Your impeccable classroom presence helped a generation of middle school students realize that French culture was formidable, and that language fluency and sophistication were better synonyms than many for growing up. Both students and faculty will miss you next year; we wish you a fruitful new phase of life ahead!
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– Nikki Khani
Lost in Thought

Have you ever wondered about what happens to a thought once lost?
Where does it come from?
Where does it go?

Does it disappear like shadows in the falling night, Happening quickly with the disappearing sun?
Or does it fade with time, The fallen tree turned to dust?

Is it whisked away by the wind to some unknown place, Where all lost ideas, all forgotten hopes reside, Yearning to be remembered, But too quiet to be heard?

Perhaps ideas and dreams that are lost Float idly in the clear blue skies, Delicate fluttering butterflies above our heads, Searching, wishing, waiting for someone new to alight upon.

– Dana Lee
Diving into the Water

Beautiful glittering lights filled my eyes
As the bubbles rose up all around me,
Surrounding me
As I plummeted into the watery depths;
I was sinking,
Yet I felt no fear
I felt calmness in me
As I sank down
Into the blue-green colored world

Bubbles were all around me,
Glittering in the light that seeped through from the surface

It was beautiful being in the sea,
I closed my eyes,
Holding my breath
And counting the number of seconds
As I slowly sank
With my arms outstretched.

Then oxygen started running out,
And adrenaline started pumping through my blood,
Urging me to swim back up to the surface.
I simply smiled, enjoying the thrill
Because it made me feel alive
And it was one of the best things about
Being a diver.
Then I quickly swam upwards,
And pushed myself out of the surface,

Gasping for breath and laughing loudly
As I took in the sweet air of life.

– Shin-Hae Lee

– Marilee Bodden
The Fall

Crumbling like bricks
Melting like stone in my hands
Life’s foundation cracked
And stumbled on a whim of God’s breath

Staring with hollow eyes,
We wonder what else is left
And what is born after death

Leaving motivation for better than rest
More than the keeping of air in our chest

Feet risen off the pavement
Slam down, ready to run
Throwing away the bullets,
Powerless gun

Battle won,
Victory for this mind
For this struggle
For this question

Only to turn the page
With more open ended losses
More weighted than lost souls hung on heavy crosses

One day the sun will stop sinking
The ocean will stop rising
But the stars will always be shining
And we'll be caught somewhere within the fall
Wondering if what we did in life was enough at all

– Mariel Yaghsizian
--- Shin-Hae Lee
Teeth and Gutters

“I counted last night! I have twelve bucks,” said Suzie Mallinson as she clutched a chocolate-chip colored teddy bear almost as big as her pint-sized head. She grinned the remaining couple of teeth she still had while gripping a strawberry pouch in her left hand. Surrounding this fair-skinned six-year-old, three other freckled girls stood and envied her toothless smile.

“His name’s Berry. I got him from the tooth fairy too. I got dimes, nickels, quarters. I got it all right here.” Suzie jingled her small strawberry pouch with her mucky hand. She continued to gloat about all of the money she had received along with some boring teddy bear. Still, the girl was officially the most envied six-year-old in the classroom.

“How did you get all that?” I squeaked impatiently, and pushing through two of my many blonde classmates, I managed to somehow squeeze myself into the group. My thick and frizzy black hair stood out in the circle of pastel colored dresses and blonde pigtails.

“Um...The toof fairy.” Suzie spat the words as if it were common knowledge.

“What’s that?” I had no idea what a “toof fairy” was. All four girls widened their American blue eyes. I was an outlier.

“You...NEVER HEARD OF THE TOOF FAIRY?! After you wooz a toof, you put it under your pillow. The toof fairy comes at night to put money under, but you gots to be slur-weeping. Sometimes she even gives you a gift like my Berry.” She smiled at her stuffed bear then gave a smirk that said, “You wish”. The pigment of my round Asian face had turned crimson. Due to the absence of an American household, my ignorance of the tooth fairy was easy to blame on the very different Korean world I had grown up in.
Having no lost teeth at the time, I became the most disappointed six-year-old in my class. I was determined. Ambitious. I had chosen the perfect candidate tooth. One of my two front teeth. Top right. Perfectly square and milky-white. Smooth and spectacular. It was the best possible spot in my smile to lose a tooth so everyone could notice.

The following week consisted of constant wiggling this tooth no matter how filthy my hands were. The saliva underneath my dime sized fingernails proved it too. I would catch myself in my sleep pestering the tooth with my tongue. It had to leave. It had to be gone. I wanted twelve dollars worth of coins that I’d probably lose in three days. I wanted an identical dull teddy-bear that I would most likely neglect in my closet. I wanted to give Suzie Mallinson the same hideous grin she gave us. For two persistent weeks of forced wiggling, my six-year-old tooth was finally prepared to forever leave my purple aching gums. With just a slight poke from a pinky, the tooth would twist adjacently inward. I was ready to lose this tooth, receive my anticipated tooth fairy money, and eventually lose more teeth than any other first grader. I could already taste the metal from the slight hint of blood underneath the root. Even though the tooth was ready to be gently plucked, I still had no idea on how to do so. I decided to ask my mother for help.

“Umma!” I looked up to a 5'4" petite Korean woman with tiresome wrinkles at the corner of her eyes. Her almond shaped eyes resembled mine; however, her smile was far more soft and sincere. I tugged at my mother’s gray sweater as she prepared Kimchi stew and white rice. The aroma was delightfully sour and spicy. Although the meal itself is eye watering and fiery, it was a scent only a true Korean child could love. Whenever I saw my mother’s rugged eyes engaged in her cooking, I only saw beauty.

“Look! Umma, look! My tooth is loose! Is the tooth fairy coming tonight?! Will I get my money?” I picked and poked at the ivory
rock-like tooth. Growing up in a Korean household, my mother was perplexed by every word I had just said. She had no idea what the tooth fairy was. Even after living in America for almost eight years, she was still unfamiliar with the common American tradition.

“Go ask Halmani,” she responded in a thick sharp accent. My mother pronounced every word with a booming resonance. She paid little attention to my jumping body and exorbitant excitement. I shrugged my shoulders and ran to my gentle grandmother whom I called Halmani, meaning grandmother in Korean. I found my grandmother, a 70 year old widow who spent the majority of her time planting seeds or singing old tunes as she harvested fresh plants from the garden, in the living room, intently sitting on her creaking rocking chair.

I happened to interrupt my grandmother peeling roots from the garden. The calluses on her fingers and short silky white hair portrayed her hard work. Three quarters of her face was crowded with wrinkles. She was smaller than my mother, but she had the exact same gentle smile. Just like my mother. My halmani was oblivious as well; however, when she saw the wobbling tooth, she suddenly became interested. She began to speak in Korean, “Open.” I listened and opened my mouth.

A crack shuddered my entire jaw. Tuscan red blood splattered on the floor. The splash of blood echoed before forming a small pool on our mahogany floors. Hot tears streamed from my cheeks and mixed with the scarlet drops that continued to flow from my innocent lips. I began to wail. Howl. It wasn’t the mere second of pain that I was crying about, but the abrupt yank my grandmother had forced. No warning.

“Come outside.” I listened and weakly walked with her onto the blacktop driveway. The tears were still clouding my almond
shaped eyes. My breaths were now short pants that I couldn’t control. How was it possible for someone you loved so much to destroy the trust you had for them in one simple action?!?

The next five seconds that followed were far worse than what had just happened. My grandmother’s fist opened wide as my beloved first tooth was tossed toward the sun. I reached for the glistening white speck spiraling into mid-air. Onto the roof. Gone. Smacked down on some roof tile. She did exactly what her mother did for her when she lost her baby teeth. She gave me the same ancient Korean tradition, to throw baby teeth on a roof in hope of good luck. In hope that I’ll be successful. In hope that my new teeth will bring others a smile as well. Who in the world made this up?!

“Halmani!... How...how is the tooth fairy supposed to get it now?” I was stupefied.

“She doesn’t need it. You have thirty more on the way.” She turned her back towards me and gracefully walked back inside with her arms folded.

Although I was disappointed at the time, tooth throwing became a tradition between my grandmother and I. For the next sixteen baby teeth, my patient grandmother would walk alongside with me outside. She’d throw a tooth onto the roof with her surprisingly powerful arms. Sometimes the tooth would land into the gutter, getting lost with the dead leaves and speckled dirt. She hoped for the same good luck her mother had told her to wish for. My Halmani would tell me to close my eyes, make a wish, and aided my hand to throw the tooth over. This tradition soon became one of my favorite childhood memories. I realized that I had something marvellous that Suzie Mallinson could never have.

