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Editor’s Note

When my preceding editor, Rachelle Wunderink, approached me at the end of my sophomore year and suggested that I consider applying to be editor of Dialogue, I immediately and emphatically declined. *Me, dialogue editor?... No way!* Like many, I suffered from a kind of irrational and unarticulable reluctance to commit to something that would demand so much involvement and responsibility. There is always a kind of vulnerability in any social or institutional involvement, and perhaps that’s what made me uneasy.

Looking back, my unwillingness was typical of the way I operated then, and the way I still find myself operating now — though hopefully less pervasively. My reaction to Rachelle was perhaps due to my subconscious belief that, as a student, I was not yet expected to shoulder any kind of “real” responsibility, or embark on anything quite so “legit”. I think this feeling is exemplary of a dichotomy that is often met with throughout our college experience; we hear talk of “the real world” — i.e. the world outside and beyond the collegiate one — as if our experiences as students here and now are but preparatory sketches of the real thing, a more or less irrelevant and duty-free trial run. I think this kind of thinking can seriously hurt our achievements and development, and I know that it did mine.

Of course I understand how this sort of paradigm could develop — it’s true that we occupy a position that is privileged, and in some ways surreal. When else are we going to be excused from so many civil duties and be allowed and expected to simply learn and socialize day after glorious day? But to me this is precisely why it is important to stress the reality of what we are going through. If we consider all this to be merely a dream-like transition that must take place if we want to live real lives, there is only so much we are going to risk, and therefore just so much we are going to learn.

If this is a dream, then there’s no waking up. There’s no magical leap that happens upon the thrusting of a diploma into our hands. Our essays, designs, calculations, and what-have-you unfortunately don’t automatically improve when we find ourselves to be graduated adults. This realization can be daunting in that suddenly our current accountability and productive worth become far more important than we may have thought, but it is also wonderfully liberating to realize that we are there. And by “there” I mean simply “here”. Perhaps all this may be summarized that way: “here” is always a better place to be than “there”, for “there” isn’t really a true thing. And now I am knowingly flirting with the painfully trite, but still I must insist that now is all we ever have. What I perhaps never realized is that I already have it.

For that reason I am glad for all the pressure Rachelle put me under to apply for this editorial position. It has been an opportunity I am lucky to have been roped into. One that has brought me into contact with many people I have come to respect, and has helped me to see the realness of what is now.

Thank you so much for reading, and now perhaps you will continue to read and view the contents of these pages with a more immediate sense of importance and wholeness.

Please enjoy,

Andrew Szobody
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Tug
Jake Schepers

The seaweed you took
for a shark
put an abrupt end
to our skinnydipping.
You insisted we head in:
  this was too
dangerous, and the seeming
calm made it that
much worse.
We were out a ways,
and had a lengthy
  swim home.
While we swam
  you caught me stealing
glances at your figure,
the detonations your splashing legs
created, your shoulders
breaking the surface
tension. I then feigned
an interest upward
and saw
the moon
holding the ocean sobbing
in its sleep, a reenactment

of the mud sucking
our feet downward
and delaying our departure
from this place to which we
will never again return,
this place to which
we owe everything.
When we reached the shore
what we took for the tide
was only the water
calling us back.

Dialogue 05
The Wilsons, Tom and Marigold, were the proprietors of the small town grocery. They were a handsome couple, but kept to themselves. There was a sort of legend about how they'd come down to the little town from the big city so many years ago, she in a silk and he in a velvet suit. They had marched right in and bought the grocery with cash. But only the oldest folk remembered. Surely it was hard to imagine Tom wearing a suit or looking at all grand. He slouched on a wooden chair behind the heavy counter of the shop all day and waited for customers, his hair mussed and his eyes dull. He was rather like a caged lion, but like the lion you see at the zoo that has quite given up and you feel for it more pity than fear. The children whispered to each other that he was glued to the chair; that he ate and slept there.

When they thought about it, the old folks thought that even when he'd arrived he'd been a little crotchety; now, though, they all agreed he was downright ornery. But his prices were fair and Marigold was kind. Besides, there wasn't another grocery within fifteen miles.

But that wasn't enough for everyone in the town. Ms. Lizabeth Hopkins swore she didn't trust the new folk, even after thirty-five years. She would as soon have trekked across the state for groceries if she'd had the means. But she didn't, which is what brought her to the Wilson's grocery one early, dusty morning.

Tom, as always, sat behind the grocery counter staring off into an unknown corner. Lizabeth stood in front of him, arms full of groceries, tapping her foot. She cleared her throat pointedly. Tom turned his head, "Yes?"

"Well! I've been standing here a good five minutes and you won't even give me a how-do-you-do?"

"Ah, Lizabeth," Tom noted carelessly. "What do you want?" She sighed irritably and dropped a head of lettuce, a bag of potatoes, and a pound of creamy butter onto the scratched counter. Tom fondled the groceries absently for a moment.

"Going to ring me up this year, Tom?" Lizabeth asked peevishly. He blinked calmly and tapped some buttons on the cash register in a slow methodical rhythm.

"$3.19," he said, "For a head of lettuce, a bag of onions and a pound of good butter."

"You blind, Tom Wilson?" Lizabeth shrieked, "Them's potatoes! I don't owe you more than $2.95!" Tom shrugged in a vague apology and took the three soiled bills she offered. He dug around in the cash register for more time than seemed necessary. Lizabeth grumbled "Tom!" and he dropped a nickel into her hand. "Thanks for nothing," she muttered, grabbed her groceries under an arm and turned to go. Tom muttered something less than flattering at her receding figure and settled himself back into his chair.

"Tom?" Marigold called from out on the street. Tom's dull face sparked at her voice. She was an older woman, but those who treat life with kindness, life often treats kindly as well. She was just as beautiful as the day they had arrived, if smaller and greyer. "Tom, honey, maybe you want to come here."

"Where?" Tom stared absently at his hands. He didn't seem to know what to do with them. They lay in his lap, huge and ungainly. He wiggled his fingers and seemed lost in thought.

"Tom, the whole village is out there, there's someone here to see you."

"Hm?"
Big John poked his head in the storefront bearing the same news. "A painter!" he bellowed. "A real live painter here in our town, to see you!" If Big John saw the sudden look of fear that crossed Tom's face he didn't let on.

"I'm not here," Tom told Marigold desperately. "Not here." But it was too late and he was there as the door sung open and a dark, fat Italian man in a velvet suit strode in and threw out his arms.

"Thomas, I could kiss you!" He shouted. Tom stared warily, no recognition in his eyes. "Don't you recognize me?" the man asked. The man was an actor now, relishing the audience of curious townsfolk who pushed in behind him. "I don't wonder, there's twice as much of me now to recognize!" He laughed a short, sharp, braying laugh.

Tom leaned forward, his eyebrows knit together "It isn't... Ricci?"

"None other!" Ricci stepped boldly behind the counter and bent to kiss him on both cheeks. "There'll be a fight now," Big John said, his voice hopeful, "Ain't no one steps back there!"

But Tom only sat weakly and allowed himself to be greeted. Ricci continued. "Your pretty wife, I see, has not aged a day." he bent over the surprised Marigold's hand and kissed it theatrically.

