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From the Editor

This has been an incredible year for Graffiti and I have a long list of people to thank. First and foremost I want to thank Professor Van Hartmann for answering each and every one of my many emails and for being so helpful throughout the whole editorial process. This magazine wouldn’t be what it is today if it weren’t for him.

I would also like to thank Graffiti’s editorial staff for all the effort they put into the magazine. This year we had our biggest editorial staff yet, comprised of thirteen talented and hard-working students. They were part of every step of the process, from the editing to the making of these pages. Special thanks as well to the English Department for its continued support and to everyone who submitted to the magazine.

When I took on this job about a year ago I had one goal in mind: publish the best that Manhattanville students have to offer. I’m happy to say that I believe we have achieved that goal. Every story, poem, and artwork in this magazine went through an extensive editing process and every contributor should feel proud to have their work published in Graffiti.

As the year progressed a new goal emerged in my mind: to expand Graffiti’s reach within the Manhattanville community. Throughout the year Graffiti hosted events and fundraisers on campus, joined social media, and got a new logo. I hope that these efforts are only the beginning of a rebranding process that will hopefully let Graffiti be known as a publication that celebrates art in all of its forms and that aims to push the boundaries of everything considered conventional.

Lastly, I want to thank you, dear reader, for reading this collection of works and supporting Graffiti this year.

Best,

Alex
Reflection of Me

Brianna Barrett

Brianna Barrett is a junior at Manhattanville College and a Studio Art major. Her passion for art is contagious and she believes it has saved her life. She enjoys traveling, creating, and writing about her experiences in hopes of one day being able to do it for a living.
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“Children come in different flavors.”
“No, but I’ve got time.”
White-washed walls splattered with blood-red paint. He populates my life. His hands are jagged and coarse – overrun by jutting veins in disarray. His breath screams, “Smoker: take my life.” But then again, he carries a three-fourths used inhaler that whispers, “Handle with care.” In Jeremy’s right faded suede pocket, there is a half-opened box of Marlboro cigarettes, that handy inhaler, and three unprescribed Adderall pills. He coughs when he coaxes me to clock in, “Merita, come.” His holey left pocket holds wrinkled gum wrappers, a once monthly unlimited, now expired Metro Card, and deceptive Chinese fortunes. The last one read: “If you love something, set it free... if it returns, keep it and love it forever.”
At the studio in our house, the whooshing fans circulate their recycled air onto my leafy tresses, my mini-garden creations. Each time, the leaves spring up an inch, sometimes two, as if on cue. Playing Russian roulette with paper mâché, I mold clay into an oval, heart-shaped head and cement the leftovers into two fist-firm arms and two tumbling legs, baby-sized.
What could have been? What did – what did I do?
Jeremy wore winter boots with bulky, knit-layered corduroys during the scorching August mornings last year. “Why?” I inquired once. “Because, you always need to be in battle mode. Without the proper footing, you’re paralyzed,” he said, his voice resonant, his face blank. At six-foot-two, he towers over me; I stumble.

I polished his black high-top boots once with spit and sweat and Clorox disinfectant wipes one day. He asked. I followed. It was Mr. Clean-aided, pine-scented-perfected, tip-top glimmering – I could see me – me submerged in a menacing mass of black.

***

“Today’s parents are yesterday’s children.” I’d read that scrawled along a wall in fading white chalk somewhere before my life became that of a shameless insomniac, an inevitable Doubting Thomas.

Rain is hammering onto my congested window. Lightning roars; silence is deafening. The droplets are pitter-patter-trickling down my window as if to return my tears long overdue. The wind is a combination of increasingly unyielding whistling and screaming in shoves. I’m gazing at the nearby crooked tree with limbs disheveled and leaves crumbling. And I’m viewing this all filtered through the punctured crisscross screen.

Plopping face-down on my unmade bed, I inhale the lemon scent of the unwashed white Egyptian cotton. Turning upward, my eyes stare into a miniature black and white ultrasound snapshot tacked to an empty, crumby bulletin board. If one looks closely enough, the tiny, dark figure is seemingly safe tucked within a celled border. What looks like little arms resembles mini tree branches subtly extending to acknowledge dear life. The almost baby is living off of the mother’s nutrients, mom-
my’s midnight dark chocolate cravings, via umbilical cord. It is lying face-up, breathing, waiting to claim a life, however unplanned. He is the product of two individuals from one spontaneous night. He was breathing. I was breathless. He was healthy. Ed was mine.

That was five months ago. It’s October now. We’re approaching Halloween – what would have been Ed’s first. I want to create a costume of dyed-black leaves to be a black swan. And, we do this every year – be costume-couple-compatible for nightlife partying. Jeremy wants to be the green-haired, white-faced Joker. But he’s torn between being Batman’s villain, or embodying a grim reaper.

“Objections from the black swan in the future arms of a grim reaper?” he asks, ruffling his hair, as if to tame a jungle overrun.

“Anything but Scream. No rationale for his killing sprees.”

“Yes, but, if you watched all four, he did have reasons. Logical ones,” he goes on. I zone out.

****

Record your natural laugh and play it backward. Wired behind a mahogany desk, I did that for laughs once. I took a Walkman, watched an episode of Friends, and recorded a tune for the soul. You play it backward because every process needs a 360 degree awakening: swimming and sinking, inhaling and exhaling, sitting and standing, living and dying. Earlier that day, I overslept and arrived fractally eyeing waiting dental clients frowning upon my arrival. My first client opened his mouth to reveal grimy plaque, potential tooth decay.

“Do you brush your teeth regularly?” I began, eyeing the spreading residue in his molars.
“To be honest, I want to say yes. But it’s only when I have time,” he replies.

“You’re thirteen now. If you keep this up, your teeth will suffer one-by-one,” I say now, locking eyes with him.

“Better my teeth than my heart,” he smiled widely, referring to his fresh-faced girlfriend, finishing off the remaining half of a lollipop, in the waiting room.

“You have to cut the sweets, too. One word for you and it’s cavities.

“I love sugar too much.” His brown eyes glitter.

“Everything’s best in moderation.”

“You’re not my mother,” he gazes blankly. And he’s right. A mother to no one is what I am.

“I’m your dentist, though. So listen. Try to,” I say, while my eyes shift from direct eye contact to his white-streaked yellow teeth.

“Sure, I’ll try,” he bargains, his mouth slightly widening.

“Great.”

“So are we done? Can I go?” He looks into the direction of the waiting room.

“Not quite. I need to rinse you off, and then you can choose a free toothbrush – color of your choice.”

“I already have a toothbrush,” he replies. His mouth opens for the rinse.

“Don’t you want a back-up?”

“Why?” His mouth closes.

“In case the bristles weaken, or, God forbid, you drop it inside a toilet.”

“Thank you, but no. I’m content.” His right palm wipes his mouth, as he hops off the recliner chair and tucks his left hand inside his front pocket.

“Want half of one?” he continues, holding four mini-sized milk chocolate with caramel Hershey’s bars
on one hand and, in the other, two milk chocolate with almond bars.

“Thanks, but I’ll pass. I only eat dark,” I mumble. On he goes to embrace his taller girlfriend, who is clutching an Architectural Digest magazine. The smell of gingersnaps and chocolate leave the room with him.

****

“I’m getting good at drawing circles.” Jeremy coughs, as he drives a thick, erasable, black Sharpie deeper in the whiteboard. The marker screeches loudly.

“They look the same to me,” I say, only briefly glancing at the row of circles for a split second.

Jeremy speaks and I listen. As a junior data analyst, he’s fair-skinned and face-caked in layered eye bags. He’s twenty-nine. We’re the same age, with undergrad degrees and masters’ both ready to begin our lives separately and together inching toward our prime.

“Can you grab me another one? This one’s dying,” he says, still holding onto the black marker.

“Here you go.” I hand him a new one, as I retrieve the used, now disposable marker. These markers come in sets and I’m glad. It’s always good to have substitutes to fill-in. If only back-ups existed, human life-speaking.

****

When one buys hangers, they come in various sets: a 24-pack, a 50-piece, an 80-bundle, and the list goes on and on. The primary purposes of hangers are for clothing display, wrinkle-prevention, and damage-control. Most are unaware of the unconventional use: self-induced abortion. Stick the top of a hanger up your vage and fingers crossed that, with the right amount of force, what’s up there goes. Abortion via unhygienic, po-
tentially fatal clothing hanger was one of the several suggestions to me. But I went the easy route. Jeremy urged for the operation saying it was the right thing to do, saying we weren’t ready, repeating, my God, repeating, we didn’t need to “burden our working selves right now.” After all, “we’re on the verge of our prime.” Once I’d succumbed yet again, we’d hugged. Who’d ever thought that hugging could feel like trying to strangle a tree trunk? The thing is: what’s gone weighs you down even more so than the things that still exist.

*******

“We’ll get two gallons of cookies-and-cream right after,” Jeremy said softly. I remember him patting my aching back like I was some mindless kid following instructions for sweets. He saw my blank face and added, “And a happy meal, too. A happy meal to go with a happy person.” He was a character; Jeremy was something. I still think this. Only there would never be enough sweets, or happy meals. Besides, happy meals were made for kids, only living children.

“I don’t think you can eat afterward,” I croaked.

“I don’t see why not.”

“So you’re telling me that the laminated brochure is wrong?”

“Oh. There’s a brochure?”

“That is laminated,” I added. My tone was monotone, robotic even.

“I’ll ask the doctor. He’ll know what’s right.”

“The doctor,” I mumbled, “why not the priest, a therapist?”

“Merita, don’t. I thought we discussed this.” Jeremy maintained firm eye contact for once, as if to say, “Shut up; don’t cause a scene. Do not. I mean it.”

“We did. I kid. I kid,” I whispered, looking from
his eyes to the half-opened window.

“Besides, you can’t lose what never was.” His face was serious; it was solid. I shuddered. How did we get here?

“It’s already something, you know. A living, breathing being.”

“You know what I meant. Let’s not fight, okay?” He stroked my hair. “So thoughtful and selfless, how lucky am I?” I thought. I rolled my eyes.

“Because arguing is the worst thing at this point, right?” My eyes locked into his. He looked at me and the half-opened window simultaneously, but mostly that window. Perhaps the Adderall is wearing out. He walked away to shut the window.

********

You can get used to a certain kind of sadness. That’s okay.

It’s okay to mourn and grieve for an almost child, a “maybe baby,” “the burden above all.”

It’s okay to question and conclude you’re a good person. It is okay.

If your body’s a temple, why can’t you treat it as such? It’s okay to not be okay. Really.

Boobs sag. Bras are useless; they are now optional. Then, you stop wearing them altogether because what’s the point? Suddenly, your quality of life has changed significantly. “For the better?” I wonder. Oh, I wonder. I don’t know. Your wardrobe becomes limited because you can’t find what you own. Maybe, you don’t know what you own. You can’t claim what’s yours. And, it’s all because of the hangers, my god, the hangers. They are scattered, sprinkled among us, like Ed is to me. Then, there are the nonstop cravings for McDonalds’ twenty-piece chicken nuggets and large fries. Let’s not forget
about the large Sprite, or, my God, leave out the happy meal. If happy meals are for happy, blissful kids, then adults must eat sad meals to accept their sad, dull lives somehow. Sad meals don't taste nearly as good, or come with a toy. That is sad.

Every bite of everything has an aftertaste. It’s a smell, a flavor I can’t for the life of me begin to describe. It is water mixed with something. It is water dominated by a powerful something. It’s rusty metal. It’s iron. It’s sulfur. It reeks of traces of blood dried-up.

That is sad.

*********

The number of tree rings means that a person has lived x years. The palms of hands closely resemble tree rings. And at first glance, from a distance, sometimes I mistake trees for people. I will never get to trace Ed’s palms with my own, or mark his budding height on a developing oak tree. I will never get to nag him, or hear his high-pitched laugh in the years before puberty hits. He will never get to touch a makahiya plant and appreciate nature at its shiest. He will never get to observe firsthand a cutting plant regrow its limbs and tell me this is why we don’t always need substitutes. He will never get to eat a happy meal, or have the opportunity to taste cookies-and-cream ice cream, or tell me he’s more of a lemon-sherbert kind of guy. Never will he tell me he’s not much of a smoker, or, if he is, only in moderation, Mom. Never will he be Batman and defeat the Joker.
As children we learn that it will never reach 75 degrees without raindrops spilling, pouring, dripping down into the lake.

Steam will rise from the streets, and if we’re lucky we might see our first rainbow. It will tie together the two halves of summer: the asphyxiating heat and the shouting thunder. The cries from the sky will most definitely bring more rain, and as children we learn that this is normal. The dichotomy of yellow days and black skies that mirrors the bees that will more-than-likely sting our feet on our way to the ice cream truck is normal. It’s expected. Mother
nature will have as many tantrums

as she likes, and our parents will
lay at the beach drinking one too
many beers and as children we will
grow up swimming without supervision
and expecting mistakes.

We will not remember the faces
of the lifeguards who kicked us out
of the lake when the sky lit up in
streaks, or the security guard
that enforced the 9 o’clock
curfew.

We will fall off our bikes—scraped
knees and battered hands, and we
will remember the shouts of
thunder turning into the shouts
of our mothers.

We will get back on our bikes
anyway,
and we will only remember the
slick of the road after rain, the
pain in our hands will subside

and we will ride away from
our homes and back towards
the beach, sand soaked with
the memories of cut-rate
parenting and sun-drunk teens.
His Last Onset

Emily Behnke

We sat. Four cushioned chairs in the front of the room, next to the red EXIT sign and the mahogany casket surrounded by bouquets of flowers.

In Tanzania, a photographer is arranging bodies. The surface of Lake Natron displays the corpses of calcified birds that met the cessation of their lives in the murk and depth and death of the salt and soda rich waters—

their legacy is left behind with their remains, like my grandfather’s. Posed and decomposed statuettes photographed by a man who finds beauty in the ultimate end, the roses that smell of both death and life.

The honesty that accompanies death sits with us, softly singing the song of our own mortality. Avant-garde harpsichord notes ringing in our ears. The esteemed beauty of fatality.
But the expected glimmer has either dimmed, or never lived. There is no flicker of artistry in the empty eyes or the positioned hands of my grandfather.

It’s the murmuring of my family that draws me in. The desperate need to hear something besides the silence, the ghost’s song. The buzzing of flies.

He lies almost unnoticed in the wake of his survival, his existence, his life. He remains in the onset of mine, the bone-dry calcified dust of my memories colored with salt-water goodbyes.

The extraction of his presence, lying in the likes of Lake Natron, with the birds. And the rest of us.
For My Father

Emily Behnke

A poem about dead sunflowers
in the garden.

In the front yard the yellow petals
have plummeted
to the dry and cracked topsoil.
Their final resting place.

Behind them is a house that forgot
how to be a home, with a red garage door
left open.

The history of a family
exposed, contrived in antique stock
and mold and the neighbors can see
everything.

A poem about a father who showed
up on time for work but didn’t even
remember walking out the front
door. Or turning the car on.

A poem about a car flipped over—
The driver’s side window is smashed
and glass is spilled all over the road, among
other things like the blinding light of
consciousness and competence and the
infinite foreboding drum of life moving
forward.

A poem for when the man’s memory fails him.

A poem for his whiskey smile and glazed over eyes.

