The Salamander
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The purpose of the Literary and Graphic Arts Society is to encourage literary and artistic creativity in the Le Moyne community and to publish outstanding student work in The Salamander. Submissions are usually solicited towards the end of the fall semester and start of the spring semester, depending on the editorial board's preference. Short stories, poems, manuscripts, non-fiction essays, photos and artwork are solicited for publication.

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The Salamander is an independent journal housed in Le Moyne College's Creative Writing Program. The editorial board normally serves for one academic year (September to May). All editorial positions are volunteered.

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T.S. Eliot wrote that “the poet cannot reach… impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done.” Consequently, we have tried to bring together works that manifest such a surrendering. We hope that what we have collected in this journal are works that have consumed their authors, taking over their minds and rendering them, what Eliot calls, catalysts of creativity and making them shreds of platinum on which poetic emotions have interacted to produce works that at once change and preserve tradition.

In making our poetry and fiction selections, we looked for works of a philosophical dimension, albeit subtle most of the time, works that displayed the manifestation of poetic (and literary) insight not normally found in raw emotions, as Eliot recommends. We have chosen works that come as close to this ideal as possible, while still being flexible enough to allow a wide range of artistic and creative talents to appear in this year's volume.

Our poetry section selection this year is larger than past years' because, firstly, we feel that a great deal of the submissions displayed qualities and poetic contributions worthy of selection, and secondly, because we received so many; this year's call saw over one-hundred and thirty poetry submissions, many of which are certainly deserving of inclusion but that had to be left out due to our space limitations.

Likewise, a great deal of extraordinarily refreshing fiction, non-fiction and photography was submitted, and as such, many good pieces still did not make the final selection.

But regardless of how many works were ultimately selected, one thing remains clear about Le Moyne’s creative talent, that it is consistently strong, increasingly noteworthy, and most importantly, ever-tempered by courage. After all, the most difficult part of the creative process might just be the challenge of allowing others to view and critique, even reject, one's work. And for finding courage in the face of that challenge, everyone who submitted work to this year's edition must be commended.

Overall, our approach this year has been different from past years in several ways. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, we have opted to significantly redesign The Salamander in favor of a more traditional look (though what that is exactly, we’re not sure). Aside from the changes in dimensions, paper, font and formatting, we have grouped entries by genre to help highlight the internal themes of each section (whatever the reader deems such themes to be). We have also arranged works by alphabetical order according to author's last name.
Further, we often asked our contributors to standardize the formatting and punctuation of their works. Some were adamant about retaining their original presentations, and so we succumbed. Others obliged and edited the works. We thank both for enduring our requests. Lastly, we have applied for an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), which has not, unfortunately, been issued in time to use this year. We expect that it will be available and ready next year. We thank I-Chene Tai, Technical Services Librarian at Le Moyne College, for helping us apply for the number.

We must also thank Le Moyne’s Creative Writing faculty for encouraging and molding the promising talent in the students whom they encounter on a daily basis. And we must thank Le Moyne’s English faculty, in general, for teaching us to appreciate, analyze, and enjoy poetry and literature. We especially thank Dr. David Lloyd for his guidance and suggestions. Finally, we must thank Le Moyne College for providing us with the funds to design and print this journal, and help keep it free.

Now, serious journal-tone aside, we sincerely hope you enjoy these selections as much as we did.

The Salamander
Le Moyne College
May 2011

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He liked to follow her home at night. Just to make sure she got home safely.

They did not know each other, but he really wanted to get to know her. She would unintentionally ignore him, and sometimes, she was completely oblivious to his presence. She never noticed that he followed her home every Wednesday night. She usually worked four to close on Wednesdays; even in the dead of night she felt comfortable walking home alone. Becca was never too cautious.

On Monday she had glitter on her face. He could notice from afar because of the bright lights of the coffee shop. They gleamed onto her face, allowing the glitter to sparkle. He thought he might get in line and ask her about the glitter. Have fun last night? he imagined himself asking. He’d form his lips into a casual smile and try not to blush. But instead, he sat in his seat and pretended to be immersed in a copy of Moby Dick. He sat about twenty feet away from the front counter, which was just close enough that he could see the infallible whiteness of her perfectly straight teeth — but just far enough that he would not be seen staring at the young woman behind the counter.

“Becca!” he heard someone shout from the behind the counter. She looked back. He peered from behind his book to see who had spoken. It was Tom. The only person who he’d ever bought coffee from and he liked Tom. Tom was friendly. When Becca looked back at Tom, Tom lifted up a clear plastic cup and pointed at it. She giggled.

He smiled. Kids, he thought to himself.

He never dared to speak to Becca because he was afraid that as soon as he tried, he would forget what words were. He gazed across the room again at Becca. She was just so beautiful. Her eyes, her hair, her smile, her lips. To him, she had the most amazing smile. He even enjoyed the cacophony of her shrill laughter.

On Tuesday, Becca served her third customer of the day with huge smile on her face.

Maybe she likes him, maybe it’s just a cordial smile, maybe she’s just in a good mood, he thought. He tried not to think about the younger man who looked hip, athletic, and handsome, the opposite of what he saw when he looked in the mirror.

Becca turned around. He swiftly switched his gaze back to the pages of the book that he hadn’t even begun to read.

“It’s apartment 213. You are planning on coming, right?” She took a seat across from the young male customer. The older man looked up again. Becca was leaning closer to the young male with her hands clasped together. “Please? You have to come! Rick, you cannot miss my birthday party!”

“Becca, I might not be able to come — but I’ll try. What’s the
street again?"

“Want me to write it down for you?”

“No, just tell me again. I’ll put it in my phone this time.”

Rick. Rick, he thought from across the room. How long have they known each other? Do they like each other? Have they dated before? Have they kissed before? He traded his book for his coffee mug and lifted it to his mouth. As he watched Becca grin and hug Rick, his blood began to boil. He quickly put the coffee cup back down and picked his book back up. He took a few deep breaths to calm himself down. Then he continued to watch Becca until closing time.

Wednesday, on his way to the coffee shop, he peered around the streets of New York. He stared at the surrounding trees, the patios, the office buildings and the apartment complexes. He rather enjoyed walking through the city and wondered if Becca enjoyed it quite as much. He began to wonder if Becca lived on this avenue. Then, he began to wonder what Becca’s house looked like. He was suddenly overwhelmed with an urge to see where exactly she lived, to smell what she smelled and to touch what she touched.

On Thursday, he sat in the cafe staring up at the wall clock, impatiently awaiting Becca’s arrival. Just as he began to worry about her whereabouts, she ran into the cafe, her blond hair tied up in a messy bun. He smiled and let out a sign of relief. He liked knowing that she was okay.

In less than twenty minutes, he stood marveling at the brownstone apartment where Becca lived. He walked up the stairs and tried to open the front door, but it was locked. He didn’t feel too discouraged, though; he figured a resident would come around soon enough.

He had been waiting on the porch of the brownstone for about half an hour when a young woman carrying large brown grocery bags approached.

“I don’t have my key,” he stated.

“Well, luckily for you, I do! Are you new?”

“I lost my key.”

“I’ve done that before, but luckily enough, I found it… four months later? It was on top of my microwave. Believe me, I have no idea how I missed it.”

“Do you want some help?” He grabbed one of the bags from the young woman.

“Thank you so much! I’m Gabrielle.”

“Oh, hello.”

“Quiet one, huh?”

Gabrielle keyed her way into the apartment building. He held the door open for her and carried her bags to the fourth floor of the building.

“Thanks!”

He finally stood outside apartment #213. Dreams do come true, he said to himself, and he turned the doorknob. He hoped Becca had forgotten to lock it during her rush to get to work. The door cracked open, and the sunlight that gleamed through the window reminded him of what he thought standing outside Heaven’s gates would be like. Perfect.

He stood silently in disbelief for the first few minutes. He inhaled and exhaled, satisfied, finally breathing the air she breathed. He shut the door and sat in the green chair in the living room. The chair was made of pleather and was quite uncomfortable. But he still thought it was perfect. He stood up to peer out of the window, then slowly walked to the kitchen, treasuring every moment he spent in Becca’s apartment. He opened her refrigerator and took note of the inventory. On the top shelf, she had an assortment of apple desserts: three plastic-wrapped fritters, two pies and a nine-inch dish of half-eaten apple crisp. On the bottom shelf was a jug of apple cider that was practically empty and an unopened jar of apple sauce. On the second, she had a carton of eggs, a jar of strawberry jam, an uncovered cup of orange juice, more apples, and a container of cream cheese. He looked around the kitchen with a huge smile on his face. He was finally here. He picked up an apple that lay on the counter and took a bite of the crisp fruit. He left soon after, afraid he would get caught.

He returned to the apartment about three hours later with a gift-wrapped basket of the only apple-scented perfume that he could find in the city. He gently placed it outside her apartment door and left.

