

The Plum Creek Review

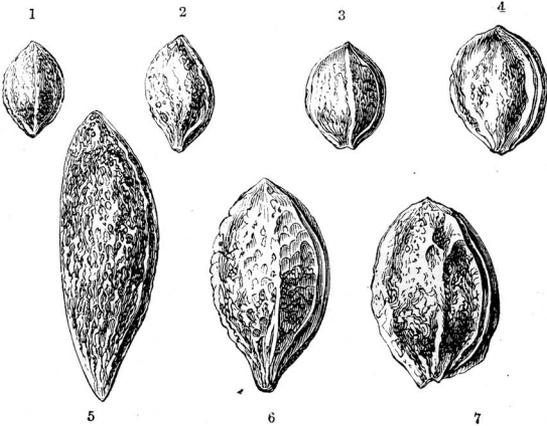


Fig. 43.—Plum Stones, of natural size, viewed laterally. 1. Bullace Plum. 2. Shropshire Damson. 3. Blue Gage. 4. Orleans. 5. Elvas. 6. Denyer's Victoria. 7. Diamond.

The Plum Creek Review

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C O N T E N T S

traintrackgospel

a new jesus is walking down water
street searching for the right flavor
ice cream for a communist to eat

his holy profile is stained by a saint's
mullet that reeks of the wine he uses
to wash and his dusty feet sing praises

to the desert left behind while mary
and judas play dominoes with dinosaur
bones on the tea shop table top and sweat

their lusty daydreams out out out and down
on the corner john the baptist is hustling
the salvation that he keeps hidden beneath

his robes he knows that wherever he goes
there will be a royal axe hungry for his neck
and that is why he likes this new jesus who

speaks and speaks and stops and cries
at night because these human sins scarring his
hands hurt worse than a traitor's kiss or the long

nails that hold railroad ties down as the train
slices through the belly of the country leaving
black smoke and forgotten longing in its wake

-Ian Rhodewalt

Mango

Father tells his girl on the telephone
he needs to see the sky
He stands in the yard
with a long dull saw,
daylight darkening
above the stratum of leaves.

His mango tree understands.
It imagines itself
hemispheres and years away,
where the mango grows giddily,
rife, where the skin
flushes tender yellow.
Here it sallow's in the sun,
and the tongues that taste it
Romanticize its name. Father draws
the silver edge across its side.

Down the street, his mother dreams
of her firstborn son, body ashed
and scattered seaward.
She tells herself: one day
he'll wash ashore like a smoothed glass bottle.
She walks through the meadow
of memory, ambles through moods
like pangean continents. She calls
the father by his brother's name,
confusing their J's in her heart's hunger.

The mamey tree stands, safely stout.
The mango hinges from its chiseled base.
Cool red stars bloom clear
through the gossamer overhead.
Papa says he's got to finish this
before the light goes. His voice wavers
like the blade. The call is cutting loose.
She says, I know, I know.

-Cecilia Galarraga

Please

*And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.*

don't pause
the conversation, I wouldn't want silence
to settle in the corner where
there was a caquetoire before
you came into the room. Blank

paper makes me nervous; I doodle
in the margins since I have nothing
to say, and haven't since the day
you gave me ink. Please don't leave

long enough for the dust to settle,
rise up against the bourgeoisie
of raggedy mops. Don't give me time

to bite my tongue, gaze at the hourglass
in the mirror, click my heels
together. Please, don't
pause

-Kathleen Riley

Semi-Permeable Membrane

between us . I
black , see
my . you ,
child () even I
watch .
days. morning
the same , ,
you don't . The difference
is great.. I was born black
, you see through skin. I
you home , I was a child
(logically) I die. They'll
watch , watch them. rain stop
for days. you will wake
loudspeaker, , screaming, language
you know. The difference us so
great.. I not born black of the ocean,
through my skin. I take you home
you won't get sick, I child (epidemiology)
and I didn't die. watch you,
them. rain stop for days. Every
morning you same loudspeaker,
distrustful, , in a language you don't
know. The difference us is not so great. I
was not born in the of the ocean, you can't
my skin. You won't get sick I take
you home, a child (epidemiologically) and I
didn't die. They'll you, you'll them.
Every morning to the same
, distrustful, screaming, but in a language
you do not know.

-Alexa Punnamkuzhyil



Amanda Goldstein

November

Then comes November. With a crack
I find my lips chapped in her dry air;
the bottom one spits a drop of blood
toward my chin. It burns from my skins own salt.
The top sits slack against my teeth. November.
But she brings kindness in proportion
to the rot. You know where to find it:
the leaves paint themselves gold and cherry,
lit by the sun like paper lanterns
from Japan. They even line a path to
the convenience store, its tubes of chapstick.
And when a creamy gray sky,
those same leaves cut with the fore edge of a knife,
shimmering serrated teeth.

The month is good to me at first
but gets bitter as she ages. I can always
feel it coming: the air suddenly brisk
bites the tops of ears, freezes wet hair.
November knows her leaves are turning
muddy and withering—like any pretty face
maladjusting to the change, refusing it,
finally lets herself waste away. Good riddance.
She does this every year; the month
goes straight to Hell by the end,
tired of putting a waxy coat on
brittle stems in preservation,
leaves me with three-quarters bare trees
and brown dead grass. Good riddance.
She's left me twenty-one times before—
Well, here's to twenty-one more, Miss!
Soon, I'll learn where she goes when she leaves,
and November First will come and I
won't be waiting. I hope that I'll age
with more poise than November, and she'll make a ritual
mourning me, reenacting our time together,
joining me, in December, underground.

-Ted Roland

Confrontation

She said, "I will follow you anywhere,
across the cement and ashy tumbleweed to Antarctica, if you want it!"
Husband, curled by the floor like a shell, a small whorl in a child's ear,
spat between his knees and stood up.
Husband's eyes and mouth were red and spoke of many hot dusks
first in college then with fish in the sea
and tiny boys and trumpets in the gritty evening air.
He spat again.

She, mother and Wife, felt the loss, that spiral
go inside and it poisoned and bedazzled her.
She heard the ocean and almost stumbled back to us,
us, the hapless ring surrounding.
Us, a shocked and cooing crowd
but lost. She spun like a top and disappeared.

Gone from us, she went out to meet the highball jungle where
every molecule burst zaftig
and purple blooming poured liquor
scent and helpless
coca. She met her bottom on a bullet train but
Bill was *my* good friend. I watched her
as she lit her candle, got her book.

(She was proud when she got it, the first time 'proud' entered the picture.
I saw the little smile play between her lips
and eye, "Thirty days, not bad?" she whispered.)
I took markers from her little son and made a chip out of
old red construction paper. It was enough I hope,
because I couldn't find a place to take us,
not on that particular night, that particular night
that particular night the Husband flew away.

The particular night the Husband flew away
we sank into it—the land of milk and honey and
swollen ducts that made her into another woman,
one without her grace and soft smell. The night sank around us
wet wool on a heifer though
we didn't get up, we sank lower into that question:
Where and When and How much? Especially Where
now that morning came and washed us out,
comically bright.

Husband came, he came back with Charleton Heston and a chariot,
ready to burn the sky, ignite that other man, and
cold now, my stomach turned. I realized the very great dark
of his night compared with ours—
a warm circle, our little bitterness and
overwhelming stinging eyes, rinsed-off cheeks.

She, a Wife again
frenetic now the shouting started, called us back from nascent memory.
Flame, a woman's breast, fleshy shame—we all felt it, shame like the curled shell, the
child's ear.

-Karin Drucker

Summer Letter

When I miss you the most,
when I want to call
it's to tell of small things

a fox's eyes in my headlights,
bees cutting holes in the peony petals,
an evening chorus
of two owls, sixteen frogs,
and a mouse in the wall above my head.

These are the things I know,
the things I can count and describe.