"Why are you here?" Tom asked. His eyes flicked about like he didn't know where to rest them. "Don't flatter yourself it's for you, though if I knew you were here I may have made the trip years ago!" He set down his luggage. "May I have a chair?" Marigold quickly fetched one from the back room. Ricci sat, sighing with relief, and pulled a pipe out of his pocket. "May I?" He glanced at Marigold and stuck the pipe back into his pocket. "Never mind. No, I'm only here for a ten minute layover. I'm on my way to Chicago—to an art show" He leaned forward with the expression of a child trying to please his teacher, "My own art show!"

"No accounting for taste in Chicago," Tom said. He had not moved from his chair.

"Tsk tsk" Ricci clucked, shaking his head, "There's the old Thomas! Now that wasn't very nice at all. But I'll forgive you seeing as you always were a better artist than I." Ricci stole a glance around the room where the townspeople, who had been perusing bridles and buttonhooks with unmilitated interest, had slowly become still, listening, whispering to each other. "What?" he exclaimed. "Do they not know?" Tom's glower deepened but Ricci stood and addressed the people. "Your Tom Wilson, groceryman, was once one of the greatest artists this country has ever seen!"

Ricci relished the amazed looks on the faces of the townsfolk and his performance continued for their benefit. "We went to school together, shared models, and apartments, painted the same old lightning-struck tree over and over and over... But then one day he up and left, and, well, when I heard someone mention his name down at the depot I couldn't believe this is where he'd ended up!" His soliloquy over, he faced Tom and seemed to wait for a response. The townsfolk, too, held their breath.

Thomas shook his head. "I'm not a painter anymore," he said slowly.

Ricci bent forward. "But why? Why not? Why did you leave?" He looked back to captivated audience. "One day he was making money, nay, making history! The next, poof!" His face went vague and he seemed almost to be talking to himself. "You were the best of all of us, weren't you, Thomas? At least you were always better than I was."

Marigold shifted uncomfortably. Tom still didn't move. "You're going to miss your train," he said finally.

Ricci consulted his watch. "I've already missed it." He settled back into his chair and smiled. His smile was like that of a little girl's, his teeth too small and white.

Dialogue 07
Tom stood uneasily, “I need to go” he said and took a step towards the back room. The children whispered gleefully and exchanged coins as he shoved his chair back and made his way across the floor. He walked strangely, shuffling like someone whose feet have fallen asleep.

“Marigold?” Tom asked, looking lost, “Mari?” She was standing in front of him, and she took his hands and said, gently, “I’m here, Tom.”

Ricci sat up suddenly, a peculiar light in his eyes. He leaned forward and said with fresh intensity, “Thomas,”

Marigold took Tom protectively by the arm. “I think you’d best go now, Mr. Ricci.”

“Yes, of course, I will. I’ll leave and never look back if your husband will do just one thing.”

Nervously, Tom stopped walking, “What’s that?”

“Paint with me.”

Tom shook his head. “I can’t. I haven’t...not in such a very long time.”

“Come on, a painting competition, just for old times sake.” The light in Ricci’s eyes was almost maniacal, and the townsfolk stared, enthralled at the story that was unfolding. “You have nothing to be afraid of, do you? Remember, I could never hold a candle to you.”

“No you couldn’t.” For a moment Tom stood as he had the first day in his hat and suit. But he lowered his head, “I can’t.”

“No stakes, no pressure,” Ricci wheedled. Tom stood silently and Ricci smoothly changed tactics. “You were great, Thomas. Really great. But you’re right, it’s been such a long time. And now, look at me, I have my own art show! You’re right, it just wouldn’t be fair.”

Tom smiled grimly, “You couldn’t paint a brick wall. Never could.”

Ricci shook his head. “No, I understand if you don’t want to paint with me, if you’re afraid that...”

“Who would be afraid of you?”

Marigold gripped Tom tighter. “Tom, dear, you don’t need to prove anything...” she said soothingly, but Ricci, beaming, was already opening his suitcase.

“I always travel with these” he smiled, showing his pretty teeth, “you never know when inspiration may strike.” He pulled two creamy canvases out of his case and several tubes of oil paint. A folded-up easel popped open and he dolloped paint expertly onto a tray. Ricci busily set things up and Tom stood braced against his counter next to Marigold. The rest of the townsfolk drew closer to Ricci, deeply interested.

“What’s he doing?”Tom asked nervously. Ricci pulled Tom’s chair from behind the counter.

“Won’t you come out here and have a seat?” Ricci said, gesturing to where he had set the chair.

“I’m sorry, I don’t have a second easel. But as I recall you’re used to using unorthodox methods, aren’t you? Painting on your lap for example?”

“Allow me” Ricci said, and he grabbed a tin plate off a wall display and squirted it with paint for Tom.

Tom hesitated only for a moment before he stepped boldly out from behind the counter. “Been a while since I seen that!” Big John breathed.

Tom sat on the chair had Ricci pulled out for him, his back straight and his head raised. His Adam’s apple bobbed up and down and his hand shook as he accepted the proffered paintbrush. The number of observers had increased to such a number that the room was cramped and there were people standing half in, half out of the door. But the townsfolk were quiet. Ricci cracked his knuckles and asked, “Any rules? Portrait? Landscape? Why not something in this room,
something in this town?” His eyes glinted, “Ought to give you an advantage,”

Tom shook his head. “The lightning struck tree.”

“Oh but we’ve painted that a thousand times.” Ricci smiled as he spoke, and his words had the impression of being recited, of being lines in a play.

“Then I’ll paint it a thousand and one.” Tom paused. “This is my first painting in thirty five years. And it will be my last.”

“Your last painting, how very dramatic.” Ricci commented drolly. “So the tree—are you sure you remember it?”

“I remember it all.” Tom sighed and the words carried the weight of a secret.

Ricci only smiled. “Good luck, Thomas,” Ricci said and swabbed a streak of blue boldly across his sky. Tom dipped his brush into the plate tentatively and his hand hesitated. But he marked his canvas and the mark seemed to give him new strength. He began to paint madly, even comfortably. The people came away from the edges of the store, craning, tiptoeing to watch the men at work. Marigold knelt by Tom and whispered now and again into his ear. And Ricci painted alone, his theatricality suddenly dissolved into complete concentration.

Ricci bent close to the paper, squinting and adding details petal by petal, leaf by leaf. Tom painted as furiously as if he were conducting an orchestra. The people were amazed to watch the men paint. They stared at Ricci’s composure, but even more they were amazed to see Tom close his eyes as if painting were a habit that merited no more attention than tying his shoes. Perhaps they did not see the sweat that hung in beaded drops on his forehead.

Minutes and then hours flew by. The people missed their suppers and Ricci missed his second train but no one could tear themselves away. Finally the men were almost done.

Ricci’s picture was picturesque and lovely. The bark of the tree crackled and the green grass stretched up its head to the glimmering sun. But Ricci soon realized that no one stood behind him or watched him.

Everyone stared at Tom as he painted unflaggingly, his own terrifying picture. Ricci set down his brushes and stood as well to watch him paint. The people no longer whispered. They did not point or shout. They stared. Tom painted frantically and Marigold wept to see him.

Thomas’ picture was crude and simple. A yellow tree trunk dominated the picture, bedecked with twisted branches that never quite met the trunk. There was green in the sky and pink smeared through the grass. It was a brooding, garish, disconcerting picture, and as the townsfolk stared at its clumsy lines they finally pieced together a puzzle decades old. After several more minutes of silence Tom sighed, unclenched his great, ungainly hand and lay down the brush. Still, no one spoke.

