

Trillium

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Hilary Dyer

Writer's Block

Mind is like a notebook
on which various
contributors are capable
of endless thought--
in pen.

The mind starts crisp,
like a new dollar bill
and pristine,
like never worn shoes.
As the dollar is spent
and travels the world,
and the sneakers are worn
by a child in the mud,
paper is crumpled
and forgotten by
a bin of bitter aluminum.

However times occur
when the thunder cracks
like a tree falling
in a silent forest,
the lightning is as bright
as Alaskan nights,
and the rain falls
like cinderblocks
from the clouds.
The mind is sparked
and the pen is inspired
to dance across the paper.

Darcy Backinger
Untitled,
photograph



Jasper Grass Monkey

Dominatrix

So called love with its invisible strings
caught me like a rabbit in a snare barely
able to breathe in its room full of poison.

A bed of nails would seem soft compared to your
piece of peace which is hammered like the hands
of an innocent man, mocked in purple's majesty.

She is my queen of spades as my red heart
blushes black in fright of this endless night.
If her transparent choke collar could squeeze

any tighter around my swollen sense of self,
my wheels would slip into the soft sand
spinning in place, tied to the leash of her will.
This illusion is more real, killing the thrill
from those fireworks on Independence Day,
screaming like fiery hijacked planes in my mind

at any tower of former freedom, now laying
in bent and twisted misery on its knees
before the memory of backward loneliness.

Jasper Grass Monkey

Mother Theresa

Mother Teresa were you happy?
Was life a wonderful, beautiful journey or was it full of
empty dinner plates and diseases that furrowed
your brow in lines of worry and care?

Now you are dead.

You touched thin flesh wrapped tightly upon Delicate
skeletons, lending your salty tears to season
their bland dry hollow eyed
and hungry existence.

When you lifted up your eyes to lofty starry skies,
sighs of woe for little children,
did you thank Him for His mercy? *Now* you have *left*
your poor bones in the rich
soil of earth. Some pray to you as they kneel before
your blessed memory,
looking to the heavens for guidance.

But I know you could not stay
in the place of rest, while so much work is still to be
done.

Wherever hell is, there will we find our dear Mother
Teresa.

Alice di Certo
Autoguarigione,

cast iron and bronze



Mary E. Cassio
Pygmalion

The clay had been a Christmas present--one of those awkward gifts that aunts give when they lack the energy to find something more fitting or appealing. Ten dark colors, stacked in perfect, heavy squares, but they all had a subtly mesmerizing iridescence, pearly on some of the colors, shimmering golden in others, and even an odd smoky green glitter in one. For weeks the package sat in the cupboard, literally forgotten and so immovable, heavy and smooth. But on a particularly wet afternoon, in a fit of bored curiosity, he had found them, and instantly the madness of potential creativity--the limitlessness of what he could do with them--had slipped through his small fingers and flowed into his mind. Though, of course, he couldn't realize it, the possibilities of the clay had enchanted him, and for a while even he sat just looking at them, ten blocks of solid color winking at him from the chipped wood of the kitchen table.

Then he started building. He began with only one thought, a castle, but as he built it, supplied in his mind with far more embellishments than he could mold, other forms, other beings came to life and his little hands worked more methodically, twisting and pulling and forming the formless. The things he built were nearly unrecognizable to other eyes. When he excitedly explained them to his mother, her mouth had smiled, but her eyes remained quizzical, and though he tried to explain in different ways -- "This is his arm, see? And see, there's a tail, and a dog-dragon with ice wings!" --and even tried speaking very slowly and clearly, that hint of a question always stayed hovering between her eyebrows and behind the darkness of her eyes. He never realized that for her they could never be more than lumpy shapes in clay; to him they were alive

not just in his imagination but as a reality, and there was no possible question about the truth of their existence. That they could not exist as a reality to her was incomprehensible to him. His figures of shimmering darkness, his softly created lives, were real, and that was all.

