



The Lyricist

The Cohesion of all *things*

2009



The Lyricist

The Cohesion
of all
things

The Lyricist
Spring 2009
Volume XLIII



The Lyricist Contest Winners

Student Poetry Contest

Judge: Rachael Traylor

1st Place

“One Month Out” - Luke Morales

2nd Place

“My mind is a mile long” - Oliver L. Samuels

Honorable Mention

“Waking Not a Muslim” - Luke Morales

Statewide Poetry Contest

Judge: Nancy Dew Taylor

1st Place

“A Paean to Ulster” - Deborah Doolittle

2nd Place

“Reminder” - Sandra Ervin Adams

Short Prose Contest

Judge: Jason Chumley

1st Place

“Just Some Rocks on a Hill” - Kendra Erickson

2nd Place

“Degrees of Separation” - Faith Crockett

Editor's Note

What is the cohesion of all things? Sometimes, and the times are more beautiful and rare than most in this world, we catch a glimpse of true knowledge through the welter and haze and utter insanity of the process of living and obtaining an education (which is, of course, the same thing). The cohesion of all things is the moment of epiphany and the quiet realization. It is the instant of clear-sighted vision, the tying together of all the threads, the synthesis of a new idea. After such a moment, life cannot be as before.

At these times, though in the midst of our swirling questions and uncertainties, we catch a glimpse of an answer, a story. These moments of revelation uncover the stories linking people and events together, the chronicles of buried connections. These moments make it seem as if, could we only linger long enough in that instant, we could understand all things in the universe. Perhaps if we could live in the cohesion of all things, there would be no story hidden that we could not find it. Carl Sagan said, "Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known." The cohesion of all things awaits within.

Acknowledgements

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One Month Out

We had no shelter
of weekday/weekend difference
well upheld traffic signals
familiar worship
black coffee –
So we hid down low
in mosquito-net sheds
near each other and ourselves
quiet songs that were familiar
laughing at the foreign
so as not to tear –
we cooped up under
eves of verses, well memorized
and new – bits read over and
over and over, lit with
light we knew and know.
And we had no shelter
yet have it now
and find it changed
not as before
for the sheds and the eves, all
the foreign, grew familiar
and somehow became our shelters instead –
to the fault, the pain
(their forms impermanent)
of those shelters whose forms
we do now inhabit.

- Luke Morales

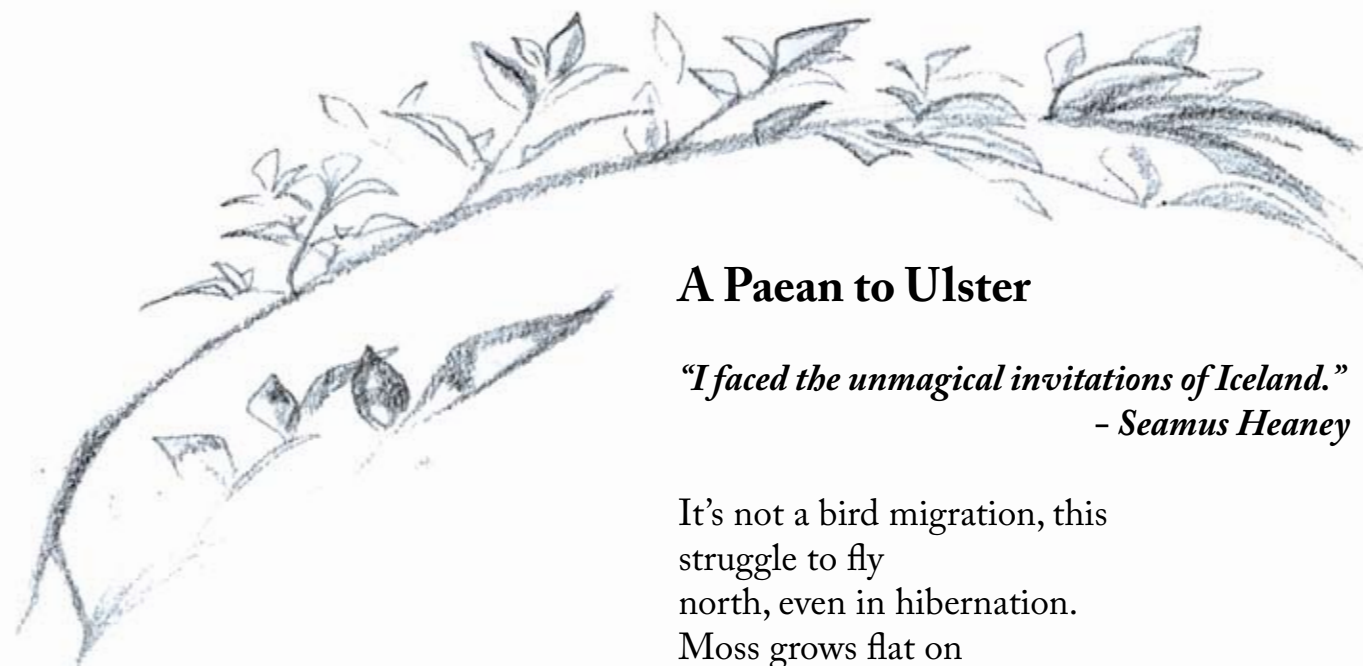
My mind is a mile long
 as are its times
 its lines
 its burgeoning spheres
 I am burdened with slow things
 with the loud
 with days I forget my name, my age —
 Sighing and the energies of breath
 Receipts of days that pile, fill, and sag.
 Grace, God, grace — for these days
 in plenty, grace for the strange and oldening days
 and for they,
 the sifting sorting thriving plains —
 where names and age solidify,
 and take their truest shape.

- Oliver L. Samuels

Waking Not a Muslim

If
 one morning
 I wake to find
 the world a different name
 — that all my memorized plots and spaces
 — the colors and the days —
 of everything I’ve lived
 everything I’ve defended —
 all ——
 are different and thus removed
 and if I break
 and if I break
 and fall in an unknown place
 know it for me
 know it for me
 and there too
 now
 know me.

- Luke Morales



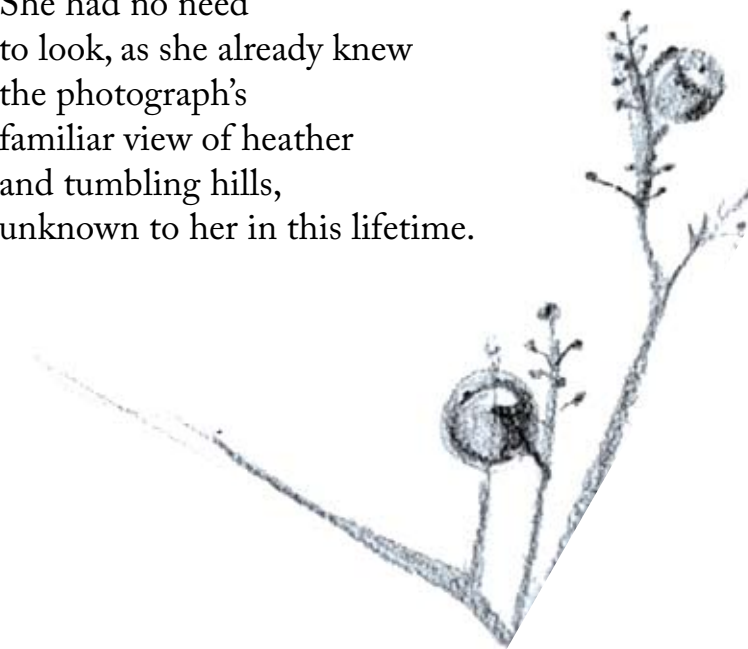
A Paean to Ulster

"I faced the unmagical invitations of Iceland."
- Seamus Heaney

It's not a bird migration, this
struggle to fly
north, even in hibernation.
Moss grows flat on
sunken stories, long calcified
corpses buried
in bogs and unearthed centuries
later, tap roots
to history. When my compass
points out the way,
I orient myself, join in
that old Vikings'
march to the sea, know my red hair
reveals that Leif
Ericson's in my pedigree –
small part along
lace-makers and hand-loom weavers,
famine planters
and emigrants to another
land now called home.

"Born in swale and swamp and sworn to water."
- Lorine Niedecker

Gram remembered
being buried in a peat bog,
a memory
dreamed in her bones, deep in her genes,
and how it came
back one day between the clothespins
and wet bed sheets
on the line. That sudden vision
as one more gasp
of air. The kiss of pink blossoms,
her parted lips
about to slip beneath the turf,
the sodden tug
of earth, her whole world collapsing
into the creep
of tendrils, of roots, and silence...
to reemerge
when she read the next day's headline:
"Thousand Year Old
Woman Found in North Irish Bog."
She had no need
to look, as she already knew
the photograph's
familiar view of heather
and tumbling hills,
unknown to her in this lifetime.



"That enters my longhand, turns cursive..."
- Seamus Heaney

So much depends
upon the bog, the conserver
of history,
heat, and slow thoughts, this glacial peat
preserves such words
as cairn, crannog. From Derry's walls,
one can look down
on Bogside, once a tenement,
now sturdy, bricked.
New row houses terrace the hill,
reconstructed
since the Troubles. Still the earth's soft,
compliant, thick
with potential fire and fumes.
The turf is sweet.
It will sustain them in winter,
keep in the warm,
help them to always remember
what came before
the trek, the cuts into the earth,
the drying stacks,
the weep of smoke up the chimney,
light as feathers.

- Deborah Doolittle



Reminder

Whenever the glass
I wash
strikes the side
of the stainless
steel sink,
it clinks,
rings,
echoes
in my ears,
becomes the wind
chimes I left behind
on the island,
hanging
from your porch.

- Sandra Ervin Adams

They say Eternity
is a moment
that never ends.
Not like a watch that stops ticking,
it's one that keeps going,
little fingers spin around
a small white wheel
Missing numbers or meaning.

They say you won't feel it,
the moments that pass.
For if time is change (A to B)
where is the alteration
in Eternity?

- Sarah Buck

Perpetual

Tick, Tock,
The Presence of the clock.

Knock, Knock,
Who's answerable for this clock?

Whom, pray, whom
Envisioned the splendid womb?

Time, Time,
Often devours the once sublime.

- Frank Orson

When We Dreamed in Monochrome

I miss the days
Of green and gray
When we dreamed in monochrome,

When worlds were lines
In wild designs
Scribbled on the busride home.

Floppies in paper sleeves
Impressions in mind they leave
Long after you give them back,

To days where we'd choose
To use Apple II's
Despite the graphics they lack.

When we used graph paper
To make dungeons tamer
So the party can come safe home,

When worlds were lines
In wild designs
And we dreamed in monochrome

- Ian Davis

He smiled because he did not know.
Knowledge does not reap a smile.
It often yields a furrowed brow,
a steadfast temperance,
grave old hands that will not
be shaken.

As I was young I chose
(unaware as all youth that a moment's course is lasting)
Depth of consciousness
A mind that cannot stop turning.
But many questions produce no answers
My mind growing slowly old—
I put my questions now to younger persons
who grant only polite smiles in return.

- Sarah Buck

Ocean's End: Lethe

Life and joy and time and dreams
All swirl around these treasured things
Called memories.

Wind-lit are these beauty-songs
That seem to sail however long
The mind remains.

An ocean's depth and breadth of thought
Waiting to be sailed across,
Explored.

But irony comes with his broken sons
To sink the ship that seeks to plumb
The ocean's depth.

Forget-me-nots and love-me-tills
Are barren isles, empty thrills
Called "promises."

"Do you remember?"
"Do you not?"
"Only now and then, in muddled spots,
But to no avail."

Now life and joy and time and dreams
Flounder on the waves of "Seem,"
Illusion's siren-daughter.