A poem for dead sunflowers. Corpses of petals shaken by the wind and he ignores them. Still, even after he’s emptied the bottle.
TheSr. Margaret Williams Prize for Literary Criticism

The Flapper in Context: Fitzgerald’s Philosophy vs. 1920s Response

an abstract

Gabrielle van Welie

For almost a century, the memory of the flapper has been preserved through F. Scott Fitzgerald’s prose. Writing in a time of social chaos, Fitzgerald rose to the occasion and became the voice of the modern woman. Or at least this is the story that we often tell ourselves about his life and art. Upon closer examination, however, it appears that Fitzgerald was just as confused about the meaning and significance of the flapper as everyone else in the 1920s. While his earlier works like *Flappers and Philosophers* romanticize the flapper, later works like *Tender Is the Night* portray the flapper as unstable and dangerous. Adding to this that his novels and short stories are works of fiction, which inherently tend to overdramatize and disfigure reality, this paper will argue Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the flapper is confusing and inconsistent because of his ambivalent response to the flapper. In having this contradictory response, Fitzgerald parallels that of the general public of the 1920s, which had strong, but varied opinions.
47 Degrees Celsius is a story set in a dystopian society and follows the lives of government officials, scientists, soldiers and involved citizens. The story dominantly follows Ava, an elite soldier who has been isolated for ten years to train for Generation Novum – a program that was created to produce peaceful relationships between countries.

As the program is corrupted by a corporate power and civilians begin to revolt, Ava must leave her isolated life and adapt to the civilian world as she struggles to reveal her former program as the threat it has become.

47 explores the extent to which people will pursue power, belief, and truth. Ava’s journey examines the extent to which greed and truth change politics and history and how these forces shape the human experience.
The William K. Everson Prize for Writing on Film

The Morning After in Remember Last Night

*a summary*

Phuong Le

While James Whale is best known for his horror classics, Remember Last Night? reveals a more comedic dimension to the English director’s œuvre. The film is deadly funny, not only because a character actually dies in it, but also due to its comical portrait of the ideal rich in the 1930s. Set in the midst of the Great Depression, Remember Last Night? follows a group of wealthy friends who, after waking from a night of drunken debauchery to find one of them dead, decide to embark on a quest to expose the murderer. This roller coaster ride of a movie defies conventions as it springs across multiple genres, from screwball comedy to detective mystery. This essay examines the film’s genre-shifting tendencies and the breakdown of the ideal of heterosexual marriages as well as its various visual motifs, most notably James Whale’s trademark use of flowers in connoting queerness and authorship. By depicting the moral incoherence as well as the social ignorance underneath the dazzling facade of Art Deco furniture and haute couture clothes, Remember Last Night? succeeds as a scathingly hilarious critique on the upperclass’s hedonistic lifestyle that completely disregards the historical context of a major economic recession.
What Could It Be?

Stephanie Kunkel

It isn’t quite your horizontal lips rarely pressed into a smile
or green greedy eyes which grow bright as you slash your prey with back-handed compliments. Or the way you blindly obey any per-scripted words ever prescribed to you: your boss, the television infomercials, or false statistics on the internet.
No, no.

It can’t be your lack of passion or complacent being.
Your excuses:
Invalid.

Your manner:
Displeasing.

Your attitude:
Disgraceful.

No, no.
It cannot be your resistant stare or how you preach.
Your inquisitive nature paired with your hyperbolic tendencies or outlandish gestures...
It’s not the way you say moist, how you fail every test, or how you’re always late and think you’re so clever.
No, no...

It’s not even your fear of spiders.
It can’t be how you smack your lips together.
Or how you talk and you talk and you talk.
Could it be
How your eyes grow wide
but your thoughts remain dull? Your mind full of dry martinis,
scented candles, or the new episode of The Real Housewives.
How your persona omits all sources of pleasure?

Oh, no.
Could it be your lack of decency?
Your tendency to repulse a small child.
Your flat hair burnt of bleach.
The remnants of alcohol on your lingering breath.

No...no...
Melting

Shannon Gaffney

Standing on this ice right now is hurting my legs. My skates are wobbling and there’s no one to catch me if I fall and I feel nauseous and I’m not sure why I drove all the way up here in my car and listened to her favorite songs on the radio.

The ice is empty without her. Cold, empty, and dark. I wish this never happened. I wish I never came back here. I wish these people would stop laughing and talking and drinking hot chocolate. It’s not fair that they get to be happy. It’s not fair they do the things we used to do. I’m beginning to think that nothing is very fair at all.

I’ve heard stories of people getting hopeful. Seeing a strip of hair that looks like someone they used to know, and running towards them, and then seeing it’s not who they thought after all. But that doesn’t happen to me. Because I’d never mistake her for anyone else. I’d know her by anything – her voice, her eyes, her hair, her neck, the way she moves her hands. And I’d know if she wasn’t here.

I’d just know.

Just like I know that this is giving me that feeling again- like the world is crashing down around me and I’m standing on the last piece of ground. Except this time, it’s not the good kind. It’s the one that scares you. It brings you back to things you thought you’d left in an old version of yourself.

Like the fact that she loved the city.

She said she’d give the whole world to live there. I
used to joke with her that I’d buy her the city... wrap it up in a pretty box, with a bow on top, and give it to her for Christmas. Unfortunately, I couldn’t bring the city to her – but I could take her there. And so I did. Every year.

We’d hop on the train, cheeks flushed with youth and chill, giggling as our teeth chattered. She’d always complain her hands were cold, but she never brought gloves. She’d always complain that my hands were cold too, but she never quite pulled her fingers away when I tried to warm them.

I’d buy her hot chocolate and a slice of cake from the bakery. We’d talk and talk and talk and I’d tease her and she’d tease me back. I never got sick of hearing her talk, even though I told her I did. Her enthusiasm was contagious. I loved her every word, because she made them sound like music. Then, we’d go find something to do.

She always had the best ideas, and she was the only one of us one brave enough to go through with them. Making snow angels in the park. Building a snowman with kids at a playground. She’d drag me into her little schemes and I tried not to let on that I enjoyed being dragged.

One day, we went ice skating. She skated circles around me. Literally.

“Come on,” she’d taunt, making me dizzy. “Pick up the pace, buddy.”

Buddy, I thought. Buddy.

“Let’s race!” she cried, and she bolted past me.

Before I could register what was happening, there was the sound of slick ice and the thump of a fall. For a moment, I thought she was crying, as I heard little muffled sounds coming from where she was on the ice. I rushed to help her, almost tripping and landing on my own face, only to find that she was laughing, loud
and deeply, with her hair swirling and dancing around her. There were such crinkles in the corners of her eyes that before I knew it, I was laughing with her. I tried to pick her up, but she slipped right back down, and I fell down right next to her, and we laughed, and laughed, and laughed. I kissed her then. I didn’t know I’d wanted to kiss her. But in that moment, there was nothing I was more sure of. I kissed her, and we were watercolors running together, first slowly, then with passion, turning one shade of blue into another. We stared. Breathless. And I felt so many things all at once that there was no way to make sense of anything at all. We kissed more after that.

I remember everything about her, probably too much. We became so connected, through movement and feeling, that to touch her became an instinct. A hand on the back of her chair. Arms pressed lightly on her waist. Her head propped gently against my shoulder when she slept on airplanes. Playing with her hands when we talked. We became so symmetrical that I searched for her in my sheets, long after she had gone.

A piece of me broke when she left, went missing. A piece of me died. And I’m making it worse, by standing here. I’m taking stitches out of a wound that I mistook for healed. But I guess these things never do heal. I guess you never get to take out the stitches.

I have to leave or I’ll never get the guts to put myself back together. So I tug the hood of my sweatshirt over my head. I yank off the wretched skates and shove my feet back into old shoes. And then I buy a hot chocolate and a slice of cake from the bakery. And I eat them alone. And I think of summer, when the ice will thaw.
People Forget Antartica’s a Continent

Jordan Winch

Dear man walking past my bench at 12:45 AM,

In passing I’ve decided to love you.
Though short was our acquaintance,
I love you all the same.

I love you for being out as early as I,
and for that fast walk you have that says
you’re a determined man and you plan
to get where you’re going.
The way you don’t look at your feet because
you’re certain of every step,
although the shoelace on your right foot is untied.
I love you.

I love you for the flawless bodily image that is you,
but also for all the flaws I cannot see.
And for the maroon sweatshirt you are wearing,
even in variation – real men wear pink.

The biggest reason of all for my love is that
when you walked by, you didn’t even look up at me.
Because whereas I’ll remember you each day our paths
don’t cross,
I won’t even be a face your mind conjures up in its
dreams.

Distance is the best remedy for unrequited love,
and though your love I hold dear,
it would kill me with its depth.

-The girl you walked past on the bench at 12:45 AM.
Love Me Harder

Alexis García

When I told him to love me harder,
I didn’t mean it literally.
Some girls get flowers, some get hickies.
Hell, some even get babies.
But I got bruises
because my man always chooses
to display to everyone that I’m his girl.
And instead of showing me the world,
he shows me a balled fist.
And I hid from my family a broken wrist.
It was harder to hide the black eye.
But I was a clumsy kid growing up;
I always managed to trip over the good ones
and land on the bad guy.
Crying never did me much good,
my mascara always ran before I ever could.
When I told him to love me harder
I should’ve seen this coming.
He used to be a prince,
but ever since
I started spending time putting on perfume
and painting my nails,
it would consume
the time I usually needed to worship at his feet
and I thought I reached my feat.
Once he said our relationship was heading in a back-
ward direction
I agreed, he slapped the lipstick off my face
and still managed to have an erection.
After a while I never muttered any ifs, ands, or buts;
I learned to keep my mouth shut.
If not, my teeth would have to make room for his knuckles
while my knees unbuckled from the weight of his blow.
He loved me harder
and let everybody know.
What It’s Like to Smile

Krystalina Padilla

A solemn volcano quaked
In the pit of my stomach.
My damp soles reflected the
Sweat in my palms as they
Stood clasped together
While I hopelessly gazed
At the cool water licking my toes
And the sand itching my feet.

An overwhelming gust of wind
Surged through the ruffles of my skirt.
The plaid had come alive.
Goosebumps rose on the inner lining
Of my thighs and base of my forearm.
The caged canary awoke.
She sung and sung ‘til her wings grew sore.

I laughed with my chest and
I smiled with my heart.
Without a word, she opens the door just enough to let him in. He smells like weed and she realizes that the apartment won’t smell like Febreeze and Lysol anymore. She knows he’s still high because his eyes are glassed over. He’s wearing his favorite shirt: a soft black cotton tee with his band’s name, “Downtown Liberation,” ironed onto it. She made it for him after the band’s first official gig. He sits on the couch, putting his legs on the dark wooden coffee table.

“Put your feet down,” she says. She wants it to be forceful, but her voice quivers.

“Wow, okay Indie, relax. Where’s my stuff?”

She points to the box on the floor. In neat black Sharpie it is simply labeled “Theo.” Inside are the clothes and shoes he left at her place. She had washed all the clothes, and even cleaned off the shoes to the best of her ability before packing it all.

But he’s not concerned with that. He wants his bong back, a colorful piece of glass that she never quite understood, that was already packed in there. He left his grandfather’s watch on the bathroom counter, so she gave that back to him. It is one of his most prized possessions, but he’s so scatterbrained that he probably doesn’t even remember that he left it at her place. She took all of the things he gave her and put them in the box as well: she wanted to get rid of all of him at once. She packed away the teddy bear that he gave her after a particularly tough finals week. There were music sheets in there too,
the first drafts of the songs he wrote for her last Valentine’s Day. In a small black velvet box was the necklace he gave her for her last birthday, her 21st. It was a rose gold heart locket she had been secretly admiring for months. He had gone into her search history to find it. If she went into his search history, she knew she wouldn’t find anything she would have wanted to see. She liked to give him his freedoms, even though he didn’t give her any.

“Thanks. So how’ve you been?” he asks kindly- Indie just wants him to leave, but for a second, his voice has its power over her again. She answers, despite hating small talk. “I’m good. My classes are going well. How’s the band doing?”

“Real good. We have a show tonight in the bar on Main Street. You should swing by if you’re free. I’m sure the guys would love to see you.”

That was a blatant lie. The three other guys in the band didn’t like her because she had taken up too much of Theo’s time.

“I have a class in the morning and an assignment to finish for it, but thanks for the invite. Maybe next time,” she says, even though she doesn’t ever intend to go to another gig for his band.

“That’d be cool. Anyway, I should go. It was nice to see you.” He walks over to the cardboard box, two feet tall, wide, and deep, and picks it up. He walks toward the door, opening it with one hand. Indie follows. Then he puts down the box and turns to Indie. He reaches out his arms for an embrace. Nervously, she returns the gesture, closing herself in his arms. She circles her arms around his thin waist, smelling a hint of cologne on his chest. His head rests on top of hers, as he is about a foot taller.

He catches the scent of her strawberry shampoo and remembers the nights they spent together at her
apartment: when he would take out his guitar and play for her, and she would sing all of his songs with him. She remembers last Christmas when they put up a small tree, celebrating the holidays together, and sadder memories flood their minds: the bickering over dishes, sweeping, drugs, and trust; the night that she locked herself in the bathroom, crying until 5 am, while he sat outside the door waiting for her to let him in. They recall all of these memories in silence, before she pulls away, and he turns to leave.
I See Me

Sarah Larson
They apparently found us by mistake
They were so quick to take
They ran through us as if they thrived off of hate
They didn’t give a warning
They didn’t give a hello or a goodbye
They didn’t seem to care if any of us died
They just wanted what we had
Said their planet was dying
So they were quick to grab
What they needed from another so that they could survive
Took all our resources so that they could remain alive
Ran through us like nothing
I wonder what they did to cause their planet to be crumbling
How
Or better yet why
Would they knowingly destroy their own home?
And when time was running out why didn’t they lead their people to safe zones?
Why have all the past great positive minds of their world beencondoned?
They’ve been silenced they’ve been killed
When all they wanted to do was build
Why did they ignore all their world’s problems?
Instead of actively working to solve them
They’ve repeatedly hurt their own people
Rarely treated each other as equals
I’m scared
Because if that’s how they treat one another...
Then how will they treat others?
I just don’t understand their plan
I screamed as they destroyed our home I said “you can’t!”
They said “we can”
How could they commit such sins?
When they landed they said they proudly called themselves humans
I tried to connect to your brother
today, but...
it wasn’t the same.
I tried to enjoy his company,
just as I do yours.
But his manner is different,
not as you are.
His vision and taste
hold remnants of you,
but it is not the same...
Some say I should like him
more than you.
But I must say...
I love you...
Original Mountain Dew
The Body’s Terpsichore
Stephanie Kunkel

Humanity in motion. Expressionism. Dance.  
It’s just another dying art embedded with strain  
and torture that drives the body

To explore its unnatural anatomical structure.  
We believe we are a fixed ideal form but I attempt  
to tap poke and prod until I feel every vessel,

Marrow and cell until I discover every atomic part that  
composes me.  
The studio room is the same, empty void garnished with  
nothing  
but tall mirrors and a cold, hard floor I swiftly explore  
crashing

My limbs against its un-forgiving surface.  
Each time I fall harder into it- some crazy, dark, locked-up  
reincarnation of the multitude of voices inside my head  
is released.

