

# THE CAULDRON

FALL/WINTER  
1993-94

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"There's a part in everyone that wants to die," I said, "a little cauldron of self-destructiveness that's always boiling under the surface. For some reason, the fires were stoked too high for you that night, and something crazy happened. But just because it happened once, it doesn't mean it's going to happen again."

— Paul Auster  
*Leviathan*

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# Adopting the universe in *Females*

A discordant note  
Echoing, but never heard.

To look out  
And see the world  
Is to look within  
And see oneself  
No longer one,  
But all

Searching  
Longing for  
Inner peace  
and harmony  
Tending to search inside  
Mistaken  
Believing harmony can exist  
In one alone.

Extending outward  
Your arms  
Your mind  
Your inner soul  
To feel  
To love  
To understand  
To respect

All those  
Whether humans or beasts  
Trees or planets  
As one's own  
Not as personal property  
But as family  
Selfishly protecting infinity  
Adopting the universe  
As one's own child.

— *Katrina Robb*

## Females in love

Brenda had one last fling  
with a fuzzy Latino  
Later that week she met the man of her dreams  
who was puzzled by the rug burns.

Deirdra's husband verbally abused her constantly  
It was no wonder she beat his head in with a dictionary.

Linda chuckled at her own funeral  
as her two best friend's were forced to be in the same room  
(they hadn't spoken since the marriage)  
and rigor mortis finished setting in.

Clara was discovered  
in the middle of the night  
whispering her husband's name  
into her best friend's womb.

Mandy married quickly and passionately,  
After 15 months of loving she realized  
she had never forgiven herself for falling in love  
in the first place.  
She lived happily after realization.

Christine was beguiled and lulled  
manipulated and raped  
beaten and broken  
and only then was she taken into  
the woods and lovingly murdered.

Kassandra watched as the dog  
licked bath water off of her husband's back  
with only a slight pang of jealousy, this time.

Kara was fucking loud.  
She always screamed her pleasure  
When she made love with her womyn.  
She wasn't afraid to love with abandon.

Helen still had her virginity  
although it was almost carelessly lost  
in a clumsy encounter with a white t-shirt  
a condom, and premature ejaculation  
it took her 3 yrs to understand what had happened.

Lizzy never forgot about her boyfriend  
the pain in his eyes when they broke up  
(Like two sharp glittering stars)  
especially when she slashed her wrists'  
mercilessly up to her elbows.

Garnette broke up with her boyfriend  
Because she was afraid of boy cooties.  
The Surgeon General declared them  
carcinogenic, leading to birth defects,  
lung cancer, constant bickering, and  
needless fear of keeping ones virginity  
before marriage. She wrote her SIP on it.

— Kristina C Sprietzer

## Barrens in love

The summer in the desert  
hot, consuming, blinding  
light, heat, fire

Then you leave the room.

The sun goes down  
frozen, bare, solitary

The taunting glimmers  
of stars too far to touch—  
too far to feel.

In grainy sand nothing takes root—  
except the rocks.

On these I lay  
my aching head

It makes one mad—the nothingness:  
not even the imagination can grow.

Only thirst in raging fire  
Only cold under mocking sky  
Only one alone and dying

Burnt by sun  
then frozen out.

— Sarah Lyberg

# little miss muffet

another little miss,  
frightened away by buggy eyes  
and creeping eight legs.  
she is a muffet,  
dancing dullard on a string,  
ignorant of her insects.  
while i turn over tuffets  
spying on spiders  
lusting after eight-leg ingredients  
for my curds and ways.

— Sharon Stebbins

## Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Kalamazoo Hornet

I

Among twenty stacks of graduate school applications  
and SIP rewrites,  
the only comforting thing  
was \$1 pitcher nights at Rick's.

II

I was in tie-dyed clothing of a stoned mind  
like a dream that was really happening,  
in which everyone was floating.

III

The hornet and a frisbee streaked across the autumn quad.  
It was a small part of the Kalamazoo College tradition.

IV

A male and a female  
are holding hands.  
A male and a female  
are holding hands.

V

I do not know which is better:  
the delicious baked cod,  
the mouth-watering liver and onions,  
the queasy feeling before hornets eat at Saga,  
or the one right after.

VI

Midterms filled the computer lab  
with last-minute hornets.  
The memory of first week  
flashed and disappeared.  
The mood among the swarm—  
an all-nighter.

VII

Oh new freshpersons of "K" College,  
why are you now declaring a major?  
Do you not see how the hornet  
changes direction  
at least twice before you graduate?

VIII

I know the Warren Court  
and the complex Marxist theory.  
But I know, too,  
that for political science comps,  
I need to know  
more than I know.

IX

When the cute upperclassman didn't return,  
it reminded you  
of the "K" Plan.

X

At the sight of unboxed hornets  
lining up the day before,  
all the squatters  
would laugh out loud.

XI

She flew to Europe  
on Sabena (Such-a-Bad-Experience-Never-Again) Airlines.  
One time, she got  
on the wrong part of the train.  
Such wonderful memories of the adventures abroad  
for hornets.

XII

The four years are almost at an end.  
I must be growing up.

XIII

It was raining all morning.  
Made breakfast, got the kids off to school,  
rushed to make my 9 a.m. meeting,  
and it was still raining.  
The reminiscing hornet sits  
in the empty nest.