The silence was broken by Tom, who amazed everyone by beginning to weep. His large shoulders shook and great tears fell from Tom’s eyes. By the townsfolk’s reactions it was a miracle on par with seeing water springing from a rock. Ricci stood apart, looking confused, ashamed, and a little embarrassed.

The scores of folk who had pressed themselves into the grocery turned as one to Ricci and glared their disapproval. “Guess you better be going” Big John said and he stepped forward threateningly. Ricci jumped and began to gather up his things. “Thomas—” he started, but Big John shook his fist and Ricci hustled out the door.

The people pressed forward and laid their hands on Tom’s shoulders, saying nothing. They knew there was nothing to say. One by one they nodded to Marigold, said “Good day” to Tom and left. It was very like a funeral, this lining up to pay respects. But as the people stepped outside the grocery
they smiled to themselves at the clouds and the sun and what grass there was.

Lizabeth was the last to leave. She cleared her throat. “I could use a length of gingham.” she said, “For curtains.” She smiled self consciously. “I’ll have to come back and buy it next time I’m here.” Tom didn’t answer.

Lizabeth shrugged her shoulders. “I didn’t like the looks of that man the first second I saw him.” She smoothed her skirt, waited a second. “Well... good day.”

Then Tom and Marigold were alone. They were silent, too, for a moment, except for the sobs that still wracked Tom’s bearlike body.

“I was great.” he said at last

“You are great,” Marigold reassured. Tom shook his head.

“This is my last painting.” He said, softly, reverently.

“I know.”

He stood to clear his brush and paints, but Marigold took them from his hands and moved toward the back room to clean them. He stood alone, then, staring blankly at his final work. His eyes were pleading and his hand reached out to touch the painting gently—so gently—not smearing the paint. “Will you describe it to me?” he whispered, and his voice was so filled with a mixture of despair and hope that Marigold turned from the doorway and met his vacant eyes. She turned, covered her face with her hands, and wordlessly disappeared into the small back room.
A Sonnet for Me and Mine

Michael Kelly

How queer will be the day when we first meet:
A war of joys and sorrows is my fate,
The comfort of your touch would be so sweet,
And yet, on moral laws my heart will grate.
When I imagine you, doubt disappears,
Your words they soothe my soul like angels' song,
Your arms embrace my frailty, faults, and fear
that God will smite us both for loving wrong.
Then I awake from this, my swindling dream
To find that I still lie in bed alone,
A drop of loss runs down my cheek, it seems
love is not for me or mine to own.

If what I think is love is but a whim,
Then why, cruel heart, do you still yearn for him?
Muriel started. The jerk of her legs was arrested by the bed sheets; yet another long night of tossing and turning had wound them around her aging limbs. Then came again the noise that had awakened her—a steady pounding on the door of her dingy apartment. With a sigh, she fumbled for her glasses, knocking them off the nightstand in her confusion. The pounding continued.

"Coming," she rasped, sleep still subduing the noise. "Hold on."

Slowly, painfully, she bent down and retrieved the frames, settled them on her nose and wrapped a housecoat around her frail body. Slowly, painfully, she shuffled to the door.

Two clicks of the key and the door creaked open. Muriel stopped it when the gap reached three inches exactly. She knew the distance from years of practice. On the porch stood an earnest looking young man whose wavy brown hair matched his uniform.

"Good morning, uh, ma'am," he said, shifting his weight from one foot to the other as Muriel peered through the crack, squinting in the sharp morning sunlight. "Uh, sorry to disturb you, uh, ma'am. Does a Mr. Leonard Richardson live here?"

Muriel blinked.

"No," she said.

"Uh, would you have a forwarding address, ma'am? I have a package for him at this address—Leonard Richardson, 622 Sycamore, Apartment A." He leaned back to take a closer look at the rusted numbers above Muriel's mailbox. The six had lost a screw and now hung from its tail, the paint it had once covered too vibrant for the surrounding wall. The young man cleared his throat. "This is that address, uh, is it not, ma'am?"

"No one by that name lives here," Muriel said.

Confused, the man hesitated. He furrowed his brow and leaned forward, opening his mouth to speak again—

"No one."

She shut the door. Through the small, dusty windows to its left she could just make out his brown uniform. The man stood for a moment, examining the package. He looked at the numbers and back at the label before setting the small box down on the worn mat and backing slowly away, tripping down the porch steps before turning and walking quickly back to the delivery truck. Muriel watched until he reached the stop sign at the end of the street. The truck slowed, but didn't quite stop before turning the corner onto Sixty-Fourth Avenue and disappearing from view.

It rained in the late afternoon. Water dripped from a leak in the porch roof, smearing the address label on the package. The blue ink seemed to billow out from the spidery handwriting, giving a sense that all was out of focus. Or it would, if Muriel had looked at the box at all. Only the corner was visible from the kitchen window, and she stared determinedly in the opposite direction as a mug of weak tea grew cold on the table to her right. She took a forceful bite of toast. It crunched satisfactorily under her dentures, but the congealing butter was slimy on her tongue and she let it fall to the plate with a look of disgust. It clattered against the china plate, the only sound in a bare room. Muriel took a heavy, rasping breath just to make more noise. She pushed back from the table, gripping the table as she stood, shaking first with frailty and then with anger.

The plate hit the floor and shattered. A particularly large piece skated across the linoleum and
into Muriel's slippers. She looked down, surprised. She was not quite sure it had been an accident.

When the floor had been painstakingly swept and every visible chip had vanished into the garbage, Muriel looked hard at the front door. No, she decided. It's not mine, anyhow. But she felt her arthritic fingers tense, as if closing around the imaginary doorknob, and she knew it was only a matter of time. Leonard Richardson, the mailman had said. 622 Sycamore, Apartment A—of course he had claimed her address as his own. No right, she thought. He had no right. But her hand found the locket she wore always under her coat, and she drew her long ridged fingernail across until it caught on the deep diagonal scratch and remembered.

Leonard Richardson, fourteen, young enough to be honey sweet and baby powder soft, old enough to break her heart with every word, swept a clump of sun-lightened hair from his eyes. It fell back again, and he peered up through it to where she stood over him, trying with all her might to give the appearance of intimidating size. This was all but impossible; he'd reached her full adult height at twelve and left long accusing fingers and sharp words her only weapons.

"Leonard," she said sternly, clear eyes crackling. "Would you like to tell me how you acquired that?"

Leonard looked down at the object in his grimy hands. His fingers were clenched around it, but he knew she could make out the glint of silver. He instinctively drew the hand against his chest, tucking the chain into his fist.

"I found it." He drew his brows together and pursed his lips. She could see his jaw muscle tense. "And to whom does it belong?"

"It's mine. I found it," he repeated. "Where did you find it, Leonard?" she asked, spitting the verb.

"I don't have to tell you," he said, sneering now.

In a moment of fury, she caught his wrist and twisted in an attempt to rest the object from him. He stood, suddenly and flung his arm wide, breaking her grip. Caught off balance, Muriel stumbled backward. Her knee buckled forward as it collided with the leg of the coffee table; she fell hard into the bookshelf. A hardcover copy of Jane Eyre tipped forward and dropped, the corner striking her forehead with just enough force to break the skin. Stunned, she wiped the blood from her temple and stared at it for a long moment before looking up at Leonard, who had uttered a clipped cry simultaneous to her own. He stood with his legs apart, shoulders squared and tensed but mouth loose. The chain swung from his fist. The silence darkened. Muriel thought his shoulders drooped, just slightly, but he turned and reached for the study door, which he shut behind with enough force to signal continued defiance.

