Table of Contents

7  Photograph
   Adena Spadaro

8  California
   Cassie Bohn

10 my mind is a sleepy fire
    Brian Sonenstein

11 Sestina
    Elise Rodgers

13 Memoir of a Granddaughter
    Elsy Estevez

14 Ogunquit, Late Summer
    Lauren Grassetti

15 Photograph
    Adena Spadaro

16 Sprawled Out in Bed
    Caitlin McDonnell

17 Worn: The Life of a Special (So Special) Object
    Meghan Smith

19 Saturday Morning 10:37
    Ryann Galloway
20 Boys Don’t Cry
Roxy Azari

22 Meander
John Smith-MacDonald

23 One Way
Caleb Goodhouse

24 Drawing
Kristin Ford

25 The Orange Line
Elise Rodgers

26 Things I Would Never Tell You I Remember I & II
Anna Walsh

28 Cape Cod Stones
Kristin Ford

30 Flying Cranes and Poetry
Emily Ayer

31 Field Study
John Smith-MacDonald

32 Drawing
Amelie Granito

33 YiaYia
JM Wilson
34 Ode to the Free Woman
   Elena Gurdian

36 Pastel Drawing
   Sarah Madeira

37 Understanding
   Cassie Bohn

38 Abdication
   C.R. MacDonald

41 Untitled
   Christine Keaney

42 Photograph
   Jasmine Bhatia

43 The Perpetual Tourist
   Jasmine Bhatia

45 Ode to My Guitar
   Gabrielle Kappes

46 pa.m
   Sarah Mielbye

48 For Aidan
   Anna Walsh

50 Charcoal Drawing
   Hailey O’Donnell
51  The Lovers’ Sestina
   Elisabeth Lohmueller

53  Photograph
   Jennifer Schuman

54  the morning after
   JM Wilson

55  Photograph
   Tanya Kollar
I was the west once. I was paradise.
  -Dan Chiasson, “Vermont”

I was the east
once. I was eras
of unquarried stone.

Once, in another life,
I was a woman constantly
taking steps—deck
to dry land.

I was a woman who hid
pen and paper
in apron pockets amongst
clothespins and spare,
accumulating change.

I watched brown shingles washed
white against a background of red
autumn. I watched trees reborn:
green and pink against wood
walls, rebuilt.

I was a woman of lilacs
and dried lavender,
who sat by the fire to knit her thoughts
into something warm
for winter

I was paradise.

Now, I find love somewhere
between champagne
and sun-burnt lips.
  A Woman of the West, I am
seductively smothered
by beauty—by the infantile passions
of summer.

We envy, here, the woman who is
miniscule. We envy feeble eyes and all
things timid. We slap palm fronds, cruelly,
across each other’s faces, we kiss
thin air.

We no longer feel
earth shaking beneath us,
beneath our heavy layers:
shrouds of steel
and liquid sand.

We live where red
is never fragile, pink
is never worn with red, and orange
is never proper—
but green, yes

that is a color we know.
my mind is a sleepy fire
Brian Sonenstein

my mind is a sleepy fire
dozing softly forward in a blur of comfort
in a porous dome by michaelangelo; starry skyscape

when normal words sound wrong
sending electric tension
through pulpy muscle fiber
sleep softly child

when serious occasion sits waning
broadcasting watery apathy
tinged with wooden lethargy
sleep softly child

when eyes tumble back
to search the warm insides of the head (fear introspection)
sleep softly child

when the body melts
like a ball of paper soaked
in microwaved water
slumped and claylike dripping
sleep softly child

there are monsters in your bedroom
He peels the skin off his Clementine in a spiral and watches it dangle above a linoleum sea before tossing it into the trashcan in the corner. Outside it’s scraping the underbelly of autumn and every window is coated in pollen yellow. He will clean them when he’s ready.

It takes too long for him to get ready His nice pair of trousers is wrinkled, the crotch creased in a spiral A missing sock too. He stares at the wallpaper of yellow flowers and wicker baskets, which look like ships lost at sea. In the yard you can tell it’s almost autumn as children bike around a lamp lit corner.

The old radio used to rest in the living room corner He moved it into the kitchen so it’d be ready to play music, to keep out the silence of autumn. It’s wheels wore brown spirals Into the white linoleum sea No one is around to drench them in cleaner, that acid yellow.

