DIGRESSIONS

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Editor’s Note and Acknowledgments

About three years ago, I was nearly struck by lightning. I have not had the distinction of being so near lightning twice, but I have had the honor of introducing this magazine for two years, and of being involved in it for three.

My time has left me impressed with the variety of material I have seen pass before my eyes, and with the variety of people who are the sources, whether by major, age, or other categorization. The very life of this magazine depends on its role as a forum for ideas expressed through writing, and also through visual representation. Every year brings changes, but there will be at least one constant: people will still be writing, and I have been pleased to watch the increasing volume of material students have been contributing.

There are old names here and there are new names here, and new names will continue appearing with each coming year to replace the departed. The new blood next year will have the pleasure of working with this year’s fresh crop, which comforts me. I sense the same gelling that I have witnessed each year here will continue.

To Dr. Suzanne Ferriss: another year, another edition more successful than the last. You make the process pleasant for us staffers, and I will personally miss the presence of your energy.

To Dr. Marlisa Santos and the Humanities Department faculty in general: my unending appreciation for supporting this project and encouraging students to participate.

Mike, Tony, and Bridget: this is it. Rest up and have fun on your ways. Chana, Perry, Stefani, and Brittany: I hope you will rest up, find the time worthwhile, and do it again in a year.

Finally, and I believe this should be a continuing trademark for this magazine, the greatest appreciation must be granted to the writers for their efforts.

It’s been fun.

Ryan Frabizio
Editor-in-Chief
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Lost Among the Bamboo

Amy Harvey
When the clouds scatter to reveal a troubled sun, moving in a manner known to none, and the earth beneath cement beneath stone beneath the floor, trembles with an inner ache and shakes us to the core. When our world shivers in its hasty shoes and turns no more. When the realization of our complete lack of purpose in this universe hits every human alive at once.

When we disintegrate among the shattered ruins of what we have destroyed.

Knowingly.

Intentionally.

Purposefully.

Then I will smile into the void.
Invisible Vivaldis saw away
as I sit aside a festive pool.
A leaping fountain moans,
“another ellipse elapsed,”
as the gush from its gold-blushing base
turns uncertain gray at its peak of life
in the heavy ink air,
and flops dead by the glowing core.

I watch the spectacle while sitting
at a crossroads of concrete and grass
Where time runs backwards in both directions on the cooled pavement
  washed with brain fluid
and drags my hoping wagon, laden with seeds, one sprouting blade
farther—
if I execute the turn.
I could keep to the rock.
It’s easier on the feet.
The grass, though, is a drug, stuffing the eyes’ hunger for possibilities,
A popping pillow to sink the mind into
As my feet stumble ahead of my youngest past seconds.

The concrete can only be washed
And polished to only a finer gray by my shuffling revisiting feet.
My own orbit of U-turns.
Okay: turn east on the grass: the west is green-gray.

From the expanding distance
I see the old dead ends to the north and south
Becoming northwest and southwest,
In danger of becoming part of the west.
Sight a half-second to the north:
Grass should be downtrodden only once by weighted feet.
One past midnight CST,
Some artificially induced new year.
Take Me Anywhere
Bridget Haley

the four foggy walls
(that were once white)
hold down the floor
speckled blue
with the dreams
of withering students

the fluorescent lights
hold down the rigid desks
which in turn hold down
the students
gazing at the empty
whiteboard
stained from years
of professors
who forgot to erase

three windows
are stuck in the back wall
covered by cobalt blinds
crying over the glass
distorting the leaves outside
and i no longer believe life outside this room is real
Angel
Chana Dukes

Your shoe is untied—
flittering glittering little lace
trapped in this time and space
after the tears are gone
the scent of despair lingers on
smoke floats around your head
the halo of dread
it is okay to cry
eye every now and then
short boy-hair and angel eyes
you’re thinking about yourself
talking about someone else
on the steps of memory
footfalls linger silently
calm and steady
but you’re crying inside
telling nothing
and saying everything.
End of the Day
Preeya Jamnadas

The light fades out,
Streaks of cold glitter
Are slowly slipping away.

A new sensation arrives,
Its colors deeper,
The touch cooler,
The time is leaking,
Slowly slipping away.

Your eyes strain,
I know it’s difficult,
Long for the moments,
When we were lit,
Slowly slipping away.

Every sun goes,
But rises again,
It’s a pattern,
Followed by
Innocent souls,
Slowly slipping away.

Every sun sets,
A beauty at greatness,
A most powerful,
The brightness,
That you once hated,
The love,
That you once cared for,
Is slowly,
Slowly,
Slipping away.
In Upton Sinclair’s jungle
There are no fun and games.
America promises “anything you want,”
If only you know the names.
But the people cannot find
What it is they need.
They do not have the money
And are wasted by disease
In The Jungle,
Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
It’ll bring you to your shuh nuh nuh nuh knees, knees.
I wanna watch you read.

In Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
They work from day to day.
In the factories where the meat bleeds,
They work without no play.
The rich men think them churls,
Dismiss’n’ them with ease.
Keep them workin’ through the night
’Cause they practically work for free
In The Jungle,
Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
Consider my, my, my, my socialist regime.
I, I wanna abolish greed.

In Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
It gets worse there everyday.
There are metaphors in the animals
For the people in the fray.
They get hungry for what they see,
But avoid the potted meat.
They can’t afford anything they want
Unless they steal it (that’s free)
In The Jungle,
Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
It’ll bring you to your shuh nuh nuh nuh knees, knees.
These people are in need.
And when you’re drunk you never
Ever want to go home, go home, go home, yeah!

You know what this is?
It’s like four hundred pages, baby.
You’re gonna die.

Reading *The Jungle*,
Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
It’ll bring you to your shuh nuh nuh knees, knees.
In *The Jungle*,
Upton Sinclair’s jungle,
Join my, my, my, my socialist regime.
*The Jungle*, in his jungle,
It’ll bring you to your...
The living standards will make you frown!
This piece is an honorary inclusion, as it was judged the best creative collaboration at a meeting between undergraduate English majors, or students interested in majoring, minoring, or participating in projects sponsored by the Humanities Department. Participants in the event divided into groups around themes including the English Renaissance, the Roaring Twenties, and Ancient Greece and Rome. This selection came from the group focusing on the Beat writers of the 1950s.

I’m back, back in New York’s concrete grip. My pen no longer makes words like my mind no longer manufactures thoughts. My eyes only see my demise, so I remove them and soak them in this cheap whiskey, letting them ferment with this nation. I’d be more productive if I were dead as fertilizer providing sustenance for my mother’s flowers. That way, I’d at least bring some struggling beauty into this conniving, corrupt world.
Claimed

Michael Bergbauer
“I was a belly dancer in a past life,” said the old woman as she shuffled the tarot deck. Her gnarled, wrinkled hands shook unsteadily as she cut the deck.

I smiled and nodded at her, as if I believed what she said. I’ve never believed in the hocus-pocus stuff, and I really was only there getting my cards read because my friends threatened to send me back home if I didn’t. According to them, if we chose to go to New Orleans on Halloween, then we might as well get into the spirit of it. Not that going back home was really a choice right then; we still had a huge amount of work to do in New Orleans. Right then we were being paid an insane amount just to see what churches were available for the Christi-Lavanado wedding.

You see, my friends and I do weddings. We set up the flowers, hire caterers to provide the food, choose the right decorations, hire a local photographer, and find the perfect church to fit the couple’s specifications. We aren’t the typical wedding planners. I mean, we do all the same stuff, but we’re more into the artistic side of wedding planning. Basically, after college, none of us could find a job that suited our abilities: one art major, one history major, and one party major. Nothing really fit us. So we decided to start a business that people would pay an arm and leg to hire. Weddings were the perfect target, with all the families out there willing to make their little princesses’ dreams come true. We organize weddings for the people who want that fairy-tale experience, and for the most part, we enjoy it. Especially when we get to travel to cities like New Orleans. Unfortunately, it was hard to find a suitable church for a daytime wedding during the night, so my dearest friends dragged me out to explore the city.

We ended up going from bar to bar, ordering anything that sounded fun, like a Ghostbuster, Screaming Purple Jesus, and my personal favorite, Strawberry Peach Daiquiris. That could be another reason why I was so easily persuaded to get my tarot cards read. The world had a fuzzy hue to it, and sometimes the ground rolled like the tide. My ears, too, could make out the steady roar of the ocean, but water was nowhere in sight. But I refused to say that I was drunk, because I wasn’t. Yet.

So there I was, poised unsteadily upon a rickety plastic stool at this old lady’s booth while she started laying out my future, according to some stupid cards. She started muttering something, but all I could hear were a barrage of ocean waves drowning out her voice. After laying the last card, she looked up at me. Over the crashing waves, I heard her say, “Child, you’re going to be bitten.”
What the heck? Bitten? I wasted twenty bucks just so some crazy old bat could tell me that I was going to be bitten? I slid off the treacherous stool, and almost collided into my friend and co-partners, Hannah and Leila. I tried to regain my balance on my deadly pair of heels.

“So what did she say?” Leila asked me, with a bit of a drunken slur.

“That crazy broad didn’t even try to act like a real psychic. I spent twenty bucks just so she could tell me that I would get bitten. Yeah, Leila, getting my fortune read was a spectacular idea.” I’m not sure if my words all came out like that, because now I did have to admit to being past tipsy and on my way to inebriated—if the ocean soundtrack in my head was any indication, I was getting closer to drunk each second.

“Well, maybe you just heard her wrong,” Hannah said, without sounding the least bit tipsy. “Maybe you’re going to be smitten.”

“Trust me, she said ‘bitten.’”

“How do you know? You’re drunk!” said Leila.

“I am not drunk,” I said with righteous indignation. “I’m just a little ways past tipsy.”

