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I began this year bright-eyed and full of ideas for Crosscurrents, but quickly realized that actually producing a printed magazine involves much more than idealistic enthusiasm. It has been a steep learning curve, but an exciting and valuable one, and as we approach the deadline to print I am beginning to believe that it will actually happen. This semester, I am thrilled to include not only our strongest student work, but also the work and words of local artists Lance Kagey and Tom Llewellyn (together, the poster group Beautiful Angle) who have made a huge impact on the local arts culture.

Now in my fourth year of working with Crosscurrents, I have come to understand it as a way to showcase the talent and hard work of students at Puget Sound. The work we have included in this semester’s publication represents the rich variety of work that my peers produce and I deeply appreciate the opportunity to amplify these voices. From the serious to the surreal, I hope that Crosscurrents continues to defy categorization and push the boundaries of “literature and art.”

With thanks,

Maia Raeder, Editor-in-Chief

EDITOR’S NOTE

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Maia Raeder, Editor-in-Chief
Beautiful Angle is a guerilla poster group based in Tacoma whose members are writer Tom Llewellyn and graphic designer Lance Kagey. Since 2002, they have created unique letterpress posters and distributed them around public spaces in Tacoma, inviting viewers to take their work down and bring it home. Their work has been recognized by the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, the Washington State Historical Society, and the Tacoma Art Museum. In 2009, they were awarded the Amocat Award by the City of Tacoma Arts Commission.

“In many urban settings around the country, MLK Jr. has been honored by having streets named for him, but the truth is that, often times, instead of creating more unity it becomes a demarcation line between the poor and the privileged. We propose that Tacoma extend MLK Jr. Way as far north and south as it will feasibly go, from North Steele to South 96th.”
INTERVIEW WITH BEAUTIFUL ANGLE

CCR: What are the major themes that you work with, and why are they interesting to you?

Lance: We don’t have an agenda that determines our themes. We talk about whatever we feel like. Whatever we care about.

Tom: There are no ongoing themes, but the things we tend to care about, in no particular order, are Tacoma, beer, place, music, ponies, and snakes.

Lance: We’ve done a series on race, on the history of Tacoma, on chairs, and on mythology. But we love a good gig poster, too.

CCR: You have a lot of work specific to Tacoma. What is your motivation for this theme? What kind of community or support have you found here?

Tom: Early on we were contacted by the president of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce and asked to stop hanging our posters, as we were uglifying downtown. About a month later, we won an award from a different part of the Chamber. That same president had to present us with the award.

Lance: We’ve also won an Amocat Arts Award from the Tacoma Arts Commission. We’ve received a number of grants from the city for Beautiful Angle projects. And we’ve been commissioned by UWT, the Washington State Historical Society, Broadway Center, and a handful of other local organizations.

Tom: It’s funny. Nowadays, there seem to be dozens of folks making Tacoma t-shirts and bumper stickers and stuff like that. When we started, you couldn’t buy anything that promoted the city in a positive way. We like to think we had some part in changing that.
Lance: There's this great quote by G.K. Chesterton that's been a bit of a guiding light for us: “Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her.”

Tom: So we refer to Tacoma as the Holy City. We try to see this place—our home—in a fully redeemed state. But we also reserve the right to criticize the heck out of it when we feel like it. That's part of loving it.

CCR: What is letterpress and what is it like to work with?

Lance: Letterpress is a very handmade, hands-on, labor-intensive process. We use a circa-1950s printing press. All the words are printed from wood or lead type. The images are either created from vintage printing plates or hand-carved images. Each new color on a poster starts that process from scratch.

Tom: It's very gear-intensive, too. You need a lot of stuff. A lot of the work is slowly collecting the typefaces and printing equipment. It all takes up a lot of space and all requires a lot of maintenance.

Lance: From concept to completion, a typical poster probably takes 20 to 40 hours to create. Some less. Some more.

CCR: How does this specific medium influence the work that you produce?

Lance: Letterpress is a series of constraints. You are bound by the limitations of the equipment you have. You can’t choose any font in existence. You’re choices are limited to the typefaces you have on hand.

Tom: And if you decide to change the image, you’ll have to spend another eight hours carving a new image in linoleum or wood or whatever you’re using.

Lance: But those constraints are where the creativity comes from. And it is so refreshing to create without the use of a computer screen.

CCR: How does the collaborative aspect work? Do you work together from the beginning or is the process more divided, coming together at the end?

Tom: We are astonishingly unstructured in our process. Sometimes the words come first. Sometimes one of us comes up with an image.

Lance: And sometimes a deadline just smacks you in the face and you have to come up with whatever you can. But the beauty is, we answer to no one but ourselves.

Tom: And our wives. Don't forget our wives.

ABOVE: BEAUTIFUL ANGLE AROUND TACOMA
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Sam came home with the news
that her dad had passed away
so we lit candles and sat in plastic
chairs on the roof

When I woke wax had pooled at
the bottoms of the candles
I struck a match and held the flame
to each browning tip
Ode to Dusk  
Zoe Branch

Soft sun demands attention  
before graceful suicide, bleeds  
slowly into elsewhere into  
slipped away just like that.

Tension,  
release —  
the tired day sighs into  
You, into  
clouds melting with  
daylight, into  
the subtle simplicity of  
the sweetest spot in time.

You are open windows,  
closed doors,  
the active suspension of  
lazy airflow between  
two unknown places as  
molecules vibrate in  
the calm quietude of night —  
and even in blackness  
You linger, white blurs tattooed  
on my eyelids,  
a sensation of beautiful  
death hanging on my  
lips.
I saw you in the mirror,
your eyes taking the shape
of a shapeless history;
and your mouth turned
to stone
with your words fossilized.

and I do and do not recognize
this feeling of drowning
in the sliver,
of stretching down to nothing
and everything
and nothing.

Time stagnates,
sinking into white noise.
black water.
no name.
Poachers armed with lenses search for spots as rare as diamonds against white Himalayas, longing so strong it’s numbing.

Brown, starved eyes peer through boards of a windblown shack troubled by the blatant disregard the pale faces grant to their own kind,

Blissfully unaware of the misery surrounding their prize.

The flash of National Geographic leaves the boy in rags and the purring hunter blinded.
Drink a cup of your favorite dark roast coffee. Add sugar and cream. Maybe just sugar or cream. If you’re really tired and the Prosecuting Attorney has been giving you a harder time than usual, leave out the additives all together. Maybe make green tea instead. After all, your mother keeps telling you that coffee caused your father’s heart attack. But you hate green tea. You watch it brewing with hatred. Take a sip, spit it out. Throw out your green tea, make coffee instead. You don’t know why you listen to your mother, you don’t like her and her politics. Or maybe you love her so you choke down the tea anyway. No. That’s wrong. There’s no way you love your mother. There’s no way you’d drink green tea for her. You always drink coffee, eventually. You always hate your mother, eventually.