The next day, he entered the unlocked apartment again. This time, he took his shoes off at the door. He sat on her bed and sniffed her disheveled pink sheets. Realizing they smelled like apples, he smiled to himself. She’d been using the perfume he gave her. He was happy that she liked it — he hadn’t been this happy in a long time. She must’ve liked my birthday gift, he thought as he began to roll around in the sheets.

He walked into the bathroom and found the perfume bottle. He sniffed the top of the bottle. It smelled beautiful. He spritzed some into the air, and sniffed. The scent was heavenly.

The next day, he resumed his seat in the corner of the coffee shop and hid behind his copy of *Moby Dick*.

“Would you like anything else?”

He could smell ripe apples, and it made his heart skip beats. Immediately, he recognized the angel who was gazing down at him. He sniffed deeply.

“Wonderful scent.”

“Thanks,” Becca said. “It’s from a secret admirer.”

Apple-skin. He loved it. He loved her.
McKenna

McKenna Clark was a woman of many names: “Mickey,” to her parents, an affectionate pet name she’s had since infancy, “Ken,” to her paternal grandfather who was slightly disappointed to get an eighth granddaughter, and “Na,” to her younger sister who had trouble pronouncing her full name when learning to speak. These were a few of her favorites, but there were others that she didn’t like so much. To McKenna, nicknames were all about context. She liked it when her grandpa called her Ken, but felt much differently in elementary school when boys would use the same name to make fun of her tomboyish tendencies.

Being a woman that’s used to answering to a variety of names, McKenna always noticed when a new one came along. This was especially true of the day McKenna ran into Henry, mostly because he called her the wrong name.

After getting in what was probably the millionth fight she and her mother had had that week regarding McKenna going to her parents’ for the upcoming Fourth of July weekend, McKenna decided she wasn’t in the mood to cook dinner: she would go out to eat alone. She figured nothing good would come of inviting someone to go with her since her foul mood would probably lead to more fighting. She drove to an Italian restaurant she had always wanted to try, Giovanni’s, got a table, and ordered a glass of wine. Replaying the fight with her mother over and over in her head, she sipped her wine and failed to notice when a man approached her table.

“Excuse me, are you Sandy?”

The question caught her a little off guard and a slightly startled look flashed across her face.

“Uh, no, sorry. I’m McKenna,” she managed to reply.

“Wait, McKenna Clark?” By now a smile had spread across his face but hers looked much the same as it had moments before.

“Yeah…”

“I’m Henry Bennett. Remember? From St. Mary’s Elementary,” he said as he came closer to the table. “Mind if I sit?”

She shook her head indicating that she in fact didn’t mind, and he pulled out the chair across from McKenna and sat down. She remembered Henry Bennett, all right. For her, he had been the reason to put on her plaid jumper every day and go to school.

“It’s funny running into you here at my uncle’s restaurant. I don’t think I’ve seen you here before.” He signaled for a nearby waiter to come to the table.

“Hello, I’ll have the chef’s special and a glass of whatever she’s having. What do you want? Anything you order is on me, Ken. Oh, do you mind if I call you ‘Ken?’” he asked politely.

She let out a small laugh, “You can call my anything you like.”
**My Sigh**

After a long day at the office, I walked into the pub. Silence caressed the atmosphere, and every chair was vacant but two. These two middle-age men seemed to have just arrived not too long ago. They sat relaxed and happy, each with his fresh cold beer. And then they spoke.

“……”

“………………”

Nothing, but the ranting and babbling of the almost hysterical news channel. Nobody talked for a peculiarly lengthy period of time. And then I left. And I realized, that out of every conversation I ever heard, this one was the most intelligent.

**Surfacing**

The water looked blacker than blue and stretched out under the thirty-foot high bridge. Chills came over me, but I blamed it on the summer breeze. I took another sip of beer and watched the excitement dance around from person to person, somehow skipping right over me.

“Are you all right?” I heard from behind me. It was Alex. He and I had never been too close. Actually, close is rather far from it.

“Oh yeah, of course,” I lied. Heights didn’t bother me at all, and I had been swimming since I was four years old. And the free falling, that was exciting. But that feeling. That one you feel right after your body gets lost under water and the struggle that stretches on forever ‘til you finally hit the top. That feeling is what terrified me more than anything.

He wasn’t the type to be scared of anything. I knew I should respect him for it, but it actually made me resent him.

“We’re going to walk up to the top… coming?”

“No, I think I’m just going to sit this one out. “ I leaned up against my car parked over by the side of the road. Far enough from the fear, close enough to feel regret.

I didn’t want to resent him, but he lived that worry-free life I had strived for and could never really reach.

“Okay,” he said.

A smile? I was expecting taunting or at least a sarcastic remark but neither came from his mouth and he walked away with his friends. My best friend followed and I waved her along hoping she too would dismiss the fact that I wasn’t joining them. When a few of us from work decided to go out I didn’t know bridge jumping was the plan. If I did, would I have come? This was a big change from sitting on the couch and watching a movie, which was all my ex ever wanted to do.

The excitement and laughter exploded into splashes and I watched one body after another disappear under the water. After everyone had jumped they headed back towards Alex’s car, but I just stood there staring.

Had I made a mistake?

Alex approached me again. I turned to him trying not to sound annoyed, “Why aren’t you with the others?”

“I came to get you, why are you standing out here all by yourself?”

“Well I don’t know, I…”

“Regret not jumping?”

“No! I don’t believe in regrets. Every decision you make is something that you did or didn’t want at that moment in time, and even if you change your mind afterward, it shouldn’t be regret because at one moment it was what you wanted,” I rambled. Could this guy be making me nervous?

“Well then, what are you feeling in this moment?”
You are not so different from me, eh?” the prisoner asked as I passed him the lit cigarette.

“How d’you figure?” I asked.

He took a long drag, the tip of the cigarette flaring in the dark.

“Marlboros,” he said, holding it up. “My uncle was a merchant. He had them imported.”

“Was?” I ventured. I knew what answer was coming, but I didn’t know if I wanted to hear it.

“His store was bombed.”

I winced at the statement, and he saw.

“No, my friend, if I may call you that; do not flinch. He was a brave and strong man. His family lived above the shop. That was the tragedy. I expect this war has not left your life untouched.”

I took the cigarette as he passed it to me. I remembered Diana, who would never hurt a fly. I wondered every night if it had hurt her when she died. My heart, now hardened, had surely felt the pain of her passing. I couldn’t speak for a while.

“They’re going to kill you, you know.” I didn’t understand why I said it, but it had been nagging me ever since he asked for a smoke. I thought he should know.

“Haha, yes. I know. At least my last cigarette will be American. You know, friend, I expected to die today. Whether it was then, or now, or later, it makes no difference. We all die.” He laughed, again. “Maybe that is something else we have in common, besides our taste in tobacco?”

His smiles disconcerted me. I was talking to a dead man. He considered himself free.

“And that’s it? That’s all for you?” I asked as I passed the dwindling stick back to him.

“Well, it is different.”

“Good different or bad different?” he questioned as he looked over at me with a smirk that told me it wouldn’t have bothered him even if I didn’t like it. He was comfortable with himself in a way I had never known.

“There is no such thing as bad different if you ask me.”

I could tell this answer intrigued him because his forehead crinkled as if he was about to question my response. Instead he simply smiled. “I like the way you think,” he said.

He was so different than anyone I had ever known. I couldn’t believe it, but I found myself admiring him. We continued to talk until I couldn’t ignore it any longer. I looked over at him and whispered when.

Before I knew it, I surfaced.
Two men turned the corner, coming to take him away.

I held up a hand, ground the last of the cigarette under my boot and helped him up.

“They hate each other. I don’t hate you.”

“He,” he laughed again. “Nor I you, Mr. Marlboro. I imagine that if they had to fight their own wars, there would be no such thing. You are a good friend, if a shared cigarette can make one.”

He reached out to shake my hand, and I took it. I hoped the gesture was not foreign to him, and cringed inwardly at my callous ignorance.

“Matt. Not Marlboro, Matt.”

“Well, Matt, if I may say, you are a better friend than many I have had. And the last alive. I am Mohammed. Haha, or I was. Farewell.”

The two men stepped forward and put zip-ties around his wrists. I took another cigarette and put the pack in his hands.

“There are two left. Remember that I am not Them.” He smiled, but this time his eyes showed tears. I lit the last cigarette, to hide those welling in my own eyes, and wondered which of those two would be his last.

“I never would have forgotten.”

I had gone out again onto the road that mornin’, as I had it in mind t’continue on eastward. Don’t ask me exactly where I was, so much, ’cause I cou’na tell ye any more’n I had just crossed over the mountains into County Kerry, an’ that’ll have t’be fine for the purposes of this story.

’Twas one of the finer dawns I’d seen in my wand’rin’, though a blanket’uv mist was beginnin’ t’fall over the mountains. I decided I’d have t’make it into the next town before the rains set in, so there would not be much relaxin’ far me that day.

I was just resting m’self against the post of a fence, with my pack laid in the beaten dirt beside me, when who should be walkin’ past but a fine sight of a devil himself?

