
LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE
FALL 2010





SPECTRUM

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Front cover art adapted from Lauren Finaldi, **Misty**
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Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine showcases the talents of the writers and artists at Northeastern University. All member of the Northeastern community are encouraged to submit original works of poetry, prose, and visual art. For more information, please visit www.spectrum.neu.edu

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Our mission at Spectrum is to showcase the best art, photography, and creative writing that the Northeastern community has to offer. Our contributors are students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Each of our contributors has a unique perspective to offer on life, both during our time at university and what comes after. We live in a time when many people are re-evaluating what is truly important, whether we need to leave our families to find ourselves, as in Lauren Olean's "Bob Arctor," or whether we wish to honor the legacy that our parents have passed down to us, as in Stuart Peterfreund's "Elegy for My Father."

Spectrum has no predetermined theme, but the submissions that find their way to us in any given semester will often have similar threads that reflect the current state of the world and the university. This semester, we explore familiar themes like identity, but also themes of addiction and betrayal, sometimes dark, sometimes humorous as in Timothy Dicesare's "The Player." The photographs in this issue hearken back to a simpler time, when we were children on a Ferris wheel as in Christine Perkins' "36" or to the pleasures of a life lived closer to nature, as in Laurel Schultheis' "Farm."

I would like to thank you for reading Spectrum and helping to support our constant peering into the human soul of our community. Take a moment to relate, to laugh, to question, and don't forget to judge. Your response to this magazine is crucial to our survival as a representation of our community. Discuss your opinions, spread the word. Let us know what you think at spectrum.magazine@gmail.com. Join us at our meetings on Monday nights at 7:30 to help decide what goes into the next issue. If you are an artist, a photographer, a writer, contribute your pieces to Spectrum. We want to represent you, but we need you to engage with us.
Thank you again and enjoy,

Miriam Laufer

Editor-in-Chief

Correction: The photographer for the January 2011 photo in our 2010-2011 calendar is Ben Landsberg. We apologize for the confusion.

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AA & THE HANGOVER THAT WOULDN'T GO AWAY

Sid Phadnis

What time would you like to come in?
I arrive the next day 20 minutes early
And obliviously absent, an empty seat in co-op class.
Siddhant?
I sit up.
Hi I'm Pretty Cute for a 30something Doctor
Where does it hurt more?
The right side I think
Are you sexually active?
Have you kissed anyone new?
February (n.): the month that laughs at your listless love life
Couldn't be? Could it?
Any history of illnesses in your family?
I lied. No.
Any serious medical events in the past?
Another two inches to my nose.
Dr. Slightly Balding and Intimidatingly Tall enters
What's your favorite poison?
Crack.
What do you drink Bud Light? Coors?
The carbonation is free
I shrugged, whatever.
The can hisses seductively
When was the last time you drank?
Two, three weeks maybe.
Cold in my grip
The sip sears its way down
Do you take any drugs?
No[t enough].
My favorite state of mind
Lift it up please.
Nothing like it ever before?
Fuck, I can't even concentrate on writing this poem.
I still have homework and Explosions in the Sky is the only it's gonna get done
but I can barely blink and I wanna Go DJ and
I gotta pee again. Goddamnit.

Christine Perkins



8:23
It's been three minutes since my last trip.
Let me tell you something.
Your brain isn't fully developed until you're 40.
You still have 22 more years to grow.
Vertigo. Tunnel vision. Bed. Now.
9:35am. I can't wipe the grin off my face.
6 days clean.
Reset.
My last Monster.
I'm serious this time.



LADDER TO ENLIGHTENMENT

BEN LANDSBERG

CIRCLE

Stuart Peterfreund

Out at dawn
along the shore
of Cayuga
to skip stones
polished by
a retreating
glacier. I spin
them into the fog:
two skips, three,
out of sight at four,
but still skipping,
hopping, sliding, popping
another three or more times
by the sound of it.

I cannot do that
anymore, or if I tried,
it is my shoulder
joint that would go
hopping, sliding, popping.

Without remorse, and
with no moss, I roll on
to a day when my
wish will be obeyed.
Scatter me here
on this lake shore,
and skip stones,
and skip stones.

LIP SERVICE

Stuart Peterfreund

As they grow snug
around my teeth,
my lips serve notice
to my head that they
are measuring me for
the skull I will become—
a creature who moves
from gestation
to infinite jest.

How snug?—snug as the hands
of the gay salesmen at Delvy's
in the West Village
as they fitted me for slacks
(and would have fitted
my front pockets, had I let them),
all the while humming
their barely audible mantra:
give it up, give it up, give it up.



A PEAR IN THE FINGERS OF A PEAR TREE

Susan D. Mays

A pear in the fingers of a pear tree,

Lamentation 2:20 - 2:23
See, O Lord, and behold,
To whom you have done this!
Alas, women eat their own fruit



A pear in the fingers of a pear tree,
no love nor enemies around, no Babylon,
no squirrels, has so far decomposed
that it's skin has no flesh to grab and
ripples so that it seems one can see the pear's
ribs. The pear's stomach is swollen,
there is no core anymore nor seeds.
The pear tree will not let go though the pear prays
"O, O let me fall that I might explode on the earth,
and that the earth might drink me whole. Let me
return to dust or burn. Ashes to ashes, let me go"
The pear tree is gray, and dumb. It grips stiffly --
"O lord" cries the pear, but no wind comes nor lightning,
not even the sun. The day is gray and dumb.



