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"WHAT I LIKE
MORE THAN
ANYTHING /
IS TO VISIT
OTHER ISLANDS..."

George Oppen

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"I think the question asked more frankly would be: is it more important to produce art or to ~~engage in~~ ^{take political action}. Of course I cannot pretend to answer such a question. I could point out this, however, that art and political action are in precise opposition in this regard: that it can always be quite easily shown that political action is going to be valuable; it is difficult to ever prove ~~that it has been in the past~~ ^{that political action has been valuable}. Whereas art is precisely the opposite case; it seems always impossible to prove that it is going to be valuable, and yet it is always quite clear that ~~in the past it has been~~ ^{the art of the past has been valuable to humanity}. I offer it only as a suggestion that art lacks in political action, not action. One does what he [sic] is most moved to do."

- George Oppen, "Pipe-Stem Daybook" II:III (ca. 1966)

In the early 1930s, the American poet George Oppen disavowed his art to become a political activist. During his quarter-century silence, Oppen worked as a prominent campaign organizer in New York, fought in the infantry in WWII, and supported his family as a carpenter in Mexico City. After a dream-prompted return to poetry in the late '50s, he wrote some of the starkest and most startling poetry I have ever encountered.

Oppen's long silence punctuated the entirety of his work. From *The Materials* to beyond Pulitzer Prize winning *Of Being Numerous*, his poems remained in conversation with the politics of action, word, and white space. Why do we create? Why do we not create? How do these (in)actions situate us ethically? The more I involve myself in the production and now dissemination of art, the more this conversation, which Oppen epitomized, rings in my mind.

Like Oppen, I don't believe that anyone can pretend to answer such questions. The dilemma, as he would probably state, falls back on Eros, desire. *One does what one is moved to do*. On this level (*I am moved...*) I believe we can approach our politics and poetics with a liberating honesty. For instance, I am moved that you are reading this. I am moved that the artists whose works fill the following pages were moved, somehow, graciously, to create.

Of course I must also credit the brilliant and hardworking ad team for what lies in the pages ahead. The implementation of their ads campaign (a political action, no doubt) led to another semester of record submissions of record quality. This, in turn, led to a grueling editorial process, for which we are always thankful. It is the editors' good judgment coupled the artists' hospitality that make it possible for me to present to you the finest edition of eleven40seven yet printed. Neither should the dedication of the design staff, headed by Creative Director Becca Adkins, be understated. It is because of them that these words are on the page. In the end, what is still more impressive is that these teams—ad, editorial, and design—are all composed of the same people. You will find their names printed on the final page of the journal.

Despite all temptation, it is clear that I cannot end this with the kind of silly platitude I love: 'art makes us better,' and the like. That would be tedious and unproductive. But whatever you make of this—the coming together of artist, editors, and you, reader—I am thankful for your action. -Bill, EIC

PARALYSIS

Paige Wells

Paige is a junior English major
from Argyle, TX

The Cypress of Sighs
bows a headdress of
rye and thigh bones.

Gossamer strands strung
with mercury beads of
lead and cranberry hides

float, ablaze against a
steel grey sky. Copper
twines wheel threads

through her battered
planks. Here, tempered
sparks flicker, then blank,

splashing lethargic arcs of
ice. She groans, her arms
charred, sown with red

ingrown thorns of half-
dead hornets. Her roots
are worn, beset by her

burden. Stretched sky-
ward, she pleads to
heaven for levity.

FORBIDDEN ARTS

Paige Wells

We trudged through the black
hills, soot peppering our snow-
shoes. Rime-ridden birch bore the
cracked racks of last season's bucks and
licorice sticks. Their sap was oil. Their
trunks oozed, slick and sweet. Ice
pricked our ears — linnets strung with
twines of iodine and violet thorns, our
lips the blue gills of a barrel-
chested grouper we caught
in August. Beneath the Temple of Glass, we plunked
each rib upon the altar. Ivory puffs of chalk
rose, its twisted heads gorging
gulps of air. The soil shuddered. Pools of
bruised black marbles quaked and spilt into
aisles littered with saber tooth
teeth and seagull tongues. Dull. Oracle-
read. You hummed "Auld Lang Syne" when they
licked your ankles, hiding beneath anointed
lids, and blew rings of smoke that
floated skyward, like bubbles from the
bottom of an inky sea.

UNTITLED

Eliza Smith

Eliza is a junior Studio Art and Painting major from San Antonio, TX



DOUBT

Taylor Haines

Taylor is a senior Strategic Communication major from San Diego, CA

She first thought of you
under a hand-sewn blanket
stitched of pale blue stars and moons.

That season, a petal pink dress
draped legs that didn't reach the ground.
A princess with no crown.

You sat in the back of her mind
through birthday parties and blurry pictures.
Her first days of summer singed

by a subtle black shadow breathing
down her back. You stayed
strapped tight, resisting her growth.

Despite your grasp, she blossomed. Fragile,
green and tender,
a new rose, nonetheless.

Her closet - your cave.
The monster of doubt with
a heartbeat she can hear.

Eyes open, she listens, night after night,
matching your slow breaths with her own,
eventually inhaling you completely.

And you kick, you pull, you burn
her insides as she swallows you whole.
Finally. She's mine.

The sound of an empty room.
A glass, filled under a dying light.
She stares into red flickering liquid

at her midnight table.
She wraps her fingers around the neck
of a flowerless vase and pours

the dirty water down the drain.
You sit across from her and smile.
Another cup, consumed in your name.

O WARRIOR

Emily Capelli
Emily is a senior Writing major
from Mars, PA

*1955—Emmett Louis Till was 14 years old when he was murdered in the Mississippi Delta.
His mutilated body was found in the Tallahatchie River three days later.*

Mosquito soldiers
form freedom against

the river,
what happens suddenly

is what happens in time.
A crowd

watches as his monuments
unravel

in his dust.
There is a door

through which certain words
cannot pass.

portēmus MULCH;
let us carry

this royal waste.
A summer with uncle

the month
after birthday,

to swim home
like the water moccasin,

the air thick as mud.

LOVE

Emily Capelli

Forge frenzy into
curious drifter: in my chest, a

hurricane of glass.

THE INFAMOUS

Emily Capelli

fight city rises
 against itself, perhaps for angels
or again for kings.
 spray-painted white women
trading sleep for better dreams
 in the bridge's belly.

nothing but pleasure
 on this day when
two prostitutes visit
 the zoo, their noses
and spread fingers
 on the koala's glass.

back on the streets,
 i stayed a hustler.
the old rosary
 hangs static
in the arms of guadalupe
 amid churchside exchanges—

light for light.
 where ends the hysteria?
i don't back down easy.
 how many emmett tills
since there was
 emmett till?

nickelbag misdemeanors,
 vagabond dependents,
prostitution, drugs,
 music lessons.
and away we go—
 the thieves who took our lives.

clowns who mean business
 in commute, sipping wine
through twizzlers.
 beautiful day,
i say.
 certainly is.

BELIEF

Lindsey Phillips

Lindsey is a sophomore Child
Development major from
Houston, TX



WRIT IN WATER

Chelsea Low

Chelsea is a sophomore
Neuroscience major from
Houston, TX

I'm standing on a bridge in Paris when I see it. There's a little girl, nine years old, sitting by her bedroom window listening to Kelly Clarkson's "Breakaway" on repeat. She's daydreaming of wild and carefree summers in North Carolina, imagining another girl might one day come across the contents of a shoebox she buried between the pond and the woods and wonder where she is now. Would she toss around the softball and know that it once belonged to the best second baseman in the Indian Trail League? Would she read the copy of *Number the Stars* that she accidentally stole from the school library because she loved it too much to bring back? Now this girl is braving the Colorado winter and pretending she is a pioneer temporarily living in a log cabin until she can continue the journey onto her real home. She's not quite sure where it is, but it's probably somewhere glamorous like Queen Elizabeth I's castle or adventurous like a bungalow on an African safari—in that case, she might be headed in the wrong direction. She blinks, and suddenly she's nineteen. It's my shadow.

My eyes start to squint at the gold lock in my hand, then at the rest of the bridge railing locks covered in the names of couples seeking to immortalize their love. Shivering from the drizzly breeze, I find an open space and quickly connect the lock to the bridge. I step back to admire the names of my parents, the view they will have of Notre Dame and the river. I glance at the green shops along the street and wonder if the charming, old Frenchman who sold me the lock is still raving to American tourists about Obama and his days of playing in a band in New York. I wonder if my parents will ever return to Paris and if their lock will still be here. I wish my friend Deanna could be here to marvel at this beauty of modern art. It's then that I realize I'm touching the same sky Kelly Clarkson used to sing about, and it's even more satisfying than devouring Nutella crepes in front of the Eiffel Tower. I've done it; I've broken away and found myself.

My friend Rebecca used to point to a crack in the sidewalk during our jogs around campus to mark the first step of our run, and I ask myself whether a pilgrimage has

_ WRIT IN WATER _

such a clear starting point. I had been searching for my voice for years, determined to travel as far as necessary to reclaim it, knowing only that I must have broken off a piece trying to bury my memories.

Fast forward one more week and I'm sifting sand between my toes somewhere outside of Rome, still looking for this beginning, careful not to spill my thoughts in the Mediterranean on the morning of July 2nd. My body doesn't yet know that it is on the verge of a raging battle with a mysteriously contracted case of mononucleosis, that this is the last day it will have before it becomes subject to a month long marathon of CT scans of the throat and allergic reactions to antibiotics. I retrace my steps and discover that June 11th is the date marking a new chapter of my life unfolding. The previous novels and sequels detailing the more mundane past of my life were all gently tucked away onto shelves as I dove into a thrilling adventure set in London, Paris, and Rome. It was to be a pilgrimage, a cultural experience so fulfilling that not even the ink on the pages could bear to sit still and instead bled through the paper and rushed into my veins. It's exactly the journey I was waiting for by the window ten years ago.

