



renaissance

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RENAISSANCE

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STUDENT AWARDS

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Falling Hair

Running my fingers through my hair
Because I am bored
Because it is long
Because it feels good
Because it reminds me of you

It reminds me of your gentle touch
Of how you smelled it and smiled
Of how you rubbed it like soft fur
Of how you twirled it round your fingers
Of how you pulled it when you felt good

Running my fingers through my hair
Deep in thought
First one hair falls
Then another and yet another
A reminder that time catches us all

Robert Linley McCoy



Compost

Andrew Harper

Tiny Droplet

She fights back the emotions
Enduring the saline sting
Trying to hold it all inside
And not let herself be betrayed
By such a tiny thing.

A tiny droplet of water
Nothing more, so it seems
Slides slowly to the tip of her nose
Gets to the edge
And clings tightly readying for the fall.

Falling off the edge
The overlooking ledge
Downward it travels through the air.
The distance seems forever.
It is suspended in space and time.

Finally it impacts the ground
With a deafening splash
Breaking the silence.
The tiny droplet waits for the others
For it will surely not be the only one.

Robert Linley McCoy

Balance

Bob Hensley

Life is a balancing act that requires inputs from several sources in order to find true stability for the soul. What we do for a living doesn't define who we are; it merely puts a label on us. It is like one leg of a three-legged stool; it is necessary, but without the other two legs, we are always wobbling and never in balance. For more than twenty years, I served my country in the United States Air Force. While many call this a noble act, and I was proud to do my part, my focus most of that time was putting in my twenty years and retiring to enjoy the fruits of my labors. I was so focused on that objective that I was oblivious to many events around me. When I finally reached my goal and retired, instead of feeling content and fulfilled, I felt as if I had awakened over the rainbow and landed in Oz, a confusing and alien land. Something was missing. I felt as if I were adrift on a sea of emptiness with no clue to my purpose. Then, about five years ago, an event happened that changed my life forever.

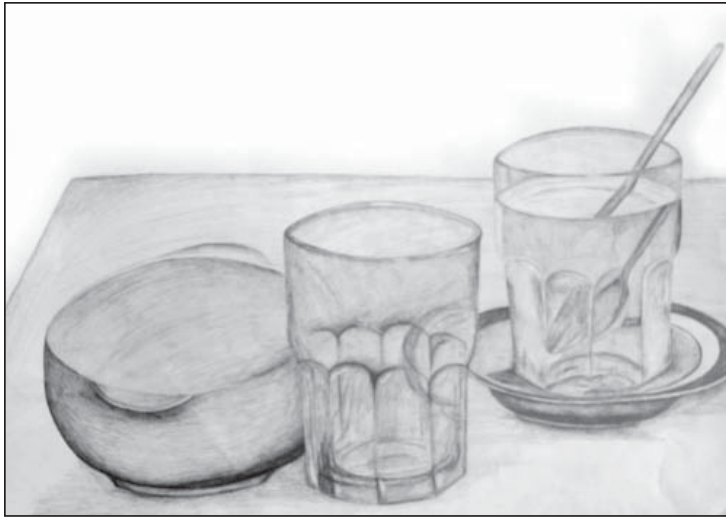
My father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and was given only a few months to live. I immediately went to him, and that visit gave me my second stool leg and a bit more balance. My father grew up with the belief that emotions were best kept bottled up, and showing too much affection, especially with male children, was not proper. Because of this, whether I did something that made him proud or did something to disappoint him, our outward relationship always appeared quite vanilla. Oh, I knew some of his past, that he had grown up on a farm, worked with the railroad, and served in the Navy before running a sales division for his company, but details of his life prior to my own were very sketchy. When he asked me if I wanted to know anything before he died, I told him I wanted to know stories of his childhood to help me understand him better. The stories he told me made him more human and three-dimensional in my mind and helped me find peace and closure when he passed a few months later. Always having viewed my father as proper and straight-laced, I truly enjoyed hearing about some of the hijinks of his time on the farm. I also learned details that he had never shared; for example, on a trip to Europe back in the 1960's, he got a parking ticket in France, which he never paid, and for the next thirty years he lived in fear that if he ever went back he would be arrested on the spot and thrown in jail.

We talked for hours during that visit. When it was time for me to leave, I gave my father a hug and told him I loved him. My father then did something I had never seen him do before; he broke down and actually cried. He said he had never known how I felt about him and wished we had talked more about emotions in the past. He said he felt a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulders and now felt that his life hadn't been spent in vain, that if I felt that way towards him, as did my other siblings, then he must have done something right in life. He said how proud he was of us all. I could feel the rift that had kept us apart during life disappear and be replaced by inner peace. I started feeling as if I were on the path to truly finding my identity and place in life.

I finally realized just how tenuous and fragile life is and that no one can predict how much time he or she has on Earth. This realization has caused me to look at life from different perspectives, to look at the environment that surrounds us and appreciate the beauty and wonder of life. This realization is the final leg to our "stool of life" that gives us stability and makes us complete. We are a product of our past, our present, and our surroundings. Since then I have made a con-

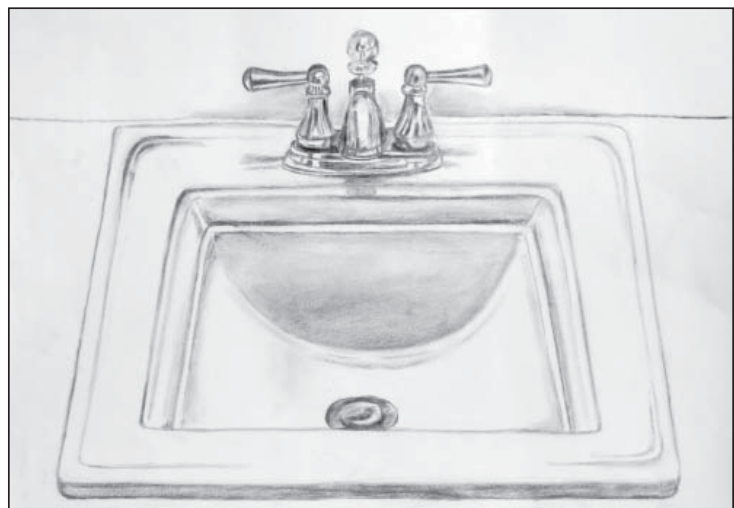
scious effort to examine things around me; I take time to watch a sunset and marvel at its beauty; I stop to watch a spider spin a web, a masterpiece in its creativity; I watch a hawk float upon air currents, free of the confines of Earth.

While my father's passing was probably the worst tragedy of my life, it was also the one event that helped me find myself. I will always remember him as the person who helped me find my identity and appreciate what a true blessing life is. Enabling me to find stability, spiritual peace, and tranquility, his passing has given me the missing legs of my life stool.



Drink

Jasmine Hickey



Deep

Andrew Harper

How to Seem Smart

Jimmy David Hicks

Everyone is plagued with the unfortunate circumstance of seeming unintelligent. The situation could be created from something as simple as tripping while riding an escalator or something as complex as coming up with an entire argument on why videogames are pure evil and then realizing that no actual evidence is in the argument. Another unfortunate circumstance develops when people get overly excited and decide to share views on various situations even though the evidence used to base their opinions was just picked up from some guy who can't tell the difference between a cat and a giraffe. Needless to say, if anyone in a room actually knows what he or she is talking about, the overeager person will likely look a bit foolish. Luckily, there are ways for people to give the impression that they are very smart even if their knowledge of current affairs or perhaps anything in general is less than reputable.

The first step of seeming smart is to conquer one's appearance. That's right. For some unfathomable reason, people sometimes base an opinion of someone's intelligence on the person's appearance. A great way to dazzle the general spectator is to wear a suit and top hat no matter what the occasion. People wearing this attire will be assumed to be smart because, obviously, the only possible solution to how they got these clothes is that they graduated from fine institutions allowing them to get jobs that would make it possible to buy incredible numbers of suits. If this attire is out of the question, another handy outfit is a sweater vest, dress pants, and dress shoes. This attire is associated only with prodigious students and people with very important interviews and is guaranteed to make people look as though they could recite a dictionary. In extreme situations, wearing a simple buttoned up collared shirt will work wonders.

No matter what the cost, it is important not to look like the guy who wears a beanie and sandals with socks and insists on sitting next to the only person in the room even though all the chairs are open.

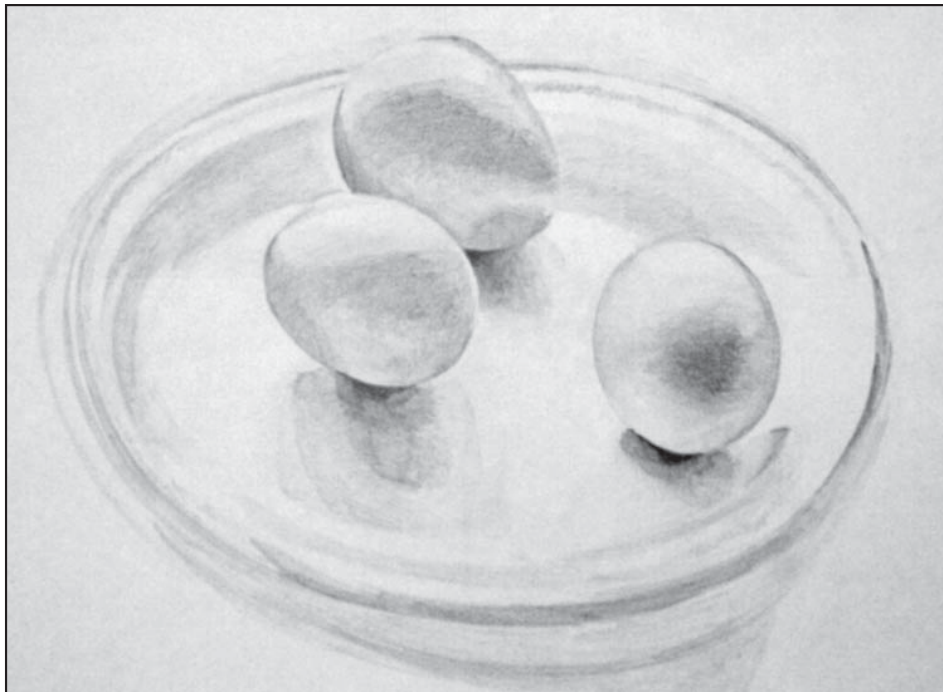
After the clothing is taken care of, the finer details may be focused on. Corrective lenses at some point or another seem to have somehow become associated with intelligence. The most impressive style of lens seems to be the monocle, which draws attention even in a crowded room. Even without corrective lenses, posture is also an important aspect of seeming smart. Sitting up straight with folded hands is a great way to seem deep in thought. If at all possible, swinging a cane while walking could be of assistance as it is a nice way to seem mildly coordinated. If good posture is not desired, it is a possible to save the appearance by making up a reason for poor posture, such as a cool sounding medical condition. A final way to appear intelligent is to at least pretend to read a complicated-looking book while listening to classical music.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to get away entirely with simply looking smart. Eventually, some stranger won't be able to contain himself or herself, or a long lost cousin will return and make ridiculous demands such as having a conversation. This will require sounding smart instead of simply telling the other person to go read the owner's manual of an old handheld game console that no one ever plays. The first requirement for sounding smart is speaking with an English accent, no matter how fake it may sound. The next step is to use long and painful sounding words and phrases such as "indubitably" and "metabolic metabolism" in situations that don't call for them. Also, instead of saying things like "this is terrible," a better replacement is "the

current circumstances are in a state of preposterously poor quality.” The final rule is to talk about complicated events no matter if the material is grossly misinterpreted or if the conversation is unwelcome. A good example of this is to mix two current events together and come up with some sort of absurd theory to make them relate.