She picked out the yellow wallpaper and it’s sheaf ran out just before the corner. They laughed and covered it with a picture of the sea There was no way to be ready For those x-rays, the brain darkened with a spiral She didn’t like it anyway, cold autumn.

The wilting chaff of autumn Leaves of red and spotted yellow Litter and drift in a spiral Fall to die in a corner He is ready to rake up that sea.
Sometimes it hits in a flood, in a sea,
sometimes while he’s peeling a Clementine in early autumn.
There is no way, oh God, to be ready.
He irons his trousers against yellow
wallpaper that ends just before the corner.
Each tear falls in a quiet spiral.

He is at sea and the Clementine is a yellow
dying sun. But now it’s just whistling autumn into every dirty corner
He’s ready to change the radio dial, fingers tuning in a desperate spiral.
Memoir of a Granddaughter
Elsy Estevez

An Abuelo with a big belly
And hands that fit just right,
On a wooden rocking chair
A granddaughter on his lap.

The fragrance of his sweat...
Mixed with cheap Cologne
That thick golden medallion
He bought back in New York,
It lay over his collar, a mile under his throat.
Virgin Mary always staring back at me
With her eyes of “know it all,”
They were both somehow connected
A mother and her son.

An abuelo caught in boyish ways
With shoe laces always untied
Climbing palm trees
Forgetting himself, his sickness and pain.

Once after throwing coconuts
From the tree top
To us on the ground
He slipped and fell.
With a splat on the soggy earth,
He left his imprint.
The sun dried it
Into a crusty ditch.

An abuelo with big feet
And a balding burnished scalp,
Granddaughter intently listening
To stories of the past.
My little pedestals on top of his
Dancing in an afternoon gleam
To the rhythm of his salsa.
He was my abuelo,
the one I’ll always miss.
Ogunquit, Late Summer
Lauren Grassetti

He sees the sun,
a ripe tangerine,
sinking gently towards the horizon,
casting shadows
on the loose sand.

The air,
heavy with the scent
of fried seafood,
empties the beach
with a tranquil swiftness.

He watches his children
lap up the last lights of day.
Surrounded by saltwater and undertow
they glide smoothly through
the dimming ocean, aware of nothing
but their own exuberance.

If he remembered
nothing but this fragment of time,
how the knot in his throat
and the swelling in his chest
are so sweet he could cry,
it would be enough.
Sprawled Out in Bed
Caitlin McDonnell

Sprawled out in bed,
Staring off into open air.
Wondering about nothing
And anything in specific.
Too tired to focus, and
Too focused to sleep.

Existence and color and
Death and love; it is
Simply the tie-dyed
Cavalcade stamped into
An already mismatched mind.

Congratulate her.

She is just as lost as
The rest of the world
Holding faded life maps.
Tonight I am “silver in pocket,” not “Brass in Pocket” like the Pretenders song, since calling silver “brass” is an insult. As the antique cameo in my case explained to me, “pocketing” is part of the life cycle of a ring. Most begin as I did in the display case of a jewelry store. We are crowded onto velvet cushions and assailed with lights aimed to make our eyes sparkle. I was usually so dazed by the end of a workday that I felt like a fake.

Like most rings, my jewelry store work ended on my selection day. A long-haired boy asked for me. He was soft spoken—the saleswoman kept asking him to repeat himself—and he counted out each of his bills. I was placed in a black box and the lid was closed. The boy asked for a bow, and the cracks of light, thin as the envelope opener that had sat next to me in my case, were gone. My world was sleepy, velveteen, black.

That’s when I was pocketed. I only know this because of how carefully I was placed and how uncareful my ride has been since. I once spoke with a ring who went through a laundry machine, and he said that the wash was nothing compared to pocketing. According to the cameo, pocketing is the most terrifying phase of a ring’s life. Some crack under the pressure, and they become known as “cheap” and “unprofessional.” It doesn’t matter whether the cracking is due to poor craftsmanship or an especially rough pocketing; rings who crack are unfilled. They aren’t symbolic.

