

tobeco



2010

literary and artistic journal

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Nia Toombs, Ken Troutman, and Mariah Leigh Yancey

ADVISOR:

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COVER ART:

“Balance” by Mark Liberto

MARGIN ART:

“Flip” by Lauren Graziano



Contributing Editors' Remarks/Acknowledgments

At the risk of sounding all mushy, I'll say: With words and art there are infinite possibilities.

All the second guessing and questions: What word should I use? When should I snap the picture? Should I add more of this color? Will this offend someone? Do I really care if this offends someone? These questions are answered by relying on a combination of education and instinct, resulting in something that will be encountered by others who will bring their own experience to the thing that has been created. Even now, you yeah—you--right there will read this book in a way that is unique from everybody else, thereby making the text something it would not have been otherwise. Hell, even if you use it to balance a coffee table and you'd better not I'm sure it'll be done in a unique way. I'd like to express my thanks to those who courageously sent in their works of art and to everyone with whom I had the pleasure of working while developing this journal. Without everybody, this issue of TOBECO wouldn't be all of the things it is...and will be.

Holly

Being a part of TOBECO has opened my eyes to how talented and artistic Clarion University's students truly are. I enjoyed going through the poems, fiction, and photography to develop our journal. There was a plethora of diverse depictions of art and I found each and every one very interesting. Having a group to publish the works of students is such an achievement. Nonetheless, I'd like to thank all the students who submitted, for caring, and allowing themselves to put their thoughts, passions, and talents, out there for others to read and critic. To write, to draw, and to capture the moments in life others just think about expressing is truly a genuinely captivating talent. I hope everyone that took part in the editing process and the publication process was as enthralled as I was. I also hope everyone that participated in an effort to benefit TOBECO continues to in the following years to come, regardless the works chosen to represent this year's volume. I felt honored to be included in the journal and available to make it happen. I'm excited for next year's meetings, events, and publication. I'd like to thank Dr. Smart for her dedication as well as my fellow members of TOBECO and PAGES for creating the journals. Keep creating Clarion!

Lauren Graziano

I had a lot of fun working with *Tobeco!* I was so surprised by the number and variety of submissions that we received! Being able to read everyone's work was a real eye opener into others' lives, the way they think



about the world, and their creative abilities! It just proves that Clarion University students have the ability to introduce so much in terms of art and ideas to the writing and artistic world. It is a shame that we couldn't use everything submitted, but then we would have a book instead of a journal! I encourage those who did not get into the journal this year to try again next year.

I think that *Tobeco* gives students the awesome opportunity to really dig deep into writing and artwork, and an outlet for displaying it. I hope to be a part of this organization for my whole college career, and to continue creating submissions for it as well. Thanks to everyone who helped make this year's journal a success: the staff, and especially all you submitters!

"To have great poets there must be great audiences too." Walt Whitman

Enjoy—Rachael Kilmer

What a special year this was for *Tobeco*. After hibernating for a couple years we reappeared into the world a little disoriented, skinny, and with an eviction notice attached to the front of our cave. We thought it would be tough going, and some weeks were rough; but with the support and encouragement from Clarion University, the English Department (especially Dr. Smart and Dr. Terman), and a handful of *Tobeco* group members, who volunteered a lot of their time, minds, and efforts; we grew fat with accomplishments. We took the first shaky trip around our old territory attempting to reestablish *Tobeco's* position as an oasis within the wilderness of college experiences. But enough with the metaphor, there is still much work that needs to be done for this art journal to continue on into the future. We need a group of confident, dependable, and open-minded students to apply their efforts each year. So feel free to give back to the journal returning writers and students; don't let this awesome opportunity for art implode.

Lastly, but mostly, I want to give a humongous thanks to all of the talented and wonderful writers and artists who submitted their work. It takes a lot of guts to submit one of your babies to judgment and opinions. This can feel invasive, especially when we don't include a work of art in the journal. Remember though, we are but a few opinions, so do not let this weigh heavy on your potential, talent, or aspirations. Keep writing, reading, and plugging away. I have a new and great appreciation for all those who submitted to *Tobeco* this year.

Ken Troutman

It has been a pleasure working with this group of talented students, being able to read the talent of other students, and getting to know the insights of two of our English professors, Dr. Smart and Dr. Terman. Year after year, students come and go, making and leaving a path of endless possibilities. On that path, the talent comes and goes, keeping ideas fresh with the new and marking legacies with the old. I'm glad *Tobeco* has been



able to give us the chance to keep this path moving, constantly being created and remembered. Thank you, Dr. Smart, Dr. Terman, Nia, Holly, Lauren, Ken, and Rachael for our teamwork in not only continuing the path through Tobeco, but for keeping it strong and very much alive.

I'm happy to have shared my time and effort with the people of this journal, and now to be able to share this effort with you. I hope you enjoy reading Tobeco, just as we have enjoyed putting it together, and let it inspire you to create and become part of this path we're building. Show the world how wonderful we are, Clarion!

Mariah Yancey

This year I learned the value of “a few good [persons],” (to borrow from a popular movie title) as I met week in and week out with the Faithful Six: Holly, Lauren, Rachael, Nia, Ken, and Mariah. As we shouldered our task over the course of 30 weeks we aptly embodied that old adage “sure and steady wins the race;” or as I have also heard it revised “sure and surly wins the race.” Happily, there was absolutely no surliness in the task we set for ourselves: to resurrect Tobeco to life and vitality once again after a two year absence. But there was a lot of laughter, a lot of dedication and commitment, a lot of joy, and I think a great appreciation for our mission and for the friendships we forged in the process of accomplishing that mission as we considered the prose, fiction, poetry, photos, and art work submitted to us by more than 80 students and faculty this year. Holly, Lauren, Rachael, Nia, Ken, and Mariah: thank you SO much for being such a wonderful group of hearts and minds and spirits to work with and for being so faithful to the process. Even though Monday night meetings could sometimes be a grind, I looked forward to being with you from 5 to 6 in Davis 203 and the fact that you just “showed up” each week was a great encouragement and inspiration to me. Without you, Tobeco would be naught.

Many, many thanks to all of our contributors, who had the courage to submit something to Tobeco in the first place. Please keep your writing and your art work coming! Thanks to Mark Liberto for letting us use his intriguing photo “Balance” as our 2010 Tobeco cover and because he waited patiently for so many months to hear back from me. Special thanks to Phil Terman for his relentless support and friendship. And special thanks to Brenda Stahlman and her associates at PAGES for all of your technical printing wizardry and because no matter what kind of day you are having, you are always so calm, welcoming, and just plain nice to talk to. . . .

