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Zephyr: The Thirteenth Issue

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Welcome, wild North-easter!
Shame it is to see
Odes to every Zephyr;
Ne'er a verse to thee.

CHARLES KINGSLEY
## Dedication 5

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A DEDICATION

This thirteenth issue of Zephyr is dedicated to our advisor, Susan McHugh. Susan has been the advisor of Zephyr since its 2005 publication. This past fall, Susan was diagnosed with cancer. Her passion for life and steadfast will allowed for her to beat the disease and we are pleased to say she is healthy and happy at this time. We often find inspiration in external forces and things that lie outside of us, and Susan has proved to be just this. We look up to her as an educator, friend, and fighter.

We hope that she, as well as you, continue to find enjoyment in the creative expression of UNE community members. In today’s world, art is essential and no individual’s expression should be limited. The editorial board is grateful that so many people are willing to share their work with others through Zephyr.
Precisely Planets

Leslie Ricker

two stars on an evening beach
a spoonful of moon inbetween
one diamond in the west
one diamond in the east
mirrored magic
pinpoint reflections
in the sea;
something living in me
remembers them beyond
the time I’m filling now,
Mars and Saturn
against velvet sky
while bars of red still ride
above the well set sun,
beauty bathes the beach
space and time undone

the pulse of heart
do I remember
its start
that first flutter
in the womb,
the original beat
that made me part
of the human bloom,
and were those stars
(precisely planets)
in the room?
Hillside Chapel

Kayla Wheeler

It sits in the lap of yellow grass,
cradled by earth and thyme.
It's steeple, small, with a miniscule cross.
Both a secret and clue

I can't help but think of all the hitchhikers who have walked by,
hoping Jesus would pick them up,
or who were Jesus, staring me in the face
with their thumbs out,
as I drive by pretending they have nothing to do with me

Then I start thinking about all the people who are really Jesus,
who I was mean to and cut in line,
who I stole from and who I snubbed,
who I adored and cried for and made love to

That's when I really beat myself up.
I've talked so much shit I wouldn't remember enough to put on a frown and worthy confession,
I've ignored friends you have needed me,
and told enough lies
sometimes I can't decipher what's true from what I want to be.
I've had two boys at once
and I know Jesus knows because the same eyes in my bible were in their heads the night I said I didn't love them

Maybe that's why I can't commit,
when the messiah himself lives in the very bones of everyone,
how can I pick a savior?
I mean, who does he think he is making me decide?
Moving from person to person he metastasizes,
a cancer I'm supposed to trust or worship
And I take the back roads at night to avoid Hillside Chapel and the possibility that it could be precious or heartbreaking. But I'm still too young and naïve to accept the fact that no matter which fork in the road I choose, or detour I'm compelled to make up, I'm not alone for this drive home.

My demons ride shotgun, sitting on top of each other, and wait. Bloodsuckers, these parasitic worms live under my skin, Nourished. But if we're all just hosts for Jesus and demons then that makes it even, right? Heaven and hell, yin and yang, Sunny and Cher, that makes it even right?

I know this balance is what we age for but it doesn't feel quite right, and I call you at two-thirty in the morning because I'm not brave, and I don't know how many times I've asked you if this is all just a dream.

Your voice echoes from the receiver, giving the courage to drive by Hillside Chapel, but I sped too fast past the sermon sign that I don't remember what it says. But that just means we can make it up, right?
Pennies for Jasper

Tyler Robert Vunk

The bloat that caught my little brother’s body made his wake far worse’n this one. He’d been in the water for over a week ’fore anyone found him. Even then, his face was so distorted, fallin’ apart like a frozen tomato left out overnight to thaw. No one in Clearmont County could recognize him, not that they would’ve wanted to anyway. The looks they gave Mama, Gilly and me... I’m sure I’ve never seen so much understandin’. Father, I guess when you grow up around life, giving and taking it as they do, you tends to feel it more when a loss comes around. Scarred as their palms may be, they’re a people of deep feelin’, and I suppose that’s why it’s as empty as it is today. It’s kinda nice though, not that Sir’s passed on, but kinda nice that this church is freed-up. I ain’t ever seen it like this. Well wait now, come to think of it, once, way after Pa left, I got a chance to walk into empty pews, and quiet walls, all on account of Tipper forgettin’ to put the money in the basket the way Mama told him to. I remember that holy water, colder than ever, and the way the light shined down on the east wall through the stained glass of St. Francis, right straight into my hands. Suppose I played with that light for ten minutes ’fore I realized it—ran away as fast as I could, too, ’cause I knew that God was watchin’. He always is, least that’s what they say.

You know, Father, silent as it is, I’ve been swimin’ in nothin’ but my thoughts these past few hours. With Tipper dyin’ the way he did, and then Sir shootin’ his self on account of Tipper, a lot of what happened is too dark to see through, Father, like someone took a brush, and covered my eyes up with a bucket of pitch. And I don’t know why, but I keep goin’ back to the way things used to be. Me and Pa had some happy times back then; we’d go fishin’ and huntin’ all the time out on the Malebrook place. And at least once a week we’d have a picnic with Mama down by the creek. That blue blanket that she’d put out was always so clean, and all those rhubarb pies she’d bake were about the only thing good enough to follow up a belly full of her chicken. I remember layin’ on my back, all tired and fat, lookin’ right up at the sky and watchin’ my folks dance out of the corner of my eye. I was little, but, even so, I knew what we were doin’ was special.

Gilly was about five when the drink got the better of Pa. Hurt her real bad, too. ‘Fore he took to goin’ to Joseph Parish, Gilly used to climb up all over Pa’s shoulders as if he were a big oak tree, gigglin’ the whole time he tickled and teased her about some boy she was sweet on. But it happened so fast. He got so mean, and in no more than a month we stopped goin’ to the creek altogether. Suppose it was only a short while later that the fightin’ started with Mama. Reckon that she’d made Tipper to try and mend Pa’s drinkin’, but, as soon as my daddy got wind of it, his long nights in town got even longer.
I remember findin’ Gilly cryin’ in the pantry one night. That was the night that Pa just got up and left. He’d used to keep his whiskey up on the top shelf. And so when he came tearin’ in, stumblin’ over me holdin’ Gilly, he pulled that cork right out that bottle, took a long pull, and then, lookin’ at me with a turned up lip and a brow covered in sweat, he said: “Boy, your hide best be thicker’n iron to walk in this world. If it ain’t, sooner or later, someone’s gonna make you bleed.” Mama, Gilly, and me never saw Pa again. Never.

Tipper came along the next fall, right around when we moved in with Sir. Mama, bein’ pregnant as she was, didn’t have a chance on keepin’ up with the house. After the first missed payment, the bank stole everythin’. Little as I was, I remember prayin’ to God for sparin’ my new brother the pains that I’d seen, with our daddy leavin’ and all. But the day we piled into Sir’s wagon, he cracked me hard in the ribs with his elbow, cursin’ me for bein’ too slow. I knew then that my prayers were not going to save me none, and my baby brother neither.

Sir had blamed Mama for Pa’s leavin’, and let each of us know that we hadn’t helped none. So, from the first of my brother’s breaths to his last, you’d probably be correct in assumin’ he had a guilty conscious. It wasn’t Tipper’s fault though: the way our pea paw had raised us didn’t leave much room for mistakes. Sir had a mean streak in him, like none I’d ever seen. If you’d even think about callin’ him Pea Paw, or Gran Pappy, whap! —you’d get a mouthful of his hand. He was in the service, back durin’ the Great War. A real hero, he was. Wasn’t so much the killin’ that hardened his spirit as much’s it was Grand Marm catchin’ cold and dyin’. When he came home from overseas, and learned that his wife had passed, and, well, that just about snapped him in two. Mama only told me about it once, and I knew enough never to bring it up again. In my family, if you wanna learn anythin’, you best have good ears.

I don’t mean to complain none, that’s not why I wanted to talk to you, Father. I just figure if I speak to you, God would hear me out. It would mean a whole lot to me if you let God know that I did my best, my very best, to be my brother’s keeper. That afternoon that Tipper was playin’ with Sir’s watch I’d been out doin’ my chores like I always done. It ain’t no excuse, but there was so much plowin’, and diggin’, and Sir kept on yellin’. He just got away from me. Tipper knew better than to go touchin’ things that don’t belong to him, but it wasn’t on purpose that he dropped that old watch; he wasn’t mean, or hateful. He just had a mistake is all. Father, let God know that my brother was a good boy, and he was on his way to becomin’ a good man, too. I know it. When he came to me that night, cryin’ and fussin’ about what he done, it was genuine. He rushed right out behind the barn, right in the middle of my business, and grabbed hold of my shirt. He said:

“Tobias, you ain’t gonna want me for no brother no more!”

