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Slate Literary Magazine, 2012-2013

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Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

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The background of the cover is filled with intricate, hand-drawn patterns. At the top right, there are dense, parallel wavy lines that resemble a landscape or a textured surface. In the center, a stylized book spine is depicted with vertical lines and a small, illegible label. The main title is rendered in a bold, hand-drawn font, with the letters themselves filled with various patterns of wavy lines and hatching. The overall style is artistic and textured.

SLATE

LITERARY

MAGAZINE

◦ 2012 — 2013 ◦

Slate

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Hear me out, teach

Forrest Robinette

Stress

by Courtney Roach

Better bring your umbrella, freshmen, because this semester it's
Going
To
Pour information. And don't forget your rain boots or else all that
college knowledge
That you are about to be exposed to, whether you find it all to be
useful or not,
Will
Seep
Into your shoes, your socks and
Catch you by a horrible surprise. You must be prepared.
Failing to prepare is to prepare to
Fail and failing
Is not
An option.
And make sure you close your windows or else you'll be
Flooded
With words, other people's opinions and useless
Facts like dates, names, equations and formulas. Did I mention the
high winds that can quite easily knock you off your high horse? If
high school was a breeze, this, Quite frankly, is a
Tornado.
Keep an eye on that tree of responsibility
That grew out of nowhere, whose branches scratch your dorm win-
dows at night, reminding you of its presence. Don't let that tree fall or
else it will crush
You
Your spirit,
Your confidence.
Perhaps your best bet would be to evacuate, or at least stay to in your
own home in Your own town, because once you're in, once you're on
campus, there is no turning Back, you're
Stuck.

Our Pantomb

by Forrest Robinette

Spaceships were not part of the plan.
The Big Guy blushes and wants to crush us
Because Goldilocks passes Venus and backtracks from Mars.
Like dinosaurs, we are made to die right here.

The Big Guy blushes and really wants to crush us
Because brains got too fat and egos followed suit.
Like dinosaurs, we must die right here.
And fuel the machines of distant descendants.

Brains got surprisingly fat and egos followed suit.
But we should pay homage to the dirt and mud
By fueling the machines of distant descendants.
I guess we missed the Challenger hint.

We must pay homage to the dirt and mud
Because our little lives are such nice gifts.
I guess I missed the Challenger hint.
Our green, blue grave is pretty swell.

Our little lives are the best gifts,
But we forget our manners and
Say the green, blue grave isn't swell.
Who could believe Earth had all we needed?

We forget our manners.
We don't know when the porridge is just right.
Why can't we just believe Earth had all we needed?
With a single man's footprint we offend more than Nimrod.

We fly away when the porridge is just right,
Though Goldilocks passes Venus and backtracks from Mars.
A single, lunar footprint outshines the Tower of Babel:
Spaceships were never part of the plan.

It's ashes to ashes, kids, and we lease our dust.

Spinning...

by Victoria Trentacoste

I see a world from downside-up through a kaleidoscope of prisms. Colors bend and flex and merge into one another, mysteriously creating pockets for light to break through; gaps in the design. I think I'm drunk, but I can't be sure. Was it you who gave me that drink? My heart is singing too loud for my sensible thought to speak, and I don't care.

The birds are telling me to smile. Maybe I should listen. They have such sweet voices, those birds. One is asking the other over for tea, but the second doesn't want to go because he would much rather have tea with that third bird over there, the pretty blue one with the white mark on its head. I can hear them talking:

"Oh but it will be such a lovely tea! We can also have crumpets" (I haven't any idea what crumpets are but they sound delightful!) "with jam, or butter if you prefer."

"No, no, I am much too busy for tea and crumpets today. Perhaps some other time."

"Oh yes, oh yes, of course! of course! Another time..." Poor little bird, she doesn't know he wants tea with the blue bird! Dear me, who should tell her?

My eye catches you looking at me. Suddenly I'm flush and I swing around the long, thick, wooden pole holding up the canopy to hide from your gaze. Its rough bark rubs over my soft, unscathed hands as I twist my body around its being. I bury my head and my laugh behind the beam. Your footsteps tell me you're coming closer so I continue to twist around this dividing line between us; the game of cat-and-mouse has begun. I dip left and dive right, but your strong, solid hand finds mine and I'm paralyzed. You grin down into my hazy eyes that are dreaming back up at you. My body is calm as you reach your arm around my waist and draw me closer. You smell like leather and spices and I can almost taste your scent on my tongue. I've never felt so wonderfully lost before.

