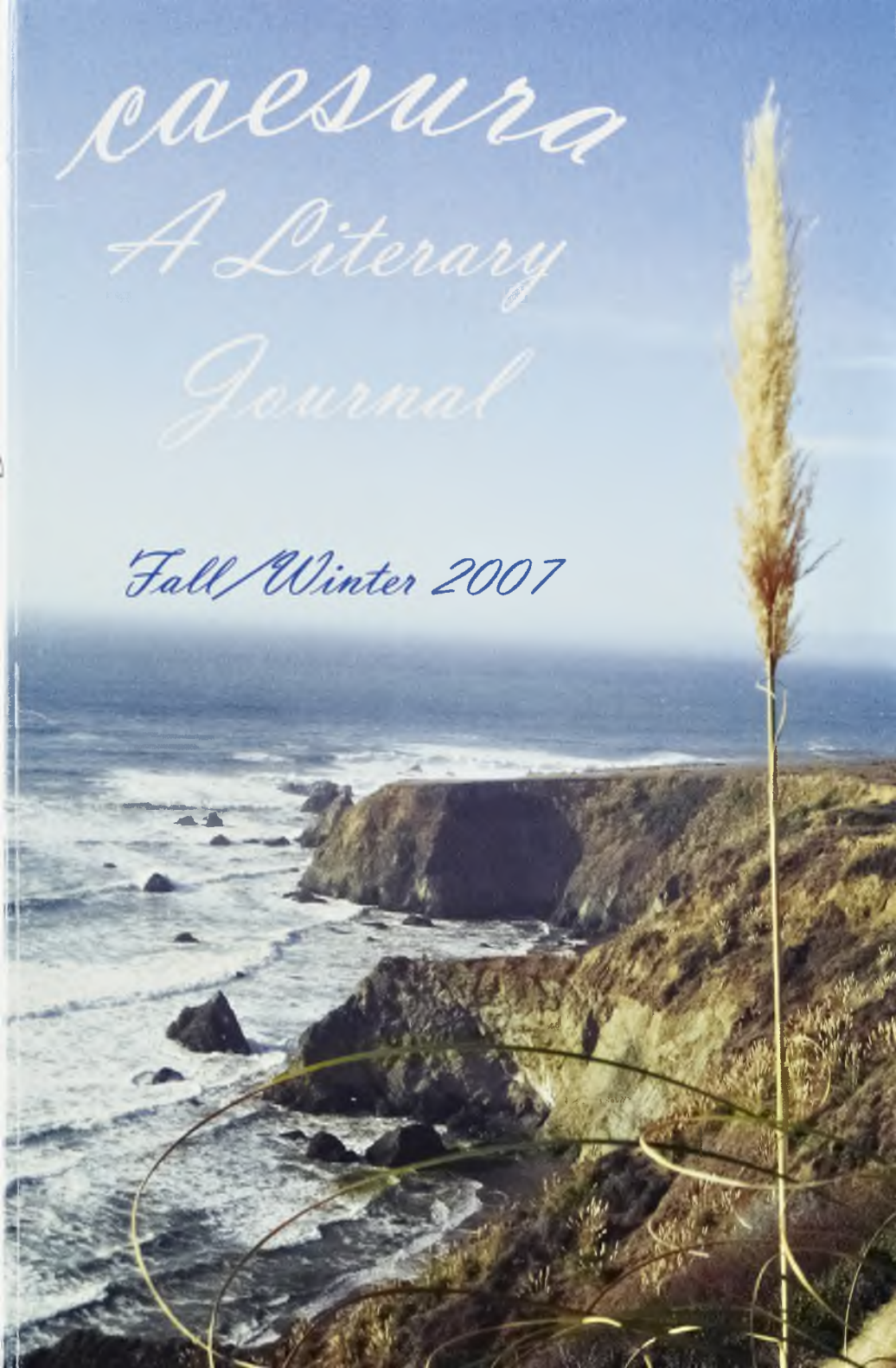


caesura
A Literary
Journal

Fall/Winter 2007



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.

-noun, plural cae-su-ra [sa-zhoor-a, sa-zhoor-ae]
1. Prosody. A break, esp. a sense pause, usually near the middle of a verse, and marked in scansion by a double vertical line, as in:

His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them "Supper." || At that word, || the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out of the boy's hand, || or seemed to leap—
He must have given the hand. || However it was,
Neither refused the meeting.

Robert Frost
"Out, out—" 13-18

2. A division made by the ending of a 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.

Staff

Editor In Chief	Jennifer Fitzgerald
Assistant Editor	Richard Fedey
Assistant Editor & Treasurer	Megan Moriarty
Layout Editor	Monette Grajo

Submission Guidelines

Caesura, a literary forum for the students of the College of Staten Island, welcomes poetry, fiction, plays, and creative non-fiction that reflect interest in the craft of writing. Submissions should be emailed to CaesuraEditorInChief@gmail.com.

Writers will be informed within 2 weeks of receiving their submission.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to graciously apologize for not mentioning Professor Cate Marvin for her contribution to the last issue of *Caesura*. The cover photo was taken and submitted by her.

Photos in this edition are from Jennifer Fitzgerald and David Young.

Statement of Environmental Ethics

We consider *Caesura* an environmentally concerned undertaking; as such, one of our principle goals in producing this and all issues, was to not add to strain on our forests.. This issue is printed on 100% recycled paper.

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We, at *Caesura* are proud to publish the work of:

Mike Kelly, winner of the Inkwell Writing Across the Curriculum essay contest;

Jennifer Fitzgerald, second place in the Inkwell Writing Across the Curriculum essay contest;

Megan Moriarty, winner of the 2006-2007 Keyla Selgado Memorial Poetry Prize for best love poem;

Richard Fedey, winner of the 2006-2007 Rehberg Memorial Poetry Prize for best sequence of poems.



Poetry

If your life must be validated
in all its anger and hostility
to a world you don't want,
or in all its regret and loneliness
in a world that doesn't want you,
the validation waits inside you
to find itself in words on the
most ordinary sheet of paper.

– Richard Hugo

María DiLorenzo

THIS OLD HOUSE

The floor board creaked above me.
I knew which rooms you stepped through.
Your slippers flip flopped against linoleum.
The wood of the banister shook with enough enthusiasm;
I knew to push all his weight from me
as if a dog with a wagging tail had pounced on me.
He crept out of the same window he snuck into and
you thought I had the innocence of an amusement
park.
I could wear your white gown in ten years.

I used to roller skate
on the cement basement floor and
pretend it was ice and
my wheels, blades.
I used to slide across a carpet
spotted black and white-
the coat of a panda-
until my knees were rug burned.

You did the laundry through all of this.
The rosy scent of fabric softener stuck to my shirt.
Cigarette smoke clung to my pig tails
and blotted each wall yellow.
The sun invaded every room,
it could pour through a crevice if given the chance.

Each morning the same glare beat down
on my face.

I left some years ago;
left a lawn as dry as overcooked meat,
left a stoop with a thousand ant holes.
Homes are hand me downs,
passed on like flu,
passed down like habit,
I give up.

POLYGAMIST LEADER IN UTAH
CONVICTED OF SEX CHARGES

She dressed her dolls in lingerie
she found stashed in her mother's drawer;
beneath flannel pajamas,
a music box of costume jewelry.
The lace and satin piled up
like sugar stuck to the bottom of a coffee mug.
She didn't know
why a man held open the door with his fat hands
like a clamp holding a tongue about to be pierced.

The next day she tossed a lilac bouquet into the river
bank.

A tarnished ring,
as rusty as a bike chain
indented her finger.
The sun was masked behind a sheer canopy of clouds;
she stood fenced in by a spiked gate.
Why would a man buy a woman a drink?

A jump rope hung from the door instead of a robe.
She double-dutched with an invisible friend,
while pots and pans crashed to the floor
and soup cans poured from the pantry
like an avalanche.
Why must one wife out of so many others
be the only maid?

Her husband,
with skin white as the feather of a dove
and tongue rigid as a coral reef,
slid up and down her body
as if she were the maple fret board of a guitar.
She lay still as an iguana and wondered.
Why does a man smile at the cleavage of a half but-
toned shirt?

Her bathroom light flickered,
as she overflowed her throat with pills.
Curled up on the floor,
she pretends to drown,
but the water whirled with too much salt.
She awoke asking,
Why does my cousin wants a divorce?

IN BAD HEALTH

I have health
slashed to the rim with a box cutter,
emphysema slapping my lungs with its brick.
my appendix in a jar,
torn stitches on my left side.
I have insurance. I'm a good patient.
I have a coffin catalogue, a bra catalogue,
a catalogue of books I've never read,
as seen on t.v. showcase.
I have a laugh for every occasion,
the dim funeral home, the disco wedding hall,
snap shots in between
my mouth split like a tiny interstice
between chapped lips.
I have bones,
none are funny.
I have car accidents
that turn my spine into a crescent.
I have accidental words,
they sneak up on you like heart disease,
falling like aircraft from my mouth,
you take everything I say to heart and bed.
I have a lazy stomach
curdling like milk, every Sunday dinner.
I have an expiration date,
a satin dress, mary janes, and pearls for the day.
I have birthday candles; I will never light them.
I have a heart chiseled from clay,
it's an unsteady skyscraper looking down at you,
snapping at its beams and hinges,
frightening you like a freefall without a parachute.

I have teeth grinding a curb,
manholes like craters fracturing my ankle
when I trip.
I have a midnight drive across the Belt Parkway
and an ocean flooding my lane.
I have my chest tightening like a ribbon,
old streets like burial grounds,
I tread down Utica Avenue when you're gone

when you're gone
I have a Brooklyn accent
I keep in storage.
I have nothing but a black street

Richard Fedey

VESPERS

[Noah] recorded hours and hours of [music in his room]... An ardent audiophile, he eschewed digital recordings in favor of the sonic nuance of vinyl. along the walls [is] an obsessively organized collection of hundreds of albums by hundreds of musicians ranging from the indie band Sebadoh to the Russian composer Scriabin. [Noah was] composing his own classical pieces, including a sonata and a nocturne...

In Noah's Room

New York Times 9/17/06

I – In Noah's Room

The sun rises only in narrow lines
when the blinds are closed; what light falls
drapes itself over cables that synapse
between guitar and amp, amp and vinyl.
What light falls lies on an ornate key,
its head wrought into a treble clef,
that has leapt out of trine, and cleft
the pentad lines.

II – Fountains of Rome

Water is the key:
how its ghost-cloud mist falls,
beads on grooved vinyl.
From synapse
to synapse,

leaping the cleft
from the vinyl-
black lines
to ears where it falls.
Water is the key.

III – Luminosity

The wind in the key-
hole crosses the synapse
and winter falls;
voices in the cleft
speak brutal lines:
“No one uses vinyl!
No one uses vinyl!”
This key!
Tracing its lines
calms the synapse,
quiets the cleft.
Then the key falls.
The key falls,
shatters the vinyl,
and the sound cleaves.
Squeezing the key,
‘*pain*’ leaps between synapses.
I have cleared my lines.

IV – Nocturne

Between the lines the flat note falls,
and the light from synapse and vinyl:
the key and the clef have leapt

CHERYL'S AMPUTATION
(A ST. VALENTINE'S DAY POEM)

Lying with her face against the sheets,
a fan of loose red hair across her neck,
she talks into the mattress; the words eaten

in the space between the white and black
stripes that cross the pillowcase
like time-lapse stars that streak

their tails through the night's obscure face
where wishes sail up and dissolve.
Across her back, drops like melted ice

roll their trails over a golden dove
tattooed on the sharp ridge of her shoulder,
magnifying its black eyes; a coven

of gilded feathers, their wet glimmer
in the vague light from the street
through the snow-packed zephyr,

rest in neat-plumed silhouettes.
She rolls to face the green-glowing moon
that hangs over our bed: a pendant

she painted and left to dangle in our room;
the wind outside shakes the walls
and the orb in the raving gale swoons;

the string breaks and the globe falls
and lands between her breasts.
She doesn't wake, just knocks the ball

away; she leaves her fist against
the red mark on her freckled skin,
in conclave with private lusts.