So, I goes: “Tipper, what’s wrong?”

Then he just spit it right out:
“I’m goin’... I’m goin’ to hell!”
That poor boy told me all of what he’d done; spilled his beans right there, on the spot! He’d been curious, and went ahead onto the shelf above the woodstove where Sir keeps his memoribles, took down that silver pocket watch, and opened it right up. Said he was windin’ it a bit, lookin’ at the hands—tryin’ to figure out how that small thing worked—when, all of a sudden, it slipped; dropped straight onto the base of the stove, and smashed the glass into a hundred pieces. Tipper said he had a grumblin’ in his guts made ’em sick, and he just scooped up all them specs of glass, and put that pocket watch right back on the shelf where he found it.

Father, I told Tipper to just go ahead and tell Mama, tell Mama real quick. She had a way of soothin’ Sir if he was in a sour mood. And, Father, sure as I’m talkin’ to you, Tipper swore that he would do just that, first thing in the mornin’. We went to sleep, and I didn’t hear nothin’, no floorboards, nothin’. But when I woke up, Tipper wasn’t in our bed. Please, Father, please, let God know I looked everywhere for that little boy; he wasn’t nowhere! And just when I started to explain the whole thing to Mama and Gilly, Sir came in from the field. He smacked me somethin’ awful, grabbed me by the ear, and drug me over to the woodstove. He showed me that silver watch without its glass face, lumped me in the back, and screamed out: “Ya mis-rible son’s a bitch, what you gone’n done now!” It wasn’t his fault, though, Father, I know that it’s just his temper. But afterwards, I got scared—real scared—’cause Tipper wasn’t anywhere to be found. Mama begged Sir to go into town, but he wouldn’t budge, tellin’ us that if Tipper were smart he wouldn’t show up ever again; said there was gonna be a beatin’ waitin’ for him, bigger than any he’d ever had. Sir drove his wagon to the mill, leavin’ Mama, Gilly, and me in each other’s arms.

The first day passed, and Tipper hadn’t come home. It was quiet at the supper table that night. Mama and Gilly were so sick with the grieves that they couldn’t eat none, and I just kept silent, tryin’ to avoid my pea paw’s eyes. Next mornin’ I heard Mama pleadin’ with Sir, absolutely pleadin’ for him to go to town. Sir looked at Mama, and done slapped her right in her mouth, sayin’: “Dang it Laura! I done tell’d you there ain’t gonna be no law gettin’. Now keep quiet, and get to fixin’ breakfast ‘for I put that lil’ bastard’s licks on your backside!” So Mama kept quiet, and cried herself to sleep that night, same as Gilly.

It came down hard the next evenin’, pourin’ like it hadn’t done all month long. For three days it rained like that: sky just opened up like a stuck pig, showerin’ every which way possible. Couldn’t work ‘tall, so Sir kept us cooped up in the bedroom, walkin’ by every hour or so, makin’ sure we’d stayed put; he kept drinkin’ out this metal flask of his, mutterin’ all sorts awful things about Tipper, and tellin’ us plenty about how we best keep a lid on it. Can’t be sure, Father, but I think it was on that fourth day that this voice in my head, real silent-like at first, came up to the top of my thoughts And, Father, can’t recall whether it was night, or day out neither—just remember it was dark, black dark. Mama
was cryin’ holdin’ Gilly close, and that voice in my skull got louder and, louder, ‘till there was nothin’ left in my mind but what it was preachin’ to me. I’d no more fear, Father, none. My arms felt like they was tree trunks, and my legs was as strong as a mule’s. I stood right up in that darkness, that foul, foul darkness, and ripped open that door to our bedroom. A light, Father, a light bright as seven suns hit my eyes, hard, so hard, Father. And that voice in my head kept screamin’, and Gilly and Mama screamed too, but they was screamin’ for me to come back; but I barely heard ‘em. And the speakin’ in my head had me repeat’n itself. And then I kept on sayin’ it, what it wanted me to. Again, and again, and louder, and louder, ‘till my lungs was full of air, and my throat was burnin’ horse; ‘till their was no voice in my skull, Father, just my own, yellin’ loud, loud, loud:

“You gonna kill him!”
“You gonna kill him!”
“You gonna kill him!”

The howlin’ wind took to my skin, and the little house shook from footsteps. And when I seen him in the doorway, it was only for a second. He was drippin’ wet, and grizzly.

“Boy, you done it now!” he screamed.

Sir came up on me fast, knockin’ me over to the floor, out the doorway, and down by the eatin’ table. The drink was heavy on his breath, and he wasn’t standin’ quite so well. “I’m puttin’ a end to all this devilry!” he shouted. His arms was strong, stronger than mine, and he kept putin’ his fists into my face; hard as anvils, they was. One after another, they kept on comin’. My mouth was all full of blood, flowin’ like the creek, flowin’ down my shirt, and onto my pants, past my feet, and into the holes of the floor.

“Who you think you is, boy?” he spat. You ain’t ‘loud to speak!”

Sir kicked me in my side and the breath went right out of me. He laughed and said: “Ain’t nothin’ but a girl in pants, you is!”

Mama and Gilly came close to the door, but Sir ran over, and pushed them back to the bedroom.

Father, I don’t know how the rest came to pass. All I know is that I watched it, like another person was doin’ it, but instead, Father, instead, it was me who done it. When Sir had his back to me, I grabbed hold of the fire poker, got up to my feet, and hit him right in the knee as hard as I could. He screamed fierce, and stumbled, but didn’t fall. His eyes shot up to me, and a smile, sick and curvy, came about one side his wrinkly face.

“You thinks you’s a man now, does ya?” he lauged at me.

Sir stopped chuckling, and stood up tall.

In a flash, he came back, swingin’ away with his fists. He missed twice, and on the second swing his ribs was right out in front. But when I went to raise that fire poker, goin’ to bash him as I should, I couldn’t do it, Father, I couldn’t do it. Almost as if that voice screamin’ away at me changed, changed to a slow hum—like right before dusk when all
them frogs and bugs is goin’ about there singin’, keepin’ an order to things, lettin’ all the other creatures know its alright to take a rest from goin’ after one another for awhile. And when he wound up, readyin’ for his blow on me, I got real quiet, and loose. Nothin’ could hurt me, seemed like. Seemed like I was made of nothin’ but stone.

Sir threw his elbow square into my nose, and there was a strong snap like breakin’ kindlin’. I felt the metal fire poker slip out my hand. And I felt my body fallin’ back, back down by the legs of the eatin’ table. And, Father, there was no pain, no pain ‘tall, just that nice, restful hum, and the fallin’ rain. Then I saw him. From my side, there he was, Tipper, just him, no one else, all cleaned and combed; he smelt like talc, and wildflowers. I tried to talk to him, but he winked, and shook his head. Father, he came real close, and hugged my bloody body, and he whispered somethin’ into my ear. Father, it was somethin’ beautiful. Then I woke up, in a strange bed. Mama and Gilly was there, so was the doctor and Mr. and Mrs. Clancy. Tears was rollin’ down Mama’s face, and she and Gilly held me tight, very tight. And, Father, that’s when I knew, knew that Tipper was dead.

When we was both a bit younger, Sir had taken me and my brother on a run to Barrington Falls to deliver some wood down an old back road unsuitable for loadin’ trucks. On the way back home, we stopped off in Jasper so Sir could get paid, and, I’ll tell you, that little town was about the biggest place me and Tipper had ever seen. There was a sweet shop, and a diner; had a pharmacy store for pills and sodas. Even had themselves a statue, right in the middle of town, for some men who’d fought in the civil war. But the thing that caught both our eyes wasn’t that statue, or the sweetshop, or even that good smellin’ diner: it was a little stone well off to the side.

If I’d hadn’t seen myself, I’d never believed it. Folks just kept comin’ up, one after another, after another, throwin’ coins down into its bottom. And then Tipper, always a touch braver’n me, shouted out to a man who was just about to toss one in:

“Hey mister!”

“What’s the matter, son?” he asked.

“Why you gettin’ rid that money for?”

The man laughed at us, and then walked over to our wagon.

“Never heard of a wishin’ well, boys?” he asked.

Tipper and I could’ve just about died laughin’. But, mindin’ our manners, we listened quietly as we could while that stranger told us what the point of throwin’ money away was. When he finished, he went across the street, and bought me and Tipper a small bag of sour balls each. He sat with us a while in the warm sun, askin’ us all about our favorite things. My little brother kept babblin’ on, and on. Don’t know how many sours I ate while listening to both of ‘em talk, but I suppose it was enough. My cheeks was sore for near an hour after he’d left us to ourselves.
Sir came back to the wagon halfway through the afternoon. He smelled bitter from the drink, and his over shirt was buttoned crooked.