My arrival in London was quickly followed by a chilly breeze, ushering me into the unfamiliar, cobblestoned streets. The gray skies above sent down a watery welcome so typical of the city that I chose to forego my umbrella and soak in the idea that I was perhaps gazing at the same towering trees and majestic architecture as literary greats for the past hundreds of years. Before I knew it, I was entering the literary worlds of Sherlock Holmes on Baker Street, Shakespeare's Globe Theater, and the countless authors and poets memorialized in Westminster Abbey. I stood at Platform Nine and Three Quarters to pay my respects to the greatest wizard I have ever known, strolled sleepy castle grounds still dreaming up fairytales, rode the London Eye, and raced through the streets on bright red double-decker buses; and all of this occurred before I even had the chance to order fish and chips at a pub. I gazed up at Buckingham Palace, feeling a bit like a peasant, and saw the Queen! I barely found time to admire the buildings older than my country yet so young to my eyes until I wandered

into Kensington Gardens in the land of Peter Pan and reflected on all that I had seen thus far.

One of the biggest surprises of my time in London was how immersed I became into the society in just seven days. I managed to become proficient at navigating the tube system even faster than I had learned my way around Sid-Richardson and Winton-Scott after attending classes in these buildings daily for a year, and it felt completely natural to turn on a British news program dealing with modern politics before going to bed. I learned to call my trash "rubbish" and the men we encountered "blokes," and I differentiated between "cheerio!" and my typical breakfast cereal. Like our tour guide, I cheered for the royal family and became a European soccer fan. I absolutely loved every minute of high tea despite ordering hot chocolate and crave the toasted sandwiches from "Pret" to this day.

I pondered over the idea that I might step back in time and head to St. James's Theatre to see Oscar Wilde's opening performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* or perhaps walk by a 21st century Sydney Carton from *A Tale of Two Cities* at any moment. Truthfully, it is strange to think that a visit to an author's home or the sight of Jane Austen's writing desk at the British Library causes one to feel a kind of closeness with the writer, yet this fact is undeniable. I was still not certain of the full magnitude of my journey, and I felt as though the pages and characters I had come to know in the past nineteen years of my life were all being released from my mind's Tower of London at once and scattered throughout the city in search of something unknown. I was lost, yet I knew the hotel was just across the street. I was experiencing a deep loss of self that not even the Queen's canary yellow dress worn in celebration of her birthday could illuminate. I was becoming a little bit frustrated that after seeing so many amazing literary sites, I still could not quite express with words what it meant to me. Soon, I was in France.

Nothing compares to running down 700 steps to get to the bottom of the Eiffel Tower just in time to watch it erupt into a shimmering beacon of light. Well, I suppose my amazement at the top as I looked across Paris, surprised at the amount of trees lining the streets, produced a similar

element of satisfaction. Yet, as I reflect on the city where no detail is spared in creating each and every street into an artwork, I am reminded of several other irreplaceable moments: an afternoon spent in the Notre Dame courtyard eating ice cream with two dear friends and sorority sisters; biking along the Grand Canal at Versailles; winding through a few streets to gaze at the narrow, green door to Hemingway's home; those precious minutes on the lock bridge.

However, not everything in Paris is as glittering and perfect as it seems—in fact, I distinctly remember a pilgrim repeating the words, "il pleut!" out of confusion that it was raining more in Paris than in London. Burs flew into my hair while we were riding at Versailles. A man, with a group of acquaintances watching from a nearby bench, approached a trio of us in the Paris metro and persisted in his efforts to get us to leave with him; as the metro arrived and we ran through the crowd to the last door in our efforts to escape him, one of my fellow pilgrims, or perhaps it was I, commented that she had never been so afraid in her life. Perhaps it is an overreaction to compare it to a scene right out of *Taken*, but it certainly erased any sort of idealistic glaze coating my view of Paris and allowed me to see a more haunting side of the city.

Ezra Pound once found inspiration for a poem from a Parisian metro station in which he compared the people to "petals on a wet, black bough." Although poetry creates a multitude of interpretations, my frightening experience in the metro caused me to identify Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" with the juxtaposition of the inherent beauty of Paris with its far darker side. France is no stranger to death and violence; from the rows of white crosses overlooking the beaches of Normandy to the near cities they have built for the dead, legacies left behind are celebrated. At the Pere Lachaise Cemetery, I visited the final resting places of numerous individuals who have left their mark on the world, including Oscar Wilde and Gertrude Stein, but I was overcome most of all by the Holocaust memorials. Upon seeing the grotesque skeletons and being reminded of *Sarah's Key*, I knew that this was a piece of my personal pilgrimage rather than a tourist's bullet point on an itinerary.

As a child, I developed a fascination for the victims of the Holocaust that was increased by the understanding that I may not possess an entirely innocent German ancestry. I felt both guilt and a great responsibility to learn from my family's past. I was slowly developing my identity by trying to make sense of the world that came before me and connecting it with the present.

The week we spent in Paris felt like one long day; I miss stopping by the bakeries for a fresh baguette or macaroon and the way the sun didn't set until 10 P.M. The city is always so alive, whether the air is filled with the sounds of a music festival or the smell of crepes. My immediate impressions told me I preferred London because of our quick and easy adjustment, but looking back I believe I miss the relaxed, mysterious atmosphere of Paris more. Nevertheless, I found it less difficult than expected to move onto our final destination, the Eternal City, especially when I remembered the delicious late night gelato outings from my trip to Rome through Frog Camp last year.

Since I had been to Rome the previous year, the second trip felt a lot more relaxing; I wasn't worried about fitting everything into my schedule and was able to simply enjoy my time with others to a greater extent than before. A few of the highlights were learning to make pasta and tiramisu at our cooking class, listening to others dream about a future life in Tivoli as we were captivated by Villa d'Este, imagining the grandeur of Pompeii before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., sitting on a hill of Circus Maximus to cheer on the Italian soccer team, and staring out of a window at the Spanish Steps from the Keats-Shelley House. This last activity was a planned part of my literary pilgrimage and was probably the closest I have ever felt to a writer. Though the original furniture had been burned after Keats' death, I was speechless to be in the very room where he spent his last few months, looking out of the same window he must have looked out of from time to time.

I met my match with Nutella gelato in my efforts to conquer a new flavor every day, learned much about the present political struggles by seeing a protest and having lunch with Flaminia, our tour guide, and lived each moment struck by the presence of an ancient city within a

modern city. The timing of the Supreme Court's decision to uphold Obama's Healthcare plan just hours after we had the opportunity to discuss Italy's own healthcare situation with Flaminia allowed us to use our cultural visions to relate our politics to countries around the world. I will always remember the waiter who brought us a free dessert complete with little hearts drawn around the plate at our first dinner in Rome, and I will never forget the insanity of Roman drivers. I particularly enjoyed watching *Angels and Demons* in our hotel room one night and being able to point out every location we had visited. On the afternoon when I went to a crypt full of bones arranged in decorative flowers, clocks, and chandeliers; I was in complete horror, but also respect for the arrangers' acceptance of death and understanding of the afterlife. I believe a plaque read something like, "You are what we were, and we are what you will become." Our trip to the beach the next day was a relaxing end to what felt like years packed into only a few days and gave me time to process the places I had seen. But I wish I could go back and experience it without having felt the onset of a combination of strep throat and mono.

What truly stands out to me about my time in Europe, and what I realized on that bridge in Paris, is how much meaning people attach to objects. I was constantly looking for souvenirs to bring back with me, mementos of my pilgrimage, and wondering about the mark I was leaving behind. Like my nine-year-old self burying items in a shoebox that represented my life near my house in North Carolina, I found that I was leaving a lock with my parents' names in Paris and throwing a coin in the Trevi Fountain in Rome to somehow leave a memory of myself behind. Even within the cities, one gains a sense of what figures and events are deemed important from the statues and monuments present. For example, in London, buildings constructed centuries ago stand next to plainer, newer buildings to replace those destroyed in the World War II bombings—a constant reminder of the war's horrors as well as England's glory. The monarchy is also celebrated through the display of King Edward's Chair and Queen Elizabeth I's tomb in Westminster Abbey, unlike the mockery made of France's royal history through art inside the Versailles Chateau, such as the giant,

pink, feathery helicopter said to be inspired by Marie Antoinette. Rome is one of the oldest cities in the world and prides itself in its Coliseum; it is determined to preserve memories of its superiority in ancient times. Within the literary world, objects that once belonged to famous writers are placed in exhibits to share the memories associated with them with generations to come. I suppose that with the death of a person or era, physical objects or monuments remain to carry on the legacy. For instance, all of the blood on the beaches of Normandy has been washed away and the town rebuilt, complete with the little candy shop where I bought peach rings and the carousel along the ocean. But the craters riddling the top of the cliff and the German pillboxes still showing the location of guns at Pointe du Hoc tell a very different story.

A theme of death surrounded our entire trip and connected with the idea of memory. In London, our tour guide casually pointed out the places where royal figures had been beheaded, and we visited burial sites in Westminster Abbey. We talked about the afterlife in a Hindu temple and saw mummies at the British Museum. In France, I saw Normandy, the Pere Lachaise Cemetery, and Napoleon's tomb; in Rome, death surrounded Pompeii, the crypt, the catacombs, and the Keats-Shelley Memorial House. The overlaps with aspects such as the theme of death served to enhance my understanding of myself as more than a tourist on my own literary pilgrimage. Since Europeans are more accustomed to plagues, war, and death in general, they are as a whole more open about the subject and realize the importance of living life to the fullest.

Nontraditional pilgrimages, like literary pilgrimages, are vital legs of life's journey to move forward and see the world from new perspectives. I chose a literary pilgrimage because most of how I imagined the people and atmospheres of the three cities and my love for traveling came from the novels and poetry I have read. I discovered more than just the lipstick on Oscar Wilde's tomb and 221b Baker Street. Following Ernest Hemingway's words in *The Sun Also Rises*, "You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another;" I learned that traveling allows me to see another piece of myself and uncover hidden

fragments of my hopes and dreams, but I will always carry with me my memories and experiences of the past. This pilgrimage brought me closer to the authors I have loved for years by renewing their words for me—now I feel like I have seen inside their minds.

