

A LITERARY JOURNAL

CAESURA

SPRING-SUMMER 2011



CAESURA

Editor In Chief Carl G. Haynes

Assistant Editor Elizabeth Murphy

Layout Editor Monette Grajo

Editorial Board David Anderson, Aniff Baker, Brian A. Gonzalez, Mahesh Mohan, Jessica Ng, Nelida L. Tolentino

Faculty Advisor Cate Marvin

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Our office is located at:

The College of Staten Island
2800 Victory Boulevard
Campus Center (1C), Room 230
Staten Island, NY 10314.

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Submission Guidelines:

Caesura, a literary magazine forum for students, welcomes poetry, fiction, plays, and creative non-fiction that relate in the craft or writing. Submissions should be sent to:

CaesuraEditorInChief@gmail.com

Writers will be informed of our decision within two weeks of receiving their submission.

What does 'caesura' mean?

This is the first question we are asked when talking about our journal. As with most good questions, this one has more than one answer.

caesura—*noun*, plural cac•su•ra [sa-zhoor-a, sa-zhoorae]

1. Prosody. A break, esp. a sense pause, usually near the middle of a verse, and marked in scansion by double vertical line, as in:
2. A division made by the ending of word within a foot, or sometimes at the end of a foot, esp. in certain recognized places near the middle of a verse.

We at caesura hold the principle that to pause is to consider. For both the writer and the reader, these pauses serve as more than breaks in speech; they are also where the writer and reader consider the words that precede the caesura and prepare to relate them to the words that follow.

CAESURA

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Daren Bastedo

Konstantine

That cocaine drip moping,
slick, inside my throat. A
taste like liquid metal that
you called “delicious.”
My flypaper mind, blue
ego, lead me there. The
blade beside the dirty
twenty, coiled into a nose straw,
its tip soaked with your nostrils’
tears. Stood above you, your
head hovered over the oversized
mirror, face up on the red-stained
grey carpet cushioning your
bare knees. Saw the other you,
bleeding into my eyes, your
face framed between the lines.
Crying for your habit, I
inhabited it. We got fucked up
And fucked, lucky to be in love.
We blew it all quick, then you
let the dealers dick blow
its load in your mouth
for another ball. How quick
can lovers fall. Your Freon
body, lips as blue as your nails,
that last fix —
Only the swaying grass, mourning
sparrows heard me sing the
requiem. Will I visit your
grave? miss the concave of

your clavicle? save the dirt
above you from the bugs?
The drugs. Damn the drugs.

Us

..

We were
pollen in springtime, I tried to
collect us, bottle us
up. Instead the dust
of us dispersed like
cliques in High School.

You smeared
rumors to the family folk, broke
the yolk that bound us. I've burned
the paper memories, fell asleep
counting the trees
that bled for Hallmark's sap. Poured

bleach into
the basin of
my long-term memory. I once touched
your fangs, dart sharp. Pierced my
knuckle's sheath like spears
in sharks. We used to remain inside

each other,
our thighs perspiring like
beer bottles' skin. What I'd give
now to use
you like you use
your vibrator.

Corridor in the Asylum

..

Pain is a penance for my thoughts,
vaulting themselves off steep cliffs.
Bleakness. The stranger exits stage
left, a room for his hand to graze his
whore's bare breast. I dream of
dreaming of a night where stars
bleed their glow like milk.

Be

..

I want you to be the beams inside the page,
illuminate each word woven,
each letter unseamed, a heartbeat.

Be a Godhand, touch everything.
A phantasm, orgasm for all organisms.
Cut open the sky, its blood floods the living.

Be Hamlet's lips mid-soliloquy, and his
audience, their eyes open curtains
draped in tragedy.

Be true love made, a club
for every spade, be
shelter for shade.

Be the impossible, a fortune
for each "x" on the calendar,
a lifetime of luxury.

Be what I cannot make you.

Alexandra Porto

Focusing on the Backdrop

My eyes scan the room; it is painted a tainted, yellowed white. She had called it *Eggshell*. I think it's actually *Manila*. I stare up at her framed degree, "Dr. Lucille Benikov Columbia, 2004." I've seen it hundreds of times. Still, whenever my mind wanders, whenever I blank out completely, it is always her degree that I focus on. It is as though my subconscious is overcome by a desire to check her credentials just one more time. Her voice plays like a backdrop to this setting, like the honking horns of city traffic I can fall asleep to at night. It may sound presumptuous, but I feel I no longer have to listen in order to hear what's being said.

She believes I am in a deep depression, even tells me she knows exactly how I feel. "We all go through it at one point or another" she says, "feels like you're drowning and you don't know how to swim. Deeper and deeper into the water you go." I fuck with her, point out that water is also a fundamental source of life, tell her that I am not drowning because I am too depressed to consider myself apart of the "circle of life." This is when she takes out her Mont Blanc, turns the notepad inward toward her chest and writes carefully, glancing up every now and then to make sure her motions have not gone by unnoticed. When she does it this time, I laugh. I've blanked out again, pictured her madly scribbling "CRAZY" on her notepad and turning it around to stick the label in my face; I wish she'd do this instead. The thought makes me insanely happy. Her calm, calculated motions stir my emotions more than anything else.

Our weekly dates don't seem to be helping. She *actually* makes me think I am crazy sometimes. But I've rationalized the whole situation as a set-up. They try to unhinge the minds of the sane. We sit in a stale room on opposing sides. She sits in a high-perched leather swivel chair, and I in a musty brown sofa, which lacks a back. Basically, I am being forced to lie down while she hovers above me,

scrutinizing my every move. She enters the room smiling, gives me a kiss on the cheek hello (I don't even kiss my friends hello). Then she promptly sits in her chair, tells me to "get comfortable" and asks, "What is on your mind?" Last Monday, I told her I was wondering if her chair was more comfortable than the couch. She hesitated; I figured it would throw her off balance, if she didn't offer me the chair her friendly-gig was up. But if she did then it would mean relinquishing her power. Her answer came in the form of a question: "Why? Is it because you are uncomfortable?" I made the mistake of saying "No, just curious" Then she informed I was avoiding my thoughts by focusing on my surroundings instead.

This is the problem with psychologists; they have a way of flipping situations in their favor, a way of saying one simple statement that is so dead-on it makes you forget about the hundred other things they've said which forced you to stare at their degree in the first place. I tell myself that next week is my week, my week to be in control. Mondays pass, and I feel as though I am actually losing control, just waiting, waiting and staring. I'm laying on a brown couch, staring at a manila wall, a framed piece of paper, and a smiling woman. I want to tell her it's not water — more like cement.

Megan Moriarty

Fishing Boat

..

It's anchored piteously, a tack on Neptune's bulletin board,
christened *Plain Jane* years ago for lack of received compliments.

The captain steers his geriatric vessel
past buoys and stealth bomber seagulls,
like a man would push a shopping cart through the frozen aisle,
half-assedly in search of pork chops.

On stagnant nights, the waters are smokestack black.
The crew rolls stale tobacco,
passes around whiskey, cites memories of soft women.

The ocean is a wide, gaping mouth
that pulls the world in when it breathes.

Her floorboards creak; the men laugh, exposing their sandpaper
teeth.

Mirror

..

Bridget was obsessed with celebrity teeth:
gapless and white like hospital sheets,
bags of cotton, young snow owls.

She would refuse to eat,
avoid her friends, listen to the rain's
glum jukebox. She dolled herself up

with polka-dot hair clips,
and ignored the zombie in the mirror.
The aphid eyes, the restless bones,

the scarred, old skin that crumpled
like heads of lettuce in the sun.

Death's Whether Basket

..

When he came to the neighborhood,
soot-eyed and greased to his bones,
the houses were warmed with cat gossip.
They hissed their suspicions over morning lounges
in the muffled flower beds.

He made a nest in Mrs. Campbell's weather basket,
watched her hang her blouses out to dry in the yard,
clothespins stuck in her timeworn mouth.

He hobbled through the drooping laundry,
with his slack-jawed beak and his runny feathers,
while Mrs. Campbell trimmed the rosebushes.

Now jacket weather crawls into the cul-de-sacs.
The trees stretch their bony appendages
and shake off the adamant leaves.

Neighbors iron shirts, toilet train their children,
finish crossword puzzles.
They all walk quickly past the bird in Mrs. Campbell's yard
with the crooked, end-all stare. You grow old in his eyes.

Kathryn Hennessy

Big Bullies

..

The decrepit halls smelled like soup and mildew as our class left the double period of biology. We were headed not too far down the hall to the computer lab for our final period before lunch, but since our small all girls high school shared rooms with the equally small elementary school, we had to wait outside the door. Our class, not a favorite with the establishment, had tried to keep quiet because the principal's office was just across the hall, and none of us wanted to hear the preachy tirades of Miss Bricker. She wobbled like a penguin, had breath like old eggs, and the physique of a retired nun, but any fear we had for her went out the window when Lacey's hybrid Steve Urkel-Fran Drescher-like voice shrieked out, "Check out the fatty!" Our attention was grabbed.

The girls closest to Lacey squished themselves into the doorway and began to cackle, "She's on *two* chairs!" They shoved one another's shoulders and held their stomachs as they giggled; their mouths formed an O shape and their eyes bugged out of their heads. They looked like goldfish. Only they weren't the ones inside the fishbowl.

I moved forward and tried to stand on the tips of my toes to peer over my classmates' heads, but I couldn't see over the many blond-streaked messy buns in front of me. "How is that possible?" Lacey wondered in disbelief. Her voice still had laughter in it. She moved aside, and I finally got a look. What they said was completely true.

The girl was massive. There's no other way to put it. She looked like the Stay Puffed Marshmallow in a blue and gold Catholic school uniform. I didn't have a mirror, but I'm sure my face looked like my classmates did a few seconds before. I peered into the room to see where the teacher was. She was over in the corner yelling at some other student about their inability to follow the instructions of

Mavis Beacon. Then I looked behind me to make sure no other teachers were in the hall. "She's huge," I muttered. My friend Kelly looked over and nodded. I moved back a bit. The different smells of everyone's hair gels, sprays, and molds were beginning to make me nauseous. Not to mention the hair that was just unwashed.

"How much do you think she weighs?" one of my classmates asked, as she faced the open door into the computer lab. I didn't know. I didn't even know where to begin. "Five hundred pounds," Lacey suggested. None of us argued. Two sturdy solid wooden chairs propped up her body. A thigh on each chair, her legs reminded me of mounds of dough under a navy and gold tablecloth. I pictured our kitchen table when my mom would bake Irish Soda Bread and wait for it to rise. The plaid skirt just draped over her navy stocking clad legs and it all led somewhere under the computer table. The girl, whose face I never saw, sat almost rigid the entire time we gawked at her. She had to hear us; we weren't exactly subtle.

