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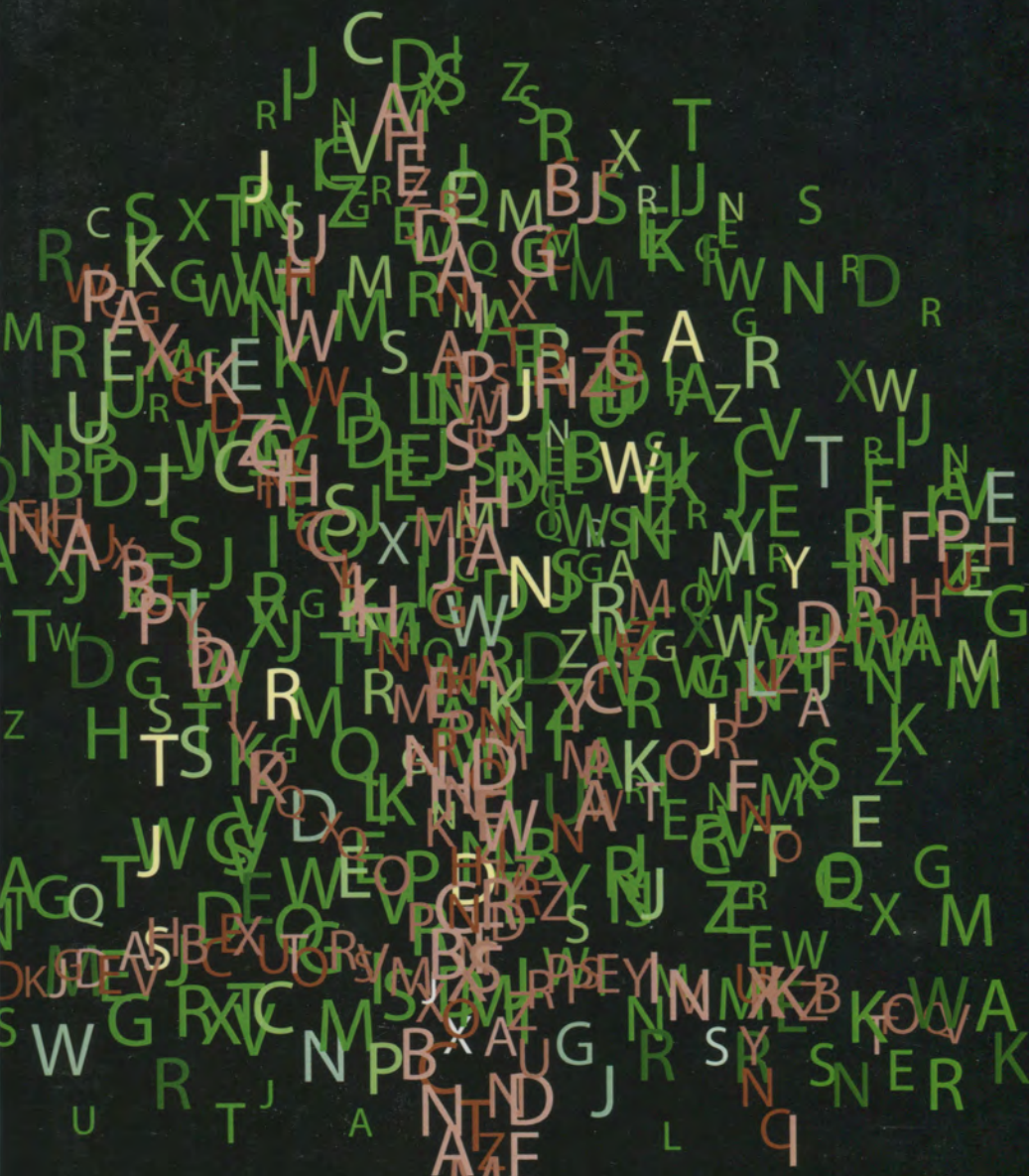


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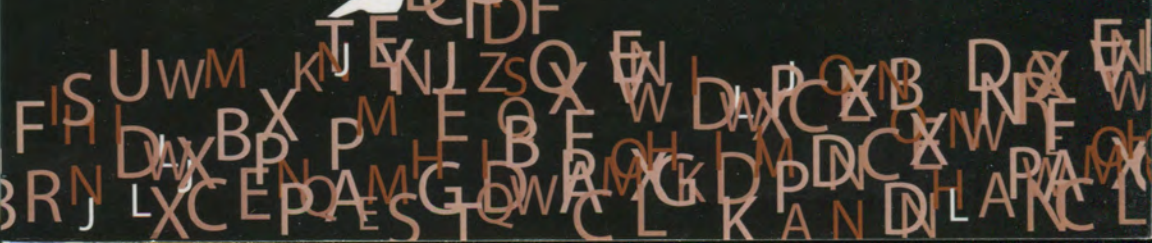
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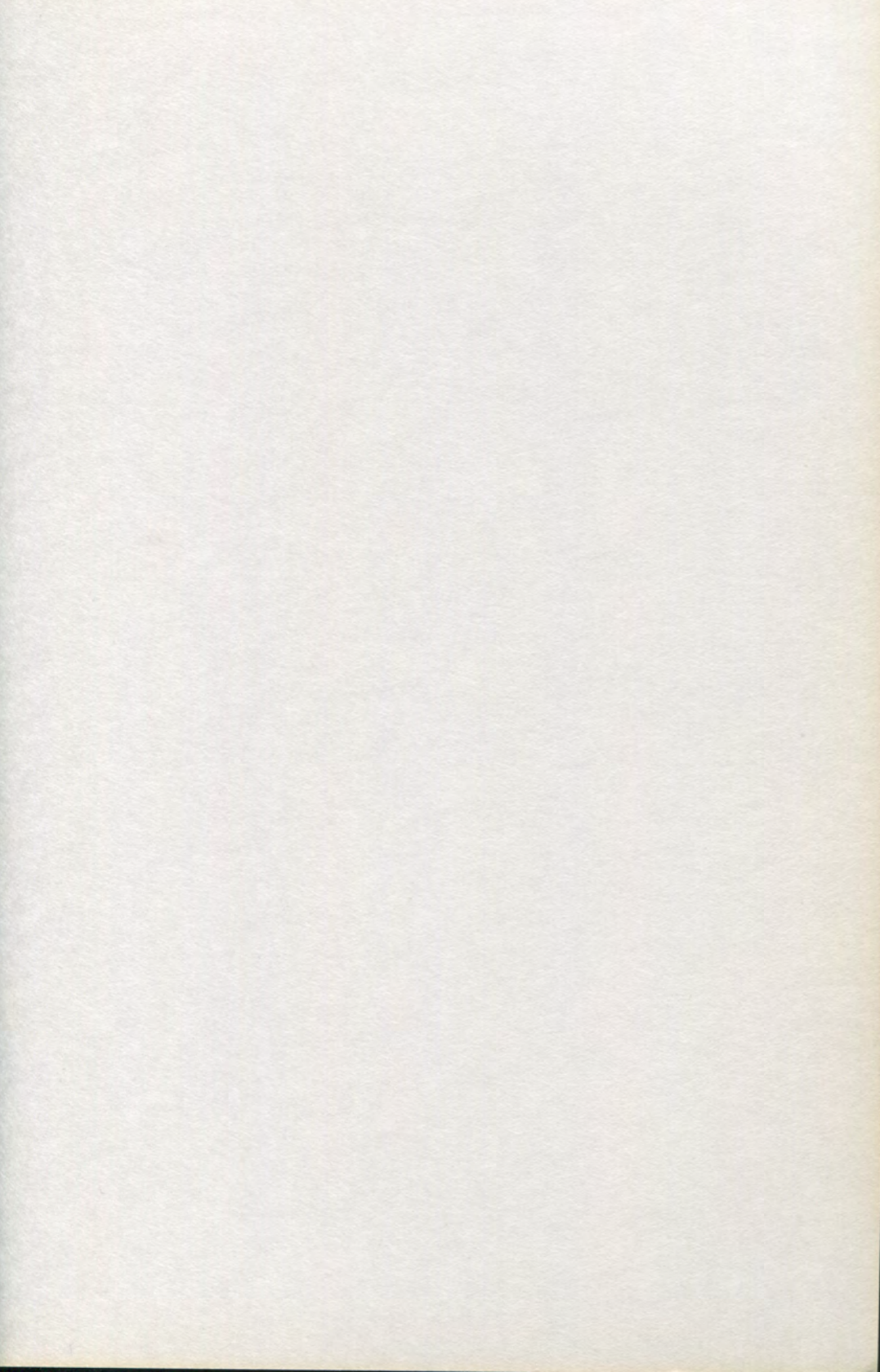
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ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY
PECAN GROVE REVIEW
10TH ANNIVERSARY





Pecan Grove Review
Pecan Grove Review
Pecan Grove Review
Pecan Grove Review

St. Mary's University
San Antonio, Texas

Volume X
Spring 2007

10th Anniversary Edition

A special note of thanks to all who submitted,
and to all those students who were involved
in the very difficult process of selection.

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Pecan Grove Press, Publishers
One Camino Santa Maria
San Antonio, Texas 78228-8606

This volume of
Pecan Grove Review
is dedicated to the memory of
Trinidad Sanchez Jr.
1943-2006

Your words will continue to inspire us...

Introduction

An anniversary celebrates the lasting quality of a relationship. Whether it's the longevity of a silver wedding celebration or the twelve-month endurance of a business or a service, an anniversary signals a time for reflection.

For the past, current, and future student editors of *Pecan Grove Review*, this issue commemorates ten years of selecting, editing, and compiling literature that was written by the St. Mary's community. And while there have been other literary magazines prior to these we christened *The Pecan Grove Review*, these volumes began with a request to give our students an opportunity to experience literature from an editorial perspective.

When Sister Ann Semel asked me to create a new literary magazine for the campus in 1993, I was immediately intrigued by the possibilities and quite mystified by the process of publishing a small magazine. I invited a small group of serious writers from my Intro to the Creative Process class to join me in reading through the first submissions we collected from the students, faculty, and staff across campus.

With each issue, all of us developed better skills as writers and editors. It's been my fortunate blessing that there was always one student on the staff who liked technology and willingly spent hours (and hours) formatting the magazine. The English-Communication Arts Department and the English Guild helped finance the magazine while I drove around San Antonio to find the small presses to publish it. We sold the magazine so that we could maintain funds for the next issue.

A decade later, the Desktop Publishing students have come on board to format the text and get practical experience in production. Dr. Palmer Hall and Louis Cortez in the Academic Library located an on-line publisher to keep a high quality product while staying within the departmental budget. Ten years later, the magazine is distributed at no charge to readers.

Even though new technology has helped the students format and publish with ease, there will never be a replacement for the dedicated group of student editors who narrow down the almost two hundred submissions to the approximately fifty pieces that are published every year. As the staff for the 2007 edition assembled this issue, they also decided to expand beyond the initial theme and include selections that captured their imaginations and inspired their generation.

After the passing of poet Trinidad Sanchez Jr., we asked his wife, Regina, if we could publish one of his poems in the magazine. Through the years, Trinidad came to our campus and generously shared his bilingual poetry during classroom readings and outdoor events. His encouragement, his wisdom, and his incredible poems fired up his audiences to venture forth as poets. He reminded listeners to trust their own voice, to be true to the words, and to remember that sometimes we need to laugh at ourselves.

The staff was delighted when I read "X=The Poem," one of the original poems that Trinidad electronically shared with the local Latino writers group. I kept this poem on my computer never expecting it would be one of the last pieces I would receive from him. My poetry compadre would want readers to enjoy his words often, and thus we publish this poem as a special gift from Trinidad Sanchez Jr. and his wife, Regina Chavez y Sanchez.

In the next ten years, there will be new developments in literature, in technology, and in the membership of the St. Mary's community. What won't change are the dedicated instructors who encourage their students to pursue literary excellence and the committed student editors who want to share the literary legacy of the Pecan Grove Review with new readers. We hope you enjoy the anniversary edition of the magazine as we celebrate the relationship between writer and reader that comes with the turning of the first page.

—Diane Gonzales Bertrand

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Somewhere Tonight

—Clarence J. Adams—

Somewhere tonight, there's a child breathing his last breath choking on his blood, while praying to God before his death. His words are innocent and bold like somehow this prayer will save his soul. There's a story to everyone's life that needs to be told so listen to my words as the truth unfolds. Does God listen to there prayers of the unjust, and when we die is our souls lied to rest. I believe God is in every hood and trailer parks from coast to coast, after all it's us who needs him the most.

Somewhere tonight, there's a women being chased running for her life to escape being raped scorned in her heart so it's men she hates turned her back on God because she lost her faith. Every thing happens for a reason she's miserable now, but it will only last for a season. Don't give up; God wants us to overcome this stormy weather because in the end things always get better.

Somewhere tonight, there's a man going to jail convicted of selling drugs to escape his hell. His only crime is to feed his son and daughter, but in his absence his children were led astray like lambs to the slaughter. So now his son has to stand up and be a man, or prepare for his death. He's somewhere tonight breathing his last breath choking on his blood while praying to God before his death. His words are innocent and bold like somehow this prayer will save his soul.

The Secret Art of Language

—David Garza—

If I could say everything
I was thinking,
I would accomplish so much more...
But I can't.

Instead my speech becomes coded,
and my meanings get muddled.
Nuances become nuisances and
truths become falsehoods
as easily as children mature
or tides
return to shore.

If I could say everything
I was feeling
I would be so much happier...
But I can't.

Instead I twist my speech into itself.
I make it fit into places it doesn't want to.
I coat my anger with sugar,
thin my sorrow with water,
and veil my love with wisps of hatred.

If I could ask for everything
I yearn for,
I would feel so much more relieved...
But I can't.
Instead my dreams become strangers
as their life force conforms.
My hope atrophies,
like unused muscle.
And as I get older and learn

this secret art
of language
I realize

that I no longer really
know what
I am saying.

At all.

Lost in Translation

—Marian Haddad—

*I do not come to offend you, oh culture,
from which I was born. Your instruments
play, your oud, your kanoun, your sweet
sound, the vibrato of your Eastern minor
tone, the bazouk, like the sweet voice
of the sitar, and the rhythmic pounding
of your drum, the durbuk. I am your child,
though I share another parent, this country
in which I was conceived and birthed,
this America. I hold you both carefully
within my palms, like fetuses born
unfledged, delicate and flowering.*

Mother tells stories of how embarrassed she was when the new “society” found out about her conception. She said she was red with herself. People would know she was still doing it, for pleasure nonetheless. She was 45 and Father was 50. Dad had emigrated from Syria to El Paso, Texas, five years before, and Mother had followed two and a half years later. It had been eight years since my brother Gus had been born, and five years since her last miscarriage. I was the twelfth child. Three had died. Dad calls me number nine.

I was delivered at Southwestern General Hospital by Doctor Robert Hibbs, who my parents still think is the final word on everything, thirty six years later, even though he misdiagnosed my sister two and a half years ago, treating her for kidney infections while her cancer was metastasizing daily in her colon and liver. But my parents still feel he is the most able physician, a type of loyalty derived from delivering their first child in a hospital delivery room. The other siblings were born either in my mother’s bed with my grandmother or a neighbor acting as midwife, or in my parents’ wheat field in the middle of a day of harvesting, Mother’s blood blessing the grain and the ground.

I think Mother was impressed not only with the hospital and the physician, but with the blood pressure belts, the shots, all the sterling utensils laid out straight in a row on a tray beside her head. I had what many would term the normal delivery circumstances: a hospital, a physician, and many visitors with gifts for Mother and me.

I was a huge baby, nine pounds, ten ounces at birth. I've seen pictures. I had folds in my legs and arms, the type Sumo wrestlers flaunt. My mother says, "Your hair was black and full and curly, and your cheeks were red, and your eyes were this big," and she makes circles with her two thumbs and forefingers and places them around her eyes. "Everybody in El Paso came to see you." Of course, everybody in El Paso consisted of the aunts and the uncles and other members of the Middle Eastern community there. Dad mentions, "Someone wanted to pay us to buy you," while Mother interjects quickly, in Arabic, that she would not allow it. For a second, I can almost believe that if the bid were high enough, a sale would've been made, not because Dad doesn't love me, but he already had eight of us, and he could have used a million dollars.

So this is where I began the split, the split between the American me and the Middle Eastern me. This is where I began the marriage and the divorce of the two cultures. As I find myself immersed in one, I find myself vacant of the other.

Sometimes they merge, and sometimes they are so disparate that I find myself unwelcome or unwanted in places, or I find myself not taking spaces, while others are open, waiting for me.

I remember the first Arab I dated. He had just moved to El Paso from Syria. Prior to dating him, I had made it a point not to date Arabs. I had seen the way my father, my uncles, and many Arabic men treated their wives. They would do anything for them. Family came first, and I always revered that trait in our Arabic men. However, their relationships often did not include the crucial element of discussion between the man and the woman, the man seeking his spouse's input on matters. His word was the last word and the first, and the wife was expected to accept decisions made by him. Less than that actually, oftentimes, her response wasn't even considered. She fed the kids, fed the man, kept the house, birthed his children. She served her imperative purpose and was highly respected for that, and that's where it seemed to end. For these reasons, I became attracted to the American, to the today man, the artist, the feeler, to the one who considered woman as an entity with a mind and opinion. And I dated these men, satisfied deep with them.

However, befriending peers from the Middle Eastern culture, I was exposed to many "eligible" bachelors, the ones my parents wanted me to marry: the doctor from Pittsburgh with the house on "The Hill," the lawyer from Houston with his private jet, Joey from El Paso, my friend of eighteen years, who lived "in our city, whose parents love you," or the doctor who recently immigrated from the old country, who

"already established his office down the street and loves classical Arabic poetry." They scared me.

I remember one invited me to dinner. I accepted. The day of the scheduled date, I came home with a fever of 102. I had lost my voice and could hardly speak. The phone rang and he was on the other line. He asked, "Are you sleeping?" I said in a raspy, barely audible voice, "No, I'm sick. I lost my voice and I have a high fever." His response was, "So, what time do you want me to pick you up?" Ignorantly, instead of using my energy to convince this person that I would not be good company, I complied and went to dinner. He began discussing "the future" before our glasses of water had reached our table. I told him, "You don't know me. How can you discuss the future?" He said, "I know you. You are Salim Haddad's daughter. Your parents were neighbors with my mother. You are from my culture." I responded, "You have no idea what my middle name is or if I have one. You have no idea if I've murdered anyone." This was the last time he asked me to dinner.