A debate is likely to start eventually in any situation that involves a discussion longer than one minute. A great way to win an argument is never to admit a mistake, no matter how many times it is pointed out and beaten. While knowing something about the topic is a great asset in a debate, it is possible to at least give the impression that all knowledge on the topic is known by yawning and coughing while the other person is talking. If all else fails, a good conclusion to an argument is to mumble something and leave. This is rarely, if ever, considered to be a rude gesture, and it can make a person seem so smart that others assume the argument is not even at his or her level.

Not being smart is no excuse to have a reputation that indicates as such. With so many options to trick people, it is possible for anyone to be considered smart. Some people would say that it is best to not draw attention to oneself, but following this advice is not likely to improve one’s reputation. Causing spectacles to appear smart is a great way to make people think highly of whoever is doing it, whether the person causing the spectacle is actually smart or not. Seeming smart simply depends on how far someone is willing to go to make a lasting impression on people he or she may never meet again.



How Many

Danielle Castillo

A Song for Sasser
Beth Rawleigh

I swear time stopped.

“I have some bad news,” Mom said quietly. “You’re going to need to pray for Mr. Sasser’s family because he passed away last night.”

“Mr. Sasser?” I asked, trying to be sure that what I was attempting to fathom was real. She said it was. Some people go through stages of acceptance, but I skipped straight to grief. It was as if my heart blew up inside my chest.

Not Sasser.

Just then, Billy and my grandma pulled up and heard me say Sasser’s name as I covered my mouth and burst into tears. He walked up, concerned, and put his arm around me as I asked what happened and heard the whole sad story.

“What’s wrong?” Grandma asked Billy.

“I think she’s getting some bad news about her teacher,” he answered, rubbing my back.

“Oh,” Grandma answered, “Well, she’s probably just already shaken up.” As if he were just a teacher.

By the time I hung up with Mom, I was sobbing.

“That’s too bad about your teacher,” Grandma said.

We got in the car, and I continued to cry, not speaking. I just couldn’t say anything. What could I say? All I could think of was Sasser.

Grandma asked a couple times if I were okay. I said I was, but I wasn’t. “What kind of teacher was he?” she asked.

“Our music teacher,” I answered.

“Aww, that’s too bad to lose your music teacher. They always make you feel good,” she answered.

I wanted to scream at her, “He wasn’t JUST my teacher!! He was more than that! He was so much more than that!” But I couldn’t. Grandma just didn’t understand, and I couldn’t expect her to.

But inside, I knew. We all knew. Me, Alison, Caroline, Mary, Judith, Anthony, Billy, Rachel . . . and the list goes on and on. All the hearts were touched by Sasser and the legacy that he left. We loved him, truly loved him.

Steele Sasser was more than just a music teacher. He gave us music. He was music. And more than that, he cared about us. He waited patiently while we goofed off and then buckled down when things got out of hand.

I can still see him standing in front of us, waving his hands as we sang. “Make my hair move!” he would yell, and we all messed up in the song from laughing. Sasser was bald. Somehow when we face the loss of a loved one, things go into perspective. We realize just how short life is, just how insignificant our problems are when we face the true tragedies life dishes out.

Sasser was gone. Gone, not ever coming back.

Life is just too short.

I’ll never forget the night of the dress rehearsal before our concert in Spring 2008. The high-

schoolers had upset Sasser, and that combined with the lack of eating dinner had sent him into diabetic shock. He never remembered anything that happened during the span of about an hour when he was delirious and said a bunch of silly and incoherent things. I was patting his head with a damp paper towel while the nurse tried to encourage him.

“They don’t understand,” Sasser was saying, almost unintelligibly “Music is everything.”

“I know,” the nurse said, and then she pointed to all of us who were gathered around him.

“They do understand. Look how much they care about you.”

Sasser rolled his head back and looked up at me with a dazed look and just stared for a minute. “We love you, Mr. Sasser,” I said, smiling at him.

Finally, he smiled, a little lopsided one, and said, “Yeah.”

I hope the angel chorus in heaven can make your hair move.

Remembering W. Steele Sasser

Wired rimmed glasses

Shiny head

Sitting on the bench outside

Puffing on a cigarette

Flip Flops in the summer

Sweaters in the winter

“Hey, Girl, what’s going on?”

“Come downstairs and have some dessert.”

Wheeling you to your office and car

Hearing you laugh as I almost

turn your wheelchair over in the elevator

Bringing you candy and juice when your

blood sugar dropped

Reassuring you as your blood sugar rose to

normal

Sewing a button on your pants as
you walked down the hall in your
graduation gown

“I am so proud of my students.”

“Come listen to the chorus.”

How nervous you got before each concert
How well your students performed

Hearing you talk about your children
How proud you were of them

The day I heard the news

The night I saw you asleep and knew
you were singing with the angels

That’s what I remember about you

Theresa White-Wallace



Tools

Andrew Harper

Query in Iambic Dimeter

When everything
that comes to mind
becomes a line
of poetry,

the monologue
within myself
produces books
of single lines.

What if I took
my single lines
and printed them
in one long poem?

Is that auto-
biography
or is it just
a mystery?

Rosalyn F. Lomax

A Poem is a Regurgitation

A poem is a regurgitation
That happens in the mind
After putting in the pain and works
Or anything you find

You fill it with the fury
And hope it doesn't melt
You fill it with the misery
You wished you hadn't felt

You assault it with the ink
You beguile it with lead
Add in a piece of broken heart
You know it's been well fed

Then you stab it with the knives
And you beat it with the sticks
You acid scorch it with the tears
And hope it didn't miss

Zara Rullman

Snake Family

My playful cousin is colorful and bright
and is always a pet for little boys
to scare their little sisters with

My little brother is black as the shadows
he waits within to catch mice that sneak
into cupboards and steal away the food

My big brother is striped and strong
he catches the members of our family that
drive people mad with their poison

I am the little sister who is small and green
I catch the spiders that hide in the grass
and wait for an unsuspecting victim

Michelle Bailey

The King of Diamonds

The king of diamonds carries his crest
on his thin, long, oily back.
He creeps through the tall grass of our lawn,
glaring at us with death-black eyes.

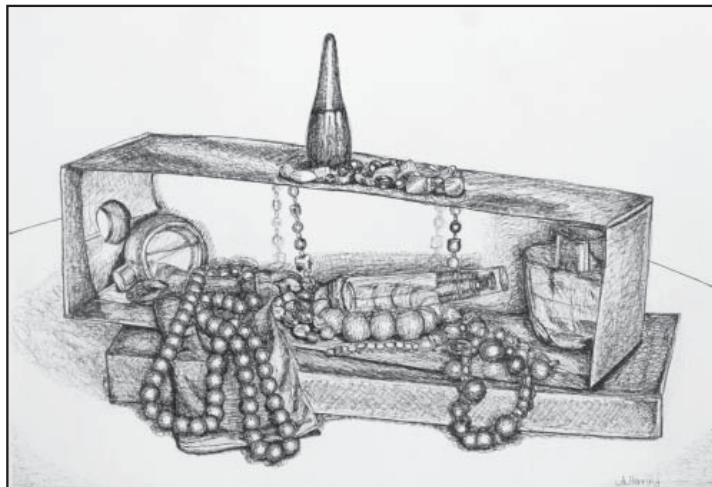
He hides his two daggers, but we know
they are there, poison-tipped, razor-sharp.
My father grabs his bush ax and meets him
in the middle of the field.

The king slips back but raises his head
and shakes his beaded tail,
daring my father with his eyes
to step closer and meet steely fangs.

The sun shines brightly as two figures freeze,
their eyes fixed on each other.
The king sways as if there were wind.
My father stands on two firm feet.

Just as the king pulls out his blades,
my father swings his ax.
The diamond-crowned head of the king
falls to lie twitching in the grass.

Alison Rawleigh



There They Are

Alyssa K. Herring

Queen Rose

Young women these days
don't know how to love a man
Maybe that's why men ain't bother'n
to ask for their hand
A woman used to dress up
and powder her face
Then let her slip hang a little
so they could see her lace

You can laugh now,
but that was the style then
Women acted like ladies
and men were real men
I use'tah dress up
and put on my "Evening in Paris"
And many a young man asked
for Queen Rose's hand in marriage

You can believe or not believe
what I tellin' ya
Go on and grow old buying
what women lib's sellin' ya
Listen to me!
Find out all about
what you been missing
And you'll see
no degree holds a candle to kissing

I'm gonna say this,
and I ain't taking it back
Have you ever wondered
why all the ugh-ly women
driving Cadillacs?

Roethyll Lunn

Red Fez

When I saw you
in your tribal clothing
and bruised blood colored fez,
you were a splendor
in black and white and red.

I stood there astounded,
absconded in my stance,
begging my Southern born hips
to do a tribal dance.