But daily his fascination with his creations grew. His time became dedicated to them, not as a passionately fickle obsession, a thing that is adored one moment and quickly forgotten the next, but almost with the same devotion as a pet, a living creature. When he came home in the early afternoon, he would first "Check on them, to see if they were OK." And after, he and his mother, giggling and exasperated, worked through the photocopied homework sheets that his teacher always sent with him, he would return to the table or to his room and become lost. Their life was entirely supplied by his mind, but every part of his body accepted his imaginings as reality, and his eyes no longer saw clay and the light blue walls of the room around him but a world that was for him more beautiful than the clay and the walls, a world whose rules and realities were defined by him and ruled by him, a world where the realities that were not entirely his own had no brilliance. His mind constantly orbited around a world foreign to his mother, his teacher, his friends. He was lost in a place they could not enter.

And then one day in early spring he came home to find them not there. His mother had walked into his room with him, watching him closely, but he had gone as usual first to the little table where they sat in one corner of his room. Only they weren't sitting there. He turned to his mother and his blonde hair fell quickly into his eyes. "They're gone!" he said, and his words were a startled half-whisper. His mother looked at him as tears welled in his blue eyes, and she nearly began crying herself. She kneeled on the floor in front

of him and looked into his face. It was white.

"They had to go away for a while. They'll be back, honey, but they're gone for now." He bit his lip, and his chin wrinkled as tears fell heavy and round to the carpet.

"When will they come back?" His voice was high, and a sob strained through his words. She pulled him into a hug, and he no longer restrained his cries. He threw his arms around her neck, and tears poured from him as he sobbed onto her shoulder. And weeks passed, and months, and eventually years, and sometimes he forgot about the clay figures for a little while, but mostly he remembered them and the secret things that he had known in the place that had been his.

Those strange shapeless forms stayed with him, and on rainy days when he was much older, he would take them out in his mind and blow the dust carefully off them. For a while, he would look at them with his own eyes, his older eyes, but as he drew closer to the images in his mind, he would look at them with eyes that saw his own beautiful world, and he would be lost again, for a while.

Teresa Ebat
Drifting

You didn't look hard enough.
I've been here all along, floating,
bumping into rocks with barnacles.

She made it home safe, didn't she?
All we had to do was wait,
or maybe use our hands to paddle.
I was trying to impress her.

I wandered from Horse Head Bay,
all around Carr Inlet
From Madrona, to Driftwood,
Glencove, to Penrose.
Floating from Hope to Home.

I passed the house twice,
but no one saw me.
I guess I was too deep.

Maybe you didn't know where to look,
I took her to a secret place. Trying
to get away from all people at the party,
you know, get her alone for a while.

I settled around Sour's Cove.
The herring pen nearby drew crabs.
I wouldn't want mom to see me now,
even if it *would* bring her closure.
I'm glad you stopped looking.

Christina M. Hines

Crow

digital photography



Amber Gershman

I am not a minority

i never meant to enslave you to poverty and
stigmatization.

i never meant to ostracize you, i never meant to de-
grade you. i never meant to lynch you, to deny you
citizenship, to shoot you in the streets b/c i was just
doing my job. i never meant to laugh at
you. to dehumanize you. to kidnap you from your
home. to obliterate your culture while refusing
you to assimilate to mine.

i never meant to restrict your education. i never meant
to limit your job opportunities. i never
meant to avoid your gaze on the streets, or not give
you proper service in my restaurant b/c
you probably won't tip.

i never meant to steal your lands, or to exploit your
labor. i never meant to define you as a color
or a stereotype. i never meant to be racist. or ignorant.
or apathetic. or cruel. or unjust.

i never meant to slander you while you walk to school,
i never meant to segregate our worlds. i
never meant to send you back to your tyrannical
government when all you wanted was an equal
life. i never meant to castigate you, to chastise you, to
criticize you, to lie cheat steal while you
labor to serve me coffee and clean my hotel
room swimming pool bathrooms laundry wipe my
ass.

i never meant to.

but we meant to. hate us. we deserve it. despise us.
don't take responsibility. make us. shove it in
our face. show us where you live. how you live. how
much you make. give us the same
looks we give you. the same service. the same
treatment.

force us go to your schools. give us the same
opportunities we give you. deny us rights,
don't let
us vote. sentence us to the death penalty for petty
crimes while you are paroled. dehumanize us.
call us names. beat us up with your police force, and
then acquit yourselves. enslave us. murder us.
rape us. make us understand why we shouldn't treat
you like we treat you.