Pull out your case files for the day. Oh look, right at the top is a case you had months ago. They’re behind on their payments and now they’re being pulled in for another hearing. You rub at your forehead: remember what your mother said about frown lines, acne scars, smile lines, crow’s feet, pimples, zits, freckles, sun spots. If you see her anytime soon, she’ll hem and haw and prattle on about the lines that don’t exist on your face. She’ll recommend an age-defying cream that this one woman in her book club or prayer circle or gossip tree or bridge friends or mahjong or whatever it was. She’ll send it to you, eventually. And it will sit on the shelf behind your bathroom mirror until you give up on it and throw it in the trash. Its plastic, vibrant blue packaging will shine in the shitty lights in your bathroom and you’ll wish that you gave a shit about what your mom wants from you. No. That’s wrong. You gave up on what your
Or maybe the cafeteria’s chicken is shit and you refuse to eat something mediocre. After all, you have expensive taste. *You’re such a high maintenance bitch.* At least, that’s why your last partner left you. They had yelled as they walked out of your shitty three room apartment. You whispered against the peeling door: *Then why do I work for the public sector.* Bits of paint flake off into your mouth; you spit out the paint sputtering and walked away. Maybe they hadn’t yelled. Maybe there had been no slamming door and no angry tears in their eyes, or a fight about them burning dinner and you not wanting to eat burnt chicken for the umpteenth time. Either way, you spit out your shitty chicken from the courthouse cafeteria like you spit out paint chips.

You curse into your wilted salad when you read the Assistant Prosecuting Attorney assigned to your last case of the day. He is one of the sharks, chasing prey mercilessly until the water is flooded with blood. He is also one of your experiments from law school. He had stolen your black coffee, laughed to the ceiling with loud guffaws that shook your head where it rested against his unblemished shoulder. Sitting there, Caesar salad hanging off your fork, you remember the way you two argued in your “Ethics of Law” seminar. Even then it was obvious he was shooting for prosecution. You think of the way your professor would switch between the two of you and eventually give up. *What a good example of the adversarial process.*

There was the time when you smashed your palms on the small, unbalanced, claustrophobic desk and stood; your chair had clattered against the scuffed wood floor of the seminar hall. The way your professor would slow clap and gesture. You remember the way your classmates watched your arguments like they were at a tennis game. Heads bouncing back and forth, taking bets underneath their tables about the winner. Their rolled eyes and snickers as the two of you battled across the
Your one night experiment in sleeping-with-the-enemy walks in.
His ring finger glints with his wedding ring. You remember seeing him around with his wife on campus a year after your class together. He was always hugging her from behind, arms tucked around her waist, chin hooked over her shoulder, sneaking kisses to her cheek, and laughing that booming laugh into her ear. He sees you, smiles, greets you. You're surprised that his teeth aren't sharp. He is, after all, a shark. He seduces your client with a plea deal that is a guarantee of punishment even though you could get her off. He knows you could. He lays it on thick, makes her scared of the judge waiting to pass judgement on her case. You comfort her, place your hand on her shoulder, try to show him a united front. But he is so charming. You've always known he was charming. Even when you hated him, he was charming. His booming, guffaw laughter is contagious and his worry and concern is intoxicating. In the end, your client signs the plea deal, gives up her rights, surrenders herself to the conditions of the plea. As you leave, your client grabs your arm.

You're one of the good ones. You tried to fight for me. You're one of the good ones.
He slides the signed plea deal into his briefcase; it's shinier than yours. He mouths his apologies. You know he's sorry, they're all always so sorry. So sorry for the ones pleading guilty, found guilty, sentenced, put away.

Or maybe your client doesn't sign the plea deal. Maybe you fight the shark and you win. Maybe she gets off and doesn't have to pay fines and restitutions and do community service. Maybe she can take all that potential money and put it toward a rehab that works. No. That's wrong. That never happens. They are always found guilty, you are always the good one, he always gets them, and you always see them again, eventually.

room.
In a rush, you remember the culmination of it all. It was something ridiculous, something so inconsequential that the new morning took it from you. Or was it something so ground-breaking, earth-shatteringly important that even today, staring at your sad forkful of lettuce, you can hear every sneered and shouted word. Overly-sentimental, bleeding heart liberal. Every one of your counters echoing back just as harsh, angry, hateful. You fucking emotionless robot, why don't you care? You remember his beautiful eyes freezing up with cold fury. You don't completely remember the moment leading up to the kiss. But it doesn't matter. He still kissed you, or you kissed him, or you kissed each other. There were your nails scratching at his back, his fingers tangling in your hair and pulling. There were your cheap sheets and your pillow being pushed to the floor. And after there was pressing your panting, swollen mouth against smooth, sweat-slicked skin. You remember his booming laugh and his bright excited lips at your brother's Star Wars poster you stole years ago. You remember his hair shining in early morning light and his whispers in your ear: We could be great. Unstoppable. Fire. You remember standing in your doorway, dressed in day clothes, him in the hallway rumpled enough for the obligatory walk of shame. You closed your door to him. You're not great. Unstoppable. Fire.

By the end of the day, your hair has deflated from whatever style you had tried that morning. Your eyes feel dry and you can remember exactly where you put your eyedrops: the bathroom counter in your apartment. You resist the urge to rub your eyes. Whatever make-up you have on will definitely rub off if you touch your eyes. Fuck it, you could give two flying shits if it messes up your eye make-up. Rub your eyes. Look at the black smear of mascara on your finger. Rub your eyes again for good measure.
Tell me what you know of the moon, 
aching womb hanging heavy in the sky. Beneath her 
a Syrian child washes up on the choked beaches of Turkey, 
lungs full of salt water and blood. 

Tell me what you know of his country, 
of the cries of his mother, of doors slammed shut 
and barbed wire borders waning dark against the night. 
Tell me what you know of home. 

