To our dear readers,

I would like to take a moment to recount the Slate staff’s exploits of the 2010-2011 year. This was a very big year for Slate. We published three magazines, debuted our first ever color cover, and expanded our submissions pool to writers and artists beyond Trinity.

This spring, Slate joined up with the Big Read initiative that was taking place at Trinity. We hosted a publishing workshop at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and opened up submissions to Academy students. We are proud to publish work in this edition from three very talented Academy students, Sheldon Gaskell, Rayne McGlamery, and Jo-Mari Lopez.

Another new development this year was the partnership that Slate formed with the online newspaper 4Legs.org. We have our own page on their site, where we publish creative prompts, events and original works from the Trinity community and beyond.

We at Slate have so much to be proud of, and I am very grateful for the whole Slate staff. Each member brings something unique to the group, and it is these different qualities that enabled us to put out a stellar magazine. So without further ado, please read on and enjoy the Slate Literary Magazine’s spring 2011 edition.

-Kristen Droesch
Editor-in-Chief
The Slate Staff

Editor in Chief
Kristen Droesch

Fine Arts Editor
Brooke Grasberger

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Verity Sayles

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Poetry Editor
Erica Stisser, James Ciano

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Design Head
Kristina Smithy

4Legs Liaison
Eliza Miller

Faculty Advisor
Okey Ndibe
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Photograph
James Ciano
Children are coming down
from the tombs on the mountain.

Scabfooted and sure, they skitter
through the treeline, arrive laughing,
covered in sacred dust.

Here in the flats they dance,
circle, clap hands, clack bones.
Headresses of fleshless saints’ fingers,
necklaces of reliquaries -

Stranger, do not speak to them,
Though your dignity demands it
Though they have desecrated the silent places,
Brought riotous light to darkness -

Do not speak to them;
They bring us something better.
1. Your alarm went off at 8AM.
What did you see at 8:03?
2. You ate hot oatmeal, drank Earl Gray,
And what was on the table?
3. While brushing your teeth did you stare
At something, or someone?
4. Before you left at 9AM, you rested.
You sat with her and spoke of what, whom, where?
5. Arrange your answers, one through four,
Before you on the floor. Examine them.
Take your time. They look like
Failed photographs: ancient Polaroids
Faded to a dizzying, smoky yellow.
Now ignite your bedside lamp,
Crawl slowly into bed,
And close your eyes. Open them:
Now you want to see again.
But now that you’ve begun to try
You see so much you swear
This isn’t home. Toss out number one.
Go make some tea. Now turn,
Face that table from number two, and look:
Your heart jumps when you see
An overweight mouse
Who wants to know if you're okay.
Go brush your teeth, here's number three,
And let your eyes fall like snow
On the everything that's there:
A chaotic collage
Of somethings and someones
Colored with soft reds, cold blues,
And a yellow that you're dying to taste.
You feel good. The couch you rested on
Before you left today
Looks welcoming tonight.
It's time for number four again.
So rest. And talk with her again
About whatever you can.
And now feel yourself falling
Into something dark and deep:
A crevice concealed
By the snow that's now covered
The path that you thought would take you to sleep.
6.

You're still wearing clothes.
You're still in bed. The front door is not closed.
7.
Good morning. It's almost 8 again.
What would you like to remember today?
8.
A fruit fly falls gracefully down,
Lands on your chin, and you are awake:

Enjoy.
The train tracks from Raleigh to Smithfield curved slightly west of a straight line, sweeping through smaller towns and farmland along the route. Commuters filed in at every stop, with shiny shoes and square shoulders, out of place in the windy grass. The train stopped twice a day in Lendover, at a wooden lean-to with a bench inside, five minutes from the junior high school. And every morning, a yellow school bus left Lendover Junior High and wound through woods and gravel roads to the town of Andersville, where seven eleven-through-thirteen-year-olds waited, backpacked and tired-eyed, at the corner of Deer Run and Elm.

I lived at the top of Deer Run. It was a dead end street that extended about a mile uphill and intersected with Elm at the bottom. On nice days, I rode my bike down the hill to the bus stop. I had mastered the art of riding one-handed while cradling my trumpet case like a football under my left arm. I had also mastered the art of making my mother believe I wore a helmet, but hiding it inside our neighbor’s elephant topiary seconds after shutting the front door. I was the master of a lot of things. I was also the oldest Junior High kid from Andersville, the year that August came.

It was April and it was raining, the day he appeared at the bus stop, arms crossed over his chest. I was walking down the hill from my house. I pulled the drawstring of my hood as tight as possible in an attempt to keep my long curls dry, but it was raining too hard, and I could feel the wetness seeping. I carried my trumpet case in a plastic shopping bag. When August became visible through the torrent, I stopped short. A boy I’ve never seen before? Nobody with kids ever moved to Andersville. Actually, nobody ever really moved to Andersville at all—the population had been severely declining for the past twenty years, and the only people who ever moved in were retirees who wanted some peace before dying. But here was this new kid, waiting for the bus.

As I moved in closer, squelching through puddles in my mother’s yellow rain boots, I noticed something strange. The kid was wearing boy’s jeans, definitely,
but his butt curved out more than an ordinary boy's—and his waist curved in. I stood
next to him at the bus stop and snuck a glance at his chest. His arms were crossed,
but I could see hints of breasts pushed up from behind them. I quickly looked away.
Butch, I thought, suddenly nervous. I had done my share of Internet research on
lesbianism and dyke culture, but never having left the Andersville area except on road
trips with my mom, I had yet to actually encounter an out lesbian. I wasn't even an
out lesbian myself—I was as in as a lesbian could be.

I glanced at August again: deep-set eyes, dark eyebrows, stone jaw. Butch.
Stone butch, I mouthed, chewing on the hardened words. I saw his eyes shifting
towards me and I looked away, suddenly self-conscious about my sweatshirt hood,
pulled so tight around my head that there was hardly a circle for my face to poke
through. I shuffled forward through the mud, stepping closer to the street so I
wouldn't be tempted to stare. When the bus came, I scampered up the grimy steps
and slpped into an empty seat near the back, watching through the window as the
new kid stepped inside. I watched the line of kids outside disappear, feeling them
shift the weight of the bus as they entered. I felt someone sit down next to me. “Well,
someone’s weirdly competitive.” The voice was gravelly, either bronchitis-ridden or
cigarette-smoking. I looked over, and there was the new kid, gazing out the bus’s
front windshield and smiling.

“What do you mean?” I said, a little offended, even though I honestly had
no idea what he meant.

“I mean, you just had to be first on the bus, didn’t you? You were getting
ready to be first even before you saw the bus coming. I could tell,” he laughed, good-
natured.

I rolled my eyes. “No. Well, maybe. But it’s just because of the rain.” He
raised his eyebrows. “Seriously. Have you ever gotten a textbook so wet that the pages
tear when you try to turn them? No fun at all.”

name?” he asked.

“I’m Ali. What’s yours?”

“Leah Dalton,” he said. And after a long pause, “but I’m thinking of
changing it.”

“Yeah? To what?”

“I don’t know. I just don’t like Leah.” He looked right at me, then. I looked
right back. His eyes were soft brown, and opaque. More like hot chocolate than root
beer.

“Well, I’ll call you nothing until you decide. I’ll call you hey you.”

“Okay. And I’ll call you Ali.”

“Okay.” We shook hands. “So, Hey You. Did you just move here?”

“Yeah, just this past weekend, actually. My dad got a job in Smithfield.”

“Huh. So... why didn’t you move to Smithfield? I mean, not that Andersville
isn’t charming, but I promise you’ll get sick of it in a few days. Your family too.
Everybody does.” He laughed. “I’m not kidding. Even the old people that move here to die get sick of it before they die, and move somewhere else.” He raised one eyebrow. “You’re really, really in the middle of nowhere. We don’t even have a post office. You have to use the one in Lendover.”

“No post office?”

“Not even a post office.”

“God damn,” he said. “I can’t live without a post office.”

“Hey, shut up. Trust me. You’ll be begging your parents to move away soon.”

“I don’t know. I kind of like it here. It’s peaceful.”

“Where did you come from, anyway?”

He laughed and pointed out the bus window, extending his arm in front of my face. He smelled like faded nutmeg and cigarette smoke. I followed his gesture up towards the thick gray sky. “You can’t see it now,” he said. “But behind that cloud is a tiny planet that scientists think is a star. It’s called Villa Villekulla. That’s where I come from. I arrived Saturday by UFO.”

I looked back at his face, which was bathed in foggy light from the window. “Villa Villekulla. Isn’t that the name of the house in Pippi Longstocking?” I said. He bit his lip and I bent over laughing.