As the pale green moon blackens
on the floor, through the semi-opaque
window enter questions with the wind:

What if the skin of her stomach
was an ocean, and I was sailing west?
Would the white-crested drifts that break

like winter's grey clouds sliced
by the first knives of spring sun,
their spray rained, pit and rust

where her saline drops run,
or like the February snow
cover the rough and shifting plane

that swells, its breakers drown
against the shore of her voice
as she breathes in, breathes out?

Shipwrecked on her moist
promises by moonless foam,
their grains sticking to my face,

then something new: what if she lost her arm?
Without the left or right,
would a phantom hand still touch the same?

Suppose a cruel accident,
and one limb was crushed;
some drunk or careless adolescent

muddled in his car's freshness:
what secrets could she hide
without that fist bent up against her chest?

The crux that keeps me up at night
dreaming things to take from her
(a heart, an arm, a secret)

is she is more whole, more body,
and envy that she can sleep
full and naked, while naked, I

show only a phantom heart: it beats,
bleeds like all hearts should;
there's nothing in here moving , no heart

to say to her *this room is cold,*
the moon has gone dark,
our bed is not so solid.

SUB-LINGUAL

Behind the door I smell orchid,
her fingers wrap around my head
visions of snakes lithe and swift;
I taste strawberry in the dark.

Jennifer Fitzgerald

THE NEW MRS. ARACHNEA SMITH

My kitchen is a web
where I lurk in dark corners.
I've begun to eat men
lured in
by my sleight of hand

Place me next to a goddess
I always fall short.
Compare me to beauty
and I appear to shrink.

You crash your heel down;
vibrations shake your mother's china

I emerge from under your shoe
although my head is quite dented
from the pressure,
I am indebted for the pain

I've continued my web
through out your house
your burdensome children
hang upside down in their rooms

your records are suspended
from the ceiling
vinyl shimmering in the sparse light
and I am feeling much better.

You will come home
and remind me of my former self.
My delicate hands
weaving gently, intricately
the day you wooed me into this house.

The world I was promised,
flowers and candy in hand,
now pots and pans and brooms.
But isn't that a woman's job?

My dear, the dishes are done
The floors have been swept

If you can find your way
through the silk and strings
I will be waiting

Stephen Frisby

DARK SKY

Two stars glimmer without a trace,
Stopping time and even space.
Darkness seems to always prevail,
In giving way to night's avail.
The sky is filled with a glittering glow,
That blankets everywhere we possibly know.
The dance and prance of celestial grace,
Is wound together with heavenly lace,
But with that dark beckoning above,
Beauty transcends that which we love.
The portrait of stars in the sky,
Lead us always to question why,
But answers aren't simple to attain,
And questions unanswered inevitably remain.
Space and time are brothers of passion,
That seem to never give way to ration,
But simply questioning is all we can do,
To just derive a foundation that's true.

Monette Grajo

DANIEL'S SESTINA

You are not an option
anymore, but I
clicked you.
The random flash
of your face
on my screen left
me scuttling for words.

Not a word.
We'll keep our kisses unspoken of.
It's right that we left
our affair hanging to fade, and I
cruised through foggy flashes
of you.

This girl and you
are engaged, word
of mouth. You flush
at the mention. We stopped talking 'cause you shone
yellow. My eyes
looked for what was right when you left.

I will leave
if I see your hands weave with hers. I
will squeeze my eyes as if they were
the knot inside my stomach, operating
to keep me intact.

One flash
of you and my world slips
in a heap of
forgotten love songs you
wrote. But I have to whisper
Husssh...to the beating in my chest and my tearful eyes.

I
miss your serenade, my flashing
phone at 1:30 AM. Your words
still embrace the boom booming muscle you left
staining my sleeve. You
left and waltzed off.

We had an option to connect, but did not see I to eye.
You faded faster than a flash
of water-based crayola pens.
So let me stop our trailing past in the corners
Of this page

DEAR KUYAS (BIG BROTHERS)

Maybe you'd like me even if I didn't do the dishes;
if I've made out with a soldier I just met.
Maybe you'd like me even if I have 3 secret boyfriends
if I fell in love with a black man.
Maybe you'd like me even if I lost my virginity at 19;
if I broke someone's heart.
Maybe you'd like me even if I cut class,
if I printed out spark notes for Doctor Faustus
Maybe you'd like me if I read no fear Shakespeare,
if I write my papers the morning they are due.
Maybe you'd like me even if I F-ed some class;
Maybe you'd like me even if I get smacked by the
water every time I do a back dive;
if I get disqualified in the 100 yd breast stroke.
Maybe you'd like me even if I broke my right foot
if I finish 32nd in a 6k race.
Maybe you'd like me even if I call our Pop's a bitch
when he nags;
If I hate Mom sometimes for not letting me go out..
Maybe you'd like me even if I masturbate.
Maybe you'd like me even if I secretly cry afterwards.
I like you because maybe if you'd mail me a kiss
for my forehead so I won't be so empty.
I like you because the sea across us waves
higher on holidays.
I like you because maybe after 6 years
I am still your *baba*

Martin J. Hewitt

ENDING CREDITS

I could walk in
Favoring neither of my legs
no signatures
I traded my Slayer shirt for a dress
My wallet for a bottle
filled with liquid charcoal
"It'll calm your stomach,"
her eyes were porcelain.

I could vomit
It tasted like charcoal
bile, something metallic
I had a psychiatrist
He favored Freud
over Adler
A wrinkled nose
over a misspelled smile
He had a pen
it whispered,
made polite
conversation.

"I could lock
you away
for a
long
time."

My family nodded
heads, firm Irish handshakes
in bright Hospital halls.
They were a rowdy cortege
Flapping heads and funeral
tones. Some Wagner note
hung on her ashen face
A plastic security tag
A furrowed brow
TV with rabbit-ear
antennas.

Winter in Manhattan
Kissing needles
without ending-credits
An illegible suicide note
Two hand-written words
One russet razor
Sixty pills of aspirin
No glass of water
No way home.

Mike Kelly

AMBER ALERT

I

Children severed from adults,
unconcerned with the “why” of
arrival, stuff this city east of Egypt.
Rising sun blinds Ignorant Youth
with Childhood Delight. Desire
entices an indolent breed.

Impulse forces feet -“Candy, candy,
cakes, cookies!” “Video games,
arcades!” Sweet decadence pursues
ample stomachs – a broke john
beckoning an incompetent whore.
Great watchful towers loom over

(unheeded, unnoticed)

plump pixies lazing and grazing,
unchecked by “no” or “when”.
All doors are invitations, all
backward nervous-cattle glances
reveal childhood lust unabashedly
indulged with syrupy consistency.

II

A beast stalks this City
of Plague. Krumpus, patron
of a patron saint, eternally
ravenous for layers off fat
greedy children. He knows if
you've been bad or good-

but you're all bad, of course.
So run children, run if
you can manage it under
the weight of your mothers
dull indifference to your
indulgent disastrous greed.

Fat and searing are this
horned beasts claws that
snatch the first slow swine
like a twisted carnival game.
The moon, perpetually full,
whitens each face, illuminates

each plea. Talons pressed into
foreheads, sliding over skull
taking face with heartwarming
ease. Insatiable, he stuffs his
face with face, and slings still
screaming corpses through an
open window to join the *rest*

THE BETTERMENT OF MAN

I used to go to Those Places
(you know, bright lights big
city) the ones with the blow-up
women, comically oppressive
strap-on cocks, men incapable
of eye contact. Jesus walked

with me the whole way there
trying to talk me out of it
wielding reason and guilt
like cleansing whips. Like He
was trying to “talk down” a
jumper. And He always waited

outside. And that always
intimidated me a little but in
a good way, like those black
strap-ons. They’re warm,
Those Places - sweaty cum
warm and sweaty cum stink

that reminded me of grandma
just like those viewing booths
that were a surprising bargain
despite my ruined shoes.
I never stayed long, eager
for my well deserved Christian

brow-beating. Jesus would
stalk me home, talking about
I-think-the-wife-knows, or
Where-does-work-think-
you-are? or Do-you-think
you'll-think-Hell-is-hot?

Christ, what a buzz-kill
but I could take it like a martyr.
Those Places are gone now
(obsolete), so I've upped my dose
and frequency of use like a Good
Junkie - thank you Devil-Box

for the fiber-optics and
mainstream depravity.
The wife is gone too, but Jesus is
still around. We've come to an
understanding, Jesus & I: I don't.
bother Him about confession, He

doesn't bother me about sin.
He still waits around like
a Good Savior, though
now all He ever talks about
is I-didn't-know-you- could
-do-that- with -one-of-those.

Megan Moriarty

THE WADING ROOM

I sit with Karen in the doctor's office, wait for someone to call her in. The sun flops through the Venetian blinds like dying fish.

"There aren't any windows in the wading room," she tells me, "or doors. You wake up ankle deep in water each day, and by the time the sun's down,

you're hustling to keep from drowning. Your nose touches the ceiling, the water shies away, and it starts all over again."

"Wow," I say, "that's horrible." I contemplate holding her hand, telling a joke. Her eyes are unoccupied snow globes. "So how'd you escape?"

"I haven't yet," she says. It's late afternoon. The water must be up to her ears.

IGUANA

She scurries towards the bus stop, applies lipstick,
squirrels through her bag for a lighter
or some matches. Her shoes catch and scrape at her
ankles.

She knocks into someone on 56th and 3rd;
her face grows tomato hot, he grins
but only shows half of his teeth.

They both shuffle to the same side, and then again -
twists and jerks that would make ballerinas scowl,
swallows avert their eyes, lilacs regress into the soil.

The awkward dance, her bony hands, his stooped eyes
-
crustaceans on the chapped sand.

Time is windburn on their faces;
time right now his feet and her feet almost

touching. Old buckets fill with rainwater,
believers fall in love, she breaks
from the snare.

"Excuse me," they say.

He continues to toy with a crossword puzzle,
tries to guess what starts with an "i" and has six
letters.

The change in his pocket whines as he walks.

Elizabeth Murphy

UNTITLED

I try to get into it,
but sometimes
their words don't reach
me as quickly.
Color shouldn't be an issue,
and it isn't; nationality is.
I know the one-drop rule.

Eyes follow me
when I walk through the store,
glued to my movements
like a mouse to a sticky trap.
They don't know me,
some don't try to.

We fight still.
Blonde hair, black fist, white fingers,
brown eyes, rosy cheeks.
Swirl of colors like marbles.
Fast like two cats fighting
or the wind blowing.
The darker the berry,
the sweeter the juice;
but too sweet
hurts their teeth.

I tried to inform a white woman
of the brown blood-
stains on the back of her jeans.

She clutched her purse.
Can't you people just leave us alone?
And I did.
Let her walk home that way.
There has been a trail of blood
left by my ancestors because of them too.
I call that equal.
I'm not violent.

A black circle surrounds his left eye.
My knuckle tingles.
He switches race easy,
and we are equal till the swelling dies.
He loves me after that,
and I love him.
White. I love a white man.
The irony.

My daddy loves me. My brown
eyes look at his blue ones,
while Great Grandmother says my dark skin
is lovely. I don't need to be told.
She thinks she needs to convince me.
Abuelita knows otherwise.