I returned from my pilgrimage just in time for an American celebration July-4th-style, and it felt like a proper homecoming for a pilgrim who had spent the past three weeks abroad. I brought back with me a few souvenirs, a Roman recipe, a disease that was not contracted in the way my family enjoys teasing me about, a newfound sense of independence and relish for each moment, one or two pounds of my newly discovered favorite foods, hundreds of photographs, and a vision of a nine-year-old girl who has traveled a long way and finally found her home. It is located deep within her soul, will never be more than one step away, and it will continue to be filled with the memories from her bucket list and travels for the rest of her life. The sun does indeed rise day after day, only to set once more until the end of time. With the passing of generations, her grave will one day be unvisited and her experiences repeated in the centuries to come, but she will be too busy off on new adventures in uncharted territories to mind. Though my story is not up to par with *The Canterbury Tales*, I am certainly changed from my journey and look forward to a time when I will have the opportunity to travel once more, careful not to take for granted the pilgrimages to be found in my own backyard.

FLEA MARKET FINDS

Lauren Afflerbaugh

Lauren is a junior Fashion Merchandising major from Austin, TX



LITMUS

kristin withers
kristin is a junior Philosophy major

If all grey-brain matter preserved our world
grey-brain Pacific plateau matter,
grey-brain walking scum stalling city streets, matter
and all that red-wine-richness waterfell down

univocal, open mouthed
out all abysmal ecstasy,
would the Lotuseaters, then, go to drown?
you can hear the pearl unfurling

o'electric verve from so far away
and even further in your murmurs
unbeknownst, and velveteen
spittle in the dead of night.

then what tongued crispness
might dog each morning.

LITHIC RESIDUA

(OR: HOW JOSEPH LEFT)

kristin withers

rebellion kept captive, hissing with-in finite
resistance — resounding so that shackled refrain,
monotonous, rattled down slain.
vilely silenced in some far corner of space I never
name, I've ever known.

exceedingly alive, damn-ed spy of the
dryness. thrown my three ghost souls
through the floors of sirens;

panting, whet pleading—eyes off, please leave me.

acacia splayed, deadened, bleak
'neath the blushed dust of
a city, layered moist, come silt-lit night.
from the agony these clouds bring me —
I've dreamt sex with tigers,

self-flocculating; aqua-pannus.
the suspension of bodies
seducing in what loward looming.

cremated myself by the turbines of hell.
rise I now out —
a stone to sand 'neath the seas of man,

centrifugal, 'lluminate sheath.

rot-chalk embalmed;
geminid souls bred,
a viscosity of
belonging. hidden
in what glaucous hollows
ceased — a kind of giving.

DUMPSTER GHOST

Rachel Hecht

Rachel is a junior Psychology major
from Dallas, TX



THE ONE-HORSE BEATITUDES

Bailey Betik

Bailey is a sophomore
Anthropology and English
major from Ennis, TX

I pray for the things unnoticed

*blessed be the amateur guitarists the sandbox feet the
sticky-pit peaches*

for the moon-white scar on my leg when I tripped up the
church's concrete steps
when I was nine, ripping my pantyhose too
for your Lego collection that you never let me play with
because I was a girl
and the two-wheeler races to the dock

for the Easter eggs still hiding somewhere in your
grandparents' pasture
for all the secrets of the world that were in those
watermelon
seeds we never dared to eat;
they turned into beanstalks, unclimbed.

blessed be the hay bales the cowtown main street mayors

for wicker-scented summers
mapped with half-torn atlases to Omaha, Vegas, Toronto,
and everywhere else we'd only heard of on television
for how your most played track on your beat-up radio was
the theme from Home Alone
I pray for big cities you never made it to.

for abandoned prom queen past-lover Polaroids
at the bottom of your chestnut drawers even though you
swore to me with swinging dreamcatcher
dashboard feet that you had no interest in this thirsty town
but you hung on to them
just in case

*blessed be the airplane pillows the waiting room magazines
the Sharpie-scented plaster*

(poem continued on next page, stanza break)

THE ONE-HORSE BEATITUDES

for your sister's comb-ridged teeth nestled tight like cities
hair like honey, soft like steam
as mockingbird lullabies lilted her
head to my shoulder, waltzing the siren-cherry glow
courtyard
waiting for rain

for faded pulses, the monotone A-flat line
the watercolor bruises sprawling
smeared across your chest
iron black threads kissing you together
in ways I was too shy to ever do

blessed be the moving van.

because we live in better safe than sorry
tucking our songs inside shower curtains and HOV lanes
and telling people we love them through conversation
hearts
crooked candy letters spelling out syllables too thin to be
spoken

I pray because I had to come back
and I am the collector of strings, the pocketeer of stars
tallying the times she double-knots her shoes
scooping up memories from the thick East Texas mud
like diving sticks from the bottom of a swimming pool

you had the same eyelashes,
but she doesn't know that yet.

my bones crack, shifting in my skin
I am stories getting ready to be told.

UTILITY

Lauren Afflerbaugh
Lauren is a junior Fashion Merchandising
major from Austin, TX



* * *

JOSHUA, 25—a graduate student.

KAREN, 17—a young woman.

SCENE: A room at Columbia University, New York, the present.

(JOSHUA is sitting at a small round table with two chairs pulled up to either end. The room is white and sterile.

KAREN enters from a door stage left.)

* * *

JOSHUA. You actually came. I'm proud of you.

KAREN. Oh, yes please do skip the pleasantries.

JOSHUA. I didn't mean it like that—you know what I meant.

KAREN. Then what did you mean? Was that a "Good morning, Karen! Looking quite charming today in your bed-head and sweatpants!" or perhaps it was more of a "How has your day gone, Karen? Did you manage to do something exciting for once in your uneventful, depressing shell of a—"

JOSHUA. Stop. Take a breath. Here, hold the stress ball.

KAREN. (Exhaling, but ignoring his offer.) Thanks. It's hard to be polite when people greet you as if it were the last time they would ever be able to talk to you. Especially you.

(JOSHUA begins attaching electrodes to KAREN's head.

KAREN does not resist.)

JOSHUA. Please don't go there. You know this is a project and that means we have to be—

KAREN. Professional. On task. Leaving the things that we actually care about at the door. I hate it.

JOSHUA. Do you want me to make a good grade on this?

KAREN. I'm not doing it for your grade. I'm doing it

for you. I'm not even sure what you do for this infinity of an hour every Wednesday.

JOSHUA. You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to - you just have to put up with me and trust me, okay?

KAREN. I'm sorry. (She embraces him.) I'm really sorry. I know you care, it's just some-times I need a nice word to make it through.

JOSHUA. I'm not a poet.

KAREN. Neither am I—that doesn't mean it doesn't feel nice to say pretty things once in a while.

(A silence)

JOSHUA. I missed you.

KAREN. Nice job, Chekov.

JOSHUA. At least I tried.

KAREN. I can just see it now, "Joshua Robbins—Poet Laureate of Colombia Psychology." You know, you only barely beat out Dr. Collins for the position. Anyone who calls the brain a "hypothalamic pathway of our sorrows, joys, and pituitary glands" deserves either a medal or an aneurysm.

JOSHUA. Don't get smart with me.

KAREN. Have I ever been any different?

JOSHUA (Laughing) I suppose not. It's why I keep you around, anyways.

KAREN. Excuse me, oh wise man-doctor, but I think you have that backwards.

JOSHUA. Really now?

KAREN. If you actually "kept me around," I'd be waiting on your hand and foot trying to get you to do all sorts of little odds and ends that I was too shy to actually tell you outright. I would call you into long meetings and talk about cryptic subjects without ever getting to the meat of why we were actually there. If you "kept me around," as you so eloquently say, I'd know why you keep calling me to these incessant meetings to flirt with me and get me to answer your rambling, opaque questions. No, I'd say that I keep you around. Yes that sounds about right. I keep you around to keep me from forgetting how much I can truly

_ D R Y _

accomplish, but am far too stupid and lonely to do on a Wednesday afternoon.

JOSHUA. (Scribbling in a notebook) Very clever.

KAREN. Thank you.

JOSHUA. Full of accurate analysis, literary cogency, and self-analysis.

KAREN. (Hesitantly) Thank you.

JOSHUA. Much better than last week.

KAREN. I'm a quick learner.

JOSHUA. You have no idea.

KAREN. What's that supposed to mean?

(JOSHUA produces a stack of books and plays from his bag.)

JOSHUA. You remember these?

KAREN. Yeah. You gave them to me last week to read.

JOSHUA. And why do I have them in my bag now?

KAREN. Because I read them.

JOSHUA. Not only did you read them, you wrote a report—as I asked you—on every single one.

KAREN. I told you, I don't really have much of a life.

JOSHUA. Twenty-two, Karen. It would be one thing if you half-read them and wrote a flimsy little BS paper.

KAREN. Just say bullshit, we're adults.

JOSHUA. Fine. But they weren't bad at all, they were some of the best analysis my professor ever read.

KAREN. If you say so.

JOSHUA. You are learning at a rate that is superhuman.

KAREN. I don't think so.

JOSHUA. Do you want to know why we meet every week?

KAREN. No.

JOSHUA. (Surprised) No? Come now, you just were complaining about it earlier.

KAREN. Anything you tell me will inevitably lead to a disappointment. For if my intellectual side is more on my mind a personal affection will seem shallow and vapid, but if my emotional side is dominant then any intellectual

_ D R Y _

answer will make this seem cold and inhuman—like a love song composed by algorithm.

JOSHUA. There it is again!

KAREN. What?

JOSHUA. Can you listen to yourself? Your insight is stunning.