“What you smilin’ about, boy?” he asked my brother, and then slapped him in the chops ‘fore he could even answer.

“Both you’s been nothin’ but trouble this whole trip,” shouted out Sir. “Shut your mouths, or I’ll see they gets shut for ya!”

We never mentioned nothin’ to our pea paw about the candy, that nice man, or the stone well. It was probably for the best, anyhow.

Father, they found Tipper all drowned and dead in that same well, up in Jasper, over a week after he went’n took off. Must’ve had it stuck in his head that if he could get some of that wish money, he’d be able get Sir’s watch fixed. Father, Tipper knew right from wrong; he knew stealin’ was a sin. But I don’t think that he’d done a deed like that if he wasn’t so scared. Tipper was a good boy, just put in a bad place is all. Could you say a good word with the Lord for him, please, Father? He was such a little boy, just so scared is all, just so scared. And I know that I ain’t nothin’ on nothin’, but if there’s got to be a switch of some kind, you let him know that I’ll do it. God can send me out of them gates, and into those fires. He can have me, but let Tipper be. Just let ‘em be.

Well, I suppose you’ve given me enough time, and I ‘preciate you hearin’ me out, Father, I really do. But I best get back over to Gilly so she can have her minute with you. She’s over there by Sir’s coffin, keepin’ close to Mama. We decided it’s best that someone stay close to her for now. Not a single word’s come out her about nothin’, not a tear neither. I just hold her hand, which she seems to take to, and Gilly and me give turns sittin’ on the porch with her. The Clancy’s been real kind to check up on us from time to time, ‘specially Mr. Clancy. He’s been helpin’ me cut down some brush for a second and third field, five times the size of Sir’s old vegetable plot. He’s a kind man, Father, a real kind man; said he’s gonna help me make my family’s land into a nice farm, a real nice farm. With a little plannin’, Mr. Clancy thinks that, come Spring, we’ll be able to scrape together a good take on Sir’s silver watch, just enough for some seed.

Mrs. Clancy comes over almost as much as her husband, keepin’ mama company while I’m clearin’ brush, and while Gilly’s back at school. The other evening after supper Mrs. Clancy pulled me aside while Gilly was out front with Mama. I remember, clear as day, her words:

“Tobias, you the man in the house now. No matter how much you might be stingin’, you ain’t to let your Mama see you cry. You understand? If you find a spell comin’ on, about Tipper, or your pea paw, you go out and chop some wood, or take up at the creek. Things is different now. You gots to be stronger than all them.”
Father, I know Mrs. Clancy means well, part of me knows she's right too, but somethin' about what she said don't sit quite right with me, not right 'tall. But every time I get to thinkin' about it, that same wash of pitch just keeps comin' over me, dark and thick, like lookin' at nothin' but the bottom of some place deep, deep and small.
Ask the Question

Steve Holt

Am I sinner?
Am I saint?
The questions quietly thunder in concealed debate
Between the wish to shine with the light of God and all his good graces
singing angelic hymns with cherubic lacings
Or the desire to dance with the devils of my inner dark spaces,
screaming throaty words with brimstone facings
To which do you confess and which do you deny?
Both ends are but a touch away,
They burn, they heal
and the struggle reveals
All that you are: both, none and one.
My Brother, A Warrior

Michael Nataupsky

In my experience,
If there was ever proof of a modern warrior,
His body would resemble a piece of used vellum
Or the bottom of a check,
Scars etched upon his body like a signature in ballpoint,
Deliberately positioned for a reasonable purpose.
His bones broken by hammers and chisels,
His skin and flesh manipulated by scalpels and sutures,
the sterilized tools of the modern battlefield,
mending and damaging in various, methodical, calculated movements
trained maneuvers expertly and precisely used.
Como os passos de uma dança
He'd have felt them all, uniquely and separately,
but only afterwards of course.
Awakened not to feel the glory of his victories,
but to only the symptoms of his engagements,
the daily dosage of chemicals and antibiotics as celebratory libations
and with inconvenient cosmetic reminders.
Legends tell of these cicatrices, epochs were inspired by them
Myths from a distant past.
Their owners,
they would show them off as trophies,
proof of conquests and triumphs.
Boasting to their admirers, with women swooning over their bravery.
But I've met the modern warrior,
And in my experience,
His scars are identical, so are his victories.
But there are no swooning maidens,
and his struggles are no longer revered.
Rather, feared
The modern warrior has proven his ferocity by this alone.

And as all great warriors, his proof is physical, and numerous
The largest running down the front of his chest
a tear in the paper, starting at the clavicle and arriving at his abdômen
It's a substantial testament, but doesn't nearly account for the heart that it veils
His head is punctuated with twin testimonies
To his endurance and vontade to live.
And the final wrapping around the side of his body
Never mentioned, even when noticed,
Simply because he's had more arduous adventures.
This warrior is of a different breed
remaining humble and tender, never boastful,
E se levanta todo dia,
Smiling, and continuing every day without complaint.
because warriors don't.

From the very start
Never do I care to see you
Let's forever stay apart
You were the "jack of all trades"
But lying was your key
Stay and remain
Far, far away from me
The Farmer's Wife

Trisha Clegg

At dim morning, the rooster crows
to tell the time—to wake
the pasture and the farmer's wife.

Rising, the dew clings to the grass and hay
stirring with the movements of livestock
ready to begin the day.

They move toward the farmer's wife
who goes out to look across the field:

The rooster has stopped crowing.
The hens begin to cluck
and she knows they are laying.
The cows stretch and scratch
and they pull up the grass, taking it in
one chew at a time.
The hay bales take shape in the rising sun,
their scent unmistakable.

The farmer's wife can close her eyes and see it still
before preparing for her own day—
so much more austere than this.
An Uncle’s Prayer

Tyler Robert Vunk

As those sticky hands fumble
in a mood pure as butter,
it’s the variety that I fear you’ll never see.

For when the train tracks become bland,
and the rug,
long tattooed with your ideas,
is no longer your workshop,
its flat, thick lines far from roads,
its pilled-up fields of wooly buttons fail to bloom,
you’ll forget.
Oh, how you’ll forget.

And once the front yard,
an arena of exotic sport,
a raceway for barefoot cousins,
a buffet of tastes, both bitter and verdant,
the awakened biologist’s dream,
has shrunken down with a slow fizzle,
back,
way back
to the postage stamp that it is,
the choices you once knew to be as abundant as bus stops,
and Jack-O-Lanterns
will seem to lessen as if by design.

But my dear, sweet young man,
it is then that you must walk alone.
And if you find this so,
keep plenty your questions,
and light their answers.
And I promise you will find your way,
your way to your new home.
Birth

Patti Genest

Across newborn ice
Dead oak leaf skates by, singing
"At last, I am free"
Fence Posts

Robert R. Paul

One post in a link of a chain
Wonder how many others remain
Nothing comes in, nothing goes out
Stands solid without a doubt
Time erodes strong fences for sure
Left standing are the strong that endure
Morning sun to touch a new day
Others sometimes don't see it this way
Fence post so strong in the light
Stand solid with all its might
Night time dew begins a decay
And foul weather that comes its way
Corner post leans and then falls
What now are all the calls
Time mends fences, new corner posts appear
Nothing comes in, nothing goes out
On a Rock

Steve Holt

On a rock in the river I stand
Solitude wrapped
Life swirls below angry and inviting
The shadows grow longer
On a body being broken by time
My life is swollen with memories
The sun sinks west and pulls me to my final destination
Southwest

Kayla Wheeler

Too many orange sunsets,
I feel swallowed whole by gravel roads and Texaco's,
the smell of gas gets me every time.
Sour goodbyes only make it easier to leave and
contradictory, you say I'm the one who's been left behind.
That's fine by me

'Cause "you gotta do what's best for you" sounds so selfish,
but when you scream at a canyon your voice ricochets off the heavens
and makes you feel like just maybe, you could be something.
And I'm going to drive until I get there

I don't smoke,
but my life smells like over-chewed Winstons
I'm that spark in the dark of a cigarette
thrown out the car window on a windy night,
and in the morning the sun will apologize,
as it watches me wake up from sleeping in my car

And I'll realize,
this is the type of friend I've been missing,
the kind of comfort hairspray and whiskey couldn't give
when reality crept up on me.
This déjà vu hangover is hard to take,
sitting in a diner that I've never been in before
when the waitress asks, "the usual?"

