



JULY 16-20, 2012

John Carroll University

**YOUNG WRITERS
WORKSHOP**

**Anthology
2012**

Inside cover

Editorial Note

Over the course of the week, your writing probed the past, clarified the present, and held a light in the direction of your futures. I have been impressed by your ability to engage in what Robert Frost calls “serious play”—and you’ve written vividly, nurtured each other’s writing, and asked good questions all week. In the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, “live the questions...Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.” Or as Edgar Lee Masters writes, in his poem “Emily Sparks”:

Work for your soul's sake,
That all the clay of you, all of the dross of you,
May yield to the fire of you,
Till the fire is nothing but light!...
Nothing but light!

Thanks for your work this summer! And thank you to Samantha Syracuse, Maggie Ilersch, and Maureen Ginley, for help in the workshop, and to Anna Hocevar, for her fearless leadership. In gratitude,

Philip Metres
Alissa Nutting

Writers

Andrew Badertscher
Shireen Bhatia
Miranda Clay
Francesca Cominelli
Kirby Davis
Sabrina Downey
Zoe Economos
Katie Everett
Amanda Gaglione
Lena Goren
Ryan Kelley
Alexandria Moore

COOKBOOK OF REVENGE

Andrew Badertscher

I

A fire burns inside a misguided conscience.
Saturate it in Kerosene and add some dry wood.
Then add a spark of “He said... She said...”
And finish it with “but you didn’t hear this from me!”

II

A fine line of perfection is drawn by a boastful hand.
Take an eraser and scrape off what’s there
Add some scribbles to it and rip up the rest.
Take a fable from the Bull’s stable and finish with, “If only I were here sooner.”

III

A fearful ghost lives inside a comforting cloud of Ego
Take it out of its home, put it in a container and shake well.
Place it in a blender until beaten and mix with mirrored words.
Finish with a complimentary cherry dipped in a dark, bitter sauce of sarcasm.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?

Andrew Badertscher

She wasn't targeted, but the bullet found her
Like a lottery ticket winner
With a prize to last for eternity

Before the reign of debris
An answer hung in the air
A gentle answer to a calm yet violent question

A shower of blood would cover the halls
Sawed-off, double barreled shotguns
Can even make a little Columbine bleed

To the question so ill with irony
Came an answer before the bang
She said yes.

A DAY AT HOME

Shireen Bhatia

*Who created death?
And did he also create life: daily bowl
of cereal, and the sound of my dad
making tea in the morning?*

Your cheeks once rich as green
lawns and eyes full of story
are now closed off like blinds on windows.
Your voice like wrinkled linen
soft and caring echoes through my head like
church bells in the morning
now just a memory.

A SPLASH OF PERIL

Shireen Bhatia

Two brothers, Larry and Saul, stood in the kitchen. It was late. However, they both knew that the task had to be done. It was their sister Lily's birthday tomorrow, and they both knew that everything had to be done perfectly or there would be consequences. The sound of crickets could be heard coming from outside. The wind blew gently as if to caress each and every object in the room. Larry was just beginning to gather the baking ingredients as Saul read the instructions.

"Alright. We need two cups of water, three eggs, and one-fourth of a cup of oil. Do you have all of that, Larry?" he said.

"Yeah," Larry said, as he put down the goods. "Ok. Well now what?"

"I'll crack the eggs," Saul said.

"Now hold on just a minute. Who is the cooking expert here?" said Larry.

"You? A cooking expert? More like full of hot air. Larry, let me do it. You'll just cause a mess" said Saul. He took the eggs, cracking each one in an orderly manner, disposing of the egg shells one by one.

Larry stood watching as his brother took his favorite job. When they were younger, every time his mother would make a cake, he would be the one to help her. Not Saul. He watched as his brother poured the mix, the water, and the oil into the bowl. Just as jealousy began to bite at him, Larry decided to take over the situation.

"Here, now that you have finished your job, can I at least blend the mix?" he asked hesitantly.

"Fine, Larry," said Saul as he handed him a whisk. "You can blend it."

Saul looked on as his brother whisked the mix quickly using his "strength." Always showing off. Saul recalled the time where he taught his brother how to

castle in chess, a deathly move that could easily take over the game. Later that same month, when Larry played against their cousin Melinda he used the castle move against her and won the game. Stunned, Melinda asked him how he knew about the move. Larry, soaking up the moment, claimed that it had come from, “years of practice and playing.” He was an absolute show off and Saul could no longer bear to see him take the center stage.

“Larry, I think the batter is ready,” Saul said irritably.

“Yeah just one second. I just want to finish this,” Larry replied, desperately trying to hold onto his time to actually make the cake.

“Enough, Larry. I’ve had it. Give me the batter,” said Saul.

“No! I’ve had it with you trying to take over everything!” Larry responded.

“For goodness sakes, Larry give it up!” exclaimed Saul as he tried to pull the bowl out of his brother’s hands only to find that Larry wouldn’t give it up.

The two brothers continued to pull and tug on the bowl, each desperately trying to win the fight. Trying to prove the other brother that he was the better one. That he was the one destined to win the battle over who would make the cake, and all future battles.

All of a sudden, Larry hit the cabinet as he tried to pull the batter away, but he found his grip slipping, resulting in the batter flying up into the air and landing on both himself and Saul.

“Great. Now look what you’ve done! The cake is ruined,” said Saul.

“Saul, you get to do everything! Just because I’m slightly younger doesn’t mean I can’t ever handle the situation!” Larry fumed.

“Ok. The arguing stops now. What’s more important is-” Saul started to say. However he was interrupted by the sound of a door shutting and the footsteps of their sister.

“So. How are my two brothers doing with my cake?” asked Lily as she walked in the kitchen. Then she saw her batter-clad brothers. Upon seeing them, she dropped her keys with her mouth agape. All three siblings stood in silence. The wind stopped blowing. All that could be heard was the chirping of the crickets outside that even dared to make a sound. It was going to be a perilous night.

BINARY EXERCISE

Miranda Clay

“Look at that.”

“Mmm-hmmm. . .”

“No. Seriously. Just tilt your head, like, ninety degrees towards me.”

“Fine, fine. What am I suppo-”

“Told you.”

“That you did.”

