The Cauldron accepts submissions from any and all students attending Kalamazoo College. Submissions should be typed and include a name, phone number, mailbox number, and e-mail address. Please place submissions in the Cauldron mailbox in the basement of Hicks Center. No literary submissions will be returned, but all visual art is returned at the request of the artist. For more information contact the Cauldron at 616-552-5000 or Kalamazoo College's English Department at 616-337-7043.

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Cover Photo: "Junk Melody #1" by Summer J. Wood.
The Cauldron you're holding in your hands would not have been a possibility without the very important contributions of my wonderful staff. Each individual's time, effort, and love of the arts made the magazine come to life. It's a fascinating process, this publication thing. You pick up submissions from the mailbox, and months later you witness those that stand out evolve into little computer files. You hand the disk on which the files are located to the wonderful design people at Western. A few days later they hand you a thick stack of odd-looking paper, which you then proofread and proofread again. Eventually you discover all of the "Teh’s" and correct the "Brown" that should actually be a "Brain." You then take the stack of odd-looking papers back to the wonderful people at Western, pick out a color scheme for the cover, and that's that. A month later, you're holding a beautiful magazine full of brilliant poetry, prose, and art. You should try it sometime. (The whole thing only takes about 7 months.)

I would like to thank some of the people (who are all "A lord to a lord, a man to a man; stuffed with all honorable virtues" in my book,) without whom the 1997/98 issue of the Cauldron would have been inconceivable. First, I would like to extend my appreciation to the members of Kalamazoo College's English Department, for having faith in one of the less punctual student leaders. Much thanks to our faculty advisory board for both their wisdom and their insight: Arnie Sabatelli, Diane Seuss-Brakeman, and Conrad Hillberry. I would also like to thank Mike Haedicke, my fearless predecessor, who never failed to offer kind and inspiring words from across the Atlantic. Next, I would like to thank Tricia Hennessy and Heather Miller, the aforementioned wonderful people from the Design Center at WMU, for making our magazine look even better than it did last year. I am indebted to each
and every Kalamazoo College student who took the time to submit their writing and art to the Cauldron. It’s all of you who keep the creative spirit alive on campus. We obviously couldn’t have done it without you. The “we” is in reference to the last group I would like to thank: all of the Cauldron staff members. I can’t express how rewarding it’s been, working with these wonderful people who share both my love and enthusiasm for creating, discussing, exposing, and supporting the arts. Each and every one of you helped out more than you could imagine, whether it was hanging signs, organizing readings, or selecting pieces to be published. To all of you, thanks.

So, with all of this said and done, let’s get down to business . . .

Michael Mullaney
Editor-in-Chief
CAULDRON

literary and arts magazine 1998-1999 issue

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Home is Where

Home in hosts of ready-made houses
no music for miles and miles of
low-lying concrete and steel
don't tempt me
It's so easy to become lost
and the sprawl has a spell
of forgetting
and false remembering
so empty it hurts my eyes
Pockets of Home
in the Quiet of the House
the sacredness of down right center
there are others but the borders are fragile and worn
you have to learn to keep awake
so you see your chance
too many motors in the Motor City
the Jungle behind I stopped here because
It felt
like Home.
The Flesh

I.
enveloped and sealed
padded cushioned in this
Suit of Flesh
(I think running into things would hurt more if I was thinner)
here me this
Baroque goddess this
Mother Earth this
luxuriant concubine
a mind and a swagger and
the blessing and curse of this
child-bearing body
I guess
that would be okay if I was
munching on grapes in some painting somewhere with
a red cloth draped discreetly between my legs but I’m not
and this breeder physique is damned
inconvenient
when I
want too much
lightness
tightness

II.
sometimes not a Suit of Flesh but a
warmth and a power
I am prone to embracing and I wasn’t
at all offended when my friend said that hugging
me was like hugging her grandmother

Obituary Tag

I never met him but he makes my day go faster, so
I appreciate him.

What did your brother, husband, father mean to you?
I’ll decide what he meant to us.

It is a game to me. I take the first thing that pops into your head
and mold it like wet clay waiting for the kiln.
With this kind of power, I could mistake myself for God
But the bitter taste of cold coffee drops me from
the heavens to a dim-lit chaos where telephones
go off like babies in the maternity ward.

Truck-driver, wine-seller, college administrator,
nobody is worth more than 10 inches for the death page.
If they were, they’d be promoted to A1.

Take your time but please hurry.
Ya, he was the greatest man you ever knew,
I know, I know.
How ‘bout his favorite after-work drink,
or his pet peeves?
Let me in his closet.
I’m sorry to hear about your loss.
My condolences to you.

The game quickens when I hang up
This unfamiliar man now challenges me to immortalize
him before deadline—no pun intended.

No picture?
Too late.
No face.
Run it.
Acquaintance

You don't want to know me,
I eat steaks, blood dripping out my mouth,
and I stuff hamburgers in my face so fast you are careful to keep your hands off the table and I don't even chew all of it and I eat with my mouth open and I don't even breathe until it's all gone.
Oh, that was good.

You don't wanna know me.
I play with puppies when there is work to be done.
I play checkers with the elementary school students when there is tutoring to be done.
I play checkers with myself when there is nothing better to do.

You don't wanna know me,
I play football.

You don't wanna know me,
I can kick your ass and your ass and your friend's ass and I... was just kidding. See what I mean.

You don't wanna know me,
I made jokes when I watched the English Patient and I drink Gin on the Sabbath.

You don't wanna know me,
I trap my friends on the floor and fart on them to show them just how much I give a damn.

You don't wanna know me,
You don't wanna know me,
I check my hope at the stairs as pain greets me with a double-latched door. I walk through the house that no one will ever call home, knowing I am trapped, just like them. What I want and what they want are the same, they just got caught and probably wanted to, to save them from whatever hell they were born into. Here, away from their corrosive routine, they are lost and frightened. If hard love is all they got, it’s all they have and they cling to it as any lost child would its mother. The new world we both want seems unreachable. We dream forbidden dreams. They dream of going to truck school or going to college or living in room 6 and I let them. I dream of throwing the football with them or taking a trip with them where I drive them anywhere they want and we don’t return. We both know that jail will happen first but we go on, acting like responsible men, if not for ourselves, just to keep these walls from crushing us. When dreams are extinguished their last breath, what do I give them? College boy rhetoric about staying positive? Fuck it, enough of this GED bullshit, let’s go shoot hoops, Wade. On the black parking lot, they are momentarily free.
Devin Brain

Beginnings

I am from chocolate chip cookies, still warm as my mother brings them home.

From Saturday morning cartoons, Spiderman, watched with my father while my mother still slept.

From a brother who should have been a horse, or maybe a bear.

From friends no one else could see.

I was born in colleges of towering slate castles, cold in any season, filled with laughing children as tall as my father.

From a dark bedroom after long good nights, when the overhead light had finally faded.

From each new book appearing from its secret nook, large print to be peered at by a dim yellow glow.

From the closet’s sentry light sliding across the floor.

I was raised with the people of middle earth, and forged in the fires of an Arakkeen sandstorm.

From boy scout camp-outs, where nightmares rocked my sleep, so real they terrified parents and friends while leaving me untouched.

From the beauty of black ink flowering onto paper, letters of fire carving out hope.

I am from words that defy sight, living in the letters seared into my mind.

Mara Cramer

Angels Last Night

Pace slowed from asphalt to ruts, side by side.

Heart quieted, step after step.

The highway roars fading into misting sky, backlit yellow-gray.

And the smell of mushrooms fills flared nostrils.

I am reduced to the love of my own breath whispering between angel wings and wet leaves.

Footprints

The night upon snow, dark shroud upon body.

Flakes float in its warmth, thousands, on my face.

Arms out

Legs spread

Sweeping wide

I rise.

Heaven’s dust on my eyelashes.

Acres

Empty valleys of glacier tongues, rivers fingering into slit braids between ridges rising in knives, angling to mountain peaks.