He was a tall fellow, disheveled as anything, with a madness in his eye and blood on the hilt of the blade he was carryin’ — blood as deep a ruby scarlet as that which stained his own breast.

Now, common sense’d tell any blind fool t’be done with it then an’ there. But I was feelin’ a strong urge and need for repentance that day, and so I decided t’call out to him.

“I wu’na enter town with such a thing,” I said, directing a nod towards his blade.

He stopped walking and in tarnin’ t’m me I could see he was noticin’ me far the first time. His mouth was drawn int’a a fine line, and his lips were pursed in frustration. He looked at me through dark, narrowed eyes, with such an expression as t’claim that I was a creature not w’arth the waste ‘uv his time. Trav’ler I am, I’m used to such looks, but I din’na take kindly to it, all the same. So of course, this was the look he held against me far such a length of time as t’cause me t’quickly regret ever stoppin’ the man at all.

When at the third aeon’s end he finally spoke, he did so haughtily, as if he were askin’ his question only t’see whether or not I’d lie. He said, “Wou’ja happ’na know a Sétanta Malone?”

Now there’s a question. A blood-covered vagabone askin’ me on the road if I know a Sétanta Malone (and it’s said, Shay-tan-tah, if yer won-derin’, at all).

I took a deep breath and answered in a slow, cautioning way, “Sure I don’t.”

He sighed heavily and tarn’d his gaze back t’the road. I slid the bag I carry onto my shoulder, slowly, never takin’ my eyes from him. What was the punishment, I wonder, for not knowin’ the answer? I took a sidling step towards the hills. If the luck was with me, I wouldn’t be finding out.

“Are ye goin’ down t’Cork, then?” I asked him, a bit n’arvusly.

“Aye, if I c’n help it.”

Far a moment I considered askin’ any number’uv obvious questions.
But the gleamin’ blade in his fist spoke reason, an’ I thought it best just t’leave it alone.

“Well,” said I, my voice pleasantly indiff’rent, “may God go with yeh.”

He nodded, never takin’ his eyes from that road. His expression — grave as it was — told me he was the sort of man who’d be needin’ more than a single God’s guidance, Praise an’ Mercy!

Then, with not another word from him, he continued on to County Cork.

I waited there, starin’ off after the wonder until he had vanished beyond a hill and out of my gaze. Then I tarn’d my own separate way an’ got myself out’uv there, fast as anything.

Could yeh imagine what’d become of me if I’d waited around for him t’figure out that my name was Sétanta Malone?

Horizons of the Lost

Enoch could see that the path was brightly marked in stark red pen over the black and white abyss of the map. That didn’t mean he knew how to read it any better. Maps had never made any sense to him; they made his eyes strain. The lines and numbers were a big knot sprawled across an expanse of white paper; paper that could have held something useful, like a spreadsheet.

The red penmanship of his brother noting roads and turns wasn’t helping in the least. It still amazed Enoch how Aaron functioned in such chaotic organization. Enoch’s world was the precision of labeled drawers, ironing boards, manila folders in metal cabinets, and five-star vertigo-enhanced hotels. Now, at a diner in the middle-of-nowhere Wyoming with a rumpled shirt and a dusty 2010 Mercedes-Benz, Enoch found himself hating dirt and missing skyscrapers.

He lifted his hand to his head, kneading the tight knot between his eyes with his thumb and forefinger, attempting to rub away a headache. This had been Aaron’s idiotic idea. Submitting himself to countrywide travel following some drawn-on map using up his two weeks of vacation time was just another masochistic method of pleasing his older brother.

He twisted the coffee cup in his hands.

“Refill?”

Enoch glanced up to see a young man in the diner’s uniform — an unseemly long green apron. The coffee was a dark complement. Raising his eyes, he noted the young man had a smooth face and muffled blue eyes.

“Uh, please.” With the backside of his hand, Enoch brushed the cup across the messy map.

The young man tilted the pot over the cup. “Need help? I’m a bit of a traveler myself.” He gave a smile that showed off a nice set of white, straight teeth.

Enoch stared at him a moment, the calculations of a businessman flashing within his smoky gray eyes. “Yeah, actually, I could use some help.” He looked quickly around the diner, counting people versus wait staff. This young man was the wait staff. “You seem a little preoccupied though.” Enoch eased back against the seat of the booth he occupied; the tension of bending over a map released in the shift.

“I have a break in fifteen… if you’re not going anywhere.” The young man looked down at the red and black lines. “Well… heh.” The smile on his face still lingered even in the moments of turning away from Enoch to tend to others around the small diner.

Heaving a sigh, Enoch traced his finger over the lines of the map, trying to locate his mistake, the road he’d missed. He couldn’t even find the town he was currently in. Grabbing his coffee and taking a gulp of the significantly warmer liquid, he smiled contentedly.
Enoch hadn't been paying attention to the passage of time and looked up in slight surprise when the sound of a bell above the entry way jingled. An attractive blonde in a clean apron walked in, giving the young man a smile. Enoch watched her converse briefly with the man, then watched him approach the booth.

Sliding into the booth on the other side, the young man looked first at the mess of a map then up to Enoch with a grin. “Looks like I have my work cut out for me, huh?” he chuckled.

Enoch heaved out a frustrated sigh. “My brother isn’t the most organized person. I can’t always read his writing either.” Stopping, he turned the conversation. “I’m Enoch, by the way. Enoch Fisher.” He stretched his arm across the short distance of the booth’s table, fingers wide in waiting.

The young man deposited his hand into the depths of Enoch’s, gripping it easily. “Jada Walker. It’s nice to meet you.” The upturn of his lips had lines playing at the ends of his smile. “So where are you headed?”

“Some lake in Canada. I can’t remember the name.” Enoch moved his finger along the map to the end of the line and pointed. “There. Aaron’s probably already waiting.”

Jada smiled as he leaned over the table to get a look at the little red marking at the edge of a lake. “You never choose where you go on vacation?” His eyes still sat on the map’s contents.

As Enoch watched Jada’s eyes, he couldn’t help but lean forward a bit. “Aaron, the thought passed through as he watched Jada’s attentiveness. “Not after I chose a city. Aaron says that doesn’t count as a vacation. Now it’s all up to him.” Enoch grinned more to himself.

Looking up from the map, Jada reached over and touched Enoch’s arm. “Your brother is probably right.” He looked back down and pulled a pen from the depths of his dirty green apron. “So… you… are…” Jada moved an inch from the road to some unnamed town. “Right here. You took a wrong exit. It happens all the time. Tricky road system keeps this place functioning.” He marked a road back to the main one. “If you take this road sixteen miles, it’s quicker than backtrack.”

Enoch nodded, watching the man’s hands trace out new lines on the heavily marked-up map. “All right.” He looked back up at Jada. “Honestly, those are just more lines to me.”

Jada smiled. “Need a different sort of direction?” He watched Enoch’s eyes, lightly tapping the pen on the map’s face.

“If you wouldn’t mind figuring this out and telling me some turn by turn by directions, I’d be very thankful.” Enoch glanced at the tapping pen, grit his teeth and turned his attention back up. “I’ll write it all out if you don’t want to; you’re being helpful enough already.”

Shaking his head, Jada pulled out a piece of scrap paper from his apron and set it next to the map. “It’s quite all right; it won’t take but a minute.”

He looked across the map, at all of the other lines and routes drawn out. “You use the same map for every trip your brother takes you on?” His finger traced the newest drawn line.

“Yeah, I asked him for a new map, and he said that ruins the point of this trip, whatever that means.” Enoch shrugged and sat back, watching Jada scribble something on the scrap paper.

Jada was chewing on the end of the pen in thought then pulled it out and spoke without looking up from the map. “Familiarity, if you’re asking…”

Enoch blinked a few times as he digested what Jada had said. Reaching out for his cup, he sipped at his coffee and watched Jada’s hands working over the map and scrap paper. “Yeah, could be. You sound a lot like my brother.” He shook his head. “He’s not right, though; the familiarity for me is precision. Everything’s normally a mess with Aaron around, and I’m never quite sure where I am.”

“You’re happy.” Jada scribbled something else down on the paper.

“When you go on these trips.”

Gray eyes shot back up to peg a hard look on Jada. Enoch jawed wordlessly, the same way he did when Aaron would ask if he enjoyed the vacations. Enoch laughed a little and shook his head. “Normally, I’d argue till I passed out.”

Jada looked up and returned the smile. “Told you.” A laugh sat in his voice and he paused for a moment, watching Enoch. “You don’t look so old when you stop scrunching your face to focus. The lines disappear.”

Enoch looked at Jada with narrowed eyes then lightened his face again. “Aaron seems to think that the rest of the year I’m in a constant state of brooding.” He paused for a moment to watch Jada’s fingers move quickly over the map, eating up the miles that Enoch wouldn’t have made sense of for hours. “I’m starting to think he’s right.”

“Are you a religious man, Enoch?” Jada asked out of nowhere.

Enoch choked on his coffee at the sudden question and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Um, not particularly. I mean, I go to church when I can find the time. Christmas at least.” He shrugged and tried to sip his coffee once more.

