

# *Spiritus Mundi*

A Collective Memory

Honors Literary Magazine  
Colorado State University

Spring 2005



**Colorado  
State**  
University

*Knowledge to Go Places*

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*a lot of people do laundry on Monday night*  
Lindsey Deming

here I sit  
contemplating shortcuts to my reading  
it's very late  
and yet  
this is the place where the young people are  
so not really that late  
I thought the machine was broken  
but that's not going to stop them  
these warriors of the midnight suds  
passing back and forth in front of my window  
(MY window; from which I view my nighttime world)  
I wonder  
do they fold now?  
I would rather be sleeping

*untitled*  
Lindsey Deming

you would chase the lightning  
if I told you it was diamond  
and eternity, although black, would have to smile

*let's stay awhile*  
Randi DePriest

I stand in whispering waters...complacent, happily  
chilled. I wonder, marvel at this feel... the solid rock below my bare feet  
rough enough to hold me, smooth enough to soothe,  
Strange quiver, torrents and swirls on my calf, always the same,  
always a little different I close my eyes just to feel and  
pretend that I look beautiful, or at least  
beautifully strange with legs shiny, bare face  
contemplative, rapt in this foreign, familiar place, but when I open my  
eyes you are checking your watch...checking time lost,  
wondering, what you are  
missing, looking far past me for something,  
someone? more. but oh, if I  
were this river I would have something important to carry  
something to say. I would be crystal in light...endless at night  
dangerous, incredible and oh, if you were this rock, hidden from all  
but me, unless I in benevolence and perfect sunlight let you glint, up  
towards uncaring eyes like yours  
you would be thankful to me, only me,  
for seeing you. I would change for you every day. I'd bring some  
wonderful word of child, fisherman, or factory  
I would be your cleanser and you would be  
the dirty one. If I were so strong, I would mercilessly pound  
you, every rapid would make you smoother, softer, better  
you would understand...you would be proud to carry me,  
to the end of water and earth. My waters  
would linger and swirl around you you would not know  
I dwell on you. You are only one brick in my endless foundation  
only you, one mark in my long path  
and if you were so unmoving  
so loyal, you would not know...  
you had no other choice  
if I were this river  
and you were this rock...

*sestina:*  
*before 2A.M., singing to streetlights and air, where my hands aren't so simple*  
 Randi DePriest

I walk alone down alien streets, alone, to  
 think and when no one can hear, to sing.  
 A woman of years, wisdom, and nothing else holds out her hands.  
 She sits under a yellow, useless streetlight  
 I give her a cigarette. We smoke together, the same air,  
 and I wonder where she and I might be if things were simpler.  
 Can she see, too, these lost ghosts of simplicity?  
 they are fallen, twisted with complication, too.  
 I, a coward, close my eyes and breathe this tainted cool air  
 and listen to some housewife singing  
 perhaps just for me. She seems to sing: Walk and think more lightly.  
 With peace, I stretch freezing numbness from my hands.  
 I come upon men raising buildings with their hands,  
 Strange that constructing an empire could be this simple.  
 they finish their day, give their welcome farewell to sunlight  
 before going home to warm meals and wives, they gather together to  
 tell jokes and their laughter rises as song,  
 their grand masculine puffs of breath visible in the night air.  
 I walk in new dark, and something heavy lifts from the air  
 whispered away by mysteriously kind hands,  
 and, as naturally as breath, I drift back to how you sang  
 off-key each morning, and I swallowed the dry metal of simplicity.  
 yet you are here in this city of life and fog, too,  
 wavering somewhere above my mind in the dim light  
 just as you were: light, more like candlelight,  
 opening your flame to love and tasting only air...  
 I am only one. You could not understand: I could not make two  
 but I can't forget how you studied my tired hands  
 and laughed. You were so beautiful, so simple  
 and even here, I can't silence your song  
 In my head. Yet here, more often, it is my song I sing.  
 In my dark, I have found my own bit of sunlight...  
 I'm too much, too little, too simple,  
 yet, at the least, I can breathe my own air.  
 I can make my life and myself with my own hands,  
 it still seems I am you and these strangers, but myself, too.  
 You will not breathe this air, do not take my song  
 These hands are cold and tired, but they will grasp my light  
 All that is my own, to prove...solitude is so beautifully simple.

*Need*  
**Peter Friedrichsen**

I don't need you here  
Watching snowflakes disappear  
Into the cold concrete  
Like fragments of broken dreams.

I don't need your eyes  
Dancing with the butterflies  
On a sunlit summer rose,  
The cool green grass between your toes.

I don't need your hair  
Sweetening the stale air  
Of a cold and empty room.  
No-one needs to share this tomb.

I don't need your hand  
Holding mine across the sand.  
Pounding surf and endless reefs,  
The sea's enough to hold my grief.

I didn't need to hear your voice.  
I somehow knew you'd made your choice.  
The white around your raven words  
Was showing me a thousand colors.

*Scarlet Stains*  
**Peter Friedrichsen**

Scarlet stains your silver tresses  
Running through your sable dresses,  
Purified by cleansing floods,  
Combed by fingers dipped in blood.

Raise your fingers to my lips.  
Taste the steel at their tips.  
Run your tongue along the blade.  
Watch the glimmer slowly fade.

Holding up the fragile names  
Trapped within their aging frames.  
March atop the rounded stones  
In step with your spotless clones.

Cheeks will blush a baby blue,  
Never having thought it through.  
Frozen hands and frozen bones  
Fashion cemetery stones.

*Pedestal Shadows*  
Peter Friedrichsen

Push your tiny teeth.  
Bleed your plastic gums.  
The rock will yield your desire.  
Just keep pushing.

Above you now I hang,  
A monument to your failure.  
You crucify me  
And I  
Am indifferent.

I am your ecstasy.

Shrink beneath our gaze.  
You will raise our banners  
And proclaim  
Our endless reign in your eyes.

Above you now we stand,  
A mausoleum of your hope.  
We crucify you  
And we  
Are indifferent.

We are your ecstasy.  
We are your envy.

Reach for the sky.  
Though you may try,  
Frustration will be  
Your only legacy.

You are the mediocrity.  
You are the mediocrity.

*Spaghetti O's*  
Brandon Germer

I'm ready to go! So take down the lights and the tent. Choose what not to carry along,  
and pack only what can fit on your back. Steal a seat in first class and meet my love,  
the evening sky.

In the moment we could die and leave a legacy of stolen shoes, demons exercised  
with yellow laughter, overflowing from a waking heart.

My friends will miss me, my foes will doubt me.  
The earth will wait for me, the heavens will accept me.  
Never imagine me alone in tears, door shut, window closed, missing home,  
because home is tomorrow, an open road, a vacant sky,  
stretching blue eyes open waiting for me, my abode.

I'm alright yeah, I'm alive because I've died!  
I'm free because I've lied, then spun around for seven years in sorrow  
and have come back as a winter wind.  
Go ahead and touch me, I'm about to be memory.  
I'm begging you please, I don't want to go without feeling you.

Wrapped 'round these bones, accepting me,  
telling me I'll never be a bathroom stall joke.  
Confirm something about my soul, and open up your world to me,  
a deep breath of something beautiful to last me through my coldest midnight.

All this in my last hour in this old town.  
Give me a piece of you, and I'll give you a thousand moons  
and pocketfulls of trinkets from the backroads and avenues of my soul,  
at least fifteen sunrises you'll never forget,  
and maybe a poem or two to share your name.

If you think it's worth your face in a freeze-frame  
locked in my present view for as long as I'll remember you,  
take my hand and lead the way

*Up For Review*  
**Brandon Germer**

It's been a year and I'm still a vagabond  
still have nails on my right and calluses on my left  
still carry two guitars – one for lullabies and one for screams  
I've made a lot of friends with airlines and bus seats  
I've heard old men's stories in bars kept under hotels  
I've sucked in the stench of diesel train engines  
and I've fallen asleep, cliffside in the wind  
with a woman under my arm, and played the sunset down

a hundred songs have passed through these lips  
and twice as many poems have escaped this pen  
I've drank down three times that many cups of coffee  
and been kissed goodnight by infinitely more winking stars

Am I proud of who I am?  
If I were to be startled out of sleep by a frightful dream  
would my chest rise up with uneven movement?  
would I bear wide eyes and hold them open?  
Or would I slow my breathing with relief,  
and go back to sleep?

