



The Kiosk

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

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CREATIVE WRITING AWARD WINNERS

First Place	"The Wasteland" y Chris Marnach
Second Placeby	"Raygun" Amanda Prince
Third Place	. "The Butterfly" by Camie Shuff

Honorable Mention

"how to dump a useless man" by Amanda Prince

ABOUT THIS YEAR'S JUDGE

Lisa Sandlin has published two short story collections, *The Famous Thing about Death* and, in 1997, *Message to the Nurse of Dreams*, which won the Texas Institute of Letters' Best Book of Fiction for that year. Her work has appeared in *Southwest Review, Shenandoah, Crazyhourse, StoryQuarterly, The New York Times Book Review*, and elsewhere, and been featured on audio-cassette as part of the Dallas Museum of Art's "Texas-Bound" series. Originally from Texas, she now lives in Nebraska and teaches at Wayne State College.

All entries are judged blindly by the editors, and no entry receives special consideration. Editors are eligible for the contest; however, they are not eligible for the prize money.

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Part I

"Somewhere along the line I knew there would be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line I knew the pearl would be handed to me"

> Jack Kerouac On the Road

Heather Buckingham

The Road More Traveled

Time tick-tocking away Life: intangible, unstoppable a Dali picture eroding in a modern museum hours of moves seconds at stop-signs waiting writing checks somebody else's story days spinning slowly the alarm deep down inside me and inside you is going to erupt spilling out in one great rush all the pent-up pieces of poetry the split-seconds that we miss every day the only way to catch time is to listen for the silent words the unspoken living aging Rembrandt's self-portrait passing we stop time when we invent

Jessica Wheeler

Blue

The night had that it's-gonna-rain feeling. You could sense it dripping off the trees, rolling off the tongues of stars that cast a glance every so often through the clouds. The sky wasn't so much black as it was violet-blue a cool kinda blue that soaks into your skin and makes you feel so good you ache with it. And the air turned chill, but it was okay cause it only meant it had that feeling, too. Everything smelled so sweet, no one ever told you it could be so sweet, and there's really no smell there at all just a feeling a cool breeze lifting the hair from the sweat on the back of your neck, and everything's moving filling you with that sweet smell, that violet-blue a cool kinda blue, and that ache, that it's-gonna-rain feeling.

Megan Lindsay

driving east

the sun setting in the rear view mirror

on a desolate stretch of 680 between Council Bluffs and the 80 interchange to Des Moines

the combined cornstalks glowing golden in fields organized by barbed wire fences

the highway ahead a clear stretch over slow asphalt hills

the sun melting on the Iowa-Nebraska border

conversing softly in the dim about being lonely and in love the day turning to dusk, to evening, and finally to night

keeping my eyes on the road and aiming somewhere east

Chris Marnach

In a Coffin

In a coffin, a house, a chair by a window where the sun shines in like the headlights of a car, she sits in self-exiled solitude, the door a coffin lid she nailed down herself.

Outside the window, across the street, school yard just reopened, the children laugh and shout and shriek as they play in the falling leaves leaves falling falling like the night she was walking and the headlights slowed and she went faster and the lights stopped and died under the streetlight and the tree and he was out and she ran and he by her hair and she and he on the ground and her nails digging and the leaves falling and Oh God the knife and

In the fifth fall she sits in the coffin, in the house, in the chair lit by the headlights of the sun. Her fingers run over the faint pink line on her throat, the frown he gave her, the coffin she built, the days and the nights she knew he would be waiting outside the coffin, the house, for her and he'd make that frown smile wide and red.

It is the day the phone tells her that her mother is sick and will die. It's been five falls since the last sight of her mother's house. The smoke of burning leaves drifts in through the windows. She has to go see her, Momma I have to see you once before you, the exhale and the incense and the coffin, this goddamn coffin, I can't but have to. She stands with her mother's face in her eyes. She goes to the door, turns the handle, shaking, the nails fly from the coffin lid, turning, I'm doing it, turning, the burning leaves, turning and open and the sun bright and warm and the wind blows in the leaves: they hit her in the face like his hands. Momma's face is gone and he's there waiting behind the tree, in the parked car, in the neighbor's house, in her house, in her, and she slams the door shut, she falls like a leaf to the floor and hammers the nails back into the coffin lid.

Camie Shuff

Still Smoking

whoever said cracks will break your mother's back, any way?

if anything if anything at all it breaks my back it breaks my back following each step you take

you keep on walking like everything's gonna be okay like everything's gonna be all right well, it's not and I'm not and I'm not gonna follow you anymore

you're leaving you say you're gonna go to California to sing in a band, to live life like you have one or something like that

you always have these ideas these dreams these ways to make me feel gray and lost even though I'm right here

with you, following you

you're gonna leave you're gonna sing you're gonna be happy and you're gonna do every damn thing in life you set out to do

while I'm still here, following

following these cracks in this sidewalk in this town on my way home with a cigarette in my hand

Amanda Prince

When We Were Goth

When we were goth And loved pilot pens and Old Gold cigarettes When we'd drink in graveyards Screaming songs we'd rather forget Pretending everything's romantic When you're running through the rain at six a.m. Coffee tripping Linoleum swimming Reminiscing, weren't those the days

When we bought out black nail polish At Halloween, Before everyone else was goth and you Could get the damn stuff all year round

When we drank Mad Dog by candle light and Smoked up in your brother's car when we Burned Barbie dolls and watched Twin Peaks in the dark

And all I want is passion in my life again All I want is passion

All this silly graveyard running Nipple piercing Coffee humming I'd give anything for that Feeling

Jessica Wheeler

Coffee

Pools in my cup black tar poison best part of waking up my ass. The shower hisses pounds my body like my own private Niagara Falls and it's just as cold. My eyelids droop lower than my tits will in twenty years and my fingers fumble blindly for the perfect slenderness of my last cigarette just one damn cigarette.

Robby Mason

Of Shining Mae Days

You're lively as light entering the sanctuary in a church of trees. You speak dapples of limelight filtering through panels of chlorophyll, fractured stained glass allowing motes to

trickle

down

upon

my

face

happy sun tears washing me in a dream shower.

Kay Liao

The Eight Seconds of the Subway

He used to go to his student by taking the subway. The parents of his tutee were very strict. If he was five minutes late, the mother's smile would become very ugly and stiff. If he was ten minutes late, he would not even get a glass of water. He decided to go there by subway, although it was a little more expensive than taking a bus, but at least he wouldn't have to carry the beverage by himself. He could easily find a seat in the last car, but it also shook more. Glancing at the scenes outside the window, he saw the hospital. It had a lot of big windows, and the window frames had a light blue sky color, harmonizing with the body of the com-cars of the subway.

"Would the idea of traveling spring up in their minds if they watched through their transparent windows?" he wondered.

Spring was just passed. It was when the weather was getting hot that he saw the girl. The girl was skinny, and had two braids. She stood behind the window watching. It seemed that she had a lot of things on her mind. He couldn't see clearly her facial features, but her disposition brought a quiet and composed quality, like a picture—Renaldsa's portrait of a girl, very slightly spreading out the sweet light. However, it was the hospital's window. Was she a patient or a special nurse accompanying a patient? A sudden sorrow came into his mind. Beauty sometimes comes with sadness.

The second time the subway passed the hospital, he saw the girl standing behind the window again. He couldn't help raising his hands and waving at her. It was like the feeling of waving his hands at the strangers when he was little and was sitting in the train. The girl seemed to notice it. She bent a

Kay Liao

little bit and nestled her head up against the window. Although the subway slowed down because it was close to the next stop, it was still moving quickly. Anything outside of his window disappeared. He had to wait till the next time. Would she still be in the hospital? Would she walk to the window? The tutoring job was only for killing time, and he wasn't really serious about earning money. But today, he talked with the parents about increasing the tutoring time from twice to three times a week. The parents were moved by his fervency and prepared a Coke for him, plus a cup of ice cream.

"You must be quarreling with your girlfriend, or else why do you like to have classes?" the little devil scoffed.