“What is it?”

“Like I have any idea? You’re the one who found it in the first place.”

“I didn’t find it so much as accidentally happened upon it. By accident.”

“Well, then. . .”

“What?”

“Shouldn’t you. . . ya’ know?”

“No, I obviously don’t know.”

“Umm. . . Examine it?”

“Examine it?”

“Or something. Just, go over there and. . .”

“And. . ?”

“I dunno, poke it with a stick.”

“Do what now?”

“Touch it.”

“Do you have **any** idea of what that thing is?”

“Nooooo-pe.”

“So, let me get this straight. You want me to waltz over to this hitherto unknown substance, and *poke* it, even knowing that very bad things could happen if I did-”

“What could happen?”

“Huh?”

“What very bad thing could erupt from. . . whatever *that* is?”

“Are you blind? What does it look like could happen? It could explode or radiate or emit poisonous gases or. . . something!”

“Something?”

“Shut up.”

“It looks like nuthin’.”

“It seems to me to be dangerous. Very dangerous.”

“How can it be dangerous?”

“Are you even looking at it?”

“Yes. . .”

“No one in their right mind goes and pokes something like that. It could be an alien substance, or leakage from one of those nuclear-reactor-thingies, or. . .”

“Oh. Of course. I forgot we had that Little Green Men-endorsed nuclear-reactor-thingy down the street. Silly me.”

“You’re not *listening* to me.”

“For good reason.”

“Well. . . if it’s so **safe**, Mister It’s-a-Right-and-Dandy-Idea-to-Skateboard-down-the-side-of-my-House, why don’t you. . . poke it, or whatnot?”

“With what?”

“Your finger.”

“Fine. Wimp.”

“Am not.”

“Are too!”

“Stalling?”

“I’m going, I’m going.”

“Ewww. . . EW! Gross. . .”

“Aw, grow up. It’s fine.”

“Better you then me.”

“Really? Had no idea from all your squeals.”

“They weren’t *squeals*!”

“Uh- huh. What were they, then?”

“Very. . . um. . .”

“Brave?”

“Yeah. Very brave. . . exhibitions of. . . ummm. . . caution?”

“Just who are you trying to convince?”

“No one! No one needs any convincing, ‘cos there’s nothing to be convi-”

“GAAA-aaaaah! Help. Help! Kate. . . my. . . AAAAAH! it **burns!**”

“Lee? LEE! What’s wrong? Lee? Answer me! Lee, please be okay. Please. I need you. LEE?”

“ . . . ”

“ . . . ”

“What do you mean, you *need* me?”

“**You.** . .asshat!”

“What?”

“Don’t EVER do that to me again!”

“What on God’s green Earth did you call me?”

“It’s all very funny, isn’t it? Pick on poor Kate. Let’s just kill fluffy bunnies and drape them over her bedspread while we’re at it, that won’t seem *sinister!*”

“Ass-what? And what is this about bunnies?”

“It’s not like Kate *cares*, about her friends, God forbid.”

“Can I have license to that ass-whatever you said? ‘Cos that was kinda’ cool. . .”

“Let’s pretend to... STAB each other or something. *That* won’t turn out wrong!”

“What the hell are you talking about women?”

“What are **you** talking about?”

“You’re inventive swears. Where did you hear that one?”

“Oh. Actually. . . Huh. That’s a funny story. See, we were- Lee? Lee? Lee? This isn’t funny anymore. Lee?! You got me once. That’s it. Come on, Lee. . . Come on. You don’t think that I’ll fall for it again, do you? It’s not like I *really* thought that the. . . substance... was poisonous. It *couldn’t* have hurt you. Right Lee? LEE? LEE!? LEE, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD ANSWER ME. . .”

ODE TO A STUTTER

Miranda Clay

Ode to a Stutter

Miranda Clay

I am one with my heart,
and too much in my head,
But my mouth is a home for two.
And as if in return for your friendship,
you took my tongue -- your pink plaything.

Like a petulant child,
keeping me all for yourself.
Tying your toy in knots, halting
my words, drawing distance
between my Old and New.

In return for my lumbering, my laboring,
stumbling along, butchering my words,
and shoving them
back to the safety of our mouth --
masticating my Misery.

WHAT DRAGONS HAVE YOU LEFT TO LOSE Miranda Clay

“It hurts my heart”
Daddy begins, weary as if carrying my mountains.

What hurts my father’s heart?

Hills purple with distance and dusk,
mine for the taking.

Whippoorwills whisper, tell me to: leave
the safety of my porch, move through the tall grass,
climb my mountains.

Hello clever fingers.

Do you haunt my father, too?
When he bemoans his heart, is it you -- creeping

down his throat, slipping
under his ribs,
dancing across his lungs?

Showing him my mountains,
Montani Semper Liberi.
Mountaineers will always be free.

Hello nimble fingers.
Hello cruel, uncaring fingers.

Do you worry a corner of his heart, too?

UNTITLED STORY

Francesca Cominelli

A saleswoman approaches, radiating a fake, wedding happiness.

“Can I help you two ladies today,” she says. The young girl of the pair, Annalee, smiles a bit shyly at the question and replies.

“Um, my wedding is coming up an-” An older woman, her mother Marta, steps in front of the girl.

“Well what other reason would we come to Vera Wang? We’re not going to buy a tractor here are we,” she says.

“I understand what kind of dress is she looking for?” says the saleswoman to Marta.

“We were thinking, princess, lots of tulle and lace and embroidered beads. We want her to shine on her wedding day.” Annalee shifts her feet from side to side and cringes at her mother’s description.

“I mean I don’t want it to be too much. My fiancé Mark wants everything to be so big and flashy. I think that maybe my dress could be a nice understatement,” says Annalee.

Marta throws up her hands in exasperation and says, “Don’t be ridiculous your dress has to match the kind of the wedding you’re having. You can’t walk down the aisle of an extravagant wedding in a boring dress.” She scans the store slowly until she points to a rack filled with ruffles, bows, and lace. “No we’ll take a look at those types of dresses.”

The saleswoman can tell these clients would be...challenging, so to appease the mother she finds a high-necked lace ball gown with capped sleeves and a honeycomb tulle skirt. She scurries off to find a size four, for the tiny bride to be. Shortly after with a frown on her face, Annalee takes tentative steps outside to show her mother the preposterously poufy dress. Marta then stands in excitement.