Roethyll Lunn

Mammy Cat

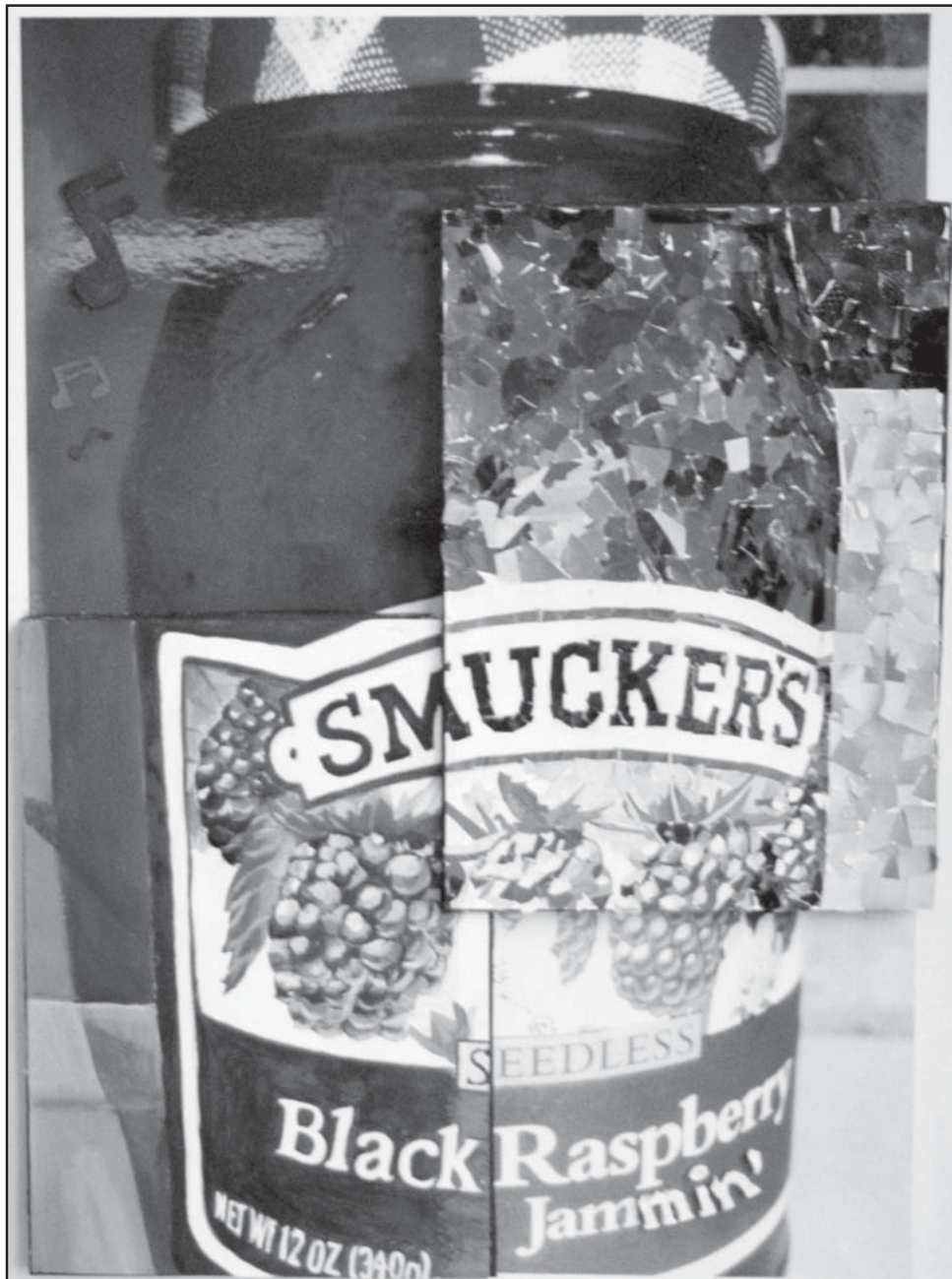
This isn't the way
That I really want to be
But somehow, over the years,
It just ended up being me.

I really fought against it,
but it seems as if I were bound
to be one of those women
that just have to run around.

I tried, I joined the church
I wanted to be honorably mentioned
I stayed there for a year
But they didn't pay any attention.

So I went back to my husband,
and he ran me back to my man
Now this cat is going to run around
With all the flair she can.

Roethyll Lunn



Jammin'

Breanna Ponzi

The Properties Mistress

At the Salvation Army
I hunt for 1950s telephones—
those black boxes with dials
almost obsolete but not antique—
a green chenille bathrobe,
and a blue McGuffey's Reader
Then, slung among the 10-cents books,
I find *Born Again: Together*
and remember us—stranded
in a small New England town
going under in Atlantis
clinging at the Roman coliseum
and how we touched in Kyoto,
saying "Sayonara" before the blade,
leapt from Middle Passage
into Caribbean waters
and how the courage of one kiss
lasts several lifetimes.
Now, I am just a Mistress—of Props
but in the cave backstage where
the tapestry suitcase seems packed
the wrapped boxes to hold gifts
the newspaper to be always today's—
art turns to life and life to truth.
Surrounded by properties, I won
nothing—but memory's jolt
and the taste of that kiss.

Margaret Boothe Baddour

The Transit of Venus

Desiring your view
she seduces you
to look at the sun.
Her soft layers
fool you, too.
She is rock hard
the shimmering orb
that hangs so low
in the evening shy—
a bass of sulfur
a core of nickel
and iron.
Voluptuous Venus
who double-crosses
the mighty sun—
only a teardrop
in his indifferent
eye.

Margaret Boothe Baddour



Wet

Ashley Winders

So Much More

You are so much more
than what I deserve
but being without you
always seems to hurt

You are so much more
than all of my thoughts
You're my only companion
You are all I've got

You are so much more
than I could ever show
How much I love you
you'll just never know

You are so much more
than the fire inside of me
It started with a spark
Now I'm burning endlessly

You are so much more
than my smile everyday
You're there to remind me
that everything's ok

You are so much more
than people can see
All they overlook
shines brightly to me

You are so much more
than I could explain
How it seems like all smile
when they hear your name

Kyle Chegwiddden

And the Earth Wouldn't Orbit

The ocean doesn't love me
The sun doesn't care
The wind doesn't stir
Through my brown hair

The rain doesn't fall
The birds do not fly
The moon doesn't shine
In my brown eyes

The streams do not flow
The sky's never blue
The stars do not blink
Unless I see you

Jeff Williams

Spring

Spring is coming; the skies are blue
The birds are chirping happily
sitting high in the tree
The green meadows
with wild flowers
springing up from
here to there
All around us I see the beauty
that can be found
Just by looking out my window
At the clouds going by

Connie Lord

Why Me!

Lazy phone!
Won't ring to give me a job.

Fat cells!
Making everybody think I'm a slob

Slow typewriter!
Won't bang fast enough to get me hired

Fast clock!
Always causing me to get fired

Disability people!
Won't ever give me a check

Bad credit!
Keep people on my neck

Silly men!
Won't ever give me a ring

Rich men!
Always marry'n Mai Ling

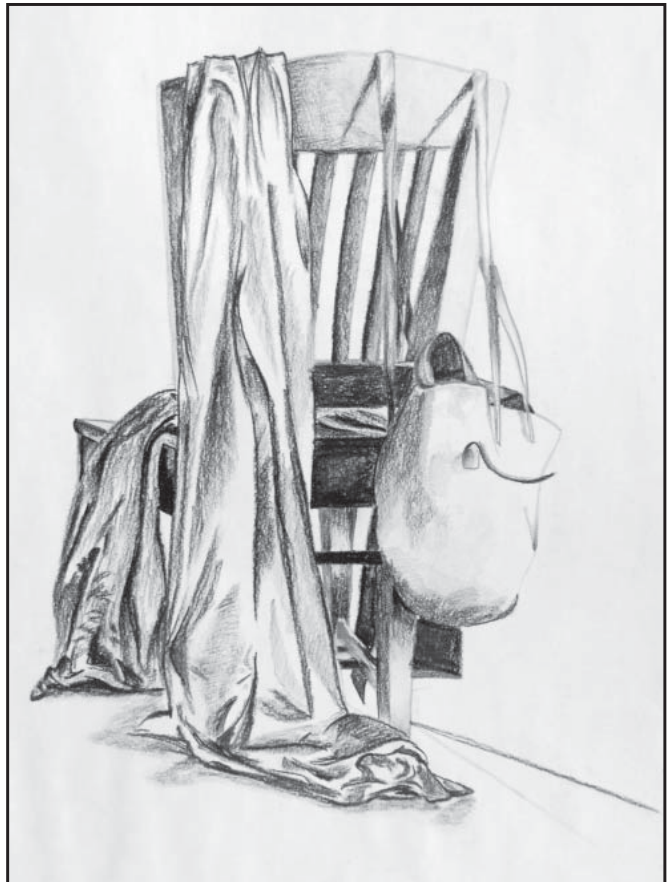
Adding machine!
Always finding me at fault

Slow car!
Always causing me to get caught

Poor me!
Can't never get a break!

Poor me! Poor me!
Never could get the right shake!

Roethyll Lunn



Gone

Danielle Castillo

Shifting Sand

Brenda Wooldridge

We finally made it to the beach. My family usually made this trip on Mother's Day. It was a tradition since my parents had moved to North Carolina four years earlier. Except for Christmas, it was the only time when we could all be together. My sisters and I were busy with our families and work, and we all lived hours apart from each other. This year we had to delay coming here for a few months but for a very good reason. My third child had chosen to be my Mother's Day present.

Arriving early, we unloaded our cars and steered all of our children toward the boardwalk. As I neared the bottom step, the salty smell of ocean assaulted my senses. Its slap teased me with the alluring call of the beach. The kids scampered on a little ahead of us, exclaiming noisily. My sisters and their husbands took off after them. Their eyes sparkled with their own childish delight as they raced to rein in the giggling brood. The kids were like a school of little fish as they darted between the legs of their parents. Finally, the game ended, and their small bodies were smothered with sunscreen.

I stayed back with my parents as everyone else made his or her way to the edge of the water. Mom put her things down. Then she too walked down and along the shore. Dad pitched our big, blue umbrella and laid out the blankets. Then, with his help, I tenderly placed my precious cargo down in the soft, shady spot he had created. Finally free of the blanket covering her, my baby giggled and kicked in satisfaction. There I placed a tiny, red pair of sunglasses on her button nose and retied the strings of her bonnet.

My dad would stay there with her. He usually preferred to sit there contentedly watching everything around him. His alert eyes scanned the scene as he took his cigarettes from his shirt pocket. He lit one of the unfiltered cigarettes and shifted into a more comfortable position. After about thirty minutes, I made my way slowly to a spot just short of the rushing water. Its hungry roars were louder now, almost deafening with the break of each wave. I sat there for a while embracing the warmth of the sand as it squished between my toes. Dreamily, I picked up handfuls of it and watched it sift through my fingers before gently blowing away.

Laughter, loud and shrill, caught my attention. I blissfully watched the animated children once again run from the adults. It had become a silly game. The kids tried repeatedly to evade their parents before being swept up high into the air away from the water. However, as soon as their little feet touched the sand, they were off again. Darting back and forth, they looked for an opening, trying to answer the beckoning call of the surf. After a time, the exhausted adults finally carried the squealing bodies into the waiting arms of the monster once more.