Some people said that after the subway was opened people's travel became so fast that the characteristics of the city changed. He didn't know. He only knew that he was cautious and anxious about being unable to catch the train. He feared he would miss the chance to see the girl. It was like an appointment they both agreed on. The girl always stood there, with her smile or sometimes waving her hands.

He practiced the words that he would say if he would have a chance to talk with her. "Hi, what's your name? I really want to know you. Even if I can only know you for a while, it's still better than nothing."

Disconsolate feelings filled his mind, because he gradually came to believe she was a patient because she seemed increasingly pale and emaciated. But on his subway he could only pass the edge of the girl's life for eight seconds at a time.

What kind of expectation could he put in these eight seconds? She might disappear behind that window at any moment, and he might end the tutoring job, or not take this subway anymore. He became conscious of this coincidence of their appointment, this rare luck that brought them together in this world. Why did he not get off the subway? he asked

The Eight Seconds of the Subway

himself. Maybe it was lack of courage. He really wanted to be like this girl, who had the courage to give herself and the others chances. But he couldn't. How about if he went there and found her? What would the situation be? Now, during eight seconds of sweet time, he at least got her smile. Across the distance and the speed, it was like truth and he could almost touch it. Yes, almost, and it was enough for him.

Valentine's Day was coming. He hesitated about what to do, wandering in front of the flower shop. Then, he decided to buy twelve pink roses and have the shop deliver them to the hospital. His first time sending flowers to someone was like doing something that gave him a guilty conscience. His whole body was immersed in an untranquil condition. Would the flower shop send to the wrong person? Would she leave the hospital? Would she guess the flowers were from him? Would she like pink roses? "Happy Valentine's Day. Hope you get well soon," the attached card said.

On the next day, he saw her standing behind that window, with a long stem pink rose in her hand. She knew! She knew! She knew — but his eyes suddenly softened because he saw that her long braids were gone. She had a scarf on her head. He understood that chemotherapy made her hair fall out. How could he not have noticed before? He curled up in the seat as if the air-conditioning was too cold in that car. But it wasn't cold inside at all; he just felt weak.

"What am I doing? Watching a flower fade?" he asked himself. "But what else could I do?"

After the thundershower in the afternoon, he started to worry that the subway might be closed down because of the weather. But it wasn't. The subway came closer to the hospital. There were three people standing behind that window, the girl and two nurses in white beside her. Were they supporting her? If they didn't help her, would she be able to stand on her own? When he got closer, he saw her

Kay Liao

smiling and waving at him. Her smiling face, the expression in her eyes, her carriage, slowly, were like a farewell ceremony. He pressed close to the window and restrained the urge to groan.

Three months, and he didn't even know her name! They hadn't even been introduced to each other! Nothing had started yet! All of these were because he had been so hesitant. The love in his mind was as old as heaven and earth. If they would have to separate on the way, wouldn't that hurt? But he was so willing to see her! What would this be? Would this be love? And he didn't even know her. After this, he might even have no names to call when missing her. It shouldn't be this way.

This time when the subway got closer to the hospital, there was no one behind that window. He quietly got off the subway and bought roses from the flower shop on the first floor. The man selling them said, "But we have got no pink roses. How about red roses? They smell so good today." He carried twelve red flowers in his hands and went to the hospital. He got onto the sixth floor-he counted before, it should be the last room on the sixth floor. Walking through the long corridor to the end without hesitation, he saw a special room with only one bed. It was empty. The sanitation worker just finished cleaning up and walked toward him, "Visiting someone? The person died already. Why didn't you come earlier?" It was too late. Sunlight shined from outside of the window. What clean and bright sunshine. He still didn't make it in time. Walking around this room, he tried to catch something, any trace the girl left. But, the room was really too strange to him, and he couldn't get a clue at all. Then, he stopped in front of the window, watching the subway passing in front of him.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight seconds. It passed. He felt very regretful. If he could only have made up

his mind earlier, gotten off the subway earlier, then, he would still have had a chance to ask, "Hi, what's your name? I want to know you so badly."

"I am Eve. What's yours?"

He turned around reflexively and saw the girl, who was standing slimly and gracefully in front of him. She still had the scarf on her head, but she looked healthy.

"I thought you ... They said you ... "

"The one who died was an old grandpa I was taking care of," she smiled healthily.

Her illness, her worn look, all was his imagination. Her hair was in a scarf because of her sister's unsuccessful hair cutting which she could only cover up. Those two nurses were her friends, and they stood there curiously.

"They said what a generation it is now to have such a boy in the world. Weird," she said.

"Then, what did you think?"

"I was just wondering when you would get off the subway."

He gave her the roses, "I really want to know you. Hope you like the red roses."

"If you tell me your name, I will consider it seriously."

"Then we'd better get out of here and find a place to talk."

"Is your name so long that it will take long to tell me?"

"No. It would be my too-good-to-be-true-feelings these months."



Part II

"I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools."

> William Faulkner The Sound and the Fury

Robby Mason

Haircut

Pungent vapors from pale blue Barbicide cause my nostrils to flare as I sit in Frank's barber chair. Each Ace comb seems to have spent an eternity bathing in that large glass jar, killing off God knows how many germs and maybe even a few stray lice from the heads of young farmboys like my own.

One of those combs cultivates furrows through my hair under the guidance of a hand whose father's hand might have done the same. Occasional snippets from scissors trim back unruly sprouts of hair and the cuttings slide down the front of the smock to build up like a silage heap in my lap.

Conversation of possible rain showers pork by the hundredweight and how the corn might be knee-high well before July, takes an intimate turn when the metallic swish of the straightedge across the strop signals the finishing touches to be done near vital portions of flesh. Reese and Chad are almost out of high school now and the missus and I are beginning to wonder whether the land can be milked much further, but Frank already knows that and efficiently wipes off the stubbly residue before tucking steamy towels around my neck almost how my father would tuck me into bed at night. Pausing, Frank says, "You've raised a better crop of boys than any corn you ever harvested."

Dave Miriovsky

The Joy of Fatherhood

As he saw the glove

hidden in the cabinet behind the well-stocked bar in his half-furnished basement, he remembered back

to the time when he was young and life was fun. He remembered how he spat

in his mitt and coolly rubbed it in like they did in the big leagues, how he chewed

on the faded laces despite their taste of lightly salted cardboard. He remembered

how every spring he treated it with oil, how his hands glided over the leather as delicately as those of a skilled sculptor, how the George Brett signature in the palm, once so bold and visible, was gradually erased

by the application of oil and the passage of his youth. He pressed his face to the tanned cowhide and the aroma

of the leathery cologne reminded him of his days in the now-empty sandlot by the Casey's

on 12th Street. Removing his nose from the confines of the glove's pocket, he closed the cabinet

and took the old Rawlings upstairs, a present for his only son's sixth birthday.

Beth Donohue

Reflections on a Saddle and Bridle Found in an Attic

Worn latigos glow with a glossy sheen stretched and worn by the brass cinch rings snugged tight ten thousand times on a hundred horses stained with the sweat and dust of untold miles beneath the Texas sky.

Blue-white Spanish conchas glisten with silver and contrast with the rust-flecked iron of the curb bit and the buckles of the bridle made so many years past by loving fingers long since gone.

Full-grain leather polished by the touch of time hand-tooled glowing with the luster of quality and age tools of the partnership between man and horse as they worked together a century ago. Randy Clyde Uhl, alum

Courting Disappointment

Disappointment stops in from time to time to remind me how much I need her.

She eyes my verses as if they were baby pictures and over wine we speak of the night they were born.

The men go unmentioned, the birth fathers, but I see her eyes sadden as she recognizes traces of them in my words.

D. says, "Tell me again about them . . . the ones that left."

As I do I feel my belly kick and she whispers, "You're welcome."

Turning to leave she adds, "Forget them."

I tell her I do. Every day.