I flow running my fingertips
through river currents of hair
beneath glaciers of mind
into deep guilles of body.
Shaping the ridges of her flesh,
I fly, breath hot against cloud.
Just one of God's angels riding coach home.

Peppermint Sparks

The wolf track is as big as a plate, imprinted on our trail,
He spreads his fingers and places his hand on the snow.

Toads slide off lily pads into warm black water.
The lilies rise as sunlight strikes, petals ajar.

Our mailbox stands lopsided on the highway,
filled with old letters and smooth stones.

Moths attack with wings against my eyelashes.
I shut the door against the ugliness.

The old Eskimo lady flips cards onto her table.
Deuce. Deuce. She plays solitaire by candlelight.
Sometimes the Heel bottle was swept away no matter how fast we ran down the creek, across the skinny logs, and through willow thickets. We fell in, our jeans heavy with water, rubbing our thighs raw. We fought. Snarling and spitting into each other's wounds. Puffball you called me, but we had the same hair. We stole caramels, Tang, Jello, plain Sugar and those cherry suckers from Edie's house. Salty peanuts erased the red stains of our raw tongues. We carved boots from cottonwood bark, sharing bloody knuckles and thin scars. I wore your cheap silk shirt. It swallowed me in smooth blues. I helped you take the nail from your palm, and rubbed ointment to heal burns of flaming oil. I brought you glasses of water when you were sick. You drank them even when you weren't thirsty. You played patient for me when I played doctor, and fathered me when I played house. We went out in your Land-Cruiser, spinning in the sweet mud, digging in it, rubbing it into our elbows and packing our fingernails. We shot grouse for dinner, ripping off the brown feathers to find the meaty breast that was good to eat. We gutted rabbits on the trapline, whipping their slit bodies between our legs, entrails flying in the snow. We burned toffee, trying to boil it to the hard rock stage. Simmered deer stew in a quiet kitchen, teaching each other lies. Bickering, biting, bitching, fighting mosquitoes from our faces. We ran parallel now, straight up, opening each other's eyes with hungry fingers.

Mara Cramer

Sugar Children

Around 1982 Mom and I find my brother at the end of the driveway. It is quiet in the cold, and his cheeks are glowing red. He's still waiting for the makeshift bus.

Around 1990 Mom comes in the morning to tell us Clancy is dead. At least she thinks so, his guts are all over the asphalt, she says. Eric and I take the cocker spaniel's left eye with a rock that morning.

Around 1986 my brother snowshoes home dragging a wolverine. Big with dark fur and a perfect white diamond worth $300. We take pictures of him holding it up. It's as big as he is. It was only caught by one toe in a martin set he tells us.

Around 1987 my brother spits in my mouth.

I wore your cheap silk shirt.

Mom and I find my brother at the end of the driveway. It is quiet in the cold, and his cheeks are glowing red. He’s still waiting for the makeshift bus.

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Around 1987 my brother spits in my mouth.

Around 1984 Dad leaves for Barrow. He shows my brother how to run the generator. I am wearing red sweatpants and don't want to cry. He hugs my mom good-bye. I think I see tears squeeze out of his eyes.

Around 1985 Dad leaves us crying behind the closing garage doors.

Mara Cramer

The Table Dad Made
Around 1985 Grandma and Grandpa take care of us. Mom is in school.
Dad is working and trapping. My brother hits me in the eye with an iceball. I tell everyone I fell and cut it open. Even Dad believes me.

Around 1993 Dad sends me a birthday card. He talks about the night I was born. How I popped out so fast I almost shot off the table and into the trash. Except I wasn’t born in 1975.

Around 1988 Mom, my brother and I sit at the Kitchen table. Dad made a long time ago. Fat flakes of snow fall outside in the dark. The house is small.

Amanda Leigh Lichtenstein

Sonnnet: Conversations with the Girl Inside

I.
I told myself I’d never forget about you. Maybe I could have left you electrified on licorice wires, or dangling on rotten branches, or by the park swinging into the sky at night, but I never thought you’d be so far from the center, so far away from home.

II.
I swim to the beginning and stuff my mouth with grape leaves when I get there. Climbing out of soft Chicago night skies, I walk down to the end of the block, kicking rocks on the way. There I fill my pockets with sharp glass and sit at the corner, looking for you and waiting for the light to change.

III.
Lights in the sky change to sudden pink when the sun goes down, like the blush in your cheeks when you started bleeding one Saturday in January. That morning you ripped the braid out of your hair and ate spoonfuls of brown sugar on the couch before Nina told you we had to go. In the orange sanctuary, you held that Torah in both hands as you walked through all the people with God in your little hands, a shamed woman, splitting the Red Sea with your Iron hammer.

IV.
Hammer out the voices in your head. Suck your butterscotch. You don’t say much, do you? You just do backward flips on my heart and lungs and brain and I don’t remember what you look like or what you think or what you care about or why you always cry or why you pulled Raise’s eyelids up when she was lying in her coffin with her hands cracked into a permanent fold on her chest. You just hum inside me, sometimes. That’s
how I know you're still there.
I forge your signatures.

V.
Sign here at the bottom, please, no your signature, no block letters, please. That's what they tell us when we want our money at the bank. I owe Kasey five hundred dollars and I wish I was back there with you at home sometimes, at the park, the railroad tracks, the JCC, Terminal parking lot. I'm stuck here in Philadelphia and I can't leave my apartment at night. I was punched in the face on November 5 and my lip is still swollen. I remember when mom smashed your head against the wall in the kitchen, just beneath the picture of a winter storm, when you were just in second grade. But I don't tell anyone about that. I say, this is the first time that I've ever experienced anything violent. They don't have to know about the concussion. You don't exist.

VI.
Existing in the space between laughter and forgetting memory are the little girl bones the red turtlenecks and the spelling tests and the lizard kisses and the loneliness. You will never know me, but I will always know you.

VII.
Do you ever really know someone? Can you ever really feel what they do? Are you ever satisfied with the answers you get? Why can't people just listen? Why can't I listen to you? I was walking down Michigan Avenue when a man with blisters on his bald head grabbed at my hair and pulled me back to where he was standing on the corner of Michigan and State. His ferris-wheel breath of electric lights came shooting out at me and he asked “have you seen the light? have you seen the day? have you seen the night? have you lost your sight? do you know what's real? Can you tell me what's right? Where are you going? How do you get to where you've already been? Get back? To the beginning? He shouted into my eyes until I finally pulled away from him and ran toward the steps of the Art Institute, sitting by the lions to catch my breath. Later that afternoon I walked to the Water Tower theater and watched a movie about the holocaust. I cried in the bathroom afterwards and threw up in the sink. Taking the train back, I sobbed the whole way and couldn't believe that I was actually alive.

IX.
Alive is washing your hair in rain water. Alive is watching lightning in an October sky. Alive is floating to the next farm with babies floating in your lap. Alive is knowing when to leave. Alive is finding you again.

X.
Sometime I find you in the closet when I go home and start looking for my books or pictures or letters. One picture way at the bottom of the box is you and Stacy wearing matching outfits in front of the junior high. Another one is you with Hilary in your lap, sitting on the red and black plaid couch in the little den. Your hands are cupping her head and I can see you smiling big behind all those pictures of old relatives on the wall. You're the middle child, there aren't many pictures of you in our family.
XI.
Families fade and break and die and scream and blur and brighten and shrivel and swell and burn and pop and whistle and moan and lie and screech and swirl and drown and spit and yell and sing and dance and pray and eat and shit and love and procrastinate and dominate and congregate and did I mention eat and fart and talk loud and talk soft and never talk and never scream, never die, never lie, or humm, or sleep. They just spin and that's all—end of story.