"Leonard!" she called, standing as quickly as her legs would allow and stepping into the hallway behind him. He paused, turning his head just enough so she could see his jaw tense again under straggly curls.

She drew out the words she knew would pain him most, weighing each before she lobbed this last weapon at his back:

"I'm disappointed in you."

He said nothing, but relaxed his fingers enough to let the chain slide through them. He hesitated for the briefest of moments before dropping the object as well. Then he walked away without turning around.

The metal glinted again in the empty hallway; the object had fallen into the only patch of
sunlight that ventured so far into the house. Muriel stepped forward. She scooped it up and peered closely—it was a cheap, circle-shaped locket with a rose engraved on the face and a deep diagonal scratch across the back.

There was no sunlight in the hallway now. All was dim, and dusty. The books were gone from the study, sold a decade ago when Leonard had left for good. The stories had been too much for her then. Before, she had run her fingers across their spines for comfort, stopping each time before *Jane Eyre* even so. But he'd walked away without turning around, so she'd packed them up, growing weaker and slower and older with each box, purging the words from her life along with all the boy's belongings and finally his name.

Knobby fingers still wrapped around the necklace, Muriel shuffled to the door. She reached for the doorknob with her right hand, pausing three inches away and leaning her forehead against the wood instead. Her temple throbbed slightly. She drew a long, rattling breath. Then Muriel closed her hand around the knob, turned as her aching finger joints would allow, and pulled the door toward herself, half-startled by the sucking noise as the weather strip unstuck. She stepped carefully over the threshold, but as she set down her foot, it caught the hem of her house coat and Muriel pitched forward onto the porch. She grabbed wildly at the door, catching herself on the doorknob but not enough to stop the fall. She landed on the welcome mat. The old wood groaned at her sudden weight.

Muriel pulled herself to her knees, sitting back as she picked up the box just to her right and pulled it onto her lap. As she read the return address, she reached again for the locket. Then she gathered the box to her chest, wrapped both arms around it, and wept.
The Zilwaukee Bridge

Davis Dryer

A monument to nothing, really.
Cement and steel ignore their weight,
giving the grandeur of forested flatness.
We drift up the incline
noticing there's not anything to notice,
and laugh it off.
Beneath and before us lay
(could it be) dozens of miles, and all we care about
is getting across.

I Thought I Knew

Davis Dryer

Somehow the grass was green in January.
I did some research.
The M40 was what got me there.

It took me somewhere I'd never been,
and I had to see for myself.
The sun kissed me good morning
and woke me up on its own.

The day took part of me away
and left me with an ache for more.
I wandered corridors.
I saw where the books were written.
I even wore my glasses.

But night fell
and it was just us and the streets.
The moon grazed our cheeks on the way back.
I'd made observations
and learned I didn't know anything.
Enveloped in the dark, whisked away,
whispered down the M40 by street signs in the peripheral.
I can smell
the stink of your dislike of me under the color
of my skin
and of the strangeness of my behavior
a mile away
the ones who birthed me
don’t want me
the ones who foster me now
don’t want me
nobody wishes to claim me
until I do something great
(like become the first black president of the
United States? ....)
No true African speaks with an accent like this
We don’t want you
take your strangeness away
No true American has a name like yours
We don’t understand you
take your strangeness away
We don’t want you
/I don’t need to be your expectations./
I can smell the
stink of your dislike
of me under the colour of my skin
a mile away
Katryn Shick, *Untitled*, film double exposure
The Dialogue editorial team would like to issue a profuse apology to Grace Ghent -- the artist featured on this spread -- and to our readers. In our last issue, these two photographs appeared mislabeled, and it is our pleasure to re-publish them under the name of the original photographer.
Grace Ghent, *Untitled*, digital photography
Andrew Fisher, *Ambiguity*, digital photography
Ann Parkin, Shroom, digital photography
The golden hour is when the world looks its most real and surreal simultaneously. Everything melts into a glow reminiscent of tranquility and regret. Sometimes great moments of beauty happen before darkness and death, just as the sun is extinguished each day. It’s a natural, aesthetic phenomenon as well as a metaphor for phases of life. In this photograph I explore this golden moment, one taken for granted daily but there if you look, in the context of cold rain and reality. For a fleeting moment, a brilliance of amber and gold irreproducible in fine jewelry lingers with cool sadness.
Brittany Beezhold, *Untitled*, charcoal on paper
Hope Velthouse, Seasonal, multi media

These two images show samples of a larger series of six leaves, upon which were typed an entire essay.
If we are not conscious of the present moment, it is as if we were sleepwalking through our day. Our minds are often elsewhere, preoccupied with the past or the future. We overlook the beauty of each moment, treating it as a mere step on the path to the next event. However, if we focus on the present, we can experience a profound sense of calm and peace. Each moment is a unique opportunity for growth and learning. If we are present and attentive, we can unlock the potential of each day and savor every moment as a precious gift.
Joanna Bayliss, *Cling To*, graphite on paper
Anna Hanchett, *O% Dutch Blood Runs Through My Veins*, sharpie on paper
Lauren Nagle, *Metals*, multi media
Hannah Abma, *Untitled*, ceramics
Hannah Abma, *Untitled (detail)*, ceramics

Hannah Abma, *Untitled (detail)*, ceramics
Panopticon

Elliot dons green facepaint to frighten away the guests. He eats in his bathrobe, unshaven, chest hair thick as horsetails, crumbs caught in his beard. She offers in between theseSi ylva coaxes flowers from long-dead, bone-strewn soil. She offers the stormclouds roll towards her from the East.

I wake up twitching, hunched over my desk, limbs flung wide as butterflies, wings to the ground. My body is a Rorschach, squeezed between needles.

Tell me what you see, peering out from the alphabetine metal teeth.

Abby Koning
God entered the room through a window pain. He was late. I didn’t take the pains to crane my stiff neck around to meet his flustered face. Sipping at my cereal like an all-too-wise handsome know-it-all who knows all too well not to get all excited over an occasion like this.

I’d ignored God so long he couldn’t stand it. At first he hollered down from heaven, and when I wouldn’t listen, he finally came down here to talk to me eye to eye. “There’s nothing that can make you have power over my life”, was the last thing I told him. He used to visit every day. Come in my window early in the morning. But lately he’s been running late, bumbling in around half passed seven, tripping on the blinds as he slips through the window pane.

And that morning, when I didn’t even look up, I was just practicing what he taught me; this searing silence he’d instilled in me from all the times I’d called to him with no answer. God’s greatest tactic is making us think he’s not there. So I thought it unusual when he started to call me. At first I responded, but then I learned better. People that like to ignore people hate worse to be ignored.

And that’s what I did. I matched my stubbornness against his. I was taught by the best. And eventually he became less than a shadow. This great orator of ages reduced to an unwelcomed guest--after he learned I wasn’t taking it anymore. After I’d learned how to get by on my own--that’s when he wanted me to listen to him the most. And I did not give in. He began to follow behind me, throughout my day, trying to get me to think thoughts of holy repentance. And as I said; he faded like a shadow. Like an imaginary friend to a kid that’s grown too old for that crap, he slipped away while I barely noticed.