*Elegiac Confusion: An exploration of the American “canon” with Harold Bloom*  
Lindsay Gypin

After reading Harold Bloom’s “Elegiac Conclusion,” an individual can only perform one of two acts. One: ponder Bloom’s well-stated points, or two: sit back and chuckle at the frustration emanating from this man. I don’t know what a tweed jacket is, but I’m sure that Harold Bloom wears one with the authentic horn-rimmed glasses he wears on his exposed, balding head. Bloom would make no attempt to conceal his balding head – no comb-over, no wig; Harold Bloom is a man that takes things “with a grain of salt” and always assumes the worst. Consider the title of this document – “Elegiac Conclusion” – this title suggests that Bloom has come to the conclusion that literature in its true form has keeled over and died; so Bloom has taken it upon himself to write an elegy for society in remembrance of literature. Well, goodbye literature, I will certainly miss you. Welcome, the dawning of a new era, an era where dead white people canon books aren’t the only texts read in classrooms. Amen.

Bloom begins his article, “Elegiac Conclusion,” by describing the themes of literature he has endured over the forty long years of his career. When Bloom began teaching, he entered “an academic context dominated by the ideas of T.S. Eliot, ideas that roused [him] to fury, and against which [he] fought as vigorously as [he] could” (Bloom 225). As Bloom writes this article in 1994, he finds himself “now surrounded by professors of hip-hop; by clones of Gallic-Germanic theory, by ideologues of gender and of various sexual persuasions; by multiculturalists unlimited” (Bloom 225). Damn those multiculturalists and their interest in the many backwater cultures that thrive in American society rather than in the “dead white people canon books” that should thrive in the classroom! I can feel Harold Bloom’s frustration oozing through his fingers and into the text of this paper; and while I sympathize with Bloom’s views, I also feel that for a student to truly understand the world, s/he must understand cultures other than dead white people culture.

I find Bloom’s approach in the article “Elegiac Conclusion” interesting because he is “preaching to the choir.” It is clear that Bloom’s intended audience is other stodgy old professors of English with conservative viewpoints. Bloom writes: “The idea that you benefit the insulted and injured by reading someone of their own origins rather than reading Shakespeare is one of the oddest illusions ever promoted by or in our schools” (Bloom 228-229). I found myself rather put off when I read this statement, because while Bloom is saying this to other conservatives to poke fun at us multiculturalists, he is telling them that us multiculturalists are wasting our time by trying to understand other oppressed cultures.

Bloom goes as far as to say: “why should [multiculturalists] read at all rather than go forth and serve the desperate needs of the exploited classes?” (Bloom 228). Again, I feel Bloom’s frustrations. He is greatly upset because he feels literature is dying and being replaced with fluff, but his words sting those of us who would be his sympathizers. I know that I learned a great deal from reading Shakespeare, and thus support the teaching of Shakespeare in the classroom. However, I also feel that to better serve the many cultures that make up the one culture that is America, Americans must also read diverse authors. Here, Bloom is saying that I am wasting my time, and that I might as well join the missionaries who travel to third world countries and preach Christianity. That is not my place. My place, as a future educator, is to expose my students to a vast amount of diverse texts so they have the knowledge and the background to understand where people from different cultures are coming from. It is my job to give my students the power to make decisions about literature and other cultures for themselves, not to force Shakespeare down their throats saying he is the only author worth reading.

Following his rant on multiculturalists and feminists, Bloom comments: “I realize that the Balkanization of literary studies is irreversible” (Bloom 225). Well, Dr. Bloom, I must ask you this: what is wrong with the Balkanization of literary studies? Granted, when different types of literature (not that there are different types in Bloom’s mind) are in a state of political warfare with one another, it can be a problem. However, if we look at “balkanization” as simply a diversity of texts, I don’t see the issue. After all, this is America, the great “melting-pot” of culture, shouldn’t it also be a great “melting-pot” of literature? Harold Bloom, of course, would see a melting pot of literature as the great basin

of volcanic liquid in Dante's *Inferno* (and here, by *Inferno*, I refer to the place Harold Bloom may be visiting after his death). Then again, Dante may be a dead white guy, but he's no Shakespeare, so my metaphor may elude Bloom's narrow mind.

Harold Bloom also writes: "There has never been an official American literary canon, and there never can be, for the aesthetic in America always exists as a lonely, idiosyncratic, isolated stance" (Bloom 225). Oh, Dr. Bloom! Don't you see? If there ever is to be an "American Canon," such a canon must consist of a number of smaller canons. The American canon will house an African-American canon section, a women's canon section, an Asian canon section, a gay/bisexual/lesbian/transgender canon section, a Hispanic canon section, etc., etc. The idea of a functional American Canon can only be supported by the Balkanization of literary studies – that is to say that the American canon cannot include only one genre of text, it must include a vast, diverse supply of texts. The American canon will take the traditional concept of "canon" and reshape it into something entirely new and improved – that is the American way: to mold and tweak a product or an idea until it achieves perfection.

I know that if indeed Harold Bloom were to read the words I have just written, he would probably have a heart attack. However, I am only reiterating (and improving upon) what he himself has written in "Elegiac Conclusion." 'There has never been an American literary canon' – but there can be – 'because the aesthetic in America always exists as a lonely, idiosyncratic, isolated stance.' Basically: yes, America does have a lonely, isolated bearing; yes, America does have an idiosyncratic point of view; yes, America is a fairly new country – all in the scheme of things. America would not be such an eccentric place if taken out of the context of the rest of the world. Why can't America have a canon? Bloom argues America can't have a canon because it is so different from other countries that do have canons, like France, where " 'French Classicism' is a coherent tradition" (Bloom 226). But what exactly is a canon, anyway? The canon is a group of "accepted" texts... but who accepts these texts? Critics like Bloom, but there is no indisputable list of canonical works because no two critics can agree on what goes into the canon and what stays out. I say that America can and will someday have a canon, and while that canon may not mirror the British canon, that doesn't mean it won't still be a canon.

There will be an American canon, the question now becomes: what will go into this distorted American canon? The English have Shakespeare, the Irish have Joyce, the Italians have Dante and the Americans have... who? Well, immediately after embarking upon a journey to find authors and texts worthy of entrance into the American Canon, we stumble into roadblock number one, which, coincidentally, happens to be one of Bloom's arguments for why America cannot have a canon. America hasn't been around long enough to have dead white people canon authors to write dead white people canon books! America has no Shakespeare, no Joyce, no Dante. Well, gosh darn it! Already in the creation of the American Canon, the creator must exit the "box." \*Steps outside of box and brushes dirt off hands.\* Where to begin? There are no ancient authors to throw into the American Canon; no single author qualifies as both dead enough and white enough. Fortunately, Harold Bloom offers some criterion for canonicity in "Elegiac Conclusion."

First, Bloom writes that he can "tell you neither what to read nor how to read it, only what I have read and think worth of rereading" (Bloom 226). In other words, the American Canon cannot be a list of texts that says "you must read Blah Blah Blah on the third day of July under the sun for one hour, and under a full moon for another hour." Good to know.

Next, Bloom writes: The deepest truth about secular canon-formation is that neither critics nor academics, let alone politicians, perform it. Writers, artists, composers themselves determine canons, by bridging between strong precursors and strong successors" (Bloom 229). In other words, I, as an academic, cannot form a secular canon. Unfortunately, a non-secular canon is an oxymoron. So, I guess I can't play "God" in the creation of the American Canon. Shoot. I was looking forward to it.

