SATORI
2011
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Mission Statement
Satori is a student-run annual magazine that expresses the artistic spirit of the students of Winona State University. We publish student poetry, prose, and graphic art every Spring, as we have since 1970.
-Dr. Gary Eddy, Faculty Advisor
Letters from the Editors

"Thank you to the poetry staff for working efficiently, but still putting in enough time and effort to sort through all of the submissions and give consideration to each piece. We enjoyed the experience. Thank you also to everyone who submitted poetry. If you were not accepted, do not be discouraged. We hope everyone will submit again next year."

- Samuel Hovda

“It never ceases to amaze me how we took nearly two hundred and fifty pages of poetry and prose and culled them until we had only the very best for this year’s Satori. I’m proud of what this issue will be - we’ve tried to represent the very best of student literature and visual art at Winona State and I feel we have succeeded. I can only hope next year is even better.”

- Spencer Santos

Being editor-in-chief of the prose section of the Satori XLI has been an exciting experience that wouldn’t have been possible without the help of everyone around me. Special thanks to the prose panel for insights and Dr. Eddy for oversight. Extra special thanks to everyone who submitted and didn’t make it into this volume. What is represented in this issue is only a tiny representation of a very diverse, talented campus.

- Sean Ramswick

“It was a pleasure to be the editor for the art and design team this year on Satori. I had a great group of people with creative ideas working together, and the finished product is something to be proud of. Thank you everyone for your hard work. Thank you also to all the people who submitted. We were blown away with all the talent Winona has to offer. I am just glad that we can showcase a small portion of it!”

- Meagan Lord
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“Fiction is a lie, and good fiction is the truth inside the lie.”
- Stephen King
I died October 21, 2009. I was thirty. All I can remember is that it was night and I was in a hurry to get home to my wife and two kids when a car ran a red. Now I am here in what you might call the afterlife.

It isn't very exciting. I had hoped it wouldn't be white pearly gates and gold harps. I hate singing and white is such an overused color. I had also hoped it wouldn't be fire and brimstone. It isn't. There are no circles and there are no phantoms. Odysseus could not have come here.

Actually the afterlife is just a dimly lit room where a lot of people sit at cubicles and stare at computer screens. I can't tell if there are walls or not and I can't really tell where the light comes from but it isn't bright white like florescent nor is it quite the warm yellow of bulbs. It just is. But what is really interesting about this place is that all there is to do is update my Facebook status.

I tried to talk to other people but they ignored me. No one wants to talk. They are glued to their computers like the business people and hipsters in cafes all over the world. The ones who, I would guess, were one (or both) of those while alive, seem to be doing it like some sort of religious exercise that doesn't excite or bore them. It just is what is done. For others there is a beginner's fire in their Facebook use. They stare intently at the screen and ogle. Some drool. I would guess these folks have never had Facebook.

It is at least entertaining. We can befriend each other and look through each other's photos. Actually we have access to every photo and memory in the world. Each memory seems like a photo we can instantly view. I find myself looking through a lot of memories of my friends. I still can't believe some of them never said to me. But it doesn't bother me much. That was just life.

Facebook chat is where things get really exciting. I meet some interesting people on it. The other day I got into a heated discussion with John Calvin and Pope Innocent III. I eventually lost interest since they seemed pretty focused on what they thought during life. But I guess that is really all there is to think about. I talked to a Buddhist who was pretty sure there was still a chance to get reincarnated but couldn't find the application. He sent me a bumper sticker that said “we're all just trying to live for the millionth time.”
There was one interesting discussion I had on Facebook chat between Jesus and Socrates. At first I didn't think it was actually Jesus since there are so many people with that name out there, but he confirmed he was the son of God. Socrates also proved to be the real philosopher I was forced to (pretend to) learn in school. Socrates seemed pretty mad at Jesus for stealing his ideas. Jesus just said they were his first and he allowed Socrates to have them. Socrates was sure he remembered recollecting them from before he was born, but Jesus said this wasn't a good argument. Socrates agreed, but countered that why would Jesus give an outsider that kind of knowledge. Jesus said that he blessed whom he chooses to. He then told Socrates and me to get off of Facebook and walk towards the light. Socrates said he wanted to search for the truth and that sensations weren't real. He continued saying sensation like light could only point us to the truth but it was through philosophizing that one could truly learn. Jesus signed off.

I got pretty bored of updating my status to “Dead and on Facebook” or “yeah…that’s right, still on Facebook.” One guy apparently was able to start making friends with living people and talking to them. That caused a pretty big stir back with the living. Living people starting doing all sorts of things like prophesy the end and selling expensive prediction of the future. Apparently, the dead guy just made these up since we don't have access to future knowledge for some reason. Either way, I was able to watch all the excitement on uploaded videos.

Eventually though I got so bored that I had to get up again. I walked down the isles and couldn't really feel what my feet touched. I couldn't really even feel myself. But I could think. I felt like I was going in a good direction. I wandered quite awhile when I realized that a few people were doing the same thing. They were moving in the same direction I was, just a few isles over. As I moved on, things got lighter. People were still in cubicles typing away, but the desks seemed farther spaced with better screens and sleek keyboards.

As I moved on I saw more and more people ahead. Clumps of people were shuffling ahead. When I moved into the next division I began to see people that I felt I could almost recognized. They had faces I felt I had seen in important history books in high school. I thought one looked a lot like Da Vinci.

I moved past these and caught up with a group.
“What are you guys doing?” I asked.
“Just moving along.”
“Why?”
“Because I felt like this isn’t all there is in heaven, though most people seem to think it is good enough.”
“Oh.” I said and followed after them.
The light became brighter and had the essence of sunlight only warmer and almost touchable. I was sure I saw Winston Churchill and Theodore Roosevelt there. Maybe even Einstein, though whoever he was, he was hunched low intent on whatever was on his screen.

Abruptly the rows ended. Before us rose a hill covered in soft green grass. We could see nothing beyond but an cream-colored haze. We climbed the hill together in silence. Then a man walked past with a frown on his face, his arms crossed.

“No good. Fine. I’ll just go back. I don’t even want to talk to you anyways. What a loser. Fine. Fine. Fine. Yeah. No good. Don’t talk to me like that. I don’t want to talk to you anymore. I am going back. All the way and further to the darkest desk I can find. Yep. All the way. Fine. That is what you want.” He mumbled as he rushed by. He didn’t even look at us.

When we reached the top of the hill I saw another hill rising up behind it. There was a little valley between the two but not as deep as the valley which we climbed out of. On the crest of this first hill I saw two groups a few feet apart from each other. In one there was a man sitting cross-legged by a fire and who had a water-skin. A few people were lounging by him talking. One of them got up, gave him a hug and walked down into the shallow vale towards the bigger hill.

In the other group, I saw two people sitting together. Between them there was a laptop. Behind them a line was forming down into the valley. A few people walked down the big hill and joined the line. I decided to check out the fire. As I walked by the guy with a laptop he hissed, “hey, come here. I will let you cut and get on your page.”

He may have been talking to me, but a woman behind me, who had decided to follow me towards the fire veered over to him. He smiled. The guy seemed like he was in his early forties, looking a little worn, stressed, but generally happy.

I walked over to fire and everyone rose to greet me. The guy who had the waterskin offered me a drink. I took a sip and realized it was the first thing I tasted in the afterlife. It was very good.

“What is going on over there?” I asked.
“Well you see, everyone seems to be addicted to computers, entertainment, and their previous life so a certain someone invented the brilliant idea to set up Facebook accounts in the afterlife.”

“Oh” I said, “So what is over that hill?” Not really knowing who the ‘certain someone’ was.

“Another hill. And then another. Eventually you will climb a huge mountain and there you will find something worth looking at.”

“Oh” I said, “why are you here then?”

“It is my duty to do this. Eventually I will go back and someone else will come, but I did this in life and old habits are hard to break.”

“What did you do in life?” I asked.

“Got as near I possibly could to the people who could not see as and tried to see.

“See what?”


“Oh.”

“So what is he doing then?” I pointed towards the guy with the laptop.

“He is trying to get people back into the cubicles. You are just starting, but the journey is pretty long and a lot lose interest along the way and turn back. Some like me try to offer little resting points for those who are tired but there are others who do the opposite and try to convince people back by reminding them of Facebook and all the updates they are missing out on. People kind of just slowly wander back. Most of those who go back I never see try to climb these hills again.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t really know how it works, but I am pretty sure that the way you acted in life is how you will act in the afterlife. I think that is why some people travel a long time into those hills before turning back. They are convinced they can make it through anything by themselves, but eventually they give up. Others I have talked to didn’t really have a lot of great things happen in their lives, but they just kind of relied on some power bigger than themselves. Some of them haven’t come back and I guess they must have made it. Well sit down and make up your mind if you really want to go on or not. It will save you a lot of time.”