Mandy Bohl

Photos

His life is in photos They are all lined up in rows The photo albums are his only friends

His children have all grown and gone His wife of fifty years has been gone now for a year

He sits in his big house all alone He sits with his photos and his memories

His mood is melancholy As his memories make him glad and glum

He waits day by day as he flips the pages Waiting for the phone, or better yet, the doorbell to ring

Nothing And then finally someone is at the door

He eagerly rushes to human contact Finally someone to show his photos to

The guests look at the photos and listen to the stories Some are genuinely interested, others simply humor the old man

As he proudly displays his life in photos The guest says good-bye

Once again he is left alone with his photos As he flips the pages to look at his photos He wonders who will take care of them when he is gone

Dave Miriovsky

The Flag in the Schoolhouse

As he saw the flag pulled tightly at each corner

by the white-gloved hands of the soldiers, he painfully remembered

the wintry days in the schoolhouse, when the class of twelve

paid tribute to the soldiers. He remembered how their small platoon,

looking at the flag hanging from the wall, rifled those words

as they pledged their allegiance. The November wind

snuck through the window in the one-room schoolhouse,

curled the flag and the flag paused, then, returned.
He saw the red and white stripes bleeding into each other,

seamlessly connected, by the union of the flag.

He remembered fifty white stars and how they floated

on the ocean-blue background, and he remembered

his thoughts of Dad, how he wondered if Dad would return

from the war in the jungle. And on this day,

five years later, through tears, he saw a larger version

of that same flag, carefully folded to a triangle

by the white-gloved hands of the soldiers, and presented by the general

to his proud mother.

Camie Shuff

Angie's Bridge

that sun used to silver the blacktop like how a black-haired kitty purrs in the luminescence of its own shine and that yellow school bus would backfire black smoke along the stretches of highway between fields and bridges and pastures and farms like how the rocks used to shoot off the spokes of our bike tires when we would all race to the main street meat locker if we heard the roaring shifts of the rendering truck rumble into town then we would watch the guts and blood and bones of those dead pigs and cows, and goats slide down off the bed of the truck like how the mashed potatoes would fall off my spoon at dinner and go plop! and sometimes if we were lucky we got to see pigs cut half in and, of course,

we would all scream! in awe! and eeww! excitement! until someone would yell "town tag time!" and

then we would all scatter

and

follow those yellow pac-man dashes in the middle of the blacktop

until we saw any perfect hiding spot so we could

pray

and count

and breathe really loud, even though we tried so hard not to

and so we played until those yellow street lights came on to signal us to go home for the night like how a mom yells "supper!" out the back door and her voice dashes

along

through the air above the blacktop until it tags the ears of her child to call him home so he can tell her over dinner all about the bloody guts that were in the rendering truck that day

ever

Angie said to me once when we were hiding under the bridge

that she didn't really like the smell of those so she wasn't ever gonna go to the meat locker yucky pigs

with the rest of us

ever

again but she did -

every time.

Beth Donohue

Sunset

The old woman sits heavily in her rocking chair gazing out the window at the waning day

the sun shines in on velvet slants warming her gaunt shoulders shrouded in lavender cotton

she remembers

her life

a deluge of images falling like the rain at Clarence's funeral

the tidy house on tenth street

Elsie and her golden hair the unnamed son; their first

the War; all those boys she knew –

gone

she is ready - the past beckons

in the last corners of the day she reaches out with trembling fingers and smiles.

The Wasteland

They sat in the kitchen, the smell of the brewing coffee strong and invigorating, the coffeepot softly purring on the counter. Outside, the early morning sun shone weakly across the horizon, the freshly fallen snow washed in the pinks and golds of the sky. It was well below zero, a cold the sun's struggling light failed to alleviate, a cold that made neither of the men sitting across from each other at the kitchen table too anxious to leave the comfort of the chairs and the kitchen and the coffee, especially for the task at hand.

"I don't know, Marv, it just seems like such a waste is all," Wade said, getting up to fill his and Marv's coffee cups, his eyes resting only for a second on the gun case that sat on the table between them.

"I know, I know," Marv said, leaning back in his chair, resting his hands on his sizable belly. "It's a deal, lemme teli ya. If it were up to me, I'd let every one of those squealin little mothers live out their lives in piggie paradise, but it ain't up to me. Boss says it's gotta be done. Prices are shit. Hell, pig *shit* is worth more these days than the actual pig. What's really bullshit, or hogshit, I guess, is, well, you been to the grocery store lately?"

"Wife does the shopping," Wade said, setting a cup of coffee in front of Marv and then taking a seat with his own cup.

"Laura? Where is that pretty young thing?"

"She's out taking Jayna to basketball practice. I tell you, all that woman ever does is go-go-go. It seems like that's all any of us do. Never really stop to enjoy anything, just go, all the time."

"It's a deal, I know." Marv took a sip of his coffee.

"Y'know, next to Yvonne, your wife makes the best pot of coffee you ever did taste. What's her secret?"

"Folgers. And I made the coffee."

"Oh." Marv took another sip. He smacked his lips and nodded. "Yup, Folgers'd be it. So, as I was sayin, you bought a ham lately?"

"Huh?"

"Well, you know as well as the next man hog prices are shit. Now, do you think that the price of ham, that's ham, dead cut-up cheap piggie, went down to match the price of a live whole cheap piggie? Hell no. Ham's the same price as it was six months ago. Christ in a Cadillac, someone's getting rich outta this deal, but it sure as hell ain't us. It just ain't payin right now to be raisin the whole live cheap piggies. Boss says to destroy whatever looks like it ain't gonna make it, sick ones, ruptures, runts. Right now they ain't worth the feed they're porkin down on. Get it? *Porkin down?"*

"I got it, Marv."

"Costs more to keep em alive than we'd get for em in the end, and if they die before they go to market, that's feed money down the pisser. It's a deal, but hey, don't tell me, tell fuckin Dow Jones."

"I know," Wade said. He had just put up three hog confinement buildings and gotten his first shipment of hogs, which filled up one of his buildings two days before. It had been hard for him to give up the self-reliant way of farming that he and his father and grandfather before him had used. But farming wasn't farming anymore; it was business, and as the twentieth century slipped into the twenty-first and family farms slipped into the dust, it was clear that the only way was to go was corporate or go broke. He had put up the buildings in the hope of staying afloat, maybe even making a little extra money, maybe even having a little more time on his hands. And then the hog prices dropped to the lowest they'd been since 1945. And now this. If there was one thing Wade hated, it was waste. And he couldn't get it out of his head that this was all this was – a waste.

"I better get the boy up," Wade said, standing and walking to the foot of the stairs.

"Justin!" he yelled.

From a room at the top of the stairs came a half-shouted, half-asleep, completely unintelligible response.

"Time to go to work!" Wade yelled again.

Again, another unintelligible response.

"He'll be down in a minute," Wade said, turning away from the stairs and sitting back down at the kitchen table.

"Gonna be a farmer like his old man?" Marv asked, sipping his coffee.

A smirk lifted the corner of Wade's mouth, and he let out a little chuckle.

The phone rang. Wade got up and answered it.

"Well, hello Yvonne," Wade said, looking over at Marv. "You wanna talk to your husband?" He listened, then laughed. "Hell no, she says," Wade smiled at Marv. "She says I got a better ass."

Marv lifted his nose in indignation. "You may have a better ass, but I'll guarantee I got a bigger—"

"What's that, Yvonne?" Wade said, stifling a laugh. "She says, Marv, don't be such a damn softie when it comes to those hogs. She says to waste those sick little bastards like you was still working for the Post Office."

"You tell her not to worry," Marv said. "Hugs 'n kisses, Pookie."

"What?" Wade stared at Marv.

"Tell *her* hugs 'n kisses. Not you, shithead." Wade told her this, then looked back at Marv.

"She says she likes the way I say it better, but hugs 'n kisses anyway. Wookie Bear." Wade hung up the phone

and looked down at Marv.

"Wookie Bear?"

"We're in love," Marv said, his nose still pointed in the air. "Even after twenty-seven years, we're still cute."

"Cute wasn't exactly the word I was thinking of."

They heard heavy footfalls descending the stairs. Into the kitchen walked Wade's sixteen-year-old son, Justin.

"Y'ever seen the dead walk, Marv?" Wade said, grinning at his son.