“Yeah, sure. Whatever you say, oh great and mighty drunken boss. Just remember that I told you not to order that last daiquiri,” Hannah replied, still showing no sign of all the alcohol she had consumed.

“Fine. Don’t believe me,” I said, as I started teetering away.

“And by the way, you’re as much the boss as I am, remember?”

I made it about three steps before the waves that were still sounding off in my head started crashing against my legs. I knew there was a reason that I wore flats when I drank. Those waves were vicious. At least normally I do. Tonight, though, I was wearing red stilettos to match my red blouse. Stumbling, I continued down the road.

“Wait up, Kelly!” Leila was shouting over the waves.

I ignored her because to stop now would mean that I would have to start again, and I was not up for that. I was having a hard enough time moving against the rising surf. If I paused I would surely be knocked over by the tide. So I kept walking forward, fighting against the raging current.

I was definitely sure I was drunk now. I had no idea where I was, but all the liquid courage in me kept me moving. Somehow I came to an eerily dark alleyway. None of the lights from the bars penetrated the pitch-blackness. It was almost as if the lights that I just passed were afraid of this caliginosity and dared not enter. Looking back, I saw neither Leila nor Hannah. In fact, the dark had distorted the entrance to the alley. Now the only hint of civilization was a small speck of light. Nothing could sober a person up faster than fear; I could feel both a chilling
terror and soberness creep up on me. I stopped moving altogether when I heard a scraping noise. The fine hairs on the back of my neck stood up as I whipped around to face it. In the obsidian alley there was nothing to see, though. The sound came again from behind, louder, closer, and far more menacing. It was almost as if something was being dragged across the ground. Something that was large and heavy. Stories of dead bodies being luggered behind a murderer, and my mother’s warnings about the dangers of the city, were like an endless recording echoing in my mind. Images of zombies dragging along their rotting limbs, and chasing the drunken girl danced through my head. The fear escalated as the sound came closer and closer.

Then, out of nowhere, a hand grabbed my shoulder, causing me to hover a foot in the air, yet I was somehow still balanced precariously on my stilettos. I could feel my heart beating hard enough to crack a rib. I turned to face the body attached to the hand, and the scream that I had been holding in check evaporated in my throat.

The man looked at me with glowing yellow eyes. I caught a glimpse of sharp canine teeth when he breathed, “Run.” Immediately I twisted from his grip, running down the alley, away from the terrifying man-monster. Somehow I found the breath to utter a scream, though it was low with the immense panic that was still obstructing my vocal chords. I ran, staggering with each fall of my heel on the pavement, when the man tackled me. He wrapped his arms around my legs and, somehow, between running and hitting the ground, I was facing him rather than the ground.

Looking at him, I saw to my absolute terror that he was even scarier than just moments before. The once human-looking hand had become claw-like, with black hair slowly lengthening as I stared in transfixed horror. His face had changed, too; now his wolf-like eyes harmonized with the muzzle that was elongating as I lay entrapped. The only explanation for this horrifying transformation was that this man was a werewolf.

That was not possible, though. Werewolves only existed in horror movies. They were meant to be corny and surreal. A man changing into a furry monster was just a myth. At least that was what I had thought before I was being held down by this petrifying creature that could only be a werewolf.

As I watched, I lost my ability to scream, again. I’m not even sure that I was breathing as the wolf man climbed up over me. Now his wolf-like snout was level with my shoulder, and I could see all the teeth in his gaping jaws.

“Too slow,” he spoke in a low, gravelly voice. Then, before I could see him move, his teeth were touching my flesh. I could feel each
breath he took, heating the sensitive skin between my neck and shoulder. 

Pain ripped into the areas surrounding my collarbone and shoulder as his jaws started to close. I felt my flesh give way as the teeth, sharp as daggers, slowly started to close with my body in between. It was as if I could feel each tooth as it penetrated my skin. The screams that had evaporated before now came tearing from my lungs. I screamed and I thrashed, yet no matter what I did, he held me down. No matter what I did, he was still biting me.

Hysterically, I remembered the old psychic’s prediction. She said I would be bitten, and now I was. The wolf man’s jaws finally clamped together. I heard my bones snap and crush. Then an intense throbbing in time to my heartbeat washed through my body, and I passed out.

I woke, staring at the clouds that covered the night sky. I was no longer in the alley, but in a field instead. I tried to move my left arm and pain radiated out into the rest of my body. Apparently, the attack wasn’t a dream.

Then I heard a long exhalation, and felt a warm breath flutter over me. I looked over and lying inches from me was a large black wolf. Not just large, but huge. There was a huge black wolf near my head, and I couldn’t move my arm.

Suddenly I felt a tingling in my body, raising goose bumps across its surface. I looked up and the clouds slowly uncovered the full moon. Then my skin seemed to catch fire as up and down my body invisible needles stabbed into me. It was more intense than the sensation after the wolf had broken through my bones. Somehow, this time I managed to remain dimly conscious. Slowly the needles changed into blunt knives grinding into my body. My vision went black, but I could still feel the open wound which was my body.