– Katherine Chi
The Façade of Beauty

Beautiful is the innocent soul
that seeks not
the “angelic” dove perched atop
the pedestal of scarlet roses
basking in Summer’s heat,
but rather the clandestine nightingale
roosted under the foliage
of burgundy leaves
resting in Autumn’s chill,
for he is not swayed
by the misleading lily,
dazzling in sight
yet putrid in smell.

’Tis Cupid’s sacred arrow
that pierces through this façade
of beauty to find the
one true love; for ‘tis
Satan himself who seeks
solace solely
upon superficiality.

Enlightened, therefore,
be the blind savior
who consecrates beauty by
seeing only with purity of heart:
“Porque yo alabo al Príncipe
que canta las riquezas de un
“Corazón Sin Cara.”
“For I praise the Prince
who sings the riches of a
“Heart Without a Face.”

— Mike Berrios
--Mariel Yaghsizian
Cowardice

How am I
Supposed to believe
That life is so fantastic
And magical
When nothing like that
Has ever happened to me?

All I've ever ended up with
Is a broken heart and
A bouquet of unanswered questions and
Nobody has ever
Chased after me
In the rain
And grabbed me close
And told me it was going to be
Okay
All they ever do is
Give up on me and
When things get bad
They don't try to fix them
They just drop it
And give up

I've come to learn that
Life is not like the books
Or movies
That I engross myself in and
People don't change
Or put themselves out on a limb or
Tell someone
They love them
On a whim
Because people are cowards
And are willing to sit around waiting
And imaging what could happen
Instead of
Making it happen

But those who are brave enough to try
To take the chance
Usually end up
Heartbroken and sad
Because the ones they decided to
Chase after in the rain
And hold close
Aren’t willing or
Are just in love
With the idea of love
So they’ll break hearts

So the brave
End up soaked by the rain
And their tears
And alone

Cowardice
Is all there is left to live
And daydreams
And fantasies
Hold the only magic
In this world

– Marilee Bodden
In Mates

I study him, dissecting a different part of his body every day of the week. Today it is his face. His skin is pale and dull but I know if he could spend a day in the sun then he would have a ruddy glow. But now it's blotchy and sweaty, because he just finished doing push-ups. His eyes are slits cut into his face, with black and beady pupils set deep within them. The bags under his eyes are bigger than themselves. The eyebrows over them are like two fat black caterpillars meeting in the middle, they remain straight until he gets angry at a guard for gripping him too hard. His nose is placed in the middle of his face like the sun at noon—except that his nose is more like a moon, with deep craters scattered across it. Thick lips live directly under the moon, his upper lip usually coated with sweat. Even though I have every physical detail memorized, I have yet to memorize his voice, only hearing it during meal times when he grunts the occasional “thank you” to whoever slops the food on his tray.

I run over his face so fast, familiar as I am with every feature, so I can’t help but look at his body. The unflattering orange jumpsuit extenuates his bulging belly, making him look like a pregnant woman in her last trimester. In contrast to his soft stomach are his firm muscular arms, from the pushups he does every morning on the edge of his bed. I wake up watching his hands gripped to the foot of the bed, lifting and lowering himself up and down.

His personality lives in his hands; they are bear paws, the skin scarred and flaky, the meat underneath thick and soft. They are capable of wiping his tears after seeing his daughter or breaking the neck of his wife.

I am closer to this man than my wife, I see her for only hours a year. Never mind my own daughter, I barely remember her name.
This much I know: when he takes a breath, I feel it reminding me that we’re alive. His hands, the hands of a killer, are one and the same as mine. They are the hands I will shake, he is the last person I will embrace before it’s my time to die.

– Nour Wazaz

– Mike Berrios
A Vow

Far below me, do you see?
A drop of onyx encrusted in a sea of sapphire,
Swept away in gold is me
Wrapped, wound, wrinkled tight,
Cold, distraught, full of ire,

Washed away with a laugh,
Presumption decreases by half,
The crescent can now be seen.

Fear and nerves that are not keen,
Fly free, away
To where I have never been.

– Abigail Podlubny

– Bianca Tomassini
A Meeting

I looked around the gym, unfamiliar faces surrounding the perimeter, as I sought an empty bench. It was safe to say that loneliness was my only company. Most people would feel stuck, wouldn’t know what to do with themselves. However I did, I was used to the comforting silence around me, my shadow fading into the abyss. The hard texture of the bench secured my body; my back was straight and my head held with pride. Unlike all these smiles made of plastic, I was sure of who I was and had enough security to distinguish reality from fantasy. Though so many people cling to each other like clusters of snow in the sky, trust to me was something earned, not given freely. Awkward stares darted my way as I quickly took a seat in the midst of a sea of insecure adolescents with conformity to rely on as their acceptance by society.

I personally didn’t care for the pointless conversations that occurred between people only for them to be twisted and used against the very people they called their “friends”. Suddenly, a girl from the same year as I, though I would ever have uttered a single word to her, sat next to me. I quickly turned my head, making sure she wasn’t close to me, when she stunned me with a shy, awkward smile, as if almost amused at my guarded behavior. I quickly faced ahead as the cheerleaders and football players ran onto the field. I folded my arms, ready to see their skirts that exposed more skin than clothing. Their eyes were demanding attention or else they would hunt you down to slowly murder you with words that razor your insides slowly when they meet you in the halls. Again the awkward girl tried to socialize, commenting on how loud and ridiculous, getting me to let out a soft but genuine laugh. Suddenly, I found myself with her two hours later, smiling ear to ear, realizing that having company was worth it if it was with true feelings and intent.

— Alexis Taylor
Wanderlust

my grandmother used to
smudge charcoal road signs
on her cheeks and draw
maps in the wrinkles under
her eyes,

chalked state lines across
the crook of her elbows and
dotted town names in the
creases between her fingers.

she spelled france and italy
in my alphabet soup one
night in august and told me
about a man she met in
madrid in 1957,

tapped a message morse
code on the inside of my
wrist that probably
translated to

i miss him

and sang a song in spanish.

at 92 the men in white coats
diagnosed her with chronic
depression
but i think she just had a chronic case of wanderlust

and a faded picture in her wallet.

– Eleanor Morgan

– Leah Foster
Whispers

If you stop and listen to the whisper of cars
Passing by your own,
You begin to hear stories of heartbreak
Or a soul far from home;
You may listen in on passionate,
Tearful,
Or cruel breakups
You may catch a glimpse of a struggling musician,
Writer,
Or actress
Someone who has just lost their mother,
Father,
Or one dear to them
You may feel the anger,
Happiness,
Or tragedy emanating from their body
You may notice their clothing: casual,
Extremely exotic,
Or barely any at all
On the body of a soul just trying to get by
You may start to talk to them,
Only for directions,
Or maybe to exchange comments on driving skills

You may choose to ignore them,
Smile at them,
Or stare them down

On this highway going nowhere
We all leave whispers behind us
Our exhaust pipes
Spew our raw emotions out into the air
So the cars behind us
Learn why they see broken,
Warm,
Or blank faces

On this infinite conveyor belt
No car is spared

– Claire Kramer

– Chad Jennings
Leaving

The girl sleeps in a meadow underneath an expansive blue sky,
The girl's little red dress is all splayed out underneath her.
Her long raven-black hair runs wild,
Messy and soft to the touch.
Her pale skin white as snow,
Her lips as rosy as a rose in full blossom.
A clear musical note rings out in the air,
Calling out to the petite girl.
Her eyes slowly flutter open as she wakes up,
Looking around her surroundings.

She runs her hands through the tall grasses,
Smelling the flowers that were blooming all around her.
She smiles, happy to be in Heaven.
A purple butterfly flutters past her,
And the same note rings out again.
She gets up and chases after the butterfly,
Running after the fluttering butterfly
That seems to be wandering all over the place,
Seeming like a lost little butterfly
With no sense of direction.
With no sense of purpose.

Then the girl reaches out to touch the butterfly,
And the moment she touches it,
The world instantly becomes black.
The blue sky is invaded by a dark army of shadows
And the flowers transform into weeping, wilting weeds
And the butterfly turns into a tall, looming cloaked figure,
Holding a scythe in its hand.
A Reaper of Souls has come to harvest another soul.
It slowly turns around to face the frightened girl,
Who doesn’t want to leave just yet.

But she does not belong here.
In the world of Souls.
Her time has come too early and the Reaper must do
its duty when there are loose souls wandering.
The Reaper’s bony hand reaches out and lightly touches the girl’s
cheek
As a glittering teardrop falls down.
In an instant, the girl’s face starts cracking and she fades away
In a flurry of butterflies

The Reaper then swings its scythe through the butterflies,
And the butterflies crumble,
Turning into dust,
Which then forms
A beautiful red rose.