In my pocket, the world rises and falls as if I am lying on a taut piece of cloth that someone has decided to wrinkle and snap tight again. I am weightless, gravity defying, and my disorientation is compounded by the strobe-light created by the joints of my box. My body is mired in velvet and I am helpless as I jerk and spin. Voices, light, and music collide. I feel like a prism. I concentrate on not cracking.

Then it is still. Dozens of people are chanting the same pattern. They stop, and music begins. One voice lifts above the others and speaks. My pocket falls, stops, and rises again. Falls, stops, and rises. I tumble to soft music. Fall, stop, and rise. More tumbling. Fall, stop, and rise. When the atmosphere changes, I’m aching and dizzy. All of the thin rays of light disappear. The darkness makes me listen harder, and I can understand the words to the song. I listen to the boy whisper them.

“Silent night/
Holy night/
All is calm/
All is bright.”

I quiver as I realize that the song is a sign that I am ready for the next phase of my life. I’m not calm, but I am bright. I sink deeper into the velvet cushion so that it touches my ears. The black will make my eyes appear more brilliant.

The song ends, the light returns, and I can feel the boy’s hand touch my box once. There is a brief trip in his pocket. We stop. It is frigid, and my silver band is so cold that the velvet cushion becomes too big.

The boy wraps his hand around my box and lifts it so fast that I nearly slide from my velvet. At first I don’t realize that he has put me in another pocket; he does it so softly that I don’t feel my box hit the bottom.

Why am I being pocketed? I am ready to be opened and to be symbolic. I have endured my pocketing purgatory and I’m ready to be worn. I close my eyes.

Another hand. A light hand that seems afraid to lift my box. I open my eyes. The bow is untied and light spills in. The cover is lifted.

“Ohhh,” says a girl. “Thank you.” She wraps her arms around the boy’s neck and kisses him.

I open my eyes wider. I want her to admire me, and I want to see the person who will wear me. Her hands are pale, her fingers, long. There are ten silver rings on them. Will I be just another ring to her? I start to curl into my velvet. It is almost as shameful to be pocketed and never become symbolic as it is to be pocketed and crack.

She takes the others off and puts them in her pocket. I’m lifted. She asks the boy if I can stay on her left ring finger. I open my eyes as wide as I can. I slide over her nail and the small joint at the top of her finger. I catch on the next joint, but the tension is released when I glide over. I come to rest at the base of her finger in front of her knuckle. The skin from her neighboring fingers rubs against my sides. I can feel the delicate bone and muscle underneath me. Her finger is cold, but I am warmer than I have ever been. I’m worn.
The diamond your ear holds is the least beautiful thing I see.
Rather it is light dancing off of your ear lobe illuminating invisible follicles of perfection.
Skin the color of milk and honey plentiful and occasionally visited by your coffee colored freckles.
Your hair is Kandinsky’s work connected, but swirled never concluding or commencing.
Wanting to touch you I am afraid that I will ruin you.
But it doesn’t stop me.
I touch your ears to see if the radiance is transferable.
Smell your hair for the purposes of intoxication.
What I see can not be captured or replicated only hoped for and prayed upon.
Boys Don’t Cry
Roxy Azari

I know a boy who cried once
You told him
Boys don’t cry
Take it like a man
Boys don’t cry

Because if he cries he shows the side
Where he is beyond robot
And beyond robot is unknown
And we fear unknown
So his eyes stay dry
Because to
Cry would crack the pride in his father walk
Which technically already cracked but he refuses to use a cane
Taught his son at a young age
To wave hello to G-I Joe and goodbye to G-I Jane.
Who were both never really seen as Barbie dolls in green shirts
But warriors in army turf.

By age 7 he was jumping on couches
Shooting at imaginary souls
Forcing hypothetical holes
Into ‘makebelieve’ skin.
All while wearing a sadistic grin

At age 7, I was told that closed fists
Never solved anything
Only made matters worse
While he was told that closed fist
Symbolized power

At age 7 I played house and teacher
While he played cops and robbers
and his father
Bought him first toy gun
Was told when life’s problems get overwhelming:
“Here’s what you do son”
BB gun bullets will do the trick
Knives and swords take your pick
But this is for you
And tears are for them
That emotional shield
Only brings you to the forefront of tears
And men don’t cry
So take this gun and wipe away your fears
Cuz men can never be vulnerable
And you’re almost a man now
So you need to learn that
Crying makes you a coward
And cowards are really boys who never grew
Into their skin
So u cannot let tears prevent you from growing
Into your limbs
Because if you cry you will never fit in

But I know a boy who cried once

Each tear in his eyes symbolized an ounce of respect lost from his pupils
And added onto mine
Until they slipped down the face
He told me that he was now his family’s disgrace
And I told him there is nothing wrong with showing emotion
‘Your tears rebel against society’s demand
And there is more honor in that
Than obeying an oppressing command.’