The moon knows nothing 
of stillborn freedom and swollen lifelines. 
She is just there, waiting. 
Her reflection comes and goes with the tide.
Words throb in the air
spun off lips and mad fingers
given release by
speakers preaching their
outraged truths. The crowd responds
each snap a crack in
the façade of
acceptable abuses.
Mmm-hmms and Amens
rapturous union
given form while eyes close in
the ecstasy of
speech. Here in the dark,
disciples of expression
exhale the world.
Selected for their strength as works of art, both in craftsmanship and insight, the following pieces are explored by Puget Sound faculty to exhibit their depth and recognize their achievement.
Weight, balance, and gesture are intrinsic properties of how we see and relate to objects in space. The vast majority of the time, our brain processes these characteristics in a subliminal and unnoticed way. Our habitual existence can desensitize us to the wonder and excitement we once had when experiencing the world for the first time.

Emily Katz’s “Frame and Ribbon” contradicts our preconceived notions of physics and motion. The thin ‘ribbon’ defies gravity, twisting and ascending due to an invisible force. It’s writhing movement lifts the solid and heavy frame. Its thinness and frailty seem to have impossible strength. The conflict of what we expect with what we see reveals the plasticity of reality.

Visual art is a tool we can use as a way to understand the world in which we live. Through decision-making, analysis, and hard work, the process of making a piece of art becomes an investigation that glimpses at some small truth of our existence. Infused with the intimate perspective of the artist, the result of this labor also unveils both the breadth and the limitation of human perception. The act of looking, then, becomes a dance between awareness and imagination; it is a chance to make worldly connections, but also an opportunity to delve introspectively.
Your Death Is Not Definable

Liana Holcomb McCann

a bridge should not define you
nor the rattle of bones, or the wind in your hair
as you fall in the wrong direction
i am here, but you choose down
and this should not define you.

one, two, three, ready, three, two, one
a hush like a blanket
before the final bell tolls
as i reach, and you jump
this should not define you.

Poetry Review

Neşe Devenot

This is a poem of duality that simultaneously undermines the prospect of duality, living in a liminal zone between the definite and indefinite. It is marked by series of pairs: two stanzas, two subjects, two modes of being, two dominant themes. Among these themes, “death” is foregrounded with “the rattle of bones” and tolling bells ringing after a “hush.” The pervasiveness of death colors the second theme of downward motion, which links the image of “wind in your hair” to falling and jumping. A literalist reading that merges these themes invites reflections on suicide: the speaker watches helplessly as a companion chooses the path of self-annihilation by jumping off of a bridge, despite attempts at consolation. Within this reading, the speaker had wanted the companion to choose life: “you” falls in “the wrong direction” despite the speaker’s reaching hand. Although the choice to “jump” was not the speaker’s desire, “i” nevertheless insists that the companion’s life should not be remembered on the basis of this decision: “i am here, but you choose down / and this should not define you.”

But the title’s echo in the first line suggests a second possible interpretation. From this vantage point, the “bridge” is a metaphysical representation of death based on their shared indefinability. Here, death is not definable in the sense that it is not a concrete destination but, instead, part of an ever-changing process. Just as a “bridge” is a transition point between two landmasses, death can be seen as a transmutation between energy states. Rather than a final act of desperation, the “jump” is repurposed as a leap into the unknown, beyond the reach of conceptual language. Whereas the literalist interpretation warns against remembering “you” through the lens of suicide, the metaphysical interpretation places “you” beyond the limiting categories of life or death whatsoever. Neither the bridge nor
The act of jumping is sufficient for containing the essence of “you.” In
fact, any attempt at stable definition is merely “wind in your hair”—
describing transient impressions based on the phenomenological
effects of an unfolding process.

Words in the poem have different meanings depending on which
of these two interpretations is privileged. For example, the second
stanza’s palindrome—“one, two, three, ready, three, two, one”—
describes the preparation for jumping and the subsequent falling to
the ground within the first interpretation, where the final “one” marks
the moment of death at the point of impact. But from the second
interpretation, death is more akin to the middle word, “ready.” Just
as life is seen as a process resulting in death, the “one, two, three”
signals a fluid process resulting in a “ready” state. But rather than
a final destination, “ready” signals the conditions of possibility for
a new sequential process—“three, two, one”—counting down to
a new state of existence. The poem’s images of death take on new
possibilities: Although “hush” can represent the absolute silence of
non-being, its association with “blanket” calls forth the image of a
mother comforting a newborn. Likewise, the grammatical friction of
“bells tolls” reveals that the singular “tolls” cannot refer to the plural
“bells,” which disrupts the signal of death. Similarly, multiple “bells”
suggests a plurality of life-death transitions rather than an isolated
occurrence. But just as the poem represents a series of negations based
on impossible definition, so the poem itself resists being reduced to a
single interpretation.

THE ANNIVERSARY
emily harman

The kettle was boiling; it had been on all day. It was one of those
days, an endless cup of tea day, when the gray of the fog seeps into
the walls, the cold metal door handles, the damp rough of a wool blanket.
The house itself seemed to ache, joints chilled and stiff, weary and
stooped under the swollen gray sky. It hadn’t rained yet, but the clouds
hung low and heavy, holding back, waiting.

The man sat still and hollow in his old armchair, sunken into the
forgiving cushions, hands gripped tight to the armrests, worn smooth.
He wore her favorite sweater, the maroon, itchy one with the hole in
the armpit. That damn hole. She had tried to patch it so many times,
cursing under her breath every time the needle slipped, hands shaking,
gaze strong. She insisted the itch was a sign of quality, and washed
it by hand once a week. Cold water, never hot, let it air dry with the
bedsheets.

He washed it now, used cold water like she said, let it air dry in
the country sun with the bedsheets. Once the wind caught it, and he
had to chase it for several miles while it danced in the air, just out of
reach. He ran through grass and burrs, tripping several times, stubbing
his toes, scraping his shins on the unforgiving earth. He ran for what
seemed like hours, breath tearing at his throat, shaking his fist at the
sky, cursing at that damn sweater until it heard him, finally floating
down into his arms as if to say Why are you running? Here I am, here I
am, I will never leave. Had it really been twenty years?

In the dining room, the mahogany table stood as it had for half a
century. A nick in the leg, water marks on the surface. The table was
set for two, as it had been since the day he brought the table home, a
surprise for their fifth anniversary. The china, too - a wedding gift from
her mother, blue and white porcelain. It had been in her family since
the 1700’s. Every time he touched it, to clean it or to set the table, she watched him like a hawk. Don’t drop that, be careful, it has been in my family since the 1700’s.

The tea kettle was boiling; it had been on all day. He rose, knees and hips and God knows what else popping and crackling with the effort. The kettle was shrieking now, a wail of loneliness, an anguished, accusatory cry, why did you forget about me.