But no one speaks. They compromise by breaking the  
tension  
through exploding movements the body relinquishes.  
Absent of mind. The process seems mechanical: strategi- 
cally placed steps

and the manipulation of each appendage. But rarely do
eyes
see the hidden process the staged dancer possess-the
tainted tights
stained with blood, the fall and the fall and the fall fall fall

of rehearsed false perfection. The illusion. These wide-white-eyed
viewers see the ruby red lip stick smiles, tanned legs, and a fixed
routine only the body has practiced. It comes from a place where I’m absent

Of thought and let the body roam free. Where I abandon all logic
and become enthralled with the cosmetic vessel I use to breathe,
the vessel which gives me life. And the only thing I ever see –

Glimpses of my blurred reflection follow me like a shadow;
Never masked. Never hidden. Exposed. But I can never watch it because as I do, it ceases to move. And I ask myself, if I withstand

this torture, this complicated fixation of finding an inner-locked demon,
to travel to a place so far within myself, hidden for a reason,
searching tirelessly to expose this raw kept secret to give to the public –

through a body so vulnerable I can no longer hide its wounds,
to expose the truth behind the superficiality we cling to, to keep society tamed – Am I mad?
Teenage Limbo

Emelie Ali

We’re stuck in this damaged emptiness
Confused, over-rated, blamed and going nowhere
Is it limbo or a dream? It’s not happiness

A purgatory not in heaven, it is not solemnness
It is encompassed in the adolescence here
We’re stuck in this damaged emptiness

A purgatory not in hell, it is not gladness
Burning, like the soul, yet frozen over there
Is it limbo or a dream? It’s not happiness

A teenage dream is not always rebelliousness
It is more humble, desired relief everywhere
We’re stuck in this damaged emptiness

See the struggle in our eyes: tiredness
Where is the escape, it could be anywhere
Is it limbo or a dream? It’s not happiness

The older generation snares, at the wantonness
Segregated from our pleas, we are left in despair
We’re stuck in this damaged emptiness
Is it limbo or a dream? It’s not happiness
The ink bleeds from me
Like a cut in a heart
It sheds from me
Beautiful words form at my silver tip
It touches
It lifts
What you call lines
I call lips
They whisper to me
You will never know
We interact silently
Yet, you proclaim our love

The ink bleeds from me
I am drained
But we continue to make love uncontrollably
I become more familiar with my force
And my purpose
To write until I cannot drip ink from my core,
No, until I am no more
And I assure you
There is always another page
Another poetic phrase
To be written down
But I refuse even in my ink’s richness
To let her drown
My ink will not pierce, not another mistress.
Who am I?
Catherine Brady

The present tense of this question confuses me. I know who I used to be.

I used to be scared. I was afraid of taking chances. Someone who held herself back because she did not want to look stupid. I used to be shy in a nervous kind of way. Never letting my voice be heard. I use to be a planner. The archenemy of the spontaneous. Never letting any situation run through my fingertips without a set goal in mind. I used to be a worrier. Staying up late at night counting the things I have yet to do and calculating the time I have to do them. I used to live my life in comfort surrounded by familiarity. I used to be bitter. I thought life was unfair. I used to be close-minded. I thought things would always stay the same. I was naïve. I thought that the girl I was then was who I was always going to be.

I know what I want to be. I want to be a writer. I want to be successful. I want to live in a brownstone and drink tea as I roam the streets of New York. I want to be cool, dye my hair funky colors for weeks at a time. Then I want to get many little tattoos that have secret meanings that only I know. I want to be a traveler. I want to venture to see the hidden inches of the world that the basic tourist would never find. I want to live abroad in these places and befriend the locales and know the best bakeries. I want to be a fighter. I want to make colorful banners and stand outside somewhere day and night protesting something I am really passionate about. I want to
start something. A charity organization, a club, a book, or whatever I feel. But I want to finish it and be proud. I then want to run around and shove it in people’s faces and say, “Look what I did, look what you can do too.” I want to be curious. I want to learn how to sew a dress or paint a landscape of a beautiful mountain. I want to be a cook. I want to create delicious food without the need of a recipe. But most importantly I want to eat it. I want to feel each bite in my mouth and savor the flavors. I want to enjoy. I want to be strong. I want to run a mile each day adding more as time progresses, so that one day I can run a marathon. But I also want to be mentally strong. I want the strength to stand-alone and speak what is on my mind. I want to be courageous. I want to live.

So who am I now?

I am a girl. I am ever changing. So do not ask me who I am because tomorrow I will be different.
The “C” Poem

for Gabby

Steven Willis

To the package of Haitian seasoning that I found crushed
In the back of my kitchen cabinet this winter,
I must warn you
this is no place for the treasure of Antilles.
In fact,
I'm not quite sure how you got here.
I would conclude,
that the contents of my cupboard heard
herds of Frenchmen call you La Perle
and attempted to play calm,
or a caucus of goods raped of nutrition and canned,
concentrated
on adding another country of the Caribbean to their continuum.
I observe you as to never have been opened,
though in truth you've been used once
discarded for bad taste
customer
captured you in his clutch, barely reading the contents
just wanting to fulfill the lust of empty shopping carts
and as for myself
I have ceased circulating isles for condiments what
seems like centuries ago
But here I am
a pot of boiling water and a bowl of cereal short of anybody’s cook
reading your fine print,
receiping the conditions you work best in. Wondering why I wanna taste you so bad.
Untitled

Brianna Barrett
Yearbook

In memoriam of C.M.

Gabrielle van Welie

We are fourteen and your body
is descending six feet below ground-level.
I am fifteen and you're still fourteen,
but I barely notice.

I am sixteen and I look back and I know
that you, my friend, are not growing.
You have been surrounded by maggots
for years now while I have been crying
over broken hearts and a tragedy or two;
but you have been down under
and you haven’t said a word.

I hear stories of others, younger
or perhaps a little older than you,
and I feel as if I knew them
and I cry as if they were you.
I shake at night like I used to
when I remembered her screaming,
your mother, to my face,
about your absence
when I was fourteen and I couldn’t comprehend
but thought I could.

I am seventeen and it has happened again.
I didn’t go to the funeral this time.
I am eighteen and I know
that you are not graduating this year.
I look around, row by row, 
and I cannot find you. 
I wonder if you loom around 
these forgotten streets of youth.

I saw the joyous faces destroyed 
from carrying a sadness that they 
could not bear and I thought of you 
and how your obituary is still 
stuck between my Roald Dahl book, 
the one we read together in school, 
and a picture of our class in which 
you smile, without knowing, 
what a crash could do.

You told me once that if you slept 
for a really long time you’d grow 
tall and I’d be shorter than you. 
You said we’d look like the couple 
in the magazine, and as you pointed 
I knew we would never look like that 
because you wouldn’t grow that tall 
and I might be white, but not blonde. 
I didn’t mean that you wouldn’t grow 
because you’d be framed 
to the size of a casket for eternity.

A girl told me that she thought she loved you, 
but it was pointless to dwell on it now. 
All I know is that I keep looking for you 
in old pictures where you live, 
and as the years go by they are the only proof 
that you existed at all, 
that you walked this earth and met me, 
and that you left.
What’s Your Name Again?

Michaela Murdock

There is a woman, an elderly woman, whose love for teaching did not retire when she retired years ago. I see her, every day, always early, and she greets me as a grandmother would, eyes lit up behind her glasses and a smile that takes up her whole face. She’s got white hair and shoes that are always buffed clean.

And I see her, this woman, but I don’t know her. We share courteous smiles, a quick “How are you?” or “Beautiful morning” and she asks me my name a few times a day.

One day, I sat beside this woman, her tiny form hunched over her knitting needles and yarn spilling from the bag at her feet. And that day, we spoke. She asked me about my studies and she told me about the gifts her former students had made her. She said she’s got a quilt on her bed filled with squares from the first graders she taught phonics to way back when. And her late husband was a wonderful dancer, and then she taught me how to move the knitting needles like I was weaving my own story...

When it was time to leave, I slipped on my coat with a grudge. And she turned and said,
“I feel as though I’ve just met you.”

I felt the same, and I told her so.
I left that day a little brighter, a little fuller.

The next morning, I greeted her cheerily, warmly, as a granddaughter would. I said,

“Good morning! How are you today?”
And she said, “Beautiful day! What’s your name?”

And I told her. I asked her about her knitting and her first graders, and her eyes widened with surprise. She said, “My husband was a wonderful dancer” and “Let me teach you how to knit” and “I have this beautiful quilt my students made for me.”

I nodded, pretended I didn’t know.
And when she turned her eyes to her yarn, I wished for yesterday’s flighty beauty, for she would never know the afternoon we shared, the day I finally knew Eleanor.

She looked up to show me her neat row of stitches. Eyes bright and youthful, she looked me over.

“Say,” she whispered, “What’s your name again?”
Chug
Stephanie Kunkel

Chug. –NO! Not the Coke as a chaser!
Just chug the whole damn bottle you stupid-waste spacer!
Chug. Because we said to – because it’s HOT.
Chug chug chug so we can play
With glass and rocks
Chug because of the tight formed lips you can’t pry
Open. Chug, chug, chug away in your fishnets and stilettos
you can’t walk in – sober or not. Chug until you hit the right spot.
Chug until you can’t find the confessions
Buried in the memories of your innocent disposition – the past.
Chug chug chug because this night will always last.
Chug chug chug. Chug to escape.
Chug. To the red solo cup as your wing man
Ready to spend a night blazed and hazed. Red-rimmed eyes
tinted with caked-on smudges of black
Mascara from yesterday’s night – to the walk of shame.
To tomorrow and today’s past. Never remembering whose sheets
you were in last – His or your own.
Chug because I said so.
AND CHUG BECAUSE YOU WANT TO
Chug because...You Only Live Once and you don’t know any better.
Chug chug – Chug now! Chug now and forever!
We chug to connect, to learn, not forget, to make love.
We chug in the stalls,
in the showers, in the halls. We chug ‘till tomorrow’s
tomorrow and even
did so this-damn morning.
Chug to escape. Chug to the night. Chug to your boy-
friend who you
don’t see in daylight! Where there is mischief and magic
and bodily sin.
Chug as your steps scatter and your minds drifts
to a hole only a rabbit would go.
Chug ‘till the music vibrates inside you. Chug chug chug
until He can’t find you. No judgment, no morals, no to-
morrow, not today.

Chug chug chug now, in the rain. Chug in the day when
the darkness coats
the night. Chug chug chug until it seems right. Chug
with your sock, on the mailbox,
on his cock! Chug chug – chug on at vibes and rock!

Chug. Chug down education, reformation and recession.
Chug chug chug until – and through – the next Depres-
sion!
Chug to attraction, propaganda and even dissatisfaction.
CHUG CHUG CHUG is the anthem of this generation.
Walk of Dreams

Angela Eckoff

Who am I going to be?
Will these fall leaves accompany me?

Will I stand in front of the blackboard?
With Jane Eyre in my hands?

Will a studio apartment welcome me home?
While I lecture and grade papers in order to comply with what life demands?

Will I walk amongst the skyscrapers?
Who have torn down my oak and maple trees.

Will buses and trains run over my hope for fresh air?
Reminding me this life will always be unfair.

Or will these fall leaves continue to accompany me?
Will they carry me towards that unknowing life of ease.

Will I walk out my red painted door to the scent of fresh cut grass?
Walking with my three children to answer the call of Sunday mass.

Past the white picket fence and tire swing.
Never again knowing what it feels like to mend a broken wing.

I take this walk and pray to God
That these fall leaves continue to accompany me.
Let me tell you something about my coffee.
I drink it early in the morning, quiet, undisturbed
quite sure that I am completely alone.
I like it bitter,
just like you get when I ask you
where you’ve been all night.
This dark roast of mine leaves marks, everywhere
On my teeth,
my hands,
my clothes,
my mind.
When this java goes down my throat
I think,
I ponder,
I wonder,
Where were you when I moaned last night?
If not you, then what was it that made me shiver and
quiver?
What provoked lightning to strike me twice?
In the early mornings I think about all this
While I wait and wonder
where the hell you were last night.
Leander came to with his hand reaching for a plain black door. His brain signaled his arm, sending tiny little electric impulses, goading him to open it, without a second thought as to where the door might lead. Opening the door could prove dangerous, but no monsters lurked on the other side: only cigarette smoke greeted his nostrils and his eyes. He coughed, waving his hand through the air to clear away the smog that circulated what seemed to be a nightclub. Red lights flashed and the low bass of jazz hummed in the air. Ladies in long, black dresses danced on small platforms and some called out to Leander.

A woman, whose hips swayed like the waves of an ocean and whose skin was like night, stepped off a platform. She leaned in towards Leander, almost pressing her lips against his ear.

“Someone is waiting for you. Keep walking toward the back. Yes, the door all the way to the back.”

He weaved his way through dancers, following the snaking hallway to another door. He reached for it, but it swung inward, revealing a room as shimmering and bright. In the middle of the room a pale woman in a gold dress smiled at him. Her lips were two dewy petals, eyes like chips of blue glass, and her skin like cool, smooth marble. She sat in a chair upholstered in velveteen silver and she motioned him to come closer.

“Excuse me, miss,” Leander asked, “Do I know you?”
She smiled, showing her teeth this time. “Oh, Leander, Leander, Leander. Lion Man. You ask me that every time you come here.”

“I think I’d remember you,” he said, scratching his head, “Being as pretty as you are. And here, of all places! I’m sure I’d remember coming here. Where am I? Where is here? Why don’t I remember?”

She laughed – her laughter was a bubbling stream, rich and flowing. Her dark, shining hair fell before her right eye. “You’re where your worst nightmares meet your most wonderful dreams. I’m Lydia,” she said breathily. “You’re not meant to remember this place. That’s how it’s supposed to be. But might I congratulate you?”

Leander shifted, adjusting his jacket, and looked around the room. “Whatever for?”

“This is the farthest you’ve ever come to discovering my wonderful secret,” Lydia said, her voice a little teasing. She pushed her fingers against Leander’s shoulder. “Come sit by me, won’t you?”

He looked behind him, but there was no longer any door. There was no way out – no escape. His heart beat in his chest and his stomach felt warm, reassuring, yet as if its contents would spill from his mouth. This woman – Lydia – was sickeningly beautiful. She reminded him of a freshly bleached skeleton – clean of rotting flesh with deep, boring sockets: the inner structure of the body that held the human essence intact. Lydia was the revelation of nightmarish truth beneath the calm exterior. She was the veneer beginning to crack. He walked closer to her, closer to the silver chair. The sickness grew within him and each step was a lurch. He couldn’t help but laugh, and she stared at him with a beautiful seriousness.

“What is your secret, then?” Leander’s voice faltered, as if struggling to carry the weight of his fear.
“Sit with me, Leander, and I’ll show you.”
Her warm face was colder now, grayer, more menacing. He couldn’t see her right side; her dark hair – much like the glittering starry night – obscured it. His heart leapt, as if it was deceived or deprived of the wholeness of truth. As he took another step toward her, he heard a small crack. His face grew pale, drained of the color of labor under the hot sun. Lydia tilted her head and remnants of her skin chipped and fell from just below her right eye.
“What’s wrong?” she asked. “Are you frightened?”
Leander swallowed and sat in the silver chair across from her. His eyes focused, trying with all his might to decipher the meaning behind her changing face, her obstruction, the deception. His voice trembled. “What are you hiding?”
She giggled, placing her hand to her lips. She grazed his jaw with her fingers. “Lean in and I’ll show you.”
He held his breath, as if he were to dive thousands of feet into the mysterious ocean. His body was tense, as if he were to be pricked with hundreds of needles. His eyes forced themselves wide and wider still, trying to capture Lydia’s secrets the minute she let them go.
Her motions were slow, as if captured second by second – an abstract dream. She pulled her hair away from the right side of her face. All of this felt as if it were happening to someone else. Leander was distant, watching it all unfold through another man’s eyes. As her face came into view, his heart beat faster, with terror rising in his gut. Where her right eye should be was a black hole, boring deep into her face. It was a void, nothingness. The skin around it was cracking like a broken porcelain doll. It was peeling like lead paint. Leander’s heart beat even
faster now, a frantic metronome.

