EDITOR’S NOTE:

During the weeks of late night editing in CB017, the imaginary words of our critics wade within my ears. “Water?” I hear, “How cliche. They’re throwing their funding down the drain, but should we expect anything different since that is, in fact, where they found their theme?”

Sitting in the desolate basement of the underused Commons Annex building only amplifies this “imaginary” opposition. Acceptance was the forced solution. Acceptance that our theme may end in down the drain, but may start with a woman washing her hands before she sits down at the dinner table to pray with her wife and their children; a man with obsessive-compulsions humming “What Can Wash Away My Sin” as he scrubs his raw and throbbing hands away; or a newborn child, washed for the first time in a cold basin by unfamiliar hands, unconsciously longing for Mother.

Viewing water as clichéd prevents the admiration of its versatility, in form—snow, rain, steam, ice—
in size—a drop, liter, gallon, pond, lake, ocean—
in color—clear, blue, yellow, green, red—
and in action—falling, washing, crashing, swirling, and laying perfectly still.

As a drink, it clears the palate; as a well, it provides for the people of a third world village; as a hurricane, its able to shut down New York City; and as Haiyan, it kills a known four thousand. Perhaps water is accessible, but that accessibility is only created by its diversity, by it having a unique relationship with every person.

This year, involvement was our organization’s charge, and accessibility was our vehicle. We’re looking for support. Perhaps our passion for our own work has led us to act too hastily, thundering proudly during our inter-organizational collaborations, and splashing as we dove into the fight for financial restitution. But, instead, we hope that we’ve rained: on baron lands to break the calloused ground where our hopes for developing a genuine student interest in art have been sown. Then, quenching those hopes, for their growth and blooming, whatever the flowers may be.

Within this issue of Dialogue, there are postcards for our readers to fill out and mail back to us using Calvin’s intra-campus mail system, or by dropping them off in a labeled box in the Fishhouse. Those who will use these postcards as a means of criticism, please do so. Critique is at the foundation of improvement, and that is our organization’s desire. However, for those of you who have been refreshed, cleansed, and blessed by this water-themed issue of Dialogue, you are equally—if not more—responsible to voice your appreciation. You are our water; you are life-giving to us.

A publication’s death is not a dramatic drowning, but rather it is a gradual, quiet erasure. Printed pages turn to sand, and ink to toe-drawn marks that are washed away by apathetic waves in a careless tide. Help us to achieve more permanence. Read us, and enjoy us. And, most importantly, speak in this conversation that you’re inevitably a part of.

With wishes for your stories to always find an audience,

Michael Kelly
Editor-in-Chief
**How to Get Involved:**

**Readers:** *Dialogue* cannot exist without faithful readers. Our magazine is 100% free to the public, so grab one for yourself, a couple more for your friends, and join the conversations about the pieces in our magazine.

**Jury Members:** During the selection process, we have a team of blind jury members review all of our submissions and rate them based on artistic merit. We need jury members for prose, poetry, and visual art.

**Staff Members:** We need dedicated students who are willing to help with the day-to-day maintenance of *Dialogue* as an organization. Positions include communications, promotions, layout design, editing, and more.

**Photographer:** We need a someone to work with artists to photograph their art work. The connection between a physical object and its visual representation requires an eye for detail and the ability to collaborate.

**Other:** Still want to be involved? We will try out best to find the perfect place in our organization for you!

If interested in any of these positions, please contact

dialogue.submissions@gmail.com.
Submission Process

*Dialogue* has two submission deadlines per semester. The first is a free-write deadline where all pieces have equal weight in being accepted for publication. The second deadline is a guided deadline where we announce specific pieces that we are looking for; pieces that meet the guidelines will be preferenced. Look for our advertisements on posters, in Student News, and on Facebook for deadline information!

Send prose, poetry, and visual art to dialogue.submissions@gmail.com. Prose and poetry should be submitted as attached Word documents. Visual art should be sent as an attached JPG file. Any visual art that cannot be sent electronically should be photographed and e-mailed as a JPG image. Each piece must be labeled “Title, Artist’s Name, Medium.” If neglected, we will be forced to leave the piece unlabeled in one or more of those ways.

A blind jury reviews submissions and rates each piece based on artistic merit. *Dialogue* has three juries: prose, poetry, and visual art.

All works chosen for publication are organized by our layout editor and reviewed by our staff before the magazine is finalized.

If chosen for publication, *Dialogue* will notify you before the publication date, and your work will appear with other selected works in the following issue.

Selected or not, do not forget to come to our release party to pick up your free copy of *Dialogue* magazine!
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Window
Kai Koopman

The window
wipes itself to view.
It smoothes the unsmoothed heart,
drugs eyes. They glaze.

We surf ever ergonomically with ink
fingering intentions. A causal swipe
here, there –
we impasto chunks of light
with plaster stuff. We make punchy
the plane, puppet the background up.

Wide-eyed we tilt to the depths
of the window. Wide-mouthed we
pool drool on it.
The window, washing
us –

Surface tension eeks
a certain depth and we can’t
help but comb the wet water.
The window wipes.
Open your eyes.
Cup your hands
And hold this new day,
The way you cradle a hot cup of tea.

Ready or not, it has come,
Unfolding before your very eyes. Ready or not, you
Have made it through the night;
You are alive to see it.

How does the leaf feel when it slips
From the great parent oak, carried by strange currents
To the unknown puddle, the windshield,
The rooftop or gutter?

We must all be born again
And again.
Red Bird
Leah Sienkowski

I remember the cashier who rung up my purchase which included the salt and pepper shakers. They were little cardinals with two and three holes dotting their backs. I also recall paying for them and that someone— the woman herself or someone else— wrapped them in sheets of gray reconstituted tissue paper. But I recall, too, that they never made it into the bag with my other miscellaneous merchandise. What I do not remember is the specifics of the compliment given, that is if it was positive enough to warrant delf thievery on the part of the cashier, but it probably was not. I imagine her anyway, her and the birds, one in each side pocket, or perhaps wing by wing in the single pocket of her apron. I imagine her slipping them into her purse, onto the table in her apartment, shaking them onto her baked potato casserole. Or I imagine her running into the parking lot in the rain shouting “You forgot something!” holding the fragile package above her head, the rain water polka dotting the paper as I drove away unknowingly. Alternatively, I imagine her shrugging, listlessly unwrapping the paper with her fake nails and telling Steve at the other register to call the stock clerk. I imagine the stock clerk moving aside the white porcelain soap dish to replace the birds where he had stocked them last Thursday. I imagine driving home imagining that the birds sat on the passenger seat next to me inside the plastic bag, atop the shower curtain, nested inside the colander. I imagine imagining pouring the salt into the empty body of a bird, with my finger covering the little holes, but some probably spilling anyway onto the counter, blending into the fake granite linoleum. I imagine the cardinals separated by a second or third fateful shopping trip. I imagine one bird in shattered pieces and one bird in Switzerland. I imagine someone else imagining me imagining them.
Orange Eyes
Natalie Eising

Wide open
Surprise, and...
Fear?
What do you see?
Do you know where I will be
Next October?
Wandering, lost and found
Or not found, brown-eyed weeping

So many sounds
Falling over each other,
Still somehow sounding
Like music, I don’t understand again
Just washing over me, drowning in it
Breathing it in, always,
In the rush of August.
Vinification
Libby Huizenga

I saw that grape on the counter beside the can opener. The light shone through it with dayglow luminescence so I held it up to you: look, look, it’s pristine. A single orb with minuscule kingdoms veined across its neon surface, a planet on the counter to the left of the range top. Molecules collide, twist, and exchange protons and heat, ferment a bouquet that consists in ingredients existent since robots walked the earth and scraped clay from human fossilized jawbones mangled then ordered by braces and NASA wires then, squelching, stomped out by years and grape juice.
Prologue: my then-girlfriend, Alison, was abroad in the Philippines from September 2012-July 2013. Feeling disconnected from her, I wrote this treatise of a memorable twenty-four (or so) hours of my life, which you are now reading. Enjoy.