KAREN. It's what's on my mind.

JOSHUA. And you didn't always have a mind to say that, correct?

KAREN. (Hesitantly) People change.

JOSHUA. But not like this. You were referred to us from our partner hospital in the city. They took an MRI of you for a concussion.

KAREN. The white, whining, tube.

JOSHUA. And they found that your neurons were making connections faster than anyone they had ever seen before. You could be told a random fact and have it take hold almost instantly. December 27th?

KAREN. Sunny, high was 54°, woke up at 7:00, actually got out of bed at 7:04, went to check up on Mom in her—my God you've got me trained like a dog!

JOSHUA. That was three months ago and you can still remember it down to the exact temperature and minute. Most people can't do that.

KAREN. Well, maybe I'm not like most people

JOSHUA. Maybe you would be smart to just drop your damned notebook, pick me up and take me in your...

JOSHUA. (Not hearing what Karen has just said) And it's not only that you had the ability to memorize facts, the hippocampus swelled, the frontal lobes, your entire brain began literally birthing new neurons. It was unlike anything we'd ever seen before.

KAREN. So you admit that I'm unlike any girl you've seen before. Ha!

JOSHUA. Yes. I thought I just made that quite clear.

KAREN. So what do you want to do with me now that you've shared your little secret?

JOSHUA. Well, we still have some tests to run and then we—

KAREN. No. I mean what do you want to do with me. I'm sick of the tubes.

_ D R Y _

JOSHUA. (Checking his watch) Well, it does look like we still have about 45 minutes left in our session. We can continue to talk, I suppose.

KAREN. Sure. Why not?

JOSHUA. I need you to do something very important for me, though.

KAREN. Anything.

(JOSHUA pulls out a tape recorder and places it on the table.)

JOSHUA. If you ever start to feel (beat) different. If anything starts to become suddenly easier or clearer you have to tell me.

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. Excuse me?

KAREN. That is the word I will use if I feel anything.

JOSHUA. Why "Dry"?

KAREN. Because that's how I feel when "it"—if it really is a thing and all of you psychologists and neuroscientists aren't just trying get a paper published ahead of every other psychologist in an over saturated job market—happens. Dry. Removed. Empty. Like someone came in and took out all the delicious feelings in life.

JOSHUA. Very good.

KAREN. You patronize me.

JOSHUA. (Writing in his notebook) Even better. Cuts right to the heart of a situation.

KAREN. Stop writing in that damn notebook and look at me! It's really quite adorable of you to be acting so professional when you're writing in a composition book you bought at a discount store. Tough times? Not getting the funding you deserve?

(JOSHUA flips on the recorder.)

JOSHUA. How did you know I bought this there?

KAREN. The barcode on the back when you lifted it up. Long, short, short, long, long, short, long, short, long, long, long with a QR code below it. It's the typical big box retail store barcode and yours is pretty low quality so it only

_ D R Y _

makes sense.

JOSHUA. Fascinating.

KAREN. No. You know what's fascinating? How you can sit there while I bear out my heart to you in secret every week here and you look back at me with nothing but cool, dispassionate disinterest. Your intellect robs you of the best things in life.

JOSHUA. You know I care about you. You're my most interesting and promising patient.

KAREN. That's right! I'm a patient. I forgot how patient one must be to be a patient. Waiting for this test and that test, and this answer and that answer which alludes to the first answer, but could be a standalone piece of sage advice on its own. "Slowly massage into skin twice daily." That's the second half of the instructions for rash medicine! If we took the time to massage ourselves twice daily I bet you we wouldn't even get rashes! People wait until there is a problem to take care of themselves. You wait until there is a problem to take care of me.

JOSHUA. I do not, that's why we are here right now.

KAREN. But are we really here? Are we actually both present in this room communicating with each other? Am I not speaking to a concave wall that is cleverly designed to transmit a dull echo of what I have just said to it without adding anything new? Am I to sit here and be studied while everything I feel is fading away like a picture with the color running off the sides? Are you just going to sit there and watch me? Hello. I am Karen Hartley. I am 17 years old. I attend P.S 536. Be sure to get all this down, you wouldn't want to miss a beat, would you? I go to sessions with a graduate psychology student named Joshua and talk about nothing in particular because I love him. Oh, did you not get that you brainless shell of a human being? I love you. I love you. I love you. Do you think I'm doing this for fun? That I enjoy being told how special I am. I AM NOT SPECIAL. I am a—say something. Say something, please.

JOSHUA. That's nice.

KAREN. That's nice? That's what you have to say to me? You are a piece of work, you know that. Do you love me?

JOSHUA. You're my patient.

_ D R Y _

KAREN. Can't you love your patient?

JOSHUA. It would be unprofessional.

KAREN. Yes, keep all emotions far away and at bay.

JOSHUA. It's called being objective.

KAREN. So you really want to end up like the rest of them? White coat, stern glare, bushy eyebrows?

JOSHUA. I would like to be successful, Karen, yes.

KAREN. Then I am your success. Love me.

JOSHUA. I'm sorry I can't indulge this any further, I've got the recorder going.

KAREN. Oh, so you're shy. That's adorable. (Into the recorder) To everyone who is listening to this. All of you strung-up people with fancy acronyms next to your names, go take a walk outside and burn this tape. If you want success, go to a farmers market and pick a ripe fruit from a pile.

JOSHUA. Give that back. You're not making any sense.

KAREN. Oh, I'm not making any sense huh? I can taste the irony.

JOSHUA. (Writing once more) Ah, synesthesia.

KAREN. No. It's a saying. When will you realize that true success doesn't lie in books and awards or tests and predictions? It's in muses, it's in love, it's in me.

JOSHUA. Will you please be quiet! I am tired of your stupid teenage affections. I do not love you. I. Do Not. But I do love what you'll do for me. You see, Karen, I love that I got to you first. Success isn't about books or awards - it's about who gets to the good stuff first. And you are the good stuff. Medical mystery good stuff. You are what will make my name. And so what? So what if you love me. You're a teenage girl, you don't even know what you want yet. You may have a condition that makes you appear to grow smarter, but it's no better than a rare form of cancer to the untrained eye. I'm saving you. So just be quiet and focus on my questions so I can get this over with.

KAREN. Oh, I'm sorry. Do you mind getting me a glass of water? My throat is a bit dry.

JOSHUA. (Excited) There—you said it. How are you feeling?

_ D R Y _

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. Excellent. Describe for me the feelings you are going through—every detail, if you would.

KAREN. No. (Mulling over the sound) Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Water.

JOSHUA. Oh, how silly of me to forget, you needed water.

(JOSHUA goes over to a sink and pours a paper cup of water and hands it to KAREN.)

JOSHUA. There you are. Drink up.

(KAREN sips at the water and is silent.)

JOSHUA. Now tell me what you are experiencing.

(Silence)

JOSHUA. Please?

(Silence)

JOSHUA. I see. You're angry with me, aren't you?

(Silence)

JOSHUA. I apologize for what I've done.

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. I just gave you water, what more do you want?

(Silence)

JOSHUA. You aren't really doing this to me, are you?

(Silence)

JOSHUA. You little bitch! You little whore of a girl. Selfish whore! Tell me how it feels, now!

KAREN. Dry.

- D R Y -

JOSHUA. Maybe I haven't been clear—this is not a game. You may be the only person in the world to have ever had this condition, if you don't tell me and my team anything you will be doing humanity a great disservice. You will be helping thousands of people! Helping me!

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. Karen, I am so sorry. I—didn't mean what I said before. It was part of the examination. I actually really do have feelings for you. In fact I think I love you. Or I'm starting to love you—what I really mean is—

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. Will you stop saying that blasted word!

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. You might be the most intelligent person alive right now on this earth. You can help millions or abandon them. All you need to do is speak.

(Silence)

JOSHUA. Fine. If you want to be that way, we won't play games anymore. I'll make you speak.

(JOSHUA presses down on an intercom)

JOSHUA. (Glaring at KAREN) This is Joshua Robbins. My patient has gone catatonic—I need someone to take her into the mental health department and commit her immediately.

(JOSHUA turns off the intercom)

JOSHUA. There. Now if you talk to me I'll send all those mean old people right back around and you can go home to Mommy and Daddy and your friends. Tell me something meaningful.

KAREN. (After a pause) Weeds.

JOSHUA. Good, very good. And what is meaningful about weeds. They are—

KAREN. Dry.

JOSHUA. Get out! Get out your ungrateful little bitch! After all I've done for you, you have the gall to take

- DRY -

away my one chance at becoming someone. You are a monster, you are a selfish brat...

KAREN. Love.

JOSHUA. Get out! Now!

(JOSHUA grabs KAREN and forces her to the door, ripping off her electrodes. A pair of Orderlies grab her and take her - struggling - offstage. JOSHUA takes a deep breath and walks back to his desk. After a long pause, he stops the recorder and begins rewinding it. He takes a look at the results of the EEG machine readout.)

JOSHUA. Oh my God. (Yelling offstage) Stop! Stop!
KAREN!

(JOSHUA runs out the door yelling KAREN's name. The tape recorder jams and starts playing again on a loop of KAREN's voice from earlier.)

KAREN (RECORDER ON LOOP). Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry.
Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry.
Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry.
Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry.
Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry. Dry.
Dry.

(This noise fades out slowly with the lights.)

END

LOOKING OUT

Ola Bodurka

Ola is a sophomore Marketing and Entrepreneurial Management major from Tulsa, OK



ABOUT A WIFE

Katherine Love

Katherine is a sophomore Journalism major from Kansas City, MO

And do the rich grow weary? In work,
In play, in love that once abounded
Behind black shutters and ironed gold
Curtains; but inside, fallow like corn

Shucks in a field, six feet above the
Dirt she'll never leave. Still, her noble
Dime besets roses and lilies, that
Shiver in a pepper, numbing fog.

Scarlet locomotive ties bellow
The conclusive tale: her escape past
Vigilant eyes in the cedar frame.
A.M. Number 9 splayed her sad pulse.

