—Lisa Viscidi

wooden teeth
I live on the seventh floor

I live on the seventh floor, and you
live just below me, and when I want
to describe just how beautiful
you
are I pound the linoleum
with feet sharp as chisels to send
you
to your window, to make
you
a sculpture. Then your face
emerges in bas-relief,
from the building, just in our
old red brick a shot through
with western sun.

—Kathy Rooney
letter

dear mom, I am thinking of home.
the mountains matter. I miss them.
only hills back east, mom.
and the snow;
here, it's not enough.
it doesn't snow on memorial day,
or on the fourth of july.
and the people,
mom, they don't split their own firewood.

— Adam Wells
felipe y yo

phoenix to albuquerque
in juan's beer up blue el camino
we drove with the windows down
the dust kicked up at dusk
los angeles dodgers en la radio
fernando valenzuela, el orgullo de mexico,
striking out gringos, now we all bleed
dodger blue
felipecito fell asleep between juan y yo
soon we drop him at his mama's house
but we have fun while he stays with me
we hike camelback mountain en el aire libre

long night home on lonely road
albuquerque to phoenix
juan y yo practice english we learn
from vin scully
carly next morning we wake to go work
at the feedstore
baling hay, selling feed for pigs y pollo
i wait four more days
fernando pitch again and felipecito
call on the telephone

—andrew peterson
Material Science

I once held a child’s belief in the might of metal.
That it couldn’t be bent or broken.
From yam and sticks I conjured powerful bonds
with the pronouncement,
“This is metal.”

I didn’t know about rust
or anything hotter than hot water.
I played “Rock, Paper, Scissors.”
I never knew how true it was about the rock.

I learned the trade of putting the hard to the soft,
of spitting off the waste to create a useful void or part.
And when that didn’t work,
Use the torch.

Now I know what it’s made of:
I can melt it, bend it and I’ve seen it break.
I have counterfitted the sun in my hand and formed metal upon itself.
I have turned steel to grit in a harsh alchemy of sparks.

And I know,
in a world where men hold mastery over metal,
metal doesn’t mean so much.

—William Rutkowski
A Small Boy-Shaped Silence

He hadn't spoken since Tuesday. Two whole days ago. It wasn't very hard to do. He hadn't even meant to. It just sort of slipped into him one morning after breakfast. The silence, an empty echo reverberating around the house, bounced off the blank walls and slid down his throat with such an ease that he could hardly tell the difference.

Tuesday morning, amidst clicking tea cups and bowls and scraping spoons, Michael sat opposite his sister at the kitchen table and kicked her periodically.

"Run! Stop it or I'll really get you in trouble." She was tall and large and unpleasant.

"You fat moron." He had whispered it. Grimining. But not too quietly. She whispered back. Kicked back, too.

"You fucking little runt! I can lose weight in a minute, but you will always be a little runt, won't you?" She went to the St. Mary's School Shaffersbury for Girls, where the girls were very well prepared.

"Mum, I need a new dress for the sixth form dance next weekend." They were prepared to be young ladies.

"What's wrong with your blue velvet one?" Young ladies who didn't smoke cigarettes and had less than three pictureings. Michael sat at his sister's bulgy-balls ears. A pair of pearly studs were lodged there like pins stuck too far into a pin cushion. Two royal pillows for two smooth, round pearly pins. Michael had also seen the small, silver cow-nose ring hanging from her belly button and smeal the dark, old cigarettes kept in a box under her bed.

"Come on, mother! For god's sake, I've already worn it!" The girl at the St. Mary's School Shaffersbury didn't swear.

"Don't swear at breakfast." Especially at breakfast.

Michael swung his leg hard this time and cracked right into a shin. Crack, swell, bruise, he thought. It made a nice breaking sound as the toe of his t-slap shoe hanged into leg and bone and skin.

"OW-ch! Michael! Stop it, you little runt! Mum, tell him!" He felt a hard slapping, ringing right above his ear as his mother bit him with the side of the wooden hairbrush she kept by the kitchen sink for just such occasions. She used the wooden side. Slap, Ring-ringingingering.

"Michael, if you touch your sister once more, you know..." And she put the hairbrush upside down next to her cereal bowl. And she left the kitchen. And a little boy with a ring-ringingingering in his head. And a smooth wooden hairbrush, brult down on the kitchen table.

"I told you before, runt. you're just like Dad. You can't help it — you just are. That's why Mum loves you less." And she left the kitchen.