And now God wasn’t in the light. God wasn’t in the beauty. But something else was gone from it all too. Just as I saw clearly, I saw much less than I had before. Everything shrunk, leaving more space for the memory of what I thought it had been. Like the days after a breakup when everything takes a paler shade, and my stillborn hopes of future good times lay abandoned like rain-soaked teddy bears scattered around on empty fairgrounds.

God didn’t exist this morning when I woke up, so I ate breakfast without him.
This American Life
Jake Schepers

My father, growing up
with the trenches of WWII
transcribed on his father's American face,
played a game—simple, really—
whenever he found himself
intruder to a swarm of mosquitoes:
as they burrowed in his ears,
he heard the whir of propellers;
as they made for his exposed skin,
he envisioned kamikaze pilots
divebombing the last American refuge.
His mission, then,
was to strike them down
with a force particular
to his strong American hand.
He told me about this game
under unmemorable circumstances
when my own boyhood lay behind me,
but I imagine a scene of my own:
my father at play, a covert mosquito,
a sting & a yelp,
a retreat making away
with prized American blood.
Brain Tumors
Sarah Vander Molen

Anything unpleasant that can happen to a person will, without a doubt, happen to me: plane crash, terrorist attack, serial killer, meningitis. This pseudo-hypochondria began when I got pneumonia at age twelve. I came back from the doctor’s office and lay down on the couch. My older sister, Julia, sat next to my feet with a bowl of pretzels and said, “You know people die from pneumonia? Yeah, they suffocate from the inside out because their lungs fill up with liquid. It’s supposed to be awful.” As she sat there on the couch, munching on her snack, a feeling of panic swelled up in me. The logic seemed perfectly clear to my twelve-year-old mind: I have pneumonia. People die from pneumonia. Therefore, I will die from pneumonia. I was never very good at math.

That night, I went to bed convinced that I would not wake up the next morning. As I lay in bed, my thoughts turned to my mother sobbing over my grave and my father cursing God for not allowing him to take my place. My sisters would be dressed all in black, rebuking themselves for all the wasted hours of pinning me down and tickling my armpits when they could have been spending their precious time learning more about who I was as a person.

Of course, I woke up the next morning, and the morning after that, and each following morning healthier than when I had gone to bed. That’s the magic of prescription pills. This miraculous recovery, however, did not provide me with any sense of optimism. In fact, I considered myself lucky to have had such a narrow escape. And the hypochondria did not stop there.

Julia, ever the sympathizer, told me one day that children, as well as adults, could get heart attacks. You would know when you were about to get a heart attack: your left arm would tingle and you would have shortness of breath. We were watching a family movie that night, and through it all, my mind was focused on my sister’s words: “Tingling left arm...shortness of breath. Tingling left arm...shortness of breath.” At that instant, most coincidentally, I felt lightheaded, as if I could not fill my lungs up with enough air. Then my left arm lost all sensation. Oh, God, no! I prayed silently, massaging my left arm, trying to bring circulation back into it. God, please don’t let me die! I’m only twelve! I fell into a fit of hysterics, which only subsided when my mom took me out into the yard and had me explain what all the fuss was.

“I’m having a heart attack,” I said.

“No you’re not,” my mom said in a shockingly unsympathetic fashion. “Why on earth would you think you’re having a heart attack?”

“Julia told me kids could get them just as much as adults!”

“Your sister is a crazy person,” my mom responded. “Sometimes kids get heart attacks if their hearts are really weak, but it’s way more common in adults. You don’t have a weak heart. You just need to stop listening to every stupid thing your sister says.”

A ray of hope was building up inside me. But I had to be sure: “So...so, I’m not having a heart attack?”

“No.”

“But my arm’s all tingly.”

“You’ve been sitting on the ground and leaning on it for the last hour.”

“Oh. I guess that makes more sense.”

My anxiety was pacified for the time being. It did not take me long to understand that being afraid of childhood heart attacks was not the most logical thing to do. But instead of channeling that
brain power into something more useful, I transferred it to other phobias. In the subsequent year or two, I had this resigned understanding that I would be one of those people who died in youth. I was terrified of being taken by the inevitable car accident or plane crash without tying up any loose ends. Every day or so, I would go up to each member of my family and say, “I love you, and I’m sorry for every mean thing that I ever did to you.” This declaration was often met with puzzled looks or chuckles, but I knew deep down that I was preparing myself for that final Judgment Day. They could laugh all they wanted; I was covering my bases.

In high school, my anxiety manifested itself in other areas of life, particularly movies. I have heard people say that they do not like scary movies, but my fear was on a different level. Once I watched a movie, I couldn’t detach my mind from it. In my literature courses, I had learned about the term “temporary suspension of disbelief,” or, the ability to believe implausible things for the sake of the story. If you were to read a story about a dragon, you would not say to yourself, “This story is stupid, because there is obviously no such thing as a dragon.” No, you would think, “Within the bounds of the story, I will believe that there are dragons,” otherwise there would be no point in reading it. For some reason, I cannot turn this switch off.

In my final year of high school, I saw The Happening by M. Night Shyamalan, a laughably substandard movie to any rational person. However, I am not a rational person. My temporary suspension of disbelief was on full swing. “For the sake of the movie,” I subconsciously told myself, “I will believe that all the trees and other plants are producing a toxin that rewrites humans’ brains, switching the self-preservation mentality to one of self-destruction, therein resulting in mass suicide by various gruesome methods.” The problem was that, when I left the movie theater and approached the doors to the parking lot, I was gripped by the fear that, once I stepped outside and took a whiff of those toxins, I would have no choice but to turn on my car, put a brick on the accelerator, and lie down in its path. The movie was real. Not only real, it was actively pursuing me.

That night, I slept on the floor of my parents’ bedroom. This was the end for me. I knew it. A monster or madman I could at least try to fight off. But my own mind was under attack and there was nothing I could do about it. I tried every trick in the book: I took a sleeping pill; I sang some church songs in my head; I tried to remember all the lines to Pride and Prejudice. I remembered my Psychology teacher telling us that a good way to relax was to focus on a simple word, such as “one,” and repeat it slowly. It’s worth a try, I thought. One...one...one...one...Oh no. Is this the part in the movie where I start going crazy and saying nonsense? One...Stop it brain! One...No! Stop going crazy! A mixture of exhaustion, terror, and Tylenol PM had prevented me from reaching an obvious conclusion: I was not in the slightest a suicidal person. Therefore, I could not simply kill myself without my consent.

The problem with these night terrors was that, in the light of day, I would chuckle to myself and think, Oh, Sarah, you do get yourself into these silly scrapes. I would be cured of any sense of trepidation. I lived a normal, peaceful life, a life which was not tainted by axe murderers or killer vegetation. But at night, the panic came. I decided early on that, if I were going to watch a scary movie, it would have to be during the day. That way, I could get over the anxiety in plenty of time before night came. I have always had an inexplicable fear of velociraptors thanks to Jurassic Park. Whenever I watched this movie, I would think, Nothing to be afraid of, Sarah. Dinosaurs are extinct. Of all the things to be afraid of, this is probably the stupidest. Besides, it’s still light out. Velociraptors can’t hurt you when it’s still light out. I always thought that I was doing just fine, but once it was time to go to bed, I would find myself convinced that I would find a velociraptor hiding in the shower. Or standing over my
shoulder as I washed my face. They could also come out of the toilet after I flushed. I have no idea why this fear of velociraptors was strictly confined to the bathroom, but it is a fear that has haunted me for longer than I care to admit.