One of your hands reaches up and your fingers curl around my neck, your thumb resting just below my parted lips. I feel my head

slowly sink back and my eyes stare up above at the canopy. Greens and blues and yellows and browns dance before my eyes. It's all so magical, this moment, but I can't seem to find my thoughts. Did you steal them from me? You make our bodies start swaying together, to and fro, in and out, a rhythm like the lines in the bark. I feel a rush like fire over my body, and the world is spinning...



Victoria Trentacoste

An Almost Visible Line

by David Field

a glimpse of white
a girl with ashen hair rushes past,
her faded gray dress ten decades too late
I pause
pencil brushing against paper
watching as she slumps on the bench
and cries
her eyes tracing the stars

around her
stones are starting to gleam
age and mold retreating into nothing
flowers shrivel
while others burst into being
a shifting patch of color

the hedges shiver with voices
excited peals of laughter
bare feet padding on the grass

ancient chapel bells
hang above my head
their ethereal chiming
an echoing backdrop
to the constant sound of whiteness
whispering in my ear

I sit and stare
as memories spring to life
and I realize
there's an almost visible line
keeping me from the past

but I can't cross it
I can only watch
as the wind drifts in circles
and time flickers by
dancing with the mist

eventually a boy appears
sodden clothing as faded as hers
and he sits beside her weeping form
drawing her close
offering a gentle arm
which she takes with silent gratitude

the vision doesn't last
soon their silhouettes grow murky
two bodies entwined in darkness
fireflies turning in the night
until there is nothing left
but the glow of their shadows
fading into memory

a glimpse of white
and the dream is gone

Freja

by Benjamin Chait

A dark projector spits heavy crystal
Chandeliers on temporarily constructed walls.
Anorexic Angels float on chessboards,
People with flashbulbs for heads line the sides.
And then Freja glides out,
Like smoke from a cigarette.
Tussled dirt-brown hair
Held in two tight pigtails.
From her skeletal frame lies a white coat,
Bleeding with yellow and ghostly palm trees.

A strutting half-dead girl going to the beach,
She just chopped off the excess and the ends.

Taken by her true cool and hoarse dark voice,
This Lost Boy learns the future is a choice.

Spring-Summer Days

by Georgia Summers

Rarely am I allowed to sit in the front seat of our navy blue Mercedes, but today it is just my mother and I on our way to the supermarket. It is one of those rare spring-summer days, lounge-in-the-sun warm, when the weather still hasn't made up its mind.

My mother, turning the steering wheel with her smooth, small hands, asks a question. "Would you be upset if your father and I got divorced?"

I am supposed to say yes, and maybe cry a little, but lately, there has been too much crying in our house. In the past month, a hard, knotty numbness has taken over my thoughts.

"I don't think so." I pause. "I mean, as long as I can see Dad, right?"

"Of course." My mother reaches over to stroke my hair.

The rest of the day goes as planned. My mother puts oranges and cereal into the shopping trolley. We talk about the weather, needing new school shoes. What we listened to on the radio.

My parents don't get divorced. The crying, the arguing, the suitcases looming by the front door all stops with the heat of summer. But the numb, pins-and-needles feeling in my mind does not go away.

I am waiting for the day when silence will not be enough to avoid foreign lipsticks in the bathroom, or a pair of limpid contacts when my entire family has 20/20 vision. I throw these things away when I find them, but I know that my mother slips into the bathroom before I do each morning. So I watch and I throw away. I am waiting for my father's absences to stretch into weeks and months, instead of mealtimes, bedtimes, and weekends "with the guys." When it is all I can do to pretend that my father is at a late meeting, or on a trip abroad to some tepid country.

I am waiting for the weather to turn.



Victoria Trentacoste

Otto Von Bismarck at the Deathbed of Marie Von Thadden

by Forrest Robinette

The white curtains of her canopy
Flutter like silk flags of surrender.
A fog of nurses and lace
Recedes to reveal her face.

Her cheek, pale as a Prussian saber,
Cleaves me in two.
Her eyes, once a blinding blue, turn to
Ash as her fever burns her life away.

