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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.

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When you turn the corner
and run into yourself
then you know that you have turned
all the corners that are left

- Langston Hughes
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Andrew Minikowski

An Observation (While Afflicted With Writer’s Block)

We try to pass the truth through our ruined tongues and twisted lips.
There are no words, no expressions, no lexicon of luck
In all of language that could sum up the expiration dates
That have been stamped on all of our synapses.

Meghan Mizak

on the street the middle school should be

on the street the middle school should be
she leaves her anguish over the dead
relationship behind—releases the hot air
balloon and flies. Roy Orbison plays below

to a string quartet that meant to flow
with the seemingly sweet sound of Pachelbel—
one cannon might cease the symphony
of the intransigent heart

that doesn’t know that part
of growing older is losing,
settling, forgetting—run away
little girl says an aging Peter Pan.

The clock tower hand
will move and I haven’t the strength
to protect you anymore.
Wake up to your childhood closing.
Stretch the Big Words

"69!" He yells over click clack taps
From cleated white Callaway\'s on the hardwood floor
As my mother lights the candles on my brother\'s
Ice cream cake.
"69! If I putted like that every day, all of us would be rich!"
He stretches his arm and voice over "all"
To show how rich, and make it clear
What a burden we would be,
He readjusts his hat and I can\’t
Tell whether his hair is pressed flat
Or thinning.
He pops the top from a Sam\'s Boston Lager,
Pulls slow and long from the bottle.

This is a recurring theme,
Uncle Scan defining
My memory of birthdays.
The one where he talked about loaning money to family,
A referendum on forgiveness.
The one where I hummed him smokes
As he bristled, calling his stepdaughter a cunt
For not helping with dishes.

Today, he stretches the big words
Like,  In  Fra  Struc  Ture
And,  I  De  O  Lo  Gy
So they seem bigger.
He talks about Marx,
The future never coming,
and unlocking the genetic code
To prove that Men are more powerful
And dominant then women.

He is 3 hours late
And his wife passes the kids off to him
As she leaves and he stays.
They don\’t kiss each other good-bye.

Eastern Exposure 7
A Word to the Wise

My mother always told me, "And this too will pass," and that is how I have lived my life since October 17, 1984. If not for her words to the wise, my life may very well have fallen so far to the wayside, that I would not have this story to tell you today.

I didn't go to the public school with the other kids on my block. I was home schooled at somebody else's home until the twelfth grade. My "teacher," Helga Fedora, was a huge, loud-mouthed whale of a woman whose only joys in life were food, and encroaching on other people's lives. Muffin crumbs would fall out of her mouth as she would talk to her class of two, her large belly wiping away whatever she had written on the blackboard. When it was time to leave, our parents would undoubtedly be delayed at pick up time due to her ramblings and question prodding. The other girl that Ms. Fedora had the pleasure of gracing her presence with was Ivy Leafdrop.

Ivy Leafdrop had a problem. She would get up multiple times during class and slip away, sometimes even during lunch and Ms. Fedora never seemed to care. One day I followed Ivy outside. I walked on tip toes, creeping down behind the big sycamore tree that shaded the house, and that is where I saw it. Ivy was convulsing. Her head was flailing from side to side and her arms looked like pipe cleaners molded into some weird, stiff formation. Her legs were jittery, and they kept doing some odd shuffling dance steps all the while her mouth was screaming phrases like, "CUNT, FUCK, ASSHOLE, MOTHER FUCKER!" I concluded with my fourth grade mentality that Ivy must be crazy and that I should stay away so as not to catch the disease. It was ten years after this that Ivy died over and out. It was all over the papers and it gave the town a fresh wave of gossip. They say that she had gone ice fishing with her brothers the day before Christmas, and had fallen through the ice. The water was too cold and no one could save her seizing body. I never knew Ivy well or long enough to become sad about this. Nevertheless, when she died something kept me from leaving the comforts of my bed for days at a time. I would never cry though, because Ivy was never my friend.

The second I graduated, as the lone student from Helga Fedora's "high school," I left the dusty little town I had grown up in without a second thought. I went north, looking for work and a place to stay. It was there that I met an elderly, worn out looking lady who went by the name Old Woman. She told me that she really needed some help tending to all of her children and running her household. I immediately took her up on this offer, seeing as if I had nothing else lined up.

We walked together to the grocery store where she bought a huge can of broth. I pointed out the wonderful selection of breads the store offered, and how nicely the rosemary loaf would go with the broth. Old Woman laughed a little at this suggestion pointing out to me, as if talking to a misbehaving two year old, that she fed her children broth without any bread. Our walk home through the countryside consisted of very little talking. The sun was setting, casting shadows, and the flies were buzzing all the while, my hands were growing tired from carrying the oversized can. It was then that I first saw it, clear as anything against the background of the blazing, setting
sun; the largest shoe I had ever seen. It was elegantly laced all the way up, and where an ankle might have been, a puffing chimney stood instead. The shoe was made of shabby leather, and there were scuff marks all around the door and windows. Old Woman did need help I thought, as about fifty some odd kids came running out of the shoe-house towards us. The noise was outrageous; the little ones were bickering while the older ones were squabbling for their turn to talk. I was relieved when Old Woman whipped them all soundly and sent them to bed.

I didn't stay in Old Woman's shoe for very long, only about a year or two. The time escaped me; it was like no time had passed at all. Since Old Woman had no idea what to do, I helped her with everything and anything that could possibly need helping. I refinshed the old leather with some waterproof rubber and added some wheels, so the house could rollerblade if Old Woman felt so obliged. I helped her fatherless children do their schoolwork, and I even slipped them some bread with their broth from time to time.

I left the rollerblade in the middle of the night sometime in late summer and never looked back. I took up work in a used book/consignment shop. It was a crumbling brick-box, hole in the wall kind of place that brought people out of the woodwork. I knew This Much is True by Wally Lamb was my first job to price and shelf. A man in his mid fifties, peeling of cat piss, and walking with a limp, handed the book to me, saying not to sell it to just anyone. And that is exactly what I did. I turned down a woman offering a golden nugget for the book, on the principle that she had untrustworthy eyebrows. Another man asked how much the copy of This Much I Knew was True would cost. I stared at him defiantly without blinking, in total silence, until he eventually, awkwardly, inched his way out of the store. It was I who slumped down behind the counter, and crawled into a cabinet and read all 897 pages by flashlight. The story moved me in a way no other had; I could not shake off the feeling that I too had a schizophrenic double out there. I was fired on the spot when I emerged from my hiding cubby, after disappearing for nearly twelve hours on my very first day. It was the best job I ever had. I left with my good health and Wally Lamb's words of wisdom ringing in my soul. "But what are our stories if not the mirrors we hold up to our fears?"

When I was eight, my father told me that I should be prepared for a lot of hardship in my life because no one is well rounded without hardship. Together we sat on our moth-eaten blue couch and watched, A Clockwork Orange. The film made me thankful that my daddy never laid a finger on me, even when he was knee deep in gin and tonics. It was on that day that I learned how horrible the world could be, not only with violence, but also from the loss of hope and purpose. I went to sleep that night and became a new person by breakfast the next morning. I felt like I was itching to leave my house from that day on, not because I didn't love my family, but because they were stuck. That little bed up couch is still there, in the same spot in the aging living room, and the same shadow of a man still fits in the cushions like a glove.

It dawned on me that my twentieth birthday was right around the corner, as I was escorted out of the used book/consignment shop. I was no longer a kid anymore, so that meant that I should probably find a home. My only requirement
was a broad horizon. I set up a tent outside a public library in Little Rock, Arkansas, and became an awkwardly familiar face to all the library goers. Within the year, I had made major headway. Hemmingway, Aristotle, Steinbeck, and Frost were all notches in my belt.

