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“What seem to us as
bitter trials are often
blessings in disguise.”

~ Oscar Wilde

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Editor's Note

As a first time editor, I think it is only natural for me to see images of hope in this issue. I enjoyed my experience, and the pieces the editors selected only made the work go more quickly.

Shannon Belden's "The Magnificent Harp" with the image of the little boy and the oyster makes me cry every time. "Coffee Beans and Cigarette Butts" by Molly Mahan has beautiful descriptions of a diner and its occupants. The descriptions of the coffee and the conversations are well written and well thought out. And that's only two of the wonderful works you'll find here.

This issue would not have happened without Emily Stanislaw. I can never thank her enough. She is multi-talented, as seen in her beautiful poem "Fireball" and her wonderful editing job. Thank you so much, Emily.

I would also be amiss if I did not thank Dr. Rode for his amazing advice and support. His help has been invaluable to me this semester. I'm not sure what I would have done without it.

This issue set a record; we received almost twice as many submissions as normal. This also gives me a lot of hope for the future of literary culture here at TCU. Even though we had trouble picking which submissions to publish, I learned so much about writing by being an editor. I hope that you will agree with the selections made. I can only hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

*Sarah Dozier
Editor -in-Chief*

P.S.

Please be sure to read our web-companion at www.1147.tcu.edu.

Ujaala Rashid

Driving Home

I was driving home. The same way that I always went. It had gotten to the point where I didn't so much see the road as I took that route, but rather that through compulsion my body would react to each curve, bend, and potential slowdowns. On autopilot, then, I've become more able to enjoy the scenery—at once more and less aware of my surroundings. I ride a dangerous edge.

But far from disconnected, I was particularly concerned with observing my surroundings that day. It was at that time so close to nightfall that you'd feel as though traveling west sent you perceptibly chasing the sun. The sun...was different, unbelievable, more incendiary than I had ever seen it, setting buildings on fire, evaporating each cloud skimming past, causing this intense visual panic that no citizen would see, that no firefighter would give a second thought. Invisible and yet unignorable. For a few moments that evening, with no one else watching, I saw the world go up in flames.

I was driving home. And as clouds obscured the last shreds of sunset, I entered the last long stretch of highway, crammed behind hundreds of inching cars, at once moments and hours away from home. I sighed and peered into my rearview mirror at the brilliant black car backed cozily behind mine. A limousine? Or so it appeared from here. It was idling fairly close. Yet crawling forward with precision, with consideration. I stared into the vaguely illuminated face of the driver, who, had I not known better, appeared to be making direct eye contact. But I did know better, didn't I? I can see him, but he couldn't possibly see me, not at this angle, not at this distance... At my childlike absurdity, I looked back in the mirror and grinned. And to my horror...he grinned back. Blinked in recognition, and smiled a wide, well-set smile. More frozen than I already was in glacial traffic, my blood ran cold and I looked away at once. Seconds crept past and too scared to look, but too tormented not to, I quickly looked up again. And there, with his head cocked slightly to the side, brow wrinkled in confusion, he blinked back at me again. He waited. He waited for me

to do something. Unsure, frightened, and deathly curious, in a wavering moment of bravery, I let slip the quickest wink. This pleased him. Life reentered his sad eyes and that smile returned. He winked back.

I had suddenly become less concerned with the impossibility of the circumstances, and instead began to really look, to see the person who could see me...in a place where I was supposed to be invisible. His face was very fair, further illuminated by the bright streetlights. He was gaunt, his cheeks sunken in slightly, creating dark hollows. His eyes too, hidden further back in his head, but shown brightly, hauntingly, particularly as they followed mine so closely. All that to say, he was handsome, almost embarrassingly so. And that perfect, angular face was accompanied by long, slender fingers tightly gripping the steering wheel, again waiting for me to make a move...

*...To see the person
who could see me...
in a place where I
was supposed to be
invisible.*

Shocked back into the reality of things, my heart pounded audibly as he mouthed something for the first time. Too quickly for me to understand. Whatever it was he was saying, he kept repeating it. Slowly at first, then more quickly, more emphatically. He seemed almost panicked for a brief moment...then impatient...I dared not take my eyes from the mirror, fearing...fearing what exactly? What fear in me could be greater than this? He continued, then furrowed his brow angrily as I shouted "I don't understand you!" At that he stopped, sighed, and shook his head. He smiled softly again and held up his hand. Palm open, fingers spread. Five. He bent down his gnarled thumb. Four. Then his pinky. Three. The remaining arthritic digits bent back into his palm until his index finger was the last one up. But rather than bending it down, he pointed ahead. Look away. He wants me to look away? Does he want this to end? Look forward, he insisted.