BIG WHEEL KEEP ON TURNING

Alexandra Legend Siegel

Old birthday cards, forgotten heart-shaped valentines, newspapers with bold headlines. The things they burned in the stone fireplace boiled into black ash as they warmed their hands. Above the hot den of flames, they burned wax candle wicks and steaming incense sticks. In their lives they had burned marshmallows, fingers, cigarettes, hearts. The old toaster oven in the kitchen had burned bread and strawberry pop-tarts. The stove had burned cakes and dinner (which they ate alone). As they watched the things they burned while sitting in the dark living room, Mary waited to see who would be the first to leave.

She closed her eyes and listened to the storm outside before focusing in on her mother's soft humming of the song she was named for, Proud Mary. She listened as proud Mary kept on burning, like old school reports in the fireplace, like fallen crumbs in the oven, like wooden crosses in the south. Her mother burned through stories like logs in the fireplace. She never gave details, she'd just say that she was part of a movement. She'd just say all her records were burned. Her birth certificate burned. Her photographs burned. The ashes were left somewhere on the farm amongst milk-dripping cows and screeching chickens; between the planks of a tree house or the leaves of peach orchards.

Her father was the first to leave, as usual. He said he was going to take advantage of the power outage and take a nap upstairs. Mary could see the frown in his lips, even in the dim light. She could see the rumble in his brow, like thunder. She heard the steps creak, the door close, the bed sag. Her mother continued to hum and Mary kept on burning.

Mary poked at the fire with the iron rod. She turned and turned the logs but the fire was dying. She watched as it struggled for air, as it choked under the weight of the heavy black wood, as it coughed up ash into the black stained chimney. Mary reached behind her for some more newspaper to burn but there was none. And so, with the loss of the great fire, her mother was the next to leave.

Mary could remember studying the Great Fire in elementary school. After the first sentence in her library book—"Chicago was built entirely of wood," she knew what was coming. People always build important things out of wood and are surprised when a fire swallows it all up. Mary was the last to leave.

She stood up suddenly and abandoned her fire tools. The front door was left open, the car in the driveway gone. She knew her mother had taken another one of her trips. Mary ran out into the rain, not to follow her mother, just to run. She ran along the slippery streets. The rain made her clothes heavy, her sleeves stuck to her elbows. After a while her run became a brisk walk as she wiped wet hair from in front of her face. She could see the light in his living room, like a flame, and wondered why his part of town never suffered from the storm power-outings.

He was holding the door open, as if he knew she was coming. She remembered when they were younger and he would wait for her on the front steps, scraping the heels of his sneakers along the edge of the stairs as he sat. Why had she stopped coming back? She wondered this as she stood facing him in the doorway. The ashes of the friendship she had burned seemed to lay between them; a mound of grey and white like his valentines day cards that burned in her fireplace. Her valentines day cards still burned in his heart, she could tell from the fire in his eyes as he pulled her in.

"Cold?" He asked as he wrapped his arms around her shivering limbs. She nodded. "You always were," he commented, with a sigh. "Seven years, Mary." He let go. "What are you doing?"

Her throat burned. Her lips burned. Her stomach burned. Her fingers burned. All the parts of

her body lit up and they burned and burned as she watched him move away. She wanted to kiss him like she had under the noisy jungle gym as kids darted across the moving bridge and sun burned their skin through plastic holes years ago. She wanted to hold his hand and tell him they'd get married with a plastic bride and groom on top of a chocolate cake with burning rainbow candles. Mary wanted to say you're the only boy I've ever loved but instead she said; "You're the only boy that's ever loved me." And his face turned to ash.

"You need to leave, Mary. Forget your way back." She could never forget. It was burned black into her memory, like the black dog that belonged to the neighbors a few houses down that always barked when she sauntered by on her way to see him. She wanted to ask him if he remembered when they'd build a tent in his basement while her mom was on one of her trips, and he'd tell her scary stories until she screamed so hard she forgot about her mom leaving or her dad hiding away in a nap. They'd put a flashlight in the middle, like a campfire and roast marshmallows over the top. She'd always be disappointed when they were just as chewy as when she took them out of the packages and he'd laugh and remind her it was all make believe.

"I thought you'd forgotten already." He sounded defeated. She shook her head. He peered outside, "Stopped raining." He stepped out and she followed. "Want one?" he asked, pulling a box of cigarettes out of his pocket. She shook her head.

Mary remembered when his grandfather died of lung cancer. There was a big article in the local section because he had owned some big snack-food company (crackers, was it?). After that, Mary made him pinky promise never to smoke. "I don't want to go to your funeral before we even have our wedding day," she'd said.

He blew out smoke and offered the cigarette to her again. A few ashes fell across her hand as she lifted it to shake it in reply. "Ow!"