Juanita Smart
Tobeco Advisor





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one : poetry //





Carousel

by Vince Spina

For Mary

Wherever you are, I am sending this
to you: harvest of November: bared branches of maples
writing their calligraphy across steel skies
—they want to say something to us
and the air spirals round itself
that we may hear. I listen as someone

says how cold she gets these days
and her body gets these days
though the temperature goes about
as always... as if it could
suspend us here out of care
for the coming memorials. Who is it
we wished to remember anyway? Your fingers
knotted into time are memory enough

...the rest had to happen, has to happen
like radio news: the inevitable good
with the inevitable bad, neither too easy
to swallow. But I want to say

what the trees wrapped in the always renewed climate say
—the thing outside us, wholly its own that
writes us into its message just the same

drawing us in as the pause between two musics
draws us in, the rift between two seasons
...from which old and needing ghosts drift out
asking us for breath.

One way or another we still gather about
this table of broken treaties,
demeaned promises, though the message
never changes... the way those rings you reached

for from your painted horse would fit any
lithe strong finger. You only had to wait.



La Vie est Belle

by Mark Liberto



Blue

by Johnny Mancu

Turn on the news,
Another black mother, singing the six o'clock blues.

For the sake of purity, irrelevant details have been omitted,
But her baby was struck by a bullet.

These are no white woman's woes, but wailing song.
Her heavy breathing, deep moans, tears that drown the city of
Pittsburgh, for a night.

Her cries cause the catfish at the bottom of the Allegheny to
shiver, black skin trembling.
A passerby turns away, but hears still, pain so true, echoing
through the streets, turning red, brick buildings blue.

Her crying questions the world, sending it spinning off it's axis,
fumbling for answers, quaking.
She wants no answers, only to release the pressure of the blues
accrued, the music explodes from her.

And her song briefly connects us all, wipes away the color of the
world.
For a second or less, undetected by the eye, the entire world
turns blue.

With the strength of a tidal wave's salty tears,
This mother paints everything live, blood blue, with a single,
breathing brush stroke.



Sunset

by Lauren Graziano



Aftertaste

by Trista Alexander

Slouchy sun,
sagging—a wet burlap sack
full of marbles—
sinking like a rock
in a bowlful of bread dough—

The sunset
is wax melting—mixing—
like oil, water, air—
smearing together but separate—
always separate brushstrokes—

The sky
is flavors in my mouth—
tangerine, strawberry, plum—
leaving a bitter aftertaste,
like sour grapes and vinegar—

I'll taste it in the morning.



Valentine's Day

by Lauren Graziano



Heart-Shaped Roses

by Krista Jones

Slowly, the petals dry out,
Fading from blood red to bland brown,
Crunching beneath my soft caresses.
All twelve roses, waning,
Are still a deep red in my memory.

When I got them, they were not in this vase.
Each rose, perfectly positioned,
Was punctuated by a lit, burgundy candle.
The heart shape stole my breath—
In twenty years I'd never received a single rose.

Wilting slowly, the scent was still strong.
It diffused perfectly, perfuming my room
In rich, fragrant waves.
The silky petals were a different kind of softness
Than the smooth, pliable stem
Or the slightly bumpy, velvety leaves.

The roses have completely dried now,
But the thorns remain—
Hard as stone and sharp as fangs—
As the blood trickles from my careless finger,
The flickering candlelight from my memory
Dies with the last of the roses.



Tuesday

by Christina Bowlin

Alarm clock buzzing too early, hurry
to get a shower while the water is still warm,
drive to work in the dark and pray
a deer does not decide to be brave,
frustration of working with my mother
at my aunt's restaurant for 6 hours,
the rush of speeding down the road
trying to get to a doctor's appointment,
just to get stuck behind a garbage truck,
late five minutes just to wait six more
for my name to be called out by the nurse,
and wait ten more for the doctor,
while the appointment lasts about ten minutes
and I go to the bank and spend too much for gas,
spend 45 minutes driving to school which seems
far too much for just one class,
finding out that more needs to be done to receive financial aid,
realization that I forgot my flash drive
which contained two poems for
this class causing me to quickly
write three just before it begins,
I would write more but the day is not done,
I will tell you more on Wednesday.



My grandmother's sitting room

by Chelsea Furl

Full of dust, each speck seemed
to catch the light, sparkling
Bare floorboards, once bright blue
now were chipped and creaking.

The sun drew out the scent
of my grandmother's perfume
and lent a golden glow
to floating flecks.

The corners still held
onto the gloom, the house
knew my grandmother
everything mourned her passing.

A leaking roof stained
one corner of the ceiling
brown and began to
sag down the wall.

sky blue and pastel pink
layers of wallpaper
had begun to curl
and chip away.

thickness in the air
set loose from the couch
was something more
than specks of dust.



Invincible

by Lauren Graziano



Spring Football Practice

by Alyssa McGinnis

Mud - tastes bitter and the grit, grimy sand
That sticks to your tongue, grinds between your teeth
and scratches your cracked, ripped lips, marks your hands
cakes your cleats, slip sliding grass divot streaks.
But blood looks good under mud, seeping through,
And you learn whether you hit your target
if the hand prints leave a deep dirty bruise
in your teammates gut. Practiced teams market
better than losers, so we hit hard.
Pads offer little protection against girls
twice your size who could bench you and then add
weight. She'll pick you up, drive you down, heads swirl.
Technique wins games. Your skin will grow back stained
but stronger when you put in time to train.



Sauce

by Paul C. Markle III

Sweet tomato sugar wafts into the air
Above my sister and I as we dance down the hall
Towards the kitchen cannery.

“Whatcha doin’, Mom?”
“Can we help?”
Sure.

Sis grabs for the wooden plunger.
My eyes zip straight for the crank.
The controls are within my reach!

Mom makes ever so careful slices through fresh flesh,
Then flips the plump fourths into the large mouth
And I crank, and sis squishes,

I hear the juice squirt, washing the clean metal red,
And I crank, and crank building muscle now,
And sis squishes faster to keep up with Mom,

And then we all bear witness to an act of God!
The separation of the good and the evil
Somehow, some way within this machine of miracles,

The gunk barely breaks through the teeth of the grinder:
The thick orange-red flesh and seedy pulp expel
From within the metal.

The good emerges from the tiny holes in the metal press:
Generous helpings of red sauce spurt from each opening,
The more I crank, the more gloriously the juice slides down.

Down the slide it flows like lava into the bowl
Filling quickly, then slower as my arm lames up
And my mind becomes infatuated with the mystery of machines!

Sis begs to swap duties, and my arms oblige,
Then gain strength again to grasp tightly a tool
That will allow me the right to crush fleshy foes to a pulp.



fiction //





Therapist

by Stacey L. Gross

Everything in the exam room was white. What wasn't white looked white under the fluorescent tube lights that whirred against the ceiling. Outside the white curtain separating Jane from the rest of the world was a white emergency room filled with white gurneys and white doctors. Jane stood against the gurney – made up to look like a bed – crossing and uncrossing her arms, waiting for the nurse to come back. Something somewhere was beeping out a steady rhythm – someone's heart was beating. The ER was quiet at this time of night. Jane wondered why no one was getting stabbed or wrecking their cars or having babies. The silence intensified the hum of the lights. A hushed discussion was taking place at the nurse's station, whispers flitting through the curtain like bees in July. She strained to distinguish words from the hum.

