

The Pen
Fall 2013

Department of English and Theatre
University of South Carolina, Beaufort
One University Boulevard
Bluffton, South Carolina 29909
uscb.edu

Editors:

Scotti DeRouen
Sarah Doty
Victoria Hilton

Cover Art By: Sarah Doty and Victoria Hilton

Special thanks to Dr. Ellen Malphrus,
our faculty sponsor.

“...biting my truant pen,
beating myself for spite:
Fool! said my muse to me,
look in thy heart and write”

— Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*

Table of Contents:

Sarah Doty	<i>Introduction</i>	v
Anonymous	<i>The Thought Box</i>	1
Michael Alexander	<i>Languishing</i>	7
	<i>Treasure</i>	8
	<i>Emotionally Wrecked</i>	9
	<i>Emotionally Wrecked</i>	10
	<i>Pt. II</i>	
Tyler Cobb	<i>Relapse</i>	12
	<i>Tents</i>	13
	<i>Tangelo</i>	14
	<i>Slither</i>	15
	<i>Spring Cleaning</i>	16
	<i>Losing It</i>	17
	<i>Help</i>	17
	<i>Innovation</i>	18
Jessica Cooler	<i>Still Born</i>	19
	<i>All in a Day</i>	20
	<i>A Year and a Half Apart</i>	21
Scotti DeRouen	<i>Alpha and Omega</i>	24
	<i>Ever Spiral</i>	28
	<i>A Mirror's a Hell of a Drag</i>	31

	<i>A Pint for the Living, A Letter for the Dead</i>	33
	<i>Dr. Seuss Never Had a Clue</i>	35
	<i>It's Irrelevant—Her Relation to Me</i>	36
	<i>Skin, Sex, Sin</i>	38
	<i>If Only I Could Bottle Time</i>	40
Sarah Doty	<i>from Sugar, Sugar (an excerpt)</i>	42
	<i>1972</i>	47
	<i>Birthday Number Eight</i>	48
	<i>Untitled</i>	49
	<i>Everything, Nothing</i>	50
	<i>Jars</i>	52
	<i>We Share the Same Genes, (But Yours are Bigger Than Mine)</i>	53
	<i>We Share the Same Genes (Part II)</i>	54
	<i>Lane</i>	57
Jess Goff	<i>2013/10/4</i>	59
	<i>from UGPA (working title)</i>	60
	<i>from UGPA (working title)</i>	64
	<i>from Rainy Planet (working title)</i>	67
	<i>from Shunkashuutou (working title)</i>	69
	<i>from Shunkashuutou (working title)</i>	73
Victoria Hilton	<i>The Trouble with Zaide</i>	75
	<i>Lemniscate</i>	77

	<i>The Playroom</i>	81
	<i>Duct Tape Dreams</i>	82
	<i>The Ace in the Sleeve</i>	83
Ciera C. Love	<i>Bottles</i>	84
	<i>Dreaming</i>	85
	<i>Real Nightmare</i>	87
Poetry Workshop	<i>The Exquisite Corpse</i>	88
Fall 2013		

Dear Reader,

We see *The Pen* as an opportunity. No matter where we have come from or where we will go next, we have come together within the pages of this little book. Forever connected, with the countless hours spent searching the creativity within our hearts and minds, we have become part of something far greater than ourselves. We share this with not only each other as writers, but with you as a reader. Each and every contributor of this Fall edition has written, rewritten, polished, and written again to give you the best work we possibly could. We invite you to experience our reflections of the world around us as well as the world we have created with the written word.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr. Ellen Malphrus. With her support over the years, and as each semester comes and goes, she has both helped guide us when we needed it and let us fly when we were ready. Our fiction and workshop classes have allowed us not only the opportunity to learn, grow, and find the creativity within ourselves, but also to come together as writers—an unspoken bond we will forever share.

This Fall 2013 edition of *The Pen* especially reflects this incredible gift, and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Sarah Doty
President, Society of Creative Writers
Fall 2013

Anonymous

The Thought Box

I've never moved.

Ever.

Been in the same place for my whole life.

It's a nice enough place, though sometimes things get old and boring.

When it became my own, the first thing I did was clean. I scrubbed for days. It was monotonous work, but it had to be done if I was going to feel at home there. I did after a while, but only once I'd rearranged the furniture and got rid of a lot of clutter.

There was no writing desk in there, and I didn't really have room for one anyway, so I ended up putting an old mirror on two crates to make a low coffee table. You know, like those things on Pinterest. Except theirs was prettier. Why? Because it wasn't a necessity.

The mirror's about as old as I am, but I thought it would be alright as a table top. Now I'm not so sure.

That table's a catchall for everything: books, notes, papers, food when it's around, clothes, random junk . . . that's where it all goes. The place itself is pretty tidy – or at least it is periodically, but that mirrored table is the one thing that collects the most stuff, and it's got the cracks and chips to prove it. And not only does it catch everything, but it's a conversation piece, apparently. That wasn't the original intent, but the first thing people notice when I let them in is that table mirror.

Take last week, for instance.

I had some friends over, and it was the first thing they started talking about. They loved it. They said it was different, and bright, and beautiful, but the funny thing was, they acted like the chips and cracks weren't there. Maybe they saw them, maybe they didn't. I had all the lights on, and I guess that sort of disguised them. But all the clutter was gone and put away, so I don't understand how they missed them.

But then, I suppose sometimes I forget they're there, too.

I really want to repaint this place, but I can't decide on a color. I've heard of people painting two opposing walls one color, and the other two another color, but I don't like that – it's too much confusion. This room is confusing enough as it is: bookshelves against the length of longer wall, some books printed and some empty. A bed in the corner for when I just can't operate anymore, and a few small stacks of books around that, too. There's a rug in the middle of the room, the one that I sit on while I'm writing at the mirrored table, but I have to admit that when I'm feeling rushed while cleaning, I tend to sweep a lot of things under that rug . . . some of the stuff should probably be thrown out, but I can't find the energy to do it most days.

Either way, I need to pick a color.

I finally choose a light cream color. It's got a hint of grey to it, but that's fine with me because all those books and my bedspread add enough color on their own. I think a nice, calm, neutral shade is just what I need.

I know you're supposed to open the windows when you paint, but it's been unseasonably cold on and off for the past month or so. I turned on the fan instead, thinking that would be alright. I actually love the smell of paint. I know it's not the best thing for brain cells, but my nose cells don't seem to mind it at all.

The painting itself didn't take long at all. It took me two days to finish because it took a while for the paint to dry. I don't think opening the windows would have helped – frost would've gotten all over the walls, which I don't fancy in the slightest.

A few splatters of paint got onto the mirrored table; I thought I had covered the whole thing with newspapers, but maybe the fan blew some off. I got the paint off, but only after a lot of scrubbing. Now there's marks on the mirror from that too.

A friend came over today and dumped all her stuff on my table and now there's a hairline crack in it. She didn't notice, and I didn't say anything, but I'm not sure how much longer that mirror will be around, which is a shame, because I was just getting used to it as it is now.

I remember when my fiancée used to come over. He was always very careful about the table: he'd put drinks on a book or DVD case because I never got around to buying coasters, and if we were eating something, he'd be careful about his plate *and* what was on it, and he'd never put his feet on it either.

He'd ignored the scratches and cracks and had said that the mirror was flawless.

Of course, that was before I broke it off.

It's been too quiet in here lately, so I've let my Pandora play in the background. No matter what station I start with, it always seems to come back to Christina Perri. All of them. And it's always the same two songs, *Jar of Hearts* and *The Lonely*.

Always the same two. . .

And I can't get them out of my head. . .

He came over the night I planned to break it off. I knew it was going to hurt him, but I had to end it; it wouldn't have been right to go on that way. It would have been lying to myself, and lying to myself would be lying to him.

We argued.

I got angry.

It killed me to kill him.

I remember he looked down at that pathetic mirror on top of those cheap crates and he said, "I remember when the face I saw in the mirror and the face I see now were the same person."

That was the day he saw the scratches, and the scuffs, and the chips, and the other marks of wear and tear that I couldn't clean up or mask anymore, and I began to wonder how many he'd put there himself that I hadn't noticed.

That was the day we both died to each other.

That was the day I became afraid to let anyone else see them too, because I didn't think I could survive the murder of someone else.

Since then, I've tried to stop caring about that table. Yeah, I made it, but people tended to not think

much of it after a while: it wasn't new after some unspoken period of time, and then it was suddenly okay for people to drop things onto it, to put their feet on it, to spill things. I know some were legitimate accidents, but some I *know* were simply carelessness, a disrespect towards me.

Sometimes they'd come over, dump their stuff out on that mirror, and leave it there for me to sort through. I'm never good at figuring out whether they mean to, or whether they dump it and just . . . forget to take it back with them. I find myself hoping I don't do the same to them. I'd feel like a pretty crappy friend.

But every time they dump their stuff, another crack forms. At first they were only hairline fractures, and I thought it was only on the glass, but I looked underneath yesterday, and it's not *only* on the glass.

It goes all the way through.

I don't know how much more my table can take.

I'm afraid to put anything of my own on it now, because I'm afraid it'll shatter, and leave me with an empty place.

I don't know what's happened to me, but I found myself sitting on the floor crying by my table.

I wasn't crying *about* the table; I don't know what I was crying about.

I looked at it and realized there was this thick crack that I hadn't noticed before – it was splitting my face in half, and the halves didn't match. They didn't even look like the same face. They sure as heck didn't look like my face.

A few tears had fallen on it, and before I wiped them away I noticed that the splintered glass made them look like each drop was two. I was surprised there weren't more, really.

I slid my hand over it, smearing the tears, and that's when it shattered.

I knew it was going to happen, I hadn't realized it would be that soon.

I had hoped for long, big shards that would be easy to clean up and maybe piece back together, but that vain thought stayed in the corner of my mind laughing at me.

I sat there staring at the pieces for a long time . . . probably hours, I don't know. I thought broken glass would glitter and sparkle like it does in books and movies.

It doesn't.

The shards were dull in color but sharp enough to keep me from moving.

