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THE ENDICOTT REVIEW

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Recovery & Endurance—by *the Editors*

Neptunia

Dan Calnan

She's leaving today. It's 1948 as Bridget Shahan stands by the docks at the Port of Boston, waiting to board the SS *Neptunia*. She's going to visit her brothers and sisters on the old family farm back home in County Kerry. She had told her oldest son Peter it would be a month or so, but she really doesn't know how long she'll be there. All she knows is that she has to go home. She has to get away from this place—the place that took her little Matthew and her husband John away from her.

There are rows of smaller vessels, fishing boats with wooden masts and painted siding, lined up beside the massive ocean liner. The sky is gray and the stone bricks beneath her feet are slick from rain. She can't stand the grayness of this place, like everything is dead or fading. She wants to see the green of the farm grass by Dingle Bay, the clear blue waters and bright yellow sand. She needs to leave this place, at least for a while. She needs to get away from all the death.

Peter is with her. He's 17 now, nearly a full-grown man, and if she was of right mind, she'd tell him to cut his unruly hair. But she doesn't notice his hair, she only sees the ocean, the dirty Boston harbor, full of tiny ripples from spitting raindrops. The ship is boarding its passengers. Peter is not going with her, he's just here to make sure she's safe. He's promised to take care of Danny and Sarah until she's back.

She watches him scan the crowd of people on the docks until he finds an orderly—a dark-skinned, broad-shouldered man in a bright white uniform. Peter grabs her wrist and walks up to him, reaching into his breast pocket to pull out two paper bills—20 dollars each. He looks behind and around him before placing the bills into the orderly's hand.

"Keep her safe," Peter says. "Swear on your life."

The orderly stuffs the bills in his uniform pocket and gives a stiff nod. She feels her son embrace her before stepping back, as the orderly takes her hand and leads her aboard.

The *Neptunia* departs at 9 a.m., moseying through the brown Harbor water. She stands on deck with the orderly, watching the city of Boston, the state of Massachusetts, and the United States of America fade from her view. She doesn't know if she ever wants to come back.

She had lived in Kenshaw, in a small house by the overhead train tracks, with a man from West Cork named John Shahan, who gave her four children. As a young man, he'd fought for the Irish Republic, but in America, he worked in construction—WPA projects around town. She taught piano lessons and took care of the children. The piano had been left there when they moved in.

"A gift from God," John had said.

She believed it. It brought them good money in Kenshaw. Even some of the well-dressed children from the East Side of town would seek her out for lessons. She'd made Peter and Danny scrub the walls and floors like mad. They'd not host guests in a filthy house.

They were happy there, in Kenshaw. Her, John, Peter, Danny, Sarah, and little Matthew. On Sundays, they drove to Saint Catherine's for mass and afterwards she made everyone a big breakfast—as much eggs and toast as they could afford. During the week, she'd walk the kids to school, and in the afternoon she'd watch them play outside with the other children of Flaherty Hills—the Clancys and the Mahoneys and the Geaneys.

Now, on the deck of the *Neptunia*, standing by the large orderly, as the land leaves her sight and the rain picks up above her head, those times before seem like some

paradise, some Heaven in her mind, where she wishes she could go and stay forever. But she can't, and as the orderly leads her down to her quarters, she can only think of the gray skies and the spitting rain. The great emptiness of the ocean. The absence of God.

For paradise was cut short in 1942, when Matthew, only three, snuck out of the house during one of Bridget's piano lessons. He must have been following Peter and Danny as they walked down the tracks toward Meisner Park in West Kenshaw. His little foot must have gotten stuck under the rail over Agganis Street, just one block over. She panicked when her student left. Sarah didn't know where Matthew was. She remembered feeling the shaking of the tracks just fifteen minutes before, and saw that the train had stopped above them.

There was no body. Only a tiny leather shoe.

The piano lessons stopped. John took harder to the drink. The boys didn't walk along the train tracks anymore. Soon they were working in construction, too, to help pay the bills. She would spend her days in the upstairs hallway, looking out the bay windows at the tracks. Perhaps he simply lost his shoe. He'll walk back any day now, and she'd buy him a whole new pair. She'd buy him all new clothes, no matter how much it cost. She'd hold him in her arms and play him a song to lull him to sleep every night. If only he could just walk right back.

As she lies in her cot in the lower quarters, she remembers the shaking of the tracks. She'd felt it so many times that she didn't even notice it anymore. She should have known. Her motherly instincts should have kicked in, known something was wrong. She should have run out the door and grabbed him. It was God that shook the ground, trying to get her attention, and she ignored him. She couldn't show herself at Saint Catherine's anymore. Every Sunday she just stayed in the hallway, staring out at the tracks, as Sarah made breakfast and John was too drunk to wake up.

She hears the rain hit the ship harder now. The orderly has gone away so she can sleep. He'll wake her up for dinner later. It's two weeks to County Kerry. To home. She tries to think of home, the farmhouse with Mary and Donald and the others. The rows and rows of potato drills and sheep. She used to help her father and brothers shear them. She tries to remember her old tabby cat, Aengus. But she can only think of how he'd claw at little mice. She once saw him torture a mouse for a whole hour, only stopping playing after it was dead. It's like how she feels about God—that he's simply toying with her, piercing her heart and clawing her body, nibbling at her mind and leaving a mess all over the ground.

It was just earlier this year that He'd finally done her in. A man from the Red Cross had come to the house and told her they found John dead on the Flaherty Street sidewalk, an empty bottle just inches from his hand. She'd fallen to the floor with tears. Peter and Danny had to lift her up the stairs to bed.

Her mind goes back and forth about God. He took little Matthew. He tried to warn her, but he died, anyway. John couldn't handle it, either. He drank to forget, right until he fell on the sidewalk, dead. God took them both away from her. Her little boy. Her love. Why must He play with his food like Aengus? Why not just swallow her whole?

She hears the pattering again, which starts to sound soothing. She closes her eyes and waits for the orderly to come back to bring her to dinner.

The shaking. She feels it. The ground is shaking. She's at the piano, and she feels the ground shake. She knows Matthew is there. She can save him. She can get his little foot right out of the rail. She can bring him home and sing him a lullaby. She can hold him and John and all her children in her arms. She just has to run.

The boom of a horn wakes her. She shoots up in the cot, and sees the room turn nearly sideways. She slides out of the cot, landing elbow-first on the hard floor. She hoists herself up. The ship keeps moving from side to side, throwing off her balance. She hears thunder and a sound like ripping metal. She sees people run through the

hallway, and she walks towards the stairs to the upper deck.

Freezing wind blows by her face. Heavy rain strikes her shoulders and the ship. The sky is black, except for flashes of lightning. People stand in boisterous crowds, as the crew men try to bark out orders. The colliding cries and yells echo in her ears. The ship no longer moves from side to side, but down. It's sinking.

She stops and stares at the sky, feeling the cold rain smack her face. There are no stars, only black clouds. The screams of girls and the cries of infants and the yelling of men all fade from her hearing.

Do it, she thinks. Take me.

It was time. It was the end. God wouldn't even let her go back home. She would stand on this deck as it sank, as it was swallowed by the icy waters of the Atlantic. She would stay there all the way down, and breathe her last breath with *Neptunia* below her. She wasn't afraid. She would see them again. Matthew and John. She could hold her son in her arms and sing him lullabies again.

She smiles at the sky and closes her eyes. God had taken everything from her. Her baby boy. John. Her life. All she knows now is the shaking, the train tracks, the silence of her piano. The emptiness of life without them. How Peter and Danny had been forced to drop out of school and work.

Peter...Danny, she thinks. Sarah.

Her eyes shoot open, as the sky brightens with a bolt of lightning. She remembers her sons and daughter at home, in that house under the train tracks that took their brother. They were holding the family together. The boys worked all day, came home covered in filth and grime. Sarah made the meals and brought them up to her every day. So much she has wanted to come back to them, to be the mother they need. But she has only ever been able to sit and stare at the train tracks, waiting for Matthew to come back.

She wanted to escape that place. But she couldn't leave them. She couldn't leave her children alone. Yet God wanted to take her, anyway.

"Why?" she asks, and waits for a response.

She hears the screams again, as people brush past her toward the crowds.

"Why!" she yells, and feels her foot slip.

She falls onto her hands, catching herself. She looks back up to the sky, as a massive bolt of lightning, splitting into three bright white strains, flashes across the sky. The deck beneath her shakes. She closes her eyes.

"Ma'am!" she hears, amidst the chaos.