Jane glanced into the corner, where a hospital case worker had set up camp. She was young. Pert, Gabe would have called her, only because he knew she considered the word mildly sexual and enjoyed needling her with one of the few irritants he had discovered. She held Jane's case file in her lap, flipping through the police report. Jane wondered if who might be waiting for Ms. Pert. Then, whether there would be anyone waiting at home for Jane. She glanced at the clock above the door. Eleven thirty. Gabe should be almost home from work. She anticipated the questions he'd have, began scripting her responses. Finally, the curtain fluttered, screeching from the friction of its metal hooks on its metal rod. Jane shivered against the cool breeze that wafted in behind him.

"I'm doctor Robinson," the man stated, offering his hand to Jane without looking up from the manilla chart in his hand. Jane considered the offering, following the curve of his arm up his over-starched jacket (white of course) to his shoulders, his neck, his plump face. His black, plastic-framed glasses, back from the fifties for another round, irritated her.

She could hear Gabe already. "The only people who wear glasses like that," he'd say, "are people who think they're hip." She wasn't sure if this sweeping generalization could be applied to all wearers of black plastic glasses but, at the very least, this Dr. Robinson remind her of Tom Collins' and Big Band Swing. Funny, considering he looked to be about the same age as little Ms. Perty McPerterson over in the corner.

"I've been assigned to perform the first part of your exam." Dr. Robinson motioned toward the fake bed. She leaned against the plastic mattress.

"The first thing I want to tell you", Robinson said as he lowered himself onto the rolling stool beside



her, “is that we offer all our rape victims free and confidential HIV testing.”

“All of your rape victims,” Jane repeated. Like an assembly line, she thought to herself. I’ll collect my complimentary HIV test and go from here to the psych ward where they’ll take my shoelaces and fit me for a mouthguard? Robinson blinked. “Do I get to pick the color?”

“The . . . excuse me?”

“Of my mouthguard. Never mind. Doesn’t HIV take months to incubate?”

Robinson chewed his bottom lip, flipping through the police report and scribbling notes. “I understand that this is a sensitive time for you right now, Miss –“ he hesitated, flipping back to the first page. “Haskins. Jane?”

“There you go,” Jane answered.

“Excellent. Miss Haskins. We just want to be sure you’re not carrying the virus. It’s a liability thing. For the doctors.”

The case worker stepped forward, dancing around the pair of them at what seemed like an appropriate distance. “It’s for everyone’s protection.”

“We need your permission to do an HIV test,” Dr. Robinson pressed.

“Do whatever. I don’t care.”

“I just need to be sure,” he continued, “that you consent to a –“

“Yes. Yes. Fucking yes. Do you want to check the box or should I?” Jane cradled her temple in her slender hand and plucked at a string of chestnut hair that hung near her chin.

“Excellent.” Robinson slapped the folder closed, then stood and crossed the room, his patent leather shoes clicking on the linoleum floor. He stopped in front of a row of cabinets and traced his fingers over the glass, stopping at the phlebotomy kit. He pulled a set of keys from his pocket, unlocked the cabinet and withdrew a sterile needle and three glass vials. “Sit up, please,” he instructed. Jane glanced over the caseworker and did as Dr. Robinson asked, the paper cover on the gurney crackling as she sat. She hated those paper blankets and the paper gown she’d been given to wear. They made her feel like a scrap someone had tossed in a corner. The caseworker looked away when their eyes met, apparently fascinated by the oxygen tank in the corner.

Robinson tied a pink rubber tourniquette around her skinny bicep. “You’re going to feel a little –“

“Just do it, man,” Jane said. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She had no reason to hate this doctor. But his childish face and those ridiculous, hip glasses, the frosted tips of his brown hair, just made



her want to scream.

The needle hesitated on her skin a moment, considering the vein before entering it - a courtesy she hadn't been afforded earlier that evening - then slid into her arm with a little pop, the tender skin inside her elbow reforming around it, and the first vial rushed with blood. When he was finished he gathered his things and headed for the door. "I'll run this down to the lab tech now and we have Dr. Ashcroft on her way in to do your pelvic."

"While he's gone," the caseworker said, taking his stool and sliding toward her, "I'd like to give you a little information on what I do here."

"I know what you do," Jane said, picking at the edge of the band aid nestled in the fold of her arm. "Is it what you always wanted to do?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Well I mean you're, what, twenty-three? Did you always want to go into social services? Or was it a nursing fantasy gone awry?"

The girl looked down at her chart. "I don't think it's relevant -"

"Just humor me," Jane said, leaning her back against the wall and twisting an invisible cigarette between her fingers. "I'm going to be here all night. Rather than going over what you already know from the police report, could you just...keep me company? Please?"

The girl smiled lightly. "I'm Sarah," she said as she offered her hand. "And I wanted to be a Psychologist originally."

"Research or clinical," Jane asked, giving her a curt shake before resuming her position.

"Clinical."

"Therapy." They considered it a moment, silence building between them. "Did you know," Jane asked as Sarah tried to avoid looking at her, "that if you break the word therapist into two words you get the and rapist? The rapist."



Heights

by Lauren Graziano



Mary-Ann, Full of Grace

by Jimi Wikander

Every Sunday, Mary-Ann faithfully rises at 8:30 for mass at 9:30. Her hair, naturally wavy, is subdued by the straightener and made to look to some like a field of wheat. She looks at herself in the mirror, making sure every hair is set in place and trusting they are, begins to apply eye liner.

Always lightly applied, just enough to bring out the violently calm green in her eyes. Mascara, lipstick, each lightly applied. The lipstick a shade darker than their natural color. Earrings, double hooped, somehow compliment the part in her hair. Only she knows why these things must be this way and how they work.

The last preparation for mass consists of this: a flask, a funnel, and whiskey. The flask is black and the texture of the Bible and used to belong to her grandfather. She tips the amber brown whiskey through the metallic silver funnel and into the Bible black flask, spilling only a little on her forefinger.

She licks the drop and thinks, "Tastes like Jesus." Flask into purse, purse over shoulder, shoes into feet, Mary-Ann out the door.



Robin's Jump

by Corey McCullough

Robin was 12 when he decided to jump the creek. It was the kind of water old men might call a run-shallow enough to wade across, deep enough to fish. It meandered through the woods behind the family farmhouse, varying from wide, gentle lengths to swirling currents at the narrow sections. There was a pinewood deck on the hillside where the creek ran narrowest and swiftest, built by Robin's grandfather years before.

It was a six foot drop from the deck to the water, and thirteen feet to the opposite shore. Robin knew because he'd marked the distances on lengths of rope and measured them. His precision- perfectionism grounded by diamond-hard practicality- was inherited from his father. That meticulous blood pumped through Robin's strong young heart and mingled with his grandfather's ambition, breeding a potent combination in the boy.

