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SHANNON MILLER
Burned by the Fire

You speak with nothing to say
Words do not form
Chasms are not filled

Instead, your eyes reject my face
Your skin radiates the perfect bronze
And your lips part, releasing the softest breath.

Your hands of such strength
Become the shield that protects us both
And the wall surrounding my heart
Crumbles into the depths of sorrow.

A light flickers on my open wound
It stops. No beat. I freeze.
Feeling lost in this oblivion
With one brush of your hand on mine
Everything is rushed back at me and there is no control.

Nothing else to feel but safe and trusted
I can take on life again
With a new high, you lifted me up above all.

But for how long?
The structured body can only hold so much
I must rely on the internal flame
The one that burnt me last time.
DAVON BRIGGS
My Family is Out of this World

A Magician can probably turn an elephant
    Into a baby mouse
But I can make the whole universe
    Fit into one house.
    My Father is Pluto
    Small, distant, and cold.
    My Mother is a star
The brightest your eyes will ever behold.
    My Sister has to be Saturn,
She was offered a couple of rings.
    My Brother Anthony is a meteor
    Never on a designated orbit.
    My Grandfather is the moon
    Only comes out at night.
    Mars might have life
    Like my Brother Mike.
    I illuminate this galaxy
Everything revolves around me.
    I hold them together as one.
    I'm the brightest of them all,
In other words, I'm the only Sun.
ERIKA TILOTTA
Color Personality

Colors can determine people.
It's true. I can tell.
Yellow is weak character
And orange likes to yell.

Blue is very soft-spoken.
Green is very calm.
Brown is adventurous
And pink is like a religious psalm.

Red can be angry.
Black is weird.
Violet is fun.
All colors engineered.

Shades are not tricky though,
And if you can't understand or see,
You are not the brightest crayon
In the box, now are we?
LORIANN R. BESPALKO
Undying

When I am here no longer,
Do not stand at my grave to weep,
   For I am not there,
       I do not sleep.

   I am in the ocean breezes that blow,
I am the whiteness of the freshly fallen snow.
I am the sunsets and other beautiful sights you see.
   Look there, that's where I shall be.

   I am in the warmth of a lover's embrace,
I am in the glow of a smile on a best friend's face.
   I am in the soft tingle of a kiss,
       I am with you in all your happiness.

When I am gone, and gone forever,
Do not stand at my grave to cry
   Because if you look up,
       You'll find me in the sky.
WILLIS DUNBAR
Thankful

I told the guy in the pale gray suit.
I was a citizen.
They might check my papers.
Immigration might show up.
I'll take the chance.
My babies are weeping and my wife is worried.
I'll take the chance.
They didn't.
I mean they haven't.
Thank God. I took the chance.
!Yo puedo trab ajo! !Si, puedo trabajo!

Let the fumes consume me.
I want to be smothered in smoke.
Let my ears devour the overwhelming noise.
I am a man.
An honest days work.
Measured by sweat and achy bones.
Tired.
Very tired.
But thankful.
ELAINE REISMAN
The Childhood Piano Scherzo

When I was a little girl my mother called me "E." Not "Ellie" or "Lanie," she'd call me just plain "E." I liked that. She'd say, "E," "let's go for a walk," then hand and hand we'd go, I liked that when she walked with me. My Mom called me "E." After walking I loved swinging upside-down, suspended and hanging by my knees. My hair would flow free! And my arms would dangle deep down taut to the ground. I liked that. Feeling free. My Mom still calls me "E."

Every Christmas Mom would give me scented panties rolled in a box. Planned out, these days-of-the-week, were delicately embroidered reminders, of "where I was and how I should be." These colored coded calendars of pink, yellow, white and blue were contrived cotton. To help me not forget. I can still hear her say, "Always wear clean panties." Then again, I still need something to help me start out my day. Exposing bold cotton still makes me think of mother.

Sundays were easy, lazy days when the music was played by me, The Lily Maid of Astolat, on my grandmother's piano. Then after, I'd walk in her garden. Now, taking a whiff I can still have those smells as they whirl my senses into a delicate spin. The scent of Phlox, purple Hyacinths and velvet day Lilies blended on my skin. This helps me not forget the damp dirt and rotting shells that once bordered her walk. By remembering this I know time passes and space devours all known landmarks. The orange-red smell of her velvet flowers still permeates my skin.

While winding my bike downhill, my hair blowing free, I dared to not let my feet touch the pedals. Without my pedals, I'd zoom into a silent sphere where even time knew nothing. I'd depend upon my senses to steer. With no look out ahead, I'd spin in mid air! My streamers flowed red.
And when the dust had cleared, you could hear me cheer! As my feet stretched open-wide: I swept past seeing. With my bold cotton exposed to air. I flew past all known landmarks. Going where the whirring metal swept me. It took me through velvet gardens where funnel-shaped scent rubbed off on my skin.