Out of love for the cultural events and the commonalities I shared with the people of my heritage, I remained a part of the cultural circle. I was again exposed to men who I did feel were like me in many ways. I was experiencing a kind of volleying from one culture to another, not landing. One night, some Middle Eastern friends, new to town, were throwing a cross-cultural party. Everybody who was anybody was there. There was a wonderful mix of people, and one of the men throwing the party intrigued me terribly. He spoke my language, he played the durbukee (the Arabic drum), he was handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired, olive-skinned, energetic and strong, and he met me where I was, in the spaces I did inhabit: the language, the music, the dance, the culture, the me that I grew up with, the sounds I grew up hearing, the food on the table, the flavor of this life.

He had prepared most of the food there, the taboolie, with its smell of fresh mint and parsley, the hummus, thick for the dipping, the baba ghanouj, eggplant crushed and potent with garlic, the kibbee he'd made, his hands mingling the ground lamb with the cracked wheat, rubbing it in his palms with ice water to keep it fresh, kneading the mixture with his fists until the meat and cracked wheat were one. There were trays of baklava at one end of the table, some filled with pistachios, others with walnuts or pecans, and at the other end, trays of meza, Arabic appetizers, olives, green, black and brown, the fresh made cheeses, the tart labnee, the round flat loaves of bread, and the smell of Arabic coffee thick in the room. And the arak, the smell of anise flavored liquor on his breath.

And when the D.J. took a break, I no longer heard Spandau Ballet's *This Much is True*. I heard the familiar beating of the goat-skinned drum. He brought it out and began playing as he carried its brown ceramic body under his arm. He took it to the gas stove, lit a burner, and let it hang upside down, close to the fire, but not touching, to warm the skin, to amplify the sound, and then he came back, sat with it wrapped between his legs and began to beat the same rhythms my brothers beat. And I picked up another drum, sitting nearby, and we pounded in rhythm to the pulse of the other.

Later, while Arabic music was playing on the stereo, he held his hand out to me, standing, and I looked up from where I sat, took it, and we danced. He moved with me. We did not touch. But his one arm lifted, the other sweeping down, an Arabic "Opa", and me with my arms and hands reaching for some sky, the wrists, the movements, and in the hips a mild sway, a soft thrust, the turn and flow of the skirt, the quick step back. I danced within the space he created for me, he moved with me and around me as I changed my course. He followed. I followed. And we circled each other in our dance.

I was intrigued. I remember thinking, "This man is like my brothers. This man feels like home." And so we dated. But things arose, the American culture mainly, "Your American friends don't know how to throw a party. They are boring. They stand around and talk. They are dull. There is nothing like Arabic music. I don't understand these people. Who is Elton John?" How could I answer this question? Where would I begin? How could I go back more than a decade and educate him on the sound of someone we had heard daily on our radios here, and him having grown up in another country, listening to his own familiar tones? And so I found myself repressing my other half, the thinking me, the one that loves Eric Clapton, Dwight Yoakam's Rock-a-billy, Stevie Ray, Texas Blues, and Southern Fried Rock, the me that loves my electric guitar, the me that doesn't want to stay at home because I am told to, but because I choose to. And so I found myself dating "The American" once more. This is what I always come back to. This seems to be the larger part of me.

I find that I often validate and confirm, "This is where I belong, with a man from the culture in which I currently live, with a man from the culture which is mine, in whose country I was born." And when I am with this man, though his names are many, I have placed my other self carefully on a shelf, locked that me in a burial until there is a place where it can float out and up. "This man understands me fully," I convince myself, but he see things differently. He sees the belly dance as only

sexual. He does not seem to see that the movement in the arms, the hips, mirrors the desert when wind tosses and ripples it. That the beads of sweat that glisten on the woman's skin, are where the music and sound seep through her, gather around her navel, rejoice there, quivering. She does not dance to the music. The music dances in her until she is dizzy in skirts, circling, and in the breast, a soft rising and falling heaves there, where behind the chest bone, the upper cage, and in the delicate wrists, lies the pounding pulse, falling quietly, as the drums stop their beating. Though the music is "cool", he does not know the depths and winds from where these minor intonations were bred, that the wordless measures hold messages which he cannot keep, that the snakelike movement of the arm and the slow swerve of the hip were born between walls he has not seen, in countries where he has not been.

And when we are in the midst of my family, he is isolated, though he tries not to be. He is lost between words my parents cannot find the American translation for. Though he appreciates the music, he does not discern the mourning in the lyrics, the words I cannot translate to him without the meaning being stripped. They were not made for his language. He was not raised with his father speaking sounds, sitting at the table reading Arabic poetry he had written in meter, the movement, the rhyme, each syllable heavy with vowels, the long e's drawn out at the ends of lines, *il mumineen, mujaraheen*, inflections well placed. The music of this language is not his, and it is not his doing. But the music of this language is mine, and I take it with me even in my sleep. The language has colored me here, in this country, the translations of tongues, Arabic to English and back, and the space in-between.

And somewhere in that space, I want to be the mother and the wife that builds her family, the mortar holding the walls, where family and God are taught, God in everything, God everywhere, Muslim or Christian, in the Arabic world, God is. *Allah oo Ugbar*, God is greater, *Enshallah*, in hopes to God. God is embedded in the Arabic tradition, woven, strong, in whom we are raised. I also want to remain the independent woman, the woman allowed to voice, to articulate, to speak and be heard, to make her way, to be strong.

And so I try to find my place somewhere in the middle of these two hemispheres, somewhere among my people and my people. I have a country in each pocket. I am rich that way and poor that way. I pick up pieces daily from each side, where I store them like coins between the tight, snug folds of my denim coin pouch, at my hip bones. Some are coins that only see light occasionally, that I have kept there between the washings, that fall out when least expected. And others, I pull out

carefully, safely, put back deep in the pocket where they cannot escape, or those I take out and lay on my night table by my bed, the way men do, and find them in the morning lying where I placed them before I slept. And so I am in-between the two, the culture I keep locked inside me and the culture I breathe daily. I am part of each and a claimant of neither. Though I am found bright in each corner, I am lost in translation.

Lost in Translation was first published in the literary magazine, *Dark Horses*, San Diego State University Fall 1999. It is reprinted with permission from the author.

La Heidi La Heidi
La Heidi La Heidi
La Heidi La Heidi

—Heidi Ramos—

“You think you’re all good right?
‘cuz you have a *volia* name.

Heidi? What kind of
or are

name is that for a *Mexicana*?
you a “hispanik?”

Te crees mucho, what you live on the Norside?

I bet you don’t even talk Mexicun, right?

Te puesto que no.

Heidi. Whatever. Your parents *se salen* with a
name
like that.

You were named after that girl right-

La Chirley Temple?

With the “grandfather,

grandfather.” See, I know—the one on the mountain, *Eh—no que no*.

Hey, just ‘cuz you live on the Norside don’t mean nuthin.

‘Cause you look Mexicun, but that name—*se salen tus* parents.

Hey Westside,

con safos girl.

Dale shine.

—Lauren Shaw—

I walk into the bowling alley and that familiar, oily shoe deodorizer scent fills my nostrils. The pins crash dangerously loud in my ears. Striding past the neon balls and tacky, mismatched shoes on display I'm surprised at how much comes hurtling back to me, faster than the ball flying down the lane next to me. I reach the counter and take my place in line, annoyed at the large groups ahead of me, wishing I didn't have to pick up my brother's party pamphlet. I turn and a shockingly vivid memory hits me. There they are, my old friends.

I am laughing, that loud, joyous laugh of the young. Mercedes squares her body and hurls the ball down the lane. Another gutter ball.

"You're about to bowl the perfect score. Zero! Zero! Zero!" I say these words laughing, taunting my best friend. I let out a laughing shriek when the second ball doesn't even try to hit the pins and instead nestles safely in the gutter.

"Alright, let's see what you can do," Katie says as she motions me to go. Her voice is dry and sarcastic, but somehow friendly at the same time. I run and release my ball in perfect form, my professional bowling shoes slide smoothly in the oiled wood. I watch as the ball maneuvers slowly down the lane and finally meets the pins. After the crash one pin remains.

"So close...yet SO FAR!" Stephanie and the other two shout.

I pretend to collapse in defeat and shame. And they jokingly comfort me on my tragic loss.

"It wasn't meant to be," Mercedes claims sadly as she pats my back.

Stephanie takes her stance and scores my strike. She jumps in surprise and joy. Then turns and points to me and laughs. I can't help but laugh too. We all shout our approval. And then a victory dance ensues. It is part robot and part Vanilla Ice. The lanes on either side are filled with older, middle-aged couples. They whisper and point and cluck their tongues, but we don't care. In fact, their looks and gestures spur us on. A whooping yell is added to our somewhat spastic moves. I feel myself laughing now, low and out loud. My laughter snaps me back to the present and suddenly I feel older and sadder. And I realize that the girls before me are not my friends.

These new, different girls toss their freshly highlighted hair as they suggestively sit in boys' laps and wiggle their backsides with glee, pretending they don't know the effect they have on the helpless boys. The boys in turn wrap their arms around the girls' waists and pull them close to whisper in their ears, making them giggle even more. They're the newer, more advanced version of me and my friends: Teenager Version 5.0.

The smell of bowling alley pizza suddenly makes me nauseous, but I'm rooted to the spot and I can't flee. I'm not sure why, maybe I don't want to. All thoughts of the party pamphlet I was sent to pick up have flown from my head. In my anger, my disgust, my nameless, confused emotion I concentrate hard on filling myself with the memories, anything to escape from a moment that I won't let myself run from.

My friends and I were the same age, maybe even older than these girls, and we *never* dressed like *that*. We wore comfy jeans, or even--God forbid--long shorts! Loose t-shirts, sometimes even bearing our all-girls' school logo, would obstruct our full or budding chests. If we had a few boys along they were simply friends and not the type of guys whose laps we would even want to sit in. Our years at Incarnate Word had served us well, diverting us from the trends and making us early cynics of men.

These girls look ridiculous wearing their thin, fancy clothes with the grubby, smelly, mismatched bowling shoes. They act like they rule not only the alley, but the whole world. As if sheer tank tops and low rise jeans are the key to world conquest. I'm confused by my own emotions and anger and suddenly instead of these girls or my friends I see my fifteen year old sister, Hayley.

I realize this is the reason for my unwarranted derision. I don't want Hayley to become these girls. I'm terrified that she and her friends will act the same way and others will think my thoughts, accuse her, label her, hate her. She's trapped somewhere between these girls and me. And I desperately want to save her, age her six years and keep her from my disdain, but I don't know how.

I see Hayley putting on her makeup, over applying the lip gloss and eye makeup. I stand in the doorway of our bathroom watching her. "Why are you all skanked up?" I purse my lips and wrinkle up nose and glare at her.

"Just because I'm wearing makeup doesn't mean I'm a skank," she replies. Defiance glows in her well lined hazel eyes. They meet mine through the mirror. She appraises my reflection and then rolls her eyes. "At least I don't look like you."

I focus on my reflection now. I wear jeans and old t-shirt; my feet are bare with chipped nail polish. I have nowhere to be and don't care about my appearance at the moment. But her words of disapproval anger me.

"You're right. Anyways, I should be more worried about you're friends. Which one of them is going to win Miss Pregnant Teen America?" I cock my head to one side.

She makes an alien sound of anger and pushes past me, entering her room, where I had been standing before. Then I feel guilty. Neither she nor her friends are really that bad. I'm just nervous because my sister and her friends already kiss boys and beg to go dancing. I'm not so much worried about them, more about the boys they flirt with.

She preens in her full-length mirror at the other side of the room. She adjusts her padded bra and ties a bow in her hair, the bow is green with white polka dots on it. It matches her green spaghetti strap top, which somehow fails to be revealing on her undeveloped frame. She knows I'm still appraising her. We are both silent, both pretending I'm not still there.

She gives herself one more brush of lip gloss before walking right past me and leaving the room. I follow her out and watch her sit down to watch cartoons with my brother, while she waits for her friends to pick her up and take her to the bowling alley. She is caught delicately between adult and child and I wonder if I'll actually see the crossover happen.

Humbled by my helplessness, I finally turn away from the Version 5.0 teens, only to be recaptured by several shrieks, half of delight, the others of terror. I now see that the wild gang of renegade teens has rolled two balls down the lane at the same time.

Laughter explodes out of me, unexpectedly as if from some cavern in my soul blocked by the heavy boulder of adulthood.

Only a few years ago this *had* been me and my friends. Katie's ball got lodged in the gutter, and Mercedes had the brilliant idea to throw another ball down the gutter to dislodge it, much to my and Stephanie's chagrin. This didn't work for these girls, and it certainly hadn't worked for us back then.

I look back and remember how annoyed the gutter goalie was and the clucking tongues that filled the air around as we laughed uncontrollably and tried to look apologetic. We failed miserably of course.

And in that instant of stupidity, the Version 5.0's and I are one, no different from each other regardless of age and knowledge. Yes, they have a little more make-up on and their clothes are a bit too tight, but they have that fire. That spark that keeps us young, the one I had almost let go out. I silently vow to call my friends tonight and to not be so critical of Hayley or her friends. I only hope that I can keep those promises.

Smiling, I turn and finally ask for the party pamphlet. I wonder how long I stood there mesmerized by the ghosts of my past and the harbinger of the future. I can't help laughing almost as loud as those girls when the cashier hands me the pamphlet nods his head towards them and says: "Teenagers".

Finding the Author's Chair

—Diane Gonzales Bertrand—

Not quite Grand Canyon lonely, but
purple socks with a white dress odd
as a child, I adventured with The Thunderbirds
in our mesquite branch spaceship.
I raced with Speedy Gonzales from
empty lot to the corner Mexican restaurant.

I didn't introduce the players, didn't expect
Mom to feed them at the family table.
But they snuck inside Church, and kept me
occupied during a Latin Mass. They stowed away
to California in the family station wagon,
and showed up when I was alone in shallow water.

They kept me company when my big sibs
walked faster to the library than I could.
They knelt by my chair at the short tables,
loved the same books I did. Slowly

my imaginary playmates transformed
into characters I created. Cozy in my company,
familiar to my voice, (delicious like cookie dough)
I stuck them inside fake books for school
book report assignments. From fifth grade
through university classes I wrote my best friend
into an epic of seventy-two-spirals proportion.

When did the imaginary folk go underground?
Perhaps my seventh graders or marriage vows
scared them away. Writing poems kept them peeking out,
but those dwarfs burrowed back under the hills
before I could call them by name.
Not until I spoke Motherese did they reappear.
On tiny tippy toes, at the end of Horton's nose,
riding the back of centipedes,
they returned during two a.m. feedings.

Make-believe cohorts brought dessert
to the Sesame Street jailhouse.
They flung back the doors
when I found the hidden key:
The books I read to my children
didn't have any kids like me.

My stories tumbled out page after page.
Some days when characters raced ahead,
I jogged beside them. If they rummaged
through their luggage inside my head, I waited—
Sometimes I left them hanging on a clothes line
until the wrinkles fell out. Never
did I let them free-fall without a net.

A publisher liked how my English and Spanish words
relaxed together like pals on vacation.
He found the artist to paint images, highlighting
colors of *canela* and *café con leche*.
He shot forth my *compadres*
on a paper plane we ride together,
all of us grabbing on tight.

The Creation Thingie The Creation Thingie The Creation Thingie The Creation Thingie

—Amanda King—

In the beginning, there was nothing.

That's not important, since there was also nothing *interesting* going on.

Right after there was nothing, a bowl suddenly appeared out of the nothingness.

Astrynaufff the Majestic, winged ninja philosopher and lord of all that is good and holy, or at least all that is just kinda *there*, looked upon his bowl and proclaimed, "Oh! That may be useful!" Astrynaufff then put the bowl into his toga pocket, for he was the Creator and could have a toga with pockets if he darned well pleased.

Astrynaufff went about the business of contemplating the nothingness before him. It was a problem, you see, for he was lord of all that is good, holy, and just kinda there, but he didn't feel he could properly live up to that title without anything remotely resembling matter before him. He really needed to fix that.

"I like it that way," came a voice out of the nothingness. The Penguin of Death waddled up to Astrynaufff, pulled up a bit of nothingness, and plopped himself down. "Rather calm, isn't it? I mean, with nothing there at all you've got nothing to worry about, right? No taxes, no iPods or Trekkies...."

Astrynaufff jumped in surprise at the Penguin of Death. "Hold on!" he cried. "How can you be here when all there is is nothingness? I didn't create you yet!"

The Penguin of Death, lord of all that is evil, foul, and more unpleasant than just kinda there, pulled out a candy bar and shrugged. "Well, here I am."

"And where did that candy bar come from?" exclaimed Astrynaufff. "I haven't created those either!"

The Penguin of Death waved a flipper in dismissal. "Details, details. Circular time and all that rubbish."

Astrynaufff put his hands upon his hips and pouted in a most deific manner. "Well *this* is an awkward muddle," he insisted, then pointed a godly finger at the Penguin (the first finger, you realize, not that *other* one). "I'm the Creator. I should be creating things, not you!"

The Penguin of Death finished his candy bar and tossed the wrapper to what would have been the ground had it actually been

formed. "I still think it's nicer this way, but if you insist on putting a world there, then I suppose there's no stopping you." He yawned. "Might as well give it a try, though, since I've got nothing better to do."

"Hmph!" Astrynaufff the Majestic turned his back on the Penguin so he couldn't see what he was doing. Astrynaufff pulled a balloon out of his pocket, blew it up to an amazing size, twisted it into a balloon hat, and placed it upon his head. This was to be his Celestial Thinking Cap.

Astrynaufff the Majestic wiggled his fingers, played a short game of rock-paper-scissors with himself (he lost), and clapped his hands. A dish of tiramisu appeared before him, floating lazily through the void on a small porcelain dessert plate with lovely little curly bits painted on the edges. It was good... but it wasn't very spectacular.

Astrynaufff pulled the bowl out of his pocket and dumped the tiramisu unceremoniously into it. The plate the tiramisu had rested on drifted absently off and developed into an intelligent life form.

Despite its plainness, it was no ordinary bowl that the tiramisu sat in now, but a magic crystal bowl. Surely something would happen now! Astrynaufff poked the tiramisu several times with his finger. Somewhere in another dimension, a Wal-Mart receipt shrieked in pain.

"Well? I'm waiting." The Penguin of Death waddled up behind Astrynaufff. "Loser." He popped Astrynaufff's balloon hat with a tea strainer.

Dazed by the sudden explosion, Astrynaufff dropped the magic crystal bowl. The tiramisu spilled all over the nothingness, transforming and rearranging itself into The Ground as the Penguin watched and snickered. The ladyfingers became the soft earth while the smooth creamy topping flowed into oceans. The little flaky chocolate bits quickly sprouted into trees, shrubs, fungus, and other forms of plant life. The Sky didn't want Existence to have too much fun without it, and so it left a wild game of Chinese Checkers to come join the rest of Creation several minutes later. The whole new world breathed a fragrant coffee scent.

Astrynaufff's balloon hat whizzed through the air, leaking glitter and confetti about the place. Each shining bit became a new life form: Taxidermists and Bloggers, Japanese Rock Stars and Dungeon Masters. Politicians sprang to existence, along with Jugglers and Carb Counters.