XII.
Everyone has a story, right, so where's yours?

XIII.
I've been lost before, not knowing where you are or when I'll be back or what I might eat for lunch with the two dollars in my back pocket. Most of the time I am making my way back to you, to the beginning, but I get distracted along the way. I start having crushes on boys who will never like me, even if they think I am smart or kinda pretty. I start having pains in my abdomen and wonder if I'll faint when I give birth. Mass media, Somalian refugees, saxophones, asthma attacks, phone bills, stretches of silence when there should be kissing, you have no idea what enrages me now, or makes me cry. You have no idea what you've become. Sometimes I think I can surrender you to the basement or the park or the corner or the Cherry slurpees at Seven-Eleven, but there are subtle ways in which you remind me that you will never leave. When I'm twenty-one and crying in my sleep, I know it's you, the little girl inside.

XIV.
I know it's you, the little girl inside.
I used to fold myself in half
In front of the mirror
Examining the exposed bone
Poking out at the middle
Like a staircase tumbling fast
Toward my head.

I could do headstands and leaps
On the steps leading to the
Bedroom.

City Bones

My neck snaps when I am followed.
Mucus on blood on lips on sidewalk.
The jaw bone creeps out at the sky
And is pushed back by strong hands.
They broke me and
I can't leave.
I can't leave.
I can't leave.

God's Lectures: Series on Remembering

I look at holocaustal graves
Where bones are tangled up in earth
Where sister eyes are empty
And fleshy stomachs have faded.
I know that I come from those bones.
The collective hollow of spinal cords
Makes one long tunnel

Though which every live Jew can crawl,
Like lice on the scalps of dictators.

Political Kissing

I suck on his tongue like marrow
Spongy and red and fertile.
Word bones protect our kisses.
Cut out the tongue and the words die.
Every time a bone is broken in half,
Another field is harvested at the
Edge of my lips.

Dragging It Back

My little girl bones were
Buried in the memory boxes
Kept in the basement,
My father's sanctuary of
Musical deaths and literary surprise.

The row of my knuckles
When I was forced to scrub
Out the blood is also down there.

In third grade I cut out a life size
Skeleton of my body, stringing
The parts together like a doctor
Or a butcher.
Then I hung it up on the door
To our house so that everyone
Could see the bones
Dangle silently on the front porch.
I'm dragging the bones up now
From the basement,
Crawling inside their fractured
Spaces and sucking on them,
As I make my way up the stairs.

Amanda Leigh Lichtenstein

Ghazal: God is in the Burning Garbage

We are waiting in line at the Salvation Army.
I smell corn on the cob and crack my back to ease the swelling.

There are piles of burning garbage on Accra Road.
Refugees sleep with the smoke and rancid fruit.

I used to meet Jeremy under the street light when I was sixteen.
Those nights remind me of Greek women and the camels and
the hot tea.

Last night, a muscle in my eye beat against the thin lid
Like nuns knocking on the door at four a'clock.

Aunt Edna quickly dumps the bread basket into her purse.
She laughs and says in a crackled slur, "Bernie, you're stuck
with me now."

I held my breath under water with my knees to my chin.
Humming like a baby, I pushed up to the surface and
panicked.

I forgive my father for starving the rabbits and the fish.
He used to think that music was milk.

Sleeping on the couch downstairs gave it away.
I eat pancakes in the dark, careful not to wake her.

Irene is whispering to me that she knows how it feels to be drunk.
I say you're only seven and she spins into a drop of rain on my
lap.

Sometimes I am burning old shoes in subway tunnels,
Melting the soles but saving the laces so I can tie my hair back.
We eat cheese fries and char dogs on the way home from the Abortion Clinic.
I watch them deep fry the meat before they grill it and my mouth waters.
I fasted all day and then dipped my fingers into the tomato stew, Kissing Mariamu on the lips and planning a walk to the ocean.
I pour one more bucket of warm water over my head.
I grab my hair in a tight fist and finally smell like I belong here.

I got a pair uh them same shoes
some ones you got on
I got em as house shoes
I got diabetes
an those parts start to die
If I bump my toe
I get gangrene.

Well.
See you later. as I scurry out from the bathroom. thinking back
to my own mother’s purple hands
full of rotting blood
quickly congealing around the knuckles
and fingernails
under loose skin
lost feeling.

Little girl
wipes hand cream
onto mother’s hands
a final gift in a life of beauty lotions
and potions and makeup and hairdyes
and permanents and deodorants
and perfumes and depilatories
to cover to hide to separate
from the animals.
(wild animals)
Mother was a wolf
but shave away the fur
from her legs her arms her belly
paint and trim her claws
curl and dye her mane blonde.
this is degradation
of this magic creature
by man
ourselves.

Too weak to bathe
she could not hide her body
she didn’t care anymore
and why should she?
What does it matter?
she was going to die!
She wanted to run through forest
under winter moon howling
sleep under damp bushes
with her sisters.
And father and I forced her
to hide
Why hand cream?
She will like that, Dad says.

Sarah Ovink

Fifi, The Headless Woman

C’mere. No. Not like that. I mean come to me. Yeah. Siddown.
Breathe it. Bask in it. Need a better view. Here, I’ll open my
legs. See, then it’s not so bad is it? Not quite so noticeable.
That’s how I lost my head, you see. I forgot what was really
important. Too much time spent on the hair, the eyes, the teeth.
Too much pressure applied, one day it just toppled off, landed
face down right there on the dresser. It’s a slow process, but
once it’s finished, that’s it. One second you’re nodding and
shrugging your shoulders, the next you’re wearing gold lame
and Frankie over here’s calling you the greatest show on earth.
The girls on the boulevard were right. It’s the legs that are
important. Now lift your eyes a little higher. There. Like to fuck a
woman who’s seen God? Some do. Sometimes I hear them
whisper as they scramble up inside me: I do believe. I do
believe.
Exodus

Quell the fires; douse
Those lights that you have.
What homes you have—
Desert them.
It is time.

What a time to lack,
What with other wretched tumults to endure.
What a time for winter.

This death means no more to me than an angel's.

October Interlude

I fear you will learn
to deal with my tea bags and
muddles of clothing
and the lists I don't make;
I fear I will find self-immolation
unadvisable and pettiness obsolete.
I fear the elements, but
tonight I am less concerned
with hypothermia than
my fear we'll have to name this thing love.
Smoke

something like an apostrophe
punctuated our last conversation;
a hazy grey possessive mingled
mostly with a contraction.

the pack of camel lights,
the satiny blankets and darkly tinted
glasses called for better words than
we had.
the sky was beginning to fall
like ashes from the chimney,
and it was time to drive home
or run inside,
the most important phrases
left unsaid:

i love you.
i have loved you.

we let the cigarettes take over,
their conversation smothering,
brighter and less regretful than our own:
they still burned strongly at one end.
they sipped up the clean world
and sighed out smoke
like a signature,
like a victory.
better than promises and excuses and even forgiveness.

Before parting the seas, he prayed

An old woman, about sixty,
with graying hair and a knit cap
was digging through trash on a Sunday night.
It was freezing and I was in a hurry;
I stepped quickly, making good time.

"Jesus never lived," she said,
"he's a creation. A myth, you know,
like that guy who was picked up
by a helicopter and dropped in the forest by mistake.
But it sure works, don't it?" and cackled madly.
I smiled and bent down as if in preparation
for an uppercut. I saw an apple in her sock,
a fresh one with no bruises yet, and bit it.
I stood up straight and kissed her forehead instead.

*I

I stood up straight and kissed her forehead instead
of getting dressed as she had asked.
That's all it took sometimes; a well placed kiss
and an act of harmless defiance drive her mad.
She pulled me down, grabbing the back of my neck
and entwining her fingers in the hair,
my hands landing on either side of her stomach
and sliding back and up, shamelessly eliciting moans.