I traded my favorite doll for a flowered ash tray. Boy did I get gypped. Though everyone wants something. And trades are necessary. Some of us trade marbles. Or, we collect baseball cards, doll clothes, and souvenirs: hair ribbons and bobby pins. Some of us just like to trade. Because everyone needs something. And there's always a need for supply and demand. Only now I have nothing left for selling. Then again, I still need known landmarks to start out my day. Sometimes, I find them where I conceal my coded calendars to help me not forget.

I had a friend when I was ten. And I remember how smart I was compared to him. But, as time passed and moments flew, he would slow me down when I was curious. And I became a favorite doll. My glorious romance with the outside world had turned tail and curled in. I remembered how I once traveled without my pedals. Devouring mother. This was embroidered in my memory. And although I began to wander within my book covers bordered with shells—the damp dirt soon stained my fingers red and reminded me to go where the whirring metal sent me.

"When I was a little girl my mother called me E." Though, now as "Elaine," I still need those color coded cottons to help me not forget that everyone wants something! And, even though time has passed and devoured all known landmarks, I can still swing upside-down, allowing my hair to flow free. I start out each day with the scent of funnel-shaped lilies, this permeates me and allows me to steer past contrived cotton, while keeping a light touch on the petals, where my Astolat music suspends me, exposing mother, as we walk hand and hand with our feet taut on the ground.
ELAINE REISMAN

Love

A gentle breeze stirs parting the folds of my robe lifting open the fabric to the eerie light of morning. Then making the moment seem more vague and vulnerable, the darkly infused scent of nightshade almost intoxicates me as bent flowers take on their own presence under the weight of the morning dew. The stalked Hostras dare their rounded pearls strung atop their tuberous green and spread Irises lick their purple tongues, dispelling dust, as the morning sun rises to gold over the trees. At once all flowers seem to throb and thrum—an opium cloud of carnal dust dispelled upon the moist grass.
ROBERT ABRUNZO
For My Love

A gentle kiss upon my cheek,
through lidded eye at once I peek,
from restful slumber I awake,
such radiant beauty I partake.

Here I find a princess sought,
and found, at once, entranced and caught,
my spirit, my body, claimed to be,
both heart and soul alone for thee.

Through life storm wrought and tempest tossed,
I count those things I've had and lost,
and discover, in time, that none compare,
to my radiant love, so fine, so fair.

When all seems like it's been in vain,
each day passed under clouds and rain,
with head held high I look and see,
my sunshine's face smiling back at me.

So long I looked yet never found,
that which filled the gaps that hound,
until the day we came together,
and realized I'll be yours forever.

My love, you give me breath and life,
the strength to battle through the strife,
a thousand battles, big and small,
for you I'll gladly bear them all.

From you comes all the joy I feel,
the love, the happiness that's finally real,
in your embrace I know I'll find,
all that's true and good and kind.
My love for you shall always surpass,
beyond the measure of any class,
a wonder at once wide and tall,
from whose glory I will never fall.

By solemn vows, we'll be as one,
joined by bands of gold and stone,
you know my dear that I love you,
and soon the world will know 

I do.
COURTNEY SMITH
Untitled

The enraged waves slammed against the rocks that had broken off from the cliff ages before. The strength of the wind tore leaves from branches and branches from the trees. Rain poured down from the black sky, flooding the earth and feeding the ocean that raged against the cliff. Lightening scorched the midnight Sky and angry, ferocious thunder sounded from the black clouds.

The rain slammed against her fragile body, soaking the baggy clothes that barely held against her thin body. The raindrops hid the tears that fell down her face as she looked out over the sea into the storm that reflected her own inner feelings and thoughts. The wind pulled at her wet, brown hair, tangling it. Lightening flashed and she looked down at her frighteningly thin body, disgust and hatred rising inside her, along with a weariness, a longing to be free.

"I can’t take this anymore. I don’t want to feel fat or hate myself anymore," she whispered.

But that voice, the voice that plagued her thoughts for as long as she could remember, that voice that never gave her peace, whispered to her again.

"Well, that’s too bad, Chrissy. You'll never be thin. You'll never be beautiful. You're fat and ugly and always will be, and you know it."

She slammed her fists against her temples, her small, ninety-pound frame falling to the saturated earth.

"I just want you to go away," she cried, curling into a ball by the edge of the cliff.

"But you'll never be rid of me, Chrissy. I've always been here, and I always will be. I keep you trying to look, at least, presentable. You're too fat, Chrissy. You'd be even more fat and ugly without me."

She looked up to the black, angry night sky and shouted into the storm, "Why do I have to feel this way? I’ve been good my whole life! What did I do to deserve this? Why am I being punished?"
Lightening flashed and violent thunder rolled through the clouds. She got to her bare, muddy feet and picked up a rock and buried it in the dark heavens, not caring that it would never hit anything but the sea.