Jada looked up, completely dropping the pen after one more scribble on the scrap paper. “All right, let me rephrase this, are you spiritual?”

With a tilt of the head and distant look in his eyes, Enoch had to think. There wasn’t a quick answer for him. The meditation class, yoga and rock garden lasted all of two days each. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Think about it harder, Enoch. Where do you find God?”

Enoch removed his eyes from Jada and the map-distance. The more he thought, though, the more his eyes wandered back to the red marks on the map. Those places were away from deadlines, looming bosses and the constant stream of memos. Those places were full of baser, easy functions.
“These vacations,” Enoch spoke aloud. “With my brother. Every other time, in the city and all that, I can’t.”

Jada leaned forward with a smile, paper in between his fingers. “Here, turn by turn. Should only take a day.” Jada held it out between them.

Taking hold of it, Enoch looked at the writing. It wasn’t the neatest, but it was legible. “Thank you,” he said and turned his eyes down at the map. He fell back into thoughts without realizing it.

“How can you live in so organized a way and always feel lost?” Jada wasn’t asking. “It’s simple, external control, Enoch. But that doesn’t always suffice.” Jada lifted the can of soda to his lips and fell into silence, waiting for Enoch to speak.

Enoch sat there, staring at the map; his gray eyes were bright as if already reflecting some faraway lake, and he smiled as he looked over the map’s roads. “How many maps can we travel on in one lifetime?” Enoch sat upright, straightened his clothes and rubbed some redness from his eyes.

“I think you’re set to go, Enoch.” It was a simple statement, softly whispered, but it pounded Enoch’s heart.

Silently, Enoch gathered up his map and followed Jada to the door. Jada held it wide open, allowing a small breeze to sweep in a bit of dirt across the restaurant floor. Enoch smiled and stepped out, undoing a button to his shirt before climbing into his Mercedes.

Apple Picking

Jamison Spencer had had another long day. He’d actually had six months of long days. Staying true to his usual routine he walked in the front door, loosened his tie, went straight to the fridge and drank his dinner until his eyes could barely stay open. Tonight was a better night than the past few had been, for tonight he not only managed to make it to the bed before he passed out, but he even managed to change into his pajamas — the flannel ones she had picked out. She had always had a thing for flannel. As his eyes drifted to close another day, the last image they processed was their wedding picture, tugged next to the lamp on the nightstand.

He wasn’t really sure if it was a sound that woke him up, or if it was the feeling of her eyes on him, but before he even opened his eyes, he knew it was her. Only her stare penetrated like that. He could not take his eyes off of her. Not just because he was terrified with each blink that she would no longer be with him when his eyes opened, but because he had never found someone more beautiful. His memory did not do her justice. With each passing moment she seemed to get rosier in her cheeks and the corners of her mouth turned up fractions of an inch. He found himself gazing, and then he realized he was wasting these fleeting moments. The moments that were the gift he had been praying for for months on end. He had imagined what he would do and say to her given the chance. They would go back to Long Beach Island, their honeymoon spot. They would run that marathon. They would laugh again for hours on end. They would sway on their porch swing in the sun and talk about the future like they had on so many Sunday afternoons. He knew travel would not be possible. Jamison decided to become more realistic about the possible activities for the dawning day, Apple Picking.

The Indian summer day that was blooming outside the door was her favorite kind of day. Because of this, she never looked at the first frost with the same scorn as the rest of their northern neighbors. It only gave her hope for those warm, colorful days that were the pinnacle of comfort. That was what he loved most about his Ellie. She always saw the good in every situation; she honestly believed in the best in people and situations, and not to a fault. She was one of those people that you could never disappoint. His eyes refocused and she was giving him that look. Her understanding eyes knew her Jamie was, once again, lost in his head.

“Apple picking,” he said. “That’s what we’ll do today — your favorite! We didn’t get to...”

He trailed off — there was no need to dampen the mood. The room got brighter with each of her blinks, as if the sun felt a duty to replace the glow each time her eyes were closed. Part of him just wanted to lie there...
and get lost in her head rather than move at all, but he knew, after seven years together, that there was no way of breaking the code of her thoughts. Her look changed a minute amount. It would not have even been noticeable to anyone other than him.

As he ran his thumb along her jaw line he kissed her forehead. “No… what’s the matter?”

Ellie tilted her head down and to the left in just the way she always did when she wanted to avoid answering his questions. She was so human to him in that moment that his heart was overcome with a feeling that was so much more than just love. Longing. In that moment she was his Ellie, and the past six months didn’t exist. He was so overwhelmed that he couldn’t help but to pull her into him. Her head fit into his shoulder just like it always had; their limbs entwined around each other like they were finding home. He breathed her in. After a moment she reluctantly pulled away, like a powerful magnet from metal. A beam of light danced across the strawberry curl that had been tussled over her forehead and landed on her amber eyes. A solitary tear caressed the contours of her face. Had he done something wrong? Jamie was confused. She turned on her back staring past the ceiling fan; her eyes looked as if she was pleading with someone in her head.

“I’m sorry.”

Suddenly Jamison realized those were the first words she had said to him. He propped himself up on his elbow and let out a slight nervous chuckle.

“Sorry? For what?” He gently swept the curl away so he could better see her eyes. She didn’t look at him, and this pained him.

“I’m sorry,” she exhaled.

Before he could open his mouth to further question her, the lights began to dim and he noticed her eyes were closed. It was strange, the less light there was in the room, the more he was able to see. A curtain appeared on a track, hanging from the ceiling, cutting the size of the room in half. Their warm oceanic walls faded to a dingy yellow. He was suddenly standing by a smaller hospital bed looking at his wife, but he didn’t remember moving. Then the beeping began. At first he didn’t know what it was. All he knew was that the sound immediately haunted him. Before he could figure out what the beeping was, it stopped, and this haunted him even more. It more than haunted him, it sent chills of fear down to his core. Then he saw the machines and the tubes. His breathing heightened, at the same rapid rate as his pulse. Ellie turned toward him. His light was gone.

“Live,” was all she said. Her voice did not sound like her own. She was weak, and strained, but most importantly, tired.

A million thoughts ran through his head. He wanted to yell out, “No! Don’t go!” but he was frozen. He didn’t even know how he knew that she was leaving him, all he knew was that he hated it. He wanted to plead, but knew it would do no good. He wanted to steal her away. Just run until there was nowhere else to go, but he knew he couldn’t escape the inevitable.

Then, in a whisper, and with a smile, she said it again, “Live.”

As her lips closed his eyes sprang open like a slinky popping down the steps. He was back in his bedroom, the sun was shining, but it just wasn’t as bright. He looked over, expectantly, but deep down he knew. There was no indentation on her pillow. Her earrings were in the dish, the cap was still off the perfume bottle, and the layer of dust still lay untouched. He thought he should feel worse today, than he did the day before, like the pattern had been, but today he felt some sense of peace. He threw back the covers, got out of bed, threw on his old, ripped jeans that she hated and the flannel shirt that she loved, and went apple picking.
Breath’s Salvation

I’ve been thinking a lot about death lately —
The last taste of earth,
the emptiness in the eyes,
the last words before diving into the sea of nothingness.

What is it that kills us?
It’s not that our heart stops.
It’s not that we run out of years.
It’s not that meaning loses its mouth,
that we cannot hear the birds,
that we can no longer feel the wind erase the heat of the sun —

I don’t mind saying that God gives us life and takes it away,
That we’ve been rewarded with the gift of soul.
Some die having been punished for not using it
Others because they’ve squeezed it dry.

I’ve been thinking a lot about life lately —
My soul’s station.
Will I clamp down upon its deceptive dream?
Will joy blaze its way to my core?
Will the weeds still speak to me
in between breaths?

What is it that constitutes living?
Is it the grind of our organs, blind mechanics,
Sisyphus and his boulder?
Is it our objects we cling to?
The stench of stale smoke that buries itself in my sleeve.
Is it that every day we are glorified by what surrounds us?
Is it that we get to play hide and go seek with the sun?

What is there between life and death then
Except one breath
inhaling and exhaling
Our soul?
Planted Winds

Set like a stone in the muck,
My childhood rises for a breath of air.

The breeze chases those rope swing memories,
Like the ocean shepherds wayward rivers.

The taunting cries of birds
Sound like a bad day of school.
The black crickets snicker at my clumsiness.

When the big oaks are hugging the saddened sky,
I think of my mother squeezing all of her love to me.

The sun tucks in the Earth
And turns the light off when she leaves.

When the acorn lazily plummets to the ground,
The scar on my right temple returns.

On top of the birch, a cardinal sits, sure of itself
And me robbed of my redness.

Now walking through the wild,
Dulled worries of being lost cross my mind.
My spirit no longer set on certainty.

I wander without intention
Like a lost feather
Looking for new life,
seeking foreign winds —

An ant climbing an insurmountable blade of grass.

It’s not my childhood that needs a breath,
But I, who needs to savor this fragile air.