Look forward. That instant lasted an eternity as I felt the white heat of halogen lights coming toward me rapidly. My ears suddenly became attuned to the sound of a roaring truck horn, my approaching end, massive and terrible. And feeling no fear and seeing no option, in my last moment I glanced back to see him serenely wave his farewell as my own car had

drifted gently away from his. But I saw something else too...
he mouthed something else, something new, something I so
clearly understood...

"Welcome" he said. As I was saying...that night, I was driving
home.



Kalli Trapnell

Paradox

Heart

Can't win.

Heart

Is weakness of mind, a loss of freedom.

Heart

Is a prison, just like a home—therefore
home is where the

Heart

Is an excuse to fail, or break promises
Just like a

Heart

Is love, itself a drug. It should be
illegal, but

Heart

Is unavoidable, an obstacle even the best
Of us must overcome.

Heart

Is human. I envy the Tin Man--
he has no

Heart.



Matt Boaz

Rose and the Thistle

I found myself engaged in a tussle
A moment of beauty in an eminent struggle
The vines they pricked but without hurry
Slow and steady, no flash, no fuss

The flower it rose and the scarlet fell
I drew it high and held it above
A token devotion to give to my lover
A requisite present, my love, my love

For there she lay in cold, calm splendor
Awaiting the victory I soon would display
And long had I worked to provide her this present
A moment of solace, a break in the fray

I stepped to the street and staggered to stand
A moment of courage and flower beheld
And froze the world with all due purpose
Endured again the toll, the bell

And sounding strong against the whisper
The dusk lay ominous on the ground
And miles ahead could not discern
The task behind, what had been found

For neither I knew, and neither did she
That might and mercy would not compare
A thought became a subtle expression
A cringe, an ache, and quick despair

For sorrow be swift and lift my hopes
Imagine another condition instead
And lay it down beside the stone
Where once and forever would rest her head

A pitiful moment, a glance of sight
The sun crestfallen beneath the sky
And as I shed my coat to turn
The stars delight in the still of night



Quincy Miller

'Murkin Dream

I'm an American!
Which means -- I rock!
And, I shot the sheriff of Iraq
While blastin I Shot the Sheriff on my I-pod.
I try not to notice that my stock has dropped.
Broke the alarm clock on my pocket watch,
And now I sleep walk a lot,
Dreaming that I talk to God,
Who told me that democracy is quite possibly flawed.
A plutocracy reflects more optimally just who we are.
You know the recipe: your s.u.v., the mall, and the bar.
Helps you forget the scenes of legless teens at home & abroad.
Illegal refugees who quest for dreams are mowing my yard;
It got me stressing like they've stolen my job,
But I don't want 'em to stop;
My friends might shun me if they know I'm a slob.
So, I guess wetbacks can get work.
According to Fox-Friendly-Fire-Network,
New Orleans and the war are minor setbacks.
Don't worry your pretty head, Sir;
There's seven American idols left and seven weeks to get there!
Did Paula have a wet chair?
Find out on the next episode of Who-Da-Heck-Care,
Brought to you by the dudes who're soon to make air
Cost more than toxic poisonous fumes, 'cause it's rare.
Avoid the gloom and despair;
Abort it!
Be laissez faire,
We can afford it. Who cares?
I'm an American!



Shannon Belden

The Magnificent Harp

Allen the oyster lived 'neath the waves
In a tiny tide pool by the dock on the bay
He swallowed a lump and got very frustrated
For he knew that the object would be transformed
Poor Al was shy, a timid sea creature
And, for an oyster, had an odd sort of feature
Instead of pearls, those most beautiful jewels
His body made trumpets and saxes and bugles
The rest of his group knew none of these details
As Allen hid out near the top with the sea snails
But alas, one fine day, his new work complete
He washed up onshore and was tripped on by feet
A boy picked him up and pried open his jaw
And exclaimed in amazement at what his eyes saw
The tiniest instrument for the tiniest hands
And a gleam so divine it impressed all the lands
When played on it sounded like the song of a whale
Mournful and sweet as the end of a tale
Little Al became famous, he headlined the news
And talk shows were begging him for interviews
The queen of Romania and the prince of Tibet
Waged battles to win him as their own royal pet
However, when offered, Al would not leave his home
With the small boy who found him that day on the shore
Art (that's the boy) loved Al for his manner
Which meant more to Al than the offer of glamour
So they lived together for a year and a day
Until Allen knew he was drifting away
As a last, dying present for his faithful friend Art
He swallowed a pearl to shape with his heart
For days Allen worked, he strove for perfection,
And then it was done, his last earthly creation
Never was ever there a harp so magnificent
As this that was made with the purity of friendship
When Arthur's small fingers plucked the strings fine as hair
The weight of Al's death became lighter than air
He knew Al had made it with great sacrifice
And so Art enjoyed it with no sort of vice

