

The English Department presents
the 2013 Annual

Poets & Writers Anthology

A collection of original composition by students, staff, faculty, and community members at College of the Redwoods. We are pleased to present these original compositions for your enjoyment.

All of this would have been impossible without the hard work and dedication of the following people:

Spring 2013 Student Editors

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Spring 2013

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Mikial Weronko	An Old Man Waiting Patiently to Die

Poetry prize is generously sponsored by Northtown Books
Prose prize is generously sponsored by Booklegger Books

Honorable Mentions:

Rebecca Ashbach	Song to My Friend
Halie Sky Carton	Morning Light
Christopher Christianson	Where My Dreams Go in the Day
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Rebecca Ashbach
MIDNIGHT MOUNTAINS

Mountains, masked in molten moonbeams,
Menace in the lucid night,
Mocking, mixed in darkness, miming,
With the bells and fluted, chiming,
Melancholy beams of light.

Lightly let us pass and ponder.
Neither linger nor neglect
Lofty legends, long and lilting,
With the woods and waters wilting:
Storied songs, sad and elect.

Yielding yet again in yonder
Flowered field and forest, see
Sweet, soft silver slowly sliding
Down the trees and water, gliding
Now in sight and now in hiding...
Dance with it, and then with me.

Let us leave, for night is passing –
Time's tradition trapped in time –
Sunlight on the dark sky dancing,
Over tree tops lightly prancing
Breaks the magic night's entrancing
With its ancient pantomime.

Once again we'll walk in wonder
When the west swallows the sun:
Wading in the mellow flowers,
Passing magic, tryst like hours
In the silent, night-hushed bowers
Where the birds and fairies sung.

Yet for now, as light's long luster
Changes night to dancing day,
Let us not forget the spell
That night-masked mountains, forests tell,
For when the dusk begins to fall,
We'll once again return their way.

Rebecca Ashbach
SONNET 37

The rain is knocking on my window pane
And dancing through the multitude of leaves.
It rushes in a current to the drain
And pours in waterfalls from off the eaves.
The wind, in turn, creeps in at its own will,
And slides through crevices too small to see.
It sings its mournful ballad to the hills,
And ruffles up the tousled locks of sea.
But here I sit: warm, barefoot, curled tight
In cozy blankets, passing pleasant time
Just listening and reading by my light,
And watching trees and bushes pantomime
At times in somber dance, at times in mirth
In tempo to the music of the earth.

Daryl Ngee Chinn

ABOUT SILENCE AS A WEAPON, OTHER POSSIBILITIES

Silence is a knife but invisible,
an intangible but palpable wall,
nothing's invisible shadow.

It is definite uncertainty,
vague unproven, hunch, dread, possibly
some joy, only possibly.

It is like Heisenberg's electron,
never certain of both place and speed.
Silence is behind, out or in, or while,

silence says, maybe yes or not, still, cloudy, just—
When silence opens its mouth to speak
it quietly stabs again, again,

uses its own enigma to confuse,
to taint, and to ruin every drop of blood,
every vein, all the way to the heart.

“Someone is disappeared” means,
Someone has done something undefined
to him and left us with silence.

“Someone has disappeared” means,
She did something to herself
or perhaps not. Silence, friends with maybe.

You cannot talk with the suicide,
the dead, the disappeared ones, all
those others. Your only companion, silence.

Thought? Vacuum? What happened?
No way to know. Every and
any possibility, every angle,

virtue, question, every nothing:
Did I do something? Why?
Why not? What? And now?

Bob Davis
CHILD WELFARE

On the hospital bed, holding her newborn close,
the young woman's face clouds
as a social worker enters.
Are you gonna take him?
I swear I'm gonna quit using,
stay clean, get my kids back.

She means it,
but it's a promise hollow as a needle.
She leaves without her son,
to a flophouse room.

Three days of sleepless solitary combat,
on a stained bare mattress, a single
naked bulb hangs from the ceiling.
Wave after wave, pain, blame and shame;
wounding herself with incantations.
Never again, never again, why am I
so fucking weak, never again.

The real nightmare of her childhood
marches past, spasms rip into belly.
Hopelessness and grief ravage,
screams of the past echo,
vibrate deep in her chest.

Then – a breakthrough.

Her only reliable companion calls
louder from a baggie under the bed,
singing its familiar lullaby.

Relax baby. I'll take you into my
protective custody.

Megan Jacobson

WORDS

Words

Are the bridges between bodies
Piled atop pillars of patience and pain
Crafted from countless islands in the sea,
As bodies spoke for themselves—
In the grunt of disapproval,
In the violent gesture of rage.

Words

Are also highways into hearts
Into the icy crevices in your chest
Which burn with a boiling intensity
At the beautiful phrases that melt the hearts
That once hardened with rage
At the fluttering phrases of falsity
And the counting down to silence.

Words

Tunnel to the mind
Sneak in undetected, disguised as beggars,
Merchants of ideas, and not thieves
Of self-esteem and self-love.

Words

Tunnel through the walls,
Baring steel and fire
Hidden beneath cloaks
And beautiful illusions
Which inflamed your heart and
Bridged the space between you
While you lay awake
Adrift at sea.

Words

Form sentences
Which create paragraphs
Infinite arrangements of ideas and meaning
But sometimes
In the silence following submission
To sadness or grief
Words begin to mean
Absolutely nothing
In this vast and empty sea.

Kate Ward Lehre
IN THE BEGINNING

The woman was tired; maybe that was why it happened. She had been trying to construct a map of the universe with words alone, but now it was late and the tiny words were still stuck on the expanse of paper, signifying -- well, not much. But just as she was giving it up to go to bed, she saw something move on the shadowy desk, out of the corner of her eye...a single word, trying to free itself, but caught, fluttering. Struggling, it managed to pull loose, leaving a ragged, broken trail. It collided with another word, then staggered off again, looping drunkenly across the page. Breathlessly still, she watched it lurch. If it even suspected her hovering there, she knew it would stop instantly. She fought the urge to reach down and pick it up, to cradle it, and move it to safety.

But the word was moving more purposefully now. Its motion was becoming graceful and she was rooted -- watching, waiting. Then, suddenly, the word turned upward with its tiny body and, as one, the whole page of words followed, all pulling free to lift into the air, opening, spreading, flying -- effortlessly, without a sound. Now the words were everywhere within the space of the room -- tiny patterns within patterns, weaving more patterns in a sort of circular, ecstatic dance.

The sight was exhilarating. How was this happening? Was this the edge of a dream, a night vision, or was she stepping into some older, deeper magic? It reminded her of one night at age eight, at her friend's lake house. She had been sitting on the dock, swinging her legs, and gazing into the water (seemingly filled with stars), when suddenly it *was* filled with stars! The whole universe had tilted, and she within it. Nothing had ever been quite the same after that. Perhaps her need to share that magic had been a part of what had propelled her into writing. Then and now, she felt herself afloat in a mystery both vast and comforting.

