

WB writer's
bloc

Spring 2015

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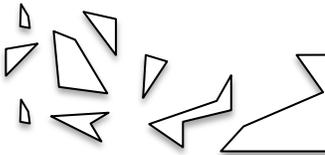
Want to know more? Want to get involved?

Email us at cornellwritersbloc@gmail.com!

For past issues and more information, check out our website at:

<http://cpep.cornell.edu/get-involved/writing/>

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Letter from the Editors

I have been volunteering as a Teaching Assistant for the Cornell Prison Education Program (CPEP) for the past 2 years. And during this period, I got to meet with many students at Auburn Correctional Facility, got to talk with them about the Laws of Thermodynamics, recite our favorite poems, discuss the most important values in our lives, and so much more.

But it was through my involvement with Writer's Bloc that I got to really interact with the students on a more personal and intellectual level, shared over the prison walls by our mutual creativity and love for the art of writing and painting. I found myself extremely humbled and impressed by their creativity and talents, putting my initial premature expectation to shame.

And I also found extreme joy in working with other Cornell students in Writer's Bloc. I feel very honored and happy to have worked with the amazing staff of Writer's Bloc. So I would like to say thank you so much to everyone involved in the process of creating this issue.

Based on a quote by Simone Weil, a French philosopher from the early 1900s, ("We have to endure the discordance between imagination and fact. It is better to say, "I am suffering," than to say "This landscape is ugly,") the theme for this issue was about how one navigates the worlds of reality and imagination. On behalf of Writer's Bloc, I hope you enjoy the issue!

—Owen Lee-Park, President

"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive."

—Madeline Jones quoting James Baldwin

Words. Gotta love 'em. —Erin Barlow, Treasurer

Allow yourself to be proud of all the progress you've made (especially the progress that no one else can see). Be proud of your writing skills, your soon-to-be six pack abs, your new level of Zen, or simply your more positive (or cynical) outlook on life.

—Christopher James-Llego, Editor

To read or write about the breadth of human experience, in the spaces of reality and imagination, is to gain perspective on the imagined realities and real imaginings in our own lives. Thank you for those perspectives.'

—Hilary Yu, Cover Designer

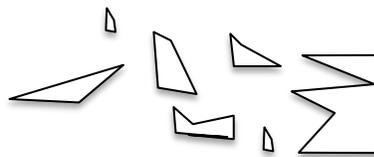


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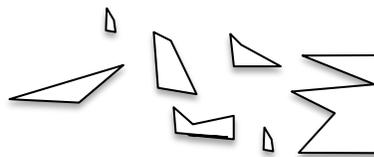
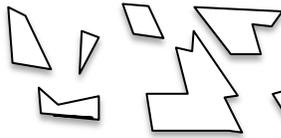


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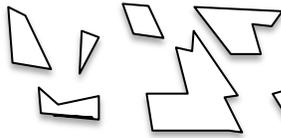
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A Likely Story

By Just

[By this point I should be confident in my ability
To say beautiful things,
To think of beautiful things.
That I'm not, says a lot, about a lot,
Notwithstanding the things I've seen.
I've come to learn that there are rules to being free,
i.e... no gardens of Eden unless you are allowed to eat from the trees.
And they say bad things come in three's.
I therefore pray that anything good comes in the thousands,
Like movable mountains that change my landscape.
I mean what I say but don't always mean the effect I create...
And don't always mean what I say,
In the way it is perceived.
I just wish I could pave the way, for people to realize their dreams.
Yet when I close my eyes all I hear is screams.
Sometimes things really are what they seem.
Imagine an Ivy League school that shows this much love to those who wear green,
Or the young Rhodes Scholar with the beauty and humility of a queen.
I wonder if an angel can have an acronym to go along with its wings.
C.P.E.P is changing things for me.
My consolation in Lieu of the love I seek...
And so, for you, I write.
I write to encapsulate my soul in the acquiescence of poetry.
It helps me to see the hope inherent in my story.
I'm growing... and I appreciate that growth.
But in the end...
I just want to go home.]



Expectation

By Nelson Angarita

Morpheus sublime.
Enchanting with a whisper.
Neither blind nor dumb.
Expectations still linger.
Silky, sweet, glistening, jeweled, poisoned lies.
I listen...

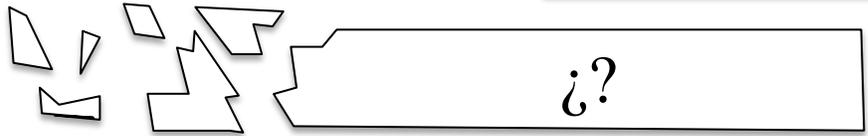
Morpheus sublime.
Pretty fruit on wicked trees.
One taste, you're caught, can't break free.
Expectations still linger.
Your reality bites.
Eating your soul all day and all night...

Morpheus sublime.
Blind, deaf and dumb.
Your reality, done.
Expectations still linger.
Dragon slayers are few.
Dreams of conquest evaporate like dew.
Still expectations linger.

Morpheus sublime.
No pull of gravity, confused by reality.
Floating in ecstasy, nostalgic kisses and sweet caresses.
Preferred to reality.
Still expectations linger.

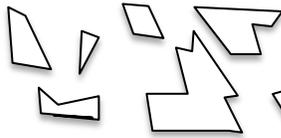
Exponential despair, flesh eating waste.
Gilded cage of sorrow.
No thought of tomorrow.
Love I tasted in haste, regret...

Morpheus sublime.
Expectations linger
STILL...



By Anonymous

I do not know you,
Still I recognize you instantaneously.
Never leaving yet unable to escape.
And there begins the end of me.
Since you have initiated the perpetual termination of everything that is,
So as to now possess an unhindered hand in all that was and will ultimately be,
To that totality I will not extend the courtesy of gratitude.
Nor its polarity.
Neither any of the multitudes of states that are the agents of your employment,
Regardless if I am now not only enslaved to you, but by you,
I assume not even indifference to the difference.
Do not be alarmed by my preliminary detection of your increasing
Reconnaissance and clandestine activity,
I only seek to aid in your efficacy.
The initial instance of your invasion is unrecollectable and impertinent
Your insidious insertion into who I am,
(Aside from how one is to deduce whether I am If and only If you are)
Now compromised is only evidence of the potential glitches in your programming.
Therefore allow me,
(Which of course you already have, ever so prescient)
To propose a set of homeostatic conditions of instability,
Ensuring optimal performance:
A reoccurring reconfiguration to the influx of input by mechanisms of
Misperception, Illogicality, Paranoia, Distortion, Illusory, Delusion,
Inversion, Fallacies, Contradiction, and Irrationality
Will counterbalance my innate inclinations for self-destruction
Since I am now us (Although I never was I).
Be not weary in your reasoning concerning my potential betrayal.
I am aware of your fail-safe mechanisms should the system be,
Corrupted or Circumvented.
For the world as we see it,
Since I am now us (Although I never was I),
Is but what you have reconstructed it to be.
Fit for a reality of my intellect,
Specifically tailored to be compatible with my unsophisticated
Ignorant and destitute nature.
For when you cease to function,
The neurosis ends,
The psychosis begins...
So do I?



Quiet Storm

By Maurice Cotton

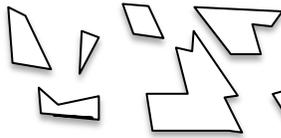
She breezed into my circumference.
She was so quiet as she came.
I did not notice the difference.
The position of my clothing remained.
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

The next time I sensed her, she was watching.
I have a tendency to detect her swirls.
Wrapped up not catching,
 using cotton material to stop those chills.
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

She captured my attention with something.
I was now clear on the atmosphere which was climatic.
Being as she is, awareness she did bring.
“THANK YOU,” I could hardly grasp behaviors as quickly.
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

I see once she gets turned on,
molecules begin to bubble.
When she is on, it is on.
Expressing herself effectively is not her trouble.
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

No one loves her energy on the face, the body more than I.
She, I cannot do without.
With her life I internalize.
Understand what I am about?
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

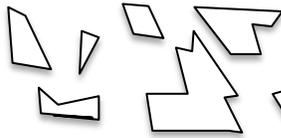


Quiet Storm

Forced to come out the hot shower.
Into the freezing cold I walk.
For an hour or so I touch her.
Yeah, dressed, I talk.
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

The next morning when I get up,
Pneumonia I have, then.
I feel fucked.
I do not know what to do to win.
Respect her condition.
That is the trick.

Be mindful of her situation.
Now, of her I cannot get sick.



Dreams of Mist

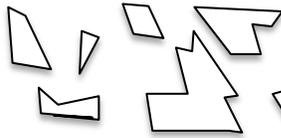
By Phil Miller

When I dream, I see the stars collide,
Sending sparkling dust into stellar winds.
Chaos reigns as time is set aside,
And the realm of divinity begins.

Pink lightning strikes from dark purple skies,
As amorphous love suddenly appears.
Staring intently, I see your eyes,
As your smile merges with my joyful tears.

Our astatic destinies unite,
Quickly igniting our celestial sphere.
On enchanting rainbows we alight,
Hand in hand facing a future so dear.

I'll sleep no more; you're a dream come true,
Commandeering my heart from pole to pole.
Out of chaos came the divine You...
The magnanimous flower of my soul.



Pale Light

By Vinny Poliandro

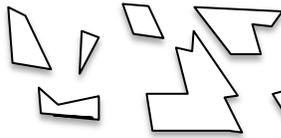
There once was three
That became one
What once was whole
Decayed to crumbs

There once were clouds
That hid the sun
The light was dim –
But now there's None.

What comes of days?
They pass so fast.
When did the flame
Die down to Ash?

'Cause once was heat
What now is ice
I once was Meek
And along came life

And where 'love' danced
Now stands a tomb
But still pale light
Escapes the moon!



