**PRISMS EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Editors-in-Chief:** Flannery James and Pieter-Paul Brakel

**Arts Editor:** Andie Wei

**Assistant Arts Editor:** Andrew Huang

**Layout Editor:** Alicja Madloch

**Assistant Layout Editor:** Eva Verzani

**Managing Editors:** Rebecca Tolpin and Mollie Wohlforth

**Submissions Editor:** Hannah Zack

**Faculty Advisors:** David Beckman, Deborah Dixler, Alexandra Mahoney

**Staff Members:**
Isabel Alland, Marley Carroll, Amy Chen, Claudia Lu, Mauranda Men, Liz Merrigan, Haley Mudrick, Shaan Pandiri, Nina Pusic, Anne Ruble, Anu Sharma, Peter Torres

**A Note from the Editors:**

Anatomy is the theme of this Spring 2014 edition of Prisms. By combining the seemingly opposing subjects of science and art, this theme served to inspire an incredibly wide range of submissions. Contributors used the theme to examine everything from the physical form to the dissection of the intangible. At the same time, the traditional openness of Prisms still allowed for a variety of literary and art pieces.

One notable feature of this issue is the inclusion of four poems in the sestina form — a very difficult form to write, as it requires a strictly patterned repetition of just six different words at the ends of lines throughout.

From our editorial board and staff, please enjoy this edition of Prisms.

Cover Art by Greta Skagerlind
Spot Art by Pieter-Paul Brakel
POETRY AND PROSE

Survival Kit by Claudia Lu 5
Sonnets from a Hospital Bed (excerpt) by Hannah Zack 6
The Anatomy of Emptiness by Tyler Friedman 7
Graceless by Grace Alofe 8
Sestina by Mark Dempsey 10
Harvest Moon by Paul Brown 12
Metaphors by Sanya Bery 15
Summertime by Mollie Wohlforth 15
False Anatomy: A Sestina by Kristie Petillo 16
Makeup of an NA Student by Ms. Powell’s 12th-Grade English Class 18
Balls by Shaan Pandiri 19
Aftertaste by Anne Ruble 20
The Antique by Tommy Damiano 22
Speech Like Glitter by Alicja Madloch 23
Tormenta Tropical by Jordyn Norris 24
Hipsters by Alicja Madloch 25
Judgment Is Coming by Kevin Lin 29
Close Enough for Me by Laurel Gupton 30
Gonzo by Remenna Xu 31
Dereliction by Flannery James 32
Love and Cars by Greta Skagerlind 33
For My Solution to Solitude, A Sestina by Mauranda Men 34
Yearning by Hernell Gabriel 35
How To Breathe Fire by Liz Merrigan 36
Dry Feet by Mollie Wohlforth 37
Our Heights by Jack Fox and Remenna Xu 39
Duality by Katherine Hall-Lapinski 41
Empty Eyes by James Marcucci 42
Science of Abuse by Adina Gitomer 43
Preserved Forever, Produced Effortlessly by Courtney Cooperman 44
Triptych by Mollie Wohlforth 47
Holding My Breath by Anne Ruble 48
Anatomy of Rain, A Sestina by Liz Merrigan 49
ART

Against a Sea of Troubles by Eva Verzani  6
Figure Drawing II by Greta Skagerlind  9
Figure Drawing I by Greta Skagerlind  11
Cutting Edge by Eva Verzani  13
Tape Series Part I by Greta Skagerlind  14
The Bookseller of Merida by Eva Verzani  26
Cloudy Skies by Andrew Huang  27
Everglades by Brendan James  27
I Didn’t Know What Time It Was by Kevin Jiang  28
Make a Wish by Katherine Hall-Lapinski  29
Tape Series Part II by Greta Skagerlind  38
Shiver by Alexandra Greulich  40
The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier to Part by Kevin Jiang  40
SURVIVAL KIT

by Claudia Lu

Fire-smelted red lipstick. To mark
and yet so that no wine has the balls to stain you back.

A coin with the same side on both sides,
because God is just available enough to make all your
life choices for you.

A copy of Tarantino’s Pulp Fiction, so you can get pumped
even when there is no PowerBar at hand.

Tampons.

A picture of Venus de Milo. As a juju
and that carrying a picture of a half-naked woman with you at
all times can never go wrong.

The seasons—spring, summer, and winter.
You don’t need excuses to bring out the thigh-high boots and
flavor everything with pumpkin.

Lip gloss. A girl’s smile
is her best ammunition in cases short of weaponry.

An axe. Just in case you lose the gloss.

A sleeping pill—when all fails,
sleep solves all shenanigans.
SONNETS FROM A HOSPITAL BED
(EXCERPT)

by Hannah Zack

Sadness, like orange juice, is palpable. It courses down your throat and can occasionally be tricky to swallow. Sadness, however, is not like a bookshelf. You can label the books all you want, but Dewey is bound to rip the label off, as it’s never quite that simple. Compassion, on a different finger but the same hand, is much like a square pizza box. Even though you ordered a round pizza, it pops into your life in a confusing manner. Pizza transportation rarely makes sense. Compassion can occasionally make sense, but it rarely comes in a circular box. Of course, if you ordered your pizza in an octagon, you’re cooking up another issue entirely. Not only will your compassion be befuddled, so will the delivery boy.

AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES

by Eva Verzani
We say nothing.
The silence would sting
   if not for the radio.
I reach out a shaking hand and
switch the station from E Street
Radio to Alt Nation.
Bruce Springsteen’s unbearable rasp
transforms into Vampire Weekend’s
reggae-inspired alternative goodness.
I can feel my mother sigh as she continues
to grip the steering wheel.
We say nothing.
We have not said anything in the
past year. Our meaningless words and conversations
serve the sole purpose of filling the vacant
space surrounding us.

I wish I could say something
anything to fill these holes but I
am afraid to admit that they have widened
beyond repair.

