Editor’s Note

Sitting here, typing, facing a slim, light box of brilliant color, I find myself entertained by the idea that this is the first time I am asked to write an editor’s note. The possibilities are limitless. A dozen or so ideas are running around inside my head, each trying to convince me of its uniqueness. One speaks of an abstract indentation, and another presents me with a display of mappings. With the nervousness of a new editor-in-chief trying to write his first editor’s note, I will just have to calm these ideas and store them in my sketchbook.

When I was a young student studying in Hong Kong, I was quite in love with reading and writing. It was a constant joy in my younger life. After immigrating to the United States at the age of thirteen, my world of language changed rapidly, more than I had anticipated. Due to my inadequate knowledge of English, I was no longer able to read books that matched my level of intelligence, nor was I able to express my thoughts in words. I was suddenly plunged under into a suffocating silence. Surrounded by layers of insufficient communications, I was unable to receive or express.

Throughout the last nine years here in the United States I have acquired enough English skills and a love for visual expression, and now my head is out from under, and I am breathing. I am listening and speaking.

It is my joy to be a part of the process to create this magazine for every one of you and to be a part of a gentle pull that takes our heads to the surface to breathe. This magazine is composed of the sounds of those first, deep breaths, which gasp not only for shade but color, words but poetry, air but life.

Thank you for picking up this magazine. May it help you breathe.

Sincerely,
Patrick Hekman
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Those Shoulders
On which We Stand
Kai Koopman

Struck out for the road, and beyond it, the West.

In preparation, battened hatches, cut ties. Shouldered the load and drew it in close.

Imagined pioneers.

Even brought a flask of whiskey and unfiltered cigarettes. Real man stuff.

Steam escaped nostrils as we slept.

In the morning, knobbly knees and arms escaped from the tent out to the frost. They unkinked and quivered with breath—envicerated again under indigo alpine sunrise.

Who but those who trod here before could carve away our affections out here in the cold?

Surely we stand on shoulders as broad as two rivers, and sharp as our intent.

They have crystallized the grass, and encased each Aspen leaf in glass.
The Straits of Youth
Joshua Brooker

oh the straits of youth, sojourns on soiled cement streets
where sleeping souls on midnight strolls, awakened, ardor meet
where sirens screaming lullabies lay grown children to wake
so endless dreams can’t have the means to ever aggregate

it was there i saw my brothers, embered passion burning dim
on the ends of cigarettes as they sang a silent hymn
all the exhaled smoke strewn verses whispered sighs of hope adrift
crescendoing a chorus of the unseen things we miss

and it was there i saw my sisters, wanton wagers of a war
where they lie and sleep with lovers in sanguined blankets on the floor
hopeful they, to find a purpose
hopeful they, once to feel safe,
in the arms of one as lost as them, muddled sweet and soft embrace

where my fathers and my mothers, watch from lofty lifted heights
while the children of the world get lost in faux fluorescent nights
finding fixes in fallacious, purporting purpose onto pale
painting putrid scenes of washed out dreams in fetid great detail

for in the city of the young, cacophonous candor still reigns king
youthful is the want to have it all, and the means to have nothing
but all this sallow shaded striving, sisyphus’d bouldering to the tor
are the straits of youthful striving, and but conduits for more

all the lostness, atlas heavy, kindles kindred movement on
where the sweat stained streets of youthful meet effectuated dawn
oh my abject alleyed angels, oh my scabrous sewered saints
these are the straits of youth and fleeting fragile time’s restraints
Snowdrops
Abby Koning

I miss it, sometimes: the igloos crafted from fanciful words, the terraces sculpted from prophecies. Do you remember when we crawled inside, started a fire, and watched the shimmering beads arrange themselves into necklaces? You placed one around my neck and proclaimed me the queen of the ice. We shivered and fell asleep in a forest of shuddering snowmen, a polar bear that creeps through glaciated landscapes. I awake alone, the fire gone cold, not even an ember to coax into flame.

Estuary
Abby Koning

We say the night is young and stumble out of bars, feet swollen with drunken waltzing, searching for some distant alley that empties in the sea.

Tomorrow I will sew small stones inside my pockets, step into the streets and wait to be swept like leaves along the gutter.
Plastics Conventions
Jonathan Heilkema

i have nothing to say on the subject
of plastics conventions
or their laws and mores
the gatherings that happen in the name
of synthesis occurring daily
within a length of pipe
i installed through the wires to
keep the fires spreading through
spider thread laid down
in 300 ad

by all accounts a good year
when the wines ran with roman blood
my father spilled with an axe of grain
axes that strung a giraffe by the
toe of a statue i saw moulded

entitled “man from future”
it regards with six eyes
set into its fore
sepulchral head, and in
there was a man with a large brain
and small eyes, who saw not
emerging from the head of the fore
Examination Room
Jacalyn Den Haan

A sudden voice through the speaker above his bed dragged Kris Frouman from his dreams. It droned about the day's news as Frouman pulled himself out of bed to begin preparing for the day.

The room was a dull shade of gray, illuminated by a naked light bulb in the middle of the ceiling. A bedside table cluttered with receipts, dust, and medicine; a bureau of drawers; and a small bed covered by a brown blanket filled the room. On one side were floor to ceiling windows. Behind the drawn shades, day was breaking on the horizon, spreading pink and blue and gold warmth across the city.

Frouman listened to the news broadcasted through the speaker as he got ready. The voice spoke of a huge sale at Central Mall while he brushed his teeth, a murder while he donned his blue work uniform, and a rising pandemic while he scarfed down breakfast. It was a typical morning.

Since he lived five blocks from his work at The Government’s Cleansing Office, Frouman walked. It would be much easier to drive, but The Government had put strict regulations on how much one could drive. To walk was to savor the four hours per week he was permitted to drive.

While walking, he thought about the day before him. Today would most likely be another long, tedious day. Frouman had been working at the Cleansing Office for ten years now, and it was rarely stimulating. Every now and then, some twelve year old would come in and put up a fight about the system, claiming that their parents had warned them about what would happen, and The Government was committing a huge crime. These children were quickly silenced. Most often, though, each day flowed into the next without distinction.

Frouman’s job was to administer the Test to the children and to watch the computer. The computer gauged each child’s IQ, and told Frouman whether the child had passed or failed. Most failed. How quickly The Government had weeded out the Nonhuman was amazing. Fifty years ago, the Nonhuman walked around the planet unchecked. Now, the vermin were almost extinct, at least in the part of the world that Frouman knew about.

Petunia was at work that morning. She was the receptionist. Frouman did not trust her. She always wore a knowing smile, and she greeted him in such a way that he believed she was a Nonhuman. Those who were born into the high Upper Class were often able to avoid Genetic Cleansing. He avoided eye contact, walking quickly to the instruction room.

“Hello, Frouman,” the instructor behind the desk greeted him. Frouman made some small noise in response. The instructor terrified him.

“There will be thirty children coming in today. At least one will be Nonhuman,” the instructor informed him.

Frouman muttered The Government’s mantra: “We must weed out the Nonhuman and protect our species.”

“Very good, Frouman. Now get to work.”

Trembling, Frouman left the room. He went directly to the white examination room, and called for the first child to be brought in.
Frouman was a hard worker. He took his job very seriously, even if it was extremely tedious. It was an honor, he told himself, that The Government relied on him to destroy Nonhumans. What he was doing was for the benefit of the entire human race.

During the first few months at his job, Frouman remembered feeling uneasy about The Government’s desire to kill. What was wrong with those who had higher IQs? That more intelligent ‘people’ had to be killed seemed unfair. Frouman understood now that these creatures, which seemed to be human, were actually a horrible mutation masquerading as human. He found pleasure and success when he discovered a mutation and eliminated it.