“I knew I’d heard that name somewhere. Okay, you broke my cover. I moved here from New York City. Manhattan.”

My eyes widened. “Why would anyone want to move here from New York City?”

“I told you, my dad got a job in Smithfield.”

“Jesus. You are going to be so bored here. Trust me. You’ll be sick of it in a day.”

*        *        *

But August never got sick of Andersville. The more time I spent with him, the more difficult it was to imagine him getting sick of anything. He was always actively listening, actively observing, actively having opinions: everything was hilarious and everything was devastating and fucked up and incredible. Once, we were walking in the woods and we saw a snake swallowing a frog. The frog was squealing and writhing in the snake’s mouth, clawing at the ground. Its back legs were visible kicking against the inside of the snake’s body, like a fetus making its first movements, in the moments before they were painfully crunched and dissolved and digested. August and I crouched on the opposite side of the dirt path and watched. When we stood up, he looked away and wiped a tear from his eye. All he said was, “holy shit.”

I never called him Leah. I systematically avoided calling him by name for two months (other than Hey You, which stuck). As soon as school got out for the summer, he asked me to call him August, and I did. He also asked me to use male pronouns when referring to him, and I did. Transgender, I thought, remembering
something I’d read on an LGBT Internet forum.

August had an older brother, Mark. Mark was a senior in high school. He wore baggy clothes and glasses and quickly made friends with Lendover High’s computer club, which, as it turned out, was full of huge stoners. August immediately caught on when Mark started coming home from school on the late bus, reeking of weed. Their mother never got close enough to Mark to smell it. “Hi honey! How was computer club?” she would say. He would smile dreamily back at her: “It was great, Mom. Thanks for asking.”

August got weed at a discounted price from his brother, in exchange for not ratting him out to their mom. He taught me how to roll a joint, and we sat in little two-person powwows in the woods behind my house, smoking and singing show tunes and laughing at the squirrels clinging upside-down to trees.

One night at the end of June, we walked deep into the woods that spread and grew like an ink stain surrounding Deer Run Drive. We were a little bit stoned and a little bit tired from the day we’d spent clearing my room of all my old clutter. It was just after sunset and the mosquitoes were leaving us alone. The sky was purple, then faded to glowing blue, then navy, then black, as we crunched through the twigs and leaves, heading west. After about an hour of hiking, we heard the trickle of some kind of slow-moving stream. August ran ahead, past a Japanese maple and through some low-hanging branches, and disappeared. I followed. When I emerged from the brush, August was standing on an old wooden bridge over a wider part of a brook, grinning in the moonlight. The bridge looked long forgotten, like the people who built it didn’t tell anybody they were building it, and then they moved away or died. It wasn’t the kind of place someone would find on purpose. I climbed up after him. We looked out at the water, both grinning like idiots. Without saying anything, he took off his clothes and jumped in, his right arm covering his breasts.

“Little fucker,” I said, kicking a leaf into the brook, “you’ll freeze!” I was more stoned than I’d thought.

“It’s June, asshole!” he shouted back up to me. After a moment, I doubled over laughing. “Are you gonna come in or just watch me like a pervert?” So I stripped down, also hiding my breasts behind crossed arms, and plunged into the softly burbling water.

*        *        *

We found our way back to the bridge the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that. Some night he slept over, and others, he went back to his house, where he was still “Leah.” He would always knock on my door in the mornings before I was awake. My mother would answer the door, avoiding names and pronouns for her own comfort, and let him inside. He’d thank her, always courteous, and climb the stairs to my room, where he would slip into bed with me, singing some ridiculous Joan Jett song or another until I woke, groaning and smacking him sleepily. I imagine
Mom shaking her head and laughing downstairs, cooking us breakfast. She probably thought we were in love. And we almost were.

Sometime mid-July, he stopped coming everyday. Just like that. At first, he said he wasn’t feeling well. Then, he stopped calling. I never called his house because of his creepy parents, and Andersville was a complete dead zone when it came to cell phone service, so when he didn’t call or show up, we were out of touch. He still showed up now and then, but when he did, he was distant and reserved. One cloudy afternoon, after a long silent walk to the bridge, I said, “do you want to talk about it?”

He looked me in the eye and smiled, lighting a cigarette. “Talk about what?”

* * *

I dreamed that I was walking to the train station in Lendover, except there were no streets: just one path, leading up through rows of deserted specialty shops and stores. The sky was gray and expansive. The path led straight to the top of a hill, and as I climbed higher, the ocean began to emerge on the other side, lapping up against the railroad tracks. Suddenly, I heard the shrill shriek of a nearby train, but I didn’t see one--just the soft tide of the ocean and the deserted beach. It shrieked again and my eyes shot open and I was in the dark in my bed in Andersville in August. The telephone was ringing. I breathed deeply and looked at the clock. 3:47 AM.

“Mm... hello?” I heard Mom’s groggy voice from her bedroom. “Okay,” she said, her voice suddenly clear and awake, “it’s okay, honey. Don’t worry about it. Of course. Just a minute.” She walked from her bedroom to mine and knocked on my door.

“Yeah? I’m awake.”
She came in and handed me the phone, mouthing the word August and shrugging sympathetically. She kissed me on the head and left, closing the door behind her.

“Hello?” I said, my voice still crackling with sleep.
“Ali,” he whispered. There was country music playing distantly in the background. He sounded like he was shivering.

I sat up in bed. “August? Are you okay? Where are you?”
“Um...” I heard him move the phone away from his face and take a deep, shuddering breath. “I’m in Raleigh.”

“You’re in Raleigh? What are you doing there? Are you okay?”
“Shh, Ali. Ali. I’m in... a friend’s apartment.”
“What friend? Whose apartment? Are you okay?”
“A friend from New York. He... he just moved here. To Raleigh. I took the train. Shh. Ali. I just--” He stopped to breathe again. “We were doing lines, and--”

“Doing lines. What do you mean? Doing lines of what?”
“Cocaine. Ali. Ali. Listen. He did a lot more than me, and then he...he sort of passed out and started shaking and... now he’s not waking up.” There was a long silence. The country song ended and a radio announcer’s voice came on in the
distance. “And I don’t know what to do.”

“Okay,” I tried to sound soothing, but my voice was shaking too. “August, it’s gonna be all right. I think you should call the police, okay? Call 9-1-1.”

“But my parents...”

“Don’t think about your parents, August. Go call 9-1-1, okay?”

“Okay. Okay.”

“I love you.”

“He thought I was eighteen, Ali.” He lowered his voice even more. “The whole time I knew him. Even in New York.” I didn’t know what to say. “But I’m only fourteen.” He sniffed three times quickly, and shuddered. “This is so fucked up,” he said, and hung up the phone.

I sat by the window, dipping in and out of sleep, until dawn.

August told me later that it wasn’t the first time he’d visited his friend in Raleigh. He’d been going every few days since the middle of July, taking that train out of Lendover and getting high and getting fucked and telling his parents he was at my house.

Todd was a 21-year-old man who he’d been sleeping with in New York until, one night, August’s mother followed August out of their apartment. She watched from a cab as he entered an unfamiliar building and then came out with his breasts bound, wearing a men’s plaid shirt and holding hands with a burly, bearded man. She followed as they made their way to a gay bar in the Village. Early the next morning, when August snuck back in, exhausted and coming down from a really strange high, she was sitting at the kitchen table, waiting.

Two weeks later, the family was on a plane, dragging their life to the most remote location his mother could come up with: Andersville, North Carolina. Dead zone. No drugs, no queers, no post office—nothing to do but wander in the woods.

August laughed and tapped his cigarette on the railing of the bridge. The ashes scattered in the wind and never touched the brook. “But I always find a way to do the opposite of what they want me to do,” he said.

Todd didn’t die when he OD’d, but he came close. The ambulance got there just in time.

*        *        *

The Daltons’ house was also on a hill. Deer Run Drive dipped and ended when it reached Elm street, and Elm Street stretched all the way to the end Andersville, then looped around and became Hemlock Place, which swelled up into the hill where August lived. The house was huge and white, with a porch that wrapped around three out of four of its sides, and no shutters on the windows. I never went inside, but I met him there on the days we rode our bikes to the bridge.

One Wednesday night, we lay side by side at the edge of the brook, sharing a bag of chips. Our bikes leaned against the Japanese maple. The first chilling hint of fall was in the air. “Ali,” he said. “How would you feel about running away?”

