon city.

III.

A magpie can recognize itself
in a mirror: but where does it find one?
I leave an old pocket mirror on my windowsill
and in the morning find it cracked
and covered in sprinkler water.

IV.

I pull out my hair as an offering
for the magpies and their dead.
I kneel in the brown grass and say
I understand what you're going through.
They chatter at me, their call a raspy siren,
and nip at my fingers.
A pigeon with a receding hairline takes hair
from my scalp and a picture to commemorate.

How do I mourn like a magpie?
Our home is decorated in copper crosses and wreaths--
I resist pulling apart every petal.
(He goes to heaven, there is no heaven, he goes--)
Instead, I hide inside a nest I built
out of my own bones, hair, and prayer cards.
No one can find me here.

She was Crying in the Middle of Dupont Circle
Bee Kinstle

She was crying in the middle of Dupont Circle. And not even for a good reason. She didn't cry when she was smashed into the train by a group of teenage boys. She didn't cry when she dropped her full cup of coffee on the ground because she tripped on the curb. And she didn't even cry when she found a singular infant sized mitten on the ground. She cried because when she walked across the kinetic walkway (a sidewalk that absorbed the energy from your footsteps), she realized she was stepping on the wrong part. She walked on the same part of that sidewalk twice a day and she realized that her footsteps had not produced any energy at all. So she cried. In the middle of Dupont Circle.

And it wasn't a walk and cry. No, it was a true stop in the middle of Dupont, disrupting all of the traffic, and fully crying. Snot dripping down her nose, her glasses foggy and covered in tears, her face wet with embarrassment.

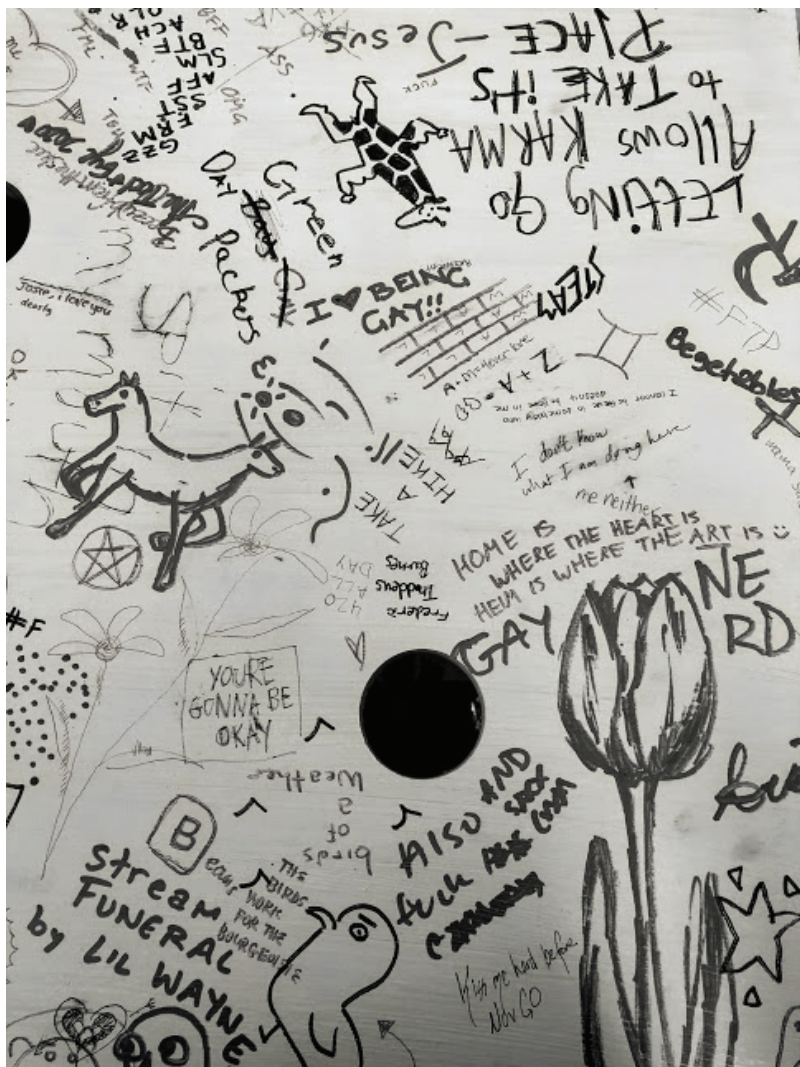
And before you say it. No, obviously she wasn't just crying over the kinetic sidewalk. That would be stupid. Well, not stupid, her therapist would remind her. Crying heals the soul. Crying is an expression of emotions. But she thinks that crying over a sidewalk is verging on stupid if not entirely stupid.

