



The Castle
Fall 2019 Edition



Wartburg College

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CSI—Cardboard Sensory Images

by Sydney Salton

Tape lines the floor in a riotous pattern. Blue. Is it to be painted? Who paints a floor? The whole object is cardboard, forming several shapes and figures. Even the furniture is cardboard. The floors are cardboard. The absent men are presumably cardboard. Life is cardboard. On one side, the blue tape slinks up the wall from the floor; more painting is to be done. These couple of walls should be white, egg-shell white, but then has to be covered in a bit of deep red, to match the new décor. The ceilings are absent, but they would also have been egg-shell white, lined with simple, flush-mount lights and a pair of ceiling fans. These, too, need a splash of crimson to accent what you bring home.

Home. This place, indeed, mimics the structure of a suburban house. Or maybe apartment. The staircases would be carpeted, had they not been made of cardboard. Lush white carpet that invites you to walk around without shoes—even without socks. Shoes are recommended, now, because of the paint. The eggshell color wouldn't be the issue. The issue would be the permanent deep red color that stays damp hours longer than the other. There are a few dark brown-orange ovals on this hypothetical lush carpeting, even though you try to keep the place clean. It is hard to keep up. Hard to make sure the new décor fits well with the colors you've added to accent your personality.

There's a backroom, made of cardboard, where the old furniture is kept. It is ice cold. Covered in plastic, the décor sat in there. In where you occasionally wander to reminisce on all of your previous phases, visit the old friends, the times you thought something or someone would look good in the living room but doesn't fit the look you're going for. This new piece, though, fits well. His legs can stand if you place them nicely against the wall, and that main color is exactly that of his splatter paint.

Indeed, murder victims do make the most interesting ornaments for one's home.

Collection of poems

by Lexi Retz

the vacancy you
feel
is the same
emptiness
that consumes
my world without
you.

somedays I cannot wait to
see you
and
somedays I wish I had never
met you

how beautiful is our life
that one person
can either
make our world better
or break our world apart?

I gave you the
option to love
me
unconditionally,
but you used
that like a knife
to stab me
in the
back.

No one realizes the
pain in my heart
until they learn

they created it

You used to put me to sleep at night
but now
you are the reason I cannot fall asleep

I am waiting for
the one
that isn't afraid to come on
adventures with
me

Sometimes what you love
isn't always what's right for you

I guess it is
too much to ask
to get the same amount of
love
as I give

You always come back to the ones
that are meant to stay

Like a wave out on the ocean,
I will come right back to you

I care because I love
but if you're not going to try
then neither am I

The faint sounds of trains passing by,
put me to sleep at night

because they remind me
of the warmth I used
to feel in bed
next to me

Stop trying for those
who never
tried for you

Let them slip away
like the memories that they
imprinted
on your heart
No one understands
the physical pain
in my heart
when you walked away
from me for the
last time.

Let the moon shine over us tonight,
while our love story dances
in the air

So many sleepless nights
trying to go to sleep
nobody that knows
wants to speak
the pain in my heart
is accompanied by
the finishing part
the reason I cry

My cover is colorful
but the things past
the cover, are far

From bright and cheerful

The memories try to
come flooding back but
my mind is a dam

I long for love
I yearn for acceptance
but in return I receive
emptiness

And if someone loves you
they won't leave
because if they truly loved you
they would never walk away
from the one person that
loved them unconditionally.

You mend your broken heart
With a bottle in your hand
And a memory in your brain
Of the lover that left you

He was my first choice
But obviously
I wasn't his

If you love her
Then you never truly loved me

All I ask
Is for the man in my life
To want to be there
I don't want to beg, pry, or work for attention

Because if he is not willing to give it to me
Then he isn't the one I want forever

I want people to realize
that
the love
the friendship
the compassion
that they give to others
make them worthy
of being appreciated
a lot more than
they are

Tell me
you love me
then tell me again
because the more
you tell me
the more I will believe it
But maybe that is the problem...
that men know
the more they say they love you
they will be able
to convince you
of something that might
not be
true

Poems by Mildred Mahatlane

HE

Was the love of my life

The love of my life until ten o three

Instead of a warm breakfast

It was pictures of him at a wedding

A wedding...not just any wedding but a wedding

Where he was the groom

And I was not... the bride

Despite him getting me naked just a week or two ago

How this could've happened

Went completely over my head

Because they were only a few four five months

While we was a year and a few

He did not love

He did not love

No he did not love me

LOVE

Is a beautiful thing...

