

**The Bottom  
Shelf Review  
Wilson College  
2009**

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## My Mother's Hands

Debbie Arthur

I think of my mother and I think of her hands; Why? When looking back over my life, all of the things that I seem to remember about her, she was using her hands

I remember when those hands patched walls with plaster. They took off rooms and rooms of wallpaper; painted every wall in our home with every color of the rainbow. They carried coal to the furnace to keep us warm in the winter; and dug out the cellar to store that coal.

Those hands took care of her children, digging stones out of our knees, putting bandage upon bandage on so many cuts and bruises to make them better. They smacked us when we disobeyed and marched us to church 3 times a week.

They took care of us when we were sick, patting our hot little heads; feeding us when we were too sick to eat, and with all those kids that was a lot of feeding. They tucked warm blankets around each of her children to keep out the cold at night. They folded in prayer each and every day to talk to God.

You would think they would be worn out with all that work they have done over the years for so many of us. But they are not.

When I walk into that house today, stressed or upset, those hands on my face and wrapped around me give me peace, it flows through those hands into me and they don't let go till I am calm.

When I need love, when I need calm, whatever I need, those hands give and give and give again.

Over the years they have given me smacks, soothing pats, food, clothing, warmth, just to name a few. But most of all they have given me love.

I will cherish those soft, soft hands forever.

I don't know how I would have gotten through this life without them.

Or without you mamma!

*I Love You*



## Error

Janessa Demeule

Super nova of love and hate

Comet flies towards the black  
I think of you but never look back

Our love crossed the stars but is now separated by a black hole,  
Within the pupils of your eyes.

I close off my heart

A space station door.  
Sealed tight leaving me in here and you out there.

The single thrum of a backwards beat

A static mission.

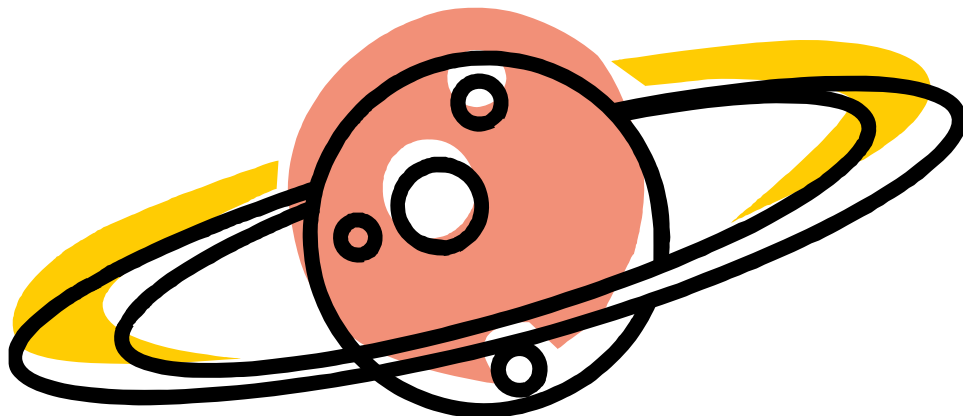
Our conversations,  
broken connections for stranded moon walkers

the satellite of my heart drifts a cold lonely path.

Reflecting the empty space  
Where my heart held your face

and my love spoke your name

Error



## Sense of Place

Emily Carver

In the light we see what come to grow,  
down stream and uphill in the gorge

At evening what grow, go down below  
and we lose the strength of daylight.

Then comes night and progress is futile,  
you are stuck in the vacant fields.

See the early light, here comes the dawn.  
Once day breaks, the world is alive.

After scorching sun beats down the young,  
there is no turning back.



## Library

Kayla Chagnon

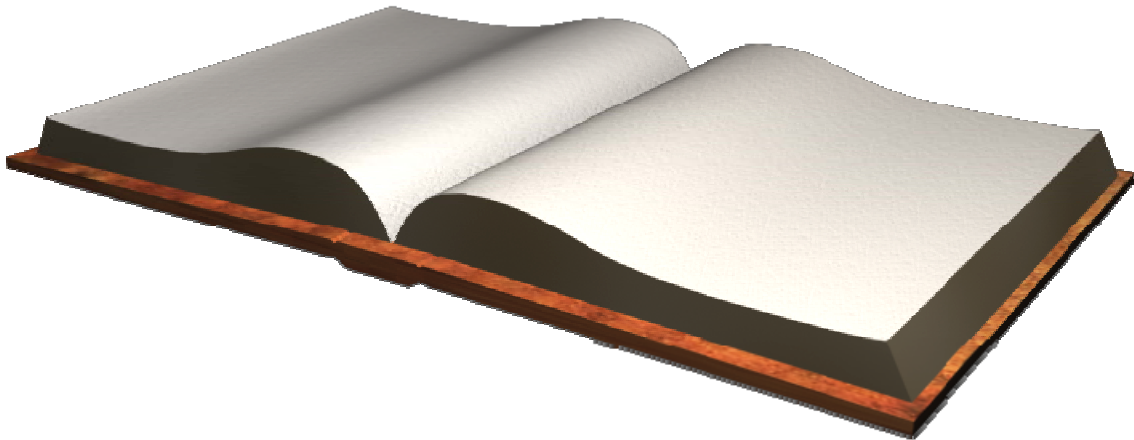
Sundays at one  
I open the doors;  
stale air rushes out.

I grab the newspapers,  
turn on the lights,  
and wait for others.

They come eventually,  
but no one gazes at the books  
sitting lined up on the shelf.

People come  
and people leave.  
But the books are never touched,  
they always stay.

When I close,  
the stale air follows me,  
but the books stay behind.



## Home Videos

Rebecca Cheek

The house is dark, too dark.

Vacant silence.

Nothing makes sense.

*Save me.*

Yesterday we were married, today my lighthearted laughter has been replaced by fear. Frozen, fisted terror holds my heart. I cannot breathe.

Old, dilapidated farmhouse. I cannot remember anything clearly. What is this horrible nightmare? Where are you my love and why are you not with me? Nothing makes sense.

I am standing in the kitchen, and the parlor I remember all too well is forward and to the right. The parlor where our vows were exchanged. I am compelled to enter, though my heart pounds painfully against my ribs. Empty as the silence.