A couple of girls continued to stare and make fun and tried to make their skirts look bigger as mimicked the girl's actual size. "She's from the grammar school, so she's no older than thirteen," I remarked to Kelly. "Damn," was her only response. I turned my head to look a bit down the hall where the other girls, the nerds, the losers, the girls who put every book in their back pack and walked tilted to one side, stood. They huddled next to the noisy water fountain and gave the rest of us disapproving looks like they were above poking fun at people, or maybe they just disapproved poking fun at people who were younger than us. The girl in question, "The Blob," as she had been dubbed, was only two or three years younger than us. I don't think age mattered. Our whole class talked about the obese babies on the *Maury Show* with the same amount of shock, awe, and amusement, including the ones who were indignant about the large girl.

I stood there and stared through the curtain of curled hair and zoned out. I agreed that the girl was a "fatty", but I was too. I wasn't as heavy as that girl, my uniform didn't have to be specially made, just let out a couple of inches, but I was obese for my age and height; I should have known better, but as one of the girls said, "Yo Mama's so fat when she was in school she sat next to *everybody!*" I found myself laughing. The girl didn't flinch; still, she had to hear us. The boy and girl on either side of her squirmed a little, perhaps they felt uncomfortable for her, or maybe they wanted to laugh too. "Jabba the Hut!" Lacey whispered in that way that was still loud and echoed in the tiled halls.

“Excuse me, young ladies! What are you doing?” Miss Bricker wobbled out of her den. We all froze, and faced the computer lab. “Get in line!” I took one last look at the large girl and moved back into place and averted my eyes. Miss Bricker was like an eclipse: you tried not to look directly at it, but you still kind of wanted to see what would happen if you did. I had heard blindness. Lacey couldn’t hold in her laughter and tried to bite her plump, over glossed lips, as her faced turned red; her head shook with laughter and looked like a bobble head on a stick thin frame. I continued to stare at the wall and count which tiles were on the verge of falling off. “Room 102 doesn’t have a class in it. Go wait in there until they’re done! ‘Round the mulberry bush!” ‘Round the mulberry bush was her way of making all the girls go in orderly fashion and in the same direction. We did an about face and went over to the other side of the hall and walked in the proper fashion. As I walked by I looked at the girl one last time; she still hadn’t changed her posture. I never saw her after that. Her outline and back are all I ever saw. Her blubbery arms just hung from her shoulder and her navy sweater vest accentuated how large her back and stomach was. I wondered if they had to have it specially made.

“Yo Mama’s so fat when she lays on the beach people yell ‘Free Willy!’” Kelly muttered right after Miss Bricker left the room she corralled us. The group of us laughed. “Yo Mama’s so fat when she goes to a restaurant she looks at the menu and goes ‘okay!’” I found that jab came out of my own mouth. The class laughed some more. I laughed with them and wondered why they didn’t think it was weird I was making a fat joke. I only needed one chair, but I hung over that one chair, so maybe that was the reason: anyone skinnier than “The Blob” was safe. I wondered if my classmates made fun of me behind my back like we were doing to this girl. Perhaps this girl had thick skin and let everything roll right off. Maybe she grew up in a family as twisted as mine, and “fat ass” was a term of endearment.

We all assumed she ate super-sized meals at McDonalds and inhaled chocolate cake in a matter of minutes, but we never stopped to wonder if there was a medical condition, something hereditary. She was just fat. It was her fault. She had no self-control when it came to Chips Ahoy! When it was finally time for our class to go into the computer lab we were disappointed to find all the chairs back into place. The group of us wanted to see what the chair looked like after she got up. The jokes continued throughout the rest of the day until it was time to go home. I don’t know if the other girls went home and

continued to talk about the girl, but I did.

That night at dinner I recalled the day's events to my parents. "This girl was huge!" I explained and held my arms all of the way out. "No, no, no. I'm not kidding! I insisted when they didn't believe me. I took two kitchen chairs and put them side-by-side to demonstrate. "She had more rolls than a bakery!" I exclaimed as I puffed out my face and tried to show the rolls. My folks just shook their heads and went about their business. I looked down at the chairs I was sitting on and saw I wasn't that far away from filling out two chairs, myself.

The next day I went to school and thought everyone would be talking about the girl from the day before, but I was somewhat disappointed to find they weren't. The day progressed without a word from anyone. We were up on the second floor in Spanish class, mid-morning, when we heard a loud bang (the janitor Bruce dropped a ladder). Our class was startled and looked towards the door that led to the hallway. "Big girl fell," Lacey whispered. The group of us laughed.

Laura Fabrizio

Masnavi Dreams

..

I want to make a pilgrimage
to Konya. I said, "*I want to
breathe the same air Rumi
once did.*" He doesn't know
who he is, but in the conversations
I have with myself, he knows
every verse in three languages.

To tell you the truth, I was
afraid. We didn't share the same
God. Whenever we exchanged
lewd fantasies like marbles
I wondered which divine being
was enraged or jovial. Sometimes,
I brought up religion like
the weather. He refused to
listen to tomorrow's forecast.
But I still donned my sunny
mask.

We whirled on the bed like
clothes in a washing machine.
I dutifully lied to my mother
that I was in school. I kindly
lied and never made it to my
friend's wedding. After a while,
I didn't care if the world knew.
The gods could have barged in
with our ancestors, with our body

undressed of shame.

Even after he made my heart
spin like a dervish, I still stash
away his existence from my
religious friends. And I pray
the barren wasteland between
my legs will suddenly bloom.



The Great Pyramid, taken by Jennifer Fitzgerald

Rhagina Chisolm

Another Somebody's Daddy

..

1

Ma daddy was cool
lak da otha side of da pillow;
he spoiled me rotten
lak cotton candy does teeth;
he took me shoppin', like every otha week.
Family photos were done every season for no reason.

2

What I didn't know den I knows now;
ma daddy lak dem young girls.
Went afta mama when she was fourteen
Mama didn't; know daddy lak dem young girls
until he slept wit her sista who was thirteen.
I didn't know dat day, he was a statutory rapist.
I jus thought my daddy was mean,
pushin' me out my room to use my bed.
I knows now he a chile molesta;
Yeah, mama told me in 2004,
daddy molested his girlfriend's daughta.
It was all makin' sense now,
ma daddy lak dem young girls.
Me and ma sista are young girls,
He prolly lak us too, if mama
didn't get us out in time.
Speakin of time, he gettin' soon.
May 30, 2009, ma sista's birfday.
Daddy, daddy, you sick bastard, I'm through,
If you come 'round here, I promise I'll kill you.

3

Now, I'm in dis here cell, fa murda.

Yeah dat's right, I killed ma daddy
lak I promised I would.
I say dat with a smile on my face.
Went back to South Carolina,
found his Scruff McGruff lookin' ass;
I turned da radio up loud,
rolled da down windows,
so folks could hear ma music,
and hit the motha fucka wit ma rental car,
twice! I crushed him in reverse,
then I sat there in the rental car,
laughin' until the cops came and got me.
Daddy, I have had to kill you,
so u don't Ever do what u do.

“Try, like some first human being, to say what you see and
experience and love and lose.”

—*Letters to a Young Poet*, by Rainer Maria Rilke

C. C. Haynes

On Relating

..

for Snowman

We ghost our
lives' learning
same lesson once

A rank God seed
seeded in
roots of a stillborn

earth—tilting
over a cup's crater
From our

thought We drool
one dime / a whale
road distance We snow

one snow Drift one
drift in footfall
We impel the same

love to season
out and skidoo
Eating the same

meal of art
while the secrets of
our body limp

like the o'clock
of the moon
We peel same

tangerine to unyoke
commingling blacks
We've lost our

yes fielding
yards of a
various color

Maria DiLorenzo

Heart Failure

Medical journals convince my heart
is a failure. How it dribbles against
my chest, a spitball bouncing tiredly
to stick like sap to a bone ceiling,
collides with other vitals. I'm shocked
from bed, breath short like small talk
with acquaintances, the bland catching
up, *how are you* surpasses a mailman's
bored route. My heart fails like men
who felt me up beside handball courts.
See them now on avenue N shit faced
at bars at noon, pumping the elderly's
gas, strumming guitars, strings rusted
like their cars exterior. This is a routine
checkup. Pressing my ear like a stetho-
scope to the street, listening to steps
tapping like my heart against my rib
cage, a dance with no rhythm. Heart
swings at my face a small fist, same
fist I knock your door: I'm avoided

like debt you owe. If only a sun would
tumor in my heart, light up rooms, light

my cigarette. I would ash onto your car
seat, claim I found another thing to love

in this neighborhood, snugly strapped
around me like a bra buckling me to

your heart's time zone of *for now*.
We split a pack of Winston's, dividing

our terms. Whose smoke rings are the
widest? My heart fails what it used to

know: an abandoned house's stripped
floors, musty couches, molded ceilings,

milk crates I sat cross legged. A room
a lot like you, not one comfortable chair

reclined in your mouth, all space spare,
too narrow to perch my lips. I used to

love the breaking in, breaking a window's
tight lipped expression to shard sneers

grinded from frames like teeth. I want
to put you back together. Sometimes

throw the same edged rock. Now
intersections flicked to roadsides flake

off maps along with my heart's cheat
sheet, stomped by your toe steel track.

Bridges raise like brows when I leave,
check points check me for answers.

Hold my heart to the sky for ransom.
Moon in half compresses like gauze

strips, lets my heart hide in its creases,
separates heart from woman all together.

Shrink

..

When they thought I wanted to bash my skull
like a windshield, an accident that leaves a car
spooning a tree, now veins like roots beneath

the ground's wrist, they sent me to therapy.
From that ceiling flower pots hung. Made me
think of hanging myself to feel breezes cool

as menthol lick my legs, dangling free to knock
over pictures lined on the desk, framing kids
I've never met. I sat on a leather couch, cushions

tough as combat. I couldn't sink into arms, wedge
my head into backrests. The shrink wrenched
my brain. My mouth was a broken faucet, dry

of words to invent how I supposedly felt. The crave
to crawl up into a ball tight as yarn, have her unknot
me. She noted nothing of me in that pad she groped

like a cigarette. A gold pen clung to her shirt pocket.
I was never too interesting, but that had proved it,
the way a repressed memory is proof and reason

for words stuttered. Why didn't she offer a tissue?
I spied the pink box at the corner of her desk. She
thought we had a breakthrough like a bulldozer

ramming through thin walls. Really, I was offended.
She couldn't find a word to scribble of me implied
she had no thought of me. An alarm beeped time

was up. I was swept out the door like trash littered
through halls of a clean building. I was the violated
ass of a girl in a mosh pit, crowd surfing my way home.

Alison Langleiben

College Party Code of Conduct

She is liquor smacked in the face,
the death drums of hangover in her ears.
She is wondering how many,
Many beers it took for her to lose her underwear.
Where is her face?
Rubbing purple disc under foggy camera lens,
The taste of too sweet, tooth aching sweet something,
What was that thing in her mouth?
She is scraping herself off the floor,
Scraping vomit off the floor.
Where is her purse?
Where is her jacket?
Where is that guy that ejected candy
Like twenty-five-cent prizes last night?
Where is her... under the couch.
She is happy, because loneliness is for ugly girls.
Art thou not the loveliest thing? Wanted. Taken.
There is a sad little smirk on her face
as she recovers the condom. Wanted. Taken.
She is sad that she didn't catch his number,
but he isn't her type anyway. Prince Henry
couldn't make it. Maybe next time.
She is flopping on her red leather heels,
stomping on her childhood.
How many drunken slips does it take to fill a guilt?
As she says *Fare thee well, my sweet child*
to the guy that ran the party
like an ancient ceremonial mania.
Sweet child to the child inside that she wasted.
She is dying just a little every little

red step.