He told me I was the only girl who could make him cry
And in that I found enigmatic pride
Because it meant I was the only girl who reminded him
How to be human on the outside.

Because in my eyes
It was never his peach fuzz, his voice, or the height of his stand
But his tears that indicated
Him becoming a man.
The morning before you left I woke and saw it on your back: the interstice of scar-tissue, the body’s calligraphy, long lines of closed flesh. You see, I have on my right wrist a mark with its own intersecting recollection: a place and a time which I remember differently than I lived it. They stand apart from ourselves like fragmented lines of a love poem on a broken tablet forgotten, say, by a Roman in his haste to slow death. And maybe sand has filled the letters that wander gently in and out of meaning the way plucked reeds float in slow water, so we praise the lines for coursing into each other, for meaning. There are the lines of scars on the body and there are the ways we make them say. I reached inside of you to steal into that room, tiny alcove of the body that is always mystery and found a point of no origin. What inflections of love we create are fictions of the body. How lovely, then, to miss your shoulders etched in the cats-eye light of the blinds, like meanders in illuminated texts, or nothing like them, I could not say.
One Way
by Caleb Goodhouse

The deadman on the subway
unnoticed in the busy fray
mistaken for a drunk and a disgrace
not helped because of his ugly face
feared for his dirty cracked hands
for his ragged clothing damned
to be brought like without help
like some hated welp
to the end of the line
and only when he disobeys the signs
noticed....
kicked and prodded by the cops
demanding “don’t you know this is the last stop”
then hauled of to some unknown fate
buried with no mourners, a coffin more like a crate

was his life like his death
similar to the last breath
with no help, no friends
to his pain no end
never a kind hand
or an arm to help him stand
just ignored, deplored
the feelings of youth never restored
The Orange Line
Elise Rodgers

The subway car lurches and a woman’s groceries spill across a dirty black rubber floor. We are underground and no one helps her pick up her oranges.

I think about all of us, perfect strangers tunneling worm-like through the belly of the city. About tunnels caving in, getting trapped. About darkness. About hundreds of years later white-eyed and pale versions of us emerging, spineless. We get in, get off; all strangers tunneling blindly, emerging topside and crawling on hot pavement as we make our way wriggling towards the heart of the city, through the hearts of each other. Underground, doors open and squirming, we spill out like split oranges.
I remember the first time I actually reached out and touched you. I touched you on your back, right below your right shoulder where you hunch a little. I touched you with two fingers and, pressing gently to get your attention from behind, I lingered slightly. I suppose lust makes everything last one moment longer.

I remember, after that first time I touched you, you turned to me, and I noticed that tiny birthmark on your neck and that, while your eyes seem so dark like stones or rocks from far away, they are actually a light, light brown up close like caramel poured on vanilla ice cream and suddenly, I couldn’t remember what I had needed to say or why I had reached out to you, only that I had touched you and you were warm and it was nice.

Since that first time I touched you my fingers have craved you.
Since that first time I touched you, I now find that I am always rushing.

II

I remember how your skin was lit beneath that streetlight and how you pressed yourself against me and my back had imprints the next morning, from the railing but it didn’t hurt me then because one of my hands was in yours and the other was sliding down the side of your face.

I remember how we kissed. It was our first and there has never been anything as lovely as that moment, as your lips.

I remember how I decided there on Spring Street what I had known for months. The next day, when I saw you at work, everything beneath me trembled.
Cranes hover,
illuminated by each line,
a wash of gray clouds
over a jagged landscape of words.
Their cast shadows shade the poetry,
lending new meaning to each line -

each brushstroke,
a winged revelation.
Field Study
John Smith-MacDonald

Exhausted, we made a museum
Of desire, from love’s wreck a mausoleum

Of want. A clay jar gleaned
From a tuscan field is deemed

Priceless, the wine neglected.
Then that false inflected

Dream of Rome, that purchased city,
Showed itself in the pretty

Arab girl who knocked my door
Each night with wine from a chain-store.

