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Dialogue

Staff and writers of Dialogue

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Having made our way through the holiday season, exchanging gifts and celebrating reunions, we have been thinking about how our work here at Dialogue reflects the spirit of the season.

We consider it our job to create a venue for authors and artists to share compositions of many mediums. From memoir to mosaic, the disciplines of arts and communication provide a fount of opportunity to explore the contexts—the histories, families, and perspectives—that have made us who we are in this moment. Sharing these compositions creates new narratives that become a part of the lives of every person who flips through this magazine.

In much the same way, breaking routines to spend time with friends and family members for the holidays allows for a pause and a reflection on the narratives that have shaped us all. It is truly a gift to have this time, and this opportunity, to appreciate the roles we play in each other’s lives. As we grow and our perspectives change, the narrative continues.

So now, as first semester has turned to a new year that will soon give way to spring, we are coming once again to a time of new beginnings. Wherever you are, we wish you well. May you begin anew and embrace the narratives that come into your life. May new friendships grow older and familial relationships be revitalized, as we all continue to create and grow into the people we will be.

As you read through this January issue of Dialogue, may you be blessed by the significance of each composition and the story that brought it about. It is our pleasure to do what we can to make this possible.

~Heather Tills, Editor-in-Chief
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I am a clanging gong, a cracked cymbal, a hollow ringing in the ear . . .

I acquire this truth too late, hours after I take the phone call from my son, sighing in the face of his simple request. I acquiesce, turn around and head the opposite way, even though it is mercilessly hot and my long day is finished and I am going home. I make sure he knows what a bother this is, but I do turn around. I do what he asks. I sacrifice. So I am already prepared—primed with heavy sighs and a head full of complaint—when I turn right on Boston Street and see the man scoot his wheelchair into the middle of the road, straddle the yellow line and wave his hand in frantic greeting. He's strategic; parked cars on either side make it impossible to slip past. I slow and lower the window and give him my best skeptic's stare. 'What?' I ask, granting him permission to start his story. It rolls out rehearsed like a telemarketer's pitch and I half listen, waiting for the punch line, the inevitable appeal. He is: a) out of catheter tubes, b) needs to get to some relatives' house, on some distant end of town, and c) taking a long time to get to the point.

I interrupt. "What do you want from me?"

He adapts to his audience and gets to the point. He needs $6.50 for an AmbuCab, one with a wheelchair lift. I admire his creativity. The AmbuCab is a nice twist and the strange amount, $6.50 instead of an even five or ten dollars, shows he put some thought into it. He matches my stare while I engage in an inner debate, but tonight I'm hard to move. Besides, I don't have cash, certainly not more than a buck or two. "Sorry." I say, although I am not, "I don't have six-fifty." I reach for the window control.

"Anything to get me close, then." He backs his chair, angling it in beside my mirror so I see our faces side by side. His expression is earnest, but not desperate, his complexion summer-singed and peppered with red sores. His tank top hangs on his angled shoulders loose and comfortable. Poised, at home in the middle of the road, he is a baited trap set to snap.

I am burnt flesh, charred bone, a smoking stench of sacrifice . . .

I sigh again, lean into my seatbelt, and tug my wallet free. It falls open, ready to prove my point. I see one folded dollar bill, and when I pull it out a five comes with it. Six bucks, I think, and it gives me pause. I shuffle a finger through the clutter in the pockets of my console, wrappers and stray keys, rusted screws, and two quarters. Six-fifty. I can not staunch the sigh that rises within me, although I know I should.

"Well, guess what." I pause, knowing better than to credit luck, but not ready to acknowledge providence. "I've got it."

I place the money, my puny sacrifice, into his hand. If he thanks me, I don't hear it. I am raising my window and shifting in gear and watching in my rear-view mirror as he pushes away, gliding downhill as I ascend. I know damn well where he's headed.

I race the three blocks to my son's house, complete my errand, then head back down hill, determined to catch him at the party store. Instead, I spot him at a bus stop, brown-bagged bottle tipped to his mouth. "Gotcha!" I whisper. Circling the block, I prepare my challenge. How's that Ambucab taste, I think. I reach for the window button, my tongue scorched with prophetic heat. He lowers the bottle, sagging into his seat deflated. The bottle tips precariously on his lap. He glances up. I turn away, anger spent, smug righteousness dissolved, and we bow our heads in unison.

We are mirrored ghosts, poor reflections, clouded images of greater truths . . .

Dialogue 05
Dream 176
Trenton Heille

Jack complains about his bone-cage from an easy chair, and I nod, and nod, remembering his hunchbacked way of going about, a putting on for the girdles who roam our street with stiletto teeth and crystalline nipples.

Vexed Jacks paces like an animal, claws bared and needle-furred, but I am not afraid, I know him well and this is for 45th Street, where siren-sounds draw men to their demise as feast for peafowl.

"Everything is trying to kill me"
Jack moans into my ear, fluttering lashes like whore-moths against my temple, already weak from a day's rain, but I punch his sternum and feel it give with a crack.
EULOGY

ALEX WESTENBROEK

My Friend was a vocalized pause aficionado. He loved the sound of mouths curling in on themselves, idling out of gear. And so, he stole them, and displayed his collection in a room of tape recorders. And as his collection grew, he added some rarer oddities, like mannequins that bit their lips, and a phonograph that cleared its throat.

He asked me once if I would come on tour with him and his collection, but I declined because all those tapes sounded like someone with a cold humming, and because the constant lean of awkward anticipation made my ears numb.
PAIN, LONELINESS, AND MEDITERRANEAN FOOD

JOSHUA EPPERLY

It was 12:17 in the afternoon, and S.J. Broussard was occupying his usual corner in the patio of the Pita Pit, Manhattan’s finest Mediterranean joint. Although his dress shirt, striped tie and olive green cardigan were clearly not agreeing with the sweltering heat, he still felt good. Today, he wasn’t just another bohemian scurrying back and forth down Gladstone Street, fretting over this and that and other trivial things. Today, he was enjoying a delicious gyro and engaged in a discussion over That Grey Mottled Sky, his newly published novel. It was raw and honest, his magnum opus, and quite possibly the most accurate expression of human misery since the works of Dostoyevsky. Not to mention, the discussion was with a lovely woman, Becky, who was sitting cross-legged on the opposite end of the plastic table.

Well, S.J. Broussard supposed that “lovely” wasn’t the most fitting word for Becky. She exuded an intensity that made his skin prickle. She cracked a lot of jokes about the human genitalia that he found to be rather uncouth. She also had this tic in which she would jerk her head up at the sky as if expecting a malevolent deity to drop a piano on her. But nonetheless, S.J. Broussard was drawn to Becky. Their relationship was woven together with a wealth of similarities. They were both twenty-seven. They both enjoyed ethnic food and novels by Cormac McCarthy. They had both overdosed on prescription drugs – he on Prozac, she on Lunesta. They even had their stomachs pumped in the same hospital on the same night, and had spent the subsequent week together in the same psychiatric ward. If he weren’t such a staunch nihilist, he would probably believe that they were destined for each other.

“Hey, I haven’t gotten this far yet.” Becky exclaimed as they turned to Chapter VI of “Movement II: Lo, that Zephyric Strumpet”. “Should we save it for later?”

“Well, no. This chapter’s important. Just try to skim it.”

Becky had arrived seventeen minutes late, which meant that they had seventeen minutes less to discuss the heart-wrenching loneliness of Sebastian’s journeys through the ruins of a post-nuclear New York City. Her lunch break was winding down and they hadn’t even yet dissected “Movement III: The Wristwatch that Sang of Voltaire”.

“So anyways, I think, I think the dog…” Becky paused, nibbled her falafel, and stared blankly into page 285. “Shit,” she muttered. “What’s this guy’s name?”

S.J. Broussard sighed. “Sebastian. His name is Sebastian.”

“Right. Sebastian. Anyways, I think the dog that Sebastian finds here in the fallout shelter symbolizes, uh… some sort of dichotomy, like between feudalism and capitalism or something. That’s probably what you were going for, right?”

Why do I try? His internal commentator went off. Why did I get out of bed today?

S.J. Broussard gave her an exasperated look. “No,” he replied, “That’s not what it meant at all.”

“Oh. Um, maybe I should look at that again.”

