The Lyceum, as an educational institution, functioned as the locus of the collective talent, ingenuity, and intellect of Ancient Greece. Since 1971, Lyceum at the University of Michigan-Dearborn has echoed this idealized tradition by serving as the showcase for the creative talents of writers and artists within the university community. The journal features poetry, short fiction, non-fiction, drama, photography and artwork submitted by students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Submissions, which retain their anonymity during the rating process, are critiqued individually by the staff and editors. Along with the publication of the journal, Lyceum exhibits local flavors of art and poetry with various on and off-campus events and shows.

Editor-in-Chief: Stephanie Portelli
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Event Manager: Alicia Quintana
Publishing Editor: Kareem Sabek
Communications Editor: Paige L. Hanson
Operations Manager: Haydar S. Ali
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Staff members: Brandon DePetro, Susan L. DeWolf, Bonnie Jacobsen, William Monette, Lindsay Nichols, Tiarra C. Overstreet, Shawn Russell, Stephen Sharbatz, Emma Slonina, Sonya Smith

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Dear Lyceum readers,

The journal you hold in your hands is a very special edition of Lyceum. One that will, perhaps, be famous for years to come.

Individually, Fall 2009 and Winter 2010 each would have been our largest issues to date. Together, they make up over 240 pages of student, alumni, faculty, and staff work. It is the first Lyceum issue to be made available as a PDF download and paved the way for the digitization of past and future issues. However, due to administrative policy changes and our own struggles with adapting to them, this issue was not printed during the 2009-2010 school year.

Three different editorial boards worked on this journal, two of which are not credited on the first page. We would like to thank Brandon DePetro, of the 2010-2011 editorial board, and Eman Elshaikh, Corrie Lucier, and Pamela Satchwell, of the 2011-2012 editorial board for all of their hard work on this issue of Lyceum.

Most importantly, we thank you – the readers – for your continuing interest in and support for Lyceum. We are proud to present you with the 2009-2010 Double Issue.

Always yours,

Stephanie Portelli, Editor-in-Chief 2009-2010
Paige L. Hanson, Editor-in-Chief 2010-2011
Emma Slonina, Editor-in-Chief 2011-2012
The Literary and Fine Arts Journal

Laura Burgher

The Butterfly House

Was so warm you could feel the heat
Brushing up against your cheeks
Making you feel soft and dozy
As if any moment you could
Drift off to sleep.
It smelled sweet like dirt
After a rain.
Flowers stretched up with
Magnificent petals
Displaying their bright goods
In contest with each other
For insect lust.
But the butterflies were lazy
And uninterested in the showy display.
They sat around the stone fountain
Slowly moving their wings
Back and forth
Back and forth
But there was one
Lying on the red tiled floor –
Its wings, one on top of the other,
Blue and purple with a bright spot of
Yellow,
That did not move.
It was this one I felt drawn to
And couldn’t pull my eyes from,
Filling me with a longing I couldn’t explain.

Watch Downhill Speed

Her slender legs dangled across mine
As we lay in the bright sunny patches on the bed.
It was these moments I liked best
When the warmth of our bodies
Kept the sheets cozy for hours.
I wanted to hold these moments forever in my mind -
The stillness, the sound of the birds letting us know
We really ought to get up.
And our refusal to listen,
Laughing at them and each other.
We wanted to be cats –
Sleeping twenty-two hours a day,
Purring away as small furry creatures
Rustled through our dreams.

But these sweet and perfect things
Always end too soon.
We only explored each other’s bodies in the dark
And spoke our secrets with inebriated tongues.
There is only so much falling we could do.

So I tried as best I could to keep it slow,
Putting off
The inevitable crash.
After the 3rd Cup
Inspiration surges through my veins
Nearly knocking me off my feet with
Ecstatic exhilaration.
In a matter of minutes I’m no longer
Snaily, sluggish, and sloth-like –
I am a boisterous, brilliant,
Beacon of light.
Every word that drips from my lips
Is shining in profound droplets
Of golden illumination.
I forget everything I once was
And stare into that shimmering black mirror
Of everything I wish I could be.

Nap Dream
Swirling
ephemeral
steam
rises up
as I sink down
into a full
cup of tea
**Distraction**

Once you’ve found her,
Say goodbye to meter and rhyme,
Farewell to metaphor, stanza and verse.

Once you have that blanket-soft body
Nuzzled up hard against yours,
What good is poetry anymore?

**Confession**

It’s not until they see
The ink-stained bed sheets,
Do they fully realize
What I mean when I say,
“I’m in love with writing.”
What do you see?
In the woman standing before you
at the end of each day,
after all the layers are gone,
stripped, and washed away.
Do you find her beautiful?
Exposed,
no longer hidden
behind the layers of make-up and clothes,
forced smiles and schedules,
strength, needed to get through the day.
Do you still love her?
Her smile fades,
revealing the flaws on her face.
Her imperfect body
swimming in a baggy t-shirt and shorts.
Exhaustion showing on her face,
stress keeping her from her bed.
Evidence of her scars,
streaming from her eyes.
Strength has dissolved by the day’s end.
Weak and tired,
do you stay?
Will you be her strength?

Wanted

A heart, with no face...
Long midnight walks, and talks
Over coffee.
Strong arms to hold me.
Depth, getting deeper.
Apply within.

She Fears


Too Tired to Swim

I’m swimming in the shallow of my soul
for the deeper I dive
the more pressure I feel.
My surroundings, chaos,
drowning in pain,
faces, words, tears,
memories, kisses, arguments, tears,
nights spent alone, relived,
more tears,
until I surface,
burying it all in the depths of my soul.
Too tired to swim,
I float on the surface.

Ruins

Sitting
amidst a scattered mess of ruins
that spread as far as I can see.
Only one pillar is left standing.
How long until its crumbling foundation
causes it, too, to collapse?
Relics of the past mock me of my poor choices.
Lost in the rubble.
Will anyone find me?
Is anyone looking?
Wondering
how I will build my empire from ashes
and shattered fragments of spent time,
disintegrating memories.
Sitting and wondering,
how a broken person can fix a broken life.
Now even I am falling apart.
Her way to me.

What brilliant rainbows!
What a magnificent metamorphosis!
This blackened butterfly
Could not and would not escape her.
I felt the surging might and flight,
An agreement of tradition and balance,
The tolling, rolling quell of a haunted spell,
That I could not and would not explain,
that I did not and should not contain,
it felt insane, and I wanted to tame it
and maintain the trip.
My stone membranes shattered as the liquid
Green poured into my veins.

She was green, as only Ireland can create.
She was toxic and hazardous to my health.
Call it a green paradise, call it a lean
pair of eyes, call her fire and ice, lean
into the green scene and find that
calling meaning that I fought and
sought, that I finally caught, and it
was through powerful hours of time
and sunshine, flowers and trees and
Bees and storms that tore me apart and
Mended me while wining and dining
In my capsized, pining vessel, lonely
And dead in an icy husk and sheen.

Herself,
My Paradise Green.

Paradise Green
At one time, I sought Paradise
Found it to be gold and gaudy,
Large,
Imposing.
Less friendly than I ever expected it would or
could be or might at the height of the
sun in its flight to the horizon.
But it passed as quickly as any day.
And I was empty.

I sought Paradise in the Great Mother Earth
Found her whole and fulfilling,
She was brown and rustic,
Embodied traditions and divine balance
Solid,
Steady,
More powerful than the tolling and rolling of
thunder while under the spell of the
quell beneath my feet, whispering
wild, and intemperate.
But then the storm passed.
And I was still empty.

I stopped seeking Paradise
It was a fruitless voyage of blackened bread
And destined to intolerably age me like the
beasts who cannot die, the statues that
pry on their way along great stretches of
stone, share their lies with the
blackest shadows of bone.
It was an empty place to be,
Until Paradise danced and sang and smiled
**One-Winged Phoenix**

Getting glimpses of greatness,
Winding perpetually around,
Creating forces that even tornadoes might envy.
Colorful,
Phantasmagorically altered,
Into a half-beast
Of both tolerance and being tolerated.
Over the top at times,
Rounded, yet stern,
Glorified, yet few want to be part,
Of this all-encompassing heat.
Nor can they compete.
Nor do they want to.

Theoretically, two flames will snuff each other out,
But what is left in its wake?
Bringing life, bringing passion (and its beautiful, blending colors)
I pass Fate (or rather circle it)
And honesty claims that even It doesn’t want to be part of this.
For by living our lives defined, we fulfill a plan.
By existing undefined, we find a plan,
Whatever best suits,
And try to go with it.
Even though it won’t often fulfill us,
We exist as a duller remnant of our once vibrant colors,
That ceased to be (or rather remained unclear).

**Rose Breath**

roses prized gild grown,
solitary gardener
sniffs twilight dreams bloom
Ministering from John Donne

Hospital hallways speak 
footsteps spilling of conversations 
beepers electrified and cellphones living,

shoes slide on 
floors of wax and wane, 
relapse and pain 
tolls for the naught and 
tolls for the many

sickened, dying and moving on. 
Everyman is I. 
John Donne, does your bell toll for me? 
I hear you 
plainly

my shoes carry to slide on 
breathing at bedside, 
ministering God’s heart 
exhorting in every human way 
prayers 
for mercy, 
for kindness, 
for pure love.

I hear you, John Donne. 
A bell tolls, could be for me,  
my footsteps now still 
to hear the noise and need 
amidst walls of 
medical courage and human condition. 
Perspective hits hard here in this jungle,

my personal troubles voiding 
into abyss fractionated 
by hope and hell.

Everyman is truly I. 
I cry inside my soul. 
I say again to myself 
“Everyman is truly I.”

The verdict is clear. 
The verdict painful, 
I am responsible for Everyman. 
Co-missioned, 
I am Everyman.
Winter Swept Away my Friends

barely black they came
birded feathers pressed looking for rest
finding shelter guessed

matter’s not wind’s warp
bodies wrapped tapped my sill
lounged lucent ‘til

blur betrothed their home,
nature hellbent struck my friends
plucked now, flung to rends

steeled bare black they
their shivers shod feathers broad,
whooshed to kingdom laud

barely birds they came
feathers pressed they came to rest,
shelter gone, swept ethos guessed

Steven Young, Jr.

Awakening

Overdue,

It’s time to roll out of hallucination
And confine yourself to others’ delusions.

Peel

The outer layer of odious existence,
Shed the skins of your last life
That died at your awakening.

Soothe

The rough and ragged leather
With beads springing from tepid sources;
Smear the invisible poisonous elixir
Into each crack of your broken mask.

Three problems solved. One
Million more to go before
The list rewrites itself.
Tribute to the a.m.

She, in a glorious autumnal effect:

I like stanzas of three
and if I ever became a poet
this is how I would write them
(mostly)

He, in the dead, shrill breaths of winter:

I like even more
your stanzas of four;
what wise galleries of humor!

She, to the earth’s last flickering embers:

WHAT IS MY THING?

never will I know.

poet
is
not
it.

LISTENER & MUTE & FAR OFFENDER –
NUMBNESS FOR LIFE!

She, when finally awakened:

Everyone became a poet. We were
born this way.

He, who is eternally shelled:

You were born a poet?
I like to think that poetry
is the child of your fashion.

SPEAKER & LOUD & CHILD LOVER –
WAITRESS FOR LIFE!

He, through the chaos of shadow:

WHERE IS THE GIRL?

I am not to know.

some
Waiting for a lightning strike.  
Hungry for ideas,  
I branch out further.  
But the roots don’t mirror  
What’s growing above ground.  
Deformed.  
I can’t help the changing of the seasons.  
Shedding leaves irrevocably,  
The way that I will never look again.  
Confusion that only winter could bring  
Bares myself, naked and alone  
With a harsh and empty landscape  
And a choice to make.  
The snow is promising though.  
It comes fast, providing cover  
Before I can grow completely cold,  
Blankets and brings warmth.  
I am not alone here after all.  
You have fallen just as I have.  
The purity is new and promising,  
Untouched by me.  
Give me your whiteness,  
And I will give you your season back.  
Reverse the fall of autumn  
The leaves will return,  
But riper than before.  
The crisp will replace the cold  
And we will remain together;  
Time is merely an imprisoning perception  
Which prevents recognition of forever.

**Wrath**

Feathered vespers waiver at the whim of the wind  
Breathing out their last flashes wherever  
Zephyr decides, tearing mother from kin,  
Converting elation to sorrow, and severs  
All reason for existence. Not bowing, the Vulcan  
Relic thrusts its vitality through onyx  
Clouds of ash and scorn, casting a burden  
Upon those that mock their power: “mere tricks  
Installing fear.” Eros steadies his bow  
Only to return jovial bliss deep  
In the shadows of his quiver. Pluto  
Accepts no more souls, letting spectres weep  
Droplets of ambrosia, offering their  
Devotion for a fate not drawn so sere.

**Time as an Imprisoning Perception**

**SABRINA BOLVARI**
**Sensation of Being Broken**

There’s that awful feeling, again...
Asphyxiation moving in on me,
In on me,
In on me,
Begins...

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**Amal Alghahmi**

**Rain Dance**

The rain can make music;
its drumming on the glass
plays a tune for the dancer
twirling, twirling in the grass.

A slender arm reaches up
to touch the stormy sky
and catch the falling raindrops
before gliding, gliding by.

A smooth bare foot moves dancer,
on the puddles, to alight;
making splashes, soaring swiftly
like a bird, a bird in flight.

The rain plays pleasant music
beating gently on the leaves;
catch a glimpse of lively dancer
darting, darting, tree to tree.

A tune and stage, harmonious;
no dancer could resist
the urge to don a tulip skirt
and in dance, in dance persist.
**Portrait of the Poet as a Young Girl**

_I_

Again and again,  
red roses  
appear at my  
bedside table.  

Each morning they do, I  
sit at my window and  
quietly pull off the petals,  
undoing perfection upon  
every passerby below.  

II

She sat at her nonexistent writing desk,  
just like she never did  
every day of the week;  
the tap-tap-tapping  
of the type-writer's keys  
could not be heard  
as she didn't depress  
the letters to write  
verses of a poem  
across a sheet of white paper  
that wasn't there.

III

I, I am a butterfly;  
soon, I will die,  
but first, I fly.

**The Walls of Mathematics Broken Down**

I’d like to break down the walls of mathematics.  
The formulaic barriers of consciousness,  
Keeping us encaged in a numerical prison,  
Each step we take predestined by a mere scholarly puzzle.
**Thomas Wesley**

**Ann Arbor**

From where we go
and to where we are,
finally ending up
where
I

am-
what conceivable madness
do we share
to walk this path?

My us and our we
are of them,
rather not of
my me or your you.

And rather our us takes control of their this,
we head down a road broached with leafless oaks,
their branches overhead.
Shedding themselves of their us-our them.

---

**Nabilah J. Safa**

**Secret Poison: A Reflection**

The beauty astonishing
Breathtakingly quiet

But-

The crickets screamed
in protest against

the cigarette sticks
of poison tossed,
into

their secret, yet
public garden

as a white Butterfly
of Hope
restored the calm.
Melissa L. Fee

Somewhere, You Are Broken

Somewhere, you are broken.

Somewhere, the hazy, pale gold outline of autumn bathes you in scarlet and amber, the colors creating a corset of emotion around your heart, laced so tightly you feel the blood pounding in your ears like the cadence of all your failures. The gentle echo of agony resonates on the wind, the mingled smell of dejection and decay hidden under the top-notes of wood fires and apple cider, drenching you in the heady scent of a soul-hurt, a body-hurt, an ache that nests in the core of your joints and marrow. It floods out of your sorrowful eyes like incandescence, sticking to your eyelashes in crystal droplets.

Somewhere, you are engulfed in the poetry of all that is fragile. Weaving the patchwork memories of happiness together with the shimmering silver thread of regret, the fabric of your psyche feels delicate and weak under your clumsy hands. Thin, cold, and insubstantial, you are left shivering under the blanket of your sun-bleached world, dreaming of the soft, warm reassurance of love that never quite touches your frostbitten mouth.

Somewhere, there are church bells ringing out the melodies that call you home. They cry out into the empty space you once occupied, desperately seeking your secret spirit, the laughter hidden in your well of melancholy. The music swells like the tide of faith, slowly ebbing away the shoreline of your solitude, crashing into you with the promise of tomorrow, the temptation to keep believing in fragments of friendship and stolen moments of bliss.

Somewhere, you are broken. Somewhere, you are a dazzling display of despair, a rainbow of gray shadows, a never-ending ocean of hope for the hopeless.

Yes, somewhere, you are broken, and this is what makes you beautiful.
"I know what the problem is. See the perpetual misgivings and magnitude of changing emotion? See the soft, slow burn in her blue eyes, blazing a basic path of pain and persistent optimism? It's a genetic disorder, she was born this way. I'm sorry to say, it's fatal. There's never been an escape."

"Doctor, tell us, true? What's she got? What are we to do?"

"Give her a paper and pen, and wait for her last breath to end. The only cure for this disease is death...

"She's a writer."

Let us mourn.

"Writer's Remorse"

The words ring in her ears, a skipping record, hauntingly clear through the rest of the buzzing static in her head, three syllables resonating with the crystal clarity of terror. Hush, darling, hush, nothing can save you now. Code blue, code red, coding. Defibrillate with ruminations of possibility and promise, rescue breathing with the lips of precise vocabulary. Cling. Cling tightly to the ink.

The needle in her arm, the drip affects her senses, sharpening, seeing with shockingly accurate perception. Beads of perspiration dot her forehead, a fever of finality, a fever of fatality, a fever of fear. Don't fight the virus coursing through your veins, love, stop the idiotic notion that you'll ever recover. The end is always been as near as your next breath, your pretty pills only prolong this all, your medications only keep the monster inside you in check, keep all that blood from spilling out in putrid pints of particular prose and poetry, festering, too much at once. It's a deadly disease, dear, it cannot be circumvented by your charm or charismatic smiles and sighs, it cannot be exorcised with indulgence or denial, it simply just is.

Peruse those pages and pages of type and tension, follow the fetid trail of speculation and the stench of fecal emotional matter, words that stink of depression and disgust and loathing and love--dive into the den of darkness and depravity, of delicacy and dulcet tones, idioms and opposites lined up back to back, as uneven and disarrayed as the whiplashes they leave on her, each one a scar and story. Cross yourself, sweetheart of sin and sanctity, silence yourself with the somnolent knowledge that you'd never make it as something else.

SIESTA
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

WAIT
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

PRISCILA BERCEA

PRISCILA BERCEA
How
Digital Photography

Hidden and Forgotten
Digital Photography

Priscila Bercea

Priscila Bercea
FREEDOM
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

STEPHEN SHARBATZ

CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

STEPHEN SHARBATZ
**PERU**
Digital Photography

**BUENOS AIRES**
Digital Photography

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**GERIC LAPUT**

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**GERIC LAPUT**
OH
Digital Photography

THOMAS WESLEY

PERCEPTION
Digital Photography

SONYA SMITH
TRANQUILITY
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

SONYA SMITH

PERSPECTIVE
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

SONYA SMITH
HELP, I’M ALIVE
Digital Photography

SARAH FLATHERS

HOW MUCH WILL YOU PAY?
Digital Artwork Sketch

TIARRA OVERSTREET
JOURNEY
Digital Photography

TIARRA OVERSTREET

LIGHT
Digital Photography

TIARRA OVERSTREET
Tequila Sunrise
Digital Photography

You Decide
Digital Photography

Tiarra Overstreet

Tiarra Overstreet
Anton Attard

Frozen Metal
Digital Photography

Flicker of Snow
Digital Photography

Anton Attard
Seasonal Beauty of Hines
Digital Photography

Phil Sattler

Storm
Digital Photography

Phil Sattler
THIS side of Eternity
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PHIL SATTLER

CONTUSION
Digital Photography

TIFFANY FOXWORTH
ASHES IN THE RIVER
Digital Photography

REACHING FOR THE SKY
Digital Photography

RAHUL MANGALORE

RAHUL MANGALORE
STAND UP
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

VENGENCE
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

BONNIE JACOBSEN

BONNIE JACOBSEN
JELLYFISH
Digital Photography

Cristina Zamarron

BAMBOO
Watercolor Painting

Stephanie Portelli
FUNKY GUMMY LOVE
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

WIND ME UP
MULTIMEDIA PIECE

STEPHANIE PORTELLI

STEPHANIE PORTELLI
**SUSAN LYNNE DEWOLF**

*I am No Stella*

Are you my darling Shakespeare, here to compare me to a summer's day?
Or are you my racy Donne, preparing me for a verbal strip-tease?
Care you to be Spenser instead, playing my determined huntsman after a long chase?
Whomever you might be, please let me know,
I need to prepare myself for the Petrarchan show.
If all you need are rosy cheeks, shining eyes, and Venus' body
I am yours but just for tonight.
For when the dawn breaks in the dark sky, you will see
that I am not the idealized beauty.
I have imperfections that you should know
and if you will not have me, I will go.
Take your blazon,
along with your Petrarchan rhetoric and loveless rhymes.
I am my own woman, a woman of the times.
I don't have a pedestal and I am far from grace,
I am not your Stella or any other such refined.
I am me, take that, and write that in rhyme.