When the blackness evaporated, I was standing, but instead of standing on my two feet, I was on four. I was standing on four white paws, and seeing the world with black-and-white vision. If it weren’t for the black wolf-head butting me, I would have started to freak out. As it was, I felt a strange relaxation come over me, and I snarled and bit at his head, just missing his ear.

He didn’t seem to mind. In fact, he slammed his head into my side again. Starting all of a sudden to get really mad at this wolf that had turned my world into an insane horror flick, I growled and bit him again. He once again head butted me, then ran.

I was ticked. No stupid wolf-man was going to head butt me and run. So I chased after him. Somewhere along the way I lost all the anger and enjoyed feeling the freedom of running. I felt connected to the world. It was empowering, like all the world’s energy was in and out of me. It felt like magic.
I ran until I finally collapsed, panting, while the black wolf barely seemed winded. Then I lay under the stars, with that crazy wolf beside me, his head on my back. I had not forgotten that he had attacked me, but at that moment in time it didn’t matter. Right then, he was warm and comforting, all I needed. That was how I fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up in a bed. It was the hotel bed that I had slept in each night that my friends and I had been there. I got up and went to the bathroom, noticing that I was in my pink pajamas with flying cows. I looked at the area between my left shoulder and neck, and there was nothing. No scar, no bruise, not even a scratch. I looked at myself, and nothing was out of place. I was still me, not some crazy wolf-girl. It was all a dream. There was no wolf-man. I was just drunk, and the psychic had freaked me out. I mean, really, werewolves don’t exist, and I never have believed in the supernatural. Smiling, I left the room, vowing to myself never to get drunk again.

It wasn’t until later that I noticed on the nearby nightstand my carefully folded red blouse covered in bloodstains and soft black wolf hairs.
Ruin
Jennifer Duguay

It’s Ruin—hiding in a glass
One drink
And there’s no turning back

The haze gets thicker
With each swig of liquor
The remedy becomes the cure
Inebriation makes reality obscure

It’s Ruin—hiding in a bottle
After the first taste
It’s easier to swallow

The cup is filled with spirits
Topped off with weakness and gloom
The glass is always half empty
And last call comes too soon
utopias are meant for desperate dreams that never come.
daydreams are adamant in their teary escape
yet, it’s a war of reason and poignant passion:
the struggle rises at the peak of day
when the body grows weary and hungry
for sound hope, the thinker begs the charlatan
to return the youth of polite society.
sardonically he laughs at the forceful drifter and
soon after forgets the use of his response;
what dreams may come at their allegiance,
what truth can be provoked –
perhaps then the desperate dream will be honorably kindled
and the thinker and charlatan may be no more.
Reflected Once More
Preeya Jamnadas

I took flight in the gloom
Shaking under a garment
Stumbling over rocks
Hair adrift far and wide
Failed my way
Could not ascertain an artifact
But I perceived higher
And detected the play of illumination

My hands began to reflect light
Sketching the trees
I traveled behind the silver light
Time ceased to beat me
I was winning
With the sun my ally

Until the clouds
Deprived me of my gain
Shed into darkness
Snatched hope
Beat me again
I failed
I lost

Once again
Perhaps one day
The moon will bend
Give me compassion
Let me go
My only desire
I crept back to the castle

Up to my chamber
My avoidance postponed
Peekaboo Frog
Michael Bergbauer
corpses scattered across my dorm room floor
send morse-coded messages
with their poisoned bodies
to my fragile mind

their march halted unexpectedly
they mime their stomp
as it echoes in my mind
resonates in my skull

pungent poison seeps through the walls
piles of death line the corners of my home
in which i sleep with fits of dreams
fearful they will return
and fight for the family
i massacred
and suffocate me in my sleep
by crawling through my mouth,
nostrils, eyes,
until i am hollow
and cleaned out
She is curled up in a large armchair in the corner of the vast library. She has passed most of her days there since the accident. Her nose is buried in some huge tome with a Latin title, and as usual, she is far too absorbed in the text to notice anything out of the ordinary. I’m peeking at her through the spaces in the shelves. I’m not really snooping. I just like to come and watch her read. I know if she realized someone was watching her, she’d probably be more than a little upset, but she is such a charming little thing, and I get so few visitors here in the library.

I vaguely remember her from before the accident. She comes in here about once every few weeks, an empty-headed little blonde thing, usually in a miniskirt or shorts. She checks out maybe one book, and returns the previous one. I didn’t pay much attention to her then, but the accident changed her. Now she comes every day at noon, and holes up in a corner with a pile of books. She doesn’t stop reading until closing, not even to eat or use the washroom. Once, I saw her glance out the window. Just once.

To tell the truth, I’m getting a little worried about her. She comes in wearing the same drab black dress every day. Her hair is slightly messy, and the bags under her pretty blue eyes just get bigger with time. She’s lost a lot of weight, too. She looks like a rail.

