Speaking Low is the theme of this Fall 2013 edition of Prisms. Our theme was chosen based both on the broad nature of the subject and its relevance within the Newark Academy community. Speaking Low can be introversion, the unspoken, and the unspeakable. At the same time, the traditional openness of Prisms still allows for a variety of literary and art pieces. From our editorial board and staff, enjoy this unique edition of Prisms.

Cover Art by Pieter-Paul Brakel
Inside Back Cover by Brendan James
Back Cover by Mia Smith
SPEAK LOW  
by Kristie Petillo

The fly learns the most when it’s soundless on the wall.  
Wringing its thumbs as words ring by, it feeds on passing  
conversation.  
While unnoticed it gets the finest cuts of fresh perspective.  
Its mouth gets filled the most when it keeps it shut.

Speak low. Speak low.  
The more you speak the less you’ll know.

But silence is a serpent that slithers in the soul,  
dashing all the moldy cobwebs but also crushing all the fireflies  
whose lightning had protected from the darkness of the void.  
The cricket’s song played loud enough can scream out the  
crippling thoughts.

Speak low. Speak low.  
The more you speak the less you’ll know.

The choice between being moot or mute is crushing in itself.  
Is it better to be vivid and vapid or violently aware?  
Spiders that don’t exist cannot bite you.  
But is it better to have them there to hunt or to let the thoughtless  
maggots writhe?

Speak low. Speak low.  
The more you speak the less you’ll know.

ABOUT FACE  
by Serena Gupta

Sometimes it’s just a visage of dust collectings and sparkles,  
A facsimile of blurry static eloping with her senses.  
But glass orbs shimmer erratically with golden ripples,  
Soft edges and hard creases, and  
You have her.

You touch her soft, delicate, pure white skin,  
Innocent eyes that let you have everything and nothing of hers,  
Billowing white cotton with frayed edges reveals supple curves—  
The fragile, untouched contours of a sleeping angel.

SWIMMING  
by Mia Smith

Sometimes it’s just a visage of dust collectings and sparkles,  
A facsimile of blurry static eloping with her senses.  
But glass orbs shimmer erratically with golden ripples,  
Soft edges and hard creases, and  
You have her.

You touch her soft, delicate, pure white skin,  
Innocent eyes that let you have everything and nothing of hers,  
Billowing white cotton with frayed edges reveals supple curves—  
The fragile, untouched contours of a sleeping angel.
When we embarked on our experiment, they told us
That we should follow
The scientific method.
And so we did.
Purpose—economic,
Hypothesis—as successful as possible,
Materials—some people, a ship, a land.
And so this nation was formed in the
Surprising petri dish of a laboratory
At the expense of so many
And so much:
Hope, love, life.

But we chose to rewrite the procedure, to
Change the order of the write-up
Because this endeavor
Was a unique pioneering, a
Whole drawn from a whole new dimension.
To the sterile scientists, we “contaminated the culture.”
No—unlike them, we were willing to humble ourselves before
the land,
Ignobly letting ourselves inwards, upwards, downwards,
Crafting a suitable container for its special contents,
Harnessing angels to stand on the water at both ends.
We threw away the quantitative for the qualitative.
So young in years, we distinguished our time by
Decades rather than dynasties
And ourselves by location rather than birthplace.
We rearranged the cross into scales.
We let each other in:
Into our schools, into our hearts
On our fragmented assumptions
Because how can you measure a dream,
Weigh an opportunity,
And expect the result to contain any less of the factor of ignorance
Than our own ideological hope?
Under the microscope, these are tiny details:
Red Bull in rows in the supermarket, skyscrapers in red and blue.
The crystal ball gliding down the rails, surrounded by a crowd in
funky glasses.
Sunday comics in the driveway, barbed wire on the border fence,
The masterminds in Silicon Valley, fireworks ambience.
So now it boils down to the results so far:
Differences, assumptions, prejudices, for the better or the worse
Distilled to the purest form
Of the shared soul of our species
In this undenied amalgamation of the world.

**UNDERSTANDING SYLVIA PLATH**

by Andie Wei

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**CODEPENDANCY**

by Andie Wei

I.

