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The Kerouac way of life has dissipated with the sound of silence leaving poetry to buy a lotto ticket in order to achieve the American dream.

by Christen Rigney
THE FINE ART OF FREEZING UP
by Ben Doyle

Froze my ass off last time we went through that, but you can’t talk about that kind of stuff inside. So, we shivered and our condensating conversation swirled around our heads like last summer’s brush fire smoke.

I ruined a perfectly good pair of shoes that day- rubber melted on black sticks- snuffing out flames with my burnt sole.

That wasn’t yesterday, though. No, yesterday we weren’t sliding around, hoping those words would catch some meaning, maybe we could kick into something good and connect somewhere. And we did.

For once we got it right for a while, and I could see us sorting things out, but there weren’t words for what we were getting at, so when we got there we just stood scared and glanced at each other, almost ashamed, through a screen of breath steam. Still, there could have been some comforting. But when the conversation froze, I decided to say it was time for me to go home. I guess I was just too cold to let you get close.

Life Jacket Required

The ink flows from her pen
Like blood through your veins
Bubbling now and then,
It intensifies your pain.

Your thoughts tumble, and are thrown
Like broken shells in the sea
Emotions choke you like a fishbone
Tears stream as you fight to see.

You collapse to the couch,
and float momentarily on the cushions.
Smack the water and scream
As you drown like a child lost
With only her letter in your hand.

by Kevin Gottlieb
Hide and Seek
by Tony Caputa

I stopped going to work, and rarely left the house. I would sit at the front window and watch life outside, and that felt natural, like I had always watched. I saw children playing hide-and-seek. I rooted for the seekers, and hoped they'd find their friends. Susan was the serious one, always had the cause, and I think John loved her passion. They covered their eyes—1,2,3...the others ran off frantically, hiding behind trees and under bushes. John was handsome and friendly, and as much as Sue lectured him on maturity, she loved him. Ready or not! They screamed, turning and sprinting to search for their friends. They introduced me to Rob. We felt the mist of the falls, dreamed, and fell in love. Some were chased and barely made it to safety, and that was sad. But saddest of all was when a few skipped to safety, unnoticed. That brought tears to my eyes...Behind you! By the side of the car! Catch them before it's too late. Before they fade away into safety. I know what would happen to them. Something awful—they'd all stop seeking and hiding. They'd hide in layers of predictability and fade away.

If everything wasn't so consistent. You laugh, play games, then off to college. You get laid, graduate, then marry. You land some pathetic job and surround yourself with familiar strangers. You let Rob fuck you on Friday nights, read his book on Saturdays, and never, never disturb him on Sunday. You know what you are doing tomorrow, next week, next year and you start suffocating. You forget why you're here in the first place. You want to stay in your predictable world, even though it's killing you, but you can't—eventually you have to move on.

Sitting in the dark
nestled under the tall, guarding oak,
starling up,
gazing out at the universe.
There is the place
where dreams are born.
Out there,
anything can be true.
The unknown,
the ultimate adventure,
where any being of imagination could live.
And down here is where,
in the mind of the visionary,
with pad and pen,
they come to life.

by William C. Paul
Orange peels on a paper plate
sit on the carpet near her shoes.
She's stretched out on the floor; the late
afternoon lingers in the air.

She weaves his hair in knots, smiles in
his skin, tempts his ear with good news,
soothes his tongue with sweets of smooth sin.
Afternoon picks the clothes shell wear.

The rug is ruffled as her
hair. How soft and subtle the blues
sing off the stereo. There were
afternoon's fingers in her hair.

Their smoke escapes the windows, heads
escape in hazy thoughts, they muse.
This sex could fill a million beds,
Afternoon lingers in the air.

by Nancy Taylor

The Wanderer
by Marc Ottaviani

The train pulls into the station and I sit waiting
for all the other passengers to get off. I wait until no
one is left, then I slowly rise and exit. My head faces
the ground and I look at no one, neither on the train nor
now on the platform. I can't look at them. I can't know
them. Therefore, I can't look. To look at a face would
be pointless, I've lost the ability to know someone. The
day is bright and warm and the sun glares brightly into
my unshaven face. I rub my jaw and am reminded of
my beard. I brush back my hair- it's long and straight
to see if there are any cabs waiting for passengers. I
grab my bag and fling it over my shoulder and sit on the
bench until a cab arrives. I smoke my last cigarette an
hour ago and I feel a bit jumpy. I go into the station to
buy a pack. A young boy laughs with another. They
look like brothers. The older one is in uniform. He's
no older than nineteen. His hair is short, a regulation
cut. They hug, shake hands, and the younger one
walks out of the station with a last look back before he
leaves. I had broken my rule of looking at people but I
was caught up in a daze. My hair hadn't been that short
in twenty years. I could have been looking at a movie
of myself. The last time I saw my brother it was in the
bus station before I went in, August 1, 1971. My God,
how I miss him. I start to get angry so I walked out of
the station. With a wipe of a tear and a light of a
cigarette, I get in a cab and head for a boarding house.

“So you here for the ceremonies?” I had no idea
what the cabbie was talking about and I did not answer.
With a look back in his mirror, he decided to try again. “It’s just that you look like maybe that’s why you’re here.” What I looked like was shit. My hair hadn’t been washed in a week and my jacket was filthy. My jacket. I was wearing my Army jacket and I had my duffle bag.