Atlanta after the fated burnt stick

..

I dare you to beat me.
Come on slug-o, try and outrun me.
I'll make your head a wife to your torso.
I want you to try to fail to fall.
They always look like him at the finish.

They say I am Artemis.
Would you pray to me after we've hunted?
Adorn me in deer hide and pray to me, like he did?
You think you have Meleager's feet?
He wore my brother's back.

If you want to touch a tender thigh,
Go to town, find a silly thing you can beat,
That'll cook you dinner,
That your mother will approve of.
A lady with a tilted head and dead eyes.

I'm not what you want.
I can fight you, I can out-stab,
I can make your muscles shrink with a squint.
I can be the man and *still* have you want me,
You're eyes all over me, you want me.
Who are you, silly man? I wrested Pelius.
You think that limp muscle means anything to me?

Dare to touch me?
I can crush you with a hug. I want to.
It's what I was raised for.
You'll never be the man in the woods.
He was an equal, my first touch of man.
To touch you, to touch you, Meleager...

You can never beat first love, so why bother?
Even if I wanted love, as I have wanted love,
It was burnt in the flame of his mother.
Go compete in some other princess' contest.
My lover is dead. Go climb a tower.
Go kiss a coma patient. Go slay something.
I'll skin myself before you touch me.

Monette

Curiosity Ate Her Cat

Joan: Almost 17. A freak outside her uber-white sheets.

Ally: 17, Asian. She's exotic with blue hair.

Setting: A Dunkin' Donuts store. Joan is sitting alone in school uniform. A small Chinese food box on her side. Spotlight on her. She is writing while narrating.

JOAN

The story I want to tell you has been eating me inside. It's nothing but a craving, I thought, and that's that. Just an urge out of curiosity but I find myself starving. I'm so hungry. I'm so hungry I can eat... (A "Meow" of a cat is heard.)

(Lights up. Ally enters, the same school uniform. Hair is a mess, blouse incompletely buttoned, socks uneven. Joan stops writing and watches Ally fuss.)

ALLY

I'm so so sorry. (Digs inside her bag.) Shoot! I left my copy... (Joan pushes her copy closer to Ally.) Oh. Ok, let's get motherhood over with. "My name is 'Write name of-'" We have to name our egg?!

JOAN

You wanna combine our name? Joal, Allan... Jason?

ALLY

Nahh... Let's skip. (Beat.) "When I was growing up..." (Beat.) Skip. "My favorite color is..." (Beat.) This is a stupid homework!

JOAN

You can't skip questions! We won't finish. (Beat.) If your childhood were a crayon, which color would it be?

ALLY

Pink.

JOAN

Cute.

ALLY

I hate pink. (Beat.) You?

JOAN

Black and white.

ALLY

Cool, but pick one.

JOAN

It's not as simple as it looks. (Beat.) I have OCD.

ALLY

Really? What do you obsess about?

JOAN

Colors.

ALLY

What about them?

JOAN

I think they're... (Beat.) dirty.

ALLY

You probably don't like me because I'm yellow...

JOAN

I'm a freak, but not a member of the Ku Klux Klan. (Beat.) I won't like you if you're always late.

ALLY

I said I'm sorry!

JOAN

I know. I'm just not very good with waiting. (Pause.) How sickening is your pink?

ALLY

As if Moses made a mistake, all the rivers and oceans turned into Pepto-Bismol...
(They laugh. Ally opens the Chinese food box, takes the egg out.)

JOAN

Careful.

ALLY

I know. (Carefully toss the egg to her other hand.)

JOAN

I said careful! The side with Mrs. Jones' signature is the face. You're gonna suffocate her!

ALLY

It's just an egg...

JOAN

Not this week. It says right there. See? Look! (Points at a section on the hand out. Breathes.) (Beat.) Can you put it back in the box... Please?

ALLY

(Looks for the signature before putting it in the box.) Do you like kids?

JOAN

When they're asleep. (Beat.) Or as eggs.

ALLY

You find them cute?

JOAN

Sometimes. But they do everything that makes anxious I forget they're cute.

ALLY

I like them. They're... new.

JOAN

If you got knocked up right now, what would you do?

ALLY

I would kill myself.

(Lights out. Lights up.)

(Ally and Joan sit across from each other. Joan is pecking inside a paper bag of Dunkin' Donuts using a straw. Ally plays with a pencil. Chinese Food box in between them)

JOAN

Yeah... you can have this...

ALLY

"Benedict"? Why?

JOAN

Too political. There's a red sprinkle on the side.

ALLY

Your turn. Didn't you tell them "No sprinkles"?

JOAN

They didn't listen! "Sunny"?

ALLY

No! I'm starving...

JOAN

Lette...y? (Pushes the paper bag to Ally.) It's French Cruller.

ALLY

Thanks. Why don't we just name it "ovum"?

JOAN

“Caviar!”

ALLY

What about “Nog”?

JOAN

That’s almost racist. “Kim.”

ALLY

That’s fine.

JOAN

Kim has a big sister that lends her clothes.

ALLY

A big brother that beats up his friends when they check her out.

JOAN

Parents who attend PTA.

ALLY

Both of them.

JOAN

In the summer they go on vacations.

ALLY

Disneyland and the Grand Canyon.

JOAN

Disneyland in Japan! (Beat.) She will never be sent to boarding school.

ALLY

On her birthday, the cake is baked from scratch.

JOAN

Not from Costco. (Beat.) Vanilla Cake covered with Chocolate Frosting!

ALLY

Barbeque parties at their backyard.

JOAN

She's allowed to invite anybody she wants. Even boys.

ALLY

But she can't start dating until she's 18. And she's not losing her virginity until—

JOAN

We can't tell her when to lose it! It's hers.

ALLY

We'll tell her abstinence, until you're ready, is the way to go.

JOAN

She's not gonna believe us. Her friends will tell her abstinence is just an excuse of people who can't get laid. (Beat.) We can only teach her how to protect herself.

ALLY

Tell her safe sex doesn't only mean tying him on the bed.

JOAN

We will be understanding parents. Race wouldn't matter.

ALLY

But manners will! (Her phone starts ringing.) Fuck! I gotta. Tomorrow we'll start the book.

JOAN

What book?

ALLY

The album. (Beat.) Of the family.
(Lights out. Lights up.)

(Spotlight on Joan. She's wearing a white Gym shirt. Chinese food box on her side. A guitar sits next to her. She's writing while narrating.)

JOAN

To do list: Clean room, check. Masturbate, check. Feed cat, Study for Anatomy, check, check. Do Sex. Ed homework with Ally, coming soon. Write a letter to parents... (She pulls out paper and pen.) *Dear Mother and Father, How's Italy? Hope all is well. I'm splendid. Everything is fine... I made a new friend in school. Her name is Allison. Elvis Costello wrote a song about a girl named Allison...* (Starts singing, "I know this world is killing you... my aim is true..." She rips the page from the notebook. She takes the guitar and starts plucking.)

(Lights up. Ally sits across, tinkering on her camera. Joan is still plucking her guitar, playing every string 5 times before moving on to the next.)

ALLY

You know, I used to wish I have OCD... (Takes a picture of Joan.)

JOAN

You wanna be a freak too? (Ally puts the camera on a nearby table, gets up.)

JOAN

Where are you going?

ALLY

To stand beside you. (Ally opens the Chinese box.)

JOAN

Wait. (She pulls out a family size hand sanitizer.) Sorry...

ALLY

It's okay. (Ally squirts on her hand, takes the egg from the box. Puts her other arm around Joan's shoulder. Joan looks at the camera, frozen. Flash!)

JOAN

I wanted to be a porn star. (Beat.) Black knee high boots and white sheets.

(They laugh. Joan starts playing "Sun and Moon".)

ALLY

It's nice to see you touching an object.

JOAN

Took me 6 years.

ALLY

To learn how to play?

JOAN

To touch a guitar.

ALLY

How long have you been on therapy?

JOAN

Both my parents are psychologists, so almost 17 years. (Beat.) And counting. (Beat.) Where do your parents work?

ALLY

I don't know. (Beat.) I live with some dude who adopted me. (Pause.)

JOAN

When I was 6 I told my parents I don't want a dog for Christmas. From then on they've concluded I will be either a three-time divorcee or a pimp. "This is why you have trouble keeping eye contact. Your future relationships are in trouble."

ALLY

I had a dog but I don't like eye contact either. It's too... revealing.

JOAN

My mom has blue eyes, and my dad has amber.

ALLY

That's why... a cluster of orange in the middle of your eyes.

JOAN

Why can't it just be black with a little white in the middle? Like Mickey Mouse. (Beat.) Or umm...brown ones, like yours. Have you picked out the gentleman caller to get jiggy with at the prom?

ALLY

No. (Beat.) Boys don't like me.

JOAN

Why wouldn't they??

ALLY

Because I don't like them. (Beat.) They seem to be just a bunch of..." colors."

JOAN

You're into Albinos.

ALLY

No. (They laugh.) I like you.

JOAN

Umm... I like you too. (Beat.) I really like you. (Beat.) I really really like you (Beat)... like you.

ALLY

Me t—

JOAN

Would you go to the prom with me?

ALLY

Really? Umm...

JOAN

(Panicking.) I don't wanna freak you out or anything, you know, we get along and I've never really had a girlfrie— A female friend. Or any friend for that matter. And you're funny and... you have a really nice smile...

ALLY

Shh... I'm trying to think how I'm gonna sneak out in a dress...

(Pause.)

(They catch each other's eyes, both look away smiling. Pause.)

JOAN

Have you ever been kissed?

ALLY

By a door.

JOAN

A person?

ALLY

(Beat.) I don't wanna talk about it. (Beat.) You?

JOAN

No. (Beat.)

ALLY

Can you play another song for me?

(Joan plays "Head over feet")

ALLY

I love this song!

JOAN

I cheated. I saw it playing in your mp3 yesterday. (They laugh. Joan plays the chorus.)

ALLY

I haven't kissed a girl.

(Lights out. Lights up)

(Spotlight on Joan. She is in schoolgirl uniform. She is writing while narrating.)