**BRANDON ALEXANDER DEPETRO**

*An Effigy of Man*

With no sense of self,
And of life-long mimicry,
I have grown weary.
The Literary and Fine Arts Journal

I'm overwhelmed in my memories of the crowds, the heat. Transposed onto everything, instead, is a big beast sleeping. I'm terrified of dying.

I look out to the window while we weep together. Imagine myself laying out in the grass. It isn't the soft variety -- it is harsh but somehow loving. Weeds, weeds, weeds.

And ants that climb over our knees. And no one waiting back at home and a scarcity of most things.

More strangers to gaze at and fall deeply in love with. Tattoo goddesses to dance around in my musings. How did she glow with such paleness? I would steal her rubies, her precious blood.

I cannot reach the marrow, but I'll consume her eventually. To find more love.

For a little while, she made me feel a little more full.

"Terminal." The word rings in my head.

You tell me that you know I'll be okay, that there are people helping me, that I need to stop googling my illness.

You push your iced beverage toward me, you tell me that I have to try the "Liquid O" at least once.

I laugh a little. It looks disgusting.

It's nothing but chalky sugar, but at least I know what I won't be missing.

This is the fifth night you've spent consoling me, but eventually, I'll stop counting.

And wildly now, looking up at you as you offer me your hand, I weep at a single truth:

We are born only once, and never again.

Samantha Lynn EhlerT

Terminal

In an old house converted to coffee shop, I am lost in a sea of painted clouds.

All the world is a murmur, a dream. Tattooed women with daring, short cuts, whose sexuality you called into question. I don't wonder for them at all.

I just love the creamy skin, disrupted by angry ink. I dream long and hard of playing guitar here, singing about the strife, my arms breaking trying to cradle an misshapen identity, a struggle to appreciate my hips. The paintings on the walls induce a fantastic terror -- a twisted artist, one with the tiniest mouth and a slippery tongue covered in wild berries and secrets unsplayed. I love the color yellow, the way it glows, the abruptness of the water. You tell me you'll be buying that painting soon.

The one with the boat, the birds, the yellow. And it brings me back to those tattoos, which belong there, and I am drawn, pulled, lurching toward the blades of her shoulders which remind me of wings. I cannot see the possibilities for my own body, no, not quite yet, there are still limits to be torn. My mouth stutters, spits, stifles a great big leap.

I insist on thinking nothing. You insist on knowing.

Later on, the world seems silent, but I can feel the train from miles away. I begin to sob and laugh simultaneously.
Love

They told me not to touch the dogs. I only touched them once in my whole life.

I sometimes crawled into the space between the evergreens and the fence to feed the boxer dogs the fallen limbs of trees. I would poke one through the fence, watching as they slowly approached me. They'd give it a sniff, but turn their heads after a moment, as if they were uninterested. Without warning, they would take a bite out of it. It used to scare me very much, but then I got used to it.

I was always excited by the mixture of chomping and panting, and the attachment that reminded me of a telephone wire we shared between us - my hand at one end, and the dog's mouth pushing and pulling on the other. I could feel the heat of their breath on my fingertips. I liked to hear the branch snap and crack inside the boxer's mouth, and listen for the soft sounds of saliva as it fell onto the ground. The sounds and feelings made me feel very much alive, and I very much liked to watch their teeth grind away.

Sometimes I apologized to the trees, because I know that I wouldn't want a girl feeding my dead parts to something else. But I think the trees understood, and that made me very happy. I asked my mother once why they all had bandages around their ears. She told me that they had their ears pasted, which meant that they went from having floppy ears to having pointy ears. It made me sad, and I just knew that the dogs must have been sad too - I didn't quite understand how they made the ears that way, but it sounded very painful and I know that if my ears were like that, I might cry, even in front of everyone.

That's why when they told me not to go near the dogs, I didn't listen. They seemed lonely sleeping outside with no one to talk to. I was too afraid to stick my hand in the fence, but I fed them their branches and sometimes I would throw pine cones over the fence so they could chase after them. Sometimes they would mumble to me with a mean sound, and I would feel afraid, so I would let go of the tree limb. They would become confused and stop chewing it, letting it fall to the ground broken and wet. After a few minutes, they would run away into the forest, and I would sit quietly and listen to the birds.

I once gave a dog a piece of corn on the cob that a neighbor had left out for the crows. I felt upset because he didn't seem to like it, and he let it fall so that it became really dirty and none of the pups would eat it.

When they found me feeding the dogs one day, they were very angry. They said it wasn't good for the dogs, and that they would get very sick if I kept feeding them. I felt awful for making them sick, so I drew them a picture to say I was sorry and I slipped it through the fence. Then one of them started to eat it, and I told him not to, but he did it anyway. I don't know if it was the smell of crayons that made them eat it - I knew a boy once who ate a crayon, and he didn't feel very good after. I told the boxers about the boy, but they kept eating the picture, so I cried and ran into the house.

After that, my mother made me stay out from behind the evergreens. Sometimes, to see the dogs, I would slip into the upstairs bedroom and look at them from the window. I tried to wave to them but they never saw me. I wondered if they thought I didn't want to be friends anymore, and this made me feel very unhappy.

I knew that I had to tell them I loved them when I saw them for one last time. I heard mother talking about love once, and she said it's something special that only you know when you feel. I knew that I loved the boxers, and I also knew that I was very, very lucky - after father went to sleep, my mother told me that not everyone gets a chance to love, and that some people never find it. I wondered if the boxers would love me, and I worried very much.

I brought four shortbread cookies and I waited at the fence. A
big, tall boxer came and I fed him one of the cookies. After a little while, two more came, and they all wanted the cookies, so I decided I would have to throw the cookies and hope that whoever hadn't gotten one could reach it first. I felt this was very fair.

I remembered that when my mother would tell me she loved me, she would sometimes run her fingers through my hair. I decided that I would touch the boxer dogs when I told them just in case they didn't know what love was. I crawled closer to the fence, bringing a finger to touch a moth that had landed on it. I caught it in my hands, and I saw that my hands were shaking very much.

I first tried to explain what it meant to love, and they wagged their tails a lot, so I knew they were listening and I knew they were happy. I went up on my tip toes and let my hand squeeze through part of the fence, and I gingerly touched the top of the big boxer's head. It felt strangely solid, and I could feel his skull coming up above his eyes. I could feel my heart pounding just like when I run for a very long time, and I wondered if hearts pound this much all of the time when you are loving.

Suddenly he stepped back and snapped his mouth shut, letting out a mean sound, and I was so afraid.

I ran all the way back inside, but I didn't cry until I was in my room all alone. My mother heard me, and she came inside to ask me why I was crying.

Sometimes she will ask me why there are enough crocodiles in my tears. She calls that an "expression". I don't know why, because I've looked in the mirror when I cried, and I didn't see anything but water. I've never seen my mother cry, but I think if she did, her tears would be something wonderful and strange like parrots or ladybugs.

"Someone broke my heart," I whispered.

She seemed very surprised, and she asked me who it was. I told her that I couldn't tell her because it would make her very sad. She promised she would not be sad, and she began to stroke the top of the head. I could feel new tears being born in my eyes, so I held my breath and counted as high as I could in my head. She told me that lots of people will break my heart, but I have to find a way to forgive them because it is part of love. This made me feel very much better.

The very next day after school I went to see the boxers. I saved the apple from lunchtime to give to the boxers, and I dropped it gently over the fence. I sat down and began to gather up dead leaves into a pile to make a bird's nest while I waited. Everything smelled like the leaves and the earth, and all the sycamore trees looked yellow-er. My teacher calls this "autumn," but my mother calls this "fall." I think my mother is right, because the reason it is "fall" is because all of the leaves begin to fall off of the trees.

The big boxer came running after a while, wagging his tail and pacing. When he wouldn't eat the apple, I knew it was because he was angry with me for touching him. I told him that I would never do it again, and that I was forgiving him for scaring me because I knew he didn't mean to.

The other boxers started to come, and some of them began to gnaw on the apple. The big boxer kept looking at me, and I wondered if he was sorry for making me afraid.

I put my hand on the fence, and he licked it with his tongue. I didn't remember anyone ever licking me before. The boxer's tongue felt very warm, and it had lots of bumps on it, too. I felt myself smiling and my heart thumping. I put my hand through the fence, and he started to lick it again and again.

I wondered if that meant he loved me,

and I made sure I thanked him because it is polite.
People

November is washing her hands in the sink, watching the paint mix with the water. She glances up at the mirror, and attempts to gleam and beam like a sensual woman she saw in a photograph. Her smile isn't as enigmatic -- instead, it is solemn but radiant. She contemplates the size of the sun and how many of herself could fit inside. Many, she decides. Very, very many.

Grey-eyes watches the crib from the hallway, twisting and turning a lock of her hair out of nervous habit. She's afraid to wake him -- he cries something fierce. Sinking down to the floor, she sets the warmed bottle at her side. After a heavy sigh, she eyes the liquid curiously. Glancing down the hallway and back at him, she puts the tip of the bottle between her teeth, and sucks with an embarrassed and mischievous smile. When she nods off, she dreams of giving teddy bears bubble baths.

Tiny reflects on his first day at Beach. A giant colorful ball that he can't wrap his arms around -- he chases it and kicks up sand. He picks it up and drops it again, and it bounces away. The majesty of holding something is replaced by the awe of losing it -- and the wonder that passes through as it is regained. His finger is sore from a baby crab that he was going to keep forever. What's wild is wild -- what's beautiful is difficult -- and nothing, not even the ocean's clamor in a little sea shell, is meant to be kept.

Shaky hopes she won't feel his heart pounding furiously as she removes her shirt and lets it collapse onto the floor. Her face glows with color -- she's a sparrow learning to use these wings of hers -- a new body that began as malleable and invisible, now whole and shimmering. He runs his fingers down her spine -- a delicate landscape he's painted only in fantasy. He kisses her shoulders slowly -- one for each vertebra. She catches herself in her knees, bending in an arcane arch. He lays his head upon her back -- his profile casting shadows on her skin.

The Doctor hops spastically in her bedroom, trying to slide into taut nylon. She tugs at it as the waist band gnaws at her hips. She catches sight of herself in the full-length mirror. On the back of her calf runs a tear of many inches. Resigned, she slips into her skirt, shakes her head and scampers off to start the coffee pot. Later, a colleague points out the flaw. Emphatically, she wags her finger and grins. "I'm a doctor," she tells them. "Not a tailor." She concludes that she has taught herself a lesson in humility, and toasts alone to that virtue come evening. One glass of wine a night (for good health, of course), every night... for the next 25 years, give or take.

Anxious finds a mouse dead in the trap in her garage. The little creature's tail was caught, nearly severed. The mouse had starved to death, she realized, on her account -- out of a trivial fear. Moving, breathing, blinking -- silent, heavy, still. Overcome with loss, she pries open the trap. Once the mouse is free, she walks into the kitchen, sinks into a chair, and weeps. Alive things die, and there is never enough time to mourn -- never, never. Alive things stop. Stopped nothing comes alive. She grieves and celebrates life. She realizes she is no longer a child! She calls in sick to work, and steps out into the earthy autumn drizzle. She buries the mouse behind the sunflowers and stares at her muddy hands, wondering how they came to be so muddy -- or to even be at all. It is glorious and sad to be something.

Compassion steps out into the mess of rain and spring muck. As she walks, she goes up to her toes to slowly and hesitantly dodge the worms drowning on the sidewalk. Her father watches from the window, in fear a shadow will overtake her, will steal her away forever. Father watches her furious dance while scanning the horizon for monsters. "People are sick," he thinks to himself. "Next time, I'll drive her." Compassion watches vehicles blaze through a yellow light. She holds her breath and waits for red.
The coastline was beautiful on fire. The red and orange sky mixed with the gray clouds as I roamed down the sandy beach. My jeans were rolled up past my ankle and I was carrying my shoes. My feet were wet and covered in sand and the wind blew my hair over my eyes. I watched the ocean and saw the white-capped waves rise and fall, not unlike my own harsh, shallow breaths.

If somebody had asked me, even a year ago, what I would picture when my grandpa dies, I'm sure my answer would sound cliché. I would probably have pictured my family, huddled together around a big box of Kleenex, while we take turns hugging and offering condolences to one another. But ever since I had obtained the news that my grandfather had no options left and was not leaving the hospital, I wished nothing more than to distance myself as far as possible from it. My cowardliness made me sick. I put it off as long as I could, but the time finally came where I ran out of excuses not to go visit Grandpa. I had been dreading it, visiting him. I edged into his hospital room a week before his death to talk to him one last time.

My grandpa had been moved up to the fourth floor. After hearing the news, the little flame of hope my family had been nursing for so long had finally been doused out. As soon as the elevator clanked to a halt and the doors opened, I thought I might go blind. Everything on this floor was white. The tables, chairs, scrubs, walls, everything. The hallways were drenched with fluorescent lighting. The only source of color came from the paintings and pictures scattered through the hallways. There were paintings by famous foreign artists with names I couldn’t pronounce, and even some drawings and sketches that patients had hung up on the walls. I couldn’t help but think of Heaven as I walked around the hallways of this floor. Preparing all of the patients for the afterlife seemed like a plausible reason for the blatant overabundance of color in this place.
I’ve never dealt with the death of someone so close to me before,” I confessed.

“Do you think this is easy for me? Because it most certainly is not. Do you think I don’t know what this is doing to you and your parents? Your aunt and uncle, too? I’m the one feeling selfish. But I’ve stopped being naïve, and you need to, too.”

“I’m sorry, grandpa.” Tears starting sliding down my cheeks. Hot and wet. I wiped them away with my free hand, embarrassed. “I’m so afraid. I can’t deal with death. And I hate seeing you leave. And I’m sorry for crying.”

He suddenly bolted upright so fast I panicked, thinking something was wrong. He grabbed my arm and his eyes widened. His voice became a sharp, authoritative tone. Something rose up in him that I had never seen.

“Trust me when I say that life is far scarier than death. And you don’t have to be sorry for crying, there’s nothing wrong with a little emotion. That’s what’s wrong with people these days. Everyone is too proud to let anything to. We all walk around with this thick suit of armor on, God forbid we let the slightest inkling of vulnerability squeeze through! So many people seem determined to live their lives as these emotionless, uptight androids. What I’m trying to say is that there’s nothing wrong with wearing your emotions on your sleeve. And there’s definitely nothing wrong with feeling scared. Believe it or not, everyone on this great planet has been in the exact same spot you are now, thinking the same thoughts, crying the same tears. Everybody is out there, fighting battles every single day against their own personal demons, trying to figure out how to defeat them. The difference between the people who succeed and the people who fail is the process, the tools we use and how we use them. And we may never completely eradicate all of those frightening thoughts from our lives, but if we keep our heads up, we’ll keep them at bay long enough to enjoy our lives.”

Traipsing down the beach even further, skipping rocks, I
thought of his funeral. After his cremation, my small family and I traveled out to Strawberry Point to throw Grandpa’s ashes out to sea. It’s a small place off the coast near where my Grandpa grew up. There are a few cliffs grouped together there, where he and his childhood friends would often play games and throw rocks into the ocean. He used to tell us stories of his adventures of near-death from falling off of the cliffs, and somehow, how he managed to save a girl every time. We chose the shallowest of the cliffs and each took turns scattering a bit of him into the ocean. No friends were invited to this, just my Grandma, my aunt and uncle and their two daughters, and my parents and I. After the wind had whirled the ashes into the blue-green water, we stood silently huddled together against the salty, sweet breeze of the Atlantic. We watched the sun set behind distant clouds in the pink and gold sky, and just as it was getting dark we began to depart. My two little cousins charged back down the hill, laughing their little heads off as they chased one another. With them, the liveliness we had all lost back in the hospital seemed to return and by the time we had arrived back at our cars our stomachs ached with laughter, our faces rich with newborn smiles. The sun sank deeper into Massachusetts and I thought about my Grandpa. I thought about my family and the courage it takes to simply be human. When sadness covers so much more in this world than happiness, it is not always easy to find the beautiful parts hidden beneath the cusp. Still, we battle on, and do our best with what we can find.

As I traveled back to where I had parked, the waves were now rolling in smoothly against the sand. Inhale, exhale. And as the sea could now breathe deep and steady breaths, I found the strength within myself to do the same.

NADA SHATILA

Ghost Town

Disconnect breathes through these streets,
Packed and crowded with vain existence;
Widened eyes and burdened shoulders,
Born from the earth, and still not home--?
Millions press against dark shapes,
Human beings with whitened skin,
And staring eyes, and accusing sneers—
And am I less, through all these years--?
Self-contained, a box of wonders;
Men and women, united in struggles—
Yet with downcast eyes, to never be
The smiling face upon TV--?
Bandits and drug lords within the static,
While children strive to learn the language
Of spic, and wetback, and brown-faced one;
Syllables like acid against the tongue.
And what to do, oh what to do,
When life is a clash between traditions—
And of how things should be, a bastardization,
Or so they say in school, the white man’s history,
Yet to simply exist, why can’t that be--?
Billionaires and movie stars,
While they scrounge and struggle behind steel bars,
Madre y padre work double shifts, while
Fingers point at “those lazy spics”—
And try to fight, and try to shout,
Yet screams are muffled by invisible hands,
And tradition and normalcy, and this is how things are—
The great white hand of modern Democracy--?
And the home of the free, the home of the brave,
The barrios in which they are enslaved,
To live and die within a man-made prison,
A transparent and hidden persecution—
Yet they do not exist, the human beings,
With different tongues and different values,
For the world is not black, nor gray,
It is one of white, and they are the aliens
Trapped within the ghost town.

**Sunbal Virk**

*Broken [Gaza]*

Hands outstretched
Frozen pleas on brink
Of cracked lips
Parched hopes
Whispers broken by turbulent winds
Running thru the land
Calling for someone, anyone
See the held out hands
Red glazed country
Altered senses
Inhaling has become toxic
Smell of death lingers in each breath
Nothing touches me but death
The dark Angel is all I see
Every taste is bitter
Screams penetrate deafened ears

The nuzzle to my temple
Cocked trigger on go
You preach words of friendship
Release me,
Release my sense of honor
A little too little, too late
Emptied Mediastinum
Stolen hearts
Broken souls
Emptied carcasses
Nothing worthwhile left behind
Yet the vultures hover
Constant watching,
Constant listening
What else do you wait for?
It was a blue sky day with light winds and a scorching sun as I, Johnny Ransic, stood on the edge of the Kalawasse Bridge, looking down at pristine waters far below. My gangly body struggled to keep itself together, especially my knees, whose shaking was on clear display since I had decided to wear gym shorts. Voices on each side and behind me chanted for me to jump. These were my friends, so I’m told, telling me that taking a step off this bridge would be a wise choice.