Also, Bloom comments: "Canonical prophecy needs to be tested about two generations after a writer dies" (Bloom 229). Actually, for this criterion, I disagree with Bloom. I'm sure that some of Shakespeare's cohorts were still being read two generations after their deaths. But now, countless generations later, society only remembers Shakespeare. So, while I disagree with Bloom's specific timeframe for canonicity, I agree that age is a concern in canon formation.

Finally, Bloom states: “Great styles are sufficient for canonicity because they possess the power of contamination, and contamination is the pragmatic test for canon formation” (Bloom 229). By “contamination,” Bloom refers to a phenomenon that occurs when a said canonical author’s writing influences (and contaminates) later authors.

So, the criterion for canonicity (according to Harold Bloom) is as follows:

1. Canon texts cannot be forced upon future generations. The current generation can only recommend texts worthy of rereading.
2. Only writers, artists, and composers can determine what goes into the canon by showing through their work which previous authors are influential to future successful authors
3. Survival through the ages is a factor in determining canonical worth.
4. Canonical texts are defined as canonical based on their ability to infect future writers.

What this criterion displays is that I alone cannot determine what goes into the American Canon; nor can any other individual person. The canon is something that has to be developed over time, so in a way, Harold Bloom is right. The infancy of America does work against its ability to possess a canon. However, one can look into the past and determine some canonical works. For example, I believe that in writing the novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright was influenced by some of the African-American slave songs. In his attempt to escape white society, Bigger Thomas metaphorically “follows the drinking gourd.” Does that mean that the “Follow the Drinking Gourd” song is one piece of the American Canon? I think so. Native American literature, like James Welch’s *Winter In the Blood*, has been influenced by the Native American creation myths in the same way that Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is influenced by Christianity’s creation myth: *The Bible*. Does the fact that there is no “bible” of Native American religion mean that Native American creation myths are not texts worthy of entering the American Canon? I don’t think so. I have read these texts and I value them because they have helped me obtain a better grasp on the history of America. By reading *Winter In the Blood*, I have developed an understanding of the Native American perspective. By reading *Native Son*, I have developed an understanding of the African-American perspective. These alternative perspectives not only allow me to understand history better, but they allow me to relate to people of these cultures better. Also, having read these texts, I have a greater understanding of what the world could be like.

Throughout my exploration of the “American Canon” and Harold Bloom’s ideals of what such a canon should look like, I’ve decided that the “birth” of an American Canon cannot be the “creation” of an American Canon. No one individual, or any group of individuals, can sit down and decide what qualifies and what doesn’t qualify as canon material. Literary critics like Harold Bloom who scoff at the idea of an American canon are like a bunch of people standing too close to a painting made up entirely of colored dots. The critics don’t see the image on the painting of the American Canon because they are standing too close to the portrait. If they were to step back, they would see a picture in the painting along with the vast amount of literature already in the American Canon. The American Canon already exists – the literature is all already there – it’s only because there are so many conservative critics like Bloom who believe that literature has no room for development that “the arts are not progressive” (Bloom 231). This conservative ideal prevents American society from fully reforming to teach the Zora Neale Hurstons of literature rather than the Shakespeares. Fortunately, there are some brave souls out there teaching progressive American literature, otherwise, Bloom wouldn’t have anything to fuss about; and I wouldn’t have any reason to write a paper defending multiculturalism.

Harold Bloom closes “Elegiac Conclusion” with the statement: “I turn to my lists, hoping that literate survivors will find some authors and books among them that they have not yet encountered and will garner the rewards that only canonical literature affords” (Bloom 233). Bloom does a wonderful job of concluding his elegy to literature. However, I believe that Harold Bloom has confused himself, and has written an “elegiac confusion” rather than an “elegiac conclusion.” Multicultural awareness is not the death of literature – it is the birth of a new era of literature. Though, possibly Harold Bloom is correct. Some cultures outside of the white people canon crowd believe that death is a new beginning – the birth of a new era. In a way, the definition of literature Harold Bloom knows and loves is currently dying during the birth of a new, redefined version of literature that coincides with emergence of the American Canon.

*Poison*  
Lindsay Gypin

Ergot poison in my soul  
My kaleidoscope eyes take in everything sevenfold  
The world around me, a Native American sweat lodge  
Everything hazy, clouded, my perceptions impaired.

Black death infects my very essence  
There are pus-filled boils within my spirit  
I spew noxious venom on everything I touch  
And everyone that comes near me.

My eternal parts a virus  
I want to spread – to infect  
To destroy everything in my path  
With the nucleus of my being.

I am multiplying within myself  
My body not large enough to keep safe  
The deadly toxin I hold within.  
It seeps through my pores, seeking a victim.

Syphilis? HIV? Hepatitis? Influenza?  
None of the above  
Only one infectious pollutant within MY soul –  
Love.

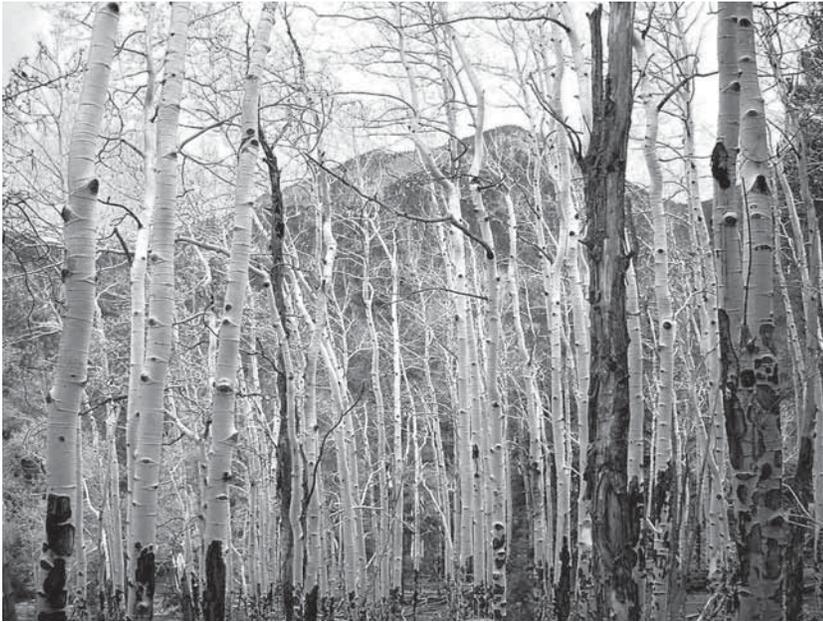
*The Power of Language*  
Lindsay Gypin

His words are saturated with meaning.  
They are mountains that have survived  
the ages and seen all. These words know  
the answers to all the questions of time;  
they are rich like moist chocolate cake with  
a glass of whole milk – or peanut butter plain.

His words dance on my tongue, cling to the  
roof of my mouth; and, though they  
go down easy, the memory of their touch –  
so full of flavor – lingers in my mouth forever.

Years from now the whisper of his voice  
will bring me back to today, and the  
exquisite taste of his words caressing  
my tongue, my ears, my heart, and my soul.

*Aspen Army (top)*  
*Tipsi on the Throne (bottom)*  
Chloe Harrell



*Forever*  
Adam Jones

Open on a bedroom, disheveled, unorganized, unkempt, no signs of life. A bed unmade, the remnants of a restless night of no sleep. Suddenly a noise, a sob from another room. Sweep down through a door into a bathroom, into a white sink not cleaned in days. A droplet of red, blood, drips into the drain. Speed increases until it's a river. A thud heard; no, two thuds. A bloody razor clatters to the floor, speckling white tile with red. Pan up from the floor to the counter. A man is huddled over the counter, crying tears that rip clear streams through oceans of red. Not tears of pain, not physical pain. Sweep back into the bedroom to a nightstand. A picture of a young woman. "Forever" written in marker across the top. A bag of disposable razors sits next to it, opened. If you look closely on the floor there's a trail of clear wet spots leading from the nightstand to the bathroom.