I didn’t believe in myself, so I put all my faith in them.
I was lost, so I clung onto them like a sailor holds his compass.
I felt small and insignificant, so I gave them the heaviest of all
values.
I was scared, so I took their empty words as comfort.
I was hopeless, so I hoped they would fix me, though I knew they
could not.
I didn’t love myself. Ever. So I loved them. Always.

II.

They pushed me, so I pushed myself until I stopped breathing.
They put me down, so I dove headfirst into the quicksand.
They ignored me, so I tried not to exist.
They poured salt into my open wounds, so I created new ones.
At last I realized they were destroying me, so I began to create
myself.
“Come down to the locker room after school and we can hang out with some of my friends,” he told me. Even though I wasn’t positive about Bud yet, I agreed to go.

After school I went down to the gym and I saw Bud with a bunch of other kids throwing around a lacrosse ball. I knew I had been right! Bud was a cool kid, and now I had the opportunity to claim my crown as most popular kid in school.

I showed them some tricks and kept hearing, “Whoa, this kid’s amazing!” They were so awed by the skills I had, which figures since the public schools only play sub-par teams during their season. I was throwing the ball against the wall at record speeds while spinning my stick. Bud didn’t act too impressed, but I knew he wasn’t better than me; nobody was!

“Let’s go to the locker room,” Bud said. “I’ll tell you who the cool girls are and who has all the parties.” I agreed and followed him. But while we were talking in the locker room, I was surprised to see him pull out a bag that had the label “K2” on it. He took the tiniest puff of the K2 and passed it over to me. I was completely confused.

“Yo Bud, why are you doing that shit?” I said.

He kinda ignored my question, and said, “I only took a small hit. I want you to take a really big one though—it’s like an initiation for the lacrosse team.”

What the hell was Bud talking about? Lacrosse players do not do drugs. At Laxerbro Academy, yeah we pounded Nattys every other weekend, but that was different. That wasn’t really bad for you. I knew that at the beginning of the season they were going to test me for drugs. I was pretty sure this K2 stuff was a drug—I wasn’t sure though.

“Yeah I’m gonna hit this hard,” I said. Maybe public school was much different from boarding school I thought. Maybe here instead of Natty Light the thing was K2.

I had no idea how to smoke this stuff, so Bud lit it while he instructed me. I took a puff. I sucked in as hard as I could. I sucked all the smoke into my lungs and then it hit me. I started coughing harder than I had ever coughed before in my entire life. I couldn’t handle the smoke.
“Dammit,” I thought, “now Bud is gonna think I’m some sort of loser.” But when I looked up, Bud was gone. I was so confused, and the coughing just kept getting worse and worse. I tried to lie down, thinking it might stop. The last thing I remember is feeling my heart beat very fast and slowly closing my eyes.

I woke up in the pitch-dark, assuming I was in the locker room and someone had shut off the lights. But when I tried to get up, I realized I was tucked into some sheets. I got out of the bed and I felt my way around to the door of the room. When I opened the door, I saw my parents, who were talking to a nurse. I looked at the time on my phone and realized it was nine pm. I had been unconscious for six hours?

“Why did you pass out in the locker room?” my parents asked. OK, I thought, maybe they don’t know I was doing drugs. Thank God they were so stupid.

“I have no idea. How did I get here?” I asked.

“A kid who was going to take a shower saw you lying on the floor and thought it was weird you’d be sleeping there. He tried to wake you up, but you just stayed asleep. He thought you were in some kind of coma or had passed out, so he got your phone from your pocket and called us. Then we brought you here.”

Good, I thought, they don’t know about the drugs. Since I was so smart, I was quickly able to come up with an excuse, saying I remembered slipping on some water and hitting my head on a bench.

“I probably passed out then,” I told them. The car ride home was pretty quiet. It seemed like they were annoyed at me for interrupting their schedule. I didn’t care, though—they were just as stupid as public school kids.

What was Bud doing, trying to get me to smoke that shit? It was like he knew I was going to pass out and he just left me there.