The Affairs of 12/1/12 in a Project Neighborhood Context

Neil Gilbert

The finiteness of time coerces me to combine the Sunday edition of my biweekly letter to Alison and my personal journal entry into one chronicle. To Alison, I love you. To my journal, I apologize for this egregious mistreatment. But so it is.

Events are by nature preceded by other events, so I must begin my tale of the first of December with a brief exploration of the final evening of November. Friday nights are generally homework nights for me; however, a butternut-squash-lasagna-induced euphoria prevented such productivity. Instead, Heather, Lillea, and I observed Clara straightening and cutting her hair, coveting the '80s-esque keratin radiating from her skull. Lillea was not feeling well, the drowsy victim of a [perhaps over-generous dose of] ibuprofen. She really looked like she needed a bedtime story, so Anthony and I tucked her in and began reading a children's story about pirates. Somehow this morphed into a bed party; in the end, Clara, Amanda, Anthony and I all squeezed onto her bed and succumbed to the classic college-student choice of wasting time—watching YouTube videos. I almost made it to bed—my teeth were brushed, retainer in! But it was not to be. An ominous knock sounded from downstairs. It turned out to be one of Lillea's brothers and his girlfriend. They extricated her from bed. We all descended to the kitchen, had a cocoa party, and decided to watch Finding Nemo. And thus I lost my Finding Nemo virginity. I was the only one awake for most of the movie. I didn't allow my solitude morph to loneliness, instead reveling in the movie and trying not to focus on the fact that I was, for all practical purposes, alone watching a children's movie late at night in a darkened basement.

The power I now possess, the previously esoteric references that I now understand—I was nearly overwhelmed! Coo-coo ka-choo, right on up to the big 'ole blue! The absurdity continued into my unconsciousness that night. I nightmared that I went shopping at Target. It was terrible; I was trapped in a vortex of shopping and left after three hours without buying anything. I spent those hours searching for ibuprofen; when I got to the cashier and realized I didn't have anything to check out, I put my cell phone on the conveyor belt. It cost sixteen dollars. At that point I realized there was no reason I needed to buy my own phone, so I excavated my pockets and found a package of ibuprofen. The cashier, however, wouldn't let me buy it since it was only for ages 6-10. It was a relief to wake.

And so began one of the more atypical Saturdays I have experienced. As I stumbled downstairs, Susie blew by me, and before I could even mumble Good morning, she cried, “Neil! The dishwasher is broken!” And indeed it was; the bottom was a creamy pool of dirty water. I didn't let it bother me too much and ate my oatmeal—supplemented, of course, with a copious dose of peanut butter. I was alone. Resisting the temptation to go birding, I realized I had nothing to do. What do normal people do on Saturdays, anyway? A large stack of dishes beside the sink begged to be baptized, and, realizing that many had been polluted by none other than me and myself, I resolved to have a dishwashing
extravaganza. For the next hour I scrubbed while jamming to Mumford & Sons. I forgot to mention, too, that I had made a large pot of coffee, assuming that other drinkers would descend upon the black gold. I found myself unallied and ended up drinking at least three and a half cups.

The dishes washed, I decided to wash myself. Washing dishes by hand is a most therapeutic experience, and I was in high spirits. Spirits so high, in fact, that I sang so loudly in the shower that Lillea could hear me with her door closed at the other end of the hallway. Fortunately, my serenading failed to awake Clara and Ellie, who were both still asleep at the time.

(At this point I called Hannah and broke the news that I watched *Finding Nemo*. I vaguely promised that I might visit later.)

Apart from attempting to fix the dishwasher with Doug, the afternoon was standard-issue, though my caffeine overdose bestowed upon me clarity and quickness of thought that I seldom enjoy, as well as uncontrollable tremors. Anyway, Doug and I spent an hour ripping apart the dishwasher and snaking the drainage hose. In the end, we concluded that a pump in the dishwasher was out of commission, a condition that exceeded our pooled mechanical ability. In the end, our sole accomplishment was the establishment of a creamy puddle across half the kitchen.

I delved into the theology of 2 Peter (an aside to Alison: read Jude and then read 2 Peter. Nuts, huh?) for a short while and then went running. Ellie, Clara, and Lillea were walking to CVS, so of course the only natural thing to do was to run between them yelling. Half an hour later, I scared them again while they were walking home. The timing could not have been more felicitous.

I accomplished a frightening amount of studying in the next couple hours; by 8 I had nothing to do. So, I gathered Koinonia’s chess set and a pair of wool socks and drove to campus. I was in such a frenetic rush (residual caffeine effects?) that I didn’t bother donning shoes.

For the second—no, third—time this semester, I ascended to the intellectual heights of 3rd vR and was bewildered at the array of unfamiliar freshmen. I no longer belonged there. I did find Hannah, but she was working (she’s the RA of 3rd, incidentally) and could not talk long. Instead she hugged me at least three times and went on her way. I set off in search of people I know, first targeting JLIN.

He was not in his room.

I encountered Hannah again; she said he might be in the conference room.

He wasn’t.

I did, however, find Abby Leistra studying in the Kalsbeek basement. She looked as tired as an engineer should, which is very. I distracted her from her studies for at least fifteen minutes; she was, however, most gracious about my interruption. We talked about thermodynamics and oral rhetoric. And she told me that JLIN was in the Morgue.

At once I took off. I slinked into the morgue and spotted my victim. Whenever someone walks into the morgue, each studious cadaver surreptitiously glances over its shoulder to identify the intruder. My entry was no exception. JLIN turned, his face crinkling in befuddlement. I grabbed him and dragged him outside.

“What brings you? Why are you here?” he asked, bewildered.

“To save you from Organic Chemistry,” I replied. We talked for probably ten minutes in the hallway. We determined that we would hang out over Christmas break; *hanging out* in this context means riding bikes to the beach from JLIN’s home in Cerritos. During this whole conversation we were touching each other in ways that would be inappropriate in any other
situation, but JLIN is exempt from normal rules of social conduct.

Together we went back up to 3rd vR for no particular reason. There I found Hannah again, who was now done with her work responsibilities. I inquired as to the feasibility of having a Christmas tree in the 3rd vR lobby. (I must interject! I failed to mention earlier that my house had been scheming to do some nocturnal Christmas tree acquisition in the nature preserve later night.) Apparently real plants (what a concept!) are technically not allowed in the dorms, and JLIN and Hannah didn’t believe me anyway, factors that bolstered my resolution to procure for them a tree.

I had run out of people to heckle; I had forgotten how industriously those 3rd vR’ers keep to their studying. So, I awkwardly left.

Just as I was exiting Calvin, I remembered that Ellie and Lillea had gone to the Fish House to study. I had nothing to do for another couple hours, so I decided to creep on them. I pulled a u-turn and drove to the CFAC parking lot.

“Shit,” I said aloud to myself as I pulled into the parking lot, “The Messiah!” The lot was densely populated with cars of the concert attendees. My plot was nearly foiled, but thankfully a spot materialized. I took it, and with my still-bare feet padded into the Fish House.

On my way in, I was accosted by MacKenzie, a girl I vaguely know from a Spanish class. We maintained a cordially awkward conversation in Spanglish for perhaps a minute before I continued in search of my housemates.

They weren’t there.

John Sherwood, another one of those vaguely known people, was sitting at the bar; I think he works there. I asked whether he had seen the errant girls. He hadn’t; however, a guy I’m told is named Carl interjected, saying, “Ellie Pedersen? Yeah, she left a little while ago.”