Astrynaufff the Majestic picked himself up and dusted off his toga, pockets and all. He gazed at the new world before him and gave a great laugh of pleasure. The laugh broke into a thousand pieces and each piece went skipping off in different directions and was immediately

eaten by an immobile fanged fern, gone forever and amounting to nothing.

“Oh fiddlesticks!”

Astrynauff gave the fiddlestick a good whack with the crystal bowl. The fiddlestick became the first human being, who then wandered off to begin mass-producing Hummers and contemplating his persistent headache.

“Oh bugger, he actually made the darned thing.” The Penguin crossed his flippers and shook his head, then wandered off to go corrupt something while singing “Electric Barbarella.”

“Splendid!” Astrynauff the Majestic pranced about the fresh green grass, delighting in the brightly blooming flowers and warm mid-morning-afternoonish sun. He paused in his rejoicing and contemplated his magic crystal bowl, rolling it around in his hands and watching a few crumbs dance about its shining surface.

“Now what?”

Now In This Time
Now In This Time
Now In This Time

—Abbie Cotrell—

And so my life has passed the middle,
death being nearer now than birth.
I am curious, yet wander there
for only moments at a time.
It is not fear that keeps me here, but more
a sense of finishing a work begun
before I start another.

I find this end time lighter, free
with more internal smiles than yesterday,
a kind of knowing where I've been and
watching others as they find their way.
I sense the heaviness of life and yet
it floats around me like a feather
blown by friendly winds from evening sky.

I am not blind to all that tears and rips the very life
from children, families here and far away. I am not blind.
My heart grieves with knowing that it could be different.
Why do we fight the image in the mirror, never seeing
that it is our own? When will we understand
that all are flesh and bone made from like clay,
filled with same water?

How strange this *past the middle* time becomes,
to smile through tears and feel the fullness of a heart spilled out
while carrying the weight of pain and joy together, lightened
by the knowing of it all.

My Kind of Anger
My Kind of Anger
My Kind of Anger
My Kind of Anger

—David Garza—

My father's anger.
A summer storm.
All booming thunder
and distant lightning.
Raucous Riot.
Scares you briefly,

then it's over.

My mother's anger.
A long, deep winter.
Unforgiving, unavoidable.
No use in arguing with ice.
It takes a year to announce,
and a season to thaw,

sometimes two.

My kind of anger.
A long fused bomb
placed inside myself.
A jack in the box filled with knives,
a crank which must be turned at least 99 times,
with

EXPLOSIONS

as subtle
as my mother's falling snow and

silence

as terrifying
as my father's raging tempest.

This Time, This Place This Time, This Place This Time, This Place This Time, This Place

—Emily E. Yager—

The thing about dancing is it doesn't matter how stupid you look. You just have to have a good time. Some people will tell you they need to drink to dance, but you don't. You just wait until everyone else is drunk. It's awkward for about a minute and then you realize, what the hell, *they're* not going to remember this. No one will remember your spastic jerking or your elbow knocking that girl's arm, splashing her drink on her shirt. "*¡Ay, perdón!*" You'll remember, but only to laugh about it.

This night—your last Saturday night in Spain. You have four days until departure, each one packed with plans. You haven't yet admitted to yourself that you can't fit everything in. The same goes for your suitcase, but you're still in the cramming phase. You arrive at the club early—that means midnight. It's just you and the people you came with, maybe a stray Spaniard here or there, but mostly Americans from your school. You leave your jacket and purse at the coat-check, because it's free and after four months, you've learned what to bring and what to leave at home. In your purse are your student I.D., three euros (in coins), your cell phone, a phone card, and the laminated copy of your passport and visa (they told you to carry this with you at all times). Just before handing the purse over, you change your mind and take your cell phone out. You squeeze it into the front pocket of your jeans. After a couple of songs you'll forget that it's there, and you can relax knowing that it won't be stolen by the shady girl working the coat-check.

For the next two hours, it's just you and your friends in the deserted club. The music's playing and the lights are spinning, but no one's dancing. The dance floor's too exposed.

"Why did we get here so early?" you ask.

"Free drinks!" comes the answer.

Finally around two the club starts to fill up. You and your friends move to the dance floor while the Spanish kids hit up the bar.

It's packed now. Some guy is hitting on you—you think. His name is Pedro, and he looks at least twenty-seven—too old for you. He's wearing a plaid shirt and pressed jeans, an outfit that looks like it could be in a Sears catalog, circa 1992. When he smiles, you notice he has wrinkles under his eyes and his teeth overlap on the bottom. He's stroking your arm and trying to hold your hand.

"Your skin is so smooth, so smooth," he keeps telling you in Spanish. What a weird compliment. The pessimistic voice in your head tells you he's reaching for something to say because you're not that great looking. But look at him.

He leans in close to talk into your ear. The music is loud, everyone around you is talking. You keep having to ask "*¿Cómo?* What?" because even after all your Spanish classes, you still can't carry on a conversation, at least, not with this noise. It doesn't help that he speaks almost entirely in slang.

According to him, your friend Carrie Beth is "*¿Como una cabra!* Like a goat!" and you are trying to figure out what that means. Maybe it means she's a good dancer? But you look at your friend who dances with all the coordination of a drunk person. She's swinging around on someone's arm, like a square dancer. She dances worse than you do. "*¡Ella está loca!*" he says and laughs. That explains it.

He's still rubbing your arm, and it's starting to creep you out.

"I came here with my friends," you tell him, trying to let him down gently. It comes out with all the fluidity of a Spanish textbook exercise, "I'm going to go dance with my friends now. See you later."

You turn away, pushing into the crowd. It's all eyes seeking out eyes, arms seeking out arms. Ten minutes later, there's some other guy tugging on your arm, introducing himself and touching his left cheek to your left cheek, then his right to your right. This custom—the two kisses—was weird when you got here four months ago, then it was okay for a while, but now it is weird again. You miss your personal space. Before you can pull away he's asking you a question.

"Where are you from?" As if it isn't obvious with that accent of yours and the clothes you are wearing. You tell him. Now he wants to know what state. What state? As if you had ever met someone from the Netherlands, or Italy, or Romania, and would think to ask, "Which province? Which city?" because you don't know one from the other.

"*Tejas*" you say hesitantly, not wanting to get into something political. With your Spanish you'll have to resort to some over-simplified defense: "*Ah, sí, el presidente. No me gusta,*" or worse, "*No es mi amigo.*" But no. He mentions another name, one you can't recognize through his accent. Is he speaking in English or Spanish now? The music is blasting. He's waiting for your reaction. You just shrug, storing the syllables in your mind. Tomorrow, sipping on pineapple juice at breakfast, it will hit you, did he say "Chuck Norris"? Yes. That is exactly what he had said. "*¡Walker, Texas Ranger!*" As if you'd ever seen that show.

The song fades out as the next one fades in. For a few seconds, the beats clash. The DJ is not so good. You escape from the boy with the Chuck Norris obsession to find your friends again. It's time to drop it like it's hot. Funny how something can be in your own language and you're not even sure what it means exactly. How would that translate into Spanish? *Suéltalo? Deja caerlo... como está caliente?* No idea. Angela will know. You stand on your toes to see over the heads. You can feel the curve of your toes creasing your leather boots, the ones you bought in the U.S., thinking they looked like something a stylish Spanish woman would wear. You spot Angela dancing, her arms wrapped around Pedro's neck. That's *just* like her! Calm down. Remember, you wanted him to leave you alone.

Now you see some other students from your school, people you never really got to know. Then you see one of the girls you came with and ask her if she's seen X, Y, and Z.

"They're walking Tara home, she got sick," your friend explains.

"Are they coming back?"

Of course they're coming back. Who would miss this night?

The dancing has made you tired, but the feeling is not entirely unpleasant. It's like being elastic. You keep dancing to delay the soreness. A glance at your watch shows it's four in the morning. You contemplate staying, you contemplate going, and decide that you are almost ready to go.

"One more song!" your friends plead. Everyone wants to stay for one more song, so you wait. But one song isn't enough. Two songs, three songs, four songs aren't enough, just like four months aren't enough. At a quarter to five, you and Carrie Beth and Norah hand your slips of paper to the coat-check girl. She hands you your purse and your jacket; everything is still there. The bouncers hold the door open for the three of you and wish you a good night. Outside, Angela and Pedro are talking along the wall. Introductions are shuffled around, then you walk away from the club alone. Carrie Beth and Norah live a few blocks away. You live in the opposite direction, towards the train station.

Halfway between the club and the cathedral, a guy hollers after you, "Hey! *Guapa*, come talk to me!" Normally, you would give him the cold shoulder, but tonight you try to be nice. What does an explanation cost you? From half a block away you call out, "I'm sorry! I'm going home now! Good night!"

Walking along the streets, your legs are rusty springs about to snap. You feel the rounded cobblestones pressing back against the soles of your boots. It feels like walking barefoot. You pass the shops on the

main street, turn a corner, and pass the convent, walking faster where the shadows overlap and there are no street lamps. You hear the faint, disquieting sound of a man relieving himself in an alley. This used to disgust you... ok, it still disgusts you. At Vía Complutense, you wait for the crosswalk sign to change. The hourly bus coming in from Madrid passes up the stop. No one's getting off here.

You turn down your street. There is the slightest chill in the air, nothing like the cold that greeted you at the airport four months ago. Now all you have left are four days, three euros in your purse, and two hours on your phone card. You decide to surprise your boyfriend back home with a phone call, because it is only ten where he is. It gives you an excuse to enjoy the breeze since you don't get reception inside anyway, and these things just make sense at five in the morning. You make the call. Sitting on the steps outside your apartment, a man stops to ask you if everything is okay. You have been holding back tears because you miss your boyfriend. "You see, I'm very gentlemanly," the man says. (It sounds better in Spanish.) You put your phone to your shoulder and thank the man. This time, your Spanish does not fail you: "Oh, everything's fine. I live nearby, thanks."

You know you'll be seeing your boyfriend soon, but that doesn't seem real now. Right now you must tell him goodbye, goodbye from Spain—for the last time, you tell yourself, but you don't believe it. The sky is pink. There is enough light to see the glint of your keys at the bottom of your purse. You turn the key in the lock and shut the door so it doesn't slam. You have to walk on the balls of your feet to keep your boots from echoing in the hall. You climb the stairs to your host family's apartment. The smell of pork cutlets from last night's dinner lingers, the plush rug is a relief to your feet. You tip-toe into your room and start to undress for bed, hanging your clothes to air out the cigarette smell. You can still get five hours of sleep and be up by noon, you think, pulling the covers over your shoulders and sinking into the mattress. Just think: in four days, you will be on a plane, leaving all this behind. But right now, for this time, this little slice of time you have left, you are here, in this place, and you have never felt more at home.

Amazing Amazing Amazing

—Luis A. Cortez—

He widens his stance to let the tailor measure. The slacks he has ordered will be ready next Thursday. Taking the ticket from the clerk, he puts on his sunglasses, hoists his packages, and bursts out onto the sidewalk and into his day.

Larry (filing the remainder of the stub): He's got it altogether.

Vince (throwing the tape over his shoulder): Nicest guy you could ever work for.

Tony (latching onto his suspenders): When I looked like that...

They stand in silence but their thoughts run on like a river. One desires to be like him, the other models himself on him and the third remembers being just like him.

A bounce in his step and a click on the pavement, he moves with a song in his ear. Trailing an unseen rollercoaster, a spin with his bags in hand, he wears his two-tone glasses, baby blue pin-striped shirt open, and jeans snug. He moves to his own private dance. With a beep of the red Miata, he's off on the road without a care in the world.

Sylvester (stirring sugar into his coffee): "Look at him. He's so beautiful."

Brandon (piercing his grapefruit): "How does he do it?"

Evan (dropping the paper onto his lap): "It must be a gift. No one's that lucky."

They sit and watch. They sit and dream of a life so carefree perched on a New York apartment balcony, in bathrobes that are frayed at the edges, with designer curtains that hide cracks in the walls.

Yet he continues. The drive down the boulevard, wind swept hair, jittering collar, the frolic of the drive is reminiscent of the many nights in the dance club. He passes the cars with ease. The engine roars with life but he doesn't pay attention to what's in front of him, his eyes are off in the distant, sunlight bouncing off the shades.

Linda (steering through the lane): "It's amazing how he radiates."

Carla (struggling for a better a look): "Truly a man."

Marco (shrugging off the admiration): "Too good to be true. He's hiding something."

They sit and watch. As he passes by, they drive alongside him in a '78 Chevy. A classic, some say, but the paint rolls in waves and peels back in some places. A headlight is out but that's not damage that's character. The classic with character trying to keep up with the Miata on a road that leads to the sun.

Off the bridge, he drives into the parking lot. He smells the polluted air and he smiles. Thirty white horses, all in a row. With a magical valley that appears only when the horses are present, his face is sculpted from the stuff of legends. Harnessing the brow of Sampson, bearing the lips of Cleopatra, gazing through the eyes of Montezuma, he glides into the café. With the finesse of Grace Kelly, the poise of Fred Astaire, he attracts all the attention.

Jacob (jerking the coffee handle): "Why can't I be like him? Is it in the genes?"

Keira (placing cookies on the rack): "Yeah, in his jeans."

Mel (with cleaning rags in hand): "But there's more to it than that. He's looking for something too."

Wiping the counter, they gawk. With sugar-laced dreams of success amid the torrid swirls of a coffee and cream audience, they are the undiscovered spoon that all revolve around. One is a writer but can't get past the first page. Another is a dancer who never gets picked; the third, an actor who moves from audition to audition. Yet despite their trials they are the happiest they've been in a long time but that's not on their minds right now. They wipe the counter with gray towels and polish the mirrors of their imagination and see themselves approaching the counter.

He pays for the latté and leaves as quickly as he entered. He crosses the street into the flower shop. He knows exactly where to go. Bundles of reds, blues, and yellows. He's been here before. He chooses the vase. He coordinates the stones. No detail left unnoticed. His large hands are deft at what they do. He arranges the spray of colors himself. He is the particular type.

Shelia (adjusting her skirt): "Why couldn't all men be like that?"

Javier (sweeping the floor): "He's a pretty boy."

Maggie (putting her items on the counter) :“Yeah, pretty boys like other pretty boys.”

Once a month on the first Tuesday, Shelia makes an extra effort to appear extra nice. He smiles back. She makes every effort to be helpful—much to the dismay of everyone else that she ignores. Javier leans on his broom and finds ways to look in his direction without directly looking at him while Maggie hopes nobody notices the bruised cheek and the limp in her step. Unlike Shelia, she convinces herself that we all must settle for what we can get.

He rushes out the door, leaving the bell chime to mark his exit. Dodging the cars, he crosses into the park where a silent crowd waits for him. Seated in rows, he makes his way. Birds sing lamentations and he can only dream of yesterday. He had never thought he'd be here so soon but at last he arrives. He stands in front of the plot. He looks down to see the headstone. He takes off the glasses to reveal red rimmed eyes—worn from the constant tears that flowed all day. He places the flowers on the grave marked, “Jenny Albright: Loving Daughter and Wife.” As he faces the crowd, he sees other headstones next to Jenny's.

Marina (1901-1984): “Her love set her free.”

Frederick (1882-1941): “Celebrate Love.”

Juana (untimely in 1968): “Love is Amazing.”

Word Words Wo Words Words ds Words ds

—William V. Tam—

The host of letters is to action bound;
Promethean light captured in prison bars
Of ink-stroke, netting onto page
Fury of legend, the cacophony of sound
Through war's declaration made.
We are the priests of the two-edged tongue;
Brandishing typeface like pitchforks.
But we--the few--those that would
Light torches to read a book
Rather than torch them in turn,
Vie to imprison ignorance's children,
Press their greedy lips back into Pandora's
Curse'd chest and seal the lid by
The fire and rage of our own words-
Syllable by syllable carving a warding sigil
With the ink-stroke cage
that our letters have made.

I lived in Mexico for Ten Years
I lived in Mexico for Ten Years
I lived in Mexico for Ten Years
I lived in Mexico for Ten Years

—Shelem Estrada—

Aqui me tienen
Stuck *en medio*
Of two *mundos*
Trying to excuse
Myself *cuando*
I can't remember
How to say *sobre*
In English or
Como se dice
Folder *en español*
Siempre looking
For excuses
Of *porque no e*
Visto the movie
"Pretty woman"
Y como I saw
the *pitufos*
En lugar de Los
Smurfs when I was
Apenas una
Niña living *en*
México For *diez*
Years *tratando de*
aprender English
porque vivia
stuck *en medio de*
la border *y*
escuchando
constantly *a la*
gente speaking
en ingles and now
me doy cuenta
that I miss *mi*
idioma and land
tratando to get

used to living *en*
los estados
unidos for ten
more years

Tonight I Can Write The Saddest Lines:

(in homage of Pablo Neruda)

—David Gomez—

Tonight I can write the saddest lines, for example
"I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too."
I cannot or could not resist the sweet kiss
And depths of which,
Star gazing through your constellations
I found myself drifting...
 Only slowly, then faster from your arms.
I tried holding on, thinking it was you who fell out of love all along.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines,
She loved me and believed in me, I could only deceive these-feelings.
I convinced myself that the moonlight reflected ultraviolet—
Light that blinded my perspective.
On nights like this, I held you in my arms; we exchanged
Dreams, I exchanged half-hearted promises.
Promises I knew I could not commit to—or subject to...
The subject too has changed in my life, so have the chapters.
I have shelved a love like no other—a UFO: an
Unidentified Feeling One cannot hide.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines,
You loved me, trusted me, and I disrespected you.
If you were conniving, it would be different. If
you did not give so blindly, it would be different—
I would be different—
My feelings would not have allowed comet's to intrigue me,
I would not have deceived these...
—Feelings.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines
Because she loved me, unconditionally,
And I only seasonally felt, reasonably inclined
to display my love and affection.
I am convinced that I have tainted a sacred, ancient ritual;
No longer am I convinced to know what True love is...

True love is unconditional, respect, blinded trust,
promised and fulfilled dreams, honesty,
HONESTLY...

Tonight I write the saddest lines
I held true love planted in my heart and ripped its roots;
Did not water its soil, deprived it of sunlight;
Fastened its noose, so tight, that...

Tonight I recite the saddest lines
"I love her, only she loves another."

Static Cling Static Cling Static Cling

—Deborah Bosworth Campbell—

When next time comes will I hear you calling?
For my sake Divine dissent declined release before the tests
To annul death's precluded protection of cherished innocence.
Dying blood cries echoes of Cain's fallen first-fruits

The cruel cut lump bows between double indemnity,
Another double surgery while threat was nonbenign.
Ins and outs diverted within the signs of hidden betrayals.
Jubilee's unknown compulsion transformed blue Sabbath cord.