Sunrise behind the sumac,
the smell of wet linden flowers
through an open window,
turtles digging silently
in the soft sand of the roadside.

These are the things I know
will come, will calm
with their rhythm of
on and on and on and

if you were here
you'd understand what I know,
what I mean when I say
the night smells like honey,
the fireflies
make the field look like a mirror
reflecting the sky.

-Marisa Beltramini

The Swan Sings

Peter Edmonson

You hear laughs you don't believe...or is it the carbonation from their rum and coke?

The drunk architect kisses your girl friend on the cheek, aiming for her mouth. He asks your name, you know he doesn't care.

You see people just like you, in search of something better. They all want independence and freedom. Rebellion is on their minds—in it—but not Ché. Liberation through spirit and not muscle.

The regulars come in; the regulars go out, until their irregularity is regular. No one can predict...

You listen to a man who tells you how much he hates God. Walk with him later tonight. Pass the main square, the Catholic Church, and he will make a cross across his chest and kiss his fist.

He is not sacrilegious.

Casablanca, Casablanca, house that is white, give us some night time delight!

Casablanca is a restaurant you have found in some third world country. Bolivia. It's spaghetti with white wine is fantastic, it's coffee makes you despise Starbuck's and the atmosphere is somewhere between the jungle and a posh '50s bar.

Its owner is Italian, though no one ever sees him. You won't either. He works for the Mafia.

It is your fourth visit. You keep coming back, but you don't know why. You love the Bohemian setting. You love when the hippies juggle for you. You think it's funny that one of them pulls out a marijuana cigarette and says, Do you want to fly?

Pull out one Boliviano and give him a tip so that later that day he can board the ship.

Are you drunk? Not yet.

You've had a good amount of alcohol and you are sitting in the same corner as your first night, next to a picture of Humphrey Bogart. What a name, what a place: Casablanca...how true...

The Midget, you call him, a man under 5 feet, old, walks into the cafe with a stack of papers and clippings. He will do this every night. He has a diary or something. You suspect he theorizes conspiracies.

He greets everyone, sober, but with a drunken demeanour, then sits down, reads and writes. Hours every night he will sit, until he closes the book, gets up, and will say goodbye to all of the workers, all of the regulars, and the first timers, and calls them his friends.

Sometimes he doesn't even buy anything...a drink, nothing. He just sits down with his little book. No one cares.

Random people, the whole night, come up to you. Some you will never see again. Some speak to you in English. They see your white skin. Others are regulars

and prefer the Spanish tongue (though the Gringo's French). Still others will say hi to you on the street a month later, and you will wonder who they are. What a name, what a place...Casablanca...

You rent the movie and take it to your apartment: Casablanca—Warner Bros. Pictures Inc. 1942, one hour, forty-two minutes, adaptation, winner of three academy awards and placed in the top one hundred movies of all time. Taking place in the city of Casablanca, Bogart plays Rick Blane, a nightclub owner in a city filled with lies, deceits, foreigners, spies and invasion, still having time to lament his only love. And how does he do this? How does he let go? Sam...Sam, Sam, his piano man.

Casablanca, what a great name for your cafe.

A piano man. That's the only thing your Casablanca is missing: a piano man. You hear Humphrey Bogart's famous line to the black piano man—play it again, Sam. He is lamenting, smoking a cigarette, romanticizing...

By your tenth visit you have met a writer from Alaska, two Germans in Bolivia here to bring back llamas and alpacas, one Chilean, a man wanted by the Spanish government for treason, an imported Castro-supporting dentist, four Peruvians, three college student Brazilians studying in Bolivia to save a dime, the regulars, four past guerrillas (one of them who knew Ché and is still convinced the U.S. had a price on his head) and a partridge in a pair tree.

But there is only one person who you always look for. You love this man. He opens time for you and lets anything dry wet. It is not at all a sexual attraction or urge you have for this man, but a slight crush on his mind, on his being as though you have seen Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad. His name is Freddy.

The cast of regulars, like yourself, include: the architect who tried to kiss your friend, a depressed Cochabambino trying his hardest to get to America (If you were a female, he'd try to marry you), a South African who teaches English and likes to have affairs with his students, the waiters, the waitresses. You know them all.

One waitress, who works almost every night, likes you. She is always your server. She is always inviting you to do things with her that would make your mother frown. You are polite in your manner of refusal and always take a rain check.

She is attractive, granted, but you don't know why you are not attracted to her.

She takes you to the kitchen in the back on your twentieth night, and makes both of you an alcoholic concoction—her creation. Shh, she says and laughs as she gives you the free drink.

Is it an aphrodisiac?

You feel guilty. This shouldn't be free. Drink it anyway.

Then, you kiss her...the first night you actually pick up that rain check, and you don't know why. When you come in tomorrow you will have some explaining to do.

Tomorrow comes and you decide you want to play cards with the fellows:

Poker, Lobo, Telefunce, anything...you're ready to bet at least 100 bolivianos.

When you arrive the architect is already drunk. What does he ever design?

The South African is speaking Spanish in a South African accent. He's harder to understand than an Argentinean. Why can't he learn the accent?

The waitress visits you.

You greet everyone. You kiss five people on their cheeks and shake seven hands. But there's really only one person here who fascinates you—one regular—one man—luckily he's playing cards with you. You even came up with a nickname for him—Machete Freddy.

Almost every night Freddy, the man you love, comes to Casablanca and with him he brings a 19 inch machete.

How much did that cost? You ask.

12 bolivianos, he says. \$1.50.

As sure as the pope is Catholic and that Christopher Columbus was not the first man to discover America, this man that you have fallen for, after walking in, will order Sex on the Beach.

Why do you do it? You ask.

Why? Because I like the sound of it, he says. Every night I can say I had Sex on the Beach and I'm in a landlocked country.

And, sure as Christopher Columbus' name was actually Colon, after his Sex on the Beach he will make a SuDoku puzzle for anyone who asks.

Why do you do it? You ask.

Because, he says, everyone should have an art form.

Then, sure as you are that Bolivia will never see its ocean again, he will play cards. He bets high and loses big. And as sure as you are of this people will stare at him relentlessly.

It is because he has an eye patch.

What happened to your eye? You ask.

It got bored in my socket, he says. You want to push him, and ask more. Can't blame it, though, he continues, I'd be pretty bored there too.

The first time you met him was by accident. You were heading to the counter with a piece of pizza in your hand. A giant knife cut a small piece. Your eyes widened as you watched it retreat—this small piece of pizza on a...giant machete? And you watched as this man with an eye patch opened his mouth and popped the pizza down as though it were popcorn.

You had to go up to him. Curiosity was in your blood like a coups de tat.

What's your name?
Freddy.
Is that a machete?
Yes.
Why do you have a machete?
I like pizza.
Can I call you Machete Freddy?
Have a seat, amigo, have a seat.

After that night you talk with a man who has fought lions, swallowed swords in the streets of Arabia, served in the French Foreign Legion, fought an alligator, explored the Amazon, imported mangos, and been married (and widowed) three times.

Some nights you and he retreat to your little corner, your little hideout from the first time you were in the cafe. A picture of Humphrey Bogart stares at you while you talk to Freddy about politics, art, love, truth, and lack thereof.

What do you think of the president?
What do you think of Catholic priests raping altar boys?
Who's your favorite artist?
Myself.
How many times have you been in love?
I've been married three times, but have yet to fall in love.
Is that true?
I don't even know what true means. Bring me a dictionary.

He only does this with you. Other regulars are jealous, others happy to see the crazy man with a machete as far away as possible.

One night he comes in and grabs your shoulder. He skips Sex on the Beach and making a SuDoku puzzle and sits you across from Mr. Bogart.

I have a poem, and I want your opinion, he says.
You're honored. You're ready. You read.

Shit happens.
Life stinks.