Many years prior, that grandfather- also named Robin- had come home from war to take his place running the family farm. He took great pride in the work and the land. He knew every hill, every rock, every tree, every stretch of water. He built his deck, alone and with his bare hands, at the narrowest part of the creek, where the water ran swift and gurgled pleasant melodies. Here an ancient hemlock leant its shade and extended a venerable branch partway over the water. There was a handmade rocker there still, which the old man had paid daily visits to ponder life's great mysteries and dream big dreams, up to his last days.

But his grandson, twelve-year-old Robin, was a boy of action. He'd already outgrown himself, along with every other boy in his class. It would be a long time before his spirit caught up with a body full of more inexplicable muscle than he knew what to do with. For now, he put it toward the kind of ambitions that had defined his childhood, like jumping the creek.

True to his nature, every factor was measured, every risk calculated. He laid the marked lengths of rope out on dry land. It became quickly apparent that a thirteen foot jump, even with room for forward progress in the descent, was nothing to sneeze at. His best running start didn't even come close to hitting the mark. Briefly he considered climbing the hemlock branch that hung almost four feet across the water. To utilize it, however, was to eliminate any running start.

And then, with all the immediacy and force of divine intervention, the solution came to him. A combination of methods would be employed: a running jump, a kick off the branch for extra momentum, and



the rest was just tuck and roll and hope for the best.

Where the fields ended and the woods began there was the tool shed. It had been a chicken coup once, and the matted-down straw that still clung in one corner attested to that. Now it was packed tight with old equipment that had hardly been looked at since his father quit taking care of the fields. Behind the shed was the stump of a long-felled oak that was about the right height. For hours on end through those dog days of summer, Robin practiced running, jumping, kicking off the stump with one foot and using the extra momentum to propel him forward. He learned how to keep his balance in mid-air, how to plant his foot correctly, and what sort of kick gave him the most momentum. His legs burned at night. He devoted himself completely to the practice, developing a technique to give optimum distance and greatest chance of success. Every day he visited the deck, and the gap seemed to grow wider.

And then there was the matter of landing. It would be a serious fall onto the opposite bank below, whose shore was littered with rocks. Even if he made it across, he would surely roll his ankle or break his leg on the rocks. But to attempt the jump elsewhere would be impossible, and to manipulate the bank to soften his landing would compromise the integrity of the undertaking.

It was a Sunday evening in August when Robin jumped. No matter that he'd never gained the target distance even under controlled circumstances. As he stood at the edge of the deck overlooking the creek, he knew somehow it was now or never. Every fiber in his being told him this was true. He readied himself at the back of the deck where the boards broke even with the forest floor. With feet planted, arms hanging loose and even at his sides, he let out a single measured breath as he narrowed his gaze on the tree branch, then the opposite bank. An empty rocker paid witness. He'd never stretched before practicing, so he didn't stretch now. He took off like a coiled spring in a dead sprint for the edge of the deck.

Wind rushed in his ears. His tennis shoes thudded over the old, oak boards. The creek gurgled below. The rest of the forest was silent. The woods itself had stopped to watch Robin's jump. He hit the end of the dock and pushed off the last board with one foot.

Time stood still in that first second, with nothing but air and water beneath him. He'd taken the angle correctly. His eyes were fixed on the mid-air stepping stone. He planted his foot on the hemlock branch and pumped his leg like a piston-

A snap resounded through the woods like a thunderclap. Panic set it as and the branch swayed against his weight. He left the branch behind and was airborne but off-balance. Time had no meaning. Arms and legs pinwheeling at the apex of his flight, he watched the world pass beneath him with frantic wonder. His descent was swift. He hit the other side with feet barely beneath his body, clearing the water by half a foot. The



momentum was too much, knocked him forward, off his feet. His body crashed headlong into the rocks, rolling end-over-end across jagged stone surfaces, leaving behind blood and skin.

A symphony of snaps erupted behind Robin. He scrambled around, excitement yet blinding him to his injuries. Far behind him now was the hemlock who'd stood tall and reverent long before an old man named Robin built a deck to dream at. The branch was twisting around itself, snapping with bright splinters at the anchor-point, and then it broke. Robin clawed up the bank for safety as the branch plummeted the six foot drop. It crashed into the creek with a deafening bang. Its longest fingers brushed harmlessly against Robin's legs, just out of harm's way. Water boiled up with mud and bark as the thing wobbled, then settled, halfway sunken in the creek.

Needles, bits of wood and bark rained down, catching in the creek's swirling ripples to be carried away. Where the branch had once been, now remained a jagged and splintered stump. The sandy-colored wood here drew stark contrast to the tree's dark, aged exterior. Sap flowed from the wound, ichor of a titan.

Robin watched it all from the opposite bank, oblivious to the gashes and chunks of missing flesh taken by the fall. He forced himself to stand, ignoring the blood running down his legs, soaking his socks, pooling in the soles of his shoes. "Fell riding my bike," he would later explain. Once the adrenaline wore off, those injuries would hurt, but never once would he regret the jump.

A smile crept over his face- the face of a boy that still had a few more years to jump creeks, skin knees, and laugh in the face of danger. A few years left at least, until that ambition, muscle and precision would be put toward bigger yet somehow less important things. Still immune to the pain in his battered legs, he hopped onto the fallen branch and took the new bridge safely, if somewhat less compellingly, back to the other side.



two : poetry //





Home

by Ashley Urik

When someone says nebbly, jaggerbush, grocery buggy,
Chipped ham, dippy eggs, gumband, red up, slippy,
And especially yinz,
The English major in me cringes,
But the 'Burgher in me smiles.

When the Steelers come with Polamalu's hair, Harrison's bulrush,
Big Ben's scramble, Holmes's miracle catch, Ward's break-your-face smile,
All especially to kill ravens,
The practical me says just a game,
But the 'Burgher in me dances.

When the winter brings snow to the knees, steal-your-breath winds,
Dirty gray slush, regular ice, black ice, unplowed roads
And especially potholes
The me who dreams of beaches says sonofabitch
But the 'Burgher in me plays.

When everyone wonders why not London, Rome, Rio de Janiero
Shang Hi, Cape Town, Madrid, Dublin, Berlin,
Or especially Paris
The me who has lived here forever says maybe someday
But the 'Burgher in me is already home.



The Old Orchard

by Rachael Kilmer



The Old Orchard

by Rachael Kilmer

There beyond the barn one sees
A patch of old and giant trees
An orchard planted long ago
The branches reaching high and low.
A place of beauty every spring
And a beautiful perfume the blossoms bring.
The juicy apples come in the fall
So many that no one could eat them all.
Such ancient varieties that no one can find
Other trees that bear the same kind.
Some taste heavenly baked in a pie
Mother's homemade, worth more than money can buy.
Apple dumplings, crisp, cake and sauce
If one doesn't try, one is suffering a loss!
I go here alone to think or to draw
And try to imagine what my ancestors saw;
This land that just was not the same
With the woods and the fields that they had to tame.
How hard it must've been to plow and to hoe
And milk the cows in rain or in snow!
As I sit at the base of my favorite tree,
With a gentle breeze blowing on me
I hear the grass move and the song of a bird
What lovely things there are to be heard!
The beauty of life completely astounds me
When that old, familiar orchard surrounds me.



