Kent State University Ashtabula
English Society
The Platypus is...

Kendra Bopp: President and resident dominatrix
Patrick O’Brien: Vice President — where in the hell is he anyway?
Jessica Stewart: Vice-Vice President
Emiliano Lebron: Secretary and insanity sifting, bullet point creator
Sherri Quirke Bolcevic: Treasurer and hero to kittens everywhere
Scott Marshand: Historian (whatever that means)
David A. Clayman: Assassin
Jordan Rimpela: Ambassador and Bounty Hunter
Amanda Frazier: Girl most likely to marry a Mighty Boosh character
Rebecca Fenton & Connie Aponte: Providers of yummy tasty goodness
Adrianna Schommer: Girl with connections
Kayla Sloan: Quiet girl generally understood to be harboring dark secrets
J.M. Romig: See Stephanie Noel
Stephanie Noel: See J.M. Romig

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Amanda Avery, Diana Gardner and the KSUA Staff

The Lovely Ladies of Loretta’s

The Harbor Perk

And all of the gluttons who supported our bake sales.

Shakespeare platypus drawn by Brian Miskowich.

Front cover photo by Jordan Rimpela.

Back cover photo by Kendra Bopp.

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And Pictures...

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I can’t remember much prior to volunteering as a guinea pig, but what I can remember is in these pages. This is the story of my final days at ConCore, the most reputable and well-known science research facility of our time. The scientists at ConCore were attempting to solve the enigma of the power that can be held within the unknown regions of the human mind, and I fit the test-subject profile perfectly: male in his mid-twenties in good health with not much holding him back. Looking back on it, I think the reason I’d decided to volunteer was simply the fact that I had nothing to lose. I had very little family left, and those who were still alive did not keep in contact with me. I had no significant other either; I lived alone with my dog, Kyle. My job was a cruel joke, a series of menial tasks that were below even me. In essence, I wasn’t doing much with my life, so why not devote some of it to ConCore and what I thought at the time to be a noble cause? It seemed like a perfectly logical way to put meaning into my life as well as money in my pocket. Soon after I joined, however, I learned that their tests were not as noble as I had previously thought. I was required to show up everyday for a variety of experiments, ranging from shock therapy to the attempt to cram, in small bits, a variety of useless literary and scientific knowledge into my memory, in hopes that I would retain most of it. Although they were pretty vague, not wanting to breed false results, I got the impression that their main goal was to begin the next stage of human evolution, though I’m still unsure of their true intent. The ending was always the same: the tests generated no results and I became a little more aggravated with these so-called “scientists,” who only concerned themselves with triggering some ancestor’s knowledge locked away inside my head and prayed for any little blip on a computer screen, announcing they’d gotten somewhere outside of the functioning cerebral area.

One day, after what seemed like countless months of spending nearly every waking moment in that ConCore lab, one of the experiments finally showed positive results. At the time I couldn’t say if it was the variety of physical stresses they’d put my body through or simply one of the sources of food and water I’d been receiving. All I knew was that this particular day was different. I remember waking up that morning and observing that my dog, Kyle, had different assortments of color surrounding his body—colors that I had never seen before in my entire life. It seemed that I not only saw the colors, but that I could actually feel them; their warmth I can only describe as a mix of yellow and white heat. When I reached out to pet him, it felt as if I was running my hand across some type of furnace. After a few moments, Kyle bolted away from me and hid; he could sense that there was something different about me.

I then immediately ran as fast as I could the eight blocks to the ConCore lab. It seemed the tests and physical workouts had left my body in perfect condition, as I performed this task with very little fatigue. About halfway to the facility, I began to wonder if perhaps it was all a dream, and, deep within me, I felt as though I should not return to that place. However, I soon found myself entering the bathroom on the
ground floor of ConCore. Perhaps I was trying to stall my going into the lab; to this day, I’m still not sure. I can only remember standing inside the bathroom and staring at my reflection in the mirror. My hair seemed as black as it had always been, yet when I ran my hand through it, it turned a sort of light brown. My skin, pale from birth, began to show a multitude of colors, ranging from reds to blues to yellows, with purples and oranges overlapping and scattered throughout. I was so focused on my new vision that I’d neglected to see that Stanley, one of the three security guards ConCore had to offer, had joined me in the men’s room. I acted as though I had been washing my hands and then quickly left the restroom while he stood there, watching me.

As I walked, I could feel the colors starting to fade. I quickly took the steps to the third floor, where they hadn’t been expecting me for another hour or so. The last several months had been a terrible ordeal, but seeing life with all of these extra colors was amazing and perplexing all at once. I felt once I reached the lab, I was going to get an explanation to all of this, or, if it was all a dream, at least wake-up in bed with an old episode of The Twilight Zone playing.

“Marvin, I can see these colors that you can’t possibly imagine; my skin, it’s glowing! The tests have finally paid off!” I declared as I burst through the door.

“Jack, are you alright?” Marvin replied. “And what do you mean ‘these colors’? I don’t see anything different about you.”

“I think it has something to do with my vision, Marvin. I noticed first thing this morning that Kyle was shining bright for some reason, though nothing else was, so I ran here right away. And just downstairs, I saw my reflection in the mirror; I’m all lit up like a Christmas tree!” I replied impatiently. “Let’s start up the machines and see if I’m showing any of the data you’ve been dreaming about since the day we began all of this.”

After a couple more minutes of me explaining the day’s events, I was strapped down to a table with a variety of different machines monitoring my heart rate, my brain activity, my nervous system, and anything else I could imagine. The colors were still present, but the readouts showed no more difference than usual. Marvin naturally requested that I stay in the lab for a few nights while he and the others ran additional tests to see if they could understand this sudden change. I awoke the next morning in that white laboratory room without the warmth I’d tried so hard to hold onto the night before. I looked down at my hands and feet; the colors had disappeared and I was the same old Jack Riley I’d been before. Two weeks would go by before I would experience any of it again. ConCore insisted I remain locked up in that lab, staring day after day at those sickeningly white walls, hoping for the colors to become visible again.

One morning nearing the two week mark, while sitting in the center of the laboratory room attempting to remember the first day I’d seen the colors, I heard a shout of victory. “JACK! You’ve done it!” Marvin called from the other side of the window, which stood between me and the research team. “We just saw something appear in your hand there. It was a bright light, only there for a moment, but your cerebral activity jumped!” Opening my eyes, I expected to see the colors, but they had not returned. Yet I finally had proof that something had changed, something we’d
never seen before. Another three days would go by before I could manifest this ability again, but this time it would change everything.