“Why darling that’s fantastic, exactly what we wanted,” Marta says. Annalee nervously twists the tulle in her hands.

“Well mom I don’t think-” The saleswoman marches over and her eyes wide in shock, but quickly slaps a smile on her face.

“You look wonderful I knew that was the dress,” the saleswoman says

“This really isn’t my thing.”

“It’s not like you would look any better in a meek dress. If anything it’d make you look dull,” her mother counters. Annalee turns away from her mother to sob in her hands. Marta hadn’t seen her cry like this since her Barbie jeep into the garage. She was so scared to tell her mother what had really happen. Marta tries to pat Annalee’s back like she did back then and think of soothing words that feel foreign to her tongue.

“Baby I just want this day to be perfect.”

“I look like a five foot one shrimp that got swallowed in a...in a... vat of cotton candy,” Annalee says.

“No you look beau-” Annalee turns around with a wild look in her eyes successfully cutting her mother off. Her hair is a tangled mess framing her face with wisps of crazy curls. She resorts to her favorite phrase often used in the height of her teenage years.

“Just leave me alone.” With that final statement the runaway bride shoots away from her mother and through the door with a very, very expensive dress hanging from her body. The alarm screams at her to come back and people in black uniform chase her through the streets. Annalee holds the dress up to her knees running past a Starbucks and into the subway. As she leaps down the stairs the tulle of her dress snags on a helpless girl’s sequined top. She grabs onto a man’s briefcase trying to steady her clumsy body, but her efforts prove fruitless. All three people stumble to the bottom of the dirty subway floor and the Vera Wang employees catch up. As her daughter is being dragged back to the store and her dress drags on the street, her mother struts to the cash register.

“We’ll definitely be buying that dress.”

A CONCEPT

Francesca Cominelli

You wrapped your stem around my branch
after the season had already changed
from yellow to orange decaying
to brown.

I held on just as hard because
I thought nothing was closer
than an apple and a tree.

The wind swung you
back and forth
You loved that wind.

I tried to grasp the new concept
of you and me.
The concept of
you, wind and me.

The more the wind swung you,
the more your grip slackened
and I was the only one
holding on.

The wind could move you
In a way I couldn't.
In a way I never wanted to.
The wind moved you until you let go
and fell nestled into the dirt.

I tried to grasp the new concept.
The concept of
you and the wind.
A concept in which
you left me.

OUR LAST NIGHT

Kirby Davis

It's strange to think that after tomorrow, no one on Earth will be alive.

Everyone is coping with the news differently. My parents have been drowning their worries in alcohol, and on one particularly drunken night my father decided to construct an "apocalypse shelter"; that ended with him passed out next to a two-foot-deep hole he managed to dig in the lawn. At least he tried. My sister is in complete denial, refusing to come home from college. My dog seems to be the only one utterly unaffected by the news. Even my goldfish passed on yesterday, though that probably resulted from starvation. Whoops.

I sit in my room now, shivering. Every company in the world has shut down; there hasn't been heat, or water, or mail for days. I wonder where I'll be this time tomorrow night. Will I be swept up in a massive tsunami? Obliterated by the asteroid they're saying could strike either in the Atlantic or the East coast? Or was everybody wrong? Will I be doing the Algebra homework I neglected when news of the impending apocalypse first surfaced?

Suddenly my bedroom door swings open, and my best friend stands in the doorway, panting.

"Pen . . . and . . . paper," she wheezes. When she realizes I am too stunned to move, she rummages through my desk drawers until she finds some herself.

"What are you--"

"The world is going to end tomorrow," Molly interrupts. "Are you ready to die? I'm not." She slides into my desk chair and scribbles furiously across the top of a sheet of notebook paper: *To-Do List*.

"What is that--"

Molly finally takes a deep breath. "This is our to-do list."

"You mean bucket list?"

"There's no need to get morbid." Molly sounds irritated.

"But you just said--"

This time, I stop myself. I've known Molly long enough; I know being her friend is a never-ending ride of contradictions and eccentricity. I'm going to miss her.

"I want to go to a high school party." My purple gel pen scrawls swiftly over the page.

"What about that band party last weekend?"

Molly scoffs. "A real party, Christina." Clearly she feels rushed; otherwise

I'd receive a lecture on the importance of my social image and how I wrongfully neglect it.

"What do you want to do?" She asks.

"I want to go cliff-diving." It is the first thing that comes to mind. We live in Massachusetts, a five-minutes' walk from a rocky bluff overlooking the Atlantic. Jumping off those rocks have become more a rite of passage in Oakwood than a dare. I've always been too afraid to do it, but suddenly cliff-diving doesn't seem quite so frightening.

"Let's go," Molly declares, leaping up out of my chair.

She never ceases to perplex me.

The thought of my parents crosses my mind. It is fleeting, though, because they're probably so drunk they won't remember my name. Staying with them would be no different than being alone.

"There's got to be a party going on somewhere. And bring a change of clothes." She grins. "We're going cliff-diving."

I want to correct her, tell her there's no party going on the day before the world ends. People aren't celebrating their imminent deaths, and if we cliff-dive tonight we'll probably contract hypothermia. But I don't. Instead, I collect a change of clothes and follow my best friend out the door as she gleefully says we'll add to the list on the way.

This is my way of coping with it, I think. I am not in denial, I am not avoiding it. I am going to enjoy what time I have left.