I thought in the old tongues there
Was something to be found. Her hair,

Blacker and thicker than the ocean,
Which I never loved, showed me

I had all along the young, the wrong notion.
i do not know the village my grandmother grew up in or the names of her parents. i do not know how old she was when she married or how she first learned english. i do not know the bills she pays, the rent she collects, or the groceries she buys.

i do not even know the greek she speaks or the letters she writes it in.

exceno.

i do not know the color of her curly hair or the exact shade of her red nails. i do not know the new wrinkles in her face or the deepening sadness of her eyes. i do not know the loneliness of her days, her anger towards her children, or her fear of death.

i do not even know the accent of her english or the broken words she scrawls.

that is what she would call me.

stranger.
Electric blue feathers hang from your raincoat ma’am
where were you
for the last few days?
Plastic flowers pasted
on the ceiling of your make believe aquarium
pretending to swim around your room.
Stenciled letters spelling
A B A
N D O N

Your shoes are much too tiny for your feet,
self imposed restraint, who knows.
And yet there you are walking head held high.
Grimacing at passing people,
groping air pushed down by birds’ flight.

You wear a mask of lovely letteredness,
behind glasses too thick to cry through,
as you attempt to convince us all
with a flash of smile
of the future of cross-eyed meditation.

I saw you again today
paper-cut paraphernalia in hands
walking the thinnest line
between purple tulips
and asiago cheese.

Dressed in light bulb gowns,
plastic bottle shoes,
highlighter halters.
You pull strands of hair out,
to show me
its natural green color.
Tea kettle steaming
pouring hot paint on the
sidewalk spelling
    F I L
    T H Y

Your pocket knife
  sticks out
caught on one thread
  posed for
attack.
Understanding
Cassie Bohn

like chalk pastilles and
the Monet-marks they make
on sketchbook paper,

like Starry Night and the brilliant
mind that saw
its pieces
for what they were
swirl
like leaves caught

up in dirt caught up
where air met air
over Kansas.
Abdication
C.R. MacDonald

He held the flute to his lips and blew a few lingering notes. From the sky overhead, a feeble shaft of sunlight broke through the clouds, but vanished as rapidly as it had appeared. He shook his cloak tighter around his tall frame. It was a wondrous thing, his cloak. It was of bright leaves sewn with creeper and jeweled with dew, woven with moss, raven feathers and encircling ivy. His crown was wrought of elegantly plaited grasses, with a single crimson leaf in its center. Around his waist, hanging from a belt of cobweb and dandelion stems was a bark pouch for the flute.

It was cold where he stood. A hostile wind racked the trees’ branches, and some leaves were dryly swept away. Many of the leaves had fallen already, forming a thick carpet of ochre, scarlet, and gold upon the ground. He took a few steps, and raised the flute again. At its tip was carved a minute oak leaf. A slow, exquisitely sad melody poured forth from the instrument, carried echoingly with the inexorable winds. The strange tune rose and fell, growing into climatic crescendos and mournfully soft pianissimos. The flute filled the woods with its music, seeming as if a hundred flutes played in doleful unison. Though these woods were forbidden to men, any listeners would have been mortally overwhelmed with the finality and melancholy of the high, bittersweet song.

Overhead, the clouds thickened and darkened, bringing the forest into an artificial twilight. A chilling mist seeped from the ground, hiding the brilliantly colored leaves from view. In the dusky gloom, the man’s russet skin and dark, merry eyes seemed almost gray.

The song was approaching its end. The notes had grown softer and weaker, though his determined fingers continued to fly across the flute’s holes. With the final quavering note of the song still echoing through the trees, he slowly lowered the flute and examined it. He was dismayed to see that the once-fine carven wood had greyed almost as much as he had. It was weathered and cracked, and some of the delicate holes had split and warped. Only the graven oak leaf emblem still blazed with color.

A sudden gust of wind blew, and, with a reluctant rustle, the last few amber leaves were swept from their tree-perches to drift to the forest floor. The chill mist grew heavy and sunk into the earth, coating the soil and leaf-carpet with a glossy sheen of brittle ice.