She mutters to herself as she reads. It is always the same movement of her lips, and I’m sure she is entirely unconscious of it. She also flutters her hand against the side of her forehead. Her fingers are so tiny and dainty a child could break them. When she turns a page, she puckers her lips as if annoyed at the interruption and inconvenience.

I wonder sometimes where she learned to read Latin, and why she bothers to read the old “Historia” that has been gathering dust for so many years on the shelf. It pleases me that someone other than myself has found some interest in it, but then again, I only picked it up after I’d been here many years.

She cuts her finger on the edge of the page, and sticks it in her mouth to suck. Her fingertips are covered with similar cuts. I couldn’t say why such an old book still has sharp edges.

I watch her for about another hour before it happens. She looks up, straight at me. Can she sense me? Impossible. I know I haven’t made a sound, and even if I could have, she wouldn’t see me. Would she?

I shrink back against the shelf. I sense more than see her as she gets out of her chair and places the book on a nearby stand. She is so graceful and light. I can’t even hear her footsteps. Her tremulous voice breaks the silence.
“Is anybody there?”

Her voice seems on the verge of breaking. I want to go to her, to comfort her and reassure her that everything will be fine. I resist temptation as common sense reluctantly sifts back in, and flee towards my usual alcove.

A moment later, a heart-wrenching sound pulls me to my curtains. She is sitting on the floor nearby, sobbing quietly. She looks sad, and scared. I slip out and tiptoe towards her. She looks up at me, the tears staining her white cheeks. She is looking at my face. Today is the first time in close to two years that she’s noticed me. I am surprised she can sense me at all. She looks into my eyes with those sky-blue pools brimming with yet unshed tears. Suddenly, all of the pieces click into place and facts start registering. The library is dark. It is after closing time. You can hardly see the blood staining her black dress, but the cuts on her wrists are deep. As if in a dream, I turn in horror towards the chair where she was sitting. There is a small curled-up body lying limply, and books are scattered on the floor.

In all the years I have spent here, there have been no others, and I have been so alone. As much as I am saddened, my heart yet leaps in joy. I reach out my arms to enfold her, and whisper words of welcome as the tears flow once again.
Free yourself
from the confines of the everlasting trite
that is spewed upon the dead earth.
My twice-numbered life means nothing
and I’m away on the breeze.
Three times I look upon this shallow place
and thrice shy away in disgust.

You are nothing but a something
which can not be defined.
Did you write your life on the tiny pages
of your little black book?

Cries from the womb cannot be heard by everyone
but tears are seen falling from the abyss
and the salty water spent on the effort of remaining within
only smoothes the path to entrance in this sad place.

From between pallid thighs
marked and broken
a resentful sorrow is born.

And upon the taking of another’s
the formidable decision is nigh
and she sobs though tears are none
for the destruction of humanity.
My Dreams Deferred
Iva Marc

So with the sun barren
clouds now soak the spirit.

Dreams distant from the touch—
rainbows bury the gold.

Hushed hope muffles the choke
sudden sharp last breath.

Decayed stench hidden
neatly beneath the broken skin.

Living the death of lost dreams.
Every day dying (again, again, again).
Midnight Burning  
Ryan Frabizio

I am friends with my burning,  
ignited from the bed  
And flickering to the bedside desk.  
I am no dream  
for I drift to many drowsy driving dreams  
before sleep’s  
thud.

This ice-body fights the flames  
until the two melt  
to one point of flowing  
ink.  
If a block of ice is thrown  
into a fiery ring,  
which wins?  
I suspect Science answers  
from a fool’s impulse,  
but  
this water vaporizes on the lips  
while leaving them moist  
and passing the pearly gates  
to still my sloshing thoughts.

Where were you  
when I wandered away from the walkway  
to a grass love-seat?

Where was I  
when you surrendered to the geometric concrete  
and plucked with the other peacocks  
about the insane silence you left behind?  
Where was I  
so I could disregard a defense  
to hear you weaving your own imitations of yarn, needing so insufficient  
much that  
by trying,  
your thread has already  
begun to  
disintegrate?
Where were you if not under the shadows of sunlit naked trees
or of neon-dim night alleys
when I claimed center-right field
wordless
and then returned and resorted to the chair—
but only after I had taken time out of mind long enough to re-believe in
time—
with satisfaction, waiting wiser for wiser.
In Open Doubt
Perry Uwanawich

My heart’s wings have been clipped by Love’s scolding scars
Two hearts collide in a wreck much worse than that of cars’
Once skipping through love’s flowery fields bedewed
One finds inhibition and logic to be subdued
Pressing lips to silken petals of lips
Taking it in in little sips
Molding you with my hands
Through barren wombs of sand
I’ve found no love to hold so dear
And find the idea rather queer
That we should each pair up in two
Before we lose our precious youth
It’s what society tells you
I find it all a bit uncouth
I doubt there is a love so true
But grew up taking it for truth
Although I believe it to be psychological
Perhaps love’s not supposed to be logical
Neither is it meant to be found
But rather waits to come around
’Til then I’ll cease to search it out
And will remain in open doubt
Ad Infinitum
Raquel Sanchez

the clock strikes one, acoustically announcing our encounter, and at our sight, distance submerges us into endless time. Metaphors spill onto blank pages, as decorum fails to restrain flamed infatuation—so each spoken syllable makes its way into the unfathomable, and what remains is an eternal, solid kiss.

  a kiss ten times removed from existence,
  which has brought you to me—and
  each word avers this truth of us, infinitely.
Tale of the ambiguity of trickling crimson
   crying in the havens of dusk
   while the bloody skies glisten to your song.