Huh. Foiled. I left, and as I walked through Johnny’s I noticed Nate Brees incarcerated in a booth, enslaved by a paper. I slid in across from him and proceeded to distract him from his paper (about The Hunger Games for his Adolescent Lit class. What a chore). Suddenly inspired, I asked him whether he thought it would be feasible to sneak in the back door of the auditorium and listen to a bit of the Messiah. He encouraged me in this folly, so I left him, bound for the CFAC.

Outside the CFAC I found them (i.e., my housemates) aimlessly wandering. I informed them of my scheme to steal music with my ears; they quickly agreed to join me. We walked in just as the intermission was concluding. We encountered Goose, who, incidentally, is Clara’s boyfriend. I was intrigued as to why he was at the concert alone and not with her. Anyway, we greeted him in passing and raced up to the second floor to waylay Grant, whom I had spotted from outside the building. I reached him just before he reentered. We had a brief conversation, which I imagine left him very perplexed; the details escape me, but I remember some babble about Christmas tree chopping.

The breakneck randomness of the night prevented us from following through on our plot. (In other words, we chickened out.) We began roving campus without purpose or directive. Ellie complained of hunger I proposed a raid on the fridge in the geology department lounge. Unfortunately, this brilliant idea was foiled by the Science Building’s locked doors. The next idea quickly came: why don’t we climb on the roof of the Spoelhof Fieldhouse? We set off in that direction.

As we approached, however, we saw a throng of people inside the fieldhouse!
NiteLife! Another plan averted.

We entered the Christmassy throng and began inquired as to the whereabouts of the food. Free food is really all any college event needs; we eschewed the crafts and games and instead munched and chatted with various people we encountered. At this point, my course collided with that of Peter’s. He drafted me to join a dodgeball tournament on his team. I enthusiastically joined and listened to the Master of Dodgeball give a spiel about proceedings. After the first minute-and-a-half I grew bored and intimidated by the other players, who were decked out in athletic clothing while I was unshod and clad in Levis. I gave Peter the slip and rejoined my housemates, who had joined a conglomeration of several other people we all knew separately.

Eventually the group was winnowed down to me, Ellie, Lillea, Jeff Bentum (I lived two doors down from him last year and said hi perhaps four times), and Mark Strikwerda (we were on Wilderness Orientation and I have barely seen him since). Jeff and I felt slightly excluded from the conversation, so we watched snippets of *Elf*, which was being played on a nearby TV. Repeated pasta commercials caused great strife between us as we debated whether we were watching *Elf* or the Lasagna channel.

Anyway, our plans to climb atop the very building in which we were now standing were now leaked. As a group we decided to do it. Along the way we picked up John-John. On our way out, we ran into Peter, who frantically led me towards the dodgeball game. We followed him for quite a ways, but then diverged and sneaked out the door at the last second. Mark briefly tried to get up on the roof, but it was a long stretch, and it hurt his hands, so we abandoned this idea. We decided to, as a group, return to Koinonia to get Doug, his truck, and a saw.

On our way back to my car (better known as The Stinkpot), we were briefly waylaid by another Jeff (i.e., Jeff Brown), who tried to convince us to go dumpster diving with the ESC. We resisted and continued on our way, disappointed, because we had been planning on going dumpster diving ourselves afterwards. They were going to steal all the stuff.

The six of us crammed into my car. As we pulled out, I heard Mumford & Sons on the radio for only the third time in my life. The ride was very cramped and warm. Humor was wonderfully easy; the whole night was so absurd that even drivel merited laughter.

We got home and hung around the kitchen for ten minutes, waiting for Doug to finish watching *Inception* and perhaps for Clara to come home so she could join in our crimes. Along the way we accumulated Amanda and Anthony. Clara didn't show up, so we absconded.

The musical tastes of the six people in the Stinkpot obviously clashed. The Red Sea Pedestrians met unanimous opposition, so instead we listened to Justin Bieber to placate the majority. At last we reached out destination and strategically parked behind some trees by the greenhouse. While “working” earlier in the week, I had roamed the wilds of the preserve to find the perfect Scotch Pine to cut. *Pinus sylvestris*, you scoundrel! The perfect pine, it turns out, was a quarter mile of bushwhacking from our parking location. It was dark and beginning to rain (since when is it sixty degrees in December?).

Eventually, after my many branches to the face and brambles to the legs, we reached the appointed pine. Taking the saw and beginning to cut, I had the sudden realization that I had the misfortune to be doing a task with eight observers. After extensive heckling and advice, the fifteen-foot conifer collapsed.

Our bloodthirst was not quenched by this one victory. Mark insisted on cutting
his own tree; after he had toppled it, he realized how ugly and scraggly it was. Anthony did the honors of cutting 3rd vR’s lovely little Christmas tree. With that, we filed back through the woods, frequently disregarding our resolve to be quiet and not alert the neighbors to our presence. Unbelievably, our presence went undetected. I crammed 3rd vR’s tree in my trunk, and we drove back to campus with my trunk hanging open. Conveniently, it began to rain.

It was a short journey, short enough that my camera and other damageables were not damaged by the exposure. We came to the dorm bearing the tree—we named it Sparta, I think—much to the confused pleasure of the 3rd vR residents. Apparently Christmas trees aren't allowed in the dorm; Grant and Hannah said they would argue for it to stay in the lobby. It wasn’t a bad little tree.

We left in a hustle to rendezvous with our posse. In the interest of rational bedtimes, Doug, Anthony, and Amanda returned to Koinonia, but the rest of us, intoxicated with success, decided to go dumpster diving after all. Of course, the ESC did indeed clean out Aldi and Panera bread. Proving our ability to adapt to new situations, we decided to dive into new pools.

Krispy Kreme was empty.
Arnie’s was full of nasty greasy napkins.

We struck gold at Bath and Body Works. This dumpster was immediately identifiable by the agreeable aroma of shampoo. Mark leaped to action. He meticulously sorted through the bags, finding all sorts of coupons, candles, and lotion. Appropriately, there were also lots of tampons in there, which made Mark cautious about where he put his hands.

We traversed the underbelly of the whole mall. Office Max, Big Lots... the treasures were endless. At Big Lots, we found a massive canister of honey-roasted peanuts amidst various broken electronics and Christmas decorations. We also found what we believed to be a bouncy ball. The next day, however, I discovered that it was a jawbreaker filled with Nerds when I tried bouncing it while waiting for my gas tank to fill at the BP station at Franklin and Eastern.

The bad thing about driving with six people in one car is that the people in the back get no heat and therefore complain incessantly about the climate. Up in the front, we were roasting. I became convinced that my throat and sinuses were full of dryer lint.

Anyway—the dumpster diving fizzled out. We tried Gander Mountain (as we drove up, we had all sorts of visions of finding guns or hip waders!) but were skunked. Mark and I took advantage of the seclusion behind Gander Mountain to share a piss. It was lovely. We had a nice view over a swale and of the Steak ‘N Shake in the distance. The evacuation of our bladders made the remainder of the car ride much more comfortable.

By now yawns outnumbered laughs, and it was today, December 2nd, and no longer December 1st. We dropped off Mark, John-John, and Jeff and headed home. When we got home, we realized that most of the crap we had gotten dumpster diving wasn’t worth saving. But, the Scotch Pine, which the returners had set up, was magnificent. Most Scotch Pines are very scraggly and lopsided; this one was only slightly so.

Epilogue:

Alison is no longer my girlfriend; she is my fiancée.

Jonathan Lin and I did indeed ride bikes from his house to the beach, on 12/26/12.