“Why what’s going on?” I finally answered.

“The Vietnam Memorial! The opening ceremony is tomorrow.”

Christ! Not what I needed. “No, I hadn’t heard anything about it.”

“Oh yeah, it’s a big monument to all the boys we lost over there. We were hit pretty hard. You were hit hard? I thought to myself. You don’t know what hard is. Hard is seeing your buddies disappear one by one. But they don’t just disappear. They slowly get torn apart until God decides they have had enough and should painfully and brutally die. Hard is doing three tours. Three tours. I was insane. Each one harder than the last. Hoping you’ll survive, fighting for what is right. Making friends. Making brothers. Brothers for eternity. Enduring the scenes of hell together binds men together. But we weren’t men, we were boys. We had no chance to be men. Boys with guns.

“Hey buddy, you still with me?”

I had spaced out hard. My heart was pounding a million times a minute and I was sweating like a pig.

“Yeah, I’m still here.”

“Yeah well, we’re here. This is it. You owe me six fifty, six fifty.”

“Here keep it. “ The sun was even hotter and as I looked up I caught a case of deja vu of a sun I’d seen many times. It couldn’t be the same sun. The sun of old had betrayed me, what seems like hundreds of years ago. How could the sun that warmed my childhood days of play and fun be the one that baked and burned me in the jungles of another world? And I’m supposed to believe that this is the same sun looking down on me now. It’s been the only thing that has been there and hasn’t disappeared forever. A constant reminder of days long past and times I wish not to remember. A banner snapping in the wind breaks me out of my latest day dream. VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL CEREMONY TUESDAY THE 12TH. Why is it now after all this time, people have decided to give a shit? I don’t even bother going into the boarding house. I couldn’t stay here now. I’ll just walk to the highway and hitch to the next town.

“Are you all right, brother, “ a voice whispered behind my head.

I turned around fast in anger, ready to explode, “You’re not my brother and-” I stopped. The face I stared into was young and beautiful. I hadn’t recognized the voice to be a woman’s, but a woman’s it was. Just a girl, really. The sun, as it shone on her face, glorified her youth. “I’m fine and I apologize for my anger.”

“Tis quite all right brother. We all get angry;
won't you come inside and sit with me? We can talk or just sit if you like.” Her voice was soothing and more beautiful than anything I had heard in a long time. Her kindness did confuse me though. She seemed to be dressed in a type of religious outfit. She was no moonie or freak, but she did belong to something. I stepped with her for a few feet but then stopped.

“No, no that’s okay. I got to go.”

“No, don’t, stay and talk.”

“No really I must go. Which way to the highway?” What was I doing?

“It’s up a few blocks to the left, but don’t venture outward on a hot day like today. It would be hell, brother.

“Hell? I don’t think so. Goodbye, I will miss your face and your kindness.”

The road was long and hot but I soon got a ride. A part of me, a large part, wanted to stay. I need to stay somewhere sometime but I don’t know. It’s too late for me. I’ve been cut too many times. My face is the only one I can bear to see because I know it will be the only one that will stay with me. My face, my memories, and the sun above me are all that’s left for me now.

HELPLESS
by Maureen Blum

How much more weight can the poor thing hold? She’s been under it for years holding up her troubles. Someone comes and throws more down and never offers help. How awful to live like that. While others come and go as they please, the poor thing must continue to push and strain.
Believe It or Not

Why do you look so surprised?
What do you mean how can I live there? Do I have a choice?
What is a person from my hometown supposed to be like?
No, I do not own a gun.
I’ve never had to use one.
As you can hear every word out of my mouth is not foul.
I’ve never been arrested or robbed, believe it or not.
I’m not at a funeral every other day, Okay!
No! All of my friends are not drug dealers or criminals.
Maybe I have known a few but it was only in passing.
Yes, I have dodged a few bullets but they weren’t meant for me.
No, I’ve never been compelled to be in the life of crime.
The fact that I’m in college trying to make something of myself should tell you that we are not all shiftless and bad.
I am not rough and tough, in fact I’m very sensitive; and I can get offended especially when I am judged solely on where I’m from and not where I’m going.

by Lisa Armstrong
She is the ocean
And I just sit by her shore
Waiting for the tide come in.
She'll wash over me for a moment,
A moment I must relish.
For soon the tide reverses
And I'll be left to wait again
Until the day when I've the courage
To swim out with her
And drown.

by Charles Silvanic

(Tyler enters and walks down enter.)

I met this girl, Lisa, like two years ago. She was pretty cool, I thought. We did the whole dating thing for ten or eleven months. We were in the part of the relationship where she thought sex seemed okay, you know, and we did that a little, except she was acting really weird. For like the last two months she was really moody and picking at me for the littlest thing I did. Like I know I’ve been the most original taking girls out on dates, but Lisa liked them. We went to see this Sylvester Stallone movie after we went to the Spaghetti Factory, and she said she never had so much fun with such a good looking guy.