-- Shin-Hae Lee

-- Marilee Bodden
The Eighty-Three-Year-Old Six-Year-Old

“E.F. Go home, E.F. go home,” was a squeaky-voiced plea often heard in the after-effects of Hurricane Sandy, emanating from the mound of jumbled blankets on my white couch pushed up against the wall. Elaine Flamm, the woman shivering under the blankets, was shaking so intensely that just watching her body quake sent goosebumps rising all over my arms. My grandmother stood at around the same height as my eleven year old little sister, yet the blankets enveloping her made her appear to be even smaller. She had entrapped herself in the layers of covers in order to avoid the cold air, and even though she had built an impermeable border against the surrounding atmosphere, she still looked like she might have been living in Antarctica, wearing only a bathing suit.

“E.F. go home,” my grandmother repeated, playing with the famous lines from one of her favorite movies, ET. “Why do you want to go home, Grandma?” I asked, checking in on her. “Oh I don’t know sweetie,” She replied, muffled by the blankets that covered every inch of her body except for the top half of her ghost-like face, which was peeping out from her thick walls of protection. “Why are you shaking like that grandma?” “Oh, I don’t know sweetie, I’m a little bit cold.” Before I could reply to the heap of blankets wearing my Grandmother’s face, her expression contorted into an image expressing the epitome of pain. “Ahh!” she gasped, drawing in short breaths of air. “OW, OW,” She whimpered loudly, causing me to hear the excruciation that she felt. A spasm of shaking coursed through her body, causing the blankets engulfing her to quake like the knees of a wounded deer, barely able to stand from the loss of blood.
“Do you want to play a game, Grandma?” I hoped aloud. I knew I had English homework to do, but there was no way I could leave my Grandmother in such duress. The shaking gradually slowed in gravity, and then ceased altogether.

“Well, okay,” she said, giving a weak smile, and a wave of relief fell over me. I had distracted her from her suffering successfully. I should have known board games would be the way to get through to her. “Alright, What do you want, Chinese Checkers? Monopoly? What about Chinese Monopoly?”

She eventually decided upon Rummikub, one of her favorite games. I might not have agreed to the game choice if I knew of the humiliating defeat I was about to suffer through. “Read ‘em and weep,” my Grandmother exclaimed, slapping down her last tile, and announcing her victory for the entire world’s ears. Maybe I would’ve stood a chance had I been able to focus on the game.

However, throughout the entire ordeal, I couldn’t help but wonder, “Could the old lady, weak and shaking in front of me possibly be the same free spirit that flew from her house in New York to visit me in New Mexico, oh so many years ago?” My five year old self was elated to open the door, discovering that on the other side was my grandmother, twice the size of me at the time, arms filled with my two favorite things in the world, games and candy. As the long and tenuous greetings were exchanged, I anxiously awaited for the moment that I could tear through the plastic wrapping of the skittles, devouring the entire bag.

“Here you go, little one,” my Grandmother chimed, handing me the red bag. Realizing in dismay that the bag had already been opened, I tore the now strangely light wrapping little more. Peering over the edge of the plastic into the bag and counting each individual skittle thoroughly, my eyes confirmed my fears. Only
eight remained, lying at the bottom of the bag. My jaw dropped so far I was afraid it might hit the floor, so I quickly pushed it back into place with my hands. “You ate them!” I yelled, in awe at the vile deed of animosity that this lady who claimed she loved me had conspired against me with.

“I know, dear, I’m so sorry. I guess I just couldn’t resist.” At first all I could think about was the sangfroid expression on my grandmother’s face as she admitted to eating my present. However, later I realized I had just met someone who shared a unique mutual love with me towards candy and games. I didn’t mind sharing so much afterwards.

Since then, my grandmother always split her delectable sweets between us. She would always joke, “What, you don’t like dark chocolate? What a perfect Grandchild.” Then she would proceed to fill my pockets with whatever milk chocolate she had, trying to divert my attention for a moment so I wouldn’t notice. She made jokes and games out of all of our visits, the same as if I went to any of my friend’s houses.

My 83 year old grandmother turned her entire life experiences, good or bad, into jokes and games. Being a survivor of breast cancer, turned into: “Guess how many boobs I have?” Winning her club ping pong tournament, and then losing badly to a much younger girl for the Brooklyn Championship became: “I was the second best ping pong player in Brooklyn. Guess how many people were in the tournament.”

“How many?” I always asked, as if I didn’t know. She’s been telling that story to me all of my life, “Two,” she would always answer, and then we would share a laugh. She’s still an exceptional player, even lacking one of her eyes. When my Grandma was younger, she was involved in one of the most horrific accidents I have ever heard of.
An eighteen-wheeler ran a stop sign, and she never would completely recover. Her car was completely totaled, and she lacked an eye for the rest of her life. Her favorite game for that one is: “Guess which eye is my real one?” Most people guess wrong, causing my Grandma to laugh every time, giddy with joy at being able to trick someone.

Since the accident, she played tennis twice a week, played Mahjong with friends of hers in town, and cooked amazing meals for me every time I visited her. She survived so much, it would seem that my Grandma was invincible. However, when the dementia hit, nearly everything in her life ceased to exist. She couldn’t drive to Mahjong because halfway there she might forget where she was going. The mere mention of exercise scared her more than death itself, making tennis or even short walks nearly impossible for her.

During the aftermath of the storm, my Grandmother and my Grandfather stayed with my family for a week and a half until their power came back on. My Grandma never stopped asking to go home, she was always cold and shaking, and although she tried to act happy, it was clear how depressed she was. Many times, I left for school after saying goodbye to my grandma, curled on the couch watching TV. When I returned home those days ten hours later, there she was, lying on the exact spot, in the exact position she had been in when I had left her. She hadn’t even changed the channel on the TV.

“George, what did Elaine have for lunch?” My mother questioned my Grandfather at the kitchen table.

“Uhh, I’m not sure,”

“Did she take her pills?”

“I wasn’t really paying attention, why don’t you ask her?” he said, one hand resting on his large belly, the other removing bits of food from his short white beard, the same color as his balding head.
“Elaine has dementia, George, she’s not going to remember,” the impatient tone of my mother said. She was a little bit disgusted that my Grandfather was unable to look after my Grandmother, even though in most cases he could barely take care of himself. Sure enough, upon questioning my Grandmother whether she had eaten a lunch or taken her pills, we found “I forget” to be her only answer. At this point, everybody was scared, because this instance put everyone in the mindset that my grandparents would have to move into a nursing home, and leave the house my grandfather had built and my grandparents had lived in for over forty years.

Luckily, when my grandma returned home when the power came back on, her condition changed dramatically. Although to this moment she still probably hasn’t left her house in about two weeks, she was totally happy. The last time I saw her frown ever was probably last October during the power outage, and she has more fun acting like a six-year-old the than most kids do.

During my latest visit, my father and I brought my Grandparents to the grocery store to stock up their fridge. “What day is it?” my grandmother asked upon entering the store. We continued to walk past the aisles as we conversed. “It’s Saturday,” I answered. Something in my voice must have given away the disappointment in my voice. “And how many times have I asked?” She asked, hoping for a shorter number. “Only five or six times today,” I reassured her, as a sly smile grew on her face. “And how many more times do you want me to ask?” “I think another two or three times should do,” I replied, laughing at ourselves for being so clever. “Andrew, I have a very serious question to ask you,” she said with a grave look growing upon her face. I already knew what the question was, and I couldn’t help smiling as I played along.
“How many?” she asked, the tips of her mouth slowly widened and curling upwards, gradually transforming her previous stern expression into one of glee.
“How many what?” I asked, still playing along.
“Girlfriends, of course! How many girlfriends do you have?” she shouted joyfully, the excitement too much for her to contain.

“Oh my god”, I muttered, shaking my head and smiling at the question, trying to think of what number I should come up with for that day. My answers usually varied from somewhere between eighteen and three hundred, and occasionally I threw in something somewhere in the millions, as if I were a celebrity who was loved by that many. “Sixty-eight,” I said, and immediately we both burst out laughing.
“So how many times have I asked you that?” she asked, already giving up hope that it was below even ten.
“About thirteen times, but you’re allowed to keep asking, since my answer changes every time.”