“What, just leaving?” I said sleepily. “Where would we go?”
I felt his shoulder shrug against mine. “Argentina.”
I gave it some thought. “Okay. They have alpaca farms there.”
“Exactly,” he said. “That’s what I need in my life. An alpaca farm. We could
build a little farm house and we wouldn’t need to have other jobs, because we could
eat the alpaca cheese and make clothes from their wool.”
“Sounds good to me,” I said, and dropped a potato chip into my mouth.
A cloud rolled over the moon and then dissolved into the still-darkening
sky. Something fluttered behind us—maybe a bat, or an owl.
He looked at me. “My parents are sending me to boarding school in
They told me this morning.”
“Oh my god.”
“I’m leaving Saturday.”
“Oh my god. Fuck.” He closed his eyes and his face fell into a tiny smile.
“I’m trying to give up on being upset about this kind of thing,” he said.
“You know? Like, none of it’s in my control, so I may as well accept that and just go
along for the ride. As much as I can.” The breeze picked up, rustled our bag of chips,
and faded. I tilted my head back and looked up into the dark trees, shifting and
ghosting like shadows of black dragons.
And then he was gone.

*        *        *

September came. I rode my bike past his house sometimes, wondering what
his room looked like, if his parents had turned it into a storage closet. If his mother
was baking a pie, if his father was shining his shoes, if his brother was sitting in the
basement, stoned out of his mind and crying, because this was what his life had
become.

I started high school and determined that it was just like middle school but
bigger. Bigger building, bigger textbooks, bigger assholes. I turned fourteen, did all
my homework, and earned mostly A’s.

He called me drunk on his third night of school, laughing and rambling
incoherently. There were hushed female voices giggling in the background. Of course
he already found the kids with the booze. I called him back the next morning and he
didn’t want to talk. He called again a week later at three in the morning. He couldn’t
sleep. He didn’t know why, he just couldn’t. He said he felt like he was going crazy. I
told him he wasn’t going crazy. I told him to just close his eyes.

October passed without a word from August. November and December
stumbled by, drunk with holidays and family from out of state. It snowed on Christmas
and didn’t stop until New Years—more snow than we had gotten in decades. Then, it
was January. I was doing my Earth Science homework when the telephone rang.

I heard Mom lift the phone from its cradle downstairs, and I continued
reading about tectonic plates. We can’t feel it, but Earth’s tectonic plates are constantly
moving beneath us, undetectably slowly. All the world’s land used to be part of the
same mass—a supercontinent called Pangea.

Minutes later, Mom was standing in my doorway. Her arms were crossed and her eyes were red and downturned. “I don’t know how to tell you this,” she said. Over millions of years, the tectonic plates have scraped and shifted against each other, splitting Pangea into separate landmasses, which eventually reached their current places on Earth.

It had been August’s mother on the phone. Late in the night, August had filled his backpack with stones and jumped off the dock into the pond on his school’s campus. They would be burying him in their family plot in upstate New York. There would be a small memorial service in Saratoga where his extended family could attend.

That night, I ate my mother’s homemade mac and cheese, then vomited my guts out. She offered to call me in sick at school the next day, but I had an Earth Science test to take. I ended up acing it.

The landmasses won’t stay put for long. In fact, they never stay put at all—they will be heavily dragged along Earth’s surface until the planet no longer exists, and every moment, our continents and islands are slightly, imperceptibly changed.

I rode my bike to the bridge. The snow had melted and the leaves of the Japanese maple, fiery red from autumn, were plastered to the wood and scattered along the edges of the brook. I sat on the bridge, cradling my knees, for hours. The water babbled smoothly beneath me. I thought of August, sitting on the wood, flicking his cigarette against the rail, and the ashes disappearing into the sky. I waited to find something left over from him—a cigarette butt on the bridge, a footprint, a potato chip bag washing ashore. But there was nothing. Just the old rustling and fluttering of the long-forgotten woods.

In April, my mother planted white peonies in our yard. I sat on the front steps and watched her as she dug and patted soil. It was the first warm day. My bare feet absorbed the sunlight from the concrete, and I spread my toes slowly over the warm roughness. Mom was wearing an old lavender sunbonnet that she’d had as long as I could remember. It was ratty and sweat-stained from years of gardening. She looked up at me, shielding her eyes from the sun. “God, I can’t believe this weather. Remember how last year it rained all April long?”

I smiled. “Vaguely.”

Andersville remained the same, as far as I was concerned. I still rode my bike one-handed down the hill to the bus stop, except when it rained. I still cradled that trumpet like a baby. Deer Run still intersected with Elm, which became Hemlock, which became a hill with an old white house on top. But there were small changes, almost imperceptible ones, that proved that time was passing. Mom’s peonies bloomed. A street sign was knocked over. Out in the woods, birds moved seeds, dirt banks eroded from running water, the Japanese maple grew new leaves. The tectonic plates shifted and the land changed shape, so slowly that no one could tell. Houses were drifting and trees were gliding. Maybe, in a hundred million years, if the world still existed, the train tracks in Lendover would bend too far with the strain of the stirring
earth beneath them, and snap.

James Gilland
I have a theory that a sprinkle of cheese will improve any recipe.
I have a theory that the egocentric stage—seeing the world in relation to you—lasts forever.
I have a theory that it is not embarrassing to buy a pair of Sketcher's shape-ups. If you say you are doing it to improve your hiking skills.

I have a theory that the more e-mails you send out the less likely you are to receive quick responses.
I have a theory that the more important e-mails you are expecting, the more spam you'll get instead.
I have a theory that no one can be sad while eating a snackpak of pudding. There is something about that moment of chocolate vanilla swirl that makes a smile necessity.

I have a theory that thinking of theories is a person's greatest defense, yet no matter how much a person theorizes a the world will never make sense.

I have a theory that there is a galaxy with a solar system just like ours.
I have a theory that in that solar system is a planet just like earth.
I have a theory that on that planet there are aliens that look just like people, Only they are far more evolved and thus have super-human abilities.

I have a theory that a mountain is just as influential as the media.
I have a theory that guilt only exists to remind us that perfection is impossible.
I have a theory that cats are as smart as humans but they choose to stay pets Because they know that then we'll take care of them. Manipulative bitches.
I have a theory that thinking of theories is a person’s greatest defense, yet no matter how much a person theorizes a the world will never make sense.

I have a theory that as self-constructed as love is, it is equally real.
I have a theory that one day me and Spiderman will meet and make beautiful Spiderbabies.
I have a theory that the door to happiness has at least five locks,
And money, sex, chocolate, and feeling like you belong are four of the keys.

I have a theory that friendship is fleeting until both parties consciously decide it isn’t.
I have a theory that one day leopard seals will realize how scary they are and take over the world.
I have a theory that you should not dress how you feel.
You should dress how you want to feel.

I have a theory that thinking of theories is a person’s greatest defense, yet no matter how much a person theorizes a the world will never make sense.
I am yellow, how yellow am I
The yellow in my veins, the yellow in my eyes
I must be going blind, I saw a yellow sun
And thought an orange was a yellow one

This yellow name, it came with my birth
My parents believed yellow came in first
Wished me off to school in a yellow school bus
Called a yellow cab, and there it was

I’m the yellow fellow who goes below
The yellow umbrella so no one knows
How yellow this fellow must feel
Slips on a yellow banana peel

Can’t follow the yellow lines at night
I even slow down on a yellow light
You can see me posted in the yellow pages
A yellow ass for sale on a daily basis

The yellow in the leaves I’ve never seen
The seasons change in a yellow submarine
I live under a rock, my yellow home Might as well die under a yellow tombstone

So yellow so yellow so yellow am I
At the end of the day, you see a yellow sky
Reflect the true yellow of my skin
I am yellow, and that is a sin
“Stop Faiz please!” Rahat can hear the tears in her voice, feel the pressure building behind her eyes, and she thinks her brother must really be the worst human being in the whole world. She knows she can’t reach him before he runs into the waves, knows it isn’t even that necessary that she does (he’s too scared to go in further than his waist), and can feel how ridiculous she is with every sinking of her embroidered silk slippers into the sand, in every time she trips over her too-long skirt. But she looks at him, grinning at her with the mango orange smeared all over his mouth and chin, his shirt intentionally inside out, and feels that she has to make him listen to her again.

He’s gone far enough that the waves break against his chest as she stops even in her absolute rage to place her slippers carefully beyond the tide line, before she walks slowly into the water, feeling the three layers of silk wrapped around her transform suddenly into a hundredweight, pulling her down. She remembers that her mother, and grandmother, are watching her, coming towards them slowly, but taking their time as they discuss her distressing lack of discipline. She doesn’t care, if she just shakes Faiz enough, maybe dunk him once in the surf, he’ll respect her again. He’s laughing at her as she grabs him hard around the shoulders, then moves both hands to the top of his head and jumps up so her weight pushes him under the water. She’s miscalculated, of course though, forgotten that he’s passed the tipping point, and he pulls her down with him.