Until that last part. We were arguing about my clothes. She said... wait, I want to tell you exactly what she said, she said, “Only a pompous, ignorant moron like you would wear those jeans ripped on purpose when you take me on cheap dates in a Delta 88 with the music up so high everybody looks at us!” So I’m like, “What?” Then she turns around and slams my fingers in the door on her way out. Anyway, stuff like that just kept happening and I got sick of it. One day when I was supposed to go over to her place I did, I walked all the way up those stupid narrow stairs with that irritating loud dachsund named Tweak barking at me, she named her dog Tweak. Went up stairs into her little kitchen and we sat down on this weird wicker stuff at the kitchen table and I took her hand in mine and I said that I was sorry but I didn’t want to see her anymore...and the next part I remember really well. It’s tough
to describe, but you know if you’re looking in someone’s eyes, you can see what they’re feeling? I was looking at her eyes and it was strange. She didn’t have the reaction I expected at all. It wasn’t like other girls I’ve broken up with at all. She was predatory.

Anyway, she calls...calls me a little while ago and says “You made...” She says “You made me have a baby.” But I didn’t want anything to do with it. Who would? I tell her that, and there’s a pause on the phone, and she says, “I have AIDS.” And she hangs up. I got the results from the lab two days ago. I’m HIV positive. I haven’t talked to her since. I call, she hangs up. Lisa’s parents have been calling me every day, though. They want to know what I’m going to do about the baby. They want to know how I could even think of giving their precious little daughter AIDS. But she is not the victim here. She was the first person I’ve ever slept with. God’s honest truth. And she said she was using protection. I thought she meant a diaphragm or something. What was she doing, praying? And...I mean, a baby with a loon like her would be enough of...what if the kid has it too? I don’t even know the kid’s name.

by Josh Russel

Black Cadillac
by Marc Ottaviani

Got ah black...Cadillac, my brown skinned black hair honey, lookin’ like a balck haired, brown skinned goddess in my black...Cadillac. White walls.. the tires...white walls on the black... Cadillac. Rollin’ and tumblin’ down all the roads, down all the routes, 66. Me and my honey, in our black...Cadillac, can ah drive all day and look real sweet, with our white walls underneath the black of the body.

Jivin’ down good old 66 with the top down, lettin’ the wind in, blowin’ through her long balck hair. We ride this Cadillac, Cadillac,...Cadillac through all the towns, makin’ sure to stop...at all the stop signs, stoppin’ for a minute or two so all the towndpeople can be sure to see me and my honey, with her smooth brown skin and wavy long black hair, sittin’ up straight in our black...Cadillac.

On top of our white wall tires, inside the chrome lines body, black and smoothe, surrounded by all the people and their jawdropped faces at the stop signs of town we drive slow and slick, we slide back to 66, rollin’ and timblin’, on those white walls, sittin’ up straight down the route, down 66, in our ah black...Cadillac.

by Josh Russel
Ode To Uncle Lester and His Barbecue Lore

When duty calls him, Uncle Lester nods, triumphantly removes the oven mitt from its rusty hook, and heavily he plods out back to "Git the grill, "which never sits there long enough to rust, unlike Cousin Phil, who hasn’t talked much after ‘Nam. The cause to celebrate is Grampa’s birthday. Eighty, he’s still a firecracker. God, that grill is good to Lester— better than Auntie Roz, and warmer, too. He calls the grill Sadie.

Sadie’s been through it all: Fourth of July, bar mitzvahs, Labor Day. She’s felt the rain, the hail, the spatula. A man can rely on this most joyous of events, the smell of raw burger inspires the greasy bard, and he begins to spin his tales of sins more juicy than the burgers. “Did I tell you guys about the time I ate the lard in my mother’s cupboard?” So the fun begins.

When Uncle Lester gets his rhythm, look out. He reaches fever pitch and words, RAT-TAT-TAT! are spat (and far) from moistened lips. A shout! A wave of flagrant fist sends bits of fat flying across the yard. “The lard! Oh, Jeez! I ate the WHOLE DAMN TUB!” A howl, a growl, the neighbor’s dog joins in. Sadie churns, the gristle burns, as does his wife’s face. A sheeze! A gasp! A slap on the knee! Please! STOP!

A scowl offsets the bard’s grin; our dinner sits and burns.

by Melinda Negus
Don't call me ma'am

Monologue

Don’t call me ma’am. It’s belittling to me. You don’t know me, you don’t respect me, you won’t acknowledge, who I am. And don’t apologize to me. I don’t need your pity and I don’t need your hand outs. I just want to pay for this dress which is too high any damn way. Don’t you touch my arm, cause I can lead myself to the cashier. I never asked for help, I just wanted to be left alone. What are you lookin’ at? Did you lose somethin’ on my face. You too busy lookin’ at me to notice yourself, but I’ll pay for this dress and I won’t lay it away, cause I’m not gonna be in debt with you for the rest of my life. Go on, ring it up and don’t forget that thing on the hem that sets the sirens off, because I’m not goin’ to jail for no dress. Thirty-eight dollars! That’s a damn shame. You’d think this dress was made of gold the way you price it. This ain’t no cotton. This polyester. I know what good cotton feels like, cause I’s a seamstress and I make these kinds of dresses all the time. That’s why I save my money to buy this one. Cause I wanted to know how it feels to wear one of these dresses I make at the job.. I said don’t call me ma’am. The people behind me ain’t going nowhere. They can wait. I works hard for my money and I want to make sure I’m buying the right thing. I saved up for five months to get this forty dollars, so I can buy this dress for my granddaughter’s baptism. She three....and her grand momma gonna be right there wit’ her, so ring that dress up and if you call me ma’am again I’m a lay you out...Wait...What’s this? ...Forty-one fifty....what tax!

by Reginald Kornegay
My grandmother sits in her chair. She knits a sweater. It fits no one. She wears it herself, for it's her life in tight twists of wool, the small bits of pain she bears.