At twenty-one years old, my new fear is cancer. I like to rationalize my behavior by telling myself that this fear is much more reasonable than my previous fears. After all, I had grown up hearing tales about the cancer-inducing powers of various household objects. What is it that can give you cancer nowadays? Hand lotion, sun exposure, Red Dye #40, High Fructose Corn Syrup. My best friend in middle school, Tori Lopez, told me that her family did not buy shredded cheese because each shred was coated with plastic and that it would give you cancer. I told her she was being stupid. We got into a huge fight. Little did I know that she was right. And there I was, going through my entire life eating shredded cheese. What were my parents thinking? My cells were going to mutate and replicate until I had a tumor the size of a watermelon hanging off my abdomen!

The worst possible type of cancer I could have—and, therefore, the one I will inevitably get—is brain cancer. I am nearsighted, but the headaches I experience are not caused by the oblong shape on my eyeball and the strain I put on it when I stare at a blackboard for hours. No, the headaches are caused by the brain tumor that has been festering and creeping unapologetically on my left-hemisphere. This brain tumor, no doubt, had begun mutating after I ate a piece of confetti cake at my fifth birthday party. I just didn’t know about it until now.

Tumors. Tumors will be my downfall: big, bulbous, pulsating tumors.
That or nuclear war.
Watching Crocodiles
Hannah Meijers

My dad loves watching crocodiles
or alligators, he doesn't care
as long as they're long
and green
and lay there lazy like spanish moss
gnarled and knobbed and hard like a spruce trunk
with eyes just poking above the brown water
all pure and stunning evil

He watches like a suburb indian at a powow
crushing powdery red warpaint in his (soft) hands
and (sort of) dancing (hopping) to the drum

or a man in a suit
(who's father's father's father wore a suit)
hitting a deer
(on a dark road in his SUV)
and (paying an arm and a leg) butchering the thing
tearing at the meat all glint and teeth

He watches in his cargo shorts and tourist straw hat
clip on sunglasses
clinging to his prescription with magnets
with that grin
like he uses when he's proud of you
and with the hair on the back of his neck
all alert

like a child staring into a closet
(that might contain the devil)
(it might contain a monster)
drawn to the closet
and staring

"just look at those jaws" he says
"just look at those jaws"
Gdye Maya Lubimaya
Eden McCune

Gdye maya lubimaya? Where is my love?
When I was growing up, Russia showed the same film every New Years. It involved some Soviet Union humor, a silly mix up, a romance, and the good old idea of one man stealing another man’s woman while we laugh and rejoice. And it included this song where a sad man searches for his lost love. In a typical Russian way, he approaches different forms of nature: a poplar tree, the rain, even the lonely moon, and he pitifully asks: where is my love? None of them answer him. He then comes to his best friend, who he trusts above all others, and asks him: where is my love? And his best friend answers: she was your love, but now she has become my wife.

Sometimes I wonder about this song. When I hear the end result I am surprised and horrified. But I think that the man knew. I think that he went to nature because he didn’t want to go to his friend and have to face the fact that his friend took his love away. He didn’t want the person that he trusted to have done such a thing. He knew all along, but he hoped to remain lost.

Now I find myself lost. I am lost in this strange American dream. I have begun to live in this foreign place, and I confess I enjoy it. I enjoy the smell of mowed grass and the clean air. I enjoy America’s love of freedom, and I enjoy the bright people here. But still I have this hollowness. Still I have this longing for her.

It is a dangerous thing to fall in love, and most of my childhood I managed to stop myself from doing such a foolish thing. I lived in cool co-existence with Mahachkala, Moscow, and Krasnodar. Perhaps I even dared to hate them, but I never felt love. I would begin to have thoughts that tiptoed in that direction, but I would execute them before they had a chance to destroy me. And so I remained relatively unharmed.

But then Odessa found me. And she destroyed me.
Yes, I was destroyed. So utterly and wonderfully destroyed. I couldn’t resist her, even through all of my pathetic fighting. She enticed me with her beauty. Her hair blew me away with brilliant white cherry blossoms, violently violet lilacs, blood-red Judas. Her aroma knocked into me of sweet acacia and that overwhelming real smell of dirt and freshness. She sang melancholy music about love and war with language so beautiful and so harsh, and her laugh was the holy chimes of the Orthodox church. And to be kissed by her: oh, it was to be beaten with the bitter taste of boiling black tea, soothed with the sweet warmth of cherry compote, and then blasted with the chilling tartness of black currant juice. She dashed me off my feet. How could I stand a chance against her?

Now I interact with Grand Rapids. She might be an ice princess, beautiful in her fantastic coldness, but she does not touch me. My blood cools, and I am frozen into boredom. Grand Rapids is too relaxed to pummel me. I ache for Odessa’s violent touch.

And so, like the man in the song, I find myself wandering aimlessly. I ask the bare maple tree:
“Where is my love?”
The wind comes, and he shakes his head at me. I gaze at the snowflakes swirling all around me, and whisper to them.
“Where is my love?”
They merely continue to fall onto my already cold face. I face the sky, and howl out to the man in the moon:
“Where is my love?!"
He remains silent.
I, exhausted, collapse into the snow. I finally open my lips and pray:
“Oh where is my love? I want her back again.”
And He answers, like I knew He would: “It was I who took her away from you.”
Birds and Banjos
Caroline Higgins

We're smoking across the street from the fire house.
On a roof that blackens the backs of my legs
We are talking about childhood when you say:
“I wanted to be a train conductor
with my pockets pulled out.”

We’re listening to that song about birds
and mountains. You know how it makes me
Think of my brother.

Maybe I'll write to him tomorrow.
An ode to plateaus (that’s all I know about Utah)
He’ll read my letter sitting under a plastic tarp
or in a cold tent
or just below the stars.

One day, he'll tell me
How he washed everyone’s bowls for extra hot chocolate
And drank it, sweet and chalky, until he got sick
He lay under his tarp (it was a tarp.)
In the western wilderness
While an old man played him a song on a banjo.

The same song---about birds and mountains.
I’ll write to him tomorrow.

Skinny (Like Long Island)
Caroline Higgins

You let me steer your boat
But kept a hand on my right hip

We turned off the motor to swim
Was it your idea? Maybe mine.

“Don’t look at me,” I said.
Because the moon was a spotlight on my spine
And there were lights inside the water
Which you said were jellyfish

The kind that didn’t hurt
Luminescent when we touched them
I don’t remember why.

We got back before the hurricane
I remember that the room was round
We watched the water through the window pane
It looked like the sea, but it was only the Sound.
That Moment
Hannah Meijers

There's that awful realization
That saliva isn't water
And if you were stranded alone in the desert
You couldn't spit it out
And drink it

Chicken Not to Tell Me
Katerina Parsons

Broody hen
Guarding her eggs
Chicks that will never be born
(They're duds)

Reminds me of you
Setting that secret
Ruffled and clucking
(I already know)
Subway
Andrew Knot

Three-meters down, the red umbrella bounced on a khaki-coated spring.

