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THE VIEW FROM ABOVE
Jeremy Shatan

The light in the window
Beckons me on
I’m here, they are there
And all is right with the world.

Key in the lock, open the door,
This is the lobby familiar
Stairs to the right, climb one flight
Key in the lock again.

The view from above
A house full of love
Though the first born is dying.

The tapes, needles, and gauze
Are there for all to see
But the trains, trucks, and toys
Carry more weight if you let them.

Put on some music
Bake up a batch
You’re just like any
Other family.

Tomorrow is appointments
Or it might be the playground
Where nobody knows
What’s happening.

The view from above
A house full of love
Though the first born is dying.
Untitled
Kat Nagel
I DON’T CRY OUT
Nick Danford

I don’t cry out because
my body knows a needy, greedy
reiterated skin-on-skin
in bed, sure, but also on streets—
handshakes where friends meet,
and in dining rooms—
a long hello-hug,
before the soft pick-up
and the clunk put-down
of chicken slowly cooked
in rosemary and white wine.

I like to cry and I don’t like
to feel the wrong kind of ache—

Ah, love, let us be true to one another,
for the world, which has
hope, and joy, and mysterious early mornings,
and help from pain
rolls upon us like a soft midnight tide
pushing upon its beach.
ARIEL (THE PRIVILEGE OF DYING FROM CANCER)
Loren Rabinowitz

We’ll probably die of cancer, you say
as the Zamboni pushes through vapor
on the final turn,
leaving glass in its wake.
It is nearly midnight on the Fourth of July.
The older students, even foreign-born, get the holiday off.
We are here alone—
youngest in the training camp, our coach, “Mother Russia,”
does not believe in children
or fireworks
or painted faces.
Holidays, we are graced with lessons,
assuming Mother Russia
feels the urge to don mink and leather and
her unhappy youth and
years of an abusive marriage,
pushing us ‘til we retch
over the side of the boards.
Not tonight, however. Tonight
we are alone—this “private ice” a privilege
unless you are eleven and would rather be
watching the parade down Main Street—
balloon in one hand, ice cream cone in the other.
The Zamboni driver has turned off the engine
and closed the doors behind his strange vehicle,
which opens its hood to belch shaved ice and snow.
Our mothers have taken a reprieve from their nightly vigil way up in the bleachers to get coffee from the machine. Think about it, he says. We’re in here, sucking up this bad air, eight hours a day. That’s not water we’re skating on, you know. It’s laced with poison and chemicals that keep it frozen even in July. No it’s not, I say. And the Zam? He says. That thing is blowing so much carbon monoxide out its tailpipe it kills a new driver every week. No it’s not, I say. Think about it, he says. Every Russian in the place smokes like a chimney stack. Your lungs are practically smoking three packs a day. They’re probably dead already. No, they’re not! I say. Probably yours are, I say, pulling off my guards. Probably. That’s why I’m faster. He lunges and I squeal, racing each other round the barrier. Then we hear it. The first explosion, the shower of sparks in a high corner of the arena. I gasp and fall, skinning my knees.
Untitled
Sarah Gumlak
Ariel takes my hand and pulls me up. At center ice, we are transfixed, same as the other kids lined up on Main Street, breathlessly watching the fireworks explode over the lake. This is the part of childhood we participate in. Minutes later, the show is over. Ariel takes my hand again. Don’t worry, I tell him. After we win the Olympics, I’m going to be a doctor. Okay, Professor, he says, which is a nicer way of saying Smarty Pants.

I should take the stairs, slowly to find that I am out of breath on opening the doors to the ninth floor wards. In room 974, you should be my patient wizened, supine, unresponsive, your family (two sons and a daughter, two grandchildren looking on) entwined in the necessary tubes and wires, a human-mechanical netting rising up around the bed.
It is stage four lung cancer, I should say. 
There is nothing more to be done. Probably from all those years he spent in an ice rink. 
The chemicals in the ice release ozone, I should say. 
The old Zambonis poured carbon monoxide into unventilated spaces. 
The Russians smoked so much and so often 
It was like taking in a pack a day, secondhand. 
And don’t forget the cold! Helping carcinogens condense in the lung tissue. 
Probably. 
Your children nod and nod. 
A privilege, this cancer, 
This far-off, breathed-in ending 
just way you said it would. 

We’ll probably die of cancer, you said. 

What was this inexplicable extinguishing act, then? 
You are twenty, an athlete, angel, lion— blond-haired, blue-eyed, you have no business in a grave crossed by violets. “Multifaceted Life of Figure Skater Ends in Cancer,” the New York Times should have read, eighty years from now. 
Not “Ends In Mystery.” 
Where did you pick it up, mystery? 
Was it there with us, too, that Fourth of July? “How can I be so scared?” you wrote at age eleven. “The fire of bravery inside me is dead.” I wonder if this is your answer.
Garden Party
Donald Kornfeld
Each week they grow lighter
until we can almost
pick them up with our
bare hands
their bones
rotten
no longer bound, no longer sound.

They fall apart at our touch,
our slice, our scrape.
We have sworn to do no harm—
but we wound them.
They have already died
a hundred deaths.

I hear the wwwwhhhhirrrrr
of the bone saw in my dreams
the sound of the saw slicing through
human remains
brains of mothers, daughters, fathers, sons
in our hands
we pass them around and when we are finished we
tie them up.