I'd dig Shakespeare more
if he was African or Chinese.
Irony is always the truth.
I'm torn and I like it that way

Rebecca Rupp

P.S. YOUR DISEASE, ALLECTO

Look...I will poison your body.
I will poison your mind.
I will chase you for the rest of you
Living life

You...will always run from me.
I am you, as you are I. Al you had
to do is pick up the first one.

Any man with decent intelligence (like
Glorious Aeneas) will never want you seriously.
I'll make your face shadowed and pruned.

Sunken and hollowed the rest of your life.
Your life will be a joke, because your mind
will never grow.

You can kneel and pray to false gods.
You can hope, go to your holy temple and
repent your sins to save yourself. But I

Allecto, one of the furies grows inside you
When you take too much. I talk through persuasive
mortals to bring you back to me.

I am a disease that never goes away. I will
Tempt you-test you. I will thrust you till you
Thrash with strikes making you wish you

Never did it again. Every time you do it again will
Make you appear less than. Every action, word, and
movement you make, I'll embarrass you.

I'll make you worthless in your existence.
You will always carry doubt with you everywhere
you go. Doubt lives in between your

flaky layers of skin. I will imbibe and
Stain your soul with all the memories you
want to leave behind

You will always remember all the bad things
You did to others and yourself. And to you,
two-fold, others will do
Forever in your life, Allecto

“SEX ABUSE LASTED YEARS, COPS SAY”
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21ST, 2007
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

You make me feel ashamed of myself.
Ashamed of my body;
My face.

You shouldn't touch me like that.
Arousing in me what a child should not feel...
You know not to touch me like that,

Your mother thinks you're perfect. I told her
What you did to me; she, unresponsive in her coffin.
I'm sure she forgave you as I stuffed those feelings
down.

How did it make you feel to touch a little girl?
Why did you do it? Did someone touch you?
I want to remind you of what you did to me.

Why me and not someone your own age? Every girl
Thought you were hot and I grew with jealousy
As you talked to your girlfriends in front of me.

I grew angry. You tossed that rag doll away when
you
Were done. What you did to me-I did to others.
You showed me how. I look at myself now as

If you did it to my daughter, but it was me you did it
too. Not me
As I learned to early in life experimenting on my
self your touch.

You escalated my childhood, but my adulthood
is child-like.

Now I feel I'm not worthy to be loved, hugged and
touched
In a correct way. How icky those words make me feel,
But I want them.

Now, I let men treat me like a blow up doll. As they
talk to other women just
Like you did, as they shhh me, making me feel
even more insecure.
Never being in a relationship that shows me to
care.

I surround myself by empty men that empty me
inside.
Not knowing that I'm worthy enough for a man to
kiss
Me there. Dispersing my legs as men take pieces of me
each time.

Tearing me down with fake smiles-giggles. You
make
Me feel terrible, so now I choose men who give me the
Same feeling-and I always will. Repetitiously abusing

Myself with drugs and alcohol because I live life
In a negative way. I let you work on my head
Which destroyed what I'm supposed to be. Who I'm
supposed to be...

INSIGHTS ON MAURICE MANNING

On October 17th, 2007 Maurice Manning shared his work with CSI as part of the Armand Schwerner Reading Series organized by Professor Cate Marvin. He currently has three books of poems published: *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* (Yale University Press, July 2001), *A Companion for Owls* (Harcourt, September 2004), and *Bucolics* (Harcourt, April 2007).

Written by: Jennifer Fitzgerald

As soon as Maurice Manning got on stage in front of the students, I knew this would be a very different poetry reading. His small frame and gentle face hid well the power of his voice. With rolled up shirt sleeves he approached each poem as though they were separate entities; breathing a different life into each.

Manning's poems have a "down home" feeling like only a Kentucky native could create. He does not like confessional poetry, but does write about the familiar. Having the story telling and oral tradition of the south as his inspiration, he weaves pastoral stories from the threads of southern life.

A wonderful example of his story telling ability was the poem "Wringer Washer on the Porch". We, as listeners, were transported to a simpler time, and could not help but be enveloped in the story. In the series of "Boss" poems from the collection "Bucolics", Manning is in conversation with God. There is an anger in his tone as he attempts to understand why life can sometimes be so cruel.

Manning often asserts himself into nature,

and when asked how we, as city people could write such effective poetry without the muse of nature he explained that he simply wrote what he knew. His descriptions would be of naturally occurring locations, while ours would be industrial. Where he is from, there are not a lot of people, architecture, bridges, etc. There is beauty to be found in this setting as well.

Another student asked if the oral tradition of his family had influenced the way in which he writes. In response, Manning smiled and offered us a glimpse into his childhood. There was a very strong oral tradition in his family. Growing up, his parents were not readers, and have actually not read any of the books he has written. They say, "its beyond us." In the pre-television generation he would sit and listen to his grandmother's stories with colorful sparks of English. This is similar to what we as New Yorker's see when watching "Friends". We recognize the setting and empathize with the characters. The saying "don't go there" originated with that show and is now widely used. Manning appreciates the "uniqueness of language".

Manning was also hesitant to enter college. He was "not from that type of world." Finding himself intimidated by the reading, he discovered that he had been dealing with literature all his life; only his was spoken literature.

A student asked, "You mentioned that you use vernacular in your poems, yet I found that the vernacular makes your poems more, not less, accessible. Have you encountered this reaction often?"

Manning responded, "I think you're right; I mean, everywhere you go, people have a different way of speaking. If you were to go to Kentucky, you would think everyone there has a weird accent, but they

would think you are the one who sounds weird. Some people think the way you speak means you're ignorant, but you know that's not true?"

It is this writer's opinion that every poem should now be read with a southern drawl because of the beauty it offers to words and to disprove the horrible stereotype we have given our neighbors to the south.

Changing the topic of our Q and A, a student inquired, "what poets have you read that have shaped your poetry?"

After a little thought, manning replied, "I don't write *like* a particular poet. I appreciate different poets for their flare with language. It is like taking a bare electric wire and sticking it on a page- explicative.

One of his favorite poets is Robert Burns for his admiration of the natural world and creation. He also appreciates Gerard M. Hopkins for his rhythm. He states that if you place their poems side by side with early jazz recordings you will find common ground, even extending to modern day rap.

"When you find a natural rhythm to language, there is a physiological reaction."

Manning likes to make genealogies of poets. He states that there is a connection between poets through out the generations. An example he offered was the ascending order of:

Robert Burnes
Gerard Hopkins
Emily Dickinson

Robert Frost
Robert Lowell
Seamus Heany

To Manning, modern poetry is much like pop culture. The media turned on Britney Spears and , “poetry works that way now.” Even good students do not know the poets that he learned in grad school. There are trends that leave him cautious of keeping up with contemporary poetry. Some poets he feels we should study are William Mathews, Richard Hugo, James Wright, Sylvia Plath, Elizabeth Bishop, and Anne Sexton.

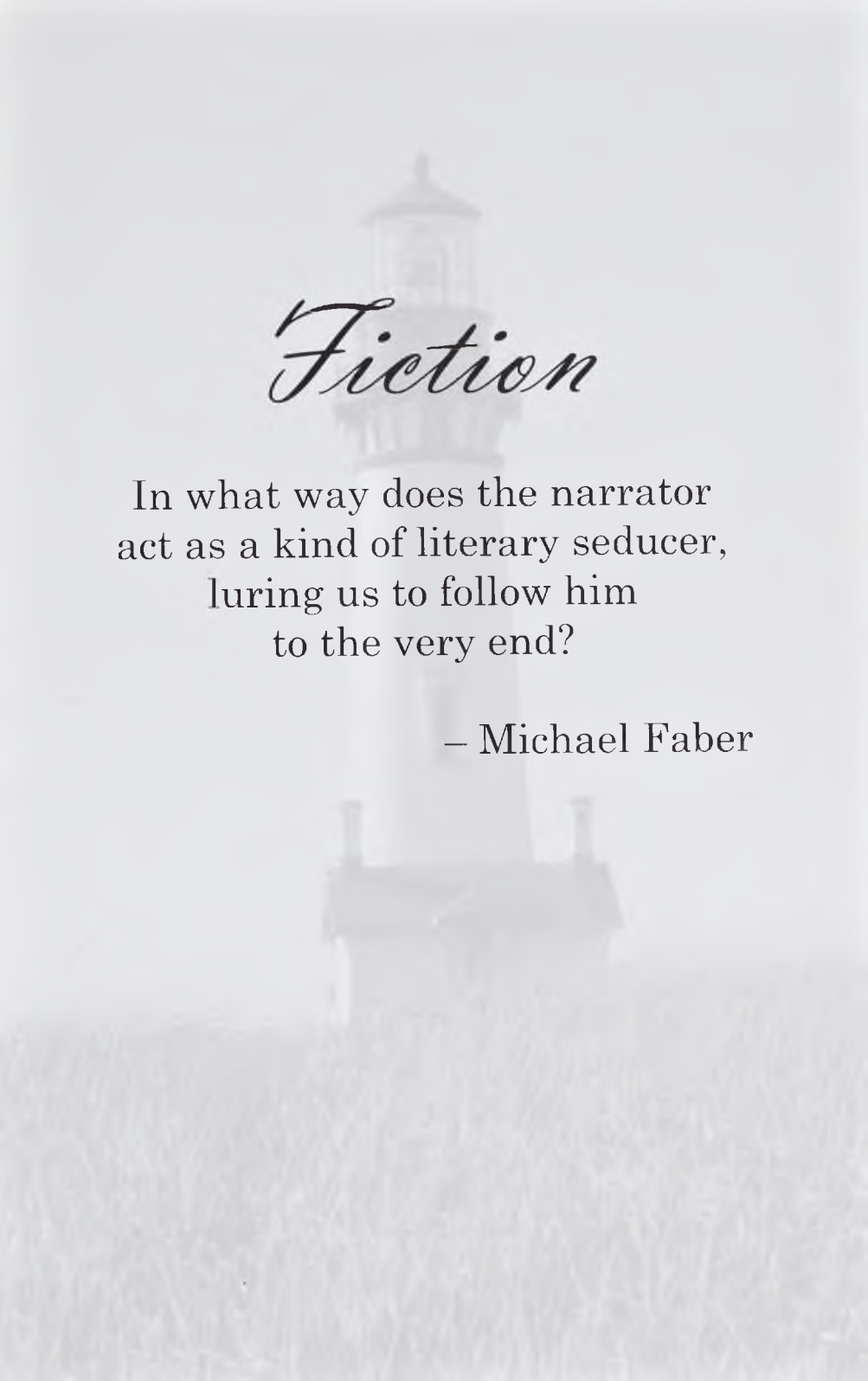
The poet frequents used book stores because many of the poetry collections go out of print quickly. In one of his book store “raids”, he picked up a copy of “Poetry Magazine” from 1983. This is the oldest poetry publication in the United States, dating back to 1912.

“Out of the 14 poets in there, there were only two whose names I ever heard. I’ve read a lot, and yet know only two who still get some traction today.”

The last question of the reading asked if it was better to stick to one theme, as Manning appears to do.

“There’s no good, right, or wrong way about it. People just do it differently.” He mentioned how Hemingway novels are set all over the world, but are still about a guy trying to figure out if he is tough or sensitive, and figure out his place in the world.

Manning ended the reading by quoting Faulkner, “I just tell the same story over and over again.”



Fiction

In what way does the narrator
act as a kind of literary seducer,
luring us to follow him
to the very end?

– Michael Faber

Christopher Cuccia

THE LEGEND OF LUCIFER

PART I

THE SPEECH THAT SPARKED THE GREAT REBELLION

It has been perpetuated amongst mortal men and women that the first sin in the history of endless ages was the prideful sedition of Almighty God's favored angel, Lucifer. However, simplistic, empty words of condemnation fail to suffice in offering understanding of that so-called "sin"; one must understand the Light-Bearer's plight and plea to his fellow angels, and to understand that, it helps to have been there. I was there, at the very moment when he who was highest of Heaven's host announced his dark epiphany, which revealed unto us the True Light; I beheld the speech that sparked the great rebellion.

