

UNBOUND

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Unbound

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Unbound is a platform of creative expression for students at the University of Oregon. We are transitor for the prismatic creative voices on campus. We understand art as a continuous process and aim to engage in its development while respecting the integrity of the artists and their work. At *Unbound* we endeavor to foster and enhance a collaborative creative process by opening a dialogue between the editorial staff and contributors. In addition to serving as a canvas for student art, *Unbound* allows its editors and staff to professionally engage in the field of publishing in an equally creative environment. We are thankful for all of our contributors because without them we would not have the opportunity to practice what we love.

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Entering Centennial Garden *in Early Spring*

By Anna Scheler

A quick transition—
stepping off the cold pavement
onto dew-wet grass.

The rhododendron
glade is bird-loud. The buds
are almost blooming,

with leather-green leaves
dripping rhythm in the pure
morning light.

Soon, all will be rose-purple in these trees.

Point Wilson Lighthouse

The retired coast guard leaned
on a bulb that gave no light.
He told us about an island in the Sound
filled with bunkers, hidden bombs.
He said they had recorded
the location of each one, but
someone lost the map.

The man chuckled at this mistake
while leaning heavily on a bulb
filled with mercury.

By Anna Scheler



CLAIRE CHRISTY

Second Runner-Up

By Isabel Zacharias

My high school cross-country coach is one of those guys who teaches differential calculus and insists on a classroom with a blackboard rather than dry-erase. He hasn't missed a day of running in forty-five years, despite the fact that he is now over seventy.

Once before practice, he was making his usual hackneyed (but well-intended) sensei speech, three-ish minutes of cryptic jabber that was meant to inspire us to run better. This one stuck with me:

"If I weren't flexible," his weird, throaty nerd accent drawled, "I would try, every day, to touch my toes — say, in the shower — and I'd get closer and closer every day. One morning, I'd do it and I'd be shocked that my knees weren't bent. I'd wonder how the progress felt so easy. Because I took it little by little."

Okay, Coach, I thought. Aight.

That was November 2011, and I have tried every morning since then to touch my toes in the shower. It's more of an unbreakable tic now than anything else: *shave, shampoo, conditioner, acne wash, reach for your toes, try to at least touch your ankles this time, rinse aaaaand done.*

■

For exactly one semester my senior year, I was on the cross-country "C-Team," a cocktail of high school social runoff too slow for junior varsity and too proud to try a different fucking extracurricular.

I joined mostly because I wanted to be hotter, or if that weren't possible, at least a little skinnier. Anyway, that's what I told people — but my decision to run had deeper roots than that, which I couldn't see for what they were until years later.

The ingredients of my days back then — honors classes, music lessons, club involvement, kind and decent friends — added up to a life so stable it was steadily driving me crazy. I was a happy and very successful student, and I was tired of it. My life thus far had consisted of a litany of authority figures pulling me in directions that would develop pre-existing talents: in other words, directions that'd be easiest for me. And I had carried out what felt like my duties, earning academic honors, winning orchestra positions, and generally attempting to be the best at everything, because that's just what you do.

From the leisurely jogs I took around the neighborhood creek after school most days, I could tell I was no good at real running, and for several reasons (genetics not the least among them), I knew I had little chance of ever getting better. But I liked it. A lot. And I thought, *it's about time to be bad at something.*

■

Old and wizened (and old) as he was, Coach ran with me and the rest of the C-Team during practices. Our joints would whine from the weight of clumsy frames as we watched dozens of sardine-like varsity legs whip and swish ahead. We sauntered at a pace comfortable for talking — and we talked.

Or rather, they talked. I left that to the more willing of the bunch, fearing I'd lose my mind, laughing the moment I called a guy "Coach" to his face and tried to accommodate a hell-normal bro convo between our huffs and puffs.

A few months into the season, though, Coach ended up right next to me in our pack. For the first time all year, struck by some otherworldly grace, I was running at the front.

“You’re getting better, huh?” he said, nodding toward me.

Weirded out by the implication he’d been watching me, but still in the mood to take the compliment I said, “What? Uh, yeah, I guess.”

“Getting more control over your body, right?” he persisted, and there was nothing to respond with but, “Yeah! I feel good, now that you [*HUFF*] mention it. I feel [*PUFF*] way good.” He smiled and I was proud.

That glorious day, I was even ahead of Baylee and Carson, the C-Team all-stars out to prove they truly belonged on JV. I couldn’t see their faces when Coach complimented me, but I felt them rolling their inappropriately mascaraed eyes. And I hate to say it — oh, I hate to say it — but they were right.

Not twenty minutes later, my seven seconds of speed had come and gone. I was suddenly exhausted and broke into a walk behind everyone, a “D-Team” unto myself.