"The apples weren't fresh this morning," I said in withdrawal,
"they weren't fresh. There were already some bruises
and I think a wormhole in one, even.
We should be more careful at the grocery store next time."
It was late and she'd already fallen asleep,
Dreaming of the sounds of a distant city street.
*Dreaming of the sounds of a distant city street, I extinguish the lost ashes of the dinner fire and dread walking to the river for more water. They found a deserted child there, caught in the reeds and cattails and waiting for a mother's breast which was not forthcoming. When it died, we buried it hastily and solemnly; we gave the child all it deserved, but we could not spare enough to save its life. We visit the tomb each spring now and it is something of a pilgrimage, paying tribute to a life more exotic than our own.*

I am thinking about becoming a pillar of salt, remembering An old woman, about sixty.

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As the ocean massages your feet it also pulls a little sand from under you. How distant the beauty of the night sky is how dark the rest of your journey.
My Favorite Ambassador

when we finally recline
the clamor has subsided,
and the wine bottle sits
heavy on the tablecloth still.
i’m exhausted you say,
wishing your neurons would
quit firing all that
vivid soldier junk, that
inflammatory clashing
fascist buffet.
hot coffee and a colonel
just waiting to fight.
you tense your neck, saying
I know it’s no tradition
to smash your host’s dishes.
and still feeling his breath
on your blouse,
still hushing his spit-filled
discourse on death.
some world we live in,
you’re murmuring as the
pillows give way to your
head, and i’m in my
nightshirt, crawling beside
you in bed. listening to
you spout your slogans and speeches, slower
and lower as you slip
into sleep. and as I wrap
my arms around my favorite
ambassador, I switch off
the only light, knowing you’ll
be on the first flight to
hong kong before I wake.

Winnebago

we rested against the winnebago
scratching sores & biting palms
while grandpa moved the
boat along, and grandma tossed
her limp hand in the air—
it’s August, she cried, and
nobody really cared. we just
nodded and bit our cheeks
and stayed in Wisconsin for
another two weeks.
Running from Commentary

The black turban, he tells me represents oppression in India. We hand the man money and walk away with our soda.

Just down the Avenue of the Americas the man from Liverpool can give us tickets to the Fantasticks for half price. The decayed smile, he says is the result of a time before fluoride was added to water.

A lack of communication, he says when the waiter brings lemon instead of lime. Speaking Vietnamese is not his forte and his memory fails him. During the war, he remembers, he saw them burn.

When I am tired of listening, I shut my book and listen to the city's voice for a change. Scratch out the author's name and, just above, I write my own.

I.

It was always summer that rescued me from the grip of long Michigan winters. This natural rhythm of the seasons, it saved me. I remembered when you first started visiting me, how your sun-drenched hair caught my eye. You would lie down next to me at the very end of the dock, where the long panel of boards came to a T. We read magazines on our stomachs with just the thin stretch of bathing suits between us. In spite of the fact that my face was scarred, you told me I could model. Your fingers brushed against my scars and read them like Braille.

II.

Your hands were always brushing up against parts of me, over scabs and mosquito bites, twisting amidst my hair. I caught you peeling skin off my shoulder. You had a need for touch, for warmth, even though I was always cold. Do you remember this cold skin? Winter was always in the back of my mind on Saturday nights. We lay on our backs in the middle of the empty street, waiting for the night sky to answer our questions.

III.

The next morning, you went to mass at 7:30. You were a good Catholic boy, and wore a tiny picture of Mary around your neck. It never came off, even when we were swimming. I practiced baptizing you. At the end of each summer I would say, "By the time I see you next June, I might have had a baby!" But you knew that after another nine months had passed, you would remain my only child. The barren winter left me lonely, and you wrote letters with reminders to pray to Antony of Padua, patron saint and protector of lost things.
IV. Loss was a reoccurring theme in our relationship. You always asked about my sister. She had died before we started spending summers here, and you wondered what she was like. I squinted as if the sun hurt my eyes and we took the boat out for a ride. When we ran out of fuel, you tied a rope to your waist and swam back to shore. We each walked up our own set of steps to the neighborhood.

V. In the neighborhood, we met with older kids and drove to the strawberry fields to make money. We shared a row. I would stand and bend over to pluck the fruits of summer while my shirt let sun shine on the top of my breasts. You sat in the dirt, your lips stained red.

VI. Do you remember how we would take some strawberries home to my mother, and then you’d sneak into her kitchen to steal them? You would emerge with great handfuls of berries, and together we would eat them while sharing a bench in the old tennis court. You called it the “V” because it was here that two roads separated like a great asphalt letter. We lingered in the space between.

VII. You never come to the cottage anymore, you say, and I’m tired of swimming alone. It is August in New York and I can barely hear your voice over the hum of the city. I’m thinking of you, sunlight on your face, standing on the bench in the “V”, and as I pull away, you wave. I shiver, and try to remember the patron saint of lost things.

Korli Schmekel

Geraniol

He used to say alchemy was the ancestor of modern chemistry but when I thought of alchemy I thought of wizards and magic and blocks of lead turning into gold. Turns out though, he was right and my perception of chemistry was wrong. He showed me it still has some magical elements. Taught me lead was one of the few metals known to the ancients. Whispered about the attraction forces between molecules. I started to get confused about the difference between being sublime and sublimation.

Before I knew it, I was letting him walk me atom by atom down the carbon chain. That boy could make gas formation sound magical. Pretty soon I was calling him dihydroxypropanol instead of sugar and stopping to smell the geraniol instead of the roses.

Funny thing about smelling the geraniol, though. Once in a while you get a good whiff and your head clears and your palate clears and your lungs clear and after that every breath of air feels like a gulp of water. Every exhalation like the breathing of fire. The earth feels flat and still beneath your feet and the smallest particle you can think of is a grain of sand. All of a sudden you see the magic, not in orbitals or quarks or chemical structures but in the larger things your eyes can see, in metamorphosis of the bug and of the season and of yourself.

I found that magic.
I found the magic when it wasn’t where he told me it was.

I took a second look.

This time, after smelling the geraniol.
This time I saw the quick hand of the magician
and heard the bitterness of the words
I thought I loved. DichloroDiphenylTrichloroethane.
Chernobyl and thalidomide.
Modern chemistry has no basis in alchemy or
anything else involving wizardry and magic.
Just in the crude manipulation of names
and ideas, the flailing grasp at the intangible.
No matter how hard he tries now, his vapors
will never make my head swim, then clear,
like smelling the roses.

Wear the black shoes now and now and now but not now; no,
now wear the sandals and leave those others in the car; bake
a cake show your face, smile; demonstrate your calligraphy
skills and tendency toward menial chores, your ability to cross
stitch and listen attentively; send presents and cards; pretend
you care when they talk about their latest senior citizens ping
pong tournament “no dear it’s not ping pong it’s table tennis”
or golf score bowling game mileage pets neighbors weight
aches indigestion; next the brown ones, speak louder sit
straighter look more interested raise your hand but not too high
seem knowledgeable but omniscient, work until it’s right start
over until it’s perfect dot your i’s cross your t’s keep practicing
until your print looks typeset; observe discern learn confidence
yet humility remorse forgiveness slip on those Sunday shoes
and then slip them off under your seat when no one’s looking
follow principles instead of rules shun rigidity think for yourself
while seeking everyone’s approval, acceptance, admiration;
wear pink tights when wearing pointe shoes thinner tighter this
time and next; this is how you please others and make them
think you enjoy being around them; this is how you finagle
your way into the identity you seek; this is how you change
shoes from one occasion to another; next the boots darling
because the shit is getting deep.
Seeking Hard Worker with 2 Heads and 1 Body

Circus Help Wanted: Currently looking for someone to look in two directions at once, then fight with themselves over which path is best. A popular ending for this performance will be staying in the original place and moping. Employee should have the ability to hold a lover in her arms while the second mind wanders elsewhere, smile demurely while the second head vomits, and maintain her cool while the second face flushes red with embarrassment. Preference for twins joined below the ribcage—two individual hearts make things interesting. Double souls need not apply.