Balance

by Mark Liberto



The Dancer

by Jessica Welsh

One last time, I memorized the way light
Falls on your neck, gently glistening to
Give life to your shadows. Truly, the night
Deceives all who dare dream. Slowly, you move

Into the indifferent arms that claim you,
Your ocean eyes lowered; your frame, too much
To bear. If I could translate beauty's truths,
I would tell her of your grace—of that touch

Of light upon your skin, the sloping calm
Of your shoulders, of the voice in your hands.
Resolved, I gouge these nails into my palm.
Your echo implores that I understand

That such a parting must only be fate,
For I am trapped by pride, and you, by paint.



Coal

by Galen Trimble

I remember sitting around the old pot bellied stove
under a blanket listening to my parents tell stories
and being asked to go throw some more coal into the stove
to keep the room warm in the winter.

When the outside was a mix of white and black
and the trees all looked dead and alone.

When the grass was once more green and the sky blue
we looked around the blackened remnants of the old home
the ground was still warm though the air had a bite
and the black lumps left from the burned structure
still remained warm in our hands
even as the drops fell from our cheeks onto the ashy blackness.

When I was younger I used to walk the rails
looking for the black gold not as valuable but gold can't keep you warm.
My friends would join me and we would sing and play
always aware of the trains that might come down on us any minute.
When we got home we would look like we were in black face
and mom would just smirk and send us to bathe.

Now looking outside the sky is blackened
looking like a night that morning will never come to again.
Dark faced men of every nationality walk past my home
eyes to the ground streaks of clean skin appearing over the ash.
Until retirement I was among those men wearing clothing of coal.
And even now the soot won't wash completely from my hands.



Summer Grows In Fields of Vegetables

by Jake Snyder

We kept beer in foam coolers
under the porch.

The sun made us bleed sweat
that shut our eyes and
watered the grit on our skin.

We churned the dirt with the old Ford tractor.
It sputtered and cackled as the dirt foamed around
the shiny steel blade.

Father, perched on the metal seat,
was guided by grandfather's barking,
his raspy voice rode over the unsteady bubbling
emerging from the aged combustion engine.

We followed their trail with shovels and hoes
to bust the clumps of stubborn clay.
The seeds, mixed with lime and fertilizer, fell softly.

When the trees threw shadows
out to meet us in the field,
I fetched a pitcher of iced water
and felt the sting of the sun's glare
cracking on the back of my neck.



A Fall Flight

by Lauren Graziano



I've never seen a butterfly in Philadelphia

by Nia Toombs

never one on the cobblestone pathway
behind Independence Hall in Olde City,
sitting between the bricks among grass and muck,
and three hundred year old dung
from John Adams or Thomas Jefferson's horses
grazing outside during the signing of the Declaration.

never one perched on the rod where
the Liberty Towers scrape off pieces of sky;
or against its glimmering crystalline windows
that glitter in the sunrise, sparkling steel reflecting light
from its highest point, like a blue sun.

never one on South Street on Fat Tuesday,
landing on the heads of college students
who have had too much beer, trying to squeeze in
the tiny pockets between people and people
wearing garish red and green and neon blue plastic beads
around their necks, bustling and giggling shoulder to shoulder.

never one in Rittenhouse Square on one of those mellow days
where the sun seems to throb in the sky, hazy and still,
never landing on one of the just-planted trees, or
in the rusty burgundy brick courtyard in the center of the park
during the Live Arts Festival, while bands play gigs to the open air
and give away free chocolate chip cookies.

never one on the street my father grew up on,
the sidewalks so skinny and streets so narrow
that cars have to park on the curb—never one fluttering
at the Water Reservoir three blocks away, two and a half miles around
where he would run in his layers of hoodies and tee shirts
and a trash bag attached to his torso with scotch tape.

continued



never a butterfly there, like here, crispy orange with fine black trim around its edges like icing, wings thin and wispy as a scrap of lace.

I recently read an article a woman wrote just after 9/11, that said that she is more of a New Yorker than an American. I almost understand, because Philadelphia drums through my blood vessels and practically pours out of my ears.

Still. I have never seen a butterfly there, never one outside of the zoo on 34th street, and then only in the spring, and then only for the last two months of spring, a swarm of them backing off as far as they can, and then ramming into the mesh screen as if it will give way. That doesn't count.

never caught one in a loose net on my grandmother's block to let it go again when the street lights came on, never watched my puppy chase one around our backyard, it landing on her nose and taking off again after she swatted it with her paw.

never knew they fly with their backs so flat, you'd swear they were towing sunlight in behind them.



Untouchable

by Lauren Graziano

A fish may love a bird
But where would they live?
Two hearts with the same cause
Yet two lives with different paths

But where would they live?
Can they survive on water or land?
Yet two lives with different paths
There is no common ground but love

Can they survive on water or land?
Would their lives fly or swim?
There is no common ground but love
Disappointment invades both worlds

Would their lives fly or swim?
Love is all they have for each other
Disappointment invades both worlds
Love is their struggle

Love is all they have for each other
A fish may love a bird
Love is their struggle
But where would they live?



A Mother and Her Son

by Mark Liberto



If

by Hannah Mitchell

If I heard an elephant singing
I would be eight again.
If I heard pirates fencing from the top of the basement stairs
I would remember how to be afraid of the dark.
If the rug running down the middle of hallway turned into a river
I would jump over it backwards, and land on the other side.

If I could talk to trees
I would ask them what minerals taste like.
If I could see bacteria, scurrying like ants
Along the surface of the end table
I would know how an albatross feels
When the curve of a coast appears on the skyline.

If I could understand the words
A prairie-dog speaks when a hawk flies overhead,
I would understand the need for safety.
If belly-buttons had bottoms
Rather than a never-ending twist of flesh,
I would feel less vulnerable.

If petrified forests didn't exist,
The cedar would seem immortal.
If I could hit the shore
In unison with the ocean,
I would understand the mechanics
Of measuring a drop of water.

If I could feel music with my fingertips
I would know all of the violin's secrets.
If all of the mugs in the kitchen cupboard had faces
I might be more sympathetic
If I could remember the pictures in yellow linoleum
I would be at home.



Picking

by Adam Holley

I remember my granddad's truck-
The little red one with no back seat,
And how much I loved when he let me shift.
And jumping out excitedly,
Running through the broad path.

I remember peak season-
An entire field of blueberry bushes
Exploding with little blue dots
That beg to be tasted.
The buzz of summer heat,
Seeming to steal my shirt.

I remember ice cream buckets-
That lay in empty stacks all through the spring
Finally getting their desired fill,
Even with me sneaking
Handfuls at a time.

I remember the angered grin-
That one granddads make
When they really can't hide
That they aren't mad at all.