The 3rd vR Christmas tree suffered banishment in the woods just to the west of KHvR, only to be subsequently rescued by the Residence Director of the dorm and placed in her apartment.
Tsunami
Adam Meyer

At first it seemed merely a mirage, a blur in the line between sky and sea. But as it approached, I realized the sea had thrown off the rules of gravity and now made to claim the sky as its own.

Rising up against the heavens, it rushed headlong toward the shore like Poseidon's trident thrown in a powerful arc from afar. I hurried away, leaving the sand for rock and higher ground where perhaps even this rebellion of the seas might not reach me.

It came onward until it towered over me like a mountain spewing forth ashen clouds, preparing the same choking death for those it touched. In the crest, the tall horses of Poseidon rode onward in triumph, crushing the innumerable foot soldiers of sand beneath their hooves, covering the shore in silver blood.

They swept past the trees and the grass, tearing them up like wheat against the ploughman before swallowing them whole, the stumps of trees rearing out like some odd Adam's apple.

Then the crest fell, breaking on the hill with a crash not unlike the sound of thunder, as if the sea tried to prove that it could shout just as mightily as its rival. White fingers grasping at my feet before retracting back into itself as the noise struck my heart, chilling it even more than my toes. The water turned brown with its newly consumed food, its swollen belly covering the newly conquered ground as it digested the trees and shrubs, sand and dirt.

Slowly it receded. The dirt and debris dispersed, carried away by arteries to the heart of the sea, while the waters forgot that there had ever been destruction here. The water retreated from the shore, leaving only the broken branches, misplaced stones, and wrecked ruins in the dirty sands: the corpses of the battlefield between sea and sky.
~abriel Hoekstra

under the waves I sleep
the dark abyss my resting place

itchigumi

my footprints are the ridges in the sand
my claws honed by the grains

ishigami

my voice is the roar of the whitewater
the hiss of crashing waves

uron

waves break at the lash of my tail
and the tips of my horns meet the lightning

ielhonan

my anger I bring the storm
and still waters in my repose

ontario

purchase your safety with copper
the fancy of my children

Frida
Dania Grevengoed
Lofted Auden
Kyle Luck

How long must I wait
‘til the bird ‘round your neck
sings “yes” to all
uncertainty?

How long will you hide the high notes
up the ladder with laughter?
From the lamp, and the light
our afghan sprawling.

Maybe just let it sound
in the crevices of this quiet:
a symphony more lasting
than we lingered at goodbye.

Lord knows I need to hear it;
and if it comes, we could dance
as beatific halcyon--like
liturgy in the morning.
no skin
Katie VanZanen
She said she felt as though she had
no skin—after
that night, I mean.
Visibly upset, she said,
a phrase perhaps too calm
for the image of St. Stephen on the wall of the Sistine chapel,
holding the empty casing of his body
in one,
raw hand.
He, however, had in that very frozen moment reached heaven’s rewards—
we remained on the beach, caught between earth and sea.
I imagine
that even the gentle,
Pacific breezes stirring the sand
would have burned, on her bare back,
like tongues of biblical flame—
refining
or damning
or both.
Before I went to the Department of Motor Vehicles, my mother recounted horror stories of days spent with a butt formed perfectly to a rigid, plastic chair, of surly government creatures sniveling behind counters, of waiting, waiting, waiting, and then figuring out she was in the wrong line. I have returned from this abyss alive and with my mentality intact, and I bring tales.

However, in comparison to stories of woe, I can say that my experience was relatively painless and bereft of that tenuous vein of insanity that runs through most of mother’s DMV stories. Perhaps, the fact that I mentally fortified myself before going in helped; I did hum the Rocky theme for a good three hours, repeat positive mantras to myself, and practice my most disarming smile (it works seventy-seven percent of the time).

Right. Even though I only waited a maximum of forty-two minutes, I did have the chance to observe the species inhabiting the Department. I’ve also started calling it The Department because it sounds much cooler than DIVN; it sounds sketchier, like a place where people say suspicious phrases with air quotation marks such as “would you like to be an ‘organ donor?’ ” or “Jonie, he needs to get ‘renewed,’ go get the ‘test.’ ”

The resident clerks seemingly never age—only continue. Immediately, when I entered, I pinpointed the curly haired man with a black headband who issued me my driver’s license some five years ago, taking the hard-fought log of driving hours I had painstakingly assembled over six months and recycling it without a second look. All I had wanted was some acknowledgement, and, maybe, just maybe, a Dum Dum sucker for my trouble. None was forthcoming.

Damn it.

Next to him was the same arcane tank of a lady with enough wrinkles to make an elderly Pug proud. And, yes, drill sergeant Williams was still bellowing out orders, forgetting that this was not Vietnam: a place to shout at lowly privates.

They’re nice enough, but only if you have the necessary paperwork, and god help you if you don’t have a copy of your insurance because there will be no getting around them.

But the residents are only a fifth of the people there. The Department also dredges fauna from every little dank hole of society, summoning them to the fluorescent glow of a dilapidated strip mall to “register” their “vehicle.” As I sat in my little plastic chair, I watched them while pretending to read my book. The first thing I noticed was the harried lady sitting one chair from me who somehow snuck her pint-sized dog in a ramshackle leather bag into the DMV. I don’t know if that’s legal; it seems like it could be a health risk to have a mangy mongrel just hanging out, but no one said anything. Some time after I sat down, an elderly gentleman, who spoke with a Russian accent I was immediately jealous of, asked,

“Can I sit here? I wish to pet your dog.”

“Um, sure,” the woman replied.

And with that, the Russian with the corduroy pants and green socks took his seat and began petting the dog. Now, there are different types of people who own canines. One type overthinks their dog, interpreting every sniff a clue to its inner psyche. The woman who owned the little rat-sniffer was of this type and indeed had very grand plans of taking this dog to prisons and schools to do what little mongrels do in those places—apparently education or drug rehabilitation or something. And then there are others who pay very little attention to the habits...
of their dog; their attitude could be summed up as follows: *I give dog food. I pet dog. Dog sleeps. Good dog.* Russian man was of the second type.

Don’t get me wrong, both types really do love their dogs, but it was interesting to see them interact. As the lady was explaining plans for her canine companion and the emotional swings the mongrel went through, you could see that the man just didn’t think that the dog was capable of such things. It was just a dog and certainly didn’t have a penchant to teach children how to read.

As enraptured as I was in this little back-and-forth, I tore myself away when my number was called. I passed the vision test with flying colors (or letters rather), blazed through the fingerprint test, and had a quick picture of me taken for my driver’s license. Although I wanted to pull a crazy, high-on-crack face so I could one-up anyone who says they have a bad driver’s license picture, I instead went for the classic toothy smile, baring as many chompers as possible. It’s always best to have a police officer think you’re a cheery guy when they pull you over, and I was hoping my license would give that impression.

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At the last moment, however, the wrinkly lady told me to pull back my hair, which if you just see my head and you’re just doing a quick glance, makes me look thirty-six percent more like a girl. *Sigh.* So now every time a police officer or airplane checker or bartender checks my license, he’s going to do a double-take and just for a second I’m going to be the chick. While being a girl is not a bad thing, I would at least like people to get one of the most basic things about me correct.

I guess that’s just the price I have to pay for having long locks, and one that apparently I’m willing to pay for the next ten years. Whew. Ten years. It’ll be weird going back to the confines of that dusty dungeon to get it renewed again, yet I feel it will be somewhat comforting. The sergeant will bellow out my name, the wrinkly lady will have a couple more wrinkles, and the man with the headband will still not give me a Dum Dum.

Damn it.
Worship
Nicholas James Alcock

The palate we share is the answer,
Like the evening you wished unity
And unattainable care,
The night you flew into the attic
Weeping in return on the steps
Of witness.

