

INDEPENDENT VOICES
2010

*Original works of poetry by upper school students of
New York City independent schools*

Independent Voices 2010 is dedicated to Vivienne Fisher, who served as a JSA Parent Representative for the Collegiate School, worked tirelessly on behalf of the organization, and among many talents and interests, was a literary enthusiast. Regrettably, she died in February, leaving her husband, Tony, her 13-year old daughter, Annabel, and a 16-year old son, Oliver. Oliver Fisher's poem "Moments", published here and recently honored with a Gold Key in the 2010 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, was written for Vivienne when she was ill.

Moments

Not the sweeping arc
of time.

Not the melting months,
nor the span of years,
but the here and the now.

Right now.

Right now.

With loss
we learn the painful truth.

Moments matter.

Moments are gossamer gifts,
fleeting favors,
temporary blessings
that take their leave
and those we love.

Moments are a blink
in the eye of time.

They pass too soon.

They pass.

They pass.

Moments matter.

Oliver Fisher

Introduction



An Upper School Student Service and Cultural Organization

www.jointschoolsny.org

Joint Schools Activities, Inc. (JSA) is a non-profit organization created and supported by the parent associations of independent schools in Manhattan and Riverdale. Our mission is to advocate interest-based and age-appropriate activities for teenagers and to provide a broad range of opportunities for socialization through common experiences.

Under the sponsorship of JSA, high school student poets have created INDEPENDENT VOICES, a project including this anthology and an evening of student readings. With great enthusiasm, encouragement, and effort from students, faculty, and JSA representatives, INDEPENDENT VOICES is now in its thirteenth year. We hope that this event will continue to provide an opportunity for our authors to share their literary talent and vision.

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Mannequin

by Elizabeth Schack

As I look through the window
I examine the mannequin
Wondering why I don't look
Like her.
Two perfect arms.
Perfectly thin thighs.
Curves that defy perfection.
A vague smile.
Flawless teeth, a faultless face.
Effortless everything.

Thinking
What life would be like
If I only
Were her.
People would envy every step
Every gesture
Every batted eye
Each and every movement.

They would ask
For the catwalk.
They would ask
For my name in lights.
They would ask for my smile.
And I would give it
All to them.

People would stop laughing
And calling me names.
I would stop
Hiding in my own
Empty skin.

Start
Eating again. Stop
Being starved. Stop
Running to the bathroom. Stop
Hurting myself. Stop
Being pressured. Have to be
Thin.
Hurting on the outside. Killing me
Within.

Still looking
Through the window
Of my favorite store.
My reflection appears
On the glass.
I want to ask
One more question
Before I walk away.

I want to ask
One more question
Before I face the world.
I don't understand
Why I can't see
What I'm seeing through the window
Is actually me.

She

by Chris Dwyer

She saunters 'cross the heather soft:
A Flawless, Unseen Sign –
Amorphous yet displaying Form –
An Entity Divine.

For She, as if by some mischance
Commands within her Wake,
Each Tender Shoot to Mighty Pine –
Hers to Give, Hers to Take.

Indeed, in rage, Her Wrath is Writ:
E'en Nature flees its throne –
The Deaf'ning Roar, Relentless Force –
Claim each domain Her own.

A Gentler Mood She oft will share:
Tides ripple o'er the Bay –
And silhouetted on Her back
A seagull glides away.

Upon the Busy Boulevard
She Combs a young lad's hair –
He whirls about and wonders Who –
No Single Person's There.

Returning from the Thoroughfare
A Calm and Hushèd Force –
And settling 'mongst the greenery,
She, the Wind, has run Her course.

The Solipsist's Decree

by Katherine Adams

So often is observed in age of rule
A clandestine agenda, under guise
Of betterment and liberating tool,
Whose ultimate effects provoke Demise.
But what of an autocracy extreme,
Whose each revolt and rise is scepter's cue?
Whose ears, Plebes' shouts, their torches monarch's gleam,
All are civil ills mere existential hue?
Impeachment's only hope would be a coup
By reigning laws of nature ere unmatched
Tsunamis, gales, would this ruler pursue
As ombudsmen for fate, with vic'try latched.
But tempest's treason, in spite of strong approach,
Could never on such sovereignty encroach.

The Darkness

by Anna Broadbent

The light clicks off.

You watch the door creak slowly as its edge nestles into the comforting arms of the frame.

The light is now a leaking balloon

Spilling

Retreating

Dying

Darkness crawls out, lapping up with its rough tongue the last single drops of gleaming sunlight

On your cold wooden floor.

The air – it's damp, swathed in an ebony blanket that billows out

Then falls

Falls

Slowly

It hovers, and suspends itself in the thick air, blinding your darting eyes

Until it settles, heaving and sighing over the small globe of your bedroom.

How did this Darkness find you?

Did you seek it out

Beg for forgiveness, want it, embrace it

Or did it intrude without your knowing

Steal into your life, follow you throughout each hour of the day, acting as a shadow, creeping near you,

Being you.

When did you begin to lose your way?

It rips your plug away from its place in the wall, the world, and leaves you floating freely, lifeless, disconnected, alone.

It breathes. Slowly. Solidly. Statistically. And then you ask this Darkness:

Who are you? What are you? Why are you?

What is your name?

It is your name.

At the Jewish New Year

by Miranda Katz

inspired by Adrienne Rich

“May the taste of honey linger

Under the bitterest tongue”

cries the uncle solemnly
and greedily sucking the
viscous liquid away
exposing the bare sour
skin of the honeyed apple
and quietly deposing
the small slice from its platter
to his frayed dirty napkin.

Immersing himself in the
bubbling throngs outside of *shul*
it is easy to forget
that on every other Sabbath
he mixes his meats and milks
and uses his prayer shawl as
a decorative table cloth
and allows hot wax to drip
upon the embroidered cloth
blurring its intricate designs
and dulling the most vibrant
crimsons and ceruleans.