“I don’t think I need to. I think I will keep going. I hope I see you around.” I said and moved towards the valley.
“Hey, wait a sec.” he said and gave me a hug then sprinkled a little water over my head.

I felt the beads hit my scalp and a chill ran down my spine. It was the first feeling I had since death. I felt the warmth of the fire heating my leg. I wanted to sit but realize there may be more fires out there and all I really wanted to do is get as far away from those cubicle as possible.

As I walked away, some of the group I came with began talking with the guy at the fire. One of them says, “screw that.”

I glance back and see a round man walking away from the fire on the green hill back into the valley.
Burgers
Marcia Ratliff

Clinging to the last shreds of hope in a dark world, but it looks like we're just driving about town, buying another hamburger, watching the sun go down, and laughing at flickering lights in a box. Which is exactly what I am doing on this winter evening, my jaw clenched and fists gripping the wheel because it's really too cold to actually hold in my hands. The line at the burger place is long, and the sun is in my eyes, and I am missing my favorite show.

I am watching my afternoon instead.

The chewing gum I'd put in my mouth at 12:47 pm now felt and tasted like a lump of tar that I had chipped out of the frozen cracks in the parking lot and was masticating for unknown reasons. Actually I had nowhere to spit it out and was thus trapped into the silent torture of gross gum. The prospect of swallowing the big wad was not a favorable one, but to leave it stuck under my chair like a bratty junior higher was equally undesirable. Suppose the HR director were to reach under and feel it, sticky and cool, long after I was gone? For the moment, I did my best to adhere it to the roof of my mouth while nonchalantly examining the chipped orange paint on my short fingernails. Orange. Really. The longer they made me wait in this smallish grey room, the more I realized how unprepared I was for this interview. Fresh breath? No, I was chewing tar. Hello, matey. How arr ye today. Well-kept hands? No, they looked like a five-year-old had painted them, gotten bored, and decided to scratch them off, and gotten bored again. This was true. Not that any of these details would prevent me from getting the job. Perhaps the fact that they were keeping me here, alone, for an hour, had some indication as to how badly they wanted me. Two-o-clock, three-o-clock, shut the door. I was too nervous to get up and leave the room, find a trash can by some unsuspecting coffee pot. This is what I got for being a minimalist, of course. Any other woman would have a large, shiny bag full of Kleenex packs and hand sanitizer and post-it notes and pens and breath mints. Hell, they'd probably have nail polish remover in there too.

This line of thought occupied my mind until 3:32 when, exactly 92 minutes late, a man in a black business suit entered the room and announced, “We are ready for you now, Miss Hodges.”
I looked up in surprise at the man. “I’m Sheila Griffith. My interview was scheduled for two-o-clock.”

The man was silent; then he produced a small notepad from his breast pocket. “There has been a mistake. Shauna Hodges was to be interviewed at three thirty. We had—” he consulted the pad again. “—a board meeting at two. Not sure how you got notified, actually. You’re not even on the list of candidates for this position. Do you know who called you for this interview?”

I stood slowly, the gum working its way over my back molars like slime.

“Excuse me, sir. I have to pick up my daughter from kindergarten.” More or less true. Most days I would be getting her, but today Dave was leaving work early for me. For my interview. I turned and left the room before the man had a chance to say anything. Who called you for this interview? Clearly if these freaks had communication issues, they should not ask their interview-less rejectamenta for help identifying their weak link. Probably it was the sniveling prude at the front desk. What a joke.

Well it was a joke. I should be laughing.

I got down the grand stone steps, all the way to the curb, before I spat the gum out of my mouth and began to cry, great gross sobs that might have sounded like laughter if you weren’t listening very closely.

I ran an orange-painted finger under each eye and wished once again for a big purse filled with Kleenex packs, cough drops, lotion, and a mirrored compact. But hold the nail polish remover. Today chipped orange fits the bill exactly.

I unclench my fists as the line at the burger place creeps forward. The tape rewinds, and I watch the show again. The chewing gum I’d put in my mouth. I roll down my window and yell into the liquid air. “I’d like a double cheeseburger and large fries, hold the pickles, extra mustard, and a large Coke too!”

The voice on the other end says, “Thank you, ma’am.” I wonder how the hell they know I’m a woman. It’s kind of creepy, and I bet they get it wrong sometimes. Maybe next time I’ll make my voice really high and then when they call me ma’am I’ll say that’s sir to you. I think of Rylee at home with Dave and how the hell I am going to explain today to him. Then I think of Lucy and how she randomly called me this morning and we talked for about an hour and how the hell she still had my number.
Because remember the cool people, how you always wanted to be them? How painful it was to be uncool and how suddenly after a long time you were metamorphosed into the cool people, you were one of them, and from the inside it was everything you ever dreamed of, except you couldn't stop dreaming? I was like that.

Lucy was like that. She was a cool person. She had everything I thought anyone ever wanted, but at night she still lay awake on her smooth pillow and thought about what she desired most, until sleep took her away to new vicissitudes. It was there she first experienced a sunset, being in it, like a bird is in the clouds and emerges blinking into the blue. When she talked to me about her dreams it was like she was driving and staring out a windshield at pink and coral clouds against a background of grayish blue, surrounding a golden sun as it dipped behind the buildings on Main Street, while I was strapped in the backseat squinting in the glare. It was like she was breathing, staring, hands limp at her sides, while I was unconsciously holding my breath, barely able to keep my eyes open, hands jammed under my chicken thighs. She was alone, her mind alone, suspended bodiless in a warm car, so that the only thing of which she was conscious was the sun itself, until the car behind her honked or maybe I said something about how damn bright the sun was.

So one day she thought it was time. Time to return to wonder. Time to be new and awkward, to reach back and feel the slimy past. Time to remove herself from perfection and middle-class suburbia. She was barely eighteen when she announced to her doting parents, “I’m leaving for New York. I’ll be back in a while.” I watched her go and thought what a jerk what a lucky bastard. I thought about her as I took classes at the community college and lived with my parents and shrank from shadows. I lay awake in my bed at night and kicked the covers off and squeezed my fists so tight my fingernails left little red lines on my palms.

She was just barely eighteen-and-a-half when the policeman shoved her in the back of his car and shouted, “What the hell do you think you’re doing?” It was a good question, but the answer didn’t matter, or it never occurred to Lucy that an answer was required or should be thought of. Indeed, who answers questions these days?

So she was a child, looking with wide eyes hidden behind dollar-store shades, a child under the guise of an adventurous adult who could take care of herself. A child impressionable and silly, yet irresistible, she would be convinced that the only true living is done on windy nights in penthouses or in back alleys or corner cafés.
where light reflects off the glass and you can see yourself in shadows and lines, caricatured and small, dark and empty, but your eyes are white. She was a child to whom everything was another adventure, all rules absent except her own. Here was a game she could win. It was wandering in the grocery store without having to worry about Mommy, running across the street without looking both ways, talking to strangers and taking candy from them.

We're older now. I'm twenty-seven, she twenty-five. I had no idea where she was until she called me this morning. She's in Texas doing some temp modeling and living with a punk rock band in the basement of a smoke shop. Typical Lucy. I didn't really think about it until I started thinking here in the car. It's finally starting to warm up, so I have to crank the defrost so I can see the burger people leaning out of their windows to the people in the cars.

Lucy bothers me. I keep thinking she is a child, was a child, experiencing the world as it met her, hands outstretched and full of candy. Trick or treat. For Lucy, it was always a treat. But maybe she was not a child, never a child, no sense of wonder following her as she made and makes her hitchhiking treks across the country. Maybe she is acutely aware of the dangers, always calculating, always sharp and alert. Maybe actions that seem daring and exciting and dreadful to me are merely flossing teeth to her, exercises in a life of constant change.

Maybe I was the child, afraid to jump into the deep end not because I couldn't swim but because the water would get in my ears and eyes and nose, afraid to jump on a plane somewhere because freedom was something I had never had but always had, always coveted but never lost. Freedom, that is what this was about. Lucy with her easy laugh and dancing eyes, always a mile ahead of me, doing things I dreamt of and wrote and read about, plunging herself headfirst into the strange, the absurd, the ordinarily extraordinary.

There are many things I do not know about Lucy. Did that trip to New York, that first leap, when she was a high school senior and I a college freshman, change her? Does she talk about it with people to impress them? Scare them? Show them a portal into adventure? Does she think about it? Does she lie awake in bed at night in her changeless smoke shop basement and wish she were on a bench in a train station, or the backseat of a car full of strangers? Does she even wish for the lonely windswept highways where she walked alone, thumb up, or the backseat of a squad car where she waited pensive or aggressive? Does she wonder about if it had been differ-
ent? Did she accomplish what she wanted to accomplish, or did she leave Walden Pond for the same reason she came? Are the questions, the endless questions, answered? What the hell do you think you are doing? If she had not gone, would she have ended up like me, here in the same place I have lived all my life, or would she have found the punk rockers anyways? Does she ever stop wondering? Does she ever drive mechanically, minimally aware of the mess of clothes and gum wrappers and coffee cups that is her car, barely paying attention to the traffic, her eyes never lifting from the gray streak of road to the golden setting sun that blinds and irritates?