I was afraid to move. I still am.

But then I remembered that I've never moved.

Ever.

Michael Alexander

Languishing

I didn't have a chance to wave goodbye
Gone are the days when my life was simple.
Isn't it a shame how quick time flies.

I remember looking at my first pimple.
I remember the stress of my final tests.
I remember falling in love with your dimples.

All I ever want to do now is get some rest.
It seems like every day is a challenge.
Life is getting hard, I'm trying my best.

I have a purpose, I just don't know what.
I hate to feel failure's sting.
I don't scream or flinch; only keep my mouth shut.

But most of the days I spend wishing
To have you back again.
Four years later and I am still grieving.

You and I were just together before your end.
You were so young so many years to live.
Your illness was real but I thought it was pretend.

There's nothing I wouldn't give
Your heart was filled with so much love.
Sorry for everything I ever did; please forgive.

You are gone now, that reality I try to shove.
You know I cry, but no need to shed a tear.
You are free now, I see you up above.

I hope to fly with you someday my dear.
Play your music for all the other angels.
Sing your sweet song and I promise I will hear.

Michael Alexander

Treasure

They don't say much
but their words are so
powerful.
I've encountered them
many times as they
have entered my dreams.
They laugh at me,
and I laugh back.
We are friends,
but their jokes are rather cruel.
Their words are powerful.

The four of them are all
asleep in the water.
She brought a souvenir.
She abducts a child
from its home yet
she receives no punishment.
I hear them all scream
crying to go back.
They fear they are endangered
and indeed they are.
But the four of them
are all treasures
I keep.
Their words I speak.

Michael Alexander
Emotionally Wrecked

I feel saddened.
Alone.
Stressed.
Depressed.
Empty.
In an unknown place,
But it feels so familiar.
Drifted off from the main road;
Don't know how I got on this path.
Do not know what the signs mean anymore.
I was on the road to recovery,
Turned around the new place was too foreign.
This vehicle has a mind of its own!
Screaming for help but it's not loud enough.
The horn doesn't work.
The brakes have failed.
The engine revved up.
Switched to fifth gear.
100 miles per hour.
In a second I saw the exit
Wellbeing was only five miles away.
But instead you came into my life and drove me crazy.
Collided into a wall and I didn't even flinch.
Among the debris flying in the air,
I see the happy memories.
The pain still remains intact.
Couldn't get rid of it.
I'm still alive
Unfortunately
Now I must pick up the pieces, and continue where I left
off.
Keep going until I can get to my final destination
But for now, I am

Michael Alexander

Emotionally Wrecked Pt. II

Sitting in the car,
crank it up let's go
there's a question in my mind
the answer I must know

Zooming down this highway
I've come to know you better
so many secrets hidden in the dash
it seems like we have been driving forever.

I remember riding with you
the few days we cut school
and smoking in the bathrooms
we thought we were so cool

But now, as we travel down this highway
I ask this question, so naïve,
with no apparent answer:
“do you love me?”

In the next few seconds
I crash and reality is split in two
my soul is ejected from the car
but my body still in the seat –right beside you

No driving lesson
could have ever prepared me
for what I just heard
my heart is totaled. my foot is still on the gas

You have no idea how hard it is
for me to pretend like I don't care.
I smile while I drive.
my true face I hide.

For months stuck at a dead end
I walk the other way – finally I let go
you'd walked away three weeks earlier
it just took me longer to learn how to move on.

Tyler Cobb

Relapse

My progress is gone with the pills on the sink,
The reflection of failure— a face with no fight
but I'm just a man who was pushed to the brink.

Doctors tell me everything they think,
I had one last chance, fight or flight.
My progress is gone with the pills on the sink.

After all the appointments with that stupid shrink,
the craving's crept in and I know it's not right
but I'm just a man who was pushed to the brink.

The crush, sniff and dilated blink
Synapses fire, mood swings gain height
My progress is gone with the pills on the sink.

My grave may be near, I smell death's stink.
All of my life I tried to be 'alright'
but I'm just a man who was pushed to the brink.

My parents tried, but I'm missing a link
I could never unwind with my grave insight
My progress is gone with the pills on the sink
but I'm just a man who was pushed to the brink.

Tyler Cobb

Tents

Not once did you offer
to pack up the car
and take me somewhere.
There was always something.

Something more important
A woman to chase
A wife to please
A beer to drink

I wanted campfires and flannel,
Ghost stories and the cicada's hymn.
An image so American
that it leapt out of mom's catalogs.

I know you say you're proud,
That I'm a smart boy. A good boy.
But words aren't enough
I'm not satisfied by empty air.

I took that damn camping trip.
I hiked over the hills
and screamed.
Just to hear my own victory echo back.

You taught me something beautiful.
That when you feel something, you show it.
My children will thank me, and theirs after them.
Out of your absence, I created presence.

Tyler Cobb

Tangelo

Sitting by the windowsill with light filtering in
the fragrance of your peel
and the softness of your skin

Faded wallpaper and the color teal
remind me of our family's lot
But there's never been a broken home or heart that
couldn't heal

The unnoticed spot
spread to the nodes
and silently grew into a knot

It used her veins like old back roads
to transport the black disease
and give the ultimate blow.

My queen of bees,
Sweet mother, lover of the sun,
who used to play by the tangelo trees

I hope you let your numbered minutes run
and enjoyed the simple flowers in the vase.
When it was all over and done

did I even recognize your face?
You were blown out when your candle grew dim
This is no longer a home, just a place.

The church bells sang the hymn,
Your ashes mixed with the earth's soul.
Now you are part of the tangelo limb,

and the fruit of your flesh decays in a bowl,
a presence never to be enjoyed.
Just a memory –stole.

Tyler Cobb
Slither

Along the way we lose ourselves,
and finding our old skin
is like searching darkness for light.
We slither through life leaving
flakes and flashes of our being across space.
You see, we have to shed
who we were to grow
into who we will be.

Tyler Cobb

Spring Cleaning.

I cannot undo what you have done.
X marks the spot but so does the hickey.
How could you? Seventeen years— Wasted.
All for some passion in our wrinkled sheets.

It all seemed too perfect.
The picket fence and the family portrait.
High school sweethearts.

Babe, you're not sorry.
The fire's already burning,
settle in and find comfort among the coals.
As far as I'm concerned, she can have you.

We built a home,
but somewhere within the walls
the supports began to rot
slowly, everything folded in.

All the country clubbers will know,
They'll walk their prissy dogs by the house
just to pause and listen
to the raging war inside.

So here's what I'll do.
I'll take the kids, half of everything
and then some more on top of that.

You can keep your promises,
the sticky-notes on my rearview
all of the "I'm Sorry" voicemails.
I left the sheets on the bed.
Tell the bitch to clean up next time.

Tyler Cobb

Losing It

I'm broken down
the tires are flat
and the hubcaps missing.

The chiggers crawl
and burrow
getting closer to the me
that I don't know.

The me that was good,
but then you came along.

A board with nails weaved through
like seeds reaching for the sun

I didn't brake or swerve

You didn't pick me

I picked you
and stalled.

The headlights dim underneath
a canopy of barren trees.

I walk away and realize

Not only have I lost you,
but I've lost me, too.

Tyler Cobb

Help

I'm sinking slowly
into the walls

I don't like it much

Hope you're okay

Tyler Cobb

Innovation

I was high on Sunday,
Mom made potluck and
the smell lingered.
Hunger rattled his cage,
but I couldn't bring myself to chew.
There was too much guilt,
and too much to do.
When the sun turned
I beckoned for sleep,
but her wings were broken
and she couldn't visit.

Now it's Wednesday and I'm low.
Mom called to check up,
I told her the news.
Hunger is dead in his cage,
and I can't escape the sheets.
Maybe if I tie them together
I'll find some comfort.
A way out— some peace

Jessica Cooler

Still Born

A life promised
Born still
Cries never released
Disappointment cradled at her chest
Every hope, every dream,
Fades
“God! Why me?” she thinks.
His small lips never used
If only he would cry
Just one small cry
Kept inside
Living only in the dark
Memories
Never formed
Opposed by the forces of nature
Peeled from the womb
Quiet weeps, too weak to sob
Restlessly worrying he might wake
Suffocated by sympathy
Touching the slight dimple in his chin
Useless limbs
Varying degrees of hysteria
Wanting, wishing, waiting
XII O’clock noon
Yesterday there was still hope
Zero chance now

Jessica Cooler

All in a Day

Time to leave this shell,
and make a new one as I grow.

 Tiny house
stagnant and decaying.

Time slings me forward,
from this red light
 to that red light.

The pace quickens,
 my mind slows.

The flesh ever inching from my bone.

Time ticks

One puff, two puffs, three puffs
 cancer.

A process that never ends.

A circular motion enslaving me
to begin again.

Jessica Cooler

A Year and a Half Apart

For what it is
and what it was
I'll try to remember.

Our lives once spent
feliculously together.

But you of all people know
the person I was then.

No apology
will ever come close
to being forgiven.

Now we spend our days
passing each other by.
With no knowledge
of the others existence.

A cold gaze
or an awkward glare
is all that we left.

I've tried
to gather the words
that I would say in your presence,

But these words
are hopelessly pieced together.

For what has changed
remains fixed
in its selfish place.

And the guilt splinters
in my rattled brain.

Exhausted by the effort
to make the world spin
against itself.

To rewind
that which was said in hurt,
that made hate.

Our reckless souls
smashed together
for the sake of sanity,
only to waver apart.

Lost by the emptiness we found
in the stillness between the sheets. .

The words
“I love you”.
Perhaps said too often
without understanding.

That even now
seems like nothing more
than overly romanticized fiction.

The idea
floats around my head,
stinging with uncertainty
irreverent as a bee.

I had a hope

of something real.

But what I found
was myself.
Pushing all of my worries
and insecurities
onto you.

You carried that burden
with great strain,
 how unfair.

Then I blamed you
for every disappointment.
All I wanted was more.
All I did was take.

Yet you stayed and endured
my soul sucking unhappiness.
And I still can't fathom why?

I guess because you
really loved me.
What a flawed concept.