Ashes

The smell of burnt bacon in the air. We sit around the breakfast table and watch Good Morning, America. Clink bone china and discuss the day's plans. Together, we drive Route 2 to the Cut River Bridge. She always held her breath as we went over, wanting to peek over the edge but hoping the weight of her body wouldn't be sucked through the rungs. Today, we hoist the urn up onto the railing and let my sister fall, her body hitting the icy waters and sinking to the bottom. It does not float.
Lying alone, arms outstretched, one leg crossed over the other, cigarette burning my fingers. There is still the red mark on my chest where you would put your head on nights like tonight. Still the same fans blowing in the window, the low rumble, hypnotizing like a sixth-grade crush. Same sheets, tonight motionless. I think of how I never smoked when you were here with me. How you'd listen to me talk and agree, rarely argue. How you'd hold onto me like you were falling. How I would hold you, taking your whole body in my arms like a father holding his daughter, one hand supporting her small head, his eyes looking into hers to find god, as he lowers her into a tiny, square crib, filled with soft blankets and a satin pillow, like a casket.

I poured the Orchard Peach Bubble Bath and watched it foam, joyful at its expansive release from the pathetic BodyWorks bottle.

Once in the tub I listened to the jazz music playing, too loud and too fast for anyone who knows anything about jazz.

Then with the door open, the music, and the peach bubbles I began the metamorphosis.

First I sang the tones of humming whales that sounded uncannily beautiful, then my legs began to disappear beneath the island peaks.

I smiled as I looked at my shining skin and let out a whoop, a whoop for whoop's sake on an early Monday morning and yelled "I'm not a Mermaid."
I was never one for hot lunches. Instead, at lunch time, I sat down to small piles of eyelashes that I’d yanked out during Mrs. Gillespie’s second period novel class. I’d place each one on the tip of my tongue and swallow them one by one. Every lash I liked to believe was a little wish. Every swallow was its cue to happen. I like to imagine the inside of my stomach, little black swimming wishes in a bowl of yellow bile hope. The day I discovered that my eyelids were bald was the day I decided that eyebrows would have to do. Once my eyebrows were naked, I had no choice but to start eating the hair from my head. A long cry came from those lovely lashes, but at least now I didn’t have to be sparing. I’d gobble my hair by the handfuls, stuffing my mouth with it as I walked down the hall, half choking on it as I ran laps around the gym, singing songs in the choir... Then one day I noticed that I was as bald as a bowling ball, gleaming like a piece of polished plastic fruit. I decided then that I couldn’t do anything but wait for all that yellow bile hope to leak itself out and sprout me some more lashes. I’m still waiting. When they do finally poke through, I’m going to yank them right out and have them for lunch. These hot lunches are making me sick.

When the darkness starts rolling through me and gusts begins to whip the leaves and clothes from my body, I scramble to the top. From the roof, I’m a ghost or a queen. Rain pounds out its hardships on my skin; my mouth can’t hold this rumbling story now. When I’m naked on the roof in a thunderstorm all anguish unravels and flies away. Deceit tangles up in sounds of water surging down storm pipes, thudding heart, pink lightning cracks. My body arches back and over the wind—now I howl what I never dared before. On the roof, I am one with this great storm. Still I want to go inside; there its dry and warm. Dry and warm inside my bed I drift. I waltz with a blackened dead man, leading. His rotting arms hold me too tightly; his putrid breath corrodes away my nostrils. Sour song, too fast. Grubs crawl out his eyes, mouth, while he rasps into my head without words; planted thoughts reek of wrongs. Graceless iniquity, my wrong lover. I cannot. The violent vomit of my fear and my silence, tramples all resistance. My wavering compliance is held up by the stench of his broken flesh. Midnight strikes. The buzz of an alarm cuts in between us And I roll over and take in a deep breath.
I roll over and take in a deep breath, sucking in and choking on pine needles and dirt. Buried alive-face down. Black dirt cools hearts more. I fell asleep in the woods again. Apparitions and a rumbling aria ride on the breezes. Like phantom, my body begins to sway its song. Release forget embrace swing breathe. My bare feet get tangled in the wild flowers or pricker bushes; it doesn’t matter which because I am the queen of mended dreams. These trees can sing my story including the unwritten end. When I am in these woods, I am it’s mystery, it’s wonder. Still, I search for the edge and I listen for thunder.

1. When he was tired of painting rotting fruit in his dark studio, Cezanne would pack up his easel and wander around outside for inspiration. He would not look at that pile of rock dumped in the middle of Provence, not majestic enough for mountain status, the infamous Sainte Victoire. Cezanne would sit himself down next to some charming brook or enchanted glen, sketching leaves and stones. But no matter what he was pointing, the Sainte Victoire would appear in the background, its bleached bones poking through the thick color and canvas.

2. Walking up the steep Chemin de Bibemus with Ilya, I saw a skull, bleached white from the sun. Ilya went crazy, pulling at her leash and whimpering. We went together to the side of the road for a closer look, and I stared, fascinated by her shiny black muzzle nudging the dull and fragile bones. Some small animal surprised by headlights, thrown into the air only to land in the thorny bushes, next to empty cigarette packs and Coke cans. I had to pull Ilya away, and as we walked towards the Sainte Victoire, I kept myself between her and the speeding cars, feeling the quick swoosh on my face each time one passed.

3. I turned my face when I saw the man sitting there on my rock, overlooking the reservoir and the Sainte Victoire. I wanted to walk away quickly and silently, but the stillness gave away the sound of twigs snapping under my sneakers. Excuse me, he said politely, have I taken your spot? I reluctantly answered, and as soon as he heard my accent, he demanded, Tell me about America. We spent an hour on that rock, watching the
gray morning become clearer and clearer, Sainte Victoire appearing from beneath the clouds. He told me that America is a violent country, that we are overtaking the French culture with McDonald’s, that he wanted to go to the States and make a million dollars, and then build himself a cottage on my cliff. I heard myself defending America for the very same reasons that I always hated it, saying that Americans are crude but at least we’re honest, that violence is exaggerated, and at least we realize racism is an issue. All of a sudden I said, I have to go, and I ran through the woods until I came to the parking lot. I sat down on a rock, my arms hugging my knees, wondering how I had found the way back so easily.

4. We couldn’t find our way out of the woods, and Claire was waiting for us to start dinner. I felt responsible, because it was me who had invited Georgia to come see my cliff, and now I had gotten us lost. There were no more markers—all the saplings looked the same—and we trudged along, conversation dead, listening for sounds of civilization in the whispering trees. Pink and orange light began to seep onto the path, coloring the decaying leaves, and we didn’t dare say It’s getting dark. Gunshots searching for wild boar echoed around us, and we stumbled faster over the betraying ground. Then, faintly in the evening breeze, we heard the hum of passing engines. We ran towards the sound, zigzagging. Eventually we found the grassy hill leading down to the highway. Smoking cigarettes, arms linked, we ignored all passing invitations to hitchhike.

5. I should have gotten up the nerve to hitchhike—Stefan and Florence would have done it in a second if I’d have said yes. But it was a clear, bright morning, and the sun still felt good on my shoulders. We probably walked three miles before we even got to the foot of the Sainte Victoire, but I felt strong and was ready to take on the mountain. The brush was dry and brittle, and thorns scratched through my jeans. I was looking at the ground for crickets and lizards and end-of-summer wildflowers, so I didn’t really notice that we had begun to climb. I heard the cicadas suddenly, though they must have been humming the whole time. Then the sun began to burn, and the drone of the cicadas rushed, thundering in my ears. Everything turned in to the sun, and I could smell its chalky, inviting rays. Something in my body resisted, made me see myself, limp, rolling down the rocks, and the words were forced up to my lips. I’m going to faint. I wondered if weakness was to give in to the light, or to pull back into the world, helplessly human.