She ignores my confusion like it's something she'd expected,
as if she'd served and bussed my table a thousand times.
We must have had coffee after closing
some time in some other diner somewhere else,
because that desperate face is something you just don't forget
I imagine we talked about
dry hair and why God is being mean to us,
how our boys are nothing special, and life is just something we can keep running from.
I’ll beg her to come with me,
but she’ll refuse and fill in the pages of the chapter I’ll call “Diner”
if I’m ever rich and settled on the west coast of the world somewhere.

But for now, I don’t mind being the desert’s gypsy
the girl the land of enchantment couldn’t have.
I’ll wander through a land of misconstrued Mexi-American witch hunts
and UFO sightings,
anyone intoxicated by the tumbleweed dust of the road would confuse the bright casino lights
for the pearly gates themselves and
if I have to fake a mirage I will,
Because the west’s silver lining doesn’t exist –
It’s just something I keep telling myself is real.
But it’s only the scratched at pieces of wallpaper behind the stove that refuse to come off,
The months old milk left in the refrigerator
whose “use by” date has gone unnoticed,
because the people who live here don’t need another reminder that
time really does stand still.
My Demons

Paige Massingale

I feel the wind against my face
As I run from the demons of my past
The beating of my heart
Mixed with my heavy breathing
Fills the silence that is my mind
My only thought is
Can I outrun my demons forever?

The demons become faster
While I become slower
My legs feel like lead
As if I'm running in quicksand

I watch, as my world turns black
My past finally catching up on me
I feel weak
I feel helpless

All I can do is watch
As my past overcomes me
There is nothing I can do
There is no escape from what has passed
Fear of Forgetting

Leslie Ricker

Moonlight through the trees
shades, shadows, silhouettes
waving leaves, glowing pines
memory retrieves the beauty
of that midnight shine

Fox in obscurity before dawn
silent ducks dragging triangular waves
a low tide languishing
red sun rising from misty seas
I've got to remember these

In short verse
life records itself
on my mind's fickle flesh
in short verse
I write it down
to keep the texture fresh

All the days, all the words
carefully captured in the log
are still prey to the haze-away
of creeping landward fog
When Push Comes to Shove

Caitlin Coen

I loved my stepfather. He was an angry, abusive alcoholic. These two sentences, these ten words, have been some of the hardest for me to reconcile and come to terms with. For a very long time, I convinced myself I hated him. After his death on June 18, 2007, at the age of 44 years, I had to face the fact that I did not. I had to face my feelings: feelings of hate, betrayal, anger, denial and grief. I realized that I used to love him, and that I pitied and missed him. Almost four years later, seeing or hearing his name still stirs up these complicated feelings, and I still struggle to forgive him for what he did to me. For a few years before his death, he did something that changed the way I will view him for the rest of my life.

I was ten years old when it happened. By then my younger sister Catherine and I had adjusted our habits to our stepfather’s drunk ways: we knew not to go anywhere or interact with him when he was in a good, playful mood and reeked of vodka; we knew to play quietly upstairs when he passed out on the living room couch; we knew not to go near him when he woke up angry several hours later.

The second situation was the present one when it happened. It must have been a weekend, because we were still wearing our matching purple nightgowns in the afternoon. The door to my room was closed, and muted sunshine fell through the shut shades. It felt like our own little world. We were playing some make-believe game, running around and rearranging some of the lighter furniture to suit our pretend environment. In the process, we pushed a nightstand in front of the door. We got into the game and in our enthusiasm, we became too loud, waking up Joseph prematurely. We knew when it happened: there was suddenly a great deal of yelling about how loud we were, and we could feel the house shaking as he stomped towards the stairs. The game was over. We cowered toward the back of the room, away from the door, hunched down in perfect silence and stillness. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest and I tried not to breathe too loudly.

Bang! The startling noise made one of us shriek. He had tried to slam the door open, but that nightstand was standing in the way. Bang! He tried to force it open again, but only managed to make a crack. I wanted to cry but feared it would only enrage him further.

“Open the door!” he screamed. “Now!

I hesitated only a second before deciding it was better to obey him than to stay safely where I was; if I didn’t open the door he would eventually, and I didn’t want to see how angry he would be then. I ran to the door, avoiding his eyes through the crack, and pushed the furniture out of the way as quickly as I could, which I feared wasn’t quickly enough.
BANG! The door flew open the second I stepped back, causing a subsequent bang! as it hit the wall. He towered in front of me, as I barely came up to his chest. He was shirtless, wearing only his underwear and glasses. His curly brown hair was disheveled from sleeping on the couch, and his green eyes were blazing, crazy with rage. His hands were curled into fists and he was breathing heavily; his exhalations smelled of morning breath and alcohol while his body reeked of sweat and vodka. The long, thick red scar underneath his right eye only added to his psychopathic appearance.

I wasn’t prepared for what happened next: he pushed me. He shoved me hard. I can’t forget his face while he did it: cold, angry and unfeeling. It was so unlike how he used to be during the first year he was married to my mother. He used to take us to the park, tease us about boys and make lame jokes. He helped us practice karate by letting us punch him over and over in the gut. Piggyback, horse and even elephant rides were his speciality—he used to make a very convincing elephant sound. But in that moment, the man I once called “Daddy” was gone forever, to be replaced for years with nothing but bad memories: tiptoeing around the house; the fights, yelling and tears that pervaded our household; and of course, that push.

I flew backward from the force of his push and landed on a large dollhouse, which broke under my fall. Instantly I burst into tears. Bruises began to form from where his hands had made contact with my shoulders and in all the places on which I had landed; my entire body—arms, legs, back and my right side—received bruises from that broken dollhouse. My mother came into the room, demanding to know what had happened.

“He pushed me!” I sobbed angrily. He lied and told her I had fallen. Catherine was too afraid and dumbstruck to support either story.

And my mother’s unbelievable reaction to all of this was to roll her eyes, sigh and walk out of the room. I still thank God that Joseph followed her when she did, because I still don’t like to think about what could have transpired next had he not.

My family avoided talking about it for years, until very recently when my mother and I went for ice cream. I told her that her reaction had made me think she had believed him over me, and her response was to tell me that that wasn’t what had happened at all. According to her, the furniture piece had never been in front of the door; I wasn’t bullied and frightened into opening the door for him; she hadn’t just simply sighed and walked out the door. She never told me what happened instead, or if she did, I don’t remember. Ever since I have wondered whose version of events is correct.

Shortly after that conversation, Joseph became jaundiced and slipped into a coma. I was told this the day before my birthday party. Within two days he died of liver failure. Back then I was still convinced that I loathed him, and when my mother delivered the grave news I grimly muttered, “Happy birthday to me.” That comment still haunts me to this day. Sometimes it takes one action, one moment, to destroy someone’s life by showing her that you are not the person she thought you were.
Dance

Paige Massingale

Her hand's intertwined with her partner's
She hears the music start

Her heart beats in time with the drums
While her soul vibrates with the guitar

Her partner leads the way
As the begin a heated dance

Their moves are as one
Mind, body, and soul are connected

Their movements graceful as air
Their hearts passionate as fire

Their bodies in time with the music
Their moves smooth like a slick Santana song

As the music starts to fade
They move in slow-mo

The graceful air becomes weak
The passionate fire starts to dim

Before the connection is broken
Her partner spins her around
Then dips her to the ground
Eager anticipation on our daughter's young face
The early September feels crisp and cool
It is our daughter's first time to school
With her heart wide open and a head full of why's
We stand in the doorway
Her small hand in mine
There I quietly contemplate a troubling thought
It is the moment, sought or not, that makes its trace
On her parents' heart
The moment we say farewell to the baby and the toddler,
The one we cradled and coddled, and taught to walk and talk,
It is the moment we turn her over to the tutelage
of others, to begin the quest
To find out the rest of what lies within and without
A journey, that no doubt – leads to a not
So distant June day, where the graduation march will play
And as I look in her eyes I hope I see,
A heart wide open and a head full of why's
Solace

Patti Genest

Things have always been easy between us - the flow of conversation - her role as daughter - mine as her mother - the unexpected blessing of combining the two while remaining best friends.

But today is different. Oh, I knew that it would be - I'd been told. We'd both known, though neither of us acknowledges the reality now by bringing it up. This way we can pretend. Besides, it's not like I hadn't been through this before. I remembered that the freckle faced little girl with the French braids I put on the bus that morning in September way back when was not quite the same one that greeted me at the end of the day.

This morning I am helping her pack her things and for the moment things are still the same.

Me: "Honey, don't forget you'll need to check with someone about getting your books as soon as we get there."

She: "I know, Mom. Should I bring more hangers than this?"