Amber Gershman

To Whom It May Concern:

I am not a mathematical equation you have memorized
you cannot plug your numbers in me and solve
me
you cannot write me down on scratch paper to
come back to later
i am not a homework assignment for a lonely night
you cannot find me listed numerically in the pages
of a textbook
you cannot graph me
i am not a formula that you can erase when you're
done
you cannot use me when it is convenient for you
you cannot divide my numerator by your denominator
to find my intercepts

Ian Greenfield

The Riddler

In waiting silence under stormy skies
You walk waiting, wandering, lost.
Searching for a glimmer in the gloom
To light your way into bright thought.
In pale rainfalls, open your eyes
To lines of notions, cascading down years
Through myriad visions, making modernity
From unsteady worlds, allaying your fears.

Curled round our lively fires,
We glow nothing into the dark.
Unfurl – let lucid bonfires blaze,
Light folkloric night with your spark.
With lines drawn in sand made stone
Catalogue two thousand evenings dim;
Fear no storm will snuff your embers.
Only cautious closeness smothers them.

Among ashes and afterbirth wait awhile
And drink the snowdrops of labors long,
Lifetimes spent in quiet storms
Gathering lyrics for the human song.
Riddler, sing, fearless blaze a tale
From forgotten bones to ages hence.
Close their covers, take up the pen
And under unquiet skies commence.

Crystal Hoffer

And It Sat upon Each of Them

There is a flame in the window.
It is about six feet tall, and it
burns red. Across the room,

where the wood of many pews
is rubbed smooth and dull
by flesh and material, but mostly
by tears
that really fall, maybe,
for that lost sense of humanity —
that goodness to which all strive
but that few even grasp.
we must give it to God, blame it
on his plan; we must dance

as the speech blurs and raises
a chorus that is in tongues
cloven by the apparent spirit,
lifting skirts with creamy thighs
hot and damp with dewy sweat
(or is it lust?), as euphoric faces are
carved and streaked with tears
for the sins of us. But are they sins
truly? Perhaps they are, more
simply, just regrets. And the people
raise their hands to the caves —
lost in the yawning, deep green
shadows that the spirit still fails
to touch, to hold, to heal.
There are those recesses...

Perhaps it is those quiet spaces —
dark and stale smelling, clinging
to the vaulted interiors of man —
for which we truly repent,
of which we know not, but know,
nonetheless, all too well.

Amber Gershman

A Series of Unfortunate Events

my incoherent world had not yet been invaded
by aimless snowflakes
by your old roommate
or politics of skin
or un house broken puppies
the last time we spoke

i took birth control at 11
and cried at 11:05 b/c you had drifted even
further away

your boxers were in my top drawer and your
toothbrush in my medicine cabinet
we were still holding onto old promises and
faded obligations
I love yous were forced and empty
because I was smoking a cigarette and
you stopped seeing a future

fuck pst or mst, my clock was set to yst (your standard
time)
which was generally four hours late if ever
I made dinner while you watched the
movies

I put the visitors pass in your car so as not to be towed
while you slept in hopes of escaping me/us/we

we slept together, in more ways than two our
relationship was a perpetual rem cycle
dreams nightmares and snoring as
obnoxious as your farts or my neurosis
we got fat with complacency worry and those pasta
dinners (the only dinners you thought I knew
how to make)

our good times were used up
in the first several moments of our introduction
(it was all downhill from there)
but we stuck it out through
almost arrests
car crashes
biopsies
family
engagement
birthday parties and banana cakes etc

unfortunately everything bad must come to an end
if not i would still be afraid to call you
in fear of you saying its over
because what's worse than having your empty lonely
unloving relationship to end
(that it keeps going)

so my condom jar collects dust in hopes that i
may soon take another lover
and my mother sits by the phone in hopes that i
may soon need her motherly advice once more
and my heart is taking a nap in preparation for
the next train wreck i demand to be a part of

you said youd call--i said i wouldnt hold my breath
(i guess we both lied)

Crystal Hoffer

The Dish and the Spoon

The sink is grey:
a silver, matte metal.
My hands through the foam--
white, yellow, pink, blue,
and every color white hides
on the inside--
disappear.
The dishes are dirty,
below the gay surface,
like sins hidden
in bloated white shells.