Creeping down the velvet teak
   tracing patterns in the seams of fraught emotion
   as empty, grinning faces mock the tender solace of your grave.

The narcissistic red filled to overflowing
   with the lost credentials
   of obsolete gods.

As the stale heat creeps up from the winding road
   to steal a honeyed kiss from trembling boughs
   the very earth dissolves
   leaving skeletal fingers groping in shadow.

In the morbid ruins of the castle
   once stronger than the hands of any man
   feathered tresses frame the sleeping beauty.

Footsteps up to the shattered tower
   echoing where none are left to listen
   voracious grin as he claims his hard-won prize.

Awake.

Lies trip over that silver tongue
   and tear off her luminescent wings
   binding her to him
   even as slivers of creation sneak their way in
   among the wreckage
   to salvage the beginnings and tie up all the ends.

She cannot fly,
   mourn the loss of freedom, pretty one
   and in sorrow, shed the colors of the rainbow.

Again.
And the banner unfolds with the snapping breezes, in the manner once, twice, forever told.

The tale will come to pass.
The Story of Us Two
Iva Marc

We sit on the couch in the family room, connected by objects that spark conversation.

Without the zzzzzzzzzzzz of the dead signal TV filter box, we would have nothing to share; without the couch we would not be near.

Disconnected in our thoughts, yet saying the same things. Dull emptiness sculpts our minds. (Silence!)

So loud, like the piercing of a dog whistle. (Opposite!) Tugging to be right, yet wanting to be on the same side. (Alone.)

Blah, blah, blah, our mouths motion like cows gnawing on mushy gum, resenting it for losing its flavor. Spit it out, don’t get it stuck on your shoe. Hardening, sticky, trapped.

Difficult to release. Difficult to move on. Difficult to let go.
La Nena y el Muñeco
Liza Rodríguez
Happy Holidays

Anthony Labson

4:00 a.m. open with special sales.
4:00 a.m. wake crazy consumers.
They wait in line giving no room for cuts,
Yet they’re ready to cut throats to get in front of the others.

The doors open and people stampede
Over cigarette butts and people’s necks
Because shoes at Footlocker are 75% off.
A woman now lies dead for a pair of New Balance.

A bottle of perfume by Chanel is only $50.
A woman takes a spray on the wrist to give it a try,
Then takes a shot in the eyes from another woman.
Now that bottle is gone and she’s left dry.

Kids are grabbing used games at GameStop
But what are they doing up at 4 in the morning?
Why are their parents letting them play games like Manhunt?
God forbid they should fight over a book by Lord Byron.

Then there are the little 13-year-old girls
Walking around the lingerie section at Victoria’s Secret.
Only I don’t think they’re shopping for their mothers.
Are they looking for something to wear at the beach?

Old hags even come and spread their dust.
It must be the one time of year I see new
Life in them as they haul ass. Makes me wonder
What happened to “What would Jesus do?”

Finally, there are the juvenile wannabes
Walking around like they are so bad
With their pants below their waists.
I hope they like it later when their butts
Are touched by Bubba’s special candy cane.

I feel sorry for the employees who have no choice
As the customers yell and curse at them like slave masters.
For making them be there, they should be the ones
Yelling at the customers, saying, “Go to hell, you stingy bastards!”
Brand new sales happen here
And there as the day goes by.
More and more bones are broken
While people on stretchers pray not to die.

People are running either to sales or to get out of the way.
What a great time and day to go to the mall
When people of all ages are spreading the holiday spirit
With fights, lacerations, and handcuffs for all.

Next time just go to Wal-Mart where
They have the same prices all year round.
It’s better than your kids coming to see you on Christmas
When you’re buried six feet under the ground.
“What are we doing here, again?” asks a confused but ecstatic-looking old man.

“I’m interviewing you for my composition class,” I reply.

“Oh, excellent! What should we start with? How about the war and how I got the Medal of Honor? Or perhaps, how I stopped Hitler’s alien doomsday machine?” he asks, beaming at me.

“I thought we would go into that later; let’s start with a simple introduction. What is your name, and where were you born?”

“My name is Thomas Arthur Jenkins; I was born in Chicago on September 1, 1922.”

“Wow! So that would make you eighty-five years old. Do you feel your age?” I politely ask.