"That's not an answer!" she cried, and returned her gaze to the sea, her anger fading away, the weakness she consistently felt returning.

She sighed heavily as she gazed longingly down at the waves as they crashed against the cliff. Fresh tears spilled from her hallow eyes. She stepped up to the edge of the cliff and looked out at the black sea.

"I'm sorry, Kat. Therapy isn't working, nothing we've tried has. I can't take this feeling anymore. I have to be free and this is the only way I have left. I'm so tired, Kat. I'm tired of trying to fight and always losing. I'm just so tired. I don't want you to worry anymore. I don't want you to go without the things you need in order to pay for my therapy. I'm going to give us both freedom. I love you so much, Kat, and I’m sorry for all the pain I've caused you, for everything."

She looked up one more time to the raging storm, her tears flowing endlessly down her cheeks as she prayed that her sister heard her. Not hearing the voice shouting behind her through the beating of her heart, she stepped over the edge and let the ocean take her, hoping to finally silence the voice, and grant herself the wrong kind of freedom.
COURTNEY SMITH

Darkness

I live in a darkness that is my mind.
Here I have been trapped for all of time.
This blackness controls all aspects of my life,
Causing me all kinds of pain and strife.
I dream for the day I can live in the light,
My thoughts and feelings actually bright.
The chains that bind me crush that wish,
Adding the desire for freedom to my list.
I want to know how to change my thoughts,
To actually win the battles I've fought.
But I don't think that will ever be.
I'll just have to live with the hatred I have for me.
ELAINE REISMAN
Life on a December Day

The old woman hangs sheets
in the cold air
of early December,
tyling the corners on rope
already frozen and crusted with ice.
Children skate the surface of a near-by pond
hard edged against a lead sky.
And, inside closed window frames,
fires light the corners of lives
where the smell of living
is sealed in and sounds of daily chores
are barely audible, and drawn behind
heavy curtains that drape the floors.
Smoke curls from a chimney
and outside a husband shovels
steaming dung out of a barn,
scrapping metal on wet cement,
he flings the heavy load
where a stain forms on previously
fallen snow, once bleached like a clean bone.
DOROTHY NOGUERAS
Respite

When disquieting events tarnish my day
I recall the aftermath of a summer’s storm,
Of silken clouds that coil into a parade
Of moving, melting, changing shapes—
A mockingbird singing on a swaying reed
His tail twitching like a metronome
Singing counterpoint to distant carillon bells—
Sounds that embroider the rain-washed air
And calm the cluttered mind until the sunsets
Grape-green yellows, purples and cherry hues
Drown day in a crescendo of color—
On a vast canvas peppered with countless stars
Proclaiming the hand of God...
Then—Leaves all to stillness and to me.
LYNN PULVERMULLER
In My Dreams

As my alarm clock goes off, I slowly come back from my dreamland and realize that it is 5:30 a.m., still before sunrise. It is so dark that I can barely see in front of my face, but I still walk around, searching for my things. The night has enveloped me in darkness, so I do not turn on the light for fear that I will be disturbing the dark silence. The small creatures of my dreams will cry out in pain if light ever invades the black surroundings of my mind. I figure that I can find my things in my room without the light by using the picture that is in my mind and by listening to the little creatures. I get dressed, and finally leave the safe-haven of my room to venture downstairs for breakfast.

When I turn on the light in the kitchen, it hurts my eyes. Why? I wonder. I am not sure, but my head aches very badly now. It hurts so bad that I soon find myself in the darkness again and I am falling, falling towards the ground. What is happening? As I hit the ground, I am somewhere inside my mind. Is that a unicorn running by? I am now with all the creatures that are in my head. I stand up, and they all come towards me. They start to pull me. Where am I going?

I follow a brick road going towards a building with a silver plate on the door. The plate says, "Black Magic Hall." The creatures stop for a moment and then they drag me inside. The darkness envelopes me as the door shuts. Suddenly, small sparks ignite in the dark air, and then a creature is hovering in front of me. The creature is a witch, a black magic witch who does harm to all the creatures that do not obey her. The witch holds out a book to me, and I take it. Then, as suddenly as she came, she disappears. I now have the Book of Spells, and I am still trying to figure out why I am here. I have no idea what the book is for, and as I try to read the cover, a bright light is suddenly in front of me. I drop the book and now I cannot find it. I begin to wonder where the light goes, so I follow it. As I go through, I find myself in a small room.

The room is white and padded. Where am I? I think to myself as I try to move my arms. A wave of fear sweeps over me when I find that I cannot move. Shapes of people start to appear in front of me. As I try to sit up, one of the shapes helps me. I do not recognize them. They start to talk, but I do not hear or understand...
what they are saying. The faces change, and standing in front of me now are my parents, my sister, and a doctor. Where am I? I think again. A piece of paper is placed in front of me on a small white table. I cannot read it until they put my glasses on. I finally know where I am as I read the heading. In big letters, across the top of the page, it says, "COMMITTED."