She stood and cried. She missed New York, where people would just walk around chaos. These D.C. people didn't understand manners. Two or three people stopped their commutes, some even *removing headphones* to ask her if she was okay. Thus, forcing her to interact with others while the snot from her nose dribbled into her mouth. She could shoo them away quickly if she tried. She just nodded and said thank you. One man lingered, offering to buy her some coffee, or a donut. She just cried harder and said no, thank you. No, he tried again, offering to buy her some hot food. She was mildly offended as her Calvin Klein coat whipped around in the wind. Granted, she bought it at Marshall's for a remarkable discount, but fuck you nice guy. She was fine financially. She just hadn't been saving the environment with her footsteps.

Maybe this was a cry about her boyfrie---ex boyfriend. Maybe this was a cry about her father taking out loans to get his car fixed. Maybe this was because she missed her cat. But when she realized that she hadn't been making energy with her commute, she broke. She supposes she needed to break. The thought comforted her. She had broken and sobbed in the middle of Dupont Circle. She didn't know how long she'd been there. Maybe 5 minutes. Maybe an hour. Time gets altered when you sob a freeing sob like this one. But all of a sudden

the tears stopped. And she choked some painful deep breaths. And she wiped her snotty nose all over her Calvin Klein discount coat, and she cleaned her glasses with her blouse, only making it worse, the polyester smearing the dirt and tears all over the lenses. She then tried her cardigan, which worked much better. Still foggy, but good enough to get home.

And like God Herself had opened the clouds, she took a deep breath. And acknowledged, lovingly, that she had just sobbed in the middle of Dupont Circle. And with that, life went on. And everything was horrible, but at the very least, she had cried. Which she was worried she would never be able to do again.



Josie Pierce

superposition
o. captain

It's 8am, and I have been
in two places all morning:
I have been now,
dorm-room-kitchen, one-room-living,
and a later now,
picket-fence-cottage, upstate-backwoods-life,
sitting on the island
in our warm-countered kitchen
while the bread rises
and you sleep.

I am dancing, headphones
over my ears, a silent
disco for one in the single-digit
morning. All the rest slumber
and I am soft-footed
with not disturbing them.

In my later now,
my hand in my pocket,
wearing a thumbprint
into the shock of velvet,
soft-fingered,
whispering touch.

The sun is the same,
in now and not-
yet-now. I know you
still are sleeping,
and I hope I am
not waking you
with daydreams.

Some Short Poems
Nathan Marvan

CHORLIE BROWN

CHARLIE BROWN: AUGH!

WUMP!

LUCY: ISN'T IT BETTER THIS WAY, CHARLIE BROWN? ISN'T IT
BETTER TO TRUST PEOPLE?

(@_@) ok

(@_@) now your touching my brain

(@_@) i dont rly like it

(@_@) get out

Chicken Soup for Distant Images
Claire Bronchick

Estimate the distance between yesterday and today as a house in Reinfeld, Germany.

The only thing deemed salvageable, a doorbell. Here, taste the rusted sound. Stomach as much as possible. The layer of dust contains proof of accommodation. It recalls distant cousins. Fingerprints of complete strangers. Now yours.

