Young Mothers of Venezuela
Leah Rosen and the staff at SASS: Communications, The Student Association, The Marvin Center Governing Board, David McAlevey and the English & Creative Writing Department, and The G.W. Review.

Wooden Teeth is published twice each year and is open to all members of The George Washington University community. Undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, alumni, and staff are encouraged to submit their poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and art. For additional information, please refer questions to:

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Submissions can be left at Marvin Center 431 or sent electronically. All submissions should be typed with name, phone number, and email address. Limit of three submissions per person per semester. If you choose to submit via email, please send a new email for each submission. No literary work is returned, but art will be returned at the request of the artist. If art is not claimed after four semesters, it becomes the property of Wooden Teeth. For more information, including deadlines and selected pieces from this issue and others, please visit our website listed below.

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amanda huminski

Spelunking

Imagine the space between our bodies
and the space between the organs in our bodies.

We are fossils in this room. Negative imprints.
The hollow spaces in your collar bone and ankles
make mountains and tunnels.

Our hands, touching, make bible-promises to
space and we erode. We are a cave.
We leave the vacancies and become spelunkers.

We are not drawings of men extended, we are
holding hands to hips, holding fingers to lips,
holding anything we can grab on to while
everything around us becomes solid.

We are indistinguishable.

Outlines of ourselves.
amy katze

Ode to an Envelope

I pull you out of the mailbox,
your skin wrinkled from rain.
Ink has carved rivers in your face.
My finger rips through the crease
licked by his tongue.

Still freckled with his fingerprints,
you speed from fogged Buffalo, sardined
in a cargo bin with other silent travelers.
A dry rubber band smashes your torso
until you finally come to sleep
inside my tiny, heated drop box.

You relish the warm air.
Then, like a mother having to die
to birth her child,
you face me, forgiving,
as I tear you open
and remove the letter from your grasp.

andrew ratner

Love Poem

Joanna, I'm dipping my hand
Into your hair again.
Please see it my way:
The season's puddled
With endless leaves, which,
Beautiful as they seem,
Are not you. Let me.
Stand where you are, away
With slender fingers.
Take out your hair-tie.

The day's been rattled by the wind:
It's crumbled, dried.
Turned to October night,
Wild above the quiet air.
It licks the east winds
Of your hair.

Wooden Teeth
Early on Saturday
I park my car at the Planned Parenthood.
Then I see them
prostrated on the sidewalk,
arms thrown to the heavens,
crying for my salvation—
the poor soul of my unborn child.
They wave photographs of
headless premature babies,
exposed insides of stillborns,
raw toddlers,
all masquerading as aborted fetuses.
They clink their plastic rosaries
and their eyes bore holes into my breasts.
A teenager shrouded in wool
shoves her bloody pamphlet in my face.
I push past her
her hip is attached to mine.
Her hand on my stomach,
she feels for the pit-pat heartbeat.

Hundreds of gods’ eyes follow my hand
as I open the door to hell.
Old men with beards and vestments
young girls with rusty chastity belts,
they all care deeply about my redemption.
They mourn my soullessness, my sacrilege.
They pray that I won’t spend eternity burning in hellfire.

As I exit the clinic, they cry for my child lost
still brimming with unforgiven original sin.
The shrouded girl is at my hip
promising to pray for me.
My dark, shallow Semitic eyes
stare into her deep eyes,
and I tell her
I don’t need her to pray for me.
I don’t believe in hell.
And I was just picking up my birth control pills,
thank you very much.
I sat at the arrivals gate in Providence for an hour and a half before Harry arrived to pick me up. Everyone else was gone by then, and the rows of connected airport chairs spread out around me, the small hall made vast without people meandering through.

"I thought maybe something happened with the baby," I said as he picked up my bags, after he'd apologized and given me a hug.

"No, we're just that disorganized these days," Harry told me. "I got a late start. Any other bags?"

"Just those two," I told him. "I am only staying for a week." I glanced at his left hand, where the thin gold band pressed into his skin as he held my bags. "I'm sorry I missed the wedding."

"We missed having you there," Harry told me. It wasn't a long walk from the gate to the parking lot, but that was all the time it took to fill me in on the details of their small wedding.

"Was Jeanne upset I couldn't make it?" I asked.

"No, we understood," Harry told me. "It was too bad you were having such a rough time with the business. People kept asking for you. It's funny," he said, "but a few times, it felt more like a reunion than a wedding. A couple of our friends even said we'd been living together so long they forgot we weren't married already."

We drove out to the new house near the bay, catching up. It had been five years since I'd last seen Harry, and nearly six months since we'd had a proper conversation on the phone. Getting ready for a baby will do that, I guess.