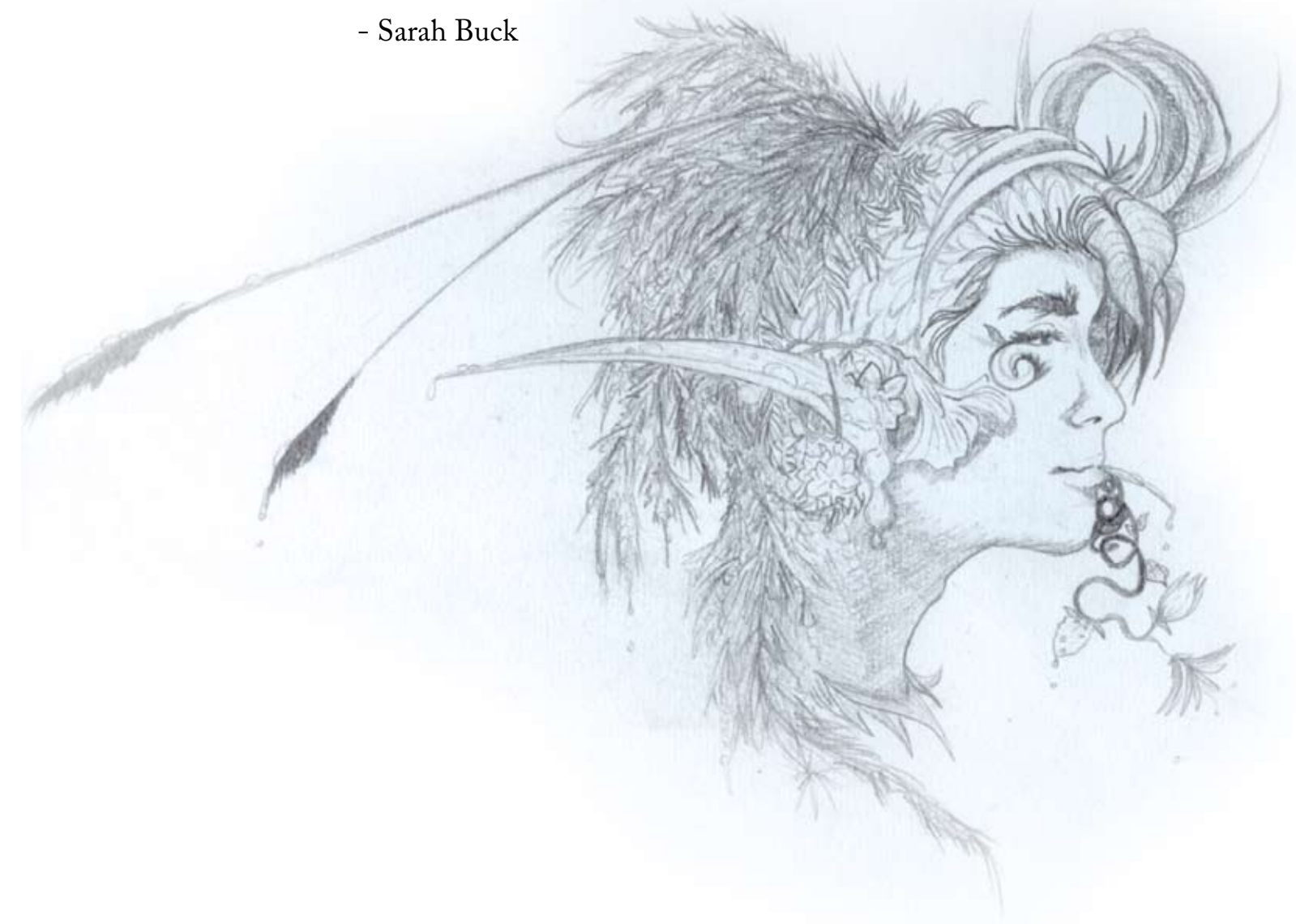
Fickle are these languid songs
That sail to last only as long
As memory stays fresh and new.

Stolen lives and there-befores,
There's nothing sacred on the shore,
No haven for one's memory,
It's lost upon the sea.

Will no one raise again the cry
to venture forth from isle to isle
and search the deep?

When sun has died and wind abated,
mind no longer seeks — it's sated,
drowning, now,
with ships long docked.

- Faith Crockett



I suppose I could
find myself jealous
of rays on a graph;
why should theoretical
things have forever
when we who breathe
die each day?

- Haley McKinney

Sweet Memory

Be it sweet memory?
Heart, soul — the lot.
Else, love that time forgot.

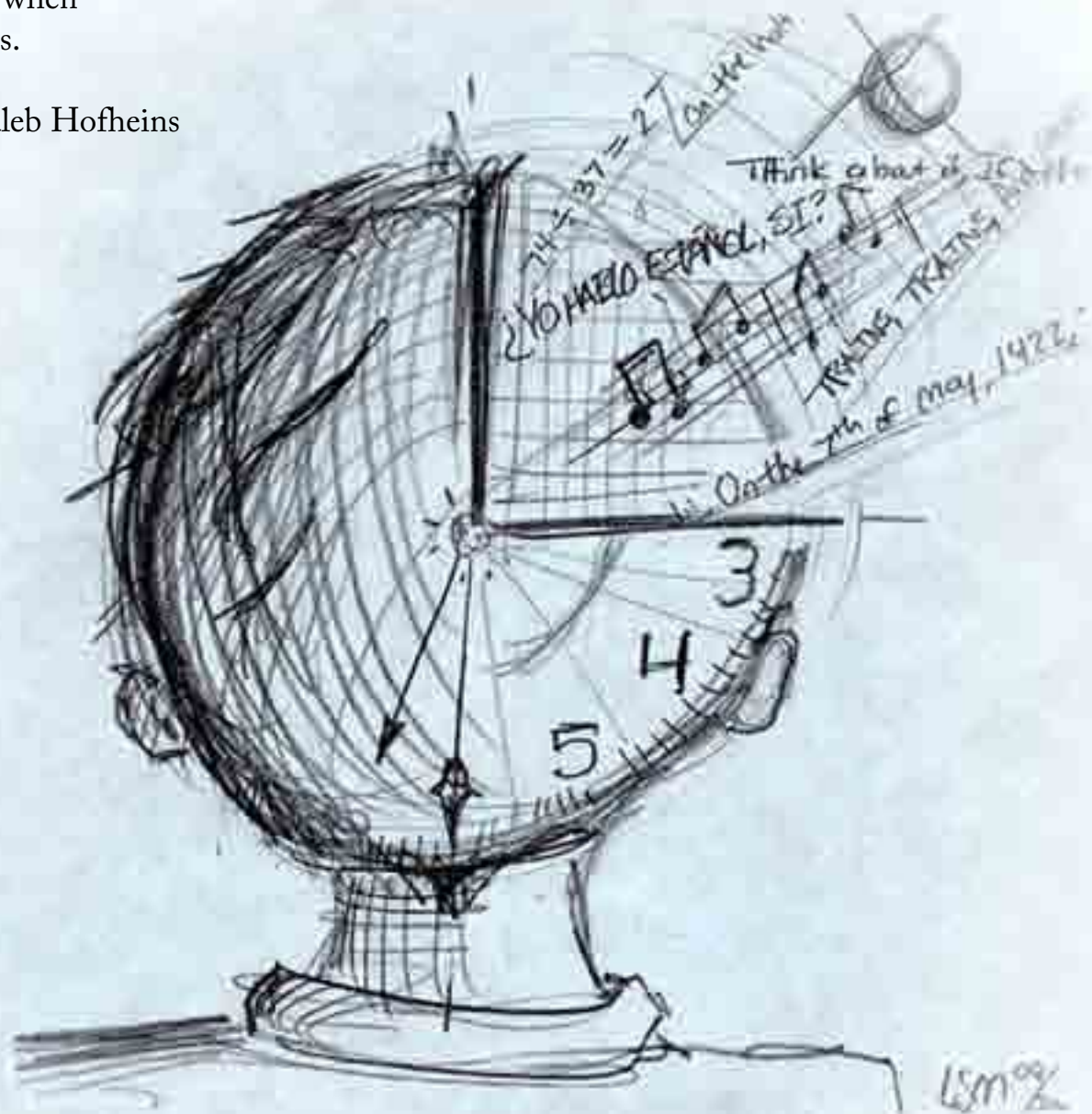
- Lauren Batchelor



Education

Hair by hair it falls.
Light dew blanketing the morning
and a collapsed twilight
when my hands are only for a pen
or a keyboard to type
and when not,
what unnamed vanity is achieved.
Do not fret, child,
seize your arithmetic
for your tomorrows will be successful
as you fumble with numbers —
telescope eyes in a book.
The world is waiting,
you have made it when
hair by hair it falls.

- Caleb Hofheins



The Window

The window of the soul had
Always been open.
The cool breeze welcomed,
And silence, broken.
Ideas freely flowed
Without governance.
So dense was the stream,
Its measure, happenstance.
Definition and honing
Were greatly needed
Before understanding and
Knowledge succeeded.

Shutting the lucid pane
Down to half-mast
Made finer the gust,
And stifled the blast.
The clean air made
Clearer by force
Allowed in great knowledge,
Inspired a course:
Years spent on learning
With what end,
But to develop a voice
And outward, it send.

Strong ideas glided on air
Into that place,
Remolding the visage,
Hardening the face.
Education came swiftly,
But not without cost.
Excitement, wonder, and innocence were lost.
Such lustful study concealed
The Ugly Deception:
Narrowed streams provide
Only slender perception.

Wind howled unheeded
By the narrowed gap.
Until with great force,
It fell with a snap.
No longer did ideas flow
With great ease.
Shut fast was the window,
And silenced the breeze.
Inside the stagnation grew
With each breath.
Nurturing disillusionment,
Suffocation, and death.

- Michael Tildsley

Speaking American

—for Charles de Gaulle

Loaded on French fries,
Belgian waffles, gravy biscuit,

I pick up my musty old
French dictionary and split,

Figuring I've got
The cat in the bag.

- Jonathan Pattishall



On the Airplane

She glances to her right,
Glimpsing his bright orange hat.
His camouflaged leg spills over to
push her dress pants toward the wall.
She rolls her eyes as he brags to his buddies,
Grown men,
About what he will kill.
She turns her eyes to her poetry books,
Knowing that she has discovered
What is wrong with America.

He glances to his left,
Spying her carefully polished nails.
She draws into herself, barely allowing
contact between their crowded limbs.
He shakes his head as she looks out the window,
Little girl,
Then furiously writes in a notebook.
He closes his eyes and rests his head on his chest,
Knowing that he has discovered
What is wrong with America.

- Laney Whiteman

Issues and platforms from which we leap
Hoping to God with faith we keep
Vote early, Vote now!
Predators of constant prowl
Every voice could make the difference
Now to just decide my preference

- Jozy R. Thomas

Irony

Do you see the irony
of Mount Rushmore?

Four faces blasted into the rock,
destroying God's mountain...

Four founding fathers,
instituting a new country
based on freedoms;
Life,
Liberty,
The pursuit of happiness...

But the four faces are carved
in the former land of the Natives.

Natives driven out of their home,
forced to lose their lives,
freedom lost to reservations.
What happiness could they pursue?

- Laney Whiteman

Ink Splashes on the Page

Ink splashes on the page.
The final wisdom of the dying age.
The prophecies writ in lightlessness,
Carried away on wings of flightlessness.
Wisdom of mystery a mystery 'til hindsight's light
Comes and finally sets the pieces right.

Ink splashed on a page.
The last remnant of a dead age.
Found in the depths of Neptune's domain,
On the last vestiges of a great creature's membrane,
The mystery of the history solved for this nation
Destroyed by the age's fiercest civilization.

Ink splashes on the page.
Indiscernible in this current age.

- Alyssa Maxwell

Prayer To St. Drogo

(patron saint of coffee house keepers, the mentally ill, midwives, the mute, orphans, shepherds, sick people, and the unattractive)

Deliver me from coffee, midwife to my insanity.
Deliver me from hours when I cannot hear anything
except the foaming of my brain, its memories
steaming to the surface, my insomnia diary:

Broken bones and bodily ills, how well I knew them—
arm rent from its socket, blood drawn
on the playground, evil girls (the devil's spawn)
herding others like sheep, and I stood alone
on the hill, orphaned, waiting until my mother
drove me home to my father, asp with a gun
and a badge: You're getting fat. Take a look
in the mirror, a girl's grim, mute face stares back.

Deliver me from pockmarked skin, red welts
and scars that scatter like burning stars
across my body's universe. Yes, I can still feel
childhood fevers, tonsils raw and ripped,
afternoon naps on the couch, taste of baby aspirin,
and the week in February when it snowed in '68,
snow as deep and quiet as my voice—
nature and I were not allowed to make any noise
that might suggest we're alive.