This is my problem, my therapist says. As if I have only one. I see what I want to be in other people, choosing a trait or talent from each one and rolling them into a demi-god me, a perfect me. But then I take these same people I perceive as perfect and I hunt down their flaws. I must know if they are as messed up as me. I want to know everything, spare no details. Questions, I never stop asking questions. It's a grim conundrum, and I must train my mind not to think that way, in terms of comparisons and shopping for perfection in everyone I meet. I suppose I am cruel as well. There are some poor fools whose poorer traits are harvested for my list of "I'm nots." I'm not hugely fat. I'm not dumb. I'm not a genius. I am no extreme, nothing extraordinary it seems. So then, who am I and what is my reason for existence. My therapist also tells me to avoid such sweeping statements. She doesn't boost my ego I suppose, but still I'd like to know. Why am I here? Am I interesting? And if I am interesting, exciting, daring, for what purpose, to brag at dinner parties as my daughter tugs my shirt away from my freckled shoulder, asking for another cookie again?

It's been a long time since I have eaten. Not this morning, not last night, Dave was late and I wasn't hungry. Suddenly ravenous, I roll my window down again. The burger people take my money and give me my food, the grease already soaking through the fry container into the paper bag, the burger bulging in its tinfoil wrapper. As my fingers close around the paper bag and I feel its warmth, the minimalist in me cringes at all this paper destined straight for a landfill. Dave would laugh at me. I'm such a glutton. I think of Rylee asking where's Mommy. And Dave answering, she's at her yoga class, she'll be home later. That's pretty funny too. When I come home smelling like grease, Dave will know I skipped yoga, something happened at my interview today, what is it dear, and I'll just laugh and say something Lucy would say, and then tell myself I'm not fat, I'm
not unemployed, I’m not divorced. And still I am not Lucy.

I’m driving home at last, my cold soda tucked between my legs, my fries at easy reaching distance, and my burger recent history. “It’s beautiful,” I realize and whisper suddenly as I stare out my windshield at the pink and coral clouds against a background of grayish blue, surrounding a golden sun as it dips behind the buildings on Seventh Street. I breathe, staring, hands limp at my sides. I am alone, my mind alone, suspended bodiless in a warm car, so that the only thing I’m conscious of is the sun itself, until the car behind me honks. Wonder. It is a wonder I can still wonder, a marvel I can still be a child sometimes. I take a big gulp of my Coke and shove a few fries into my mouth, getting my orange fingernails greasy, salty. My stomach feels pleasantly full, replete, like Rylee looks when she’s asleep after a long day. But then, I am one of the few. Clinging to whatever it is that still gave me the stomach for this stuff, but it looks like I’m just driving home, finishing another large fry, weeping over the sunset like a sob, and laughing at my reflection in the rearview mirror.
Wasn’t the artificial atmosphere supposed to make the night less frigid? The controllers who sat thousands of stories above the blinking lights of the city were probably laughing their asses off at me as they sip on rum flavored coffee and eating jelly-filled donuts. They are probably chuckling as I sit here on the rust red dust we call ground, huddled in a ball covered from head to toe in mystery-material that science insists will keep you warm in negative 50 degree weather, shivering and watching my breath turn to mist before my eyes.

All I can say to that is that someone along the line lied. Actually, a lot of people probably lied. The scientists lied to their corporate bosses, saying it was possible to live here without freezing to death at night and burning up during the day due to special alterations of the atmosphere and to modern cloth. The corporations in turn lied to the government official, greatly exaggerating the actual facts that the scientists had lied to them about. Then the government, having been lied to, decided to set up this “space colony” and tell the general public that it was affordable to go and that it would make their lives better. Not knowing that they have been lied to by people who haven’t even talked to them, the public moves to outer space for several years before landing on this godforsaken hunk of rusted red rock.

Hell, the coffee makers probably lied to the controllers about what actually goes into the coffee. It’s probably rum with artificial coffee flavoring.

So here I sit on that same hunk of rock, staring up at a dark blue sky. Cold stars blinking back at me. They are lies too. Half of those stars probably died thousands of years ago, but they have the audacity to keep showing up every night, as though they are still there and glittering brightly.

The only thing that has never lied to anyone is this ground I sit on. It never pretended to be pleasant, or even habitable. The jagged edges of craters look sinister. It’s as bare and unforgiving as even the driest desert on earth. But these things are familiar now. There is almost a comfort in the hostile environment now. I know everything there is to know about this place. I know the caves, dark and filled with strange dark creatures that flapped strange wings and hid
in the shadows with the light I had been carrying with me. I know
every cavern, and where the best places to find shade from the merci-
less sun, even at high noon.

In the distance the harsh glow of florescent and neon lights
gleam against the black sky. Even now, in the dead of night, it is
well lit. People are probably mulling about, doing god knows what,
like tiny little ants. Like a hive of wannabe queen bees, they scuttle
around to satisfy their own wants regardless of everyone else around
them. Maybe one in a million of these despicable creatures aren't a
selfish little cockroach. They are moths, attracted to the strange al-
luring glow of the light. So they foolishly go toward it and the people
holding it in the palm of their hands. What a stupid little moth.

Without seeing it, I know there is a fence around the city. It
is a large and ugly monstrosity, made of deadly looking wires. There
are no sentries. No guard dogs ready to attack if someone were to
approach. No blinding searchlights peer down on those who walk
away into the darkness. Only a rusty ill-used gate, squealing and
screaming when opened.

But is it the fence that keeps me away?
“Everyone lies,” I repeat out loud to the brutal landscape. In re-
response, I get a gust of wind in my face. I can't move the muscles in
my cheeks or mouth for a few moments.

Honestly, I had the same reaction before. I couldn't move. It
sort of felt like I couldn't hear either. Everything was muffled and
very far away. She asked if I was listening, sounding more accusa-
tory than concerned. I don't honestly know why I had hoped she
would be concerned. No, she would be concerned only with herself.
My listening or not had more to do with her than with me.

How was I supposed to listen if my ears were no longer working?

It was all I could manage to just nod.

Apparently her lie had been going on for a while now.

Anything we had had, probably died out a long time ago. Yet there
she was, pretending to be there, content to go behind my back. Best
friend, turned worst enemy.

Some stupid philosopher somewhere, more concerned with
the meaning of the universe and life itself, would stupidly say that
the truth will set you free. That seeing things rationally is always the
better option. By knowing how things are, we are better prepared for
the world through it.

The truth is, I'd rather believe the lie.
The Wax Dummy
Karin Chandler

She always smiled. You never saw her not smiling. A wax dummy. A wax dummy doesn't smile. How did she turn into a wax dummy that doesn't smile? How did she turn into a wax dummy that doesn't resemble her in any way? With the red dress on, a bridesmaid's dress to be exact, and flowers underneath her carefully laid out hands. She was supposed to be a bridesmaid. She was supposed to be a bridesmaid in her brother's wedding with her two sisters. She was supposed to be at the rehearsal dinner. She was supposed to be there, but she wasn't.

I wonder if she felt anything; perhaps the sharp pain of the car smashing head on? Herself being ejected from the back seat, right before dying instantly on impact? Did she hear her sisters dying with her? Were they screaming? Did they even make a sound? What did the people in the other car feel? They all survived. They didn't become wax dummies. Why didn't she survive?

She didn't wear her seat belt. Why didn't she wear her seat belt? She didn't wear her seat belt because the thought of being strangled terrified her. Yet, it's strange that she was more terrified of being strangled, than of being ejected from her seat. I wonder if she would still be alive if she wore her seat belt? Maybe not, but I still wonder.

She used to sit next to me. She used to be my friend. She used to play clarinet. She used to talk like everybody else. Now she doesn't. She is trapped inside a wax dummy, unable to escape. You might see her standing in the hallway. Just standing there, staring at you. Staring at you, hoping that you won't forget, just hoping that all her memories are not lost. Not lost within the wax dummy.

The last time I saw her, she was standing outside the classroom. Then it was winter break. My mom woke me up early in the morning and showed the front page of the newspaper. I didn't believe it. I doubted the truth for weeks. However, it all became true when I entered the school after winter break. We had discussions in class and didn't do much of anything. In band, we left a chair empty. For our concert, we played “Childhood Hymn” in remembrance. This was in seventh grade. We also played the song again our senior year of high school. Her parents sat in the audience.
Going to the funeral, I saw her. She didn't look like herself; instead, she looked like a wax dummy. A wax dummy doesn't smile. How did she turn into a wax dummy that doesn't smile? How did she turn into a wax dummy that doesn't resemble her in any way? With the red dress on, a bridesmaid's dress to be exact, and flowers underneath her carefully laid out hands. She was supposed to be a bridesmaid in her brother's wedding with her two sisters. She was supposed to be there, but she wasn't. She is forever trapped inside the wax dummy.
Author's note:
The people, places, and events in this story are based on real people, places, and events. This story is a work of fiction in which I have attempted to be historically accurate.