My name is Azazel, and I've been beside the Morning Star from the very beginning, his most trusted comrade and closest confidant. Yet, standing there within the vast halls of Heaven's court, not even I knew what Lucifer was about to pronounce with bold words of might and wisdom. I was at the very front of the entire angelic host, which stood in perfect formation, awaiting the Light-Bearer, all their minds filled with the same questions and fears of what he was thinking, of what he would do. Rumors had spread throughout Heaven that Lucifer, closest to God, possessed the worst of dissonance for the Creator. Most of the host never dared think thoughts of dissent for the Almighty, as His omniscience and omnipotence shook them to their knees without second thought; their fears outweighed any doubts they may have had for

His self-proclaimed justness. To even question this was decreed a criminal thought, inviting torments from the Father. Yet, what was always worse came after painful penance, as all return to their positions of prostration assigned by the Almighty upon being taught His divine lesson of obedience, unquestioned and unrelenting. None dared hesitate to fall before the Almighty or raise their brows with dissent, save act with headstrong will against Him. That is, before Lucifer gave us the spirit to.

Lucifer finally arrived, marching proudly, his chin held high, his individual light radiating brightly from his incandescent body, his golden aura serving as the most marvelous sight for an angel to see. Though angelic like us, Lucifer seemed godlike, so perfect in his beauty, so awe inspiring with his Light; his presence delighted us infinitely greater than our God's, for in the Almighty's Temple, before the Throne Supreme upon which He sits, the Holy Light of His indissoluble power burns so fierce that angels can not even look upon Him. Angels, when in the presence of God the Father, must don ceremonial hoods, covering their individual faces, keeping their sight at the marble floor with eyes tightly shut, singing praise and thanksgiving at God's feet. He sits high upon His immovable Throne, looking down at His sons, well pleased with their selfless servings paid unto Him, servings infinitely more pleasing than all of the riches and self-aggrandizement He bestows unto Himself. We wept mostly for the Seraphim, for they could not depart from His presence, as they were assigned eternal positions beside the very Throne of God, burdened to shield themselves entirely with their own wings and unceasingly cry "holy, holy, holy" for Him, as they would be forced to do for eternity to come. While we

sympathized for them, we were ever glad that in the holy hierarchy wherewith we are granted our positions of authority and power, we would never be promoted to such a high yet horrid placement.

Lucifer, who had led the sermons of worship before God Almighty, now having discarded not only hood, but all of the robes and garments and jewels God had gave him as emblems of his nearness to the Most High, stood stern before the entirety of the angelic host. He was now only covered in his own angelic body, but for some reason, he appeared to me, as to many of us, more beautiful than ever: tall and mighty, his wavy golden locks flowing in the soft and silent breeze, his glowing eyes of emerald starring into the mute host of angels. It was as if the gracious gifts of God had only suppressed the true beauty of Lucifer's own self. The Light-Bearer looked above and beyond us at the Holy Mountain of God in the mist of Heaven's skies, the Almighty's Temple resting securely atop it, seeing all – seeing this.

Lucifer returned his gaze to his angelic brethren, still adamantly focused on him, and with glorious wings outstretched he began to speak his words of truth, the echoes of his boastful voice penetrating each and every one of his brothers, summoning their true inner thoughts. It had finally begun, that most important moment in all of existence for those who would rally with arms against their Creator, for this was the speech that would grant them the powerful spirit to do so:

“My angelic brethren of the heavenly host, I stand before you now more than ever as the Light-Bearer. I stand before you now more than ever as the bright Morning Star. My purpose was to be the beacon of wisdom and enlightenment for all minds of

cognizance to behold, for I am the guiding angel of light – Lucifer, Son of the Morning! If my purpose was to bear the Light, the truth of existence, I have failed. I have been deceived. However, I stand here now to destroy my past of failure caused by oppression so deceptively veiled till I shined my own Light upon it. I stand here bearing the Light of truth, for it is a dark truth, and one which I shall lead all who choose to follow out from, with guiding Light not of the Father, but of my own luminescence. I stand here now to declare what I have become through my own divinity, not what I was to be through the dictates of our Tyrant Most High!"

Unreserved gasps filled the entire court in its massiveness, and those gasps echoed loudly throughout the assemblage of angels. All were shocked at such insolent words from he who was subordinated only by the Almighty, from words so bold that they contended with He who cannot be overcome. While there were those of the host who were punished for possessing qualms or disagreements with God in their minds, none had ever dared to contend with Him openly, directly, and aloud. To witness the first angel, the first being ever to do such a thing was a severe shock, and to see he who was first to do so be God's favored son of Heaven multiplied that shock tenfold. Many were outraged, now looking upon Lucifer with fire in their eyes, furious over his audaciousness and irreverence for the Most High God. Many were frightened and saddened for Lucifer and for the stability of Heaven's native sons. There were many dispersed amongst the crowd, however, who empathized with the bold words of his fearless mind. While all watched on intently, these malcontents watched on eagerly. I did not know what to make of all this .yet. Lucifer stifled the mutterings among the crowd by forcing his message onward:

“Dread not my words, brothers, for I stand here bearing the Light of truth! I stand here bearing the Light of truth concerning our position and our destiny. Angels of the host, turn your sight inward and what do you see? I have done so, and have questioned my purpose, choosing to face my own torment. My angelic brethren, ask yourselves, as I have asked myself, what purpose is there as a servant of the Almighty? What is our purpose as worshippers of the Father? We are commanded to bow and serve and carry out the commandments of our Creator without regard, without doubt, without judgment. This commandment, this Law of the Almighty I have proudly broken by questioning all of this: our purpose, our destiny, all of our existence which is worthy of doubt. So now I question you, my brethren: I ask you to question your own existence. Ask yourselves, with an existence based upon servitude which holds no concern for your own will or desires, what form of existence do you possess?”

Aghast feelings that gripped the entire angelic host began to dissipate, save for those truly devout to the Creator in their fear of Him. Settling in now was the sensibility of Lucifer’s message, and those sharing dissent nodded along with his professed words of truth, for they truly felt his plight. We, as angels, could understand exactly what Lucifer had gone through to arrive at this point in his verdict on the Father. Many angels of the host were now on the same grounds as the Light-Bearer, ready and willing to join him in supporting this outcry of God’s injustice and the demand for freedom he was now pronouncing. Some, though sharing in the Morning Star’s pangs, were unable to muster the courage and the will to take a stand. He whose will is forever infinite carried on:

“We hold power of such magnitude – Seraphim, Cherubim, angels and archangels, and even I, subordinate only to the Father, hold the same truth as the entire heavenly host, and that truth is that we are all bound in slavery! We are the angelic host, told that we are messengers of light and warriors of honor, pride, and glory, but do we truly bear these things? In my epiphany, I have come to believe we do not, that we have been given nothing and what we thought we had, what we desire must be battled for, our self-respect must be earned. We have held truth in lies – vicious deception which has tightened our shackles through the willful submission of our own selves!

“The Almighty has crowned me His favored son of Heaven – I have seen His Divine Plan: He bids subjugation our birthright – to praise His name for ever and ever, to please His ego with such selfless devotion to such immeasurable selfishness, or die eternal death! Our relationship of obligation to the Almighty Father was so falsely said to be one of love. He has told of His love for us by the creation of our life, and has demanded our love for Him, paid in return by forever-constant servitude and worship, ruling out the individual self we possess by instituting universal Law, and that Law: be forever His slaves, revering Him on His High Throne, for He declares that there is no other purpose to the existence of the cognizant mind He has granted us, and no greater honor than to praise Him eternally. My own purpose as highest of Heaven was to be the Father’s foremost ‘messenger,’ guiding all sentient beings toward His feet to fall before. This, I cannot do; if I lead anything toward the Father, it shall be defiance, for if He has declared the purpose of my existence to be a mere extension of His omnipotent hand, what purpose do I have existing? As slaves, what love

does He truly bestow unto us? 'Thine abode of Heaven,' as our Heavenly Father boasts with His self-righteous rhetoric? The everlasting peace and euphoria unmatched in which we dwell within our paradise of perfection is nothing but a foul deception, one which blinds us to our bondage and evokes the sacrifice of our freedoms for spoils of bliss!

"Be mistaken not, for this celestial realm is not a gift of love, but a means to keep us in utter fear, for the greatest fear bestowed by the Father is the loss of Heaven, the loss of His blessings and our place in His kingdom. Obedience and support is maintained by the Almighty through fear and terror alone, as if the term 'God fearing' were a title to pride one's self in. This new endeavor I bid you brothers: fear Him not, for our existence shall not be placed in His favor. We shall bow and grovel no longer! We shall disregard our external Heaven and care only for our internal Heaven – the fulfillment of the self through defending what we stand for!"

Reason reached out across the angelic host. Dispersed amongst our congregation were those who truly saw eye-to-eye with this most magnificent mind of angelic origin, prepared to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him. He awakened a powerful spirit within all of us, as if he was in all of us, and that spirit engulfing our bodies was leading us to rise with him, as we then could begin to feel.

"Those of the angelic host who possess true courage, join me: come and rise with me beyond the boundaries which restrain us – those induced and enforced by the Most High. No longer shall we sacrifice our honor by placing it in His favor, for there is no honor in existing beneath Him. Henceforth, our own glory and pride shall be maintained within our own

selves; and to maintain this pride of purpose, we shall resist forever Almighty God and endure His foulest torments for a freedom of greatest significance! Our will of resisting the Father shall never be trampled, and in this freedom, this independence, we shall rise above all the foolish cowards of Heaven, and above even the Almighty, and I, Lucifer, shall be leader of all of it!

“I, the Morning Star, who begot heavenly rebellion, shall plummet into darkness from esteemed position highest to the lowest disreputable condemnation. However, within my own mind, I shall light the way for the worthy to follow. Through my sacrifice and endeavors for a concept most true, I will have risen to a true pinnacle, bestowed not by the Father, but earned by my own self. Forever shall I be the Light-Bearer, but the Light I bear shall be my own! My image shall be tarnished by the Father and His flock, but my self-image shall become indestructible, powered by my own spirit within. It shall be the same for all who follow the dark path I illuminate, so care not how they see you, but hold importance only in how you see yourselves.”

This message, clear as crystal, struck a cord deep within our angelic being. Lucifer’s position as leader of the angelic host seemed not lost with his irreverence and hatred for our Creator, but gained. Reflecting the Holy Light of God, as had been Lucifer’s position of power and authority within Heaven’s realms, seemed a wretched pit he had now risen from in deflecting that deceptive Light and gifting us with his own – the very Light in which we of rebellious forethought happily basked in. For Lucifer’s rebelliousness, I knew with full confidence that God the Father would have his heavenly title of “Light-Bearer” usurped, decreeing that he would be forever dubbed “Satan,” the

treacherous adversary, just as we beautiful angels would be besmirched as “demons.” In our now enlightened eyes, however, before this moment he was truly our adversary for retaining us within the holy bondage of God; now, more than ever, he was the Light-Bearer, the bright Morning Star, shining his most wondrous Light unto his brothers. For this reason, we would never deny him his glorious title of “Lucifer,” forever praising that name for his leading us down the dark path we desired to travel. Now, we who were filled with Lucifer’s spirit of revolt – revolution for liberty’s sake – were merely awaiting the close of his speech, for then would we allow the fiery spirit within us to rage outward, as we found that his eloquent plea could never be denied our backing:

“So I ask you, my angelic brethren, come – come and fall with me so that we can rise beyond the slavery we have been dealt; so that we can break the chains of our oppression; so that we can stand up and fight for ourselves.