She is wearing a soft, pink dress.
Her favorite color now betrays her by
Accentuating the white death that
Leeches upon her skin.

I see bones pushing up through her flesh,
And wonder: Where is the plump girl I
Ran with into the Black Forest? What is this
Pitiful puppet sent to die in her place?

Hah! "The Iron Chancellor."
Marie is the beloved gap in my
Plate armor, a weakness I have
Nursed against better judgment.

Red stains on her handkerchief
Rend me more than red rivers
In the meadows of Austria and France,
Rivers I ordered made.

Here, my revered gods submit to a
Force more primal than war
Where one woman's hacking cough
Slices deeper than shrapnel.

Dear God, will you accept a prayer
After years of shared loathing?
If a being as kind and gentle as this
Should perish, I will abandon this Earth.

I hear my merciful God
Playfully respond,
"There is no iron here,
Only flesh."

-Pomerania, 1846

YOU

by Morganna Becker

I
cower in corners and crevices of coffee shops
smelling soaked fresh air
as lovers
go by.
Jealous perhaps
that I must put myself in
a caffeinated stupor
to create and make
in saturated presence
Which is why
my dying ember ebbs
toward the fire that burns with
you.
Such courage I wish I had
to be
but I don't know what
I want.
Maybe it's just
you.
I've lost my poetry.
Put your lips to mine
and heat the emptiness
Breathe backward the fire.
Put your lips to mine.
You.
I want
to be
you.
My dying ember ebbs
in saturated presence
A caffeinated stupor
jealous, perhaps,
as lovers
cower in corners and crevices of coffee shops.

The Man of Her Dreams

by Jamil Ragland

It's a muggy August afternoon, the kind where gnats gather in annoying clouds and buzz over the sizzling sidewalk. You're wearing your new Dunkin Donuts shirt, a yellow, itchy polyester monstrosity when Ms. Devin walks in and orders an iced coconut coffee, cream and sugar, light on the ice. You've known her since you were a kid, playing football with her son, Chris, who was big and fast but too nice to ever be really good. You haven't seen her since you moved off Broad Street seven years ago, but she remembers you, asks about your family, what your brothers are up to. She says excuse her dress, she's just come from yoga class, and you remember the first funny feeling you ever had in your pants was the day you knocked on her door to ask if Chris could come outside. She answered the door in a towel, her micro braids clinging wetly to the golden, skin of her collarbone, the curvature of her breasts exposed.

Finally she asks about you, what are your plans. You're in school, living off-campus, taking classes here and there to finish your degree sometime in the next decade. You want to teach, history or English, it doesn't really matter because they're basically the same subject. Oh really, she says, that's great because she's working with a non-profit in the city that tutors poor children free of charge, and they're looking to hire another tutor, if you're interested. She hands you her card and you notice that her nails are French manicured. Call to set up an interview, she says as she leaves. You discover after all these years that her first name is Yolanda.

A week later you're sitting in a folding chair outside an office in the Urban League on Woodland Street. You've walked or rode by this building hundreds of times and never went in, and now you're disappointed by the drab gray color scheme of the desks, the cubicle dividers, everything. You wonder who's going to interview you, and you give yourself a quick once over. You're wearing a dark blue short sleeve button up and the same pair of black slacks you always wear. The soles of your shoes are worn down on the inside from years of

continual use. You hope that the interviewer doesn't think negatively of you for not wearing a tie. If asked, you'll say that it's very hot outside, which it is, but the truth is that you don't own a tie except for the purple one your father bought you to wear to your cousin's funeral, but that only matches the purple shirt he bought you as well, and you couldn't wear that because it's long sleeve and it's very hot outside.