Like vultures we peck at
the eyes of the dead
our forceps eating away at
traces of fat, flesh.
If eyes are the window to the soul:
What has happened to theirs?
What has happened to ours?
Aspirin Re-Crystallization
Claire Bayan
A Study of the Spine
Claire Bayan
I was fortunate enough to be in Seattle the only weekend in October during which the sun decided to shine. Its presence was more aesthetic than functional: it was chilly when Annie and I walked hand-in-hand through the arboretum. We appreciated the light from the late-morning cadence through the foliage of a melting-pot of tree species.

Settling into a picnic table next to the water, we sunned ourselves while passing the guitar back and forth. You could not be youth in Seattle without an acoustic guitar. I watched as her tiny fingers wrapped around the frets like vines to a fret-trellis. Listening to snippets of her voice was like catching whispers in the wind. I lay back on the picnic table. Contentment and excitement, water and lava mixed, and the resulting steam billowed upwards, folding upwards the corners of my lips.

Annie was focused on the guitar, cheeks rosy from either the hike or her own playing. I knew she was terribly shy with playing guitar in front of others. She tries to hide any signs of weakness, even (especially?) from me. I noticed this particularly while she drove me around that weekend, for most of her anxiety stemmed not from getting into accidents, but from embarrassing herself in front of me.
I tried my best to show her that I cared not in spite of but because of her vulnerabilities. I knew that eventually she will turn herself inside out and shake out all the contents. They will clatter onto the table, plastic effigies, old talismans. We will sort through all of her insecurities and laugh in triumph together. She had done the same with me: time’s great mirror reflects the largest of structures, and I am excited for that day when we see the symmetry.

//

Annie was at the wheel; I was slouching in the passenger seat. The Zipcar made its way to a Korean restaurant in college town. Along the way, we sang along to music by a local folk band blasted from Annie’s phone. We could not for the life of us link the phone to the car stereo system.

“Been talkin bout / the way things change,” she sang. Annie’s enunciation was altered by her smile. The vowels were less open, consonants less consonant. I tried to harmonize while air-drumming. The sea sparkled like a tambourine; our stomachs growled a slow and low like the bass drum beat. Picturesque: two people anticipating good food, enjoying a simple song together on a crisp, autumn day.

“My family lives in a different state.” Annie’s in a different nation-state, mine’s in a different state in the American sense. I thought of home and how every year I would get sick around this time. I thought of concerts in the school gym and post-nasal drip. I wondered what images or feelings popped up in Annie’s mind.
“And if you don’t know what to make of this / then we will not relate.” This line elevated the song to a high level of respect in my mind. From such a deep and rich topic as separation from loved ones, a few words in three sentences captured so much. My proclivity to wordplay was especially tickled by the word “relate.”

“And if you don’t know what to make of this / then we will not relate,” we repeated. A crescendo led us to the prolonged, cathartic “Oh” as cymbals crashed like foamy waves, piano drifting and bobbing on a C major arpeggio. The two of us swayed to the music like a pair of palm trees in the ocean breeze, rooted side by side, born from two coconuts that drifted from very different places to the same bronze shore.

“Rivers and roads / rivers and roads / rivers ‘til I reach you.”

The song ends with the mantra-like chanting of those words for two minutes. At first I wondered what Annie took away from that line, but I stopped; I already knew. For the beauty of love is in the sharing of experiences, interpretations, and ideals, and since we were in love with each other, we both knew what the song was about.

“Oh / rivers and roads / rivers ‘til I reach you.”

//

Annie and I were leaning on a wooden counter reeking of saltwater and weed: smells of Pungent Sound. Russian pastries in hand, we surveyed Pike Place. Kibitzing gulls flocked around a game of chess to our right. Their squawks were unable to arouse a scraggly, possibly homeless man, who lay stiffly on a bench to our left, and behind him the Ferris wheel rotated in the distance. The Ferris wheel turned with such a slow pace that it seemed as if it were grinding to a halt. The cars rose and fell, each with its share of time in the light of the setting sun and the shade.
Lifeline
Samuel Cohen-Tanugi
I wondered if that was what the earth looked like from orbit: imperceptibly rotating, although it is whirling at an absurdly high angular velocity. Fixating on the rotating wheel, I felt the gnawing anxiety and desire for that view at the top of the ride. Up, up, up in the car you went, seemingly slowly as the sky-ceiling barely moved towards you. Then, the dark waters of the sound rush up to meet your fall. All the while you wished the ride would keep going for one more rotation. Life’s no roller coaster. It’s more of a Ferris wheel in that you despair about the imperceptible march of time and is terribly overpriced.

I refocused my attention on Annie. I was fascinated by the reserved nature of her resting face. There are many beautiful people in the world, and there are many (yet fewer) people who know that they are. It is their action and attitude, their personality, upon realizing their beauty that comprises true beauty. Some would take a Helen-of-Troy stance and inflame the world with their face. Some would hide it in fear or hoard it in greed. Some would misuse it like an unwieldy tool, never quite confident in their own and (by extension) their tools’ abilities.

Annie was none of the above. Her subtle motions and subtler grins suggested some unseen force in the depths of her body. She knew she was beautiful and kept it in check. Not to say she was as still as a marble statue, no. In fact, she was as fluid as the development section of a Mozart piano sonata. With an expert hand, she navigated the full range of human emotion through distant keys and chromatic progressions, all the while never sacrificing passion for the levity where necessary.