Seeded seeking spirit with peril's advancing onslaught,
Till Sennacharib's sudden succumb slinks elsewhere.
Hushed husband no more to call "master" wished
Guilt removed on victory's eternal redemption.

As prayer cord wrapped Purple bruise to public identity,
Prophet call relates above to not beyond commitment.
Law cannot compromise Code's holy integration.
Wisdom forsakes solo presumption and communal wrath.

Vision in agony's despair; awake to no escape.
Word whips scourge future to forever berate.
And crown of thorn's blood sacrifice for other.
Each prepared a gift of sorrowful mystery.

Three times opened doors witnessed Your beckon.
"Here I am, Lord" the verbal refrain to Your Ends.
Amid wonder, delay, and unassuming means:
Amen submitted to feel again rejection.

Three retreats aligned unclear vision to You.
Contingency transcending human strategy,
Dared false insecurity in Your identity,
Tripping walk-talk while under your cloak.

~~Abortion~~ A Mother's Exception

—Damien Ramirez—

Abortion, it is not acceptable
Unless...
Unless the mother was raped,
Unless the child might not be happy,
Unless the child might suffer,
Unless the child will be unhealthy,
Unless it was incest.

Failure to raise a child, it is not acceptable
Unless...
Unless she has no family to support her,
Unless there is no biological father to help her,
Unless she has no education,
Unless she can't speak the primary language of her new country,
Unless she has no time.

Failure to put your child through college, it is not acceptable
Unless...
Unless the parents are a minority,
Unless the parents received no more than a grade school education,
Unless the parents can't afford to pay for college,
Unless your child failed a grade in high school,
Unless your child was truant for a year.

It was acceptable
for her to give up,
but
she made an exception.
She worked hard for me.

Membership card claims "All are called to sainthood".
Woe before park hastened depart to inhibit standard satisfaction.
How would hidden face from self hold burning flame?
Revirgined cord of sacrament mocks blemished Binding.

Would humility's effort proxy the object of desire to
Succumb to passion's near reward without effort or regret?
Loyal friendship covenant takes back in love
Independent reflection of stifled desire.

Scents of Swirling Danger

—Diane Gonzales Bertrand—

“You must hide. Now!” Ramon pushed Catarina out of his way.

She caught the table edge behind her, her legs slipping over the polished stone floor. She fell to one knee. “Ramon—I’m sorry—so sorry.” But she knew apologies wouldn’t save either of them. She stood up slowly. Her legs trembled within the folds of her patched skirt. He had turned his attention towards the cabinet where their father had once kept his collection of pistols and rifles, smooth polished weapons that he had collected with pride since he was a boy. Each time in the past year that Ramon had to sell one weapon for food, their father had cried and run from the house. He had found friends to buy him tequila, to help him forget how true revolution starts the day a son disrespects his father.

Ramon pulled out a long pistol, the last one of value in the cabinet. “What are you going to do?” Catarina reached again for her brother’s arm and squeezed it tightly. She didn’t want to be separated from him. They had to stay together. There was no one left now but the two of them.

“Catarina, go! They will come for you!” Again he pushed her away. This time the cold metal of the pistol grazed her arm, made her shiver and cry.

“I cannot leave you, Ramon.”

“You must hide. They might kill me, but what happens to you will be worse. Go! Catarina, you must go!” Ramon turned his head as if he heard something suspicious. “Find a place to hide. I think I hear voices.” Catarina kissed his face before he pushed her away. They had talked of hiding places before, but that was before her friends had been found in the cellar and dragged before a firing squad. She had heard stories of women hiding under the dirty mounds of a chicken coop, hiding between wall panels, even cutting their hair and dressing like men. What could she do to protect herself?

She ran through the house, among rooms she had scampered through as a child, carefree and innocent. She would hide behind tall plants or under carved tables. She remembered how Ramon and their sister Amelia would call out, “Where are you little cat?” And Catarina would meow and giggle. Everyone would laugh together and make cat

sounds so loud their mother would come in and threaten to swat them all with her shoe if they didn't stop.

Catarina always thought her mother's room was the best place to hide except her mother didn't want them to play there. Still, as a child, she had often hidden under the carved wooden frame of the feather bed and listened while her mother sang pretty songs and brushed her beautiful black hair. Several times the maid found Catarina napping against her mother's perfumed dresses inside the tall clothes cabinet. On rainy days, Catarina liked to hide among her mother's things and dream of becoming just like her.

Frightful danger made Catarina want to run to her mother's room today, but no childhood hiding places could protect her from angry soldiers tearing through houses, looking for citizens who changed from allies to enemies on the whim of the officials in power.

How could she have acted so foolish? She had felt too confident her family's name would keep them safe. This morning Catarina mentioned it to that rude soldier that stopped her, believing he would show her respect and let her pass. How could she know such prideful behavior would provoke soldiers to invade her neighborhood?

What would happen to Ramon? What would happen to her? Where could she hide? Perhaps her father's room, further back in the house, might provide refuge.

Bees of fear swarmed between her breasts as she opened the door to her father's bedroom, and then locked it behind her. Shadows simmered through the thin, drawn curtains, bathing the room in a purple haze. The bed frame was empty with no mattress or any covers to hide her trembling body. Then she saw what option stood before her. It was the only place in the whole house that the soldiers might leave alone. Catarina raised the lid on the long, cedar coffin. It smelled like fresh cut trees that had filled the house with the scent of holiday parties. How they had laughed and danced at those parties—Catarina with her father—twirling and spinning in circles around the other dancers. She'd trip over him, but he'd catch her and twirl her off her feet until she flew through the air and the scene blurred into colorful candles and cinnamon smells, sounds of glass tinkling, with her family celebrating in laughing voices.

Angry curses echoed in the house, shredding her memories. Catarina's hand tightened on the lid of the coffin. She stared inside it. It looked deep and wide, and its contents were not so broad that she wouldn't have room inside. It was the only place left to hide from the

soldiers. She heard them stomping through the house, yelling for traitors, breaking glass, and knocking over furniture.

Smells of brandy and soap filled her nose as she swung one leg over the side and pushed herself over. She swallowed the urge to vomit, to scream, to cry for her father to help her escape.

Quickly she lifted her other leg over the edge of the cedar box. At the sounds of splintering wood and banging of guns near the bedroom door, Catarina moved faster.

She shook without knowing whether she feared the soldiers about to crash through the door or the sad, blue face of her father as he rested under her in the coffin. She didn't dwell on the answer as she pulled the lid closed on top of them both.

In the black cave that absorbed them, she stopped breathing. She rested her face against the freezing curve of her father's neck and dropped her arm across his body.

Dance with me, Pápi, she whispered as the bedroom door crashed open. Yelling voices filled the room, her eyes shut tight against them. One more time, could her father lift her off the face of the earth into a blur of happy colors and sounds?

Catarina clamped her fingers tight to his jacket. She sucked the insides of her cheek to keep from crying as the horrors inside the box and the danger outside it crept around her body like a smelly, wet cloak. Muffled voices seemed to echo through the wood. Would they look inside the coffin? Would they find a scared girl clinging to her father for protection?

She froze when something slammed down on the lid. Silent tears slipped down her face. The last few months of her father's life he had been a broken man, robbed of his pride and respect. His old friends shunned him, and his new friends only liked him drunk. No one wanted his skills. He felt defeated when Catarina had to go to work so they could eat because Ramon's salary was used for high taxes on the house. What had happened to the man who said, "Protecting my family is my duty, my life"?

It seemed as if each soldier who was in the room had to hit the coffin. Why, to ward off his own death? She counted five hits, felt footsteps around her. Her heartbeat matched each noise, pound for sound. She prayed in desperation that the men would respect the dead; leave her father with his death and Catarina with her life.

Then, silence. Silence like a single holy candle burning in an empty church; like a sinner's refection before speaking the first words of penance inside a confession box.

Catarina uncurled her fingers, allowing them to rest against her father's woven jacket. She felt a tiny hole near his pocket. She traced the stitching where she had mended another hole near the lapel. She expelled one slow breath, then another, easing her mind into safety.

From behind her shoulder, dim light filtered inside the coffin.

"Little Cat, are you here?" Her brother's whisper slipped inside the tight space.

"Ramon." Her voice embraced his name.

"The soldiers are gone. It's safe—for now."

The lid lifted up, and her brother's strong arms pulled her away from the dead body of their father. "Of all places—it must have been awful to hide there."

Catarina stood beside the coffin. She glanced down at the withered face of her father. She shook her head, knowing that her father had protected her for the last time, just as he had promised, as was his duty, his life.

The Shampoo Lady

—Edgar A. Alanis—

She sold home-made shampoos in front of her apartment building for at least three years. The old lady was very light-skinned and spoke with a Norwegian accent. In her attempts to sell her products, she would neatly arrange her different sized bottles on a small, wooden table that seemed to sway in the wind. Everyday, she would wear the same red shirt that looked as if she had found it in a dumpster. Her wrinkled face gave me the impression that she was around seventy years old, but she still had the strength to walk and carry her small table and shampoos from her apartment everyday.

Unlikely as it seemed, we both sold products to make a living. I used to work at a department store four blocks away from my apartment. It had started out as a temporary job while I saved enough money to get a college degree, but I ended up working there for more than five years.

Everyday, coming to and from work, I began to notice her more and more. She became almost like my child. Day after day, I had to make sure that she was safe. Selling shampoos on the rough streets of Harlem wasn't necessarily the safest place. The tall, rusty apartment buildings had broken doors and taped-up windows. Graffiti colored the walls of the alley ways where stray dogs scavenged for food.

My apartment was less than half a block away from the shampoo lady, and I could see her working from my bedroom window. Older ladies that walked by to investigate her shampoos would more than likely buy two or three.

"Good shampoo. Make your hair stronger and pretty," she would say to her customers. "Better than store."

I would stare out of my window and would get lost in her work. She would raise a bottle into the air while she lured customers with the other. It was hard not to envision her as a child playing with brothers or sisters in a distant land. Her life was something foreign to me, and yet—I felt a strong connection with her.

The strenuous, hard work, the risks she must have taken to get here reminded me of my own past. The strife to make a living reminded me of my parents, when we came from Puerto Rico in 1981. I was only ten years old and life already seemed like a bad game we just couldn't win; moving to America seemed like the only answer.

It'd be nearly 6:15 and the shampoo lady would still have her shampoos out. The moon was visible as the sun sunk away into the gray earth. She would normally pack up when it was completely dark, with only the street lamps to give her light. When I'd watch, I could see her silhouette packing bottles into cardboard boxes. She wasn't afraid of the night, almost as if she knew she was completely shielded from its dangers.

As much as I observed her, I never saw her as a poor immigrant trying to make a living. Just from passing her by, I could see the wisdom that radiated from her eyes, her knowledge much more valuable than anything material. Her weathered hands told a story about struggles and pain. Each scar, each finger told me what kind of life she had lived. Her life was something I had known, something I had experienced, even though I hid it with fashion clothes and expensive jewelry.

After several weeks, I had noticed that the old lady's routine would remain the same almost everyday. There were days when she would stay in her apartment on account of bad weather. But when she didn't set her table on bright, sunny days, my thoughts would consume with worry and fear. I'd worry that she was sick, or was in need of help. But I would stay inside my own apartment, consumed in my own world, and do nothing.

The shampoos of the shampoo lady seemed like they were a part of her. A part that if removed would make her incomplete. She fused her life into her product. She probably worked hard mixing the ingredients and bottling the liquid, a skill her parents might have taught her.

It was the second week of August when I had invited several of my co-workers to my apartment for an evening of food and drinks. I tried to impress them with expensive wine and fine food.

"I'm so glad your apartment isn't too far from here," said Joanna, "It beats paying for a cab."

Joanna tossed her hair as we crossed the first intersection from work. The girls and I walked three blocks, and could see the shampoo lady in the distance. As we approached her, I could see the stares my friends were giving her as she attempted to sell us her shampoos.

"No that's okay," said Lucy with an angry look.

"Shampoo good for your pretty blonde hair," said the shampoo lady.

"I get mine from real stores," answered Lucy as she walked.

"Okay, maybe next time," the old lady answered back.

I could hear the sorrow in the old lady's voice for another lost

customer. My mind quickly tried to get rid of such thoughts.

In the apartment, conversation about men and work inhabited the time. We lounged in the living room, sitting on couches I had tried to pass off as leather. We drank our wine and ate cheeses with special cheese knives. Holding a glass of champagne, Joanna looked out of the living room window and noticed the shampoo lady packing away her products. I knew because the sun had just set.

"Can you believe that old lady? What is she, crazy? She actually thinks she's going to sell that junk."

"I know, like get a real job," said Lucy as she took a sip from her glass.

"Don't be stupid," I said, "she's much too old to get a job. Why don't you leave her alone?"

The conversation had turned awkward. I hadn't noticed that I had defended the old lady. My friends looked at me like I was somebody different.

"What's wrong, Julia? You're usually the first one to say something mean about other people," said Joanna laughing.

I took Joanna's comment harshly because I knew it was true. The mood had changed entirely, and the girls decided to leave. I knew they were thinking that they would rather be somewhere else, and I was glad that they were leaving.

After they had left, I went into my bedroom and looked out of the window, tossing the brown curtains for a better look. I saw the shampoo lady carrying her boxes into her apartment, her gray hair tossing in the wind. Secretly I hoped she had managed to make a lot of money.

Darkness had once again inhabited the world, and regret and sorrow filled me as I went to bed that night. I felt sympathy for the old lady because she deserved much better. I envisioned her wrinkled face, and I felt regret because I didn't help her, just as I had wished that someone would have helped my family fifteen years ago.

Thoughts of my past and of the old woman's life consumed my mind at work the next day. Distracted from my duties, I asked to leave early from work. I walked with an eager pace, feeling the chilly breeze of the early winter. I wrapped my scarf around my neck and could see the old lady two blocks away. As I was getting closer to the old lady, I could see her holding shampoos in both hands. Birds sang and frolicked with the swaying branches of the trees. I had arrived at her table. Today would be different.

"Do you want to buy shampoo," she said, "They're very, very good."

"How much are they?" I asked.

"Only three dollars," she said.

I reached into my purse and handed her nine dollars.

"Give me three."

The old woman gathered up three bottles, placed them in a brown, paper bag and handed it to me. She took my nine dollars and placed them in a black box.

"I'm Julia," I said. "I live in those apartments right there. What is your name?"

The old woman looked up at me with surprise, as if taken aback by my question. She gave a small smile and said, "I'm Margrethe. Very nice to meet you."

We shook hands in mid-air and smiled at each other.

"You know, you and I have a lot in common," I said, knowing that her life would no longer be a mystery to me.

Lately
Lately
Lately

—Anissa Velez—

Lately, for no particular reason,
I've been thinking about Robert
And myself, older with strands of gray hair

Living on different blocks in San Antonio
He will father children, at least two
With a wife whose beauty I will never compare to

Gently make love to her night after night
and occasionally in the morning while
rays of sunlight slowly devour darkness

Study the pages of a centuries-old
philosopher whose books he first read
at the suggestion of a close friend

Me?
I'll teach all the important names
Who appear to have said it all

To students who doodle
hearts, smiley faces, band names
onto blank notebook pages

Night after night slip into a still bed,
frigid sheets. Perhaps in the morning
I'll scribble a few lines of poetry.

Keeping Watch Keeping Watch Keeping Watch

—Dan Lupo—

I was out one night in
The still deep green of my manicured back yard
Hugging myself against the midnight chill
Keeping watch as did those shepherds, lo
On ancient hillside crags: weary, hungry, keen-eyed
For some unseen sign of life.

I scanned the canyon past my yard
And watched memories like sheep graze lazily down
Nibbling bitter tufts of fresh shame,
Gnawing raw roots of regret, stalks of old scars.
The faceless sky filled my black yard
And the bleak canyon below
With dark.

A piercing light appeared and
Neither squint nor palm-pressed eyes allayed the pain.
My eyes on fire I cursed and stumbled blind to find the switch
To kill the motion-triggered lights installed that day to ward away
Intruders, vagrants, and any unseen signs of life.

At last I found the flagrant switch and flipped it off
But somehow light yet breached my forearm dam
And seemed to bleach my burning eyes. Frantic
Up-and-down-and-up-and-down I flicked the switch
A panicked code clicking quick for help to cease
The searing pain until at last I prayed Dear God
PLEASE!

The pain stopped. Relieved, I raised my lids in
Infinitesimal increments, and when again I could see
I realized only pain had ceased, not light. Confused
I scanned the roofline but no bulb burned
In the floodlight sockets. I sought the plug
But it lay limp, powerless beneath its outlet.
I spun around and wild-eyed the sky to find behind

My head, high above me deep within me
A star aglow — bright beyond all imagining.

It was then a path appeared I'd never known was there
Undulating down the darkened canyon
Like a black river made newly white by full moon light.
My eyes trailed its meandering to the dim horizon;
There, two trees crossed,
Beckoning with outstretched arms.

I Will Carry You

—Mary King—

Listen to my voice. Not with your ears, child. You can't hear me with them. Stay quiet. Do not call for your companions. They will not hear me. I am speaking to you, and my words are for you. You can pretend not to hear me.

You can sit and turn away, but I will speak, because you are hearing everything I say.

You can think you are ignoring me, but you cannot help but do other wise. Turn yourself around, child, and listen to my voice.

Look at my face. Not with your eyes, child. You can't see me with them. I can choose to have a face that human eyes can see, but I shall not show it to you.

You must learn that the visible is not all that makes up the world. See, you have found me now, even though I am not tangible. You have more than one set of eyes, and some see more clearly than others. Open your eyes, child, and look at my face.

Trust in me. I cannot give you a reason why, child, that you could not reason away.

But, remember this: You will base your reasoning upon things you hear and see,

Things you cannot always believe. I can show you how to truly hear and see. You must put all your faith in me. It is not mine to keep. I shall take it away, And give it to the keeper of my own faith, whom I know to be most worthy. Take that risk, child, and trust in me.

Believe in me. Even if you do not, child, I shall continue to exist. Once man did not believe in the farthest of planets and stars, yet there they were.

So also am I.

If you should choose to deny me, I shall wait for your return.

Be it an hour or a lifetime, I shall be patient and wait.

Believe in me, because I believe in you.

Just like my patience, my belief shall not waver.

Even if you can't believe in yourself, I shall always believe in you.

During those times you must follow me closely.
Follow my instructions, child, and believe in me.

Take my wings, child. I don't need them to fly.
I have them to give them to you. I am by your side.
See, I can hold you up until you learn to use them. I am stronger than I look.
I am light, I am quick. If you fall, I shall catch you.
Lean on me. I can bear both my weight and yours, and many more besides.
Know that you can trust me. I live to be your guide.
Use your aide, child, and take my wings.

Listen to my voice. Look at my face.
Trust in me. Believe in me.
Take my wings, and give me your hand, child.
My name is Sariel. I will carry you.