From that point on, I’d been instructed to imagine the colors I was seeing and to “hold” them with my hands. I was attempting to create something that wasn’t there, and it worked. I was in the same room I’d been in for those two weeks, staring at the window that separated me from the scientists. I was imagining Kyle with his variety of colors and what it had felt like to touch him when it happened; this white light came from within my hands and began to form a shape in the air that was about two feet wide and four feet high. It appeared to be in the shape of a small doorway. I held it there for several minutes without too much struggle before it disappeared. I requested to go home, assuring the scientists that, with a little bit of rest and relaxation, I could produce the light again and perhaps keep it there even longer. The scientists insisted I stay inside the lab. At that point I’d begun to lose all track of time; I could not even tell if it was day or night. I felt so much anger towards ConCore; why couldn’t they just let me leave? I had been faithful and honest; I had submitted myself to every test and mere whim they’d asked of me. Why wouldn’t they let me go home for a night?

“Jack, we can’t let you go out into the world. Imagine the damage you could do. That last light you put out melted the floor right there,” Marvin said as he pointed to an area right in front of me. “You could hurt yourself, or even someone else. You could kill someone Jack.” My anger grew at the accusation that I would inadvertently kill myself or someone else, and as it grew, I focused on the feeling of the light inside my palms. I’m not sure where the energy came from, but something burst inside of me: a mix of anger and the need to escape. Only a moment later, the light reappeared, forming the same doorway-shape as it had before, only this time it seemed as though something existed on the other side of it. I looked more closely and saw a field and blue skies through the door. I looked up at Marvin and saw him shaking his head “no.” The scientists were scrambling to get to me, but I was too quick; I smiled at them all as I leapt through the doorway to freedom.

So it is here in this wide field in the middle of nowhere that I stare down at my journal, looking back on the time since this all began. I want to remember my experiences at ConCore; I feel I need to remember, for it may be important one day. For now I am without my home, without my possessions, without Kyle, and yet... I am content, for now. The colors still come and go. Some days they appear bright and dazzling, crowding in at me until all I see are splashes of color. Other days, the field seems as it has always been. I have tried creating another doorway, but I have yet to succeed. Sometimes I wonder if I’m really trying at all, or if I’m going through the motions to please my subconscious. I believe somewhere deep down inside of myself I don’t really want to go back. I may be without all that I love, but at least I am free. I hope if you are reading this you might use my experiences to understand what became of Jack Riley. I never made my mark on the world, just another person going through the motions almost invisible; today the world has forgotten me and I am truly invisible.
Our Changing World

Amanda Dunn

When the sky and the Lake are all streaked in grey
The cold autumn wind carries the spray
Out on the Lake slowly making her way
An elegant ship churns through the waves.

I must stop and watch, and pull off to the side
What is her name, and her cargo inside?
The new self-unloader hasn’t hampered her glide
Gently curved hull, steaming slowly with pride.

Has she come from Duluth, so far to the north
On her way to Ohio, with a hold filled with ore?
The swell of the Lake rocks her to and fro
Slowly she passes, and emotion springs forth.

The lighthouse she passes, no longer a home
For years it’s stood fast, enduring the foam
No more does its light guide the lakers ashore
Radar and satellites now handle this chore.

The Hullets are gone, the tracks are now trails
Great steam locomotives now boxes of nails
The furnaces and mills, once who fed millions
Moved overseas, making their owners billions.

Grandpa put pistons in blocks, two at a time
For thirty-four years, on an assembly line
My father, however, his luck did not hold
After but thirty they showed him the door.

It’s getting dark now, and she turns on her lights
The boat, like Ohio, goes on through the night
All around the Lakes now, darkness descends
But when night begins, we know it must end.

I sit watching the boat, feeling sadness and pride
Her bow and stern cabins twinkling with lights
Like that ship, perhaps, the Midwest can endure
But in what direction will she and I go?

She is fifty years old, I wish her fifty more
I get back in my truck and close the door
Perhaps, one day, I’ll see her again
Here’s hoping the sun will shine on us then.
Inevitable Defeat
Mary Mastromatteo

A brittle leaf, wind-blown and brown
Still clutches to the tree.
Through sluicing rain and relentless snow,
A brittle leaf, all alone.
For the others have come and gone:
They have bud and grown and wilted,
To be blown away in the wind
In the middle of the season’s change.
But that brittle leaf holds on, like me,
To what it knows-
To all it’s known:

A life afraid of change.
Press your hands to the mirror, girl,
and your cheek to the glass.
Does your breath fog it up, or does it flow
beyond?
Press harder, push through.
Does your breath fog it up,
Or are you seeing more?
Are you seeing past?
Past the end of your own nose, past your fingertips,
past the glass that shows everywhere you’ve already been.

If you wiped the fog away now,
are you sure
it’s your own face you’d see?
All ways
are your ways.
  You just haven’t chosen one yet.

Press a little harder, push through.
Don’t need to look at the reflection;
you already know what’s behind you.
It will wait for you to come back.
  and even if it doesn’t...
  and maybe you won’t...

Press harder, push through
to what you can’t see.
  You might fall all the way to the bottom.
  You might find the claws that catch.
  Or you might be a queen.
The Beginning of a Mid-life Crisis
David A. Clayman

Thirty...
A single year past twenty-nine,
but in a summary light years away from fun.
The big three-o,
this is definitely a number with depression written all over it.
I can already feel it crawling up my legs
crashing straight into my brain.
Oh the Alzheimer’s stealthy reminder.
THIRTY!
The one word realization that in all actuality
I have not accomplished a single fucking thing in my previous twenty-nine years,
however, in doing nothing,
I did somehow accomplish with certainty to completely destroy my body.
My knees creak and clank with every movement,
fingers refuse to open all the way, eyes are blurry, hearing is shit,
and finally, to add insult to injury,
when I piss there is always a multiple of streams,
spraying all astray so that aiming has become a worthless task.
Which brings me back to my decrepit knees,
I am always having to bend down in agony to sop up all of my waywardly pissings,
and as if my manly ego had not taken a blow before,
I add a crack, a grunt, and an old man sigh to remedy this.
So now I sit like a woman.
And why not! The smell of urine just reminds me of a geriatric center,
and that is not a thought that I want lingering in my head
chomping away like a disease eating at my already fading pride.
Role Play
Brian Miskowich

Midday sun percolating through the dust
in the air let us look into the sunbeams
like into a dessert tray; fine yellow gelatin,
the astral field of air bubbles encased forever,
only these move, catch the eye in their
stumbled, slant form, miniature white actors
drifting in and off stage.

Waiting for that sunbeam to shift,
realizing that we had paid it no heed,
hadn’t really cared, because, in the end,
the day, bright and gay and separated
so cleanly by a pallid wood window frame
was some sort of antithesis, as if we
just couldn’t think so dark in such light.

Aspiring to be something other than the slack
lace of a shoe, or the unease of a belt too tight
to sit comfortably, we tried to conjure out
something hidden hard inside us, a bit of
longing, or anger perhaps, or a wonder
that we lived in such luxury, that all we were
was a bunch of uncomfortable kids.