One day a little girl with blonde pigtails was reading Charlotte's Web in the kitty corner. Sneaking up behind her I whispered, "Charlotte dies," in the spookiest voice I could muster. The girl flung the book ten feet in the air and ran from the room screaming for her mommy. This is how I got my kicks for a while, reading and making people feel uncomfortable. If the library was to be my home, I didn't need to have no pigtails taking up the joint. I stayed at the library until the city police came to my tent and took me to a woman's shelter one day, just after New Year's.

It was there that I met Fattybulger. She wore a coat that looked like a calico cat's fur. She had a New York accent and a bad attitude. I loved her instantly. She introduced me to the wonderful world of Shakespeare. His play, Twelfth Night, will forever be my favorite, probably because of the memories that go along with it. Fatty and I would parade around outside parks, drinking whiskey, acting out scenes, and screaming the lines until the sun came up, or the po po rolled in. To this day when I think of the handsome Cesario revealing himself as the dainty Viola, my heart stops and my head thinks back to Fattybulger, taking off her calico jacket and looking like a real person and not another homeless prostitute. The two of us went well together, like carrots and string beans. I never had a friend like her before, someone who didn't ask where I was going in life, but what I was doing right at that moment. When I looked into her eyes, I saw the same twinkling nostalgia that I knew must glimmer in mine. She tied it all together for me, and Wally Lamb's words of wisdom swam back to the forefront of my mind. "I walked over and looked closer at the statue of the goddess. She was wearing a headdress with a skull and a cobra and a crescent moon. Maybe this is what peace of mind was all about: having a poisonous snake on your head and smiling anyway."

It all went downhill when Fatty died of AIDS. I left the shelter and started doing some shooting up of my own, in her memory. I saw something like God in those needles; I saw hope in my own veins. I heard Shakespeare's words in my ears when no one was talking, and the traffic seemed to stop. "O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou, That, not with standing thy capacity Receivest as the sea, nought enters there." How I wanted to be in the play and live through the words of love. I fell down, way down into a tunnel echoing with the sounds of Shakespearean rhetoric. When I reached the bottom there was Shakespeare himself, asking for a line of dope, a shot of whiskey, and my company.

I opened my eyes to see white. The curtains, the sheets, the floor, the side table, all white. I heard footsteps, and a pockmarked doctor appeared at the white door, wearing a white lab coat and a sly look. He said he wanted to offer me a highly top-secret form of therapy that I am not even allowed to tell you about, my faithful listener. Maybe someday you too will get this chance; I hope you get to read about me in the prints. I'll be all dressed up like a shiny new penny with Shakespeare at my side and a healthy head on my shoulders, ready to make history.
Adolescence in Motion

Praise to the army-green pick-up truck
that carried me to high school every day,
escorted by the smell of McDonald's leftovers
crumpled on the floorboards.

Praise to the horn that wouldn't sound,
that compelled Paulette to yell "Honk" from the open window
because that was easier than walking to Angie's front door.

Praise to the thin, rust-pocked sheet metal
covering my truck. Like Fred Flintstone,
I could poke my foot out the door and push
the bald tires over the ice-slicked street.

Praise to the door that randomly jammed,
like that time I was stopped by a cop.
He wanted me to get out, but I had to ask him
to move away from the door
so that I could lean back and place the perfect
kick that would pop the door open.

Praise to that same door that later
began to fly open every time
I turned left into the Highland High School
parking lot. My hand would automatically pull it shut
again as if I learned that feat in Driver's Ed
right behind "buckle your seatbelt" and "check your blind spot."

Praise to the stick shift that Michelle always tripped over
while we poured out and around the truck
like circus clowns tumbling from their tiny car.
We performed a Chinese Fire Drill at the red light
of Yellowstone and Chubbuck, trailed by our laughter
that ignored the blaring horns and fuming shouts

that would later turn into ours.
This Accident

These are the two jet-black skid marks leaving the road. The back of the car—trunk popped open, overstuffed suitcases inside. This is the gaping hole where the Jaws-of-Life ripped the driver’s door from its hinges, and the door is there on the ground like the crumpled Coke can. Here, the windshield spiderwebs—shattered like thin ice on a pond at the beginning of winter. This is the blood and hair and brain matter that is stuck to it. This is the steering wheel, bent slightly upward, broken in three places where it crushed the driver’s chest leaving these torn, blood soaked bits of cloth caught in its jagged edges. Here a Foreigner disk hangs from the CD player—“Head Games.” This is the sweet smell of anti-freeze that has spilled onto the ground. This is the hood of the car, accordion-like from the tree. This is the tree, now being squeezed by arms of twisted street—the death grip of a lover too afraid to let go. Here is the tow truck preparing to haul the wreckage away.
CPR

My breath fills my brother’s lungs.
Two hands on his chest,
I am his beating heart.
Pounding, pushing, breathing.
We’re such a long way from innocence.
From skipping rocks and digging for worms.
Not many years ago,
He was saving my toes from werewolves
And my heart from the wicked.
Now the wicked surges through his veins.
Evils comes in substance form,
Trying to pry the next victim
From my arms.
You cannot have him.
You will not take him.
Your evil will succumb to his light.
Holly Gonzalez

My Biology Teacher Tells the Class That Sharks Can't Get Cancer

after Steve Straight’s “On Hearing That Someone Bought a House on Nantucket Island for 7.9 Million Dollars and Then Razed It to Build One They Liked Better”

I am the compilation of your greatest fears:
the darkness on a stormy night,
the boogeyman crouched beneath your bed,
the grave height from which in dreams you drop.

I am that flock of doctors pelting you
with words like malignant and radiation.
I am that heavy boulder in your breasts
stealing your sex.

I am a deadly spider, branching my
bristly legs through your already sluggish
brain. My venom uses your
veins as a railway to your heart.

Yes, I can break your body,
yet I am powerless against your spirit.
The person I loved

Cuddled up in the curves of the giant tires
on our old elementary school's playground,

you tell me about your adventures
abroad, across Europe.

You look so different now
from the last time we played here-

your jaw has squared and grown stubble
your waist and arms have lost their baby fat.

But I remember your face as it was,
(the face I once wished my children would have)

when we didn't know the world,
when we knew each other but not ourselves.

We met at those monkey bars.
You pushed me down, then felt bad and helped me up.

Under that red plastic slide
is where you hugged me the first time.

That picnic table is where we ate lunch
on warm Spring afternoons;

if I looked at the left leg I could find
where you carved our initials with your pencil.

The swing set sways with the weight
of our childhood ghosts pushing higher and faster

as you tell me about your lover in France
saying only the person I loved.

You still could not admit
it was he.
Berry Season

Perhaps it was raspberries that populated the chaparral
and blossomed in black-purple clustered-up clusters
in time for warm pies and cold ice-cream
or not cooking at all,
but for smushing to war paint for war games,
for fake blood of robbers shot dead
on a play Fort Knox plot,
just for pulling a handful of some-sort-of-berry
from its stone-probing roots in the rough backyard brambles.
There's no fun until you get poisoned
by popping a mouthful - to swell up your tongue,
and to clog your throat in a pollen rich spume
of gushing black berries on the roof of your mouth.
Sucking seeds between teeth, prodding grimy, inked fingers
past lips engorged, into cheeks engorged with the blood of late August
or some other month, lost in histamines between school years.
With regrets you'd have eaten each dribbled last globule
of the make-you-rasp blackberries, the probable drupelets
of some nasty venomous Northeastern nightshade,
if not for the bedtime that called you inside.
Memory

I think I know you.
I know the way we hold fingers
Locked inside the spaces
That were once vacant.
I know the sorrow on your face
And the way it ran back
Hiding into the shadows it cast
Across your features
After I pronounced
Affectionate little words.
I know the feel
Of my fingertips caressing the frame
Of your back,
Falling like raindrops
In random, unsynchronized taps
And smoothing,
Running down and
Over your curves:
A map I have memorized.
And I know the weight,
The warm smell,
And the soft sound
Your breath has against
The bare and nakedness
Of my neck
As you fall dormant
Into soft kingdoms of clouds
With sighs cloaked in comatose slumber.
Holding Hands on Sunday

I think of him out there in the darkness and fall asleep
Paul Marries, "Sleepwatching"

Each week the same disorganized shuffle,
one by one we five emptied into the stiff pew,
four back, on the right, and I was sure
to sit beside my father. That week in his plaid,
red checkered shirt, the one my mom
always told him was too casual.