But whatever it was
is displaced now.

Still present,
but pushed aside.
To make room for something
a little more solid

A little less me
and a little more her.

Scotti DeRouen

Alpha & Omega

In the beginning there was nothing. Then, Phillip was born. He was born to a family of loving parents. Authoritarian in their raising of Phillip, he was given high standards to apply himself to and rewarded for success but encouraged in failure. His mother used to always say, “If life kicks you down, get back up and kick its ass.” He lived that way his whole life.

Elementary school was boring and swift. Days of crayons and clay—days turned blue to gray and then blue again. ABC’s and 123’s, bullying on the playground and kissing behind the swings. The world spun on and on while Phillip zoomed through life at subsonic speed.

Elementary school was boring and swift.

Middle school was boring and long.

Phillip managed A’s and B’s and showed up to class almost every day. His best friend was named Duncan and they stayed friends. Phillip’s first kiss was then. Her name was Sarah. Things could’ve been better for their attempt at love, but things could have been worse. They went their separate ways—both happier.

Middle school was boring and long.

High school was

A’s and B’s. He met a girl his senior year who he fell in love with. Alexis. He bought her flowers and things but she couldn’t decide what she wanted from him. He thought it was probably because he was too slow. He gave up and found someone else. She fell in love with

him after he was in love with being in love with someone else who was not her. They never got over it.

High school was.

College was informative.

He applied to a small university of little notoriety. A's and B's. He went there without any purpose. Phillip thought maybe that was the purpose. Phillip had one professor who got through to him: Dr. Ellen. She encouraged and critiqued his good work and bad work instead of deciding whether it was acceptable or unacceptable.

College was informative and interesting.

He met a woman in school named Keri. They fell in love in that cliché way that makes your stomach churn and makes one nauseous—it's disgusting but pleasant. They were happy. She left him. It was all his fault. At least, that's what he thought. He thought he did his best. He remembered his mother, "When life kicks you down, get back up and kick its ass." Failure.

Acknowledgement. Recovery. Reassimilation. Phillip felt different. He eventually talked to her at a bar. The results are negotiable. He regretted knowing he'd love like that again.

Graduate school was work.

He finished his Master's degree in a year and a half. A's and B's. Got his Ph.D in 19th through 20th century English literature in three years. Took him two years to find a job. A job that pertained to his degree.

Life afterwards was good.

Phillip taught in a small university of little notoriety. He taught things and then he taught other things. He taught a course on graphic novels and how they were social

impacts and could be considered canon works and be looked at as a definitive artistic style. Easy A's and B's for people needing easy A's and B's. He loved teaching and learning from students. He never married and taught for many years.

Retirement was the beginning.

He then sold his house, his car, and all his belongings except a single suitcase, a tooth brush, and a few changes of clothes. Anything he couldn't sell he donated or threw away. He paid off the last of his debts to all businesses and practices. He then booked a flight to India. He spent the next three years of his life travelling across the Eastern world. Involving himself with the daily life and cuisine of every person he met. He was happy.

Returning was the beginning of the end.

He went to see a physician for a general checkup since he had been out of the country for so long. You know how it is, when you learn something new it can be dangerous to the norm.

“Sir, what's the most peaceful way to die?”

The physician let it go though, and answered that an overdose of sleeping pills or morphine seemed to be the least painful but he wasn't entirely sure. The physician asked if he would mind seeing a psychiatrist, since they now ask before forcing. Phillip asserted that he did not see the point but if he thought it best then he would. So, he did.

He and Dr. Spleen talked for several months and in that time, Phillip told him about his wonderful journeys in Thailand and Japan and his memories of teaching in the university. Dr. Spleen was determined to find a

something wrong with Phillip. He couldn't find anything. He went as far as getting into contact with people who knew him. They all said he was happy enough. Just an average person in an absurd world.

An absurd world of absurdities.

To the suicidal thoughts Phillip seemed to be having, he said to Dr. Spleen, "It's not a negative or spiteful response to anyone or anything. No one's made me angry or sad. Well, of course people *have* but that isn't the point. I'm content. Sometimes it's like you can see a ball rolling, but you know it's eventually going to stop. I'm bored. I don't want to watch the ball roll. I already know how it ends. It stops."

That was that.

Dr. Spleen had to let Phillip go. Phillip thanked him on their last visit. With that, Mr. Spleen never saw or heard of Phillip again.

This is the end.

An officer at the scene of the incident stated, "I've never seen anyone look more at peace."

The world continued to spin.

Scotti DeRouen

Everspiral

I sit in a room filled with nothing. It is a room with no walls, and no ceiling. Looking up, there is nothing but darkness. The walls are the same as the ceiling. The floor is damp but dry. The air is thick yet thin. The room is endless yet constricting. Surrounded by nothing. Engulfed by nothing. *Nothing is something, something is nothing.* There is a wall. There is no place where the wall begins and the floor ends. One begins where the other ends, and so it goes. The wall is the floor. The floor is the wall. I look to my left—the wall continues on. I look to my right—the wall continues on. Seemingly infinite in its finiteness. I touch the wall. It is cool and still. It feels like the floor. The floor feels like the wall. One keeps me from falling down, the other keeps me from falling forward. Or progressing forward. *Ceiling ceiling, man-made sky.* A voice. I hear a voice. A voice from the wall? *Voices voices in the sky.* It asks me questions. *What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?* Now I caress the wall with the ends of my fingers—trying to feel for the voice. What is this what is this? *A mulberry bush.* I ask the wall where I am. *A mulberry bush.* Who is in the wall? *A monkey and a weasel.* I ask the wall why I am here. *To learn to learn.* What can I learn? *All that you can.* The wall begins to shift. It pulsates. Throbs. Shutters. Shakes. Cracks. Breaks. Erodes. Rebuilds. Stops. Silence. There is no wall. Only a hole. A spiral. A black spiral. Stairs. *All around the mulberry bush.* Heart in my throat. Hand on the rail. I want to cry. I

can't. I want to breathe. I can. The air enters my lungs sharply. It reminds me of where I am. In a hole. I want to leave. I can't. I don't want to breathe. I can. *the monkey chased the weasel*. The wall begins to move. Faces. Images. Pictures in the wall. Some are still. Some are moving. Paintings of war. Paintings of death. Paintings of pain. I slip. I lose my breath. *The monkey thought 'twas all in fun*. I stare. An image of a man. He's holding a burnt child. Dead. The child's eyes are closed. His mouth is gaping open—once screaming. His skin is different shades of pink and red. Charred pieces flake off. There is water falling out of the man's eyes. Another man approaches. His mouth is moving. Words I don't know. Words I can't know. *Why are you crying?* I'm not crying. The man is crying. *Civilian casualty*. The child? *Man up. Get moving*. I'm trying to learn. A gunshot. The crying man is still. The Other Man stands. *Big kids don't cry*. I turn away. More walking. Walking in descending circles. Walking down the ever spiral. *All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel*. Learning is child's play. What can you learn from playing? From a wall? From walking in circles? *Exactly*. What? *Stop*. But, you're making me. *You made me*. You were here when I got here. *You shaped me*. What are you? *You*. I pause. Cold. Damp. Irritated. Hot. My stomach is knotted. My throat dry. Eyes itchy. Tongue sticky. What am I? *Man*. What am I supposed to learn? Silence. I descend. My ears are ringing. Ringing from silence. It's absurd. It's deafening. The wall plays more movies. A woman is raped. A fetus aborted. *A child*. A child aborted. *A fetus*. Which is it? *Does it matter?* Yes. *Why?* Silence

again; but, now my own. I descend. Movies. Scenes. Images. *the monkey thought 'twas all in fun*. A boy lies on a street. Dirty street. He's bleeding. *Mugged*. That's a shame. *Killed a child*. Well, then he deserved it. *In war for his country*. Well, then he didn't deserve it. *Why?* I stop. A sound from behind. A shuffle of feet. I look back up the stairs. It's the Other Man. He has a gun. Perspiration. Fear. Adrenaline. I run. Descending. *All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel- the monkey thought 'twas all in fun—* I run. I run. Sweat stings eyes. Feet hurt. Lungs burn. Mouth's dry. I fall. No more stairs. Back in the room. Back in the room with the wall. The Other Man is there. I look up. Barrel to my nose. I ask him why. Other Man said, "Because you're the same man." What man? "The Other Man." I ask why. He smiles. *Pop! goes the weasel.*

Scotti DeRouen

A Mirror's a Hell of a Drag

It's not fun to talk about.
It's not fun to see.
It's not fun to realize
 you're exactly like me.

A frail, scared child
 with nothing to lose.
Pathetic and sheltered—
 we're a ruby red ruse.

We think we know it all
 and we act like we do.
It'd be a goddamn shame
 if someone shit on what we knew.

Our words have power
 but our concerns are ass-backwards.
The difference is I can admit
 that both of us cowards.

I'm just as shameful.
I'm just as angry.
I wish someone could help you,
 just like someone helped me.

We've never been compromised
 by the tone of our skin,
 or the sex that we crave.

But, where I've shifted to learn,
you've learned to hate.

We masquerade as intellectuals
but are chauvinistic and insatiable.
I hope the world can forgive us both—
because I'm just like you
but I can't say you're just like me.

Scotti DeRouen

A Pint for the Living, a Letter for the Dead

It's been so long since I've put a pen to page,
and it's been longer still since I've seen your
face.

So, here I sit—awaiting a rhyme,
hoping to illuminate a page with life.
My final ode—your story retold—
the tale of a broken man.

You pulled me from the muddy roads,
and purpose in my life.
An oath of honor,
a bond of blood—
two men without a light.
In mutual failure, we toasted our defeat,
and drank to our ill times.

Dangerous roads were nothing but adventure—
our time was spent in wandering wonder.
We chased your death, and held no fears,
we battled beasts with a hand o' beer.
We brought fear to devils themselves.
We soared above like titans and gods
without concern of being or not.

But pools of glass and beds of water
now ripple with a ghost.
A toast to the slayer of gods we lost that day,
to frail codes of honor and manmade plagues.
We never spoke of why—only the glory to be had,

As if you saw it by signs in the sky.
How could I forget those starless nights?