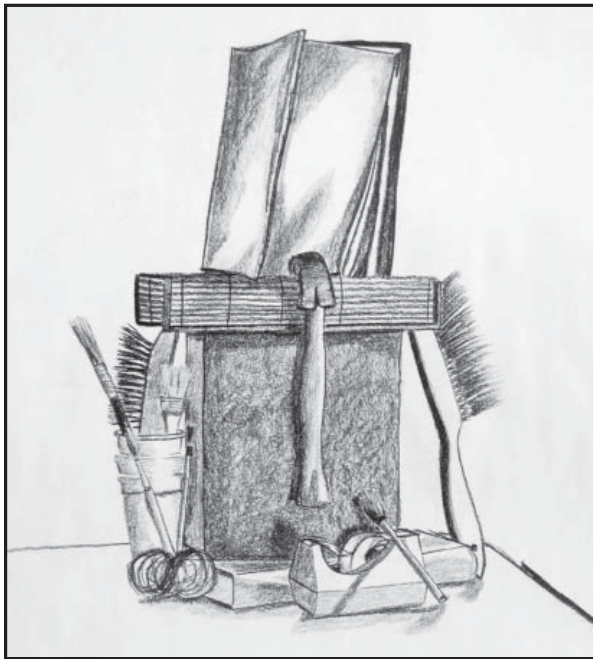
Then, tired of sitting, I waded past the edge of the great abyss. The waves slapped each other. I could feel the foaming glee of water as it hungrily lapped around my ankles. It only stayed a second before it pulled back. As the water returned to the vast expanse of its home, it took pieces of the beach with it. For now, it was satisfied to take a small amount at a time. It seemed to me as if the ocean were stealing a piece of the beach's soul each time as they kissed in a never-ending ritual.

Eventually, I made my way lazily back to the blanket. My dad had adjusted the umbrella to shield the baby from the movement of the sun. I silently continued to move closer to the peace-

ful scene. He sensed my approach and opened his eyes. He nodded at the baby, letting me know she had fallen asleep. I sat down at the edge of their oasis, trying not to disturb her.

Ultimately, the wind picked up the shifting sands and smacked us repeatedly before carrying the tiny particles away on its endless breath. I grabbed the baby, trying to shelter her from the clutches of the wind. Then gathering everyone and our things, we rushed to the cars. We had scarcely pulled out of the lot before the rains came.

That trip had been the last time we all went to the beach together. It would also be the last time my father saw the ocean. The coal miner's disease had stolen his last breath with its cold, black obsidian hands. My sisters were busy watching their own little families grow up. We had each been pulled into life's undercurrents. It would be nine years before I would visit that beach again. On that day, there was no sign of an impending storm. My children had grown, but their sun-kissed faces still lit up with intense joy and excitement as they splashed in the ocean. To me, the beach looked virtually the same. The tides still raced to feed upon the sands, scooping it into its vast body. The blinding sand was calm as it waited for the next kiss from its lover. We would make new memories on that day as we played in the shifting sand and pounding surf.



Missing

Latoya Edwards

To the Golden-Haired Girl

When the air was still
And the wind blew
We held each other's hands
And they fit like puzzle pieces.

When the rain poured
On your mother's porch
We stood there in an embrace
And we made our own umbrellas.

When the storm disturbed the world
And that fury had drenched the earth
All we could see were beach days
And our molding the sand with our toes

When the leaves plucked themselves
From the dead trees
Your hand slipped from mine
And autumn winds carried you away.

When I gaze at the skies
While I'm lying in the grass
I envision sapphire eyes beaming
And the rippling of golden hair.

Preston Sharpe

Changes and Endings

I want to run away from the world
Before it says goodbye
I want to be the one dropped dead
Then left alone to cry

I couldn't fathom wishing
That any sunset comes
To see a happy afternoon
End with the downing of the sun

And when I see the moon
I think: Why must you go away?
Likewise when the flower blooms
I wish at such state it would stay

I held onto my childhood things
And thought: "you'll always be the
same"
But I awoke and realized
I was the one that changed

Zara Rullman

How I'm feelin'

Like a waterfall in the desert
and a firefly in the dark
something about you is different
that just sets you apart

Beyond what I can imagine
and all I can understand
how all the world disappears
when you hold my hand

You walk into a room
and everyone stops and looks
You remind me of a princess
from a fairy tale book

You continue to capture my heart
and appear in all my dreams
I couldn't stop this if I tried
as crazy as it seems

So I'll go along with feeling
and I want everyone to know
I'm holding on to you forever
because I'm not going to let go

Kyle Chegwidden

My Music Always There

Suddenly no signal; nothing was aloud
As if the sky had opened up
And bagged away the sound

The wind hid behind the mountains
The crickets wouldn't play
The water stilled in fountains
And the robins refused say

The moment was so swift
As if it was not at all
Like a crack in the sky
Caused the music to fall

My ears opened up
Like wings onto the air
That moment it occurred to me
That it was always there

Zara Rullman

Happy Black

Black is the cold night in winter
the pin-pricked canopy above
the man in the black leather jacket
sipping his coffee without cream.

Black is the man from New Orleans
who plays his shiny baby grand
striking his favorite black keys
reading the inky notes from the sheet
music.

Black is the movie theater
during a mystery's midnight showing
a couple cuddled in the darkest corner
while the film's credits scroll.

Black is the hair of the mother
who sings to her baby at night
by the red-edged coals in the fireplace
drowning in soft soot.

Alison Rawleigh



The Mother Church of Country Music

Brent Hood

Dropped Change

Kourtney Willis

Scuffing my sneaker clad feet on the linoleum floor, I leaned against the cash register. I was supposed to be doing something. We were always supposed to be busy. I thought about the repetitiveness of it all and how it must be life's way of telling me, "you're almost there, soon the transformation will be complete. You'll be a mindless working drone without an original thought in your head." But work was work I argued with my pessimistic side, and I would just have to make the best of it. It was 10:55; the store closed in a few minutes. I was fully prepared to stand there for all five of them lost in my thoughts. Crossing my arms with a huff, I gave the plastic light up keys of the register a mean glare. After a few seconds, I let out my breath and let my arms swing loose. I couldn't help but think, "That's great, Kourtney. I'm sure the register is really intimidated." The sound of footsteps at the end of the counter stopped my personal tirade.

Coming up the aisle through my line was a woman holding a baby in one hand and in the other juggling a quart of milk and a small loaf of bread. I say "woman," but she couldn't have been more than twenty. Her hair was loose around her shoulders, and her thin shirt and jeans were on the dirty side. She set her stuff on the belt and didn't look at me; instead, she stared at the floor as though she were ashamed. She was thin like she hadn't been eating, and she could barely look over the top of my head despite being at least three years older than me. The baby she held in her arms was asleep in a soft blue onesie and looked clean and well cared for. Soft blonde curls covered his head, and he had his thumb stuck in his little pink mouth.

"Hi...how are you?" I asked, motionless, really meaning it.

Slowly, she looked up at me, her exhausted brown eyes looking into my probing blue ones. "Tired," she offered quietly looking away again. Picking up the quart of milk, I ran it over the scanner and put it on the other side of the register and then turned back around to get the bread. The total came to about \$6.00. I put her things in bags while she got the money together. Looking up at her through my hair, I saw tears in her eyes as she dug through her bag with one hand and held onto her baby with the other. Putting her bags on the end of the counter, I straightened and saw what she held in her hand. Three crumpled ones that she quickly gave to me and went back to looking in her bag. I could see her struggling to keep the hot tears from sliding down her face. Looking from her to the sleeping baby and back, I felt in my back pocket and pulled out a five, the only money I had. It was supposed to be for my lunch but...I quickly dropped it so she wouldn't see me. "Hey, you must have dropped this," I said picking it up off the counter. Looking from the money in my hand to me, she looked incredulous. She knew she hadn't dropped it. I knew she hadn't dropped it. Pride is a delicate thing. I tapped the buttons on the register. When the drawer popped out, I put the money inside. Not looking up, I handed her the receipt and told her to have a nice night. Standing there, bags in hand, she looked at me, not at the floor, not at the door. She looked up at me. She didn't thank me, and her mouth didn't smile, but her eyes did. When she walked to the door, she turned and nodded before heading out into the dark.



Live Expression

Brent Hood

The Myth of Solitude

A poet in isolation is a poet dodging the draft—
They myth of the lonely riverside garret
The 4AM bottles of too warm rosé
The skin so pale as to defy the sun—
Lies, lies, damned lies, and statistics!

The accoutrements are mere way stations.
Vesuvius is a hunk of angry stone without
Its Pompeii to destroy, the Mississippi
A long lined snake without New Orleans.
A poet in isolation is a poet chiseling the muse.

Poe fell alone on a Baltimore street, body
In mud and muck. His gravekeeper's vigil
Is so misplaced! He was a poet alone—
His body a wasteland, his mind
Post-Apocalyptic, destroyed.

Jeff Williams

Not Admitting to Being Jealous

You know I'll only fall apart
Knowing I can't have your heart
That "we" will never be
Even though you're everything to me

To watch you give your heart away
And just to hear you say
You're loving someone new
And I'm falling for you

What is it I'm feeling here
As I want to disappear
Tirelessly trying to understand
Watching you hold his hand

I don't want to think of you and him
Or what'll go down when lights are dimmed
God, I don't even want to care
But I'm dying when I see you there

Why do you have to look so great?
It's just so hard to concentrate
When I know he's holding you
Like I always wanted to

How come I'm just the friend
And I'm always having to pretend
That I'm all right with things this way
And I always have to say

Things I don't really mean
And lie about everything
Truth is, he's in my place
If only you'd see it that way

Kyle Chegwidden

Missing You

I don't know where you are
or where you have been
All I know is I'm here
dying to see you again
I've held on for years
waiting for your return
The meaning of empty
is just one thing I've learned
Like the hammock outside
where you used to swing
and where you'd tell everything
It's still there tied to the tree
where you whispered you loved me
I still have the albums
we slow danced to
and all of the feelings
that you never knew
I remember when we talked
There used to be such a rush
I wonder if it would still be there
if we kept in touch
So, I'll stay a little longer
and come what will
because after all this while
I want you still

Kyle Chegwidden

My Mimi, Milly Rawleigh

My Mimi, Milly Rawleigh
Salt and pepper, silver streaks
In coconut cream cake batter
Sappy sweet syrup
Fluffy feather down bed
Sinky, squishy soft pillows
Proper paper planning pages
Dates, deadlines, due-by-when
Gentle gestures, gingerbread
Comfy quick cat-nap couch
Fumbling fingers fondly find
Plucky piano progressions
Silly salicylic acid in a
Slippery, drippy, soapy dish
A dozen muffins from the oven
With crispy, crusty, puffy crowns
With Mimi, Milly Rawleigh

Alison Rawleigh



Eye Catcher

Gene Smith

Moon Flower

Michelle Bailey

In the bouquet of flowers are yellow cannas lilies, small little bursts of white cluster roses, then a large white flower, called a Moon Flower, with paper thin petals that spread out to be as large as a hand with outstretched fingers. That flower does not seem to fit in the bouquet, but it is the one that is the most special.

