Eastern Exposure

Student Literary Journal
2009
EASTERN EXPOSURE, Eastern Connecticut State University's student literary magazine, is published annually by the English Club of Eastern Connecticut State University, English Department, 225 Webb Hall, 83 Windham Street, Willimantic, CT 06226. E-mail: englishclub@stu.easternct.edu. Phone: (860) 456-4570. Fax: (860) 456-4580.

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EASTERN EXPOSURE showcases the literary work of Eastern Connecticut State University's student writers. In doing so, it promotes the university's mission to be "the state's public liberal arts university" and "to be a model community of learners of different ages from diverse cultural, racial and social backgrounds."

SUBMISSIONS: EASTERN EXPOSURE accepts submissions of student poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction from the beginning of the fall term until 4 p.m. on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. All Eastern students are invited to submit their work (up to five poems, one short story, and one piece of creative nonfiction) as a single Word attachment to englishclub@stu.easternct.edu. Each student should also include a brief (15-word) biographical note with his/her submission.

EASTERN EXPOSURE is distributed free to members of the Eastern Connecticut State University community. Current issues are available in the campus bookstore, the Student Center, Smith Library, and the English Department Office. Back issues may be available through the English Club Faculty Advisor and the English Department.

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Special thanks to Kevin Paquin (University Relations) and Michael Palumbo (CTT) for their help with this issue, and to John Bazin (Student Affairs), Karyl Bulmer (Fiscal Affairs) and everyone associated with BAM for their guidance and support.

Cover art was created by Aaron Zambrano.

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i don't know what it is about you that closes and opens;  
only something in me understands the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses.

e.e. cummings
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The Morning Glories

to my sister

Before we were old enough

to have to pay our own bills,

we played in morning glories.

We would sneak out the back door
to the tall chain link dog pen.
You would unlatch the hook closure,

letting us into our own world.

The way the vines curved and grew
mad it look like a throne,
two girls just wanting to get away.

We would shake the fence,
sprinkling dew all over

mismatched outfits we threw on
in the early morning light.

The purple flowers open,
they were perfect little horns

announcing to our shared court
the princesses had arrived.

We wished they would grow into our bodies
and wrap their tendrils around us.

In that place,
there was no fighting,

no families shattered.
Nothing was wrong
in our minds when we were protected
by the fresh green leaves.

We played games of make believe
as long as we could back then.
After Jumping off the Roof of Your Old High School,

The doc sends you home
with some glorious drug
that rumbles your stomach,
produces a swift, sweeping glow,
a continual buzz that makes you think
you suddenly know something.

Big,
Your arm is big.
Hand, too.

You unravel the pink, pale bandages
and reveal the bruise,
its little purple storm clouds
covering the underside of your forearm,
spreading, as if diffused in water,
past the bicep, almost up the shoulder.
A small mountain of your body
juts out — a misplaced second elbow.
You touch it.

You touch it and you’re afraid to leave home.
Already, your cousin has called
making sure you were just drunk, right?
This isn’t some suicide thing?
Already your aunt has sent flowers:
lilacs and daffodils humming on the kitchen table.
My Grandmother's Roses

only bloom white
or cream
or ivory
but always pure, like the
cross above her bed
with the naked savior bleeding
cinnamon-colored paint that she
kneels before every night
in her teal robe and slippers.

She has told me
she prays for the man I love;
has told me
she prays they won’t send him back
over there again.
She prays he’ll be able to stay
here with me.
Then, every night my grandmother crosses
herself and climbs into her empty
bed, the silence in the room
screaming my grandfather’s absence.

And I remember being six years old,
helping her tend her roses,
their syrupy perfume hovering
in the air while my
little hands tilled
the coffee ground soil,
my grandmother
telling me about God
and not to listen to my father.
Nightlight

every night
since she’s returned
from the war on terror,

(about which she says
it was black as flies
swarming on a moonless night)

before she comes to bed,
before she switches off the glare
of the bedside lamp —

rests her mind and eyes —
she switches on the amber glow
of the nightlight
The Waiting

I'll wait for you when the sky won't open tonight's constellations and let the light break over the places where we dance.

I'll wait for you where vines wind through broken fences, weave across their white chipped faces, pointy edges that unlock the sky, open a field of stars and dust that falls from too much wishing.

I don't know the power of a wish, except that it might be all I have left. I don't want to wait for you when you're with her, but I do.

I'll wait for you until I can't anymore, when the days grow long and the sky turns yellow.
Birch Saplings along CT Route 2

You sit beside me, frigid and vacant,
While breezes whip the trees back to the wood.
You stare ahead, tight-lipped and festering,
Insistent that your misfortune is my doing.
Never yours, always mine, never yours.
But as the leaves whisper by the roadway,
You really know it is your own inability to let go,
Your underlying malaise, your secret
That all of your lies have been exposed.
Is it guilt or arrogance
That won't let you look at me,
But keeps your eyes smoldering on my friends, the delicate trees?
Sardines
After Kim Addonizio's "The Embers"

The trees were where we hid when we thought
no one was looking. We scattered
from the light and breathed in hard. We waited in the shadows,
one Miss-is-ippi, two Miss-is-ippi.
Our hands gripped the trunk forming a cohesive bond-
flesh to sap to tree to nature to flesh.
The moments in between were what terrified me: the slow and agonizing
wait punctuated by my heart hiccupping.
Behind the pines, oaks, and maples, I found
solitude, the protection I craved.
With just a cool, damp patch of earth, I believed
if I sat perfectly still, I could be forgotten.
The wind tickled my skin, carrying the smell
of sweat, grass clippings, and the oppressive summer heat.
When the wind blew, the branches swayed to the loose beat
of rusted patio wind chimes.
The choirs of cicadas rejoiced. Light
could not get me. I hid from flashlights
and curfews always beckoning me to come forward. One November
Saturday, I came back. My place of refuge had been
wiped out. No one would ever come to this clearing and find safety
in branches. No child would peel their sticky skin
from the gritty, infected bark, and no child would know the dark instead of
the light.
I chose a stump to sit on, clutched my knees, and
closed my eyes trying to recall a time when the darkness enveloped my body,
and not being found was enough to keep me hiding.
The Sunken Barn

Every year at this time, when the wind shuffles the fallen leaves, when the early Autumn air is too cool for short sleeves, my father and I drive the pick-up across the lawn and pile in the pool furniture, umbrellas, chairs, and flowers pots, the underside of everything slick as we stack it, back to front before climbing in the cab. Bouncing across the grass, along the hyacinths, I notice how deeply the barn has sunken now, the cracked red paint still cracking, peeling away around the windows where weeds weave their way inside.

I think about my father’s face so many years ago, and the look in his eyes when he asked me if I resented him for being gay. And this is all I can think of as we duck through the doorway, as he leans plastic chairs beside the rotting beam. I stare at the two-by-fours, corroded tools hanging from rusty nails, and at the roof, never buckling, refusing to collapse.