"So it could be any day now," I said. "I had to shout so he could hear me over the roar of the engine and the road. He must still have been looking for a more baby-proof car to replace the Jeep." "Yep. Any day," Harry told me. "We both appreciate you coming now. Jeanne's pretty nervous, and I don't know anything about babies."

"Well, me neither," I warned him.

"Right," Harry said, "but the company will mean a lot to her. It's hard, I think, because we haven't met anybody besides the people at the College yet. We definitely haven't met anyone she's gotten friendly enough with to come to the hospital with us. I trapped my hand around the door handle so that I wouldn't be jerked around so much when he downshifted."

"I'm sure she's really missing her mom these days," I said. He nodded slowly. "There's that, too," Harry said. "My dad's coming up in a couple weeks, but he just can't make the trip right now. Besides, he's no good with this stuff. So, anyway, you can see what a difference it makes, having such a good, old friend here." He glanced over at me. "I'm really glad you came, Nessa. We've really missed you."

When his eyes were back on the road, I scrunched further down in the soft mass of the passenger seat. I had the excuse of being tired from the plane ready, if he asked. When I laid my head against the plastic window at just the right angle, I could see the road stretching ahead without the side of the windshield getting in the way. Objects, the mirror in front of me cautioned, may be closer than they appear. I glanced over at Harry, and then I closed my eyes. The mirror had no idea.

That night, Harry and Jeanne and I sat out on the rough cement rectangle that passed for a porch on the front of their new house. It was what my dad would probably call a stoop; to me, it was just a glorified top step with a patch of outdoor carpet spread across it and some folding chairs clustered close together.

Although it was almost dark, from where I sat Jeanne's pregnant belly seemed to take up nearly half the size of the rest of her small frame. I wondered if it was possible she might be having twins, but I decided not to ask. From where I sat, one baby was bad enough.

"It has a yard and a finished basement," Harry was telling me. He and I were sipping white wine and Jeanne was clutching a lemonade, looking forlorn. "We thought that'd be best for starting a family. The place is a little run down, but I think we were lucky to find it. It'll be awhile before Jeanne goes back to work, but the rent's pretty low and we should get by on my teacher's salary for a few years."

"Yours! So you're definitely doing the whole mom thing?" I asked Jeanne. She nodded. "There aren't a whole lot of options for day care up here," Jeanne said. "And to be honest, I'm looking forward to it. We have a little money saved, and Harry will be working at the College." She leaned forward. "I'm sure it sounds foolish to you, Nessa, but like the idea of being a stay-at-home mom."

I sat back slowly in the wooden folding chair. Harry had written about his wonder, in one of his recent letters, at what he called the flashfloods and sudden earthquakes of Jeanne's pregnancy. I wondered if this was the main event, or just the first tremors predicting some later outburst.

"I don't think that sounds foolish," I told her. "I don't know why you think I would, either. I think it sounds like a good plan for the two of you, for where you are. I think you'll be a great mom," I added. She beamed at me, all the force in her look completely gone.

"The front step is broken and evidently the attic leaks, but I can fix that," Harry said, going right on as though he hadn't heard Jeanne's words. I knew he had, though, because as soon as I'd started talking Harry had laid one of his hands over one of hers, and she was quiet. The dull gold..."
of his wedding band continued to catch the sunset light despite the quickly deepening dusk.

"Maybe I'll hire one of the students to come out and help on the weekends," Harry went on. "There's not much else for them to do. I'm sure some of them will want some extra beer money."

"It must be frustrating for them when it's so cold," I said, "and they live so close to the beach."

I kept watching his wedding band as Harry ran his hand over his close-cropped hair, then let it fall back to the armrest.

"Yeah, it's pretty barren out there now, and over the winter," Harry said. I saw a shadow move to his shoulder: her right hand, the one without the ring. "Desolate, I should say," Harry corrected himself. "Never say 'barren' near a pregnant woman," he told me. I laughed, even though Jeanne didn't. I didn't know what the problem was. Infertility didn't seem to be something she struggled with.

"Excuse me," Jeanne said, planting her feet in a wide stance on the floor, and she half-pushed, half-dragged herself out of the chair. "I'm going to lie down for a while." At the doorway she glanced back at us. "It's getting dark," she said.

"We'll be in soon, hon," Harry told her. "Anyway, it's too hot in there to have wine." Jeanne disappeared inside the house, and Harry and I sat alone, together, for the first time in nearly five years.

"You'll have to excuse her," Harry said. He'd let his voice fall low, almost faint, just the way I remember him doing all those nights in college we sat up together, talking about nothing in particular, drinking Jameson and playing cards. Now, I thought, he might just be worried about Jeanne overhearing him. "She really is happy to see you," he said.