“Do you like it? Do you like what you see?” she asked, her voice eager, grabbing, almost greedy. “Would you like to see what I can do?”

She raised her right hand before her face, or what was left of it, and pushed her middle and index fingers deep within the socket. She reached far within her face, within the blackness, the nothingness, and her whole hand almost disappeared, sucked begrudgingly into the void. She laughed – almost a wince – as if it hurt her to reach deep, deep, deep inside herself, into tunneling darkness. As if this hole was an illness.

Leander’s body shook, fingers to toes. Each tremor was an earthquake destroying the grand architecture of his body. He tried to speak, but his voice felt lost, non-existent. It creaked like a door on rusty hinges.

“Lydia?”

She exhaled and withdrew her fingers from the cavernous depths of her face. She turned to him, more broken than she was before – at least on the inside. “Do you want to see me do it again?” she said, her voice breathy and excited like a child.

He didn’t know what to say. His body wanted to collapse within itself, stop existing, cease. Each mechanism in him wanted to die. But he could not look away when Lydia held a shiny, waxy, perfectly spherical eye between her bloody fingers. And she smiled...

“I’ve got all these nightmares hidden inside me, all this darkness. It’s ugly, isn’t it?” She winced. “God, it hurts.”

Leander nodded. His skin was clammy.

She opened her perfect mouth and put the eye inside. She tasted it. She swallowed, smiled, and said, “Maybe next time, you’ll learn something, kiddo.”

“I know,” he whispered. “I know now.”
Remake of Durer

In memoriam of my grandfather

Alicia Leedham
Wandering

Krystalina Padilla

It wanders through the darkness
With a thirst for blood,
Quenching its dry hunger
In the shadows of
The midnight moon,
Searching for a soul
In the soulless night.

It slithers under the sheets.
It’s empty presence
Clutches her tightly
With it’s brute fists
And chilling breath
In the soulless night.

It treads lightly underneath her bed
And hisses in the cold breeze,
Whispering its desires
In the soulless night.

It creaks in the closet and
Brushes in the branches
Outside her window—
Keeping her up
In the soulless night.

It ticks and tocks
With the hands in the clock,
Waving at her with it's
Ageless hands,
As she tries to sleep
In the soulless night.

She wakes.
She sleeps.
And wakes again
In the soulless night.

It cannot be understood
Nor explained,
Why she cannot sleep
In the soulless night.
Scenes of Hallows Eve

Katherine Shkreli

The purple sky
with gray misty clouds
covering the full moon
tries to light
the paths.

It watches the kids
who try to find
ghosts
in haunted places
On this night of
Hallows’ Eve.

The kids sit in the cemetery
as they inhale the fire into their lungs
and smoke gathers around them,
drinking their beer and
fooling around for warmth.

With a Ouija board,
they try to conjure up the spirits
Until they hear
a stick crack in the night
and they scurry.

The girls hide in the basement,
sitting in a circle,
lighting their candles,
reading from the red book,
trying to cast spells
on the ones
they desire.
Repeating the words
over
and over,
holding hands
till a candle blows out
and they
scream.

A man
with the palest face
and reddest eyes
I’ve ever seen slithers through
the crowded masquerade-themed ball,
hunting.
When he finds
his innocent victim
he whispers sweet-nothings into her ear
Until he kisses her neck,
bites gently
and blood drips down
his lips.

Walking through the small town
lit by the moon,
Little ones dressed as
vampires,
witches and
warlocks
run through the misty streets
feigning
for the candy-filled homes
as they jump frightfully from the pranksters who live for this night of Hallows’ Eve.
The Contortionist

Samantha Biegel

Sliding
cleverly through the cracks,
I fit like a puzzle piece
just as the oblivious and timorous
who leap too late
and become entangled
in my coils
exactly aligned with my insides.

A pair of eyes, two stained-glass marbles
await in the night
that is as cold
as my blood.
I sit in secrecy
poised for the strike
that initiates the slow suffocation
I crave, my jaw unhinged.

Rewards are guaranteed
as the shadows and I are one.
We unite at that hour of the night
and stand guard until dawn.
Do Not React
(Modeled after Jon Sands’ White Boy, after Angel Nafis
after Terrance Hayes)

Rai-ya Wilson

When they say your skin is too dark, do not listen.
When he rapes you every night in your sleep, do not wait three months to speak.
When they say you do not meet their expectations, do not try to please them.
When he pressures you to have sex, do not go against your beliefs.
When your father says you are not good enough, do not change.
When they say you should believe in God, do not react.
When they say your morals are wrong, do not change them.
When he rapes you every night in your sleep, do not wait three months to speak.
When she says it was your fault, do not believe her.
When they say you have the “wrong” body, do not wish for it to be right.
When you feel your world is crashing down, do not hesitate to pick up the pieces.
When your grandmother dies, do not shut people out.
When he rapes you every night in your sleep, do not wait three months to speak.
When your mother blames herself, do not let her think that way.
When society says you are a statistic, do not let that define you.
When your brother says he is leaving for the army, do not hold back your tears.
When your sister says you will change lives, do not ignore her.
When herapes you every night in your sleep, do not wait three months to speak.
When they say you should believe in God, do not react. Simply ask, “Where was your God when I needed him?”
Lipstick Stains

Emelie Ali

I don’t wear lipstick to attract
I wear lipstick because I’ll never get kissed
Because red stains are hard to miss
When I wear lipstick people don’t see my face
They see the symbol of taste
A symbol universally known
Worn by women who are grown

But I am a child
So I wear it with the incentive of being mild
Wearing it not for glee
I wear it just for me
Because I deserve to be seen
Trapped in this feigned serene

That is the hope I have made
There is the twenty dollars I have paid
To coax myself that with these stained lips
I am no longer transparent
Shame
Catherine Brady

It’s hard to forget sometimes that I shouldn’t go back. Especially when you constantly have to stare at it. It’s hard to let go of those feelings when it smiles at you, and makes funny jokes or wears flannel shirts. The way it grazes your waist as it walks by leaving your body frozen.

You can start to feel yourself begging for more. The smell that lingers behind engulfs your mind and causes you to become drunk in infatuation. You stand there with your eyes closed breathing it in, telling yourself it’s not worth it. You need to remember they are playing you, they know the game by heart.

They know what they are doing. You can see it when they look away. Deep in thought is when a person is the most beautiful. They are completely infused in their own world.

A world you wish you could be apart of. But they had no intention of inviting you to stay. That is where the shame comes from. The miscommunication. The misleading path.
If I would have known the intentions from the start it would have been easier or so I think. Then there is the humiliation of wanting someone when they are using you. You cannot believe you fell for it. You watched others fall but you swore you were smarter, quicker, and could see past the lies, his lies.

But were they lies? I need to stop, I can’t keep going back to that.

Because that’s where my trouble begins. I am ashamed.
Her

Stephanie Kunkel

Oversized men’s flannels hide your petite frame. Black, ripped tights cover your delicate legs. Your tinted, auburn hair falls loose to your shoulders. You are a vessel of containment, constantly trying to creep your way out; through the words of the Beatles and Edgar Allan Poe. You hear these distant whispers as a prayer I can never quite decipher and says the most bizarre things about democracy, humanity, and perspective through impressionism. You coat the world with romantic colored paints and shades of charcoal we can’t see. I remember your old room: plastered pink with tangerine trim, records encompassing an entire wall, distorted fragments of art works composed by you, me, or things you found in magazines. The numerous unfinished paintings you leave about, act as little reminders you were once here. Scattered charcoal smooth pencils, fine tipped pens, brushes with remnants of paint – the sole way you communicate with the world. I always smile when I see your half-freckled, Whoville nose jammed
into some piece – always examining the minds of others in your own quiet, little, way.
Self Portrait

Bianca Rosario Ramírez
Mallory looked around the coffee shop from behind her newspaper as she waited for her boyfriend to stop by during his lunch break. She fanned out the front page, checking her list of suspects once again. Four different coffee shop patrons were listed on her napkin, three others crossed out below. Her pen hovered over the remaining four names. Poking her head out over the top of the newspaper, she watched the man by the window stand up, throw a five dollar bill down and walk towards the door. She drew a line next to his name – shifty eyes. She eyed her second suspect, the old man doing the crossword three seats over from her. She crossed his name off her suspect list. He was holding a pen with difficulty and his hand shook when he picked up his mug. She couldn’t fathom him holding a murder weapon steady.

“What are you doing?” Luke asked, coming into the café. He sat down in the seat next to her. “Why do you have all those names—”

“Be quiet!” She waved a hand at him, but her cover was blown. Her three remaining suspects all looked her way. She turned to her boyfriend, folding her newspaper back to its original size. “I was,” she emphasized, “trying to find the murderer. Do you have to be so loud?”

“I doubt that a murderer would be sitting in a coffee shop right across from the police station. There’s no time to enjoy an espresso when there’s people to kill.”

“If I was the serial killer, I would try to blend in.
So sitting in the coffee shop across from the police station is exactly what I would do. People don’t expect the murderer to enjoy coffee, so he can hide right in front of them.”

“I don’t think we’re dealing with a serial killer, I told you that. People are going to get worried if you keep saying that.”

“It has to be a serial killer. Three girls killed in eight months? There’s a connection there.” She snuck a glance at her third suspect, a middle-aged man who was reading a book on crime scenes. “See, suspicious behavior. Why would he be reading ‘crime scenes for dummies’ if he wasn’t guilty?”

Her boyfriend took a sip from his newly refilled coffee mug. “If I had to guess, I would say it’s because just two days ago, a woman was murdered only thirty minutes away from here. He’s probably doing research, or figuring out how to stay safe. I told you to do the same thing yesterday but instead you’re spying on townies and trying to figure out who murdered his neighbor. This isn’t one of your shows; you could get in real trouble.”

She looked back down at the front page, covered in details about the murder two nights ago. The young woman had lived alone, and had been stabbed in the chest somewhere around 2:30 in the morning. Mallory’s boyfriend had even given an official statement because he was the detective working on the crime scene. “Can’t you tell me anything interesting? Or do I have to call Samantha?”

“I’m not legally allowed to tell you anything. Stop asking. Read the newspaper. And don’t even think of calling Samantha; she just got promoted. Don’t get her in trouble because you’re trying to be the next Criminal Minds character.”

She dismissed his comment. “I want to know
what’s happening.”

“If I could tell you, I would, you know that. We’re not allowed to say anything about the case. It could be dangerous. You’re already looking for suspects in the coffee shop. Telling you anything else would have you chasing people down the street yelling ‘murderer’ at them. I don’t want you to go looking.”

“Hmm, tempting,” she teased and laughed when he frowned. “I promise I won’t go looking for murderers. I just wish we knew more, so this guy could be locked up.”

“I know, and I’m working on it. How about tonight I tell you what I know about crimes in general, and we’ll make a list of suspicious serial killer behaviors.”

“You just admitted it’s a serial killer.” She patted him on the arm when he froze. “Just go back to work. I’ll be fine.”

After he left, she sorted through all the files she had made on the case and compiled a list. She had some of Luke’s case information, stolen from his office the last time she visited him. She spread out the papers in front of her so that she could look through them with ease. She jotted down the similarities between the cases, mainly that all three women were all under twenty-five and lived close to each other. A second list listed all the traits the police believed the killer to have. Luke’s notes said they suspected it was a man, somewhere between thirty and forty. Mallory wouldn’t rule out a woman though; she knew women could be even more dangerous than men. Samantha could certainly be more dangerous than Luke when she was mad. But other than similar victims and a small killer profile she didn’t have anything to work with. She just had what she read in books and saw during one of her many Law and Order: SVU marathons.
Her evidence was lacking, but she wouldn’t stop now that she had real lists. And according to her boyfriend, if anyone showed an unusual amount of interest in the case, they could be classified as a suspect.

Mallory looked around the café once more. The man reading the crime scene book was gone; she would have to watch him more closely tomorrow. Everyone else in the café was reading the same newspaper she had spread across the counter. Everyone in town was going to be interested in this case until it died down. “That doesn’t help,” she murmured as she crossed out that behavior on her list.

The café door opened as a new customer walked in, bringing a gust of wind with him. Mallory tugged her coat closer to her body and looked over at the guest. She realized she had never seen him before. He met her gaze as he waited for his large coffee. She smiled over at him but his face remained impassive.

“Do you know who that is?” she asked the barista when he had left with his coffee.

“His name’s Nicholas, he moved here a couple weeks ago. He comes in everyday for a coffee and leaves. He mostly keeps to himself.” She poured Mallory another cup.

“He moved to town after a murder?”

“No sweetie, he moved here a week before it happened. It’s an unfortunate bit of luck if you ask me. He probably thought he would be safe in a little town like this and a girl gets murdered after the contract is signed.”

“I would just leave again. Why would he stay?”

The barista shook her head. “I wouldn’t know. Tell your boyfriend I wish him good luck on the case.”

Mallory left the café, not sure if she should depend on the barista, one of her main suspects, for information.
A week later Mallory hadn’t made any progress in finding the serial killer. She eliminated half of her neighbors from her suspect list after consulting her stolen information. She spread her map of the town out on the kitchen table and put an X where the last girl had been murdered, or at least where she thought she had been murdered. She could never be sure when looking at a map. The second victim’s house was on a street that branched off one of the major highways she was looking at. She drew another X on the second victim’s home. The first house was only a few inches away from the second. The two crime scenes were only an hour away from each other. She drew the third X over the first victim’s home. The first victim had lived the furthest away, very far on the left side of the map. However, it wasn’t the first X that scared her. It was the third one. The distance between her town and each crime scene decreased with every X.

She capped her pen before hanging the map up in the living room. It looked a little messy, red X’s overlapping older black ones. Blue sharpie crossed over her misplaced X’s and uneven purple lines connected all the houses.

She ran through her list of suspects. There were a few on her list but only three really stood out. The coffee barista lived within a reasonable distance of all three places. She had been in a very public feud with the third victim for a year before the murder. The barista had started dating the woman’s ex and even though the relationship was short lived, the feud lived on. A year long feud over a four month relationship was enough to make anyone angry. And the barista was known to have a sharp temper that needed only a little bit of prodding to expose. But could a fight between two bitter girls lead to a killing spree?
The town carpenter that everyone used but feared for his high prices lived two doors down from the first crime scene and everyone knew he had been working on a project for the house where the first victim had been murdered. The woman had complained about the cost of her new kitchen two days before her picture showed up in the newspaper as the next victim. She drew exclamation points next to his name. He seemed like a logical choice, and every book she ever read warned against sketchy construction workers.

After a short deliberation, she added the new guy, Nicholas to her list of suspects. She didn’t know much about him, but based on what the barista said and what she had noticed in the short time, he would be the perfect third suspect. Although maybe the barista was less than trustworthy. But Nicholas was still an option. Moving into the town right after a murder and then another one followed? Definitely suspicious. She made a note to ask Sam about it later.

“Anyone home?” her boyfriend asked and the front door clicked.

She ripped down the map from the wall and crumpled it in her hands. She looked around the small living room, trying to figure out where she could hide the map. He always looked behind the couch; he knew she liked to hide her things there. He had found failed research papers from college and denied job applications behind there; he would most likely look there again. There was a house plant in the corner that neither of them watered and she crumpled the map further before sticking it under the plant. She used her foot to brush the misplaced dirt under the rug. If Luke noticed she would just tell him it was raining when she got home. He would complain about the weather before handing
her a broom and grumbling his way to the bedroom. For now she was safe, no trace of what she was doing in sight. Luke was already aggravated over her interest in the case; he didn’t need to know she was drawing maps to pinpoint suspects.