A woman's voice calls you into the office, and you're surprised to see Ms. Devin sitting behind another gray desk, and then you realize that of course she's going to be the interviewer, it's her card you have in your wallet. You walk in with your resume in your left hand and reach out with your right hand to take hers and notice how smooth her skin is and that she has no rings on and in fact she has no jewelry on whatsoever, no earrings or necklaces or anything. It intrigues you, but you snap back and thank Ms. Devin for seeing you today. She smiles and says please, call her Yolanda. You wonder when that happened, when you reached the age or the maturity level to be on a first name basis with people who are clearly your social superiors, and you think that maybe you haven't and she just hasn't realized it yet so you clam up to prevent yourself from saying something stupid. You stare at the tiny amount of cleavage exposed by her chocolate blouse as she explains that this interview is just a formality, that she's known you for years and that that you're just the kind of person the program needs, that it will be good for the kids to see a successful black male tutoring them. She takes the resume from you and says that you've grown up quite nicely. You smile and say thank you Yolanda, and as her name rolls off your tongue you feel a surge of heat in your chest that rises into your neck and envelops your brain and you think your head is about to explode.

She tells you to be back here, in her office, at noon on September 7th, that's the first day of the program. So you are. You're standing in her office, wearing the purple shirt and purple tie despite the fact that it's an Indian summer outside, because hot or not you don't think you can get away with wearing the blue shirt again. Yolanda introduces you to the other tutors. Mr. Mathis tutors in reading. He looks like your standard public school liberal, with spiked hair and thin rimmed glasses, here to do his service and relieve some white guilt. The other tutor, Mr. N, is Serbian and has a last name that no one can pronounce, so of course he's the math tutor. You spend the next three hours getting ready for students and trying to understand what Mr. N is saying to you when your first student arrives at 2:58 PM, a fat Hispanic boy

asking about colonial history between gasps of air. You hate colonial history, but you find it easy to work with him. In fact, before you know it, you've seen five students and it's 5:30, time to go home. Tutoring is a breeze, you relate so easily to the kids and you can explain things in ways they understand because it's how you explain it to yourself. And you've proven you don't need a college degree to help kids. It's just an expensive piece of paper, like you always knew.

Yolanda tells you that you've done well, that she can tell you've made a good impression with the kids. She asks you how you're getting home. You shrug. The bus, like always. Would you like a ride? Now you're in her silver Nissan Xterra, the sun a lazy golden disk right above the tree line, hitting you in the eyes as the A/C hits you in the chin. Yolanda is wearing a white sundress with pink floral patterns. To avoid staring at her legs you make small talk, about the weather, about sports, about anything, but you notice that you don't talk about Chris, because that would be weird. But why would that be weird? Because of what you're thinking about his mother?

As you pull onto Vine Street, approaching the two family house where your hole-in-the-wall room that you rent from an old Jamaican man who hates your music and your videogames and probably you personally is, the conversation turns towards relationships. Yolanda keeps her sob story impressively short: her husband left her, actually right after you moved. It was hard on Chris, but a relief for her. You try to do the same: you had a girlfriend out at University of Hartford, then you moved off campus, and that was pretty much the end. You never officially called it quits, but you noticed in May that she stopped calling, and if she wasn't going to call you then you weren't going to be the one to always call her. That door that inevitably comes at least a little ajar whenever a man and a woman spend any amount of time together was wide open, and you made your move. You put your hand on her thigh. Well, not you exactly, but something inside you that remembered that you hadn't had sex in four months, and while that was a relatively short time, sex was like money, in that you never thought about it until you had it, and then once you got some you always wanted more.

She looks at you, and then your hand, and you're surprised that you actually did what you were thinking, and you're even more surprised when she slides your hand to her inner thigh while pressing her soft lips against yours. You instantly begin calculating in your head: you're 23, which means Chris is 19, which means that if Yolanda had Chris when she was 18, which she didn't, she's at least 37, so yup

you're definitely making out with an older woman. That knowledge makes her kiss electrifying, and you kiss her back, with tongue and everything. Yet you can't totally enjoy it because you keep thinking that this must be a mistake, a momentary lapse in judgment on her part. What could she possibly see in you? Or maybe you're over-thinking it, and she's just going with the moment like you are, but do 40 year old women do that sort of thing? You're confused, and when your lips part, right at the moment that your libido lets you know that it's satisfied, for now, you hastily thank her for the ride and run into the Jamaican man's house and he chews you out for slamming the front door.