"Are you sure about that?" I asked.

"She's just scared, about the baby," Harry told me. The light had fallen so far that even the glint of the gold ring had begun to fade, and I could find only the dimmest outline of his sharp, pale jaw when I searched the air.

"What is she afraid of?" I asked, sounding more scornful than I'd meant to. "People have babies every day."

"Wouldn't you be?" Harry asked. It seemed the light would never fall so completely that it would hide the end of the world that rested on his ring finger.

"I never thought about it," I said after a minute.

"Well, you might someday," he said. I didn't answer.

"Anyway," Harry said quietly, long time later, "she's worried about something going wrong. Me, too," he added. I didn't know what to tell him, so I slowly navigated the darkness with my hand until I found our wine bottle on the floor. Once I returned it, a glass lighter, I heard Harry pick it up and pour also. I'd bought at least the time it took to drink this glass of wine to keep sit-

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It seemed the light would never fail so completely that it would hide the end of the world that rested on his ring finger.

“I’m writing again,” Harry said into the stillness. “So I suppose it’s productive anxiety, if nothing else.” I laughed at him.

“Anything good?” I asked.

“Mostly crap,” Harry said. “Crap,” he repeated, lengthening the a. I could hear his lips pull into that thin smile of his. “But a few poems I’m happy with, sure.”

“You’ll have to let me read them later,” I told him. “Think you’ll have time to write once classes start?” He sighed.

“I thought I would,” Harry said, yawning. “but I was talking to my dad earlier this week, and he said, no chance.”

“Well, I guess he’d know,” I said. “You probably pick some things up after, what, twenty-nine years?” Harry nodded, and was quiet for a moment.

“God,” he said. “My father’s been teaching for as long as I’ve been alive.”

“And now you’re starting to teach the same year your baby’s going to be born,” I said. “You’ve got a real family tradition going.” I took a long sip of my wine.

“See, this is why I miss you, Nessa,” Harry said. His speech was slowing down and growing even fainter. The wine was doing its job. “That would have taken me days to come around to, you know?”

“Sure,” I said, keeping my tone light. “You really ought to keep me around more.”

“Yes, we should,” Harry said, laughing. I shut my eyes at the we.

“How is your dad these days?” I asked, savoring the self-created darkness.

“He does okay,” Harry told me. “I think he’s looking forward to retiring. He seems worn out. He asked about you,” Harry added. “You’ve always been his favorite of my friends.”

“Your dad’s a good guy,” I told Harry. “You should tell him I said hi.”

“Will do. He thought it was great, you being able to come up this weekend.”

“I guess he would,” I said, opening my eyes and drinking again.

The first time I met Harry’s father, I’d been impressed with what a gentleman he was. He took us all out for dinner at a nice Italian place away from campus, and he didn’t talk to any of us like we were just college students. The free meal had been rare enough. Beyond that, though, he had really listened, and it was easy to tell where Harry got his innate sense of diplomacy and quick mind.

Years, and several visits, after that first dinner, Mr. Deegan drove down to help move Harry’s stuff out of the dorm before graduation. I’d gone down to Harry’s room to see if he needed any help packing and found it empty. When Mr. Deegan came in, he found me fast asleep on Harry’s stripped mattress.

“Nessa?” he asked, shaking my shoulder gently. I sat up quickly, rubbing at the mattress lines embedded deep in my face.

“Sorry, Mr. Deegan,” I said. “I didn’t mean to fall asleep. I was looking for Harry.”

“Oh,” Mr. Deegan said, then grinned. “Do you meet him here often?” I must have looked mortified, because he dropped his grin quickly. “Sorry,” he said. “It’s none of my business.”

“That’s all right,” I said. Still sleep-fogged, I doubted I sounded convincing.

“Wait,” Mr. Deegan said. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind. “You’re not his girlfriend, are you?” he asked. I just shook my head. “Well, then I really feel dumb. He’s mentioned going out with one of his friends. I just assumed it would be you.”

“That’s a pretty common mistake around here,” I said, swinging my legs over the side of the bed. “A lot of our friends were surprised. His girlfriend’s name is Jeanne,” I told him.

“I believe he’s mentioned that name,” Mr. Deegan said, slowly. “I hope you don’t mind me saying, Nessa, but I think that’s a damn shame.” I remember just staring up at him.

“Mr. Deegan,” I managed to say.

“Listen, like I say, I know it’s none of my business,” he told me. “And Harry wouldn’t be seeing her if this Jeanine wasn’t a real nice girl.”

“Jeanne,” I corrected him. “And she is.”