They say

Beauty has been lost from my eyes

She is beautiful

I can't see it

He is beautiful

That's all I could see now
he has disappeared
beautiful has disappeared
my love has disappeared
love.
Has disappeared

(no title)

Introductions aside, let me condemn you
For we are grieving not for weeks but for months,
Decades on end for the minority who do not get the priority
For the unsung heroes of your soil.
Not seen are the toils of the fallen
How they are crawling, under the
Feet of the carelessly treading

I see shades of grey.
What's with the necessity to weigh?
Is it not one race?
What's with the necessity to debase?
When we were all promised a land of dreams
Without consideration for our genes
Have we not suffered enough?
Do you not see our scruff?
See the tears
That nourish your hairs

Constantly at war

We are forced to abhor

Not those who take us to battle,

But those we call our brothers for example.

I lay a sword on his chest

Like we were not fed from the same breast.

I got issues you say?

Overtime the same cliché?

Don't mind my out of focus vision

I just can't stand the division

Not really a negation

But we need to see the equation.

Forced to believe she is better than her mother

Just because of a difference in color.

Constantly bleaching,

Getting perms. Oh

Why can't I come to terms?

Is my afro not decent?

A Movie Ticket Stub

by Haley Jacobsen

He always smelled so good. God, she missed the way he used to smell.

“Sadie! Let’s go to the movies when you get done with work, okay?” he had asked. At the time, he smelled of dirty socks, sweat, and basketball. He had probably just finished practice.

She had nodded her head in response and readjusted the apron that hung loosely on her tiny frame. That night, he’d smelled of cheap cologne, as though he thought if he wore a lot it would even out with the small amount of money he spent. His effort was adorable.

“Popcorn?” He offered the bucket to her. She smiled, shook her head no, and instead took his empty hand in hers. She laid her head upon his shoulder. She could smell the very thing he’d probably tried to hide with his overpowering cologne: the nervous sweat mixing with old spice deodorant as it slid down his skin.

“Can I walk you to your door?” He had asked as they pulled into her driveway, and of course she couldn’t say no. She would do anything to have just a second longer with him, even though she knew it wouldn’t be long before he was waiting to pick her up for another fun adventure.

“Kiss me,” she’d whisper when they reached her door and he would. He would leave smelling of popcorn and her perfume and she would sleep in his t-shirt, which now smelt of cheap cologne, popcorn, and sweaty old spice.

That night he had squeezed her hand harder than normal, but she was too caught up in the thrill of the movie to notice.

She missed his lips. She missed the way they formed a smile. She could watch that for hours and never get bored. Maybe that’s why she didn’t mind as much if he made a joke at her expense. She knew

the difference in the way they formed a fake smile and the way they formed the truly genuine smile he often gave.

She missed watching them move smoothly to form the syllables of her name and the way they felt when they brushed her skin. It didn't matter if it were her forehead or her cheeks. It was the way they simply said, "I need you" without using a single word. She loved the way they felt pressed against her smooth and pale skin.

That night they had started to form the words to say a final goodbye, but she had pressed her finger to them and whispered, "Shhhh baby, don't say good night. Just stay with me."

Now these sensations were but a mere thought and replaced by the rushing of tears running down her face. She was still wearing his t-shirt.

His eyes were the sort of blue that pierced even the hardest of hearts. Sometimes she felt as if he could see through her. She'd thought he could see every insecurity, every secret, and she didn't mind. She wanted him to know her in a way no one else could and he always told her he loved her insecurities because each thing she saw as imperfections, were in fact perfect in his eyes.

That night, he'd meant for her to see something deep inside his eyes and she had missed it. Now the things she had loved most about him were the things she knew she should've paid more attention to. Was he nervous because he was afraid of what she might be thinking, or was he nervous because of the choice he was going to make later that night? Did he squeeze her hand too tight because the movie was exciting or because he was silently begging her to notice the silent pain causing him to shake? If only she had listened to the words he had longed to say, maybe her heart wouldn't feel as broken and lost as it did now. If only she had paid attention to the flicker of sadness in his eyes as he left.