While Grandfather dies, my grandmother cries in her work. She tries to knit her prayers in tangled cords. Sighs escape her. She ties it off. Her old eyes close. Rest, fore'er.

by Jessica Shanahan
Autumnal Graces
by Kelly Byrne

Grandpa and I sat in silence beneath the fall foliage. His callused hands, cracked the weathered with years of labor, lay still upon his thick legs as a leaf gently drifted to sit, like I used to, upon his lap. I could see its orange-gold reflection in his tired eyes as he focused on it. Just as he reached to caress it, a strange wind mustered from nowhere, whisking it away in an invisible whirlwind of strength. The trees danced and shook as if someone were tickling their tummies. A chill crept under my skin, tingling my arms and legs with goose-bumps, so Grandpa gathered me like a bundle of leaves in his arms, and wrapped me in the old wool blanket he had given me for my fifth birthday. We sat in the grace of the Autumn, engulfed by the invisible whirlwind of Time.

Time has crowned Grandpa king of the autumnal winds. As I sit here again, beneath these towers of leafy fire, I remember that day only a year ago, that we found peace in each other's company, in each other's silence. Now I find a piece of Grandpa in every leaf that is swept away by the invisible whirlwind that is autumn. Today, the trees rustle nervously, they whisper your name, Grandpa. I miss our silence, I miss our time. You were my invisible whirlwind of strength Grandpa, but now all I can do is whisper autumnal graces at your feet and pray that the hush of your stillness has brought you great pleasure in your kingdom of fire and gold.
She knows I'm watching.

Three tables over,
She takes time biting
White teeth in red skin,
breaking, crunching noise,
Lips gripping the piece,
They pull it inside.
Her cheeks forced outward...

And juice—oh, the juice,
Sliding in its stream
On her light brown chin
...I'm tingling within.

Loud red lips pouting
She glances at me.
I smile, but she scowls.
She thinks I want her.
Yeah, sure, she's nice but
...I just love apples.

by Kevin Gottlieb

MARY
by Michael Martin

I guess you could say that I enjoyed the Reverend John's speeches or homilies or whatever he was babblin' about at that pulpit. But there's no doubt, in my mind, that I enjoyed his daughter Mary a hell of a lot more.

It's probably a sin to sleep with a reverend's daughter, but that didn't stop me. I should have thought about that though. If I had any brains in my head at all, I would have just listened to Reverend John's speeches. I never would have looked up at her. You see, she played the organ. You had to look up at her. Not one of them wimpy little things either. She played one of them big cathedral type organs. The ones that remind you of your sins with every note, even though the church only held fifty some odd people. You could say that Reverend John was hopeful about the size of his flock, or maybe he just wanted her to play the damn thing. Who knows?

Of course, the thing was too loud for such a tiny church. But Reverend John loved his daughter so he loved the way it sounded. The flock loved the Reverend John so it stayed. Mary'd play along with the choir and all the other instruments and voices would be drowned out in the process. Except for Helen Maxwell, lead soprano, no one seemed to mind. I've heard that Father Thomas of St. Bartholomew's complained about the noise. The good reverend didn't pay him no mind. Catholics and Methodists never got along in this town.
anyway.

One Sunday, I was just listening to the reverend talk about Jesus either savin’ or risin’ that’s all he seems to do. Once he was finished, the choir broke into a hallelujah. Mary was vigorously pumping away at the pedals, I think Helen’s voice was actually starting to gain on her. Well, it was the third mass and Helen had been saving herself for this moment. I’ve never been an early riser. I figure Goo’s got enough patience for a man like me. Sweat was pouring from both of their foreheads. It was the age old contest of man against machine. The machine won and Helen slinked back to her seat to wait for the next week. I think it was at that moment that I fell in love with Mary.

After mass, I rushed over to Mary to tell her what a great job she had done. She just looked at me and smiled. “I know”, was all she said and walked away. Let me say right now that Mary was no looker. In fact, more than a few people said she was down right homely. I must admit, she is a bit overweight but that never hurt nobody. And her hair was dyed blonde but a little chemical intervention never hurt anybody neither. Most men can admire a good lie or at least should able to. I didn’t really see a problem with her. And I loved the fact that she was proud of herself when everyone thought she had no reason to be. She would swagger into a room and everyone would know that she was there. And if just the sight of her wasn’t enough she’d do something to get your attention. How can you not love a girl like that?