And, yet here, my hand grows still;
so, I'll play the poet no more.
To the man who battled for the lust of the fight—
I cheer and praise your name.
But, to my brother, broken by creeds—
I'll not raise my glass to your grave.

My beard has grown long, my eyes have turned grey,
and I've lost all my will and craving to pray.
So I'll sing 'til I'm merry, and fill pints to a head,
but I'll not waste my time mourning
for a man who wished himself dead.

I will miss you, my friend.

Scotti DeRouen

Dr. Seuss Never Had a Clue

Awaken to find a room without memories or heirs.
Baffled, you sit—eyes gliding through the air.
Confusion is your worst but only conclusion,
Delusion fiddles with all of your solutions.
Explaining the room is simpler than
finding out your presence's origin.
Gaunt feels the brain,
heavy feel the thoughts,
illiterate feels the mind,
jaded feels the soul.
Knowing is to feel safe in a place you've never been.
Loosen your morals—everyone else has.
Mount yourself above the world—
noose yourself by sheet & stone.
Olfactories will warn others in time,
piss & shit don't mix well with the boys.
Quantity is what we have, but quality is far too fancy.
Rights & freedom don't matter here.
Suicide was your best plea;
thus, the results: the piss, the shit, & the noose.
Utopia is the world we manufactured &
vehemently we dispose of, violently we devour.
Warped becomes justice, power becomes pride.
Xylophones remind me of prison bars now.
You'd better get to jumping before they find you out—
Zen is acceptance. Dead is dead.

Scotti DeRouen

It's Irrelevant—Her Relation to Me

You seem so calm and still while lying on your bed
The moon lights your face—a pale milky glow
My life is much more simple now that you're fucking
dead

From ear to ear I've split your face upon your little head,
The wind seems to carry gory details with irony and
flow.

You seem so calm and still while lying on your bed.

The world once relished in the nonsense you said,
and what more could a lady ask than to be treated like a
ho'?

My life is much more simple now that you're fucking
dead.

My hands hold the arbiter of fate, brimming with lead.
You broke apart her spirit and tossed her in a hole.
You seem so calm and still while lying on your bed.

I told you that you'd pay for this the night her body
bled—
broken, beaten, raped, and wrecked—you thought I'd
never know.
My life is much more simple now that you're fucking
dead.

There's no one here to tuck you in, so shotgun will
instead.
You're all dead and God is next—a single fatal blow.
You seem so calm and while still lying on your bed.
My life is much more simple now that you're fucking
dead.

Scotti DeRouen

Skin, Sex, Sin

The smell.
The supple texture.
The cause of wedding bells.

A sudden pleasure.
A change of space.
A life at rest is in tenure.

It was a variable case
It wasn't about guilt,
It was about the race.

A kind of moral tilt—
It's all about the game—
Time to pay up for what you've built.

A slug without aim
A broken noose
To whom it may concern, I'm to blame.

Golden eggs from the golden goose,
Anxious and waiting.
Fill the graves: two by two.

Lying and baiting—
A rim job here, a blow job there.
Endless and meaningless stating.

The media cares,
So clean that shit from your nose.
Screaming obscenities—goddamn waste of air.

Trimmed up perceptions and counting crows.
You're gonna be a fucking star, kid,
and all the world will know.

Scotti DeRouen

If Only I Could Bottle Time

Tick,
 Tock,
 Goes
 The
Clock.

Funny how that seems to go.
Clicking of clocks
&
Ticking of tocks—
one minute we're here,
the next we're gone.

That cliché never gets old.
Maybe I'd rather bottle time
Than buy up bottled air.
I'd tuck it far away;
In my secret place.

I could take it out at any point,
Refresh the reservoirs of patience.
Then I could say,
“Fuck the man,
I own my life.”

Tick,
 Tock,
 Goes
 The
Clock.

But, I don't—and neither do you.
We never will.
It's our own fault.
Nietzsche once said that
we murdered our God.

And that we fucking did.
We thought it was a game
We slit his throat—
 we slit his throat—
resurrected him, and did it again.
Our God was time, but we didn't know that.
And we thought He'd come back.

I once thought I'd like
To be a bottler of time.
But, now I think I'd rather
See if clocks can die.

Tick,
 Tock,
 Goes
 The
Clock.

Sarah Doty

from Sugar, Sugar (an excerpt)

[Part 7]

That Thing They Call a Flashback from Hell

Drake lay down on the bed and leaned over to the nightstand, shoving the cream colored dial phone out of the way and started cutting a line.

He didn't look up. He only said "come here and suck my dick."

Red ignored him and slid the cigarette and dirt stained curtains past the AC box and looked out the window. *There's nothing out there for me, is there?* She stared at the casino lights lining the streets and watched as people walked by. *They're so oblivious.*

"What the fuck are you doing girl? There's nothing out that window worth a damn. Now get your ass over here and suck my dick."

Red squinted her eyes and softly touched the hollow skin above her cheekbones.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," she muttered, and she slid the curtains back, letting the darkness take back the room.

She gagged down the spitting shots of his warm satisfaction and he shoved her head back and smiled. He handed her a coaster with a neat little line cut just for her. She took it.

"There you go. Now get out of here and get me something decent to eat. God knows your pussy's not enough."

She heard him laughing as she turned toward the door, and it died out as she shut it and the sounds of the city engulfed her in a sweet torment. She stopped for a moment and looked around her. *What the fuck am I doing?*

Red slid her hand across her mouth and wiped it

on her jeans. She hadn't eaten in days. She waited at a bus stop and an old man smiled kindly and sat down gingerly on the bench next to her.

"You look like you could use the help of the Lord, honey."

"Thanks, but I'm pretty sure whoever the hell is out there watching this clusterfuck doesn't give a shit about me."

He smiled again and said, "He loves us all, you know."

Red didn't look at him as she replied, "nah, no Jesus for me, thanks. All I need is a quick death, and since your "loving Lord" hasn't given me that, I'll settle for some food. Thanks for the conversation, but I'd really rather sit here in silence, if you don't mind."

"You're a smart girl—I can tell. Reminds me of my granddaughter. She's at UNLV teaching anthropology. You go to school here too?"

"Do I look like I'm in school?" she snapped back.

Red immediately felt bad for snapping at the old man, even if he was annoying the shit out of her, so she let her tone die down a little and said "nah, I got two years in and quit. Can we stop the chit chat now?"

"Well, two years huh? Wouldn't take you much longer to finish then..."

"No, I guess not."

"What were you studying?"

"It doesn't matter now. I already told you, I quit."

"Sure it matters. Just because you leave doesn't mean you can't go back."

Red held back the quick words that always escaped her mouth before she thought them through. She stared out in the direction of the mountains. She remembered the smell of pine, the smell of new

textbooks, the excitement of being able to start over. Then she shifted to that coffee stained chair in group therapy, Drake's belt, Scott. Her entire life unraveling before her eyes.

She looked down at the white stain on the side of her jeans and said "you can never go home again."

"Ah, I see."

Red was getting angry at this point. *What's this guy's fucking deal?*

"What's your point old man? I'm nothing. This is my life, all right? Waiting at a bus stop. No use thinking any further than that."

He studied her face for a moment. She wouldn't meet his eyes, so instead she focused on the pearl white buttons of his blue flannel shirt, his pen pocket on his left breast, his jeans and boots and proud form only an old man can have. She remembered her grandpa and squinted her eyes again. *It's like a hundred degrees out. How's this guy wearing a flannel shirt?*

He smiled again and said, "you'll find your way. I know you will," then he slowly stood up as the bus approached. Red didn't move. She just watched him grab onto the railing by the door and slowly make his way up the steps and onto the bus, and as the doors began to close she saw him look back at her and wink. He and the bus were gone and she was alone.

Red was in a mixed state of annoyance and sadness and was quite frankly just plain pissed off. Drake had driven his bike up from New Mexico but rarely let Red drive it. Only if she'd been a "good girl" that day, so she walked back to the motel room, opened the door, grabbed the keys from the table and left. Drake was passed out anyway. Red was sick of fast food and Chinese and the 4 Queens coffee shop, so she rode down I 515 toward Green Valley Parkway. She

hadn't been there since she was nine, but she knew the way, and as she parked the bike in the small lot of Blueberry Hill she thought *fuck it—I'm getting the decent meal* and walked inside.

She slumped down in one of the swivel chairs at the counter and stared at the folded napkin and silverware and thick white coffee mug. A waitress with a kind round face brought her coffee and a glass of water and took her order. Red unwrapped the folded napkin, took out the spoon, and folded the napkin again, placing the fork and knife next to each other in an even line. As she waited for her food she played with the ice in her water, dipping the spoon in and pulling out one piece at a time and popping it in her mouth. When the waitress came back with her food, Red ate stacks of pancakes with boysenberry syrup and eggs and sourdough toast. Funny how food can put you in such a good mood. Red stuffed another bite of pancake and egg in her mouth and motioned for the waitress.

“Hey, can you box up just a regular breakfast sampler?”

The waitress smiled and said, “sure” then turned toward the kitchen.

Red waved her fork again toward the woman and said, “oh, and make sure the eggs are runny.”

She smiled as the waitress gave her a quizzical look and turned back toward the kitchen again. Red wiped up the last of her food with her toast and paid and took the bag with Drake's food and stuffed it in the backpack she kept in the bike. She laughed.

When she got back to the hotel room Drake was lazily propped up on the bed watching TV with his legs spread out and feet crossed. Dirty white socks.

“What the hell took you so long?”

“Traffic, sorry. Said you wanted something decent, so that's what I got,” and she tossed the bag with

the Styrofoam box on the bed.

“Where’s yours?”

Red smiled. “I wasn’t hungry.”

She was taking off her shoes when she realized the shower was running.

She looked up at Drake and asked, “is someone here?”

“Why the fuck is my food soaked in egg yolk?”