(Continued with no stanza break)

He ne'er showed it off, none heard its song
For if he had done so, it would have been wrong
Allen had been kind, the humblest of souls
Who wanted no glory or fame of his own
So when Art felt lonely or just missed his friend
The harp helped remind him, he was loved 'til the end



Molly Mahan

Coffee Beans and Cigarette Butts

I find myself here again, and it's almost hard to believe. Years later. Alone. The same shady twenty-four hour diner. Still cheap. Still less than a mile away from the university. I don't know why I continue to come back to this place after all these years. Perhaps I find something therapeutic about reflecting on the past. On a past that barely was and the unending possibilities of what could have been and, of course, was not. I nod politely at the waitress as she places a warm glass of water on the table and hands me a menu. I already know what I'll be ordering, as I order the same thing every time I make this little trek out here, but I accept the menu all the same and look it over, just for show. She walks away, saying she'll be back in a moment.

Once she has left me there in that raggedy old booth, the seats torn from age and misuse, I lift my gaze from the menu and glance across the table expectantly and see him sitting there in my mind's eye. Thick chestnut hair, deep-set blue eyes and that God forsaken smirk. Sometimes I think he smirks just to irritate me. As usual, upon seeing that crooked smile of his, I take the bait and ask him what's on his mind. He says that it's nothing, and then inquires about my asking. I tell him that it looks like he knows something I don't. He claims that it's because he does. I roll my eyes and try my best not to groan, but of course I fail and that smirk of his just inches up further on his face and now I know he's doing it just to agitate me. I sigh and slide down a bit in my seat, trying my best not to show my irritation.

The waitress returns to ask about my beverage selection and I can hear him speak for me as I order a mug of coffee, served black. She nods then asks if I would like anything else. I dissent and she walks away, taking the menu and promising to return shortly. I nod and fold my arms before turning my attention to the napkin dispenser and jam rack pressed up against the wall to my left. I pick up a packet of blackberry jam, holding it delicately between my thumb and forefinger, looking at it intently. I raise my eye and look across the table as they fill with the joy of a child.

They have blackberry jam, I exclaim excitedly. He shakes his head and does well not to laugh or balk at my puerile pleasure. Strawberry is the correct choice, he replies matter-of-factly while taking a packet of strawberry jam from the rack and tossing it at me. I furrow my brow at him, annoyed, picking the packet up from my lap where it had fallen. If you wanted toast, I explain, you should have ordered it instead of trying to hawk mine. He tells me he doesn't want the toast, he is merely telling me what the right and proper thing to do is, anything except strawberry jam would be a sin. As if my jam selection was a moral decision! He speaks with such certainty that I'm not certain if I should be amused or disgusted by the absurdity of his statement. I sigh then shake my head and laugh; it doesn't matter to him either way how I feel about it, so I might as well go with it.

As usual upon seeing that crooked smile of his, I take the bait, and ask him what's on his mind.

The coffee hasn't changed any. I'm sure if he were really here with me he'd order it and harp on about how great it is—how much of an experience this diner's coffee truly is. I sigh softly to myself. It's hard to believe that after all this time, I still find myself coming here and thinking about him. Perhaps that's why I come: to remember. To remember a man I don't love and never loved, but perhaps would have loved if ever given the chance. The waitress returns to see if I want or need anything else. I shake my head and she places the check down at the edge of the table, face down, and tells me to pay up front at the register when I'm finished with everything.

He reaches over and swipes the check. Reading off the bill he tells me how much I owe him. I pull a few one dollar bills out of a silver cigarette case I use to hold my money as we both slide out from our respective sides of the booth. Before I can turn on my heel he grabs my wrist and tells me to try the coffee. That menacing smirk has turned into the prize winning grin of a car salesman. I look at him doubtfully but fail to see what harm there could be in actually trying it. I lift the mug to my lips and take a quick sip ... and it's the most disgusting thing I have ever tasted. I try my best not to gag before demanding to know

what the hell is in there and why on earth would he put himself through the agony of drinking it, then have the audacity to vouch for it and encourage the innocent to drink it. He chuckles at me then that smirk returns and he explains.