She opens her eyes. Right where the lightning flashed is the orderly, stretching out his hand, his white uniform soaked. She reaches hers out, and he pulls her to her feet. He shoves them through the crowd, toward the side of the ship, and lifts her into a lifeboat. As she gathers herself in her seat, she sees the orderly give a crew man one of the 20 dollar bills to hoist them down to the water.

Bridget watches the *Neptunia* become smaller as the boat paddles away. They aren't alone—the orderly paddles with some of the crew men, who she overheard saying they didn't get too far from New England. A younger mother with small children sat beside her. A small boy stares at her, and she smiles back at him before the mother pulls him away.

She remembers her boys back home and takes a deep breath of the cold air. She would be home with them soon. There was nothing to find in County Kerry. Neither John nor Matthew would be there. They were dead. They would always be dead. But she couldn't abandon the living.

Everyone shivers as the rain comes to a stop, and they see the *Neptunia* slowly dip underneath the ocean surface. Bridget stares off into the black distance, the vast Atlantic Ocean, the road back home. She hears the oars paddle against it, feels the cold air and hunger in her belly. But all she focuses on is the parting black clouds in the distance, and the stars beginning to populate the skies.

Ms. Willow Tree

Allie Hastings

Why do you weep, Ms. Willow Tree?
I know of no other tree that can make me feel as safe, and sheltered
And as happy as you.

So why do you weep, Ms. Willow Tree?
Children love to hang from your embrace,
For you provide them a place of sanctity and cover –
Of comfort and escape.

So why do you weep, Ms. Willow Tree?
You are a favorite amongst many,
Who travel far and wide to marvel at your low-swinging branches,
And luscious green canopy.

So why do you weep, Ms. Willow Tree?
Nature has blessed you, for you are one of the first to sprout leaves in the spring
And one of the last to shed foliage in the fall.

So why do you weep, Ms. Willow Tree?
The world loves you and still you bow your head to the ground,
Making efforts to hide.

What are you so afraid of?
Let us dry those sacred eyes.

Loud Silence

Claire Orr

I left the place where it was hurting. I stepped out from the building into the silence of the cold. I couldn't hear anything. I couldn't see anything through the fog of my glasses. The moisture in my breath dampens my mask. All I can see is a cloudy haze.

Pulling down my mask I wander through the empty brick path. I come upon a couple walking. Bundled up head to toe. Arm and arm. Gracefully strolling by as I remember how we used to roam the frozen nights.

Walking down the hill, going back in time. I'm being pulled to where this all began. Walking through a ghost town. No cars, no people. The dorms emit a distant rhythm. I'm being pulled across the street. Reminiscent of the cold sleepless walks from years before.

The snow crunches under my boots. The snapping wind slices my cheeks. The wind smells cold and crisp freezing just the tip of my nose and all my little nose hairs. I lift the caution tape and trek on. Standing against a railing looking out at the black abyss a stream of memories flood in.

That wall three years ago. I remember me and him happily sharing secrets. Giving our hearts under the moon. The moon wasn't with me tonight though. Now, I just shout my mistakes silently in a whisper roar. The black abyss thunders in reply.

Everything has changed since then. The ocean wall collapsed, the water is not the same water as that night, everything has been distorted through time. But the ocean still looks at me. Steady. Purposeful. Free. Ebbing and flowing. How simple a life like that must be where all can change yet stay the same.

I taste salt streaming down my face. My eyelashes freeze. My cheeks sting as the wind tries to wipe them clean. Icicles hang from the gutters. My parents always told me "icicles hanging from a roof are a sign of poor insulation or gutter drainage." They cling to the gutter slowly to melt away drip by drip and eventually they will dwindle into nothing or come smashing to the cement. They look stable as they grasp to the gutter.

Rocks balanced on top of one another stand firmly in the puffing wind. They don't look phased by the cold air. Standing firm, balanced, withstanding the wind. I tried to move a rock that was leaning up against the beautiful tower. They wobbled fearing they might fall.

The angels in the night sky look down at me with a pale light. The moon is half there but I can't see Him fully. He isn't answering my questions and cries. "What do I do, Lord?" I try to listen for an answer, but everything is so loud in the silence.

I see our ghosts everywhere I look. Walking back to Hamilton late at night. Sitting on the chilling wall by the sidewalk sharing warm thoughts and feelings. Sitting on the ocean wall for a genuine first kiss. Standing on the lookout taking president's ball photos. Walking on the seashore sharing our days. Now, I walk back alone with a stinging in my heart and a pain in my mind to Reginald my fish. The fish that makes me feel less lonely.

I think Reggie would like the ocean swimming around. I hope he would think he was the biggest fish of them all in the open abyss. I hope he would have joy swimming around the waves. I hope he wouldn't leave me forever.

Stage Three: Bargaining

Rianon Prushinski

I like to bargain
with the universe.
If you give me a sign,
I'll be nicer to myself.
I like that line too much to
put it in a poem about you,
so I've decided this is a poem
about me. This is a poem about
the waves throwing my body
against the rocks, the
splintered boards of
sunken ships threatening
to pin me underwater. This
is a poem about me digging puzzle
pieces from my hair, from my throat,
from the tattoos on my skin. This is
a poem about me looking for a sign
from the universe, and being nicer
to myself without finding one.

Cloudy Days

Emma Cundari

When everything is too much
The constant noise of the world
Buzzes
At an unbearable pitch
And you hide your bright face
Behind the grey curtain of a cloudy day
Because it's too hard
To be someone else's light
When the fire that burns within you
Is nothing but a flickering flame

Glare

George Rosatone

Fistfuls of fresh grass
thrown into the wind.
West.
I needed guidance,
finally entrusting the natural world.

I followed the setting sun,
just as the wind told me to,
into a thickly shadowed wood,
relentlessly pierced by beautifully blinding sunbeams.
Godrays of every color.

Further west,
deeper than I had ever wandered before,
lay a young deer in a bed of flowers.
He had been shot, waiting to die,
his eye blinded by a particular sunbeam.

I watched him for a moment,
but no one came.
So I moved ever-so-slightly to the west,
and I sat with him.
He wasn't scared in the slightest.

So we sat
amongst the flowers
blinded by a sun soon to set
theorizing how we got here
and remembering what comes next

For South Boston

Áine Griffin

When I think of the city I knew as a child
I think of my grandmother's back deck,
Tucked in between the triple deckers.
It was just a few potted plants,
A chemtrailed square of sky,
And a slice of hot city air,
But it gave me hard ground
Beneath my feet
And breath
Pounding through my bones.

For ten years I sat out there,
A sticky strawberry slush smile
Permanently smeared across my face,
Counting down the glory days
While planes whirred overhead
And church bells sang in the distance.

My Mamo and her lovely satin voice
telling me stories of the homeland,
Johnny next door, with his midday cigarettes and his wife-beaters
Jump ropes and scraped knees,
Front stoops and the daily Herald
Boys with backwards caps and mean streaks,
That's all I knew of the city,
That's all I knew of the world.

--

When I turned thirteen
My grandmother's porch chair
lay empty.
A vacant throne amid the potted plants.
All spring, I sat out there with the geraniums and Johnny
And together we grieved
As her breath,
Her ration of cement and air,
Was released back to the city.

In my naivety I could only mourn
The loss at the tip of my nose.
I couldn't see
My Mamo's vacant deck
Was just one of hundreds,
A single drop in the wave of change
Washing over the city.

--

Last year Johnny's building was sold
For close to a million.

He had one last cigarette
Standing in his back door.
The ashes embered in the old white dish
As he blew a final stream of smoke
Into the July air.
I watched it dance up to the clouds,
Spiral in the gap between the buildings,
And disappear.

It was a quiet tribute,
a lonely goodbye.

I wonder if the man who bought the apartment
A young thirty-something from Rhode Island
Who surfed and worked downtown,
I wonder if he ever thought about the man who
left
The ashtray on his porch.
I wonder if before investing in an urban
property
If he thought about whose backs he stood on,
Who owned that little square of cement and
sky and air before him -

Because I don't always think about it,
When people ask me where I'm from.

I don't always think about
The hundreds of back decks
Pressed between the apartments
And the generations that called them home.

And how one day,
when the final front stoop,
When the final slice of sky,
is sold
The air of the neighborhood
Will belong to new lungs,

And the city I knew as a child
For all its beauty
And all its ugly

Will breathe no more.

Grounded

Emma Cundari

I don't know how to tell you this.
I've tried to tell it to the bathroom mirror
Too many times.
But the toothpaste stains haven't responded well.