Back at the house, the first thing we did was to take the chocolate, marshmallows, cookies, and other assortment of sweets that my grandmother had picked out and restock my Grandmother’s candy drawer. We both continued to have the same affinity for sweets that I had when I was five. Collecting huge handfuls of candy, we moved into the living room of the passive solar house with the huge window revealing their uncut lawn, a common grazing spot for deer, and the deep woods on my Grandparents’ property.
Grabbing my hand and leading me to the cabinet, she slid the mahogany doors in opposite directions, revealing stacks of cardboard boxes holding our favorite games, and at least fifteen different decks of playing cards. “What do you want to play,” she asked me, “Monopoly? Chinese Checkers? What about Chinese Monopoly?”

-- Andrew Flamm
Lament

The tip of her toes
Graze the azure sea
Voice
Echoing
At the moon above
Singing

An empty boat drifts
And the crickets sing
Her hair is the sunshine
That eludes my sight

A name
Cannot be matched
To the face
A distant memory
Fading my very being

But the sound
The sight
Etched in perfectly
Singing the sweet... sweet lament

– Jack Ashford
-- Bianca Tomassini
LOVE IS BLIND

– Shin-Hae Lee
Autumn Rain

It is the beginning of Autumn. The treetops are blazing with color, the first layer of leaves are drifting down. I am wandering in the woods, with the branches snapping and breaking under my weight, and leaves shuffling past my feet. Daydreaming, I am oblivious to the world, mindlessly roaming under the canopy of gold and crimson.

Suddenly, a low rumble snaps my mind back into reality, and I blink back into consciousness. Through the thick layer of leaves the sky seems darker, the clouds obscuring the sun. The sound of raindrops surrounds me, preventing any other noise from penetrating. Yet I stand there still, unmoving and motionless, allowing the transparent droplets of water to penetrate my clothing. Another clap of thunder rings through the air and the rain falls faster, a never-ending cascade of water. I feel limitless in this rain; I am infinite.

– Jing-Jing Wang
You

It's such a cliche, flippantly overused.
Time seems to wear it away.
Mom, you persevere through time.
Everyday, though, never tiring.
Under happiness and joy, hurt and pain,
Positive and negative, you're there for me.

Are you there for me despite my
Repeating of mistakes? Yes you are.
Every time, you forgive me.
Though I'm careless, though I'm unthinking,
Hearing but not listening,
Error-prone and forgetful,
Rude, angry, and disrespectful,
Etched in your heart is a patience born
From a mother's unending love.
Of course, I don't want to abuse it, yet
Regretfully, remorsefully, I do.
My heart hurts when I hurt you.
Each time, though, you forgive me.

I

Love unconditionally.
Oh, can it get more impossible?! 
Verily I say, I have taken it for granted,
Exceptions being holidays and birthdays.

Your happiness is important to me.
Obedience is not my strong point,
Until I see you smile, and I try my hardest again.

I know you love me.
The truth is made present whenever your
Revenge is your love.

Yet, I hope you see how much I love you too.

– Klemens Gowin

– Tori Stone
Mi Vida

En el estilo de Instantes del autor anónimo
De Paige Greger-Moser

Si pudiera vivir nuevamente mi vida.
En la próxima tendría mucha felicidad.
No haría los mismos errores,
Tendría la misma alegría pero no la misma tristeza.
Si pudiera vivir nuevamente mi vida.
Daría abrazos a todos mis amigos y familia por todo.
Reconocería todo que yo tengo y no esperaría por más.
Si pudiera vivir nuevamente mi vida.
Pero, afortunadamente, yo tengo tiempo,
Para sonreír,
Para reír,
Para tener felicidad.
No necesito vivir mi vida nuevamente porque
yo tengo esta vida para vivir.

-- Alyssa Carroll
Sleep

Sometimes I
Lie awake at night and
Ponder you

I
Remember you
So sweet and
So lovely
But tired,
Too

You won’t change.
If you tried,
I’d.

Sometimes I lie awake
Dreaming all night of

What we used to be
What we are now
But not what’s
In between

You used to
Complete me
Now you
Defeat me.

Sometimes I can’t
Forget the thought of you

But sometimes
I sleep,
Too. -- Marilee Bodden
To Kill a Rabbit

It was just the four of us on that cold April morning: me, Justin, the farmer (whose name had escaped me) and the white rabbit, all of us shivering at the breeze that wove through the trees behind the farmer's house. I was twelve years old, still very much a kid, in a red shirt just in case there was blood, shivering as much because of my nervousness as because of the breeze. Justin was about 40, wearing, as always, his military surplus clothes (a faded olive green tee shirt and tan cargo pants) and the smell of burning wood.

The backyard of the farmer's house sat on a swamp, and so as we walked down to the pens the dry ground gradually gave way to an old wooden boardwalk, only large enough for us to walk single file. There wasn't a farm we were walking to, no fields or barns, just a large rabbit hutch fenced in with chicken wire. Because the farmer was a rabbit farmer, raising the rabbits for slaughter, his backyard was the slaughterhouse. The backyard looked absolutely normal until you realized its purpose, at which point you began to notice the board nailed between two trees, for skinning and gutting, and the smoothness of the stump, worn down by weather and use.

The rabbit farmer I don't remember; his importance to me was simply in providing the rabbit. The rabbit itself I remember clearly, soft the touch, about the size of a small cat and covered with white fur. Its eyes were brown, and its nose twitched as it took in the new people. Like all rabbits I have ever been near, this one gave off an odor unique to rabbits, a sour barnyard musk that pervaded the air. It looked tiny in the farmer's hands, and its coat was a pure white against the dark fabric and of the farmer's shirt.

Justin was almost an uncle to me; he had taught me almost everything about the forest, how to build a shelter, how to track and identify animals, how to build a fire with only a stick and twine. But today he was here in another capacity. I was almost thirteen,
and was starting to feel like I was no longer a boy.

Suddenly girls and politics had become interesting to me. Suddenly I wanted to join the adults in their conversations rather than go off to play with my friends. What I wanted more than anything was to prove to myself that I could be a man, to earn the respect of the adults I admired, to be viewed as an equal by my parents. The only one I had told about this was Justin, and he had suggested I take part in a rite of passage, some ritual that would make me feel myself to be a man. So I stood there that morning knowing I was about to engage in the most serious act in this world: The taking of a life. I felt like I stood at a door; if I succeeded, if I managed to kill the rabbit, I would become a man, but if I failed, if I was unable either mentally or physically to complete the ritual, I would stay a boy. The consequences were even greater, because failure meant that I would not only stay a boy in the eyes of my parents, but I would also loose the respect of Justin.

There wasn’t a ceremony, no prayers were uttered, no offerings burned, no words exchanged, but the air still had a sacrosanct feeling. The farmer placed a white cloth over the rabbit’s head, the cloth a dirty white against the snow white of the rabbit’s fur, and then placed him on the stump, soft white fur on brown hard lifeless wood, the rabbit still living, the stump already killed. The rabbit was innocent of what was about to transpire, while the stump had been a part of this ritual for a long time. He nodded to me and I picked up the pipe that leaned against the stump. It was an ugly thing, short and a dull grey, and surprisingly heavy for its size. The fear rushed in as I lifted the pipe. I was scared of failing, scared of being proved unready to be a man.

The farmer instructed me as I walked up to the stump: “One clean blow should do it.” “Swing from the shoulder.” “Too hard is just as bad as too soft, you have to use just the right amount of strength.”
As I lifted the pipe I breathed in. In addition to my abstract fears, I also had a fear of taking a life. A clean kill would be one thing, but the picture I kept playing in my head was one of mistakes. Too soft a hit, and then the rabbit would still be alive, maimed and bleeding, and I would be responsible. A clean kill was something I could bear; causing the rabbit unnecessary pain was something I couldn’t. The forest noises died into the background, the chickadees and robins stopping their songs, the wind stopped rustling the tree leaves. It seemed like the whole world held its breath, waiting for what I was about to do. As my heartbeat thudded in my ears I breathed out, and smashed the pipe down. The swing was simple; it felt just like I was trying to hammer a nail in. As the pipe swung down I remembered the farmer’s words: “Too hard is just as bad as too soft, be careful you don’t crack the skull. I eased up on the blow just as I was landing it, a quick tap, rather than a crushing strike, to the veiled head of the rabbit. Just like when swinging a hammer, the recoil of the blow jerked my arm up, bringing the pipe back over my shoulder. But I had miscalculated; my strike wasn’t quite hard enough. My worst fear was realized, the rabbit began madly jerking around, bleeding slightly from its head, finally understanding the true danger of its situation. The cloth slipped off its head, exposing wild eyes. The eyes seemed to stare right at me, and I could feel the accusations in them. You did this, they seemed to say; you hurt us and couldn’t finish the job. I felt adrenaline in my veins, a sudden shock of energy, and as panic started to set in I hammered down again, three savage strokes desperately trying to make the rabbit’s terrible convulsions stop.