You said it was I for whom you came
And smoked and left,
Others uninterested in how archaic
Rain renders flood,
How illusory gain is idle talk,
But I too took it for nothing
Dreaming the holding hand of grace
And perpetual refrain.

I too took division and freedom
To retain purgatorial visions
Of hope and rectitude,
You watched seated as I indulged
In an imprisoned reverence.

But recall,
The invisible drags tidal wind
Into our ears and mouths
As we hang life to progression,
This hanging life our worship.
Welcome to the Vegetables
Leah Sienkowski

Inside the greenhouse the air is pleasantly muggy, a contrast to the sharpness of March. This afternoon I sit on a folding chair with a planting tray across my lap making depressions with my fingertips into wet soil—my early April hands new to dirt beneath nails. I poke holes in each of the seventy-two cells, and then shake some seeds from a glass jar into my hand.

Lettuce seeds the size of a baby’s eyelash and the color of soil fall into the crevices of my palm. I try to focus; a lapse in attention could cause me to deposit too many in one cell, or none in another. The seeds stick to my fingers as I transfer each one to a cell of the plastic tray. Soon the seeds will germinate and these desiccated bits will be left behind by root and shoot, the delicate green cotyledons—the first leaves—will burst from the soil.

I stack the finished trays on the ground at my side. Soon someone else will add a layer of topsoil, water in the seeds, and place the tray on one of the low shelves lining the greenhouse, leaving the work to the seed, to a hint of light, and to time.

***

We work our way down three-hundred foot beds, stuffing our hands into the dirt. It is morning: damp, not too hot, rain on the horizon. Good transplant weather. Today we are planting three varieties of kale in three rows with eight inch spacing. We’ve waited a bit too long and the seedlings have become root-bound, so that the root ball slides easily from the plastic cell. Some of us remove the starts from the trays and lay them down at measured intervals, and the rest of us follow, one of us on each row, hopping along, shoving out hands into rocky clay soil, into feather-soft loam, or sometimes, but rarely, into thick, wet mud. We tuck the plants in as fast as we can, pushing the soil up around the base of the stem and hoping for the best; though by our estimation the plants look too small for the real world. For the first couple of weeks the plants are flaccid and sad, but eventually the shock of transplant passes; they perk right up.

***

Today we sit in a circle in the syrup barn slicing up seed potatoes. We divvy up the eyes—at least one per chunk and toss them into five-gallon buckets with a satisfying plunk. Seed potatoes are hideous—they smell bitter, their skin is wrinkled, they juice slightly upon slicing. From their eyes sprout short wormy arms.

We are the farm hands, the farm feet, the farm knees. We’re in this for the long run—or at least the long season. We’re in it for pure ideals and the foul, monotonous chores.

For hours we grab and slice and chuck, discuss our friends’ relationship problems, what we’d do with a thousand dollars, how much we’d pay for a nap right now.

***

Weeds are surprising; both in their voracity and multiplicity—but those attributes
are well documented. For the unpracticed weeder, the horror is in their similitude. Weed­
ing, at first, is the art of seeing. I have to learn the distinction between each vegetable
seedling and each weed, lest I mistake garlic shoots for grass, baby carrots for Ragweed,
and radish seedlings for Lambsquarters. Soon though, the distinction becomes unspeak­
ably stark; how could I not have known? My mind drifts from the difference between
velvetleaf and bean seedling, to the space between my knees and waist. The work be­
comes physical.

Halfway down the row, blood has pooled in my knees and my muscles hurt from
squatting. I regress from meditative position and humble myself, accept my limitations—
kneel. But quickly enough, my pants are caked in mud, my feet grow sore, and I give in
again. I resort to drag-my-ass-along-the-ground position which limits weeding to a one
handed activity. Soon, what I had anticipated and avoided has since occurred: my ass is
sopping wet. I resume the squat.

It takes weeks to learn the balance and flow between poses, but eventually the
action becomes routine. The weeds expel their spindly bodies from the soil and embed
their roots beneath it, and I respond with equal and opposite force, extracting these
intruders once and for all and leaving them limp between rows.

Sight is no longer an action, and body position is no longer a thought. The
distance of concern settles between me and the end of the row, but eventually I stop
looking up. The row is long; it’s best not to think about it.

***

In early summer lettuce heads reach the size of basketballs, crumplly spinach
leaves spurt from the ground, and pea tendrils curl sweetly toward trellises. In shifts the
rows are tilled, made into beds, planted. The garden fills up and the greenhouse empties.
There is a high turnover in produce, but not management. The same nine of us tend
the farm, following the plants from seed to table. We watch the carbon from the air,
the nutrients from the soil and the rain from the sky make colorful leaves and roots and
fruits. We hand over the fruit of our labor in plastic bags to paying customers, and return
leftover plant material to the earth. With the money we make we’ll feed the ground again
in the fall; we’ll buy seeds, lay irrigation line, and build fences. It’s a closed loop we love
and long to escape.

***

One day in May we are harvesting scallions. Their stalky leaves are empty like
straws, and require gentle hands. We peel off outer leaves, scrub each little head free of
dirt and band the tender green shoots in bunches of ten. We come up short. Somebody
has to go harvest more.

***

At market I stand beneath a green plastic banner, printed with the name of the
farm, and above a red-checkered tablecloth, piled high with mounds of produce. Quarts
of pole beans, baskets of bok choy, and piles of radishes fill the table.

“These are the Scallions,” I say, trying to set up a customer. “And this is Kale.”
Questions are directed toward the produce: “How much?” Someone asks, pointing. “Swiss Chard, right?” I navigate introductions, facilitate sales, and redirect people looking for tomatoes to the month of July.

“They have the crunch of a radish,” I say. “And they taste like a cross between an apple and a cabbage…” I hack away at the subtleties of kohlrabi, knowing very well that my attempts at explanation is lacking. While I can trace the bodies of each vegetable from seed to germination to transplant to fruiting to harvest, as for the afterlife, the era post-extraction, I know rather little. I fudge answers to questions like: “How long will they last?” “How do I store these?” and “What’s the best way to use this?”

The question of the day, however, I have down. We’re in the two-week “scape” window and basketfuls of curious green curlicues, like locks of Medusa’s hair, lure onlookers. “Ah, yes, they’re called *scapes*.” I begin. “They’re actually the flowering head of the garlic plant.” I pause for dramatic effect. I continue. “See, we snap them off the plant around this time of the season to encourage the garlic root bulb to size up. With the tenderness of asparagus and the flavor of garlic; you can braise them on their own, or chop them up for added flavor. Perfect for soup or pesto!” People smile and move on. “Interesting!” They say.

***

On harvest days the other farm hands and I pile into the back of the box truck, or the bed of the pickup with the empty tubs and crates. My boots have a gash in the heel and are a few sizes too big. We wear scarves and wool socks and yesterday’s mud-encrusted blue jeans. We scatter birds in the oats as we drive out to the vegetable field. We shout, make animal sounds, laugh wholeheartedly. It’s six am and mid July; the sky is pink; the dew is still on the leaves. Our hands are old to dirt by now and our feet are rough and cracked, but the unfettered ride still makes us whoop.

***

The peas are still alive upon harvest. Sweet and starchy embryos expand their venous, translucent cases. Too early, too fibrous—too late, too starchy. A swift pinch coupled with a downward yank leads to a snap of the neck. The pea sits in your hand-tight at the seams, plump to the point of bursting. A final exchange which soon becomes ordinary—you could do it in your sleep.

***

The internal pressure of a cabbage must be something astounding. I feel the head which has begun to harden with the formation of tightly bound layers. New layers unfurl, nestled tightly within the older, outer layers. Before it can bolt, that is, before the thick bud can burst into flower, rendering it an inedible, bitter stalk, I take to it with a quick saw of the scythe—truncating its reproductive potential. I crack off the large, bug-eaten outer leaves and place it next to the other heads in the tub.