Months before this flower had ever even blossomed, it was just a picture on a computer screen. The flower was bought for Sandy, my mom's best friend. It was bought by Sandy's husband Mike Miller, my dad's best friend. He thought she would like it because it only bloomed on the night of the last full moon of the summer. Only for one night would the flower be seen, and because of that, it made it even more beautiful. So he bought it knowing she would love the suspense of waiting for it to blossom. The day it arrived in the mail, Mike planted it in the garden. He made sure she did not see the picture of the flower on the box. He wanted the blossom to be a surprise. His wife was excited when he told her what he had done. She always loved surprises, especially ones she had to wait for. She loved the wanting to know but not being able to find out.

A month before the Moon Flower was meant to bloom, Sandy died in a car crash. That day was two days before their second wedding anniversary. They had found each other late in life but felt as if they had been high school sweethearts. Mike was completely devastated. He did not think of anything except how much he missed her. Most of all, he missed their evening in the garden. They would tend the flowers and pick their vegetables every evening before dinner. Each night a fresh vase of flowers would be on the table. When the funeral was over and he was able to work and start living a life without her, he realized the moon flower was due to bloom the next night.

The same night the flower was supposed to bloom, my parents were going to be renewing their vows for their 25th wedding anniversary. My parents had known Mike and Sandy for over fifteen years. They might as well have been family. We were going to have a small party at our house with family and close friends. My parents wanted Mike to read a passage from the Bible before they spoke their vows to each other.

Before Mike left for the party, he noticed the moon flower had blossomed. He went over to the small bush with one beautifully pale flower. It looked so fragile that if he touched it, it would fall apart. He knelt on the ground before it and wept for his wife. She would have loved seeing the moon flower. They would have sat together on the porch swing and stared at it for hours talking about how beautiful it was. If only she were here. He did the only thing he thought he should do. He picked the flower and put it in a vase to take to his wife's best friend, my mom.

When he got to the party, he sought out my mom. She wore a white dress and had a beautiful bouquet of flowers. Mike then told her the story behind the pale flower. She cried for Sandy. Then came the time for Mike to read the passage and for my parents to renew their vows. In the bouquet, my mom had stuck in the moon flower. It did not seem to match the rest. It was beautiful.



Christmas Box

Ashley Winders



My Chocolate

Danielle Castillo



Into the Mystic

Diane Joyner

The Flood

In this land there is absence, in this river there is nothing
on this tree there are no leaves, only dry twigs and shriveled berries
so the dreams of all fall like dirt upon the hard pan
the salt flats and cracked parquet of the desert floor
in this absence there is no sorrow, no joy, no sense of belonging
only the silence like an empty chair or naked bed springs.

And you chant “Bring on the rain! Bring on the water!
Bring on the flood! Cleanse this wounded land! Let the winds blow
life and seeds onto newly fertile soils! Let the peace that is belonging
flow like streams born of ocean tides and cold fronts!
Bring on the rain! Bring on the water! Bring on the flood!”
But all you hear is silence, only silence, silence of an empty chair.

Jeff Williams

A Cold and Black December Came Early Today

Watch the sky
Count from ten
I feel nothing
Only cold

My eyes are blank
I can't see the future
I can't remember the past
All dressed in black

I can't focus
I'm not all well
I'm not all here
I'm just drifting

Candace Johnson

Sue Jones

Restless energy, hands a flutter,
creative juices flowed.
Wellspring of love, reaching others,
lover of those unloved.
Happy of heart, spreading joy,
laughter in every story.
Follower of God, lover of Christ
showing the path to glory.
Gentle doe eyes, sharing a smile,
crown of soft brown curls.
Sweet life-spirit, wife mother child,
a void left in our world.

I love you, Mama

Kim Clark

Hands

Hand of contrast
With the holding of two hands
Hold together
Lives of different worlds.

Smooth is the hand of the young girl
Unaware of what lies ahead.
Aged is the hand of the older woman
Two generations removed.

One remembers a life gone by
Time that just won't slow down.
The other looks beyond the days
To a future not yet found.

Yesterday and tomorrow
Joined in the moment.
Time stopped briefly
With the holding of two hands.

Jennifer Parker

Ashes to Ashes

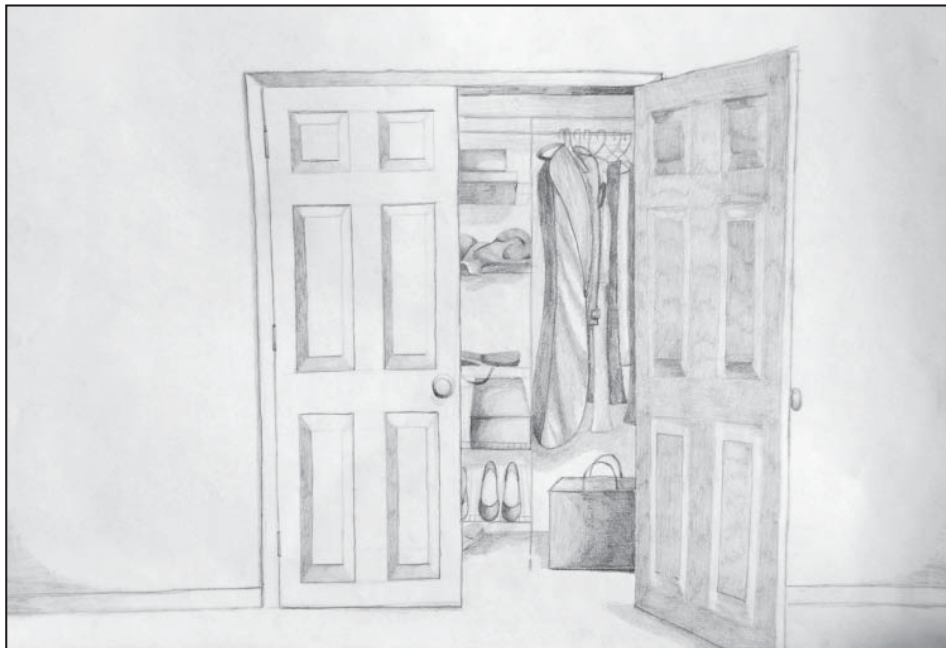
I turn the compost heap
and add to wet dark leaves
my kitchen leavings of the day.
Nearby I see the cross
that marks our beagle's grave

and in my heart I feel
the absence of my mother-in-law,
dead now a week, her leavings
in the Quaker cemetery under trees
alive before the Revolution.

Her death compounds
the major leavings of my life--
parents, Greenwood Cemetery;
brother, silver box of ashes
on my mantel; close friends,

too many—
I turn my grief and add new leavings
to the compost heap that is my heart.

Rosalyn F. Lomax



Closet

Alyssa K. Herring

A London Alphabet

All Hallows and St. Mary Abbots Church,
Albert with Victoria, and Westminster Abbey.
Bridges and **B**ig **B**en and **B**uckingham Palace,
Billy Elliot, *Beowulf*, the **B**arbican,
Bobbies and **B**eefeaters, **B**eatles and **B**ach.
Castles, cathedrals, chapels, Coronation Chair,
Covent Garden and Cotswolds,
Christ Church and Canterbury Cathedral.
Downing Street, **D**iana's Walk, red **d**ouble-**d**ecker bus.
Elizabeth twice and the London Eye.
Fanny Burney and Falstaff.
The **G**lobe and many galleries, Gutenberg Bible,
Gardens of old and St. **G**iles' Church,
Several King **G**eorges, and Mind the **G**ap!
Hampton Court and several King **H**enrys,
Handel and **H**errick, **H**arrods and **H**orse Guards.
The **I**nterval (or intermission) and many an ancient inn,
Sir Isaac Newton as the Thinker at the British Library
(and his pew at St. Mary Abbott).
Johns and **J**ameses and **J**ewels in the Crown.
King Lear at the Globe and **K**eats and all the **K**ings
and High Street **K**ensington.
Leeds Castle, British Library, *Lear* at the Globe,
New London Symphony,
And Longfellow (first American at Abbey).
British **M**useum, **M**illennium Bridge,
John **M**ilton's resting place,
A concert at St. **M**artin-in-the-Fields,
St. **M**argaret's Church, and Mind the Gap!
National Gallery and Admiral **N**elson.
Wilfred **O**wen and a jaunt to **O**xford.
Parliament, *Pygmalion*, **P**oet's Corner, St. **P**aul's.
Queens and **q**uires, and everyone **q**ueues up.
Rosetta Stone, *Regina*, *Rex*, and **R**oyal Albert Hall.
Shakespeare and a Stratford jaunt, the Sutton Hoo,
And cigarette pack warnings, **S**MOKING **K**ILLS!
Tower of London, **T**rafalgar Square,
Tottenham Court Road, **T**ate Modern,
Take-Away (our take-out), the **T**ube (the Underground).
Victoria Palace and Old **V**ic, **V**ictoria with **A**lbert,
Vivaldi's *Gloria* in concert at St. **M**artin's.
Wordsworth at **W**estminster Abbey,
Merry Wives of Windsor at the Globe,
William with **M**ary, and Underground signs for "Way Out."
X is in Exeter where I really must go next time!
Yellow is the Circle Line on the Underground.
"Whoreson zed" is Kent's insult defending old King Lear!
Never too long is the alphabet
For Lomax's London. Love!

Rosalyn F. Lomax

Dreaming the Gap

At every stop
on the London tube
a pleasant voice calls out
to "Mind the gap!"

The gap between
platform and train
is not a threat until
the nightmares come

and then all night
the "Mind the gap!" resounds
each time the gap grows wide
and wider till my size

diminishes to Alice,
whose tumble was inspired
by Christ Church College stair,
the Oxford guide reminds,

but no kind voice warns how
Millennium Bridge
aquiver over Thames
will lure me toward the Globe—

I blithely cross that gap
until my eyes grow wide
when I see where I am
and lose my breath

and in the night
the gap grows wide
and deepens with each call
of "Mind the gap!"

Rosalyn F. Lomax



Looking for Lunch

Gene Smith

Ravenesque

So a dark bird has perched on the plaster bust,
turning green from rain and algae, sitting lonely
on the blue wooden boards of a neglected porch.