We say nothing
while the emptiness
expands.
GRACELESS

by Grace Alofe

It started young.
I've never been particularly
Good at handling myself.
When I think of
Bicycles,
Jungle gyms,
Roller blades,
I think of my subsequent broken
Arm,
Leg,
Wrist.
I knew all the nurses at the hospital
By name.
“One day you’ll break something
We may not be able to fix.”
But breaking myself
Is intertwined in my genes,
Nestled in my joints,
Forever stuck between my teeth.
Momma had pains in her bones and
Daddy’s been in a chair
Since his third fall.
“We’re a clumsy people.”
So how can you blame me
When, after you gave me your heart,
I dropped it?
I dropped it and it broke into so many
Unfixable pieces.
I saw it coming.
Always.
I broke you.
But I’m not sorry.
It’s time you learn what I was
Born knowing how to do.
Learn to put yourself back together.
Figure Drawing II

by Greta Skagerlind
Our shovels have been through quite a lot. The snow
Has been particularly bad this season, and the trees
Are the worse for it. I sit on the floor,
Hoping that that popping sound is the furnace.
I casually untie and retie my shoe,
Staring vaguely at a bleak pine.

I notice a ring of grass under the pine—
A damp spot, sure, but with no snow.
Wish we had one of those around the town. The tree
Leaves my mind. I sit up on the carpeted floor
And wonder how soaked it would be if I broke the furnace
And the water from the boiler swept away my shoes.

I stop myself—no need to get into a romantic stupor over shoes
And boilers. That’d be silly. I pine
Instead for something to keep away the snow,
Or at least a way to keep the driveway clear and the trees
From losing branches. I get off the floor,
Stand awkwardly awhile, and walk over to the furnace.

It rumbles happily. I lean against the furnace,
Absorbing the heat into my sweater. I remember my shoes
And run barefoot to put them in the closet. There are pine
Needles in the soles. At least it’s not more snow.
Bored again, I wonder aloud how many trees
Make up a hardwood floor.

I wish I remembered to wear socks. The floor
Is as cold as the furnace
Is warm. I won’t put on the shoes,
But I open the closet again to stare at them. The pines
Quiver and dance outside in the snow
As if they weren’t trees,
But only the rubber skeletons of trees.
The outside seems distant, but the floor
Is close enough. I lie down again, in full view of the furnace.
I can tell who isn’t standing over me by his shoes—
Dark soles, sides the color of pine,
Sprinkled with melted snow.

The furnace watches me get my shoes
And sighs, thinking about the pine trees in the snow
And what it would be like to burst onto the floor.

**Figure Drawing I**

by Greta Skagerlind
The black bag rested on the cold table, bathed in the soft glow of the full moon shining through the small, barred window. Dr. Werner stood in the hall for a few moments before entering the morgue, filling the small white room with a nearly blinding light as he flipped the switch on the wall. He hung his raincoat on a hook, whistling a tune that echoed around the empty room, and then he put on his long white doctor’s coat, his blue felt mask, and his hat. He grabbed a pair of latex gloves from a box on the desk and poked through the file for tonight’s body. Female, car accident, early twenties, brain-dead; the only part Dr. Werner really noticed was that the body was marked for organ harvest. He walked over to the table and unzipped the body bag, taking care to cover the face before he got a good look at it. He had developed that habit when he first started this job, as he feared seeing the faces during the procedure. Now, it was only out of habit.

He took a scalpel and started the first incision at the sternum, slicing a pattern similar to an upside-down “Y” into the chest, before lifting the fair-colored skin up to reveal the interior of the body. Dr. Werner looked at the clock. All he had to do was go in and get the liver, kidneys, and left lung; he figured if he hurried, he could finish and be home before midnight. He glanced at the electrocardiograph, making sure that the body was functioning healthily, and went and got the organ-preservation containers from the freezer at the end of the room and placed them under the operating table. He then began the process of opening the ribcage, unflinching as the ribs cracked and snapped as he winched them open. He found out long ago that the key to this job is that the body that he is working on is no longer a person; it is just a collection of chemicals and atoms, not so different from a table or a pair of shoes. After the ribcage was open, he turned off the ventilator and the ECG monitor and waited for the heart to stop beating.

The full moon shone through the window as Dr. Werner worked, bathing him in its glow as he cut out the heart and lungs and put the required organs into the preservation containers. The moon watched him as he submerged the left lung into the preservation fluid and took the container to the freezer. He went back and moved on to the liver, fishing through the tissue, organs, and blood as he carefully disemboweled the body, taking the liver and placing it into its container and putting it in the freezer. Then he went back and took the kidneys, cutting them from
the abdomen and storing them in the freezer. The full moon watched. Dr. Werner finished up, admiring his work as he hastily stitched the body up. The form said that the family had decided on cremation, which meant that the body didn’t have to look pretty, which made his job easier.

After Dr. Werner finished cleaning up and stored the depleted corpse into the freezer, he put on his coat and left the morgue, signaling to the lady at the desk down the empty hall to send in the nurses to take the organs wherever they needed to go. As he walked across the parking lot under the forced light of the streetlamps, he wondered whether or not any of those organs would go on to save someone’s life, and whether or not those people would know where they came from. Probably not, he thought. He didn’t even remember that girl’s name; it was something along the lines of Maria or Marion. He shrugged it off. As far as he was concerned, the things he worked with no longer had any names. He began whistling the same tune again, and as he walked to his car, he wondered if he would make it home in time for The Tonight Show, ignoring the full moon as it slowly darkened, hiding behind gray and black storm clouds.

**Cutting Edge**

by Eva Verzani
TAPE SERIES PART I

by Greta Skagerlind
Metaphors

Influenced by Sylvia Plath’s poem “Metaphors”

I’m a riddle in nine syllables,
A masterpiece, in “progress,” of course,
A mouse dancing in a giant’s shoes,
The lovely mirror that shows the truth,
The memories that are not paper,
The definition of rebellion,
The yellow paint in a sea of blue.
But, truthfully, I’m just metaphors,
Lost, hopeful, misunderstood phrases.

