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You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.

Maya Angelou

American Poet and Novelist

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EDITOR'S Note

Fall has always reminded me of fiery red trees bursting against a clouded gray sky. The harvest season is full of vibrant color contrasts, of simultaneous death and vigor; to me, fall is a celebration of nature's duality, of the seemingly impossible idea that life can come from death.

In the spirit of the season, therefore, I think it is interesting to point out the strikingly paradoxical way that the Fall 2010 issue came together.

In this issue, you'll find pieces that are full of melancholy and danger, as in the grim, savage world that Travis Freeman paints in "What Do You Do With the Wild Dogs?" and in Nicole Zschiesche's oddly humorous and chilling tale of the revenge enacted on a renegade robot wife. You'll also find a carefree whimsicality in photos like Tori Bell's "Untitled." Our poetry reflects crisply on the human capacity for creativity and self-expression; Alaina Behan's "Reunion" drips with tangible nostalgia while Chad Gallman's "The Man Goes Mangoes" questions our perceptions of reality with a simple play on words.

However, these incredibly distinct works are held together by a single theme--that human nature is inherently twisted and beautiful all at once. The pieces in this edition of *eleven4osevcn* argue that human nature is made up of these dualities, much like the season of autumn itself.

As you flip through this collection of work from some of the best creative talents on campus, consider what binds us all together, the contrasts that define our relationships, our perceptions. When you're finished, visit our web edition of *eleven4oseven* at www.1147.tcu.edu for more student work.

I'd like to thank everyone on staff this year for their diligence and creativity, along with everyone who submitted to this issue.

Keep breaking the mold!

Kelli Trapnell Editor-in-Chief

Haiku for a Dancer

Bill Hamlett

Adagio dear All are suspended in your Fluid Arabesque

CHICAGO

Paige Perry



Paige is a junior Studio Art - Photography major from Grand Prairie, TX. (For more of Paige's work, go to www.1147.tcu.edu)

SUPPOSE I Were

Anannya Mukherjee

Suppose you gripped my tongue and twisted and I bled words that – in their lives — painted rainbows! – In the skies – and parted cloudbursts!

and trickled down the sidewalks, colors blending into amalgamated waterslides!
Paragliders! would it make me really real?
Again? –

If you jarred me like a raindrop,

would it make me

really real

again?

Anannya is a sophomore English and Philosophy double major from Mumbai, India.

What do you do with the Wild Dogs?

Travis Freeman

Pacing out there—thinned, wild-eyed—with sinewy muscle pulling tightly over bones and joints—the Wild Dogs await...crazed in their minds and souls from too much meat— or too little...an affront to God, not of his mold or making...instead, they sprang forth as the imagined life of that ancient, caged Panther of Paris—freed from a life of confinement, but whether stalking out in the night, or hidden away in some filthy burrow beneath a tree stump, they are no longer at home in this world. What would it mean to have that which is innate within you beaten into submission? What would arise in its place?

You could ask them, I suppose, but I advise against such undertakings.

The Wild Dogs run in packs through my dreams. The steam rising from their bodies in the moonlight, heads low to the ground—unbounded, unburdened, lawless. I am perched on a high outcropping of rock, as the Dogs circle and howl at my presence. Their eyes, unnaturally bright in that darkness, lock onto my own. The Alpha Dog sits directly below me—silent, foreboding, he stares directly into me. In my head, I can hear his words, but they are unintelligible, gibberish. The Dog grasps something deep within me, something I will never know, and in a clear, sympathetic voice, tells me, "Come...come with us..." My child, frightened by the screaming, awakens me from this fever.

These Dogs have haunted us like breathing specters. The work of our people used to end immediately at sunset, for we had to return within the confines of our walls to shut them out. The night is the only thing we gave to them, our only acquiescence. But as our people grew and multiplied, the walls began to pull tight like a noose around our necks. So we gave up acquiescence, we gave up accepting their existence.

No- now the hammer is the only rule in dealing with them. All they seem to understand is the smash. It is miraculous the resistance of their skulls to give way—like striking iron. There is little that gets into

those stubborn heads of theirs, and it is nearly as difficult to get the gray matter out—but not impossible.

The Song of the Hunt

In teams of twos or threes we creep, beyond the white walls of our city, to crack the skulls, of stupid beasts who don't deserve our pity.

What else would you have us do? Our streets overflow; three families must sleep to a house. Disease festers and waits in the gutters and alleys. The land immediately surrounding our walls is becoming barren—we must venture outward if we are to maintain.