“But you’ve been there for him. You’re the only one he talks about,” Mr. Deegan said. “You’ve always seemed inseparable. He doesn’t tell me too much and I don’t ask much more, but I know you’ve stood by him in some pretty tough spots.”

“He’s helped me too,” I said. “He’s a good friend. This year, when I started getting insomnia, he’s stayed up late to keep me company.”

“And how often do you get insomnia?” Mr. Deegan asked, but he said it like a father would, not a doctor. Just like that, I knew that he knew, and something in the way he said the words made it clear there was no lie he’d believe.

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"Every chance I get," I told him instead, and stared at my hands. Mr. Deegan sat down on the other end of the bed, and he looked at me with a level of compassion I'd only ever seen on Harry's face before.

"Does he know that?" Mr. Deegan asked gently.

"I hide it pretty well, now that he's dating Jeanne," I told him. Now that I'd started being honest, I wasn't sure how to stop. "I didn't use to. There's no way he couldn't figure it out."

"Sometimes you have to hit a boy over the head a little," Mr. Deegan told me. "Trust me. In my case, you can still feel the bumps." That actually made me smile.

"I did try," I told him. "But by the time I got the courage to really do it right, Jeanne was already around. He's just not interested in me." He nodded.

"And how interested are you?" Mr. Deegan asked. I bit my lip.

"I'd marry him if he asked me to," I said, looking right at him. "And I'm the one who doesn't want to marry anybody. I felt drunk, saying the words out loud to anyone was new, and to tell this man this secret was terrifying. Mr. Deegan sat back against the cinderblock wall.

"Oh, Nessa," he said. "I'm sorry for my son. Sometimes that's how these things go." He shook his head. "There must be something...if you just told him how you felt..."

"I can't," I said. "I've been his best friend for four years. I've already lost him." I caught a piece of the thick mattress seam between my fingers and ran my fingertips along its ridges. "He comes to me to talk about Jeanne. I knew about them four months before our friends did," I told him. Then I gripped the mattress seam tightly. I remember thinking it might stop me from falling off the bed. "He comes here and he tells me about the family he wants to have and what he wants to do. He told me what he's going to name his kids," I told Mr. Deegan, "and I'm not anywhere in those plans. I know that. I'm not out to hurt anybody," I said. "I won't do that to him."

"Would Harry do that for you, if things were reversed?" Mr. Deegan asked. I shrugged. "I don't know," I said. "I'm sure he'd never let it get this way. He'd know what to do, and he'd do it. But for me, now, this is...this is it. I've just got to wait and see."

"Wait for what?" Mr. Deegan asked.

"For when things change, so I can be there," I said.

The contractions came at eleven the following morning. We reached the hospital on time and there were no complications. Six hours of labor later, Jeanne held her daughter Bria for the first time.

Later in the week, while Jeanne napped heavily and Harry ran out to the store for diaper wipes, I found myself alone with the baby. She breathed with her mouth slightly open, and from time to..."
time her leg would spasm sideways and kick out at the empty air.

"What a beauty," I said, cradling her and leaning back into Harry's thick, scratched leather armchair. "What a beauty you are." The tiny eyes opened and closed sleepily. I touched her nose lightly with my index finger, then moved it to her hand and let her coil her fingers around mine. She was so small and perfect she looked almost alien, as though some infinitely gentle being had been seen a human and proceeded to sculpt a new one with all imperfections forgotten. Her eyes opened again and stayed open, focusing on nothing, but I held her up and looked her in the eye anyway.

"I have a confession to make," I said quietly, her feet pressing into my stomach. "I didn't want you to be born. Not that I wanted anything to happen to your mom, that's important," I added. "And now that I see you here, I'm pretty ashamed of myself." Bria's head began to turn in an odd angle, so I laid her back into the crook of my arm.

"It's nothing personal," I said, running my hand over her dark fuzz. "The trouble is, I've been in love with your daddy for almost ten years, waiting to see if he would ever love your mom. You know, he didn't even get married until he knew you were going to come along.

Bria wriggled and shifted on the chair and wrapped my arms around her.

"But good men don't leave women with babies," I told her. "Whatever else I could say about your dad, you should know he's always been a very good man."

The overwhelming urge to kiss the baby welled up in me then, and I held her up and pressed my lips gently against her forehead. I definable scent of infant—something connected on some deep level with baby powder and Johnson & Johnson shampoo and the sticky plastic tabs on diapers—was spreading all around me.

"You could have been mine," I whispered, "I never wanted a baby or a house in Rhode Island or to be somebody's wife. But I would have done it for your dad, and I know I would have loved it. I would have loved you," I told Bria. My eyes ached, and when I shifted the baby so I could rub them, my fingers came away moist.