I had to talk to her, but not when the reverend or Helen or Don Harris who said that Mary was as cold as an igloo when there wasn’t an audience around. I never trusted Don, ever since he tried to sneak out with those rubbers out of Smith’s Drug store. If you can’t be honest about that, what can you be honest about? So, as Mary was walking away from me telling her how great she was for the fourth or fifth week in a row, I asked her what she was doing this afternoon. This was all out of ear shot of the good reverend, of course. She said that she was planning on practicing in church for next week’s services. “Playing that good takes practice you know. It’s like anything else, the more practice you get the better you become at it.” I asked if I could watch her. She didn’t seem to mind the idea much. Another audience when usually she was alone, even if it was only me.

I got to the church at five. She had been there for a good hour or so. As I walked up the stairs to the choir loft I saw pieces of music scattered all around. She must have been done with them. I sat down to the side of her, probably where Sandy Dennis sings her mediocre alto, or so I’ve heard. Mary didn’t pay me no mind. She just kept right on playing that organ for all it was worth. Needless to say it was loud, louder than anything I ever heard before. Then she started pumping her foot faster and slamming the keys harder. The entire loft began to shake. I heard her shout a second, “Just like God, huh Jim?” I couldn’t say no, then again I couldn’t say much of anything that anyone would hear. I couldn’t even hear my own words before or after they came out.

I just sat there watching Mary pump and slam for an hour or so. I had no idea what she played, all those religious tunes all sound the same to me. All about how great God is and how bad we are. I’ve never
liked the words much. But the sound, that’s a different story. Now there’s something any man can like. And to imagine that mighty powerful sound coming from one little homely, overweight girl was amazing. She certainly knew the best way to get someone’s attention.

Mary finished and she walked to her car. I followed her and wanted to say something, but I had no idea what. She opened the door and looked at me. “Like I told you before, I know.” She got in and so did I. I can’t remember if she asked me to or not. I just remember following her. I looked at her in the car and it was then that I realized I wanted her. She smiled at me. “I’m glad somebody else knows,” she said as she grabbed me by the back of the head and pressed my lips to hers.

I lost my virginity in the back seat of her car that night in the parking lot of Reverend John’s church. I don’t know about Mary. But I still think she makes the earth move in that loft.

tremble
strangled muffled cry
fragile stranger
gives
meek smiles
the scars fades
for an instant.

crimson shadowy heat
fragile friend
takes
hungry kisses
to inhale strength
that seeps.

liquid energy drips
fragile lover
who steals
souls
that shed glass
to heal.

fragile stranger friend lover
suffocating in sorrow
realizing your loneliness
trembling in my shadow
encircling embracing
sustaining healing

under skin rings
long
lost laughter.

by Liliana Almendarez
The Looking Glass Man
by Judith Furnari

Pray tarry with me my Looking Glass Man;
For what the heavens forgave you simply could not;
I was thrown to the wolves as Autumn's lost lush;
 betrothed to the midnight of one sultry touch.
The Angels stammered shrieking and reeking of such lust;
To drink from the cup of the blood of the unjust.
I stood as a spirit upon the unhallowed gates,
But salvation comes to slowly, too soon or too late.
And I gazed upon my very soul too much, too soon,
too late.

I do not understand thee, my Looking Glass Man,
These dual life perceptions have driven me half mad!
Smitten by a notion beyond all space and time,
Your cold eyes need not tell me that love has been unkind.
I thought I was the enchantress and that you were my fair game,
As pure as the Holy Innocent young and slaughtered babes.
But alas you were the vampire who loathed me like the sun,
I was then your carnage and you were then my drug.
Of all the pretty words that never quite come true;
I wonder if a martyr knows why heaven is called Blue?

So hear me now my Looking Glass Man;
A heart is so hard when your head is in hand
Come forth my brave soldier, you've now begun to fade.
The corpse is already rotting deep within my brain.
But with beauty still prevailing, the clock is meant to stop.
Though the heavens may have forbade us,
I simply just could not.

God's Laughter

I wish the Big Dipper
would scoop away Arian's belt
Leaving him pantless
for the eyes of millions
Truly then would I believe that
God has a sense of humor.

by Christen Rigney
A week after the dinner, a major in the army came to the restaurant. When I saw him, I immediately put down the record I was changing. Rosa Marie froze in place near a customer’s table. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Stella emerge from the kitchen and stop abruptly—a hand placed over her heart when she saw the uniformed officer with the grim face. She sank slowly to her knees and moaned. It was a low moan and grew steadily louder. The major’s words as he read from a slip of paper, “killed in action near the border of France” were almost unnecessary.

I saw Stella place her head on the floor, her dark hair falling over, her body racked with sobs. Rosa Marie bent over and clutched her tightly, also crying. The weeping sounds grew louder, permeating the restaurant with a sound that rips the heart. Louder and louder it became and I found myself crying because of the terrible agony and emptiness in the sound.
Rain, Love
by Anthony Caputa

'Tis only rain
my love, falling from above. Twill
aid flowers,
and grass,
to grow and green my love.

But don't they fret to be so wet? And will too much rain not wilt their leaves, their petals, their hearts?

'Tis the rain my love, that carries their hearts, their lives, and it falls too seldom to wilt their hearts and leaves.

But the rain beats so hard tonight. Will it ease before the flowers are crushed, and the grass all drowns? The rain beats so hard tonight, I fear it possesses the power to kill.

My love, my pet my dearest heart of hearts; rain in never beats too hard for those who need much.

But what of all those who need only a little rain? Will they be spared the power of rain, or be sacrificed in its name?