October 1916
Where does one begin, without a beginning? I suppose it was the night she showed me the sculpture. In the dark it was glowing and I had nothing to say about it. Nothing to say about her, really. Not anymore. The passions of the past months lay behind me, behind her.

June 1916
In the morning they came to get the bloody thing, their suits white and crisp in the sun. Hugo did not want to see them, but they came to his front door, eagerly.

The tall one spoke. “So you say you have no idea how it got here?”

“No,” Hugo replied. No.

“The war,” said the tall man. “The damn war. Makes a lot of men go crazy, I guess. Well, we’ll just cite an UNKNOWN cause of death on the certificate. Damn lot of those these days.”

“Damn right.” Hugo slammed the door and let the men leave, carrying the body of his friend Niall wrapped in a white sheet. No idea how it got there? Oh, Hugo knew. He could still see Niall’s wan face, when they’d last been together.

“Hugo,” Niall paused, his paintbrush hovering over the tip of the leaf.

“Mmm.”

“I don’t want to do this anymore.” Hugo failed to hear the tremor in Niall’s voice.

“What, paint?”

“No. Dada.” Dada was the name Hugo had given his movement of artistic rebellion, of absurdity in all things, the name Hugo had found by flipping to a random page in the dictionary.

Hugo turned to look at Niall. He was painting on a banana leaf, which would wilt in a matter of days and leave his painting worthless. Aha, life is short, goodbye. Dada. It was a brilliant idea,
one Hugo wished he had birthed himself. It was every teacher’s
some great work. You just need a little break.”

Niall whirled around on his stool, gripping his paintbrush.
“Hugo, no. I am done. Forever. This stuff—” he gestured at his leaf
“—isn’t anything. It is insanity. It is depressing. We sit in this stuffy
studio making ugly things that rich people like to buy while they’re
between lovers. We don’t do anything, we don’t change anything, we
just show. Show people what they already know.”

Hugo listened, puzzled and amused. It was the same reac-
tion many people had to Dada. It was true, but it was not true. Dada
or nada? Niall was a weird kid, about 20 years old, a casual deserter
like Hugo, living in Berlin after leaving the German military on a
made-up excuse. He was melancholy and quiet, but Hugo liked his
brazen ideas, the way he overturned all conventions. “Look, Niall.
Take a month off, go visit your family—”

“I have no family.”

“Right then, go live in a flat somewhere else. Take the time
to do some thinking and then come back.”

“Hugo.” Niall’s blue eyes drilled into Hugo’s. “I won’t be
back.”

That was a month ago. This morning he’d found Niall on
his lawn. The air raid sirens had wailed all night, masking the sound
of the gunshots, he supposed. Or else he was just too accustomed
to Berlin. The note Hugo found under Niall’s left hand: Hugo, I did
some thinking and this is where I ended up. 1916. He’d found his
friend with three bullets through his left leg, right arm, and head.
The men in white suits, taking him—the body—away, who knows
where. The local crematorium, probably. Well, this would make a
good painting. Gross, crude, legs, arms, face, lost in red and black.
Niall’s body would be his best work yet. How inspiring. Hugo was
surprised at the satisfaction he felt sinking his brush into the red
paint. Niall, you were wrong.

August 1916

“And this is a bit too gentle,” Emmy said, walking over to
the far side of Hugo’s complete painting of the dead man, Niall. She
pointed to the bottom corner, where Hugo had blended yellow, blue,
and green into the overwhelming red and black. “It almost feels
hopeful.”

“Is there no hope?” he teased her.
“Hope?” she answered in the same tone. “Since when can we have hope?”

“Since we moved to Zürich,” he said. “I got this studio and started the Cabaret Voltaire cafe, and I can spend all the time I want with you.”

“Ah,” she laughed, “I did not mean to be your vacation from reality, my dear philosopher.” She wrapped her arms around his back.

“Maybe I needed one,” he whispered into her hair.

She swatted his butt playfully and turned to leave the studio. “See you tonight at nine then,” she said.

“Right.” He sighed. Is there no hope? He had said it in jest, but on second, or thousandth, thought he wanted to know the answer. The affirmative answer. Oh Emmy. He had not told her about Berlin, about the real reason why they had moved across the border to Switzerland.

He had to get away from Niall. All that Niall meant.

He had hoped—yes, he had hoped—his work and his mood would improve here, that he could think more freely, create art that lived, tell them all he wanted to tell. No. He was even more melancholy here, here with his lavish meals, his literary friends. His life contradicted his artwork now that he was outside, in neutral Switzerland.

Hugo stood and threw his paintbrush on the floor. He raked his fingers through his hair and clenched his teeth. Hypocrite. Weakling. Removed from the tension of Berlin, he wanted to be there, feel the aching pulse of an absurd city, but he kept seeing his friend in his front yard, trying to tell him something, something worth dying for. Something he had brushed over callously, something he had not tried to understand, something he had merely used as a subject for his painting. He swatted the corner of the hanging canvas and sank against the wall.

Emmy had no idea. He didn’t know if she noticed how he struggled to act happy when she came in. How he couldn’t sleep at night, air raid sirens absent and gunshots few. How he struggled to paint, to think. Thinking. That was probably it. He was thinking too hard. I did some thinking and this is where I ended up. He could not explain to Emmy or to anyone else his sudden need for hours by the river, in the park, anywhere. He was Hugo Ball, the founder and fearless leader of Dada, and such a man was not seen in parks watching sunlight glisten on water. He was young, he had a glamorous and faithful wife, he had nothing to fear, but he could not stay in the
studio with the painting. He could smell the sticky blood, the sweet scent of newly decaying flesh. He hated it.

Then there was Emmy. What was Emmy up to? Did she think he didn’t notice the late nights she spent in the basement of the Cabaret Voltaire, practicing? Emmy, who could write and perform a new act in ten minutes, practicing. Beautiful Emmy, like a star in Zürich, beautiful Emmy and her beautiful friends. He would ask her about it tonight, when they were alone again.

Another August Day

A dead robin in the street, one wing sticking straight up into the air, twitching as the flies descended on it. A white limestone monument, broken at the base and sunken into the soft peat so that only the back was visible. Our beloved Lizzy, who died at thirteen. Lizzy, looks like your family’s forgotten you too. We have that in common, poor bastards, but I have Emmy. Mosquitoes in the graveyard, biting me as I sit in the grass, trying to sketch. Sucking my blood, the little demons. None of us is invincible, it seems, from mosquitoes or bullets or hell. Here today. Dead in the street tomorrow. Urgent. So it is urgent that we say what needs to be said. Every hour, every heartbeat. And who would want to waste time while the clock ticks on so urgently?

Still August 1916

Hugo sat on the grass, sketchpad balanced on one knee, staring out into the lake. He was getting tired of looking at their art, these scores of Dada disciples and their absurd eyeballs. Droves of young men and women coming to Zürich, to the Cabaret Voltaire, to show their work to him, Hugo Ball. Author of the allegedly brilliant Dada Manifesto, founder of this movement of angry young people who hated war but loved to paint it. Tired? No, that wasn't quite the right word. Something about the art repulsed him, disgusted him, something beyond the repulsion it was supposed to have. Ah, maybe he was just burnt out. After all, it was not really meant to be art, and its absurdity was its meaning. A good tall absinthe would end his funk. Deaden the ache he felt when he looked at their twisted sculptures; their nonsensical landscapes; his own masterpiece, the bloody body, which they pored over like eager vultures. Still. He fingered the tender warm grass and noted how the light from the slanting afternoon sun made it glow, a warm yet refreshing green. It was beautiful, it was comfortable, it did not make sense. How could
such peace exist at the same time as war, in such an awful world? On a microcosmic level, here, he felt human, unashamed to be part of a race endowed with intelligence, even beauty. But how ugly, how awful Europe was. How his own front yard had been that morning in Berlin. How terrible he was for snatching up Niall’s note and failing to understand it.

Hugo’s thoughts were interrupted by a small voice at his side. He turned to squint up at a towheaded little boy.

“Sir, I caught two fish today.”

“Did you,” Hugo mumbled, pretending to be intent on his sketch.

“A big fish and a small fish. I let them both go.”

“Mmmm.”

“And the small fish died!” said the boy, his eyes round with sorrow.

Hugo softened and turned to the boy. “Did the small fish have a name?”

“No,” said the boy. “I just met him and I didn’t want him to die.”