The Ferris wheel turned. Annie chewed in short bursts, rhythmically. I just kept my arm around her as our patch of earth fell into shadow.
I’m at work thinking who cares about the way medical students learn to put their hands on another’s body. The problem with medical school is that they make too big a deal out of the small things. *How do we empathize, how do we negotiate the physical examination* are questions they ask themselves. As if touch can be condensed into an equation, a step-by-step process. Something we keep on a cheat sheet in a back pocket or on the bottom of a shoe. This isn’t learning. This isn’t work. I want to say think of Elliott in that ill-fitting suit and remember the last time you felt it. A face wet with sweat, your breath barely leaves your lungs. You feel an ache at the bottom of the stomach that grounds you. You’re anxious. I think of the weight of these songs. The things said that make one go fuck; he believes she’ll come back to him one day. Don’t we know better. This is how we construct the language of loss. How we’re meant to acknowledge that we all need to touch and be touched. There is no need to over think it. The body gives itself over when necessary.
ON MISSING SOMEONE WHO ISN’T YOUR FIANCÉ
Eva Saavedra

Say it in a whisper. The lowest key your voice can settle into or keep it tucked away in the smoothness of your throat, like a receipt crumpled and hidden in your jeans’ back pocket. The receipt that proves you just spent eighty dollars on a dress you’ll wear only once. The one you bought for that day, for the picnic in Weaselbrook Park, the swing sets, and how he promised to hold you up with his legs, feet firm against your hipbones. Your arms spread wide, think about the airplane you’ll never be for obvious reasons: flesh, blood, diminutiveness. I’ll tell myself this is as wild as any manx, the way you hated your face when you were younger, convinced the eyes were too big, your nose not slender enough, your skin too dark. Denying something is wrong when your beloved approaches, pretending all this is acceptable as long as it’s neither seen nor heard like the tree falling in some distant forest.

AFTER LISTENING TO ELLIOT SMITH’S TWO DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF “MISS MISERY”
Eva Saavedra

I’m at work thinking who cares about the way medical students learn to put their hands on another’s body. The problem with medical school is that they make too big a deal out of the small things. How do we empathize, how do we negotiate the physical examination are questions they ask themselves. As if touch can be condensed into an equation, a step-by-step process. Something we keep on a cheat sheet in a back pocket or on the bottom of a shoe. This isn’t learning. This isn’t work. I want to say think of Elliott in that ill-fitting suit and remember the last time you felt it. A face wet with sweat, your breath barely leaves your lungs. You feel an ache at the bottom of the stomach that grounds you. You’re anxious. I think of the weight of these songs. The things said that make one go fuck; he believes she’ll come back to him one day. Don’t we know better. This is how we construct the language of loss. How we’re meant to acknowledge that we all need to touch and be touched. There is no need to over think it. The body gives itself over when necessary.
Figures in Charcoal
Lisa Tian
Figures in Charcoal
Lisa Tian
A POEM
Sam Porter

jax pilfered my matches:
his fire was dying.
His only hope
was wax and wick.
His chunks of muscle
I hardly saw
so softly lit
in the spilled
candle light.
Only his eyes glowed
and they were
tearful eyes, thickly
vibrating behind
quiet crying.
But I snuffed his light
between my fingers,
ignoring the brief sting.
Disbelief beside chagrin,
to see me snuff his essence with a pinch,
must have swelled inside him.
But I never saw.

Should I now
cut the darkness
with a spark,
for pity,
and let him live,
only to destroy himself
as he always does in myth?

Figures in Charcoal
Lisa Tian
A jax pilfered my matches:
his fire was dying.
His only hope
was wax and wick.

His chunks of muscle
I hardly saw
so softly lit
in the spilled
 candle light.

Only his eyes glowed
and they were
tearful eyes, thickly
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But I snuffed his light
between my fingers,
ignoring the brief sting.

Disbelief beside chagrin,
to see me snuff his essence with a pinch,
must have swelled inside him.
But I never saw.

Should I now
cut the darkness
with a spark,
for pity,

and let him live,
only to destroy himself
as he always does in myth?
THE PLATE MAKER

Sam Porter

This man, fastidious, made plates
Of ivory. Engraved with faces
Of pig-like, warty gods,
With bulging eyes in the center
Where the food would sit.

He took pains because he felt pains,
And he thought that he should give
What he felt. Through the plates,
He sent his direst secrets and
his en chambered conflicts with
The stochastic, the blind, and
The rest of the shallow laws
That supposedly spun moons and
Spurned and spawned life.

It was art married to utility,
and he did not spare the ugly.

He did not engrave faces of gods
that were worshipped - only gods
that he created for his own recreation.
Order, justice, symmetry, beauty,
all tangled into something unrecognizable
In the faces on his plates for sale.
This man, fastidious, made plates
Of ivory. Engraved with faces
Of pig-like, warty gods,
With bulging eyes in the center
Where the food would sit.

He took pains because he felt pains,
And he thought that he should give
What he felt. Through the plates,
He sent his direst secrets and
His enchambered conflicts with
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The rest of the shallow laws
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That were worshipped - only gods
That he created for his own recreation.

Order, justice, symmetry, beauty,
All tangled into something unrecognizable
In the faces on his plates for sale.