Only on this Saturday
can he rhapsodize about
his people
and their struggles and their triumphs

and their quantity and tragedy
the promises of unity
the blessings of community.
But this devotion will not last:

On Yom Kippur he will not fast
on account of his blood sugar.

siren song

by Darya Koltunyuk

i hear it
somewhere in the distance a siren
is rushing is reaching
out to someone
who hears the song of rescue
so swift it has no time
to choose its key and runs
through all the possible notes
its only melody is hope.

each second brings the song
close, closer
louder, loud while
the song pushes against each second.

i see it
an overwhelming burst of sound
piercing my consciousness and
it is gone.

the song is gone just as abruptly as it came.
a sudden diminuendo of sound
and there is
silence.

mutely the siren continues its song
and one day
i will hear it again,
singing for me.

Tempos of the Tracks

by Renee Kraiem

Hurrying past a musician in the subway station
Makes me feel guilty. I am one of those people,
The fussing and cussing commuters, rushing,
No time, no money, no prerogative to deviate from the routine.

The beats on the real streets of Manhattan,
Emanating from the boom box of a dance crew or the beat
boxing of a nobody,
Persevere through the dense cloud of crowded strangers,
struggling
Not to succumb to the overwhelming heat.

Perhaps what remains a puzzle is how the musicians,
The man violently playing the electric violin,
The troupe that shares the soothing melody of flutes,
The family that blasts harmonious melodies, a capella,

How is it that they continue to play so pleasantly,
Unrequited martyrs who break the monotonous rhythms of the
rolling trains?

Pedestrian

By Joshua Burgess

Feel:

The coarse pebbles under your bare feet
The gravel grating and grinding your calloused flesh
The scents of birch and maple drift across your face
Like smoke against a ceiling

The yellow mounds of the subway platform
Press against your sole
The impatience of sound and wind
Waiting to consume you

The strain of your arch
As you crossed the steaming tar
The popping and cracking of your old bones
Underneath the denim

The man inches, canes in his hands,
Down the cement
Eyeing his penny loafers
As a child watches a fire

Bound
By fear and awe
As the leather folds inward
To accompany the rising heel

The Ride of My Life

by Brandon Romero

Rumbling and tumbling much like the stomach
Of a hungry boy I await this train
Of mine, dressed warmly from feet to neck
Thoughts just starting to break in my brain.
I have made this long trek mechanical
It has become a daily ritual
That brings me to hall after wondrous hall
Scholarly things become habitual.
A time of ten six times over is my
Potential odyssey when the masses
Of my home seem docilely *nice* not sly
Only some filth leaving their crevices
The best and worst I live with in this world
Yet I would never change it truth be told

The Villain

by Nikhil Teckchandani

I wandered,
Blinded by the capriciousness of youth.

I would gently skip stones across the surface of
My pool of thought,

Observing the spherical projectiles
With an insatiable curiosity.

This serenity,
However,
Was a fleeting ecstasy.

My Atlasian burden of innocence is slowly
Fracturing my mantle,
The immensity is becoming unbearable.

Eventually
The truth scars the flawless,
And decays the callow,

Awakens the slumbering and
Enlightens the ignorant.

God is a sadistic creature,
Human nature is vice,
And Religion has corrupted those of the mind.

I am a mere witness to the conflagration of these heroes,
And the ultimate consequence of the Truth:

I am the Villain.

Untitled

by Morgan Monahan

Its onset quiet as the fading sun,
Yet spiteful like the steps of silent death.
Fatigue's sweet sorrow no one can outrun,
Still, best if you try not to catch your breath.
Sleep's lovely hollows we in comfort find,
And latitudes of dreams dissolve worries,
But to its fetters is our time confined –
Rest we must depart with anxious flurries,
And wake with even greater weariness
To lifeless worlds that we thought left behind,
Lest we forsake all of our tiresome tasks,
For the eternal dark that plagues our minds,
Performing only for the granite masks.
But we live on, awake in discontent,
Closed eyes repay that which we were just lent.

Pantoum for the Lonely

by Patrick Collins

What a waste,
the light is still on in her window.
She must have forgotten;
I hope she turns it off soon.

The light's still on in her window.
It can't be him she said he was gone.
I hope she turns it off soon;
I'd hate to see her leave it on all night.

It can't be him, she said he was gone
and now it was only me.
I'd hate to see that light stay on all night.
Maybe I'll give her a call.

She said now it was only me, but
he always looks at her with those owner's eyes.
Maybe I'll give her a call and
he'll pick up.

He always looks at her with those owner's eyes.
I hate that.
He'll pick up some new girl next week
and here I am, alone.

I hate that
the only reason I know is the light in her window.
Here I am alone;
at least she could have told me.

The only reason I know is a light in a window.
Maybe it's something else.
She would have told me
if it was something I should know.

If it was something I should know,
she would have told me;
maybe it's something else;
the only reason I know is a light in the window.

The Persistence of Memory:
After Salvador Dali
by Grace Brown

A dream is all I feel
The world is melting before my eyes
Clocks stuck at different times
Life being taken out of those around me
A calm sea is all I see
Sand only thing for miles around
A creature lies lifeless on the ground

Our Life:
after a painting by Gustave Caillebotte
by James Basuk

This is how the cycle works
We die every day
We are born every day
And we are eaten every day
Every day

Waiting for Nothing
by Clio Sherman

Sitting next to a vase of flowers
Waiting for hours and hours
Waiting for someone to burst through her doors
To notice she cleaned her nice tiled floor
Wanting someone to love and to care about
But in her head she does have some doubts
Knowing her heart is made of ice
Looking back through all of her life
She never had anyone to love
And there is nothing that she could be less proud of.

Lion

by James Basuk

He wants his food
His ribs stand out
Like a sore thumb
Ready for the fight
Because it might be his last

Artillery:

after a painting by Roger de La Fresnaye

by Will Sacks

The band stood beside the cavalry,
Heads held high,
Bring the beat.
Trumpets bursting,
Drums rolling,
Horses neighing.
The backdrop is ablaze,
The scent of gunpowder is in the air,
“Préparez l’artillerie!”
The cannons roll in.
The artillery men,
In their black coats,
Feed shell after shell
Into the gun.
The shells rain down,
Screaming into the ground.
And the band plays on.