At times such as these, certain questions must be
broached. For instance, are you simply asleep,
suffering from quaffing of strange, strong liquors?

Or did a friend, finding you gone, leave a plate
of cornbread for you, only you came in the back,
leaving a feast for any old avian friend to find?

Perhaps you merely forgot, in the rush of morn,
to take your lithium, and now a price must be
paid, a hallucination squatting on cheap bric-a-brac.

While asking these questions, though, remember
heat and air conditioning cost money, and startled
birds are unpredictable. To wit: shut fast the door!

Jeff Williams

A White Mourning

Mary Spears

I awaken to fierce bangs on the door of my small sanctuary. An euphoric brother yells the joyous news through the painted wood. It has snowed! Finally, it has snowed! He loudly invites me to come, come see the glorious thing which has now befallen us, this picturesque symbol of December that evaded our town. Yet, I do not heed his call, for it is very warm beneath three layers of wool and fabric and much too early in the day for snow wars. Uncaring, I return to sleep and vague half-dreams.

Later, I am awakened by a different noise, the absolute absence of sound. It seeps through well-built brick and presses against me, harsh and unnerving. From between the thin slats of window shades, soft rays pour, and the sharp gleam of winter reflects off the walls of my bedroom. I slip out of bed and dress hastily in the chilling air. Leaving my comfortable lair, I creep through our suburban castle. The house feels like the coldest of stone chapels as I walk through it, hoping the heating will be fixed some time before Wednesday. Shivering shadows are all around, for the lamps are off, and I dare not flip a switch to turn them on. In this darkened mausoleum, any light would be sacrilege.

The front door sticks as I try to open it, barring me maliciously for its own trite purposes. The knob is an iron ice cube, and my fingers recoil from it violently, reminding me that I have forgotten a pair of gloves atop the cluttered dresser of my room. I forsake them and go out anyway.

My first impression of the surroundings is one of quiet peace. There is such serenity, such calmness in the atmosphere. I inhale deeply and exhale, watching my breath gambol and gavotte around my face before it disappears. A cool, cheerful feeling stirs within me.

Then, I truly notice the emptiness. The silence that first assailed me earlier now crushes with its full force. There is no sign nor sound of any living thing. All that was green, yellow, or brown is now buried under a blotting white blanket. Even the sky is not blue or gray but a strange, sickening cottony color. Everything is shrouded and still.

It is strong and cruel, this magnificent, blinding white, which now brings to mind bleached bones and marble tombstones. A beautiful death nevertheless! The horrible perfection of it is terrifying, and I search the landscape in desperation for some ugly mark, some mis-formed lump, some overlooked weakness!

But there is naught. I gaze downwards in disappointment. Then, I see a muddy boot print clearly outlined on the ground, marring the frozen powder's false innocence. Beyond it lie others, a wide trail of them, stretching off into a hazy distance. Their obnoxious imperfection comforts me. I call out my brother's name and run wildly into the freezing air, staining the snow with my own honest dirt.



Metamorphosis

Ashley Winders

Excerpt from Capricorn Sol's Autistic Genie

J. L. Knoll

I looked out the window hoping to meet Emmy that very same day. But I knew that my visit could not last long at her house. I sighed and got dressed for school. School had started only a couple of months ago, and I already knew that Emmy would not be there at school, for she was going to go to another school in New York. It was a feeling of loss and deprivation at the big move for Emmy, who was my best friend since kindergarten. She had been there through my tough times and my good times. And when Emmy was not around, I still had Danny to take care of me. But in my heart, I wished that Danny and Dad would get along like they used to back when I was younger.

I shed some tears as I walked toward my locker. I wiped them away impatiently because I did not want anyone to see my crying. When I got there, I opened up my locker and found something that I had not seen before. It was a pink pearl that shimmered with the brightest pink, and it was caged and put on a pretty chain that swirled with great craftsmanship. I looked around to make sure that no one was looking, and I put on the chain. The pink pearl glowed around my neck as though it was meant to be there. I knew that someone would try to steal a pink pearl away from me, so I tucked the chain inside my shirt.

I grabbed my proper books, and I rushed to class. There, Mr. Horne, the science teacher, called the roll, and when he got to Emmy's name, I told him that Emmy would be moving very soon. He checked off Emmy's name, and he said, "Well, I would like you all to take a look at our pictures of science."

When the bell rang ending school, I went home on the bus, hoping that Emmy had not moved away yet. I went over to Emmy's house to say one last goodbye to her before her big move, but somehow, the pain of sadness that I was feeling deeply inside began to swell up.

Emmy was helping with her packing, and she saw me and said, "I'm sorry that I have to move away."

"I know," I replied sadly. "I hope you can come and visit me sometime on your summer vacation."

"My parents would probably be too busy by that time," said Emmy, patting me on the back. "Maybe when they have the time, I can come and visit you during one of my vacations."

I nodded, and then, I realized that I was crying. I brushed away the tears, but it seemed like they were flooding out of my eyes. Emmy must have noticed my sadness, and then she said, "I really will miss you. I know how hard it is for you to make new friends when I am gone."

"I know. I will miss you too."

Emmy hugged me, and it was the last hug she gave me before she left in the morning.



Punky

April Crow

Brother, please, give up on me

Can a man of your complexion
walk in my direction?

Brother, please,

Give up on me!

Don't even try to get my detection
without a BMW and a PH.D!

Roethyll Lunn

The Lady Behind the Glass

A lonely little man
In a lonely little world
Stares up at a window
At a lonely little girl

His thoughts begin to wonder
About the lady behind the glass
Tempting him to toss a pebble
For an opportunity to ask

Robert Linley McCoy

The “Buffalo”

Sabrina Kornegay

The story begins with a woman gazing out of a window into a field of buffalo. The old buffalo farthest away is frail from age and years of stress on her body. Another buffalo still fights to be strong but knows deep down she too will soon suffer the same fate as the older buffalo. Finally, the youngest of the buffalo stands closest to the window, halfway down a path that forks two ways at the end. One side of the forked path leads to the other two buffalo. The other is a long and winding road of something too far away to make out, a road of uncertainty and unknown. The road is full of hills and rocks and many other obstacles that appear only as hardships and challenges. The woman stares more closely out the window. She stares so closely and for so long that she can make out every detail of the buffalo. She can see every strand of reddish brown fur around its face and each small puff of warm air that blows from its snout, almost fogging the mirror with each of its breaths. The most intriguing observation is that of the left eye of this buffalo. The top eyelid pulsates and twitches involuntarily back and forth.

Just then, her concentration is broken by the annoyance that puts her in front of the mirror in the first place. She watches as her upper left eyelid dances to an unknown beat. She closes her eye and applies pressure, hoping to gain the control she must have, wondering how long, how much more she can take, how long before she ends up as deathly ill as those before her, those with this same personality. This personality motivates her and drives her to do things most individuals would not in their right minds attempt. This personality forces her to aim for perfection, to never settle, to know that she can do it all. This personality taunts her when she settles for something. This personality was finally given a title in her PSY 150 class . . . Buffalo.

Yes, I am a buffalo. I must be great at all that I do, all that I know I can do. Even when grades are not important, all that matters is that I at least make a C; I can not settle. I must push to the limit, past the limit when possible. The difference between an A and a B, an A and an A+ is haunting. Shouldn't a B be okay, though? I'm a mom of two toddlers, work, take care of the home and money, and go to school full time. Isn't it okay to make a B or C? No, I have no excuses. There is no point in trying to reason with myself. I am always right.

My mom, too, is always right. Her mom is right as well. Even when we all disagree, each of us is right. They too are that of the buffalo personality. My grandmother's personality has clashed with everyone else's. Married and divorced four times, she is perfect, and all of these men are not. Nothing is wrong with her, and now she drinks away the pain of perfections each night, alone.

My mom too could do it all—single mom of three working three jobs—but we knew when school started again we would always get new clothes and one pair of name brand shoes. How could any mom turn a few dollars into everything we needed and a lot of what we wanted? Nothing could stop her! She was perfect and stronger than the world until she was in the hospital, 90 pounds and stressed beyond repair. She, too, has been married numerous times. She, too, is alone.

I am just as strong as they are, stronger even. The stress can not take me; it will not. I keep pushing and building my tolerance and endurance. I'm stronger. I have to be. The twitch will go away; it may come back, but I will learn to control it. I will conquer it like every other challenge I have faced. It will not defeat me!

So, now, I stand like the buffalo at a fork in the road. How can I win?

Goldsboro Spring

Mulberry, Walnut, Evergreen,
all streets fit for a bride,
where dogwoods white and dogwoods pink
proclaim the Eastertide.

Their arching hues go on for blocks,
a feast for hungry eyes,
and in the arch a heav'nly blue
backdrop of April skies.

Rosalyn F. Lomax

Schroedinger's parakeet

sits in his cage, grooming yellow
feathers, eating seeds, twittering
nervously. How will his world
be different? After the appointed
moment, will he finally be free
of his nemesis, free to fearlessly
flap his wings, or will his feline
foe stare back at him, thinking
as it watches the cage, will this
or will this not be the day.

Jeff Williams



Frog Shade

Gene Smith

Revelation

Theresa White-Wallace

I was fifteen years old and was running as fast as I could down the winding hallway. Not far behind was a crowd of people who were also running to safety. Finally, I came to this enormous rectangle shaped room. The ceiling was high, and the floor was made of white marble. The longest part of the wall was made of glass. I knew I would be safe once I was on the other side of the glass wall. I also knew what lived beneath the staircase on the other side. I would be okay, but the people behind me would be hurt. The crowd was getting closer as I ran toward the double glass doors. I had to make it to the doors before the crowd got too close. I was tired and out of breath. The crowd ascended on the doors as soon as I closed them. I could hear bodies slam against the glass. From left to right, people were crawling over each other. The glass wall was now a sea of people. The crowd would eventually make it through the doors, but there was nothing I could do for them once they made their way to the other side. They would be hurt.

Everything became dark as I turned my back to the crowd. I could barely see the open staircase that ran the width of the wall. The creature that lived under the staircase would not hurt me, but the people on the other side of the wall would not be as lucky. I could feel the heat from the creature on the back of my legs as I made my way down the long staircase. When I got to the bottom of the staircase, I saw two blonde haired children around four years of age. I recognized the children because I had encountered them before. I knew danger was around the corner as it always was when the children were involved. At that moment, I wished that I had not seen them. I had protected them in the past, but I was afraid that I would not be able to do that this time.

