Prometbia 2000

"Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

--Dylan Thomas
Editorial Staff

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Editor’s Note

I would first like to thank every author who dared to submit his or her writing. It is not an easy thing to open oneself to criticism, to the possibility of acceptance or rejection. This year saw an enormous response to Promethia, and the responsibility I felt to your poetic vision and trust was the driving force behind the effort that went into the magazine you now hold. You truly are inspired of God, and I pray that your thoughts always, as Thoreau said, keep pace with the sun.

To my staff, all that I can say is that I owe Promethia to you. Your hard work and sharp (sometimes painful) insight kept me on track and brought forth a better magazine than I could have ever completed alone. I hope that this is everything you ever dreamed it would be. I know it is for me. Ana Maria, your depth of vision into the world around you astounds me. You are the most well-read person I have ever met, and I am proud to be a witness to your joining the ranks of authors you quote so well. Amanda, your strong commitment to excellence and unique viewpoint are an inspiration. Your honesty has shaped the canon of this magazine more than any other force that comes to mind, and I am thankful for your presence on staff. Joy, what can I say? You are there in both the good times and the rough. Your loving support is what keeps me upright, and anything worthy I have done or ever will do, especially Promethia, is to your credit. I love you.

To Dr. Walker, I owe the ability to be a part of this glorious literary heritage. Your belief in my abilities as an editor has been a strong blessing and an even stronger motivation. I can only hope that this year’s magazine lives up to the legacy that lies before it.

And, of course, no Promethia editor can advance one step in the production of this magazine without a constant thought to the ones in whose shadow he lies. Promethia exists because of the immense efforts of John Affleck three years ago to bring it back from the dead. Geoffrey Wright established not only the foundations under our castles in the air, but he also created a standard of editorial excellence to which all future editors will continually aspire. And, of course, Joe Spann, who carried the torch and showed that Promethia will endure long after we all have faded from memory. This year I believe that Promethia has become the university’s magazine, representing many writers from every academic department. May the authors represented here, and those that appear in future issues, always strive to “rage against the dying of the light.”
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“The artist is the antennae of the race.”
--Ezra Pound

“We can never be born enough. We are human beings, for whom birth is a supremely welcome mystery, the mystery of growing... Life, for external us, is now.”
--E. E. Cummings

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.”
--William Shakespeare
A Perfect World

Glittered village
never old
sealed in crystal
water globe –
quiet,
peaceful...
suddenly turned upside down,
swirling beauty
rises
down,
released to fall again
on unchanged landscape.
No harm done –
just a favor.
And i outside
its glassy sky
observe and hold
my only
perfect world.

-- Alyson Sutherland

I Will Wash Out My Curls Tonight

I will wash out my curls tonight;
the stench is too large a price to pay
for the beauty, and the guilt is
undeserved within me. I will wet
them with a chilling, cold afterthought:
water, regret—and I will wet them
‘till they’re gone. When all is straight,
then, I shall breathe again, and when
the scent departs, I will be free.

-- Jana Swartwood

An Icy Blast

An icy blast,
A gust of wind,
A look aghast,
Where the door had been.

-- Elizabeth Helmuth

Poland

Too fast, too hard
you hit me with your smile
I’d wait for you, if you’d hold me
but your neglect destroys me

time and time, I do it to myself
increments of pain increase
like a train, bearing down
and I’m helpless to your smile

you walk away and leave me soaked
soaked in my repeatable disgrace
emotion to meaningless to feel
my only comfort in your absence

emptiness comes full circle
entertained in this shallow search
alone I’ll be, withering with every smile
eternally bound to your denial

-- Chris Londino
Up Here,
Down There

The nice thing
about being way up here
is that you can marvel at
life without really taking part in
it. The little cars seem just to
creeper along and the people are oh so
tiny and harmless looking. Science says
the lower you go the air pressure increases,
and I have to agree, because down here the
weight sure feels heavier upon my burdened

B A C K

-- Trent Hunter

To E.

The mere wisp of a thought, heedless of its fragility, trips through the midnight-stained streets
of winter, laughing at the cold. If the beginning of this wild-goose chase had been planned, I would’ve
rehearsed the way I said hello. The trees swayed in their elfin loveliness... I lost track of that original,
gypsy thought. It left me lonely for the way the moon smiles. Remember the curve of the hill against
the benevolent sky? I saw you really, truly breathe there. You thought you were alone. How close to
the surface of our spirits does the unknown dwell?

Much later, I realized that it got tangled in your fingers.

-- Ana Maria Correa
i know they smile
like moss hung epiphanies
along telephone wires i catch glimpses of driving down old southern highways
stretching and cawing like the crows that mingle there
in jazzy gestations of jive talking vernacular
accustomed to those parts of seventeen i traveled as a kid

such thoughts now revel with me along these steamy streets of hazy cooling rain
that i wander in pools of water and vintage
so far from the reasons that i’m thinking of, drinking of, in convolution and the purest of clarity.

those memories were there
of poppa’s old canes and sheathed swords standing in martyrdom at the end of the hall
and of brother’s too soon sabbatical to the land of white socks and pidgin tongues
of which i gain a smile just thinking of.

one of those crows might’ve called that very thing that they saw of me
a cheshire grin, an evil grin, or even a crocodile grin, but this was none so pleasant
no, it was a grin meant for thought – more of an eccentric one –
one that comes when something tickles the fancy
like the musk of beer-soaked breath or august leaf baths
that i could’ve, would’ve shared with them
them those memories, those vigilantes, those eponyms of immortalized south.

-- F. Rutledge Hammes

i want to love you because i love you
not because the world is so vast, and i’ve walked so far alone
or because i carry too much on my shoulders,
those are passing, a frantic flock of birds

i don’t want to love you because single is so lonely,
and solitude heaves like a withered man in the midst of a crowd
or solo, i feel so small that i shrink into a bullet of shy sun
a star shut in glass, crashing for an escape

alone, i can conquer the world
alone, the victory bears no taste
i want to love you as the sweetness in the wind,
the lush aroma in my veins

--Eliza Cortez


Incomplete Creation

The chips of rock
Long ago ceased to fall
Yet still the form within the stone
Cries and struggles,
   Silently,
   To break free.
He was never fully born,
He will never fully die.
Trapped within a tomb of rock,
He waits to breathe.

--Joshua D. Lease

Impossible Truth

The adventure-less life of a youth
sparks animosity towards monotonous routines.
They continually search for truth
in their daily repetitive scenes.
They yearn for any form of change in their environment
Maybe if the sky would turn magenta
   spotted with yellow and give off a pearly scent.
Or if everyone would around in orange dresses to their ankles
   and show how well their money was spent.
Life is dull, meaningless, and lifeless.
Life is a composition of mechanical machines
   performing useless tasks.
Every human is made of the same organs
   and is covered with a different-colored mask.
All these facts will remain for eternity,
   unless one soul braves to alter God’s intention for His human toys.
Or humans will live infinitely in mundane noise.

--Paola M. Alvarez

Prayer Tower

1

The Christ followers’ Mecca shadows its
  shaft-molded apex upon upturned faces,
  faithful travelers bathe wide-eyed
  beneath the mirrored plate watching,
  meditating, and being watched by Oral’s
  vision’s face, acres of golden surface
  second only to heaven’s floor: streets
  that mirror your soul, illuminate your faith,
  only here will Satan’s shadow be
  burned by the fire atop the shrine.

2

Lips locked in silent prayer befit
the purpose of the place, sacred
  garden. Their hands meditate upon tactual
  shapes while reverent eyes remain closed in
  peaceful bliss, unstable eyelids quake
  at mental images fit for a different
  place. Free moving arms begin to
  shower untamed praise to one,
  draping polished silk, pretending
  heavenly dreams, and then arms convulse
  in fluid worship, creative shadows mix
  beneath the Prayer Tower’s flaming glow.

--Jerome Harlan
Dear Colleen,

The girl who fell off the merry-go-round had been hunting for lavender behind the walls of her church the day before. She knew it must be somewhere. For melancholy to acceptingly embrace joy like that couldn’t happen just by chance. Maybe it had been mixed in with the paint. Or it could be hidden under the altar.