ODE TO A STAGE LIGHT

Sabrina Downey

In the dark,
In the cold,
Mole-blind, I'm aware of shapes
In the darkness beyond me:
Allies moving, holding their breaths.
I blink, trying to see
Where sight is not an option.
"Hold!"
Comes the call and I am blinded
Encased in a pillar of light
By the flip of a switch.
"Don't move!" when I raise a hand to shield my dazzled eyes
And so I stand
Frozen, yet boiled alive
Offered up as a human sacrifice
Upon the altar of Great Art.
Green and red shades flicker above,
Illuminating corners of my little world.
I narrow my eyes against the glare.
Orders barked, suggestions made-
Other lights are adjusted.
Standing onstage beneath a personal spotlight-
This seems easy
To an audience unaware of the droplet of perspiration
Exploring a neck that is stiff with the effort
Of supporting a headful
Of pinned-up, slicked-back hair
And words to fill pages.
Directors know, but have no concern
For the torment of this Christmas-colored furnace.
It is theirs to observe
And ours to withstand.
The ruby-red hue upon me
Tells the audience that I am in love

Before I have even begun to speak.
That's no small burden-the challenge of living up to the light
To match its radiance with your own blinding power.
"Start the second speech!"
The light follows me as I move,
And from my movement, my words, my appearance
And my light
I transform into a character
Far larger than life.
My shadow dances along the floor, cast
By my fierce companion
Glowing just above me
My ally against the crushing darkness
When the house lights
Go out.

Her shoes matched the delicately blushing rosebuds of her cheeks on that bright, warm day when promise hung in the air and hope tangled its light fingers in the bouncing curls of her ponytail. Her leotard was taut, her skirt was tied, her tights were straight, and there was a smile on her face as she took her place at the barre.

“You have such marvelous potential.” Madame murmured, watching with a critical eye as she plied and stretched her legs. Cold, calculating eyes traveled from the new shoes to the eager face, the bright eyes. “You might be the best in the class, *ma petite*. I hope that you are prepared to work harder than you ever have in your life.”

She nodded earnestly, ribbons wafting through the cool air, but she wondered at the teacher’s words. She was already the best, it was plain to see. She could dance better than any of the others already. Why would she need to work so hard?

Dipping her head over her extended right arm, she peeked at her reflection in the mirror and smiled with pride as her gaze fell upon the gentle, soft pink of her beloved shoes. Her mother was whispering to another mother where they both lingered in the hallway, reluctant to tear their gazes from the small studio, and the words were easily recognizable. “She’s been dancing for years already-just look at my little Alice! She’ll be magnificent; just you wait and see.”

She pointed her toe and beamed delightedly as Madame nodded her approval.

With such immense support behind, how could she fail? She was the best in the class on her very first day at the American Ballet Academy and her joy was complete.

A sticky coating of perspiration had accumulated along her little body by the time four o’clock came, sticking her tunic to her back, bedraggling her once-lustrous curls, and tugging at her ribbons until they hung limply. Her delight had waned until her spirits were as low as the weary ribbons, tired of fighting to remain buoyant. She was so tired that the polished wooden floor seemed as inviting as a feather-stuffed pillow and, trudging down the hallway, pulling her bag behind her, she wanted nothing more than to crawl into her mother’s arms and fall asleep for all eternity. She joined the seven other first-graders waiting for their parents at the front door and slid down the wall to sit and rest her

throbbing feet. Her very bones seemed too heavy, as though filled with liquid heat instead of marrow, and she couldn't fathom the reason for her weariness.

Her head was spared the aching effort of puzzling over the matter when, through the blur of exhaustion, she noticed the collective attention fixated upon the practice room across the hall.

The young woman inside was a vision of stoic black and soft pink, spinning gracefully across the floor with long and strong legs, her head and arms graceful and infinitely gentle. She seemed so perfect, so close to heaven, that the little girl assumed these attributes to be the product of age—after all, this beautiful, poised dancer was at least sixteen!

The whirling feet came to a rest and in the mirror, one pair of eyes met another. Alice shivered as the dancer offered a smile before rising to her toes and setting herself in motion again, like a dancer on a music box. Why, the little girl wondered, was she doing the same move over and over again when it was already perfect?

The tapping of high heels announced the brisk, practical presence of Madame and the spell placed upon the little dancers was broken by her intimidating countenance. They turned away, searching through their lunchboxes for crumbs to satisfy the aching in their bellies or pressing the noses against the glass in search of their mothers. Alice watched as Madame reached for the handle of the door and the young dancer inside transformed a pirouette into a respectful curtsy, listening to hear the words of the teacher before glancing at the clock and nodding. Slinging a bulging bag over her shoulder, she walked from the room on her pointed toes, her back straight.

Alice shuffled a few infinitesimal inches down the wall as the fallen angel folded her long legs and slid to a seat on the floor, recognizing her with a smile.

Madame knelt beside her, one arm around the thin shoulders, and gestured between the two artists. “*Ma petite* is one of our first-grade dancers. Little one, gaze upon the greatest dancer in this company.”

A smile of pride crossed the older girl's face as Alice's eyes widened with awe and she blinked several times, confused. If Madame said so, it must be true—but this was not how a ballet dancer looked, surely! The best dancer in the company was a long, lean body dripping with perspiration, the muscles bunching and shining with moisture. She leaned forward, running a hand down one infinitely long leg, and tugged at the ribbons of her soft pink pointe shoes, the stiff toe of which brushed the soft pad of Alice's soft shoes in exactly the same shade. A tiny

foot encased in pink tights was withdrawn and the filmy fabric was peeled away to reveal angry red beneath the gentle pink. Blood had dried, rust-red, on the feet, or ran in scarlet trails between the toes from splits in the skin borne of hours of endless work. A blister on the big toe had burst open and the girl's jaw clamped tightly shut as she bent her knee to cradle the foot in two hands like a helpless infant.

"Working as hard as ever, I see." Madame squeezed the girl's shoulder before rising and continuing down the hallway. A smile of gratitude for the recognition crossed the girl's face even as a tear slid down her cheek and she wrapped her hands protectively around the battered toes.

"My God."

Alice looked up to see her mother staring in horror at the blood running down the dancer's hand. Frozen in horror, she groped for Alice and pulled her to her feet. "Stop staring," she hissed, her voice cracking. "Go-just go."

Alice stumbled, trying to reach her bag as her mother tugged at her.

"It's not something to hide," came the voice of the young dancer as she reached to free her other foot from bondage. The sour tang of blood invaded the hallway, trickles of the liquid spilling from her shoe. "She should know the price that must be paid in order to be the best."

UNTIL YOU STOPPED MY FLOW

Zoe Economos

#1

beep

I'm not trying to make you angry.
Please,
remember when I said your breasts were
the size of galaxies?

I'm trying to make you open up.

I could've been your racing partner.
I could've been the peas to your...
You know,
our inside joke?
Oh well, Ariadne.