A new figure appeared in the darkling woods. She stepped from behind two stately elms, veins of hoarfrost branching out from her every stop, freezing and riming the carpet of leaves.
The man turned to look at this newcomer. It was a woman, or at the very least woman-like. She was glacially beautiful and impossibly, frightfully thin—the picture of chilling perfection. Her face was statuesque, flawless in every regard. Perhaps her eyes were the most frightening of all. If they were blue, they were like no other blue in this world. Their gaze was simultaneously entrancing and terrifying. The hair that framed her face was closer to silver than white, and upon her head was an icy crown that glimmered faintly with the dusk. She was robed in clothes of the purest white and deepest blue, trimmed with silvery furs. A shimmering dust of diamondshine glittered from her whenever the light reflected properly.

In the bruised light, the woman spoke. “Well, then. Shall we?”

In her slender, elegantly bejeweled fingers, the woman clutched a sword, of sorts, for it was as much like an earthly sword as a star is like a diamond. It was a wild, gorgeous thing, all silver and glinting pearl and sparkling frost-sheen—as attractive as it was deadly.

She raised the sword, and a hideous wind shrieked through the copse of trees, vile and obtrusive. A few specks of something white and cold flew with the wind. Some landed on her skin, and, finding insufficient warmth to melt, stayed. Across the way, the man pulled his cloak tighter and returned her gaze. He carried no sword, but instead a staff; a noble, fine shaft of smoothed birch whose stout, pale wood fairly gleamed. A fiery sprig of orange and red leaves sprouted from the top, and glossy ivy crept around its length.

He bowed once to the woman, and spun the staff into a ready position. The woman’s sword met it at once, faster than would have seemed possible. She fought vigorously and with cold, driving energy. She was as relentless as a storm, and as ferocious. For every blow that she struck with the deadly white sword, it was all the man could do to block it with his birch staff.

With every clash of staff and blade, the air steadily grew more frigid. The clouds conspired and grew into a deep, foreboding purple.

The man began to tire. Every time he raised his staff, it required more energy and determination. The wind bit shrewdly at his exposed hands, gnawed viciously at his cheeks and ears. It cut through his leafy cloak, and some of the scarlet and orange leaves had begun to tear off with the wind. The flute had fallen and cracked. Even several of his prized raven feathers had blown loose from their lodging in his crown, lost forever in the storm. His breath emerged in painful gasps of cloudy white. Willpower alone kept him from the woman’s chilly blade.

Finally, with a mighty swing of the lady’s sword, the staff split with a great crack like a thunderclap. Instantly, the storm and winds quieted. The
little leaves at the staff’s head withered and fell to the ground. The two halves dropped from the man’s frozen fingers, disintegrating into a bright trail of leaves. Immediately, the sword was at his throat. The man dropped to his knees, eyes closed. “Be off,” the woman said.

The kneeling man said nothing. He forced his frozen fingers upward to untie the knot from his cloak. It slowly slipped from his shoulders, the little leaves and feathers and dew-beads and willow shoots claimed by the wind. The flute had crumbled into little more than a dust of sad shavings, and his once-magnificent crown was dried and wasted, the crimson leaf curved, like him, in defeat. “Be off,” the woman repeated.

The man opened his eyes and stood. His tall, thin frame was stooped and emaciated, and the wind seemed to bend him like one of the nearby branches.

Though it seemed to require more energy then he possessed, the man bowed, low and formally, to the lady before him. Chill flakes of snow began to fall more heavily from the darkened sky. A sudden chink opened in the clouds at the horizon, allowing the briefest and smallest slant of sunset to sneak in. The woman whirled her sword once, and a great gust of freezing wind blew directly at the man. A long swirl of ardently colored leaves, blown southwards with the wind into the final ray of sun, was the last seen of him.

The lady sheathed her blade as the clouds closed, and the darkness overtook the woods once again.

Autumn had abdicated, and Winter had come to take her throne.
I
She was chewing her cheek as she stood there alone, twirling her dirty blonde hair around a delicate finger. Her other hand protectively covered her stomach as a cold wind passed over her, chasing after the train that had just gone by.