We wanted to be in pain, and in peril, and hopeless.
So we hunched ourselves over the floor and rolled.
Little resin knucklebones, the purple ones
were lucky; they rolled twenties, every time, guaranteed.
We didn’t know what we would become, but we knew
what we wanted to be: not even heroes, or big,
just worth something.

So we were there, deep in the dungeon, and altars of black
cemented char, bones, we might think, growing morbid
with the thrill of it, with the grinning skull above, which
spoke to us, and told us things about life and the universe and about how maybe this world of ours was paper thin, and had boundaries and maybe we ought to get a hole punch, and start exploring - the desk? Maybe the analogy wasn’t so hot, but we’d run with it, and laugh.

vi
And we’d start to do silly things, things we couldn’t call anything but silly things, because we didn’t want to give them more weight, and make them our things, they were just cast-offs, getting the slack out, getting into character, we’d order pancreas steaks at the tavern, watch Andy, the DM, our little god, shake his head and say “The barkeep looks at you like you’re crazy.”

vii
We knew that that would be the response, we didn’t care, because we were young, and we did those things, and you had to accept that we were young. But then we would begin, we’d fly into it like we were hot shit, and could act, and then suddenly we were, and we could, we rolled criticals, and did amazing things, with broadsword flashing and trumpet sound.

viii
Then we’d come to feel something deeper, at that altar again, like maybe we shouldn’t listen, but we did anyway, to some big voice telling us to punch holes in the world, this world we’d ventured forth into, to make a mark, so we did, and we came to a place somewhere distant, and also right at home, because it was clear: we were heroes, we were heroes again. Or was this the first time?

ix
And in the distance, some convoy would be making its way across a plain, somehow alien, maybe it was the colors, and they would say to us perhaps “you are chosen,” and we were so taken in we would just roll with that, we guessed. Only soon we got all that danger we’d hoped for, and demons swirled malignant around our people, our charges, and we found ourselves stymied.
We slashed and hacked, and dungeoneered, and cast our best spells. Only it didn’t work, and when we got right down to it, all our bluster and power amounted to not a whole lot in the face of something different, and maybe with a new world we ought to have been thinking in a new way? Only then it was too late, and the foes we had long sought danced like fire around us, until we were dizzied and dismayed.

But it wouldn’t end there, no no, our godling would tell us with a vicious smile, maybe a sneer, we weren’t sure by then, that all those people, those people we said we’d kind of promise to defend, were pretty much fucked. And there those demons went, a dark foggish cloud of hate and sorrow, and washed over those people, and we could naught but be witness to men with no hope, and women and children torn asunder, and mothers looking with sadness at their babes, all still.

We would feel the hurt of failure, and we’d try to say to each other, “well that sucked,” but sucked didn’t cover it, because we’d just been witness to a slaughter, and we realized that maybe sheep weren’t quite so hapless, maybe they killed shepherds in ways we hadn’t thought of. And then some kind of music would come on, spindling randomly in the player, and the violin would carve a line into us.

And with tears in our eyes, held like a laden sponge, for fear a drop might fall, and show our weakness, we’d realize that it was four in the morning, and maybe we ought to get something to eat, and go home, because we could also feel sleep mixed in those tears, and who could stomach any more death tonight anyway, even if it was monsters.
GAYS, MAKING AMERICA FABULOUS SINCE 1776
Art Appreciation

J.M. Romig

From behind your canvas
you peer up at me
taking in the details of my body.
Your scientific eyes studying me
cold
with neither lust or disgust
as if I were a vase
or a basket of fruit.
Not long before this we embraced one another
in the throes of passion.
You were never more into me than that moment.
The skillful motions of your lips and tongue,
throwing my body into religious convulsions
and praising your name.
It intrigues me how you can turn that off.
How you can refrain from smiling as you draw the outline of my nipple.
How my naked body so near and ready
doesn’t cause that animal I’ve come to know so well
to overpower the artist in you.
I’m truly fascinated,
filled with both admiration and jealousy
for that woman you are creating.
An imitation getting more attention than the original.
I know, it’s not really like that.
In your mind, we are closer than we have ever been
but you look so far away
hiding from me behind that easel
cheating on my body with your interpretation.
No doubt, she will be flawless,
and have none of my ugly imperfections.
She isn’t even finished being born
and I hate her already.
Although, I’ll lie when you reveal her to me.
I’ll tell you that she’s beautiful
that I really like her.
Then, I’ll make love to you
right there on the floor.
Forcing her to watch.
Victory’s Key
Sherri Quirke Bolcevic

Murderous kings, wicked queens, and false princes;
Sorceresses too.
They all try,
Blades lashing, poisons dripping,
Scheming,
Dreaming,
To seize power in a paralyzing clutch
And never,
Never free it.
But they fail, fall
Foiled always.
And the world turns on
Happily, ever.
Until when, one day,
There is a tiny scream and
The world gets
Not cold and dreary dark
But summer hot and noon bright
Always, forever
Because She likes it that way.
The people fearfully ask
“What’s happened?”
While an old crone,
Powerful once but now
Forgotten,
Cackles gleefully
“Finally someone killed the damn kids!”
New Mexico Suite
   Lexi Johnson

Above Albuquerque

At night
From a few thousand feet
Ho-hum suburbs
Are glittering jewels
Dancing before my eyes
In yellows, golds, and greens
As the plane banks left
Preparing for landing.

The Voice of the Mountain

At ten thousand plus feet
Atop a mountain,
With my camera and myself
and a few dozen others, just snapping away.

I hear a voice say
Hey, Stop
Look around you, not through the lens.
Are you here for pictures to show your friends?
Or are you here to experience the mountain?

Road Trip

Who needs coffee when you wake up to desert cold?
Who needs a book when you can watch the red mesas in the sun?
Who has time to take pictures when this landscape so desolate is constantly changing?

Have you ever seen the sun and the moon shine together?
Have you ever seen the mountains?
Have you ever seen them glow purple?

Have you ever seen the red tinged
New Mexican highway
Flying by at 75 mph
On a road trip to AZ?
The Glass Harmonica and Broken Crystal
Emiliano Lebron

Society
Falling apart
Breaking, shattering
Like fine lead crystal
Stoned to death
And shards flying away
Piercing the people
The church and the steeple
Deadly crystal meth

My eyes can see
The path to the heart
The glass harmonica beams
It spins and gleams
It sings a song
But soon it cracks
It was not strong
To bear the weight
A grave mistake
It cannot come back

Unknown to me
From the very start
The fate of man
An empty bandstand
The glass harmonica hums
Like a weak medicine
Plays a small tune glum
Hope seems but a dream
And one word perceived
Armageddon

An end to be
Taken to heart
As none can avoid
Imagined joy
A trial by fire
Abysmal flame
Some who desire
To stray from the light
To stop and fight
To point and blame

Are we not free
To play the part
To sit and pray
To find a way
But we are broken
Like fine lead crystal
Our only token
Is the sound of trumpets
Like thunderstorms
Evil's downfall

Can no one see
The pointed dart
The glass harmonica sings no more
Its spinning ended, and none can store
Up all the fear and grief
We all must come together at last
Victims of the thief
Who stole our unity
Divided we fail to be
Beautiful like crystal glass

~ 23 ~
The man lay flat in the brush looking over onto the village. It was quiet and serene, the clouds forming a slight haze. The creek moved slowly to the larger river; the trickling, splashing sounds sending shivers down his spine. Was he being followed? Were they trying to find him? The patter of his feet on the ground was the only sound in the muted silence. Yet, he suspected that they were more than capable of tracking. A sense of fright came over him as he imagined them stalking behind him. Turning, he saw nobody and was for a second reassured. Yet he knew that soon they would be following him if they were not already. He had to get to the village; he had to hide.