Becky brought her head down and scrutinized the book as if it were a cadaver splayed out for an autopsy. Meanwhile, S.J. Broussard stared at her pixie cut. The hairstyle was a bit boyish, sure, but it was also unbearably cute. A sudden chatter broke his thoughts. He swung his gaze up into the elms behind Becky and caught sight of two squirrels mating with wild abandon. He looked back down into his lap.
“Oh!” Becky exclaimed. “Maybe it fits in with that animal motif.”

“No, it really isn’t about that,” S.J. Broussard answered, disheartened. Earlier that morning, when he had visualized the course of the conversation, he hadn’t figured that they would get hung up on which words were motifs and which sentences were arranged in iambic pentameter. He had hoped that by this point in time, Becky’s eyes would be watering over with sympathy. He had even entertained himself with the thought of Becky asking, “Maybe we could transfer this book club into my apartment tonight” and had played out that scenario to its logical conclusion.

Becky performed another head-jerking tic and sighed. “I… I don’t get it,” she exclaimed. “I just don’t get it.”

He felt a compulsion to pound his head against the nearest hard surface, but stifled it and ventured forward.

“What do you mean, ‘don’t get it'? What’s not to get?”

She was tearing her napkin into little bits. “Well…” she answered, “Not that the story’s bad, or that the book is poorly written or anything…”

“Is it the Osaka Five biker gang? Because they get explained in the end, if you didn’t catch that.”

“No. I just don’t know why I should care.”

I’m a worm. I’m a worm who thinks that fancy words can make up for my utter lack of social skills.

S.J. Broussard looked at Becky’s fingernails. “Well,” he mumbled, “it’s about pain. I mean, my job is to ---”

“Yeah, yeah,” she interjected. “To bring pain back into the prose.”

He winched. He hated it when she repeated his own slogans to him like that. “But every­thing in the story is connected back to pain,” he countered. “Sebastian’s schizophrenia. The Church of All Morality and their search for the IQ84 portal. The J-37 automaton that infinitely recites ‘The Hollow Men’!” His voice rose as he brought his defense to a finale. “All of it! It all comes back to the pain and the human condition!”

“Listen…” Becky reached across the table and touched his clammy fingers. “I love how you’re so concerned about the human condition. But it’s getting buried underneath all this flowery language. Sometimes I feel like you’re trying to impress some Shakespeare appreciation society or something.” She thumbed her way to a page with a sticky note and some underlined text. “Here’s an example.”

S.J. Broussard’s stomach churned. Becky straightened her back, put on her best ceremoni­al face and began to read the second paragraph on page sixteen.

“And now we descend like buzzards onto the only wanderer who can still yet bleat with the resilience bestowed to him by the bacchanalian some know as ‘God’. Sebastian Orwell, amidst the desecrated ruins, was the only strand of wheat remaining after the reaping borne by the warheads. He ambled about the rubble in search of a solitary human touch, akin to a baby pining to suckle from the well-worn teat of its mother.”

She shut the book, and S.J. Broussard felt as if she had also shut any possibility of them spending the rest of their lives together.

Nadia, the Lebanese waitress who always served them, appeared at the table. She asked whether they wanted the check together or separate. Becky chose the latter. Nadia disappeared into the restaurant, but not before exchanging warm smiles with Becky. S.J. Broussard was perplexed. Becky never smiled at him like that.
“So,” Becky snapped her gaze towards him and continued, “Is Sebastian a strand of wheat or a baby ‘pinning’ to ‘suckle’? I need a clear picture of the guy I’m supposed to care about.”

“Well... he’s me, fundamentally.”

“No he isn’t,” Becky answered tersely. “I can’t figure him out. I like you better. And besides, have you ever heard a mother say to her baby, ‘Hey, you look thirsty. Wanna suckle my teat?’ Why couldn’t you have just written, ‘he was lonely?’ or something?”

It occurred to him that that might have been the more effective way of putting it. But he couldn’t let Becky step on him like a doormat any longer.

S.J. Broussard slid his horn-rimmed glasses back onto the bridge of his nose and said, “If you can’t appreciate fine literature, then hurry over to Schuler Books. The author of Confessions of a Frat Boy was doing a book signing, last time I saw. Maybe he’ll let you be a groupie.”

“How dare you!”

He got up from his plastic chair, intent on having the last word. “I shouldn’t bother with someone who can’t understand pain.”

Becky stood up. “What did you say?” she yelled, grabbing him by his neatly ironed collar.

“What the hell did you say?”

The midday patrons peeled their eyes from their smartphones and stared at them like a wake of vultures. The Pita Pit was supposed to be a peaceful place. No one had ever disrupted their communally private enjoyment of the best Mediterranean food in Manhattan. S.J. Broussard shivered.

“Should I remind you why my stomach was pumped that night? It wasn’t cuz I felt like treating myself to a pity party. My parents were killed in a car accident! My mom’s skull was crushed like an eggshell! Do you know what that does to someone?”

A few tables away, a morbidly obese man set down his gyro and expressed his irritation.

“For God’s sake, lady, we’re trying to eat here!”

“For God’s sake, blimp,” she retorted, “I’m trying to yell here!”

The man deflated into an amorphous mass in his chair.

Becky still had his collar clenched in her hands, and S.J. Broussard was debating whether or not to wrench away and risk tearing his Modena Ivory dress shirt. Nadia reappeared at their table. She made a small, timid cough and held out the two check holders to them. At that moment he would’ve given anything to be one of those squirrels mating in the elms. In all their scurrying and mindless reproduction, they never had to deal with the hell of human relations.

Becky laughed awkwardly. “Um, just set them on the table, sweetie.”

“What’s wrong?” Nadia asked in her alluring Arabic accent.

“Oh no, we’re okay. I’m just teaching my friend here how to straighten his tie.”

The waitress only narrowed her coffee-colored eyes at him. “I could mess him up. I have a lipstick gun for men like him. It goes ‘bzzz’ and it messes you up bad.”

“Just go!” She stuttered. “W-we’ll talk about this later, okay?”

Disappointedly, Nadia left them.

Becky released her grip on him, and he backed away slowly from the self-destruction. She was crying now, and her mascara was forming streaks down her face. S.J. Broussard thought it might be right to hug her, but his mortal fear of intimacy advised against it.

“I’m sorry, Becky,” he mumbled. “I shouldn’t have said that.” The apology was only partially sincere. At that point, any sort of remorse in him was being trounced by his need to get the hell out of there.

10 DIALOGUE
"You’re not sorry." She quivered. "You’re only ever sorry for yourself. You couldn’t even go through with it that night. You gulped the pills and phoned ER the second after. You only wanted everyone else to feel sorry for you, too. Why should you get all the attention?"

He considered all the reasons and chose the best one. "I have… issues."

"Oh, issues! Big deal. You’re not an orphan. I guess you think your ‘issues’ makes you an expert on ‘the human condition’, huh?" Becky shoved her things into her tattered messenger bag and slung it over her shoulder. "When I feel like shit, I don’t change my name to SJ. Brow­ssard and write a steampunk-Kafkaesque-Shakespearean-nihilist exploration of the human condition. I talk to someone about it."

SJ.

Broussard couldn’t believe it. French contained no such ‘w’ sound.

"It’s Broussard. Brow-ssard."

Becky smiled sardonically through her tears. "No," she stated. "It’s Stu Schmittendorf.” His face shriveled up into itself. "Don’t…"

"Whatever, Stu." She fished a ten and a five from her pocket and set them on the table. "And if you’re trying to get into my pants with that ‘woe-is-me’ crap, you can forget it. I’m a lesbian. You honestly should’ve figured that out by now.”

He most certainly had not known that. But in a strange way, it made sense. It at least explained her borderline-neurotic obsession with Ani DiFranco.

She wiped her nose on her handkerchief and looked to the street.

"I have to get to work. Don’t try to call me."

He had a feeling this was the last time he’d see her. To his surprise, the book was still on the table, taking up space between a check holder and torn-up bits of napkin.

"Y-you forgot your copy of That Grey, Mottled Sky."

Becky glanced behind her as she passed through the wrought-iron fence. "Keep it. You can use the paper to bandage your grey, mottled soul."

He watched her cross Gladstone Street and head south down the opposing sidewalk. Within another minute, her form became lost in the crowd. He soon only saw a jumbled blur of businessmen and bohemians, all hurrying down solitary paths towards their respective cubicles and coffee shops. An emptiness welled up inside of him.