Michael sat with the hairbrush and the left-over breakfast and the little-less love. The air was empty. Even the pigeons that congregated on the roof were holding their breath. No coo-cooing.

"MOOOOSEEE!!" The word screamed through the house and leapt back down Michael's throat as if it hadn't been heard by anyone. He looked around the kitchen and through the door into the hallway. He waited for the clod-thumping of his sister's Doc Mauress down the stairs. He waited for someone to pick up the hairbrush. He listened. Coo, coo. The pigeons couldn't hold it any longer, picking up their coo-cooing where they had left off.

He hadn't spoken since Tuesday. Since the pigeons, indifferent, had resumed their distant cooing. Since he'd yelled "MOOOOSEEE!!" in the empty kitchen and swallowed it right back down again. He'd swallowed some silence, too. In with the air and the particles and the ash. He hadn't planned it. It actually turned out to be a lot easier than you might think. A lot easier than saying things. You didn't have to wait for a response you might not want. Or one you might never get. In the car on the way to school his mother was unaware that her son had swallowed anything other than cornflakes and milk. She turned on the radio to Channel Four.


The Archer's theme tune da-dummed, as it did every morning. No different. His mother, as she did every morning, da-dummed along with it. Michael, as with every other morning, picked the scabs on his knees, if there were any. If there weren't, then he just picked imaginary ones, which led to more scabs anyway. Two scabby knees. Today he picked his left knee till it bled. And looked at his mother.

She turned to look at him and almost smiled. She was mild da-dum. She never listened to the show, but she just loved da-dumming along with the theme tune. He smiled back. Pick, pick. A warm, sticky feeling on his knee. The Archer's theme tune was over and she looked at him again. She had a little-less love on her face. A lot less.

"Michael! For God's sake, how many times have I told you not to pick your scabs? How many? Hmm?" She tapped her nail on the leather steering wheel. He tried to sort of push the scab back on and stop the blood, but she slapped away his hands.

Just don't TOUCH it anymore, alright? Can you do that?" He noticed a spot of blood on the dashboard in front of him. A spot of his scabby blood. The people on the Archer's show were talking about the jelly nice weather. He reached forward, wiped it off with his index finger and quickly put it in his mouth. The Archer's were wondering if it was going to rain. He liked the taste of his own blood, his own saltiness. He smiled, finger in mouth. The car was halfway up the school's long drive. The Archers and their lively conversation had been turned off. His mother was speaking to him.

"I said, Do you, Michael? Do you think for once you might make an effort and behave like a good little boy? Sit up straight, wear your tie properly, not huran your sister at breakfast? Of course you do. You don't want to grow up like your father, do you? Of course you don't. He used to pick his scabs at your age and now he's in jail. You don't want to go to prison now, do you Michael? No. Obviously not. I think I've made myself clear. Now, go to the infirmary straight away and get a plaster for that BEFORE you go to class. And take your bloody finger out of your mouth! You look like a three year old. Is that how a young man conducts himself?" The car was at the school building.

"Now go. Get a move on. Or else you'll be late and young men do not want to be late for class." He got a move on.

It was three move on the afternoon precisely. Michael looked at his watch. He sat, a small, boy-shaped silence, in the third row by the window. When Mrs. Saunders — her grey curly hair and grey woolly skirt only adding to her general grumpiness — spied a small, silent boy looking out the window, she proceeded accordingly. Michael turned away from the window in time to see the small, white missile incoming like a torpedo from the German U-boats in his comic books. It pinged off his forehead and onto the floor, scrawling a white unintelligible message on the wooden boards, leaving behind little white chunks of chalk. Michael looked down. A careless, invisible hand had signed the floorboards. He turned to look at the boy at the next desk, a white, chalkly bindi smudged between his eyebrows. The floorboards cracked. Once. Twice. Outside, some prospective parents squared their chery faces into the glass rectangle in the door and nodded appreciatively, before being sucked away into the vacuum of the school's long corridors. Michael thought he might like to be sucked away, too. Although, it did sound quite painful. The boy in the next row whispered, but not too quietly.

"You've got something on your face, Letworth." The desks and chairs and floorboards stirred with general amusement, although the boys were silent. Michael could hear Mr. Clamp teaching history in the next room; wheelies and course shorties made their way into the building from the football fields. The floorboards cracked. Once. Twice. The old school building was very creepy. Mrs. Saunders pulled another piece of chalk — long, white, unbroken — from the box and pointed it at the silence in the third row by the window.