***

It is late July when the tomatoes begin to ripen. Their bodies soften, their colors change—they begin to die. As each is removed from its branch, we collect them face
down in bins.

As we progress down the row, our palms turn yellow-green-bronze, and the hair on our arms is tinged the same. When we are halfway down the row, our crate is full—we pierce a rotten tomato on the fence post to mark our spot, and hoist the twenty-pound crate up to our waist, watching the ground ahead of us to avoid stepping onto sharp weeds or rotting fruit.

The tomato plants sway and droop, overwhelmed with heft of fruit in gold, magenta, lime, indigo, and red. We return to our place in the row, eyeing tomatoes of appropriate ripeness, pressing our fingers into the shoulder of each promising-looking fruit. Variously cracked and scarred, rippled and smooth, dappled and striped, some pop off upon subtle suggestion, while others require a two handed wrestle from their stemmy cages. The tomato plants are five feet tall and trellised to prevent toppling. But sometimes they lean outwards anyway, escaping the tightly strung twine.

As we feel the warmth of the fruit in our hand, we remember pounding in the t-posts with a post driver; we remember our shoulders shaking as we lifted the heavy metal tool over our heads and let it slam down—kachink—driving the metal into the loosely tilled soil.

But today our fingertips are black; the little glands on the leaves imprint us with the dark tar of the tomato. We try to remember not to wipe away sweat from our faces. To take several trips and to avoid filling the crates too full thereby breaking the fragile skin. We can’t stack them too high, or they’ll crush each other.

Three fifty pound crates later, and one side of one three-hundred foot row is complete: only twenty-three to go.

By August, the melons have caught some sort of fungus; the fruit looks fine, but the leaves of the plant are charred brown. As you turn the smooth, heavy orb over in your hands, you must be careful not to break the cord. You check the yellow window on the underside of the fruit looking for the color of streetlights: the sign of ripeness. Each melon turns in its own time, but by late August, we are harvesting five hundred in a day. They fill the bed of the white pickup truck.

In September I spray down the heads of lettuce. To my numb fingers, the water feels warm. The fields are still full, but the plants look tired; all of us are eager for frost. Most of the large harvests are done—potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions. The storage kohlrabi is the size of dinner plates, and the Brussels sprouts are slowly forming on the stalks.

I walk down the trail we’ve compacted over the course of the season. The work day is finally over. I harvest a few bell peppers for dinner on my way back, twisting the stems until the fruit falls into my ready hands. The fruits are hollow like blown-glass and in the midst of turning from green to yellow. As I leave the field, I make my sweatshirt into a sling and hold their shiny bodies close to my own.
Ivory Past
Nicholas James Alcock

"Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requires. Nescio, sed fieri sentio et exerci01:" (Catullus 85)

I have been found and broken
Under the weight of purity,
All-consuming, ill-aligned,
Assumption the only vice
Clinging with temporal hands
To mine, tepid as they are.

And hands shaking presuppose
Hers adorn this other flesh.

And yet, physical as thought,
As I have done time and again,
Forgetful I lean into
Another life, indigent,
Surmising infancy would
Again drop me to her arms.

And hands shaking presuppose
Hers adorn this other flesh.

Figure Study
Rachel Kok
Dialogue 33
Verulamium
Kyle Luck

St. Alban slipped on dogshit
trudgin’ uphill toward eternity.
Following familial footsteps
(or the tired tracks of tourists).

“What a pretty church,”
I hear my neighbor whisper.
As the esophagus splits
we finish ice cream at the altar.

Continuity
Melissa McMaagd
Dialogue 35
“You see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of gold. Think of how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain which is also golden, will bring me back to the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat...” (The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)
Meridians
Kai Koopman

Limbs to the lake. Driving, it took too long to capture the Blue Star. We took our limbs to the lake.

And limning, we found dunes, wind and men walking. We found Goldsworthy in their steps. We found lines we might not have otherwise.

Limbs to the lake – lineations and waves. Riding home, we wisked along, lining manholes. We found Goldsworthy in our curls.
Among the great buildings of Paris, noble city of upward-sweeping spires and exquisite Gothic facades, the Centre Georges Pompidou Museum of Modern Art lacks something in the way of majesty. Its industrial appearance encapsulates all that I find off-putting about the late twentieth century—I simply cannot stomach concrete overhangs and exposed heating ducts. The Louvre and the Musée de la Orangerie are art museums in the dignified sense. They hum with holiness in the manner of modern shrines to humanity’s best; they’re churches for the a-religious with paintings like icons for the unorthodox. Discernible figures in believable landscapes represent something of human life. Impressionism and renaissance art have a narrative quality that connects the viewer to the image. But in the contemporary art museum, the collection tends toward the abstract.

Out of place in the museum, as the museum is among the noble buildings of Paris, I depended on our docent for guidance. Specially contracted to speak English to a skulk of dazed American college students, the stiletto-clad Frenchwoman strode boldly about the maze of clean white walls. Midway through the tour, near the heart of the labyrinth, she bid us pause in front of a particular display case. It housed an elongated metal figure, cast by an unfamiliar Italian artist: Giacometti.

I am confident that someone of the group photographed the sculpture; I have but a mental picture, and an unremarkable one. The piece itself did not impress me, perhaps simply due to a lack of familiarity with the medium or the distressing smallness of the coffee I’d purchased that morning. I have no recollection of what the docent said about the sculpture itself, its place in the modern history of metal-casting, or its impact on the artistic community. But I paused to scribble down something she said by way of artistic exegesis:

"Imagine our destiny. We know that we’re born—" she looked at me and shrugged—"but we don’t know anything else.”

I collected many phrases during the January I spent in France. My jottings consisted mainly of circular philosophical preponderances on gender, courtesy of the lectures in the French feminism class that had brought me across the Atlantic. Our project involved investigating the underlying theses on which societal conceptions of gender are based, trying to define the ambiguity between biology and culture, identifying the relationships and reciprocity. We considered the contradiction of distinguishing men and women in order to fight for the eradication of legal difference. The class dropped us into a distressingly muddied debate that complicated my blind support for female empowerment. The art museum docent’s poetic pronouncement served as resolution to these quandaries in the manner of a throwing up of hands. We enter this life with no certainty but of our starting point, and we shrug. The rest of life is guesswork. Destiny is what we imagine.

Patrick Madden, an American essayist, says that we see the world in approxima-
tions and averages. Subjective may not mean arbitrary, but the best we have is a hypothesis; the most we have is a partial truth. His friend and fellow writer Brian Doyle claims that we tell stories because we don’t have answers for everything, or much of anything at all. They speak of writing; the Parisian docent refers to modern art, but the principle applies to more than one discipline of the human life. We are gamblers and artists, all of us, relying on assumptions we cannot trace to inform decisions whose repercussions we cannot fathom. Imagine our destiny. We know that we’re born—in the tradition of René Descartes, we know only that we exist—but we don’t know anything else.

Months after my studies in Paris, I sat in a very different lecture delivered by a white-haired and unkempt academic whose aging dog stood guard by the podium. He drew a lopsided circle on the chalkboard.

“This is everything you know,” he said, waving the chalk over the enclosed space. “Okay, so you go to school; you live a little. You learn a little more.” He smudged out the circle and redrew it a bit larger. “And look at that,” he crowed, marking several points along the outline—“more points of contact with everything you don’t know. More surface area to butt up against the unknown.”

He crossed his hands and rested them on his belly, grinning crookedly at the class.

“The more you learn,” he said, “the more you realize you ain’t got a clue.”