"Sorry." He took her hand and rubbed his thumb along the red burn. "You need to leave, Mary," he said, letting go. As she took her first step off the front stairs and with his back turned to her, he whirled around suddenly. "Happy Birthday, Mary." Then he walked back into the house, the door slamming shut behind him. Mary started her slow walk back home, the sun was falling through the clouds and landing in patterns across the black pavement. When she came home she found her mom humming in the kitchen with all the lights in the house on.

"The cake's a little burned this year, you're lucky it even got made in this terrible storm." She slathered the cake with chocolate icing and licked her fingers as she went. Mary couldn't believe that she'd returned so soon from one of her trips. Maybe it wasn't one of her trips after all.

"I had to make a quick run to the supermarket to get icing. Where were you?" Mary shrugged. "Visiting an old friend." Her mother put the candles in the cake and Mary watched them burn before blowing them out. She couldn't remember the last time they sang "Happy Birthday." Her mother cut her a thick slice of cake.

"Eat up, I'll make us some tea," her mother said and started humming. She danced her way to the stove. A flame must have caught on to Mary's birthday card that her mother had absent-mindedly left on the stove because pretty soon the stove was burning. And the cupboards were burning. And the walls were burning. And the kitchen was burning. And the house was burning. And Mary, she just kept on burning.



What I can give you:
Hugs on the T, Hugs off the
T, Hugs near the T.

A HAIKU

JACKIE GLADSTEIN



PLAY IT

Jason Jedrusiak

Perhaps we should play

Tag
with our bodies
Tag
with our breath
Tag
chase it around our organs
Tag
chase it around our bones
from one spot to the next
Tag
we just miss it as it moves
from one spot to the next
Tag
we just miss it as it plays
from one spot to the next
Tag
we just miss it
as it dances
towardourtoestowardourfingertipstowardourhearttowardtheemptiness
of our thought

Perhaps we should play
It

And chase ourselves
while standing still...

BUTTONS AND CLOVES

Willow Goldstein

SUGGESTION

C.N. Tascio

"Don't be such a mope!"

you said.

And I laughed!

Aloud!

What a funny word

to toss at one

who's six feet

underground…

A "mope"?

Or did you say

a "mop"?

Shall I continue

cleaning,

my grime encrusted box?

Or,

lean my breath

against the wall –

ignore the dust,

and

stop.



53 Christine Perkins



THE STAGNATING SOLDIER:
A FAILED SILENCE/A BLOODIED TONGUE

Ashley A. Bishop

His travels do not concern me.
I resolve to keep lips and mouth
shut tight as traps on mouse.

If it settles him to see green leaves grow
from rot-branches of limb and finger's weed,
pupil's lids shall be tucked and tight.

(A shroud of thick wool against his new morning's light.)

When greened-boots smother
yellowing flowers in the sand,
I will pick and dig at pearl-white hands.

(Let Red-coats group and charge onward home,
in search of palace from which we all have grown.)

MEMPHIS

William F. Clark

Love's little feat, at the molecular level,
Composes the strain of one thread to the other.

Like a cherry bouquet of wind crinkling dead leaves
Or straw leather bound broom scraping sidewalk squares.

Somewhere far off,
It's the dust that winds molten iron core
Or meteor rock slung at dead moonstone.
But, here, softly, sweeping the earth
On a warm summer night, the fireflies
And the crickets
And the children
In the field ahead together—

Are only a moment of thought
When we lay on our stomachs
And drum the grass with our feet.

A STUDY OF PIGEON DERRIERE IN A FIELD OF CLOVERS



STORM GARDEN

Jason Jedrusiak

languid
symphony
boils
my
ears

language
sweats,
trudges
my
delicate

Death
in
smooth
rain
drops

fiddle,
pant,
fiddle,
pant

a
petal
falls

love
me

not.



Caroline Malouse

(good)by(e): Valentine

THE PLAYER

Timothy Dicesare

She broke up with me. Lindsey broke up with me. Well, kind of. I guess it could be considered mutual. It's complicated though. She doesn't think it is but it is. To her it was a simple choice, but what she doesn't get is that giving up World of Warcraft is out of the question. She didn't understand that, I'm sure you do, though.

Let me back up a little. Everything was going fine. We met at a party, clicked, and just started hanging out regularly. This was before Wrath of the Lich King was released. Sorry, I'll do my best to explain but if I confuse you with terminology please stop me. Wrath of the Lich King is the second expansion to World of Warcraft, released in late 2008. It was preceded by the Burning Crusade in early 2007 and the original launch of the game in late 2004. I've been playing since launch. Anyway, yeah, we met before Wrath, when I had plenty of free time.

It was fun though. She was the first girl that I really, really liked. I remember the exact moment it happened too. We were at a show. A post rock-show no less. I had never met a girl before that would agree to go to a post-rock show with me. Hell, even when I try to play a song, most girls don't make it past the intro. She was there though, with me. We saw Caspian. It was loud. Loud enough to make you wrinkle your nose on the high notes. Loud enough that when you opened your mouth on the low notes you could feel your uvula vibrate. We were silent for most of the set. Occasionally we exchanged glances. Then she put her arm around my waist. That's when I knew I liked her. We tried to speak after the show but neither of us could hear anything. I would have thought that that long in silence would be awkward but for some reason it wasn't. Her hand was still around my waist. This was two weeks before Wrath was released.