Shades of jagged gray fill my vision as the house slowly disappears. So many times I thought it would never occur, yet hoped for the day you would make me your wife. But you did it. With you, I can do anything; I am unstoppable.

Your farmhouse kitchen once again. I have returned to the nightmarish stagnant air, the creaking sounds so common with old houses. The groans are too familiar: your house is now my home. But where are you?

*Save me.*

I remember our Disneyworld trip. I was delighted you let me use the camcorder, even though you hate having your picture taken. The video was so funny. I loved seeing us laughing together and just being, well... us.

Giant teacups from Alice in Wonderland.

Lunch with a princess.

Poses with Mickey Mouse.

I sigh with happiness until the moonlight in the kitchen dims. Squeezing my lids shut I will this temporary loss of vision to leave.

I slowly open my eyes to move towards the only moonlit room – the parlor. I am lost in a house filled with questions and memories of you. Answer my heart's cries. The room draws closer with every step I take. The crude wooden planks of the floor give just enough.

With each footfall, a creak.

A moan.

A screech.

Every step makes my heart beat like a thousand wild stallions.

*I know this room.*

*This room knows me.*

Once through the doorway, by the light of the almost-full moon, I see it. Or what is left of it. The body... the body is dismembered. Limb cut from limb, I want to turn away, but find it impossible. My stomach revolts at the bloody sight before me. A man's naked, headless torso lies in front of the ash-filled fireplace.

His arms - unattached to his torso, and with fingers still curled around the windowsill, as if only his arms were able to attempt escape.

His legs – removed. Just like his head. It is at this moment, I lose it. I cannot stop the convulsions of my own body. The sight is too much. Collapse of legs. Quickened breath, panic. Frantic. My eyes search for the killer in a frenzy, dizzying path.

*Save me.*

Suddenly, a noise cuts through my throbbing heartbeat. The padding of tiny feet. Human? No. The sound is from paws. A filthy creature appears from another entrance. An entrance leading outdoors. This creature is a dog. He would have been cute with his

floppy ears and curly tail if not for the crusted dirt covering his body. If not for the slobbering, snarling mouth. The beast's teeth are stained a deep cherry, a small body, but large enough to be more than I desire to reckon with. And the sinister color of death. Shock.

Disgust.

The beast takes the dead man's arm... drags it out the door between its teeth.

Every part of me wants to faint. The black spots behind my eyes try to take over my whole self. Somehow, I come up with enough strength to push back. To remove myself from the room of death. Desperate to understand what is happening, I follow the retreating dog outside. The half moon lights the dog's shape enough to see the mutt drop the arm into a hole in the backyard. He is burying the man's body parts!

*I know that dog.*

*That dog knows me.*

I need to get that arm back! Confusion fills my mind as I wonder why it is so important to me that this arm be returned back to its place beside the body. I just need to survive this night of torture long enough to save myself. Long enough to find you. Long enough to make sure you are still alive. The arm. I need it.

*Save me.*

Impatiently, with a body full of taut nerves, I wait for the dog to finish its dirty little task. Like a favorite bone, the dog never seems satisfied with the way this arm is buried. The dog dashes away after an eternity of my inhales and exhales. His job is complete. Running, tripping, the skin scraped on knees. Reckless adrenaline courses through my veins as I claw at the moist night earth. The dirt is up to my elbows, but still I continue searching, why I do not know.

I am coming for you.

I will find you soon.

My fingers brush against the arm.

Cold.

Stiff.

The bluing flesh of it is visible as I brush more dirt away. With my own pink arms now covered in dirt, I hold the arm in outstretched in my hands, as if it is diseased. Attempting a slight glance at the arm, the small tattoo catches my eye.

It is your family crest.

This tattoo is identical to yours.

I fight to keep the bile deeper within my throat as I return to the house through the kitchen. No, this is not your arm. It cannot be. Your family name knows many descendents. I realize now why I feel the need to return this arm. I am connected to it in the way I am now connected to you and the line of your blood.

The paint-chipped screen door I loved to walk through in summer now whines in pain as I pull it open with my free pinky finger. I squint my eyes almost shut, ignoring the creaking floor, and quickly deposit the arm back into the bare parlor by the windowsill.

I am ready to begin my search for you.

I refuse to leave without my best friend.

Without my love.

More than any other thing, I need to know you are alright. Afraid to call out to you, I tiptoe through the remaining rooms. A small bathroom with its sink and toilet is eerie with its cold porcelain and murky mirror. I remember when in this bathroom we stood in front of the mirror as you fastened my necklace clasp. I shake my head to keep my focus on finding you. Your dining room once filled with a gorgeous dinette set and Oriental rug has been stripped of all furniture. The outline of the now missing carpet is faintly visible. Wallpaper peeling on the walls is a haunting reminder of the skin ripped off the dead man's body. The house's silence becomes thick enough to choke me.

I somehow feel the killer's presence.

It is more than unsettling.

*Save me.*

Just as I inch silently back to the kitchen, I hear an almost deafening roar. Crouching down behind the sink, I am able to look out the window in enough time to see at least fifteen enormous men pulling into the unkempt yard. They are all riding atop snarling motorcycles, each three times the normal size of a motorcycle.

Again, my vision clouds.

You have a motorcycle.

An iridescent charcoal, full of chrome additions and a rowdy bellow that made your heart skip a beat with delight. Riding around the countryside on your "bike" was so much fun. My favorite ride was when you took me to Cowan's Gap for a surprise picnic one weekend. That trip is a most vivid memory of you. That day you packed the video camera for me, too. The funniest moment of that tape had to be when you fell in the lake trying to impress me with your incredible balancing act.

Any other time, I would have welcomed the sound of these men on motorcycles.

But not tonight.

*I know those men.*

*Those men know me.*

With the screen door slamming behind me, I run as fast as possible to the hill.

I know the men have heard me, see my tiny escaping form.

They follow, their spit-shined boots drowning out the wild thump of my heart.

Sheer terror and adrenaline course through me. The men would say my capture is deserved, as the slice of moon catches the shine of their uniform buttons.

But I know the truth.