The skull of the rabbit didn’t crack, but rather deflated. The eyes popped out of the skull, both the accusatory stare and any life that had been in them gone. Blood stained the top of the skull, a brilliant red against the white fur. While the muscles continued to spasm, the terrible convulsions that had wrecked the rabbit’s body stopped almost immediately. From the first swing to the final
twitch couldn’t have been more than seven or eight seconds, but every detail is perfectly clear in my memory.

Because that’s the power of the rite of passage: the willful taking of an animal’s life, especially when it happens face-to-face, requires you to form a connection with that animal. It requires you to gain, if only for an instant, an understanding of the true power of life.

The rabbit would have to be skinned and cleaned, the pelt tanned and the body prepared for cooking, but for a minute we all just stood there, experiencing the gift that is life.

– Ike Katz-Justice

–Marilee Bodden
To utter the small, simple phrase, “I’m really nervous” is a huge, understatement. Instead of butterflies, my stomach only contains air. It constantly cries to be filled with a feeling of confidence, which is the only cure for its emptiness. The only thing about me that is present in this hallway is my physical form. This is the only way I know that I am standing here. My mind and feelings are trying to escape the sound of anxious voices coming from other fellow performers. Scattered laughter and humor that were once in the open air are transformed into sly smirks and jittery motions. While my eyes read this, my hands begin to recognize the saxophone that they are holding, and my neck now settles itself under the neckstrap.

My mind finally stops watching the movie starring my family, and I really hope that they will be amazed. I begin to wish that my eyes could see through the doors which reveal the audience and the stage that is waiting for us. However, my ears pick up that voices are quieting and then hushing, which means that it’s our chance to make classical music come alive and speak to the listeners in the crowd. After being relieved, I am startled to remember my name, I still can’t grasp the thought of me, a junior in Woodgrove High, being nervous about a 30 minute performance.

You would think that I would remember that I’m in a school in the outskirts of New Hampshire, but the thought leaves my mind just as fast as I think it. As the flute player in front of me moves under the bright lights of the stage, I go through the doors that have shielded us. For a moment I am hidden by the shade of the curtains, but I soon am showered by applause too as I pass through in line. My feet briskly walk to my position, and I put the piece by Beethoven on the stand in front of me.

– Alexandra Taylor
Cliff

Cliff
Leading to an endless void
Its tip stabs the emerald sea
With elegance

One cannot simply comprehend
The gulls
The wind
Better than me

As I lie under the jade encrusted sky
The grass swallows me whole
Its touch still tickles my skin

The sky morphs
As if it were a cocoon
With beauty erupting

Graceful
Poignant
Drawing me in

Until only my
Shadow remains...

– Jack Ashford
The seniors I met as a freshman in high school were a considerably bad influence on me. My freshman year they introduced me to several new and wondrous things, including high school party culture and a myriad of less than desirable individuals. However, till this day none of these things has ever done any serious harm to me. In fact, the most dangerous activity they introduced me to was school sanctioned. It was the god-awful sport of wrestling. Wrestling pretty much brings together all the worst parts of being a freshmen in high school: everyone is bigger and stronger than you; everyone wants to beat you up; and you end up in a position where you have absolutely zero idea of what you’re doing.

Unfortunately for freshman me, I knew none of this when one day, a senior named Tomer suggested I join the wrestling team. He was a tough Israeli guy and in his thick accent told me, “You will get much bigger from this, you will learn how to fight the toff-guys who hang around New Haven, plus I am on the team and we can cheer.” What was not to like? I had already been trying to bulk up. Scrawniness was one of my few flaws. I was cool (this turned out to be entirely attributable to my “new kid” status), handsome, smart and athletic already. I played varsity soccer, so well in fact that I spent most of the season on the bench so that I wouldn’t humiliate the other team. So many girls were attracted to me that almost none could muster up the courage to talk to me, or make eye contact, or act as if they registered my existence at all. In short, I was already a paradigm of freshman perfection; how hard could it be to add being a badass fighter with huge guns to my list of achievements?

I went out to purchase equipment the very weekend Tomer recruited me. I didn’t skimp on a thing. Only the finest head guards and wrestling shoes money could buy, along with a wardrobe
worth of underarmor shirts.

I didn’t really know yet how any of this stuff worked, but I’d cer-
tainly want to look good once I’d mastered the art of wrestling; it
would likely take no longer than three weeks, tops.

The first week of the winter season arrived and I was excited for
wrestling practice to begin. When I arrived for the first practice,
members of the wrestling team were already warming up, grapp-
ling with each other, or (if they were newbies like me) trying to
look productive by stretching or adjusting their headgear. Two
wrestling mats were placed next to each other in the middle of the
school gym. At the center of each mat was a circle that constituted
the “ring”. I pictured myself picking up goliath-sized men and
throwing them from the circle without breaking a sweat. It would
be my fortress of solitude; no one would dare face me in it.

Amidst my fantasies of performing he-man like feats, a relatively
unassuming guy with ginger hair greeted me, his name was Matt,
but everyone called him ‘The Captain’. He spoke with a somewhat
squeaky voice, “Hey dude! You new to wrastlin’? Yeah we call it
wrastlin’ on the team, it’s kinda an inside thing! I’m one of the cap-
tains here, you’re gonna love the sport!” The term “wrastlin” con-
jured up images in my head of rounding up pigs in the dirt. I’d
lived down south for a time and knew a few farmer-types who
often referred to “wrastlin’ pigs” as a sort of game. They’d see how
long it took to chase the pig and force it into submission in the
mud, after which they would take it out for slaughter. I certainly
hoped this Captain guy wasn’t planning on serving me as bacon.

Nevertheless, I was overwhelmed by his enthusiasm and by the
fact that he seemed to hug all the guys on the team— a lot. Of
course I had heard the stereotypes about wrestling: its just an ex-
cuse for guys to get on top of each other; everyone is lacking a
number of brain cells; so on and so forth. But even if I encountered
these things, I knew I had a trump card; I wasn’t a quitter. It was one of the qualities I was most proud of. I never quit anything; not violin in the first grade even though my mom had begged me to stop for the sake of the neighbors; not Tae Kwon Do even after I had broken a fair amount of furniture in the house fighting off invisible ninjas; and I certainly wasn’t going to let wrestling end my quitless streak.

As the practice begun I felt as confident as ever. We preformed running drills and push-ups and a variety of strength training exercises. My body ached and the sweat poured off my body; it was one of the hardest workouts I’d ever taken part in, but my resolve did not waver. The coaches were a pair of short but extremely stalky guys. One was named Joe and was clearly a “toff guy”, as Tomer would have put it. He had tattoos and cussed a lot to make himself seem edgy, but was a nice enough guy. The other coach was called Jack. He was the shorter of the two and had a voice that made The Captain’s high-pitched voice sound like James Earl Jones’. Perhaps to compensate for his more diminutive stature, he was also the most intense of the coaches. I had to hold back my laughter when it sounded like Mickey Mouse was yelling to “move our sorry asses”.

After an hour the workout was over, I sat down by the mat, took a refreshing drink and was ready to head for the locker room. However, just as I was starting for the door I felt a hand grip my shoulder. It was The Captain. “Hey dude, wheredya think you’re going? We still gotta teach you how to wrestle!” My initial reaction was one of confusion. “Isn’t that what I’ve been doing for the last hour?” The Captain seemed to find the situation funny and, with a cocky air, looked me dead in the eye and uttered the old cliché, “Naw man, that was just the beginning”.

It turns out that wrestling is a lot more than just athleticism. Once I got back on the mat, I realized that there’d be no “pre-season
warm-up period”; we would be going straight into learning the technique. I started to feel a tad disappointed; if this “skill” training was to be the majority of the team’s practices, I worried that there would be little time to attain the Adonis like physique I had been promised. I voiced my concerns to The Captain and he reassured me, “Strength is good and all, man, but learning how to really wrastl’ is the key to success”. Apparently The Captain was known for being a particularly un-muscular wrestler. His forte was his mastery of a variety of takedowns, grapples and other such techniques.

The Captain led me to the middle of the mat and told me I would first learn bottom and top positions. My worries about not getting ripped were quickly replaced by a deep sense of discomfort. Jokingly, I asked, “Aren’t you at least going to buy me dinner first?” His face took on a serious tone as his brow lowered and he tightened his lips. “If your not gonna take this shit seriously, you oughta leave now!” I stood in shock, mouth ajar and eyes wide. I looked around and noticed the other team members were staring at us. I quickly dropped to my knees and did as he instructed.