"Tough break, bro."

Reality crashed down onto S.J. Broussard. A dozen pairs of eyes were honed in on him, and he wondered how he had let himself become so surrounded. He was the court jester, dancing his humiliating dance on a stage for the Pita Pit regulars.

"What? Who said that?"

Before the inquiry was through, his nose was directed towards the source by a nauseating, cologne-laden vapor. His insides tied into knots when he identified the owner of the voice. It was none other than Joseph “Broseph” Bryant, the swooned-over author of Confessions of a Frat Boy. He was lounging in the shaded corner opposite to his, his left hand holding his book and his right arm around his big-breasted counterpart.

"I said, ‘tough break’," he repeated, sucking air into his Abercrombie-clad chest. "She’s a lesbian, bro. Or should I say, ‘Stu’."

The patrons chuckled. Bryant’s girl expelled a mousy laugh. Even the fat man Becky had insulted lifted his head out of his arms and smiled at S.J. Broussard’s misery. He felt as if a cosmic magnifying glass was centering all the sun’s UV rays onto him.

"How dare you laugh at me?” he bellowed at the crowd. "I’m a writer!”
“Me too!” Bryant countered. “And the ladies can’t get enough of it! I bet I could even draft yours into my groupie squad. But she’ll have to pledge to do all that girl-on-girl action under my supervision.”

“You, you… plebeian!” S.J. Broussard heard himself shout.

In a series of uncoordinated, high-speed movements, S.J. Broussard flipped over his antagonists’ table. What happened next was almost surreal. He watched the faces of Bryant and his girl contort with shock as Tabbouleh and Baba Ghanouj rained down onto their clothes. He watched them dodge the path of the toppling umbrella pole and fall onto the patio’s brick floor. The pole’s metallic surface clanged against the wrought-iron fence behind them. A lone falafel rolled from the scene and came to rest at his feet. Coolly, he crushed it with the sole of his TOMS.

He had never felt more powerful.

Around him, the spectators burst into an angry din. Just as S.J. Broussard was debating whether or not he should belt out a line from Hamlet, he saw Bryant rise from the wreckage, filled with a Smirnoff-fueled rage only witnessed within the most elite circles of the fraternity.

“Come at me, bro, come at me!”

Without even scooping up his abandoned book, S.J. Broussard wheeled around and hopped the fence. His pant leg caught a protruding iron rail and he tumbled through the elms, ultimately ending up at the foot of his 1982 Schwinn Le Tour. He rose from the mulch, mounted his steed, and set his feet in motion before Joseph “Broseph” Bryant had navigated through the gated entrance of the Pita Pit patio.

S.J. Broussard pedaled on a jet stream of adrenaline. He weaved victoriously through the pedestrian-clogged sidewalks, putting distance between him and Bryant’s hulking body. But within another few blocks, his elation had faded completely, and he felt very much alone again.

He found himself thinking of Becky. By the time he had reached Sylvan Park on the corner of Leonard and Gladstone, his face had devolved into a mess of mucus and tears.

The park was a modest attempt at urban green space. It hardly could be considered a park; it was more like a last-ditch municipal effort to offer pedestrians an asylum from the city streets. But it would have to suffice. He skidded to a stop, stumbled down its cobblestone path, and collapsed onto the nearest vacant bench. There, he hid his head in his arms and sniveled over the latest friendship he had destroyed.

His thoughts returned to the week he and Becky had spent in the Manhattan Psychiatric Center. Most of their time there had been spent sitting through hackneyed psychotherapy and drinking coffee from Styrofoam cups, but there was one memory from that fugue-state that he had stored for safekeeping. After sharing a silent game of Chinese checkers, Becky had asked him his reason for being there. “Attempted suicide,” he had responded, to which she murmured, “Well, good to know I’m not the only one.”

What a concept. In all his writing, it seemed that he had only accomplished to convince himself that he was the chief stockholder of human misery. It was ironic, really - the more he tried to communicate his loneliness through writing, the more others shirked him off, and the lonelier he became. Maybe the problem was that they all were too wrapped up in their own misery to hear about his.

A dirty, bearded bum materialized from behind a clump of white oaks. The man approached him, twitching as if covered in an army of invisible hornets. “Listen, brother,” he
began. “I’m strugglin’. I gotta get twenty-three more dollars today for rehab so I can kick my heroine ad ---”

“Do you mind?” S.J. Broussard declared through his tears. “I’m suffering, here!”

The intruder skulked off and he resumed his sobbing.

He sat there awhile, observing the afternoon traffic with watery eyes. Then, while estimating how far his entrails would splatter if he were to jump into an oncoming car, his phone buzzed. He dug it out from his pocket and glanced at the screen. It was his counselor. They had scheduled an appointment for one o’clock, and with all the lunacy that had transpired in the last hour, the obligation had slipped his mind. Hastily, he transferred the phlegm in his nostrils onto his cardigan and picked it up.

“H-hello?”

“St--- excuse me, um, Mr. Broussard? It’s Sara. How are you doing?”

_The girl I love is a lesbian and no one understands a goddamn thing I write._

“Oh, you know, um... alright. I just got caught up discussing my novel with a friend. She thought it was...” he searched for the right adjective. “Enthralling.”

“Good to hear.” She paused. He wondered if she had heard his sniffling. “Well, it’s ten past one. Are you still coming today? We could continue discussing your commentary of the human condition in Movement III of your novel, if you’d like. Or we could talk about something else.”

“Yeah, that would be great. I-I’ll hop on my bike and be there in five.”

“Great.”

“Oh, um... Sara?”

“Yes?”

_I’m lonely._

“Maybe we could talk about Sebastian some more. You know, the protagonist?”

“We could do that, too. Okay, S.J. Broussard, I’ll see you soon.”

“Yeah, bye.”

S.J. Broussard clamored onto his bike and continued pedaling down Gladstone Street. He considered stopping by his loft to grab another copy of his book, then remembered he had the whole thing memorized. Besides, Sara was waiting. She was fifteen years his elder, but still, she was quite attractive for her age and very intelligent. He sensed a growing connection between them, something more than just the professional relationship counselors were required to have with their patients. Maybe he could ask her out for some Mediterranean food in the near future. But probably not at the Pita Pit this time.
that bag of chocolate chips emptied
into the banana bread batter and the trail
mix and the pancakes
but mostly into my mouth—I confess—
one by one by—

your last letters emptied
onto my lap onto the floor: treasures and
ticket
stubs and wrappers written in a different
language
semisweet bittersweet words

put that bag on a high shelf.
pass the pink soap.
let me wash my sticky fingers.
WHY I’M NOT
A JAZZ MUSICIAN
SABRINA LEE

as prescient as a fortune cookie, the sleep camel
bats one crusty eyelid
and peers around the giant
mound of sand, salt, star
light,
because the toe
nail bounces like a pearl
of tapioca,
because the bruise blooms blue,

because the modernist french romantic pelican
wings over the rolling star,
bouncing pearls of blue
from her rent chest on the light encrusted
tapioca.
WHEN THE TIME COMES

ABBY ZWART

In the back corner of the bottom drawer of my dresser, there is a box. It’s nondescript, one of those plastic Rubbermaid numbers with latches on each side that open and close with a satisfying click. My name is written on the lid with the sort of shimmering pastel paint pens favored by middle school girls. It smells faintly of powder and hairspray, a remnant of my high school theater days when the box was filled with mascara and cold cream.

When something important needs preserving, I open the bottom drawer. I’m a collector, but I hate clutter, so in go the movie ticket stubs, the birthday cards, the bottle caps. In go the bookmarks and receipts and brochures, Polaroids and pencils and playbills. They all mingle; they all stand alone. Notes from eighth grade next to senior pictures next to bracelets from summer camp.

Every so often, I go through the box. It’s rarely intentional, usually an excuse to procrastinate cleaning or homework. Just a glance at the decorated top, my name painstakingly printed and various squiggles and rhinestones scattered just so, can spark a memory and send me tumbling down Nostalgia Boulevard like some kind of helpless tumbleweed. Letters blow me back to middle school crushes, tickets rush me to outdoor concerts, and shells toss me bouncing across the sand of a blustery beach.