Summertime

by Mollie Wohlfirth

When the melting ice cream
dribbles off your chin
and forms puddles of
love songs on the
gum-freckled,
sun-baked pavement,

I will pick up the
phone and call you
and tell you that I love you.

I will kiss you,
and your lips will
taste like slow-churned
dairy,
and I will laugh at
my lactose intolerance
and kiss you again.
FALSE ANATOMY: A SESTINA

by Kristie Petillo

After a lifetime of abuse from my teeth,
I gave you, my ten bitten soldiers, a burial in purple.
Because I’m childish,
I had to make you inedible to allow me a chance to be perfect.
My Ma always told me to paint my fingers lighter than my skin,
but I chose the color of reveries. I chose the violet of the galaxy.

But of all the biological peculiarities of our galaxy,
how am I able to eat myself? How did evolution give me restless teeth?
When I am cut I bleed, and when I hold my breath I turn purple.
I used to think I was abnormal because I’m childish,
but nail-biting is too human to be unnatural and imperfect.
Still, I find my habit a worse sin than crooked teeth or acned skin.

I paid the painter to massage my skin
and coat your whole denary regiment the color of the galaxy.
When she was done, you were shaped like teeth.
She coated you in plastic as well as in purple.
I lied about why I was at a salon with bitten nails because I’m childish.
I made up a sister getting married who wanted my nails to be perfect.

For one day, you stayed completely perfect.
All ten of you in your acrylic uniforms saluted flawlessly against my skin.
Beauty in beauty, I felt lovely inside the galaxy.
But soon withdrawal wracked my teeth.
The bicuspids in my mouth were hungry for the white beneath the purple.
The bicuspids in my heart chided because I’m childish.
I bite my nails. I’m childish.
And in your gnarled state, you ten destroy any chance I have at being perfect.
My eyes are big, my waist visible enough, my hair is darker than my skin.
I’m brilliant, although I’m not the fairest star in the galaxy.
I should revel in the beauty of my acceptable eyebrows and asymmetrical teeth,
But instead I waste my money turning my fingernails purple.

In less than a week, I had pulled off all the purple and sunk you into my nervous mouth because I’m childish.
I’m not perfect.
By pulling you off without glue remover, I tore my skin.
In witness of all things omniscient in the galaxy,
I sacrificed you to my teeth.

Under false anatomy I hid you from my teeth. You were safe behind the purple.
Childish, I stole your armor and ceded. If I can’t be perfect, neither can you.
The anxiety that makes me bite wriggles in my skin. Habit is the strongest force in the galaxy.
MAKEUP OF AN NA STUDENT

by Ms. Powell’s 12th-grade English class
compiled by Grace Alofe

• 1 doe-eyed freshman
• 1 cup talent
• 1 cup competitive drive
• 1 lb. stress
• 1 ½ cups knowing how to bullshit
• ½ cup strong opinions
• 1 cup competitiveness
• 2 cups intellectual ego
• ½ cup pride
• ¾ cup intelligence
• ½ cup college anxiety
• 2 cups senioritis

Directions:
1. Take the doe-eyed freshman and thoroughly mix in talent, competitive drive, and ¼ lb. stress. Put aside in a bowl.
2. In another bowl, combine the essential flavors: knowing how to bullshit, competitiveness, and intellectual ego.
3. Knead the ingredients of both bowls into a resilient dough. As the dough begins to take shape, steadily increase the amount of stress until all gone.
4. Coat the dough in strong opinions so that nothing sticks to it.
5. Line a baking tray with pride and intelligence. Press the dough into the tray so that it absorbs the pride and intelligence completely.
6. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes.
7. Just before finished baking, cover with a heavy coating of college anxiety.
8. Remove from oven and glaze with senioritis as it cools.
*Sprinkles of a social life may be added, but are by no means necessary.
I love my father,
Which is why I hated losing to him.

I respected my father
More than anyone in the world,
But he always had to beat me.
Always.

I played chess.
My passions rose higher than a hot-air balloon,
I always had my nose in the books,
Always reading, playing, learning, researching, and trying again.
I told my dad that I loved chess.
“Oh yeah? I used to play, why don’t you play me?”
Thirty-two moves and a crushing checkmate later,
My chess career ended.

So when my dad started playing golf,
I wasn’t very excited.

We drove to the range.
He lined up his shot,
Swung, and missed.
I lined up mine,
Swung,

And today I still play golf.
AFTERTASTE

by Anne Ruble

I hate to admit it,
but you were right.
And I know that you know that you were right,
I get it in each glimpse I catch you sneaking at me.
Sometimes I wonder how the
light in your eyes looks when I’m not there to
peer deeply into it. Then I remember,
we don’t even greet each other,
our eye contact is minimal, and those pesky remembrances
crash over me like ocean waves.
I can feel the tide dragging me under,
but I don’t feel like drowning.
Not yet.

Of course, there are afternoons,
and more often
late mornings, when I want to submerge,
and I always end up halfway to dialing your number before I stop.
I’ve finally gotten around to stapling the wounds closed,
each pinch a painful reminder of
what brought those gaping holes to exist.
At least they indicate how you’ve changed.
You’ve started sending friends to rub
in salt, a proxy war I am too tired and too over you to fight.

Maybe I overcompensated for the whole “part ii” of this.
We both knew there was a one, and then the
“after one.”
I’ve found the after one doesn’t blush as much and insists on skipping
love songs. Or worse, the after one dances to love songs
and forces all the memories
depth,
depth down.

The amount of money I would give
to know what you think of when
you see me is alarming,
especially considering how
I’m supposed to be saving for a trip,
a getaway to somewhere you would never go.
The problem with a trip is that I’d have to come home,
and I don’t know where that is anymore.

Each thought isn’t connected,
because in the one you connected my thoughts.