Perplexed by Persona Non Grata

By Julio Iglesias

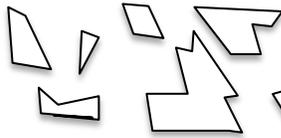
My discourse is vanished
Usurped by other hands
Will I ever know
If I'd only glanced

Cozened for vainglory
Your world is half the story
Violated but unbroken
These thoughts will be spoken

He witnessed the creation
A glean full intimation
Juxtaposing distinct dichotomies
Of two unique societies

Homefree and unscathed
O so you thought
Those scribbled lines would come to naught
But you're now an after thought

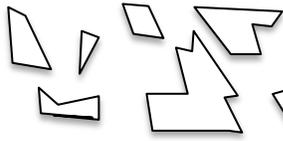
I've passed the baton
The finishing line is up ahead
My protégé is in my stead
Undaunted and unabashed
My thoughts will come to pass



Rules of Engagement

By Raymond VanClief

BREATHE...1...2...3
TO RELIEVE THE TENSION
I RECOUNT MY POSITION
32 HOURS AWAKE AND
STILL NO BETTER CONDITION
THE LAST SHELL WAS HELL
SHOTS DREW MY ATTENTION
MIND'FRAME IS SANE
THOUGH NOT TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE
NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE
THE NATIVES ARE SUSPICIOUS
TALKED TO HEADQUARTERS
I'M ALONE FOR THIS MISSION
WHEN THE GATES ARE CRACKED
GOTTA HANDLE BUSINESS
THIS IS WHY I WAS CHOSEN
THEY KNOW I'LL GO THE DISTANCE
GOTTA KEEP'EM SAFE
KNOWING THAT I MISS THEM
YEAR AFTER YEAR GOES BY
YET NO BODY LISTENS
I SHED SO MANY TEARS
THEY POOL AROUND THE DITCHES
MY KNIFE WAS ONCE VERY SHARP
NOW THE DULLNESS IS GONNA GET'EM
THE FIRST CASUALTY WAS TRUE
NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT'EM
MY AIM WAS ON POINT
AND MY ESCAPE WAS ESSENTIAL
THOUGH THE BATTLE WAS LOST
THE WAR ISN'T FINISHED
THE NEXT DAY WILL BE THE SAME
IN THESE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT



Inescapable Ends

By Lucas W. Whaley

Last night my sun died
Burned inward to cinders
In the endless surrounding cold

It flickered as it fell,
Some last second trepidation
Long past its expiration date

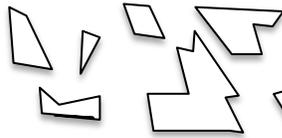
My sun impacted upon waters
Without witness
Giving neither sizzle nor sigh

Sinking below churning waves
It descended past depths
Where it should implode under pressure

Amid the rip-tides of trenches,
Wrapped in layers of darkness,
Dimly struggles my sun

Straining...
Listening for echoes
Of whale song and shine

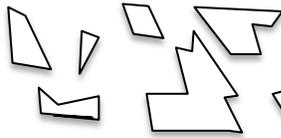
For Marina and For Kimbré
"I mourn for those who never knew you"
-Killswitch Engage



The Video Game Sutra

By Sean O'Malley

“Everything with form and appearance is an illusion,” said the Buddha in the Diamond Sutra. And that works for me. Because the alternative is despair. The despair of knowing that beyond these walls is yet another prison; a land of arbitrary police searches and unrelenting surveillance. The only differences are the yard is bigger, the commissary’s better (if you can afford it) and it’s co-ed. So I imagine that I am in a video game and I am trying to get to the next level; even though I know the next level is an Orwellian dystopia crammed with zombies. Up until now I’ve played the game deplorably; falling into the same trap over and over. But I am still here. And I am grateful for that. Because the graphics are exquisite.



Internal Affairs

By Khalib Gould

As I cast my gaze,
so not to appear amazed,
or show my feelings are truly transparent;

Or that the windows to my soul,
have not yet closed,
and my desire for her space has run rampant;

It's a daring feat I repeatedly repeat,
a brief glance, a warm smile,
a drafty sigh;

She's aware that I'm there,
not too close to raise ears,
we communicate at length with our eyes

.....

As I visualize vacations we've yet to take,
conversations over dinners we've yet to taste,
my mind runs wild in the presence of her;

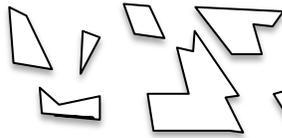
A gorgeous lass,
with plenty of class,
a fact – I'm sure – you'll concur

.....

While we subliminally flirt,
wishing to share our desserts,
Strawberry Oil *** Honey's Suckle *** Chocolate Syrup;

She has an affinity for my tongue,
and the tunes that I hum,
her breaths become less shallow and more terse;
But as I opened my eyes,
to my theme's demise,
I frown – another pipe dream up in smoke;

Though we haven't officially met,
I still awake in a sweat,
The mental matinee *** Keeps me away *** From the rope

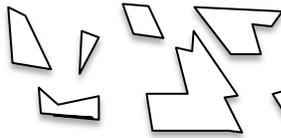


Cache Crops

By Reggie Bell

Wasted resources from lives filled with pleasures
the hoarding of treasure, a mark of man's measure
Mining for minerals and tapping reserves
consuming much more than any deserves
Offering no return on what's been invested
buried with debt while intact with assets
Proceeds and profits through existence has needs
donated but put toward diabolical deeds
A species that secretes itself six-feet-deep
in vaults which cripple vital economies
Ledgers of lies that society applies
embezzling from nature on which it relies
A daily reminder is gravity's pull
a medium of exchange once coffers are full
Expecting a blessing; some remuneration
yet refusing creation its just compensation
All living things relinquish themselves
fodder for future, recycling of wealth
Humanity could right these blasphemous wrongs
by forbidding prayer and psalm for the embalmed

Note: "Cache Crops" is a neo-euphemism for cemeteries.



Untitled

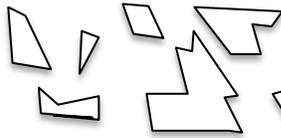
By Troy Bullock

At times, his travel would seem pale
Afflicted and oppressed by not passing a test
Hope seemed dull.
The thought of quitting lingered in his mind.
But he liquidated all traces of discouragement,
Took many steps further,
And asked his teacher for advice.
She pinpointed the rules of accuracy,
Expressed her desire to teach,
Enlightened him that the main instrument is to discipline yourself
In order for success to be grasped...

Now his terrarium becomes his study hall.
Books assembled from wall to wall.
In the abyss of his hollow deep cave,
He blocks out the rage and violence,
And seeks for the treasures of tomorrow...

The King becomes keen,
Highbrowed.
Grounded to breed achievement.
Receiving his G.E.D.
Stimulates his mental capacity,
His desire to hunt for a higher degree...

He understands that obstacles exist,
But consistency knocks down
The barrier of his critical past
And warrants triumph.
But failure to digest his brain
With sustenance of education
Would dilute his crown as King
And hinder the steps of the never-ending journey of learning...



Awakening

By Joseph DeLeyer

The people of America have to endure the lack of harmony between imagination and reality. It is easier to believe “I am free,” than to awaken to the fact that our government is attacking our civil liberties.

In 2015 the United States government is using every trick in the book to pull the wool over the eyes of the sheep. The civil liberties of the average citizen are under attack by their government, however, too many citizens are blind to the current state of affairs within their own country. The United States Constitution was written by the forefathers of this country to circumvent the oppressive power of King George and create a new ideology for a new land. The fact that absolute power has the ability to corrupt absolutely it is no small wonder that our government has become the same tyrant that we, as a country, once broke away from. Is our perceived freedom within the United States imaginary or a tangible reality?

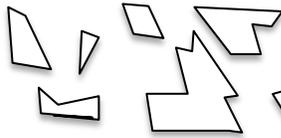
3rd Amendment Right

“No soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house; without the consent of the owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.”

The Third Amendment was placed within the United States Constitution because King George had been enforcing acts that had forced homeowners to house his soldiers. These soldiers were used to maintain surveillance on the townspeople and if need be rise up against them. Quartering troops made the townspeople live-in hostages in their towns and homes; the people were at the mercy of the occupying troops. The spoils of war of the day were rape and pillage; King George’s soldiers were notorious for these practices. King George had created a police state where the occupying force reported back all data gathered through surveillance directly back to those loyal to the Crown. The forefathers imagined a utopia where their ideals could become reality; a place where the citizens could be free from surveillance from its government.

In 2015 one may notice that their lives are under constant surveillance. In every neighborhood within the United States one will find surveillance cameras that feed directly into the nearest police precinct, Big Brother is always watching. Are these cameras not police surveillance? The cameras were installed throughout the cities in America after the tragic events of 9/11 to “protect” the people; however, these cameras have been used in more criminal cases against American citizens than they have caught “terrorists.” Under the “Homeland Security Act,” the people have lost many of their rights that this country was founded on, yet very few people seem to notice. Is this imaginative or reality?

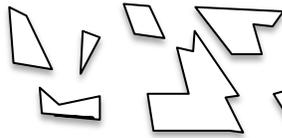
Oftentimes in life there is a fine line between the imagined and what is reality. An imagined sense of security has the ability to make some people feel safe. Reality is sometimes a hard truth that people do not want to know. Ignorance to reality allows for certain truths to be ignored within people. Knowledge is a burden when it has the ability to open the eyes of the blind.