6. How can a human being live without his own kind? There is a legend of an old hermit who built the stone dwelling on top of the Sainte Victoire. They say that he knows every inch of the rock, lives on rabbits and wild thyme, walks naked because he likes to feel the wind as if he’s listening to it. He is accustomed to the cold, steps in the only snow in all of Provence. Why did he select this lonely mountain for his resting place? They say he’s crazy for rejecting his race, and that the mistral is a frigid, temperamental lover. They forget that loneliness is conferred, while solitude is chosen.

7. I chose to bring Christophe to my secret cliff—he never asked or knew what it was to me. And so when we arrived at the edge of the woods, I started toward my regular path. He
grabbed my hand. No, he said, cover your eyes. I used to come here all the time, and I want you to see a really special place. I let him lead me gently over his path, over roots and jutting rocks. When we stopped, he positioned me so he could see my reaction when I opened my eyes. I gasped. See, isn’t it amazing? he said. It was amazing, it was my amazing view that I had chosen to share with him. And somehow, between what he had to show me, and what I had wanted to give him, the cliff became wholly his. The view of the Ste Victoire was connected to all of his childhood stories, and my few reflective months paled away to nothing. O ma chérie, he exclaimed, I can’t believe we were thinking of the same place! Me neither, I whispered, and clung to his arm in the suddenly cold December air.

8.

Sudden cold spells are never such a surprise in Provence. All you have to do is watch the clouds around the Ste Victoire, and you can predict any weather pattern. Thick cottony ones at sunset mean rain; dark stringy ones mean wind; wispy ones mean crisp mornings when the Provençal will wash the stucco in warm, golden light. Somehow it seems appropriate that the perky girls who do the weather news should be less accurate than a crotchety old rock. The Ste Victoire feels the weather in its arthritic bones, breathes it back out into the clouds, and waits for the elements to smooth away its jagged fractures.
“You know, for the longest time I thought we were going to church on Sundays, just like all the other families. People ask me if I want to be saved by Jesus, and I say I was brought up on Post-Modernism instead of Catholicism. Do you know Kandinsky? Rothko? Do you know Jackson Pollack? I met Pollack once, wandering around the Fourteenth Arondissement. He said to me, ‘Hey Jacques, where’s the bars around here?’ He bought me many pastis, and told me all about the world of artists. ‘Hey Jacques,’ he said, ‘you must always have a passion, you must always be searching. Because when the dream is dead, your dreammaker dries up, and you just float away, you die.’

“When you stare too long at paintings, when you take up brushes and paint and cry at the blank white expanse of canvas, you start to realize some things. An ugly dress painted yellow is just an ugly yellow dress. A knight dressed up in cardboard is still on a quest, but he doesn’t have to be chivalrous or loyal or romantic—he just has to be searching. Look, here is the Pompidou Center. You go inside, okay?”

I begged him to stay, invited him for coffee, offered all my money. But he just turned around, started back towards the cathedral, the afternoon sunlight glinting off his aluminum-wrapped helmet.
Small towns eat you up inside
painting your cotton white soul white with sin

My sister is buried in the old cemetery
dissolving under the shade of an apple tree

Most people don't know that Boulder Valley
School is inflicted upon innocent children.

At night I dream of the shadow demon who chases me
wailing words I need to know but can't understand.

My grandfather told me that when nothing else is left,
You leave.

He awakens me
From anesthetic sleep
the world injected
into my criss-crossing
Christ veins.
Pump me up
like Air Jordans
I can fly.
SAFETY — Road Commission Style

It's all about appearance.
Trust me because they'll tell you different.
Once the safety guys from the state leave, they could give a shit.
That generic-ass vest they hand to you like a suit of armor?
Sheeeeyat.
Drivers don't slow down for weirdos,
speed up if anything.

YOU MUST ALWAYS WEAR SAFETY GLASSES WITH SIDE SHIELDS WHEN WORKING ON THE ROAD.
Side shields?! You wanna see those bastards comin' head-on.
Safety glasses?! Hell, put some dark cellophane in some frames,
and call it good.

Finally, they got the hard hat.
WEAR IT WHEN REGULATING TRAFFIC.
Because if you get hit (your vest is bold like a target, ya know),
that piece of thin-ass plastic will stay put.
Yeah right. Hold it in the hand opposite the sign.
Only wear it when the foreman comes.
Throw it at cars going too fast,
but don't wear it too often.
Too many fine women drive by,
The vest makes you look stupid enough.
How'd I learn?
Ask the one-eyed guy over there in the wheelchair—he used to work here.

Billy, take truck 1346 to a rest area
And sleep away the rest of the day.
SHOULDER MAINTENANCE.

Big John, take Damon in 1380 to the titty bar.
Make sure you park the truck in back, though.
POTHOLE PATCHING.

Derrick, take 1351 and drive around
Until your hangover goes away.
GRASS AND WEED CONTROL.

Murph, take 1226 and the tar machine.
Go out on I-75 to dance and scream at the women.
SURFACE MAINTENANCE.

J.T., take 1354 and go to your house.
Eat breakfast, take a nap, and put your garbage
In the back of the truck to take to the dump.
ROADSIDE CLEANUP.

Richard, take Reggie in 1103 to the slab
Crew, sit in the pickup and look at porno mags.
TRAFFIC CONTROL.

Me? I'll wait 'till everyone leaves, go home
to screw my unemployed girlfriend, then drive around
In my black Camaro. That way, I won't be using
Road Commission gas in the truck—I mean, shit, we can't be wasting tax dollars.
Elijah Newton

Untitled

Sam Arnold

Kept up at Night
I went to Starlite Coney Island the other day and finally saw inside the mirrored house that used to be my family's. The house no one could see into. The house that made everyone think things were fine when they were really nothing of the sort. I sat down in my usual booth and saw a man across the restaurant with his wife and son. The boy had to be around sixteen years old. I could tell he was a mature boy. Clean shaven, nice haircut, soft eyes. As I sat there eating my coney dog and fries, I watched them. I watched how they moved, how they talked to each other, the looks on their faces when they raised their gaze from the table. I saw everything but heard nothing. But what does sound matter? You can feel the strong words, the angry words, the nice words. I returned to my food once the waitress came to the table.

When I next looked up, I saw the wife looking down in shame, the boy watching with wide eyes and glancing around the room. The man was directing a stern look at his wife. I could see the anger in her face coupled with embarrassment caused by this man talking to her and looking down upon her as if she were a child. She raised her head and said something to her husband with eyes full of fire, cheeks the color of blood. The man immediately grabbed her arm and said some of the strong words. I felt them because I was there. I felt the "You better shut your fuckin' mouth." I was there. I felt the pull on my arm because I was there. I was the boy looking around the room as if to say, "I hope nobody sees this shit. Is anyone looking?" Of course not. No one was looking, not even me. My memory had taken me back to my own house, leaving my body there to offer an empty stare to the fighting family.
I opened the door to our mirrored house, but not with my hand. I kicked it down. I kicked it down because over the years it gets harder and harder to return. I went inside and saw my mother, looking in the bathroom mirror with the crack in it to see if her makeup covered the bruises. I saw my father not taking out the garbage, not doing the laundry, not washing the dishes. I saw him sitting on the couch with a beer in his hand watching football, waiting for something to go wrong or to get drunk so he would have an excuse to yell. I saw myself in my room, writing, immortalizing my life on thick, white paper. I looked out the window to all the people standing outside, each once having something to tell me.

“You got you a good old dad, Jefferson.”

“You should consider yourself lucky, Jefferson. A lot of fathers don’t care about their families like your dad cares about you and your mother.”

“Hopefully one day, Jefferson, you’ll grow up to be just like your old man.”