My skin is pale:
an old ivory yellow.
My fingers in the water
search, feel, touch, explore
all the dirty things
(at the bottom,
no one sees).
The pots are stainless
(my hands in the water, clean),
but the steel is spotted with subtle
marks that reveal their use.

The knife is sharp:
a smooth, honed edge.
My flesh in the water--
wrinkled, pink, soft, stained
with the things I have done
in darkness--

and my secrets
are ripe to be sliced open
by the quiet blade of karma

that waits patiently
for my guilt to catch up
with me.

I cannot wash my hands of this.

Hilary Dyer
Spork

/\//\//\//\

S P O R K

Plastic utensil
with an Identity
crisis. Make up
your mind will
you? Ethnicity

white or

black

Like

spoon

round

concave

convex

pointy

sharp.

Stick

a fork

in me

I am

DO

NE

!

Crystal Hoffer
Tipple Widow

For these days spent alone
My company is the droning voice and too loud music
of the TV
In this cold, scattered room marked with the objects of
a life
While outside the silence awaits like a pale stranger,

My company is the drowning voice and too loud
music of the TV
In a disordered bed with orange, green, blue, dragon
bedecked blankets
while outside the silence awaits like a pale stranger,
there you lie asleep, alone in your unnatural disaster.

In a disordered bed with orange, green, blue, dragon
bedecked blankets
There is a nearly tangible smell – saccharine and
sticky.
There you lie asleep, alone in your unnatural disaster,
But we are together – you and I – as I stare at your
closed, roving eyes.

There is a nearly tangible smell – saccharine and sticky.
(the familiar smell on the outskirts of your breath),
And we are together – in a way – as I stare at your
closed, roving eyes;
But the memory of my empty hours is a close, leering
friend.

In the familiar smell on the outskirts of your breath,
in this cold, scattered room marked with the objects of
a life,
is the memory of my empty hours: a close, leering
friend
for these days spent alone.

C. Wesley Clough
Bigfoot

"Bigfoot is a hoax!"

The newscaster announces,

"Started by a man who died today."

Ignoring the Native American legends

That stretch back centuries.

"The Paterson film is a fake."

"A man in a monkey suit."

Although scientific analysis shows

Movements beyond the range of human ability.

"I can even tell you who made it."

The Hollywood insiders say,

Long after the man they point to

Has denied any involvement.

"Bigfoot is a fake man."

Says a world wise friend,

As I try to tell him

Of a strange experience in the mountains.

"Haven't you heard on the news?"

"The man who made him up died yesterday."

And deep in the mist shrouded mountains,

In the rugged fastness where

Few men tread the trails,

One smiling Sasquatch tells another

That Humans don't really exist.

Floria Varnoos

I Don't Have to Forget

It is enough if I just don't listen to the song "Take Me Back to the Boat on the River" anymore, and if I don't smell Fendi cologne. I know it's not difficult. I do have to throw out those old stories and write something else. I don't have to read the books he gave me: Sartre, Marquez, or Hemingway, and not any from Chekhov, Hedayat, or Salinger. And when I go to bed, I have to stop having those dreams and thoughts about him, and then I may be able to sing again.

At least it is easier to erase those tapes. Or I will give them away. I must throw out whatever I own that is yellow: the dishes, sponge and soap, the towels, sheets and lamps, and I will buy everything in orange – but no – orange is made from yellow and red, so I will get blue – no – he knew I loved blue. What about that yellow stationary, the blue and yellow carpet, yellow tablecloth and all my blue and yellow t-shirts? I may throw them out or give them away, or – that's okay – they are just things.

It won't take much of my time, and then I will be okay with new changes. Ah – damn – this shirt still smells of Fendi. I wore it in his friend's apartment last time. I don't have to visit any of our common friends anymore. What if they ask about him? I cannot be calm and nice. Sure, I will cry. I can't cry, be okay and then take my tea and smile. They will notice how sensitive and sentimental I am. They might say the era for this kind of sentimentalism has passed. They might say that is not intelligent, to be sad and in love with someone who has left you for someone else. They may call me a dreamer and say I am not living in this world; they may say this kind of love happens only in stories, movies, and myths.