The ceiling light snapped on. Her husband was there.

"Are you coming to bed?"

"Just a minute. I'm finishing up."

She tried to return to the moving words, but they were instantly back on the page, motionless, and tangled in her pencil marks. She stood a moment, head bowed and hands pressed as if in prayer. She was trying to experience it again, to seal it within herself. And she made a vow that tomorrow she would help the words break free once again. She smiled, and went to bed.

Diana Lynn

MOTHER FINALLY SHRUGGED

It only lasted a moment
there was nothing to be done
no plan
no answers
nothing.

Sitting on the side of her bed
swollen legs dangling
hollow bones
 under thin aqua lace and white embroidery
small sloped shoulders
rising then dropping

vast hazel eyes
rimmed in wet red
 glancing up under weary lids

her only shrug in eighty-seven years
her never-say-die attitude

over.

Vanessa Pike-Vrtiak

SOMEONE ELSE'S LANGUAGE

Maybe it was the way she drove her truck. Loud. Reckless. Containers of boxed wine moving around the plush beige seats. Reggae music jumbled blaring in and out of parking lots. Mothers clutching their children as the truck rounded corners. Coughing up black smog. Deep and dark like her very own charcoaled colored lungs. Her pit bulls smiling in the passenger seat. Their overgrown yellow nails gripping into the leather. Their pink camouflage collars glimmering in the sunlight.

They were the only souls that truly knew my mother. They watched her bathe. They heard her cameo conversations with the moon. Watched her tip her chin over countless bowls of spaghetti and bloody filet mignon that she often shared with them. And they knew that she had trouble sleeping. And that she would wake up in the middle of the night with someone else's identity wrapped around her tongue. She would attempt to speak Cherokee. Hmong. Spanish. Any language but her own. She would pray out loud. Her television on. Her bare giant legs exposed to God.

She would ask for him to make her stronger. Make her more loveable. Perhaps send her a money tree that she could cultivate in her own back yard. But most importantly, she would ask to be understood. Because even though she claimed she never cared what anyone dared to think of her, she did. She cared so deeply that it was written down her face. It was so clear that anyone could read this map. Even the most ordinary person would tell her she looked tired. That her eyes were spell bound, possessed by the drunkenness of hope. Of a new life.

One day she began to read minds. She heard the mail carrier, the hitchhiker, the butcher, her landlord, all ramble on in their shoebox-squared heads about her. They questioned her motives. Danced with the word malicious. Conjured up images of her in a floral print dress twirling blind folded with the devil. They made her into something she wasn't. A welfare whore. A crook. An obese selfish mother.

After hearing these words she took out a packet of markers and a giant white canvas. She began crafting her new relationship with life. With time. She spelled her new name gently in the middle of the page. She drew herself thin, younger, childless. She imagined that she would laugh. Consume wine without being labeled an alcoholic. She would have friends. She would have a passport. She would finally travel to the Cayman Islands. Where she would meet the man of her dreams. He would be waiting for her on some lookout rock in white linen. Of course her dogs would be with her. She would be known for her beauty. Her honesty. She would simply: be.

She sold everything. Even her photo albums. She emptied closets. Took endless trips to the dump. Paid for it all to disappear. And without more than a moment's notice, she embarked on what it meant to be homeless again. To sleep in discarded hotels. To bathe with a sliver of white soap. To cough sunlight and snow.

She never called us again. She would send long letters without a return address, about how empty we were. How we are nothing but strangers. Sometimes she would include a subscription to her latest wine club. Or a Buddhist mantra that she herself was practicing. And somehow she expected that our questions deserved no answers. She thought that because she never had a mother, we shouldn't either.

My sisters and I now mother ourselves. We mother the earth. We mother each other, our friends, our newly formed families. We sink in between the spaces of what we thought it would mean to be a mother. So we can find inclusivity. So that we will never run. So that we will never wake up in the middle of the night, speaking someone else's language.

Stephanie Procopio
BURIED

They say time heals you. With the passing of time, the pain goes away. These people obviously don't feel the pain themselves. That's a horrible description of what happens.

Closer to the truth, because the real description is beyond the written word, is the pain is buried. As time passes, new experiences and new feelings cover up the pain. It's still there, only hidden behind laughs, smiles, and good times.

But there are seeds buried, too. And when they're covered enough, they are able to grow. Eventually they surface and the pain is there again, felt in this new form. You try to pull it out like any weed in the garden, but this isn't just any weed. The roots come up too, and along with it, a bit of everything that had been buried in the first place, all right there at the surface, baring its ugly face at you.

There is no hiding behind laughs or smiles. There are no good times with that in your face. Not until you manage to bury it all again. You sit in the back of a room, slowly sipping from the cup in your hand, watching everyone else have a good time. You still lie when others talk to you, not wanting to showcase the surfaced pain with everyone else in the room.

You do this until there is a small layer covering everything that was dug up, using others' smiling faces to cover up the pain. You smile once more and move out of the corner, laughing and having fun. Time passes again, and you add more until you can't feel the pain buried inside you.

It stays there, buried for another length of time, longer each time, but you know another of the innumerable seeds will begin to sprout again and will surface no matter how far it is buried, because another of those pain-filled days brings a memory to the surface.

Djineva Reneau-Tuzzolino
MAKING, TEARING, MENDING

It is your sixteenth birthday, and you are about to give yourself a present.

You're staring at yourself in the mirror, tugging on the thick, dark brown strands of hair that go down to your back, running your fingers through them as you recall your mother, how she adored this hair, how she gushed and told you what a queen – a *Malkia* you looked like when it dried into its natural curls.

With scissors and a fistful of your hair, you are no longer the queen your mother said, but with a queen's authority and power you cut, attacking your hair with sharp scissors. There is no care in the hasty slices, only a goal. The goal to turn from a *Malika* to a *Mfalme*, and when you look in the mirror, you can only feel like a king, even when covered in and surrounded by clumps of unwanted hair, with glazed and red eyes, you feel whole and right and *good*. Like maybe, you have won.

A battle won is not a war won, and the fury of your mother is a war all in itself. She grabs at the sparse curls at your scalp, her dark fingers and bright white nails digging into where your hair meets your scalp. "*Wazazi – My parents*, did not come to America so you could do this to yourself!" she shrieked, and in that moment you know very well that you are far from being a king, for a king would scream back.

A king would scream back *I am not your daughter. I never was.*

When you try to talk to her again the next morning, she looks at you, speaking softly as she wraps an arm around your shoulders. "*Mimi na wewe pete na kidole. Mimi kamwe hatawaacha,*" she tells you. *You and I are a ring on a finger. I will never abandon you,*" and with that your mother's knees are soon pressing firmly against your back, her hands running the

buzzer over your head, the comforting and electrifying buzz of it drowning her out as she mutters your name over and over again. “Kanai,” a name that means contentment. She gave it to you in the hopes that it would cease the screams you let out as she held you in her arms on the day of your birth. “You seemed at war with the world the second you entered it,” she told you once, and laughed, most likely at how badly she failed in that effort.