Tucking in the Night

Holding hands and seeking the sunrise, we caught
The moon sneaking into the tree that swallows
Nighttime things.
It has all it can do —
Every branch of its tree being —
To keep the evening squashed inside.

We are remnants of the night.
But I do not want to be
Shoved
Inside a tree cupboard — can’t
We be an exception?

Of course not.
Once you let one nighttime continue
Next thing you know — even the moon
Can’t be subdued.

Snuggle back into your tree-cubby, dear moon.
Dawn gets glory and church bells,
But no one wakes up
Under layers of lovely sunlight dreams.
I Lie
I lie. Every day
I lie about everything
From head to toe, I lie
About my height.
I add an inch that does not exist
To make myself larger.

I lie about everything
From ear to ear, I lie
Through my smile.
I don’t like you but I give a grin
To make my life easier.

From sea to sea, I lie
About what I’ve seen
In places I’ve never been,
Because I can.

But I don’t acknowledge all the things I have seen
And all the places I have been.
Isn’t that funny?

I lie as I lie in bed,
To myself, as I dream.
But I never believe it.

But if I lie. Every day.
Do I really lie about everything?
Or is that a lie as well.
Am I lying now?

She Knew It Would Never Be So
She beats at the dough.
Flour billows around her bare hands.
She knew it would never be so.

It rises and stirs with each blow,
Swirling and descending with each demand.
She beats at the dough.

He left last Easter before she thought to know
How much hassle he could withstand.
She knew it would never be so.

He believed they had reached a plateau,
And drove off after declaring she would understand.
She kneads the dough.

She now waits for a simple hello.
She made his Christmas cookies — the ones with pecans.
She knew it would never be so.

She said goodbye to her beau,
Lost hope that love withstands.
She beats at the dough.
She knows it could never be so.
Tonight I watch
mama always said
that once we get
to heaven, we can
watch over those we love.

tonight i watch
jimmy carve
into my roasted thigh.

i had followed him
all over the barn into the field
hoping my nudges
would catch his affection.

one wintry morning,
mr. matthews’ steel hands
replaced jimmy.

i was captured, branded,
slaughtered, cut up,
and frozen.

i knew my
screams were silent
but the pain remained
excruciating.

jimmy bites,
swallows,
and repeats.

i wonder if he
tastes the corn
he used to feed me. me,
the little runt who
finally captured his
attention.

One with Oedipus
When it was the end of us
You wanted me hollowed
Only to be filled with self-pity,
Shattered on the floor
Like a diamond menagerie,
Howl to the sky in remorse,
Mimic Greek tragedies,
That only you are fond of.

When it was the end of “us”
I fell away from your script.
Your plan for a tear-stained widow
With gaping mouth,
Fingers twisted mercilessly in hair
Was never fulfilled.

For I did not grant you the satisfaction
of seeing me as anything but perfect.

But when I was alone
I scratched my eyes red,
So I could never see your acted kindness again.
I try to be everything you want
even after our death.

And I will haunt you,
As your own personal Tragedy.

I will be your walking Oedipus.
A Timeless Affair
   (A Parody of “Sonnet 18”)

Must I describe him as a variation in the year?
For he is more desirable and more enchanting:
His French crop rattles any chaste maiden,
And each angle is more limiting:

Sometimes too sultry, his polished abs glisten,
And in his spray tanned tint,
Every broad from Timbuktu shivers,
By Vogue or GQ standards;

But his bronzed shell will not tarnish,
Nor will he lose that Abercrombie physique,
Nor will I detest his hand in Marriage,
Because he will forever live in my magazine spread;

So long as he’s stocked on shelves,
So long lives my eternal affair.

When In Retirement
   (A Parody of “Sonnet 29”)

When in retirement with cash flow and oversized bifocals,
Deserted, I disintegrate in a hospital bed,
And ponder destiny’s intentions with my dying cries,
And look at my shriveled body and curse my fate,
Wishing I was one more pompous S.O.B.,
Featured like John Wayne, surrounded by lady callers,
Desiring this man’s woman, and that man’s plasma,
With what time not spent at arts and crafts;
but these are merely frivolous thoughts

Then I think of Grace Kelly, and my body,
like the blonde nurse giving me my daily
sponge bath, sings hymns at social hour,
   For being in this depository bears such humanity
   I would not end this life of recreation with Marlon Brando.
Broken Pieces

The building, broken, crumbling.
The person inside, alone, forgotten, frightened.
Eggshells in her hair confirming the taunts
from passersby who instigate and inhibit.

The dull gray: her mood, the building;
one color dominates.
She is misunderstood,
feeding off misconceptions instead of breaking them.

On the wall to the right, the paint has dried and peeled.
Never to be known what was said entirely.
She doesn’t speak, just picks at the shells,
embedded long ago, but finally discovered.

She relates easily to the little broken bits.
There is no longer a person there,
just broken bits of her shadow.
The center of the broken egg cemented,
there is no way to remove it, but she doesn’t mind.

Occasionally she speaks:
“Broken, falling, tumbling fast,
this was not my chosen path.”

A Combination of the Two

You went up the mountain
and then they brought it upon you
stone by stone by stone,
but it is the way of the outcast
to go it alone,
and it’s no secret you’ve seen the view
as a combination of the two.

You came down from heaven,
and then they sought it out in you
home away from home,
but it is the way of the blessed
to go it alone,
and it’s a safe bet you’ve heard the news
as a combination of the two.
A Thomas of Another Sort

Well, I’ve had my doubts
like you wouldn’t believe,
I’ve heard from mouths
that were fed to deceive,
but in leaving it all unsaid
in not being misled
I’ve been dying to be honest
haven’t been in love yet
haven’t been a husband
just the dead brother in your heart
a Thomas of another sort.

If songs of praise have a leather binding,
and thirty pieces a silver lining,
would the mother of a Judas abort
a Thomas of another sort,
if her first born son was climbing
a tree with a noose because its tightening
had some gravity to extort?

Well, I’ve bore the cross
of not being convinced,
I’ve been in talks
with a Jew’s innocence
and in pleading for the accused,
in not being confused,
I’ve been trying to be lawless
haven’t been in lockstep,
haven’t been agnostic,
just the tried lover in your court,
a Thomas of another sort.

I’m not the cohort John was.
I’m just another Thomas,
a Thomas of another sort.
Couldn’t tell ya about
official dogmas when it’s doubt
that lead me from the sea
right on into the port,
as a Thomas of another sort.

A Pen

There was a pen.
And the world saw a pen.
But there was a girl.
And she saw the pen and she saw the words flowing onto the canvas.
She saw reds and oranges
splashing the paper through her words.
She saw somber blues
and deep purples.
She saw art.
And the world saw a pen.

There was a picture.
And the world saw a picture.
A still frame.
Unmoving.
But there was a boy.
And he saw the picture and he saw the earth breathe.
He saw birds soaring through the sky
and the animals below it.
He saw nests and love and life.
And the world saw a picture.

There was a ring.
And the world saw just a ring.
But there was a man
and he saw the ring and he saw love.
He saw beauty and new directions
and he saw happiness.
He saw a family and he saw life.
And the world saw a ring.

There was a letter.
And the world saw just a letter.
A piece of paper with illegible, scratchy words.
And there was a woman
and she saw the letter
and she saw hope.
She saw the red, white, and blue,
and the camouflage.
She saw a blessing from God.
And the world saw just a letter.
There was a coffin.
And the world saw a coffin.
The world saw a coffin and death and sadness.
But there stood that woman
and the woman saw heaven and angels
and life.
The woman saw God
and she saw her husband with Him
and she saw happiness.
She had a pen,
and the picture,
and the letter,
and the ring,
and she would always have him.

Clouds in My Coffee

Auntie’s squash-yellow oven
only matches the kitchen when
Carly Simon’s voice travels through the room.
Sometimes the seventies lingered there
like the burnt black crust
left on the oven racks.

It’d start with the scratch of a record player
and two simple requests —
“You’re So Vain” and a Manhattan,
heavy on the whiskey please, Dad made them strong.
And before the words even began
she was walking into the kitchen
like she was walking onto a yacht.
A Tupperware spatula as her microphone —
she’d serenade green peas and roasted turkey,
trying to reach the low, raspy notes.

Her voice dies out before she even reaches
clouds in my coffee.
None of us kids ever knew who she belted
the words toward. It didn’t matter.
The clouds always passed…
The song would stop and the oven clashed again.
Pumpkin Tears

The last day of October
Mother cooked those
hollow tears—the tears that Father
liked to salt with insults.
Pumpkin tears, she calls them.

Father carved the round pumpkin clean,
His smooth knife methodically moves
back and forth
in and out
he throws the insides carelessly
onto the sunburned pavement
that last day of October.

I pick seeds from the tossed gunk
and throw them into the cape of my costume,
I show Mother, proud, like
a fat, black cat with a mouse dangling from her mouth.
She runs her hands through the seeds
Pumpkin tears, she calls them.

She spends a lifetime cleaning them off,
the scalding water scars her beautiful hands;
I try to hold them
But her grip is too weak on
that last day of October.