It's just how coffee is supposed to taste, I tell the waitress as I hand her the few dollars I owe her. The perfect blend of coffee beans and cigarette butts. I flash an amused smirk, and she looks at me with the same confusion I must have had on my face the first time I was told this. I give a quick wave of my hand before I thrust my hands into my coat pockets and go out into the night, not quite as alone as I was when I came in.



Rachel Blackmon

UNSEEN

Whipping through a sea of legs,
Keeping in close sight the large ones,
Bathed in blue denim.

The snake like shape these men and women
Make as they stand one in front of the other,
Dares me to break free in an effort to relieve
The tension that waiting in line can create.

As I study the faces above mine,
I see no smiles on their lips or in their eyes.
None are willing to look back at
My own small reflection of what they once were.

I am careful to check in with those sky-colored pillars
As I duck to miss each triangle shaped
Piece of wood used to support the windows
The stiff lipped people pour their wages through.

Weaving in and out of cotton and polyester,
I get lost in the groove – my groove.
In an imaginary world all my own,
Finally, I am special.

My doe eyes dart upwards,
Scanning frantically for my check point.
Nana! I yelp
As I spot her broad behind waddling away from me,
I run to catch up.

One day, I think, I'll be worth noticing.



Callie Mason

Katrina

Trees twist and bend, just like toothpicks.
Water swells, morphing into a monster.
Wind whips, houses turn into piles of sticks.
She lashes out, no one to control her.

A child's doll hangs from the limbs of a tree;
Caked with mud but its eyes are still blinking.
It was too late for the family to flee;
No where to go while their house is sinking.

Gripping the shingles of the engulfed house;
Squinting through the rain, hoping for rescue.
Clenching his Bible, praying he'll get out;
Frozen from waiting, stiff like a statue.



Callie Mason

Locket

As I was walking down the street,
Among the cobble stone,
I looked down upon my feet
When something shiny shone.

So I bent down to pick it up
And blew off the red dust,
I knew that it was old for sure,
'Cause it was wrapped in rust.

It was something special to him,
As far I could tell.
For the locket protected her;
Her picture told the tale

The still image showed her smile,
Her hair pulled in a bun.
It hung round his neck awhile
'Til the clasp came undone.

I wonder if he'll come find it,
This memory on a chain.
I'll keep it in my pocket
Until he comes again.



Alex Burdick

Her name is Kristin

He has a brown box in the back of his closet,
that he does not know I have seen.
An average sized box with one side split open,
like a red busted knuckle after an alley fight.
It has all the things she once gave to him, when they were
together. But now they aren't, and he and I are, and
the box remains, like a polished stone in a stream.

Heavy and obtuse, the box carries my predecessor carefully.
The shell is all that remains, where a hermit crab used to live.
Now, the shell offers memories of something beautiful,
something I cannot be.
I wish I pushed the mystery box back into its dark, murky
corner.
But, like Pandora, I loosed the ghost,
that I must now chase.
I dug through the secrets, I dumped out the box.
The same way a child carefully pounds sand,
into a red plastic bucket,
then pours out to let mix with new foaming waves.
I was sorry to see the beautiful things inside
sweet pictures, sappy notes, a coffee cup.
Memories that I never knew, lie quietly on the ground.
Hey! She even made him a scrapbook!
I don't know how the hell to scrapbook.
Pictures of them kissing, romantic cards, movie stubs.
Proof that she was there before me and
she did all the things I do now.

Waves of knowledge give me perspective,
but not enough answers.
I need to know more. I become frantic.
Am I prettier? Smarter? Funnier? Better?
The box has shown me her face and I know her name.
I know more than I already should,
but still not enough to suffice.

(Continued with no stanza break)

Because she no longer exists to him,
except in this sea shell he has kept.
And the box, like a keepsake, waits
for us, and reminds me that I was not the first...
and may not be the last.