— *Jennine E Guiang*

## Wednesday lunch

If life is no "garden-variety romance novel" Then why am I different, why are roses growing in my hair and why does my voice take flight into a girlhood I don't quite like or have a handle on? When I can't get through the day without cringing at some comment or spiting fire at some theory why does lunch with a Marlboro Man turn me to giggles and wit, tossed hair and smiles? I am both bitch and baby when a best friend looks at me like a stranger would, his eyes all judgment and dismay. Respect flies out the window at times like this, when I've turned into a babbling idiot for the sake of some attention and I shatter myself in one fell swoop; I am deconstructing all progress not brick by brick but with a bulldozer.

— Jennie Laird

## World spinning

The whole world sat quietly by the bay window in Grandfather's study. Monica noticed that the world hardly ever seemed to be spinning, except when Abercrombie, Grandfather's German Shepherd, trotted his tail into the room, even though he was supposed to wait politely in the hall. But Grandfather told Monica that the world was always spinning so slowly that she would never be able to see or feel it move, except of course, when Abercrombie knocked it.

Monica knew that this blue ball was really and truly the world because Gran read the box, which said, "See the World with Macpherson's Globes." Monica did see it, and she thought the whole thing was rather tiny. Cairo and Leningrad were just polka dots, and all of Australia was smaller than her plush pink elephant.

Grandfather loved the world, and he would tell her stories about it when he had time. Grandfather was British, but he grew up in Greece, and on his way home from school he would talk to the temple gods. In Japan he planted other people's gardens and learned to meditate. And he met Gran under a Spanish April moon, and tried to serenade her in a language she did not understand.

To Monica, Grandfather seemed like a giant, and she was amazed that he could fit into all those small places. She thought that someday she might like to try it herself, if the world would stop spinning long enough for her to climb on. She decided to ask Grandfather for help.

But suddenly he wasn't in his study. He wasn't anywhere. Gran said that Grandfather was on a trip and would not be coming back. Later, Monica found Abercrombie in the basement, huddled in the big box that said "See the World." She kissed his brown ears, and together they tried to become as tiny as Cairo.

— *Deidra K Razzaque*

# Me and Jennie

Boys buy baseball cards to become brothers. Girls swim between each other's legs. Me and Jennie do in the neighborhood public pool.

Me and Jennie drive motorcycles to F&M once a month for Hot Tamales, period pads, and diarrhea medicine for our moms. We hang from freeway overpasses on the way home, plop cinnamon candies on whizzing cars below, laugh till we pee, and then count our left-over change.

Me and Jennie don't count brothers or sisters—only twins that grow from our tree-top hair like Debbie Jo, Herkmer, Bingo...

We scream in sewers to converse with Penny, our friend in the canoe. We tell others she lives there. They twirl their fingers saying "coo-coo" but believe us...

Me and Jennie don't believe in Halloween —only Devil's Night when our moms help us soap windows and we don't have to dress up.

Me and Jennie float through cabin walls at three a.m. to French kiss him in the camp chapel and lick stars through stained glass.

We swing so high our Nike's touch heaven where we buy Jordache every week, gossip, scream, laugh without getting kicked out, and smoke cigarettes that god says are good for us.

Me and Jennie don't believe in church—only prayers.

What are we doing in your ear? Tickling you with wet middle fingers so you won't forget our feeling.

Between the two of us we can fill up a size C bra.

We sleep on hills under honeyburst moons, swimming and  
crumbling into crunchy leaves, smelling ripe every fall.

Me and Jennie sniff each other's body odor and call it  
perfume.

We chew each other's fingernails till we bleed and become  
prunes.

Between me and Jennie we can fill a pool with our red rivers.  
We can cut the sea with our scissor legs, gargle chlorinated water,  
and trade myths in bubbled voices.

— Sharon Stebbins

# The Dyke In Shining Armor

a fairy tale

The sheep leapt hysterically, as a diamond shaped pattern of red and orange swooped down at the edge of their herd. Katara had not always been a shepherd, so it was no wonder that her methods were not orthodox; she was herding her sheep with a kite.

"Katara! Katara!" called out Mika, spotting her in the field "The princess has been kidnapped!"

"What?!!?!?"

"She was gone this morning from her chambers. No one was seen coming in or out. All that was left behind was a picture of a white horse. Even the great wizards are stumped."

"Humph" was all that Katara replied, her eyes slanted a bit "Where'd you learn all this? Was that what the herald was for?"

"Uh-huh. Lord Brodrick got a group of men together to go search for her. I don't know how they'll find her. They're sending Alric, and Bill, and Paul, and..."

"Humph" Katara replied again slitting her eyes "They couldn't find a dump if they took it."

Mika watched Katara carefully and then burst out "Well aren't you going to go do something?!?!?"

"Whataya mean am I gonna do somethin'?"

"Well I just figured—"

"Figured what?!" Katara practically yelled. Mika ducked her head and dragged her toe in the ground.

"I figured you do something, since you don't think those guys could find shit in a field, and since you can do ANYTHING, and cause you do like her, don't you?" The child asked shyly, and snuffled up at Katara. Katara stared across the field at her flock. Ever since she and the princess were caught exchanging their first and only kiss, she had been sent from royal playmate, to royal shepherdess. It was hard knowing that the court ad town was alive with gossip, when she didn't even know if the princess had LIKED being kissed by her.

"I can't do exactly ANYTHING." Grinned a forgiving Katara.

"You can make magic!" Mika pointed up at the kite. "You can make those things fly, and that's more than most! I betcha you could find the princess, and then the king would let you marry her!" Katara loved the idea that the child hadn't yet accepted the values of her townsmen.

"I take it that's the reward for her return?" Katara asked. Mika

nodded. "What am I going to do with my flock?" Wondered Katara out loud.

"I can do it! I can do it!" Mika answered gleefully.

"Ok, you take care of them." The child hugged Katara thankfully and cried:

"Don't leave without your kite! It's good luck! Besides if you get in trouble, you can fly it as your help signal, and we'll come looking for you!"