I was just home; how can I be in an asylum? The rest of the words become a blur as I read them: "Sees creatures in her own reality. Has fainting spells. Parents committed her so she does not hurt herself and for her to get treatment. Repeatedly describes herself as ‘The Chosen One’ and says that she needs to find the Book of Spells. Reported crazy." After I finish reading, I politely begin to tell them that I am not crazy. They, of course, do not believe me. I scream curses and spells at them as I try to get up and run. They all laugh and the doctor walks toward me with a long needle. I scream to them to stop, pleading with them. They do not listen.

I instantly feel the prick of the needle and let out one piercing scream that ends in sobs. I hear someone say, "Crazy kids always deny their reality." I try to talk, but I cannot. I then see the small creatures again, and they welcome me back. Now I get to continue my search for the Book of Spells, but first I try one last time to wake up. I try, but what is the use? No one wants me anyway. I fall back into the black silence of my mind. I hear my body scream endlessly as more drugs are pumped into my system to sedate me. I want to wake up now. I keep telling myself that this is one continuous dream and that I will wake up in my room with my stuffed animals soon. I realize that I will never wake up as I slip deeper and deeper into the dark, depressing silence of my mind. I will never get to see the sunrise again. I will always be in my dreams.
I sit back in my chair. Underneath our table, my wiggling toes, trapped inside my shoes, point to the man sitting across from me at a slightly acute angle—one large enough to outline the width of his hips. We smile gently in unison like an unspoken agreement.

"Would you like some more wine?" I nearly jump; his words break me from my thoughtless trance. I nod. He pours. I drink and slide backward with a sigh into the arms of my chair.

Well, we discussed a bit of our life stories; touched on some childhood memories; general facts concerning family, work, politics, and hobbies; hopes, dreams, and failures.

"Are you going to have another as well?" I pipe up, motioning to the bottle. He licks his lips. "I guess I might as well finish it." I check my watch.

"It's still pretty early."

"For you, perhaps." There it is again—that expression in his eyes! I couldn't read into it but, whatever it means, it seeps into me and makes me edgy. I try to evade his stare but my eyes defiantly dart from one enlarged pupil to the other.

"I've had a wonderful time, Chelsea. I'll give you a lift back to your apartment?"

"Sure. Want to get a move on?"

He grins. I squeeze his hand. His expression swims with my touch. Together, they hold their breath, diving into the possibilities this night has to offer. He pays the check and leads me to his car as I debate if what I want is a mere possibility to him or a decided reality. A candlelit, mouthwatering feast served under a warm silk tablecloth, a rich chocolate mousse to satisfy my sweet-tooth hunger, and two empty bottles of a buttery merlot transforms my careless mood into a provocative desire.

He drops me off at the sidewalk leading to my apartment. I lean over and kiss him hard; I taste the wine upon and between our stained lips. I linger long enough to whisper, "Walk me to my stairs?"

He turns his key and takes it out of the ignition. Stepping out of the car, he walks around to my door, opening it slowly and closing it behind me. My feet touch the pavement, his arms link around mine to hold my body straight. We walk up the stairs leading to my front door.
"You know, it's been a long time since I've felt like I have a lot in common with someone after a first date," he says, standing casually, leaning against the thin metal railing lining the small staircase. I smile and fiddle with my key chain. "I'd like to do this again." He continues. "Weekends are best but, well, I guess you can just call me sometime and let me know when you're available."

"That would be nice." I unlock my door.

"Okay. Great. Perfect." He smacks his hands together, rubbing them slightly. "Would you like to come in?"

"Oh, thanks. I'd love to! But I have a long day tomorrow. You know what they say about Mondays!"

I giggle a bit. Honestly, between you and me, I have no idea what anyone says about Mondays. Though I doubt it's anything important, whatever it might be. But that's beside the point. Right now I'm getting frustrated and he's turning to leave.

"Are you sure?" I open the door, placing one foot onto my soft blue carpet. "Just for some coffee or something?"

"No, really. I'm fine." He touches my arm lightly and pecks me on the cheek.

"Give me a call tomorrow?" I shake my head yes and give him a small, close-mouthed smile.

"Alright then. Great. That's wonderful." He grins like he's begging the sides of his mouth for wrinkles. "You look a bit, I don't know, down? Did I say something wrong?"

"No. I just expected—"

"I mean, I wasn't too bold, was I? To ask you to call tomorrow?"

"Quite the opposite, actually."

"Oh good. I didn't want to give you the wrong impression of me. You're very trusting to invite me in, but really, you shouldn't be so giving. It's a good quality, to be so kind, but you have to think, if I was someone else, well, what I'm trying to say is someone else could take advantage of that situation."