“Only sometimes do these muscles and bones ache, but my mind is as strong as ever,” says Thomas proudly.

“Well, I will be the judge of that,” I jest.

Thomas gives a nervous laugh.

“What was it like growing up? What kind of things did you do as a child?”

“Back then it was tough. As far back as I can remember, I was always working for somebody, making shoes, tilling land, lifting crates, you name it. But all that hard work made me strong. You always had to defend yourself living where I was in Chicago,” he says, squinting in thought.

“Why did you have to defend yourself? Where were your parents?”

“Well, it was Chicago! You had to deal with the occasional mugging, or if you messed up on the job, you’d get a beating from the foreman. Now, as for my parents, they were working, too. They had to make a living, they did. They sent me to most of the jobs, anyway.”

“Ah, but you learned to cope with your surroundings, which made you into the man you are today.”

“Well, not exactly. The war is what changed me the most,” says Thomas with a smile. And for the first time during the interview I look at Thomas as a whole. He is a tall man, about five-eleven, wearing a plaid button-down shirt and worn old blue jeans. His hair is grey and white and his face is wrinkled. His thin body seems to have a slight muscular shape, but the most noteworthy detail is a thin scar across his right cheek, and his right earlobe is missing.

“If you don’t mind me asking, where did you get that scar?”

“This,” he says, touching it gently with a wild look in his eye. “I
got this from Adolf Hitler himself!”
    Thomas is roaring with laughter.
    “Well, what happened?” I ask.
    “Oh, right,” says Thomas, still chuckling to himself.
    “When World War II was coming to a close, Franklin Delano
Roosevelt had created a special covert unit of the finest men from the
army and the navy. I happened to be one of those men.”
    “But there is no record of such a thing,” I interject.
    “That’s because the government kept it all hush-hush. Very few
people knew this group ever existed. Anyway, our job was to take out
Hitler himself.
    “On April 30, 1945, we had been given intelligence that Hitler
was holed up in a castle fortress, so we moved out that very night. Upon
arrival it became a stealth mission, and I gotta say, those navy boys were
like regular James Bonds. There were perfect spies, but I was more of a
Rambo type of guy. You know, running and gunning! Anyway, even with
the navy boys leading us with their superior sneaking skills, one of us had
set off an alarm.”
    “Who set it off? Was it you?”
    The color drains from Thomas’s face.
    “Well, I don’t want to use any names or point any fingers. Let’s
just get back to the story. So after the alarm went off, it turned into one
crazy gunfight in there! Nazis were coming at us from everywhere! Guns
were blazing, grenades were exploding, and we had to fall back. And that
was when the funniest thing happened.”
    Thomas starts to laugh again.
    “What?” I ask, on the edge of my seat.
    “We fell back right into Hitler’s private quarters!” Thomas says,
unable to control his laughter. In fear of him having a heart attack, I let
him catch his breath before continuing.
    “So there we were. Everyone was frozen. Hitler was looking
right into my eyes. Then I saw it. I thought it was a telescope at first, but
I pulled myself together and saw the mechanics of it. The biggest cannon
the world has ever seen! Everything happened so fast. My team dove
off in all different directions, firing and bombing the remaining Nazis,
but I charged straight at Hitler. He drew his weapon the fastest I’ve ever
seen! I had barely taken cover when he had fired and I took this wound,”
Thomas says, pointing at his scar and missing earlobe. “I quickly re-
turned fire, hitting Hitler in the leg. I walked over to finish the job, but
Hitler decided to take his own life instead.”
    “What happened to the doomsday cannon?”
    “Well, when I first saw it, I knew it wasn’t of this world. The
mechanics of it were way too advanced. I mean, there were computers
hooked up to it! But after Hitler had taken himself out, I turned to investigate the thing but it was gone!” Thomas says wide-eyed. 

“But how?”

“Well, while we were making a mad dash for the exit, Nazis were still on our tail. I looked to the sky; the stars twinkled back. Then I saw it, a strange aircraft! It had a circular shape and lights were coming from it. It was the biggest thing I’ve ever seen! I knew it had to be a flying saucer!”

“Did anyone else see the craft?”
“No, just me. But everybody saw the weapon.”
“So you believe Hitler and the Nazis were involved with aliens?”
“Yes, I do,” says Thomas sternly.
“Well, I think that concludes my interview. Thank you very much for your time.”
Old Friend
Perry Uwanawich

Was it real?
Is it true?
What’s the deal?
Did you feel the way I do?