Cole Goslet
Rummage Sale

The cry of a lone harmonica
answers the metallic scream of an approaching train.
The smell of grease fills my heart.

*

I think he's dead.
Well, I am not really sure.

The thin elderly man,
with the unshaven weathered face,
lies on a concrete mattress
with his head wedged between
a garbage bin and a brick wall.

With a smile on his sleeping face,
he looks happier than any of the
wealthy passersby.

His dark and dirty clothes
contrast with the puffy, bleach-white socks
that warm his shoeless feet.

*

We had never been so wet.

Our plans to enjoy the street performers at Washington Square
had become a dash for shelter.

We ran all the way to Bleeker St. and settled into that
new age Italian restaurant
with the goldfish pond in the back.

Our drying clothes scattered about the chairs,
as we enjoyed the warm food and safe haven
discovered in the village.

*

The boy who took the train from Harlem
was bursting with dreams.

His eyes were as bright as the endless blanket
exploding with color that filled the midnight sky.

He asks around,
"Hey man, do you want to buy my CD?"
No one responds.

A 15-story portrait of Puff Daddy
looks down; The "King of Times Square"
seems to chuckle at this kid that doesn't have a chance.

*

It must have been 100 degrees
that day.

We had no intention of giving up our bench
in the cool shade of that maple tree.

To one side
the old men
playing chess.

On the other,
the endless tables occupied
by neighbors selling their junk.

Running around us
was that barefoot six-year-old girl
acting as if she was in charge of the neighborhood,
shouting out
"Rummage Sale!"
The Mayor of Senior Citizens

Unscarred by the cruelty of strangers who view him as the strange one, the "Mayor" of senior citizen's coat is worn-brown with coffee stains, and dirty elbows. Hair medium length, thinning, gray like his whiskers; thick-rimmed glasses frame his blue eyes that have seen so much, and seen nothing at all.

I've seen him walking many times, hard in the air, arm moving up and down like a toy running on batteries. His smile is ever present. Whether or not he gets a hello, or a wave in return, he wears that smile like the Joker, who mocks him with false salutations.

His smile doesn't waver with the lack of responses. His hand is in the air, waving to everybody on the street. Sometimes compassion gives him a greeting, to ease the loneliness belying the expression.

He's lonely, I can see that. His daily workout: walking from the senior high-rise to the coffee shop and back. Sneakers afoot, inches from the bottom of his semi-dirty olive trousers, he is prepared to journey through the puddles that the rain leaves behind.
You Are Not Rome!

Raised by wolves, yes, this is true,
But no Romulus or Remus are you!
Found as a babe by the river, you claim.
Was it the mighty Tiber?
Or perhaps in the reeds of the fertile Nile?
It was the former, you exclaim.
The latter would make you out to be Moses,
And you have neither virtue nor a beard.
So you are not an empire-builder or liberator of men,
Yet you insist on your royalty, lineage, and pure sense of right.
No one sees you in such high regard, despite your constant pleas.
So why don't you lay down,
Cast aside your ambition, your sea-parting staff,
And join the rest of us on the sidewalk?
Richard Schaef

Words

The war in Lebanon is over

words ringing still
in the ears of Hussein Ali Ahmed, age 70,
lying in Nabatiyeh hospital
in a coma

Hussein was pruning his orange trees,
he never knew
what hit him

his daughter Suwad
prays she hears
just one word
slurred whispered
sitting at her father's bedside
talking to him

I know he hears me,
he squeezes my hand
when I talk to him

words cut down
when Hadi, age 11,
left half his body
on the playground
the morning
of the ceasefire.

In Lebanon,
there is no ceasefire
cluster bombs
thousands,
if not millions
of them lie undetonated
on the ground

bombing words
to oblivion

in the middle of a sentence
in the middle of a thought
in the middle of a street
Geophagy

By their fruits ye shall know them.
—The Gospels

Oddly, what this reminds me of is the time in Vermont in the middle of a long summer drought when I stood in disbelief watching the cows eat dirt. But this isn’t about long droughts in Vermont, not about cows eating dirt. What this is about are Haitians in Haiti eating dirt because dirt is all they can afford to eat. This is sixteen-year-old Charlene eating mud cookies to keep from dying, to keep her one-month-old son, who looks thinner than the day he was born, from dying. This is them, them eating dirt, staving off the hunger pangs of a new world geography ruled by ravening wolves, rats, and flies.

1 Geophagy is the act of eating dirt

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My Book of Revelations

I

Accepting the body of Christ along with the blessing of our priest:
First Communion we are Catholics now.
I ignore the chattering of others straight posture, silent.
The priest's homily dominates over the hacking of old crones and
the persistent wails of babies hoping to remind us that they're there.

At home, after Mass, I imagine I am a priest. Religion
is a vein of ore I intend to unearth. I preside
from my own pulpit acting out the motions of the Mass.
I embrace the Holy Ghost and the Eucharistic Host.

II

Anita's stuffy dining room, where the aroma of "Hungry-Mans"
overpowers the scent of Jesus' cherry-candle face.
My father keeps vigil over our catechism instructor Anita.
Catholicism is synonymous with child abuse. The parents' presence
is a formality requested by Saint James, Anita says, Nothing more than that.

Anita animatedly explains to us (her Confirmation students)
that she received visions from God where he offered her his guidance.
God spoke to me, showed me what I needed to see!
He explained that the Harry Potter toys I needed for my son's
birthday were on sale at Target! And there they were!

III

Confirmation class our new instructor Macy starts off with
a Christian rap song, which allows me to forgive all the Christian
rock I've learned to avoid. She lectures to our class that
evolution is a lie and that she didn't come from a monkey.
Her children and their friends cheer.
Macy asks that we rank a list of sins in order from one to ten, one being the worst and ten being the *most innocent.*
She applauds a girl who announces she ranked premarital sex above date rape, murder, and drive-by shootings.
Forgive them Father; They know not what They do.

**IV**

Four years later, I'm confirmed; it is my sister's turn.
I sit in the pew, watching a fresh herd of lambs approach the bishop.
I study the remodeled interior of Saint James Church with a new fresco on the dome above us: four angels offer a crown of thorns, the Holy Grail, a dove with wings outstretched, the Shroud of Christ.

All I see, staring into the angels' childlike faces
is Jesus' likeness in a fresh piece of toast.
The Respirator

Before you died,
You followed me into a dream that couldn't last,
A dream in which you opened your eyes speaking
In ways I don't understand and hardly remember.

This morning, I stand in a hospital room
Watching my sister fold her hands inside her pockets
As my grandmother bends over you with rosary beads.

I move the wires away from your heart
So I can rest my head on your chest,
As I did with my father when I was too small to count.

I want to count the beats,
Feel the rhythm in my ears,
But I know it's too late.