Call me.

click

#2

beep

Ariadne.
I can't make myself
get out of bed.
It feels like you.

Whatever.
There, I said it.
I've loved you from the moment...
Hey,
Do you still have that bruise from my hand?

I suppose this is what you've been-

click

#3

beep

(damn it, I was cut off)

Anyway,

what you've been talking about

Always wanting someone to be

wonderfully engrossed

in you.

You know,

I was never that interested

in you

until you stopped my flow.

click

#4

beep

No! No! No!

You can't escape me, darlin',

and

I'm vivacious

and

I can't escape drinking you

and

am I boring you?

and

well, I was just horny

and

wondering if you wanted to sit

you know
on my lap
and
I was also thinking that...
that
Peace, it doesn't.
Mean.
Shit.

click

UNIVERSALLY IMMUNE

A slightly jarring mass of stardust by:
Zoe Economos

“We are all little travelers. When it is time for us to leave, we exit from one world and enter a new one, etcetera. You’re my little traveler.”-Nicholas Economos

“I hate you.”- Zoe Economos

“I love you. I love you unconditionally.

*I love you to the ends of the earth and beyond forever
and always. I guess you can’t tell right now.”-Mandy Economos*

“Note to self: Must love everyone visibly.”-Gus Constantine Economos

*I love you all. No visible displays needed. I thank you. This book is dedicated to you all,
my family.*

Prologue

1972

There was little to be said that had not been said before about the blue skies and the hurried look of the trees as they flew by. Alice looked at them, surrounded by a metal coffin of cacophony, sedentary in a flowing vein of life. A large amount of invasive noises made by the wind that came rushing through the small crack in the space between the backseat window and car frame made her slowly grow deaf. She turned away from the vicious pounding sound, filled with tears and salivating with the promise of release in the form of an emptying of a bladder. As her delicate worn-down callouses scraped against her ribs, her breathing grew shallow. She slumped in her seat, breathing in and out with as much force as one could have used in that simple task needed for life.

Everyone was startled by the sounds emitted from the back. They turned around. Mother and Father were talking only briefly about the reflection that their faces made in the windshield, a fleeting image in the midst of the ones that had already been talked about. Sister was sitting next to Alice, absentmindedly touching the worn pages of the journal that someone had given her in a moment of hurried abandon. They were only a few seconds too late.

By then, Alice had only muttered one utterance, “Here.” She rolled her eyes above her head to deliver a terrible ripping puff of air, and had slowly began her journey elsewhere. On foot of course, she carried her body across the plane, her socks in one hand and her shoes in the other. The veins in her wrists, having been cut off of all oxygen as she lay on the floor of the car, stood out like blue rivers against areas of land covered in white sand.

Swerve, dash, trip, fall.

Mother screamed.

“My baby! Shall we stop the car?”

Father wiped beneath his glasses, preparing himself for the burial. Shaking her knee gently, he whispered:

“If only you were here, my gently dying mound of feathers. If only you could be here with my baby.”

Sister was still in her trance, blood now marring her pages with red. She was always the dying bird. That was never inherited; just shown.

The dying bird’s mind was gone.

Alice looked, found, came, conquered. She looked from everywhere at once, as if she was a million little ladybugs placed all over the world, with the same line of vision. She had learned this in kindergarten, but only slightly. Through playing with the blocks she had come up with a way to shorten her life and extend her demise.

Chapter One: Breathy Motions

2004

I have always been fascinated by the physical manifestation of emotion, the internal (or perhaps external) hum of the universe made semi-tangible through mechanical processing. When I was little, my father would do a seasonal experiment for me. His rough hands would cut two rectangular pieces of plywood. Wrapping worm-like wires around the now cross-shaped mechanism. Placing it in a field, the sun handing down its rays in a blind show of affection, as birds stared at it quizzically with their beady eyes, filled with wonder and excitement at the idea of a long, skinny worm, never-ending. This copper wire cross would sit in the field, connected to an amplifier. My father and I would lie in the grass, his large hand enfolding my small one, listening to the hum of the galaxies, the occasional meteor shower, or the moon's breathy motions. I felt so connected to myself then, feeling me as a small babe, wrapped snugly in the chasms of a black hole, a shooting star. I was lying in wheat, cattails, and long grass, listening to the mechanical representation of the universe.

My father would later (it seemed endlessly later, millions instead of a couple of years) come home from work, after having kissed me goodbye all those years ago, his whiskers scratching the dimple of my cheek. He would have a harrowed look about him, still quizzically bird-like, but with a weary taint.

That all changed with the seasons themselves. Soon, he was gone. He left with his plywood, his crosses, and his wire. With him went a sense of wonder that had always plagued and blessed me. I no longer was interested in the moon's reflected breath. I sat in the middle of my field, our field, hands over my ears, cold biting into my elbows, eyes shut, not speaking, no longer laughing. It was night as I moved slowly into darkness, realizing that there was nothing that I could do to stop the beauty and the terror from slipping from my organs and veins.

I became blind, deaf and mute.

Not by my own devices, as you would most probably like to think but by the intense external circumstances that sickened me, poisoned my insides, then my outsides. My mother, now no longer the shining moon that I had always adored, a marble statue, was the distantly glimmering star, sick and not caring to implode.

That weary taint was the only thing left in the living room from his smoke and formaldehyde-like drink, and my mother clung to it. She would sit in the living room, deaf in a way that was possible to me, the silent mouse, and the moon's vibrations, drinking the formaldehyde. She never knew that in a moment she would be lying waist deep in a pool of her own vomit; she never knew much at all.

My total incapacitation left me lying on my bed, feeling the quilted edge of my pillow. I was a hairless mole rat, moving amongst the dark beauty of my own imagination. My life flashed before me, like a memory once forgotten, but now would never be again. I hoped that one day I could hear music. Hear the vibrations. I realized how little I loved my parents when I could see them, how much I loved them now, and how little the sound of my life meant when I thought that my parents no longer loved me. My love made me shiver, and then burn. Lay down with me, said God, said the Universe.