See that?
I’m making excuses,
excuses that should slip between the
cracks and be forgotten,
just like how I haven’t binged on ice cream since you left. To me,
the binge would prove that
you meant something to me, and I’ve
got a rocky road of regret to wolf down in the meantime.
You and your goddamn new personality are the mint chip on my shoulder,
your footsteps walking away from every attempt at conversation
become the
spoon hitting the bowl.

Instead of talking about my feelings,
I’ve immersed in
F. Scott Fitzgerald,
letting disillusion and jazz be a replacement for
touchy-feely moments.
Usually I’ll read until our song gets stuck in my head,
each note a stab to an already wounded being.
Of course, I’ve committed the entire thing to memory,
probably more now that you’re gone.
Those moments I go and put headphones in
and listen to dubstep as loud as I can.
Another reason to hate you:
you have forced me into dubstep,
and the four-year-old child
who dictates my music tastes insists
that only dubstep will purge
my mind of you.
The worst part is then remembering a joke you made and laughing.
It could have been stupid, with your sense of humor it was, and damn, I laughed because I loved you.
I laughed so hard because I loved you so much,
and there is no way that I can ever erase that.
I know I can’t erase that.
You whispered to me that we couldn’t erase it, and you were right.
I shouldn’t have underestimated you.
My head echoes,
each heartbeat another moment I’ve lived in the after one.

THE ANTIQUE

by Tommy Damiano

His father died two weeks ago.
The house looks so empty,
but he always feels a presence,
especially near the door.
It’s an antique.
He and his father bought it together
at a yard sale many years ago.
Unevenly carved around its edges,
almost entirely black with the exception of the silver-tarnished knob
and a gargoyle figurehead knocker.
The bell rings while he’s home alone,
followed by powerful knocks of the gargoyle.
Timidly, he opens the door.
No one is there.
When words fall from the curve of your lips they don’t die, she said.

Because death is for the mortal and the weak, the loveless and the analytical.

She plays her cigarette like a harmonica and glitters in the sun because no rain can put her out.

Words can slosh around.

She chews with her mouth open to speech, words can build worlds and you can paint an atlas with your own creations.

And her letters get caught on your sweater and they stay, dangling like wind chimes, like silver bells in winter.

I want to be a doctor because I want to explore the words inside you.

Her feet bent inward with her words, every heart beats to a story.

And she beat her boots on the pavement, and each scuff mark is a map to her destination because she isn’t from earth, she merely survives here, and the book in her chipped black manicure is just another portal, and she laughs with her hips and smiles with her soul because she knows it’s only life, not something to be scared of at all.
The words on the foreign news station were suddenly translated by the sounds of warm, lazy air being transformed into blades sharp enough to bring down telephone poles. We had to stay indoors, not because of the tree that decided to take a nap against our hotel door, but because there was no one else around to share in our increasingly fantastic vacation.

After misplacing our luggage on our seven hour flight in the morning, getting lost in the Spanish countryside during the afternoon, and settling in to our deserted home for the next week at night, the murky and obese clouds that greeted us on day two seemed commonplace in the overall scheme of things.

An odd mixture of beach sand, salt water, and leaves from wind-blown trees pelted our windows, eliminating any chances of taking a mid-morning nap. Remnants of jet lag clung to me like the layer of blankets I dragged with me out of my room. My mom, lethargic in her armchair, followed my movements with her eyes, but stayed resolute in her own cocoon of blankets. I gave her a nod-shrug, a secret code we'd mastered over the years. “Good morning.” She reciprocated with a quick motion of her own. Proper American English wouldn't begin to be spoken until our jet lag took a break from keeping our heads in the clouds.

Our wooden jailer outside made it impossible to leave our cell, just as the downed telephone poles made it impossible to call the policia ten miles up the road. After a couple dozen failed attempts to reach the operator, we sat in a silence routinely broken by the ruckus of continuous booms outside our window.

After a hearty breakfast of mini-mart soup and day-old bread, the next hour seemed to drag on like the dark grey sacks hovering overhead. Our attempts to pass the time were greeted with airplane mode and white noise thanks to T-Mobile and flimsy satellite dishes. We quickly abandoned reading due to the restlessness that had buried itself in our stomachs after being trapped for a quarter of the day. Our last hope was the cabinet that rested under the TV, slightly dusty with under-use.

My mom had given me one command as she continued to sink into her cocoon of cotton. Her order, “Find something to do,” filled my knees as they sank to the floor then trekked into my hands to open the
dusty gold-painted handle. Drawing back the door, I was greeted with a tribute to the 90’s in the form of the movies in rectangles covered with tough plastic. Stacking them next to the coffee table, I gathered my tools, water, a bowl and a full bag of chips. While the anti-pirating logo began to play, I settled into a couch cushion, planning to stay a while.

Three quarters of the rest of the day was spent with me entering extravagant ships and falling in love, only to let go of him after our ship splits in half, telling strangers at a bus stop how life is like a box of chocolates, gliding through a French ballroom in the arms of a selfish prince turned beast, fighting off burglars because my parents thought that I needed to be left alone in the house at age of eight, and foiling the evil plans of Dr. Evil and his companion Mini Me.

The storm had ended halfway between my going to return a book and sending my father off into the woods with no map to speak of, but we were still being held captive by our wooden jailer. I shifted a bit to see the grey fade from the sky and reveal black ink, and paid it no mind as I signed my life away to the beast and reenacted the effects of Stockholm syndrome.

I’ve got some inspiration stirred into my morning coffee. It snuck in between the sugar lumps—three—and now the day seems hurried. It’s darker out, too, because the bitterness of ideas made my morning motivation undrinkable.

I’m running away from dingy cafes because they’re filled with labeled enthusiasts. They want me to morph around the ink circling in my brain, to bite my pen and release all they want me to say. Lenses follow me—Ray-Bans—and with wistful airs proclaim me one of them.