Red heard the shower turn off, and a tall form appeared from the bathroom door. She turned toward the mirror by the sink, and Red saw water trickling down between the girl’s shoulder blades from her tousled brown hair. The white motel room towel hardly covered her body, stopping just above the back of her thighs, and when Red looked into the mirror the figure leaned slightly to the side and smiled.

Red recognized that evil grin and heard her dad’s voice in her head laughing and saying “that girl’s got the biggest tits I’ve ever seen.”

The last thing any father wants is a slut for a daughter with big tits.

Red’s heart pounded in her ears and hate filled her veins, a feeling she’d finally let go of two years ago. Guess hate never truly leaves you.

“Gia.”

She turned lightly on one naked heel to face her sister.

Gia’s eyes bore into her as she smiled that sadistic smile and said “hey Red.”

Well fuck, here we go again.

Sarah Doty

1972

There's a place
I may never see again,
but your face will remain the same.
Even as the 40 years came and gone,
escaping from Stevens and yelling
"I'm a wild man!"

But the memories seem so far away now,
of the Bull Dog,
digging trenches,
and the hill.

Sitting on the ground,
watching the '68 World Series
and wishing you were home.

Mapping out a future
someone else made for you,
and never going back again.

I'm you.
You're him.
And it will never be the same.

Sarah Doty

Birthday Number Eight

You've had cake in your lungs since '65
Flying thirty feet in the air
It's a wonder you're still alive.

It's not your fault the bitch couldn't drive
While others never warned, only stood to stare
You've had cake in your lungs since '65

It wasn't the fall that led to your demise
But what came after just isn't fair
It's a wonder you're still alive.

Mom knew you had more life to live
She yanked you back like a powerful mare
But you've had cake in your lungs since '65

So much revenge in my mind to contrive
Not once did you hear that horn blare
It's a wonder you're still alive.

Just because you're breathing doesn't mean you've
survived
Trapped in your brain, stiff body, convulsing despair
You've had cake in your lungs since '65
It's a wonder you're still alive.

Sarah Doty

Untitled

The smell of blood:
it seeps in no matter where she goes.
Laying on the floor,
struggling to breathe—
 forever embedded in her memory.

Shooting them up,
waiting for the phone to ring,
but it never does.
Placing a rug over the red.
It'll always be there though—
 forever embedded in her memory.

No place to go
to escape the stale smell,
turning brown underneath
and still trickling.
 Alive.

Pack up the boys—
right hand man at her side.
Just the four of them now,
driving somewhere unknown,
driving somewhere alone,
and the blood seeps in the windows.
Crossing each border,
it only gets stronger—
 forever embedded in her memory.

Sarah Doty

Everything, Nothing

Everything starts to look the same,
after a while.

The minutes seem so long,
then the days pass,
and the months are next,
and the years are gone,
then everything starts to look the same,
after a while.

Everything starts to look the same,
after a while.

People come—then they always go,
wearing the same clothes,
wearing the same face,
and I never know if they'll return—
then everything starts to look the same,
after a while.

Everyone starts to look the same,
after a while.

I hear them speaking,
then them preaching,
their lips are moving—
but I don't hear them anymore,
then everyone starts to look the same,
after a while.

Nothing looks the same,
after a while.

As the years pass,
then the months,
then the days,
then the minutes,
and the time is gone.
Then nothing looks the same,
 after a while.

Nothing looks the same,
 after a while.
When the seconds are over,
before the minutes were gone,
while the days slowly passed,
and the months drug on,
as the years went by—
and I finally looked up to see your face.
Then everything starts to look the same,
and nothing looks the same,
 after a while.

Sarah Doty

Jars

His mom collects these things—
in glass jars around her house.
Funny how she never visits.

His mom collects these things—
underneath the 5 clocks on her living room wall
that tell the time in major cities around the world,
but who needs to know the time in Tokyo?

His mom collects these things—
does she know how to tell the time here?
She has red hair—at least I think she does.
I should know, but she never visits.

Where does she get these things?
Nowhere near home, that's for sure.
Would an empty jar calling for its friends
be enough to bring her here?

Sarah Doty

*We Share the Same Genes
(But Yours Are Bigger Than Mine)*

Every once in a while
I catch a glimpse of your face
In my rearview mirror.

I like to see you in my mind
With ruby red eyes.
Evil, a devil.

You told me to do what I'm good at:
Taking advantage of people
Being a slut
and playing video games.

We're exactly alike,
At least in those first two traits
You say I'm good at.

I suppose we're both strong
Determined
Independent and intense.

Neither of us is frail
Neither of us has to masquerade
As someone we're not.

We both know who we are
And pretend to be okay with that.
The same blood flows in our veins.

You used to be his only little girl
And now I'm here, and you hate me for that
And I hate you for being here first.

We both know things shifted
We've both let him down
But at least he still loves me
And he still loves you too.

But at the end of the day
Sharing the same genes
Is the only thing at play.

Sarah Doty

*We Share the Same Genes
(Part II)*

You do realize I'm older than you, right?
You don't look so frail anymore
now that you've gotten fat.

 You know I could kick your fucking ass.

You're just a 20 something year old kid,
masquerading as a know it all bitch,
but you don't have a clue.

 And you know it.

Like you of all people
have a right to tell me
how to raise my kids?

 You're an idiot.

Just because you're "married" now
doesn't mean you know shit.

You have no right to judge me.

 You don't know me at all.

News flash—I was his little girl first.
Then my world shifted with the birth of you.
He shipped me back to Florida.
He'd never do that to you.

Everything was better back then
when it was just he and I.
I didn't mind you so much for one weekend a month.
But before, it was just us—not you.

That woman came into all our lives.
She wanted him but without the baggage.
The baggage was me.
He never thought that of you.

Her kid was the Golden Boy,
and I was the drugged out bitch,
so he sent me away again.
He'd never do that to you.

You and I went to San Francisco first, remember?
So why'd he only take you?
Every. Single. Year.
He never did that with me.

I had my chance, just like you,
but I fucked up—pawned my grandmother's ruby ring.
You even fucked up too, the “good girl.”
At least he helped you.

“Some people just can't fight.
They can't fight the good fight.
Blood's thicker than water, bitch,”
but you never cared about that.

You were supposed to be my sister,
but I know you never cared.

We've always been too different,
and I know he loves you more.

The truth is, he really did try to help me,
but maybe I never let him.

You and I could've had more,
but your life's been so much better than mine,
and I really do hate you, simply for being you.

Sarah Doty

Lane

She'll never love me the way she loves you.
Maybe she was never meant to.
I said before I wanted to take advantage of her.
I know deep down it's just the corruption
 turned corrosion
 of an already tainted gold surface.

I saw myself reflected in her eyes for a time.
 Then there was you.
 It was always meant to be you.

But even when I look in the mirror now,
I still see her face. I still see her smile.
I thought we were the same,
and I judged, and I condemned.
 I wanted her to be exactly like me,
 but she isn't, and she never will be.

I was jealous and accusatory,
 finding faults in her being
 that were really my own.

She's better than me, and I hate her.
I can't help but still love her,
 even though she never truly loved me.

She used me as she did with everybody.
I used to think her soul was pure—
 damaged, thus worthy even more.

But all she caused was disarray and pain,
and I don't know how to find myself again.
She gave me hope, and she gave me laughter,
and now you're together
while I'm alone without her.

I'd say I'm better off,
but then I remember
godamnit I still love her.

Jess Goff

2013/10/4

It's okay.
While you're with him,
your arms twisted,
knotted like branches,
petrified,
I'm drawn East.

The salt air breathes,
warm, gently across my neck.
The cool sand guides me
to its soft bed next to the water.
Waves embrace me as I lean into
this moment, unafraid.
Reassuring.
I fall onto soft sheets,
caressing every inch of skin on my body,
pulling me deeper,
my breath escaping me.
I'm completely in still harmony.

It's okay.
While you lay with him,
stiff like dead wood,
I've gone
to become one
with the sea.

Jess Goff

from UGPA (working title)

It was saturday afternoon and hot as hell. The four of us sat in the living room doing nothing. Some show about pregnancy was playing, but we were mostly on our phones not paying attention. Sage was laying her head on Emir's lap, half-watching as he texted some friend of his.

"Do you think we'll have a kid one day?" She asked quietly, more of a thought than a real consideration.

He answered without looking away from his message.

"I dunno. Maybe?"

"I think kids are stupid. I'm never having one, it's a waste of my time and money." I said, my eyes on the ceiling, where they'd been focusing on a shapeless stain.

"Whoa, mean." Sage half-joked, but her tone said she was kind of serious.

"Just saying. Besides, who's ever gonna be important enough for me to make another human with anyways?" I turned my head to look at her, right in her eyes. She let them meet for a second but quickly moved them to the floor.

"Well, it's not like we can just pull a girlfriend out of our ass for you. Don't be the bitter single friend, Aaron. Nobody likes them." Emir cut his eyes at me and went back to his text.

"Whatever, it's not like it matters anyways." I tried to look at Sage again, but she wouldn't move her

eyes.

Emir whispered something to Sage and looked me over before getting up and stepping outside, heading to his BMW. After he pulled the door closed, she looked up from the spot on the floor she'd been staring at for ever.

"We're going to a friend's house downtown. She's having this huge party because her mom died and her dad kinda just left. She payed the house off with the life insurance so it's hers now. Anyways, it's gonna be bomb. You guys should come."

She smiled a bit and it was uncomfortably awkward.

"I'll think about it." Kain said. His eyes darted back down to his phone, thumbs moving lazily.

"I'll text you later if I decide to come. I'm not feeling up to anything that crazy after last night, but we'll see." I smiled as best as I could.

"Okay. Later, guys." She stood and left quietly. The car started and sped away, the sound muffled by the outer walls.

Kain and I had sex that night.

I remember thinking there was nothing special about it. It was hot and sweaty and we breathed heavy and it was viscerally pleasing, but after we were done I felt emptier than before. What I thought would fill a void somewhere inside me only widened the one that was already there. I had a cigarette on the front porch at two in the morning feeling dirty, feeling like an object, stripped of my humanity. In part because I knew that's all I was to him, just a body he could get off on, but also because I went along with it even though I knew. I

wasn't surprised when he got up and went to the kitchen to get another hit of whatever he was on that night right after he came, leaving me alone without a word in his bed. I knew it all before I went with him to the house, and out of everything that's what made me feel the worst.