If Only Wishes Had Wings

By Just

If only wishes had wings
So be it, be it so.
Be it pain, Be it hate, Just let it go
Be it true, Be it love, let it show.
Be it sure, Be it everything, let it Grow.
Be it pure, Be it Destiny, let it flow.
Be it Right, be it mine, let me know.
Or I won't.
Whatever it may be, allow it to be what it is
Soon you will see that fantasy, is Death's Kiss.
Let it Go.
Fight the Good fight, Just know.
You can't fight, and defeat, what cannot be controlled.
Not a soul, will see all highs and no lows.
Without truth, backed with proof, there will be no Growth.
Let it Grow, let it Flow,
like an ocean without a wave, without a boat, without a coast,
There is only forever, pray for it to end, but it won't.
let it soak.
Let it be absorbed into your pores like light encased in soap.
Until you exist, in the midst of life's Glow.
Only then can you be sure to stay afloat.
Free to fly, fly as high in the sky as your mind is able to fly...
Though at times, I do not wish that wishes had wings,
because if fantasy is allowed to fly, then reality will stay grounded.
I just love to see beautiful things when I Dream.
Even armed with the knowledge that the state of Rapid eye movement,
is not swift enough to footrace with reality,
My physical inadequacy... Coupled with my intellectual capacity,
by-passes veracity and envelopes me in satisfaction
It's like I'm in the matrix.
The complication of incarceration, got me Dreaming
while awake, about places,
more fortunate souls circle, when planning a Quick vacation.
Or when I'm pacing, at the same time that I'm laying,
In the cell reading mail, that hasn't yet been delivered
about the demise of my generation.
Until I realize that the idea of a perfect world is
Just a fantasy.
A tumor in the prefrontal cortex of reality,
A rumor that has ever been proven true, that will never be prove true...
But so be it, you know?
Such is the way of the world.



The Purpose-Driven Death

By Vinny Poliandro

A fly. A single, solitary house fly.

Within its simmering vision lay a hundred different choices. Prospects. Opportunities. Each one the same image-different Angles—different shots..Camera One, Camera Two. Perception. After all, perception is ALL reality REALLY is.

The grotesque, furry-legged creature Wandered about, doing as Nature designed it to do. Flew. Ate. Bred. Rinse + Repeat. Detours Need not apply to work this Avenue.

Didn't stop to question its ABSOLUTE solitude. She did not fall victim + drown in the lot in life that nature dictated + Assigned. Her ugly, vile, lonely existence was not compelled to ponder or debate “the Meaning of Life.” Even if it had another to debate with—it would not. The fly understood the meaning of life: To be.

There was no sorrow when it witnessed decomposition. There was no “guilt” when she “sinned.” The ALL-NATURAL, God-instilled void reigned supreme. The void no God trespassed through. And that void was in God—and that void WAS God—for only a God could produce such freedom of will—such emancipation from emotion. And in this divine, God-less void, the fly prospered. It was able to “live.” To TRULY LIVE.

But such is life, that such a care-free existence mustn't endure long. No. The basic requirement is that for one to exist for many years, it must do so in torment.

Enter: The human.

The (so-called) only cognitive being. The supreme specimen. The agitator. The victim. The thrall + the 170.

Cognitive.

Consciousness.

The ability to suffer + to feel. To love + to fear. To fear + to love. To fear love + love fear.

After all, what truly separates us from our genetically-similar brethren? Born into a jungle of concrete + chaos, we differ little from the inferior Animal Kingdom. The REAL difference? We drink without thirst. We labor without rest. Judge without question + war without reason. We spend countless hours + years working HARD to advance + evolve technology that can help us devolve emotionally and spiritually. Help us dissolve our morals and society.

There are some of these superior creatures who ONLY know pain. “Without pain—one cannot know joy...” But yet without love or joy—all that there is, is pain. No comparison needed. Relativity Rejected.

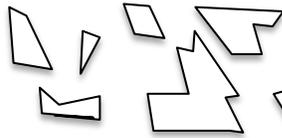
So...What's the point of this essay? What's the moral to this fable? The punch to this jest or the profound to this parable? It's synonymous with the reason we breathe.

To fill a gap between 2 spaces of inevitable and everlasting stretching emptiness. I wrote this because...I did.

To live is to suffer. Still, the rain brings life.

The purpose is to create a purpose.

And to disregard or achieve.



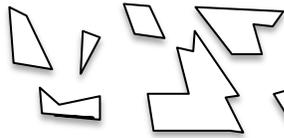
Eternal Longing of a Restless Mind

By Petros Bedi

As I returned from work in the prison's law library earlier today, three sparrows flew from the end of the gallery and landed on the windowsill directly across from my cell. Every time I went near the cell bars and did something that required moving my hands, they would fly towards me in the direction that the hands moved, and when they would see that nothing was thrown there, they would change course in mid-air and return to the window sill. Several people in the gallery feed these birds every day. My neighbor, Mike, is one of them. He rolls up small pieces of bread into balls about one-eighth of an inch in diameter and throws them on the floor in front of our cells. Perhaps they flew across my cell because they confused me with Mike. They paid attention to every move that I made, but they did so not because they were hungry. There were pieces of bread on the floor, yet they showed no interest in them. It seems that even birds look for something different to stimulate their senses, something new, when they are no longer hungry. Perhaps they, too, suffer from a restless mind or a need for change as we humans do. Certainly, humans aren't the only species capable of playing.

Mike heard me coming back and called to ask if I saw the mailbag on the front desk when I came in. I said, "Yes, the mail is there, all sorted out in stacks for each gallery." "Who's working?" he asked. I told him the name of the officer. "I hate it when that guy works," he said, "he never gives out mail on time." As we were talking, a couple of guys walked down the gallery near the front desk and remained there standing and talking. Every time they noticed the officer getting up, they looked to see if he would pick up the mail to hand it out—not unlike the sparrows did in respond to my hand gestures. In our block, mail is usually handed out between 3:00 to 3:30pm every day, except weekends and holidays, when there is no mail. A letter from the outside world is greatly appreciated in prison. It provides a person with fresh material to feed the imagination, helping escape from reality for some time. Almost nothing is new here. The same routine is repeated every day, sometimes for decades. Without a variety of external stimulation, the mind gets bored. What characterizes prison as a place of punishment is mostly the limited stimuli from the outside world. Prison is designed to starve the senses. The mind tries to compensate for this absence of contact with a desired object by creating the object in the imagination. This kind of imagination produces some weak versions of physical and mental sensations that resemble those experienced when in contact with the actual object. These sensations are similar to those produced by drugs in that they strengthen the need for the desired object even more. The object of dependence for sensations has some power over a person's behavior, and dependence on anything restricts freedom of action.

When I first came upstate to serve my sentence of 42 ½ years to life, in 2000, I used to hate weekends and holidays because there was no mail given out on those days. Those were days that seemed to me to be never-ending. Every weekday, at 3:30pm, I used to sit near the gate of the cell waiting for the officer to pass out mail. The days

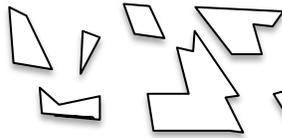


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that I got mail, I would open the envelope and devour the content of the letter as quickly as possible, especially if it was from a girl or a friend I used to hang out with. After reading it, awareness of where I was would return and disappointment would follow. The letter produced some sensations, which, apart from being temporary, did not satisfy. In fact, those sensations aggravated even more the need for stimulation that was present before reading the letter. This experience could be compared with that of having a strong itch but having no means by which you can scratch it. Receiving a letter would be similar to stroking that itching area with a feather; first it seems that you get some satisfaction, but you quickly realize that the feather just increased the magnitude of the itch a hundredfold. When I became aware of how futile it was seeking satisfaction from things that don't even satisfy, I knew I needed to do something about it. Throughout my life, I never liked anything that made me dependent on it. This is the reason I never liked using drugs, drinking alcohol, coffee, or smoking cigarettes. Sometimes I even wish I didn't need to eat to survive.

Ever since I was a boy growing up in Albania, I was taught not to develop any strong attachment to, or dependence on, anything. "Less attached you are to things, less distress you will experience when you lose them," my father had told me when I was 7 or 8 years old, and our dog had died. This advice came to good use to me when I was 15 years old. The communist government exiled my family—my parents, grandmother, 12-year-old sister, and me—to a small town far from home for suspicion that we were against communist ideology. 25 to 30 secret and regular police armed with AK47s took us from home at gunpoint and transported us on military trucks to the new town. We were forced to leave behind everything that was accumulated for several generations, and I wasn't allowed to go back to school, but I don't remember any of us feeling any distress for the loss. We just started over and adapted to the new place. In prison, as I recalled these memories, I told myself that I have to focus and see how I can adapt to this new place. I had heard that mediation might help, so I decided to try it out for a while. I remembered some instructions on how to meditate that I had learned from a monk at a Buddhist monastery in Thailand a few years earlier. I also remembered this monk telling me over and over again, "Only the present exists, the past is gone, and the future is not here yet." According to the meditation instructions, I was to focus on counting the breath. Counting one when I breathed in, two when I breathed out; that when I reached ten I was to return and start all over again from one; and that every time I would catch my mind wandering, I was to bring it back to the breath. "Follow the breath, become the breath," the monk had told me.

Around this time, an attorney was preparing the brief to appeal my conviction. In her letters, she sounded very confident that my conviction would be overturned. Her confidence gave me hope that I would get out soon. Every time I sat to meditate, and that was every day, I spent most of the time imagining what I would do when I got out of prison instead of focusing on the breath. Somehow, I ended up using meditation as a means to escape from reality. I believed that it was a matter of time before the world of my imagination becomes reality. But the Appellate Division affirmed my conviction

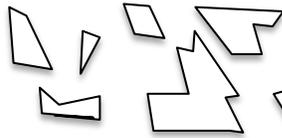


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and, as a result, the world of my imagination collapsed. The only world that was left was the world of the present, the prison, possibly for the rest of my life. The disappointment was strong; it felt as if there was a knot in my chest blocking the air from reaching deep into the lungs. That experience really brought my focus on the breath. I remember putting a curtain on the bars of my cell, blocked the external noise with earplugs, and sitting to meditate. The mind became quiet quickly because the distractions of the past and the imagined future had ceased to exist. My view of the future was blank, and without a future, there was no interest in the past. After spending some time sitting, the disappointment started to melt away and I experienced an openness in the mind that developed into a state that was free of all psychological needs. Perhaps this was the freedom of having nothing left to lose; nothing for the mind to hold on to. I knew then that the freedom that comes from meditation is beyond any freedom the physical world can provide. I knew that no matter what happens in the future, meditation was something that I would do for the rest of my life.