I don't have to forget to watch that movie we had planned to watch together. Watching a film alone is so sad, and I don't want to cry in front of people. Look! Here, why did I forget to throw away this birthday card and these dried flowers? Ah, how dusty! Three years old!

I have to clean here. There are many things that I have to do. I must spend my energy, get tired, and forget. I can walk; we walked on the North Mountain. But I might see him! He might be there with his friends — new ones — she might be there too. No, I don't want to see them, any of them. But what if I see them? I wish I could die, but if as they say, ghosts are free to go everywhere, I may find them on a nice evening together listening to "Take Me Back to the Boat on the River," and he may be telling her the same things he used to tell me. I must take care when I go out. And when I go out, I don't have to forget I know people who teach in universities and work for private companies, or the teacher who has young female students or older ones.

I don't forget to look at men, especially those with kind looking eyes. I don't forget not to go to any AutoCAD computer course, not to see teachers who smile at students, gently and nicely, while bending over their computers.

The easiest thing not to do is visit anyone who might play that music, or might wear that cologne, or might dress in yellow, or people who go skiing in winter or who go swimming in summer.

I don't forget not to turn on a TV program that might be about a man who lives in a house with yellow-brown furniture, with a room that has a window in front of the bed, a cupboard beside the desk, and a bookshelf beside the door — a bookshelf that has books about mathematics and technology, or about mechanics and physics, or about poetry and music.

I don't forget not to buy any kind of chocolate that he loved, or to go to any of those hotels that we went to, or to order any tea that he ordered with chocolate as we listened to the piano play, drinking tea to get warm and watching the cold, shiny night outside.

I don't forget not to cook the Tahchin that he cooked so well when we were alone, when he didn't have to teach, and during our best days, during New Year's holidays.

I don't have to be in any Masnavy Poetry class that his mother has gone to, or to any Yoga practice that his brother has gone to, nor to travel to Isfahan, to Mashad, to the Caspian Sea, or to Zanjan where his father has gone before. I don't have to read novels and see the theater that his mother liked. I don't have to like the history and philosophy his father liked, and I don't have to be interested in archaeology or geography like his brother.

I won't look at a man in a black suit or blue jeans or in wool slacks, in a leather coat or a cashmere jacket or cotton pullover, in black shoes or white sports shoes or brown boots. I won't look at the men who are very well shaved or the men who do not shave.

I don't have to get thirsty and drink, get hungry and eat, get sleepy and sleep. I don't have to smell, touch, listen, or talk. I won't use in my writings the words that have the letters "a" and "h," and not the ones with "o" and "s," and not the ones with "n" and "e," and not the ones with "b" and "l."

I have to start from here, the latest...gw...zx...
pqwz...

C. Walle

Death of the Barn

Beside the Oak, taller than the barn,
the barn slumps, like a teen-ager on the couch.
Where we once walked the cows to the stalls for
 milking,
the double doors--gone. The room where I cleaned
the separator, I often got stuck upside down in,
 kindling.

Dirty dead hay, hangs from rafters, sagging

with age and weight, much like myself.
I can still hear the laughter as we dove
from the rafters to the piled hay below.
Filled with fear of disappearing into the hay forever,
and the adrenaline of the joy of jumping free,
we swan-dived into the newly cut hay.

I know if Mother knew what I had done
to acquire the hay, she would have had a heart attack,
as I had stood on the hay rake, releasing the handle
to leave the rolls for the men to fork into the truck.
Riding the teeth gobbling forage, the rake would surely
shred me like hay, given the chance.

Now I stand and look at this old barn. I don't
see death and decay. I see boys chasing girls
with snakes. I see digging potatoes in the hot sun.
I smell warm milk pouring into the cans,
cowpies, and the sweetness of new mown hay.

Steve Keller

Glass in the Sandbox

He had a hand in it.
We were all up to our necks
with glass in the sandbox.

A rough time on the playground
when you can't leave but
certainly cannot stay.

If only we had yanked your seat
when we played musical chairs.
If only once upon time
had never come.

Now that never-never land
stretches out before us and
we have to go home with dirty faces.

Now that the playground bullies rule.

Now the kids down the block will never play with
us,
fearing there'll be glass in the sandbox.