I lay on the couch until I could see the sky lightening through the voile that Sage hung over the front windows and I knew I wouldn't sleep.

Sage set a mug in front of me on the table. Coffee she made, brewed fresh when she and Emir got home not long after sunrise. He went up to their bedroom but Sage said she couldn't sleep, she was still too wired, so she was gonna just stay up until she had work later that day.

She sat next to me, resting her elbow on the arm of the couch, reclined.

"So, how was it?" We hadn't really talked since they came back and I still didn't really feel like it, but the silence was too awkward with last night weighing on my mind and any distraction was better than letting it fester there.

She took a long sip from her cup. She had her coffee iced because she was still hot, she said.

"It was pretty prime. There were tons of people. Christa had some bomb molly. Best. High. Ever."

"Jealous." I really wasn't, we both knew I hated it.

We sat there next to each other for ten minutes, not saying much, even though I wanted to. I wanted to tell Sage everything, about how I didn't mean what I said yesterday and about me and Kain and how much I

regretted it and how shitty I felt because I didn't get any sleep but it didn't feel like the right time for any of it.

So I let the time I actually had with her alone waste in silence until she decided to go sleep, too. She said she felt more tired now than she did when they got home.

When she got to the foot of the stairs my jaw tensed.

"Sage, you know—"

I didn't finish. She blinked, waiting, but nothing ever came. I looked up at her wanting to say something so badly but not letting myself.

She flashed a quick smile.

"Get some sleep, Aaron."

Up the stairs to lay with him.

Jess Goff

from UGPA (working title)

When we got back to the house, Emir was really shaken up. He couldn't sit still, he kept moving and getting up to walk around the room and sitting back down and fidgeting some more. There was this look in his eyes, I'd never seen it on anybody before.

None of us were talking much. We were all sitting there, staring at each other and at nothing and at the walls back and forth. We were crashing, but that wasn't the only thing that kept us silent.

Emir wouldn't stop fidgeting and it was pissing me off. I wished he would just go up to his room and sit there alone instead of being down here. I wanted to be still, to be quiet. I needed to, for a minute.

He stood up again and walked a few steps towards the wall, but then he turned towards us.

"What the fuck was that?"

Nobody said anything at first. I thought it was a really stupid question.

"What's your goddamn *problem*?" Kain asked.

"What's *my* problem? What's wrong with *me*?" Emir's voice raised to a yell. "What's the fuck is wrong with *you* guys? We just *killed* someone. We fucking *murdered* him."

"You knew what we were going there to do. If you didn't want to, why did you come?" I asked dryly. I didn't have the patience for this right now.

Emir was right in front of me instantly, his finger held right in my face, pointing. "You shut up!" His voice strained with the volume it produced.

"He's right. We all knew what we were getting into tonight. We agreed on it." Sage's voice was quiet, her head hung.

Emir looked stunned. His eyes shot over to her, wide, but her face was covered by her hair, her head still low. He dropped his hand from my face and his eyes went hollow again.

That was when Emir left.

He said he couldn't take any more. He said we'd gone too far, that what we did was terrible.

He said that all the things we did were terrible, but this, this wasn't forgivable. He said he couldn't be a part of it anymore, that he wished he never was but that we can't take back the past, can we?

So he left Sage sitting there on the couch and drove away with a few of his things.

—

Things were different after that. Sage wouldn't talk much that night. She kind of just lay there on the couch, staring at the TV but not really watching, her eyes not focused on anything real in front of her. I tried to comfort her, I tried to sit with her and tell her that it was okay, that Emir was just shaken and he left for a while probably just to think about things and he would be back in a few hours. She wouldn't say anything to me, though.

I didn't like seeing her like that. Normally, she was so bright, always smiling about something, trying to get us feel better about everything, trying to make us all happy. Then, she looked empty. There was nothing in her eyes, her face was blank as she lay still saying nothing. She was in pain, but she wouldn't show it with

her voice or her body. She kept everything tight inside.

I was upset, I was sad and angry and confused. Mostly, I was mad at Emir for leaving Sage alone. He knew he was the one that held her up, the thing that kept her stable no matter what. And he just left like that. He fell out from under her, their construction failed. The tension was too much so she came toppling to the ground and smashed into chunks of rubble. And there was nothing Kain or I could do about it.

I wanted so bad to pick up the pieces of her, to be the mortar that would hold her together again, but I knew I couldn't be, I never would be able to be. I knew that, no matter how much I wanted to be with her, no matter how much she may have liked me, I would never be a replacement for Emir. I didn't know what, but there was something about him that nobody else seemed to have in her eyes. That's why she stayed with him through all the shit they dealt with, because he had some special thing.

Maybe soulmates are a real thing. Maybe there is one person meant for each of us somewhere, and maybe that's what Emir was to her. It was one thing I wanted so badly to be but never would, and that night I knew that's how it was. That I would never be able to be with her.

It stung, but I sat close to her the whole night.

Jess Goff

from Rainy Planet (working title)

Lightning strikes in the distance, a bright flash of white in the corner of my vision. I study the afterimage that stands against the dark sky: a single bolt, thick and slightly bent, that passes from high in the clouds to the rough sea below. Then the thunder, a monstrous, shattering percussion, tears through the air and through me. The static and rumbling make my body melt into the space around me. I feel like I have no beginning and no end, like my skin doesn't separate me from the air and my body doesn't have limits.

I look up above me at the flat, gray sky that stretches as far as I can see. I think about how it always rains here, how that's the only weather. Ever since we moved here, I haven't seen a single sunny day, and the rain hasn't stopped. I shouldn't even notice it now, after the years of its constant pounding. It should be white noise by now, but I still can't get it off my mind. I like it. It's not new anymore, but I always like the storm.

I wonder what it's like to feel the sun on your skin and run through the crisp air in a field that's not soaked to death. I can vaguely remember the smell of sunny days, but it's been so long since I've seen one. The last time I felt the sun was when I was a child.

A flash of green. A sweet smell— grass. Crushing underneath the sheet I'm sitting on— I feel your hand on mine, soft — the sheet we're sitting on. Warm air surrounds us, the sky above is blushing in all kinds of yellow and orange and pink. I inhale— crisp and fresh, perfect. Fireflies surround us, dancing with their

*glow. Birds chirp in the distance, short songs. The last
fleeting rays of sun our skin as we watch it disappear
slowly beyond the horizon.*

It's the first memory of home I've let myself feel
for a while. Another tremendous crash of thunder, a
sharp gust of cold wind that whips the rain into a stiff
sheet.

Jess Goff

from Shunkashuutou (working title)

We stepped to the mouth of the tunnel and it was dark, so dark. I'd never seen something so dark in my life, didn't think it was possible for such an absence of light to exist above ground. My eyes strained as they looked far into the distance, meeting with nothing but black foreground.

Kain was right next to me, holding my left hand, looking forward, eyes blank except for wary determination. I shivered and he turned his head to meet my eyes. We looked at each other like that, holding hands, for several seconds before he nodded. I returned one, short and rigid, shivering again.

I knew no good could come of this.

He took a step forward, his foot disappearing into thick shadow.

I followed, step by step, until the wall of black enveloped us.

No light.

For the first time in my life, my eyes were completely useless. I couldn't even pick out faint, blurred outlines. Nothing. I was blind.

He walked forward slowly, single step after single step, meticulously. Carefully, he didn't want to run into unseen obstacles and slip and make a loud noise to attract.

Except for our steps, silence pervaded. The sound of each footfall shot from the point of contact, deflected by the curved walls into my ears, so loud. Between, the quiet pushed against my eardrums,

deafening, maddening.

I knew no good would come of this.

We continued forward, still not able to see any speck of light in the distance signaling the end of the tunnel.

Turn around. We should turn around.

We shouldn't be here.

Kain stopped dead.

My breath halted.

Sound. Scratching. Against the walls, the ground, something else farther back in the tunnel.

Breaths, short and staccato, sniffing.

It was one of them. More, two or three. They were moving together towards us in the darkness, their sounds reaching us sooner and sooner as they closed in. They heaved with exertion, moving fast, wheezing as they breathed.

Excited. Anticipating.

I felt now more than ever before like prey.

Trapped, impaired, frozen in cold-blooded fear. Hunted.

Kain gripped my forearm so tightly it hurt. We'd turned to face the way we came in, and I was ahead of Kain by a short distance, closer to the exit.

The breaths and scratching grew louder, closer, so close I was surprised they weren't on top of us yet. I shut my eyes tight, so tight.

Then it was silent.

Completely still.

The breathing, the scratching, the excited wheezes and aspirations.

None of it.

I opened my eyes again to black. Kain held my

arm firmly, pulling taut to hold me in my place. We stood like that for endless minutes, an eternity in darkness.

Then he nudged me forward, encouraging.

Against all my instincts, I took a step. Too loud. It made so much noise.

Nothing. Nothing moved except for my foot and my body in suit.

Another step, Kain's fingers still locked around my wrist.

My foot shuffled into a can that clanked loudly away.

Still nothing.

More steps.

One, two, three in succession, and I stopped.

We shouldn't be here.

One more step and I bumped into something firm.

The wall? It was warm and gave too much.

Flesh.

Kain was behind me, still gripping my arm.

Kain was behind me. He was behind.

Behind.

A sharp exhalation pushed a breath of warm, moist breath onto my cheek.

I screamed and fell back, stumbling.

Nails cut my arm, my neck, my shoulder. A searing pain shot through my left wrist and up my forearm and I cried out in pain. I tried to back away but they surrounded us.

They surrounded us and waited for us to move.

Trapped.

I screamed and swung my arms, trying to hit anything, my nails reaching for anything to scratch, to tear, to save myself.

“Run!” Kain let loose his grip on my arm and I dashed.

I ran and ran and ran and didn't look back and I heard Kain grunting and screaming and I didn't look back because I couldn't think about turning back to those things. I heard metal tear through flesh and I heard inhuman screeches, cries of pain, and I kept running and I could see the circle of light and it kept getting bigger and bigger so fast and there was nothing in my way and I knew I had to keep running and get out.