I’m afraid of forgetting. Aren’t we all? We’ve all got these boxes or drawers or envelopes. There are so many good things in this life: fast friendships, satin dresses, long vacations, short poetry, heartfelt confessions, chocolate chip pancakes… I can’t bear the thought of losing the good stuff. So I save.

Sometimes, I lose track of what’s in the box. I pull out an unfamiliar scrap of ribbon, or maybe an unidentified clothespin. There’s a note from Anthony, who apparently thinks I’m beautiful circa 1998. Did I know an Anthony? A birthday card from Aunt Diane is also puzzling. My grandma’s sister, right? Creepy black legs make me jump. Why the hell is there a plastic spider in here?!

These forgotten memories make me sad. They stress me out, to be honest. Why are they here? They can only mean that I’ve forgotten some essential moment: a costume, perhaps, or a child I babysat. It was, no doubt, something excellent, some part of the good stuff. Will I ever recall its significance? An existential sort of depression sets in: a soul-crushing, panic-inducing, has-my-life-really-been-worthwhile fear that I’ve forgotten something that could make me happy.

But before I can get too carried away, though, reality sets in. I’ve set up a reminder for myself, displayed right on the box itself. Taped to the inside of the lid is the end of Mary Oliver’s poem, “In Blackwater Woods.”

To live in this world
you must be able

to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

When I go through the box with Mary, I can forgive my forgetting. The time has come. It’s okay to let it go. Let it go.
An entity steps out of a hypothesized field and lends things mass. Lends every part and particle mass.

The universe’s fabric was confirmed viscous by CERN Laboratories on 4 July, 2012.

Our mass—the quality by which we lumber, lay and leap about—is a steady flowing through space; a slowness so slow it almost withstands life’s unraveling.

The Higgs Boson was frozen enough to tempt us to understanding—itself a missed understanding—a subdivision of the subatomic—enabling the precise qualities it lacks:

A catalyst for all: the ink; the page. Another allowance that things have heft beyond the stuff that snares them.
Taressa Van Dam, **DOORWAYS**, Digital photograph
Tori Haugen, **PRIDE OF SAINT CHAPPELLE**, Digital photograph
Kerry Aarnoutse, **EDMONTON**, Acrylic on canvas
Joanna Bayliss, *Scoliosis Study #2*, Acrylic on paper
Tanice Mast, **THE WOODS IN MUD**, Mud, string, cardboard, and twigs
Martín Ávila, **POR FIN**, Collage
Tori Haugen, *Silence*, Digital photograph
“Liebe zum Detail” means love for detail in Germany, the country I am from. Since I believe that God is the most amazing artist who chooses the most creative compositions and colors to paint His world, I am eager to use my photography to honor God’s love for detail in His creation.

It’s easy for us to miss out on the wonders of the little things in life by running through our fast-paced lives. Many of the hidden treasures and amazing details in this world only get revealed to us when we take the time to slow down and allow our eyes to wander and find its hidden beauty. With my pictures, I’d like to draw attention to some of the wonderful details I noticed during my time as a missionary in Kona, Hawaii in 2011. The first six pictures in my collection “Colors of Kona” highlight some of the vivid colors that are part of the everyday life in Kona. The seventh image is a portrait of the artist Gille Legacy, who also lives on the island. Most people simply pass him by, only noticing the obvious: him being tied to a wheelchair because of cerebral palsy. Only a few people take the time to slow down to find out about the amazing artist that lives inside of this man. Even though Gille has basically no control over the rest of his body, he has learned to create whole worlds on canvases by painting with his nose.

So today, take some time to slow down and allow yourself to find the hidden beauty of this day. Because it’s the little things in life that make the world go around.

(For further information about Gille, please visit: http://keolamagazine.com/the-life-as-art/gille-legacy-the-man-who-paints-with-his-nose/)

Kat Stahl, Liebe zum Detail - Colors of Kona, Digital photographs
Sarah Gabrielse, **GIRAFFE**, Mixed Media: old water colour, glue, acrylic paint, sharpie, staples, and guitar strings
Sydney Carrick, **FREEDOM**, Digital photograph,
Taressa Van Dam, *CANNON*, Digital Photograph
PROFESSORS' CORNER

Morning Haiku
November 2012

JAMES VANDEN BOSCH
Venus rises now
In the morning’s crescent moon,
Love still ascending.

JANE ZWART
Outside this window,
backlit leaves, each puppeting
over some heaven.

BILL VANDE KOPPLE
Peering through silk mist
Toward the beckoning dock:
But promises die.

JENNIFER HOLBERG
Living in Japan
Never wrote haiku at all
Now only under duress.

BILL VANDE KOPPLE
Peering through silk mist
Toward the beckoning dock:
But promises die.

DEBRA RIENSTRA
swirling nebula
eye of star-creation storm
Klingon warships lurk
Haiku Contest Top 5

Katerina Parsons
Rivulets of rain
become an accessory
on days like today.

Shen Leong
Your constant praising
Half delights, half terrifies.
When will I fail you?

Jared Haverdink
Exuberant brook-
Though you toss and swell onward,
You inspire stillness.

Carrie Field
I said I was lost
They named it anxiety
And gave me white pills

Michael VanderMeer
A bottle of wine
And a memory of you
But more the bottle
sleek black cattle flick muddy tails
at the sawtooth, the tall and dusty
mountains far beyond them,
and above the Sierras the sky is a patchwork
of contrails, as if those thick white
plumes stitch together
the uneven squares of blue.

we’ve just come from a burger joint
down the road, the kind with red-
and white-checked plastic tablecloths littered
with napkins that never get all
the grease off my fingers.
My mother isn’t with me, so I
wipe my hands on the seat
of my pants.

Still, they leave marks
on the window. I have twisted
in my seat to see the mountains,
leaning toward them far as the walls
of the big white van allow—
there is much between me and the cattle
more yet to the mountains
and it’s further still to the sky.
Bottom Drawer Dress
Sue Yurick

We all have sacred garments, holy to us
as the shroud of Turin:
Mine is a long cotton dress, navy blue
with tiny white dots.
When I am being dramatic and French,
its waist is “ahm-PEER”, because
the word Empire troubles my mind.

Like the shroud it bears the imprint of a
body dead, then alive and ascended,
not on a cloud, but a plane out of Barcelona.

If I were to open the seams, there might be some
dust from the mountain near Moncín,
or crumbs from good Spanish bread.

The dark stain I sniff after twenty years
might be from the rough red wine of Campo de Borja,
surely a factor in that escape.

Some call the shroud a fake; the dress
I can vouch for
witnessed new life,
baptism performed by God Himself on the rainy Ramblas,
As I ran hand in hand with my darling deliverer,
whose fingers I now know were crossed.
THE DAMN DISHES
Benjamin Rietema

To not clean up your dishes should be a sin; to leave your shoes out in the living room should be punishable by whipping; to make hair-curling noises in god-forsaken hours of the night, a crime worthy of the loss of an appendage. In fact, we should stick an extra clause in the Ten Commandments, right after “Thou shalt not murder.” We could add a subtext to it, as in “Thou shalt not murder—unless your housemates are hopeless slobs, then it’s cool.” It was probably edited out.

I bet this is a perennial problem, one steeped in the long history of living relations. Even among the first cave dwellers, someone neglected to clean up their mastodon and left their bloody spear out in the living room. The disciples, a rowdy bunch of fellows at best, were most likely terribly dirty (well, Jesus had to clean their feet, right?). “Peter! Did you have to leave half of the bread and fish just laying out there? This is ridiculous,” says one distraught Mary (in a Bible passage not often quoted) after one too many a miracle left untaken care of.

SIMPLY BREAD
Benjamin Rietema

What is it about a slice of bread still warm from the oven, the crunch of a crust perfectly developed, the humble drumble of crumbs down the front of your shirt? The contented, serene look in your eyes shows the world that you have just had a delectable piece of bread—and that you could care less that it looks like you devoured that thing with an angry squirrel-like tenacity. The smell drifts, taps you on the shoulder—like in the cartoons—and you feel as if you could float on wings to wherever it beckons from. Moreover, this smell could move mountains; pacify even the most ornery of children and adults (because adults can be worse than kids, honestly); cause an atheist to become a believer in deity; solve all the world conflict (ever wonder why people fight? No chocolate chip banana bread). Even King Solomon and all his wealth and wisdom could scarce do better than a round artisan boule straight out of the bowels of the oven on a socked-in snow day. Until you get that blanket, light a roaring fire and have your legs stretched out to receive its warmth, I say that you have not known life.
He refused to die in the glory of steel and mahogany; he escaped left of the dial, into Minneapoline obscurity.