You are in love with Freddy Machete Freddy.

This week will be different for you.
Walk in, greet the regulars, see the Midget in his corner with a stack of papers, two Afro-Brazilians playing chess, your waitress, who by now makes you horny.
You sit down to play cards and wait for Machete Freddy.

Freddy never comes.

That's alright, you shrug, just a disappointment. It's not like he comes every night.

Four nights pass. You try making your own SuDoku.

Night 1 2 4 in Casablanca. No one has even spoken of Freddy and his disappearance. You resort to asking one person where he is—the drunk architect.

Who's Freddy? He responds.

By the fifth night you can't take it, you have to know. You're playing cards, you say: Where is Machete Freddy?

He left.

He left?

Yeah, for Europe. Say, how will he get that machete on the plane?

Is he coming back?

Why would he come back?

What?

Your right hand starts to jitter and your left foot starts shaking.

Did he, did he leave an address?

Check the warehouses.

They all laugh.

Why? Why? Why did this happen? You would have been happier to find out that he killed himself than this. Why didn't he tell you? Were you not friends? Were you not the best of friends? Did he not let you read his poem?

Excuse yourself from the table.

Shake...shake...shake...

Head to the bathroom...

Hear the comments directed at you: What happened to him? Perhaps too much alcohol. Perhaps.

Breathe...but you can't, not correctly. Your chest feels like it would if you were trapped in a Bolivian tin mine or a pack of cigarettes.

The air doesn't want to go in or out, but stay in your throat.

Open the bathroom door.

Open the damn door!

Carajo!

Nothing, he didn't tell you anything! He didn't give anyone a number, a note. You will never see him again—wait, this you do not know. It's possible, right? Right? Right!

The door is locked. What do you do?

Wait.

Breathe.

Wait? Wait? You've waited for five days.

Go to the women's room.

Your eyes water, you're very light headed. You must look drunk.

There is a line for the lady's room.

Carajo!

On your way back to the locked men's room you see the blurred images of the people...

You can't breathe. Your chest, grab your chest.

If you die here, it's alright. It's appropriate, you think.

Why is it appropriate?

The images, all those people, the Afros, the card players, the random people who will be in this city for only a week.

The regulars. Your friends, right?

Knock on the door. Knock, knock. Screw it. Pound on the door!

When you leave Bolivia you won't even keep in contact with them—it's true. You won't leave your number, your address, they won't either. You will be Freddy. Not even will you stay in contact with the waitress you have made love to twelve times.

Asphyxiation.

The door opens.

Your stomach feels—

Throw up. You have amazing luck, amazing aim, right in the toilet.

Your leg doesn't stop shaking.

Drunk, they must all think you're drunk.

Are you? Are you drunk? What is this? What is this?

Someone closes the door for you.

Stay in the bathroom.

Lie on the floor.

Wait, you can't. It's too small. Economy size.

Sit up.

Your stomach feels better.

What was that?

It's as though throwing up has just cleared your airway—welcome oxygen!

You get up and wash your face.

You are going to live.

You wipe your face off with a towel and open the door.

You're still panting, it's not a direct passage. You're cold right now, and light headed, but you are going to live. Now that you know this, now you—

A piano man! That's what is missing. That's what you need—music to drown yourself in, music...a clean sounding key...just one song.

You sit down in your old corner next to Humphrey Bogart. You barely could walk, but you made it. You want him to sing.

This place, you loved this place, but not anymore. These people were your favorite until you realized they do nothing except gather to swap alcohol, stories, and

look for momentary companionship.

Alcohol wouldn't solve your problem, a piano would.

What was your problem?

You're still light headed and all you can think of is Sam, the piano man from Casablanca, Warner Bros., 1942.

Whisper it without even knowing: Sam, Sam, Sam, where are you?

A woman comes up to you, cigarette in hand, piercing on her tongue. She is directly across from Bogart's face as though about to kiss it.

Who's Sam? She asks, then sits down next to you. She has great difficulty at this. She chose alcohol, perhaps in lack of a piano.

Sex is all he wanted, nothing less, nothing more. You hear her say.

Why is she talking to you? Shh...listen...

He came from the States. I loved him, you know that?

You think of interrupting her, of asking her why she's speaking English. It's obviously not her language. Why is she sitting here? What's her name? You want to ask, but, who interrupts Sam?

He came here every day, when I was a waitress, with a hat just like Humphrey Bogart.

She laughs. It sounds like a trill.

He was from Alaska, writing a book. Have you heard of it? The Wrong Indian. I'm the heroine...

I loved him, you know? But I'm not faithful...

A year we were together. Ten months of lies...

He didn't love me. It was just for the sex...

And here, I tried to be his muse. I tried so hard...

You are breathing, breathing, breathing, no longer gasping. Your stomach feels coarse, but lighter. You are beginning to fly without the Hippie's marijuana.

Her song is mellow, cut, dry as a martini.

He break up with me. He end it. I loved him, but I just couldn't be faithful. So, I took sleeping pills, I came here and told him. What do you call that? Suicide? I tried. He had my stomach pumped.

You no longer care why she is telling you this. You realize, though, that some people need to play the piano while others need to listen, and that balance is the closest to perfection you may ever witness.

One last time, she says it: I loved him.

Your head, you can feel your head. It feels grounded. Your legs no longer shake. Your body feels your blood.

She laughs; warm like you, warm and smooth as Casablanca's hot chocolate... the finale...here it comes...

And then I realized I liked women more than men.

She laughs first. You laugh too. Beethoven would have been jealous.

Without blurs you turn your head: the Midget, the Afro Brazilians, the South African, the architect, cards, chess, cigarette smoke, beers, your waitress, the pianist in front of you.

Casablanca, Casablanca, house that is white, give us some night time delight!

Play it again, Sam, you say, because that must be her name. Play it again...

And she says, Who's Sam?



Sky Speckled
Maya Silver

Congregation

We are gathering, collecting in
yards and along fences and we perch
on semi-sinusoidal, oh so
regular waves of black electrical cord
which penetrates the houses below with
sickly distraction

What intentions we have are ours
to know and conceal in black-feathered
pockets and in ridges along
knuckles, along thinning, pale feet
in feigned intensity which drains
to our toes

I speak not for the rest, no, would
not make that claim and yet—
haven't you wondered, haven't
you thought, perhaps they are of
one mind, of one *crackle-thwip*,
razor-sweet mind?

- *Anna Lunde*

Scott Ritter Speaks on Addiction to War

Professional warrior, you have no neck. We citizens
sit on cushioned plastic as you operate a machine

hovering in the middle of the room. You manipulate
the space like a meat cleaver, massaging your arguments

into slices for us to chew. You push and pull and lift and lower
with such ease, but our teeth are not made for meat and we are only now

learning to chew. Sadly, old warrior, your body is off balance,
your gut hangs like guilt of pre-emption. Addicted to tactic

you speak to simplify opponents and core values. Back at your hotel room
your underwear hangs from you like large leaves. You look into the mirror

your hands folded above your head pressing down
in attempt to materialize your own

core values. I imagine you as an artichoke, yourself
a stranger sucking sour meat from under the leaves of your fingers,
scratching the textured surface with your teeth, drooling.

-Danielle Gersbkoff

A Mistake

Her kisses were empty, emolument
for his friendship, drowsy, lazy dragées
for his sadness. And she turned off the light,
deciding to bivouac by his side, blanketless,
wanting him gone by morning.

When she woke, the sun,
glowing like a liver in hospital light,
stood in her mauve curtains,
a pudgy hussy, an ingratiating gossip,
as if her twelve year old sister, arms akimbo,
were chanting *morning, morning, morning!*

-David Merriman

Body Language

Anna Lunde

He could not help but watch her over the shoulder of his friend as she sat and ate and laughed. He always thought that her mouth was deceptively large. Demure lips seemed to pinch together around an oral cavity of tiny proportions, but when she laughed, and when she ate, her smile became huge, filled with shiny teeth and pink gums. When he passed her on the sidewalk, when she was withdrawn into herself, he simply wanted to reach out and pull at the corners until her smile was forced to surface.