Samantha Shircliff

Broken Record

The light in the bathroom won't flicker on, and the mini fridge is not making its usual humming sound. The landlord has finally had it with us. She's turned the power off. This issue, of course, does not occur to me until my laptop goes dead and plugging it into the off-white, cracked wall outlet does nothing to bring it back to life. After walking through the apartment, flipping light switches and even trying to click on the old, 1970's style television, I slump into the kitchen chair, it creaking beneath me as I sit, the woven seat bottom straining from the overuse, and pick my book up to read. I won't even try to write anymore today. I have become too irritated to begin to think straight.

But my book does little to distract me. All I can think of is what he will do when he gets home from the studio. He usually walks in, silently, paying no attention to me, kissing me on the forehead blindly, while I heat up a couple frozen dinners. He walks into the bedroom, switches on the TV and heads for the perpetually ceaseless pile of clothes to find some paint-free ones. He is calm and collected, quiet, and, like usual, unfocused. Tonight, he'll walk into a dark, cold, candle-lit kitchen, ignore me, grunt a few times while he tries to work the TV – without luck – slip out of his clothes and climb into the rickety bed, without a word, as it squeaks and grumbles under his weight. That's what happens on the bad days – most days; on the days when he can't sell any paintings or a day like today, when the realization that we have no money hits both of us like a ton of bricks.

I guess then, tonight will be the night.

Before he gets home I go next door to our neighbor's apartment to borrow their microwave so we might at least be able to eat something – something more than the pop tarts and coffee we had for breakfast. I hope that dinner will keep him from an immediate dismissal of the issue so we can try and discuss it. The candles I had lit at dusk give the atmosphere a musky smell and give the kitchen an eerie glow, doing little to warm the now freezing apartment. I bundle up in two t-shirts, a sweater and my winter coat as well as leggings, a pair of jeans and three

pairs of socks. I check my old, cracked wrist watch: 6:10. I still have a little while before he'll be home.

I grab a handful of coins and head out the door to the street, where the nearby streetlights flicker over the dark, deserted sidewalk. I walk quickly around the corner of the crumbling, deteriorating apartment building, past the old man in the old wool coat and white beard, pushing a shopping cart full of random nick-knacks, and over to the old payphone. I deposit my fifty cents into the coin slot, pick up the phone and dial the number I haven't thought of in almost four years.

I stand there, shivering, trying to warm my bare hands, watching as the little white puffs of snow begin to fall from the sky, listening to the ringing of the phone on the other line. I begin to become impatient, letting my nerves get to me. Finally, the ringing stops and a woman speaks:

...might at least be able to eat something-something more than poptarts and coffee we had for breakfast...

"Hello?"

"Um," I clear my throat, "hi - Mom?" and sit there nervously waiting for her response.

The line remains silent for a few seconds and I can only sit and think she hung up, until I hear her take in a few short breaths. "It's been so long," she says through her sobs.

"I know - um, it's just," I take a deep breath, "I - I really need - a place - somewhere to stay..." I trail off, waiting for her response.

She sits wordlessly for a while, the tears acting up; her sobs putting doubt in my mind. I shouldn't have called her. I expected too much. It really has been too long. But then she says the only thing that could possibly console me at this moment: "Please, Jamie, let me help," she is still sniffing through tears as she tries to console me.

I am overcome with relief, "Thank you, Mom, so much."

She takes a few deep breaths to calm down. "We'll have a room set up for the two of -"

"Wait, Mom, no," I clear my throat, and force myself to mumble out the words, "just me."

"Oh," is all she can say for a while. She sits on the other line silently, as if waiting for me to say something to explain myself to her. When I don't respond, she awkwardly begins to say goodbye, to which I respond to rather quickly in an urge to avoid any more conversation.

I hang up with a sigh of relief and run back up the stairs to the apartment. Grabbing our only working flashlight, I rush into the bedroom and crouch down on the cold, hard concrete and begin scrounging under the bed for the old duffle bag I've had since college. When I finally pull out the dust covered, moth eaten bag, it dawns on me that I don't even own enough things to fill it halfway. I dig through the pile of clothes, picking out the few things that are mine. I gather my toiletries, laptop, and other personal notes from around the room and tuck them neatly into the bag with the clothes. With one more glance at my watch, I shove the duffle bag into our tiny closet and head back out to the darkened kitchen to sit and wait. The dinners are only a few seconds away from freezing back into their original state when he finally walks through the door.

He looks around with a small frown on his face, glancing at the candles and me, most likely wondering why I look as if I've gained twenty pounds. I sit, anticipating his reaction to the lack of lighting, but to my surprise he shrugs his shoulders and a grin like I haven't seen for years spreads across his face. He walks over to me and lifts me up into his arms, kissing me roughly on the lips. Now it's my turn to scrunch my forehead questioningly at him when he pulls me back to smile at me again.