He stood, hoping that they would not discover him. How he wished to be free of their tyrannical evil. If only he could get far enough away, they would never find him again. He hooked his arm around the nearest tree. The trunk was curved, as if the sun had not reached it well enough as a sapling, twisting it slowly towards the light. The bark was rough and if he moved his arm, he knew he might get scraped. Below the roots, the river swayed in a small gully. Would he be able to get away fast enough?

The sweat poured from his skin as he began the sharp decline. He could barely imagine how his life had suddenly changed. At one moment he was just a regular art dealer, the next they were following him all across the countryside. His profound fear prompted him to step up the pace. He hoped to reach the settlement before sundown, since he was forced to walk and the night would make a chance of attack even greater. If he could only reach the village, perhaps he would be able to hide. The church tower in the distance was just visible and it gave him a slight bit of hope.

These vain hopes were dashed suddenly as he stumbled, crashing down the hill. He was scraped and bruised as he finally righted himself. Had anyone heard him? He tried to perceive if anything had changed, if anyone had noticed his descent. A bird twittered in a nearby tree, making him jump. Could it be a spy? He got back to his feet and began to run the rest of the way, fearful of the pursuit behind him. Would he be able to get away?

In the small gully, he found the creek, flowing with a purpose known only to itself, and he followed it towards the city. He assumed that its edge would provide the fastest trail to follow: at least that was what he hoped. The city did not seem to grow any closer, but if he could reach it, he would be safe.

At first, he only felt slight trepidation. This turned into a sinister feeling that persisted until he felt it coursing through his body and mind. Someone was nearby. He felt energy shock through his body, and he knew that they had found him. They had used their great technology to halt him. Fear flew up his spine as he fell to the ground, thrashing back and forth through spindly brambles. Looking up, he saw the face. They had found him. The next thing he knew, a rock came pelting down onto his head from above, and his brain relented. Consciousness left him as his eyes grew dim. They had found him. All was lost. His hope did not prevail. They had found him.
Dreams came upon him after a short time of his mind being free. He was bound to a table from which he could not rise. The walls were bleached white, as if he was in a hospital, or perhaps this was their operation room. The thought frightened him so much that he could not stand it. Nightmares. He had never been in such a place before. His mind’s eye blurred as he recoiled in his sleep. Why could he not awaken? The thought perplexed him; he needed to wake!

The man who haunted his dreams, Dr. Vorn, appeared by his side. Vorn was the man he had killed: the man who had been the ringleader of the evil operation. But he knew that Vorn was actually dead; he had seen it happen. In fact, he had cascaded the blows to Vorn’s temple, murdering the man. Yet he had felt little guilt over this. It had been justice, the man had deserved it. “How are we feeling today?” Vorn’s nightmare-phantom asked in a slow monotonous tone, simultaneously removing a syringe from beside the bed. “It’s time for your medicine.” He screamed aloud at the very idea, and suddenly woke up. Thank God! He was awake. The visions of evil had left him.

He discovered himself to be on a tan beach. They had left him alone. They had dropped him off at the sea. “Oh Lord!” he called out. “Thank You!” There was no response except the waves crashing against the shore. The ground was verdant not far behind him and a cliff appeared on his left. Past the small grassy sward began a forest that continued up on top of the cliffs in the distance. It was so recognizable; he felt exhilarated. He was home. He could remember coming here when he had been young, with his father, mother, brother, and sister. What a happy time it had been! He smiled at the thought.

Yet, he also knew that they would not be finished with him. This was a test. They were going to see whether he would run away or not. He would flee. He would run away. Happiness circulated through him as he saw figures out on a distant sandbar. Maybe they would help him. They would of course. He was home.

Hurrying forward, he found the water was fairly shallow. After continuing further, he discovered that the depth increased steadily. The wetness sloshed against him. He would escape, and they would never find him again. But where would he go? Thoughts of strange and distant places occurred to him. Maybe he would go to America, or perhaps South Africa, or even Australia. Happiness flamed through him as the thoughts roiled through his mind. The water got deeper as he continued forward. The sandbar was just in the distance out of his reach. He knew he would have to swim soon.

He plunged into the water, joyously stroking through the waves to the sandbar. The people there would help him, maybe they had a boat. He could take the boat to America. Happiness conflagrated through him as he saw the figures on the distant sandbar. All of his life, he had hoped for a way of escape, and now it was appearing before his eyes.

Something was wrong, the sandbar was not getting any nearer; instead the water just got deeper and deeper. He could see it in the distance, the people standing there waiting for him, calling to him. He began to run out of energy. He looked back and discovered that the beach was no longer in sight. He was feeling highly perturbed. The
waves of the sea washed over his face, and he struggled for air. For a few heartbeats he was entirely engulfed by the press of the water, but finally he regained his balance and floated to the surface.

Finally, the sandbar began to come closer. The faces of the people upon the shore were now visible. The odd familiarity about them forced him to stop in his tracks. Happiness blazed into his body and soul as he saw his mother and father waiting for him, faces white as death. It was impossible, he said to himself, for they had died many years ago. Then, he finally understood.

In the Dedham Institution for the Mentally Unstable, Dr. Johan Vorn looked upon his former patient. He wished he could have helped him, the man having been in such a poor state. How he had broken the bonds that tethered him to his bed were beyond Vorn. It must have taken a great amount of energy spurred on by his hysterical dreams. He stared at the body slumped over the water basin. In one of his episodes, the man had drowned himself. How the mind could play tricks on those susceptible. Dr. Vorn averted his eyes, there were reports to fill out now.

Sherri Quirke Bolcevic
Lights Out
   J.M. Romig

Sometimes I wish for power to go out.
Be it a downed power line, a blackout,
or simply a bill that wasn't paid on time.
That way we would have an excuse to break out
those scented candles I got you for Christmas last year.
The apartment will fill with their fruity aroma
and I'd know why you never lit them.

We'd laugh, as we re-learn to navigate our living room,
half-arguing over whose idea it was
to put that table there.
I'd knock over that hideous lamp your mother gave you,
insisting that it was an accident, and that you didn't really like it either,
So now, at least we have an excuse to trash it,
'Cause I know how much you hate to throw things away.
That's why I'm still here.
Not that I'm complaining.

