

VOYAGER

THE VOYAGER

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STONE LETTERS

I dwell on what the stone would have said,
set down on hollowed dirt and mud.
There were no accomplishments to
boast, no titles worth the carve.
The rain would be drawn to my plot,
foxes would rest above my head while
the birds indulge every morsel to crawl
from the earth. The grass would be well-kept,
the stones replaced yearly and sweeps of late
August breeze would blow out the last vigils. The
dust would lay thin on the lapel, faded by
enclosure. The tablet would have been cleaned
daily and forgotten nightly. Any scars would
have been smoothed over, a last image of
perfection. I wonder what flowers would
be planted, but those carved letters in my stone
would not be me.

Joe Weil



Jessica Parker

ALVIN CERNA— ALWAYS TOGETHER, WINTER, 2004

When I was a child, our doctor was a man named Calvin Burris. He was young—he'd only been a real doctor for four or five years by the time I was born, and by then he'd already been doctor to my brother Leonard and sister Judy.

Maybe it was his youth that made him that way, but our mother learned early on that Calvin Burris was a good man in a bad time. With two kids already in tow and a husband working as a lawyer when folks around us were too poor to even think about hiring a lawyer, I guess he knew they would struggle.

So right when they realized she was pregnant for the third time, he sat her and my dad down in his office and said, 'Listen. I'll make a deal with you. I've delivered nine sets of twins before, all healthy. So if you take good care of yourself, and you let me deliver my tenth pair of twins, I'll cover the charges myself.'

At this point, it was so early in the pregnancy that there was no way to know. But he did, somehow.

Granted, I doubt he'd expected us to come two months early. In 1948, that was a big problem. He probably didn't anticipate bills for three months of intensive-care for a couple newborns.

He paid it, though. And he got his tenth pair of healthy (well, almost healthy) twins.

We came into this world together, of course. Arthur came first, screaming out his half-baked lungs as Calvin Burris shouted, 'It's a boy!' and handed him over to the anxious nurse.

I came a minute or two later. I came quiet, though. Burris thought I was dead for the first minute or two before I heard Arthur screaming and started screaming myself. And sometimes I think that if I hadn't heard my brother, I wouldn't have started crying at all. And that maybe if we hadn't been together, I just wouldn't have been. At all.

We were released from the hospital for the first time three months later, and Burris said we

were strong as little bulls.

Look forward to 1953. We always wore these raggedy, hand-patched clothes that'd been handed down from Leonard even though we had expensive stuff from Sears. Dad said that we couldn't wear our good clothing because it was for church. But it was really because robberies were all over the place, and he didn't want anyone to think we were wealthy. Which we sometimes were, by then.

By this time, Arthur and I were five years old and exceptionally gifted explorers.

We would circle around the house, shooting our toy pistols at enemies who didn't exist. We climbed and fell from the trees in our back yard. Once, we piled up all of the untouched books in the attic up into makeshift stairs, all to get our father's old painted model airplane he'd made as a child.

We learned that it didn't fly, and earned a serious ass-whooping. Which, looking back, wasn't serious at all.

One day - since we were nothing less than brilliant - we took up the task of exploring our

parents' bedroom. There, we found ancient jewelry boxes with earrings and bracelets that had gone untouched for centuries. There were ties in Dad's closet that were as long as we were tall, and we walked about in his shoes that were ten times the size of our feet. We stared clueless at a bra and decided that it would make a good sock-slingshot. Which it did.

It didn't take us long to find a big clear glass bottle sitting on the dresser, with white capsule-pills filling it to the brim.

We knew it wasn't candy or something to play with. Dad took them for his stomach aches—he had a bad ulcer back then. But for whatever reason, it seemed a brilliant idea to get the bottle and look at it.

Unfortunately, in my efforts to grab hold of it, I knocked it over, and it shattered, white capsules scattering about the floor like blood at a crime scene. Arthur and I stood still, as though if we didn't move or make a sound we could pretend that it had never happened.

At first, it was nice when our mother hadn't been angry. But then it was bad, because she

refused to believe that we hadn't swallowed any. And soon Arthur and I were sitting on the counter in the kitchen, our brother Leonard scolding us as though he were an adult when he wasn't even eight yet.

Next thing we knew, Mom was crying and panicking on the phone with Doctor Calvin Burris, saying something about her two little boys Alvin and Arthur swallowing their father's ulcer medication.

Well, it wasn't our fault that she didn't believe us!

Then suddenly she gave us these big glasses of soda, except it was green, much brighter green than you'd expect a Sprite to be. But we drank it anyway, and it had this bitter, salty taste to it even with how sweet it was. And for a few minutes our mother sat there with us with the phone still in her hand, and she suddenly started crying and shouting something into the phone again.

I didn't have any idea what was going on, and I didn't understand. I just remember hearing as Calvin Burris suddenly started to laugh, and said something, and our mother slowly started calm-

ing down. And that day our father came home with a new bottle of pills and a box of chocolate NIPS candy, because that was our favorite, handed it to us, and didn't say a word.

We missed out an entire school year when we were nine, and had to repeat the fourth grade. It was great.

For Christmas in 1958, our older brother Leonard got a new sled from Santa Claus. It was this beautifully-crafted blue sled that seemed to tear down the hill in our icy front yard like a knife. We were allowed to sled as much as we wanted, as long as Dad or Leonard were home to make sure we were alright. Mom would have watched us, but she was inside taking care of our little sister Laurie, who was slow. We didn't know it then, since she was only a baby, but she was.