I came to this city many years ago, with my daughter and my son. I have only my daughter now. It is a story much the same as many others--

A conversation between father and daughter at the traveling hour, in pitchest black--

"I know it is dark and cold, but we must travel at night-the night is safest, vou must wear it like a cloak-believe me when I tell you it has not always been like this; once we knew the sun and felt it as friend-we will know it again, my sweetness, vou and I. but for now, pull your collar tight and move swiftly; this night conceals both you and I and that which is lying in wait, to strike and take you

away from me--I will not allow it, I will keep you, but I am one alone. worn from travel-you must learn to forget all that has befallen us; it will not fill your belly nor rest your legs--I loved your brother just as you, but it has been days-be aware of the sounds around you-we are never alone: others are also moving tonight, and packs of beasts are afoot-it is time to move now, my dear: I am so sorry I cannot carry you, but my legs, my feet-you must be strong for me; take this last piece of bread, guard it for when it is needed-the bleeding appears to have stopped for now--I know it hurts. but have we ever known anything else? This is our lot. Once we start moving, never speak; vou must be a mouse for me-hold onto my hand and don't stop-trust me when I tell vou we will soon know our friend the sun again. and you will have learned to forget."

Through that dark world, through that nightmare, I came to this place – to my home. It is our world now, and those dogs, they must go.

It has become necessary to crack their skulls—there is nothing else to do. Reason has been tried, but the Wild Dogs do not wish to change. Their sweet-eyed young too unreal—the eyes project the picture show of the untamable. We give them the smash.

We have tried castration, but the goddamn things split like complicated amoebae.

I feel nothing for them. I have no pity for something that can prevent its own demise by an acceptance of the tidal sway of history, but because of pure, dumb will, does not. Of course they have spoken of their innate necessity, their meaning in and for this world. Spoken only in riddles—saying that if their heart was no longer theirs, it would no longer beat.

Rubbish. They are so much rubbish, and must be swept away.

To speak truthfully, they have done nothing to harm us. It is their existence that is an insult. Fundamentally they do not fit – a square peg in a round hole. A square peg will only fit into a round hole with force, and for that– there is the hammer. We are giving them their place.

Yes, yes, yes—I have smelled the blood of the Wild Dogs curdling black on the back of my hand, I have tasted the hammer after the crack. In the beginning, I wailed as their dead eyes rolled up white—I had yet to learn that they were only beasts, and nothing more.

One evening, my hunting group became separated from one another. I was alone, and crept warily through the darkness, hammer in hand. I came into a clearing, and in it sat the Alpha Dog. He caught me in his stare, and I stood, motionless.

"I cannot come with you," I told him. The Dog arched his neck, bellowed a high, singing howl, and then lowered his head. He did not move as I approached—did not move, even with the smash. That night, the moaning of the dogs prevented sleep for all within the city walls.

The Wild Dogs still stalk the surrounding night. There are few left, but they will never leave—they will always haunt us. You cannot destroy the Wild Dogs, for first you must destroy that which made them. And that which made them is as essential as the atom.

They are beyond—just as the knife slashed through the water cannot cut what it cannot touch.

Travis is a junior English major from Austin, TX. He is also the recipient of the 2nd Annual Sandra Brown Excellence in Literary Fiction (ELF) Award.

Untitled

Tori Bell



Tori is a freshman Studio Art-Photography major from Dallas, TX.

THE MAN GOES MANGOES

Chad Gallman

The branch quakes Under the weight Of the sunset fruit.

Like dropped from alchemists' hands The mangoes bring down the silky curtain of dusk.

Night breaks with them as they hit the ground.

Pirated sun-rays ripple in juice mirrors Inside moon spotted shadows of the Mango tree.

The soil becomes a sweet sponge.

Night winds whisper through the leaves. The skin, pulp, and seeds turn cold.

A man breathes in the stale morning air.

If, last night, the man had only been there to catch them as they fell,
He wouldn't have climbed so high today.
Sticky footed and dirtied mouth the man goes mangoes up the tree.

"Then like a mango I will be!" I heard him shout. For there were no more mangoes hanging around.

Whether from the man or whether from the trees I do not know, but from the top, I heard a mango mantra:

(continued on next page, new stanza)

"When the mangoes go, man goes mangoes."

"When the mangoes go, man goes mangoes."

From my pocket I take a mango. I look at it, and look at it until my eyes go nearly blind. But I can't take a bite, because I don't know what I hold in my hand.

DOLLHOUSE

Nicole Zschiesche

Dinner was not ready when Carter walked through the door. The normal feast of odors—roast beef, tender brisket, mashed potatoes, casserole—that would waft in from the kitchen to greet him like a new puppy, were eerily absent.

"Ava? I'm home," he called out, setting his keys on the antique table that hugged the entryway. Carter stood in the foyer, briefcase still in hand. His ears strained for the disturbances in the silence—the usual hum of activity that told him Ava was somewhere busying herself in the house. Nothing.