He lets go, and she retreats for a moment into the peace around her. Suddenly she feels something slam into her, her body convulses, somersaults. She makes herself go limp, sure that this is just a wave that broke at just the wrong time, bat her into a rollercoaster that will stop. Her mind goes blank, and she seeks the empty floating place in her mind that always comes after the dark orange spots behind her eyelids have begun to flicker, and her throat burns just a little. Something’s wrong, though. It feels as though there are worms under her skin, everything itches and argh, she needs to tear out this scratch so badly. In the next
instant it is as though a tarp, weighed down by rainwater, has fallen and shrouded her. The whole narrow world is the same hazy consistency she remembers from the aftermath of the eye drops her doctor would use on her sometimes, when she'd have to hold her mother's hand all the way to their car because everything looked so wrong.

She slides against the heavy suffocating walls around her and realizes she's been trying to raise an arm. She pays attention this time, and concentrates, and all that happens is that she feels the slimy scratchy slide against her front again, while part of her jerks violently to the other side. It hits something sharp. She stops trying to move, and wonders if dying is always so bland when one is close to it. There is no tensed muscle, no strings pulled tight, and no desperate pressure in her skull. Everything feels all right, she's hungry, but not starving. And then she begins to feel a frenzy building in her body. Her mouth yaws open, convulsing desperately around the water she gulps. It doesn't help, however. Her body starts to thrash madly from side to side as she tries to escape. She knows now she needs oxygen, and doesn't understand why the water didn't give her that. Anyway she can't think now, and can't see, but hears strangely drawing sounds from the direction of her wounded side. She wants to go towards them, it's important, but her body is this unwieldy, flopping thing. She moves her head, and manages only to pivot a little on the spot. She tells herself to kick, but feels only a useless convulsive flop. Keeping her head steady, she pushes halfheartedly to one side, and finds herself propelled surprisingly strongly towards the sound. What felt like much of her body had moved smoothly, sharply against the water. It didn't seem like she had a tail, for her body moved far too coherently, but she'd felt a thin, fluttering thing that ran most of the length of her belly move as though it were separate from the bulk of her.

She'd found a gap in the pulsing walls that trapped her, and outside their confines was bombarded by shrill sound that had somehow a physical quality to it. There were two patches of particular harshness right on top of her! This overrode even the frantic need for oxygen that still drove her. She sawed her not-tail wildly, trying to get away, but felt the same heavy draping walls as before clamp around her. She goes up with it, and as she passes the boundary into leaching dryness her mouth gasps again. She can feel the relief, feel her body first convulse and then quiet as oxygen brings feeling to numbness. Now things really feel wrong, though. The wet weight she was scooped up in shields her from the horribly dry outsideness for the most part, but whoever's holding her is clearly not very steady. She feels the material slipping, and burrows her head desperately into it. The chinks let in a gut-wrenching, dessicating heat that feels as though all the fluid in her body is being siphoned out. The thing holding her, an outline of frenziedly echoed blips, emits a terribly wrong sound. She can't help the static convulsion that goes through her in response, feels the shock pass through the barrier into the not entirely unfamiliar thing. She falls, still trussed up in the confining bundle, still held by the felled
being, into the welcoming water. As she senses the world under water, she realizes her mother holds her. Her brother and grandmother must be there also! She remembers how much her family has always wanted a goldfish-so gracefully golden-and pictures herself instead in the beloved lily pond in their garden. Of course she has no idea what exactly she looks like, but her body moved so fluidly though the water! Her cousins would bring her bread every morning, and enraptured watch her glide. Her mother would sit with fingers dangling into the water and speak as always of just the right rug to pull her living room together. She feels suddenly her body flung through the water as her cocoon is shaken out. The desperate signals she is emitting take now longer and longer to echo back to her, and finally she cannot hear a response at all.
I envision your birth to be beautiful.  
Quick and painless. Your childhood,  
Nothing short of a swing set. A story,  
Just before goodnight son I love you.  
A smile smattered and smirking.  
You will be more all star than your converse,  
The souls of your shoes will take you to  
Where dreams are made of and back again.  
Worries will be which girls hand to hold on the  
Lunch line. You will have pockets full of futures  
sleeves stuffed with tricks. Yes. You will be younger then.  
Creative and curious,  
I imagine the day will come when you ask me,  
Dad, What does it mean to be a man?  
And son  
Before age or adolescence  
Or authority tries to define  
It for you, before anyone  
Ever tells you otherwise  
Please here it from me. Your father.  
A man. Who has lived half his life  
Not even knowing the answer.  
Who hides himself inside headphones  
And hoodies. I haven’t blinked in 18 years.  
18 years and I am still learning to love myself  
still trying to find myself. I don’t know who I am.  
I have notebooks that speak louder than I can.  
Regret? No I’m not regretful.
Regret is only something humans can feel.
But Son,
Learn from my mistakes,
No matter what anyone says.
There is nothing more manly than being yourself.
You mustn't muster up muscle to feel like a man.
Strength is not measured in how much weight your arms can weigh
But in how much weight your words can weigh. You do not
Have to flex biceps, flex facial muscles every time you express
Yourself. Bench press the emotion out of your heart, off of your chest
Even if it means yanking the fucking tears out of your eyes, because don't ever
Be afraid to let yourself cry. Son emotion is manly. Expression is manly. Beauty is
manly. You asked me what it means to be a man, but do not ask me to ever call you
one because no name, no word, no 3 letters could ever contain everything that you
will be.
I envision you under the covers.
Ready for bedtime story. No,
Dad you choose this time. But first
Tell me what it’s about. Oh well
This Story; this one’s about a
Father who might one day die
Knowing he spoke truth
Rachel Carey
To be stricken,
So that your body cannot move
But without your obsession in its design.
Water seeping into your foundation
Softening your whole earth

Stricken with something,
So sinister yet so indulgent,
Forcing you to discover its truth
Hidden behind a million shrouds

Burning in your chest,
Swimming in your head,
Stewing in your soul,
A recipe so wonderful and selfish
You’d only cook it once…
Maybe twice.

Wrapping you in lavender furs,
As exotic as an avalanche
And equally stirring.

You can feel it’s powers
tickling through your veins,
whispering in your ear,
begging you to bask in it’s brilliant light.

Crashing you down to God,
Ripping your limbs into limp strings
Blessing your naivety with misery
Only pieces of a tiny apple.
And finally, a murmuring shadow
In death or what-have-you.
The echoing love and eternity
I take the bus home each day from work, where concrete parking lots scatter the city like the still-brown fields back in my little town. Today at the usual time, I am freed from the confines of the office and its stagnant air moving like a characterless and indifferent song in and out of the vents, and thrust into the blue skies of a Spring afternoon, sunlight outlining high structures in gold, and the warm and playful wind meandering around buildings. The bus stop is ancient and worn: a sun-baked bench a faded green, and a dull aluminum sign sticking up, a pillar of rust along the busy city street and long shaded alleyways in between. It reminds me of the approach of summer and its pleasures, when I was young and used to come to the big city on a sunny day to frolic among the little lonely oriental shops lining the street. People shuffled by, some rich with suits and prosperous strides, some poor and out wearing rags, and little ugly pigeons scuffled about their quick-paced feet.

There are pigeons all over the place in this city, quick young ones flocking down upon women with cereal boxes, weathered old ones strutting along the sidewalk picking at garbage. As I go to sit on the bench, a little black one with shallow eyes waddles up to me and pokes its pale beak around the base of the rusted iron legs. I watch it pecking at the grime and gum, trying to make a meal; I would give it some bread if I had any, the poor ignorant thing.

The bus pulls up with its deep rumbling engine, and the bird takes flight, its tattered wings opening to sunlight, specks of color radiating out like a prism.

The bus isn’t too crowded today: a couple holding hands, an old woman reading a book, a few businessmen switching from talking on their phones to looking out the window. I take my seat along with the others coming on. A minority is sitting on the seat to the right of me. His large hands are clasped together out in front of him, his back bent slightly, his head turned, facing the window. I catch a glimpse of his thirsty brown eyes, parched by poverty, as he takes a look around the bus, and then turns back to scanning the street, the people walking by, buildings, and vehicles moving with the bus toward the highway. Dreadlocks fall about his neck and back,
brown, thick, and snake-like. On top of them, he wears a yellow and red beanie hat streaked with dirt stains and faded like a t-shirt worn too long.