Whispering under his breath, he soothed the kettle with a twist of the stove knobs and set it on the countertop, where it hissed and sputtered as it cooled. Careful now, with the blue and white china. The little cup and saucer were so vulnerable, naked and empty, and he worried he might break them. He poured the steaming water, careful not to spill a drop. Cream next, then sugar. She usually left the half and half out in a tiny china pitcher, but lately he had been keeping it in the fridge. Easier that way. The carton was heavy and he cursed as it slipped from his grip. Cream dotted his front, each stubborn drop clinging to the yarn. When was the last time he had washed his sweater? It had been raining for days on end, and the clothesline was growing moldy. She used to take care of that. Cold water, air dry. She always brought the line in with her after, even if the sky was clear. Patting his front dry with a paper towel, he retreated to his armchair. Maybe tomorrow.

The tea kettle was boiling. He reached the tea, where it sat in its tin on the highest shelf. Noting the crust of dried cream on the countertop, he grabbed a blue and white cup and saucer, pouring the water. Careful now. Where was that sugar? He scanned the countertop, finally locating it behind the now-warm half and half carton. Gripping the tiny silver spoon, he watched it tremble as he guided it into the mug, dumped the sugar into the tea, watched it swirl and dissolve, disappearing in the heat. He wandered into the living room, leaving the tea on the mahogany table, where it left a ring of tears on the dark wood, begging to be remembered.

The man jolted awake with a start. He was freezing. Some time ago, the sun had set, and the man shivered, icy air seeping under his skin. That damn hole. He set the tea kettle to boil. Remember the night the power went out? It had been sudden, a flicker and then nothing. They were sitting at the dining room table, set for two, when everything went dark. He had made her tea then, poured it with steady hands, not shaking like his are now. They sat together in the darkness, the rough wool of the blanket pulling them closer together until he no longer knew which arms were his, until it no longer mattered. Here I am, here I am.

He decided to have a cup of tea now. Setting the kettle to boil, he wondered where the rest of the china was, that blue and white set of four, four cups four saucers four plates, they had been in her family since the 1700’s. Only one cup and saucer sat on the shelf. He hoped he would find the others soon, that he hadn’t broken them with his shaky hands. Pour the water, careful, add cream and sugar. He wondered where all the half and half had gone. The time, too. It was almost midnight, and the rain had begun, clouds finally letting go with a howl and a frigid wind. It was pitch black outside, and he could barely see the clothesline where it stretched across the yard. The window was warped in its reflection, sleet steadily drumming against the cold glass. He set the tea on his bedside table where it rattled against its saucer, gently, and still. He shut his eyes, heard her voice in the wind and the staccato rhythm of the rain as he sank into sleep, Please don’t forget, here I am, here I am, I am still here.

He woke early the next morning to a familiar light, chilled and stiff. It was one of those days. He thought he’d have a cup of tea, and he set the kettle to boil.
Even the sound of the teakettle is a “shrieking” one, “anguished” and “accusatory.” Thus the ritual of making the tea is fraught with peril: “pour the water, careful, add cream and sugar. Careful now.” She begs to be remembered but how can she be forgotten? She “watch[es] him like a hawk. Don’t drop that[!]”

The ending invites multiple interpretations. Is the new day yet another in a series of days, or has something extraordinary happened? He wakes to a “familiar light,” and though he “sets the kettle to boil” as usual, that “familiar light” is strange and haunting and suggests that the wife has succeeded in reaching him through the dark and pulling him, finally, into death.

On the face of it, “The Anniversary” is a nostalgic portrait of a tender marriage refracted through the eyes of a long-time widower. Its language is evocative and precise: “The house itself seemed to ache. . . stooped under the swollen gray sky.” But this fine story invites, perhaps insists upon, a closer look. And that closer look reveals sophisticated complexities that uphold yet undermine those initial impressions. It is not a simple marriage, despite all the familiar images that would suggest it.

The story unspools in a non-linear or lyric fashion based on repetition, here the image of a tea pot set to boil and the ritual of making tea, supervised from the beyond by the longed-for wife. This repetition calls into question the chronological sequence of events. How much time indeed has passed from the first cup of tea to the last? It’s difficult to say. And perhaps irrelevant, as we are entering a liminal world in which time passes, time has passed, a world of all time and no time, marked by the immanence of rain at the beginning which finally lets loose at the end.

The wife has left the husband with specific instructions on the care and handling of her “favorite” sweater, which the husband often wears. It is a stand in for the wife and perhaps the marriage, rich in ambiguity and contradiction. It is uncomfortable (“itchy”), adds little warmth, and comes with explicit instructions: wash weekly in cold water with the bed sheets, air dry, and when you’re done, pull in the laundry line against the damp. One time it is caught up by the wind, virtually taunting him, as the husband chases it down “for miles,” stumbling and finally falling, scraping his shins, all the while “cursing at that damn sweater until it heard him, finally floating down into his arms.” Tenderness and tease.
SCRABBLE
amelia rice

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When the door to the apartment opened, Charlie knew it was Sam. He'd been letting himself in a lot lately.

“Hey,” Charlie said from behind his book. He was lying face up on the couch, reading.

“You still have those pictures up,” Sam answered. Charlie didn't put down his book.

“So?”

“So it’s been what, two months now?” he asked. Charlie glanced upwards and saw that Sam’s brow was furrowed in his direction. That happened a lot lately, too.

“Three,” Charlie answered levelly, “I just like the pictures, that’s all.”

He heard Sam sigh from the kitchen before walking up next to Charlie and sitting down on the coffee table across from him. He had a serious look on his face.

“What are you doing?”

“You know what I mean.”

Charlie set the book down on his chest and thought about it. His brain flashed through images from the last few months like a slideshow; him making ramen, him going for jogs, him pouring drinks at Crawley’s, him watching sitcoms in sweatpants, him reading books on the couch. Actually, most of the slides were him reading books on the couch, but he was pretty sure this wasn’t what Sam meant either.

“I don’t know,” he answered. Sam made an even grimmer expression.

“You know, moping around after a breakup is fine for a while,” he said.

“I’m not-”

“But keeping the photos of you two on your fridge?” he plowed on. “Keeping her spare key under the mat? And her toothbrush on the bathroom counter? Don’t you still have her toothbrush, too?”

Charlie didn’t answer.

“This is getting out of hand,” he continued. “I know you really cared about her, but Tori is gone. You have to start living your life, man.”

Charlie sighed and sat up off the couch, putting a scrap of paper into his book to mark where he left off.

“I know,” he replied. “It’s just...hard.”

“I know. But life is hard,” Sam responded. “I’m going to get to work. I’ll see you there in an hour.”