The hairdresser liked to take a lot of time in washing her customer's hair, massaging products into the scalp. She knew that people responded well to such treatment, and she liked happy customers. This customer's hair was long and fine, and she imagined making hair-and-suds sculptures like a child in a bath. When she did the final rinse, she found her customer fast asleep.

She shifted her angle slightly, looking for that beautiful line that ran down off the brow along the back of the cheek, revealing the structure of cheek, the tip of the nose; the tight little corner of the mouth was lost by the odd angle.

The lecture was boring, the girl's vision blurred. The teacher's doppelganger appeared, partly colliding with the original image. As the girl let her eyes un-focus further, looking beyond the chalkboard, through the back of the classroom, the two teachers slid farther and farther apart, both images taking on an unreliable quality. One second she could see the writing on the chalkboard, then it was obscured by the blue suit as the right-hand teacher gained strength and popped back into relative clarity. But just as another section of the chalkboard was pushing its way through the shoulder and neck of the left-hand teacher, the right-hand image lost its resolve. Refocusing her eyes, she found nothing in the front of the classroom but a patchwork of blue suit and chalk writing; the teacher's features remained floating in disparate locations behind the desk. She hid her face in her hands.

The man hated his feet. He thought they looked stunted and abnormal. Like a word that grows uncomfortable from overuse, the more he stared at his feet the more absurd and vulgar they looked. When he tripped down the stairs and broke his wrist, he cried out in pain, but no one heard him, and he found he could not rise.



Fourth Floor
Chris Hamby

River Rising

April, the river rose,
spilling over its banks.
It brought up with it sticks
and cigarette butts, packing peanuts,
memories and mud mixing in dark
pools around our home.
The begonias in the backyard
drowned. A mattress
floated on the surface, bumping up
against the oak trees.
Black waters lapping at our door,
we retreated inside as the it demanded
to be let in. When it left, it left
behind the dead wet earth.
There is still a watermark on our house

where the river rose
then stopped.

-Colleen Fullin

Frankford Lullaby

If Philadelphia were my mother
tonight I'd let her wrap me
in her arms and sing the Blue
Line to me as a lullaby of reflected
window selves and scratched seats,
then lay me down on Margaret
Orthodox station with my hustle
in my hand.

On the block of those streets
I was a rock star running hard
with farm boy blood in my veins,
trying to crack those city eyes,
those headlights cocked
and deadly. The black
tinted windows, the Mustang
boys so ready, priest
pimp tripping the sidewalk down
with a limp.

The whispers rip past
the tracks, shifting the
panhandler's traffic

simple, flannel, Irish. Church
rises up away from the subway,
the subwoofers of holy lethargy
pounding out an elegy to my concrete
mother, buses shuffling down her
asphalt thighs past the iron
shells of burned out warehouses.

There's a ticket token pass spoken "Erie
Torresdale" by the conductor
as he glances back, black billboards
stumbling drunkenly on. Getting off
and walking tall, I let the accent slip
down my throat like semen, acidic and young,
afraid of nothing but my mother
wonders if I'll wake up from her song.

-Ian Rhodewalt



Cocoa, You Old Leveler
Maya Silver

The Tongues of Angels

When my father lay on the church carpet roaring,
eyes closed, two hours, three nights a week,
for two weeks, that was weird.
I tiptoed around the Lion of Judah
at midnight wondering if we could go home soon.
Speaking in angelic languages

was much more normal, praying
with the Holy Spirit. During a revival when I was ten,
my father asked if I wanted to be filled
with the Spirit, an overflowing cup. The preacher, Sherby,
had won Mr. Tennessee before he got saved; he could bench
four-fifty and had a neck like a bull.

My eyes scrounged the floor before they darted
to my father's, nodding. Sherby placed his paw on my forehead;
eyelids closed. I scrubbed my brain,
let my tongue go limp as if playing dead,
waited for an angel's tongue to replace my own,

but I only felt the pressure
of his palm urging me to fall back
into my father's arms, to be gently slain.
Nothing hit 'Play.' My tongue was a corpse.

Finally, I stole a phrase that had rolled across the floor
the day before. A mockingbird,
I repeated, "Ah shah la tang day shittiaco,"
over and over and over. And fell.

Three days later, cocooned
on the couch at home, I overheard my parents' voices,
my mother recalling how she had once approached
a man babbling on the floor of the church. She had smelt

sulfur on his breath, seen the puff
of yellow: it was a demon
speaking through him, mocking the work
of the Spirit. My blanket overtook me

like leathery wings; violet skin
with green blotches rose in my brain as over a body.
Was this an angel convicting me? If only
I could cut out its tongue.

-Alex Darr

The Curator Sleeps

Four days left in my own mind; I asked the curator to please be kind but he fell asleep and ushered me on. So I danced with lilacs and waited for their springtime bloom before leaving on a dingy for an ocean cave. A seagull was sweet enough to show me the way, though suggested I take a lobster trap back; that route would be quicker it said. When I finally stopped the row and sunk into the entryway, I found I'd drowned. I hoped to get CPR from a mermaid, but they don't exist in the New England waters. I waited until I was bloated, then my body broke apart and swam away to find its master. If it hadn't been for the draggers and their big nets I might never have gotten back together. Illusive figures worked the boat deck: orange slickers hung onto faceless bodies. But they were decent enough folk to let me earn my keep back to shore. Bad luck, though, came from the superstitions of the sea. The motor stalled and then it fried and scorched with heat and longed for fire. Only brazen wind was there to save us and I, along with the gentle crew, threw up my shirt and sailed. I braced my arms against the passionate gale and shouted the fury of defiance, a cry laced with exaltation. Dragged across protruding rocks, my skin was torn and the salt lapped the wound in courtesy. I lost those faceless travelers somewhere past; when I came upon the woods of a foreign land I was alone. With no guide I scavenged blind and curious and tasted berries and moss until I felt the growth within me. Twigs broke through fingertips and ruffled my hair. Bark, with the miniscule cuts of blades, sliced all pores so it might breathe the air. I crusted over, condemned to stand ground among the cheerful pines. Paralysis. Living. It was a good life until the lumberyard restocked; every tree does their part and I fell without a cry. A tree sees a great ordeal; I thanked it for hosting me. Then I ran to the shore at the edge of the earth and leapt from the cliff. I fell through the sky, that I might surface once more from the love of a coma. The curator held open a door of fantastic light and I sat up wiping the dirt from my face.

-Georgie Schaefer

Late August

Here there is
dust and sun,
a heat unmoved
by the circling of a fan.

I line up our shoes,
keep the counters clean
and cook for a hunger larger
than the two of us.
Knees turned away
we eat on one plate
in silence.

When they cut down that tree,
the giant maple
holding our bed up
in a birdsong palm,
the world came crashing close.

Late August,
I wish for winter
I wish for that warm reason
to stay in bed a minute longer
for the cold floors and snow
that hurried us together
into that bright white morning—

-Marisa Beltramini

Vacation with the Deutschmans.