So I don't know how to tell you this;
Remember when we fell?
Through those rose-colored skies,
And our feet never touched the ground?
Well, I feel the dirt between my toes now,
And my eyes are no longer blocked
by those pastel-colored clouds.
I'm sorry, but I'm not falling with you anymore.

Lavender Pacemaker

George Rosatone

Donning exposed clothes,
I found myself now draped in gold

Intertwining bound sunshine,
A light to blind my tunneled eyes

Lavender pacemaker,
Keep my soul from running away
Daffodil breather,
My baby lungs can't help but ache

Winslet Clementine,
Thank you for trying to organize a spotted mind.

Promise

Temple Jordan

Play Selection Rhythm Nation.
When I Think Of You, State Of The World, Better Days.
Funky Big Band, You Want This R&B Junkie.
Like You Don't Love Me Nasty.
Hey Baby, That's The Way Love Goes.
LUV, Let's Wait A While.
Just A Little While, The Pleasure Principle.
Where Are You Now, Lessons Learned.
Gon B Alright With U.

The Great Forever, Truth or Dare, Discipline, Love 2 Love,
Exhibition.

Anytime, Anyplace, Dammn Baby, Alright.
Doesn't Really Matter, What's Ur Name?
The Meaning, You Ain't Right
Looking For Love, Trust A Try.
4 Words, Feedback, Slolove, Morning, Night.
Truly, It All Comes Down To Love.
Clouds, Wind, Rain, Truth.

After You Fall, Call On Me, Promise.

a T.J. production '20

Harrowing

Dan Calnan

I forget that the dead are gone—
that those smiles, hugs,
handshakes and kisses
will simply never happen again.
For that's the true sadness,
not that they're dead,
that they're *gone*.

Gammy died when I was a toddler,
before I could truly know her.
To me, Gammy's face is
a picture on the side table and
her voice is my father's impressions.
But I don't remember her hand
touching mine, her own voice
in my ears, that brogue of Mayo.

Dad barely knew his oldest brother—
Uncle PJ, so we call him, though
never old enough to be an uncle.
He died on the corner of Oxford and
Market Street – a T-bone crash in 1974.
I drove through that intersection
dozens of times before I knew where
the car pummeled his shotgun seat.
I only know him from his death,
a graduation picture, and the grave
he shares with Uncle John.

Now Uncle John I knew very well.
A thick mustache, like a fireman's,
though actually a construction man,
like his father and grandfather before him.
I remember the Fourth of July
at Sunrise Lake in New Hampshire,
sitting in front of him on a jet ski
in a bright red and yellow life jacket.
We hit the waves too hard one time
and turned over into the water.
I remember how he liked Rush,
and how we both jumped and played
air-keyboard when "Tom Sawyer" came on.

And I remember the phone call
in Mr. Wilkins' office, where
Mom told me he was dead.

Why was I not torn in half with tears?
What didn't click in my head that
my heart did not sink, but my brain
became static on that June morning?
It seems normal that I don't feel much
when I think of Gammy and PJ's deaths,
but when I hung up the phone
and walked up the stairs,
I didn't know what to feel.

But then, on the wet morning
at St. Joseph's Cemetery,
when they set his casket down
by the tree they planted for Gammy,
I found and felt the true sadness.

I saw Papa, a man of 86 then,
stand between the graves
of his wife and oldest son.
I saw my aunts, the five daughters
lay roses as they mourned
another lost brother.

And I saw my father,
six feet and six inches tall
and wide in the chest,
bring his hands to his eyes
and cry for the man
who taught him how to play basketball,
who sat with him at Papa's house
for hours on the weekend,
drinking Bud Lights and
laughing, while I played
hide-and-seek with cousins.

Such a sight grasped the veins
in my chest and twisted them
into tangled wires, split them
like broken guitar strings.

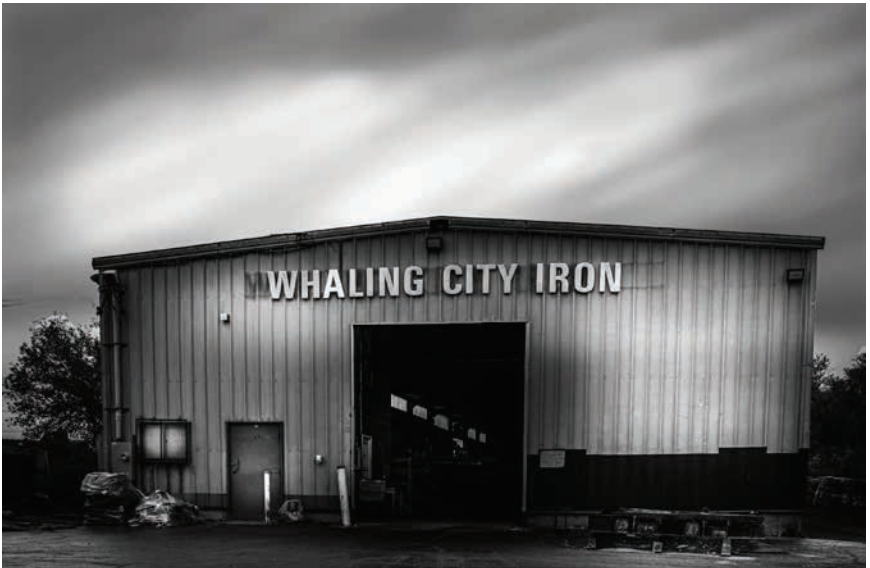
I forget that John is dead,
buried in the cemetery
I can see from my house.
But I remember
the sight of my dad crying,
my grandfather still living
after losing three loves,
the photos of the man in
picture frames on the wall,
and set beside his tombstone.

All the dead I've known and seen,
all the photographs and second-hand
stories, the memories and eulogies,
the testaments of their life—those
are what remind me that they're gone.

To know that they died is
to know that they lived—
to pluck a golden bough
from the tree of memory
and sail down the Acheron,
harrowing sadness and joy
from the Earth, bringing
them back to me once more.



Aleksandra Tsangarides—Tierney



Elizabeth Dourian



Matthew GashGilder



Alexandra Rose



Alyssa Cantwell



Cayley Oram



Emma Farrington—Stuck At the Border



Julia Steriti



Anna Fitzgerald



Taylor Carmody

Late Spring

Kacy Fallon

Pollen scatters like the mismatched map
of freckles on my back—late May,
and winter has finally left. Lilac clusters swell like
the bruises I couldn't scrub away,
like the growing pink mold in the sink drain where
I left my skin flakes to decay. Last night,
I dreamed of horses, massive beasts, running
in the moonless dark like thieves. I
was sitting next to men
I didn't know, didn't want to know. We
didn't speak. The horses ran so close,
a stampede nearing me, and then I am running
down stairs, stairs that I don't want to remember,
but I remember. I will never forget or forgive how
I mistook alarms for wedding bells. The
stairs are narrowing now—it's the monk house in Florence,
Italy—blurred candlelight shifting and wax slipping
down the cold, lumpy walls of concrete. I want to look
in the mirror and recognize who looks back at me.
On my walk to work, a woman stands at the corner
of Tremont and Emerson—7:52, every morning,
the ends of her hair still dripping. Sinking her teeth
into an apple, we cross the street
together. She watches for a train
that doesn't come, and when she looks at me
she looks past me, like she is thinking of
asking, "C'mon. Was your childhood
that bad?" I want to see what she sees
when we pass the lilac bush silently. Sometimes
I know someone is speaking, but wipers scream
against a windshield, swishing like
the ever-quickening pace of my pulse. "Violet,"
I overheard a man say on a first date
in Boston over Easter weekend. He said his favorite color
was violet, but I hear violent. I want to pluck
the fat, beautiful bunches of lilac, stamp out
the smell, grind the petals and the memories.
Headlights, streetlights, a lighter
ignites under an umbrella tonight—everything is
burning, but we have waited so long for this, spring,
the lilacs; we have waited to criticize these blooms—how
we yearned for these blooms, for what was absent,
only to curse and ruin.

I, also, am America

Sergio Inestrosa

I, also, am America
I am your dark skin brother
The one that was born
in the South-South.

When they
(The ICE officers) throw me out
I will not panic nor cry
I know for sure that I'll return;
I always return
and I'll be stronger.

Tomorrow morning
I will be at work, as usual,
And no one'll dare to tell me
Go away
Why? —you ask
Because I, also, am America.