I emerged from the curtain of shadow into daylight, my pupils contracting painfully, leaving me blind again. I knew I was safe, though, in the light.

I collapsed onto the ground, a soft pile of snow cradling me, and I let my breathing slow. Seconds later Kain exploded from the darkness, screaming for me.

I raised myself to a sitting position, looking at him. He was covered in so much blood, but he seemed okay and relatively uninjured.

“Over here.” I said, raising my right arm to wave at him.

He turned to my voice, and his eyes widened, his face looked numb. His gaze was at my lap, and I followed it down.

That's when I noticed the blood. So much blood pooled around my legs and on my lap, soaking into my pants from my open wrist. It flowed in soft pulses from where my hand used to be.

I remember looking back up to his face, frozen there, so pale, before darkness overtook my vision again.

Jess Goff

from Shunkashuutou (working title)

The sky arched over and around us, enveloping the moment in faint, serene light. The sun had sunk below the horizon some time ago, leaving us cold in the thin November air, but we stayed, still laying on our backs next to each other, gazing up at the deep velvet blue above us and stars that appeared here and there as the blue darkened, pointing them out in their beauty. Calm quiet surrounded us, everything settling with twilight, our slow breathing the only sound noticeable among the hush. Our breath rose in loose plumes, drifting fluidly, dissolving into the air around them as they cooled.

We lay next to each other, our adjacent arms laced together, terminated in woven fingers. Our jackets zipped high, it was cold enough for a coat but we were comfortable enough as we were, our own warmth enough to keep from freezing. A single star shot across the sky, leaving a long, thin trail in its wake.

We lay like that, together, arms tied in warmth, until the last of the light left. The sun was gone, it took with it the cerulean glow that calmed our eyes, leaving only star-dappled black. I wanted it to last, even only minutes more, I wanted to be there with you under the watercolor sky until I was tired.

But you stood and held your hand towards me,

so I took it and rose with you. We walked back to the house across the open yard. I was slower, you got to the door and held it for me until I caught up. Before I stepped in, I turned to take another look at the sky.

Tomorrow, I decided.

Always tomorrow.

Victoria Hilton

The Trouble with Zaide

I only visited my grandfather once for a weekend during the summer when I was eleven. He and my father had a falling out long before I was born, and it was only because of my mother's pleading that I ever met the man. I stood on his front porch steps with my over-stuffed duffle bag on shoulder waiting to be acknowledged. He sat slightly angled from me in a paint-chipped rocking chair wearing stained overalls and a faded Corona cap. Salt and pepper darted out in all directions behind his overalls, and his skin, though leathery, retained tone not akin to men of his age.

I cleared my throat. "Hi, Grandfather."

He spat a wad of tobacco over the edge of the porch past his feet. "Boy."

His chair creaked as it rocked to and fro across the wood. I shifted my bag uncomfortably, watching the old man pack another pinch into his lower lip. "Know what I like, boy?"

"No, Grandfather."

"I like a squealer. I like to sneak in and surprise her, grab her from behind. She can't get away from me. No, boy, they never get away from me."

I let the bag slide and took a half step backwards.

"Don't move, boy." His eyes never met mine. "They're much slicker than you, and I never miss." He spat the juices once again over the edge of the porch and crossed his hands together. "You've got to take good care of her first, treat her like a queen. Make her think

she's the only one." He chuckled and mumbled something inaudible to himself.

"When the time is right, and I always know when the time is right, I like to go out and handle my business the right way," he said with a wink. He reached behind the chair and pulled out a shotgun that had previously been obstructed from my view. "I always keep the chamber loaded, so I just walk right up to her, tie her up real nice, and put that round right between her eyes."

I could feel my knees growing weak.

"I'll hang her up afterwards and slit her throat to drain the blood." He spat again, threw out the old chew, and put in a new pinch. "Then, then I have to slice her right down the middle and gut her out, clean her up real pretty like. They always look better like that anyway, and it makes 'em easier to cut up later."

I felt my skin clam up and stomach churn as images of my grandfather seducing innocent women and murdering them, chopping them up and gutting them flooded my mind and drained all color from my face. My hand slid slowly down the rail as my knees quivered. "What's wrong with you, boy?"

We locked eyes for the first time. "You're a sick man."

"Oh, God. Don't tell me you're one of those frilly vegan lilies."

I stood in utter confusion. The old man looked at me and smiled. "My God, boy, don't you eat bacon?"

Victoria Hilton

Lemniscate

The attic in that house had only one window. It was a cheap circular piece reminiscent of suncatchers that Emmaline loved to make that had been affixed to the room three summers back after a rock had been thrown through the ancient panes by neighboring hooligans. The room was stale and dusty, littered with cardboard boxes, sets of broken Christmas lights, and bookshelves lined with moth-eaten covers and torn pages. Emmaline and I went up, not bothering to mind the creaking floorboards every third step or the roaches scattering about. Though it was midday, we could only see half the room illuminated by the light through the painted portal.

“The dabbler shall pay the piper.” Her voice was soft, almost unnoticeable. She cocked her head to the side, running her index finger along something I could not distinguish. “Gregory, what’s *The Grand Grimoire*?”

“I don’t know. What’ve you found?”

“Only a book and a board game.”

“Let me see that.” She handed me the wooden board, painstakingly handcrafted in a crescent shape in the middle with the alphabet broken into two arcs of thirteen letters, the numbers one through nine in line below with zero at the end. A smiling sun had been carved into the upper left hand corner with the word “yes” beside it, while a stern moon had been carved into the upper right hand corner with a “no” carved next to it. Half an inch below the number line was the word “GOOD BYE.”

Emmaline handed me an oversized guitar pick with a hole towards the bottom. “This came with it too.”

I flipped it over and over before taking the board and pick and sitting in the middle of the light cast down from the single window in the room. “Do you know what this is?”

She shook her head innocently. “This is a planchette, and this is a Ouija board.” I knew she didn’t have a notion of either, but I would show her as a brother ought to. “Sit across from me.”

She sat on the floor opposite me in a flowered sun dress, freckles showing on her sunburned cheeks and shoulders. I could see her fidgeting uncomfortably with the straps of her dress as they dug into her raw skin. Reaching across, I slid them off to free her. I took her hands under mine and placed them a top the planchette. Her skin felt so soft, mine so calloused, the planchette, splintered. She whispered across the board: “What now, Gregory?”

I loved the way she said my name in that whisper. I was not Greg, one of the guys or Gregory Leonard Cannon, about to get a belt for something. I was Gregory, her protector, her brother, her lover. I smiled at her, rubbing the palm of her hand with my thumb. “We ask it questions now.”

She looked at me, dumbfounded. I squeezed her hand to assure her. I cleared my throat. “Is anyone there? Is anyone listening?”

Nothing happened. “Can anyone or anything hear me?”

No response. The room was as empty as it had been before Emmaline and I had arrived. I dropped my

hands from hers and let them flail into my lap. We sat there in complete silence, she not daring to move, I too disappointed to. Then I heard her whisper something to the board: “Are mommy and daddy ever going to quit fighting?”

The planchette moved slowly across the board to the stern moon in the upper right hand corner. “No.” She let out a sort of whimper not customarily made by any human.

“Don’t cry; you moved it there.”

It was as if I had struck her across the face with both hands going opposite directions. “I didn’t move it. It moved me!”

In the words of my mother, the conviction in her face was as devout as any Baptist in the South. Wet freckles meant nothing; I didn’t believe her. She moved her hands from the planchette and crossed her arms on top of her legs like she always did when she was upset with me. I rolled my eyes, knowing how this would end. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw movement from the board. The planchette slid effortlessly across the carved numbers and letters first to one corner of the board, then to its opposite, next across, and finally diagonally. Her eyes met mine though we exchanged no words. The piece began to move in a figure eight pattern repeatedly, stopping only when I’d put my finger in its path, resuming when I removed it. “Gregory, I think we should go back downstairs now.”

I could hear the tremor in her voice, but I was far too gone to stop. “Who are you?” I watched the movement, effortless and graceful. “Z-o-z-o. Zozo? That’s a stupid name.”

Immediately the planchette began to repeat the figure eight pattern it had begun earlier, the loops growing wildly until the pointer flew off of the board out of the circular window, sending shards of painted glass into the yard below. I felt the skin on my neck crawl as she let out a piercing shriek, her head tossed back and arms flung oddly behind her, mouth agape. She looked not at me but through me, and I knew that Emmaline was lost forever. She cracked her neck on both sides before reaching out to touch me, brushing one fingertip down the side of my left cheek. “You’ve really fucked up this time haven’t you, Gregory?”

Victoria Hilton

The Playroom

I'd like to take my thumb and run it straight down the middle, from adam's apple to belly button, deep enough to open up, not deep enough to damage much; I want to look inside. You lie so still upon your bed, queen sheets stained with shame, but it's too late now. Keep your eyes open: never mind, I'll pin them back. A safety pin under the lid and out the top, pushed through the eyebrow and closed with a click; the same on the right. You will not blink, doctor's orders.

A cotton swab of alcohol to cleanse the area, not needed. You never swabbed my arm or thigh or chest before each and every shot you gave me. Your fingers cold and invasive checking my pulse and reflexes and heartbeat under my shirt. I cried every night you came into my room to play. "No crying," you'd say. "Doctor's orders."

You'd make me take off my clothes and wear mom's apron as a hospital gown. You said you closed your eyes, but I know you never did. You never will. How does it feel to lie here on this bed unable to move but sensing every prick, every prod, every nerve ending firing? Feel the blade slice down your jaw line, right to left, smooth and precise. A cotton swab of lemon juice to wipe away the blood. Pliers to rip off each and every nail, fingers and toes, a dash of salt to fill the wounds. A cup of ammonia to funnel through the middle, no stitches to save you.

Lie still, brother. Doctor's orders.