I had tried, and admirably, but I’d spent all my energy in those twenty minutes attempting to sustain Coach’s impression of my success story — that I had changed — that I’d fulfilled my identity as the girl who set out to join cross country and become a new, fit, improved person. Now I was just the girl who was never going to win. Of whom everyone wondered *Why bother?* But whom no one ever dared to actually ask, “Why bother?”

Here is why:

I love to run. I love the way it feels desperate and deadly and the way it is nearly impossible. I love its dichotomy of lightness and weight, its animalism, its meditative motion, its forward, forward, forward. It asks nothing but an effort, pure and human. And I love it. And I am not good at it, and I was raised to think that is insane.

■

The year I ran my first cross-country race was the same year I won homecoming queen.

Or, as my mom says, “Close enough.” I was third (what my school generously called “second runner-up”), next to Abbie Holting, a soft-haired, goody-good Baptist, and Rachel Ferencz, who I swear milked her Type 1 diabetes for the sympathy vote.

In the pictures, I look ecstatic, but the truth is, it was strange. Me — co-captain of the trivia team and president and founder of the Ukulele Club — standing on the football field, shivering in a dress with silky fabric I remember exactly the feel of. Dark green, my color. Fluttery and tiered like my tiara. It felt somewhere between a movie starring a typical popular homecoming queen and a movie starring a mega-nerd who everyone votes for as a joke. I was neither.

This achievement, if it can really be called that, has not at all affected my life path and bears no significance to me personally. I remember it only on rare occasion, and when I do, I sort of laugh.

Homecoming queen is an almost purely arbitrary title. No one has a reasoned argument as to why certain people win out over others — and even if this were possible, who cares? What does it mean to be homecoming queen? What does it mean to be first, second, second runner-up? What’s it mean to be a runner?

Let me point on my résumé to everything I’ve won: scholarships, poetry slams, essay contests, leadership this, leadership that. None of it proves anything, except that I’ve honed my ability to manically, critically compare myself to everyone around me.

I imagine that my cross-country coach — a visibly fulfilled man from what seems like an idealized version of a less narcissistic era — has quite a short résumé:

Van Rose
EXPERIENCE

Shawnee Mission School District, math teacher & coach, 45 years

Long-distance runner, 65 years

■

The day I ran the school district's season opening cross-country race is one my parents probably hardly remember.

I finished in what my friend Jake described as the "front of the last third" of my division. This was nothing to scoff at given my experience, but what left me more amazed was the feeling of finishing at all. I could hardly believe myself crossing the line after wanting so many times, more than anything, to stop.

Heaving, I was outside myself, just like all the dumb sports movies — totally other and floating above, the most alive and the most dead I have ever been. Jake and a handful of friends from Ukulele Club were standing in a line at the finish, holding signs with my name on them; one said, simply, "Isabel Runs".

"I fucking did it," I told Jake, thoughtlessly leaning my whole dead weight into him, my limbs and lungs both rendered limp.

"Dude, you didn't just do it," he said. "You did great." He kissed me on the mouth, or maybe I just imagined that.

■

Last Tuesday morning, about 7:43 A.M., I bent over in the shower, folding my body gently in half, my ritual. Breathing deep into the backs of my hamstrings, this time, I felt something foreign: my toes, round and big feeling in slim fingers.

I was reminded then, for no real reason, of something Coach used to say after almost every one of his pre-practice speeches: "In this sport," he said, "the only competition is yourself. Remember that."

"Huh," I muttered, and shut the water off.

Reclamation

By Elizabeth Valdez

I plant acorns
in my room
that grow and
break down the walls.

Year by year
the cities disappear
beneath the oaks.

Recuperación

By Elizabeth Valdez

En mi cuarto
siembro bellotas
que crecen
y rompen las paredes.

Año tras año
las ciudades desaparecen
debajo de los robles.



ANNE MAGRATTEN



Hands in the Door

By Persia Hejazi

Matty perched himself on a taut leather sectional that was undoubtedly chosen for its looks rather than its comfort. The sitting room he was in was the least occupied room in the house, and he could only vaguely feel the incessant thump of the music. Matty ran his hand over his face; the hours upon hours of washing dishes had left his hands dried and cracked. He took a sip of his too strong drink and mentally weighed the pros and cons of buying lotion or just jacking some from one of the bathrooms. Matty knew it would be fairly easy, but taking a sip of his drink and looking down at his hand-me-down jeans made him swallow that option immediately. *Wouldn't it be so fitting if the poor kid got caught stealing? And lotion of all things?* The alcohol burned in his stomach at the mental image.