Rewind three days. A bedroom, disheveled, unorganized, unkempt. A man on his knees pleading into a phone. I love you, I love you, I love you. I miss you. Come home. I'm sorry. I can't live without you. A response. I can't, I'm sorry, you know that. In time you'll get over me. You're strong. A picture on the dresser reads "Forever" as the man traces the letters with his finger. Is this the end? Is there nothing left to hold on to? What did I do wrong? Is there someone else? A reply. I'll always love you. It's just... I need this. I need a change. I'm sorry. I can't come back. I can't ever come back. Be strong. I'll always love you. Click. A man bangs his head on a nightstand in desperation, and gently replaces the phone on the hook. Gets under the covers. Closes his eyes.

Rewind a week or so. A bedroom, a man's voice heard through the receiver of a phone. I have to work late tonight, don't wait up for me. I'll stay here tonight and I'll see you tomorrow. A reply. It's okay, I understand. Mhm, I love you too. Goodnight. A woman puts the phone down and picks it up, dials numbers. A man's voice, a different man. Hello? A reply. I need you now; he's working late tonight. The strange man says he'll be over soon. Fast-forward ten minutes and there's a knock on the door. A woman opens it and he comes in. The bedroom shudders with the presence of this stranger, this intruder. The floor groans as he enters with a bottle of wine. They drink together. The bed creaks as they climb in. Fast-forward two hours. A strange man climbs out of bed and dresses in a hurry. A quick kiss on the lips. A woman says I love you, it won't be long. I'm almost ready. A strange man says Hurry, leaves. A bedroom disheveled from a night of unnatural passion. Fast-forward a day and a man comes home, sees the bedroom, says You must not have slept well. A woman says no, kisses him on the cheek, says she's going out with a girlfriend.

Rewind two months. A bedroom half empty; a man and a woman moving furniture in: a bed big enough for the two of them, a nightstand. A man places a picture gingerly on the nightstand, carefully reads the word "Forever" and smiles to himself. Fast-forward three hours and the room is complete. The house is complete. Love and hope on both their faces, they kiss each other passionately, exchange I love yous. This is the start of something good, I can feel it. This is forever. An uneasy smile and a woman's reply. People change. A man says But we won't. This is forever. A man on his knees, hand in his pocket. Pulls out a ring. Will you marry me? A woman takes a step back, heart flutters, says she needs to think. A man disappointed, forces himself to smile, says Take your time, I know you'll come around.

Rewind to the beginning. Two young people in love. A man's birthday. A woman hands him a picture with a big grin. A picture of her, she says she wrote him a message. He reads the word "Forever" off the picture and smiles, stands up, gives her a big hug. Asks her to move in with him, they can start a life together, everything will be great. She would love to. They begin planning their life together.

Fast-forward to the beginning of the end. A woman at a gym, a strange man approaches her and asks her if he can jog with her. A woman agrees. Two people start to talk, look at each other, see a glimmer in their eyes. Time lapse shows a woman and a strange man meeting regularly at a gym. In another world a man whose job slowly consumes more and more of his time. Change scene to a bedroom made up lovingly. A strange man becomes more and more frequent a visitor. A strange man says I love you. A woman says I love you too. A man says I love you. A woman says I love you too, the sparkle gone from her eye. A man thinks he notices something, but doesn't say anything. A woman grows more and more distant.

Fast-forward. A bedroom littered with boxes and suitcases, a man crying on his knees, Don't leave, don't leave. We can fix this. Where are you going? What did I do wrong? How can I make it up to you? Don't leave me here, I can never live without you. I'll die without you. A reply. I'm sorry, people change. I changed, we changed. I can't do this anymore. A man asks Is there someone else? A reply. No. I just need a change, I'm sorry. I'll call you in a few days. I can't do this anymore. A man confused, disheveled, unkempt, lies broken hearted on the floor. A door slams. A bedroom empty, a bed unmade, a picture on the nightstand says "Forever," a man closes his eyes.

Fast-forward to the end, a man slumped over in the bathroom, heartbroken and dead, no more blood pumping from his opened veins. A pool turns maroon over time. He had been in bed for three days. No food. No sleep. For three days. Three days earlier he had called the number she left him. He begged her to come back. He thought he heard a second breath on the other line. He thought he heard a strange man's voice asking her to Hurry, come to bed. He had gently hung up the phone. He was in bed for three days before he made up his mind. A man slumped over in the bathroom, finally at rest. A picture on the nightstand reads "Forever." Under it, scrawled hastily, a man's handwriting. "I'll love you forever."

Fast-forward two years. She never heard what happened to him. She never called him again. She was happy with her new life, with her new love. She didn't want to think back to the past. She didn't want to relive the past, question her choices, question her morals. She knew he would be okay. She knew he was strong. If she had moved on, he could move on. She never saw the scene in the bathroom. She never remembered the picture she had given him that he kept on his nightstand until the end. She never saw the note he wrote her. She forgot him. She never knew how much he meant it when he said he loved her. Zoom in.

For a moment a man and a woman shared a love that was perfect. For a single moment, perfection existed. Zoom into a moment far enough and it lasts forever. Between a single second there is an infinite amount of time. Zoom far enough in on a timeline, on a single moment, and it lives on forever. Zoom out.

Zoom out into eternity. Zoom out from a timeline far enough and the moment never happened. Zoom out from the beginning of time to the end of time and nothing matters. Put a dot on a map and zoom out until the map is just a dot itself, and it's like the dot never existed. Zoom out on a timeline and no moments ever existed. But for some reason, when looking at this timeline, there's a point from which a new feeling begins. From some indefinite point of time on this timeline until the very end, there's a new feeling of love. From this far out the moment never existed, but the feeling lives on. A man told a woman he would love her forever, and on this timeline there's a new feeling of love that stretches on into eternity. Fade to black.

*Feline Instincts*  
Stephen Oesterreich



*I Surrender*  
Stephen Oesterreich



*Pencil to Paper*  
Allison Porter

How do you draw a breaking heart?  
Do you start where it's still whole  
Or where it's falling apart?

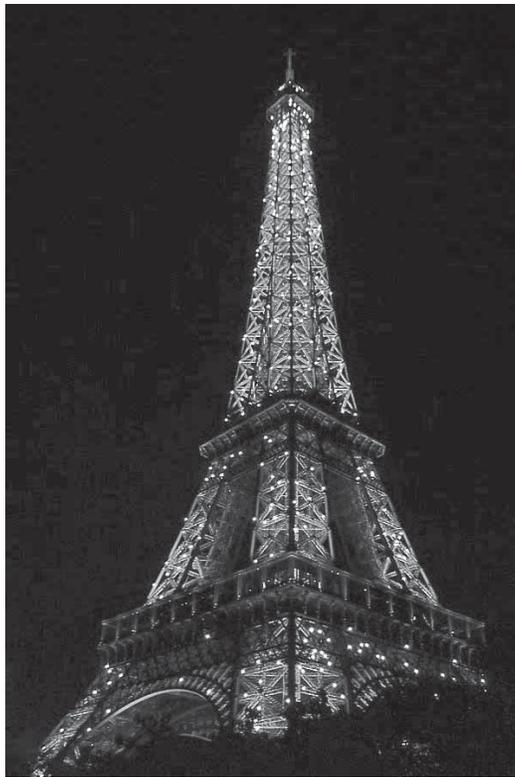
What about the blood that's dripping down?  
Do you sketch what's pouring out  
Or the stains on the ground?

Which instrument of imagery, color or lead?  
Do you capture the fractured texture  
Or the crimson red?

What of the shadows cast on the mass?  
Do you base them on the darkness of the present  
Or the light of the past?

How do you treat a broken heart?  
Do you pretend it's still whole  
Or let it all fall apart?