Look for me? Katara thought. What about the princess? Where the hell do I look?

Barbara Yaga, for all her 89 years, greeted Katara by doing a cherry drop out of her tree.

"Katara! I was just doing my daily exercises—hanging upside down is good for the circulation, you know—what are you doing out on this side of the woods—want a banana muffin?—I just made them this morning—I'll go inside and get you one." Barbara Yaga was like a grandma to Katara and the Princess. Often times they would meet the old woman in the woods, and enjoyed her company greatly. She was a grand storehouse of information concerning the woods and the land.

"It's still a little warm. I made them very early this morning, couldn't sleep in." She smiled at Katara "so where's your girlfriend?" Grandma had always referred to the as girlfriends, but it still made Katara a little uncomfortable.

"Um...apparently...kidnapped." Katara said between mouthfuls of banana muffin.

"Kidnapped?!! Oh dear! Who did it?"

"Well that's kinda why I'm here, do you remember that white horse we use to see in the woods all the time, just 'Cess and me? We use to ask you about it all the time? Whose it was and stuff? Well 'Cess was just gone, and left behind was the picture of a white horse. And I was thinking maybe there's some kind of connection."

"White...horse." Grandma looked ponderously at the ground, her eyes suddenly widened "White horse? Oh dear—on no—not" Grandma sat on the nearest rock and explained "In the time that Pegasus is aligned with Taurus, the flying white horse will claim its princess bride, and only her lover can hinder that betrothal." Katara cocked her head quizzically and asked:

"Where the hell did you get that crock of bull?"

Grandma shook her head as if dispersing cobwebs from her vision.

"Oh its just an old wives tale—I'm an old wife! I'm entitled!" she answered snappily. Then she sighed. "Well there's no male hero in this story." She smiled at Katara. "You're as close to a lover as we'll get." Katara opened her mouth to protest. "Oh don't you deny it, your shenanigans are all over the place. Personally I say love is love, let the children be. If my ole Fred had been a woman I would have loved him—or her—just the same, now then you go after her!"

Katara glowed a little with Grandma's approval, but it was quickly replaced by confusion. She asked hastily: "But where?"

Grandma laughed girlishly and said with a grin:

"Oops! I forgot to tell you, now haven't I? You just follow the tail of Pegasus till it reaches the ocean, travel down the coast towards Taurus. You'll find the tower and the maiden will be there. Is she still a maiden? Just teasing you dearie—oh and before you go take some muffins for your trip—OH and here's a good coil of rope—one can always use rope, now can't one? And its very light weight and strong. You might need it, after all 'Cess was always fa— on the husky side."

Katara gave her a fake scowl, a grin and a thanks, and headed off in the direction she knew Pegasus' tail to be.

Katara was cold, wet, and, to top it off, her banana muffins were soggy. she couldn't find a tower down the coastline. She rounded a bend and still couldn't see a tower. She stared out into the ocean and nearly fell off the edge of the escarpment. Barely could she see a tower in the middle of the ocean, outlined on the horizon by the setting sun.

"How the hell am I suppose to get out there?!" Wondered and exasperated Katara. She made a small camp and warmed herself by the fire drying herself and the muffins out.

"Where's my magic now Mika?" She snorted sarcastically. She bit into a muffin and sudden revelation made her spit it out.

"Magic—Wind—Holy Zephyrs!!!" Katara yelled. Quickly Katara assembled her kite and tested the wind. I was straight off the coastline and into the sea. Katara jigged happily. She then devised a harness and fastened it to the kite. Tying Grandma's rope to a stout and sturdy tree, Katara leaned back off the escarpment and prayed for the wind to hold her. It held, and Katara whooping in delight, began reeling herself out. Remarkably, Grandma's rope never seemed to run out, though Katara only held a few coils in her hand. "Grandma's got more than a few wives' tales." Katara grinned to herself.

Soon Katara reached the tower. Tying up her kite (as if it was some winged steed) she wondered how she and the princess would

get back. After all she was kind of pudgy.

Katara met the princess almost immediately and greeted her shyly. What do you say to the womyn you've kissed once, were suddenly dragged away from, and now have some to save?

"Um...Hi, How you doin'?"

"Fine you silly thing!" giggled the Princess, and kissed Katara. Then giggled again. "I knew you would come! My knight in shining armor! You've got to meet the flying mare." The Princess guided Katara to a richly decorated room where she found, reclining on velvet cushions, a white mare, with wings folded gracefully across her back.

"So you are real!" exclaimed Katara.

"Why yes, I am. And if I may be francis with you, your love for the Princess is also real." Katara blushed and looked at the princess. "I know that in your world you are persecuted for that love, so I designed this tower, for females to be in love together. You are the first to be united. There are many more whom I wish to bring to this tower." The mare smiled at the two womyn with warm and wise old eyes. "There are few joys on this earth, what matters the fragile shells that encase them?"

"Umm...that's awfully nice and all mare ma'am." Katara answered, and said "But ummmm...if I DO love the princess and she loves me, AND there's more of us—MANY— then why should we have to hole up in isolation?—meaning no disrespect for your tower, and all mare ma'am. I don't want to hide it any more. Princess, the king has offered your hand as a reward for your return, will you ask him to consider me?"

The Princess' eyes fired little bolts.

"He did, did he? Humph! I'll marry who I want, and when I want, and Daddy has nothing to say about it. consider you—I'm sure!! Why do we need to ask him!? Yes Katara I will marry you!"

And with that Katara and the Princess exchanged a REAL kiss this time.

And there was no giggling afterward.