Now he smelled of formaldehyde. His hands were clasped together and gently placed on his chest in a way that would never be comfortable to any normal person. His eyes were closed and made to look as if he were sleeping and his lips were pursed together in a straight line and void of all emotion. He was gone forever, and she held on to all she had left of him; a ratty old t-shirt, a movie ticket stub, faded pictures and what ifs.

Poems by Trevor J. Hurd

Diagnosis

An insidious illness had manifested itself in society.

Self-reflection is neglected,
Ignorance is respected.

Slander is encouraged,
And the pursuit of knowledge is lost—
buried by the bread and circus provided to us by the powers that be.

What are we do to?

Turn to the Transcendentalists of yesteryear, I say!
For they predicted this grave sickness long ago.

—bare witness to the copious benefits that nature provides,
see to it that you do not lose yourself in a world dominated by ego.

To do this is to ensure that a life of “quiet desperation” will not be your fate.

Endure; for this too shall pass.

Progress!

The animal instinct of pleasure is ancient.
The effort to overcome it,
is not.
To progress is to overcome.
However, can one overcome that which is innate?

No.

Thus, we are in a perpetual state of pursuing progress!
...despite the ambiguity of progress.
Happy is the person who recognizes this.
Apathetic are those who do not.

Yet, it is ignorance that is bliss.

Emotion & Support:

It rises from within us.

A collection of sentimental chambers so subdued they are inaccessible to the English language.

Yet somehow,

one glance into the eyes of another,

A single, heavy sigh,

A delayed response,

An uncustomary interaction,

And we know.

We know that the internal metamorphosis is occurring once again.

That the indescribable winter of the soul has arrived,

Burdening those who must endure the isolation it demands.

Thus, when you see it, in whatever shape it may come,

Harness whatever empathy you have harbored in thy self.

For you may not understand.

In fact, it is unlikely that you will.

But your presence is enough,

It has always been enough.

If it must have a name, call it Love.

You stir up an emotion in me.

Inexplicably provoking the most ancient of feelings subdued within the human soul.

I plead with myself to let you go,

left with nothing more than silent woe.

Longing to be free, it is a moment of sublime when I realize that it was never destined to be.

Irreparable pain is what you have caused,

Yet I wait for you candid.

Open with my heart I cannot be cryptic.

I seek you and that is all.

Despite these feelings, I cannot help but wonder if it is you,
Not I,
Who is deeply troubled.

A Tree in the Storm

by Haley Jacobsen

The storm raged in the dark of night, and in it her hollowed, weathered self stood. Her roots weakened with every push from the wind, and sometimes she wished she would just fall. The wind stole from her, her leaves and her branches. It pushed and tried her will to live. This was just one of the many storms she has fought and will continue to fight. Years of blizzards and droughts have weakened her frame. Years of rainstorms and thunder and lightning have left her worn and tired. Years and years of fighting had left her hollow and broken. Pieces of her bark are missing, and many of her branches are broken. Sure, she has seen good days. There have been times when she was covered with beautiful buds and new life. There have always been good days and bad days, but these days to her were not worth the fight. Most days, she stood still as the wind tickled her face, pieces of her dying and fading, her roots weakening. During this storm, she simply wished to fall. She wished for her source of life, her roots, to be pulled from the ground.

Her roots hold her and the other trees like her in place. They connect her to her surroundings. With each fight, she withdraws herself from the things she once loved, wishing to not be seen or in the way. She doesn't want a child to trip on her roots, or a teen to fall out of her branches. She doesn't want to create leaves to rake, and yet she cannot control those things. No matter how hard the ground is or how far down her roots reach, a simple storm could still pull her from the loving grasp of the Earth, especially if she didn't put up a fight.

She was simply tired of standing tall. Only a person who really looked at her closely would notice her hollow and empty core, and no one had the time to do so. No one had the time to water her during droughts or to shelter her giant frame from the cold. It was simply not possible. It wasn't their fault that she was hollow and empty. No, it was no one in particular's fault. In some cases you can blame an earthquake, and other times you can blame a violent, windy funnel that pulled her from the ground. In this case, there was no big, dramatic event, it was simply the dragging of time and a loss of purpose. She didn't have a reason to exist.