The carefree yelling from the other kids at the party came and went like the circling beam of a lighthouse, but Matty was used to being in a house that never slept. He lived in a small house where most of his extended family seemed to take turns living in, sleeping on the couch or the floor, always a constant presence. They were boisterous and proud and raised their children by their necks until it was their turn to make the walls of that house vibrate with loud opinions. Matty learned a long time ago how to still himself. Putting his drink down, he struggled to remember the last time he was surrounded by silence. It had been that morning, and he had been waiting for the bus to pick him up. He stood outside, between the edge of his property and the road, his only companion being the white mailbox he liked to lean on. He stood and concentrated on ignoring the December cold that seemed to occupy his lungs.

Matty only saw the blue behind his eyelids that morning, as if he were underwater. It was early enough that the sun had not made it above the houses yet, and Matty remembered in the first weeks since he had started working night shifts after school how unsympathetic mornings had become. He used to fold himself carelessly over his dingy white mailbox in the front of his house to shield his eyes from the coming day and grasp at sleep for a little longer. Now he savored the minutes outside his house, in the moments where Matty's work schedule and assignments didn't matter and his family didn't have anything to say to him. Now every morning, he leans against the mailbox, feet planted and head gazing up at an invisible sun, the layers of him dropping like bricks as the morning fog kisses his cheeks in damp acceptance.

"Hey." He heard fingers snap in front of his face. His eyes opened and found a boy in front him, his eyes up in expectation.

"Yeah?" he said to the boy. He wondered if this was the owner of the house, and if he had a thing about letting people sit on the couch in pants that weren't pleated.

The boy looked around. "Do you, uh, have anything I can score off you?" *What?* "I have cash." *Oh.* He sucked his drink down through his teeth.

"Sorry, I just sold the last of my stuff." He lied, and with that, he pushed himself off the couch in order to check in with his girlfriend, who was probably the only person in the house who cared enough to look past the shades of blacks and blues that Matty lived in, and the only person who would believe him when he says he has never done drugs.

Matty sighed and pulled off his hood. The sides of his head still felt fuzzy from recently shaving them off. Matty frowned absentmindedly and stroked the smooth skin above his ears to the back of his neck, dimly missing the rest of his hair. *"Why don't you just put your hair in pigtails, huh Matty?"*

one cousin had piped up last week as Matty walked through his living room to go work. *"Don't forget your apron"* an aunt cackled as she dumped an ashtray. Matty left without a word. His dad did not find it as amusing. The next night when he was returning from a shift at the restaurant, he found him sitting on the couch in the low lamplight. He pushed a razor into Matty's hands without looking at him, reminding him that he had a son, *not a daughter*. The top of his head was still just as long and stuck up like a nasty crop of blackberries.

The thrum of the music pounded through the carpet and up Matty's legs, propelling through the house. Matty replayed the look that the boy had given him, a look that he had felt too many times. Their eyes slid off Matty, careful not to fully notice him, lest he notice them back.

His girlfriend Juliet had a smile that turned up on one side, and when Matty saw it, he knew she was planning something he would regret. It was a smile that slowly bloomed until she got what she wanted. When she had showed up at the end of his shift, she was ready with that smile. *Hey Matty. A little curl of her mouth. You wanna have some fun tonight?*

Juliet and Matty's relationship didn't require much talking on either end, and he didn't mind that a good chunk of it was Jules parading him in front of her parents like a walking middle finger. He let her paint him as the silent bad boy and she let him drive her car up the old logger roads in the forested hills around town. The time spent in the backseat of that car was spent avoiding thinking about their future more than anything else.

Jules was in front of the kitchen counter with a triage of other girls, swaying and giggling to the music. Boys hung around pouring more of the punch everyone was drinking, liberally pouring it into different bottles of alcohol. He wondered if any of them was the one who had been expelled from school, inciting this celebration. Matty kept his eyes on Jules' form as she moved to the beat, her ponytail a golden river down her back. He grabbed a cigarette from the pack in his pocket and lit it. He only got one good drag before a force hit him in the back and knocked his cig out of his hand.

"My bad!" A clap on his shoulder and a thousand watt smile flashed at him in apology. He looked up at the boy and exhaled an angry cloud. They stood there, the bass dispelling the smoke that enveloped between them.

"It's fine." Matty said, his jaw muscles jumping. He shrugged the hand off. *Rich prick*. Matty knew better than to pick up the cigarette from the floor in front of one these boarding school jerks. He looked down and ground the cigarette into the carpet. He turned to see Jules looking at him. He made his way over and was immediately tangled up in his girlfriend's limbs. She pulled him close.

"Having fun yet? Or are you just gonna work on your frowny face all night?"

He fought the instinct to frown harder. "I'm sorry," he said, almost meaning it. He moved a stray hair from her face.

"You can make it up to me by dancing with me." She tried to move him to the beat, but he didn't budge.

She stopped pulling. "Fine, fine. Go be sad somewhere else. But give me your jacket, I'm cold." She stuck her lip out for emphasis. Matty laughed and shrugged out of his jacket.