“You’re back early.”

“It’s been a slow day. Is that a murder mystery book?” He pointed towards the book on the table next to her.

“How is it a slow day with a murderer on the loose?” she ignored his question, closing the book. “People are worried to leave their houses, to walk their dogs, and you’re coming home early? I feel like the police aren’t even trying to solve this case.”

“I spent all day thinking about this case, can we talk about something else? You’re too invested in this anyway. What did you do all day?”

“Nothing.” She brushed more dirt under the rug before sitting down.

Luke sat down next to her. “I know it’s scary having to deal with this. But we’re trying our best to find the person responsible for these murders. I want you to stop worrying about this, okay?”

“I’m just scared. It’s been over a month since the last murder, what if someone I know is next? I hate having to look over my shoulder when I walk here at night.”

“I’m not going to let anyone hurt you. That’s a promise. I know you want to play detective on this but it’s too dangerous. This guy isn’t just some average bank robber, he’s killed people. I don’t have a problem with you making a list of suspects, but I don’t want you doing anything that could put you in danger.”

“I promise.”
Two weeks later and Mallory had narrowed down her search to the barista, the carpenter and the new guy. All her other suspects had slowly been ruled out after a discussion with Sam. Now she was down to just her main three. She sat in the coffee shop, watching Nicholas read the morning’s newspaper. He looked over his shoulder every five minutes as if he knew she was watching him. She made sure to look away when he looked in her direction. She walked up to the counter, passing him slowly to get a good look. He didn’t look up from his reading and she didn’t see any sketchy scratch marks.

She took her seat once again, trying to figure out if his behavior really was suspicious. Everyone in town had been acting the same way, especially after the third murder. Maybe her boyfriend had been right and she needed to back off. She didn’t want to become the fourth girl. She had seen that happen in quite a few movies.

“Hey Mallory! Still playing Law and Order?” Samantha, Mallory’s best friend, sat down across from her. “Luke’s been telling me what you’ve been doing.”

“And? Did he send you here to tell me I’m being ridiculous?”

“Of course, it’s Luke.” Sam adjusted the badge on her coat. “But I’m not gonna lecture you. Do I think you’re dumb for trying to track a murderer? Yes. But if you want to act out your fantasy of being Olivia Benson then why should I try and stop you? I wanna be your Elliot Stabler.” She stopped and looked around. “Although this isn’t really an SVU case if you think about it. It’s more like CSI. But that show totally dived once Grissom left.”

Mallory sighed. “I hate to interrupt your speech about how Grissom inspired you to join the Police Department but did you have anything to say or do you
just want to rant? My number one suspect is sitting over there drinking coffee and looking suspicious. What do you think?”

Samantha looked over to where Mallory’s head was tilted.

“The new guy? Oh come on, it’s never the most suspicious person! I thought you were better than that.”

“Obviously I’m not. I think he’s hiding something.”

“Then let’s go ask! Maybe he’s got a crazy ex-wife he’s hiding from so she doesn’t hand him their neglected child and then runs off without offering to pay child support. People do that all the time.”

“We can’t just go over there! Luke would have a heart attack. And what if us going over there makes us his next victims? I’m only 24. I’ve only been on one roller coaster, and I haven’t even gone to Spain and I promised my grandmother—”

Samantha was already out of her seat and grabbing Mallory’s hand. “Now’s not the time to wimp out. You’ve been making lists for weeks, let’s do something about it.”

They were almost to his booth when he stood up and walked out. Samantha turned to her friend. “I’ll make you a deal. I’ll give you a real ‘tracking a person of interest’ experience and then when we find out he’s innocent you go back to your apartment, give me all the crap you’ve been working on and then you just start planning your trip to Spain okay? Drop the case.”

Mallory had never seen her friend look so serious. Except when she stood next to Luke during formal police addresses. She nodded her head. “Fine. I’ll drop it if it’s that important to you.”

Samantha smiled and then dragged her out of the
coffee shop. Nicholas was barely visible in front of them, just a small smudge in the surrounding landscape. “You have to be quiet and try to blend in.”

“I know. I watched all thirteen seasons—”

“Shush! Let’s go!”

They trailed behind him quietly, making sure they didn’t get too close even when he stopped to look around or tie his shoelace.

“Are you kidding? His shoe wasn’t even untied! This is ridiculous.” Mallory huffed.

They hid behind a tree when he looked behind him. “You’ve got to make your voice lower. How is your talking voice always at a yelling volume?”

Mallory rolled her eyes and looked around the tree. “He’s walking again. We’re good to go.”

“I’m the cop on this mission. Calm down Nancy Drew.”

Mallory turned back toward Nicholas. He turned into one of the housing developments the city had just finished building. Mallory almost followed him into the street but Samantha tugged her back.

“This is as far as we go.”

“What? The trail will go cold! We have to scope out the house!”

Samantha pulled her back further. Once they were a block away from the developments Samantha tugged Mallory until they were facing each other. “He’s not a suspect. He was ruled out three weeks ago. His older sister was one of the victims, that’s why he’s here. He’s packing up all her stuff and then he’s going to take it back to New York to their parents. People think he’s moved in but he’s really come to move his sister out. Or at least her stuff. Will you leave him alone now? And leave the detective stuff to your boyfriend? Stop listening
to the barista and listen to the news. He’s been checked out, he’s good. Now let’s go and get all your shit from your apartment. And you better have my guacamole chips because I’m starving.”

They walked back to Mallory’s apartment slowly, Samantha texting her boss and Mallory thinking back on her lists. She was definitely not a detective.

Mallory turned the key on her door when they arrived and Samantha went right to the couch and leaned over the back, checking behind it.

“What the hell?”

“I’ve known you for 10 years. I know your hiding places. The big things are always behind the couch, the pregnancy tests are always locked in your jewelry box and the Costco size twizzlers are tucked behind the—”

“Okay, thank you for knowing way too much. You creep. Besides, it’s not behind there. I found a better place.”

Sam looked around for a minute. Then she walked over to the plant and pulled the map out from underneath the purple pot.

“How the hell did you know it was there?”

“It’s my job. Oh my god seriously? X marks the spot? That’s how you were doing this?” Samantha had unrolled Mallory’s map and was looking it over. “This isn’t too bad. But you’ve got some of the addresses in the wrong place. No wonder you failed geography in college.” She folded it back up and then took more notes from behind the couch. And the books from the coffee table. “Luke let you keep these around the house?”

“He said reading couldn’t get me in trouble.” Samantha looked through all of Mallory’s stuff and then laughed. “You’re pretty good at putting things together. Although your geography skills are shit and your sus-
pects are not even feasible. The barista? Really? The only thing killer about her is her coffee.” She paused. “Okay I’m sorry that was horrible and I regret that joke already. But you’re more organized than half the guys on the team, your boyfriend included.” She put all of Mallory’s stuff into her backpack and then kicked it to the side.

“So now that you’ve gone on your mission and your suspect is innocent, no more spy work for you okay? You need to be safe and I can’t help you if you keep prancing after strange men with shifty eyes. The case is almost wrapped up anyway and you just need to lay low and watch CSI rather than act it out okay? Otherwise Luke is going to make me your babysitter and I have better things to do with my life than watch you.”

“Will you still be my Elliot Stabler?”

“Duh! Someone has to protect you from Ice-T and his season 8 hairstyle.”

And Mallory closed the one crime book Sam had left her, making sure that her bookmark was still in the same spot.
Chelsea

Alexandra Espinal
Harlem’s Hughes
Karin Manson-Mayhams

You was one of the greatest
In a time where the ghetto paid attention
When your words, made you famous

Remember, the “Y” by Lenox Ave. is right down the street
The opposite way, I know a guy
You know that guy that holds the heat

Still, you fired with your tongue through Harlem and made it breathe
And your voice rung like vibrations in hearts of dehumanized thugs
But caged animals are so hard to keep

Between the gun shots and the trains on the east, even with no old jazz joints
It’s hard to find silence, to find peace

Everyone can see
but no one speaks
About Harlem not being what it used to be

So on your grave, trust and believe
You were one of the greatest
A last in a dying breed
Eyes squeezed shut, she spun in the slipping summer night because her daddy told her that’s how wishes come true. He said there’s a star up there looking, scouring the ground for a spinner. And when finally, the wisher is spotted, the star leaps down closer, so fast you could miss it, and shines with the glow of a wishcometrue magic.

Loose, Icandoitmyself braids dangled down her back as she twirled until her knees wobbled and she plopped! on the grass, indigo in the light of the night. There came an instant when the sky was still in motion around the rosy face squinting at a kajillion constellations. “Honey, it’s late, come inside” but she stayed, intent to find the magic, oneminutemom magic, so she laid flat to pretend her whole universe was space. Most every night she spent this way, eyes to skies, searching for the shooting star that also searched for her. When at last she found it, her sleepy eyes drooped shut and she dozed till she felt the familiar arms of her brave mother, lifting her up to rest on her hip. ButI'mnottiredmom she always mumbled into the soft collarbone. Her mother
always complied, “Just resting your eyes,”
and the little girl’s braids unraveled
in the embrace. And so she drifted, dreaming
of her father, the wish she always wished
on the stars that danced her way.
The Pricks of Pooh’s Honey

Stephanie Kunkel

One.
I step on the nest.
The world begins to transform into a distortion
of brightly-colored neurons and elaborate
structures composed of heightened emotional respons-
es...
I can’t stay in the corner of the forest waiting for others to come save me.

Two.
The striped yellow and black miniature taxi cars
playfully tickle my skin; before I start bleeding
from their piercing pricks. Speckles of red tingle my skin
and I sway
and sway and sway as I hear the hum of a honey-colored bear.

Three.
My lips go numb. The translucent filmy-layer of honey compromises
my vision but its smell – an intoxicating call of nature – drifts
me to faint into a layer of forest-green and chocolate brown leaves,
deep into the Hundred Acre Woods.

Four.
I see a black river; hinted with speckles of colors: reds,
yellows, blues,
 purples, and whites you can’t see when you are awake.
Trapped.
Alone. My only company my half-sedated mind and sticky
rep lips that can’t sing. And I only think:
I am so willy, nilly, silly...
Five.
My eyelids strain to open – even if just ajar – to see the tangible
objects my fingertips crave to grasp. But all that’s here is haphazardly
pasted – astray – explosive – fragments of the color spectrum.
Trapped in the never ending river, it knows there is no hurry –
it knows I will wake up some day – but it still tries to eat me.
Six.
“What’s beyond the river, deep in the Hundred Acre Woods?” whispers Piglet.
“My toes won’t wiggle, Deep in the Hundred Acre Woods,” giggles Tiger.

My eyes don’t open...
My Gal

Alexandra Risko

She’s unique,
my gal,
not everyone can handle her.
My gal is sweet.
My gal is awkward
and wonderful.

She’s harsh
and gentle,
with a sweet caress
and bright laugh.
She consumes me
and
keeps me as her own.

My gal is green satin
curdling me raw;
she makes me feel
alive and on fire,
she can make me cry or laugh.

My gal takes me places
I’ve never been before,
and sometimes we go on wild rides
where I always swear
we’ll get caught,
for my gal is daring
and yet..
she’s sweet and awkward
and wonderful.
My gal is that smokey caress
consuming my every thought
and taking over my body.

She is unique, my gal,
not everyone can handle her...

But, she’s my gal;
and I’ve got a handle on her pretty good.
It’s almost noon on this Sunday morning. The girls behind the counter bustle back and forth, giving and taking orders as they come. The line that once was wrapped around the tight, sharp corners of the bagel shop is just dying down. The last of the typical well-dressed church crowd throw their trash away and hustle out the door.

Three older ladies approach the front of the line; they all seem to be in their mid to late sixties. One wears a red flowered shirt that is completely unbuttoned, revealing a crisp white shirt almost matching the color of her hair. She pairs this with long khaki pants and white tennis shoes peeking out beneath the cuffs, her thin fragile back hunched over as she smiles aimlessly. Her friend next to her is a plump strawberry blonde with thin metal-framed glasses. Her stomach guts out in the center of her body, covered by a light pink and grey striped shirt. Her khakis hit just in the middle of her calf, revealing her chunky New Balance sneakers and bunched up tube socks. She holds her tan leather bag tightly beneath her chubby arm. Almost invisible behind the others, the last spiky haired friend stands wearing a denim on denim ensemble, the jacket and the jeans in the same shade of blue. Her gold necklace lays upon the crease of her white crew neck shirt and her tiny head peeks around her friends, trying to be a part of their conversation. They stand in the same position, one next to the other, every Sunday impatiently awaiting their usual orders. The
plump woman stares in the direction of any of the five passing girls as they pace behind the long marble counters juggling bagels and coffee in each hand. She huffs and puffs each time one passes without recognizing her presence. The young girls avoid eye contact as they continue to work on their current order, taking their time as they dread these ladies. A sixteen year old blonde looks towards a brunette who seems to be slightly older with wide eyes and a slight jolt of her head relays that it’s her turn, since she had to deal with them last week. The brunette pleads with the blonde as she shakes her head back in the same motion swishing the high pony tail on the top of her head. The brunette puts up a good fight, but is the obvious loser as she drags her feet to the counter.

With a big smile on her face she says, “Hi ladies. What can I get for you guys?” The plump one snarls demandingly, almost to the point of yelling while pointing to her friend in front of her.

“She has already been helped. It’s my turn; no one has helped me yet.”

The brunette holds her breath in and slaps her smile in place, knowing that she will really have to focus to keep it there. “Well then what can I get for you?” she asks, grabbing a small white paper the size of an index card and a black pen.

The older lady presses her bulky tan purse up against the counter and leans in towards the young girl. With a diminishing Long Island accent, she says, very slowly, emphasizing each word, “I want a small tea, not decaffeinated.” Then she trails off, complaining to the girl she got decaf last week.

“I would also like a sesame bagel, not toasted with a side of maple walnut cream cheese, but make sure it is on the side.”

“Okay I got it,” the young girl says with a half
smile fighting the urge not to roll her eyes. “Just let me get your tea and you can sit down.” The plump woman follows the girl with her eyes and then moves down the counter to get a closer look as the young girl reaches for the hot water to fill the cup.

“Excuse me! I don’t do decaffeinated” the older lady screams. The young girl, with a little attitude emerging, hands the tea across to the women on the other side and says, “I know, its not.” She snatches the tea and slowly makes her way to her seat demanding her other two friends follow. They sit in the red booth by the door. The spiky haired one sits alone as the other two squish together on the other side. They all engage in a conversation, but the plump one does not seem completely in tune, her eyes still glued to the brunette preparing her sesame bagel with a side of maple walnut cream cheese.

Her head moves in circles, pivoting around the obstacles that stand in between her and the brunette. She continues to talk but her face grows impatient. The bagel comes in a matter of seconds. She moves the stack of napkins she accumulated from the service table to the side. She slightly looks up at the young girl with an annoyed look on her face. She then insincerely says, “Thanks, but I said I wanted it toasted.”
Metamorphosis

Emily Behnke

Listen:
We are looking up at
two different skies
at two different sunsets,
at the same time.
We are in different places.

You’ve found yourself in
Vermont where the frost is
rabid and biting and I’ve
found myself staring into
another painting.

Correggio’s depiction of
Jupiter and Io does not
resemble pain or regret.
Jupiter’s infidelity
is disguised in a gray smog.
It doesn’t cover up his
past.

Nothing can, because it is
his mistakes that speak for
something greater than the
picture—they spill into Io’s
open arms and stain her
porcelain skin.
He is taking over:
a body unseen, disappearing
and unforgiving. Seductive,
his gaze
remains on her eyes,
his lips
lie just upon her cheek.