*...watching me break
into a million pieces
right before him...*

"Um, hey," I stammer. "Good day?"

"Amazing day," he beams, squeezing me tighter in his arms. With this, he lets go and hums a familiar tune while gliding over into his seat, smiling even more than before. As he lifts his fork to dig into his plastic dish of meatloaf, potatoes and

carrots, he looks over to me – still standing – and says, “Dinner looks great tonight, Jamie.”

I don’t know what to say to that. I stare at him, a mixture of shock and confusion keeping me from moving, waiting for more of an explanation. It takes me a few minutes to shake out of my trance and sit down across from him and even more of an effort to pick up my fork and begin eating as well. After a few minutes of him humming and chewing his food and me staring and picking at mine, I find the courage to ask, “What happened at the studio today?”

He flashed his white teeth at me and replied, “We’ll never have to worry about this,” he motions to the candles and the frozen dinners, “again.”

It takes a minute to register. He sits there, smiling at me, waiting expectantly for me to jump up in excitement, hug him, kiss him and tell him how much I love him, how proud of him I am, just like every other time. But to his surprise, and to mine, I can’t do anything but sit there and let the tears run down my face, the little holes in the corners of my eyes opening for the first time in years. Not again. Not again. I think to myself.

I can’t tell him why I’m crying. I can’t tell him that I am torn inside, so ready to leave, desperate to get out of this prison that I suffer through every day. I try to think of how in love we used to be, how happy we were living our dreams and proud to be out on our own; but it’s so hard to cover up the life we live now: barely talking, let alone looking at each other. We are two strangers living under one roof. I have to get out, provide for myself and make a new life, start over and try to be happy again. I can no longer live in this world; the one so much like a broken record, where the same part continues to play over and over again, and there is no way to fix it unless someone picks up the needle and stops it from playing. It’s time for me to pick up the needle.

He sits, staring at me questioningly, his brow furrowed and the smile he once held now drooping to match his eyes, watching me break into a million pieces right before him. I don’t want him to comfort me; I don’t deserve his comfort. He begins to

get out of his chair to come over to me, but I reach over and grab his hand, shaking my head and motioning for him to stay in his seat. I don't want him to ask me what's wrong, so I choke out the first excuse that comes to mind, "I'm ju-just s-s-so hap-p-py." With this, his concerned eyes soften and his grin spreads back across his face. He caresses my hand which I have unconsciously left in his and I try to take a few deep breaths to calm myself down.

I immediately pull my hand out of his and try to occupy myself by clearing the empty plastic trays off the always dirty table and attempting to wipe it down with a damp washcloth, doing little to rid it of its permanent grime. I turn to the cracked, yellowing sink and reach for the faucet. It slowly begins to dribble out water as I crank the knob towards the H T lettering that used to be HOT, although I know it will get nowhere close to this temperature. As I begin to scrub the tarnished forks and the foggy looking glasses with the torn and stained hand towel, I hear him come up behind me. He doesn't seem to notice my uneasiness as he hugs me and kisses me on the back of my neck. I have to bite my lip hard and squeeze my eyes tight to keep myself from crying again. As he releases me, I remain standing there, frozen, until I hear him in the bedroom, whistling happily as he puts on a change of clothes.

Carrying the flashlight, I push through the brown sheet hung to serve as a door to the bathroom and slowly feel my way around to the sink. I have to pull myself together and regain my confidence to follow through with it. I turn on the sink and splash my face with

I have to end it now.

water. I look at my shadow of a reflection in the cracked mirror and begin to recite, in my head, how I'm going to tell him when the whistling in the room adjacent comes to a sudden halt. It takes all my energy to reach over to the hung fabric and pull it back to look into the candle-lit room and into his eyes. They are open wide in surprise, yet they droop from sadness. His brow is furrowed in question and his mouth is slightly open as his gaze goes from me, to the object my flashlight is shining on.

In his hand, and directly in the beam of the flashlight in mine, is the gray, moth eaten duffle bag I had hurriedly stuffed into the closet earlier this evening. I am paralyzed in my spot; all I

can do is stare at the bag and think of my stupid mistake. All the while, I feel his gaze boring into me, waiting for me to give an explanation. When I do nothing but stand there, he begins to slowly shake his head. "No. No, no, no, no, no. Please. No," is all he says. He repeats it over and over again, and his voice begins to crack. Finally, nothing can be understood because they have become muffled in his sobs.