"The next time I catch you looking out that window, young man, it won't be a piece of chalk." He stared at Mrs. Saunders. Olympic chalk-flicker, missile-aimer, U-boat captain, and certified maths teacher and thought that maybe he would prefer just not to exist for a minute or two. At least until twenty small faces returned their peering, sneering gaze to the equation-splittered blackboard, to the numbers that add up properly and the symbols that divide them. Two small
eyes looked down at the blunted chalk on the floor. The missile had rolled slightly towards his desk. Not existing, he thought, might have its advantages. Two small eyes looked up at the classroom world. The U-boat captain was still staring at him and all her troops still peered at his small, silent desk-like stage.

"Well, Mr. Letchworth?" And he said nothing. Nothing at all.

Nothing, however, was not going to satisfy the captain. She had seen worse days than this, she had confronted far more cunning enemies and certainly was not about to be rustled by this small, vacant boy. This insolent boy.

"Mr. Letchworth, as you've been so attentive and interested in this class, would you kindly enlighten us as to the answer to number two?" The desks and chairs waited in restless anticipation. Still-ness. The U-boat captain was tapping her next warhead on the lectern. Tap Tap. The troops suspended any troop whisperings. Hold your breath, they tacitly agreed. For the answer to number two.

Next door, from Mr. Clamp's room, there was a chaos of banging desk lids, the pandemonium and rising chatter of a lecture's end. But in Mrs. Saunders' maths class, the answer to number two was very still and silent. To Mrs. Saunders it was downright impudent. At The Oratory Preparatory School for Boys, silence was not tolerated. Not in the least. And, following time-honoured procedure and policy, she proceeded to equitably bruise two sets of small, silent knuckles with a steel ruler in front of a classroom of flushed troops.

Michael pulled his sleeves down over the throbbing bulge dropping from his wrists, as he sat swinging his bare knees in the Headmaster's office. The U-boat captain was shouting.

"He just won't say anything! He has been nothing but disrespectful, insolent and—"

"Nothing at all!" The headmaster, who was also a priest, loomed over Michael and peered into two frightened eyes.


He wondered if his mother would come and get him now. If she would buy him some new shoes. She would not be pleased. Not one bit. She might even send him to bed without supper. She might even love him a little less. She might never come and get him. What if she just decided to leave him there? To punish him? There were boys who stayed at the school all the time. Some had been there for years. Their parents couldn't love them much at all to have just left them there. Or maybe one day they just forgot to pick them up. They were forgotten about, which was far worse than being left. Being left at least sounded like someone was going to come back and get you at some point.

The captain, who was still very upset, was refusing to throw chalk stubs at a child that wouldn't respond, let alone teach one. The chalk cloud that seemed to surround her had followed her from the blackboard all the way down the many steps and long corridors to the headmaster's office. Creak. Creak. Now it hung all about her. Her hands released white powder at every movement and her grey skirt was crossstreaked with furry, white lines.

But what happened, after you've been left or forgotten about, when you got too old to go to school? They locked you away until you were old and grey and chalky and made you teach rooms full of little boys whose mothers loved them. Swing. Swing. Two bare knees. Back and forth.

The booming headmaster was looming in again. His face was so large, or maybe so close, that it was all that Michael could see. A world, a whole universe, of old hairy face. And he breathed in the stale, already-breathed-in air that the huge face spat at him. A whole world of stale, old, hairy breath.

"You are going to be one of those left behind if you're not careful. . . No one wants a little boy who won't speak, you know." Swing, swing. At least he wasn't forgotten about, he thought. Not yet.

The Oratory Preparatory School for Boys prepared their boys very well. They prepared them for Oxford and
Cambridge. They prepared them for London and for the Country. They taught their boys sportsmanship and honour. But what to do with a small, boy-shaped silence? The headmaster, who was also a priest, sent him off to the confessional. God can deal with this one. But not even God could reach down one small throat and extract the silence that had slid down there, that was swallowed with the air and the particles and the ache. So the priest, who was also the headmaster, sent off for his mother.

On the way home, two bare knees sat still. The car passed through the school gates and turned right, following the colossal brick wall that ran the length of the grounds. A lengthy, colossal wall. The kids from nearby Reading, who were less reverent, had left aerosol masterpieces all along it, replacing the school sign with: "Purgatory Pissing Pool for Pussies."

His mother turned to look at him. He knew that he was loved a little-less. Then she looked back to the road. Back and forth. Like windshield wipers. Swish, swish. All the way home. She just looked. But he hadn't been left. And he wasn't forgotten. That was something.