Teresa Ebat
Virgin Sheet

Drenched in water, cleansed
and flawless. It's soaked once more.

Freckled hands smooth bumps and dips,
demanding perfection.

Stretched in length,
its tightened flesh surrenders.

Cotton strips bind crust to a cedar plank.
Quiet snow turns to solid powder.

It leans against a wooden cross
and stares at blue eyes staring back.

Fingers trace invisible beauty, and a virgin
sheet lays in wait.

Sable wand in crimson water, releases
fits of passion.

Jason Line

Please Allow Me to Introduce Myself

The first time Norman Lewis heard “Sympathy for the Devil,” he was lying on the backseat of his father’s car on the way to California. Norman awoke as the stereo clicked and reversed the tape inside. He had been using his father’s duffle bags as a makeshift pillow and he rubbed out the uncomfortable imprint the thick green cloth had left on his cheek. He stretched out his thin little arms and peeked over the bags into the front seat. The ashtray overflowed and the passenger’s seat was littered with empty coffee cups and cassettes. A light rain pattered on the windshield as the car sped into the setting sun. As the music started up, his father tapped out the rhythm of the opening drums on the steering wheel, then reached over and cranked the volume knob. He glanced back at Norman, smiled, winked, then turned his attention back to the road.

Norman propped himself up on his elbows and cradled his chin in his hands staring at his father and listening to the strange song coming out of the old Toyota’s straining speakers. Years later, he would hate how much he looked like his old man. Then years after that, he would sometimes stare into the mirror just to catch a glimpse of him, a brief moment when he would be staring back, and ease the loneliness and fear he felt.

Norman lay back again and stared up at the ceiling, taking a deep breath, letting the imagery of the song lead him into a conversation with the devil. As Mick Jagger and John Lewis sang the dark duet, Norman just listened, too young to understand the meaning; he could only feel its heaviness, but he knew that his father understood by the way he cried out each word. It took a long time for Norman to truly

understand that song, but he could feel it from that first moment.

Fifteen years later, Norman awakes with his face plastered to a duffel bag, this time his own. His right ear aches from the headphone wedged into it, as strange tribal drums start up and a piano belts out its opening chords. A stewardess passes by with a carafe of warm coffee and he is shocked back in the stuffed airliner, back on his trip across the ocean. He looks around the cabin at all the other zonked out soldiers around him, then lies back once again, the devil introduces himself to Norman Lewis.

Richard Wakefield

Olfactory Ontology

The smell of French fries scents the evening breeze;
the wind tonight is from the Dairy Queen.
This afternoon we smelled the melting cheese
and garlic from Bob's Authentic Italian Cuisine.
This morning's early rising folks could sniff
the ersatz maple from the Pancake Palace.
And late on tonight we'll catch a whiff
of apple pie wafting from Chez Alice.

In years past north was from the cedar mill,
and south, in fall, was Maltby's fresh-cut hay.
The east was cow manure from Baker's Hill,
and west was salt and seaweed from the bay.
From year to year the breezes slack and swell.
We find ourselves amidst a world of smell.

Melanie Johnson

Bus Stop,

digital photograph



Melanie Johnson
Portico of Women's building, OSU,
digital photograph



Muhammad Jmaileh
Booby Trapped

I can't feel my legs,
they are asleep.
The ground absorbed me,
and cut off circulation

They are asleep.
Their eyes are shut.
They must have muted their cries,
and cut off circulation.

They must have muted their cries.
Didn't hear my girlfriend.
Their eyes are shut.
Blind destruction of humanity?

Watching any news channels,
seeing the bullets fly past
over the bomb that blew.
No coverage on us.

Didn't hear my girlfriend
over the bomb that blew.
Blind destruction of humanity
near the village on the river.

Seeing the bullets fly past,
no coverage on us.
Watching any news channel,
They must have muted their cries.

Near the village on the river,
the ground absorbed me
over the bomb that blew.
I Can't Feel my Legs!

Patrice Bunge

Storm Damage *Padilla Bay August 2007*

Two cedars went down in last winter's winds.
Once soft green leaves, now brown and burnt, rest

in spreads of fireweed, nettles and fern. From here
I can see the bay, placid and shallow this late

afternoon. The sun simmers on the water
and here, where we once sat, limbs broken

and strewn, victims of a violent force
unseen in the dead of summer. Loss is

a wad of roots, wrenched and slashed from its
earth, bald-faced in the unforgiving light of day.