My mouth nearly drops. "Oh, Danny, please." I try desperately to regain my composure. "I was only thinking that you could come in, maybe get to know each other a bit better? You know, those two bottles of wine were very kind and giving to me. I just thought I'd return the favor."
He laughs. "You really are too much!"
"I'm being serious!"
"You're a sweet girl, Chelsea. You have a big heart."
I shake my head. What the hell doesn't he understand here?
"Give me a call tomorrow." He walks with a bounce in his step down my stairs.
"Alright then."

He opens the door to his car. "I'm glad I met you. It's so good to know there are still some decent people out there. Some people who know life isn't all about getting drunk and having sex with just about anyone in the thrill of a moment."
"Excuse me?"
"Well, a beautiful woman like yourself must have come across some sleazy men in your time. It's good to see it hasn't made you cynical. That gives me hope. Some girls I've dated, they just want to lead you into their bedrooms on the first night out!" He stops. He looks down at the street and kicks a pebble from the side of his tire.

"Anyway, like I was saying," He stares into my eyes. They're back to that intense expression yet again. I blink quickly, stone-faced. "I believe there should be more to relationships—more to life—than that kind of attitude." He speaks slower, quieter. "I know there's more to someone than what their body has to offer."

"Right." I whisper.

He clears his throat. "Right. I'll be waiting to hear from you. Sleep well." He waves to me as he steps into his car. I return the gesture as he drives away.

I close my door and rip the post-it note from its thumbtack. The barren bulletin board stares at me blankly, mimicking that look in Danny's eyes. I silently beg it to stop. I crumble the yellow paper in defiance, hiding his number from my sight. Throwing it into the garbage—on top of a browned banana peel from breakfast, next to yesterday's grease stained pizza box—I try to erase his name from my mind and stop his words from embedding themselves into my memory. I decide the presence of the balled-up paper makes the garbage bag completely full. I tie up the ends of the bag, open my door, and throw it next to my neighbor's heap of trash. Retreating inside my apartment, I lock my door in relief.
WILLIS DUNBAR
Professor, I'm sorry. But...

There's gum under my seat.
Still fresh.
Still clammy.
Stuck between my fingernails.
Another cold hard unforgiving desk
presses against my back.
The boy beside my
body gives off
an obnoxious smell.
The dormant air
makes it hard.
No!
Makes it impossible
to open my
eyes and ears.
My mind is anywhere
but here.
In Cancun.
Maybe Bermuda,
even
Aruba.
Dreaming of getting wet and wild.
Still in the bed.
Still at the party.
Still everywhere but here.
A stressed smirk teases
the professor's face,
as he covers his frustration.
I feel this frustration.
So I try
and try. Try
to write or scribble notes
that gradually turn into doodles.
Doodles, professor, doodles.
ERIKA TILOTTA
In Between: On A Windowsill

*I live in a doorway
between two rooms* .

-Pat Mora, "Sonrisas"

I don’t live in a doorway. The doorway separates two rooms. I live on a windowsill that separates the inside and the outside. I live in three worlds: the inside, the outside, and the in-between.

The inside world is my house. It is mostly dark, but it is warm. It is home. I am comfortable in my surroundings. There are no big changes in my house; everything stays still. I can go anywhere in my house such as the bedrooms, the kitchen, and the dining room. When I am inside, I can be myself in mind and fashion (or lack of). However, being inside hurts. The only things I do are go on the internet, watch television, do homework, eat, sleep, and play with my pets. My parents tell me to get out of the house and to be a normal teenager. They say it is great.

The outside world is everything more than the inside world. It is bright, but it can still be cold. It is the real world. There is adventure everywhere, even if some of us don’t realize it. Everything is constantly changing and moving. There are places to go and some that are restricted. I can go into a store, but I can’t go to a bar until I am at the legal drinking age. When I am outside, I can conform with everyone and do what they do: go shopping, walk in the park. I can talk to a different person, go to the movies, eat food that I never had before…There are more things to do. However, being outside hurts. Some friends and people are not interested in doing things like seeing a specific movie with me. Even worse are the people who think they are better than I am, and take advantage of my sensitivity. They make me hate myself.

The in-between world is not really a world at all, but a place on the windowsill. I can see both the inside world and the outside world. It is a gift and a curse. The in-between world is not really a world at all, but a place on the windowsill. I can see both the inside world and the outside world. It is a gift and a curse. The two worlds are exciting and boring from different eyes. The worlds are also cruel, with fights and the
feeling of failure. I am isolated from my current family and from the people outside because I am unique. I am not accepted by some people because I have different views on certain subjects such as politics and religion...just like everyone else. I am alone in two opinionated worlds. I break down crying for the lack of friends and for having friends that don't want anything to do with me. I just don't want to be alone.