How I found myself teetering on the railing of this rustic truss bridge is a typical tale of adolescent idolatry.

Yesterday afternoon after school, I was engaging in a fierce ping-pong match in the backyard of my best friend, Ricky Gular. Despite his slight obesity, he never made excuses or shied away from physical competition, tending to surprise many with his grace and strength along the way. We were in our ninth match of this Friday afternoon, and the heat of the day was starting to get to me. Sweat dripped off my nose and brow and it was getting harder and harder to keep a firm grip on the paddle. I could tell Ricky was struggling as well, but never the quitter, he played on, as did I.

At exactly 3:31, Ricky’s older brother, Cash, pulled up in the driveway in his newly-purchased Toyota Yaris. I remember the precise time because the moment Cash stepped out of the car, he strutted into the backyard and dramatically asked, "What time is it?"

Being slightly hallucinatory and on the verge of heat stroke, I went against my better judgment and checked my cell phone. "It's 3:31," I said, lobbing a softball for Cash to knock out of the park.

"Wrong, young man. It's time for me to whoop your ass in ping-pong."

He had been living in an apartment on his own for months now, so this unanticipated arrival was very welcome. Cash approached us closer and showed off that famous Cash grin, a gleam-
he would have amused my futile attempts at winning, but the way he destroyed me this time gave me the feeling that he was rushing through the motions because he had more important matters to get to. The sun's brain-draining heat must have been wearing off, because my deductive reasoning was right on point. After man-handling me in a 21-2 match, he flipped the paddle into the air and let it hit the table with a solid thud. He quickly removed his sunglasses and pointed at us with each hand.

"My young friends, I did not come here to take away your dignity or show off my prowess in the art of ponging, although I happened to accomplish both anyway. Tell me, what do you two know about the Kanawasse Bridge?"

Not being socially ignorant lads, we knew everything about the Kanawasse Bridge. It was the site where a rite of passage in our town took place, dating back all the way back to the 1990s. It was a sacred ritual, akin to a Maasai warrior initiation or a glitzy bar mitzvah. The task was simple: stand on the edge of the bridge and jump into the Kanawasse River, a solid fifty feet below. While neither Ricky nor I were at his plunge, rumor has it that Cash did a backward flip off the span that would was so unbelievably impressive that it would have garnered him a gold medal in diving at the Olympics. Cash had to say no more. As soon as he asked the question, Ricky and I answered simultaneously.

"Not a chance," Ricky said flat-out, shaking his head.

"I'm in." I said in a determined monotone, as if entranced. Cash flashed that beaming smile of his, eyes glinting in the sun like shards of jade. I had just made him one happy man. He told me when to be at the bridge and then said nothing more about it, reveling in my cluelessness as to what to expect. I never asked why he chose now to take us to the bridge, I just assumed that, being Cash, he had his reasons, however metaphysical and high-minded they may be. That was enough for me.

At high noon the next day, I found myself on the bridge, relentlessly gulping down knots of nervousness. The turnout was modest, with Ricky and Cash in attendance, obviously, but also the crew that Cash hung around with. They all shared his sense of style, as well as his attitude toward this short, silly thing we call existence. With an exuberant and cheering crowd of 5 men and Ricky, I inched closer and closer to the edge.

Cash wasn't just talking to hear his own speak, he did plan on whooping my ass at ping-pong, which he did as effortlessly as everything else in his life. Under normal circumstances, he would have amused my futile attempts at winning, but the way he destroyed me this time gave me the feeling that he was rushing through the motions because he had more important matters to get to. The sun's brain-draining heat must have been wearing off, because my deductive reasoning was right on point. After man-handling me in a 21-2 match, he flipped the paddle into the air and let it hit the table with a solid thud. He quickly removed his sunglasses and pointed at us with each hand.

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Then doubt started to creep into my mind. What kind of sick rite of passage was this? How does doing this make me a man? I can step backward and onto the safe concrete of the bridge and still be a man in my own right. I mean, everybody becomes a man regardless of doing this stupid stunt, right? So why do I have to do this? I'm not bound by any tradition. I can still walk into my 5th period AP Calc class on Monday with my head high and be the same person I always was, with no need to feel ashamed of myself. By going through with this, I'm just perpetuating the idea that being a man is conditional. "You're only a man if..." That's bullshit! We're all men! I'm a man!

Clearly I was stalling. This youthful philosophy was complete rambling and ranting on a Dennis Miller-level. And yet, I felt there was still a point to what my fevered mind was saying. Why was I doing this? What kind of rite of passage into your "next stage in life" can also end your life? I still have a lot to live for, and I'm putting it all on the line for an idiotic risk like this? I am in the exact same position as a suicidal person looking to end their life, but I'm supposed to believe that this is in some way different? No, I'm not buying that.

Having convinced myself a little bit that this was suddenly a very bad idea, I inched back ever so slightly, hoping my audience would not notice.

Ricky, however, was acutely aware of every movement I was making, and commented on my belly being yellow, to which I retorted with the fact that the color-coded courage system went out of style decades ago. He told me to quit being a pussy and just jump already. I would have pointed out that I didn't see him on the railing, teetering on the brink of oblivion, but he had a legitimate excuse. At 275 pounds, were he to jump, he would probably break some bones and cause the first ever "water mushroom cloud." I, however, with my svelte, javelin-like body, would theoretically enter into the water without harm.

"It'll be like slipping your hand right into a glove," as Cash's buddy, Rico, put it.

More like diving into wet cement, thought my pessimistic brain.

I raised my head up for the first time in what felt like days, vertebrae cracking until my eyes were finally off the calm and foreboding waters below and were now basking in the view of the woods all around. Suddenly, I was struck with one of those feelings wherein you see something every day, but when the lighting is just right, and the sounds of nature mix into your ears so serenely, and your mind is in a rare state of meditation or fear, that a familiar sight transfigures itself into the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. That's what I saw when I lifted my head to look upon God's green earth before me. The visual was picturesque, like a screensaver on a computer in Heaven. The trees were greener than anything that the Wonka-esque minds at Crayola could ever conceive. This striking scene of an expansive emerald forest, from this precarious position on the ledge between safety and uncertainty, made me feel at peace. And then a face popped into my head.

Two weeks prior to Cash's proposition, I was given another life-changing opportunity. I was invited to what was certain to be a raucous party at the home of Alena Rush. Alena was not a postmodern popular girl in any way. She was obsessed with parties, pep rallies and, of course, popularity. While our ways of approaching high school were polar opposite, we were on good terms, dating back ninth grade when we teamed up for volleyball in Gym class. She gave me the scoop as we passed each other in between classes, keeping it simple and earnest.

"Oh, Johnny! I'm having a party at my place! I really hope you can make it!"

The party was going to be that Saturday night, giving me a full three days to sweat over whether I should go or not. Not being a drinker, I knew I was going to be the outcast. Worse, I could potentially be the loner at the shindig, to use my father's word for anything involving four or more people. Ricky, being Cash's younger brother and thus an inherent invitee to parties, finally convinced me to go, saying that I needed to be his wingman, a term he had recently picked up after finally watching Top Gun. While he never said it explicitly, it was clear that Ricky was one of those people who wanted to hold onto high school as long as possible, leaving his claw marks on the walls as he was dragged off to college and "the real world."

So there I was in Alena Rush's stepdad's basement, sitting on one of the many over-cushioned couches, talking to some younger guy from our school. His name was Ray and he was an
herself. 

"Hi, I'm Johnny."

Her name was Kelly Cusac. "We met at the party of a mutual friend," I said in my head, imagining myself retelling this meeting to future generations of Ransics. We walked back over to where I had been sitting and where, as if by fate, the asshole Ray had vacated to go get his fourth beer of the night. We sat down and in a very Before Sunrise/Before Sunset kind of way, we spent the evening getting to know each other. We were unique in that we were among the handful of people who stayed sober in what turned out to be a pretty drunken mixer. She told me about her love of alternative music and I told her that I usually don't go to these kinds of parties. She was the same way, she admitted. I learned of her uncertainty about college and her love of independent film, and what won me over more than anything else, the fact that she quoted Gandhi and George Costanza within 10 minutes of each other. 

As the night wore on and the beer pong tournament taking place five-feet-away declared its champion of the night, I took a step further into personally uncharted territory and told her that I really liked her. I even asked that vague, cliché question that boys ask because of their lack of eloquence and clarity: "Would you like to do something sometime?"

"Yes. Absolutely," she said with a genuine smile of excitement. We would go on a date later that next week.

Kelly Cusac is the kind of girl I would jump off a bridge for.

I inched closer to the edge. The voices around me were fading away. Images of Kelly flooded my mind, perfectly blending in with the awe-inspiring nature before me. If our first date was any indication of how our relationship was going to go, then I was going to marry this girl.

I lifted my right leg and let my weight shift forward, letting gravity do the rest. The moment both soles left the comfort of that hundred-year-old iron railing and my body began accelerating toward its downward destination, my entire future began flashing before my eyes.

Kelly and I are walking through a park on a spring day. We clasp hands, holding on tight and lovingly, looking at how perfectly our fingers interlock together. We proceed to look at each other asshole, but he was a person to talk to and if I stopped talking to him, I would be the only one not participating in either a drinking game or a conversation. He was going on and on about this prime weed he was going to light up later tonight when a cavalcade of girls sashayed their way down the stairs. These were ladies from another school, Jackson High, I would later discover. In these groups of girls, especially the stereotypical ones, the head honcho can be picked out like a one-person police line-up. They're either one of two people: The prettiest girl in school or the girl who thinks she's the prettiest, but isn't, and has to make up for it by having a "great" tan, having parents who let her have parties at her house, and having obnoxiously preppy clothes. In our school's case, Alena actually was the prettiest girl in school, and while occasionally shallow, was usually quite sweet. This other posse was something else entirely, and the girl leading the pack, giving off a radioactive orange glow, laughing loudly with a cringed nose and horse face, was definitely the latter of the two girls previously described. Alena, excuse the pun, rushed over to them and gave them all the girliest hugs possible.

And in a sudden burst of cinematic revelation, I saw the real beauty in the crowd of girls who had just arrived. After Alena got out of the way and the pack separated a wee bit, I got a full glimpse of her stunning figure. That asshole Ray's voice became muted and I was struck with a tunnel vision I only got in my days playing baseball. My entire focus was on this girl who was looking around the room, arms folded and seemingly uncomfortable in these strange surroundings. I felt as if I understood everything about who she was in that second of astonishment. Her hair was indescribably just the right length and shade of auburn. In my mind, she dressed just like I imagined a young businesswoman would dress on Casual Fridays. No. Erase that. I saw her more like a real life model for Urban Outfitters, but without the pretentiousness that exudes from them. Her appearance transformed me. My entire self went into a sort-of autopilot, full of charity, confidence, and chivalry. I actually walked over to her and introduced myself while she was still surrounded by her gaggle of girlfriends. That's like walking across the mine-laded field of No Man's Land and straight into the enemy trenches, rather than carefully playing the game of chess that is "making a move" and waiting until she is by
and smile, feeling the chemistry flow back and forth between us. I see her lying in bed next to me, and she looks positively radiant as the morning sun breaks through the bedroom blinds and illuminates her gorgeous face. I tell her I love her and that she looks perfectly pretty in that exact point in time. We're leaving one of our college classes together and I ask her to follow me to the main atrium, where I get on one knee and, as a junior majoring in Film Studies with no clear career outlook, I ask her to marry me. She begins crying and nods her head, causing all the onlookers to freeze in their spots and applaud our love. We're in an apartment that we're both better than and we're using our booming adult voices to argue over childish things. I still love her and she still loves me, and no argument between us ever gets to the point where we take our rings off and call it a day. Instead, we make up and grow stronger, having twins along the way. We call the boy Jacob Daniel after her grandfather and Marla Kaye after my grandmother. We raise them to be good kids, satisfactory teenagers, and outstanding adults. In return for the greatest love ever to grace His earth, God gives Kelly ovarian cancer and she dies at the age of 73 with me by her bedside. I live a lonely 20 years more with memories and old photos surrounding me. I'm an old man who shakes his head at the world around him but can always smile when he thinks of his wife, Kelly Helena Cusac. When I'm 94 and it's my turn to take a bow and leave the stage, I do it with grace and step in front of a bus.

BAM!

I hit the water with such a magnificent force that I can imagine all the guys up on the bridge letting out a solemn and concerned, "Oh shit." I open my eyes and estimate that I'm about 15 feet from the surface. My body doesn't go into a panic and shoot up for air, and a quick jerk of my extremities tells me that there isn't a broken bone to report. I took the dive and survived. The water is cool for such warm weather, and I am thoroughly enjoying every moment that I'm under it. I can see the gentle current of the river and even catch a glimpse of a few small fish going by.

I feel free. I feel as if everything in my life has been figured out and that when I come to the surface and have that light breeze sweep across my soaked body, with those people screaming up above in jubilation, that my life will finally make sense. It must be an unintended and unexpected feeling that suicide jumpers experience when they are in mid-air, plummeting to their doom. Like some sort of self-arranging puzzle, all the pieces of their life go perfectly into place while they're reaching their maximum velocity, and they suddenly realize that things weren't so bad and that all will be well in time. For those lucky few that survive those jumps, they must emerge out of it not thinking, "Great, another thing I failed at," but rather, "I've been given a second chance."

Fifty feet up and thirty seconds ago, I was a boy in love and with an admiration for a small-town hipster. But right here, right now, as I let my natural buoyancy lift me to the boundary between water and air, I am reemerging from these depths as a new person. My head crests and I begin wading in place, breathing in my first breaths of freedom. The celebration commences up above and I look to my adoring fans, smiling, and then bursting into a laughter that can only be described as euphoric with a maniacal touch.

Cash, ever the pop culture-referencing opportunist, yells down, "Hey Mikey, I think he likes it!"

I keep laughing, embracing the feeling as much as I can, knowing something this good does not last for long. I hear Ricky calling my name, still unconvinced of my well-being, "Johnny! Johnny! Hey, are you okay?!"

I halt my laughing but hold onto my smile as I shout back to him, "I'm a man now, Ricky! Call me John!"

I emerge out of the river and meet up with the crew, sharing high-fives and hugs with all of them. Cash, in a display of "passing on the crown," bestows his beanie upon my drenched head. I pose for a few photos with them before telling them I have somewhere to go. I get on my bike and ride back to my house for a quick dry-off before heading over to Kelly's. I ask her if she would like to go for a walk with me, to which she readily accepts.

Kelly and I walk through a park on a spring day. We clasp hands, holding on tight and lovingly, looking at how perfectly our fingers interlock together. We proceed to look at each other and smile, feeling the chemistry flow back and forth between us.
spoke, "I envision a French Empire extending across the Channel and establishing a firm tricolor flag into English soil. I have amassed a formidable army of nearly 700,000 ready to set sail from the city of Calais and I am personally prepared to die in my effort to take that island. I have been planning this launch for close to 4 years now and my will to see it through shall not and cannot be broken. We march in ten days."

I took a moment away from brownie cutting to turn around and partake in the field commanders' reactions to this proposition. They all reared back in their seats from hearing the scope of this wild and crazy plan. A bearded gentleman was so astonished by this strategy that he vomited on the floor, which I dutifully began to clean up. I was startled into a brief hesitation as I caught sight of Monsieur Ney, who, rather than arching back in astonishment, leaned in and halted his pipe smoking. It was clear this fellow of mouse-like intelligence was intrigued by this daring, and if I may be so bold to say, sexy idea of My Lord. Ney began to speak in what started as a whisper, but steadily grew into a normal tone. "This approach you have formulated is positively brilliant, if not unheard of and perchance suicidal. It would be thick-witted of me to contemplate that an extraordinary individual such as you would take us this far toward a beacon of victory and suddenly steer us off course into complete oblivion." He looked to the fellow commanders around him, "Meanwhile, you skittish knaves appear ill at heart at the mere thought of an assault on the English. And you, General Blousseau, vomit in front of our Emperor at the proposal of his idea? You make me want to throw up."

He then spit at the General, who was quietly crying in shame. "I am for, and always will be for, my Emperor and the masterful thoughts his mind brings to us."

Confident in the persuasion of his rant, the simpleton Ney leaned back into a normal posture and began to once more smoke his pipe, despite having run out of tobacco. I went back to my brownies, trying to act just as confident as Ney, hoping My Lord would notice me and maybe even compliment my new shoes I had made to impress him. He did not; instead he kept his eyes firmly on that fool Ney and began to commend him for backing his plan.

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Napoleon in Winter

(Translated from Auguste D’Obriot’s classic memoirs of serving Emperor Bonaparte in the Napoleonic Wars, "Fuck Russia, Let Us Go Home: The Harrowing Memoirs of a Soldier, Adviser, and Man.")

Chapter 34 - General Ronaldo Rojita

It was a thought that came to my mind incessantly these days. A feeling of jubilation and near ecstasy. An invincibility that could be touched by none. I was a part in the single greatest empire in the Age of Man. My Lord was named Napoleon, and I was his humble servant. For I existed as one of his trusted military advisors and at any given moment I could be found sitting in on meetings, figuring out logistics, drawing up battle strategies to defeat entire nations, and having arguments about the morality of shooting women in the streets of Berlin.

However, most of the time I was in the corner fixing up a pot of coffee and cutting a pan of brownies into perfect circles at My Lord's request.

Today I was doing just these things while no more than ten feet from me, another conversation was being had between My Lord and various field commanders. The only one I knew was a Michel Ney, an ambitious dolt with a penchant for gambling and extravagant fornication. He was widely hailed for his bravery in the field, but this was only due to his stupidity in not seeing the dangers of which he faced in battle, but the only one who knew this was I. Being the loyal man that I was to My Lord, I dared not second-guess him for having an empty-minded fellow in his inner circle. So there Ney continued to sit in his comfortable wooden chair, smoking away at his mahogany pipe, listening to My Lord. On this particular occasion, My Lord had gathered his trusted group to divulge a brazen new plot to expand the Empire.

"I am absolutely steadfast in this plan, gentlemen," My Lord spoke, "I envision a French Empire extending across the Channel and establishing a firm tricolor flag into English soil. I have amassed a formidable army of nearly 700,000 ready to set sail from the city of Calais and I am personally prepared to die in my effort to take that island. I have been planning this launch for close to 4 years now and my will to see it through shall not and cannot be broken. We march in ten days."
Immediately recognized his accent as being German.

"Ah, Commander Ney, I expected nothing less than your eloquent words to so fully support my proposition. I thank you."

Eloquent? From that moronic meatbag? He could barely string a sentence together. Not that I was jealous.

"However," My Lord continued, "To better explain how we plan to achieve this objective, I have used my many resources to bring an outside field tactician of high reputation with us today. Men, I give you General Ronaldo Rojita."

This, I must tell you now, was something never before done. My Lord depended mainly on himself or his inner circle of commanders when formulating plots. I had never heard of this General Rojita and could not understand why My Lord, the greatest mind in military affairs, would need to bring in someone, let alone an "outsider," to help explain his vision. Perhaps he was having inner doubts that he was keeping from his field commanders or possibly that he was suffering a mental strain from his constant paranoia. Perhaps My Lord had finally reached the point where his ambitions and reality could no longer coexist, as his hopes and dreams had outstretched what could be reasonably accomplished, just as I expected would happen and had been anticipating for a year now.

Or perhaps he was just in need of love. A love that was right in front of him making brownies.

Anyway, the door to the room flung open to reveal a giant rather than the man we had all expected. He stood at least two meters tall and looked as if he could pummel anybody in the room to within a centimeter of their lives. He flourished a well-groomed moustache and had piercing steel eyes that made me yelp silently to myself from across the room. He walked stiffly to My Lord's side, which I'm sure My Lord did not appreciate, as General Rojita dwarfed him in comparison. And yet, while the field commanders, except for that feeble-brained Ney, cowered in their seats, My Lord seemed practically giddy at this goliath's arrival. I turned to watch the action unfold.

"Isn't he a mighty brute?" My Lord exclaimed with glee.