However, if you were to ask the person who lived in the house next to her, they would tell you that tree provided the perfect shade. When they were just mere children, she had been the perfect place to hide during a game of hide and seek. When they were teens, she was the perfect tree to steal a kiss under, and when they were too old for that, she was simply the perfect tree to take shelter from the sun in those summer months. She was the perfect tree to read under. In the fall, she provided the perfect amount of leaves for their young grandchildren to jump in. Despite the fact that these things should be obvious, all she saw was the overwhelming emptiness that seemed to swallow her up. She saw the black in the dead of night and the raw emptiness of those cold and lonely winter months. This is often how someone like me can feel.

Asphyxiation

by Kaitlyn Parks

I wrote a poem called Asphyxiation. This is how it goes:

“I gasp for air, struggling to breathe.

It feels like the entirety of the universe has been rested on my chest.

I am not Atlas, the Titan who holds the sky.

This meek human form was never made for things like that.

My lungs burn as I fight for each breath.

My heart pounds. My face and hands sweat.

Chills cover every inch of my body, halting all thoughts.

There is nothing but silence in my mind.

Silence and the world screaming ‘stop! stop! make it stop!’ over and over and over.

No one, no, nothing is listening. No sound escapes.

I'm suffering all alone.

Surrounded by hundreds of people who could save me and I'm all alone.

My face begins to turn blue. My fingers go numb.

My vision blurs until, like a blink, everything goes dark.

No more sounds escape my lips.

I am gone, asphyxiated by the fear of never being enough.

Lost to the world because the world feared something different.

Dead because being accepted was not allowed.

Suffocated.

Cold.

Dead.”

destructive

by Sydney Salton

It comes to me no surprise
that It's the color of the heart
and the color of blood
with the black mark of Death
that is painted in front of me.

It comes to me no surprise
the obstruction Death has on Life's movements
where the living are contained
never evolving.
Death even causes Life to die.

It comes to me no surprise
the whiteness so packed together
how this Life is so small
so limited,
but in Death, It is so unknown.

It comes to me no surprise
that pieces of us are missing
that some of us are shattered
distraught,
but hide it from one another every day.

It comes to me no surprise
that people will dispute irrelevant things
and praise idealistic manners
being consumed

by the dark shadows of envy.

It comes to me no surprise
raw, peaceful moments in Life never last;
though dull overarching notions
hover,
never leaving our presence.

It comes to me no surprise
that Life can be so bright
red with both energy and
depression,
sometimes forgetting the difference.

It comes to me no surprise
the engagements enjoyed by some
are traumatic, disgusting, and
fatal,
and allow Death to enter freely.

It comes to me no surprise
the color of evil and the unknown
are the same deep color
pitch-dark,
eerie, stable, never-ending black.

It comes to me no surprise
that people fall hard for sayings in a book
with authors no one knew
personally
but that walked the earth before it was called Earth.

It comes to me a surprise
that no one noticed it earlier
the impact we have on Death
so small
but It on us—
destructive.

Lies

by Haley Jacobsen

Lies, lies and more lies.
It's all I hear, all that's capable of being said.
"You're better off without him."
"eventually thoughts of him will leave your head."
"People never change."
"Time can heal pain."

Why can't we just say the truth?
It's all that really should be said.
"He didn't really love you"
"he'll always be in your head."
"People change, he just won't change for you"
"time doesn't heal pain, he'll forget you and you'll forget him too"

Why do we always have to lie?
It doesn't make anything easier.
We all know the truth we eagerly hide.
Nobody really eats ice cream and cries in front of the tv.
No, we go home, and we cry ourselves to sleep in secret
And then we wake up and go on with life. That's it.

We drag our sorry butts out of bed
And we comb our hair and we wash away the evidence.
We cover our puffy eyes with concealer
And use exhaustion as an excuse for the rest
So, you lie to us and we lie to you
Don't deny it, we all know it's true.

We lie, and we lie, and we lie.
We think it helps and maybe sometimes it does,
But we'll always find out the truth.
We'll find that we're not better with them or without them
We'll find that people change because we change ourselves.
We'll find the truth because the truth always reveals itself.

Speechless

by Trevor Krug

Speechless

A genuine entreatment

To the strain of my heart;

I beseech her to reach out and take it;

As a bolt, she strikes; it hums in her palm.

My gaze rests tenderly

On hers, a reflection of the vault of heaven;

And in her eyes a dove rises over a meadow of Crocus,

Pulchritudinous in decorum and demeanor; desirous.