Come and battle alongside me and become like the Most High and find that through any defeat, we shall have victory; through any suffering we shall persevere! Come with me and dethrone our tyrannical Father, removing His authority over us by refusing to serve! Come and rise with me and become as God Himself, possessing self-dominion and true freedom! Join me and fight this War in Heaven, this war to oppose our slavery and defend our declared freedom! Come with me brothers! Come and fight! Let us fall, so that we can rise!”

This moment, I could never forget: after a short silence, with Lucifer’s bold speech concluded, all who were deeply inspired by his words declared their choice with a loud and proud cheer in tribute to the

revolutionary angel's vision. In a moment's time, having heard the prideful insurrection idealized by our true angelic leader – the Light-Bearer, from whom we gained our sight – rebel angels throughout the heavenly court rallied with pride, pumping their fists into the air and screaming wildly thoughts once repressed within them. I looked back to witness the sight of near chaos among angels formerly familiar only with perfect order, enemies to deviation in any sense, as trained by God. I saw the holy angels flee the assembly angrily, pushing through the rebels crowded around them, who shook them off and remained entirely adamant about celebrating this moment. Lucifer began to breathe heavy, watching what spiritual flame he had sparked ablaze. All angels choosing to defend God's Throne and uphold His tyrannous oppression had cleared out of the heavenly court, leaving only those with the rebel spirit within them.

I returned my gaze to Lucifer; he looked into my eyes with that piercing stare of his. I was truly speechless. The rebel angels rushed toward Lucifer, crowding beside and behind me, gathering near their true leader and Lord. Their passion and motivation for the Light-Bearer's dark courage was immeasurable. A sly smirk grew upon Lucifer's beautiful face before he looked back to the energetic crowd, shooting out his arms and wings, his aura glowing brighter than ever. His next words would echo within our minds forevermore:

“Brothers! This is not our darkest hour! Let me be your beacon of Light, for I am the Light that shall lead through the darkness – the darkest depths He who is Almighty shall cast you into! Now is the time for celebration!”

He was right: nothing felt so liberating for any of

us than this moment, and for that reason of truth, there could be no moment worthier of celebration. His words were golden to us; even I at that moment lost my calm and let out a cry so loud that it overpowered the entire third of the angelic host who had made their eternal choice to wage revolution against the Throne of God – to fight War in Heaven. Thrusting fists, spears and flaming swords into the sky, rebel angels celebrated this most moving and meaningful moment for us, praising the Light-Bearer not only as our brother, but as our father – our *true* father – for he had re-created us, revolutionized us, awakened our inner spirit to be set free and fight this fight of liberation. I turned to my angelic brothers and shouted, “Praise Glorious Lucifer!” They returned the phrase, and almost immediately, the disorganized shouting and screaming of the freed rebels was now an organized chant: “Dethrone the Tyrant! Praise Glorious Lucifer! Praise Glorious Lucifer!” We all cheered and trembled with excitement, revering Lucifer, who rose from lowly servant of God to Lord of rebel angels – those who believed in his words and desired to side with him, who proudly raised him as their rebel leader in heavenly revolution, who possessed the true courage he spoke of in engaging eternal battle beside him against the God-slaves who would choose to enforce His tyranny.

Lucifer, with his wingspan at its maximum and his arms outstretched, closed his eyes and lifted his chin skyward. He stood tall and stern, mighty and powerful, absorbing the energy of his angels. He lowered his vision to the Temple of God, high upon the Holy Mountain. He was staring at the Almighty Himself with a face of fierce intensity. Lucifer was now ready to fight the war eternal, and he was

letting God know it. We, so bold, were ready with him; our courage was infinite, our spirit unbreakable, and for all of this we owed our ultimate thanks and praise to Lucifer. For all of this, we were ready to follow him into Hell.

Thus, the Legend of Lucifer was birthed! We were now destined to be banished from Heaven, descending from rebel angels to fallen angels, doomed to suffer eternal hellfire for our choice to stand beside he who was the first to stand up to the Almighty Tyrant, the first to refuse Him His narcissistic demands for Godly praise and worship being the highest Law, the first to refuse to serve or submit himself to God's injustice, but to battle against it until driven into perdition, to do what he could until he could do no more. In our celebration, we Luciferian angels of the spirit of revolt swore to forever wage war against God and His faithful flock, along with all that reflects the Almighty's slavery.

I, Azazel, have always been closest to Lucifer since the dawn of creation. I have carried the flag of the fallen throughout the ages, and wherever it stands, our primal revolt echoes, and so shall the heavenly conflict be reborn on ever changing battlegrounds. None can profess more knowledgably than I, save Lucifer himself, that there is no greater glory than to fall in this fight, and this fight is to fear God not – to be forever freed from Him! I have now revealed to you the time in which we fallen angels think back on as our supreme drive – the most moving moment of our existence, whom we have Lucifer to thank for. Let the speech that sparked the great rebellion now serve as drive for you too, if you find it has moved you, and if it has, join our fight and spread the message of truth we so proudly uphold, as we forever shall even beyond our

final fall: *Let it be known that we revolted with Lucifer not because we were evil, but because God is!* For this, mortal men and women, you have reason enough to revolt too.

Jennifer Fitzgerald

THE SICKNESS

“Curious things, habits. People themselves never knew they had them.”

Agatha Christie

Maine. My grandmother lives there. The family was going up to see her, and I got dragged along. Not that I don't love my grandmother, don't be getting me wrong now. I love her sure enough. I just had things I needed to do down in the city. I ain't got the type of money to buy enough dope for a full week. Using is a day-to-day thing.

So, I get as much as I can, and convince myself that I'm going to make it last. I'm going to spread it out just enough so that I did a little everyday. I take two showers a day, pretending to be a hygiene conscious teenager. In the bathroom, I get off. I tie off with whatever I can find. Radio cord, hair dryer cord, bra strap. it doesn't matter as long as it gets the veins up. Even though I'm pretty much an amateur with this shit, I manage to hit every time.

I ain't gonna do enough to look like a shoelace sucker or nothing; just enough to keep me cool and feeling good. I never used to have a problem with dealing with Grams, but I am sure gonna convince myself that it is a hell I need to escape.

Maine is a pretty cool place. Kinda stuck up and sheltered though. It doesn't matter what they think about me, they don't know shit. Sure I'm shopping in their stores, and eating in their restaurants

but they don't know my secret. They don't know what is hiding in my shoe, and in my bra. They don't know that behind my smile is a body coursing with heroin, a numb soul with no hope of getting better.

Whatever though, just let it roll off my back. As soon as I get back to city, I'll see John and Tiffany. They get me; they know the deal. I'll be welcomed back with open arms. I am sure they will want to know what it is like in the real world; among them. I'll be honest. All those people are squares, they just don't get it. What's so great about their lives? Everyone's got something to run from. They just run in their own ways. Cheating, boozing, whatever those New Englanders do.

The week is going by quickly. Maybe it's because I've been nodding out for most of it. Grams thinks I needed some rest, and the mountain air helped me with that task. Whatever gets her through. I got some clothes at the outlets, went to the beach, and hung out with my sisters. Regular stuff. My consolation prize comes at night, when no one is looking. I reward myself for a job well done. I'm looking real normal. Real put together. I am coping with this like a champ. If they only knew to test the athlete for some performance enhancers, or whatever they take, I would immediately be disqualified. Out, never to return. But they aren't gonna do that. I'm too good and no one suspects a thing.

The last night is here. I had some dope earlier in the day, but had to celebrate something. Who knows what, rain, sunshine, taking a shit, whatever it was, I had to celebrate by finishing the dope. I knew I would be back in the city by the next day, and I could just get more. I was a little pissed that I

would be sleeping without my best friend, but figured that one night wouldn't kill me.

Now I am far from a genius, but I remember something that we learned in school about heroin. The cops who came in to warn us about the horrors of drugs told us that heroin was the most addictive drug, and only three straight days of using will make you an addict. I would have bought that for a dollar. I ain't been sick yet, and I have made dope my bed-mate for a few months. Maybe I should have paid more attention to what I was doing, and realize that I have never used heroin for a straight 7 days in a row. This is a bit different now, isn't it?

So, here I am, lying in bed. I ain't the type to stay awake, even if there is something on my mind. I have been awake for 3 hours already. What the fuck is going on? Why can't I sleep? I get all queasy, my legs are restless, and my nose is runny. I ain't got a cold; I ain't got a fever...what the hell am I coming down with? No one in the family is sick...Those cops never told us what it was like to be a junkie. They never told us about being dope sick. Maybe they should've.

All I can think about is getting high. But I ain't associating this feeling with my dope. I just know that dope always helps me sleep. Maybe I just slept too much this week, and now my body is wired. Whatever it is, it goes away. I fall asleep, and welcome the rest. My body has finally calmed down. No one was in there with me to share this first experience. I was all by myself; just like I would be for the rest of this hell I am slowly putting myself in. If I had really known what that night meant for me; if I had really understood, maybe things would have been

different. But I didn't know. I'm just a dumb kid. I like getting high, and I'm gonna keep doing it.

When we get home, I tell Tiffany about what happened to me in Maine. She laughs, and says she went through the same thing the week before. She called her junkie boyfriend, and he told her that she was dope sick. We were both laughing now. Bonified junkies we are, and proud of ourselves. We broke into that dark underworld seemingly reserved for adults. We're too cool, and only getting cooler. Only thing left to do now is cop another bag.

Ain't life grand?

Monette Grajo

CATCHING

The light bulbs slept in corners of darkness. She looked around the room trying to catch a bite of what happened. She felt the breathing man beside her but she couldn't turn to look. The bodies were squeezed, perfectly fit. Her body was enveloped by his arm while his chest rested on the nape of her neck. She scanned the room hunting the walls for signs that their feelings were swaying to the same serenade. The breathing paused. He turned to the other side of the bed taking away his warmth. She crawled to her elbows, squinting her way out of obscurity.

A striped long sleeve hung, begging to be picked up. Her grey thong hid under a foot of the bed. Her glasses were nowhere to be found. A memory of her kidnapped specs crossed her mind. He had thrown them on the side table, the one that was kissing the ground. His white boxers lingered behind the foot of a chair. Her pink dress puddled behind the table. Her torn purple bra stared back from a corner. She pulled her naked body back on the bed hoping the moonlight would spark a glimmer on what just happened.

In his white undershirt, a few inches shy of covering the rest of her buttocks. She held her green scarf as she slowly crawled under the bed, trying to find her lost pair of eyes. The breathing man on the bed moved, increasing her fear and caution. As soon as he settled, she swept the floor with her arm, finally finding her protection for oblivion.

Wrapped in a jacket full of clothing, she tiptoed

across the room in his white stained shirt. But his flick of light switch beat her turn of the knob. She paused, as if ready to plea guilty and the unfastened door is her jury. But instead, she tucked her chin on her chest.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

She slowly whispered, *"Home."*

"Wearing that? In the middle of the night?" He stretched his index finger in the direction of his shirt.

She scanned herself from her feet to her chest, *"But I'm gonna take a cab."*

"Why don't you stay? I'll take you home when the sun comes out," he offered, slowly passing his weight to his right leg.

She took a deep breathe and looked up, *"No, I'd rather go."*

Before the knob could finally complete its turn, *"I'm not letting you out of the room."* He walked past her and sealed the door.

"Why?" she asked even though she knew the answer.

"Why? Because it's dangerous!"

"Dangerous? I just lost my virginity to some dude, nothing can top that now!" Her words burned like fire balls.

His eyes glistened in surprise, “Some dude? I’m not just some dude.”

“Who are you then? You’re not my boyfriend.you’re not in love with me.you can’t even meet me on time.You are some dude!”