Not far from the staircase was a wooden door that led to daylight on the other side. It was so dark that the children and I could barely see as we made our way toward the door. I began to hear screams as I closed the door behind us. The crowd had broken through the glass doors. The creature was waiting for them. I picked up the little girl and took the hand of the little boy. I told them that we were going to walk up the path that led to the road above. I also told them that we would be safe, but whatever they heard, they were not to look back or they would be hurt. The screams seemed to get louder as we made our way up the path. Once there, I put the little girl down and took her hand. As we stood, the first of the wounded began to make their way up the path. I couldn't believe my eyes. Everyone's clothes were singed from the heat. Most had red burn marks, and everyone had orange size, red, round, open wounds. The scorpion that lived under the staircase had burned and stung the people. Only a few survived and managed to make it through the wooden door. The children and I stood still as the last of the survivors passed. Everything was now quiet. The screaming below had stopped.

I turned to the children and said, "Let's go." The paved road, green trees, and mountains disappeared. Ahead, the land was flat. As far as the eye could see was sand. Lying on the side of the road was a skull of a cow. As I looked at the skull, I noticed something unusual about one of the eye sockets. Inside the socket I saw darkness and one little star. The star twinkled. I woke up. What a dream!

I Smiled

I awakened to loud raining
and I smiled

I walked outside and saw dark clouds
and I smiled

The sky was black and overcast
and I smiled

The crisp air was biting cold
and I smiled

The wind had stayed at bay today
and I smiled

I waltzed through the steady downpour
and I smiled

Robert Linley McCoy

Ominous

The soft, cool spring breeze
Dances through the trees
Tickling slumbering humans
As they lie nestled in roped berths
Or on hard wooden planks of porches.
Everything is in serenity.

Twilight marches before dusk
Broadcasting his approach.
All becomes silent
Deathly silent.

Robert Linley McCoy



I Walk The Line

Brent Hood

The Answer
Marc Mahan

Ruthie was born on June 25, 1966. One day when Ruthie was five years old, she asked her mom and dad a very important question. Not sure of the answer, they put the question off onto someone else. “That’s a question best suited for God. One day, maybe, He will tell you the answer.”

Ruthie promptly wrote to God asking him the question. Ruthie, it should be noted, believed that God was a wizened old man who lived in the clouds. On a scrap of paper, Ruthie jotted down what she most needed to know. She also included her address in case God didn’t know where to send the answer. Ruthie knew of only one way the question could reach God. She fastened the note to the end of the string of a helium balloon and let it float away.

The wind currents carried the balloon across the Atlantic Ocean, all the way to North Africa where it eventually lost its lift and was discovered by the talented musician Philippe. Unfortunately, because the note was written in English, Philippe didn’t not understand the question. He went to see his American friend Melissa who he hoped might translate it for him.

“Could you tell me what this says?”

Melissa studied the paper with a furrowed brow. “It’s a question and damned if I know the answer. Perhaps my boyfriend Roger would know—his nose is always in a book learning about one thing or another.” That evening she handed Roger the question.

“Do you know the answer to this?”

Roger took the note and carefully read over the question that was written in crayon. “Most curious. What are the chances of this note making its way to me?”

“Why, does the question hold some significance for you?”

“Indeed it does. If there’s one thing in this world that I’m sure of, it’s the answer to this question.” He slipped on his pants and began hunting for his shoes.

“What are you doing?”

“What does it look like? I’m leaving for America.”

“Roger, this is ridiculous; it’s just a silly little question.”

“Melissa, somewhere out there,” he said gesturing to the world at large, “there is a child who needs an answer. I have to go.” He stood up with purpose.

“Don’t be crazy! You could always respond by post.”

“You and I both know that the African mail system cannot be trusted. I must go.” He placed his hands on her shoulders and moved her aside.

“If you leave, I won’t be here when you get back.”

“Then, I guess, this is farewell.”

Roger, mad with determination, swam into the ocean. After nearly drowning, he washed up on the beach. Realizing that swimming was not an option, he decided to fly instead. He bought a plane ticket with the last of his money, leaving him penniless. Once in the air, Roger remembered why he’d left America in the first place. He’d fled to Africa to dodge the Vietnam War draft, but nothing was going to stop him from delivering the answer.

Upon landing, he was immediately arrested and thrown into prison for draft evasion. Roger served two hard years of backbreaking labor and social reform. Through it all, the dream of delivering the answer kept him from becoming bitter.

After being released from jail, Roger was broke. He knew he had to make some traveling

money. The only job Roger could find was as a garbage man. Day after day, he slung trash, and by night, he slept in a halfway house. Soon he had saved enough money to buy a bus ticket to the town in which the girl lived.

Roger boarded the bus with the hope that his journey was nearing its end. His fellow passengers stared at Roger in disgust and gave him a wide berth. By this time, the stench and grime of his recent profession had overtaken him. It was no matter to Roger what people thought about him because he knew the answer. From where the bus deposited him, he still had thirty-two miles of ground to cover. Had he known this, he would have worked the extra day needed to earn money to buy new walking shoes.

Ten hours, and one heat stroke later, Roger arrived at his destination. Weak with dehydration and covered with cracked bleeding sunburned skin, he stumbled onto the street where Ruthie lived. An alarmed neighbor promptly called the police to report a vagrant and possible deviant who had wandered into their lives.

Roger stopped at a mailbox, took out the well-worn scrap of paper, and confirmed Ruthie's address. His heart swelled—he had made it. He knocked on the door with considered restraint. Now that he was here, he wanted to shout the answer at the top of his lungs. An older woman, Ruthie's mother Roger assumed, opened the door. "Yes..." was all she managed before her eyes widened in terror, and the color vanished from her face.

"Ruthie," Roger croaked. "I need to see Ruthie."

This was all Ruthie's mother needed to hear to know that his man was trouble. She tried to shut the door but Roger, ever determined, stepped forward into the house. "Ruthie!" her mother screamed. "Run to your room and lock the door!"

"But I have something for Ruthie," Roger tried to explain.

Roger attempted to get past Ruthie's mother, but she blocked him with her body. She was willing to fight him. That's when the police arrived.

Roger refused to give up and went down swinging. He pleaded with the cops that he alone had the answer that Ruthie needed if only he could see her. To the cop's ears, this sounded very bad. In the struggle with the police, he had lost the one thing that would support and defend his mad claim—the scrap of paper on which Ruthie's question was written.

The police finally managed to handcuff Roger and placed him into the back of a squad car.

Ruthie, now that the bad man had been captured, left the safety of her room. She spotted the piece of paper on the floor and recognized it immediately. Nearly two years had passed since she'd written her question, but it had never, not even once, left her mind. Picking up the paper, she ran outside to the street to where everyone had gathered to watch the crazed lunatic be hauled away by the police. Roger, from the back seat of the squad car, notice a young girl emerge from the crowd with a familiar scrap of paper in hand. He met her eyes and saw understanding there. In that instant, she perceived that this wild man had traveled years and miles and suffered countless ordeals so that he could give her the answer.

The sirens started up, indicating departure.

"The answer! What is it?" Ruthie frantically yelled.

Tears of joy spilled down Roger's sun burned and bruised face. Finally, he was going to be able to give her the answer after all. As the police car began to pull away, Roger put his head against the window and shouted to Ruthie. "Yes! The answer is Yes."

A smile leapt onto Ruthie's face. She heard his muffled answer and knew it to be true.

Dream Sparrow

For the sea is a black-scaled monster
who hides between the mountains
we live on, waiting for someone
to set foot on him so he can
drag them down into his folds.

But my father was smarter
than the sea and sent us by air
toward our goal...all of us
except our cunning sparrow,
who chirped that he'd rather walk.

So unmeasured time passed
before we would see my bird again,
and while I feared he would die,
he fought puddles, rivers, and waterfalls
until he was stronger than us all.

Yet the sea seemed undaunted
as our brave sparrow approached,
feathers ruffled, ready to kill,
with his sharp beak aimed true
to the sea-monster's scaled belly.

And the scales burst from the creature,
turning into raindrops as they fell,
and the monster lost its form and swirled
back
into itself, its dying cry a loud wave
that swept over our mountain.

So now we sail over the monster's grave
in our little ski towards the land
we were told of years ago, the place
that will be worth all our travels,
a new place to call home.

Alison Rawleigh



Plates

Brent Hood

How to Kill a Balloon Animal

Jennifer Lynn Hobbs

Balloon animals are perhaps the most evil creatures on this planet. Sure, they are cute, and children enjoy playing with them, but something is beneath the surface that not many people know. They wait for children to fall in love with them; then, they die. They deliberately break children's hearts! Balloon animals must be stopped! We must destroy all of them before they hurt somebody else. Killing them is simple. Bob will demonstrate how it is done.

Before Bob begins, he will need a few items. The first of these items is a non-see-through bag such as a purse or possibly a book bag. The second set of items he will need is tea and cookies. He will also need candy, preferably Twizzlers and Gummy Bears, but any kind will work. All of these items can be purchased at a local grocery store for a minimal price. Bob will also need a basic sewing needle and escargot (which is optional and will be left up to Bob on whether or not he wants to use it).

The first step in killing these creatures is finding them. Bob has to hunt down a clown. Clowns are easily recognizable, though. They are usually surrounded by lots of children and wear brightly colored clothes. If that is not enough, just look for a big red nose. Now Bob has found the creator of these horrific animals. He will have to find a hiding place close to the clown and the balloon animal. Bob must wait for the clown to leave the animal alone (a diversion may have to be planned for this). After the clown has left, Bob will sneak closer to the animal, being careful and making sure that no one sees him.

After he has chosen his method, Bob will have to get the balloon animal to come to him. This part can be tricky unless he knows what to do. Bob can always try to call it to him. He will call it just like he would a cute dog. Bob will get down on his knees, hold his hand out, and call out to it. If that does not work, there is always bribery. Balloon animals love candy. Their favorites are Twizzlers and Gummy Bears, but any type of candy will work.