"Oh, baby, baby, baby," I said in a sing-song. "You made me cry, little girl." Then I sighed. "Look at that," I said. "You've been out in the world exactly four days, and I'm blaming you for my mistakes." Bria made a little noise, something between a coo and a cry. I stood up with her, feeling how much more of a process that became while clutching seven newborn pounds and four ounces, and was conscious of every breath Bria took against my chest.

I walked her down the hallway toward her mother's room, and looked in on Jeanne's sleeping form. She lay facing me and I focused on her eyes, afraid I'd startle her just by being there if she suddenly woke. The tense, nervous lines of her face had eased, for once, and she looked close to the way I remembered her from college.

***

A few weeks before graduation, Jeanne walked out into the main room of her tiny apartment with a wine bottle and pushed a path through the boxes scattered on the floor. Harry was out someplace with his dad.

"Paper cups. Classy," I said as she sat the cups and bottle on the coffee table.

"Hey, what do you want?" Jeanne said. "This wine, these cups, a Lean Cuisine and a bottle of ketchup are all that's left in my kitchen."

"Well, with those alternatives...cheers, I guess," I said. After a few sips I took a close look at all the boxes that had formed intricate constellations on the floor. "You look pretty well packed. I'm not sure how much help I'll be."

"Oh, there's still lots," Jeanne told me. "I have to go through four years' worth of papers I've kept sitting around, and Harry didn't do such a great job with his stuff. Would you mind going through his boxes, those over there—" she pointed toward a stack near the door—"and just kind of consolidate them?" I nodded. "'He's got stuff everywhere," she added. "I don't know what's wrong with him." I took my cup of wine over with me, and kicked at some of the half-empty boxes. It looked like Harry had picked through Jeanne's apartment, gathered up the things he'd accumulated there, and spread them between about eight more boxes than he'd needed to.

"Yeah, this is pretty bad," I told Jeanne. She'd dragged a heavy box of loose papers into the center of the floor. She laughed, and I settled on the carpet in front of Harry's boxes.

It wasn't until we'd both made some headway on our boxes and paused for a second glass of wine that Jeanne got around to making her point.

"Nessa, has he said anything to you about what he's thinking about the next few years?" she asked. I blinked at her.

"Harry?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said. "I don't know what that means," I said. "Has he said anything? About what?"

"About us," Jeanne said, softly. "What he thinks is going to happen in grad school, after grad school. What he thinks about me." I stared at her. "I know he talks to you about things he won't tell me," she said. "I know there's a lot between you two." She tucked a loose strand of her behind her ear. "And maybe that's fine. This is college, so whatever. But we're about to graduate, and everything's going to change." Jeanne had put her cup aside on the table, and now she sat with her fingernails pressing visibly into her thigh.

"Jeanne, what he thinks about you? He's crazy about you, he loves you. How can you not know that?" I asked. Then it hit me. "Are you asking me if I'm sleeping with Harry?"

"Yes," she said. "Her voice had gone slightly higher. "And if you are, would you stop, please?"

"I can't believe you," I said. "Are you really asking me that? Really?"

She sagged backwards, into the couch.
"No," she said. "I'm not. I know you'd never do that," she said. I stared hard at the carpet for just a second, just to focus. I knew I'd never do it either, and I knew it better than she did. It was somehow easier, in those days, to keep from crying during those conversations.

"You're right," I said. "Absolutely never. Okay?"

"Okay," she said. "Sorry."

"It's okay," I said. "About the other thing—"

"But you have, right?" Jeanne interrupted. "You have slept with him."

I leaned my head back against the pillows on the couch. There was a popcorn ceiling above my head, and I traced mazes around the bumps with my eyes as I answered her.

"No," I sighed. "I'm not lying," I told her when she said nothing. "Harry's my best friend, that's all. That's all he's ever been." By then, I'd gotten so good at covering I knew Jeanne would hear any change in my voice as anger instead of what it was, but I still tried to calm down. I glanced over at her. "You're one of my best friends, too," I told her. "Have I ever slept with you?"

With that one, at least, I got a laugh and a blush out of her.

"See?" I said. "I'm harmless. But you should have said something earlier. How long have you been worried about this?" She swirled the wine in her cup; I could hear it quietly thwack against the paper sides.

"A while," she admitted. "Claire and Danielle were talking to me a few weeks ago, and they thought maybe it was true."

"It's not," I said again. "No part of that is true. Harry loves you and he's happy. And you love him. Right?"

"Of course," Jeanne said.