I held his left hand in mine, turning, bending,
inspecting every crease, vein, and the golden band
that would take flight across our living room.
Thirty years of construction had not calloused
his soft palm as I pressed my outstretched
hand to his and realized man and boy,
father and son, we two.

At twelve, Luke, crucifixion, and resurrection
pass over my preoccupied ears. At thirteen
holding hands on Sunday was a shadow, illuminated
by the Pastor’s piercing words entering into my empty ears,
my hands still outstretched for my father’s.
Circles

Fifteen is too old to ride a merry-go-round,
too old for this twirling
coffee-painted pony
to take me back to last June,

to the machine that spins
dizzying circles, as I stand
at the head of my friend's hospital bed,
holding her swollen, peeling hand.

The whoosh of the machine
echoes around the Lysol-clean room,
spinning, like my mom’s washing machine
as it wrings, not water, but oxygen
into her blood.

I bend to whisper all the newest
gossip, as if she will
sit up and follow me
down the hall and back into
our ninth grade classroom,

where we text under our desks
and pose for pics with clicks
that are sent to cyberspace.
Where I wish memories
would go instead of here

with the coffee-brown pony
who, like me, can't break free
from its endless
circles taking me back to last June.
that foliage growth effect
I.
that foliage growth effect
stimulates our cells to flourish
breathe
imbibe beach moonshine
We are
alive nourished windblown
professional youth run amok
monkeys with banana problems
just
hanging
around
motivated by everything
with nothing to do
We are
a surf riot in motion
II.
So this is the pinnacle of life.
This is where the preliminary hours lead to
Jaded yesterday.
This rub raw security sweater and mom jeans
Hope for strain
Identity for a mortgage
Asynchronous schedules and handshakes.
This winter will be rough until
that Daylight Savings time creeps in
only for us to serve in this
Light-fingered robotic wasteland.
III.
Good-for-nothing punk ruffians
Using up our resources, our oxygen
Listen to their erratic cadence
So like the ocean.
wild
horse
galloping
in their own stupid oblivion.
How fitting this humanity
A once rotund whale
now beached and dissipating in the hot sun.

A for Anarchy

We hate you.
People are going to think we're the same,
We're not.
Oh say can you see through black bandanas to our tongues?
Spitting acid of truth eating away your excuse.
Can you see our eyes and what they've seen
The murder the greed the obscene the unclean
From HIV genocide apartheid crack and dope fiend?
See through our dreadlocks and Mohawks to our brains,
Which dwell on admiration for the brave
Who hit you where it hurts.
See us descend on your
Benefactor/Alumni luncheon
Like locusts, and inhale
Jalapeno poppers and stuffed mushrooms.
Close your open bar.
Pigs in security blankets,
You can't fly so you fall
Slowed by golden parachutes.
See us stop traffic,
Lie down in the highway
On the warm asphalt
To get our blood boiling,
See through the A for Anarchy logo to our heart,
Laced with bitterness
We can't contain.
Spilling light life into
Love life,
"You're always so angry"
She says.
We are angry because we hate you.
How wasteful you are,
that foliage growth effect
I.
that foliage growth effect
stimulates our cells to flourish
breathe
imbibe beach moonshine
We are
alive nourished windblown
professional youth run amok
monkeys with banana problems
just
hanging
around
motivated by everything
with nothing to do
We are
a surf riot in motion
II.
So this is the pinnacle of life.
This is where the preliminary hours lead to
Jaded yesterday.
This rub raw security sweater and mom jeans
Hope for strain
Identity for a mortgage
Asynchronous schedules and handshakes.
This winter will be rough until
that Daylight Savings time creeps in
only for us to serve in this
Light-fingered robotic wasteland.
III.
Good-for-nothing punk ruffians
Using up our resources, our oxygen
Listen to their erratic cadence
So like the ocean.
wild
horse
galloping
in their own stupid oblivion.
How fitting this humanity
A once rotund whale
now beached and dissipating in the hot sun.

A for Anarchy

We hate you.
People are going to think we're the same,
We're not.
Oh say can you see through black bandanas to our tongues?
Spitting acid of truth eating away your excuse.
Can you see our eyes and what they've seen
The murder the greed the obscene the unclean
From HIV genocide apartheid crack and dope fiend?
See through our dreadlocks and Mohawks to our brains,
Which dwell on admiration for the brave
Who hit you where it hurts.
See us descend on your
Benefactor/Alumni luncheon
Like locusts, and nhale
Jalapeno poppers and stuffed mushrooms.
Close your open bar.
Pigs in security blankets,
You can't fly so you fall
Slowed by golden parachutes.

See us stop traffic,
Lie down in the highway
On the warm asphalt
To get our blood boiling,

See through the A for Anarchy logo to our heart,
Laced with bitterness
We can't contain.
Spilling fight life into
Love life,
"You're always so angry"
She says.

We are angry because we hate you.
How wasteful you are,
Kellin Atherton, con's

The decisions you make
Destructive to everything but you.

See this brick
As it leaves our fist
To punch holes in the closed doors
You hide behind.
We are going to throw paint on you,
Mail you anthrax with a long list of facts.
Because you
Are ill informed.

Andrew Garaventa

What Terrifies Him (Recognition of the Drunk Within)

is the isolation: the walls-crumbling-in feeling
he eases into, like the rip tide
creeping up the sand towards
the unsuspecting swimmer.
It creeps in until he's locked
in a room, sloshing a bottle in his hand.

He hears the ocean's waves in there; it's a conch shell.

is the black, the lost in-a-
fog-so-dense-you-could-stumble-off-a-ravine feeling
that swallows him.

Black out.

is the want-it-so-bad feeling he dreams
a goddamn Tree of Knowledge sprouts
with bottles growing on it—a shining angel
hands him a freshly-picked Coors.

is that some days, in the early morning,
when he looks into the mirror,
it's my goddamn face that stares back.

Kellin Atherton

Tea Party

I am angry

They're gonna git ya,
Knockin' down yer door
Draggin' ya out inteh the street
Teh make ya kill granny
And sodomize each other.

I've got three guns,
One fer each television.
I'm 'bout teh git another and another,
Fer pirates and illegals.

They're takin' over.
We are losin' ground.

The commies, the facists, the coloreds and the queers have our balls in a vice.

So what we goin' do?
We goin' teabag those sum'bitches.
Jesus and Reagan is comin' too.
Strapped from ankle teh elbow
In hollow point armor piercin'
Semi automatic ammunition
And a 36 month subscription
Teh Deer Huntin' aid Bass Fishin'.

I'm so angry.
Throw me some Winston's.