The Whirligig of Time

By Jenny Davis

She opened her mouth, and sunlight streamed out,
pearly teeth illuminated by a glare
that seemed to come from the deep trench
of her beautiful throat.

Everything she touched was immediately transformed,
mundane objects assuming perfectly frozen,
hero-like poses in gold
at the sight of her long, thin fingers.

She was the kind of girl who spent her summers at the beach,
basking like a turkey in the unfiltered sun and sporting toenails
effortlessly painted

with chipped rose-colored polish.

Sand and salt wouldn't dare stick to her flawless skin,
but slid off her bronzed shoulders
as if they knew they had no right
to trespass.

She was a ballerina in a pink tulle skirt
and tiny rose shoes encasing
dainty, pointed toes –
a whirligig put on display,
rotating on an ornate stand and
turning in slow-motion circles
as soft music floated
out of her gold box.

I opened my mouth, and things spilled out,
the two-dimensional planes, shapes, and lines
in my geometry textbook
lifting off the page
and prancing around the tangled

space
of my brain
and the tiny green chloroplasts on my Biology lab sheet
bursting thick in the air,
jelly-like stroma suspended in space
before bouncing to the ground.
A tornado of the colorful matter of life swirling around my head
while I stood
completely still in the comfortable shadows,
illuminated by a single, spastic bulb.
If I stared hard enough at the darkness,
I could see the tiny electrons buzzing
as vibrant as tiny fireflies and ferocious as a mob of angry bees.
It would all be uncovered layer by layer –
like a Russian nesting doll growing
smaller and smaller and smaller.

Breeze

By Natalie Haim

I stretch out my legs
feeling the warm breeze sweep through the classroom
whispering sweet, summer thoughts in my ear,
enticing me with its lazy arms.
And I stop wondering if Spenser ever loved,
or if Shakespeare only wanted fame,
and succumb to the daydream
that has been poking at my consciousness,
and shifting in and out of my head.
I dream of green leaves, and budding flowers
that envelop me in their scent.
A blade of grass that tickles my cheek;
a butterfly that grazes my arm with its intricate wing.
And then, like a rude awakening, a loud noise brings me back
to a classroom swimming before my eyes,
to the sonnets of years past, as I yearn for the future.

Staring Out at the Mediterranean Sea at Sunset

by Nicole Himmel

Sipping the cream
On top of a warm cappuccino
A dense delight
So many different tastes
Which to savor first?
The milky juxtaposition of the cream and sugar?
The powdered chocolate?
The coffee?
No
You let the sea of flavors swirl in your mouth
As one glorious entity
Until your spoiled lips let out a smug mmm
Then there's that last punch of coffee
Dark and sophisticated at the very bottom
You tilt the glass letting the black gold trickle down your throat
That beautiful moment
Right before everything is gone
And all your disappointed eyes can see
Is the bottom of a cracked porcelain cup

I watch the blazing sun let out its last brilliant flare
And stare with wet eyes at the burnt horizon
I place my empty porcelain cup on the table beside me
And realize that nothing in life is permanent
Feelings and people pass like doves across the Mediterranean
Sea
Blurring ever so slowly until they disappear
And you start to wonder
If they were ever there in the first place

In the Bear Creeks of Southern Alaska

by Alexandra Ozols

Silver salmon slither like the deceased souls of the Underworld –
Black Bear is their Hades;
jam-packed, scrambling for a chance at life:
a game of blackjack.
Some jump as if to spring ahead;
others sprint like sperm,
striving to ascend the cascade.
A young bear creeps among the berry bushes,
his stomach craving a fishy breakfast –
careful claws linger for the perfect catch,
ready to pluck.
But success eludes the youth's quick claws
with every attempt at a hearty meal –
he must make do with the pitiful pile
of breathless scales.

Progress in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963

by A.E. Hairston

He sits in Woolworth's
At the banquette of apathy,
His white hands vigilantly penciling words
Across and Down.

Then without looking,
He carefully adds two sugars
To the coffee the way he takes it
And moves to draw the blind
On the window behind his head.

Ropes of water may rule the day,
But inside here,
Bobby Vee is on the radio,
And the pecan pie is to die for.

Coney Island, 1980

by Evan Harden

Families plotted whimsically along the wavy sand
warm with the sun's taunting rays, shining without discernment.
Exhaust freely spewing from clanking metal,
brashly thrust into collision by feverish drivers.

Dainty umbrellas with vertigo patterns were jostled by impatient
gusts,
seagulls floated, aimlessly intermingled with taut balloons and
with Nathan's weighty scents
that simmered off of grills, clumsily billowed upward past the
stout Ferris Wheel,
who rotated at its own inconsistent rhythm, calmly surveying the
steamy boardwalk,
where lively ebullience fluttered past, scurried past.
Plank after
plank.

Boisterous boom boxes blared witty rhymes, abruptly cut short
by Brooklyn's #1 DJ,
already foreshortened tank tops and trunks rolled even farther up
the body,
exposing vulnerable skin, a shade lighter each inch.

The mechanical pounding of worn slot machines, caked with
dried sea salt and mustard, stopped.
A lucky tourist has won \$50, while locals divert their envy to the
tumultuous waves,
every penny of the prize spent on Coney Island Corndogs and
Silly Hats from 1980.

Night Ride

by William Wheeler

My father pulls up in his car.
He signals me to get inside.
The night above yields not one star.
My eyes are red; I try to hide.
My head is turned the other way.
His eyes are focused straight ahead.
I do not have a word to say.
The silence weighs me down like lead.
The speakers and the vents converged
Blow formless jazz against my face.
In cool calm gusts I am submerged.
I breathe the sound of midnight grace.
The solemn street lamps glowing bright
Illuminate the empty sky.
Their orange trails on in the night
And follows us as we go by.
Our faces meet with silent glance.
Our eyes are glazed and dipped in light.
The two of us are in a trance.
My dad alone arrests my sight.
I see in him the lonely soul
That jazz and drink are known to make.
His glare consumes me by the whole.
He sees I've made his same mistake.

Brothers of Apartheid

by Griffin Adams

I will go down on my knees and...