“Alright so we start in this position, you on your hands and knees, me behind you, hands on your stomach and arm.” I could feel his breath on the back of my neck and wondered if this was how being molested felt. I thought to myself, “Okay man, just relax, persevere like always, after a while this’ll be less awkward, don’t worry…”

After a few awkward moments of The Captain pointing out flaws in my “bottom positioning” (all whilst hunched over behind me) he said we would do a practice round. He counted to three and yelled, “WRESTLE!” straight in my ear. It shocked me to the point that I was almost unaware that he had gotten his legs around my waist. Before I knew it he had put me in a “spladdle”. This was his token move and would come to be my worst nightmare. It’s hard to convey the weird mixture of discomfort, pain and
humiliation that is a “spladdle”. The best way to describe it is to picture your body as pretzel with your head between your legs.

The Captain released me from his anaconda-like grip and stood up, towering over my crippled body as I writhed in pain on the mat. “What the hell was that!?” I uttered with a great degree of difficulty. “That, my friend, was wrastlin!” The Captain smugly responded. I had never felt homicidal feelings toward another human being, but there’s a first time for everything. The Captain proceeded to put me through the same process several times before practice was finished. By the end of practice, I felt like a husk of a man. For the first time I could remember, I felt soundly defeated. Tomer came over to me. “Yo dude, don’t worry bout that guy Matt, he thinks he’s toff shit.” All I could muster was a feeble and apathetic, “Sure.”

The practices continued and between my attempts to find someone—anyone—other than The Captain to practice with, and my determination to build up my strength and abilities, I thought I was becoming a considerably better wrestler. All the same, The Captain was becoming my personal boogey man. I’d wake up at night in a cold sweat, reeling from nightmares filled with spladdles.

It came time for me to fight my first match after a month of practice. I was to fight an exhibition round—no pressure to perform for the sake of the team, just the desire to prove to myself that I could become the invincible fighter I had envisioned. En route to the match the coaches handed out the singlets. I had heard the term “singlet” get thrown around a lot at practice but never questioned what it meant. As I was tossed a skimpy piece of spandex, I soon understood that this “singlet” was going to become the source of much discomfort.

When we got to the venue for the match and entered the changing
room, I suddenly felt transported back to the first day of middle school gym class. Next to all these behemoths buried to their necks in muscle, I felt quite shy to change into my all too revealing singlet. Reluctantly, I maneuvered my way into the contraption (I couldn’t really call it clothing) and found that my skinny figure didn’t even fill it up all the way. It hung on me loosely like excess skin, except where it met my nether regions. There, it clung tightly enough for any passer by get a splendid view of my (for lack of a better term) junk. Essentially, it was any shrimpy kid’s worst nightmare.

The gym was filled with wrestlers, many of whom crowded around every match. Some watched to shout on their teammates, some just to enjoy watching some other poor kid have the crap beat out of him. All around me I saw every type of wrestler: the small kids who had joined to bulk up; the wrestling veterans who intensely stared down their opponents from afar; the occasional man-child whom I doubted was young enough to be wrestling in high school, given that he had a full beard and biceps the size of my head.

After a few hours of nervously waiting, my time to wrestle came. I got on the mat and felt my knees shake; all the hubris I’d had departed. I waited anxiously for my opponent. I pictured him in my head: he’d likely be at least 5 inches taller than me, covered in tattoos and war wounds, probably ripped and ready to tear me to pieces. My breath was growing shallow and my palms were sweaty enough to drown a small child. Then I saw my opponent step out from the crowd. He removed his retainer and took off his oversized glasses before stepping on the mat. He didn’t seem to have his headgear on correctly, and he actually managed to seem skinnier than I was. His face was covered in acne and the severity of his overbite was probably considered an orthodontic mystery. I could hear his coach call him “Ping Lee”. My only conceivable explanation for how small this kid looked was that he was a super
genius from China who had started high school at the age of 12.

My confidence came flowing back into me. I felt ready to pulverize this kid. The Captain wouldn’t dare spladdle me again after he saw what would become of this twerp. We met at the center of the mat, and our eyes locked. I knew from the look of fear in his eyes that this was also his first time. His lip seemed to be quivering slightly, as if he was about to collapse on the floor and beg for mercy. I was almost reluctant to start as I could smell his “b.o.” strongly. We placed each other in the starting hold. He was breathing heavily and shakily. I was trying hard not to unlock my stare, even as I knew The Captain was watching from afar, ready to pound me for my every mistake. The referee put the whistle to his lips, took a deep inhale and blew loudly, yelled “Wrestle!” and it began.

Neither Ping nor I moved at first; neither of us seemed sure what to do. All of a sudden Ping lunged forward at me. He got his armpit in my face and I nearly fainted from the sheer stench of it. I toppled to the ground and he got on top of me. He got a hold of my wrists and proceeded to pull my right arm left across my body and my left arm across to my right. What resulted was a feeling that he was either going to choke me to death with my own arms or that he was going to pull my arms from their sockets. I was thinking about wrastlin’ pigs again and I suddenly knew exactly how the pig felt—my face buried in the dirty ground, the weight of my oppressor squeezing the life out of me, knowing that no matter how I tried, my demise would come soon.

As I felt my vision begin to tunnel, I came to the realization that I could make it all end by simply turning onto my back and letting Ping pin me. And in just a few short seconds, as I felt my muscles stop struggling and Ping start to turn me on my back, I saw all my determination vanish. The hours I toiled screeching on the violin all so that I could play “twinkle twinkle little star”; the days spent trying to master Tae Kwon Do forms so I could show them off to
my parents and watch their horrified expressions as I kicked over vase after vase; they all meant nothing.

The referee struck the mat and yelled, “Pin!” Ping rose and lifted up his arms, eyes glistening with disbelief. I remained in a haze of shame, defeat and surrender. My teammates patted me on the back as I collapsed on the bench and applauded my “good effort for a first try”. I knew that they all knew what I had done. I knew especially that The Captain knew and would make me suffer for giving up.

The next day of practice I showed up to the mat, wearing not my over-expensive wrestling gear, but jeans and a t-shirt. Brian came up to me and squeaked, “Where’s your damn gear!!” I simply told him that I thought wrestling wasn’t for me. The Captain joined us and put a hand on my shoulder, “C’mon man, I know you’re not a quitter.” I had to give it to him; The Captain was a more sophisticated guy than I had thought. Perhaps he had seen in me more than just a novice wrestler. Maybe he had seen a cocky freshman that needed to be taught a lesson in humility. Maybe he saw a kid who thought he had an unbreakable will and knew the best thing he could do for him was to break it. Regardless, I replied to The Captain, “I don’t know man, I just don’t think I’m cut out for “wrastlin’”, ya know”. He nodded sympathetically and he and Brian let me leave in peace.

I ended up just as scrawny as I had started freshmen year. And I ended up with just as much fighting skill. Freshman year I discovered popularity and how fickle and fleeting it is. I met a group of friends who introduced me to new lifestyles and new ideas. However, the most important thing I did freshman year was join the wrestling team and meet a borderline sadist of a Captain named Matt. From him I learned that to be modest is something anyone can do, but to be truly humble, you must first accept that at one point or another you’re going to be a quitter.

-- Luis Nario
More Than Just Man’s Best Friend

My brother kept putting his hand on the pen, and the excitable dogs would jump up and try to bite it. He would then pull it away quickly and place it somewhere else, repeating the process. In the nice weather of the spring after we got her, I would wear sundresses and run around on the small hill in our grassy backyard. Sweetie would follow us up the hill, yapping at the hem of my dress. If she could catch me, which she inevitably would, she would literally hang onto my dress as I continued to run.

Sweetie would chase me, in nothing but my underwear, around my parent’s bedroom, trying to snap at me and grab onto something, but there really wasn’t anything for her to hang onto. Whenever I got tired of the chase, I would lie down on the bed with my arm dangling over the edge, and she would playfully chew on my hand.

The years are now very evident in Sweetie. Her once chocolaty brown hair is an off grey color, even looking closer to white on her head. Looking into her eyes, it is easy to see how foggy they are with cataracts, and her vision is quite poor. As well, she is nearly deaf. Even from a few feet away she can’t hear her name being called. When she gets taken for a walk and let off her leash, she usually pauses to sniff the ground while we walk ahead. When she is done investigating, there is a moment of confusion and perhaps fear because she is not sure where we have gone and she can no longer see us from far away. Even if her name is called, she will have trouble telling from which direction the sound is coming, and she will turn her head from side to side trying to see or hear more. Usually someone will walk closer to her calling her name, “Sweetie, Sweetie, SWEETIE!” and finally she will spot us and faithfully lope along, happy as always.
I've basically had her since birth, and I feel she is very attached to me as well. One of the habits I've developed in the past year or so is whenever I walk past her, I always pause to check to see her chest rising and falling, reassuring myself she is still breathing. It is one of my biggest fears that one day I will check and I won’t see movement, even though this really is inevitable. Life as I know it is coming to an end; it will soon become something vastly different, for better or for worse. Thinking this way makes me want to scream and cry and crawl under the dining room table with Sweetie like I used to when I was younger. My childhood will never come back, just the same as I will never have a dog that is the same as Sweetie, whose name really sums her up in one word.