I clung to my realization that there was something to be explored in lack of sight, hearing and talking. I realized that nothing that would be put in my mouth would be mundane; in fact, nothing would be mundane. My anger, as though a defeated samurai, had retreated to the dark gluttonous caves in the back of my brain. I loved the possibility of my own life flashing before my inner eyes. It helped me to grow into a different being, a sightless wonder. The crosses flashed in front of me; I became a born-again. Of course, no one could listen to me shout my praise to the Lord. Shouting praises was overrated anyway. I was a silent preacher.

MIRROR IMAGES

Katie Everett

Two stars spiraling
Following the same celestial path
Laughter melding so perfectly
We heard a single voice
Lying together on cool, green grass
Telling a story neither of us knew
We built entire worlds around words
That fell from our lips like coals
Burning with thralls of fancy
Sisters in everything but blood
We walked a lone stride
Toe matching toe
Arms swinging in sync
Mirror images of the other
Tears fell like sparks
From a dying, flickering fire
When we parted
Now two seeds sown from distance
I found myself gazing
At a stranger I could never know
Our friendship scattering like ashes

TRAFFIC JAM

Katie Everett

Lines of whining bright
Lights littering tar-boiled trails
Ramming, jamming impatience
Spreads lead-filled grimaces
Wishing withered tires to turn
Steering wheels strangled
Gear- shifts gutted
Cruelly fooling the driver
Into believing he is in control
I wonder with this thunder
Of roiling, revving engines
When we will be free
To roam the realm of roads
To ports unknown

SIGHT/BLINDNESS

Katie Everett

I was born Theresa Juliet Halestrom among the hustle and bustle of an otherwise average day in the grand city of New York. Sights, sounds, and smells were all so potent in a city of such character that I was often overcome with the vast amount of information. As a child I watched with wide eyes at the beggar on the street hollering in a drunken rage for money, his eyes red and unfocused, his clothing ragged and stained. I drank in the smell of freshly brewed coffee just down the street from our apartment and choked occasionally on the acrid stench of exhaust from many cars. At night the city noises comforted me with the low buzz of honking cars and people's calls which wafted in through my open window. While those memories faded with my lost vision, there was one that I never remembered with anything but perfect clarity.

I was sixteen, coming home from a party where people drank upon bottles of beer and where sense and reason were regarded as unnecessary. I shouldn't have gotten in the car, should have known better, but I have long since ceased the barrage of 'what ifs and whys' knowing they will only drive me to madness. I remember the driver, drunk and stupid, went through a red light and, testing fate, lost. A semi hit us head on, crushing the little car as easily as a child might crush an empty can of soda. I was sober enough to see the truck coming, to notice the bright lights tearing toward us, but called out a warning too late. I stared out the window, scarcely believing what was in front of me.

I remember the white truck, the flashy red logo on the side appearing as a splash of blood to my eyes. I remember the man behind the wheel, Jim Clayborne as I later found out, looking terrified with his mouth in a silent scream and his big eyes popping. I remember the way the red light stretched over the car, enveloping us in a red haze of confusion as the truck rammed into the side. I remember the last thing I saw, hunched down as though to protect myself, were the scuffed and dirt-encrusted red converse I had so carefully picked out for the occasion; they were my favorite pair. I woke up bloodied and bruised, but alive, but none of that mattered as I screamed, "I can't see!"

My first months were spent in terror of everything and everyone. I flinched at the slightest noise and jumped at the slightest touch. I felt my way along every hallway, through every room, like an old man, hunched over and unsteady. I was always in the dark and I had no candle to light my way. As the years passed me

by I realized with a cold horror that I was slowly forgetting what it was like to see. Faces and houses I had memorized perfectly, now faded to dull wisps of recognition, ghosts of their former glory. There was only one person who could wave away my fears like dust before a fan.

Ten years and seventeen surgeries had passed me by. The doctor entered my room and I felt Jason's hand squeeze mine gently, saying everything I needed in that small gesture. I could tell through every step the doctor took exactly where he was in the room as he approached my bed. His hands smelled like hospital, like plastic, disinfectant, and sickness, but he was here to save me. "Let's take those bandages off now, shall we?" I nodded, my mouth dry and my heart racing with fear and excitement.

Slowly the coarse bandages fell from my face and trembling, I opened my eyes. For a moment I looked upon the utter blackness that had dominated my life for so long and I feared that the surgery had failed. However soon the darkness fell away to be replaced by blurry images that morphed into shapes and colors. I could suddenly see the grey walls and ceiling, the ordinary and boring adornings of a hospital room. I could see the sunlight flooding through the open window and my eyes streamed at the brightness.

However I didn't care about the room, or even the light, which were all I had sought for so many years. All I could look at was my hand intertwined with Jason's. My small, slight hand covered in scars from my years in the dark and his long, thin fingers wrapped tenderly around mine, my anchor in a raging storm. It was a simple and mundane sight, two hands clasped together, but in that moment it was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen.

THREAD AND OYSTER SHELLS

Amanda Gaglione

It was a blue dress,
turquoise I think,
paired with
a string of bulbous pearls.

The dress was cumbersome,
its pleats a little heavy,
its waist a little tight.
I always wanted to unzip it.

When I did though
shed the petaled dress
that snagged the pearls,
a childish part of me saddened.

Fabric pooled at my ankles,
ivory orbs finding room corners to hide in.
The bust of the dress sat stiffly upright
in a sad attempt to cling to my calves.

The zipper flayed open
and brushed my skin as I stepped out.
My heels dimpled when stay pearls
stuck to the bottoms of my feet.

The dress was given to a bargain shop,
the pearls swept away by hard bristled brooms.
I gently rolled the last pearl between two fingers
as if it would crumble at my touch.

I wondered of the loss
and whether it mattered at all.

It seems like she never blinks. The woman in the corner of the room. Her eyes roam the faces of Her peers as if She can understand them just by staring.

“Dolly dolly, name her Molly,” She once said, head lolled to one side. Her crystal eyes stared forward with the most appalling emptiness. She sings, always of the nurses. Molly is the youngest and She says that Molly looks like a doll.

“Porcelain dolls are fragile you know. You might want to assure that you don’t break on accident,” She told her.

I wrap my arm behind Her back, feeling vertebrae against my skin. I tell Her that it’s time for washing.