He shed his trench coat and opened the door to place it in the closet. The empty hangers clanked and jingled together like wind chimes, laughing at Carter as he stood dumbfounded.

"Ava?" Carter called out. He waited for an answer, hanging up his coat above his golf bag and closing the closet door softly.

There. He heard the wooden groan of their dresser drawers being opened. Making his way down the hallway, he could distinguish other sounds too. The rustle of fabric. The swish of a full skirt. The soft padding of feet on carpet. And Ava's hum as she moved about the room. Carter's heart pounded in his ears as he crept up to the door, placed his hand on the doorknob, and turned it slowly. The door swung open. Ava looked up as she walked to the dresser.

"Oh hi, darling," Ava said, smiling. She plunged a hand into the dresser and pulled out two cashmere sweaters, folded as if they had never been worn. That was her specialty. "Which do you think—the cream or the layender?"

"For what?" Carter asked as she inspected both sweaters, weighing them in her hands like a scale.

"Oh, I just can't decide. I like both, but I want to make sure I have room for everything," she said. "I think cream." She nodded and tucked the layender sweater back into the drawer.

Carter watched her as she crossed to the bed, where a large leather suitcase lay open, nearly full of neatly folded clothes.

"What's going on?" Carter asked, marching into the room so that he was even with Ava as she rearranged the clothes.

"I'm leaving you, sweetheart," she said without looking up.

Carter staggered beneath the words. How could she do this to him? And her voice, so even and sweet...He had worked so hard to smooth it out, to correct all of the little kinks— the buzzing and the whirring— that had initially interrupted her speech. He had wanted her voice to be musical and pleasant and now it stung his ears to hear her say those words without any intonation of betrayal.

"You can't do that," he whispered.

Ava continued to place her clothes delicately in the suitcase, humming again as she did. Her long, graceful fingers smoothed the shirts at the brim of the suitcase. Carter looked on as she tapped one of those fingers, tipped by a carefully manicured fingernail, against her lips as she went over a mental to-do list. Carter had made those lips. Perpetually rosy in color, and the top lip was as full as the bottom, like the lips of a young waitress Carter had been fascinated with in college. Every detail was fashioned with care, from her soft golden curls to her dainty ankles—bits and pieces of memories, of beautiful specimens Carter had encountered.

And now his masterpiece—what he had dedicated his life to creating—was packing. He had given her everything she needed to be content at his side. He had denied her nothing. He had worked his ass off making her what she was now, the perfect companion. Was there another man?

Carter felt his hands begin to shake and he clenched his fists as she continued to hum the ridiculous tune he had chosen for her.

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Dollhouse		

Again and again and again as wild speculations shot around his brain.

"You can't do that!" he yelled again, silencing her. "I made you. You belong with me, Ava."

He grabbed a handful of shirts and dresses from the suitcase and placed them in an unfolded heap on the bed. "Now— now stop this nonsense and—"

"Now, dear... It's not nonsense," Ava said, surveying him with her cold blue eyes— the only unique feature she possessed. "I was watching Oprah today while I was folding your shirts, and there was this nice lady who wrote a book— Dr. Janice, I think it was—and she was saying every woman deserves happiness. It's up to her to figure out what that means for her. And I started thinking about it—"

"She wasn't talking about you! God!" Carter said. He knew that letting her watch the television was a bad idea. "That's for real women— not you."

Ava put her hands on her hips and furrowed her brow slightly.

"I am a woman," she said. Her voice had a subtle, metallic edge to it. "I look like a woman, don't I? I act like a woman. I am a woman, Carter."

"You're not a woman- you're a glorified toaster!"

"Don't treat me like an object, darling. I'm your wife."

"Yes—exactly! You're my wife, and you need to stay with me," Carter said, biting back his urge to toss the suitcase through the window. Instead, he sat on the edge of the bed. Ava continued to stand rigid in the center of the room, thinking, as Carter hoped, about his words. He reached for her hand and let his thumb glide gently over her unblemished skin.

"We're happy, right?" he murmured. Perhaps if she returned to sanity long enough, Carter could fix the problem and she would abandon the notion, unpack her bag, and start dinner.

She smiled at him warmly and pulled her hand from his grasp. She turned back to the bed and started to fold the clothes Carter had disturbed. She sighed as she placed them back in the suitcase. "I've been reading about happiness," she said gently, zipping up the suitcase with ease. "I smile like I'm supposed to. I can laugh and walk and say that I am happy. But I don't know what it is. And I don't feel it. I'm sorry, baby."