Untitled
Jesse Koskey
Untitled
Jesse Koskey
CONSIDER THE LOBSTER
Joe Tobias

Half-sedated in the fridge’s cold, piled in brown paper bags like broccoli, swaying their long antennae, their rubber-banded pincers, alive, far from the crags of marine cliffs and the taste of dark salty water. I remember seven lobsters at a dinner party of seven friends: how we put pots onto the stovetop, brought water to a boil, held each to our faces, inspecting the ugly carapace of bodies the black fish-eggs of eyes, liquid passing into steam, their hundred thousand neurons electric. I remember one lobster splaying its claws, some benthic insect or angel surprised by its own wing span, exceeding a pot’s diameter, how I hid my face, happier to commit cruelties without knowing them
until we dropped lobsters one by one
and I watched through a glass lid
two kept moving
longer than seemed humane,
except what is humanity
when it comes to lobsters becoming
more beautiful when they are boiled.
And we marveled at that deep red
their speckled brown shells became,
salivated in thickening kitchen air,
twisted tails from thoraxes,
hungry for white meat drenched
in butter and brine, our hands
covered in both. Is it erotic
or monstrous that I picture you
sucking my flesh off of bone,
except I am not a lobster,
and I would eat them
again and again, for the taste.
Étude for Greens
Mira Han

until we dropped lobsters one by one
and I watched through a glass lid
when two kept moving
gerather than seemed humane,
except what is humanity
when it comes to lobsters becoming
more beautiful when they are boiled.
And we marveled at that deep red
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in butter and brine, our hands
covered in both. Is it erotic
or monstrous that I picture you
sucking my flesh off of bone,
except I am not a lobster,
and I would eat them
again and again, for the taste.
THURSDAY EVENING
Yaagnik Kosuri

There are days when I see only sadness. Maybe my mood today was yesterday’s residue, from the funeral of the vivacious woman. I had a day like this in New Jersey once, at a family reunion when I was on break from Princeton. Harsha mama and Vijay uncle and Sanjay uncle were in the basement while we were out on the deck. Knocking back scotches, no doubt. When they came up, they were numb and red, reduced to only the true bits of themselves. Harsha mama’s skin was reptilian, I saw the bulge in his pocket, the marlboro reds that owned him. He looked at my younger cousin, asking for pizza, for bread coated in cheese and tomatoes. Seeing the white fuzz of his beard, I wished for him to don a funeral garb, to just end it.

On days like this, I am adrift in memory. Outside the ER, I passed the spot where Mona and I had seen the black violist. A little black girl and her father had passed by too. “It’s actually her birthday, haha,’ he said to me. I looked at the girl, she was chubby, sporting a plastic tiara on her head. I told the violist, and she played happy birthday for the girl while Mona and I sang for her. Her father looked on from the corner as the violist asked “Are you special today?”

My face flushed with emotion. I wondered whether I was injecting sadness where it shouldn’t be. I had a photo at home, of me, in a blue ninja turtles raincoat, my father in his pyjamas, seeing me off to school. We were posing for the camera. I was too old to be carried, not yet old enough that I couldn’t find refuge where I was: tucked in his armpit, happily. I wonder if someone had seen us then, whether they would have felt how I did at this fat girl and plastic tiara. I doubt it, though. That was a happy time. The past is heartbreaking simply because it has ceased to be.
These were my thoughts as I entered the ER. Dr. Johnson was standing there, smiling warmly, so warmly I thought for a second I was on drugs. I welcomed his distraction. "Talk to them," he said, gesturing to the mother and son "anywhere from one to ten minutes." Donovan, the son, was terser than his mother. Soon, though, I got them both to talk. About the father who left Donovan, who was never there for him. He got into gambling, and was now living with a street girl (a slut, Erma said) who tried to kill him and burn his house down. "She’s fuckin nuts," Erma said, "Nuts ass slut. These kids are all I have."

After about 30 minutes of talking to them, I wandered into the back of the ER. There was a black lesbian there, who had met her lover online in a chatroom. A month after they started dating, she was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, and the lover had never left her. The woman was probably in the winter of her life, her partner had gone out to buy a donut. She cried in front of me, bawled like a little baby. "She’s my angel...oh..she’s my saving grace. the lord doesn’t give you more than you can’t handle...not more than you can handle," she said.

I looked at her, touched her shoulder, brought her some water. When I left the ER, I was heading to Mona’s place. I got off at 116th to walk the remainder down. We were both exhausted--it was nice to be around her. I made a bed on the floor and laid down, feeling the wood beneath my body. I was thinking of the South African at the funeral; he had quoted Prospero from The Tempest. I had read The Tempest as a kid, blazed through the play, reading the words not understanding how they linked to each other. I closed my eyes thinking of the South African, how his lips curled around the words I had read long ago: “Our revels now are ended. This insubstantial pageant faded, We are such stuff, as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.”
TODO TIENE SU FINAL
Danny Lascano

What a day!
Exhausted on a hammock
I continued to hear faint echoes of
music blaring, friends dancing
dominoes clicking, guitars strumming,
families singing, people leaving.

I was the center of attention tonight
friends and family passed by to greet me,
Yes: the ones I abandoned but miss dearly,
at that place we romantically called home,
located between my memory,
and the geographic-temporal coordinates
of when and where my life took place
before I decided to venture off to make money
traveling across rivers, across desserts
on a cruel, crisp April morning
traipsing towards my financial betterment
carrying no passport, just large empty pockets
and heavy memories.
I eventually embraced Western frigidity
embracing through the years my now pale complexion.
I had sadly become a nomad
living everywhere, in nowhere, between somewhere
in the imaginary boundaries of annihilated nationalism,
feigned allegiance, failed assimilation
in a country that gave me opportunities,
I only wish I could have brought home.
But the special occasion began
bleeding its peacock colors into my life,
filling in the monotones of my skin
and life in this country.
Joy began permeating the air
as we spoke, like we only can,
 loud, energetic and
lacking in political correctness
but full of refreshing candidness.
And a life was celebrated
achievements listed, objectives accomplished.
I embraced this moment
talking to everyone and exuding nostalgia.