"Well, there you go," I said. "I'm pretty sure that's most of what you'll need to get by. The two of you are happy. I'd never do anything to interfere with that."

"You should know, I don't blame your mom for anything," I told the tiny girl as I walked her back into the small den. Her head was on my shoulder, her eyes closed again, and I thought she might be asleep. "Or you. You're not going to remember any of this, but I don't know when I'll see you again. I want you to know none of this was anybody's fault but mine." I held her close, and I could feel her heart beating against my skin. Outside I heard a car door shut. Harry had come home. "Can I tell you something else?" I asked the baby. I could hear Harry's feet crunching on the stone driveway. "I came here this weekend to finally tell him the truth. Thank God you stopped me." I kissed the top of her head. "I can't believe I almost did."

Before I left Rhode Island, I called the store and told Josh I was taking a few more days away. It was the slow season and I knew we could afford it. When he asked why, I told him I wanted to go home. He probably knew something was wrong the moment he heard my voice on the other end of the line. There was no kidding around, no complaining about being left to fend for himself in our shop. Just, "Okay, Nessie. Say hi to your folks for me." And finally, "Just relax, okay? Do me a favor and don't worry about things here." Josh has a good-man streak in him, too.

I flew down to South Jersey. It was good to be back with the familiar, the easy. I went back because there's where I went after college, the first time I left Harry behind with Jeanne, and tried to forget about them both. Now there was Bria to forget as well. I hoped this time it would work better.

I drove out to the shore one day at dusk. In high school I used to go out there with my best friend and look for ghost crabs, but now she was somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic on a research boat. For the first time ever, I envied that and wished I could have gone out there with her and seen the open sea and open sky.

Instead, I went down to the tide line and slipped my shoes off. My feet pressed like rubber stamps on the damp, compact sand, giving it stretch marks that radiated from my toes and heels. I stepped around a deposit of driftwood and broken shells to stand directly in front of the water. I waited, braced, for the cold October ocean. There was a wind up that night and it came all the way down the curve of the beach. In the moment before the water assailed my pale bare feet, I made out the skeletal outline of the Ferris wheel, miles away, and noticed the trail of lights over kitchen sinks leading all the way down to it that was the only reality I could find of the houses of the year-round residents.

The ocean was so cold I didn't feel the wave until it was gone, and the next was already on top of me. Seaweed washed up against my ankles, and I fought the instinct to cringe and shake it away. Instead I stood as still as I could and imagined I felt the world turning. There was nothing on the horizon. The water was black, not blue or green, and the sky behind the massive set of stars was black as well. In the face of that enormity, even the stars were no comfort. The moon had dissolved behind a thick cloud, casting serrated shadows along the flat sand. I had dreamed, when I was younger, of a time when Harry and I would come here. Now the cold stars and the black water and the inert arcade that stood waiting for summer were luring me into their nearly-silent world alone.

I just stood there. My feet sank into the soft wet beach and the sand between my toes leaked away, making me lean forward even as I fought against gravity. I knew the world was moving, moving on, because right then with my feet in the ocean I could feel it turn. Before too long I would have no ground left to stand on, and as still as I tried to stay, the earth itself was pulling me forward, relentlessly, against my will.
nikki birdsey

The back of my hand
is paper flat, it's
as if you have
smelted it into perfect,
recyclable metal sheets or
ironed it to fit—
then discarded it, stretched
and thin, on the
floor. Still red from
where you touched it.

You have moved on to your next
design: perfectly shaped
lines and metals into another beautiful
grey flower, each petal the
opposite of me.

I walk out of your house
in muted steps.
I cut regular
blood-dark shapes in
the cracked concrete. I
have already melted into
the trees.

rob grant

_Fucking Sunlight_

The windows are paired.
You had a rough morning.
There are even threesomes to the left.
They had an exceptionally rough morning.
she's sniffed "the living yeast
his bottled citrus zest can't cologne,"
tasted "the gist gentle shading of his lips,"
stroked, "those three rivulets of hair

starting their return to the recently
shaved nape of his neck," and noted
"the greenish tinge of his shave-subcutaneous
darkness," but even the

"three fingers at a time, shuffled off the tip . . .
the cautious contractions in sympathy,
"the faint feeling of stretching it now,
what was started by hand"

—all the pang-inducers
from 'glasswork' (and my other homoeotica)
surd expressions, it turns out:
smoke; "nothing?

why can't we share this man?"
Essie folds her hands, hiding the text;

[the venous pattern shifts on
parallel bones like firework under that thin
skin; edged knuckles press green through
her brownish noise; the music of

Essie ekes out, loud and noisy.]
natasha simons\textit{midnight}
in Pasternak's house, there is no one.
in this house, there is no one.
but there is no future for this doorway.
anyway, my garments afford me
little grace with which to welcome you.

there are eight thousand things
that have broken my heart—
the sink leaking for the third time in as many days, for example.
my utilities take to heart the theory
that repetition can catch catch catch attention.

that has never seemed to work for me.
every corner reveals the lack of you—
but the cotton that surrounds my thought says:
have you left yet? come say goodbye.
have you left yet?

come say goodbye.