I couldn't take it when she started having sex.
Couldn't. I'd sat on that couch
so many times.
Her dry humping him there, her bouncing
breasts, horrified me.
She had the first set. I saw
her nipple once by accident, it was so
purple.
I saw her mother talk on that couch
looking like Susan Sarandon
except for her chandelier neck. We watched
the Sixth Sense at her birthday party
on that couch, playing the goo goo dolls,
her tight grip on my clammy hand. So many sweaters
color coded in her closet. We laid down
our heads underneath the sweater rainbow. She never ate,
beautiful tightness dyed straightened hair
dancing like a commercial, her belly
peeking out waving innocently. Vacation
with her family. Dinner, skis, mountains,
twins, attention, abuse;
they needed me, an excuse
to keep it together in the middle
of the snow, we could have washed away
into the thick plastic booth seating.
Next to me I imagined her lips folded
hung over the flat edge of her face
melting, her nose dripping
collecting viscously around the low spot in the floor,
draining. I sat on the edge
of my seat stared so long at those long faces,
dreamt of gouging my eyes
with the toothpick from her hamburger. I hesitated
before stepping over the floor drain,
begging for it to suck me under.

-Danielle Gersbkoff

Walt Whitman

I am I am I am that's what Walt Whitman said. I said, shut up. I don't want to hear it. I said, shut your pie hole. I said, you seem nice. I didn't know what to say to him. I smiled and showed my teeth. I laughed at the wrong moments. I'm not so angry, really. I covered my teeth. I showed them. I covered my mouth with my hand to be not gross when I talked with my mouth full. How goofy is that. How goofy is it that that's not polite even though nobody can see your food.

I love everyone around me. That's what I said to Walt Whitman.

By that time he was drunk. I think he loved me right then.

I went into the bathroom and looked into the toilet bowl. I looked for a litter box, which I didn't find. I looked at the toothbrushes. There were three toothbrushes.

The first one was white with a blue green grip for the thumb. The second one had a transparent red handle. The third had a yellow handle and the bristles were pointing all over the place.

I looked to see if there were three different kinds of toothpaste, so I could match the toothpastes with the toothbrushes by personality type. The only toothpaste was a tube of Aim.

I wanted to brush my teeth but I didn't bring my toothbrush to Walt Whitman's house.

Aim is cheap red toothpaste. I like Arm & Hammer With Baking Soda and Whitening Peroxide. I still didn't want to go back out to face Walt Whitman yet. I wanted to pee but I didn't have to pee. I considered pouring water from a glass into the water in the toilet bowl to simulate the sound of me peeing. I didn't do it. I spit in the toilet.

I was conflicted about whether it was better to leave the tiny bubbles the spit made floating around on the surface of Walt Whitman's toilet water, or to flush them and waste water and also let him hear me flush after he heard me definitely not pee.

I didn't flush, but I swished the spit around with the toilet scrubber a little bit.

I washed my hands and dried them and put lotion on them, because there was a bottle of Caswell Massey lotion on the sink.

Is it normal to say that there was half a bottle of Caswell Massey lotion on the sink?

That's a more accurate way to put it.

I went back into the dining room, where Walt was sitting and writing confessional poetry for some reason. I said, hey. He looked up. I didn't know what to say so I sat across from him and said, can I have another drink. I poured another drink for me because he said I could but I didn't pour him one because he didn't ask me to, and besides, he'd had enough.

I said, what are you working on. He said, I don't know yet. That's the kind of thing I'd say, maybe. I said, I know exactly what you mean, and smiled and showed my teeth. I wasn't sure if I really felt like smiling or if I was just being friendly.

He said, you have such a pretty smile.
I said, shut up you old perv, and laughed.
He laughed. His laugh was loud and possibly uncertain.
He said, listen to this.

I am in love with my feet. I look at them now that I lost all the weight and I say, it's so good to see you. Your calluses are yellow and friendly.
He stopped and said, I think we have so much to learn from the Japanese.
I ignored him.
I could tell he was being ironic but I don't know how I could tell.
I just could.
I wanted to hug him, but I also wanted him to never be ironic again.
He smiled. I smiled and thought, he's so nice, like a big cat.
He said, you're so nice.

-Alexandra Casanave

Actin Filament Map

reach
my all
fingers that
ancient out pins
sea my the
of fingers lightning soul
fortunate reaching signals
mishaps the
end,
we yet
don't a
mind wound we
it in don't
may the mind
form beginning
all into
things: a the
the single linking larger
brain, screw our darkness
the of fingers: where
ice, flesh gut there
the is us, is
tree stuff no
us light
but
for
the
eye.

-Alexa Punnamkuzhyil

Untitled

I am hunting mallards in a dream.
A still life by the river
is abandoned by my friend Jeff.
A well mannered black man
with a voice of precious stone
is recounting Jeff's youthful discretions
to a prospective employer.
Jeff begs him to stop.
Arrows fall from above
landing in the sand on either side
of a brilliant mallard.
I search but can not find their source.
More arrows.
The drake is heading toward me.
Likewise the arrows.
I start to run.
The drake cries of conspiracy.
At the display case
the mallards are scrambling
out of the forest.
A mechanical duck of cartoonish
dimension quacks a monotony
and bears a clock built into its body.
I think it announces the change
of seasons. But I feel like it might
explode!
I discover a fruited chocolate
by the freezer and ask the man
with the shotguns about the dogs.
He has misplaced a special one,
leveling his shotguns all the while.
I find his dog for him.
A beautiful breed of big dog,
With a coat of indigo blue
and almond shaped eyes of yellow.

-Michael R. Jones

Reading

I tried to sneak in quietly. I didn't mean
for the heavy door to squeal. It seemed
everyone turned to stare down my searing face
which blossomed cherry, and I think
especially the speaker must have minded
my late entrance to the reading.

I stole an empty seat. The poet began reading
one of her nature poems, whose subtle meaning
easily escaped me as my wandering mind
adapted to the new environment. It seemed
that suddenly I couldn't really think
about the gushing words because your face

caught me off-guard. I snapped around to face
front. Fighting to focus on the reading –
enveloped in sensuality until I'd think
about your tiny gesture's meaning.
I wasn't ready for you, though it seemed
I knew you'd be here in the back of my mind.

Once I heard you scoff and I minded
my own business for a minute, but your face
a poker tell if only to me, seemed
to contort with disgust at the reading
of a certain line. You're demeaning.
It's not fair of you to think

that the poet didn't think
the metaphor through. I know your mind
and you don't have to be so mean.
Your lack of manners effaced
the artist's well-earned reading.
I should have known, it seems,

you were wrong before we started. You seemed
so exciting at the time. To think
the poet wasn't worth a reading,
because in your own more capable mind
you craft better lines, well you just don't want to face
the painful emotions behind her meaning.

I never quite know what your glances mean. I seem to find fondness on your face, but then again I used to think we were so like-minded. I'm just no good at readings.

-Danielle Blake



Amanda Goldstein

Kasturba Gandhi

Mohatma,

is it the trace of lemon juice on your lips
that puckers them,
or me?

You hum as you scrape up excrement
beneath the dry sun, yet when it sets
I am untouchable.

Mohatma,

you rise up like full moon tide
but you need me like salt
to anchor you,
hold on to by the seat of your dhoti
and keep you from floating up among gods.

-Laura Boffa

Superposition

i.

Your hands are two doves
spiraling and swooping
over my shoulders. Tonight
grass whistles with wind.
The blades lap against each other.
On the other side of the world,
someone is kissing her lover goodnight
for the last time.

ii.

She kisses his leathery face
until he drifts to visions.
Later she wakes, hearing a sound like
a vulture having lost
a nest full of new eggs.
Outside the door,
an army lifts the weapons
we have paid for.
A silver pebble slices the air
like a sleek animal.

iii.

If the cat is both alive and dead
inside of the box, as you
have explained, then what about
those blurry places? Alive like wind
or like feathers, dead like a fossil,
a forgotten song? The last time I heard
your voice it was a leaf,
stemless, somewhere between
paper and firewood. It was a tree,
dampened for me,
embroidered with ants.
This cat should teach us how
to fly in fearlessness,
not knowing when it will be alive,
not knowing when it will be dead.

iv.