Justin grinned, somewhat ferociously, back at his father.

"So, this is the future farmer," Marv said.

"Yeah," Justin said, looking down at him. "Nose ring gave it away, huh."

Justin plopped down in a chair at the table, looked at the gun case, glanced quickly at Marv, then looked out the window. His black hair stuck up in every direction; his dark eyes were bloodshot. Wade suspected he had been out drinking the night before, but then again, Justin always looked and acted like hell in the morning. As he looked at his son, Wade wondered at his appearance. Both Wade, Laura, and their fourteen-year-old daughter Jayna were blonde, blue-eyed, and tall. Justin was small and dark. That and the four earrings and nose ring distinguished him not only from the rest of the family, but also from many members of their small community, who were not used to seeing flashing metal sticking out of so many places on someone's face.

"Don't get too comfortable," Wade said to Justin. He then turned to Marv. "You ready? Might as well get this over with."

Marv slurped down the rest of his coffee and stood. He struggled briefly to snap the buttons of his coat across his expansive belly. Wade and Justin exchanged amused glances behind his back. Marv took the gun case from the table.

"You just better hope I don't revert back to my Vietnam days," Marv said as they went out the door into the biting cold. "Or none of those little pork chops are gonna be standing."

"Shit, Marv, you were never in Nam," Wade said, laughing.

Marv climbed into his truck. "Sure I was," he said in a tone that made it impossible to tell if he was kidding or not. Wade looked at him a moment, then went to his own truck. Justin climbed in the passenger seat and they set out on the ten-mile drive to the hog buildings.

"How you feeling this morning?" Wade asked as he drove.

"Fine." Justin said, staring out the window.

"Been drinking last night?"

"No."

"You smell like an ashtray."

"We went bowling. Bowling alley smells like an ashtray."

"Oh. What was your score?"

Justin looked at him with a smirk on his face. "I got a 96, Caitlyn got a 106, Autumn got an 87, and Oliver got 194." Justin's smirk bloomed into a grin. "You wanna call the bowling alley and fingerprint the ball too?"

"I don't think you should be hanging out with Oliver Coyle."

Justin's grin fell. "Why?"

"People say he's on drugs."

A short, bitter laugh came out of Justin's mouth. "I'm sure people say the same thing about me." He looked at Wade, his finger flicking his nose ring back and forth.

"So you ready for this?" Wade said. He wanted to change the subject. He was worried about his son. Justin

hated people judging him on how he looked, but how did he expect not to be judged when he seemed to do anything just to get looked at? Maybe in New York or California where lots of people looked like that he could get away with it, but not here. And as hard as Wade tried not to, he judged Justin just as much as the people of their community did. He could never say so to his son, though. He kept his silence.

"You know how ready I am," Justin said, looking back out the window.

"You don't have to be in there when the shooting starts." Wade looked over at him as they pulled into the drive of the hog lot. "You know I'm looking forward to this as much as you are."

"Yeah," Justin said as Wade parked the truck. "Thanks," he said softly.

They got out of the truck as Marv pulled up behind them and parked. He climbed out of the truck, gun case in hand. He took a deep breath and exhaled, his breath like a plume of smoke in the frigid air.

"Yep, it was on a cold morning like this we landed in Nam," Marv said, walking over to Wade and Justin.

"Isn't Vietnam a jungle?" Justin said, a grin on his face. "And isn't a jungle usually hot?"

"Not that morning, son," Marv said in that same indistinguishable tone he had used with Wade earlier. He turned to walk toward the office between the hog buildings. "Not that morning."

Justin looked at Wade. Wade shrugged his shoulders and they followed Marv into the office.

Marv opened the gun case and took out the gun. He looked it over, loaded it, and held it out to Justin. "You wanna take out a few of the little bacon bits, kiddo?" Marv asked, a twinkle in his eye. "Let out some of that teen-age anger?" "You go ahead," Justin said, straight-faced. "I'm sure middle-aged anger's a whole lot worse."

"Justin," Wade said, a warning in his voice.

"Your boy's a smart ass, Wade," Marv said, still looking at Justin with the twinkle in his eye. "I like him. Plenty of dumb asses out there; smart one's good for a change."

"Thanks," Justin said. "I think."

Marv set the gun on the desk, took out his wallet, and handed Justin a ten-dollar bill.

"Go to town for me and get some bullets, sonny," Marv said. "I'll be runnin low after today. You can keep the change. Just don't be spendin all that on candy or drugs or anything like that."

"Gee, not even some heroin?" Justin said, a pleading look in his eyes.

"Trust me, boy, smack's a fuckin deal. You don't wanna mess with that shit. I know. Fuck, we did some crazy shit in Nam." Once again, Marv's tone was indistinguishable.

Justin looked at Marv, looked over at Wade, and looked back at Marv, a perplexed look on his face.

"Um, okay, I'm gonna go," Justin said. "Can I take the truck?"

"Here," Wade said, throwing Justin the keys. "Be careful. Roads are a little icy."

"I know. I'll be back in little bit. Thanks Marv," Justin said as he walked out the door.

"You got a good kid, Wade," Marv said as they watched Justin drive off. "Real spitfire. He'll go far."

"I'm sure he will."

"You hate that fuckin bull ring he's got, don't ya?"

"You could say that."

"It's a deal. All about the changin of the times. One generation's gotta be different from the rest. You got no room to talk, neither. I heard stories about you in your hell-

raisin days, tearin around here on a motorcycle, drinkin beer, bein a royal pain in your parents' asses."

"Shit, I was a good kid."

"My beautiful ass you were. I wasn't no hallelujah singin angel myself. Those were crazy fuckin times. Shit, in Nam—"

"What's the deal with this Nam shit?" Wade said, laughing. "You never mentioned anything about being in Vietnam before today."

"And you never mentioned nothin about hatin the boy's nose ring before today, but that don't mean you didn't hate it before you mentioned it." Marv grinned at him.

Wade laughed. "Fine, Marv, whatever you say."

"Didn't want to be here for the slaughter, did he?" Marv said, his face growing serious.

"No."

"I understand. Don't want to be here for it myself. But I suppose," Marv picked up the gun and an extra box of bullets, "we might as well get this shit over with."

They walked in silence to the hog building. It was a long low building, dusty and loud with the squeals of hogs. There were thirty pens on each side of the building. Wade had sorted through the hogs yesterday, picking out all of the sick looking ones, and put them all in the fourteenth pen. Wade and Marv walked up the long alleyway to the sick pen.

"How many you got here?" Marv asked.

"Twenty-eight. There's about ten in there, the ones with the blue marks, that I thought might pull through. You can judge for yourself."

"Shit, Wade," Marv said, releasing the safety on his gun. "Let the massacre begin."

"You're a good shot, right? You ain't gonna shoot up my building?"

"Not to worry, Wade. Back in Nam, I was a marksman." Marv took aim at the head of a very ill-looking hog standing near the cement wall of the pen.

"God take your poor shit-eatin piggie souls," Marv said, and pulled the trigger. The crack of the gunshot echoed throughout the building. The pig's head snapped back, blood shot out of the wound. The pig fell over on its side, convulsing, twitching, rolling in its own blood on the shitcovered the floor. It finally stopped moving as another shot was fired, its eyes bulging, its mouth gaping, its blood pooling under it. Every hog in the building was up, squealing and running.

Wade watched the blood and the falling, the convulsing and the dying, but only because he forced himself. Another shot. And another. They all died the same way, rolling in their own shit. Marv kept firing. He didn't even seem to be looking at the hogs. It was like he was somewhere else. Sweat was starting to roll down his face. He fired. He reloaded his gun and fired again. The hogs were screaming. The building was getting hazy with gun smoke. Wade's ears were ringing from the blasts and from the screaming of the hogs. Another shot, another hog fell, more blood mixed with the shit that covered the hogs as they thrashed and died. Again and again. He turned away, tried to shut his ears to the deafening noise, but couldn't.

And then the gunfire stopped.