JOAN

Dear Mum and Dad, I'm sorry I threw the crayons out of the window back in 1st grade. I thought there were too many colors. All I needed was black to write on the paper and maybe white, just because it's barely a shade. The colors seem to be haunting me now. I met somebody. And I think... I love... her. Yes, Mum, I'm in love with girl. A cunt-owner, somebody with a vajjayjay, me gusta chocha, Mother, I'm a box licker! (Beat.) Can one of you, please, please, tell me this is just a stage? Is this Oedipal Complex gone wrong? Or maybe my version of phallus envy? Well, how do I castrate this envy?! (Beat.) What am I thinking, falling in love with a

bipedal that bleeds every month? Is my own PMS not enough that I want more?
(Beat.) *Oh my God, if I die tomorrow my tomb is gonna say, "Loving daughter, caring friend, and a rigid muff diver!"* (Pause.) *P.S. I'm doomed and I'm loving it.*
(Lights up. Ally enters in schoolgirl uniform. She is wearing shades and a hat. She holds the Chinese food box with caution.)

ALLY

I can't stay too long.

JOAN

I'll see you tomorrow?

ALLY

I won't be in class. Here's the photo album. (Pulls a binder from her bag, hits the Chinese food box.) Holy Shit! No, no, no, no no!! No!
(She starts to sob.) (Pause.) She cracked!

JOAN

I might have a tape. Maybe we can still fix her.

ALLY

The yolk's seeping out. (Beat.) She's broken...(She sobs.) He found your poem. (Ally embraces Joan. Hat falls off her head, showing short hair, unevenly cut.) He said no man will ever love me. (Joan embraces Ally tightly.)

(Lights out. Lights up.)

(Spotlight on Allison. She wears a white halter Chinese dress. Her hair is now even. Chinese food box on her side. She reads out loud.)

*I'd like to blow
your candle on fire,
to tame my cat
that purrs*

*when you
spank my words
with your tongue
like a pig
tailed-
school girl.*

*Doodle, doodle
with your fingertips
punish this butterfly
in a crucifix.*

*I am this kiss.
Juxtaposition of orbicularis oris
under the guarding moon.*

*A collide
Of lips
waiting
For you to
Miss
Me. To
draw the same
outline*

*of breathe when
we part,
giving
chance to our
tongue.*

(Lights up. Joan enters. She wears long black dress and a white sport coat. She holds 2 pink carnations corsages.)

JOAN

Limo's ou— Wow! (Beat.) You look, beautiful.

ALLY

Thank you. So do you.

JOAN

Handsome. (Beat.) Let's say goodbye.

(Joan places one corsage on Ally. Joan places one corsage on top of the Chinese food box. Ally moves the Chinese food box to another table. Both girls' back facing the audience.)

ALLY

You weren't just an egg...

JOAN

And we thank you.

(Joan holds Ally's hand (Hand with corsage). Ally rests her head on Joan's shoulder.)

(Lights out.)

THE END.

Ron Jimenia

Ars Poetica

..

My poem should have
wrinkly skin to show
wisdom, your poem a flat
nose so it can read,
a mouth to speak
different languages
or make a new one.
It should have
a big head for big ideas,
and room for bigger
expectations, flowing
Vidal Sasson hair, just
in case they think it sucks it
still has one beautiful
thing for readers to
ponder on. A torso, long
enough to compliment
the arms and fingers.
Its feet to step on haters'
faces, keeping the plump
legs moving, guiding
the lively mess written together.

Pay What's Most Dear

..

I'm falling deeper into
eating breakfast,
watching TV just
enough to preserve
[my existence.]
No time. Time for the morning
commute, riding
sideways, thighs
pressing hard on
the seat, legs too
short. Can't look
much out the window His head's
in the way. Young teens in
the back pay your dues, do
not make fun. Whatever *W*
poser just hold your skate
-board in the mall when it
just rained. Two old men
gossip and complain, some hope
to be a hot topic.

After minutes of
awkwardness, I
get out to become
weird again. As
soon as I'm in,
I'm bored.
Walking to walk. I walk to walk.
In the room with my peers, I sit
uncomfortably. "Okay class, solve
this equation." Can't solve why I'm
here why solve that? So I draw
constantly as if I've been reborn

after suffering a stroke. Maybe I
draw to hide. Nope. I'm just really
bored. I say 'I don't know' because
I mean I don't know. But she call
me anyway. I guess my answer.

Ten minutes later, I do
know. But why now?
Do I have a problem?
Professor calls me to
solve again. My name
is a curse. I get nervous
every time it is called.
I forgot what she said,
so I say umm...

Can't handle this anymore
so I dream of fiery red
with long glowing
feathers, they perch
on clouds, How do
they do that? Soar
around lazily, wish
I could flap my wings
loud enough to hear...
The dream's over.
I pressed too hard on
my arm, it won't let
go, leaving me with
an everlasting sour
look for quick stares
to follow.

What a creeper. He scares
me. I'm a monster. Too much
in my mind: there's only one
jacket left, drawing is half
done, print shirts, fill orders,
how *maganda* she looks.

Still in class not paying
Yeah, finally over. Everyone
scurries out like a herd of
cattle escaping predators.
I was left. Not good with
groups. The time I spend
alone is the time I need to
see what's most clear. I
head out of the building
with no energy left. I'm
a hungry monster.



Taken by Alexandra Porto

Patricia Kosa

Cliché

..

One:

“Ryan honey?” Steven kissed his daughter’s forehead lightly. “It’s for the best.” He glanced over at his wife who was standing in the hallway, her hands folded across her chest.

Ryan shrugged. “Whatever.” She pulled her duffle bag next to her, the crisp white sheets of her bed wrinkling. “To be honest, I just don’t care anymore.”

Steven shook his head, taking a seat next to his daughter. “Stop that, we’re just a phone call away Ry.”

Ryan nodded, her head down. “That’s not the point dad.” She ran her hands through her golden locks. “Why are you guys making such a big deal of this, it was what? One time?”

Pam sighed, crouching in front of her daughter. “Because honey, we love you.” She grabbed Ryan’s hands. “And we just want you to get better.” She smiled at Steven. “Right?”

Ryan clanked at her mother. “Mom. Dad.” She rolled her eyes. “I don’t have to stay in this.” She motioned around the brightly lit room. “Shit hole. It’s too white, and the people smile too much, and it smells here.” She sniffed the air. “And...”

Pam rose to her feet, grabbing Steven by the arm. “You’ll be fine Ryan.” She smiled wide. “And we have to go.” She glanced at her watch. “They said fifteen minutes to get you settled, and we’re way over that.”

“Fine.” Ryan’s head hit her pillow with a thud. “Go! Leave me here!” She covered her face with her hands. “You guys don’t love me.”

Steven gave Ryan a sympathetic look, his eyes sparkling as he smiled. “We do love you Ryan.”

Ryan nodded, waving her family away blindly. “Liars. If you loved me you wouldn’t leave me in this place.”

Pam chuckled, shuffling quickly into the hallway. “See you in

four weeks honey.” She closed the metal door with a click.

“Think of it like a vacation.” Steven tapped the door. “A nice, peaceful vacation.”

Ryan uncovered her eyes. “Stupid bitch.” She kicked the mattress with her heels. “I hate them.”

“Rough day?” A throaty voice bounced from behind a floral curtain.

Ryan’s brow furrowed. “What the hell?” she sat up quickly, flattening her shirt. “You were here?” She poked the curtain. “The whole time?”

The curtain slid quickly, metal rings clanking, dust filling the air. “Sure.” The brunette pulled at her bed linens. “I was, you know.” She looked up. “Around.”

Ryan put her head in her hands. “And the day gets better.”

“Hey!” The brunette nodded at Ryan. “It’s no picnic for me either Drama Queen.” She folded her feet underneath her body, her shirt rising up on her back. “As a matter of fact, I was perfectly happy sleeping with myself.” She shook her head with laughter. “That came out wrong. What I mean is...”

Ryan scoffed, rolling her eyes at the babbling stranger in the next bed. “Who are you anyway?” She stared into brown eyes.

“Me? Why?”

Ryan rolled her eyes again, watching the brunette fold her hands in her lap. “Well since I’m stuck with you, I think I should know who I’m stuck with. Don’t you agree?”

The stranger nodded. “Sure.”

Ryan nodded, holding out her hand. “I’m Ryan, Ryan Harlot.”

“And I.” The brunette winked. “Know that already.” She smiled coyly. “Remember Ryany Poo, I was here.” She pointed to her mattress. “The entire time.”

Ryan shook her head, pulling her hand back. “What are you here for then?” she hugged her folded legs close to her body.

“One question at a time Napoleon.” The brunette chuckled, curls bouncing with every movement. “The name’s Ashley, Ashley Franks.”

Ryan smiled. “You must be crazy too huh?”

Two:

“Let me tell you.” Ashley turned around, slowly walking backwards. “You picked the best day to come here Blondie.”

Ryan rolled her eyes. “Could you not call me that?” She

followed the brunette through the echoing hallway. “My name is Ryan, R-Y-A-N, Ryan.”

Ashley laughed, “OCD?”

“Huh?”

Ashley shook her head, pushing open a white door. “I could, but what’s the fun in that.” She smirked, “Blondie!”

Ryan threw her hands in the air. “I really hate you.”

“I know.” Ashley pointed. “Anger issues?” She closed the door behind her.

“What?” Ryan scanned the white tiled room quickly. “This place is so.”

Ashley chuckled. “Homey?” She sat in a black armchair.”

Ryan walked aimlessly around the circular setup. “I was going to stay creepy.” She tapped the back of Ashley’s chair. “So how long are you here for?”

“Ashley?” A male voice echoed though the room. “She never leaves.” He laughed making his way in front of Ashley’s chair.

Ashley rolled her eyes, pushing herself up off the chair. “Shut it Daniels.” She high fived the pajama clad boy. “Nice cows.” She pulled at his pants.

“Nice blonde.” He nudged Ashley’s ribs. “Where’d you find her? The bi polar wing?”

Ashley shrugged. “This is.” She snapped her fingers vigorously, gazing into Ryan’s blue eyes. “Blond...”

Ryan shifted uncomfortably. “I’m Ryan.” She grabbed the boy’s hand. “And you are?”

“Crazy?” The muscular boy pulled Ryan’s hand up and down roughly.

Ryan nodded slowly.

“Nick.” He folded his arms over his chest. “It’s a little joke we have here. But I guess you...”

“No I get it.” Ryan forced a laugh. “It’s a good one.”

Ashley scoffed. “You don’t have to humor his Blondie. He knows he sucks.”

Nick leaned his elbow on Ashley’s shoulder. “So what brings you to this lovely place?”

Ashley sighed, pushing his arm off quickly. “Off.” She stepped to the left.

“Uhm parents?” Ryan glanced between Ashley and Nick.

Nick laughed. “No, no, no. Like what are you here? Let me guess, you talk to yourself?”

Ryan shook her head.

“Cut?”

Ryan shook her head.

“Gay?”

Ryan pulled her sleeves over her hands.

Ashley smiled at Ryan sadly. “Leave her alone Moron.” She slowly sat again.

“Ashley being nice? Did they up your meds again?” Nick relaxed into the chair opposite Ashley, his feet resting on the edge of his seat.

Ashley laughed, patting the seat next to her. “We don’t bite Blond.” She shifted in her seat. “I mean Ryan.”

Ryan sat down cautiously.

“But Madison does.” Nick leaned back in his chair.