They want me to buy billowing floral skirts (the slower to run away in) and conform in our opposition to conformity.

I opt for the subway in my flight because it’s been described by too many lopsided loops and typewriters to contain anything new to portray.

I’m safe in ambiguity and press The New Yorker to my face.

I fall asleep and stories tattoo themselves on my cheek.

Ironic.

HIPSTERS

by Alicja Madloch
THE BOOKSELLER OF MERIDA

by Eva Verzani
CLOUDY SKIES
by Andrew Huang

EVERGLADES
by Brendan James
I Didn’t Know What Time It Was

by Kevin Jiang
Judgment is coming.
A milieu reeks of decadence.
The cold pop can buried beside corn crops,
Exhaust fumes from the Ford floating beside clouds,
And not a single flippin’ soul giving care.
Green paper exorbitant in the hands of the pin-striped suited,
A brave street-dwelling sojourner salvages a greasy omelet wrap,
And not a single flippin’ soul giving care.
What seasoning should be sprinkled on the snug turkey?
How much does the designer turtleneck sweater cost?
Every flippin’ soul gives care.
Judgment is coming.

Make a Wish

by Katherine Hall-Lapinski
You have 27 freckles on the tip of your left ear and 25 on your right,
but when you turn your head 45 degrees to the left,
or sometimes when it’s 36 degrees to the right,
you have 25 freckles on the tip of your left ear
and 27 on your right.
A fact I have since learned to live with,
like the way you cough in groups of three
or that you blink 20 times per minute,
and I
co cough in couplets and blink 21 times per 61 seconds.
However, that seems close enough for me,
so I think we work well together.
With my reading glasses,
I discovered I have no freckles on the tip of my left ear
and an unfortunate-looking mole on the tip of my right,
but when I turn my head 45 degrees to the left,
no one could notice my freckle-less state,
and sometimes when it’s 36 degrees to the right,
the mole on my right can seem like a freckle,
and that seems close enough for me,
so we work well together
and I think you should stay.
When I went to the dentist, they told me I had to get injected with some anesthetics. And I’m no professional, so I asked them what that meant, how long I’d be under, how foggy I’d be when I got up, but no, they said, I’d be awake the whole time. And now I was feeling nervous because the thought of some stranger putting a drill into my mouth while I was conscious made me want to pee a little. The nurse reassured me and told me that I’d be totally numb. I told her that I’m already depressed, so telling me that I’m going to feel numb was not exactly a great sell.

Three hours later I’m on my way home and I’m absolutely starving. All I can do is dream about my kitchen. I barely heard my dentist warn me about the dangers of eating while numb. Whatever. Like I’m stupid enough to misalign my mouth and injure myself.

Turns out, I was exactly that stupid.

So I’m eating and I bite down and I feel this crunch. I hear it reverberate throughout my mouth and all of a sudden I feel as if something is horribly, horribly wrong. So I hobble over to a mirror and I stick out my tongue, just to take a look. It takes me a while to notice anything, though, because all I can see is red. So much fucking red. And I’m confused out of my mind until I realize that the red is probably my blood.

I end up wiping out the blood to take a look at the damage and I’m not quite sure what I’m seeing. I’d bitten my tongue; that much was obvious. There was a big purple swelling off the right side with some clear indentations. Now, at this point there’s still a lot of blood coming out. I feel like I’m swaying, like I’m bobbing up and down, like I don’t know which way is up and which way is down, all because I’ve lost so much blood. But as far as I can tell, I’m a capable adult. I look down and all the blood drips onto the floor, like some kind of sick massacre, and before I know it my feet are stuck to the ground and I’m wading through partially congealed parts of myself. My lips are sticking together but there’s still stuff coming out. Looking in the mirror, I swear it looks like my mouth is pulling apart by itself. Kind of surreal. I don’t hate the image; I don’t feel sick. But I do feel hungry.

At this point I feel like there’s not much else I can do. I stand like a paralyzed American Gothic with liters and liters of my life dripping away, until I finally feel the stream lessen. God bless the anesthetics, because I still don’t feel a thing. I drag my feet up and I make my way back to the kitchen. I wipe my arms on some napkins with no real hope for cleaning them off. And then I keep eating.
The man with no organs
turns himself inside out, says,
look at all these hollow spaces.
Shows us all the empty places
before the pale,
murderous morning
reaches its fingers through the high windows.
The hard knot of muscle
missing from his chest
glistens
in a color we cannot name.
He tells us of the daughter he
will not have, in a house that
will not be built, on a river that exists only
to those not standing
on its invisible banks.
In the light now seeping in we almost see
her dark eyes, the skin
thrumming
with all the life beneath.
LOVE AND CARS

by Greta Skagerlind

I was nine
when my heavy-metal teenage neighbor
backed his family minivan
into their old-and-rotting side door
but he wasn’t drunk
just in love
with his girlfriend and
the way she’d been kissing his neck
at the time.

I was twelve
when my mother slammed our blue station wagon door
on my hand when I wasn’t looking and I felt
a crunching in my carpal bones
when she screamed
louder than I did.

I was seventeen
when I fumbled with the too-smooth steering wheel and
almost crashed my car
into a white vinyl garage door in
the school parking lot
because in the rearview mirror
I was watching you walk away.
FOR MY SOLUTION TO SOLITUDE,  
A SESTINA  

by Mauranda Men

I can’t call this a love 
letter. I’m writing to a fantasy, 
after all, and I can’t skew 
the truth to myself any longer. I wish you could stay 
always beside me as the world around us dissolves into a trap 
of never-ending, infinite, impossible entropy,

but the problem is my entropy; 
as far as I can tell from the whispers of passersby, my love 
for you has come to trap 
my consciousness in this fantasy. 
I yearned to slice the stays 
of this life and revert to another one, one where the skew

are the righteous. Where all skew 
lines are recognized not as uncategorizable, productions of the

inevitable entropy 
that engulfs human knowledge; where to stay 
in the mind is not a labor of love; 
where you, my fantasy, 
could break out of the trap

of this little skull and this little mind and trip the traps 
in the world for yourself. I didn’t know that I would skew 
myself, be accused of living in a fantasy. 
That an idea, like a drug, would captivate my thoughts, that the 
neuronic entropy 
I created could only increase. I knew you as my brother, my sister, my 
teacher, my love, 
the only friend that was willing to stay.