At 12:30, Frouman took a lunch break. He had seen fifteen of the thirty children that would come today. None so far had been mutant. Very few that came in were. He would only find one perhaps two or three times per month.

Lunch was, as always, a sandwich on white bread delivered to him by a food service worker. He ate the bread in his examination room in silence, crumbs falling onto his lap.

At 1:00, Frouman went back to work. Child number sixteen walked in. Richard Jordan was his name. He wore dark hair, dark eyes, and plain clothes. Frouman led him to the chair in the middle of the examination room. “Have a seat,” he instructed the boy, “and drink this.” A plastic cup full of something like buttermilk was placed in the boy’s hands.

“At least one will be Nonhuman,” the instructor had said. Could this boy be the one? He seemed innocent enough.

“I’m going to ask you some questions now, Richard. All’s you need to do is answer the questions. Just tell me when you’re ready.”

“Ready,” came the response, after a pause.

“All right. Complete this sequence. One, one, two, three, five, eight, thirteen...”

The boy thought for a moment, and then responded with “twenty one.”

“I’m going to show you a piece of paper now, Richard. It has ink on it. Tell me what the ink stain reminds you of.” Frouman walked over to the boy and handed him the inkblot.

“Why, it’s a bald eagle! Oh, but if you turn it this way, it kind of looks like an old man!”

“Good, good,” replied Frouman, not matching the boy’s enthusiasm. “This is the next question: if some boos are yees, and all yees are yoos, are all yoos boos?”

“No,” came the answer. The boy continued, but Frouman did not hear it. Words were flashing across the screen. So this was he. From within a sterile white cupboard, he took a syringe and walked towards the boy.

“Is that the entire test?” the boy asked innocently. Then, paralysed by fear and with dark eyes wide and fixated on the syringe in Frouman’s hand, he shrieked, “Are you going to kill me for being too smart?”

“It’s for your own good,” Frouman responded calmly.

The thought briefly crossed his mind as he injected the contents into the boy that it was a pity the way he screamed.
Godless Existentialist
Kathleen O’Bannon

A quiet weeping melody
To match the melancholy mood.

There's always something in between.
All's single like the only moon:

She orbits something so unlike—
Without conjunction, runs a ring.

A structure faked to strike the eye.
Too bad—no looker-on to see.

No plural—me without a match.
What is this fabled perfect rhyme?

Desire tortures—drags out wrath.
The only hand to hold is mine.

Play quiet weeping melody.
Curl up in bed; stare at the sky.

Share life myself; create the me.
I wish that you were here tonight.
1981 Two-Door Revolution

Chelsea Tanis

Hold still, little canvas
while your brother paints his shadow upon your skin

If he said it’s okay it’s okay it’s okay
the blood of mother’s Jesus on his lips
trickles off his chin
to the baby bird below, he splutters

Hey, big guy
fingers crammed beneath your skinny thighs
you know
men have digital irises
and warm, smoky breath
you know

He peaks at his reflections to confirm they’ve listened

Then back

Eighty-two-four-six-eight miles per hour, but
he still can’t keep up with the louder nows
The Sky Is Empty Tonight
Drew Reichard

The first thing he noticed was that the ground was vibrating and jostling back and forth. Suddenly afraid, Gabriel Crane gripped his knees and forced his eyes open as if expecting to see some horrible nightmare. He had woken in a strange, elongated room with two rows of benches creating a narrow pathway up the center. He was seated in one of them, and next to him was an oddly dressed man with the brim of his hat pulled over his face. There was constant rattling paired with a humming noise that made him think the room was under a great amount of pressure. And there was a sickening pale light emanating in strips along the floor and in a pattern of dots above him. But, disoriented as he was, Gabriel couldn’t seem to pinpoint the light source.

His musing was interrupted with a start upon realizing that the walls to either side of him were made almost entirely of glass, and outside it was dark. But it was the stars behind the glass that caught his attention. They were unimaginably bright and large, and they seemed to be moving rapidly behind the strange room, peering in at him as they passed. He tried to track their motion, but the back wall blocked his sight. As he watched, fascinated for a time, he came to the realization that he was profoundly disappointed. He saw that these particular stars, though they were larger and brighter than he had ever seen before, had a light somehow less pure than the white light of the ones he was familiar with. And all of the sudden, he knew they would be of no guidance to him, and that he was in a strange place far away from his home.

The vibrating came back to him as he focused on it, but it had reduced in his mind to a gentle, almost lulling hum. Gabriel wondered if that was the reason many of the other occupants were sleeping. It made him wary. He wanted to get up and inspect things more closely, but his slumbering neighbor blocked him from the passageway. Gabriel could only sit and wait for something to happen. It was a most unpleasant sort of helplessness—completely lost and confused by what he saw and heard. His attention was continually yanked away from one puzzle to the next so that it became impossible to focus. He wriggled in his chair impatiently, hopping to wake the man next to him and interrogate him.

It worked.

The man grunted and, lifting the brim of his funny hat, blinked up at Gabriel. “Eh?” He said.

Gabriel interrogated: “Where are we?”

As he spoke, it seemed to him that his words were of a different language, but somehow he knew what to say and how to say it. He decided it was the least of his problems.

The man raised his eyebrows slightly and then peered at Gabriel closely, giving him a queer look. “Greyhound,” he said.

Gabriel was mystified. Perhaps the man could not understand him. He tried again, pronouncing his words more slowly.

“Where are we?”

This time the man understood. “Of course,” he said. “Hour or so north of D.C., Montgomery County.”

Then again, perhaps Gabriel Crane didn’t understand this language. He nodded as if he had understood, and then sat back and closed his eyes.
The room stopped vibrating just as Gabriel Crane was getting close to losing his calm. He had kept his eyes shut tightly, willing the sounds and jolts to go away. When they stopped, he told himself he would wake up on his mat, everything back in place. The stars back in the sky. The lights back on the wall. The strange man and his hat back in his dream.

So when the room finally went quiet like something had died inside of it, he was most elated, until he opened his eyes. The lights became brighter, almost as if it were daylight, but one glance outside told him that it was still nighttime. The man next to him got up and followed the crowd of yawning, unconcerned people out into the aisle, where they began a single-file shuffle to the front and, one by one, disappeared.

Exhausted and bewildered and more than a little frightened of being left behind in the dead room, Gabriel followed the herd to the front. He was the last out, and, turning back to inspect the outside of this odd room, he found himself staring. There on the side of what looked like a giant box was a painted dog. A greyhound. Gabriel didn’t know what to make of the room. It was at least twice his height and boxy with many colors. To his dismay, it jolted with renewed life, breathed noisily out of its back, and then rolled away on strange wheels. It smelled like death.

"Gabriel Crane?"

Gabriel turned toward the man who recognized him and looked in his eyes. There was something like smug recognition there. He would never forget that look.

"I have found you," said the man. His mouth moved in a foreign way it seemed to Gabriel, but he understood the man the same as he had understood himself.

"You, of course, speak English?" The man seemed uncertain for a time.

"I can understand you," replied Gabriel.

The man looked relieved. "Yes," he said as if the matter was settled. "Now come with me. I am sure you have many questions for me."

Gabriel looked around. There were lights everywhere, and he knew they were not stars. Their light was pale and dying. Diseased. He looked up and his heart plummeted. This could not be his world. This world had no stars.

Seeing his dismay, the man spoke to Gabriel. "Do not be afraid," he said. "I am Troy Bender." He said this as if that would fix Gabriel Crane’s problems – as if that would put the stars back in the sky. Gabriel wanted to scoff.