Deliver me from old expressions, a mother's advice:
children shall be seen but never heard.
Deliver me from people who don't believe in speaking up
for what you need. Deliver me from silence that bleeds
stones, pebbled babies trapped, nowhere to travel,
no cradle where they can hide.

Deliver me from birthing children of my past, ugly
bodies blue and crippled, sallow eyes and timid tongues.
They will only grow up to be chronic wasters, melancholics
and alcoholics, coughers and wheezers.

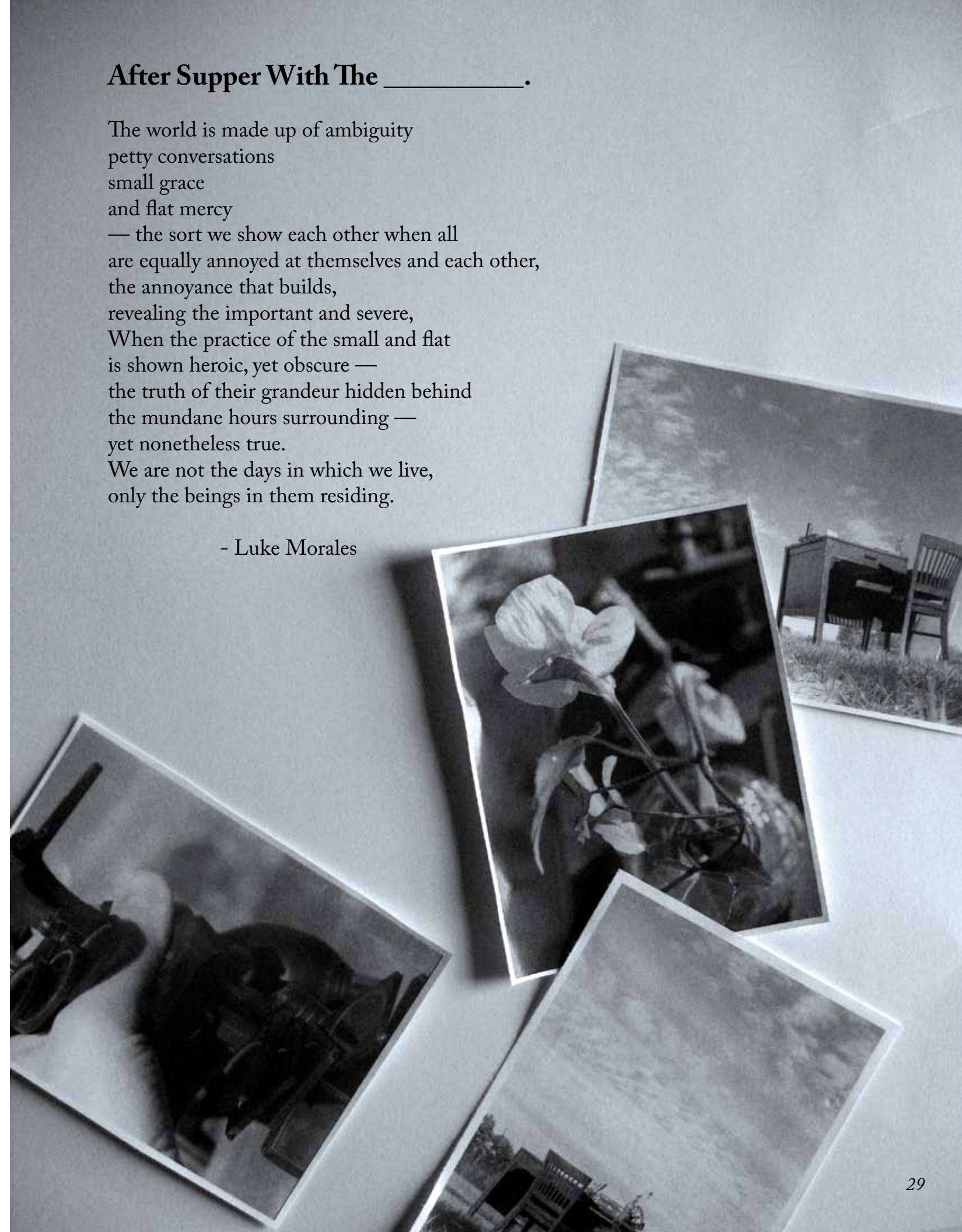
Deliver me from believing in greener grasses, let me be
content with this tired face, these glasses,
hair that frizzes when it rains, morning aches and pains,
the occasional forgetting of a name.

- Andrea Bates

After Supper With The _____.

The world is made up of ambiguity
petty conversations
small grace
and flat mercy
— the sort we show each other when all
are equally annoyed at themselves and each other,
the annoyance that builds,
revealing the important and severe,
When the practice of the small and flat
is shown heroic, yet obscure —
the truth of their grandeur hidden behind
the mundane hours surrounding —
yet nonetheless true.
We are not the days in which we live,
only the beings in them residing.

- Luke Morales



Loom Lazy

Contradiction—
Lying in bed
To watch the sunrise,
Phoebus already at work
As we Slugabeds suppose
That weaving
Weaves itself

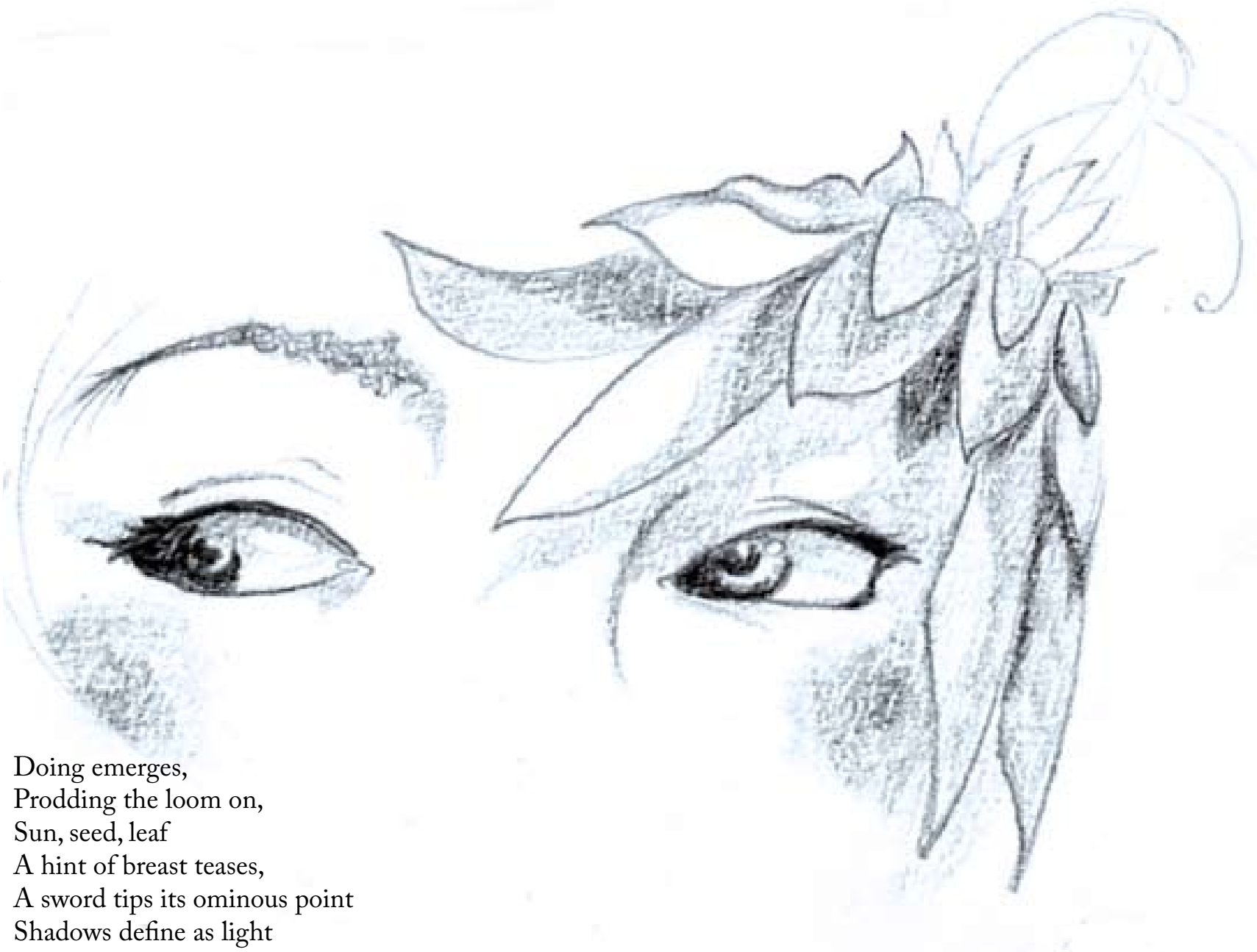
Of course those horses
Wouldn't rise alone
It takes a god
To make steeds stand
To weave a circle
In the sky.

Dawn stretching out
Just like that weaving she
does,
Perpetual Penelope
At her loom
Greets the horizontal
Horizon
Lengthens its images

Doing emerges,
Prodding the loom on,
Sun, seed, leaf
A hint of breast teases,
A sword tips its ominous point
Shadows define as light
Declines
And then she unwinds,
Unravels
Like us here
Ready for warp and woof

In the new cycle
Skein shifts
One less dog
To greet
We mourn a lesser world
Dog gone
One thread unravels
Before we returned.

- Laurel E. Eason



They Cling to Life with Both Hands

for Robert and Mary Gamble

Though their walking smiles waver
With white breeze and autumn sky
Their thin bones quavering sing
A hoarse and sappy sweet song
They amble past brooks – no wading
Banks of brooks prove unyielding

Their knees are rigid – unbending
Yet, they cling to life – like vines on stems
Beyond the winding of the winds
Past the edges of continents and islands
Beneath Titans tumultuous tugging waves
In waters ankle deep they swim

Rose thorns and leaves placate
Pink eternal at their pious peak!
They place full vases on their dresser scarves
And cling to life, both hands dusting
The edges of their skiffs and sweaters
Like beggars lice there cling to the other binds

A round life is squeezed to fill one eye
Even the rasping breath is savored
Tired hips step flatlands longing
Still for memoried mountain's – sweet life
Wisteria smatterings and the red maple gracing
Tall, tall trees, near to God, nearer to heaven

Lost prayers are fear signed lines on their faces
Shuffling soft steps saunter past graveyards
Eternal stone remains – reminders of all roads
Still, they cling to their life with both hands
Tired eyes squint the knowledge and the wisdom
Tired hips on flatland longing – the heart is guiding
Tired fingers aged and worn to brown bone.

- Desirata Gamble

Deception

Eventually,
One will find
That tangled tongues
Weave in and out
And slanderous messages
Taste of Doubt.

- Marissa Blake

Desertion

Oh, what a time for my soul to flee,
It left cold my heart, deserted me.
What, no love or loyalty—
Such as this reflects, is my soul not me?

- Lauren Batchelor

Insomnia

When darkness conquers luminosity,
And daytime is left behind,
Miniscule thoughts invade my mind:
I am left awake.

When everything is mute,
And silence replaces sound,
My peace cannot be found:
I am left awake.

When night crawlers creep,
And bed bugs bite,
My eyes restless through the night:
I am left awake.

When I'm enveloped in quilts,
Within the refuge of my bed,
The visions will not depart my head:
I am left awake.

When I'm staring at the ceiling
As reasonable people sleep,
My eyes refuse to shut a peep:
I am left awake.

When I've counted all the sheep
And sleepless time begins to fly,
The sun approaches the clearing sky:
I am left awake.

- Kelsey Camacho

Black Gold

I wanted to record how it made me feel:
Mrs. Moore said it was especially damaging because it was committed in the body.
She was so correct but so understated—

It occurred in my flesh:
it penetrated to my soul through blood and bone and muscle and sweaty skin.

It pitched into the darkest cavern of my being
(a place I never knew existed before this mining of my heart)

And out bubbled a blackness that covered me,

And dripped from me—

And drowned me: then mummified me.