I ain't never been in the militare,'
But I gotta 'merican flag sticker in the rear winda'
Of my 1979 Ford pickup.
It's blue.
And along with my red blood and white skin
I look like Old Glory himself when I

Speed away from Planned Parenthood
Finger's sticky from gummin' they locks up wit krazy glue,

And Elmer's glue I
Took from Wal Mart's back teh school section
Teh make signs fer rallies.
They paper my son's walls

22 Eastern Exposure

Eastern Exposure 23
Kellin Atherton, con't

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Destructive to everything but you.

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Took from Wal Mart's back teh school section
Teh make signs fer rallies.
They paper my son's walls

22 Eastern Exposure
Teh remind him,
"Get Your Own Job"
"God Hates Gays," and
"Where's Your Birth Certificate?"

I don't pay fer shit,
I'm American.
Why should I pay fer somethin' China made?
I pay too many taxes.
I paid fer 9/11 in stress and tears,
That shit was worse than the holocaust
Well...
Don' matter, Jews and A-rabs 'er basically the same thing anyway.

Fuck yeah I go teh church.
I go twice a week;
On sundee's fer service,
And whensees to a support group fer fellas who
Beat their old ladies.

No,
I don't hit my wife no more,
But if she hadn't run off wit my brother I still would.

Goddamn I'm angry.
So are my friends.
This time, we're strappin' up
And goin' to a speech.
We ain't goin' teh listen,
We goin' teh drown 'em out in Fire,
Brimstone,
And the Pledge of Allegiance.
And I made me the best sign yet,
It's a picture of a monkey in a suit and tie with a Hitler mustache.
And it says FEAR,
Free
Every
Angry
Redneck
'Cuz we the only real American's left.

Tyler Is Fired After Telling It Like It Is
After "Hard Rock Returns From Prison / From The Hospital
For The Criminal Insane"

Tyler / was / "known: not to take no shit
From nobody," and he had the texts to prove it.
When our pug-faced manager snarled
In his direction, he showed his teeth in return.
His words burst with confidence
As he coolly pointed out her hypocrisy.
Slow and mean, he dubbed her
'The Beast.'

She wouldn't let us take breaks
Just the black girl and the Puerto Rican,
Not so bad during the week — but
On weekends we worked almost ten hours straight
Together.

Remember Tyler? We used to be in this together
Me washing dishes while you rinsed, like a happy couple-
Quickly scarfing food in the back where
The cameras can't reach, between
Surges of surly customers.
They never got to you -
A ray of sunshine in this fluorescent artificiality.

She shaves minutes off my timesheets now
Just enough to make me late on bills -
I feel her hate in the ink of each paycheck's signature.
Yesterday she texted me: "Ur a spoiled little bitch
And you dont deserve ur hours."

What could I say? You would've known.
You were my doer of things,
Voicing indignant words I could not,
Tempering their grip with threats of going to the state,
Fighting back where I would lower my head
And bite my tongue until it bled.
This job was dispensable to you;
You were protected by two parents with a fountain in their front yard.
But I was adrift in the world, clutching this water-logged job.
I don't pay fer shit, 
I'm American. 
Why should I pay fer somethin' China made? 
I pay too many taxes. 
I paid fer 9/11 in stress and tears, 
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This job was dispensable to you; 
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But I was adrift in the world, clutching this water-logged job.
Megan Fitzgerald, con't

Is it so easy to forget me?
Your friend of several years?
You won't answer when I call-
Do you think I sold you out to 'The Beast?'
I swear it wasn't me
And I was just as shocked as you when
Two Fridays ago she taped the schedule up
With a smug smirk of satisfaction
Relishing in her triumph over a wealthy, white boy.

Her fish eyes slide over my pale face
As if to say—
You're next.

Jack Carenza

May

Now you are my muse May,
the loveliest—lush landscape, chaste rebirth,
sky yearning for pigments possessed by
superior earth. Your choirs whistle
the optimistic song of the budding
dogwood, the outburst of fuchsia
and milk-soaked impatiens.
The triumphant Hummingbird purges
memories of the goose's dismal departure.
Blueberries and strawberries coax
the sun, whom in zeal to sample
Persephone's garden, kisses
you in a precipitate phase of passion.
If the sun's advances
please you not, my admiration
is for naught?—oh May.

The Second Half of Endless Summer

My buddies and me are getting real well known,
Yeah, the bad guys know us and they leave us alone.
- The Beach Boys

There are formative years between 15 and 21
that, in reflection, love resentment and affection.
Childhood fantasies can be dispelled in practice,
anything extraordinary can become ordinary, taken for granted.
I wanted to be in a rock band with my best friends.

We spent our collective lifesevenues, as mid-teens,
on a blue, high-top, Ford E-350 conversion van,
that we all got tattooed on our asses 5 years later
in Missouri.

When I should have been drinking and having regrettable sex
I was boarded up in wooden loft of a hot van.
The four of us built that loft in Tom's driveway,
the spring I turned 16; I remember it.
I remember the smells, impending rain, and
the dogwood tree next to his basketball hoop.

I stripped down to my boxers, four years later,
in that same loft, in that same van,
groaning through a July, 14 hour, dry desert drive:
Phoenix to San Antonio.

While I was missing the sun come up on sandstone
mesa in New Mexico, I was busy missing a girl at home
who I wouldn't even be speaking to in two months.
Six days later, I dove into the dew in Mississippi.
I had never gone so long without seeing grass.
Megan Fitzgerald, con't

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The Ugly Truth

Wanna come see my room?
Sweeeet.
Turn the tv on: Panty-drop lighting--
Chicks are less likely to take it all off in full light.
Girls are all self-conscious and shit.
Don't want us to see their cellulite
or their like, liverspots, or whatever.

Now she's pretending to be interested
In my Doors posters, my Steven Segal movies-
I can see right through that shit, sweetheart.
Just like I can see right through that black sheer tube top
And the hidden meaning of the fairy tattoo above your ass crack.
Hey, you wanna massage?
Oh your mom just got back from surgery?
How interesting.
Your little brother put on your work uniform?
Hal! Hal! Hal! Hal! That's ADORABLE.
You're so witty and fascinating!
Make-up and ponies and your facebook accountblahblahblah
blahblah staring at your ass tuning you out tuning you out I'm tuning you out,
Veroni-lindsey-heather-who-gives-a-fuck, you're all the same.
Same smell
Same laugh
Same hair flip
Same dumb jokes
Same dimples above your ass crack
Same way of thinking you're special/different from all the other hoes.
Same lies.

Did you pass out, honey?
Yeah, she's done, she's sooo done...

........

Jostle, jostle—wake up, I got work in a few hours
Don't text me, I'll text you.
With a lob of a purse she falters out the door, gone.

And I'm alone again.

Conor Gereg

Awake

"So they said they'd start digging by the end of the month?" Ray pulled the last few strings of tobacco from his inner lip. "That's a shame Jack. Efin' shame."

"Things have changed," Jack leaned cross-armed against the side of his truck. "This isn't the same place as it once was. Should have bought that property when I had the chance. Money, man, that'll bring an end to every good man in this world." His voice trailed off. He lifted the brim of his sweat-soaked hat, sliding a tired hand back through his matted hair. Jack felt worn. The days had a way of grinding his withering spirit, sapping the energy from his voice. "No sense in fretting. Not much we can do about it now."

The two men stood at the crest of the hill, adjacent to Jack's house, a small ranch, overlooking the plot of land that was now speckled with construction equipment. From their elevated view the land looked like a colony of ants, swarming with idle trucks and backhoes. They examined the terrain, imagining how the once tranquil landscape would look once it was filled with buzzing traffic and human disorder. The peaceful songs of nature rang out amidst a high summer sky, only to be broken by the hummin' of a distant car exhaust.