– Paige Greger-Moser
The Piano

Once upon a time, it stood proud and tall
Strong against my childish efforts,
The cliffside my tsunamic attempts crashed against,
The anvil against my hardened hammer.
Like the shore, though, worn away in time.
Like water, like a river triumphed my tries.
Time and trial being the name of the game.
My booming thunder, my flashing lightning,
Pointless in the expectations of myself,
But time and trial, like the wind,
I persevered, as best I could.

It withstood my strength, my anger, my wrath,
Mocking me with cacophonous sound.
Sounding like a screeching hunt call,
I became the hunted, and it the hunter.
Time and trial, though, won me in the end,
And age tempered my haste and sin.
Towards battle no longer I marched,
But to peace, agreements, negotiations.
At last, harmony was achieved,
Not due to my raging rush
But more so to endurance, time and trial.

Now, no screech of battle sounds today,
It is sweet melody, the songbird’s beauty.
Instead of two factions, sun versus moon,
We are now one, the wind and the sun,
The air and the light. Born of time and trial.

– Klemens Gowin

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Winter Bones

he is like january grass
under her hands —
cold, and sharp, and
rough.

he is a pine tree boy,
bark eyes and needle
words.

inhale, and it tastes like
home.

she is a Russian winter —
brITTLE frozen bones,
sub zero heart, icicle
fingers.

her insides are a tundra
and the northern lights
stay trapped in her
capillaries.

(she's too selfish to
let out the beauty.)

exhale, and she freezes
the air.

she is not in love with the
maple trees but the
evergreens, green
and sturdy.

he thinks that they could
be like jack frost
together.

– Eleanor Morgan

– Leah Foster
Lost Youth

The old man spends his days sitting on his front porch. The only time he gets up is to do one of three things: eat, sleep or answer Mother Nature’s call. He spends his golden years long on the porch remembering. From the time his last child went off to college he has been perpetually stuck in the past, day dreaming of youth. He lives in his mind, where he is always twenty, young, fresh, energetic and with the whole world ahead of him. He remembers when he first met his wife. She was a young innocent flower, the opposite of how he would describe her today; a dry autumn leaf just waiting to be crushed on her way to disintegration.

The old man sits with his eyes closed imagining. He sees his twenty year old self forever partying and carefree, the very epitome of youth. When he opens his eyes he is always disappointed by the wrinkly sun-spotted body he sees. He misses the past, the girls flirting up close in his smooth bright face and sharp dark green eyes. He dreams of the thick black hair which his fingers itch to run through.

He awakes out from the daydream by the sound of a car whizzing past. It is going fast, pushing 90 mph he’d guess, with electronic music and thrilling youthful laughter spilling loudly from it. He grins, yearning for a power to turn back the hands of time and join them. The car is almost around the corner which is shaded by a dignified oak tree. The old man looks at the tree, feels a connection, and sympathizes with the old tree. He imagines a time when the tree was a young sapling and he a young man. Long past their strong and supple youth, the old man imagines that the tree too dreams of the days when he was young. When the world still wondered how tall he would grow and how much shade he would provide.

As the car is rounding the corner, the driver misjudges the turn.
The car hits the tree. The old man stops smiling and cannot move. The car looks like the victim in a violent cartoon; flattened at the front, with smoke spreading like fog over the scene. The old man gets up stiffly, and walks towards the accident. He looks through the back seat window; behind the cracked glass he sees the youthful bodies which were alive only seconds before now unmoving, crushed, and unrecognizable to anyone who would have known them.

The old man is frozen. He lifts his head and sees the tree still standing as if nothing had happened. As he looks down at the youth, he sees them dead. The old man stares blankly for a few minutes, and then wraps both his aged arms around the rough bark. He throws his head back and laughs.

– Nour Wazaz

– Maya Harlan
Florida

I recall the sounds of a plane
The strength of it as it rose.
My feet levitated off the floor.
The clouds swarmed as we moved through the atmosphere.
The ground shrunk.
I felt free.

The show begins as the killer whales rise out of the water.
The strength of their power as they float into the air.
My fists clench like my tight shoelaces.
The cold water slams me.
I open my eyes,
I feel free.

-- Jon Aliwalas

-- Katie Daily
Hospital Scene

He wanted to help but he felt weak and helpless, and he didn’t want to get in the way. Instead, he kept glued to his chair and tried to slink away in his corner, and to not look at anything too hard. He couldn’t focus on the tubes for too long without feeling sick and upset, and he couldn’t look at his grandfather for more than a few seconds before he felt ready to cry. All he wanted to do was bolt out of his chair and run far away from that white-lit, beeping hospital room. But he also felt that if he stood up and left, he would never be able to come back.

It was all too much, and he felt in the way. Even in the corner, he felt like he was taking up too much room, or maybe it was just too much oxygen. He stood up and edged around the nurses and beeping stands to the door. He stumbled out and leaned against the wall. He felt even more sick than before, so he slid down to the floor. He closed his eyes and tried to breathe deeply and not keel over.

Even in the hallway, he felt like he was in the way. He wasn’t being helpful in any way to anyone and all he had to add was tears and pained looks. He stood up and looked at the doorway. The curtain was pulled and he couldn’t see in. Maybe when he went back in everything would be better, and he wouldn’t feel sick again. Maybe he wouldn’t feel in the way and helpless and desperate and heart-broken. Probably not, but he went in anyway.

– Paige Greger-Moser
Finding the Love in Hate

Staring intently at his mandatory white uniform, I didn’t have the courage to meet Richard’s tired eyes with mine. Richard had lost weight. He was much skinnier than his usual stocky build. For the first time I could see the outline of his collarbone, sitting just a few inches below his 5 o’clock shadow scruff. The two of us sat awkwardly in a vacant white room at Middlesex Hospital’s psychiatric ward in utter silence. Leveling his chin up with mine, Richard forced eye contact and muttered, “So...? Are you shocked? I-I guess they said I had some kind of mental breakdown.” A couple of weeks ago, Richard began leaving the house around 11 pm, driving to who knows where and returning home around 4 in the morning. When confronted, he started preaching that, “God was calling”, and that “There were others telling him to.” Finally, Richard reached his breaking point when he bashed his head into the dry-wall just a couple of days ago.

I was more than just shocked; I was in disbelief. Never in a hundred years would I have guessed that my quirky, beloved, golden voiced, practically straight-A student brother would be diagnosed with a severe lifelong case of Bipolar Disorder. Looking down at his gray hospital slippers, I began to feel guilty about my indignant treatment towards Richard over the past 16 years. Although I’ve lived with my older brother all my life, I never knew much about him. In fact I didn’t want to know much about him. With acne covering his jaw line and a skinny unibrow above his Asian eyes, I felt embarrassed just by the thought of my loud, geeky brother. Even though we’re only a year apart, we have little in common. He and I were just two barely speaking residents living under the same roof, and we would both eventually move on to college with the same minimal communication.

This wasn’t always the case though. For a mere fragment of my childhood, Richard and I actually did have a few moments of
sibling endearment in between the short lived quarrels over who got to use the remote. While our parents worked endless hours, we cooperated since we only had each other. Mom and Dad started up Dynasty Jewelry, a successful jewelry business chain in Connecticut, and worked almost 80 hours a week maintaining it. Richard and I were deprived of the average childhood. There were no little league baseball games, ballet classes, or Disney World vacations. Instead, we were stuck with Aunt Lee, Grandma, older cousins, and more countless baby sitters. As children with overworking parents and interchangeable nannies, we easily became bored around the house. Somehow I discovered simple amusement in just dressing and interacting with my hundred or so miscellaneous Barbie dolls while Richard arranged his decks of laminated Yu-Gi-Oh cards. We treasured our separate collections equally, and we independently spent the majority of our time playing with them. Richard often grew more lonesome than I did because unlike dolls, Yu-Gi-Oh is a multiplayer card game.

“Katherine, I have an idea!” Practically shrieking in my ear, Richard scurried over to my side in his Batman PJ’s on our seventh Christmas afternoon together. Santa, who left me a brand new Malibu Beach House for my Polly Pockets, gave Richard three new golden decks of cards.