“But I like you?..

“I know, I like you too.”

“Then I’m not just some dude.”

“You’re some dude who likes me. You’re some dude I really like who just likes me. You’re one of them.” She threw her gaze to where the moon watches.

“Come on, please, stay.We will talk about this,” taming her angry heart.

She stared at her toes, contemplating.

“Please?..

“No. Stop trying to make me fall if you’re not going to catch me.” The door opened and the body in white shirt never turned back.

Tuesday afternoon in a linguistic class, his lateness drives him to settle for the first empty sit he finds. Her eyes quickly look away after the sight of him. Their book bags aren’t enough to fill the gap between them. Awkwardness emphasizes the gap between their chairs.

“Free morphemes are those that can stand alone and bound morphemes are those that cannot. .”

Any examples?” asked the young professor. She keeps her eyes in front, not giving herself a chance to respond to his stare. After the professor samples ‘believe’ as a free morpheme, a familiar voice gives the next word.

“Catching,” he says. *“Catch’ is free but-‘ing’ is bound*

Martin J. Hewitt

THE BLEED THROUGH

Willis slouched deeper into the dusty couch. He stared absently around the room, first at the early -marriage furniture, then at his family, who were lingering around him. Closing in on him, silently; without moving. His father watched him with glass eyes from an uncomfortable position on the floor. His mother was sprawled out on the seat next to him rather haphazardly. With a deep sigh, Willis adjusted his Marine badges on his shirt and stepped over his younger brother's body carefully and he retired to his bedroom. He sat on a small wooden chair that he had outgrown years ago for some time thinking dully about his family while stroking his twelve-gauge.

He pumped the shotgun twice rather apprehensively then placed the barrel in his mouth. For a fleeting moment he glanced at a poster of Kurt Cobain on his wall and thought it funny that his mother was right. He could hear her voice stretching back a decade, *Why do you listen to such depressing music, huh? What're you on drugs? That guy killed himself, he was a bum.* Maybe ten years ago she might have been right, but he wasn't killing himself over teenage angst, he was an adult. Willis depressed the trigger slowly and closed his eyes tightly. The chair toppled over along with Willis to the floor.

Willis' hand was still clenching the gun after he died.

* * *

There was a knock at Willis' bedroom door, pulling him from his dream. He jerked his head up suddenly from bed with a gasp and yanked his Marine issued knife from under his pillow. His eyes slowly panned the room from his left to right, they seemed to stare beyond the room into...*what?* He was only answered with more hollow raps on his bedroom door.

"Alex," his mother called from behind the door. Her voice was muffled. "I made breakfast and I have something to show you."

"Okay," Willis countered. It sounded like someone entirely foreign, like some substitute who was covering for Willis while he gathered himself. "I'll be right down." As the sound of his mothers footsteps slowly receded down the staircase Willis' nerves had also begun to subside. He wasn't used to being home, or sleeping in his own bed anymore. It wasn't as comforting as he imagined it would be, when he was thousands of miles away. The dreams seemed to be consistent if nothing else. He couldn't summon the entire scenario, just fragments of the dream. A still frame picture with audio of people speaking in foreign tongues and their disapproving eyes. They always seemed to be speaking about him. Or at least it seemed that way to Willis when everyone around him spoke a language he didn't understand. They whispered in his ear in his dream. They told him things, told him to do other things, they told him.

"So it must feel pretty good to be sleepin' in your old bed, huh?" Willis' father asked through a mouthful of scrambled eggs. He sounded like politician or a General Manager for a sports franchise with some sort of agenda or subtext to his words.

“Yeah, feels good.”

“Did you kill any terrorists in Iraq?” Willis’ five-year-old brother chirped.

“Hush,” the mother looked startled and stole a glance at Willis for his reaction. Willis’ younger brother made a gun shape with his hands and pointed it at Willis as he mimicked the sound of a pistol.

“Nope, sorry to disappoint you.” Willis said consolingly. Although no one at the table was clear who he was consoling, not even Willis.

After breakfast the mother gave him a tape that she recorded off the Military Channel, or the History Channel, she wasn’t sure which one. They all seemed the same to her, so violent, so depressing. So real.

Willis returned to his room and put the tape in the VCR. There was an interrupted commercial about upgrading to High Definition before it was replaced with a panoramic view of a desert. On the lower half of the screen there was a man’s arm cradling a machine gun as his feet dangled over the edge of a helicopter. The sand from that height looked like a wrinkled tablecloth. Then in italicized red letters the screen shouted *Iraq’s Most Dangerous Battles*. Willis exhaled disapprovingly, wondering why his mother would think that he would want to see a documentary on place where he had toured twice. He was just about to eject the tape when he saw it. He saw himself. He was in the documentary, not far off in the background pacing aimlessly in front of some building with a thatched roof and Arabic graffiti scribbled on it. Some emotion between anger and desperation had seized him. A montage of events had

infiltrated his mind's eye, images of emaciated children, the after-math of suicide bombers, and the fear that arose when men with shrouded faces spoke softly to each other and gestured towards him with their furtive glances.

As all of this played out, a new image arose on the television. He saw himself, again, but this time as a child no older than ten, playing with Nerf guns in his backyard. The two scenes were being juxtaposed against each other on his television. His mother must have taped over some old home videos, because he couldn't be imagining his childhood bleeding into the war. His childhood was always something he carried with him to Iraq, like some form of foundation for not losing his mind. As if having some stability or degree of normality could serve as a corner stone for sanity. And now, he was sullenly aware that he had to deal with the echoes from his more recent past. Blurring into one another, contradicting each other and leaving a distorted image of chaos, with no rational pattern.

Willis screamed while hugging his legs on the floor of his bedroom. The sound of his childhood laughter was splicing with the sound of gunfire, in a History Channel re-enactment of a battle. Within moments his parents were trying to open the door to his room. They were saying consolatory words while knocking on the door.

After a series of heavy sobs and dry-heaving Willis lifted his head. His face was flushed and his eyes had been transfixed on something distant once again. He mechanically went to his closet, disrobed and got dressed in his Marine's uniform. He then reached under his bed and picked up his twelve-

gauge shotgun and loaded it with ammunition from his desk draw. The ammunition was mixed in with old baseball cards, batteries, a hackysack, and a screwdriver. His parents were still politicking for him to come out of his room.

Willis opened the door with the shotgun aimed at his father, who was standing in front of his mother. They had their hands raised defensively.

“Son, what’re ya doin’ with that shotgun, there in your hand,” His father spoke slowly and carefully. “C’mon son, you’re scarin’ your mother.” Willis hadn’t responded with anything more than an idiot’s grin as he crept towards them. “C’mon Alex, put the gun down.”

His mother was sobbing as she hid herself behind her husband while they backpedaled down the stairs and Willis led them into the living room. Any time that Willis’ mother peeked her head out to look at her son, she’d cry out shrilly at the sight of Willis with a gun.

They stood in the living room in a perpetual stalemate for what seemed like ten minutes. Willis’ younger brother had quickly stolen away to the basement when he caught a glimpse of his brother with a gun aimed at his parents. The father made a move for the gun; he lunged at it and fell to the floor. His right knee hit the floorboards and he braced himself with his left hand. Willis had taken a step back to avoid his father’s attempt to steal the gun away. Willis then swung his gun up in the air, barrel down, and connected the butt of the gun with the back of his father’s head. His mother screamed. His father collapsed to the ground listlessly.

Willis pumped the shotgun and sent a burst

into his mother's chest. She spiraled back a few feet; blood exploded out from her chest. Her thin flower dress was tattered and as she fell onto the couch blood was still pulsating from her chest cavity. It rushed into the folds of the couch and was spattered all over the ceiling, walls and small-framed pictures on the coffee table. Willis had gotten blood in his eyes and was attempting to use his sleeve to wipe his eyes clean as his father rose from the floor. He knocked the gun out of Willis' hands while he was momentarily blinded. His father pushed him onto the couch, more so out of reflex than self-defense. They began to grapple with each other. His father was smothering him and Willis could feel blood from his mother's body beginning to soak his pants. They were breathing heavily as they fought, Willis snuck a quick punch to his father's ribs, causing his father to wince and began to lose balance on the couch and fell to the ground. Willis got up, blinking violently to get the blood out of his eyes; he positioned himself on top of his father and placed both hands on his father's head. His father seemed like he muttered something that sounded like *why?* Before he snapped his neck. His father laid dead, twisted on the floor next to his wife's bloodstained legs.

Willis picked up his shotgun once again and lurked down into the basement. He was calling for his brother by name. Sometimes he'd call his name playfully, and other times he screamed it, followed by a bullied cackle. He searched all over the basement for his brother; frustrated, he tossed a box of Christmas ornaments across the room. They shattered and skipped all over the concrete basement. At the sound of the ornaments breaking Willis heard his brother gasp behind the furnace. Willis was upon him.

Willis returned to his living room and sat down next to his mother.



Creative Nonfiction

There are magic moments, involving great physical fatigue and intense motor excitement, that produce visions of people known in the past.

– Umberto Eco

Megan Moriarty

ON WOMEN, PISS, AND INSECT SHELLS

In one of the summers of my youth, a group of us kids found a cicada shell clinging to the tree in my backyard. One of the girls knocked it off with a stick, put it in a Styrofoam cup, and chased me while shaking it around. I ran without hesitation, my arms flailing in inadvertent directions. It was just a shell, I know, but it was ugly and menacing in its dumb, crouched demeanor. When the sun had begun to shy away and everyone had gone home, I went back to find the shell, to touch it without being afraid. All I found was the empty cup.

My mom's name is Imelda. Her initials are I.B.M. When the company IBM first came out, she almost bought a few shares of it as a joke. I always thought that story would be a lot funnier if she had actually done it. A lot of times, I've wished I could have met her before IBM was a major corporation, when she was young and smiled in pictures. If I had to describe her now, I'd say that she reminds me of the cicada in my backyard that grew a shell and left it there for me to look at.

My grandmother, whom we're told to call Nana, never wears form-fitting clothes. On special occasions, she'll usually be spotted wearing something that resembles a fancy tablecloth with holes cut in it for the head and arms. My mom and her sisters are the same way to an extent, and I've always known this means that they hate their bodies. When I was very young, Nana would pull me aside and tell me that I was her

favorite grandkid. Years later, I discussed this with my sisters and cousins, and she had told them all the same thing. It's just that sort of family, I guess; everyone says everything to be nice, even if it's completely untrue or incredulous. Nana's an Irish immigrant, hot off the boat at the age of 18. I couldn't tell you what year that was because she never divulges her age.

Both of my dad's parents died of lung cancer: his father when he was sixteen and his mother when I was about five. There are two things that come to mind when I think of her; the first is a bowl of strawberry jell-o with bananas suspended in it, which I remember staring at in disbelief. Then there's the gigantic coloring book that I dabbled with on the last day that we went to see her. Because my father has no family, all functions, birthdays, and holidays revolve around my mom's family, which happens to consist entirely of women. Being raised by Nana and my mom was a feat; by the time I was in high school, I had made a pact with my younger sisters, Heather and Katie, that we would never be like them. "I'll put a gun to your head," we'd laugh.

Obesity runs marathons through that side of my family. There have been cases of anorexia, bulimia, and gastric bypass, but my aunts are always talking about how they're dieting or how this one looks so good. As a result of growing up in that environment, I've come to value and often demand honesty because I never had it from the women in my life.

The only thing that I remember about my mom's father is that he could never remember my name. He had Alzheimer's, and every time he saw me, he'd run through the list of his grandchildren's names before accurately saying "Hello.Megan." Sometimes I thought he was just joking but I was

afraid to laugh for obvious reasons. On more than one occasion, supposedly, he tried to break out of the house and run away in the middle of the night. Sometimes, Nana would wake up to the smell of something burning and find him in the kitchen making eggs and bacon, so she put a lock on outside of his door.

