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submit
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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON DC
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39 Contributor Biographies
Life is too short to chalk things up to chance. I read into every “hey” and every “see ya”; every “hi” and every “bye”; every “whatever” and every “fuck you”. Words and encounters aren’t accidents, you know. Even if they only last a stutter or a glance.

Seeing her was no accident. She said “hey.” I said “hey.” I saw her eyes jolt back and forth from me to the ground, to her friend, to the sky. So I said, “I’d love to chat but I have to get to work.” She said, “Oh sure, I’ll see ya around.” And now I sit in this coffee shop in an empty booth and it’s raining outside.

I like to pretend I actually see her around like she says we will. (Truth is, we’re never in the same place.) I pretend she will stay in one place for a while. I pretend we’re sitting here over coffee.

“Hey,” she says.

“Hey.”

I pretend we’re comfortable with each other. I pretend I can gaze at her like I never used to. Maybe because she was too real and I couldn’t believe that I actually had her. But I never had her. She belonged everywhere. I couldn’t know that then. But now I see that she wasn’t granted to me, so I gaze at her. She’s so beautiful. There’s no more beautiful girl in all the city. I know.

She couldn’t take just one person. A girl like that needs tons and tons of love—millions of people to love her. And she’ll get it one day. She’ll be a star. And though she never sang for me, I know it sounds as great as people will one day say it will. To tell you the truth, I never actually heard her sing. It would have been futile to hear anyway, I think. Just one more part of her that would have made her memory even more overbearing. It’s too much weight on the mind to have loved someone so beautiful. Such beauty is impractical to know.

Now I pretend it’s two years later and she is a star, just like I knew she would be. And an acquaintance of mine mentions her—“Oh, have you heard her new song?”

And I will say, “Yes, in fact, she and I were in love not too long ago.”

And they’ll say, “Damn, you shouldn’t have let her get away.”

And I won’t know what to say.

Here I am going on and my coffee is getting cold. I pretend she’s here again.

“Hey,” she says, “let’s get out of here.”

She needs refuge from the cozy, air-conditioned diner. She’d rather be in the humid rain outside.

“Go,” I would say. I would have to. I know myself and I can’t follow her in and out of everywhere. And anyway, I would lose her along the way. There’s someone else out there for her to love. Not that I want her to love anyone else, but that I know I can’t stop it. My time with her, this bird, is over. I watch her put on her hooded (she looks adorable in it), then she kisses me goodbye and walks out. I sit and watch my bird, no, the bird, the most beautiful bird I’ve ever known, outside my window at the bus stop. What comes next? I sit showering the bird in me with lukewarm coffee and cigarette smoke like that old barfly, waiting for someone to come in. I watch the notes of rain water roll down the glass collecting all the other little droplets until they swell, getting bigger and bigger, gaining more and more momentum, until they finally reach the wooden seal and level out.
ashfia alam  *Beneath My Tongue*

By the time Melina caught up to me, I was standing in a restaurant. There was pizza and a buffet of Italian foods that I loved. But I would not eat. It had only been two hours since lunch; why waste my appetite? She, however, had not eaten anything since morning, so I waited for her to gather the meats and the pasta onto the black plastic plate. It drove me a bit crazy, watching her, so I glanced away from the buffet. Around me were scattered people, some lost and some inseparable. My eyes caught individual cakes in plastic containers. They were placed so innocently on that stand.

“I want one of those cakes so badly,” I said as I walked towards the cake stand. I could feel her rolling her eyes at me, so I prepared myself for an attack.

“If you want one so badly, buy one.”

I toyed with the idea of 600 calories in my body, and refused. “No, I can’t. Besides, I already ate.”

Her lips were pursed while she glared at me. I grinned weakly, and followed her to the cash register.

“I really, really, want that chocolate cake.”

Melina sighed when we sat down. She said, “Listen, I always go with the flow. I eat when I want to eat, you know? If you’re hungry, eat the cake.”

A horrible thought came to my mind as she tried to persuade me. Obviously, her reasoning was why she was fatter than most.

I bit my lip, regretting my thoughts immediately. She had lost weight. Plus, she even had salad on her plate, instead of the large slab of lemon chicken I would have gotten in replacement of the leafy greens. It didn’t matter whether she was fatter or not, she still had pretty good metabolism when she controlled her eating habits. I, on the other hand, had terrible metabolism. I could eat a grape and gain a pound.