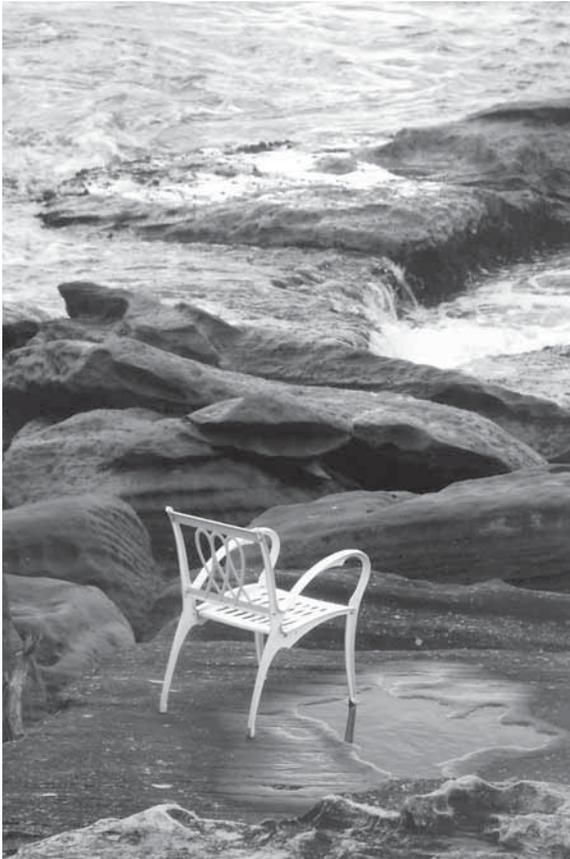
*A Day on the Farm (top)*  
*La Tour Eiffel A Nuit (bottom)*  
Travis Ritz



*Katoomba (top)*  
*Mixed Blessing (bottom)*  
Shea Robinson



*Relax (left)*  
*Time (top right)*  
*Writing on the Wall (lower right)*  
Shea Robinson



## *Home Means Nevada*

Jessi Rochel

Twenty seven million miles  
of baked asphalt, cracked yellow paint  
dirt caked in ruts and ridges  
black and sticky tar.

Windshield wipers sway in time  
to static crackling on the radio  
sweeping across the splattered bugs,  
Rorschach patterns on the glass.

*I spy with my little eye something blue.*

Fast food wrappers litter the dash:  
a half-eaten burger  
cold stale fries  
sticky melted ice cream in soggy cardboard cups.

*On the road again.*

A blue and white sign alone in the windswept grass:  
gas station twelve miles,  
our eighth stop in half as many hours.  
The tank is full.

LA traffic jam  
sticking to the seat  
hot diesel air  
angry blaring horns.

*He's poking me. She's on my side. Don't make me stop  
this car.*

Oregon monsoon  
rain hammers on the roof  
drops drip in window gaps  
weeping down the glass.

*I have to go to the bathroom.*

Three wrong turns in Idaho.  
Flat tire five miles outside of Boise;  
I change it and we drive on.

At McDonald's I forget  
and order a Big N' Tasty with pickles;  
no one eats it.

The kids want McNuggets with honey and ketchup,  
the way it was before.

But they're out of honey.

Fat gum-drop tears drip off Becca's nose.

I crumple up the wrappers and throw everything away.

*E-I-E-I-O.*

The kids are cranky, tired, bored;  
hands sticky with markers, fast food, Play-Doh.  
They breathe warm apple juice  
from their plastic cups abandoned on the floor,  
sleeping like pretzels  
around their seatbelts.

*Are we there yet?*

I can't pass the time with the stories they want to hear  
the stories I want to hear  
about talking road signs  
and the people in the cars  
that we pass  
that pass us.

*You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.*

Soon they'll go to camp  
backpacks stuffed with clothes  
names written in black marker on their tags.  
Horseback riding and burnt s'mores  
canoe races and popsicle stick picture frames  
bunk beds and mosquitoes.

*Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah.*

But this summer they're four and six,  
and we're still driving the familiar route,  
seeing the same things we've seen every summer.  
Run-down diners where we order strawberry milkshakes  
with extra whipped cream and rainbow sprinkles.  
Hotels with the smell of stale cigarette smoke  
rusty shower drains  
and outdoor swimming pools.  
Cheap souvenir stores where the kids investigate  
every polished rock and Indian feather headdress,  
consulting each other for advice on which prize is the best.

It's still the same as last summer  
and the one before that.

Or almost the same.

There's just one thing:

the seat beside me

empty pop bottles, a map, ticket stubs, my purse.

*Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas, Nevada.*

Tomorrow is our last stop,  
the kids and I will scatter the ashes.  
It was always his favorite part of the trip.  
He liked the Hoover Dam  
and humming "Home Means Nevada"  
because it meant we were almost back.

*Time*  
Jessi Rochel

Puddles were already collecting in the street three minutes and twenty-one seconds after the first raindrops dotted my window. Now it's been raining for two hours, fourteen minutes, and thirty-eight seconds. I know because I've been watching the clock above the kitchen sink – watching the minute hand creep around in slow circles and listening to the tick tick tick of the little black second hand.

Thunder grumbles overhead. Even though it's right above me, it sounds drowsy and distant. It isn't even loud enough to make me want to hide under my bed like I did when I was little. I'm not so scared anymore. Two hours, fifteen minutes, and seven seconds. A car splashes sloppily down the street. The tires plow through the puddles, turning them into miniature geysers and making it rain up as well as down. Even though it's barely mid-morning, the driver has his lights on. I wonder where he's going.

I can't find my shoes. I left them in front of the heater register yesterday to dry out because it was raining then, too. But now they're not there. My toes are freezing, even with my socks on, so I take turns trying to warm them up. First I stand on top of my left foot, then my right. One of my socks has a hole in the heel, and I can feel the cold linoleum through it, gnawing at the exposed skin with icicle teeth. I wonder where my shoes are. Two hours, seventeen minutes, and forty-two seconds.

Another car is coming down the street. The lights aren't on this time. But the car is moving so slowly, just caterpillar-crawling past the houses. The tires roll idly through the puddles, making waves instead of eruptions. I can see the driver's face scrunched close against the glass, searching for house numbers, trying to see around or through or under the rain drops. I guess it doesn't work because the car doesn't stop. Two hours and nineteen minutes. Maybe he was lost.

The power goes out. I flip the light switch a few times just to make sure. Nothing happens. It's okay because it was already dark in here anyway. But now the clock isn't working anymore – the hands have stopped at 9:37 a.m. And I can't check my watch because I can't find that either. Maybe it's with my shoes.

I turn away from the window and get out a bright pink bowl and a big metal spoon for breakfast. I open the freezer and pull out a carton of bargain brand cookie dough ice cream. I don't want it to melt. A thin layer of frost dusts the outside, but it disappears under my touch. I scoop out heaping spoonfuls and drop them in my bowl. I'm tired of waiting, of always saving the better things for later. They never turn out the way I thought they would.

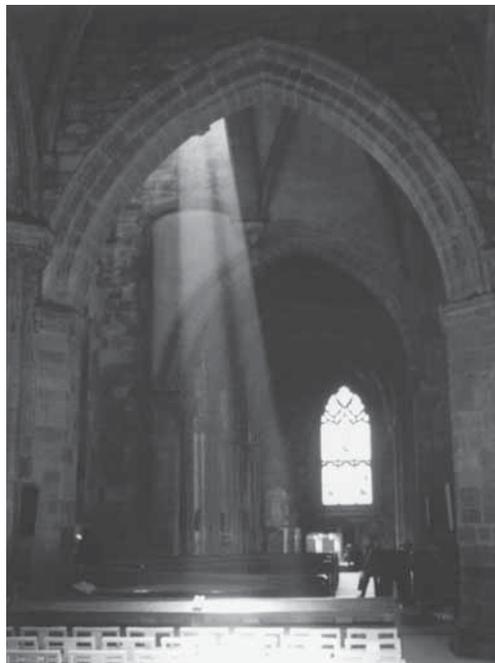
I look at the clock again. He's late.