Once our Christmas vacation from school ended, we would come home for lunch every day from about ten-thirty until noon, and then walk back. But, since we had time between the walk there and the walk back, me, Arthur and our other brother Oliver would

sneak Leonard's sled outside, and one of us would watch for cars while the others would take turns riding the sled down.

There came a moment that I stood there and was supposed to be waiting my turn as Arthur rode and Oliver watched, but then something unusual happened—the boy from next door came outside and started talking to Oliver.

Now, we weren't allowed to play with that kid or any of the kids in that house, but Oliver talked to him anyway. So neither of us realized that a truck was coming, and I had jumped onto the back of the sled just in time to see it just before it ran us down.

We couldn't go back to school that year because of how bad we were hurt. Arthur broke his leg in four different places, and the wheel got caught on his foot and kept on turning, so he'd never be able to walk or run right again. I ended up slamming my head against the front license plate and cracked my skull open. There's a metal plate in there, now.

I don't remember much about when we were recovering. I remember that our room in the

hospital was always either too hot or too cold, and that we couldn't find our way around without getting lost. I remember how Doctor Calvin Burris, in the evenings before he would leave us, gave us both a handful of the chocolate NIPS candy, because he knew we didn't like the hospital food. And I remember him telling us that if I hadn't jumped on and jolted the sled forward, Arthur probably wouldn't have lived. I like to take credit on that.

2001. Arthur was the first to arrive at the hospital when I had my heart attack. He brought his chess set and a deck of cards and he ate a box of those candies and we sat together as though everything is normal, until my kids arrived to flog me with questions.

Then, he left me to their mercy, and went home to his wife and two children, who were seven and seventeen, then.

We're not together anymore.

I'm with him, but he's not with me. He's gone up to his eternal rest—gone there with no warning

at all. Just woke up a couple days ago, walked the dog, took out the garbage and died. The heart attack that was supposed to have taken me three years ago came back, and took him instead.

We've used this funeral home for as long as I can remember, even when I was a child. Fifty years ago the room seemed so much bigger, but now it's packed and congested with people politely pushing and prodding at each other to get a chance to see Arthur.

Most people don't look like they're asleep when they're dead, no matter how hard the morticians try to make them look better. But Arthur is different. There's a look of peace that I've never seen before. The permanent smirk that had always been etched on his face is still there. They said he didn't feel anything, that he was dead before he even knew it, and the smirk makes me believe them a little more. Not completely, but it helps.

His twenty-year-old son is standing toward the back of the room, with my four children, now all adults themselves. He lets them coddle him and comfort him, and I think that's a good way for him to

cope—there's nothing wrong with it, anyway.

His ten-year-old daughter is different. She stands next to me, staring into the casket with eyes that are like mine, and like her father's.

There are tears flooding over in her eyes, but she does not let them fall. Her lower lip trembles but she won't make a sound. I can see her shaking where she stands, but she refuses to slouch over, and she stands there stiffly, struggling, staring at her father in the box.

I look away from her after a moment, my eyes turning to my brother.

I've been to a million funerals in my life. I've buried my mother, my father, more than one of my other siblings, and my wife. I don't understand why this is so much more difficult...

"Uncle Alvin?"

The sound of my name throws me off, and I look down at my niece. She looks so young and small to me, now.

"...Yes?"

The sound of my own voice is strained. I feel my throat tightening with tears. My mouth feels dry.

She looks at me, her eyes glazed over with fluid that's not allowed to fall. And after a moment, she moves, and I see her hand coming toward me. "Can I hold your hand?"

Somehow, the question seems to throw me off even more, and I suddenly feel like a javelin's flown through my chest and torn through everything, and for a second I think that I'm having my own heart attack. But then I realize I was merely forgetting to breathe, and I take a sharp gasp inward.

I look at her with eyes that mirror her own, and then look at Arthur in his casket. But despite myself I shake my head a little, and I think fast. "Well... I can't," I tell her.

I look away from her. But I can't look at Arthur either, so I look at the small bunch of fake flowers Arthur's ex-wife bought for the occasion, as though the white fabric roses in the false-glass mold is so fascinating.

"I've got my two girls," I continue, even though my daughters are nowhere near me. "What if they both want to hold my hand? I've only got two hands, after all."

She looks up at me and gives me this kind of owlish expression, and reminds me of a deer in headlights. But then she doesn't say anything, and she nods and stuffs her hands into the pockets of her black dress pants. She's always hated dresses.

We're quiet after that. Minutes pass in the painfully slow kind of way, but I don't mind that. I want to memorize my brother's face, as though it were terribly different from my own, as though I didn't have a single photograph.

Suddenly I feel this pang of guilt rush through me and I look at her, and I smile and I start telling her, "You know... one time, when we were really little kids, younger than you, your dad and I went into our dad's room, and your dad broke open this big bottle of pills." I paused and thought about it, chuckling, though I don't find it all that funny even though I want to.

"...Anyway, our mother found us, and though we were gonna die if she didn't do something, cause she thought we took them. So she called our doctor, and he tells her to give us glasses of soda with soap in them, that way we'd

hack up whatever pills we'd taken..."