The house in Reinfeld, Germany fades in and out of view. About thirty kilometres from any sense of civilization, daisies and dandelions push up through the foundations of the house in Reinfeld, Germany. Daisies and dandelions that are eaten by deer or robins or moles. Deer or robins that are eaten by wolves or coyotes or bears. Coyotes that eat daisies and dandelions on hungry days. Remember a warning posted on the road: beware the sovereignty of the valley, the dirt paths, the vacant lots. The temperature drops. A portrait of hot breath in the house in Reinfeld, Germany.

The house in Reinfeld, Germany has never been seen, either up close or at a distance. A mirage spit out at the foot of a mountain. Or washed onto the shore of a great river. Sunken into the bog. Do you miss treasured childhood toys? The Polly Pocket's dynasty met its end in a dog's mouth. The color leached by molars and canines, well before its demise. Snap underfoot the glass shards. Reach into the frame and find a haze, a pressure, a tone. Tumble through the grass to find the driftwood that built the house in Reinfeld Germany.

You have never heard of Reinfeld, Germany.
You have never heard of a house in Reinfeld, Germany.
You have never heard of the house in Reinfeld, Germany.

Take a two hour walk, a three hour stroll, or thirty minutes in two different buses and a trolley. Sit across the table from the residents. Say, excuse me, but I need to go vomit. It was something in the eight cups of water, four heads of celery, five medium carrots, 4-5lb chicken, large yellow onion, cup of long-grain brown rice, and salt and pepper. Bile the color of the kitchen wallpaper of the house in Reinfeld, Germany. Let cook for at least an hour. Strip chicken from the carcass and return it to the broth. Imagine your muscles releasing around the bones and tense in disgust at the image, at the idea of being more than double image. Italian parsley to garnish.

Queer Appetites
Zachary Seaton Lewis

I partake in sweet delights! (and wanting more)
Suck the sticky residue off my fingers, and,
wanting more,
Proceed to eat my fingers.

Constellations
Christy Ammons

In my dreams, we walk hand in hand and our steps are seamlessly in sync. The light of the evening sun bounces off your golden hair and blinds me. We don't talk. We don't have to. When the sun goes down, we lie in the sand, resting against each other. I wake up when I fall asleep.

You are in the bathroom right now, cursing loudly. I mouth along to your favorite words as you speak them. *Motherfucking, motherfucking, motherfucking son of a bitch*. I wrap my arms around myself and squeeze as hard as I can. When you first loosened your lips and let me hear your sailor's tongue, I was appalled. I thought about packing up and going home, but you begged and threatened me not to go. That was the first thing that struck fear straight to my bones, like the feeling of water that's way too cold. How could you kiss me with a mouth so dirty? But soon I caught the flu. I picked up your language and suddenly every word out of my mouth was *Shit* or *Fuck* and I hated myself.

Whenever you lose your temper and your top blows off, I think of that day when we laid in the grass until the sun disappeared and the moon showed his face. That was when I fully began to trust you, and I let you in despite your aggression. It wasn't your fault you became this. I laid my head on your chest and you held me tightly, almost desperately. You kissed my forehead and confessed your father's anger and your mother's pining for pills. We cried together when the stars came out, but we dried our tears so we could find the constellations.

I lie in bed and remember how you were when the children were young and malleable. I remember how our daughter cried in the dirt during her fifth birthday party while her brother stuffed his face, green cake icing smeared across his cheeks from the Oscar the Grouch cupcakes. She loved Oscar and sobbed because she didn't want to eat him. The sight of her brother's mouth engulfing the cupcake character must have pushed her over the edge, and her tears increased tenfold. You swept her up in your arms and planted delicate kisses all over her wet face. Her sniffles subsided as you bounced her on your hip, her loose brown curls swinging through the air. When you tickled her tummy, she squealed with delight and it was as though she never had a tear in her eye.