Wade turned around and looked at Marv. He was pale, sweating, breathing heavy. The gun was still pointing into the pen. Marv's arm lowered slowly. The hogs in the surrounding pens were still up and running in pathetic circles, screaming — in every pen but the fourteenth. Two hogs stood stock-still in the middle of twenty-six blood and shit covered corpses. Blood spattered the walls of the pen. Blood spattered the two live pigs left in the pen. Here and

there were chips out of the cement.

"Jesus," Wade said under his breath.

"You need me for anything else, Wade?" Marv asked. His voice was quiet. Marv's voice was never quiet.

"No, Marv, you go ahead," Wade said, looking at him. "Justin should be back with your bullets pretty soon if you want to wait."

"That's okay. I'll get em some other time. Gimme a call. We'll grab a beer." Marv walked off down the alleyway, still panting and sweating.

"Thanks, Marv," Wade called after him.

"Don't thank me," Marv said as the door closed behind him.

Wade shook his head. He looked back at the pen. The combination of the shit and the blood smeared on the dead pigs made it look like they were already rotting. The smell was horrible. It looked like a picture of a mass grave. Two live hogs stood in the middle of it. Wade put on his gloves and climbed into the pen. The floor was sticky. He grabbed one of the hogs by the hind legs. It squealed and fought. He lifted it over the edge of the pen and dropped it into the next pen.

"Lucky son of a bitch," Wade said as he watched the blood-spattered pig mingle with the other pigs in the pen. Wade turned to grab the other hog, but then he saw the two small holes in the side of its neck and head, and the trails of blood running down.

"Guess you weren't so lucky. Fuck." Wade climbed out of the pen. "Some marksman you were, Marv," Wade said to himself as he walked over to the shelf in the front of the building and got the hammer.

He climbed back into the pen. The hog was staring at him, its body tensing, ready to run. He raised the hammer.

"You poor dumb son of a bitch," Wade said as he

brought the hammer down as hard as he could. The pig tried to dodge but a dull thud sounded as the hammer slammed down onto the hog's skull. The hog squealed and dropped to the ground. Then it tried to stand back up.

"Dammit," Wade said and swung the hammer again. The hog fell over on its side, convulsing, breathing weakly, low squeals and blood issuing from its mouth. It would die soon enough.

Wade looked up and saw Justin standing in the doorway, Marv's bullets in hand.

"Is it done?" Justin said.

"Yeah. Marv left one alive with two bullets in its head. Just putting it out of its misery," Wade said as he climbed out of the pen.

Justin walked up to Wade. He glanced into the pen, then looked away quickly. Wade thought he heard him say "shit" under his breath.

"It ain't pretty," Wade said.

"No," Justin said, facing away from the pen. "Where's Marv? I got his bullets."

"He had to go. Why don't you go and get the cart. You can put those bullets in the office while you're out there."

Wade opened the door to the pen as Justin went out to get the cart. Wade would wash it out tomorrow, but he wanted to get the bodies out as soon as possible. Justin came back in, pushing the cart in front of him. He pushed it up to the pen.

"Well, here we go," Wade said, grabbing one front leg and one hind leg of a dead hog, picking it up, and throwing it into the cart. It was a disgusting job. But Wade had done worse. A friend of his had gone away for the weekend last summer, leaving his hog buildings unattended. The cooling system had broken. Three-fourths of his hogs had died from over-heating and suffocation. The man came home to

bloated, red, swollen corpses. Wade had helped haul out the dead. The smell was sickening. At one point one of the other men helping ran outside and vomited on the ground. It was horrible.

Wade pushed the thoughts out of his mind. He lifted and threw the dead hogs methodically, mechanically, trying to keep the thought of what he was doing out of his head. As Wade threw one of the hogs, a piece of its brain flew off and landed on the wall near Justin. Justin stepped back, his face going pale.

"You okay?" Wade asked.

"Yeah," Justin said, the color returning to his face. "I'm fine."

Wade came to the hog that he had hit with the hammer. It was still alive. Barely. It was breathing shallowly, and every once in a while it would twitch. Wade picked it up like the others and threw it on top of the dead hogs in the cart. It started to squeal.

"That one's still alive," Justin said, looking at Wade.

"It'll be dead soon enough," Wade said, trying to block out the squealing. "Got two bullets in its head and two hammer dents. It's just taking its time."

Wade picked up a dead hog and threw it on top of the slightly living one. And then another. The hog that still lived screamed, twitching and thrashing under the dead ones. Wade looked up and saw Justin staring at it. He saw him starting to turn green.

"Do you need me here right now?" Justin said softly.

"No. You okay?"

"I just need to go outside for a while."

"Go ahead."

He watched Justin walk quickly out the door. The hog's screaming stopped in a choked gurgle. It stopped thrashing. It joined its penmates.

Wade shook his head. Goddammit. It was starting to get to him. What a fucking waste. Goddammit. Goddammit. He picked up the bloody hammer that was lying on the floor of the pen and threw it down the alleyway. The only time he ever brought down a hog was if it was *going* to die, not if it might die. And now some corporate fuck who didn't know a goddamn thing about the land or the livestock or the farms or the farmers was making him haul a cart of dead bloody shitty hogs because the almighty goddamn Dow fucking Jones says we ain't gonna pay shit to you so kill your livestock and let em fucking rot. What a waste. What a goddamn fucking waste.

And that was the way it was. No way to get around it. No way to rebel. Do what Mr. Corporate Fuck says and get a check, feed your family, put your kids through college, while still doing some semblance of what you love. Don't do it and don't get a check and lose the farm. It was pointless to rage against it. Nothing would change. This wouldn't be the last time he would be doing this. He knew that. Go along with it. Accept it. There was no other way.

The cart was full. The rest of the corpses would have to wait until Trip Number Two. Wade grabbed the handles and pushed the cart down the alleyway and out the door. The sun was high now, the sky a light icy blue. It was very cold. The residual heat from the carcasses rose like smoke from the cart. The snow was hard and crunched as he pushed the cart over it.

A biting breeze blew the smell of cigarette smoke to Wade's nostrils. He felt his temper rise again. He stormed around the side of the building and found Justin blowing out a plume of smoke. Justin's eyes widened when he saw Wade. Wade opened his mouth to commence yelling, but then he saw how pale Justin was, and how the hand that held the smoldering cigarette shook, and he knew that the

The Wasteland

shaking of Justin's hand was not just from the cold. The shout in his throat choked. His anger died.

"Don't ever let your mother see you doing that," Wade said, very softly, and turned away. He felt hollow, defeated. He went back to the cart and pushed it over near the driveway, the place where the rendering truck would pick up the corpses. What a waste. He tipped the cart over, watched the steaming corpses slide to the ground. The snow turned red. He felt so drained. So lifeless. He looked at the pile of the dead on the ground and shook his head.

"What a waste," Wade said to himself. "What a goddamn waste."

He pushed the cart, slowly, back to the building.

Part III

"We turned at a dozen paces, for love is a duel, and looked at each other for the last time."

> Jack Kerouac On the Road

General Review of the Sex Situation

Woman wants monogamy; Man delights in novelty. Love is woman's moon and sun; Man has other forms of fun. Woman lives but in her lord; Count to ten, and man is bored. With this the gist and sum of it, What earthly good can come of it?

Dorothy Parker

Amanda Prince

Barefoot November

there's a ring of crystals around a full moon

barefoot, on the cold cement i wait

for snow to melt holding my coat around me

sitting in front of my house

i wish my life was like that song

the one where you show up at five a.m.

in your winter coat crying and i tell you

it's not only okay, it'll be beautiful

and we cuddle through layers of sweatshirts and your navy blue peacoat

but in that dream, my hair's red and that night

my hair was fuck-you pink in the microwaved radioactive peach-colored dawn

like you could drink it—and it would taste like a fuzzy navel

or you could take a Polaroid and send it to your grandma better than a hallmark card but maybe not

i'm thinking in the four a.m. emptiness

drinking a bud lite i stole from my parent's refrigerator

wearing an ugly yellow sweater

giving up

and putting my shoes back on.