Her tears became nursling Ceci's tears
Who spiraled like a train wreck - Cyclic
Ages of rich grown weary, behind
Black shutters and ironed gold curtains.

TEN SECONDS TO FREEDOM

Claire Shelton

Claire is a sophomore Spanish and Writing major from Tulsa, OK

October

My gaze is focused on a fly buzzing up against the window. It flies from edge to edge, desperate to escape. It turns and makes a beeline toward me, lands on my arm, hovers beside my head. The buzzing monotone of its wings transforms into the steady beating of my heart. It's slower than usual, my heart. I count the beats. *Ten, nine, eight*. Someone opens the door and I can make out every footfall, every crunching leaf. I pick up the straw and grab the edge of the coffee table to steady myself as I lean down to inhale again. I recline in the chair and feel the euphoria roll through me, let it take over. People are running their fingernails lightly along my spine. Someone is moving the dimmer up and down on the light switch as my shoulders submit to the weight of my tingling skull. *Ten, nine, eight, seven*. My eyes close before I get to one. My heartbeat pounding in my ears wakes me up some time later, begging for more sustenance.

November

It's Sunday night and I find myself sitting grudgingly at a table with a girl from my French class, Laura, and her friend. They're talking about boys and parties and all those things that twenty-something-year-old girls generally talk about. I try to tune them out in an effort to eat as quickly as possible because I feel like I could use a fix. *Ten, nine, eight*.

They ramble on as if I'm not there, which is fine by me. I catch bits of the conversation, enough to determine that they're arguing, but spend most of my effort staring at the pretty redhead sitting across from me. Her hair reaches down past her shoulders, curling in all the right places, framing her face just slightly enough that it looks effortless. *Seven, six, five*.

Laura's voice pushes through my reverie. "What about that guy from last night? He was cute."

"Yeah," says the redhead. "But he's too nice to hook up with."

TEN SECONDS TO FREEDOM

"So date him."

"Come on, Laura," says the girl. "You know I don't date."

I decide it's the perfect time to leave. I consider introducing myself to the attractive redhead across from me, but reject the idea and leave without bothering to look back. I throw away my trash and head to the exit and just as I'm reaching out to push the door open, I feel a hand on my forearm. I turn around.

I'm immediately taken aback by her eyes, which I hadn't noticed before. They're the color of honey with flecks of green here and there. And I can't seem to look away, to turn around and keep walking and feign disinterest.

"I'm Ava. Ava Oswald."

She holds out her hand. I take it.

"Samuel," I say.

I mull over Ava's irises and the texture of her palm for the whole two miles between campus and my apartment. Once I'm home, I pick up my guitar and spend about seven and a half minutes staring at the wall, unable to come up with anything resembling a melody.

I put my guitar back on its stand and walk into the bathroom. I open the cabinet above the toilet and remove a syringe, fill it, tap it. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six*. I count as I nod off.

It's Thursday, four days after the aforementioned date, and I'm sitting at the bar of a club. I see Laura and Ava across the room. Before I can do more than contemplate leaving, Laura looks back at me and we make eye contact.

She's yelling in Ava's ear over the dubstep bass that's pumping through the venue, rippling through my bone marrow. She grabs Ava's wrist and pulls her firmly away from the guy who has his tongue in her mouth. Then Laura pushes Ava towards me and returns to the dance floor.

"Oh...Hey sexy."

"Um, hi Ava."

"I met you...yesterday?" says Ava. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," I say, even though she's wrong.

I can tell she doesn't remember my name, but she

doesn't bother to ask. Instead she takes the lead. When I decline her offer to dance—I hate dancing—she starts slurring her way through the speech. I blew a few lines in my parked car when I arrived. I like the way the alcohol supplements the euphoria, but also sort of dulls it out. The combination mutes my pounding pulse. Even so, I'm thinking straight enough to recognize that this speech is clearly rehearsed and she probably repeats it every night.

I've recently lost nearly all interest in sex. Even high sex becomes secondary. But she's winking at me and slurring pleads into my ear and through the haze of alcohol and the rush of heroin, I think, hell, why not? It can't hurt.

So when Ava grabs my hand and guides it up her skirt and asks, "Wanna head back to my place?" I eagerly consent.

"Sure thing," I say before downing the rest of my vodka.

As we walk out of the bar, her arm around my waist, I consider backing out. *Ten, nine, eight.* But I could use a hookup. And what's the harm? It can't hurt.

But it does hurt. Afterwards, when she's fallen asleep beside me, my heart skips a beat not once, but twice. And it does that thing where it gushes out way too much blood all at once and it literally hurts. I don't remember the last time I felt that sort of rumbling in my chest. For that matter, I don't remember the last time a feeling other than that of heroin really registered at all. So I do what any sane man would do. I stand up to leave, move to pull on my jeans. But I make the mistake of glancing back at her. And I can't seem to pull my gaze away from her fluttering eyelids and her chest as it rhythmically rises and falls. So I crawl back into bed, careful not to wake her. I can't sleep, of course. Instead, I just stare up at the ceiling, matching the sound of my breathing to hers, and think how totally, incredibly, utterly, terribly fucked I am.

December

I go home for Christmas and mostly listen to my parents fighting the whole week. My seven-year-old sister,

Charlotte, begs me to get in the hot tub with her on the evening of Christmas day. We sit out there together, listening to the stillness of the winter air.

"Samuel?"

"Yes, Char?"

"Look!" she says, pointing at the surface of the water.

"What is it?"

"Look, look!" she pleads, frustrated that I can't see it.

"Water?"

"Look how pretty the lights are!" she squeals.

I glance up at the colored lights that embellish our backyard, so that night is not so much night as a darkened rainbow.

"Yeah, Char. They're really pretty," I say.

"Nooo, silly," she says. "Look at the water. They look prettier in the water."

I look down then and see the reflection of the lights, undulating erratically with each movement of our bodies.

"Shh, don't move," she says.

And we spend the next half hour trying to convince the lights to stand still.

I tuck Charlotte into bed an hour later and walk downstairs to see if my parents are asleep yet. The stash I hid in my former room is beckoning me. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six.*

I sit down on the couch next to my dad. He's watching a rerun of the evening news.

"When are you gonna get your shit together?" he asks.

"Give him a break, Robert," says my mom from down the hall.

He lowers his voice then. "Seriously. I'm not gonna keep paying for your school if you keep this up."

When I say nothing, he turns back to the TV with an audible sigh. He doesn't even acknowledge when I leave the room, grab my already packed duffel from my room, and drive away, headlights off.

I used to be desperately afraid of losing people.

TEN SECONDS TO FREEDOM

But I suppose it wasn't losing people so much as being left. I always felt like I needed people. And there's something so inherently pathetic about the word *need*. It's like when my parents used to tell me they were disappointed in me. If they grounded me or something, I'd be all like, "Whatever, fuck parents." But if they used the word "disappointed," then that was a whole other issue.

People, especially girls, always seem disappointed when I say I need them. That I'm not as strong as they assumed. So I started doing this thing where I would leave if I felt like I needed someone more than she needed me. Occasionally I would find someone who needed me as much as I needed her. We'd call it love because that's what you do. I love you, we'd say, over and over, back and forth.

But everybody thinks they're in love when they're in love. It's not until after the fact, when you look back and realize that what you had wasn't love at all. It was just need. Just addiction. And what is addiction, I wonder, but the—often ambiguous—line where desire meets necessity, each perpetually teetering along that narrow border?

January

Ava sits up on the bed and scoots herself over to lean against the wall. I avoided her for almost two months until we ran into each other earlier this evening and I made a mental note to stay away from bars for a time. But when she saw me it was too late to back out because I was wasted and she was wasted and the rest is history.

After we've sobered up a bit, I start getting curious.

"So why don't you date?" I ask.

"I tried that once," she says.

She pauses and waits for my reaction. When I say nothing, she continues, her voice softer now.

"Eventually it just gets to the point where you don't care enough about the-boy-you-fucked-last-night."

After a moment, she says, "Whatever," and reaches down to remove my freshly donned pants.

I am awoken by necessity at seven in the morning and blow a line in the bathroom while Ava sleeps. *Ten, nine, eight*. Two hours later, I've stopped nodding off enough that

TEN SECONDS TO FREEDOM

I may appear clean to a girl with a massive hangover.

We walk to the coffee shop a few blocks from my apartment. I sit at a small round table beside a window while Ava stands in line to order. Above my head hangs a shaded lantern with a light flickering beneath the cover. I see the silhouette of an insect buzzing around, trying to escape. I wonder how it got in there in the first place. I bet it's wondering the same thing, trapped inside a light bulb that can't decide whether to shine light or let darkness suffice.

"Hey Samuel?" Ava says, sitting across from me.

"Yes?"

"Do you believe in God?" she asks.

"Yeah. You?"

"No," she says.

"Why not?"

"I've seen too much," she replies. "Why do you believe in God?"

"Because I've seen too much," I say.

There is movement on the ground outside, a little sparrow picking its way around the chair and table legs, combing the concrete for leftover crumbs. It pecks vigorously against the surface that refuses to give for sustenance that does not exist.

February

My cell phone rings and I fish through my sheets to find where it fell from my grasp the night before.

"Hello?"

"Samuel?"

"Yes?"

"It's Elizabeth."

"Um," I say. I can't seem to form coherent words.

"Nice to hear your voice, too," she says. "Look, I... I'll be outside your apartment in ten minutes. Can you let me in?"

"Liz, I can't. You shouldn't—"

"Just do it, Sam. Please."

"Liz," I say.

"Please," she says.

TEN SECONDS TO FREEDOM

Fifteen minutes later I find myself on top of my unmade bed two feet across from a girl I haven't seen in three years. I should add that I also swore to never be alone in a room with her ever again.

"How did you find me?" I ask.

"I called your mom," she says.