The name is an antonym of you, just as is the body you inhabit, and the fact is highlighted every slide of skin over your vertebrae, every barefoot step across dusty carpet, every thought that enters your head.

But with the last swipe of the buzzer and the small, plastic sound it makes as it clicks off, you smile bigger than you have in months, and when you turn up to look back at her, you can see that she’s smiling too, a little smaller and a little tighter maybe, but a smile.

That was the first step.

A step that turned into a run-away from Kanai and from all lack of contentment. If it were as easy to do with your whole body what you did with your hair, you would not have to run for so long. But wish and try as you might, there are no scissors sharp enough to slice away every inch of you.

While blades cannot shape your young body, wind and rain and time certainly can. The Queen was eroded and sculpted away, leaving the Mfalme, The seventeen-year-old King by the name of Jabari in her place, and he is everything a king could be, were a king clad in slightly too-loose T-shirts and sneakers bought two sizes too big *because no boy has size seven feet*. But size seven or size nine feet, you are Jabari through and through, the tight compression shirt you take off at night and the slickness of your sex is one of the only indications of the Queen who once reigned this body. There are other indications as well, relics from the past in boxes (upon boxes)

stacked in a far corner of your mother's closet. You had intended to get some money for the clothes "*For college, mom,*" but she was too smart for that flimsy excuse, and shook her head. "You owe me this," she said, looking you dead in the eyes, and you knew she was right. Although she didn't understand much of the King and Queen within you or of Jabari, the lanky strange boy with brown eyes just as round and deep and heavy as hers. Really, three boxes of girls' clothes aren't worth much, but you could've bought a twenty sack with the money, from the boy down the street who wears too much cologne. Pissed off and grumbling, you stacked the boxes on top of each other, refusing to take multiple trips, refusing to spend any more time with boxes filled with what feels like a past life. A life that only really ended just now, a life that only began to fade away a year ago.

A king you wished to be and a king you were, and this king loved colorful clothing from thrift stores, and he loved alcohol and he loved girls and he loved parties and he loved sitting on a couch too fancy for such a crazy party while a girl laughed and flirted with him, and Jabari laughed, too. Maybe a little loud and maybe a little too long, but he is reigning all the same. Cocky and exhilarated, you began to walk out onto the porch, a cigarette Jabari had pulled out of someone's pack before they could protest dangling between his lips as he stumbled out, and right into the solid and unforgiving body that was Joe McColley. Boys will be boys, and this tall eighteen-year-old drunk lump of a boy tended to injure anyone who touched him that wasn't a high school girl in at least the 8/10 range and as a nineteen-year-old boy Jabari is none of these things. Joe turns to look at him and shoves you, and it's only after he's wiping away the spit on his forehead that you realize that he's at least twice your size, or maybe you realized that before but didn't think it would be something to take into account when picking a fight with him.

You should have.

He throws a fist your way, and you hold in a cry of pain, gritting your teeth and making a noise that's somewhere between a snarl and laugh before you slam into him, shoving your shoulder and elbow against his stomach because there is something to be said for the element of surprise. There is also something to be said for a badly bleeding lip, but more of that later. It was exhilarating in a way, but just as any positive effects from physical confrontation, it was short lived, and after you had finished laughing at him, you felt a hard punch and sudden, even more striking illumination. A porch light, bright white rays, stop Joe in his tracks and leaves the hate and beer-filled goliath cocking his head to the side curiously. "You're a chi--"

Jabari is a proud man, and he punched the last person who called him a girl, so why not again? So you do. It's not a hard one, but it pisses him off, and he chases you off the porch, and you're laughing and shaking and *oh god crying and bleeding* and thankful that Kanai took rock climbing classes because it makes it a whole lot easier to scramble up a fence and away from the pissed-off white boy. Fuck that. Still though, you're bleeding pretty badly, and from the way mouth and your whole entire face aches, you know it's going to be worse in the morning.

It is.

And in the midst of the swelling and the ice and the pain and the explanations, you can't help but admire the bruise as it forms around your heavy brown eyes. The fat lip and the cut across your jaw are less pretty, but you can't help but think it all looks nice against your dark brown skin. A sick sort of pretty. One that maybe you can embrace.

And you do.

You look in the mirror the next day, running your hands over the short, tight curls on your head and smoothing over nonexistent wrinkles in the yellow and peacock feather print fabric you're wearing now, and after two years of Jabari, the Queen is back. The Queen is back,

and the Queen is beautiful, wearing her yellow dress and her black heels and her purple bruises and red wounds all as one outfit. The black eye is more of a crown than a memory of pain.

You are Queen for the next day and the next, but Jabari is back within a week, all tight binders and loose T-shirts and too big sneakers, and over time it's all you. For whether it's him or her the scars over your eyebrow from when you fell as a child, which are still there, and your eyes, identical to your mother's are still there, and so is your thick brown hair, and no matter how short it is, it belongs to both sides. Soon your closet looks like one that a married couple would have, filled with dresses and jeans and boxers and stockings--and all of it is yours. Soon you all find a girl, and she loves you and she kisses well and she loves you when she undoes your tie to tie it herself before you go to work, and she loves you when two pairs of stockings lay discarded on the floor. And she is knees pressed against your back and hands on your shoulders and kisses on your neck and fingers run through your hair, and she is contentment and a voice whispering, "It's going to be okay." To Jabari, and to Kanai, and to all of you, and you can only hope it lasts forever.

Patti Stammer

TIME IN A BOTTLE

In February of 1978, the day after my 34th birthday, I stopped by my parent's home. Mom was in the kitchen, and we sat together at the table, talking about what I'd done to celebrate.

"Did you get any fun birthday presents?"

For some unknown reason, maybe because this seemed like such an odd question from my mother, I blurted out an honest answer...go figure. "As a matter of fact, I did," and pulled out a small baggie of marijuana that a pal had given me. My mother's hand flew to cover her mouth for a moment, and then she said, "I've heard they sprinkle that stuff on the salads at Chuck's Steakhouse."

After I got control of my giggling, I told her that I didn't think that was true, but the thought of it was pretty funny. Now here comes the watershed moment in years of conversations with my mother... "Want to smoke some and see what all the fuss is about, Mom?" The minute those words tumbled out of my mouth, I was caught in that old familiar place I know so well, between a hug and a scream. To my horror and delight, she said yes. It was the '70s...what can I say?

I took out the roller and papers that were part of the gift, and began to roll a joint. While I was doing this, she was closing all the curtains and locking the doors, stopping just short of turning out all the lights, even though it was the middle of the afternoon.

So, here I was, 34 years old, sitting at the kitchen table, in semi-darkness, locked in the house, asking my mother for a match to fire up a doobie. And fire it up we did; both of us, being smokers at the time, we took a couple of big hits and started to giggle. Mom got the hiccups, and

my eyes and nose started to water and run from laughing. I don't remember much of the conversation. We'd laughed so long that we needed a big box of Kleenex to wipe up what my granddaughter calls 'giggle-snot.'