Finally, Gabriel asked his question. "Where am I?"

Mr. Bender seemed to consider for a moment, tilting his head; the fat of his neck spilled out over his collar and hung loosely by his shoulder.

"You are in Earth," he smiled. "My world."

"Your world? You are king here?" Gabriel decided he would not believe this man if he said yes.

"I am not king here," he said. "I am well known though. And I can help you. You see, Gabriel Crane, I made you and I brought you here to see if I could do such a thing. We have much to talk about. Come, and I will show you my home."

He began walking across the blasted earth and Gabriel followed, realizing he had no other option. Mr. Bender led them to a large black object. The blackness shone with the light of the sickened skies. The man pointed at a protrusion on the side of the smooth surface.

"Pull that handle there and climb in. This machine is how we will go to my house." He seemed to be rather giddy. "Oh I have so much I can teach you. I have always dreamed about this, Gabriel. Always dreamed you would come. And now you are here!" He was de-
Gabriel put his hand on the bump, and his fingers slid under it and into a cavity on the surface. He pulled. To his astonishment, an entire section of the object swung out at his slight pressure, and it revealed a small area with a seating arrangement. Troy Bender was already seated on his side.

"Get in. Get in!" cried Mr. Bender excitedly.

Gabriel ducked his head and sat down.

Bender gestured impatiently. "Close the door."

Gabriel Crane reached out and pulled the frame, and it trapped him inside. He placed his hand on the glass, wondering if he would ever get out again.

The machine whispered to life under the command of Troy Bender, and Gabriel watched him control it forward, and move it left, and move it right. They went faster and faster, but it seemed like they were not going any great speed until the window vanished to Gabriel's right, and there was a heavy wind that tore a tear from Gabriel's eyes.

He did not understand anything that was happening, and when he asked he was told that all of this was nothing compared to how Troy Bender had brought him here. That, the man said, was true magic.

"You don't believe me, Gabriel. Do you? Come on. Admit it. I know you just as well as you know yourself." He laughed delightedly.

"No," said Gabriel. "I don't believe you."

"I see I won't say anything to change your mind. Here." He reached out and handed Gabriel a thick book. The pages were impossibly thin and clean and white. They were whiter than the dying lights of this world.

"Go on. Turn it over and read the back first. You'll see," Mr. Bender prompted.

Gabriel did. And on the back of the book he read, with a growing tremble in his hands, a summary of his life. He turned the book back over and read the title.

*The Sky Is Empty Tonight.*

"It's a best-seller here," said Mr. Bender. "I'd say quite a few young American's know the story of Gabriel Crane and his young world close to the stars, and how the stars were taken away by the dark magician, and how you fought to win them back. You are a hero to people even on this world."

Gabriel had opened the book at random and was reading, frantic. All the things foretold in the book had come true.

"Are you a prophet?" he asked Mr. Bender.

"No," said Mr. Bender. "I did not predict these events. I created them. I spoke them into existence. I wrote this book, and the story came into being. You, Gabriel, came into being. Your world, Gabriel, came into being as I wrote the words down. Your troubles, Gabriel, happened because I decided they should. Your victories, Gabriel Crane, came to pass exactly as I wrote them. And now I have brought you here to see what it would be like."

"What are you saying?" Gabriel was becoming very upset.

"I am god," said Troy Bender. "I believe I can be none other than your god. If you don't believe me then watch as things happen the way I ordain them to happen. You are the way you are because I made you that way. Even your doubt is by my creation."

Gabriel didn't say anything. He couldn't. This man was insane.

Mr. Bender's sausage-hands gripped the rod on the floor between them, and there was a lurch. The wind came faster and harder, and Gabriel wanted the glass to slide up again and
block it out. He wanted to think, but Mr. Bender’s lips continued moving. He spoke of his story and of Gabriel’s story until, finally, he turned off the machine.

“This is my house,” said Mr. Bender. “I bid you come inside so that I can show you the bits and pieces of my life, and then I can show you what will become of your life. I have been writing.”

“I’m not going to go into your house,” said Gabriel.

“If you don’t I’ll have to write it down, and then you will have to.” He took out a pad of the same thin, clean paper and a small instrument and wrote:

And then Gabriel Crane gets out of my car and walks inside my house, taking a seat at the kitchen table. He is very hungry, and it delights him that Mr. Bender saw fit to have him over for dinner.

Gabriel opened the door, got out, and trudged toward the house with a delighted Mr. Bender leading him in. A little way into the house, he took a seat at the kitchen table and looked around at the curiosities filling the room.

“So what happens now, Mr. Bender?” Gabriel asked finally.

Mr. Bender spread his arms wide and walked around the room. “But isn’t this fun? I can show you around my world. And perhaps,” he wagged a bulging finger at Gabriel, “Perhaps you can help me write my story. Your story. Maybe I’ll even let you come up with ideas. Imagine! Working hand in hand with your god. Why, we could do anything. Create anything. Imagine further, then create more.”

Gabriel stared at the man.

“You don’t seem to understand, Gabriel. This is real, genuine creation. I think, therefore you are.”

Then Gabriel laughed. He laughed for a long time, and it began to have an effect on Mr. Bender so that his chin and cheeks wagged angrily.

“I don’t think you understand, Mr. Bender. I can make being god a very frustrating job for you. Dealing with all of my problems. My prayers. Heaven forbid. No. You most definitely do not want such responsibility.”

“Indeed?” said Mr. Bender, clearly fascinated by this admission. “I did not think of that.” He puzzled for a moment.

“Well in that case, all I have to do is wipe the slate clean.”

He took out his paper again and wrote on the table so that Gabriel could see:

Gabriel Crane sits in the chair quietly while I kill him.

With that he pulled a steak knife from its sheath and inspected the point.

“Know that you can never truly die, Gabriel. I can still write your story, but you are correct. I cannot have you here always spoiling my efforts at dictating your life. You would become selfish and then later you would want complete control. I cannot have such a thing. You are right.”

He thrust the blade at the seated man, but Gabriel caught his wrist and flung him backward and on to the floor with a mighty heave. Now Gabriel, with the knife in his hand, stood over his god, who squealed and tried to get up. But Gabriel stamped on his hand and broke the thick sausages. He knelt beside the sobbing author.

“Your writing had no effect on me, Mr. Bender. I chose to walk into the house on my own. You chose to believe my lie. Perhaps it had something to do with my not believing in you?” He leaned down and whispered into the Troy Bender’s ear. “Do you want to know how this story ends?”

Mr. Bender’s eyes went wide. “How?” He barely managed a whisper.
Mike Langeveld, *Untitled*, film photography
Mike Langeveld, Untitled, film photography
Karl Sparrman, *Farfar, Farmor, Far*, digital photography
Jonathan Lin, *The World’s a Harsh Place*, digital photography

*This image was part of a personal year-long project from 2010-2011*
Karl Sparrman, *South Bound*, digital photography
When it comes to photography I tend to shoot the world around me - whether that be a candid shot of my friends or a photograph of the landscape that encompasses me. In this case - I stopped on the side of the road and basked in the beauty that enveloped me. It seems that a majority of people take nature for granted, but pictures can capture those moments in creation that are simply missed due to the busyness of our lives. So take a break and look.
Laura Sheppard, *In God's Sight*, digital photography
Samantha Vanderberg, *Sunday Morning 1*, digital photography

24 Dialogue
Bjorn Sparrman, *Bus from the Airport*, ink
While doing an internship in the city of Hikone, my fellow intern and I took our day off to climb mountains surrounding the city.