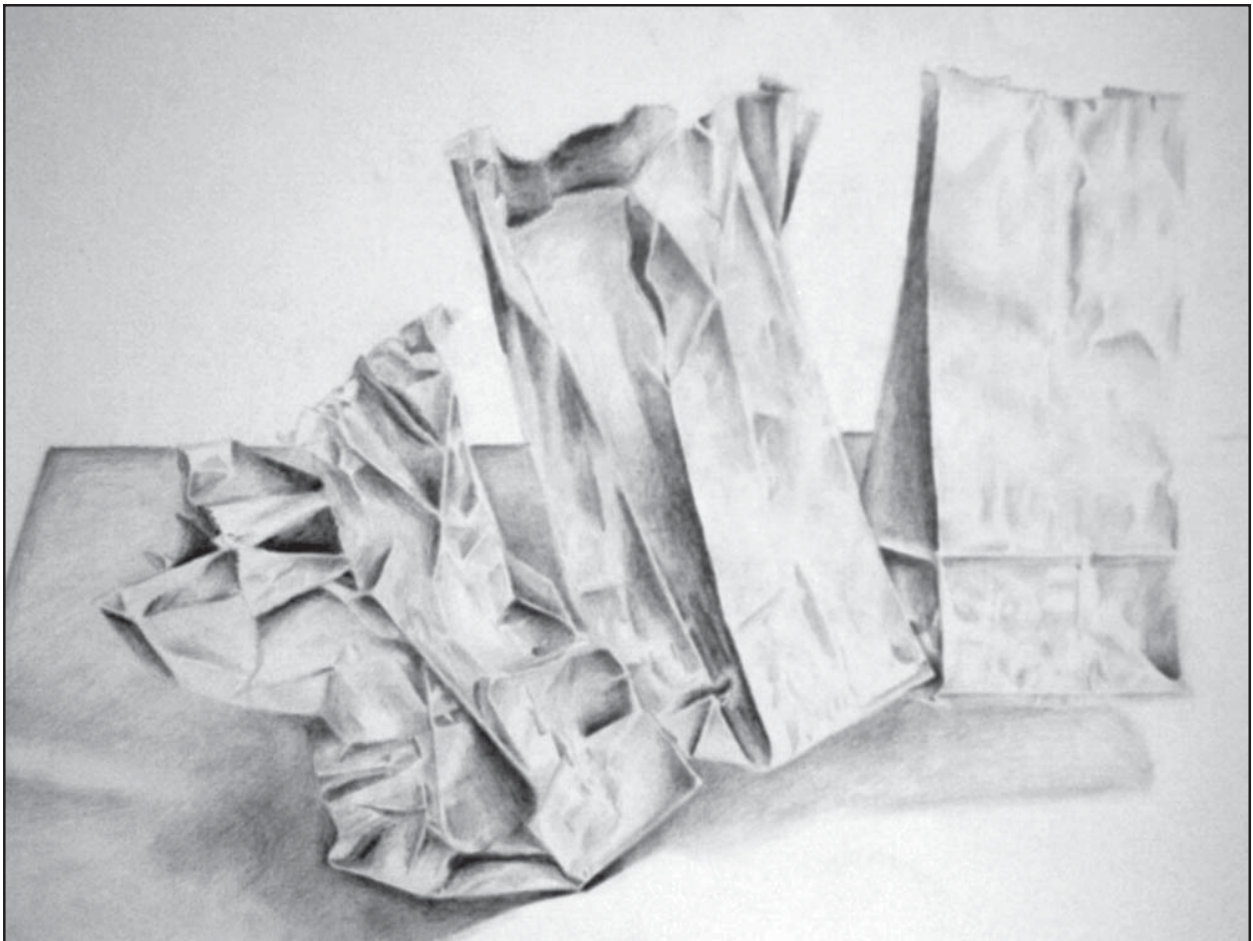
It is now time for Bob to make his move. He will have to be quick on this part and make absolutely sure that he is not seen. The target is now in his range. Bob must leap from his spot and grab the unsuspecting victim. He will quickly throw it into the bag that he purchased earlier.

The balloon animal will probably be extremely scared at his time, which takes the fun out of it. Once he gets home, Bob will try to get it to relax and feel as comfortable as possible. He will try having a friendly chat over Twizzlers and Gummy Bears, and he will ask it about its family and how life has been. Bob will also apologize for scaring and kidnapping it.

The animal is now relaxed and a little more trusting of Bob. The time is right for him to carry out his plan: 1. sticking it with a needle or 2. sitting on it. If he chooses to stab it, he will casually excuse himself from the room. He will pull out a basic sewing needle and quietly walk up to the back of the chair in which the animal is sitting. He will reach around and quickly prick the balloon with the needle. It will make a loud popping sound as it explodes.

"Accidentally" sitting on it might be a bit easier. It requires no materials and can be dismissed with a simple "Oops." All Bob has to do is just come into the room with more Gummies making sure that his back is to the chair that the animal occupies. Bob will calmly sit down, pretending that he does not know that the balloon is there. He will wait until he hears the popping sound and then jump up and cover his mouth as he says his escape clause. "Oops" takes care of everything.

The deed is now done. Bob has done his part in ridding this world of the evil creatures known as balloon animals. Now, for the last step on his journey. It is time to dispose of the evidence. Bob will gather all the pieces that are left of the balloon. He can throw them in a fire. This method is effective, but the scent is not the best in the world. Of course, there is always Plan B. It is more costly, but it's worth it in the end. Bob can have a few friends over for a formal get together and scatter the remaining pieces of his kill into a plate of escargot. He will then serve the dish to his guests and watch as the evidence disappears. No one will ever suspect a thing because everyone knows that snails taste like balloons.



Paper Bags

April Crow

Seconds and Exponents

Jon Cronin

Everyone does something stupid at some point in life. The trick is to learn from that stupid something and move forward. Then again, the problem with the word “trick” is that tricks need to be learned. Some people learn quickly—others? Not so much. When it really comes down to business, it does not matter what happened, why it happened, where it happened, or whose fault it was. I have come to believe that life is nothing more than a series of interesting choices. Through hands-on encounters, I have also learned that those choices come with consequences. Life is fragile, and the smallest of things—one second in our lives—can have a huge impact.

Scientists estimate that the time the brain spends on making a decision—a choice—is equal to about one second. Although people may dwell on something for several hours or even days, most people tend to have their minds already set on one decision or the other long before they finish “thinking.” In fact, according to one study, mostly the only thing done during that “thinking” phase is a battle with that crazy little thing called conscience. Parents teach their children that choices have consequences. That lesson is one that people often learn the hard way a couple of times. Interestingly enough, it turns out that this essential life lesson can be explained with math. It is time to break out a calculator and let math illustrate just how fragile life really is.

The first thing to figure is how many minutes are in 100 seconds. The calculator says that 100 seconds is equal to 1.66 minutes. So, applying the rules of exponents, it stands to reason that 1000 seconds is the same as 16 minutes and 40 seconds. Now, this is where it gets gritty. One million seconds rounded to the nearest minute is about one week, four days, thirteen hours, and 37 minutes. One billion seconds rounded to the nearest day is the same as 31 years and 285 days.

Now for a break. Looking at the difference between one million seconds and one billion seconds shows the fragility of life. If a person lived to be ninety, he would hit the million second mark some 3,000 times, but he would hit the billion second mark only three times. It is a simple rule of powers and exponents, but is remarkable when illustrated in the manner of time. Next, the calculator says that one trillion seconds is equal to 3,178 years. Mankind has not even hit the one trillion second mark since the beginning of A.D. calendar, and over 2000 years have passed. Last, how long would it take to reach 100 trillion seconds? The answer there is 317,808 years. Well, that is longer than the human race has been in existence.

Now, does one second seem to make a difference in a period of over 317,000 years? Well, how could it? It seems to be way too short a time. Yet, a terminal disease such as cancer starts with merely one bad cell. One bad cell can lead to a person’s death. Life is fragile, and the smallest of things—one second in a person’s life—can have a huge impact.

My Monster

I don't know how this happened
In 2000
I wanted a web site
The monster was born
It was cute and little at first
But then
I wanted more
I was told that I couldn't do it
It would be too big
But I didn't listen
I fought to get the password
Today
I have a monster on my hands
Now bigger than the sky
And still growing

Candace Johnson

The Infamous Him

Walking down the hallway
Palms sweating
Heartbeat racing
Look around to see
If he is there

Who you ask
Him
The infamous him
The one I need
The one I hear say I love you
He tells me I am great
He cherishes me in all I do

I stop
I turn around and see him
The infamous him
My prince charming

Brittany Evrard

The Alien Flower

In an entangled swamp of green,
There lies the strangest of earthly plants,
A monster that awaits
And devours flies, spiders, and ants.

The deceptive flora stands
Among the normal flowers.
But the naked eye can see
It isn't really one of ours.

Who's ever heard of a rose
That ate the meat of the living?
The thorns on this jagged flower
Are not quite so forgiving.

The imposter has no muscles
And no stomach for its food.
And it never bares a conscience
For the lives it freshly chewed.

So, beware the monster flower,
For it is not as it seems.
As you gaze at its fanged-mouth,
You know not what it schemes.

Preston Sharpe

No Bloodshed During Snowfall

The snow dusted neighborhoods Shiite and Sunni alike, faintly falling, as James Joyce wrote, like the decent of their last end, the living and the dead...A flurry is a swift and passing joy.

-- Associated Press, January 12, 2008

The long-haired Filipino kid with dolorous eyes
sits up front with me. Two more and a small Chinese Girl,
Suk Li, called Shirley, ride in back

We have feasted
On Lebanese food at Neo Monde—kibi, tabooly, laban—
and studied together for hours at the Museum of Art:
Roman torsos, Egyptian heads, African masks,
Melanesian pipes, a Wyeth house, an O’Keeffe church,
a modern college of gun, funnel, barbed wire and rocks,
early American portraits. “Those men--” Shirley pointed
to three be-wigged people on the wall “look like—
your Founding Fathers?” The black security guard
has taken our laughing picture before a mobile with flowers
and butterflies shaped like a fighter plane.

Now the radio says
that is has snowed in Baghdad after eighty years. We pass
a row of crabapple trees blooming deep pink in January.
A flurry is a swift and passing joy.

Margaret Boothe Baddour



Azalea

Danielle Castillo

Remembering a Royal Woman

Royal, the perfect name for her,
slender, elegant, gliding
down our halls and through our lives,
never losing her life's balance
or her brilliant smile
despite recurring obstacles.
Practical, efficient, effective, serious,
gentle, smiling, giggling, excited.

She loved good students, good papers,
good books, good coffee, good clothes,
good shopping, and good friends.
She created beauty in her needlework
and in her home, but her greatest joy
was her family, beginning
with her childhood sweetheart.

She shed a tear as the fall semester
kept her from her grandchild
until evening. She flashed a smile
sharing news of one daughter's
theater work or enjoying a dinner
for women educators
with her other daughter.
She reveled in the story as her husband
told how their grandchild had said,
"B is for the Beatles."

Medical events she arranged
at the convenience of her classes.
Illness never stopped her kindnesses
or her calls to her sick friends.
Her pew at St. Stephen's—rarely empty.

Royal, the perfect name for Sharon,
Queen of the Writing Center,
Queen of English 113 and Virginia Woolf,
Queen of American literature,
a queen in many hearts at WCC,
reigning still in her legacy
of good teaching.

Rosalyn F. Lomax

*In memory of
Sharon Royal, 1947 -2008*