At some point, the laughter turned into a crying jag. Jim Croce came on the radio singing "Time in a Bottle." We sang along with Jim, to each other, and sobbed.

*If I could save time in a bottle
the first thing that I'd like to do,
is to save every day
till Eternity passes away
just to spend them with you.*

*If I could make days last forever
if words could make wishes come true,
I'd save every day like a treasure and then,
again, I would spend them with you.*

My mother stopped crying, looked at my red, swollen eyes and apologized for being so strict when I was growing up. That was a shock, but what came next almost laid me on the floor. "I almost lost you so many times when you were young. I loved you so much. I couldn't let go." My reply, in retrospect, was less than gracious, "You were so strict because you loved me? Are you kidding me? I never would have guessed that in a million years." She held up a box of See's Candy and said, "I'm sorry. I did the best I could." Something about chocolate and tears satisfies a primal need, maybe one that only women share.

My father came home shortly after we had dried our eyes, but the empty chocolate box and a big pile of candy wrappers and Kleenex were in the middle of the table. "What the hell is going on here?" he growled after a couple of loud knocks to get the door unlocked. Our laughter

began again as he clomped off to his favorite chair in the living room. We soon heard reruns of *Combat* on TV.

In June, as I was leaving for grad school, eight hours north of my parents' home, she told me she was sick. Four months later, she was dying of cancer. Dad called and said to come home.

Lying in bed, tubes everywhere, her hair cut very short, she was so thin, almost skeletal. Because of the fluid in her lungs, attempts to speak were only muffled sounds, and frustration filled her eyes. I talked of our new house, her darling granddaughter, school, curtains, and all the little things of life. We cried, and I combed her hair.

My father, my sister, and our daughters were in the room. When everyone left, except my daughter Sonja and me, there was a soft gurgling sound that seemed to go on forever. We held her hands and waited. As the sound stopped, her eyes, clouded by pain and drugs, turned a clear, bright green. We watched what seemed like a miracle as the lines in her face softened, and there was a young woman with beautiful skin, wispy hair, and startling green eyes.

My father returned a few minutes later, but my sister had taken her young daughter home, not realizing that our mother had already left us. When my dad came back into the room, he stood still for a moment, looked down at her and said, "She looks just like she did when I married her." He slumped down in the hideously bright orange visitor chair that seemed so out of place. My daughter sat down outside the door and waited. I sat with my mother, still holding her hand.

As we called my sister and the rest of our family, I thought of the day mom, and I sat in her kitchen, crying, laughing, eating chocolates, and felt years of estrangement fading away, and the hole in my heart began to mend.

But there never seems to be enough time

to do the things you want to do

once you find them.

I've looked around enough to know

that you're the one I want to go

through time with.

Gabriel Vanaver
PRESENCE

as i sit back
far from the ruffraff
my wits graphed
on a syntax
one joke, kids laugh
one toke, bliss blast
gun smoke, wish cash
unspoken, views clash
i wrote this to pass
a tic tock tisk task
to quote the rich & broke
“impossible to tell what provokes which path”

I see all the struggle and pain in the paper today
illegal immigrants are smuggled, taken away
money guides us to comfort, the poor walk until their feet hurt
while the wealthy glide by hovering over the dirt

i feel this overpopulation rocking the tectonic plates
earth responds with hurricanes tidal waves tornados earthquakes
whatever works, don't believe in fate or lethal injection
have faith that you are chosen by natural selection
let the best win, but don't invest in this as a primary lesson
follow your dreams don't second guess your instincts go where you're destined
and if ever! you end up questioning your intentions
know that time can never break but it can always be bent by your perception

since our great inception we've gone our own direction
as legends leave impressions with a long list of confessions
we beat past the current for the many future blessings
and revel in the essence, between hell and heaven.

What's the distance between the moon and sun
the difference between zero and one, fear and fun
I walk with the hours, as I watch the minutes run
running in circles in this time space continuum
A simple symbol similar to some
I rotate my dome a different way to motivate
then it comes the given sum, the heart's rhythm, the vivid drum
beats between what's been done, and that which limits none
i sit there stunned

they say seasons change through logic and reason
that'll have you leaving freedom for what you believe in
But if, you have that gift, and persist and quit dreaming
you might get a taste.... if you succeed the preceding

Mikial Weronko

AN OLD MAN WAITING PATIENTLY TO DIE

He sat there,
An old man waiting patiently to die,
And I as a boy approached him,
Letting my youth ask for why he waited,
For why he did so, so patiently,
And for why he did not fight,
Strive to see another day.
And he, as an old man, turned his head in my direction and began:

"I am running short on tomorrows,
And life has ordained everything as fleeting.
Look at me and answer me for what do I fight for,
And strive to see another day?"

"To live," I said.

"To live or to be alive," he responded,
And he paused, before looking at me to continue.
"We were never built to last,
The games we play,
The songs we sing,
--the tools we use to build our ends.
Our ghosts increase with age,
And we dance amidst our personal Hiroshimas.
For why would I cling to something I could never fully grasp before?"

And when I did not answer him, he spoke sternly:

"Listen to me, boy, and do not think that only my age has been left to speak to you.
I have found life sweet and nature consuming.
I have learned youthfulness will fail,
And the disease of the old will set in.
Yet, I am not bitter and can still withhold a contraction from this line.
I do not wait for death,
I wait for time.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Rebecca Ashbach
SONG TO MY FRIEND

Leaves are laughing; sunbeams shimmer
While we linger by the lake.
Shadows lengthen, breezes whisper,
Dusky air grows clearer, crisper
As the night begins to break.

Hear the calm crackling of leaflets
While we wander through the trees.
See their mystic, miming dancing
Sweetly swaying, hearts entrancing,
Playing with the tangled breeze.

Mist is wafting off the fields.
Take my hand, and we will run:
Leaping, dancing, laughing, racing,
Bounding over creeks, embracing
All the wonders that are tracing
Our sweet quest to catch the sun!

Halie Sky Carton
MORNING LIGHT

The morning light precedes you,
Then the dawn will greet you,
And you'll go, This I know,
Yet I cannot stop you,
From the journey you are taking,
Though my heart is breaking,
I only smile when your eyes meet mine,
For I seem to find,
That once your mind is made up,
Nothing in this world can stop you,
Not my tears or my advice,
I watch you gently through the night,
And all I ask for when you go,
Is that you know I love you so,
And that this house will not forsake you,
If your journey, it should break you,
And tired, weary you should collapse at this door,
I will not question but accept,
And welcome you back with open arms,
Though I know when your back is turned,
And you walk through that door,
I will not see you ever more,
So the morning light precedes you,
When the dawn has greeted you,
You will go, This I know,
But no matter what, I love you so.