Whirling knobkerries cast sinister shadows
Along the stained streaks of tin trash cans.
Men dressed in normal clothes and flaming tires
With nothing but missionary books and bad dreams
Wake up wielding AK-47s because
They grew up sitting in muddy rain watching
Bullets raining through crowded corridors,
Making glistening shards out of their townships.

Beg those who want to drag our country into...

Cracked picket fences crumble against the
Pastel – aquamarine, lilac, neon orange –
Shingles of squatting shacks squandered
By fearless Africans running away in fear.
In grey striped suits Mangosuthu Buthelezi
Slumps under the weight of so many slights and
Cleansing his hands in murky puddles of squalor
Hurls stones chopped by Mandela, Tambo, Sisulu
Into the burning rubble of his own race, so that
He can stand up straight and broadcast in red
And frantic children that he was more than just a man
Drifting away in shackles and scuttled across oceans of time.

Bloodshed and to persuade them not to do so...

In a black and white jumpsuit the incumbent savior
Of South Africa, clasping his hands together,

Shares a laugh with the Zulu nationalist in his
Striped suit, his eyes squinting with boyhood abandon
Yet catching enough of the shorter man's
Impassioned glaze on his weary forehead
To beam with no regrets: *I am your brother.*

Moments

by Oliver Fisher

Not the sweeping arc
of time.
Not the melting months,
nor the span of years,
but the here and the now.
Right now.
Right now.
With loss
we learn the painful truth.
Moments matter.
Moments are gossamer gifts,
fleeting favors,
temporary blessings
that take their leave
and those we love.
Moments are a blink
in the eye of time.
They pass too soon.
They pass.
They pass.
Moments matter.

Careless

by Nicole Mak

Hot summer suns come out to play on sunny school buses.
Out in the sandy desert I was thinking of soft tops and long
jeans.

Tousled hair for my playful personality.

It was too distracting.

I couldn't stop seeing the veins net his arms.

This time, when I look at his eyes I see how green they are.

Today they were green and tomorrow they'd be blue.

He told me, "Play patient."

There will come a point when I'm unsatisfactory.

But there are only three months left so take every second you
need.

I'm just pretending – what am I doing?

He said, "Tell me what you mean."

He tried to open me up.

He told me his story.

He had a thing for soda and smokes.

I knew what I wanted.

Sandy yet dark, white bunny finds hole number 6.

Too. Self. Conscious.

I once was young

by Isaac Kaplan

I once was young.
I once ran through the snow in nothing
but my boxers and a set of
clean white socks.

But now
I am afraid that as we walk
We will realize there is nothing between us
But a thin sheet of cool, stagnant air.

I'm afraid that as you drift away to somewhere else
That somewhere else will hold you forever.
That someone else will hold you forever.
That I will never.

purified expectations, putrid realizations, petrified of so much
that I can't remember.
Long ago I wasn't afraid of the dark.
Long ago we ran through the pitch-black forest wearing
nothingbutbluejeans.

we are fools, you and I and all the rest,
fighting over decided trivialities.
we lost the war forever ago
and yet with commendable innocence we battle on.

they are the youths of this world,
bottled up
against the limits of their own visions.

This is how we are

have been

will always be.

O youth, O brave youth, O troubled youth, you have failed in
your hapless endeavor.

Good night sweet heart.

I'll visit you when it isn't raining quite so hard.

3:00 AM

by Juliet deButts

For what

ineffable inescapable inarguable

reasons does the night

excite

so many more

passions

than the day

all coiled springs coming

loose releasing tension

is it the

darkness, coiling or perhaps the

lights that chase it all away?

Why do we feel the need to

taunt the sky

by fighting back against the setting

of the sun

by spilling out our reams and reams

of false electric flaming brightness

into the innocent

night?

so bright?

Are we perhaps in search of

clarity

peace

stillness

and do we envy the night

for all of that, for all it has unknowing?

Is that why we stay

up late and

burn such quantities of midnight oil?

or are we scared
 of all the shadows so
 we try futilely to scare them off in turn
again and again
 with our brightness
not realizing that we only
 give
 them
 strength.

Memory

by Nicole Mak

I dropped in and fell off the bed.
You will remember me as the one with the headache.
I mumbled and you said “what?”
You will think I’m crazy, or quiet, mostly the one with angry
eyes.
You will think I underestimate myself.
I walked away and you turned around.
You will see me as the one who retracts, under the covers, into
my head.
I am the one who lost thought, somewhere between a breath or
two.
You will remember me as the one without thinking.
I knocked and you answered.
You will see me as the one who disagrees.
You will see me as the one who dreams.
I can smile, only because you say I don’t anymore.

Like a Flower in a Vase

by Matthew Allan

Gorged on hot dogs and face down in the mud,
Above rich volcanic soil
With his blackened lids for love,
For her endured myth and mystery
And could turn to jagged spots.
For he had spent all his energy
Working for charlatans on his block.
In bars he told stories of a friend
Named Hemingway, who drank Absinthe
And performed knife tricks.
He was swimming in the grit
And had been placed on a shelf.
Marlboros eat away at themselves
And turn into magic
Like the heroes of spell.
Young man you are a machine
The world has taken your face
And polished it clean.
You are overlooked,
You are thrown out with the crooks,
You are unperceived,
You are a puppet on a string,
No one knows your name.
This has given you the freedom
To put yourself on display
Like flowers in a vase.

Alone

by Jeremiah Magier

He stands alone
His tears have abandoned him
There are some things society can't allow
And now he stands alone
But he has not forgotten
The medal the society once gave him
For killing a man
Nor the contempt they gave him
For loving a man
There are some things a society can't allow
Two men can't kiss
Nor two women love
There are some things society can't allow
He remembers the humiliation he suffered
And he cries with rage
And he cries with sorrow
But people just pass him by
They laugh at him
After all
There are some things society won't allow

Darkness and Light

by Jacob Kaufman

My path is lit by light and dark.
Through joy and pain my life goes on.
Knowing not what lies ahead,
I press on, holding dear what's gone.