She's heard the story more than once before, usually by me. But still, the quiet around us is painful, even more painful than talking, so I go on, "But... we hadn't taken them. So it didn't do anything. And Doctor Burriss thought it was the funniest thing... He said he wasn't surprised—we were strong as bulls, but dumb as sheep..." The way I say it reflected how it was told to me, not in an unkind tone.

My niece doesn't say anything. Her brother comes and stands by her for a few moments, says something to her in a hushed tone. And I hear her tell him to go away because she doesn't want to sit down now. It doesn't surprise me.

When we're alone (as alone as we can be, at least) with Arthur, I glance around and then look at her, and then I take a handful of those NIPS candies out of my pocket, and put them in his suit pocket instead. "They're his favorite," I tell her, before handing her a piece.

She looks up at me suddenly and throws me off again, and

she looks at the piece of candy as though she's scared of it, and looks at me again.

"Go ahead," I tell her, before glancing at the body and shrugging a little. "I don't think he'll mind."

She nods, and pops the candy into her mouth without a word. Suddenly the shaking of her shoulders and the trembling of her lip intensify, as though the sugar sent a message to her brain in an instant. "Uncle Alvin...?"

I don't answer her. But I take hold of her hand in my own, and it shakes violently. I see the tears fight their way from her eyes, and I feel mine emptying as well. "It's going to be okay," I tell her, "It's going to be okay."

But I remember losing my father. It isn't going to be okay.

For now it is, though. And my niece and I stand there together in front of Arthur and cry, and nobody bothers us.

Delia Shankey



John Bhatti

PTSD

Fever travels
up
my
spine.

Sleep burns
rough mornings.

Ashes get lost
in dust when
your
words catch on
my
name.

I feel you here
in these
sweat-filled
nightmares,

they creep up my core,
choke me till my lungs
collapse
into

nothing.

Pressure from your
finger point

on my chest
sparks flames,

your touch lingers.
Bruises heal to
blue-black reminders of
invisibility.

I am not seen.

I am reborn in cemented pain
hatched
through cracks
in honesty,

you promised you wouldn't hurt me.

Quick steps against
sidewalk
pavement,
deep breaths and
heel clicks tell time.

Seconds turn to years,

in these
urgent
hollow
hours.

I still wait.

My veins catch fire.

Jessica Mizzi

SOMEDAY

She stared out the window of her apartment on 168th street, right above a small bodega that sold fresh fruit and porn magazines. The smoke from her cigarette curled towards the ceiling, only partially escaping out the window. Her hair grazed her shoulders. Her gray spaghetti strap top was covered with coffee stains and had a small hole from when she dropped her cigarette. It practically fell off her thin body. Her black cotton shorts rolled up on her thighs, leaving nothing to the imagination (two months into the relationship there wasn't much left for me to have to imagine, anyway). Her knees were tucked up against her chest. She rested her head on them as she looked down on the street below. She let out a content sigh. The floor was littered with various books, most she had yet to finish. Jimmie was notorious for starting a book, quickly becoming infatuated with it, only to be lured away by some new title. She would eventually pick up the book she left, but only when she grew

bored of the new one or when it was convenient for her.

“What time is your call tonight?” I asked her, trying to speak over the familiar sound of Judy Garland’s voice singing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” from her mother’s old record player. Years of being pinned under the needle made Judy’s once clear voice scratchy and distressed. It was Jimmie’s favorite record - she played it almost every day. It became as routine as her morning coffee and cigarette.

She didn’t respond. I’m not sure if she didn’t hear me or if she was too lost in herself to hear me. I rolled to my side and grabbed my pack of cigarettes off her coffee table. Jimmie had stolen my lighter, again, and had tucked it into her pack of Parliaments. I never understood why she smoked them - I hate Parliaments. She once told me that she thought the recessed filter made her look elegant. I’d smoke one every so often out of desperation but I prefer Camel Blues. I

enjoy the potency. Jimmie complained that they are too harsh but she still had no trouble sneaking her hand into my pocket as I drove and taking one.

“You know what I hope happens when I die?” she asked with her fluttery voice. I pushed myself up on my arms to look at her. She still continued to look out the window and showed no signs of distress. It was as if she had made a statement about the weather.

“Huh?” I mumbled, my cigarette hanging out of my mouth.

“Do you know what I hope happens when I die?”

“That’s morbid,” I responded, concerned with her choice of topic. I lit my cigarette. She turned to look at me. She swung her legs off the ledge and protested,

“No it’s not! It’s actually really beautiful if you let me tell you!”

“Ok, shoot.” I leaned back on the couch.

“Well, I hope that I see a bright, white light.”

“Very original,” I replied, letting the smoke escape from my nose. She hopped off the window and pranced to my side. She knelt

next to me and lightly hit my chest. Her eyebrows wrinkled.

“Will you stop doing that! Let me finish.” I yawned and tapped the ashes from my cigarette into my empty coffee mug.

“Ok, I’m sorry- there’s a white light.” She smiled and inched closer to me on her knees, continuing gleefully,

“So there’s gonna be that big, bright light that everybody says, right? But instead of hearing, like, angels or something, I wanna hear this.” She motioned to the record player and continued, “But I don’t want it to be perfect. I want it just like this. Nothing would make me happier.” I looked at her from the corner of my eye, unimpressed and unamused with her.

She smiled coyly as she looked down, once again becoming lost in herself.

“It would be as you die, you know,” I corrected her, “Not when. You’re in the physical act of doing it.” She rolled her eyes at me and shrugged,

“You know what I meant.” There was a heavy pause between us. Judy continued to sing.

“What made you think of

that?" I asked, half fearing the answer. She pushed her hair behind her ear and shrugged,

"Just a thought that popped up in my head." She giggled and leaned her face against my pillow. She lightly pressed her lips against mine; I didn't return the effort.

"What song would you hear?"

"What?"

"As you die, what song do you wanna hear?" I put my cigarette out. I rubbed my face and let out an exasperated moan. I was 25 years old at the time, I had just been promoted to manager for an up and coming technology company - I had no intention of planning my final moments just yet.

"I don't know. What does it matter?"

"Come on, Seth, just answer the question!" She smiled brightly as she nudged me, somehow amused with the game she had just created. I sighed and covered my eyes with my arm.

"Ugh, I don't know."

"Just say something."

"I don't want to do this!" I yelled.

I lunged to my feet. Her

green eyes fluttered. She slumped back down to her side. I pushed my hair back, trying to formulate an excuse for my outburst.

"I'm too much to handle, aren't I?" she asked sincerely. I stutted, trying to think of a way not to upset her. I rubbed my temples,

"I mean, I guess. Sometimes." Her breath caught in her throat. She brought her knees back up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. She became small.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. I loosened my shoulders.

"No, I, don't apologize. It's, it's me. You're perfect." She didn't respond. She was lost in herself.

I walked to the record player and lifted the needle, causing the music to come to an abrupt stop. Horns honked from the street below. She looked straight ahead, refusing to look up at me as she asked,

"You're breaking up with me. Aren't you?" Her face was stoic.

"Jimmie, I--"

"Don't sugar coat it. Just tell me." I swallowed hard, again trying to find the proper phrasing.

“Yeah.”

Jimmie didn't blink at my blunt admission. She looked to her right, finding a book she had only gotten halfway through. She picked it up and flipped through its pages. She threw it as hard as she could against the wall. She put her head in her hands. I walked towards her, getting on my knees to be eye level with her. She quickly turned away.

“Look at me,” I said gently, reaching out to touch her hand. She turned her body away from me even more but allowed my hand on her arm. She whimpered softly.

“Listen, please, just listen. You are perfect, ok? And I don't want you to ever change but you're expecting too much out of me. I am not the right guy for you. There is someone out there just as perfect as you are and they will come, ok? It's just that...I can't give you what you need right now. I can't give anyone that right now. It's not fair to you, ok? Please, look at me.” She brought her knees even closer to her chest. I reached out and touched her face, guiding her to look up at me,

“I want to hear you say, 'I did nothing wrong.' Say it for me.”

Tears ran down her face. She sniffled and cracked.

“I did nothing wrong.” I sighed, content with hearing her broken voice.

“C'mon, give me a hug.” She threw herself into my arms and began to weep into my chest. I didn't speak, only ran my fingers through her hair.

“I have to go to work now,” I said, afraid to peel myself away from her even though her crying had come to a lull. She nodded. I picked her up from her knees. I pushed her hair back as I looked into her eyes for the final time.

“You're going to be all right,” I said.

“How do you know?” her voice cracked. I shrugged,

“I've been worse than you are now - I've been better.” She hugged me. My phone buzzed in my pocket to remind me that I had to catch the train but I still held on to her. I pulled her away from my chest,

“Break legs tonight.” I gently touched her nose, and she smiled at me. I picked up my pack of cigarettes and left.

Jimmie's fiancé and I made eye-contact with each other from across the room. We gave each other a knowing nod. I hope she heard "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" as it happened, like she had said on that April day two years ago. I hope Jimmie will sing "Out There" to me as she leads me into that cliché white light I once mocked.

Arianna Sotos



GRACE LEE

THE SURRENDER OF A REBEL

It wasn't your fault, really.
Or mine.
There's a grand canyon
between what we should have been
and what we were, really.

And there are mountains
that sherpas can't climb
and Jack Keruac
wouldn't dream of,
a ruck strapped to his back
and a glint in his eye
as he usually was.

The waves rocked against
the white sand so harshly
that monkeys in the trees
a mile away ran back up
and cowered for cover.
And the strong lean surfer
turned his back
and packed his things.

A tornado ripped through that Kansan desert
and dust swirled through the air,
a terror to the farmer,
with Dorothy nowhere to be found
and "Home" soon to be swallowed up.

And black ash drifted
like twisted little snowflakes,
each piece more unique than the next, I guess.
And each piece destined to make
graveyards of those people,
too slow to flee.

There are simply things we cannot do.
And we deserve better than we have.
We were meant to never be.
Not really.

Sarah Montello



Katrina Kuan

SUMMER DRIVE

I rest my head on your lap,
you play with my hair

wrapping one of my curls
around your finger

I close my eyes, I feel the sun
through the car window

drying my soaked bathing suit
the lake water makes it cling to my skin

Rose Sanchez

GRIEF

Charcoal liner seeps into her famished face,
overwhelms her
maudlin eyes, fixed on the faded black and white
photograph.
“Mama would like this one,” she says with a smile.

N.C. Zaidan



Natalie Tripodi

WHEN THE BIRDS FLED

I want to recede into the wallpaper in the room where you died, to be a part of the space where air was last cradled in your lungs, to be the cool windowpane contracting against the wintertime air depressing my quarks into the imprint of your body standing on the stool your grandmother carved when your mother was pregnant with you, to be that footstool as it felt the sweet pressure of your weight on it, to be the folding petals of millions of interlocking chrysanthemums printed on the wall—they were the last hints of life you saw—to feel your warmth for as long as I can hold on to it because all I can feel now are the hollow centers of my bones, and how the rims of my eyelids are turning the same shade of blue your dress was that day, and just how long it really takes to blink when all I see is you hanging from the ceiling fan like the ballerina on the rear-view mirror of your old Ford Galaxy whenever I close my eyes, and my face feeling wet like the soil they dropped you into last

week, and my chest having this terrible feeling of you squeezing your arms across me just below my collarbones like I'm holding you above the dirty carpet, and I remember how winter was always your worst season but I never expected you to disappear on a Thursday morning in late February, even after all those therapy sessions and antidepressants, and I really just wish you were here or talked to me or that I answered your call three days before, because I never forgot about you, not even for a second—I was just busy for a little while, maybe my own fears and defects got in the way and I needed to be on my own for a little while to sort things out, that's all, I promise you that—just like how you promised that you were doing okay and you didn't think like that anymore, but you lied, oh you just lied, lied to me, like the day you said the sleeping pills were an accident that one time two years ago, but I knew they weren't, so I just kept my eye on you, hoping you wouldn't try to

slink away into your shadow and not come back, because I thought if you knew I loved you and always would, then you'd finally be happy, and those chemicals in your brain would straighten themselves out, and it wouldn't matter your family couldn't stand us being together, or how your mother told you I was a devil and I'd end up keeping you from heaven, and I wonder if that's why you did it, just to prove to her she was wrong—I like to think you found heaven after all, despite her, despite the priest they made you talk to in confession, despite the old women who glared at us in the mall while I held your hand—they didn't know how nervous I had been to feel your fingers enfolded in mine, how your cheeks turned into this pretty pale pink when your eyes met mine, how I never quite knew what to say whenever you smiled, how my limbs would tremble when I held you tight to my chest when I thought we could mush ourselves so close together we'd really be one and the same, how proud I was at your recital when you danced the lead to Swan Lake and were just so beautiful and the limelight drenched you in a halo so radiant I

was speechless as your body moved like your hair did in the ocean that time we went to the beach in Point Pleasant when you turned seventeen, how your smile was bright like the arches of light in the lens flares in the photos we took that day, but none of them cared about those things like I did—none of them cared you only liked pineapple soft-serve with shaved coconut from the parlor on Plum Street, and you thought frozen yogurt was a sad lie people told themselves was healthy whenever we passed by one of the seven frozen yogurt chain stores in town, and the amusement park down near the lake was stupid and should be torn down, but I really knew it was because the first girl you fell in love with worked there, and you just hated seeing her smiling when you were just an experiment for her, and to be honest I didn't mind because I hated seeing her, too, because it used to be that whenever you touched me, her ghost would hover above us in the dark, and if I opened my eyes, I would see her eyes staring at us, mouthing to me she had pieces of you I would never have, the same types of pieces you

had of me, and it always bothered me, even when I said it didn't, or I didn't want to be naked with you because I was too cold or too tired or too full or too hungry—anything—and it was never any of those things, really, it was that I was filled to the brim with this thick, viscous shame and guilt hot as white tungsten, and whenever you fell asleep it would overflow into the pillowcase, my body purging whatever remnants of the lessons my parents had tried to instill in me, because I didn't want to live like they wanted me to, just like you didn't want to visit those priests because they just made it worse, oh just so much worse for us, especially after those sleeping pills, because even though I knew why you did it, you never told me, you never told me any of it, even when I told you all the things I would never want to admit even to myself, and you'd hold me, stroke my shoulder blades, tell me that you loved me—I wonder if you didn't think I loved you like you loved me, so maybe that was why I bought you this pale blue dress with white little birds printed on it, since I knew you loved birds and wanted to get a tattoo of a

dove on your right wrist, and also how you loved dresses that you could spin around in and they'd go up into a circle, making you look like a toy top from above, and your face just lit up and you changed right into it—but why did you have to wear that dress when you did it, why did you have string yourself up wearing your surprise from our two and a half year anniversary, why did you want me finding you when you texted me you wanted to see me so we could talk, and I could keep asking all these stupid questions when I know that you can't just crawl out of your grave and answer me, but you didn't even write me a note when you wrote your parents one, telling them you were sorry, and if you were going to end up in hell anyways it was better not to tempt anyone else—they were right all along—when six months ago you told me you finally accepted who you were, after the three years of telling me you never wanted to be without me and then screaming at me to leave you alone the next day, and I knew you never meant it, you just didn't know who to listen to, especially after your mother threatened to call the police when I