Christopher Christianson

WHERE MY DREAMS GO IN THE DAY

I know where my dreams go in the day. Like bristly, white birds, they float and careen through the atmosphere. I lose myself in their cool embrace and tuck my hands under my arms to keep warm.

“Harry,” he said. It’s something I never considered. I always speculated, of course—came up with theories and the like, but nothing very satisfying. Did I ever truly understand?

“I have something to tell you.” Here it comes. I’m afraid, terrified in fact. Somewhere deep down in the crevices of my brain I know what he’s about to say. My body shakes, and I let the smells of winter—pine trees and frost—invade my nostrils. Do I want to hear this? No . . . I want nothing to come out of that grave face of his. He looks as if he’s about to run a marathon.

“I’m gay.” A bomb falls over London. The air raid sirens echo through the dark alleys.

“Did you hear me, Harry? I’m gay.” Just yesterday I was pondering the meaning of life, and today I’ve found it. It’s staring me clear in the face, and I’m letting it come toward me, closer and closer. I faint, or wish as if I had.

“Harry!” My mind is frozen—a crashed computer. No matter how many keys I frantically press, pulling out my hair and rubbing my face, no good will come of it. All I’ll get is a bald spot and a few pimples. I’m broken.

“Harry.” The sound of my name confuses me. Am I really that person . . . or maybe just a manifestation? A long time ago my mom explained to me why she named me Harry, and not, say, Ralph or Jack or Mike or Chris.

“You want to know why I named you Harry?” she said. Her eyes were bright, and her wrinkled face was a Sharpei puppy. She had what’s called crows’ feet coming out of her eyes

every time she smiled. It was a foggy morning outside, and her hands were occupied with dishes. I was busy eating Cap'n Crunch.

“Sure, mom,” I said, in between bites, not really listening.

“Well, when you were born, and you were all slimy and slick,” she started to giggle, and I could tell right then and there that I didn't want to hear another word, “there was a swath of hair right where your,” she continued, laughing now, “right where your . . .” she thought this was hilarious, “right where your little pee-pee is.” She pointed to the spot and went all out this time, covering her mouth with both of her soap-covered hands. Her crows' feet surfaced.

I sunk into a deep pit of embarrassment. I was only twelve at the time and would rather have heard *anything* than my mom talk about hair anywhere near my “little pee-pee” (which, coincidentally, was just starting to sprout). “As it turns out,” she continued, calming down a bit, “it was just a bit of my pubic hair that came off during your birth and,” she thought this was *really* funny, “stuck right on your little penis.” She cracked up again, saying penis like it was the cutest thing in the whole world.

“Oh,” was all I could say. I had heard enough. I went back to my room without even finishing my bowl of cereal, confused and angry, and still able to hear my mom's hearty laughter coming from the kitchen.

“Harry, say something.” I came out of my reverie like a man waking from a coma. “Harry,” said my friend, his face contorted and close to tears. I knew that he just wanted to hear me accept him. Although, at the time, I didn't even know what he was anymore.

“Yeah, I'm all right,” I said. I gave him a smile to convince him.

“I have something else to tell you, too,” he said. I stood still and waited. His face became graver, and I could tell that it was no marathon this time . . . Nope, this time he was running for his life. “I’m attracted to you.”

Again, the sirens went off over London, and the bombs fell. People ran for their shelters, and the screams of the wounded could be heard all the way over in France. I went pale. I think I was really going to faint this time. The azure sky was turning black, and tiny dots of light played at my vision’s edges. I groped for a nearby tree and rested my wheezing body against it. Slowly, the sky turned its radiant, winter-blue again.

“Harry . . .” He wanted me to say something, something comforting, I suppose, but I couldn’t think of a single thing. I stared into his eyes, searching for a prompt perhaps. They were clear and blue like the sky, offering me nothing. A single, red vein coursed through the cornea of his right eye like a river of blood in a desert full of milk.

I opened my mouth to finally say something, but all I could muster was a mousy squeak. I could tell he was upset about this: his eyes had started to glisten. We continued to stare at each other in painful silence for a few more seconds. I found myself suddenly wishing I had never known him.

With a small cry and a fast walk, my friend turned around and left. He abandoned me there, and I watched his back with his favorite green shirt on get farther and farther away. As he rounded a corner, I knew that he was gone forever. Did I try to stop him? Did I console him? Was I the friend that I thought I was?

No.

I just looked at him like one would look at an ugly painting. I didn’t understand him. I had forgotten all about the good times when we laughed together and went swimming. I had

forgotten the time when he had told me all his most private secrets, and I had told him mine. I had forgotten that he lent me his bed when I lost my virginity with his ex-girlfriend, Karen. I had forgotten that he was my friend, and now . . . well, he's gone . . .

What was his name?

I saw him a year later at Safeway looking at Snackwell's chocolate pudding. I was busy with my own shopping and stumbled upon him like one falls off a cliff.

"Hi," I said. My voice fell flat on the ground.

"Oh . . . hi," he said. He was as startled and reluctant to see me as I was to see him. His face was flushed, and he kept glancing away.

"Long time no see," I said.

"Yeah." A small, uncomfortable smile played at the edge of his mouth. Our hearts were beating fast, and our brains were spinning like hamsters in a wheel.

"How are you?" I asked.

"Fine," he answered.

My head was hot. I fidgeted with my hair and let him groom his nails. Looking into his face after not having seen him in a year was a painful stab-wound to the gut. We were the best of friends at one time, but we were also very stubborn. I bet he still remembers the comment I made about his mother's weight.

Then I said, "Well, I ought to go," and I did. Our good-bye was a forced echo of what once was.

Whatever became of him?

Sometimes, while I'm lying around on the couch by myself, listening to the waves crash outside and letting the cool breeze sift through the open window, I think about him. I wonder

what he's doing now and how he could possibly get around without me. I wonder who joins in with his corny jokes. I wonder how he can laugh and cry without my shoulder. I wonder who's there to tell him he's special. *How could he possibly find another person like me?* I know I'll never be able to find someone else like him . . .

Yes, I know where my dreams go in the day. My dreams are with him.

Amy Fontaine

OF A HAWK AND A LIGHTHOUSE

The lighthouse stood barren on the craggy cliffs. The morning mist rolled in, like fingers of smoke from some primordial fire across the sea, and crept up the rocks to where the lighthouse stood empty and alone. This gray fabric covered the sky, enveloping the cheeky pale sunrise like a jealous lover. Swallowing it, eating it away until the lighthouse stood in a premature darkness reflective of her mood.

The once-joyful red and white stripes of paint on the lighthouse had been peeled away by winds and waves and time and sadness. The wooden door was chipped and scarred, the windows of the lantern room stained with gull droppings. Her back turned to land, the lighthouse stood looking out to sea, as if waiting for a lover who had died long ago. Knowing he would never return.

Night fell, and the gasping stars struggled to breathe despite the mist that choked their sky. But the lighthouse never cast her glow upon the dark and restless waters. Unlike the stars, she had lost all hope. She knew no one was coming.