As I debated myself, Melina watched me like I was a zoo animal. I touched my hair, wondering if it had loosened from my perfect ponytail. Even if it had she couldn’t criticize. Her dark hair was shrouded in wisps around her face, and she hadn’t bothered to smooth it out.

Perhaps it was my face that she was looking at. Unfortunately, I had an atrocious t-zone of oil. Grabbing a napkin, I wiped across my forehead. At the same time, by habit, I glanced down at my stomach, remembering the gross, bulgy rolls of fat on my abdomen. That was enough confirmation to reject the cake.

“What is wrong with you?” Melina asked. She was scrutinizing me, her deep, green eyes trying to interpret exactly what I was doing. I just grinned, trying to act as if my actions were normal.

“Nothing! Hey, guess what,” I started to say, changing the subject. A morbid thought came to mind. “I was raped the other day.”

She snorted and the food almost flew out of her mouth. I cringed, though she managed to swallow before speaking again.
"You are so stupid." She said, an appropriate response to my proclamation.

"No, seriously." I tried not to laugh.

She shook her head. "What, you already played a game of monopoly?"

Monopoly. It was a strange joke between my friends and me, something I've always laughed at. I was the expected virgin in the group, the innocent one who had never been touched. They assumed that I was innocent enough to be lured by a game of monopoly and then raped. It didn't make any sense, but the first time they told me this joke, I felt obligated to laugh. Now, I pretended to giggle, amused by her question.

"No, you retard," I snorted. "I'm not stupid, okay?"

She didn't say anything after that; she was eating. Sitting across from her, I watched her chew salad and pasta together. She picked at lettuce and then scooped it up once she was finished swallowing. We sat in silence, my heart lurching every ten seconds. Silence didn't suit me. It made me think, and my thoughts consisted of Wednesdays from my past. I did not want to think of Wednesdays.

"Hey, why don't you eat something?" she finally said, returning me to Thursday, to today.

I shook my head, unable to speak for a moment. Then, I cleared my throat, coughing up spit and throttling it down again. "No, I'm not hungry. I sweat." My voice was coarse, as if I were tired and worn out, though I was truly feeling fine.

She rolled her eyes. I imagined a torture device, a wheel with a person tied to it, endlessly rolling. What was wrong with me?

"Hey, you look like you were just attacked or something," Melina noticed. This time, I rolled my eyes.

"Yeah, duh. In the past thirty minutes, I was pounced on, dragged, kicked, almost raped, but then I escaped and you and every single person here didn't seem to notice."

She was swallowing again. It annoyed me, to watch her chew and swallow. Finally, she spoke. "Good point."

My excitement was wearing off. I needed to bustle through the crowds in the mall, shop for accessories, and forget about what happened in the past, weeks ago, yesterday, or even this morning. Distractions were necessary to spoil time. Waiting in an awkward silence for Melina to finish eating was not a distraction; it allowed me to focus, to concentrate, and to remember.

"Hey, what would you say if I was really attacked?" I started to speak again.

"You are terrible at making conversation," she claimed, rather than answering me.

I tried again. "Tell me."

She wasn't looking at me. She was looking at her food and taking my talks lightly, as if I weren't desperate. Well, I was. I was desperate, but she didn't know it. She didn't say what I wanted to hear. She lazily drewled, "I don't know. You're so weird."

I felt hot, almost choked by my black coat. I managed to take it off, then my scarf and my hat. The red
walls here weren’t helping against the heat I was feeling. Maybe the warmth of the food managed to swim its way towards me. Maybe, I was loony, and turning into Blanche Dubois.

“What if I were killed?” I spouted randomly again.
She was indifferent. “ Wouldn’t care.”
“Kidnapped?”
“Oh well.”
“Abused?”
“Yeah right.”
“Raped?”
“We already went through that, didn’t we?”
I wanted to stop there. I was about to stop there, but then I blurted out, “What if I was molested when I was a child?”

This time, she stopped eating and stared at me square in the face. I gazed back at her, absent-mindedly wondering how she would look if she were thin and if she were to have nose surgery. I waited patiently for her to blink and look away, but she didn’t. Sweat broke out behind my neck, and I told myself to calm down. To remember my promise. To remember that I could trust no one. I could tell no one.

“That isn’t funny,” she said seriously. Why was she concerned? Why, now, after all of the horrible things I’ve just told her, does she care about this? I was getting angry, but instead of screaming, instead of throwing a tantrum, I laughed.

“ I’m just kidding, Mel, calm down.”
She sighed and shook her head. I continued smiling awkwardly, until she was done eating.