They are here to take me away, to meet a similar fate as the beheaded man.

I struggle to run faster.

My legs seem to be stuck in slow motion and my ears hear the sounds of the heavy footfalls, closing in quickly behind me. Cresting the top of the hill, I see the town looming closer. For the first time since my panicked sprint from the kitchen, I glance behind me, only to find the men inches from arms' length.

The realization of my sealed fate and imminent death is almost welcomed.

My final fleeting thoughts are of you - where you are, and why I never found you.

Stumble.

Gasp.

Fall.

Rough hands scratch.

Yank on my body.

I am pulled up roughly by my hair.

Screaming in pain, a choking gulp escapes my lips.

I wonder for the last time if you are still alive.

Shoved to the ground, the men pounce. I am crushed under the weight of them.

*Save me.*

Suddenly,

I wake.

I am disoriented at first.

Where am I?

My mind grasps for understanding.

The walls, our bedroom.

The television on, our home videos still playing.



It is not until this moment I realize... all has been a dream, an unspeakably dreadful nightmare. Wintry sweat dots my brow as I breath deeply. The nightmarish farmhouse is nowhere in sight. My head leans back into the pillow as I attempt normal breath again. Sighing in relief, I roll over.

I am ready to wake you.

Every part of me feels the need to let this dream out, to tell you how very real it felt, not knowing if you were alright. And now, with relief flooding my face, I turn over to face you and find nothing but a dirt-covered arm in your place. I see your family crest.

*I know that arm.*

*That arm is yours.*

My body shakes once again.

Breath labored with sharp inhales and painful exhales. I reach to steady myself. The sight causes the bile to rise in my throat once again. My arms are also covered in dirt, my fingernails filled with soil.

*Save me from myself.*

There is blood on the sheets.

Rebecca Cheek

## **Music**

### **Noise**

A powerful almost deafening clamor  
movement outside my window  
the sound of a massive thing  
drawing closer ever closer  
drowning my thoughts  
impossible to work  
covering my ears  
hoping it away  
stop all that  
painful  
noise

Road construction is not music.

### **Commence**

Silence fall  
fingers poise  
pages shuffle  
hands rise  
anticipation  
symphony begin

### **Listen**

Impress  
surprise  
undress  
captivate  
caress  
music is our bodies

## Heart

My beating heart is music

slap  
double-dutch ropes  
whistle  
blazing fireworks  
hum  
night cicadas

my beating heart

listen  
spoken words  
body reacts  
inescapable  
rhythm  
sound

my beating heart

uncontrollable  
cascading from within  
bend ear to listen  
a sigh  
make more than noise  
forget me not

my beating heart

listen  
when soul aches  
wish to be wounded cries  
when love speaks  
wish to be the only song  
I am music

My beating heart is music

## A Reply to a Knight

MLS Cooray

Twirl. Step. Hurl. One. Two.  
Touch and Stroke.  
Two heavily worn palms enter pure stretches of seemingly nothing.  
Such is the purity of snow-covered ground.  
Its perfect demeanor marred by a pair of ebony, slender hands.  
The end of its bleak stare shows piles of rubbish heaps.  
Their malodorous presence  
Suppressing the fortitudinous beauty  
Of that long stretch of white land

To exist as a mere landscape.  
The ebony fingers stroke the blanche expanse,  
Seeking explanations for its moods,  
Its constant gaze into azure peaks,  
And its dazzling smile to the wink of blue-green streams  
That rush past its vast terrains of white.  
Circular motions of her hands question:  
Why look away from the lick of her palms  
And into yonder?  
Determined specks of white dust melt on her palms,  
Unwilling to reply.

Both hands are drawn to the ground,  
Wretchedly seeking to mingle into struggles of vanity and pursuit,  
Longing and abandonment, discontent and mirth  
Both azure peaks glaze distantly in the sun.  
The terrain cannot be unmuted.  
The plea for longing is unbroken  
As its sullied ground invites earthly discourse.

A plea then escapes as the sun shines overhead.  
None belong to the body of that vast expanse of spotless ground.  
Ebony fingers intermingle with rubious gushes of blood.  
A single drop christens the brooding ground.  
Gusts of air spread across the terrain,  
The hues attempting to nudge the blemish to a pale beginning.

Paler and paler does it grow.  
The gusts have had their way  
As they leap away as quickly as they had hurled.  
One. Two. Their palms close in with each other,  
As quickly as a prayerful maid's gaze lifts upwards.  
White specks cover the surface of her hands.  
Their meeting is quick;  
The surface now only becomes the memory of a momentary embrace  
As tiny droplets trickle towards dark, slender fingers  
And roll onto chilly surfaces.

One carelessly drawn circle demarcates that large expanse  
Within the stillness of noon.  
In memory of the pair of ebony hands that sought  
To clutch reason and persuade desire to own both of them  
At least for a while;  
That imperfect pair that sought to banish  
Longing from the mirthless landscape  
While hoping to heighten the presence of Desire  
Between their owner and her lover.

Their task remains unfinished,  
As they draw into a close.  
A quiet separation must take hold  
As they leave a careful caress  
Sketched into heavy expanse.

Tender gusts once again fill in  
To warm the face of the pale and lonely lover,  
Whose longing strays long after  
Droplets melted from the azure peaks  
Rolling towards the vast white landscape.

## Innocence

MLR Cooray

My lover and I  
Were sprung in time though  
Youth was our decay.

We dreamt and dreamt  
And sighed and smiled,  
Like naked fools that laughed.  
Naked fools that merely sighed  
And caressed with their feet.

Our lips were but our brushes  
That circled frantic strokes.  
Our eyes were but our palettes  
That colored naked youth.

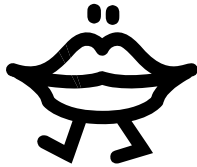
And all that while we smiled  
as if it were thing to do.  
Can love be only of the flesh,  
And be yours too?



## Lips

Doug Crawford

When they are loose they sink ships  
When they are glossy they're hip  
Punks will say "don't give me any"  
Luscious red  
The flower named after them – tulips  
We lick them until they are chapped  
Words are often lost on them  
They frame a smile  
Bee-stung  
Bewitching  
*Lips*



## Seraphim with a Demon's Kiss

Briana Doscher

Her kiss upon my lips  
intoxication of a seraphim.  
Words that draw me closer  
I am a servant to her beauty.