These wires are sunflower stems.

Doctors slice the green stalks diagonally,
Placing the yellow hearts in translucent glasses
To give life for little while, until they must wilt away.

You still won't open your eyes,
Even though they tell us you can.
I think about tearing these tubes from your machine,
How I might lift these flowers to your face,
Avoiding the places where the sunlight breaks.
My Best Friend, Now a Zombie

My best friend from high school one year after graduating crashed. His motorcycle helmedless into the car in front of him at midnight. Drunk, flying fifty feet onto his head. I wandered the halls of the hospital trying to locate him standing in the doorway. I saw a stranger in Dave’s body his mother pulled me out to the corridor. Gary, he has a bruised brain, he won’t recognize you he doesn’t recognize us. The doctors had to open his skull to relieve the pressure They don’t expect he will fully recover, but...

I lifted my heavy feet and pushed forward in four-wheel drive low never taking my eyes off of his. I moved toward his cocoon keeping a safe distance I could not speak. Neither could Dave. He was strapped to the bed like a mental ward patient. The only thing coming out of his mouth besides drool was groaning and grunting things change as quickly as a traffic light. Maybe if there was a light instead of a stop sign. He survived but only as a shell of my best friend for the last three years my partner. In adolescence cliff diving at the quarry riding off-road motorcycles in gravel pits. Beer drinking and smoking on Friday nights cruising town looking for hot spots to chill. Now a year later struggling to walk with a body as strange to him as to me. A zombie his left leg lags behind as though he had a stroke left arm limp a broken wing.

Chemically-Altered Language

I want to tell you something, Doctor. I want to tell it to you in great detail, with such force that these thoughts are branded into my brain. I’m going to get real close to your ear, until you can feel my breath shallow on the back of your neck and the hairs vibrate with my voice so I can whisper this story only to you, because I think you’ll understand. You see, I met him on my way here, and we were doomed to meet. If Romeo had known what he’d have to endure with that Juliet, I’ll bet he would have killed himself right off. I was just lying down in the waiting room on one of those couches, the way Freud would have had me do it, taking in the gorgeous ceiling tiles, how they looked like the Midwest under snow. I could pick our pictures in the water stains and it was like watching the sky, too.

I had already organized all the magazines on the table by issue, date, and alphabetically by title. That’s what got me here in the first place. See, I used to work in this library and organize the paper clips in the drawer by color and size, alphabetically, of course. Blue. Green. Orange. Pink. Purple. Red. Yellow. My real job was to keep the books in the right order, which I did quite well, but then I got too good at it and started aligning them parallel to each other and perfectly perpendicular with the shelf. The librarians found me right-angling the books in the stacks on a Tuesday and that’s when they figured that something in the brain was askew, so they suggested I go visit a counselor or something, which led me to the waiting room.

I met him there, when he bent into my sight. His face was so close to mine. The first thing I noticed was his tattoos, there was one on his neck that looked symbolic. His entire left arm was covered in tattoos, but there was absolutely nothing on the right arm. I thought half of him told the truth, but I wasn’t sure which half. Stubble dotted his face and his hair was kind of wild. Around his eyes were dark circles as if he hadn’t had any sleep in years, but the eyes themselves were so blue I had to look away; it made my nerves scream.

He said, “Is this the right place? I’m here to see the doctor.” I liked his voice. He sounded as if he already knew me, and we could have been friends.

“Take a seat,” I said, shifting toward a cross-legged position on the couch. He sat down next to me and the couch sunk down a little. Then we were at the same level.
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"Take a seat," I said, shifting toward a cross-legged position on the
couch. He sat down next to me and the couch sunk down a little. Then we
were at the same level.
“What’re you in here for?” he asked.

I just looked at my shoes and the dirt that was buried in the fabric. His sneakers seemed so strange and big next to mine. Mine were narrow and dark and the shoelaces were wound awful tight. His shoes were so white and clean; they hadn’t seen dirt or grime and I was jealous of those shoes and how perfect they were.

“C’mon. I’m not going to judge you,” he said, nudging me a bit with his elbow. My skin twitched. I couldn’t remember the last time I had felt human contact.

“I am misunderstood,” I said. “And lonely.” The words weren’t meant to be spoken. They had fluttered around in my brain for a while, but they were secret. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m a little misunderstood, too,” he smiled. “That’s why I’ve only got tattoos on the left side. I promised my mother I would leave half of myself blank and normal, as she calls it. So what’s your story?”

“My story? I work in... I’m a literary scientist.”

“A literary scientist, eh? I’m learning to play the piano.”

“The piano?”

“I’m in a band. I’m the keyboardist.” His teeth were very straight. “How long have you been coming here?” I asked.

“The last two years, more or less. You, though, I can tell you’re new...and way more interesting than the last girl I met in the waiting room. She just sat in the corner and chipped away her fingernails.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything,” he said.

“Do you think everything turns out right in the end? For the good people?”

He asked, “Does it matter, if it’s the end?”

“But what happens to the good people?”

“Well, the good people save each other. They hold the girl’s hand.” He leaped his fingers in mine, pulling me toward him. “And they look at the sunset and feel so alive and they don’t feel any pain, but their pulses align and they’re okay in the end. They are happy.”

“Do they tell each other secrets?” I asked.

“Secrets don’t exist anymore. They tell each other everything.”

A tall woman leaned around the corner of the doorjamb, glanced around the room at us and then said to me, “You can come in now.”

“I’ll be right there,” I told her as she slunk away like a shadow recoiling.

His hand brushed against mine as he pulled away. I stood up and slid to the doorway, my back to the wall. My heart wouldn’t slow down. There was too much oxygen in the air. It was a great feeling, a light-headed feeling, things got all bright around the edges and sound got muffled.

“I think words are making me sick,” I whispered to him in the doorway. Then, I turned and fled into the tiny doctor’s office. The last image I had of him in that waiting room was the look on his face, like he would peel back the horizon to find me again.

When I came back he wasn’t there, but his phone number was written in pen all over the couch where he had sat; I memorized every digit.

***

I started taking things slow. The proper milligrams each day. After a week, I thought I might be okay enough to talk to him again, so I dialed the number. We met at the ice skating rink at the old pond. I took public transportation because it made me feel invisible. Something about the way the gears ground together, the way it wheezed to a stop, the way its brakes shrieked, something in that was safe. Every motion swept through the people riding the bus. A stop and our heartbeats lurched forward together. And when it slowed, our breathing followed. Complete strangers trapped in a glass box. That was the windows, and the world outside kept going, whizzing past like the movie sped up. It got much worse at night.