Are these nameless faces, propped with newspapers, coffees, and spike-collared hounds—

out of the umbrella and into the houndsman’s coffer sprung a silver-sided piece—

Or faceless names?

“Vienna’s Catholicism survives in its underbelly,” I thought as umbrella and coin harmonized to sing the same unfamiliar song.

A Show for Me
Ryan Hagerman

A show for me:

You sing so coldly, though you have cigarettes in your mouth.

If your heart needs an ice pick I will give it fire.
Phenomenology
Colleen Keehl

Coriolis effect leaves waves
    drifting in something that isn't a universal wave — on bulged waters in this
world, on fat sides; an
amphidromic point leaving paradoxical joints
fluid in motion, fluid in life, liquid in water; an omnipotence
of gravity & coasts & all things unknown.

A fulcrum is amplified
on itself, a focus
that cycles better inclinations, a focus
on thyself
leaves no room for any else when high tides & tidal amplitude render a yearly
    bases &
no alternatives of eternity.

Rotation is reduced by $1.5 \text{ milliseconds/century}$ because
momentum desires to conserve:
small jells of crystal skies
rolled to slosh in your hand
reminds that diurnal inequality is inevitable in
this world of unjustness.

The Syzygy of the sun is no moon,
but remains a secret to never keep.

Furthermore the moon lies 5 degrees off the plane of the ecliptic,
    dragging
28 degrees on the inhabitants on the earth from standing straight.

There is no universal universals that keep this world turning.
American Soul
Daniel Camacho

Mr. U.S. Representative said, “It takes more than walking across the border to become an American—it’s within our souls.”

I don’t know what those words mean, and I don’t think I want to know. But I can’t help but ask, what is an American soul?

I’ve never been so thirsty so as to cross a desert so hungry so as to swim a river in so much pain so as to clutch onto the edge of a train for days and days only to end up with a job that pays change... but it could’ve easily been me.

I see my face in theirs, their tongue sounds like home to me. I too have brown skin, so sometimes the difference is only paper-thin.

Since when do borders delineate what is human? Since when do they enclose the reach of our compassion? Can’t you have one ounce of compassion? Enough to see the suffering? Enough...to see the separated families.

Enough to see the children. It’s no fault of their own. Little brown kids grow up in a society that’s reluctant to give them a diploma but quick to deploy them.

Please don’t say this is simply my issue because these are my people. Most of them are Christians—so if you’re baptized—they’re your people too!

What is an American Soul? When was it made?

Fearing “invaders”—we only fear ourselves, our dark past within, our dark present without, we’ve kept Columbus’ feast day.

What is an American Soul? What is its price?

I want to betray the melting pot, turn my back on this heresy. I’d rather speak in tongues even if I always feel homeless. I’d rather speak in tongues even if I’ll always be soulless.
The Nameless Picker
Andrew McClelland

He dances in the red light
His Guitar hanging
His hand twitching the pick
His fingers writhing in ecstasy
Slow red and gold ecstasy

The Pint reverberates in pools
Pools of liquid pleasure
Dulcet low grating musical notes
The transporters of desire
Nay not transporters, a train

A red train chugging along
Guitar strings chugging to death,
A red death upon the long golden voyage
Home a house of highs and lows
Of Rocks and Rolls

Rocks and Rolls, Hells Bells
The lone nameless picker picking
Strumming himself into a grave
A grave of the Blues. A grave of
Bye Gone Days. A grave of woes.

The tones fill the soul
Down to the bone marrow
It cuts to the core of the Blues.
And reds the light that paints the face
through the cigarette smoke.
Flight Patterns of the Acer Saccharum
Michelle Ratering

Migratory birds dot the sky--
I left along with them.

That morning the road was layered
mist swirled and fresh
newly laid gravel crunched beneath
the trees were looming traps.

Here I cried. Here I fell and here I listened.
Your stories. Your woes.

Here I grew my primaries again.

My retreat is a slow progression
down to the roots, earth bound.
Cold, quiet & waiting.

Everything
Katie Van Zanen

abdominal discomfort
anyone have ibuprofen?
no, it's fine, but I still don't know
what? if he cheated on me
where I'm gonna live, that sort of thing
broken gasket- needs a new engine
there goes the family bank account.
What sort of thing does one wear skiing?
fabulous.
finish that gift for your uncle
clean your room for guests
I just wish there was something we could do.
stroller, diapers, car seat
it just breaks my heart
hug him goodbye
remember to leave by four
at walgreens
need anything?
everything.
Family Portrait
Justin Majetich

My father is an alligator, and my mom is a smoothed sheet of aluminum. Josiah is a word describing a feeling—a feeling with savage teeth and leathered hide—and I am running with Sam’s Choice Diet Cola (and I hate diet sodas).

My father, pictured in a frame above the mantle, basks along the banks of my mother’s warm thighs. There is a fleck of something metallic in his smile, and his eye is an orb of wild pyrite he purchased from a gift shop in Yellowstone, circa ’98.

I slosh, fresh and bubbly, around his ankles where a shipwrecked ant washes ashore, sticky and dead.

(Armillaria Ostoyae)
Justin Majetich

I saw the ghosts of 1,000 trees staggered down the mountainside moon white in moaning procession.

There’s a tendrilled orgy on the other side of the soil—36,000 lovers perpetuating for 9,000 years—

I know because when I pushed my finger through, I felt the organism moisten:

oh sweet honey fruit,

everything I know is sunk beneath the bog’s black banks

oh sweet bubbling honey fruit,

everything I feel is sunk beneath black water

I found my condescendent god fucking in the dirt.
Drive Out the Night
Megan Meulink

Halfway through I found you.
and halfway through I found that it was you

angry tempest caged in bone began
raging stains
blotchy dark
as inky air submerged
a flood
drive out a heavy breath
of my mistakes
and found them
on a cloud

mental chokehold
tighter stillness
thought will burn to fade
a lightbulb gasp
eternal scintillation
out

take me

woven Dis cord
faceless
tangled mane
fail to catch a fault or
any sea-drowned sin
and stare at stagnant stone
alone within
a coffin made for guesswork all divine
close leopard-spotted wounds
lift lids
to heaven tightly shut
every day a turn to capture time
but never subtle flicker in your eye
and I
a fool with fatal appetite
and pace dictated by a tidal
heartbeat
  stairstep
  raindrop
  eyelash
lashes on my vein
I will not bother innocence again

a friendly foe
who stopped me short of you
has struck
a chord of distance
on this stance
and fancy that
I would converse with Luck
or was it Kurt?
I have not yet forgot

a sip a slip
a step
from haloed sphere
where questions turn to shimmer
look away
I cannot say a thing in studded prose
but wishing that you’d find me thus alone
I see her tranquil eyes
and taste your breath
to pacify

and halfway through you knew me.
Halfway through you knew that it was me
Now that everything is quiet, my thoughts no longer interrupted by the sound of rubber losing purchase, metal shearing and contorting, and the beautifully elegant song of glass shattering, I am left to the numbing cold, free to mull over my epitaph. However silence gives way to images, not words, and once again I am in your arms. That image is shuffled away and thousands take its place. Hundreds of memories, words, and thoughts vie for my attention and as I am looking into your brown eyes once more my solace is shattered by the wailing of an ambulance.