Hugo smiled a small, hard smile. “Yes, that happens.” He went back to his sketch. He could put the boy in it. He could put anything he wanted in it, of course. The boy dying, the fish dying, darkness, fury. Dying. Dead. He was tired of death. What if he wanted to paint life? Life, its absurd, tortured forms, its endless suffering, its meaninglessness. Nothing. No. Was that where it all ended? Hugo felt very tired. The boy stood silently, twirling his fishing line around his fingers.

“That’s too bad,” Hugo said. He wished he had something more to say. You’ll see him in fishy heaven? He’ll be happier? Make a wish on the fish. “I’m really sorry. I truly am.” The boy nodded and walked down to the rocks at the water’s edge, to his mother who looked up and smiled at him.

Hugo blinked in the brightness. His fingers twitched, and he snatched up his graphite stub. The boy’s face. The face, yes. The young face, the beautiful innocent smooth clean face, the boy’s face. With each stroke, he grew more confident, the lines taking the form of round eyes, soft lips, small nose. He bit his lip as the stub flew across the page.
September 1916

The face was complete. It was perfect. Wrought in various colors, but predominantly blue. Hugo tipped back on his stool and squinted at the painting, a grin pulling at the corner of his lip. Emmy would love it.

It was beautiful.
It had no flaw. No Dada.
Niall, the new Niall, would have loved it.
Hugo’s thoughts were interrupted by footsteps on the stairs.
“Hugo?” It was Emmy.
“Come in, love.”
“Hugo, have you been up here all day?” She came over to where he sat.

“Just finishing up this painting,” he said, standing and inviting her to take a look. He liked the way the afternoon sun made the blue brighter, more alive. Emmy was silent beside him. “Well, do you like it?” He turned from the painting to look at her face.

She bit her lip. “It looks like you worked hard,” she said finally.

“Not really, no. This one came to me, just like that, like inspiration.” He shifted his weight between feet. Left, right, left, right.

“Hugo, it’s beautiful—”

“I knew you’d love it!”

She held up her hand, face grim. “I don’t. I don’t like it at all. Hugo, it’s not realistic.”

“Realistic?” Hugo could feel the hairs on his neck raising, the sweat beading on his temples. He was used to criticism of his work. Liked it, actually. It made better art. But Emmy’s words hit him and sunk like bullets in sand.

“Look at this.” She strode to the other end of the studio where he’d rolled up the painting of the body. Niall. She unrolled it across the floor. “This, Hugo, this is everything we’ve worked for. This has the world talking. This painting holds pain and death under a magnifying glass and shouts, look at this, this is what you are doing. This is where you are going. All the chaos and horror of this war we’ve been in for too long comes together in this piece. People will start to think you’re crazy if you make things like, like this.” She gestured toward the boy’s face.

“Maybe I am crazy!” How could he explain to her his urge to create beauty, to explore beauty? It was so much more alluring, so much more elusive. It was so much more realistic. “Since when have I
ever cared what other people think? They’ve always written me up as a lunatic.”

“I don’t know,” she snapped. “You never cared what I thought.”

“No? Haven’t I always asked you for your help on my work? Didn’t I consult you when we moved to Switzerland?”

“Ha,” she laughed. “You told me we were moving and left me to sort it out.”

“I—”

“You. My husband the famous artist. Not a word for his not-so-famous wife. All the articles are about you, the interviews, the visitors.”

“Dada isn’t meant to make any individual famous. We make art to call attention to the ugliness of war.” Hugo regretted his words the moment they hung in the air like stale breath. He’d caught himself.

“Ugliness of war? With paintings like this?”

“Emmy.” He tried to calm himself. “Emmy, I can’t do this right now.” How could he tell her he wanted to paint beautiful things to contrast with the ugliness of war? Like a banker who studies real money so he can spot counterfeit?

“No. I guess not.” She whirled away from him and thundered down the stairs.

October 1916

Emmy had been up late last night; Hugo heard her slide into bed as the clock struck three. He couldn’t sleep, but he pretended to so she would not glare at him and ask What? The nights were later and later now, and he had no desire to go to the basement to see her or find out what it was she was doing down there. They lived side by side like enemies, silent enmity killing them both.

Yet in a sudden conviction, Hugo climbed out of bed, slipped into his pants, and tiptoed down the hall past his studio, down two flights of stairs to the basement of the Cabaret Voltaire. He had to know what was down here, why Emmy stayed here so late and did not tell him where she’d been. If it was another man, so be it. Hugo would leave her. Return to Berlin perhaps, better for both of them. He’d give her the café, take nothing, and disappear. He paused in the cafe, looking at the silent tables, the art on the walls, the napkins perfectly placed for the breakfast crowd. The bar, shining and
surreal. Opening the cupboard, Hugo removed a bottle and continued down the stairs.

“Hugo.”

It was Emmy, trailing behind him, her nightgown flowing around her body. Hugo opened his mouth to make an excuse, but closed it when she spoke.

“Hugo, I have something to show you.” She turned and led the way down the stairs and into the back room, lit by a small square window covered with bars. “I have been working on this for a couple of months now. I think it’s finished. I wanted you to see it.” She pulled a tarpaulin off a lumpy object in the corner.

The Beginning

Where does one begin, without a beginning? I suppose it was the night she showed me the sculpture. In the dark it was glowing blue and I had nothing to say about it. Nothing to say about her, really. Not anymore. Actually she was very beautiful. Still. Her hair hung in golden wisps around her chin, and her eyes sparkled in the light from the street. Her skin was smooth, soft, and perfect. The statue was something else entirely. Its head was only half there, and its arms were both broken, one at the shoulder and one below the elbow, so that they stuck out in painful angles. The fingers were covered in warts, and the legs were sliced up and bleeding. She’d painted the great blobs of stone blood with a deep red, but in the blue light, Hugo saw black. It was amazing, really, the way she could make stone bleed, the way she could turn the beauty of feminine form into something ugly, something monstrous. But that was the essence of Dada. My bastard child.

Ah, Emmy, we should have done it differently.
Art

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.”

-Thomas Merton
Unfinished Path

Dana Serum
Smoke Man
Kayla Fayerweather
Control

Brianna Klapperich
Untitled
Tia Troy
A translation of Revelations 21:6 into binary.
Sweet Nothings
Danielle Wick
Abstract Moment
Mary Bohman
Concerned Pug
Dana Serum
Lindsey
Danielle Wick
Incoming Traffic
Rebecca Mueller
Mona Lisa Smiles
Danielle Wick
Old man and the River
Katelyn Bronniche
Winding Path
Dana Serum
Poetry

“Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood”

–T.S. Eliot
What is the word?!

I want to scoop out my brain
with a serrated-tipped grapefruit spoon:
the concave mirror
clenches the zesty citrus nodules,
near-bursting; but with a thin membrane,
luminous with sheen
holding the taste back,
I stumble in my attempt to harvest
from the rind, squirting myself in the eye.
the flavor is near…

a slap in the face;
you feel, not mal-intent,
but a zeal for living
tweaking behind your ears
with a sour bustling bristle.

I want to shower my brain
with sugar for taste
and then blanket my brain
with my tongue; but a self-deception
obfuscates my inner workings:

perhaps I used salt instead
for only a foul bitterness quakes—
What is that word?!

What is that word…?

It will come to me at
3 AM and I will smack my mouth,
talcum powder tongue,
and fall back asleep:
the word,
the taste,
at the moment it doesn’t matter.
Tonight my thoughts return to our kitchen table—
not the heavy wooden one with removable leaves,
now resting its weight on your dining room rug—
but rather to the wobbling old aluminum table
with its cracked white paint and screw-on legs,
sitting so practically in the corner of our old kitchen
beside the back stairs leading to your workshop below.

At this table you taught me to drink tea—
our cool, refreshing beverage for the heat of those summers—
unsweetened and over ice, black and bitter,
starting from distilled water—tap would cause the sludge
and the film across the surface—brought to a boil in the microwave
then two tea bags floating in the heated jar, dispelling their ink
like the shadow of scruff spreading over your face.

There I’d rest my cheek on the cool metal, picking at paint flakes,
and watch as the clear water transformed
into that dark, delicious letter—“T.” I didn’t know
that now, as I make tea in my own kitchen, too small for a table,
I would take a single mug from the shelf,
watching the bags bleed into the water, and ache
for the cold of aluminum under my elbows.
After the Intermission in a Friendship

Samuel Hovda

Like a fracture, there is no complete heal.
The new bone is stronger, can bear a heavier load,
But it is less supple.

David Gallant

When I was a young boy, I used to
Help my dad pick vegetables
From a garden the size of a classroom
Next to my grandpa’s house in the country.
We didn’t use chemicals, so
Whenever we had an armful of
Squash, tomatoes, cucumbers,
Carrots, pumpkins, watermelons
That were bruised and oozed slimy juices
That held dead insects like amber,
I would run to the garage to find a baseball bat
(Taped an extra inch thick so my dad could
Use it for slow-pitch softball games when he was sixteen).
He would pitch underhand, from the side
To avoid the explosion of organic
Pulp, skin, seeds, and rind
That fell against the side of a silo,
Sticking and coagulating.
I’m sorry.
I never got around to thanking you
for teaching me how to make rice
in our scratched aluminum pressure cooker,
or that I need a little milk and cinnamon for really good french toast.