Jules rejoined her friends, swinging Matty's jacket around like a stand-in dance partner while Matty found his way out to a balcony, goosebumps erupting immediately on his bare arms. Sliding the door closed behind him muffled most of the noise, and Matty exhaled a long breath, rubbed his eyes and rolled his shoulders, hoping to smooth out the look of exhaustion that hung off his silhouette.

He grabbed the metal railing hard, his arm muscles jumping. Sometimes, Matty dreamed that

the front door of his house was slowly closing, trapping him inside. He tried as hard as he could to sprint through it, but could not reach it fast enough. The door closed over and over again, and each time it felt more final than the last. He worked and studied and careened towards the door, hands flailing out, searching. Closer. He was getting closer, he thought. Closer to finding his way past the winding forest of his hometown, past the piles of dirty dishes he had to scrub, past the wary stares of his relatives who knew he was something other, some piece of them that didn't quite fit, something—

The door slid open and the full beat of the music pulled Matty's head up. He released the white-knuckled grip he had on the railing and turned around to the girls behind him. They hung off each other, not moving too close to Matty.

They laughed and pointed at their houses that they could see from where they were standing, even pretending to fall over the balcony. I need a cigarette. He reached instinctively for the pocket of his hoodie only for his hand to grasp his shirt. He swore under his breath. My wallet.

"Scuse me," he said to no one and pushed his way back inside.

He found his girlfriend half laying on a deep-set leather couch staring into her phone, swallowed up by his hoodie.

"Jules, take off the jacket." She didn't look up.

"No'm wearing it." He reached for the pockets and she swatted his hands away. "Stop that tickles!" Matty exhaled and slowly reaching into the pockets, he found them empty. Fuck. His wallet only had a couple days' tips, but he weighed this loss against the extra shifts he would need to tack on to make up for this, time he should be spending on writing scholarship essays. He shut his eyes. So close, so close! He could see the sliver of light getting smaller as the door was closing in front of him. So close, so close, so close—

"Close to what?" Matty looked around and saw the boy who had knocked the cigarette out of his hand sitting next to him. He didn't realize he had been talking.

"Nothing," he said pushing off the ground and getting up. "I just lost my..." How could he explain what he had lost to someone who doesn't know the concept of losing?

"This?" Matty looked down and saw him hold up his wallet. Relief washed over him, but he tried not to let it show. Matty gingerly took the wallet, mentally noting how this guy was wearing twice his life savings on his wrist.

"Thanks," he said. Matty nodded again at the boy then twisted away to make sure everything was there. It was. Thank God. He felt the overwhelming urge to sink into his bed and never get up. Turning back to his girlfriend, he took her hands and pulled slowly to try to get her to stand. "Jules, let's go. Where are your friends?" Her head lolled a little as she considered this before shrugging. A groan made its way up Matty's throat, "Jules." She smiled with her eyes closed.

"Need a ride?" Matty forgot about the guy sitting next to him. "Juliet can stay here if you want, I can arrange a ride back for you." Matty wondered why this guy was bothering to help him, a complete stranger.

"Thanks, but I should stay with her until she sobers up so I can take her home, plus I don't think that whoever lives here would want to find some wasted chick in their house." Matty didn't mention the fact that it caused his stomach to turn just thinking of any of these rich kids taking one look at the his home, bursting, unkempt, sagging at the weight of the people living in it. They didn't need to see with their own eyes that they were better than him—he already knew.

"I don't mind. You can take my car if you want," he said.

Matty eyed Jules' unsteady progress of sitting up and wondered if she would be able walk into her house unassisted. "On that thought, why don't we drive around until she's okay to go home?" The boy nodded with a small smile.

■

Matty got his girlfriend secured in the backseat without any trouble and looked up just in time to catch a set of keys. His dark brows knitted together in confusion.

"I'm not allowed to drive my dad's car," the boy said with a smirk. "He didn't rule out other people driving it."

"You would rather have my girlfriend yak in your dad's car than your house—a car that you are not even allowed to drive? How much did you have to drink?" This didn't stop Matty from clutching the keys harder.

"I'm sure if anything happens I can hose it off before my dad gets back from Bali." Before my dad gets back from Bah-lee, Matty mentally mocked, but shrugged as if he understood what it was like to spend a winter somewhere exotic.

The last gaggle of revelers passed in front of the open garage and whooped in their direction with mixed shouts of "Jaaaaames!" and "Have fun on your extended vacation!" Matty looked at the boy from the other side of the car. James.

"Are you the guy that got expelled?" He looked at James, a smirk tugging at his lips. James ran a hand through his flax spun hair.

"What have you heard?" His eyes followed the retreating boys' figures.

Matty shrugged. "That's it." The garage light cast a shadow over James' face as he adjusted the watch on his wrist. He seemed sharper, like the edge of a cliff. He looked at Matty without really seeing him, his thousand-watt smile back in place.