Everyone needs their turn to tumble off of the merry-go-round. Unscrew your Mason jar and let the fireflies free...

A random reminder:

To chase mourning doves, a quiet, tender sorrow has got to live inside you. (That’s why children flush them into the sky.) You can’t pounce on your hunger. You’ve got to laconically sit by it like your best friend in fifth grade...strike up a conversation and slowly realize that you’ve only gone half way.

Dear Jane,

I know I’ve mentioned this in passing before, but here’s the thing. When a small baby fixes his eyes on apparent nothingness and gazes intently in recognition (and sometimes smiles), he’s looking at the angel he played tag with in God’s mind. When we stare into space, maybe we’re straining to see that angel move...Because the game isn’t over. Life is garbed in this rough and tumble free-for-all. Sorrow and laughter are dresses you don... And joy is the language of purpose.

--Ana Maria Correa
Color

I sit quietly in my corner of the room, pretending to read when really, I'm waiting for you. I'm waiting and watching expectantly, impatiently, for the moment when my longing eyes will be fulfilled. And here you are and I swell with pride. Even though you are not, the thought of you is mine. Your entrance reminds me of a movie I once saw. It was black and white until she looked into his eyes and then... Color. Brilliant color. That's the part that reminds me of you. Life encompassing color. If I were to tell you, you would laugh and scold me for watching movies instead of living. "Besides," you would say, "I prefer black and white. It's more sophisticated."
"But," I would answer, "color is alive." And you are alive, aren't you? You are, and I am watching you, the yellow sun and blue sky and red rose of my life. The three colors by which all others are made, that's what you are to me. My life is black and white without you. You are my color, and yet I cannot have you. You leave and I return, not happily, to my book, my book with white pages and black words. Still, I do not read. I sit and mournfully stare at black and white and dream of the day I can hold color in my arms.

--Jessica Sigler
Street

Cement dumping, dust particle filled
Wind blown soot casing and encasing automobiles
Spread by reinforced steel honeybees
To the Pollen-populated masses of
Ticky-tacky all-in-a-row domains
Sweat-stained men,
Backbone of America men stand compliant to
The force of Caterpillar as deaf trained ears do
So forcefully not hear the cries and curses of the
Road rageified average joe.

Cascade falling, heaven's assault
Siege of brow-broiling atmosfather
To wash promethian rebellion from
Sin stained man.
Oily, onyx-sleek skin stretched so
Tight, close, gripping the edges of
Earth hold, a latex enchantment
Repelling, removing drops as
Delicate as fingers plucking
Lint-balls off a new sweater.

--Ryan Dean Moore

Vanish

Sitting on this lonely porch
Watching the smoke rise from my hand
It vanishes as it blends into the night air
I wonder, will I vanish?

Alone, I waste away minutes
Wondering who I am to become
the gifts I have to make me something
And the fear of being forgotten

Why do I hesitate in my endeavors
What is to fear when I have nothing
I've become complacent in my solitude
And maybe I like the peace of being alone.

Nothing is left but the stench
Mediocrity, the fear of failure
To stop this feeling now would be my greatest success
Severing the roots of hesitance

the gifts I have to make me something
Why do I hesitate?
Nothing will come until I go
And be great the way I am supposed to be.

Will I vanish? Will I blend?
Which gifts can I lend?
In a world where everybody thinks he is somebody
Will I vanish? Will I blend?

--Chris Londino
**Promethia**  
1999-2000

**Kaam hei Haraam**

Jao aur kaam karo,  
Aaram hei jo haram.  
Phir bhee tum na seekhoge  
Ise hee shabdon ko phir padoge!

Maan bhee to to jao  
kiya chaho tumareh padun pao?  
Hahn! Hoohn! Jao bhee yaar.  
Naheen manoge kiya?

Mein yeh kyon likhaan hoon?  
Sir kaphaa raahaa jo han!  
Danda le kar aana padega?  
Jao aur kuch acha kaam kariyega.

Theek hei band mein ab karta hun,  
kalam ko bhee salaam karta hun,  
bas ek baat puch lun akharee bai  
Jal Jal! Kuch kar ke dikha!

---Rohan Singh

**Ode to an Irishman**

Someone else is washing your windows  
Elvis played here  
Was that look the stress, the cold  
Was it me?

I never did turn 18  
I made no wish  
Throw your fist in the air  
Rock on to God

It's not my obsession  
It was his idea  
Watching Lola run  
I just wanted to be your tambourine girl

It had to be the bass  
Your heritage  
Was it just your green tee shirt?  
Want worth

---Laura Colleen Kemp

**The Fair**

I can see the lights from the fairground even before we drive into the overgrown grass parking lot. The long weeds scratch at our legs as we walk towards the pulsating city that has invaded the once-quiet pasture. As we draw nearer, the sounds of excited laughter and screaming hover in the air, barely audible over the constant rumbling of giant-sized generators. After crossing through a barrier of tractor-trailers and thick-skinned wires, we stumble into the neon glow of the midway. Here exists an alien world, a strange mixture of sights and sounds that confuse the senses. There are spinning cars, flying saucers, and makeshift rollercoasters, all displayed in a mix of flashing and moving colors. The carnies stand around smoking their orange glowing cigarettes, their eyes searching the crowd for pretty girls and half-dressed women. Beyond the few rides are lighted booths filled with cheap stuffed animals, plastic toys, and disheveled attendants beckoning for quarters and unlucky players. People mill about the midway with their cokes and hot dogs and a handful of yellow tickets for their overzealous children. Beyond are more booths, their buzzing yellow lights attracting a frenzy of moths and people. Here the smell of elephant ears and other deep-fried delicacies tempt passers-by and add to the already dizzying effect of the midway. We wander through the crowds, happy to squander our time in this temporary city of revelry. Finally, we find ourselves back out in the car-filled pasture, where crickets and frogs take precedence over the fading rumble of generators and rides. As we drive away, I watch the lights fade until all I can see is a haze in the sky, an ethereal glow hanging above the fairgrounds, and I am satisfied because I have been to the fair.

---Nicole Baxter
"Those who hear not the music think the dancers mad."

--Anonymous

"Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."

--William Shakespeare

"Sanity was statistical; it was merely a question of learning to think as they thought."

--George Orwell
A Case for Sanity

I found you sitting on a toilet in the side yard when I came home from work today;

The lines etched in your face were a thousand laughs deep.

You were tearing up cardboard boxes from the neighbor's trash to help out the garbage man; your hands had a hard time grasping; gray veins marbled your swollen, arthritic knuckles.

When I asked you what you were doing you chuckled and explained to me that your knees had gotten tired from sweeping the driveway.

You resumed your usefulness with precious intent while I entered the kitchen musing over the wide-open front door of our Boston apartment.

Collapsing into a lumpy kitchen chair, I heard you yell in a warbled, strained voice, “There's milk in the freezer. Drink it before it goes bad.”

I could hear you making your slow way, eyes serious and intent on the ground, legs shuffling one inch at a time, hands feeling over splintered railings, back bent low to make out the shadows of the stairs; all the while you chuckled and cooed at your awkward self, “I'm a comin', I'm a comin'.”

You wanted to talk; you always do want to.

You slumped into your chair and fumbled around on the bleached tablecloth for two hearing aids. You finally found them in your shirt pocket.

You held my hand between both of yours.

You told me that you miss your wife though she's been gone now for six years.

You told me that your girlfriend called today.

“I should have married her—she could really play the piano. If only her nose wasn't so big.”

I listened to the years behind your eyes.

I think that you are the one sane person I know.

—Sandra Crandall
It was a day just like any other day. I awoke to the inane babblings of 92.7 KBBL “all talk – all the time” on my radio. I struggled out of bed and, after a brief sojourn in the bathroom, sat down for my usual breakfast of microwaveable chicken pot pie. I arrived at the factory ten after nine, lunchbox in hand, to the sounds of chaos. Something was amiss. Racing through the front door I was greeted with absolute confusion.