“...Yeah? What do you want?” Sitting cross-legged in a scarlet red holiday dress besides the Christmas tree and still brushing the wavy red hair of one of my prized dolls, Chloe, I paid little attention to his simple proposal.

“If I play dolls with you, will you at least try to let me teach you how to play Yu-Gi-Oh?” I hesitated then apathetically agreed, “Um...Okay, I guess.” In my eyes at the time, the deal Richard was asking wasn’t a fair trade. I didn’t care whether or not he chose to join me and my perfectly sculpted dolls; however, if I were to join him in...ugh that Yu-Gi-Oh game, I cringed at just the thought of holding the cards. Who else finds amusement in collecting cards? No one with a life, that’s who. Still I agreed because I felt bad for him and seeing his chubby face light up on Christmas day made my mother happy.
After suffering through hours of braiding fake hair and manhandling girly figurines, Richard finally stood up. “Okay. Now that Chloe is married to Prince Charming, had her dream wedding, and owns a mansion...can we play Yu-Gi-Oh now?”

My snobby voice shattered his Christmas joy, “Ew no. I will never play cards with you.” I smirked and folded my tiny arms together. “What?! I just...but I just did all of that for you.” Richard became irritated at first, but his scowling expression turned into a forlorn sulk. Slowly walking towards the couch and half-heartedly sitting down, part of him already knew I wouldn’t hold up my end of the deal. After feeling guilty for a couple of minutes, I suggested a competitive-free game of checkers. Checkers is no Yu-Gi-Oh, but it was a compromise for me. Growing up, I accepted the fact that Richard was better than me at any intellectual activity. I knew he’d end up winning almost every single round, but I also knew he deserved to be reimbursed. For the rest of that innocent evening, I won only two games while Richard grinned with an impressive score of nine. Playfully throwing checker pieces at one another, we giggled and devoured snowman shaped sugar cookies until finally, my mother came downstairs to chastise us at two in the morning.

As time went on, our bickering evolved into violent screaming. From age eight to twelve, the summers consisted of pranks pulled by my brother and his pesky friends. The words, “I hate you” became more frequently used in our fights especially after finding salt on my toothbrush, golf balls hidden in my sneakers, and a whoopee cushion at the bottom of my backpack which once boomed throughout the entire room when I threw my bag down in the middle of my math class.

“RICHARD. WHAT IN THE WORLD IS WRONG WITH YOU!?” Pointing towards my bathroom in the hallway with invisible steam blowing out my ears, I screamed at the top of my lungs. “Is there something wrong, dear sister?” Richard nonchalantly
walked out of his bedroom with two other chuckling friends.

“YEAH THERE’S SOMETHING WRONG. YOU PUT A FRIGGIN’ FROG IN MY SHOWER.” Burning up, my face was now the color of a chili pepper. Before turning on the shower head, I heard a deep croak. At just the first sight of the repulsive vomit-colored amphibian, I screamed. I absolutely despise frogs. “Whoa. Don’t just start accusing me of something I didn’t do,” Richard’s smart aleck behavior was coming out again. “I’m not. I’m accusing you of something you did do, you useless pig.” I marched over to him and his friends and spat the last three words with bitter spite.

Unoffended and still smug, Richard continued, “That wasn’t me. That was Grant.” Richard pointed to a blonde eleven-year-old boy next to him with a bowl shaped haircut. “Plus that frog was probably attracted to your disgusting face anyway.” “I hate you. I hope you end up alone.” I stormed back into my room and refused to shower in that bathroom for months.

As middle school went by, the teasing pranks subsided while our “hate” for each other increased. After our father deserted our family, Richard started blaming me for all of his problems. When my mom remarried to my solemn step-dad during eighth grade, I took my anger out on him as well. I hated Richard’s abilities more than his personality. Richard could study on the twenty-minute bus ride to school while I would have to study for two hours only to receive a lower test grade than him. I’d try to sabotage his performance by making his alarm go off every two hours in the night. Complaining to his video game obsessed friends instead, Richard would make up stories about how many guys I wanted to hook up with or how I would steal from other people’s houses. All of them would absorb the false information and call me “flat chested fatty” or “wannabe”. By my freshman year, Richard’s sophomore year, we were completely disinterested in each other’s lives. I guess we eventually just got tired of dealing with each other. We stopped arguing in the car
rides and never even thought twice about laughing in the same room. The few conversations we had involved us delivering a message, “Mom said to call her,” or whenever one of us was homesick, the other became the middleman, “Here’s the homework you missed today.” I shrugged my shoulders whenever somebody asked about Richard running in the class election.

Half of the student body filled the auditorium with disinterest and apathy by crossing their arms and slouching in their seats. The other half stared intently as Richard raised his rigid chin and made eye contact with almost all of the two hundred teenagers. Wiping off a sweat drop with his hairy hands and examining the microphone before him, Richard tapped the podium with his jittery index fingers and patterned his looks back and forth between his speech and the audience. He inhaled a deep breath that unbuttoned the fifth button of his dress shirt while his matching black bowtie and suspenders were crying to be undone from his bear like gut. Nodding to his left, the school counselor pressed play button on a boom box. All of a sudden Richard started rapping. A feeling of respect rose throughout the entire room. The students who were half asleep rose up and straightened their back. Richard’s scruffy caterpillar puberty mustache moved up and down while his silver braces gleamed under the bright fluorescent lights. His voice boomed and pierced the atmosphere with sharp pronunciation and confidence flowing to the beat of the tune.

“Why is it that we got no ping pong team? Bring your balls, and not the plastic ones.” Laughter roared. He struck another hand in the air, “Let’s raise some money for Red Cross charity. Play it for some integrity.” By the end of his speech, he thanked the audience in a graceful manner and the entire front row began to stand up and clap. He received the standing ovation he deserved and bowed his head as a sign of respect. He gently stepped down from the podium and from that day on, my brother was known as President of the Junior Class.
I didn’t realize how much time I could’ve enjoyed with Richard until I was sitting across from him in that windowless white room. Everything became a blur in that moment. I found myself picking at my cuticles, unsure of why Richard had changed so drastically within the past few weeks. To be honest no one actually knew what or why, it just sporadically happened. Richard gently got up from his seat and walked towards the door, “If you’re not going to say any--”

“I’m sorry.” I interrupted his goodbye, “I haven’t really been ...a good sister.”

“Oh.” Surprised, Richard raised his eyebrows. “You really shouldn’t be blaming yourself. They said it occurs in the late teens.” A few more seconds passed by in silence.

“I never meant it...All those times I said that I hated you. I don’t.” I didn’t dare to look him in the eye. The last time I spoke to Richard about anything sentimental was years ago.

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry too. Thanks.” He leaned in for a handshake, but I came forward to a hug. We uncomfortably laughed. I didn’t leave his hospital with some sort of life-changing transformation, but every Saturday and Thursday evening at 6:30 pm, I bring with me a deck of cards and a chess and checkers set.

– Katherine Chi

-- Katie Daily
Without You Here

I can watch the seasons change now
Without you here, my eyes capture everything but your face
Every morning I sit in the same spot
Without your focused image,
One I had traced in my memory like I was watching
My life through an antique camera.

I can feel the emptiness of the world now
Without you here, the crowd of faces looms
Every day, I weave in the hallways
Without you as my destination
As if I’m running a marathon, crossing the finish line
Only to lift my head, feeling everything around me
Except your gaze;

I can drive on long stretches of highway
Without you here, there’s no one to take me on the short rides
That hold my most beautiful memories
Every Friday night, I know the ache of only making my plans
Without you around the corner
Like a mother watching children learn how to fly,
Knowing you might not come back.

– Claire Kramer
Translation of *Mi Vida* (p. 44)

If I could live my life again.
In the next one I would have a lot of happiness.
I would not make the same mistakes,
I would have the same happiness but not the same sadness.
If I could live my life again.
I would hug my family and friends for any reason.
I would acknowledge all I have and would not expect more.
If I could live my life again.
But, fortunately, I have time,
To smile,
To laugh,
To hold happiness.
I don't need to live my live again because
I have this one to live.
Time For Tea

The flames
Dance under the silver kettle.
The water not yet ready to boil,
Restrained, not making a peep.

The kettle heats up,
Fast and faster,
The water in the kettle begins to swirl.
Until the kettle can’t hold it in any longer.
The water starts to bubble more and more.
Steam hisses and juts out the spout.
The top jittery and nervous, ready to explode.

The flames disappear,
The burner now off.
All too quickly it calms down,
About to be poured into a cup.

Now, I drink a cup of tea.
Tomorrow, I will graduate.

–Sarah Haddad