The next few days at work are hard. Not because of the kids. They're great as usual, attentive, funny, eager to learn. It's hard to work with them though and avoid Yolanda at the same time. You take your lunch on the far side of the cafeteria while Mr. Mathis rants at you about unequal wealth distribution. When she walks by to observe your work, you bury your face into your notes. You're not sure what happens now, but you feel like you're doing your best to avoid some kind of scolding. You're hoping that you can both forget about it and move on because you really can't afford to lose this job since you burned your bridges at Dunkin Donuts and that Jamaican bastard will have your ass on the streets in two minutes flat if you're even a day late with the rent. You repeat your mantra whenever you hear the door to her office creak open: just let this blow over, just let this blow over.

You've done a pretty good job of being incognito all week, and it's Friday afternoon and you're standing in front of the Urban League marveling at the city's public transportation system which requires you to take three buses to go the five miles to your house when the silver Xterra stops right in front of you. Would you like a ride? Your mind says no, but your loins say yes and there's really no contest there so you climb into her personal tank. You keep your hands folded across your chest, your eyes straight ahead and your mouth shut throughout the duration of the ride. You're in front of your house again, returned to the scene of the crime, and you don't know what to expect but you know to expect something which is why you won't just get out of the damn truck. Maybe you make out again? Maybe you get fired? You're completely caught off guard when Yolanda reaches over and unzips your jeans. Your mind races. Did you take a shower last night? You haven't shaved down there in months. Are you wearing those stupid Garfield boxers? You open your mouth to ask her what she's doing and to offer up dozens of excuses to explain away what she's going to find down there, then realize how stupid that would be and instead try to

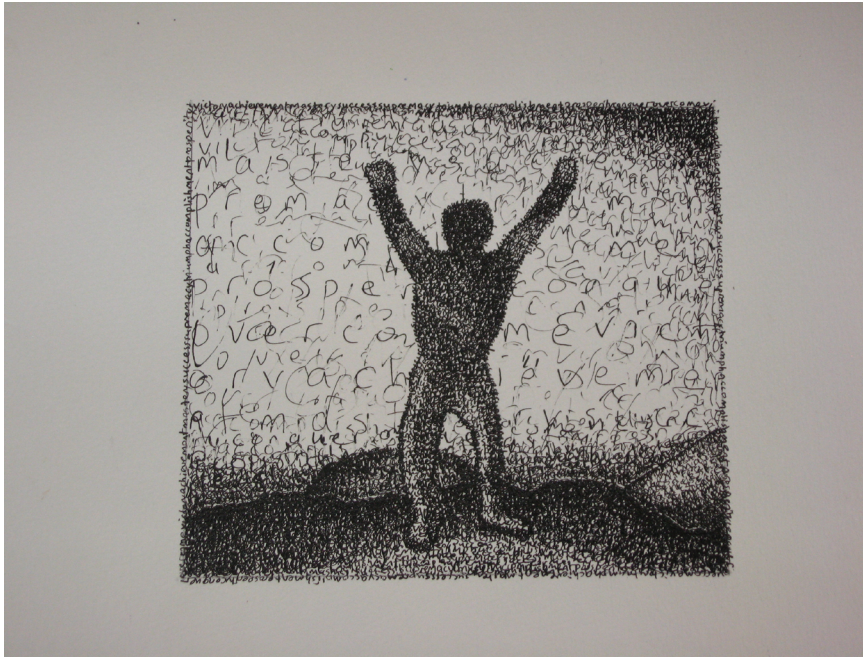
relax as you feel her soft, wet lips on you once again. There had always been a nagging question at the edge of your consciousness, growing in incessant force with every day you worked for \$8.25 an hour at Dunkin Donuts, with every class that you barely scraped by with a C, with every time you picked up your phone to call your ex but didn't because you were too afraid to admit that you'd made a mistake. When were you going to grow up? When were you going to feel confident enough to stop calling yourself a kid? Well, if you weren't a man at this moment, right now, with someone's mother blowing you, when would you be?

As you rise towards climax, you know that something has changed for you. You're having an affair with an older woman. How fucking awesome is that? This is *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, and you're Taye Diggs. You decide that you're going to fulfill her womanly needs, that you're going to be the man of her dreams. But you can't stop thinking about how cool this is. An affair! That just sounds so adult. In fact, you can't wait for her to finish so that you can get into her room and call the very first person in your phone book and tell them just how fucking awesome you are.