*

The red-tailed hawk had soared above the world all his life. He had seen things, many things. He saw so much more than people see. From a half-mile above the ground, he saw a mouse giving birth in the long grass. He saw the fleas on the hairs on the back of a squirrel as it ran down a tree trunk on a mountain far below. He saw people of all kinds clamoring and fighting and loving in their cities – he recognized their millions of individual faces. But in all his travels, the red-tailed hawk had never found a home.

He wasn't sure what kept him from settling down – courting a mate, building a nest, raising some chicks, and folding up his wings. But something propelled him ever onward – his heart was restless as his wild, mewling scream as he plunged along air currents toward who-knows-where.

Eventually, he found the lighthouse on the craggy cliffs overlooking a beach. The fog had not yet swallowed the sunset, and a yellow-orange brilliance lay watery over everything. In that brilliance the hawk saw the lighthouse.

In that moment, he knew.

He flew through the open, scarred door, over the aged wooden staircase, and up to the lantern room with its stained windows. He perched there and watched as the sun went down and the night's mist enfolded the world. From the base of the platform from whence light once came, the hawk looked out to sea. And in the darkness of that despondent lighthouse, in the blue-gray-black ocean world he saw outside, in this cavern of emptiness the hawk glimpsed eternity.

Inside her, everything would be all right.

Delighted with her feathery company, so pleased that someone lived inside her again, ecstatic that she was loved even in her tired age, the lighthouse cast a beam of light onto the water.

*

The hawk and the lighthouse lived happily for many days. There were enough crumbs left in the lighthouse pantry and enough vegetation growing in her cracks and crevices to sustain a steady supply of mice and rats, on which the hawk eagerly fed. But he flew up to the lantern

room for every sunrise and sunset, and he and the lighthouse watched the world grow old together.

The world was no longer full of darkness for the lighthouse – she sparkled like a new bride, sending her light out over the ocean each night. She believed in herself again – thought that maybe someday she would lead someone home. And the hawk, for his part, never left her, felt no need to wander. At least, he didn't at first.

But one sunset as the hawk sat on the platform he heard a shrieking cry. Over the ocean flapped another hawk, the feathers of her tail glowing red against the yellow sky. She stared through a window at the hawk. He stared back.

In that moment, he knew.

The male flew out of the lighthouse. The lighthouse watched as he and the female cavorted over the sparkling, orange-and-yellow sea, twirling around each other, and then flew back toward land together.

Night fell. Rain came. No one entered the lighthouse. The lighthouse stood on her craggy cliffs: shivering, waiting. She sent her light into the darkness and prayed.

*

When the next day came, the red-tailed hawks flew through the open, scarred door, over the aged wooden staircase, and up to the lantern room, carrying talonfuls of twigs and bark. In the depression below the dusty lighthouse lamp, they placed the twigs carefully, forming a circular shape which they lined with the bark. And they stayed there together and watched each sunrise and sunset out the stained lighthouse windows.

The lighthouse was old, and she knew the wandering ways of living things. When the round white objects deposited in the twig-ball by the female hatched into baby hawks, the

lighthouse knew the babies would grow up. She knew that eventually, the hawks would grow restless and fly away from her, as every life had before. But in the meantime, she had a family to share every sunrise and sunset, to keep her company through the stormy, misty nights. And in this moment, that was what mattered. Not the future, not the emptiness, but now.

And the lighthouse was happy.

Amy Fontaine
APIS FLOREA

I.

Honey bees
Circle
Like babies starting to walk

Circle
To orient themselves
To find their way

Honey bees know where the sun is
Even when it's covered by cloud

I wish I knew too

II.

Honey bees see beauty
Honey bees create sweetness

But they also
Can hurt

I remember
As a young child
Saving a bee from a hotel pool
Feeling the stinger
Sink into my palm
As I cried,
"I'm trying to help you!"

Both of us
Died that day

III.

Honey bees know
The world
Piece it together
From landmarks, fragments
Perfect as stained glass

I think that's true
For all of us.
Even if we don't realize it,
We know.
We have a crafted purpose.
Sure as flowers
Are sculptured
For their pollen to be received,
We were also born
To receive
To give
To fly
To dance

The honey bees
Circle.

They have found me.

Ron Halvorsen
A RIVER'S STORY

The wild river runs through Paradise Lost,
In the great blue-green valley,
Now forlorn, like the young maiden's defeated eyes,
Fear etched on the faces of the sacred mountain's vanquished spirits,
Watching in horror,
As she was cast down upon the rock of death
By the greedy white settlers who wanted the red man's land.

Her blood whisked away by the mighty Klamath,
Nameless sea monsters crushing her skull,
Riding for eternity on the white foam waves,
Longing for a place to rest her tortured soul.

Earth, Water and Sky call to Ishi,
Standing in reverence,
Calling out to his tribe,
Praying that the Earth Mother will grant him strength.

Where art thou, oh wise Spirit Council?
Are you hiding in the misty wind?
Ephemeral in the clouds that paint the tips of the Marble Mountains?

The wisdom of the elders cannot be seen,
For it dances upon the backs of the last wild salmon,
Spawning in vain upon the cradle of the despoiled Klamath,
Overrun with sediments, dams, and ignorance.

Yet there remains still a bend in the river,
A frozen nano second,
Defying the treachery of manifest destiny.

Here the water still runs deep and cold,
The chainsaws are silent,
The salmon find solace,
a bend in the river unclaimed by the Great White Father.

The ancient upriver tree
Longs for more branches,
Robbed of its essence,
Slowly suffocating at this bend in the river.
Where art thou, wise Council?
Can you heal these wounds?

The Creator looks down upon Ishi—"the last wild Indian,"
Ishi looks up, pleadingly,
Can the river spirits stop the bombardment?
The helicopters attack with a hellish crescendo,
Yet Ishi stands his ground,
A peaceful icon in a world gone mad.

The Karuk earth temple provides shelter for the survivors,
Rising upward in perfect symmetry,
A home for the sons and daughters,
Who will someday return to this bend in the river.

Do these spirits of the mountains have names?
Hiawatha? Peltier? Chief Joseph? Crazy Horse?
How many hearts are buried at this bend in the river?

The late afternoon sun caresses the river,
Softening the colors,
Casting a cool shadow upon the thirsty land.

Two redwood canoes await him,
At this bend in the river.
One for Ishi,
One for his rescued maiden.

Through the trees,
Over the mountains,
Bathed in the crystalline waters of the mighty Klamath,
two lovers at last ascend to the Creator.

Diana Lynn
CRAZY OLD WOMEN

Have you no shame
dancing alone together
swaying
on this high desert sand
weaving sundown shadows
into long braids
filled with flowers of orange light.

Stop.
Talk to us.

Tell us why
your thin flesh moves
sensuously
on worn out bones,
why your
wrinkled lips
still smile
laughing out loud,
why your twirling arms
cast off
even memories
to the open sky.

Tell us why your silent feet
whirl white dust
and why your hands stretch out
as if to hold

everything.