Sorry, but it seems that you’ve outlived your stay. 
Under orders (I had hoped to evade) to trap 
you back whence you came, from someone that I know gives me only 
love. 
You know her. You know me, the skew 
of my glasses, the tilt of my head, the entropy
vortex of my neurons, inside and out. She thinks you’re a fantasy.

Limitations in my brainpower tell me I could never come up with a fantasy
as imperfectly flawless as you, could never dupe myself into believing
that your stay
would continue for all time through the growing entropy
of my innocence. I released you from the trap.
I chose a road that resulted in the skew-er-ing of my actions by people, corporeal people, that I love.

This isn’t goodbye. I know you stay, pacing, round and round the trap.
They hope I’ll outgrow the fantasy. I know you still prefer the skew Tightropes, drink the entropy consuming my mind. To my first and last true friend, all my love.

YEARNING
by Hernell Gabriel

I look at him,
his soft lips smacking, smacking,
his eyes gleaming,
furry eyebrows going up and down, dancing,
feet tapping the chair in front of him.
I wonder what he is thinking
as he fiddles under his desk with it.
His hands are strong with long fingers.
I have never seen such pretty hands on a teenage boy.
I want it. I want it.
Should I ask now? Would it be too forward of me?
I have been admiring it for a while, but what would he think?
I want to taste what he tastes.
I want to share this momentous joy with him.
Finally I ask, “Can I have a piece of gum?”
HOW TO BREATHE FIRE

by Liz Merrigan

Tonight, I tell you, you will breathe fire, and you won’t burn the roof of your mouth.

I don’t get why you’re looking at me like that. You’re just as flammable as I.

Look down. You’ll see the carnage of a long, one-sided battle. Let the ash sidle up beside you, run its condescending fingers through your singed hair, smoothing down the flyaways. Watch it pull back its lips.

“But I’ve got standards,” you sniff. Calm down. Slouch a little. Habits are hard upkeep, harder quitting. Be spontaneous. Write notes to your sister-in-law, whom you’re living with for now because you’re broke as hell. Imagine falling in love with her by accident. “Sorry,” you whisk weightlessly on a post-it as your brother ghosts by in the dim hallway, “but I can’t give you up.” He’s on the cold side of your door. Ask if you can meet her at the junction of oh shit and never mind. Lower your voice to the tune of licked lips and sideways glances, the pensive bass groaning of mattress springs. Become your bedroom carpet when she says no, your face yellowing into that strange Florida-shaped stain. You’ll grimace when they drop your suitcase on your groin and screech for you to somersault out to the curb. But you will keep your love letters in a fishbowl and promise you’ll burn them—later, when you can fireproof your tongue.

We’re in the same boat, my friend. Let me tell you about stove flames and their cages. They’re what warp behind my eyelids when I dart between dimensions, or samba in and out of grocery aisles, whichever strikes me first. Sometimes the range doesn’t start, but that’s okay. I fiddle with the knob, flick on the lighter. Sometimes I leave the gas on. Doesn’t make for easy breathing, but it draws the fire from my throat, designs a bigger, better explosion. When I open my eyes, a metabolic mushroom cloud ascends and sears my lashes. I want this for you. I want you to choke so you’ll learn to fill your lungs wisely.

You’re shaking your head. Measured, mournful.

Don’t you get it?

It’s not combustion if you mean it. Hold your sparks in the palm of your hand and don’t let go until you can inhale them. Here, the clock hand hits the sclerotic 6, and you wake. It taps the terminal 12, and you fall away.

But out there, you can breathe fire.
When the sky fell,
and we had to wade
knee-deep through the clouds,
it meant the world that
you offered me a piggy-back ride
to keep my toes dry,
and that for once,
as I clung to my throne upon your back,
the full choir of hallway whisperers
had to look up to me,
perched high in your safety.
They could not pull me into the fog,
because you were there as
they fumbled through
the fingers of gray mist below.

When you faltered,
I breathed my love
into your ear, onto the
baby hair on the back of your neck.
That love, that breath
was 30% oxygen, 70% relief,
and 100% thankful
to you
for choosing me
over dry feet.
TAPE SERIES PART II

by Greta Skagerlind
HE WAS SO TALL
and I?
I WAS SO SHORT
And our height difference
was
Too
Large
Unlike me
but like him:
Large
He was as tall and wide as a building
and I was as tall and wide as a bush
maybe a small bush
outside his house
hiding
If you walked into his house
you would be in his ribcage
the chandelier, his heart
THUMP
THUMP THUMP
The red of his heart
like the red of my heart
our only similarity
if you went upstairs and looked out the window
you would look out his eyes
As I would look out his eyes
and they would be him
If you reached out to touch it
your hand would touch the chandelier
(aka: his heart)
But beware!
Because if you touch too much,
The chandelier will fall
(aka: his heart)
And the heart will fall
and break
into a million tiny little pieces
like the tears that fall from my eyes
THE IMAGINED SAVIOR IS FAR EASIER TO PAINT

by Kevin Jiang
For every color
there is a complement.
For every fraction
a reciprocal and every function
an inverse. And like this
every human too
is composed
of dualities. A bilateral beauty
within and without.
Enigmatic life forces
pulse through vessels
as the chambers contract
and release.
Every skip, jump, and leap
is born from the same repeating
process. Flex
and extend. These inner workings
are a masterpiece of nature.
The rise and fall
of the thoracic cavity
produced by one inhale
and one exhale. Rhythmically
pulsing, dancing, breathing to our
own bewildermint. Our
proportions, symmetry, and matter
distinguish us. Living organisms,
a single network of dualities.
Empty Eyes

by James Marcucci

Twin orbs of still sea stared;
before them, I snapped my fingers again and again
but there wasn’t anything there.