Cooked in an oven of maybes,
the little teardrop seeds
shrink in self-loathing.
The smoke suffocates.
Mother and I are left starving on this last day of October.

Subito vivace

We slouched over cases and carry-ons,
packed into trains of plastic chairs
in JFK; drowned in drowsy jetlag
while the world whooshed on in the whine of engines.
An ageless man bounded in,
a cream shirt, the collar and cuffs unbuttoned
beneath a face radiating the sun.
His glasses reflected the cracked chairs
and the cake carpet, but brightened them,
pulling the discord of the gate into harmony.

He leapt toward the chairs like a scherzo,
left a trail like a romance unfurling behind him,
the silk strands of his walnut hair gliding as freely
as horsehair from a bow.
His warmth, a charismatic’s glow
blessed the listless piled around him.

He sipped tea between smiles over his paper cup,
humming a humoresque, then Le Cygne,
his fingertips, like bees, vibrating over his knee.
Though I strained against my congealed tongue—
to compose a compliment, or phrase an aphorism—
my voice refused to stain his music.
It was enough to soak his sunlight.
A call to board fragmented the air.
When his outsized case scraped my purse,
his warm hand pressed my wrist in apology,
and jolted my qi.

He was his music, the sonata of sweetened tea,
the tango to tigers’ eyes,
the appassionato on purple silks,
the fantasy for lily’s fragrance.
Dolce, vivace, animato, maestoso—
Marmalade

A shame, I need to be here for so long
(For “long” alone would count as but a night)
Within a day, in sooth, I will be gone
You’ll find I left within the dark of night

For now, I’m seated at your wholesome table
Powdered cocoa; I’d cook if I was able
Pancakes and spaghetti, pre-made sauce
To suggest that you take lessons’d be my loss

The sun’s pale yellow face that marks the dawn ing
Spreads shadows long beneath the kitchen awning
A murky light, as soft as longing touch
Lost in a dream I held in midnight frost

And who’d suspect what’s easily ignored?
The firebrand lurking just within the door
Avoided, shunned, regarded with disgust
And more than a little warranted mistrust

I see the eyes that quickly turn away
as if the truth is so easily erased
Betrayed, and so the traitor learns his trade
Tell me: better I go? or better had I stayed?

I am the wretch,
the thing that no one really wanted
devil disguised, nocturnal beast a-wanderin’
dishonest, weak, deceitful, faithless vagrant
A shadow in the night, a lost and lonely misfit

I have them all fooled
but her — not her...
She believed me once
But our trust has been abused

My friend, it’s quits from here on out
No more behold the wind-blown, trustless lout
The dream, the chance, the road so very near —
If only I knew what hands held me here...

Oh yes, this dawn so pure no one suspects a thing
What misadventures desperation brings
And sure as sickly pale hangs morning’s coming light
Nothing to lose, I’ll be gone for sure tonight.
Strawberry

Red —
A sunset fire
Sitting plump and untouched
In a field of beautiful ripe.
Pluck from the weight of
Fingers, of tongue on skin.
Guarded by triangle petals —
Lift, let your lips
Dance across sweet
Morning dew,
The waking wetness drink.

Tender berry straining
To feel caress of teeth
Holding juice succulent
To wash past lips
Over taste buds flowing
Into being.
Indulge, swallow
Lavish this fruit
From tip to hilt
Your hunger-ache fulfilled
A sunset fire —
Red

Take a Number

Browse the cuts of meat
while you wait for the barkeep
to see that you’re waiting.
I noticed you long before
your dark eyes reached mine.
Your enticing smile,
that sexy, arrogant strut.
“Can I buy you a drink?”

I feel blood rush to my cheeks.

I don’t want to be the sandwich
you’ll eat half of then toss away.

I flash a smile.
“No thanks.”
You’re not bothered.
You move on to the next deli case
and examine your other options.

I exchange glances with
another good looking man.
“Hi! Can I buy you a drink?”
Don’t you have anything original to say?

I gesture to my full
bottle of Blue light.
Just a revolving door
of shallow small talk.
Lonely men and women
looking for something—anything—
to fill the void or mask the pain.

My friend returns from the ladies’ room
and pulls me out of my bitter cloud.
We snap our fingers in time
with the beat and shake
away our emptiness.
Missing

I saw you yesterday.
Driving past that same parkway where we played football in the rain,
Where we spoke of promises to spend less money and drink less beer.

It’s colder than it was then.

Gripping the wheel, I slightly smirk at not keeping my word.
At least the beer part.

Arriving home, I wanted to call
But I...

I saw you last night.
At our favorite downtown bar dancing off beat
Singing a duet with the jukebox and telling every face
You loved them.

It is quieter than it was then.

It is lonelier than it was then.

Chastity

“Lord, grant me chastity and continence, only not yet.”

– St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine was not foolish
for stealing—just to steal.
It wasn’t just the passion
for the peach,
but the peach’s passionate
kisses: sweet, wet and ravenous.

One can never be chaste with words,
but must be frivolous with consonants—
to steal words like peaches.
Neverland

You said you never wanted to grow up
and I often imagine you at the table with
Peter, the array of paint becomes a golden feast
carrots, peas, apple pie with extra whipped cream—
endless bread and sweets galore—
any dish you can imagine.

Wendy giggles because you somehow managed
to get the mashed potatoes on your nose.
You wink at Peter and suddenly chocolate syrup
is oozing down her face.

You are always smiling, never in pain,
a nice blue dress replaces the white robe
and a creamy pearl bracelet covers the
scars from the I.V.

Your hair is back and blonde
and your eyes sparkle once again
as blue as the crazy crocs water.

I imagine you giggling as Hook
dances on the croc’s nose—knowing
all too well his goofy boxers will be revealed.

If you were here you would make me
rewind, play, repeat.

But now you are snorting
your hand is covering your mouth and a
few sweet tears stream down
your flushed face.

I know you’ll never be back here,
but it’s nice to picture you
in Never, Neverland.

No Reason For Seasons

Breath painted on glass
Fingers twirling ghostly shadows.
Innocence through fingertips,
Lips parting, whispering goodnight.

Carving pumpkins and clutching gush,
piling cherry glazed leaves near your
trampoline, bouncing the night away.
When we got tired of jumping we’d lay
and look at the branches that blocked the stars.

Walking through snowstorms
soaking shoes, sloshing slush,
throwing mush, rolling in wetness.
Skin stuck to icicles, frozen wind
crispy against collar bones.

The summer simmered our souls.
When we got tired of walking we’d drive.
Going around town blasting favorite songs
singing along when we didn’t get along
and the music tuned out our screams.

Hearts pounding, heads spinning.
Stomachs dropping, sweat escaping
Pores pouring hate. I miss you so much.
So much.

You know your days have died
when the sun doesn’t rise and
there’s no such thing as light.
When there’s no reason for seasons
you let the minute-hand tick by.
“A Little Candy for Christmas”

What is sex to you? Moments where
tiny slivers of chocolate raspberry sweetness, covered in double
dark mocha,
portioned and shared by two,
meet laughter, tears, hopes, dreams, fears and tenderness.
All congealed through salty peppermint sweat, exchanged in
butter-scotch kisses,
caressed with smooth lavender fragranced hands.

Where two minds gingerly embrace as two pumping rock hard candy
hearts keep pace.
Where there are only beginnings, no ends.
Where there are no truces, only restings,
no prisoners quartered and no losers.

Where all of creation and time forgoes continuation in order that two
people can weld
themselves together in the hope of conquering against a concrete and
steel world.
Just as a brilliant red sun nestles amidst a teal and purple sky,
and a sugar plum moon starts to show,
while little lemon drop stars appear in lovers’ eyes.

“Eulogy to the Leaves”
(given by the trees)

What yellows
have come to grace our space,
What reds
set ablaze bronzing shards of protruding green
covering solemn brown, Mother Earth,
What oranges
floated around blue sky-father to mix their pigment among the fallen.

What colors, these are,
that lay us bare
and make known
our woodland-world as all search for water, rest and food.

No longer
can we hide you, gentle deer, from plaid-shirt-interlopers.
No longer
can we give you, sweet feathered kind, a dry-place from rain.
No longer
can we conceal those who do not wish to be seen,

For, dear brothers and sisters sleep, at our base
marking the bright ones, over our canopy,
have circularly passed
from our grasp
Just as you
leave us now.

Seek refuge, friends
among our cousins
Tamarack, Hemlock, and Yellow…
Tempus Frangit

Why do I even
or ever bother
with staring at
the clock? Force
of habit, I assume
or presume, because
I am a reasonable person
as much as you, and that
is the only reasonable
explanation although
there are unreasonable
ones aplenty. I always
hoped for better than was
always better than was
happening at that moment.
I guess I know better now
you decide if I do. This
is the best of all possible
worlds, from second to
second from inch to inch,
captured in the orbit of our
collective collected
time, together and
apart like now.

Prisoner's Thoughts on 10:21

And all his footprints lead to prison.
You could see them,
even in a bad light.

They were a bright, electrifying neon:
one long strip
that stayed defined through long exposure.

