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What happened to the rest of them didn’t matter. What mattered was the he had chewed four of them and vomited in the sink. He knew that much and that was all he needed to know because it was the truth.

Party with All the Writers On My Wall

by Taya Kitaysky

I went to the party of my life
and John Ashbery was there,
as well as Russell Edson, who hid
very nicely beside a bowl in the corner,
and Jorie Graham
who took four men into the bedroom
and howled very nicely as well,
those four men of course
were: Ginsberg Tate Strand Simic
and also Atwood who is a man
when she feels like it,
she can just write herself
out of her body, I know.
Whitman ate the whole room
after which Rilke pricked himself
on a rose thorn and as he died
Olson, Roethke and Baudelaire
swam by in his blood
shouting poems,
while Eliot, Eliot
swished the moon around
like a yolk-less egg
in his bowler hat,
and oh Marquez,
he tossed it
into the garden
where it of course
became a woman.
make out what he was saying because he kept his mouth mostly shut. "Where the fuck are my pills?"

"Alex," Thomas said. "I gotta tell ya. I lied. There's no girl in Durango. I made her up completely." He stood up and realized that he was naked. There was a towel hanging next to him, but he didn't want to wrap it around his waist so he just held his hands over his crotch. "Sorry I lied."

"I don't give a fuck," Alex said. "My pills. Where are they?"

"I took four of them. I'm sorry. There were so many in the bottle I didn't think you'd notice four. I was drunk, I guess."

"Four my fucking ass. You emptied my whole fucking bottle you fucking asshole. I can barely even move my fucking face." Thomas didn't think he'd ever heard Alex curse, and even though he'd been good friends with him in middle school didn't think he'd ever been very angry at all. This was new for him, and Thomas couldn't make much sense of it. It looked like an act, some kind of joke Alex was pulling.

"You're a liar," he said. "Now let me go get some clothes on. I'm sorry about the girl from Durango and I'm sorry about the pills." He put his pants and shirt back on without hearing whatever it was that Alex was yelling. He washed his face and looked at himself in the mirror. It still hurt, but he could bend his fingers just enough to dry his face off with the towel. "I think the snow is letting up," he said, "we should go get my car so I can get home. I haven't done my Christmas shopping yet."

"You lying son of a bitch, you call your fucking mom and get her to help you with your car. I'm fucking done having you here." He yelled a little with pain and kicked the base of the sink. Thomas went upstairs to find the phone. He called home and told his mother what happened.

"You took his pills?" she asked. She sounded like he'd woken her up.

"Only four of them," he said. "I'm sorry if I bothered you, but I need to get home. I'll be waiting on the porch."

"The snow was still falling outside, but had let up a bit. He couldn't tell where the sun was shining from, but there was daylight all around, so it was up somewhere. If he couldn't even see the sun, he figured, he couldn't see a tiny church. It was out in the canyon somewhere, and was comfortable with that. He was comfortable all around, and was still feeling a little remnant of how he'd felt last night. One of these days soon, he thought, he'd find a girl. She wouldn't be from Durango, probably, and she might not be all that pretty, but it would be nice. If he talked to her right she might think his hands were pretty interesting. He tried to remember how many pills he'd taken. It was four. It was four pills and he was sure of it. Alex, or someone, was a liar, but it wasn't him. Whatever anyone had to say, he didn't know what happened to the rest of them.

---

The Rock Inside Your Heart Inside You

by Taya Kitaysky

The rock in your heart:
there was nothing they could do.
Your arteries had already grown around
it like roots, you blood loved it
as a river does its stone.

Inside the rock is a crystal
shining secretly to itself.
It is shy, it blushes
light unborn from the dark.

The light inside the crystal inside
the rock inside your heart
inside you,
and now you will never rest,
there is nothing you can do.

Think of your body.
A vague outline standing
alone in a field.
The madman who tore yellow flowers
out of the ground for you
is gone.
You are alone, the wind near.
Even in their slow clear bleeding,
the flowers forgave you.

The wind finds the tunnels
into your body, going too fast
in the dark. It finds your heart.
The rock hardens and softens
like a fist.