Our class tour of the museum ended around noon, the rest of the day ours to spend as we wished. The group dispersed across the plaza, moving in the direction of lunch or the Champs Elysees or any number of Parisian landmarks, but I remained indecisive, clutching a map of the Métro and the guidebook tucked between my arm and ribcage. Though I speak enough French to navigate the subway without much trouble and had in my hands the resources necessary to discern a route through the city, none of this provided much benefit without a destination. The difficulty lay not in discovering where to begin, or how to travel, but in where to go, selecting among the myriad of cultural offerings in the city of love and setting boldly out in the chosen direction. A friend and I wandered down Rue Saint-Martin, discussing possibilities. We hoped to happen upon an inexpensive restaurant. We hoped to happen upon a decision.

“Imagine our destiny,” the docent smiled. “We know that we’re born, but we don’t know anything else.”
Blue Dream
Alexandra Bass

Circular normality  
   Flipped
The day the girls danced across the shore  
   Startled
White seagulls scattered upwards  
   Rolling
Waves pulled back to expose blue sand  
A sky mirror  
   White sky
Blue Sand
Seagulls screamed in protest but  
   Laughing
The girls reveled in their ineffable blue dream
An Inquiry Towards a Weeping Willow
Abigail Hocking

Unlike the mighty oak that towers
The weeping willow salks and cowers
Before the warm rays of the sun
Bemoaning a day that has not yet begun.
She ignores the waves that kiss the shore
Of the lake that feeds her very core
Deaf to the wind's sweet serenade
Blind to autumn’s swirling parade.

O Willow, love,
Why do you weep,
When in such company you keep?
Yet here am I, weeping too,
I suppose that I am no greater than you.
For in the same company I keep
Yet still I choose to droop and weep.
Basket Writer
Rose Nelessen
His pen weaves a new atmosphere
with familiar faces:
the Board of Directors stand
on four feet
as the Paris Metro flies over Manhattan,
over two ladies drinking
coffee, and two others drinking wine,
on Sunday at eleven.
He weaves eyes and hands, cars and bones,
and the periodic table
of sweatshirts and scarves to keep him warm.
Finishing the rim,
he weaves lovers and airplanes. Folding
words on a page,
he weaved you and me and yesterday.
Tony
Leah Sienkowski

Ambassador for every living thing
you test the waters of compassion
until you are soaked and smiling.

You are the one who has filled the cracks
between the trees
connecting the branches with your own kind of music
allowing even the shiest truths to come out of hiding
and to sing.
It Happened with Perfection, Like a Dream
Rose Nelessen

It happened with perfection, like a dream;
I stood, on nothing, but I still stood tall
with you, something borrowed and green.
Our eyes were blue. The mosses, all
new to the thought of trees about to wed
old memories. In a ravishing present,
the leaves program the day’s events.
Birdsong filled our ears with haunting assent.
Gorging ourselves thin on celebration,
we drank all the earth could spare to rust.
When all the rice had put the birds to bed,
we heard quiet and began to throw up.
a scene.

Like a car crash near a bakery,
Everything is wrong
while the air is sweet.

Water Series
Jasmine Krieger
Nightswimming
James Li

“Four years ago, my sister walked into Lake Michigan. We found the car a week later, and her bloated body exactly one month after that,” I tell Lucy, knowing very well that she’s one of the only people at college I’ve told this to.

We’re walking on a pitch black beach – to our left is the empty dark roar of Lake Michigan – to our right is the rustle of tall trees – their night silhouettes looking like twisted giants. It is perhaps one or two in the morning. Lucy wraps herself in a blanket as she walks. I clutch an unopened bottle of contraband Tequila, trying not to shiver.

I continue:
“After we found her body, her High School friends would write on her Facebook wall and say teenage things as if she were alive... You know, like “Hey girl, I’m so sorry to hear that you’re dead, but remember that time we went to Summer Camp together?” And the weirdest part was, it almost made me believe that she was alive. I would type messages to her, saying how much I missed her stupid face, hoping for the letter she never gave. And in a strange sense, people who die in this generation have a digital afterlife. But they’re only alive for as long as you want to believe that they are.”

Lucy thinks quietly, digesting the thought.

“Who’s to say that she isn’t alive, though?” my friend says, letting her feet sink into the fine, cold sand. “People drink wine and eat bread at churches. While I don’t think most of them would call it the actual flesh and blood of Jesus, I don’t think it makes the act of Communion any less legitimate.”

We walk in silence for a while, feeling like the last humans on earth. There is no noise but the waves, our breathing and the trees - no cars, no music, no laughter or conversation. With nothing relative to our American medium-sized lives, the beach at night feels like a dream upon waking. Twelve hours ago we were in a classroom. Six hours ago we were in a dorm room. It’s fascinating how much your world can change with just an hour on the road – from a suburban prison to a surreal dark planet that could have existed before or after civilization.

“I’m honestly terrified of the Lake,” I admit, trying to look straight ahead.

“How does it scare you? Because of your sister?”

“I don’t know. I guess it taps into my fear of nothingness.”

“Nothingness?” she asks.

“Yeah. When I was a kid I wouldn’t be able to sleep because I’d be too busy wondering what would happen if God died, or if existence hadn’t existed at all. I’d pray to God in tears, begging that He wouldn’t die, or let me become nothing again. And the shore at night is probably the best physical manifestation of that fear. Knowing that my sister’s last thoughts were there doesn’t help either.”

“I used to get a lot of anxiety about nonexistence, too. I had these recurrent nightmares where all the colors in the world disappeared one morning, except for black. There was no light, no colors, no nothing but this eternal blindness. And all the people of the world would just lie down where they were, and... just wait to die.”

I stare at the invisible horizon’s shadowy face, the stars and the orange glow of distant Chicago reflecting and bleeding off each other in the darkness. The lake of eternal emptiness roars and spits out of its dark and wide maw in return. It was hungry enough to claim my sister that night, and goose-bumps form with the thought. I am horrified by the many evil secrets the
lake holds in its deep and dark watery chambers, waiting to resurface without warning. I almost feel like running, like a child up the stairs after turning off the lights.

“Best not to look at it, then,” Lucy says, a warm arm over my shoulder. “Let’s watch the stars instead.”

We lie down on the blanket, our small bodies feeling vulnerable and exposed to the great expanse we gaze at, not knowing where to settle our eyes. Looking up at the night sky, I realize it isn’t pure black at all, but instead freckled and textured with white, blue and yellow. I wish I could describe how overwhelmingly big it is, but no human vocabulary or photograph could ever properly capture something so pure and terrifying. The tiny eyes of my tiny body are taking in pinpricks of light billions of miles away from stars, some already dead for billions of years. I suddenly have the strangest sensation of feeling tremendously unimportant, pressed between the infinite universe and the hungry black waters of nothingness. It is an unnerving and uncomfortable feeling. I do not need to exist. And when I stop existing, and when all of us stop existing, the stars and the lake will still be here, waiting.

“Don’t you just feel so small?,” my friend whispers, squeezing my hand tightly. “I find it humbling to know that we’re really just animals in an organic spaceship flying aimlessly through a great empty void.”

“Shit, yeah. I feel tiny.”

Conscious that our planet and our suburbs and our little college student lives are just a grain of sand in a metaphorical beach, or a lone person treading water in the middle of a great, black sea, the fact that we exist or love at all suddenly feels like a miracle in itself.

The sand we lay on is suddenly sacred sand.

“I know it’s terrifying, but I’ve often taken comfort knowing our lesser place in the universe,” she continues. “Sometimes, bad things happen without explanation. But the sheer audacity of being alive in an ocean so vast, wild, and unpredictable means that we should carry on and savor what we do have. And that when things are out of our control, it’s because everything is out of our control, as we are just extras in a giant cosmic play.”