During lunch the next day, I started questioning Bud, asking him, “Why the hell did you just leave me there?” He seemed surprised to see me. I could tell he was trying to make up an excuse on the spot, but he wasn’t as smart as me. “Why are you trying to lie to me, Bud? Were you trying to put me in a coma or something you idiot?”
“E,” she hums from the kitchen.
“L” (she repeats this twice because the sound gets caught under her tongue), “I, Z,” (the Z buzzes, squeezes between her teeth like a G), and those letters hover just out of reach, their dots and dashes scrambling, forming foreign silhouettes.
Beyond the sliding door red and orange clouds breathe fire into the living room, smoking out daydreams of Dr. Seuss and fermenting pranks until my wrist spasms, my fingers trip and tumble across double-lined paper.
“A, B.”
Her long dark hair holds memories in an absence of white, refracting sunbeams into oxygen and a steadying pulse as it dips around the wall.
She drops to the carpet beside me, the warmth of her arm stretching along my shoulders in tandem with the turning of cerebral gears. Her Lipton tea fills the uncertain spaces with black and brown smells. “E,” she pauses, takes a pensive sip, and laughter rolls from her lips in plum-stained cascades. She taps a blunted fingernail against the mahogany, “T, H, but somehow, your Z” (buzz) “looks wrong.”
But neither of us knows how to fix it.
THE STORYTELLER

by Liz Merrigan

He wears his scarf the way my polaroids instruct,
with frail neck bones hidden behind clumsy woolen stitches.
He knows, of course,
exactly what you’re thinking. After all, he holds souls
in the box of tic tacs tucked into the front pocket of his faded
jeans.

At night he sinks into the lichened planks of lonely park benches
serenading the ozone with a Ziploc of blanched dust.
If you drop a coin into the pasty canvas of his palm
he’ll weave fables out of grass and dead leaves.
His words never falter because he’s made of them.
They multiply in his belly and spill from his mouth, his pores, his
eyes.

He’d once been a child, he’d sometimes claim on chillier nights,
he’d once fallen in love.
But there had been a fire, fire under fireworks,
lotus flowers sailing into trenches. That was the end of the world,
the coda, ringing through the droplets in the tropical air,
and everyone had died, except
no one knew.

“Beware of straight teeth,” he’d mutter in conclusion,
stabbing the breeze with a knobby index finger.
“Most people don’t believe me,
but teeth tell the truth.”

I would watch the neon lights behind me spin within his
uninhabited features.

“I believe you,” I’d say, running my dry tongue over metal
brackets.

His laughter would echo boots over gravel.

BEHIND A BLACK MASK

by Oluwadamilola Oshewa

I act like it doesn’t exist
Like my brown skin doesn’t ring some bell of difference in your
mind
Like no certain judgments pass through your thoughts when I open
my mouth to speak
But then when you read my name with its nineteen letters imported
from Nigeria
And you realize that I am even more different than you thought
Browner than brown and blacker than black
African not just African-American
I look you in the eye behind your white mask and
Your pale white skin rings a bell of my past, present, and future
You surround me, but with no embrace
And yet I still find the strength to act like it doesn’t exist
We all act like it doesn’t exist, but it still does and it always will
At least for me it will

UNTITLED

by Thomas Bernhardt

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with frail neck bones hidden behind clumsy woolen stitches.
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brackets.

His laughter would echo boots over gravel.
**AND WE WERE OFF**

by Hannah Kraft

I was at the moors of my Irish genes
Feeling my ancestors
Through the bottom of my boots—
Out of the mist its breath
Made a wreath about my head
Black sides chaffing—a live locomotive
Warm to the touch
My brother cradled my foot
And pushed me into the air—
Over the moon
I landed on that dark back—
Closing my knees about his sides
We became two pieces of a puzzle locked in place
And my brother thinking it funny
Slapped that side hard
A gun shot in the morning air

And we were off—
Scudding across grew clouds of peat
Flying in shambled pieces behind us—
I leaned into him, wrapped my
Fingers into the dark gypsy hair of mane
Siren’s voice in my ears
From the brine of the sea
No breath for me as terror
Bumped aside my heart—
So I spoke to him—
In a prayer—
Take me to the stars!

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**VILLANELLE**

by Mia Smith

I might have lost myself some years ago
To scathing comments branded in my mind;
My conscience, sinking far down; deep; below.

They promised I was worth something. “We’ll show
You how to be free from your world confined.”
I might have lost myself some years ago.

I had to fix my broken smile, although
Excoriating thoughts still kept me blind—
My conscience, sinking far down; deep; below.