He had been in his room for some time listening with his ear jammed up under the space between the door and the carpet. There wasn't much of it. His ear was almost bent in half, but he could still hear. His head was ringing/ginging a little, but he could still hear. The carpet was warm and fuzzy against his ear.

"...no, I'm telling you, I've tried that. I've tried everything short of yanking his bloody vocal cords out! It's just got no effect on him, I mean, the boy is absolutely Out To Lunch! I never seen anything like it! Of course, it goes without saying whose genes these are...yes..."

Apparently, you can still hear even when you're Out To Lunch. Even when your ear's bent in half. Even when your head's ringing/ginging a bit. Michael wondered where Out To Lunch came on the scale of What Was Worse. Obviously it was better than being forgotten. It sounded like a Good Thing. Maybe his mother loved him a little-more. His ear was getting warm and fuzzy from the carpet.

"...I'll try to talk to him, doctor, but I don't think that will do any good. He's just so god-damned stubborn!..."

The rim of light from the hallway that glowed under the door and onto Michael's closed eyelids suddenly turned dark and shady. He opened his eyes. Two thick, rubbery Doc Martens soles stood about a foot or so away on the other side of the door. Thump. thump. A low grunting noise.

"You're just so pathetic, Sam. Do you know that? You're going to have to start speaking at some point. Who do you think's going to feed you? Not me, that's for sure. Not Mum. If you keep this up, she's going to send you to the looney bin!"

But if I'm Out To Lunch, he thought... One black sole kicked the door, not half an ear away, but no ear away. Thud. Ringing/ginging. He unbent his ear from the small space under the door. Thud, thud. The door handle jiggled and was still. It was locked.

"Are you listening to me, runt? Thud. thud and a jiggie, then still."

"God, you're hopeless, you are."

And two thick, black, thumping Doc Martens thumped and clumped off down the hallway, slamming their door behind them, slamming our little silences and slamming in screaming music, green hair dye and pain.

Michael put his ear back to the space under the door. He wondered who his mother was talking to on the phone downstairs. He wondered who it was that now knew that he was Out to Lunch.

The door to Michael's room jiggled and shuddered open, rubbing along the carpet. It stopped when it hit Michael's curled-up, sea-shell body, lying where he had fallen asleep the night before, ear to the warm, fuzzy carpet. The square block of sky outside of his window was pale with morning light and he could hear the coo-cooing of the pigeons on the roof.

"Alright, come on, then. You'll better have some breakfast," And, groggy with earfuls of carpet and dreams of torpedo missiles, he followed his mother downstairs to the kitchen.

—Janna Schoenberger
The kettle began to squeal and shake and he watched his mother run around the kitchen table to the stove. Slish, slish, slish. She yanked it off the stove and squealed like the kettle as she touched the metal — SHIT! — and dropped it next to Michael's cereal bowl. She breathed in slowly, looked up at the clock and yelled at the light bulb in the kitchen ceiling.

"SAMANTHA! If you don't get down here by the time I count to three you'll go without breakfast! Do you hear me?" A door opened and muffled punk music rang down into the kitchen. His mother banged the kettle down on the table as though she were stamping her foot with it.

"DO YOU HEAR ME?" There was a far-off muffled shuffling from upstairs. Michael watched her look down at the table and then to the steaming silver kettle and her throbbing head. She looked back up at the light and took another deep breath.

"ONE..." The shouting music was cut off as a door banged shut. Michael looked at his cereal bowl and counted the soggy flakes.

"One..." It just sort of slipped out of him.

"TWO..." His mother was still shrieking at the light bulb. He had counted five when he realised she was now staring at him, shaking her burnt hand up and down as if that would stop the pain.

"What did you say?" Michael looked up. He could hear the rhythmic clunk-thumping of his sister's Doc Martens as she took the stairs by twos.

"What did you just say, Michael?" He heard the final thump as his sister landed in the downstairs hallway. He pictured her graceful leap from the first landing all the way to the floor, at least ten steps, holding onto the railings, crashing and cracking onto the floorboards below. He felt the vibration in the kitchen. Boom. Like an atomic bomb. Like a big mushroom cloud exploding over the earth. He looked over at the wooden hairbrush by the sink as the Atom Bomb pounded into the kitchen, dropped her bag on the floor and sat down on the other side of the table.

"Alright! Bloody hell, I'm ready! For God's sake, mother, there's no need to yell!" She yelled. The Atom Bomb had green hair. Like a big green mushroom sprouting from her head. Michael marvelled at it. But his mother was still staring at him.