Bodies were scattered everywhere, in a disorderly fashion. Searching for the source of the problem, I spotted shift manager Bob sitting in a corner muttering incoherently to himself, obviously traumatized. Strangely, his nose seemed a little red. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that his shoelaces had been tied together. Pulling out my nail clippers, I managed to sever the bonds. Confident that disaster had been averted, I turned and was faced with the real cause of this mess…

It was Ambrose Buzanson, the night watchman, under employment at the factory as part of an early release program from the local mental institution. He was wearing an inner tube around his waist, tissue boxes on his feet, and sporting hip waders on his head. Under his breath he chanted, “Spruce moose, spruce moose!” In one hand he held an AK-47 assault rifle, in the other, a toaster. As I looked around at the devastation, I cringed. In one corner sat Patty from assembly, tied to a chair. In front of her stood Ambrose, playing the “got your nose” game again and again. It was obvious the others had suffered the same fate, for their noses were red and swollen as well.

My first instinct was to protect Patty and, without thinking, I cried out, “Ambrose, cease and desist at once, or I shall have no recourse but to subdue and disarm you with substantial physical force!”

Ambrose looked at me with a mildly annoyed expression on his face. “Snuff-a-lup-a-gus?” he muttered questioningly as he raised the rifle to his shoulder. About that time, my second instinct, self-preservation, kicked in.

“Look!” I yelled, pointing to a spot on the wall behind him. It was a slice of bread held to the wall by processed cheese spread. It was left over from a lunch hour food fight several days ago. As Ambrose stared in wonder and amazement at the suspended bread, I made my escape.

Slipping into Mr. Canaleoni’s office/bachelor pad, I left Ambrose deeply engrossed in a conversation with the bread. Once inside, I searched my soul for an answer, a clue, anything to stop this reign of madness. As my eyes roamed the room, they fell on a leather bean bag chair. Remembering a previous conversation I had had with Ambrose, I recalled him mentioning a phobia about bean bag chairs coming to life. Hiding a tape recorder in one of the folds, and placing a hat on the chair, I pushed it out of the office. Hitting the play button once outside, I scurried over to a pile of boxes and waited. Suddenly the chair, with its hat, seemed to come to life as “New York, New York” resounded through the warehouse over the moaning of the victims. Turning with a start, Ambrose stumbled toward the chair, his toaster hanging menacingly at his side.

Seeing my chance, I grabbed a metal bar from the floor and took aim. Never was a bar thrown so majestically with such perfect form. On a rainbow course, it hurtled through the air and, as the sun glistened off it, I knew justice would prevail. The bar landed with a muffled thud, 30 feet to the right of Ambrose, in a pile of Styrofoam. Undaunted, I opened my lunchbox and produced a can of rice pudding. Again taking aim, I launched it high in the air. This time a higher power guided the pudding and it bounced off Ambrose’s hip wader-clad skull. As Ambrose slumped to the floor, his rifle hit the ground exploding in a cacophony of gunfire. Thinking solely of the others, I burst from my hiding spot and dove at the bean bag chair, knocking it on top of Ambrose and stifling the gunfire.

Fully satisfied that the threat had been neutralized, I tied up Ambrose, called the paramedics, and began the laborious task of untying all the shoelaces and applying lotion to the noses of the whimpering victims. For my selfless acts, I was awarded a medal of bravery by Mr. Canaleoni himself, and was also given the bean bag chair. Now, whenever I sit at home listening to Frank Sinatra in my bullet-riddled chair, I remember the day when I, too, was a hero.

--Peter Laing
hi FISH MOTHER of george washington NO that’s what the owner says martin VAN buren founder of pipe club(telltall tales trickle like streams) bean COUNTER the man with the cold voice(sell sale salvagable green) i wouldn’t put up with the BEAST THAT patrols from HERE to THERE

--Chris Rennier

purist hypocrisy...

a vagabond wasteland crooning like Alzheimer’s on crack poor Frost – Poe – and Thoreau miserable because art is feces ...in the MODERN age... rhyme – meter – sonnets – TALENT all nuked with metaphorical cancer just vomit...and “uncontrollably”...you have a poem... the anointing of GENIUS...has departed

--Matthew Ryan Corder
Befuddled

I am befuddled. Why I would ever use such a word also befuddles me

(There it is again).
It is not a word I have ever used before to describe anything—why did it come?
Grandpa was befuddled a lot (At least that's what he said).
Befuddled by creaking floors, stalled cars, leaky faucets, Grandma’s peccadillos.
(wasn't much of a handyman).
When it came to kids, he would rant About their rap music and baggy pants.
It befuddled him.

Funny, I've always attributed befuddled to old age And now I've just used it.
Ticking grandfather clock of time has made his first “bong” and has granted me the use of this great word... “befuddled.”
And so I begin the downward down slope of life, “befuddled” merely the beginning.
Soon I will be able to say “whippersnapper,” “young’un,”—instead of younger, harsher swears I will use “fiddlesticks”—“dag-nabbit” (And as my teeth fall out I will make newer incoherent ones).
I can wear black dress socks to go with black dress shoes, which goes perfectly with pink swim trunks (not to mention a huge straw hat).
I can sit at the table—mumble between spoonfuls of creamed corn, dribble it out of my mouth and roar in laughter about “these kids today.”

I'll get a cane, shake it at my old wife (I'll probably call her “mother” too).

I'll sit in my old rocking chair—sleeping through reruns of “Hee-Haw,” “Hogan's Heroes,” waking only to guffaw with laughter (and to spit out phlegm into my coffee cup).

And I will still be “befuddled”—though maybe I'll change it around and say, “I'm befuddled,” or “befubbled,” or something (I can get away with it, 'cause “that's just Grandpa”).
I can yell at my grandkids to “turn that blasted racket off!” They'll probably cry, that'll be neat.
If I ever feel ignored, I just start coughing Everyone acts real concerned... I can tell kids of my days in the war—even though I wasn’t in one—They’ll never check.
And if they do, they’ll simply say, “Grandpa gets confused” (To which I respond, “No! I am befuddled!”).
Twenty minute bathroom breaks, Saggy cheeks, hunched shoulders varicose veins, arthritis... (But hey, at least there’s Viagra).

Yes, all this approaches steadily, metronomically... No...no, I don’t think I’m ready for that word yet— I'm still confused.

--Todd Skinner
wit (the bright inventor, rode his bike up a hill
he forgot about the brakes, & took a horrible spill) practice
the nonfilling / ceiling constellations
angeldrapes
reversing the carriage, I / (forgot to think about you/
& those stars that are counting/
on me to fulfill their dreams)
the water of un-ness

seeming its way past gates of
highways, pushing into greens of terrain,
where people lounge in chairs of colors.
yells for train “it’s time to go” &
sits on mountain tops and points for where
you to go

behind the statue he sits in front
of candle flames where the priest stands
with the incense burning learning
fragmentation & moments are not here to stay

there I go I sit in fields of corn &
wait for you to pass by and blindly I go, &
the hand before me I can only feel the tug,
its shape I cannot see from here
to their passing cars and lines of
opportunity, do I see you, or do you see me? shall I wait or rise to greet?

3 shots (I am disturbed for you) I wish that you were young again. (& we never knew what
right or wrong was), younger than I, & being what boys do best, and playing like children again, but
that is nothing but a candle flame
3 drum rolls & out to lunch at iron pipes that run from the sky, & grain elevators pour into my
soul
3 hours & re-run that thing through my mind, it shakes like an earthquake and moves in like a
tide
& out again leaving creatures & fresh bottles of contraband that fell from the lips of a holy man)
just like being primal
tossing us/heads down/unstable/bridges
(who doesn’t know this in all its perplexity?)

--Chris Rennier
Shooting Down Invisible Airplanes

I remember pushing into caves
gun in hand, firing into darkness
screams filling murky air as two collide
Like a train wreck.

Now I sit in endless sweaty chairs
pictures of battle rumble before lazy eyes
gun still in hand, forever pointing upward
but now shooting at air—at airplanes
that aren’t there.