Harmonic

by David Field

Each power chord greets the flash
of staccato bulbs, rolling sweat
on bodies crowded, turning, wet,
swaying to each cymbal crash.
Shadows skip like film reels, a trick
of the syncopated lights, and
the bassist slaps one calloused hand,
keeping in time with the tender licks
of the guitarist. They wish this song
would last, they hope the ghost
of its melody sings on, but most
will forget it once it's gone.
The hi-hat trembles on the drum,
while practiced hands give one last strum.



David Field

I am frozen and I am not.

by Alex Lipton

Breathless, I gaze at the ceiling. It is a wintry sky; an intricately carved ice sculpture, its flowery patterns adorning our sky. Amid the scorching summer, these azure walls encase our bubble of winter. Blankets of light push through the windows giving our skin a bluish, icy tinge. Snowflakes hang, stationary, in the air with no intent of ever coming down. Time is as stagnant as the heavy, humid air just outside these ice walls; as motionless as a river in January.

But we never experience this cold. This room is not an embodiment of brutal blizzards past.

With him, I feel the heat of summer, the heat of him looking into my eyes, the heat of emotion dripping out of every pore. We are drenched in it. We, wrapped in frozen time, move swiftly, smoothly, radiantly. As luminous as the sun, we are the epithet of the summer heat, summer friendship, summer passion.

I am frozen and I am not.

King of Waste (with chords)

by Austin Tewksbury

C Am C Am C Am C Am
C Am C Am C Am C

C Dm
I change my point of view

F G
And now I see

C Dm
A place to strike at you

F G
So I just swing

C Dm
The man's neck flinches back

F G
The stick into his face

Am Dm
And for a moment I become

G C Am C Am C Am C
King of the waste

C Dm
The shade of my face deepens

F G
And I go in

C Dm
And there I watch the tide

F G
Roll down my chin

C Dm
And when my painting's out

F G
My teeth in a grin

Am Dm
I take the light off of my soul

G C Am C Am C Am C
And talk to it again

C Am
She saw me weeks ago

F Em
So far across the globe

Dm
But love is lost now

G C Am C Am
And I am just a shadow

C Am
With kings of waste to read

F Em
Their things and costumes piled on
me

Dm G
The image I am will emerge

C Am
Tomorrow

C Am C Am C
In the skin I borrowed

C Dm
I feel the burning sun

F G
And in my head

C Dm
I walk a burning path

F G
Into my death

C Dm
But I climb stairs and sing

F G
At all unlistening ears

Am Dm
And I create a living dream

G C Am C Am C Am C
To host my dying fears

C Dm
In the fading light

F G
My soul awake

C Dm
It cries out to me

F G
And I am brave

C Dm
And on the faith of brothers

F G
And sisters I hold dear

Am Dm
I ride the light like country lanes

G C Am C Am C Am C
And come up queen of there

C Am
He left for privacy

F Em
A misfit in khakis

Dm G
But kids' promises blow away

C Am C Am
In the breeze

C Am
With music to believe

F Em
The power of the dreams in me

Dm G
The song I am will become mine

C Am
Tomorrow

C Am C Am
In the skin I borrowed

C Am C Am
In the skin I borrowed

C Am C
In the skin

Chapped

by Kiely MacMahon

muscle memory
ties my tongue to the roof of my mouth
stuck like citrus between chemically whitened teeth

you linger in the crook of my neck
the shoulder crack
the molded fingers
the freckles over half my cheek

you make me sweaty like exposed brick
pounded red, orange, oxblood

you lie with half-truths and swallow your vowels

sunflowers get bigger and bigger and you
gulp palm fronds like seeds
wedged syllables inside your lip-tangerines



Victoria Trentacoste

White Clouds

by Benjamin Chait

Foolishly, I attempted to
Count the White Clouds
You painted on
The walls and the ceiling
Of your bold and blue room.

This must have been
Your attempt at
Holding Heaven.
Playing God.

When I tilted my head,
The rows of White Clouds
Seemed to create:

Adam's ribcage.
You must have been the heart.

Pumping stories of
Cinemas and shooters,
Sex and space
Into my veins.

Underneath those
White Clouds,
There was something new
About you,
In a familiar way.

Writing stories,
Cutting up strawberries,
Playing videogames.

You came to me,
You put your hand on my shoulder,
You said,

“

”

“I'm happy too,” I responded.