“One time.” Ashley turned her head. “They shot her with a...”

“Tranquilizer gun.” A Latina plopped into a red chair. “You spreading more rumors Ashley?”

Nick tapped his fingers on the armrest. “Yup. Always causing trouble that one.”

“I’m Madison by the way.” The girl nodded in Ryan’s direction.

Ryan nodded. “Ryan.”

Madison curled into the chair. “Right.”

Ryan looked up, windows covering the ceiling.

“It’s supposed to make us feel.” Ashley hugged her knees to her chest. “Positive?” She watched clouds float by. “But...”

“It makes me want to puke.”

“Weirdoes.” Nick opened his eyes as he stood. “Well ladies.” He bowed to the group. “I have to go.” He sighed. “Pottery.”

Ashley laughed, smiling at Ryan. “They think the arts help.”

Madison shrugged following Nick toward the door.

“You guys coming to group later?” Nick turned the door knob slowly.

Ashley nodded. “Where else do I have to be?” She waved him off.

“Good point.” Nick walked out the door. “Oh.” His body reappeared. “Nice to meet you Ryan.”

Ashley closed her eyes, humming an unknown tune. “I don’t think you have to go you know.” She opened one eye.

Ryan frowned. “To where?”

“Group therapy.” Ashley stood up, stretching her legs.

Ryan bit her lip. “They gave me this.” She handed Ashley a yellow piece of paper.

Ashley glanced at the paper then back at Ryan. “Well.” She walked toward the large white door. “I guess I’ll be seeing you in therapy then.”

“Great.” Ryan rubbed her temples. “Fan-fuckin-tastic.”

Three:

“Check mate.” Nick jumped from his seat. “Rematch?” He nudged Ashley, setting up his black pieces.

Ashley shook her head. “Nah, I don’t feel like playing anymore.” She tossed her white knight into the box. “Go bother Madison.”

Nick’s eyes lowered. “But I’d much rather bother you.” He sang gleefully, dancing like a ballerina.

“Nice moves Nick.” Ryan grasped his shoulder. “Very sexy.”

Nick nodded his face neutral. “Yeah, yeah I am.”

Ryan chuckled. “Hey Ash.” She waved at Ashley.

Ashley rolled her eyes, walking to the other end of the room. “We’ll play later Nick.”

Nick nodded. “What’s up Ryan?” He turned around, taking his seat behind the chessboard.

Ryan pointed toward the curly haired brunette sitting in the corner. “What’s her problem?”

Nick watched as Ashley closed her eyes, her head hitting the wall softly. “Don’t.” He warned shaking his head.

Ryan stiffened her jaw. “Don’t what?” She innocently batted her eyelashes.

Nick shook his head feverously.

“Are you okay?” Ryan lightly squeezed Nick’s shoulder.

Nick’s eyes blinked. “Don’t touch me, you could be one of them!”

Ryan jumped away quickly. “Okay, could be one of who?”

Sweat poured down Nick’s face, droplets hitting the floor. “Th, the, da,” he spat backing away slowly, his hands shaking in nervousness.

Ryan rolled her eyes. “Fucking nut job.” She walked toward the unsuspecting brunette. “What the hell is up with him?” Ryan took a seat next to Ashley, who was once again humming a tune.

Ashley’s head continued to rock back and forth, every once in a while lightly tapping the painted sheetrock.

“Hello?” Ryan waved her hand in front of Ashley’s eyes. “Earth to Ashley.”

Ashley slapped Ryan’s hand roughly.

“Well that was rude.” Ryan folded her hands over her chest in annoyance.

Ashley closed her eyes, the humming stopped. “What do you want Blondie?” He head fell into her hands.

Ryan flicked her front teeth with her tongue. “Nothing. Forget it.”

“Look.” Ashley stared straight ahead. “If you’re looking for a friend, go somewhere else, I’m no interested.”

Ryan laughed mockingly.

Ashley’s head turned slowly, her eyes reddened. “He’ll be fine, shot up with drugs and bam a good as new buff boy.” She rubbed her eyes. “He gets paranoid, that’s what you saw.”

Ryan nodded, her face hard. “Oh.”

Ashley nodded.

“Miss Franks?” A young nurse walked over to the duo.

Ashley looked up. “You rang?”

The nurse nodded, grabbing Ashley by the elbow. “Body checked Miss Franks.” She glanced down at Ryan. “She won’t be long.”

Ryan nodded as the two walked out of the room slowly.

“I wouldn’t bother.” Madison’s voice screeched. “No one has cracked her yet.” She held her hand out for Ryan.

Ryan grabbed her hand, slowly rising to her feet. “What are you talking about?” She smirked, following Madison into a sitting room.

Madison jumped onto a green sofa, tossing its pillows onto the floor. “Ashley?”

Ryan ran her hand through her hair. “I’m just being nice.”

Madison shook her head. “Liar.” She pointed at Ryan. “You want to get inside her.” She paused, watching Ryan blush. Madison shook her head. “I mean her head you perv, but now that I know your secret.”

Ryan scratched her calf. “My secret?”

Madison nodded. “Your secret.”

Ryan’s nostrils flared. “I really don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“No one ever does.” Ashley’s raspy voice entered the room. “That’s why the lock her up.” She smiled. “Always speaking those

crazy tongues, ain't that right Maddie?"

Madison's eyes squinted. "Speaking of the devil." She wiggled her toes.

Ashley stepped next to Ryan. "Come on." She whispered in her ear.

Ryan nodded, blushing as Ashley intertwined their fingers.

"Where are we going?" Ryan's palms began to sweat.

Ashley glared, checking up and down the hallway. "Would you relax Blondie." She laughed, pushing open a large black door, quickly entering a staircase.

"I told you to stop calling me that." Ryan whipped her hand out of Ashley's grasp. "Are we supposed to be here because I don't think..."

Ashley's lips collided with Ryan's, their hand once again intertwining. "Now shut up." She breathed, dragging Ryan up the steps.

Ryan held her hand to her lips. "You kissed me."

Ashley continued to run up the steps, two at a time. "Yeah and?" She began to breath heavy.

Ryan struggled to catch up. "Usually you don't just kiss someone." She bumped into Ashley's back.

"Would you pay attention and stop analyzing things?" Ashley whispered through her teeth.

Ashley tapped the door handle. "Awesome." She knocked into the rusted door with her shoulder, it opened with a creak.

Four:

"Damn." Ashley slowly walked toward the edge of the roof, gravel crackling under her feet. "It's chilly tonight." She breathed, her breath visible in the crisp night air.

Ryan hugged herself tightly for warmth, her arms covered with goosebumps. "You're not gonna jump now." She kicked a rock over to hold the door. "Are you?"

Ashley laughed, her voice echoing off the empty buildings. "No Ry." She jumped onto the brick ledge. "I'm not." She slowly walked, balancing herself on the narrow bricks. "You coming?"

Ryan shook her head, leaning her back against the cool gray wall. "That's okay." She cupped her hands over her mouth, warming her fingers. "I'm fine right here." She slapped the wall with her palm. "It's nice and safe." She whispered, lowering herself to the gravel roof.

"Pussy!" Ashley rubbed her hands together.

Ryan rolled her eyes, pushing off the ground with her hands, small pebbles sticking to her palms. “No.” She walked over to Ashley, who swayed in the breeze.

Ashley smiled, continuing to walk on the edge. “Come on.” She held out her hand.

Ryan shook her head again, following Ashley safely on to roof. “I’m coming.” She rubbed her arms. “God!”

“What?” Ashley snickered, jumping off the ledge.

Ryan laughed. “You’re an ass.”

Ashley walked into the darkness. “Ry.” She stuck out her hand into the light. “Grab my hand.”

Ryan’s brow wrinkled. “If you wanted to hold my hand, all you had to do was ask.” She clasped the brunette’s hand.

“Oh my God Ryan, you’re hilarious.” Ashley’s face was outlined in the moonlight.

“Damn right I am.” Ryan rubbed her fingernails on her shirt.

“Watch where you’re going.” Ashley dragged Ryan quickly.

Ryan sighed. “I can’t see anything.”

“You don’t have to.” Ashley stopped suddenly, Ryan running into her back again.

“Sorry?” Ryan blushed, her hand still being held tightly by Ashley.

“Yeah, yeah.” Ashley waved Ryan off. “Go!” She pointed to a rusting ladder. “Climb!”

Ryan turned around. “Where are we going?” She wiggled her fingers in Ashley’s grasp. “And what’s in that bag?” She pointed to a black North Face strapped onto Ashley’s back.

“Who are you? Question girl?” She released Ryan’s hand. “Climb!”

Ryan sighed loudly, grasping a rung, her left foot resting on the first.

“Quit procrastinating and do damn it.” Ashley walked behind Ryan, her chest pushing into Ryan’s back.

Ryan closed her eyes, and began to climb, slowly and then picking up speed. “Are we allowed to be up here?”

Ashley chuckled, shaking her head. “No.” She pulled herself up. “But we’re here anyway right?”

Ryan looked around. “Well?”

“Patience Ry,” Ashley placed the book bag on the roof.

Ryan knelt down next to Ashley, her breath warming Ashley’s cheeks. “You could have said we were going outside, it’s fucking

freezing.”

“Cry baby.” Ashley handed Ryan a gray hoodie. “Put this on.”

Ryan quickly threw it over her head. “Thanks.” She watched as Ashley pulled out a thermos and two mugs. “Where’d you get that?” Ryan leaned forward as steam flew into the air, Ashley pouring its contents into mugs. Ashley flashed Ryan an annoyed look. “Right.” Ryan scratched her eyebrow. “No questions.”

“Here.” Ashley handed Ryan her steaming cup.

“What is?” Ryan paused, sniffing its contents. “Where did you get booze? And mixed with hot chocolate?”

Ashley smiled, sipping her glass. “Yep.” She pulled out a blanket. “What can I say?” She spread out the wrinkles. “I’m a genius.”

Ryan laughed, bringing the cup to her mouth. “You definitely are something.” She looked up at the sky.

Ashley shrugged putting her glass down on the roof.

“We’re not going to get caught right?” Ryan’s head turned quickly, searching the shadows.

Ashley shook her head. “Would you relax?”

Ryan sighed again, her breath combining with the chilled air.

“you never cut class did you?” Ashley smirked.

“What?” Ryan’s hands cradled the mug.

Ashley tilted her head knowingly.

“No.” Ryan blew on the hot liquid. “But this,” she looked around again, “is definitely what it feels like.”

Ashley picked up her mug again. “I bet you’re the genius at school.”

Ryan smiled, shaking her head. “No.” She scooted closer to Ashley. “I’m not.”

“Right.”

“So?” Ryan shifted, her eyes once again watching the stars. “What’s your story?” She frowned when Ashley avoided her gaze.

“What a beautiful night it is out.” Ashley leaned on her elbows. “It’s the kind of night you could just lay on your back and count the stars.”

Ryan nodded. “You’re avoiding my question.”

Ashley shrugged. “Did you ever do anything really...” Ashley looked into Ryan’s eyes. “Bad?”