Please,
your closed eyes
tell us what they see.

Please,
your silent song
sing it to us.

We want to know

what you hear on the wind.

But you only move faster
faster
shoulders dip
hips
heads
hearts
pulse in time
to an endless drum
again
again
again,

and then you slow
stop
and
speak...

“We have no shame
for we have loved,

and now
when we look,
we see,

when we listen,
we hear,

and when
we dance to
the rhythm
of the world,

we all shout,

Yes!”

Lauri Rose
SURENNDER, NOT!

She picked up the book, put it on the table, and finally walked through the door. The hallway was painted a bland non-offensive apricot, and the pictures on the wall were determinedly cheerful. She took a deep breath and started turning right toward the dining room, remembering Clara's words from last night, "Mom, you have to socialize, I can't be your only friend. Go play bingo, it'll be fun."

Coming toward her up the hallway was an attendant pushing another resident who rode, head hanging forward, in a hot pink wheelchair. The attendant's smile was genuine, "Mrs. Wright, so nice to see you out and about. Going to join us for bingo today?"

The woman in the wheelchair also smiled. Disabled from a stroke, half of her face drooped downward, making the smile into a twisted Quasimodo sort of thing. A thin line of saliva dripped from the soft corner of her sagging mouth as she struggled to say the words, "Good day to start. Double points today."

Jean smiled back. They were nice people. She hoped they would not see her smile for what it was, a weak attempt to disguise dismay tinged with fear, "I...I forgot something," she said, and turning back, she fled into the relative safety of her own small non-offensive apricot apartment.

Her back to the door, she reminded herself it had been her own idea to move to *Oak Village Active Retirement and Assisted Living Estates*. Of course the children had been supportive and, she suspected, quietly ecstatic that they hadn't had to force the issue. It was losing the driver's license that had made it clear to Jean she could not live alone anymore, not

without serious imposition on her friends and family. And that she couldn't do. That would have hurt worse than the diagnosis.

Still, why Clara would think she would *ever* want to play bingo was beyond her. She was a solitary intellectual creature; she had always been a solitary creature; even in elementary school she had been considered a stuck-up little prig. Crossing the small room, Jean sat by the window which faced the outside world. Looking down at the grocery store parking lot, she imagined where all those young mothers and busy single men would be in another 50 years. Clara, when she called tonight, would be disappointed at her faint-heartedness but Clara could be damned. Jean would not surrender herself without a fight.

Issa Stemler
THE ORCHARD

The almond orchard had long been dead by the time I was born. A handful of scattered trees survived in isolation throughout the five acres, and many of them were marked with the mustard yellow bark of sickness. Dry grass the color of Barbie hair covered the property from street to street, hiding the carcasses of a dozen or less dead trees. Also poking out of the glistening bristle were tumbleweeds, some as big as the tool shed, several piles of rusting junk, and our house, barn red with gravy brown trim. A sandy driveway looped in front of the house around a small grove of pine trees that kept the house from street view. Nowhere in the yard could be stood on bare feet because of the sharp weeds and sand that was always too hot. When I was in second grade, my father started selling dirt by the truck full and parked a large bucket tractor in front of a patch of land that wouldn't grow grass for years. Jagged craters were bitten out of the small hill that rose and fell softly across the yard. The bites had been made too close to a few of the remaining trees, and their roots protruded out of skinny columns of dirt rising from the new depressions. They looked like tiny islands in a drained sea bowl, the roots desperately grasping for water and finding the air instead.

A large mound of displaced sand became the highest point of elevation in the yard. All around it was soft sand without any dead grass or weeds, and every time the tractor scooped, new, moist sand was patted onto the mound. It was as big as a bedroom and quickly became our favorite place to play.

On the third day of the World Series, my little brother sat on top of the mound. His plastic army men were planted in a semi circle around the lumpy peak. I reclined in the shade of the slope with my hands behind my head, just happy to feel the cooler sand against my back and

sit at a forty-five degree angle. My affinity for such succor upset my father, who tried to contest it by giving me chores that would qualify a grown man as a beast of burden; I might be forced to spend all hours of a waking day digging long trenches for irrigation systems that would never be installed or chopping weeds aimlessly across the plain. I knew the pointless work had no purpose other than to punish me but tried not to complain. It was idleness of mind that I craved, and the work didn't interfere.

That afternoon I had been in the slanted position long enough that my eyelids were half drawn. The glossy view of the yard from where I sat was always hazed with childish detachment. Sunlight scalded everything except for my small patch of shade. Armrests had formed under the weight of my elbows, and my head had broken in to its own little mold.

The mound shuffled a step forward, and I felt myself falling backwards from the waist up. The sand underneath me gave way so quickly that I was flat on my back before I could change the direction of my gaze. Directly in front of me the sky lay vast and uncluttered. It was as though I had been leaning on a balloon that had popped.

I sat up in alarm and confusion. My stomach felt the way it did whenever a car took a hill too fast but stronger, like the moment of sudden mortification, except I didn't feel humiliated. In front of me, one of the lonely island trees stuck out from the side of its hump. It was parallel to the ground like a lowered cannon, its roots poking out on the other side.

I turned around and saw that the mound was gone. So was the hole in front of it. In its absence was a perfect circle patch of sand. It looked like a big, sandy mosquito bite on the yard. I stood up and turned around a few times to see that everything else was the same except for the missing mound and the bent over tree. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the small green leg of a plastic army man poking out of the dirt, and my stomach dropped again.

“Charley!” I screamed. My chest ached from the wind that I was throwing out of it. “CHARRRLEEEY!” again and again, my cheeks feeling strained for the two long vowels. Dropping to my knees, I started plunging my arms into the sand as deep as I could. I brought them back up violently and tried to shovel with my cupped hands. I was trying to dig the way cartoon animals did but couldn't keep up with the sand flowing back into place. I felt trapped inside an hourglass that had been widened in the middle so that the sand could escape more quickly.

Mud formed on the stream of tears rushing from my eyes as I screamed for help and tried to burrow. As much as I wanted to wipe the sand out of my eyes, I couldn't stop digging. I had changed direction and caught a glimpse of the bucket tractor and imagined my father using it to get Charlie out. It would only take one scoop, but it would be too late.

I don't know how much time had elapsed before I gave up digging. The holes I had made were disorganized and unimpressive, if not a catastrophic waste of time. The mound had been over twice my height. My limbs were searing with pain from the disjointed, strenuous movements, but the real pain was knowing that I just couldn't dig very well and that people can only go without air for a couple minutes before they die. I wondered if my brother could breathe. In a flash of acute misery, I started a sprint for the shed. I continued to scream, but there were no words.

As I made my way to the shed, my grandmother stepped out of the house and came toward me with a hand over her squinted eyes.

“Why are you so noisy?” she asked. She saw that I had been crying. “And so dirty?”