Skin that is a pale ivory  
lips red from the blood she draws.  
My veins ever pulsing  
with the life I feed her.

Eyes that lacerate my flesh  
Delirium in my thoughts.  
Her laughter is steel bells  
Ringing through a soundless night

But as she takes my body  
to my dying soul she gives life.  
She pulls me from grace  
lulling my heart towards the grave.

The icy moon reflecting  
skin of marble perfection.  
My body always aches for  
the agony of pain and deliverance.

My life is evanescent in her arms,  
but my cries will be silenced  
As she brings me the only gift  
she gives: death



## A Quiet Woman

Sharon Erby

There is a solitude of space

A solitude of sea  
A solitude of death, but these  
Society shall be  
Compared with that profounder site  
That polar privacy  
A soul admitted to itself --  
Finite infinity.

“There is a Solitude of Space” -- Emily Dickinson

“Hush now,” I told her. “Listen to the quiet.” And she settled then, leaning into my shoulder. I stretched my arm around her. A soft wind whooshed, tossing Em’s dark hair across her pale face while the new leaves trembled on the trees below us. Up high on the mountain, we were two souls, separate; still, as we looked out over the awakening earth crowned with a brilliant blue sky; as we heard the steady rush from a stream engorged after winter’s melting; as we felt the cool breeze fade with the sun; as we smelled the myriad simple fragrances melded exotic in the moving air; and as we tasted the true sweet treat of spring, we fused with *life* and with each other—for a moment.

“Mom, I’m cold. And I need to call Jenna,” Em said. The spell was broken. My dear daughter and I are, in some ways, of different kinds.

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The summer sky’s sudden feast of rain wrought from cumulonimbus clouds relieved the thirsty fields. I stood on the porch watching as they turned their faces up; how they needed its kiss! Then, as quickly as it had started, the rain stopped, and fresh sunshine sparkled the raindrops on the window into little jewels.

A warm blanket of wind wrapped around me and its gentle roar became my mantra; I could feel my breath fall into its rhythm—until the ringing cell phone in my pocket called me back: *Sorry. I’m not available to take your call.*

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Gray gave way to the rains that in November can fall down into your very bones. And the faded leaves fell with it, matting into the gullies that earlier floods had carved. “Shhhh Shhhh Shhhh,” the remaining birds told me; they told *us*—this earth and me—to get calm and to hear the change that was coming. The dregs in the fields adjacent bent their ears to listen, too: Yes! One coat would be lost and another gained.

And everything around me was preparing for the event. The thought of curling up in a cave or a cove or a den not to be disturbed by mice or men seemed suddenly delicious. Then, through the breach in the line of trees I saw the lumber truck coming toward me. We humans, after all, must look to the forests and to other sources for fuels to dry the rain in our bones.

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Snow! And a white tornado lived its seconds-long furious life in the field directly across from the house. The impression, though, was *slow motion* that provided a pristine sift of elegance over pastures earlier caked with the manure necessary to coax a summer crop up and out.

In this starkness I was struck with an awareness that Thoreau articulated best: “In what concerns you much, do not think you have companions: Know that you are alone in the world.” Yet this reality is as much my comfort as my pain—for it shows the significance of *self*. For me, white is a field of faces. Isolation comes in numbers, in throngs, in intrusions of institutions.

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Give me solitude, give me Nature, give me again, O Nature your primal sanities!

“Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun” – Walt Whitman

I am a quiet woman. Like Walt Whitman, I seek solitude. Like Emily Dickinson, I seek the solitude that comes from knowledge and understanding of my *self*. It’s my disposition to do so—to *be* so. Still, for years, for *ever*, it seems, society has made me feel as if my natural bent needs to be un-bent and re-bent. “Don’t worry,” well-meaning elementary school teachers told me when they found me after I’d slipped away (like I often did) to seek a quiet place (that window ledge on the backside of the building where I could look into the window and catch reflections of clouds was wonderful!) while other children screamed and played during recess. “You’ll get over it.” The kindly coaxings, however, became admonishments by the time I reached my high school years. “It’s something you’ll need to *overcome*,” even a guidance counselor told me. “You just *can’t* be so quiet. *The world will eat you alive.*” Indeed. What did he really know of me? What did he know of *my* world?

*My* world is the same as theirs—the one that looks like a lovely blue orb (if you’re in outer space). I suppose it’s my *approach* to it that’s different. While most of *them* are seeking solace in the company of others, *I’m* finding it as much within myself and the nature that surrounds me. With our contemporary culture’s notion that unless you’re “getting out there” (which often translates to attending and ‘fully participating’ in myriad socially-sanctioned events) and cultivating as many relationships as a mega-farmer is cultivating different crops, it’s no small surprise, that those of us who’d prefer a tromp in the woods alone or just being with a simple circle of family and a *friend* (that’s right—it’s not plural) or (alright) *two*, get an askance from our culture’s collective raised eyebrow.

Add to it that I’m a female, and some of my gender might regard me as a disgrace to what women have accomplished since Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem—by choosing not to compete with anyone other than myself, and by refusing to believe I must perform for others in the work-world to prove my mettle; and instead, by seeking (and creating) every opportunity to run from the often suffocating “team player” scene to instead get somewhere, *anywhere*, to breathe purer, quieter air—I’m often deemed not assertive enough—by *their* standards.

The fact is, I enjoy my own company. I’m comfortable with myself. I’m not afraid to be alone. Indeed, it’s when I’m alone that I can simply *be* myself and take time to consider what it is that I want from this world, from my life—rather than simply bow to what others expect or hope to extract from this existence. In a world that often makes me feel like I’m a machine switched to ‘high,’ having a point when I can switch to ‘off’ is as much a requirement for me as drinking my eight glasses of water a day. Even my

family knows (and accepts, mostly) that when my voice takes on a higher pitch and I remark that “all I want is *peace*,” it’s time to leave me alone—to allow me to reconnect with my quiet, inner self.