You must’ve if actions be but stronger words
For yours pour out for all to see
I know about the bees but baby we’re birds
Oh but how I wish it could be

We’re in different worlds you and me
Me just getting life straight
You on the other side
Hook line sinker, you the bait

And so you leave
As does life
So do the leaves
All is white
All but me
Swooning
*Iva Marc*

Sara swoons to soft whispers.  
Her body gently glides  
head – back – butt – thighs - feet  
to a pillow-top of golden dandelions.
To fall in love
One must love Love
The heart afraid
Will not be made
To dance in trance
Of true Romance
A heart behind four walls
Is one that never falls
For fear of falling hard
This heart’s always on guard
But deep inside
No one can hide
The lingering longing and aching pain
Resonating through his brain
Which rings in Love’s open ears
And rings and rings over again
And through cold and stubborn tears
Refrain he may try
Even ’til he dies
But escape he may not
That which God above hath wrought
Enchantment
Jennifer Duguay

Five years—the enchantment—still alive
A fantasy—torment—the infatuation survived
An uncompromising dream—one—that won’t die
Filled with hope—with love—with denial

What love it was
If it wasn’t love
Who knows what it was
When it was all said—it was done

It was an illusion—built on desire
A burning inside—where there was no fire
A constant appeal—for another’s heart
Denial—in full—or in part

One moment—inspired
The next—ill desired
So many images—plaguing the mind
Decisions to make—but how to decide

Love so perfect—too much right to be wrong
A look at the truth—what was—is gone
Illusions of trust—of love
Whatever it seemed—it wasn’t what it was

Delusions of love—what it could’ve been
You and I as lovers—companions—friends
Whatever it was—why did it end?
Too idealistic—the reality was dead

Five years—the enchantment—still alive
A fantasy—torment—the infatuation survived
An uncompromising dream—one—that won’t die
Filled with hope—with love—with denial
Boys with Accents
Lydia R. Malcolm

Your brow is furrowed,
Your eyes shine with brilliant thoughts.
But the words won’t come.
Your hopes rise, fall, your confidence lost.

You start to walk away,
I stop you and smile, I see you.
I don’t need the words.
I
see
you.

Take my hand and I will let you show me
Who you are, where you’ve been.
I will teach you,
Learn from you.

Talk to me with your broken words.
Look at me with eyes that speak volumes.
Soothe me with your sing-song sounds.
Make love in a language of our own.
Flickersmoke
Ryan Frabizio

Somewhere in human self-imposed haze
thought is struck ablaze
against the grindstone that whirs
when sleep is the pearl.

It is only a farewell spark,
the shine which enlightens blindness at a blink
before the sluggard dark
allows it to slink
away like a clever raccoon from its trap.
I chase
but it’s a speedy ace
best shot and jotted down
and smoldered into my crown.

The lit-wick brain
strains
burning against a lax wax stump
until the shine only glows, then mellows
into forgotten
flickersmoke.
Adjustment
Raquel Sanchez

flux in the river—and I can never step in the same place again
slowly I bid the tide goodbye—while thirsting for rain
altering perspectives transform time—and memories decay into the
arcane
the day arrives and morning is vague—the time has come when all have
lost their name
I Am Summer Embodied
Bridget Haley

i am summer embodied

melanin, muscle mass, freckles, endorphins, hairflips,
and coy, blue eyes
compose my body
along with yearnings, fantasies, and hands reaching to the sky (among
their other travels)

groggy morning memories fade into the crisp denial
of the heat washed away by the
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Gentle Words Say Something Unbeautiful
Chana Dukes

I was gazing at the clearest stars over water
when you found me, slipped me to my knees
carried me into the singing trees
as all your shushing whispers filled my silence.

Your skin is the darkest of midnights
your eyes summer skies turned to cloud
if you asked me to caress this moment
I’d reply that you are fearsome proud.

Smooth, your tightened touch, and strong
your catlike prowl, the darkening of desire
all I would otherwise admire
if your coming was welcome at all.

The drifting night laps around our ankles
as you lay me down on softest moss
muffle my cries with a piece of summer
tie my surprise with creeping vines in knots.

I would lie and tell you I’ve a man
who has stepped inside to soften up the bed
but gentle tears refuse to stop their tread
through attempts to speak around the glove.

I beg to God for you to find merciful relief
and release me, stumbling, to my darkened night
but your melting blade has creased among my grief
and you are many things but kind.
When I saw your name
engraved in white upon a heavy green metallic rectangle
held a foot above ground by a dull gray pole
I stopped to mourn.
I stopped
beside an indecorous lush bush, pulsing in a washing breeze.

In the cool of the moment, I thought of knowing you.
Were you a woman or a man? I have known men named Jerry
and known women named Ryan,
and Ryan is rooted in kingship,
so no one knows who is who, or what, or why.
So rise, and let me know you and me.
Or must I come to you? I know you have the patience.
I have sometimes lost mine.
I have sat on unforgiving cold tile
on heavy nights, listening to Hell’s Bells
bonging in my ears,
flowing in the cold flame-bursts.

Who the hell are you?

I understand. You are too much above me
or envy my current place above you.
We are not ready to talk as equals.
You are above throat noises.

If I think to myself in my language
since I know no other
will it better satisfy you?

Damn.

I know.
Begin empty-mouthed,
Follow mind-emptied,
but the tomb is a tomorrow, too short away
to shed this dull shell
on my own.
Jerry, we’ll not talk again soon.
Water Lily
Amy Harvey