At night, when I was home and comfortable, I said hello to my mother. She went to bed, telling me to sleep as well. Instead, I took a shower. In the blue bathtub, as the water ran loudly against my pores and my damp hair, I closed my eyes. I didn’t look at myself as I scrubbed my skin over and over again. Soon, the steaming water was gone, and I was freezing. Hesitantly opening my eyes, I grasped my pink towel and wrapped it around my body. The white tiled floor became wet as soon as I stepped on it and the mirrors were fogged, but even then, I could see my bare, red, and raw skin. Rash and goose bumps spread across my shoulders my throat, my arms, my collarbone; I was engulfed in scarlet. I stared at myself, my pink lips, my flushed cheeks, and my sunken eyes. There was water on my face, but I could still taste the salt of dry tears and the mascara that had not quite washed away. My eyes burned, but I couldn’t look away from my hazy reflection. Suddenly, before my eyes, my red skin reverted into charcoal stains and fingerprints, my body a spotted figure of pain.
**Untitled**

he dragged her by the legs
across our living room floor,
her skirt rode up and her hands
desperately tried to keep it down -
the kids are watching
and all I could think was,
how embarrassing, seeing
my mother's underwear.

they say that if you put a rat
in a cold pot of water and heat it
he won't try and get out.
I can't remember the pot being cold.
I can't remember the pot being warm.
all I can remember is when it
boiled over.

---

**tim durkin**

**Nina Simone**

The moment I tasted the chill night air,
the instant the smoke hit my tongue,
I inhaled, it was decided.

I wanted only quiet, but the distant rumblings
of the apparatus groaned around me.
I hymned a roar from the inner depths,
my dark core expanding and contracting again.

They heard me but didn't stop, the gears
kept clicking into place. The shrieks of dying birds
chimed back, so I sang deeper into space.
Sinclair didn’t know anything about fancy spirits. She opened her mouth and pushed out any word she could think of: “Beer?”

“Beer?” Richard said, like he had spotted Beer across the room and had not seen him since college.

Startled, Sinclair tried again: “Vodka?”

“Do you like iced tea?” Richard asked. By this time, the waitress was eyeing her as if she wanted her to make up her mind already.

“Sure,”

“A Long Island Iced Tea and a Mark and Coke,” Richard said. The waitress walked away as if conflicted.

“She must be jealous,” said Sinclair.

The drinks continued through the evening and so did Richard’s dry jokes, which seemed to moisten with each swallow. This is a man who gets finer over the course of a night, Sinclair thought. There’s a saying for that.

As he was speaking, the flow into the bar began. Sinclair’s flirtatious fatigue accepted Richard’s curling remarks and mingled with the fantastic moody of gentlemen that presently appeared: the lanky ones with oval glasses and opaque lenses that hid their business greediness; the homely ones in three piece suits drinking scotch into the late night trying to elude the miusus; the old professors with grey hair and tweed suits with leather elbows; the younger, crease-free faces talking to the professors, who name dropped Nietzsche and Proust; the lonely writer at the bar with a pencil in one hand and a Jack and Diet in the other, the vintage foradora sitting passively on the back of his head; and the one with the mustache in front of her; she wanted him to say more things with that jazzy voice of his. “Want to get out of here?” he said. He rose and she rose with him.

The darkness of Enniscient Street would have been a cold, stumbling feet to maneuver without Richard’s arm around her. The street lights’ blur on the sidewalk reminded her of a movie scene in black and white. Two brown port bottles appeared ahead, developed white labels, turned in stounced nuns who scarred them with holy eyes as they went by. They came upon a park, the one with the merry-go-round that she used to squeal with joy on as a younger girl.

“No do you need to rest a minute?” Richard asked.

Sinclair giggled.

The two sat down on the edge of the merry-go-round, whose mechanisms felt like they shifted into gear just as she thumped down. She scouted towards the center so that her new shoes wouldn’t drag in the dirt.

“We’re spinning,” she squealed.

Richard laughed so distinguishably. He touched her hair and her half-closed eyes, her red lips like rose petals.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said.

He went in for it like they do in movies. The ride felt like it was going faster and faster, faster, faster. And then she woke up, the sky still dark. She was alone. The blurred world seen from the merry-go-round settled into place; the merry-go-round suddenly stopped.
muriel moore

Hey, You

Hey, you,
Who long so desperately
to be pressed to the matching pieces
of someone else.
Who have never been quite close
enough
to nothing
to be something.
You, who hope that your structure,
too well concealed for your taste,
will be steady and strong
when pushed to distinction.
You, who wonder
if reclaiming your yards of skin
with ink and silver
would make you more your own,
or just other.
You, who hate
that you feel like dough in your own hands,
but, if you pushed yourself, you'd admit
that it's not in a hateful way—
You are kneadable but unkneaded,
leavened in a way you fight,
but a way you live with.