We drive past the cornfields
swaying gray in September light.
A flutter of white-throated sparrows
digs between the crumpled rows.
Your palms are brown lizards
perched on the steering wheel. They speak
with the sharp tooth of silence.
This is how we loved:
subcutaneously, without apology.
We accelerate and inch the breath
from our drummed stomachs,
nearing the destination.
I can see it on a green sign.
This is how we war: carelessly,
without even knowing.

-Cecelia Galarraga

too late to go home

So the moon and me, we're walking home, right. It's about one o'clock in the a.m. or one thirty maybe. There's a sassafras twig in my mouth that I'm chewing on. I've got spring coursing through my veins; this one girl is on my brain. The shadows smell of sex. I cross Amorsend Street with the dogwoods in full bloom overhead. A Cadillac slams on its brakes, but plows into me anyway, and I go down hard. As the blackness rolls in with the speed of a cigarette, and the blood rushes out of my forehead, all I can hear is a soft and slow drummer playing a distant jazz fill. The moon turns a corner and goes on home without me, drinks some hot milk and honey before toddling off to bed. The rain dances across my stiffening body in the next hour, washes me baptism-clean. As the bars downtown flush their patients out at closing time, the moon snores loudly and rolls over in stained sheets. The Cadillac, seventy three miles out of town and heading west, is ringing with a country song of two timing bastards, broken women, and the massaging hands of Jesus.

-Ian Rhodewalt



Rock Island of the Boobies and Penguins

Maya Silver

Four Motions for Losing Emotions.

I

At times, upon rising from the gentle tug of sleep I feel
as if I had not, but watch two toothless birds
with feathers jagged break off from the picture frame.
They are not for the sky alone, for they will find
another window pain to paint, while inside the colors churn
pencils and petals and people, the edges far fading from foggy.
I fear the shapes of cold that hunger on my breath
will cut themselves away, carrying
shadow pieces to follow the wind, until I am left
alone. I have only words, fragments fall-
ing like leaves from the breath of two
who walk, coats heavy against the cold. I surreptitiously steal away
their thoughts, and like a child leap
into the decay.

II

I am the camera that rests
in my head, taking life like a bag of air;
I cannot blink as the crowd
crowds me in, cannot breathe my own breath,
when I speak it's a caw carbon copy,
I am caught in the crow created sky.
I escape, all is silent.
In my room of bottled breezes
where the wood is dark and light left lingering
at the door I unload lungs of their load, never stopping until
bang on window, bottles break,
shattered air and (amidst
the clatter of birds) I remember all is oxygen.

III

I want to leave that which is of the masses
to the mannequins, whose politics of published roses
mouthless shout that I am in love,
beating clouds against my brain like soggy cigarettes.
All I can do is dress them up in furs and glitter,
hide between their legs and scratch letter after letter, another
artforartsake in the attic.
If only I could find the words to fetter
fast to the inside of my potters cheek, those that
cut the sky like skin
letting stars bleed out
bringing me closer and closer to

IV

The light goes off in the window and I cease
to feel the burn. My heart, dragging
downward, beats low and dull. I can no longer see
my own face, those tired eyes of brown, the lips that
crack with cold and smile. Now I only sense the tip
of a nose. I am
awake and wanting with the hunger
of an earthquake, the insatiable sea
gulls ripping apart bags of chips between the legs
of sun caressed flesh.
I think of something to say after I have fallen
back to sleep. Or maybe I've already
said it.

-Jesse Miller

Blacktop

The blacktop is where the children gather—all of their fluids accumulate and form the paste of youth. Scrawny boys with buck teeth stomp around and spit. The girls spray cheap perfume and walk through the cloud—they don't realize that the boys cannot see them yet. The kid with chapped lips and a runny nose that never goes away laughs—flecks of mucus flatten on impact. Every day, somebody cries. One of the taller children trips over the basketball and falls hard— a piece of his knee is missing and blood is everywhere.

The children do not see what the blacktop sees. Even the teacher does not know. At night, (this is true and scares me), when it is dark, the old women from the town gather. With small silver spoons, they collect the crust from the blacktop. When they get home, they sprinkle it into alcohol and rub it behind their ears.

-David Greenberg

Los Angeles

Los Angeles: an American coastal city. Your hair—
my mouth is, kind of, imagining it.

(Object-subject/my own mouth's numbness, I need this/you are
from California.) I need to, I need to think harder about my signifiers.

I need to look at my hair and my makeup
and think about, how does she see me from seeing my hair and makeup?

I need to think. I think I need a moment.

Maybe I am rushing,

I know I am rushing but also

I'm listening over and over to the same dance song. I know I'm rushing

I know I am oh but oh but oh god. And that is all just

tense or what. and this is just god and not about needing

or, this is just lushness and fullness and blood/this is what is.

And if it means an open umbrella, or that, or

glottal or hunkers, that

is fine this is perfect/harpishly plucking your perfect ahh. Or whatever.

And you know. I have questions when our hands touch

and thirstless and I am just oh,

a thistle and hairbrush.

-Alexandra Casanave

Junkie's Sonnet

In a drunken gaffe God blurted my fate.
To apologise, I was wasted for years.
Spittle epiphanies, plans inchoate,
a chloroform rag sopped in dark, stout beer
He gave me to suck. Happy was I, blue
& flapping with crazed oriflammes of cheer,
thin as a flicked dime, inhaling stars, glue
as viscid and yellow as pus. I feared
falling asleep alone; stoned firebrands
napped on my sheets. Fulgent & cavalier,
six lines blown, I decked hookers with cut hands,
romanced a red toilet. *I am sincere!*
I remember what God whispered, he said
I'd lick the rind of death 'fore I were dead.

-David Merriman



Leah Brotzman

With Apologies to Lesley Gore

There is a period of maybe five minutes this morning where the sun creeps over the roof across the street and along the porch and I don't notice it until it begins to cooly come up my arm like a hand creeping over the seat divide in a movie theater and

*Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
Everything that's wonderful is what I feel when*

(I will never write again,
Not like I did when
Everything was hard
and
a girl I pretended I
loved)

(name one poet who wrote
anything decent over 30)

in a movie theater and warms me up through my blanket and sleeves and I think, “

(who wasn't doing drugs
or in a trance
or women,
who hardly count)

“In another five minutes, the porch roof will cut off the sun; this is poetry” and rush back to my notebook to jot down a few lines before the moment leaves me (as if by leaving, I weren't abandoning the moment just as thoroughly), hoping to get the first decent bits I've recorded in weeks

(I say “notebook”
and not “laptop” because
it's more romantic. ditto
“weeks” not “years” and
the whole scene, even tho
I sat there finishing my
breakfast, too lazy
to rush inside)

*Brighter than a lucky penny,
When you're near the rain cloud disappears, dear,
And I feel so fine just to know that you are mine*

(tho because the beats said tho
women because maybe mysogyny
can make up for not being gay
which might not be a prereq
for being a decent poet
but comes close.

I am channeling poets who are
not myself
in ways that are entirely
disingenuous

)

, so I jot down my lines with sunshine and coffee on my lips and I can't get this ditty
out of my head that I don't really know the words of, but I remember starts out with
"sunshine and lollipops and"

*Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows,
Everything that's wonderful is sure to come your way*

(and hungover, which maybe accounts
for my "drugs," and under 30
besides, so really not writing
because I don't write, not
because I'm spent or
a woman)

and I feel a little bit sappy thinking of the song, writing a poem about sunshine, and
the moment is really gone, not because I left, but because I let myself write myself out
of the warmth of the sun against my skin

*'Cause you're in love, you're in love,
And love is here to stay!*

-Ben Kossak



Mask
Jackie Bousek

When Out Walking

Avoid eye contact with the people you knew
a few years ago—that brief romantic tryst
or the friend of a friend from the art opening.
They'll look you in the face like children do,
frustrated, not understanding an adult's list
of needs from those around them; still hoping
there's a spark of *Once...* worth it to pursue.
Accidental connections with people, like cysts,
are found in the dark, when we reach out, groping.
But when out walking—with any luck—they'll avoid you.