We saw a lot of mushrooms.

Nice this one.

and this one.

WTF it's raining.

Bjorn Sparrman, Day of a Foreigner, ink
Wet, bug-bitten, and tired, we came across a collection of old buildings in the middle of the forest. They turned out to be the Ii family temple. We rested there for a while.

As we meditated, the rain falling gently, under the watchful eye of the largest Daruma on earth, we slowly one by one, begin to levitate, achieving enlightenment. We have since become stone ourselves.
Jenny Swim, Steel Body, steel
Jenny Swim, *Steel Body (detail)*, steel
Stephanie Kang, Munhwa (To Anyone), mixed media

These images address the effects of Westernization on Korean pop culture and society. By using the Korean pop group 2ne1 as an example to this change, I focus on the transformation of Korean self-image through mass media.
Bridgette L. Keehl, Series of Memories: Paroxysm of Being Wakened, watercolor
Cyanide
Elizabeth Steiner

there's gristle creeping
down your chin from
my left shank. pick your
teeth and spit, stretch
to spice my round and
deflower the kosher.
persuade your fork
beneath each breast to yield
lust from the bones.
grin and suck chagrin
from my lips, can you
taste that marinade?
i made it all for you.
Time Lapse
Laura Sheppard

he was here
once
open and shut.

hiding behind three lenses
heard but not seen
hands directing, condensing, counting...
smiles on paper but not his.
was he real?

leaf through glass pages, searching, hungry
any sign of him here?
smiles without his, but not without him:
he was there, but he isn’t here.

there!
when blinking red counted for him
he stands, hand on shoulder
shining
but no more.

more pages, more books, smiles but not his
never his.
hiding behind three lenses
no longer seen, no longer heard
hiding
did he live?

search behind lenses, behind pages, behind doors
for a hand on shoulder -
a man.
he was here

in a flash
he was gone.
The Space Between
Sarah Bonthuis

Beneath thin translucent skin
Delicate bones jut out.

Reaching out, intertwining your
Elegant fingers with my own;

Mistakenly believing
That I could preserve your grace.

You occupied the space between.

In return I offered nothing
But salty tears and desperate prayers.

Deliverance (Psalm 116:8)
Sarah Bonthuis

Lullabies of whispered words
Fitful sleep in too small chairs.

Waiting rooms filled
With dread, tired eyes,

Black coffee. A makeshift home,
Temporary shelter from the storm.

From this too, I wonder,
Will you choose to deliver us?

And if you won’t,
How then, Lord, will I still say:

“You have delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling”?

Where, then, shall I find peace?
Waiting in rooms of dread and disbelief.
On “Wild Swans at Coole”

Josiah Majetich

I am watching a couple kiss in front of me.  
They smile—completely rapt in each other’s gazes.  
They don’t seem to care I can see.  
I want to laugh and turn away, but the more he touches her hair  
The more I feel alone.

Uniform looks in their eyes.  
Each pair floating down the path.  
Opening doors for each other, over talking, over walking, over thinking,  
over gesturing.  
Just fabricating interactions to maintain a vicinity to each other.  
The wild swans at Coole—there were fifty-nine of them.

Someone will not be loved.
Where’s my wife? She is supposed to be here today to replace the geraniums by my bedside. They’ve been dead for God knows how long. She meant to come last week and the week before, but I bet you she got caught up in some traffic. If she made it past the freeway I’m sure those damned guards at the entryway stopped her and took that little red handbag of hers and sent her off in the opposite direction. I talked to her last night on the phone. I heard her say, “I’m coming tomorrow, Richard, and I’m bringing you some fresh new flowers”. The lady who keeps barging into my room and asking strange questions, Susan I think, she said that I didn’t talk to my wife last night. In fact, she says, it’s been nearly three months since the last time I spoke to her. Well, to hell with her. Where’s my wife?

But maybe she’s napping in one of those cushy armchairs in the residence hallways. She does that sometimes. Leave it to Helen to come way out here to visit me from Gary, or is it Goshen, and snooze off before she can even say hello.

I walk up and down each hallway three or five times and find everyone but my wife. The lady with the curly hair and the scrunched-up pug face is sitting in that red and green striped armchair that I always take afternoon naps in. It looks like she’ll be swallowed up in it and I tell her that the chair’s not safe for her. She doesn’t even acknowledge my presence. I’ve always found her rude. I run into the man with the crippled leg and the Yosemite hat, and he tells me that he is the building supervisor and the lieutenant of the 38th brigade and that he is here to protect me against the boy scouts and other such intruders. I tell him that I don’t even know who he is.

What was I doing? Was I going to my room or exercising my legs or looking for someone? Well, it couldn’t have been too important. I go over to the dining area and help myself to a cup of coffee because it seems like that time of day. I choose the red mug with the Labrador on it because it looks like the dog that I had once, maybe five or ten years back. That mutt would’ve liked it here. Lots of hands to feed from and rugs to piss on. I add two packets of Sweet ‘n Lows and one packet of cream and watch the black coffee turn caramel-colored. I like the smell of the steam.

One of the white-coated women puts a hand on my shoulder and says there’s a guest here for me. My grandson, she claims. I don’t think I even have a grandson. I’m guessing she’s just spouting nonsense, but I don’t want to offend her any so I follow her over to the front lobby by the shiny glass door.

There’s a younger fellow that approaches me with a nervous smile and tells me his name is John. Well, I was certain he said John but he corrected me when I called him that. Then he says his name is Justin, repeats it a few times in a louder tone and all like he thinks my ears are failing me. He thinks he’s some sort of doctor, thinks he can tell me which maladies I do and don’t have. Well he couldn’t tell a horse’s head from its ass. He looks like one of those Beatniks straight out of the town I grew up in. What was the name of it? It was somewhere out in West Virginia. Was it Charles Town or Chester? Charleston? This Justin fellow brushes his greasy brown hair from his eyes and looks at me as if expecting something.
I ask if I can help him with anything.

He looks hurt by this, as if I’d said something wrong. He tells me he’s my grandson. Well, all I was doing was showing him some courtesy. He asks me if I’d like to sit down somewhere, and I tell him that of course I would, loafing is my favorite pastime after all. This young man doesn’t seem all bad. Despite his messy appearance, there’s something in him I like - just can’t tell what it is. I follow him to those cozy leather armchairs next to the piano and he helps me sit down. I don’t know why these chairs are even here, gathered around for some audience, when I haven’t heard a melody coming from it for years.

This man – Joe, I believe - starts with all the usual questions, the types of questions the managers from out of state ask of us when they come and visit. “How are you liking it here?” he asks. “You liking the food?” and “You keeping busy here?” and more of the standard discourse. I humor him and answer the way he wants me to answer. This man looks about the same age as me, not quite as suave of course, but he got to be my age, give or take five years. I’ll be damned if he isn’t Joe Rivera, back from Saigon or the Mekong Delta or wherever the hell the rice paddy was that they dumped him in. He has to be Joe Rivera, and he wants to start up the baseball team again. We’re gonna start playing again in that dusty lot behind the hardware store. If we can’t do that, then that grassy area out behind this place, if the guards would let us.

I tell Joe Rivera that it’s a great scheme he has, coming all the way over from Vietnam to get another season going, to get me and him and Fred and Mike all on the same team again. He has to watch out for those Boy Scouts, though, because whenever they show up they make a big mess. I went out in the grassy area to play baseball one time, a few months or years ago, but then the Boy Scouts came knocking at the front door. I was dragged back inside and told to sit on my ass and work with them at these crafts with colored paper and glue and crayons. But this man only looks at his feet and back at me and tells me that his name is Justin and that he’s my grandson. Of course. Don’t know what I was thinking, this whole baseball idea.