I can still see him picking
All of the blueberries himself.



nonfiction //





Bookgirl

by Megan Goode

The library wasn't much more than a hole in the wall. Paint was peeling off like tree bark on the lobby walls, and several of the fluorescent lights had burnt out or were on the fritz. The building had an eerie feel to it, one could almost believe in the old haunting legends. The air was thick with dust and smelled of ancient books. The two paper-skinned librarians who sat behind the circulation desk seemed to rival the building in age. The card catalog bore their shaky script, each handwritten index card had turned yellow.

As a young teenager, this wasn't necessarily where most of the other kids came to hang out, and that was just fine by me. I wasn't an anti-social young girl, I was a cheerleader, had plenty of friends, and a footballer-player boyfriend, but I loved the solitude and the history that the library offered. I could spend hours reading the encyclopedia, rifling through magazines, or sitting cross-legged on the floor at the end of the stacks, fingers eagerly turning the pages of my current read. This was one place where I knew I belonged. When I was 30 years old, I found myself alone with two young children. I had spent the better part of the last five years as a stay-at-home mom, spending afternoons doing toddler crafts, reading picture books, cutting coupons and schlepping mountains of baby equipment back and forth to Grandma's. My only time as a career girl since I'd become pregnant was as a part-time "Customer Service Specialist" at Old Navy. It was my meager attempt to retain some socialization skills with the outside world.

I now found myself thrust into the role of single parent and sole provider, both financially and emotionally. This itself was a daunting task, but the fact that I hadn't graduated from college made things a bit trickier. I'd been in a serious car accident during my sophomore year at the University of Pittsburgh, and had to medically withdraw from my courses. Two back surgeries later, I'd somehow neglected to get back into school and, like a snowball, life had picked up speed, offering a marriage and children.

Needless to say, I had to figure some things out, and fast. My major in school had been English; I had figured that I'd either teach or just write the greatest book of all time, secure the largest book advance in publishing history, and be sitting on an enormous nest egg before I was 30. Surprisingly enough, that didn't happen.

I found myself sitting in the JobPath offices at the local Community College onesummer afternoon a few years ago. I nervously sat in the waiting room, coloring with my 5-year-old and using my foot to push my 13-month-old in his stroller.



To my left sat an 18-year-old blonde, smacking gum and reapplying her frosted lipstick. Her dangerously low-cut shorts had “Juicy” scrolled across the rear end, and I was sure she didn’t know the meaning of a stretch mark.

“OH, MY GAWD! They are like, so freekin’ cute!” She shrieked in delight.

“Thanks,” I said, feigning a smile.

“I cannot *wait* to have a baby. My boyfriend already has the name picked out: Suave. It will just be so awesome to pick out little Abercrombie outfits and Baby Nikes.” She popped a huge pink bubble that deflated across her nose.

“Well, when your baby barfs on a \$50 designer outfit, you quickly learn that the sale rack at Target is a much better idea.”

Her look quickly deflated. I hadn’t meant to sound nasty, but I was fried and my youngest son had been up all night before. I was beginning to feel like this was a really bad idea. I suddenly questioned what in the hell I was doing there. Maybe I should just high-tail it out to my car, go home and apply for a temp job or wait tables. I was beginning to realize how crazy this idea was.

“Megan Goode?” A plump, middle-aged woman with a brightly-colored jacket, linen pants and African jewelry called my name from behind the maze of cubicles.

“That’s me,” I said. “Come on, Robbie, grab your toys and follow me.” As I stood up, my diaper bag emptied onto the floor, spewing diapers, wipes, Tampax, breastfeeding cream and about 5 million Cheerios.

“Oh, my gawd,” Juicy shrieked, but offered no assistance. I quickly shoved everything back into my bag and grabbed my oldest son. As I maneuvered the stroller through the narrow aisles, I barreled into a handful of garbage cans, and ran over an elderly man’s foot. This was NOT starting out positively. I found my way to my advisor, who smiled, and in a calm voice said, “Not to worry, honey. I’ve been there.”

Her warm caramel-colored skin and thick braids set off a pair of deep-set hazel eyes. “My name is Ms. Mobley. I’ll be assisting you in your transition back to school.” Her voice was warm and smooth, like honey. She had a faint Southern accent, and when she talked, I imagined sitting in a rocking chair on a wrap-around porch, sipping Sun Tea.

“I appreciate it,” I said quietly. “Sorry to make such an entrance.”

She shooed my apology away with pursed lips and a crinkled brow. “I commend you for simply being here, doll. Now, I’ve looked over your transcripts, and I must say, I’m impressed. Your grades were excellent. I’m only sorry you had to take a detour to get your degree. I think the best idea would be for you to take some placement tests, and career feelers. That will give us a place to start. Do you have any idea what you want to



do?”

“I know what I *want* to do, but I don't know if it's the most realistic goal.”

“You know what they say about wanting something bad enough,” Ms. Mobley said with a grin.

“I want to be a librarian. It's really what I've always wanted, I just think that maybe I should shelve that idea and get a certificate in something so I can get into the job market as soon as possible.” I explained my single-parent status, the lack of any kind of support.

“Well that certainly has a bit of sense to it, but I'd hate to see you not do what you want. Perhaps this is your chance to really go for it. Well, whatever you decide, I'm here to help. Why don't I take your little ones over to the vending machine for some cookies while you take the tests?”

“That's very nice of you, thank you.” I was nearly uncomfortable with her kindness.

I took a No. 2 pencil and my testing materials into an empty room and sat down. The career feeler test was filled with personality questions about my comfort level in a number of given situations and my interests and hobbies. I marked the little dots that corresponded to my choices and handed the paper to the secretary. When she returned the quiz to me a few minutes later, the print-out showed my suggested career choices in bold text: AUTHOR, LIBRARIAN, TEACHER. In that instant, I knew I had to do this. I had been through a hellish divorce, and was devoting myself as a mother. I needed to do something that would feed me, and I knew this was it. I'd made too many decisions I'd regretted, and I didn't want to add another to the list.

I finished up at the Community College last winter, and am now a year away from my degree. It has been as difficult as one would expect. Fighting the red tape of financial aid, finding babysitting for in-class courses, and working around SpongeBob and soccer practices while enrolled in online classes. My children, now 9 and 5, have been as understanding as two young kids can be. They cheer for my A's, but resent my deadlines, that at times leave me frazzled and sleep deprived. I hope that they learn from me that hard work really does pay off, that not settling is the right thing to do. I want them to bust their asses to get what they want, and never stop believing that they're capable of anything.

I started working in the public library almost 4 years ago, and it has been a saving force in my life. My co-workers have become like family-hanging my papers up in the staff office, and already planning my graduation party. They have become aunts and uncles to my kids, who have spent more than their share of summer afternoons at the library. Luckily, my boys love books and they are enjoying being raised among the stacks.

I've learned to balance things to a degree. The boys and I have all sat around the kitchen table, doing our homework. I'll curl up with a reading assignment and hold them as they watch a new DVD. I've learned to judge their living room dance contests, while typing furiously at the keyboard.