You, who search your face
For family or strangers
whose features you know,
and wonder if their mirrors look like yours.
Who earmark your flaws for later review—
tailed as possible reasons
why no one is reaching for you.
Who chew your way up to acceptance
only to shove yourself back,
thrashing against the idea
that you might be in some way beautiful,
because this cannot possibly be you
completed as you were meant to be.
Hey, you.
the hell with it. I'll buy the whole damn multipack for the pink one
on a sticky summer day in the air conditioning of a Target
the bite of a fresh 27
sloughing my taste buds with granules of sugar fished from the bottom
of a coconut ice coffee
( the warmth of a body behind mine )
glass ash trays wiped chlorox clean
a shamrock shake.
(my mother's voice on my voice mail)
the 2 dollar extra all-natural minimalist style soap dispenser, thank you
America
thank you for consistency
thank you for stuff
for when you can't get the Things

Looking at Life through Rose-Colored Eyes!

A pre game for a meal, or two.
why does everyone look so incredulous when you arrive high?
dump a cup of coffee on your dried brains,
do they know? they know. how could they know?
prove it.

"Everyone is hoping to catch one of their own!" remarked Simon Woods, a
local bait-shop owner. Over the past few days the number of boat rentals in
the area has skyrocketed, as people take to the water in search of a similar
creature. And, the spending which the death of this nigh-immortal beast has
stimulated "certainly comes as a relief in this recession," said Woods.

“My wife has started introducing me as the world’s greatest fisherman,”
blushed Bret Shepard – one of the anglers responsible for the catch. Shepard
says that it was on his line that the behemoth creature, which had swum the
seas since the collapse of Rome, finally asphyxiated on the deck of a motor-
boat. “It’s just really cool that we were able to see such an incredible thing, and
to share it with the community.”

“I wonder what it tastes like,” remarked one onlooker who was present for
the catch, grinning playfully at the sight of the mutilated beast. “I bet it tastes
nasty.” remarked another, making a face at the massive form lashed to the
pier. “I guess we’ll never know,” shrugged a third.

Next week: An exclusive interview on destructive psychology, with Dr. Step-
en Graham. Are people naturally prone to cruelty?
j.b. garber

Father Native
I carry a book near my left breast, walking
through the field of hot dust that's coughed
from what many call The Heavens. Men dressed as deserts
tiptoe with homemade scarves and teary eyes,
brushing me apologetically as they fall from sight.

I read to the men who strangle. The men who kill so
intimately that they blush in the act. They press against
the breathless other, an unfamiliar man,
gripping him with white knuckles,
squeezing him, feeling him with the same
dirtied fingernails and scarred hands
that wives and daughters and sons once felt.

Only soft words leave the book --
only that which may not be hurt.
The soldiers make fists to grab at the fantasy.
The wounded feel the hums like the voice of a lover.
The dead stay silent in solidarity.

jennifer thibodeau

To Be Dead
To be dead must be easy, unless
of course you die in front of a mirror,
and then you have to look at yourself all dead,
and blue and bloated because that happens.
When I found my grandfather dead he was
in front of the television, and I
wondered if he was embarrassed because
everyone on "Nick at Night" could see him.
I know for sure he would have been upset
if he was dead in front of Murder She
Wrote, he had a thing for Angela Lansbury.
But it was his five-year-old granddaughter
who discovered him. And I thought he looked
beautifully like he always did at the TV.
buddy doit

ADHD Mornings

So if all the badass mother fuckers get karma'd down to roaches by the natural flow of reincarnation. And then if I got down there I so would be a roach fucking roach battling the likes of jack the ripper and the texas chain saw massacre guy (who's from Wisconsin creepily enough) but they would be roaches to so yah know maybe we'd just be like fuck off.

-Butch.

Coding nights
bit bytes and bugs
fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck.

The art of the american haiku must in fact remain aesthetic while its people may not

Bushido Bohemia Bellruse
all except the last
most abstract
one for the gentleman
two for the starving artist
three for all girls and ladies
bringing new flowers in the early hours.