Though I doubted
The extent to which
You understood
My sincerity.

For I had searched for
White clouds
In parties,

I had searched for
White clouds
In drugs,

And I had searched for
White clouds
In empty sex.

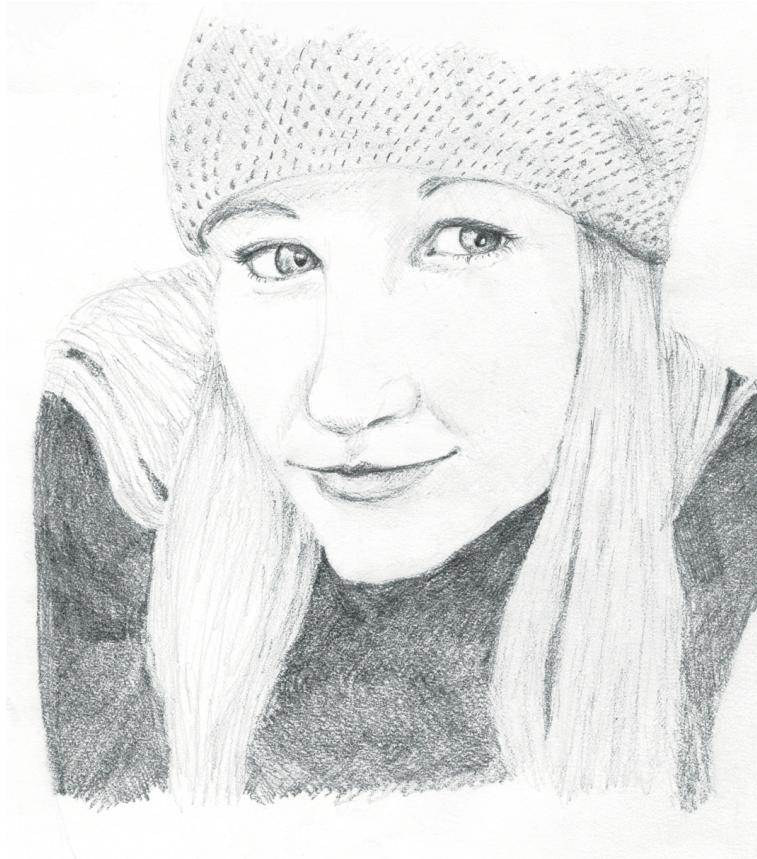
Yet somehow,
I found White Clouds
With you.

White Clouds like Viking ships
Prepared to set sail towards Neverland
On a sea of Teenage Dreams.

You were like a captain.
Floating on a tall mast.
Someone I had forgotten.
Someone I had once admired

Sharp blonde-looks.
Soft boyish-smile.
Subtle romantic-readiness.
A real imagination.

Fitzgerald would have loved you.



Georgia Summers

Carry My Dead Letters

by Georgia Summers

Carry my dead letters; bright reflection
Of sun stricken, salty flecked, wind bruised
Crystal, speak not of loss, nor of ill-used
Fate, but of breath, breeze, shoreline: perfection.
Pause to hear the compass and direction;
'Cross the Atlantic, our maiden cruised,
Oceanus and Aeolus to our ship fused,
Who kissed Fortune, Lady of rejection.
Luck changed; voices howled in terror, "O! pity
Those between the Devil and the deep sea;
Redeem us, sing to us safety's ditty,
That we may meet land, love, once more be free."
Speckled words that speak no truth of my fear
Carry my dead voice for the world to hear.

Arachnid

by David Field

The spider king scurries from
wall to wall, dragging a trail of
gossamer thread behind him;
a skywriter in miniature,
tracing letters too small to read
across cloudy sheetrock.

From afar, his throne looks
like a gray curtain, and he
a beetle king, content
with royal life –
but when he walks,
his palace trembles,
thread by spindly thread.

Each bend, each tiny node
where his pathways intersect
could house a city –
a world in which lesser insects
lie on beds of silk
and wonder at the workings
of their universe.

And perhaps we ourselves are
like those little folk,
spinning tales into the ether, while
our king treads lightly up above
on the tails he too
has spun.