“I know your nightmare, you know,” She says, neck bowed down, chin on her collarbone. Her voice takes on an eerie singsong tone.

I sigh and move Her thin legs into place on the wheelchair. “What’s it about then?”

“You,” She says, eyes roll furiously in their sockets. Disjointed marbles.

“And what exactly happens?” I ask, only half paying attention.

“Knives,” She says. Tendrils of oily blonde hair cover Her eyes but I watch their fevered motions when I spin Her chair towards me.

“Excuse me?” I ask, a little fearful.

“When you were a baby you dreamed of knives. Your mother’s knives,” She says, humming when She is finished. Her pallid irises shake.

She is not wrong. I used to wake to my own screaming and, sometimes, to blood on my pillows. I feared my mother’s insanity so much that, out of a dreamer’s horror, I would pierce my own skin with my nails.

“Charlotte Charlotte, sweet Charlotte,” She crows. For the first time since She has been in the mental ward, She centers Her taut head on Her neck. Her eyes stop shaking and, after a long blink, She looks straight at me.

“Charlotte Charlotte, dressed in scarlet,” She sings, eyes blinking rapidly.

Before I can breathe or ask questions, I feel warmth between my collarbones. I look down and watch wine colored liquid dilate from the center of my chest. Pain hollows my lungs and I make horrible breathy sounds as the serrated knife pushes so deep that I watch its glinting tip emerge from my chest.

“Mother always loved me better,” She says from Her wheelchair.

The last things I see are Her eyes once again roving the room. The last I hear is my mother’s sweet kiss upon her favorite daughter’s forehead.

SALT SOAKED SKY

Lena Goren

His palpable pain
Heartbreak rings
Sings through the six strings strumming,
Knock-knock-knocking between chords.

My ear presses the grass
Blades blur with tears
The crack in his warble,
Tearing,
Down to my heart.

Though it is his spirit to lift
The salt gilded gift,
Raising us with each note,
“Don’t leave me high, don’t leave me dry.”

He soaks us all,
Pain peeling away
Layers and layers of heartache,
And hurt,
Breaking under endless blue.

The moment now past
Going our ways,
Temporary indents,
Bodies carrying
The spring grass scent.

“Eat your peas honey,” Mom encouraged, pushing the bowl towards me.

“I don’t like peas; I never have, never will,” I replied, pushing them back across the table. “Please pass the parmesan.”

“You *love* peas,” My mother said, her voice more strained than the first time. “And you *hate* cheese of all sorts.”

“Oh Circe, please,” Said Narcissus, “The boy is just trying to be like his father. Isn’t that right Hermes?” my father put in, gazing at his reflection in his spoon, flipping it back and forth to master both the upside and downside angles.

“Narci, chew with your mouth closed please, and Hermes, don’t put your silverware down like that unless you’re finished. Oh and you’ve got a little something.” She reached across the table, licking her napkin to wipe the spaghetti sauce from my face, but I swatted it away quickly.

“Mom, that’s not sauce, I cut myself shaving this morning and it just reopened.” The pointless lie drew a smirk across my face, but for once, she bought it.

“Oh look at my big boy, all grown up and shaving. Do you need more shaving cream then? A new razor? What brand do you like? I’ll make sure to take care of everything, and I’ll even drive you to school tomorrow,” my mother’s excitement to control my life may seem sweet from an outsider’s perspective, but from here it was just suffocating. She insisted on driving me every single day for the past two years, and so far I have avoided it all but three times.

“No mom you don’t have to do that, Bacchus is having a party after school and so Ares is gonna drive me tomorrow.” That part was true. One could not survive off lies alone, and I was not about to let my mom drive me to the wildest party of the year. Plus, I had convinced the entire school that my parents had disappeared years ago on an expedition to Antarctica, and that it was my life’s dream to become a professional explorer and find them. That was the first lie that ever really got me somewhere with a girl, and that Hecate sure knew how to party. My father, who was clearly not in Antarctica, was still gazing into the tiny spoon, searching for any miniscule cuts that might mar his perfect complexion.

“Circe darling, do you see that?” He pointed to his face, presumably at some birthmark or other imperfection, invisible to the rest of the world. It was probably one of those ‘infected pores’ I warned him about weeks ago.

“See what? Are you bleeding? Do you need to go to the hospital? I have a basic medical training. We’ll patch it up right away.” Mother rose from her seat and started buzzing around the room like a crazed bumblebee at one hundred miles an hour.

My father sighed, “You’re right dear, we should have this checked out immediately by a professional. I’m going straight to the hospital; it could be one of those infected pores I heard about. They say that they can lead to an unnatural decrease in male hormones.” My father’s voice raised an octave as he checked his reflection in every mirror from the dining room to the front door. There were quite a lot of them.

“Um, I’m finished too. Thanks for dinner mom,” I said, hurriedly placing my silverware in the aforementioned position and rushing up the stairs. I could hardly wait to go on Chat-Roulette and tell people about my horribly depressing and nonexistent problems.

AN ODE TO FAITH

Ryan Kelley

You were there before memories
in the mornings before meals
Then in my misanthropic moment
you left a hole, gaping and growing

Outspoken, not outsmarted
Bravery I found
I spat acidic sounds,
waded in waves

Oh pious pirate, Oh lying Light
Spilling untrue Truth
Apart, I cross the sea
Cursing your anchored Way

Yet you crown the others
Glory sung at the grave
When they can me up
will you show your face?

A STRANGER IN THE DARK

Ryan Kelley

The New World

When the Jefferson Shire stepped off of the boat and on to the crudely constructed peer, he was in awe. Everything his senses took in was new and exciting. The shape of the distant foliage, the off-putting but alluring odors, and the chirping of some sure-to-be exotic fowls, were all welcoming him. Jefferson inhaled, letting the fresh air swim around his insides. Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Before Jefferson could complete his turn, a man dropped a shovel and a rifle into his arms. The man pointed down towards the tree line, where Jefferson's fellow passengers were marching into the greenery.

A camp (or what would have to do as a camp) was built about four kilometers into the woods. Small effigies were built to honor the promise of the land, the covenant of Henry, and in hopes of New England's prosperity. While the other men slept, Jefferson sat by his smoking twigs, chewing on plans for the future.