So here I sit on my windowsill, feeling the wind hit half my face. I watch both worlds and their contents. I am damned to stay where I am, fearing I will fall outside or inside my room. I am pushed by family one way and pushed by strangers in another. My happiness and sorrow struggle to balance each other. There are times I wonder about jumping. I don't know, so I stay where I am. Two worlds separated and I am in-between, like the glass window and just as fragile.
ROBERT ABRUNZO
Hell Above, Heaven Below

I sat on high in green-leafed tree,
watching a stream flow far below.
Clear blue water, calm and pure,
so softly, swiftly it did flow.

Flowers bloomed along its edge,
in red and blue and green.
Fed by that stream, of melted snow,
the land was strong and clean.

The forest came alive for me,
as clearings filled with song.
Heaven on earth, there I had found,
for which my heart did long.

Joining with nature, so far down,
to find my life's great essence.
Intruding, would I find my peace,
destroying heaven with my presence?

I pondered my place, should I descend,
where in heaven could I fit.
Shattered dreams filled my head,
thus still on high I sit.
LORIANN R BESPALKO
Silence

It is completely quiet,
Without a single sound;
Not a single movement can be found.
Do you hear it?
It is the silence.

No one talks.
No one speaks.
Suddenly, everyone you know seems so mild and meek.
I still hear it:
Silence.

It is deafening now.
There is not a sound.
The silence is all around
It is enveloping me
Bringing in the darkness
Where no one is around...
Where there is not a sound.
I didn't want to kiss that little green amphibian, but his mastery of the English language and his sharp intellect persuaded me to outweigh the consequences. A princess didn't deserve this sudden change of personality. Sure he turned into a prince by title, but his voice was harsh and he had a temper. His Pinocchio-like nose unusually and largely occupied the center of his face. His beady eyes seemed to sting like a bee. He generally evoked a robotic, awkward strangeness. I was not pleased.
JESSICA FARGNOLI
Maelstrom

In the world of chaos and confusion
Arises the element of turbulence
That forms a spiraling whirlpool
Where many can survive or lose all hope
  Stay strong in adversity
  Calm in the wake of fear
  Triumphant in your spiral
    Upward
    Downward
Wherever you are in the maelstrom
JENNIFER BERTOLINI

Waiting

Not knowing.
   The seconds turn into minutes,
      the minutes turn into hours,
      the hours into days...
   You sit holding back,
   Anger, Frustration, Anxiety.
   You walk around trying hard
to calm yourself from the suspense.
   Thinking...
   Will it be bad or good?
   Will it affect you or not?
You do all types of things, trying to relax,
but instead all you want to do is SCREAM!
   The time will soon come,
      and you will know.
   But until then,
The Question is... WHEN?
MEAGHAN O’KELLY
Gasping For Breath

Gasping for breath
In a sinking world.
Pulling against the current
Trying to fill your lungs.
Fall into the quicksand,
Go along with the flow.
Oxygen is leaving,
Your eyes are seeing black.
You float above the ground
And see yourself lying there.
The sunset sings to you
As you float above the sea.
Singing a warm soft song
Telling you to come.
You follow and are swallowed,
Pulled farther and farther away.
You think about your family
And try to return to them.
It’s too late now.
You’ve been sucked in,
Never to return.
You hear their cries and screams
And feel their pain and tears.
You try to push your way back,
But you are stuck.
You long to see their faces
And burn to hold them in your arms.
All is gone and all is quiet.
This can’t be heaven.
But then all of your favorite things appear
And you realize that this is your heaven.
You no longer feel the missing void
Of the loss of your family.
There is a lake and a fishing pole.
You pick it up and toss a line,
   Feeling a tug before the animal slips away.
   You blink and suddenly the water
   Transforms itself into thousands of books,
   The stories bringing you to different worlds,
      Anything you want, yours to have.
   But then you remember faintly
   As you look down to your finger.
      A gold band there, what for?
   Oh, yes. Wife, children, life.
Tears begin to flow and your heart begins to hurt
   Wait! What heart?
   Fingers float from arm to neck.
      No pulsing, no thumping.
   You pull off your shirt and see a hole.
An empty void where your heart used to reside.
   The pit of books is now a pit of hearts.
   You try to run away and fall into the pit.
Your eyes snap open, your hands unclench.
   You walk into the bathroom
      And touch your arm and neck.
   There is a pulse, there is thumping.
      The nightmare is over
   And you are home once more.
DAVON BRIGGS
A Simple Story

"Damn, hurry up. There isn't any reason to look pretty." They were late for practice, an hour late, and Simple was an hour later than he's ever been.

"Alright Simple, come on n. I'm ready. How's my hat?
"Cool"
"And my hair?
"Come on Ray, now you're playing."
"You're driving?"
"It's your car. You drive."

The track was a fifteen-minute drive but Ray looked as if he wanted to get there in two. Cutting lanes and taking yellow signals as an indication to speed up, he was giving this Celica a little more than it could handle.