Carter watched in disbelief as she slid the suitcase off the bed and wheeled it to the door. He sat for a momeant on the edge of the bed and glanced around the room at the prominently displayed photographs of him and Ava. Carter could see himself aging next to a flawless Ava from one glossy photo to the next. Ten years without a problem. She couldn't do this to him.

He sprung from the bed and marched out the door, hot on Ava's heels as she walked towards the foyer.

"There's another man, isn't there? Isn't there?!" he spat. "What do you think he's going to do when he finds out what you are, huh? He's going to throw you away like the trash that you are!" Ava paused, allowing him to catch up to her.

"There's no man. I am a woman and I deserve my happiness," she said. Her tone was as pleasant as it always was, but the words hit Carter like a hailstorm.

"What are you going to do with that, Ava? It won't keep you warm at night," he barked.

"I deserve happiness, and I'm going to find out what that is for me."

Ava continued walking, her eyes on the front door.

"Yeah, well good luck. I hope your happiness can provide for you and give you the type of power you need, because I'm sure as hell not giving it to you," he said, hoping those words would stop her from reaching the door. She needed him. She had to stay.

"I can take care of myself, Carter. I know how. Don't worry about me," she said over her shoulder.

She was almost to the door. Carter couldn't let her go. He had worked so hard and had built his life around her.

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Dollhouse		

He bolted for the front door and blocked her way, catching her off guard. He dropped to his knees and clutched at her skirt, burying his face in the folds. He hadn't intended to cry, but now hot tears were burning his eyes and creeping down his face.

"Please, Ava," he begged. "Please don't leave. Stay with me." He stood up and tried to pull her face towards his. If she could just see how his pain was choking him, then maybe that would be enough.

"I love you," he said through clenched teeth.

"Oh, Carter," she said softly, turning her head towards his face. He could see now how lifeless her eyes were as she pried his hands from her face. "Thank you. But I can't stay."

She turned back to the door, wheeling her suitcase behind her.

Carter could feel something snap inside him and heat rushed to his face, his eyes, his hands. His body was alive and on fire with human emotion, and his heart beat in his ears. Before he knew what he was doing, his hands were ripping open the hall closet and clutching at anything. His fingers found the cool head of a golf club leaning against the wall. He tore it from its resting place and felt the familiar grooves of the handle connect with his hands. His own voice and Ava's screams filled his ears as the club collided with Ava's skull with a twang of metal on metal.

"You can't do this! You can't leave me!" he roared. His tears blinded him as his arm grew tired. The screams had died down and only their echoes remained in the hallway.

Carter dropped the club and slowly removed his jacket to cover Ava.

Staggering to the bedroom, Carter ripped a picture of the two of them from the wall. He collapsed on the bed, cradling the frame as he drifted to sleep.

The next morning, Carter pulled himself slowly from sleep and wandered into the hallway to survey the damage from the previous night.

Ava lay partially obscured by Carter's jacket. Her legs stuck out at odd angles from beneath the jacket and her normally flawless hair was now disheveled.

He pulled the jacket back gingerly and sighed. He hated to see her that way, with her wiring and circuits exposed and protruding through her fleshy exterior. Her metallic skeleton glimmered along her scraped jaw-line and her neck seemed to be badly aligned.

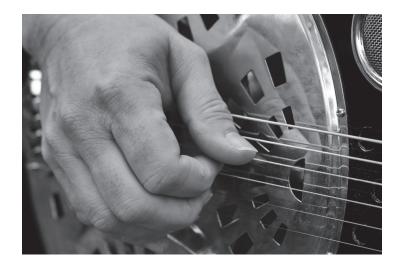
At least there wasn't a bloody mess for Carter to drag down to the basement. He rested her body on his workbench. It was strange to him how their relationship had come full circle. Carter had worked on Ava for years on that same surface, perfecting every detail and enhancing his work with each new set of blueprints. The blueprints were pinned on the wall above the table, marking his progress.

He sighed again and ran his fingers through his hair. He could salvage the parts and perhaps begin anew, improve upon the last attempt. And he could build something better, without all of the little annoyances that he had regretted with Ava.

He sat down in his desk chair and removed his old designs from a file beneath the worktable. It was time to start again.