As I write this, I'm sitting on an uncomfortable green, plastic lawn chair at my apartment complex's swimming pool. I'm thoroughly exhausted, having been up since 4 AM with my night job as a newspaper carrier, but the joy that I feel watching my two strong, healthy, happy, laughing kids, is very much worth it all. I'm doing this for them, no doubt. I want them to have a better life, with a mom who has less on her plate, and we're getting there. My house may frequently be a mess, I may have not had a date in years, and I may have added coffee as a major food group, but I'm getting there, as well.

The first day of 10th grade may seem like a big deal because it is the entrance into high school. My friends left school that first day, eager to try out their driver's permits and hit the mall.

"I'll catch you guys later," I said after the bus let us off.

"Aw, come on, Meg. We're going to find matching outfits for the dance on Friday," my best friend, Rachel pleaded. "You can't miss that!"

"How about if I meet you guys there? I've got something I have to do."

"Promise?" Rachel always was a stickler for commitments.

"Pinky swear. See ya!"

I turned left on my street, away from my house and cut through a few yards that were in desperate need of a mowing. The September day was exceptionally warm, and I wished that I'd worn shorts instead of jeans when I'd gotten dressed that morning.

When I reached my destination, I bounded up the concrete steps, crumbling in places, and nearly bumped into an old woman lugging a bunch of knitting books. I reached the front desk and took a breath.

"Hi, I just started the 10th grade today, and I'd like to go into the back." I could barely contain my excitement.

The librarian behind the desk peered over her smudged reading glasses.

"Mmm Hmm," she murmured. "Do you have your permission slip?"

I pulled a crumpled piece of legal paper out of my backpack, smoothed it out and handed it to her. My mother's signature gave me permission to go into the back of the library.

She glanced it over, marked her initials in a black marker and filed it in a small, metal box.

The Crantor Memorial Library had an archaic policy that prohibited anyone under 10th grade from stepping foot behind the circulation desk. That was where the Adult collection was housed and I'd waited as long as I could remember to get back there. I didn't even know what to expect. I tip-toed around the corner and the world seemed to open up. For such a small building, it looked like there was a mile of books in front of me. It was quiet, and I was the only one in the room. The lights were dim and the room was windowless, smelling of



old books. Plain brown wooden shelves held thousands of titles, both new ones covered in plastic and brightly colored text. The old books were worn and plain, with the binding thread peeking out from the spines. I walked slowly, running my fingers across the titles, stopping now and then to pull something from the shelf that had caught my eye. To me, this was the happiest of places. Millions of other worlds, other lives lived on those pages, and I could step inside one just by cracking open the book. I could travel anywhere, be anyone, and love anybody within this room.

I made my way to the L's and pulled a small, worn paperback from the shelf. The pale purple cover showed a bird, mid-flight. To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. I'd been waiting since I'd seen the movie on TV to read this book. I opened it up and drank in the first few words: "When he was thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow." I lost myself in the life of a little girl named Scout and her father, Atticus. I may have been in a dingy, underfunded library, but that day I was in Maycomb County, Alabama, perched in the balcony of a courthouse, watching a man named Boo Radley, and playing with a boy named Dill.

I didn't look up from that book until the lights clicked off over my head and I realized the library was closing. I'd spent 4 hours in that corner, and had surely infuriated my best friend. It was a day I will never forget.



City Lights

by Mariah Leigh Yancey



Living the Dream

by Mariah Leigh Yancey

In Rome, I wait anxiously to see primarily the Coliseum, for I remember wishing to see it in elementary school while learning about the Roman Empire so long ago...and here I am. I pray all day that the clouds scatter and the sun shines when we enter the Coliseum so that I can experience its full grandeur. Just as we enter in with our tour group, the sun comes out, shining the ancient legend of the dream I'm walking and hides back behind the clouds as we leave for dinner. Amazing; but no words ever give it justice. We then sit in front of Trevi Fountain, again with gelato, for it really is the best ice cream in the world. We stopped every time we saw that word...and I had no problem eating in Europe...I tasted everything...most people don't even want to know. Then visiting Vatican City and St. Paul's Basilica, I cannot believe it, but we hear the Pope speak! The crowd gathers around the monitors as I stand watching the ceremony and the hearing the religiously influential icon. But I take a personal detour from the group and explore the Pantheon, sitting inside this ancient hole-topped building as it rains. Absorbingly meditating, I daze into the drains as the water splatters onto the floor of the Pantheon, in Rome, Italy, where I am sitting, soaking in the moment, not caring about anything else but that. I don't even care what people think as I walk up to the splatters and freely let the water sprinkle my face for a second. I stand being rained on in the ancient building of the Olympian gods. I probably look crazy...and for those few seconds, I am.

Flying into Paris from Rome, and completely leaving my foreign language behind, the French are not at all what I expected. Aside from the horror stories I heard about how they treat Americans, they are nice and friendly, trying to speak whatever English they know. Catching the first glimpse of the Eiffel Tower, my eyes tear up yet again, because I just can't believe it. Finally reaching and climbing it, a storm hits and everyone at the very top races at neck-breaking speed to escape the height in the storm. We laugh watching everyone run past us, as we stand back and soak it all in-literally and figuratively...at the top of the Eiffel Tower. We stand under our umbrellas and watch the storm clouds transform over Paris. Later, walking through Notre Dame, I appreciate the charm of this gothic cathedral, still in a state of dreamy surrealism, trying to wake up but completely loving that I'm living a dream.



Stavi

by Holly Fuller

In the movie *The Boondock Saints*, a cat meets a comically accidental end via handgun; after which, Norman Reedus's character shouts: "I can't believe that just fucking happened!"

That was more or less what went through my head when I ran over Stavi. The pot-bellied grey and white cat had taken up residence on our front porch and had swiftly endeared himself to us with his scrawny, twitching tail, crooked whiskers and mellow personality. He'd made a habit of vegetating beneath our vehicles to avoid the summer heat. This was something to which my family and I had become accustomed. Usually, he'd get out from under whichever car we were traveling in long before the engine even started.

My sister Krysta and I ducked into my little black Ford. I don't remember which movie we'd initially decided on; but as we sat, we fidgeted with our seat belts and the CD player, choosing a suitable song to cruise to. *Evolution* by Korn, I think we'd agreed upon. She wouldn't listen to classic rock and listening to precisely what she wanted in my car was a concession I was unwilling to make.

I put Frank -my car -into reverse and as I watched the fence across the street get closer in the rear-view mirror, Frank's right front tire rolled over something I was praying was a rock. I knew it wasn't, though. If it had been a rock, I would have felt it shift amongst the others in the driveway. It wasn't a rock; but I felt... something. My mind immediately flashed to the benevolent tabby.

Every four-letter word went through my mind as a blur of grey sped past the front of my car and flopped down in the flower bed by the large chunk of drift wood that had been a gift of sorts from my grandma's one-time boyfriend. Stavi began to spasm as though his body were conducting huge amounts of electricity. Krysta flew out of the car before I'd even put it in park, going to the aid of the feline which, in the pit of my stomach, I knew was doomed.