Megan Lindsay

wind

The wind is steady and strong, bitter and invincible, invisibly freeing snow airborne against the black backdrop of night

(I'm watching for clues in your eyes)

the cold sneaks into my shoes through the laces and past the leather tongues

(my toes are sore from wanting)

the weatherman said

"it's only seventeen degrees below zero out there tonight"

and as we sit, not talking, staring our separate ways, I feel my blood chill and my pulse slow

I kiss the ice on the inside of the window carefully, pull away and check your reaction the wet print from my cold lips freezes over calm and quick

(I don't want to be cold on the inside with you)

Robby Mason

Merry Primavera

first puddle of spring exotic liquor of snow courts drunk summer thoughts

Megan Lindsay

Excerpts from last summer

June/July

Some nights I just did the dishes and fell asleep on the couch, watching Lifetime Television and waiting for you to stumble through our front door, your silhouette in the pixilated light swaying, staying sweet, even though my image of you turned stale and bitter and that one perfect photographic memory of last spring (when we stayed up all night and watched the sun heat up the day so slowly, but steadily, and I composed poetry for you with the window wide open) faded, so slowly but steadily

August

Awake, I dreamed of Kerouac and Neruda, longing for the synchronicity and experience of that one slow, but steady, perfect line, convinced that there was poetry there somewhere in the way that fall descended so slowly, but steadily, into our bed

Amanda Prince

how to dump a useless man

I would write a poem if it would help, I would sit in that car with you for three days straight as you drove through the entire tri-state area scouring every strip bar and juice bar and gentleman's club for his car if I thought it would help you get over this and

I'm past the days of self-righteous blathering about how you need to just dump him and say fuck it and get it over with, I hope,

cuz Marsha was right when she said nineteen-year-olds giving other nineteen-year-olds advice about love is completely insane

cuz I'd probably do the same for something

as stupid as a boy

and you've suffered the

same too-high-pitched laughs of fake "I'm okays" from me and as I sit in this car

what I'm trying to convey with my silence and

stories about grade school four-square mishaps is,

"I understand"

we can drive for days till you're over this honey, we can drive for days Sonnet Conover

Late Night Awakening

I scramble

d o

2

W

n

from my bed

as swift as a squirrel scaling a tree.

He's there.

Talking and tittering in a group of students an hour after he was supposed to call Me.

Images

f

of hugs and idle chatter.

Pitifully, I

view this scene, unrevealed to him.

Clamoring back to bed

I am disgusted with myself

a 1 1

n

i

g

for yet another asshole.

Megan Lindsay

your grace

I get cheaper and cheaper every minute that I pass, sitting here on the bed, singing *Amazing Grace* bottle of white zinfandel in one hand Camel Light in the other

You will spend thirty-four dollars at the strip bar tonight and bitch about loaning me five dollars for Taco Bell tomorrow

how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me

I locked the bedroom door

Every day and Saturday I tell myself that on Sunday I'll be gone

I am struggling broke stressed-out and you are eagerly shoving dollar bills into the G-string bikini of a woman bobbing her tits in your face she's just trying to make a living and you're just trying to make a night

"that's the price" they say "of love"

I say it's that one thought locked in my mind that makes me an easy sale

I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see

just that one thought in my stomach rebounding the wine and cigarettes and dancers and nights alone

how precious is your grace

Dave Miriovsky

The man slammed the door – wondering why his new wife always opened it.

Jessica Wheeler

Porn Connoisseur

Red suede shoes meander avenues looking up the skirts of strippers. Wicky-wicky-wack. Dig.

Josh Call

Faithful

Black lights shining in the lust-filled eyes of a man, drooling like the foam clinging to a freshly drawn beer.

A lonely man sitting, the shade of gold on his hand, a lump of indignation and disgust nestled away in the oblivion of his shirt-front pocket.

Such a man is seen everywhere, eyes following the bounce of pierce-nippled breasts, jiggling absurdly to nameless music.

Such a man's eyes are filled with wonder, and the miracles of drunken horny flexibility, that move like a chorus line a handsbreath from his outstretched tongue.

Such a good man, building walls around himself, in hard-earned dollars, sneering at the eternally out-of-reach pussy taunting him as harshly as a shrewish wife's tongue So does this man sit, his chair worn perfectly to the form of his ratted jeans, while nameless faces of drunk sincerity and desire whisper

to him invitingly...

"Back again tonight? Are you having a good time?"

Camie Shuff

The Butterfly

so sexy, so wild, so evil she whispered eternal sounds of flutter into my ear

her gold dust dived into the air with each tiny trustle of her broken wing

she told me the story

it was the spider, she said that broke her wing

"itwazz de day wit blue skies"

she was in mid-flight until suddenly she ovulated right into his web

"face to face vee stared"

she, paralyzed by his silk he, paralyzed by her beauty both seduced in this cocoon of love

"itwazz sucha bootifull ting"

her words still linger in my ears from yesterday's mourning hour she was so sexy, so wild so evil

she said there was no more to tell only a broken wing to sing about the sighs of wingache

then she laughed with a luster and kissed my ear

she hissed and fluttered away

she left a mark on my heart yesterday and now, I, too am paralyzed by her poisoned tongue

Amanda Prince

Raygun

for m and m

have a cat named Raygun. She's jet black with white socks and won't cuddle with anyone. My friend Claudia named her. Raygun is walking around the basement, knocking over ashtrays, while me and Claudia sit in bean bag chairs, smoking and watching an A&E special on Betty Page. "Damn, she's hot," Claudia says.

I say, "Yeah."

It's August and unusually cold. This summer has been rainy and endless. Wet gray days blend with other wet gray days. I'm sitting here in my black sweater and slip, staring at the TV and the end of my cigarette. The sound of cars driving by on wet pavement mixes with Claudia's short impatient breaths.

Claudia's like my best friend; no, we're no best friends; we're more like Siamese twins who were never separated. There's some invisible connection no one else can see, at least that's what she always says. We look nothing alike. She's tall, beautiful, with bright curly hair and a loud, lipstick-drenched mouth. She has weird pointy teeth. I'm short, with straight blonde hair; I have ugly skinny legs that bruise easily.

She's sitting in the orange beanbag chair, thrown on the floor across from the green loveseat. She's wearing her green converse tennis shoes - the ones that were hi-tops then she cut them off and drew swirls and stars on them with a pilot pen, and a big silver L and a big silver R on their proper sides.

She's picking at the callused skin around the tips of her fingernails and staring off into empty space. Her pupils grow, and her left eye slides ever so slightly off center. She looks like she's trying to focus on the empty space, trying to see
what it is that hangs out between things. She's breathing slowly, petting the cat, stopping to run her hands through her hair, pulling it all up into a ponytail, then letting it all fall down on her shoulders again. I see the thin razor marks on the fleshy part of her upper arms. I think I want to run my fingers over them, put my lips over them and make them disappear, fade and disappear, leaving her unscarred and whole again.

My stomach turns.

One night she drank four ounces of Robitussin DM, thick grape flavored cough syrup and put her hand through some boy's basement window. I dragged her home through the kitchen, where she threw glasses and her mother's dishes, and then into her room. I went into her bathroom to splash some water on my face and came back to find her carving thin lines into her arms, shaking.

That was Claudia then, but she's better now. There were the doctors, the pink pills, and the night she took them with crank and vodka and ended up pulling her hair out in the emergency room, strapped to the metal bed. She was squeezing my hand so hard it hurt whispering, "Maddy, you gotta stay with me, you gotta keep talking to me." Her brother drove her home that night. I was just numb after it all, but worried, in the way that I'm used to being worried.

I don't know what it takes, Band-Aids and long stretches of time, I guess. Somebody buys new dishes and Claudia usually wears long sleeved shirts. It's not all doom and gloom. Sometimes we still run around barefoot, and sometimes we just sit down here doing nothing.

Her drawings are tacked up all over the fake wood-grain panels in my basement. Hanging over the overstuffed loveseat is a big, black-and-white, charcoal drawing of me, with big crazy doe eyes and ratty hair. It says, "To my Maddy with much love" on the bottom. Claudia points to the picture with her lit cigarette. I'm looking off the page at something in

the distance, but I don't know what.