My father? They really couldn’t see into the house, could they? The only thing he and my mother had was me. The only thing I had with him was sports and even then it was a struggle. If I didn’t play good, I’d hear about it the entire way home from the game. Even if I did play good, there would still be something wrong to keep me from getting too confident in myself. The only time I heard how proud he was of me was from other people and whenever he was drunk. He would call me at 2:30 in the morning, telling me to come pick him up at the bar. The entire way home, I sat silent listening to his infinite knowledge about how I should live my life, a nervous smile smeared across my face. Upon arriving home, he would wake my mother with a thunderous, “LIZAI, GODDAMNIT! MAKE ME SOMETHING TO EAT!” I would disappear into the shadows and head for my room, hoping that maybe this will be the time they won’t fight. Hoping this will be the time he doesn’t hit her. Hoping this will be the time she doesn’t end up in my bed, rocking me to sleep like a small child who just had a nightmare.

I then stepped outside my mirrored house, wanting to see what everyone else saw. I saw my father getting mad and throwing my mother down the steps. I saw him yelling at me. I saw him drunk and stoned, beating my mother until she had sex with him. I turned around to tell the others. To show them what really went on. But they weren’t watching. Their heads were turned. They wanted the jokes, the wisdom, the bullshit that was my father. No one was interested in this.

The young boy at the other table was staring at me while his parents argued, those soft eyes wanting to leave, to be rescued. Yeah, I see you, I see it all. And yes, don’t worry . . . I understand.
Father Grass

I was ten, walking back from a day spent with the grass which shone dull brown in the sizzling summer sun. I don't remember the walk, but I remember the grass. It was waving in the stale wind, whispering against my bare feet. It made my feet hurt to think how soft the dry grass was. I was suddenly through a glass door, sliding on its runner, no hinges squeaking like the old back door. I was on a course carpet, worn thin through the years of use by other tenant's feet. I wondered what my feet said, what other people's feet had said, to that carpet. How long was it since it was new and soft? How soft did it used to be? Probably not, my mother says when I ask her, "this carpet was never soft, not for the price we paid for this place."

I smile at her like I understand the meaning of money and why we don't have any. I stop smiling, and ask, "What's money momma?"

"Just something we used to live on, honey, but nothing for you to worry about. It's just that Dad doesn't live here anymore. He can't help us now." I nod, walk out onto the dry grass, and come back inside.

"Mom," I ask, "why does the grass hurt my feet so much?"

"Because it's hot out and the sun had dried it all up." I nod and walk across the soft blue carpet to the cracked tile floor. The tile feels jagged and rough. I hurry over it to get to the soft carpet again. I sit down in front of a blank TV and pretend to watch cartoons.

Girls' Room

Last year I started smoking cloves. It seemed a natural progression; all my friends started on Camel Lights or Marlboro's, wearing ankle-length chains and playing cards out by the bridge over Mary's River. I'd always been into varying the trend, I'd stand on a rock far out into the river, puffing on those wide brown smoky treats, staring out into the sun spots on the waves like any minute I expected Neptune to break through. I'd wear those tight black miniskirts in the drizzling Oregon rain and never shiver.

One night I was moving my hand around down there under the covers like usual and an angel appeared to me in my bed. She kissed me on both cheeks and said I was blessed, then kissed me full on the mouth. She wasn't shy with her tongue. I woke up shaking and coming, shaking and coming in a hard sweat that seemed to pour from my toes and fingertips and eyes, pouring out in a river of emotion and sudden understanding. I changed my sheets and went back to sleep, but that angel never left me.

Indeed, the very next day she came up behind me in History and patted my back as she handed me another B-paper. "Good effort," she said. "I'm seeing real improvement." "Thank you," I breathed and slumped back in my seat, miniskirt twisted around my hips in hopeless wonder. The second hand jumped out of the corner of my eye; I couldn't break away from those coral-painted lips mouthing the atrocities of war and famine. I clutched my pencil and chewed away at a hangnail, dreaming of a turnip farm in 1200 Europe, peasant women overcome by passion, witches burning in the fields.

Ms. Hanson stared at me in consternation. I pretended to rub my eyes and took out a stick of gum, pulling it slowly into my mouth out of the waxy white paper.
"Frankie White wants to sleep with you," said Frannie matter-of-factly, caking purple gunk on her lips in the girls' bathroom. Her oversized, dirty-blue handbag clunked to the floor and let loose a shower of stolen make-up and Bic pens. "Shit," said Frannie.

"Frankie White," I said thoughtfully, spinning his face out before me to be considered. "Cute, but a little short for my taste."

"Oh, I like the shorter ones," said Frannie. "It's much easier to kiss them." I frowned, thinking of Frankie's rather large and mushy-looking lips. They looked like something you slice up to put on party crackers. "Come on, don't tell me you wouldn't do him in a second." Frannie's eyes widened as she drew black Cover Girl lines out to her hairline.

"Maybe," I started slowly, "purely for the experience, you know, of being with a soccer jock. Got to have variety," I lied. I'd never slept with a boy in my life, had never really thought about it as something I would really do. I had this idea that sex was just something to talk about, like cafeteria food. It wasn't something you actually did anything with; just there to look at so you didn't have to stare at everyone else the whole lunch period. Frannie smirked at me in the smeared mirror and slammed the bathroom door on her way out, bag jostling against her wide hips wrapped in black denim. I stared at the mirror and thought furiously about sex until the bell rang.

Back in the hall I put my head down and raced forward, staring at people's feet. China flats, Mary Janes, scuffed Converse flashed up at me in the spaces between the Nike bags and pieces of discarded notebook paper. A pair of dark-blue Adidas slammed down in front of my book. I looked up to see Frankie White's baby blues fixed on mine, a hesitant smile on those mushy lips. He had a piece of lettuce stuck between his front teeth and he smelled like Right Guard and spearmint. Serves me right for skipping out on Gym to talk about sex with Frannie Meyers, I groaned to myself. My thoughts flitted to Ms. Hanson and the way her hands made ways out of this air when she talked to us about Eric the Red. Suddenly I found myself blocked up against the lockers and

Frankie was breathing in my ear. I remembered that this was supposed to be erotic and dutifully closed my eyes. Frankie's hair tickled my nose. "Meet me in the back parking lot after school," he said. "I want to tell you something." I nodded as he backed away, and unconsciously shook a clove out of the pack in my jacket pocket, put it in my mouth.

In Government I drew long curlicues in the margins of my notebook. Ms. Hanson smiled as she led a discussion of the McCarthy era. I could hardly bear to look at her. Her red, perfectly sculpted nails tapped softly on the crisp folds of her dark pleated skirt. I wanted to cry out to her, warn her somehow, freeze her with a word. I could think of nothing plausible. The second hand swept the clock. The bell rang and Ms. Hanson gathered her books. Still stuck dumb by her lips, her nails, I waited slumped in my seat. She touched my hair as she left, her hand brushing it's sticky layers of impossible height.

In the back parking lot I found Frankie leaning up against a pickup truck. Two of his buddies were sitting in the cab. He grabbed me and whisked me around so that my back was pressed up against the tailgate, his body pressed up against mine. He had was reaching up my skirt, searching, searching, his mouth on mine, his hard-on pressed to my stomach. I suppose I should have struggled, broken away. Instead I closed my eyes and thought of craters and Neptune, red nails against a chalkboard sky.
Image of a man with an IV in a hospital bed

Mike Collins

Picture a bum in a corporate meeting. Picture a skunk, run over in the road, ice freezing over dried blood on fur. Picture an hourglass, slowly and deliberately emptying. Picture a hungry man, emaciated but still walking. Every now and then his head drops in exhaustion, his hollow cheeks unshaven. Picture a finished fighter in the fifteenth round. When he hears the ref say "ten" he wipes the blood from the corner of his mouth and rolls over. Then think, just for a minute, about sugar.