Me: "Probably, are you bringing the flannel sheets? Oh...pictures! I almost forgot - I put a few pictures together. I thought you might want to put them up in your room."

She: "I'm gonna miss you, Mom."

Me: "Same here....Oh....don't forget Woolly Bully."

She: "Mom...I'm not bringing Woolly Bully....."

There it was - the first wave of change.

In some closet - in one of many boxes of photographs that I have vowed to put into albums when I have the time - there is a picture of her when she turned two. She is sitting in her high chair wearing the dress with the pinafore that I made her just for that day. She has just torn the paper off one of her gifts and for the first time...her large green eyes have come to rest on Woolly Bully. There has not been a night since that moment, which she has not slept with him. He is really quite ugly now...his face misshapen...tannish hair matted...his felt mouth pushed up and off to one side.

He has maintained his position as her favorite despite the arrival of all the others - the collection of polar bears - the dolls on the shelf - unicorns and stuffed dogs won at various fairs. Through the dissolution of my marriage to her father - the heartbreak of a sibling's mental illness - when it seemed like everyone else had gone away - Woolly Bully stood firm, his horns not quite as prominent as they once had been but resilient nonetheless.

Two days later, we stand in her dorm room and I make the time drag. I fluff up her pillow, straighten her rug. With hands on my hips, I nod my head. "You'll make it cozy," I say.

We come back after lunch and before I can tell her she asks me first, "You don't have to leave yet, do you?"

Her sisters are with me and nobody speaks. "No...," I manage, "what would you like to do? Want to go sit in the TV. room downstairs for a while?"
She nods her head and it hits me. She has not looked into my eyes for the last hour.
"So what will you do when I leave?" I ask.
She shrugs her shoulders, "Probably go to Sadie’s dorm - go to supper."
Sadie is an incoming freshman as well - a former field hockey teammate from the same high school.
We sit for a while - she by the window - I on the couch feeling so far away. We catch each other's glance from time to time and we smile.
"Well I probably should be going." I say it first so that she doesn’t have to.
"I’ll walk you to the car," she says.
I watch from a distance as she hugs her sisters. I feel the tears coming but can still blink them back. When it's my turn to hold her I forget to let go. We both pull back and see that we're crying.
"I will be just a phone call away," I tell her.
Those green eyes - large and now filtered through tears finally meet mine. She closes them and nods.
"I'm sorry," I say, "I didn’t mean to do this - I promised myself I would not do this. Want a ride to Sadie's dorm?"
I know and she knows - that this is that moment - that passage of time - that new door we’ve crossed through and cannot return.
We talk almost nightly but even over the phone and e-mails we exchange, I sense the change.
We wrestle with our new roles - neither of us sure. She seems so aloof and letting her go is breaking my heart. I mope around the house driving everyone crazy with my sadness. How could one day bring about so much change - bring us to such different places?
Two days before Parents' and Friends’ Weekend she calls. "What time will you be here?" she asks. "I can’t wait, I’ve told all my friends about you - they’re dying to meet you."
I suddenly realize that we are not in different places at all. We have both undergone a major transition in our lives. Yet the door is still open. It's not a new life with no turning back - just a new room. She and I will continue to step back and forth over that threshold until we feel safe...until it is time.
Before she hangs up she has a request, "Mom....when you come up this weekend....could you bring Woolly Bully? My roommate doesn't care if I sleep with a stuffed animal."
I put the phone down. I go to her room and pick up the bull. I hold him against my face for a very long time. I don’t let him go until I am ready...until it is time...until I feel safe.
Out to the Market

Michaela Hoffman

We need Milk. Oysters. Ramen. Eggs.
Milk, Oysters, Ramen, Eggs...

I dash to the back
of Hannaford
past the bakery and tanks
where little lobsters form a staircase
for the largest ones to climb.

A cart juts out from the cereal aisle.
A white face
a black phone spots her ear.
Her earrings jangle above her Yoplait's, cream cheese,
Skinny Cows.
"So what are we
having tonight?"

I wonder the same.

Kids play tag by the bagels.
"Bock, bock, chicken," one taunts
folding his arms into mini wings.
Dad sweeps him up with an arm
and a bag of Tyson.

Whatever happened to the woman
who ate the horse who ate the dog
who ate the pig
who ate the grain with the artificial growth hormone?

She died, Billy.
With a heavy basket,
I join the assembly line
Miss Grandin once loved.

Bleat-bleat-bleat
Hands-fly-to-keep-up
with the conveyor belt.

I’m afraid
I’m missing something
on the list.
“How much?”
Milk, Oysters, Ramen, Eggs...

The answer is on a screen
in front of me.
Afterlife

Paige Massingale

Staring forward at my goal
I walk the snowy path
All is quiet around me

Crunch, crunch, crunch
The sound of my feet
Against snow fills the silence

Snow falls lightly on my head
Yet I don’t get wet
The wind blows against my skin
Yet I feel no chill

I suddenly realize
I am dead
No longer breathing
No longer with the living

Despite this revelation
I keep moving forward
My destination:
Anywhere, nowhere, it doesn’t matter

I am dead
Where can I go?
A white light shines ahead
I walk toward the light

My soul being drawn to the light
As I near the light I feel warm inside
I have found Heaven
This is Heaven

With arms spread apart
I accept my fate with open arms
A Salve Called Bed Song

Tyler Robert Vunk

As curious as a kiss,
our shoulders rub.

From now until dawn
skin will moisten
sheets will buckle,
and breaths,
breaths of plenty,
those ladles of warmth, and bath salts,
pour over the thresholds of sleeping napes,
layering, washing,
preserving like the learned hand of a bridge painter,
employed for yet another seasonal job.

And as we turn,
twisting in a maceration of elbows, and thighs,
we open.

Those bruises,
so yellow,
so fickle,
are left to themselves,
keeping as they should,
underneath soft, clean sheets,
below our sensitive frames,
awakening,
with us,
upon puffy pillows wadded with the furtive mischief of slumber.

Numb arms,
billows of tartness,
crackling bones louder than the rippling snaps of an evergreen brush fire,
meet us with a candor we’ve adjusted to.
We talk of dreams,
of unlived lives, and unwanted terrors,
of a flagrant, wandering knee,
a vivified pest,
that wines and dines your grumbles into a laughter
I will always keep dear.

But, it is now,
with its rawnness of must, and stink,
that you snuggle close.
And it is now,
with its sweet forgiveness,
that I will fall in love with you,
over, and over,
over, and over,
like the rusty whistle of a forgotten tune.
Type 2 Mistake

Lisa May Giles

(thinking the desert was unbeautiful because uncolored)

"the error arises . . . from making a composite of particulars, and so erasing the particulars"
—Elaine Scarry

Muted forms so calmly equivalent they melt down into a soup bowl surface of dust.

Brown, tan, dirt, chocolate, gray, lavender, WAIT.

Saddle, hide, leather, cowskin, shoe-tongue, taupe, bronze, sand, stone, pigmented pores of dead lava.

WAIT: lavender.

That’s the thing.

Rain or no – the presence of the not-brown hues means a linguistic reach toward purple, toward sage, toward the red rim of red rock canyon.

The canyon wears lipstick.

The canyon’s lips stick together,

Make my lips stick to another’s, make me want to take in all that open, under-sky air, radiator steaming through the hood as we go up the spiral press, the agon-torture of sinuous incline, ascent.
I assent to overheating.
I assay the passenger.
I say yes.

I will leave but I will come back to this place.
Will you be my passenger then?
Sun Before Dusk

Elena Kalioras

The strong, constant chatter from the sound of day
Flutters in upon my doze and calls below
With heat; the blessing from the bright sun's glow
Is shined upon me where my soft soul lays,
Beaming like a proud monarch by the ocean bays
Living. Blinded by glare I cannot know:
The clobber of rushed winds brings signs of snow
And in a blitz casts away all the gold rays.

I lie upon my heart. My eyes like ears
Grasp at the cracked and harsh sounds. Already dusk
Sinks deeper and hovers a grey cover
Of night; the light grows heavier into lifeless dust
Between the time span lies a light that's near
Coming ever sooner
Life for another
Collecting

Danielle Cropley

Like pickled memories, preserved past their expiration date. I'm an experimentation as of late. You wanted sweet, not sour chunks of hate, but this is what you get. Lost your carbon receipt? No take backs, just fingerprints inked black. Dip me in wax or sterilize by scalding. Boiled-down disappointment? Yup. Nothing will flush my briny taste. And nothing with unglue shame's paper label. Take your butchered pride to the icebox; keep your popsicle-heart company.
The Falls

Kayla Carr

The crumbling paint-chipped buildings  
Plastered by five-year-old, faded For Sale signs.  
Constant flashing blue lights and K-9 dogs:  
Human fear detectors.