Burnt Out

Rianon Prushinski

When I was young
they said I was smart.
I thought myself a
child of Athena.
Wise beyond my years,
an old soul.
Old souls wither fast,
break like dried petals
past season. They
become flammable.
Sometimes they burn.
I don't remember the flame.

Is there a god of wasted potential?
Maybe I could pray to them instead.
Offer up my jaded wisdom and rotting
leaves, take them from me please.
I'm offering you up my mind. It used
to be sharp, but it's dulled over time.
It's yours if you want it.

I'm calling out to you now,
O mighty god of wasted potential.
Accept my atrophied youth, it's all
I have. I can't find Athena anywhere
and my armor does not shine
like Hers.
Be gentle with me. Please.



George Rosatone—Friendly Fire



Rachel Cardillo

Feminist?

Cilla Miller

I was never one to call myself that
I was never one to believe myself that
But I was never one to dilute the fact that it is there
That i am a woman and believe that i want what everyone else can get

I am a black, first gen, daddy-issued, mentally unstable, woman
I am a black woman
Maybe you didn't hear me
I am being looked down on
Thought less than
Unexpected
I am a black woman

I never thought i was a feminist
The word never stuck to me
The label always just fell off
I never thought too deeply into it
But i get mad when only i wash the dishes
When i am the first to be called to get my dad a cup of water
I am the first to be called to put something together
To clean the bathroom i didn't get dirty
To fix something i never broke

Maybe i have always been a feminist
I always had something to say
"Why don't you get it yourself"
"Why do i always have to clean"
"There are three other people in this house that could do it"

The irony behind it is that my mom always asked me
"Because you do it best. I can't trust the boys to do it how I like"
I was always the little sister who was ironing her brother's clothes
"Sissy you always do it better than me"
The little sister who chores were passed over to
The little sister everyone expected the world from
But never expected to struggle
You expect me to build it from mud and clay
The little sister everyone expected to be doing the best
The little sister whose struggle went unnoticed because they were too
busy looking at my brother
The sister who got blamed for her brother's shortcomings

Maybe it's just a me thing
Maybe it's a girl thing

But it wasn't always like this
I used to be the little girl to roughhouse with the boys
Didn't care about my hair
My clothes
None of it
Never wanted to be a teacher, or a nurse
Never thought of myself in a dress
Never dreamed of weddings or marriage
Still don't
Maybe i was always a feminist
Maybe i always wanted my expectation to be equal to others
Maybe i didn't want to be seen as the golden child
Maybe i didn't want my own brother to be jealous of me
When i could never be jealous of myself
When i can't even be half as happy as everyone always expects me to be

Maybe I am a feminist
That would make a lot of this make sense
Like why i feel so strongly about this
Why my emotions are slow burning
But raging at the same time
I don't know
Maybe I am a feminist

Walk With Me

Molly Hyman

Unexpected twists and turns lead the way as my feet crunched on old beat up snow. A path that was used at least once before. New trails and directions to come upon as I would continue alone on my journey through the woods. The dirt brown trees with no color attached. The discolored and aged snow surrounding my every step. Very few accents of fresh color and energy, but still a loud environment. Eerie and cold. The taste of crisp air was prevalent and offered no real deep breath. The ground is a waterless river. The sky is a gray opening. A lot to question when thinking about how vast the space is between the two. Open air for what? Birds and planes? Wasted space that should be filled with creativity and ideas. Think outside of the box. I sat down on a rock. A large rock, like a really large rock. Perhaps a boulder. Found a no snow zone and kept my supplies dry. I looked around as if something was going to jump out and appear different, but it was the same old dirt brown trees with the same old discolored snow. No new findings yet. Brought myself back from my philosophical thoughts. Normalized my ideas to fit in again. Can't have anyone thinking I think outside the box. I stand up and feel my ankles turn red from being the only thing exposed to the sharp air. I enjoy it. Cold and intense as if you were to stand in a walk-in freezer for an hour. Alone to only hear distant voices. Not wondering what they are talking about. Not in a rude way, just in a way of compartmentalizing. Maybe my thoughts are what's filling that vast space between the waterless river and the gray opening. If I project enough then they will fill it. Maybe I will feel content then. Like I have accomplished something. Different for everyone. No predicting how that'll turn out. What even is an accomplishment? I turn around. To find myself repeating my path with my repeating thoughts on the side. No real difference, just backwards. Or maybe upside down depending on how you look at it.

Accidents

Emma Cundari

Flashing blue and red lights illuminated the front of the two-story colonial house and revealed a child-sized silhouette sitting in the open front door. Matt looked out at the emergency vehicles parked in the street, watching the swarm of uniformed people rushing up the yard towards him. They were saying something.

“Hey kid, you OK?”

“Where’s your dad sweetie?”

“Buddy, can you tell me what happened?”

What? He couldn’t hear them clearly, too many voices. Too far away to reach Matt in the safety of his memories. There the sun was warm against his face while he played catch with Dad. Dad was standing on the other side of the front walkway, with its cracked concrete, and he had a big smile on his face. The kind that made the edges of his eyes fold up like that weird instrument his music teacher, Mrs. Corduba, showed Matt once. What was it? It started with an A... an accordion! The edges of Dad’s eyes looked like an accordion that day. And Matt stood across from him holding the blue foam baseball, the kind made for kids so that they don’t get hurt, in the center of his new glove.

“Mattie, my boy! You caught it!” Dad shouted and ran over to Matt, he picked him up and spun him around. The sun was warm and he and Dad were spinning and happy. Mom had come up to the front door to watch them through the glass, the edges of her eyes were like accordions too. She was wearing her yellow flower dress, the one that Dad always said made her look like Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*. After he said that he would say that Mom was his princess and then Dad would spin Mom around in the kitchen, just like Matt was spinning.

He spun his way into another memory. It was raining in this one and big brown muddy pools of water were spotted across the front yard. Usually, Matt would be in his Iron Man rain boots splashing through the puddles, getting coated in mud, and then getting scolded by Mom for it. But not in this memory, in this memory, Matt didn’t feel like jumping in puddles. He was waiting for Mom to come home. He wouldn’t move until she did. It didn’t matter what anyone else said, Mom was going to come home. And when she got there Matt was going to be waiting at the door.

That memory was from the day Mom had the accident.

At five years old, Matt only remembered waiting for Mom. He couldn’t remember the policeman who had shown up while Mom was out at the grocery store. Nor could he remember the three firm *knock, knock, knock*’s at the front door that interrupted the Saturday morning cartoons. Dad heaved himself up from the couch and placed the sports section of the newspaper on the coffee table. Matt didn’t remember staying with his back against the coffee table, which was as close to the TV screen as he was allowed to get, while Dad answered the door.

“Hello officer! How can I help you?”

“Are you Jack Greenburgh?”

“I am.”

“I have some tough news about your wife, Mr. Greenburgh. There was an accident on Main Street-”

Dad had stepped outside and closed the door. But Mrs. Hawthorne from next door came over soon after that and spent the rest of the day with Matt. Later, when Matt asked Dad where he went, Dad said he had to go to the hospital. But they were all lying. The policeman, Mrs. Hawthorne, Dad, they were all lying because Mom was coming home.

But Matt only remembers standing at the screen door, watching the cars splashing through the puddles on the street, and waiting for Mom to come home.

But Mom didn't come home. And the next time Matt saw her she looked like she was sleeping. He and Dad were standing next to the wooden sleeping bag Mom was lying in. Someone had called it a casket, but Matt didn't know what that meant. He just knew that his shiny black dress shoes kept pinching his toes, and the tie felt funky against his neck. Matt would reach up to tug it away from his irritated neck, only for Aunt Missy to huff out an exasperated sigh and re-tighten it. Aunt Missy was standing on Matt's other side in the long line of Greenburgh and Joneses that led up to Mom's casket. She was the only relative at the funeral home that Matt knew, she was Mom's big sister. Aunt Missy would come down and visit Mom once a month, and the two of them would go to the Garden State Mall to buy all the things that Aunt Missy couldn't get where she lived in Lake Placid, NY. But they wouldn't do that anymore. Because Mom was asleep in her wooden casket next to Dad, who looked like he was a zombie. He had dark crescent moons under his eyes, the edges of which no longer looked like accordions and never would again, and his face was pale except for his nose which was bright red. People kept coming up to Matt and Dad, saying how sorry they were and that Mom was a good woman, sometimes they would say she was in a better place. But Matt didn't understand, what did they mean when they said they were sorry? What did how good Mom was, have to do with anything? And how was she in a better place? There was no better place than home, that's what Mom used to say.