PAUL

Paige Perry



ROCKETSHIP IN BLACK & WHITE

Jason Carley

The reflection in the mirror squints, sucks in a heavy breath through pale lips as if whistling in reverse, then exhales a drawn-out, exaggerated sigh that would make a bystander think the man in the mirror is about to die or that he has just died and is now some remnant, a spirit left behind like the lingering odor of an overfilled vacuum cleaner in a cramped room. But he is fairly certain that he is alive. The mirror is coated with months' worth of toothpaste splatter, Crest Extra Whitening, because that's what Mel used even though I told her all the time it's a gimmick. Happy blinks once, twice, blinks too much, because now he's thinking about blinking Better than thinking about her. He shuts his eyes tightly for a moment, opens them again, focuses on his hair. It is still gelled from last night, but it stands tousled, out of order, a few solitary strands of silver poking through like feral children dancing in a thick, black forest. He plucks out a gray hair and yelps, turns on the faucet. It hisses, sputters, gargles for a moment before spraying out entirely too much water. Happy slaps the knob down halfway and turns it all the way to H. Steam begins to pour out of the sink and the mirror reminds him of the deep stain on his white Banana Republic dress shirt She was enough she was more than enough she was perfect.

Light from strung up bulbs refracted smoothly through Melissa's half-empty glass of Merlot, danced on her face like sun moving across white sand beneath shallow water. She always said that wine was an acquired taste that she hadn't acquired yet, but Happy had convinced her to have a glass for the occasion. The band on the stage was playing soft wedding-sounding jazz, the kind that makes a dull moment romantic and a romantic moment unforgettable. This moment was somewhere in between. Happy's obsequious friends encircled him, droning on about price optimization and B2C business models, all in hopes that he might be interested in investing or at least in providing some financial insight. Their vacuous, plastic wives and mistresses sat around Melissa in designer dresses, yakking about the bride and about how her new husband had arranged for a trip in a hot air balloon as part of their honeymoon to the Caribbean. Happy smiled so slightly that no one around could even have detected it, except for Melissa, if she had been looking. He took his black and grey striped Burberry tie in one hand and

pushed the Windsor knot upward to make sure it was tucked neatly against his collar. I'd keep going I'd keep going all the way to the moon with you, Mel was wearing the white dress she had found on sale at J.C. Penney for thirty dollars. What a deal, she had said, what a bargain. All the dresses he had bought her hung unmolested in her closet, still showing off their triple digit price tags.

She took a sip of wine, or pretended to, and glanced at Happy from across the table. Disregarding the conversation around him, Happy tried to scoot back his wicker chair, but the precisely trimmed Bermuda grass resisted the legs. He picked it up and moved it, ignoring the confused looks being shot around. Never taking his eyes off Melissa, Happy circled the table. He took her left hand and she kept the glass in the other. Away from stale tuxedos and laundry-smelling sundresses, they fled to the dance floor, where the bride and groom and some family friends and their kids were already dancing. But they were alone, Mel and he. She wrapped her arms around him, careful not to let her wine escape over the edges of the glass as they swaved predictably like an old wooden rocking chair on some stranger's porch, rocking in the tepid energy of the July night. Happy pulled away just enough to look Melissa in the eyes I love you Dancers spun all around, laughing and singing, unaware that the world in which they existed had ceased to be for two people on the dance floor. Happy leaned forward and took Melissa's cheek in his hand, kissed her lips gently. Something cold and wet and red spilled on his chest. Melissa frowned, blushing slightly, recovering the wine glass. She was not made for his world, but Happy does not know this, or he knows but has convinced himself otherwise. Or he is torturously aware and is using all his strength to erase the idea from ever having existed. He dabs at the stain, but he is not angry. He takes out a Lucky Strike and lights it with the silver Zippo that Melissa gave him for his birthday Yes I'd take you all the way to the moon and we'd be happy there just you and I

Melissa steered her red piece-of-crap '89 Ford Ranger to the side of the busy highway, turned the key backward in the ignition, then forward again. The starter clicked incessantly like a toy machine gun in the hands of a maniacal five-year-old. With unnecessary force, she jammed the column shifter all the way to park, squeezing her cheeks up to her eyes to seal in the saltiness that tried to force its way around the sides of her eyelids. Clouds were hanging low in the October sky. A steady drizzle pattered against the windshield that separated her from the green smog on the distant downtown LA skyline. Blurs of taillights wisped by like phantoms chasing each other, agitating water from the pavement into aimless clouds of mist. Melissa looked through the rear window over her shoulder, her hours of careful packing now seeming nothing more than a cruel joke. Raindrops were meticulously invading the

cardboard boxes her father had strapped down in the truck bed. She snatched violently for breath through wet, mucus-clogged nostrils, swallowed, sighed deeply. Through blurred eyes, she could vaguely make out the text on the overhanging road sign. Eleven miles to go. Her head found a perfect place in cupped hands, which she filled up like a sink If I had just gone to Tennessee or Missouri I could still be back home before it gets dark and Paul and Susan and Jamie would just be getting back from school and Daddy would be outside trying to fix the stupid tractor and Mom would come outside with her hands on her hips and she smiles tilts her head running now across the field that Jamie never mows hugging her until its getting dark now look at the lightning bugs, the headlights traffic was getting worse. She wiped off her face and put the key back in the ignition—more clicking and a loud pop accompanied by steam. It had brought her halfway across the country and now eleven miles away I've made it this far I can't go back now