She says, "That's my favorite one, it shows your eyes, your eyes are so crazy and sad, Maddy, like you're so much older, or know more than me or something."

"Whatever, moonbeam."

"Oh, fuck off." Claudia makes smoke rings in the air and tries to grab them. She breathes out another puff of smoke and says, "I'm so fucking bored." Then she turns her green eyes right at me. "You wanna get high, Maddy?"

I curl into a ball on the ratty blue beanbag, picking little styrofoam bits out of the holes Raygun scratched into it. "I dunno, whatever."

Claudia is still staring at me. "C'mon," she says. "We can go get rural or something."

"Getting rural" is something we used to do a lot in high school. We'd drive in Claudia's blue Buick out past cornfield after cornfield, onto dirt roads and into weird, empty, creepy parts of Nebraska, looking for somewhere to smoke. We'd get high and tell stories.

"I don't really feel like doing anything," I say.

"So you wanna just sit on your ass and be lame?"

"I don't know. Okay, I don't care."

I can tell she's getting pissed cause she's still staring. It's like she's trying to drill a hole through me, crawl into my eyes and look at my brain. I'm sick of her eyes.

I just want her to leave now. Raygun walks by, and I reach out to pet her, but she just arches her back and tries to bite me.

A few weeks ago me and "the boy," as Claudia affectionately calls him, went out to Stone Park to get high. It was a beautiful fall day.

I started screaming, "Dude, fall is so sexy, fall is so fucking sexy, it's like summer's just coming up and kissing winter right on the lips, and on days like this they use tongue, and in the middle of all that heat and cold is like, fall, and it's all about change, and warm sweaters, and that kind of weather where it's cold but you wear a little tank top anyways, just to feel that sexy fall chill brushing you all over lightly."

l took my shirt off and ran down the trail, and the boy laughed so hard he wet himself.

"Star sign Scorpio fucker who-oh who-oh" Claudia sings under her breath. I think she's in one of her good moods. It's hard to tell.

I get so mad at her. I don't know if it's just some thing inside me, like maybe I was born to overreact. Maybe it's because it's hard to lose people, or feel like you are, maybe I'm just too afraid of losing people, maybe I should talk to her and maybe I should stop staring at the picture on my mirror that says "figure this out for yourself."

We're way drunk, singing Christmas carols for no reason. Claudia's holding my hand screaming, "Merry Christmas, merry fucking Christmas," but it's not even Christmas—it's the middle of July—and we're walking through downtown holding hands, singing out loud.

I tell her I can see it snowing in her eyes. Slurring my speech. The stars spin above us; we crash into each other on the sidewalk. Her hand brushes my hip. I kiss her on the cheek and sing "lean on me, when you're not strong la da da," and we bust into a chorus of that whole summer camp thing, laughing and running races from stoplight to stoplight.

3:00 a.m., kind of fucked up, typing in my room with a bad tummy ache. Silence is louder than any noise, I've decided. I've decided her eyes have iced over, and I've decided I'm a very bad friend. The boy is probably at home sleeping, wish he was here. He'd give me fruit-flavored Tums and two-percent milk to wash them down with. He's good that way.

Claudia's asleep, or pretending to be again. Seems like it's all she does anymore.

Claudia's a good kisser. I know cause we'd make out in photo booths at the mall, the one's with a video camera that shows on a TV outside the booth, and kids would walk by and point and say stuff like, "Mommy, is that two girls kissing?" We got a real kick out of that in high school.

We don't kiss much anymore, even just to scare away drunk guys at Perkins or to get free drinks at parties. I guess it's sort of a stupid high school thing — doing shocking shit just to get a rise out of people — but it was kind of fun to be shocking, kind of gets your blood going.

Tonight she's wearing her slinky, black, rock-star pants, and she curled her hair with soda cans, so it's all big and crazy. She's lining her eyes in the mirror with a black pencil. She's getting ready to go out.

She looks over her shoulder and says, "Hey, doll, you gonna go to Bill's with me?"

I say, "Sure," cause if don't I know she'll whine until I do.

I put on my slinky, sexy, black dress that makes me look like I have tits. I guess I'm really ready to get out and do something. So we end up at this guy named Bill's house and drink a whole bunch of martinis made with gin and "noilly prat" vermouth, we got a kick out of that: "noilly prat." I have no idea how you pronounce that.

We fell down drunk on each other, laughing, and we called the boy and he came over and sat on my lap and gave me kisses while Claudia got him beers and we cuddled like a bunch of silly drunk kids. Claudia drove us home while I made out with the boy, smelling like sweet smelly whiskey and honey and cigarettes; I looked like shit, but I didn't care.

Tears are rolling out of my eyes onto my cheeks. In the back of my head I'm watching myself dripping snot and salty

tears all over the phone. I'm whispering, "I miss you, I need you here." I'm listening to his breath.

He's hesitating, carefully picking his words. "Madeline, I need to go to bed."

I let out a long breath, one that says, I think, please please, don't hang up. I'm so fucking lonely tonight, and I can't sleep. I'd just say that if I wasn't so afraid.

He says, "I love you, but I have to go." Then he says goodnight and with a click he's gone, and I'm sitting in the dark.

I look at Claudia, in the other room, passed out on the loveseat. I'm sure she's lost in her dreams of angels and prom dresses and tangerines, all the things she tells me about. I watch the light from the moon streak across her red hair, making her face look eerie and blue.

I lean back in my orange vinyl beanbag and stare at the glow-in-the dark stars we put on the ceiling last summer and think, "So this is what it comes down to."

It's been one of those weeks. Lately, every week has been one of those weeks. I'm really not this bummed all the time. It's just that winter here is cold and boring, and I can feel it sneaking up too quick. I feel stuck in this town, even though Claudia always says we're gonna go somewhere, but we don't. I don't know why. Memories sneak up, like memories tend to do, when the light from the moon slips into my basement at four a.m.

It's too early to go to sleep, too late to wake up, or something like that. Raygun stirs in her pile of blankets, running through fields of catnip in her dreams.

I touch my stomach and suck it into my body, feeling my ribs stick out from under my skin. My grandma says I should eat more, which I guess is what grandmas are supposed to say. I'm not hungry, though.

A memory –

We drive, holding hands, completely silent as the beams from the streetlights enter the car, casting on his face bars of white light that scream backwards as we drive faster; the road rushing by in a gray-black blur, a river of pavement running. I can't see it, but I know it's there. I take bitter swigs out of a bottle of vodka I stole from my parent's garage. It burns my throat and makes my head heavy as the stars rush by, blurred and sleepy.

The boy is older than me, by at least two years, I think. I must have met him at school, sneaking cigarettes between art classes and drug deals. His face is feminine and delicate, with those high cheekbones and long eyelashes. He sits with all the punk kids at their very own lunch table, with their old lunchboxes covered in stickers cataloging all the obscure indie bands they've seen, their big shoes, and dark eyeliner. I've been sitting alone, not going to lunch at all, or sitting in the bathroom smoking joints with the long-haired metal girls from my English class.

"So do you wanna go somewhere?" His voice is quiet, like everything he says is a big secret; a big secret, serious thing.

I don't say anything, I just take another drink.

He looks at me weird and says, "Are you okay?"

He squeezes my hand and runs his thumbs up and down my palm, like he cares or something. I can't believe I'm here, in this car at two in the morning, driving up and down the streets downtown, past boarded-up shops and closed coffee bars, drinking vodka and listening to his breath and watching my reflection in the window.

My reflection is distorted, pulled-out and skinny, changing as the light swirls in and out of the car. My hand on my knee, my thick black tights, my velvet skirt.

Another memory -

I met him three years ago. It must have been. Claudia took me to this dingy, dirty, little punk club and introduced me to him. He was wearing dark blue jeans and a black vneck sweater. He looks young when I think about it now, but back then he seemed older and more confident. He bummed me a cigarette, and I coughed and choked on it.

Then we all drove out to Stone Park and listened to some tape that Claudia had re-wound so it played backwards. We listened to it, driving on narrow roads through trees that closed in from every direction, leafless, gnarled, and threatening.