My right hand tried to wrench the key from the ignition, but was unsuccessful. Looking down and



cursing myself (not for the first time) I grasped the gear shifter and jerked it upward into 'Park' then proceeded to yank the key out, killing the engine.

I walked up to where my sister was already blubbing over Stavi's barely-breathing body, cell phone in my hand. I called my dad at work, sorry that he would have to take time out of his evening to inter the cat. Somewhere in the back of my mind I thanked God that for my sister's sake, no grotesque, crimson puddle surrounded Stavi.

I told Dad what I'd done. He kept his voice un-accusing. As I ended the connection, I noted that Stavi had stopped breathing.

"I think he's dead," Krysta sobbed.

"No kidding," I said.

Five minutes into The Simpson's Movie (we'd settled on this after Krysta told me what a horrible person I was), the cat -is it Itchy or Scratchy? -gets impaled and exploded or destroyed in some other brutal manner. Another Saints moment popped into my head. I really couldn't help laughing.

"I'll be back at nine; bury the cat!" I said, leaning over to Krysta.

That would technically be a misquote as David Della Rocco says 'fucking cat,' but I don't say that word in front of my sister, whose cat I had just reduced to a speed bump.





three : poetry //





College Cravings

by Caitlin Jones

We bolt through the door and pounce on the illusive
touch-pad like lions claiming a wounded antelope.
No quick movements, or all hope will be lost.
Each choice must be methodical, as well planned
as a brain surgeon attempting to remove a tumor.
As steady as a tight-rope walker we decide our fate,
our hunger hanging in the balance.
We wait in utter silence,
fearful that a miscalculation has been made.
Finally, number 492 is called.
We once again have defeated our hunger with three dollars
and six Sheetz hotdogs.



A Child's Mind by Mark Liberto



My List

by Jaime Adams

The smell of feet, green split peas

Cologne on the pillows and my “Doors” blanket

Beer as he stumbles in the door

My grandma’s house on the sheets she passed down to me

Fresh grass, green as the split peas

New babies

Sheetz onion rings, greasy, fatty, and heavenly melting in my mouth

Outdoor smell on my babies after a day of playing outside

Pure anger, gritting teeth, pounding skull, not hearing my words, or ignoring them

Smell of rain in the dirty puddles in my driveway, drip drip drip

Sweet tea on my tongue tastes like honey from a bee hive sweet, thick, warm

Sex, musty, hot, damp, disgusting, sticky, worthless, used, tired

Sickness in my stomach, my chest sinks with every breath

Breath that smells of nicotine and foul kisses



Stormy

by Juanita M. Smart



Words In Place Of A Whistle

by Philip Terman

Two days before she died
as she lived—instantly,
chasing a rabbit—she leaped

her four slender legs
into the back of the truck
for a Sunday romp,

when the law forbids hunters.
December, unseasonably warm,
the fields so empty and long

when she bounded across them
it must have felt like the borderless
sky, a wheat runway,

glistening gold coat ringed
with white around the neck,
elongated snout sniffing out

an invisible prey for miles.
Svelte frame, never a chowhound,
dainty, alert for inaudible music,

undetectable scents
from that higher world
where she perched,

those blistering days, in the shade
of a spruce, overseeing
her garden and small estate, nose

twitching, taking off in a flash.
Even in sleep she was loyal.
She shadowed us everywhere,

ears cocked at the hint of a walk.
How many miles down dirt roads,
companion, and that gravel pathway

around the cemetery behind the church?
She always chased her calling—
rabbits disappearing into tall grasses,

deer leaping at the horizon,
even the forbidden skunk
she never learned to avoid,

though it sprayed her
three days running. Once,
a porcupine needle pierced through

her black upper lip. In the end,
she never caught anyone,
like those geese in the pond

she'd circle around, afraid of water,
barking her fool head off.
It was the chase she was after—

the quick flight into wherever
the rustlings led her.
She'd always return on my whistle—

no matter how distant
the distractions, the way I call now
in our familiar notes

and imagine her charging across
the open space that separates us,
slowing down to match my pace.



The Grind

by Diane Hahn

Higher and higher the bales climb up the elevator
An assembly line of leafy green bricks
Freshly shaped, hot from the big field
Metal cogs and rusted chain groan
And creak in protest, the machine itself tired of the effort,
The unwieldy bales as well, against their will being cut, raked, molded, bound, and thrown

The people, too, whether standing upon the tall stacked throne
High above, or stuck below as keeper of the elevator
Are tired, their arms and faces pouring sweat from the effort,
Their stomachs clenched hard as bricks
Of muscles that ache and produce desperate groans
Eyes hopelessly scanning the wagon bed, counting the piled bounty of the field

Their hands move automatically, rarely having ever felt
This sore and tight before, despite which, still, they throw
Bale after bale as the discontent sky groans,
Challenging the people on the wagon to load more urgently the elevator
The pressure of the grind the brick
On which they are supported; here there is no victory for mere lonely effort

Only when the last bale is placed safely in its winter home may the effort
End, until it begins again in a few weeks, once the field
Has replaced its loss, growing more bricks



Throughout the summer, the pace only thrown
By rain, or the rare sick day of the elevator
But not the people, who know better to groan

Around their boss, but their groans
Don't reach him now, his efforts
Lying not here in the hayloft or with the elevator
But out there, where he takes the tractor around and around the field
Row after row of miniature olivine hills thrown
Up from the twiggy plains, landing in the wagon, bricks

This endless grind of backbreaking bricks
Will one day make their bones groan
For the last time, when they will throw
Off their bonds, give up their efforts
Unnoticed by those in the field
Until he alone must work the elevator

Both loading and unloading the bricks, unable to handle the effort
So too, his groans will fall deaf upon the field
Until he is so weak that he will be thrown, leaving only the elevator.



Sunset of the Dream

by Mariah Leigh Yancey



Rooftops

by Shannon Ragen

Laying under the stars,
shining like headlights
through the shadowy
stretch of sky.

The brown shingles
are coarse sandpaper
under my back.

I listen to the leaves rustle
in the trees as they float
with the waves of the wind.

The crickets chirp softly,
serenading their sweethearts.

Occasionally I hear the
thunderous rumble of engines
as the cars zoom by

on to bigger things,
on to more important places.



Transcendental Trek

by Lauren Graziano



THC

by Kenneth Troutman

I've been to the Land of the
Midnight Sun to Break Fall
To the Land of the Mid-Day
Moon. Amie, both were
Frozen—Countries caped in solid shards
Of ice crystals—where cliffs captured the sky
And locked it in gems of Arctic water; constructing
Idyllic walls encircling...jailing me in beauty. So I fell
Beyond—feeling
Somewhere in-between Gone and Gone—
Free; Knowing between what I think it is and
What I hope it isn't; Past a Seahawk sifting
For a drowning; Past the crows squawking
For Death; Past a vulture finishing a tattered body.
Along this trip I found my...
My breath.
My, Oh, My—my flower.