After that day, for the next 13 years, I did mainly three things: meditating as much as I had time for (at least four hours a day, for several years I received guidance from a Zen teacher), learning law and English (I only knew some basic English at the time), and working out. During the first few years I reviewed my views about life and how those views had formed. I reflected on things that I did in the past and looked for the real reasons behind doing what I did. I tried to understand what it was that made prison a place of punishment. I continued to imagine, but meditation helped me imagine without losing touch with reality; it helped me see that when imagination is fueled by pure wishful thinking, or it arises as an impulsive activity to stimulate the senses, there will always be disappointment. Instead of using imagination to try to escape my reality, I used it to find ways to change it. By 2010, I had filed, and the courts denied, over a dozen petitions in which I protested that my conviction was wrongfully obtained. Although I was involved in a criminal life before coming to prison, I had not done any of the crimes I was charged and convicted with. In 2013, however, with the help of my attorney, Joel B. Rudin from Manhattan, my main conviction was overturned and my sentence was reduced (my earliest release date is now scheduled for January 3rd of 2017). I am still not completely free from feeling the effect of monotony that prison creates, except when I am meditating. At times, I imagined a more pleasant future and look forward to living it. I look forward to the day that I will be able to walk somewhere under trees from being surrounded by all this noise. I look forward to the day that I will meet my little nieces and nephew (they are not in the U.S.) and I imagine teaching them how to meditate. But this kind of imagining does not create conflict in my mind. I recognize it for what it is and it does not prevent me from doing what I have to do while I am here.

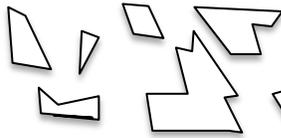
Meditation brings understanding about how the conditioned mind works. It weakens the momentum of such a conditioning; it allows for some freedom in action instead of just reacting to circumstances. Meditation is not something that can be of help only to us in prison. The effect of a restless mind is felt more by us in prison because we don't, as people outside the prison do, have access to as many objects that produce



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desired sensations. Having access to these objects, however, is not a cure for a restless mind. Access to drugs does not cure a user's addiction. Sensations always produce a need for further sensations and, as a result, the restlessness of the mind is ever on the increase. This hunger for sensations causes us to devour the natural resources of our planet; it causes us to destroy the very environment we live in. Attachment to pleasant sensations causes us to exploit each other and fight wars when we feel a threat of losing objects that cause them. Today's consumerist society is a product of restless minds.

Even animals take some time in which they withdraw their senses from the external world. The sparrows, for example, may fly back and forth from one window to another or from the floor to a cell bar or a table, they may display restless characteristics, but after some time, they land in safe place out of our reach and just sit still for relatively long periods of time. They pull their heads back as if they could shrink their necks at will and stop moving completely. They look as if they are free of all concerns and fears during those periods; they look as if they are in deep, natural meditation. It seems that we humans are the only species on the planet who seek stimulation of the senses continuously without stop. Even when we are asleep our desires and fears don't go away; they are expressed in the form of dreams or nightmares. Our minds never seem to rest. Meditation can change that; it can bring some peace. Meditation can lessen mental suffering significantly. That has been the case with me.



Sleep Selfie

By Michael Shane Hale

“It’s about knowing your angles,” was the advice she heard once from Kim Kardashian. Her hand tightened as it lifted the phone into position. She knew the positioning so well, she did it in her sleep.

“No, really,” she posted on her Facebook page. “The next morning I noticed the pictures on the phone. There I was, head to pillow. My angles were perfect except my mouth was hanging open. LOL!!” None of her Facebook friends liked her post.

The screen framed a perfect, setting sun.

“Dammit!” Her hand dropped to her side. “Why can’t I angle myself out fo the screen?” She adjusted her pink vest and shuffled on the observatory. The platform bulged out over the wound of a ravine. Heavy boots with brown sweat pants tucked inside held a coating of dust. She was skeptical about beating it off, which precluded her snapping the view of the Grand Canyon through the glass floor. It really bothered her. If she doesn’t take the selfie, she would be haunted.

She eyed the striated earth and was taken aback. She easily took in the whole scene and it made her feel like she knew this place. But this felt like a lie. She wrestled between knowing some mental representation that was being mapped out in her brain and knowing she hadn’t touched a single pebble with her fingers or feet. She saw herself in the contradiction. The selfie was a way to look like she was somewhere without really being there. But the picture, unlike her mental representations, didn’t lie.

She squeezed the sides of the phone and caught the sun’s rays glimmering up and over the stamped apple on the case’s body. She wished she had a second phone to catch the beauty of the first.

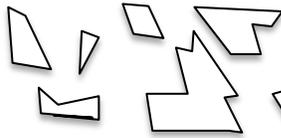
Fingering a strand of hair behind her ear, she pushed herself up on the ocher colored rail.

“If I push the button...” she wouldn’t say the words “without me being in it.” Being dropped from the picture would be like her falling down, knowing the secret physics of forces, gravity and rates of speed before breaking open on the dry bed below.

She was her father’s daughter, no doubt about it. Her feminized cheeks were the only distinction. Same nose, same chin, same dimples, same green eyes. Her father’s tragedy ran through her life like the Colorado River carving out a gorge in Arizona. His protests of innocence slammed against her. He just needed the evidence.

“Just take the damn picture already,” her hand shot upwards just in time to catch a bronzed creation. She smiled drawing her lips into that delicate territory of appearing pursed and created another alibi. All of her Facebook friends liked this one.

Easter Sunday 2015



Reality

By Nelson Angarita

Where were we when we agreed upon this reality?
Steam-powered progress leads to an oil and gas-powered economic expanse.
Concrete and steel replaced wood and stone,
Electric power replaced the candle burn.

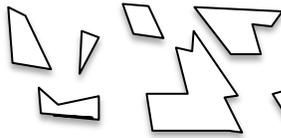
Where were we when we agreed upon this reality?
The radio captured our attention,
Television captured our imagination and computers enthrall us.
Where now cell phones have enslaved us.
Manifest destiny of a digital age,
where we bare our flesh, our privacy, our souls.

Where were we when we agreed upon this reality?
So much information but little retained.
Who or what is truly to blame.
Ethnic cleansing, religious strife,
unification or civil divide.
War for liberty, war for peace,
War to feed the starving beast.

Where were we when we agreed upon this reality?
Slavery, indentured servitude, poverty and prison.
Ignorant father, mother, sister, brother and all our kin.
When we think we can change the world by doing nothing.
Apathy and indifference till it's you that is lost.

Where were we when we agreed upon this reality?
Blood in your eyes shedding tears in the rain.
A sea of humanity once you walk out your door,
always a stranger, forever more.
Lost in the crowd we are all the same.
Movie star royals with too much to say,
politicians point fingers, but never take blame.
We want what we want without concern for need.
Our souls are corrupt by corporate greed.

Where were we when we agreed upon this reality?
Gaia is dying, the cancer is us.
Perpetual black space is her ultimate fate.
What do I care this new iPhone is great!
Another dead planet, this one third from the sun.
Our sun just a star of four billion to see.

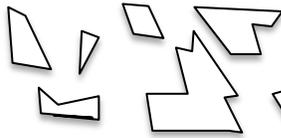


Reality

And that is just in our Milky Way galaxy.
One in a billion we can't even see.
So what should we do to save our own skin?
I am but one, with you we are two.
But I need your advice on what we should do.
Tethered to a phone you chose not to answer.
Now I'm busy today, my show's on T.V. and then after that I have another to see.
Let someone else worry, struggle, despair.
I made an attempt, you saw me, you were there!
Why should I care what the future will be, my life and yours is a preconceived fatality.
It is all a question of our mortality.
Now I know exactly where we were when we agreed upon this reality.

OBLIVIOUS

Those who have lived their life by bad example seem to always have good advice. We all have the power to re-create ourselves and one person can make a difference. Many can change the World...



Souvenirs

By Jacob Russell

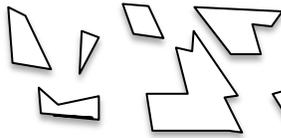
Belligerent silence filled the car as it splashed northbound along rain-soaked I-5. With concerted determination, he focused on the landscape sliding by as if committing every image to memory. He said nothing. She said nothing. He had nothing to say, and he cared nothing for anything she had to say, which was nothing. So as she drove, shaking her head with melodramatic disgust, he stared out of the passenger-side window, giving her his back with passive-aggressive hostility. He sat with awkward rigidity, his butt halfway up the bucket-seat, his spine telephone-pole-straight, and his back never touching the seat. Had she cared, she might have noticed. She didn't, on either account.

Each breath was a scourge upon his throat and lungs thanks to the abrasive stench of her overpowering lilac-scented perfume, which she knew he couldn't stand. It was stronger, more brutal than usual. He found her perfume almost as noxious as the chemical reek of artificial pine spewing from the green tree dangling from her rearview mirror. The foul potpourri was exacerbated by the car's heater, which she had switched to high. The gag-inducing miasma added another level to his suffering. The heat alone punished him in his green turtleneck and gray St. John's Academy hoodie. Sweat flooded down his back and forehead as he struggled to breathe. The salty wetness stung his shoulders and back almost as bad as the time at the beach he's gotten himself tangled in a jellyfish's tentacles. He tried cracking his window but she had eliminated that avenue of relief with the power-window locks.