They tried to hunt him there, those mythologizers, but he was sheltered in the skyways and Decembers:

a ghost on the canvas of our imaginations, the hoarse harmony behind each unmet expectation.

He put a screwdriver through his bones and ligaments; an anthropologists of nostalgia penned her acknowledgment, but neural fiber never forgets, and muscle memory is the triumph of the aural inscribed ontologically.

Now every chord is another name for his, and every melody another word for Westerberg.

He’ll inherit the earth, but don’t tell anybody It’s been his since birth, and it’s his already.
PHOTO ALBUM
ALEX WESTENBROEK

Every year, I pine for summer’s end—
for the end
of mid-September when my lungs
relearn the taste
of a brisk draw
of blue, when I blink and clear
the smears from my glasses
and soak in every color,
every synthesis of yellow and red
woven in a natural veil:
Heaven’s aisle
in backward bloom.

October will end soon,
once the leaves slip
off,
lifted,
unveiling the pale
complexion of December,
the cold grey eyes of February,
the dreary kiss of April,
and, eventually, the heavy off-blue living room of July.

I wish I could throw my eyelids all the way wide and bask.

Blithe,
the breeze breathes past my cheeks
while I walk home
enjoying a cold draught
of fall.
ALL THE WILD AND WONDERFUL THINGS
MARY SNOOK

Foreign blooms, immortal flower
Incandescent, colored, power
Am I the wildest, striped and pruned,
Am I the strangest, cragged and looped,
Am I the weirdest, scorned and duped,
Am I not woman, God’s fruit?

Separate Strands, similar pattern
Shined with glory, still in tatters
Am I the feather, tall and proud
Am I the eye, blind and loud
Am I the thread, small, hidden
Am I not his bird, his creature?

Spread across the sky, a banner
Reflections of the light its manner
Am I the arch, foundation,
Am I the hue, the true friend
Am I the light, the kind guide
Am I not his beauty, his creation?
IN RARE FORM

ALLYSSA METZNER

I noticed dinner unprepared, I caught it idle in the pantry. As if startled to see me there—awake from my slumber. Staggering back for quite sometime, I found a bathroom mirror.

In rare form, I beheld soap scum clinging to the tiles. My stomach caressing the rim of the sink. Though I stood far away.

Depression as it wandered.

It was the heavy breath of the rooms, that finally woke me. The stench of phone calls unanswered. The smell of dirty dishes lingered. And there was dog shit somewhere.
Charlie’s mother holds him in her soft fat arms for the first time. To the nurse’s amazement, he doesn’t cry. The next few years are mostly insignificant.

It’s his fourth birthday. His friends and mother bring out a cake, singing. This upsets him greatly, although he manages a smile. His father takes a photo with a Polaroid camera. This goes on for the many birthdays since. Charlie’s mother likes delighting her son, gardening and writing-plays (none of which are ever published).

Charlie’s father notes that his son is the first generation to see the television as a normal granted housing appliance, like the telephone or the washing machine. Charlie’s father doesn’t like Soviets, meeting new people, or folk music. He does, however, own several vinyl discs of Beethoven, Strauss, and Britten, which he listens to religiously, often waving his pen at work as a mock conductor’s baton.

Dropping the book he’s reading in bed, Charlie suddenly realizes that silence makes him happy, and noise upsets and confuses him greatly. He then realizes that people make noise, and that makes him unhappy. Through the ingenious use of baking soda, a portable radio, and a typewriter, he convinces his parents that their noisy urban apartment is haunted. They quickly move to a small town in the middle of Kansas where they have relatives, and his father is forced to change jobs from a quantity surveyor to a fry chef. These changes, unknown to Charlie, put incredible strain on his parents’ marriage. The sound of their arguments is soon as loud as the construction work outside the old apartment.

Charlie likes rural life more than the city. He makes his first friend on a baseball pitch, sometime in the afternoon. His friend’s name is Texas, a fact that amuses Charlie greatly. A summer later, they try to shoot their first Super 8 film. Their friendship ends when Texas and Charlie disagree on whether it should be a silent film or not (“Who makes silent films now anyway?” “Stop shouting, please.”)

There’s a violent thunderstorm outside. Reading a novel in bed, the lights suddenly go out. Charlie’s parents come in, holding a candle, and ask if he’s okay and if he’s scared. Their son nods. He quietly acknowledges that he’s far more frightened of thunder than he is of lightning.

Charlie notes that this particular moment, eating a burger lunch at a diner while his parents look on adoringly, may be the singularly most beautiful moment of his rather uneventful childhood. That moment ends immediately when the television comes on to announce that JFK is dead, shot by a lone gunman from a warehouse. The waitress drops a plate in shock, and it shatters on the floor. Charlie realizes that he would never want to be shot under any circumstance. Guns are very loud and make people scream. Also, it must hurt. The day after, he decides to walk around with earplugs. It helps, a little.

Charlie starts his education at a small elementary school, which holds exactly one hundred students from the ages of five to eleven and a state-of-the-art Swedish made playground. He is extremely bright and reserved, but does not get on well with the other students. He enjoys story time the most. On the third day, Charlie’s nose is broken and his arm requires several stitches from the school nurse. He doesn’t tell the teachers or his mother who did it. The child does, however, try to explain his rare condition. The teacher, an expert, tells the mother that Charlie’s simply anti-social and that she’s an expert at this kind of thing, so don’t worry too much, your
son's in safe hands now at this school. Charlie wants to protest, but doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t want to hurt the teacher’s feelings.

Charlie makes his second friend, who is quietly reserved and several years older. Richard wants to be a marine biologist when he grows up. They quietly fish for tadpoles together in the river. Their friendship ends when suited men deport Richard’s family back to Cuba. The next few years are insignificant.

Charlie discovers that his condition is gradually getting worse. He cannot describe it well, even though he is normally articulate with words. Quite simply: the less noise there is, the happier he feels. The teenager actively avoids human contact, as it generally involves noise or conversation. He uses pillows and blankets to insulate noise in his bedroom. He considers surgery, but is scared of blades and hospital beds. He occasionally feels lonely, but fails to make friends, even when he transfers to a larger public school. He reads many books on philosophy and physics.

If Charlie isn’t burying his head in a mound of pillows to drown out the Strauss record playing next door, he can hear the sounds of his father shouting, slamming the door, and pulling out of the drive for the very last time.

On the same night, Charlie realizes, acknowledging the irony, that he really enjoys music, but the noise is too great to actually listen to it. The untested musician plays imaginary Beatles records in his head, his fingers drumming the table with the co-ordination and arithmetic of a trained pianist, his lips silently mouthing the words (“But baby, it’s cold outside.”).

A teenager now, Charlie silently buys a pair of headphones from the local thrift store, the kind used by the world’s pilots. He fills them up with rubber foam from the garage. He tries them on and smiles broadly. He is happy for three months, until a truck almost runs him over, just outside his house, while he is still clutching the groceries. His mother forbids him from wearing them ever again. The truck driver apologizes and comes in for tea. He explains how hard it is to be a truck driver, and how he once accidently ran over an endangered animal in a Wisconsin forest (“You should have seen their faces when I dragged it into the lobby!”)

Charlie unexpectedly falls in love with a girl in his class named Phoebe Fisher. This is the first time he has felt these emotions, and he rather likes it. He first spots Phoebe in the library reading *The Catcher in the Rye* and biting her nails. Charlie likes to imagine that she is deeply intelligent and that she adores small animals (none of these are true).

Awkward and unfamiliar to conversation, he sends her letters instead. Ms. Fisher replies to most of them, often leaving pressed flowers and question marks in red. She writes a minimalist school production about a veteran returning home, controversial for its critical treatment of the ongoing Vietnam War. Charlie watches from the back with earplugs (this is the most crowded room he has ever been in) and joins the standing ovation.

Charlie gets his first job looking after a wilderness trail. He enjoys the peace and the generous pay from his gracious manager (who is sixty-five years old and has always wanted children). In three months he can identify every type of bird that lives in the forest, and he knows which berries to avoid.