When Mrs. Hawthorne came up and told Matt that she was sorry and Mom was in a better place, Matt told her what Mom used to say. Dad drew in a startled breath and began to cry.

"I'm so sorry," Aunt Missy told Mrs. Hawthorne. "Mattie's been having a hard time understanding everything that's happened since Mary's passing."

Aunt Missy was right. Matt didn't understand what had happened, not at first. For those first weeks, he still kept vigil at the front door, waiting for that navy blue minivan to pull into the driveway. Waiting for Mom to climb out and holler, "I need some big strong boys to come help me with the groceries!"

In this imagined scenario, Matt would run out the front door and race towards the car. First, he would throw his arms around Mom's waist real tight, with his face pressed against the warm safety of her stomach. And Matt would feel Mom's laugh on his cheeks as it would vibrate through her belly. Then he would pull back and rush to the back of the car to grab as many plastic grocery bags as he could carry, and bring them inside for her.

But after the fifth week without Mom, Matt began to understand.

While Matt had been busy waiting for Mom, Dad had changed. The dark crescent moons under his hazel eyes seemed to become permanent, and a new blotchy red flush often graced his thinning cheeks. He stopped shaving at some point and a wiry bush of black hair began to take over the lower half of his face. Dad started going to work earlier and coming home later. Leaving Matt with Mrs. Hawthorne who started dropping him off and picking him up from school. Mrs. Hawthorne's house smelled musty, and there were these lacey things, *doilies*, everywhere. It wasn't that Matt didn't like Mrs. Hawthorne, her round wrinkly face was friendly and she always gave him treats. But sometimes he wished that Dad would come pick him up from school like he did before.

When Dad would get home from work at around 8 p.m., he would drop a heavy hand on top of Matt's head and ruffle his hair and then Dad would make his way to the fridge on feet weighed down by exhaustion. The fridge didn't have as much stuff in it as it used to. There were no tubs of hummus or little plastic Tupperware packed with carrot sticks. There were no mini balls of mozzarella cheese wrapped in sticky red wax. The only things to be found in the fridge were tinfoil-wrapped casseroles from Mrs. Hawthorne, boxes of leftover pizza, and two six-packs of Heineken. Matt didn't know

what those green glass bottles were, only that they were a grown-up drink and that they made Dad fall asleep on the couch.

All of these changes meant that Dad didn't play catch with him anymore. The baseballs and mitts gathered dust in the basket by the front door, next to where he and Dad left their shoes in a pile on the floor. One time Matt got up the courage to ask Dad if they could play. It was noon on a Sunday, the one day of the week that Dad wasn't at work. Matt gathered the neglected mitts and one of the soft foam balls, then he made his way up the stairs and down the dark hallway towards the master bedroom. The doorway already cracked open, so Matt just gave it a nudge to push it wide enough for him to fit his small 4-year-old body through the opening.

It was the first time that Matt had been in the room since Mom was gone. When he was last in here it was because he had a nightmare about a big shadow monster that was trying to get him. He had woken up convinced that the monster was hiding in his closet, and was going to get him once Mom and Dad left. So Mom had bundled him up in his fuzzy green blanket and ushered him into the safety of his parent's bed. Then the room had been neat, with all of the clothes put away and the dirty laundry hamper hidden away behind the closed doors of the closet. Now there were dirty clothes scattered across the floor and clean clothes were spilling out of the open dresser drawers. Next to the bed, there were empty green bottles that Dad's hand, limp with sleep, hovered above. Seeing the room that he once went to for safety look so different caused Matt's chest to feel tight and his breath to come in rapidly increasing puffs. He backed away from the door and raced back downstairs, dumping the mitts and baseball on top of the shoe pile. He spent the rest of the day watching cartoons at Mrs. Hawthorne's house. When Matt showed up at her front door that day the only thing she said was, "Would you like a cookie sweetheart? I just made a fresh batch of snickerdoodles."

Almost a year had passed since they lost Mom in the accident, and Matt still wasn't sure exactly what the accident was. He once asked Mrs. Hawthorne, her thin white eyebrows had scrunched down over the tops of her eyes and she had struggled to smile at him. Then she said, "Well your Mom was driving home from the grocery store, and then there was an accident."

'And then there was an accident'. That was the part that Matthew didn't understand. How could some undefined thing happen to his mom on her way home from the grocery store, something that meant that she would never come home again? But Matt decided not to ask Mrs. Hawthorne again, even though he desperately wanted an answer, because it had made her quiet for the rest of that afternoon and he felt bad. Asking Dad wouldn't work either, questions about Mom only made his eyes glassy while his hand reached for another green bottle.

"Kid!"

The strobing blue and red lights filled Matt's vision again as the flood of memories bled away. He startled at the loud voice of the policeman crouching in front of him.

"You with me now kid?"

Matt nodded his head

"Did you call 9-1-1?"

"Yeah," Matt said to the officer's left shoulder. For some reason looking at the man's face would make this all real, so Matt wasn't going to look, and then maybe everything would be okay.

"Can you tell me what happened kiddo? Where's your dad?"

"I think an accident happened to him."

The image of Dad's head crashing into the table as he fell to the kitchen floor flashed through Matt's mind. They had been watching *Beauty and the Beast* in the living room, and Dad was going through the green bottles faster than normal. He had gone to the

kitchen to get another one when he stumbled over his own feet and then *BANG!* Matt didn't know what to do. Dad was laying on the floor under the table with a gash on his forehead, and no matter how much Matt shook him Dad wouldn't wake up. So he had called 9-1-1 like Mrs. Hawthorne had shown him to, in case something bad happened.

Matt was pulled out of his memory again by the sound of the front door banging open behind him as the officers ran into the house.

The police found Jack Greenburgh on the kitchen floor with a Heineken near his right hand and his head under the table. After some patient coaxing, they were able to get the story of what happened from Matt. Jack ended up with a mild concussion and an invitation to grief counseling and the local AA group.



Nikki Sigrist

Can you taste what I'm saying?

Gianna Tretton

The first time I made food for myself was later than most people, I think
I started with the steak, bought from the store by my mom
She always makes us breakfast, lunch, and dinner
The best food on the planet is made right in her kitchen
My little sister sat waiting for me to finish
It was just us for the night
We planned on watching two movies, maybe three
The steak sizzled on the pan, along with the oil
When it was time, I tossed in the onions and peppers
Being in the middle, I never had to make meals when our parents were out
Now, I think of the way my older sister would do this
Add some salt, a little pepper, stir it all together
Prep the bread to the side of the stove, get the table set for us to eat
I am the oldest for the year, for the night, for this meal
Before we eat, I say a prayer:
Thank you God for this food
We talk about what we'll be watching after dinner
I wonder if she's thinking about when she'll have to cook
When I'm off and away
I wonder if she'll miss us when she has our parents to herself
Then she tells me that it's the best steak and cheese sandwich she's ever had
I think I've had better, but the words are delightful to hear
Now I know how my mom feels
How my older sister felt
When they make us the gift of a home-cooked meal



Sarah Mirisola—Frogs on a Train



Tom Tranfaglia



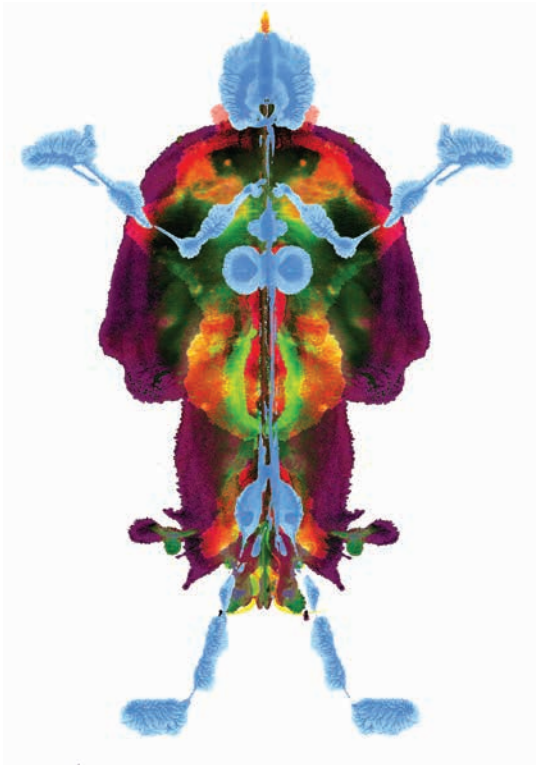
Caitlin Smith



Emma Purple—Winter Wandering



Manaia Friend—Telly's Diner Restaurant Design (Nighttime Outdoor)



Mark Towner—Kacyll



Lauren Bower



Selia Potas—College Hall at Sunset

Cranberry Ocean

Allie Hastings

If I could show you where my heart lies
I'd draw out a map, circling all the sounds and spaces
And the people and places
That spark joy;
I'd throw a drop into the sea of
Endless possibility
And let the course of love take over
Weaving streaks of passionate red through
The calm of deep salt blue;
I think by the end of it all
You'd see a
Cranberry Ocean –
A vast expanse of vibrant hues,
Floating amidst buoyancy
Each sphere distinct but
connected to the whole
In its ecstasy.
Perhaps we each have our own
Cranberry Ocean –
A mind palace that represents all of what makes us
Human, and what makes our hearts beat
To the insatiable drum
Of life;
An ocean that can never overflow but rather
Pulse in steady peace
To its own hearty rhythm.