Two winters dragged by slowly for Jefferson Shire and the men of *The Tudor*. Since they had arrived, two kilometers of the towering tress had been cleared, and from the lumber; they erected two barracks for housing. If you asked Lord Owen, the tentative homes were magnificent testaments to the will of the glorious Englishman. If asked Jefferson Shire, they were over-packed cabins with leaking roofs. Lord Owen had only been inside one of the barracks to inspect on the day of completion. On that day, he made a fine speech on the Divine Right of the Crown. That night (along with all other nights) Lord Owen slept in his quarters aboard *The Tudor*.

The Wild

Jefferson eventually grew tired of the snail-like days at the barracks. One night, he crept off to the woods, searching perhaps for a place to defect or take solace. This was the first time Jefferson saw an Indian. He screamed. The small boy, garnished in feathers and hessian screamed right back. Jefferson did not know what to make of the shadowy specter. The two were alone in the woods, far from the alien camp and aboriginal homes. The sun had long since set so; Jefferson took steps towards the boy to examine him. The closer Jefferson came, the more demonic the bird-boy appeared to him. With each step Jefferson took, his breaths grew deeper and his heart ravaged against his chest. As Jefferson

leaned down to meet the eyes of the strange, quill-headed boy, he was sure his heart would fail him. In the small moments before their eyes were even, Jefferson realized he had no idea what was about to happen. Such a realization only made his inhales more intense. In the fleeting seconds that the man and boy became equal, Jefferson resorted to his primal instinct. He lunged, pinned, grappled, snarled- until finally, he squeezed.

In a transcendent calm and complete silence, Jefferson Shire returned to the barracks. For a moment he considered canning himself up among his fellow Englishmen. No, he thought, tonight I will sleep with dignity.

Divine Right

Owen had not slept all night. Earlier that day, his lieutenant delivered grave news; *The Tudor* and her men had settled over two-hundred kilometers away from where they were meant to be. Two years had been wasted here. With a deep sigh, Owen made his way over to the old, mahogany liquor cabinet. He reached to crack open the door. Suddenly he heard shouts, then a calamity reminiscent of falling timber.

A wild-eyed settler burst into the quarters with a rifle in hand.

Powerless

The shovel and rifle formed a weak tripod, propped against a tree. The work had been quick and sloppy, but soon Jefferson's job would be complete. The boy was easy enough to get into a hole; his tiny body might have been sleeping. However, Owen's body was oozing and purple still. Jefferson threw him beside the boy with a roll and a heave. Now to bury and then sleep at last, thought Jefferson.

As the sun rose Jefferson returned the final scoop of earth. The grave was crude and unholy. Jefferson dropped his shovel, and slunk down against his tree, chewing on plans for the future.

ODE TO A SHORTENED TEMPER

Alexandria Moore

You are the fuse to my atomic casing.
Go ahead, hiss your way closer,
my fearless friend.
Spark on,
so I can offer my glorious display.
All for you,
my daring darling.

If we're a match, our bond is the lighter,
and on-lookers "ooh" and "ahh,"
enlightened by our volatility,
our volcanic presence.
Kindle the flame,
my perilous paramour,
let's fuel coals to outlive the fire.
Please, keep on striking until I ignite,
my lawless love.
I want to show you how I burn.

BLACK TIE EVENT

Alexandria Moore

Why wear black?

Why must this morning's mourning
suffer from monochromatic sludge,
the kind that films over your panty-hoed, tip-toe heels?

Why this empty relic,
ancient dress code,
arcane offering
towards the dead, for the living?

Your soles are worn like worn down souls,
Which ache then numb,
pain to return later,
demanding an audience
who will applaud their catharsis,
celebrate their woes.

The noise will fade
But you will remain,
And resonate and euphonize
the bravado of being.
Why hide masked in black?

Rain falls for you,
no interest in the dead,
so why cower beneath your gauzy umbrella?
Mascara-stained cheeks could use
its caressing touch
and cleansing torrents.

Unveiled grief wears no glossy shell,
but thrums bass chords
in plucked hearts.
Why come at all if you dress in black?

Haven't you seen enough darkness?
Aren't you ready for the light?

Arabica. She was named after the fermented beans that grinded their lives. It was cruel to name her after something so greatly despised, but life was cruel, and if she knew that from the start, she might learn quickly to accept it the same way they accepted rain in a drought- fervently and fleetingly. The name wasn't of their own culture, it was a dirty word passed down from the hands of a few, by those who drank in American and French and Italian words and spit them out as cusses. They collected some – *altura, sumpremo, excelso, robusta, beneficio* – and they all rang softly, hinted at false beauty. But *Arabica* was more potent than the rest. In each lilting syllable a hint of their stories unwound. Somewhere in it was their own culture, somewhere under the hard, foreign shell were the stories of their people. And so it claimed her.

Arabica was a child of the fields and factories, of poverty and bounty. She was clawed at by the needy and greedy. There were songs about this, and they were chanted at her for years until finally a time came when she understood them and felt how warped her world was. It existed as a bowed spectrum, straining against the pressure. Both ends touched her, but only half belonged to her. She thought about it often, and every time it enraged her. She felt it in her calluses, like an ugly scar that wore her.

Her mother told her how ugly it was to be so hateful so young. She would try to rub the calluses away, singing of stars, and owls, and often of love, and for a while the strain would slacken. The twinkling stars, the hooting owls, the beating hearts- they silenced the rest and sunk in deep, resonating years after the notes were last sung.

She blanketed herself in these songs, yet there was no fabric that could sustain such severity. Her mind frayed, seams split, stripping her of naivety, of innocence. She and her mama sewed patches with bright, new fabrics that faded quickly, bleached by the sun in the scorched fields. All around her, burnt remnants were all that survived.

Once, the sky broke. It drenched her dusty hair and blistered hands, rich wells swamping the fields, abundance pooling at her feet, trickling through her toes.

“Arabica, Arabica, Arabica!” Her mama called to her from across the field, and together they danced to all the songs they had ever sung. Notes splashed,

words dripped, and Arabica swelled with new lyrics, more beautiful than any others.

“My mama, my mama, my mama’s my own,” she sang, the words more cool and refreshing than the rain.

Her mama took her hands, as if to wash away her calluses.