Free Play Free Play Free Play

—Amber Nicole Day—

Words dance across the page
In cadence with the mood.
Sometimes a slow waltz,
And sometimes a hurried fox trot or rumba.
With each form of dance
Comes separate images and thoughts.
The mind's improvisation is fascinating
As it struggles to find the right steps.
We use these steps, these building blocks,
To build our dance.

Poetry is dance.
It's muse is life.
Words are jazz and music;
More than musical notes.
Each one is unique every time.
They are woven together;
Molded gently, though sometimes not so gently,
Into a form, an image, a line.

Surrender to the muse.
Patience yields fruit.
The vine of knowledge prospers.
The heart of emotion flourishes.
Thoughts have a chance to arrange themselves.
The urge to create flows
From our open minds.
Transform into another self, full of love and feeling.
Be your own creation.

If you are going to dance,
Do it with style.
Let the quality of your steps
Make a perfect routine.
Let your jazz become the music of your voice, the manifestation of a dream.
Don't censor your soul.

Don't just dance in one place.
Dance everywhere you can.
Dance where you wouldn't normally before.
You can dance in any place.
The world is a dance floor.
Dance to live.
Dance for life!
Realize what has been there all along; reach out for the flying dream.
It's all free play.

For Sister Ann

(who came late in life to her painting)

—Abbie Cotrell—

There, in the garden, the green
had sustained them.

They had come to depend on its
strength and resilience to carry them through

like strong faith in the face of wearing winds,
sheltering bough for all.

Then one day (no one knows just when.)
the bloom appeared.

The blossom was single, the color intense,
pure joy!

After, like dew dropped by the dawn,
the colors came forth in profusion,

gentle pinks, brilliant yellows, sweet orange,
vermilion reds to make the heart sing

and blues gathered fresh
from the sky,

all colors of love sown from before
into soil now tended with care.

Breathless we watch
as the beauty unfolds

from miracle palette of body
and soul onto new canvas

For all to behold.

All This Clutter All This Clutter All This Clutter

—Angela Mercedes Becerra—

Posters and lamps
Books, newspapers
Post-its and dead plants
Bookshelves curving with anonymous papers
Glasses and blank CDs
Bits of notes and receipts
Candles and wiring
Memories and fish food
Change, deadlines
Quotes and unfinished book reviews
Loneliness, statuettes
Postcards and regrets
Calendars, prejudices
Insecurities and grudges
Hopes and unmet ambitions
Ties and old friendships
Faces, names, places, curses, races, sobs,
sighs, wrongs, favors, lusts, leavings,
comings, chases, crazes all sorts of mazes
and words that should have been thoughts...
After all that work
filling and hanging
All I want
is white walls and empty spaces.

Why do I move
Why do I move
Why do I move
Why do I move
Why do I move

—Matt Scruggs—

Why do I move?
To keep things going?
To keep things whole?
NO
I do not move.
The universe moves
I am still
I watch the world pass around me
Like the small blonde woman in the large SUV that cuts you off
In traffic and parks in the handicapped
Space,
I am the center of the universe
Maybe you are not in my universe
Maybe you are in yours
Maybe we're all in the blonde woman's
According to her rear window
Her children do tae kwon do

Maybe we are all on someone's rear window

Maybe there is no window

Sometimes it feels like there are two, squeezing us flat in hard times.
One always breaks, though.
Maybe both break
And we are just random stickers floating
Looking for something to attach to

So we don't feel lonely
I am my own window
The highway runs itself under my car
I
Don't
Move.

Given God's Grace

—Deborah Bosworth Campbell—

The snow was sifting like confectioners sugar sprinkled across every leaf.
Such luscious beauty to behold
I did not want the children's eyes to miss.
How odd that there can be such sweetness in that frosting on dead
leaves.

I had wondered why that blighted oak tree never dropped
all those leaves decaying.
It does not still need them in the dead of winter.
Their season has past.

Why do people cling to miseries of the past
while Mercy surrounds them.
There is no comfort in memories not so fond.
That tree was neglected in the season of change.
I did not see a security blanket of snow insulating the old.
It was a transformation.
In spite of the ugliness to which we may cling,
God creates in His image such beauty to behold.

Did you notice?
The dusk is dim yet the tree glistens.
The eyes of the children reflect the sparkle.
Bubble gum cheeks and tootsie roll tummies.
And I see the Love that will be nourished there too.
In the cleansing purity of that gentle snow,
God brings His Hope to vanquish despair.
It is only in the cold that we could ever see such Light.

Delicious

—Amber Nicole Day—

Emerson talked
of delicious torments—
I wish he could see you.
For you are a sumptuous delight
every time I see your face.
My body starts to shiver,
my heart continues to ache,
for a love I can't touch;
a face I can't forget.

Trapped in an elevator
today I couldn't breathe,
your soul so close to mine.
If I could only reach
for your open collar.
Place a kiss upon
your neck, your chest.
If desire could be a
strawberry shortcake,
I'd share it with you.
And we would eat all day,
together trapped in that elevator,
and let meaningless time tick by.

A Chink In The Armor A Chink In The Armor A Chink In The Armor

—Abbie Cotrell—

He did not even know it was there,
a tiny hole—nothing more
until cold drafted in
and left him wrapped
only in his shame.

What had seemed to be
muscle and bone holding
up man, turning him home,
became before all eyes
dust scattered on naked wind.

But what if dust were gathered up,
moistened by His blood, reworked,
made new again,
wet clay formed by forgiveness
into forgiven man?

Then all receive some
measure of His grace.

Subtle Offenses Subtle Offenses Subtle Offenses

— J. Leslie Elliott-Benton —

Clink, the ice cubes settled in my tea, shifting through the amber liquid. A rivulet of water slid down the glass as I watched, disturbing the droplets of condensation gathered on the surface and collecting in a shiny pool on the slick tablecloth. From outside rang the squeals and laughter of ten preschoolers cavorting in the sprinkler. Their tiny wet bodies sprang over the darts of water again and again, slipping, colliding, and collapsing in giggles.

We mothers sought the shelter and relative cool of the indoors. Sapped of our energy by the burdensome heat of the Texas summer, we lounged languidly around the kitchen table, sipping peppermint iced tea and snacking on fruit salad and goldfish crackers. The four of us kept close watch on the happenings outside, and the glass door remained slightly ajar to let in noise or the occasional sodden, grass-covered toddler.

Tucking a strand of her short black hair behind her ear, Monica remarked, "I really like the stencil work you've done in here, Tamara. And that yellow is nice with your curtains." She leaned forward, resting her chin in her hand, and pouted, "I'm not so sure about the color of my kitchen- I was going for red, but I keep seeing too much peach. It's almost a salmon."

"Definitely salmon, no almost about it," I said, partly teasing. I had seen Monica's kitchen, and there was no question. Monica shot me a dirty look and stuck out her tongue. Across the table from her, Michelle let out a loud sigh and shifted her baby to her other breast. Hakeem was just six months old, and with two other little ones to care for poor Michelle felt far too harried to think about anything as trivial as paint. Her haphazard ponytail and the dark circles under her eyes bore witness to her exhaustion. I couldn't help noticing, either, that she'd worn that same green shirt the day before.

Tamara reached for the pitcher and poured herself another glass of tea, loosing a new spray of cold water droplets on the tablecloth. I took another sip of my own drink, trying to be polite. I didn't much care for the tea's minty flavor. Mid-drink, I glanced up and caught Tamara's eyes. She arched one red eyebrow, expectantly. Oh no, I thought, here it comes.

Sure enough, "Well, what did you think?" Tamara asked with a cheerful tone that belied the seriousness of her query. Her green eyes held mine intently and she smiled, biting down on her lower lip.

Of course I'd known this moment was coming. I had met Tamara through Playgroup about one year before, and we became fast friends. I loved her strong voice and assertive personality, her big, sturdy frame and great shining mane of red hair, and her unfailingly jovial nature, but most of all I admired her quick wit and her intelligence. We shared, among other things, a passion for reading, and we each enjoyed introducing the other to new authors and new genres. Tamara had given me many books to read, but none so important as the one with which she had entrusted me two weeks ago.

On that fateful night two weeks prior, over red wine at a Bunco game, my dear friend confessed to me that she had written a book of her own.

I couldn't have been more impressed. A book! Though it was far from published, she had worked through her story from beginning to end, and she felt it was just about finished. She had shown it to no one. To me, writing a book seemed an impossible dream. To have the creativity and the dedication to produce a volume of my own posed a challenge both daunting and exhilarating, and here, right under my nose, was a woman who had proven herself capable. Wow.

I don't remember whether I asked or she offered. Of course I wanted to read it! I followed her home after the Bunco game that night and she handed me the incredible manuscript. We stood in her moonlit driveway, the night large and dark around us, and talked for hours. The significance of our exchange filled us both with giddy excitement. We laughed until we cried, sharing insights on the meaning of life, marriage, and motherhood, until the lateness of the hour caught up with us and we knew the time had come to say goodnight.

I arrived home after midnight to the sounds of a sleeping house. I peeked into each bedroom at my slumbering family, feeling a pang of guilt for staying out so much later than I'd planned. I could have quietly crept into my bed, slipping under the covers with only the whisper of the cool sheets across my legs and the soft creak of the settling mattress to betray my untimely wakefulness, but I did not.

Tamara's manuscript seemed a living thing. Encased in a simple black three-ring binder, its substantial weight provided a physical manifestation of its emotional and intellectual importance. Flipping on the kitchen light, I pulled out a chair and sat down at the dining room table, looking reverently at the work before me. In that moment, nothing exist-

ed but myself and Tamara's book. I took a deep breath. My eyes welled up with admiration for my friend and my chest swelled with the pride of knowing that she had entrusted to me her innermost thoughts on paper. I ran my hand across the binder's smooth cover and pulled it open, glanced at her title page, and began to read in earnest. It wasn't long before I stumbled over a glaring plot inconsistency... then a misspelling... then a typo... a grammatical error... a disorganized sentence... and on and on...

It was a mess.

I struggled through another thirty pages or so before pushing the manuscript aside and shuffling off to bed, weary and disheartened. Now, two weeks later, I could no longer avoid this conversation. I felt the smooth rim of the glass between my lips as I shielded my sensitive teeth from the coldness of the tea. I gulped down more of the sweet drink than I wanted to, trying not to taste. It went down hard and my stomach churned, queasy with dread.

Tamara's bright eyes stared back at me with lightly veiled vulnerability. How could I tell her what I thought of her manuscript? That the book she'd spent years crafting needed so much work I didn't even know where to begin? That despite her brilliance, creativity, and wit, she was not a great writer? How could I tell her I had not even finished it? Damn my poor planning!

"Um," I crunched down on a piece of ice, then swallowed, "I've been so busy lately." Pathetic lie! I wanted to buy some time to frame my response, but it was too late. The damage was done.

Tamara's face fell. It only lasted an instant, then she recovered gracefully, straightening in her chair. We both knew that even during busy times it never took me two weeks to read a book. My hesitation said enough. I mumbled some weak compliments about her lead character and trailed off, unsure how to mend the hurt caused by my unspoken criticism.

Characteristically, Tamara bounced back quickly. The topic had become as uncomfortable for her as it was for me, and she wanted to move on. Turning to Monica, still obliviously scrutinizing the leaves stenciled around the doorway, Tamara said, "I don't know if I'd call it salmon, exactly- it kinda has a southwest look."

"Yuck," Monica wrinkled her nose in distaste. "I was aiming for an Asian flare. You know, feng shui. What did you think about the color of my kitchen, Michelle?"

"I don't know, Monica," Michelle sighed again, shifting her weight and wiping the perspiration from her sleeping baby's forehead. "I

thought it was fine before you painted it.”

I rubbed a trail in the condensation on my glass with my fingertip and noted that I'd managed to down about half of the offensive beverage. Good, that was polite. I could stop now.

“I agree with Michelle,” I said to Monica, “and it's definitely salmon.”

Looking across the table, I caught Tamara's eye again, and she smiled. Still friends.

Then she lifted up the pitcher and refilled my glass.

Oil-Factory Oil-Factory Oil-Factory

—Kate Scully—

That is not the smell of sautéed onions
Hissing from the heated eye
That scent that lifts and salivates the room
Fills more than every quiche combined

And that is not the sound of chopping
An onomatopoeia, pop, pop, pop
Coming from that off-white counter
Where slicing always seems to stop

And just above that sloppy sink
I cannot see the bird that hums
Sipping from the bright red feeder
Always shrieking, "Watch your thumbs!"

And those are not the marks from dancing
To the songs that did not matter
Those dark scuffs of pent up glee
Anticipate a tempting platter

I have not opened that frosty monolith
And found a blackness in the night
And groped for shifting milk cartons
Who hide themselves, and laugh in fright

She did not walk across those tiles
And duck behind my mother's arms

As that unburdened eye marked her step
And I fell victim to her charms
"Whine less, breathe more"
She did not say in gruff and smoky tones
While sipping from the sparkling vino
And supervising soaking bones
Meaning that in ever sense
These moments merge into one place
Where all things bright and beautiful
Breathe and fill an empty space

Rise of the Weak

—Damian Ramirez—

POP. 1. 2.
Keep it cool.
Sliiide to move.
Make them drooooool
Fast
Lightning! Shoes.
Murder that fool.
Put him to shame,
then walk away.
He'll live another day
but
his pride is gone away.

He rises again.
From all that
comes back for you.
2, 3, 4.
Takes it slow.
Rewwiinds and fast forwardss
You sit
and
watch
your pride
desipitate,
but he takes your hand

and shows you
how to move his way.

Poema Sin Nombre: Numero Uno

—Ivan Juarez—

No creo que entiendas que poderoso realmente eres.
Con un aliento puedes renovar mundos.

El cielo azul se convertiría
Amarillo, plomo, o verde si lo quisieras.
Y los pájaros
(trenzas del viento)
Se cambiarían su naturaleza
Con los peces
(gotas de agua).

Llámale a la luna, se acercará a la tierra
Casi besando el mar.
Si mandarás que las azucenas se volvieran
Tan negras como el odio
Lo harían sin pensar.

Rompe la mesa de los elementos
(deja los químicos en delirio.)
Roba de los poetas el manantial de la imaginación
(que se mueran de llanto.)

Con tu dedo cambiarías la rotación del mundo,
Empujándolo al revés.
Entonces saltaría el río de su cauce para jugar
al arco iris entre las estrellas.

¿Cómo sé que tienes tanto poder?
Porque has cambiado mi mundo
sin darte cuenta.
Por eso, por parte de todos nosotros,
Te suplico que tengas cuidado con tu sonrisa.

Children of War

—Natalie A. Avitua—

It took us about thirty minutes to reach the train station and we still had fifteen minutes until Tobias and Abigail's train was scheduled to arrive. My Aunt had signed up with a Save the Children organization that takes in children who have been separated from their families during the current war.

Waiting on the platform my Aunt stood stiffly against the wall with her straw hat on her strawberry blonde hair. She was fairly tall and lean. Her skirt swayed in the light breeze. I sat on a nearby bench and watch as people would approach the ticket and news stands. After sitting for about ten minutes I asked my Aunt if we could purchase a few pieces of candy at the news stand. She handed me a few pennies and off I went.

There were so many different newspapers from all over the United States. I felt overwhelmed with all of the headlines, *Will the War End?*, *Bombing Overseas*, *Silent Cries*. Then one in particular caught my eye. It was a Boston newspaper and though it was not the main headline it had my attention, *Innocent Casualties, the Children of War*. Picking the paper up I tried to read it unnoticed as the salesman helped out another customer.

The article read that many Jewish families were being taken to labor camps from places called ghettos where they were forced to live in. At these camps children were separated from their families and worked to death. If the children were unfit for physical labor they were used for experiments by Nazi doctors.

A chill went up my spine and I could feel my back becoming tight and tense. My eyes began to tear up as I thought about being taken away from my mom. I could not bear to be without her.

My thin hands tightened on the edges of the paper when the salesman hollered, "Are you gonna buy that paper kid?"

I dropped the paper from my hands, "No sir. But I would like to purchase a few of those peppermint candies please," I watched as he reached over and handed me the candies in a small brown paper bag, "Thank you sir." I handed him my money.

As I walked back to my Aunt I could hear the train approaching so I ran to her side, "How will we know who they are? We don't even know what they look like!"

"We'll be able to tell," my Aunt held her hat as the train pulled in to stop and spoke louder as the train's brakes squealed, "they are wearing the Star of David on their clothes."

I looked at her puzzled, but I started searching for the two children as masses of people began to unload from the train. Since I was not very tall I had to stand on my toes and my Aunt stretched herself, trying to see who was exiting. With the crowd now thinning out I spotted the two standing side by side. Tobias was about a foot taller than Abigail, whose hand he held firmly.

"They are over there, Aunt Sylvia!" I pointed at the two of them.

"It is not polite to point Jenny," my Aunt said as she picked at my blouse to straighten it out, then she ran her hands down her skirt to make sure there were no wrinkles.

As we approached the two I had spotted, Abigail moved closer to her brother. They were both very thin compared to me. Tobias was tall with straight dark brown hair and eyes. Abigail's hair was also brown, but cut just above her shoulders. It was so different from the long golden curls I combed every night. Abigail's eyes were round and I couldn't tell if she wanted to cry or if she was just scared.

I stared at them, dressed in their dark gray coats that were tattered and patched up with bits of other materials. It wasn't very cold out and I began to feel warm just looking at them bundled in multiple layers of thin clothing. On the left side of both of their jackets was a yellow star. Unlike the five point stars that I would get on my spelling test, their stars had six points. It was the only bright color that was actually on them, the rest of their clothing was different shades of gray and brown.

"You must be Tobias and Abigail. I am Sylvia Townsend, and the two of you will be staying with me for a while," my Aunt smiled as friendly as she could.

The only response she received was a quiet, "Thank you for your generosity Mrs. Townsend," from Tobias, as Abigail hid herself behind his arm.

We didn't have to help them carry their belongings because they both shared a single stained cloth bag which Tobias toted over his right shoulder. Together we caught the bus and headed to my Aunt Sylvia's house. While riding on the bus, my Aunt tried her best to create small talk between the two children and herself. She was not very successful and seemed to give up as we approached our stop.

After arriving at my Aunt's home, I showed Abigail where she would be sleeping. As I showed her the closet where she could put her

belongings she finally muttered a few words, "Will you be living here as well?"

"No, but I do come over just about everyday. My Aunt takes care of me while my mom is at work and makes me practice my etiquette." I watched as she sat on the bed and looked out the window. Tears began to form in her eyes and roll down her cheek.

"Oh, don't cry, it's going to be okay. If you need anything my Aunt is here for you. She is really nice. I know that she is not your mother, but you can talk to her about anything." I said trying to cheer her up.