I rarely speak on the bus besides the soft “thank you” to the nice black driver who’s on sometimes (and I make sure to give him an extra tip knowing that he will need it), but there was something about this poor man, the content look of him sitting there in rags and watching the city disappear, that peaked my curiosity.

“Hello! May I ask you a question? Where are you off to?” I ask.

The man turns and looks me straight in the eyes with a wide wonder. He looks almost like a beggar with his lips quivering slightly.

“Going home,” he says and licks his lips. He moves his hands over his rough, green overcoat as if making an attempt to wipe away sweat. His fingers are long and his knuckles are large, wrinkled, and cracked in places. He looks like a worker, one of those poor pot-smoking field boys who travel place to place for paychecks.

“Me too,” I say. “What brings you to the city?”

He turns back toward the window.

“Family.”

If only there was a family, the poor humble beggar. Or maybe he does have a little boy with a girlfriend somewhere. It seems like he would. Out the window, I watch the city slowly fade into suburbia, counting the cars passing slowly by: one, two, a tractor trailer truck and its large clock-like wheels spinning, keeping time to the dark pavement of the highway.

“It looks winter’s not done with yet. Hard times are coming still,” he says and scratches his rough, unshaven chin with a hand.

“Really? Feels like summer’s here already,” I say. The sun is coming through the window now. Its presence is warm on my neck, and the sky is blue, and the buds are just beginning to pop out red and beautifully in the sparse trees along the highway.

“Not yet. You may think it’s gone and days are warm by green grass and sunshine, but I know otherwise. I can feel cold still in my veins; wind still sharp on my back. Summer’s coming, but winter’s not gone yet.” He shakes his head and lets his big brown hands hang between his legs.

“That’s hard to believe,” I say.

“Yeah, it is, but most of us know it. Summer doesn’t come easy.”

I give this a little chuckle and nod my head. “You’re right about that.” Really I know that this man has spent too many days on the streets and has finally cracked.

The rest of the ride, he’s quiet and looking out the window at the tree-line flashing by. He looks a lot like a worker as the sun falls against his skin, the way the men and women look in summer, hoeing the fields with course hands and strong arms, sweat on their brows, sun beating down on them, burning them up. Still,
I wonder where he’s going, where he’ll live if he gets the job, how he’ll be able to live paycheck to paycheck. I look out the window and watch the fields rolling by.

The bus stops at a small station in the town next to mine to let us all off. We leave, the businessmen with their phones, the couples, hand in hand, the old woman cradling her book.

“After you,” I say to the man as we go to exit. He looks at me with the same wonder and shakes his head.

“No, after you. You were first.”

“I’ve been first many times off this bus. Go ahead! All the struggles you’ve faced, this is the least I can do.”

The poor man narrows his eyes and wrinkles his forehead, and hurries off the bus without a word, making his way down the sidewalk. I look on, filled with sadness, and go to my parked car. If only he knew how hard a life he lived.

As I drive home, I listen to the radio. They talk about the beautiful weather, the feeling of summer in the air, but Friday, they say it’s going to snow
A Found Poem

The Students of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

This found poem was created by a group of students at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts this spring when Slate visited the campus to run a publishing workshop. Each student picked a line from the piece they brought to work one, and this is the charming result.

show emotion
scars you
screamed from the top of your lungs
she sighed, more hopeless now
during the night
you sleep in a bed with no permanent lover
time goes by
santa claus in summer
making stories believable
worlds reconfigure
but not everyone notices it
i’m just a ghost
blue and bruised
there’s no luck for cindy
isolated from the world
magical world
either like a princess or hero
When I was seven years old I asked my father if I could start cleaning the bathroom. After making sure I didn’t have a fever, he said, “absolutely,” and taught me the basics of bathroom cleaning. I have been cleaning the bathroom every other week for eleven years now, in addition to setting and clearing the table, washing the dishes, gathering the garbage from each room on Tuesday evenings, and vacuuming. By now I know which chemicals are the best for removing mildew and that Windex and paper towels are a far better method of getting dust out of the grooves in the toilet because wet rags simply spread it. I have an exact procedure that I follow when clearing the dishes each night; put all dish-washer safe plates, bowls, and silverware in their proper racks, rinse the remaining dishes in the sink, soap them up, rinse again, place them in the drying rack, dry any extras. I have been up to my elbows in Dawn soapsuds and I have nearly sprained my wrist scrubbing dried marinara sauce off of pots.

If an outsider were to look into my kitchen window on a typical weeknight they would think I am an aspiring housewife. I do not, however, want to retreat to the kitchen immediately after dinner to clean up the mess I made as so many women do. I want to linger at the dinner table, take my children out of their seats and let them run around the house with that night’s pasta sauce still smeared on their cheeks. I want to make building-block worlds with my children and watch them collapse from my perch on the rug and not bother to take note that one has fallen under the couch and should be moved before the next time I vacuum. I want to be a mother who creates and experiences life, not a mother who cleans it up.

I want to bring my children to the park after bedtime and let them leap across plastic bridges and down dirty slides because they weren’t able to go with their friends after school. I want to let my daughter act as my hair stylist and not hurriedly brush out the loops and braids she has haphazardly woven into my head. And when my children are older, and crying in their rooms because they
feel like they have run out of places to turn to, I won’t send them to a psychiatrist with a worn-down couch with too soft tissues because I don’t have enough time to balance their problems with my work. I will sit them on my bed and explain to them that there are places they have yet to know, and that I will stumble along in the dark with them.

And through all of this I will be doing my best to stay out of the kitchen sink. I will avoid getting lost in soapy water like so many before me have.
CHANGE OF HEART

Lorenzo Sewanan

I met a man, who had his heart removed;
In long hours of blink-less surgery,
He had dreamt.

He ran, Central Park in the afternoon, winding through trees and girls tanning under sun,

(Surgeons made a hole where once there’d been a man’s chest. )
Swam the lake; he was a child again, bright leaves and dark water clouding his vision,

(They installed a living heart from the dead, kept under ice. )
Waltzed his wife, ballroom shows flashing, a champion’s smooth steps and turns reappearing,

(Connected intricate vessels to the heart, like wiring up a car battery.)
Tasted smooth red wine, gently draining from the side of the glass without leaving a drop.

(They pumped him full of electricity and waited. )
Lights came on. And he felt it beating strong once again.

I met a man, who has his heart replaced;
He now dreams with eyes open,
Looking and living for them in the world.
INSECURITIES...
Mary Ellen Molski

does he like me am i good fast blonde strong funny smart rich skilled practiced polished smooth chic lovely radiant lovely perky chill enough did i brush my teeth will she see my sweat stains did i attach the copy of my recommendation to the email to the office of the chancellor what if i fall what if i fail did i sign my name did i dot every i what did he say do they know im available on weekends or nights or mornings or thursday afternoons on call if i stutter what if i forget the words what if i forget my place what if i say the wrong thing what if i use the wrong name fork foot gesture font footnote citation pagination spelling phrase what if im lying what if she hates me what if they think im a jerk how will i know if i did it right said the right thing used the right name fork foot gesture font footnote citation pagination spelling phrase handshake ill only wait ten minutes ill check my email one more time one more time one more time maybe they spelled it wrong maybe theres too many candidates too few references maybe they lied or told the truth or werent home or dont care and wont return their call even if maybe theyre just waiting for approval what if they dont approve of me what if the other ones are better faster blonder stronger funnier smarter richer skilled practiced polished debonair smooth chic lovely radiant perky chill what if this is all after all this time what if i still dont what to do what do i do how do you do
PAINT TO THE MUSIC
Victoria Trentacoste
Kristen Droesch

Sandra let her body sway gently with the rhythm of the bus. She crossed her left leg over her right and balanced her book against her knee. She was getting a little nauseous as she tried to focus on the adventure of Hercule Poirot on his train returning from Syria. It had been a welcome distraction from the screaming children in the row behind her, and the parents that had given up on trying to control their demon spawn. The nausea creeping up on her forced her to return the novel to her purse and stare out the window.

The Atlantic Ocean spread out beyond the bus as it sped down the coast to Hyannis Port. Sandra hoped the water would be warm enough for swimming; Penelope had said that it should be, by the late August weekend that they had chosen to vacation in the Cape. They were taking over the Cape Cod beach house belonging to the family of Penelope’s fiancée, Chris. No, not just Chris, Sandra corrected herself. Christopher Anthony Nicholas Stanhope IV. Penelope reeled in that name, and she couldn’t wait to get married and be able to become Mrs. Christopher Stanhope, rather than Penelope Weizenberger.