"You ready to go?" The edge was gone.

Matty nodded.

■

They drove into the night and Matty couldn't help but feel the adrenaline course through him every time he gripped the gearshift and revved the engine, propelling him into the outskirts of town, farther from home, farther into the beyond.

Jules was singing softly to the music that filtered through the radio, James bobbed his head lazily to the beat, and Matty couldn't for the life of him remember the words. The moment held for a while until the streetlights became scarce, then nonexistent. The road became more untamed, slithering along the curves of the landscape.

"How did you and Jules meet?" James said. The subdued air was gone.

Matty glanced in the rearview mirror and saw Jules leaning onto the headrest, fast asleep. Her hair cut a ribbon of light in the darkness of the backseat.

"We met over the summer when I was mowing lawns for her family." He saw James nod in the corner of his eye. "You guys know each other long?"

"Yeah our families are friends." He could hear James tap at the glass. "She didn't tell me she had a boyfriend."

Matty chewed his cheek. "You weren't the only one she didn't tell. I don't exactly look like I fit into the right tax bracket to party with the trust fund club." He couldn't help the ice in his voice.

"I mean, I don't, um, I didn't—" Matty looked at James and whatever words he was going to

say fell back down his throat in an impatient groan.

“Hey, don’t worry about it; I don’t exactly look like the kind of guy Jules should be with.” I get it. His head slid back to the road but could feel James’ eyes on him still.

The radio hummed lightly between them. Matty wondered what it would be like to be James, without the hungry, desperate tug he felt at his core. The ease of the way James smiled and carried himself told Matty that James had never faced any rapidly closing doors.

Matty coughed. “I don’t look too good in khakis anyway.” He glanced at James and smirked. He looked back at the road just in time to see that he almost missed the turnoff. Matty swore then turned the wheel sharply and pulled the e-brake, causing the car to veer to his left as they tried to aim for the dirt road that would lead them up the mountain.

As the car drifted wildly, he heard a surprised shout come from the passenger seat, and a hand gripped his arm hard. He spared a look at James and saw that he was glancing at him like he was a madman. Matty straightened the wheel and the car stopped acting like a fairground ride. James’ hand stayed clasped around Matty’s forearm.

Matty’s entire body tensed and he was eternally thankful that he could concentrate on not crashing the car, instead of what he was supposed to do with his arm. He swallowed as the tips of James’ finger pressed into him, surely leaving five well-groomed crescent marks into his skin. Matty didn’t dare look. He stayed frozen in indecision until the road evened out and as he moved to shift into a lower gear, James let go and ran his hand through his hair, trying to smooth it down.

“I can’t believe she didn’t wake up,” James said, nerves ringing his words as he turned around to the back seat.

Jules. Matty looked back at her in the rearview mirror, expecting to see her glaring at him. I know, she would say. Shame burned through Matty and his smile faltered.

He was about to tell James that Jules could sleep through everything—even Matty’s 5:00 a.m. alarm, but that made him feel worse. He let the moment pass, and they continued up the winding road up through the inky evergreens that seemed to reach out to the car, wanting.

“So... how’d you get expelled?” Matty said, turning the wheel this way and that. He looked at James and saw that the boy looking out the window, his lips pressed together.

“You really want to know?” Matty nodded, but James hadn’t looked up.

“Yes.”

“..I got in a fight.” He rolled his head. “Well, less of a fight, more of me decking my lit teacher.” Matty didn’t say anything, just struggled to picture James’ hands curling into something ugly like a fist, and how it would feel with intent to hurt reverberating through his bones. “My dad didn’t even ask why—not even a little bit curious! Just wrote a check and had a car sent to pick me and my shit up.”

“So what’s tonight? A farewell party?” James rested his forehead on the cool glass of the window.

“Something like that.” He tapped the glass. “I could trash the house, the car, it doesn’t matter. I’ll be shipped off again by the time break’s over anyway. I’m in my dad’s pocket. I go where he wants me to go.” James looked at him and shrugged. Matty glanced at James. They both knew what it was like to feel caged. James just happened to have his dipped in gold.

James pressed his head back to glass, and Matty saw James eyes dart past the trees, past anything he could actually see. He could see James imagining what it would be like to be free of his dad’s hold, just as Matty imagined what it would be like to keep driving past the city limits without ever looking back. Matty wondered if this was the James that no one got to know, where he didn’t feel himself grating against expectations. Where he was free to just let go.

“But who am I to complain?” James smiled without looking up.

They were silent for a moment. Matty gnawed on a chapped part of his lip.

“I think that I’ve been dreaming of leaving for so long that I don’t actually know where I’ll go when I get out. Anywhere has to be better than here. My life starts the second I get out of my house for good.” He could feel the familiar flip-flop in his stomach as he coasted a corner too tightly. James did not grab for his arm again.