- Charlotte K. Smith

Sand and Silica

Sand and silica
are my portal
to a black world
now spotted
soft galaxies, orange and green

Sand and silica
are my portal
to shapes, shadows
shimmering reflections
slick water on asphalt

Sand and silica
are my portal
to subdued wind
hidden division
to draughts of air

Sand and silica
are my portal
to disturbing silence
sleek stockade
to sound's resonance

Sand and silica
are my portal
and yet a prison wall
- Sarah Beasley

Abomination

Though teeth are sharp and intentions gray
Please hear this monster out
For in his cage he will not stay
What he wants is to be let out

- Cord Martinez

So stood we,
together with reserve.
Whatever hello we offered,
it sank without nerve.

- Haley McKinney



Soul Song

I found my soul today
It was hiding between the pages of Neruda
I read the lines
that shook my dreams
and there she was
Clinging to his words
like lovers do

I shook that soul right off the page
Watched her dance on my fingertips
as AC/DC played
She shimmied and shook
She swayed and dipped
She was madness laughing
at some inside joke
She was icy fire soft to the touch

Her toes grazed lightly
across my wounds
She kissed them sweetly
bathing them in her phoenix tears
The candle's flame caught her eye
she marveled in the glow
Her fingers prodded the spark
and welcomed the electric burn

So long she was lost
in the dark corners of
Expectation and Grief
I listened to her silent songs
and whispered chatter
She carried me zigzagging
through her tales of Orphaned Cinderella fleeing
from the Big Bad Wolf
with only a poison apple to eat
The poison apple gave her
desperate sleep
Inside this sleep
she dreamed that she was bleeding
Bleeding from wounds shaped like
Yesterday and Tomorrow
wounds that bled like eyes shed tears
Dream Cinderella closed
Yesterday and Tomorrow



with a needle and thread from her Sewing Kit
She awoke to warm darkness
fingering the tiny x's on her flesh
She heard an inside out growl
and laughed because now she was
Poisonous to eat

That wandering soul finished her tale
with a devilish smirk
Then danced on my desk
rolling in nail polish and glitter
and stomping her feet
She twirled into rainbow colors
that splashed on the walls
with dizzy speed
A scene of fairies, mermaids
and water appeared
then a garden of flowers and stone
Next came blinding white
and greedy green
She twirled rainbow colors
Faster and Faster
Then fell to the floor in
Giggling Gasping

I wanted to join
her insanity on the floor
But soon she was dancing
once more
She flitted and frizzied
She flounced and she spun
She scaled my bookshelf
and swam in the words
There was tea with Mrs. Gaskell
and the Mad Hatter
and a road trip with Jack Kerouac
and Buddha
She took the road less traveled by with Frost
and ended up at a castle
guarded thrice

Then she danced again
She wiggled and waltzed
She twist and she tangoed
She was wild beauty
broken faith

She was mosaic hope
broken time
She danced in moonlight motion
making love to the stars
Till dawn broke her disco fever
and rocked her to sleepy yawns
That soul, she kissed me
with butterfly promises
Then curled inside Neruda's words
and fell fastly asleep.

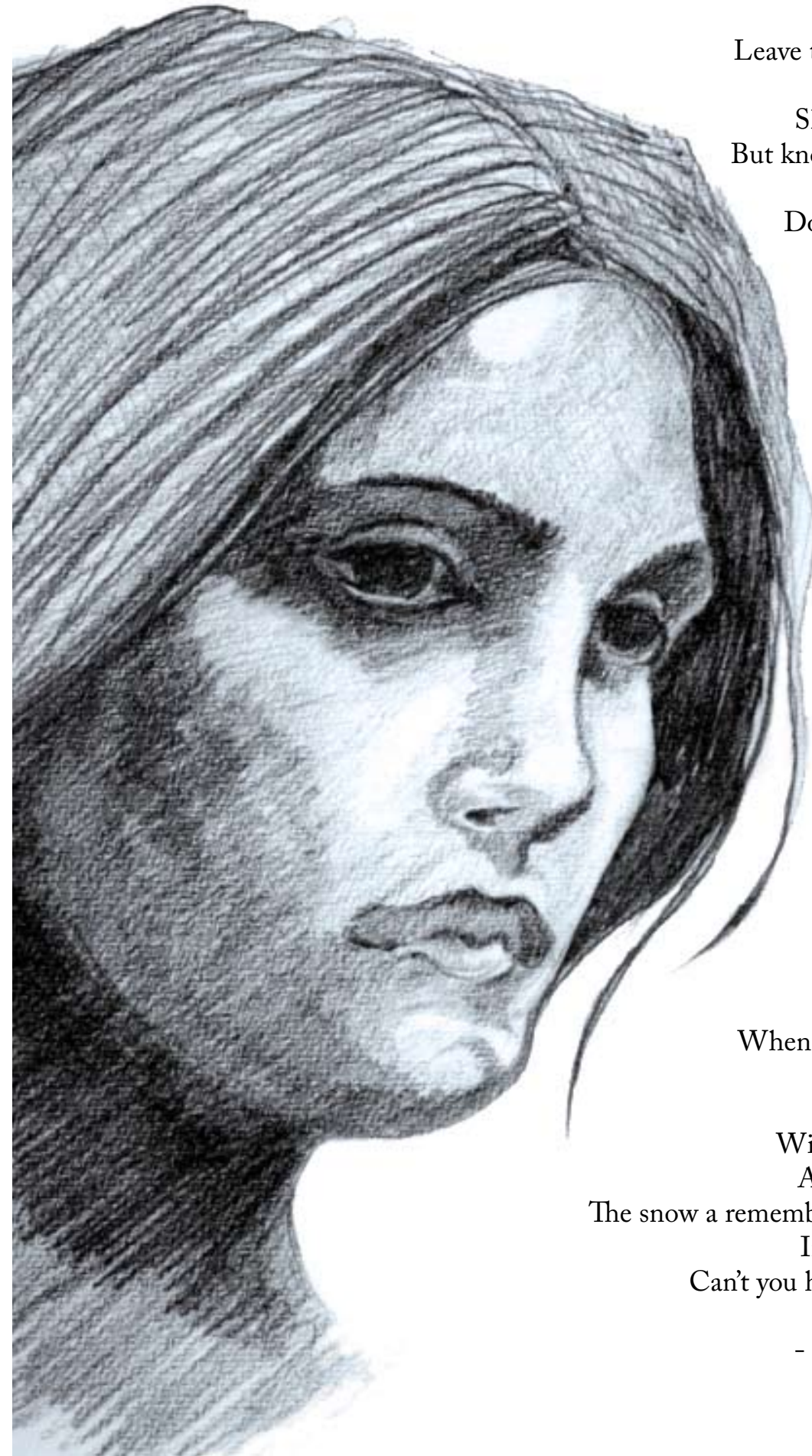
Two blocks down the road
in the house beside mine
upstairs
Adjacent to America
where I grew up
a girl was sold to Uncle Sam
to be used for 3 quarters of an hour
and she wondered if he would be nice
and doesn't wonder any more.
And I prayed for a better computer,
and complained that my soup was cold
last night when they were waiting
the selling game their life
waiting for the day time
when sells go down a bit.

Who are we when the lights go off
who are we when we aren't looking
who are we when we buy and sell
oh God—who are we now?

- Oliver L. Samuels

Burn secret songs;
Consume this immense sound.
Leave this place of dark, slender winds
For a quieter where.
Shut the door behind you tightly,
But know, a silent smile will uncloset it.
Off you go now, into the world.
Don't let them see your quiet soul.

- Stephanie Ricker



Silence

When you say my name
I retreat
I surrender
With a flag of purity
A blanket of virtue
The snow a remembrance of my once
Innocent existence
Can't you hear me as it falls?

- Douglas Campen

Visiting at the Cemetery

She stands Between the Two Flowers:
All That Is Left
of a Life That Once Was.

The sun Warms Her Back as
She stares Ahead

Into the Darkness That Lies Before Her.

- Samantha Lisk

There was the great shaking
the days when we shook so much
dislodging our days and thoughts and
yet there was survival; need to eat —
And the shaking was accepted, just as it
had been foreseen.

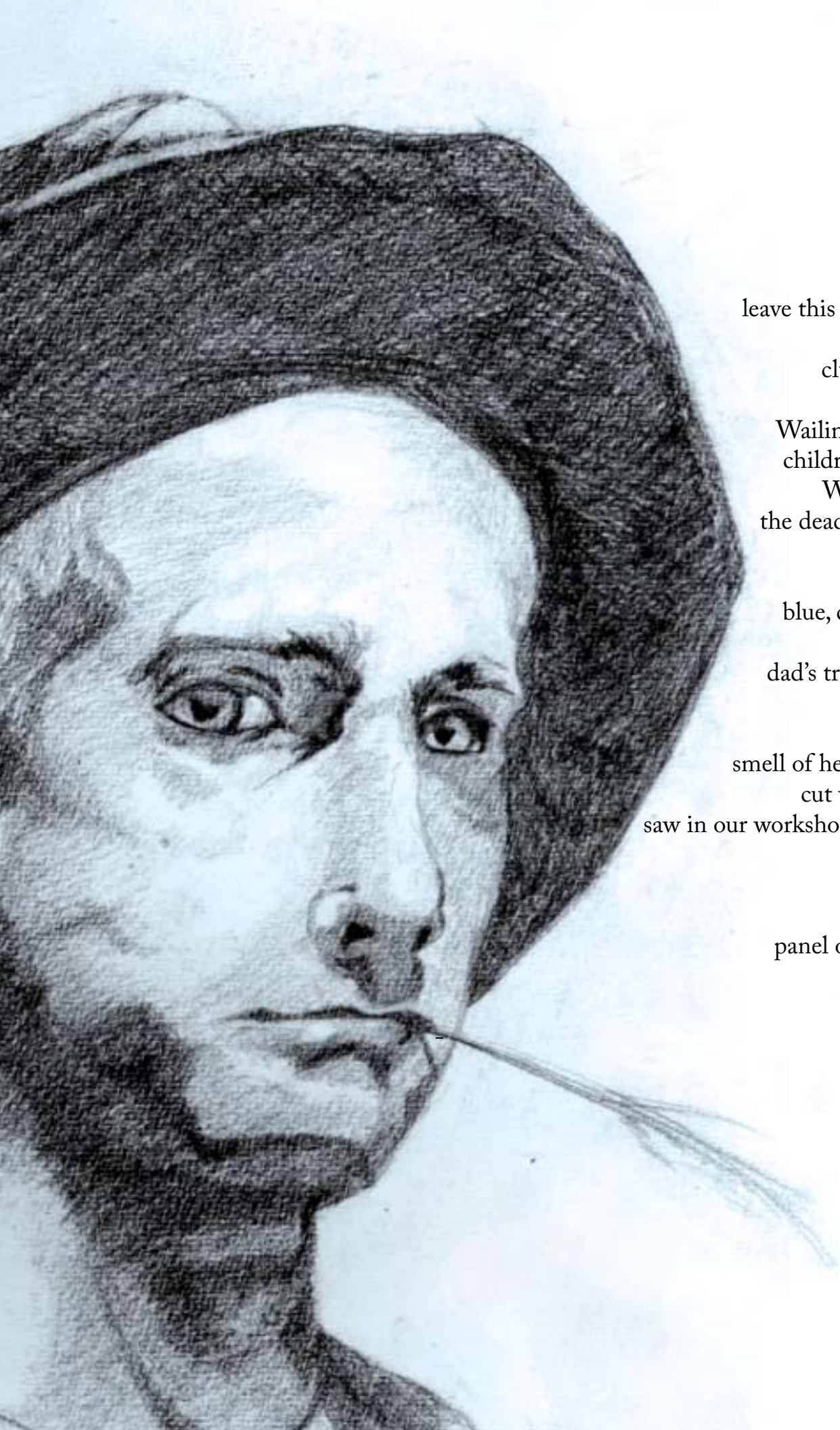
Yet, Now —
the present days and hours —
when perspective proves the past —
we see the truth of what we've seen
And we pause at the memories
Still at the thought of shaking
Quiet while the world continues
We have seen the shaking places
we have trembled where we stood —
and only now we name it so —
And still,
we shake
though quiet.