My love for you is like a Cranberry Ocean –
A never-ending sea of
Endless possibility
For every piece of me will forever be
Tied to you in harmonious
Synchrony.

82 Billion, Billion Gallons

Cassandra Rio

And when she said his name
I could feel the stress sizzle,
up and down my body.
It was almost like my body
was warning me, not to feel anything
for this name,
and not to associate feelings
with this one word.
But I cannot do that, because to me
this one word
is my whole world.

My mind crashing harder
than these waves tonight
and there is nothing I can do
besides watch it happen.
There's beauty in it,
but wouldn't it be nice
if these waves drift gracefully against
the shore
instead of smashing hard,
against every rock they encounter.



Juliana Silva

Stranded

Malinda Johnson

It happened like this.

First, my cousin, and her boyfriend thought that it would be such a good idea, like the best idea, to go out and crash through the ocean waves on such a dreary, sunless summer day.

We had just got back from a mini vacation in Rhode Island. Already exhausted, but completely psyched, because how couldn't a swift jet ski ride make you feel on top of the world. That's the ironic part, it didn't.

This was the plan. Go out about four miles on the ocean, through the channel, and end up at a spot to cliff jump. Turn around, just after jumping and head back to the dock. Sounds simple, right?

Now, according to the Connecticut boating rules, you can only go so fast when first launching into the water. That's called a "no wake zone". From the dock to the ocean, surrounded by tall, green marsh plants rested a crane. Wavering to the bridge, I clenched the vest in front of me as we sped off into the uncharted.

I had no sense of direction of Long Island Sound. It had only taken us about twenty minutes to arrive at the spot to cliff jump. We jumped. Anxiously swimming back to the anchored watercraft because another dose of adrenaline would kick in. But this time, a different type.

My cousin gently gripped the handle as we cruised through the channel. Any sound we made echoed throughout. Hundreds upon hundreds of docked boats, looking desperate for a spin. Not a single person. Not a single bird. Not a single engine running. Except ours, of course.

The salty, green seaweed started to smell like the fumes of gasoline. A bright orange signal suddenly screeched through my ears. *Overheating. Overheating. Overheating.* Turning the key on and off, there was no choice but to tow the jetski back. Ourselves. Because there was no service, no one to help, and SeaTow charges five-hundred dollars an hour – no way.

Three and a half miles from launching. Four miles an hour at five-o-clock. You do the math. Yeah, not enough time before the sky turns dark. But there was no other option but to keep going.

The clouds swallowed the ocean, the skyline invisible. Finally approaching some houses along shore, we contemplated docking the jet skis and asking for help, it was that serious. Except there was nowhere to dock around the bulky ocean rocks.

Still, three miles to go. The waves suddenly seemed to become angry; salty water toppling over us onto the jetski. Without realizing, my lower left leg started to feel like it was stinging. A jellyfish. Like I really needed another issue.

I squinted my eyes from a distance, seeing something or someone that might be able to help. A man on a green kayak fishing. That's what I saw. I could not help but to think how someone could fish while ruthlessly rocking on the waves. Clearly he wasn't any help.

By dusk, the one cell phone on board with us finally caught service. Desperately calling for help, my cousin's uncle answered and was on his way. Half an hour later still floating on the ocean, the lights of his boat shone through the dense fog, our emotions lighting up.

Hands being offered to climb up on his boat like a firefighter's opening arms after a catastrophe. My cousin, her boyfriend, and myself were urged to quickly take off the cold, wet life vests and wrap ourselves in a warm, dry blanket. There we sat, feeling the ocean breeze upon our faces in disbelief.

I know right? Totally crazy.

Chuck

Anna Principato

The fastest boy in the fourth grade, champion of his class spelling bee, professional hunter of spiders and master of several magic tricks, Chuck Danvers was a lot of things as a nine-year old, peaceful, however, was not one of them.

He was the special kind of kid who could turn any mundane activity into a prime time for shenanigans. That's what his mother always called his troubling actions, shenanigans. She would shout from down in the kitchen in her shrillest voice, "Chuck! There better not be any shenanigans going on up there!" And then she would return to cooking or cleaning or whatever it was she spent hours in the kitchen for.

Chuck had a knack for getting into trouble but this didn't mean he wasn't any less smart than the other kids. In fact, many of his teachers believed that the reason Chuck caused so much trouble was because he was simply bored with the material. He spent his school days completing his work at top speed and then causing a ruckus among his classmates by turning his worksheets into the most intricate paper airplanes. He was the insightful little shit who was the first of the fourth graders to discover that if you got a teacher talking about a certain subject they couldn't help themselves and they would spend the class period discussing said subject in great depth. All of the kids in Chuck's classes revered him as a god. He could recite his multiplication tables just as well as he could skate.

At home, however, things were different. The new addition to the family, Baby Jeanie, was the one who was worshipped in the Danvers household. Everyday like clockwork his parents obsessed over her needs. Whether her diaper was full or her food was ready, it was all about Baby Jeanie all the time and Chuck was needless to say sick of it.

"I hate babies." Chuck said, throwing his hat down on the wood chips by the swings. His best friend Haley swung towards Chuck, nearly kicking the hat into the middle of the playground. Haley and Chuck had been the best of friends since kindergarten when she taught him how to draw a dog, and now the pair were practically one, they were inseparable.

"Why? Don't you have a baby sister?" She said looking puzzled. Gravity drew her swing backwards as she lifted her little blonde head to the sky, "I've always wanted a baby sister," she mused.

"Don't say that." Chuck grumbled. "They're no good, nobody cares about me anymore." He picked his hat up off of the ground, dusting off the wood splinters that clung desperately to the red wool. "My mom used to make mac and cheese with little hotdogs cut up in it. Did you know that? Just for me. Now Baby Jeanie gets all the special food."

"I thought babies couldn't eat real food." Haley said.

"They can't!" Chuck shouted. "Did you know they don't have teeth? How stupid is that?"

"My dad says stupid is a bad word."

"Your dad is stupid."

"Hey!" Haley planted her feet down and stopped her swinging in its tracks. She made a move to run away from him but Chuck stepped in front of her.

"I'm sorry, that was mean." Chuck shook his head, looking down at his shoes.

"Sorry Haley."

"Apology accepted," Haley huffed as she sat back down on the swing, "Why don't you like having a little sister anyway?"

"She's weird, Haley," Chuck said. "She doesn't even like to skate!"

"I don't like to skate." Haley said.

"Yeah but you play the drums, and that's okay." Chuck said.

"Maybe Baby Jeanie will like the drums, have you tried that?" Haley asked, starting to swing once more. She giggled, "A baby playing drums, can you imagine?"

Chuck looked far away and pondered this thought for a moment and then snapped out of it.

"Wanna play tag?" He asked.

Later that day Chuck was still thinking about playing the drums with Baby Jeanie. She sure did like to scream so maybe they could bond over making loud noises. He wanted to be a good big brother. In fact, he wanted to be the best big brother he could, Chuck just wasn't sure how. Kicking rocks on his walk back home from the bus stop, Chuck was so enveloped in his thoughts of playing the drums with Baby Jeanie he didn't notice the speeding truck until it was too late.

The truck, brilliant red in its hue, slammed into little Chuck's body and sent him flying into the pavement. The gravel from the road dug into the soft flesh of Chuck's cheek and he lay on his back looking up at the blue sky above him. He tried to suck in a breath but there was no such luck. A ringing, loud and yet distant, clouded his mind as he lay there gasping sprawled in a pile in the road. Suddenly a large pair of heavy boots came into his view and soon after the shadow of the very tall man who had been driving the truck obscured Chuck's vision of the sky. The driver seemed to be trying to say something to Chuck but Chuck couldn't hear the words. Chuck closed his eyes momentarily and the ringing stopped completely and so did everything else.