I feel my heart break into two pieces. How can I do this to him? I've ruined what should be one of the happiest days of his life. But it's too late now. "I-I," I stutter, "I can't – I just can't – I'm sorry, but it's too much. I – " I can't hold the tears back any longer. My words turn into sobs and become indecipherable.

We both stand there, on opposite sides of our old rickety bed that we bought together six years ago, tears rolling down our cheeks, me unable to make eye contact with him, he staring at me as if the longer he does, the longer I'll stay. After a while, he drops the bag and walks over to me, embracing me in his long arms, holding me tight against the cold, and, for a minute, I think I might change my mind. I hug him back as his grip becomes loose and he collapses to his knees. He puts his head against my stomach and wraps his arms around my waist while I stroke his hair. Maybe I'll stay; things could get better.

But then I come to my senses and begin shaking my head. I remember the last time; and the time before that; and the time before that; and the time before that. I have to end it now. I gently pull his arms from around me and finally look into his deep blue eyes. I take his face in my hands and try to say something, anything that might console him, but all I can do is shake my head and say, "I'm sorry." I turn away from him and swiftly walk over and pick up my bag. I pull my key to the apartment out of my pocket and set it on the table on my way out.

On my way down the stairs everything is a blur behind my tear-filled eyes. I wipe my running nose on my sleeve and try to muffle my sobs as I push through the door to the street. I reach out with my left hand to flag down a taxi and glance at the thin golden band that wraps around my finger. My stomach feels sick for a moment when I realize that it means nothing now. It is merely a piece of scrap metal that I will eventually

have to remove from its sacred place on my hand. This induces more tears and the taxi that pulls up to the curb looks like a big yellow smear across my vision.

I open the door and throw my duffle into the back seat and slide in after it. I take a couple breaths and tell the driver,

“Hartford, Connecticut.”



Sarah Dombrowsky

Second Date Confession

We have been quiet friends for years and yet
you know nothing that happens behind these painted
eyes.

False trust comes with nothing beyond time- false comfort and
quick decisions.

You no longer scare my heart into racing.

We are wrong.

My saying I'm lonely is truth- honesty- not your cue, not
your call to action.

You cannot be my savior.

You are not who or what I seek.

I seek joy and safety.

You offer only lust and incomplete conversations-
temporary but consuming distractions from life's concerns.

I have no energy for time wasting, for life wasting.

I refuse to play until I win.

I'm giving up *men like you*- those that cause self-doubt, that
alter my priorities.

I'm giving up immediate gratification- the heartless gift
you offer.

I give up certain disappointment.

This disaster hasn't lived long, but it is enough.

Unclear and unwarranted expectations abound.

I kiss you by reaction, not action- the response I have been
trained to give.

That kiss does not belong to you.

It is of the one who started the habit.

We feel good, but we are not right.

I am not what you need. You are not what I seek.

We are doomed before we begin. Let it go.



Sarah Dombrowsky

Left

It should have worked.
I opened my heart just a little...
She looked me straight in the eye and said, No thanks.
I searched those hazel eyes for hints of indecision; the blues
and greens unreadable, her face solemn. She reads me and I
am at a loss for what she sees.
It felt perfect. She's so perfectly beautiful.

It should have worked.
I opened doors, ate like a gentleman, from the outside in...
Time passed like old friends with quick wits and long
glances...
She let me hold her hand, her waist...graze her neck...
I was sure she'd melt in my arms, sure she'd stay when her
heart began to race.
I can hear her keys jingle and shoes slap against the tile, just
outside my door.
She is energy and light, mesmerizing in her remedy- she heals
with just her presence.

It should have worked, but it failed miserably.
She's unhappy.
We are unhappy.
She left here.
She left me here, starting at the back of my door, at the hallway
where we said goodnight- my world darkened and blurred as
the latch clicked shut.
I know we haven't been together long. Moments of connection
should be measured, not days or years, not dates or
celebrations.

It should have worked.
Together, circling each other, we found bliss in honest words
and open minds.
I pushed too hard. Her walk from apartment to elevator is
really a flee from my intensity.
I need something good in my life and she is goodness in
every form.

(Continued with no stanza break)

It should have worked. It was right.
I can't understand her, but I asked.
She needed to stay. She is safe with me.
I can see how delicate her innocence is, so different from
 my jaded heart.
I just wanted her to stay.
I just want her to stay as long as she can.