\textit{rachel malis}\textit{Mother and Child}

Not in potpourri in your sock drawer
or note taped to your mirror,
but she is in picture frames
on your dresser, desk.
In the kitchen, carefully
refolding the sack of flour
you measure a half teaspoon,
flattening it against the inside
of a baking soda box.
Who taught you how to do these things?

You remind your eleven year-old sister
to brush her hair, pick up dirty clothes.
She never knew her mother, but you
are the one with the greater loss,
old enough to know she was
a person, and not just your mother,
old enough to learn and then forget
her smell. You let your sister lick
the spoon before sending her upstairs
promising to tuck her into bed.

You kick your flip-flops into the closet
that once held your mother's shoes,
white Ked sneakers for work,
tired slippers molded to her feet,
scuffed high heels in patent leather.
Shoes you cleaned out yourself;
the belongings of a woman
still lingering in photographs.
On your nightstand, an empty
erfume bottle remains.
The Fiddle That
dana liebelson
Was Not a Violin
Pressed pudgy fingers against the gut
strings, wanting it only to weep the smallest
melody for me like the old classic records in the chest
with the two brass locks buckled across the top

Stand straight, rosin the bow
harped the taut teacher hired
to rosin my mind
contort my fingers properly to play
linear scales that sealed cracks of creativity
made the music emotionally mute despite
the squall of shrieking strings
Lynching a wild-cat
Parents put me in the basement
locked the door
warned the neighbors

Should have warned me
not to touch the bluegrass records
like running Everclear across my gums and
kissing a coked-up Shiva
I ran straight to classical hell and
told Bill Monroe to save me a seat.

Help me lord
Stretched the sins, junked the Mozart diet
Lusted after the Irish
Love-affairied with the Appalachian
Lipped the jazz
Locked my concertos in the chest
The lucky chumps
I couldn’t just use the gut strings
needed the heart strings too amen
ask Bill
he’s on the third floor
and he gets it.
j.j. lopenta
We eat our soup
At night,
In the dark,
Braiding our hairs in half,
We supp on our cereal,
And doze,
Alive but asleep,
Wit' dose puttering lips,

First Snowfall,
January 2007

andrew ratner
It's been too warm a season
to call this winter,
—but to see snow finally fall,
I forget months of waiting,
even for only an inch or two.

I remember sledding as a kid—
that was winter—
at Blueberry Hill, even if
I hit that patch of ice,
careened and lost my breath.

At least I got it back:
how it came out in busts,
made clouds in the air,
mixing with the cold
& newly fallen snow.

rob grant
dry-lipped responses: a manifesto
"Why is this a poem?" she asked.

A pink pack of Nerds and a lip-gloss rest errantly under a large girl's desk.

"It isn't a poem unless it rhymes," another intruded.
"Or unless it has a set meter, like a haiku."

And why do we fall?
Why fight when no one listens?
Because of lip-gloss.

"I disagree."

And so does the lip-gloss, and Guststein, and the University of Iowa. So do untied shoe laces, and memorable phrases, and possibly math teachers with bird-shit-white hair.

Great 19th-century beards and Eugene Debs and, more than most, a half-empty can of Mr. PiBB

forgotten on a lunch desk.

"So!"

The lip-gloss (pause) is disappointed.
Washing Faces

rachel malis

Until I stopped being a little girl,
my father washed his face next to me
with iridescent wallpaper,
flashing arches, mother-of-pearl.
I hated the cold rivulets
that ran down around to the back
of my neck, finding new paths
to the ash brown wisps
that fell out of my ponytail.

He had a small hole
in the back of his neck,
an inverted scar, a loss.
The pink eraser at the end
of a number two pencil
was a perfect fit when I poked.

He told me the hole
was from being in the army,
not by choice, in the USSR;
from being too miserable,
or too deprived to wash
the hard to reach places.
Infection ensued.

Making me guilty enough
to rub the bar of Dove
into a purple washcloth.
I watched the fibers
turn feather white.