Sanity->
Another drug binge
Brings on independence
freeform artwork
is homework
can you hear me now professor
wait for it
Timothy Leary.
MATT: 15, is sitting on a beanbag couch playing Call of Duty on his Xbox. There is a half-empty bag of Doritos on the table in front of him. Battlefield sounds (gunfire, etc.) throughout.

MATT: So uh... I remember this one time, in probably kindergarten? It was, um... [shakes fist at camera] Yeah. Kindergarten, on the playground. Or maybe the sandbox. Yeah, I was in the sandbox with some—

MATT: No! Die! Ugh—some other kids, and we were, you know, just digging around, having fun, when this girl comes over—Oh, hell yeah! Suck it! That was sick. She was like, in a different class, but I had a crush on her, I think. I don't know, she was cute. She had this crazy hair, all curls, you know. And—God! No! Come on—sorry, hang on a sec. [More furious button-mashing] And I think she was funny, maybe. It's hard to remember. But I was in the sandbox and she came over, and she said, "Matt, come here, I got something for you." And she had her hands cupped over each other, like she was hiding something inside, like this [awkwardly tries to demonstrate hand position while continuing to play game, fails]—well, I can't show you, but you get it. She kept saying, "come here, come here." So I did, I said "Okay—" that was her name, Maria—I said "Maria, what's in there?" And she leaned in real close, so she was almost breating in my ear, and she whispers, "I got a bee." Wait—Shit! No no no... God dammit! Come on, get him!—ughhh. I'm allergic to bees, right? Like deathly allergic, I get hives and have trouble breathing and stuff. And she says it again, "I've got a bee in my hand!" And she starts waving her hands in my face—yeah! This little girl, who was at that point the greatest love of my life, you know, with her damn hair and everything; suddenly turns out to be a crazy psycho murderous bitch. And she's trying to kill me. So I ran! I ran and ran, and I was crying and I couldn't see, right, so I tripped on something and fell, and I scraped up my hands, and suddenly this girl is on top of me—literally, she's kneeling on my chest, and I can't get up, and she's got her hands right in my face, and I'm crying and begging her, let me up, let me up, don't let it out, stop it. And right then she opens her hands. And you know what fell out? One of those goddamn helicopter seeds. She didn't have a bee at all. She got up and laughed and ran away like it was a big joke, to pretend you were about to kill someone. [Grenade explosion, Matt's character on screen is killed. The television is covered in blood. "Game Over" appears.] Shit, I'm done. That's it. [Leans over to get some Doritos]. What are you still doing here? Do you want to play, or what?
sarah perillo *First Communion*

I wouldn’t say it dissolves, the word suggesting too smooth a transition from solid to liquid—
No, there are chunks, irregular, dry, coming apart in my mouth like wet newspaper.

While gray faces intone heavy hymns, I peek behind the altar to find the wine poured from a plastic gallon of Welch’s.

I wander outside in my white lace dress like so many cobwebs. Wild grapes grow at the back of the churchyard, some poking through the chain-link fence.

They burst in my mouth, a cold, sweet flood, and from somewhere I hear the cooing of doves.
The girl’s name was Caroline. She was sure. That had been his daughter’s name. Well, first, it had been her ex-girlfriend’s grandmother’s name, but then it had been his daughter’s name. He had not wanted to name his daughter Caroline. He had never even met his ex-girlfriend’s grandmother. After much debate, they had decided to name the baby Margaret if it was a girl and Brian if it was a boy. But then, when he missed his daughter’s birth because he was watching the Kentucky Derby at Shamrock Bar, his ex-girlfriend decided to name the child Caroline anyway. In the end, it hadn’t been worth it: the horse, Tejano Ron, who was supposed to be a sure thing, didn’t even place.

This Caroline, the bus Caroline, wore a pink top the color of cotton candy and carried a purple duffle bag. She boarded between two gray suits, a slender and lanky girl with peach skin and flushed cheeks. Her hair was red and brown and gold and magnetic. He hoped she would sit next to him, but she settled three rows in front of him. He shifted in his seat to see her better, then tried not to look at her. Not to be too obvious. He glanced at his cell phone and flipped it open and shut a couple of times before shoving it back in his pocket.

She had freckles spreading across her upper back. A strand from her Auburn bun curled behind her ear. He could see the arch of her clavicle from where he sat. The man in front of him raised his newspaper and blocked his view. He craned his head to the side, searching for the pink. He slid, casually, from his window seat towards the aisle.

He closed his eyes and inhaled, searching through odors of coffee and sweat and rubber for something sweet, for a trace of her. He imagined that he found it: a combination of baby powder and lilac.