“Wow.”

“It’s why we put a white flag on the moon.”

A flash of distant lightning makes the sky flicker. We wait, but never hear the thunder.

“What’s your best memory of your sister?” Lucy asks.

I think about it, listening to the waves inhale and exhale.

“I must have been about six or seven. My dad was giving a lecture in London, and decided to bring us along for vacation. I’m not quite sure how, but through some connections he managed to get us two into the Natural History Museum on Christmas day, when it was closed to the public. I can remember walking into its main hall, and with golden sunlight streaming through the ceiling windows, the arched terracotta walls, and that white statue of Charles Darwin watching over us like some old Greek god, I thought I was in the most beautiful church I had ever seen.

I can remember running down the endless marble halls with little feet, our young minds barely able to take in so many wonders. Strange, almost mythical, creatures filling corner upon corridor... Colorful birds the size of horses. Wolves snarling behind glass, fixed in time. And dinosaurs! Real dinosaurs, their claws and teeth as ferocious and sharp as they were millions of years ago. You could have told us that it was heaven, and we would have believed you. I can remember my sister whispering and asking if we’d ever find the Artist who had drawn and designed all this.”
I turn my head and look at my dear friend, who is smiling with her eyes closed and her face lifted towards the night air.

“When we first saw the whale, we knew that we had found the King of this creation—the one who had designed everything we’d seen. It was probably the closest thing I’ve ever had to a spiritual experience. Not only was this model the biggest thing in the museum—a few hundred feet of fiberglass suspended in the air, but there was also something so undeniably powerful and mysterious about it. I can remember us two just standing there, holding hands, and not being able to have words to describe our awe. I’d never felt so wonderfully small or useless in my life.”

I can’t help laughing at the ridiculousness of it all.

“And when we finally had to leave, I can remember my sister and I laying down pamphlets and Christmas candy by the whale in tribute. Like it was God! Or Zeus!”

“That’s brilliant!” Lucy says. “Call me a postmodernist, but I think it’s a sacred thing to see the world in your own terms.”

I pause nervously and then confess.

“I’ve never told anyone this before, but I often wonder if my sister walked into Lake Michigan to find the whale for herself... And I wonder if she ever found it.”

“Well, let’s hope that she did.”

We lie there in silence for a long while, our warm hands clasped together, wrapped comfortably and perilously between the blankets of nothingness and everything, the water breathing with us as we exist.

“You know, one of my biggest dreams came true tonight,” she says.

“What, really?”

“Yeah. I’ve always wanted to go to outer-space.”

And with the darkness enveloping us from all sides, the stars set in the sky and in the water, and the lack of technology, it isn’t hard at all to see why she’d think that at all. Lucy stands up and motions at the heavy bottle of Tequila in my hands.

“Now let’s give thanks,” she says.

I twist the cap open, and pass the bottle to her. Lucy raises it up to the heavens.

“For all that is sacred and worthwhile. For everything out of our control, and for those who carry on in the face of death. In gratitude for being presently alive, friends, and impulsive weekend road trips. For the Creator, the lake, and outer-space. And for the Whale, the King of All Creatures.”

She drinks thirstily. She passes the forbidden bottle to me, and I drink too, feeling the liquid fire burn down my throat and slide into my stomach, almost laughing at the foreign sensation as my eyes water. The alcohol kicks in about twenty seconds later. A warm shot of life courses through my veins, from my feet to my hands to my head, and I suddenly feel much more alive.

“Ah!” I exclaim, on the cusp of realization. “Now I know why people drink wine in Communion. It’s because you can feel it.”

She nods in agreement and drinks one last swig.

“Let’s go night swimming.”

Before I can stand, my friend is already running towards the rolling waves. In the darkness, it takes me a while to realize that she is naked. I hear a splash, then a shriek.

“IT’S SO COLD!”

I follow her, taking off my clothes as I run, fumbling awkwardly in the night as if I’ve never undressed myself before. I feel like a child again, little uncoordinated feet stumbling
around the halls of an unending museum. When I step in the water, the coldness and sheer physicality of it shocks me. I let out a gasp.

“Come on!” she says.

Focusing on my own warmth, I start to wade deeper into the freezing black water, step by step, the invisible coldness reaching up to my ankles and now my knees. I breathe in, and close my eyes. I think about my sister. I wonder how she was able to drown herself with such deliberateness and intention — how she was able to walk into Lake Michigan and, against all animal instinct, not swim to survive.

“But it’s freezing!” I yell back. And when I shout to Lucy, I realize that I have something my sister didn’t have that lonely night: A friend.

When somebody you love dies, your youth and innocence goes with them. It’s an unexpected and uninvited graduation — one you cannot control. I am unable to picture my sister’s face properly anymore, and I hate myself for it. I am acutely aware that my own memories are finite and fading — and that when I am dead and my parents are dead, my sister will be lost to history forever. Lost to the Lake and lost to the stars.

But I want to believe that my friend is right. That within our own little childishly pure kingdoms we have the right to say what is true and believe what reality means to us. That while we are helpless to evil, we are, in every sense of the word, invulnerable if we choose to be. That while we may be finite and fragile beings, it is in our own limitations where we find true liberation.

I throw myself fully into the water and open my eyes.

And in that moment, floating in the cold watery vacuum, I swear I can see a whale swimming in a bed of stars.
Cherry Shirt
Anna Hanchet
"During the fifty-four years that I have inhabited this planet, I have been disturbed only three times. The first time was twenty-two years ago, when some giddy goose fell from goodness knows where. He made the most frightful noise that resounded all over the place, and I made four mistakes in my addition..."
JOSIAH SLEPPY

it's a lovely thing, the ing, to be caught up in spinning, smooth processing, progressing, messing with staticity, unconditionally expressing fixedness dead (or testing it)

I take it as a personal motto: “never admit the end”...
and continue

continuing, the neologism
for the twenty-first century,
one I thought of myself,
thank you very much

one figure is the circle
it has been used by bankers
and cavemen alike to
accomplish tasks
and by poets even, to
accomplish tasks
like this one

here is a thought experiment:
let us take ing and I for granted
with these givens, can we guarantee the existence of You?...
continuing, that genius neologism, combining ing and continue, a pure stroke of brilliance, to embody, or incarnate (allowing myself this one pretension), in one breath, the self-presentation of the concept, as of course Derrida shows still I think that you ought to be happy for having to try again for if I said, congratulations, you achieved it, already death has slept in your bed because of the ed

but the ing in congratulations, please be trying again is music to the ears of any self-respecting banker, or caveman

the word is a world, as it is—as it happens, pardon the lapse—and I find that You are the necessary and sufficient conditions, both, for the ing

or, of course, You being the necessary, etc etc

being as we are being academics here, let us examine numbered lists of propositions and see whether they are worth anything
1. never speak about death non-poetically
2. death is not that bad

of course, in hindsight our analysis just must consist of only the fact that these propositions are only eds, just eds, justly being so called, and thus are worth nothing compared to my new neologism word, continuing

the devil is the one who would take life and say, that's a wrap!...and think people listened to him but really they would be reveling in the endless play of my genius ing-word, continuing, disregarding the deadly propositions
Dialogue dedicates this issue to Professor Vande Kopple.

He never did anything for us; instead he showed us how to do it ourselves. All right, that's not fair; he did a whole bunch for us too.

Although he couldn't fit in our office he was a real presence in our efforts here. An activist for publishing student work, he enjoyed Dialogue thoroughly. Our official advisor, but more accurately described as a friend, we navigate strange waters without him to guide us. But Vande Kopple also taught us about the glorious fish that swim alongside us.

We miss him fiercely.
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