Matty knew this road well enough to accelerate and start taking the turns a little wildly, the dirt churning beneath the tires with the edge of the mountain always visible, like a warning. Who started yelling first, Matty didn’t know, but they started laughing, then screaming, a note of hysteria in their voices. They rolled down the windows and felt the wind takes their shouts with them, the cold air making them shiver in their seat belts and hands tremble with potential.

And then they were at the top, the car coming to a halt, but the two boys were still in motion. James sprung out the car and ran to edge of the cliff; the night was fading enough to see the sleepy town spread out below. Matty got out and went to the back seat to check on his girlfriend, again feeling guilty for forgetting she was in the car.

“Jules,” Matty said, pulling a stray hair out of her face. “How’re you feeling?” Matty cupped her head as she groaned.

“Everything is spinning,” she moaned, “Remind me never to drink again.”

“I’m sorry,” he said with a laugh. This time he meant it. She closed her eyes and drifted back to sleep, and he closed the door again. He pulled out a cigarette from his pocket and was about to light it when James ran to him and grabbed the cigarette right out of his mouth and chucked it.

“What the fuck?” Matty said. James just smirked.

“My bad!” James did not look sorry at all, and a realization dawned on him.

“Hey! Did you do that to me on purpose? At the party?” He looked up at the boy, their breath billowy with clouds around them in the chilly morning air.

“Didn’t anyone tell you that smoking is bad for you?” He gave Matty a genuine smile. Matty remembered how he had ground the cigarette under his heel, burning a permanent mark into the carpet. He liked knowing it was there.

James looked at his watch, then up at the sky. “Shit it’s almost sunrise! I’m fuckin’ beat.” He crossed to the front of the car and hopped onto the hood, laid his head on the windshield and closed his eyes.

Matty watched all of this with an unfamiliar lightness that threatened to carry him off. He climbed onto the hood as well. They were shoulder to shoulder, and Matty tried to close his eyes but could not stop the nervous energy that flitted through his veins. His hand twitched and brushed against the knuckles of James’ hand. Matty only hesitated for a second before grabbing James’ hand. His heart was pounding and he made sure not to hold it too tight so that James could wiggle free if he wanted. James laced his fingers between Matty’s and held on tight enough that they could feel each other’s pulses.

Resting his head on the windshield, Matty closed his eyes and welcomed the blue in-between of the early morning that enveloped him, between sleeping and waking, running and reaching, grasping and holding.

Tom Leeson, Wyoming 2008

By Taylor Sharman

At the edge of Cheyenne, Wyoming
A gray wolf watches with two moons for eyes
Fixed sorely on the orb—
Almighty it hangs, suspended
By starry masses.

A bestial stare met with
A swallowing purr of whispers
From celestial guardians.

He gazes up through gilded lenses.
Eyes stretched alive,
Each amber film penciled with uneasy ridges.
All vessels lead to heart's center.

Forepaws raw, another trying hunt.
His protracted stride hangs low
Without shame
As he stalks, pulsing,
To the drum of his brothers.

The air is thicker in the crescent glow
That dapples a tightly packed coat
Bristled in rubies
And rusty earth,
Whiskers heavy with blood.

Exhaust steams around
His merciless jowl
That breaks open into a note—
Arresting, head thrown back
A bellow thunders
From deep beneath his place
Earth vibrating as he crescendos
Then holds steady without breath.

At the edge of Cheyenne, Wyoming
A gray wolf turns up his ears
To a big black vault
Awaiting the moon's reply
To his fruitful cry
But the moon says nothing
And retreats
Gracefully, to a galactic refuge.

Creekbed

By Isabel Zacharias

You don't have to think about it now,

when the coffee
is still choking
in the brewer—

when Jamie's still asleep
on the armchair and you find
yourself relieved to see
breath ghosting up from
warm-blooded lungs,

the ashes of the night
drifting down from the living room
ceiling like the first snow of
the season —

when the two
wet cloths you'd placed
on Jamie's forehead, piss drunk
the night before, objecting,

“Belle,
hey,
I'm not that low”

still cover his eyes
like new-fallen leaves
desperate, still
to hide at all cost
from the shameless shining
moon and the promised
morning light —

when the single white
sheet you lay across him
creases up in craggy peaks
and valleys, still
and delicate as ancient
porcelain,

when the wolves
come on the radio
singing news
from that day years ago
when Jamie was
that low,
down in the dust where
he'd thrown himself slowly —

You don't have to wake up just
yet, when not even the coffee
is done thinking,
and Jamie
looks so young with limbs bent
across the day's first angles.