A year later, the high-schoolers are on their first date. It goes well, until Charlie runs out of the cinema, disturbed by the loud gunshots from the screen. He apologizes by giving Phoebe a pet rabbit. Phoebe appreciates the gesture, but explains that she doesn’t like small animals, which shocks Charlie. Later that night, he cries to sleep. They remain friends, reading quietly
in the library. He gets perfect scores on all his tests, but couldn’t care less.

Charlie graduates from high school and, with his mother’s blessing and money, takes a train to Miami as a reward. There, he meets his old friend Richard, who’s just proudly graduated from the University of Havana with a BSc in marine biology and proudly owns a research vessel with “all the modern conveniences”. With great excitement, Charlie goes scuba diving for the first time, delighted by what he sees. However, he is both surprised and upset to discover how noisy the ocean is, with the sounds of his own breathing, fish swimming, and a thousand other ambient noises he cannot immediately identify. Richard offers to take him in his quieter submersible, but Charlie is finished with the ocean. They do, however, catch several large fish and enjoy eating them while watching the sunset in silence.

Charlie arrives at the gates of Texas University, his hands grasping heavy bags. He specifically requested a month earlier in a letter not to have a roommate. The freshman protects his dorm room with soundproofing foam and avoids all social events. He cooks his own food, and many people on his floor do not know his name. Charlie takes a keen interest in speleology, the study of caves. He exceeds in school, and he is marked out by his professor as one of the nation’s brightest students and the future of cave research and exploration. These are the fastest four years of Charlie’s life, as he spends most of it in his lonely dorm room, studying and making notes. He still sends Phoebe Fisher letters on a weekly basis. She replies, but without any pressed flowers or question marks in red.

The National Geographic Society takes an interest in Charlie and gives him a generous grant to study caves in the nation of Peru upon his graduation day, handed by a smiling, suited representative. They secretly hope he’ll make a report interesting enough to publish as their monthly magazine special and share with their wives. With a highly qualified team of twenty researchers, writers, and photographers, Charlie flies to Lima in a cargo plane (he doesn’t like the persistent buzz of the airplane engines, but comes prepared). His first time in a foreign country, the pioneer is pleasantly surprised by the waft of humid warm air as he exits the aircraft.

A month into leading the exhibition, Charlie is sitting by the jungle campsite, sick of the relentless weather. He is also weary of the incessant orchestra of crickets, rain, and the many other sounds of the jungle, even the birds. Tearing a fat black leech from his mud-caked leg, he hopes that the destination is worth the journey. He dreams of clean sheets and showers.

Four days later, Charlie discovers true silence after abseiling to the bottom of an extraordinarily large cave and exploring deeper and deeper into its dark and damp belly. He has never felt any happier or more at peace. There is barely a sound. Charlie can finally think clearly, and his thoughts are rich, colorful, and brilliant. The rest of the expedition run excitedly into the cavern, taking measurements and photographs and setting up recording equipment and lights, quickly interrupt this. One of the junior researchers captures a bat and lovingly names it after his fiancé.

Charlie, for a desperate moment, considers going deeper and deeper into the pitch-black tunnels where nobody would find him and staying there until he succumbs to starvation. But he realizes that no matter where he goes, even in the furthest deserts of the highest mountains, either nature or man will always surround him. This man’s heart is broken as he rests upon a stalagmite.

Realizing that his last four years of studying was in vain, a despondent Charlie terminates the expedition early and takes the first ship home, passing through the Panama Canal. The
National Geographic is nevertheless pleased and produces a documentary to be shown at lecture halls and universities across the nation. The caves become a tourist attraction. Sponsors, admirers, and the National Geographic Society make Charlie instantly rich. He does not attend their social gatherings or fundraisers. Instead, he gets a bachelor’s degree in physical science to occupy his mind.

Charlie spends a year hopeless in his noise-insulated Washington D.C. apartment. He grows a beard like Castro’s. His letters to Phoebe Fisher become more frequent as her replies become less common. Unknown to him, Ms. Fisher is happily living in Manhattan, living with an aspiring handsome music producer. Richard, the marine biologist, is his only visitor in the year, bringing gifts of rare underwater specimens on Christmas day.

What Charlie sees on the television saves him from a caffeinated sofa death. Charlie watches in awe as a black-and-white astronaut elegantly glides outside Skylab and fixes it with his own hands, the surface of the earth gleaming behind him. With great revelation, Charlie realizes that true silence would be found in space, with nobody around and no air for sound to travel through. He leaves immediately by Greyhound to Florida and bikes to the Kennedy Space Center. NASA is impressed by Charlie’s work at the National Geographic Society, his practical understanding of science, his 20/20 vision, and his impressive beard (“Good grief, that looks like Castro’s!”). He is hired on the spot and starts intensive training the next week.

The following three years are spent flying jets, fixing mock-ups in deep water chambers, and extinguishing fires in pure oxygen environments. All of these are extremely loud activities, and Charlie isn’t allowed to wear earplugs. He presses on only in hope for the destination. Just before his first mission to fix a solar panel at Skylab, Charlie divides the rest of his stagnant fortune and sends them in thirds: one to his mother, who runs a successful diner; one to Richard’s private underwater research foundation; and one to Phoebe Fisher, who hasn’t replied to his letters for one and a half years. Ms. Fisher later uses the money to start up a rescue shelter for small animals.

It is launch day. The Apollo rocket sits impatiently outside, warming steadily. A group of four men and women fit Charlie into his bulky suit. He allows one to shave off his hair, then encourages him to shave off his beard, too (“I won’t be needing this in space.” “I know I shouldn’t say this, but it looks just like Castro’s!”). He receives his last minute injections and poses with the rest of his crew for the crowds and the cameras.

After a series of steel lifts, they clamber inside, and the heavy door seals shut. Looking up at the ceiling, Charlie is reminded of the times he read in bed. The crew double checks all the on-board systems and give the thumbs up. The countdown begins and the rocket gets increasingly louder as it vibrates violently. Then, finally, the incredible force of her engines roar into life, kicking the craft into space with a ribbbing cloud. The noise is unbearable. Like that night in Peru, ripping a leech out of his leg, Charlie once again wonders whether the journey is worth the destination as his teeth chatter and his palms sweat.

The color from the thick window changes from a bright blue to an uncanny pitch black. The crew sense their bodies change, and despite their training, feel overwhelmingly disorientated. It’s an indescribably foreign sensation. The shaking and noise tones down as gravity shifts and alters. There is a relative silence, but not true silence, not yet. Lights come on, and switches are pulled. The astronauts stare out of the glass to the bright blues and greens down below (“Wow, isn’t this just beautiful, Steve?” “Yes, Denise. It is very beautiful out here.”).
A few hours, after some anticipation, they successfully dock. The Skylab is a lot larger than Charlie expected and a lot louder with the whir of machinery and atmosphere regulators. The crew opens a bottle of specially made cognac and laugh as it comes out in foaming spheres. Steve tries to catch one with his tongue.

It is now eighteen hours into the operation. The rest of the crew sleeps surprisingly soundly, strapped into their harnesses. Charlie silently floats out of his cot and puts on a pair of headphones with soundproofing foam in it, the type of headphones World War Two pilots used. With great difficulty, he puts on his bulky suit, one strap at a time. The helmet comes on last. The airlock alarm wakes everyone else up, but by the time they can get out of their belts, Charlie is floating in space, tethered to a umbilical cable. They radio for help. A man is in danger (“I don’t know what happened! Just like I told you, we woke up, and he’s gone. Just like that.”)

The stars. Who knew that there were so many in the sky? Charlie used to dream in his childhood bed that the night sky was a great blanket covering the earth with bright holes in it. He always wanted to know what was behind it.

Unknown to Charlie, he is immediately above the Peruvian jungles he once swore to never return to. If the astronaut knew this, he would laugh, because he’s bloody ecstatic, and irony is bloody funny. And why shouldn’t he be happy? The spaceman is almost at his destination, only attached to the world by a lone cable.