Suffering in silence, he sneaked a glance behind them. Charcoal clouds obscured the sun like a sooty smudge across the sky. They drove through downtown Sacramento and he eyed the gold-domed capitol. The sudden memory of his class trip there the previous spring elicited a smile. Things had been much better then, before she invaded his life. The Sacramento River ran parallel to the interstate a few hundred yards or so to their left. As much as he wanted a final look at the mid-1800s era buildings and wooden sidewalks along the riverbank, he refused to look in her direction. The city soon slid away into housing developments and then into farmland and empty fields.

She turned on the stereo and the silent stalemate was broken by the catchy chorus of some one-hit-wonder pop group. The next song was his favorite. He ever-so-slightly tapped his left index finger against his thigh. Noticing this, and knowing the song was his favorite, she made a show of stabbing the power button with a talon-like manicured nail, killing the radio. Her triumphant smirk collapsed into a scowl when the finger kept tapping and he began lightly humming the silenced song's melody. Knuckles popped like Rice Krispies in milk as she squeezed the wheel. He felt their speed increase as her high-heeled foot crushed the accelerator. Despite the smirk he now wore like a victory mask, he refused to give her the satisfaction of acknowledging her, even if only to gloat. Instead, he pressed his brow against the cool, damp window and savored the momentary relief from the insufferable inferno in which she had him trapped.

Arco Arena appeared to their right and then quickly vanished again. As they took the off-ramp leading to the airport he spotted a McDonald's and his belly gurgled in protest at its emptiness. She hadn't made him breakfast that morning and when he'd attempted to pour himself one last bowl of Trix she'd insisted there wasn't time.



Souvenirs

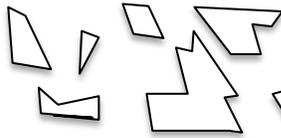
There had been time, however, for her to spend ten minutes standing in the driveway explaining to her gossipy friend next door where they were going and why, elaborating on how horrible of a human being he was. He endured the unfair indignity of their dirty looks and belittling comments with stoic silence. He was good at that, he'd had plenty of practice bearing sole blame for all things large and small. It hadn't been like that in the beginning, not until *after* the wedding. Never had he imagined this would happen – how could he? Nothing had turned out like he'd expected.

They pulled into the massive airport parking lot and, despite plenty of open spaces near the terminal, she chose the furthest possible space from the terminal. He sighed at the thought of having to shlep his heavy bag what seemed like miles in the monsoon-like downpour. He finally turned in her direction, for no other reason than to unbuckle his seatbelt. Just as his finger started depressing the red release button everything went black before exploding into sparks. It felt like a whole colony of fire-ants was attacking the right side of his face. It took a few seconds to realize what had just happened: She had slapped the hell out of him! More shocked than hurt, he glared at her with unabashed hatred. “You’re an ungrateful little shit – always have been,” she screeched at him like a menopausal howler monkey. Glaring at her with brittle fierceness, he said nothing. “How could you break your father’s heart like that? You don’t deserve his love, you little ingrate.” Holding her stare and matching its rancor, he still said nothing. He just glared, loathing her with the myopic intensity only a ten-year-old’s animus knows. “You always have to be so difficult. You didn’t even try to make it work. Mikey calls your father dad, but you never once called me mom, did you?” Once more, her hand lashed out and cracked against the side of his face. This time, however, he’d seen it coming and was better prepared for it. He knew it was useless trying to explain just how hard he had tried – he truly had – that *she* hadn’t kept *any* of her promises and had intentionally made things worse. “I wonder why, *Judy*,” he replied with a resigned sigh, finally speaking for the first time all morning. Before she could respond, or strike again, he freed himself from the seatbelt and stiffly scrambled out of the car.

The icy sting of the rain on his face helped extinguish some of the flaming soreness. Opening the rear-passenger door of her Lexus, he yanked the huge duffel bag off of the back seat. It was nearly as long as he was, and almost as heavy. Holding his burden with both hands, he eyed the distance to the terminal and sighed. “I woulda parked closer, but we wouldn’t want anyone dinging my new car, now would we,” she remarked from under an umbrella, making no attempt to protect him from the rain. Giving her his back once more, he began trudging toward the terminal.

He had obvious trouble with the bag’s weight. Every few steps he paused to shift the heavy load to the other side. Less than a quarter of the way to the terminal he was already soaked to his underwear. “That’s why it has a shoulder strap – try using it, stupid,” she snapped impatiently. The shove to the back caused him to wince in pain. She seemed not to notice. Using the shoulder strap wasn’t an option. So he toiled on toward the terminal, suffering in silence as he always did.

They finally reached the terminal and checked his bag. For the first time all morning he felt some relief. As they started walking away from the baggage counter he saw his grandmother and aunt Cindy standing a few yards away. Clothes dripping



Souvenirs

water and soggy sneakers squeaking with each step, he fled to them, happy for the first time that day. His arms locked around his grandmother and he found instant comfort in her warmth and the smoky scent of her Salem cigarettes. Expecting the big hug she always had for him, he was unprepared when she shoved him away. Stumbling backwards on slippery-soled sneakers, he tripped and collapsed onto the sticky tile floor. Tears welled in his eyes as he stared up with frightened incomprehension. The anger on her face was something he'd never seen. His aunt Cindy had a similar look scrawled onto her face, adding to his fearful confusion.

Most of the passersby pretended not to notice him on the ground like a soggy pile of rags. But some gawked at him as they rushed by, laughing and pointing at him on the floor surrounded by three obviously unsympathetic women. Frightened, lying on a filthy floor, and being laughed at by strangers, he had never felt so low, or so alone, in his entire life.

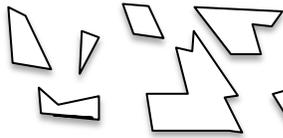
As he began pushing himself off of the floor his aunt Cindy grabbed the hood of his sweatshirt and jerked him to his feet. Using the hood as a leash, his 300-plus pound aunt yanked him toward the escalators leading to the boarding gates. His knees nearly gave out as the heavy fabric of the wet hoodie bit into his upper back and shoulders, scouring his skin like 80-grit sandpaper. A muffled sob slid up his throat as he was prodded forward like a condemned prisoner escorted by three silent and pitiless guards. Despite the terminal's heat, he shivered uncontrollably from the coldness he now felt. And despite his empty stomach he had the sudden urge to use the bathroom.

Only when they reached the barrier of metal detectors did his aunt relinquish hold of his hood. He didn't look up at the TSA agents as he cleared the security checkpoint. The moment his aunt managed to wedge her bulk through a machine without setting it off – which took numerous attempts – her sweaty, sausage-like fingers snatched his hood and she dragged him onward.

Sitting at the boarding gate flanked by his grandmother and gargantuan aunt, he was berated tag-team style – one jumping in whenever the other paused for breath. Judy stood a few feet away sipping a diet soda while talking on her phone and grinning at him. “I told you to go to your dad and talk to him last night,” his grandmother snarled, digging her nails into his trembling thigh. “You couldn't even do that,” she squeezed harder, “not for the man who loves you so much and gives up so much to provide everything imaginable. How can a son be so cruel to his father?”

Shame nearly forced him into tears. How *could* he tell her, what could he say? He couldn't tell anybody because no one cared. He wanted nothing more than to tell her the truth, to share his secret. But fear and shame kept him from doing so. Besides, maybe everything was his fault – he'd been told that so many times that he no longer knew what to believe anymore. He also feared she wouldn't believe him, especially now after the way she was treating him. So he remained silent, isolated in his suffering.

Forever passed before he finally heard the boarding call. His aunt's meaty hand thudded into his back and propelled him off of the seat. He almost crashed face-first onto the carpeted floor, but she clamped onto his shoulder with steam-shovel strength and jerked him to his feet. The agony-inflicted gasp that escaped him was so loud



Souvenirs

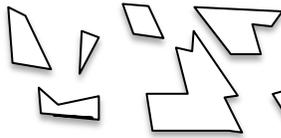
everyone in the immediate area looked his way. The heavy hand slid off of his shoulder as people watched with curiosity. Free of his burden and seeing Judy at the counter handing over his ticket, he bolted for the tunnel leading to the plane. His grandmother and aunt offered no parting words of love or concern. He didn't look back at them as he fled to the plane for refuge. Judy gave an audible hiss as he passed her. Without looking at her, he grinned and loudly replied, "bitch!"

At the tunnel's entrance an attractive flight attendant gently took his hand and guided him to his seat. She helped buckle him into his seat in the last row, closest to the flight attendants' station. Noticing his wet clothes and that he was shivering, she reached up and retrieved a blanket for him, which she unfolded and draped over his trembling body. He thanked her with a grateful smile. Seeing him stiffly leaning forward in the seat, she whispered, "Don't worry, I think flying is scary, too. Nothing to be ashamed of, sweetie. Takeoff's the worst part, but you'll be fine, promise. Once we're at cruising altitude I'll bring you a soda and a snack, okay?" His smile widened as he nodded his head. He wished Judy had been half as nice as this stranger. "Where are you heading to all by yourself, hon?" she asked as she fussed with his blanket. "To live with my mom."

Takeoff was the worst part. He fought against it but couldn't keep his back off of the seat. He could only bury his face in the blanket and gnash his teeth against the pain. Noticing the nice flight attendant watching him with concern, he turned his head toward the window, thankful to have the entire row to himself. They leveled out and the "no seat belt" sign came on. He quickly unbuckled and rushed to the lavatory behind his seat.

Once he finished fumbling with the lock he began easing out of his wet sweatshirt and turtleneck. Alone in the tiny toilet, he began crying as the clingy clothes scraped up his back and over his shoulders. Naked from the waist up, he turned and inspected himself in the mirror. His back looked like a topographic road map, a network of raised crimson welts crisscrossed from the tops of his shoulders down to the small of his back. Fluid oozed from the swollen wounds where layers of his delicate skin had been flogged away. The raw marks sat atop yellow and purplish bruises of past punishments. Alone and quietly crying in the cramped bathroom smelling of chemical disinfectant, tears singed his eyes as he stared at the final souvenirs from his father.