You do not have to think about
the cold room welled inside you,
or the cold room Jamie's lungs made

when you found him that cold mourning,
years ago, now,

still
down in the creek-
bed, breathless but still
silently
howling.



Apples

By Zachary Larison

The sign read “FRESH, LOCALLY GROWN APPLES” in an inviting bold font. Droplets of water clustered near the stem of each apple, which one by one slid into the wooden crate that housed the selection. It must have rained recently, the old man thought, recalling no rain that week. He placed one hand through his suspenders and left one hand poised and ready to select an apple. He scanned for green. Yes, green was the place to start—sometimes tart, sometimes sour, always delicious. He spotted an apple that had been grown to perfection. Holding it in his hand, he noticed a strange familiarity, as if he had raised it from seed to store himself. The apple bore a crisp green sheen, like leaves in the passion of spring or a wound gone too long untended. Looking around he checked to see if she was there. He couldn’t remember the last time he had seen her or even who she was precisely. A faded memory crept into his consciousness. He remembered her saying as he walked through a field of trees, an apple in hand, “Don’t do that again! It’s bad for business. Bad for business...” He failed to recall what exactly she had warned him about and paid no mind to it, confident yet strangely cautious of the warning nonetheless. The apple’s moist exterior mirrored its flesh, affirming the quality of his choice as he bit into it. Inspecting the exposed, glistening flesh, he smiled. Satisfied, he placed the apple back into the crate and continued perusing.

One particular green apple caught his eye. It was afflicted by a fire blight, a common scourge of the orchard. It reminded him of Private Travis McKenna, the last time he had seen him, strewn up against a tree struggling through his final hour. The apple was blackened in certain spots and only faint streaks of green remained, pale and fading into memory. He pitied this apple in its inanimate despair, when suddenly a delicate hand, adorned with more rings than fingers, tapped his shoulder. He turned around to greet a young girl, dressed in khakis and a loose fitting polo emblazoned with the store’s logo. She inquired if everything was all right and if the dejected old man needed any help. He shook his head, resigning to silence and turned around to face the apple crate. He felt somber, but he could not remember why and his face froze, bewildered.

After a few moments searching his mind to no effect, he meandered over toward the Red Delicious apples near the store’s window. Before he could sample their namesake sweetness, a woman called for him. It was her. He could feel the familiarity of her call, yet he could not find a name in his ailing mind, only scattered memories. Still, he would have recognized her shrill voice even if God hadn’t given him ears. Just the way it seemed to slice into his bones was chilling. Panicking, he grabbed two Red Delicious apples and scurried off. He found a circular clothing rack at the rear of the store to hide in and plunged into it. Sitting with his knees up to his chest, a gray, disheveled beard tucked between them, he brought the first apple to his mouth, took a bite, and smiled. Satisfied, he closed his eyes, savoring every moment, and put his hands out, imagining a wooden crate was before him. He feigned placing it back on the tray and released it. Waiting for the apple to stop rolling, and wondering all the while why it was rolling to begin with, he took the second apple to his mouth. But before he could chomp into it, the woman called to him, closer this time. She called softly, and the old man emerged through the clothing, a soft silk robe tickling his cheek. She was tall and gray hair danced upon her troubled face. She wore no makeup and the sleeve of her shirt was frayed and stained a muddy color. She looked more beautiful than anyone he had ever seen. His eyes widened, renewed by her visage. She wore a simple silver band on her left hand. Looking down at his own hand, he realized he wore the same band.

They had been married for forty-five years, just when memories are cherished the most. He trusted her implicitly. She told him to close his eyes and take her hand. The sound of beeping became louder with each step. His sweaty hand gripped hers anxiously as if it were their first embrace.

They stopped at the register, and the old man lifted his head as he heard her say to the store clerk, "I am sorry about this again, Mr. Allen. Just take whatever he ruined out of your payment for this week's shipment."

Mr. Allen responded calmly, "A small inconvenience for the best apples in town!"

As they emerged from the store, she walked him toward a truck that bore the same lettering as the crates of apples. She guided him into the passenger seat and they left, the woman in tears, and the sweet taste of the apples soured in his mouth.



KENNETH OSBORN

Letters to *Crushes*

By Ghoncheh Azadeh

I sink back into summer camp whenever I'm with you, a good sinking feeling. The kind where you slowly ease your feet into the sea of something that you want to be entirely submerged in. The way the wet feels, the way the wading in feels. It's how you think everything else is supposed to feel, but never does. It's a precise mixture of face paint, beautiful mistakes, losing your voice screaming, "YOU CAN'T RIDE ON MY LITTLE RED WAGON," and making every bodily motion a dance move. So maybe that's it, maybe you managed to slide into my life during the only time my guard is down. Who needs a layer of protection when they aren't in the real world?