Claudia was crazier back then; tall, beautiful, and crazy. That same night, we smoked pot in her blue Buick and then she took off her shirt and ran through the park, screaming at the top of her lungs, laughing and singing. She ran up to me and looked at me with her crazy eyes.

"C'mon Maddy, get wild."

The pot made me feel sort of dizzy, tingly all over, and kind of sick, but sort of crazy, too. The winter air was cold and dangerous, but right then I didn't care. I pulled my thick sweater over my head and felt the cold against my bare skin. Claudia pulled me along the trail, kissing my cheek and singing songs I didn't know. The boy watched from the hood of Claudia's car, smoking a cigarette and laughing at us.

The other day I dreamed that Claudia packed her bags and took off to California. I have this picture of her, red hair flying against a gray sky. Her thumb pointed towards it, her eyes determined and fierce.

But then I woke up and saw her snoring on the sofa.

I smoked a cigarette and drank a cup of coffee. I called the boy and apologized for being such a sappy mess the other night. He didn't seem to mind. He came over and I got lost in

his skin for a few hours. Then we fell asleep, curled up under a ratty blanket on the basement floor.

I woke up around two o'clock, and Claudia was gone. Raygun was curled up on the warm place her body had left on the ratty loveseat.

Part IV

"The man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; The motions of his spirit are dull as night, And his affections dark as Erebus; Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music."

> William Shakespeare The Merchant of Venice

"Forever chemical You trade a piece of your soul With no return And who you think you know Doesn't know you at all Their drain is needless Some day we'll wave hello And wish we'd never waved goodbye To this romance We'll drink up every line And shoot up every word Till there's no more Crashing down Crashing down my friends Only love Only love can win So cry these tears we'll cry as all We've held so long to fall apart As the curtain falls we bid you all goodnight" The Smashing Pumpkins

"This Time"

Beth Donohue

Carousel

color light calliope music clashing as the children scream with delight and the wooden steeds rear and gallop in a circle whirling in the summer night horses gleaming with jewels and fresh paint flashing brass poles tossing manes sculpted legs frozen power spinning flying with the music of fantasy.

Good Advice

You don't say much I guess I know what you're saying I'm trying to be with the silence and forget filling it up with Awkward questions like a mom driving you home going "How's school going? Boyfriends? Family?" These are just starting points

and you would look at me like "you already know" and I do so I'm sitting here just trying to feel this silence and I'd say, "Honey I know you're hurting," but I see your sharp spaces, sometimes you need to not hear me running my mouth like I know what I'm talking about because most of the time I don't and I'm working on

just listening

because I need to hear something different than the sound of my voice making up stories that are only

partially true and I usually only cry when I'm alone and yeah it's hard for me

to talk about.

Boyfriends? Car? Family?

Pause. Breathe. Wait for response.

You're looking at me like "I'm scared" and I'm looking at you like,

"You're so beautiful."

Give me a quarter. I'll solve all your problems.

"Dump your boyfriend. Quit your job."

Next. Give me a quarter; I'll solve all your problems and even give you a little tip:

"Blow jobs are a bad substitute for conversation"

Put it in a fortune cookie. Dump your boyfriend.

I'm trying to listen, but okay I admit it, I still think

I'm right.

Streetsongs

Peddlers in the street, sellin their wares, singin out their sales Streetsongs . . . A woman sellin magazines A man sellin newspapers Can ya hear 'em? A woman sellin Holy Water A man sellin Hotel Bibles Hear 'em sing? A woman sellin meth A man sellin coke Mmmmm . . . sing it. . . . A woman sellin herself A man sellin his soul Oooooaaaaahhhhhh The singin, ringin out like the songs of Angels in Hell singin Hosannas on High Baby, can you hear the streetsongs? And I bought a magazine, for the articles, a'course, cuz I couldn't bear the headlines, and I blessed myself with Holy Water in a Mickey's bottle, flipped thru a Motel 6 King James and screamed to Jesus as bat-winged demons made love in the clouds and cherubs fucked in the streets Sing it to Sweet Motel 6 Jesus! And I bought her with my green money and she bought me with her green eyes

Ooohhh Ahhhmazing Grace, how sweet thy moan Ooooooaaaahhhhhhhhh Oh, I snorted my soul away, yes, I snorted my soul awayawaywaywayaway And Gracie's asleep, and I'm sittin on the edge of the bed, my head in my hands, streetlamp lightin my misery, and I hear the drunks singin to their paperbagwine, singin to Sweet Motel 6 Jesus singin singin singin to Jesus sing it Can ya hear it, Baby, can ya hear it? OoooooGodaaaahhhhhhh the streetsongs . . .

Friday Night at Bill's

the girls dress up we show up late wearing blue-hooded sweatshirts searching for beer and Frank Sinatra there are people here I will never know or never want to one of the skinny melanoma girls tanned orange and gross is showing a guy in a baseball cap her new underwear Lee leans over and says "what a skank" I try to act offended and say "yeah, maybe but she's really pretty nice" I am sitting on the green sofa between Matt and Lee, both with bony hips and loud laughs at 4:30 a.m.

Bill breaks open a glow stick the kind you get at the Rollerama or for Halloween I am drunk, someone is yelling someone says they smell a gas leak I don't care the living room is a constellation bodies move defined by stars I crawl onto the sofa next to you and curl up in your arms and watch the stars in my head form on your skin

we stumble into Ben's room to warm sheets and whispers Jessica Wheeler

James Dean wanna be black leather blue jeans smokes crushed beneath your heel cool

.

Bryce Gerking

Fat sweaty Elvis Prescription rhinestone abuse Thankyouverymuch

Scenes from an adolescent late-night drive

you said

"we're just a bunch of skinny geeks who know how to

get it on"

and I said "skinny geeks who know how to get it on" that's a poem right there that's beautiful

I said "I saw a ghost" and we drove kissing scared

trying to explain my position in the world I said "I don't hate all men, just the stupid ones I mean, cuz there's good men they just make the bad ones look worse" and I thought just cause I'm angry doesn't mean it's about you

"We mess around, we don't talk much"

The girl in the snazzy pants with the black and white Richenbacher is standing right in front of me she's a rock star she's beautiful and I'm dancing like an idiot

Megan Lindsay

Secret Songs (for someone who forgot)

I.

i always wanted to be a rock star and woo all the green-eyed boys

II.

The trees outside look sick. They're black with rain, the bare branches exploding at the tips with the fungus-like foliage of spring.

III.

sometimes she swims in my veins like a drug Secret Songs (for someone who forgot)

IV.

I saw behind your eyes today. I looked real close and saw forever there. And then you blinked and I swore off love 'til summer.

V.

the stars shrink in the receding velvet sky the longer I stare

I jump higher and higher trying to touch Orion's belt

the day confronts the moon

leaving me sore calves as a reminder that I can't get close enough to anything

dawn breaks and I roll on through the morning trying to fix it

VI.

when I was little we took day trips to the mountains and I remember there was always a cooler in the back seat with soda pop and sandwiches that my mom made

Megan Lindsay

and wrapped up into tight cellophane squares and every ten minutes we'd have to stop to pick up rocks

on the side of the road because my brother and I collected rocks and once we were walking on big rocks across a stream and I slipped and fell and I got my right foot all wet and we drove home with my wet sock on the car antenna and it didn't fly off like I thought it was going to because, like I said, we stopped every ten minutes so my brother and I could pick up rocks

VIJ.

You steal my shadows while I'm out chasing the moon

running in circles at the length of my chain

VIII.

One of those sappy old-fashioned love songs is playing on the radio.

I sing along. Just because I know the words.

IX.

there's a Polaroid picture of her taped to the wall she's wearing sunglasses,

Secret Songs (for someone who forgot)

a drunken grin, and a new haircut. it was the summer after the spring, after the rape, and i didn't know yet

we drank and shared stories

it wasn't summer, it was labor day

we threw rocks through his windows

i wonder if that's what Wordsworth meant by "spots of time" how a memory can take you back farther than you want to go

Х.

the rain stopped it smells like new leaves

I shut the window.