And if he were to plant the
ghost of a kiss upon her flushed,
open mouth
he would not be thinking
of the affliction of the distance
between them—the reality
that they are separate entities

connecting in only their need
for each other. No, in this
painting they are brought
together as one. The warmth
of a bright sheet draped
around Io
and the blue memory of daylight
beyond Jupiter's figure heats
their hearts and facilitates the
motions of love.

The smoke that shades the
core of his being does not speak
a word of the past, only the
present.

Only of us, in our
lost devotion to one another.
Our affliction of distance.

Our hearts and arms, accepting
the notion of the unknown,
becoming Jupiter’s
all-encompassing smog,
casting our skepticism into
the ether of our forgotten regrets.
Untitled

Jordnnel Sainville
An excerpt of
The Art of Figuring Out Life
Bianca Reyes

While walking to my job interview, I began to feel calmer and less nervous. I thought to myself, “I can do this!” while walking into the building and into the elevator, which carried me all the way to the 42nd floor. Once I walked into the JustFab office, however, all of my confidence flew out the window.

I stepped out of the elevator and entered a world of skinny bitches that looked like Barbies and guys wearing extremely tight pants, strutting their stuff, as if they were walking the runway. To my left, I observed a group of women gossiping about another staff member that was sitting in the cafeteria: “Oh my gosh! That has so many carbs!” Rule #1 at JustFab: No eating in public. To the right, I saw a skeleton in a dress having her picture taken. An audience of ladies stared in awe. “She’s so skinny,” they said, admiring the model. In my opinion, the model looked frightening.

In the middle of the chaos, a secretary stood out from the crowd: she was the only one with a smile on her face. I walked over to her desk and kindly asked, “Hi, do you know where Lisa’s office is? My name is Linda Bertolli. I’m here for a job interview.”

“I’m Lisa.” The smile came right off her face.

“Oh well, it’s very nice to meet you.” I greeted the four foot tall woman that was sitting behind the desk.

“This way,” she replied.
I walked into an office that was the size of a small house. An older woman with long blonde hair sat in a large rolling office chair that might as well have been a couch. The chair was turned facing the large glass window that displayed a beautiful view of Times Square. I sat down in a retro looking office chair and crossed my legs so that I could fit half of my ass on the chair.

“Very impressive resume Mrs.—” The woman paused and turned around.

“Bertolli,” I said, finishing her statement. “Like the spaghetti?” The woman asked with a snicker. She was still glancing down at the piece of paper. Her glasses were barely hanging off the tip of her nose.

“Yes. My husband is from Italy,” I explained. “Mhmm.” I could already tell that this was a woman of few words.

“Well, I don’t have many questions. Your resume says it all.” The woman looked up from the papers in her hands. “I could waste time asking you pointless questions about yourself, your work experience, and inspirations, but to be quite honest, I don’t really care.”

I said nothing.

“Well, you’ve got the job,” the woman informed me.

“Thank you so much!” I was so overjoyed. “My name is Nora. Welcome to JustFab.”

The first couple of weeks at my job made me want to go back to my old job. The work atmosphere was exciting, but it was almost impossible to keep up with the social responsibilities. I quickly went from being Nora’s secretary to being her personal assistant. She even asked me to take her kids to the Museum of Modern Art on Friday. Was I a nanny now too? And apparently it was my job to take her kids trick-or-treating for Halloween. It’s
pretty sad when your own parents won’t take you trick-or-treating. Should I open presents with them on Christmas too? Aside from everything, I enjoyed spending time with Nora’s kids. Cora, Nora’s three-year-old daughter, is the cutest, smartest little girl you will ever meet. Nora’s twin boys, Michael and Matthew, are way too smart for eight-year-olds. Miranda, Nora’s fifteen-year-old daughter was very quiet and liked to be by herself. She seems to put up a wall all of the time. All of Nora’s kids were very polite and educated; it’s a shame that they’re parents don’t seem to appreciate it.

When I took them to the art museum Michael and Matthew told me about an upcoming science fair at their school. Last year they won second place on a robot that they built together. They also told me that they wished their parents could have come, but they were away on business trips.

“I’m sure mom and dad will come this year,” I said. “Your mom is free almost every weekend in November.”

“Don’t be so sure of that,” Michael said.

“Well, I’ll come,” I declared.

“Why?” The kids all asked in harmony.

“Because I want to,” I explained.

The next day I requested a day off of work. Of course, Nora asked me why. “Well, Michael and Matthew told me about the science fair at school.” I paused, wondering what she would say about the idea. “And I told them that I would go.” I waited for a response.

“Well, I don’t see why not. I suppose someone should go and see their second place projects this year.”

“I’m sure the boys worked very hard on that ‘second place’ science fair project. Not many kids their age can build a robot without any help from an adult,” I argued in the twins’ defense.
“Second place is not first place. People who settle for second best will never get anywhere in life. I will not teach my kids to settle for anything less than the best,” Nora said, standing up from her chair.

I slowly and quietly walked out of the office and realized people were staring. Beep. It was a text from Nora. Don’t make me look bad. I didn’t reply. I just gazed up at her, sitting in her office, while I sat at my desk. I wondered what was going on in that blonde-haired head of hers. Rule #2 at JustFab: Never correct Nora, even when she is actually wrong.

The day of the science fair finally came along and the twins were more than ready to present their science project. When I arrived at the kids’ house to pick them up I found that they were alone.

“Where’s your mother?” I asked.

“Mommy said she needed some ‘me’ time,” the twins replied.

“She left you home alone?”

“We’re not alone. Maria’s here,” Cora said.

“Who’s Maria?” I asked, feeling confused.

“Maria’s the maid,” Miranda said.

I shook my head. “Ok. Let’s just go before we’re late for your science fair.”

I looked down at Cora, who was holding a car key.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“Mommy said you should drive us there because it’s too cold to walk. And she doesn’t want us taking any public transportation because it’s unsafe,” the girl replied.

When we arrived at the science fair I could tell Matthew was nervous. “Are you alright Matthew?” I asked.
“What if I come in second place again?”
“That’s pretty close to first place, isn’t it?” I tried to reason with him.
“Mommy says second place people never get anywhere in life.”
“That’s not true. The only thing that matters in life is that you try your best,” I explained to Matthew while Michael listened in on our conversation.

The twins presented their project, a volcano that stood five feet tall and looked very realistic. The boys pressed a red button on a small remote, which led to a big explosion of red lava from the volcano. Hands began clapping before another explosion occurred from the volcano and there was confetti everywhere. When the judges announced the winner Michael and Matthew came in first place.

On our way home, I announced that I wanted to take the kids out to celebrate. The kids cheered in the back seat. Miranda, sitting in the front seat, made me wonder. She didn’t show any emotion, just like Nora.

When we walked into Good Eats, the waiter sat us down at the corner booth. The kids were excited looking at the menu, deciding what they were going to order. I was happy they were having a good time. It made me wonder if Nora ever went out or spent time with them. When I returned the kids home they immediately started calling out for Nora. “Mom! Mom! We won First Place!” The kids were struck with silence when they realized she wasn’t even home. The look of disappointment of their faces made me feel empty as well.

“You won First Place. Mommy’s going to be so proud of you. For now, go take showers and get into your pajamas. You have Maria here if you need anything. I have to go now, but I’m sure we’ll see each other again
very soon,” I said.

I walked out feeling a little sad because the kids were so disappointed in their mother. As I made my way home, I wondered what kind of people these four lonely children would grow up to be.
I seldom spoke of her before her passing. I seldom speak of her now. True love resides in a love of one’s faults, one’s mistakes, one’s definitions.

Her mistakes we the long nights where she was no longer a Christian woman, a painter, my mother. Her persona, hazed by night-time, roaming the cold, dark road, tainted with the temptations that only come out at night.

Searching for herself and finding nothing.

The long nights blending into days.

Those long nights she lost apart of her being. And those long nights would cost her a clean day. And would cost her love. That’s not all I remember, but is the definition I would cling to, as she held my baby.

As she stumbled in my house Where my wife slept. The house
Where my children slept.
Her faults remain tethered in my mind.

She was a grandmother who, at her old age, would crawl on the floor and create another one of her many worlds. Where she would play tea party at the palace. Barbie at the beach. With Barney and his friends. She was never that mother to me.

Her spirit lingers in the worn, wooden floorboards of my home. In the hearts of my children playing tea. In my mind forever. In my sister’ dreams. She was never that mother to me.
In This Moment

Karin Manson-Mayhams

with the comfort from a distant flame on our face
prickly greens beneath
me, you, and nature
a thin spread cloth beneath

in your eyes
a bright reflection “King of the Sky”
it reigns
for this moment, we await

birds can flee to their abode in the trees
a sound of celebration amongst the leaves
above us the pink, purple, and dark blues approach
leaving only a chill through us

we cling, intertwined
as the yellow and orange fades
yes, we must wait

just a lesser warmth, you whisper
a grey and white egg
hanging amongst littler signals
as high pitched crickets play and fiddle
in this moment, we wait
Black Widow

Inspired by the film “Mississippi Burning”
From the point of view of an African American in 1964

Imani S. Williams

Something would happen.
Anything could happen.
Everything did happen
In Mississippi 1964.
The Ku Klux Klan hanging men
With midnight skin,
Having no remorse.

Deep in the night.
A black Mississippian
Is beaten for the color of his skin,
Trying to hang on, this may be God’s test.
Living in fear a routine.
Freedom and death mean the same thing.
Tears flow from a colored eye
Feeding the white man’s pride.
A black widow looks at the stars in the sky
Naming each one after every son who has died.
She cries and cries.
But no one comes and sits by her side.
No one to tell her everything’s alright.
Mississippi burning before her eyes.

Clenching her dress, shaking violently.
Screaming for her family
Flashbacks of her husband
Hanging from a tree.
The wrath of this woman
A dangerous black widow.

A crazy white crowd,
Makes an innocent little boy
A motherless child.
White men satisfied
How can they sleep at night?
Did anything inhumane.
And after?
Had the nerve to pray in Jesus’s name.
Children burying their parents six feet under.
At the tender age of 12 or younger.

The only hope they had?
Was for a white man to feel guilty
For the rest of his life,
Living
With the blood of a “nigger” on his sleeve.
Hope, that hell would never freeze over
And the men who murdered them
Would burn
Like Mississippi.
Cross Paths

Destiny Wagner

I hate his eyes, I hate his face
I hate his lips, I hate my taste

I hate his hands, I hate his sin
I hate his attitude, I hate my choice of men

I hate his smile, I hate teeth
I hate his hair, I hate his mischief

I hate his games, I hate his lies
I hate his intentions and he loves my cries

He loves my tears, he loves my pain
He loves my weakness, it keeps him sane

He loves my sorrow, he knows I’m naive
He loves using me, he knows I won’t leave

He loves when I’m wrong, he adores my sin
He loves knowing that I will never stop loving him
Reincarnation

Nendirmwa Parradang

The first real life memory I have of my mother is when she stepped out of a renowned university, in a red suit whose exaggerated shoulders gave her power. She was clutching a Master’s degree and I was entranced. I remember thinking that she was the type of woman I wanted to be. I did not want to like her or be just like her, I wanted to be her.

The second is surreal to me. We were all in our tiny Daewoo on our way to church, five children in the backseat. We drove on the road that continually seeps into my thoughts, even fifteen years later. My mother would occasionally turn to look at us and I felt special; what had I done to deserve such beauty to love me? She turned back once more to say “Nendir, wind up those windows!” But I couldn’t do that, not today. Today she had let me wear her gold bracelets on my chubby child arms. I put my hand out the window constantly watching them glisten, thinking one day, and they would be mine. I would marry a man who was as kind as my father and who would give me pure gold bracelets even though he couldn’t afford them.

Lost in my bracelets, I did not notice the wind changing and I saw it happen. They fell off my arm, skittering on the road behind us. “Dave! Tsaya da mota! Tsaya da mota!” She ran into the street, like a crazed
woman looking for the currency of their love. Cars passed by staring at her, but she didn’t care. We never found them.

She was completely silent on the way to church, but I knew she wanted to cry the way I was crying. When we got to church, she smiled and prayed and the other women watched jealous of her class. She had the type of class that needed no cash, not even gold.

My teenage years came and I loved and resented her at the same time. I grew further away from her. We were different people; she was the virginal creature who had no boyfriend until she met my father. I was the girl who felt sullied by having 2 boyfriends in 2 years; kissing them in backstreets, giving them hand jobs under study hall tables. There was a chasm between us. I knew she felt it, she would say, “Don’t fall in love too early.” I still loved her, still told her of friends who’d broken my trust but never of the boys. I became “educated,” rolling my eyes at her thoughts, at her God, at her simple power suits.

She told us she was pregnant again. It was a surprise baby. She never looked so beautiful. My father held her hand smiling, hiding his sadness that he would be in Thailand for months on end. He had to take more courses to get us out of this flat. We understood. He called me and said, “You really have to help your mother out more, she’s sick and pregnant and I know it’s hard for her, you don’t know how strong she is.” He was right: her daily routine consisted of taking us to school, going to work and vomiting. She had the baby and we named her Seyilnen, which means, “We thank God”. I looked at her
for the first time and loved her in a way that made it impossible not to love the woman who made her. It took me to the first day I walked into my grandma’s village house saw a picture on the wall and said “Kaka, is that me?”

“Haba Nendir, that’s your mummy nau.”

I do not go around trying to find myself. I’ve cheated the desultory youth. I am my mothers’ daughter; I grew up into the woman, I adored, resented and now am happy to be. We are a single entity, the mother and the daughter, who grow together and look back on the mistakes, glad it all happened the way it did. Tagwaye, twins.
Untitled

Austin LaPointe
Renaissance Fair

Katherine Shkreli

The trumpet is blown and all who hear
Wait to see the Queen pass near.
The parade of Knights, Pirates and more
Come through dancing to the beat of the drums.

The purple ribbons tied in the flowered crowns
Wave through the wind on this perfect sunny day.
Pirates who are dressed in black tights are yelling,
“Make way for her Majesty!”

The Knights who fight on horses
Leading the parade.
Some wave and throw roses
Others smile and show off their mighty swords.

I see one in the distance.
Brown long hair with the bluest eyes.
His armor glistening from the sun
As he walks through the crowd.

The Knight comes to me, takes my hand
And with his soft, smiling lips
Bends and kisses my knuckles
And disappears in the crowd.

The world became silent,
I was taken aback,
Who was he?
Where did he disappear?

Then here she comes, 
The one we’ve all been waiting for, 
The Queen has arrived. 
“Long Live The Queen” is shouted 
as thousands bow down.
What Is Love?