He hadn’t seen Caroline since she was three weeks old. Back then, leaving had seemed like the only rational choice. His ex-girlfriend, Bridget, had not put on any makeup that day. Not even lipstick. Caroline’s wailing had begun the moment Bridget collapsed on the couch for a nap. He’d been eating a sandwich in the kitchen when Bridget yelled that it was time. “I don’t climb on top of myself to get pregnant. I can’t do everything.” Fifteen years later, her weary voice still echoed. He had placed his sandwich on the counter and gone to the nursery. He remembered pausing at the door, staring at the little pink person bellowing from beneath a periwinkle blanket. She looked so fragile. He had imagined reaching into her crib to pick her up, grabbing the infant by the arm, and tending it off by accident. His sandwich made its way back up his throat—the taste of bologna, Swiss cheese and mustard. He’d scanned the room frantically, looking for something, anything, to quiet the child. When he realized there was nothing he could do besides pick her up, he panicked. He reached for a bag of diapers under her crib. There were three left. He shoved them in the closet and went downstairs, announcing that Bridget needed to tend to her daughter because he was making a diaper run. He kept up the pretense until he entered the 7-Eleven. There, he bought a pack of Carmels and a lottery ticket, got in his old Chevy and just kept driving.

The Caroline on the bus was not strikingly beautiful, yet her looks were lovely, rounded and kind. He noticed her narrow, slender wrists. One had a beaded pearl bracelet around it. He hoped she had not been told she was average her whole life. He wished something funny would happen in her book. She would have a striking smile, dimpled like her mother’s. He willed the edges of her mouth to curl. Perhaps she would even release a delicate laugh under her breath. Mostly, her lips remained pursed or, sometimes, a little parted, as if at any moment a whistle would escape.

He prayed she would be getting off at his stop. Maybe she was planning to go grocery shopping. She would come up to him in his checkout line at McKenn’s and ask him where the dishwashing soap was. He would lead her right to it. He would show her the way.

She was rummaging through her purple duffle now. Pulling out white tights, a leotard and hair ties. A dancer! He wondered if she had any solo performances. Maybe he should try to attend. He would bring her flowers. Lilies. There had been a vase of lilies in her nursery.

If he could just talk to her. If he could just apologize. If he could just explain. He knew Bridget had probably told her all kinds of lies about him—she tended to exaggerate. She tended to see the worst in people. If Caroline could just hear his side of the story. He would tell her about the time he had gone back for her. Two years after her birth.

He was ringing up a mother’s groceries. Her child had been sitting in the metal shopping cart, two chubby legs swinging from her seat. She had been eating an animal cracker and staring up at him. He had helped the mother load the bags into her car. Then he had walked straight to the bus stop, three hours still left on his shift. He remembered stopping to pick up diapers and animal crackers. “My daughter goes crazy for these things,” he had said to the clerk, pointing at the crackers. He would have presented the diapers to Bridget, like a medal. “Just got a bit lost,” he would have laughed. Bridget would have found this funny—eventually. But the apartment, his apartment, had been empty. The walls stripped. Even the poster of Wrigley Field over the fireplace was gone. If Caroline could just know this, she would forgive him.

He closed his eyes. Her voice would be soft when she forgave him, not nasal or shrill like her mother’s. Then, as if he had willed it to happen, Caroline spoke.

“Hi, Dad.” Her voice was airy and sounded younger than he had expected. Dad. She’d called him Dad. He kept his eyes closed, feeling his blood warm. Hi Caroline. Hi, my sweet child. He opened his eyes. She was not looking at him. She was speaking into a cell phone. He wanted to correct her. To show her that her dad was not on the other end of that phone call but here, on the bus, watching over her. Protecting her. The bus pulled to a stop. It was his stop, but he remained in his seat, his heart thudding. A woman in a crimson sweater, sitting directly across the aisle from Caroline, stood to exit. He rose to his feet and slid into the vacant seat. He sat to the left of his daughter now, nothing but the gap of the aisle between them. She was still calling the person on the phone Dad.
"It's 3515 Wisconsin Avenue. Can you meet me there?" She was silent for a moment. Then, with relief, "Thanks, Dad! I can't believe I forgot them! He was staring at her, craning his head to the side and peering. She glanced up at him, the phone wedged between her shoulder and ear. He smiled at her and she looked away. He'd expected her to recognize him. To hang up on whatever imposter she was calling her father. She turned her head towards the window and lowered her voice.