This Justin is an oddball. Don’t necessarily mean it in any negative fashion. He told me he’s my grandson but sure as hell doesn’t look it. He looks about the age as me but talks and dresses differently. His words are so clear and sensible, unlike all those crazies here jabbering away with words I can’t make out. And he’s wearing one of those tie-dye shirts under his sweatshirt like he just emerged from the commune, his head still caught in purple haze clouds and all. But that God-awful beard. Some spots look all like Grizzly Adams while other spots look nearly clean-shaven. His face reminds me of a lawn full of ragweed. I don’t imagine him getting any kind of action with that beard.

He hesitantly asks me if I’ve played much baseball here. I might have. I know I’ve hardly set a foot outside. I tell him the most excitement I get here is karaoke every Tuesday night because they sing “Johnny B. Goode” and it’s the only time the women around here get a little loose. He laughs and tells me I’ve still got my same sense of humor, and I don’t know what he means.

Most of the time, though, everyone here’s so quiet. It’s like some sort of spell passed through the place and left everyone all glassy-eyed and mute as death itself. The piano hasn’t been touched for years; no one’s tried playing even a goddamn nursery rhyme on it. A few folks have hardly ever moved. There’s that woman with the frizzy blonde hair, sitting
in her wheel chair and looking at the dead logs in the fireplace, just like yesterday and the
day before. Over at a table close to the dining hall is the man who looks like a skeleton, fool-
ing around with the same jigsaw puzzle every day. I think the white-coated people like it like
this, all calm and lifeless.

I ask Justin what he’s doing here and how he got up here all the way from Charleston.
He gives me that sympathetic look I’m not fond of and says, “Well... I’m not from Charle-
ton, I’m from Fort Wayne, Indiana. It’s about an hour’s drive. I drove up here by myself, in
my car.”

His own car, he says. It better be a Chevy or a Buick or Cadillac. I’ve been an automo-
tive specialty technician at General Motors for nearly thirty years now and still going strong.
I got to make my way over to the plant one of these next days. None of my relations should
have a car from any place besides General Motors. I ask him, “What set of wheels you got
there?”

“Oh... a 1998 Monte Carlo”, he says. “It’s a good car. I think it’s parked right outside this
window. Want to see it?”

A Monte Carlo, good for him. I say it wouldn’t be a smart idea to take a look at it be-
cause the guards would catch us before we’d make it out the door. The young man replies
that we’d just be looking through the window and that there aren’t any guards here any-
ways. Strange... I always thought there were. He draws back the blinds from the window
behind us while I get myself up from my leather armchair. For a good while the glass win-
dow doesn’t exist anymore as I stare at the Monte Carlo, admiring its shapes and features.
It got a good paint job – such a bright red. It reminds me of something from long before. I
stare longer at the Chevy logo and some dents in the hood and then I remember.

We sit back down and I start speaking to this young man – John, I think – about those
days I went out driving all around in my old Monte Carlo. It’s exciting, remembering all of
it so suddenly, and I’m uncertain as to why it’s been so buried up in my head. I feel like I’ve
uncovered something valuable, brushed the cobwebs off something that was mistakenly
placed in storage.

I tell him about how I’d race against Mike and Freddy through back-country roads un-
derneath star-filled summer skies. On all those Friday nights when I was young and careless,
I’d settle down into the vinyl seat of my dented-up Monte Carlo and drive like I was trying
to outrun an avalanche that would crush my free spirit if it ever caught me. During early
morning hours when everyone with common sense had abandoned the roads, we’d scream
down empty freeways, pitting ourselves nose to nose against one another. We’d blare our
stereos, throw half-eaten food at each other’s cars, poke our heads out the windows - ev-
erything that would block out the silence of the nights. I tell him about when fate caught
up to Freddy, when the deer ran out and he swerved off the road and into a tree. I stared at
what was left of my friend’s body and that was the first time I felt and smelled and tasted
death. I tell him how when I stood at Freddy’s funeral, stiff and degraded, I was comforted
by a mysterious presence and first knew the grace of God. A sensation I rarely ever feel now
in this place.

The young man sitting in front of me, who all at once looks so familiar yet so foreign,
scratches his scruffy beard and looks at me with astonishment. He asks me if I remember
anyone else from earlier. It’s as if he’s expecting something of me. I don’t know who he is,
whether he’s a manager or an old friend or coworker, and I don’t know what his motives may be. Without knowing what he wants me to remember, I mull over these pictures and sounds in my head. From a distance I watch myself hurtling down roads, boozing up with old friends and strutting around through long humid days. Suddenly I see someone else in these pictures. I see my wife Helen.

I clear my throat and tell him about Helen. I tell him how we would spend our nights coasting around unfamiliar blocks, not caring about the lack of any particular destination. We’d just like to talk to each other as the sleeping suburbs glided on past us. I remember how I’d pull my Monte Carlo in the gravel lot of the small park when the fireflies were out and the houses were silent. We’d go and lie in the grass between the willow trees, discussing our futures and considering the possibility of maybe going away somewhere. Although I’m just revealing these details to him now, he still says he’s known Helen for a long while. I can barely piece together what Helen looks like right now, but somehow I’m recalling her face from long ago as if I’d been transported to that time again.

I ask this man if she smiled the last time he saw her. He tells me she smiled nearly the whole time he was over there. “She has a really nice smile”, I say.

Wait.... wasn’t she supposed to be here today?

She must be lost. What a damned fool I am, losing track of time like that. I get myself up on my two feet and look straight into the eyes of the gentleman sitting in the opposing leather chair. He’s been considerate enough as to listen to my rambling all the way through. He asks me what’s on my mind and I inform him that I really should be getting off. I have to look around for my wife; she must be behind any one of the corners in the residence hallways.

“Richard...” he gently replies, “I’ll be seeing her later today. She’s back over at her house right now.”

Now everyone’s spouting nonsense. I tell him that it’s been great talking to him about everything but I really have to go find Helen. I have to show her some hospitality, after all. The young man stays planted to the spot. He doesn’t seem ready to leave yet. With a careful voice, he asks, “Is there... uh... anything you need praying for?”

I ask him if he’s some kind of pastor and he says he isn’t. I thank him for the offer but assure him that there aren’t really any troubles on my mind. I just need to get my ass moving and find my wife.

He goes and wraps his arms around me in a sort of uncomfortable hug that lasts only a few seconds. I don’t know why, but I feel that it’s only right that I hug back. I tell him that we’ll have to talk again next time he comes over from St. Louis. And just in case he runs into Helen, I instruct him to let her know that I need some fresh geraniums. He brushes his greasy brown hair out from in front of his eyes and meanders towards the shiny glass door out front.

“Hey, Joe!” I call out, “Watch out for the guards out front. You gotta be polite or they might snatch everything you got on you!”

He gives me an honest attempt at a smile and steps into the parking lot outside. I watch him drive off in his 1998 Monte Carlo until it vanishes far down the road.
I rest on my bed and pull the blankets up to my chest. They smell too strongly of bleach. There’s some show on with all these cowboys running around, shooting off each other’s hats and getting thrown out of saloons. The cowboy on the white horse has a nice hat. The white-coated lady with the curly hair - Sue I believe - barges in again and asks how I’m doing. I’m willing to bet that she’s itching to knock boots with me. She’s just waiting for a day to take me by surprise. She says that it’s about nine thirty at night but her clock must be off. I drank my afternoon coffee just a short while ago.