The giant ape gave a deep, hearty laugh, "I wouldn't hurt a fly, I promise. Unless the Emperor here ordered me to!"

Having traveled all across Europe by My Lord's side, I im-

mediately recognized his accent as being German.

"Now, I am but a modest man from Mexico, but believe me, I will devote my heart and soul to helping lead this Empire to new and grander heights. That is why I have been asked by our dear Emperor Napoleon to speak to you of his plan for invading England."

"Ahem," the idiot Ney interrupted, "I think we all understand the plan quite clearly, and we certainly do not need a grotesque beast such as yourself telling us what the situation is. Commander Vomit Stains over here probably understood it better than all of us."

Still more quiet blubbering from the bearded regurgitator.

Rojita looked infuriated by the comments and was ready to attack, but My Lord put his hand on Rojita's chest to stop him, then seemed to press the palm of his hand firmly into him, and began slowly and subtly rubbing his pectorals. Not that I noticed.

"Rojita, please," he said calmly before turning his attention to Ney, "Commander Ney, you know I value your opinion, but when I met Rojita at...a treaty signing last month, I saw in this modern day Hercules a man that we needed with us."

That nitwit Ney retorted, "But surely not for him educate us on something we already understand. If that, then why not have him tell to us how a rifle works, or how to eat a potato? I do not see his purpose."

"Actually," Rojita began, regaining his composure, "I wanted to speak to you, Emperor, in private about this matter, but I believe that with this dissent coming at me so unexpectedly, I feel I must present it to you now."

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My Lord nodded for him to do so. Rojita turned to the commanders and proceeded to unapologetically tear apart My Lord's brilliantly conceived scheme.

"I think the plan to attack England is honestly a crock; a gross mistake that would leave the French army beleaguered and weakened to the point where neighboring countries could swoop in and recapture their lands. The Empire, I fear, will be faced with mortal danger if this English invasion is put into action. In all due respect, Emperor, your country does not have the naval capacity for the amount of men you wish to send across the Channel, let alone the logistical elements."
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followed my proposition without even considering the dangers and flaws that it clearly had. This was a test in which you all failed. Rojita, my friend, I shall put you second-in-command in the push for Russia."

Ney, the current second-in-command and first-in-jackassery, shot up from his seat, "My Lord, I must protest this grievously unfair decision! For this entire campaign I have stood by you steadfast, not in blindness but through reason! I have considered thoughtfully every maneuver and deployment you have made, every choice and decision that you have promulgated. I have exerted myself and spent untold hours reviewing your plans because I wanted to make sure I was not going into the heart of a battle with my eyes closed and hands tied behind my back! You charge me with blind faith in regards to your orders? To that, I say, 'Non!' This heap of trash has unmistakably brainwashed you through devious means, and I wish you to see through that. Stick with your plan, sir, to England! It is our only way!"

The suddenly impassioned Ney stood there, fists digging into the table as he leaned toward My Lord. Never before had such an outburst come from the normally even-tempered Ney, and the rarity of this occurrence was not lost on the field commanders or My Lord himself. I wanted to say something during that heated moment of contention. The feeling built up in me like a long held love for an unattainable person of power. I could not believe it at the time, but, I actually wanted to stand up for Ney. While being the most offensively ignorant man I had ever had the displeasure of knowing, he was nonetheless as fierce an advocate of My Lord as I was. Meanwhile, this Rojita had obviously taken advantage of My Lord's weakened mental state caused by his increased paranoia and self-doubt, and was now acting like vile snake speaking poison into My Lord's ear. My opinion being as valued as it was to My Lord, I knew I was faced with the daunting task of giving my endorsement to one of these men. This entrusted position meant I was essentially sealing the fate of the Empire with my choice. At that historical place in time, I put down my brownie tray, stepped forward and spoke in defense of Commander Michel Ney.

"Do you see, gentlemen?" My Lord spoke in a polite tone that felt a tad bit forced, "I brought General Rojita here because he is a man of ideas. He heard my plan and saw the pitfalls that could have meant utter defeat for us. All of you, even Ney, blindly followed my proposition without even considering the dangers and flaws that it clearly had. This was a test in which you all failed. Rojita, my friend, I shall put you second-in-command in the push for Russia."
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Field commanders shuffled out of the tent next into the growing chillingly chilly air. Ney stayed behind and asked General Rojita if he could have a moment of his time in private. He generously obliged and Ney spoke in a low and inquisitive voice, putting aside his distaste and hatred for the General for the time being in order to understand the man’s motives. While this rendezvous took place, I poured cups of coffee for no one in particular.

"General, I have been by the Emperor's side for nearly four years now and know the ins and outs of military strategy and the likes. England seems like such a prime opportunity and obvious next step for the Empire while Russia is but a flight-of-fancy at this stage. Not to offend, but why are you pushing so hard for a risky Russia-bound strategy?"

"Between you and me, my friend," he said, leaning in to tell a secret, "For the snow."

I halted what I was doing, in disbelief of what I might have just heard. I was unsure of what he meant, and to be honest, quite puzzled if he had meant what I thought he meant. Ney, confused, inquired, "Snow?"

"My friend, I have lived 30 of my years in the city of Tijuana. Never have we experienced a true snowfall before, and my journeys to England and Germany and such have all come during the peak summer months. But Russia, this is an opportunity to actually see real snow in substantial amounts, especially with winter arriving in a matter of weeks. We'll make snowballs and snow angels. I have heard of such people to have made men of snow. Can you believe that? I can't pass it up."

"So this whole strategy was conceived solely for you to see snow?"

"Truthfully, I do not even have a strategy. I am not even a General. Now this is just between you and me, amigo. Understood?"

Rojita all the while appeared thoroughly pleased. Within just a few moments he had discredited an Emperor’s military strategy, proposed his own wildly dangerous scheme, and won that Emperor over with that plan, all the while making an utter fool of the previous second-in-command. A good day by any man’s standards. My Lord stood up to leave and as custom, the rest of us stood at attention until he exited through the slit in the tent. The field commanders shuffled out of the tent next into the growingly chilly air. Ney stayed behind and asked General Rojita if he could have a moment of his time in private. He generously obliged and Ney spoke in a low and inquisitive voice, putting aside his distaste and hatred for the General for the time being in order to understand the man’s motives. While this rendezvous took place, I poured cups of coffee for no one in particular.

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I turned to them, slack-jawed and bug-eyed, and saw Rojita making Ney very aware of his ability to potentially obliterate him into ashes. The former second-in-command nodded his head and I prayed in my mind that Rojita would not snap his bones then and there. Seeing that he had made his point, The Mexican exited with haste out of the tent and left Ney and I, shivering in fear and in a dilemma. Our Emperor had been duped by a swindler and fallen

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under his spell, leaving us at the mercy of whatever this Rojita fellow wanted to do with the Empire. And he had just made his intentions quite clear.

We were going to Russia for the snow.

**ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL FACTS**

- General Blousseau’s rare condition of Acute Regurgitation Syndrome was not properly diagnosed until after his death. During his life, many around him thought he was just a huge coward, even by French standards. [Source: *You Ruined My Carpet! A Biography of General Marc-Alain Blousseau*]

- Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte did not meet General Ronaldo Rojita at a treaty signing, but rather in a bathroom in Lyons, France. [Source: *The Autobiography of Ronaldo Rojita, Volume Seven*]

- The Grand Armée would later be decimated by the unforgiving Russian winter, and Napoleon would retreat in defeat and humiliation. Napoleon fired Rojita shortly thereafter and reinstated Commander Michel Ney as second-in-command. As an apology for having not listened to him, Napoleon then gave Ney permission to punch Rojita in the testicles. [Source: *Fuck Russia, Let Us Go Home: The Harrowing Memoirs of a Soldier, Adviser, and Man, Chapter 46*]

- After Napoleon’s final defeat at The Battle of Waterloo, Auguste D’Obriot wrote a short poem about the loss, which also incorporated his complex feelings for the Emperor. The poem would later be found and turned into the 1974 worldwide hit song “Waterloo” by the Swedish pop quartet ABBA. [Source: *The New American High School Textbook: AP World History, 15th Edition*]

- Many military historians and professionally educated guessers have come to a consensus that if Napoleon’s army had been sent to England, they would have overpowered the country after a lengthy war and ultimately renamed it “Muppet Treasure Island.” [Source: *The 1996 Barcelona Historical-Guesser Conference*]

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**Warwolf**

Towering in height, to the Brits t’was a sight
And they christened it the loup-de-guerre.
It would frighten their foe, and leave them in woe
But as in love, all in war is fair.

Quite a distance it could throw, and to Scotland it would go
By order of Edward the King.
Stones three hundred pounds or more, would be sent in the air to soar
With just the lightest fling.

Approaching the castle Stirling, it was ready to do its hurling
Only to be told to halt.
The Scots caught its eye, and rather than die
Asked that there’d be no assault.

The battle hadn’t even begun, but the Brits had it won
And the conflict had been defused.
But as the swords fell, Edward let out a yell,
“Fire!”
Saying, “I’d still like to see it used.”
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[Editor's Note: I refuse to ask Mrs. Cartwright if this happened, so that anecdote will remain a mystery.]

I was still uncertain as to one aspect of my story: whether the story should be told as a first-person tale, or in the third-person, with a God-like figure overseeing the action. Ian continued pondering his perspective predicament as he pranced into the elevator, concluding that a third-person narrator with an affinity for alliterations would probably be too gimmicky. Inside the elevator, which was his favorite kind, an OTIS brand, was a guy whom Ian had attended many college classes with. Ian couldn’t remember his name, but he kept thinking that his hair was some sort of clue. He considered the fact that if there were a third-person narrator of his life, he would know the name of the man next to him. Unfortunately, I don’t, and neither does Ian.

Ian then realized what a brilliant idea it would be to write his story with a narrator who knew just as much as the protagonist. He also thought how fun a third-person narrator would be, as he liked to type his own name.

[Author's Note:  IAN IAN IAN IAN IAN IAN IAN IAN IAN IAN. The narrator’s right.]

The man in the elevator unexpectedly and swiftly swiveled his head in Ian’s direction and sternly announced, “My name is Roy, Ian. We had Mediterranean History class together during Sophomore year and Creative Writing III during our Senior year.”

“My name isn’t Ian,” he responded.

This was true, his name wasn’t Ian, but the other man’s name was Roy.

[Author’s Note: It’s true, my name isn’t Ian, I was lying earlier about the narrator being right. Oh, and I’m only half-sure the guy’s name is Roy. Could’ve been Ron.]

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[Editor’s Note: It’s right about here that I got lost.]

[Author’s Note: You would lose track already, prick. Pay attention.]

The two men awkwardly went back to staring up at the elevator’s floor counter as it went higher and higher. It was between the third and fourth floor that “the man going to pitch the story whose name wasn’t Ian” had decided against using such an unknowledgeable narrator to tell the story he was about to pitch. If the story was going to be as complex and interesting as he planned, he couldn’t afford to have a narrator who couldn’t explain the situations and had to refer to the protagonist as “the

The Pitch

[Editor’s Note: Some of the following dialogue/descriptions/vulgari-ties are either entirely fictional or completely true. The author refuses to explain what actually occurred, and thus, we at the publishing house are having a difficult time classifying this piece.]

So, it was a sunny partly cloudy Saturday morning when I walked into the building of The Jillian Group, a national publishing house. I knew walking in there that the story I was going to turn in was going to be deni-gated, disgraced and discarded, all in front of my face. Or worse, they would love it and promise to promote the hell out of it, but they would edit it into oblivion and make it practically unrecognizable from what I had written. Despite these premonitions, I walked through that front door and made my way to the 5th floor to talk to Jillian Cartwright, the head of the company.

[Author’s Note: It would turn out that I was right, judging by the editor’s note at the beginning of the story.]

Jillian Cartwright was one of those headstrong, independent women that possess such a dislikable Type A personality that it totally cancels out the pure sex that they ooze out of every pore of their body. I had met with her once before, at a bar called . where we held a lively discussion about my short story idea: A guy who pitches his story to a real bitch of a vixen and then has to deal with an editor who constantly interrupts his work because he can’t easily categorize the guy’s work of fiction, because all the details seem real. She looked at me with an expressionless face and told me that she loved it and wanted me to present it to her board of directors. I fucked her that night and told her I was going to include a part in the story where the protagonist has sex with the head of the publishing company.

“That’s getting too personal,” she told me, adjusting herself under the sheets. “You don’t want to force stuff like that into your work. Let it come naturally.”

So I obliged her, as she was the one getting my story off the ground, and decided against mentioning how the character screwed the publishing house owner.

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man going to pitch the story whose name wasn’t Ian.” For one, that would get tiresome for the reader and annoying to “the man going to pitch the story whose name wasn’t Ian,” since he knew he would hate to type that out every time he had to mention himself. Because of this, he dropped the narrator idea and settled on bringing the story a more Sedaris-like touch and writing in the first-person.

Having resolved that issue in my head, I watched as my old classmate walked out of the elevator on the fourth floor, clearing his throat as a way to tell me, “Sorry for the scene I made.” I smirked to myself and moved to the middle of the elevator so I could see the elevator doors close in a real symmetrical and thematic way. I paced about for a second and remembered I would pass by the editor’s cubicle office on my way to Jillian’s corner office. I had to make sure to flick him off.

[Editor’s Note: You’re such an asshole.]

I should take this moment to kind of messy up things. Sorry. See, the recollection I’m about to tell is going to take longer to tell then it would take me to reach the fifth floor and walk to Jillian’s office, even if I were to crabwalk in slow-motion, especially with all this explanation I had to add on just now. So for all intents and purposes (a phrase I’ve been dying to use forever) I’m going to freeze myself in place while I tell this story.

[Editor’s Note: OK, so I can basically guarantee that this part of the story is false. Last time I checked, stopping the time-space continuum is impossible.]

[Author’s Note: It’s my story, moron, I can do whatever I want. Just because I’m writing a fictional story that’s true doesn’t mean I can’t stop time.]

The morning after Jillian and I had drunk, passionate sex, we had breakfast in her appropriately named breakfast nook. I had blueberry waffles and apple juice. She didn’t eat. She. Just. Stared! I looked up from my delicious meal and saw her piercing eyes penetrating me deeper than, well, you could probably finish the sexual thought.

“What?” I think I said.

“So you haven’t written any of your story yet? You just have the idea?”

“I’m writing it right now.”

“But it’s not finished?”

“It can’t be finished until I get it published.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Non sequitur?”

“Kinda.”

I dropped my fork and put my full attention toward trying to explain my vision to Jillian, which is actually the author’s vision. “The story is about a guy who pitches an idea to a sexy, but infuriating and intimidating woman, who accepts the piece and promises to publish it. That part you know. Except, I decided that the guy has reconsiderations along the way about the plot and style, and after sleeping with the aforementioned woman, he decides to turn the story into a story about me writing the story.”

“So the character in your original idea, the one you’re pitching, is pitching a story about a guy, you, writing a story about pitching the story?”

“Are you lost?”

“Absolutely.”

“The person reading this story right now probably is too.”

“What? This isn’t a story.”

“But when I write our dialogue into the story later, it will be part of a story, so in that context, I will be referring to the readers of the story. Which, oddly enough, will be you, among others.”

“Me?”

“You plan on reading my story once it’s done, right?”

“Right.”

“Terrific.”

“The story’s not done yet though, correct?”

“Correct and incorrect. It’s correct in that it’s not done as I’m talking to you right now, but because I’m putting this dialogue into the story, when people eventually read this, it will be done.”

“So, at this present time, your story is both not done and done.”

“As long as we keep talking about it and I have to put all this into the story later.”

“I must say,” She said, “This is turning out to be a fascinating idea.”

Although I’m pretty sure people before me had attempted similar writing endeavors, I chose not to mention that, as her cold, stonewall face was showing hints of admiration. I knew if I played it right, I’d be able to lovingly bang her one more time before she had to go to work.

[Author’s Note: To the editor, upon your second proofread, I would like to insert at the end of that paragraph, “Mission Accomplished.”]
The point of retelling this tale is to try and explain what exactly I was about to formally pitch to Jillian and the board of directors at her company. It would have been pretty boring if I had just spent a long paragraph talking about the plot of my idea, when that bit of action from a couple mornings ago was far more appealing. According to Wikipedia, it’s better to show than tell when writing. So, I saved you from a dull bit of exposition and gave you dialogue instead. Back to the elevator, eh?

[Editor’s Note: Was the dialogue real though? Did it occur? Didn’t you tell her before you wouldn’t mention sleeping with her in the story? Which story? Were you lying then or now? Explaining where the fiction begins and ends would be really helpful.]

[Author’s Note: Author’s Note:]

Having frozen for a few minutes to give some background information to the reader on the story I was about to pitch, I was finally able to move again, and with the familiar ding of the elevator, I shuffled out and made my way to the receptionist’s desk. The lady at the desk looked to be fresh out of college, perhaps three years younger than I, and was working the librarian look. She had her silky black hair done up in a bun, with cat-eye glasses perched on the end of her nose, eyes staring at the computer screen to her right. She noticed me and smiled. I could tell it wasn’t that typical smile that she gives to everyone that walks in. She liked me.

“Hi, may I help you?”

“Would you like to narrate my story?”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m here to pitch my story to Jillian, er, um, Mrs. Cartwright. I’m still looking for a point of narration, though.”

“Oh, of course! But I thought you already decided on doing a Sedaris-like, first-person narration when you were in the elevator?”

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, Mrs. Cartwright had me read the incomplete draft you emailed her two days ago.”

“But, I just decided on it now, on the elevator on my way up here.”

“Right before you went into your flashba...”

[Author’s Note: On second thought, I don’t think this conversation can be written coherently or logically enough to work. The idea I was going for is too complex to even explain. So just fuck it, I’m starting over. I would, however, ask you not to remove it from the piece, please.]

“Hi, may I help you?”

“I’m here to see Jillian, er, um, Mrs. Cartwright. I’m pitching my story to her and the board today.”

“Fantastic.”

“I figure while I’m here, I might as well ask you on a date as well. I’d kick myself all day if I didn’t.”

She was flattered. She smiled. “You’re very forward. Why should I want to go on a date with you?”

“Because you like me. That smile you gave me was different than the one a receptionist usually gives people. Before you smiled, you gave me a subtle look-over, from my feet to my face. Meaning, the smile was because of what you saw, not a regular routine smile you give to any schlum who comes out of the elevator.”

Sorry, I forgot to mention the look-over part earlier. Anyway, I had caught her. She had no choice but to cave. “You’re very observant.”

“I’m a writer.”

She wrote her phone number on the back of an index card and handed it to me. “So what’s your story about?”

“The writer is still writing it.”

“You’re not the writer?”

“I’m a character in the story.”

She laughed, because she was confused, not amused. “OK. What’s your character?”

“I’m a writer pitching a story.”

“How Meta.”

“Even more Meta is the fact that you referenced Meta in a metafictional short story.”

“Excuse me?”

“This conversation will be in the story. You’re a character now too. How does it feel?”

“Same. Mrs. Cartwright is probably waiting for you.”

“As I left, I turned back to see her face one more time. She smiled just like the first time I saw her smile.

[Editor’s Note: I didn’t know confusion was a viable form of flirtation.]

On my way to Jillian’s office, I passed by the cubicle office of and promptly flicked him off, as promised.

[Author’s Note: Funny how you complain about my “fiction/truth blurring” as you lie to the reader and cross out the name of the real place
The men and Jillian shook their heads in a barely cognitive sign of comprehension. The disgusting man with a moustache raised his hand. “Yes, Lyle?” I pointed toward him. “You mentioned something that I am curious about. You said that the editor of your story will be a key part of the plot. Does the editor here at the company know that he will be involved?” “No, sir.” [Editor’s Note: Is this paragraph directed toward me?] [Author’s Note: Unless it’s my middle finger, nothing is directed toward you.]

Anyway, I’ll consider that idea. I knocked on the corner office door of Jillian Cartwright, who practically ripped the door off the hinges right after my fourth knock.