Liz Behnisch

Las Casas de Cristal

(Houses Made of Glass)

Primero Vignette

The moon rose above the arid Earth; the night gives life to fleeting moments of truth paled by the light of day. They lay in bed, the drinks of the night floating the brains in their heads. Lines become blurry and start to criss-cross while the world spins on its steady axis. Steadily, steadily, they become more and more unsteady.

We have invented happiness. He blinks¹. They lay side by side staring up at the ceiling.

“You became a part of my life too fast,” he says matter-of-factly. She turns her head and looks over at the side of his face. His profile is unconventionally handsome; he makes her nervous, though from her bumptious nature and eloquence, it’s difficult to see her anxiety.

“I only wanted to be a season in your life,” she begins, he looks over at her, and she continues, “Just a short season. You know, just throw yourself into it and enjoy it while you can. One of those strange and happy events out of a long saga.”

Nothing lasts². She shivers. The nights have turned cold; the looming winter sneaks in under the window pane and creeps softly against her bare skin.

We invented happiness. He blinks.

“You’re a cool girl.”

She shifts and tugs the blanket close up around her neck. “Then why do you make me feel so self-conscious? All this constant rejection. Rejection does that to a person, you know. You’d be self-conscious too.” She wraps her arms around herself and brings her knees in close to her chest in the space between them.

"I'm sorry," he looks over at the corner of his bed where a teddy bear sits hidden partially by his pillow, partially by the dark. "It's difficult to explain. I don't even understand what I'm thinking right now. It's all too fast. Too serious."

She stares at the ceiling, thinking of a million things to say at that moment, but says nothing. They both remain silent for a few minutes. The void of verbal expression leaves each of them to their own thoughts. They watch the ceiling fan as it pumps the chilly night air through the room. She leans over and kisses his ear.

She whispers, "I am not the mouth for these ears"³. She turned over and closed her eyes. He looked over at her as she lay there under the blanket. She looked small. He put his arms around her and pressed his face close to hers breathing in deeply. He kissed the back of her neck and squeezed her hand. She pulled his arms closer around her torso, feeling his warm skin against hers. She murmurs loud enough for them both to hear, "One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth"⁴.

We have invented happiness. They close their eyes. Sleep bonds them until the sun overpowers the moon and the sober dawn dims the light of the evening.

Notes:

1: Allusion to the prologue of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra's speech on the last man.

2: Merry Prankster motto.

3,4: Direct quotes from the prologue of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra's speech on the last man.



Emily Stanislaw

Fireball

I wait for my legs to break, to fall free.
Sometimes, dying and pain are what we plan.
I would like to drown in the dark, deep sea;
With concrete around my ankles and hands.
A tunnel of darkness, my fortune depicts:
A stone well. I float, escaping life with
Buoyant green napalm. A falling lit match.
Now waters' dreams steam away so swift.
Water and fire send my black smoke into sky
White birds fly in front of the dark eclipse,
Beacons of knowledge, beacons of light,
Like wide eyes behind copper keyholes.
Aggressive death in life, is beauty in love.

Ashes to ashes, my dust to your dust.



Takeshi Takahashi

Inspiration

I beg for something new to write:
A single thing pure and untainted,
Not written down by any poet,
And by an artist never painted.
An idea never conceived of before,
Or perspective completely newborn.
A line of previously untold words,
Or even new clarity on an idea worn.
Anything to open my mind's eye again,
For I've lost my sight of the great.
There seems to be too much of the same
In the world at large as of late.
The poets have lost their lofty way,
Chasing fame instead of the truth.
Exchanging honesty and brilliance,
For a way to appeal to the youth.
Artists appear to have shut their eyes.
Drawing blindly but attempting to see
To the other side of the world we know,
They are deluded and need to be freed.
Singers too have peddled their art
For some attention and a slice of the pie.
What once was a life of honesty,
Is now an overpublicized lie.
They have all thrown away their titles,
Proud names among the greatest of man.
Supplying the beautiful, noble truth,
Is now second fiddle to plain demand.
For we have caffeinated the dreamer,
Blinded those who saw beauty in dirt,
And have given us all equal visions,
That we may neither laugh nor be hurt.
Therefore I beg to break out of this chain,
I cry for inspiration to find,
And open my thoughts to the world beyond,
So I can once again see with my mind.



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"When it is dark enough, you can see the stars."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson