

A Thank You

We would like to thank Dan Chelotti. He reawakened *Bloom* two years ago in his Writing and Editing for Publication class. A year later, he gathered writing students to build the literary magazine's staff. This is *Bloom*'s second year of publication. Dan Chelotti is the inspiration for *Bloom* and we are happy to spread literature to Elms College in his honor. He has molded us into lovers of language and we will always be indebted to him for the unparalleled writing instruction he has given us. He is a teacher, a guide, and a friend to us all.

Also, we would like to congratulate Dan and his lovely wife Kismet on the birth of their beautiful daughter, Selma. We are sure she will write poems about motorcycles and birch trees and sparrows before even learning to talk.

Congratulations on the baby, man.

Thank you,
Moolb
The Bloom Staff
(2011-2012)

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It's Time I Wrote a Poem in London

Colleen Dell

I am
an elastic band
stretched over the ocean;
afraid to snap back,
but I will.

I am
a weightless feather
blowing far from the wing;
naught to do but wait
for the still.

When You Camp in June

Sean Smith

Log fire roars in a pit I made from clay stones
Your face is reddened, smoke in your eyes
Emulsify your emotions with the tinder
Try to use your heart, it's becoming of you
Your eyes
They roll like the tide under our feet when I said to you
You are more beautiful than the most beautiful thing in the world
I was never really good with being an on the spot wordsmith
We stroll back from our moment; you hid behind your eyes an appreciation
You held a felicity foaming inside.



Heartstrings by Lindsay Papsin

Mothering

Anne Harrison

The woman feels the warmth against her chest, and wraps her arms around the young boy nestled in her lap. The blanket surrounds them like a chrysalis, and they are secure as one. The woman buries her nose in her son's tangled curls and breathes deeply. They sit silent now, after the ritual of naming what they know – big dipper, little dipper, Orion's Belt, Cassiopeia.

"Look, mom," the boy whispers turning her chin downward from sky to meadow. "Fireflies. They're like stars on Earth."

"Stars on Earth," the woman repeats, and the silence resumes.

"Mom, can I ride my bike to school tomorrow?"

It is a question from the void – the gaping unknown outside the blanket. The woman feels her breath become shallow and her voice cracks as she replies, "Well… maybe. Do you think you are ready? It's pretty far."

"I know I'm ready, mom. Justin Price has been riding his bike to school for a whole year, and so has Ben Rule, and Melissa Carter, and…"

"OK. OK. We'll try it tomorrow. OK?"

"Thanks, mom," the boy says as he propels himself into her arms.

The next day dawns early for the woman secretly hoping for rain. A cacophony of birds at 5:00 forewarns a beautiful day, and the woman awakens thinking of traffic and helmets and intersections. She lies in bed and travels the route

between home and school. Crossing guards. Tires. Brakes. Helmet. Crossing guards.

The boy radiates excitement – a tangible reminder that "don't worry, mom" were the first words he ever spoke.

Crossing guards.

It doesn't matter that she follows. He likes knowing that she's there, glancing every now and then over his right shoulder.

The woman drives slowly. Flashers flashing. Balancing hold and release. She watches his sturdy legs pumping along, pedals turning. Shoulders squared, intent on the ride. She watches as car after car slows and passes, her breath held as each gives her precious son a wide berth. She can see the crossing guard in the distance. Other children with bikes. The school zone sign. Flashers flashing, her car is a shadow in the sunlight. He is doing fine, so proud. He is so young, so scared. Proud and scared… back and forth… motion breaking open the chrysalis releasing the butterfly.

At the intersection he joins the other children with bikes. A quick wave from the boy, a blown kiss from the woman. And slowly, slowly, she turns the car to home.

I Give In

Karissa Venne & Katie Condon

I give in too quickly to the standards of life—the ones that tell me I should be sad every time you forget to buy my favorite cereal. But, I won't spend too much time talking about sadness; there are so many other things that make up our skeletons, like bones. Sometimes I try not to be too metaphorical. I want you to know that when I say "I feel like a crumpled leaf today" what I really mean is that I've lost all faith. But I am not brave enough to actually say that. If you're having trouble trusting me then I cannot blame you.

When a tree falls in the woods and no one is around then it never fell at all and I feel embarrassed for people who believe they have the world figured out. I could kill them. I killed you in the first stanza and you didn't even notice, but I walked by a dead bird on the sidewalk and I didn't notice either

So who's the bad guy? Don't answer that.

I consider this place to be less specific than anywhere else. I'm looking for something maybe in a leaf or the way your hair shines but I don't know what I'm looking for. Please, don't tell me—that's the beauty of confusion. Confusion? Realization feels difficult. We flourish in chaos, you and I. You tell me that I'm beautiful. I try to be complacent because anger feels too difficult to manage.

It is 5:20 and I am having trouble breathing I'm beginning to understand that no one has it easy and if you feel clarity

pressing on your eyes then it is only one kind of ignorance swapping in for another. I write poems but they age as soon as clarity hits and then I need to search for a new way of meaning.

Meaning can never really be destroyed—there are remnants lingering in things simply waiting to be named.

Untitled

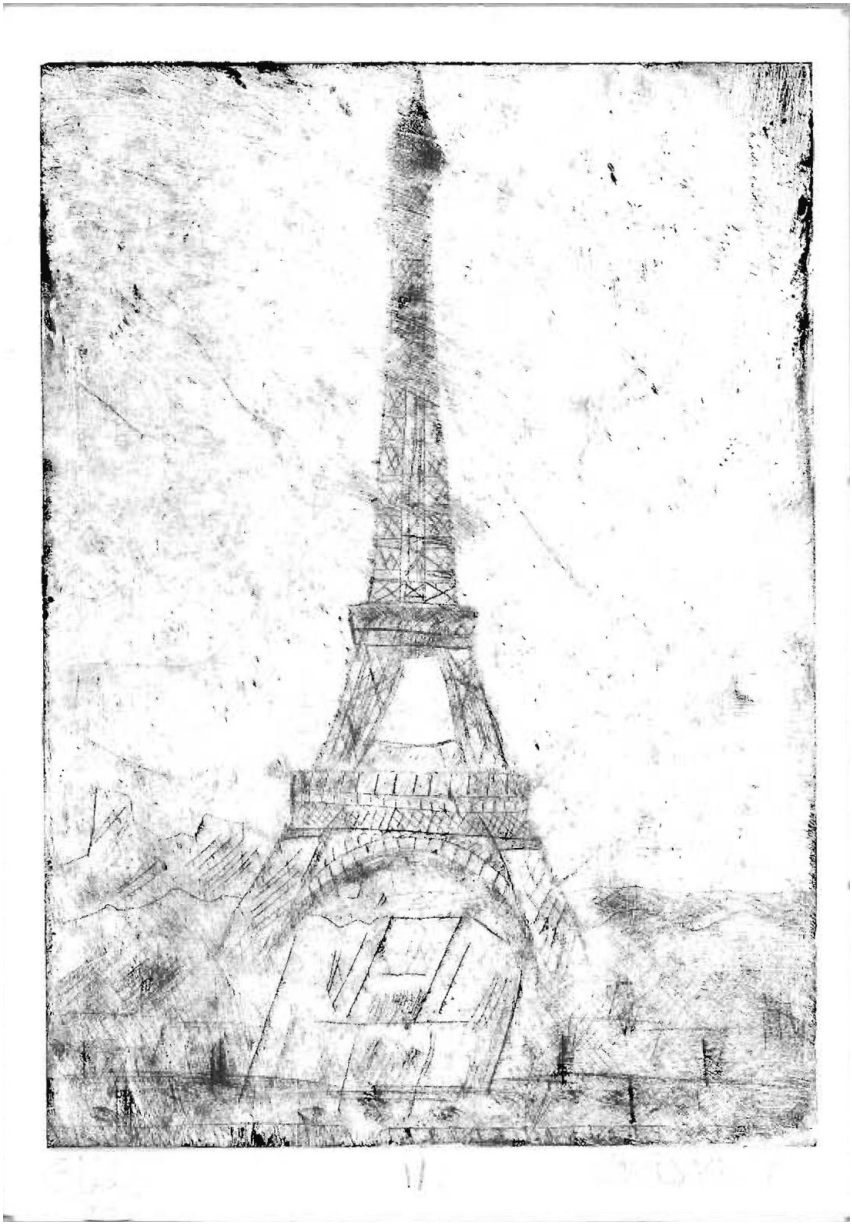
Anonymous

And all I really want to do
is touch you in those secret places
that once were mine.
I want to be safe
with the curve of my body
locking into yours, fitting like two pieces
of a cosmic puzzle.
I want to whisper "I love you"
I want to feel your breathing, heavy
against my neck,
I want to feel the beads of sweat collecting
on your skin.
And all I really want you to do
is touch me in those secret places
that are still yours.

Untitled

Anonymous

The sky is falling all around me
(I don’t mind, I don’t mind)
I barely notice anything
In the soft gold buzz
Enveloping our bodies
This atmosphere is choking me
But with your skin against mine
There's no need to breathe
I'll rush through your veins
And travel to your heart
Where I will hum to the beat.



Eiffel Tower by Karissa Venne

The American Dream… At Last *Meghan Sullivan*

The nurse delivered Nora's breakfast. Nora whispered, "Thank you." The nurse smiled and asked if Nora needed anything. Nora shook her head no and that concluded the silent conversation. Nora stared at the tray holding a corn muffin packaged in plastic wrap; a scrambled egg, grey and unappealing, mounded upon a stark white plate; and a carton of "fresh-squeezed" orange juice standing in the upper left hand corner. Nora poked at the food with her fork for a minute. She longed to return to her own home, to sit in her recliner with a cup of Irish tea and a scone. 'Those were the days,' she thought to herself.

She finished her breakfast with her eyes closed. She flipped on the television, fiddling with the remote until she found the channel with her morning talk show. A correspondent was doing a story on different parades throughout the country. He mentioned Boston. He proclaimed, "Today might be your lucky day! At 11 o'clock Eastern time, you can catch one the finest St. Paddy's Day parades, Boston's. Be sure to look for dancers flown in from Ireland, as well as our very own PBC float carrying your favorite newscasters!" Nora was ecstatic; she would not have to miss the parade after all!

Suddenly, the door slowly pushed forward. "Hi Grandma!" two tiny voices shrilled in unison.

"Maggie! Tommy!" Nora exclaimed. She had been waiting for months to see her grandchildren, whom she hadn't set eyes on since Christmas. She was rushed to the hospital shortly after New Year's. Only their mother and father and their aunts and uncles were allowed to visit Nora. This was truly a wonderful birthday present. Then an announcer blared out through the television speakers, "Welcome to the 108th Annual South Boston St Patrick's Day Parade." Everything she wished for had come true. Her grandchildren had come to visit her, and she was able to watch the grand parade with them. Colleens waved atop elaborate floats, marshals and their families walked gallantly along the shamrock marked streets, and dancers performed intricate steps. "One day I want to be a colleen, Grandma," Maggie declared.

"Oh, I'm sure you will!" Nora replied. Her daughter was the colleen in the '80's. Nora remembered attending all the parties, church functions, and Masses. She could still clearly recall her daughter gleefully waving from atop a magnificent float, and the bright smile on her face.

A brief commercial break interrupted the broadcast. "Grandma, open the present I made for you!" Maggie ordered.

"Oh, thank you, dear," Nora told Maggie, as she eagerly placed the present on Nora's lap. Shiny, metallic blue wrapping paper covered the package and a bow made of yellow ribbon was stuck to the middle of the gift. Nora slowly opened the

package and discovered a thick, forest green book, about “8 x 8” in size, was inside. The cover read, “DEAR IRISH MEMORIES.” Nora carefully turned to the first page. A black and white photo was framed in sage green and centered on a Kelly green sheet of cardstock. Nora analyzed the picture. She immediately remembered the moment when the photograph was taken.

*

Nora had been aboard the USS Flurry for barely two weeks, but longed to return home. The only activities she ever participated in, or more accurately was actually allowed to partake in, were sleeping, eating, spending time on the main deck, and lying on her lumpy, rock hard, bed. Nor did she actually enjoy any of these daily endeavors. It was a monotony of the same routine every day: rising from bed, not from sleep, about six o’clock in the morning; struggling to swallow a stale roll that not even the hungriest seagulls would dare ingest; and leisurely walking back and forth along the main deck, breathing in the “fresh air,” which in all actuality could be classified as a pulmonologist’s worst nightmare. The days went on and on, with little excitement and few events to energize the dreary passengers.

Finally, a rumor circulated amongst the lower class passengers that there was to be a ceili in the main hallway of steerage. Three men decided that the spirits of those on board the ship needed lifting and together they formed a misfit band.

The trio planned to play until they had exhausted the list of every song they knew on their tin whistle, fiddle, and accordion, or at least till dawn broke the next day. They began to spread the word, inviting all to attend, no matter where they called home.

This news made Nora ecstatic. Although she had limited options, she debated what to wear. At last, she decided on the navy blue dress her mother had stitched especially for the day Nora entered Boston Harbor. The tea length dress was trimmed with snow-white lace she received for Christmas from her Aunt Kathleen. Nora slipped the dress on and played with her long, russet-colored hair. She felt as if she were a princess invited to a grand gala where she would meet the prince of her dreams and live happily ever after. Little did she know, this fairy tale would become a reality.

Nora waltzed into the hallway, oblivious to its filth; still fantasizing she was a princess entering an elegant ballroom. She spotted her friend, Maire, and began to walk towards the table where she was sitting. Abruptly, she felt a nudge against her arm and heard the piercing sound of glass shattering. Nora glanced down. She saw her prince; a handsome young man, with auburn hair, the brightest smile, and the most engaging laugh. She hastily snapped out of her caprice and began to help the lad pick up the pieces of broken glass. He warmly gazed at

her and apologized. "Oh, I'm so sorry," Michael stated, "I must have been easily ignorant not to see a pretty lass like you!"

Nora blushed. She continued to help the man gather the fragments of glass shards strewn on the floor. Then she replied, "Oh, it's quite all right. Sometimes I'm in my own little world, just dreaming. It was actually my fault!"

"Well in that case, to compensate me, may I have this dance?" Michael inquired.

Without waiting for a reply, Michael swept Nora to her feet. She found herself doing all the jigs and reels she had been taught by Mrs. Murphy as a little girl. She had forgotten that she was on a foul smelling ship and her wishes to return to the old sod. Michael seemed to comfort her with his very presence. At the end of last dance, Michael asked, "Would you like to accompany me on a walk around the upper deck?"

Nora replied, "I would be honored." Nora and Michael cascaded up the steep steps to the main deck. They were invigorated with energy and joy neither had felt since they were small children. They strolled to the railing, where they looked up at the twinkling stars and listened to the ocean waves gently crashing against the hull of the ship. They gazed into each other's eyes and their lips met. Following the osculate, Michael escorted Nora back to her room. They exchanged good nights and neither, despite how hard they tried, could fall asleep. All Nora could think about was when he

would propose. All Michael could think about was when the opportunity would arise for him to ask her to be his wife.

*

Nora continued to flip through the book the rest of the afternoon, occasionally glancing at the television to watch the parade. It was filled with pictures of her sons' and daughter's weddings, as well as the births of her grandchildren. Two pages were dedicated to Nora and Michael's 50th and 60th wedding anniversaries. At last, she came to the final page. On paper scattered with emerald shamrocks, was a picture of her whole family at Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade, the year before Michael passed away. She began to weep again, not with tears of sorrow, but tears of joy. She had finally come to the realization why she was forced onto to the USS Flurry years ago by her own parents: to ensure her children had all the opportunities she missed out on. She hugged her daughter and grandchildren tightly and murmured, "Thank you."

Just as the parade was about to conclude, Dr. Krawiec ambled in. He stated, "Nora, I've been looking at your records and it seems your condition is improving. It has progressed so much so, there is no longer any reason you need to stay here. I have discussed it with your daughter and sons who have assured me your home is in perfect condition for you to complete your rehabilitation there. If you would like, I could

have your daughter sign the papers right now, and you be in your own bed by seven tonight."

Nora was elated. Nora proclaimed to the doctor, "I would love to go home, doctor. Your hospital really lacks some of the finest cuisine, tea and scones!"



Rockport Motif by Douglas Scallon

We Must Go

Karissa Venne

My sister sees me—

Who was alive for two years longer than her;
Who braided her hair on Sundays; who taught
Her how to drive in the Industrial Park; who

Shared books and Gilmore Girls discs;
Who could not be trusted with
Her heavy secret; who drifted away;

Who was sleeping in the bed next to her until
This September.

September came and our room grew cold.
It smelled of emptiness and her clothes didn't
Squirm on the floor; my bookcases had holes.

New York City is known for dreams
And I like to think of her with the one she loves

Drinking pineapple juice in Starbucks,
Wearing all black on sidewalks,
Passing by Julie Andrews without a word—
Shattering every predictability

Like she would if she were here
In September, and if I still called

Our strangling town home.
If she still dangled bracelets from
Her ears, just to stand alone.

Oma

Karissa Venne

Oma, do you remember
That vacation
In Lake George
Where you left
Footstep circles on the kitchen floor?

You swore
And screamed; won mini-golf games.
Your wigs were
Beautiful.

I never appreciated how delicately your
Earlobes sagged
Until you left us.

I hated when you made us sing
Rudolph for quarters.

When you insulted the employees at the movie theatre,
Your talk was sharp and beating
Underneath your skin.

I loved how you were out of your mind,
But beautifully so.

Untitled

Hillary Arvanitis

As my fingers dance across your sweet skin
My mouth begins to water in anticipation
As I open my mouth I let my tongue
Glide across your smooth outer self
Teasing you, and myself, before I get to the main course

With a firm grip I draw you close to me
a smile sweeps across my face
it's time to begin

As I pierce into you my fingers become
covered in your sweet juices
I suck on them and smile
only the sweetest of liquids can be found in you

My mouth licks, sucks
fingers dancing around you
fully enjoying my lovely little treat
you never fail to delight my pallet
with all your savory juices

Eating you is the sweetest sensation
as it comes to an end I smile
and you smile back at me
both of us satisfied with my choice in an afternoon snack

I fucking love peaches.



Niagara by Karissa Venne

There Are Birds in My Lungs

Tessa Rivers

There are birds in my lungs
made of paper mache and
desecrated valentine's day cards.

They do not fly
but perch upon my bronchial tubes
threatening at any second
to claw and peck their way out.

They will hatch from my chest
an eruption of feathers;
an explosion of candy and
I love you's that nobody reads anymore.

There are birds in my lungs
and they wish to be free
but they cannot break out
of my glass ribcage
they cannot see past the holes
in my shirt
but peek out of my throat

Oh, to fly again!
Flying freely means something more
to a twelve year old girl with no father
the father that sent her
the valentine's day cards
that she's torn up and crafted

into lungs that cannot breathe anymore.
They are full of feathers
and those goddamn birds.

Untitled

Tessa Rivers

In the burrow of suffering
the voices soak,
ruining the carpet with day old wine –
an obscene gesture of solitude

look at the lonely ones
with a heather grey sadness
streaking through their veins
they inhabit your dreams

I miss your stale breath
all over my neck
before the alarm clock
whisked us away
without even a window view to keep us company
just water in a plastic jug
and cold, acrid coffee

desk blotters will show you
that I'm obsessed with absolution

Pebbles

Joe Sherry

Once upon a time there was a boy named Bobby, who possessed a limitless curiosity. Bobby kept a notebook and recorded everything new he learned, carefully logging anything he thought worthwhile, or that made his imagination soar. He read anything and everything he could find: handbooks, how-to guides, science-fiction, adventure stories and his favorite: fairy tales. A lot of fairy tales took place in the woods, and he pictured them happening outside of his bedroom window. He loved the black and white morality, how easy it was to tell the villains from the heroes, and at twelve years old he had already come to the realization that life did not offer the same clear cut answers he could find in his books.

One day Bobby was visiting his grandfather. He loved to sit on the porch and hear his grandfather talk, whether about the woods and the creatures contained within, or the trouble his father got in when he himself was just a boy. His grandfather had a great voice for stories, low and resonant, but he knew exactly where to throw a raise in pitch to heighten the drama. Like all the best storytellers, his grandfather's stories created a quiet stillness inside of the boy. Most of the stories were pure fiction, and the few stories the old man told of his own life were about his time in the army. Bobby took a big sip of lemonade and looked at his grandfather. Despite the heavy creases around his eyes, there was still a spark in them. He tried to picture his grandfather as a child, but could not quite do it; the image danced on the edge of his imagination.

As his grandfather finished a story, this one about a jackalope, Bobby could not contain his curiosity, “Grandpa, you

must have had a great time as a boy. I'll bet you did all sorts of things! What did you do with all of your summers?" His grandfather paused, and inhaled deeply from his pipe, seeming to turn the idea over in his mind.

"Well Bobby, I don't rightly know. I suppose I fished, and played soldiers. I think I remember lots of games, most of which involved a ball of some sort, all of which involved some running."

"Grandpa! You have to remember more than that. How could you forget being a boy? I know you've lived a long time, but surely you must of had some fun."

"Must *have*, had some fun," his grandfather corrected him, "Not must *of*."

"Then you must *have* had some fun!"

"I suppose I must have. But it was a long time ago, Bobby, and in the grand scheme of things, I guess I just kind of lost track."

"I wouldn't lose track. I know it"

"Well, you have to remember, I married your grandmother when I was just nineteen before I left for the war. When I returned home your Uncle John was already three years old. Two years after that, we had your father, and making sure the three of them had food and shelter took over the lion's share of my thoughts. The adventures of boys paled in my memory, and it was time for new adventures."

Bobby listened intently, knowing that everything his grandfather said was important, but knowing that childhood didn't just disappear because new experiences came about.

"I guess I understand. At least a little."

"You do?"

“I do.”

“Good, now why don't you go play? Enjoy being a boy, for both of us.”

And with that he did. Bobby ran through the woods, and crouched on the ground. He lifted logs and watched bugs scatter, and he skipped stones on the small pond off the path. When the sun grew weary and started sinking beneath the tree line, Bobby momentarily lost his bearings and wasn't sure which way led home. His heart sped up and panic set in quickly, the stories of the woods after dark crashing into his head. Just as he started to feel helpless, he looked around and noticed a familiar elm. A bird's nest sat nestled in a branch that aimed toward his yard, like a giant's finger leading the way home. Bobby wasted no time in scurrying back.

Getting lost, even for a second, reminded Bobby of one of his favorite stories: Hansel and Gretel. It wasn't the witch or the candy house that he liked, but the cleverness of the children. The dropping of the pebbles along the path so that their cruel stepmother didn't succeed in getting them lost, was a great trick. The first time anyways. Of course, using bread crumbs the second time around, didn't work as well, but they had done their best. He thought time acted an awful lot like that evil stepmother, trying to get you lost and turned around so you couldn't even remember being a boy. If only he could leave a trail of pebbles, so that he could always find his way back to being a kid. He liked the idea, but knew that life was windier and filled with more obstacles than even the densest patch of forest.

He looked around his room, and saw a model of Frankenstein's monster, the plastic painted green, to resemble

dead skin animated by a mad scientist's touch. After he had finished painting it the previous year, it was his most prized possession, and he would stare at it endlessly. These days it just sat on his desk with Bobby rarely remembering it was even there: it was just a part of the clutter. Over the summer his bike was the thing he couldn't live without. While sitting on the high seat and peddling furiously, his jacket flapped behind him and he felt ready to take flight at any moment. He thought about the way he outgrew things, and how rarely simple stuff stood the test of time. An idea started to form in Bobby's mind and a smile sprung to his face. Of course! He went over and cleared the top of an old toy chest he hadn't used in years. *This will work perfect,* he thought to himself. He started cleaning out the inside and saw some green army man that he had melted down, one afternoon when he was feeling particularly destructive. He remembered the thrill of watching their bodies turn soft and melt into to a thick sludge before drying into the lumps he saw before him. He remembered how warm the sun was that day, and how the breeze felt when it flipped his hair around. He decided to leave them in the chest.

He went around his room searching for relics, things that reminded him of being six or seven years old. He found an item for every year of his life thus far. Last went the Frankenstein model. He held it a second longer than the others, his love for it fresher than the older things. He toyed with the idea of tossing in the horn off of his bike, but he wasn't ready to give that up yet. By next summer, it joined the rest of his stuff.

Bobby added one new thing every year, something that had meant a lot to him, and would remind him of where he

was. His ball glove got added when he was a teenager. The next year a scarf that a girl, a very pretty girl, had given him went in with his treasures. The chest grew full, but even as he outgrew the things that he was putting inside the chest, he didn't outgrow the ritual itself. Finally, when he was twenty four, he added a tiny man in a tuxedo, one with just a dab of frosting on his small artificial dress shoe. It was the last thing he would add.

More years passed and Rob and his wife's family grew with the birth of twins. They moved twice, and although it remained unopened the chest made the move with them both times, more of an afterthought than any conscious decision. His wife asked about it one night, and he waved it away. "Not a big deal, just some stuff from when I was a kid"

"Do you want me to go through it, and clean it out?" she asked him.

"Nah, I'll get to it."

Together they grew old in their house, and their children had children of their own. Rob loved all of his grand kids, but one, Tommy, would ride his bike to their house at least once a week, usually just to say hi. One afternoon, when Tommy was eleven, he sat across from his grandfather sipping on a cool glass of iced tea, and he got a mischievous look in his eye. "Grandpa, were you ever a kid?"

"I think we both know the answer to that Tommy!" he said with a chuckle.

"Well, what were you like?"

"What was I like? I was a boy."

"I know, but what did you do for fun?"

“For fun? All sorts of things I suppose, I-” he paused. “Tommy, what time do you have to be home?”

“Well I told mom I'd be home for supper, and that's not for a few hours yet, why?”

“Because I'd like to show you something. If you've got the time.” Tommy looked curiously at his grandfather and nodded. Robert shot his grandson a wink. “Come with me.”

Robert opened the door to the cellar and felt for the piece of string that turned on the bulb over the stairs. He yanked the string and a yellow glow lit the basement. Tommy followed his grandfather down and into the space under the stairs. Underneath some old camping equipment, and a couple of yellow raincoats he saw an old chest. “Little help, Tommy?” Tommy helped the old man pull the chest out and set it on the basement floor. “Care to do the honors?” he asked his grandson. Tommy flipped the top of the chest open and peered inside. Together the two of them followed the pebbles back to an old man's childhood, and Robert was glad he didn't have to follow the path back alone.



Dragon Roof by Dave Peters

The Day My Toaster Was Replaced With a Cactus

Mike Biegner

Today I went to make toast but the toaster had been replaced
with a cactus.
I am not afraid of cactus, but toasters scare me to death.
When I was young, I'd heard stories of people getting
electrocuted
sticking forks or knives into the trap-like slots that hold the
bread for toasting.
I was certain that my toaster would lure me into its mouth &
I would be the victim of its razor teeth.
Perhaps those living in cactus climates – Arizonans, or
Nevadans – have their
Own horror stories about cactus, of those impaled on barbs &
left for dead.
Maybe there are stories of hemophiliacs bleeding to death after
An angry encounter with a cactus rescued from a local nursery.
We carry our orange-cone stories with us
The ones that warn us of the objects of this world that can
harm us.

What we learn through saturation are the hardest things to
quit.

Storm Clouds

Mike Biegner

the saddened grass
with weak eyes
has the slack jaw
of a coward
under the gray painted
ceiling
of storm clouds

I hold coffee
my one true friend
close

the rhododendron seem indifferent

the college kids so yellow
are ready for another school year

it is difficult to move
in the pictures I see

it all appears
like film drowned in developer
under a red light.
ghostlike

rising like fog
crawling up like disgust
covering the chintz of everything

the rain all over
everything.



Cliché Philosophy Textbook Cover by Jason Murphy

Untitled

Hillary Arvanitis

Standing in the bright room I suddenly remember all the things I want to tell you. Like, I totally remember the end to that joke I was telling in the car earlier today. “Because he lost his contacts!” I say, laughing to myself. I bet you would have thought that was so funny. Oh shit, I forgot to tell you Elliot and Michelle totally bailed on this weekend. You would have been so pissed so it's probably best I didn't tell you.

I decide to sit in one of the chairs because I feel a sudden surge of things I want to say to you. Like how cute I thought your outfit looked tonight, and how I want you to cut my hair in the morning. You did such a good job last time, I want you to try and do it just like before, only not as short. I forgot to tell you that it turns out I was the one who had lost the keys last night at Jack's party. I didn't forget to tell you on purpose, I just forgot I took them because I was so baked. Me and Stephanie thought it would be funny to hide them I the fish tank and we were right, it was fucking hilarious, until Luke woke up and saw one of his fish impaled by a random set of car keys.

Running my fingers over the ridges of the chair I feel overwhelmed by everything I was meaning to tell you. I want to tell you that snorkeling at the Rock Docks was so fun and we should totally snorkel more often once we get back home. Sliding my feet back and forth on the white tiled floors I remember I still owe you money from when you bought me lunch at Johnny's Sand and Sun Hut three weeks ago. Fucking bitch, you owe me a pack of cigs from when you traded my last Marb to that super Asian looking dude for a shot of Tequila.

Yeah, there were so many thinks I wanted to tell you, but now I can't.

The chair feels so soft but yet rough under my cold fingers. Soft like your skin; I meant to ask you what kind of moisturizer you were using but I completely forgot. The chair's color reminds me of the hoodie I borrowed that I'll never be able to give back.

I can hear faint voices in the background. Different people talking about different things. Or is it in my head? Am I hearing all the things I mean to say to you? I feel my hands begin to tense up and it's getting kind of hard to breathe now. I feel tears beginning to form, but now is not a time to cry. I stand up and quickly walk up to the desk, trying to keep my composure. The same nurse who spoke to me before is reading over some sort of file looking thins as I approach. She sees me and quickly stands up; her eyes are full of both comfort and concern.

“Um...” I say, trying to figure out how to worth this right. “I, um, I need to talk to her. Just for a second. Is there any way I can..?”

She nods. “Right this way, sweetheart.” She points to the nearby staircase. She gives me a look that makes me think this happens a lot more often than she'd like, but still she looks like she understands how urgent this is.

I need to tell you, I just have to. She walks me down several flights of stairs as I try to organize my thoughts into the most important things I have to say, because I know I probably won’t have much time. We walk for what feels like an eternity and when we come to the last floor she points me towards a room.

“I bet you guys get a lot of exercise coming down here all the time.”

She looks almost shocked at my statement but smiles and walks away. I'm glad she didn't say anything; that was a fucking horrible joke. I notice it's very cold in this little room and I'm shaking. However, I'm not sure if it's from the cold or the urgency of the situation. She walks up to a woman sitting at another desk and tells her who I need to see but that it'll only take a moment. Shit, what if I forget what I have to tell you! I don't want to be rushed but I'm so nervous I bet I'm going to forget everything I came down here to say.

“Right this way,” the other woman says to me and I walk into the room. It's kind of dark but she clicks on the light and I see you. You were always so beautiful; I always meant to tell you that. “Take your time, sweetheart,” the nurse repeats. “I'll be just outside this door when you're finished.”

I hear the door click behind me and there is suddenly a lump in my throat. My hands feel sweaty which is impossible because it's fucking freezing in here. The room sort of smells likes alcohol; it's freaking me out a little bit. I take a deep breath and go to speak but nothing comes out. It’s funny how it doesn't matter what I mean to say but can't when I know you'll never hear me.

I look at you and see a blackish color around your lips; reminding me they put up one hell of a fight for you. You look so white under the lights and I realize how sterile it smells in here. It seems impossible this is happening. How could anything bad happen here it's so fucking clean. How could anything vile survive in a place like... I don't want to finish that thought.

As I clench my hands and feel how sweaty they're becoming, I remember some of the things I want to tell you. I want to tell you that I kept my promise: I was there till the end. I want to tell you I'll never love another. Then I remember I have a few questions for you.

“WHY?!” I shout, almost too loud. Why do we ask questions even when we'll never know the answer? I just want to know why you didn't listen to me tonight.

“I fucking told you!” I yell a little quieter. “I fucking told you to watch your shit! Those guys were total fucking creeps and I told you they were trouble.” I can't believe I'm actually yelling at my best friend but it just keeps spilling out of me.

“You know how fucked I am now, huh?!” I say, trying to regain my composure. “What the fuck am I supposed to do now, huh?! I meant to tell you you're a real asshole, you know. I meant to tell you that our fucking reckless behavior was eventually going to catch up with us. Do you know I was thinking about going home? I was going to see if you wanted to come with me!” When you talk to someone for the last time you realize all the things you want to say to them. My voice starts to quiver and water begins to cloud my vision but I keep on talking. “I loved you, did I ever tell you that?! I was meaning to remind you how much you mean to me, how lost I would be without you and how I need you.”

I wish I hadn't come down here. “I didn't even want to go to that stupid party tonight, I was going to tell you but you were so excited I just, I, I didn't want to ruin your fun!” I finally realized why I went down those stairs.

“I love you,” I barely whisper, “and I just want to remind you, in case you ever forget or wonder different.” I turn my

back and reach for the door and I could swear I hear you say something, but it was probably nothing.

"I'm all set." I say, tears streaming down my face. Walking back up the stairs to the main floor I feel like an idiot but I just needed to tell you some stuff before I left.

Walking out of the hospital is a blur, a surreal blur. I'm not sure what I'm going to do next, but I know I just need to leave. I should probably head back to the hotel; I know everyone is waiting for me. But, I just wanted to make sure I had one last chance to talk to you, one last chance to tell you all those things I had to say.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner."



Daydream by Lindsay Papsin

Porches

Dan Chelotti

Without porches,
I wouldn't
Be able to walk
As slowly as I do,
Wouldn't know the rain
As the excuse some birds use
To be quiet. Walking
Is a good excuse to be quiet.
One time I saw a manatee
Eating from the stones
That formed a jetty,
And my walk home
Was very quiet,
As if the world
Were a diving bell,
And that we humans
Were fleas on the head
Of a deity peering through
The glass at the wonders
Of a sea too large
For our small eyes
To gather.



Gardenia by John Lambdin

Earthquake in Turkey

Harry Brandt

From the morning newspaper
I carry with me into the garden
the sweat and mortar,
muscles and dust
of that seventh day
when sleepless villagers
pried back the slab of broken wall
and lunged toward
the powdered unworldly father
curled on his side
- an ancient nautilus
bitten into rock -
with his arm around his small son.

I look up to see a soft-yellow
sulfur butterfly
- no heavier than light -
arise from the lantana's
river of color.

Pudgy Soccer Player

Dave Peters

Harry sat up and felt the cold toilet tank sting against his back. He reached his hand underneath himself and wiped in a forward direction. He peaked at the white paper folded several times and smiled, surprised that it was clean. His bowels were making progress. Discarding the toilet paper into the bowl he got up, pulled his pants to his waist and while fastening his belt looked into the bowl, "Good God" he said seriously. He had never seen a specimen so king-size in his life. It was stocky and regal floating idly in the bowl. Captivity was undignified for a creature of such solidity. "It ought to be in the wild," he thought, "be free." He pictured a large moose peering through tree branches, the eyes an amber color highlighted by a streak of sun that penetrated through the boughs.

The sound of the flush was forgotten behind the rush of the faucet streaming with warming water. Harry massaged his hands with the soap and water into a thick lather. The scent was of lilies and it reminded him of his mother. Its essence enveloped him and he walked out of the bathroom as a newborn boy alive but not yet fully aware. He had never known his mother in an adult capacity, but as she died when he was just barely one year, the memory he had of her was preserved, frozen in time, and although it was distant to him at most moments of the day, it could be triggered unexpectedly by some scent or perhaps a texture, as it had from the soap moments earlier. His mother's warm essence comforted him and made him vulnerable to the cruelty of the cold strange gas in the hallway. Someone in the office was painting something, but why they would hire someone to paint at normal business

hours he could not understand. It was probably one of the owners' sons, Harry thought, a privileged child who could come in or out at any convenient time, do some trivial task and rake in more than someone working in the factory who had been there for years.

Harry returned to his cubical and began to gather his things. It was nearing the end of the day, 15 minutes remained, and as he subtracted back the time from 4 PM and the tasks that must be done, he knew that he was a little ahead of schedule. There would be extra moments remaining, and if his boss, Don, came by and saw him sitting without work, staring, as it would appear to an onlooker unfamiliar with the inner workings of Harry's mind, Don would probably shout. In truth, Harry was staring at the wall of his cubicle, but like humans who dare to dream, he is capable of producing a world beneath the surface of reality, a world that exists solely in his head, and when Harry looks as if he is just staring, he, in fact, is deep in thought about the judgments of morality that plague his life, or, perhaps, what to do about the future, and lastly the most important question of what will make him great. He may have held wayward opinions of where his life was headed, but one certain fact remained, he would not waste his one life as a salesman for an ultrasonic welding machine manufacturer. There was something more for him here; he could feel it in his heart, whatever that is.

At first, the face was just a blur and Harry didn't notice it. Then he realized that Don was waving at him, motioning for him to unplug earplugs that Harry wasn't even wearing.

"What's up, Don?" he asked once he gathered his senses. But Don continued walking down the hall and when Harry got

up to see what he was doing, his voice belched out from the walls as his hunched body kept moving forward,

"There's 4 minutes left, Harry. Would you please just *look* busy!"

A glorious and rare avian species, the red winged black bird, flew out into the sky. As Harry watched it through the windshield push itself higher from the surging flaps of its wings, he was caught off guard by a yellow dodge ball launched horizontally into the street and chased by an overweight adolescent soccer player. Harry pumped on the breaks with a shocking intensity but he remained calm. Though his pupils dilated and his heart rate shot up to speeds he had only ever felt while playing sweeper in soccer as a boy, his palms remained dry and held a responsible 10 and 2 grip on the steering wheel. The car halted within inches of the unaware player who had just then noticed the vehicle when Harry in a deliberate show of delayed anger laid on the horn for 3 whole seconds. The player, seemingly unaffected by the severity of the situation (perhaps unaware of physical consequences of three thousand pounds of metal colliding with 175 pounds of squishy flesh at a speed of 35 miles per hour) bent down and plucked the ball that was slightly lodged between the tire and the pavement, got up, looked at Harry and returned to the grass.

About 2 minutes and 18 seconds before the red winged blackbird and the player with squishy flesh entered into Harry's consciousness, he had pressed the button on the radio that brought Magic 89.4 into his ears. Magic 89.4 played "Hits from the 80's, 90's, and 4Ever." This phrase repeated menacingly over the air 27 times per hour, in between each

song in a way that drove Harry crazy. The length of songs were related to the general public's attention span in a design that first began during the Great Depression when people would listen to a song on the radio from anywhere on average of 3.23 to 3.54 minutes. "Startling statistic for people today who can't focus long enough to take a shit," Harry thought, "perhaps people had less to do back then." Following the war, however, the economy was surging in the U.S. as it never had before. People didn't have time to listen to music, they merely wanted background noise. Music then became the soundtrack to busy, productive lives. Americans were getting things done, and in a consumer economy, they consumed tunes. Hit American song lengths shortened by an average of .8 seconds every year from then on. Harry has been in the habit of criticizing popular music ever since his band, Harry and the Trumen, failed to gain notable success. By complaining that popular music doesn't contain any real substance, Harry could attain a feeling that he was musically superior to the masses, and for that reason Harry timed songs and criticized them on their brevity. He set the timer on his phone, and when the Billboard #3 hit song *Love in Carpets* by Flag Pole began, Harry recorded that 2 minutes and 13 seconds later the song finished and for that reason it was stupid and designed for the brainless. It was during his rant after the song that he saw the bird.

A trash truck was on the road and Harry found it peculiar that they were picking up trash on a Friday. "That's stupid," he muttered to himself.

"Hits from the 80's, 90's, and 4Ever."

"DAMMIT!" He screamed suddenly hammering his right palm into the steering wheel. "Monday was Columbus Day!" He

had forgotten to take out the trash. Now he knew the maggots would grow in the food he had thrown away, and then they would hatch and become flies and then they would spawn on everything. By the time the trash trucks returned next Thursday, his entire life would be flies. BZZZZZing around his ears when he slept, BZZZZing on his Reuben sandwiches, BZZZZing on the window panes for weeks until finally they would tap the glass for the final time and fall, hitting the linoleum ground, they would curl their legs into x's and die. The whole cycle disgusted him, and he grew increasingly irritable at the leaves for turning brown, dying, and falling.

Aisle three was chaos. Boxes of Italian pasta were mixed together with the salad dressing on the same shelf. There was cat food placed next to toothpaste. He was looking for something different. A headache had developed sometime between the bird, the soccer player, and the trash truck, and when he finally found the Advil it was shelved next to Special K. There were no jellybeans in this store, Harry spent 20 minutes looking but there was nothing.

He meant to buy a pound of corned beef, but in the end decided on a half pound. At Fruit Fair, the deli counter attendants always wrap the cold cuts in plastic envelopes and finally, they seal the envelopes with a paper sticker that notes the type of meat, the date it was purchased, the weight, the price, and several other things that Harry never bothered to read. The thing was the sticker. It contained an adhesive on the back that was far stronger than the thin plastic envelope it stuck to. Inevitably, the customer would just have to tear the plastic around the edge of the sticker completely ruining the

package and allowing for a dry stream of refrigerated air to permeate the package and dehydrate the meat.

"Jen, cleanup on aisle twelve, and Julio for God's sake would you organize aisle three!" a metallic sounding voice blurted over the loudspeaker. Harry had known there was something amiss in aisle three and took the tiniest shred of gratification from knowing that he knew. But then Magic 89.4 returned to the loudspeaker and the miserable hits continued.

Harry had a music teacher in college that was paranoid about the effect that mindless, "pop" music had on the masses. That teacher had managed to convince a large portion of the music department that the music industry was secretly run by the government and, therefore, it limited what was played on the air to three musical keys.

"Break outside of those keys" the professor said from behind his sheet music, "and the public wouldn't know what to do with themselves. Play some jazz in a grocery store, department store, the bank or DMV," he leaned out from behind the pages like a killer whale showing its teeth, "you'd get madness!" Everyone gasped.

Outside, the sky was a dark purple gray. The thick cloud coverage blocked the sunset from showing and kept the moon from appearing. The bags in his hands were heavier than Harry could manage. The plastic handles weighed down on his wrists and pulled and stretched at the muscles until hot red creases formed in his palms. His fingers were cut off from fresh blood because the handles pinched the vessels and veins in his fingers and kept new blood from coming and old blood from leaving. He wondered if one incident could cause permanent

damage. Trying to shrug his shoulders but unable from the weight of the groceries, Harry pressed on. The voice of his adoptive father bellowed in his head and convinced him the pain was bearable; he would not stop. He didn't have time to stop, he told himself. It would be too much effort to put them down and pick them up, the sensations would have to be endured all over again and for a longer time.

When he finally arrived at the car, he tried with his right hand to fish the electric remote key out of his coat pocket without putting the bags down. He felt them at his fingertips but the resistance of the weight of the bags challenged him in a way that nothing ever had before. He must succeed; he's come this far. His body tipped farther to the left and his right arm fidgeted from the strain of the weight of all the bags; it was numb. A box of cereal jammed into the right side of his abdominal muscles and poked at his insides.

"I must" he ordered himself, "must get them!" He maneuvered the key ring and finally got it onto his index finger when the weight of the groceries and the pointy corner of the cereal box on his right side won out. The groceries broke through and poured out onto the cold sandy pavement. His Advil rolled to a hiding place from where it was never retrieved. A bottle of French dressing splattered onto his shoes.

He beeped the station wagon trunk open and began loading what was left of his groceries inside. He placed the bags from his left hand side over the car seat he uses when his son visits on alternate weekends. The upward lifting motion his body used to hoist the remaining groceries over the obstacle shifted something in his stomach that give way to an unexpected release of a gas in his khakis so large that it could

have been measured in time and space. He sat down in the driver seat and felt the cold mush of excrement from between the sides of his thighs. There was nothing left for him to do but go home.



Circle Vision by Debbie Gomes

Climbing

Jennifer Jordan

Movement through air, the white birch shivers
A rogue breeze unearths peppery scents of
Molting leaves, crisp underfoot.
Roots emerge from
Disguise of earth.
Ascension of
Winding paths carved by glacial quarry.
Stream nearby rushes as
Snow melts within my mind.
My whole being guided by thoughts as I drift
Farther from time and reason, all thoughts
Consuming, blending
Fears suppressed {for now}
Power to what my eyes see
What I hear
What I feel {memories}
Mosaics of distant places, tender moments
Your face
Your voice
Your anger
Your rage {no not there}
Sun light flickers through hole punched tree tops
Short rests on cool rocks, warm moss between fingers
No lips moving for words slipping, just knowing
Where I am
A continuation
Of earth
On my journey to the summit.

Villanelle in Sepia

Jennifer Jordan

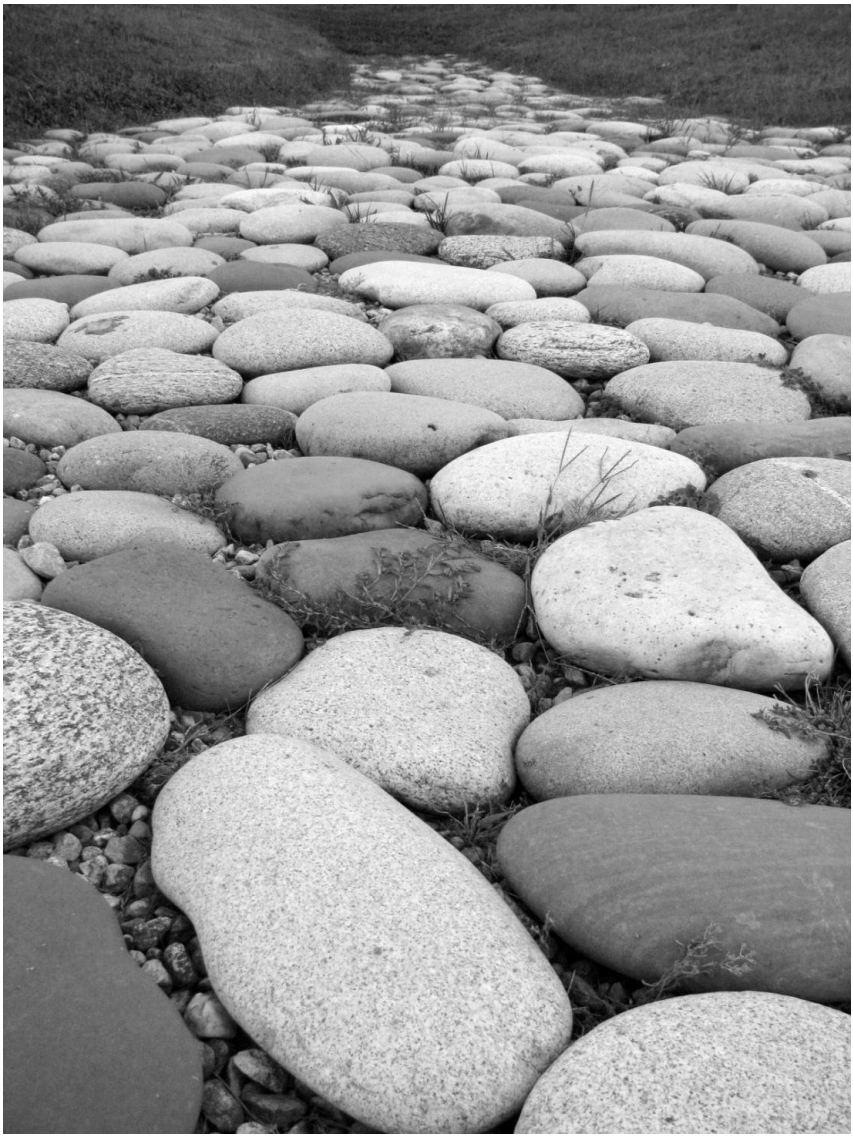
Amber waves form rippling hues
Subtle lights within the frame
Washed from skies of violet blue

Beset confinement to amuse
Perched while posing hidden pain
Amber waves form rippling hues

Collapse of thought from minds obtuse
From a shutter; a pulse of vein
Washed from skies of violet blue

Maple syrup glazed portrait views
Halos of light to a shadow's refrain
Amber waves form rippling hues

A moment's escape too soon to lose
From eyes to image; a printed gain
Amber waves form rippling hues
Washed from skies of violet blue



What's Around the Bend by Debbie Gomes

Wasted Year

Sonia Vaz

You are carved in my skin
my stomach twisted with thorns,
why do you have to leave?

Your mind is muddled with another's lips
but I was here when the clouds
pushed themselves onto you.

I am a few crumbs on the table,
disintegrated in salt water,
that I poured for you.

Did you forget that I was steadfast
I guarded your side,
begged at your feet?

But I will walk, feet bare,
caressing sharp stones.
Swollen throat.

Come find me,
if you find that young wine
doesn't suit your tastes.

September

Sonia Vaz

You tell the angels,

You're not made for wings
And white's not your color.

The air is empty.
Just,
empty.

But the ground is full.

I could wage war with the dirt,
Dig you out.

You would fill the air,
and you would be here.

Be here.

and you could tell the angels.

A Sip of Coffee

Jane Miliotis

The wide boulevard loomed before her. She breathed in the exhaust fumes spewed out by the lumbering buses and autos speeding by her small six-year old frame. Finally, a break in traffic allowed her to dart across the street to the safety of the opposite sidewalk. As her red leather shoes pushed against the asphalt, she glanced down the street where she was headed. He was there.

She continued walking towards the two-family, two storied house where she lived. As she approached the two-toned Chevrolet coupe sitting at the end of the dirt driveway, she imagined her grandfather, her "Papou", sitting in the kitchen upstairs at the yellow laminate table. He would be speaking to her mother, his daughter-in-law, in his heavily Greek-accented phrases while sipping his creamy, sugar-laden coffee. And, he would be waiting . . . for her.

She hurried now. As she ran past her neighbor's house, she prayed that the bold, black dog who dwelled there would not be outside and waiting to chase her. As no dog appeared, her fear subsided and she skipped past the car to the backdoor of her house. She climbed the stairs to the second floor and opened the door to the kitchen. As she stepped into the room, she pulled off her spring jacket and handed it to her mother. She then jumped on to her grandfather's lap and let the warmth envelop her.

The ritual then began. She picked up the teaspoon from the table and began dipping it into the coffee. She would continue dipping her spoon and sipping the coffee as her mother rustled about listening to Papou. Her mother, unlike her, did not

struggle to understand his words. But even though she struggled to comprehend the words, her grandfather's accent and his sonorous tone entertained her and, yes, soothed her. By giving her a box of chocolates, by escorting her to the park, by offering his hand, he provided her an escape from fear – the underlying fear that she would lose her younger sister to the infections that plagued her.

But, the next year, she would wake one morning to her mother's voice telling her that it was Papou, not her sister that had left them and gone to heaven. A strange coldness possessed her and she replied, "So?"

And it was years later when her body, her mind, her heart could absorb such a loss that she finally cried. She stared at photos of him. She asked her father about the Cretan village that bore him and of his arranged marriage to the troubled, young Athenian woman; the Yia-Yia she never knew.

She asked to hear of his cooking skills and his penchant for playing cards. She asked about his temper and his willingness to confront anyone who questioned his authority as chef of the restaurant where he worked. She spoke with the friends and relatives who had voyaged from Greece to America knowing that Papou would be there to house and feed them.

She also recalled her childhood memories. She remembered that he called her "Kukla". She remembered that he fried fish on Fridays and that he stashed lamb's heads and skinned rabbits in the freezer. And, she also remembered, that from the rabbit and the hideous lamb's head, he concocted delicious cinnamon-laced dishes that tasted of his native Crete.

And finally, finally, she could say thank you for the sweetness of his coffee. And finally, finally, she could say good-bye.



Flower in Sun by Dave Peters

Low Ghosts

Katie Condon

She was standing on the roof
debating whether or not she should consider
herself as someone who is crazy, but in a good way.

She stood facing the sky,
sifting through the layers of her mind

as if sifting through shades of light at dusk.
Soon, the layers gave way—

the dusk touched the roof.
She knew that there were limits

she could move through,
and that moving through these limits

would prevent things like dusk
from losing their quiet significance.

"Consider yourself lucky," something said.
The girl paused, "Who said that?"

Nothing said anything.
The girl couldn't be sure who had spoken

and like a ghost who rises as dusk falls,
she moved through the silence as quickly

as the dusk had moved from the roofs
and disappeared into the sky.

The girl didn't consider the situation
strange, nor did she consider herself

as someone who is crazy in a bad way.
An onlooker might have considered the girl

as someone who saw things with her mind,
just as roofs see past dusk and directly into the sky.

T.S. Eliot in the Mountains

Katie Condon

Be strong, T.S. Eliot.
Perhaps there is a life here
of not being afraid of your own heart beating.
It's hard to see the sky with the ground
mounted up on all sides of you,
but harder still when your eyes
are the eyes of statues crouching on
lonely banisters or on pedestals
in crowded and twisting streets.
T.S. Eliot, the birds are all silent,
perched on dark branches, dignified,
invisible, moving without direction
through the dimming hours—
They cannot speak for you anymore,
because mountains are nothing more
than rocks that are looked at
and death is of no consequence
to people anymore.