I stop my tongue from spouting damnit,  
And glare at the overweight, uniformed, over inflated ego  
Whose salary I pay.  
I take my seatbelt ticket  
As my left hand quickly cranks up the window,  
Cutting off his, “Have a good day Mam.”  
Bullshit! I’m certainly not going to now.

Once proud white and vibrant orange,  
Now melting creamsicle tint, Moxie signs  
Teeter from every other telephone pole.  
Pot-holed, broken, salted roads  
Driven by pot-smoke filled cars,  
Straight but posted at 30.

Winter is welcomed by Budweiser bottles  
Chilling in the snow  
And the sound of crackling wood  
In make-shift fireplaces.  
Snow covers still yellow inspection stickers  
And registrations from ’09.  
Unlicensed townsmen make better use  
Of sidewalks and bicycles.

A town of “lifers,” a friendly dump side Sunday embrace,  
In front of 2,000 pounds of trash.  
Other towns would say—  
WE are the trash.
Rite Aids and movie galleries form short-lived roots,
But Cigarette Shopper's doors are ever-revolving—
Certification of our lower-class income.
Mother pressures me to choose
College-bound, family dinner table,
non-skunk smelling friends.
I snicker,
"We live in Lisbon."
We All Fall to Pieces

Danielle Cropley

do I count the ridges
in your prints?
up and down, up and down
they step like every
rusty spring
round and round, round and round

do I choke on drunken
gasps of forgotten air?
do I fracture glasses
yet only prick myself?

I lift my skin-covered bones;
count again
round and round, round and round
do my concrete eyelids
fall with fault?
down and down, down and down

I stopped counting,
dissolved the ridges
until even the numbers
were gone.
The flames were everywhere. They were licking the fringes of my skirt and belching smoke at my face, turning the house an awful shade of red. I could smell my hair being singed as I gagged against the stench. Baby Peggy was screaming for Ma while she thrashed in her crib, trying to escape the heat. Outside the house, I could hear men laughing and calling for Da, calling him a traitor and a coward.

The whole time I was frozen to the spot, unable to grab the baby and completely useless against the fire; I felt for the hundredth time in my life that I was about to die.

And then I woke up. I flew straight up out of my shared bed, jostling Mary in my terror. My pulse racing, I checked the room around me. My comb was where I left it on my hope chest, my skirts from yesterday still where I'd thrown them on the floor, and my diary still propped open to yesterday's entry, November 14th, 1920.

“Calm yourself, Catherine,” I coached myself, “It’s only another one of them nightmares.”

I was no stranger to nightmares. In the past few years, Cork had grown to be an alien place to me, so different from the quiet county of my girlhood. I never used to see policemen brawling in the streets, nor houses set ablaze or shop windows smashed in. When I was a child, my Da wasn’t killed before my eyes for defecting from the corrupt police forces.

The sun was far from being up, however, and I wouldn’t be much good to anyone if I didn’t get some sleep. So I started humming to myself the tune of a rebel song I heard one of the injured Irish rebel soldiers sing, once upon a time, “Oró sé do bheatha ‘bhaile...”.

The day following that memorable nightmare was dreadfully quiet in Mallow, Cork. There wasn’t a single threat at the Post Office where Ma worked, threatening to blow up the ‘bloody arm of the bloody British’ as had happened to so many other government offices around. I didn’t see a single IRA boy run around with his hurly in the middle of the night, making trouble for the police. And most shocking of all, there had been a scarce, single call on Ma from the Cumann na mBán, the woman’s organization in these parts. All week, no one laughed, joked, or said more to one another than what was necessary. When I confided to Ma that I thought the war must be coming to an end if the fighting seemed to be stopping, she just shook her head and told me it was only the calm before the storm.

Sunday proved her right. Ma and my younger sister Mary, with baby Peggy on her hip, were leaving of St. Mary’s night Mass, dressed in their best Sunday clothes. I said my final prayer at the altar for the safety of my older brother, Padraig, who was off fighting in Tom Barry’s flying column somewhere in the Cork countryside before running out to join them on in the road. The final peels of the church bells were echoing around the darkening town as we started towards home when a commotion stopped all the church-goers dead. Turning around, I could see a horse cantering towards the group of us, waving a rifle in the air and wearing the uniform of the Irish Republican Army.

“RUN!” he roared, urging his horse on past the crowd and out towards the country.
"What's wrong?" Father O'Malley yelled back fearfully from the top of the church steps, still in his flowing Mass vestments.

The horseman turned back around and shouted, "Dublin's in uproar! The IRA's gone and executed top British officers, and now that the peelers have caught wind, they're mad with revenge!"

Ma crossed herself with an exhale of, "Sweet Jesus," and then grabbed Mary's arm. "Come on girls," she said under her breath, "We need to go." And so we all practically ran home, away from the frantic crowd in front of St. Mary's that was now elbowing each other in their hast to find safety.

Once inside our second floor flat above Mr. O'Toole's tailor shop (a far cry from the little cottage we'd lived in when Da was alive), Ma told me to put the baby to bed and send Mary off into the other room. "I need you to run for me," she said by way of explanation.

I was used to running secret messages for Ma. Working for the Post Office was how she'd been recruited by the IRA man Liam Lynch, and she'd been doing his spy business ever since. It was often my job to run the intelligence over a town or two to Florence O'Donoghue, or more often Mr. Lynch himself. Ma said that if she could steal information being sent over the wire or phone, so could the British, and so everything had to be delivered by hand. As a result, my bicycle had more miles on it than a six year old thoroughbred.

Today, however, I was being sent in a new direction. "Tom Barry," Ma said wistfully, thinking, I'm sure, of her son who was currently fighting under that brigade leader, "in Macroom."

I gasped. Macroom? That was a full day's ride!

Ma patted my hands to placate me. "Now I know you haven't ever ridden that far, but this one is important. More than any other I've had you run. Now that I know Mick's assassination plans have succeeded in Dublin, I need to pass this on to Barry. I know I can count on you, but if you think it's too much, I'll have to run it myself. It needs to get there by sunrise."

When she put it like that, there was nothing I could do but acquiesce. She had to work in the morning and not showing up would mean terrible things for her, both from the British officers in the Post Office who thought they could count on her and the IRA men who actually did. "Alright then. Where will he be?"

Ma took my long coat off the hook and slipped a piece of paper into the special, hidden pocket that we'd created on the inside fold, whispering directions as she sealed the pouch shut.

I tried to look ready and strong as Ma kissed me on the forehead, "That's my brave lass."

I gave her a smile as I slipped the coat on and grabbed my winter hat. It wouldn't snow quite this early, but it was still getting cold at nights now. Without looking back, I silently went down the stairs and fished my bike out from its hiding spot in the alley. "Just another, routine ride," I repeated to myself as I peddled away.

I had nearly made it out of Mallow before seeing my first troop of Auxies. Thankfully, I had time to dive into a ditch and hide before they marched past. There were ten men altogether, carrying rifles with bayonets. They looked like they'd been marching long, coming from somewhere in the countryside towards town. To my horror, I realized their intended destination, the empty O'Connor's house, a couple hundred feet from my position. But My best girl friend, Deidre's screams from in the house sent the blood running cold through my body; for some reason, she was at home.
“Out, out all of you!” I heard the Auxiliary leader shout his order after banging down the door, “I don’t want to have to come in there and drag you out!”

My heart was thudding in my ears as I watched Deidre, her Ma, her Grandma, and her five little brothers stumble out of the house, all clad in their thin nightwear and most without shoes. The next thing I knew, her Ma and Grandma were screaming filthy insults and the children wailed in protest as the family was shoved onto the ground of their dirt path leading towards the street. With them out of the way, half of the men left and ran into the house, breaking, ripping, and smashing everything in sight. I stayed put in my ditch, too afraid to breathe, never mind run across the street to try and help.

But just when I was sure the horrors had reached their limits, I noticed Deidre spit on one of her guards. His face purpled with rage and he struck her hard in the face, sending her crumpling. “Will!” the insulted officer called to his leader, “Help me with this one!”

The two officers then proceeded to shove her body over a fallen log and pin her down; one pulled his bayonet off his rifle and whetted it on his stone. “I bet you think you’re really brave, huh?”

I felt the bile rise in my throat as he slowly ripped a clump of beautiful, auburn hair away from her scalp and threw it away. The soldiers laughed. I choked. Deidre whimpered, but said nothing. In agony I watched as they slowly transformed my best friend into a wailing mass of blood and tears.