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"Where are we going?"
"You'll see."
"Slow down."
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Warm jazz faded into the sweaty night air, faded into a memory that would always be remembered, as Happy drove dutifully, unknowingly, with the wind blowing onto his face from both open windows *After tonight we'll be together forever that's funny a wedding conceived on a wedding night not funny romantic* with Mel in the passenger seat leaning her head against the doorframe, looking out at the streetlights whizzing by. She had thought they were going back to the apartment, but Happy was taking them to the most romantic place he could think of—to the park where they had first kissed on the night they had met.

Red light.

Happy pulled up to the intersection, adjusted his cuff links—the square silver ones that he wore for special occasions—and tried to be present in the moment. A solitary star under Orion's belt twinkled blue and red like a police siren.

"See that star?" he asked. Melissa strained her neck to look out the windshield. "I think it's an airplane."

"No, it's a star," he said reassuringly. "It's not moving."

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Rocketship		

"What do you think happens when two stars fall in love?" Melissa asked wistfully. Happy squinted involuntarily, the skin above his eyebrows folding up *They don't fall in love they don't come back inside they can't fall in love* "I think that's why they twinkle," she continued, "because they're so in love." "It's all the dust," Happy said. "All the dust between them and us." "Sometimes what I miss most about home is how you can't see the stars here."

"Maybe someday we'll go where we can see the stars."

"Let's fly out to one tonight," she said with a glow in her eyes. "Let's fly to one and find out what happens when stars make love." Melissa closed her eyes and leaned back in the chair. Happy lit a cigarette *It's too far we'd be old and dead before we ever made it*

"Since when do you smoke in the car?" Green light.

Though it had been drizzling most of the day, as if by some curse or a benevolent act of fate, it began to pour just when Happy finally made it out of the office. He cursed himself for having left his black golf umbrella in the trunk of the Bentley over the weekend. He hated getting his suits wet. With a hand futilely covering his leather messenger bag, he sprinted through the parking lot.

LA traffic. Rain pounded at the windshield with all the fury of a drive-through car wash that had been cranked up too high by some delinquent teenager. Happy clicked his tongue, but Band of Horses blotted out the sticky wet sounds from inside his mouth and from the tires lapping at the slick surface of the 405. Drivers were merging into the left lane to circumvent an abandoned Ford Ranger, its bed piled high with cardboard boxes that were dissolving like brown sugar under a faucet. Happy rolled past the truck slowly, not even touching his foot to the gas pedal. A girl sat in the driver's seat with her eyes shut tightly. Some lightning bolt of philanthropy struck Happy and he found himself knocking on the passenger side window of the truck, a puddle sloshing over his brown oxfords.

Startled, her eyes wide open, the girl recoiled into the corner between her seat and the door. Fall-textured rain drenched Happy as he waited for her to recover from the shock and unlock the door. He sat down and shut the door, his body shaking slightly under his wet, sticking suit.

[&]quot;What's wrong? Flat tire?"

"No, I have no idea." Her voice quivered, but was loud enough for him to catch her Midwestern accent. "Something that makes it click and pop."

"Well you picked a great spot to stop. Everyone's having to go around you."

She was looking him in the eyes, her hair wet like a dishrag, her makeup running. Happy stopped trembling, for he could no longer feel anything except an overwhelming sensation *We're going to be together for a long time* She looked away out the window and blinked, squeezed her hands together tightly. "I don't know anyone here that I can call," she said. "I'm from...I'm just moving today."

"I'm Happy," he said.

Sometimes two people can be completely motionless, forsaking words and thoughts for the simple contentment of being alone together. But as Happy and Melissa lie side by side in the sticky, damp grass, unspeakable words thrash around Happy's mind, and the stillness scratches, irritates, haunts. A half moon casts random, confused shadows across the park, and the horizon glows with distant Hollywood lights. Happy lights a fresh cigarette. Immense weight from a small box in his suit jacket pocket presses against his chest.

"Hey, stop that," Melissa says, half playfully and half seriously trying to pull the cigarette away from his hand.

Happy takes a deep drag, watches the smoke fade into the blackness *Should I* follow it all wrapped up in the flumes like a baby in a blanket until I get far away from Melissa turns over on her side to face him, but he is still staring upward at the image of the spiraling smoke that has burned into his eyes, the actual smoke having long since disappeared.

"What's wrong?" she asks. "You're acting weird."

Melissa is silent.