We'd make up games to pass the time,
like "Would you ever?"
"Would you ever kiss me in a dark room?" You'd ask.
I'd find your lips in the abyss and show you my answer.
A few hours later we'd play "Where's my pants?"

Once dressed, we'd stumble our way over furniture
to get outside,
where we'd lay next to each other in the grass
-which is a little wet, but we don't care-
and enjoy the stars without the distraction of the city lights.

We'd fall asleep this way,
I'd wake up in the morning next to you,
with my shirt on backwards,
my frown upside down,
and you still sleeping, sideways
with your head on my chest
and your leg wrapped around mine.

Electricity? Who needs it?
We make our own.
Ohio

Kendra Bopp

My self has never
been fully
explained
in this climate.
My intransigent id
seeks kindred terrain,
stark beauty
flat vistas—
a pastoral
monochromatic;
a landscape aural,
tactual—indiscernible
to imaginations
myopia-dulled.

My self wants to feed

on organic artistry—
Raw-Arid-Exquisite,
but chokes
on sylvan splendor
and its creatures of Pan
and dies—hungry,
unexplained,
engulfed by the
Great River.
Knowms
    Everett Hunt

Strung out pouting in the yard, like a lawn gnome
Wishing I had a guitar and I was back home
Sitting in the hotel room, waiting for a snow brush and broom
Could I be the lonely man that couldn't sing too soon?

The audience is filled with strangers to themselves
They want to know all the gnomes, but don't know they are the elves
So they ignore all the simple things that are
They're commodity fetishists that go out to buy big brand new cars
They wish that they had known themselves before the sky was blue
But it seems to me that knowing themselves is nothing I should do.

A Day In L.A.
    Everett Hunt

In this vicinity, I can hardly see
In this smog where I can barely breathe
But what I do to you is what you do to me
You do it out of pain
I do it out of play
You say you want to stay
But we're freezing in the rain
I know what you are saying
But it isn't making sense
As I look at you, you shiver
As you stop to catch your breath
If we stay this way forever
We will surely meet our deaths
Ever After
Sherri Quirke Bolcevic

When I was young, my father had always tucked me in at night with a story, his words following me down into sleep.

The stories differed, from night to night, but some things remained always the same.

His princess was always brave and smart and beautiful. And, even when she had to be sad first, in the end she was always happy with her strong, handsome prince.

I had daydreamed of his stories, when I was young, wanting to be that princess then, later, hoping to find that prince, my someone to hold me and love me and be strong when I couldn’t, and have a life built out of blissful clichés.

I’m not young, now, but I’m safe and loved and strong. In her arms.

I wonder sometimes why my father never told me any stories that ended with the two princesses living their happily ever after.
Theory of a Madman
Emiliano Lebron

1.) Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:

Guess what I have?
Is there a better way to alienate yourself from society
Than to have a mental disease?

It does strange things to you
It makes you look at things in a new light
All of a sudden, things become...well...dirty
You notice little insignificant things
Just little tiny moments
That drive you nuts!
How hospital patients cough and sneeze on magazines
With their tuberculosis, influenza, strep throat, whatever
It is disgusting!
And then people expect you to read their little bacteria book
And get all pissed off when you don’t
It’s just a magazine
What’s your problem?
The fact that Hackity Hackenstein over there
Was hocking a loogie on page 36
That’s my problem

2.) OCD

I can say honestly that as a crazy person
I like religion
Life is so fucking miserable
It gives me some hope for a decent future.
And I like the fact that the people there
Are just as crazy as I am.
I can sit through the common right-wing Shiite Republican tirade
About how Barack Obama is going to usher in the Apocalypse
And I think to myself:
I can hang out with these people
This is why I can’t stand atheists
Always breathing down your neck
Telling you you’re some fucking idiot for having a faith.
In the effort of creating a visual
Imagine a little girl and her mother walking down the street
The little girl turns to her mother and says:

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Mommy, why is that man rubbing his hands all weird?
Why does he open doors with his sleeves?
Why does he stand in the corner of a crowded room?
Why does he jump when I sneeze?
And I can hear it now:
Oh honey, it’s all very simple
According to Darwin’s theory of evolution
He has de-evolved
He is a lesser being
Don’t go near him, you might get infected
Natural selection?
Oh, that’s comforting
Nice to know all this has happened to me
For no reason whatsoever
Life is just a bowl of cherries!
Rotten cherries
Survival of the fittest?
Well then I should’ve died a long time ago
I’m not exactly “fit”
Not under any definition of the word
I’m not physically fit
I’m not mentally fit
I’m not financially fit
I can barely function around people
I’m not fit
And I could care less
I like living
And I know that when I die
I’ll look God straight in the face
And I’ll say:
Were you not watching what was going on down there?
Did you not hear what people were saying about you?
Did you not see the stupidity and bigotry oozing out of every single person?
And I’m sure God will interrupt me right there
And say to me:
I saw it all
I tuned in every day
That would explain a lot
I can see the entertainment value in that
Humanity:
The ultimate reality show

3.) OCD
This is all very controversial
As indeed it should be
I am gripping onto every fiber of reality that I can
Hoping to keep myself regular
There's no Activia for craziness
I can’t make sense of it, can you?
Just be sure not to ask a psychiatrist
He or she will give you ten simple words:
Here’s a prescription for Prozac
Now shut the hell up!
Two-hundred dollars.
I can hear my psychiatrist now:
Emiliano, you need to take the medication consistently
Have the benefit of the medication
With the cognitive therapy
The therapy and the medication need to be taken together
Before we can see benefit
Did you catch any of that?
I cannot take Prozac
If you would like to experience what it is like to take Prozac
Feel free to join me in this simple simulator
I would like for everyone to please be quiet
Now just listen
You hear that?
Now imagine that in your head
For three hours straight!
Absolutely no brain activity whatsoever!
That is what Prozac does for you
I mean, it works
But it messes with your mind
I remember when I found the mysterious tick
From not taking the medicine regularly
Yes, as well as OCD
I now have a tick
Thank you Prozac
Thank you medicine
Thank you science
For constructively fucking with me for six years

4.) What is existence?
What is life?
I’ve asked this question multiple times
And not a damn person has been able to tell me
At least not give me a straight answer
The Bible leaves this little answer out
Every religious text seems to not address this
Humanism is the proverbial crack whore
On this big street corner I call “bad ideas”
So bad, in fact, I won’t even bother explaining it
And everyone wants to turn into the expert:
You need to seize the day
You need to define your own happiness
You need to value the future
You're the boss of your life
You have the power over the universe
You can do it
Really?
Is that the best you’ve got?
Have you been stocking up on fortune cookies?
Confucius says shut up
You know one of my friends asked me
What two words could I use to sum up my life?
I thought a while, and came up with these:
Huh? and What?
Yes, ladies and gentleman
Life is a giant question
No one seems to be able to answer
At least, not truthfully
Or competently
Life is a metaphor
And as everyone knows:
No one pays attention to metaphors
When you think about life, think about this:
No matter how bad you think you have it
Someone has it much worse
And that is enough to convince me
Though life may suck
And everyone dies
It could always be much worse
I’m blessed to live somewhere where food is readily available
I’m blessed to live somewhere where I can find a doctor
I’m blessed to have my family
I’m just blessed
And I’m the crazy one