Myself I could not recognize or know;
These suffocating thoughts were intertwined.
I might have lost myself some years ago.

But I’m okay, for I have learned to grow.
My self-oppression ceased to further bind
My conscience, sinking far down; deep; below.

The healing process, although promise shows,
Still pulls me down, and leaves me far behind.
I might have lost myself some years ago;
My conscience sinking farther down; below.
In memory of Uncle Youssef, a man I could never know

Dear Amani,

There are some family members that are ghosts. You remember them being there at your third birthday party or in the back of your memory cracking jokes at family dinners, but you don’t remember their middle names. You don’t remember if they loved you, or if they hugged you when you cried. You don’t remember if they soothed you when you skinned your knee, or if they yelled at you when you crossed the street without holding their hands. But you do remember the day your mother and you walked to the Caribbean restaurant to buy beef patties and cola. You remember seeing him, asking your mother for money, and all you wanted to do was hug him. Your mother said not to touch him in a sharp whisper, and she held your shoulder as she declined. And I’m sorry that you never knew the full story. I’m sorry that at their funeral, which happened a week after your thirteenth birthday, you felt empty and guilty. Most of all I’m sorry that you feel so alone, and that you feel the need to curse my name—I’m sorry I never answered. So here it is, enclosed is the story of the ghost.

God or Allah

I sent Youssef to live in Guyana. He was born with your grandmother at the Edoo family farm. The country was poor, yes, but there was a silent beauty in the land. It was warm and rainy. Youssef was born with yellow skin and hair on his ears and head. Zabedah fell in a silent obsession with her first-born. In the mornings, while she ate salt fish and bake, she would measure the feet of her son in her palm. When he was three she had to turn her palm vertically and complained that her son grew like a weed.

Youssef was beautiful. I pride myself in his youth days, I pride myself in his smile. Maybe you’ll remember it. He did good in the sun, in the warm weather—some humans do better with light. But I had a plan for Zabedah, and when Youssef was fourteen he came to America. Your mother came with him when she was two years old, and your uncle Shazim, when he was four. Not long after Zabedah’s stay in America your Aunt Bibi was conceived.

They lived in East Orange. For most it’s a city closely kin to
Newark with words that express it like “guns,” “black,” and “poor.” Zabedah lived in a one-bedroom apartment with her four children, grandmother, brother, and sister-in-law. They lived across the street from Rowley Park. It was a small strip of grass and pavement between the two family houses huddled too close together on Prospect Street. The children played there and during the summer bought subways and ices from the corner store next door.

You see, when humans are young, and feel like they have the world grasped firmly somewhere between their palms, any major shift can send them dropping what they knew. They can become broken, quiet, searching to be whole. Youssef was obedient to your grandmother. He cleaned the house. He cooked curry and rotti for his siblings. Your mother remembers this. But Youssef had to start high school once he came to America.

And if you don’t know Clifford Scott Academy, there are two types of kids. There are the quiet kids who keep their mouths shut and eyes towards the boards because they want to leave the ghetto. Then there are the kids that stay, the kids that smoke weed on Harriet St. at the park, the kids that play football or run track. The kids that glamour poverty. Youssef made friends with the wrong type of people. At the same time something dark was growing in his mind. His sun was taken from him, his country of champagne mango, figs, and dal, his Guyana. He was not his childlike self. He didn’t smile as much. He had three children to take care of as his mother worked three jobs on South Orange Ave. From the time she took bus number 72, he was in charge of feeding them. He had to protect his brother from being jumped by the hoodlums on Prospect, and he had to protect his sisters from his uncle.

But Youssef was not strong. He wasn’t built to be. It was depression that made him smoke. From there it was a dealer that recognized Youssef’s accent and desperation. One night, while smoking a blunt his friend rolled him, Youssef’s body was shot with a strong and short high. The weed was laced with cocaine. The days afterwards, Youssef felt trapped in his own mind, like there was a weight on his chest that would only keep pressing until he suffocated. So he went back, and paid for another hit to feel weightless.