Dogs Eat Each Other?

by Alex Hirschl

Literally Clifford is a penguin. He is an insurance salesman. Being flightless, Clifford is oft mocked by other birds. They call him “prey” and say things like “garcon, we’ll have some more champagne” and “get back on the pole” the last of which is particularly annoying to Clifford as he is clearly not a slutty reptilian skin-shedder. Clifford is insecure, not just about his lack of flight but digits in general. The latter of which has been a real hindrance to Clifford’s movement up the corporate ladder. Clifford recently equipped himself with dictation software, which allows him to operate his computer at the same rate of speed as most others in his office. He could never hope for the productivity of the tentacled or the ape’s ability to open doors, but mid level management is finally attainable. Clifford is not alone in his struggles. In fact not only his digitally challenged, but also his *digitally* challenged friends make it a point to look out for each other in the dog eat dog world that is mid level insurance. No matter how you slice it, dogs are assholes; they eat each other. Clifford’s recent software upgrade has influenced many others to adopt his method of dictating instructions rather than fumble around hitting key after key with beaks and snouts. Even the redundant spineless invertebrates could finally dream of a path out of customer service. This influence has not gone unnoticed by management. So much so that Clifford is chosen to travel to a high-profile prospective clients office to attempt to sell a policy. Clifford is nervous about this task. He realizes the only reason his ape boss has chosen him is that the prospective client is also a Penguin, but this fact does not mitigate Clifford’s anxiety. Clifford sets off in his car toward the prospective client’s office. On the way his car overheats and he calls a tow truck. The truck takes Clifford to a local garage where the mechanics are all dogs. Clifford, not pleased to patronize a canine establishment, goes across the street to a diner to wait. He orders a bowl of vanilla ice cream. Being a penguin without his bespoke eating utensils, Clifford must use his beak and ironically eat like the dog that is currently fixing his car. He finishes, pays and makes his way back across the street.

“Do you know what’s wrong with my car?” Clifford asks the mechanic, wary already of dealing with dogs. Popping his head up from under the hood with nametag on his shirt reading “Rufus,” he notices Clifford and says, “It looks like you blew a seal.”

Typical dog humor, they always have to take it there.

“No, it’s just vanilla ice cream. What’s wrong with my car?”



David Field

Hear me out, teach

by Forrest Robinette

Miss D, you're golden, but you're
Killing me. "Infatuation" is not part of my vocabulary at this, particular,
Moment. You say teen angst, passing passion, media influence. I say
Love, baby,
Love, and a little bit more! No fancy schmancy phrases, just
One word for my girl. One
Short, sweet syllable, Miss D. It
Rockets up right out of your rib cage, just feels good, like a big
Sneeze, like a blood-curdling scream, like a space launch. Love. It's
Red and I can paint your walls with it. Love. It's fat and it's
Huge and you get
Out of its way—

Do you know she eats cheese pizza with nutella? Wild, I
Know. She's full of that stuff. You see! You haven't even met
Her, Miss D. You haven't even seen my
Girl: Woman. Goddess. Helen. Aphrodite! And she may be a
Goddess, but what we've got is real, like a dusty
Lamp, a smelly sock, a broken alarm clock. You haven't seen her
Eyes, Miss D. Oh, when you see
Her eyes,
Those shimmering emeralds. Have you seen her twitch her tiny,
Pointy ears when she does Algebra? She hates her hair because she says
it doesn't behave, that reddish-brown mane, honorably defiant, might
as well don
War paint every morning when the straightener comes out. Straight
hair is
Fad and I will
Endure. Miss D, she is coarse, unruly, sheer
Perfection—

Her imperfections? I'm happily
Suffering from amnesia. Love-induced dementia. I would say that her
flaws
Vanished, but that implies they once
Existed. My biology? Okay, I know I have hormones, but my love is
not
Chemical. You can't bottle it in one of your test tubes and
Analyze it because this transcends science. It
Must! Crazy? You
Betcha. She keeps me up at night. Seven nights, to be exact: Anxiety
to
Exhilaration to terror to fate. The edge of a knife is quite Uncomfort-
able, but I'm
Lovin' the ride, Miss D. As for my studies? Okay,
Teach. Love is part of learning. I
Can learn the atomic number for Cadmium or
Chase my soul mate. I'll let you mull that one, Miss D!
Risk, you say? Odds don't apply to the love-struck.
We romantics make real
Shitty gamblers.

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