Once their “evidence” of treason had been found in the now trashed house, the Auxie leader spat, “Now, next time you might think twice about messin’ with the English!” And with a laugh, he sent his troops marching back towards Mallow.

I could feel Ma’s note to Tom Barry weighing heavily in my pocket as the street emptied of soldiers. I looked back and forth, between my possibly dying best friend and the road that lead to my appointed duty. I felt tears scalding my cheeks as I pulled my bike out of the ditch and positioned it south, towards Macroom. With a last glance behind me, I put my feet to the pedals, and turned completely around. I flew to Deidre and after jumping off my still moving bicycle, I scooped her up in a bone-crunching hug.

“I won’t let them get away with this,” I swore as we cried together. She clung tightly to my skirts and jacket, moaning in pain and humiliation.

But I couldn’t stay long. I ripped the secret note out of its pocket and stuffed the missive all the way down my sock and into my shoe. With a final goodbye to warmth, I took off my jacket and wrapped Deidre up with it. “You’re in my prayers,” I whispered as I released my hold on her, rushing away from her family and already on my bicycle, heading for Tom Barry.

I was almost regretting my act of charity as the cold November wind bit against my bare arms, but I pedaled on. I could feel the dried tears from hours ago freezing on my cheek, the air rushing onto me the faster I tried to escape from it. My thighs were straining against the even ground, protesting against long hours of work without rest.

The biting cold and bitter memories soon made me realize I wouldn’t be able to make it to Macroom if I continued feeling sorry for myself. So sucking in a breath, I started singing into the wind the song of the rebel soldier from long ago, “Óró sé do bheatha ‘bhaileeeeeee! ‘Nois ar theacht an tsamhraidh.”
A little over an hour later, I found a sign on the side of the road that read “Macroom.” A quick stop at the small church, two wrong turns, and I gleeful race down a hill later, I was at the door of what I’d been told was McMaher’s farm. This time, instead of being greeted by a gentlemanly old priest, I quickly found a rifle in my face. “What d’ya want?” a lad about my age barked.

“Do you have a spare loaf of bread for my uncle?” I asked without hesitation. The password was the most important part of the mission, I knew. After one failed attempt at the beginning of Lent last year, I learned to memorize it better than any of my other directions.

He lowered his weapon and motioned for me to follow him through the house, which I did. It wasn’t long before we were climbing a previously hidden ladder in the connected barn, making our way towards the sound of a few dozen men snoring and one flickering candle.

Making it up to the top, we stopped short of the men with hushed awe on my part. These were the men defending Ireland. The lad who’d taken my password now tipped his cap and looked as though he was going to leave me, but before he could go, I needed to know one more thing. I leaned in and whispered, pointing to the man standing guard with the candle, “Who’s your man, there?”

He gave me a quizzical look, but answered, “He’s Tom Barry. Ya came for him, didn’t ya?”

I felt stupid, but nodded and let him climb back down. Tom Barry had looked up at the sound of his name, and was now climbing over piles of sleeping men, holding the candle in front of him as he made his way towards me.

“Message?” He asked quietly, shining the light into my face and making me squint against the brightness I hadn’t seen for hours. I nodded though, and pulled the slightly squished note out of my sock and handed it to him.

“From Mallow,” I answered by way of explanation.

He looked shocked as he took my offering, “Mallow? You came all the way from Mallow?” I nodded. He clarified with an incredulous expression, “In one night?”

I smiled with pride, “Ma said it was urgent. More urgent than anything she’s ever sent me out with. So I rode fast.”

His face grew serious as he knelt down with the candle and unfolded Ma’s message. I remained standing, though I wavered slightly against gravity and my own fatigue. His expression was easily read in the candlelight, from surprise to elation to cold resolve. After he had finished reading, he quickly crumpled the note up and set it atop the candle, letting it turn to smoke and ash.

“Get some sleep,” he suggested, using his head to motion towards an empty corner of the loft, “You’ve had a long night, I think.”

I agreed with him gratefully, awkwardly made my way around the men to reach the corner, and without a further though, quickly sunk into blissful unconsciousness.

When I woke, the loft was empty of men, but their possessions (excluding their guns) were strewn everywhere. The high, thatched ceiling betrayed the bright sunlight outside and I guessed I’d slept long into the afternoon. My stomach agreed, so I climbed down the ladder and went out in search of food. When I reached the ground and peeked outside the barn, however, I found the former farm boys camped on the grass, listening intently to Tom.
I stood awkwardly behind the group, watching Tom gesticulate widely, getting the boys excited for an ambush they were about to make, the details of which had come courtesy of my late-night missive. When he sent the rowdy soldiers scampering off for drills, he called me over,

“Walk with me, please?” He asked seriously, leaving little room for rebuttal. I nervously got up and followed him out towards the hay fields. We passed in awkward silence for many minutes, passing haystack after haystack until he came to a stop.

“You’re already running messages for us, so I was wondering if you would be ok with something slightly more illegal?” He abruptly questioned. I said nothing, but motioned for him to continue. “We need someone to distract the Brits before the ambush...”

I’d already heard his plan when he had told the men. I wasn’t sure about getting involved in a combat of any kind, but then the image of bleeding Deidre came into my head. I couldn’t say no. “When do you need me?”

An hour later, I was standing in the middle of a road with a fake, broken-down motorbike, ten miles outside of Kilmichael. I had on a stolen uniform of the Black and Tans, my hair tied up under the cap so you couldn’t tell I was a girl at all. We’d been waiting there since before noon (it now being somewhere close to supper) with the men from the flying column still crouched in their positions on the hills on either side of the road and I still in my scratchy men’s pants. A few times we’d had false alarms when some other, non-British convoy would pass and I’d had to make excuses for my broken bike in my deepest voice. They’d all looked at me oddly, but moved on.

But this time, I thought as I heard the tell-tale rumbles of a large vehicle, this would be the time actual Auxiliary forces were descending on our trap, not poor country farmers or travelling salesmen. As they turned the corner, I proved my instincts right. A large, armored truck was headed my way, the men sitting in the back dressed in the same, smart Black and Tan uniform I was wearing.

And I froze. They were put-putting along, growing closer and closer, and all I could see before me were the monsters who less than a week ago had tortured my best friend. Those men who murdered my father, too, claimed my memory, and the officers who had burned down Billy Foster’s, and countless other British thugs. I saw all of England slowing down in a large truck in front of me, ready to assert its dominance over me and those I loved.

I snapped out of the daze. I dropped to the ground and picked up the largest rock I could find, and staring the driver dead in the eyes, hurtled it as hard as I could towards the windshield, watching it shatter. Before the officers could retaliate, I watched a hand grenade fling high in the air by Tom Barry’s hand and then land with a rocking explosion on the truck.

I ran into the low, roadside ditch, taking cover like Tom had told me as the battle raged on above, men shouting and guns blasting. Smoke and dust choked the air as I fought to stay as low as I could. On the road, men were dying. Men I sent to their graves.

The shock of what I’d done seeped through, but I felt no regret. The image of Deidre would be burned forever into my memory, as would the sight of my brother’s eyes filling with fright as he aimed his gun, and my father’s unprepared death. Sobs caught in my throat, but what came out was the sweet song of the rebel, heralding the coming of summer and home: “Óró sé do bheatha ’bhaile! ’Nois ar theacht an tsamhráidh!”
Eyes

Haven Lindsey

If your eyes weren't so blue
I'd leave you today
after so many years
no words left to say.

But your eyes speak of depth
with their shades and their hues;
they convey all the feelings
living inside of you.

Eyes speak their own language
of truth, they don't lie
they don't feel self-conscious
and don't want to die.

If your eyes weren't so blue
it'd be easy for me
if they could be quiet
I could be free.
The Funeral of a Tree

Danielle Cropley

Memories are diseases under my bark, catching my branches in the strain of wind. My trunk buckles under tomorrow's snow and it snows. Rings contort the years inside me, while ants bore into my core. Roots watered by a flood of burned-down forests; can my seedlings sprout from this drought?

Can an ax-wielding man in red plaid cut me, and burn me; send these ashes to sea? Pulp me into life-stained paper, Plank a house from my spine, Or craft the pieces of a boat, rowed down the river. Free me.
Unfold

Leslie Ricker

there are lilacs in the back
so gracefully planted
a spike here, a spike there
no helter-skelter flowers grow
in this old man’s yard

there are tulips around the well,
morning glories around the garden,
scatterings of rose, of violet, of lavender,
and those lilacs,
deep purple lilacs,
around it all

in ‘somewhere fields’ (maybe Idaho)
unkempt flowers bloom,
nature prunes those;
but in this habitat
the growth goes where it is told
and stays where it is put;
do the flowers grow better
as the colors, in planned rhythm
steadily unfold?
Silent Amaya

Paige Massingale

When the night sets in I appear
Washing away your sorrows and fears

Always seen but never heard
Never seen in the day

I am the night rain
Drowning your pain and anguish

I am as calm as the wind
Just as gentle too

I am your savior
Everything you dream of

I am Silent Amaya
I am Silent Night Rain
Here to wash you of your sin
Gone, Sister

Kayla Wheeler

The rocking chair on the front porch sits swinging,
it's my pendulum, my martyr.
Cars with license plates emblazoned with
tea mountains and palmetto trees
drive fast and fade away. They are my
longing and I am just a pit stop to something better.