You cannot see your body
anymore. You know only
that the wind has passed
through your heart,
is waiting on the other side.
It does not die, it opens.

The wind, holding close, hesitating
on the other side of your
heart.

"Do you wish you could change them often? Like, if you could switch hands with me
or somebody else?"

"I'd change it," he said. "Yea, I'd change it. Not with your hands. I don't want your
hands. I'd change it, I think, if I could." His hands were still coming back together after he'd
broken them not long ago, and he wrapped them around his last Gimp and took a drink. "If
I could," he said.

"I guess that's good," Alex said, getting up. "I guess I'd want to change them too. I'm
going to bed now, though. It's probably late. Night, Hooks."

Thomas didn't say anything, but turned his head to watch Alex walk down the stairs
to his room. After a few minutes he finished his drink and went downstairs himself.

Before going to lie down on the couch, Thomas went into the bathroom and took off
all of his clothes. He held his hands behind his back and looked at himself in the mirror. The
way he saw it, it looked perfect. Since freshman year, when he stopped spending time with
Alex, he had worked out during lunch at school every day, and the muscles on his arms and
all over his body were strong. His hair was cut to make his jaw look stronger and his cheek-
bones higher, and thanks to various soaps and creams he hadn't had so much as a blemish on
his face for all of high school.

Down by his stomach, Alex had left the orange pill bottle on the counter. Thomas
poured four of the pills out of the bottle and onto the counter. He chewed them, drank a glass
of water and looked himself over in the mirror until they kicked in. When he saw his reflec-
tion, he didn't see why a girl from Durango wouldn't want to visit him and call him every
fuckin' day. He took his hand out from behind his back and started to move them. He
wrapped each one around the opposite wrist, and stood like that for ten minutes or an hour,
until he was satisfied with his reflection. The bathroom had a mirror near the toilet, and he
stood by it to watch the snow outside. There was a little less snow, and he could see it falling
under an orange streetlight a ways down the road. The snow was in big, orange piles under
the light and looked comfortable and warm. He tried making shadow puppets with his hands
but he had never learned how, so they always looked like hands and nothing else. After
looking at the streetlight some more he vomited in the sink and on the counter. He lay on the
floor and fell asleep with his hands behind his head.

The next morning, he woke up with Alex's foot slamming him on the chest. His hands
hurt again, but he could still grab the foot and push it off of him. He sat up and looked at
Alex, who was holding his swollen pink face.

"Where the fuck are all my pills?" Alex was yelling over and over. It was hard to
He hung up and looked at the back of Alex's head.

"What's tomorrow?" he asked.

"The twenty-third, why?"

"My mother wants me home. That's weird."

"Well, some people do their shopping then. There's a big rush at my work of people that don't want to admit they've put off Christmas by shopping on Christmas Eve." He laughed. His parents and sister turned off the TV and went into their rooms. The house was dark and cool, and without the sun up Thomas could only see tiny balls of snow flying against the window.

When he was sure that his parents would be staying in their rooms for the rest of the night, Alex opened a liquor cabinet and asked Thomas if he wanted a Gimpers. They'd been best friends in Middle School, and had come up with this as their specialty drink. Alex's older brother, who was in college now, had thought of the name. The reason, he'd said, was that after two or three of them, Alex and Thomas would walk around the house like they had limps. Thomas had never been able to get rid of the idea that it had something to do with his hands. He had Alex mix him one, then two, then three. They drank them looking out the window, and Thomas was starting to feel a thick, dark drunk when Alex started talking.

"That girl from Durango, she's," he paused for a second and scratched his temple. "I've always meant to ask you this. I mean, she's real, right? 'Cause I've never seen her around too often. Besides, it's not like we're best buds or anything these days."

"Okay," Alex said. "Okay. That's not all I wanted to ask though, just a little question. Now, well, you've screwed her and all that, right? I mean, that's true too?"

"Of course it's true. It's all fucking true. Is that what you're getting at?"