5.) Here are the grounds of my theory:
The people who claim that they are so rational
That they are on the side of logic
That they are right
Have made one similar claim:
That people like me
You know, “the crazy people that think”
Are not fit to live
All men are created equal
But apparently some are more equal than others
And my theory:
If only certain people are fit to live
Then what is the point of living?
I give you the three-ring threshold of testable bigotry
I give you the intolerance of intolerable irrationality
And I ask you
No, I implore you to prove them all wrong
Beyond a shadow of a doubt!
Live, damn it!
Live life how YOU see fit
Not how others see it fit for you
This is not a call to revolution
Nor is this a call to anarchy
There are some morals involved here
You should know them and embrace them
I can’t tell you what they are
That’s for you to decide
Your life is meaningful
It may not be perfect
It may not always be happy
But it still has value
You still matter to someone
You are needed by someone
Despite what you may think at times
Your life is more valuable than gold
More valuable than every diamond in Africa
More valuable than every gallon of oil in the Middle East
More valuable than every company on the New York Stock Exchange
Your life is more valuable than you could ever imagine
And I can definitely say that your life is more valuable than
A
Worthless
Piece
Of
Paper
Meanginless Shirt  
Mary Mastromatteo

A meaningless shirt  
When I was wet and cold, given to me by my love.  
A meaningless shirt  
Just hung in the closet, waiting for a girl like me.  
Your favorite shirt  
Hanging close to your body, brushing the skin I loved.  
I keep it close to me,  
This meaningless shirt  
With your baby powder scent fading away  
Like a winter’s ever creeping upon the flowers.  
But this meaningless shirt is the world to me,  
A meaningless shirt I keep forever close to me.

Silence  
Leanne Blevins

Where are you? Why can’t I see you?  
You’ve left me alone in this awful place to pick up the pieces, some which I cannot find.  

Where are you? Why can’t I hear you?  
I am screaming for you to come back, but I fear in death you can no longer hear my voice.  

Where are you? I cannot taste you.  
Your passionate kisses have abandoned my lips forever and now my mouth is lonely.  

Where are you? I cannot feel you.  
There are no more warm embraces and my body is now numb from the cold.  

Your untimely departure took with it my hopes, my dreams.  
They have since been replaced with anger and fear.  

Love and strength were my secret friends and you took them away without a word.  
How could you do this? Why did you do this?  

Silence, I now realize is the deadliest thing of all.
The Viewing
Tara Neely

His face is yellow, cold, and dead -
So unlike what he had been.
He didn’t look good, or even at peace;
He was just there to be seen.

The granddaughters giggle in a corner
To the irritation of the grieving daughter.
The family came in from the city,
But they can’t stand the sight of each other.

Murmurs and tears from the guests
Who scratch their names into the visitor’s book,
And of course they come with condolences,
Though they mostly just came to look.

Being dead must be easy, there’s nothing to do –
From man to formaldehyde bag.
The living must dig out your six-foot hole,
And the others just have jet lag.

People are tactless and silly and loud,
So I just stand still while they awkwardly stare.
As I’ve said, it’s all just a chance to come look –
Not many of them actually care.

It’s hard to watch his widow cry,
And see the milling people overdoing
Their emotions, like hyper zombies.
All part of what’s expected at the viewing.

The groups disperse, at very long last,
What a torturous time it has been.
We’re all dead in some way, our faces are cold,
And we’re only there to be seen.
Lessons from the Past
Barbara Smallwood

Cattle cars of the trains
overloaded, groaning and grinding
their way towards certain death
Faces abound through the slats
some old and weary, already given up
others determined to survive the odds.
At the destination, doors are opened
people herded out like farm animals
beaten or kicked if they are too slow
had no food or water for days
standing room only, barely space to breathe.
Stationed in a line like bulls at slaughter
the selection now begins
Man who thinks he's God
pointing to the right or the left
one line to go straight to the showers
old, young, diseased, feeble
the other to a fate worse than death
starvation, disease, exposure to the elements
these also filled many a ditch and oven in these camps.
Millions and millions of nameless died
from hardship, cruelty, neglect
and unknown nameless experimentation.
Yet many survived and have lived to tell
of the horrors and monsters that were
praying deep in their hearts
that humankind of today will have
the wisdom, tolerance, and love
to never do the same.
His final words lay on a scrap of paper, forgotten beside the untouched water and kidney-shaped basin on the familiar rolling table.

A man in white, abstracted, explains the uselessness of hope, the value of mercy as the killing instrument pulled from his breast pocket guides her through the legalities.

The whoosh-thump of each breath an incidental lament as the brightly-hued nurses perform their final ministrations and leave her to witness, alone.

Silence soon replaces the mechanistic life of a man now relegated to the past tense. She leans over him, smoothes his hair, slips his final words into her pocket, and turns to go.
An Extremely Important Ending
Brian Miskowich

This is very much a life
lived wrong.
Started wrong.
Marveling at the world, at the abstract.
(Computers.)
But unable to connect, unable to disconnect
Enough to speak in a land of distant speech.
The mystery of separation.
Why?

Why not speak?
Why not gaze upon the face
of friends and be uplifted?
We shall all descend into an endless, ghostly phase,
Apocalypse walking, shuffling, mumbling.
Nobody left, nobody home.
Forgotten foes to stalk our homes,
forgotten too, to be left asunder,
Adrift, aflame in cold vapor, the world’s reconfiguration.
Iced and stinging, empty streets, the
populace lost.
Adrift, unable.
All lights are green, impending impact,
the structure toppling,
a domino clatter.
Faceless, nobody to see it, no minds left large enough, open enough
to fit within them witness.
The end, and we nowhere found, not there
to see it, candles in the windy sunlight.
I once believed in God,
Until I didn't.
This epiphany was not reached through some catastrophic event;
No death or loves lost brought on his dismissal;
In truth, he nullified himself.

The struggle to please him was immense;
The monotonous daily chore of attempting to live an examined life
Consumed me—wholly.
One realizes this impossibility quickly:
Depression rears its ugly face.

Living my life to glorify God helped no one;
It does not feed the mouths of the hungry,
It does not stop crimes against humanity,
Houses cannot be rebuilt with glory,
After God decides to wash them away.

The ground we stand on is solid,
our actions create reactions: the Earth is very real.
Yet
Through God, we focus on what we cannot see,
that which we cannot touch
and find solace through it, ignoring reality;
suppressing ourselves so willingly to those who know how to capitalize on it.