“Yeah. See you.”

Sam shut the door sternly behind him, and Charlie could hear him replace the key under the mat before walking away.

He sat up, thinking about what to eat before work. He had been working the past few months, but sometimes he couldn’t bring himself to do it. Much like his flat, everything from the rickety bar stools to the graffitied bathroom stalls had special significance to him now. Some nights, he remembered the good things; how she had sat at the bar while he poured drinks until his shift ended, and how she had wanted to go dancing. He didn’t like dancing all that much but he liked her, and so they were out until the clubs closed, then running around the city, tipsy until sunrise.

Other nights, though, he remembered that text. She had told him before, of course, that she was going to finish school in London. They had some of the best acting programs in the world, and she was going to be one of the world’s greatest actresses, so she had to go. He’d asked if she’d stay, and she’d said no. He had known she wouldn’t, but it was worth a try. What he didn’t know was that she was going to call things off.

_I'm sorry_, the text read. _I had fun, but I think it's better to end things now_.

He’d been wiping up the bar and getting ready to go home when he got it. He tried calling her, but she didn’t pick up, so he ended
up staying on Sam’s couch that night. When he got home the next morning, most of her things were gone. The only things left were the key, the toothbrush, a couple fridge magnets, and some polaroids he had found buried in a kitchen drawer. It took her two weeks to finally call him back. He said that he missed her, and she said that she was seeing someone, so that was that.

After that phone call, he had fished the polaroids out of the drawer. The two of them smiled blissfully up from the glossy paper; holding each other, kissing each other, laughing with each other. He had looked at them for a long time before sticking them on the fridge with Tori’s flower magnets. He hadn’t touched them since. He didn’t want to ruin them.

Charlie got up from the couch with a sigh, and went to the kitchen, looking at them. He knew Sam was right, but it didn’t feel right. He reached up to unpin them, but he couldn’t make himself do it. Maybe it would be easier tomorrow. He reached into the freezer to get a microwave meal then went to go find some clean clothes for work.

*****

A few days later, Charlie was making macaroni and cheese. He was late to work again. He fully expected the phone call.

“Hello?”

“What the hell, man?”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry, I’ll be there soon,” Charlie said through a mouthful of noodles. He was hesitant to say that he was doing better, but he’d actually cooked food for the first time in weeks. He considered this a step in the right direction, but Charlie could tell that this wasn’t going to change Sam’s mood at all.

“Damn right, you will!” he growled through the receiver. “Do you know how many people are in here? There are three bachelorette parties. Three. I’ve made so many cosmos in the past hour I can’t see two feet in front of my own face!”

Charlie’s phone made a beeping noise.

“There’s someone on the other line,” he said. “I’ll see you in ten minutes.”

“Eleven, and you’re fired!” Sam blustered. Then the line went dead. Charlie clicked over.

“Whullo?” he asked, mouth stuffed with pasta again.

“Charlie?”

He dropped the phone. The pot almost fell off the stove, and he had to catch it before it hit the floor. He scrambled to pick his phone up off the linoleum and choke down his mouthful of food.

“Um, wow, Tori, hi, uh-”

“Is this a bad time?”

“No!” Charlie cried out. He put the whole pot of noodles in the fridge and threw his fork in the sink with a loud clang. “Not at all! Why? Um, how, how are you?”

“I’m doing well, actually,” she answered. “I was... I wanted to talk to you is all.”

“I wanted to talk to you is all. He steadied himself against the counter as that sunk in.

“I’ve been wanting to talk to you, too,” he answered. The clock ticked rhythmically from the wall and Victoria did not reply. Charlie racked his brain for something normal to say.

“How’s London?” he asked finally.

“London is nice,” she answered quietly. Charlie nodded in response, then quickly realized his mistake.

“Oh. Yeah? That’s good. I’m glad. . .” he trailed off. Months of wanting to hear her voice, and he didn’t even know what to say. He bit his lip. “How’s your boyfriend?”

“I don’t know,” she answered. He heard her laugh dryly under her breath. “We broke it off.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t know,” she answered. He heard her laugh dryly under her breath. “We broke it off.”

“Oh,” he answered.

“Yeah.” She sounded tired. “Things were good but... it wasn’t them same. He just wasn’t you.”

“Oh.”

Charlie couldn’t help it. A giddiness started to rise in his stomach
that made him tipsy with the idea that maybe this wasn't all there was. Maybe they could try again.

“I really miss you,” she said. “I miss being with you.”
“I miss you, too,” he answered. “I’ve missed you since you left.”
“I missed you as soon as I got off the plane,” she said earnestly. “I wish I hadn’t sent that text.”

His head was spinning, but he wasn’t drunk, he was drowning.

“I wish that I had followed you,” he responded. “I wish I had told you I love you.”

He didn’t know what made him say it. He wanted to take it back as it left his mouth, even as he was forming the words.

Tori didn’t say anything.

He clenched the phone tightly in his hand and held his breath.

There were some things in this world that you couldn’t unsay, and the silence that followed was strained. Every second that ticked by made his gut clench tighter, but Charlie waited. Finally, she spoke.

“Come to London.”

Charlie blinked.

“What?”

There was a beeping noise in Charlie’s phone. Sam. It had been more than ten minutes but he didn’t care. He didn’t dare hang up.

“Come to London,” she repeated.

The beeping stopped, then immediately started again. Sam would have to forgive him.

“Okay.”

*****

Sam was less than pleased when he found out why Charlie was late to work. Charlie explained to him what happened; how Victoria still loved him, she was sorry about what happened, and he was going to see her in London so that they could work things out.

“That sounds like a load of crap,” he’d said, but Charlie just frowned and booked his plane ticket. He had always wanted to see London, and he liked the idea of sightseeing with Tori. He spent the whole drive to the airport telling Sam about the things he found in the guidebook, and Sam all but kicked him out of the front seat when they arrived. It was a miracle that Charlie could pull his nose out of it long enough to get through security.

Charlie’s phone rang almost as soon as he stumbled through the line. With his suitcase in one hand, his shoes dangling from the other, and a laptop clamped under his arm, he had to hobble his way to a bench before answering the call. He thumbed his phone open quickly, hopping on one foot to try and get his shoe back on.

“Hello?”

“Charlie. Hey.”

“Oh, hey,” he said, grinning when he recognized the voice. Tori.

“Where are you?” she asked.

“I’m in the airport,” he answered cheerily. People bustled around him, looking hassled and frantic as they tried to get to their planes. “I think my plane is boarding soon.”