II
A woman stood impatiently on the platform, appearing distracted as she folded and then unfolded her arms across her chest. She pulled up the sleeve of her leather jacket and glanced at her Rolex. Looking up in time to see a man approaching her walking with fast strides she opened her arms and they embraced, kissing hungrily. She quickly removed the ring from her finger and slipped it into her pocket, just as she always did.

III
“I hate these damn hiccups,” Frank grumbled. He couldn’t see straight at this point. Leaning against the wall for support, he searched in his pockets for his flask. When he found it, he unscrewed the cap and hungrily brought it to his lips. Frank put the cap back on and shoved it into his coat pocket. Hiccup.
“Hey, don’t I know you from somewhere?”
Frank turned around, startled. “Uh, from AA, right?”
The man smiled and shook his hand. “Yeah! Yeah, that’s it exactly.”
Silence. A train whistle could faintly be heard within the tunnel.
“So, how long have you been sober?”
“Five years,” slurried Frank. “Five long years.” He grinned as his fingers curled tightly around the flask in his pocket.

IV
The priest stood quietly near the edge of the platform. His face appeared calm as he stared straight ahead, waiting for his train. His eyes were empty. Very slowly, he closed his eyes and drew the Bible out of his pocket. With his other hand, he made the sign of the cross over the sacred book. Then, as if he was releasing a beautiful white dove back into the wild, he opened his eyes and let the Bible fall from his old hands and onto the train tracks. He backed away as if startled by what he had just done, turned, and left the platform.
ēk
It’s the first day of the year, and what a start.
I am ill from the night before.
Unsuspecting cuisine wreaked havoc on my system.

dō
By this point, I’ve become immune to the incessant honking.
The imperfect roads are strewn with potholes.
Too ill to notice, it’s fine if my head bangs against the seat.

tīn
At the toll, our car has a flat.
I stand by the road watching Mr. Singh, our turbaned driver, inspecting the faulty wheel.
Alas, I cannot help the situation, so I stare aimlessly into the distance.

chār
Lost in the utter confusion, I collect dust as every imaginable mode of transportation zooms by.
Mr. Singh finds a new tire and acquires the help of a uniformed man.
Brand name luggages scatter the highway divide, lessening the load on the car.

panch
In the haze of sickness, I grab my bag
Safeguarding my passport, my money, my identification.
I struggle to stay standing- my head aches.

chhe
A strange vehicle slows down and one of my fellow travelers, camera in hand, snaps a photo.
Fueled by electricity, it is not quite a tricycle or a scooter.
The scene is so outlandish to me, I can’t imagine riding in one of these.

sāt
The people point, and slow down. They leer.
They must be thinking, how funny, the foreigners are having trouble!
Even in the fatherland, I am still the foreigner.
āth
Don’t they know that we share the same lineage? Can’t they tell?
Here, my insides scream that I don’t belong.
But there, my outsides scream that I do.

nau
We live by the same traditions and share the same values.
There, I am regarded as different for the things that I share with all the people here. I’m a stranger in a land that will never belong to me.
Will a land ever belong to me?

das
Back in the car, Mr. Singh is apologetic.
My fellow travelers engage him in conversation, but I attempt to rest.
As I stare out the window, I see the same faces.
Not much progress has been made.
Ode to My Guitar
Gabrielle Kappes

six track rail road of steel
night and day you are the one
over an echoing chasm
so silent
I fret
no rhythm
no chords
cold to my fingers.
lyrics lay low in my ears
that old black magic, you have my on a string.
Guitar, call your masters:
sweet Charlie Christian
Lew Paul so electrifying
smokin’ Wes Montgomery
Eric Clapton bluesy
soulful Kenny Burrell
George Benson masquerades
upside down Jimi Hendrix
I riff on
jim jimi jimi ji-ji-jim jimi

It is 1936
I am in Paris
the Hot Club Quintet
jams in orange orbs of light
I drink red wine,
smell stale beer
and Gauloise cigarettes.
Django’s fingers dance
Nuage
Honey Suckle Rose,
then the crazy cat smiles at me
I am on the bandstand
A gypsy spell anoints my fingers,
they fly
like skylarks from telephone wires
pa.m
Sarah Mielbye

when otherworlds
envelope the
crinkled nuclei
with veiled
BEEPS(%$&*)
and warm
winter wool
spun tanta
    lies
    ingly
in grays and
muffled discourse

this box is
buzzing
and you can
touch
each
thing
touch, touch
and my fingers
know
because
they are
    heavy.