Along this ceaseless path I tread,
"Hellos", "Goodbyes", and "Whys" abound.
I will continue on my own
Until, by someone, I am found.

Through love and hate my heart is thrown
And yet as my life is unfurled,
I heard the song my heart had sung
And know I expanded my world.

But now I am no longer young.
The world is not just wrong or right.
Learn well the song that I have sung
And take the darkness with the light.

The End of Our Apartment

by Jackson Leeds

It was a rush, that day
To see everything I clung to,
Everything I used,
Everything I called my own,
Disintegrate into cultural, expensive flames.

We stood with the rest of the people on the sidewalk
Torn with emotion like old receipts.
Should we complain about the loss
Or just be happy for all we still had?
I looked behind me in hopes of more pleasant scenery.

What I saw that day
Was years of hard work being destroyed,
A lifestyle evaporating,
Money burning to crisps.
I had no choice but to care.

It was unfortunate to see my spoils slip away
Like fingers hanging from a ledge.
But as I saw them jump
From the fire escape
I knew I was the lucky one.

Treads, Tracks, and Toy Soldiers

by Andrew Maxwell Freeman Pauker

Yes sir, no sir, of course, sir. All of your little toy soldiers,
coming from the same mold. Straight lines, straight swords.
The stable pulse of the metal-toed boots on the cemented road.
Clack, clack clack.

What for? What end? Uncle Sam's great glory?

Fumes fired from the tip of silver sticks. Is this the way to
achieve our goals?

Still sir. Dare not stop. Stop the wheels of war from turning.

I mean, what are we without it? What am I but another track on
the tread of the war machine that we are?

Dear America, Sincerely, the Kids

by Eric Shalom

Green lawn, white fence, American flag.
Eat, commute, work, eat, commute, sleep.
Rain falls hard. I walk alone.
Try hard not to float away.
I'll write on their walls tomorrow.
The kids are certainly alright (really).
He worked. He lived. He died.

Flo

by Haley Sherif

In a field, I am
Scattered amongst yellow sunflowers.
The soft chirp of red-bellied birds.
Sunshine gleams through the barred slits.
He sits, solemnly in prayer,
Muttering softly under his breath.
The bells of the church chime,
With the rhythm of his ballpoint
Pen.
Sixteen girls chatter in a corner.
A dog barks in Monticello.
Her earring jingles on my right side.
Somewhere in London, a poet taps his left hand.
1:00 A.M. Japan, Elmo smiles.

Starry Night's Moon

by Emily Wynne

I appear a warm, corn-colored comfort
To the quiet, quaint town below
Knowing nothing of the vast stars, and the planets, and the
countless infinity
Which surrounds them swirling
Making the quiet, quaint town a thimble of dust in God's great
hand
Darling village, do you feel protected
By undulating dips and valleys and trees?
By the steeple in the center of your village, center of your heart?
Or by me, the harvest moon radiating light?
Do you not know, I am but a reflection of the sun
I am nothing on my own, neither are you
I am cold and will be lost by you
The sun will come, triumphant, taking its throne
And I will slink into darkness, all alone

Nector

by Marjorie Levinson

Drowning in memories of what could have been,
I am withered by my misfortune,
No longer a man, but just my wife's possession.
Lulu, a shore with open arms,
Welcomes me into her heart.
With her, I am a man.
Free
of the restraining reins Marie has placed on me.
A firm rock,
No longer decomposed by the stress of our marriage.
With Marie,
I am only sand,
Desiring so much to become a part of Lulu's shore,
Yet too weak to leave Marie alone
To corrode other rocks that were once stable men.

The Rabid Bat

by Clare Redden

Weird stuff happens in the middle of the night
When you think there's a murderer in the house
In the foggy place between reality and dreams
Creaking boards translated into stealth
The air crackles with electric fear
Muscles tensed in the stilly night
Lie and wait
 for the inevitable doom
The hall clock's inconsistent ticking
 beats time passed
The insubstantial shadow takes wing
 Plunging nightmare into reality

moon

by Emma Specter

bit fingernail spat into the navy sky
 fat buoyant orb incandescent against the hot orange sunset
 framed by whispering veils of night-time gray
 darting silver jetstreams of light
 dance down through the bruise-purple night
 pausing softly to cup a chubby cheek in hand
or haunt the long thin hollows of a pale set jaw
premature luminous skeleton sits uncertainly at the border of the
violent azure
dwarfed by the sun's steely splendor
full, cold and pale, launched like a crooked opulent marble
into the shivering air

Pigeons

by Avital Morris

Tonight the pigeon misses
her devilish ears. She looks up to the bare
earth to lean out of the river,

out of the air – before she falls, dropping
the gold bird. The silk of green diamonds
is horrible to hear, and you

just sit in this red night; listening
your only play –
the fish is inches from here, you go away.

Feeling is a rough sleep; relax
on target in your coat of stones – but you could ruin something
so slowly
that it became manifold including this: a thinker.

My Life

by Juliet Zou

Sometimes I think that it might be a square,
drawn with precision on a spotless piece of paper.

Or maybe a delicate yellow flower,
with only two petals left.

But when I look out the window,
and see the breeze rustling the reddening leaves,
I feel like maybe it's something different.

A small path, winding over deserted mountains and fields,
or the edge of a tree,
with one leaf dangling into the water.

The one pebble that disturbs
the peace of a small pond,
or the moment just before a bubble is popped.

But I could tell you that it is like a leopard,
slinking through the jungle after a heavy rain,
or the feeling of swinging into the air,
and into the bright sky.

Or I could say that it is like an empty room with
just one painting in it,
or the feeling of looking down from a high tower.

Some days I feel as if it's just like a spring,
with perfectly compressed coils,

or a purple polka-dotted bow,
clipping back my hair.

Maybe it's the feeling
when a wave hits me and catches me off guard,
or when I see the orange sun
right before it dips below the horizon.

But it could just be the compressing silence of midnight,
when my dreams wander and mix with reality,
and I can see silver rain and a pink moon,
dangling from my roof.

Mary

by Emma Gulley

And Mary said
that he was her one and only.
That she had known his lamb's wool hair,
that she had known how it grew in dunes and circles,
that she had traced its pattern
as he, the infant, slept in her breast.