He was supposed to be here yesterday.

*Noontime Inspiration*  
Ravi Chandrasekhar Singaraju



*Hear My Prayer*  
Nicole Carner



*In an alleyway*  
Valerie Stull

our foreheads pushed together  
I see your shadow  
cast behind us, street light projection  
on the weeping concrete wall.

standing in the rain, I feel  
calluses on your palm, the tips of your fingers  
from manual labor, hours of guitar  
flaky yellow skin.  
you hum something that wilts into air-  
trying to make me smile looking up.

*The Lord will surely comfort Zion.*

but you weren't there when I saw his waxy eyelids,  
yellow against  
white: walls, carpet, air.  
stickiness of death clung to my blue sweater  
like hungry infant hands, pulling.

no one told me I would know stillness-  
a body cemented on orchid bed sheets,  
engraved on dusty faces.

you weren't there when they sang  
notes like poppy petals falling stem to sidewalk,  
a strange celebration of life.  
those lost are not stolen.

*The Lord will surely comfort Zion.*

no one told me I would feel waterfalls.  
we sprinkled ashes like new year's confetti  
to put down what was missing.

*The Lord will surely comfort Zion.*

*Re:*  
**Valerie Stull**

I received your letter. I was quite surprised that you had written me, surprised to read your brain splattered on the page through Kierkegaard and Sartre's liquid explanation. Your existentialism becomes a down comforter, the satisfaction in knowing about the unknown. The potential of existence undiscovered. Do you remember? I pressed my hand onto your chest and told you how we were crumbling, existential atheism and some twisted form of faith cannot and simply do not mix. You were crying then, the tears long fountains on your chin. But seeing as how dissatisfied you are, your artificial highs aren't keeping you getting up in the morning, taking you to work, working your hands to the bone, I didn't see options. I can only think that there is another driving force, and although I want to reach down into your soul and pull it out, I can't find it. Why won't you just show it to me? You are wondering why I am reminding you of a time you do not want to remember. I see you, so far away, a watercolor of recreation. I dream that you are rebuilding yourself, rebirthing your own desires. Open your mind. I read your words, the pulse inside me revving up slowly so those words can drip off my nose into beautiful poetry. There is a certain dissatisfaction in knowing that what we know is so small. Microscopic existence really. But as you boast, we are still products of choice, so do I have the potential to destroy you? Or is it a product of my mind, valuing the ethic over the aesthetic?

*To Whom It Concerns:*  
**Valerie Stull**

yet somehow we lost it,  
the ability to see the wind.

(it dissipated years ago, when we scratched off our eyes  
paid for slavery, told disjointed aphorisms)

we need fire. breezes to carry smoke  
across empty bridges  
warning our neighbors that we're coming  
we want resolution, tattooed labels  
made in America.

---

if a return of  
hot wind scalds our tongues  
we see Rwanda again in red  
alabaster stone gardens of our own losses.

let sky be bold engravings  
wind-sight resolutions.

sincerely-

*Maybe*  
Caitlin Walls

maybe I'm ten, and running through an open field  
 deflecting the first drops of rain with braids and an open mouth  
 shrieking with delight, feet dead blind to the next step  
 unconcerned to falling or flying, they just go.  
 maybe I could learn from this again, from ten, or seven or nine  
 the first drops of rain christening my sun-naked skin  
 my feet plentiful in their steps, meager in worries  
 maybe I could walk like that again, unshaved, green-laden  
 maybe I could roll over in my sheets ten times backwards  
 and be there, magically, like a fawn in spring's high grass  
 spotted and oblivious to the predator only yards away, who is  
 crouched and focused as the first, solitary rain drops falls.

*Pursuing Poetry*  
Caitlin Walls

*"Untalented and ignorant as I am, I wish to 'pursue poetry' at least until I'm eighty-five."* – Mutso Takahashi

sometimes we have the dignified privilege of  
 stroking open the eyes of the dove, for we all know that  
 innocence does not open its eyes willingly, and the  
 pursuit of anything in life, ten feet below the clouds and  
 tumbling incoherently, is debauched and shattering.  
 sometimes, murmuring to people blending into walls  
 of chartreuse and yellow-blue, we suddenly don't see them, but  
 instead the long hallway behind them, leading out, where  
 we know in other rooms we might be more favored, we  
 might have a slight advantage over the defrocked mulligans.  
 sometimes, long and aching in the birthing regions of night,  
 we stretch and type furiously, and spell words wrong but  
 it never matters, because the pursuit is deeper than  
 language, stronger than knowledge, more trying than

a rebellious dog, gnawing at your already half-desiccated leg.  
 sometimes we read about softly spoken irony, a man  
 speaking of pursuing poetry even as his eyes have been  
 sealed shut by the wandering fingers of a jealous god,  
 even as he groans in the caliginous shadows, even at  
 twenty-five and he is much too stubborn to step aside and  
 blend into those hideous chartreuse walls, at least, not  
 until he's eighty-five and the still-innocent doves have  
 broken all his fingers and split his lips, rendering him  
 unable to write and speak poetry, yet still stringing the words  
 together in his mind, long trains of a particular's man's  
 art; long roads of an ignorant, untalented life pursuing  
 poetry with the ironic passion of a stubborn twenty-five year  
 old.

*You and I*  
Caitlin Walls

*For Mom, a partner in faith and equal in love*

*“Said Jesus, on whom be peace: The world is a bridge, pass over it, but build no house there.”  
– Inscription on Akbar’s Gate of Victory, Japan*

And this is why we feel that restless twinge that calls  
to the glowing properties of our Old Souls. It’s why  
transience is a double-*entendre* art, albeit misfortune, and why  
I struggle as you do  
to convey what has no words, what is limited by a short-sighted alphabet.  
It’s why we sometimes lift our arms when singing, and that one word  
*Hallelujah*  
rips through us, a breath from Holy Spirit, a gasp from an awakening God.

Rickety and cobbled, this bridge houses many, and very few  
pass over it  
for it is narrow and unfathomable, and like the woman on your right,  
the man on your left  
many cannot see.  
It’s why, at five in the morning at identical moments angels flurry their wings  
over our faces, and we startle awake.  
You listen – do I?

This world is a bridge, and we shall pass confidently. Words limit me,  
but our hearts feel as one, and I know this.  
My house shall be a house absent of time, so I wait.  
Until then, I grasp your hand at fleeting moments, hopeful that  
the swaying bridge will pause, right us again and let us continue on.  
Intervals at nightfall could not pause us, and the bell clangs on,  
calling us Home. I will follow you, boldly and with  
declaration, if only you remember that a heart is more honest than the  
mind, and that in this world and the one to come,  
I love you.

The glow between us never leaves. It is the restless twinge, angels  
calling our names, the West Wind voracious in its demands for answers,  
and halted by an inadequate language, I whisper a word as old as  
starlight, as weathered as ancient souls that wander here, muttering a litany  
of smoke-curling *Abbas*, alighting the bridge with praise and love,  
turning eccentricities and stereotypes into soft enticements, into a single  
smoldering sigh of *Hallelujah*, a mother-daughter inferno of monotheistic  
adulation.

*July 13th, 2004*  
Lacey Wilson

Today my life is this: I flutter my eyes open, crusty and unwilling around 10 or 11 am. I sweat through my sheets in my hot room, cursing the traffic outside and the heat and the birds for rustling me from my dreams so goddamn early. My alarm goes off, and I do multiples of nine in my head, angry and half-dozing, after subtracting 20 from the time, to see how long I can sleep before I have to be at my grandpa's house.

I wake, finally, and get out of bed. I check my email, turn on the television to channel 32 and begin plucking my eyebrows, annihilating the black buds that have surfaced below my contrived arches. I watch *Law & Order*, though I've seen this episode at least twice, and read the electronic journals of my half-friends from across the nation and of my roommate, just fifteen feet away. With my tweezers (they serve a double duty), I pop the pimples that have cropped up on my face in the last eight hours, and again consider becoming a dermatologist because I've whittled my face into a science of pus-and-dirt-removal.