Then came November 12th. I arrived at Gamestop at 10PM to get in line for the midnight release. Before I left home I had everything in order. The game was already installed, so all that I had to do was input the CD key and I was ready to enter the continent of Northrend, the dwelling of the Lich King. I showered before I left because I knew that wasn't going to happen again for a while. I laid out six Red Bulls on my desk and made sure the pantry was stocked with Ramen noodles and Mountain Dew. I also added the number to New York Pizza to my phone, just in case.

I called her while I was in line. She knew I played WoW but I don't think she knew how serious I was. I told her I was just tagging along with some friends because I thought a midnight release would be cool to go to. I was alone. She knew a bunch of people that went to the Halo 3 release so she didn't think it was too weird. WoW isn't Halo though. She didn't know that at the time.

I was around 20 or so in line so I got the game not too much past midnight, I think Gamestop actually started a little early so it couldn't have been more than five past. This part is a little embarrassing so please don't repeat it, okay? Even though it's only about a fifteen minute walk, I was going to take a cab from Gamestop back to my apartment to cut down on travel time. There weren't any cabs though, so I ran. I sprinted. I think I made the trip in about five minutes. If this was the gym class mile run, I'm pretty sure I would have beat the cross country kids. I was so fast that I was actually the first person on the server, oh, a few thousand people, to load into Northrend. I didn't leave my apartment for over two days. I slept maybe two or three hours.

Actually though, Lindsey didn't suspect anything. She was busy studying for an exam and I was surprisingly good at multitasking questing in game and talking on the phone. Plenty of practice with my mom I guess. We met up again for lunch on Thursday. Thursday is server maintenance day and Blizzard scheduled an extended one. They said the servers would be down until 5PM but it al-

ways runs long, so I had plenty of time. I think she noticed the bags under my eyes. Well, actually, I know she noticed, because she asked about them. I didn't tell her that I was almost level 80 though, I made up something about a paper or exam or whatever. I'm not sure if she bought it. She asked me what I was doing that weekend. I jokingly said playing World of Warcraft. I wasn't joking. She laughed and told me to call her. I didn't. I hit 80 over the weekend instead.

I suppose I got kind of lucky. The next week I was actually able to squeeze in some time to hang out with her. I was the first person in my guild to hit level 80 so there wasn't too much that I could do that week. Sure, I ran some instances but we weren't ready for 25 man raids yet, we didn't have that many 80s until the following week. Oh I'm losing you? Sorry. A guild is a group of players that do instances and raids together. An instance being a dungeon whose events are isolated from the larger world. A raid being an instance that requires more than 5 players. There.

So as I was saying, we actually spent some time together that week. I took her out to dinner one night. I had quests and epic items on my mind, but still, we had a good time. We went out again two days later. Another show. This time one of her bands. It wasn't bad but I could hear the next day.

I was on a roll for the next month and a half actually. The following week was Thanksgiving. I decided to stay around to play more. My mom was disappointed, but whatever. More importantly, Lindsey went home so I was only obligated to a phone call a day, more than manageable, even with our new five night a week raid schedule. Then, when she came back from Thanksgiving break, she was so bogged down with papers and finals, I was mostly off the hook. We had two lunch dates, strategically planned on maintenance Thursday, and we went out two Saturday nights, one of the nights off from raiding. Then she went home for Christmas break.

I thought I had it all. I thought I had done the impossible. For over a month, I had successfully balanced being a full time WoW player with having a girlfriend. I didn't know anyone who had ever done it before. I thought I was making history.

Christmas break came and went uneventfully. I was logging about 12 hours a day. It was amazing. She was still calling daily but that was fine. To be honest, I actually looked forward to her calls.

Then Christmas break ended. That's when things started going downhill. My guild was attempting the hard mode versions of the raid encounters and I needed to keep my attendance at 100% so that I could have first pick of epic item drops. On top of that, I had 2v2, 3v3, and 5v5 arena teams. On top of that, I had to do battlegrounds to get honor points. And finally, on top of that, I was leveling an alt Deathknight. It was already shaping up to be a busy semester.

She asked me to hang out Monday. I couldn't. She asked again Tuesday, I couldn't. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. No, no, no. We finally got together on Saturday. She spent the night but I could tell that she was distant. And kind of pissed. More pissed than distant come to think of it. She asked me why I blew her off all week. I told her I had stuff. She asked what kind of stuff. I told her school stuff. Then she asked how I had so much school stuff in the first week of the semester. I should have changed my lie at that point but I didn't. I said I had to really buckle down this semester to bring my grades up. What I really meant by that was that I wanted to be the best geared character on my server. Actually, at that time, I was the best geared character and I wanted to stay that way. She said she understood but that it's not hard to balance school and a relationship. That she had done it last semester. That being with me didn't prevent her from getting a 3.7. I told her that I'd try harder.