The group of three visiting couples had been briefed multiple times by Penelope about how they were to behave while on this particular vacation. The Stanhopes went as far back on the Cape as the Kennedys, Penelope was quick to remind them again and again, and Christopher’s family had a reputation to uphold. The house was to be treated with respect, everyone was expected to be on their best behavior while in town, and (she stared especially hard at Sandra when she said this) it would be in incredibly poor taste to make Chappaquiddick jokes if they decided to spend a day there. She rolled her eyes at the memory of Penelope lecturing them in the kitchen of Sandra’s Brooklyn apartment while the various couples sat around the dinner table; Sandra & Matthew, Madeline & Steve, and Vanessa & Abigail. Where had she gone, the Penelope of their early friendship? The old Penny (can’t call her that any more; it’s not posh enough) was wild and beautiful. This new person was more tightly wound than an alarm clock.
They used to get up in the middle of the night to drive into the country on a whim and camp out all weekend. Where was the Penelope who had gone cliff diving (without an instructor) when they were 21, and told her mother to screw off when they were 23 as she had grown tired of her mother’s endless nagging to “do something” with her life? Where was the Penelope who had never missed a night of Vanessa’s sapphic-themed poetry while Abigail accompanied her girlfriend on the mandolin?

Sandra knew that some wicked little part of Penelope had become ashamed of the fact that she had two lesbian friends, and Sandra couldn’t help but wonder if Vanessa and Abigail knew it too. It was hard to miss Penelope’s uncomfortable squirming whenever Vanessa and Abigail kissed in public, or held hands when they were all walking together.

It used to be that Penelope was there for every insane scheme Sandra and their friends could come up with. She never missed a birthday or performance. She was at every important date in their lives and she was always supportive of her friends’ decisions.

Sandra smiled as she remembered the night they had all gathered up on the roof of Madeline’s apartment to celebrate her new job. They had spread out a blanket to protect their legs from the tar roof, warmed from the stored warmth of the day, and lounged against tasseled cushions, drinking cheap champagne.

Over an hour in, Penelope had risen to her feet, champagne in hand, and somehow managed to balance on the balls of her feet. She raised her glass and said, “To us! May we always be so young, so wild, and so beautiful!” Penelope laughed, swaying on her toes, and threw back the rest of her drink in one gulp.

The others roared with laughter, both pleased and amused by her ridiculous wish.

But now Penelope didn’t have time for “all that”, as she termed it. She was too busy buying dated linen suits, toadying up to Christopher’s mother, and throwing formal dinner parties. All she needed was a pillbox hat and some white gloves and she could have been a body double for Jackie O.

Sandra sighed. Her eyes drifted across the aisle to where her boyfriend Matthew sat with their bags. The crowded bus and limited seating had forced them to separate, but it didn’t bother them. Matt had wanted to rest anyway. He was slumped against the window, arms crossed limply across his chest. She smiled softly and admired his profile, lit from behind by the bright August sunlight. He was so beautiful. Sandra’s smile turned down slightly as she remembered the talk they had had the night before, as they were packing for their trip.

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Matthew sat on the bed and watched Sandra pace back and forth across their bedroom. The drawers on her side of the dresser were hanging open and Sandra was gesturing with a soft blue scarf as she rambled. Her feelings were more than a little mixed about vacationing with Penelope and Christopher Anthony
Nicholas Stanhope IV.

At some point in the last few months, Penelope had gotten it into her head that it was wrong to live with someone you weren’t married to.

Never mind that Penelope was sleeping with Christopher, and had been for almost two years. No, it was living together “without the benefit of marriage”, as she put it, that was wrong. She had developed a selective moral code. Sandra could see it in her eyes every time Penelope and Christopher came over for dinner. The other woman’s eyes would wander around the apartment, taking in all the markers of a shared life; the photos on the walls, male and female toiletries in the bathroom, the bedroom where two people clearly slept every night. Penelope judged it all in a way she never had before. Maybe it was something about being able to prove that two people shared such intimacy before being married. Even since she had become engaged, Penelope seemed to want to hide the fact that she wasn’t a virgin. Perhaps she was worried that if anyone from his side found out that she wasn’t a virgin, they would make him call it off. Who thought like that? Sandra rambled off all this, and more.

“Honey, she’s been your friend for years. This is what she wants to do. It’s clearly making her happy,” Matthew quickly held up a hand to stop her protestations of the sincerity of Penelope’s happiness. “And if she’s happy, than you just need to get on board and keep your opinions to yourself. I did the same thing with my sister’s husband. I think the guy’s an idiot, but he’s good to her, and she loves him, so I keep my mouth shut. And you’ve got to do the same. Chris isn’t such a bad guy.”

Sandra slowed her movements and stared at her lover, a slow smile growing on her lips. “You’re right. I’ll just have to learn to put up with it. But I don’t like it,” she added quickly.

Matthew smiled gently, in that way that showed her how well he knew her. “I know.” He opened his arms. “C’mere baby.”

Sandra crawled across the bed and let him pull her close.

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The bus began to slow. Sandra pressed her face against the window and spotted the Hyannis Port bus station drawing towards them.

She stood up and pulled her long black hair out of her face with a tie on her wrist before crossing the aisle to shake Matthew awake. He smiled drowsily up at her.

They gathered up their bags and got in line behind an old Korean couple, three young men and the family of screaming children, and waited for the bus to come to a stop.

“Look!” Sandra said excitedly, peering out the window. “It’s Madeline!” Matthew craned his head around his girlfriend to look. “Oh yeah.” He waved. Their redhead friend stood under the bus station awning looking around eagerly for some sign of them. The bus squealed to a halt and the doors slid open. Madeline
was there immediately, bouncing happily as she waited for them to file off, reaching forward trying to take their bags and hug them at the same time. They shuffled awkwardly away from the bus.

“Where’s Steve?” Matthew asked.

Madeline pulled Sandra’s overnight bag out of her hands and slung it across her back. “He’s in the car. We couldn’t find a place to park, so he’s got the car idling on the curb.” She laughed loudly.

The trio began walking towards the exit of the station. “Are the others here yet?” Sandra asked.

Madeline smiled. “Yup. Steve and I got in this morning, and Vanessa and Abby arrived last night. Chris and Penelope have been here since Wednesday.”

Christopher, Sandra corrected silently.

They rounded the corner of the station and spotted Steve sitting behind the wheel of his car across the lot. He smiled and waved to them.

On the ride to the house, Madeline, Steve and Matthew chatted quietly. Sandra wasn’t listening. She was becoming more and more anxious as they drew closer to the house. What would she find in that place? A Stanhope Wife? So many different scenarios were running through her head that when they finally arrived at the house she didn’t know what to expect; Wild Penny, or Mrs. Christopher Anthony Nicholas Stanhope IV, gloves and all?

It was somewhere in between. Penelope stood on the front porch in a pair of spotless white slacks and a blue and white sailor-sweater, but the spark of happiness in her eyes when she pulled Sandra in for a hug was reminiscent of the light that used to fill them all the time not so long ago. Maybe the wild woman was still in there somewhere.

The day passed uneventfully. The couples lounged around, Vanessa and Abby went swimming, Penelope made lunch. Everything was perfect. As perfect as Penelope could have ever wished. And it was driving Sandra crazy. They weren’t perfect people, god damn it! It was unnatural. It was Christopher. He was away for the day, taking care of some family business in Boston. He would be back after dinner. Sandra smiled when she learned this, but it still didn’t remove his influence in the house.

As a result of this influence, Sandra spent as little time with Penelope as possible. She could only spend so much time hearing about the Stanhope family business (the business that Christopher would someday be running). She couldn’t stand to hear one more thing from Penelope about Christopher’s perfect debutant sisters. The longing in Penelope’s voice when she spoke of their starched perfection was too much to handle. Where had it come from?

After lunch, Sandra slipped into her bathing suit and wrapped a batik sarong around her hips. She wandered out of the house and down towards the beach, smiling at the sight of Matthew reading in the hammock strung between two of the few trees on the property. He smiled back, winked and returned to his book.
Sandra paused for a moment at the base of the hill that made up half of the backyard, stroking her foot back and forth across the perfect line where the grass met the sand. It couldn’t possibly have formed so perfectly in nature.

She settled herself comfortably in the sand a few yards from the water line, wiggling her bottom down into the sand and drawing her legs up to her chest. Vanessa and Abigail were splashing around in the shallows as Abigail attempted to draw her girlfriend in deeper. Bits of their conversation floated across the water to Sandra’s ears.