And Mary said
that she had stayed up with him
all night
every night
for weeks
because he could only be content
when his mother rocked him in her arms
under the eucalyptus tree.

And Mary said
that he had fallen out of the same tree
years later, trying to be a grown-up,
and the boy who had been trying to be a man
became a boy again
and cried in her lap
until all was well.

And Mary knew
that he wouldn't work with wood.

And Mary knew
that he wouldn't be a father.

And Mary said
that the savior of man
was her boy.

Untitled

by Ashley Johnson

New Year's Eve

smells like

a pungent mix of contact and 3 day old coquito,

10

papi's up to his old tricks

the ones he never hid in his sleeves

9

slurred spanglish and gunshots masquerade as fireworks

for a chance to dance with the

stars –

flicker like cigarettes

8

I guess they had a drink or two

7

too many already broken resolutions

6

the only thing new here is regret

5

and maybe the snowflakes

4

are the closest they'll get to the taste of heaven,

the only baptism they'll receive before spring showers

3

so I'll watch them live another night to be forgotten

2

like last year, this year and

1

Happy New Year

Once Keen

by Marianne Dorado

Jimmy sits in front of the computer screen.
He does not think, he only sits and stares
While the pictures saturate his once keen

Brain. And at the ripe old age of fifteen
He does nothing and he no longer cares.
Jimmy sits in front of the TV screen

And grows fat on chips and drinks with caffeine.
A voyeur, who no longer dreams or dares,
While the pictures saturate his once keen

Mind. And he never ponders the unseen
Or wonders about the virtual players
He meets daily on the video game screen.

Going outside's not part of Jim's routine
He would rather sit in comfy armchairs
While the pictures saturate his once keen

Head. Addicted to this digital morphine
Nothing will change him, no pleading or prayers,
For Jim will sit in front of any screen
While the pictures saturate his once keen
Brain.

Kindness

by Mimi vonSchack

Kindness is not an easy thing for us.

I am moth

You are flame

My paper wings float on the crescent of your smoke.

I nibble away at sweater sleeves; tangled up in stray threads –

A girl unraveled.

We want to be kind.

I am house

You are night

I'm haunted by your eerie shadows in the windows of my eyes.

Cars drive by dusting my glass with yellow light.

I am incapable

You are incapacitated

With lust or something.

Like I said, kindness is not an easy thing for us.

You can't expect the sun when you know all I can get you is
daylight!

I am foot

You are splinter

You're stuck in my flesh, a black dot tucked beneath layers of
skin.

I scratch at you, but you sting. You're hard to see but I feel you
under the surface.

I am here

You are there

I wish you didn't travel so much. I could follow you, you know.

If you bothered to tell me where you are going.

Untitled

by Qiu Meng Fogarty

The scene is happy,
the day is bright,
the hallway is empty.
He is smiling.

Outside the art room
on the eleventh floor
where you can see the birds fly
and tree tops below –
On the eleventh floor
outside the art room.
He is smiling.

Just for a moment
when a butterfly stops to rest
on an unexpected finger
and for a second
pauses
before fluttering away.
And what is left –
a fading memory and a soft
sensation.

He is smiling.
But he doesn't like it here
On the eleventh floor
And so he flies.

Sestina for the Insects

by Emily Crane

My unclean insect self makes a pattering sound
as it scuttles through mind paths I know
so well I could follow them blind, solely by touch.
But I cannot flee the pervading, sickening smell
of answers I would never dare to taste,
so I choose not to feel the world against my skin.

I unwrap myself from my skin,
folding it slowly to relish the crinkling sound,
and place it in the drawer where ants gather to steal a taste.
I don't let slip any announcements, but they always know –
Perhaps, as I am cooked, they recognize my smell
and prepare their stomachs for my touch.

Every morning: more holes through which I must touch
and more memories missing from my skin.
Some say the strongest memories are smells,
mine vanished without a sound.
I turn to the ants, I'm sure they know,
their mouths are full of my memories' taste.

I've heard ants have a lemony taste.
If I eat them, will I re-feel their touch?
I debate whether or not I should reconquer all that they know,
reclaim the devoured shreds of my skin through their skin –
The ants deliver my conclusion with no speech or sound
by ushering in the rot with its knowledgeable smell.

My nose may shrivel on my face at the smell,
but my tongue quivers, longing for a taste.
As the ants squish, there is a faint crunching sound –
Unlike me, they have hard skin,
more resilient to the touch.
I stuff myself on all I know.

I won't admit how much I know,
even though my proclamatory breath carries a lemony smell.
Go ahead, try to interrogate me with your burning touch –
But the lights are too bright for my taste
and I don't much care for the sizzle of cooking skin.
It's an overly self-conscious sound.

You know how I taste,
how I smell, how I touch,
so I shrink to my insect skin with no protest sound.

Coats

by Stefanie Spanfeller

There is a hallway that leads from one room
Into the next.
The only doors are on the sides
And they're so white that when you touch them
There is evidence for weeks
Because your fingerprints,
Which are yours alone,
Tell a story
About how you walked the same hallway
Only weeks before.
At the end of the wood,
Before the silent grand piano,
Where the inside meets the outside,
There is one last closet,
And inside it sit the empty hangers
Where your coats once hung,
Perfectly aligned beside mine.

Why I Make My Bed Every Morning

by Sayda Morales

Her brown eyes are silently rusting away
What once was a lion mane vicious brown is now a cloud-faded
gray.
I fear she has given up.
What was once half-full is now a nearly empty cup.
She walks slowly and awkwardly because her feet no longer
dance,
Only stand on twelve hour shifts as she numbs herself into a
trance.
I have seen her bleeding feet leave stains across the floor,
Told her, "I love you," even though I wish I could tell her more,
Like, "Mom, don't worry about your pain, I can heal you with
my pen,
I can suck out your anguish and smear it on withered sheets so
when
It sells and makes a fortune, you'll never work a day in your life
again."
But even I know that's like reaching for the stars,
Like trying to use a plastic spoon to cut through metal bars.
No, I cannot promise her that just yet
Because promises I cannot keep I always regret.
So all I can promise her is that I'll never forget
To make the beds in the morning because that's what she loves
best:
To see her house in order, even when her life's a mess.