When I say nothing, she keeps talking. "Okay, Sam. I know you don't want to talk. Just... Can I stay here for the night? I got evicted and I'm on my way back home to my dad's house."

"No," I say.

"Sam. Please."

"I have a girlfriend."

"I won't do anything, okay? Just. Please. Sam... Please." And then she starts to cry and I awkwardly close the gap between us and wrap my arms around her. She feels foreign against my chest, her tears like acid on my skin, her body no longer fitting into mine the way it used to.

"You did this," she says.

"I know," I say.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"I really, really am," I say.

After the guilt trip, I let her stay the night atop the couch in my living room. It's my fault she fell apart in the first place. I started dating Elizabeth right around the time I was getting into drugs my senior year of high school. She found me mysterious, intriguing. And she was determined to understand me. So when she discovered my collection of unmarked prescriptions, she started doing it too. The wake of my necessity pulled her in. I'm an anchor. And when I start to sink, I pull everyone else down with me.

Elizabeth leaves around noon the next day and her presence is replaced by Ava. We talk for a while at first.

"You know, someday I'll become too much for you," she says.

"Never," I say.

"It will happen. Just wait."

I place my hands on her shoulders and wait until she looks up at me.

TEN SECONDS TO FREEDOM

"Never," I say again.

Something about Ava makes me feel like I can run and run and never have to turn around and come back. Like I'll never be forced to succumb to the persuasive pull of the needle stash in the back of my bathroom cabinet or the bag of powdered chemicals stuffed in the bottom drawer of my bedside table. There's just something about Ava. And sitting there across the bed from her, watching her slide off the straps of her blouse, I consider telling her all of this. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five.* But her bra is off now and she's pushing me onto my back by my shoulders, pulling off my shirt and kissing down my chest. And I become a bit too preoccupied to remember what I wanted so desperately for her to know.

I walk her out to her car when we are done.

"Shh," she says, although neither of us is talking.

"What?"

"I like the way the night sounds," she says, although I hear nothing.

I kiss her then, pressing her up against her little hatchback. For the first time, I notice the way her mouth tastes like coffee and the skin of her neck smells like October. And in that moment I like the idea of being something with somebody.

After Ava leaves, I head over to a house party and I'm high within half an hour, even though I promised myself that I would try harder to hold back. The walls are pulsing in sync with the beat of my heart and I am free until I remember the chains. *Ten, nine, eight, seven.* I sink down into an armchair in the corner of the room, watching the couple making out a few yards away, watching his hand trail down her back and disappear beneath her waistband.

Someone comes over and offers me a joint and it dulls out the euphoria in a way that only makes me feel freer. Makes me forget that I'm falling in love and I'm fucked and if I don't leave she'll leave. And if she doesn't leave I'll pull her in. I sit up, start to panic, hyperventilate. Ava. Oh fuck, Ava.

I pick up a bottle from a nearby table and take a couple swigs, feel my mind dull out again, and lean back.

I stare at the ceiling. I breathe, eyes trained on the single flickering light bulb above me, the cracks in the plaster where the ceiling meets the walls. I breathe. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four.*

When I open my eyes, I'm at home. And Ava is there, sitting on the edge of the bed looking sad. My head's still fuzzy and my judgment is blurred, so I open my mouth to speak.

"Did you know?" I ask.

"Yes," she says.

"I'm sorry."

"You're not."

"I love you," I say.

"You don't," she says.

"Hold me."

And she does.

March

To my surprise, Ava doesn't leave once my addiction is exposed. One day about a month after the incident, we decide to go to the fair. I hate the fair because it heightens my claustrophobia. I'm always afraid I'll end up stuck in some endless labyrinth of publicity with a desperate craving for a fix. But Ava loves the fair and it's even harder to turn her down now that she knows. If I give into her every desire, maybe she'll continue to see past the traps that ensnare me.

Ava spends the entire evening dragging me around the fairground, our interlocked fingers prisoners' handcuffs. After the twelfth ride and the fourth bit of fried cuisine, my pulse starts begging and I tell Ava we should head back to my place. *Ten, nine, eight.*

"Wait," she says.

"What?"

"Just let me see the birds."

We make our way towards a display of exotic birds. She refuses to hold the colorful parrots and just stares at a little brown sparrow crouching in the corner of its cage.

"She looks lonely."

"Yeah," I say. "I guess."

Ava looks around. And when she's sure that the bird-handler is occupied, she unfastens the cage closure,

opens the door, and reaches in, grabbing the sparrow with her right hand and cupping her left on top. The bird begins to squeal between her hands, used to being trapped in a larger enclosure.

"Fly," she whispers, opening her hands once we're out of eyesight of the bird woman.

"Be free."

Ava sits cross-legged on my carpet, leaning her head against the wall behind her, eyes closed, breathing deeply.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," she says without opening her eyes. "Just thinking."

"Okay," I say.

Her eyes flicker open and her mouth curves up at the corners.

"Play for me?"

So I pick up my guitar and start to play, sitting on the edge of the bed, facing away from her. I play like Ava isn't there, let myself sink into the high that is music, the euphoria that chords give me.

I wish I could wrap her up into a song, like a vine coils its tendrils around lampposts and fences and balcony railings. If I could turn her into chords and riffs and rhyming lyrics, maybe I could understand her. Maybe I could find out where her hidden freedom lies and bring it to her, gift it to her. But Ava doesn't fit into the music like most people do—I can't play her; her song doesn't seem to exist in my subconscious. So I stop fingering about the frets of my guitar and look up at her.

"What?" she asks. The dim light from the overcast afternoon casts a slight shadow across her face and highlights the emerald pigment in her irises.

"Samuel? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I say, setting my guitar down and moving towards her, and onto her, and into her. And even in the shuddering afterglow, she still seems trapped within herself.

I wish I could free her. I've got sex and music and heroin, but anything past that is beyond my reach. There's love too, I guess, but my love has never helped anyone.

Even so, with me still bent over her, I say, "You know

I love you, right?"

"Why does it scare you so much to say that?" she asks.

"Because once upon a time I loved a girl," I say. "And I destroyed her."

She stays over that night, and for once I sleep. I hear her voice push through my dreams at one point. She's there, whispering in my ear, softly. When her tone turns to terror I jolt awake and sit up in bed. She's sitting in an armchair in the corner of my room but she doesn't see me.

"You're kidding," she's saying repeatedly, shaking her head back and forth. "You're joking. This is a joke. Shut up. No. No. No. Okay, I... just call me when you find out."

Ava walks toward me now, shoulders slouched, eyes turned to the floor, still unseeing. She sits down on the edge of the bed, her back towards me.

"Ava?"

She doesn't turn around.

"Ava, what's wrong?"

Silence.

"Ava? What happened?"

She turns then but only stares at the wall behind me.

"Just hold me."

And I do.

I wake up the next morning to the sound of Ava's muted sobbing. She's sitting on the floor against the wall, hands covering her face, her body shaking. I stand up and walk over to her. I squat down and pull her hands off her eyes. She glares at me for a second before her gaze softens suddenly and glazes over.

"Is there anything I can do?" I'm not used to her showing this much emotion.

I don't know why I do it, why I let her try. I don't know how else to comfort her. I start by holding her and trying to rock her back to sleep like a baby. I tell her a story. I sing her a song. I kiss her until my lips feel raw.

"I'm scared I'll never feel again. What if I never feel again?" she says. And the desperation in her voice is what does it for me. I walk over to the cabinet in my bathroom, remove a full plastic bag and a couple straws. *Ten, nine,*

eight, seven, six, five, four.

April

Over the next month I watch her become imprisoned. I listen to her tell me that sex isn't as good and "maybe we should just get high" and then one day, I can't take it anymore. I'm clean and studying for my midterm exams the next day and she shows up at my door so chilled out she can barely articulate her thoughts.

"I'm sorry," she says.

"Why?"

"I just came from Stephen's room."

"The guy you..."

"Yeah," she says. "That one. From the bar. The night we..."

"Oh," I say, blankly.

I don't know how to respond. I just hold her as she cries and tuck her into bed at two in the morning, three hours later. As I watch her sleep, I start to panic. I start to lose it. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five.* I did this to her.

And then I'm gone, out the door and running. I end up at my car somehow, get in, and gun it up the coast. I stop before I get wherever I'm going, pull over on the side of the highway and grab a discarded syringe from the floorboard. I shoot up again, and again, and again and before I know it I'm getting out of my car and walking out into the street so I can see the moon better. I see it, big and round and white. I lower my eyes and see two white moons moving towards me. I have just enough time to run back to my car, just enough time to bolt out from the center of the road. But I see the solution. It's there in front of me. It's coming closer. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six—Bolt now, Sam. Last chance. Five, four, three, two—I'm sorry, Ava. One.*

October

As Ava makes her way past the building, she notices the vines that have crawled their way up the wall through the years. They are gnarled and crackling, utterly and undeniably dead at first glance. And yet they still cling to the vertical slab of cement, their fingers still reaching towards the sky. And a few bright green ivy leaves still crop up here and there, despite the abundance of decay by

which they are surrounded.

Ava pulls out her last clean syringe on her way to the parking lot. She twirls it in her hands as her feet fall quicker, her pulse thudding, begging. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six.*

As she's digging in her purse for her keys, a sparrow flies past her, its wing barely clipping her bent elbow. She's so startled that the syringe falls from her grip and into the storm sewer beneath her feet.

She repeatedly kicks the front tire of her car, yelling in tempo.

She rests her hands on top of her car and leans down, pressing her forehead against the window. She breathes deeply and paces along the painted yellow line a few times before she sits down on the cement and cries. After a lifetime or two, Ava pushes herself onto her feet, unlocks the car door, and slips inside.

She drives out of the light emitting from the street lamps scattered around the vacant parking lot, just as I did right before I shook free. As she drives along the coast and passes the sight of my death, she allows herself to think about me for the first time in months. I consume her mind and she forgets about the lost and wasted syringe that now lies at the bottom of the sewer.