Ryan wrinkled up her face. “Maybe.”

Ashley gazed up at the night sky. “I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No.” Ryan’s hand grazed Ashley’s. “It’s fine.” Ryan thought for a moment. “Yeah.” She cupped Ashley’s hand. “Lots of things.”

Ashley’s eyes laughed. “They couldn’t be all bad Ryan.”

Ryan shrugged. “There was this person.” She paused. “I liked her, I guess.” She searched Ashley’s face. “She was.” She chuckled. “So shy. I told some of my friends, and they absolutely hated her, hated me.” She bit her lip. “You know, the girls who knew everything, so I stood her up. I think that was bad, to you know, go with the herd.” Ryan followed Ashley’s gaze into the sky. “I guess its really not bad.” Ryan intertwined their hands. “What about you?” She smirked. “Have you done anything really bad?” She mocked, placing her fingers under Ashley’s chin.

“Yes.”

“Can I ask you a question?” Ryan’s eyes drew shapes in the sky.

Ashley leaned on her hand. “Is it personal?”

Ryan shook her head, her shadow bouncing off the wall.

“Then shoot.” Ashley smiled, her hair sticking to her face.

Ryan kicked at the gravel. “Why can you ask me all these questions?” She turned her head. “Act like you care.” She focused back on the sky. “And then you blow me off when I do the same for you.”

“I’m not as nasty as everyone says I am.” Ashley joked, now lying on her back. “They just catch me on my bad days.”

Ryan laughed, her hand lightly touching Ashley’s thigh. “So that’s like what?” She scrunched up her nose. “Everyday?”

Ashley snorted back laughter. “Nice.” She turned her head, her lips centimeters from Ryan’s cheek. “Real nice.”

Ryan felt Ashley’s breath, instinctively turning her head, their lips almost touching. “See.” She whispered. “I told you I could be bad.” She laughed, turning her attention back on the stars.

Ashley bit the inside of her cheek, continuing to stare at the blonde next to her. “I have trust issues.”

Ryan nodded, facing Ashley again, their eyes connected.

“That’s why I blow you off.” Ashley frowned. “I don’t open up to people.” She searched Ryan’s eyes. “I don’t let people love me.” She watched as Ryan licked her lips. “And.” She closed her eyes. “I don’t love.”

“Anyone?” Ryan played with Ashley’s hands.

Ashley shook her head.

“Why?” Ryan licked her lips again.

Ashley shrugged, turning her head as Ryan’s lips inched closer. “People suck.”

Ryan frowned, folding her arms over her chest. “Some do.” She inched closer. “Some don’t.” Ryan smiled, standing to her feet.

“Hey!” Ashley whispered loudly. “Where you are you going?”

Ryan winked. “I think I just cracked Ashley Franks.” She happily walked toward the opposite end of the roof.

Lori Lovaglio

Chaser

..

Frozen morning, the trees
like popsicles. And you
vomit up last years laughs
somewhere down the hall.

The rusty smell latches to
me like a germ. My cells
writhe and squirm.

I wanted to step on those
needles, for you. To hear
the crunching, to watch
the pieces scatter, plastic
roaches, running this way
and that.

Your concentration smells
like a burnt match. A manic
eye caught in the tarnish of
the spoon. Blood coagulating
like hungry dogs.

To understand you is to

tip toe the wire. It's thin
and sways in the wind.
And I cannot do that.
Can you blame me?

Your face is worn, a tired
saddle on the horses back,
cracking with shame. I'm
losing the reins, they're
burning my hands.

I was the cork that held
you inside the bottle. But
you knocked so loud that
someone ripped me out.

Habit

..

Sometimes the words hit like shrapnel,
cutting into the deepest wells of organs.

Other times, they are lambs, that lay
their tiny heads onto the skin, onto the brain.

They burn through parchment, through
paper, drift as ashes into the wet soil

to be born again, through someone else's
pen. I watch the rolling of the world from

this chair, and pick pieces, like swollen
fruit. A bee pounds on the windowpane,

trying to reach sun amidst it's doom; it

doesn't understand. The roof yawns
in the wind, creaking and groaning like
a lover turned over. Hard to ignore the
song of night peeling out of day's soft
shell, spreading it's feathers across the sky.

Searing clocks and birthing tongues,
the ink sets a stain on virgin pages.



Peruvian President's office, taken by Michael Diaz

Elizabeth Murphy

My daddy lies

..

here dead in the morgue
and I haven't had a chance
to mourn yet. His finger twitches
and eye lids flutter like the wings
of a dying fly.

My daddy never punished
me, never yelled, nor treated,
shared or smiled. Never was
his hug May warm on my skin.
Never. He never was there.

My daddy's leech
of a last name embeds itself
Deep. Fuming out my pours,
Leaking out my eyes, my wounds,
my nose, my sweat, my breast milk,
Daddy.

My daddy never was,
Nor could be my
daddy. Dads won't pretend,
dads don't dismiss, fathers
aren't absent. Sperm
donors sometimes
acknowledge at a distance
as animals sometimes
eat their young. That's love
all the same, I feel no hatred.

My dear daddy,
Momma struggles, and
I'm afraid you drained
our beauty. Butterflies
do cry in the winter time
now father .

My daddy breathes
my breath somewhere.
At times, I wonder if
we inhale and exhale the same
time. He lies, and I have lied.
My daddy lays himself
in the morgue. He isn't dead,
but he might as well be.

Amanda Candrilli

Falling

..

Red and yellow leaves clap against tarred bedrock.
A mauve wall of clouds crowds the moon's glow.
A sole figure sequestered within a pane of glass,
Agape and grasping the scene of the street below.

Her elbows are deployed upon the white windowsill,
Back painfully arched to encompass clear views,
Stretching hands burst through sleeves like blossoming flowers
Sporadically grasping at their conversations, bringing them near.

Oh idiopathic idolatry for idiocracy, while hankering
For a party to look in and admire her with similar furor.
She shakes her head and her world like an etch-a-sketch,
Denying anything from grasping permanency in her frame.

Monette Anderson

i do

..

I think about circus
animals when I'm
constipated

- lions I want

to braid

- elephants

I want to
suck.

I darken my
eyebrows

- with a Fine

point pen who
disemboweled
my grammar

- gum trap

my tongue to
a gag reflex.

I can't wait

- for my

seven veils
to dance

- to keep

your name

barbed on
a dash,
encoded with
our wedding
date
in case
WASPs

- call me

yellow.

Salvatore Tarantola

The Newsstand

..

A pebble became lodged in the sole of my boot as I walked past one of the construction areas that seemed to have proliferated in Bay Ridge over the past three years. The skeletons of multi-family housing sprung up on almost any block you cared to walk on between 65th and 86th Streets, and I found it nearly impossible to remember what home or store was knocked down to make room for the uninspired and intrusive structures. Bay Ridge wasn't a neighborhood that readily submitted to change, and being a resident for most of my adult life, I found the metamorphosis offensive and threatening. The old limestone and pre-war apartment buildings comprising much of the landscape stood guard over the community to warn newcomers of their steadfast place in Brooklyn history, and to dissuade developers and young, liberal politicians from enticing the infidels with their promises of a welcoming, incumbent populace and low-priced dwellings. I rested my foot on the base of a lamppost and removed the nuisance with the tip of my ballpoint pen. The black rock bounced twice on the sidewalk and plunged into a storm drain at the curb without a sound.

It was early Saturday morning. Spring bulbs marched in place within their wrought iron prisons at the foot of every address, and my street was still asleep after the noisy and discourteous Friday night throngs had barged through to the bars and 24-hour take-outs up and down the adjoining avenues. I couldn't remember where I parked my car the afternoon before, so I headed toward the corner of 74th Street and 3rd Avenue to resuscitate my memory; that's where I'd stopped and ran into Olivia's to pick up the newspapers and some smokes before finding an elusive spot and walking home.

Forty-ounce bottles of Olde English and Colt 45, some empty, some partially consumed, others shattered, were discarded at the bases of several trees and on the front steps of one or two

unfenced homes along the way. Various clumps of garbage lined either side of the gutter, and the decent cars that used to park on this street, like the lawyers' freshly detailed convertible Mercedes', or the podiatrists' black, shining BMWs, were slowly being replaced by Hyundai's and faded, pre-80s four-door Chevys and Fords.

Day laborers, whose presence had exploded simultaneously with the metastasis of cheap condominiums, and the children and friends of the invaders making quarters in the vertical eyesores, were the bringers of this new layer of filth to the scenery. Who else could it be? Bay Ridge had successfully staved *no-class* encroachment unlike Benson Hurst, Gravesend, and other neighborhoods in Central and Southern Brooklyn, but it was apparent that a persistent bacterium had finally penetrated our defense, and it multiplied unseen among the muted facades and painted cornices of this once prestigious town they used to call Yellow Hook. I had seen the eyes of those repulsed by my presence in their haven, and I fought to prove my worth and my right to sow seeds there by sweeping my sidewalk, establishing neighborly relationships, and buying the house in which I lived. My family and I were part of the demographic fabric, and we and our kind dyed that cloth to a hue that was finally colorless. I was witnessing the approach of a stubborn stain, and saw my fight for entry and acceptance becoming insignificant. Reverse gentrification had arrived at our doorstep.

"Hi, Olivia. Hey, Olivia! Can you hear me? It's me, Mr. Druillet." Olivia was the owner of the Optimo newsstand where I'd stopped the day before. Though the place wasn't a newsstand in the traditional sense, *Newsstand* was the word painted in white and black on the big sign hung over the entrance. The business existed long before I got to Brooklyn. Its wood-planked floor was worn shiny by decades of customer traffic, and the patterned Formica countertops were faded by the sliding of saucers and silverware, and the incessant movement of small change. Olivia was fumbling quarts of milk at the refrigerator toward the back of the store. Her image was framed by two spinning potato chip racks, and just above her hoary updo hung a swaying length of dried, yellow fly tape. The place was redolent with fresh pound cake, newly delivered papers, and percolating coffee.

"Hello? Is somebody there?" Olivia began to turn as she spoke and dropped a milk carton. I walked over to help her, but not too quickly. She startled easily, and her eighty-year-old heart would probably forgive my reluctant assistance.

"Ah, Mr. D. I'm so glad you're here this morning. Oh, no,

no. Don't bother. I'll pick it up." Olivia gripped the small red container with an age-twisted hand and threw it into the fridge. I was always mesmerized by the residual strength that the elderly could summon from their bodies. I saw the muscles of Olivia's forearm and hand in action, and watched as her purple veins snaked their way through the striations and disappeared into a rolled-up sleeve. Her pallid skin was a thin sheet that covered withering anatomy, but beneath it all was a machine that could still hoist stacks of magazines and newspapers, serve-up twenty donuts and fifty cups of coffee, and make meaningful conversation with myriad comers and goers, and all before 6 a.m. Olivia wore black every time I saw her, and today was no exception. At five feet, she stood near a foot shorter than me. She wore a skirt that was probably too revealing for her station in life, and nylon socks that fell to a clump on her shoes. Olivia was on the thin side, but it was easy to see that real beauty and robustness had only recently left her. Her breasts looked warm and replete, and they lay unrestrained upon her ribcage. Between them was a silver Eastern cross that she often kissed. Her eyes were brown and they crackled with the subtle orange light of the store. Outside, the 3rd Avenue serenade began with screeching tires and an obnoxious, heavy-handed horn.