She takes some leather bound photo album down from a shelf and sits in a rickety chair by my bedside. The commercials come on so I suppose I can peel my eyes away for a moment and look at whatever it is she’s holding. She tells me that I made this photo album; I made it to help myself remember. I don’t understand what she means. She shows me pictures of all sorts of people and reads me their names. They all smile at me from the photographs, and I’m not sure if I should smile back or not. She tells me they’re related to me. She comes to a picture of a young man with wiry brown hair and a scruffy beard. He’s sitting on a bench in front of a pond full of algae. He looks like he’s posing for something. She tells me his name is Justin and that he’s my grandson, the one that visited me today.

I grin wide because I know that the one who visited me wasn’t a manager or a friend or coworker but my own grandson. It makes sense now, why he visited me, why he talked to me for as long as he did. No one talks to me for half as long. I warm up inside and feel a kind of joy that I’m not accustomed to feeling. The white-coated lady says that I’m lucky to have such a kind grandson. She puts the photo album away and softly walks out of my room. I look back at the television in front of me.

The last advertisement for God knows what cuts out and the cowboy show is back on. Now the cowboys on the television are crossing some rapids. They’re forcing their steeds to march nearly chest deep through the waters. Those look like good strong horses. They better not get swept away. The cowboy on the white horse has a nice hat.
memory keeper
Sabrina Lee

we traced your footsteps
stepping through those narrow
alleyways, tasting the sticky samples the street
vendors sliced onto little plastic plates.
and you showed me

the school where you were
expelled for screams and sobs

the tiny store where you once stole bright
sweet things and where you had
to go back and say sorry

the little inlet
where you would toss
your homemade lunch since school
lunches tasted better. the rice
separated sinking like snow
flakes in a glass globe.

you tell me i'm your memory

keeper and traces of you
slice—sob—steal
through me

whispers sink like rice in my heart.
Chinese proverb
Sabrina Lee

Tying together those who will some day meet
red threads string across time and space
to some where, some time, some unforeseen place.
Is that why we sit silently dangling our feet

off the rooftop? We feel the heavy heat
and watch the bright night buses race,
tyng together those who will some day meet.
Red threads string across time and space,

and ours has shortened. As we slowly eat
the chocolate cake, as tears like icing glaze your face,
as a light wind blows, warm rain like grace
blesses our heads, our house, our shadowed street,
tyng together those who will some day meet.
Fourth Grade Art Class
Kai Koopman

More so than color and line, art class in grade school
Made use of papier-mâché and twine
Strung from coat hangers and empty spools
Of thread paper-clipped to ceiling tiles.

Red twine looped around the pruned mouths
Of each balloon,
And goopy mâché hardened over the distended rubber
In neat shells.
A pod of oblong globes, blotchily painted aqua blue
And green for the continents.

They hung from the ceiling like spiders’ egg sacs,
Which the class could easily have drawn
From referencing old National Geographics.

Each world we made floated there above us,
Ominous—paint and paper crust buoying down air—
Ready to fracture at a pin drop
And release a million black arachnids over the desks
Where we doodled spiders on newsprint:

Two black ovals; a red hourglass on the larger blotch;
Mandibles and eight legs strung-out from the body;
All color and line—

Silk trailed from the ends of our spiders
Like strands of twine.
California Roll

Jake Schepers

As an entry-level sushi
it sufficed to satisfy
the virgin pallet.
But as it lay there
on your plate,
you surmised how it
got there, its individual
parts compacted according
to cultural specifications.
How many others could be
just like this one? Same
order, flavor, fish?
More a snowflake
in that it cannot fall
down in the same way ever.
Crystalline structure.
Hexagonal. Radially symmetric.
Is this the reincarnation
of manna? It’s been
thousands of years,
but we greet it as an old
friend who never quite left.
The Sinai message
as the sushi commands:
shema, shema,
wasabi, soy.
A golden calf propped upon
two bronze Asherah poles,
chopsticks bearing buds
like Aaron’s staff.
In the Leaving
Josh deLacy

Accelerating past brick buildings and landscaped gardens. Not until untamed trees reappear do I collapse to the speed limit.

Statistics is the number one thing alumni wish they learned better during their undergrad.

Familiarity ended in May.

For the first two years, a friend and I devised a plan to erupt the chapel: gallons of vinegar, tubs of baking soda, and bottles of red dye to cascade down at 10:22 am.

A ridiculous sculpture.

There’s a theory that you can dissect every response into seven basic emotions. His scribbles on the whiteboard. I’m trying to see if it fits.

Christianity superficially instilled.

Special rocks that no faculty or student cares to understand.

Eighty-two under the Crossing.

Now, when I would reject their symbolism, I wish I knew. Nostalgia for confrontation.

The dorm was my haven, free heat and security, discussions and posturing. Welcoming me back even after I burst free and wandered a semester in Spain.

Chocolate and peanut butter, said the chaplain.

But doesn’t too much candy make you sick?

The future, open.

Some of your best conversations will happen between two and four a.m., a speaker said. Don’t waste them by studying or sleeping.

Nineteen credits as an RA and cross runner guaranteed a life frantic and pure, yet we still relinquished time for truth and struggles and doubts.

I enter a world unknown.

Will I, too, regret statistics more than these?

In the desperate housing scramble before senior year, we failed. But the apartments were our failsafe, and the year still succeeded.

Hoping against police on the Beltline.

Between two and four a.m., I hear your echo in the emptiness of this new-to-me kitchen.

The color of the copyrighted bricks.

A world devoid of more than an institution.

An institution.

I enter a world, unknown.

Cooking anew with vomit residue.

How?

I, without.
A Dog’s Devotion
Michael Kelly

I stepped out of my car and started walking up the driveway to my parent’s front door and I could already hear it: the sporadic shuffling of heavy paws and thick, black nails scuffing the kitchen floor. Accompanying these chaotic footsteps was a deep, quick bark, whining as if to say “Hey! Mom! Dad! Person! Outside!” When I put my hand on the doorknob, I could feel his nose pressed against the other side of the entrance. Nevertheless, I threw open the door to bombard him with unwarranted praise, petting, and accepting kisses as he jumped up to my shoulders and sloppily whipped his slimy, pink tongue toward my face. “Get off him, Cody!” my dad scolded as he tried to remove this seventy pound beast out of his way so that he and my mom could have their turn at welcoming me home. But Cody was persistent and nudged his way under every groin and into every hug, staring at us with wide eyes and mouth open, panting from all the effort required to reclaim his place at the center of our attention.

Shortly after this episode, however, this cute, affectionate dog morphed into a bothersome, tiring burden. He became an ever-present obstacle as I unloaded my luggage and attempted to walk through my house. Then his overweight body plopped down in front of my head as I tried to watch TV. And if he wasn’t being petted enough, he would dig his claws into my arm to remind it of its duty. I couldn’t even go to the bathroom without him barging through the door with the same idiotic, goofy grin on his face that, hours earlier, I adored.

Maybe I’m just unappreciative. After all, where else could I find such devotion? In people? My family and friends love me wholeheartedly, that’s unarguable; but devotion is an act people often reserve for only the few things they revere. God is usually somewhere on the list, then a husband or a wife, maybe the kids, but only if they behave, and it ends with some embarrassing reality show that leaves you to wonder how you didn’t make the cut.

To further complicate the problem, we must take my dog’s IQ into account, which I believe is a negative number. I’ll watch him as he regularly forces his elongated nose between the cushions of the couch and loudly snorts up the dirt and crumbs while licking the burgundy leather material that surrounds his face, which makes me wonder why I’m idolizing anything about this animal. Further, I cannot say that my dog’s devotion to me is unique, because only a few days after I’ve settled in, my mom and I had to lock the dog in her bedroom so that he would not tackle my grandma to the ground when she joined us for lunch. As we ate, we could hear him whimpering behind the closed door, longing not to see the people who fed him or played with him daily, but a person that comes over no more than once or twice a year that could provide him with only an hour of attention before she falls asleep in her chair.