Minutes later he heard a soft tapping on the bathroom door. "Is everything alright in there? Are you okay, hon?" He recognized the flight attendant's muffled voice. He wiped away his tears with a newfound resolve and replied, "I am now."



Things that Make Me Sad

By Vinny Poliandro

1.

Happy Children,
Wedding Rings
Sunny days
+ birds that sing

2.

My daughter's voice,
the fleeting years
Repeating choice
to betray those dear.

3.

Sober times,
empty minds.
The belief that there's
someone divine.

4.

Holidays
with 'home' so far
Wake up
To see steel bars

5.

Enter young,
Exit old
My heart WAS WARM
Before it froze

6.

Had it all
Lost it all
No more depths
For me to Fall

7.

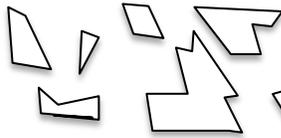
Suffered much
+ tried to run
Until at last
inside I'm numb

8.

A "someone"
is what life brings
But then we die
+ we're just a "thing"

9.

So what's the point?
Well-life IS fair
And that is why,
We ALL despair!!



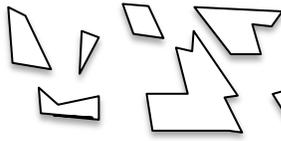
Fire

By Abram Saroufim

She kissed me when I arrived home.
– Not even a spark.
I went to my desk to write.
My pen sped as the thought train in my head
Boarded the paper in front of me...
My flow was interrupted
By her hand on my shoulder.
“Ready?” she asked.
“Do we really have to do this?”
“Please...It’s been so long.”

We returned to find our home burning.
It crackled and roared,
Obliterating all.
In the remains, the pages.
Reduced to ash.
Months gone because of a single spark.

She looked at me.
Her lips curled into a frown.
Her tears glistened in the firelight.
I kissed her warmly.
This time, the air charged between our lips.



Bright Heart Elegy

By Kari Miya

You were kind, with bright eyes that glistened
I was stubborn, and refused to listen

You understood and dried my tears
But ignorant yet I closed my ears

Our shadows stretched across this empty landscape
All I wanted was an escape

Today, tomorrow, yesterday,
You always said everything would be okay

I remembered a feeling I nearly forgot
Your smile glowed so bright in my thoughts

I never even knew your name
Yet you found me and listened just the same

Days flew by in a single blink
Although I resisted, you didn't shrink

But I ran away in desperation
What had been lost in translation?

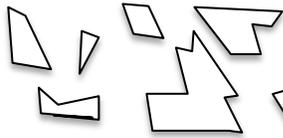
Those words I accepted too late as true
I didn't know that you were in pain too

You absorbed all of my anguish and torment so dense
And this is all I can offer in recompense

I hate me, I hate this world—I would do anything
To hear the shining heart that listened to everything

I wipe bitter tears away with my lonely hand
As I kneel in this harshly hostile land

So it's for you I cry this selfish melody
It's for your bright heart I write this elegy



Frisbees Aren't Meant for Arbor Days, Or Rainy Mays

By George Famutimi

Take the pen you're holding
and write your high-flung soul on something blank that'll
hold it. Watch it soar
like a Frisbee as it dodges branch after branch,
cringe as it rests
in the tree; beacon of light in mangled trunk.
Your mother lies there.
Retreat as the gouged apparition
sifts into sight, umami floods your tongue as
it points an eye at you, with the same glare she always had.

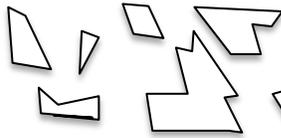
Forget about it

A mind
destined for concert halls, cramped with shaky palms and a bad back.
Coursing black hair, melons and cake at her front and back,
a handful for the first five senses.
Back to her green eyes;
sharp like a steak knife
but dull and wide when she points them your way.
You only notice them because they
follow her head follow you
to the door, to the bar and back to the door.

A mouthful of hair, dinner cut short, she wants
you on her like a dot on an I: constant,
penetrating, removed when she climaxes.

Her rhythmic pants routine, you hope
they aren't fake like the trunk
you hide your failures and alcohol.

Fell in fat you ate 4 donuts and half a gallon of milk
when she said she didn't want to do this anymore.
Cascades of callousness bounce 'tween you
the tree's leaves wilt off. You can't climb
as high as you used to, but if you can lose
yourself in a live tree can you find infinity in a dead one?



Prison – Man

By Alex Chertok

What writing is

To my students at Auburn, whom I force to write during each class

It took me long enough to see that
what you do is hard.

Not only the single-
file of your days, or your small cage
whose walls must sound like loud prayer
that wants so bad to be a wind-soft prairie.

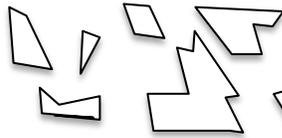
Not only this, but your looking-your-life-
in-the-face-and-not-blinking.
Locking eyes with your life until it talks.
Taking it by the throat to hear it beg,

then letting go to let it breathe. It's hard
to coax music out of a life's sharp notes.

You show me how. You give me a glimpse,
a glint, only for a moment, and then it's gone –

but it's enough. It lets me step foot
into the dark room of my own life. A man

gives light for others to see better by.



The Sitting Tree

By Heather Bianchi

The sky held onto the sun, and the sunlight clasped the trees. The trees clasped the earth, and the earth held onto me. The grass brushed against my bare legs, scraped and bruised from being constantly outdoors.

I traced the blades with my fingertips and paid no mind to the dirt beneath my fingernails. I smoothed the pleats on my sundress and lay back on the small, sorry excuse of a hill. It slightly sloped downwards, breaking the flat plain of land.

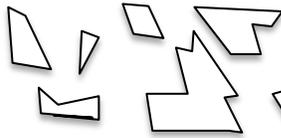
To me it was a mountain. I tilted my chin and squinted as the light blinded me momentarily. When my pupils adjusted, I focused on the clouds and tried to find things familiar to me. I longed to look the sun dead in the eye. I could see it in my peripheral, but I knew you weren't supposed to stare at it directly. I almost built up the courage, but averted my eyes down at the last moment.

My lids closed and my sense of sight faded into the background. I could smell the fresh vegetables of the garden at the bottom of the hill. I could hear the buzzing of insects and the howling of dogs off in the distance. I could feel my own mind churning.

The mind that comprised me did not feel the same as the body lying in the grass. Who was I? I suddenly sat up, feeling outside of the body I resided in. I felt my limbs go numb and soon I could no longer feel like they were mine. My body felt like a stranger and I could not fathom that it was me. Me, and this young girl lying on the grass, we were one and the same.

It left as quickly as it came.

The sky held onto the sun, and the sunlight clasped the trees. The tree on the hill clasped both the earth and that which was not, and the earth only clasped a part of me.



The Physiology of a Rubber Ball

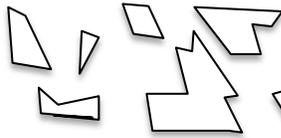
By Lucas W. Whaley

A rubber ball is a horrible beast to behold. Whether red, or blue, or yellow, the rubber ball absorbs punishment with minimal damage to its seamless surface. The dents and dings the rubber ball incurs from an endless barrage of hands, and feet, and hard surfaces rebound before the impact can do more than leave the occasional scuff mark – the hard-won battle scars of use.

Use is the rubber ball's sole function and purpose. Idle, the rubber ball is naught. In use, the rubber ball exists. No matter how many times the rubber ball is tossed aside, thrown away, passed around, the rubber ball always bounces back for more. One foot is much like another. The tread marks they leave are much the same. A well-placed kick can send the rubber ball smashing into the wall only to return, in the most direct and expedient manner, careening to its abuser. The rubber ball's desires are immaterial.

The rubber ball is envied for its seeming invulnerability. The rubber ball holds all of its hurt internally. Eventually the rubber ball will show cracks, small fissures, which mar its once smooth perfection. The damage is irreversible. At this point the rubber ball will begin to see progressively less use, until the nothing which is inside can be seen on the outside. Then it will see no use at all.

Without use it is naught.



Summer in 5B

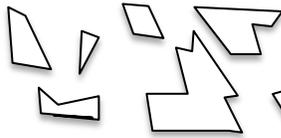
By Jennifer Lara

I shared a couch with a boy who extinguished
flames with his wet fingers.
The walls' ivory shells peeled away to reveal a rusty red
and the green plastic chairs had white scratches up and down their legs.
Below a florescent light that made my skin look like it was bubbling
and my under-eye circles look plum purple,
we inhaled each other's white smoke until the rims of our eyes turned pink
until the world on the other side of the painted shut window
was as real as a video game.

We moved in slow motion.
The Doors on vinyl played in the other room just loud enough for us to hear.
Our ankles crossed over the wooden coffee table marked with glass rings and silver
sharpie
and when I closed my eyes the darkness of my lids lit up with the colors of an oil slick.
I piled my hair atop my head and thought
about the silence that could've been awkward but wasn't.
When the drugs wore off our minds would be unchanged;
The way we looked at each other would be the same.

That summer was for living outside the scaffolding built for us by our fathers,
outside the walls painted and adorned by adoring mothers.
With our thoughts crammed sideways onto journal pages.
We were stubborn, pushing into our minds until we saw things we couldn't understand
and turning those into reasons to stay
where men in suits who contemplated jumping off buildings
couldn't be our bosses.

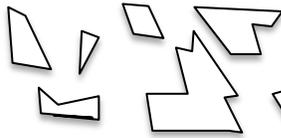
There in a small quiet room he told me he was sure, he knew who I was.
All I knew was the gold and green in his eyes and that the flame of a candle always dies.