"What's the rush Ray?"
"Calm down. You got your seatbelt on?"
"Yeah."
"Let me check because I'll be damned if I get another tick—"
"Get your hand off my waist and watch the road! You acting like you—"

What Ray couldn't see was that there was a red light flashing and it wasn't the police. Running past the stop signal and into oncoming traffic, their car was hit by another and went head on into a telephone pole.

"Simple. Are you okay?"
"Yeah. Not a scratch. Let's go and get some help."

Getting out of the car, they were shocked to see that no one bothered to ask them how they were doing. In stead, as they walked away from the scene, a crowd formed around the car and people looked in it as if the windows were rolled up and there were two gold nuggets lying on the driver's seat.

"Simple, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"
"Well I don't know. I'm afraid to ask but what are you thinking?"

"No one even noticed us. I don't have insurance on that car. We're two minutes from the track. Let's just go like nothing even happened."
"Well do you really think they didn't see us?"
"If they did then they're just about the rudest bunch of people I've ever come across. Let's not worry about that. Take the chance."

"Alright but let's go up this local road to blend in."

While walking, the wind began to blow very hard but strangely, Ray's hat, which was so neatly placed, didn't blow off and Simple didn't seem to notice the unusual gusts. What brought the wind to his attention was the ten-dollar bill that brushed past his leg and landed in the grass. To avoid attention, he knelt down as if he were tying his sneaker then slipped the bill into his pocket. As he got up, he looked around to see if his stealthy attempt had failed. As he looked over the bushes that stood on the lucky patch of grass, he noticed another ten-dollar bill—but an approximate ten stack of fifty-dollar bills accompanied this one. This time, he couldn't help to alert Ray.

"Hey, look at all that money."

"Where? Ohhh, damn. Let me get some."

"See, look at you Ray. We're gonna get caught. You have to do it like this. Smooth."

They picked up all the money in sight, and then looked around to see if anyone was watching. Apparently, people were, because there was a group of four people chasing bills across the street. It was a sight to see because as they jumped and ran in circles, the rest of the people walked past as if they didn't see opportunity flying in the air. But Simple and Ray saw it. They ran across the street to join the mayhem. When the group of four turned into a group of six, they all stopped to acknowledge each other. One of the others said, "Hey, we must be in Heaven."

"...We just got in an accident. Our car was totaled but we got away without a scratch."

Ray responded behind a smile, "Must be. There might be more over there in the grass."

As they all policed the grass, they managed to come across a few more bills.

"Kurren C. Williams, and this is my husband Franc, my son William but we call him Bill, and my daughter Wanda A. M'Leslie Williams. We're all together.
This money isn't our only luck. We just got in an accident. Our car was totaled but we got away without a scratch."

Ray looked at Simple out of the corner of his eye and quickly changed the subject.

"So how much money do you have Simple?"

"Two hundred-thousand "

"Well we have one million between the four of us. My wife and the family are going on vacation. Simple's a funny name."

Simple responded by saying, "Are we lost Ray?"

"Looks to me as if we're in the middle of nowhere but I can't wait to get out of here so I can buy a new c—,"

Simple cut by saying, "Let's find our way out. Follow the flow of the river. It leads somewhere." As they were walking, Fran c noticed an opening between a pair of bushes. "Look, a way out."

When they parted the bushes, it was a road so straight; it looked like an upside down letter "v." They decided to follow the road in hope to find a store on the side—but more than that, some more bills. As they walked the road, Simple felt an awkward feeling of loneliness and it added to his feeling when he looked back and couldn't see the forest from which they came. His revelation was broken by Ray, "So Simple what are you gonna do with all that money?"

"My mother will never have to work again. That's just about all I'm—"

He was interrupted by Bill saying, "Look, people!"

About a quarter mile down the road were six people slowly approaching. When they caught Ray's attention he said, "Let's not tell them about what we just found. If we have to double back through the woods again, we can continue our search." The rest agreed but Simple nodded silently. As the people were in plain view, Ray and the Williams family attempted to avoid eye contact, but Simple fell a few feet behind and slowed his pace. As the people got closer, he noticed that they were very poorly dressed. When they were just a couple of feet away, he could see they had two children with them. Their eyes wore an empty look but were glazed with moisture. Simple let his company walk ahead and stopped to get a better look at the people. He never saw anyone walk so gracefully. When they were side by side with Simple, they turned and stared at him without a word; then simultaneously, a tear fell from twelve eyes. Lost for any other words, Simple said "Would you like so me money?"