"Okay, it's true then." Alex was smiling. There was a little spit on his chin. "What I need to know is, now don't get offended here, I just always wondered something. Your hands, and that, did it ever get in the way? I mean, how did you get her bra off, or any of that?"

Thomas knew that there was something he said to this. There was a sentence in his head somewhere that he'd answered this question with time after time after time. He looked past Alex for a while before it came to him. "She took them off for me," he said.

---

Highway Ars Poetica

by Cory Ferrer

"this is my arm
that on its own refused to be a wing."

-Cesar Vallejo

1

Sunlight rises up from the edge of a wave just now, entering the shore.

I sit down one day to write a poem,

the white page opens up before me,

bright with shapes of sunlight from between the leaves shuddering gently above me.

I hold a book smeared both with ink and ash

between my hands. I sit-

the day opens up as well.

In the poem they are similar.

---

Again the voice inside the skull grows a voice inside its own,

Thought swings its speech like an arm,
inventing a second mouth to sleeve the sound in,
then opens the jaws with its fingers.
The air turns white in its breath. The brain gets carried off in its dog teeth.

My mind has made an animal
I whisper accidentally.

I begin to write a poem in which
I whispered accidentally.

In which the ground runs out
and leaves the tree roots hanging
in midair.

Softly, they begin once more
to build a nest.

I approach the memory in broad daylight:

a highway on the hill,
and my self walking down it. Cars
stir the dust as they pass,
and a single face stares out
from each advancing window.

The city like a hand of rust is slowly
opened, palm towards the sun,
it's people spread the fingers outward.

The arm is stone and reaches up the ground.
We enter its streets like a pulse in its vein:

Moving like a line of blood
through the intersection.

"You know, Hooks," Alex started, sitting down across the table, "I haven't really talked to you in a while. We used to hang out all the time in Middle School. What've you been up to these days?" He took a drink and looked right at Thomas. Thomas turned his head and looked out the window. The snow wasn't letting up at all; he could only see a faint trace of the asphalt driveway through all the white outside.

"I don't really know," he said. "This and that, I guess. Homework." Thomas didn't do homework. When he came home from school he either spent the evening smoking cigarettes on his roof or arguing with his mother about what TV shows were the best. Every night before he fell asleep he would try to remember everything he'd done during the day. The events always blurred together a little bit because none of them stuck out.

"What about you?" he asked after a while. He was still looking at the road out side in the snow. It seemed like it was showing through, but he wondered if it wouldn't do the same thing the church was doing before: popping up somewhere else every time he turned his head.

"Not much. How's that girl of yours doing? The one in Durango you always used to talk about. You two still together?" He smiled and wiped his mouth when a little stream of drool came out. Thomas didn't do homework. When he came home from school he either spent the evening smoking cigarettes on his roof or arguing with his mother about what TV shows were the best. Every night before he fell asleep he would try to remember everything he'd done during the day. The events always blurred together a little bit because none of them stuck out.

"She's just fine," he said, still looking out the window. "She calls me every fucking day." He looked at the road fading into the snow, and heard Alex drumming his fingers on the table.

"You should call your parents," Alex said after a while. "Looks like you'll be here all night."

Thomas looked away from the window and back at Alex's swollen, pink face. He felt like Alex could drive him back, but that he was keeping him here for the company. He was impatient with Alex for keeping him from whatever important things he felt like he did at home. He stood up from the table and Alex pointed him towards the phone. He dialed his house number with his thumbs. From the Holder house, he had to dial the area code, because the county line was between the two houses. His younger brother, Erin, answered the phone.

"Hooks? Is that you? Where are you?"

"I'm at Alex's house. My fucking car got stuck and now I have to wait here for the snow to let up. Put mom on the phone."

"Don't get pushy, asshole. Mom's watching TV. I'll tell her for you. She'll be pissed if you're not back tomorrow, though."
Alex laughed and pulled his head out of the car. When Thomas couldn't see him anymore, he said, "I can't pull you out today, but I think I'll be able to take you back to my house before the snow lets up a bit. Worst comes to worst you'll have to stay the night and we'll get the car tomorrow."