“Come to the conference room,” she said, “The board is waiting in there.”

We walked into a plain room with a long, rectangular desk. The room was so devastatingly dull and dreary that not even my endless bag of creativity and adjectives could make the room seem interesting. The men occupying the seats around the desk were possibly just as uninteresting as the room. I knew from the moment I walked in and surveyed my surroundings that describing this scene in my story was going to be hell. I’ll skip the introductions and whatnot and get to the part where I’m sitting down before this group of old men and Jillian and directly after I’ve laid out my formal story pitch.

“Are you lost?” I asked.

“Yes, to be truthful,” the old, skinny man named Karl Horn confessed. “I lost track at about the elevator. Did you know that at one point, when referring to the floor of the publishing house, you wrote “5th,” using the number 5. Later on, however, you write the word out in full.”

“I did?”

“You did.”

“Anything else?”

The other skinny man named Francis Lewandowski piped up, “I’m concerned about our ability to promote this. Not only promote it, but to sell it at all. Do you know what I mean? The content is very labyrinthine and convoluted. This is why your brand of writing is so…so…rare in the mainstream.”

“I do understand. I’m sorry for my forgetfulness, but did I mention anything of the ending?”

“Oh,” Jillian said in “surprise.” I put that in quotations because I doubt her range of emotions can achieve true surprise. “You’ve finally come up with an ending?”

“I have. The writer who’s writing the story about a writer pitching his story gets his story accepted, even though the writer he’s writing about pitching his story gets his turned down.”

Jillian asked, “And you’re the writer?”

“Right.”

The men and Jillian shook their heads in a barely cognitive sign of comprehension.

The disgusting man with a moustache raised his hand.

“Yes, Lyle?” I pointed toward him.

“You mentioned something that I am curious about. You said that the editor of your story will be a key part of the plot. Does the editor here at the company know that he will be involved?”

“No, sir.”

[Editor’s Note: I would indeed like to know how I’m going to be in your story so that I can contact my lawyer.] [Author’s Note: Please insert into the paragraph about me boning Jillian that I was playing “Electric Feel” by MGMT whilst boning. Thanks.]

The men all looked at each other while Jillian kept her eyes on me. I could’ve sworn I detected a smile from her. Maybe she was proud of my work. Either way, after the men looked at each other, they asked me to wait in Jillian’s office while they deliberated. I said something and left.

[Author’s Note: By the way, earlier on, I made an Author’s Note that read “Author’s Note: Author’s Note.” I did that on purpose to fuck with you and make you think I was the one that fucked up.]

I reached the office, sat in Jillian’s leather chair and promptly dozed off.

… … …

“And that, gentlemen, is where the story hits its dramatic conclusion. The protagonist awakes and is informed by the board of directors and Jillian that his story has been turned down, due to lack of plot cohesiveness, marketing issues, and general hatred of the story overall. The story ends there, leaving the audience wondering just what exactly they read. Did they read the story of the writer pitching the story, or the story that the writer was pitching, or something different altogether?”

The board of directors and Jillian stood up and applauded the pro-
You can really put me to sleep. Smooth monotone, shiny disconnect in your eyes. I see them only briefly as my eyes roll subconsciously unconsciously sometimes... consciously. Your irrelevance sweeps me off my feet—induces my stupor—an overhaul of reverie.
Rockaby

Torrential twilight
pours from a full mournin’ moon
nature’s rockaby.

The Meaning of a Cloud

Cloud(Kloud) n. 1.) the water wells of heaven. 2.) seat cushions for the angels’ choir. 3.) a daydreamer’s vessel. 4.) pillows for love birds. 5.) Mood rings sliding on Mother Sky’s fingers. 6.) the universal sculptor’s marble of choice. 7.) the sun’s cotton blanket. 8.) concealer for Mother Sky’s face. 9.) lily pads for the night’s shining frogs. 10.) usually peaceful nomadic bodies. 11.) spear throwers of light. 12.) islands for weary traveling geese. v. 13.) producers of gloom. 14.) to cause a haze in one’s sky. 15.) to contaminate the truth. 16.) to make the Sky angry. 17.) to bring water to a dried up populace. 18.) to provide the passing a bed for eternity. 19.) to invade the Sky’s settlements. 20.) to transcend the ordinary mass of water or crystal particles
Ashley VanSteelandt

Flight of Hope

Akil’s body shook as the cool midnight air held him in a tight embrace. The bitter air from the Bay of Bengal always invaded the interior of his family’s bamboo and mud house, no matter how much dung he and his brothers used to seal the holes in the walls. “Aahhh,” he moaned quietly as he rubbed his pain stricken ankles; the freezing air always produced joint pain that racked his thin teenage body like jabbing pins. As he lay on his straw stuffed charpoy on the mud floor, he wished he had a real bed. How wonderful it would be to lie on a strong mattress instead of this dirty floor, he thought. As the pain rose from his ankles to his knees, he rubbed them in a circular motion, hoping that the massage would lull him to sleep.

“Aahhh…” he moaned again but much louder this time; so loud that his mother, Tarajaan, awoke from her corner of the room.

“Beta, what is wrong?” she asked as she stepped over her other sons, who lay sleeping on the floor.

“My legs, my legs.” he whimpered as he tried to hold back his tears. He hated to cry. He was seventeen for God’s sake, a man in the eyes of the village. Real men do not cry. However, his mother was wise enough to know that all men feel pain and need to be comforted just as much as women; men simply let their pride keep them from receiving help sometimes. She readjusted her cotton sari as she sat next to her son and began to massage his legs.

“Amma, you don’t need to rub my legs. I can do it myself.” he said as he tried to push her hands away.

“Shhh, Akil, you never know how to ask for help.” she said. Akil faked a frown even though he loved his mother’s massage. He lay back down onto his charpoy and closed his eyes, allowing his mother’s hands to knead away the pain. This was the fourth time this week his legs ached, and he longed for the days when he would have a real house made of red bricks, real furniture with soft cushions and heat for the frost bitten nights. As Akil breath slowed with deep sleep, Tarajaan wondered, “How many more nights will Akil have to suffer?”

“What kinds of lives have Soffath and I really given our nine sons?,” she thought. She had never questioned their lives until Akil began to learn about that young country in North America called the United States of America. “Ammreeka…” Tarajaan said to herself. She had listened to Akil describe this land where people of any race or religion had the liberty to live a life full of freedom, happiness, and perhaps most importantly of all, choice. Despite having spent more time learning how to become a wife and mother than a scholar, Tarajaan knew that God had given everyone the freedom to live their own lives, but society often restricted people’s choices. Society had determined her education and therefore her life. Her dreams of a career in business had shattered when she began her domestic and marital lessons. Even twenty years after her wedding day, Tarajaan still fantasized about working in an office, and earning enough money to not only pay the mounting monthly expenses but to also buy a home made out of stone and brick with real glass windows.

Suddenly she felt warm breath caress her hands; Akil had finally fallen asleep and had curled into a fetal position. She smiled as she thought about how he had always slept in that position. Her soft smile quickly turned bittersweet as she remembered his birth. Tarajaan first met her son when the midwife had laid his little soft body at her bosom. After she fed him, he curled his body against her chest as she rubbed his back. She wished she could hold him like that forever.

As Tarajaan got up to her feet, she bent over her son and kissed his forehead in blessing. “Would he still sleep in this position on their last night together as a family?,” she asked herself.

A few days from now Akil would leave his family to start a new life in a town in America called San Francisco. He and two of his friends had saved enough money to rent an apartment next to his cousin. Akil planned to get a job at one of the ‘big three’ car factories and earn enough money to own his own home and someday start a family. An overwhelming sense of loss swept over Tarajaan. A tear fell down Tarajaan’s caramel skinned face unto Akil’s rich mahogany cheek. She ran her tired calloused hands through his thick hair; it was soft as black velvet like her own hair that touched the floor.

***

Akil seemed to walk in a daze for the next two days; all he could think about was his journey to America. What happened to that excitement he had been carrying inside of him for the past few months? As he lay on his charpoy, he thought about how this might be the last time he ever slept on a mud floor. He tried to sleep but all he could do was think about tomorrow. As he watched the chest of
his younger brother Bakor rise and descend with the ease only deep sleep can bring, he wondered when he would ever see this place again. For years the largest room in their two room bamboo and mud house had served as a bedroom for his parents and nine brothers. Will I ever return to this house one day?, he thought as he blew a mosquito off his brother Katia’s back. He realized that he was not going to be able to sleep that night. So he stepped over Katia, pushed away the hole ridden curtain that separated the children’s sleeping area from his parents’, and walked out of the house through the rectangular opening that served as an entrance and exit.

The night air that had tortured him for years with its bitterness warmly held him tonight. Tears stung Akil’s eyes. Why was the air being so kind to him tonight? Was it because he was leaving in the morning? Would the air miss him? Everyone had been so kind to him for the past few weeks; even his teacher who often slapped Akil’s hands whenever he was playing pranks in schools (which was often) blessed him and prayed to Allah everyday that He would protect and guide Akil to help him find “the American dream.” The more everyone praised and congratulated Akil on his success of receiving a visa to go to ‘the land of freedom’, the more remorse he felt for leaving his beloved village. Despite its lack of amenities, Bengal, India was still his home. For the first time, doubt began to cloud his mind; could he really survive in America? Would he able to get a job at the factory or would he end up living as a bum on the streets? Would Americans be able to understand his English?

Akil finally released the tears that he had held within him for so long. “Oh Allah, please help me. Give me strength,” he prayed. As he wept on the sand covered path that connected his home to the banks of the lake, he saw a huge sharash. Its red beak glistened in the moonlight as it descended into the lake. The sharash was Akil’s favorite bird; he and his brothers liked to watch “the shah of all birds” because of its height and red coloring. When he was a child, he would sit by the lake by himself at night hoping to see the sharash. It seemed as though the bird knew to show up every time Akil was sad or lonely. Akil began to believe that the bird could sense his feelings and he would wait for the bird to show up every time he was upset. Even though he had grown out of his silly belief, he still loved to watch the bird as it caught fish and ascended into the air. “I’ll miss you,” Akil whispered to the sharash. “I know you will,” a soft female voice whispered in his ear. He slowly turned around hoping it wasn’t one of the spirits that were said to have haunted the lake at the night. Akil smiled when he saw his mother’s face next to him.

“You scared me Amma. Why are you out here?” he asked. “I saw you leave the house and I followed you,” Tarajaan said.

Akil tried to wipe his tear streaked face, but the thought of never seeing his mother again only brought more tears to his eyes. Here was the woman who had raised him, nurtured him, and educated him on what it really meant to be a man. She taught him that real men do whatever is necessary and just to provide a better life for their future generations. This philosophy was what had fueled his desire to move to America. Akil knew that if he was blessed with children someday, then he would want them to be able to attend school and have the opportunity to become anything that they wanted to be; these were freedoms his village did not offer. Tarajaan stroked his bony shoulders as he wept. Each tear hit her heart like a hammer hitting a mirror; she hated to see her son cry. However, she knew he and her future grandchildren and great grandchildren would have better lives in America.

“Oh, the sacrifices we must make for our children!” she cried. Not being able to restrain her emotions anymore, Tarajaan grabbed Akil and held him so hard she feared she would break his skinny body. Akil surrendered to his mother’s embrace and released all of the sorrow he had held inside of his heart for weeks. Would he ever see his family again?

***

All of his belongings were packed and ready to be checked onto the plane as he sat in the airport with his family.

“This is it beta,” Soffath said.

“I know Dodi,” Akil replied.

“Strange,” Akil said, “Now that the moment has come, I do not know what to say”. His parents and nine brothers encircled him and took turns hugging and kissing him goodbye on the cheeks. Throughout the whole process of saying goodbye, his father never took his hands off of Akil’s shoulders. Though Soffath was a man of little words, his family could always read his emotions in his body language. This day, Soffath was terrified of letting go of his son. After Akil said goodbye to his brothers, he embraced his Dodi once more.

“Kudi tomacca coribenne shahijo beta,” Soffath whispered into Akil’s ear. The shakiness in his father voice as he blessed him comforted Akil, because it reminded him that his father loved him.

Passengers began to board the plane. Akil knelt before his par-
I would often play soccer with my older brother and his friends to pass the time by on slow summer days; hot, humid days, when the sun seemed like it was inching closer to you by the minute. It was really the only thing to do as a poor kid in Syria, if you wanted to keep your sanity anyway. Cards were out of the question, my parents forbade it, and video games were deemed an exorbitant luxury that only the privileged few could enjoy, along with books. Comic books and the adventure novels that we liked to read were very expensive and hard to come by, and since there wasn’t a library in our neighborhood, we had to make due with the ratty, outdated textbooks that they shoved in our hands in school, the kind of books that discussed nothing past the year 1965.

Sometimes we would pull stupid pranks on passers-by or try to build some silly contraption when playing soccer got too monotonous. Other times we’d play tag or hide-and-seek. But our all time favorite thing to do when the boredom really kicked in was to compete in “macho” games that tested our masculinity. The most exciting one was hopping over the street side of the railing that guarded a friend’s apartment balcony and teetering over the edge while still holding on to the vertical bars, pretending like we were going to let go at any minute and fall five stories down. We would each take a turn pretending to fall off the edge and compete to see who could last the longest. We would all start off strong, all of us brave enough to confront death, but then slowly our numbers would dwindle, until eventually, only those of us completely unafraid would remain. I was among those few elite soldiers – as we liked to call ourselves – who were considered the bravest of the brave, although we were no such thing. We would stand there as long as we could, trying hard not to show our fear, waiting for someone to receive their blessing. His mother laid her hand on the crown of his head and his father laid his hand on top of hers and they prayed God’s protection, guidance, and blessing over him.

“Amee tomarra bahlo bashee,” Akil said to his family as he rose to his feet. He held back his tears as he picked up his carry-on bag and walked towards the plane. Before he entered the plane, he waved goodbye to his family and shouted “Kuda hafiz” to them in the traditional farewell. When he took his seat next the window, he waved again as they waved back vigorously. As the plane took off, his doubts began to overtake him again.

Just then, he heard the passenger in the next seat say, “Look sir; outside your window.” Akil looked out the window and only saw the land beneath them growing smaller.

“I don’t see anything,” he said.

“Look again, sir,” the passenger insisted. He looked again and saw a sharash sailing in the air next to them. Akil began to laugh as he watched the bird grow smaller and smaller as the plane reached the clouds.

“Why are you laughing?” the passenger asked. Akil smiled and said, “Because I’ve got my hope back.”
me and his hands straight behind him holding on to the bars, stood Malek. His body leaned forward, and his head hung low, looking onto the street five stories below, which was bereft of people and any life at all. He wasn’t shaking or crying; in fact, he seemed calm and strangely composed, whispering prayers to himself while the bright summer sun beat mercilessly down on him and the wind flapped about his loose fitting button-up shirt.

After a few minutes of trying to collect myself and relieve my shock, I began inching my way towards him. The last thing I wanted to do was surprise him so once I reached the open glass sliding door, I stopped and took a deep, quite breath. And then, almost in a whisper, barely audible, I said to him, “Malek. Malek, it’s Adam. We’re waiting for you downstairs. Everybody is waiting for you... What are you still doing up here?”

He turned his head slightly to the side, to the point where I could only, but clearly, see the left profile of his face. His eyes were squinted by the sunlight but I could still see enough of them to notice that they didn’t betray any sense of surprise to have seen me. In fact, with his relaxed demeanor, it was as though he was expecting me to show.

“Where do we go from here, Adam?” he said to me suddenly. “Where do we go when the world has had enough?” I still remember the tone of his voice, sad and still. It reminded me of the three-legged dogs I would sometimes see in the allies, skinny, tired, and with eyes drained of hope. “Where do we go, Adam?”

His questions caught me off-guard and I didn’t know how to respond to them, not at all, but I figured I should anyway. “I don’t know,” I said impulsively. “I’m not sure.” Then we both stayed quiet for some time while he kept his head down to the street and I tried again to manage my shock.

One day, Malek stayed behind, excusing himself to go use the bathroom. He was going to catch up with us later, he said, and so we all left. We reached the bottom floor when I realized that I had forgotten my soccer ball in the apartment and I rushed back up to get it. I quickly grabbed it and was on my way to leave when the open balcony door caught my eye.

On the other side of the railings, with his back towards
He paused for a few moments and turned his head back around, but this time looked straight ahead to take in the horizon spotted with crescent moons springing from atop minarets and domes. He could see the smog, too. I know because I could see it clearly myself. It made me think of the garbage in the streets that smelled ten times worse on hot days like this one. I started inching closer to him as he surveyed the jagged skyline, until he spoke again.

“The Great Library of Alexandria. Now that would’ve been a great place to be a librarian. There was a little paragraph written about it in our ancient history book – just a tiny, little paragraph – about how it was the center of knowledge for the Hellenistic world, about how it boasted a wealth of 180,000 scrolls at one point.”

He lost himself in thought once again.

“Can you imagine that, Adam? 180,000 scrolls! That’s amazing! Think of how much insight we lost when it was raided over and over again and then burnt down.”

“You’re right,” I said, trying to buy some time, “we must’ve lost a lot of knowledge. But you can reclaim that knowledge, Malek. You can be a librarian if you want to and run your own great library someday... You can be whatever you want to be but you need to step on over here first.”

He walked a little bit closer to him with my right hand out front. “Give me your hand. Let me help you over.”

“Stop.”

I stopped.

The wind furiously beat at his button-up shirt. “There’s nothing you can do for me now, Adam. I’ve made up my
Winters in Tehran

Winters in Tehran see no snow,
But they are colder than they are here.
Find some time, and go
Hear silent streets packed with fear
And tell me if you think Religion, live
With sentiments dead,
Can cry with obtuse voice, “Theocracy Thrives!”
While all around, feeble men shout, “Let’s Paint the Town Red
With the Blood of the Innocent!”
Sick of sin, yet sinful still,
On Heavenly missions sent,
Clerics claim, “Verses Kill!”
Outside a mosque in Tehran,
A man offers me tea and says, “Don’t you love winters in Iran?”

mind.”

And then, with his arms stretched as far they can go besides him, he jumped.

The muezzin’s call to prayer from the local mosque floated in the air, as if responding to Malek’s death. The voice booming from the minaret, clear and calm and soothing, seemed to be everywhere, as if one with the entire city of Damascus. Within moments, the street was filled with tired worshippers, many of whom were huddled around Malek in a wide circle. I reached the bottom to find my friends already transfixed by his bloody corpse, along with the rest of the spectators. I marveled too, though, I marveled too.

An old man with cane in hand finally broke the silence and walked closer to Malek and then bent down to pick up a crumbled and tattered piece of paper nestled in his right palm.

He gazed at it for a few moments, appearing to be on the verge of tears... and then he too, like the muezzin before him, with booming voice read aloud Malek’s last message to us all, “We live as we die: alone.”
Go Ahead and Laugh

Go ahead and laugh
When I tell you the wealth of your worth
How unrepeated the light
Of the life in you.

You think this too kind
As you look out from
The midnight window of your eyes
Knowing that darkness seems
Hardly kept out by the house lamps
You own.

And how unsolved you are;
How violent the storms
Season by season
When everything is shaken and fallen
To be tearfully picked up
A broken cup here, piles of papers,
A chair overturned.

You know your darkness well
So honestly, without a trace of flattery,
I’ll tell you the other story.

How unrepeated the light of your life
The wealth or your worth
Like no other, ever again.

In a Dream / 2 Generations

Washboards and frying pans, the black cast iron kind
Aprons, rolling pins, children running barefoot
Saving string and buttons
Humid slow nights, sausages and eggs
Ironing with a shaker of water, staring at the stars
Walking to a train
Hats with feathers, heavy stockings, girdles
Silent men reading papers, going to war
Starched white tablecloths, waiters with towels
Tunnels exploding into sunlight, trees whirring by.