And looking through the window of his coffin
(through which he is buried alive, above the ground),
he wonders if Death has a special smile for such occasions,
or if, in the instant his body is freed for transfer
he'll surprise everyone and jump up out of his old, moldy,
frayed,
beaten,
washed out skin,
and give Death and the guards the chase of their life.

With a smile, he realizes no.
In the full, electric-neon exposure of time,
there are no fortunate (unfortunate)
last-minute, no holds-barred miraculous
miraculous detours. No old men,
only getting older,
have ever made the Great Escape.

He's going to live through time until it kills him.
And as he puts away this piece of paper
to write a better, happier poem,
he dreams of what might happen at ten twenty-two.
Life by Proxy

Can I get a hug by proxy?

A kiss in the mail?

Will you sing to me a lullaby, soothe me to sleep from outside my room?

Would you hold my hand please, someone through the window?

Sunlight warms my face and I pretend for a while, anyway that I'm here.

Mirror, Mirror

The Piper sang to me spreading lullabies and poison in the same breath.
The Queen raged, ranted, and dripping in the wind, my sheets painted the roses.
That Prince, he broke my mirror — Seven years bad luck, spent in a single day.
I found a glass slipper smashed to bits in a bed of rage.

I would have fallen asleep for an eternity given a choice.
The Psychology of Seniority

Entry #1
I spent an hour today looking at apartments. I used to do this for fun, as well as looking for private islands and couture gowns, but now it’s not a game. I’m actually looking for an apartment, which means college is almost over, which means soon I will be in the real world looking for working and working and with no one but myself to blame if I fail.

Well, probably I could find someone else. Hopefully my creativity won’t be stifled by all the suffocating freedom.

The notion of “the real world” is not a new one. Since mid-to-late high school I and my friends have been bewailing and/or celebrating our age and our approach to the real life hovering just beyond college. That glowing image still shines out there, mirage-like through the heat waves of senior year, but it’s getting sharper angles and more solid colors and taking the shape of mundane yet frightening things, like apartments, couches, mattresses and wireless routers. I might be able to handle the imaginary “real world” bubble out there, but paying utilities bill is beyond my comprehension at this point. Sarah Vowell said that she knew she was going to die someday when her mother let her make the cornbread dressing on Thanksgiving. An apartment is the latest and clearest sign of my mortality. How long am I going to have to live there?

Entry #2
I don’t know who I am right now. I don’t think I’ve changed that much recently, but all the same, my view of myself and other people’s views of me seem to be blurry, not defined in any way. I hear myself as if from outside, and I can’t tell if I’m someone I’d like to hang out with. I can’t tell if other people are experiencing similar doubts about me. Shifts in my environments and in my physical self, small though they may be, seem to have shoved me into some sort of in-between place where there are no certainties. I’m older now, theoretically in a leadership role, theoretically as high on the ladder as I can get, but nothing has changed, and that has changed everything. All expectations have been blown away and there is nothing to replace them but vague confusion and a sense that something has to change, but I don’t know what that might be. Even my confusion is confused.

Entry #3
What exactly does seniority entail? Seniority and superiority seem to go hand in hand most of the time, but I don’t seem to be getting any of that. Maybe it’s because I’m mostly taking 300 classes this semester but I’m not getting any special privileges or treatment, I’m not getting any preference
when it comes to homework or getting cast in shows. In fact this year (all five weeks of it) has probably been the most difficult of my Le Moyne career. Why? Because being a senior in college does not mean the same thing as being a senior in high school. It does not mean that you can blow off classes and nobody cares, it does not mean that your worries are over because you’ve already been accepted into the next stage of your life. It means that you have to work and struggle to correct any mistakes you made over the last three years, that you have to pull up your GPA so you can graduate with some form of honors. It means that you have to pull up your college magnum opus in the form of an honors thesis and that you have to make yourself marketable for employers and grad schools. Seniority is no longer a privilege, but a hurdle. Maybe once I get a job I’ll start to long for seniority again because this time it will mean I will be favored and people will kowtow to me and I can have coffee brought to me instead of bringing it to other people, but for now I can hardly wait until this seniority thing is over.

Entry #4
The other day I had a horrifying realization. As it stands now, my plan is to move to New York City in June. I would apply for and be accepted by at least one internship or job, and I would begin life as an adult. I was reflecting on this when I had a thought. “But wait,” I thought, “do they give interns vacation time? Or entry level employees? How could I go to Cape Cod if we go? How could I go camping and go to Water Safari?” Then it struck me. I probably can’t do those things. Last summer might have been THE last summer I spend as someone who takes summer vacations off. Dun dun DUUUUUUUN! No wonder people become teachers. No wonder people go to grad school. Why wouldn’t you want to put off that horrific eventuality for as long as possible? But I’ve made a relatively firm choice not to go to grad school. Relatively firm, as I say. It might be like some Non-Newtonian fluid which is solid as long as I’m moving but which sucks me under into more classes as soon as I stand still for a moment. I don’t want to take more classes or write more papers or do more research on things that don’t particularly interest me. I want to have freedom from that, but that means I have to be chained to something else. A job, for instance. What if I get hired for an actual job this year? You can’t just walk away from that! It’s not like a class you can just drop. You can’t drop being an adult and run home where your parents will cook for you and do your laundry. Granted, I know how to cook and do laundry. That’s not the issue. The issue is trading in a secure life with fairly large chunks of free time for a life where I belong to someplace where I am chained up until 5 every day, 5 if I’m lucky. My sister often doesn’t get home until 8, not to mention the fact that her boss never takes vacations so neither can she. How can I do that? But how can I not? If I do then I’ll have to slide down that razor blade of life, as Tom Lehrer so eloquently put it, but if I don’t I’ll just be desperately clinging to college, which I don’t even want anymore. How do we let go of the safe to slide down into the unknown and unforgiving? There’s no class for that.

Entry #5
“So, Fiona, you’re a senior?”
“Yup. Scary, right?”
“So are you going to go to grad school?”
What? No! Are you insane? What possible reason could I have to go to grad school? How are you imagining I’m going to pay for that? And what would I study? English? Look, I have a lot of respect for college professors and their commitment to an underpaid job where they get to be ignored by annoying twenty-somethings five days a week, but I think if I had to do that I would take my chances living in a cardboard box, and what else am I supposed to do with a graduate degree in English? And it’s not like I could study anything else because I have very few ideas yet of what I want to do with my life. I’m not going to spend two years and thousands of dollars I don’t have on something I don’t know if I want, only to find out I don’t want it and I have to start the process all over again. And I would, because I could not stay in a job that wasn’t interesting to me. I would end up quitting and being one of those semi-inspiring stories of people who quit their dead-end job to do something they really wanted to do, like bake. But I think I would prefer to just start baking now rather than try writing more papers and argue with more professors so that I can nail myself to a career where I’ll have to do those things for the rest of my life. No thank you.
“…no, I don’t think so.”

Entry #6
I’m not much of a gambler. It might be something instilled in me from my Scottish ancestry, because gambling usually entails losing money, and I am not cool with that. I even hold onto play money. But this summer I am going to take several of the biggest gambles of my life.

First: Moving to New York City. Almost a clichéd gamble, really. There are only so many coming-of-age or making-it-on-your-own movies that don’t include someone moving to the big bad apple. And here I go, joining the hopeful throng, throwing my cap in the air and hoping it doesn’t get stolen by a drifter or a naked cowboy.

Second: I will be applying for internships. This is relatively low-risk since I’m fairly well qualified for the ones I have in mind, and once an internship ends you can leave that place if you don’t like it. But I’m also going to be applying for jobs, real, entry-level jobs. That scares me. Again, having a real salaried staff position somewhere makes me a grown-up,
which means I am that much closer to the grave. Also, while I’m sure this is irrational, I can’t help but feel that as soon as I have a job I have to hold it down. I have to keep working and working doing one thing, like a cog in a machine. And while it would be nice to have a niche, what is the real distinction between a niche and a rut? How many options will this cut off for me? If I’m an editor, I can never really be a great actress. If I’m a dramaturg or literary manager at a theater, I can never be an editor. And if I’m an actor, I can probably never feed and support myself. I have the completely unoriginal fear that choosing one field will limit me for the rest of my life.

Third: I will be moving in with my boyfriend. We have been dating for three and a half years, four in June. We get along extremely well. Even if we’ve been together for an entire day and night, we still don’t want to leave each other. We talk unironically about marriage all the time. We fully expect to spend the rest of our lives together. But the thought of moving in and taking the next step toward marriage terrifies me as much as anything else. What if, by some chance, we change our minds? What if we can’t stand living together? What if we can’t make enough money to support ourselves? There is also a chance, though it’s not a huge one, that Peter will be going to graduate school in China for two years. What the hell am I supposed to do if he does that? I don’t want to live in freaking Shanghai. I don’t want to be unable to talk to anyone. What would I do there? How can I get a job in China? And by some chance it’s not possible for me to live with Peter, am I going to live on my own? In China? No. Absolutely not. If I can’t live with Peter, I’m not going to China, and if I don’t go to China, then I’m not going to see Peter for two years. I really don’t know if our relationship can withstand that.