"Michael, I Asked You A Question. What Did You Just Say?" She spoke very slowly — the same way his teachers did when they asked the French exchange students questions in class. Michael grinned as he looked over the breakfast table at his sister. The green mushroom exploded over her huge, round head like an unforgettable cloud. He said nothing.

"Right, then! If this is the way you're going to carry on—" His mother turned to the sink for the wooden hairbrush, but was stopped immediately by the green fire raging on his sister's head.

"Boom." He said quietly. And began to eat his cereal.

—Felicity Thompson
The Only Copy Ever Made

And Dee I still want
Berries in July,
My mind making
Love in the library,
Fear leaking like lyrics
From the corners of my eyes.

I remember once thinking that
The sky could stretch
Forever like my hands:
But when my feet land firm
My legs will give,
And I will lie in liars’ beds,
Wanting and waiting
For the spin cycle to end,
Crying at night alone
For the stars unseen by us,
For stars, for stars
That no longer exist
(But are still seen).

Wanting and waiting
To cry for the copies
Made and wasted,
Recycled in bins.

And my mind is still making
Love in the library.
My shoulders shrink
From the cold and the truth.
That in December,
There are no Belgian berries, and Dee,
My eyelids are shivering to see
The stars unseen, the stars
Nonsistent.

In this library with the forever-
Stretching ceilings,
My hands will reach
Until eternity buckles
And infinity gives way,
Permitting my fingers to meet
Those nonexistent makebelieve
Forever-real galaxies,
When my feet will land firm
On stars unseen and in beds unmade,

And until the only copy ever made
Will be the real thing.

— Carissa DiMargo

—Ken Pao
City

A golden condor sits in a gray wire cage
one man, woman, and child sail,
in the shape of the Capitol, and told Love.
This is the story I give you tonight from the city
of memory. A city built on temples, tombs, flames,
this is where he was shot, this room
where he died, elegant scars on a plain face
cut by the dark diagonal of the state you are in.

Away from you I am in the state of nonexistence,
drowning in dirty waters, searching through the alphabet for
a way home. Two hundred years ago two lovers
decided on a home and dug a grave
of hopes and dreams. This place of death
would be theirs, a story buried in the metal
and filth of the earth, like our story,
a promise made under a bowl of stars.

Now just whispers, just touches, no more teaks
up 93, the tether of asphalt connecting us.
For you it’s the salt in the back of the throat, the weight
of the fog that direct the lost to where they belong.
In this city it’s stone, letters, numbers that speak.
I know where you are by the hollow of a word,
echoed and blank and unheard and everywhere.
It’s here, in the city I know, where I
remember a forgotten story, and love you.

— Sudeep Sharma

Days Like Severed Lily Pads

Days float by like severed lily pads,
it takes years to admit this fact that
gives gray meaning to the word "human."

The days float on lily pads without maps
to guide them; out of reach, beyond rescue,
aborted to the currents of memory:
a reckless river where we have no control.

Many men die in the wake;
slowly they move with the current,
head-down, submerged in the dream
of grasping the pad by its root,
pulling it in and riding it downstream;
but the bodies are too heavy,
water laps over their backs
as they sink and rise again.

Sensing loss is instinctual—
a man senses his
and moves on.
He knows that lily pads
sustain only minimal weight
and sink if too heavily regarded.
Instead, he skims across ponds,
his toes touch only the interface
before lifting up and stretching on.

— Jeremy Daniel
Praying for Magda

I didn’t need that job, I told myself. But the image reflected back to me in bathroom mirrors told me I needed something. My skin was yellow and I couldn’t remember if my eyes had always been hazel or if they were just fading like the rest of me. I looked old.

I knew I had stayed at a place for too long, smoked too many of a friend’s cigarettes, or left the ice tray empty just enough for them to say, "You know Ellie, you have to do something about all of this." They were right. Something.

I just needed money. That was the something everyone talks about. That had to be the something. I would visit my sister in Springfield and she would talk about money too. On most of the visits she would give me some, but one time I pushed her hand away and told her that I was going to make my own. I lasted three months before I left Magda and the bordello in Plimpton. I had nothing to do with Magda Corish besides that she was a housekeeper at the John Carver Inn in Plimpton and so was I. She had been working there since she was 14 and I was just leaving.

Magda was 32 years old and every day she wore cotton dresses with belts, clops, and an apron with huge green pockets. One morning she showed up to work in a long skirt and sneakers and everyone made fun of her. I asked her why the sudden change in style and she seemed to yell back at me.