Oh, and by the way, forget Jung and his introversion/extraversion continuum. *I already know what I am.* Would Freud attribute my disposition to some sort of sexual repression? Didn’t I make the ‘oral,’ ‘anal,’ or ‘phallic’ cut? Is my quiet nature really a neurosis? No. I’m simply self-reliant, which is hardly the same as being negatively detached—I don’t avoid people. Over the years, I’ve just learned to pick and choose my companions. Indeed, to me, those who require constant companionship and validation (however superficial it is) might more aptly be termed neurotic. I now accept that many people *cannot* accept (and feel the need to ‘correct’) those, like myself, who prefer to participate fully in a life “off the stage.”

I accept also that many people are uncomfortable with solitude, for many reasons. Perhaps the greatest of these is ‘society’ itself—which in its most literal interpretation implies the interaction of the ‘many’ versus the ‘one.’ Yes. There is need for and benefit in humanity’s interaction; yet, societal pressure negates solitude. Let’s accept that there is benefit in solitude.

What’s to gain in solitude? There’s a part of me that sighs in needing even to address the question, since its answer is so inherently a part of who I am. Solitude provides the ultimate challenge—can a human being learn to live in peace with himself or herself? And I would posture that if each would accept the challenge, and if each could conquer it, then each might also be better able to live peacefully within society. Solitude also provides the ultimate opportunity—for the individual to understand and to know what it means to be human, and to recognize and accept the societal responsibility that recognition entails. How better can we understand our ‘place’ than by first understanding who we really are as individuals?

Also, we cannot overlook the connection between solitude and the spiritual—from the New Testament account of Jesus’ forty days alone in the desert (from which he emerged stronger, after rebuffing myriad temptations), to Mohammad, to Teresa of Avila, to name only a few—representatives from each religion regard solitude as a requirement for union with the absolute. And on a personal level, I can attest that my early innate connection with my *self* inspired both a love of nature, as I sought realms to claim solitude, and a power of imagination that sustains and expands me still. Ever a bridge to unity between self and what is greater than self, nature (and my engagement with it) has always provided me the ultimate transport to transcendence. To those who prefer the companionship of others and who wish to remain constantly visible, I respond with acceptance. I simply request that those temperments reciprocate and acknowledge my ability to contribute—on *my own* terms.

Long ago, when I was only five years old, I remember donning my red corduroy jacket and heading for the top of the hill behind home—I knew even then that I needed solitude (although I’m certain I didn’t ascribe that name to it; I just wanted to get away from the noise)—and that being outside could (and would) provide it for me. And after living many years as quietly crammed with the solitude I found both within nature and within myself, I must say (alas and alack and surprise!): Mr. Guidance Counselor—the world has not yet eaten me alive. Through the self-knowledge I have gained while in solitude, I have learned much about who I am and what I want and need from life. I have learned to live peacefully with others. I have learned to exist with nature. I have learned (and I accept) my ‘place’ in this world. And, Mr. Guidance Counselor, in the infinity of ‘ifs’—if I knew you were still with this world, if I could find you, and if you would accept, *I would invite you into my quiet.*

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Earth, teach me quiet as the grasses are still with new light.

-- from a Ute prayer

We always waited until late fall to go on an ‘explore’ in the woods, my dog Scamp and I. When you’re a child of the country you learn some things early: I learned that snakes “go away” in early November, and since I preferred not to partake of their company, I chose to limit my and my mutt’s (he was a mix of beagle and dachshund – delightfully sniffy and quite close to the ground) excursions until that time of the year to tried and true places, like the catwalk under the bridge that was close to home, or down the road that paralleled the creek all the way to the town called Yellow Dog.

Curious, how no one in the family worried about a ten-year-old child taking off with just a small dog for a couple of hours. Or if they did, they didn’t show it, and I didn’t know it. I suppose by that time, they’d become accustomed to my solitary treks. And I *had* made the promise to steer clear of the creek after that episode when I was five. I’d walked down to it, alone, after the sound of the rushing water got stuck in my ears. It wasn’t enough to just hear it, I’d decided. I needed to *see* it, too. And it was while I was standing there watching the shadows of the leaves reflect off the water and breathing in its rhythm, that I heard Mom’s voice—pitched higher than normal, crying out my name. I left the creek, then, and as I approached our house, Mom ran out to me and hugged me as if she hadn’t seen me in years. It was after the “where were you’s” ended that the “don’t you ever’s” began. Anyway, I suppose my family didn’t worry about my wanderings as much when they saw me grab Scamp’s leash.

I never made a big production when we went—I’d throw some food into a brown lunch bag (a few crackers, an apple, candy if we had it), pull on a jacket, stuff the bag into it, and go. I never needed to worry about Scamp being ready. Not exactly my silent traveling companion, he’d be tugging at his chain unable to contain himself when I approached. Even though we lived several miles from town, we had a few neighbors, and over the years, when several had wandered into the yard, Scamp had promptly proceeded to bite them—and went from ‘Scamp, Unchained’ to just ‘plain-chained’ in the process. But we were like Pip and Joe Gargery from Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, Scamp and I—“ever the best of friends;” Scamp never bit me.

I believed the woods behind our house were enchanted. My older brothers collected arrowheads, and I figured that’s where they’d found them. The very thought of having my own collection (or even one or two that I’d uncovered on my own) fascinated me. As I recall, I already had it planned that Dad would make a display case for my treasures just like he did for the arrowheads my brothers had found. That I’d need to first find these arrowheads seemed unimportant at the time. My mind had already moved on to thinking of all the sorts of stories I’d need to make up about the Indians who used the arrowheads and (horror of horrors!) what they did with them. And of course I’d need to share these stories with my little nieces and nephews when they came for Sunday dinners. And of course I’d need to wait until it was dark and they were almost ready to go home before I did so. With all those lofty goals already secure in my head, I connected Scamp’s leash to his collar, and we took off into the woods.