The Faithful Friar – The Verona Times

by Alexandra Stovicek

*Poetic Letters between Juliet and The Friar inspired by
Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*

Dear Faithful Friar,

Whatever shall I do?

I am in unwanted peril. My true love sprung from ancient grudges, fair Romeo, a Montague, the object of my desire. But what's Romeo? It is nor hand, nor foot, and my love doth grow from the man, not his name. Ay, the worthiest hand and the most saintly lips I have touched, are tender and full of meaning.

Alas, whatever shall I do? Deny thy father and refuse thy name, or succumb to the mutiny of my dignified household? O, a plague on both our houses, which break the bonds of my heart's true love, the fair son of rich Montague, thine own enemy. Good preacher, I confess that I love that slanderous man, who has abused my face with unwanted tears.

Speak, good ghostly father, and lend thy breath.

Sincerely,

Star-Crossed Sister

Dear Star-Crossed Sister,

A glooming peace this morning will soon bring!

Alas, poor maiden, my advice is none more than sin. Even so,
my toil shall strive to mend your woe. Remember, keep to thy
love, and Romeo will love you. The gray morn will smile on this
frowning night, eastern clouds with streaks of light.

In plants, herbs and medicines you shall find, a remedy far fairer
than mine. Once tasted, the heart is frozen still, and 42 hours
hence you shall awaken well. Dear Romeo shall come and sweet
saluteth you, and to your bed he shall come lie, awake from
slumber, fully satisfied.

So go, bright angel that is our sun, and hide in the happiness to
come. Ignoring your parent's strife, and all who see you
wronged, go on tomorrow, staying strong.

- The Faithful Friar

Princess Calypso and the Giant Palace at the Bottom of the Sea

by Katie Harris

This is a picture of you and me.
Sandy feet, salty hair, wet bathing suits, toothless smiles.
I was ten and a half, you were nine.
If you look close you can see the Nantucket ferry behind us.
And if you look real close you can see
Princess Calypso and the giant palace at the bottom of the sea.

Once after church Mommy told us when you die you go to
heaven.
Do you remember?
I was six and a half, you were five.
I said "What's heaven?"
Mommy said, "It's a wonderful place where good people go to
stay forever."
Charlotte said heaven wasn't real
Charlotte was our babysitter. Charlotte was seventeen. Charlotte
knew everything.

You always liked the ocean.
I liked Barbie dolls.
"There's a giant palace at the bottom of the sea," you said.
I was eight and a half, you were seven.
"That's where Princess Calypso lives."
I thought imaginary friends were stupid, I didn't like your
games,
Didn't like playing mermaids,
But I always went along.

You said, "It's a magic place and
Only the goodest mermaids and mermans can go there and
They all stay there forever and ever."
Like heaven.
But heaven wasn't real.
Charlotte said so.
And neither were
Princess Calypso and the giant palace at the bottom of the sea.

It was a foggy day and even though Mommy said no we couldn't
go to the beach
You said, "Princess Calypso says we *need* to get that seashell.
We need to get it now"
- I was eleven and a half, you were ten -
Because the seashell is the key
To the giant palace at the bottom of the sea."

"Aren't you a little old for this?" I said.
"I mean, you have to grow up sometime.
You know this stuff's not real."
"Then I won't grow up," you said.
"I don't have to grow up.
I'll stay with Princess Calypso forever
In the giant palace at the bottom of the sea."
I said, "Yeah, right."

I listened to you as usual.
I listened to you even though Mommy said no.
I listened to you even though the tide *was* coming in and it *was*
too foggy.
I listened to you even though they weren't real,
Princess Calypso and the giant palace at the bottom of the sea.

We went in together holding hands.
I was eleven and a half, you were ten.
You said, "I found it! Here!"
You were excited and happy and you said,
"Here! Take it! Take it!" You let go of my hand.
I came out with the shell.

We don't go to Nantucket anymore,
But I still have the picture of you and me.
Sandy feet, salty hair, wet bathing suits, toothless smiles.
I was ten and a half, you were nine.
nine then, ten forever
With Princess Calypso in her giant palace at the bottom of the
sea.

Her Words Would Carry

By Cecilia Wolfe

She was told to pray each night upon her knees
For peace, strength, love and prosperity
She was told her words would carry through the skies
Though in the dark she wondered who listened so high

She was told she'd be protected as long as she was good
She was told she would be happy throughout her childhood
She believed that through good deeds her world would be okay
She walked, her head above the clouds and smiled day to day

Then she was told that bad things happen to good people
From that day on, this little girl began to believe in evil
Though she spoke some holy words each night before bed
They had lost all meaning within her heart and within her head

She was told her words would carry through the skies
She wondered if all she was told, were nothing more than lies

A Hare-y Issue

by Serena Eggers

Peter O'Hare is a well-to-do shrink
Who has troubled patients galore,
And when you enter his office, you'll think
(as have so many before)
That the rabbit's portrait on his wall in a frame
Merely shows his love for his pet –
But have I not said, when I told you his name,
That he is a shrink, not a vet?
In fact, he himself could use therapy
For a life-long problem he's had:
He has a great fear of creatures with fur,
Which I'm sure you'll agree is just sad.
Because of this fear, he was slow to agree
When a patient of his, Mrs. Black,
Brought in her mad rabbit for him to see
And with time to set on the right track.
When a large sum of money and the promise of fame
Could not buy the doctor's consent,
The lady threatened to blacken his name,
Which naturally made him repent.
And so, in the first of many appointments,
O'Hare asked the rabbit to speak
Of the accident, sorrow, or grave disappointment
That had rendered it moody and weak.
The doctor learned, while avoiding the biting,
That it was not crazy but sad
Because it had witnessed its dear owners fighting
And feared a divorce: it was bad.
And so Doctor O'Hare felt a tug in his heart

And, having told Mrs. Black, got his fee,
As well as a picture to remember his part
In the case of the century.