I’m a good “what if”-er. I have an extremely active imagination, and I am very good at what my mother calls “borrowing trouble.” There is no reason to think any of my fears will come to pass. They are the same irrational fears that everyone has when they begin to move past the comforting knowledge incubator that is college. But I am haunted by these fears all the same, and no amount of telling myself they’re irrational seems to help me stop having them.

Entry #7
Peter’s sister, Helen, works in psychology. She believes that twenty-somethings should be included in their own sort of psychological category. It should not go from teenager to adult. There is a category in between those two where a person, still a teenager at heart and probably in action, has to learn to be an adult. I agree with this wholeheartedly. As I write this, I am sitting in my pajamas and watching “Be Prepared” from The Lion King. But at night I am working at a professional theatre with an internationally recognized director working on a very difficult project about the Congo. An internationally recognized director, by the way, who, the other day, said, “Fiona, you’re the best.” So I’m having a difficult time reconciling the pajama-wearing Disney-watching part of myself with the extremely professional, hard-working and valuable part of myself. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with either of those parts of me, but at the same time I feel like I need there to be less of a division, and I need psychological time to find more unity within myself. I feel like I’m on a cliff, not so much at the edge as with the arches of my sneakers pressed against the sharp corner of the edge, tilted at a forty-five degree angle, held up from the devastating fall by a branch of my fear and a branch of my childhood. But I can’t stay suspended like that for very long.
The Salamander 65

Excerpts from
Things I Learned at Home: A Home-School Memoir

Having our team name printed and mounted on the table made it real. Sure, it just said LEAH, since it was too much to cram North-Area Loving Education at Home onto the marbled purple-and-green laminated card in a font size that viewers at home could read. And sure, it was only those viewers who received WCNY public broadcasting who would actually read it. But here was the proof that we, the first (and only) home-school team, were going where no home-schoolers had gone before.

As team captain, I wedged myself between my friends Mark and Lauren behind the table, and I threaded the microphone under my shining purple blouse. The studio was frigid—I was terrified my brain would freeze up on the questions—and the lights were as bright as sunshine on snow. I’d already charmed our host—who doubled as a ClassicFM host: the moment he had walked in to the green room before the game, I’d said, “I know you—you like Shostakovich.”

“Ten bonus points for you,” he’d replied.

I peered past the glare at the competition on the other side of the room. Port Byron, a public school. An all-boy team, their loose striped polos far too casual relative to Mark’s tie and Lauren’s silver earrings. It was hard to be intimidated—but I managed. This was the reputation of every home-schooler everywhere on the line. More than that, it was in practicing for this game show—in the local library and on three-way calls between my house, Mark’s, and Lauren’s—that I finally found a place in the home-school community, and I did not want to face disbandment if we lost. My stomach felt like it was eating itself when the popping theme song rolled up on the questions—and the lights were as bright as sunshine on snow. I’d already charmed our host—who doubled as a ClassicFM host: the moment he had walked in to the green room before the game, I’d said, “I know you—you like Shostakovich.”

“Ten bonus points for you,” he’d replied.

I slipped a smile to Lauren. She smiled back.

“My home-school adventure began with an argument. It was the summer after my first year in public school, kindergarten. I’d learned that only one of my kindergarten girlfriends would be in my first-grade class—Danielle, and I didn’t even really like her. Mom had learned that I’d be stuck in a mixed classroom, with both average students and special-needs students. Although I wasn’t old enough to understand how this would affect me, I was proud enough to understand that I’d been the smartest in my kinder-

garten class: Emily copied off my math worksheets, even though I didn’t want to let her; I sat bursting with frustration at how Brian didn’t even know his alphabet; and the only grades I received that weren’t 1’s were in “playtime.” A mixed classroom would not be for me; the only problem was convincing Dad of this fact.

Mom and toddler Alex sat on one blue-striped couch, and Dad on the other. The topic at hand was home-schooling.

“She won’t get enough attention if she stays in public school,” Mom said. “They’ll be too busy with the other students, but if we teach her at home, she’ll get attention. And it’s not like I work anymore.”

I was on Mom’s side—always the winning side.

“But,” Dad said, “we can’t just take her out of school.”

“The only other option is to send her to St. Mary’s,” Mom said.

This confused me, given the horror stories of cranky nuns who forbade bathroom breaks that Mom would tell about her days there. I thought she hated it too much to ever send me there. And I did not want to go.

While Mom and Dad’s conversation got stiffer, I got two pieces of paper from the Macintosh printer and a pencil, and scribbled down math problems. I poked Dad—while he was still talking—and said, “Here—do this math problem alone, and then do this one with Mom, and see which is more fun—”

“No.” He pushed the pages back. “Marge, public school is free. I’m working, and we have plenty of other things to do, too. And are we going to do this forever?”

But I knew that his argument was pointless. I was already looking forward to staying home to go to school.

§

We had cousins in Texas who were homeschooled. Mom called Aunt Dawn for tips on how to do it. Samples from different curricula companies started arriving: Abeka Book, Bob Jones, and Alpha Omega. My vote was for Alpha Omega, since there was a Power Rangers character named Omega, but Mom eventually picked Abeka Book, which I would later learn was the most difficult curricula available. Not long after she’d ordered them, a secretary from Allen Road Elementary called to ask Mom to a before-school-year parent-teacher meeting.

“I’m sorry, but Ashley will not be attending public school; she’s going to be home-schooled.”

The secretary offered to give us the school’s curriculum, but Mom turned her down. I was pleased with that decision—to my black-and-white mind, everything public-school was already turning “bad,” and I was insulted that they didn’t know that I was going to be home-schooled. That was the last offer of assistance we received from the school district.

§

65
The first day of home-schooling was not typical. For some reason, Grandma and Grandpa chose that day to visit, which wound up me and my younger brother, even though I really wanted to start home-school. The school district, still clueless, sent around the bus to our house, and Dad sent me away from the window, even though I wanted to exit the bus driver by waving at him through the curtains. UPS—or "the oops-truck," as we called it—hadn't brought our curricula yet, so we couldn't really begin, but Mom had gotten her hands on some New York State fact book—coloring books for me and Alex to work in. I sat at the little blue Fisher-Price table in my little blue plastic chair, and I learned all about the state bird (American bluebird) and the state flower (wild rose) and the state muffin (apple) while I colored without anyone telling me to hurry up.

When the schoolbooks arrived, our "routine" started. I'd get up when I got up (usually around 7 a.m.), put on my stockings and dress, eat my breakfast of Froot Loops and Cheerios, then work on school until it was done. I liked to touch the bright yellow cover of the arithmetic book, which had two toucans on the front—two for second grade, which was what Mom started me in, instead of first grade. Phonics was second grade, too, and history was third grade, but we didn't do any of the tests—I just read about how Pocahontas married John Rolfe, not John Smith, and how George Washington Carver as a slave was allowed molasses only once a week, and how Laura Ingalls Wilder travelled in a prairie schooner, but I already knew that from reading the Little House books with Mom. I had a science textbook, but Alex and I also watched "Bill Nye the Science Guy" with Mom while we ate our Spaghetti-O's at dinner. And best of all, I got to choose my own books to read: American Girl, Baby-sitter's Little Sister, Caddie Woodlawn, and all sorts of new books from the Troll warehouse sale and catalogues.

§

In contrast to many, many homeschoolers, my family did not choose home-schooling because of religion. We barely attended Mass twice a year, though we did say prayers at night. Usually. But, like Buddhists attending Catholic school for the academics, even the secular home-schooler has to negotiate home-schooling's ubiquitous association with evangelical Christianity.

For me, it started and almost ended with skipping a chapter on mis...
to make an effort not to blame it on the prayer Mark led in the green room before we walked on set—a prayer full of help us win, Lord, to glorify You, as I kept thinking back to a Confirmation lesson on how one shouldn't be selfish and begrudge nonbelievers victories you'd wanted.

§

Although neither of my teammates—Lauren or Mark—was quite as Hermione-like as I was, and there was still that religion gap between us, we were able to talk about home-school stuff—studying in a family and being independent and putting up with home-school stereotypes. During one of our three-way calls, Lauren mentioned that one of the women at her church, a woman who'd always hated home-schoolers, said, after watching us on TV, “I love home-schoolers!”

“We have a convert!” I said, before realizing my word.

§

I wasn’t expecting anyone to cheer for me at commencement when I got onstage (in the Pepsi Building-cum-warehouse, at the Fairgrounds) for Mom and Dad to give me my diploma, but then screaming and clapping burst out to my left.

“Who is that?” I asked Mom. My eyes watered.

“That’s Lauren and her family.”
The Places We'll Go
Be Still

Sanctuary — Notre Dame, Paris
Secrets are safe with me — Leicester, England

“We’ll always have Paris” — Paris, France
Meadow of the Sons of Nós

Klutzilla
So There

Swan Lake
Footprints to the Forrest