Picture me. "Ten" with a broken wing. He tries to pull his.PathVariable. Listen as he talks, my leg twitching, my school book open and unread before me. See how I look for you among the unconnect-ed words, like a child running from a fight. Hear a match come to life amid so much dying. Listen as I exhale. Know what it is to die, again, just a little, just one more time. Picture death as a fat man in a tacky yellow suit. Feel his tender round cheeks as they touch yours, spinning, holding you, feet off the ground, still, yet ever faster, evermore, turning and turning until you are your own world. Watch his obese smile grow as the dance climaxes. Picture teeth like tombstones, eyes the same light blue as a shallow creek. Hear laughter like the tide coming in and beg to be washed away. Feel death's caressing hand on the side of your face, searing cold. Know his hold on you, gently tight, embracing you, his mouth locking with yours for one brief instant, before he lets you go, dropping to the concrete like a child's kite without wind, your heart coming out your mouth. And blinding blackness, like plain white paper without ink.

And tomorrow, eternally, the snooze button.

Heather Smith

The Dead Prom Queen

1. I stand by the door. The white skirt of my dress hovers unnatu-rally against the eggshell white of the wall. You can see the picture window off to the side. The sky is ink black. I am a paper doll in white gloves. My shoes are dyed to match.

2. How can I explain to you, standing at this bend in the road, night after night? Was I the only one who died here? Were the rest of them not as well-dressed as I was? I stand here and try to think of my beginning. There must have been an accident, the long bloodstain on the road that would not go away. Is that a good story? There must have been more. Is one dead girl a tragedy? Is one dead girl gruesome enough?

3. I would like to not have died alone. I would like, perhaps, to have been the prettiest, the poorest, the one who sewed her own dress and borrowed her dead mother's gloves.

4. This is the photograph that you find later, in the yearbook, perhaps. It is an old photograph, so that my skin is white, my hair is whiter than white, like light reflecting off glass, and my eyes and lips are black, pure coal black. My coal black eyes are wide open, looking past the camera into some unknowable future, full of wet hope. My coal black lips are parted, and between them, my teeth, whiter than white. White as snow, black as stone, red as blood, although that is another story.

5. I am dead dead dead. Standing, white and flickering, at the black edge of that particularly tricky curve. I step forward, perhaps, but it is flung far away from the car, so that I am found last, pale and gorgeous in death, with only a red ribbon of blood dried at the edge of my mouth, alluding to a skull crushed, guts collapsing into each other. Perhaps a pool of blood stretched out around me, a glistening backdrop for the white dress.
6. Take me away. I want a body again. I want to lie upside down on the couch, feet drumming aimlessly against the eggshell white walls. I want to drive somewhere on a bright Saturday morning. I want a diary full of confessions and nasty remarks and what I ate and what I wore and who I hated. I want my best friend, with her long green eyes, and thoughts and body as familiar as my own, next to me on the couch, our voices whispering together against the darkness.

7. I sewed my own prom dress, because my family was poor and my mother was dead. It wasn't the fanciest, but it was the most beautiful, and I was going with the tallest, most handsome, most charming, most respectable boy, who lived in the biggest house. Everyone was maybe just a teeny bit bitchy, because he was the best. And I was so beautiful. I looked just like my dead mother, but more beautiful. And I sewed that white fountain of a dress myself.

8. I look into the mirror and it's like looking at a photograph.

9. And so I stand by the side of the road, white against the black trees, and maybe someone will stop—two boys on their way to prom—it is always two boys on their way to prom. And they are so reassuringly human, their faces upholstered in blood-flushed flesh. And I won't say a word except maybe, "I was on my way to the prom and my car broke down," which is what I always say. And there's no car anywhere on the road, and I don't shiver, though the air cuts through their lungs like ice, but they don't care. I'm so beautiful, so unlike any girl they've ever seen, that they are in love with me already. So I will ride with them, hands folded in their long white gloves, as they prattle on, and by the time they turn off the engine I'm gone. What else is there? A gymnasium swathed in pink and purple crepe paper? Perhaps a slow dance across a badly varnished wooden floor? Was this supposed to be the end of the story, spinning like a toy in a music box through a maze of teenage flesh?

10. I stand here by the black road and think: I have no body. I think: I have no past. I think I am maybe one the stars that prickled on around me. Stories are told about the stars. They acquire husbands, children, revenges. Stories are told about the stars, and they blaze like light reflected off glass; they are distant worlds of white fire. And I stand here, white and beautiful, and I am only a burning story, barely visible against the dark trees.
Emily Von Strien

Wing Walker

"It's probably a smart thing to have a clear mind prior to engaging in perilous stunts like these," she thinks with a grimace right before she signals her readiness to the pilot. The engines stutter before they come to life and as she's turning to wave at the crowd she realized that even the roaring of the two engines can't drone out her sadness today. To the anxious crowd looking on however, her bravery seems undaunted, her gaiety unscathed. The climb is her favorite part of the ride. Her legs are straddling tightly to the strut, her wrists bound to it with leather straps, and she feels the force both lift her up and push her body down as the earth tries to pull her back. Though she has done this a million times, it always gets her heart pounding and for a moment she is really smiling. Yes, let's just keep going up, she silently pleads even though the wings are leveling and she senses gravity to be losing interest.

The pilot cast her a quick procedural glance, which she meets half way with one definite nod. She is quickly unbuckling the straps so that she can unwrap her legs and find that precious balance before she starts the routine.

All of the people on the ground watching her are just sprinkles now. Usually at this point she has entirely forgotten the gaping mouthed audience but ever since Alyosha Asley’s tragedy, she can’t help but look down. Alyosha didn’t believe in God or luck or even herself but in the crowds that came from miles to see her. The unbroken awe of those on the ground is what keep you from falling, hon. It's like hundreds of little hands holding you in place, they will keep you safe—so long as you make it good, girlie.

Before they took off, she feared that if she were going to fall, today would be the day. But the familiarity of the routine and the drone of the engines has taken over her body and before thoughts of slipping, accidentally or not, could invade she is walking gracefully back and forth from one tip of the wing to the other. The first walk back always feels a little more dangerous that than the rest.

She’s on the edge leaning back with an arm outreached like an angel wing. She doesn’t pretend today to hear the quick gasps and shrieks that she must be evoking from the people below. Standing on the edge of the wing, everything else disappears. It's just me and these wing tips and the wires I hold on to that criss cross my path and the tremendous force of the air on this body. This is a lonely place to be.

She secures her ankles to the strut with the leather straps. The pilot looks back again and this time he nods. She stands up straight, takes one deep breath and then lets go. Her body falls back. Screams from below are the pilots cue to dive. Blood and old sadnesses now pound in her head and in her fingertips as she swings from her ankles. She feels the pull of the earth again. It wants her back.

She wishes suddenly that she were facing the other direction. She wishes that she could see the frightened faces as the plane plummets straight into the crowd. She wishes that her fingertips could graze the tops of those black fedoras but the plane levels out too soon.
What a Read! Tell me more about The Cauldron!

The Cauldron Literary and Arts Organization is an independent, self-governed student organization that is dedicated to promoting and supporting the arts and the diverse voices of the artists on Kalamazoo College’s campus. Through the publication of literature and sponsorship of events, The Cauldron participates actively in the campus public life.

Throughout the course of the year, The Cauldron collects artistic and literary works from Kalamazoo College students and reviews them for publication in the annual Cauldron Literary and Arts Magazine (which you’re holding).

In addition to this annual volume, The Cauldron makes exemplary student poetry, prose, and artwork available to the campus community through additional periodic publication that are distributed free of charge. These publications include additional information on local artistic events and resources.

The Cauldron also upholds and promotes the arts on campus by sponsoring numerous public artistic events and activities such as readings, expositions, and discussion groups.

We love to talk about ourselves, so if you have any questions or comments on the magazine, please give us a call at (616) 552-5000. Also, get in touch if you would like us to advertise your literary or artistic organization or if you’d like to bring an artistic event to Kalamazoo College’s campus. Finally, if you’re a thoughtful, sensitive, and far-sighted philanthropist who would like to reenergize a group of students working ceaselessly to keep the flame of human creativity alive, please keep that thought in your head and run straight to your phone. We promise you a) near-endless gratitude, b) your name in print under a big THANK YOU in our next issue, and of course c) an extremely worthwhile and productive use of your generous donation.
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