Red Ball Fliers and Schwinn bikes
Good Humor trucks and street ball
Ringing doorbells, staying out past streetlights, frozen tag
Humid slow nights, Cheerios and milk
Swimming pools, the smell of chlorine and
wet cement with a hint of soft tar.
Washing dishes in the sink, staring at the stars.
Waiting for a bus
Blue uniforms with matching black-banded hats
Fat women reading bibles, men standing, swaying
Ads for Coke Cola, coins clinking in a glass box
Brakes screeching, doors popping open.
SONYA SMITH

Signs

I immediately saw the signs. It was in a restaurant over an early dinner. A happy enough looking family: Mom, Dad, son, daughter, and toddler in highchair. I was near her table, and overheard their conversation. Dad ordered everyone’s food, even though his son said, “But Dad, I want chicken, not fish,” it fell on deaf ears – his son was eating fish that night.

Mom’s mistake was trying to make her son feel better – cushion the blow of her son’s heart by telling him that she was making chicken for dinner tomorrow, and, “The fish here is good.” That’s when I saw it... then I knew – the icy glare given by dad – she immediately lowered her head, her voice dropping to a barely audible level. Only three words she said after that. Her nerves were on high alert because she jumped when the busboy cleared the table behind her.

Dinner is served – mom’s remained untouched. She assisted her older two by cutting their food and feeding her toddler in tandem time. A task she knew as well as I. Dad sitting opposite mom with his son – his meal ¾ gone by the time mom ate her first bite. As he finished his meal he looked at her, exasperated - he had to wait. He instructed the waitress to bring take home containers as soon as possible – there was a game on tonight.

My heart dropped in seeing this family – and I was immediately transported back seven years. I have been in her shoes – I was, at one time, that mom. I do not know if mom managed to quell the storm that was brewing; I certainly pray she was able to. I was not as lucky, my personal storm did not abate until I found the strength to walk away.

I did approach her in the restroom. I couldn’t stop myself. I explained it was possible to escape the nightmare, but it fell on deaf ears. She couldn’t hear me, “She could handle it,” she said, “It wasn’t so bad.” I think of her often, and pray that the day she gains freedom has already made itself available. Her walk will be hard, and at sometimes seem very long; however, it will be her walk – for herself and her children. The freedom from the emotional turmoil and excuses to cover the abuse is well worth the journey.
The Conversation

Eleven o'clock after the show;  
You flirt and I demure.  
The play, you say, was excellent,  
heaven-sent, hell-bent,  
existentialist and noir.  
My rolling eyes are hidden by  
the broken city light.  
But you like Wilde,  
and so do I.  
We both pretend it's 1895.  
I curtsy and you tip your hat,  
I giggle at our little game.  
So with shared thoughts  
on Victorian arts,  
I begin to warm to you.  
So sad you had to break the spell.

I write, I say,  
You write! You cry, and snatch my hand,  
laugh,  
I am a poet, too.  
Stepping back, I stumble and  
cannot stop your tongue.  
Just as I thought,  
your verse was cursed  
with painful rhyme,  
diction lost in time,  
fourteen lines of thous and thines,  
and French that's lost on me.

So pretty! I lie, smiling wide,  
a mask for my disgust.

I play pretty for umpteenth minutes.  
Too sweet to snatch your tongue and run.  
But, oh, the time, I really must fly,  
pull the venom from my ears.  
Your number on a pretty card,  
I rip it, spit it, on the train.  
You are so nice, so shiny, and well-dressed.  
But words do more than looks.  
So sorry that it ends this way.  
But I could never love a rotten poet.
To God from a Child

I went with Mama on Sunday to a room full of other boys and girls. We colored pictures and sang songs and learned about Your Son. I liked Him because I was a son too. When Mama came to take me away, I pouted until my lower lip was sore. Mama said, “Nothing lasts forever.”

Daddy bought me a fish. I named him Gilligan because I learned in school that fish have gills. After school one day, he was floating with his tummy to the air. I cried until my eyes were puffy and he swam down the toilet. Daddy said, “Nothing lasts forever.”

Mom and Dad and I had to buy flowers and wear black clothes because Grandma didn’t make it. All I could think was that the box must not be as comfy as a bed and I yelled at You to bring her back but You didn’t answer. I yelled until my voice hurt and I hated You after that. I said, “Nothing lasts forever.”
**Abstract Kiss**
Oil Painting

**Butterfly**
Acrylic Painting

**Sarah Rahal**

**Sarah Rahal**
LADIES
ACRYLIC PAINTING

LEBANESE CULTURE
ACRYLIC PAINTING

SARAH RAHAL

SARAH RAHAL
AfricAn NiGHT
Oil Painting

Norway: Roses
Ink with Tempera Paint

SARAH RAHAL

KRISTINE DOWHAN
Fallen Leaves
Digital Photography

Scatter
Digital Photography

Scott Underwood

Scott Underwood
OMNIMUM-GATHERUM
PASTEL DRAWING

Emma Slonina

WINDING DOWN
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Stefanie Mullins
Transitions
Digital Photography

Smoke
Digital Photography

Yamiko Crayton

Siddharth Valluri
Flatiron Building
Digital Photography

Fall 2009

Winter 2010

Stephen Sharbatz
3-D Attack
Digital Photography

Sprightly Splendor
Digital Photography

Stephen Sharbatz

Stephen Sharbatz
CHIMERICAL
Digital Photography

WINTER’S SCIMITAR
Digital Photography

STEPHEN SHARBATZ

STEPHEN SHARBATZ
BRIDGES OF QUESTIONABLE INTEGRITY
Acrylic Painting

ZACHARY McINCHAK

PERILS OF PROSPERITY
Acrylic Painting

ZACHARY McINCHAK
THE LONELY CYCLE
Digital Photography

ANTON ATTARD

WALKING ON WATER
Digital Photography

ANTON ATTARD
**Lost Shoes**
Digital Photography

**Tracks**
Digital Photography

**Whitney Jones**

**Whitney Jones**
**Motion Standing Still**
Digital Photography

**Mind’s Eye**
Digital Photography

**Tiarra Overstreet**

**Tiarra Overstreet**
COME IN, HAVE A Seat
Digital Photography

PAST
Digital Photography

Tiarra Overstreet

Tiarra Overstreet
THE CITY
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

TIARRA OVERSTREET

NAKED RECLUSION
CHARCOAL DRAWING

SARAH QARANA
**Pixilated Past**
Acrylic Painting

**Best Dressed**
Mixed Magazine Mosaic

Sarah Qarana

Sarah Qarana
Golden Age for Bees
Digital Photography

Sarah Kesler

Treat?
Digital Photography

Sarah Kesler
AGUA FANTASTICA
Digital Photography

THAT KIND OF NIGHT
Digital Photography

SARAH KESLER

SARAH KESLER
Magically Delicious
Digital Photography

SARAH KESLER

Surgeon General’s Warning
Digital Photography

SARAH KESLER
IN TWILIGHT
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

DAVID ELNER

THE LONG HALL
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

DAVID ELNER
TAKE A HIKE
Digital Photography

DOWN THE VALLEY
Digital Photography

DAVID ELNER

DAVID ELNER
FLOWER BED
Digital Photography

BLISS
Digital Photography

DAVID ELNER

DAVID ELNER
OPEN
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

MONOLITH
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

DAVID ELNER

DAVID ELNER
A Peculiar Vibrance
Digital Photography

Ascension to the Wild
Digital Photography

David Elner

David Elner
Drift
Digital Photography

Nap
Digital Photography

David Elner

Jennifer Drake
**Rio Urubamba**
Acrylic Painting

**Centrifuge**
Oil Painting

**Geric Laput**

**Geric Laput**
**Tree**
**Oil Painting**

**Roof Over My Head**
**Digital Photography**

**Anthony Jose**

**Shahad Atiya**
CAPRICIOUS
PENCIL DRAWING

EMMA SLONINA

BASHFUL
GRAPHITE DRAWING

ANTHONY DEDAKIS
To My Flicker, Without Flame

When they find out what happened to you, Ahnné, they’ll make a prayer of my name and a concubine out of yours. They said that I infatuated the plague with shallow breaths and my trail of marooned footprints. With a prophecy clawing inside their throats and an effigy wrapped around their necks, they crumbled at your feet with sickles drawn and papyrus shields held high. Before the travesty of tragedy, there was a light that flickered…

I thought I found you…

weeping, in that desolate place they call the night.
The moon hung low, under the veil of clouds, and drew luminescence across the waves. The wind rolled the sky onto the shore and it settled as misplaced light fragments amidst the darkness of night.

In a lapse of perforated obscurities, your timid image manifested in the distance; I ran to you as I did in the fray but the air was sharp, hindering my connection of muscle to movement. If you would have heeded to my voice, Ahnné, you would have seen me reaching through the shadows with my hand outstretched and your flicker tightly tucked away in my memories of you. But the moon had you entranced; cackling wildly as it broke off mountain peaks, cutting the light from itself and flooding the ocean.

I called out to you, Ahnné, but your face washed away from my grasp, leaving the wind and I mourning for the fading connection.

Brought upon by the treachery of trailing seas, I’ve failed in preventing you from becoming the sentiments they adore while they’ve turned me into a veil of flame.

Of the horrid images my eyes have embalmed, yours, forever hollow and vacant, is the only one I cannot replace. When the stench of their breath sends me back to that desolate place, the thoughts are overwhelming. I have to tie back my tongue with my teeth to keep my brain from escaping my lips. Every pulsation of palpitations is an infectious reminder that when your lips were on mine, and I emptied my body into yours, I couldn’t keep the breath from escaping through.

My darling Ahnné, these blades have blood on them! It’s not the bile of the beast that rests against my naked back but it is your severed veins that form the sheath around my waist! I wear it…and it taunts me. From your frailties, Ahnné, I’ve fallen into the depths of the umbra.

To your incarcerated wick,
I bid my dream a mirage of sweat beats and heart beads.
Condemning letter from name,
they’ve come for my pulse as they portrayed their prerogative.
To your shadowless skeleton,
I’ll drown porous organs with a cask of idle ichor.
By their pantomime woes,
the search for shapeless sheepskin becomes an endeavor of lung-taunting sunsets.
To your enthralling presence,
I’ll cast a cascade of subverted candlesticks into dormant waves.
They wouldn’t dare speak your name, for I would let the pick-etched shoreline fade into the oceans turbulent riptide, condemning flicker from flame.
...and I Told Them I Facilitated Breath

In those desperate moments of our civility, we found comfort in silence and heightened senses.

In the boiler room, beyond de-shackled pipes and coarseness stifled, you confided in me the burden that crooks your neck.

It was there that, (all issues aside, we were free to connect) light transcended the cracks and your stiffened face etched itself into my spine.

I’ll take your burden, circumnavigate the emotions entailed, and portray them as my own incongruence’s.

When we make our breaths quiet enough to lull the beast to sleep, it is then that my chest expands and internal liquids come to a boil.

In the den of the dormant, my shiver of confidence comes in the form of your drooping shoulders.

By your quivering lips, I mask myself; recumbent fears dissipating the stiffened air to the den of the vagrant. Bequeathed in my calloused voice, I lost the pleading in your eyes, complacent in the space between us.

With an access to absence, we found the control that we so desperately sought after; like children, we fought for our grip.

When the sun cracks the horizon, bleeding orange over the sky; and twisted brass connects the air we’ve created to the den of the silent; and the crook in your neck snaps the civility from our grasp, the idea I once had about you, fell prey to de-shackled pipes and coarseness stifled.
By Crooked Means of Encroachment

Narrowly I sit, transfixed by translucent fixtures in the encompassing silence of this early August morning. It was the seventeenth, three days before our two year anniversary, nine days after we told my parents we were “trying” and less than thirty-six hours since she told me she wanted “Elizabeth,” after her grandmother.

I hear a deep sigh from above and look up to see her staring at me with displacement and the most desperate of sympathy. Her right hand stood firmly on her hip and her left hand gripping the edge of the granite countertop. Her gaze flickered back and forth between holding mine and lowering her eyes momentarily.

I looked down to see that my right hand was vigorously tapping against the underside of my left hand nearest my pinky, my right thumb meticulously placed in the center of my left hand for support and an outlet for a fifth mallet if necessary. As the reality of the situation befell upon me, I unwound my hands for fear of encroachment and tried to settle myself as a more personified version of myself. When I look up at her again she looks away as though I am a leper who has beseeched the most horrid of scars but for reasons unknown to myself, well deserving of these afflictions.

The long sigh was preceded by extravagant hand motions and I knew she had begun to divulge into the epilogue of the tyrant.

Her menial ploy is quite simplistic and turns to be quite endearing (so long as I fail to mention any such thought). She starts fairly moderate; beginning by closing herself off, both vocally and emotionally. After the initial dissertation that encompasses my faulting as an individual, she precedes into strew about the house in some nit-picking fashion, making exclamations as she skulked around corners, pointing out imperfections in both the house and its architect. This is the drollest part of her incessantness, the unprecedented and unjustified call for the drowning of egos and the vaguest of threats.

How long has it been since she starting going off? Five…ten minutes maybe?

I quickly glance up from my unwavering gaze, transfixed on the tiny muscles moving on the back of my hand as I tap out the rhythm, any rhythm, waiting for her to rid me of this awkwardness and undesirable situation. My eyes move from the back corner of the ceiling across the image of our kitchen, capturing her stillness in my mind, and quickly halted my eyes back to the ripples forming under my skin.

She was fearful, her head was completely crooked to the side, hands folded over her chest and her shoulders drooped inwards and forward.

Okay…the anger subsided, soon the crying, then the comfort. I waited momentarily to see if she would give me the ultimate clue as to what to say foreboding her arduous emotional presentation. Again, I waited, several moments passed and she had only proceeded as far as crying silently into her chin. This was new…unexpected, but only a minor hurdle in her ultimate plan, so I buy into it. When I stood, the sound of the chair scratching against the linoleum floor startled her, as if she forgot I was in the room.

I took a step towards her, my arms at half-mast, ready to bring in this broken and scarred beauty so as to bring her and our life back to normalcy. When we finally caught eyes, I can’t help but say that my lips curled in pleasantries but were immediately rebuked when upon this, her face stricken with sorrow now held the bitter mask of frustration and agitation.

She walked past me, mumbling something under her breath… sounded like asshole but I’m not sure. She grabbed her keys off the counter behind me and walked out the front door.

Good, I thought, she’ll go for a drive, calm herself down, and then come back…until then, I should probably straighten up the house a bit.
Is that why you put a gun in my hand?
And ask me to kill a foreign man?

Oh my Lord have mercy on me
Was it better to be blind than to see?
The blood-soaked faces.
The blood-soaked faces.

Oh my friend when will we meet
Amidst a dark and empty street
Or a field of wheat?
Help me stand on my own two feet,
Please help me stand on my own two feet.

For we are the lost boys
Not yet grown to be men.
Hymn to an Unknown God

Streaks of light
Through cracked windows,
Upon which butterflies hover.

Enough to reassure me of your presence.

Mohamed Alcodray

Writer’s Block

The cold ceramic makes me shiver.
The droning fan makes me numb.
I sit hunched over
notebook in hand
pushing with all my might.

Only shit comes out.
They’re a Dime a Dozen

Sam
I met Sam through one of my good friends. He was cordial and sweet. He was a bit shorter than me but made up for it in personality. We went on a few dates. He assimilated well within my group of friends, and he always offered to pay. Things looked promising. The next day at school, he pulled me aside and told me that after I had left, his ex had come over. They had made out and he was sorry. I said that it was fine because we had never defined our relationship as exclusive. That night he called and left a message. He was hysterically crying and apologizing. I never returned his phone call and deleted his message immediately.

Brian
I met Brian through a customer at work. His aunt gave me a synopsis of him, and I must admit, he looked great on paper. Our first date went well. He was about my height and attractive in a general sort of sense. He then began to call and text me all the time. He talked about the future often, our future. One night at his house, we watched a movie. I could hear him chew loudly in my ear and at one point, he pulled my arm over to him so that I would cuddle with him. I gave him a peck on the cheek when I left and sent him a text message saying, “I don’t think this is going to work out.”

Steve
I met Steve at a bar work party. He was a friend of my brother’s girlfriend, and he was tall with brown hair and green eyes. He was actually flirting with another girl, and this gave me incentive to try; a game. The next day my brother’s girlfriend called and asked if she could give Steve my number. We went out to his favorite restaurant, and he wouldn’t order until I did. Later, we walked down the boulevard and discussed our futures. We passed my favorite art gallery and I asked, “Who is your favorite artist?” He said, “I honestly don’t really get into art.” I then asked, “Well, who’s your favorite author?” He said, “Oh, I don’t read much.” I ignored his call the following day.

Mason
I met Mason at a show he and his friends were performing. His lead singer was dating my friend, so we went for support. The club was dark and I could barely see my hand in front of my face. Mason introduced himself politely and shook my hand. I could tell he was smiling, because I was. He read Jack London and had lived in Alaska. We drank a few beers above the stage and had a little dance party all together as the opening bands played. He asked if he could have my number before going on stage. After, the lights came on and he walked me to my car. From the light, I noticed the glimmer of very crooked teeth and tattoos up his neck. He asked me if I’d like to go back to his place. I said no, and drove away laughing with my girlfriends.

Jake
I met Jake through my sister. He was the younger brother of someone she worked with. He was very tall and boisterous. We all agreed to go to a baseball game and he helped me find my seat and carried the food. He even bought a round for all four of us. That night, he asked us back to his apartment to sober up. I walked into his apartment and the instant smell of cat filled my nose. I counted five. I turned to my sister and said, “Sara, we have to leave now.” She didn’t even have to ask why.

Brett
I met Brett at school. He had been in a few Psych classes with me and always listened to the latest gossip going on in my life. I always made fun of his white socks that he wore with black shoes. After a few semesters, he built up the courage to ask me out. We agreed to meet for a movie. Upon arriving, he smiled at me and motioned for me to look at his shoes, he had finally bought black socks. When ordering popcorn, I glanced at his eyes and they were blood-shot. I asked if something was wrong. He said, “No, I just smoked in my car, did you want some?” I sat silently through the movie and hugged him after he walked me to my car. He repeatedly called me without answer for two weeks until he got the mes-
Chase
I met Chase when I was 12 and didn’t speak to him until I was 21. As a pleasant surprise, he could talk without hesitation. He was taller than me, skinny build. He had tattoos and drank by the liter. He asked me my major and I asked him his favorite song. The next night, I saw him again at a party. He came over to me, cup in hand, and programmed his number into my phone. He then preceded to ask what my major was. I turned around and deleted his number from my memory bank.

Andrew
I met Andrew at my friend’s house. He was crashing in the basement until he found a place. He was medium build and wore band t-shirts. We ran through a field while listening to Oasis and later watched some movies on VHS. He was very eccentric and wore no shoes. I found this endearing. We went back to his room and he played me a song on the keyboard. Upon observing his room, I saw posters hanging on the wall of Kama Sutra and various other sexual positions. He said, “I don’t know how you feel, but sex is not such a big deal to me.” He finished burning me a CD. I thanked him and walked expediently from the room.

Charlie
I met Charlie through my best friend. Athletic build; hair: blonde; eyes: blue. Needless to say, my mother approved. He lived in Grosse Pointe and drove a BMW. My dad smiled happily as he pulled in the driveway. We went to a few concerts and he took me on his boat. He made me laugh, but didn’t talk much about the realities of life. He went off to Colorado to study. Major: biomedical science. Once he was home on holiday, he called me to his mansion. “I just couldn’t leave without telling you this... I love you. And I couldn’t let you go again without saying it.” I shut the door and drove hastily away, never looking back.