Tori didn’t reply.

“Tori? Are you still there?”

“Yeah,” she sighed. “Charlie? I called because I need to tell you something . . .”

Charlie tucked the phone between his ear and his shoulder so he could tie his shoes.

“What’s up?” he asked casually. He wondered if there would be meals on the plane. Should he bring his own food? No, it was a long way to London, there had to be food on the plane.

“It’s just, um . . . God, this so awkward, I don’t know how to say it.”

“If you want, you can just wait a few hours and tell me in person,” Charlie replied, smiling at the thought. “Would that be easier?”

“Oh, God, no. Listen, I don’t know if you still want to come. I mean—I’d love to see you, but considering . . . but, I don’t want things to get weird.”

“Jesus, it’s just— it’s about James.”
Charlie finished tying his shoes and shuffled through his things looking for his passport.
“What about him?”
Silence. Charlie paused. Something inside him was prickling unpleasantly.
“Tori? What about?”
“We’re back together.”
The bottom dropped out of Charlie’s stomach like a trapdoor.
He had seen things like this in movies; the main character finds out the murderer is his father, or the sister had kidnapped the baby, and everything goes hazy. In a perfect moment of shock and clarity, the world slows down, the noise fades away, the character is suspended in time.

Charlie didn’t think the movies did it any justice.
“You should still come, of course,” Tori said. It sounded like she was underwater. “I’d still love to see you...”
Charlie’s thumb hit the end call button before she could finish her sentence. Where mere seconds ago his surroundings had been eerily absent, they were now unbearably present. The whir of hundreds of rolling suitcases mingled with the squawks of angry children, beeping wands in security, people prattling into their cellphones, business shoes squeaking against the floor.

With trembling hands, Charlie punched Sam’s number into his phone. It only rang through twice.
“What’s up?”
“Tori got back together with James,” he blurted out. The words felt foreign as he said them, and even after, hanging thickly in the air like cigarette smoke. For a moment, there was silence, then Sam let out a long, low whistle.
“Shit,” he said. Charlie didn’t know what to feel. Should he be upset? Angry? Did it even matter? For the moment, he just felt empty. As he looked at the nonrefundable plane ticket clenched in his hand, the intercom beeped to life.

Now boarding flight 237, service to London, at gate 3B. Again, now boarding flight 237, service to London, at gate 3B

“What do I do?” he asked. There was a sudden shuffle as some people around him started moving in the direction of the gate.
“I don’t know,” Sam said. “What do you want to do?”
Charlie clutched the handle of his suitcase. What did he want to do? Was there anything to be done? He thought about going home, throwing away his ticket on the way out the door. He thought about just sitting there, on that bench, until security finally tossed him out the door themselves.
“I guess I’m coming home,” he replied. The sadness finally began to creep in. He had no business there anymore. He didn’t really want to go home, but he might as well save security the hassle.

His only other option, he supposed, was to go anyways. He had the ticket, he had his things, he was already in the airport. It wouldn’t be too hard to find a place to stay in London. But why would he go? He couldn’t see Victoria; not now.
“What are you thinking?” Sam asked him.
“I’m not sure,” he replied. What did he want?

Final boarding call for flight 237, service to London, from gate 3B. Final boarding call for flight 237 service to London from gate 3B.

“Sam, I’m going to have to call you back.”
“Sure,” he said. “Just, uh . . . I’m sorry, man. If you need a ride or something, let me know.”

Sam hung up the phone, and Charlie slipped it back into his pocket. He stood up from the bench and gripped the handle of his suitcase. With a last deep breath, he squared his shoulders and tried to walk with the conviction of the passengers around him.

It was hard; the weight of gravity alone made his knees shake, we're
\textit{back together} echoed in his head like a scratched CD, his hand ached from the tightness of his grip on the suitcase. But, he did it anyways. He took long strides, stared straight ahead, walked right up to the gate, and with slightly shaky hands, he gave the flight attendant his passport and his plane ticket. She smiled with bright red lips.

“Welcome aboard,” she said cheerily. Charlie nodded and made his way down the gangplank. He made a point of not looking back.

*****

Charlie trudged up the familiar stairs to his apartment, keys rattling as he opened his door. With a soft sigh, he dropped his bag to the floor and walked in, running a hand through his disheveled hair. It was not yet sunrise, and is only coherent thought was that he needed a strong cup of coffee. It took him longer than usual to get his coffee machine in order, but soon the filter was nestled into the lid and the water began to boil.

With the coffee underway, Charlie lazily unzipped his backpack, letting its contents spill onto the counter. Wallet, keys, cheap cell phone he bought for the week, gum wrapper, and an envelope of photos.

He reached under the flap and pulled out the polaroids; him inside the Tower of London, him inside the London Eye, him having a drink with some Londoners at a pub, him riding a bright red tour bus. The photos had actually turned out quite well, he thought, thumbing through his adventures, even though some things hadn’t worked out as planned.

With a frown, he began to quietly consider his little flat, listening to the steady drip of the coffee machine. An entire week had gone by, but nothing was different. The dishes he cleaned were still in the drying rack, the clock still ticked steadily in the corner, the light had still flickered for a moment before turning on. Charlie didn’t know what he had expected.

The coffee machine beeped as the last of the coffee dripped into the pot. He poured some into the biggest mug he owned and took a long sip. Still weary from the jet lag, but having only one clean pair of underwear left, he set about putting his laundry into the hamper and trying to find some quarters for the machine.

It was as he was pawing fruitlessly through a drawer in his bedside table that his phone buzzed with a new message. It was Tori. His heart lurched unpleasantly before he picked up the phone and thumbed it open.

\textit{I’m really sorry about what happened. I’m leaving James for good. Call me?}

That longing had returned to his stomach and Charlie’s hand lowered to his side, the phone still dangling from his fingers. He stared unseeingly at the ground long enough to catalog every fiber in the carpet, rubbing the back of his neck.

Slowly, he made his way across the room and into the kitchen, the polaroids spread out on the countertop. He ran his fingers over their glossy fronts, each one immortalizing a memory, a smile. He turned the phone over and over in his hand, then set it gently on the counter.

Charlie picked out a photo of him in the London Eye, beaming against the backdrop of the great city transformed into pieces of a doll house. He walked over to the fridge, and with steady hands, pulled a magnet from its surface. A picture of Victoria fluttered to the floor, and Charlie pinned the picture of him in the London Eye in its place.