Perhaps now I’m confusing devotion with excitement, but shouldn’t they be inseparable? Unfortunately, when I walked into the Christmas service at church, I realized that the answer was “no”. Sleepy eyes and mumbling lips surrounded me as
I joined the congregation in halfheartedly singing songs of celebration on the day that we believe God became human to pardon us from Hell. Granted, that sacrifice was two thousand years ago, but doesn’t God continually make sacrifices for us each day just by letting us live, knowing that we will constantly fail him? Isn’t grace more than enough motivation to worship if a piece of Chex-Mix gets my dog to ecstatically obey my every command? Maybe the glory of the sacrifice was overshadowed by how exhausted I was after still getting the childish rush of adrenaline on Christmas Eve from my lofty dreams about what presents I might get the next morning. Or, maybe I was embarrassed to show the extent of my devotion with so many other people around. A fear of judgment, comparison, superiority, or other behaviors that are so unfortunately present within the Christian community, might have overtaken me in the same way that my dog conveniently refuses to do tricks when anyone I want to impress is watching. Maybe we’re just shy...

Devotion, then, must develop in quiet times alone, when nothing else can steal the glory. The times when I’m laying on the couch watching TV and Cody waddles over, looks me in the eyes, and slowly slides down to the floor beside me. The times when there’s a thunderstorm and, even though he’s not allowed to, he comes running down to the basement and into my bed with me. And during the times when we’re walking outside and Cody sees a squirrel and darts after it, causing his leash to burn my hand, releasing himself from my control. I call out to him, and he freezes in the middle of the open yard, shifts his gaze from the squirrel to me, then to the squirrel, then back to me. I turn around and start to walk away when I hear grass blades bending under his furry feet, and feel his pointy head as it rams into the back of my legs while his slimy, pink tongue slaps against my hands, as if to ask me for forgiveness. I laugh at how much I’ve personified this poor animal by giving him the capacity to feel guilt, until I remember the people who came running to Jesus, kissing his feet and pleading for his grace. Then, as I reflect on how comparable we are, united in being fallen creations, I let my pestering puppy continue, because I know that’s the best he can offer.
You are defined by the cradle which never carried you
You are defined by the toy that never bought your time
You are defined by the locker which never held your lunchbox
You are defined by white picket fences never hopped
are defined by the streets that never saw
are defined by the asphalt that never scraped
defined by window panes which never held your reflection
by tables which never fed
by a hand never hitched

Who defined I
empty notebooks
packaged textbook
shelved Bible
void of little
still filling

You
You Say Lots of Things
Leah Sienkowski

sleeping here is not like sleeping anywhere else.
here the lights do terrible things to our faces,
you gather tea blossoms in your hands.
and you point to my shoe:
all rubbed off on one side.
you are a right walker,
you say.
you say lots of things.

The House, Yesterday
Leah Sienkowski

Giddy lies
and laundered words
grip that place between your ribs where feeling flows,
that place you can be curious and happy to be sorry.
But congenially I wonder with you
as you wipe your mouth over getting old
while cakes burn and sink in the oven
and three dogs bark circles around the house.
It is so short a time for everything to happen at once-
going, gone
with tailpipes of beautiful exhaust.
Plastic Little Covers
Michelle Jokisch

last night i remembered
the color spectrum
i dreamt to once
buy.

the patterns against
the light

cautiously entertained
the brown circles of my eyes.

last night as i
lingered behind
their shadows

i
faced the marked
freshman ink

& pretended that
this
was just
a dream.

of sorts and old
songs
and a heated
seat.

of fall smells
and pearly
white dents

all concealing the
later
shaking frame
in that
small twin size bed.
Summer’s Rain Dance
Leah Jonker

Sunday - July 1968

Hot steam is rising to my face and little droplets a my own hard-working sweat drip down the back a my neck. Like wrinkled raisins, my hands scrub them white’s dishes clean a all impurities. Ironic, I think to myself looking down at them ashy, black hands a mine. Them “dirty, unclean fingers” as Mrs. Wangly called them yesterday upon my dropping her fine, fine hairbrush. I reckon Mrs. Wangly’s cold heart don’t get thinking about all them things I get to touching everyday she opens that door a hers to my uncleanliness. Hot, hot, steam­ing water. Ironic.

That son a hers, he be the only brave soul behind these walls. He got a quick tongue that boy, but it ain’t mean I disapprove. He the only white I feel I’m looking up at when I speak. Out a respect a course, not height. Some say he joining them hippies cause a his modern, revolutionist ideas, but from what I seen he just got his head screwed on tight. For example, just this evening at supper, Mrs. Wangly got herself started ranting bout how them coloreds are taking over the town dirtying up them water fountains and such, but she got shut up real quick. “Ma, your skin is ten shades blacker under that pasty mask.” As one might imagine, a mess a yelling and unclean words flew wild. She done drove her sweet Christopher from the house. We ain’t seen him since.

Here I go again like I always do, catching myself in this dirty act a disrespecting Mrs. Wangly. I’d be deathly ashamed if them Wanglys could hear my thoughts right through my skull. My thick, thick skull.

“Don’t think such things, Annaliese.”

My heart freezes into a solid block a ice at the deep, condemning voice. There stands Christopher, dripping from head to toe in the doorway a the kitchen. No white never come back here.

“You wicked boy!” Fore I knows it, my steaming wash-rag is flying across the room.

“Do you normally think out loud when you work?” Christopher say. A playful smile wrinkles his sad-looking eyes. “I’m only teasing Liese. Rough night, yea? Sorry you had to hear that.”

He don’t lie, that boy. A rough night it is with Mrs. Wangly causing all kinds a trouble.

“I know what’ll make you laugh. Have you ever experienced a warm summer rain?” He and all his nerve grabs my arm, pulling me out the door fore I can protest. “A course. Can’t count the number a times I walk home in it.”

“No, no, that’s not a warm summer rain.” He telling me I’m a liar? “You have to dance, Liese! Dance till you can’t stand no more! Dance till the rain beats you down. Dance till the drops soak into every pore.” He scream into the night’s air. “I’ll teach you. Close your eyes, lean your head back, throw your arms up.” I do what he say. Elephant sized drops a water hit my eyelids. “Now spin Annaliese! Spin!” I spin and I spin till my head feels light and my worries all gone. I spin till the rain washes them droplets a sweat from my neck. I spin till Mrs. Wangly ain’t bothering my thoughts. And I spin till the color a my skin ain’t dirty. I spin and I spin till everything right inside me. Then I hear a sound so rare to my own ears that even I has to stop and listen. I hear the sound a my own laugh.
After Falling into the Sea
Trenton Heille

Forgive me, love, if I should die inside this conch shell, cradled by fibonacci curves, with the hum of sea currents

And click of nautilus about my ears, 20,000 leagues deep, in mollusk-made resting place for bones

Cinnamon
Ben Rietema

I peer into the scent of your Snug cinnamon. The rich brown envelops me as I wash out The blatant nothingness. Shout and be utterly silent Run and be still, Do you sense: The tremor of an omnipotent butterfly? The softness of a thunderstorm? The inextricable taste of a lily? The glance of a clear shiver, Roils my stomach into a turquoise blue. I can’t help but dismiss my Snowy discernment.
Beauty
Ae Hee Lee

A sparrow cannot fly when its wings are wet.
When its wings are wet a sparrow cannot fly.
It wails until the sun blooms,
And the sparrow flies away.