Sounds seeped out of the stillness to greet us with each step—the crunch and crackle of leaves dry and ready to fly with any errant gust of November wind—or the air itself, sometimes soft and whistly around me, and then, in the next instant, pushy, screechy, and sometimes hurtful, if it blasted grasses and leaves at my face. I used the

hand that wasn't holding Scamp's leash to brush the debris away. And as always, my dog's sniffer was on over-drive, as he burrowed it deep, through the leaves and into the dirt, unlocking the mustiness of the forest's floor. He didn't even look up. *Did he see with his nose, too?* The glittering sky, contrasted with the subdued colors of fall there on the withering earth, gave me a hint of what forever must look like when it's compared with way back when.

Funny how time doesn't rule us when what's going on around us demands and absorbs our attention. Once inside the woods, I watched my every step. Downed branches that would have been apparent during the spring or summer were now obscured by the leaves that had finally completed their life cycle, and lay grounded, one on top of the other in the mass graves that were everywhere. *How far had we walked?* That detail was no more important than the fact that I had no real arrowheads to put in that conjured up display case. *How long were we in the woods before it happened?* Scamp had sniffed out something under a rotted log, and was trying to dig it out, when I heard the sound. It was a sort of snort, muffled (to my ears, at least) by the sound of Scamp's paws scratching to get at whatever he'd unearthed; he was absorbed with the dirt he was digging. As for me, I turned toward the sound. And there, across the stretch of a few nearly bare trees, stood the biggest deer I'd ever seen. It was a buck; afterwards, everyone wanted to know, "How many points? Did you see how many points he had?" The number of 'points' on that fellow's antlers was the furthest thing from my mind then. What *was* on my mind was the absolute magnificence of him.

Sure, I'd seen deer before, but never so close, never so...He turned his head toward me; those black eyes of his locked with mine. Time no longer existed and the universe was the quadrant that contained the trees and ground on which the deer and I stood. Even the air that flowed between us was different. I felt something: But it wasn't until afterwards that I could articulate it—even then, *how could I ever get it right?* I somehow *knew* that the deer and I were something *more* than just a deer, *more* than just a girl. And whatever it was, it connected us as much as our locked eyes did. I felt more alive than I'd ever felt before.

Then—the tug on the leash, my hand holding it tight, barking, barking, and the deer—leaping into another universe. And I was being pulled through the dry leaves and over downed logs, dodging branches, as Scamp, now aware of something worlds better than whatever was under that rotting log, determined he was going to get it. *How long did it take me to get him slowed down? How long had we been gone from home?* When we made it back to the top of the hill right behind the house, I yanked again on Scamp's leash and made him sit still. And I sat there beside him. *Still.*

Time randomly grants us glimpses into the timeless. And after, it seems to mock us by floating away on the crest of a cloud, leaving us to wonder. But don't even try to figure it out—your questions will never be answered. *I never did find my arrowheads*, I remember saying sourly, after-the-fact. Still, there's a fragment of those lucky glimpses that stays with us, I believe. And it's the ultimate in time-release—enough to stretch across a lifetime. I suppose each of us has our own way of coaxing infinity. For me, it's *quiet*.

## Singing

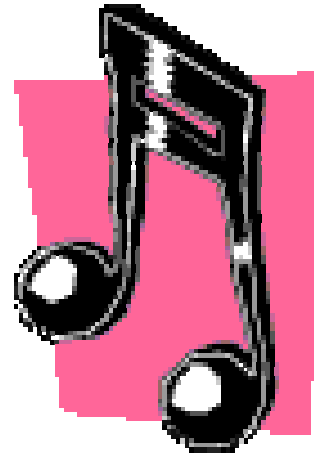
Laura Graham

Shall I sing you a song made of notes of my soul?  
Shall I sing everything that I am?  
Shall I play out a tune of a half that is whole?  
As sweet and replete as I can?

Well, what would you give me to hear such a song?  
Silver and gold do not hold any value.  
But if you would join me, singing along  
Wonderful harmony just me with you

Oh then I would sing of the seas and the skies,  
The divided united, fortune and fate.  
Then you must join with me and harmonize  
The melody only we could create.

But sadly I wonder could you pay such a price?  
Does your ear truly hear music of mine?  
Listen oh listen, you don't realize  
I've sung the song all along the whole time.



## **Impression vs. Expression.**

Whitney Hawkins

Dancing on the edge of an impression  
Yet to phase or yet to impress.  
Flowing through time and distance  
These words they never part;  
Smoothly wading over passion,  
The words that come from heart;  
Stop and stare with a blank expression,  
But you can't overlook a smile like that.

Touch of skin, you feel it too  
A tingle, a rush, and a sensation you can't describe.  
Caress a face you long to touch;  
Break down a barrier of the unexplained,  
Fill what's left as the replacement.  
Lie under the clouds and listen  
As the air dances in emptiness upon us bare  
You can't overlook a temptation like that.

## **Self: Yet, Not Infliction**

Whitney Hawkins

The heart grows older,  
A time to relapse;  
Another let down,  
Another turn around,  
In the silence of the splintering cold.

Blue-black streams all over a body,  
A time to forget this;  
Another self conflict,  
Another repeated inflict,  
In the silence of the frozen mirror.

A storm after that hissed with ache,  
A time never to forgive;  
Another polished twist,  
Another full clenched fist,  
In the silence of endless breaking.

Walking under a velvet sun,  
A time that's been lost;  
Another lesson learned,  
Another try not earned,  
In the silence of a burning sky.



## Polished Feelings

Christina Howard

You can mask your feeling in the clothes that you wear  
The shoes upon your feet, or the color of your hair  
But when you want to show yourself, or hide behind your fear  
You can paint your nails different colors to show the world you are real.

Bright colors show the sunshine;  
Dull colors conceal the pain  
Society may say that if you decorate all your fingers with a different shade  
You may have gone completely insane.

The older you get, the less color you paint  
It all begins when your childhood memories start to fade.  
The yellows become dark, the pinks turn to red  
Everything around you becomes dead

Summer to winter- the cycle continues  
All of a sudden, things become new...  
The new shades come out, the styles change  
The darks are now in- as the bright colors fade away.