They made their way inside Jack Campbell's single-story home, set under an awning of tall oaks. The trees made the house appear even more microscopic than it actually was; a single bedroom, minuscule kitchen space, and a bathroom that Jack's wife Nikki declared "the origami room" because she and Jack would have to fold their bodies in order to fit inside the modest space.

"Chicago huh?" Ray said as he examined a single plane ticket sitting on the kitchen counter.

"Yeah, Nikki leaves tomorrow. It's a, uh, business venture," Jack said. He liked the way the word 'venture' sounded on his tongue. "More like a vacation for me. Having her out of the house for a bit wouldn't be the worst thing for us."

"Everything okay?" Ray asked as he pinched another lipful of tobacco from his canister.

"Yeah. Fine." Jack paused. The sound of Jack pounding his chewing gum between his teeth echoed in the long silence of the kitchen. Dying to lighten the mood, Jack interjected, "Everything won't be fine if she finds you dipping that shit in our house. You have heard of cancer of the mouth, haven't you, Ray?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm giving the stuff up next week anyway," Ray said, making his way towards the door. "Well, you let me know if this place gets lonely while Nikki's gone. Let's turn this shack back into the frat house it once was."

"Of course. I'm well aware of how to contact you," Jack said, pushing open the screen door.

Nikki returned home at 10 that night, her car crunching the gravel in the driveway. Jack considered trying to look busy but lay stationary on their living room sofa. He sent Nikki a wave as she entered the house, her briefcase swung across her shoulder.

"You eat?" Nikki asked, throwing her bags on the kitchen counter.
The Ugly Truth

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Sweet.
Turn the tv on: Panty-drop lighting—
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Girls are all self-conscious and shit.
Don’t want us to see their cellulite
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And I’m alone again.
“Yeah. Polished off the rest of that birthday cake your mother sent.” Jack kept his eyes transfixed on the television.

“That’s fantastic. Which diet is that part of? Atkins or South Beach?” Nikki responded hastily. “I get the two mixed up.”

Jack sat silent. He knew he wasn’t the same man that Nikki had married twelve years ago. The small deposit of fat beneath his chin had become more noticeable as the years passed. The “man breasts” he had once joked to her about when he was younger no longer seemed quite as funny. The concept of a morning run seemed more laborious with each passing season.

“See you in the morning.” Nikki said, to no one in particular, and carried a box of Triscuits, dragging her bags behind her to the bedroom.

With Nikki’s flight approaching, Jack could no longer tolerate living with her. He began to notice the subtleties of living with a woman he no longer cared for. She had told him that her trip to see her family in Chicago was only a “break.” Jack had never heard of another married thirty-something couple that took a break. He hated the way she announced the word or the way she always laughed to cover the immaturity in her unsure voice. He knew he hated living with her. He hated the way she left the kitchen sponge dripping cold and wet in the kitchen sink. He especially hated sleeping with her. Each night he found her body contorted into a pretzel and knackered driven into his lower spine, wracked throughout a restless night to find himself inhaling each breath of her oxygen-less, stale exhale. Until her plane left for Chicago the next morning, this was the life he grew to tolerate.

Jack woke up the following morning curled on the sofa. He was anxious. He glanced at Nikki’s ticket on the kitchen counter. Their morning began much the same as most mornings. Gurgling coffee pots spitting steam and optimism, clinking porcelain dishes and mugs. The kitchen television, all too cheery. The one commonality that Jack and Nikki shared was their morning ritual of ridiculing the local news station, in particular, the local weatherman. A tall, sharp-looking, middle-aged man named Kurt. Jack wished to have his confidence, his charm, and his faultless set of teeth. Kurt, the weatherman, had declared a low pressure system for the morning—with the possibly of an upgrade to a tropical depression. Still the storm failed to create enough unease for Jack to think twice about leaving Nikki at the airport.

“I should probably call the airline.” Nikki said. “Just to make sure everything is running on schedule.”

“No, don’t do that.” Jack reasoned. “This: This is nothing.” Motioning towards the kitchen window. “We’ll be fine.”

They finished their breakfast, sinking their used dishes into the vat of dirty plates where they would sit. Jack carried Nikki’s luggage, tossing each oversized bag haphazardly into the bed of his truck.

“You think you should maybe tie my bags down? They’re also going to get soaked.” Nikki said. “These bags are worth more than anything you own.”

“I won’t drive fast. This is hardly rain.”

“We’re going on the highway Jack. It’s raining.” Nikki said, begging for an intelligent solution.

“I won’t drive fast.” Jack repeated.

Nikki let out a sigh and hopped into the truck, slamming the passenger door behind her. Jack sat behind the wheel as he eyed the dashboard clock, calculating the time until he would be alone. They continued south on Highway 51. Nikki fiddled with Jack’s radio, turning the dials frantically, but only static came through the speakers.

“You still haven’t fixed your radio?” Nikki said, arching her neck at him, as if a better angle would help her to understand her husband.

“I’ve been busy.” Jack said. He clicked on the windshield wipers as the rain began to fall.

Nikki laughed sarcastically. She knew Jack hadn’t worked for two weeks, since he’d been fired from the Christmas tree nursery for urinating unknowingly on the site where the owner’s dog had been buried weeks earlier.

“We need to talk about this when I get back. If you expect me to set foot here again, you better pull yourself together Jack.” Nikki declared. “It’s a little embarrassing. My friend Rachel’s husband is working his hands to the bone putting an addition on their house. You? You sit at home hoping one of your friends is going to show up one day and hand you another job. Are you listening to me Jack?”

Jack remained focused on the road. Occasionally he adjusted his rearview mirror. “Hand me that bag of seeds in the glove compartment,” Jack said, an open hand outstretched.

They arrived at the airport three hours early. Jack pulled the truck to the curb of the terminal and stepped out.

“You want to help me with some of these bags? Maybe I’ll give you a tip,” Nikki said. She tried to crack a smile.

Jack looked around and asked, “You think they have bathrooms close by? I’ve got to spill.” He walked past Nikki and through the sliding doors of the terminal.

When Jack returned to his truck he found the bed of the truck emptied of Nikki’s wet baggage. Tailgate left down. Feeling lighter, Jack got back into the truck and made his way home.

Sitting in traffic, Jack basked in the weightless tranquility of the Nikki-less car ride. He could see planes taking off, struggling through the rain. The massive aircrafts rose rapidly, like wet birds determined to climb into clearer skies. The wings of the planes began to shimmer uncontrollably, dancing in the deluge of rain. It fell heavier, creating a blanket of water across the truck’s windshield. Jack threw another handful of sunflower seeds in his mouth and continued home.

Jack arrived home with just enough daylight left to navigate his way to the dimly lit front door. The walk from the car to the front steps had soaked his clothes, making them cold and heavy. Jack closed the door behind him and adjusted the thermostat. Aware that the he was finally alone in the house, Jack dropped his wet clothes in front of the door. He felt free. Completely naked, he turned on the kitchen television to keep him company while he peered into his bedroom: empty, except for a pile of clothes he had pushed to the corner of the room.
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Jack sat silent. He knew he wasn't the same man that Nikki had married twelve years ago. The small deposit of fat beneath his chin had become more noticeable as the years passed. The "man breasts" he had once joked to her about when he was younger no longer seemed quite as funny. The concept of a morning run seemed more laborious with each passing season.

"See you in the morning," Nikki said, to no one in particular, and carried a box of Triscuits, dragging her bags behind her to the bedroom.