I shower, after I've blotched and puffed out my face with my tweezers, where I follow my strict routine of zoning out for a period of ten minutes, then commencing with shampoo, conditioner, face wash, and Caress soap. And when I get out of the shower, I comb my hair carefully with a pick, moisturize religiously with SPF 15 lotion, and get dressed in a tank top and jeans.

And today I drive over the six yellow speed bumps to my grandpa's house. Today, we will get in his Oldsmobile to visit my grandma in the nursing home. We do this every week, sometimes twice a week. And every time is nearly the same. I am not expecting anything spectacular or unique from this trip to the nursing home. I can only hope I won't cry again after we leave like I have the last few times. Crying takes its toll on me, and it's too hot outside to turn so red.

I walk in and begin eating five steps into my grandpa's house. He didn't make me fresh bread, so I settle for Wonder Bread and a can of Diet Coke. He talks to me as I scarf his food, asking me how work is going, how that girl Lisa is (it's Lissa, with a short I – it's always been short I – but she is Lisa with a long E to my grandpa). I answer muffled, half-formed responses – work is okay, Lissa's fine. I've only been awake for an hour; responses beyond two syllables are hard earned.

After a review of all the people in my life and their respective issues, we finally saunter to the Olds. Blue and heavy, the 14-year-old car (with perhaps 50,000 miles on the odometer) lumbers down the road and resists my foot on the brake, a rhino on wheels, patient and inert, hard to get going but hard to stop once it moves. Grandpa talks to me now about seeing Grandma, on the way to her nursing home, reminding me why we make this trip to see her. I nod as I think silently, "Yes, I know she gets sad, yes, I know she's not doing so good anymore." I know what he is saying, but I hate hearing it. Especially today: it's much too hot for this kind of talk, and the air conditioner is not loud enough to glaze over his words.

The interminable mile-long drive ends in the nursing home parking lot. I take out Grandpa's wheelchair as he laments the weight he thinks he's gained and how lazy he's become in the last few months since turning 92. I can't hear him over the metal chair clunking against the sides of the trunk. I can't hear him over the reverberations of "Grandma not doing so good" bouncing between my ears. I roll the chair to him and he settles in, the big wheel rolling onto my toe, a guard against his rolling away alone. We work together in getting through the double doors of the home, only one of the barriers to my grandma.

We roll past the human lumps sitting, slack-jawed, in their own wheelchairs beside the doorway. Some of them recognize us, but not many; my grandpa lifts a finger, smiling and tipping his hat, greeting, in his down-home farmer boy way, the blank stares of my grandma's cohorts in the home. Finally, we quietly cross the threshold to my grandma's room, where it is dark and quiet but for the Country Music Television channel flickering across my grandma's roommate's TV screen. I roll Grandpa into the room, push the two-inch foam mat beneath the bed, and announce our entrance loud and energetic enough to get my grandma's attention from her daydream. She turns and half-smiles, her brown eyes glittering with water, not energy or recognition, and I tower over her as I lean down to kiss her dry lips. She smiles bigger then, and as my grandpa begins yelling and gesturing to communicate through her wax-clogged hearing aids, I sit in the chair against the opposite wall.

She remembers my name, soon, and my sister's name, as my grandpa talks disjointedly about what and how we're doing. She doesn't even have her glasses on, but she remembers today that I'm old enough to drive, that I'm in school. She asks about school, her voice caught throaty against her tonsils, pulled down and warped by gravity as she lies on her back,

simply turning her head against her pillow, never sitting up straight – I tell her that it's summer, so school isn't going on right now, but that I'm working and sick of it. She smiles again, laughs, and my grandpa laughs too, his eyes sparkling in time with the TV.

I look at the floor. Soon, I can't sit still, watching my grandpa yell and my grandma try to understand, reading his lips in the half-dark, nodding, reminiscent of the future Grandmas sitting by the front door. I wander the room considering whether I could fight off any infection she may have passed on to me with that peck on the lips, whether I could be the next diabetic in the family, whether slow, slow death like this in the form of kidney failures and congestive heart failures and ankle swelling and dementia skips a generation. As I step toward the door, my thoughts skip to the boy of the summer, his sun-browned shoulders and warm, dry hands and the way he touches me and the way he sleeps on my pillow in the dull sunlight from my window. And as I turn back to face my grandma's window, I see her roommate lifting her hand, like she's a skewed reflection of my grandpa's wave, and I wonder whether she's gesturing, whether she's lost control, why isn't she watching TV like she always does? And why is her family never here with her?

Suddenly, it's 2:30 and a half hour has passed more quickly than normal half hours in the nursing home do. We settle my grandma back into bed beneath her knitted pink covers, make sure she's comfortable, and I awkwardly peck her on the lips again before wheeling my grandpa back through the door with a loud goodbye to signify our leaving. As soon as we reach the parking lot, battling back through the double doors to the sunlight, my grandpa begins a revised narrative of Grandma's status, saying that she did better today than usual, she was much more talkative, had lots to say. I listen as well as I can as we scuttle the Olds back home, and when I return Grandpa to his empty house, I leave for my own car and apartment as quickly as I can without seeming rude.

I always leave the nursing home feeling transitory, out of place. Sometimes it even hits the point of sentimental, and sometimes I cry when I return to my car alone, as I do today. The smell of the nursing home, the fans in the hallways pushing the old air around, the old-lady shoes on the young nurses' feet, the hunched, vacant bodies of gray-haired men and women lumbering and scuffling and rolling around in their wheelchairs, up and down the light pink hallway, back and forth, all day long. My grandpa and I driving back and forth along that interminable mile to visit those mindless bodies, remind them of the things they've been deprived of. My drive over the six yellow speed bumps from my apartment to my grandpa's house and back. Working. Arguing with my sister. Finding a career. Going to college. Having a family. Hooking up at a bar. The constant, pointless process of checking my email. My zone-and-wash routine in the shower. The walk back and forth over and atop my dirty clothes, lying a foot from the washer.

My personal hell, to which I'm sure I'll go when I die, will consist of never-ending laundry – towels, underwear, T-shirts, pajamas, bed sheets, blankets – and a never-ending need for clean clothes. In this hell, I will forever be short of clothing with somewhere to be, and the proper attire will forever be wrinkled and soiled in the laundry basket. And to top it off, I will be the proud owner of Hell's only stacked washer-dryer unit, one exactly like the one I have in my apartment. The one whose eyes are bigger than its stomach: it can wash twice as much as it can dry, leaving my clothes (when I actually acquire the gumption to put them in the washer and *then* the dryer) dank and damp until I "dry" them four times. My personal hell will be unending dirty laundry, and piles of "clean" clothes mildewed because the dryer is inadequate, and wrinkles, and inappropriate attire for every occasion.

Sometimes, when I actually do my laundry, I leave the clean remnants of my glorious victory over my stubborn laziness on my floor, just a foot from the dresser drawers where they belong. I cannot make myself finish the task; I cannot make myself finish any task, really. I am Half-Assed Girl of the Dirty Laundry; I am Cuts Corners Habitually. I am Jane's Lack of Stick-To-It-iveness.

I stole that from the guy who wrote *Fight Club*, who probably stole it from somewhere else. I read only half of that book.

We need these stories to tell: we need to know that picking at your face will just give you scars; chewing too much gum will give you TMJ; smoking will give you cancer. Going to college will get you a job. Working too hard will give you ulcers. Burning your bridges will leave you with nowhere to go. We need to pass these on, these anecdotes upon anecdotes about this little life we live.