"My mother and I are going to five o’clock Mass after work," she said. "I’ve gotta pray to get out of this hellhole."

I tried not to make Magda upset. When she and I worked together, I made sure she did the bathrooms and I cleaned the rooms. They always told me to keep it that way. They said she would steal things from the guests. When I told Magda to do the bathrooms she always bit down on her lip hard and made her hands into fists.

"They told you to say that, didn’t they?" she would ask me. I shrugged my shoulders and pretended to be interested in the number of towels we had on the cart or the number of beds we would have to change that day.

"Goddammit!" She would yell. "They really have it in for me."

We worked together often because the head housekeeper said we made a good team. "Ellie, she works the forest when she’s with you, you know," she said, lighting up an unfiltered cigarette and picking at her cuticles as I vacuumed.

"She annoys the hell out of everyone else."

Magda’s husband was gay. At least that was the story I heard from the other girls. Magda and her sister-in-law got into a big fight, and it ended with the sister-in-law telling Magda that he had only married her for the second paycheck. Magda never believed it though, and they stayed married. To me, Magda was the kind of person who didn’t believe anything. She was like soft cotton wrapped in barbed wire. Nothing really got inside.

Magda’s husband worked at the McDonald’s on Route 53 and he picked Magda up from work sometimes. But he would forget and leave Magda waiting outside the front office. I saw her once, standing under the green awning holding a cigarette, patting the wet curls that stuck to her head.

"Do you want a ride?" I asked from my car window wondering why she married someone who wouldn’t even pick her up from work.

"No, my husband’s coming," she replied not at me but to the horizon or to the rain. "He’s just a little late."

Once I saw Magda steal. The head housekeeper had the day off, and I decided to let her do the bedrooms for once. So some days I let her do the bedrooms because I could not stand seeing her so sad.

"Wish people like that, Ellie," my mother told me once, "you just have to realize they must have a pretty hard life."

I usually told her that I had a cold and the dust from vacuuming underneath the beds irritated my sinuses. She would nod and eagerly begin stripping the beds of their sheets.
We always made the beds together because it was faster that way. One time I left the toilet brush on the bathroom floor and went out to help. Magda stood in front of an open suitcase holding a man's wallet. I noticed she had closed the doors of the room. Usually we did that when we wanted to have a smoke. Magda was not smoking.

She never looked up to see me watching her. I returned to the bathroom and called her from there.

"Are you doing the beds now?" My voice sounded like I had been around the line fifty times before I decided to actually say it. The girls said they all had caught her in the act, opening duffel bags, showing her stubby hands into coat pockets.

"I'm almost ready," she called back. She must have a pretty hard life, I told myself.

Magda caught me once, too. I wasn't smiling, though. It was after everyone left. I stayed late, double-checking the rooms on our wing, making sure Magda had cleaned the bathtubs with bleach and not Pledge, making sure there were no underwear underneath the beds or condoms in the nightstand drawers. If a guest found as much as a hair on the rim of a toilet, a free room was guaranteed. The girls said that the guests, when they entered their room for the first time, had to feel like it was the first time anyone had been there before them. That they were the first to step barefoot into the shower stall or to pull the blanket up close to their faces. Each guest had this anonymous existence, I thought. Each room represented a starting over. But the plastic wrapping over the cups eventually came undone, and it was my job to make it all new again.

So I double-checked the rooms that day, making sure there were no mildew rings in the bathtubs or toothpaste in the sink. I was wiping a lipstick stain off a bathroom mirror when I saw my reflection. I stopped. I remember noticing how green my eyes looked under the fluorescent light. Looking at my face, I could see that my eyes were green again. I remember standing in front of the mirror just staring at my face waiting for something to happen.

"What are you doing?" Magda stood in the doorway. I wondered how long she had been watching me. "I already did this bathroom."

I avoided looking at her, but I saw that she still had her apron on. "I was just—" I looked at her now. She had her hands deep within the huge green pockets of her apron. Her forehead wrinkled as she looked at me, her oversized eyes stared at me and she waited, almost as if to tell me an enormous secret. "I was just checking my lipstick," I picked up my rug and looked in the mirror again, this time turning my lips, touching the last remains of lipstick that was never there. Magda was still staring, though.

"I'll see you later," I said, moving past her in the doorway. There was nothing I could say. With Magda, sometimes, I wanted to say everything.

No one liked Magda. The girls sat on the washing machines and tables that filled the linen room, grating the air with their nicotine-stained teeth, throwing back their heads in laughter at Magda's hairy armpits or the way she walked with bow legs. They called her pathetic because she stole, but everyone around that place did.