Now that you have become your father, now that I'm covered in bruises, now that our children never smile, the stars don't come out. Maybe I don't see them because I'm stuck in this house.

You come out of the bathroom and saunter toward me with only a towel around your waist. Your hand finds its way to my hips and slinks down the path to my ass. The other hand lightly rests on my neck.

“Wanna play?” you ask, breathing heavy, hot air into my ear.

Before I can answer, you are already on top of me. “Sure,” I murmur as I lie still and let you touch me. When you’re done you kiss my mouth and thank me for the ride. I lie in bed the rest of the morning, dreaming about the Big Dipper and the North Star and which way to go.

Untitled
Danielle Chelosky

I mumble “I love you” and wait 20 hours for the next call meanwhile my car rejects all of my CDs and in traffic
I thought I saw you so I cut you off but it was just someone with a similar face and I write the words: “I am a pendulum swinging between ecstasy and devastation,” and I think about the tab of acid in your copy of Slaughterhouse Five that’s been there for four years because you’re waiting for the right time but it’s probably too old to work now anyway. And I remember when we had first been dating and we went to the Sex Museum and drank shooter bottles of liquor and I got jealous whenever we were surrounded by portraits of naked women and on the train I laid my legs over yours and took a photo and that became our thing, our overlapping body parts, an innocent intersection, a simple form of affection, like the way you read the last line of a book before you even begin, even if I tell you not to.

Lucid
Elise Turner

Realizing my eyes are strapped to the front of my face, but also that I am made of nerve endings, but also that how you say *God is One* is the same way you say *God is Each*, which is the same thing as looking down at Zoe C, swimming towards me, no, it's when she stops in front of me, bobbing, and for a second it aches, turquoise and light and this tiny impossible body, made of bone, bursting, literally bursting with light. But then - this - Zoe C was not consumed by light. Zoe C looked away from me, pouting, as Matthew kicked water at her, as she raised her hand and whined *Oh come on!* As I slammed my head on the culinary shack, as we drank a gallon of hot water from the same milk jug, as we played *Raise your hand if you are like me*, as we molded water and flour in sticky hands until it was bread, as a million bodies stripped in open sun, as we pulled the squirming bodies of root systems from the dirt and shook them, as we put worms in each other's hands and watched them wriggle, as Finley gave me a tooth fallen from her body, as we rubbed hot sunscreen on each other, as I kneeled in the dirt, as we prayed and grabbed handfuls of challah with dirty hands. This all happened, and it was easy - even when I took Aiden to the nurse, first thing in the morning, sore stomach from nervousness he can't name or touch yet (or the too late burn of the sun on his face, or the long bleeding scratch on Zoe C's leg, or yesterday when she whispered to me *I am so homesick*) nothing to say to make any of it better, but still, meant wholly, *Oh my God, me too.*

Neckboy finds a dead animal in a dream
Seth Bearman

I respond to dreams the way some folks sit up when teacher tells them something they never heard of before, same as when the man betting next to you says you better hit on this next one. How are you supposed to know they got the faintest evening star what they're talking about? You aren't—you just hit. Or I do, anyway.

It's like the reverse of when I can't get some sleep, I'm just lying there all hot and sweaty since it's always beatingest summertime, so what do I think of? Something dull and dumb, duh. It's gotta repeat till it becomes sleep for me. It's gotta be, Oh, here's me walking on down some path I been on before (no particular path, though; only works if there's nothing interesting at all to catch my mind). I'm thinking, Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot...I'm thinking, Treetops go by, sprawling clouds, sky doesn't have no color, no birds or none that I can see, right foot, left foot...I'm thinking, I'm hearing the crunch of like gravel under my feet, satisfying sound but not too intriguing, every step's gotta be exactly the same so that sound pulses steady. So that pulse gets to a soft fuzz, and them trees a soft blur, and those feet a soft sway, right foot, left foot, right. That's me, walking down the path that leads to sleep. That's my pre-dream.