--Todd Skinner

Ill-Spoken Comment

Upon my head it landed;
Thrown by one left-handed.
The oozing juice meandered
O’er ear and cheek did wander.

I turned to shout my curses
Against such foul abuses;
But stopped abruptly in the fight
By more projectiles in their flight.

I ducked, I dodged, to no avail;
Pummeled I fell beneath the hail.
Why me? I pondered, what wrong I said?
...Besides the odd appearance of your head.

--Robert Samuel Thorpe

The revenge of the matriarchy

Some women (I am convinced) are misplaced specimens
of an earlier age
when the matrons ruled the roost with
an iron fist and
kept their domain steadily unhappy
gone are those days
now we must all suffer
as they stake out their kingdoms
in little nooks and crannies of the world
and customer service
as a result
is like hell.

--Amanda Hall
the torment of inexpression...

there's a ruckus
brewing
--stealthily--
in the famished nations of my brain
a revolt
against propriety
against expression
and the weapons of war
are as a blind poet's fate
a blank page
covered with a thousand
scented nothings...

--Matthew Ryan Corder
Train to Philadelphia

Jack stroked his dog-eared ticket in between his fingers, feeling the slick gloss of the paper over and over again until it curved at the ends and he felt the dull underside. A quick glance over and he saw children playing in the station house, throwing an old tennis ball back and forth. Keep Away. He remembered the game. A round, fat kid was presently in the middle, huffing and wheezing and squealing while the smaller, thinner boys who would live much longer than their portly counterpart taunted him by keeping the ball just out of reach. The fat kid persisted, chasing the ball and his dignity around the station like a dog chasing its tail. Thick in head as well as in body. When Jack was ten, he remembered, a little oriental boy, big as a sumo, chased him for three blocks after Jack chucked three big rocks at him 10:34. The train was already late. The ticket said 10:31. Jack never put much faith into that time, though; people didn’t know how to keep a schedule anymore, not enough discipline.

Phi 10:31 Amtrak.

He hated that city. He hated it because Janet was there. She was there in the same nice house with the same nice man who didn’t tell her how her green eyes were spooky and how she always overstarched everything and

--For the love of God, can’t you just be on time?
--You always have to have things just so, don’t you, Jack?
--No, I have to have things done right. You seem incapable of doing things right.

Her eyes would light up in a glowing jade rage. That always made him nervous, and he would check for sharp objects nearby. Then the hiccups. This eased everything. He would laugh. Laugh and continue on. She seemed unable to even complete a sentence.

--You <hic> <hic> I... <hic>...I hate <hic> I do nothing <hic> to try <hic>

He couldn’t hold it. He would laugh so hard. Then she would cry and try and talk and hiccup, and she would cry some more and hiccup, and then she would start throwing things. Anything she could find. Alarm clocks, pens, pencils, cups, dishes, pots, pans, the little scrubbies that she never used ‘cause she never did the dishes. But it always ended with the Phillies mug. She could never break it. Oh, she would try. She would bounce it, smash it, and beat it against anything she could find. Then she would cry harder and harder, sobbing and yelling and hiccuping until she couldn’t breathe, and she ended up in a heap on the floor with the alarm clock, the pens, the pencils, shattered glass and ceramic, the pots and the pans, and the little indestructible coffee mug that she would clutch tightly to her breasts. Breasts that were off-limits to him now. He would laugh all the way to work those days, his immortal coffee mug at his side, filled with the chunky coffee that came from not putting in the filter right in the morning. She couldn’t do much of anything, except drink.

10:36. Still late. It would be here at 10:40. On Tuesdays, it always came at 10:40. Congrats to the fat kid; he finally caught the ball and thin boy holding it. Now he was sitting on the thin kid’s head. The mother or the nanny or the babysitter or whatever the older woman was was sitting on the bench, oblivious, reading another fashion magazine that promised to make her look like someone who she couldn’t possibly look like, no matter how many cosmetic surgeries or face-lifts or liposuctions she went through. She was heinous. In the meantime, those kids she was watching—not watching—were going straight to hell learning how to steal and thief and shoot and kill. One of them was being suffocated, meanwhile his brother or friend was in the news shop with candy stuffed in his pockets and jacket and shirt. 10:38.

Phi 10:31 Amtrak.
September 8, 1975.

1970.

Janet would leave for days at a time, leaving Kelly all by herself. He would come home from work, unaware that Janet was gone. Kelly would be hiding in the bathroom cabinet. With the Drano and the bleach and the hair spray.

--Honey, why are you in here?
--'Cuz of the witch.
--What witch?
--The one in the closet.

She would always whisper that last part. She meant the linen closet. The one with the shelves. It would have had to have been one mighty small witch. He explained it to her.

--If there were a witch, you could just step on her and squish her.
--Really? I could?
--Yeah, it'd be kinda messy though. Witches squish pretty messy.
--Ewwwww.

Then he would come home the next day, Janet would be gone, Kelly would be in the cabinet again with the NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION labels and the scissors and the plastic bags.

Eventually, she would come home. She would come home dressed in that cheap fur of hers, reeking of the weekend spent at Red Roof Inn with a bottle of Reds and some other guy with more up-and-at-'em as she would say, than he. He would yell about the poison in the cabinet and the witches in the closet. Janet would strut across the room giggling.

--She knows better than that. I'm going to bed.
--She's a kid, and you never know. This is inexcusable.

She would laugh some more and hiccup, but not from anger. He would soon follow, but he would check the bathroom. There were always six in the drawer. Six. Now there were three. At the very least, she could have the other guy supply his own birth control. He could've used his student discount.

10:39

The boy got caught. Greed. If he would've just stuck to one or two candy bars, he would've been home free. He was trying to rip off half the supply in one shot.

--You go back, you can always go back.
--Whaddya mean I can go back?
--You take a little, no one notices, then you go back, take some more, then you go back again, take some more. Then you go back one last time, take your sixty cents you brought with ya and you buy a candy bar. It throws them off.

His brother taught him well. They never went without candy, and Jack never got caught shoplifting. A boy's money should be spent on other things anyway, or saved. But you gotta have the candy. You gotta have the candy.
This other boy knew that rule; unfortunately, he didn't have the skill. Now the paunchy, over-made-up, aging bag of a horror of a woman was trying to buy her son or nephew or meal ticket out of the problem. Coins and nickels spilled out of her purse. She tried paying for everything. The vendor relented. Pleased that he got money for not selling anything. The lady yanked the little boy by the arm, dug through her purse for something, then slapped the kid hard, across the face. Definitely his mother. She did it again and again. The boy screamed, blubbered, covered his face. His legs went slack, and she had to literally drag him away with the rest of her sons as they left. A trip ruined.

10:41

He saw the train in the distance. It was late. Not going to be here at 10:40 like he thought. No matter, it didn't matter anymore.

Read to Phi 10:31 Amtrak

September 8, 1975.


She had gotten sick in Reading. Sick eating that burger Janet had given her to save money instead of taking her to a real restaurant, right before she dropped her off to be with him. Janet should go to hell. He hoped she would. Straight to hell for those green eyes and cheating and neglecting. For destruction of property. And murder.

10:43

The train was closer now, the front of it touching and pushing through the tip of his vision's reach. He moved closer to the edge of the platform, wondering what it would be like to be on the train.

--You're safe now, Kelly, no witches here. See? No closets.
--The nurse scares me.
--No, she's here to help you.
--I'm tired. Don't feel good.

The train was slowing down now, readying to stop and pick up. Jack walked along the edge, swung around the safety gate, and began to run. One of the attendants shouted at him and began to pursue.

10:44

--She's mine! <hic> <hic> SHE BELONGS TO ME!
--You? You're killing her!
--She's fine... <hic> <hic> You're the one who's ruining her, you <hic> son of a <hic>...

He was much faster than the attendant, who had given up and was calling for help in his pursuit. Smoke poured out of the train as it continued to head into the station. He jumped off the platform onto the tracks.