His funeral was a bleak affair. No one enjoys funerals, that's something that goes without saying, but children's funerals were the worst. Baby Jeanie didn't make a peep the entire ceremony. Not when her mother delivered that teary eulogy, not when they lowered Chuck's small casket into his little but deep grave, not when they tossed a bouquet of the yellow flowers the Danvers grew in their front yard into the grave with Chuck, and not when she saw his shadowy little figure hanging over the gravestone looking her dead in the eyes.

"Today we are gathered to celebrate the life of our beloved son, Chuck Danvers." The priest before the crowd of Chuck's closest family and friends said. A grimace crossed his face and he looked down at the small grave before him, "What a wonderful and yet short life Chuck lived. It is true that he will be missed dearly by each and every one of us gathered today." He opened the Bible before him, and began to read a lengthy passage about those who have passed away, the crowd began to fill with the sound of snuffles and muffled cries.

Out of everyone at his funeral, Chuck hated this affair the most. Hovering above his own gravestone, he watched his family, Haley's family, and a couple people that he didn't quite recognize say their goodbyes to the grave before him. He didn't like those little yellow flowers that grew in the front lawn, he didn't like any of the poetry that was read, he didn't like the way that everyone was dressed in black because if it truly was a celebration of his life everyone should be sporting red outfits as that was his favorite color. He hated that someone had brought his skateboard to the funeral and leaned it up against his gravestone. He especially hated that everyone was crying but most of all Chuck hated seeing Baby Jeanie, dressed in her best little black dress with little black shoes buckled into her stroller by his sniffing parent's side.

That had been his job when he and his mother went on walks through their neighborhood. He would push that little carriage with Baby Jeanie giggling in it past their neighbors houses and around the block. She would laugh so hard when Chuck started running behind the stroller, and they would race through the neighborhood at top speed. A feeling of sadness fell upon Chuck as he sat there on his stone looking out at the people who loved him.

He hopped off the stone and walked over to where his parents stood at the edge

of his grave. He brushed past them and kneeled to look into Baby Jeanie's stroller. Her brilliant grey eyes stared back into his with an expression not of fear but of fascination.

"I'm sorry I have to leave you Baby Jeanie," Chuck said looking down at his toes. "I never was a good big brother."

Baby Jeanie's big eyes stared into his and the stoney expression that had graced her face for the entire ceremony faded into a soft smile. She reached her pudgy little hands out towards Chuck's face. She smiled brightly and did a soft giggle. Who would push her stroller around now that Chuck was gone, Chuck wondered. His mind began to overflow with a rush of frightening thoughts. If he couldn't take care of Baby Jeanie who would? If he couldn't teach her how to play the drums how would she learn?

The soft tread of shoes on grass snapped Chuck out of his thoughts. Haley, eyes red from tears and nose runny, had walked over and rested her hands on the handles of Baby Jeanie's stroller and in that moment Chuck knew she was going to be okay.

Baby Jeanie was getting the best big sister in the entire world, Haley was the one who actually wanted a little sister. Chuck stood to stand by Haley's side and looked down at Baby Jeanie. The fastest girl in the fourth grade, semi-professional butterfly catcher, and nearly world renowned artist, Haley Clovers was a lot of things as an almost nine year old and full-time big sister was just added to that list.

He looked between the two of them and then reached down into his grave and snatched two flowers from the bouquet his parent's had tossed down, he twiddled the stems between his fingers and then tucked one behind Baby Jeanie's ear, and placed one in the pocket of Haley's little black cardigan. Baby Jeanie smiled up at him and did that little gurgle giggle that babies tend to do. Chuck smiled and then grabbed his skateboard, skating off towards the setting sun.

THE END



Ian Cushman



Heather MacBeath



Ellie Chapell



Kimberly Rodier



Julia Vogel



Elias Woolsey—Time



Olivia Barbaro



Kaitlin Marino—Flower Child

February 3rd, 2021

Katie Clarke

I feel like I'm tiptoeing around the edges of myself
And I can't figure out how to get back inside...
Observing what occurs instead of living it
Are we all doing that?
It's helpful wearing a mask every day because I don't know if they can tell
My teeth hurt from wondering what the world tastes like...

18th Birthday

Claire Orr

"Your bags are packed and at the door"
They must have said
Or maybe it was more like "pack your bags,
Get out the door"
Or maybe it was discussed about beforehand
All I know is that on his 18th birthday
His bags were packed
He was driven to a tiny motel and
The first week was paid for
They left him there
Was there a "goodbye"?
Any "good luck" or "we wish you well"?
All I know is that he was there
Alone
With his packed bags
On his 18th birthday

For Jay, Never Past Tense

Sarah Wolak

How do you write about someone who was—and is—larger than life? He was a strong and kind man, someone that I admired and I'm sure I'm not the only one. He was special and witty and fun. I feel like these simple words are not worthy or strong enough to capture how much he did and how much he was loved.

His name had many definitions. He was a son, a brother, a friend, an uncle, a partner, a good guy, a president, a boss, a dog dad, a planner, an explorer, a map-maker, a jokester, a chef, a leader, a role model, and an overall great man. His love language was giving - no price was too big for his wallet. He gave out money and his happiness equally. He survived off of giving people better days. His flaw was that he didn't know how to say no; that's where we differ. I know how to let people down, something that Jay never learned.

For forty-six years he gave and gave. Even still, he continues to give: he gives me hope for his legacy, he gives me a smile while writing this, and the occasional chuckle or tears. He gave me those precious memories I can keep with me in my heart forever. Grief isn't easy.

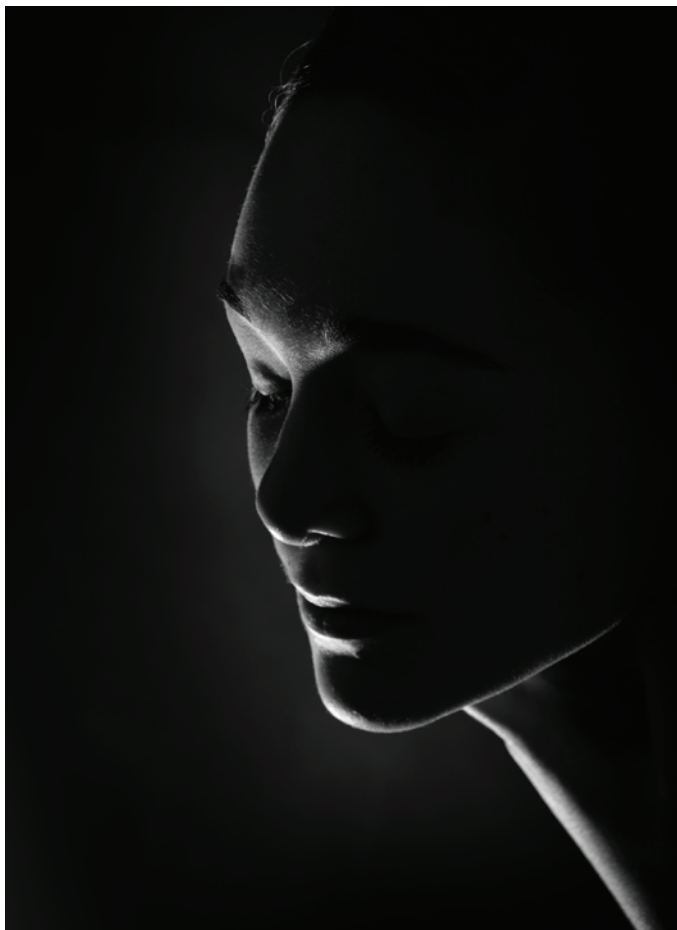
He isn't past tense, he's present. When I tell people about Jay, I say that I love him, not loved. I say that he is a good man, not was. He is still alive in my heart and soul. I hear him in my favorite songs and during the night's silence. I have dreams where we talk and it feels normal, and I wake up with the remnants of a conversation that never was.

Grief isn't easy. I'm a natural-born writer and struggling to find the words to pen this piece. I never thought that it would be hard for me to simply smile, or even get out of bed most days. Remembering that he's gone is like having a constant black hole in my chest, draining and weighing me down. I look through old photographs and wonder about the pain he was hiding.