The white mare flew them back to the castle (Katara didn't want to try the kite. "No offense 'Cess, but you are kinda— curvaceous." Katara grinned.)

The townspeople took a while getting used to the idea that their Princess was a lesbian, and that she married her dyke in shining armor (though she only wore a skirt, not armor) And when she became—or rather they— became Queens, it was the most prosperous and fair reign they could ever remember.

— Kristina C Sprietzer

## RED-FACED PELICANS

the water shocked my body with cold.  
i liked the way it splashed in my mouth, with its moldy flavor.  
I drank it in.  
you jumped out at me,  
frightening me,  
from behind the cattails that decorated the lake.  
you laughed at the way my lips fell open into  
a startled "O".  
with one finger you beckoned my stick-shaped body  
towards you.  
using the same finger you yanked at the bow of  
my red bathing suit ties.  
my top fell, and with your smile eating my neck,  
we made the pelicans blush.

— Amy Hicks

## Coloring

The blue of his eyes springs to mind—  
sudden and painful,  
like looking at the snow on a bright, sunny day...  
There is beauty,  
and there is grief.  
I recoil from remembering,  
my stomach shaky from the shock  
of this fragment best forgotten.  
My desire to dispel the image  
strengthens it in my mind,  
enhancing the eyes,  
adding the face and hair,  
the neck,  
the body.  
With every picture recalled,  
a blow is delivered to my strength.  
I cannot forget,  
and I hate to remember.

— *Jessica Lee Walsh*

## 'Antoinette'

She lies at the foot of the stairs—purple welts cling to  
her pale cream-flecked arms like man-o-wars

stinging and sucking the lifeblood,  
and light-years from her—but she is not dead,  
only pretending,  
and the azure-smooth wounds

are just make up, like the glittery  
lilac shadow she wears at the  
Kaleidoscope bar and grill.

The woman is now outside  
drinking inky blackness like  
a wet-slickered man's bile.

And oh she basks in the deep, lurid moonlight.

The rays are low, but intense  
as a light bulb clicked on to the  
highest extremity. Her whole-milk  
skin is *all* white now.

The welts are gone—burnt away,  
maybe they really were never there.

She flicks open a rusty compact  
like she used to flick a cigarette ash.  
In the glass she bears her teeth—  
yellow, honey-soft teeth that point.  
She howls low, passionate, mad  
and turns back to the stairs  
back to her bruises, wounds and welts.

Her howl dies with dawn and she is locked in the attic.

— *Kezia Pearlman*

## Life-Like

She talks about giving her life away like someone else might talk about the stray pennies floating at the bottom of her purse or broken bits of glass, collected and thrown away. Yet she sounds like no one else I have ever known because she isn't, and her life is certainly more than something gathered in shards and turned over to those ahead or behind, certainly there's a valuable collection somewhere that she's just not willing to pass out, to pass away from her own place with her hands open and in the air. There's a time and a place for everything, even putting up a fence and saying this is mine with her jaw clenched and her teeth showing. There should be a voice somewhere strong and sincere enough, when she sees the copper and shakes her head, to convince her that what she has is gold.

— *Jennie Laird*

## A traumatizing situation

My third eye kept me awake all night. I swear, the damn thing never lets me get any rest, even when I'm asleep.

For most of the night I was staring at the blue-flowered wallpaper that the maintenance guy put up last Friday. What cheap material. It was shredding all over my hardwood floor in piles that couldn't be seen by the normal human eye. But hell, if anyone else with a third-eye implant came over they'd think I was a slob who never cleaned.

I don't know why I ever let Ian talk me into getting this implant. The money will be nice, of course, and I wanted to help him make his big scientific breakthrough. I mean, I feel like I owe him. But I just don't know if he's worth the hassle. Wouldn't there have been an easier way to prove my love? Whatever happened to buying lingerie?

I've always liked to stand out, but usually that involved, say, wearing mismatched shoes. Now I can never just blend into a crowd. People always stare. After they pass me, their kids are sent back with the number of a good ophthalmologist. The money I've been spending on eyeshadow is outrageous. Not to mention the fact that my glasses never seem to fit right anymore.

Why would Ian do this to me? What was he thinking? The next time I'm asleep and I see his wife going into the E-Z Rest Motel with her boss I'm not even going to tell him about it.

— Deidra K Razzaque

## Plain-faced

You admire me  
As I flaunt by.  
I look beautiful with  
Every perfect piece  
Of my body adjusted  
In the right place.  
If I choose to  
Take you home  
You'd dip into  
My half-naked  
Body covered only  
With the white sheets.  
You'd gasp and beg for more.  
But, when you awoke  
The next morning  
You'd find that I was  
Plain-faced.  
And your dreams  
would be diminished  
In my lazy yawn.

— Amy Hicks

# On How We Are Eating an Avocado

Our own narratives revolve around the things others do not do as well as they should. We can say "that sucks" or "bummer" or "we don't know it's just getting us down" or simply worry about everything.

The music and voices and traffic and wind and electronic things that beep and people fixing broken stuff and cutting long lawns. This noise gets to be a lot and we can't mind simple happenings or occurrences or thoughts that aren't sensed. The clocks say this about any given time. And we summarize, "oh yeah I was alive yesterday" or "last year I was living in such and such a country".

In the dark we can't see walls or the hand. We look, and when it's light with free time we take an inventory, a bit too cursory though, and we don't indicate how fast we accumulate hands or walls. We turn our head for a minute; we eventually renote the things previously noticed. In streams with, in all likelihood, no fairies, but still our hand and millions of pebbles demanding inspection and then our legs tingle because of crouching.