shades
facing
in the other noitcerid
make my windows
pulse
with
“i know”

but it is good.
spot
    (in wide expanse of hibernation)
that stays like grass
    (in sea of tiny red hectagons)
flickers
but does not
fade

she knows God best when He is all her own
    (save the ones in conical hats
who rarely know Him anyway.)

and Aurora lifts the woolen veil--
a swan song for peace.

but,
there is always
    tomorrow.
For Aidan
Anna Walsh

Aidan, I knew your mother well.
Her tears fell into the sink.
We sat on a counter, facing
each other. Your mother and I. And you too.
And our picture was in
her pocket folded in fours.

She used to be everything I wanted
to be. She still is
everything to me.
But that day, she was so thin,
Aidan, so young, and so
tired. So old for fourteen.
She seemed to be
barely anything, barely
at all.

You were filling her up
and yet you hollowed her out.
She cried. Often.
She was barely alive, Aidan.
 Barely alive just
barely. Until, she unfolded you.
You, and she started living.

She saw your eyes, Aidan. They
could be her eyes, maybe.
Maybe his eyes.
She saw your face and neck
and thighs. You.
all cradled inside.
And she decided there
that she could never die, Aidan.
Never ever die
with you inside.
And I held your picture in my hands
but I didn’t even know
if I believed in you. Your picture
was unfolded but I couldn’t see
you in her
from where I sat. So
I tried to feel if you
were real. I tried to find an extra heartbeat.
I touched her stomach and
her hair. I pulled her close to me. She was
suddenly so much
more than me.

Aidan, I could barely speak,
when she left. Just barely, so I
whispered prayers alone.
Did you know, Aidan? She always
admired the Virgin Mary.
“Blessed are
you and blessed is
the fruit of thy womb...”

Years ago, your mother made me
a knotted rosary with her own hands.
And I prayed Aidan, with
that handmade chain.
Hail Mary’s. Full of grace.
Like your mother.
My fingers tracing blue knots
in the dark.
The Lover’s Sestina
Elisabeth Lohmueller

And to think, it was just last year
when the dentist found an open sore
in your mouth and refused to put his hands
near there again. He spoke over the waiting room television.
You need to see a physician. You need tests.
I drove you to your apartment in silence.

I hadn’t known you well then, that the silence
had been harboring in you for years.
The doctor calls with the results of the tests.
You cover your eyes as if the light makes them sore.
A man and woman make love on the television.
You drop the phone. I keep close to you, kiss your hands.

The nurse turns to me, having noticed no ring on your hand.
Have you always used protection? She breaks the silence.
I nod. Then you ask me if I forgot to turn off the television.
In the office, the doctor says months, maybe a year.
That night in bed, you tell me your chest feels sore.
I rest my head on it to hear your heart, to test
its rhythm. Now every day has become another test.
You tell me you can feel strength in my hands,
strength I want to inject into a body so sore,
but you flinch at the mention of needles. Only silence
hovers in the bedroom and the mourning of lost years
together, years to be passed alone in front of the television.

You mother switches on the television
while she wonders if this is a kind of test.
You didn’t tell her you were gay until last year,
but now she has to get it. We hold hands.
She can’t help but stare in silence.
She knows. We see it in her eyes. There isn’t any time to be sore.
The night sweats make you sore
the next morning. You obsess about some new show on television.
You refuse my help to get to the bathroom, stumbling in silence.
The doctor wants to admit you. You tell him he should suffer through all
the tests
instead. I wake up to you shaking me with your hands.
We have to go now. I drive for what feels like years.

I love a body needled with wet black sores. The pulse test
reads dead. The television reports a man has strangled his wife with his hands.
I watch in silence as he exist the courtroom. Ten to fifteen years.
The Morning After  
(*after Gustav Klimt’s The Kiss*)  
JM Wilson

she moves about  
hers kitchen,  
gold falling off her  
skin and into the  
mixing bowl. she  
doesn’t notice the  
shimmer swirling  
in the batter, but listens  
instead for her lover  
awaking upstairs.
A rushlight, flickering and small, is better than no light at all.

Rushlight Literary Magazine • Wheaton College • Norton, MA 02766