- Oliver L. Samuels

The Vanishing

The yellow silk kimono
bought by a soldier
for his girl back home
dances alone
in thick moist air
on a beach at Danang.
No one fills it out now,
no one gives it form,
its only companions the stars
that sprinkle the night
tight bound in clannish constellations.
She faded too, with the silk,
no longer bright as a canary —

- Michelle Kern Hines



Overalls

Ready to leave
leave this dental white cavern
cavern of clutter
clutter to strap you in

Wailing, wanting children
children wanting, wailing
Wailing like the dead
the dead crying out of want

I see blue
blue, denim, dark overalls
overalls like dad's
dad's treasured suit to wear

Sawdust I smell
smell of herbal wood fresh cut
cut with whirrrring saw
saw in our workshop, mine and daddy's

White blinds eyes
eyes on the panel
panel options, credit/debit
debit

- Sarah Beasley

Talking With Relatives of the Deceased

It is the hour of standing in doorways,
and you wish you had a dollar nailed to the casket
for every time one of your mother's friends says,
if you need anything, just call,
and shaking hands is a geriatric pin-the-tail-on-the donkey,
manicured over seventy set pinching your palm to scarlet.

If only wakes were for the living, if only you could confess
the circumstances of your person, pull out every persona
stacked one inside another, like those Russian Matryoshka dolls,
peasant mother birthing tinier and tinier versions of herself:
one afraid of the dark;
one who imagined what she could feed him and make him happy;
one who never trusted sandals;
one who heard the ceiling say over and over again:
stay a minute, save me.
If only you could keep going
until you reach the baby that does not open.
If only she were not so hard, but softer,
sweeter, like this candy caught in your throat.

Mother always said, There's beauty in going for blood,
Hers were Mary's served tall, glasses etched with pink flamingos,
greasy fingers and detergent having worn the feathers off their necks.
The day before she died a glass propped by the bed,
at the edge of the mattress her mouth didn't relax—
it was a furnace burning slips of paper,
a father's letters, secrets revealing what death would come next.

- Andrea Bates

Your Heart Is a Church You Enter Only When It's Dark

A child's hands learn to pray:
this is the church, this is the steeple—
now you look through the peephole
before opening the door,
if you even open it at all.

That wood is heavy—
oak, maple, stained black cherry—
wrought iron hinges, gothic bands and
palisades,
barbed wire and crown of thorns.

Moonlit dolor jewels
stained glass, ruby you wear
on your sleeve. In this chamber
of the non-believer, refuge
of fallen angels and ghosts,

you miss him the most, the one
who takes you back to adoration,
incense burning its sandaled wood,
touch of silken robes, golden
stole sinewing the throat.

Bedtime prayers choke the air.
So many people aren't near—
imagination's vespertine
shadow: his hand
holding yours at the altar:

Your heart is a church
you enter only when it's dark.
Upon the chancel the lily you rooted,
bulb fed on memory. It needs a little
watering respite from your tears.

- Andrea Bates

Latihan

Like mirrored light his eyes reflect a mist
and glimmer in a fallow light bequeathed,
to eyes that drip and reek of one bewitched,
A soul winged free on quest of clarity

I feel the meshing of my soul with his,
between dusk, and bitter darkness, we sit.
Darkness directs the stars to fade in tune
we dance with words, as spiral raindrops twist.

Like minds in a kaleidoscope we blend.
Prisms pulse into dimensional shifts
and constellations dim before our gleam.
We skip across the pulsing silver crests

We climb from infant fantasy to spill,
ever flowers, artesian force to spray,
a crown, enough to mate the rabid sun.
We slather on the clouds as they waltz past

Our bones may splinter in the future breeze,
or we may wither on the drapes of yore,
perhaps, mellow on the dew-like drops of time.
Meanwhile, we in harmony play like youth unchained.

I breathe a smell of long ago and know,
I have meshed souls with eternity and he.
Looking glass reflections we have always been
Like minds in a kaleidoscope of dreams.

- Desirata Gamble

The Lord is a warrior;

To fight with Passion, Honor, and Bravery,
To help set captives free from slavery;
To find the Strength I dreamed I knew,
To be tested and to be found True.
To matter when it matters most,
To Rage against the demonic host;
To stand among the Sons of Thunder,
To ne'er give up, nor e'er surrender.
All this is my Heart's Desire,
Set ablaze by Holy Fire—
For now and all my pledge shall be
To Live, and Fight, and Bleed with Thee.
And when I die, this is my plea:
Lord, in Thy Kingdom—remember me.

the Lord is His name.

Exodus 15:3

- Jon Burgess

Nominal

I ironed out my Sunday best
 (white lies, thoughtful murders, and a sweater vest)
& picked up the Good Book—an epistle by the apostle Franklin.
Grace to those who help themselves, said he,
 so I took all I'd earned
 for drinking less, smiling more,
 and tossing pennies to the poor.
My life is wellness, dimes, and sense;
 I ask with every prayer
 that time be sold for the feast of wealth:
Hope makes meager fare.
Contentedly pious, I flee the church (speaking never a word)
 and hurry to Monday—Poor Richard is right:
 I'll sleep once I'm interred.
Amen.

- Rachael Traylor

I penned the path to his salvation
with windy wisdom and good intent
& composed the perfect conviction to win him to the truth.

May mercy wreck my composition
and so provide the salve
to fill my words with the weight of your glory
& the sweetness of grace.

- Rachael Traylor

Reaction

So God condemned the snake
And then me
Praise the Lord:
Are you kidding?
And gee, God,
Didn't I just
Want to be
Like you?
Ain't imitation
The sincerest form
Of flattery?
Not subject to bribe,
Eh?

Ok
Me and the snake
Get the picture

- Laurel E. Eason

The Dead See

All are joyous inside.
Everyone is free.
The preacher mouths his pretty words,
But even the dead can see.

None commits a sin inside.
No one has a fear.
The singers mouth their pretty words,
But even the dead can hear.

Men walk on Galilee inside,
They rise the dead and heal,
Their mothers mouth their pretty words,
But even the dead can feel.

They praise the risen Lord inside
Whose life for them He gives.
Who shows beyond their pretty words
That even the dead can live
If only they would hear His words
Then they at last would live.

- Roger Gibbons


Intervention

What a hoot!
Think owl-knowledge
Would let you know
The very idea of rescue
Accident
The twist of fate
Finally
Of course
No amount of intervention
Does the trick
Even a heavenly edict
Unless it's a hurricane

Well,
Job did learn
From the whirlwind

Somebody
Only later
Though
Added
Reprieve

- Laurel E. Eason



I will be dead soon.
I will die for lack of water.
My throat is so dry it hurts to breathe.
I am naked in this desert.
My skin is red and peeling; the sun beats down on me.
I am dizzy.
Under its weight.
My blood is pounding in my ears.
I stumble, weary, over myself
And fall down this dune.
The sand grates my skin, re-opening scabby wounds;
I catch a mouthful, and my wounds bleed.
Spitting out sand I try to cry for help
But my dry throat rasps and creaks like insect wings
And no one hears.
I try again
I manage a whisper: Help.
I listen to the sand
the sun
the heat
the thirst
the silence
And finally I give up.

Then the wind cools my face
Angels carry me to a secret place
And I drink Living Water.

- Jon Burgess

Alone in the Snow

One time I saw a silent snowfall
on an empty boulevard in the soft
silent light of street lamps,
where no soul broke the peace:
Once saw an armless man drive
a wheat thresher with his shoeless feet
(he didn't know I was there):
One time saw a blind child guided
through school by a faithless dog yoked
with more get-up than an ox:
Another time I heard God sneeze.
God can never have that sneeze back,
like every moment of my life where
I thought the godhead, all alone,
without even the solace of good poetry.

- Jonathan Pattishall

Oozed

Smell the dusty scent
from rain tapping, no pounding
its drops on a tin roof.
Feel after-storm freshness,
watch those water beads
slide down the metal top
like oozing glue glides,
sometimes sounding
similar to BBs rolling
skittering
down
tin-ridged seams
as if gun-fired shots of bullets
shower,
skid down.

- Patsy Kennedy Lain

War

The rain came down like bullets that day
Ripping through the air
Noisily, Ceaseless
It launched out of the clouds
And tore
Down
Down
Down
To the unassuming realm
It murdered the young, innocent green saplings
And beat at the well armored old oaks

Mercilessly
The thick gray-fingered clouds
spat out their wrath on the unsuspecting novices
Continuing its rampage
It gained power as it barrelled down
Streets
Alleys
Plazas

Viselike
The storm tightened its grip
and altered the usual harmonious mood of the town

Its departure was slower than its arrival
It stayed to linger
In the
Air
Lakes
Lowlands

It toned down
melted along windowpanes
fell off mailboxes
streamed out of gutters

The town went to sleep
and awoke
exhausted
to find the remains

- Marissa Blake

Path

A path in the grass
weaves itself
emerging
as an empty grass vein
running crookedly straight
wiggles where he walked
from his house
down to mine.

Behind my house
it runs between
the neighbor and me,
greet's the gravel road
leading to his house
there on the hill
where *He Be Strange*
began walking and
shaped that green seam.

- Patsy Kennedy Lain

Upon the Field of Stars

I tread upon a field of green
in Night's dark air so chill,
and stood aloft from man or beast
on solitary soil.

Night's horizon rose to greet me,
evening's wind in firmament's stars.
Upon the earth I lay my head
and knew no more of it.

Eternity rose up before me—
expanse across the sky;
heaven's gates did part to show me
infinity's embrace.

Stars so still, now old, now new:
whispers of the aeons.
Ancient songs strum upon the soul,
calling me thence.

Eternity took me aloft,
behind celestial night.
I lost myself to silent thought,
infinity bore me anew.

My mind dispersed among the stars
to play in pools of naught.
A harmony of unity
when lifted up on thought.

All minds are one,
all minds are none,
caught in firmament's gaze.
All is naught and naught is all—
for vastness fills the soul.

Lifted up, up, up
upon the tendrils of eternity.

Alleluia, alleluia.

- Faith Crockett

A Small Bit of Nighttime

The black cat looked at me.
Curiously, as felines tend to do.

Examining me,
looking through me.

Its tail was severed,
a crimson imperfection
in its inky exterior.

A small bit of nighttime
roaming under the glaze
of a midday sun.

Its eyes;
yellow marbles,
searching for my
intentions.

Was I an angry child?
A lonely old man?
A helping hand with
a portion of tuna sandwich?

Perhaps.

But the black cat must have
concluded otherwise—
Returning to the safety of a sewer drain.

- Tyler Douglas

To Mars

driving to mars on an autumn night
the road is dark and crisp
earthy leaves are swept to the shoulders behind
the curves, like pupils, widen in the moonglow
a pair of crawdad-pawed raccoons rearup
on their fattened bottoms then bustle away
their eyes gleaming like saturn's rings
passing the old trucks with crated hounds
muzzles all full of bear scent
above, the stars pierce closer and brighter
as we rise up from the earth and
into the mountain night air
ahead, the course winds tighter
knuckles whiten and a stern gaze
turns to a mercurian smile
autumn is here and i am
flying to mars in a black sedan

- Sara Putnam

High Risk Iris

Shapeless mounds of formless figures
Penetrating the mind – dinner time!
Faces rushing by blurry.
Too bad. Next time.
Tasteless, odorless colorless crud
Nutrition abounds.
Pad of paper lucid
Pencil – number 2 – twirling
Hexagonal bliss – prism amiss!

Dropped – cracked – broken
Toil makes use of freaks
Imperfect, split, dull.
Right eye open
Ready for action
Iris vacant –
Insertion, whirring, whittling
Done – Sharp, Clean.
Throat musings – pencil shavings
Waitress? Yes, please.
One for the road.

- Michael Tildsley



Conducting

An Ode to Dr. Wilson

He pushes and pulls the air
Churning the noise into harmony
Cutting out the infection with his baton
Mending key signatures and instilling good rhythm
You feel
The pulse, the movement
A voyage to be helplessly, hopefully sailed
When you hear,
The breath of euphony rise and fall around you
Stitching together warm air to be blown
Into a hearth of tools making
Music.

- Elizabeth Long

Poetry

Poetry—
Where punctuation really neednt matter
Nor must matter grammar neither.
Poetry—
Where ideas may flow in a simile
like a peaceful river,
or make you work through the
jagged mountain of a metaphor.
Poetry—
Where an extremely simple rhyme
Can explain a concept every time,
Or form can be
confused, concrete,
no scheme,
No flow,
no
logic.
Poetry—
Where a rose can stand for
Love, death, lust, blood,
An adulterous woman...
Or maybe it's just a rose.
And that is the way the poet
Rules the world.