With Nikki's flight approaching, Jack could no longer tolerate living with her. He began to notice the subtleties of living with a woman he no longer cared for. She had told him that her trip to see her family in Chicago was only a "break." Jack had never heard of another married thirty-something couple that took breaks. He hated the way she announced the word or the way she always laughed to cover the immaturity in her unsure voice. He knew he hated living with her. He hated the way she left the kitchen sponge dripping cold and wet in the kitchen sink. Especially hated sleeping with her. Each night he found her body contorted into a pretzel of L, kneecap driven into his lower spine, waking throughout a restless night to find himself inhaling each breath of her oxygen-less, stale exhale. Until her plane left for Chicago the next morning, that was the life he grew to tolerate.

Jack woke up the following morning curled on the sofa. He was anxious. He glanced at Nikki's ticket on the kitchen counter. Their morning began much the same as most mornings. Gurgling coffee pots spitting steam and optimism, clinking porcelain dishes and mugs. The kitchen television, all too cheery. The one commonality that Jack and Nikki shared was their morning ritual of ridiculing the local news station, in particular, the local weatherman. A tall, sharp-looking, middle-aged man named Kurt. Jack wished to have his confidence, his charm, and his faultless set of teeth. Kurt, the weatherman, had declared a low pressure system for the morning—with the possibility of an upgrade to a tropical depression. Still the storm failed to create enough unease for Jack to think twice about leaving Nikki at the airport.

"I should probably call the airline," Nikki said. "Just to make sure everything is running on schedule."

"No, don't do that," Jack reasoned. "This? This is nothing," Motioning towards the kitchen window. "We'll be fine."

They finished their breakfast, sinking their used dishes into the vat of dirty plates where they would sit. Jack carried Nikki's luggage, tossing each oversized bag haphazardly into the bed of his truck.

"You think you should start smoking? They're also going to get soaked," Nikki said. "These bags are worth more than anything you own."

"I won't drive fast. This is hardly rain."

"We're going on the highway Jack. It's raining," Nikki said, begging for an intelligent solution.

"I won't drive fast." Jack repeated.

Nikki let out a sigh and hopped into the truck, slamming the passenger door behind her. Jack sat behind the wheel as he eyed the dashboard's clock, calculating the time until he would be alone. They continued south on Highway 51. Nikki fiddled with Jack's radio, turning the dials frantically, but only static came through the speakers.

"You still haven't fixed your radio?" Nikki said, arching her neck at him, as if a better angle would help her to understand her husband.

"I've been busy," Jack said. He clicked on the windshield wipers as the rain began to fall.

Nikki laughed sarcastically. She knew Jack hadn't worked for two weeks, since he'd been fired from the Christmas tree nursery for urinating unknowingly on the site where the owner's dog had been buried weeks earlier.

"We need to talk about this when I get back. If you expect me to set foot here again, you better pull yourself together Jack." Nikki declared. "It's a little embarrassing. My friend Rachel's husband is working his hands to the bone putting an addition on their house. You? You sit at home hoping one of your friends is going to show up one day and hand you another job. Are you listening to me Jack?"

Jack remained focused on the road. Occasionally he adjusted his rearview mirror. "Hand me that bag of seeds in the glove compartment," Jack said, an open hand outstretched.

They arrived at the airport three hours early. Jack pulled the truck to the curb of the terminal and stepped out.

"You want to help me with some of these bags? Maybe I'll give you a tip," Nikki said. She tried to crack a smile.

Jack looked around her and asked, "You think they have bathrooms close by? I've got to spill." He walked past Nikki and through the sliding doors of the terminal.

When Jack returned to his truck he found the bed of the truck emptied of Nikki's wet baggage. Tailgate down. Feeling lighter, Jack got back into the truck and made his way home.

Sitting in traffic, Jack basked in the weightless tranquility of the Nikki-less car ride. He could see planes taking off, struggling through the rain. The massive aircrafts rose rapidly, like wet birds determined to climb into clearer skies. The wings of the planes began to shimmer uncontrollably, dancing in the deluge of rain. It fell heavier, creating a blanket of water across the truck's windshield. Jack threw another handful of sunflower seeds in his mouth and continued home.

Jack arrived home with just enough daylight left to navigate his way to the dimly lit front door. The walk from the car to the front steps had soaked his clothes, making them cold and heavy. Jack closed the door behind him and adjusted the thermostat. Aware that the he was finally alone in the house, Jack dropped his wet clothes in front of the door. He felt free. Completely naked, he turned on the kitchen television to keep him company while he peered into his bedroom: empty, except for a pile of clothes he had pushed to the corner of the room.
Over the next few days Jack found that he particularly enjoyed the freedom of being naked in his own house. He cooked himself meals, occasionally spilling food on his bare flesh. He found reading enjoyable in the nude too, and began to read some of the books Nikki had left. He felt restricted by shirt collars that wrapped too tightly around his neck, or the belt loop he occasionally skipped. At some point he became unaware that he was no longer wearing clothes.

Then one morning, Jack was awoken by a knock at the front door. Rolling off of the sofa, his bare flesh bouncing with each footstep, he made his way to greet his visitors. The door handle felt strange in his hand. It was the first time he had opened it since he'd returned from the airport. He swung open the door, pushing aside the pile of clothes still on the floor and presented himself to his new visitors. A pair of Jehovah's Witnesses stood still, their eyes catching Jack's pale nude body in the doorway. Jack waited for them to speak. The outside light was bright in his eyes.

"Hello sir," The taller of the two gentlemen spoke. His eyes were now looking down at Jack's bare feet, avoiding his body entirely. "We're, we're, we are sorry to have disrupted you. Would you be interested in some literature?" He said as he presented the pamphlets to Jack.

Jack examined the pamphlets. "Hmm. "The Watchtower," He inspected the text. Excited to have something new to read he accepted the gift. "What's the other one you have there?" Jack took the other book from his guest and examined it. His skin felt chilled from the outside air. "Awake," he said, reading the cover. His smile arched from ear to ear "Thanks guys. Really, what a treat." Before Jack could finish, the men had turned their backs and were making their way down the driveway.

Jack spent the next few days lost in a world he had created for himself. On nice days he would walk the perimeter of the property, gazing at the construction at the bottom of the hill. Large trucks spitting diesel puffs into the summer sky while backhoes beeped and churned in the humid air, opening holes in the ground. Inside his house he functioned solely on animalistic instincts. He rummaged through the depths of his kitchen shelves when hungry, and fell asleep wherever he felt tired. The kitchen had become cluttered with empty boxes and strewn plastic.

One afternoon, Jack was awoken by Ray's truck pulling into the driveway. Peering through the blinds, Jack watched his friend walk towards the front door. Ray gave a few knocks before curiously peering into the house. Jack crouched beneath the window and waited. Ray gave a second set of knocks and turned back down the driveway towards his truck and left.

Later that day, asleep in front of his television, the phone rang. Surprised that the phone still worked, he read the incoming number from the caller I.D. He recognized it. It was Nikki. Jack leaned from his seat and pulled the telephone wire from the wall. Silencing the telephone. Silencing the world.

I just want to be enough for you

is what I want to say
each time I kiss the bridge of your nose.

You open my gates to lazy days
where sunbeams dance across
my chest like children often do,
skipping along sidewalks
where shadows collide with amber light.

You intrigue me
in the ways you can so easily unfold me,
make my insides grow quiet,
blooming in chrysanthemums when you are near.

I want to know the ways of your streets,
where they might carry me,
but as much as I want to know,
doubt follows me
like a nameless girl who has just slept in your bed.

The Power of Saying Nothing

It has been three weeks since you changed,
And I say nothing.

When you are with her,
I hope my presence looms over you,
Hangs
like a deer's hind legs bound with rope
wrapped around a cedar tree's arm,
blood dripping from its pale tongue.
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Hangs
like a deer's hind leg bound with rope
wrapped around a cedar tree's arm,
blood dripping from its pale tongue.
Gone

She sat there cold and bruised, and watched him walk away.