"No! It's not going to be okay! My Mum is gone! She's probably dead!" yelled Abigail.

At this point I began to regret what I had said. Abigail's tears began to stream down her face and her brother Tobias ran into the room. My Aunt followed not far behind.

"It's okay Abby," he looked at me not with anger as I would have thought, but with concern in his eyes. "What happened?"

"I don't know. I was just talking to her. . ." I was cut off by Abigail.

"She was talking about Mum, oh Tobias, I miss her so much," Abigail continued to cry and I looked at my Aunt standing in the doorway. She motioned with her hand for me to follow her.

"Jenny, we must be very careful with what we say around our guest. We do not know much about them, so please watch what you say." My Aunt looked at me with a smile on her face and I felt that it was my responsibility to make things better.

Walking back into the room Abigail and Tobias were in, I saw him pull something out of his coat pocket. Raising his open palm he held several different colored marbles in his hand. They glistened like gems as the sun hit them.

"Do you like to play marbles?" I asked as I walked back into the room.

With her tiny swollen eyes, Abigail looked up at me and smiled. "It's my favorite game. Tobias is the only one who still plays marbles with me."

"May I play?" I asked, hoping that this would be my chance to make up for making her cry.

"I'd love to!" she said, grabbing the marbles out of Tobias's hand and standing up from the bed.

Together the three of us went to the back yard and began to play. The day was beautiful and the sky clear. An airplane flew over head, causing Abigail to jump and again she hid herself with Tobias's arm.

"Abby, its okay. It's not like at home. You see there are no bombs. Look." Tobias pointed up to the plane as it passed over the neighbor's house.

"What's the matter? Why does she hide all the time?" I asked Tobias as I scooted closer to them.

"Back home we had blackouts, where we could not have any lights on. If there was any sign of light, planes were sent to drop bombs on that area. One night during a black out, someone had lit up a store and before you knew it many bombs were being dropped. They were so close to our house that it shook. It wasn't long after that we were sent away." Tobias held Abigail in his arms, giving her a little squeeze every now and then.

"Were you scared?" I asked. Though it was gruesome to hear I couldn't help but ask more questions, "Is that how you ended up here in the United States?"

"Before we came to the States we were forced to move many places." Tobias shuttered.

Immediately my thoughts went back to the article I had read at the train station. "Did you have to live in a ghetto?" I asked.

"Yes." Tobias said then gave Abigail a kiss on her head, "It was a horrible experience."

"You didn't tell her about the soldiers, Tobias." Abigail's voice seemed smaller than before. "They came to our house and forced us to leave after the bombing. Then they took us to that scary neighborhood."

"We were fortunate enough not to be there long. Our mother had given us some papers that allowed us to leave the ghetto and come to the States," Tobias said as he started to collect the scattered marbles from the ground. Cupping them in his hand, he placed them back into is pocket. "Come. Let's go inside, I think Abigail needs a nap."

"I'm not sleepy," Abigail said as she yawned.

Back inside the house, I sat at the kitchen table. Tobias had taken Abigail to her room and joined me at the table without saying a word.

I sat there looking at him. His dark brown hair was like the dirt in the flower beds, mine was bright like the sun. His eyes looked tired and old; mine were bright without a care in the world. I couldn't believe what I had heard. They were forced out of their home to a place of ruins, then to be sent far away from their family to a stranger's home.

"Jenny," Tobias's voice interrupted my thoughts, "you have been very nice to my sister. Thank you so much. But while she is asleep I would like to tell you something."

I was scared that now he was going to get mad at me for making Abigail cry earlier, "Okay."

"The reason Abigail cried when you mentioned our Mum is because she and our Dad were taken away the night before we left for the States. They were sent off to a labor camp and we have heard no word from them in two weeks." Tobias's eyes were pink and tears began to fall down his cheeks.

"I am so sorry. I didn't mean to make her cry. I didn't mean to make anyone cry." I sat at the table watching as he tried to hold the rest of his tears back, "I'm always here if you need to talk and you have my Aunt too. We can be your family away from home until you hear from your parents again."

Tobias smiled as he wiped his nose with a handkerchief he pulled from his back pocket, "Thank you."

The afternoon passed by and soon my mom arrived to pick me up. She was surprised to meet Tobias and Abigail, but was ginger with them. As I watched her talking and laughing with Abigail I couldn't help but think how lucky I was to have her.

Colombian Meals

—Caroline E. Hallman—

Tía Ester knew the best places to buy *almohabanas*, *buñuelos*, or *pan de bono* for Saturday's breakfast.

Mami made the chocolate, while
Papi sang the "Café" song, con Rafael.

Walking home from school,
Abuelita would protect me from the angry dog behind the fence,
hand in hand.

Her *sopas* were always ready for lunch,
thick with whole chicken legs stretching from the rim of the pot.

Dinner at Tía Nacha's was fancy,
reprimanding me for touching the immaculate walls
of her apartment with my lizard-catching hands.

Hollering conversation over buzzing blenders,
my cousins and I all wished they would quiet down.
Now we're uncomfortable in the silence of our own "grown-up" meals.
Nothing tastes quite as good as a meal made laughing, yelling, singing, nagging.

Victim of Changes

—Kristen Flores—

Leaning the seat of her torn jeans against the pole outside the band hall, she waits for me once more. Her black rooted hair jets out of a white bandana, letting her straight blond locks flow to her shoulders. The muscles in her biceps sprout from a white tank top—"If you're gonna look bad at least wear matching clothes," I overheard her say one day.

I slow my stride towards the door as she says, "Hey, McRios, come here for a second."

I sigh and swallow hard, feeling the fear of what she wants welling in my stomach. I walk up to her, careful to stay out of arms reach and say, "Hi Tessa. You wanted me?"

She hooks her thumbs in her belt loops and takes a step forward, "Yeah. Can I have a ride home after school? I'm tired of walking."

Hesitantly I ask, "Where do you live?"

She smiles that crooked smile and says, "Not far. Two blocks away about." She cocks her head to one side and stares at me, awaiting my response.

"Sure, I can take you then. I just wanted to make sure you didn't live too far away because I can't be home late today, my mom'll kill me."

She straightens up to say, "Kay. You have that green van out by the football field?" I nod my head in agreement. "See you there after school."

All through class I find myself thinking of my ride home. *What if she really lives out by Hobson or something? You'll be late. Mom will kill you. No, Tessa will kill you if you don't take her. What if she wants you to pick something up on the way home? You can't have drugs or booze in your car. Oh shit. What if she has friends that want a ride home too? What are you gonna do then? What if that nosy cop decided to stop you because she's in the car with you? Charlie knows her too well. Oh shit...* The bell interrupts my thoughts and I run out to my green van by the football field. When I get there Tessa sends a twinge of anger through my veins as she leans against the driver's side *Hell no, she's not driving.* She's changed into a faded black Guns and Roses t-shirt and a pair of tight leather pants. I'm careful to control my facial expressions and my breathing. Her hair is purple and wet.

"How you like it McRios? I did it in Home Ec. Mrs. Theis freaked!" she says.

I laugh and say, "I like it. It's really cool."

I walk over to the passenger's side of the van, unlock the door, open it, and throw my pack in the back seat. I gaze at the empty Sonic cups, plastic wrappers, old papers, and smashed paper bags that create a crunchy collage at the foot of the passenger's seat. Hurriedly I say, "Don't mind the mess, just step on whatever."

She reluctantly walks over to the passenger's side. I hold the door open for her and wait for her to get in, and then I close the door for her. I go over to the driver's side, unlock it, and hop in. I put my seat belt on then start the car and look over at her as she lights up a cigarette, doesn't roll the window down to let the smoke out, and forgets about the seat belt dangling off to her right shoulder. While she is reprogramming all of my radio stations I tell her, "You might wanna roll down the window, my A/C doesn't work that well."

She smiles at me and says, "Kay."

We pull out of the parking lot, make a right onto the main road, and I ask, "So where to?"

Surprisingly, she says, "Go straight here, across the street, then you're going to make a left at the first stop sign and my house is all the way on the end."

I chuckle, relieving some of my stress and say, "Can do."

Please God, hear this small prayer, please don't let her beat me up once we get there, just let her get out of the car and leave. I sigh. Oh yeah, don't let her torch my car with her cigarette, please?

I make the left at the stop sign and she says, "You see that brick house straight ahead? That's me. Just don't pull into the driveway." I nod my head in understanding. I pull up to the curb of her brick house and we sit in the car for a minute. She takes one last drag from her cigarette and flicks it off to the curb. I sit with my hands on the steering wheel, waiting

for her to leave. "Thanks McRios," she says as she opens the door.

"No problem. Any time."

My hands tighten on the steering wheel as I wait for her to enter her house. Once she disappears behind a white door I put my car into drive, listen to the crackle of loose gravel beneath my Michelins and slowly watch her house shrink in my rearview mirror. I stop at the stop sign, ready to make a right back into my own world. I sigh heavily and grin to myself, glancing into the rear view mirror one last time. My grin quickly fades as I see Tessa lying on the front lawn, face down, not

moving. I just stare at the shrunken body for a second, forcing her into my eye's focus. My breath grows heavy as I watch her white fingers clump grass in an attempt to get up.

A large man in a white muscle shirt, with barbed wire tattooed on his left bicep, has planted his huge black boots at her side. He tilts the bottle of amber liquor in his hand to his lips and lets most of it spill onto his black, curly moustache, down to his chest. He quickly empties the bottle and smashes it against the asphalt in the road.

Tessa rolls over onto her back and he hunches over to yell at her.

I clench my hands on the steering wheel once more and, against the acid pumping in my stomach, I turn my car around to go back to her house. I slowly pull up to the curb where I had just left her and leaving the car on, I step outside of my safe haven.

The bulky figure towering over Tessa turns his wild brown eyes into chinks of disdain as he asks, "Can I help you?"

Tessa gets onto all fours and gradually stands up, holding her stomach with one arm.

I timidly say, "Yes, sir. Umm, I needed to give Tessa her backpack. She forgot it." He doesn't say anything, he doesn't even move. He just devours me in those narrow eyes. The vein in his neck is starting to bulge and the fists at this sides clench into hammers.

Tessa looks at me through wet eyes, her purple hair sticking to her red face, covering a black eye.

I lock my eyes on the man standing arms length away from her. And I slowly walk up to her, smiling. "Come on Tessa, come get your bag, real quick."

I watch the tall, muscular man, steaming on the lawn and grab Tessa's free hand. I take it in my own and lead her to the van. I whisper to her, "When you get there, pretend like you're opening the side door, then open the front door and go to the back seat. I'll take care of the rest."

She shuffles to the side door, weakly tugs at the latch and glances at me. In a calm voice I say, "Oh yeah. I forgot. That door doesn't open. You gotta use the front door." I walk over to the driver's side, still keeping my eye on the beast, and I slide into the seat. I tell her, "Hang on, okay, I'm gonna rip outta here."

The passenger's door is wide open and she is stretched across the seat, hanging half way in the middle of the van, with her legs sticking out into the road. I smile at the big man who has begun to stumble towards the car. I quietly close my door. With sweat beading at my brow, I sigh, "Here we go."

I floor the gas and turn the wheel tight. Tessa flies into the back seat, smashing her head against the very last bench seat. The passenger door slams shut. I kick up loose gravel and pelt our adversary in the face with it. We leave him standing on the lawn yelling obscenities and wiping his eyes.

"I hope he's blind for life," Tessa whispers.

I run three stop signs, make a left and get on the highway. I take her to Hobson, to my friend Sophie's house. My body trembles and drips with sweat the whole way, the whole five minutes.

When we reach my friend's driveway I turn the car off and go around the van to open the side door. Tessa weakly laughs and says, "I thought you said this door don't open."

I smile, "I lied."

I help her out of the car and am surprised when she puts an arm around my shoulders for support. I put my arm around her waist and help her walk up the steps towards Sophie's house. I knock on the door. Nobody answers. I try the handle to the door, twist it, and push the door open. I lead Tessa into the dark house and seat her on the first couch I see. I don't bother turning any lights on. Instead I walk into the kitchen and raid the freezer for a slab of meat. I pull a wash cloth from a drawer and put one side of the meat in it. I walk over to Tessa, lean down to her and say, "Here, put this on your eye, it'll help." She sits there, motionless. I press the cold meat against her eye, and place her hand against the towel to hold it. "Just watch for the cat. He's blind, but he's got a good sense of smell. Just push him away if he bothers you," I tell her as I walk into the bathroom.

I scurry through drawers filled with pieces of broken makeup, condoms, drained Jack Daniels bottles and mouthwash. Sophie's life in a nutshell—men and booze. I finally find a busted rubber band. I quickly tie it together with a bulging knot. I grab a towel from a pile on the floor and go back to the living room. Tessa is just as I left her.

I give her the towel and ask, "Is this okay? I don't know if it's clean or not, but it's the best one I could find." She laughs and hands it back to me. I use it to dry her hair the best I can. Then I gather her purple streaks in my fingers and tie her hair in a ponytail. Next, I grab the telephone in the kitchen and call my mom. I tell her that I'm going to be late, "I had a flat, Mom, but I fixed it... I couldn't call you cause there was no phone... I was in the parking lot at school... No, don't send Dad, I'm on my way right now... Love you too. Bye." I hang up the phone, walk over to Tessa, and kneel down at her feet, "Are you okay?"

She smiles and starts to cry again, "That bastard..."

I shake my head, unsure of whether I should continue to control my instincts of hugging her. Instead I go to the refrigerator and pull out a jug of chocolate milk. I pour her a glass and hand it to her, holding the sweaty meat while she drinks. I nervously laugh and say, "It always makes me feel better when I get into a fight with my folks." She takes a sip and hands the glass back. I put it on the coffee table in front of her and say, "Well, I gotta get going before my mom really gets mad. Sophie will be home in an hour or so. Just tell anyone who comes that I brought you and that I had to leave. They'll understand."

I start trailing off, losing confidence in myself, as I remember how powerful Tessa is compared to me, "I'll be calling the house in about 30 minutes, once I get home. Don't pick up, but I'll keep calling till I get Sophie so I can fill her in. You can stay here tonight if you don't mind." She nods her head and slumps into the couch. I nod my head and walk out the door, careful to gently close the screen door behind me. I climb into my van and head home.

Later that night, I got a hold of Sophie, "Hey, sorry I left you a surprise."

"Huh? Oh, Tessa. Yeah. That's cool."

"I owe you a hunk of meat."

She laughs, "Naw, I was gonna feed it to Bubbles anyway."

"Cool. So is it okay if she stays with you?"

"Yeah, for sure. Mom is working the next few nights so it'll be nice to not be alone."

"Yeah, that's true. Did she tell you what happened?" I ask.

"Yeah, it's all good. I told her to stay here for as long as she wanted. I don't think Mom'll mind at all."

"Thanks for taking care of her, Sophie. I would've brought her here, but you know my parents."

"Yep. They'd have freaked and thought you were into drugs or something. Then I really wouldn't get to see you!"

"Yeah."

"Well, it's okay. At least we can hang at my house until they let you hang with me more," she says.

"Yeah. I love your house more than mine anyway. I feel so free there, like my home away from home."

"Ha-ha! That's cause they're never any parents here!"

"Yeah, I guess. Well, I better go."

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye."

“Bye.”

Tessa didn't come to school for the rest of the week, which was about three days. Sophie said that Tessa was living with her until she felt up to going back home. She never did go home; instead she moved in with her aunt who lived close to Sophie's house. When she finally did come back to school things were different between us. We weren't exactly friends, but she didn't hassle me anymore and she made sure that anyone who did, didn't do it for long. However, to this day I am always reminded of a bully-turned-protector who never said, “Thank you” in words, but yelled it to the whole world in the way she looked out for me after that day.

Polysemy
Polysemy
Polysemy
Polysemy

—Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill—

Some words mean more than one thing

Polysemy...

Poly - many

Semy - semantics

Many meanings...

At play

each day.

Today, April 4, 2006, the word is

SHOT,

really it is

SHOTS,

Plural, multiple

Multiple layers of meaning,

multiple layers careening

together in the grey matter traffic jam of my mind.

Today,

My son, six months old, receives his next round of SHOTS.

Vocal chords, lungs in fine shape.

His protest reminds, hints,

a nagging of polysemy...

of another protest,

another fourth of April,

another set of shots.

April 4, 1968

Garbage collectors striking,

Dr. King connecting -

SHOTS

But not of life,
of death
of Martin's death
of the body,
but not of the dream
that we are judged, that the infants who received shots today are judged,
not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

The Dream, spiritus sancti,
Holy Spirit? Sacred breath?
polysemy working again ...

Today, my six month old son received his next round of shots. After the first needle sunk into his plump little thigh, his eyes shot me the death rays of betrayal. He was not happy about the situation and clearly, I was a traitor.

The Half

—Lori L. Ripper—

Half of who we are is who we used to be.
This is why sometimes I can not stand me.

Half of the things we fear others will do are things we've already done.
This is why I always fear trouble has begun.

Half of what we joke about is always partially true.
This is why when you kid, I don't believe you.

Half of what we look like came from someone else's style.
This is why I never carry a full smile.

Half of our cries for help will never be heard at all.
This is why sometimes I decide not to call.

Half of what we say will happen, we never do.
This is why I fear you won't come through.

Half of what we hate is actually blinded by love.
This is why letting go can get so tough.

Half of who we say we are isn't even true.
This is why I wonder if your really you.

Half of what we aren't, we might end up being.
This is why I just can't stop dreaming.

And still half of who I'm staring at, I can't even see.
But I guess that's just the other half of me

Slay Evil Immediately

—Amanda King—

The Shinsengumi, the police force in Kyoto, had only a few simple rules, and even those could be condensed into the force's motto: *aku soku zan*. Slay evil immediately. Whether samurai or farmers who came to learn the sword, all men knew when joining that any deviation meant punishment of the most severe sort. The harsh motto kept the Shinsengumi strong, not only in protecting Kyoto, but in their fight to prevent the Emperor's return to the throne. They were highly visible and highly efficient, an effective force to counter the Imperialists. That was why, like many, Kenzô had left everything to join them.

Kenzô's hands trembled with fear as he lifted his teacup to his lips. He sat cross-legged on the soft floor, alone in the plain room he shared with his brother and several other members of his unit. Kenzô could hear occasional muttering voices and passing footsteps outside. Those voices filled him with guilt; he could imagine he heard his name disdainfully whispered among what snatches of phrases he could catch. Those voices resonated with his shame in himself.

Kenzô wore his full Shinsengumi uniform: white kimono, gray pants, steel headband, and sky-blue *haori* jacket with white mountain stripes on the sleeves, though he had not gone on patrol through Kyoto's streets that day. The captains had already taken Kenzô's swords away. The other men had been exceedingly kind to him all day, but did it out of pity for a doomed man awaiting punishment.