Charlie stood back to admire his work, sipping coffee and listening to the birds begin to chirp outside. The sunrise streamed golden through the window, and for the first time in a long while, Charlie started to feel something soft, warm. Something like home. He smiled.
What about monday night
eight pm
walking around with
a half eaten burrito,
crying.

Stride by stumble
through
pockmarked puddles
and pooled projections of
high wire flickering
lodged in the asphalt.

There’s nothing
in the quiet,
perfect, wordlessness
of night.
In the soft drone of
sectionalized suburbia.
And in the trees,
sowed
in rows of hang-low
fluorescent-glow
photosynthesis.

There is a way
to hear sirens down the street
and pay attention to the
rhythm of footsteps,
instead.

And if following streetlights
there is something
greater,
stronger.
Than head down,
toes forward.

Something more than
pavement and
glossed soles in the beat
of rain.

Please,
hold it in.
Sunday morning catching up to us as we run down Capitol Hill,

I search for a memory to cherish on the bus ride home.

The stars are pink from the lights of an Easter window display.

You say there is a show somewhere, so we listen for the music buzzing distant and hear its hum from the bricks of a run-down building four blocks up.

Inside, a green lantern lights the crowd like visitors from another planet.

You try to whisper in my ear but the guitar is too loud and I can only watch as I lose you in the maze of dancing bodies.

Under the current of amplifiers and “this is our last song” I hear your laugh echoing through the backdoor.

I find you pissing in the alleyway, falling over all smiles saying, “Today is a holy day.”
LONGING

tiare gill

I desire to be somewhere secure
in the snow-flecked mountain heights.
Sometimes, you will find them shrouded
in ink-colored clouds and engulfed in rain.
I will be on ridges watching for the apparition of lightning,
and feeling the rumble of thunder on my skin.

Other days you will find me among the fallen leaves,
lying down on lush grass with my face directed upward—
toward the warmth of the sun.
And I will stay there until my hair grows long
and my limbs turn as brown
as the damp earth underneath me.
THE BIBLIOPHILE’S LEGACY

cody chun

Size of collection: 2593 volumes
Percentage read: $2328 / 2593 = 89.7\%$
Number of hardcover volumes: 992
Number of softcover volumes: 1598
Number of volumes with damaged/missing covers: 3/1 (Spilled coffee required the removal of the cover of *To the Lighthouse*)
Number of first editions: 72
Number of volumes exceeding 500 pages: 790
Number of volumes exceeding 1000 pages: 38
Average book length: 69,500 words
Last acquisition: *Notes from Underground*, Fyodor Dostoevsky
Number of books by Camus: 11
Tenor of collection: melancholy
Temperament of collection: stoical
Pairs well with: Sangiovese
Estimated value of collection: $50,250

*Executor’s Note: Collection was liquidated by the legatees. A single book was kept, a collection of original poetry by the deceased, worth $0.*

CHARACTER STUDY #2

crystal poole

He’s all stutter jump, pacing back and forth excitable to the touch—like lightning his words strike, his voice cuts.
He has a porcupine heart, and I’m stuck pulling thorns from my hands once more.
But this isn’t about me.
It's about the way he told himself that it’s okay—that people could love him for who he isn’t.
I wonder if he even cares, if he wants to care, when he stopped caring, or if he never did.
I know he cares.
He throws up walls as he tears them down.
He doesn't want to be seen, but that’s all he’s ever wanted, and he hasn’t quite learned how to deal with his own chaos.
But I’ll pick up the pieces of shattered glass he throws at me when he can’t hold them, and I’ll show him how to make pretty windows out of brokenness, so he knows—
he’s not a sad story.
LIKE a sucker punch to the face,
It'll knock you flat on your ass
And you'll sit, reeling,
Marveling at what hit you.

Like coffee through your lips,
It'll burn your tongue
And leave you tasting bitter,
But you'll still crave it in the early morning.

Like a song you've just found,
You'll want to play it over and over
Until you hate it
And you'll start listening to the radio again.

Like a magician's assistant,
It'll be a distraction,
And in a puff of smoke, I'll vanish,
And you'll realize that you're alone.
I have felt water as outer space,  
fresh and cold on my skin;  
I have heard animal cries  
reverberate between the Earth’s vertebrae;  
I have tasted wind as  
glacial melt; I have smelled prehistory  
in the age of the untainted pines and dust.  
I have touched where the planet bends  
and becomes Big Sky.  
All this makes me feel small  
and incorporated, like a  
granule of sugar in a wedding cake.  
But when Big Sky splinters  
into storm, I feel  
big as a glacier-carved valley, I feel  
big as a storm amplified, I feel  
big as a must stone suddenly given a voice,  
I feel  
like every raindrop, every soundwave,  
every photon of light birthed on a mountain-top  
for just long enough to illuminate  
a field of lupines bent in the wind, I feel  
like  
everything.  
When Big Sky splits  
I crack  
and all that is inside of me  
bursts forth in a rumble  
and a flash of lightning.  
When it thunders,  
I am Big Sky.
He paused at the door of the apartment. He had made it this far without overthinking things, was he really going to start now? *She's not going to be in there,* he reminded himself. He wasn't sure it would be better if she were. For a split second, the image of her face flitted through his mind, surprised and overjoyed as he entered unannounced. He shoved it away, perhaps with more force than necessary. *Focus.* He took a breath, and before his thoughts could wander again, he turned the key and in one swift motion stepped in, shut the door, and locked it. *Her smiling face as he turned...* Exhaling, he forced his mind to go blank, but he could not shake that hopeless hope that hung at the back of his mind.

The apartment was still as a grave. The watery morning sunlight barely lit the room, and the eerie silence struck him like a hammer. A soft *tch* escaped his lips. *Of course it's empty. Focus.* He took a few steps into the open expanse that was kitchen, dining, and living room. He noticed the musty, dank smell of smoke that hung in the air, acidic from the cigarettes she refused to quit and earthy from the incense she swore held magic. He wondered if the haze would ever go away, or if it would forever be her imprint on the small, one-bedroom apartment she called home. A few steps brought him into the kitchen, where small details started to prick his attention: dirty dishes, untouched mail, dying flowers with a cloud of fruit flies, scattered pens and hair ties and doodads. They were all piled in the corners like snow drifts of life. *Didn't she ever tidy?* He shut down that thought too. He was not here to judge. He was here to clean.

He decided to start with the mail. It was safe, normal, and easy enough to sort and organize. Junk mail in one pile, bills in the other. Incredibly, there were a few handwritten letters, which he set aside to be returned with a note. He didn't know how she did it, but she managed to have pen pals in this day and age. On the last letter, he read the swooping cursive on the small blue envelope and wondered if she had ever told him about this person. What kind of relationship did they have with her? Were they family? Friends? Strangers?