"Just have a lot on my mind, I guess," he says, half apologetically, taking another drag. A crisp, delicate crackle from the burning tip of the cigarette

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[&]quot;Why?"

[&]quot;I don't know, what's wrong?"

[&]quot;No, why did you say I'm acting weird?"

[&]quot;I don't know, you're not being you."

[&]quot;Well I'm me, so I must be being me."

relaxes him slightly if I can just focus on just think about the crackle come inside you're all wet I won't have to decide let's dry you off I won't have to think the burning tip smoldering in an eye She rolls on top of him, pushes away the cigarette I won't decide so don't ask me to I'll just keep She kisses him.

"Don't forget," Mel says, "My show's at eight tomorrow in Santa Monica."

"I won't forget." He kisses her. "Why aren't you wearing the perfume I bought you?"

She rests her head girlishly on his chest. "I think Rocco's allergic to it."

"That's expensive perfume," Happy says, his voice tiny and powerless, the words almost nonexistent. He inhales a final breath from the cigarette deep into his lungs, lets it linger long enough to poison his thoughts, then pushes it out steadily, forcefully.

She smells like rain Happy took a deep breath and folded his silk napkin in half, placed it across his slacks. Melissa left hers folded around her silverware on the table. Their clothes had not dried completely and Melissa had only half successfully repaired her makeup.

"Well I thought some crazy person had left it there in the middle of the lane, but when I drove by I saw you and all of the sudden I was just standing there knocking on the window." Happy smiled charmingly. "You are crazy, right?" Last minute dinner reservation for two at Patina in downtown LA—nearly impossible (for most). Champagne glasses clinked. Waiters scurried. Wealthy patrons laughed at the perfectly appropriate volume level, taking every opportunity to flash impossibly white teeth.

Melissa tapped her foot against the floor, looking around excitedly, nervously, shifting her gaze from table to table as if taking it all in, while Happy sat at ease I'll show you what my world is like I'll open your eyes and you'll love me for it you'll be even more beautiful because of how much I'll love you and people will feel it wish they had it too

A tangibly serious waiter with pointy ears approached the table and asked, "May I start you off with a bottle of our house wine?"

"Sure," Happy said, "That would be fine."

Melissa blinked, scrunched her nose. "Can I have Sprite?"

"Sprite?" The waiter repeated the word as if he had not heard her the first time.

"Yes, please," said Melissa.

Happy added, "You can bring her a wine glass too." The waiter gone, Happy returned his gaze to Melissa, quickly asked, "So what made you want to move out here all the way from...Alabama, you said?"

"Arkansas. And I don't know, I guess I partly just wanted to do something different with my life, you know, get away from home. And partly I'm a singer, and I figured this would be the best place to come for that. For singing and everything."

"Oh really? What kind of singer?" asked Happy. "Heavy metal?" He stuck out his tongue like Gene Simmons. Melissa giggled, "More like folksy stuff, I guess. Like acoustic guitar stuff."

Bugs all around are making such a fuss that Happy can hardly think, but Melissa does not notice. Happy's clicking tongue involuntarily joins in the silent cacophony. Melissa lies next to him, still pressed closely against his side. Fortunately for his lungs, Happy has depleted his supply of Lucky Strikes, leaving him without allies.

"Remember the day we met?" says Melissa, syrupy reminiscence dripping from her words.

Happy mutters a half-coherent, "Yeah, me too." He is staring at a suicidal army of moths laying siege to a nearby lamppost *Why don't they stop do they not know or do they know and can't stop*

Melissa is feeling around in the grass. "Where did this come from?" she asks, holding up a small fuzzy box.

Happy's body tenses all at once. He reflexively sits up. "Oh, it must have

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[&]quot;Are you any good?"

[&]quot;Huh?"

[&]quot;Are you good?"

[&]quot;I don't know. I guess we'll see."

[&]quot;Well I'm glad I pulled over to help that crazy person on the side of the road."

[&]quot;Uhuh."

[&]quot;That's one of my favorite memories to remember."

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fallen out-It's just-"

"Wait, is this a—" her voice is giddy now. "Are you—"

Melissa opens the box and sees the diamond ring carefully tucked into the slit inside. Her face explodes from the center, eyes bursting wide, mouth shooting open, shouting, "Oh, of course! Of course, I'll marry you!" She's laughing, throwing her arms around him, now crying warm tears.

Happy robotically returns her embrace and sees the stars as he holds her in his arms. They are far away. He lets his arms go loose and takes a step back after she finally lets go.

"Look, I..." he stammers, forces himself to look her in the eyes. "I can't."

She is smiling still, squinting slightly. "You can't what?"