I ran my hands through your tangled hair,
crying questions about now and then.
Twin orbs of stormy sea stared.

The bleached-white room stank of despair.
I asked if you remembered when . . .
but there wasn’t anything there.

Wires and tubes and beeping lights hung everywhere,
and so I wrote with a dark green pen
about the twin orbs of solitary sea that simply stared.

When I heard the news I screamed, “Unfair!”
I had to take you back home then.
But there wasn’t anything there.

I looked at you and sobbed my prayer.
“Please, just a little longer, just to say goodbye. Amen.”
Twin blue orbs of still sea stare,
and you’re still not there.
THE SCIENCE OF ABUSE

by Adina Gitomer

In school, he learned that Newton’s Third Law is:
*For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.*
But when he watches his father’s fist meet his mother’s pale cheek,
it leaves a mark painted blue and purple,
while the fist lingers unscathed and ready to strike again.

In school, he learned that it is grammatically incorrect:
*To put “I” or “me” before the other party.*
But when he hears his mother cry out in terror,
his father does not hesitate
as he takes another sip and injects more pain
into one arm and then the other.

In school, he learned that it is improper to:
*Have a larger figure on top of a smaller figure in a fraction.*
Yet when he feels his father’s tall shadow cast
so heavily over his mother,
there is nobody there to rearrange this problem.

In school, he learned that Newton’s Third Law is:
*For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.*
But his mother’s scarred trepidation never matches his father’s clouded
void.

At home, he learned not to trust.
Because the rules of the world didn’t even apply to the world,
and because his father told his father-in-law that he would treat her well.
Put together my summer handwriting with a worn-out headlamp battery, leaving my pen unsupervised to scrawl crisscrossing words over the lines on the paper, my poem is barely legible and abruptly ends after these eight lines. On the bottom of the page I wrote a list of poems I wanted to have written. I didn’t want to write them: I wanted to peer out of the tent flap and not believe the view was real, to sing off-key by the campfire, to plunge into the unknown—and then emerge, with pages of poetry, perfectly produced and put onto paper for posterity. (The notebook itself would be useless for posterity because of my handwriting, but I would type it on lazy days and save it in a desktop file, for posterity, and for my future enjoyment.)

The pages before my forty-word burst of rhyme are ripped out, given to the children on the same hill, the hill where I tried to reflect that last night but ended up cold, ready to return to my tent, and kind of needing to pee but not wanting to ruin the idealized moment. A few nights ago, I flipped through my summer notebook, stopped on one of the ripped pages, and wrote, “Page ripped in Sachapamba,” to make sure I never forget. I closed my notebook, wishing I had written more, wishing I had tried writing less, and mostly just wishing to be back.

For ten days, with fifteen new friends, I walked up steep dirt paths, careful to avoid the scattered cow pies, waving to the children in their windows on the way. We cursed the chickens and grumbled about the hike, then worked to rebuild the school until sunset. Quickly this became routine—rolling out of my tent each morning to an impossibly perfect view, hardly believing that I had slept between these mountains, wrapped up in wisps of cloud. Mornings began with groggy gratitude, dunking our hands in cold water and eating exotic fruits to propel us into afternoons of hard work, sometimes strewn with complaints about the tiring efforts of scraping shingles and shoveling stone, and of course the occasional yearnings for a return to indoor plumbing.
Yet each night, we wished that there were fewer yesterdays and more tomorrows in Sachapamba, our newfound home in the middle of the mountains, hours away from anything else. We knew that for the rest of our lives, paved streets would seem like burdensome ruts compared to the unexpected obstacles left by the animals on Sachapamba’s paths. Even flushing toilets would seem sterile and cold, just impersonal porcelain compared to the dirt we so arduously shoveled.

In still, cold darkness, with only a few hours until goodbye, how could I put all that in a poem?

Although sometimes my dirt-caked skin and sore muscles repressed it, every minute in Sachapamba was pure happiness. Subconsciously, I knew I would wish to relive these days for the rest of my life. Sitting on the hill my last night there, recognizing that this impeccable calm and joy would soon slip past the border of the present into memory’s territory, I tried to catch it in my notebook. Greedily, I wanted to leave nothing behind, to keep it forever. Any emotion, any excitement, any epiphany, I needed to stuff into the pages.

Perfect moments always nudge my mind, nagging me to prolong their existence. What writer can merely watch a sunset, or gaze at midnight stars? Leaving my notebook in the tent and immersing myself in complete tranquility by looking at the sky would mean a loss of happiness preserved, draining the supply available to release on the worst of days. I felt selfish and wasteful embracing the stars when I thought about the smog above the roof of my big suburban house, a house I yearned to exchange for such a perfect view each night.

But the equator is colder than people think, especially up in the mountains, and I would freeze if I sat there until all these thoughts were captured in my notebook. Yet I couldn’t end my night with a clumsy trip to the bathroom tent. Stumbling in the dark for the zipper and the toilet paper was not the closure that I needed. Instead, I held it in and absorbed the moment, telling myself I would write about it later, that I would eventually craft the memory into a poem. Now I have just an idealized image of the sky, a list of poems to write, and eight illegible lines. In my self-imposed obligatory attempt at poetry, I wrote about my worries, the Sachapambans’ natural contentment, and my attempts to build it. I admired their simple happiness, but clearly I did not embrace it.

Few of the poems from my list are written, but still I have the jagged edges of ripped pages in my notebook, little tears as meaningful
as the words bound between the covers. After working each afternoon, we played on the sunset-draped hill with the children, sometimes bringing them markers we had packed in our suitcases, although none of us had brought drawing pads. Scrounging for paper one afternoon, I reluctantly ripped it from my notebook, regretting the shreds inside the spine. Yet my bitterness melted when every child proudly presented me with a drawing and placed it in my hands.