It is though them and their teaching of God
That we hate in the name of God,
We go to war in the name of God,
We kill in the name of God,
We die in the name of God.

And yet, though all the transgressions made in his name;
And in honor of him, he does nothing.
The sheep never had a Shepherd.

I once believed in him;
Until I did no longer.

Thank god.
Forbidden
Heather Martin

If I could whisper something soft,
    I'd end it with a kiss.
to belong with such a passion,
    is why the world exists.
If I could tell you that I love you,
    with no complicated risks,
    I'd tell you every hour,
    with more than just my lips.
If I could hold you till forever,
    without a second gone to waste.
I'd hold you till my body dies
    and relish in your taste.

Tonight
Nicki Demchak

Sometimes it takes awhile
To recognize a piece of mind
And when you find it, you will see
It was meant to be, meant to be
Tonight

Last night, I dreamt of you
Some things I cannot choose
And when you find me indefinitely
    I’ll see you without me
    And I hope not to care

Bad times I’m walking through
Bound to me I’m so confused
Nonetheless, I won’t change
It makes me who I am today
    And I’m not scared

~ 49 ~
Ladylike Pursuits

Lexi Johnson

I smiled at myself in the mirror as Cecile finished tightening my corset and began to set my hair. My lips were full and curled up sensuously. My hair was dark against my alabaster skin. Congratulations were in order; I looked like a lady of my class should. All those hours of learning to be a proper lady had not been wasted.

Turning away from my reflection in the mirror, I set my eyes on the fashionable dress that had been delivered from the dressmaker’s just today. Apparently, Father’s money comes in handy for something more than funding experiments. The poor old man nearly had a stroke when I asked him for the dress. He had given up hope that I would ever find any interest in the proper pastimes of a lady. For years he had lamented that I spent all my time in the laboratory and not at parties in pursuit of a decent husband. Not that I had any interest in that, but I could not let anyone know what I was plotting.

Recently, a spy was discovered in my laboratory. After some aggressive questioning I found that the spy was in the employ of my childhood friend turned scientific nemesis and libertine, Edward Stein. That bombastic amateur was attempting to gather information on my latest project, a miniscule pistol with power twice its size. It symbolized the culmination of my research. Fueled by æther, it would become the weapon of choice for the cautious lady or the clandestine assassin. It was a fascinating project. I would be damned before I let that dilettante steal my work.

Cecile finished my hair and helped me into my gown, a silk aubergine fabrication. I dismissed her before I added the final touch to my outfit, a sleek, diminutive pistol that I slid down the front of my corset. It fit snuggly, lethally, against my skin. Giving myself one final, confident smile, I left for what was being lauded as the party of the year, hosted by none other than Edward Stein.

I stepped out of the car in front of the grand mansion Stein called home. I surveyed the Corinthian columns and Grecian friezes as I ascended the stairs. As I walked through the door, I was quickly engulfed in the raucous crowd, surrounded by the sounds of the party. The bubble of laughter and champagne was all around. An orchestra’s soaring chords sounded above it all, playing what I could only assume was all the rage in Paris.

Maneuvering through the crowd, I spotted the man I was looking for: Edward Stein. He was speaking to a colleague of mine, Dr. Hyde. I stopped to check my appearance in a gilt mirror. I looked as I had when I had left my house, refined yet sultry. Confident I would be able to lure that reprobate, Stein, into my plot, I turned towards the corner where there were conversing.

Stein’s shock at my approach was priceless. He went silent mid-sentence and his eyes went wide. Dr. Hyde followed his gaze. Upon seeing me, he waved me over to him.
in an excited manner, “Good evening, Artemis,” he said, “It is so wonderful to see you out and about!”

“Good evening, Dr. Hyde,” I replied and I nodded a greeting to Stein, giving him a flirtatious smile.

Stein recovered himself and replied, “Artemis! You look ravishing this evening,” he savored the sentence, “It has been too long.”

“Indeed, it has,” I said, “Have you and Dr. Hyde been discussing our newest project?”

“Indeed, we have Artemis,” Dr. Hyde said excitedly, “Why I was just telling Edward about your pistol...”

Hyde was quickly interrupted by Stein, who asked, “Artemis, would you honor me with a dance?”

“It would be my pleasure,” I smiled, offering him my arm.

He guided me to the floor as the orchestra began a waltz. He put his hand on my waist, bringing us too close together to be modest and we began gliding along the dance floor.

He smiled at me, “It has been so long since I last saw you; I had forgotten your beauty,” he paused, “You have become a recluse. You research must be quite engaging.”

“It is, indeed, most fascinating,” I demurred. I felt the pressure of the pistol in my corset.

“I was quite intrigued by what Dr. Hyde told me. You must tell me more about it.”

I realized that this could be my opportunity to get him alone. Calmly I said, “If it fascinates you so, then I suppose I must tell you,” I looked around, smiled at him, and suggested, “Perhaps somewhere more private,” I raised an eyebrow, knowing he would understand.

Stein’s eyes lit up and he led me off the dance floor, through the partiers, towards his private rooms. He made certain that no one saw us leave. A laugh nearly burst from my lips at the thought of this well-known libertine attempting to protect my honor.

Quietly, Stein opened the door to his room and secreted me inside. He turned the lock before turning to me saying, “Who says a woman cannot be beautiful and smart?”

He moved towards me, grabbing me by the waist. I felt the soft pressure of his lips on mine and I let him lead me backwards towards his bed. My plan was working.

He pulled away and began to fiddle with his bowtie and unbutton his shirt. My brain sent my body into action, here was my chance. Quickly, I reached into my corset and pulled out the object that Stein was so interested in. Looking up he saw the tiny weapon in my hand.

He did not comprehend it at first, “You never do leave the laboratory do you, Artemis,” he questioned.

“You were so keen on it, Edward, that I thought you might like to see it in action,” the words seethed with venom and fear came across his face.
No one heard a thing over the orchestra and the bubble of champagne. I returned to the party to find Hyde glancing around, searching for someone among the revelers. “Artemis! There you are. I was just looking for you. Where have you been?” he queried.

“Dancing,” I answered, “The orchestra is glorious this evening.” He asked me one last question, before I excused myself to enjoy a few dances before heading back to my laboratory, “Have you seen Edward?” “Not since our waltz,” I answered coolly and moved away to join next dance.
I Am the Mediator  
   Emiliano Lebron

I am the one  
Who sits in the middle  
Listening  
My only job  
Is to decipher the riddle  
Made by both sides  
Arguing  
Wasting time  
No accord can they find  
Harmony is set aside  
But it is fun  
To watch their mouths run  
They lie  
They chastise  
They hypnotize  
But they are stupid  
So I sit  
At the round table  
And watch their circus  
Of point-counterpoint  
And dry wit  
A building unstable  
A crazy caucus  
A meeting of the minds  
Trying to make a point  
That they can’t even find  
I am the mediator  
I sit and sort papers  
And ideas  
I invite sense  
I make deals  
I represent truth  
Against the lying coup  
How great it feels  
To be the mediator  
To hear both sides  
And watch the anger stew  
And do...  
Nothing!
Senseless
Barbara Smallwood

The thunderheads roll
brilliant lightning flashes
a gunshot rings out
but is muffled by
the steady driving rain.
Valuables are quickly taken
as the blood is already
rinsing away into the gutters
faint moaning sounds
suddenly cease as
final light fades
from emerald green eyes.
Another senseless murder
killer walking around free
doesn't even merit
front page headlines
here in the city anymore.
Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
     Jennifer Swickard

Through the sliding glass doors I walk
Into a rancid wall of
Feces, urine, and death
Want to run away
But daddy has my hand
And says "We have to see Grandma today."