“Don’t you trust me honey?” Abigail crooned, pulling on Vanessa’s arm. Vanessa leaned back, towards the shore and said, “Of course I do. It’s man-eating sharks that I don’t trust.”

Abigail dropped her girlfriend’s arm in frustration. “Nessie, we’re in Cape Cod. There are no sharks; their teeth are too fucked up for this place.” She said, completely serious.

Vanessa laughed so hard that her body relaxed and Abigail was able to pull her in deeper for their swimming lesson. Sandra watched all of this and smiled. Sitting there on the beach, with the sand warming her from below and the sun from above, and the wonderful tang of the salty ocean air clinging to her skin and hair, Sandra recalled the time so many years before when she had taught Penelope how to swim. It had been the summer between their sophomore and junior years in college, and they had jumped the fence into Sandra’s neighbor’s pool yard, taking advantage of the fact that the Clarke’s were out of town for the week.

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Sandra and Penelope sprinted silently across the large paved pool yard, leaping over discarded pool toys that the Clarke children had left lying around. They skidded to a halt at the entrance to the shallow end and immediately began disrobing until they were standing naked at the top of the pool stairs. Nudity was nothing to them; they had seen each other naked multiple times since their freshman year as roommates, and they were used to the sight of each other’s naked bodies.

The girls waded into the shallow end of the pool, Penelope lingering on the last step. Sandra laughed and floated up onto her back, gliding in a happy little circle before her friend.

“Come on Penny!” she said, rolling her eyes. Of all things, the fearless Penelope Weizenberger was afraid of the water?

“I’m working on it!” Penny shot back as she eased herself down into the water fully.

Sandra flipped back down to put her feet on the bottom of the pool.

“Don’t you trust me honey?” She asked.

Penelope’s eyes glowed warmly. “Of course I do,” she said, taking that first tentative, awkward stroke through the shallows of the pool towards her friend.
By their senior year, Penelope was swimming laps around Sandra, who was content to simply lay back and enjoy the show.

Christopher arrived just after dinner, before the sun began to set. He pulled his car into the circular gravel driveway. Sandra was curled up in a big wicker chair on the front porch with Matthew opposite her, and she had to glance away from the approaching car as the evening sun bounced off the sleek black body of the Mercedes Benz. Christopher got out of the car, leaning back in to pull out a briefcase and a Bloomingdales bag.

Penelope appeared in the doorway. She threw open the screen door and sailed across the white porch to the top of the stairs. She had a flouncy apron tied around her waist to preserve the perfection of her white pants. Everything was so white. The wicker furniture, the white stripes on the seat cushions gleaming against their deep blue counterparts, the porch itself. It was too much.

Christopher mounted the stairs and kissed Penelope on the cheek as she reached for his briefcase. It was like watching modern day Cleavers live.

Sandra turned away, missing the moment when Christopher leaned into Penelope and pressed his forehead gently against hers. He stroked her cheek tenderly with his thumb. She closed her eyes, mirroring Christopher’s peaceful smile.

Sandra saw none of this as she wandered back into the house. She only heard Penelope’s sounds of delight as she exclaimed over the cashmere sweater that Christopher had bought for her in Boston. Sandra felt her lip curl involuntarily. Cashmere. Christ. There had been a day when Penelope laughed at people who spent good money on expensive cashmere sweaters and coats. Her old thrift store pea coat kept her just as warm, Penelope had asserted. Sandra felt her sneer deepen.

Matthew brushed his fingers against the inside of her wrist and he smiled knowingly at her, his eyes telling her to let it be. Sandra laughed on a sigh and rolled her eyes as she felt her frustration temporarily melt away. She went in search of Vanessa and Abigail, needing the comfort of the antithesis of the Cleavers. She didn’t think she could handle being in the same room as Christopher and Penelope, watching the way Penelope kicked Debutant Mode into high gear when her fiancée was around.

But then something changed as the sun went down.

It was an open sort of night. Everyone was laying about the house, engaged in various lazy pursuits. The soft, warm evening air filled the spaces in between them, leaving everyone on their own little island.

Sandra watched from the kitchen as Penelope dragged an extension cord behind her across the back lawn and plugged it into a string of tiny electric hurricane lamps. They were suspended in a ring around several tall poles. Wooden
Adirondack chairs were clustered together inside the ring of light.

Everyone soon gathered out there for drinks. Gin and tonics rested on the arms of the chairs, glowing in tall blue glasses, cool and fresh, like little stars in the sea of the hot night; St. Elmo’s fire burning against the endless dark ocean beyond the edge of the hill.

It had suddenly become the sort of night where no one really touched each other, not because of the heat, but because of the unspoken consciousness, the awareness of each other, the feeling of contentment with themselves and with each other, content in a way that they wouldn’t be in the morning.

Except for Sandra. They sat together drinking for almost an hour, bordered by the strings of lights, caged in, and the more she drank, the angrier she got. It began with the return of Christopher. Sandra despised the way that Penelope changed when he arrived. She trembled excitedly, like a poodle, and fell over herself as she scrambled to cater to him.

After a solid hour of drinking, Sandra couldn’t take it anymore. Just as Matthew entered the house to get more ice and tonic water, she slumped down in her chair, staring across her legs at Penelope on the other side of the circle. “What are you doing Penny?” She scoffed. “What are you doing with this fucker, huh?”

The others fell silent. Abigail laughed uneasily and Christopher’s eyebrows rose in shock as he looked quickly around the circle to confirm what he had heard. Penelope, not quite as drunk as Sandra, sat up straighter in her chair and stared in disbelief at Sandra.

“What?”

“You heard me. You’re too good for this prick. You used to be so great! Now you’re just this uptight blue-blood clone. What’s the matter with you?”

Madeline’s eyes were darting back and forth nervously as she leaned forward and extended a hand to Sandra. Her voice when she spoke was nervous and breathy. “Sandra, honey, this isn’t-.”

“Explain this to me,” Sandra said, cutting off Madeline and gesturing wildly between Penelope and Christopher. Her voice was sharp, even through the gin. “Because I can’t understand how you could possibly be happy with this fucker.” She glanced over at Christopher. His eyes were wide. Sandra would bet anything that debutants didn’t speak like this.

“Sandra!” Penelope ground out. “Be quiet. You have no idea what you’re talking about.” She was speaking in that deep, firm voice that she used to use when she was tired of dealing with other people’s nonsense and wanted to enforce her will. Sandra hadn’t heard that tone in a long time.

Sandra jerked forward. “There you are! You haven’t sounded like yourself in so long! I don’t understand why you’re doing this.”

“Doing what?” Penelope said, filling each word with her exasperation and growing anger.
“This! All of this!” Sandra waved her hands wildly, encompassing the perfect house, the meticulously kept lawn and Christopher. “You’ve become a Stepford Bride.”

“You’re mad at me for getting married? Or, what, for growing up? Sandra, I’m 27 years old. This is what happens when people are adults; they get married, settle down and stop acting like children.”

“Is that how you think of us?” Sandra snorted derisively.

Penelope raised her hands and let them drop exasperatedly into her lap.

“Maybe, a little bit.”

Sandra’s lip curled up in a deep sneer. “At least I still have a personality,” she muttered.

“Fuck you,” Penelope growled. Sandra was just drunk enough not to recognize the warning signs. Penelope could be terrifying in her anger, and she had been holding that wild rage in for almost two years.

“Yes!” Sandra swung forward on her seat and leaned towards Penelope.

“That’s you! Christ, I haven’t heard you swear in so fucking long! You love to curse! You’re so good at it. What’s happened to you? You couldn’t possibly really want to be with this prick.”

Rage sparked up in Penelope’s eyes. “Shut up.” The warning was there in her deep, tight voice. “Don’t you ever question that I love him.”

Sandra opened her mouth to retaliate when Matthew swooped in and scooped her up in his arms. He was just sober enough to navigate their way back to the bedroom Penelope had assigned them and set Sandra down gently on the bed. The open window let in the raised voices of the group below. It wasn’t a welcoming sound. Matthew began to pack.

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On the bus home the next morning, Sandra pressed her face into Matthew’s shoulder and moaned. She could barely look out the window at the sunshine pouring through the glass, let alone take out her book. She thought her head might explode if she tried to focus on the words. Sandra recognized the signs of this particular type of hangover; she would be sick all day. Far from ideal for traveling.

Matt shifted beside her. She felt his muscles tighten underneath her face in the way that let her know that he was tense.

“Are you mad at me?” She murmured into his shirt.

“No,” he said after a minute. “I just don’t see why you couldn’t have controlled yourself.”

“I was drunk,” she protested weakly.