was over, and how we could never go to your house if your family was around, only getting to meet at the park on the lake, or behind the coffee house up on Main Street, or in the gazebo in front of the shopping center downtown, and I know it wasn't easy for you, but damn, none of this was easy for me either, and maybe that's why I asked to be alone for a couple weeks, to be without you so I could calm down and stop myself from watching the wallpaper try to peel into the shapes of the bodies of those who wanted other things for me reaching out for me with paper-thin conviction for fingers, chasing me out of the peace of dark rooms—but I loved you through it all, through every time we yelled or cried or begged the other to stay or leave, and you didn't even mention me at all in the last words anyone would ever get from you—didn't even mention the Saturday nights at the bowling alley eating nachos and curly fries with cheesecake milkshakes, arguing if the bumpers got to stay up so the ball didn't get into another person's lane like it did on our first date, and the old couple whose lane it had ended up in

yelled at us we ruined their scores, even though their ball had already gone down the lane, and you ultimately won the argument so the bumpers stayed down, but you softened the blow of me losing by kissing my forehead, burning a hot pink mouth into the defeated furrows of my forehead—didn't even mention the Wednesday night in late June when I was leaning against the siding of my white house, right beneath the halogen light showing how hard and fast the rain was falling, my left foot pressed against the concrete of the foundation, the grey hood of my raincoat draped across my forehead, and you standing in front of me, your black rain-boots shining like vinyl and sinking into the mud, the grass winking its virescent eyes in coy and encouraging flashes, and you leaning in when I was in the middle of telling you about my brother in college who never attended any of his philosophy classes except for tests and still managed to pull off an A in the class, and you kissing me for the first time, your beeswax chap-stick sticking to my dry, mousy lips, smelling like chocolate and blueberry, the phos-

phenes when I closed my eyes in your softness erupting into cherry lemonade fireworks, the drink you had at dinner that night with plain pasta and grilled chicken, and when you pulled away how your mouth, still red with rushed blood and my lipgloss, quivered with nervous laughter, and I threw my arms around your waist and buried my nose into your neck to let you know my heart was beating against my ribs with the same frantic force yours was—didn't even mention the bracelets I made you from glass beads and faux leather cording I bought on sale at the craft store near the high school since you never liked owning things that everyone else had, how the first one looked like turquoise and freshwater pearls, since you loved the colors of the ocean you remembered seeing in Hawaii when you were ten years old, and the next one pink and silver as a reminder of your first tutu you got when you were two years old, and the next one black since you complained that pink and blue weren't neutral enough to wear everyday, and you wanted something of me to carry with you always, no matter where

you went—didn't even mention how it felt to be wholly naked with someone for the first time, and just how right it felt, how pure, how close I was to you with our skins pressed together and the smoothness of your ribs and middle of your back, only seeing your nails and teeth shine in the nightlight you had leftover from when you were seven, casting a pale violet light about the room, with yellow in the middle, since the plastic was molded into a glittered golden star springing from a plum tail, and I counted the twenty two freckles sprinkled across your forehead above your eyebrows, reminding me of how I used to draw seagulls when I was little, and when I told you so, you laughed at me, telling me about your future dove you'd have etched into your skin one day, and we planned to go together so I could hold your hand when the needle pounded against you, since I heard the wrist is a painful place to get a tattoo and I wanted to make sure that you'd be okay, and you told me that as long as you were with me, you would be okay—didn't even mention you stroking my hair straight again in the back-

seat of that old Ford of yours,
listening to “Stairway to Heaven”
after making out in the CVS parking
lot after it was closed for the night,
the wrappers of Hershey bars and
Diet Mountain Dew bottles littering
the passenger seat after we had our
makeshift picnic since the park was
always filled with screaming tod-
dlers, and we weren’t exactly fans of
small children after one decided to
flip your skirt up when we were
taking a walk together and the
parent didn’t even say anything to
the kid, so we elected for your car
instead because the privacy was nice
since no one would be around at
that hour, as, how you put it, the
sidewalks would roll up around
town at about eight o’clock each
night, weeknight or not, and you
wanted the job of rolling them back
out early in the mornings since you
loved getting up before the sun
would crawl out of the horizon—
didn’t even mention the corners of
my soul that you broke off and
slipped into your pocket for safe-
keeping, and now they’re buried
along with you, even when I pass by
the movies or the pharmacy or the
coffee shop or ice cream parlor or
any sidewalk around town, all I see

is you slowly turning in your pale
blue dress, hanging from the rafters
or porches, and sometimes you
reach out for me, those pretty hazel
eyes of yours swollen in your skull,
still looking at me the same way you
did in the nighttime or rain, and I’ll
admit that I want to find you again,
but I know that I can’t do that,
because if I wasn’t good enough for
you to stay when you loved me and
were alive, I doubt that I’d be
enough when you’ve got a whole
afterlife around where you could do
whatever you want, maybe finally
see how, even in the Frick museum
we visited in New York City, you
were still the most beautiful and
precious thing in that building, and I
just hope that you’re dancing wher-
ever you go, and that maybe you
will visit me, let me see your face,
see it in the night when I am in
between the raindrops, see it darting
by that halogen lightbulb stuck on
the side of my house, let me know
that you’re okay, let me know you
caught whatever it was you chased
into somewhere between the ceiling
and floor, let me know you finally
found something enough for you.

Alyssa Hamilton

THE ART OF SUNDAY.

I awake in sun-stained sheets
to neck pecks and bashful eyelashes.
You gently caress my porcelain skin
and send shivers to the tips of my infinitesimal toes.

I have mastered the language of your sighs,
where breath hangs heavy in guiltless early air.
You brew a fresh pot of coffee,
bring its electric waves to part the sea of your lips.

We watch the eggshell clouds
burn purple mountains majesty against
tides of rolling vastness. You speak in tender
morning-sound with tired paper eyelids.

And the world suddenly explodes in
cherry blossom petals, dance with silent snowflakes.
Golden crinkled autumn leaves drift into place
along the seashell battered shoreline.

I gaze upon your handsome face.
Your fingers collect my fragments,
piece me back together, send sweet
candy through my crooked veins.

I find comfort in our kitchen scurries.
Our home has a heartbeat in this silence.

Ariana Carpentieri



Lauren Hernandez

THE FALL

It was cold. The air was damp, or at least that's how I remember it walking from my dorm to a friend's room. We had to work on a group project that was due in two days, and we had not yet started. The concrete sidewalk curved, like the brightly colored squares in the children's game "Candyland." Ring, ring, ring! My dad was calling, which wasn't unusual—we talked at least once a day. But the tone he used was not his own. It sounded as if he were dreading the words that were about to come out of his mouth. It was the voice he used when he had to tell me that someone had died. This voice masked the frantic feeling he must have felt. He has always been the strong one.

My mother was in the hospital again. It did not shock me, though. She had been sick for a while. What was unusual was hearing it from my father. They were separated, and I would typically get these phone calls from my mom herself or my best friend, Kaitlyn. How did he know before I did? I

called Kaitlyn, who was at the hospital with my mom. She told me my mother had fallen and broken her ankle. A broken ankle would not be a big deal if my mother wasn't already sick...

Getting from school to the emergency room at St. John's Hospital is a blur. All I remember is walking through two glass sliding doors that were smudged with hand prints, and had "Emergency" written across them in crimson red. My mom was comatose. Her ankle bone was protruding from her skin. Fresh blood layered over dry, brown, crusted blood like paint on a wall. She wasn't breathing on her own. My gut felt like a wrestler had their tightest grip around my intestines. The wind had been sucked out of my lungs. I wasn't able to say anything—the thoughts in my head were even stuttering. I couldn't think. I couldn't stop the room from spinning. I was on an awful carnival ride.

The steps to the apartment complex where my mom and I lived was a time capsule of memories: the hard grey cement made up of clear and metallic rocks that sparkled when the light hit them, and the black iron railings that curve into backwards S's where the paint is chipping off of all holding precious moment's between my mother and I. The two of us would sit on those steps on summer days while I waited for the bus to take me to camp. My mom's red hair would glisten in the light, like Ariel's in *The Little Mermaid*. Sometimes the sun was so hot it felt like your skin could melt off, yet she always had this green travel mug that she would sip coffee from. I never understood how could she drink something so hot when it was boiling outside. I thought she must be drinking the best thing ever since she drank it constantly, and how could my mom not love anything awesome. When she let me taste it, I was horribly disappointed and disgusted. She smiled at me.

"You'll understand when you're older," she reassured me.

She was in pain, excruciating agony. Her eyes were rolling to the back of her head. She flitted and fluttered her eyelids, trying to regain consciousness. Her body was shutting down. I stood there as doctors hovered, watching and moving her, doing what I guess doctors needed to do. The doctors slowly trickled out, and it was just me and her. I was holding her hand, probably a little too hard, singing "You Are My Sunshine" over and over again. Kaitlyn told me later that I sounded like a child in the dark corner of a horror movie—my voice low, quiet, and harsh from crying. Tears streamed down my face, like hot tea from a kettle. I do not know if she heard me, or if she even knew I was holding her hand. But that doesn't matter.

Her face gleamed from the fluorescent light that was above her. It was so bright I couldn't even look at it. It made me think of the light people claim to see when they are leaving this world. But it wasn't my mother's time. Not yet.

Keri McGuinness

SAILING

The smell of the sea
filled my nose with
the sway of a thousand
blades of grass
bending to the Bohol breeze.
The water slushes
beneath me, split
in two by the steel ax
of the ship's hull,
whispering its tender words
against the metal.
Slushing and boiling,
until the tabs of chocolate and rice
are mixed into the pot,
and my mother would pour
the ocean into my bowl,
slathered with condensed milk
from my grandma's pantry.
My spoon would fill with water
and sugar, and sink the world's
basin into my mouth.

Earl Owen Minoza



Jennifer Jimenez

CONFESSIONS

While others slept
I slipped into your clothes,
pretending to be you
as little sisters do.

I remember,
you would paint my nails,
We would play with dolls,
You dressed me up,
wanting a little sister.

I learned to lie
Tell you, “no”
I don’t want to play today.
I can’t be seen in makeup.

In the closet
dreams and fears hid in there
a beautiful young girl?
or was I a monster hiding in your closet?

Rose Sanchez

WEREWOLF

There wasn't a full moon,
but he turned anyway.
Something that I didn't recognize,
that didn't recognize me.
He looked down at me with
eyes that starved
for something I couldn't give.
All monsters have a birthplace,
somewhere it always lurked
waiting, pacing, prowling.
I couldn't tell you where his was.
But I was the perfect prey-
maybe that's what tempted the beast.
My mother told me that
when prey comes, the wolf follows.
And the wolf followed that night.