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I realize, as I climb the seven steps to my apartment, turning the key to the right and back 180 degrees to the left to relock it, that Grandma used to be a spectacular woman. She raised seven children, saw her first into marriage as she carried her last, looked after her husband and his always breaking legs, swatted at the boys when they came home from the station early, sent them back without supper to help their dad and his customers. She sewed, quilted, gardened, cooked, baked, did the laundry, played with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, helped raise me when I was young, though she'd probably had her fill of raising children by the time I was born to her youngest child. The pictures I've seen of her before she fell (doing laundry, of all things – she stepped off the last step to the basement, and, thinking it was the ground floor, she toppled with her basket of clothing and landed with broken bones inside her ear, a loss of balance and hearing, and, in my child-like view of the incident, diabetes – she has never been the same), she looked sassy and beautiful. She looked like she'd tell you how it was, how wrong you were, and then go about her business and you'd be left watching her be beautiful, kneading dough or pushing through dirt with her soft fingers and perfectly oval fingernails, and she would ignore you until you'd done something right or wrong and needed her attention again.

After the fall, she couldn't hear anything in her right ear and she resented the plastic intended to help her hear again. The charming sassiness disintegrated into residual stubbornness, and she refused to eat properly to level out her diabetic system. She missed cakes, pies, sugar cookies. I remember that she continued to bake for a while after the fall, but stopped when she began to lose her balance in the kitchen, when she began to sneak tastes of the batters and mess up her medication, when her children would chastise her for eating her cookies after she made them. As I grew into my adolescence, my grandma grew away from us. She became forgetful and isolated, forgot her grandchildren's names, her children's names, forgot what day, then what year it was. She receded to her past, when she was truly spectacular, a star of the small prison town, a time when her children were with her and remembered her birthday and when everyone gathered for dinner in the screened-in porch with the june bugs' lights flashing and falling like fireworks outside.

As I grew into my adolescence, my grandma found the scissors and began cutting up her blankets at midnight, making patches for her imaginary quilts and clothes for children long married and retired. My grandpa resorted to hiding the scissors, the knives, to staying up at night until he was sure she'd fallen asleep before he let himself go to bed. Before long, she lost all control and she kept falling out of bed, and she was too weak to get herself up again. My grandpa, with his two canes and a leg brace, couldn't help her anymore. My grandpa resorted to an empty household and a nursing home for my grandma.

I see her sometimes in her pink-covered bed, with her eyes glazed over, her chest rising and falling inconstantly, and I think she's remembering something she loved once. I wonder if she knows she doesn't deserve this, these pink walls and old, yellow fans, call buttons for nurses and random great-grandchildren's pictures pasted to a board behind her head. I wonder if she knows that Grandpa wasn't trying to hurt her or take her away from the things she loved – he was only trying to protect her. I wonder if she lives in an uninterrupted world of remembered pasts and half-constructed memories and kind words and smiles.

I have this vision of my grandpa wooing my grandma when they were young. It's entirely untrue, made of old movies and romance novels and sepia pictures: he maybe 24, she barely 18, he running alongside a train, a bouquet of lilacs fluttering in his hand, at a wooden station in the middle of Kansas, a sea of wheat and dried corn beyond the train, her gloved hand gripping the glass of the car's open window, her hat slanted on her head, her auburn hair glossy and smooth against her forehead in the bright sun from the cloudless sky. There is no speaking in this vision, just the interminable running, the silent pleading, the hands outstretched, the knowing that she will get off the train before it leaves the station or he will find a way to get to her next stop when she does, the flowers tousled in the wind of the train churning away from the station.

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Later, after I cry and check my emails, I get into my bed alone. I feel the quilt my mother made me when I was young enveloping me and I pull my worn pink teddy bear close to my chest. I turn off the light and settle into my small bed on my left side with my back to the door. I think about those warm, dry hands and those brown shoulders. I think about how lonely I have been lately; I think about how lonely my grandma – and my grandpa – must be, sleeping alone, living alone, after sixty years of sharing a bed with a warm, content body. There is so much more to this than brown hands and touching and the fear of contracting old age from a kiss. There is so much more.

I fall asleep, finally, and I start over in the heat of the morning of July 14.

*October 15, 2004*

Lacey Wilson

My sneakered foot crunched  
into the yellow leaves on the  
sidewalk when he said to his beer-  
breathed friend, "November tenth.  
Yeah, that's when I'm moving.  
To Japan."  
He held his hand back  
for me to hold (he and his friend  
filling the four-shouldered width of  
the sidewalk – I stayed behind to leave  
him space) and we made a spiral  
of our two hands  
on the small of his back.  
"I signed a contract  
to teach there for a year,"  
his voice crackled, like autumn,  
from smoke and cold air  
and beer.  
I looked down at the torn and  
drying leaves fluttering  
around my steps like  
a shuddering breath  
behind a closed door.  
I bit my lip  
and dug my nails into  
the soft pads of his fingers.  
  
It rains here in the fall harder  
and more often  
than in the spring and summer.  
The fall carries an irony  
all its own, rushing water to the things  
that cannot drink nor revive, now: pissing  
into a droughted streambed; pumping  
saline into a bloodless vein.  
Tears for numbers and weeks on  
the tip of the nose or on a cheekbone;  
wet mascara blackening a grey t-shirt

on pink sidewalks –  
these make little difference, now.  
We simply pray for the frost to come  
so we can pluck tears  
away from our skin  
and drop them in the snow.

Now is when we start bundling,  
covering up, insulating,  
hibernating, each in her own  
sweater and scarf to hide her tender spots.  
Now is the most beautiful season –  
this fall, these perfect, final explosions  
of color shooting from the ground,  
like fireworks on the eyelids of nature,  
thumbed shut by cold fog after cold fog;  
trees suffocating, their skins reddening  
then yellowing,  
as they die the season away slowly,  
long enough of a death  
for us to take pictures of ourselves  
reveling in the return  
of yet another end,  
tossing and turning  
in the fallen carcasses of summer.

I walked through the musty smell  
of decaying leaves,  
my hand cupped in his, and thought  
just how fucking beautiful we were  
in that close, dark box of street light,  
our skins glistening in the after-midnight mist,  
separated now by layers of wool  
and weeks turning to years,  
having just begun to touch.  
I let go of his warm hand then,  
now, to put on a pair of gloves.

*On the Subject of Love*  
Lacey Wilson

I keep *Love* by my bedside table.  
No, it's not what you think –  
I don't set the idea there and  
pretend not to notice it, or look at it  
every night in hopes of finding  
something new, or think to myself,  
"I need to put that somewhere else –  
it's really giving me nightmares  
being so close to my head at night."  
I don't have ideas about *Love*,  
or an outline, or a schema, or a poem  
about it framed on the table.  
I have absolutely no visions of  
Prince Charming rescuing a girl like  
me from the adolescence of twenty-something  
on the brink of "life," afraid to take  
another step.  
No visions of that – none. Zero.

No, you totally misunderstand me –  
it's a hard-backed, maroon-covered  
copy of *Love* by Toni Morrison,  
with lavender-gray calligraphy,  
simple and almost plain. It's very deceiving.  
I read the first page a few weeks  
ago – haven't cracked it open since.  
I don't have any pages worn or folded,  
no lines highlighted for poignancy or  
meaning. I get tired and annoyed  
every time I touch it – my eyes close

like lead weights, like I've been  
crying for hours and hours, upon  
looking at the dedication.  
I'm not sure I'll ever be able to  
read that book. I may be too young;  
I read somewhere about an age requirement  
for understanding it, something  
to the effect of:  
"Must be a certifiable Mature Adult  
to comprehend *Love*."

By no means do I consider myself  
mature or within the range of  
"adult." I am certainly not  
certified in such things.

I think I'll let it stay on  
the bedside table for now. It's  
harmless, and everyone's talking  
about it (though it's only been in  
print, this book, for a year, it's  
been in the mouth of  
humankind since the  
dawn of time) – I might as well be  
part of the crowd, even if  
only superficially. Besides,  
almost everything I've read is a  
review of *Love* – I'll certainly  
be able to plagiarize an answer to  
that ubiquitous question:  
"How's *Love* for ya?"