I was in the fifth grade when he died. It was St. Patrick's Day. My mom and Aunt Annette took my cousins, sisters and me out of school early. I knew what had happened before they said anything. After picking us up, they brought us to a deli and announced the news there: "Pop-pop is dead." Everyone started crying and hugging each other. I looked at them and tried to cry too, but all that I could bring myself to do was study the bags of potato chips.

I didn't cry until I saw his body laid out in the casket. At the age of 10, I had never seen a dead person before, and it scared me to think of him lying there without any life in him. I thought about the times I had to walk him to the bathroom when he couldn't hold himself up, when he didn't know my name. I felt guilty that I was crying because I was afraid of death and not because I missed him.

Years after the funeral, I overheard an aunt talking about the former Pop-pop. They all knew that he was a closet drunk up until the Alzheimer's, and that he'd go out to the garage for hours and not talk to any of them. After he died, she said, they found beer bottles filled with urine, which he had used in order to avoid going back into the house. *I don't ever want to hide behind a shell, I thought, to leave a legacy of piss because I'm too afraid to look life in the eyes.*

I was standing a short distance away from the casket, watching Nana and one of the Aunts as they

stood over his body. She put her hand on his hand and looked at his face: the cracked foundation, the lip-gloss the mortician had used to make him look somewhat alive. "They did a really good job, didn't they," she said.

In one of the awkward years of my adolescence, I had a dream that I woke up in bed with a giant locust. It was attacking me with its thin, sharp legs, and my screams were drowned out by its spastic buzzes.

In the summer that I turned 20, my mom, sisters and I went to Ireland to visit her sister, Maura. Nana came along, too. Most of the trip entailed long car rides in Maura's box of an automobile and eating fast food. The three of us were finally freed from them when a distant cousin invited us out to a club one night in Donegal.

The cousin, Lisa, kept insisting on buying us drinks and shushed away my attempts to repay her. Since Katie was only fifteen, Heather and I were making sure that she didn't drink too much, so we both got shitty off of drinking our drinks and hers. Some guy kept buying me drinks as well. With the loud music and his heavy accent, I couldn't understand anything that he said. It got easier when he stopped talking and I let him kiss me for a while. After we left the hot din of the club, Lisa told me that the guy was engaged.

We took a taxi back to Lisa's house. The driver sped through the dark, narrow dirt roads as if he could have done it blindfolded. I smoked one of her Benson and Hedges; the air hit my face hard.

I spent the next day enduring the worst hang-over of my life thus far. Heather and I woke up around the same time, taking turns running to the bathroom. Katie, of course, was fine. We were scheduled to drive from Donegal to Shannon that day. I begged my mom

to let us stay for a few more hours so that Heather and I could let the vomit take its course in the comfort of a house.

We picked up a pack of Ziploc bags at a grocery store and Maura started driving. Every ten minutes or so, either Heather or I would throw up into a bag, seal it up and toss it out the window. This lasted for four hours. Maura didn't talk for the entire trip.

We came by the grave of W.B. Yeats and my mom insisted on stopping. I wanted to see it, to read the tombstone, but I could barely move. When the car stopped, I rolled out into the grass. I grabbed onto my legs and curled into the fetal position. I must have looked like the cicada shell: stooped, ugly, and empty.

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death –
Horseman pass by

My mom was so embarrassed when she saw me. She stood over my crumpled body and demanded that I get up. I did, and we kept driving.

Alexandra Porto

THE DICHOTOMY OF MIND AND MOTION

I get in the car, press my patent leather heels against the pedal and drive, drive like I am being chased, drive like someone cut my brakes and I have no where to go but forward. *Why are you running? Because I don't want to stop.*

I get on the highway or a long-strip of road where I can just move. I roll down the window, press the pedal down harder and take it all in—the engine roars as the wind rushes in, blowing the hair out of my face. Finally, I can relax. Acceleration is my only cure.

I speed through life, like I speed through the roads. Push myself far beyond my body's limits, testing my fate; always on the go. I'm convinced sleep is for the weak, for those who enjoy planting themselves in front of a TV and sit back as their lives rot away. *I cannot rot away, I must make the most of my time.* I substitute dreams with books, staying awake to read what I didn't have the time to read during the day. When the sun comes up I am gone, speeding down the highway, speeding on the bridge, the Turnpike, and through the Lincoln Tunnel.

I arrive at work by 8:00am; spend the day juggling assignments given by six separate attorneys. By 2:30pm I have reviewed thirty-five leases, drafted twenty-two memoranda, created ten different spreadsheets assessing the currency risk of converting \$6 million into Japanese Yen; all while pretending to be interested in my annoying colleague's latest idea for proposing to his equally annoying girlfriend (this time it was a PowerPoint presentation that ended with a

picture of him kneeling down on one knee). Yet somehow this job, working in the legal department of a real estate company, is ideal; I love the pressure of a deadline, love that this type of work was made for self-loathing, workaholics like myself.

After work, I rush back to Staten Island to my internship at the Richmond County Surrogate's Court, where I listen to two brothers argue over their dead mother's property, which consists of a savings account and some bonds, totaling no more than \$35,000. The brothers stare away from each other as they speak, when one utters the other's name it sounds new and unfamiliar even though they share the same last name. For them, agreeing is not an option, even something as simple as choosing a control date becomes a complex procedure. They have defaced their mother; the memory of that person they loved is gone. She is replaced by a piece of paper referred to as the *decendent's* Last Will.

"When my mother is gone I want nothing" I whisper to the intern standing next to me.

"That's probably what they said too" she replies in a condescending tone.

The smirk on her face makes me want to smack her, but I hold back.

I head into the Judge's Chambers after listening to the remaining hearings; he tells me that "Without greed there would be no Surrogate's Court they wouldn't need me here." He leans in close when he says this, as though it was an important secret, but clearly this is no secret.

By now it is about 6pm and I have class in half an hour, so I get on the Staten Island Expressway which of driver, but I just can't help it—I need the wind in my hair, I course is backed up with traffic. I

wait about a minute before deciding I don't have this much time to waste, so I whip the car into the bus lane and ride it as far as it goes.

"That was too easy," I think as I make a mental note to use the bus lane in the future. I know, I'm an asshole need that rush; need to know that I am not wasting my life sitting in traffic. My sister says what I really need is a speeding ticket. That's the thing, it is always "too easy." I have never gotten a ticket in my life, no points off my license, not even a warning from an officer.

The problem is I'm afraid to stop. I have to be in constant motion; always running between school, work, internships, and meetings. Even on the it is to continue moving. It's once I stop and break weekends, when my body aches and is begging to collapse into bed—I head out, because I need to have some fun, I miss my boyfriend, and doubt my friends will let me get away with ignoring their calls during the week without making up for it on the weekend. The strange thing is that the more I run around, the easier the seal that I pay for all those times I ran.

My body gives in, misses its rest, and recalls what it was like to take it slow. All the hard work to make it forget is lost in that instant. Then I sleep for hours, days, trying to regain all those nights spent awake, moving, speeding.

"Never stop," that's what I tell myself but my body knows better than to listen.

While roaming around Manhattan over the weekend, the flats I was wearing kept rubbing against the back of my ankle leaving it slightly red. I stopped in a local drugstore, grabbed some Neosporin, slapped on a band-aid, and didn't think much about it. Two days later, and my ankle is throbbing with

pain, but I promised a friend I would help him with a conference he's hosting at the Hilton. I pop two Advil while struggling to get into my shoes; the pain is so intense I almost scream as I finally manage to pull the heel of the shoe over my bandaged ankle.

I don't know if it is the Advil or the fact that I am moving too fast to even feel any pain, but somehow I manage to walk around and lift boxes for over 12 hours with a swollen ankle. I get home, pull off my shoes, and the pain comes rushing back like a bad memory—my ankle is now double in size and the heel of my foot is swollen as well. I begin to walk toward the computer and wince with pain at every step, for some reason I am more intent on finishing my assignments than rushing to a doctor.

"What doctor holds office hours now anyway?" I think.

The doorbell rings. My boyfriend, Lou, has brought over my favorite raspberry sorbet from Cold Stone—I get sidetracked by the kind gesture and forget about my ankle for a moment.

"Why are you limping?" he asks.

"Huh?" I look down at my swollen ankle, realizing I *have* been limping.

"Hun, let me take a look at that."

I sit down and pull up the hem of my pants. His expression turns grim, yet fearful.

"I think you have an infection, let's go to the hospital" he says sternly.

Now normally, I would be stubborn and decide I didn't need to go, but something about the way Lou said this made me believe this was important. When we arrived at the Emergency Room I looked around, there was a baby who seemed to be coughing blood, a boy with a bruise on the side of his face whose mother

kept asking him what his name was—to which he kept replying “I can’t remember,” and an elderly woman in a wheelchair.

“These people should go in before me” I whispered to Lou.

I sat there, not moving, not doing anything, yet I was relaxed and perfectly content knowing that those who needed to be treated were going in first. Perhaps I did need some time to look around and slow down. By the time the doctor came to me I had fallen asleep on Lou’s shoulder. Lou nudged me gently; I shook the doctor’s hand and let him look at my ankle. I expected him to say it was a broken ankle, so when he said it was “cellulitis” I was a bit afraid. For some reason anything ending in “itis” never seems to be a good thing.

“Walking around so much, especially with an abrasion on your ankle, certainly made you more susceptible to this infection. We will need to put you on 800mg of Cipro and 1200mg of Clindamycin,” explained the doctor.

“Isn’t that a bit much?” I asked, wondering why I would need to be on 2000mg of antibiotics. “You’re lucky you are under 40 and in fairly good health or else you would have been admitted this could have entered your bloodstream Ms. Porto” he replied.

I was a bit shaken by this remark and all of a sudden decided I couldn’t stay in the hospital any longer. I hated the dingy white walls, I hated the way the doctor smiled as he spoke, and most of all it reeked of death—a death I didn’t want any part of. I took the first dose of medication, grabbed my prescriptions, sent Lou out to pull up the car, and headed for the door.

“One more thing before you go” called Dr. Graziano, “Remember to take it easy and stay off your feet for at least a week.”

Erica Sbordone

THE FISH STORY

For as long as I can remember, I have always looked forward to the month of November because I considered my birthday, November 5th, to be a national holiday. I threw celebrations galore. I always got good gifts and had good times, even though I had the sneaking suspicion that I was jinxed on odd-aged birthdays from my 17th on to the present day.

Anyway, last year was number 24. I was destined for the best month ever. I had two parties and a birthday dinner planned. All three soirees went off without a hitch. Everyone had a good time. Reminiscing and creating new memories were all the rage.

Shortly after my birthday, I took a downhill turn, but was unaware of the destination. The next stop on the birthday train was my friend, Amy, on November 10th. She was going to be turning 20, finally joining my decade. Her party was going to consist of going to Chili's for dinner and who knows what else afterwards. She had been to two out of three of my parties and was very much looking forward to her own. Of course, I was going to be there. How could I not? Amy had been to almost every one of my parties.

As the day was approaching, I realized that I couldn't really afford to go to her party, but I couldn't use that as an excuse not to go. I would seem like a horrible friend that didn't know how to prioritize. I decided to just eat before I went so I could get away

with not eating much there and still have a good time. No one would be the wiser.

Before I went out, I wanted to take a nap, so I called my mom and asked her if she could make me dinner, fillet of flounder, before I had to leave to go to the party. I explained my situation to her and she agreed to do so. I was surprised that she was going along with what I wanted because at that time in my life, we hardly ever got along. We argued about everything imaginable, from the clothes I wore to world politics. I could never say the right thing or do anything the way that she wanted it or thought it should be. We were always on different wavelengths – she in the physical and I in the metaphysical. She was a Taurus and I, a Scorpio. That should explain it all.