Charlie turns off the radio and looks towards his planet. The silence is overwhelming. For the first time, he can hear himself think perfectly; he can hear the wonderful symphonies of his mind. The pulsing of his heartbeat, the blood rushing through his head, soft labored breathing. There are the sounds of the ocean, of the jungle, of the city, of the schoolyard, of the orchestra. Charlie remembers everything that has happened in the brilliant colors of sound. The ripping of the envelope, the family car crunching on gravel, his father playing Britten in the study. The moment in the hospital room, where his mother held him in her soft fat arms for the first time, when the doctor cut the cord.

Charlie pulls on the cable and turns around. The sky is impossibly large. There are too many stars to count. There is no ending here.

Charlie cuts the cord and spins into the soft, fat arms of infinity.
SESTINA: THE TABBY CAT

AE HEE LEE

Once I chanced to come across this tabby cat:
He had a large mackerel stripe that like a bruise
faded among the gray hairs of his coat.
He licked his paws after treading on fire leaves
and instead of mewling or rolling on the ground,
"Do you know why I am here?" he asked me.

With such a look of saucy glee he asked me,
that I must say my tongue was caught by this cat.
Then the wind swept across the empty ground.
It joined the chorus that inflicted a bruise
on my delicate mind full of wordy leaves,
which were bind by reason's tight coat.

"So? Do you know why?" he purred while tugging my coat.
Now I was sure he was trying to test me
and my mettle to not beat around the leaves.
But as I had no answer, I just stared at the cat
and how his eye mirrored a cloud, an amber bruise.
My mute response made him stamp the ground.

With that mighty tap he brought me down to the ground.
This made me quickly huddle into my heavy coat,
wishing his query would feel less of a bruise
and more of a rhetorical question. He grinned at me.
I closed one eye and saw the trees shedding, but the cat
and the wind said "they are shooting stars, not just yellow leaves."

Then my heart finally understood that nothing leaves
forever. I sought sideways, and found seeds in my ground.
"I think you know why now," said the cat.
I scrambled up and threw off my muddy coat;
The stripped tabby had shared with me
the secret of a flower that can blossom from a bruise.

44 DIALOGUE
I gently caressed the misunderstood bruise
that had spread over my thread of feelings and leaves.
I summoned a shower of sunlight to soak me,
and with it I watered the dusty ground—
I wrapped the sky with my new coat
of twilight. “I do know why,” I said to the cat.

“It’s for the same reason a bruise on the ground
is not like the free leaves and a comfortable coat.”
Having these words sprouted in me, I smiled at the pleased cat.
FiREFLIES
Ae Hee Lee

Dim, light footed stars.

Dim, light footed stars.

You emerged to tempt her into growing.

But when the restless pangs of spring rang throughout a child's green chest,

Cold and harmless gleams you seemed.

She who let you burrow in her chest found that your pleasant luminary was distasteful, toxic to one's bowels, addictively filling.

When you really were the fiery tip of Cupid's lead arrow.

A house that left an orange candle burning by the window, waiting for her to come back?

And yet why is it that your blinking reminds her of a house, faraway.

Where are you guiding her to?

Through steady glows, Morse code, you called out to her until she grew lost and wary from chasing. Ash-blond Will-o-the-wisps, weaving through dark European woods, Mercy--

Cleverly, you burrowed yourselves in the ground, blanketed in the bark of trees, so winter's lucid breath would not extinguish you.
A ROPE

Richard Martin

below the glassy churning, sun
shine on the surface
above your head.

Never breathing
hollowing
the inside, tree trunks thick
as aged minds knot tradition

to follow the line left before
you tug with the right
step on the other.

A stone shifts
and lifts
with it, dust still murk
waters bring remembrance

of new and old plans
built on the land
through the forest.

Your desires
surge with the raging tide
a shore, dry for
your feet.
LIKE SHEEP
KATHERINA PARSONS

The sky is dark in the mornings
    when you pour, rumpled, out of bed,
    crusted over, still healing from the interruption
    of the
Sun.
Day dawns too early.
    We fold into each other like a paper fan.
    Our voices, too, exploring, grope,
    our knees graze;
like sheep I wonder if we’ve gone astray.
brass bells from the church contain her lonely remains within the choir's leather folders. Only autumnal dusk; ladders. Proclaiming the as husks, the orange leaves. Twist, sever. Knots. Warm singing. Quivering chimes. Blankets. Polyphonic.
It does not take long for the flies to find me.

I pause, lying in wait for the prickle of their tiny dipteran legs on my skin, with my hand poised to strike—but senses enlivened; I note a dozen such conflicting sensations. Dry golden wheatgrass brushes against the skin of my elbow. Wind slides over my shoulders. A loose strand of hair tickles my neck. And just beyond the buzzing of my enemy I hear a distant rushing—perhaps the highway to the northeast, or an as yet undiscovered creek. The sound fades ever so slightly as I turn my head toward a far-off wind chime, stirred by the breeze that dances past me, carrying the scent of pines that anchor this rock-studded landscape.

The fly lands on my toes. I twitch, and it careens about my left leg for a moment, before returning to that same roost. I twitch again, but the buzzing is lost in a whir of approaching wind. Another dry, warm current, stronger than the last, sets the wheatgrass wagging over the lichen-speckled boulders, spilled variably across the plain. The wind grows old, feeble, and a lower rumble calls my attention upward.

A shape veiled by Spanish moss, tucked in the crook of angular pine branches—a small insect worries the edge of a hole at the bottom of the imperfect sphere, ringed in variegated tan, just cooler than the color of my skin. A wasp’s nest, from which a number—about five, I think, though it’s hard to count—expedition south, returning after each brief sojourn to tend the white object inside the globe. I can’t quite make it out. One explorer hums about my arm and I feel the current of air pushed against me by the force of his constantly vibrating wings.

On assuring himself of my benignity, he returns to the nest. The high pitched, more frantic whine of the flies is again the only sound. The fly returns to my foot. I twitch, and startle myself awake.

The fly careens about my leg for a moment, before returning to its roost.
Bindweed, knotweed,  
Fallopia convolvulus  
deceived again this year,  
emerged disguised as morning glories,  
crept up the budded lilies,  
second story thieves  
tiptoe on laddered leaves,  
stealthy. No morning glory trumpets  
herald the climb out of the fraught perennials.

The Latin name whispers of lost fertility.

The tiny seeds are found  
in ancient middens, proof  
these devil’s tethers once were prized,  
gathered by women squinting at the  
ground  
as I squint now, millennia later.

Knotted, entwined myself, I know  
better than to yank up by the roots.  
Painstakingly start at the searching end,  
unwind, unwind, lest I destroy beauty  
strangled, overrun.  
Lesson: don’t tear this bond up from the  
roots.  
Instead unwind, unwind, rebind.
THE OAK TREES

GABE LEPAGE

The acorns lay scattered in the dirt.
Some are rotting,
being eaten up by worms from the inside.
Others sink into the darkness
under the leaves and soil
and the dark preserves them.

So the saints sank,
locked into their closets,
and the almsgivers practiced sleight of hand.
They did not eat.
The dark fed them.
AFTER THE EXILE
ERICA JENSEN

gravid days when at the tombs
dandelions spark & fly
green defeat of the cicadas
the electric sun dies

to a land of shades
& all things ignite
in this room which has
only just been abandoned.

after the heavy rain
falls & fuses like baby kicks
honey licks fire at the lion’s bones
Snow White flicks her red tongue.
She is crafty like a clean-bellied snake.

She chooses with her teeth. She is
Waiting with her lips. She would
Rather sleep alive than die awake.

Formless and empty, she is
Swallowing the question, she is
Waiting for an answer, she is
Sleeping; tasting dust.
A STORM ABOVE
Sleeping Bear
Ryan Hagerman

A wooden piano bench creaks
and the guitar string squeaks as the player
plucks slowly, meditatively.

He watches the sun set over Lake Michigan
and wonders where the righteous go,
his face, hard, cracked;
The world shrugs against him.

Brake lights diffuse and spread
into red blotches—like paint smudges—
between raindrops on the windshield.