When we read the Bible, we move from word to sentence and we finish it or usually put it down to pick up a glass or exit or nail trimmers. We stop saying "good morning" say "good afternoon". Later "good night" or worse "see you in the morning." We buy two records, spin one then another, rent two videos, choose a la carte from a full menu, don't earn money as architects or dental hygienists, answer the phone, the door knocks and mail on the table. Our necks stiffen or we borrow a dollar from someone and pay it back when we cash a check or withdraw one.

First Emily Dickinson and then Jackson Pollock and now, tons of people. We can read an enormous book that introduces to biology, one about neurons in the brain and sociology, economics, etc. We take tests to monitor our proficiency. Or it is classes to improve. We have to enroll in time and pass.

Space is so big, we saw one ocean and we are glad that space has so little atmosphere. Nothing big should be filled. Population, whether houses or words, is not what we savor in the minimal things that remind us of more than well functioning aortas and protein intake charts or sleeping enough and the price of wicker chairs at some store we visited last month.

We concentrate and meet strong, giving people, don't feel rushed, and no one is angry because of something we are doing wrong. We are not worrying about that bad thing we did six years ago or how we won't see Ireland or India, not to mention anything about our present which we feel upset about even now.

Everything is long that has no point. Accumulation itself is desired, but is it possible to waste the time until then? Focus and

balance alleviate a lot of pressures fog or never having invented our very own wheel can occasion. We might try to roll down a hill, but then we find ourselves getting to the top first, with its particular view that we won't be understanding or enjoying. Not being omniscient or omnipresent, we don't value our feet like we should, because we can imagine selling them in order to buy another arm or torso.

We get punched in the ribs and hear someone say "take that". When we wake up with a bruise we look at the clock and either hurry or relax depending on whether we are late for an appointment we don't want to go to. At the appointment we discover that something we are comfortable with will be no longer. If it was another appointment, they would be praising us for a job well done on something we did but hadn't wanted to.

To buy the new stereo we need another 75 dollars and it will take us two weeks to get that much and until then we are listening to a radio that can't tune in the two stations that rock most. The frequencies are weak like the bookseller that doesn't order our favorite books because they don't sell even though we spend so much of our money on these very books. We have to return the ones we borrow and loan some of ours and not have them when we want to check out this certain passage that is on our mind.

The possibilities to refinance, shop around, invest, cut coupons, mortgage, increase earning power, rent to own, turn the channel, change our values, judge a book by its cover, cut our hair, legally abort, use a different script, clean the kitchen, and the next thing. Billboards, bulletin boards, the classifieds, magazines, on the side of a semi, a brief radio spot. Our cat vomits and we clean up even though we gag and feel sick ourselves. Someone throws a rock through our window; we read the message and put the shards in the dumpster. "You're ugly and your mama can't dance." Written by a thirteen year old on the paper around the rock. Could have said "Fuck you" or "Suck my cunt."

Because our car stinks we buy a rearview mirror air freshener. A scantily clad attractive person is pictured on the pine scented card-board. We drive to work and the store and to visit friends while looking at the pine beauty. We feel beckoned and know not how to relieve our new fresh smelling desire. Our dreams become torrid and we wake up and we use a cloth. We chop an onion and start crying, it feels good to cry so we continue to eat onions. Later we get one that looks like a Christmas tree and try to think of the manger, what the baby Jesus became, our multitudinous capability to discover what we hadn't been looking at one minute before, and hence the skill to absorb all while rolling the eyes in disgust.

— Matt Lager

## Tocca/Toccata

I know the song  
you made in me  
Your touch  
a lover of its own.  
You waltz in graceful circles  
on the wakened ballroom  
of my skin,  
bring music to  
the silence there  
and light to fright the dark.  
Believe me when  
I say to you  
that I still feel the dance  
and know the truth  
I give to you  
that I still hear the song  
Oh, swelling up inside of me  
like a bright cascade  
of thunder  
which echoes in the silence there  
Through my bones  
and in my blood  
that same cathedral of my soul  
as once the time I leant upon  
the singing wood and sighing air  
and stayed inside the music there  
forever caught  
in ecstasy  
the music  
one  
with  
you  
and  
me

— Karen Bailey

# STOP

Don't hold me Don't touch me  
With you comes fire  
Fire that will burn me  
Don't burn me Don't make me hot  
You know how  
You'll never stop  
Don't love me Don't want me  
For I may want your back  
Forbidden feelings, forbidden to me  
Help me Show me  
STOP STOP  
Please don't stop  
Hold Me Touch me  
Love me Want me Burn me  
But don't look me in the eye  
For I will never be the same again

— *Marnie L Ernst*

## for tom

she put all her love in a beautiful  
and rather expensive box,  
exquisitely wrapped up  
in phone calls,  
greeting cards,  
love poems,  
whispers,  
and kisses,  
with an endless ribbon of letters and longing gazes  
(just for you, sweetie).  
however,  
he just left the gift there on the table,  
telling her that the box was far too lovely to rip open.

— Hope Barrone

## Tomatoes

This morning, Kevin was startled awake by his alarm clock, which had not yet gone off. It sat there ticking like an overripe tomato ready to splatter its guts on his head, just like it usually did. For this very reason, Kevin tries to avoid tomatoes.

During third hour Kevin's friend Shannon informed him that Leamington, Ontario makes wonderful spaghetti sauce with sushi, and that her Japanese grandmother is the tomato capital of the world. Kevin wasn't sure that she had her facts straight. Nonetheless, he started to ponder them—green tomatoes, yellow tomatoes, mushy tomatoes, and also the fact that, while tomatoes are fruits, people tend to eat them with other vegetables. Kevin has obviously never had watermelon-tomato-kiwi salad.