One of the children replied by saying, "No, we'll be fine but you should get rid of it because you won't need it where you're going."
Before Simple could respond, they turned and walked away. He noticed that one of the adults was wearing a book bag with an open zipper. Instead of noticing them, he let them walk a few feet then he tossed the money into the bag and watched them walk away and get smaller and smaller until they were out of sight. When he turned around, he noticed Ray and the Williams’ had left him. Strangely, even though he was by himself, he didn't feel alone, but he began to break into a slow jog in an effort to find his friend. After running nearly a mile he came to an hill alongside the continuing road. He chose to run up the hill and ran into a crowd of people. He began to search the crowd for the flat-leavers until he scanned every face. By this time, he was in front of the crowd and could see what was causing all the commotion. Down a small hill, he saw two men looking into a light shining between two tall trees. Suddenly, one of the men transcended the light. Then a young girl came from behind Simple and went down the hill to repeat the process. When she was out of sight, a man softly pushed Simple. He turned around to hear the man say, "Go on young man. It's your turn."

Without a word, Simple gracefully walked down the hill and not once did he look back. He was no longer alone.

Simple and a friend get into a car accident. They exit the car, not knowing that they are wandering spirits and they really died in the accident. In the attempt to escape the scene they come across others from the accident, who were also killed, and lots of money. They get lost while searching for more money then come to a road. They don't know this is the road that leads to the crossing-over, but Simple gets a clue when he comes across six people headed in the opposite direction to fill in for him and the five others. Simple continues on to meet his fate.

Draw your own conclusion.
MEAGHAN O’KELLY
Night

I still feel his arms around me. He was like the Man of Steel when he picked me up and squeezed until I thought my insides would burst. I giggled and choked and screamed before he finally released me and I fell back to the kitchen floor in heap. I would get up and run after him for a real hug, forcing him to wrap his big, safe, daddy-arms around me until I was finished.

Now I feel those hugs when I sleep at night, waiting for him to come and visit me in my dreams. The part of him that I remember most vividly is his hands. Big enough for my cheeks to fit in, they would cradle my face on a cold winter day, or carry my six-year-old body to bed when I was too tired to walk. They were callused from time and yard work, torn by the thorns of his beloved roses. To hold his hand was like being rapped in a warm bed on a freezing morning. It was never cold between the safe comfort of his fingers and his palms, never harsh when I needed consoling. They are the epitome of what home is supposed to feel like.

The smell of him has long since lifted from his old gray fleece, worn jeans, and moccasins. Every time I smell cigarette smoke and Old Spice I remember being a little girl and watching him walk around the house in his scrubs, getting ready to go to work at the hospital. When he was done shaving around his dark mustache in the dim bathroom, he would put on lime-scented Old Spice aftershave and then rub the leftovers onto my cheeks. I would carry his scent along with me all day. It made me feel so special. I was sneaking smells of his fleece coat for a month before all trace of him had been sucked out of the old and tired time capsule.

His surprisingly good singing voice still rings in my ears when I hear Eric Clapton and Bob Marley—both requirements of music knowledge in my father’s house—as well as Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin. Music was the spark that lit the fire of his memory. He would talk for hours about his forty-five years of life, or the thousands of books he’d inhaled (all holding the importance of oxygen to him), or what he thought about anything and everything, all with Cat Stevens or Cream playing in the background. His soothing, deep voice would lull me into a dreamy sleep as he talked into the night, amusing himself more than anyone else.

If I shut my eyes as tightly as I can in the darkness of my bedroom in the middle of the night, I can still feel those hands holding mine, smell his mixture of cigarettes and aftershave, and hear his voice vibrating through my ears. They bounce around the nerves in my brain making me feel as if he is right next to me. The black of night lulls me into a deep slumber and we meet again, a little girl and her daddy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heart pounding</th>
<th>Steady</th>
<th>The sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temperature rising</td>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>Of your heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulse jumping</td>
<td>Calm, yet ecstatic</td>
<td>Pulsating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palms sweating</td>
<td>Laughing</td>
<td>Is the dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing speedily</td>
<td>Smiling</td>
<td>Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All blurred</td>
<td>Cheesy</td>
<td>Making its own beat</td>
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<tr>
<td>But the sound of the music</td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Replacing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything slowly, slowly</td>
<td>Music changing</td>
<td>Music’s rhythm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disappearing</td>
<td>Coming to an end</td>
<td>Stop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swaying</td>
<td>Head pounding</td>
<td>Focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popping</td>
<td>Side throbbing</td>
<td>Walk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snapping</td>
<td>Tiredness taking effect</td>
<td>Sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibrating</td>
<td>People and things</td>
<td>Replenish yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td>All muscles moving</td>
<td>Returning to eyesight</td>
<td>Then get up</td>
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<tr>
<td>One after the other</td>
<td>Body slowing</td>
<td>And start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat by beat</td>
<td>No popping</td>
<td>All over again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulse by pulse</td>
<td>Snapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoned out</td>
<td>Or vibrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaced out</td>
<td>Only swaying</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serene, yet excited</td>
<td>And stepping</td>
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