Someone snatched a lottery ticket from a drawer once, and everyone stole food. We filled plastic cups with cola, took cookies from the package, grabbed candy from the fridge, I used to spray expensive perfume on my neck. That stuff was acceptable somehow. It was all stuff people would never notice.

"It's just plain wrong," one girl said. "I mean, remember that one day she came in with a brand new watch?"

"I sure do," the head housekeeper replied. She laughed, stirring her coffee and shaking her head.

"Jesus Christ! I bet she could run a pawn shop with all the things she's stole!"

They all laughed this time. Their heavy bodies shook the washing machines and tables underneath them.

"Yeah, but—" I almost could not say it. They looked over at me. I had been standing near the door, kicking the corner of it with my foot. Some of them looked over, but they would only listen to the louder ones.

"And that time she had those brand new sneakers with that special—"
"She must have a pretty hard life, you know," I said quietly to the Spanish-speaking girl standing next to me. She smiled at me and laughed, but something made her stop. She looked at me hard, shrugging her shoulders, telling me she could not understand me anyway. But I think she was shrugging her shoulders and listening to me because she did.

Magda's husband was the only one who ever stood up for her. I heard from the girls that Magda was made fun of so much in school by the other kids that she had to stand against the wall next to the teacher at recess. They said Magda's husband changed all that. He kept starting and kicking at the kids. Soon Magda was able to sit in the sandbox or on the swings if she wanted to. That's how I imagined her. I imagined that she might sit in the sandbox and build this enormous castle around her.

One day I left.

It was in October, during the hotel's slow season. We had only six or seven rooms to clean and Magda went out for a smoke break.

"Do you want a cigarette?" she asked, untying her apron and putting on this yellow and red down jacket.

"No, I'm just trying to quit, I think." She shrugged her shoulders at me. As she left, I saw that her apron was hanging on the cart next to the linen bag. I lifted my hand to see her turn the corner. She only took that apron off when she went outside. I reached for the linen bag to see again if it was really hair dye spread on the pillowcase of room 109. It looked like blood or chocolate pudding. I couldn't concentrate, though. I thought of the girls and the stealing. I lifted the apron and reached inside the green pockets. There was only paper in here, I said to myself. Lots of playing cards and gum wrappers. I took out a card. There were hundreds of them. They had soft edges. Construction paper. There were hundreds of squares of pink construction paper in Magda's apron. There was something written on each one in blue ink. They are like letters, I thought. I took one, putting the apron back in the linen bag.

I did not come back after that day. I took a train instead. I went to Springfield to live with my sister. Magda stayed. She would continue to make the pink squares. I thought, slipping them into coat pockets, showing them with stubby fingers into duffel bags. They were prayer cards. She made them herself, I assumed. Mine had a striped border drawn with red pens. I still read mine sometimes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn:
for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the pure in heart:
for they shall see God.
— Matthew 5:3-10

—Joanna Romansic
Name

It was never yours to begin with.
It came from a whisper, an utterance
in the moment of panic, pain, love,
when your mother and father met you
and marked you as theirs. Your body,
glistening with blood, and you, wailing
from the pain of oxygen, were folded
into a word to be carried in the throat
of everyone but you. Later, you had to learn it:
mouth, lips, mind bent to fit around its vowels
and consonants, then tucked in the fold
in the back of your tongue rubbing you raw,
begging to be pushed out. You kept it
and now you love it. But listen, my mother
was named three times before she was two.

You need to rip it out. You may need scissors,
a scalpel, alcohol, but you must rip it out.
Ignore the clean bite pushing to call it back,
ignore the sharp cold of the loss of the cord,
ignore the hot liquid need to cry, and breathe anew.

—Sudeep Sharma
we meet

I. Two steps past the pay phone
Where I first dialed your number
The day I had no idea my life would change forever.
One step outside the door of the semi-seedy metrobar
Where intoxication made it so hard to remember your name.
Not your smile.
Amateur pornwease tickled my tongue
Clung to my lips as I concentrated on my lust,
Unaware of my love.
Concrete glitter, almost snow swept us inside.
And we indulged in rebellion

II. Erotic, tarrypanny tiles,
Warm with urban mischief and the vibration
Of a 1940’s radiator.
We are publicly alone
In the comfort of NYC intoxication.
A light denotes occupied, outside
And I selfishly disregard the possible women in line,
With lipstick and tampons.
Lips, drunken sticky, and it is in this moment of freedom
I notice the texture of your hair.
You are wearing fleece
And I keep with me the sensation of touching your waistline/skin boundary.
You breathe close,
A pattern that has since imprinted itself in my soul.
I wish for forever
And secretly wonder your last name.