But this was day, although not day at the same time, because the sky was so thick with papier mâché clouds and completely, completely white. He met me off the bus at the rink, with a pair of skates’ dangling from his hand. There was something familiar in the way his shoulders just seemed to hang there, something dormant and wiry in the muscles. This rink was right by the plaza where the doctor’s office was so we both knew how to get there. On the frozen pond, children were ice skating. This one girl kept slashing her skate at the ice, walking clumsily more than actually gliding. Her hair was brown and messy like mine and I wondered where her parents were, if they were watching, if they noticed that when she was a child she cut cursive into the ice. She closed her eyes and kicked off from the edge of the pond. She was so incredibly alone on that pond. I hoped someone was looking for her.

“Was the bus ride long?” he asked.

“I have no idea. I stopped wearing a watch years ago,” I said.

“So?” he said. “We should get to know each other.”

“You’re the only one who understands,” I said with a half smile.

“Where are you from?” he asked. I pointed to the east.
“What're you in here for?” he asked.
I just looked at my shoes and the dirt that was buried in the fabric. His sneakers seemed so strange and big next to mine. Mine were narrow and dark and the shoelaces were wound awful tight. His shoes were so white and clean; they hadn't seen dirt or grime and I was jealous of those shoes and how perfect they were.

“C'mon. I'm not going to judge you,” he said, nudging me a bit with his elbow. My skin twitched. I couldn't remember the last time I had felt human contact.

“I am misunderstood,” I said. “And lonely.” The words weren't meant to be spoken. They had fluttered around in my brain for a while, but they were secret. “I'm sorry.”

“I'm a little misunderstood, too,” he smiled. “That's why I've only got tattoos on the left side. I promised my mother I would leave half of myself blank and 'normal', as she calls it. So what's your story?”

“My story? I work in...I'm a literary scientist.”

“A literary scientist, eh? I'm learning to play the piano.”

“The piano?”

“I'm in a band. I'm the keyboardist.” His teeth were very straight.

“How long have you been coming here?” I asked.

“The last two years, more or less. You, though, I can tell you're new...and way more interesting than the last girl I met in the waiting room. She just sat in the corner and chipped away her fingernails.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything,” he said.

“Do you think everything turns out right in the end? For the good people?”

“What happens to them?”

He asked, “Does it matter, if it's the end?”

“But what happens to the good people?”

“Well, the good people save each other. The boy reaches over and holds the girl's hand.” He licked his fingers in mine, pulling me toward him.

“And they look at the sunset and feel so alive and they don't feel any pain, but their pulses align and they're okay in the end. They are happy.”

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“So,” he said. “We should get to know each other.”

“You're the only one who understands,” I said with a half smile.

“Where are you from?” he asked. I pointed to the east.
“You?” He pointed to the west, and for a moment, we both stood there, fingers aimed in opposite directions.

“Two parallel lines in a plane will never cross,” he said quietly.

“What if they are on separate planes?” I asked. We sat down on a rotted picnic bench by the pond, its wood cold and damp. He tossed off his shoes and slid on a pair of ice skates. I noticed that the leather was cracked all up and down the ankle as he laced them. My own skates were harder to put on, because I'd had to buy them secondhand when he invited me to the rink. They were at least a size too small.

“How is your hand?” I asked, but I did not look at him.

“We'll be playing some shows soon. You should come.”

“I'll do that.” I fumbled with the laces. Some of the parents were watching. They had all gathered on this side of the pond, tying their own children's shoes. One woman with a cock-eyed floral kerchief wrapped around her tightly-bound hair gave us a dirty look. It didn't help that I was in my mid-twenties and he was a few years older than I was. All the kids were under twelve.

“I don't think she likes me. We should go,” I stammered, edging further away from the woman's gaze.

“We came here to skate. Let's skate,” he said, lifting me from the bench. His fingers were wrapped around my arm, holding me up on the ice.

“Have you ever been ice skating before?”

It was so slippery and my ankles twisted every way, trying to find some balance. “I never learned how to ice skate. My parents never taught me how.” I felt hot tears and prayed they would freeze.

“Well, my parents are from Florida. We live on the ocean and I taught myself when I came up North.” He took both my hands and began skating backwards slowly.

“I'm skating!” I shouted. A few of the children turned toward me. Except, this time, I didn't care what they thought. We skimmed the perimeter. As we rounded a bend in the pond, I caught a glimpse at the window of the building and, Doctor, I swear I saw you looking out there at us. Those eyes, the way you just stared impassively, I crumpled after that. I let go of his grip and fell onto the ice. My ankle felt hot and I shuffled over to the edge of the pond on a snow bank. He sat down next to me.

“What happened? You let go.”

“I saw her. I did. The Doctor – she was in that window.” I gestured to the building, but there was no one in the window.

“Don't worry about her,” he said, shoveling snow on my ankle to diminish the swelling. “She doesn't make everything right. She told me to take the medication and I refused and I'm better because of it.” I hung my head in embarrassment. I knew I was weak to take the pills. I should have been stronger like him. That was when I felt it coming on, the intense need to get out of there or no, exist, but I had to maintain equilibrium because any upset could throw the scale off. That kind of damage causes scars and bruises. My cerebral cortex must be black and blue from all the damage I inflicted upon myself.

The tree beside me caught my eye. About eye level, there were scratches in the trunk, probably carved by some couple – two sets of initials in a heart. I was discerning who they were and what the other lacerations in the surface might mean when I started seeing words in the bark. Rough, gnarled pieces of bark and in the canyons and spaces between, there were the edges of words forming. Words scrolled up and down the trunk and all over it. None of them made sense at first, but then they began arranging the longer I looked at it.

“What're you looking at?” he asked.

“I see... words, on the tree.” I knew he wouldn't believe me, but he looked anyway.

“There's nothing there,” he said and paused. “Do you like books?”

“Yes,” I said. “Too much.”

“It's simply a matter of reading too much as a child. That's all. Really.” He rested his arm over my shoulder. He felt so heavy leaning on me and all I could manage was a feeble “Of course.”

***

The next time we found each other was in a cramped coffee house on Main. He was sitting cross-legged on a wine-red couch in the corner, holding a cup of coffee, but he never drank from it the whole time. It had been about a week and I was still trying to make the medication work. You see, Doctor, you gave me a load of pills after the first time I went to see you, to be sure I was properly medicated every day. Except, that morning I had a feeling that I would be meeting him. I had this premonition, so I downed a whole slew of pills. Not enough to kill myself – what a waste of time that would have been – but enough to make this medication-induced, okay feeling permanent. To be honest, I wanted to impress him and I wanted him to think I was pretty now, but it got real hard to concentrate after upping the dose. I threw down my bag and sat down beside him on the couch. There were so many people in the coffee house. All these executives at tables with beautiful women,
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"How is your band?" I asked, but I did not look at him.

"We'll be playing some shows soon. You should come."

"I'll do that." I fumbled with the laces. Some of the parents were watching. They had all gathered on this side of the pond, tying their own children's shoes. One woman with a cock-eyed floral kerchief wrapped around her tightly-bound hair gave us a dirty look. It didn't help that I was in my mid-twenties and he was a few years older than I was. All the kids were under twelve.