Untitled

By Russell P. Cessna Jr.

What if I told you I didn't love you
Just to push you away
and told you I hate you
because
I really want you to stay
Would you understand that I'm broken?
That I prefer hugs over kisses?
Even though I've forgotten what it feels like
I still miss it.
I don't love you and I hate you
Why won't you listen?
Maybe someday, someone will hear...
Understand that I'm broken
And prefer hugs over kisses.
Can't you feel my pain?
You will if you listen



Untitled

By Maurice Cotton

Resources of home and recreation with regard to the industrial city is in need of reform. The lament of there being a change in the climate because of man has some merit when the accounts such as pneumonia contraction are bad. This is evidence from Mike Davis (201). He contends that “city life is rapidly destroying the ecological niche” (41).

For example, some change in the climate is because of the depletion of the ozone layer. This means the abundant use of cheap fossil fuels for the abundant production of food or for production that contributes to the depletion because of carbon emissions (ibid., 41). The thing with using cheap fuels is that coal is the most harmful to the environment (ibid., 34). Alternative sources of energy should be developed then recycled to slow climate change, using unrecycled-cheapter fossil fuels speeds the change. Perhaps anthropocene (human domination) can come to harvest the super-energy from the climate change.

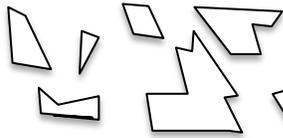
Some industries are taking responsibility for their part in their contribution to climate change. Those industries are developing and recycling energies less harmful to the environment (humanity) than coal. For instance, instead of industries burning coal for energy, industries are using solar panels, wind mills, or hydro-power for energy then recycling those energies to return to the environment as fresh air or water.

There are opportunities and challenges with climate change because engineers love designing tools to recycle energy. Robert Gottlieb (2005) insinuates super-energy designers by saying, “Resource development projects, through the application of science, would be designed to maximize” (55). For instance, humanity knows the results that climate change is having upon the environment as asthma. The knowledge gives humanity the opportunity to legislate the supernatural events of climate change to the industrial cities’ advantage. Humanity is faced with wind, water, cold, snow and sun in ways that are not common to humanity. Humanity is empathic, when we see a bird fly eventually we fly. When we see nature being phenomenal such as ‘northeasterns’ (storms) we tend to become supernatural. Some make a good living by the climate change because of the cleanup and buildup which follows the storms.

The challenge is as humanity to be present to use the uncommon ways nature is being applied to humanity’s benefit such for human reproduction or survival. Also, knowing when the supernatural events occur is required. The evidence is that nature such as snow; water; wind; sun; and cold are going to be present in nuclear proportions that can be a benefit as opposed to a liability when harvested for the industrial city.

References

- Davis, Mike. “Who Will Build the Ark.” *New Left Review* 61. 2010 (2010): 29-46.
Gottlieb, Robert. *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*. Island Press. 2005



Duplicity of Life

By E. Paris Whitfield

Black Lives,
White Lives,
Brown,
Tan,
and even Yellow Lives

matter...

Then how is it possible to be murdered by someone sworn to protect, serve, and defend?
For living in the skin, that has been given? Or likely wrongfully convicted of a crime,
even while not being an active participant?

A failed system,
or is it cosmic fate?

Black Lives,
White Lives,
Brown,
Tan,

and even Yellow Lives matter?

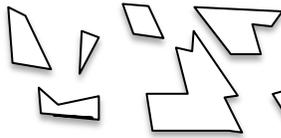
Only for those whom are born with a Silver Spoon in their mouth, or which lays
politely beside their matching Platter.

Freedom is not Free.

Sanity, in this cruel reality, divest small fragments of who I ought to be.

Ipsa Facto,

and it does not matter my sexual preference, gender, orientation, religion, or
creed—if I want Justice in America, my blood must bleed a rich deep, rooted,
hue of Green.



Involved

By Quentin Lewis

IT'S DEEP LIKE THE GOVERNMENT
FOUL RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS
THE RICH JUST WANT TO STAY ON TOP BUT IT'S CUMBERSOME
TO RULE OVER EVERYBODY AND LOBBY
THE CORPORATE CONSTRUCT
THAT GOT MORE INFLUENCE WITH BIG BUCKS

IT'S DEEP LIKE BARACK OBAMA
LEGAL MARIJUANA
FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA
FROM SOLDIERS BY WAR MONGERS

DEEP LIKE THE AMERICAN DREAM
THE MEDIA SELL DREAMS
USE SMOKE SCREENS
TO KEEP YOUR FOCUS OFF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

IT'S DEEPER THAN A REALITY SHOW
THEY KNOW THE REGIONS OF THE BRAIN
APPEAL TO YOUR LOW DESIRES
GET HIGHER THAN COCAINE

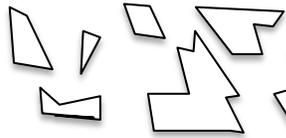
IT'S DEEP LIKE THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX
MASS INCARCERATION
THE GROSS NATIONAL DEBT

IT'S DEEP LIKE THE PRIVATIZATION OF MILITARY
BLACK WATER IS SCARY
BIG GUNS YOU GOT TO CARRY

CAUSE IT'S DEEP LIKE MICHAEL BROWN AND ERIC GARNER
POLICE BRUTALITY ON CORNERS
CELL BLOCKS IS HOTTER THAN A HILTON SAUNA

DEEPER THAN BENJAMIN'S
RESOURCES GET EXHORTED FROM THE MOTHERLAND
BLOOD DIAMONDS IS GOING ON WIVES HANDS

IT'S DEEPER THAN AN EDUCATION
CAUSE WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE
YOU COULD BECOME THE MIDDLEMAN FOR THE RICH ELITE



Involved

IT'S DEEPER THAN THE WAR ON DRUGS
BECAUSE THE IRAN CONTRA SCANDAL
WITH RONALD REAGAN
HE WAS THE PLUG

IT'S DEEPER THAN SKINNY JEANS
DESIGNERS IS GAY RIGHTS HEADLINERS
CHANGING GENDER ROLES TO DEFINE US

IT'S DEEP LIKE WRITER'S BLOCK
PHYSICALLY BUT NOT MENTALLY WE LOCKED
THIS IS OUR FREEDOM WHEN MY PEN JOT

WORDS THAT ARE DEEPER THAN ANYTHING YOU EVER HEARD
THEY GOT THE NERVE
POLITICIANS IS JUST CROOKS FROM THE SUBURBS

IT'S DEEP LIKE ABORTIONS
TAKING BABIES BY PORTION
AN ARM, A LEG, I'M NAUSEOUS
ROE V. WADE THE CAUSE OF IT

IT'S DEEPER THAN A GRADE A POINT AVERAGE
DON'T BE A SMART DUMMY
BRAGGING 'BOUT KNOWLEDGE AND WON'T PASS IT

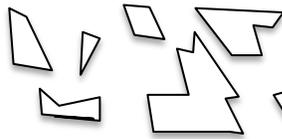
IT'S DEEPER THAN RELIGION
THAT'S ALL ABOUT DIVISION
IF I GAVE YOU A SMIDGEN
MY VISION WILL KEEP ME IN PRISON

IT'S DEEPER THAN REVOLUTION AND WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION
CAUSE WILL A NEW GOVERNMENT REVERSE DAMAGE OF EARTH
POLLUTION

DEEP LIKE THE GRAND CANYON AND NATURAL PHENOMENON
TEST MY WEAPON ON YOU LIKE HIROSHIMA AND DROP BOMBS

IT'S DEEPER THAN FARRAKHAN
BECAUSE ISLAM IS NOT THE BLACK MAN'S CULTURE
ARABS INVADED AFRICA WITH SOLDIERS

DEEPER THAN COMRADES
2PAC AND BIGGIE WAS BROTHERS JUST LIKE NO OTHER



Involved

UNTIL THE MONEY CAUSED A COLLAPSE

IT'S DEEPER THAN CNN PLUS NEWSDAY AND FOX
DEEPER THAN PINE BOX WHERE YOUR BODY GOES TO ROT

IT'S DEEP LIKE THE HIGH SCHOOL TO PENITENTIARY PIPELINE
IT'S MODERN DAY SLAVERY 21ST CENTURY BOX TIME

DEEPER THAN TALIBAN AMERICA FOREIGN POLICY IS HONESTLY
CREATING TERRORIST TO ECONOMIES

DEEPER THAN REPRESENTING YOUR HOOD
CAUSE IF YOU DON'T OWN THE PROPERTY
CLAIMING THE TERRITORY AINT GOOD

DEPER THAN ILLUMINATI
WE IN IVY LEAGUE
CPEP INSPIRE ME
AN INTELLECTUAL SECRET SOCIETY

DEEP LIKE THE BUSH DYNASTY
TAKING OIL FROM COUNTRIES THAT CAN'T DEFEND AGAINST IT
AMERICANS BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU VISIT

IT'S DEEP CAUSE EUROPEAN EXPLORATIONS WAS MILITARY EXPEDITIONS
THEY BUILT THIS EMPIRE FROM CONQUEST AND BIGGER AMMUNITION

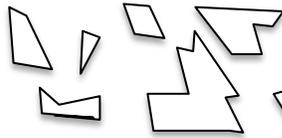
IT'S DEEPER THAN A DEMOCRACY
BECAUSE WITHOUT A FULLY INFORMED PUBLIC
THEN FREEDOM IS JUST HYPOCRISY