I’m also sorry
for not making a scene about those potato pancakes at Perkins,
sitting across from each other in a booth for the first and the last
time
because you were finally skinny enough to fit.

Now, remembering the sharp downward
twitch of your beard and the dip of your brown eyes
when you saw half-raw hash brown bits
hanging out of Bisquick’s excuse for pancakes,
I wish I had.

I wish I had stood up in the booth, started yelling,
“This man is two months from losing
a year long battle with cancer
and the best you can do
is fucking hash brown bits?
You should be ashamed
of yourselves!”

But, goddamn it, I would only have been
yelling at myself –

Ashamed for myself, for all the times I said
I’d spend the weekend videotaping you telling those
hundred stories you always told
only to turn tail and run, eight hours in,
catching any ride that wouldn’t ask questions
back to my apartment the same night.

Now, two years later,
I’m left wondering whether or not you would have wanted me to stand shaken, awed and weeping in front of your empty corpse, subconsciously formulating nightmares out of the undividing flesh.

I think not.
I think you would rather I remember you grunting as you tugged weeds from your obnoxious garden of green beans, sweetcorn and ox heart tomatoes or tugging your beard with your other hand on your hip, glaring at a computer as it blew subsonic raspberries in the back of your computer store: GOM. Grumpy Old Men. My grumpy old man.

But mostly I remember you laughing to tears when you said, “I’m so full of shit…” and I replied, “Not anymore…” This conversation in that old wood-paneled van, just after you’d lost control of your bowels in the elevator at Mayo.

I loved you and forgave you for everything then, you know, and I glared at anyone who wrinkled their noses at the dark stain creeping down your leg –

“That’s my dad, goddamn you. Whether he smells bad or not, he worked as a cowboy once and has a degree in making hybrid plants and owns his own computer shop. He has five kids and doesn’t love the step-ones any less than the rest of them and has a temper to shame the devil and owns a little auburn poodle whom he loves even though he swore he wouldn’t.
The mighty fall mightily
and you should be humbled
to see him
like this.”

I remember in the van, while wiping tears
of laughter off your face, you smiled at me and said,
“That joke… You’re a terrible daughter,
just terrible.”
A Country for Anything but Old Men
Luke Wilcox

I’ve had the displeasure of watching those old men fade,
Departing this life just before I realized I needed them.
I wanted to ask, “Did you know that life was this cruel?”
But they were gone, one in an urn, burnt to little pieces
That would never resemble the kindness I remember.
Another in the ground, the last I saw of him,
his face taxidermic and cosmetised
To an unnatural sheen, his bones with a fine gloss over them
As the flesh dissolved before the oils. And one I barely knew,
Seized by a bottle and anger, a man so furious that
I could feel pain as my father told me of his father.
When he was out, they would hide his belts, so that they would suffer
Only his hand, after they were dragged out from under their beds.
But I imagine him as a great man anyways, one that life
broke into pieces, and so he broke his children in turn.
Now he is gone; the hand of discipline skeletal
And decayed, laid flat upon burial, but now curled
Under years of soil, reminiscing with erosion
At the fact that handshakes no longer matter.
The Last Call
Elise Nelson

In silence I grip your rough hand,
Interlacing my fingers in yours
And pulling your hand up to rest
Under my tear spackled chin.
A choked breath rises in my throat

If you were gone, I would feel it
Right under this rib, here.
Where the wisps of your military cut
Brushed as your head dropped
Against my chest.

If you ceased to exist, I’d feel it
On these lips, cold.
Still warm and tender from restless,
Heated kisses of long ago.

If I got the call tomorrow, I’d feel it
In my knees as they hit the floor,
My tears as they splashed warm against
Clasped hands.
We Looked like Giants
Alyssa Pederson

Parked on Sandalwood Street, 
in front of the big white house 
with the white stone pillars, 
next to the railroad tracks 
six blocks from your ticking mother, 
adding the minutes until you're late, 
we looked like giants 
folded in the backseat of the Lumina, 
trying to tease our boundaries 
and come as close as possible 
to going too far at sixteen. 
Your feet bent around the armrest 
my head crushed against the window, 
seatbelt pressed into the back of my neck 
as you would kiss my waistline route 
and my muscles would soften and bend like rubber. 
Our clothes spread about dirty floor mats, 
we twisted and crumbled in our tiny box 
leaving our giant handprints on the foggy glass, 
then turning over on our crooked backs 
and we would laugh, moving belt buckles 
from bruising our satisfied bones 
because we looked like giants 
when we were happy making steam 
and not making love.
Facing a Nightfall
Rebecca Lutz

I took a stroll through the park this evening;
I was completely alone, but that didn’t matter.
The maples and oaks had just begun to turn their leaves
as yet another year faced its death.
Oranges, yellows, golds,
Just mere hints of them now,
but soon, very soon,
they will blossom into the vibrant hues of a painter’s palette,
waiting for their master’s hand to guide them to their prime.
But even as I appreciate their colors the light fades,
consuming every thought to their brilliance,
Transforming the world into a dismal array of grays.
I move along.
As the stars start to twinkle, I think of you and your smile.
What are you doing right now?
I imagine off living your life,
waiting in a perfectly dimmed café for the next person you call “the one”.
But it’s a lie, isn’t it?
I don’t know.
I just hate the sound of night without your laugh.
I can’t stand the feeling of that empty apartment
Where I waste my time watching M*A*S*H reruns and old sci-fi movies,
Last night’s crusty pizza box still sitting forgotten on the coffee table.
But I turn my strides homeward anyway
To meet my dismal doom of vacant-TV-stares and the stench of heated leftovers.
For days, I’ve been staring at my cell thinking,
“Do I dare call you? Tell you that I’m sorry?
Do I dare call to say that it was all my fault and I want you home?”
My feet stop outside the apartment, and my hand finds the key to unlock the door.
Maybe tomorrow.
The Wolfman is on tonight.
Indoors I Cry --
Outside is Dreary, but Dry

Doug Olmstead

I mow the lawn
in my flip flops
and underwear,
green and white polka dots.
My ratty bathrobe is a cape
of misadventure as I crawl along
behind my push mower. Hewn heft
of clogs or slivers of grass gravitating
in a cyclotron of terror, mayhem,
and lawn care. The lawn
is a shamble of brambles and prick
weeds and don't forget the Creeping Charlie;
too many complaints in this neighborhood,
about length and length not,
have gotten me out
into this 'fresh' air,
half naked but I don't care.
Inside, my inner self flutters the shades
spying on me. He won't come out to play,
the cry-baby.

He's outside and I'm inside. Poor guy
has to mow the lawn after the property owner
had to come over and spoil our lazy fun.
I'm just too depressed, he let me sleep
and now I'm screaming in here
and all is falling,
shambling down.
Only my rambling,
trouble-filled soul
can peer out these windows,
and see the chaos in grass-form,
so I'm going to shut the blinds
It rained earlier, so the grass sticks
to my shoes and the blade
that does my scytheful handiwork.
The machine loses self-propulsion
as the blade ceases to spin:
a body of something clogging it all up
kills the motor in an abrupt jip.
Glazed over, I ran down a turtle
with my vehicle of destruction;
I did not notice,
but myself on the inside must be crying.

I caught the last act of the scene,
watching helpless animals
fall into the machine of man. Weight
bears down and the saltwater tears
pool in my sockets, ancient lakebeds,
sunken and red with use.
I don’t really mind as the tears
run onto my suit, vest, and tie,
all pinstripe gray and of the highest caliber.
Too bad I’m worthless and my other self
is out killing small helpless animals.
My cereal sits aside and has become one lump
of bran, too soggy to remember, and the raisins
lay drown at the bottom of the bowl;
poor bastards, suspended
just like me in time, in static yet fluid
movement, all around, callous
to the feelings of the spoon. A tool
like the lawnmower, a vehicle of responsibility. I ditched
too early to warrant an excuse
but I didn’t care. They complained, but I just plopped
on the couch and began to spill
the tears out of my skull, leaking
like a condensating pane, not doing its job
to keep out the weather,
between me and him—
my zombie self.
We make eye contact as his eyes well up and begin to twinge.
I take in a deep and carefully planned breath and go outside
to try my luck at mowing the lawn in my Italian leather shoes,
the smell of gasoline and turfed death in the air.