Man cannot caress fire despite its warmth.
Fire cannot caress man despite his warmth.
But because they love each other,
They remain by each other’s side.

Nobody can see the end of the world.
The end of the world can be seen by Nobody.
Today is beloved despite its grey,
Tomorrow waits for Hope and then rips her veil.

The wind is invisible but speaks to many ears.
Many ears do not hear the invisible wind speak.
For they fear that it can ruffle hearts,
But they forget it also lifts feet.
It was 6:58am and Ella Wallis couldn't find her arm. It blended in with the bedspread so expertly that she had to locate it by touch. This was the occasion that led her to wonder if she shouldn't be a little alarmed.

She had been fading gradually now for quite some time. It was a slow, gradual fade so subtle it hadn't merited much notice. Her legs would be lost for a few seconds in the tumbling floral design of the couch, her arm would shift a few shades to match the wallpaper. It all happened slowly enough that Ella refused to admit that anything was going on, until the day she woke up missing her left arm. Even then, she wasn't particularly troubled.

Ella had enjoyed fading, at first. On the bus she was glad no one turned to her to ask silly questions; at the café, she was grateful that the effusive waitress did not keep returning to chat or fill her coffee. Even as Ella arrived to work in the grand city library, she was glad that the young children's librarian stopped meeting her eye and smiling like she usually had. She liked the children's librarian well enough, but never knew how to respond.

On the bus that morning, the driver didn't ask Ella for her quarters and she was left standing awkwardly on the landing for a moment before she leaned over and dropped them into the box herself. Settling into a seat next to a preoccupied businessman, she smoothed her neat, navy skirt and noted how it looked like stained red velvet and how her purse looked rather like it was hovering several inches above an empty seat. "Excuse me," Ella muttered nervously, turning to the businessman next to her. "Excuse me, I don't mean to bother you, but--" The man grunted and turned the page of his newspaper, and, abashed, Ella looked down at her lap.

Ella stumbled out of the bus with the flow of the crowd and walked into the grand marble library. Taking quick steps past the children's librarian, she headed straight for the basement where she worked. Ella removed her coat and sighed contentedly in the musty dimness. She switched on her desk lamp and settled into pasting up an encyclopedia that had suffered at the hands of an elementary-schooler. Ella worked quietly and efficiently until midmorning, when she realized she was reading the synopsis of a new novel right through her less-than-solid arm. Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she resolved to see the doctor.

Gathering her things, Ella walked to the front desk where Omar, the manager, sat tall and important. She stood there waiting to be noticed. "Omar?" she asked softly. He didn't look up and she cleared her throat apologetically, "I'm—I'm not feeling well, I think I'll take the afternoon off." Omar still didn't look up, but turned the page of his novel impassively. A surge of fear passed through Ella and she rubbed her hands together to reassure herself that they were still solid. Working up the courage, she raised her voice. "Omar?!" He looked up. Ella exhaled.

The doctor was a short, bald man with sweaty hands and pictures of his children spread across the walls. He listened absently as she explained her complaints.
and shrugged when she finished. He took her arm in his hands and examined it perfunctorily, prodded it with a tongue depressor, held it up to the light. "You seem to me to be perfectly visible, Ms. Wallis." The doctor said, and Ella felt at once rather silly to have taken the afternoon off from work. The doctor stepped on her foot as he left the room but she decided not to say anything.

It was quiet at home that night, as it always was, and Ella decided to rest. She woke up in the darkness several hours later and felt peculiar. Her body blended into the bed, which blended into the floor and that darkness stretched out the window, the same color as the spaces between the stars. The blending was so anonymous, so complete that it felt metaphysical.

The next morning Ella found herself pulling out a brightly colored dress from the back of her closet and a gaudy hat she had vowed to never wear again. Waiting for the bus she pounced on the familiar businessman, inquiring about the weather. The businessman pulled away and looked pointedly into his paper. But another man muttered, "excuse me, ma'am," as he passed her and Ella was more relieved than she cared to admit. At work she ran upstairs with every question she could think of and was thrilled with every answer. The children's librarian blinked curiously at Omar. "New employee?" she asked and others wondered.

Over the next few days, Ella found some success in this method. She found that if she talked brightly enough and loud enough, she would stay visible. She found herself in a new position, chattering with everyone in her path, desperately trying to hold onto her solidity. There were times when she slipped into silence and was bowled over by commuters; one day she was marked absent from work and couldn't bring herself to say she'd been there the whole time.

Something else began to change as well. The home that had been her fortress of solitude became her prison, where she ceased to be. Ella began to dread heading home each day into that vague dream where it was too easy to misplace herself. For the first time since high school she began to go out to movies and restaurants, anything to prolong the night's end. She began to wildly consider getting married, just to have someone at night to reassure her existence. The whole business of being visible was exhausting and she often wondered if it was worth it.

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One morning Ella woke up and couldn't find herself at all. "This is it," she thought, resignedly. She tossed a bright green feather boa around her shoulders and pulled on a pair of stiletto heels. Squinting into an empty mirror, she approximated as she put hot pink lipstick on her mouth. After assuring that she had done all she could, she walked resolutely down to the bus stop. There, as every morning, stood the businessman, his face hidden behind his newspaper. Ella marched up and stood squarely in front of him. "Good morning," she whispered. He didn't respond, and some madness filled her and she yelled, "Good morning!"

He gave no response and a funny feeling filled her stomach. "I exist," she told him, though as she looked down at the pavement through her own body she started to wonder.

"How do you know?" the businessman muttered, turning a sheet of his news-
paper. Ella was a bit taken aback at this, but she pulled herself up even taller.

"Because you can see me?" The statement was meant to come out strong, but her voice tilted up nervously at the end, making it a question.

"No I can’t," the man said, and he didn’t look up.

Ella stood there, and considered blending into the walls forever, a wraith of a person left to herself, without obligations or expectations. But instead she put her foot down. "I exist!" she shouted. There was no reaction from the man and she flew at him in a rage, tearing the newspaper from his hands and shredding it, pounding at him with her fists and screaming, "I exist! I exist!" His eyes flicked up and saw her for a second, she was sure of it. Her heart pounded and she looked down at her own body and was sure there was a hint of it, a shimmer of solidity against the traffic coursing behind her. His eyes flicked back down as the bus arrived and he walked in and paid his fare exactly as every other day.

Ella stood on the pavement, her hands balled into fists as the man settled into a seat, found another newspaper and buried his head in it. The bus rumbled into gear and pulled away.

Ella thought about running after the bus yelling for it to let her on. She thought about stopping the pedestrians who were jogging past her, or about running into traffic and holding up her hands. She opened her mouth but something deep within her held her back. She swallowed her comments and stood quietly. Ella Wallis shimmered like a ghost for a moment as the traffic rushed behind her, then she was lost in the pebbled sidewalk and the billboards and the people that walked right through her on their way.
Intercostals
Angela Dekoeffoeck

Muscles just below my skin
Intercostals to breathe out, breathe in
Wrapped around each rib, each curve
An inner coast, a sea of nerve
Ragged bone arched round my chest
A cost of ivory wound by flesh

On the inner coast where the heart pulse meets the shore,
Do you ever think of me anymore?
Or has that storm turned to a soft ebbing tide
With ocean's flow beginning to subside?

Moon light's pull has lost its power to save
Restore heart beat once more and crashing wave
Waves to break a heart of stone
Each grain falling down to the melancholy tone
Of time dissolving all the sand
Leaving only a desolate strand
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