You lean your head on the window and we form
harmonies driving on the road to dark dunes.
**LONG BREATHS**

**WILL MONTE**

*God, my prayer begins. I conjure up an image of what he might look like, so I can have some idea of who I’m talking to. An all-consuming light doesn’t do the trick, that’s too vague and impersonal. Maybe a naked, bald, effeminate human with no anatomical parts? With a shimmery golden glow behind him? No. Too weird. Burning bush? No, scary. Angel with six wings, two covering his eyes and two covering his feet? Yikes... I could just think of trees, I guess. Yeah, I’ll just think of grass and trees and mountains. Maybe an old warbled tree, with twisted roots that clutch the ground and branches that twirl into the sky like frazzled hair—to show how creative God is. Okay:*

*God, please watch over me—*

No, no, I can’t think of trees—that’s too much like pantheism. I’m just going to think of the dude on the cover of *The Giver*. Yes... that works:

*God, please watch over me. I know I’m not perfect. I sin relentlessly all the time. All the time. And I know that I don’t talk to you enough, and that might have something to do with it. I also don’t sing in church, but the music is so bad... it’s so bad, God. Either we sing these old hymns that I can’t relate to, or we sing these crappy “modern” songs that are actually ten years old, and even so, they all sound like mashed potatoes. Do you like those songs? Good grief. I’m sorry I’m too embarrassed to raise my hands towards the sky during these songs, but even if I did it would be to fit in with the crowd, anyways, so it wouldn’t mean anything. But you know that, I guess. Can you help me to feel, God? I want to love you, like the Bible tells me I should love you. Can you love me? Can you tell me that you love me? I want to know what it feels like to hug you. I want to hear your voice. I want to laugh with you. I want to eat a meal with you. I want you to love me. Please love me. Love me love me love me love me...*

*Bearded God sits before me, listening. He’s decked out in traditional heavenly garb; you know, an ivory-looking robe of some sort. Sometimes, at the end of these prayers, I imagine him hugging me, and I’m enveloped with a feeling of desperate warmth—desperate because the warmth is fleeting, and I know it is, and I want it to be a real and lasting sign that I’ve just been touched by God’s love and not just a sign that I’ve imagined. Sometimes I imagine him frowning, because it’s all very upsetting for him to hear one of his followers so far off the path. I imagine his lips moving. He tells me something, placing that something deep in my gut for me to find later: the solution to my loneliness apart from him.*

*God... help me not to imagine you, but to know you.*

“God’s thoughts are not your thoughts. His ways are not your ways.”

I wonder if God has a personality. I wonder if he laughs, and what he laughs at, and if he laughs with me, at my jokes, at the movie I’m watching, at the poop joke I just read online that kept me in silent fits of laughter for the last several minutes. I would like to believe in a God that laughs.

I wonder if another perfect deity existed, would he-she be any different from God? Or when a being reaches perfection, infinitude, does that mean that he-she encapsulate all the best aspects of personality, and must therefore be no different from any other perfect being? I would like to believe God isn’t just infinite perfection, but a quirky individual, who, in his infinite perfection, laughs at my poop jokes.

*Does God yearn? Or, in his perfection—which needs nothing—does he always rest content? Does he yearn for my love, even though he doesn’t need it? I wonder.*
I wonder, when I pray to God love me love me love me love me if he responds, secretly, I love you I love you I love you I love you. I wonder why he doesn’t tell me directly with words, and why I must scavenge through people and events in my life in order to separate God’s love from what isn’t God’s love—how am I to know which is which? How can I not wonder what tricks my imagination is pulling?

I wonder if people actually know how God is working in their lives. I wonder why it must be faith, and not fact, which guides our lives.

“God works in mysterious ways.”

I can’t be certain, as I stand among the masses worshiping, whether that person next to me is actually loving God right now. I know I shouldn’t speculate—it’s not my place—but if they’re actually loving him, and feeling his love in return, I want to know how they do it. I want to lift up my arms in adoration of God.

Maybe I’ll lift up my arms. Maybe I’ll feel something, and my eyes will close in ecstasy, and all of those monotonous lyrics will come to life behind my lips. Even as I imagine doing it, lifting up my arms, I can already feel the emptiness between them, between the palms of my hands, between my face and the ceiling. I don’t want to feel that. I won’t lift up my arms.

If this were two years ago, in the lush Pennsylvanian mountains of Camp Susque, I would have raised my arms. I closed my eyes often that summer—during praise, during prayer. Surrounded by a tight-knit group of like-minded Christians, it wasn’t uncommon for us camp-counselors-in-training to stop for prayer in the middle of conversation, earnestly asking for God to heal a relationship or offer his guidance. Each day began in Bible study and ended in worship.

What God actually did, I’m not certain. I am certain, however, that I was always on the lookout. Was it God that healed that camper? Or was it just being in a caring community. Was it God that filled me with emotion during that praise song? Or was it the manipulative chord progressions and vague lyrics, fueling excitement like the synopsis on the back jacket of a book? Was it God that made prayer so meaningful? Or was it the vulnerability of praying out loud with others? Was any of it God?

For all questions I didn’t have the answer to, my maxim became God works in mysterious ways. Like pain medicine, the always-applicable phrase hid my doubt from me. I raised my arms. I closed my eyes. God is here, I hoped, I yearned. What does he look like as he is here? I don’t know—God works in mysterious ways. Does he like this song? Does it matter?

When I look back at my time at Camp Susque, I can only see my hands grasping the air. I can only see my imagination working wildly to conjure emotion, to connect events. I can only taste the putrid flavor of mystery. Were all the wonderful things about Camp Susque—the community, the laughter, the conversation—because of God?

“It’s possible to know God better than your senses.”

I love my friend Drew. Drew and I have deep discussions, play video games, eat together, laugh together, and hug each other. I know what Drew thinks is funny, and what gets on his nerves, and that he spends an absurd amount of time sorting his Magic cards. I know Drew.

I want to love God, but God and I don’t have deep discussions, play video games, eat together, laugh together, or hug each other. I don’t know what God thinks is funny, or what gets on his nerves, or how he spends his time. I don’t know God.

Humans love in very particular ways: we touch each other; we talk to each other; we give to each other (sometimes gifts, sometimes labor); we spend time with each other.
I've never touched God. Of all the things I crave so deeply, to be touched by God is perhaps the most profound. During nights sobbing into my pillow, lonely and overwhelmed, I can't imagine a better remedy than God's hug.

My conversations with God are, quite painfully, monologues. Prayer—which I only do because I want to interact with God—is not a dialogue. My prayers are great works of fiction. My prayers should be stacked on shelves next to Ulysses and To Kill A Mockingbird. Is God listening? I can only hope.

I've never given God a gift, or mown his lawn. I can't give God something he doesn't already have, or needs. I can't help God.

I've never spent time with God. At least, when I make a space at the table for God, I've never seen him sitting there, or even heard his deep, long breaths brush over the surface between plates and silverware and glasses of wine.

Did I love God at Camp Susque? Does the enviable worshiper at my side love God as she lifts her arms, closes her eyes, and throws her words up into the sky, hoping they don't leaf back down through the air?

“If we knew, it wouldn't be faith.”

If I'm to have a relationship with God, I don't want to just be told that God is love. I don't want to just hear a list of vague traits like: all-powerful, jealous, good, wrathful, forgiving, perfect. I want to know God. I want to know him better than my friend Drew, whom I love, but who I'm not supposed to love as much as I love God, who I have a hard time loving, because he's very vague.

Should I worry if voicing these thoughts make me a heretic? Too often, all of these thoughts are dismissed—made trivial by people's attempts to fix them. When I talk about these things, I don't want to hear about your own experience with God.

“I was once where you were, Will. I really was. And then I prayed and did devotions daily, and God revealed himself to me in strange ways. I can't explain it to you, but I know, I just know, that God was there.”

How demeaning to tell me that you were once where I was, and have moved through it, beyond it, from the lonely caves of sinners to the pearly gates of saints.

I don't want to be told that I'm asking the wrong questions; that it's not important what God looks like, that it's not important that I can't touch God, or hear his voice, or mow his lawn. Do you have better questions for me? Will they point me in a better direction? Why do you think I'm going in the wrong direction? Perhaps my questions are coming from a member of a generation so deeply misled that we believe it possible to be chums with God.

“Love only God. Only God can complete you.”

So many people have a huge hole in their heart. They try to fill it with money. They try to fill it with sex. They try to fill it with work. They try to fill it with family. They try to fill it with love. Christian groups criticize these people, piously stating “they're trying to fill a hole that only God can fill.”

I have a hole in my heart created by God's absence—God, please fill my heart—that remains to be filled. Don't tell me I'm doing it wrong.

Don't give me answers.

Wonder with me.
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