Terrified of the soap's sting,
I scrunch the eyes
and blindly rinsed the cloth.
Blinking, I watched my father
wash, using his hands,
splashing water directly
into his face, not frightened, but angry.
And then, like two deer,
father and daughter in unison
bowed their heads to the sink.
|j. Sleeping it Off in Broad Daylight |

Ringed up juvenile disposition in their tired wasteland eyes, 
Making a go of it in terrifying sweeps of sheeted "wait untils." 
That creaking asleep in the corners, prodigious in its crunch, 
Cranking out our swan songs and improvised melodies 
Into the crotch-less panties of the infinite ether.

The cold, clay-bound dildos of business, 
The vibrators of engineering, batteries long dead, 
The sad cast aside blow-up dolls of law-time taxes, 
And the rival rim-job professions, which are all the same sex of waiting

The Boners... 
Oh, the Boners of our lives, 
All the Boners of our lives, 

Of yours 
And mine, 

Are long since limp in anticipation of the tiny little boner-respirators they will soon require.
contributor

Biographies

The poetry of Nikki Birdseye can be found on p. 24.

Benjamin Chomsky is a photographer from Boulder, Colorado studying English and Creative Writing.

Rachel Delity is thrilled to be graduating this semester that, despite investing a few heart-felt seconds in the idea between L and M streets on Tuesday afternoon, she can’t think of any good one-liners for this space. Instead, she’d like to thank the E&CW Dept. and Prof. Moskowitz, Clair, Pollack, Plott, Combs, Levine, and Fisher for four great years’ worth of their indulgence and advice. Finally, E.B. White was right when he said it’s not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. But Wooden Teeth, in years past and present, has always proven itself good for both.

Ruby Aoubry is a junior Psychology major, Philosophy and Fine Arts minor at GWU. Her dream is to become a freelance photographer for National Geographic. Since she knows that this is an unrealistic aspiration to have, she has decided to take the safer path. She has still to decide what the safer path may be.

Rob Grant is a North Eastern Democrat and is proud of Vermont for electing a self-proclaimed socialist to the Senate in Bernie Sanders. Besides politics, Rob’s other interests are NASCAR, hunting, and catfish noodling.

Ryder Hash is a freshman majoring in nothing and minoring in everything. Ryder realized over the past few years that he can’t help becoming some sort of photographer. Ryder thinks the world is a blurry confusing place, but has discovered that everything becomes simple and focused through the viewfinder of a camera.

Anna Hellions used to think that poetry could save the world. As of late, she’s beginning to have more faith in international soccer and the Food Network.

I is from Milwaukee! He looks forward to writing in French.

Amy Lazo is a junior majoring in Political Communication, although deep down she kind of just wants to be a poet. She would like to thank her family for their love and support (and that also goes for our shih tzu, Desi and Lucy) and looks forward to traveling this summer.

 finalized_birdseye is an undergraduate freshman who grew up in the mountains of Montana. She can usually be found in the courtyard at night, criticizing the pitiful amount of stars in the District. She likes climbing things for no reason. She is a second-degree black belt, but she cannot for the life of her catch a Frisbee. When she grows up, she wants to sail across the world eating fresh sushi in a pretty blue dress. Her deepest fear is that this is not a real job.

Rachel Mals is a senior double majoring in Women’s Studies and English and Creative Writing. After graduation, she will be attending the Master of Fine Arts program at Arizona State University, where she hopes to get loads of sunshine and a great tan while writing poems about cacti.

 finalized_costello is graduating in May and wants to blow this Popsicle stand for someplace new and exciting but has to make some money first. This summer you may find her tucked away in a cubicle or living on a friend’s couch, but if all goes her way, come October she will be living the expat life in Spain while sipping sangria and speaking Spanish swimmingly. She also wants to make her readers aware that sidewalk counselors do exist and it is bizarre and if you would like to counteract these counselors she should look up the Washington Area Clinic Defense Task Force.

 finalized_yang graduated Wittenberg U with a Bachelor’s. (To WU’s Kent Dixon, Paul owes loads of whatever patience, direction, [the occasional ritual] club on the pate; and roles-modeling is paid back in.) *Paul through ’97: teaching, cache-cache, Europe, marriage.* Circa 1997, Paul took a Master’s in Linguistics from Ohio University. *Through ’91: wife’s success, subsequent move to DC.* Recently, graduate study at GW [present tense] seems to be culminating in the examination of reader engagement with postmodern horror (hip-ly super-entitled: “The Kids Are Alright”). Besides a few poems that stuck, Paul has published/presented non-fiction research in Dialectology.

 finalized_lopez is a senior majoring in English, minoring in Music and Empanada Earing. He will be graduating come May. Someone once asked him about his future after graduation. I’ve never seen anyone run away so fast in my life.

 finalized_serious can best be summed up as indifferent to you. Unless you’re a puppy, or Ivanka Trump.