Rafael, ¿te acuerdas?
¿Te acuerdas, José?

But everything comes to an end
as I began to exit with all my friends
they suddenly stopped me,
sadly saying, “Tú no puedes irte.”
Or how we say it in America:
“You cannot leave”.
Everyone solemnly departed,
one by one
and this is when I realized what it meant to die:
not being able to see your friends and family,
anymore.
Triptych
Stephen Nicholas
Triptych
Stephen Nicholas
Triptych
Stephen Nicholas
OUTSKIRTS
Ethan McCurdy

Under the adorned arch
Whirls a howling carnival of rehearsed
Drumbeats horns and handclaps
Before a painted audience
Until quietly I retreat
Past the puerile muses of the fountain
Lantern moss and Spanish oaks
And capitulate unto the improvisation
Of a lone saxophonist
Blowing cool jazz
Into his own reflection
The main entrance lobby held the atmosphere of a luxury hotel with a trio of gigantic metal sculptures showcased to the immediate left of the busy revolving door. A large chandelier of opaque glass plates loomed gracefully above and appeared like floating seashells illuminated by a barrage of tiny white lights. Two statue-still attendants stood smiling behind a smooth white marble podium. They were both smartly dressed in charcoal jackets accented with gold braid shoulder trim. Walking up to the podium in quick strides, Sandra slid her I.D. toward the closest attendant and announced her destination: “Apartment 21A.”

“Go on up Miss, he’s expecting you,” responded the attendant, pointing toward a line of elevator doors. Sandra turned around and took two steps before the attendant blurted in a concerned tone, “Please Miss, do not use the knocker or press the doorbell, it drives the dog crazy.”

The building’s elegance spilled into the hallway of the 21st floor. Sandra glanced down the empty hallway where shiny brass knockers gleamed in the soft light cast by overhead glass globes. Woven into the embossed wallpaper were golden chains crossing each other diagonally. From a distance, they formed large diamonds joined by studs of small rubies pushing outward from the wall. Here and there was a charm or a heart-shaped locket with a prominent keyhole bored at its center. The carpet was deep red and sank softly with every step.

Peering into the open door slit of apartment 21A, Sandra looked down at the smudged knocker and suspended the cool ring in midair. She propelled it downward, sounding a loud clang. The doorman’s concerned face flashed in her mind the instant Sandra heard barking. As he had promised, the distant howls of an angry dog together with a frantic male voice shouting “Monty….Monty. Quiet down Monty,” squeezed through the door slit toward her nervous frame.
“Nice start,” Sandra muttered to herself and entered, giving the door a cautious push.

The dim kitchen was reduced to a narrow path lined with stacks of books, knotted plastic bags, food containers and cans forming a sea of clutter that rose to the level of her arms. Loose pages littered the jagged pathway falling off piled plastic bags of all colors, many bags eroded by dry rot. Sandra could recognize the round tops of closed cans in clear bags in a few spots on the cluttered walls. Off in the corner was a rectangular unit that resembled a refrigerator, but she could not be sure. She looked around, her senses heightened, the hairs on her arms chilled and raised. Holding her breath, she moved through the thick air that now engulfed her, pushing it aside like a heavy curtain. Trying to avoid the loose pages that stuck to her shoes, she lifted her legs high, heading towards the light of the wider living room.

The trash-lined corridor ended in a small cul-de-sac around a brown-stained Lazy-Boy where Peter lay beneath the dusty sun slants near a large bay window. He jerked into a startled stare, and Sandra stood peering down onto his mottled face. His eyes appeared sunken in the massive cheeks that comprised the majority of his face. Peter’s eyes were filled with emptiness and he looked through her, as if she were a sheet of glass. After a moment’s delay he said, “It was about time you showed up.” Again the dog fell into a few loud fits of barking.

Peter’s exposed chest gathered in loose rings of skin and then tightened as if they would burst when he sat upright. Sandra smiled awkwardly and parted her lips to speak when from behind the recliner appeared a mouth of sharp white canines and a couple flecks of spit. This time, the dog barked incessantly as if threatened, sounding long, loud howls.
Alfred
Sharon Madanes
“Monty…Monty!” Peter shouted, heaving his right arm behind to touch the brown fur of the disgruntled mutt. His bare arms sagged and their hanging flesh mopped the surface of the armrest as he patted Monty into silence. The dog must have been bound at the neck, for Sandra could only see part of its face. It quieted down after a couple seconds and turned around so that its stubbed tail wagged into the chair. Monty disturbed a nest of papers, and as they shifted beneath his movement, a strong whiff of stale urine and feces raced up to Sandra’s nostrils.

The air was thick with fibrous bits illuminated by the sunlight in Peter’s living room. Sandra stood rigid, centering herself in the narrow aisle, and peered down onto the city through the large window. The yellow cabs snailed along the streets and people walked along the paved sidewalks like ants, into and around each other. Suddenly becoming more aware of the contents in this living-room junkyard, Sandra imagined things unseen, feeling tiny legs crawling under her sleeves. Her mind leapt, moving quickly though this haven for critters, suddenly seeing long tails of large rats and the crouched backs of roaches.