Down the hall we make our way
Past the rooms of the living dead
Bodies fully functioning
Minds long gone
Far too deteriorated to ever repair

Into Grandma's room we step
Over to her bed she lays
In the same clothes
As every other day
Thursday's lunch still on her blouse
Today is Sunday.

Hair matted to her head
Feces under her nails
Getting skinnier by the minute
They have forgotten her
Left her a prisoner
To this place, this bed, her body.

Nursing and Rehabilitation Center?
Now that I am grown
I have come to know
That those who come to stay
Never walk away.
LISTEN

Marcus McCaleb

Look up, look far, know where to stand,
The men who built this land with frail AND tired hands
Walked through HOT sands and tall grasses, got whipped and lashed, some until they passed.
Now these days they want to give us life,
For the drugs THEY supply, WE sell, and put in THEIR family’s pipes.

That’s the way they try to hold us back
Passing so many years of living hell, Mothers finally getting to become grandmothers
As their children grow large in numbers
As these numbers grow, more problems arise.
Like people killing babies, taking the innocence from a child’s eyes; then taking their lives.
Brother vs. Brother, Mother, Father, Sister and all others against one another.
So many funerals, our people go away; pain every day.
Destruction in the eyes of all who fall

Hearing talks of new world orders, what about TODAY, not what’s around the corner.
We could walk in a different town and be treated like a foreigner; hearing “I’m gonna get that guy!”
But Why?... we’ll all still be people ‘til we die.
We might as well kill ourselves if we can’t unite as one.
We were all one, at one time or another.
It is time to change, no more being deranged.
Getting up in a world delayed by weak minds, dumb crimes; Wake up people, it is time.
Life is what we make it... we all can do it people, stand tall, pushing away all negatives,
Living breathing, speaking as one, throw down your guns. Raise your families with bonds so tight,
Loving them, teaching them, uniting them, once again...we are one...one!
For EVERY RACE LISTEN, I CONSIDER THIS TO BE MY NEW WORLD ORDER.
WHAT I WANT TO SEE, ARE MY PEOPLE AROUND THE CORNER.
Defender
Patrick O’Brien

Defender of the New Road
You Stand Alone.
Outside in rain to melt witches
Left in cold even snowmen would shudder.
No bigger than an eight year-old
Not nearly as valuable or irreplaceable
Blinking solemnly at passersby
Your time has ended, your brethren retrieved
You have been left behind.
You are just a lone road construction barrel,
Left to face the seasons.

The Real World
Patrick O’Brien

Eight Miles to Work
Eight Hours of Work
One hour of break
Twenty minutes of driving
Fifteen minutes waiting for the bus
Three hours of class
Six hours of sleep
Repeat.
The Reunion
    David A. Clayman

She plinked furiously on rusted fallow strings,
Creating a ghastly, infuriating noise.
I found my tensions ever increasing,
With each abrasive strum
Of her young untrained fingers.

This is a shrill reunion I’d have thought never to occur.
For until now,
Buried deep in the bowels of my closet,
This rosewood and mahogany instrument,
Scored and scratched with haunting memories,
Was clandestine
Never to resurface.

Hours upon hours
I offered myself in practice,
Self mutilating already callused fingers
And, even they too did crack.
Now, a single drop from shadowy humid clouds
Elicits my hands to constrict and deform
With a dreadful cramping pain.

For what reasons did I obsessively sacrifice?
It was supposed to be the key to my dreams...

Yes, through this guitar,
These matured eyes have seen many places,
But all, when subsequently shut,
Were always certain to open up
To new surroundings.

Inhabitants of such quick places were much the same.
Never was I truly able to boast
Of an honest relationship,
Just a few awkward mornings,
And regretful goodbyes...

But this was many years ago, and
As I reached out in parental manner,
An attempt to disarm her
Relieving my mind,  
Something unexpected happened.  

I looked past the chaotic, nerve-racking clatter,  
And there it was,  
In all its innocence.  
A daughter’s smile...  

The loathsome noise,  
Suddenly began to unwrap itself,  
Presenting a simple precious melody.  
The music she was producing was not the same farce  
That I had come to associate with...  
No, this was genuine and unblemished,  
Fresh as anything that I have ever known in my entire existence.  
Yet overflowing with familiarity.  

Reluctantly but excitedly I picked up the old beaten guitar,  
Gave it a quick needed tune.  
And knowing fully that her comprehension was limited  
I proceeded to show her some forgotten chords.  
She gave me her complete attention.  

Then I sang silly songs  
With horrible voices  
She laughed, and I  
For the first time in a long time  
Felt whole again.  
Memories I had buried long ago  
Uncovered themselves again,  
I saw myself at a young age playing for hours,  
Only this time it was for no particular reason,  
No pain at all  
Just to play...
My Serenity

J.M. Romig

I find my serenity
On the beach
Swinging alone
Nearly hypnotized
By the rhythmic squeaking
Of the metal chains
That keep me floating in the sky
Of my mind's eye
I try and listen past it
For the sounds of the lake
Although I cannot hear them
Over the machines
Tearing down a nearby building
That used to be my school
I find the racket soothing
Interesting
The way the sounds clash
With the chain's music

I open my eyes
It's not a sunny day
Dark clouds are rolling in
Over the horizon
It's going to rain
I don't mind too much
As long as it's a warm rain
I'd like that
If it's not
I won't complain
This moment
Won't be any less perfect
Castellón
Kendra Bopp

My love resurfaced in Spain,
on a mid-afternoon
train caught between
Madrid and Castellón.

Three boys danced
around a cassette player. Sony —
my mind latched onto
the letters of the familiar name
rendering them strange,
ese— o— ene— i griega,
the internal chant
became a melody interrupted
when the youngest boy began to sing
in accented English
and I realized their song
belonged to me,
to a memory
so far removed
that it was barely still mine.

The Spanish countryside melted
into Arizona desert and I became
my younger self
on Canyon Lake, lying next to him
in the wave rocked boat
while catfish jumped and
music lulled us into half-sleep
under the late August sun.

In Castellón,
gently shaken by the singing boy,
I left the desert,
and the boat,
and the man
behind.