He felt it then. A whisper in his ear. A gentle tap on his shoulder. He turned. His torso was contorting before he could stop it. His breath caught in his throat as he scanned the room, his eyes searching and unmistakably finding.

*She was there, in everything.*

She was laughing on the couch, setting a bottle down next to its brethren. She was spinning in the center of the living room, giggling as she watched her skirt twirl. He watched her flit from one corner of the room to the next: lighting incense, admiring the flowers, throwing back the drapes. Sighing, dancing, laughing, singing. She was there and living and he couldn't escape her, no matter where his eyes fled. He looked down into his hand — to the letter that he held — and she was there. A shadow of her upon him as he caressed the name of the letter. He saw her face smile with recognition and set aside the letter for a time when she could cherish the opening.

A teardrop fell. His next breath hitched. He clutched the letter to him like a lifeline, but it wasn't enough. It was *for* her, but it wasn't *her.* He stumbled into the living room, a dumb imitation of her airy steps, clutching at anything he could get his hands on. He clawed at her clothes, piled on the chair, seeking asylum from the breaking of his dam and finding only more cracks. He sunk to his knees, then to the floor.

*He could not bear to stand where she had stood.*
He was not worthy.

Breathing came hard, but when it did, it was filled with her ethereal scent, so rich and so ubiquitous that if he closed his eyes, he could almost imagine that she was there. A broken sob woke him from his reverie. His control shattered, he surrendered to his grief, his loss. He wanted to scream and curse and howl, but all that came out was the sound of his breaking heart. He fell to pieces, pounded by sorrow until there was nothing left except his bleeding heart and the shards of himself to grind into it.

Even after an eternity, his essence hollow, sore, and shaking, he was not ready to be whole again. Pushing himself together and onto his knees, he looked around the room. She was still present, but a ghost now. No longer taunting him, but guiding him.

Clutching the letter and the piece of clothing he had grabbed (it was one of her favorite tank tops; a black one with bright teal and yellow paint splatters on it), he let himself cry gently. He hadn't realized there was this much water in him, and he wondered distanty where his body was pulling in the reserve. Having mourned that incrementally small facet, he crawled over to the cider bottles that hugged the couch and cried over them, adding one to his collection. He then stumbled to his feet and wandered over to the window, looking out over her mid afternoon view. He lit one of her cigarettes and let it burn in the incense holder; he breathed deeply, feeling light-headed, and swayed with the smoke.

He was exhausted, raw, and unmade, but he felt a faint trickle of new life. He looked down at the shelf where the incense lay and noticed the stack of papers there, noise complaints from anyone and everyone in the vicinity. He laughed, a single, ragged sound that fought its way out of his throat. His fingers chose the topmost complaint to partner with the letter.

He turned to the stereo system which held a place of honor, guarding the flanks of the fireplace. He let his feet, a little more steady now, take him to them. He thumbed through her CDs, stacked to fall at the slightest provocation. He shook his head at some of the more ridiculous ones, a smile tugging at the heavy corners of his mouth. He stopped when he came to the first one they had listened to together. He hesitated for a moment, and then fiddled with the system until he got it to accept the CD. The sound came vomiting out, almost howling him over, and he struggled to find the volume knob. He turned it down a few notches, but stopped. The beat reverberated through his bones and heart and head, he felt rather than heard the music. It swayed his hips and moved his feet and suddenly he was dancing. Swirling, spinning, stumbling; living where she had lived. Caught up in the euphoria of the moment, he threw his head back and laughed, laughed. Holding his pieces of her, he stretched his arms out as far as they could go, feeling them sway and dip and soar like newly minted angel wings.

After that, it was easier. No less painful; tears still fell and sorrow still courted, but this time the pain was an old friend, and the tears traversed a familiar path. He began sorting things. At first, nothing was worthless enough to warrant the trash, but eventually he conceded that the napkin she had used to sop up grease on her pizza could be parted with. He had a secret pile too, one he pretended didn't exist, but every now and then he would set something aside next to the tank top, the bottle, the notice and the handwritten letter.

The work went faster the more he was at it. Soon the counters in the living room were clean, as was the dining room table, the refrigerator, and the sink side of the kitchen. He faced the living room again, the island between them, and looming above it all, her bouquet of rotting flowers. He knew them vaguely as big flowers; chrysanthemums, rhododendrons, sunflowers. He saw them as she...
must have seen them; beautiful, vibrant, full of life. An inspiration. He grabbed the vase and held them. What does one do with rotting flowers?

He took the vase over to the fireplace and dug around in the recycling, pulling out all the slips of paper and crumpled receipts he could and throwing them into the fireplace. The flames that sprang up were voluptuous and hungry, but he waited until they had lived a little before he fed them the flowers, one at a time. As the last one burned, he realized that the flame was going to go out soon, starved in the heat of first life. It had nothing substantial to survive. Unwilling to let the fire die, he cast around for other things to burn, anything at all, but he had pulled everything he could.

His eyes fell on his secret pile.

They were things that she had left her mark on: a receipt on which she had doodled a daisy, a sticky note reminding herself to get milk, quit smoking, take tap lessons, and vacuum, a bottle that had the imprint of her lips on the rim. He brought the pile over to the fire, and slowly placed the daisied receipt onto the flames.

The heat dried his tears before they fell. The items that he’d picked up first were the last to go. The bottle he decided against putting in the fire and the letter he knew needed to be sent away. The tank top... He laid it on the top of the fire with such reverence he nearly burned the back of his hands. Empty, he watched the last of her go up in smoke. He felt like he could have stayed there for all time, but a nagging voice in the back of his head reminded him that people would be showing up soon. Sighing, he got up off the floor, turned the music down, and let the embers crumble quietly to ash.

On his way home, he bought himself a bouquet of sunflowers.
FROM A BLOCK OF PARMESAN

gianna olson

You share memories
like sprinkles of parmesan over spaghetti.

You speak of the family farm, the soil in dry heat
and the freckled vegetables in their rows.
Your papa calls your name over the tall stalks, long and yellow
like pasta
as the sun begins to set.

You tell us of Japan's lantern light and women wearing silk,
of Marines playing cards
and football in a field
where ash collects on fences -
stories that linger.
Oregano and rosemary.

We see your first love and your first house,
both beautiful and framed by oak trees
in the red sugo,
the magic sauce that Nona stirs
in a big pot over the stove,

the reason why we are here
clanking and twirling our forks.