"Mr. D, sit down and let me get you some coffee. I made it fresh."

I quickly complied as Olivia shuffled behind the counter and pulled down a cup. There was an opened *New York Post* on the table, but I didn't bother perusing; I found its' prose beneath me.

"So how are you feeling, Olivia? How's business? ...Olivia? Olivia?"

"I'm fine, Mr. D. This weather's a little crazy, though. It's been such a warm April. I'm not used to such comfortable weather so early in the year. Business? Business is pretty good. Had lotsa customers this morning. A little strange for a Saturday." She placed the coffee in front of me and slid a bowl of sugar next to my hand.

"How are you today, Mr. D? You look a little upset about something."

I didn't offer a truthful answer right away, and I scanned the overstocked shop as I replied with Brooklyn small talk.

"Ah, nothin', really. You know, bills, work, my big fat belly. All that kinda shit." I'd patronized the place for more than seven years, but never stayed more than five minutes, or engaged in any real conversation with her. *Maybe it was time to get to know Olivia a little better.*

The coffee was delicious; it didn't even need any milk.

"Actually, I'm a little concerned about the direction that the neighborhood seems to be going in, Olivia. I went to an indoor ATM on 5th Avenue last week, and two bums, white guys, were sleeping right in front of the machine. They were wrapped in a blanket, and the stink of vomit and piss was overwhelming. I had to hold my breath and reach on tippy-toes to get my money. When I got home from work later that day, I saw yellow barricade tape at the front of the same bank—it was robbed at somethin' like two in the afternoon. I couldn't believe it."

"Oh, yes. I heard about the hold-up. Marta, she's one of the tellers, she came here the day after and told me about it. She said two white fellows came in with guns and threw a bag over that little window that the girls sit behind and demanded it to be filled. Everyone was so afraid that they were going to shoot the place up, but they didn't. They took about thirty-thousand dollars, my goodness." Olivia counted-off singles from a shoebox and wiped the table and turned on the lottery machine as she spoke to me. Her face was as white as white could be, and when she looked at me, it was like being looked upon by a negative image of my grandmother back in Missouri. Olivia's glance was comforting.

"Do you live in Bay Ridge, Olivia?"

"Oh, yes. I've lived here for almost seventy years. I live right upstairs. My husband died twenty-three years ago, then I took over the business. Thank heavens I don't have to pay rent. We were able to buy the building a long time ago, before the prices got so crazy."

Just as she finished speaking, two Arabic women quickly walked past the front of the store. Like robed demons they shot looks at us through the slits of their black burkas. They were scary, and they were everywhere. I saw them behind the wheels of giant SUVs, and pushing strollers with their young up and down the avenues. I thought their husbands didn't allow such freedoms and hypocrisies, I guess I was wrong.

"I hate those Muslims. They look like black Klansmen, only more terrifying. At least you know what a Klansman might have on his mind, right? Those Muslim women always look like they're putting a curse on you, or plotting to blow up your house when you're sleeping."

Olivia didn't respond. I wasn't even sure that she heard me. Two men entered the store in the middle of a conversation. They were Mexican, and dressed in flannels and torn jeans. One of them

had a claw hammer hanging from his hip.

“Good morning, Señorita.”

“Oh, buenos días, boys. Two hot chocolates and two glazed, right?”

On their way to build another sand castle, right?

“Good morning, Mister.” One of them shocked me with a greeting.

“Hey, good morning. How are you?”

Olivia handed them a brown paper bag and they walked out. I looked through the big plate window and saw that the avenue had come to life with dog-walkers and early shoppers. The white building across the street was awash in pink sunlight.

“So, what else is on your mind Mr. D?”

The door opened again, and in slid a 30ish man with a weather-burned face and stains on his drooping shirt. His shoes were untied and his odor was deeply objectionable. He seemed to be foaming at the mouth.

“O l i v i a. Can I hava cuppa coffee, sweetheart? Please.”

“Hiya, Henry. Where’s your brother today?” Olivia poured a take-out cup and placed it on the counter next to me. The man lurched over and took a stool. I got up and faked some interest in the magazine rack. He and Olivia leaned in close to each other and spoke almost in whispers. I found her willingness to be near him surprising.

“I’m sorry Mr. D. He’s gone.”

“An old friend, I assume.”

I walked back to the small counter and sat before Olivia’s furrowed brow.

“Come now, Mr. D. Henry’s not an old friend, but he is someone that I care about. His brother Charlie, too. They usually travel as a team, but he told me that Charlie passed away. That poor, poor boy. He was 36. The two men that you saw sleeping in the bank were probably Henry and Charlie, Mr. D.” I felt scolded and a little ashamed. There was something in the toaster. A bell rang and Olivia dropped a poppy seed bagel by my second cup of coffee.

“Well, Mr. D. What else is on your mind?”

I answered her with a blank stare and swallowed my strange remorse at hearing of Charlie’s death. Olivia was breaking rolls of quarters into the register as I continued with my original train of thought.

“It’s just that I feel like I’m being pushed out of something,

you know? Like there are all of these strange and inconsiderate people suddenly around me. I walked into a candy store to get some lollipops for my daughter the other day, and this Arab kid walks in, cuts right in front of me, and says to the guy, "Gimme a ten-dolla phone card," like I wasn't even standing there. The Arab clerk then gives this idiot the card and completely ignores me as well. Then the kid walks outside and starts laughing about it with all of his Arab friends. Forget about parking around here. These crazy people whip u-turns at ninety miles-an-hour just to try and beat you to an open spot, even though it's legitimately yours. Then they're ready to hop out of the car with a baseball bat if you don't give it up. If that's not enough, there's all of these buildings going up, like on 72nd Street and 81st Street, and there's something like twelve families living in two apartments. Their kids and all their cousins and all these foreigners are sitting on cars, throwing garbage in the street, giving you dirty looks if you glance in their direction. It's ridiculous. This neighborhood used to be mine. What happened?"

She pursed her lips and looked down at the floor. I thought maybe she didn't hear me, but then she closed the register drawer and walked over to where I was sitting. A thousand poppy seeds surrounded my cup.

"You know, Mr. D..." The door crashed open and a woman entered the store. Her burka flowed like ink across the floor as she ran to Olivia and hugged her. The breeze she left as she passed behind me smelled flowery and clear, but it wasn't perfume. It was just pure.

"Grandmama, hallo. Oh, I love you, I love you." They squeezed and slowly rocked each other, and the woman buried her shrouded face in Olivia's tiny shoulder. I was aghast. I even felt a little sick.

"Madecha, my girl. Where are you going today?" They ended their embrace and began to speak enthusiastically. I looked down at the countertop; the *New York Post* was gone. Henry must've taken it. I left five bucks and then I left the store.

"Oh, no. The car!" I could see it my mind as clearly as when I parked it. "It's on 78th Street between 3rd and 4th. Shit." I walked up along the passenger side and kept my eye on the windshield for signs of orange, and there it was. "A hundred and fifteen bucks." I stayed at the newsstand too long. The street still seemed dirty and the houses less beautiful than ever.

I pushed open my front door and walked upstairs to the bedroom. I kneeled and reached under the bed and pulled out a

green hatbox that held hundreds of old pictures. I pushed aside photos of my wife, my daughters, my Aunt Ethel and Uncle Ed, friends, and dogs, and cousins, in search of one that hadn't seen light in over twenty years. And there, near the bottom of the box wrapped in purple cloth was the horror. I took it out, replaced the lid and pushed the box back under the bed.

The banister felt cool as I palmed its length down the stairs. I walked outside, sat down on the front steps and began to unwrap the photo. My breath became short and my pulse throbbed in my fingertips before I folded back the last section to reveal the photo fully. There, in sepia tint, was my great grandfather hanged from a high branch of a slippery elm. A crowd of whites were at his curled toes looking up at what they had done. His body was long and looked like something El Greco foretold long ago; his dead eyes stared at something on the ground. One of my tears fell onto his image. *Oh, no. I'll ruin it.* I covered the picture and wept into my hands. I heard someone laughing, but I didn't look up. I think it was a child. The laughter and sound of scraping leather soles came closer and closer, and then they stopped.

"Excuse me sir, excuse me." I lifted my head and saw an Arabic man with short hair and a close beard standing there holding the hand of a little beautiful girl.

"My daughter, sir, would like to give you something."

I stood and walked down the steps to where they were waiting, and I crouched to meet her glorious face. She was no more than four.

"I want you to have this because you are sad."

She brought her tiny arm from behind her back and proudly held out a red tulip.

"Oh, thank you so very much. It is the most beautiful flower I've ever seen. You have made me very, very happy. What's your name?" She took a deep breath and smiled.

"My name is Nawar."

They continued toward the avenue and I stood up and watched them until they were gone. I went back inside and up to the hatbox under the bed. I placed the picture back inside and rested the tulip on top of it.

"Thank you, Nawar. Thank you."

Chelsea Gendvil

The Curl of a Hair

A body exists
filled with holes
and spaces. A thought craves
to stuff them, the gaps
in perception. She remembers
him the way she thinks
he is. The way
she wants him.
Until he's there
then, "Oh yes, that was it."
Maybe the difference
in the curl of a hair.
Something always drops
a little lower, blurs a bit
closer. She finds his laugh
is deeper in her ears.
His colors,
shades of warmth,
burning and cooling
in her brain.
His flesh confesses
it races with atoms.
Her lips touched
with his own, smooth
a chapped crease with eager
moisture. The friction of movement
rushes downy skin together
as electrons switch briefly.
Two clouds of molecules
breathe liminally into each other.

They are numerous
tiny circles dallying
about one another.
What is touch
is a blend of dots
drawn symbiotically
not touching.

The Red Minutes

Your gagging throat.
Your matted hair
wet with sweat.
The pills your tongue
rolled down your belly
for the headache
and the hangover.
Those red seconds
smelled like gin
and looked like
cat food. The covers
of our bed ruined.
Your bitter breath
mumbling sex.
The suave stumble.
You convinced me
this turned me on,
your parody of love.
But your liquor heavy
blood nodded your head
and fainted it
on my stomach,
its pillow. My belly
button echoed
your snores. I loved
you in those red minutes
like a pet loving child.
You, my breathing doll

I was grateful
for your haphazard affection.
In those red hours,
I absorbed the minty sadness
burning cool in my cheeks.
That love faded softly
with the first flutter
of your waking eyes.

I am the narrator. I am just up in the sky telling the story.
I just know everything. So pay no attention to me.