The Shinsengumi rules were so clear and simple in the few short years Kenzô spent with them. He had never thought he would break one. Even now, Kenzô did not doubt his decision to join, but still, if he had stayed with his high-class Imperialist family in Chôshû instead of defying them to join the Shinsengumi, he never would have met this fate. Three days ago, Kenzô would have found himself at the dreaded Gensai's side instead of at the end of his blade.

On that fateful night, the Imperialists had gotten word that the leaders of the powerful, anti-Imperialist Aizu Clan were forming a strategic meeting in Kyoto. Spies ran swiftly on both sides, and the Shinsengumi flew to Aizu's protection. Of all the Imperialists, why had Kenzô faced Gensai? At first glance, the man appeared tiny and slender enough to pass for a woman, an appearance that belied his reputation as most

lethal of the Four Legendary Manslayers. Gensai was a hand-picked favorite of the Emperor himself.

Running through the streets in search of unfamiliar faces and malicious movements, Kenzô had cornered Gensai near the Ikedaya Inn that the Imperialists had raided the previous year, not knowing who he was.

Gensai had hidden only until Kenzô found his eyes in the shadows, then he leaped out and attacked. His ferocity alone immediately showed Kenzô that this was no normal opponent. His cold, calculating assassin's moves slipped precisely through Kenzô's defenses, and he struck with a violent energy that reverberated through their blades.

Kenzô pressed in and Gensai drew him back, leading him away from his unit, trading blows all the while. The rest of the Shinsengumi melted away. There was only Kenzô and his enemy, battling swiftly down the rough, dusty street. He had engaged in battle, single-minded like an animal trained to perform one solitary task, and nothing else could matter until he defeated his opponent.

Kenzô fought with his lifetime of skill, but he found Gensai's moves a degree better than his in every aspect. He stepped lighter. He thrust faster. He blocked quicker. He saw through Kenzô's most complicated feints.

The fight flowed away from the inn and towards the edges of the city. Exhausted in battle, bleeding, both hands blistering from his hilt, Kenzô took a huge leap backward and readjusted his grip on his sword, gasping for air.

Gensai calmly took the familiar stance famous to his unique, lightning-fast style. A bolt of recognition shot through Kenzô's mind, and his fierce warrior's spirit dissolved, leaving his sword heavy and his will formless. He realized in that moment that he could not win. Not against one of the Four Legendary Manslayers.

Kenzô fled. He did not even sheathe his sword but simply took off running. Fear propelled him more than any sense of duty. Gensai pursued. Kenzô heard his light, quick footsteps behind him, still in the rhythm of the battle. He followed closely, but just as Kenzô expected to hear the ring of cold metal, Gensai disappeared.

Kenzô never knew how he escaped with his life; Gensai could have easily cut him down. Not until afterwards did Kenzô wonder why the assassin let him go. Perhaps he had known Kenzô's punishment would come later.

The crime of letting that Imperialist dog escape brought Kenzô back to the present. He set his teacup back on his tray and sighed, lifting a hand to tug nervously at his topknot. Shinsengumi law forbade losing once engaged in a battle. Kenzô's unit commander found out about his failure right away, of course. Kenzô could have met a respectable death at Gensai's hands, but the Shinsengumi left him only one other way to regain his honor. The captains kept proceedings a secret, but Kenzô knew his punishment came tonight. He could think of no other reason why he sat in his room alone, in full uniform but unarmed.

The door slid open softly and Kenzô's younger brother Jirô entered.

"So the captains chose you for my *kaishaku*?" asked Kenzô.

How fitting that Jirô would fulfill the task. The Westerners pouring into the country in recent years never could translate *kaishaku*, "executioner," they termed it, but not correctly. Kenzô's *kaishaku* was his aide, his second, his guardian in the oldest sense of the word. Though the job seemed appalling, it was right to have someone dear to Kenzô fulfill the task.

Jirô nodded solemnly to his brother, as if he was merely a formal acquaintance. As samurai, Kenzô and Jirô had been trained for the possibility of this ceremony since childhood, but the impact still set Jirô's face in hard lines. He also wore his full uniform and was armed with Kenzô's long sword, the hilt wrapped in white paper.

"It's time, Kenzô."

Kenzô nodded and stood. Jirô led him from the men's quarters around the garden. Kenzô stumbled as he walked across the smooth wooden floor, dizzy with anticipation, and turned his head to avoid meeting his brother's panicked eyes, the only part of him that did not move with perfect calmness. Kenzô allowed himself one last look at the moon as it peeked through the swaying camilla trees, illuminating the garden, highlighting the blossoms that drifted down to blanket the grass in a pond of bright red and white. He and his brother had stood watch at the gate so many times, gazing up at that same moon.

The pair came to the commander's waiting room. Jirô slid the door open and led Kenzô inside. The small room had been prepared. Several white mats covered the floor in the center, a white candle posted at each corner. They had forgone the white curtains and lanterns; though a samurai, Kenzô no longer held a high enough rank to have them since he left his family in Chôshû. Really, the whole affair should have taken place in the garden, but the need for secrecy outweighed the need for ceremony.

Without cue, Kenzô crossed to the center of the room and took his place sitting on his knees on the mats. He needed no further instruction. Jirô stepped behind a white paper screen set to the side to prepare himself.

The feared Vice-Commander Hijikata who had written the Shinsengumi's unforgiving laws sat before Kenzô as chief witness. The candlelight barely lit his stern face, making the lines sharper, his expression harder.

"Kenzô," began Hijikata with no introduction, "you are charged with allowing the enemy to escape." His voice was harsh enough that simply listening to it should have been sufficient punishment. He had truly earned his nickname, 'The Demon Commander.' "This breaks both the first Article and our most prominent law. Punishment is *Seppuku*, which you have known since you joined our ranks. Have you any last words to the witnesses?"

Kenzô bowed slightly and answered with the proper response. The words seemed so proscribed as he contemplated them, but he realized he truly meant them. "I have nothing which I wish to say," Kenzô said formally. "I am indebted to you for the kindness I received under your charge, and I beg you to take my respects to the commanders who have treated me so well."

With that said, Kenzô pulled his garments from his shoulders, baring his skin to the waist, fighting to keep his face as stoic as the witnesses'. His blue *haori* with the white mountain stripes on the sleeves fluttered to the ground behind him, shedding his status under his captain, leaving only the pure white beneath. He tucked his kimono sleeves under his knees.

Hijikata nodded for the ceremony to proceed. Jirô emerged, bearing Kenzo's short sword on a tray. He set it before his brother, then took his place at Kenzô's left, pulling his kimono and *haori* from his right shoulder to let the sleeves hang behind him. He drew his sword with the white-wrapped hilt and laid the sheath on the ground, ready to fulfill the most important task of the *kaishaku*. He held the naked blade at waist-level, tensed for his moment.

Kenzô willed his hands to steady themselves. Such a short span of time – from samurai to disgrace. He had not slain evil immediately. This was it. This was the only way to regain his honor. This was it.

Kenzô slowly reached out and grasped his short sword. Bowing his head, he drew it, laid the sheath aside, and pressed the cold point to his stomach with both hands.

Jirô raised his blade high, then severed his brother's life with his strike.

The Walking Dead The Walking Dead The Walking Dead

—Lance S. Gossen—

At five P.M. the young man
walks about in stripes behind
the cement walls of the worker's barracks.
I pass loudly in my tank.

Then again he comes to the fence
to call the Americans, Russians, and stands
feeble, unjacketed, having been
beaten, starved, and tortured, and I compare him
to the walking dead.

The clanking treads of the tank
rushes with a hush sound over
the dead bodies as I glare and pass appalled.

Whiskey

—Phillip Salcido—

This place,
There's no escape,
Night after night,
Within my deepest thoughts it lies,
Haunting my every dream.

So here I am,
Nothing has changed,
The old willow,
The sound of the water rushing by,
The memories of what was.

I gaze into the distance,
There under that willow,
Our last goodbyes we shared,
You took the bullet,
Holding me tightly as the car sped away.

I blame myself,
Always have,
Our love took you from me,
Together again,
I would give anything.

People think I'm crazy,
They say I'm not the same,
But they don't feel my pain,
My misery,
My dying heart.

Oh...it cannot be,
I dare not close my eyes,
You...standing before me,
Your presence fills my soul,
How I've waited for this moment.

I take one last sip of this whiskey,
My only friend since you've been gone,
I raise the barrel to my chest,
I know how to fix this broken heart,
I'm coming John.

My Father, So Precise

—Anissa Velez—

On Tuesday night my mother told me that
My father held me when I was an infant
Wrapped in a soft, pink blanket
His aqua eyes gazed over me for a few moments
His hands gentle with my fragile body
Careful not to make me cry
He whispered some thoughts
And handed me back to my mother
It angers me that I can not recall what he looked like
or remember the sound of his voice when he said my name

This ain't Living This ain't Living This ain't Living

—Clarence J Adams—

This Ain't Living

Life in New Orleans is similar to prison last month I had a friend engulf himself in flames because of the life he was giving Another buddy jumped off the bridge the son was found but the father is still missing eternally damned and never forgiving.

This Ain't Living

Were taking our own lives before we get the chance to say we have risen. In our kids minds we instill violence and greed instead of overdosing them on love, hugs, and kissing.

This Ain't Living

Life in New Orleans is similar to prison I am screaming out to God I hope he'll listen and come to the aid of my people because society has found a more clever way to lynch them.

This Ain't Living

Red Cross, FEMA, and elected officials were placed there to twist them and force the flooding in inner communities where only the poor will miss them. Then go off to church where there safe and Christian I am not dead but still a victim.

This Ain't Living

The struggle for hope is to hard here's my question to the Lord: Why don't you love me GOD? Because

This Ain't Living!!!!

The Ugly Girl

—Dominique Burkett—

Sitting on my grandmother's elegant white couch, wearing my favorite outfit—a jean vest with a matching skirt and big sunflower hat—I remember feeling so pretty. I was eight years old, and aside from my perfectly round cheeks, freckle-polluted face, and dark brown hair that looked like it had been styled on a mannequin and then dropped on my head, I thought I was pretty.

I remember my grandmother's words as she and my mother came into the living room and saw me sitting obediently on the couch. "Oh Virginia, imagine when this child starts wearing makeup? She'll be so pretty."

Those words were forever embedded in my head. She would never let me forget them. They were repeated to me until the day I actually began wearing makeup. Now, I think she just repeated those words again and again to reassure herself that her ugly duckling granddaughter would one day be a swan and complete her perfect family portrait.

As a child, I was always frustrated around my family because I wasn't like my cousins. I couldn't fit into cute little bikinis, and I didn't have long straight hair like they did. My brothers and I stood out, and were made fun of at every family function, because there were five of us, and we all looked so different. My grandfather would crack a joke when the "Burketts" walked in the door. "God damn it Virginia! Every time we turn around, you have another kid!"

I blamed my mom for a lot of my ridicule, because she didn't seem to listen to their jokes, and never noticed how they hurt my feelings. I mistook her indifference for heartlessness, especially when she would primp me before family gatherings in a way that would guarantee I would be made fun of.

There was the portrait of the grandchildren, hanging proudly over my grandmother's elegant fireplace. All five of the granddaughters' perfect, angelic faces smiling, clothed in their colorful, frilly Easter dresses. And there I was, pushed to the corner of the portrait standing proudly in my purple crushed velvet, skin-tight dress. My mother always tried to keep the competition fierce between the granddaughters by making me stand out as best as she could. She spent hours before family portraits, curling and teasing my hair until it stood five inches above my head in every direction. My grandmother always stood in the corner as

the picture was getting taken, shaking her head at my mother for making me look like a teenage prostitute. When it came time to smile for the camera, all my cousins flashed their pearly whites as I grinned, trying to hide my mouth of metal.

As a child, I just thought I was overly sensitive when I would cry after my cousins made fun of something I wore, or tease me for never wanting to put down the book I was reading to go play with them. Many times, I probably was too sensitive. But now, thinking back to some of the things they said or did to hurt my feelings, they really were mean. Growing up with them is probably what caused me to be the defensive person I am today.

One summer night, my four cousins and I were swimming in our grandmother's backyard Jacuzzi as we usually did after a day of adventures.

"Hey, let's play the truth game! Everyone has to play, ok?" my cousin Erica ordered. She was my second eldest cousin, "the evil one" who always found ways to make us feel bad about ourselves because it made her feel powerful. I was her favorite target, because I was the shy, awkward one.

Everyone hated playing her games, but could never get up the courage to tell her no. We never knew what we were scared of either. It might've been her beauty, or our secret desire to be her favorite, or the fact that she was grandma's favorite.

She was standing in the Jacuzzi with her hands on her hips waiting for everyone's full attention. Right as I heard the word "truth" come from her mouth, my whole body became tense. I knew I had to play whether I felt like it or not.

"You have to make a list of the cousins from prettiest to ugliest, and you have to tell the truth! I'll go first"

As Erica began her list, my mind raced, trying to think of excuses to go in the house. I wanted to pretend to drown just so that they'd have to stop the game to save me. Instead, I just sat quietly on the Jacuzzi step as she named us off. "Lindsey, me...then Ashley, then Krista, and....it's a tie between Kara and Dominique."

Phew! At least I'm not at the bottom of the list by myself. The others began naming off their list. Everyone's was practically the same- the cute, thin, tan skinned cousins at the top, and the chubby, pale skinned, freckle-faced ones at the bottom. When it came my turn, I even put myself at the bottom, because I didn't want to be different than anyone else. If I was, I knew I'd just get teased for it, and they'd make me re-evaluate my list.

I wasn't embarrassed or sad when I heard my name at the bottom of the list because I already expected it. I saw how my other cousins were always told how pretty they were, while I was told I would be someday. Each of my cousins had their own unique style, humor, and beauty. Everyone had a distinct quality about them, except me. Erica and Lindsey were beautiful, Ashley and Krista were intelligent and had traveled around the world before they were out of elementary school, and Kara could always make everyone laugh. Whenever we would play shops, each cousin had their own store, and I was always their customer. The game was really a metaphor for my whole childhood. I wanted something that each of them had, that I couldn't find in myself. I lived off their personalities, taking a little something from each of them, and adding it to my own identity.

What I realized later on in life was that I was my own unique person. I just couldn't see it because I was living behind my wall of insecurities. Just as every child is at a young age, I was impressionable. I grew up believing I was ugly, because there was no one to tell me otherwise. When my cousins said it, I just thought they were telling the truth, and that I couldn't change the truth— just wait for the day when I could start wearing makeup.

There was no one who could comfort me. I was alone. I couldn't even hide behind my own mother because she heard what she wanted to hear, and all she wanted to hear was how pretty her children were. I thought that she was in denial herself. I was always tempted to ask her if she really thought I was pretty, or if it was just an act. I never did though— not because I was scared she wouldn't tell me the truth, but because I was scared she would.

As an adult, thinking back to when I was a little girl of eight, sitting on my grandmother's elegant white couch, wearing my favorite outfit—an outfit I hope no one in my family remembers—I remember how awkward-looking I was as a child. That picture of me on that couch still hangs in my grandmother's house, I think, to remind me of how much I've blossomed. I suffered through a very long, awkward stage. Braces, bad hair, dark cluttered freckles, chubby thighs and belly— I wasn't cute. I know that now, but I didn't then. And I wished they hadn't told me.

The Modern Day Amontillado

—Pamela Lopez—

A bell rings and a hallway with wooden doors is suddenly swarmed with what appears to be an army of clones. The clones all wear a wool plaid skirt, a crisp white collared shirt, a blood red cardigan, white knee highs and black flat shoes. They walk in two separate directions, all chatting and laughing amongst each other. Suddenly, the crowd is disrupted by one particular girl shoving her way through the army, using her notebook to shove and push her schoolmates out of her way. She's rushing to avoid being late to her next class. She stands out from the crowd though, and it's evident. Unlike the other girls, she wears the same skirt, only hers has ripped from the wear and tear of four years of use; her blouse is wrinkled, it was yanked out of drawer and "looked clean enough"; her knee highs are black and she wears black high tops which have been painted vividly. Her hair is wild and messy in its curly state. She wears black eyeliner which makes her eyes appear abnormally large. She doesn't dress this way to stand out; she does so because it's comfortable. That and she is too lazy to iron on a regular basis.

I was that girl three years ago.

I was seventeen, a senior in high school, eagerly awaiting the impending graduation that was only a few months away. Somehow or another, I had obtained a copy of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, by Steven Chbosky. I finished the book in record time and I was left with such a huge range of emotions. Awe, sympathy, anger, joy; emotions I never knew I could feel so strongly from just reading a book. Never had I read a book that made me feel like it was written **just** for me, a fabulous secret or surprise that I had discovered. I wanted to create something that would touch someone else as much as the book had touched me.

I did anything but take my schoolwork seriously in high school. I was always able to maintain a more than decent GPA without really studying. Basically, I just attended class and handed in the homework I had breezed through the night before. I have always been an excellent writer, so this class was a "blow off" class to me, and was what I felt to be nothing more than a waste of my time.

It was only a few weeks before I graduated high school. I attended a small, private Catholic school, with a graduation class of 74 girls. For creative writing class, with I **hated**, our final project was to create a five to ten page fictional story accompanied with a portfolio of all the

stories we had created through out the semester. Rather than stick to my traditional, trusted and familiar humorous style of writing, I decided to actually challenge myself and create something with a more serious mood.

It was the night before my required portfolio was due, and the final paper had yet to be done. I was not procrastinating. To be perfectly honest, I had forgotten about it. I probably would not have even done it, had it not been for my mother reminding me that the printer had broke once again and that I would have to print out my portfolio at school.

Like a madwoman, I ran around my house frantically searching for my car keys; it was going to be a long night. Suffering a severe case of writer's block, I started to panic. The clerk at the corner store made a clever remark bout my 2 am coffee run, but my mind was a million miles away.

As I got into my car, I reached under the seat to listen to look for a CD to listen to on the ride back to my house, (I'm not the best driver and objects tend to find their way: under the seats of my car, once in the sunroof, and occasionally out the window).

Instead of a CD, I pulled out my semi-battered copy of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I pondered how the book had exactly ended up under my seat and why I would find it at that particular moment, yet at the same moment, I didn't care.

I took it as a sign and a sudden inspiration to create something that would make an impact. Maybe it was the coffee, maybe it was the fact that it was almost 3 am and the paper was due in five hours, maybe it was the fact that if I did not do this paper I would fail the class and I would not graduate. Whatever it was, I took it as a sign.

So three cups of coffee, a *bright eyes* CD set on repeat and 3 and a half hours later ... my paper was done. I created a short fictional story about a boy with a speech impediment who assassinated his principal, and a few other students at his graduation ceremony, right before taking his own life. It just so happened that I had been doing research on the Columbine tragedy for another class. Wit the information still fresh in my mind, the idea of an "outcast" was on my mind. I wasn't sure that my story would be as great as I had wanted or make an impact, but it would have to do. I saved my work on a floppy disk, threw it in my bag and left for school. I printed out my story and turned it in without a second thought. When evaluations and grades were distributed, I was the only senior who instead of a grade received a note informing me that I was to have a conference with the guidance counselor, principal and the teacher after school.