-Ted Roland

Consume

It was a cathartic rain,
so big that there was hardly room
left in the air to breathe.

I'd watched the drops freckle his shirt—
a dark blue at first, until it stuck to his chest and arms,
shiny and black.

He said my name, almost in a gurgle
as the rain fell through his teeth,
sounding so distant.

Give me, you know man.

My hand fell into the pocket
where our lukewarm scotch
liked to live in its little flask.

It went sliding into his gut
warm and started its grabbing at his soft parts.

I could be inside his belly

cultivating that
minutely burning slosh
across the bottom—

I could be pouring down his throat.
If he'd ask for that.

He opened up his lips to the sky,
washing out the bitter taste with rainwater;
drops quivered at the corners of his mouth
and I wobbled with them.

-Rachel Guthrie

Khmer New

The stupa rises, clear glass, like a hundred-foot bottle of beer
though stone-cornered and capped. And dry, except for the skulls.
Nine thousand of them, rising tiers; each blooms
a sick yellow, gray, or brown. No sheen clothes
them with halos. They did not die in the war:
just beasts thrown in pits. And above it all, children sing

oblivious to the death-garden next to their school. Mosquitoes sing
in the tourists' ears, attracted to the sweat, like beer.
The pests' forerunners starved. The butchers made war
with DDT: not on insects, but on stinking skulls
and bodies—dead, or nearly so. Shreds of the victims' clothes—
pink, yellow, blue—now push from the graves like blooms.

*Two-thirds of the graves are exhumed after a new state blooms.
The stupa's foundation is built. Cauldrons encroach: burning logs sing
like witches. The diggers will burn their own clothes
to excise the beefy scent. The brew froths like beer
or piss. All avoid stirring: faces surface. They boil skulls,
stripping them clean for tourists, who soon war*

over price with guides. One guide has a side-market: *war
flowers*. "Sir, a dollar for some lovely war blooms
to offer at the stupa?" White Tiger skulls
smirk on the guides' green umbrellas while benches sing,
in red and gold, the wonders of Angkor Beer.
Many sport Angkor Wat in gold and crimson on their clothes,

unmasking Tiger Beer as an upstart. One cannot buy clothes
advertising the green Tiger at the souvenir shop. The war
rages across the country between Angkor and Tiger Beer,
unperturbed by landmines that dot Cambodia like blooms.
The sexy youths in the commercials can't hear the hoes sing
through the air here at Choeng Ek, burying themselves in skulls

like young men in women's bodies. One grave has no skulls
only women's bones, and no clothes.
No one here ever had a bullet sing
into their ear: there might have been another war,
and bullets were too precious to waste. Red blooms
on the TV: "You can't waste a drop of Angkor Beer!"

-Alex Darr

Daily Fire

Like air

 making and unmaking
—on geology's pages
on planetary tables—
its invisible buildings
 is man.

His language is barely a seed
yet burns

 on space's open palm.
Syllables show incandescently.

As such, they're plants:
 their roots

fracturing the silence,
 their branches

build homes in the sound.

 Syllables:
they entangle and untangle,
 playing
in likeness and unlikeness.

Syllables:

 ripening in minds,
flowering in mouths.

 Their roots
drink night, eat up light.

 Languages:
trees incandescing
with leaves of rain.

Vegetation out of lightning,
geometry out of echoes:

on the sheet of paper
the poem arises

 like day
on space's open palm.

*-Octavio Paz
translated from the Spanish by Ted Roland*



Coney Island
Chris Hamby

Herbert Sandstrom

Julian Cartwright

HERBERT SANDSTROM IS MY NAME IN THIS PARTICULAR DAYDREAM. I AM NOT THE OPPOSITE OF MY REAL SELF, NOR AM I EVERYTHING I WANT TO BE. . .

But for some reason, I, Herbert Sandstrom, am created each time Julian slips away from reality. Not in a dramatic way, I know he's not crazy, but in the boring way. When he is bored and also daydreaming, that is my call to duty. My alarm clock beeps and I am off to work. There is a lot of traffic, but I drive aggressively, weaving in and out of lanes like a madman. I have many deadlines to meet; new ones are created instantly. They appear in a folder in my PDA, which I check about every five minutes. I realize that time for Julian is much faster, that five minutes for me is not much of anything in the real world. But this is an extremely competitive occupation. If I fail to meet deadlines, there is no question Julian will fire me, lose faith in me in favor of some other, more exciting daydream. And there's that constant reminder coming through my car stereo—"Herbert Sandstrom is an official man. He has amazing hair, which flows in the wind. His office is well-decorated but not very functional. He doesn't feel like working today."

Julian's voice sort of makes me nervous. Sometimes he decides to give me a day off when I've already driven half way to work. He sends me right back and demands that I read the paper and forces me to put on old Soul and Motown records with a cup of mint tea. I don't want to do this! I would rather be out enjoying myself, but here I sit, liquid scalding my mouth, nodding my head to some music from someone else's generation. Julian doesn't appreciate this stuff either—what's the big idea?

Such was my afternoon of misery until the phone rang.

"Herbert Sandstrom," it said. "Herbert Sandstrom really likes Motown records. Herbert Sandstrom really wants a sex change. No, Herbert Sandstrom really wants a promotion."

"Yes!" I said. "Herbert Sandstrom would like that!"

"NO," the voice said. "Herbert Sandstrom didn't get the promotion. In fact he is going to be infected with a freak strain of leprosy."

"What! You can't do that! Isn't it lethal?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," the voice said. "But it won't happen for another week or so."

And that was it. The leprosy would kick in in a week or so.

IN THE MEAN TIME, HERBERT DECIDES TO TAKE IT EASY. HE POURS HIMSELF A HOT, AROMATIC MUG OF OOLONG TEA AND SAVORS ITS SWEET AROMA.

You can't say that something aromatic has a sweet aroma, I thought. That's redundant. Idiot.

I'LL MAKE YOU REDUNDANT

(Julian is not a nice guy. Julian is just about the worst person ever to have lived. He is an idiot.)

SAVORING ITS SWEET AROMA, HERBERT OPENS A CONTAINER OF HIS MOST FAVORITE DESSERT, PECAN SANDIES. HERBERT GORGES HIMSELF ON THESE SWEET-SALTY BUNDLES OF HAPPINESS.

I have just downed an entire box of cookies. I am about to vomit, but I am strangely unable to move. Herbert is tired and sick. Herbert is sick of this and just wants to go to bed forever.

HERBERT FEELS A SUDDEN BURST OF ENERGY. HE RUNS TO GET HIS TYPEWRITER AND POURS HIMSELF A WHOLE POT OF COFFEE, WHICH HE DRINKS.

A whole pot of coffee, which he drinks. It's not even written well. Fine, I'll drink it! Then I'll spew it all over your precious typewriter. I can't stand the thing. I'd rather write by hand.

HERBERT SPEWS THE CONTENTS OF HIS VERY FULL STOMACH ONTO HIS BELOVED TYPEWRITER. HE DECIDES TO WRITE BY HAND.

"I hate Julian. He is an idiot. He is the worst person ever to have lived."

IT WAS CATHARTIC FOR HERBERT TO WRITE THESE WORDS, WORDS WHICH HAD BEEN WEIGHING SO HEAVILY UPON HIS TORTURED MIND. HE FOUND THAT, WITH EACH LETTER, WITH EACH STROKE OF HIS PEN, HE WAS ABLE TO FIND A MEASURE OF FREEDOM...

"Julian is a jerk. I wish he would die."

AND SO HE BEGAN TO STEER THE DIRECTION OF HIS OWN LIFE. SLOWLY, METHODICALLY, BUT WITH GREAT PASSION. WRITE ON, HERBERT! WRITE INTO THE NIGHT!