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sipping coffee and talking about real estate and sin. The air smelled like politics from all the conversation.

My thoughts were going pretty fast like ticker tape in my mind. He said, "I knew I'd find you."

I said, "How are, how are, how are, how are..." My lips kept repeating those dumb words. I couldn't reach the ones I needed. "How are how are how are how are..." I wanted to stop talking, really I did, because I have this way of holding it all inside until the thoughts turn to concrete and burst out through the cracks. I looked at him and his face was all crinkled with worry, but I couldn't meet his eyes. And then I started crying silently where my body just heaved and I held everything in so tight that the pressure built. He reached over, wrapped his arms around me, and it occurred to me that I couldn't feel anything at all. That was when I saw the coffee; it must have fallen off his lap when he went to catch me from falling. The mahogany liquid was fanning out across the tile floor.

"There are words in the coffee," I said, shaking. Wherever it spilled, whole sentences unraveled and crushed together. He just stood up, draped his jacket over my shoulders, and walked me to the door. He took me home with him that night, just to be sure I was okay. We sat in his apartment with just the darkness, and outside the whole world burst into illumination. ***

Sunlight poured into the room in waves and seared through my eyelids. I jolted up and all around me were blankets and sheets, white and clean, just the way I left them. They were wound around my legs. I kept looking around the place, at the clock on the wall, at the way the light shimmered on the curtains, at the way the pillow had fallen to the floor during the night; I couldn't remember that happening. Life didn't feel quite wrong, but it sure didn't feel right either.

***

You said, "How are you doing today?"

I said, "Fine. Just fine."

You said, "You can't use those vague terms anymore. Do you remember our arrangement?"

I said, "What arrangement is that?" and tried to act coy. So you said, "You need to state precisely what you feel in exact terms. Tell me what is going on in your life."

I said, "What if I just feel fine?"

Then you said, "When you say 'fine', what do you mean?" and crossed and uncrossed your legs until there was enough friction to spark electricity.

I said, "I'd really much rather quit this appointment," and kicked at the oriental rug on the floor.

You said, "And why is that?" I still wasn't used to so many questions. You took off your glasses and began tapping your finger on the desk. It made me so nervous, I started folding inside myself again.

That's why I said, "I have better things to do." I didn't.

You said, "How is the medication working?" as you skimmed through my files. I doubted that you were actually reading them. They probably didn't even say anything important anyway, just a nice chart of two of the levels of brain chemicals in bar-graph form with bright colors.

I said, "Lately, I've been thinking that I'm just fine without it." I hadn't even thought of counting the leaves of the office plants in weeks.

Slipping your glasses back on, you said, "Really? Right now, you seem very lucky. You are far improved from when I first met you."

I said, "But he doesn't need medication. I wish I could just be myself, but I don't know how anymore."

You said, "I had noticed you were spending time with the other patient, but I must warn you not to take him so seriously."

I said, "He seems like an awfully nice person."

You said, "Yes, he does. But what he says are lies." Then you reached over from your chair and patted my knee. Every muscle jumped, and I squirmed away, closer to the door. You made me think of my mother, like she was right there in the room with her wild, gray hair and a hand on each hip, laughing, coming after me when I'd worked so hard to put so many miles between us and built up the anonymity like layers of ice. I said, "He told me about his parents and his band." I could feel my muscles tense, ready to explode.

You said, "He was raised in foster care. His mother was a junkie and he never knew his father. He was passed around from home to home until he was eighteen and he's been holding down a job at the dry cleaners. He can't play a note of the piano."

Fright or flight, I said, quietly, "That's a lie."

You said, "I needed to tell you that because I see how you are searching for attachments, but I strongly discourage patients from forming any sort of bond whatsoever. It is both unhealthy and unfortunate." There was no emotion in your voice at all.

I said, "I have to go," and snatched my purse off the floor and scurried out of the office. I could hear my heels on each of the forty-six stairs. I
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Slipping your glasses back on, you said, "Really? Right now, you seem very lucid. You are far improved from when I first met you."

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I said, "I have to go," and snatched my purse off the floor and scurried out of the office. I could hear my heels on each of the forty-six stairs I
touched on the way down. I didn't know who to trust. Suddenly the ceilings were too high and the passage was too narrow.

***

Doctor, I've been taking all these pills. Don't get me wrong — I think they're great and the colors are just fabulous, especially the mint green. It gives me a buzz like you wouldn't believe. I don't feel anxious or nervous or depressed or afraid. I don't feel happy or excited or funny or free. I don't feel a whole lot these days, Doctor. I don't feel him rummaging around in my thoughts anymore, and I wish I did, so badly. I've kept the phone upside down on the table for the last week, thinking he'd try to find me again. You told me to take it slow, see how it goes — if I feel like flying, tone it down, toss some pills. You told me to drink the water and the pill in one gulp — I had never taken pills before, so every time I swallowed, it felt like someone gouged their thumb into my neck and was trying to kill me. After a few weeks that subsided and the people stopped coming to kill me, but it got so I could taste the weather and feel every motion in my body. If I stopped and sat real still, I could feel the blood rushing through my veins and dripping into the ventricles. I started wondering if my pulse was off, if there was a swooshing backward of blood, if my lungs were expanding right. Doctor, I could hear the neurons firing. So I started listening to music wherever I went. And even though I could hear the music, I also began to see the words. There was sheet music on the panes of the window. Then I noticed that words were plastered to banana peels. I found Crime and Punishment written on the ceiling so I followed it to the roof. I knew I shouldn't have done that.

The story was starting to hurt, and I couldn't make it go away. I'd close my eyes, but the words were everywhere and I had to read them. I read volumes and volumes until I couldn't take it anymore, so, Doctor, I quit those meds. But you see, that's when the nightmares appeared. They were made of wallpaper. Night after night, I wake and I'm on the roof, my arms spread open. My bare feet cling to the shingles and the nightgown whirls about my knees. But, Doctor, you gotta make it stop. I've been edging closer and closer each night. Oh, it's maybe a dozen feet down, but I can't stop myself. It's so open up here — the sky could swallow me whole. I could drown in space. Doctor, you gotta get me those pills. I would exchange my blood for graphite if it would give me a story. If I cut my arm, words would bleed right onto the page...and form this story.
He opens his green eyes. My hands burst through the windows like wings. I feel the light on my face. I open my eyes to the space. It's so close. I can barely reach my hands to spread them wide. My hands spread behind me, leaving a puddle of ears.
Let's Make a Deal

in your house:
your parents
looked exactly the same,
exactly like you,
exactly like no one.
I think you all had crewcuts
and I was wearing this dumb thermal undershirt patterned
with monkeys my friend's sister
was giving away because it didn't fit her
just like it didn't fit me and
I had to keep pulling it down at the wrists and waist,
because I needed something to do besides wonder
what fucked-up barber was cutting your family's hair.