His junior year of high school, he dropped out. He worked a few odd jobs, leaving home for nights at a time. Zabedah cried, did Salaat more times than I can count with her son on her mind. She went back to the masjid on Fourth Street. She sought safety in me, but I could not answer her. For years Youssef did this, for years your grandmother wept. Zabedah found a home with enough bedrooms. She took Youssef in, many nights picking him up off the street. When Youssef was 35 she sent him to Guyana to escape the people. In Guyana he married and had a child named Imran. When he returned, he was 41. She housed him, his child, and his wife. Then your grandmother sent him into rehab for the second time, paying for it with her insurance that she earned from a steady job at the hospital. Imran was four, Youssef was forty-two when he died. He had been recovering from an asthma attack a week earlier when he decided to have another hit. The funeral was at the masjid on Fourth Street. Your grandmother wore a black khimar. She wailed when she saw the body. As she screamed his name between sobs you were holding Imran’s hand. He asked if his daddy was going to wake up. You said no. He said okay. You stared blankly at your uncle’s face, trying to find a trace of yourself in him. You didn’t, except for the yellow skin and black curls. A week later Youssef’s widow and son went back to Guyana. Your grandmother bore the loss of her grandchild. Your grandmother no longer had curry and rotti for her fourteen grandchildren every Saturday night. She no longer cooked. When you visit her, and the house is muggy and empty, hold her.

Did you know that the people on the street used to call him Osama, with his long beard and East Indian heritage? That’s what he was to them, Osama. When the dealer calls out, and asks, aye yo where’s Osama at tonight? The answer will be, I don’t know man. But I know, and you know, that Osama is dead, or maybe he never existed. Maybe Osama was who Youssef pretended to be. Youssef didn’t break your grandmother. Osama did.
THE QUIET

by James Marcucci

I stand outside an empty house once filled with laughter.
It’s so quiet now.

It was a summer years ago.
The sun hung high in the sky, shining its ever-present light that seared
my flesh and blinded me.
A cacophony of bird chirps drilled into my adolescent ears.
My sweat dripped down the dips and crests of my face
as I wrestled with the window’s metal clasp, splinters digging into my
small hands.
That bastard locked me out!

Hours later, we were stretched upon our leather throne.
Our large Irish lungs drowned out the voices coming from the screen
with our debate.
I cut, stabbed, and slashed the air, using the tweezers I used to rip bits
of roof out of my hands to
accentuate my every point.
Throat parched, I drank the only thing we ever agreed was the best:
Sweet Iced Tea.

The day after that he was gone.

Today, as I sip that black nectar, I wallow in its taste;
so bitter and yet still with a hint of that same sweetness.
It’s so quiet now.
On the best days I can remember what we debated during the show.
On a good day I can remember how and why I got over my fear of
heights and climbed atop the roof.
On most days I remember bits and pieces of our time together.
On a bad day I can’t remember the last thing he said to me.
On the worst days I can’t remember my own brother’s face.

I sit alone in a house far too big for just one person.
It’s so quiet now.

BLUE

by Remenna Xu

the first recall comes as a chill,
deep in my bones
like a frost over living blood

rolling and slapping
when heat melts ice and
feeling returns to old wounds already been scabbed over.

i know why i am freezing
and i know his eyes command my cold
but i am frozen in his gaze —

blue like bottoms of
oceans and rivers and lakes all solid ice

when he speaks to me with lips parted slightly
his face speckled red with chapped skin and
the tenderness i feel is so unrequited that
i think it is impossible for no one to hear the stone-cold
thud
of my heart falling and hitting the ground
as he turns away without a second glance.
**ALLOW ME A VACANT SMILE**
by Kristie Petillo

I have empathy *** Helen Keller, when I was five I was set on fire, **** inside, my brain fried, and the world ** came quieter.

My world ** a transistor radio, whose knobs I **** with my uvula, **** * cannot **** a clear channel. **** words *** strained ******* a cheesecloth. I only hear some.

My fingers are **** tongues; their words *** **** than just gestication. Bless *** meek and ***** the quiet whose words **** almost ***** heard.

My words *** pumiced by my teeth. Only some *** fit the**** the gaps. **** fog of mumbles that *********** rounds us makes it hard *** me ** speak *** impossible ** hear you.

Don’t scold ** for yelling, ******** * * *, ** least I don’t think * am Hearing aids *** *** of style. They **n’t match ** earrings.