- Laney Whiteman



lurching violently at this wispy genie
of an idea

- Jon Burgess

Siblings (Instruments in Quarrel)

A recorder is a poser to the clarinet
Just like a kazoo is an annoying wannabe-cousin to the brass

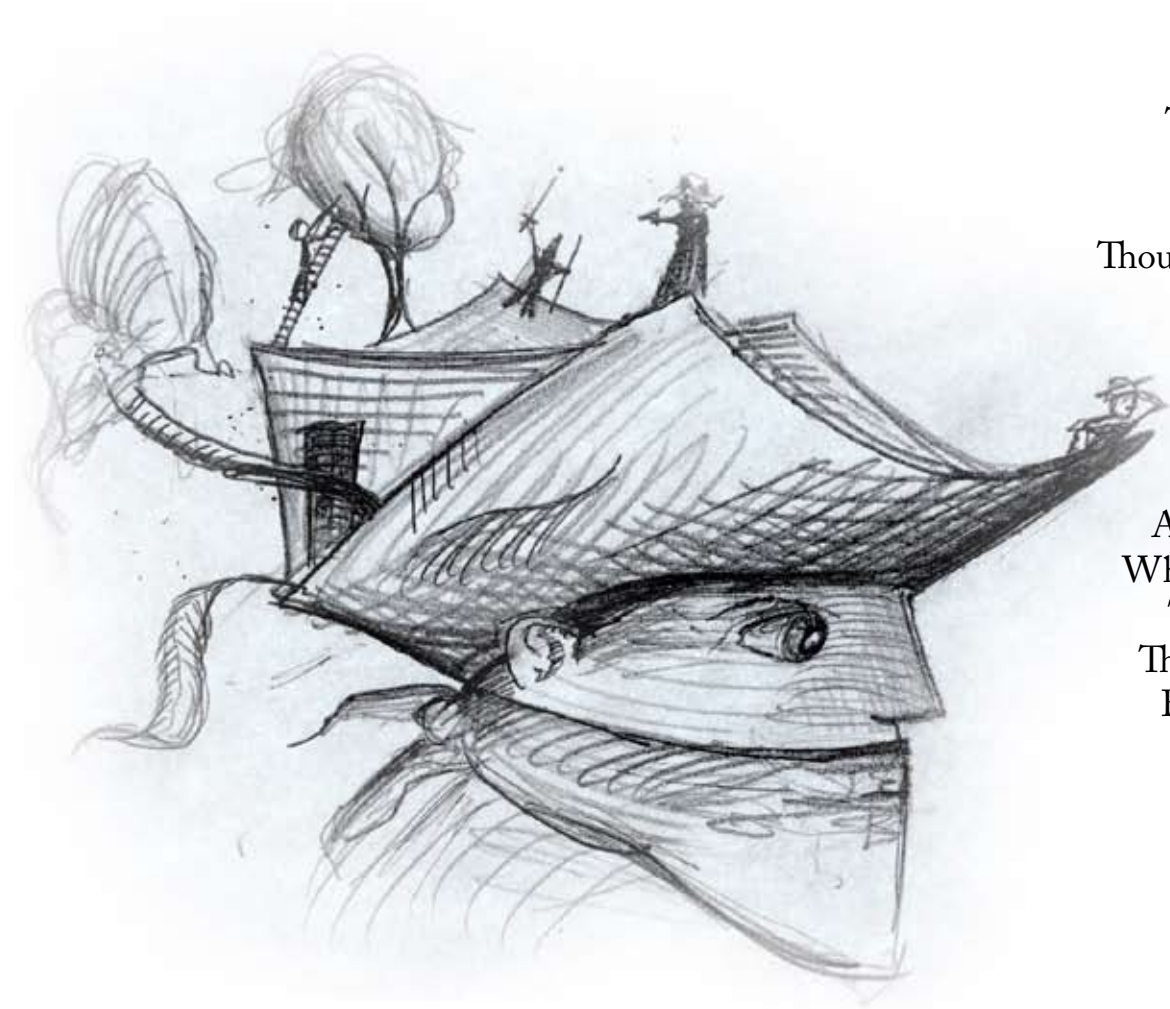
Likewise the flute shrills in injustice and points of view
As the trumpets blast their right to be heard.

A long drawl crawls across the air
Low and deep, progressively getting higher

Octaves climb effortlessly with this instrument
The trombone, he is, oh how he slides with ease.

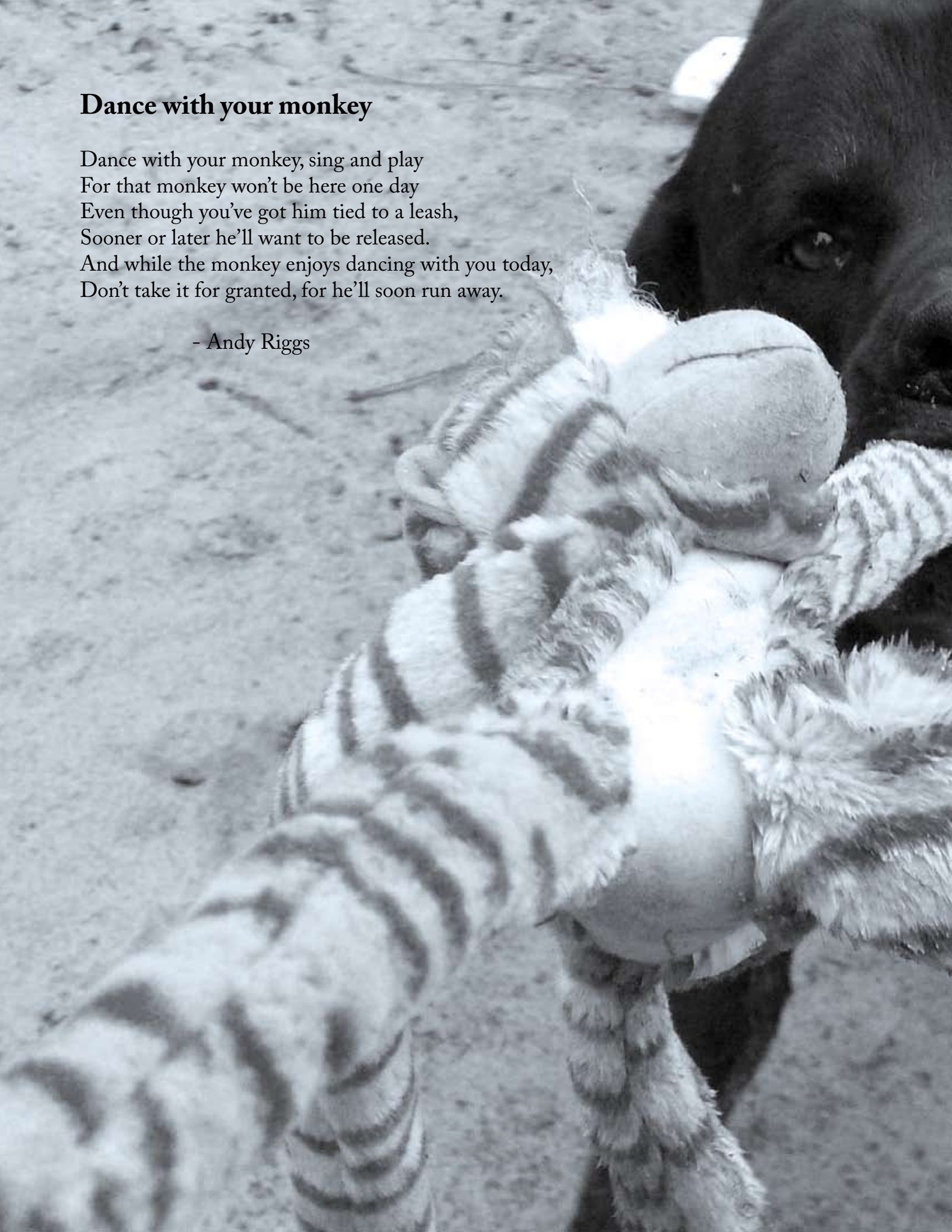
And with just as much effort
Dumps his spit on top of the French horn.

- Elizabeth "Kiki" Long



Ships of the Sky

Ships of the sky,
Ships of the sea.
Hidden from m'eye,
Hidden from me.
Feathers all splayed,
Tattered and frayed,
Floating aloft
Deceptively soft.
Beautiful and cold
And centuries old,
These ships sail on
For someone to hail on.
Hail to hearken,
Worlds to darken,
O'er which they rule
With fists so cruel;
The worlds laid to waste
In a flicker of haste.
The worlds rebuild,
Though thousands are killed.
The ships move on
Hither, thither, and yon
Destroying lives
And Precious archives
And children's dreams
And small sweet streams.
When mayhem has ceased,
The final chaos released,
The ships hide once more,
Become of tales and lore
Told to child
While weather is mild
So they can see
Quite clearly
Beyond the shrouds
Of things called clouds.
Ships of the sky,
Ships of the sea.
Floating up so high
Sleeping travesty.
- Alyssa Maxwell



Dance with your monkey

Dance with your monkey, sing and play
For that monkey won't be here one day
Even though you've got him tied to a leash,
Sooner or later he'll want to be released.
And while the monkey enjoys dancing with you today,
Don't take it for granted, for he'll soon run away.

- Andy Riggs

O, but to write suckish poetry

O, but to write suckish poetry; t'is no higher trash.
"Lo!" Ye might exclaim, "t'was that not too rash?
Such a claim as that shan't go unprotected!"
But alas, it seems thine logic hath been arrested.
That which is suckish is no more than suckish.
Protest and quarrel all ye desire and wish.
The truth still holds, strong and fast
"Til long after ye hath breathed thy last.
Should a verse bear no rhyme, no scheme,
'Tis nothing more than prose with a pretty theme,
And atrocious grammar, and failed attempts of greatness
Conjured by the whimsical and fickle and faithless.
True poetry comes from the sickly soul of the stained
Who have naught but the urge to write of their pain,
Or the desire to scribble about that which was lost,
Or the success that they attained at too high a cost.
Then, lastly, there is mine own self, who writes of
Nature and poets who write of pain and love.

- Megan Jeffries

Cinderella Is a Masochist

Cinderella is a masochist
Snow White lives with seven men
Fairy Tales of olden days
Create the dreams of children.
Robin Hood's deceptions
Make heroes out of thieves,
While Peter Pan's cross dressing
Demonstrates miniskirts from leaves.
Our ideals and aspirations
Concocted and infused
From cold reality and hard knock life
By fate and chance removed
Belle's finest attribute
Is walking while reading a book,
While Jasmine's a pro at distraction
Arresting men with just one look.
If the dreams we have inside us
Are products of these tales,
Then perhaps we're all spoiled princess brats
And sexist lovesick males.

- Kendra Erickson



The Spirits of Violets Are Stunning

The years strum pages
Which flutter when primed
Yet, lie still as the twilight
When left akin to sheets on the line

Like old stars in the heavens
Their twinkle declines
Yet, flutter like pages
Unbound at the spine

The years melt like Violets
At the end of their prime
Petal by petal, stem and brine
Their twinkle and strum
Seem both out of time

The years lie like pages
Now words and no rhymes
Still, flutter like sheets wet on the line
When the wind ruffles twilight
And strums the violets with light
Petal by petal, bound with green spine

Then, the spirits of violets
Are stunning with shine
With the years as their stems
Bound so fragile in time

- Desirata Gamble



The Signature

The Morning Star, the last one seen,
Defies the order of night.
But in defiance, overstays his welcome,
To be consumed by heaven's Light.
Not merely once, but countless performed,
This harrowing shadow play.
A constant reminder, to every age,
That Victory precedes each day.

- Michael Tildsley

This Other Side of the Sky

I see a sight Emerson never knew
Dickinson and Poe would marvel at the view
Above a veil of marbled clouds
This other side of the sky
I whisper through time
Yes—man can fly—


- Kendra Erickson

The Sky

The sky seems fearful today,
Shuddering as it keeps the universe from spilling into the world.
Or maybe it's the other way around.
Wonder what it worries about...
Protecting its earth, its love, its child?
Probably not...