The next week she did the pop-in visit. It was a Wednesday night. It was my birthday. I didn't tell anyone that it was my birthday because I had a raid. She remembered though and got my roommate to let her in the apartment to surprise me. He must have been pissed at me for some reason. When she walked in my room, I was in my boxers at the computer talking into my headset. The five

cans of Mountain Dew and three cereal bowls, all with leftover milk, made it pretty clear to her that I hadn't gone outside that day. She didn't say anything at first. She just stared at me, wide-eyed, trying to come up with something to say. I was in the middle of a boss fight so I obviously had to turn back around to the computer screen. She just stood their. I finished the fight. Then I told my guild I had to afk for a few. I said I had gf agro. It's gamer lingo. They understood.

She asked what I did all day. She asked why I didn't return her texts. She asked why I wasn't going out for my birthday. She didn't like any of the answers that I gave her. She left and told me that she'd call me later.

She called me two days later. She said she needed some time to think about things. That she wants this relationship to be more serious but that she's been talking to my friends and she knows how much I've been playing. That I need to pick between her and World of Warcraft. I was playing while she was talking. I apologized though, and asked her how much I needed to cut back to make things work. She said completely. I asked if it was the only way. She said it was. I agreed. We chatted for a little longer and she finally went to bed. I played through the night.

Real life endings are always less eventful than fiction, I'm sorry. We went on for another two weeks. I tried to make more time for her. I even skipped a raid. I didn't feel good about it. But she finally caught me. I guess she had a friend that plays. She suspected I was still playing so she made a character on the friend's account and logged into my server. She messaged me "I thought you quit." I messaged back "?." She messaged me "We're done."

It's strange to have someone break up with you in the chat window of a video game. She logged the character off, so I couldn't message her back. I thought about calling her but I didn't. I was in the middle of an insanely long boss fight at the time, so I couldn't really stop anyway.

We haven't spoken since. A new raid dungeon is coming out next week, so that should be fun.



OCEANSIDE WINDOWS

BEN LANDSBERG



ANCHORED IN TIME
Meghan Doty

INSERT HEAR

Jason Jedrusiak

insert, hear:

-

that blank line
isn't empty!

you're just naive,
shallow;
it's rich, with color

if I say,
it's void:

-

: by invisible ink





FARM Laurel Schultheis

Act II: Scene II

I had assumed that, like me, your life started when I met you.

I thought that our spark could only be something unprecedented, something that, until we touched, you never knew. I thought that when our paths crossed – when our eyes defiantly met – and a quake took up residence in the backs of my knees, your world ended, too.

I guess it still might have.

Act II: Scene III

One day you went out for groceries, and for reasons I still couldn't identify, I decided to clean off the tops of everything. I had one of those extendable poles with a feather-duster-head that housewives often have in commercials, and I was going to do it all – the fans, the big lamps, the upper cabinets and the top of the fridge. As yet untouched, it had been someone's gift to me at my wedding shower. While not thoughtful, it was certainly recession-proof. And because I had never used it, it was in your closet. And because it was in your closet, I never got around to using it.

As I grappled with the awkward aluminum length of the thing, something fell from your top shelf.

Act II: Scene IV

I stood up and froze, like an animal on the freeway. I stared down at the box, unsure of what to do.

It was a shoebox
(same blue as those curtains)

that I knew that I had never seen before. Because marriage has certain tenets, I knew that this meant I was not meant to see it. But it had landed on a corner and tossed its top away, and there were loose leaf sheets of paper scattered all across the floor.

(I'm sorry)
that I looked, but no one could have done it. Not even you would've been strong enough
(had our positions been reversed)

Prologue

I don't know if she died, or if she left you. I don't know if you were pining for a woman lost to the world, or lost only to you. Were they letters you could have sent, if you had known where she had gone? Or were they letters that should have been buried long ago, but that you couldn't bring yourself to part with, because they were the last little bit of her you had?

(Please)

I read just a few before I heard the garage door. I was bawling with such force that I had to call up the strength to sustain my sobs from way down in my toes, even though I had fallen to my knees on the floor.
(Oh)

So many questions. I wondered how long before you met me that things between you had ended. I wondered what color her eyes were. If you remembered exactly how she smelled. I wondered if you were angry when she loved you, or only angry because she was gone.
(Baby)

And underneath it all, like a little piece of heart that shriveled and went black, but kept on beating with the rest – did you ever wish that I could be her?
(No.)

For an instant? For a day?
(Never once.)