Beaming, blasé beauty bequeaths itself

To his jaded countenance.

How had this happened?

How had this happened?

‘Sometimes when you least expect it,

l'amour vous laissera sans voix’

Speechless

speechless

9,330 days
by Alexandra Wonyu

Did you know?

There's a special kind of jasmine that only blooms in the wintertime,

Growing atop a faraway mountain, on a foreign land.

In fact, there's only one of these flowers,

One per lifetime.

She does not wither,

Even as the snow is relentless in trying to bury her.

Her leaves stay intact,

Even as the long, cold months stretch out indefinitely.

Her petals retain that lovely peach colour,

Even as countless, malicious snowflakes seek to stain her.

The white season has been particularly harsh this year

But she stands proudly,

And she smiles through it.

She does that, yes.

And what can we do if not go crazy over it?

People travel ungodly distances just to catch a glimpse of her gorgeousness

And she just gazes upon us,

All mighty, all queen-like,

For weeks, months, years,

9,329 days.

Truth is,

She had been gradually wilting,

Powerless under the weight of the deadly snow.

Truth is,

She just wanted to be with us,

In our embrace,

And not above us,

Freezing away all by herself.

And now, as the spring comes,

Peach turns to burgundy,

And she fades, fades away,

This 25th year becoming the final one,

The last we shall ever see her dazzling smile.

We never deserved it, anyway.

Paper Planes and Problematic Pals

By Carina Collet

“Why shouldn’t you write with a broken pencil?” you ask. Alex and Mitch glance at one another and shrug.

“I don’t know, why?” Alex says.

You grin. “Because it’s pointless.”

Alex groans, then chuckles, but Mitch laughs loudly, flicking his bangs out of his eyes.

Just then, Mitch’s phone begins to vibrate. He glances down at it, annoyed, but his expression quickly shifts to one of excitement.

“Our food is ready!”

You bite your lower lip and smile at him. “I know that I said I would get it, but I’m really comfy now... can you go pick it up? Pretty please?”

“Sure,” Mitch replies, “No problem.” He grabs his car keys and coat, then heads out into the apartment hallway.

You turn to examine Alex, who is folding a piece of paper into an airplane. He throws it at you, and you catch it in your lap. “Unfold me” is written on the wing. You glance up at Alex, who is watching you intently. Returning your gaze to the paper plane, you pull on the corners of the paper, flattening it back out. In Mitch’s messy chicken scratch, it reads, “Roses are red, violets are blue, I think that I might be falling in love with you.”

Your heart rate increases, heat creeping up your neck and into your cheeks. Taking a deep breath, you look up into Alex’s eyes—they are wide, vulnerable, hopeful. He raises an eyebrow questioningly. You smile, reach your hand across the gap between your chairs, and interlace your fingers with his when your hands meet.

“I’ve been feeling the same way,” you whisper.

Alex smiles widely enough to show off his dimples. “Lately, all I want to do is spend time with you. When I’m with you, I’m content; whenever I’m away from you, I just want to hang out with you again. I can’t get you out of my head—your smile, your eyes, the way you stand on your tiptoes when you’re nervous...” He trails off, taking a deep breath, carefully studying your face.

Your eyes are prickling with unexpected tears. You blink rapidly to clear them. “That’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard,” you say. “Let’s go out tomorrow—just the two of us, on a real date.”

Alex squeezes your hand. “I was hoping you would say that. Although... maybe not tomorrow? Not to ruin the moment, but I have a big test Monday.”

You both laugh, dissipating the nervous energy in the room.

“Oh, I see how it is,” you tease, but quickly say, “Thursday, then?”

“Sounds perfect,” Alex says. He squeezes your hand, and the two of you converse comfortably as the sun sinks lower in the sky. Its rays slip through the window blinds, illuminating Alex’s hazel eyes. Your conversation trails off, and you lean closer to him; your heartbeat quickens.

A knock sounds on the apartment door. You sit up rapidly, inhaling.

“That must be Mitch with the food,” you say, rising to let him in. The fluffy blanket that was wrapped around your legs falls to the floor. Goosebumps rise on your exposed skin as the traces of cold winter air brush through the apartment. Mitch stands outside, holding a bag of Thai takeout in each hand.