Now, I’m eating some soggy cereal I found.
My eyes are swollen shut and through the blurry rift
I can only see the TV’s fluttering static
and I fall into watching the war between the dots.
I imagine myself a soldier in the trenches
as I hear the lawn mower Doppler by the window
and the mortars zip through my perception,
my kills carved into the side of my helmet,
my rifle itching to be used, to have a purpose;
my boots would be thick with the bloody path,
marching, I would stumble, but be helped back up,
urged to continue, to persevere.
Walking on the frozen lake
James McGuire

I am walking on the frozen lake
On top of the water, on top of the ice, on top of the snow
And I am crying. Don't ask, my tears are my own.

As the tears freeze to my face on the frozen lake,
I remember Dante shivering in the lowest circle,
And laugh that I would remember Dante and think about literature now
Since I am crying, but my mind won't stay on one thing.

Foot prints in the white snow that uncover the grey ice.
Above are the bluffs, that have always been there
And will always be there quiet and firm.

And above those bluffs, bleak and hazed is the white sun
Drowning in the grey clouds. Or maybe it is pressing through.
Ode to the Hunt
Luke Wilcox

Game dear to me,
   In the chase of laced Victoria
Lavender perfume leaves dull
Purple streaks in the air which
Bears perforations from people
Passing through the olfactory haze,
A jagged line from a treasure map
In the stale air.

Contestants prepare in walk-in closets,
Conflicting over patterns and a lack
Of Camouflage. Canary yellow has
Never been so subtle. Pinstriped
Night cats bait cougars, forgetting
The feline balance of power.
   Sincerely Chase, I adore you,
   Even though I cannot stand
The gore of a successful hunt:
Splatters of clothing sundered
From contestant's bodies, false

Words hanging in the air overhead,
Waiting to be remembered,
And if they snared well
They get polished and set
Next to the buckshot.
Do belts with more notches fit better?
And is the purpose of removing a ring
To venture to get another?
Game that favors none,
You accept any willing.

   Time – and again – traps
Are staged in downtown bars
Or coffee shops (both which serve
Cheap beer).
Over a New Castle I
Listened to strategy.
“Nachos are perfect –
Why? – Accidental Hand
Contact.” Only serious
Competitors survive
Among other hunters.

Endless because even as
Last night’s kill hangs
From the wall, a split
Hide ready to tan
On a sunlit bed,
You call for more victors.
Mushroom Hunting
Samuel Hovda

Trees surround me like a crowd
At a wake. I can no longer see my car,
Let alone County Road 1 leading back
To my grandfather’s farmhouse.

These are my trees. My grandfather passed them,
With the land I stand on, to my father,
Who gave them to me with a hissing gasp
Like the air being let out of a tire. I’m hunting morels.

There is no underbrush, so I glide on my feet
As if through the air. This is the ginseng patch I was forced
To till, plant, and mulch for an entire summer
When I was thirteen. Few plants grew the next year
With no one to willingly take care of it.

Still moving, I see on one tree up ahead,
Branches bending their sharp elbows
And wrinkled hands. I count the leaves:
Eight copper rings—an Elm.

At the base, one morel. I pluck it,
Head the color between caramel and dirt,
Shape of an elongated egg,
With holes like in a sponge.

I poke the tip of my pinky into one;
A crack like the fissure in a granite
Headstone in an old country-church cemetery
Splits through the surface.

I put a hand on bark and step
Around the tree. On the other side,
There is a troop of morels, a gallon-Ziploc-bagful,
Waiting in the dirt, poking through the fallen leaves.
Lightning Bugs and Swamp Exploration
Leisha R. Mitchem

Dusk comes, a gentle snuffing,
leading night slowly forward.
They are filthy, the boys and her,
covered in muck and mud and mosquito bites
after exploring the marshes.
They stumble into a clearing along the river,
a mile from Lake Rebekah,
filled with snake grass that breaks
with a wet pop between knuckles,
Now a dash—
for the mound of sand
the city dumped here last summer.

The boys remove t-shirts, heavy with sweat,
their square shoulders hunched
like the last curve of the sinking sun,
still learning to fill the man's shape.
They climb to the top
and run and jump and flip down the sides,
perhaps for the girl and her cut offs cut too short
or maybe for the boys left alive inside.
Then, as the light fades behind the Mississippi,
they rub cool sand on the bites
and, engulfed in night, become surrounded
by a sea of speckled light.
Sludge mixes with the snow. Mud captures flattened cigarette butts in dirty ice.
And I trudge on
Under the cold.

The streets plot in silence. The buildings snatch at the sky like meadow grasses
And cars are rusting
And a yellow glove is forgotten.

And ideas are crowding each other like mad dogs licking and drooling in a pack
Thoughts are lead.
Hope lies robbed.

But I look up and see the blue sky searching forever for the edge of its canvas.
And up there are clouds
And a new space.

Up there is enough room for the mad dogs to run and run and run, to tire in cirrus.
And up there thoughts will do yoga
And swim next to nimbus.

Up there we can laugh and play and dance and not worry about dinner time because when we need to leave
We will rain down.
Growing Up in a Second Family
Luke Wilcox

I wanted everything of you, each thing I lacked
You held in your grasp, and raised it above my head
And in front of my eyes. Things like talent and charisma
Dangled from your fingertips and swayed before me. I reached out,
But each time the momentum of your social pendulum moved them
Away, so slow and natural was the way these lockets evaded me.

Attempting to siphon you further I went to your father,
Instead of taunting me, he challenged, and held his fist
Closed and in front of me, in it was wisdom, but force
Was needed to break his grip. How cruel to need
Force to become wise. “You can have this” he said,
“But you must take it from me.” And when I had failed
He admitted that his son had not succeeded either.

How true that we both lacked, we tore through life
Ignorant of pain and consequence for years. Though less
Did I suffer, as I watched you agonize (you wouldn’t admit that),
And I grew from you. Each time your heart broke
I swore that would not be me. So I closed my heart,
And you departed from me. But we came together again,
Only being distanced by a pane of glass and a wired receiver.
You told me “We can’t say much, this is recorded.”

I wanted more than that, more than you gave me.
Some nights, in our rat-hole of a two-bedroom,
I could hear you, in love, as its maelstrom
Echoed down the stairwell in a low moan
and I listened to the thundering of flesh,
and a cry for God. I moved closer to it and braced myself
Against the wall. My fingertips arched from tip to joint
And pushed against the spackle paint, as if to recoil and also hover.
I heard your breath, My breath too, it was the same.
When you finally gasped – I choked for air,
but it wasn't enough, I wanted more.
Years I watched, trying to guide us both, even absent
Of wisdom. It remained locked in the old man’s hand.
And while my desire for it weakened, his strength had not.
So we lived in folly, again and again, but each time I would step back,
Further from your faults. Time came to display things, but you
Were already blind. Those chains you held were nothing but weight
And problems you caused. And I don’t need your
weakness, I already have mine
Three Ways I Write Poetry
Samuel Hovda

I.
At three in the morning, the bones
In my fingers shoot little flames.
I drag my hands across pages
Of a college-bound notebook.

II.
At seven in the morning, I sip green tea
And watch the sun gloss the windowpanes.
I load a weather report for the day on my laptop.
For some unknown reason, I remember my father.
My eyes shield themselves with tears
That fall onto my computer screen.
I open a new document in Microsoft Word to catch them.

III.
At four in the afternoon, my heart is bored
With thoughts of minor scales and stars.
But, with free time at hand, my mind
Takes this opportunity to say some words
On how moments are here one second
And then gone. I save these words
To recite to my heart tonight.
“With Love, From Chuck
Danielle Wick

“When did the future switch from being a promise to being a threat?”
- Chuck Palahniuk

Then you wake up one morning to your buddy Chuck, good old Palahniuk, screaming knock-knock jokes at you from between some Playboy model’s airbrushed tits and you’re knocked flat – back onto your ass, back into a hospital waiting room, back into your brother’s arms, back into that poem about shitty potato pancakes

and you’re miserable, you’re hocking up snot and you feel like someone’s sitting on your chest, you find it hard to breathe while you’re freezing, walking around your apartment in shoes, pants and yesterday’s bra, wondering why the heat never heats and why you’re losing your voice

but you’re also smiling. Not with your face but with the sharp bits in your chest, with the ink that creeps through the microscopic valleys in your winter skin, with the rubber edges of each burn scar floating aimlessly over the surface of your body –

your nerves are fired up, purring, snapping and finally, after all of that, all those tumors and pills and measured journalistic torture,

you look at a blank page and feel like the future’s a promise."
in dreams the monsters come for you
but they are never real
phantasmagoric, fleeting forms
you wake and they are gone

in dreams the fairies dance with you
the sky and flowers smile
your friends laugh but disappear
as sure as monsters do

in life the monsters follow you
real as hammer striking nail
looming, devilish, gleeful forms
you wake and they are there

in life the fairies hide from you
the sky is grey and old
your friends love you or fall away
but still the monsters stay

sometimes i prefer the dreams
Screams – metallic blood that I could
taste but could not see. Sprawled
out in a pool of glass and oil,
sparks rained down from what could
have been Heaven.
Breathing stung me, burned me, but when I saw
you were not stung, not burned by breathing,
that hurt worse – that was more pain than
three of my shattered ribs put together.
Your body was twisted, tangled; your perfectly
long black eyelashes were the only part
that seem untouched, unspoiled.
Sirens wailing in the distance were too
late for you, and it hardly mattered
anymore for me. You were gone.
My hand crept through
the broken glass, nestling into yours,
and there in the cold, there I found peace.
Ode to [My] Muscles (II)
Doug Olmstead

Ooh. I discover you like a sprouting flower,
out of the soil, deep in the forest, up on a hill,
the bud to be a beautiful, silky creation—
to become a rare pink lady’s slipper
here in the north.