"You'll have to clear some of this fucking snow out of the way of my door," Thomas said. "I'm trapped in here." He turned his head and spit out his window. Alex let out a light-hearted yell of disgust.

"You spit on me, Hooks."

"Sorry fat face, I didn't see you there."

They didn't talk on the way to the Holder house. Alex was focused on trying to see the road right in front of him, and Thomas was looking out for the church. He knew that it was impossible to see and every time he saw two pillars, they were sitting still even though the car was moving. When they got to the house, Thomas saw Alex take a clear orange pill bottle off the dash and put it in his pocket.

"What're those?" Thomas asked.

"They're pain pills," Alex said. "The dentist gave them to me for my gums." He patted his pocket and looked into Thomas's face.

"Think you could share?" Thomas asked. "For my hands, I mean. They hurt like hell today."

"Aspirin, maybe." Alex said. "I can't give these out. I need all of them."

Thomas didn't say anything, and they went up the stairs to the front door.

The Holder family was sitting on the couch watching TV. Alex's mother got up to talk to Thomas, but his father and sister stayed on the couch.

"Alex, you took forever. Who's this you brought with you?" She looked worried, and probably a little annoyed. She didn't spend too much time looking at Thomas.

"This is Hooks, mom," Alex said. "Thomas. He lives about ten miles to the west of here."

Alex's mother was pleased to meet Thomas, and stuck her hand out for him to shake. He pretended not to see it, and went up more stairs and into the kitchen. Alex gave his mother a hug and followed. Coffee was already brewing on the counter, and Alex poured two cups. Thomas cupped his mug with both hands and brought it to his lips. The heat of the coffee hurt his hands less than the cold. Ideally, he thought, he wouldn't feel anything in his hands at all, but this was better than the cold in the car. He drank the coffee and smiled but never said "thank you."
Each path draws back to the source.

The sloshed weight of blood filling the heart's first chamber stops. Holds its place beneath the pulse. Isolated, the one cocoon between two heartbeats splitting open from the center, opening the very moment I am at the edge of:

I sit in the shade of cedar branches,
The wind pulls each wave to shore.

Motionless,
I watch a black wasp
begin its crawl across my hand.

Thought swings its speech like an arm.
The heartbeat drums in the distance, pulling closer. Like any two red centipedes in a coiled ball of human bone, Like the single sip of blood held still between them.

The heart-
The very nexus of the plant and roots,

flows both toward and through the center.

By the shore
I watch the crashing wave slide back from its watermark in the sand.

When Alex Holder pulled over to the side of the canyon road to help, Thomas didn't even notice until there was a rap on his window. He cranked the window down with his palm, and squinted out against the snow blowing in.

"Hooks?" Alex asked. "I can't even see your face. Is that you?" He stuck his head inside the car, and Thomas saw that it was twice the size it normally was. His cheeks were swollen and bright pink.

"It's Thomas," he said after looking at Alex's face for a while. "What the fuck happened to your face?"

"Wisdom teeth. I got 'em out a few days ago. Just before this snow started, actually. They were growing in sideways or something, so the dentist had to really dig 'em out."

Thomas laughed. "I'll bet that hurt like a bitch. Your face looks like a fat fucking cherry."
The completed body, weaving the memory inside, its silk and venom, like a spider's, feeding on the single moment. She sits enormous on her bed of eggs. In this way the day begins:

4

A boy walks slowly up the hill, along the asphalt shoulder of the highway.

The constant breeze of passing cars at his back.

Sparse plants grow in lines of gravel and in dust.

A great and sudden wind swells up, wrapping the boy and his clothes like a river.

A caravan rushes by: first two cars with each a sign on top:

OVERSIZE LOAD

in great black letters, and half a building follows on its truck bed,

a town house, bisected and covered in one white plastic sheet, loose and flapping in its own torrential wind.

The truck rumbles by like a train.

The poet, now seen stooping down to pick a half smoked cigarette beside the road,

finds a turtle torn in half, lying on its back.

A single fly lands on its brittle entrails. The road between each half
is glazed with dark and shining blood. 
The mineral stain drying in the afternoon.