“Charleysunderthesandpileseeitsgoneitsflat!!” I yelled, pointing at the leveled mound. She tried to speak to me again but struggled with a laughter that made her shake. “Charley oh

keh...Charley eenside.” It came out in fragments that I could barely understand through her thick Filipino accent and affectionate cackles. She pointed with a finger toward the house. She couldn't offer an outstretched arm for the gesture because it was being used to clench her stomach. Once I stepped away, she was able to laugh uncontrollably. “Soosmareeosep,” she said, a Filipino expletive short for “Jesus Mary Joseph.”

I ran inside and saw that Charlie was sitting on the couch staring at the television. He didn't even look at me when I came in. I walked back outside, sat against the back of the house, and sobbed until I felt as parched as the dead orchard. Eventually I ran out of tears, rinsed my face off with one of the hoses in the yard, and went back inside. My grandmother had spread butter on enough saltines to cover the plate on the table twice. Panic had caused my stomach to roll around on crushed hot coals. It burned and hurt and would hurt all week, setting a pattern I would have for the rest of my life. I ate the whole plate of crackers and fell asleep in my room.

When I woke up, my parents were home, and the whole family was watching television. “I heard that you kids got scared by the earthquake! Charley ran inside for his grandma and Maleesa just hollered and hollered,” said my Father, who'd been given the humorous account.

On the television the news showed the bridge to San Francisco. The top level had broken, and cars were trying to escape. An emergency worker had made a mistake and told the drivers to go the wrong way, right to the fallen deck. Someone had died as his car plunged into the gap and smashed into the roadbed below. I imagined a dashboard's view of the ground disappearing. In the city, lots of people had died under a crushed freeway, and many were trying to dig out whoever might still be alive. They wore hard hats and used big machines. Some people were just digging with whatever tools they could bring.

No one asked, but I knew.

Mikail Weronko
SAINT'S LIQUORS

We prayed to the saint of loose change devoutly. Praying for a good harvest of fallen quarters and forgotten dimes, hoping those tattered cushions could deliver us from the Friday night and save our souls from the work week. The trick was the tip jars you were supposed to have already called upon. The ones on store counters and relatives' shelves. It was through those you were supposed to show up, hands in pockets lined with enough change until you clutched a rosemary of copper Lincoln heads. Only then would we call upon the saint of loose change after collecting the offering as we sat in Jimmy's veteran Plymouth, shepherd by his cigarette smoke and sermoned by his words.

Then pensively, he would count the collection, adding weight and body to what he came to see as his purpose on these late night drives. Building his act in a casting of what might as well been one big show for him. A pilgrimed drive. An offering. And a story of atonement. Atonement of the long pause variety, drawing out breath and soul, teaching us that term patience we never fully bothered to grasp. He knew how to relish his minute and made us feel every second of it we wasted. It was the power he felt. He had been ordained by the saint of loose change years ago and blessed with his uncle's old car soon after. He wanted us to squirm. Waiting. Stalling. Giving enough time for someone to confess. For one of us to break the silence and crack, "Forgive me Jimmy, for I have failed to bring enough change." But there was always silence, and only a sigh after that, once Jimmy realized there would be no confession again tonight.

Stepping out of the car provided each of us with a release of energy. A small flow of endorphins leaving each of us, and sense of hope coming to us as walked toward the entrance.

Marcus and I approached the doors mesmerized by the glow, only stopping once noticing Jimmy's stillness. Facing away from us, he stood locked in contemplation of the Plymouth. Admiring its repulsive beauty. The neon glow of the store objectifying its design. His ownership only seemed to entice him more, allowing for a transposition of his worldly desires onto his worldly belongings. It was a rock, he would say. His Plymouth was a rock, yet he would make it sail down empty roads.

Marcus placed his back toward me to light a cigarette, admiring the "Saint's Liquors" road sign while facing the darkness extending past the empty lot. I turned toward the light radiating from inside and gazing in, I watched the girl at the register, locked in dialogue with a plastic phone that must have been issued to the store decades before she was born. Her face young and contorted against an assailant both real and imaginary. Animated. Her voice crescendoing just barely to be heard outside saying, "But I loved her." Then softening, until we moved again and approached the automatic doors, "I loved her."

Jimmy made the occasional glance back at the Plymouth to proclaim what a night tonight would be. He conjured reminders of past Fridays and filled the air with gestures toward the vehicle. His every jab hung on our thoughts, tinting them with nostalgia and making us forget how the story always went, blinding us from what the Plymouth truly became in our mind's reflection. A neon cathedral at night after a drink or two on a deserted stretch of highway and the slums in the morning when the dark tinted windows were no longer shown as stained glass displays for Saint's Liquors.

Still, on each of our minds a communal shot of vodka remained etched in forethought. The burning sensation only increasing as we passed through the parted automatic doors. Displays greeted us, reminding us of the fortunes we could have and the snacks we could behold.

Passing the display of children's cereal filled with its charismatic anthropomorphism always made laugh. It was as if viewing the inside of some cosmic joke too complicated to understand, yet always amusing.

Jimmy glided to the back of the store, amidst the alcohol displays, while Marcus thumbed through the magazines. I watched the girl at the counter in attempt to compose herself after slamming the phone down minutes before. The store quieted with awareness, leaving only the sound of Jimmy rustling bottles around as he ran dozens of vodka-infused scenarios around his mind. For the first time since entering, the girl looked at us. I felt her gaze dart back and forth between the three of us, before being interrupted by the ring of the store phone.

She flinched and hesitated. A distanced gaze with a look meant to distance her mind crossed her face. Her breath shallow once the air cleared of the first ring, hoping the silence would prevail.

Oblivious, Jimmy continued his bottle shuffle.

A look of pain crossed her face with the second ring, and defenselessness with the third and proceeding, as if each were a blow to her person.

Jimmy's shuffling slowed once the silence maintained and finally ended with a triumphant Jimmy lifting a bottle into the air. As if in cheer, the phone began to call out again. At the register, her face contorted with defiance.

Each of us turned to approach the register, watching her lift the receiver and letting it dangle and swing on its cord, dragging across the display where it was attached. Jimmy fumbled for the change in his pockets at the counter as we listened to the bellowing we heard escape with each pass of the receiver.

"No daughter of mine."

She wore a plastic name tag with "Lucy" engraved in the center. The phone continued to slide against the display.

"How could you do this to your mother and me?"

Tonight she was someone's fallen angel.

Jimmy left the change on the counter and with bottle in hand, walked toward the door.

She was breaking someone's religion.

We crossed the threshold of the door, looking back at the girl who stood at the register. I watched as she mouthed, "Because I loved her," in response to the air that collected the booming voice on the phone.

Outside, Jimmy resumed waving his arms through the air, emphasizing the word "tonight" with each past. Allusions to lost souls of the daily grind and the sin of compliance filled the air. The future was our god. Jimmy must have become a prophet on one of these runs. Then, without ceremony, his grasp on the bottle was lost. The world fluxed with its cascade toward the ground.

When the bottle shattered, our religion broke.