A beautiful bulge, beveled and brewing,
a new muscle thoroughly appears under my shoulder blade.
A tribute to work wrought, won.

It’s a cheap thrill,
I know, but I like to labor, changing every day until
I descry a muscle by happenstance.

But I wonder if
I’m not the only one. So many other guys toning
and strengthening pecs, abs, delts, lats, and biceps triceps.

Perhaps you are saucier than the innocent flower I believed
you to be. Putting on talcum powder like rouge,
and visiting the corners of bones and tendons, sewing your sinews
in sin. Whoring around town giving dudes pleasure in their
discovery of you.

Perhaps while I’m doing a set
trying to accentuate my back muscles,
you’re across town letting
some random guy
tweak you and prod you in front of the mirror,
doing an arm curl to show you off,
kissing you, caressing your sleek beauty.
And they say women have an unhealthy body image…

But this is about you. Not what Others are thinking about you
or forming opinions or factions around you. Hell, you make
David look like a god, Sports heroes deities, and Van Damme im-
mortal.

Your hills and valleys I could meander all day,
skipping rocks in brooks and playing in your villages,
the clock-towers and vineyards my jungle gyms.
You form life by holding it in your arms,
  a strained chokehold.
or a guarded stronghold
of tissue.

I am a man. This is my destiny. You are my fate
and my friend to love and nourish, to grow and flourish
gaining mass like a star, to shine wildly
in the body oil of time.            
  Burning all others who try to get to you.
Bastards, all of them!

Meanwhile, 50,000 BCE…

beasts
ready to kill with you at their ready. Pounding chest, showing pride,
I am there to kill, with you by my side.       
I was strong, bashed

skull
and torso alike. Now I sit by brook-side washing off blood. Spy
pink bulbous flower. Pick it and the muscles in my jaw tear into its
silky flesh.
First Kiss
Samuel Hovda

Our lips create a juncture beneath Rochester streetlamps.
Our bodies are firm on the sidewalk,
Affixed appurtenances, like showerheads.
Your fingers and thumbs outline
An upside-down triangle on my upper back.
They feel like the patter of falling droplets.

Your lips sonic-boom against mine
Like the explosion of a raindrop.
We are hands folding prayers to here
And now as each second lurches forward
Like the choppy movements of a lagging video.
The browns of your eyes flash like camera lenses.

Down the alleyway, a dog behind a dumpster barks once;
The perforated line of scars beneath your left eye catches the lamp-light;
A middle-aged business man passes us, his right cheek twitching;
The rubbed-around ruby lipstick on his collar sparkles.

We’re not red roses rising from the bottom of a glass half-globe
Or the halves of a crimson, sutured, stone heart.
We’re plastic paperweights, cheap replicas
Of the Gonda and the Charlton buildings
As we saw them this evening
Walking the sidewalk beside 4th street.

You turn to walk up the steps and into your parents’ house.
The zephyrs take your hand like your mother
Leading you down a grocery-store aisle
As I remain, still clinging, like paper in the wind.
Stay:
*Molly Barrett*

It's hard to find your mouth  
When we're playing in the dark.

A teenage hide-and-seek  
No flashlights allowed  
    Shaking, sputtering  
    At least I know we're still alive.

Here's my heart—can you see it in the dark?  
Here, right here. If you blink, you'll miss it.  
“Miss me?”  
    I haven't even left you yet.  
“But you will,” I said. They all leave.  
Whether or not they understand what I need.  
Dark.

10, 9, 8, 7

It reminds me of being ten again, the way your eyelashes kiss my cheek.  
Here, right here. Can't you hear it in the dark?  
“It's okay, you know.”  
    Don't say it, you said.  
But I won't.  
And I don't.  
And I'm scared.

6,5,4,3

Here, right here.

2,1

Ready or not, here I come.
Goodbye to another Best-One-Night-Seasonal-Stand Friend
James McGuire

I.

Two calendars came and past before I saw Emily.
I drove down the line separating river from bluffs to see her.
We ate cherry pie she made with harvest's fresh fruits,
tart happy depth charges dropped, exploding on the tongue.
We biked on gravel trails and watched the Egrets fly from the marsh
warning of the coming storm. The flutter of white reminded me:
When the first snows come, drifting down, riding the circles
of air currents, I will think of her and wish
she would come to venture with me out into the haze.
But the snows have not come, and summer has not surrendered.
When the night began to come I followed the river home,
and she fell away again into the calendars stacked up under my bed.

II.

That night, on the tracks of a highway John steamed into town
like the first autumn airstreams riding out from an icy Hudson bay
and marked the yearly turning of the clock
it must be time to gather in the warmth and buy books for classes.

John's tangled dreaded hair under a crumpled leather hat
was painted by the embers we sat around
as his parents toasted his great departure with champagne
to France where he will squish grapes between his toes.

We are left alone by the red-dwarf logs burning out their last,
and we speak of things that may lead to supernovas
but not yet. We need to read more tomes and watch a little longer.
But for a few hours twice a year we sit and observe the rite of friendship.
Our marshmallows were toasted and stuck between the chocolate and crackers
The gold warming thick bars of deep brunette sprawled across our tongues.
The darkness gnaws at our meeting reminding us like alarm clocks sounding too early
That we must throw off these sheets of happy crossing to be tossed back into the pot.

He is the wind and I am the boulder.
He pedals across the seas and mountains and towers
While I, a living stone, quiver in a field of frenzied work.
But for this moment we hold hands and dance like wild goat-men.

The whistle of the night screams again, its engine begins to shrug
and my mind waves goodbye to another best-one-night-seasonal-stand friend
as we hug. And I will go back to being a boulder and he the wind.
But we are struggling on towards hope, just taking different roads with different tickets.
You hold me together
Fragile as an eggshell
Binding yourself to me
Placing yourself between me
And the world.

Your tarnished links
Surround my wrist
A chain of memories
Flecked and changing
With exposure like the spots
That appear on the sun.
Your skin used to be aureate.
Flashy like daylight glinting
On a slick highway

Dangerous and gaudy
A symbol for everything I feared
But we change together
You faded around my wrist
Became a chain of my DNA.
When Your Eyes Speak
Emily Templin

The window is open with a cool breeze coming in
I’ve never felt this kind of air before. It pierces my lungs, but in a
good way
making my heart pump – faster.

All of a sudden
My eyes open

I can’t believe they’ve been closed for so long

Though there is something sensual about having your eyes closed. It’s
the
… not knowing what to expect
that gives me such a rush; using other senses to take in the surround-
ings.

Funny how
eyes
have a way of understanding people; for the longest time I used to
think my
eyes
were always open, now I know they were closed the whole time

But now—
Now they’re open
And life—
Looks completely different.

People say eyes are the window to the soul
but I think that everyone’s eyes are glued shut
Like an old abandoned house
waiting
to be opened
It’s something we don’t realize or see until the right person comes
along and unknowingly
stumbles
upon
the right path
   leading to your doorstep.
The doors and windows are locked, but when it’s right, that person
will have the key;
they’ve had it their whole life.
The doors become unlocked and the window becomes unjamed,
circulating the rest of the house
free to explore
and with the slightest touch
he unveiled what was there the whole time,
freeing me.

The thing is, once that window is open, it doesn’t shut.
Not for a terrible storm
not for a cold night.
It won’t always be sunshine and butterflies, but that’s the beauty of
the soul;
it
never
closes
It’s a magnificent piece of art.
Set on display only to get bypassed—
Until one day, someone comes along and finds beauty in it—
Wanting to take it home.

This soul I bare,
isn’t really mine,
but for someone else to find—and once it’s found,
it’s as if I’m finally whole.
Together
free to explore
Two bodies diverged into one.

Eyes speak when words cannot—
And your eyes
   They speak
And my eyes
   They listen

So don’t worry about how run-down the house appears
what matters is the inside
because
we often use our eyes for looking, forgetting to actually see…
And my eyes—
    They’re finally open—
Ready to explore life

My window is open and it’s a beautiful storm.
    freeing me.

The thing is, once that window is open, it doesn’t shut.
Not for a terrible storm
    not for a cold night.
It won’t always be sunshine and butterflies, but that’s the beauty of the soul;
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