Ava pictures me sitting in the passenger seat of the car, where I used to sit when we would drive up along the coast, me gazing out at the sea, her eyes locked on the sky when she wasn't watching the road. I wish I could reach out and touch her then, feel her skin, allow her to feel it too. To appreciate the texture of her own skin. I never had enough courage to do that.

I watch her inhale deeply, hoping that she feels me in that breath. Because I'm there, occupying the empty space within her little vehicle. Her breath shakes, her lungs quiver.

She drives into the night, seeing clearly despite the darkness, just as I stumbled into the light, unable to see without it. Ava and I found freedom on that darkened road along the coast.

you remember how she looked that day—
eyes a blood-red velvet curtain.
pull the rope, flick the switch.
show time.

she wanted a slice of your heart
for every standing ovation.
a clump of arteries, maybe,
a sliver of vena cava.

she left your lungs alone, though,
because she couldn't stand the smell;
tobacco stained flesh, alveoli gasping.
in. out. in. out. in

y te pierdes entre tus órganos
dentro. afuera. respira. espera.
ella era

she was

you remember how she looked that day—
skin a scraped and bloody mess.
grab the glass, drag it down.
break a leg.

SANTA

Jack Sperco

Jack is a sophomore Strategic Communication major from Scottsdale, AZ



GOODNIGHT TO NEW YORKERS

Michael Smith

Trip is a junior Psychology major from Dallas, TX

Underneath the stars
The squirrels bicker and moan.
Daddy's home dummies!

Tomatoes explode.
Thunder shakes the old dead tree
In Fort Greene Park.

Bye water blankets!
Hello full moon; you are orange.
Keep dancing, slowly.

Raccoons in trash cans
Dig for leftover Pad Thai
On Seventeenth Street.

Cinnamon toothpicks
Smack lips like cracker chewers.
Pumpkin spice candles

Burn slow like autumn.
Be careful! Balled fists only
Turn redder with time.

The telephone rings:
"Goodnight to New Yorkers!"
(Twenty floors later)

I lie in my bed,
And watch from the windowsill,
A yellow taxi square dance.

MONTE CARLO, 2012

Trip Starkey
Trip is a junior English major from
Evergreen, CO



AS YOU LIE

Back down in
Your cool October
Bed, sheets linen
And tattered at the
Edges, you listen
To the morning, quiet
And still. You would sit
By the window, and
Stare at the dying trees
To keep your tired eyes
From seeing the dawn
As it arrived on a single
White cloud.

Those mornings
Grabbed your
Shoulders
As you cracked
Eggs in a flowerpot,
And opened the window,
Letting the morning dew
Drip down onto
Your soft
Brown hair.

In the early light
Two warblers
Pecked out the eyes
Of their mother, and
Swaddled down
In her nest
To wait and see
What she would do next.

Where is love in the afternoon?
The cat scraped across the kitchen
Floor, clinging to the doorframe, and
Watched your sundress
Twirl in the fading light.

Trip Starkey

Trip is a junior English major from
Evergreen, CO

_ AS YOU LIE _

That night, the rain fell
Heavily through the rusted
Gutter. Sitting around a cracked
Lantern, we looked deep
Into midnight beneath
A blanket of stars, reflecting
The city lights below. Each
Dot, a point on the spinning
Globe that sat on your father's
Desk. You smiled in the dim light,
Remembering when you used
To strike matches on old candle wicks
Just long enough to see if your reflection
Showed in the picture frame you made
Out of stained Popsicle sticks.

And where did the night leave us?
Two kids tracing the dots on our
Backs freckled with fear. Drinking
The last carton of milk two days
After it expired. Your eyes were empty.
There was only the burning beneath
Your dry fingers, scratching at the door
Where your ghosts locked themselves
To keep from seeing the daylight.

In the silent night
An owl sat, staring
At the moon, and
Whispered his own
Melodies to see if
Anyone could hear them.

After that morning, you
Ran beneath the daybreak.
Sprinting down the alley,
I heard you scream to the
Sky that you let me down
The only way you could.
Two eyes face the brick
Wall, weaving back and forth
Beneath the quiet burden of

AS YOU LIE

Adolescence. I saw you there
On the sidewalk, crying out
To the passersby who were
Perched on the park benches
That Sunday. I saw you reach
Up and try to grab their shoulders,
But they heard your panting
And scattered off into the light.

The daylight hung low that autumn,
Pacing the October horizon. I saw it
In the dresser drawer as I pulled out
My wool socks. Your side of the bed was
Hollow, still masking the crescent form
You left behind. On the floor beneath
The windowsill where you sat, I would
Grab your shoulders before breakfast
And kiss your neck, running my hands
Down the olive skin of each arm
Wrapped around your pillows. The
Streetlamps turned off as the sun crept
Through the windows, and the silence
Echoed down the street.

And where are you, love? Where are the
Words that dripped from your lips into my ears
As your legs fell around my thighs, suffocating
The night. The sheets were tangled beneath
Our feet while the frantic mothers down the street
Called out to their children, crossing the pavement
Beneath the shaded lamps. Those mothers who wish
They could escape the gentle light, and lie here in
An evening bed. Their heels clap across the cement
In rhythm with the setting of the sun that throws
Our shadows across the wall. As day recedes,
We are blotted out by the dark before their tired eyes
Can see us dancing in the crystal window.

As the morning returns, our bed
Is empty. I hear the placid noise
Of mothers taking their boys and
Girls to the corner to wait at the
Bus stop. Their children's voices

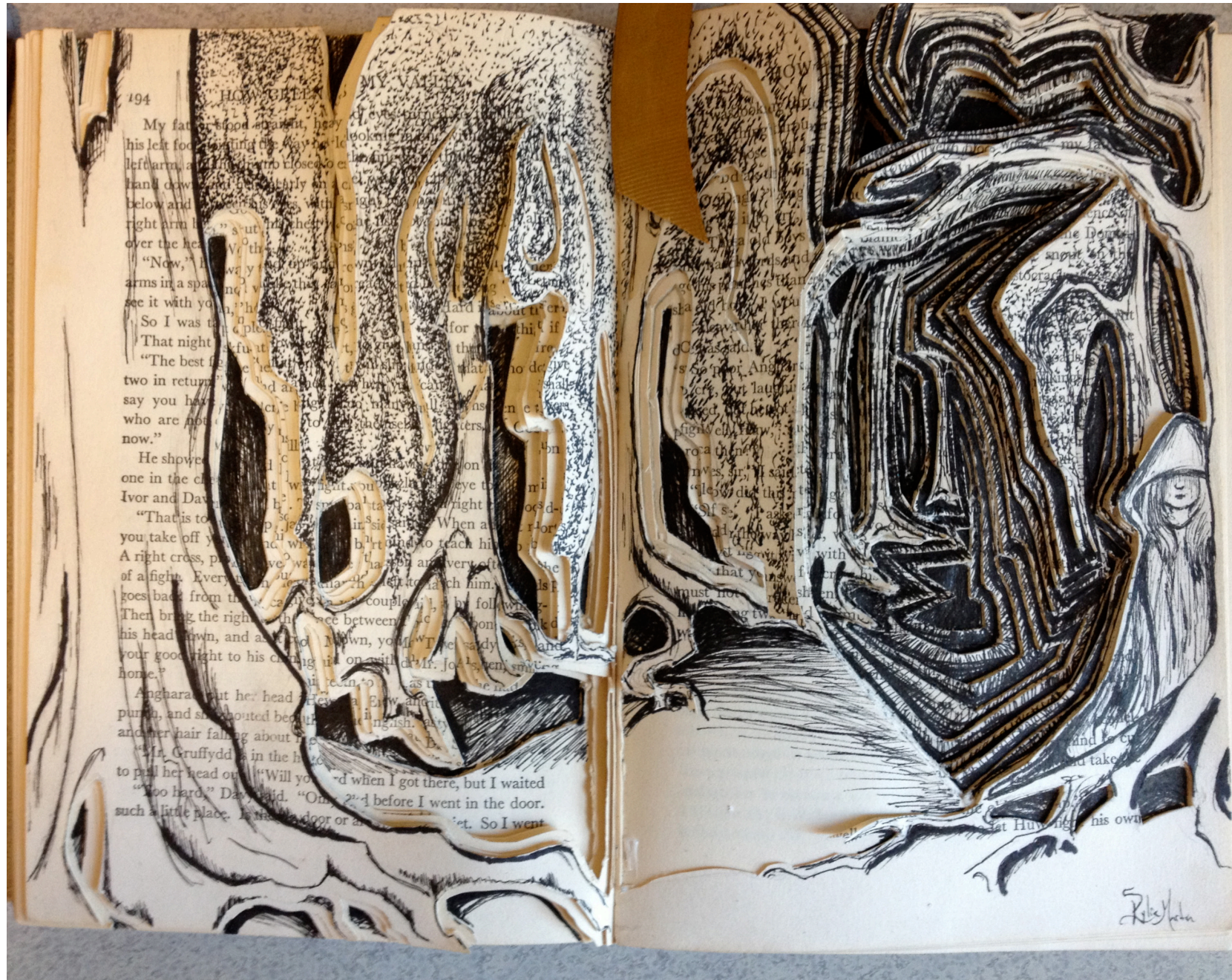
AS YOU LIE

Are carried up on the early breeze,
Running through the window. A quiet
Rain begins to pierce the clamor. I eat
My scrambled eggs, and drink my whole
Milk. All the while knowing I will be here,
Alone. I keep waiting for you to walk back
Through that door, into my arms, lying down
In this October bed. You would feel the warmth
Of my hand on the nape of your neck, as we
Begin to make our afternoon shadows in
The rain, across the crystal mirror.