Victoria Hilton

Duct Tape Dreams

I like the walls here. They're bumpy and not quite finished, kind of like the ones at home. Not my home. This is my home now. Four white walls and a little bed for a little girl. I don't even have a window. I miss my window at home. Not my home. That old home. I miss that window. I could see next door into Todd Dufinsky's window, watch him lie in bed flipping that basketball up for hours and hours. I tried it once and flipped the ball onto the dresser knocking off my dad's portrait. The glass shattered and a thick shard went into the bottom of my left foot. I never cried, not even when I pulled it out with my teeth. I stopped the bleeding with duct tape; my dad said it fixes everything. It wasn't enough to fix me. That's why my mother sent me here and my dad to hell.

But I like the walls here. Sometimes the nurses look at me strange when they come to check on me. They ask, "Are you okay? What are you doing?" I smile and ask them, "Can't you see it?" No one ever does. I always take a nap after their visit, but then it's gone. I run my fingertips along the bumps, feel the ridges rise and fall. And I remember when I find the hole next to the corner by the door.

Hell is just beyond the hole in the wall.

Victoria Hilton

The Ace in the Sleeve

Sit in your comfy chair and make another call
 “169th? Why not? What’ve I got to lose?”
 Raise the flag and sound the
 alarm,
 excite the boys to fight for
 you.
Pour another glass of ruby
 and toast to the death toll
 rising,
 rising,
 rising.

 You masquerade as some hero
 banging war drums
 cutting funds
 not giving a damn about
 who’s wearing the tags.
Keep trying to take and take and take:
 I dare you.

 Frail is the spirit and empty the wallet
 to bury our dead.

 Shift your attention to the home front
and leave our boys alone.
 Haven’t you done enough?

 We vie for his attention
 and your call comes before mine
 but here’s the thing:
 he answers to you because of me.

Ciera C. Love

Bottles

I'm too sober for my own good.
Someone said they drink to find a hidden message in a
bottle.
I'm drinking to escape the emptiness.
Pursuit of happiness.
I'm drinking for excuses as to why I'm feeling useless. .

– But I stopped
I don't drink, but I'm still thinking,
“Why am I here?”
Every time my eyes open from a blink.
I should've kept close to the bottle,
Because now I can't blame my own oppression on the
bottle,
But who am I to drink to fuel depression?
I had to think,
“What kind of impression am I leaving on the bottle?”

I'm going down – full throttle
On the gas as I try to mask what I know to be
impossible.
– What I know will still haunt you, mom.
I won't go there now,
But wow,
Look what you've done.
How dare I give you all the credit
Or the blame.
Depending on however you read it.
Either way I take shots by myself
to refill all of the allotted spots within myself.
As your broken heart poisons my mental health.
With your words stabbing below the belt
And that motherly love

Is now just a feeling once felt.

Excuse my belch,
But I should've kept close to the bottle,
Because as I,
with sober eyes,
look into yours,
I can see clearly it's not the same feeling you once felt
towards me,
When I longed for you to give me a bottle.

Ciera C. Love

Dreaming

Cloud nine when you hold me close.
And when you say my name like no other.
When you say we'll always be together.
You say it's always and forever.
Us apart? Baby, never.
Seventh Heaven when we kiss.
You said it's something I'll *never have to miss*.
Unless you're in Heaven,
Dressed in all black,
Crisp.
Our love is the real deal,
Even the deaf and blind know this.
Because when you blow a me kiss,
I really believe I feel a mist.
Strike me speechless - speech impediment - lisp.
Know you're at the top when only Heavens right above
you?
We've got no peak, no top.
No stopping for us two.

We do the do like no one else will do.
Same us, but our love stays new.
It's all so true,
But then I open my eyes.

And suddenly I realize
Love; how it couldn't make you stay
You're gone with the morning rays
I still see you
But you don't even look my way.
You don't even say my name.
Every day is the same.
Both of us playing *the quiet game*.
Okay, so maybe we're not playing.
This is just how we live without merely talking to each
other.
Because when I close my eyes I'm you're everything.
Your wife,
A mother.
I can't control my dreaming
But it'd be nice if you could save some of my heart that
you're stealing.
I just need some type of healing.
I'll throw out all the cards you're dealing.
Just for that mutual feeling.
Just so I don't have to be only dreaming.

Ciera C. Love

Real Nightmare

I don't dream anymore.
I nightmare on a daily basis.
I wake up to and from a bad dream.
I wake up so I'm not forced to face it.
Which means my bad dream is reality.
I fell and like all bad dreams I kept falling.
And in reality you didn't grab hold of me.
I wake up in tears
And go to sleep with then on my pillows.
I just need some guidance when it comes to you -
grandmother willow.
For real, though.
It's been hard dreaming with a broken heart.
We ended before we ever made it official - head start.
But here's the sad part,
You painted my HD picture for me,

What a work of art.

I see you with my eyes closed.
I feel you all around me.
Maybe if I shouldn't have let my wish be exposed.
Then just maybe we could be.
Damn, loves not fair.
I just want one sweet dream of you.
Nightmares are not what scare.
I know they're dreams, and aren't true.
I lost you in reality already,
I just don't want to lose you in my dreams too.

The Exquisite Corpse

Each of the following works was created by
Surrealist method called the Exquisite Corpse.

Participants begin with a topic announced at random,
they write the first thing that comes to mind on their own
paper, fold the paper over to conceal their line from the
next writer's eyes, and they then pass their paper on.

What results is a work with multiple authors,
created without creative limitations. Each line of the
following works was written by a different member of
USCB's Society of Creative Writers or a student from
this semester's Poetry Workshop, taught by Dr. Ellen
Malphrus.

Exquisite Corpse #1

They call me a stunning, cunning, linguist

What am I doing with my life?

Cold and desperation

Across the withered pasture she rides

Pink love seats and vanilla candles

Nice shoes, yo'

I miss the little things

You're gone, and it's dark

Gone

As the puppets race to answer

And I loved it

Exquisite Corpse #2

Shattered cups of tea

Chilling to the bone

Into the night, sweetly

Oh, excuse me for not giving you the courtesy of not
giving a shit

No, officer, you misunderstand

Fade away

Over the fence and into the back lot

Maybe I'm not all that important after all

Yeah, for one brief moment the world was ours.

Exquisite Corpse #3

Outside

Metamorphosis

Golden trumpets

Why even bother

As it comes to the final victory,

Carry on little one

Exquisite Corpse #4

I wish it didn't have to be this way

Almost anything else will do

I'm sinking slowly in the walls

Contagious

Exposed, as the daffodils bloom

Dry, cracked ground

Some spark too fast and die too hard

Exquisite Corpse #5

Money is the anthem of success

Wearing cowboy boots

Country farming, man

Along the river bed

Perpetual blending—the world's on fire

Exquisite Corpse #6

Beautiful

Tenderly, with honeyed whispers

I don't want to miss you

But it does remind me of you...

If you turn left, what happens

Call me the martini queen

No more time

And the train whistles a long goodbye

I wish he'd had more to say

Exquisite Corpse #7

How about another, dear?

Are those fires or crosses?

She plays in the tree with ghosts

Revealing

Fearful of nothing, righteous in victory

I love to hate you and hate to love you

I hate to admit that it's probably for the best

It's the end

Why?

Exquisite Corpse #8

Venetian blinds

Is there really a more bright and sunny day ahead?

Or anyone for that matter

I'm not apathetic, I just don't care.

Not only have I lost you, but I've lost me too...

Hurtful and damaged

As teacups rattle in the kitchen cabinet

I'm here today, guess that's all that matters

Kind of like us

If a pen is a weapon, you'll have to pry it from my cold
dead hands

Exquisite Corpse #9

Begin again, restart the end

Take a walk down the Milky Way

Beyond the Outback

Or somewhere in London

I'm alive

Overdone

Deadweight

Unordinary

Oops

Exquisite Corpse #10

It's a nice night for a swim
The ever so mystical dolphin says
I don't drink beer—I drink malt liquor
I like turtles, jaws, and killer whales
I'm sorry I lied,
But I could be a unicorn

Exquisite Corpse #11

I'd like to tell you a story, but it doesn't end well
Bury the beauty, then watch it rise on wing beats
Punch line, forgot it
So what's next?
Crack, crack, heart attack. Dead.

Exquisite Corpse #12

Snap back to reality
You aren't from around here...
Fly, fly, fly away
Ever present longing, envy of the marsh
I didn't grab my shoes or nothin'
This is the best worst trip ever
Play that old piano mamma,
Play me that song

Exquisite Corpse #13

Where I come from, rain is a good thing
As the oak limb held a patient hope
I'm chopped full of surprises
I forgot my socks
And now the music's stopped

Exquisite Corpse #14

What the hell?
I'll damn well have kids if I want to
Oh well, it's too late now
So then I got out of my car and shot him with an RPG
That's all you were to me
A hot sandwich, a cup of joe...
No one ever said life would be this hard

Exquisite Corpse #15

I'll let you in on a little secret:
Friends are other animals to associate with
Warm fire and candlelight
Black tipped wings
Yellow fields, building angels

Exquisite Corpse #16

I can teach you, but I have to change

Disintegration of thought

Removed from all weapons

A picture of you holding a picture of me

I only wish my fist could hurt you as much as your
words hurt me

I'm not your mother

This is my finest hour—I'm calling you out

Exquisite Corpse #17

I thought he was the one

Righteous

Hypocrisy

It's okay to pray for the people that you love

As deep paneled doors open into the sunset

Exquisite Corpse #18

Why so ordinary?

Sprinkles in my socks, oh yeahh

Nothing like me

Take time to smell the roses

As the mountains grow smaller

I've been locked out of Heaven

Hit by a train

Return us to our simple urn

Exquisite Corpse #19

The Easter Bunny killed—

Never mind, furbies freak me out

I mean, c'mon, look at those dimples

At least I'm tall

Today was a good day

Shuffling, shuffling, shuffling

In the raven cliff, onward

We've all gone home

Exquisite Corpse #20

I'm so far behind just trying to stay in the now

This night can't last forever—it's time to let her go

Single out for a heartache

You told me I was nothing then said I was everything

Only a glance

Willingness regained

Does this sound familiar?