He grabbed the keys to his Ford pickup and left her.

She leaned against the wall and her eyes searched the spackled ceiling and hoped it would come crashing down on her.

Maybe. Maybe then he'd come back. Return to her side to hold her in his arms, and gaze at her with those smiling eyes just like he used to, instead of...

But she knew he'd never change. People never change. So she unstuck herself from the floor and staggered into their bedroom.

She stumbled right past the mirror without even looking in. As she reached his dresser, she hunched over in agony, and wiped a drop of blood from the corner of her mouth.

She opened up the top drawer, and wrestled with his clothes, found his revolver. The cool metal trembled in her hands.

Tears stream, barrel to mouth, car door slams, and then...

A New England Women's Filler

"My husband died a few years back."

Cold hard-iron now caresses and consoles.

"Hands and mind need somethin' to do."

Seized locomotive engines, rusted rails, comfort.

"Been here since he past, never gonna leave."

Phone calls, ordering train parts: a type of communion.

"That old bobbleter's escorted freight up north."

Tours, visitors; strangers, her husband in new shoes.

Fragile rail lights in need of repair, brittle in stiff winters, soft in summer.

1A small caboose
Amanda Nagle

Gone

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Grey Clark

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Tours, visitors; strangers,
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Fragile rail lights in need of repair,
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---

\(^1\)A small caboose
Prayer Shawl

My rocking chair is my companion
this night,
as I move between reality and wishes.
As the pale pink yarn slides through my fingers
I see my niece's china-doll skin.
She died last spring, and I'm crocheting
this shawl for her mom.

With each stitch of my mother-tired hands
I see my sister's hands
clutching her daughter's
pink-painted fingers for the last time.

Each inch of yarn
hooks onto the next
like the endless ribbon of longing
that will be forever pulled from her heart.

The Ground Is Cold in October

Slumping around a shallow hole in the earth
each mourner tosses in a shovel's head of dirt.
Some smile through tears just as leaves dance
on the coattails of the wind. A few look on
in terror as they stare into her face. Fear
of an end, no thoughts of new beginnings
as she surrounds them, until she takes them.
Still some grip the tree with frightened faces.
While others grow cold and wither; they know
their gust is coming. A few stay green long
past the rest only to slip away in the silence
of a still, sunny Sunday.

For the leaves that jump at will and for
those that stay on fighting, for the leaves
that were untimely ripped and those that chose
their peaceful breeze, and for the one that fell so
stiff into that shallow hole, you all will know
when you meet her there, the ground is cold in October.
Prayer Shawl

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For the leaves that jump at will and for those that stay on fighting, for the leaves that were untimely ripped and those that chose their peaceful breeze, and for the one that fell so stiff into that shallow hole, you all will know when you meet her there, the ground is cold in October.
Potatoes

I don't know my grandfather
Or his parents
Or the people who came before him.

All I know is that we share the same
Irish name and love for mashed potatoes.

On Thanksgiving I am reminded of this,
As my grandmother, his widow
Scrubs the rough skin
Peels the layers back;

I only knew my husband for ten years.

Sometimes when I can't sleep at night,
I think of how my relatives might have lived in Ireland,
I wonder if they were happy,
If they ate salt herring in three bites
To see a future husband in a dream.
I wonder if they lit candles in windows
On the night after November 1st,
Loving the dead like she does,
Or if they were the ones
Digging until the sun fell into the earth,
In hopes to gather enough potatoes
To feed a family without
Getting lost in the shadows.

Approaching the mirror,

after a night of lost sleep, I notice the bags
under my eyes,
sunken skin of my skull,

and I picture my grandmother, Re,
the last time I saw her in Georgia.

I touch a hand to the blemished skin
and can feel her frail body
perched in the wheelchair.
Her eyes search my face,
worry builds within them
when she cannot find my name
in the stores of her memory
decimated by the stroke.

I splash a palm full of water into my
face, trying to knock the memory out
of my mind,

like the stroke knocked the wind out of
her when she collapsed.
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Tripod

1.
A three-legged deer hobbles,
each exaggerated step drawing
it nearer to the refuge of brambles
outlined by the bay windows
of the kitchen, its writhing eyes
daring towards my parents,
my sister, my grandmother and me.

Despite a maimed limb, Tripod
(so dubbed by my amiable sister)
maintains the grace of her ilk,
wafting through the ivy-donned
bed, as Grandma pirouettes
through the kitchen clutching the
dirtied dishes to her breasts.

2.
A three-legged deer hobbles
away from the road,
shepherding two speckled fawns
who mimic their
mother's natural gimp's gait.

I glance up, pointing out the
routine sight of Tripod to
Grandma, who lays down her cards,
struggling to align her
wheelchair with the window.

3.
A three-legged deer hobbles,
each exaggerated step drawing
it nearer to the refuge of brambles
outlined by the bay windows
of the kitchen, its writhing eyes
daring towards my parents,
my sister, and me.

Beautiful Insomnia

hyperventilating beneath bedcovers
even night shines through windows
selfish eyes, greedy mind
pictures unimagined blur to focus.

dead voices whisper
tickling ears
but just out of reach.

glowing twisting light
echo on plain walls
dancing a lullaby
desperately in vain.

heat escaping
heart slows
feigning death.

blood flows faintly
brain struggling to imagine
what it's like to truly live.

hallucinating
hands twitch
uncontrollable
eyelids flicker.

dawn breathes reprise
and screams the end.
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Night Walking

For the man I passed in Beer, East Devon, England
Carelessly I roamed the cobbled streets,
dodged light shed from lamps,
nodded at the pub owner as he swept
stale stories from his earthen floor,
fresh for the next day's drunken drivel.
Three fishermen echoed tall tales,
their legs dangled off the side of a boat
and cast swirls into the sea's salty mist.
Ahead, two late-night lovers enjoyed the
mossy knoll's serene bed, too engaged
to have heard the fishermen's laughter.
I almost lost myself there too, but you
brushed by me with a purposed pace
and a stench that broke me from my daze.
I craned to watch your motley march, your
bushy beard, your soleless shoes. That's
when I saw a Scottish Sterling fall from
somewhere in your tattered clothes and hit
the stones with an eerie cry that made
those lovers pause. But you continued to
your manor perched high atop the hill.
And as I watched you disappear I wondered
why your currency was so acceptable in Beer.

Man Strapped for Cash Goes Dumpster-Diving at the
Willimantic McDonald's

He buys a cheeseburger
dripping with enough grease
to promise a future of lovehandles
and diabetes. He paid for the meal
entirely with coupons.
Buy-one-Angus Burger-get-one-half-off,
Buy-two-Small-Fries-get-one-free:

enough coupons to ensure he doesn't spend
a single dime on a burger that barely merits
five dollars.

He berates the serving staff, haggling
out the deal. They don't accept
his coupons, which are only valid in Hebron.
His voice rises, his brows furrow until
they match the creases of his dirt-stained
hands. The day manager tells him they'll take
the coupon, but just this once.

Before sitting with his meal,
he approaches the restroom, glances my way,
and dives a hand into a trash bin.
He retrieves a used, extra-large iced-tea cup from the
rank depths of the receptacle and heads into
the restroom. He emerges, hands dripping wet, with
a purified prize: another money saver.

Desperation wears many masks, some more
revolting than all the fetid garbage of a trash bin.
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Infantry

Landmines fill voids of silence
following one last step.
Is it the toe? The hint of moving forward
the messenger of temperature.

The rounded way you press down
when you walk,
the way your arch resists,
that resistance antagonizes
the explosives in the earth.
The core of damage and smoke
feels this delicate refusal,
the upward curve.
It engulfs it, rushes to meet it,
smothers its subtle beauty
into flat nothingness.