Kevin was so absorbed in thought that when his world history teacher asked him to name the capital of Mozambique, Kevin replied, "Pickled." Needless to say, Kevin was way off base. The capital of Mozambique is Maputo.

In the parking lot after school, Kevin revved the engine of his jet black Jeep and backed over a girl with tomato-red hair. Then he jumped out of the Jeep and kissed the girl hard on the lips. He thought that she would be upset about one of the things he had so recently brazenly done to her, but she said that she'd had a crush on him since sixth grade. Then she asked him to go to the movies on Saturday. During the next two minutes of his life, Kevin made a date for Saturday at seven, forgot to ask the girl's name, and wondered what his grandmother was making for dinner.

— *Deidra K Razzaque*

## Response

I need to go to the bathroom. I clutch my knees tighter against my chest. I am curled into a ball, resting on my right side. The Ansel Adams calendar on the wall a few inches from my face is still on October. I'm behind. Or maybe absent.

I don't know where my keys are.

I do, they're hanging from the yellow tack on the bulletin board by the phone. But I don't want to go get them. I don't want to go down the hall and see people and unlock the bathroom door and go into a stall and see myself. My thighs must be different now, older, taunting. My underwear must smell like my revenge.

I don't think I can deal with that, so I hang onto my body, hold it together, hoping that nothing will come out—urine, tears, whatever grows or does not grow within me. I hold myself this way until I can no longer read the numbers on my calendar, until the days are lost in darkness. It must be nighttime, because I know my eyes are open.

The phone rings, like it has been ringing forever. I know who it is. Stuart, constantly Stuart, constant Stuart.



I took a taxi to his apartment on Friday. The driver was enormously fat; he filled the cab, and I felt squeezed out by his size. He quizzed me from the moment we left the dorm until we got to the apartment: "You a student? What's your major? Where you from? What you going to do with your life?"

Each question was harder than the one before. I couldn't answer the last one, so I looked out the window, away from his overwhelming gaze, which hovered in the rearview mirror.

He filled my silence. He talked about the cost of college these days. I practiced in my mind.

Not enough, though. When I got to Stuart's and told him, he wouldn't let me break up with him, he couldn't understand my reasons. There was no logic in my needs for freedom. I hadn't practiced logic.

"Is there someone else?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "Me. I need to work on my life, and I need to be on my own. I can't give anything to you anymore. I'm confused about everything, and I need to figure it out."

"What are you confused about? I'll help you," he said.

"You, us, my life. I don't know why I'm at school, I don't know where I'm going with it all, I don't know if I love you. And

you deserve better," I said, although I wasn't sure about that either.

"I thought you wanted to be a doctor," he said. It was that simple to him. I wanted to hit him. My fist curled. I choked on the anger and my tongue lashed out at him.

"Look," I hissed, "I can't go out with you anymore. If you don't understand, that's your problem, not mine. I should have expected it from you, you never understand a damn thing."

He looked stunned and unbelieving. Hurt.

"I'm sorry. No, I'm not. I just can't explain it any better than I have," I said.

He put his arms around me and I pushed him away.

"I forgive you," he said.

"I didn't ask you to."

"I love you."

I started crying then, because I wanted it to be true, but I knew it wasn't. He had loved me, before I moved here, when I was a high school girl who worshipped him, a girl who waited for him on weekends and then followed him to a university she didn't even like.



But I was no longer her.

He reached out to me again. I resigned to his hands, his arms, his mouth. He fucked me, there was no love made. I walked home early in the morning, without saying good-bye.

And nothing had changed. Constantly Stuart, coloring me gray and making me smaller. I was a wad of clay to him—maybe he made me into a mug, maybe an ashtray, maybe I was nothing but mud.



My roommate comes in. She is here, now. She does not talk to me. She thinks I am asleep. I don't hear her move around in the dark. I'm not sure whether my ears don't work or she is being quiet. Either way she is here, and I huddle into myself more.

I try to ignore her like I ignore myself, but I can't. She is probably looking at me, judging me. She is probably thinking that I have done something wrong. I start to sweat; little pools of sin form on my skin.

The silence hurts. The pain...I come back to myself. I try to move my left arm. When my hands release, feeling rushes into them and my knees stiffly shift away from my breasts. My fingers would be white from grasping each other, if it were light. They might be white anyway. I don't want to know.

My arm moves as if it does not know me. I touch myself down there. I am wet, I can feel it even through my pants. I haven't done it right, I've let myself fall apart. I don't know what the wetness is. It could be sweat, the urine that I've been holding all day, blood, seeds that retreat.

I need to go to the bathroom, to find out what this is. I try to straighten myself, I try moving one muscle at a time, but each one fights me.

I don't blame my body, not at all. I have made it angry, I have made it do things.

The phone rings again. My ears wake up. I freeze for a moment in my gradual progress.

My roommate answers. "Hello? She's asleep...Okay," she directs her voice to me, "HEY! Wake up! Stuart's on the phone."

I do not move or speak. Her eyes cover my back with a million bee stings.

"Stuart, she's, like, passed out...I tried...I don't know, I just got back...She's probably fine, just sleeping...Okay...Okay...Bye."

She puts the receiver back on the phone loudly. She turns on the answering machine. Its small electric beep makes me wince inside. Stuart will hear me, hear my voice on the recording. I don't want him to touch me, even with his voice.

She leaves. She will be gone until morning. She still loves her constant one.



I went down to Jeff and Greg's room last night. The night before with Stuart had made me even more confused. I felt the need to be near someone, to speak. I thought they would understand.