down the stairs, downstairs.
the stairs had no back, the basement
unfinished. a couch, tweed, threadbare,
afghan crumpled in a pile
at the edge of the couch, the edge of the world
a bleak apocalyptic scene
and we're the only two people alive
but we sit in silence in fear
because pretty soon the zombies upstairs
will turn away from Let's Make a Deal and try
to bite our ears off by way of inane
questioning about my parents, and where I live,
and what sports I play but
you shut the door to the upstairs
so that I can't hear
what Game Show Network game your parents
are mindlessly bobbing their heads and slapping
their knees to.

this basement could have been mine,
the couch, the blanket, the cold, the must, the dust,
the pipes that rattled with every flushing
toilet up above, the fact that you could hear the piss,  
the flush, the wash cadence of any  
given bathroom  goer.

the buildup  
sealed me off. TV  
turned on, not me. lights  
turned off. took  
the crumpled afghan and laid  
it over both of us so that if someone  
were to come downstairs, at that moment,  
they might think anything  
other than nothing was going  
on under the dead weight  
of that damn blanket, you squeezed  
my hand once and held it  
loosely, little conviction,  
our hands were both sweating, cold, limp  
trying to slip away needing air  
my hands knew what a couch, a blanket, a dark  
room, a TV glow meant but  
where my hand expected your hand acted  
my lips feared yours.

the missed kiss started with a  
head turn, wanting the skewed cinematic release  
of teenage angst to be over  
before it began.  
I turned, leaned, slipped?  
felt your tongue in my mouth  
so far in I'm certain you tasted  
the orthodontist's bitter cement still packed  
into my molars from my  
recent retainer-fitting appointment.  
the choppy, sloppy, waves  
of a 15-year-old boy's tremulous tongue  
searching, you drowned mine.  
I almost sank, until I could finally reach dry land.  
I pulled away and you were smiling.
Calendar

April 19th
We met eyes for the first time,
waiting for tickets to the old fairgrounds.
We spoke and we walked, temperate air abounding.
She told me about her cats and how they were
the only men in her life. I bought a candied
apple and we shared it over hot cocoa.
A good start. We agreed to meet again sometime soon.
Words were planted and her face, I remember, was
like a stargazer lily, delicate and open,
outlined in purity.

June 12th
Hot and heavy,
she spread lotion on my back.
I watched her walk
to the water's edge, sand still clinging
to her legs. Her hips swayed in unison
with the coming waves, crashing
against my hopes of a lonely summer.
I still haven't forgotten that vision
of her ankles deep in the water,
a ball of fire at her back, a sexy white
two-piece contrasting her dark skin.
She waved to me, acknowledging my stare.

August 9th
Summer nights together outside,
holding hands under a starry shroud.
Both her cats are familiar by name: Jasper
and Fleece. I let them eat out of my hand.
She inches closer to me, atop her
old tattered bed sheet. The grass rustles
underneath our blanket, her head meets my chest,
my heart pauses in motion, she nestles into
her spot just like her two tabbies taught her.

October 6th
Things are dying in those fires we once extinguished by beating
That which was so is now old and bar
and biting winds g
as we walked thro
and red couldn't re
ach strides so far o
so far off. Like a l
from surprise, stra
my world.

January 1st
Brought about no frozen lakes and s
accentuate my lot
I only think of her now, sitting in my
the seat across from me
as I steep my mo
how the walls use
with her giggles a
She's probably so
as I'm stuck here
she bought me. I
would walk arou
next to her. "Son
handing me her col
collar still home
The same if
I look into, each
morning walk.
The cool night breeze tickles her hair
on my face. “I love you,” she says.
I look deeper into the sky, as she says it again,
and I acknowledge. My focus shifts to her head atop my chest,
up and down it goes with each breath,
her coal black hair dancing in moonlit shadows.

October 6th
Things are dying inside,
those fires we once burnt are being
extinguished by her withdrawn glare.
That which was so full and flowing
is now old and bare: my desires. Crisp
and biting winds gripped our hands
as we walked through the park. Shades of yellow
and red couldn’t remind us of being so close,
each stride so far off, two people so close, yet
so far off. Like a kudzu weed, she sprouted up
from surprise, strangling my branches, uprooting
my world.

January 1st
Brought about no change;
frozen lakes and streams
accentuate my loneliness.
I only think of her once a day
now, sitting in my Four Seasons room,
the seat across from me empty
as I steep my morning tea. I miss
how the walls used to echo
with her giggles and our words.
She’s probably someplace warmer,
as I’m stuck here wrapped in the robe
she bought me. She complained how I
would walk around naked, just after I awoke
next to her. “Someone will see you,” she said,
handing me her solution. The gray cotton
collar still home to her lipstick, stained and
torn. The same image returns from each mirror
I look into, each puddled reflection, on my lonely
morning walk.
Chasing Fire

The runner's strides lengthen on the treadmill,
as her blonde hair separates into drawn-out strands,
like ocean waves breaking upon her shoulders.

Her sweat leaks into her shirt like lightning,
as the liquid bolts of gray zigzag down her
slender body, forming cracks in the ice
of her snow-white shirt,
crevices through which
a stream of gasoline
begins to surge,
flowing as free as
the blood within her veins.

Blue shorts conform
to the movement of her quads,
a flag in a hurricane,
as her feet slam against the belt
at even, carefully timed intervals,
producing a thunderous clatter,
as if the surface might shatter.
But her pale face sits still as an iceberg,
never turning, never questioning.

Breathing in and out, every three strides,
she rids her body of
failing relationships,
the classes she hates,
the days that hurt,
ready to light a match,
and run with the flames.
Damage
The one-eyed man is less complete than the blind man. He knows what he lacks.
—The Hunchback of Notre Dame

I turn a blind eye to
Those unfortunate ones
Born into wheelchairs or walkers:
Their oxygen, like mine, was cut off
In the womb

I cringe and shudder
To know I am one of them,
Bound to their hopelessness,
Sharing their bitter fate.

My fingers fumble to clasp a necklace,
My hand fails to twist a doorknob,
My foot drags along as an anchor,
A permanent reminder.

There’s no magical cure,
No elixir to heal me,
No pill, no medicine will relieve my pain.

My blame lies with those of mankind
For their part in the creation of
This human tragedy.

God had no hand in this.
Disability, a word that haunts me,
Separates me from humanity.