— Josiah Sable, *ten years old*

Spiridoula Karagiannis

The Penitent Magdalen Georges De la Tour

Life and death come as one
The life within my groin
The death on my lap

My husband's child
My husband's skull

What will become of me
Sitting here contemplating
My own life, if I take it
The child will also die
If I do not then I must
Be charged with

My husband's murder
My husband's soul

This candle my only light
It burns and yet I freeze
The bitter days fade
The stares from the town
Burn holes in my spine

My husband's spine
My husband's skull

Sitting here contemplating
My own demise, the candle's
Flame turns to Hellfire
As it falls to the floor

The flames cleanse me
Of my sins and

My husband's child
My husband's death

Dark Side of the Moon

My unhappiness consumes,
The noise of my mind blending
With that of the uncaring world.
A monsoon of confusion strikes
Slamming my emotions to the shore
Shattering. I bleed fear.

It licks its lips of dripping blood
As it indulges in its feast of me.
I weep dreaming of the moon,
Trying to block out the sound
Of starving chewing teeth.
The unhappiness devours me.

The sun selfishly disregards me
As I lie there dying, hemorrhaging.
I ignore the rising pain as it hits
Me. The sun seems deaf to
My blood curdling screams and
Blind to the gore soaked shore.

The moon has vacated my world,
It hides its beautiful caring eyes
And keeps the soothing sounds
Of night. Perhaps the moon could
Bring an end to the carnage.
The dark side calms and ends the banquet.

Unhappiness takes viciously small bites
As life trickles away towards the shore.

I wonder when this agony will end,
This destruction of a human life.
The sun joins me in bleeding
As I hear the night noises arrive.

The night muffling the chewing,
I regain my strength and rebound.
It ends as the bleeding slows
The water cleansing the shore.
The moon smiles conspiratorially
As the cool calm night commences.

I life myself from the sand
And begin to run, frolicking
Naked free of care. Overlooking,
For now, the mere hours I have
Until the next consumption.

Margaret Harper

Memoir of an Ex-Prostitute
“Just Do It!”

..

After serving ninety days on Prison Island for possession of marijuana, I looked a mess. My weave was gone and I badly needed a fresh perm. I threw away the skimpy clothing that I wore when arrested, except for the stiletto shoes that I kindly gave to a young girl who was thrilled to death over them. After being encouraged by other inmates, I helped myself to old clothing that had been lying around our cell block; the blue kakis I wore on the morning of my release looked more like they were part of a uniform than actual street clothing. It was early September and the weather was still warm so I needed nor coat or jacket. Instead I wore an unrecognizable large shirt with stripes. Finally, as a free woman, I wore the one thing that was intentionally bought just for me...my brand new Black and White Uptown Nikes.

My name is Victory, I'm twenty-three and this is my story. My parents, who died in a fire three years ago while trapped in their upstairs bedroom, told me they chose my name because of the overwhelming joy they felt when I was born. You see, they loved each other more than any man and woman I had ever known and told me they had tried a very long time to have a child, so they felt victorious. I loved them a lot, though I'd always pondered the reality of my name...Victory. But on the streets of New York I was called Satin, thanks to an old boyfriend named Frank who turned me out.

Being the only child, there was no real family to turn to...and no money; everything I once had was gone. I was treated as an outcast by my father's side of the family because my mother was his unlikely second wife... and her family lived in Alabama, a place I had no desire to even visit. I dropped out of college in the middle of my sophomore year to help Frank spend the little money I inherited after

funeral expenses. I didn't do cocaine or heroine. Marijuana chased by Grey Goose was the drug I craved. Frank and my two pimps after him seemed to always have plenty of it when I took breaks from walking in stiletto through the cement jungle of New York City. In fact, my stay at Prison was a much needed break.

I'll never forget that night; I was picked up during a police sweep on a 'loitering to commit prostitution' charge. But after being fingerprinted I was shipped to Prison on a prior – possession of marijuana, which is another story. Everyday during my imprisonment I would ask myself...and God:

Will this be a turning point in my life...or will I return to the pimps, pushers and whores?

Sure, I was locked up several times in the past, but never made it to Prison Island. Well, call it what you want: luck, blessing, or just pure fate when I met a cellmate named Judy in a prison dorm that resembled a bubble. It was connected by an outside walkway to the main building on the women's side. How did I get there? ...Maybe divine intervention. Anyway, Judy introduced me to a man named Paul over the phone during break time. He was some kind of community activist and lived in Canarsie, a part of Brooklyn I worked and knew very well. He was also a white Caucasian and I wondered why he wanted to befriend someone like me, a Black ghetto prostitute whom he had never seen and knew nothing about, except for what Judy told him...she built me up to be a good girl who really needed help.

I couldn't make commissary (that's when people send money to their loved ones in jail so they can buy cigarettes, snacks or any necessary thing the inmate might need) because pimps, pushers and whores seem to forget about you when you're locked up and unable to produce...at least the ones I knew. But Paul sent me commissary twice *and* the Black and White Uptown Nikes. He also promised, during our phone conversations, that he would help me make a new start. All I had to do was call him when I was released and he'd be there for me. My self esteem was low and my faith in humanity had long ago died. Needless to say, when I was released I ran back to the same streets with the same punks.

What was I expecting as I rushed back to the abode of my last pimp, Cowboy, and his two whores, Star and Diva...a celebration of joy that I was out of jail? What I got was a fresh pair of stilettos, a new weave and a ride in a white Mercedes Benz that took me back to

hell where I reacquainted myself with almost forgotten johns, drugs, alcohol and my old street name 'Satin'.

"Hey baby! Did you miss me?"

"Yeah girl, daddy's pickin' us up in a few, we gotta get you ready" answered Diva, the youngest whore who had just turned seventeen. And that was that.

I was angry that no one had even tried to get me out or at least send me commissary, but I said nothing...just continued to do what I had been doing when I was swept up by the police nearly three months ago. But something deep down in me had changed. I told no one, but kept thinking about Paul and his promise.

Everything seemed to be falling apart. Most of my street family was in jail or on their way because of lingering court cases that could no longer wait. The thought of Paul and his promise of help haunted me day and night until finally while walking the whore's strip, I looked up and saw a great light exuding from the fullness of the moon. It lit up the streets and the night suddenly turned to day. I became transfixed by all the brightness; that's when God whispered to me:

"Stop and go."

I began to walk away and slowly realized that the whores, pimps and johns had cleared the streets. Through silence I heard the clicking of my stilettos on the sidewalk and after walking a distance I took them off, reached into my large handbag, grabbed my cell and threw it away, then I reached in again and took out the Black and White Uptowns Paul had sent me while in prison...and with courage I spoke out loud:

"Just Do It!"

I then ran to the Parkway, found a pay phone and called Paul. I was so relieved that he was home and began apologizing for not calling sooner as I had promised.

"Hi Paul...please...Don't hang up...I'm so sorry for not calling sooner...when I was first released...I really need help."

"Victory! ...Where are you now?"

"On the Parkway."

"You're not very far from me. I'll send a cab for you. Give me an address"

"134 E. 2nd Chance Court."

"Okay, look out for 'Bringitonhome Car Service,' they shouldn't take long."

"Thanks Paul."

When I arrived he was outside waiting. This would be our first face to face meeting. He was in his forties, medium height, average weight with dirty blond mixed with grey shoulder length hair. He looked like a relic from the sixties revolution. I hadn't felt shy in quite some time, but he and his friend made me a welcomed guest right away.

"Hello Victory, I'm glad you made it"

"So am I."

It felt good hearing someone call me by the name my parents had given me and to actually listen to the pronunciation of the syllables. He then introduced me to his friend, Gary. They were both congenial though I perceived Gary as being present for protection rather than friendship, just in case I turned out to be someone dangerous.

I tried to hide my nervousness by talking incessantly:

"What a beautiful chair. Is this a one of a kind? I've never seen one like it before. There's a bus stop down the corner from here, isn't there? Whatever you're cooking smells very good. Men are such good cooks....etc... etc...etc..."

He finally stopped my rattle by taking my hand and leading me into another room off to the left of where we stood. The room was very nice and cozy but the décor wasn't what he was interested in showing off. He walked over to the two large army bags resting on a love seat.

"I hope everything fits. I went by your size you described over the phone."

I was at once speechless, but heard myself say:

"Thank you."

"Looking at you now I think everything will fit perfectly," he offered as I tried like hell to find composure.

As I couldn't contain myself any longer I started to cry and explain to him how undeserving I felt in receiving such unconditional love from someone I had deceived.

He just looked at me, smiled and said, "This is what I do". He then left me alone in the room and joined his friend Gary in preparing dinner. I stayed looking through all the things he had saved for me, with unbelievable joy.

Later the three of us ate dinner, talked, and laughed until midnight when Gary left. He lived in the bungalow next door to Gary's. I retired to Paul's bedroom after showering and figured the least I could do was give him sex for all that he had done. Life had

taught me that nobody does anything for you just out of kindness, and I was willing to pay my debt. He watched me as I walked naked into his bedroom. Tall, thin and shapely, I was glistening from all the Johnson's baby oil I had poured over my body. Our eyes met and lingered before he turned away from me, gathered some things out of a drawer and told me to have sweet dreams.

"I'll be sleeping in the other room...You have a big day ahead of you...Get some sleep. Good night and sweet dreams Victory."

"But...okay, goodnight."

I kinda' think expected to have a little fun in bed before sending me off to rehab but changed his mind midstream, deciding instead to treat me like a lady. God had been intervening a lot for me lately.

That morning he left for work and entrusted me to lock up behind myself. But when I locked and closed his door to start my life changing journey to rehab, I saw him a half block away, watching my every move. I carried one bag with me since he promised the night before to send the other one wherever I settled; I promised to call and leave a forwarding address. He said he had faith that I would do the right thing, though I know he had doubts. I had to prove to him that I would "just do it!".

Paul kept his promise and I kept mine. He sent the other bag and I never heard from him since. I tried calling and left messages with numbers where

I could be reached, but he never called. I don't know where he is or if he's even alive, but I do know that I will never forget him; he will live forever in my memory of very important people. As for me...I got myself together and I'm movin' on!

Casey R. Troeller

Bin Hooker

..

Garbage picking,
Finding value in what others have tossed away
I think I was lying on that curb
When the new 'she' found me
And quickly
She found so many uses
For that lumpy bag of trash
I called, "myself"

Later on
Cleaned up, shaven, in shape
She would look at me
But the corners of her eyes no longer smiled
I think that she,
Samantha, only liked potential
She threw me to the street again
But I stood and walked away this time
Because I am more modern now
Having recently been Reduced, Reused, and Recycled

Only Here and Now is Real

..

Yes, I am awake,
But how like a dream it is.
Three months to study
Here in London.

Was leaving not falling asleep
Allowing the world, my world at least,
To keep moving and changing
While I am blissfully unaware

Mostly though
My return will make it dreamlike
Having awoken,
It will become mine alone
And no description, no words
Will truly help others to see

They will never know
How real it was
How complete I felt
How it changed me

And the worst of it is
That it shall fade from me too
In my mind become fragmented and vague
Leaving only
The hope
That my slumber will send me there again

Often I think now
Of becoming comatose



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