Kelly Loomis
Daughter of Jack and Janet Loomis
August 6, 1967—September 8, 1973

It was small like she was. Gray and cold, like the heart that put her there.
Read to Phi 10:31 Amtrak

Shouts everywhere, the train was trying to stop, its brakes squealing. Jack stopped and waited. Waited to see if he could read the company name on the front.

--This court hereby awards custody to Janet Loomis.
--I'm afraid she didn't make it Mr. Loomis; she was quite a fighter. I'm sorry.

--It is the judgment of this court that you be imprisoned for one year for the death of your child, I certainly hope you will think about what you have done, Mr. Loomis. Think very hard.

10:45

A M T R A K

--Todd Skinner
“Your whole past was but a birth and a becoming.”

--Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

“All Joy reminds. It is never a possession; always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’”

--C.S. Lewis

“Memory, the mother of the Muses.”

--Socrates
For H.D.T.

Emersonian spark
Fanned to flame by
Wings of a fly in his brain
That buzzed with
Uncivilized disobedience
Toward Concord

A week on a river
Two years in a shack
He came back
One eyebrow still raised
A bit lower, perhaps
Than it had been
On Independence Day

Volumes unsold
(Unclaimed gold)
When the long walk ended
And the drum beat ceased
And the world
Finally
Put a cupped hand
To its ear

--Keith E. Gogan
The Grove on a Summer Evening

Half-naked, sun-browned children
With scraped knees and bare feet
Splash through the wetness
Of cooling sprinklers,
While the older one take refuge
In the sanctuary of the front stoop
Spatting watermelon pits
Like bullets, into tiny black piles—
Speckling the sidewalk
Where the girls have displayed
Their hopscotch masterpieces.
In the distance is the echo
Of a baseball,
Being struck in the sandlot
By a broken branch.

The sun droops wearily on the horizon
As I watch from the grove
Beneath the majestic maples:
Those abandoned palatial towers
From a summer
When unicorns had still been possible,
And the tall, lush grasses
Were footstools and pillows for princes
And princesses in disguise;

And the sky, the color of rainbow sherbet
Was almost smooth enough to eat,
With its swirling melange of raspberry, lemon
And deep orange, topped with
Whipped cream and powdered sugar clouds.

Shimmering streams of golden haze would
sometimes
Penetrate the dense foliage walls,
And through the picture window I could see
The horizon as the blue black hands of night
Slowly extended to wrap the world in a tight
embrace.

Like drops from an inkwell
That drench the page,
The night fingers would crawl over the earth
Cloaking it in darkness,
Hiding the treasure
Of emerald leaves that would,
For one moment, shine like gold
In the dwindling summer sun,
Whispering and sighing long-forgotten secrets
Once told in confidence.
Oftentimes the crickets would join in,
Chirping and squeaking another
Bedtime story,
While the sky became
A sheet of tarpaper
That had trapped hundreds of lightning bugs.

Once again, I climb the winding staircase
To the highest tower
Of them all,
And push back the flying green flags
To get a better view.

—Jessica Allen
Dear Jack,

During the night, my long-suffering window cracked. I should have kept going... Light isn’t supposed to die like that. It was as if an intercessing saint gave in. Life is one long, constant shock of realization. I say to myself, “Don’t leave your hands over you ears. Stay awake. The best part is coming.”

You lost the light and slowly closed your gentle eyes. The breathing was supposed to continue...that was the plan. Remember? You were supposed to hold your great-grandchildren and tell them the story about Raleigh Brown and the silk waste in your gas tank. The dirt roads of Burma and the snake charmers of India... But somehow, you knew all along. Why was it kept beneath your shirt? Your quiet blue eyes never let me know. I wanted so desperately to trade my experience for what you held. You weren’t supposed to let it drift away... The pitiless sky swallowed it whole. I could’ve told you that I would’ve kept it better. Everything was going to be done. I told you that. Did you think of me at all on those spare, white sheets? What did your hands do with the silence? Why was the youngest the only one to really know?

You saw it all, and yet the four walls persisted in holding you there. They had never kept you back before. You always had to be out under the cloud-filled sky. And the rain. And the sere hillsides and the rice fields. Were you frayed and weary? The little stuffed Scotty that you kept pinned to the dashboard of your ’65 Jeep (that I gave you in elementary school) never let on...

So now the fruit trees are gone, and I have no earthly idea when I’ll head back. Change has been slowly eating the home out of the house... My futile hands cover closed eyes. No: things will always be the way they have been. The tire swing will always be half-filled with old rain water. Mysterious cats will always traipse across the ivy-clad, wooden fence. (But always doesn’t mean forever.)

You weren’t supposed to leave yet. The best part was coming... Even I could have told you that.

You should have kept going and seen every subsequent sunrise. But now, I’m left with a naked grief that stays too well awake.

--A child

--Ana Maria Correa
Orange and Cinnamon

Fresh cold wind
pierces my teeth with icy pain,
The smell of ripe apples
grumbles within my stomach
all indicators to me of
the cinnamon and orange season.

Is it only children who struggle
to make the transition
from one season to the next?
Hands still sticky from a bomb pop
reaching for a steamy mug of cider.

"Grab a jacket when you leave,
the night is sure to be bitter"
"Put a sweatshirt over that, you’ll freeze!"

Or do we all insist
to hold onto the past,
while reaching ahead towards reality?
Socks under sandals,
t-shirts over long sleeves.

I want to ride the conveyor belt
with the apples as they
bounce toward the press,
then jump off before I too am squeezed
of all my ripe juices
and unwelcome guests.

Should child-like faith
overtake our Thomas minds
that a new season
is in fact a good thing?

Open-air pumpkin patches
threaten to birth the great pumpkin.
Hay mazes wind beneath
the naked pole-barn’s covering.

Can’t the child become the mediator
between the seasons?

Apple cider
only tastes right
when cooling inside my mouth
while saturating
a sugar covered
cinnamon donut hole

There remains the comfort of
Indian summer days,
Flannels and sweatshirts shed,
allowing dry leaves to crush
beneath the bare skin.

The best of both worlds,
a summer day,
an autumn evening
swirled together into
the finest season.

Baked pumpkin seeds
Retired lawn mowers
Light jackets
County fair
Elephant ears and 4-H projects.

--Joy Uyetake
She'll Count to Ten on Her Fingers

where are you
hiding in red
several ropes around neck
might hold you back
love. can it be still
after time we can't see
blinded by our own sight
she'll count to 10
(she's got plexi-glass eyes)
will you be
in my mirror
image i find
and this teardrop shatters
the sirens...
way too loud
no. it's just the sound of regret
she'll count to 10
(she's got plexi-glass eyes)
stop the rain from
smashing me down

--Jacob Carver

A Ground

Grandma fell again last week
on the wet blacktop
and they laughed it to me
But I saw Ocean City in her eyes
remembering two years before
on the boardwalk
dry pleated planks edging up before my step
I went down, splintered my palm
scattered Famous Boardwalk
French Fries to the gulls
and slipped Jim's Lemonade through
the beams in a
splash
like tide against the jetty
where foaming Atlantic spit sinks
between barnacled rocks
or pools in depressions
pounded out by the weather of
immeasurable years
(They didn't see me though)
and Grandpa held her up every morning
that summer
above cement slick with sand
and took her hand every night
over wooden walks shadowed by crowds
and shifting under heavy footfalls
just enough to jar the timing from your step
And she would smile her eyes shyly
and assured
every time his arm or hand
pressed tighter
But
last week she smiled only shy
and I saw another breaker roll in her eyes
and salt water slipping down
After pounding her stroke
on the jetty

--Alisa Stoner
Oxford Town

City of Spires and inspiration!
Bells that ring, clocks that chime.
How lovely is Oxford town, home of scholars and porters;
   Faceless statues, buildings whose stones and mortar
   Have aged into solid, smooth walls.
   What wonders you would spell out
   if I could activate your voice.
   But voices are here, and they call out to me
   As I walk in the ancient quads
   or pass in front of a chapel.
   Does the spirit of Newman or Ruskin still lurk here?
   There are ghosts that would eject me promptly
   If I shirked my work or camped here lightly.
   No, they will have none of that.
The scholar here must worship at the altar of Minerva
   And only occasionally at Bachus’ shrine;
   For worlds wait to be conquered,
   And planets wait to be healed from ignorance.
So, Oxford, baptize me in the waters of knowledge,
   Leaving no Achilles’ heel;
   Immerse me, engulf me, infuse me
or
   Let me become mute and faceless like your
   ancient statues,
   So that if I cannot beautify the world,
   I also cannot harm it.