I’ve never gotten over
Being one doctor’s negligent mistake.
You bring out the alcoholic in me,

the bloodshot eyes in me.
The used-up cans and bottles where
the red wine has turned pink.
The worrying, insomniac nights in me.
I've been to AA — I know I'll be an alcoholic for life
gone over the edge and sucked
back into a vicious, brutal cycle.
You bring out the other ruined
relationships I've had,
exes, and friends who'll never speak
to me again. My family disowned me
because of my destroying
habit that has no bottom.
You bring out the banging
my head on my desk, pacing
the room, strung-out mind in me.
The wish that I had never tried this
stuff. The desire for redemption in me
To stop all this.
The vomiting in random places
providing temporary relief.
Grey Goose, Mike's Hard Lemonade,
Zima, Budweiser
bottles gleaming on a shelf,
behind the accommodating bartender.
Screwdrivers, Black Russians,
Cosmopolitans, Apple tonics,
Sex on the Beach.
Sparkling glasses touching my hand.
You bring out the bitter scent
of cigarette smoke at midnight in me.
Your stranglehold affects my every waking moment.
I want peace, sobriety, release.
There's the fear of relapse each time
I take another drink of you.

Glass Hell

I tip back the beer and drown myself in the endless tides of ale; I sit
alone in the dim light of a dank bar. The floor is seeped with lager split during
nights of heavy drinking. Smoke twirls listlessly in the air like thin clouds on a
cold day; they emanate from the glowing embers of the barman's cigar, which
he puffs rhythmically. My face is prickled with stubble; my eyes are as red as
the bikini of the model in a Miller poster above the bar. I have the appearance
of a drunk as I celebrate my gluttony, guilping beer and carelessly spending
what money I have left. I used to write stories for a profession; I received
royalties for setting words down on a page. Then the words stopped coming
to me, along with the money. I never achieved fame and now my time is spent
thriftlessly in this dump. The barman crosses the tavern and wipes down the
deserted tables.

"It's nearin' closin' time, Michael," he says to me without looking up.
"You ought to be headin' home."
"When do you close?"
"At eleven. Same as every night."
"Then I suppose eleven is when I ought to be heading home. Looks
like I've got another half hour left."

The barman returns to the counter and refills my mug wordlessly.
The door opens and a gust of chilling winter-air blows a traveler across the
threshold.

"Y'all still open?" he asks. His accent is Southern; he sounds like
my mother's relatives in Atlanta. The barman groans, but waves the drifter
over. The man takes the stool next to me and orders a light beer. He retrieves
a crumpled wad of cash from his tattered jacket pocket and hands it to the
barman, who passes him a glass of Miller Lite and a mug. The drifter pushes
the mug away and drinks the beer straight.

"Can't beat the taste of beer fresh out the bottle," he says. He
observes me for a moment, as I observe him, and then offers his hand.
"Name's Eugene. Friends back home call me Ole Eugene. I don't think I'm
that old, but I suppose the name stuck. Eugene sounds like an old fart's name,
to be fair."

I shake the man's hand without looking at him and flush down an-
other swig. "I'm Michael," I say. "Where's home for you, Eugene?"
"Georgia, town called Commerce," Eugene says. "Nice place; spent
my boyhood there. Then I left to see what was out in the world. You know,
that tired line."
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The used-up cans and bottles where
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that tired line."
"I have family in Atlanta," I say. I'm not sure what possesses me to bother with this man in dirty clothes. He has wild, disheveled hair with grime on his face and fingernails; it looks as if he's walked all the way from Georgia. It's his eyes that draw me in; they're the liveliest green.

"Know it well, beautiful city," Eugene says, smiling. "You from Georgia?"

"Just have family there."

He drains his beer and I offer to buy him another. It's been a long while since I had an enjoyable conversation. We talk about Georgia and life down South. Eugene does most of the talking while I listen and the barman continues to scrub down tables and prepare for closing. After a time, Eugene reaches into his chest pocket and produces a crinkled, dirt-smudged photo of a beautiful young woman. "Her name's Evelyn," he explains. "I left her with a kid when I first moved on from Commerce, searchin' for work and adventure. Never had much money, so you can plainly tell. Odd jobs—landscapin' mostly these days. Still write her and send along what money I can. The kid must be going on ten or eleven now." He regards the photo with a smile before returning it with care to his pocket. "She's remarried now, never responds to my calls or letters, but I keep on writin' her. Letters... how old fashioned, right? Guess I am Ole Eugene after all. What about you? Got a girl?"

"Not at the moment."

"I take it from your tone that it's not a subject you particularly like to talk about."

I stare at the man seated next to me in the dim light. The barman motions to the clock; it's last call. I have never told a stranger the details of my divorce, but I suddenly feel the urge to explain myself. "I had a daughter. Beautiful girl named Laura. Samantha, my ex-wife, and I couldn't have been happier. We had her when we were young, didn't know what we were getting into. Got married when we found out about the baby. She grew to about eleven months and then passed—leukemia. Samantha couldn't bear it. She grew quiet. Never talked much. About a year ago, she had a miscarriage and left me. She couldn't stand to be around me after losing two. That's when I started coming to places like this. Lost myself in the bottom of a glass. Now, the checks have stopped coming 'cause I stopped writing." I force out a laugh and stroke my sweating mug of rich ale. I don't want to look back at the dayworker. I divulged my weight to another and now I had no more use for him. He served his purpose.

Eugene says nothing until our silence is broken by the barman clearing his throat. "Closin' time gentlemen," he says. I slide the money I owe in his direction and leave swiftly, hoping to lose Eugene, but he catches up to me outside and shakes my hand.

"It was a pleasure to meet you, Michael. I hope you find your way out of the glass."

I don't know how to reply or if I should feel insulted. Ole Eugene puts my shoulder and disappears into the night. I'm inebriated, but I keep drinking, sipping from my flask of cheap vodka. I meander through the streets until I arrive at the beach. The freezing wind blows off the water and chills me to the heart. The Sound stretches out before me and in the distance I imagine the lights of Long Island reaching across the chilly sea for my hand. I rest on the sand and drain the rest of the vodka, no mixer. I flip open my cell phone and call Samantha; we haven't spoken in months. The call goes straight to voicemail. I stare at the cell and throw it into the water.

I am a statue, inert, and companionsed only by grief, watching the water pull at the grains of sand around my boots. In one week it will be February 23, 2008: the anniversary of Laura's death. For the first time in months, hot tears stream down my face. I collapse into the sand, my tears forming tiny rivers coursing through the granules.

My sobs are cut short by the rumbling of the fierce, black waves. I lift my face, expecting a torrent to crash over the beach and drag me out with the rip tide. However, instead of breakers coursing over me, the water laps at me, pulling at my clothes. I can't explain what mania grips me, but I follow the inviting tug of the waves and slide into the water, ignoring the freezing temperature. I start to shiver, but the alcohol keeps me feeling warm. Instead of turning back, I let the waves pull me further from shore.