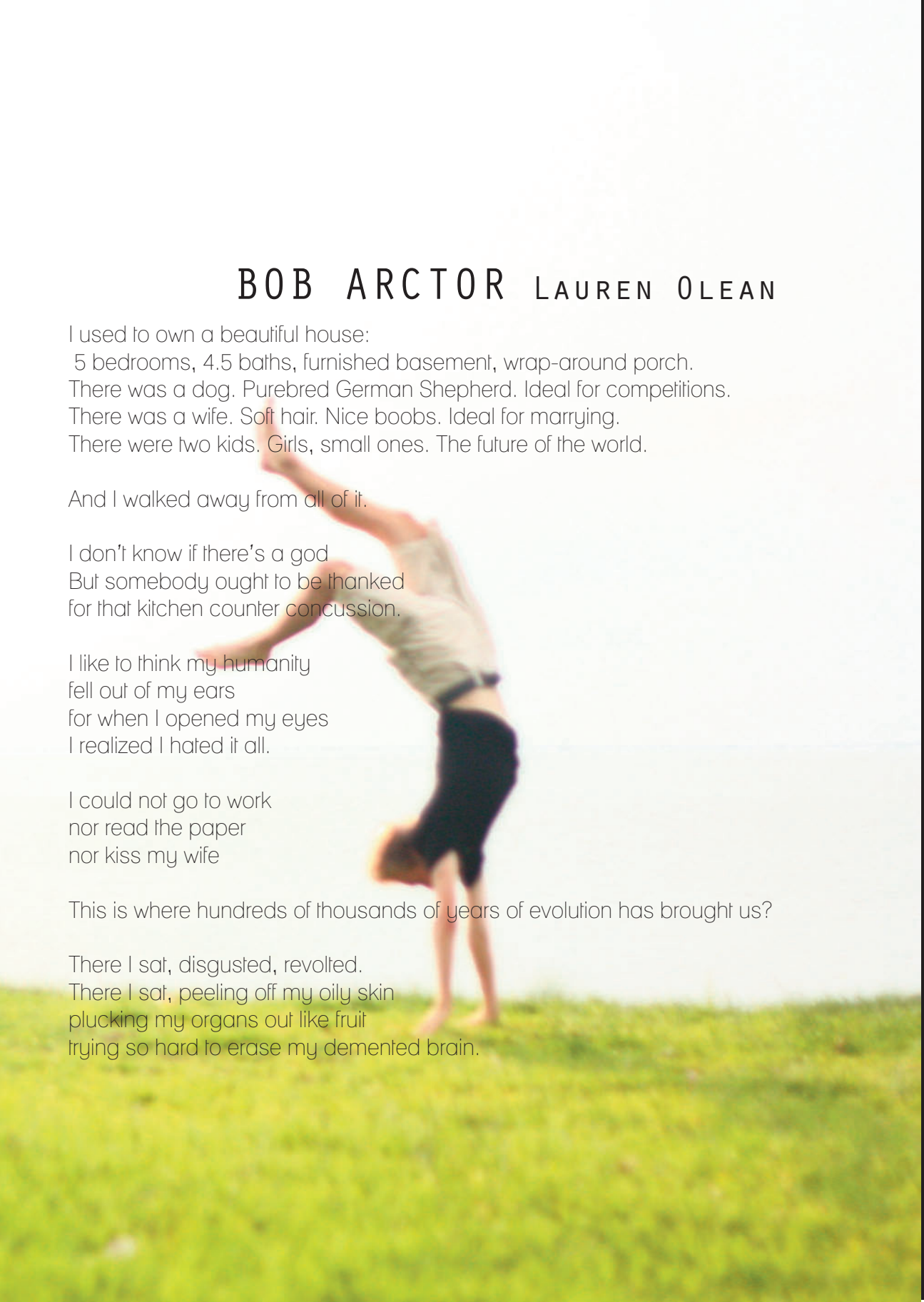
IN AN HOUR

Timothy Dicesare

It's Friday
at three
and I'm leaving
at four
which is already earlier
than when I should be leaving
but I've just browsed
Digg all day
because those schematics
and that code
and the testing
can wait until Monday
and I've gotten up
for water refills
seven times since lunch
and gone to pee
ten times today
and stood unzipped
at the urinal and waited
until someone else walked in
to zip back up and leave
because it kills an extra
thirty to ninety seconds
and that's around
point two five percent
of the workday
and this last hour
feels like the week
but that five minutes
this morning
between the alarms
is a second
and in that second
I thought of sex
and life
and love
and that girl who I
don't remember now
and she did something
but the memory of her
shrunk back to size
before I knew what it was
and I go to take another sip
from my Styrofoam water cup
and blow some bubbles
until I can barely breathe
and I'm lightheaded
but it's never
as good as weed
and the cup's
not a substitute
for a bong
nor the dream
for sex
nor time killing
for reading
nor the job
for a life
and it's
still
not even
close
to four

BOB ARCTOR

LAUREN OLEAN



I used to own a beautiful house:
5 bedrooms, 4.5 baths, furnished basement, wrap-around porch.
There was a dog. Purebred German Shepherd. Ideal for competitions.
There was a wife. Soft hair. Nice boobs. Ideal for marrying.
There were two kids. Girls, small ones. The future of the world.

And I walked away from all of it.

I don't know if there's a god
But somebody ought to be thanked
for that kitchen counter concussion.

I like to think my humanity
fell out of my ears
for when I opened my eyes
I realized I hated it all.

I could not go to work
nor read the paper
nor kiss my wife

This is where hundreds of thousands of years of evolution has brought us?

There I sat, disgusted, revolted.
There I sat, peeling off my oily skin
plucking my organs out like fruit
trying so hard to erase my demented brain.

RECITATIVE

Lauren DiTullio

Prologue

I dream of him wrapped in blue velvet curtains.

Though we began soon after we met to share a bed, I do not dream of him in sheets.

I know that he married me, but remember in photographs. He gave me the greatest gift of all, but I do not imagine him holding my children.