The sky is hard today.
Concrete and forever, like a dam holding something back.
But there seems to be a flaw, a crack, a divide
With light piercing through.
Like the eye of a storm pulling all towards it.
Gravely lit shadows hurtle towards earth
Tomb is but a letter away
From womb...

- Douglas Campen

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a grass seed head against a cloudy sky and a distant landscape. The hand is in the foreground, holding a single stalk of grass with a seed head. The background shows a hazy landscape with trees and a body of water under a cloudy sky.

Constellations—my jungle gym
Best of thoughts to trace
the wild patterns etched in the nocturne sky
see how low the dipper's handle goes?
How easily I could grab hold and swing up,
Finding footholds in the dark between the stars
And sit at last among old friends,
Discussing philosophy and how the world will end.

- Sarah Buck

Just Some Rocks on a Hill

by Kendra Erickson

British cabs don't smell. Eight train rides, six airplanes, four cars, twenty tube rides, and two cabs experienced, Jen was confident she had endured enough public transportation across the Motherland to be an authority on the subject. Four days and three hours crossing Ireland, two days and four hours seeing the land of the Scots, another six hours coursing through the Cotswolds, and three days bustling in London-town. At this point the eight hour airplane ride and the possibility of a fifteen hour layover sounded like bliss, given that the airport provided padded seats. For all the sights that the Old Empire offered, stuffed down their throats and into their suitcases, the students couldn't help dreaming of sweet tea, chicken biscuits, and barbecue that promised hot plates of ribs slathered in rich tomato-based Texas rib sauce. For the creation of these things alone, one student said that the Revolution was worth every minute.

British cabs have sticky seats. It may be fifty degrees outside, but it was eighty in the taxi. The driver had been talking to the man in the passenger seat for the past five minutes, so Jen stalled when she realized he was expecting a response from her, scanning her brain for any indication of what the topic had been.

"Uh, on vaca - uh, I mean holiday," she answered vaguely, praying she'd guessed correctly. She recognized the tense shoulders the other passenger adopted, the sideways scan out the corner of his eye. Her Carolina twang certainly didn't match up with the British short A's and deep throated tones. "From the states," she confirmed, squaring her own shoulders, her tired wall of defenses shouldered. The passenger shifted in his seat.

The entirety of her senior trip abroad to the land of legendary fog to search for insight and well rounded worldviews had produced plastic wrapped, gift shopped, summarized, and laminated replicas stamped with the worldwide "Made in China." Jen's envisioned search for magic and romance in the land of Robin Hood and Peter Pan had long been

disillusioned through museums, Starbucks, little sleep, cheap hotels, and too many sights too fast, too heavy, too confusing. Most of the students didn't mind; that was what they truly wanted: Great Britain in a t-shirt and a coffee mug set in a gift shop window, the outrageous price making the most of the exchange rate.

Amidst the train rides, the busy streets of London, or crowded on the tube, Jen kept a wary eye turned to the bustling crowds. When her face was just another packed in a tube car or settled in the corner of a cozy pub, a tourist who looked and sounded and dressed like her would stumble their way through the locals, and Jen would find herself wishing she'd worked on her accent before boarding the plane. "The American Tourist" was listed between pickpockets and malaria under the lengthy notable hazards of travel abroad: the visor dripping with sweat, the fanny-pack bursting with maps and batteries, the obnoxious exclamations in a volume inconsiderate of the British concepts of space management, and always, always the camera bag adding unnecessary girth to the waist. Highlighted and double underlined, the title was essentially branded on the students' foreheads in every restaurant they invaded, every train car they packed.

Jen thought the cosmopolitan atmosphere of London would offer an amount of anonymity, and to some extent she'd been right. But just the day before, as the ever constant "Mind the gap" echoed through the station, boarding and exiting passengers swept Jen along, slipping and fitting onto the coveted seats and overhead bars of the tube car until it was overflowing. A sudden jerk of the tube car made Jen's stomach lurch and she found herself scrunched past her comfort level against the stylish jacket of the woman in front of her. Four, five, six individuals vainly tried to stuff themselves into the middle of the passenger car, as former occupants scrambled for cover in the aisles and laps of those seated. Jen froze when she realized she recognized the twang in their voices. A peek at the Boston Red Sox baseball cap, Old Navy jacket, the strap of what looked like a weighty Wal-Mart camera bag, and the tube map crunched between the fingers and the bar of the car handles set off warning bells in Jen's head. The jacketed woman tensed her shoulders and turned as disapprovingly as possible in the direction of the windows, causing Jen to wince as her fingers pinched under the tightened grip of her bar-sharer. Jen wished she hadn't chosen to wear her

Nike brand tennis shoes to baby her blisters.

The sixty-four seconds to Paddington ticked slower and slower as the new comers voices deafened the other passengers as they railed about the slow restaurant service, the tightly packed tube cars, the stupidity of left side driving, the dehumanizing "queue" or check-out line system, the expensive gift stores, and the lack of hot dog stands. Even as she tried to merge along with the wave of exiting passengers, Jen reddened under their stares as her "sorry" grated against their own. Her heart pounded as she turned down the wrong hallway out of the station, bruising her shoulders against strangers who stared at her apology with cold, aloof eyes.

The silence in the tight cab made Jen aware of the exhaustion deep in her bones, in her mind, in her fingers. The hypnotizing fields dragged in dizzying patterns of amber and lime blurred past her window in swaying rows of dark and light. The continuous looping was interrupted only by thick rows of gnarled trees marking ancient acres and maintaining natural boundaries obeyed and uncrossed for centuries. Jen wondered how long the boundary lines had been set and why she couldn't break through them.

"On holiday, you say? From the States? What part?"

Caught off-guard, Jen stammered, "Uh, the coast. In the east. Uh, Raleigh? North Carolina?" The taxi driver dipped his head in acknowledgement. The man in black next to him shifted. Jen's eyes shifted with him between the two men.

"Well it's a good idea to get here in the morning. Later in the afternoon all the buses come and ugh, it's a nightmare." The driver took a quick look over his shoulder as he noted the dense cloud cover and approved of Jen's umbrella. "You're in England now you know. Jen looked stupidly at the mini umbrella she'd stuffed in her bag, one of the suggestions the students had all received on a list their first day.

"It hasn't rained yet," Jen lamely commented. But it was true, and she almost laughed. "It really hasn't rained, we haven't seen one day of rain," Jen found she was repeating herself in time to the shifting of the man in black. Her eye caught the taxi driver studying her reflection in the rear view mirror.

"Then you haven't seen England."

The taxi pulled into a wide parking lot and paused

expectantly. His eyes were blue in the rearview mirror and held her frozen in her seat. Jen forced a breath and grabbed her bag, fumbling for the handle of the taxi. The man in black didn't move. She slammed the door too hard and shoved her hand into her bag digging for her wallet. The taxi driver accepted the "fiver" through his window, but she resisted the urge to meet his eyes. Even as she weaved through the parking blocks to the familiar tourism signs that indicated an exclusive package deal, she felt him following her path, urging her along. She quickened her stride.

"Drive away, drive away," she whispered through her teeth. What did he expect from her? She was just another tourist feeding the consumer market and worse, she was an American. When did that term become so despicable to her? Turn her stomach? She felt like a traitor to the country whose pledge she'd memorized, whose anthem she'd sang, whose colors she proudly wore. Who were these people to make her despise her country and bear the weight of prejudice?

She hadn't seen England? If anything he only proved what she knew all along. If she had not seen England than it was their fault, his fault. She'd come to see, she'd come to learn, but all they'd offered her was a shadow of an empire put on display behind bulletproof glass.

Jen dared a glance over her shoulder before she could catch herself and stopped in midstep when she saw only an empty parking lot. Her breathing slowed and she checked her watch. 9:03 AM. The brochure had advertised that the park opened at nine, so that meant a quick look, a few souvenirs, catch a bus back to Salisbury by 9:30, a train to London by 9:45, and back at the hotel by lunch.

Jen slid a "tenner" under the glass slot, received the headphones and prerecorded tour tape from the tourist box. She climbed the steps out of the pit onto the mound and held her breath, pausing as she mounted the top, her feet crunching gravel. Gray stones rose from the ground to tower ahead of her: twenty feet high building blocks left by a giant toddler to tumble to the ground or balance on each other in an incomplete double ring of stone doorways. The perimeter was blocked fifty feet away by a single rope looped along a series of metal poles that followed a gravel footpath around the hedge of stones.

Jen circled the path staring blankly at the stones,

headphones and bag hanging from each hand. As she rounded the farthest corner from the entrance to the site, she left them on the path behind her. Taking a few more steps, she stopped and stared at the rocks. They didn't make sense; they looked different from every angle. They were an anomaly of size and shape incongruent with the landscape yet as fitting on the hill as skyscrapers in a city skyline. As she'd left the hotel room that morning her roommate had groaned at the alarm going off at 5:30AM, "They're just some rocks on a hill."

They were just rocks on a hill. Jen seared the sight of their impenetrable walls onto the backs of her eyes and blinked ghostly copies of them across the horizon. She followed the path to her right, and her eyes found the stone-age road indentation in the ground at her feet that led far down the hill into the valley, carving a course over the waving grass onto the next hill, finally disappearing as it rounded the top. Feet carving a path for centuries dragging massive rocks onto a vacant hill among other hills created a lasting monument to their devotion and scientific genius.

There was more to the stones than just rocks on a hill. It had meant something to someone, Jen realized, before it was a tourist attraction. Before the road and the taxis, and the plastic replicas, and the headphones or the ticket office. When the land was just the land and the giants played with building blocks. When Robin Hood loved Marian and saved England from Prince John, and Arthur met his destiny with Excalibur in hand. When Peter Pan filled the dreams of British children following the stars, and the Normans built their castle walls on the backs of Saxon scum.

That was what she'd come to find—something beyond the stereotypes and brochures, the prejudices and the shame. A deeper something that filled and made her want to be something beyond what she thought was all she would ever be. To be a part of something so monumental that it would outlast even its own memory.

She slipped her bag back over her shoulder and held the headphones idly in her hand as she completed the course around the stones. Starting the descent back to the parking lot, Jen placed the headphones in the receivers and turned back for a last look at the stones.

Then it started to rain.

Degrees of Separation

by Faith Crockett

Sunset's salvo of fiery orange and pink filled the windshield as Beethoven's Panthetique wafted over the speakers. The open windows provided Karen's hair the freedom to revel in the cool wind afforded by the 55 mile-per-hour speed.

Karen looked at the clock. 5:30 glared back at her. She could almost feel her mother's perturbed anger stewing in the kitchen. Would she be mad that Karen was late? She imagined her mother saying, in her quiet tone, "You know you should call if you are going to be late. We would've made other plans if we'd known you were going to be late..." But her dad would understand. Maybe they could even watch that basketball game coming up tonight and eat dinner in front of the TV like they used to. It had been so long since she'd called him. He probably thought her uncaring. Why couldn't she be a better daughter? But she did care. It's just that college...

Biting her lip, Karen thought back to the quiz that morning. She had studied; she just studied the wrong material—somehow skipping chapter four, and poring over chapter five instead. Her teacher probably thought she was just lazy and irresponsible. Karen imagined her teacher, coffee in hand, sighing in frustration as he graded her paper: "How does this Karen girl expect to survive the real world when she can't even pass a simple quiz?"

Couldn't people understand she was trying? With a constricted sigh, she attempted to relax, attempted to enjoy the ephemeral brilliance of the sunset before it was gone forever.

Karen slammed on the brakes and swerved. Something big in the road. A deer. A sick feeling mingled with the assault of adrenaline as she realized she was no longer in control—the car kept spinning even after she let up on the wheel. A violent CRASH sent her—

*

Stupid. Why did they always get in fights? Jack drove down the same highway he'd driven down many times

before. The smell of pine air freshener mixed with the outside air; Jack's window was down a crack. Marie just didn't get it. He loved her, damn it. Why did she always get mad at him? He really was doing the best he could.

Jack needed some time to wind down. He had left in the middle of the fight, which made it worse. He wasn't going out to pick up women or nothing. Just get a beer. It would help him stop being so angry. He had been pretty angry. It scared him. Jack loved Marie...he loved her. Then why had he gotten so angry? What had they even been fighting about? He thought back to their tiny bedroom in the apartment. She said something about his clothes...No, she'd interrupted him. It had made him so mad. Oh, God, she hadn't deserved it. He thought of how he'd yelled and called her names. Jack remembered the smell of burning pasta as she stood there, looking at him. What had that look meant?