It isn't your physique, as adorably doughy as it might be. It isn't the hurt I sense in your back as it bridges forward to meet my tippy-toed stance. I could tell that you were an awkward, twiggy child, whenever that was. You can do the math like you always do. Slipping the numbers into conversation here and there. The subtraction is hardly in my favor: "When I was 7 blah blah blah... OH... You were only an infant..." The light mix of blue and gray in your eyes are more telling than you realize. I'd bring this to your attention if it would offer me an edge. The only edge I may have is comparing the softness of my hair to yours. Combing through your hair is rough on my already dried out fingers. I skip over tangles so it won't hurt, even when I just wanted to force them apart. Be your own piece of hair! Be independent! This curly, blonde bundle lay atop your head, uncaring, unwilling to bend to my touch, not unlike yourself (bending back aside). Campers call you Ultimate Chris and mean it. You merely smirk at their youthful adoration. I press myself against you, put your lips to mine, and all just for practice it seems. You remain unflinchingly indifferent. You miss caring, about anything, just barely. It makes me feel foolish, being perfectly honest. "Being perfectly Honest, I wanted to kiss you tonight," is the only thing you've admitted to me. This was during the last day of camp; it doesn't count in the real world.

You preach loneliness while serving it up on a platter. Am I a paperweight? A mere instrument? I figure this much, but you'll need to tell me yourself.

At the airport, I said that I'd keep pursuing you until you told me to act otherwise. Like when you're filling up a glass of water for someone and throw out the line, "Say when." Everyone knows how it works. "When," you say it so there's no overflow, no liquid spilling onto the table. I'm soaking your table, now your pants, and then your shoes. So say "WHEN" already. Just say it. Tell me the words.

I am trying to break your heart.

Swept

By Isabel Zacharias

at night in the deep
alone night
in our place,

i sweep because Lucy
works late.

i erase from the floor —
with broad brushstrokes
and body, spine
swaying —
the particles left
from sweet Lucy's
breathing:

films of salt spilled
from her oatmeal
that morning,
the faraway
morning, the dust
puffs (the hell do they come
from?),
the thousands
of hairs from
the diligent
air's wearing-down of us —
all of it's being condensed into
Lucy & Isabel Dust.

now it's one thing, solid,
sane,
like a proverb.
here:
pile of filth, here:
proof that we
have been
here
every day.
finally,
proof i can stare at.

Thing — to live life by:
a small dusty lullaby
needing a shine,
which i
and the dustpan
know by heart —
la la
la la,

and swift like a wind
the pile billows into
the trash can like
sand —
innumerable
again.

i sweep because you
hardly notice a floor's
clean or dirty. you would only
ever sweep if i asked you,
and i would always rather
let you be.

Lucy,
the night is so long
when you're gone.

'nother hard day
at work
i hear you
thinking,
our door behind you closing
on another daily
day.

i'll be sleeping by then,
but rest
la la
la, Lucy —

walk to your bed
with immaculate
clean feet.
don't worry you'll wake me.

i'll be singing
in my sleep,

la la
so quietly,

you'll wonder
if you're hearing things.

i'll see you in the morning

la la
la, sweet Lucy,

when i thank God
for that dirt
that you keep
treading in.

Invisible War

By Olivia Wilkinson

I. Prodrome

My fingers fall on the the light switch
and my body collapses
on the carpet near my bed,
a crumpled mass of limbs and hair.

I. Aura

My eyes open to the wet air
of Vietnam: War Zone D.
I was sent to inspect the area
for an enemy unseen.
Camp is miles away,
but my socks remain dry.
I give the signal,
and my preventatives follow me
into the foreign vegetation.
Charlie waits behind palm leaves,
fleshy stems and rippled trunks,
and engulfs me once my vision suddenly
turns to blackness.

I. Migraine

The life in me starts to flicker,
and I wonder
when the ground met my cheek.
Acute basilar torment
and diplopia pull my eyes apart
from the already hollow sockets.
The vessels in my head constrict,
pulsating to the pattering
of the now plummeting drops
of lukewarm water.
I reach for an abortive analgesic,
but I've already waited too long
for help to come.
Gunshots bounce between the walls of my
skull,
blasting my body into a sinkhole
of mud and stems.
I haven't given up.
My feet search for solid ground,

but the mud swallows my legs
without chewing.
I've given up.
The antiemetic in my pocket
has dissolved to a bitter,
useless substance.
My abdomen purges
what will I have left
and I'm a hollow sack
of skin and sick.
My lids shut down,
Charlie sheaths an M1 Carbine,
and I leave War Zone D.

I. Postdrome

My lids flutter open,
lash brushing lash,
butterflies playing tag along the strands.
My skin soaks in a few of the crepuscular rays
that squeezed themselves through the blinds.
The softness of carpet
signals cover, and the silence
of the room says
I'm home.
Charlie has left,
only to return tomorrow.



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