Even as he lay beside me, built my shelves, and kissed our babies goodnight, I would dream of perfect darkness in which I could not see his face. I would inhale the smell of sawdust and sweat, and lose myself in the moment of pressing my palms to his back for the very first time.

He is still the husband that lives in my mind – brawny and tired, moody and delicious. He barks orders and if my eyes flash fire back at him
(and they did)

it is only because he lights it inside of me.

Act I: Scene I

He says that I cannot do this job because I am a woman, and I throw coffee on his slacks. He asks me to stop wearing heels to his rehearsals, because the noise gives him a headache. I invest in tap shoes, and begin to dance every place I go.

The cast is made up of darling talents with darting eyes. I drink with them and share their secrets. I am every understudy. Their opening night is my opening night, a separate thing entirely from his directorial debut. Where he is a General, I am a confidant.

Ingénue squeezes my arm, just above the elbow, chewing at a hangnail and sweating from each pore. But I shake my head, smilingly unperturbed.

"He can't fire me.
(because he needs me)
I'm the stage manager."

I offer her a cigarette, but she goes outside for cocaine.

Act I: Scene II

And though he pins me roughly in the wings, I slide within his calloused hands. He takes me, and I am plush, cerulean surrender. His boots scrape black hardwood as angel wings sprout from my back and beat at the curtains, driven mad by the livewire thrum in his lips.

Act I: Scene III

I knew that I never danced a day in my life until I learned to dance around him. For everyone else we played the same game, but he sent roses from secret admirers and hid chocolates in my locker. Once, he took the Valentine's card he'd tacked to my station, ripped it to pieces, and flung them into the house.

I was down there, slinking amongst the empty seats, sweeping. He said I'd
(missed a bit of trash.)

Later, snuggling me to his chest, he asked how I had liked my confetti.

Life went on and was divine.

Intermission
We had Olivia and Shane.

A basset hound and a golden retriever, along with a smattering of fish, small reptiles, and a hamster.

His big break, a bigger house.

Actor's strike, much smaller house, and freelance reporting for me on the side.

For her: SATs, LSATs, a law firm in Boston.

And him: Squire, Les Paul, on tour in Illinois.

But they came back for the funeral when he dropped dead at 65.

"Honey? Dad had a heart attack. No warning signs."

Act II: Scene I

Not much exciting has since happened to me. Livvy is pregnant, and seeing that belly just lights me right up. Her husband, also a lawyer, now cleans the gutters and fixes the light above the sink when the wires go all finicky and loose. I haven't heard from Shane in 27 days.
You were all things I had that were sweet, and you're gone now. And as tears douse my face, and I think only of those curtains, I whisper to the empty room
(I'm sorry)

the thing I never got to say:





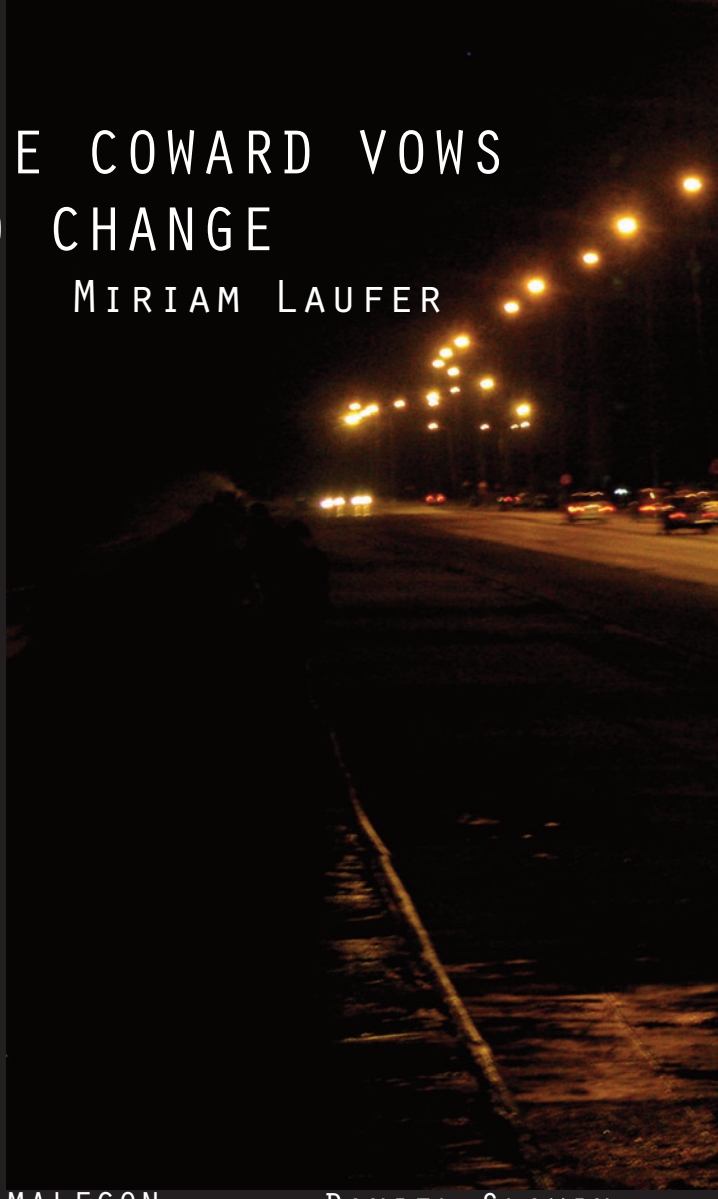
THERE IS A PLUM ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER

Susan D. Mays

There is a plum on the kitchen counter
which I sat on and pressed in until it's
innards broke through it's skin. It's bleeding
all over - it's on your kitchen counter,
and I am sorry for the mess though
it was not only me who made it.
It was your husband and I making love
over the groceries, and though we
tried to tidy up, this is our neglect:
A plum, red, dark purple and bleeding.