Rising into the air is the memory,
escaping the dust,
the way we float and soar.
Beyond what’s known,
accepted,
written in stone,
and what’s forgotten,
buried in whispers,
then sung again to the deaf.

We are not that flat wasteland
nor those bombs we hide and carry
like orphan secrets.

We are humid nights
when ashes turn
to pixie dust.
So we dance through the landmines,
our feet curved in unison,
memories safe, rising to the sky.
Southgate Apt. 4D

My father slept in bursts like gunfire,
batted dreams away with twitching fingers
that clenched and scrunched, and cigarette butts burned
holes through blankets, safety, security -
he locked himself in plaid
and feigned relief through weekend naps
in range of shafts of sun between the blinds.

Coffee grounds and ash escaped a stained and grizzled muzzle
when he choked awake in cracking coughs and phlegm,
recoiling in a tarry-lunged sputter.
Calming, he breathed slow to the site of his offspring
on the sofa nearby,
absorbed in the cushions
as if nothing transpired.

In bleary transfer from couch to a chair,
he'd pick up a clipboard,
a cold mug of coffee, a carton of Camels,
and hammer out a new cartoon,
heaving sighs of dusty prayers for the middling wakened life
and drift swiftly off again at the mercy of burning embers
in his limp and hanging hand.

And as fast as he dozed off he came to life again.
With ballistic punches he became a thunderbolt.
A guttural bellow in his thousandth awakening
would greet the material
to throw off his blankets,
to scramble for the remote,
bugged eyes bloodshot, bagged with bruised rings
he'd painlessly stare down the television,
and shift his legs out from under himself
to rise and scuffle to the broken couch again.

Somewhere long ago he stood drunk in a jungle,
aimed at unborn mutants and mothers and Viet Minh,
and shot for the sake of sleeping his weekends away.
Cardboard Sentiment

A spreadsheet sits prepared
upon my father’s desk,
waiting for my family’s drive
to Hallmark.
The columns stretch far,
first names, last names,
relations, locations,
birthdays.

We arrive with
sparkling doors and
luminous decorations.
Green and red flourish,
reminding us of the season
like the buzz of our clocks
forcing us out of bed.
Ropes are tangled about,
glittery leaves attached,
vessels sprouting, as if there
were a genuine flow of blood
throughout our hearts.

Our lists are given.
“Ok, for Christmas…
Me, mom, your brother,
grandma, grandpa,
we’ll take care of
your cousins, Aunt Peggie,
and Uncle Ed, don’t worry.”
I scan the array of cards
like bricks on a wall, each
with the same poetic language
I’d never use,
to say things I’d never say.
Glancing at my parents' list, 
long enough to spread to the 
highest branches of our family tree, 
above the clouds and out of sight, 
I read of their acquaintances 
and relatives that lie miles above. 
The people whose birthdays 
they no longer remember 
and perhaps never did, 
relying on their number, 
their cell, 
of a spreadsheet that is saved 
in the form of bits and bytes.

****************************

The cards total $65, greater than 50, 
so we earn a free plate with red swirls. 
Another reminder of the holiday ahead 
that we must celebrate with our loved ones, 
who we haven't seen since Thanksgiving, 
and before that... who knows.

****************************

Our cards lay scattered across the table, 
fallen from the white plastic bag, 
like acorns that have fallen 
onto the wet autumn ground 
from the tallest trees surrounding our home, 
the branches to which they belong a mystery. 
We decipher which are for whom, 
form an assembly line, 
four chairs, equal distance apart, 
one pen at each station, 
then scribble our names with efficiency. 
The minor variations in our handwriting styles 
reveal to the receivers 
we care enough to spend one second 
signing our own name.
Death of a Nemesis

I.
It’s a Tuesday. I hang up the phone and before I put it back in my pocket, I look at it and think, “this is how big your tumor is.” I take a moment by myself to look down the hill through a grove of pine and spruce to Lake Champlain, which this time of year changes temperature by the hour. So at noon when we dove in, our bodies went numb, and we couldn’t stay under. But late last night we swam out to a raft and stared at the stars. Whenever it got cold, would take a dip to let the water thaw us. I look past the lake to Burlington, and think of when you took us on vacation there and we stayed on Pop-pop’s sailboat, and Nicky and I saw the fish that swallowed Jonah swim from under the dock, gliding down till it disappeared in the depth. I look past my car in the driveway down to the main road the leads past one of the governor’s mansions and the thrift shops, to the ice cream store with the antique Hershey’s sign in the window. I think in all these directions and know, that I’ve won. That you’ve only got six months. That I have risen above the tyranny of your nature to drag your body through the streets, and pull your monument to the cobblestone.

II.
I think back to Saturday, sitting on the shoulder of 395 between my friends, hands cuffed behind our backs as the cop places my stash on the roof and gives a speech about bringing drugs into his town. My friends rat me out, and cry as they think of their parents and their futures. And I think of you, standing before our congregation of addicts, homeless, abusers, and prostitutes, saying “if we make the same mistakes over and over, god will turn his back on us.” The cop takes off our cuffs, saying mine for last, and asks, “How’s your throwing arm, son?” And I tell him that it’s “pretty damn good.” He turns his back to us and I chuck everything into the woods, and we drive 55 the whole way home. I think of how it would have killed mom if I got arrested on Saturday, and you got brain cancer on Tuesday.

III.
The months pass, and it’s obvious as you dip chocolate cake in chicken soup and try to give the dog a pencil as a treat that you’re not going to make it the full six. I don’t visit. Instead, I start smoking as a parting, “fuck you.”

IV.
Near the end, I drove Nicky to the Hospice center and got as far as the door.
to your room, but when I saw your feet peeking out from behind the curtain I knew it was too much, and I waited in a room where a man played folk songs on an old rosewood Martin watching the TV on mute as Catch the Wind echoed off the walls.

V.
At your funeral, we sang worship songs and shook hands with the assholes who called us liars when we said you were sick, and now called themselves friends and family. I milked the sad when the pretty girls walked by, trying to get a courtesy fuck. Mom asked me to fill in as a pallbearer when your oldest son showed up drunk and I said no. Pop-pop wondered aloud why everyone was so sad, as my friends stifled giggles. And after the service, when Adelle tried to give me a hug and say she was sorry, Ross put his arm in her way and said, “Dude, bro’s before ho’s,” and pulled me in for the real thing, while you lay a few feet away in socks and sandals.
Contributor's Notes

Kellin Aberton is an English major/Writing minor and will serve as English Club President next year.

Casey Bissette of Lisbon, CT, is a senior Performing Arts/Theatre major with an English/Writing minor.

Jack Carenza is a freshman English major from Norwich, CT.

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Gray Clark is a search and rescue coast guard medic (2002-2004) from Neah Bay Washington.

Brian DeMilla is a senior at Eastern, working part-time with the State Auditors.

Megan Fitzgerald is a senior English major at Eastern.

Andrew Gazaventa is a senior English major/Writing minor and President of English Club.

Conor Gereg is a senior English major/Writing minor who has been writing for the Campus Lantern newspaper since 2007.

Kileen Gilroy is a senior English major from Narraganset, RI.

Holly Gonzalez is a senior English major with a minor in Writing.

Patricia Haggard is a mother of four and an English Major at Eastern. She has won honorable mention in the Leo Connellon Poetry Award.

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Denise Powers is from Stafford Springs, CT and is pursing a degree in Social Work.

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Amanda Salmas is a senior at Eastern majoring in English.

Amanda Topping is a English major/Writing minor and an active member of the English Club for the past year.
Writers in This Issue

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