So whisper ***** grain ** salt because my ears *** **** a sieve. I want ** you ** think ***** I heard you. so ***** me * vacant smile and allow *** ******* nod. And I **** make you feel clever. You will **** me feel **** I’m not numb.

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**LEFT UNFINISHED**
by Alicja Madloch

I wish you could wash away the way I cried on the fabric seat and just keep the smell of sea salt and vinegar from the crumbs in its fold from that one night we watched a shitty Nicholas Sparks movie like in a cliché summer special.

I know I asked for closure but it tastes a bit too sterile and feels a bit too white and I don’t think it fits and I want to return it.

I’ll return your key too, so don’t worry, but I’ll pack it in a box with a lock of my hair and maybe a tape with songs that remind me of how you kissed my hand and drove my car. I didn’t burn your letters. I’ve tried to get lost in the curls of your words, but in the end ink speaks little of character.

My drive now takes twice as long because the toddler in my pocket doesn’t like to cross the road we joked was named after you. And I hope you keep making messes because I’d hate to lose the feeling that bits of me might be meshed in your carpet and mingling with bits of you.

I also might be wearing your sweater around like an evening gown because you said I looked beautiful in it and I’ve learned to believe you.
I couldn’t care less about blisters from dancing barefoot in the street and imagining raindrops with your silhouette. I kiss the scars from being clumsy around you because pain is just another memory linking the two of us in a dream catcher of some lover’s joke and even the ashes of this love affair are more beautiful than any prospect of the future I can imagine for myself.

UNTITLED

by Mia Smith

A FRIENDLY SUGGESTION

by Mauranda Men

You would never believe how easy it is to sit alone in the lunchroom. Believe me, it requires skill. I’m serious. Go at the peak of the period, and mesh yourself with the crowd. Choose a seat at an already populated table; not next to a group already immersed in chatter, just one or two seats away. Just far enough to be separate. To do this outside in the courtyard is a little harder, without the enclosing walls to shield your presence, to give you the security of solitude. Outside, windows rim the space, and people scuttle back and forth when you look in. But why, why can’t anyone bear to try what I’m suggesting? We’ve all done it, gone to lunch before we were ready or wanted to or even so late that we might be late for class. Just because someone didn’t want to go alone. Why does everyone Assume that creative writers Only have whimsical minds; people need A structure to follow, a procedure For people Or classes Or mealtimes Or talking To feel like they belong? The secret anguish of those Who are left sitting Alone At a table when others have gone on to class Silently taking in who sits with who Trying to seem engaged in the conversation when truly daydreaming Of what would happen if we all tried, just For one moment, to Stop Time and time again Wishing that we all belonged When really, We don’t always want to.
**POSTURE**

by Liz Merrigan

My mother told me not to sit
with my spine hunched and
one knee coiled
against my chest.
She said the way one leg dangled over the cushion edge
and the other bent inward was wrong.
the position was wrong,
my blood flow would be
wrong
and, oh the agony,
the disease,
the lightning God would use to strike me down
each time my masochistic limb would disobey.
That’s true, I’d agree,
and as she’d close the door
my legs would hang parallel, heels facing down.
My hands would curve, poised at the keyboard, and
my eyes would fix,
swallowing virtual light in their circular fissures
and blinking to red-black.
Cochleae catch tap-clicks with every roll of the tired eyes,
an upward jerk of the head throwing glitter into double vision
each time the forehead falls.
The ritual. The rhythm, the chorus, the refrain.
Coming back to it was never hard,
it was realizing that it was what it was, a repetition
that throws you, every time,
that throws you, even when you expect it.
At eleven, night seeping between the folds of my cortex, the door
would creak open and she’d catch my leg
creeping back into a semi-pretzel.
Why don’t I ever listen? That’s a valid question.
Really, though, I just never understood why
my feet never could touch the ground, why
the same two inches between my toes and consummation
neither grew nor shrunk.

I wish my tendons would tear,
the web of ligaments unravel,
so my two worthless bookends would just hit the bottom, already.
I hate the way my skin falls to vacancy,
how it always skims a sense of closeness
but the floorboards never come to meet it.