This is the exact moment when you
push open the screen door, come sit next to me
and say, "Let's go somewhere."
And before I can say no,
the wind exhales the leaves in the direction of the cars,
even they can't resist
Instead of asking mother nature,
do you know what it's like to be a
twenty-year-old orphan?
I turn to you, and ask you whose car we're going to take.

We take off, marrying ourselves to the road
and hot pavement,
our attitudes as strange and obscure as Boo Radley,
but cool and withdrawn as
Dick Hickock and Perry Smith.
Pedal to the floor, you drive fearless,
and I check the rearview to see if we've
outrun our past, but it's only lagging behind.

You turn on the radio for some
FM childhood nostalgia and it's sweet,
but all the voices sound tired
because they haven't been resurrected,
they've just kept singing even after
we were through with them the first time.
We’re just a pair of pretty criminals
committing petty crimes,
Who would have thought our knack for stage makeup
and costumes was an appetite for disguised adrenaline?
We were made for criminality.

Our genotypes ooze the body language,
the right words and proper cheek bones
just soft enough to get away with murder.
I remember when our father said,
"Look at the monsters I’ve created,"
Because it was the first time he had
taken responsibility for something he had done.

I couldn’t avoid this life if I wanted to,
even destiny knows this shit stays in the family.
People say my last name twice
because they think it sounds familiar.
But you and I, we don’t talk about it much,
we just carry out the promises we made
to each other, and that has always been enough.
And as we drive I think about where we’re going,
not where we’re driving to,
but where we’re going.
In the Cradle of My Father’s Bones

Tyler Robert Vunk

Upon those shoulders where I once rode
now rests a quilted edge.
Yet those fingers,
with their shells of grey veneer,
tepid,
and scribbled,
still roar aloud,
if but only in a tap.

And lately,
as I spin as I always have,
my riotous, proud spin,
a barking dog at a television,
I’ve heard every one of those pats,
each a little louder than before,
until they became music.

Such sounds!

Ah, but it is in your groans,
your groans old friend,
where I know what I’ve heard is true.
For yours is the story of the leaf,
A subtle beauty,
found on its way to the ground.
Purple and Black Asics

Meegan Bolduc

My breathing slows
And then all I can hear is my heartbeat
Bada-Bada-Bada
Steady
Until I get a random burst of energy
Ba-da-Ba-da-Ba-da
My purple and black Asics kick up dirt with every stride
They're happy
I can tell
To no longer be pushing against pavement
They like to feel some give as they propel me further
Propel me faster
They like to explore new territories
To feel new terrain
To taste the earth
And nature
And the saltiness of my sweat
It's a new sweat, a cleaner one
Mimicking the ambiance of this whole place
It's peaceful
But I can tell it has a wild side
Like me
And my purple and black Asics
We both like new adventures
And a little bit of danger
They take me on a new route today
With no consideration of athletic ability
They bring me alongside the ocean
Whose majestic waters of cobalt and azure
Attempt to draw me in
She is a siren, and I am but a sailor
But no
My purple and black Asics push my farther
And farther
And the farther I go, the happier I become
Happy for the cool ocean breeze
I can feel it
Like the embrace of a loved one, my mother
Or the encouragement of a friend
Happy for these fleeting warm fall days
Where a tee shirt keeps you warm
And the windows can still be left open
Happy for the crisp smell of change
Like the reds and oranges of the large oak tree
Standing tall
Amongst all that green
Happy for this time to think
To reflect
To breathe like I haven’t in the last few hectic weeks
My purple and black Asics bring me through the forest
The sound muffling pines seem to broadcast my thoughts
I’m hungry.
I have so much organic chemistry homework.
I’m hungry.
Seem to broadcast my heart.
Badoom-Badoom-Badoom
A loud base on the left side of my chest
My purple and black asics tell me to relax
To breathe
To keep running further
And further
Until I can’t hear my thoughts anymore
Or my heart
Only the pounding of my purple and black Asics
And the wind rustling through the leaves
And the three deer to my left
Prancing across my path
The three deer to my left
I stop
Slightly frightened
Mostly mesmerized
Their large round eyes seem to tell a story
The story of the forest
Or maybe I just see my story within them
I cannot look away
I hold that stare
And I breathe
And I enjoy
Beautiful
But then the deer continues onwards
And my purple and black Asics propel me forwards once again
Skin’s Memory

Danielle Cropley

me, a scrapbook?

speckled peach paper,
engraved with blackened stenciling,
laminated ribbons rooting life;
dying them purplish blue
blanketing peach-fuzz folds,
salty sweetness pooling warm,
stick-on scars, double-sided;
taping them pink, brown, and white.
chipping paint; red hot
burnt but not crispy; still soft,
goose bumps pop, rippling
under itchy wool’s gray.

starched sheet of beige,
frozen ridges, print-less.
glued in place with a mask
powdered, embossed, glossed
over.

a scarpbbok, me? not yet.
Slowly Drowning

Lin Labbe

People hold out their hands this, I see
I don't understand why others like me
People around me really do care
They wish me luck in every prayer
Those friends reach out, I let them down
Wallowing in self-pity, my troubles I drown.

These friends I have, want me to be free
I let them down because I'm afraid of me
Friends like mine I know are very rare
Want to help me, though I don't really dare
These friends reach out, I let them down
Wallowing in self-pity, my troubles I drown.

I admit it's a problem that cuts like a knife
I want to be strong and get on with my life
One friend lost a loved one to one of my kind
Still she reaches out, I'm selfish, I'm blind
No these blinders I put on fool only me
I drive people away, I don't want them to see
These friends reach out, I let them down
Wallowing in self-pity, my troubles I drown.

Friends are here to give me some backing
Yet what do I do; I send them packing
Friends don't give up on me but I always do
Wish I would be strong and do what they say to
These friends reach, out I let them down
Wallowing in self-pity my troubles I drown.

When friends reach out I tell them lies
They know better, not believing my alibis
I'll do better I promise the first of the year
I'll pull up those boot straps, I'll show no fear
I'll show my friends who reach out I'm really strong
I know wallowing in self-pity hurts them; it's wrong.
Personal Politics

Leslie Ricker

half-amused with happiness
by tall pink flowers
filling a narrow valley
with beauty and attraction
and a hint of bees
wonder's garden
without the stubborn trees

a garden denotes a gathering
cultivating powers of cultivation
maybe more out of less, conversation
learning paths and politics
pressing hard for persuasion
seeking webs of friendship
reliant but pliant enough
to withstand
a few abrasions

the grass is still green
and birds continue to chatter
but the whimsical state
of the caring mind
has moved on
to other matters
Comfort

Haven Lindsey

Yes, I'm alone and
no I'm not lonely, 
what more need I say 
to convince, you of that?

No, I'm not sad 
nor am I angry, 
it's my karma, my path 
and I will embrace that.

Content on my own 
at ease around others, 
our oceans are wavy
our world is not flat.

To be fine with the bumps 
to float over the bobbles, 
makes one strong 
to accept things like that.

To grab onto anger 
like holding a flame, 
it's senseless to burn me 
so you I can blame.

Yes, I'm alone and 
I'm free but not lonely,
there isn’t a need 
to convince you of that.

Would you consider 
quiet reflection? 
To be still, to be quiet 
are you open to that?
The Land

Anne Miller

The land stretches before my eyes
My weary bones and tired sighs
A land untouched, my vision sharp
The forbidden place a world apart

Golden sun with fury divine
The lightened maid of ancient time
Upon her throne, seeks to prove
Kindness in all the gentle move

The world of towers grows stale and weak
The voice of songs no longer speaks
The thane of madness takes his hold
Light fades with shadows growing bold

Alone stands I against the tide
My faith and fight are by my side
I will face the darkness old
With power and bloodline rich and bold

When the spirit of light begins to fly
When shadows and doubt succumb and die
Alas my friends, as I must go
The wind beneath my wings will blow

Away I will soar above the clouds
The gale of peace on mercy’s brow
The queen of sun and moon and stars
Will take me in her loving arms
To the land
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