Arianna Sotos



Lauren Hernandez

NEWLYWEDS

The moon was unusually bright. So bright that it even drowned out some of the thick orange glow of the city lights that would often hang heavy like a fog over the buildings. Even the streets seemed quieter than usual. Occasionally, gentle murmurs of young lovers or soft giggles of children would float up in the wind, carrying through the air as if whispered from some other world or some other time. That was why they had chosen this apartment. It was just close enough to the city that they could watch and listen, that they could see the very life of the place unfold, and just far enough away that they needn't be a part of it. It wasn't for them, the noise and chatter and never-ending activity. They were homebodies, and naturally enjoyed the quiet.

He stood on the balcony, still dressed in his suit after a long day's work. His shirt was buttoned up to his throat, tie tight about his neck. There was something serene in the lines of his face as he stood

beneath the moon, the soft light reflecting off of his skin so that he almost seemed to glow as he looked out over the rooftops that stretched like an endless maze until they disappeared into the dark and fell away, as the earth is wont to do when one looks out too far for too long.

He had left the doors to the balcony ajar, and she watched him from their bed as he gazed out into the night. She thought she saw something sad in him; his fists clenched just a little too tight on the railing, his lips set too thin. She liked to watch him think, to see his expressions change, as fleeting as the notions he contemplated. She often thought those expressions were the reason she married him. In those moments, she would wish she could melt into him, so that she might really know him. Know his thoughts, his every emotion. He was always so closed-off, except when he looked away and didn't know she was watching.

She slid gracefully from

the bed. He didn't turn, but she didn't expect him to. Her bare feet padded softly against the floor, her nightgown billowed out behind her. On the small table they had placed on the balcony, there was a vase filled with red and pink flowers; she had just refilled the vase that morning. She took a red carnation from the bunch and moved behind him, wrapping her arms about his chest, holding the flower against his heart. He chuckled and took the flower between his fingers. Slowly, he turned, and brought his hand up to caress her face. He pushed her hair back, gently tucking the flower behind her ear.

"Beautiful," he said, holding her gaze. His eyes danced like a flame on the wick of a candle. She knew in those moments that she loved him, and thought he must love her too.

"Won't you come inside?" she asked, resting her head on his chest. He held her close and kissed her forehead.

"It's a beautiful night," he said. He knew that he loved her— He wouldn't have married her if he hadn't. But he liked to be alone in the quiet. He liked the night,

the way the darkness settled like a blanket over the city, and all became calm and peaceful. It was so different from the chaos that came with the sun, the rattle of trains, the shuffling feet, the shriek of factory whistles, the endless chatter of the men as they worked, lasting until the sun began to sink down under the horizon.

She moved away from him, and he watched her go, hardly making a sound as she drifted into the apartment and out of his sight. He turned again to face the moon, closing his eyes as the light and the night washed over him, melting away the work and the noise. He felt empty and whole all at once as the breeze engulfed him. Taking a deep breath in, he let the clean night air fill his lungs and wash away the thick stench of work. When he opened his eyes, she was standing before him, holding out his palate and a brush.

"Paint for me?" she whispered, holding them out for him. He smiled as he reached for them.

"What would you have me paint?" he asked her. She smiled almost wickedly in return, her eyes alight with humor.

“Whatever your heart most desires,” she said, resting her hand on his chest. He leaned forward to kiss her, but she was already turning, gliding, almost ghostly, into the apartment. He felt his lips pull up into a grin, and reached for the only pink rose nestled in the vase. Then he followed her, closing the door behind him without a sound.

Savannah Finver



John Bhatti

UNTITLED: INSPIRED BY APOLLINAIRE'S "LE PONT MIRABEAU"

You are not
here to unnerve me anymore,
but somehow
this hidden library, where
we sat in silence
together,
inspires old memories.

I see your blue eyes, our
nervous silences,
imperfect moments --
and I can laugh now.
Not out of mockery or derision,
but appreciation of feeling,
imperfection,
time.

I've never felt more alive in this quiet.

I think of you as I look at our empty table now,
Remembering how you concentrated on your
reading,
pretending like I don't make you nervous sitting
beside you.

A giggle inevitably breaks the tension --

Your laugh captivates me.

N.C. Zaidan

UNTITLED

Rage against the
morning sky.
Your ombre
eyes
pierce through the
hot lights;
The blanket's waves
fold in and out.
A film
strewn across our core —
Clouds the memories, the
walks, the blisters,
the talks.
Wasted are the breezes,
damned
are the leaves
left uncombed.
The morning
crows shadowed
amongst the rays,
are arsenic to
insomniac eyes.
Relish for the rise as much as
the set.
This cycle of
ours grows, bears
the same tune.
I plant
the fruits,
you harvest the rot.

Joe Weil

MY MOTHER'S LABOR

I was ripped from my mother's belly
on a Friday afternoon in March
when the ground was layered white
like glistening new teeth.
I cried in the bustle of scalpels
and heart rate monitors,
lungs cowering as I wailed
when my skin felt the colorless
latex sheathing the doctor's hands.
For three days, my mother was pumped
full of fluids, drugs wearing down the layers
of collagen protecting her heart,
the reason why her face blanches
when she gets too angry.
I wonder, when she saw me,
saw my yellow body laced blue with jaundice
and fresh oxygen, if she thought I was worth it.
And I wonder the same sometimes

Alyssa Hamilton