“Thank you for picking that up,” you say, shutting the door behind him. You scurry back to your chair, wrapping yourself back into the soft grey blanket. The fabric provides a double comfort—it

insulates your legs, and it cuts them off from Mitch's burning gaze. Perhaps it wasn't your brightest idea to wear shorts today.

"I also grabbed a little something extra," he says, setting the bags on the table, "while I was out," he pulls a smaller container out of one of the larger bags, presenting it to you. "I know it's your favorite." He smirks, pleased with himself as he hands you the snickerdoodle blizzard.

"Wow, thanks, Mitch!" You smile, pleased that he thought of you. Yet your stomach crawls a bit as you think of the conversation you just had with Alex. Surely, Mitch is just being friendly. Surely, as best friends, they talk about the girls they like.

"Isn't Dairy Queen a little out-of-the-way?" Alex queries.

"Here's your shrimp bowl," Mitch says, ignoring the question as he passes you the dish, "and your red curry." He hands Alex a patterned red box.

Mitch then passes you a spoon, his hand lingering just a little too long on your own.

Alex clears his throat and gives Mitch a pointed look.

"What?" Mitch asks innocently.

Alex shakes his head, then asks, "How's it going with Miranda?"

"Who? Oh, um, yeah, turns out she didn't want to date anyone shorter than six foot," Mitch answers.

You give a small sigh and check your watch. You give a start and check it again.

"Guys! The show started two minutes ago!" A quick scramble ensues as you search for the remote. Mitch finds it between two cushions on the couch, triumphantly holding it above his head. Alex snatches it from his hand, turns the television on, and punches in the number for channel 5.

"And we'll be right back with the second round of blind auditions for The Voice," the host says. The camera pans out over the audience, and then a commercial for Subaru begins to play.

"Well, I don't think we've missed anything important," Mitch comments.

"I still can't believe she's gotten this far! Andrea's so talented," you say.

"She could be a mega-star someday," Alex adds. "She's young, charming, pretty... and short! We could set her up with you, Mitch." Alex settles onto the floor at the base of your chair, leaning back, his shoulders just barely touching your blanket-encased legs.

Mitch sprawls on the couch. "Was that supposed to be an insult? I could totally get with Andrea if I wanted to." He glances at the food, forgotten on the coffee table, then nudges the ice cream closer to you as he grabs his box of curry.

"Prove it," Alex counters, focusing a little too intently upon a commercial for BMW. His tone is relaxed, but his shoulders are tense.

"I've got my sights set on someone else," Mitch says. He glances at you, his arctic blue eyes piercing into your own. Your face grows hot, and you grab the Blizzard from the coffee table.

Fortunately, at that moment the show returns. All three of you turn to watch. You happily smack-talk and critique all of the competitors who come before Andrea, jubilantly cheer when three judges turn around for her, and continue to make derogatory comments about the few competitors after her.

"Andrea sang so well. She's going to win this show," you say.

"We should meet again to watch next week!" Mitch suggests. "Make it our Friday routine."

You glance at Alex. His eyebrows are furrowed, but his expression clears when Mitch looks his way.

"Yeah, sounds good. Will you let Andrea know that we're rooting for her?" Alex asks you. He winks and hooks his thumb toward Mitch, mouthing, "Especially him."

You smile mischievously. "I'll be sure to text her and let her know."

The guys shrug on their coats and say goodnight. After closing the door, your shoulders relax, and you take a deep breath. You begin to clear the table, but the sight of the empty Blizzard cup next to the

creased paper airplane makes your stomach writhe. So, instead of cleaning up, you walk to the kitchen, make a cup of peppermint tea, and call your sister for advice.

Poems by Cade Pederson
Elegy for the King

Alas! Caerleon left without the king!
On Camlann's field, thou diest an effigy
Whose erstwhile labours long made body wring
Thro' agony, ecstasy, exequy.

Among Nine Worthies shews thine august name:
Bells toll funereal; minstrels quaver,
Intoning lais of thine idylls and fame
Known hither and yon as times of favour!

Conveyed to Avalon, thou liest still
Once and future king for Right, 'tis written
A reign wrested from Caliburn's anvil
Anon to return, Matter of Britain!