--Grady Walker

My Purpose in Life

When I was younger and completely unaware of my slight ineptness with the sciences, I wanted to be a geneticist so that I could clone myself. When I got to high school, I would run around telling my teachers that I wanted to be an anarchist when I grew up (in order to avoid them comparing me with my brother, who was a past honor student and was currently pursuing medical school). After I became a born again Christian, I wanted to become a pathologist so that I could raise people from the dead. Later, I came to my senses and decided to go into nursing. After getting kicked out of nursing school, I completely rejected the sciences and decided that I wanted to be a nomadic panhandler and, if I got bored, do some singing/guitar playing on the weekends.

--Jocelyn Hoppe
Puzzle Pieces

We went by, with little boys in our hands, wandering long paths of long-forsaken memories: a father dying, wrapped in covers on his bed, whilst the flowers fade and amber leaves are sifted through thick November air. The turn of varying tides is come, and one vessel, cold shell, gives way to another, life passes to life, and many waters of spiritual shade are waded through; unforgiving hearts break like fragile vases hurled off a wide cliff. I stand at the head and watch, as eternity unfolds before him, everlasting giving up its dead, gathering the fragments of mankind, whatever fragments have run into blessed immortality.

--Amanda Hall

Dear Deborah,

What makes this so memorable? How is it that bare openness is so immeasurably dear? Why do some things lodge themselves in our souls...? We choose to let them stay. We do, Deborah. Don’t get buried in forgetfulness... These things are “lost and lovely.” I’m getting good at letting them fly home. Whatever I’m supposed to know and remember will rest in my head again. I won’t weep anymore for not being able to grasp the wind. If I held and re-experienced a memory, it would cease to be a memory.

The shadows are getting longer... I persist to sit in my own subtle brand of obscurity. I’m learning what it’s for...*still* after all this time. These walls are pretty wide...

I’m going in.

So how long...well. No, that’s not the right question. (Remembering what Blake said...) I want to keep my permanent address in “eternity’s sunrise.” How do things look from where you stand? Don’t forget to scribble a line here and there...for yourself as well as for me. I want to keep my world hand-made. Take the scraps that you find and thread them together. We’re both constructing living silences in places of chaos. Guard your vision... how you see what you see... your own private spin on how life hits you... Keep it safe.

Leaning into tomorrow,

Mimi

--Ana Maria Correa
Memorial Day

Earth cries today
For all the fallen warriors;
Sky breaks forth in shouts;
Great tears flow down in memory
Of fathers who valued their children
And mothers who loved them
More than life itself.

Great rumbles shudder
And make the sky explode
To recreate the sound of guns
Of “bombs bursting in air.”

Pools of water stand
In silent tribute
To the flowing blood
Of wounded saviors.

The loss overwhelms,
The gain rises up
To cheer their heroic deeds.
They never meant to be so,
Only strived to do their best.

Now the enemies are our own hearts
Of greed and hate,
The culprits whose life is war.
We can die to those today
With love and kindness true.

--Robert Samuel Thorpe
"Out of our quarrels with others we make rhetoric. Out of our quarrels with ourselves we make poetry."

--W.B. Yeats

"Put your ear down to your soul and listen hard."

--Anne Sexton

"Let me know myself, Lord, and I shall know Thee."

--St. Augustine
Undressing Memphis

Another peculiar dispensation of solitude
removes me to a bar stool to sip black coffee
and read poems by the latest Pablo Neruda Award winner,
to stare in the mirror behind the bar at reflections
of the emerald-and-cream-colored trolley flickering
between bottles of Wild Turkey and Jim Beam.

Returning to the downtown Marriott,
following the trolley tracks bulging like varicose veins
through the buckled skin of Main Street,
shoots of steam slither like tendrils of Medusa’s hair
up from manholes into the velvet air, and the lilting
laughter of a Halloween drag queen echoes
like a dreamed voice, and I wonder,
as a crumpled Dr. Pepper can rattles by on a gust,
if I’ve ever seen this homeless man before,
seen those eyes in the mirror before,
or walked this street at some other half-awakened
moment in my life.

And I’m left walking, half awake, down
avenues of memory, leaning in the moonlight with my naked
shoulder pressed against the windowpane overlooking
downtown Memphis, curiously sure
I’ve stared through windows like this before,
my eyes like hands slipping the strap off a naked
shoulder, sliding back the linen curtains from a plump,
voluptuous bend in the Mississippi,
the certainty of my memories drifting on a slow
swirl in the dark water and fading with the trolley bells.

--Geoffrey Armstrong Wright

i so pygmy below these big skies that spread and recross their legs
day in and day out
since time,
when all but Tinsley’s strings began with the sounds of hide-drums
pounding, burrowing through caves, caverns deep, and i so minute.
minute like reason and purpose is to justifying our gangrenous selves.
minute because life justifies life just as our purpose justifies our living,
when, in truth,
fate handles us like the rising tides over tiny disperse oyster beds laden in pluff mud and facility.

--F. Rutledge Hammes
Night

linger
one moment
more
darkness

moon
hold me
in your
ethereal glow

just one more
breath

stars
shine bright
burn
fight against the
sun

daylight
makes my
passion
foolishness

sleep
you cannot

conquer me
for dreams
make cloudy
memory of
emotion

morning
I cannot
bear
your reason

night’s mystery
captivates me
holding a
million

possibilities
in half-lit
shadows
in this moment

my fairly-tale
is real

painted with
diamond stars
and ghost

breezes

if only I
could capture it
like the
song in a
ballerina
music-box

but sunlight
plays my song
off-key
and leaves me
holding
half-remembered
half-lived
memory

dawn
delay your fire

reds and yellows
let me savor
one last taste
of flying fancy

midnight blue

--Nicole Baxter

bypass

lying on a sterile bed you are exposed
blue pale with death’s whisper and saline
pulsating the droning duo
the cold machine the metronome of the heart
sings in your silence.

they say that you are fine
you say it feels like ‘Nam cold shrapnel in your gut
the scream of death in tunneled light explosions
in your memory
mechanic songs in your chest

--Sandra Crandall
space sonnet 112

from here I have a perfect
view of the moon
a place in the sun
a lovely one
caught up in an analog\(^1\) paradise
a high fidelity rhapsody

1- referring to music emitted from a record player

--Ayana Contreras

Elevator Ride

Ah, the elevator ride, the greatest part of my day. Every morning, I push through my daily routine to make it to the elevator button, where I will push the up button and wait. I feel like a kid on Christmas morning, all giddy and excited, while the elevator cuts other people's rides short in favor of mine. This is the moment right before the choir bursts out in the "Hallelujah Chorus." The anticipation of what you know is coming, yet it surprises more and more every time. I stand in impatient expectation, hoping that no one walks up to join me on the elevator.

Sometimes they do, they come to spoil my one moment of the day. For every waking hour of my life I hear human voices saying so much, yet never saying a thing; at home in the morning, in my car on the way to work. I need this time in the elevator to be a productive member of society, to be able to reflect on who I am and why I am living. With the slightest bit of an intruder into my private time, I casually walk into the restroom to allow the perpetrator to come and go. I give them a couple of minutes, then slip back out in front of the elevator where my wait begins again. I take this time very seriously. My ride in the elevator is exactly that, my ride, and I will not allow anyone to steal that from me.

Now I hear the two dings that signal the arrival of my haven, and I try to keep myself from running into its open arms. I slam my fingers into the eighth floor button, and the elevator begins my ride. Then I stand still, soaking in the tranquility. I feel so secure and confident now. I cast back upon my feelings and emotions, not allowing my schedule to filter into my thoughts. This is my time. This present situation is where I want to spend the rest of my life. I do not want to go to my office, to the grocery store, or even home. My soul pine daily for this moment in which I am able to feed it and nurture it.