Greg opened the door. Jeff wasn't there, but I went in anyway, sat on Greg's bed, and started talking. He sat beside me, seeming serious and caring.

I tearlessly told Greg what had happened, how I had tried. He listened.

When I was done talking, he got me a beer and started shooting out things meant to make me feel better.

"He doesn't want to lose you. I mean, he'll never find anyone as great as you are, and he knows it."

I glared at him, annoyed at his bad attempt.

He went on, "Maybe he really does love you. You know how guys are when it comes to feelings and shit."

I smiled a little at his accuracy. I couldn't cry, but I needed to. I needed to scream, to find help.

Greg looked at me, beyond me. He reached out and hugged me. We held each other and rocked slowly from side to side. I hoped that as we rocked, the answers would rise to the top of my brain.

Instead, like a snow globe, everything got mixed up. While Greg held me, I shrank. I noticed the red plaid on his flannel-clad shoulder, his cologne, the muscles in his back. But I didn't feel anything. I was a third party, watching myself and Greg.



I am a glacier, I am a forming stalactite, I am evaporating water.

My progress is slow and unnoticeable. Yet it persists.

My muscles are talking about me. They smugly whisper and cramp in laughter, mocking me.

I try not to listen to them. I hate eavesdropping.

I think of everything else. I wonder if this is a leap year, but February is long gone. February I hate. I try to think of who wrote The House of Seven Gables. I think of Stats class and bean burritos and golf carts and Corinthian columns. I think of brass hinges and sassafras leaves and fountain pens and used cars. I think of Revelations and my driver's license and postage stamps and baseball hats.

Always in motion.

I am nearly straight now, closer than I have been for a long time. I roll slowly onto my back. My left side rejoins me. Blood adjusts. Gravity returns, but it is wrong. I am being pulled in too many directions, not just down. I could be drawn and quartered by gravity, divided and destroyed.

My arms are here. My legs, too. Everything in pairs. Except my head. I should know this, someday I will be a doctor.

I will never be anything. Health is in the eye of the beholder. I don't want the responsibility.

I cross my arms over my stomach, downward, my hands on my hipbones, which stick out from my pelvis and scream at me. They yell out the names, names of those who have claimed them. There are only two.

Stuart.

Greg.



When Greg's arms circled me last night, he was open. He was the presence of my mother as I woke up from a nightmare, he was anesthesia, diversion.

So I did not expect him to kiss my neck, to start moving his

hands all over me, to lean me back on his bed. I was not surprised, either. I was objective.

My mouth met his, not because I wanted him. He paid attention to me. He appreciated me. He was not Stuart, he was a reason to hate Stuart.

I took and acting class last summer.

While he was on me, sticking his ugly limb of hot flesh into me, I smiled, I kissed him, I made those sick noises of ecstasy.

Greg thought we made love. Really, he fucked me and I went along with it.

When he rolled off me, I waited for the feeling of freedom and emancipation from Stuart to explode in me. It didn't.

Instead the picture window in my brain shattered. Nothing remained.

I curled into a ball. My back was to Greg, my face towards the room.

Greg put a hand on my shoulder. I started shaking, so he pulled the blanket over me. It was that simple to him.

"I'm not cold," I said.

"What's wrong?"

He really didn't know.

He fucked me again.



The phone rings. The answering machine picks it up. I hear a voice that once was mine, then the voice that is always Stuart's.

"Honey, this is Stuart. I'm worried about you. Please call me. I love you," he recites.

I need to vomit. I need to get to the bathroom. The nausea pumps me into panic and suddenly I move. I roll onto my left side, off the bed and onto the floor. I push myself up with my arms and then my legs. I walk to the door and feel around for the doorknob. Under the glare of the hallway lights, I stop for a second. Then I move ahead, to the right, past three doors.

I do not have my keys. The bathroom door will not open without them. I try the handle anyway, as if the door will recognize that I am not a south side rapist and let me in. It doesn't open. I step back and I lean over, my hands pressed against the door, my elbows locked, my head down.

With my head down, I see what the wetness is that covers my pants. It is everything.

My stomach ignites and I puke onto the dark green, institutional carpet that covers the halls.

The vomit splatters onto my pants. I stop and breathe deeply,

puke again, stop. I am done. But it is not gone, I didn't clean myself out. It never stops.



After Greg stopped, he slept. I curled up again, no longer shaking. I flew around the room, I hovered above me, I danced on the shattered glass that covered my skin.

And a few seconds later, it was morning. Greg shook me. Like I had been sleeping.

"Wow," he said, "What a night. I'll make sure I recommend you to my friends."

I said nothing. He walked me up to my door and turned to leave. As I closed the door, I heard his voice one last time.

"See you around," he said.

It was that simple.



I step away from the pool of vomit. I start to return to my room. The spit and puke oozes around my mouth. At the threshold of my room, I strip. The tank-top that hugs my torso is damp with sweat. As I pull it over my head, the cloth smears the vomit on my face. I take off my unhooked bra. When I pull the string on Stuart's sweat pants, they slowly fall over my hips and to the floor. I step out of them. I cannot touch my underwear. That is too close to it, to all I have done, to the possibility.

I can almost see. It must be near morning. I move forward, towards the window, not walking but gliding absently. Gray paints the sky evenly. The sun is not yet up, then. Or maybe it is just hidden.

So. Here I stand, naked in the early morning. I am all here, as I was before. Even with my clothes off, the evidence is on my skin, tattooed on my skin. Slut, it says. Easy. Cheap fuck. Whore.

And I wrote it. It is my handwriting on my skin. I chose the words. I live the words.