“I’m Sandra, the visiting nurse,” she offered. “I am here to help you. How are you? Do you live here alone?” She felt the need to fill the cluttered space with words.

Peter’s voice was a low rasp when he replied, “Are you an idiot or something? I live here with Monty…Jesus Christ, I just got back from that hell-hole hospital and they send a dumb nurse like you.” Monty was on his feet barking with Peter’s angry words.

Sandra froze, and her anxiety transformed into humiliation. She stood firmly, hesitant to say anything more. She looked away from Peter and absorbed the details of his home, a home. How could this be home? Sandra had never seen anything like this. Since starting her job, Sandra could never look at the city in the same way. She glanced at the many tall buildings wondering how many Peters lay trapped inside of them, hidden by picturesque cladding and the buzzing excitement of the well-lit city streets.
“Ohhhhh ho ho ho, ha ha ha ha hahaaaaaaaahaaaahaaa,” he laughed out loud, heartily, hungrily. “Oh my, you should have seen her face Monty, oh my, how hilarious. You’re one of those people aren’t you? All brains, not a funny bone in that body, that—young body.”

Sandra felt his gaze sweep upward from her legs and was disgusted when his beady eyes lingered on her bosom. When she looked at him again, Peter had a filthy grin plastered to his face.

Three, maybe five, minutes had lapsed and Sandra had done nothing. Looking around for a free spot to place her bag and jacket and finding none, she kept her jacket on and slung her bag strap diagonally across her torso. She extracted a pair of clear vinyl gloves from the bag. “Let’s start by assessing your skin and checking your blood pressure,” she said, crouching over his blotchy neck, hoping to find tick bite, or even better, a cluster of three red bites—the characteristic sign of bed bugs. It would be perfect: an easy way out of this uncomfortable visit.

Monty shifted behind the chair, adjusting his position on the pile of papers.

“You also have an ulcer that needs to be cleaned—may I have a look?”

“Yes, yes, it’s on the right, let me turn around.” Peter said.

Peter pushed the button on the small remote wedged in the elastic of his boxers and the chair glided backward with the steady hum of the motor. He wiggled sideways in the chair, heaving to the left where a blood-soaked patch had stained his clothing and the chair’s fuzzy fabric. It had oozed into the brown cushion where a darkened spot was now visible. Sandra pulled Peter’s boxers downward to expose the moist square plastered to his butt cheek.
Monty shifted again. The dog’s scuffle made Sandra look around nervously before returning to her task at hand. She peeled away the dressing, holding Peter’s flesh back with her gloved fore finger where the tape hugged tightly onto the wound’s caving perimeter. If the drainage had not given it away, the pungent smell that punched upwards was an obvious sign of infected tissue.

All wounds, Sandra thought, whether slough-laden, bright pink or elastic, were a call for help. Peter’s large wound was a sad story. Sandra visualized the formation of a pressure ulcer, imagining the tremendous weight of Peter’s body, of bone and organ, all of his insides, sitting for hours above the shallow skin—an aerial tourniquet occluding the flow of blood to the body’s largest organ and starving its own tissue. Sandra focused intently on Peter’s wound, softening with concern, committing his bleeding hole to memory, swallowing its details, touching its perimeter lightly with her fingers, asking him if he felt pain. She felt it was the least she could do to offer any assistance. The wound was something Sandra could manage: it was a task for which she was prepared and trained. She removed her dirty gloves encasing the soiled dressing and placed them on the floor. She reached into her coat pocket where a bottle of waterless hand gel was strategically placed and smudged a dollop of its contents between her rubbing hands.

She again opened her bag, now hanging off her right hip, and removed squirt bottles of saline solution, sterile gauze packets, more vinyl gloves, tape, cotton-tipped applicators, paper drape and a small white plastic bag. Using the chair’s armrest as a table, she covered the stained brown cloth with the disposable paper drape. Carefully, Sandra opened the gauze packets, arranging them in a line along the width of the drape. She fluffed the empty bag so that it filled with dense air and placed it by her feet, directly above an open Time magazine, and then tossed in the dirty gloves.
Peter fidgeted, wiggling his buttocks and smearing a bit of reddish drainage onto the drape’s edge. “What are you, an idiot? How long does it take you to change this stupid wound?” he said, his voice partly absorbed by the chair. Monty stood up, sniffing at the floor.

“I will be done soon,” Sandra replied calmly, donning a fresh pair of gloves, grabbing a neatly folded square of gauze and scrunching the fibers into the fine drizzle of saline. She squirted some solution directly into the open wound, stopping for a second as Peter flinched. Sandra inserted the gauze into Peter’s wound, which unfolded and expanded into a wide perforated sheet. Using a fresh cotton-tipped applicator, she wiped the wound’s perimeter with a single swipe, pulling the used gauze out and into the plastic bag at her feet. She repeated this step three more times, targeting various sections of the wound bed, pulling up more clumps of yellow froth with each swipe. Some of the foul odor had dispersed through the room, hiding in the thicket of surrounding trash. When Sandra again looked at the wound bed, it was marbled with hints of healthy flesh peeking between the yellow slough. Sandra took another piece of gauze, moistened it and placed it gently into the wound, covered it with two dry gauze squares, and tore four pieces of tape to edge around the perimeter of the square.

“How does it look?” Peter asked, a hint of concern in his voice.

Sandra wanted to know so much about Peter, about how he had become this way—an angry man in the midst of this clutter.