The numbness that had taken me blows apart as spine-bowing pain surges through me. I swear my nerve endings are on fire as deft hands assess my wounds and attempt to gently lift me onto a gurney. My head feels as if it has been cleaved in two but I catch one voice in the chaos around me. It says, “She just recently lost her husband,” and that is when I knew the rumors I would hear—when someone I didn’t even know could hold that tone of voice and use those words consecutively in a sentence. It may as well have been spoken in plain English, the unsaid thought that this accident may not have been so accidental. I attempt to locate the voice, to tell its person that the deer came out of nowhere and I had panicked, hitting my brakes on a road glare with black ice. But I discover that I cannot move my neck and realization dawns bright and cold, I cannot move at all.

The sound of doors slamming and hushed voices fills the time and I find myself slipping back to you. But this time the memories are twisted into vicious wraiths and I see your face contorted as we fight, hurt filling your eyes when my words cut deeply, and night spent in our bed, cold and alone, because I had gotten angry over something not worth noting, let alone worth a night of cold stares and an empty bed. A night that we would never get back and at that time one of the last few normal evenings we would ever have.

Pain gives way to agony as I see you lying still in a hospital bed, the only indication that you are still alive being the gentle humming and beeping of various machines attached to you. Images of you smiling for my sake as doctors and nurses poke and prod flash before my eyes along with the sensations of your arms holding tightly to me as I cried while you were dying, proving to be the better person even as the cancer ate away at you, and finally a gentle memory of kissing you goodnight. I enjoy this reprieve and knowing I would pay for it shortly before the final memory hit.

It had taken me days to form this original memory as this memory’s origination, seven words, had destroyed me thoroughly and completely. The doctor’s words that day seemed as cold and sterile as the hospital around us as he said, “He didn’t make it through the night.” My entire body, both physically and mentally, rebel as these words and the pain and hurt constricting my chest is underscored as the machines I am hooked to shriek wildly, telling the EMTS that my heart is slowing even though I feel as if it is pounding its way through my chest.

A scream builds in my throat while commotion breaks out in a flurry around me, but the scream never makes it close to reality. In fact after months of tears, of asking why, and pleading with the Christian God as well as any other deity who might listen to please spare my husband and then of finally quietly resigning myself to the fact that death would be a peaceful reprieve, I could not imagine screaming at this point—especially not over myself.

From watching other mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, whatever you fall apart I know what it should sound like and have more than a general idea of the emotion behind it, but after hours of trying not to break and fall apart I have no clue how to arrange my face to bring this sound into the
realm of the tangible. Instead it remains inside, tearing me apart.

I overhear another voice, this time attached to the face directly above me, tell the others around him that the internal bleeding is worse than they originally thought - that someone should call ahead and book an O.R. ...O.R.? I knew that term. I had associated it only with television hospital dramas, a fictitious entertainment turned into brutal reality. Was I dying? Oh God, was I really dying?

Panic rushes through me as I realize that out of all of my prayers one of them was about to be answered. In the dark moments between midnight and dawn, when the house only amplified your absence I begged God to take me too in the event that He would not save you. Now that my wish was on the verge of fruition I wanted to take it back, but another smaller part of me was at peace. And it is too late, far too late and all thought of you dissipates as I fight to remain conscious, a battle briefly lost as I went from looking up into the worried faces of strangers to the ceiling of my own personal hell on earth, the hospital where I sat in hopeless resignation and watched you die.

Noises and images blur to form a bleary sideshow in my mind. As it becomes harder to focus on any one thing the voices become more urgent, more strained. I catch one last stray thought vocalized; this time from my ever diminishing field of vision. “We have to hurry or she’s not going to make it.” Trepidation, for a moment, tries to fight its way through my body, but I have no strength left. Emotions, thoughts, and sound flood away in lieu of a tide of static silence; the only discerning observation is of stark red and white, a symphony of exit signs leading me home to you.
Shadow Studies
Andrew Szobody

dungbeatles roll vast balls of dung through thick sand for to feed on

we drag behind us – like prison balls – our shadows

...

when walking, my shadow makes the gentle sound of a mistake

the sound of names scratched on the inside of my ribs

...

his shadow fell crisp and sharp like that of an actor

the curtain fell

...

chased endlessly, to be substance-less good god it must be like having flesh and bones and a urethra

...

intoxicated, I punched my shadow in its face

the impact shattered my knuckles like the face of a porcelain doll
... 

a frenchman’s shadow once spoke 
to me of 
“a way of seeing things which is not a direct way”

this had me pitifully enthralled 
for as long as the dream lasted

thank god I awoke

...

did you know your shadow is always present: 
the nihilistic queen of mimes

...

i saw a woman attack 
her shadow as it lay 
on the asphalt –
tearing at its face until her fingers were mere 
stubs

meanwhile the man beside her decided to 
emphasize his alone-ness by stomping madly
on the foot of his own 
shadow

neither man nor woman noticed the other

a shadow massacre
Maps and lines
Leah Sienkowski
Complexities create
the poetics of ecosystem-
the crying rain
and considerable air.
But look how little there is left!
The leaving
the leaving
the leaving.
Lucky moths have two faces,
they hide happily disguised
from birds that beautiful make them-
artistic progression feeding
these hungry craftsmen of height.
Flight breeds creation, still loves still,
but my bad nervous heart
wants to write a fighting poem
that strangles and screams.

Snake Grass
Leah Sienkowski
Your hands are
nests,
my shoulders
two tired slumping
pieces of me
displayed adamantly
like dishes dirty in the sink.
Take one by one,
steady me clean.
Scattered Objects and Seams
Michelle Jokisch
sweeping all the particles of the corners of the underneath of the undergarments and in-betweens.
we sweep it all up to no avail for the windows are open and the wind drags the bits of brown and green again inside.
Curiosity Killed the Cat
Ae Hee Lee

It is said that Curiosity Killed the Cat. But Aha! The Cat got to know it all. I say, was it worth dying for? Well, I really wouldn't know. But yes, the Cat got to know it all. But what if he found nothing at all? Would that still make it worth it? I don't understand. Why did he want to know it all? The Cat is a cat and nothing more.

It would not understand even if it knew. Knowing is not the same as understanding. Maybe the Cat wanted to understand it all? But oh! What's the point? It would not survive it! Then, why put up that futile try? Is the Cat pleased with having known, understood it all? But what use was it for the Cat? Dead, It cannot enjoy its knowledge. For what reason? Why? That ambition got it killed. Curiosity killed the Cat. What did the Cat see? The All? The Nothing? Wait, aren't those two the same? The Cat died because of something, for knowing all or knowing nothing. Maybe it was punishment. Maybe it saw something it should have not. But if it saw all, or saw nothing, What is this "all"? What is this "nothing"?

Geez, I am being curious... Cat.
Curiosity Killed
i didn’t sleep
Elizabeth Steiner

our first night
together in that twin
frame under its
scruffy blue duvet.
it had come sheetless like
a february streaker (i’ll never
understand the british).

the metal squawked each
time i itched my calf with
my fat toe and although
we swore with fifth fingers we’d
never need more space i was
an inadvertent puff
from a linoleum pillow.

so i petered
away the coon’s age with
stubborn lyrics and how
bizarre this felt and
how much i
missed bed sheets.

i woke up with halitosis and
a hangover
and the next time we
slept together i was
three sheets to the wind.
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