"Okay, I'm almost there. I'll see you soon."' A silence as she listened. "Great. Love you. Bye," she hung up and he breathed a bit easier. He noticed her ears, small and curved, with an attached lobe. She got that from me, he thought.

She began to notice his staring, a crease etching in her forehead, above a mole by her eyebrow. She looked as if she was trying to solve an equation. She was probably good in math. He had always had a gift with numbers. Even the probability stuff, although his track record with the horses didn't show it. She kept glancing at him and he realized that he, himself was the equation she was trying to solve. He smiled again and her lips parted slightly. She looked away, and then, in small increments, brought her eyes back to him. She was biting her bottom lip now. Her goose-bumped left leg began to jiggle. Her deep blue eyes grew wider.

He nodded at her, silently pleading for her to recognize him. Yes, here he was. Her father. Sitting right here. He couldn't take it. He needed to hear her.

"Hi, Sweetie," he said, lifting his hand. Caroline's eyes narrowed and she frowned. She began to look around the bus. It was crowded. The only other seat was to her right, closer to the window. She slid into it, away from him. Now there was an aisle and a seat between them. She was moving further away. He couldn't help himself.

"Caroline," he whispered. "Caroline."

"You have the wrong person. Sorry," she had acknowledged him. Finally, looked right at him and spoke! He grinned at her.

"Caroline, we have so much to talk about."

"That's not me," she turned her body away from him.

"Listen, honey, how about I come to one of your performances?"

She twisted her head towards him. She saw her swallow. The bus slowed and she stood. This was her stop. Without looking at him she reached for her bag and walked towards the exit. She had not even bothered to say goodbye. He sat back in his seat, fiddling with the lowest button of his clean white shirt. It would be okay. He would try again tomorrow. He rocked forward and back. Forward and back again.
But what if he’d scared her?

He leapt to his feet. He couldn’t lose her. The bus crawled towards a red traffic light. “Stop. Hang on,” he called to the driver, “I need to get off.” He sprang to the sidewalk, turning his head in all directions. Desperately searching. He saw the purple bag a block away and he set off after it. A “Washington School of Ballet” sign came into view and he quickened his pace.

“Caroline! Wait!” She glanced over her shoulder and when she saw his face, she gave a kind of yelp. She was running now.

“Caroline! Please, honey. It was so long ago. Don’t be upset. I wasn’t ready before. Caroline!” He jogged after her, her auburn bun bouncing furiously and unraveling onto her shoulders. It was like a game they would have played when she was younger, Daddy try and catch me! He was faster than her. He was gaining. They were almost to the dance studio. Caroline glanced backwards and tripped, falling to the cement sidewalk. She was on the ground and he ran up to her, reaching out his hand. “Caroline! Sweetie, are you okay?” Her elbow was scratched. She rolled away from him.

“I’m not Caroline,” she yelled into the sidewalk. “I don’t know who that is. Please stop. Please.” He moved to pick her up from the ground but she pushed herself away from the sidewalk before he could touch her. She was crying. He had the urge to wrap his arms around her and make everything better. He moved closer to her and she backed away from him, shaking her head. She saw something behind him and her expression changed.

“Hey!” A man’s voice came from behind him, harsh and loud. “Get away from my daughter!” He turned as a man in a pinstriped suit and blue tie moved between him and Caroline. In one hand he carried a pair of worn pink slippers.

“Dad,” Caroline said. She reached for the man’s arm, and the man put his hand on her shoulder.

“Are you okay? What’s going on?”

Caroline nodded, then shrugged. She kept her hand on his arm.

“What the hell are you doing?” the suited man said to him. “Who are you?” It was silent and he turned to the girl. Natalie, who is this?"

“He was on the bus. I don’t know,” she whispered.

“Caroline,” He mumbled. He took a step back, squinting at her.

“What? What did you say?” The man in the suit was guiding Caroline to one side, shielding her from her true father.

“Her name is Caroline, not Natalie.”

The man stared at him. “Stay away from my daughter. Do you hear me?” A blue vein throbbed in the man’s neck.
"She's my daughter," he said. "I couldn't be there for her before, but it's not too late. I'm here now."
The man in the suit gaped at him, his cheeks pink. He could hear Caroline breathing loudly. He looked at her. "I'm sorry. We have so much to say to each other. We can go to my house. But first, tell him your
name is Caroline."

"What are you talking about?" Her voice was much higher than before.

"Go to the studio, Natalie."
The man kept staring at him. "Go and tell them to call the police."
She didn't move. She stood staring at him, biting her lip. "Now, Natalie!" He looked at the girl, at her once spiraled bun, now a heap of loose strands on top of her head. Couldn't she recognize him even a little bit? Maybe if he showed her his ear lobes she would see.