Look my sweet, my precious heart of hearts! The rain has stopped; your worries put to rest, and hold me near your heart.
TODAY

I decided to get up,
I felt changed.
I felt left.
I felt down.
I was trying to see.
I was complaining
about what I was needing
but instead of receiving
I was told to leave.

by Maureen Blum

Progress

You are, to me, your jacket splayed across your chair.
I look around your room and see in its space what I’ve never seen before—your form in all the things you own.
The jacket holds your shape in the way that it’s been thrown—
carefree, untroubled by the details of its weight.
I see you in the pictures on your walls, the clippings detailed
by your thoughtful scrawls. The shoes left under the desk to
tumble and entwine, as shoes always seem to do, upside down to
one another as if longing to crawl back inside their boxes to
resume their slumber.
The desk lamp on your doorsill, bending, neck broken, aiming for
the ceiling.
The paper and pen you cast aside, sometimes falling into the half
open drawer where you always find your wallet after looking last.
In all these things I see the curve of your body when the cover
has been thrown; the swelling and the shrinking of your belly as
you breathe.
The half read books beside your bed are all the things I haven’t
had the time to tell you. All these things are you to me because
they are not you—because you use and then forget them, never
needing any of them for a second.
These things remind me you do not like things but will save them
all, even the empty pens and dead bird lamp, until you think to
stop and put each one to rest. I can’t be boxed and taken with
you, but unlike things I can forgive you for not needing me. I see
you for the first time as I look around your room from the corner
in your bed, and I know that I have come into my own. And I am
not tire yet, and I will not splay myself passive on your chair.
Four in the Morning

Monologue

by John J. Garrett

Mitch

It was a Tuesday. It was a hot Tuesday. Not like there were any days that weren't hot. Mondays, Fridays, even Christmas felt like your balls were dripping with sweat. Daryl an' me had just stepped out in our khakis and I could already feel the sun sinking into me like a match against my skin. Daryl was a black fell'a'. I grew up sayin' nigger, but after I met Daryl, I just couldn't stomach that word anymore. I could tell that he had stopped, just felt it somehow behind me. When you've been in the shit with someone, there's a link there, you know what I mean.

So I looked back at him and saw Min, this little girl, probably twelve, although it was sometimes hard to tell with gooks. She used to sit outside the base with a puke green cooler, rusted near the bottom. For a quarter she'd sell ya a Coca-Cola, but most G.I.'s gave her a buck. Daryl had his wallet flopped open and asked if I wanted one.

Sweat had already been tricklin' down from my upper lip and onto my tongue, all I could taste was salt. I wanted one, but I don't remember what I said. I don't really remember much, except Daryl's big ass smile. Silhouetted against his dark lips it seemed like the brightest thing I'd ever seen. I noticed her the next second. As soon as she reached under her shirt with that shaking right hand, I knew what she was doin'. I tried to scream... I tried to move... I couldn't even open my mouth. She was packed as we used to call it.

Twelve grenades strapped to her stomach. Man, all she had to do was pull one pin. The last thing I saw before I was thrown back were Daryl's eyes, how they kind of widened... I think he knew.

I was up right after it. A small frag was in my arm but I really couldn't feel it. He was standing between me and the girl, if not I might'a... I just walked over, slow like, I mean, I knew there was nothing... Then, um, (pause). Strange thing about the G.I. boot is how it has a habit of staying together on impact. Most of his foot was still in it, I think that's what they sent home. The M.P.'s were swarmin' like maggots... man, there was beaucoup blood. I, once I could feel things again, there was the pain from the frag, but also this warm sensation on my cheek. I thought it might be a burn, but it was wet and a... kind of chunky.

I think that's why last week got to me so much. Here's this kid, twenty probably, maybe nineteen. Same age as I was when I was in Nam'. I'm sittin' on my porch and he steps into my bushes. Can't see me of course, I sit with the lights out. College is back so I figure he's just some drunk takin' a piss. Then there's this twisting, like metal, and I realize this punk is messin' with my flag pole. He rips it off the side of my house and starts down the street. He's walkin' down the goddamn street with my flag pole. Then he slides the flag out, tossing the pole in someone's yard. And he's trying to rip the thing. Not like he can, the stupid little shit, but he's tryin'. And I'm thinkin', Who the hell are you? Who the fuck are you to take my flag from my house and try an' rip the goddamn thing. I'm just standing therethinking, you motherfucker. I killed people for that flag. So you could get drunk and screw every night, I slit a man's throat for that flag. How dare he touch my flag. I saw
children ripped apart, I sat in the bushes all night long waiting for a fuckin’ gook to send me home in black plastic so that mother fucker could rip the flag off my fuckin’ house. (Pause) I wanted my ’16 in hand. I wanted to show that little fuck what an assault rifle does to twenty year old flesh. But I just watched him walk down the street. Finally he threw it down, frustrated, and went on his way.

I know this isn’t new ta’ you. I... I just needed to tell someone who’s been in the Shit. Who knows what it’s like to wake up at four in the morning and feel the blood soaked remains of your best friend, still stuck to your right cheek.

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**Tuesday Morning**

by Jason Stearns

The yuppy puppy properly dresses; he puts on his black poppy tie.