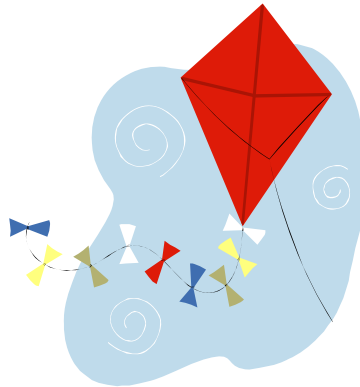
## Kite

Xiaomeng Li

She's a beautiful angel  
fettered by string.  
She's a vigorous bird  
blocked by wind.

I fly her to the pure blue sky  
She turns into a rainbow shuttles in the clouds.  
I let her go  
She hesitates.

One moment, she disappears  
Searching for the amplitude of heaven.  
One moment, she falls  
Leaving empty...



## Sunflower (Death of Van Gogh)

Xiaomeng Li

My blood was  
desperate fire  
in your empty pupil

red,  
blue,  
green,  
yellow,  
finally in Black

I perished in your wintry coffin,  
awkwardly posed  
on your ardent chest

1890.  
Summer died.  
My golden tears  
gilt  
the endless sea  
of wheat

## Serenity

Keshie L. Mansouri

Feeling serene on this peaceful lakefront,  
many people surround me but I am  
as calm as the breeze that billows  
through the sails before me.

Daydreams catapult me to far-away places.  
Skirts ruffle in the gentle wind nearby.  
I am a part of the sky and the air.  
Closing my eyes, I float free.

Like the tresses that escape my sunhat  
with fervor.  
Do I dare to let the tendrils escape?  
For a lady must follow  
the simple rules of decorum.

Dare I throw caution to the wind?  
Alas, I must not.  
But the gentle breeze blowing  
through my hair would surely feel  
like a lover's sweet kiss.



## Untitled

Rochelle Plummer

Peace, I embrace-

even when it runs and hides.

Patience, I cannot grasp-

even though it sits and waits.

Chance, I take-

but it always seems to slip away.

Memories, I preserve-

and yet they continually disappear.

Silence, I hear-

even when it shouts and screams.

Time, I keep-

even though it never stays.

Truth, I trust-

but it continually lies and deceives.

Why, I ask-

and yet no reply ever answers me.

## Avalon

Michelle Sheely

“If I were a paradox  
Would you dissect me?  
If I were unorthodox  
Would you protect me...?”

If I were winter  
Would you sublimate me?  
If I were cinder  
Would you infuriate me...?”

I tiredly ask  
With inner-demons soon unmasked  
And herein I find the task

Of listening to what can't be heard.

Don't wait, I'm craving your return.

I'm starting to submerge  
Beneath waves of uncertainty  
Where I can't resist the urge  
To keep falling disconcertedly

Stop fighting so inertly.

You know I find unparalleled sacrifice  
In the mind of honesty  
With an unwilling price  
And a tremendous sense of urgency

Please, explain my emergency.

But where will I find sanctity  
In the arms of this delivery  
That slowly finds a liberty  
In yearning for eternity.

Please tell me you understand sincerity.

And I wasn't lying when I said permanently.

So when my questions yield no answer  
And those eyes wander amiss  
While runs dry the well of banter  
Just remember this:

Henceforth I'll be trying or  
Henceforth I'll be dying.

## The Reason

Yewon Suh

You said you liked a cute hair,  
So I got my hair cut.  
You said you liked a skinny girl,  
So I lost weight for three months.  
You said you liked a girl to wear a skirt,  
So I didn't wear pants whenever I met you.

Now you are saying you are leaving me  
Because I have changed a lot.







I want you to hate me  
I want you to acknowledge every single  
wrong thing I have ever done to you  
show me a deviation in your consistency  
show me some emotion  
anger, pain, jealousy  
resentment  
show me you love me  
I mean  
    I thought you loved me



## No Reception

Jacquelyn Valencia

It's not easy thinking about it now, knowing that I let it last so long—the period of no reception. Those times when there was no break through of information, no getting the message across, let alone thinking something up to say in the first place. *Hi sweetie...I think you're great, I really do. You're something special. See you soon.*

Silence, heavy breathing, and the wind.

No thoughts to restore my mind.

No friends to pass the time.

You stood still on the East, facing West, over 100 miles in distance, while I cried from the West, eyes to the East, screaming your name just to let the wind carry it away, lifelessly. But we both know that on such days the wind only blows from East to West. And so, we both know now that you never got my message: *I fear I cant quite make it through the hard times. My grandfather's dying, could you just... hold my hand?*

Emptiness, slowly suffocating, and the snow.

Just a hat to warm my head.

Just hello, goodbye instead.

Though, we still found the time to get together—Fridays, Saturdays, and, now and then, on Sunday mornings. I'd tell you about my day and about my excitement for the future. You'd say: **“Okay,”** and leave it at that. I'd let you know how much you meant to me; how, when you were away all week I felt so alone and so empty inside. *My daughter says she's not my little baby anymore. Could you stop time? I need someone to talk to.* You'd look at me and smile, then begin to take off my clothes piece by piece, never saying a word.

Nakedness, rapidly numbing, and the dark.

Bordeaux and Merlot to fill the void.

Hopes of you, destroyed.

And then, it wasn't just my clothes you stripped away. You eschewed ideas by looking in the other direction: you wouldn't answer, you'd never remark. *I'm just curious—do you hear me?* I'd call to say “hello, I love you,” but the silence from the other end of the phone made me believe that you had died. *I want to know what you think, how you feel.*

Just like with the wind, my words echoed, echoed through the phone; they echoed through space, and echoed in my mind, but soon this echo of a thought became nonexistent, and soon, so, too, did I. *How will we get to know each other?*

Motionless, steadily fading, and the sky.

Cigarettes to burn the day away.

Smoke inhaled, to fill me on the inside.

Later, I came home for a while—one month, two days, and a few odd hours. We resided two blocks away from each other; our houses, merely separated by a few rows of conjoined cement blocks—nothing more. Two blocks away is a backyard. *Connect two cans by a long string: we'll talk all night.* Two blocks away was a battlefield. Two inches away seemed like two worlds away. *Reception is bad this time of year.* We sat at bars until inebriation, only to sit on kitchen floors in silence until sunrise.

Sharpness, intensely jabbing, and the pain.

A drop of poetry, a dose of fiction.

Sex in shades of gray to pass the time.