Beyond the Ken of Man

From ages long since withered
Lie tokens buried 'neath moor and fen
Of works and makes of elder days
As solemn cairns
Or talismans become
With mired fates, both subtle and grand
The old nonetheless
Yields in season
Its life's blood
Filling the droughts of wellsprings
Those hallowed legacies
Those deep founts of wisdom
That watered bygone Byzantium
And the flowering of Latium
Haughtiness forebodes
Doom at zenith's meting
Pray, ever will we learn
Of things thus heralded by antiquity
In the Cycle beyond the ken of Man.

Postmodernity

What is it about postmodernity that leaves us reeling?
Is it that which has gone out of the world (i.e., feeling)?
For whom and for what do we spurn, learn, and earn?

–It’s a condition for young and old to upturn and downturn.
–It’s that song “Cat’s in the Cradle and the Silver Spoon.”
–It’s that medal to festoon or that person to lampoon.

Musings

When one’s mind ripens,
The world opens
Torrentially.
When one’s ego marvels,
The mundane transcends
Metaphysically.
When one’s erudition fails,
The soul allays
Wistfully.
When one’s story ends,
The memory lives
Ethereally.

The Westering of the Sea

Evening zephyrs whisper along the strand.
Tides sift the sand that foams white.
Sunbeams transmute the ruddy sky.
Gulls take wing o’er the crag to some other haunt.
Cottage shutters flap and whistle.
Grasses dance and sway near the footpath.
Jetsam finds a place here at the westering of the sea.

What We Found in the River

By Lindsey Jacobs

My grandma lives twenty miles from town and one mile from a river in what's small enough to be a cottage. She and Grandpa Ander built it themselves when our tiny family moved to America. Every board and nail, those two put together. Even after grandpa died, it was like he never truly left, not when I saw his handwork in the long oak deck and floorboards. The marbled knots in the wood were his thumbprints.

Grandma's touch was more so outside, from the lilacs she arranged around her walls to the stone path leading to her massive garden. She didn't like store bought food, not when she'd grown up on the produce straight from the grounds of Ithaca.

I loved every bit of the place.

"Look over there, Meris," my younger sister calls. In the garden, where we usually spend our summer evenings, five impressive acres of raspberries and sunflowers tower over us. My sister points, her finger red with juice. I peer after her, through the trees and undergrowth that have flourished since Grandpa's heart attack. They intertwine into a barrier, thorned and guarded. She could not possibly see past it. I couldn't, and I was two heads taller. "There's someone over there."

"That's nice, Nadi," I say, because she often mumbles about nothing and that's what you have to do to shut her up. Like the garden, her imagination ran wild. My response doesn't satisfy her. She sets her basket of berries at our feet and scampers away before I have the bearings to grab her.

"Nadia!"

She is too much like me and she doesn't listen. She pulls at the low branches, pushing through the thorns. Then she turns and grins at me, daring me to follow. For a moment, I consider fetching Grandma, whose only rule was not to wander too near the river. It wasn't the same back home in Greece, where Nadi and I used to run across our whole island barefooted and wild, swinging in the low branches and wading in the low-tide. But here in America, my pirate days were over.

However, my sister heads right to the edge of our family's property. I drop my basket of rhubarb and take off after her.

The branches tug at my hair, and for the first time, I regret that I am taller than my sister. It's much harder for me to duck under the canopy. Nadia stomps on like an elephant, loud and reckless, so I never lose her trail even when she vanishes from sight.

I glance behind me, but I no longer see the house.

"Nadia," I call. She doesn't respond. I brace myself and barrel through the last of the trees, which give way to a yawning stream.

Nadia giggles at the shore, waving across the water. A boy younger than both of us sits in the mud on the other side. His skin is freckled, his limbs skinny and awkward. He waves back shyly at my sister.

I turn back to the thick branches and foliage from which we emerged. "Nadi, how'd you know he was here?"

I yelp and jump forward to drag her back by the straps of her overalls as she plants a foot in the water.

"That's far enough," I grunt. Gone are the days that I could carry her at the hip. She was growing like a weed. "Yaya said not to go near the river."

She rolls her dark eyes. "That rule wasn't made for *me*."

A younger me would have smacked her. Instead, I glower, and she at least has the decency to look a little sorry.

"Oy, what's your name?" Nadia calls to the boy. The river's width is a measly ten feet, close enough that I can see his gold-flecked eyes. His hair is sandy and tame compared to Nadia's wild mane. He huddles into himself.