"My name is Natalie." She stared at him, her hands in fists at her sides. She was moving towards the studio but looking him in the eyes. "I am not Caroline. I am not your daughter and you are not my father."

He shook his head and took a step toward her. The man in the suit raised an arm. "Go now, Natalie! Hurry!"
The man handed her the shoes. She turned and ran toward the building. He froze. He put his face in his hands. I am not Caroline, she'd said. I am not your daughter and you are not my father.

The man with the tie stood glaring at him. "If you turn and walk away, right now, if you never so much as blink in my daughter's direction, then I won't have you thrown in jail."

He closed his mouth. His lips rubbed together like two strips of sandpaper. Her voice reverberated in his mind. He could barely hear the man speaking. I am not Caroline. I am not your daughter and you are not my father. "You have three seconds," the man said, reaching for something in his pocket, perhaps a phone. I am not Caroline. I am not your daughter and you are not my father. He took a step backward and then turned, suddenly, and walked away. I am not Caroline. I am not your daughter and you are not my father.

He began to taste bologna and mustard and Swiss cheese in his mouth. He needed to sit, to think. He had been so sure. He turned a corner and walked into a coffee house with big red couches and brown walls. He collapsed into a chair near the window, scanning the room. He could smell coffee and pastries. Next to the counter, a girl sat at a table typing on a laptop. Her hair was pulled into a ponytail. She looked focused, determined. She was probably writing a paper. She was probably a good student. Her name was Caroline, he was sure.

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I count three times you have promised me forever.
Instead of measuring it in
cliche blocks of curiosities killed,
I want you to tell me
what forever tastes like.

Does it taste like
a guilt-free chocolate cake;
the kind you’d feel
binding to your thighs
as you lick your fingers clean?
Otherwise, you’d discover
that it tastes just as decadent
coming up as it does going down.

Or does it taste like
dollar store pasta and
stale bagels after you’ve
eaten them exclusively
for two weeks straight?
We did that one time when
my dad got laid off and spent
his severance checks, in full, on
Bud Light and Old Golds.

Perhaps it just burns
like French espresso, the
real potent kind that
you’re too proud to silence
with milk and sugar.
Your throat is raw afterwards;
it gives you the shakes and
you don’t sleep for days.
contributor biographies

ashfa abd is a freshman who doesn't know what to tell you about herself. She can tell you that the water she's drinking right now tastes funny, that there are five tabs open on her Google Chrome, that she's listening to "Always Need You" by Melissa Polinar, and that she's feeling something but can't name the exact emotion. When she doesn't get her dose of hugs, she'll end up with a folder of somber stories, some of which she doesn't recall writing.

antarah crawley is a native of Washington, D.C. Find out more about him at antarachrawley.com.

buddy dell stands a chance of becoming a man with all his f-a-c-i-l-i-t-i-e-s intact.

tim dorkin is reluctantly planning a pilgrimage to Edward Abbey's grave.

stephanie fairman will be abroad next year and will miss Wooden Teeth. Period.

david felton is awful. He's just awful.

j. k. guth is signs with his initials because it makes him feel fancy. His mother wants to put all of his writing on the refrigerator. Please do not show this to his mother.

leah lawler is a junior theatre major, with a concentration in partying & bullshit.

mariel mcren will one day know something about herself.

rebecca mclure is a Junior majoring in English and Creative Writing. She loves fairy tales and children's literature especially Strega Nona, Go, Dog, Go! and the profound poetry of Shel Silverstein.

amanda newman is a junior majoring in theatre and minoring in music. She is very active in both the theatre department and student theatre organizations, and has been recently seen onstage in the New Plays Festival, Much Ado About Nothing, The Cure at Troy, and James and the Giant Peach. She loves tea, London, gin & tonics, and in all actuality should probably be an old English woman. I believe in Sherlock Holmes; Moriarty was real.

sarah guilio aspires to someday be a crazy cat lady. She also wants to live on a boat. She's unsure whether the two are mutually exclusive.

rachel planer is a Communication major who loves rappers from Atlanta and fine dining. She always wants to be on a beach.

jesufer ibohdeo was born in Middle Earth, raised in Boston and is now graduating with a degree in Early Modern English History. In her heyday she was known as a fierce competitor on the Thurston Hall Mario Kart circuit. With this first and last publication in Wooden Teeth she can now die happy and would like J Street to cater the affair.