Quickly, it all spun out of control. I felt exiled, and my heart, in exile from my body. *My grandfather died, I called you, remember? Where were you—I really needed you.* Time passed, and I drove West, back to the small town I came from. “I think I’m leaving now, for good,” I said. **“Why? What’s wrong? Where are you going? We have a good thing together, you know, on the weekends. I can take you to the hospital to see your grandfather so you won’t have to feel so alone.”** *The funeral was a week ago.*

Silence, heavy breathing, and the wind.

Thoughts, restoring my mind.

Life, to live, to pass the time.

*I have to go now. See yah...around.*

**“I guess I’ll never understand.”**

Now to far out of range. No service. No reception.

## Falling into Place

Dora Vlassakis

I imagine her to be thirty two,  
bearing her first child.

The splendor of life shone through her eyes,  
as she decorated the front lawn.

She's become quite festive,  
seven months in.

Up the cobblestone path; the neighbor's children beg for candy.

The bumble bee giggles and stares.  
As the ghouls and goblins rub her belly.

The shirt she wears does nothing to hide it,  
orange only accentuates her waist.

She lifts her blouse to count the stretch marks; beauty imprinted on her skin.  
Two more months and counting.

Motherhood begins.

## Converse with a Mirror

Sami Winkler

Roll out the red carpet, dear girl  
for you deserve nothing less.  
Give yourself over to one who truly adorns you.  
Let someone else fall at your feet.  
Give someone else the chance to feel exposed.  
Change status so that you're the one  
to receive the glory.  
Sell out to no one's request.  
Dance to your own song and make it up  
as you go along.



## Medicated

Ashley Laman

think

.....think

.....nothing

I am cold, so cold

billowing waterfalls couldn't quench my thirst

as my heart races like a meth head's

and my skin crawls like a dope fiend's

think

.....think

.....nothing

it all becomes mass confusion

covering my body

and clutching my soul

empty thoughts take over me

think

.....think

.....nothing

deafening silence instantly strikes

inner peace seems to overcome

but at what cost was it attained

what price have I paid

think

.....think

.....nothing

held captive in my own body

I am left feeling bare

everything is numb

in a world of Lithium



## The Mad Ravings of a Contemporary Woman

Jessica Carnes

I am not like you and, thank your God, you are not like me. *I hate my white flesh!!!* Its screams disrupt the birds in my favorite tree that I gaze at when I sit on my balcony. As the birds banter escalates into a loud discordant cry for rescue, my skin's voice overwhelms me as it says "*ugly spoiled and boring!*" I commence to study my skin, covered with a thin, light-blond fur. Again it screams, this time yelling, "*privileged mofo, who provides your ticket to heaven?*" I have moles scattered all over my arms and I wear a slight tan, after all it is the season. All this time I assume I'm going to hell. So I berate you, skin, "*in more ways than not in this melting pot nation, you are my ticket to subjugation and ghetto condemnation*" White skin, a snowy complexion, a white sheen of complacency, "*I spit at you, and wait for the moment you earned in an urn for the point of decomposition you lived to achieve!*" Bah! Who has the patience for this? "*I deny you white skin because I can!!*"

Cultural blankness causes chronic discontent. A baby in this world ruled by infants has no chance in hell at growing up—be it boy or girl. I hate babies and I detest children and I ignore adolescents. As I observe the teenage monsters in the scholastic halls and in drunken brawls, I discern no difference between the two. To these foolish creatures America extends its greedy hand, and reassures them that the world, their world, offers endless opportunities to increase their wealth. I shudder at the shallow condition of the younger pool. Oh, I quiver with excitement, because I know that soon "*all of us will adopt a shade darker mentality, 'cause our lives will be at stake. To hell with our salvation!!!*" God, I met one day in a diner, over a dinner of broasted chicken. Eye to eye, Him and I conversed. He suspended me in a mood of inebriation, I believe, so if I share with a skeptical being, my story, it sounds incredulous and loses all of its credibility. But believers who worship the *white* man in a robe prepared me to say, "I was drunk in the Holy Spirit and experienced a life changing, religious epiphany."

I am dumb—founded on years and years of mental illness, *they* still call it. Oh! Cruel doctors, who judge my insanity through their sane lenses, how the heck do you know, *I said know*, the depths of my insanity when I only see you 15 minutes a month and I tell you what you *want to freakin' hear!* The white-starched truth happens to thrive on what you don't know. For instance, ambition, the lubricant of advancement, I totally lack. Unfortunately, unlike laughter, it's not infectious. I sit on my couch, like a lady bird sits on her nest to protect her eggs, and I protect my honor. No risk, no harm, no fatal action, I preserve my reputation.

Everything happens in cycles. If I enjoyed both man and woman sexually, I suppose I would experience bi-cycles. Hey you religious freaks celebrate Jesus' birth, and death and rebirth. If I read the Bible correctly, it's not the cycle of life you idiots should celebrate, but the cycle of living everyday, morning, noon and night for instance. What did Jesus accomplish day to day? Some of you posers in the church who faithfully go every Sunday and never read the bible. Does that excuse you from asking yourself several thousand times a day What Would Jesus Do? More importantly, *what the hell am I going to do?* 'Cause that's what continues the cycle. Nature's power looms over me like a skyscraper I look at from its base. Nature rules every other cycle that goes round and round like a caged mouse in a wheel. She kills a city with one swipe of dissatisfaction, and she remains unpredictable although us prehistoric Captain Dipshits created an entire career out of following Ms. Deceit Full. Ah! I find Nature terribly disagreeable, and unfortunately for her mercy I must ask.

I must shed my notorious ego. It houses hideous thoughts about myself, and about you. It cares only to the extent that it knows enough about your situation to tear you down and then bulldoze you into the earth. It terrifies me. It fusses with my sanity.



It demands attention and adoration. It feeds on Drama, and builds the set for a situation full of insults and recriminations. The match continues between God's will and my ego. The ball never is out of play. I swear I refuse them on a daily basis. The 'gifts' my ego procures for me. But it's persistent and conniving and very hungry; my strength deteriorates. I'm a waste of longitude and latitude. Just set me on fire and watch me burn.

**The End!**