CD’s spin, and just-for-one-coffee hisses; the music pours, and the “breakfast” steams.

He puts a lighter to a white sexy stick and inhales; the light, dizzy morning enters his eyes.

The puppy yuppily skips out through the marble doors; he picks up a prop, a paper with News along the way.

He laughs at a bum that is stuck to the marble; his laugh blurs, lurches, and dances with the smoke from the stick.

The bum reaches with a long tongue, kissing pompous feet; the yuppy is tripped, sick for a split second, then laughs again, stepping.
He shoots a nothing-beam with a handful of blacksilver pulled
from a thousand dollar suit pocket; his Porsche beeps and giggles
with morning delight, saying, drive me, drive me.

Plunging blacksilver deep inside Porsche’s neck, he twists;
the automobile moans and sighs aloud with its hurt-but-does-not-hurt anticipation.

Little, bitty, shitty cabs toot by smiling, bouncing left and right; while racing and rocketing, a man and a Porsche leave tiny people far behind in the smutty dust of contemporary city.

The yuppy that can’t slow down, plummets headlong down a hole
and explodes on impact with a little sign that reads “SON OF A VP BITCH ONLY: all others will be publicly spanked!”; the love-tap landing of his semi-systematic friend, suits him fine, and he departs.

Clap, clap, clap, his fancy fuck you steps; he flicks fuzzy fugitives off thousand dollar sleeves; neck wood thickens; masks pour; darting eyes jump huge up the dark, dark tower; a slot is slapped; a rush of the glass bubble, bubbling up, like last night’s fizz, going up, up where the ice sits heavy, but floating; as he reaches the top.

The friendly funny-boy smiles to beckon the lips of luscious typewriter girls in red; surveying further, to pinstriped pillars of muscled grey, the thousand dollar suit-boy fixes on a man, for a second his heart beats.

The type-written words of the hard/soft girls, focus on and follow our thousand dollar friend, and whisper “money” in his ears; while the iron P’s & Q’s of the men, bounce and scatter, thrilling him still.

He dances with secretaries, touching their breasts; he laughs and grabs a hot cup of black steam (from too young a girl); he sees and scrutinizes everyone; he leaves a trail of headaches; then strangles a stack of folders from an ordinary desk.

He struts onward; his expensive feet pound; pages shift between
his delicate fingers; he paints each one in his mind; 
They distract him; 
he stumbles; 
someone laughs, and is fired.

He sees office to his left, silly lips to his right; water keg 
burp, giggle, tip and smash; 
"Meyerson vs. Meyerson," Mama says to baby, "here son, take 
this son"; 
(huh?); 
slap! and, "fuck you son!"; 
another stumble, and Samantha-secretary sidewinds, 
curls at the opening, lawyer-lover extraordinary; they engage in ritual 
brushing and trip through a door, into a corner of glass, 
clutching little silvery spoons; he pushes buttons; he gets 
pellets; he drools; and the expanse, above and below, 
spreads and screams.

The Darkest Hour
by David Sherman

A man of living past 
whose memories have been filled 
Staring at me 
my ghostly eyes

so cold 
so lonely 
bitter and scornful

His wrists and hands 
were of shabbled skin 
covering bone 

His back was hunched over 
in shame

and his old wobbly knees 
trembled 
like the last leaf 
in a dying tree 
blowing in the fall breeze
Enough to Make Me Go Blind

If I am society,
Then for now I am being jerked off
by political projects.
And with more care for the process
Than the resultant effects,
no wonder society
Has lost all its respect
For a government that has ruled
With a mighty hand of neglect.

by Kevin Gottlieb
as a bud, you struggle through the ice and snow of winter to emerge in the spring—a time of rebirth and renewal. You grow, slowly in the warming sun, stretching yourself toward the sky, yearning for warmth, life and vitality. You need the air, you need the soft rain, and the shelter of the tree to achieve your potential. You are full grown, a green, veiny leaf on a tree branch. The air begins to cool, the sun shines less, the days are shorter and the nights longer. You turn different color—like a chameleon in the desert and a rainbow in the sky; one last burst of life. You start to die. You fall off the branch, drifts slowly to your eternal resting spot.

RIP

by Shannon Matthews

Oh God, It’s Hot In Here, Mom!
by Dorald Bastian

Oh god, it’s hot in here, ma. Every night I say the same thing and every night my ma kisses her teeth and strolls away to her room. For five years, I’ve been pleading with her to invest in an air conditioner and her response was always the same; to kiss her teeth and go off to her end of the furnace. I never press the issue when she does this because I am familiar with the extent of her patience. Instead I adjust the position of the old window fan so that it can throw as much air as possible on me. I don’t know why I even bother to do this because it is always so hot and stifling, more so than when the fan is off. With the fan on, I feel as though the hot air travels up the length of my body like a wave of heat parching every inch of me.