By now the elevator signals the end of my ride; I have reached the eighth floor. I grab my briefcase and check myself in the mirrored walls. It is now time to enter back into the real world. I appreciate what the elevator has done for me, and I cannot wait for tomorrow's morning ride. The doors slide open, and my ears are filled with phone rings, typing, and talking. Here I go, ready to spill out all that I am, just so I can get it back tomorrow morning on my elevator ride.

--Nicholas Barron
On Becoming

how do we become I wonder
in a reverie of melancholy
dampened by the heat of worry
drowning in a well of pity
wandering on the limbs of whimsy
how do we become

...content as anything
...perched as we are on branches
...of uncertainty wondering if the breeze will throw us to the ground
...smash our bird-brains all to pieces
...never even guessing trees are not where we belong
...too afraid to see beyond the how jealous in our apathy we squat and squander always thinking never doing
...how do we become

--Nicole Baxter

cosmic prayer 57

Father, in Your presence gravity is a memory bliss overflows my cup, it runneth over I am in orbit

--Ayana Contreras

Alisa Stoner
indian style and placid, here i sit.

i am the cypress, knobby knees jutting, shabbily barking stoic torso,
pondering in solace what and where fails intent from the swaddled swamps of slime
the dangers of thought that arise from meetings like these, and mishumor
thesethese cypress domes, these cypress domes,
this call of elders
to here on the brow of time errant
where all things intersect, forehead and crease,
intersect like crosses, both bare and born.

--F. Rutledge Hammes

A pause

This world, stitched together carefully, tightly, loosely, undulating, free in all the right places. The threads that hold the ocean to its floor, the foamy waves to the cloud-frothed skies, are bound by love, the never-ending hymn that dazzles the night sky as the planets dance and twirl to unbearable bright rhythms and songs so deep the human heart cannot fathom. I catch a melody in the broken piece of crispy golden leaf at my foot. Its thin skin and hardened veins are a cobweb stained glass through which the winter sun shimmers. The world is shedding its skin. The trees are loosing themselves. The ends of my hairs are splitting up, and the dysfunction, entropy in a single strand of hair drives me crazy. Lone airplane overhead, through a crystal blue sky, fly. Quietness becomes me. The human race—stew of fuddled, muddied open mouths, loud, broiling. A hush, please. In silence, we watch the sun rise. We, too, immortal generation, will soon be in the grave, resting quietly, feeding worms and holding up a half-ton granite stone. We hustle, bustle, die.
One dandelion left standing.
In all the field.
A few feather-seeds from extinction.

--Amanda Hali
Detached!

Life is a movie, and I’m not in it.
Much is beautiful; some is ugly.
I call out to pleasant, attractive faces,
But no one hears.
I try to get into the picture,
The living, breathing picture,
But there is no space for me.
I attempt regression in dark places,
Yet I’m pushed toward the screen
and commanded to watch.

When will the figures stop moving?
When will the lights go on?
When can I go home?
I mean really home.
I am tired of seeing life only as living images:
Impersonal, indifferent, irrelevant, insufferable.

It wasn’t always like this.
I had ideals, goals, ambition,
But I’m tired of all that,
It never got me into the movie,
except to watch.
How can I get onto the screen?
Watching/observing is/are not living.
I want to live. Oh, God! I do!

But now I know I never can.
Who is the Great Joker who keeps me here?

--Grady Walker

Beyond Reach

In this world of broken dreams
Where unsung melodies float
just beyond reach
Gaiety and mirth linger as a
passing summer breeze
It is a bittersweet thing
To rise from the murky sea of melancholy
And grasp at Hope as she flutters
outside the window.

--Kimberly Wilson

Hypostasis

Stark, brilliant, dry ice-fire
Is swallowed
Encased with-
In a grave of veins
And arteries
Trapped, yet flowing
To a sloshing froth
Within my brain.

Smooth liquidity
Satins its way across
The tender alive of my skin,
Crawling its way into my nose
And eyes, hanging on my ears
Like the bard’s Ethiop.
It picks and pulls its way
Into the pores, through the hair,
Down the throat,
Swallowing me
And I am drowned.

--Ryan Dean Moore
Memoirs of the Sleeping Dragon

He wakes you up in the middle of the night
With starving screams beyond the realm of control
Caressing the famine that dwells within, begging to feed
Inside the kingdom of a tangible third-world reality
Poverty-stricken by the psychological warfare
Pounding at the doorway of the mind
With the intensity of a mack truck
Something dark, something evil
Laughing in the face of adversity
The violent breaking of my fragile strength (or lack there of)
Igniting a fire that cannot be quenched
Playing into the devil’s hand
The hollow sounds of hellish voices
Cry out to a deaf world that fools not The Hunger
Mocking me in condemning silence
Nobody knows, nobody knows
Dripping with sweat and soiled in tears
By a cold schizophrenic fever fueled by fear
Violent seizures that shake the very monarchy of my existence
Bring me to my knees as I give to the need
With vodka-stained lips I take shelter in the bottle’s kiss

—Chris Abbott

diminutive, and yet so much depends upon it not for wheelbarrows or rainwater,
but for ancient bee skeps and minute concepts of greatness
and skeins of geese on lakes of drainage.

and there, virtueless, i sit empty handed and barren of both fertility and money
offering my last quarter to a hungry man who hobbled up and reached out with his decrepit hand,
trading it for his amour-propre
to which i gave a smile, wishing i had more.

i earned one back, however—god knows why—
until he told me years later, in a similar situation.

—F. Rutledge Hammes
A Parable

Once in an ancient community of monks, there arose a discussion as to what monastic practice was the most virtuous. Many varying opinions were held among the brothers and all but one old monk took part in the talk. He sat listening in one comer of the room with his cowl veiled over his bowed head and his knotted prayer-robe clenched tightly in his hand. He watched as the one of the younger brothers stood enthusiastically to share his revelation, “Through much prayer and thoughtful consternation, I have become convinced of the opinion that, among the monastic virtues, none is greater than perpetual silence. It is through silence alone that...,” but before he could finish, he was interrupted by a chubby, old monk who said, “No, no, no! You are all wrong! How is it that you children are unable to see, as I do, that humility is the greatest of the virtues? It is for this alone that I have painfully sacrificed fifty years of my life to arduous monastic labor and, indeed, have only recently obtained it. Among the virtues, none is more enviable than humility.” Next, a middle-aged monk interjected his brief challenge, “I would be willing to bet any of you that no virtue is more pleasing to Christ than monastic poverty.” The murmurings of the monks were once again interrupted as a group of novices stood to offer their opinion, “We all agree that solitude is truly the essence of monasticism and is, therefore, the greatest virtue.” The discussions and interjections continued until everyone in the room had spoken his mind, except for the old monk in the corner who continued to listen and pray. After everyone realized that he had not spoken, one of the brothers asked the old man what the entire community was thinking, “What do you think, Father?” At this, the crippled, old monk stood to his feet and, placing his prayer-robe in his now vacant seat, proceeded to his cell to pray.

Anonymous

The way out

Four-leaf clover green chalkboard
scribbled dirty white with chalkdust—
words of wisdom like graffiti out-run my pea-brain.
You flex your scrawny arms,
such charms;
so old, so wordly wise:
your cool sends me laughing away.
My mind grins at what it thinks it knows.
Mind-flowers dance like
silly whirling dirvishes,
topsy-turvy lilies spilled on the water.
Eternity tries to fill my vacuum mind;
my caverns flush the vision out,
like squeegies,
intellectualizing my religion,
concentric circles finding their way
off my page.
Groping closer to the real,
I feel my way out;
flat walls all around
circle me.

--Amanda Hall

space sonnet 86

embrace the moon as it
kisses the stars above
come drink your sugared
black tea, baby
ain’t it grand to be here
with the one you love?