Chris
I met Chris at work. He was in a different department, but coincidentally best friends with my brother. I didn’t like him at first; he was too short, shaved head, and was seven years older than me. He had been injured in the Marines and was now just trying to find some place to get by. All of the work people would go bowling on Fridays, and Chris and I started talking. One night I took his hand in mine as he drove us back to his place. He told me he hated PDAs and seldom held girls’ hands, but was fine with mine. I took this as a good sign. We didn’t talk about gossip or trivial bar stories, however, we would spend our nights discussing Descartes, Shakespeare, and The Office. We got along well because most of the time I would lay on his couch and read while he watched TV. He would help me with my stories and cooked me dinner often. After a year, he still hadn’t said “I love you” and I was strangely okay with this. One night, Chris, my brother, and some friends were playing video games downstairs. I found an email he had saved on his computer. It was from a girl, Sarah, and read, “I can’t keep doing this. I can’t stand to see you with her while you’re still sleeping with me.” I packed up my toothbrush, my sweatpants, and my purse, and walked out the door. He called me later and asked why I had left so abruptly. I told him to ask Sarah.

Brandon
I met Brandon when I was 15. He was a year older and was a basketball player. I just so happened to be a cheerleader. We met during one of our games when he asked the line of people if he could borrow a dollar for a pop. I offered because he was 6’5” with blonde hair, blue eyes, and one killer smile. He sat by me on the bus rides and shared his mp3 player with me. He was my first love, and the one that I was going to marry, we had planned it since we were 15. Four years later, we had been dating on and off and realized that we both needed to grow up, separately. That fourth of July, he invited me to his brother’s rooftop to watch the fireworks. He held me as if I was going to leave him and said he would never love anyone as much as he loved me. As we walked up to my driveway, he looked at me with tears streaming down his face and said, “I’m moving to Florida. I can’t stay here and go from one job to the next. I need to take care of you. I need to be somebody. I’ll be back in two years and we can start a life together.” We dated sporadically and would try to see each other as often as we could. I had other boyfriends, and he had other girlfriends, but
we both knew I was just waiting for him to come home. Two years later, one July afternoon, he came home and told me he had been hired at the hospital in Tampa. He asked me to move down there, and we would get married. I told him my family was here and I needed to finish school. We drank with friends that night and he kissed me like we were 15 again. Three weeks later, we spoke on the phone and he said, “I don’t know. I’ve never met anyone like her. And that’s why I married her.” It’s been six months, and I haven’t spoken to him since.

Ken
Ken was Brandon’s friend. He was tall like Brandon but not as confident. He helped me pick up the pieces of my shattered ego when he left. I wasn’t ready to date anyone, and I made this clear to Ken. He still called everyday, regardless. We would go through walks in the park and cook dinner with his family. He took me away from everything, and his love for me saved my life. He would listen as I cried or rambled on about nothing. He would drive me around to find the best spot to lay in the bed of his truck to look at the stars. I was determined not to date him, for I was worried that I would lose him, like everything else in my life. I lied and said that I wasn’t ready for a relationship to push Ken away before he left me. And he did. He met Jane and stopped talking to me slowly at first, and then altogether. The last conversation that we had he asked me, “I loved you. Hypothetically, if I weren’t dating Jane, would you date me?” Without hesitation, I answered, “Yes.”

The Side Effects of Text Messaging

“I’m not seeing anyone else.”

He said this with an adamant gaze towards the open doorway leading away from his bedroom. He was perched on the foot of the bed with his back against the wall. She was lying down with her outstretched legs crossed and her arms tucked behind her head. The moonlight from the window above cast an ominous shadow across Peter’s face as he lifted his steady hand and took a drag from his cigarette. She watched as he did this and felt an eerie cool wash over her sunburned skin. Then the rage began to boil.

“It’s a strange thing.” Stella said in her passive voice as she reached for the remote and began mindlessly flipping through the channels.

After a long pause, Peter lifted his head and replied, “What’s that?”

She set down the remote and focused her attention on him.

“The distance. It speaks volumes, it really does. And I feel it, I could see it in you for Christ’s sake as soon as I walked in.”

Peter became rigid with guilt. He dare not take his gaze away from the door. He swallowed hard and burned out his cigarette in the ash tray.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She sat up Indian-style facing him. She rested her elbows on her knees and bent her head down in her palms. Peter thought she was about to cry, for Stella began convulsing with tiny shakes. When she lifted her head, he could see that she was not tearful, but
she was laughing.

“What’s so funny?” He said with an uneasy grin.

Shaking her head slowly and trying to maintain the giggles, she replied.

“It’s just... it’s just... you. You look puzzled, Peter.” Stella cocked her head to the side with a slight grin. “This is not brain surgery. It was a simple question. The distance, you’re off right now in your head. I can see it. You’re going over the images of whatever the hell you did. Trust me, I don’t want to know about it. I don’t even want think about it. All I wanted from you was the truth. And you couldn’t even muster up the courage to tell me.”

“Stella, I really have no idea what you’re talking about. And why are you... smiling?”

Stella collected her childish giggle which showed her giddiness for the new discovery. She became callous once again and reached across Peter to his computer desk and grabbed his cell phone. She looked at it for awhile flipping it around in her timid hands and slowly opened the phone. Peter stayed motionless although his insides were screaming to grab the phone away from her.

Stella smiled at the tiny blue screen and shook the phone at Peter.

“These things, hmm, I doubt the creator was a man. These things are people’s digital footprints. And most people, I assure you, are too dim to understand the true value of them.”

A long paused consumed the room and outside thunder began to crack.

“But I commend you, Peter. You deleted mostly everything, presumably moments before I arrived. You think you would have learned, but apparently things just slipped through the cracks.”

“What, Stella? What did you find? There’s nothing incriminating in there. I admit, I deleted a lot, from past girlfriends and things. I deleted every girl’s phone number. I told you, I want this to work this time. I’ve changed. I’ve changed for you.”

“Oh, Peter, desperation doesn’t suit you. And anyway, I told you I don’t care if you see other people. And quite frankly, I don’t even want to see you. And quite frankly, I don’t even want to see you. I just wanted to play a little game. A game that you lost because you were too scared to see the reaction on my face when you told me the truth. But I admit, this is the best part. You’re sitting there half-shaking in your guilt and curiosity. You have no idea what I know nor what is on this little device of yours. You’re going over in your mind every last text message and picture that you received and sent. But you can’t pinpoint it. Oh, but don’t worry sweetie. I would never delete anything. It’s still in here. And when I leave, you will go through everything in haste. And you will find it. Your stomach will sink and you will most likely want to vomit. No, not because you said it, because we both know that you have no problem being crude. But you will know that I read it. You will know that this was not meant for my fragile, innocent, little mind that you like to pretend I still have. And you will know that this smile on my face is because of the extreme pleasure I’m getting from the fact that I am leaving you now, and because I know who you really are. You will feel the disgust that I see in you, and then, not right away, but there will be moments when you look in the mirror and you will see what I see in you now; a repulsive, self-loathing bastard who will never change.”

Stella closed the phone and placed it in Peter’s shaking hand. She slowly rose to the floor, grabbed her purse and walked to the door. In the frame, she turned around and with a smile said, “I hope she was worth it.”
If they make our stories into a movie, I’m certain I can just imagine what the trailer will look like. They’ll get most of it wrong, of course, but maybe, just maybe, the essence of everything will be there.

They’ll start with those cheesy words that introduce all mass-marketed teen movies and coming-of-age stories. Stark block lettering contrasting with a blank background. ONE SUMMER. ONE GROUP OF FRIENDS. ONE LIFECHANGING ADVENTURE. Maybe they’ll pull out some quasi-intellectual questions. HAVE YOU EVER FELT ALONE? HAVE YOU EVER FELT DIFFERENT? HAVE YOU EVER WANTED MORE?

Then, a shot of a busted-up blue van whizzing past a spot on a lonely highway, complete with the “fast-car” sound effect. This always makes me laugh because, honestly, how often is the freeway completely clear? Almost never. The sky will be blue, the wind slightly moving some tall grass in the background, the air obviously warm—a lovely summer day. There will be an interior shot of kids sleeping, kicking each other, throwing gummy worms around, and faintly, faintly, you can hear the music start in the background. Just when the viewer is straining their ears because of a vaguely familiar tune, the music will be cut-off: a shot of a boy drooling on another boy’s shoulder, half-asleep and reaching down to scratch his crotch. Cue the resident smartass of the movie, who will get a close-up, shaggy brown hair hanging in his eyes, metal glinting from his lip. “Dude, wake up and put the morning wood away. This is not a public restroom, and you are not George Michael. Lift up your hand and back away slowly.” Giggles from the rest of the van.

The music hits again at a deafening volume, hard. Maybe some classic punk to reflect some of the ideas in the story— the anger, the rebellion, the pain. That’s risky, though, and the trailer’s got to pull in as many people as possible, so even if they go with alternative, it’ll be something with more pop sensibility, a song that will get stuck in a viewer’s head and remind them to see this film. Most likely, though, it’ll be an old Motown classic, because it is a code in the film industry that road trips equal Motown sound, and there’s just no getting around it.

So “Ain’t Too Proud To Beg” rolls, and the montage begins, centered around this group of young adults at basement shows, in all-night diners, laying in the grass watching the stars. The brains of the operation, a girl, will suddenly be speaking. “Are you happy? Are any of us? We need a voice. We need something. Let’s do this. Let’s do anything.” The music will drown everything out again, and there will be a shot of the inevitable sing-along scene that attempts to validate the Motown choice. One of the kids will shout “Turn this up!” as everyone sings and dances outside of a rest stop somewhere in the middle of Jersey on day twelve: Cut to a blonde with large sunglasses. “Jersey? Why the hell are we in Jersey?” she’ll ask. One of the guys will shrug in reply. “Jersey’s punk ain’t like punk anywhere else.”

There will be crying and hugs, lines like “I never knew that until I met you guys” and “Scene kids aren’t really that special. We’re just better at being fucked up than anyone else.” The “fucked” will be changed to “screwed”, though, despite what I write in this book.

And there I’ll be, of course, the Hollywood version of me, thinner, prettier. They’ll hire an unknown actress to play me. They’ll make me a brunette instead of a redhead and give me a short choppy hair cut and tight T-shirts with pictures of Robert Smith on them. And I’ll sit in the corner of the van a lot, scratching in a notebook and doing voiceovers like Kevin from the Wonder Years.

The names will be changed, of course, since I’ve had to change them here, within these pages. But you’ll still be able to see yourselves if you look carefully enough. You’ll see your smiles shining out from underneath strange names, names that I picked out of oblivion, names like Hunter and Hannah, stupid nicknames like...
Cigarette

The black thought, one that hits the bottom of your spine and travels upward. Unable to wipe away images of translucent pigmentation and that gentle, sloping curve of a mouth meant to be kissed with teeth and not tongue. Right now, gently brushing the end of a filter — filter, too orange and obtrusive against the delicate, thin white paper, too ugly against your crimson red pout.

Weighted words on my lips, pretending it's the pressure of your mouth. Knot in the stomach, that sick swooping sensation, the angry bile rising to the throat, coils in the chest wound so tightly that they break. Swallow; forget the mental pictures of dark hair caressing cheekbones, wisps of everything you never knew you wanted. Trace the outline of a hip, calling cards etched into skin with black Sharpie markers. You're like quicksand — the more I struggle, the faster I fall. Writing lyrics on a broken door in a bathroom stall— carved solidly into surfaces by that beloved switchblade. The one with a point just sharp enough to really make exsanguination the latest trend in suicides. Nothing is more pathetic than a straight-edge kid dying for a cigarette.

Those burning embers, flickering in the darkness, silhouetting shadows on your face. You inhale deeply, the slender form of your fingers relaxing carelessly into a V. Exhale, shivering, enjoying the smoke that curls out from your nose, watching the foggy haze that seeps out from under your tongue and floats towards the stars. Take another drag, cupping the cinders in the palm of your hand, consoling yourself with temporary heat. Exhale. “It’s so fuckin’ cold.”

The nicotine saturates you with illusions of life. I can’t tear my eyes away. You make me want to take up a bad habit. Ashes drop to the ground, mixing with gray-hued snow and creating a paste to rub over these ideas. Whiting out pages of depraved thoughts,
ones I’ll later claim I can’t recall. I encircle your small, pallid wrist for a moment and you let it go limp, the object of vice scarcely held between your two knuckles. I lift your wrist to my face and pause, not even bothering to transfer the cigarette to my own hand. “I need a cigarette,” I say through chattering teeth.

You bite your lip. You picked that up from me. I am your bad habit. I need a lip ring. At least then I’d have an excuse.

“You don’t smoke.” A muscle in your jaw twitches.

“Neither do you,” I remind softly. I drop your hand and gravity captures the cancer stick, letting it float soundlessly to the ground. It takes an infinite amount of time, the red-orange flame dying and crushed under the heel of your sneaker.

Black polished fingernails running over cracked Formica tables. Coffee like mud. Gray eyes are only sexy when they shine like forgotten stars, burning through with the radiance a million girls with ocean-blue irises could never capture. Or so you sketch me with your lines. Our bodies fit together like the notches of handcuffs. Can I chain you to the last drags of that fallen cigarette, watching you blaze and burn, that sphere of smoldering heat in a tranquil January night?


Pull out another pack, a friend, strike a match and allow the sulfurous scent to engulf us momentarily. Breathe so deep. Shrug it off. I grab the villain convulsively, hold it my forearm. The sweat pools on my brow and slides down my face into my eyes immediately. Clenched jaw. Hold out. That nauseating smell of sizzling flesh. Weak in the knees. Fire suddenly extinguished. You’re fascinated and horrified.

“I told you I needed a cigarette.”

You nod and bury your face in the side of my neck. “Next time, just take a drag of mine, okay?”

We’re that screwed up. We don’t even smoke. But if we did, maybe it’d be better. Real cigarette burns are only on the outside. The cigarette burns I get from you go down to the core.
“What’s that?” my little sister asks, climbing into my lap. She is all baby-faced and innocent, nothing but big blue eyes and giggles.

“What’s what, Sissy?” I smile, tickling her tiny little stomach.

She pushes the hair impatiently out of her eyes, tapping the side of my nose and the hoop that lies embedded in the skin. “That. What is that?”

I give her an ironic grin. “Armor.”

“Do I need one?”

I hug her tightly. “God, I hope not. But maybe some day, yeah. Yeah, you’re special. You’ll probably need armor, too.”

I stand in front of the mirror, carefully applying thick, heavy lines of black to my eyelids. I hear the clump of a stool and my sister’s face suddenly appears in the glass, too.

“What’s that?” she asks, scrunching up her nose and watching me intently.

“What’s what?” I bite my lip, trying to get the lines of black straight and even.

She points to the kohl in my hand. “That.”

“Armor.”

“Do I need some?” she rubs her own eyes anxiously.

“Nope. Right now all you need to worry about is what happened to the last juice-box.”

“Missy! You drank the last one?”

I grin slyly. “Maybe…”

She pouts.

“…or maybe I hid it in the bottom cupboard so one of the boys wouldn’t drink it.”

She races up the stairs.

I’m pulling down the black beanie, low enough to cover my
eyes.

Sister waltzes up and tugs on my coat sleeve.

“Where you going?”
I ruffle her hair. “To a concert.”

“You’ll be home to read me a story?” She frowns. I pick her up and wince. She’s nearly too big to do that now. The thought saddens me.

“No, you’ll be sleeping, you’ve got school tomorrow. I’ll sneak in and give you a kiss though, okay? And two stories tomorrow to make up for it?”

She nods happily. She pokes at the wool on my head. “Hey, what’s that?”

“A hat, silly girl.”

“What’s it for?”

“Armor.”

She twirls a strand of her brown hair nervously. “Should I put one on?”

I kiss her and set her down. “Nah. What kind of nerdy girl wears a hat to bed?”

She laughs and runs off.

My mother finds me sitting at the counter at six in the morning, stirring my coffee absenty.

“ Couldn’t sleep again?” she asks, pouring herself a cup of the steaming liquid. I nod.

“Everything okay?”

I shrug. “The same.”

“You let things haunt you. You think too much. You feel too much. Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it?”

I shrug again, staring into the abyss of my coffee cup. “I’m dealing. I always deal. I’m tough.”

“You’re too tough for your own good.”

I manage to grin with just a hint of melancholy. “There’s no such thing.”

Sister comes bouncing into the room, wide awake despite the early hour.

“‘Morning!” she enthuses, hugging me around the waist. She’s getting so tall. She stares up at me and pauses, her hands moving to her hips. “What’s that?”

“What’s what, Sissy-Pie?” She motions for me to lean over, then pulls at the metal spiking through my bottom lip. “That?”

“Armor.”

My mother catches my eye as I answer, shaking her head.

I’m sitting in the back yard, stereo on full blast, enjoying the temperate weather. My mother wanders out the back door and settle into the chair beside me.

“Hey,” I say automatically, not bothering to look up from my sketch pad.

“Hey.” There’s pleasant silence, but with tension in the air, and I’m certain my mother came out here to talk about something specific.

“You were thinking about him again, weren’t you?” she asks tentatively, almost hesitantly. I hate that she would ever feel that way about me, unwilling to broach a subject.

“Yeah.”

“He’s thinking about you too, you know.”

I toss aside my pencil and close the pad, sighing. “Oh yeah? How would you know something like that?”

“Because he wears armor, too. And usually, the ones with the most armor on the outside are the most vulnerable ones inside. Give him time.”

I hug my mom. Sometimes I forget how lucky I am.

“Try letting a little more out, though,” she says, standing up. “You bottle up too much.”

“I have to.”

She waits for me to say what I need to say.

“I’m in love with him.”

She smiles at me sadly. “I know, sweetheart. I know.”

Sister comes up the sidewalk, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Oh, Sis, what’s wrong?” I ask, scooping her into my lap. She shakes her head.

“Don’t wanna talk about it yet?”

She nods.

“Okay.” We sit for awhile, and she reaches down and
laughs at my shoelaces, which are black with little red stars.

“What’s that?”

“Armor.”

She nods thoughtfully. “They were teasing me,” she confesses finally.

“Who? The kids at school?” I ask, immediately upset on her behalf.

“Yeah.”

“You usually don’t take that from anybody.”

She shrugs, wiping at the tear stains on her face. “Sometimes it hurts too much. You know?”

I nod, biting my lip and willing with all my heart that my own eyes don’t betray me. “Yes. I do know what you mean.”

“What should I do?”

I pause for a moment, slipping a pink jelly bracelet off of my wrist where dozens of others sit.

I slide it over her hand, and it’s so big that it dangles nicely.

She grins. “It’s pink. My favorite color. It’s pretty. Like you.”

Her tone is sincere because she means it. She means every word. I’d forgotten that people could be that way. I’m sad that today is the beginning of change for her.

I swallow thickly and blink.

“When the other kids tease you, just touch it and remember that what they say doesn’t matter, because it isn’t true. I’m here and I love you and I’m telling you it isn’t true. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Silence.

“So...” she draws out the word and laughs. “What is this?” she asks, tugging at the bracelet on her arm.

“Armor.”

She nods and presses her sticky lips to my cheek. “Love you.”

And she scampers away.

It’s only once she’s gone that I cry.

---

A Living Memory

Weary and faded, sinking
Into the tempest of
Disappointment. A
Crumbling effigy of
Prolonged goodbyes and
Abandoned affection.
Burnt out lighthouse eyes,
Broken terracotta
Heart, a patchwork
Of pain and discarded
Dreams. Stunted,
Stuttering, scared, and
Scarred. A living memory
Bathed in cold, crystal
Shadow, petrified.
A living memory,
A pale gold outline of
Splendor lost, of wrongs
Never righted, of apologies
Never given, never received.
I am—
Hiding in autumn’s courtyard,
Crying in the moonlight,
Frightened, alone,
A living memory—
A dying soul.
**Mechanical Man**

Mechanical man --
oil-barrel body,
parallel pendulums,
rustproof hinges --
you are

Incapable
of uncertainty.
You are

faulty
without faults.
You are

harmless
lacking intent.
You are

not a man
at all,
are you?