Because of their argument, Marie had left the pasta cooking too long. It had begun to burn. She had looked at him like he was the smell of burning pasta—alarming, and good-for-nothing. The thought of pasta reminded him of the birthday meal Marie had made him last week. She'd been so nice, surprised him with his favorite: spaghetti. And she'd bought him a cell phone and taught him how to use it.

And now this. Jack felt that same anger, now turned on himself. He was good-for-nothing, like the smell of burning pasta. He should be thrown out. Marie...

But he couldn't go back now. No, she wouldn't understand. She'd just get mad at him again. He felt awful, like he couldn't do anything right. Just a quick drink to loosen—

Jack smelled the burn of rubber that came with the screech of tires. He hit his brakes hard, too, trying not to hit the car in front. CRASH. Too late.

Damn! On top of everything else, and now this! Jack didn't need this. He needed to get away. Couldn't he get just one night to rest? But no, he had to deal with this jerk. Probably drunk, or high. Jack could still smell the burnt rubber as he got out of the car. It was mixed with the smell of wet dirt from the woods near the road.

Annoyed, he walked over to the other car. He didn't need this. It would look like his fault. He couldn't pay the insurance if they raised it again. What would

Marie say? All the stress of life came closing in on him, making him feel trapped. To Jack's surprise, the guy's car was facing the other direction. Everything had gone by too fast for Jack to figure out what had happened. He got closer to the car.

Inside was a girl. She was bleeding. It looked bad. Jack didn't know what to do. What should he do? What could he do? Damn! No good! The smell of burnt rubber mixed with the memory of burnt pasta.

—Cell phone! Jack had a cell phone! He thought of Marie. After fumbling in his pocket, he pulled it out and dialed ...9...1-1.

“Hello? Hi, ummmm....There's a girl here. I think she's hurt real bad....”

Clarence felt pretty down as he putted along the highway in his junker. A four-year degree, and still no work in sight. People didn't care about college anymore. They just cared about “work experience”. Even McDonald's had turned him down. Ouch. Clarence felt like doing a story on the plight of journalism majors during this recession. He could be the center story!

His girl Stacy hated that he hadn't sold his camcorder yet. Yeah, he needed the money, but the camera was the only chance he had at getting a video journalism job. Really, he couldn't afford to give it up. Clarence was still living with his parents, after all! He needed to keep the camera. He'd find the perfect story, submit it to a local station, and then...

Ambulance sirens whined from behind. Clarence mechanically pulled over to let it pass. He half-considered following it, thinking to channel the spirits of the uber-dedicated reporter-hounds. Surprisingly, though, it stopped a couple hundred feet in front of him. An accident!

Clarence wondered what had happened. One car was facing the opposite direction. Clarence looked down at his camcorder, which gleamed amid the McDonald's bags and coffee cups that graced the seat beside him. It was worth a shot.

Clarence pulled slowly forward until he was only a few yards away from the scene. He nearly fell out of the car, clutching his camera. A few books and burger wrappers had fallen out with him. He bent down to pick them up. If he could just find a cool spin on

this story—or even just sell the footage to a news station—maybe it would be his “in” for a job.

He was fumbling around, looking for his tripod—and notebook, and pencil—when he heard the sirens sound again. Clarence looked up to see the ambulance speeding off.

“Darn it!”

Wait. There was some guy still at the scene. He was pacing back and forth, looking worried. He wore a large, yellowed t-shirt full of holes (it looked like swiss cheese). His hair was pulled back in a small ponytail. The quintessential working-class man. Perfect story fodder. “Unexpected tragedy rattles man.” No, no. That's a terrible title. “Unexpected tragedy hits home.” Yeah! That's good! Now, how to approach him...

“Hello, sir.”

The man looked up. Clarence coughed nervously.

“Hello, sir. Could you tell me what happened here?”

The man glanced at the dented car, forlorn. “The girl... I think she was hurt—real bad. I called 911, but was it fast enough? God, she looked so bad. I don't know what to do. I want to go home and see my wife...”

He was still in shock. The poor guy. It must have been some accident. How would the guy handle a camera being shoved in his face? But Clarence had to get the story. His career depended on it!

“That's completely understandable, sir. It's going to be okay. I'll help you home n' stuff. But first, would you mind repeating what you just said?”

Clarence clicked the camera on, and hit a button. The little red “Recording” light blinked.

Bill sat on the couch and watched TV.

“And the weather for today in the central part of the state is...”

He ate some chips. They were stale.

His wife was nagging him about something. Not like he needed to be reminded what a failure he was. His daughter was going to be coming soon, back to this junk hole. She probably hated him--probably couldn't wait to get back to school, where at least she could live somewhere decent. A light fizzled in and out in the already-dim apartment.

His wife's voice went on as she bustled around the kitchen, the floor creaking as she stepped on the cracked linoleum.

“...Bill? Are you listening to me? You still haven't fixed the toilet. Didn't you say you'd get on that yesterday? You know, sometimes I think it'd be better if I just did it myself. Are you finished with your supper? I'll get it in a second. Keep the TV on—I wanted to see that new cooking show coming up. You know, I was talking to...”

Bill turned back to the TV. Some reporter was droning on about a man and his wife being brought closer together over an accident. Some girl had got herself in the hospital when she spun out onto the side of the road. Stupid teenagers, Bill thought. Teens today were always getting themselves drunk or blathering away on their cell phones, oblivious to the outside world.

“Bill, your daughter's going to be home any minute, and you're still on the couch watching that damn television. Do you want her to see you like that? She's late, actually. Must take after you. Bill, you really should...”

Bill ate some more chips and flipped the channel. It was a basketball game.

A Minature Life

by Stephanie Ricker

Annette sat ramrod straight in the armchair in the parlor. The skirt of her silk burgundy dress fanned out flawlessly over the horsehair upholstery, and the toes of her black patent leather shoes were neatly aligned. Her golden ringlets didn't move at all in the still air of the house. She wasn't certain how long she had been sitting there, staring with glassy eyes at the floral wallpaper on the parlor wall, waiting for something to happen.

The parlor was exquisite. Its cushioned furniture had claw-footed wooden legs, delicately curved. A large and intricately patterned rug lay on the hardwood floor in the center of the room, and plush velvet drapes hung on the windows, which were never opened. Painted glass lamps stood on the filigreed end tables, though they were never lit. A piano, never played, stood in one corner of the room. Beautifully detailed paintings of people Annette did not know hung on the walls, and she never asked who they were intended to represent. The room itself was a work of art, a frozen tableau of elegance.

Every room in the house was similarly perfect, impeccably decorated and meticulously furnished. Annette never moved anything; the gilt-edged copy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* had always set at the same carefully-placed angle on the table. She never touched anything; when she sat, she did so cautiously and with as little movement as possible. She didn't look closely at anything. She had lived in this house as long as she could remember, yet she didn't know whose portraits hung in the parlor. She hadn't bought any of the furnishings herself. She didn't know why the lamps were never lit, or why the piano was never played. It could hardly even be called her house. She felt even less at home than a guest would have, yet she couldn't remember the last time she had left the house for any reason. Indeed, no reason seemed valid enough to motivate her to do so.

The house was caught in the customary late afternoon hush. If she bothered to look at the ornate wall clock, the hands would read half-past five. She knew that her father would soon be in the entryway, with

his dark, carefully-brushed coat and leather briefcase in hand. In a moment her mother would be on the stairs, going down to greet him, even though Annette would not hear any prefatory movement from the room above. Her mother and father were that way, appearing in rooms without the slightest sound to announce their presence. Her mother, in particular, seemed to float, her feet never showing from beneath her full-skirted gowns. Now, she knew, her father would respond briefly to her mother's standard query about his work day before proceeding to his study. Her mother would turn, the top of her head exactly in line with the stair step sixth from the bottom, and go into the kitchen to supervise the dinner preparations. She always wore a delicate and utterly superfluous apron for this process, even though she did none of the cooking herself.

Eventually the three of them would meet in the wallpapered dining room with its mahogany furniture, and they would carefully be seated at the lace tablecloth-covered table. Her father would ask Annette how her studies were coming along, and her mother would express vague dismay at the condition of the roast. After a suitable pause, her mother would renew the topic of going abroad for the summer, and her father would mull over the idea as the wine was poured. Annette would sit quietly, eyes on that lace tablecloth, and make encouraging or discouraging sounds, whichever seemed appropriate, at regular intervals. Yes, by all means, we must see the Louvre once again. No, Papa, she did not have her heart set on painting the Champs-Élysées, but of course they simply had to see it. At last dinner would end, and her father would depart to his study to read. Her mother would ascend to her sewing room to lay out pieces for yet another dress for Annette. Annette already had closets full of dresses, one for every occasion and in every color, yet there always seemed to be more on the way. Eventually a caller would arrive. Callers inevitably came every evening, and each seemed to require yet another change in dress. Annette and her mother would receive them in the parlor. Annette would sit in the very same chair she sat in now and would make sparkling, witty conversation about nothing at all while the hands on the ornate clock seemed not to move.

This was what always happened. Her parents held the same stilted sort of conversations in the same tones of voice. The issue of Paris would never be settled one way or another. Though the witty conversation

mocked something new or they had lamb for dinner instead of roast, there was no variation or shadow of turning in their days. The minute differences only reinforced the sameness. One day was exactly like another; the order of them never changed, and the events themselves always happened precisely as stiffly and regimented as they had the day before. These things always happened, and these things were not what Annette waited for.

One day, she believed, something else would happen. She couldn't imagine what it might be; she couldn't imagine anything different from the proscribed set of daily events, couldn't imagine a setting other than their perfectly furnished house, couldn't imagine conversation other than over the mahogany table. She hadn't the hint of an idea of a different life, and yet she believed—because she had to believe so—that there was a different life, and that one day it would find her. She lived in the perpetual hush of movement never quite actualized.

Annette sat perfectly straight in the parlor, flawless ringlets motionless, staring ahead with glassy eyes, and waited for something to happen.

A little girl knelt down on the intricately patterned rug covering the hardwood floor, her skirt fanning out over the carpet. She opened the side of the ornate house. With one hand, she made the father walk through the door into the entryway. He had a coat tucked carefully over his arm. With her other hand, she made the mother walk down the carpeted stairs and greet the father.

The third doll sat in the parlor of the dollhouse, her toes neatly aligned, her ringlets perfect as ever. Her glass eyes stared at the wall of the parlor, her expression enigmatic and strangely hopeful underneath her painted face.

The little girl's father opened the door and stalked into the entryway, coat over his arm and briefcase in hand. He sighed heavily and hung his coat on the rack as the little girl's mother floated soundlessly down the stairs to greet him. The smells of dinner cooking in the kitchen wafted into the playroom from the open door, and the maid began laying the fine china out on the table.

Contributors

Sandra Ervin Adams lives in Jacksonville, NC, and her first book of poetry is about Union Point Park in New Bern. Her second book will be called *Weymouth and Beyond*.

Lauren Batchelor writes pithy poems.

Andrea Bates is a Wilmington poet of great brilliance.

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Jon Burgess has hair of astronomical proportions.

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Faith Crockett knows the words to dance on the wind.

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Cord Martinez is a poet from Fayetteville, NC.

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Alyssa Maxwell creates the city of night.

Haley McKinney writes tiny poems with great shouts.

Luke Morales basically responds quickly usually. He is a fourth-year senior, his education having lasted one year too long. He also likes the use of the —.

Frank Orson is the next Napoleon.

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Sara Putnam tames foxes and loves her rose.

Stephanie Ricker is the Keeper of the Minds.

Andy Riggs dances with his monkey.

Oliver L. Samuels was born in North Carolina, but didn't grow up there (though he tried). He enjoys writing and thinking and doing both at the same time.

Charlotte K. Smith is here and there.

Jozy R. Thomas wears the best hats.

Michael Tildsley often visits a Night Gallery only to find himself lost in a pensive Twilight Zone.

Rachael Traylor sees all the patterns of the world.

Lee Walker's mind works in mysterious ways.

Laney Whiteman is one acquainted with words.

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