(Dedicated to all the hopeless romantics of the world)

Gianni Mogrovejo

What is love?
Can anybody fully explain?
How come after our first encounter with it goes wrong,
We don’t look at it the same?
Does love come with cute little nicknames?
Like “sweet cheeks” or “honey bun”
Or are those names just for fun?
How can I find love if I don’t know what it looks like?
They say when you have it, you just know
But how do they know?
I’ve been trying to figure out how I define love for the past year
Is it wrong to look at love with fear?
Because sometimes love can leave you in tears
Without love we feel like something is missing
Love is the ultimate contradiction
Because love can kill you but can also bring you life
Love can bring people together but can also make them fight
Love is deadly, but is also kind
Why does genuinely long lasting love seem so hard to find?
If love is supposed to be forever
How come so many married couples don’t stay together?
Why are divorce rates higher than ever?
How come some people can quickly move on to another when their significant other dies?
Is our definition of “love” just one big lie?
Maybe our definition is all wrong
Maybe all these Disney movies and Twilight books have been misleading us all along
Maybe we just need to find a new definition of love
What of the love that’s unconditional like from the man above?
Is that a different love or is all love the same?
Are there different categories to love or does it all fall into one lane?
Love is the only thing that can drive the most sane person insane
No one can fight it and win, not even the most trained brain
Am I trying to put a definition on something that can’t be fully explained?
Have my past efforts of trying to understand love thus been in vain?
Should I refrain from putting a definition to love and just leave it unexplained?
Because taking out the mystery from it just seems lame
Love is what we all desire
No power compared to love is higher
Some try to pretend like they don’t want it but I know secretly they do
Because what’s nicer than having someone to cry to?
Someone who will love you for you
Do we truly need love or do we just desperately want it?
Why when some people have love do they feel the need to flaunt it?
Even if you say you don’t need it because you have you
I believe loving yourself could be considered a form of love too
Love is the most valuable thing in this world, arguably
Funny how the most valuable thing can’t be genuinely bought with any money
The most valuable thing is free
The most valuable thing is something we can’t even touch or see
The most valuable thing is something I don’t think the human mind can comprehend fully
I realize the most valuable thing is inside all of us actually
All you have to do when it’s given to you is accept it willingly

We love to give it and we love even more to take it
Once we’re in it we never wanna escape it
We can’t help but indulge in its essence
We will follow it till the ends of the Earth because we love being in its presence
We willingly give up control of ourselves
Because we can’t get enough of these feelings that are felt
Love is the strongest drug in the world yet it’s still legal
The government realizes love is driving people crazy so they are trying to take it away starting with gay people
But what they don’t realize is that love can’t be stopped
Love has no form, shape, or size
Love on this Earth will never fully die
They say love is strictly for a man and a woman, no one else
But how can you put a limit on a feeling that’s felt?
Love can’t be limited, it can’t be prohibited
If love’s end result is peace
Why are some people arguing for a love to cease?

So many unanswered questions about love but nobody has the answers
When I asked my mom how she knew she was in love she answered
“I knew because when we would fight I still missed him”
I think my quest to fully understand love will be a never-ending mission
Do animals feel love or is their love different?
Are humans the only ones who know of love or are aliens out in space feeling it too, somewhere far off distant?
If we tried to explain it to them, would they even understand?
Or would they be just as confused as to what love is as I am?
If they do know what love is they will probably look at us and wonder why
We teach love differently between girls and guys

That topic could be a poem on its own
But back to the question whose answer I’ve desperately wanted to know

Whether you call it love or amor
Love is something we never feel we have enough of, we always want more
Love is something people will die for
To acquire love people will try and try
They will continue to search far and wide
All for the lost treasure of love that I first encountered when I was born and looked deep into my mother’s eyes
And I’ll encounter one last time at my funeral when I pass to the other side

If love hurts us continuously
Why do we keep coming back as if things will be different?
I guess because there’s always that small hope
That maybe this time our love won’t sink and will instead float
Love starts out beautiful for many but over time their view on it becomes jaded
I don’t blame some people for thinking love is overrated
My friend told me she doesn’t believe in love at all
But when I asked her to give her definition of love, she didn’t have one at all
Which lead me to further believe that nobody knows how love should be
But people tell me they love me
So whatever it is I seem to have a lot
Is love only felt by living things or can we program it into a robot?
Is love only meant to be shared by two?
Is it wrong to go after your friend’s girlfriend if you TRULY love her too?
These questions aren’t for me to answer... They’re for you
Love is defined differently from person to person, this much is true
We won’t agree on everything but some things we can I’m sure
Like the fact that to a hurt soul, love is the cure
Whether love from yourself or love from another
Love between a sister and a brother
Love between friends
Love between an old couple that never seemed to end
Interracial, heterosexual, or same sex
Love in all its forms is equally as beautiful as the rest
No more no less
All love is beautiful regardless
Evangelical Conflagration

Alejandro González
Squeeze
Alyssa Harr

The crisp air nips the apples of my cheeks.
My heart is thumping in my chest,
Matching each footstep on the cold ground.
I squeeze her hand and look to her with a soft smile,
The touch tethers me to reality.

We walk a little further,
And I know the destination is in sight.
The smile grows, tugging at my wind chapped lips.
My heart is still racing,
Feeling like it’s going to pound out of my chest.

Her long blonde hair hides her face
And her crystal green eyes watch our feet
Take each synchronized step.
In her mind, she’s spotted our destination,
But she doesn’t even know it.

Every nerve tingles,
An amazing sensation words can’t even try to match.
The cars are speeding by, other couples walking to similar places,
But my head’s in the clouds.
Just a little further, we walk.

We stop.

And I turn ever so slightly to face her,
The smile on my face all too bright against the dark of the night sky.
I can feel the dimples in my rosy cheeks,
The ones she says she loves so much,
And I squeeze her hand.

Just once.

Her shining smile reaches her eyes and mirrors my own.
The sight is all I could have ever asked for.
And in this moment, with her chilled lips pressed against mine,
I’ve found happiness.
In the middle of a dirty, busy, city sidewalk

She is my home.
Rain Renders Retention

Stephanie Kunkel

Cars race by me with blurred plates, humming engines and bright red taillights that remind me of Christmas lights. And I remember the many Christmases as a child huddled around the fireplace with my brother and sister and the countless ornaments on my Mother’s Tree.

And my Father’s Tree, artificial and bare with plastic ornaments we all agreed were tacky. And it’s funny, I can always recall the gifts my Mother had given me: pretty socks and jewelry I never quite liked. As my Father hunted tirelessly to get me the perfect facial because he could never quite understand what it was like to be a young girl.

The houses I stroll past are guarded by white picket fences preventing the entrance to lives I can only presume are the opposite of my own home, filled with old pictures, wooden chairs, strays of artwork never quite finished. Tall open windows with sheer white curtains—During the day we never turn on the lights.
We lock ourselves behind the old red door and disappear into a world of our own. A world where I am a princess by day and an astronaut by night. A world in which anything and everything and nothing is possible.

The big open windows allow us to see the real world as it really is.
I think about the big open windows as I stroll past the identical, pastel plastered houses.

The light from the sun is replaced by yellow porch lights.

I walk through the puddles on the pavement and let the rippled water destroy the soles of my shoes, The day’s almost over.

An eerie quietness fills my ears with a high-pitched ringing, reminding me of a time when I was someone else, who used to think the high-pitched ringing in my ears were Indian men marching to their drums.

When I thought there was a world within ours, composed of pixies and faeries and a swarm of tiny mystical creatures mankind has never encountered, has never known the truth to what exists beneath the world of their own.

Where I used to believe mermaids were hidden in the depths of the dark navy blue ocean, coated
by layers of murky green, aquamarine, royal blue and white waves.

When little dreamers come out to play

And as I walk up the grey stone steps back to the only home
I’ve ever known, I see the bright red door with the gold elegant

knocker that didn’t match the decor inside. The bright red door,
was one of the few things agreed upon by my sister, brother, and me.

The bright red door that isn’t there anymore.
Ms. New York City

Krystalina Padilla

City trains where I read my book
in the midst of a baby crying by
is where I find complete
Solace.

Though, its rusty stops and tedious rattles
on the tracks and loudspeaker
thump at my temples like a gong.
A homeless beggar rides along.

His coal hands and raggedy clothes
convince riders without headphones
and those without a clear sense of direction.
A homeless beggar makes two dollars.

He jingles his palm of coins
From the tuxedoed bankers to the
Construction workers,
All sipping the same morning cup of joe.

Lick, fold, save my page.
Off the train I go.
I’m ten minutes late from delays.
I bent my MetroCard by mistake.

A volcano erupts in the pit of Times Square.
Lava drips from my ears.
A melodious commotion awakens
the dreary-eyed school kids, 
sleep deprived parents, 
and stroller pushing nannies, 
tugging children’s arms 
across the crowded city streets.

Steam from a pothole warms my legs 
through the gusty winds 
as I make my way across the street. 
The blinking red hand tells my fate. 
Because yellow cabs slow down for no one. 
My day has only just begun.
Moths

Shannon Gaffney

I’m lying beneath him in our personal tundra. He is quite fond of me at night, but when the blood rushes back to his head, he will awake as if I am not there. He will eat the slippery, yellow eggs and pancakes that I make for him, and he will kiss our children on the forehead with a staleness only rivaled by the bread in our cupboard, and he will leave in the nicest of cars.

Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

You were fire. A million gold flames exploding into feeling, and I was your little mosquito. You kissed me hard against bookcases, and you treated my skin like your artwork. The eager canvas greeted each careful stroke. I trusted you with my colors.

Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

We have a maid here, who cleans the house. When he is home, and I am not, she caters to some of his more private needs—the ones I left unsatisfied last night when I told him I had a headache.

Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

My youngest son has his eyes, but he has your spirit, and sometimes I pretend that he has your blood. When I watch him receive books of business for Christmas, and he thanks his father politely, I picture those stacks of Harry Potter novels, with lovingly worn bindings, in his hands instead of yours. I don’t think my little boy will ever read them. I don’t know if he will ever believe in magic.
Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

My lips always curl into the brightest smiles. But my eyes never crinkle in the corners. His friends never mind, and they greet me just the same, and they gossip about who was best dressed at Sunday mass, and who made the brownies for the 5th grade bake sale. You and I used to joke about living in a cardboard box. Isn’t it strange how I do live in one?

Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

Once, you and I walked all over town. We were laughing so hard, I forgot my medication, and later, I had a panic episode in a grocery store. I started to cry, and I started to shake, and you held my hand and you took me outside. I told you not to tell me not to worry. You said you would tell me to breathe instead.

Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

I told him once that I felt sick. The room was spinning. I couldn’t breathe and thought I might be insane and I fell to the floor and I asked him to hold me on the sharp bathroom tiles and I asked him to tell me to breathe, to breathe, to breathe. He looked at me, his mouth agape. He told me not to worry. He asked what was wrong with me.

Some things you do for money. Some things you do for love.

Please tell me where you are. Please light a match and leave it for me, and I will follow the smoke, because I know it better than I know myself. I was wrong, I was wrong, oh God I was wrong, and your little moth wants back to her flame, and she will take it in a cardboard box, as long as it is yours.

Some things you do just to keep on breathing.
The Tree of Life

Samantha Biegel
The Darkest Party You Will Ever Attend

Jordan Winch

To rendezvous with Satan would be an awesome date: he’ll have balloons that pop and leak a black vapor and streamers that stream around your neck if you get too close. The punch would be poisoned with an ardent flavor of destruction and the cup you drink it out of will disintegrate when your mouth touches it. He’ll show you the demons of the world but not the demons you’ll encounter in your lifetime, he’ll want to surprise you with those when the time comes. He’ll show you his special army of bloodhounds that he trains strictly for demise and sends to snuff out the holy angels. Your date will be malevolent and bitter, yet sweet because he knows how to trick. He’ll send you home with a thorn in your side forever reminding you of your rendezvous with the Devil and a string he’ll keep tied around your heart, ready to be pulled at any minute.
Because I Sculpted You

Alexis García

The reason your,
Heart beats to the sound of my voice,
Skin tenses up over a second of my touch,
Crooked smile tries balancing itself,

The reason you,
Believe in residing in obscurity,
Wonder if there would be a you without a me,
Let your thoughts submit to my command,

The reason I,
Render myself completely at your will,
Worship the words that slide off your tongue,
Embrace the inevitable fact of your demise,

The reason time,
Keeps us close, but tears us apart,
Leaves it up to me to destroy you,
Remembers my true nature,

The reason we,
Know today is your last day,
Mistake this bond as more than professional,
Think foolishly that things may be different,

Is Because I Sculpted You.
In the beginning we were friends, at some point we were the best of friends but now our relationship is like old paint, falling apart; but I, the ever-observant Hadiza noticed it. I waited for Aisha after class and pretended to still love her, offering a crooked smile and waving my chubby fingers as Aisha sauntered down the hallway. It was supposed to take 15 seconds to get across the hallway but Aisha took a full minute to say a high-pitched “hi!” to all her friends, or as I called them, her fans. In all my years here, I hadn’t spoken to as many people as Aisha did in that hallway.

I watched her laugh, displaying perfect teeth. She raised her skinny arm to run her fingers through her hair that bounced and curled in abundance. I couldn’t help but feel my own hair, which was coarse and short and breaking; in a sense, my hair reflects who I am. There she was basking in the sunlight that came through the windows, looking ethereal like she belonged with the heavenlies; meanwhile I hid in the dark corner of the hallway, and I felt comfortable there.

Finally the goddess herself made her way to me but not before one of her minions kisses her on the cheek and comments on how smooth her skin is. The minion glanced at me and I could tell she felt pity because my face was pockmarked, so, in what she thought would make me feel better, she said “Err, nice backpack!” I smiled, but internally rolled my eyes. I fought hard to keep down the bile.
Aisha grabbed me in a hug and said in her soft Hausa-British accent, “That math class was brutal! Haddy, you have to help me out, you know you’re the math genius and I’m the speaker, we’re like two sides of a coin!” She laughs, which I never do. She starts babbling about how we’re going to be “best friends forever” and in that moment I hate her more than I ever have. I think to myself, “We are not two sides of a coin! I’m smarter than you but you get better grades, you are the whole coin, my dullness only serves to make you brighter.”

Everyone thinks Aisha is so good and, I’ll admit, sometimes she is, but I know things about her no one else does, like the time she fell in love with a professor who was married and cried when she had to end it because, as she said, “I don’t know who I’m turning into, I saw his wife and kids walking on campus today and I thought I could ruin that family, I don’t want to ruin anything!” I was the rational one and told her not to go into it in the first place and the day she came to me crying about it, I loathed and pitied her; there she was, Aisha the Beautiful, defeated. The only thing that could make this moment better was if he fell in love with me. Then I would have truly beaten her. I would have ruined her.
The South Bronx Rose
(Inspired by 2pac’s “The Rose that Grew From Concrete”)

Gianni Morgovejo

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete
Proving Nature’s laws obsolete?
I only noticed it when I stopped long enough in my tracks and found
That it was standing tall, despite the feet almost crushing it from all around.
Most things that try to grow from there just accept defeat.
They are left undiscovered in the ground buried deep.
They never last,
So they never saw what life was like through the cracks.
But this Rose had other plans,
And still rose through beautifully by telling itself it can.
It’s still growing even though the ones that were supposed to water it instead ran.

From the start it was forced to dig its roots into and grow
In an environment where it’s hard
For one’s life to get far,
And not come out with at least some scars.
But despite this,
Growth from this rose continues to take place,
Despite the occasional harshness seen and felt from its mother earth’s face.
And the same was felt from its father.
Many times in its life this rose has had to provide itself with its own water.
Although sometimes, all it feels from the ones who planted it
Is neglect,
It still treats them with love and respect.

So many have tried to take advantage of this rose’s giving ways.
They want its beauty for themselves, to put in their own personal vase.
Because of this, now a days,
The ones who try to hold it that way are usually cut quick
by its thorns that surround it COMPLETELY.
But this rose saw something in me,
and so it had chosen to release its thorns solely for me to see.
And so I saw it at its peak beauty.
I saw it in a way that not many people do
I saw it defenseless, without its thorns, and in this form, it was easy to adorn.
In this rare form that only a select few have seen,
I saw a passionate lover’s dream.
And although I had this rose just to myself for some time,
It was decided that it was better for her and me,
That this rose be set free.
And ever since,
I’ve said goodbye to feeling its beautiful soft petals and smelling its unique fragrance
I am honored to have been one of the few people who knows
How it feels to have held this beautiful rose,

In a bouquet filled with roses just like it, no one can ever say they bought her,
Because this rose is the only one of its kind
That’s why I sought her.