THE COWARD VOWS TO CHANGE

MIRIAM LAUFER



MALECON

DANIEL SLAVIN

Do each day one thing that scares you
Eleanor Roosevelt said to me
For this land is your land
To cherish and to hold

I lift my lamp beside the golden door
Emma Lazerus invited me
And I won't leave
Until I get what I came for

I crossed the Sea of Reeds
And I saw the fire at Mount Sinai
And nights of flames are seared into my heart
In the land where they heiled Hitler

I fled before Charybdis
And missed the woo of the Sirens' song
I hid in the horse
And returned to Ithaka

The only thing to fear is fear itself
Franklin Roosevelt said to me
So I ate my chocolate
And I conjured my Patronus

Call me Ishmael, for I have sinned
Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'me raba
Please let my people go
For I am still my sister's keeper

I've learned your lessons well
Do as you would be done by
And there will be liberty throughout the land
And let them eat their bread

But I don't lay me down to sleep
And death's second self unwraps
Enfolds me in its choking grasp
And fills me with the heat

You cannot hurt the world
Winston Churchill said to me
For as long as you are brave and true and also fierce
You cannot seriously distress her



ELEGY FOR MY FATHER

STUART PETERFREUND

The eighth day after I was born
my father raised his new son up
above the blade and Kiddush cup,
a covenant with God and son.

While I was being raised, I sought
to be a teacher and to write.
My father kept these goals in sight,
and I came down just where I ought.

To raise up is to sanctify—
a Kiddush cup, a Torah scroll.
A child raised up serves to extol
a parent's generosity.

Upon this solemn ground—here where
he goes to enter into rest—
I count myself profoundly blessed.
On shoulders of all fathers past,
I honor my father at the last:
he raised me up and placed me there.

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

J.M. Olejarz

5.
when the last picture show ended, it took something with it
that was hard to define; and it remained that way (elusive)
maybe because we weren't sure what it was, or maybe we
didn't want to speak aloud what we knew,— afraid that
naming it would give it a weight, a solidity, that it hadn't possessed
before. if it could remain nameless, it could remain relegated
to the spaces between words, the silent allaround, without a tether
to tie it to ourselves.

instead we shook hands all around and murmured
congenial goodbyes, so at least we would part on good terms.
and some of us left, run out of the roots that had kept us from drifting,
and some of us made a series of growing mistakes to try to find ourselves,
and some of us stayed right there with the only work we would ever know,
a part of the mistakes or trying to make something from what was left,
for want of knowing what else to do

and then it ended, and no one could deny the space it left within us.

4.
there are locations never meant to be attached
to—yet we formed unthinking devotion
to the posteritous town of anna lawreen graham.
when j.m. keen & daughter first pioneered the barren area,
they built up there an arbitrary location they called
home, a place as good as any for settling.
so we did—put down claim to the land, and it built up,
grew and grew, to the innate limit that it could.
and all the while we were sinking ourselves into the earth
and dirt—we did it naturally, like breathing in, as
we always did whenever we became stationary.
but stationary became inert, and inert became stuck, and
then it was years later and we hadn't even realized.

3.
upon his graduation he discovered the listless sense of
self that came from continuing to live where he was stuck.
he started to wander without ever moving, drifting
between distractions, looking for an anchor. he went
to mexico to get drunk, get laid, and get away. he went
to new york to see what it might hold for him. he went
to work then, stumbling into a purpose by filling in
the space left by sam's departure. it wasn't much, but
neither was it nothing. he fell into one affair, then another,
got married, got it annulled, and got punched in the face
by an old friend who was soon to leave again.
they realized, though, that what they had in common had been
more real somehow than what they had apart, so they agreed
to share the last picture show together, so that someone else
would be there, to say they each were present.

2.
in the end, the last picture show ended, the last stopper fell away,
and it came down to connections—how many we'd had,
how many we had left, and what would be sufficient
for the continuing future. our parents had moved south for
warmth and family; our friends were relocating for jobs, or
pairing off and vanishing into the annals of married life; our town
was for lack of anything else slowing. just slowing. and that was all.
we watched it happening one by one, and gradually, almost
imperceptibly, it came to be Anarene, Wherever-We-Were, while "we"
shrunk and shrunk.

1.
we'd ignored it for years
when ignoring it was like breathing,—
not just because it was easy, but because
we inhaled it with every breath, drew it in
where it stuck to our insides until
they and it and we were interchangeable
and undividable and irreversible—
but those days are gone, the days when
we had something to do
until one day we didn't.