"I can't do...this," he says, motioning with his hands, oscillating them slightly, indicating distance or shape or size we just don't fit

Her face loses shape and sheasks, "But why? What did I do? Why do you have the ring?"

"You didn't do anything. I swear you didn't do anything, I just can't. I can't do this," he says, backpedaling, fishing through his slack's pockets. "I'm so sorry, Mel." He finds his car-keys and sets them down in the grass "Take my car. I'm so, so--"

He turns around and runs, stripping off his suit jacket, ripping out his cufflinks and tie, just as a child dressed up in costume wants only to tear away his ridiculous disguise after being scolded by his parents. He runs until he cannot tell himself apart from the night is still *I just want to stay here with you until the sun comes up* Happy and Melissa lie side by side, wondering how they were so fortunate as to have met, and like that in the rain, Melissa keeps saying, I always did think there was something special about the rain. Happy's socks are still soggy, but he doesn't mind *She smells like rain* He reaches for Melissa's hand and rolls over to look her in the eyes *Perfect*

Happy splashes hot water on his face and dries off with Melissa's plush hand towel. Rather than look for stain remover he tosses his dress shirt in the garbage can on top of a few banana peels and yesterday's leftover chicken

[&]quot;I—it must have fallen out."

and rice, tries not to look at Melissa's cashmere cardigan hanging by the door or at her Siamese cat frozen on the windowsill Where's that perfume, I'll spray it on your face He empties several glasses of Glenmorangie before lying down on the couch and pulling Mel's soft red blanket over his head. Evening light washes over the living room, through the blinds, and Happy opens his eyes, closes them again before rolling off the couch. He brushes his teeth and sprays John Varvatos Artisan on his chest and neck, drives the old silver Jaguar coupe with windows down to the 3rd Street Promenade in Santa Monica and finds parking on 4th at an open meter, drops in eight quarters to put two hours on the timer that should give us plenty of time. He makes his way down the warmly lit street, feeling the ocean breeze on his face, passes a young man and woman who walk arm in arm in love they probably think but they don't know what love is they can't because they don't know what we have rounding the corner of 3rd, passing the brontosaurus-shaped shrubbery, she is sitting on a stool strumming her beatup acoustic with the bright red pick guard. A crowd of a dozen people encircle her, half interested. Her voice travels sweetly down the street like the buzzing wings of a hummingbird that hovers forever, unable to choose a flower but I'm going to make it up to you Mel I'm going to take you past the moon all the way to the farthest star and I'll never stop until we're there and we're old and time will bend and stop for us Happy reaches the crowd and stands facing Melissa as she plays a song he has heard her sing many times, singing just say the words you can't deny I'll bow my head and gently sigh Melissa looks up she's not wearing the ring of course she's not delicately guiding the strings through a melodic arpeggio. When her eves meet Happy's, he is unsure of whether or not to smile. He raises the sides of his mouth ever so slightly, meekly. Shoppers and tourists pass them by, unaware that time has ceased to exist for two people in the middle of the crowded street.

Without missing a note, Melissa continues to twist saccharine air from the hole in her guitar, but she does not take her eyes off Happy I'll take you to the stars if you'll come with me I'll take you to the farthest one just come back inside Melissa sits on the steps under the rain, looking out at nothing in particular. She says she's looking at the moon, he watches from the doorway. The light spills out into the night just come back inside and dry off you're all wet just come inside she looks mournfully back down at her guitar and suddenly Happy is painfully aware of all the sounds of the city drowning out this moment, drowning out her song as she keeps playing all I wanted was to watch the moon with you

REUNION

Alaina Behan

Hands cup the juices of the moon, pearled dissolution. I am tipping the tulips with scarlet as you once marked me.

I carry the mark on rose-thorned heart & remember how smoke filled every hollow of me,

it filled me like no one had ever tried.

Calendars drip their frigid honey, dusting into graveyards of smashed ants.

They are feasting on my flesh like no human ever could.

I am cupping robins' faces & bumpy gecko tongues. I am tasting the smell of Fridays and nonexistent gods.

Fear is filling the empty smoke hollows and my hands are itching.

(continued on next page, new stanza)

I am dreaming of laundered polos & the curve between neck and shoulder,

where you will tuck my head when these last few weeks have muddled by.

UNREQUITED

Alaina Behan

When the earbuds fall out, my whole earth clatters silent. I coast on melancholy waves of tumbling ash.

For all my grasping at tinder moons, no light swells like the thump of your pulse & the bulge of your throat.

It is a dwarf star that ghosts across my iceberg mouth: the promise of a chance that we will gulp—and taste—and feel.

Never mine, though I'd kindle hope forever. Never mind.

MAPLE ROAD

Nicola Welch



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Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.

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