In my sleep, I dream of hell, deserts, massive explosions. I wake to find myself thirsty and sticky. Before I leave my nest, I must peel the fitted sheets off my skin which came loose. I imagine, as a result of my tossing and turning all night. I walk across my room toward the door. With each step the floor creaks, but each creak is a familiar cry that affords me a sense of harmony and serenity that one finds in a place called home. I peer into my mother’s room to see if she is awake. I chuckle at the sight of her body stretched out on the floor, clothed only in her brassiere and slip. I move toward the kitchen. Without any conscious
table to discover a Sears catalogue announcing a five day sale. I run through the pages hoping that there would be a page for household appliances. There is. Yes, air conditioners at Sears are on sale! A sudden burst of energy comes to me and I want to run to my mother and wake her to pass on the news of my discovery, but I already know what her response will be. I throw my head back, resting it in the palm of my hand, my elbow point toward the ceiling where my eyes register the bare spots on the ceiling where the old paint has succumbed to age and gravity. Ninety-five dollars and ninety-nine cents, I thought aloud, never noticing my mother had come into the kitchen. "What did you say, boy?"

"Oh, nothin' ma." I'm smiling now as I rehearse the price in my head. Smiling, almost grinning, I tickle myself with the thought that tonight I should be able to sleep like a babe.

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Junkyard

by Kelly Byrne

They all have a place there, because they are of no use to anyone elsewhere

Casual conversations...

From one to another you will glance, and they will all seem the same.

Telling worn out stories to each other of old, rusty pickup trucks, lazy cows named Daisy, and the way it used to be...

knowing they'll never live to retrieve that life, that simple life...

when good was a boy and girl kissing for the first time on the fifth date, and bad was rarely spoken of.
Sad, broken bodies
with few repairs;
riddled with ailments.
Their windshield,
shattered and blinded by
years of use.
Some have no tread on their tires
and others, having been
stripped
of theirs, are left only
with frustrating, naked wheelwells
and a tragic loss of
spirit.

Stacked,
one on top of other,
five, maybe ten stories high,
they each have their
own space.

Because we are self Consumed
and cannot be bothered to lend an ear
and listen to their
stories,
this space is solely theirs;
theirs to quietly lay down and die.

Forgotten Memories

I faintly recall it myself—
when hills were made of berries,
and under my bed lived a chocolate elf.

Lu-la-byes were sung by dancing faires,
owls were studious, and rabbits played tricks,
when hills were made of berries,
and games were just for kicks.
We were foolish, so wonderfully foolish, when
our games were just for kicks.
I can hardly recall when hills were made of berries,
when a wolf couldn’t blow down a house made of
bricks—
when magical rabbits performed tricks for dancing
fairies.
I faintly recall myself—
I can hardly recall when hills were made of berries,
and under my bed lived a chocolate elf.
by Tony Caputa
Eric and Charlene

**X-cerpt**

by Sonja Brown

I looked up when we got closer to the courts. They were more crowded than usual. I stepped through the door in the gate that went around the courts and turned around to face Eric. He had his hands on the bar that ran across the top of the gate door and he was staring at me. I bounced my handball. I had to do something 'cause if I had just stood there I would've died. He stood staring and I stood bouncing for what seemed like a hour. I felt stupid just standing there so I decided to do something. I looked Eric square in the face. I almost had a heart attack. I looked at him for 'bout a full three seconds then I broke into a big, stupid grin 'cause I was 'bout to lose my mind and start laughing hysterically. He smiled. He probably thought I was crazy.

We got to the courts and was standing up against the gate on the handball side. Everybody and their brother had decided to come out to the courts that day. Charlene stood there and started bouncing that handball. That thing is an extension of her. She can bounce and catch that thing without even looking at it. I stood there watching her, like a ass, watching her bounce that ball and just looking at her for I don't know how long. I didn't realize I had been staring at her for that long or that hard 'til she looked up at me. She looked me dead in my eyes then gave me the biggest, beautifulest smile I've ever seen. And she didn't stop bouncing that ball for a second. She was probably thinking how much of a ass I was for standing there just looking at her. I wanted to grab her and kiss her but I knew I couldn't do that, so I just told her I'd see her later. I'm such a' ass.

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**SUBURBAN BOREDOM**

by Alison Burke

A boy, suggesting more a man behind the pulls and folds of his grey, thread-bare sweat shirt, (cotton thinned at elbow's space with dried, embedded spots of paint in crusted green along the ragged elastic waist) kneels impatiently atop his father's tool shed, waiting...vibrating the summer stillness closing around him. The storm he feels in air erects his soul. He stiffens. Cool produces beads of sweat. The day was killed at sunset; now the night embroiders black throughout the sky. The boy, suggesting more a man, peers through the dark, descending crack of twilight to the tudor house next door. A window lit on second floor implies inhabitance. He bites his lip and moans, "I wish I had binoculars." What once had fallen flaccid hardens now. He sighs, releasing pre-storm static which his bones predict with ache. A silhouette then runs by window's frame. He leans into the night in hope of better view. With quivering and dampened lips, he whispers, "Right now, right now, come to the window." Delivering brings forth success. A girl, suggesting more a...girl behind the lack of rise in tee shirt worn, approaches window, hesitates. The clouds have rolled into their places for the storm. Gazing into compressed night, she discerns a figure, gasps, and pulls her shades.
In dedication
to the people
who have inspired,
and supported me.
I am going to miss all of you,
especially
Cathy Santos
Betsy McTiernan
Marvin Henchbarger
Larry, Bonnie and Kyle Ott
Mark Cole
Jara Thomas
&
Sonja Brown