Fledgling

by Andrea Paz

There are songs I can't sing
Because my throat is too sore
And bells that don't ring
Because no one's at the door
There are flowers I don't smell
And notes I don't play
Their keys lie in pieces
While the melodies decay
There are trees that don't fall
And some that do
And with them, lost homes
Of fledglings who never flew
There are thing I can't say
And words I can't write
There are battles I can't win
Because I'm too scared to fight

Uninvited Progeny

by Evy Exime

Because I was born a girl it was thought
I wouldn't end up like my father.
But he is double helixed into my being
And every time I look in the mirror I see him.

Tears well up into my eyes
And stain my face because I can't bear the semblance.
Maybe he couldn't either,
Maybe that's why he left.
He couldn't bear to look in the eyes that matched his own
And deal with the things he saw there.

One of his mistakes,
Looking too much like himself
And staring back at him.
Asking too much of him;
To love the owner of the eyes that were looking back at him.
My eyes.

The innocent imploring iridescent
And obviously oblivious
Eyes of his youngest daughter,
Didn't mean much
When he suddenly soundlessly scampered away
Into places unknown.

Never allowing me to be a kid
Because when daddy weeded himself out of my life
He uprooted my childhood with him.
Causing me to grow up too fast
Making me grow up fatherless

One more father added to the list of statistics
One less father to raise his child
One more girl to look for the absence of his love in other places
In other people
In other ways.

And suddenly soundlessly scampering away
When things go awry
When things get hard
And when faced with eyes asking for too much.

But because I was born a girl it was thought
I wouldn't end up like my father.
I wouldn't make as many mistakes as he did
But he is double helixed into my being
And every time I look in the mirror I see him.
I am my father's daughter.

Untitled

by Isabel Sen

How carefully we studied that lost art:
The art of loving still while saying good-bye,
To link fingers while tearing palms apart,
To, still as one soul, release one sigh –
And, in the winter, on our separate roads
To, as one soul, breathe our frosty breaths
Sending smoke signals, our secret codes.
I fear our fingers will be linked in death.
It is as though there's yet some debt I owe
To you, as my palms won't let me forget
The feel of fingernails sliding away.
You once said we would each reap what we sowed,
And I, without your foresight, scorned your threat.
And now: What did we sow? My palms are gray.

New Angels

by Chelsea Powell

She floated effortlessly across
The floor, trying to tell me
About her new angels.

Her motions promised fresh words.
My books had long grown dusty;
I was afraid to see the ink again,
Having memorized its message
Of tears and blood and love.

Her angels promised spears
And chains and light,
Razor soft feathers brushing past.

I had no need for new angels;
Mine had carried me well.
But her soul lay with spirits
Beyond my reach, beyond
My heaven.

Untitled

by Amanda Coulson-Drasner

I don't understand why you have to define,
Why you have to separate, mark, and classify beauty into
triangles and other shapes with sharp corners and no room for
breath.

How does the sunset not overwhelm you with its touch?
Are you not forced to your knees by the power of a snowflake?

I don't understand why I can't love everything at once,
Why am I not allowed to sit on the ground and breathe in the
scent of the world,
Hold it inside me until I burst,
Until it flows out of my ears, my eyes, my mouth,
In rivulets of gold and silver, rose petals and colored beads.

I don't understand why you're so afraid,
Because nothing ever really changes,
Because it changes all the time.
Change is the constant, and the variables are the stars and your
infinite range of emotions,
Which I don't have the capacity to feel,
No matter how many hours I spend in the dark with you.

I don't understand why I don't love you the way you love me,
Don't you see how when our eyes meet,
Yours are open while mine are shut?
I can't ever see all of you,
Only pieces at a time,
Like the shape of your face, your broken finger, or the silent
mountains you dream of.

I don't understand why winter is so much more than a season,
Why the cold goes deeper than my bones,
And everyone who's ever left comes back at night,
Triggering dreams of red walls and screaming voices that only
get louder when I wake up.

And I don't understand
What I understand
When we sit beneath the cherry trees,
And I see the blossoms in our hair.
But I feel whole again.

We Cut That Down

by Emma Horwitz

Willow trees are almost indecipherable
From their specifics, multiplicities
Like pumpkin seeds
Which all seem to look the same
In handfuls. Treading
Through the waves
Of Red Osier
Dogwood, whips red streaks
Across your temples almost
Crossing to pupils, and over my
Back. I'm turned towards
The center of the coniferous forest,
Grade A White Pine hovering over
The violent R.O.D. field
Whose red blush embarrasses at nothing.

Late afternoon as you spun
Relentlessly towards some West-facing
Window trying to catch your breath,
I tried to catch your breath
And fell towards a long night
In another room with flapping arms,
Chapping chests against
The air, throwing
Fists like we used to concentrate
On measurements and divisions.

For every flaw on the hem
Of this dress
I've tripped over mismatched

Planks, saw-toothed
Breaks
From when I looked
Out the steel rimmed
Window, watching
You rip
The Grade A White Pine
Into flooring.

The unexpected taste of candy canes

by Malena Keys

There is a crimson, velvet dress
in a cardboard box on the top shelf of my closet.

It smells like nutmeg and gives me attitude
so I laugh
and hope to be witty someday.

It's the color of the red lipstick I asked to wear, and I realized
how stereotypes
can sometimes be true.
I reach for my pocket because vanilla is a horrible flavor
and I need more.

After a second I feel blood pump to every crevice
of my body,
and the veins behind my eyes tug back.
I wish I could remember the time when this lasted,
but at least I can taste chocolate.

The Grave

by Margaret Carrasco Arias

The graveyard is overrun with weeds.
The roots of dilapidated trees
reach out over the headstones,
framing and covering the graves
mercilessly and silently.

No one ever goes inside
but it is not fear.
Because the graveyard isn't like waking
from a nightmare screaming,
but waking up crying
not understanding why.
Remembering what you'd rather not.

It's like the Christmas card
From your relatives in Kansas
That has fallen behind the couch
The picture is now unrecognizable
And the words blurred into the background.

Cross-legged on my bed, I listen
to the clicking clock.

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