---

**Chameleons**

It has been said that the human
beast is an amorphous creature, that
our forms will always waiver.
Shape shifters, as fickle as the floating
feather, falling or flying; a figure
in the fingertips of Zephyr.
And like that dancing acrobat,
when the gods get sick of their
toys, we will plummet without
the brace of our marionette cords
firmly in some force’s grasp.
Even then we maintain our
chameleon nature: from soul
to skin; from skin to bone;
from bone to dust, where
we still mimic the feather.
Exorcising Daemons

Hello, my name is --- and I’m an alcoholic; have been forever.

The Mathematics of Heartache

I counted for weeks, calculated the growing distance between what was and what was becoming.

I set endpoints and crawled towards them like a new amputee, only half as strong as I once was.

I slept while the world awoke, missed the flowers and trees painting the town alive and green.

I counted for weeks, counted the days, minutes, seconds since you held your door open and said goodbye like always, like never before.

I listened to Seven Swans while the sky changed from blue to black to blue again.

I wandered through memories like a child lost in a grocery store, calling out to you, clinging to what I had left.

I counted for weeks, counted the distance between kisses, between emptiness and your eyes,
between making love and apathy, 
between my hello and your goodbye.

I woke up 
and walked instead of crawled, 
listened to the wind of a world turned over, 
began to forget.
I put you into words and told you to stay there, 
I wrote my goodbye on fresh sheets of white paper, 
a thousand times. 
And I counted every one.

**Haydar Ali**

**The Timepiece**

It all happened simply enough. For those of you of stomach light and heart faint, I beg you to read no further than beyond the period of this sentence. There, I have made my disclaimer plainly as the eye can see, and let the record show: I hold you responsible if you do not wish to consider it. You see, clear as day. Now, allow me to proceed.

On a drizzly night, no different than the common London day as of late, I happened upon an old timepiece whilst I was strolling in the park. An odd piece it was, a rather peculiar one really. It didn’t resemble in the least the more usual timepieces that one frequently observe in the windows of Fleet Street shops, nor did it have a liking to any of the more fashionable pieces that I see worn from time to time on the pockets of MP’s or the sort, nor was it even of the kind that the seeming paupers possess. No, it was different, interestingly different, puzzlingly different. Different enough for me to consider taking it right then and there. How was it different, you ask? A reasonable question I might add, but I must confess I am not quite sure. Maybe it was the numbers – although they were in the regular – or maybe it was the hands – the short one appeared the long and the long the short – but how could that be? In any matter, nevermind that for now, and I would appreciate you to not ask again, thank you very much.

Now, where was I? Oh yes, the timepiece was now safely in my coat pocket, and it remained there until the next morning when I secured it in one of the drawers of my chest, never you mind which one, in case you were wondering. I wonder though, why do you wonder dear reader? So there it was, safe as a secret in my drawer, while the hours, days, weeks, and months passed by, and I’d utterly forgotten I’d even had it! Seven months passed on, to be exact, seven months to the day I’d found it, I do believe, when I was suddenly reminded of it while walking by a giant sun-
dial in London square. And then I remembered it again – for you
see I’d forgotten it shortly afterwards – when I heard the tolls of
Big Ben. I couldn’t believe how amazingly stupid I was in forget-
ting it so quickly, and so I resolved to never forget it again and
immediately walked back toward my apartment in South End to
release it from the drawer and to place it in a more visible spot. I
thought of placing it in the windowsill, but pointing it inwardly
of course, for I am not as pretentious as you accuse me of being. I
also considered hanging it from a nail on my door, but that would
be too odd though, wouldn’t it? However, my contemplations
were all in vain, for I soon realized that my beloved timepiece was
inoperative. It was not working in the least, but I supposed that
that was to be expected after seven months of neglect. Still, my
frustration did not subside; in fact, it gradually worsened, and as
the seconds, minutes, hours, and days went by, it developed into
hot anger. But I do not know why. It was only a silly timepiece
after all. Besides, I had never been one to focus on the mate-
rial things of this world; modesty was my policy, and as you can
imagine, I led a fairly simple life. But the more that I reminded
myself of this, the more that I became absolutely repulsed by this
wretched, non-working timepiece and the more that I could not
bear its sight. It disgusted me and it haunted me too. I could not
sleep, I could not eat, I could not think because of this ghastly,
worthless thing. Its presence consumed my life and would have
nearly driven me to insanity had I not finally come to my senses
and realized that I needed to rid myself of this horrid curse. Yes, I
must destroy it, thought I, or it will surely destroy me.

My task was now set. I wrapped the timepiece in a small,
red handkerchief (I could not look at it while knowing its dismal
fate), and I raised my hammer as far as my arm could stretch to
ensure its absolute destruction once and for all. I hesitated initially
though; perhaps I had been too quick to condemn the poor thing;
maybe it did not deserve such a shortened life, but I deemed such
apprehensions to be only cowardice, and I quickly steeled my
heart to carry the deed. I was ready; the hammer at peak height,
I swung down with vicious ferocity, anxious to rid the world of a
heavy burden, but curse me! – I could not do it. I could not do it,
dear reader; the damned thing had a hold on me that I could not

release. My failure’s result was immediate; my eyes sunk further
into the recesses of my face; my lips thinned to mere lines, and my
skin paled to a transparent paste, revealing purple veins and the
like. Oh, woe is me, dear reader, woe is me that I should live to
endure such a miserable fate!

Three sleepless nights I spent pondering – what am I to do?
Three sleepless nights of utter torment. Until it occurred to me:
yes, yes, I shall return it to its original resting place. Yes, to where
I found it. Brilliant! It would not know any different, and so what
if it did? It would not be around me any longer, and that would
suffice to be my peace. Yes! With hastened pace, I returned to
the place from whence it found me and laid it to rest upon several
rocks. A profound joy overcame me at that instant and continued
throughout my return home, and I embraced it as a newfound
shilling. I hopped and pranced and skipped and sang – I was free!
Free of that timepiece fetter.

But, my joy was not for long, for as I awoke the following
morning, I could not help but feel guilt. Guilt. Guilt in aban-
donment, recklessness, and a multitude of other crimes which I
have not heart enough to list. I became restless with worry, pac-
ing about my small room for hours and feeling sympathy for the
timepiece, for its rejected situation, shunned by me – by me! Oh
God! How could I be so careless? Where will it go now? In whose
unworthy possession might it now fall? My conscience could not
suffer such sorrowful questions, and so I retrieved it. But I could
not keep it, for reasons established, and so once again I was tor-
mented with possibilities. What to do? Think, think, damn you!
Finally, I opted to take the pitiful thing to a pawnbroker, and that I
did.

He was a sorry sort of man. Stout, and much too pompous
for my liking. On account of his gait and cane and numerous other
physical shortcomings, such as baldness and the thickest of spec-
tacles, I’d place him in the mid to late fifties, but I suppose that all
of that is of no consequence to you, so I’ll forego a more elaborate
description.
His shop was in quite good order with many fascinating artifacts. It certainly smelled like a pawn shop, too, smelled of dust and old age. His business seemed to be going along well, and that helped to ease my discomfort with this entire situation; at least I could rest assured that my precious timepiece will be handled with the utmost professional care. As I approached him with my timepiece in hand, he looked a bit displeased, and as I walked closer, he took on a condescending disposition.

“What can I help you with, sir?” he said with his nose high up in the air.

“Uh – yes, right. I am interested in selling this timepiece, sir,” I said with extended hand.

But before I could hand it to him, he grabbed it from me and appraised it in a fashion that did not suit my liking. The careless way in which he held it insulted me to no small degree.

“Hmm, this is a rather peculiar item you have here my lad. It is certainly extraordinary. What say you to 20 shillings?”

“20 shillings! Are you mad!” I found myself shouting uncontrollably.

“Well, all right then,” he said in a cautious tone, “what do you believe it is worth?”

How could I answer such a nonsense question? “What do I believe it’s worth?” – what do I believe it is worth! He must have been madder than I had originally suspected. A priceless gem as this has no price, I said to him, and I exited his shop with outrage. Before I could step out entirely though, he called back to me and asked for the reason of my departure. “I cannot do business with such a man as you,” I said to him.

“Such a man as what, sir?” he cried.

“Why, a madman, of course.” And I turned to leave.

That night, for his inexcusable effrontery, I resolved to murder this impudent pawnbroker. I concluded that a man of his depravity should not be allowed to inhabit this world. The following morning, as I awoke to carry the deed, I found the pawnbroker sitting at the edge of my bed with butcher’s knife in hand.

“Good morning old chap,” he said in a friendly tone, “Could I bother you to lead me to that peculiar piece that you brought in yesterday?”

I was startled, but I replied still, “I have already made it clear to you, sir. I refuse to sell it; not to the likes of you.”

“Oh, I do not wish to purchase it, my dear fellow. I do not even wish to own it, you see. I am a modest man, of modest income and modest behavior. However, I have come to the realization that you do not deserve the company of such a wonderfully strange item; not you, sir. If you please, I would like to take it now.”

“I am sorry, sir, but I cannot oblige your request. Now, I would like you to leave, sir. It is the morning, and I should like to prepare myself for the onslaught of the day.”

At this he laughed. “Onslaught indeed,” he chuckled, said, “quite right, old chap, quite right… Oh, where are my manners. I have been a bit intrusive, haven’t I? I beg your pardon for that, good sir, but I urge you to reconsider your position. I would really like to obtain that piece; could you bring it to me?”

What audacity! What nerve had he to sneak into my apartment and make such an outrageous claim to my timepiece, my timepiece, dear reader! I could not maintain my decorum any longer. “How dare you, sir!” I shouted at him, “I will not suffer such ridiculous commands. Now if you do not mind, I demand that you leave at once.”

“Come now, my lad. I do not mean to offend you; I would just like to have that piece. That is all. Surely, you can understand
that. Now, kindly direct me to it sir, or else I shall have to resort to unpleasant means to elicit it from your undeserving clutch.” As he said this, he positioned himself next to my side with his knife pointed directly down at my chest, with a smile that matched the severity of the situation. “Please do not make me have to ask you again, sir.”

At this, I had no choice but to acquiesce. I led him to my drawer and showed him the timepiece, and he grabbed it fiendishly. Oh, if you only saw the miserable grin on his face, dear reader. That wretched grin from ear to ear; it would have been enough to make your blood boil too. His eyes lit up; his yellowed teeth all showed; his remaining hair stood up on end. Then he cried, “It’s mine!” and began to jump, like a child at play. But that was soon to be his undoing. His butcher’s knife slipped from his grasp during his foolish glee, and as soon as it did, I grabbed it from the floor and stabbed him in the heart, then the eyes, and then I slit him across the face.

The constables arrived a quarter past one to investigate a cry that some neighbors had heard that morning. They arrived to find me eating my breakfast, with the pawnbroker at the foot of my bed. I had not bothered to be rid of the body; I had actually rather enjoyed it being there. I had, however, taken careful measures to hide the timepiece, but I will not divulge where I hid it, not as of yet.

As to me, I have been sentenced to die by noose, and I must confess, I do not believe that to be unjust. My life was simple after all; the world will not miss me much. But I do have one small favor to ask of you, dear reader: if you are interested in finding the timepiece, I can direct you to its location, if only you promise to bring it to me. Please, dear reader, if not for pity’s sake, than do it to help a dying man find some small measure of comfort during his final days. Oh, how I miss it so – I should like to see it again. Just once more; just one last time before it is gone forever, I should just like to hold it again. That is my only request, dear reader, my only plea. Reply to me, beloved friend, and you shall be dearer to me than any other. God save you, Godspeed, and good luck.

SUSAN LYNNNE DEWOLF

The Most Happy

A true raven-haired beauty
Venus redefined
Intelligent, proud, and alluring
Quickly you captivated his eye.
The Great Whore, they called you
Because of your power over him
You ignored their remarks and persisted
Becoming the Most Happy, his most revered.
Because of your stubborn nature
And your family’s pride
You pushed Great Katherine off her seat
And assumed the role you were meant to fill.
Further and farther into despair you became
Frantic and lonely, you did not give away
Your worries and insecurities, your wish to grant
Your husband’s wishes, his only true request.
Soon enough, you gave your most precious gift
England’s future glorified prize
This was not enough
So came your demise.
Alone in that putrid Tower
Confined and repressed
Your world torn and shaken
Your pride was all you had left.
That fateful May morning
Your feet treaded the Tower green
Meeting the swift French sword
You met your ultimate defeat.
**Libby Richards**

**Erosion**

You are driftwood following through each new wave.

I am the constant shore on the beach of your origin. The beach where you split from your tree, broke free from constraint and set sail.

I am longing to harbor you again. The storms rise and I shine my brightest lighthouse in your name but in the morning, you wash up on a more beautiful beach— the water of her eyes much bluer than mine.

The tree you broke free from still stands at my shoreline with the broken base of your branch longing for its extension. My tide has kept rhythm yet, lost its drive.

---

**John Lost**

**Sensation**

a woman | to the rest

Touches deeper than the five - Senses
SABRINA BOLVARI

Sex as my Drug of Choice

I love the way your eyes roll back
And muscles tense just to relax.
It’s like I shot you up with a
Syringe of your sweetest dreams.
Addicts just can’t get enough,
Horrible as it seems.

STEPHANIE PORTELLI

Zombie Haiku

People tend to say
beauty is only skin deep.
I like your insides.
**Vampire Haiku**

You don’t hate garlic,  
And your skin doesn’t glitter,  
But you sure do suck.

---

**CONTRIBUTORS**

**Jacqui Abad** is a junior double-majoring in History and Secondary Education, who maintains her own website called One Canvas One Soul.  
“My heart is like an open highway.”   -“It’s My Life” by Bon Jovi

**Mohamed Alcodray** spent his first 16 years in the dark, until a high school English teacher—Ikens—showed him the light. It took a few years for his eyes to adjust, but the squinting has since subsided; the world is ever-clear for the ambitious 21 year old. Among his life goals: amazing-things-only-a-preten tious-18-to-24-year-old-could-expect-of-himself.  
“As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date.”

**Amal Alghami** is a sophomore majoring in Biology.  
“That crazed girl improvising her music/Her poetry, dancing upon the shore/Her soul in division from itself/Climbing, falling She knew not where/Hiding amid the cargo of a steamship/Her knee-cap broken, that girl I declare/A beautiful lofty thing, or a thing/Heroically lost, heroically found.”   - William Butler Yeats

**Haydar Ali** is a senior with a Biochemistry major.  
“Give a man a fish, he’ll eat for a day. Give a man a subprime fish loan, now you’re in business buddy.”   - Stephen Colbert

**Sarah Alsaden** is a freshman majoring in both English and Political Science.

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“The unexamined life is not worth living.”   - Socrates

**Anton Attard** is a senior at U of M-Dearborn. He is majoring in Biology and minoring in Political Science. He loves reading, photography, traveling, and spending time with friends and family.  
“God can see a black ant walk on a black stone in a black night”   - Arab Proverb
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“‘I’m a mouth that doesn’t smile, I’m a word that no one ever wants to say.’”

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“The inner meaning of art is to strive for excellence. You have to fight against all kinds of obstacles, and then through art you can find yourself.”
-Suda Chandrashekar

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“Mental reflection is so much more interesting than TV; it’s a shame more people don’t switch over to it.”
-Robert Pirsig

DONNA COLLINS is junior majoring in English. She is a “nontraditional” student, returning to school after many years. She has raised children and worked in various jobs in the labor field. She has been involved in writing lyrics, music, and poetry, sometimes performing musically.

YAMIKO CRAYTON is a sophomore majoring in Journalism.

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SUSAN LYNN DEWOLF is a senior majoring in English and History.
“All the world’s a stage,/And all the men and women merely players/They have their exits and their entrances,/And one man in his time plays many parts,/His acts being seven ages.”

ANTHONY DEDAKIS is a sophomore majoring in Engineering.
“The saddest thing in life is a waste of talent”
-Robert De Niro

KRISTINE DOWHAN is a freshman majoring in mathematics. She loves puzzles and singing in the rain.
“The difference between school and life? In school, you’re taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you’re given a test that teaches you a lesson.”
-Tom Bodett

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JENNIFER DRAKE is a returning student and is really enjoying the process this time around.
“What would you attempt to do if you knew you would not fail?”

SAMANTHA LYNN EHLERT is a freshman majoring in Anthropology as well as Women and Gender Studies.
“And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so? I did./And what did you want?/To call myself beloved, to feel myself/beloved on the earth.”
-Raymond Carver

DAVID ELNER is a senior majoring in Computer Science.
“Well there’s your problem!”
-Adam Savage, MythBusters

MELISSA L. FEE is a senior majoring in English.
“I write for the same reason I breathe- because if I didn’t, I would die.”
-Isaac Asimov

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“Do not ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.”
-John Donne

PAIGE L. HANSON is a senior majoring in English.
“I might join your century, but only as a doubtful guest.”
-The Dresden Dolls

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“How true it is that words are but vague shadows of the volumes we mean.”
-Theodore Dreiser

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Zachary McInchak is a junior majoring in Humanities. Born in Lincoln Park, MI, artist/designer Zachary McInchak finds inspiration in life’s forward motion and in times of reflection. He is influenced by modern masters such as Henri Matisse, pioneer comic book artists Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, and the art of ancient cultures throughout history. His works have been featured at the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit, Michigan House of Representatives, University of Michigan-Dearborn, and Henry Ford Community College. Zachary is currently employed as a graphic designer for WhateverLife.com, a creative social network for teens and young adults.

Stefanie Mullins is a junior majoring in Journalism and Screen Studies.

“Life is overrated.”

Tiarra Overstreet is a senior majoring Communications and minor in African and African American Studies.

Stephanie Portelli is a senior majoring in Elementary Education with concentrations in Language Arts and Mathematics.

“I hope that the worlds turns, and that things get better. But what I hope most of all is that you understand what I mean when I tell you that, even

Sarah Qarana

“When you are loved, you can do anything in creation. When you are loved, there’s no need at all to understand what’s happening, because everything happens within you.” -The Alchemist

Alicia Quintana is a senior majoring in English.

Andrew Renaud is a junior majoring in Journalism and Screen Studies.

“Among other things, you’ll find that you’re not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You’re by no means alone on that score, you’ll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You’ll learn from them - if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It’s a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn’t education. It’s history. It’s poetry.”

Libby Richards is a sophomore.

“love never comes home/until fear, possession, jealousy/are far gone/sage has burnt/and fresh candles lit/and by that time/i may be asleep”

Matthew Ripper is an alumnus and a former Editor-in-Chief of Lyceum.

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“Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.” -Samuel Beckett

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“I do not write for such dull elves/As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves.” -Jane Austen in a letter to her sister Cassandra
PHIL SATTLER is a senior majoring in Electrical Engineering.
“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” -John 3:16

STEPHEN SHARBATZ is a returning student obtaining his Secondary Education teaching certificate.

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“You need chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star.”
-Friedrich Nietzsche

EMMA SLOGINA is a sophomore majoring in Political Science and Hispanic Studies.
“The most boring thing in the entire world is nudity. The second most boring thing is honesty. The third most boring thing in the entire world is your sorry-assed past.” -Chuck Palahniuk, Invisible Monsters

SONYA SMITH is a senior majoring in English.

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“It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people’s minds.” -Samuel Adams

SIDDHARTH VALLURI is a graduate student studying Automotive Engineering.

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SUNBAL VIRK is a senior majoring in Criminal Justice and Psychology.
“If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character./ If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home./ If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation./ When there is order in each nation, there will be peace in the world.”

THOMAS WESLEY is a senior majoring in Urban and Regional Studies.
“It is our responsibilities, not ourselves that we should take seriously.” -Peter Ustinov

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“The illusion which exalts us is dearer to us than ten thousand truths.”
-Aleksandr Pushkin

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Lyceum is an entirely student-run publication at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Students not only assist in the judging and compilation of the journal, but build up a variety of professional skills while gaining experience in team leadership and event planning. Lyceum members also have fun and meet new people—regular outings are held each semester.

Students, alumni, faculty, and staff are encouraged to join Lyceum at any time during the school year; membership is always open. Meetings are held on a weekly basis in the Lyceum office, 2115 UC. To join, send an e-mail to lyceum.umd@gmail.com expressing your interest.

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