How else to describe a goldfinch's cry
as thistle seed catches the wind,

the forsaken place where two trees lie,
unable to endure and survive?

Gail Kelly
Multiplexic Paths
acrylic



Jason Line

What Were You Thinking?

The snow is falling in ugly thick clumps. So many totally unique, complex, and perfect shapes crowded together, that they gravitate towards each other--be it due to beauty, mere proximity, or physical laws--they attract and weigh the others down, increasing in mass, until they accelerate and crash heavy and awkward out of the sky. Tonight they cover the streets. They fall over my windshield.

It is silent. The engine of my car is a whisper and I can hear the snow crunch under my tires. The wipers are deafening compared to the still and lonely calm of the early morning. The winter makes this early hour unbearably lonely.

I can smell the coffee Janice gave me on the way out of the house. I haven't had any. I hate using this little cup lid. It always dribbles coffee into my beard trying to drink out of it. She knows that. I think that's why she gives me the thermos every morning instead of a travel mug.

Two hours from now, after all the papers on my route are delivered, I'll go back home and pull a mug out of the kitchen cabinet, sit at the table and drink the lukewarm coffee. Janice will be snoring quietly on the couch, waiting for me to come home, so she can make breakfast for the kids before sending them off to school and work. I truly believe she just gives me the thermos cause it makes her giggle, thinking of me, dribbling coffee down my chin. I think that I'll humor her and wash the mug, put it back in the cabinet, and place the dirty thermos in the sink, just like yesterday.

Right now, I am in my car, finishing my route. The volume is turned down on my radio, and I spin the knob, so I can just make out Smokey singing

“Tears of a Clown.” I have made two stops so far and turn the corner onto Fortune Street. The rear tires loosen their grip a little, and I punch the accelerator to fish tail. Not too much. Just a bit of fun while I have the road all to myself.

I pull into an empty parking lot and move bundles of paper around in my trunk until I find my tire chains. My fingers are numb and wet by the time I get the chains on and am driving again. I approach downtown and climb the hill into city center. My next stop is the bus stop bench.

I let out a sigh as the possibility of the next few hours flips quickly through my head. I think of Janice on the couch. I take the car out of gear and coast up the curb, the snowy figure just outside my window. I look out at it, my breath coats the glass, hazy and dense. It is an impressionist work of a person, painted in white and shades of grey. I sit and admire this for a moment, open the door and brace myself. It seems colder now and the air steals away the warmth from my lungs.

The lump is sitting perfectly upright. I brush the snow away and find a man. He is close to the same age as myself, the skin of his face dark purple, crystals of ice hanging thick around his nose and mouth. His eyes are closed, and his hair is cropped. He is wearing a black knee length wool coat that looks very expensive. His arms are crossed, and as I move away more snow, I find a near-empty bottle of scotch set between his legs.

I cup my hands and blow warm air into them. I walk down the street a ways from my car and dial the emergency line on my phone. The cold has gotten into my bones and I have trouble holding the phone steady next to my ear.

“Police operator 93175, what is your emergency?”

“I found a man.” My voice echoed down the

empty street.

“That is not an emergency, sir.”

“He’s dead. Frozen.” I say. “Can you send someone out to the bus station?”

I explain the situation, and the operator tells me someone is on the way, that I need to stay at the scene until they arrive. I think that I should fill the newsstand, but I don’t. I am not going to make the rest of my deliveries. A little less money for presents this year. I think about all the bills piling up at home. I think about glasses and braces, college funds and sports’ physicals. I think about Janice’s ratty bathrobe. I think about the bolgna sandwiches I eat for lunch.

I return to the car and shut down the engine. The heater stops pumping out warm air. I grab up my thermos and walk back to the man on the bench. I kick the snow off the man’s shoes. They are black leather and seem expensive, but I don’t know anything about that kind of stuff. I sit down in the cold snow next to him.

We are bookends. Between us, shelved messily, the days we have lived. Here we meet, holding up this moment. I unscrew my thermos’ lid and pour steaming coffee into the little cup lid. I drink and it runs down my chin into my beard.