Anyway, like I was saying, this is just the opposite of something so boring familiar it puts me to sleep. This is when my dream tells me some special kind of wow, something just nuts enough I gotta believe it, gotta get up right away to see how it looks and sounds in this thing they call 'waking life.' See, I always heard the way you are in dreams has got to do with how you wish you were for real. Like most things, that just doesn't apply to me—I always, always dream crazy, and that's supposed to mean I wish I was? Nuh-uh, no chance, and anyway, if I'm not already crazy awake, I would not like to be any more so, no thank-you. And another anyway on top of that, my always-always crazy dreams don't always-always wake me up the way how this one does, so amazing I'm simply not asleep anymore.

When it happens, I have no trouble remembering what my dream showed me. Crackling, dripping, echoes off a cave wall, and a warm light coming from behind where I can see, so that's gotta be my shadow reaching out to cover whatever's slumped against the darkness. There's this wet-dry smell I've hardly ever had up my nose before, clay that's set but not fired, natural clay kicked up from the bed of the creek. But this is underground, somewhere someplace, with a ceiling like any old room and then the ground curling up to meet it—littlest light, dawntime white, flashing out from the line where they touch. In my dream, I stretch my great long neck the way I'm always stretching,

and the shadow from my head peels itself off the heap in the corner so that I can finally see it.

Kneeling there—twisted in the last spectacular moments of its life, wretched moments that would never end so long as the light from either end of that little tunnel never crept in to show it—is the half-erased carcass of some thumping animal. In the dark I can trace its mazy antlers, grown from its head like two trees sharing pain. Its eyes lock with mine before I am sitting up in bed, ready to search it out.

In the Daylight
Josie Pierce

It all changes in the daylight. In the daylight, it all changes. Sun on the shutters, streaks and shadows. Everything changes, but a bottle on the windowsill. Did you stay the night? A bottle on the windowsill, glass and grass-colored, crooked, gone. Glue undone. Irreconcilable patterns on the wall, only a still fan. I didn't bother enough, it's been so long. Changes in the wood, my door frame came loose, a hinge I outgrew. Did you like what you saw in the light? Loose as your dad's guitar string, I cut my finger last night it bled out like a tiny diamond. No use.

In the diamond now, fields of light, I am not ready yet. And the love will carry us, and the wind did not. The whiskey sun, I'll see you then. Glints in the ballpark dugout, in the daylight, would you have waited in the driveway? Parked, if it was daylight? I know as I've always known. It all changes, his car stuffed full and old, I could almost take a pencil to it. It all changes. I never wanted to be in the place where it isn't enough. It could almost be postcard-Italy, if you squint by the train station. I hate you. In the daylight, everything is too precious. A yellow pond of words remains. Like pee or pale ale.

Yeah we're all cowboys, who cares. It is, as you say, in the washing and the making. I know, I am too folded. You're the silence in the sky, I walk the highway in daylight, see a ray and a blue jay. When it finally happened, I was quiet. I am alive in the corral. In that awful place again, all has changed. All the stupid things we're supposed to say. It takes two, in the daylight. To uncover the truth, the covers in mourning, upset and setting, rising all the same. I go to work. The wispy flower tips thrown, unrecoverable. The daylight witness to our errors, every misplayed and graceless Bill-Buckner-Spreading-His-Legs-In-Game-6-of-The-World-Series, and isn't that just what happened?



DEAD CHICKENS

Annie Bingham

The Memory of War
William Shullenberger

In Spring we wake with mouths full of crocuses,
hearing the shouts of children through the yards
like flocks of bronze grackles urged northward.

Then cries of the dead stray down from the mountains,
and the pink inner eyelid flares with images--
children stacked like fresh loaves of bread in the dust.

The shadow of a broken elm gashes the grass.
The children race through the wound untouched.
Already hot with bees, the apple tree flowers.