“¿Para mí?”
“Sí, un regalo.”

Yes, all for me. Presents from eight boys and girls, ranging from 3 to 12 years old. Children who had just created masterpieces with brand-new Crayola markers were giving them away, taking just as much joy in sharing their work as creating it. We smile when we get, they smile when they give, as I would write on that hill a few nights later. With the children, I didn’t think about the fleeting moments of my trip. I didn’t try to bring home joy as a souvenir, plainly displayed in my notebook whenever I would need to see it. Yet here, children were handing me pieces of paper, bursting with color, that now hang on my walls. Effortlessly, I had received tangible, enduring reminders of my happiness, marker-drawn manifestations of the poems I intended to scribble on my notebook’s pages. Their drawings also saved me from scouring my vocabulary to capture the image of Sachapamba. Every child who sat with me on the hill drew the village’s flawless landscape—their playground, my personal paradise. I envied their access to the stars, wishing I could trade my room where their pictures hang for a glimpse of their backyards every day.

Even the rips in my notebook fill the place of poetry now. They are proof that I didn’t just think in Sachapamba, or write in my tent late at night. I lived, I played, I tore a piece of paper from this notebook, right here in this spot along the spine, and gave it to a child. I touched this notebook in Sachapamba. This notebook was in Sachapamba, and it’s here in New Jersey. It was in my tent, on that hill, and now it’s in my bedroom. My notebook was in the presence of impossibly beautiful sunrises, and sunsets, and striking black nights.

What a shame my notebook couldn’t write in itself and record all the magic it saw. Then I could have spent more time without a pencil in my hand, living in simple contentment without the worries of forgetting, of leaving memories behind, of thoughts slipping away. There would be no deposits of happiness for my hands to scrawl across the pages, but I could still return home with joy as a souvenir, preserved forever, produced effortlessly.
Live life like a triptych.
Split it up.
Regard things differently, in parts.
Classify.
Create boundaries in your mind.
Don’t think about the really old Jesus ones
that hinge themselves together for thousands of years
and scream at you about religion.
(Don’t think about anything that screams at you about religion.)
They are tucked away in corners of museums for a reason.

Be the modern ones
held together
by sheer artistic will.
(Don’t forget that they are all weird,
and that if you’re not going to be weird,
then what’s the point?)
Three separate pieces
connected by something . . .
undiscoverable.
Much less obvious than hinges.

Rope?
Nah.
Staples?
Too damaging.
(Don’t put holes in anything, let alone yourself.
Your art is yourself.
Your life is art.)

Tendons.
Tie your parts together
with tendons.
Evolution’s rope.
Evolution’s always right,
except when people get in the way.
Remember,
Bitches will be bitches.
Remember,
You are a bitch
and you howl at the stars.
Remember,
You have two more blank canvases.

HOLDING MY BREATH

by Anne Ruble

when I’m talking to you, you occasionally
say things,
things that make me feel like ice was
injected into my veins.
then
my body temperature rises, and
my heartbeats become a fast,
unnumbered dance, one that
only you would try to dance to;
and my thoughts begin to add up and
multiply until the first thought that comes to
my mind becomes the best thing to say.
as the syllables roll off my tongue,
your eyes light up so
beautifully, and
you blink.
this is the most uncharted
i’ve been, and i forget things like why
and how.
my legs will push me to run. go fast, faster.
being hurt isn’t a choice
but you are.
ANATOMY OF RAIN, A SESTINA

by Liz Merrigan

A rib cage broad and handsome stands vigil, a roof
to shield the heart from rain that sends the pebbles
rolling down the hillside. The lawn is green
and slick like skin. From the mud, the trees sprout like
fingers.

On the dry side of the door, the afternoon dust
mites crawl under the couch. The unwashed floors breathe.

The girl’s spine begins to curve outward. It’s hard to breathe
when her lungs are always sliding backward like the roof
never stopped the rain from seeping in. Her thoughts drop like pebbles
as she wilts over the desk, her cheeks turning the sickly green
of promises. Her pencils melt quietly into fingers
while her toes dangle from the chair. They trace building plans into the
dust.

The mother in the kitchen is trying to light the stove, even though the
dust
sways, lazy in the stuttering light just above. Why won’t the fire breathe
inside its iron cage? She bangs and rattles the roof
as if the flying rust will disappear. It sails through air instead, pebbles
the tiles, collects like nail clippings with the black green
of decay. She will clean it with a dishrag underfoot. Never with warm
fingers.

Outside, lightning combs the lawn with hasty fingers.
From the locked window, the clouds are dust
over a blue dinner plate. The deck’s wooden planks don’t breathe.
The patio trembles, puddles forming goose bumps from drops skidding
off the roof,
and at the bottom of the steep driveway, the pebbles
press their frantic ears to the fractured asphalt, listening for green.

The girl’s tongue has turned the color of her ballpoint pen, green
from venomous ink. Her textbook is open to the hundreds, her fingers
crossed with paper cuts. Blood highlights the right words, tints the dust
a pretty sunset shade. Her nose curves softly, an oxygen mask that can’t breathe
for her. Now her feet have found the floor to stomp out the designs, but
the roof recoils out of reach. Eraser shavings scatter like pebbles.

In the dining room, the mother picks the smooth grey pebbles from the seafood pasta, sprinkles the parsley so it turns unbearably green.
She sets the forks and settles cups with numb fingers, and from its gut, the carpet belches puffs of dust.
The blinds don’t hide the storm that watches the mother breathe with labor, spilling water from the pitcher. Rain dribbles from the lip of the roof.

Tomorrow, the dust may settle, and the house may learn to breathe, but now the soggy roof is crumbling under silent pebbles. The girl looks at her fingers. They’ve turned mold green.