Alice di Certo

**This American Life Series:
Bikers**

silver gelatin photograph



All American Girl,

silver gelatin photograph



Matthew Ross

A Prelude to Jacob's Dream

The mighty Esau rises ere the day,
so keen a hunter seeking still his prey.
Ere Phoebus' cart has reached its highest peak
he quits the field possessing he did seek.
(a croaking raven fills the air with fear
With poison for the porches of his ear
And Esau shakes with woe-betiding doom
His heart turns flesh for fear to quick consume)
He carves the meat then roasts the ample lot
Arriving late, his father's blessing sought,
but with his father comes to realize,
his brother Jacob blew the solemn prize.
With cunning art of Ulysseian worth
The crafty Jacob steals his brother's birth.

In haste young Jacob rides thru desert sands
in search of shelter at a stranger's hands;
in fear, he shuns the vengeance of his foe
his flight unstay'd to count his countless woes.
(On tender lambs a shifty coyote feeds
his hunger drives his thievish bloody deeds
until the shepherd's wrath is fierce unkindled.
He seeks the felon, bloody thoughts unmingled
With any sense of scruple or restraint,
with savage deeds his mother earth to taint.
Foreseeing mischief and embittered strife
the coyote flees in terror of his life.)
So Jacob flies thru wastelands void of paths
Avoiding still a brother's rouse'd wrath.

Now Phoebus ends his journey and travails
And fix'ed stars bespeckle night's dark veil;
Wrapped close in Lethe's sorrow-drowning weeds
To peaceful resting Jacob's mind concedes.
Black Death's twin brother sleep, of all we find
Is nature's truest balm for troubled minds...

Richard Wakefield
Shooting Star

That shooting star last night
inscribed its sudden arc,
an autograph of light
and left a darker dark.
They used to say such things
betokened dawning ages,
foretold the death of kings
or blazed the way for sages.
But now we know it's grit
ignited by descent,
no message borned in it,
no purpose, nothing meant.
And yet we long to think
that moment's random fire
is proof enough to link
our lives with something higher.

Crystal Hoffer

The Scrying Bowl

Wedge between two lichen spotted rocks,
the bones were brittle and sharp that lay
on the banks in an early spring sun
still watery with winter. I crouched
beside a river that seemed to move
in a time and space all its own,
no concern for present tense or future
whereabouts; indeed, combining much
like time stretches through the stars
and back again, futures and pasts
so distant as to be nearly unrecognizable
but for the thoughtless liquid between them.

I placed the matte black bowl in the swift
currents until the water swirled into
and out again, forming a sort of petite
whirlpool that coalesced like swift dreams
in that night-blue vessel. Someone told me
once that I should fill the bowl and gaze
in the water, clearing my head of all
its cobwebs and debris (would that it were
possible) until I began to see glimpses
of those vast times and places that water holds
like whispers close to its susurrus mouth.

What I saw were pale clouds, bulbous
and immense, moving with solemnity across
the sky, across the fleeting reflection
of my own face whose linear lines are
all too aware of time. What I saw
was but a drop in a silent void
that offers no responses and no enlightened
moments outside of imagination. What I saw
was the consistency of change in a world
thinly held together by instances
that are mostly over before they are noted
for their presence, the fleeting beliefs
that shape the perception of the moment
into menacing. What I saw in that fragment
of time with the breeze making my ears ache
and with some strands of hair clinging
to my lips, were those clouds, whose shapes
visit momentarily, passing swiftly
in the deep recesses of a shallow bowl.

Richard Wakefield
Breaking the Ice

On winter mornings children slouch their ways
from home to school along the icy walks.
They hold their faces downcast as they gaze
at blue-green screens. One texts, another talks
to someone, maybe, in another time zone,
and some do things that these days pass for games--
but not with those who walk beside--alone.
Some watch movies squeezed to two-inch frames,
and all have headsets planted in their ears.

It's old news, how an old man clucks his tongue
at what's become of kids in recent years,
how youth has lost its way since he was young.
But when I walk, the buses gone, I see
the frozen puddles last year's children cracked
and smashed like Vandals sacking Rome in glee
are undisturbed, their sheets of ice intact.