I reach my arms out to the left-hand window pane. I slide it to the right. Cold air licks my skin.

I want hot air and sun, so that I will melt. I want rain, I want to dissolve and slide away. I want snow so I can bury myself.

But there is only cold air. My damp skin is sliced by it. The cold is what I hate most.

I open the window further and return to my wet bed.

I am a ball, lying on my right side, cold and simple.

— *Jessica L Walsh*

## Treblinka

1.

Henrik drove the train back and forth,  
sometimes pulling and sometimes  
pushing those cattle cars across the fields,  
cutting where the crops grew at last harvest.

The townspeople shook their heads and mourned  
the what of the last year. Nothing would grow  
here after the trains came, they said, these men  
who laughed at the cries for water and freedom,  
whose only inconvenience was the way the transport  
ruined the land and the screams they could hear,  
waking him, in the middle of the night.

But Henrik was glad for the vodka he was paid with;  
without that drink he couldn't do it, taking the people  
from their homes to slow death—he always knew  
their destination before they did. When asked about  
those screams he says Oh, yes, I could hear them.

He fingers the rim of his crystal-cut glass, skims  
the clear liquid with his fingertip and looks us  
squarely in the eye. They were people, human,  
just like me, I knew that. Do you think I didn't know,  
he asks with a break in his voice. I marched them to  
their deaths—do you think I didn't know?

2.

An evil magician's trick, Saul is whispering,  
one minute mother, father, brother...next minute  
nothing. Alone. Within seconds, we cleared  
the railway platform of any evidence that we  
existed. They picked me because I was 13 and strong,  
and they thought I would heft and drag bodies as  
well as the suitcases, emptied of belongings, that I  
stacked in rows. Those cases were our only trace,  
scarred with name, age, status. One of these epitaphs  
stays with me after all the years, beyond the ash I  
still smell, above the weightless skeletons that required  
little strength to lift and to burn. It read only:  
Hanna. 6 years old. Orphan.

3.

They spoke Jew, the old Polish farmer says, and no I couldn't understand them. But surely you could hear the terror in their voices? Certainly you knew they wanted out from those cages, to go back to their own land and to till their own soil? Didn't you know they wanted to live, just like you did? The old man shrugs as he looks at the sky for some relief, his skin wrinkles more as he pauses, then answers: You cut your finger and it doesn't hurt me. Our blood, yours and mine—our blood is not the same.

4.

Besides his thirst, it is the little boy that Abraham remembers most. The boy drives the family cows home, striking their flanks with the branch he also uses as a walking stick. From the inside of the cattle car someone has pried a window open, sweet air and sunlight, and Abraham asks, with signing hands, "Where are we?" His only answer is the boy shaking his head and marking his own neck from ear to ear, a death grin that Abraham doesn't yet understand. The boy, with the grass beneath his feet, knows that with darkness he will go to his own house, to a warm meal and a bed; he is confident that the next day will see him driving the cows again, along the same path, making the same gestures to the next chattel of Jews. His own well holds much water. No one will stop him from drinking.

— *Jennie Laird*

## Trebilnik SNOW CRABS

The crab legs were  
slightly pink on the  
outside, almost as if  
they had been dusted by my blush.

They stuck out at  
odd angles, claws up, from  
the bowl between us.

We bent their bodies backwards,  
with our quick fingers.

The legs resisted, until a  
crack was heard.

The meat was cotton white,  
begging to be dipped  
in the bowl of melted butter,  
that rested on your stomach.

I watched as you touched  
the pale flesh to your tongue,  
letting the golden juice  
drip down your chin,  
for me to taste.

— Amy Hicks

I am ten years old, tired and barefoot,  
floating on the unsteady sea of a  
kitchen floor I rarely stand on.  
My only father leans against a white stove,  
eating curried rice out of a burnt aluminum pot.  
He uses his hands, clawing at the gooey orange  
clumps of his past.  
He makes a mess, spilling rice on the hard,  
blue tiles, blurring the sea a dull shade of blood.  
He tells me to clean it up and I obey.  
Because I am his first-born child.  
Because when I am with him  
I forget how to swim.

— *Deidra K Razzaque*

## The fall

This time last year—there are no leaves on  
the ground, just stones in the street  
and the two of them dodging tiny cars through  
one-way alleys and God how they stumble,

running through the early morning darkness  
for the black cab, its rounded edges waiting  
at the corner as he holds her hand; he pulls her  
along yet he hold her hand as if it

belongs there, her gloved fingers wrapped  
in his gloved fingers as the dawn begins.  
She's still half asleep; she's freezing and eager  
to climb inside to this potbelly stove, to the

warmth of the car, where their arms will open  
and they'll fall into each other while the driver  
speaks of Pavorotti and how even in the opera,  
young love sleeps in on weekends. They laugh

at this, far from home and what they expected;  
this idea that love has anything to do with them,  
even as he holds her hand, even as they sit,  
close in each other's arms.

— *Jennie Laird*

## Walking

My steps are a mantra  
Blackbird calls deepen the focus  
With every footfall, I leave tensions behind me  
As if I was walking into a dream, a vision  
The sweet smell of grasses  
the soft earth beneath my feet  
make it a reality no dream could portray

The pup, sniffing madly, wholly absorbed  
breaks her attention intermittently to check on me  
I too break my focus  
As problems bubble through  
trying to be solved

Knowing them to be unsolvable, meanable  
little cares that grab hold the muscles at the base of my neck  
Stepping deeper into the mantra  
they have no hold

When I return I hope to walk  
with the same measure, the same poise  
on the hard pavement  
as I do now, on this soft earth

— *Kristina C Sprietzer*

The fall

Walking