A long moment passed before he spoke again. “You weren’t that drunk.”
traffic jam on a road to nowhere
the devil rides shotgun.
grace and virtue our passengers - terrible back seat drivers
in rearview patience tailgates, and love switches lanes
then beauty pulls up beside
rouged and ready for a date with strength
knowledge reads the newspaper; comic section
happiness and worry carpool, while anger lays on his horn
misfortune has a flat, flares lit and flashers on
selflessness rolls by but does not stop to help

the radio waves relay: that sin
collided with innocence
and we all crane our necks to see
Can you see the people gathered,
Crowded about one another,
Anxious, awaiting this great exposé?
Reporters with their cameras
Held at the ready. Journalists, their pens
Quivering, eager to mark the page.
This lofty unveilng of sculpture,
This priceless addition to the city
Even the beggar woman from Asylum street
Turns her worn face to the spectacle
Playing out in her city
Against the backdrop
Of the state house dome’s impressive
Glistening golden-leaf.
A business man too, bustling through
The cramped boulevard in his
Tailored dark blue suit
Takes the time to pause at the crowd
And elbow for a closer look

And wonder what the people say
When the barriers fall and reveal
Thirty-six stones, chunked in rows
Their weathered hides a tarnished brown and grey
Well, the beggar woman turns away and
Continues down to her bench
Where she will sleep, night after
Forgotten, slowly withering to decay
And the business man turns back to his
Elitist meeting, a walk he takes nearly every day

Undoubtedly in thirty years, the rocks will
Retain their present beauty.
The crab grass gnarled at their feet
Is but a testament to their immobility.
The trash that sweeps between their rows,
Is of little consequence to these
Great monuments of stone

And once one hundred years have passed
And brought the city to it’s knees,
And the grandsons of the business man
Are found begging in the streets,
Surely they can find comfort
In the power of the brackish colored stones
And in the great domed building’s
Golden platted gleam.

*Stone Field is a sculpture in the center of Hartford that cost the city 87,000 dollars. However, many were upset by it, because the sculpture appears to be nothing more than 36 stones arranged in a triangle.*
Victoria Trentacoste
My abuela lived on the second floor of our two family home. She would get up before the sunrise so she could start her cooking. Not even the thick walls between us could keep the aroma of spices from seeping through the cracks, down the stairs, and through the keyhole. Abuela tended to her stove and oven all day long. She cleaned edges, adjusted nozzles, added a few pinches of her home grown spices to the chuletas frying in a thin layer of oil. She never used measuring cups. “A true chef knows what her food needs” she would say adding a pinch of cilantro to the boiling rice. She would reach into a bag of cumin, pinch the red dust between her fingers, sprinkle it into the steaming pots. “Perfecto” she would sigh, adjusting the crooked frame of her glasses, and then she would smile at me.

As though an alarm had gone off, all of her children arrived, in vans stuffed with my cousins and their dogs. The doors, rolled open, and fell hungry children and parents. Everyone piled into the backyard. My aunts settled into lawn chairs to discuss the most recent gossip of our family. My uncles popped open beers and seated themselves at the picnic table for a game of dominoes and who’ll get drunk first. My cousins filled up all the empty spaces of the yard. We played baseball in the driveway, collected rocks out of abuela’s garden, and set up obstacle courses on the play-scape.

Although there were 35 kids to play with, I always enjoyed sitting with the mothers and tending to the babies. I liked stroking their soft apple red cheeks and wiping the dried drool caked in the corners of their lips. I jumped at the chance to spoon my abuela’s rice into their gummy mouths. I adored cradling them in my arms, humming melodies into their ears.

I loved watching abuela cook, working over the stove like a musician working on a symphony to be played for the Queen herself, or a doctor fussing over what would be the cure to cancer itself.

Abuela was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer when I was in the eighth grade. The doctors said there was nothing they could do for her, that those hot
a bed made of metal, hoses running from her nose, wires hanging over the edges, and machines that sounded like leaf blowers pumping air into her lungs. She looked out of place in my bubblegum pink bedroom, surrounded by teddy bears and dolls I had once played doctor with, whose illnesses never went past the simple cure of a kiss. I tried kissing my grandmother’s withered cheeks, wishing every time that maybe her eyes would flicker open, she would adjust her glasses, and that she would make my favorite french fries.

My mother would spook soup between her cracked lips, clapping and cheering every time she swallowed. I always played along, even though I knew that the liquid had only run down her dry throat, and fallen into her empty stomach. When my abuela began eating apple sauce everyone celebrated. It was like watching a baby get fed. It was frightening to think that only a few months before, my abuela had been the one feeding a baby in her arms, wiping the doll from a toothy grin, smiling down at the little bundle. I remembered abuela being the caretaker, as my mother wiped the spit on her chin.

For a while, I believed that my grandmother was going to get better. She had begun to walk, and speak. But one day, she asked my mother to bring her to the hospital. The doctors told us she wasn’t going to last through the night.

Vans filled with family members parked in the hospital garage. The children filed by abuela’s bedside to kiss her cheek, ask for her blessings, and tell her they loved her. All 35 of us followed this pattern before going into the family room of the hospital. No one seemed worried. “Abuela can’t die. If she does, who will cook the ham on Christmas?” I tried to believe that what they were saying was true. That she would be home in no time, wearing her bent glasses, and skirts decorated in flowers. But deep down, I knew that my grandma was already gone.

The little kids seemed more concerned than the big kids that our abuela was in the hospital. “What’s gonna happen to her?” they asked. They always thought I had the answers. I remembered what my grandma had told me to tell them when it came time for her to go. She had seated me on the edge of her bed and held my tiny hands in her wrinkled ones, “One day, you’re going to have to take care of los nenes for me. I’m getting old. Soon God is going to call me home. And when that happens, you have to tell them that Papa Dios, father God, is calling me back to the kitchen in heaven.”

I told the children not to be sad. I told them that she was in heaven cooking a big pot of rice for God. I knew that los nines were now my job. I had to wipe the drool from their faces and feed them chicken. I had to rock them gently and teach them about cooking. It was time for me to truly put down the Barbie dolls and pick up the baby bottles.

I remember the words of my grandmother, “Yo vivo para los ninos” I live for the children. My grandmother did live for the children. And I wish to continue that.
I do not care if I have a big home, or a shiny red car. Only that I make a difference in a child’s life, for that in my opinion is the greatest gift there is. I ache for the day when I have my own classroom with children whose dreams are limitless. Where I can nourish those dreams and help them reach their potential. Where I can make a difference in their lives; and watch them grow into the people who will one day take our place.

I wish to learn more than what my abuela has already taught me; take on a classroom of children, and treat them like my grandmother treated her food; carefully and with love.
Kristen Droesch
If in my weakness I have used thee ill
And trampled o’er the gift of thine esteem;
If thine affection, precious to me still,
Hath faded like the tendrils of a dream;
If I have fallen from my Lady’s grace
And squand’red that perfection which thou owest;
If I must ne’er again gentle thy face,
Or show mine in the places where thou goest;
If I must sacrifice the cool caress
Of thy smooth, alabaster finger-tips,
And wander through the world all comfortless,
Bereft of but the mem’ry of your lips—
Dear Jane, the simple sum of all is this:
That cost is small for my Dark Lady’s kiss.

--Will
No one calls on gypsies now that weathermen give bad reports
Now that packing lip is vile and they can’t read palms with snuff-stained fingers.

When it’s early and the clapboard grays are shut to any chink of sun
There’s no need for diviners to point their rods toward luck.
Luck is old-fashioned.

And for the travelling curriers, and their velvet-nosed brides,
The hay hasn’t kept that same citric chew –
When it shows up in squat bales from Omaha, the stalks are crisp and the ends are dry.

The Shetlands toss their glossy manes, too fine-spined and precious
To ferry Korean contortionists across the ring.
The Shetlands are dapple-brown, so the urine doesn’t show
Like on the tufted ankles of the cream ponies.

The bearded lady waxes now, but only at the cupid’s bow and
Lip-edge pleat where saltine crumbs can cling.
Don Ephraim Goz, the Honduran Hercules, likes a smooth lip for kissing her
And the susurrus of fine-haired flesh when she whispers her passion.

And after shows, I’d like to share in passing cans of porter
From the steps of some tawdry caravan
While the carney belch and study Hustler for the articles
And the high-flying Lombardos heat water in a Busch-bottom boiler
For melting nubs of opium.
A ringmaster's got his hand on a girl's leg and she's posing in his top-hat
And the pastern prints of tired ponies will barely lead him home
If he can't spot the tent against a dull dawn.
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