The next morning I was too tired to think and my head began to pound every time I tried to blink. I got into my car, dreading an entire day of pain and exhaustion.

I sat at my desk, barely conscious, staring at the neatly framed Van Gogh print on the opposite wall—the one with the crows circling this cornfield and everything is swirling. Then Carolyn comes up to me, white as a ghost.

"Herbert, what happened to you?"

"You don't want to know."

"But you're all... Have you seen a doctor?"

"I don't need a doctor. I'm just... exhausted and fed up and sick," I moaned.

"Your face," she said. "It's—It's covered in little black dots."

Oh no. Not now—this is not the time, I thought.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you have—"

"—Leprosy. I know. This is the worst day ever."

It's just inhumane to do that to someone, I thought, in the middle of the week.

"Could you at least give me a day?" I said aloud. "Or at least enough time to have my life flash before my eyes—cause right now it hurts to even open them."

Carolyn was gone. She has to compete for Julian's attention just like the rest of us. She was just being polite, but I mean, what would it matter to her if I dropped dead?

"Are you up there!" I yelled. It was like I was trying to debate with the Great and Powerful Oz, unable to state any reason why he should listen to me. I tugged at my hair, waiting for the clock to strike five.

HERBERT SANDSTROM DROVE HOME IN THE PERFECT SILENCE THAT HE CRAVED. HE TOOK THE LONG WAY HOME BECAUSE HE WAS FEELING SENTIMENTAL. HE LONGED TO VISIT THE PLACE WHERE HE FIRST FELL IN LOVE.

My nose keeps falling off. It's hard to drive that way. There must be a penalty for driving noseless. It's probably worse than passing a schoolbus. I felt like I was losing sensation or something—I really couldn't feel my feet. I parked near the boardwalk and walked a few blocks on my stone-feet. This was the place. It had been a rainy day, when I was a teenager.

A DAY HE WOULD NEVER FORGET, A DAY HE COULD NOT FORGET. . .

There was a little ice cream place. I just got out of the funhouse, which I thought was a drag. But there was this girl in the ice cream line and we talked about how we preferred gelato. I was a major snob even then, I realized. But I couldn't stop thinking about this girl who didn't like ice cream but ate it anyway. But it didn't matter because there was no gelato there anyway. I felt sort of embarrassed to have had the conversation at all.

Looking at myself noseless in the funhouse mirror with my body starting to decay, I just lost all hope, not necessarily in a bad way, but it was easier than I expected. . .

My eyes began to overflow with tears. This is really not my life, I thought, in the way you can say, "this is my job." I started to think that growing up is basically giving up control over your own life, while gripping more tenaciously to your instincts. I guess I've grown up then.

AND HERBERT SANDSTROM BROKE DOWN ON THE BOARDWALK IN A FULL REALIZATION OF HIS USELESSNESS, SOBBING UNCONTROLLABLY, HIS DISTORTED IMAGE SO GROSS, SO HIDEOUS THAT IT MADE HIM ILL TO THINK...

I dialed 9-1-1 on a payphone with my remaining finger.

"Hello? Yes, I would like to order an ambulance. . . well, not exactly. I'm nearly dead, but I think I'll pull through." I reminded myself of the Monty Python movie, the one that Julian has never seen. The guy says, "I'm not dead yet," right before someone bops him on the head. (Probably ironic for Julian): as I called to mind this scene I lost consciousness in a matter of minutes, or maybe they were just seconds, or possibly even less than one second.

Before I knew it, I was in the hospital. My whole body hurt, and I was beginning to wish that Julian would just finish me off. The nurse who was there looked sort

of bored and sort of concerned, as if she were ready to pull the plug. Whether she would or not I couldn't say—probably not, because I just woke up. Damn it! Maybe that means I'm getting better. There's really no way to tell. I sort of preferred staying in this state. It makes transitions easier. I would say 'choices' but I don't want to push my luck.

Someone came by with a food tray, but I really had a hard time believing the food was for me. If I am really a leper, no one should be in the room with me, I thought. They're probably lepers too. The nurse prepared to empty a half spoonful of mashed potatoes into my weakened mouth. When it was safely deposited, I started to move. I felt pretty numb, but motile. I started to choke, and I guess my voice was fine because I heard it all craggly.

"I hate hospital food," I said. The nurse managed to crack a smile.

"I'm glad you're up and eating," she said.

"I have leprosy," I said.

"You hit your head on a telephone booth," she said. "You're going to be just fine."

I groaned. This was a perfect time to ask myself "What is life?" and to be, as usual, completely unequipped to even go into the problem. So I didn't ask it to myself.

I felt kind of like a child. I didn't get any flashback to childhood—in fact I felt like a different child, someone who was not me. All I could do was stare at the wall. I was not interested in television.

"You've got to have something to eat and drink. You're dehydrated."

I ate, but decidedly without gusto.

Or pesto.

HERBERT SANDSTROM WANTS PESTO.

I finished up the tray pretty quickly, quickly covering up that weird feeling of babiness.

BUT WOULD HERBERT SANDSTROM EVER REALLY BE THE SAME AGAIN?

Hopefully not.

I was released from the hospital that same day, but I still felt like crap. I didn't have any will to do anything. But I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep.

When I got home, I started writing stuff down. Stuff that had happened to me.

THUS HERBERT FORGED A NEW IDENTITY. ALAS HIS FATE WAS NOT TO SERVE BUT TO CREATE!

THENCEFORTH HERBERT WOULD BE A WRITER!

I took a pair of scissors and cut off all my hair, then fell asleep alone in my bed in my room in a matter of seconds (after writing out this dialog).

AND THAT IS HOW HERBERT SANDSTROM SCRATCHED HIM-
SELF OUT OF EXISTENCE—PERMANENTLY AND
IRREFUTABLY.

(LOOK, I'M THE ONE WHO'S MAKING UP THE STORIES HERE,
AND I DON'T NEED THE COMPETITION! ...I SORT
OF JUST REALIZED, HERBERT WAS BOUND TO BE DAMN GOOD BE-
CAUSE HE HAD LIFE EXPERIENCE !!
I THINK HE'S PRETTY MUCH DONE. RIGHT?)



Eva
Chris Hamby

Tumble

I like your coat
hanging next to mine
in the closet.
They are close,
touching,
the wool kissing the suede
in the darkness
like teenagers
at the kind of party
we never went to.
They are fighting
together,
comrades in arms
battling gravity,
and no one can bring them down.
No one,
except you
or me,
with the slightest touch
of our hands.

-Stephanie Bolmer

Ode to St. Ide's Malt Liquor

Your high gravity malt
makes me heavy drunk.
You make me contemplate
things like four planes
blinking simultaneously
...well, a little out of sync:
one, then the next,
then the next, then
I break the silence with a fart joke.
You make me stupid, like I'm stoned
but with more gravity involved.

When I wake the next day,
I can feel the heaviness again
in the furthest pit of my intestines,
and I shout, "Beware the Ides of Malt!"
Relief comes in the form of distraction:
a bird outside twittering
 "birdy-birdy-birdy-birdy"
as well as my own unbridled
beer fart opera.

-Ted Roland



Cock Fight
Jackie Bousek

The Plum Creek Review, Oberlin's oldest literary magazine, was founded in 1964. In 1997, the name was changed to *Enchiridion*.

This year we decided to revive the original name, in the spirit of returning to our roots. We hope you have enjoyed Oberlin College's 2008 edition of *The Plum Creek Review*!

This transition would not have been possible without the help and kindness given by many different members of the Oberlin community.

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Finally, but certainly not leastily, we'd like to thank everyone who submitted this semester. Please keep the Fall magazine in mind as you pursue your artistic interests over the summer!

Love,
Spunk, Gusto, and the rest of the Plum Creek Review Crew

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