**HIMALAYAN SCHOOL GIRL**

by Brendan James
another’s eyes were like worn denim:
comfort, trust.
they were the eyes of a person
who had been hurt,
the eyes of someone you knew could identify
with your past. you knew you could trust him,
that is, until the denim shrinks in the dryer
and turns its back on you.
then his eyes are unforgiving, and you hate them.
and you hate yourself, for remembering the good
when it is all tainted
by bad.

i hate eyes at times, a liar’s eyes are always the ones
that you have to watch
oh
so
carefully.
but good liars can manipulate their eyes
because they’re windows to the soul,
the soul you were drawn to
from the first blink.

i love eyes — they tell you things that people themselves can’t.
you have to watch them
oh
so
carefully.
but a good person won’t change their eyes
because they’re windows to the soul,
the soul you were drawn to
from the first blink.

her eyes were warm
like milk chocolate,
the chocolate you eat amongst tears
and that aching lonely feeling
and somehow her eyes,
they wrapped all of that into one glance.

his eyes reminded me of a dark wood:
oak, mahogany.
the color of your dining room table
just the way they moved
was like an
amber colored
whiskey
being poured into
a crystal glass.

someone asked me once how could i
summarize someone?
you can’t.

someone asked me once how could i
summarize someone?
you can.
but only if they can
summarize you.
Pavement doesn’t fold well. Neither do
pillows. I am learning that papier mache is
nothing like paper. The man I thought I
loved turned out to be an origami doll. Some days
he is a flower, delicate and honest. Other
days he is a frog. It is a good thing
we have no children. I’ve killed
every tadpole I’ve owned.
When he is a crane and tricks me into
bringing him into the garden, I tie
fishing line around him. A harness fine as
cobwebs. So he can’t lose me.
If I have left him too long between
the pages of a book, he tucks himself into
the shape of a clumsy heart. One day I come
home to find a paper goldfish contemplating
my journal. “How many people
could these pages make?” he asks me.
He is already folding himself
into something with hands.
TO OCCUPY YOU
by Alicja Madloch

Sometimes I pretend that I can hear words in the static—as if there were things communicated through the subconscious like a message unto myself. I can slow the ticking of a clock if I just focus hard enough and perhaps that makes me an impromptu master of time.

My grandma told me to walk in straight lines and never risk stepping on the curb. I yearned for an edge, a cliff on which to learn to balance my life. I liked to test boundaries, to expand them by climbing, exploring, and gathering scabs that molded into scars commemorating my adventures; beautiful if only to the mirror and the hand running up my legs.

I’ve written down my blushes in hasty run-on sentences and prayed hard that I’d forget my silly goals. I’ve had dreams that left me sweaty and unsettled in a spiderweb of sheets chaining my body whilst my mind escaped. I talk in fables and the assumption in all of them is that life is half-true, easy prey to an experienced tongue. I bring the words to life in a vivid “out of this world” way.

Maybe when you strip everything away there’s just flesh and blood and just a little bit of pain. Scalped I would portrayed Me just as much because my brain speaks of itself and who needs to worry about what the industry considers appealing. This poem is just a few grains, some musings, while the rest slip past my rings and bury themselves in other inspirations left untouched.
TIRED AT THREE

by Greta Skagerlind

Upstairs, the wall-papered shoebox
looms above me, pink and flowery, and sways in
the storm; a soggy cardboard diorama
dropped on its side.
Brother dearest goo goo’s and ga ga’s,
extends his Michaelangelo hand toward the ceiling.
I pick at my fingernails until they bleed.

Downstairs, the shoebox is bigger, taller,
more mysterious. I hear the sounds
of my father’s boot-heels
clicking like little staccato ghosts on the stairs.
Not a word is uttered in my direction.
I open my mouth to speak,
but a bad word escapes Daddy’s mouth—
before I can ask him “why?”
—he is probably cursing the loss of some vital fluid
from the rental car.

Upstairs, a wooden rocking horse,
with sprawling cracks in its lacquer and fraying yarn hair,
peers at me amidst the floral abyss.
I stare into its yellow eye
as the last of the Sydney city lights
reflect off the shiny veneer.
I do not ask it “why?”
Instead I bite my nails and accept my fate.
My brother stirs in his crib.
I can sense Jealousy,
an undetected, velveteen crook,
climb through the window and overtake me
as I envy his serenity, so easily achieved.