Most people never notice
Or stop long enough to behold it.
Only when you fully stop in your tracks
Can you truly appreciate how this beautiful life has man-aged to rise through the cracks.

Ironic how out of such ugliness and doubt
Something so beautiful could sprout out.
Look closely at everything you’ve been through
The definition of a beautiful struggle is you.

It never accepted defeat,
Against all odds it beat.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete.
I Can’t Breathe

Brianna Barrett
The Mirror – I Swear it’s Lying

Victoria Santamorena

There is a white door at the end of a very long hallway. The door seems familiar, like a snapshot of something vague from your childhood. You do not dwell on it long, but something in your mind keeps taking you back to when you were seven years old, listening to your grandfather mumble about shaving cream and the price of gasoline. You are walking towards that door, not knowing what is on the other side. Your heart pumps in your chest and you can feel the blood move in your body, tingling and warm. You feel each muscle as it contracts and each part of your body responds to the air in your lungs and the blood in your veins. For the first time, you are able to feel the very unsettling aliveness of your mobile self; it frightens you. You do not stop walking. The door gets closer and your heart beats faster; your palms collect sweat between each line and crease; your mouth is dry.

The door is alive: its glaring paleness is stuck in your mind’s eye like the blinding light you see after staring at the sun. A knock on the other side brings you back from your momentary reminiscing. There should be silence. No one is on the other side of that door, at least no one should be. Your hands tremble, excitement itches your palms and dances on your spine. Your fingers reach for the doorknob, and steady, as steady as you can manage, you open the door and inside is a bathroom neat and white with a porcelain sink – pipes exposed – a medicine cabinet resting above it, a mirror facing you, a
claw foot tub beneath the window, and small black and white tiles placed into the floor with utmost care.

Your grandfather’s pocket watch rests on the edge of the porcelain sink. Its bronze familiarity calls out to you – a soft, faint, far off whisper. You hear its mechanical clock heart tick, frantically announcing the metronome of its existence. You remember seven years old – greedy, grabbing hands grasping for just a touch of the aged metal. How the back was worn away – the inscription an illegible jumble of swirl upon swirl, curl mingling with artisanal scribble. The hands – the hands on the face of that coveted watch just don’t work like they used to, and the white face has jaundiced with age. It’s just like grandfather: Illinois written on the lines of its face.

You pick up the pocket watch and recall a small, insignificant, yet nagging detail: the watch’s silver chain that, like an arrow, pointed to treasure. How could you forget? How could you forget the secrets that grandfather showed you on Sunday nights with a root beer in hand and the chatter of the barbershop behind? How could you forget grandfather’s scissors? How he laughed when mother took them in hand and snip snip snipped everything away; one eye always hidden – one eye always watching you, so that grandfather, when given the loose ends of strings, would call her the fates?

How could you forget that this silver chain, like a noose, tied up grandfather’s secrets in his throat? That the chain pointed to small, simple secrets with such a smug, self-satisfied pleasure? Hanging on the end of that chain were three medals. One – you recall – heralded a hero: arms stretched out, ready to throw himself into battle. You remember the dates and the inscription carved into the gilded bronze: 1947-1948, “Team Champi-
ons- Bowling”. What bright veneer existed that could not mask the hidden darkness behind such prized trophies? Grandfather was a champion, lauded with the highest of honors: the laurel and the flame. But such rewards were reserved for how well he evaded your grasp.

Another medal catches your eye: 1928. Another year for the champion hailed hero. You wonder if this was the first of grandfather’s wonderfully mythic deeds, if this was the first commemoration. There are too many pictures on this prize to determine why grandfather had won. Was it for his strength, for his mind, for his kindness? You read the words: “Community Service Commission”. On this medal, the feet of Mercury fly away, decorating each sacrificial act – the accolade – with a symbolic blessing.

The last and final medal is so small you almost forget it, but it is the one thing you can’t forget. Hidden among chain and time and pomp is the near microscopic prize that says all you will ever need to know about the old man. Engraved in tarnished silver is a sleepy eye. Thick lashes jut out from its drooping lids, its pupil staring, staring in disapproval. What beast had grandfather slain? What battle won, so that he could be the victor, the possessor of such a miniscule amount of glory? But how could you forget? How could you forget that this eye once meant everything? It was grandfather’s motif – tucked away, only surfacing through story or song or secrets. Only surfacing in your wild night dreams where secrets like Sunday nights at the barbershop would become so clear. Secrets like Sunday nights at the barbershop where mother would watch you like the fates. Now you understood why mother watched you – one eye always staring.

You remember mother with a stern eye and controlled limbs; how she waited in the corner, sitting on
the counter, a cigarette in one hand as smoke billowed from her prim mouth. You remember the scissors in the other, guarded, as if a harbinger of a discord she would not allow. How she frowned when grandfather smiled, when he danced around the parlor, lumbering. How she frowned when he stole small glances from your wondrous eyes and smiles from your lips.

You remember how she stood with her arms crossed on Sunday nights while she swept both dust and secrets under the rug. You remember how she picked up empty glass bottles and sighed with precision. How she hated grandfather’s watch, because he could not forget his deeds or his travels or long-dead friends, but she could. You remember how mother watched you, because she feared what you might find in grandfather’s aging voice and roving eyes. She feared that one day, you’d snip snip snip away the strings of fate, so you could be like grandfather, and like mother, and look for control. So you could be like grandfather, and remember things that made you dream and stray from the preferred and decided realities of women with scissors.

You look up from the watch, now only glittering with the faint, distant memories of a past too far removed to feel as if it once belonged to you. Every part of you feels numb as you stand at the edge of the porcelain sink, your hands gripping the sides. You stare into the mirror, at your face, at the door behind your body, reflected back at you with warped permanence. Something startles you. You jump. Perhaps it is the pang of melancholy that sometimes accompanies nostalgia, but you know better. Your nerves feel as if they are unraveling inside you. In the doorway behind you, standing in the shadow, is grandfather. You smile to yourself, remembering long, solitary drives to the country and visits to deserted beaches.
Grandfather knew best. Grandfather, with his long face and red nose. Grandfather, and his sagging, clinging skin. Grandfather, who told you the secrets he never told your mother. Grandfather, who unfolded to you like a tattered umbrella. There is grandfather, smiling at you from a reflection. And there you are, standing before a mirror, the coveted pocket watch close to your hand. You pick it up; it feels so much heavier than you anticipated. You turn around, ready to restore the prize to its rightful owner, but grandfather isn’t there. You look back at the mirror, back at your reflection and you remember that grandfather died. And you remember why mother watched you as she snip snip snipped everything away, just like the fates.
Void the Mind
Stephanie Kunkel

It rained today
But no one was listening to the whispers
Of fallen tears on the weathered streets.

Bodies roam over the glazed watermarks on the ground.
Miniscule liquid drops taint the onyx concrete.
Faceless, rigid bodies carry yellow umbrellas
Obscure thoughts and restrained eyes.

No one looked beyond the yellow umbrellas
And no one cared.
I’m Coming Up

Sarah Larson
Contributors

Alexandra Espinal is a junior at Manhattanville majoring in Communications and minoring in English Literature. Aside from writing, she enjoys making pottery and film photography. She tries to keep at least one live plant in her room so that she’ll live longer.

Gabrielle van Welie is a junior at Manhattanville majoring in Creative Writing and Communications. She enjoys doing things with a pinch of cynicism and hopes to one day become a world-renowned novelist. In the mean time she reads, writes, cooks, and travels.

Emelie Ali, normally refereed to as Emmie, is currently a freshman planning to major in Creative Writing. She has been writing since seventh grade and constantly surrounds herself in creativity with the help of Netflix, HBO, and BBC. She hopes to one day publish a collection of poems and one novel in the unforeseeable future.

Mikayla Amaral is a freshman at Manhattanville and an Education and English Literature double major. She enjoys reading and writing. She currently works at a pre school but hopes to one day become a high school English teacher.

Emily Behnke is a freshman at Manhattanville College. She is a Sociology and Spanish major with a minor in Creative Writing. In her spare time, she enjoys reading poetry, doing yoga, and volunteering at various non-profit organizations.

Samantha Biegel is a Manhattanville freshman who plans on pursuing a major in either English, Art History, or both. She enjoys writing poetry and short fiction, reading, learning, meeting new people, running, hiking, traveling, and taking pictures with her Canon Rebel T5i Camera. This aspiring artist hopes to one day have a career in doing something she loves and some-
thing that will change people’s lives for the better.

**Catherine Brady** is a Junior at Manhattanville and an English major and Communications minor. In her spare time she likes to hangout with her friends, read (her favorite book is “Not that Kind of Girl’ by Lena Dunham) and dream of traveling the world. She hopes to one day live in NYC and become a magazine editor.

**Jessica Danger** is a freshman in Mville. She plans to major in international studies and minor in French and philosophy. She hopes to travel around the world and eventually live in England because of their awesome accents.

**Angela Eckhoff** is a junior at Manhattanville College and an English Literature major with a minor in Creative Writing. She enjoys reading, writing and working with children. Her two favorite things to do are going hiking and trying new foods from different cultures. She hopes to become an English Literature professor and to travel to all the places she has read about in her favorite novels.

**Shannon Gaffney** is a freshman at Manhattanville pursuing a major in musical theatre and a minor in creative writing. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, dancing, and shopping for beautiful, impractical shoes. She has always loved to write and plans to make sure it is always a part of her life.

**Alexis García** is currently a sophomore at Manhattanville. She is majoring in Creative Writing with a minor in Criminal Law. When she isn’t writing a new poem or working on one of her novels, she’s usually losing herself to the lyrical genius of Sam Smith.

**Lindsay Greiner** is a Creative/ Professional Writing major expecting to graduate in May. She spends her time shoe shopping, googling cute animals, and writing. After graduation she hopes to get a job writing for a television crime show, preferably Law
and Order: SVU.

**Alyssa Harr** is a junior at Manhattanville College and an English Literature major with a double minor in Psychology and World Religions. She enjoys writing, watching Netflix, and sleeping. She is still trying to figure out exactly what she wants to do in this crazy world but hopes that one day she might just be a published poet.

**Steph Kunkel** is a junior at Manhattanville College and a Professional/Creative Writing major. She enjoys reading, writing, and dancing. Steph attempts to use her creative skills to create choreography for dance pieces as well as write poems and short stories. She aspires to one day become an author.

**Austin LaPointe** is a junior at Manhattanville College and is majoring in Marketing. He is part of the Manhattanville Rugby Club as well as a fresh water fish enthusiast.

**Phuong Le** is a junior at Manhattanville with a double major in Communications and English as well as a minor in French. Her writings can be found on the film site Movie Mezzanine and her own blog Cinematic Gloom. When not rambling on about movies, she enjoys caring too much about David Bowie.

**Alicia Leedham** is a sophomore at Manhattanville College with a double major in Political Science and World Religions. Art has always been an outlet for her and she enjoys to draw and paint when she can. Her goal is to one day be involved in the United Nations and to become Secretary of State.

**Allison Malaluan** is a sophomore at Manhattanville planning to major in Psychology and Creative Writing. She likes poetry, biking, breathing, and answering questions with questions.

**Karin Manson-Mayhams** is a sophomore at Manhattanville. In her spare time, she enjoys coaching basketball and writing poetry. In the future she hopes to inspire youth to express them-
selves through various art forms.

Michaela Murdock is a sophomore at Manhattanville and an English and Education major. She loves to read, write, and cook. She has hopes to one day publish a book of her poetry.

Gianni Mogrovejo is a sophomore at Manhattanville College and lives in a very small 2-person room called a “Dingle” in Founders. Gianni has dreams of pursuing some kind of career in hip-hop and hopes to promote the culture in a positive way. He is quiet around new people, prefers small circles, doesn’t drink or smoke, loves his close friends, and is obsessed with everything J. Cole, Dreamville, and Joe Budden.

Krystalina Padilla is a junior at Manhattanville as well as an English literature major and women’s studies minor. She enjoys writing poetry and reading Sylvia Plath. She hopes to one day become a high school English teacher.

Nendirmwa Parradang is a senior at Manhattanville College and an International Studies major. She loves reading “old-timey” books and delving into the Bible. She also spends her days misusing punctuations. See.

Jelani A. Price is a sophomore at Manhattanville and a Communications and Sociology major. He is on the Track and Field team as well as the Rugby Football Club. His favorite authors include Richard Wright, Harold Robbins, Jackie Collins, Toni Morrison, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Yasunari Kawabata. He hopes to one day be an archivist.

Bianca Reyes is a sophomore at Manhattanville as well as a double major in Communications and Sociology. She enjoys writing, running, and knitting. In her spare time she likes to shop. She hopes to become a magazine editor one day.

Alexandra Risko is a freshman at Manhattanville who plans to double major in English Literature and Business Management.
She enjoys reading and writing and aspires to become an editor in a publishing house after graduation. She has recently found a knack for writing poetry.

**Sofía Rivera Pérez** is a senior at Manhattanville College and an English Literature major with a Pre-Med minor. She enjoys writing, drawing, traveling, and reading. She hopes to one day work with Doctors Without Borders.

**Shannon Roberts** is a junior at Manhattanville. She is a Creative Writing major and Psychology minor. On campus she is a part of the track team and spends much of her free time reading and writing.

**Bianca Rosario Ramírez** is a sophomore at Manhattanville and Digital Media Production and Communications Studies double major with a minor in Studio Art. She is very passionate about filmmaking, photography, and graphic design. She is currently a member of Manhattanville’s Video Project, a Social Media/PR and YouTube channel manager for MVL’s Writer’s Block, and a photographer and writer for *Touchstone*.

**Victoria Santamorena** is a sophomore at Manhattanville majoring in English Literature. She enjoys reading, writing, and obsessing over David Lynch. In her spare time, she likes analyze the meaning of her own existence and collecting things both strange and unusual. She hopes to pursue a career as a folklorist or a professor of English literature.

**Katherine Shkreli** is a junior studying Creative Writing and is an editor for Graffiti Magazine. When she’s all grown up she hopes to travel the world and write about all her adventures.

**Destiny Wagner** is a freshman at Manhattanville studying Marketing and International Studies. She enjoys dancing, traveling, and cosmetology. In her spare time she loves to go to the gym and work out. She hopes to one day be a marketing coordinator and work for a corporation.
Born and raised in Chicago Illinois, Creative Writing major Steven Willis uses his poetry to address the culture issues of our time. With art heavily influenced by urban life and religion, Steven mixes elements of hip hop and classic literature to help express his eclectic personal narrative. He began doing spoken word at the age of 15. Steven is currently Louder Than A Bomb University 2014 Individual Champion.

Imani S. Williams is a junior at Manhattanville College majoring in Communications and minoring in Creative and Professional Writing. She has previously won first place in a Sarah Lawrence College Poetry festival with her poem “Colors That Run”. Imani hopes to become a news anchor/reporter some day and is currently a freelance associate producer for News 12 Westchester.

Rai-ya Wilson is currently a sophomore at Manhattanville. She is pursuing a self-designed major in Youth Advocacy. She plans on attending law school and becoming a Child Advocacy lawyer. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her ten nieces and nephews, reading, writing, and watching Netflix.

Jordan Winch is a sophomore at Manhattanville as well as a Creative Writing major and a prospective Business Management major and Women's Studies minor. She enjoys reading and writing and hopes to one day combine both of those hobbies and become a book editor. She is on the Manhattanville Cheerleading team and vigorously enjoys her time here on campus.