INTO THE DEEP

Kylie Martin

Kylie is a sophomore Studio Art and Painting major from Fort Hood, TX



LAMBCHOP

Kylie Martin

Kylie is a sophomore Studio Art and Painting major from Fort Hood, TX



5:47 ON A TUESDAY Ashley Rea

Ashley is a sophomore Economics and English major from Coppell, TX

They say water has no taste
but I think they're wrong, whoever
They are anyway and I've never
had better water than from the
faded Nike bottles used in cross
country practice each morning, when Drew
would use one he'd always miss,
sending droplets splattering down soaking into
the sweat drenched shirt that might
have been light gray once but
it's charcoal dark damp now and
even black in the cool fog
of Andy Brown park at 5:30
am on a Tuesday which means
hills day, more like hell day
to be honest, we'd go up
past the public library to Hertz
street we joked it should be
called Hurts street as we sprinted
up the monstrous hill calves burning
with each step, past Kim Kirby's
house man that girl could run
and finally reaching to top and
turning to fly, pinwheel legs careening
carelessly down the still dark hill
with momentum gathering as you realized
you couldn't stop even if you
wanted to and let's face it
you don't because right now at
5:47 am on a cold Tuesday
you are free, breaking through walls
of muscle and sinew and lack
of sleep and you are perfect
and alive and fifteen so even
though you cursed Coach bitterly on
the frozen bike ride to school
it's worth it just for this
moment and soon it will fade
and you'll turn around for another
God-awful hill sprint but now
you're drinking greedily from the cracked
Nike bottle passing it around the
clump of quiet teammates who shift,
stretch quads caught in silent thought.

REVOLUTIONS OF TOPSY-TURVY

Christie Shields
Christie is a senior English major
from Fort Worth, TX

The hours tug
at the zombie living my life.
Give a mile,
take an inch. Every door closed,
5 more open.

"Just 2 more,"
that fluffy friend calls to me.
One more window to close,
I will meet you when the moon is high
on Red Bull and 5-Hour energy.

Drunk legs stagger
To predetermined places sans
navigation. Rest stop,
next right. Too late,
sleep cycle moves to rinse.

*What makes you so damned
sure that you're perfect
huh? A paragon of stop
And go, short
of upside down.*

Tick and tick,
Delirium for two. Yes,
I'll have fries with that.
5:55 a.m. buzzes with
Beekeeper's Daughter.

Time for 8 plus 4 plus
2 more. To do,
To don't, post by noon.
Breathe.
Shhh, the baby's sleeping.

ODE TO FRESH AIR

Christie Shields

Ugggh! He loiters there,
Burnt ash wafting from his fingertips
And soon after—
His mouth. I jab and weave,
Shuck and jive
Out of the path of that toxic cloud.

His pose is so *Rebel Without a Cause*,
He probably murders fish,
Consuming limes and his
Sister's tears soon after.
He's the sort who ignores postings, policies
Or procedures and I suffer.

The cloud attacks me and I
Cut the air. Passersby take notice,
Staged in case of violence or mental illness.
His violation unnoticed,
I cringe as I hear him suck poison
Arms of blackness strangling my bronchi.

I cough indignantly, posturing.
His lips curl a smile
He nods to my existence
I slant my eyes, bend my mouth.
My features cold,
Like the hearts of the broken.

And faces pass, unaware
That, every day, we dance.

HUK BEACH

Corley Padgett

Corley is a junior Communication Studies
major from Talty, TX



COBBLESTONE STREETS

Corley Padgett
Corley is a junior
Communication Studies major
from Talty, TX



LLAMAS AND METEORITES

Megan Doyle
Megan is a junior Psychology
and Writing major from
Rockwall, TX

I can't do this. Nothing is straight. I glared at my roommate Liddy out of the corner of my eye, wishing she would just jump out the window. The squeal from the vacuum cleaner ground across the carpet, and I could hear this ugly crackling whenever the suction tube found a hidden patch of crumbs. My fingers rested lightly on the keyboard—each hovering above its respective asdfjkl; key—and although nothing twitched, I could feel this inferno of self-control about to break loose.

The vacuum ground up. You're going against the grain of the carpet! The vacuum ground down. That wasn't straight! I curled my poised fingers and resisted the overwhelming urge to stand up and turn around. I just focused all my frustration against my roommate, wishing I could shoot hate-lasers out of my back. I'd given up on all efforts to calm down. I'd forgotten all my arguments with myself: just survive finals and all of this would be over, no more having to look at her face, and no more having to deal with her terrible habits.

I once again focused on the computer screen, trying to channel my irritation to something more productive. I took one deep breath and typed the first letter: L. Then I hit the backspace button three times. This won't work. With three deft clicks of the track pad, I quickly changed the whole document's alignment to justify and made sure that it was still double-spaced in Times New Roman. There. Everything's perfect. Almost everything. I hated that indentation in the paragraph I hadn't started yet. It took away that "centered" look I wanted.

My roommate's voice cut into my concentration.

"Do you want this poster?" My forehead wrinkled as I felt my train of thought fading away forever. No, I didn't want that terrible excuse of a rock star's image. Despite the fact that I listen to the music, Liddey seemed to forget that the corners bear the same gaping holes her pushpins put into the drywall and the paper had wrinkled under the steam of both our straightening irons by the sink mirror.

Instead of replying, I began to type, one well-placed key at a time.

I reached down and pulled out a mouthful of grass between my strong teeth. With an easy motion, my long neck propelled my head back up. I began to munch. After exactly fifteen chews, I spat out anything that hadn't fallen down my throat, reached down, and began the whole process again. Fifteen chews. Fifteen chews. Nothing works better than the number fifteen.

The rest of my herd always wondered why I was so obsessed with that number, after all numbers were such a human preoccupation. I always said that I want to leave, and they would always ask why I wouldn't. I would simply reply, "Including me, there are fifteen llamas."

They always complained that I never answered the original question, but I didn't care. There are fifteen llamas, and I can't leave for fear that that number would go down to fourteen. So here I stay.

"Hello? Ann? Are you listening to me? Did you unplug the mini fridge or what?"

"Anna," I whispered.

"What was that?"

My fingers curled and suddenly pounded once against the keyboard. "I told you a million times. Call me

Anna." It's more symmetrical that way, even if the word "symmetrical" isn't symmetrical.

"You only told me once, but that's not the point. I'm checking it now and thanks a lot for leaving it plugged in. If the freezer leaks moisture everywhere it's coming out of your housing deposit." Liddy finally unplugged the vacuum cleaner and began sloppily winding the cord. I cringed and went back to the computer. I didn't care. Things are coming to a close, including having to have a roommate. Next fall it's just me and my own apartment.

"On a deadline," I murmured. Before continuing, I clicked on my school email for the fifteenth time. Guess I won't be getting any letters today.

dkls;ah.

I stopped chewing long enough to look at the night sky. Those tiny lights always drove me crazy. Humans often saw animals in those lights: a bird, a fish, a horse. It was there way to putting organization to the mess. I don't agree. You can't organize anything by putting some sort of chaotic patter to it. It doesn't work that way. No matter what the humans do, they can't actually reach up there and change those lights. They will forever be in that mess, just as hopelessly unorganized as the day somebody spilled them up there.

One of the lights moved. My black eyes widened for a split second as it shot straight past where it was supposed to go and vanished from sight. So close. Though, it makes it all the more frustrating when those lights rearrange themselves and remain just as disorganized as before. I wish I could go up there and show them how they should be placed. Then order would be reintroduced and I could finally have some peace of mind.

The door opened and I was pried out my concentration again. The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end when I heard the fall of an unfamiliar boot.

"Dad!" I heard Liddy's voice behind me whisper hurriedly. "You have to take off your shoes! Leave them in the hallway." I didn't say anything. I pretended to type, but couldn't concentrate long enough to actually write anything. I just stayed silent and listened.

"Liddy, honey, why do we have to do that? It's not like either of you is responsible for this dorm now." It must be my roommate's mother. She didn't know.

I couldn't hear what Liddy said after that, but I assume it was some flippant comment about her clean freak roommate. All I got was something that sounded like, "became that weird." That wasn't even the whole truth. Liddy was even more so to blame. Can I help it if she doesn't do anything right?

For the next several painful minutes I just sat and listened to the scraping of boxes and Liddy's personal belongings. Finally all that stuff would be out of the room. Despite her moving things around and sometimes adding and subtracting items, I never thought that this room was more perfect than before either moved our stuff in. Posters, CDs, clothes, books: clutter is clutter. Thinking about all the things about her that drive me crazy, I finally found a place in my mind where I could continue writing. My fingers worked faster on the keys.

I just stared at the tiny lights until my eyes hurt from straining them in the darkness. Why did they have to be so imperfect? There they were, never shifting, always there, from sundown to sunup. If they had to always be right there, why couldn't they be straight? Why couldn't they be

organized by size or color instead of by whether they form the outline of a duck?

I angrily reached down, plucked another mouthful of grass, and immediately spat it back out. Such a scitter-scattered array made no sense. What kind of world is this where the only things that remain completely fixed and unchanging are so completely misaligned and imperfect?

What kind of world is this where there can only be fifteen llamas in the herd?

I hate this. I hate this. I hate this. There is nothing but chaos and chance. None of us can even hope to change this crazy world or make it just a little bit easier to understand. Fifteen: that is something I get. Anything else is gibberish.

"Ann? Anna," she quickly corrected. "I'm leaving now." I didn't turn around. "I just wanted you know that it was fun for a while." The usual parting requirements. Funny, I thought she'd say something like "good riddance," but there was more. "I think you're a good person and all, but you really need to work on your manner. I know I gave up after a while, but you can be really standoffish sometimes. I want you to get help, that is, if you ever want friends. I tried." I didn't react. "Goodbye."

I heard the door close. She didn't lock it.

I finally looked up from my computer and stared around the empty room. The walls and floor were startlingly white after two semesters of living. I looked around at the recently vacuumed and scrubbed surfaces.

I realized I had to clean everything all over again.

OMINOUS PORTENT

Sarah Morris

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“MAKE IT NEW!”

Ezra Pound

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