When I was about eight years old, Jay played the song "Mad World" by Gary Jules in the car. It was the first time I had heard such sad lyrics, "I find it kinda funny/ I find it kinda sad/ The dreams in which I'm dying/ Are the best I've ever had." As I've grown less naive than my eight-year-old self, those lyrics replay in my head. I feel so selfish for feeling sorry for myself but at the same time, I feel like nobody understands. Grief isn't easy.



Melissa Izzio



Erin McDermott



Madison Durfee

One Year Later

Rianon Prushinski

I spent so much time waiting
for you to acknowledge that
I existed, I almost forgot to.
Exist, I mean. I never finish
my sentences. Right.
According to you,
I never finish my sentences right.
I can tell by the way you always
cut me off.

I remember a time when
you pulled me to your chest.
I remember resisting you,
afraid to stain
your white cotton t-shirt
with my makeup.
I remember giving in,
but you were unmarked.
I was so careful.

I wish I could go back in time
leave that stain,
One you couldn't wash out,
the cotton scarred by the
imprint of my face.
Red lipstick, black eyeliner,
foundation the color of my skin.
I wish you had to throw it out.

I'm tired of washing my hands of you.

Gray Area

Emma Cundari

Purgatory.
The place between
Two definite
And
Opposing views.
Full of unanswered
And unasked
Questions.
Neither right
Nor wrong.
Neither black
Nor white.
But a muddled
Confused blend
Of the two.
This
Is the gray area



Kirsten Doherty

Dancing Canaries

George Rosatone

"This is disgusting." Kim grunted, following Gwen's lead as they lowered themselves onto the cold tiles of the bathroom floor. The muffled sounds of yelling and running echoed from the other side of the locked door - proof that the party was alive and well—even without them.

Gwen pulled a fluffy, pink robe off a nearby hook, spreading it out across the floor and motioning for Kim to join her. As the two got into position across from one another, Gwen couldn't help but think of the robe as magic carpet. She laughed to herself at the notion. Kim, lost in her own mind, noted the beautifully embroidered "G" at the robe's edge.

"Better?" Gwen asked, fixing her eyes on Kim, who rolled her own in return.

"Whatever else I can do to make you more comfortable, princess." said Gwen before slamming her fist into one of the floor tiles, loosening it. "Don't pout at me either. You know, you should really try to relax more."

Gwen's teasing was cut off by a loud banging against the bathroom door, which made her flinch and scurry to fit the loosened floor tile back into place. Kim grabbed her arm, stopping her panic.

"Don't worry, I locked it. Try to relax." a smirking Kim whispered before another round of knocking ensued, only to be followed by the sound of an agitated (and probably intoxicated) set of shoes shuffling away from the door. Gwen brushed off Kim's hand and went back to the tile, knocking it aside and pulling out a little ziploc bag filled with a small bottle and an even smaller needle.

"Holy crap," said Kim, "I didn't know you were serious. I thought you just meant, like, an ironic name for weed, or something."

"Nope." Gwen poked the needle into the top of the bottle, watching as the golden liquid crept its way upstream. "As of today, I am officially an adult. So, naturally, I am officially moving on to adult drugs. How much do you want?"

"I... I think I'm good. My 18th's not for another couple of months, so, y'know. All you. But don't take it all! I mean, I'll need some soon, right? Right? Yeah. Ok. How much did you drink tonight?"

"Cool." Gwen grunted as she stabbed her near-full syringe into her elbow. Kim instinctively reached out a concerned hand, but lowered it before Gwen could see. "How much did I drink?" Gwen continued, "uh... why? Do I seem out of it?"

Kim's eyes stalked the bathroom walls. Next to the robe Gwen had pulled down, there were three more - all different colors, and all with their own little initials embroidered in the corner. None of them were as small as Gwen's. The tallest of the robes nearly touched the ceiling, which was painted a sandy beige, and the blinding single fluorescent bulb in the ceiling's center was surrounded by a collection of small, painted seashells. Kim's eyes followed the rings of shells until her eyes were swept onto the walls themselves, which were painted a light, low-tide blue. They even had little hand-painted fish scattered about. Kim noted how some fish were painted much more childishly than others - all no higher on the wall than what a 4 year old could reach - and how all of these sloppier scribbles were innocently signed with an equally poor "G".

"No, no you're okay," said Kim, snapping out of her trance. "it's just tha-".

Gwen couldn't hear her. She was too distracted by what had landed on Kim's nose - a butterfly. A butterfly that soon exploded into a mass of even smaller butterflies. Their wings expanded, growing fuzzier, until their newformed beaks showed her that they were, in fact, canaries. A red one, a blue one, and a green one. Fluttering all around. Watching. Staring. Singing. Canaries in a kaleidoscope, blending together to hide the even larger bird sitting behind them. After their dance, the canaries broke off, revealing the soul-branding amber eyes of an owl that sat perched across the

tiled woods. Watching. Staring. Singing. Gwen, dizzy from the dancing canaries and the burning eyes of that damned watchful owl, felt herself fall; the cold, tiled grass painfully catching her skeleton as it cracked downward. Above her shone the blinding, yellow-tinted light of the moon as it rested in the middle of the sky. Small beads of sweat rolled off Gwen's forehead as she saw a large crab crawl its way from under the moon's cover. She stayed there, unable to move from the ground, unable to close her own burning eyes, forced to listen to the sporadic, panicked singing of the owl and forced to watch the slow emergence of the moon-crab. The owl's singing only grew louder as she felt a large shadow swallow her frozen body. The shadow belonged to a blindingly white stallion, who revealed itself in her flaming peripherals. Gwen saw what looked to be the stallion's hoof gently raise itself into the air, lingering for a moment before slamming down into her chest. Her body jolted. The Stallion repeated this motion. The chest-slammings continued in its own rhythmic tempo for some time, but was eventually interrupted when the stallion's rider dismounted and moved toward her. Gwen's eyes were completely burned over now, but she could still make out the brief, looming silhouette of the rider's figure as it leaned down and locked its lips against hers.

Gwen blinked. For the first time in what seemed like hours, she blinked. Her head was spinning, but she was able to raise herself from the bathroom floor and focus her eyes on Kim, who was now only a few inches away from her on their magic carpet.

"Jesus Christ," Kim let out, wiping the sweat from her forehead, "You are so lucky that my job made me learn CPR."

Throwing herself forward, Gwen wrapped her arms around Kim's neck. The two stayed that way until the door behind them was met with another round of drunken knocking.

Acheron

Dan Calnan

I smell blood through
silent streets of suburbs,
cul de sacs in the setting sun,
the warmth upon the concrete.

Blood – a word of physical
and abstract truth.

I see and hear and feel
that great world tree
that dwells within the Earth,
as it does in our brains
and in our blood.

I taste the land,
I see rivers from the sky,
watching those twisting, turning tubes
which formed borders between nations,
brought people from farms to cities,
to build up their homes and lives.

I stand in awe at mountains,
enormously close,
yet far from my grasp,
like a planet crashed to Earth,
immersed in fog and topped with snow.
I'm an ant to its majesty.

I love the highways,
brutal killing fields,
an animal carcass every two miles,
so grotesque and gray,
yet surrounded by green grass,
blooming trees, and drained
and flooding rivers.

I wonder how many rivers are in this world.
You can't even see half of them on a map.
The closer you look, the more you see
how water winds itself through
the streets we drive on,
the dirt we dig graves in,
the grass we mow and
the rocks we climb on –
how Earth is pockmarked and
cracked with flowing water.

Gaia, like her children, is porous –
full of tubes and twisting bodies,
and flowing, spilling liquid.
Veins in the organs of valleys
and mountains and swamplands,
bringing the inner organisms of the blood
to where she needs them.

These rivers and highways,
lakes and parking lots!
These pathways to tomorrow –
let me travel them longer,
watch the overgrown grass
and leafless trees run beside me,
life and death together,
unafraid of the other.

Let me wade these waters,
sail the Acheron down through
the twists and turns of Yggdrasil,
as it descends into the mind,
the branches into other realms,
and the waters which cleanse
and drown, which flow through
Earth and Hell the same.

you are killing me
forcing me to sit in this four walled room
expecting me to function
to continue living my life
acting like this new reality hasn't stripped away the prime
memories of being young
i live the same life everyday
having to accept that this will just be a blimp in my life
yet not seeing the end



let me out
let me breathe
let me live life
sincerely,
the kids in 2021

Juliana D'Orazio—The Kids in 2021



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