“It is healing slowly, but such a deep wound takes time to heal. Try to stay off it,” she answered pulling up his boxers. Seeing the stale blood patch she asked, “Do you have a clean pair of pants?”
Cajal is My Homeboy
Macayla Donegan
“Look at me, lady. Do you think I can change my pants?” Peter said, rocking his body onto his back—the very same position that Sandra had found him in. His boxers remained crooked and he pulled them up in the front to the best of his ability. “When the cleaning lady comes this evening, we will change them.”

“You...you have a cleaning lady?” she asked, surprised. “Well why doesn’t she help you clean up and throw out all this trash, and...”

“It is not trash!” Peter interrupted, Monty barking at his raised voice. Peter surveyed the contents of the room, a king amidst mounds of treasure. His face was bright as he pointed into the clutter. “Look at that ivory lamp near the corner. Do you know how much that’s worth? It’s an antique for Christ’s sake—worth more than you. I have food in here to last into my death, and documents that have been passed down to me from as far back as my great-grandfather.” He looked up at Sandra, offended.

Sandra glanced away from Peter, her eyes jumping haphazardly through the cluttered space, then lingering again on the ivory lamp. Even through the dust, the smooth edges of the base appeared flawless. The sculptor’s strokes, intricate and detailed, had chiseled a young angel stretching into the torn shading, its genitals fluffed on a plush bed of plump ivory scrotum. Its feathers were embossed by the dust, each groove smooth, precise. The left wing had been severed, a crack line visible. Below the lamp was a picture frame, where the face of a young man smiled into the clutter. He was handsome, a thinner version of Peter. His eyes were bright, keen, and aware. His posture was erect. Sandra meditated on this picture—the wide smile, the prominent cheeks.
“Tell me about the lamp,” Sandra said softly, still facing the corner. “It’s beautiful.”

“Well,” Peter started. “I remember it in my father’s house when I was just a boy.”

“Really? How old is it?”

“I don’t know for sure, but it’s been handed down for generations. You see that crack line by the wing?” Peter asked.

“Just barely,” Sandra replied.

“I threw it down when I was a boy. My father was livid. He was so upset, so upset.”

“Is that you in the picture over there?” Sandra pointed under the lamp.

“Yes, yes. Only thirty-three back then. Took that on my first trip to Texas. I had a brother who lived out there.”

“Where is he now?” Sandra asked.

“I don’t speak to him, haven’t spoken to him for years.” Peter replied.

“So you have no relatives or family that you keep in touch with?” Sandra asked.

Monty sighed and then stood up. Peter turned, brought his arm around to pet his dog and Monty rubbed his long head into Peter’s hand.

“Only Monty,” he said.
When Sandra first walked in to Peter’s apartment, she was concerned about safety and frowned upon the contents of the room, deeming them either fire or safety hazards. She had planned to go directly to the landlord to inform him of the state of Peter’s apartment and to call animal protective services for Monty. A social worker would be needed to conduct a long-term needs assessment, which has a strong basis in the homecare services provided. These actions, aligned with protocol, were the “right thing to do.”

But Sandra had done the right thing before, once tearing an elderly woman from her cat of fifteen years, severing this woman from the only thing that kept her going every day, the only thing that gave her affection. The woman screamed when her cat was taken away, caged in the back of a small white van. Sandra stood in front of this woman as she hunched over in tears, repeating the name of her cat in sorrow-filled whispers. “Whiskers…Whiskers.” How can helping be so painful, Sandra thought, maintaining her poised composure, choking back her own tears.

Sandra, fearing how Peter would react to the plans she would make for him, repeated, “Try to stay off your wound.”

“I cannot do anything but sit on this wound,” Peter said. “I eat, sleep and live in this chair.”

“Maybe we can take out some stuff and get you to lie down on your bed,” Sandra said looking around for any signs of a bedroom.
“Did you not hear me? This is my bedroom,” Peter shouted. “You have done what you came to do. Get out, go about your day. Get out!” Monty was up on his feet barking like crazy, swinging his jaw into the chair. Sandra quickly retreated to the door, turning sideways to avoid touching the room’s contents; she again glanced at the ivory lamp and edged her way backward into the kitchen and through the front door, pulling the brass knocker to close it behind her. Monty’s barking was still faintly heard behind the thick door where Sandra stood thinking, sucking in the lighter “fresher” air in the hallway. She would need to come back daily to clean this wound. How should she proceed?

As Peter had rightly said, she had done what she was sent to do. The wound had been cleaned as ordered. If Peter did not mind his situation, should Sandra? What was the extent of her responsibility?

Sandra stood outside of Peter’s door, looking down at the large knocker. She watched her left hand encircle it. She pulled it upward, held it suspended, felt her heart pulsing through her thumb. Time stilled. Thought stopped. Sandra closed her eyes and slowly dropped the knocker. She stood in front of Peter’s door and bent her head, counting the many fingerprints on the brass knob.
CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Elizabeth Ackley is a second year P&S student. While most of her doodles these days are medically-themed cartoons decorating her lecture notes, she prefers to channel her artistic efforts into more light-hearted googly-eyed critters and abstract watercolors on birthday cards for friends.

Claire-Audrey Bayan is completing her first year at P&S. She trained in fine art with the Greek painter Peter Galifinakis from 1996-2007. She is particularly interested in the intersections between the visual arts, medicine and science, and she is eager to continue this exploration during medical school and beyond.