--Ayana Contreras
Ode to Sky

When the evening sky
Yawns as the day grows tired
Her purple lips spread
Across the horizon
Skewing the orange rays
From her Eye, the Sun,
And blazing stretch marks
Until the day is done.

When pale light flickers,
Fades with ever grayer shades,
She sends all her clouds
Away to their beds;
Watches to insure
The traveler's rest,
And blankets the chilled earth
After day's long test.

Moves her Eye
Always open and bright
So that others can wake
From the lonely night
Reaches with rays

To tickle the dreamer
And winks behind trees
Happy, pleasant beamer.

All through my sleep
She works and she plays
Until morning she brings
And never delays.

Oh, Sky, direct me
So I might know
Who has created
Such glorious show?
For ribbons of splendor
And falling snow
Adorn you in seasons
Wherever you go.
May the dear Lord
Rest you on wings
Of heaven
So I may enjoy you
Each week of seven.

--Dawn O'Donnell

fantasma explodes

I am not an accident
not flotsam, nor jetsam
floating through eternity
uncontrollably
I am not a circus freak
not captive, nor caged
chained within false destiny
longing to be free
I will rise
above all odds
I will grow
through laughter and tears
I will pass sonically
above torment
I will know,
faith quells my fears
fantasma explodes>>>>>>>

--Ayana Contreras
To Build This Fire

Light a spark in the cold, arid sea of white;  
Watch it flicker—for a moment—  
For the spark, the candle to the heart  
Dies in vain and you panic  
Stretching upward, screaming at the eagle who’s  
Free to simply fly away from destiny that  
Captures and kills even as the spark,  
In its sudden death, serves as nature’s  
Final, deterministic witness.

Shiver—yes, shiver, in the dark  
Cold that stills the soul.  
Shiver—but don’t wait too long  
Else the shadow already creeping in  
May overtake the will of the heart,  
Stilling the shiver that waits to be,  
Canceling the trembling you-ness  
That sits in the alone-filled darkness  
Of frigid, white eternity.

Rush, tripping, sliding in the would-be  
Wet world of white ivory to where,  
Safety apparent ‘neath the limb of a tree,  
The spark will grow and warm and be  
Without the isolate deadness falling,  
Snuffing, killing—but it’s too late—  
The spark dies one last time in deluge of snow—  
You torment me slowly with images  
Of hopeless future; time and past are dead.

I can’t be the candle any longer  
Shivering in the cold, white, winter wind.  
The fate of the spark lies in the will  
Of the spark-maker, yet I wrestle and I  
Fear and I shiver, wondering how in this  
Determined order the spark could bear to flicker more  
As coldness consumes; breathe in me, You,  
And blow away the shadow that creeps,  
Like the snow-covered branch,  
To end the spark, the shivering...me.

—Jana Swartwood
This life left me long ago like the 386
This life left me long ago like the 386
And now the water that comes from this head sprays only trite sympathy
But luckily drains itself, for were I to carry it in buckets
Like my ancestors, I would surely be alone.

All this toil, all this memory gone to waste
And in the end all my files go to the bin anyway,
Stored in the Library of Congress for no one to care
(Worldly sin in the heavyweight division).

In the night, my stomach turns and wants, but I deny it
As best I know how, for then breakfast tastes better.
But somehow the night always comes
And I infiltrate the ranks of thought like a virus,

And cling to thoughts of God and resolutions unsure—
Near trickery it feels—but faith holds me in its grasp
As well as some indefinable knowing that I wish would go away
Like a lifeboat that you wish would sink just so you could feel the water a little longer.

--Jared Anderson

On Night Visions

For one silent moment, I close my encumbering eyelids at night;
Suddenly gray swirls begin to take form.
Envisioned is a thought pondered upon briefly the previous day;
But now as if it had come true
Before my very eyes, drama unfolds
Like a rose unshaken by the sun, aware that I can awaken myself when I choose to.
Upon doing so, at times instantaneous deletion occurs.
From my memory that which seemed so real is now gone.
Forever? As time progresses, I engage in an activity
Differing from anything I have ever done,
Yet I can nearly predict happenings, seconds before their occurrence.
Hypnotic swirls form in my mind’s eye;
I sigh, bothered by this sensation that I feel,
As if that very sigh was an element of the night vision which seemed so real.
To me, dreams are significant; the realities therein, magnificent.
And from time to time, when a sequel is called for,
My mind’s eye opens at the closure of my eyelids;
Then once again the swirls fade into being.

--Tarik Dugas
My guitar strings

My guitar strings pound like a ripping hundred chords
as I crank the sounds out, ripping, rip, rip,
strung strumming blamming out the hard notes,
plicking plucking the gentle sounds
till the wooden box of strings talks and
whispers
loud things in my ears
let the song begin
come again
listen to the echoes of the music
pounding like a mad man in my head
ahead the bell, the sounds,
the little sneaking animals race
before the sounding of the music
and dance wildly with delight when
it overcomes them and the fright turns
into liquid joy.
O dance, o dance, o dance
the fields away, dance through cold nights
hot days, and dance away through
stars and dreams and wake in
the morning to find it all was
just a piece of long forgotten memory
I long to see the day when
broken shrifts of song
be day wakings, not the stuff of
night’s dark brain, when dancing,
pounding, rhythmic loving to the
sound of life on the stringed box
wavers on the edge of dulled eternity’s
long string of life
come again, come again,
rage on again, life
wage your wild war in me
I want to live,
want to live
to live
live.

--Amanda Hall
just once collect my things and move south to live amidst the ferns of lagging days
with just my barefoot loafers

  and dockside shrimp. i’d sit and watch the sea-worn trawlers stretch out into the
harbor and the vanquishing day.

their masts would, as always, appear and disappear below the lazy veranda of moss that would
hang over my head and in my view.

  they’d remind me of the sleep that lingers in the corners of eyes early in the morning—
  whose eyes exactly? i don’t know,
  but it is always something beautiful to see. beautiful because it was.
  beautiful because in leisure and half-sleep everything is.

i am observant, or at least pretend to be so, and in just the right light, i’d notice, i’m sure,
  as i have so many times before,
that the moss would glow from the boughs of the trees like chandeliers, and the sun would shine,
  impenetrable, with the red fury of a first breaking blister.

i’d wait on the ships to become nothing more than shadowy memoriums of a forgotten dusk,
  trying to guess how many more evenings that that halfstrung tire-swing had out over the water,
and then i’d put in a plug, and leave, having little or no more business left there.

--F. Rutledge Hammes
Scrapnotes for Well-wishers

Since we can’t hear the stars sing anymore, they resort to Morse Code: winking and flashing frantically to be heard. The silence of space—the chasm man created—came from the emptiness of knowing too much, but learning nothing at all...hollowly only listening to our own voices.

Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.

I wrestled myself to the ground and realized the infinite good in giving up.

Stalking moonlight is a spectator sport.

Her flickering sobs found a home in his hands. Will your sigh give you away? Or the way you lean your head on your hands? Will it be the way you see lightning...or your views on moonlight? Maybe you’ll see the absurd in what I say and call me on my harmless emptiness. Because once you know my secret, it can’t hurt me anymore. I want you to know about that little inner box... I want something to only be obvious to you and no one else. I’m reaching for the way you say, “Let’s go.”

We’re flying between two perches at present...courageously grinning at the unknown that tries to taunt us.

The way I see it, something has to give soon.

So this is what the furniture of Time consists of: the heavy panic of things coming apart and drifting away. There is no room for holding it together. This helplessness is too hard for me. I shouldn’t even try...I will cover my eyes with my hands and wait.

(Everyone should just go home.)

Breathing is an effort. I don’t want to drain away...

I don’t want her to go away. How long can I hold this intact? It pulls on me until I begin to fall apart. I want to be there when they drive away...losing it all over again.

I’m ever-increasingly alive to my loss. I’m glad. I’ll never turn my back on sorrow or the weight of the departure. Leaving...

Leaving the door unlocked and the light on...letting the music play as I remain entirely open to change.

I stand on the pavement and wave.

--Ana Maria Correa
"There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein."

--Red Smith