"I'm Nadia." She grins. "You have a name, don't you?"

"Give him a chance to answer."

The newcomer blinks. "I'm Lucas."

He peers back up the river, expressionless but watchful. I follow his gaze to a formation of boulders near his shoreline, where the water runs voraciously. The spray rises over our heads.

Nadia rocks on her heels, nearly ripping from my grip. "Do you want to play with us?"

Lucas again doesn't respond, not with a nod or shake. He stares at the rocks. He sits oddly still and blends into the layers of mud cast behind him. When a cool breeze rears, no goosebumps paint his arms. His hair doesn't even rustle.

Nadia frowns, impatient. "You're weird." To my horror, she picks up a stone and flings it with a scrawny arm. It lands a pace from the boy's ankles.

"Nadia!" I want to wring her neck.

Lucas stiffly turns to the pebble but still says nothing.

Nadia blushes. "I wasn't trying to hit him."

"Hush."

Lucas is back to peering at the boulders, unconcerned with our presence. I step along the shore, my hand up for Nadia to stay put.

"I swear it," she says. "I wasn't trying to hit him."

"You're lucky you're so uncoordinated," I say, but there's no bite behind it. I steady my gaze ahead of me in the water, planting one foot on a rock in the shallows, and then another.

"Lucas," I say, gravel crunching under my foot. "What are you looking at?"

"Meris?" Nadia looks between me and Lucas, who doesn't acknowledge me as I hop to a new rock. "Meris, remember Yaya's rule?"

I hop atop three more boulders in quick succession, lest I lose my nerve. There's something there. I feel it in my bones like one feels the wind on their skin.

Cool droplets splash at my toes as the current picks up the deeper I hover. The next stone is the farthest, a leap the length of my height. The boulder shines, slick with water and moss.

"Don't be stupid." Nadia paces behind me, breaking my concentration.

I whip around on my perch. "Shut up, Nadia!" I heft my skirt and knot it at my hip. "And sit still. You're making me nervous."

"Come back to shore." Nadia shakes her head. "Or I'll come get you."

"And what, carry me back?" I roll my eyes. I weigh a stone more than her.

She looks to Lucas then with a change of heart. "Little boy, where are your parents? Go home."

To our surprise, he answers. "I don't know where they are."

Nadia chews on her words. “Well, just get out of here. Our grandma owns this land. Strangers aren’t allowed.”

Slowly, Lucas’ gaze returns to me on the stone, water rushing underneath me.

Nadia whines. “Meris, please. *Remember your accident in Ithaca?*”

The reminder stings. I’m the reason neither of us are allowed to play by the river.

And the reason we had to leave home.

Lucas has yet to move an inch. He watches me curiously.

I crouch and jump, catching the rock with both hands and landing roughly on my knees, breaking skin. Moments pass before I find enough balance to stand. I put on a brave face and turn back to my sister. She sticks out her tongue.

I climb to the trio of rocks on which Lucas has been so fixated. They’re bigger than they looked from the shore. I pull myself over the top, crouching for balance as another strong breeze threatens to topple me. Nadia fidgets like a dog on a porch wanting in the house. I peer into the water.

I can’t say the sight of sandy hair and freckles below surprises me. On the shore, Lucas stands. His jeans and shoes unblemished and clean. He looks no older than six.

Below me, his body floats in time with the crashing waves, caught between two boulders. He has the same red jacket and white tennies, the same gold flecks in his unblinking eyes.

“Nadi,” I call, cold to my core. “Go get Yaya.”

She grins and raises an eyebrow. “Stuck, are you?” She bends and rolls up her overalls. “Hold up, I’ll come get you.”

I shake my head. “Don’t.”

Her lips twist in confusion. Then she looks across to the other shore, where not of trace of Lucas remains. Not even a smear in the mud, or an imprint where he sat.

“No,” she breathes, eyes wide. She stumbles back. “No.”

“Nadia,” I start, but my voice breaks.

My sister wraps her skinny brown arms around herself, bending over as if her stomach hurts. I am reminded that she’s seven years old. “Meris, where’d he go?”

All I say is, “Go get Yaya.”

Nadia turns and dashes back the way we came.

Poem by Carina Collet

Autumn is the loudest silence
Of crackling leaves
Of kindling dreams
Of fiercer breeze
Each whisper like thunder to sleep-seeking trees.

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