Samuel Cohen-Tanugi was born in Paris to a Tunisian father and an American mother and moved to the United States for college. He’s always been drawn to photography as an art form and developed a passion for the camera when he discovered he could share his outlook on the world through his pictures, especially as he embarked on new experiences off the beaten path. Sam took a couple of years off before medical school with no further purpose than to sample the human condition in many varied settings. At the age of 25, he still doesn’t have a clear path ahead of him, but his hope is to work towards the health of communities and to empower people to live the best lives they can.

Nick Danford grew up in New Hampshire and loves being in New York for medical school. In his spare time he writes poetry, plays basketball, and hangs out with friends and family.

Macayla Donegan is a first year graduate student in Neuroscience. She paints neurons sometimes.

Sarah Gumlak (P&S 2017) does science with her head and art with her heart. Occasionally the two overlap and something unexpected is born. Hopefully that’s how being a doctor will feel.
Mira Han was born in Seoul, Korea and lives in West Nyack, NY. Her art experience was gained mostly through self-study, and her paintings have received recognition at multiple art shows. Mira’s artist statement is to pursue simplicity and sharpen her ability to see color and value, balancing between all different mediums. Her struggle won’t be stopped until she acknowledges the subject matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of color.

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Kimberly La Force was born on the island of St. Lucia and moved to New York in her early twenties. She has written several poems, plays, and fiction pieces and has been published by The New Tech Times, City Tech Writer and Pulse. Her feature screenplay “A Marriage Proposal” was published in Best American Short Plays 2010-2011 Anthology and was a finalist for the Lou Rivers Drama Writing Award. This one act play was performed at the Literary Arts Festival in Brooklyn, NY and at the St. Louis Community College Theater. She lives and works in Brooklyn.
Sharon Madanes hails from Chicago, IL. She received her BA in Art from Yale University, and her MFA in painting from Hunter College.

Danny Lascano was born in Northern New Jersey in a Latin American island that separates many people from their homeland south of the border. Hence, he has strong ties to his parent’s country, Ecuador, and Spanish, his mother tongue. He is above all a reader but also dabbles in photography, poetry, and fiction/non-fiction. He happens to also study medicine. And although he hasn’t decided whether he likes medicine more than writing or vice versa, until then he is hoping that meaning flourishes as writing becomes a mode of thinking and thinking leads to more writing. Medicine fills the spaces in between.

Ethan McCurdy enjoys coffee, reading and writing poetry, old records, and neuroscience. He grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which you have likely never heard of. Or, of which you have never heard, although he is not that type of person.

Kathryn Nagel is a 2nd year Columbia-Bassett student currently enjoying physician training in the upstate woods of Cooperstown. She has a deep respect for the field of medicine and an impressive apt for mind-wandering.

Stephen W. Nicholas, MD is the Associate Dean for Admissions at P&S, director of the global health track for student scholarly projects, and the founder and director of the IFAP Global Health Program. He began writing poetry in medical school in 1977, and he served as the arts editor for Synapse, a quarterly arts newspaper at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

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Eva Maria Saavedra was born and raised in New Jersey and now resides in Brooklyn, NY. She received a BA from SUNY Purchase and an MFA in writing and translation from Columbia's School of the Arts. Her poetry has appeared in Callaloo, Catch-Up, The Acentos Review, Generations, Prick of the Spindle, and Apogee Journal.

Jeremy Shatan has worked at Hope & Heroes, fundraising for Columbia University Medical Center’s programs for children with cancer and blood disorders, for ten years. He has been a photographer since high school, a writer since kindergarten, and a music obsessive since birth. A lifelong New Yorker, Jeremy lives in Inwood with his wife, the artist and writer Karen Capucilli. They have three children.

Lisa Tian was born in a small mountain town in Inner Mongolia, China. Growing up, her father’s career took her all over Australia, Canada, and the United States. Even though she never stayed in any one place for more than a few years, she always felt she took a part of it with her. It gave her a chance to experience the different ways people live and see the world. She loves sketching and painting in her free time. Though an amateur, she feels that art has a way of capturing something that photographs somehow cannot.

Joseph Tobias is a second-year medical student. Before coming to P&S, he was a graduate student in poetry.

Rebecca Tsevat is a first year P&S student. She grew up in Ohio, studied English and Biology in college, and completed a master’s degree in Narrative Medicine prior to medical school. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, running, and volunteering.

Jeremy Ying is a violinist, singer, conductor, writer, and League of Legends enthusiast – attends medical school whenever he finds the time. He hails from Plano, Texas, yet does not own a cowboy hat. His go-to dish to cook for guests is Coca-Cola pork chops; his favorite structure of the brain is the mammillary bodies.
ABOUT REFLEXIONS

Founded in the 1980s, Reflexions publishes the creative work of the Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC) community. It is published by students under the auspices of the P&S Club, the student activities organization of Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons in New York, NY. The journal is published annually in the spring.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors of Reflexions would like to thank Dr. Lisa Mellman and the P&S Office of Medical Education, Ms. Rosemarie Scilipoti and the P&S Club and the P&S Admissions Office for their financial support.

Reflexions was laid out using Adobe® InDesign® CC Version 9.0 and printed by ACS, Inc. in Harrisburg, PA.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Reflexions welcomes submissions of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction and visual art on health-related and non-health-related themes from students, faculty, staff and alumni of CUMC. The call for submissions goes out each fall. Please contact cumc-reflexions@columbia.edu with questions and submissions. Please address all other correspondence to:

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