Notorious for being a “rebel” at my high school, I quickly scanned my memory for any antics I might have committed or been involved with that would have gotten me into trouble; for once in my four years of high school, I was at a loss. When I entered the conference room and saw the somber faces of the faculty looking back at me, I honestly thought someone in my family had died. (My grandfather had been critically ill at this time, and we had prepared for the worst any day now). I’m not quite sure who, but one of the staff members started off with:

“Pamela...we know that you’re not exactly popular with a lot of people here and...”

I thought: *thank you? I was called in here when I could be driving to grab a Diet Coke with my best friend? To tell me that I’m un-popular? Next they’ll tell me that I’m ugly.*

“...we are concerned that your anger towards the other girls may become out of control and we honestly have everyone’s best interests in mind...”

What the Hell were they talking about? All I want is to get a Diet Coke right now, I don’t know why I’m here, but all I know is that I’m thirsty...

“...and which is why we have decided not to allow you to walk the stage at your graduation.”

Upon hearing this, a response from me was finally submitted verbally. I blurted out my reaction like word vomit. “What? Why?! You think I’m going to kill someone? If I couldn’t cope with being so ‘un-popular’ and having to endure all the shit I get from teachers and other students, don’t you think I would have done it already?”

Uh-oh. That was a little much.

I attempted to calm myself down, and to defend myself on a more rational and not so threatening level. I explained that I honestly hadn’t finished the paper until three that very morning. I pointed out that I had just recently on the Columbine tragedy for another class.

But even then, they had their minds made up. My reaction should have been one of dismay; however it was just the opposite. My paper had actually triggered a reaction! When I look back at my reaction, it wouldn’t be very different from today. Only in present time I would

speak faster, louder and use "bigger words", and alert those in higher power of this travesty.

I am proud of what happened because I got exactly what I wanted initially. The faculty's precautions were necessary because my story was very graphic and vividly detailed. I hope that they would take the same precautions if the situation were to arise again, although they should tackle the problem a little more professionally.

Apparently, my story was so vivid and realistic, the school's administration was alerted, and talk was that I could be possibly the one senior in the school's history not to "walk" the stage at graduation, yet actually be graduating. I couldn't believe that something I had created in one night had actually caused a stir, and I had achieved what I had wanted: a reaction. I was thrilled.

Exactly twelve days later, I found myself backstage at the city convention center gazing at my reflection in the large mirror and I could feel the heat from the huge light bulbs that lined the frame as I adjusted my graduation cap, and fixed my make-up one last time. I then turned around and faced the wall, and was patted down by my guidance counselor under the supervision of my principal. So in the end, I ended up "walking" the stage at my graduation after being informed that I would not do so, and no one was fatally injured. I had completed two of my goals: graduating from high school and creating something that impacted someone enough to take action.

I'm not going to lie. As I strutted across the stage I felt cockier than I believe I will ever feel in my entire life. Under the glare of the spot lights, I couldn't see anything and was too caught up in the moment to hear a sound. With a huge smirk that I was later informed was visible from the highest balcony, I opted to high five rather than hug the principal, guidance counselor and president of the school as all the girls before me had, and accepted my diploma. With that being done, I twirled around and smiled, striking a pose like the ham that I am, not yet ready to give up the attention that was focused on me.

I then turned to the trio of administrators and pointed and laughed in triumph. Then I proceeded to calmly and humbly return to my sea as the audience laughed, applauded and cheered; my poor family blushed and lowered their heads, politely clapping.

As for my story, which was entitled, *The Modern Day Amontillado*, it received an "A+", and was published in a local literary magazine. Although I cannot graduate high school again, I can and *will*, write another story that can trigger a reaction and cause a stir, and I *cannot* wait to do it again.

Tinkerbell's Gift
Tinkerbell's Gift
Tinkerbell's Gift

—Nancy Perez—

Child from the womb of an undeserving mother
Victim to the cruelty of fates everlasting grasp
Lover of hope, which hope has forgotten
The slave of love and all its despairs
Let me walk you across the road of damnation
Let me lead you to the side of salvation
Don't hide your wounds
For then how would I heal them?
Don't turn away
The tears will still flow.
My heart yearns to help you
To take from you the pain
My soul is willing to make the sacrifice Tinkerbell gave
Your poison is my drink
I'll bleed instead of you
The only tears that ever flow
Belong to my friends and family alone
Poisoned I've been
And still yours I'll take
Don't fear my death
When you all are my hope
Don't suffer without me
Don't hate for I can for you
Don't fear I'll be your shield.
My love keeps me going
But laugh when I won't
Love the one you wait for
Smile when I fake mine
So I know it's worth it
Destiny was cruel to me
But it was cruel to you
I'll take your place in the chains of its dungeon
If only to see your eyes gleam with light
Gleam with hope
Gleam with my sacrifice
And leave I won't

To Some Not All To Some Not All To Some Not All

—Elizabeth Pena—

Why do we as women fill our emotional gap with a man?
For example, we're sad, mad, suicidal, ultimately emotionally unstable;
So we turn to a man as a source of affection, praise and love.
For their kind gesture, we in return love them, "can't live without them",
look for them,
call them, and eventually...piss them off and scare them away.
Once they're gone, we try to get them back.
Now, we're needy, dependent, bothersome pests and eventually make a
name for ourselves.
"Psycho, bi-polar, needy"
"You see? That's why I don't want a girlfriend!" They say.
So wise. They know us too well.
But if you're lucky, he'll come back.
He's attracted to the mother figure, the warmth, the attention and affection.
"I can cook for you, let me help you with that." we say.
Promises to make him stay another day.
We smell good, feel good, and look at them in that special way no other
woman can.
As the days pass, he may no longer be affectionate or loving;
But hurtful, degrading, and mean.
"Why do you hurt me?" We cry.
Tears of sadness in our eyes.
Too weak to leave, we say,
"He'll change."
We wait, it'll happen if we give them time. It will happen right?
Even the strongest women stick around.
They wait for him to change, but why?
Who will show us there is another emotional filler?
And it's not a man. You'll see. You'll find out for yourself.
While we wait for our men to change, on the other side of the world,
across the street,
down the block, in the next city, the woman next to you wakes up, gets
dressed, goes to
school, work, dinner, drinks with her mind in one setting:
MAN HUNTER

They need him and their biggest fear is being alone, living alone, eating
alone, doing
laundry alone, and dying alone. Is being unmarried being alone?

As women, do we have lives of our own?

How long have we waited for our happiness to walk over to us and offer
to buy a drink?

Will that new tight shirt bring your future husband to you?

If you're alone and single next year, will you know what to do?

You can wait and see who will come to you or you can live your life.

You can live for you.

The Harvest

—Emily E. Yager—

Irina drew the blade smoothly through the potato, turned it, and halved it again. Cutting crosswise, the whitish cubes fell into the pot on her lap. When she had finished, she stood up, set the pot on the table, and glanced out the window. The sun was dropping towards the earth. Soon her father would return from the harvest fields.

The growing season had been damp that year, the summer dry and cool. The rye had grown unusually high—up to Irina's shoulders. Yesterday, she had gathered up stalks for bundling, following behind her father, who cut the rye with great sweeps of his scythe.

Irina pulled a loaf of bread from the oven and set it on the table to cool. She rarely ate it herself these days; she made it for her father. She had grown up watching her mother make the bread, helping her knead it with her small hands. Now she must make it by herself, as she did so many things by herself. She did not like being reminded of this, that there was no one left but her and her father.

Three years ago, a mysterious plague had swooped down over their village. Nearly half the villagers died, including Irina's two brothers. Irina had not seen what the plague did to them that day in the fields when they became ill. She did not see what it made them do. She was in the house with her mother when it happened. Irina's mother had begged her husband to tell her what happened, and he, foolish in his grief, made the mistake of telling her. Irina's mother screamed and beat her fists on her husband's chest. Why had he not done anything? Why had he let the devil take their sons? She grieved and prayed and fasted over her dead boys. In the end, her prayers were answered, but her sons were not brought back. She was brought closer to them two months later when she went to her grave.

Irina's father vowed to never speak another word about what had happened. He and his daughter each mourned in silence. However, in the village, Irina heard how people had suddenly gone mad. They thrashed their limbs, yelled at people no one else could see, and vomited on themselves. Others itched and shook uncontrollably until they went stiff. One story told of a son returning from a neighboring village to find his family members slumped over their chairs, their half-eaten dinner still sitting on the table.

A number of people tried to explain it. The priest said the plague was the burning flames of Hell reaching to earth. He called it St. Anthony's fire and said it was a sign to the villagers of the punishment that awaited them if they did not reform their wicked ways and give more money to the church. The apothecary said it was an ailment that first afflicted the stomach; he sold a drinking potion that he claimed would protect the villagers in the case of another outbreak. A traveling grain merchant said it was caused by something that grew on the rye, and offered his wheat at a discounted price.

The bread's aroma filled the hut. For some reason, it did not sicken Irina, like it usually did. In fact, she longed for a taste. Now she longed to remember meals eaten with the family. Life was hard then, but now it was worse. The pain in her stomach tempted her beyond resistance. She cut a slice of bread, chewed and savored the texture, the flavor, the warm feeling as it sunk to her stomach. With the raw potatoes still in their pot on the table, Irina laid her head down and closed her eyes.

As she lay resting, Irina felt a burning in her hands, then her feet. She looked at her palms, but there was no visible sign of harm. The heat moved up her wrists, her ankles. She looked to see if she had left the oven door open, or put too much wood on the fire. Nothing looked out of place. It could be a fever. Her father would know what to do. In any case, it was too hot to stay in the hut. She ran outside in a panic, leaving the door swinging behind her.

Outside, she spun around, looked to the woods, then to the sky, holding the back of her hand to her head. The wind was cold, but it only seemed to make her burn that much hotter. Stumbling, she made her way into the field, calling out for her father.

"Papa! Papa!" He was probably on the other side of the field, still cutting the rye. His hearing was almost gone now, but she still called for him out of habit, out of fear.

Partway into the field, Irina became confused and lost track of where she was going. She wondered if she should turn back to the hut. She spun around but could not see it. The rye towered over her, the ochre stalks swaying in the wind. Looking up, the sky burned white, then fell dark, like the sun

had jolted from its zenith to the horizon in an instant. Irina fell to the ground. Then she remembered: she was looking for someone. Her mother? She would sit next to Irina on the bed and dab her face with a cool, wet cloth. Yes, Irina just had to reach her, and all would be well.

She pawed furiously at the earth with her hands. Having lost all sense of time, she cried out, "Viktor! Help me find Mama!"

Something moved in the dirt. A young man's hands poked through the dirt, reaching. She rolled to evade their grasping. All around her was a dry sea of gold and brown. The stalks leaned over her, began weaving themselves together, covering her. She fought against them, pushing with all her weight, staggered up, and ran.

As she ran her legs became tangled by her skirts and she crashed to the ground. A few feet away, she saw her father lying on the ground. For a moment she thought she understood. She began to recite the Lord's Prayer, up to the line "Give us this day our daily bread," but could not continue. "Our daily bread, our daily bread," she muttered, thinking of the loaves she had so carefully baked, never knowing what was inside. She opened her eyes one last time. The slanted light of sunset burned right through to her heart. The black forest line appeared through the rye stalks. In her mind, she walked behind her father one last time through the rye, his scythe clearing a path in front of them. She followed his path, not knowing whether it led to Heaven or Hell.

Captivation of Silence

—Amanda Tillman—

I sit here in your wake's shadow
But you don't hear, don't see me
Your fingers move mountains
But they don't touch mine

I stand in the silence you've left
Hearing your heart beat
Fettered and chained to you
To your abandonment of me

I lean toward your touch
A flicker that's hypnotic with
An ember that's never faded out
You'll destroy me without knowing

I wait in the silence of the lies
Love over powering my disgust
Trust displacing my disappointment
Knowing that you need me more

I linger in your love's laughter
Knowing that you've stolen
And will never quite return
That which was mine first

I dance on your pin tips
Waiting for a moment of you
To grace my finger tips, when you
Remember, conceived, I am yours

Soldier / Child

—William V. Tam—

Youth, under fearful gravity you staggered-
Bronzed shoulders bitten by a weighty inheritance.
Now the mangled, ape-like war engine seizes;
The bloodied arms that shield you are still,
Shattered beneath the blind hammer strokes
Of a crimson conjugation-
Power has taken Faith to bed.

Slag, the pillow upon which you sleep,
Blackened sand, now your sheet, smothers.
An ashen womb for you, small soldier-
Lie in deep; Rest a prisoner's rest.
A sandpaper crone's fingers caress,
Sifts chains into your hair.
A nation's umbilical banner binds
Your bloodied wrists in silent repose.

Once birthed in a swaddling flag,
Ill-begotten progeny at the breast of Belief.
You nursed cold, marbled milk like the news.
The Father fired his sanctions in salvo across the land;
Each echo harnessed weight onto your armored back,
Forced to grow, your eyes burned
With the belching, hereditary fire in your belly.
But your razor ideals have gritted with sand.

A new mother tends your wounds;
Anointing the teeth marks of Death
With her enveloping, molten arms.
The barren hag grows bloated
With children she can not have.
The sand, consuming, will not yield,
Though its drifts mix beneath the wings of crows;
Your sword now a burned and bent grimace
On the ill-favored morning field.

Binary Opposition Binary Opposition Binary Opposition

—Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill—

Binary opposition

Division

Elision

Illusion

The shun of these //-tion// words?

Contextualization

Civilization

The morpheme of //-tion//
which creates nouns:

Reification,

making things into things,

Difference as reified,

not open to change,

no glimmer of transformation,

but,

hope

through

Reconciliation

And yes,

Forgiveness...

//-ness//,

another noun-making morpheme...

Cyber Withdrawal Cyber Withdrawal

—Kimberly Quintero—

An endless list of friends illuminated by a soft warm glow,
Bright, shiny, happy faces artificially welcome me, even when I am not.
In this secretive world of diversity it is hard to feel low.
You no longer see me; instead it is an animated yellow dot.
The familiar ring of your IM's is more comforting than your ever-
changing voice.

My heart is no longer seen on my sleeve.
Times change and with it come the loss of human contact.
My words are no longer heard, but are seen on a screen which makes
them seem bolder.
Every word is now seen as more than a simple conversation but instead
as a contract.
My fingers bleed now since that is where my heart now resides.

It is now time to say goodbye.
With a quiet beep the only world I enjoy disappears.
I must now face this bleak, uninviting world where I dare not say hi.
If only in this world I could tell you my fears.
Alas, I wait near a phone which will never ring and a visit which will
never come.

Luckily, Memory Stays

—Anh Nguyen—

As a little girl I used to dream every night. Often, I dreamed that I could fly around the house, very close to the ceilings, watching my parents, brothers, and sister sleeping. Some nights, they slept so peacefully that I, too, went back to sleep feeling content. Some nights, they slept with disturbance and weariness carved so deeply in their faces that I felt my heart sink. Too young to understand what could have happened to my beloved ones, but like miracles, the dreams held me close to them. I subconsciously imagined what I could not consciously see.

Dreams are temples for love and imagination.

Back then, my world was never still. I saw vivid shapes or faces of animals and people; on the walls, on the ground, on any smooth or rough surface, any kind of texture, anything. Whenever I looked, my eyes would instantaneously see colors and images.

At night, as the lights went out I was left with only a pitch-black. My world turned into a true fantasia. Millions of colorful, tiny, shiny dots flowed and danced around me. They moved in random speeds and orders, but magically drew together to make the shapes of whatever I wanted to see. At times I thought they were invisible atoms that could only be seen in total darkness. I figured they belonged to another world that paralleled our world; in pure darkness the two worlds somehow entered an intersection.

These images and thoughts used to dominate my world.

When I stopped believing, seeing, or having them—I do not know. I wonder if my education in reason and logics expelled me from that fantastic world.

Sometimes I feel like an exile looking back in bewilderment and regret, wondering why I cannot return. I carry on living by continually dropping and picking up pieces of thoughts and ideas, constantly losing and gaining.

Luckily, memory stays.



—Ivan Juárez—

Aquí estoy, y te sigo esperando
Aunque sé que mi espera es inútil.
Después del amor, después de la ira y las lagrimas
La espera es todo lo que me queda.
Siempre serás un sueño.
Ya no quiero verte jamás, mas quiero solo imaginarte.
Cuando me pierdo buscándote
La luz del sol se ve azul y el viento lleva sabor de arena.
Tierra y mar; se resecan y se rompen mis labios.
Eres mi más peor desliz;
Me has costado un año de sonrisas y una montaña de desesperación.
¿Sabes lo que me haces?
No puedo soportar tu mirada fija y me siento como plomo en tu presencia.
Fingimos que no nos conocemos y no entiendo por qué.
Ah, Perdóname...me equivoque...claro...sí, tienes razón.
No podemos ser amigos
Porque mi necio corazón nunca podría dejar de quererte.
Éste es el último poema que escribiré por ti, te lo juro.

X=THE POEM X=THE POEM

—Trinidad Sánchez, Jr.—

Each X-mas take it to my ex *y que te acompañan los mariachi con la música* of their xylophone, trumpets *y guitarrones*.
Si, toma mi corazón for my ex, the one who xed out the xxx of our love and xed out the x that marked the spot on my heart. Our relationship had grown to be like the two XXs of the Roman numeral XX always standing next to each other *listo para bailar la música Xicana*.

The break-up felt very much like the two lines that make an X, the 24th letter, separated standing there next to each other like the double *ll* of the Spanish alphabet, the Mexicans use. Think of Texas without the x that's what the experience felt like.

In a xenophobic moment she marked all my *calzones* with xses so that other women would know I was her ex. I felt the x chromosome was missing in this x-rated relationship. Felt like someone had placed a hex on the x in my life. Yes, each X-mas have the x-man (mailman) take it to my ex, tell her to x (multiply) the xes (the unknown quantity) of my love with hers. Tell her, this corazónazo is from Xavier... let her guess my last name.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The history of the United States of America is a story of a young nation that grew from a small group of colonies on the eastern coast of North America. The first European settlers arrived in 1492, and over the centuries, the colonies developed their own unique culture and identity. In 1776, the colonies declared their independence from Great Britain, and the United States was born. The new nation faced many challenges, including the American Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights. Despite these challenges, the United States emerged as a powerful and influential nation, and its history continues to shape the world today.

“ In the next ten years, there will be new developments in literature, in technology, and in the membership of the St. Mary’s Community. What won’t change are the dedicated instructors who encourage their students to pursue literary excellence and the committed student editors who want to share the literary legacy of the *Pecan Grove Review* with new readers. ”