III. Love, hot little girl,
Outside with a secret tear in my stocking.
Left in the name of possible passion.
We have switched to vagabond style,
40 oz. of heaven.
In brown bag beautiful.
Side street now and magic cement.
We start collecting snow,
First on his eyelashes and then on my neck,
Leaving misty wet kisses,
For the second time that nite.

—Lindsay Heller
Salt Peanuts

listen to the jaunted solo
the bird and dir mucey hall may '53
i'm just happy to be alive today
my favorite solo is on salt peanuts

the bird and dir mucey hall may '53
i was a young alto myself
my favorite solo is on salt peanuts
they shot up before they hit the stage

i was a young alto myself maybe
i couldn't believe my ears
they shot up before they hit the stage
well the bird is my hero

maybe i couldn't believe my ears
smack do wonders for my play
well the bird is my hero
died of an overdose in march '55

smack do wonders for my play
i play underground, you wait for the train
died of an overdose in march '55
when the train come you no hear me

i play underground, you wait for the train
sometimes you throw quarters
when the train come you no hear me
i pawn my alto thirty five dollar

sometimes you throw quarters
i used to blow you sixteenth note
i pawn my alto thirty five dollar
salt peanuts salt peanuts

i used to blow you sixteenth note
listen to the jaunted solo
salt peanuts salt peanuts
i'm just happy to be alive today

—Andrew Peterson
Fatima Al-Qadi is an amateur photographer, poet, artist and composer who is obsessed with aesthetics and getting out of here fast!

Unfortunately, Jeremy Daniel was struck by a rubber bullet during the World Bank/IMF protests and died before writing his bio. However, we are sure that his uninteresting life would have inspired no one and we’d like to take this time to confess that the only reason his poem got into the magazine is because he bribed us.

Carissa DiMarco didn’t have time to write a good bio.

Amanda Fisher is a collector of memories, pretty things and good ideas. She hopes to follow Peter Pan in his quest to fly third star to the right, straight on till morning and find never land.

Jessica Greco is an artist wannabe who hails from a leper colony in the South Pacific. She needs to learn how to paint.

Lindsey Heller aspires to be a pop icon of the new millennium. (You know, Andy Warhol style, with more than 15 minutes of fame.) She likes to create all the time—poems are her specialty, though she makes a good cup of coffee too. She would like to thank New York City, the stars in the sky, boys with wisdom and her mommy and daddy for providing all the inspiration and strength she will ever need.

Ken Pao is taking things to the next level.

Andrew Peterson is the Sausage King of Chicago—brown hair, leather vest, devastatingly handsome.

Joanna Romanic is a sophomore at GW, majoring in journalism, but really she’s just biding her time before she can pursue her dream of becoming a romance novelist.

Kathy Rooney would like to thank SJT for quashing her plan to cohabitate with Clark Harding, thus making this issue’s poem possible.

William Rutkowski
A stealthy haiku hacker,
has fun with the form.

Sophomore, Janna Therese Schoenberger, is double majoring in Art and Biology. She would like to thank Ellen at the veggie stand for her love, support and chili.

Sudeep Sharma once saw Jim McGreevey outside the Red Fort in New Delhi. At least he’s not talking about the time he thought he saw Paula Zahn outside a Taco Bell in New Jersey.

Lauren Silberman can be found clearing away asbestos from a quaint bungalow in Tahiti, where she and her Italian lover, Didier, have escaped the capitalist media machine. She apologizes if any piece appears waterlogged, since she can only communicate via carrier seagull.

Felicity Thompson is a graduating senior with a creative writing minor and a philosophy major. Her favourite contemporary author is Arundhati Roy of The God of Small Things.

Dezso Vekassy is an electrical engineering doctoral student from Hungary who enjoys kayaking and his favorite cartoon is Dexter’s Laboratory. He has two wonderful nephews, Aron and Levonte. He has never actually been on the Moon.

Lisa Viscidi

Jeff Wunderson is trying to disconnect the plaster cast he has adhered to himself without pulling off the skin.

Adam Wells is a child prodigy who pops the heads off words like he does dandelions.

David Zielke loves to take pictures of people, he also loves plants and Stevie Wonder, although almost nothing after he wrote “I Just Called to Say I Love You.” He would like to thank all people who have helped him.