After what feels like ages spent bobbing further from shore, I see a light dance around me under the water, reflections of the moon in the ocean. Slowly the waves start to gather more ferocity and I'm caught between whitecaps growing in size. Ignoring the potential danger of my surroundings, I study the flickering of the moon in the water. I suck in a deep breath, blink the cold droplets from my eyes, and can see the moonlight form into the neck of a glass below the surface. True to character, the glass I envision is a giant beer bottle at the ocean floor, the moonlight refracting off its sparkling shell. I see myself diving down to the bottleneck and entering into the humongous, sunken glass, which is miraculously empty of water, airtight. Slowly, I let the old writer's instincts take over, and my vision takes off.

The glass rests on the sea floor and continues along the depths of the water to the farthest reaches of the Sound. It is a beautiful crystal with a greenish hue and its structure is maintained by decorative swirls of metal inlaid in the glass. These girders are ornamented with opals, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires; all the gems gleam in the dark, unyielding abyss. The pulsating black ocean pushes in on the glass and I can hear the metal girders strain.
Andrew Garavena, cont.

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to bother with this man in dirty clothes. He has wild, disheveled hair with
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Leaving Naugatuck, CT

The deer chewed through my mother’s tomato plants.
The squirrels burrowed through my house’s Sheetrock,
Foxes brought ticks into my yard,
Crows ruled the trees, not letting other birds in.

The wildlife was my distraction
From the sewage plant and the rusting,
Worn-out factories built into the landscape along the Naugatuck River;
The toxic waste dump was capped and planted over with grass.

I’ve since returned to my hometown.
Apartments are boarded up,
Stores have closed,
Once-brilliantly painted signs are chipped, hanging lopsided.
What happened?
Andrew Garvenia, cont.

Assortments of fish and underwater plants cluster about the glass, as if drawn to the sparkling jewels inlaid in the metal. I reach a set of revolving glass doors at the end of the bottleneck. Pushing through, I enter into a massive, glass ballroom at the bottom of the ocean. A crystal chandelier glistens at the top of the cylindrical room and a radio plays a soft jazz tune that echoes hauntingly through the chamber, rebounding off the walls of the empty dome. Confetti is scattered across the floor and deflating balloons dangle off hooks along the walls.

As I inspect the dome, the sun begins to rise. The early morning rays strike the dome and the glass dazzles like never before, gleaming like a second sun submerged below the waves. Standing alone, I become aware of another's presence. I turn and immediately drop to my knees. Standing at the revolving doors, dressed in a blue petticoat, is my daughter Laura. She is older now, about eleven, as if she'd never passed away, as if she'd lived through the disease and never left me. She waves for me to take her hand.

I rise to my feet, my legs shaking so violently they can barely support me, and take a step towards her. With a roar, the glass dome crumples under the pressure of the waves. Cracks run through the glass like sprinters; the metal girders crease and fold over on themselves. Water pushes through the breaking glass and swirls through the dome. Laura stands calmly across from me and waits. I fight my way through the rapidly rising water towards my daughter. I throw off my coat in order to attain better maneuverability in the flood and notice my flask escaping the coat pocket, floating away. The water is now at chest-height and I start to swim, gasping for breath. The water raises me up while Laura floats serenely.

I'm sore and losing energy. The air in the dome thins out as the water charges into the ballroom. The ocean violates the space that, for a few seconds, was completely mine. Taking one last deep breath, I dive under the water and swim as hard as I can, taking Laura's hand. Her grip is strong and she leads me through the revolving doors and into the glass bottleneck. The waters have invaded this area too and the way out is far.

I have that vision, amongst the violent waves of the Sound. I imagine Samantha weeping over the grave of our daughter, her telling me those two deaths is more than she can bear, myself drinking at the bar. Ole Eugene shaking my hand. As my eyes grow heavy, I feel confident in my ability to face whatever is on the other side of the bottleneck tunnel I know is at the bottom of the ocean, far beneath me now. Laura is not in the bottle; she's left it and I need to do the same to reach her. I let out my breath and feel the seawater course into my lungs. I smile and think of Eugene; I have found my way out of the glass.

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Dressing My Daughter

1.
Holding my new baby girl,
inhaling her soft, clean scent,
I button her into a white
jumper popping with pink ruffles.
Swaddling her,
my fingers stroke her soft skin.
I cradle her as we step
from the hospital room.

2.
Warm water streaming down my back,
rejuvenating my tired body,
just home from birthing my second child.
Then panic flashing as I see
my new son,
dressed with no help from me.
Seeping with pride,
his five-year-old sister displays him
like the frog she caught last night
in the pond behind our house.

3.
Back in a hospital room, my baby is thirteen years grown.
Her unending energy drowned by the infection.
I comb and braid her dark, earthy-brown hair.
The nurse says, "She has the best dressed head in the ICU."
4.
In another life, I remember
dressing my daughter one last time,
Taking her stiff limbs and guiding them
through the arm holes as if she is a
life-sized doll.
I help to lift her, to slide her shirt on;
her skin cold, unnatural plastic.

I climb into her bed
and squeeze every drop of time.
But, too soon, I must
fight against mother’s gravity to
step from the hospital room.
Megan Clampett is recent graduate of Eastern with an English major and a
writing minor. She is from Old Saybrook, CT.

Brian DeMillia is currently in his junior year here at Eastern, majoring in
Accounting, but enjoys using poetry to describe the many complexities
within life and the situations he's encountered thus far.

Michael Gale is a senior attending Eastern Connecticut State University.

Andrew Garaventa is an English major from Manchester, CT. His story
"Glass Hell" won Honorable Mention in the 2009 The Connecticut Review
fiction contest.

Kileen Gilroy is a senior English and Secondary Education major with a
minor in Writing. She has work in recent or forthcoming issues of The North
Central Review and The New Plains Review.

Cole Goulet is a senior English major and Writing minor. His poem "Part
of Me is You" won the 2008 Bailey Poetry Prize, which included publication
in The Chrysalis Reader. He also had two poems published The North Central
Review.

Stephanie Grueßner is an English major from the quaint hamlet of Vernon,
CT.

Patricia Haggard is an English major living in Groton, CT. She is a Navy
wife and mother of four who won Honorable Mention in The Connecticut
Review's 2009 poetry contest.

Allison Kelley is a senior Communication major at Eastern. She enjoys
writing creative non-fiction.

Andrew Minikowski is an English major from Colchester, CT. His poems
have previously appeared in The Salmon River Review.

Ed Partlow, Jr. is a 42-year-old Computer Science major with minors in
English and Physics, just finishing his B.A. with a long-term goal of earning
a Ph.D. in theoretical physics.
Katheryn Prussia is a senior attending Eastern Connecticut State University.

Richard Schaaf is a senior at Eastern Connecticut State University in the General Studies Program.

Gary Tourjéé just earned a M.A. in Education from Sacred Heart University and finished required English credits at Eastern for Secondary Certification.

Geoffrey Weldon is a senior English major.

Esté Yarmosh is a senior English major with a minor in Writing from Orange, CT, who loves to write poetry and fiction. Her work appeared in the 2007 and 2008 editions of *Eastern Exposure.*
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