DEEPER THAN NOTORIETY
WE ALL WANT A GOOD NAME
BUT THE FAME CAN DRIVE YOU INSANE

IT'S DEEPER THAN A 16
CAUSE WITH ALL THIS GUNS AND DRUG TALK
IT CHANGED THE MEANING OF MICROPHONE FIEND

IT'S DEEPER THAN FACE BOOK
BECAUSE YOU GAVE POLICE A FREE PASS TO INVADY YOUR PRIVACY
WITHOUT A WARRANT LIKE HERE LOOK

IT'S DEEPER THAN NOT SNITCHING



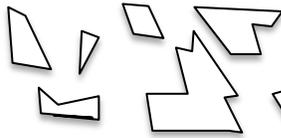
Involved

BECAUSE IF YOU NOT HOLDING DOWN YOUR FAMILY IN PRISON
DEFINITELY YOU WON'T BE FORGIVEN

IT'S DEEPER THAN THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR
IT'S SO BIG THEY DIG TUNNELS IN MEXICO
BLACK MARKET HUSTLE TO LIVE

IT'S DEEPER THAN 2015 NEW YEARS
'CAUSE WHEN THE STAR OF SIRIUS REACHES ITS APEX
THE UNIVERSE SWITCH GEARS

IT'S DEEP
SO REACH BEYOND ORDINARY CONSCIOUSNESS
AND TRY TO SEE WHAT I SEE IN THIS WORLD
IT'S MARVELOUS



Dragonfly

By Kari Miya

It wavered and buzzed around my head
Swinging high and swooping low
Reaching in and dropping out

Like the swing set from before that day

A gleaming enamel body
Polished jeweled eyes
Webbed glass wings

Like the stained glass from after that day

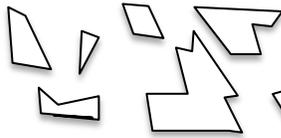
Landing poised on a leaf
Silent and still and staring
Seeing nothing, nothing, nothing

Like you from that day

“So you haven’t forgotten yet?”
It laughed
And took flight

A soul broke open and flew
As I reached out a silent, shaking hand
Too late

Like me from that day



Me...

By Russell P. Cessna Jr.

Me...

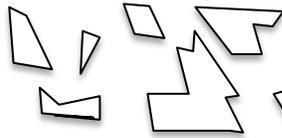
An inexperienced wild cub
Was pounded in and out of the system
Since the age of thirteen
Expressing only the burst of destructiveness
Through grim manner.
Marked by the notable
High temper of an uncultivated mind
He rattles his cage until he is free...

He mingles and associates
Himself with his comrades.
Chiseled by ignorance
He is ignorant to their illiteracy
And returns to his familiar pad...

Crippled by the ripple of idiocy
He sits enclosed behind a fence
And tickles his temple
Trying to comprehend and make sense
Out of nonsense.
He does not know how to put alphabets into words;
Nor how to write a sentence
Witless of directing a pen...

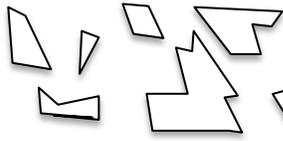
Cooped in the concrete blocks of Comstock
He is aware of his low finance of intelligence
But his belligerence persuades him to believe
He is invincible and he becomes rebellious
To himself and the system...

But, quiet eyes lurk concerned
For the untamed lad
They realize he is a casualty of being untutored
And naïve to what he lacks.
So the strong voice of Dave's whispered
"Encouragement"
Exhorted the lion-hearted King to be brave
To achieve and not be a statistic of illiteracy
Which many have fallen victim to in the system...
No longer a cub
And took his first step of a never-ending journey to learn.



Me...

He searched for tools in school.
Beginning in A.B.E.
He comes acquainted with his A, B, C's.
And understands the decency of a sentence.



Solus Descension

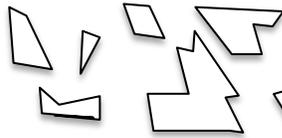
By Heather Bianchi

Not blackness
Rather greyness.
It seeps into every corner
It slices mercilessly
Glass.

The lines of the charcoal pen
Form a web of complexity
Messy, chaotic,
As nauseating as could be.

Spinning
Falling
Weightless
Yet succumbing to gravity's force
Crumpled paper surrendering to the floor.

Thunder booms
A hammer smashes velvet roses.
The ceiling rains knives
The box violently closes.



My Old Train Station

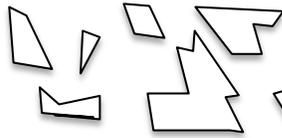
By Heather Bianchi

Ghosts swarming the forbidden tracks
Submerged by debris, dirt, and dust
They are metal fragments of the past.

The walls are the only ones who hear
The gentle whispers of the spirits
As they tell their tales of trials and triumphs
And their failures that resulted in their souls trapped in this abyss.

The dark tunnels only experience brief glimpses of sunlight that soon retreat in disgust
and disappointment.
And empty benches will never be occupied by those living again.
They patiently wait for beating hearts, smiles, and voices,
That have long since been dead.

No longer will the train come speeding down these tracks or through this empty station.
There is no one left worth picking up.
The train continues forever down a new path,
And the ghosts will lay un-awakened.



Love Letter to a Dead Girl

By Kari Miya

My Dearest Marcelline,

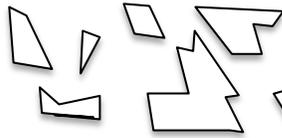
Fate is cruel. Life is cruel, and crazy, too. But you knew that, didn't you? Isn't that why you're gone today? Was death kinder and gentler to you than life could have ever been?

I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. But even now, as I write these words, as I scream them in my mind a million times over, I know that they can't bring you back. I could dream, wistfully, as I've done nearly every passing moment since your departure; but knowing that these dreams can never take flight, I'm forced to cut off their immature wings before they can try. So here I want to express to you, my dead love that never was, everything that I wanted to be.

If I were to have one more day with you, I wonder what we could have done. You enjoyed almost everything, so I suppose that whatever it was we would have done, you would have had a fantastic day, and you would have told me so with glimmering eyes and glowing cheeks the day after, just as you had so many times before. At the end of that day, though, we would have found some place where we could watch the sun set over the humming city skyline, hold hands and talk about the meanings of life and death and love as the city burned in a brilliant blaze behind us. It would have been there that I would have told you that I loved you, and I would have held my breath as I waited for a response, waited an age spread out in a millisecond for the telltale signs in your eyes that would reveal whether or not your feelings were reciprocated. Maybe they weren't, and that would have been all right with me. But even now, I have an odd feeling that my feelings were returned, and maybe you remained quiet because you were just as shy about it as I was. It would have been something simple, and quiet, and awkward, stated with a flushed face and trembling hands, but as long as those three words were stated with the complete honesty and purity I would have said them with, I suppose that it wouldn't have mattered how I said it. It would have been something along the lines of, "Hey—Marcelline, I really, really like you. A lot. I guess you can call it love... I mean, yeah, let's call it that. Marcelline, I love you." How much of a difference would those words have made?

But I was a fool, and once again let cowardice seize the reigns of my heart and ride it away with alarming speed. The day never happened. Or, rather, it did happen, and I was too much of a coward to make it happen the way that it should have. Instead, I let it slide by, purple sand dripping steadily from an hourglass. And when the soft purple sand had stopped falling, no hand reached out to flip it over again. But we watched as the purple faded into dusk and dusk turned into dust.

You never knew that I loved you (did you?), and I shall forever hold that regret deep within me, even after the sun sets on this day fifty years from now. You'll forgive me if I try to move on, won't you? It will be extremely difficult, of course—if I didn't have the courage to profess my feelings to you, then how can I have the audacity to wake up to tomorrow? If I could leave my memories with you, have them cremated so that they can be a part of your happy ashes, then I can look forward to the future. But you knew, just as I do now, that forgetting could be just as painful as remembering.



Love Letter to a Dead Girl

I wonder where you are today. We were not religious people; for us, the only afterlife that ever existed was the ones that we had read about in Greek mythology. Even though we never believed in stories and fairy-tales, I can only wish that your effervescent soul is having its own happily ever after, somewhere, even if it's a place that I can't visualize or ever visit. Gray, cloudy skies were your favorite landscapes; are you singing the rain behind the clouds? I'd like to imagine that you are, and that the bittersweet rain that embraces the earth is not the result of your tears, but is rather the consequence of the clouds themselves, that would tremble and weep at the sound of your echoing voice. It pains me to go outside, now. The delicate blue sky is abandoning and mocking; but the stormy sky, the one you treasured so much, leaves me feeling more lonely than ever, even if you are just beyond those clouds, knowing that you will never again be here to laugh in the rain with me.

I've been selfish, and for that I apologize yet again. This letter is about my love for you, and I've only expressed the deepest anguish and regret. I can write you more stories, more scenarios, more dreams to be jarred up and sit sparkling on shelves until they too fade into dust; but this is a letter, my letter to you, and letters don't require stories. The stories that were, the stories that could have been—those don't matter anymore, because they now dwell in the most unreliable parts of my memory. I'm not one for sappy love songs, love poems, or anything romantic, for that matter. But even so, I want your life to have been more than just another tragedy. In your life on earth, you were the quiet campfire around which people gathered to express elation; your sparks danced and jumped and flew, but never burnt or destroyed. Your soothing crackling would lull friends and family to sleep, as they would silently drop off while gazing into the glowing wholesomeness of your heart. Now that your beautiful embers have died, the chill of the wind strikes us, and wakes us, and reminds us that even though we are together, we are lonely. I rouse too late, knowing that I had failed to fuel your flame, and I can only watch as your happy ashes are blown away into the glittering starry sky that paints the dawn so cruelly. It was astounding to everyone who was warmed by you how little you were affected by the ever-changing scenery, how you continued your luminous dance no matter how vicious the winter snows blew.

The day the embers died was the day that a part of me, my heart, was extinguished forever. I love you, Marcelline, and even though I know that it's too late, I will set alight these words and somehow find a way to send them to you, my love, so that one day, I can be as tranquil as your happy ashes.

Signed with love,

Yours truly