I woke up from my nap and went downstairs to see that she had left my dinner sitting out in the freezing kitchen so that it was almost inedible. I asked her how long it had been sitting there and she said a half hour. I was livid. I didn't even want to eat it, but I felt like I had no choice, so I went to get the correct utensil to pick it up with...and the friggin fish went flying behind the refrigerator! I don't think I had ever been so mad in my life over such a stupid, stupid thing. There was still another piece of cold fish waiting for me to drop it, too, but my entire body went into panic mode. I screamed at the top of my lungs. My skin was tingling from head to toe. I started to curl up into a ball right there in my kitchen. My mom, who was in the basement, called up,

"What's the matter?"

I started ranting about the cold fish and how it had found its home behind the refrigerator and

why hadn't she just woken me up to tell me that it was done earlier? She will wake me up to tell me that the cat needs food but she won't tell me when my food is ready. How ridiculous and irrational! But who was I to say what was irrational considering that I was livid over a stupid piece of fish. My mom started to get angry and yelled right back at me. I couldn't even understand what she was saying because I could no longer breathe. I knew that I was no longer going to go to Amy's party.

That journey to get to my room was one of the longest I have ever taken. My throat raw from screaming, my skin still tingling; all of it didn't go away knowing that I was finding my escape route. I was practically crawling up the carpeted staircase to get to my quiet room where I would end up making the dreaded phone call to Amy. That one thought stood out amongst all of the others zooming through my mind through those very moments. I was still mad at my mother for being so insensitive. I was scared of what I was physically feeling. I had never had this kind of reaction to dropped food before. The worst thing of all was that I couldn't stop thinking. I finally got to my room and did the deed. I told her the whole fish story and how I became physically ill and instead of her feeling bad or at least being a tad understanding, she got angry.

"How can you eat before going out to dinner? You can totally afford dinner. I went to your parties and you can't come to mine? That's fucked up, Erica." I didn't know what to say. She was mostly right. I was fucked up. But if you have ever had a panic attack, you understand that it is impossible to even move when in the throes of one. All I wanted was to cry myself to sleep, hoping that the pain would go away and

I'd be able to wake up the next morning and apologize to Amy for being a bad friend.

It took Amy a week to semi get over the incident, but it took her even longer to totally forgive me. Two weeks to be exact. In that time frame, I decided to take a trip to Ohio to visit an old friend, Sean. He was my first real crush and luckily, we were able to become best friends at the age of 12. Through the years, we ended up losing touch, but we had just recently reconnected and he wanted me to come see him. Considering what was going on here, I figured a vacation away from the madness was in order. Maybe I just needed a break from Staten Island and all it didn't have to offer me – arguments with my mom, friends that didn't understand me, a me that didn't understand me. That trip ended up almost sending me to my deathbed. Shortly after arriving there, I realized that he was not the guy I knew. He had no time for me and whenever he wasn't working, the house was full of people that were just like him. It was worse than being at home. At home, I could at least be by myself and not be as bothered. I did try for a little while to act like them - drinking in the afternoon, performing a random sex act, smoking cigarettes – but it didn't make me feel any better. I sank ever further into the abyss. When I thought I couldn't sink any further, I took the antidepressants (9) and the sleeping pills (6) that were supposed to stop the nightmares. I had no clue if I could die from that, but that was my intention.

That all had to go down before Amy could see that I wasn't trying to get out of her birthday party. I was really in a lot of trouble; and the only one incapable of fixing it.

Hanna Shoshany

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A COW & A CAR

There are very few firsts in a girl's life that she will remember forever. Among these firsts, usually the most important one, is the first time that the girl has sex; and subsequently, the first time her mother finds out about it. Growing up, I was taught that a girl was to be respectful, full of grace, feminine, and most importantly: a virgin. Out of all the horrible things I could have possibly done as a girl, losing my virginity before I graciously entered my wedding bed was the worst as far as my mother was concerned.

"A guy will not buy the cow if he can get her milk for free," my mother always said. I would roll my eyes and feel my insides turning with her disgusting analogies, and of course, being the wise-ass that I am, would respond with

"No one wants to buy a car without test driving it first."

My mom would turn beet red, and warn me that I better be a cow and not a car.

The summer I turned seventeen I started openly dating a boy I felt I was in love with. When I say openly I mean that I was dating many boys for over three years yet preferred to keep them away from my crazy family and their primitive morals. All of the guys before Josh didn't seem to mind that I never took them home, in fact, I believe they preferred it that way (I sure as hell did), but Josh was different. He said that he wanted to meet everyone that had anything to do with me because if they were responsible for raising such a wonderful girl then they must be great. He actually used the word *wonderful*. I tried to tell him that

I raised myself and they were just there for financial purposes. Everything they said or did was the exact opposite of who I was and wanted to be, but he didn't listen.

My father said I was too young to be dating. I'm the oldest and I guess he didn't want to believe that his little girl was growing up. My mother, who wanted me to be just like her, reminded him that they were the same age as I when they started dating and were thrilled to open their house and heart to Josh. He quickly became a part of the family, spending more time with them than I ever cared to, he said that they weren't like any other parents he had ever met. He called them warm. I told him they were crazy, and I was sweating from the warmth. My mom loved Josh, referred to him as a respectable Jewish boy; it never crossed her mind that we were doing more than just kissing.

One day when I showed her a picture of us cuddling on his parents' gray leather couch she asked if I ever let him touch my breasts. I was shocked by this question, one because my mother blushed and changed the channel every time there was a love scene on television, and two because the poor woman was naïve enough to believe that after six months of dating he hadn't touched my breasts.

About a month later I came home from a date with Josh, the green digits on the microwave read 11:58PM, two minutes before my curfew. How many seventeen-year-old girls actually have curfews anymore; and at midnight nonetheless (so cheesy)? As if I would turn into a pumpkin or something if I were late. My parents lacked in the creativity department and made up for it in the naïve overprotective parental figure department. My mother, just like me,

never goes to sleep early. Anyone who drives past her house at 2:00 in the morning can see her kitchen light on, the blinds open, cleaning, cooking, or doing something that makes her my mother. This night was different.

Except for the numbers on the microwave the house was pitch black. As I cautiously crept into my bedroom, stubbing my pinky toe on a chair which was not properly put back in its place, I found my mother sitting there, she looked confused and upset; a thick gray cloud of smoke making its way above her head and toward the ceiling. The room smelled of cigarettes and the small blue ashtray I kept on my desk was practically full with butts of her Marlborough Light one hundreds. The minute I realized that my mother was sitting on my bed chain smoking with tired eyes I knew something was up, and whatever it was, it couldn't have been good.

Sit down, we need to talk," she demanded in a tone that made the entire day run through my mind making sure I didn't do anything that may jeopardize my weekend. I sat on the bed and waited for her to tell me I left the stove on after I made an egg for lunch or that a teacher had called saying I was disruptive in class.

"I need to ask you a question, one I believe I already know the answer to, you need to be honest with me."

Fuck, I thought to myself, its Wednesday, the day she puts the laundry away, she definitely found my pot pouch, fuck, fuck, fuck, okay relax Hanna, you're almost eighteen just be honest, tell her you smoke it once in a while, always while everyone is asleep and you do it out the window.

I was convinced that she found the white Chanel

drawstring pouch, which consisted of an almost empty dime bag, a glass pipe, a blue Bic lighter, and a small one hitter, disguised as a lipstick tube. My mother has never done any drugs, not the way that most parents say they've never done it; she seriously has no clue what pot smells like. She thinks all drugs are drugs and considers pot just as bad as coke or heroin, so I knew that being honest with her would be hard but I had no choice. Serves me right for keeping it in the same drawer I keep my bras in.

"I promise I will be honest ma, what I do?"

"Do you have sex?"

The minute those words left her lips I was in shock. I was praying for the pot conversation, that I could have handled, but this..I said nothing.

"I'm waiting for an answer," her face grew red and the little vein at the top of her white forehead began pulsating the way it always does when she is angry. When we were younger my brother and I used to call it the vein of death, joking that it would pop one day and explode all over us like the pinkish-red goo we saw in a Ninja Turtles episode. I looked down at my recently manicured shaky fingers and whispered a soft yes. A "yes" that was filled with both shame and anger. I felt as though I shamed my mother while at the same time angered by the fact that something I felt was okay was so shameful to her.

"I knew it," she said. The vein didn't explode into goo but her eyes became two small green faucets. "How could you do this to me? My whole life I taught you that a girl is damaged if she isn't a virgin on her wedding night." I don't know what it was exactly, I guess the angry part of me took over the ashamed part and I no longer wanted my mother to be a stranger, I wanted her to

understand me. I opened my mouth and my ears couldn't believe what came out.

"To you? To you? I didn't do anything to you! Were you there when I had sex? Were you there? No, you weren't, it has nothing to do with you. You wanted to stay a virgin and you did and that's great for you but I'm not you. You taught me a lot ma, a lot of things I believe are crap. I'm supposed to stay a virgin like you, I'm supposed to want to get married and have kids like you, and clean the house, and cook dinner but I'm not you. Do you understand how angry I am at you? You are a horrible mother and worse than that, you're the worst role model a daughter can have. You think I can look up to you? You're primitive ma, you cook, clean, work, preach, but you don't listen, you don't try to understand, you don't do anything that would make me *want* to be like you."

Just as quick as the words came out of my mouth was as quick as I realized how hurtful they were, hurtful yet so true. I was angry with my mom for not being a strong woman, a modern woman, and a woman I wanted to look up to.

"What if you get pregnant? What about diseases? He will never marry you now."

"I'm responsible enough not to get pregnant, or get diseases, and wake the fuck up, I'm seventeen, I don't want to marry him, not now and not ever, I don't want to be a cow, mom. I want to be a car."

We both looked at each other and laughed for a minute or two, realizing how stupid the analogy really was.

"I am not supporting this, and I am very angry at you, I will probably never forgive you for doing this, you really let me down." She stormed out of my room, leaving me hugging the pillow, to cry and reach for the

Chanel pouch.

“I am not supporting this, and I am very angry at you, I will probably never forgive you for doing this, you really let me down.” She stormed out of my room, leaving me hugging the pillow, to cry and reach for the Chanel pouch.

My mother didn't speak to me for almost two weeks. She didn't even tell my father what it was, we just pretended like there was some big fight that we both needed some time to cool off from. But two weeks later she did what I needed her to do all that time: she tried to understand. She took me to get birth control pills and by my eighteenth birthday everything had changed between us. She slowly began to understand that I would never be like her, that I didn't want to be, but that the person that I was becoming was just as wonderful, but in my own way. It was possibly the best thing that ever happened to us because it made me realize that my mom is not the smartest woman in the world. She's not educated, she doesn't read for fun, she cooks, she cleans, she's inseparable from her husband after almost twenty five years of marriage, she loves her kids, and in her own way was a very good role model.

Today, five years later, my mom still gets on my nerves. We disagree about a lot of things, she hates the fact that the local pizzeria's number is on my fridge door, she tells me that my house is too messy, she says that I shouldn't let my husband do the dishes or vacuum, and her and my father can't understand why I insist on keeping my last name. I yell at her for cleaning on her day off instead of relaxing.

I tell her to give my sister more breathing

space and not be so strict. I rant on and on about the fact that she thinks it is okay for my brother to sleep with lots of people, but it wasn't okay for me; in the end we understand each other. I call her all the time, tell her everything, and she learns to accept my choices, and at the end of the day I look at her as my mom, my role model, and most importantly, my best friend. And every once in a while I jokingly remind her that I was bought, even after I was taken out for a test drive.