Legs and claws 
bent stiff as wire, dry fleshted. 
The smooth jawed reptile head thrust out, 
glued onto asphalt.

But the neck, the open neck, 
held gently to sky, 
through the skin of it, 
the sunlight enters.

The other half of the house 
passes.

In the poem, these two things are similar.

The gust of wind dies down.

As for each part of its own— 
I have no idea what happens next.

The sunlight rises in the dust 
of passing cars,

strung up, almost. 
glowing in the shifting current, 
filling up the wind.

from the “real world” living at boarding school in Northern Michigan, then I better start volunteering in the community and stop complaining. This is not exactly an easy lesson to learn, and my father, who starts charter schools in Pittsburgh and doesn’t whine about anything except the shrill voices of his wife and kids, wears shoes that are big to fill.

I learn almost the same lesson from spending time with my brother—namely, to do exactly what I want to do with my life, to do it fully and well, and then to stop the over-analyzing and be happy. I spent most of my summer barefoot, squeezing spiders with my brother to see what color their stomach guts were, racing him around the track at the gym and beating him every time because I wanted to and I knew he can take it, even though you’re supposed to let little kids win. And why not take a nap in a fort built out of sheets and chairs, or only consent to learning how to read if it involves potty words? Why not bike around the park and scrape yourself up so bad you cry for an hour, but then get back on the next day, for another loop around? This has nothing to do with a misguided attempt at recreating a childhood, and everything to do with wanting to experience life now, with all of my senses, as passionate, 17-year-old girl.

On the phone the other night, my brother told me about rocks he was collecting for my return from Michigan, and offered to mail me his Spiderman superhero if I promised to bring it back over Thanksgiving break. I solemnly gave my word. “If I tell you one more thing about my day, can we be done?” he asked. “I’m in the middle of building a bad guy out of Lego.” I listened to his tale of some escapade in Spanish class and swore to myself that some day I would end a telephone conversation in the same way.
friends that girls can bluff just as well. But for as long as I can remember I have craved the soft and quiet love of my close female friends, comfortable understandings.

In elementary school, I was the obnoxious little girl who folded her hands before the teacher asked and was terrified of accidentally breaking a rule. I worried all day that my sister or I would miss the school bus home. After school, I worried that I wouldn’t have time to finish my homework, and in the evenings I worried I’d fall asleep too late and be tired the next day. I woke up at 6 am every morning, before anyone else in my family, to get in a half hour of practicing on piano and clarinet each. I stressed for weeks when the cafeteria lady yelled at me, and broke down sobbing on a school bus when the driver threatened to take us all back to detention because we were misbehaving so bad.

I don’t know if this nervousness was entirely a result of my gender—maybe I would have been just as uptight if my father had sent along a Y chromosome. But most of the little boys I know aren’t like this, and most of the little girls are, to some degree. My brother’s friends play hard and fight hard and cry hard. They bend rules and aren’t afraid to be yelled at and when there is fun to be had, they have it. Most of the little girls I know seem to me only interested in making adults happy, and that’s one of the most choking interests to have when you’re five years old.

I helped run a writing club at a public elementary school last year, and was struck at how much more fun the boys seemed to have—running around the cafeteria until they were physically caught, testing us with words that verged on cussing. The girls vied for our attention by pulling on our arms and involving themselves in intricate disputes they wanted us to mediate. The boys wrote about dragons conquering kingdoms and Easter bunnies switching their insurance companies to Geico; the girls wrote about cats that painted their fingernails and went on dates. But it was the girls the teachers praised—for sitting still, for telling them when someone else was bad—and the boys who were sent to the time-out room and told they needed to get a hold of themselves.

I figured out the bell schedule at my school by first grade, and have squirmed watching the seconds of boring class time drag past ever since. Six-year-olds are getting robbed of part of their childhoods, plain and simple, if they’re taught it’s okay to wish away the day as long as they do it quietly. I waited for an ecology class in my senior year of high school to actually get out and learn through experience about the natural world, and it’s my fault for waiting, I know. But I wish someone at school, early on, would have told me it was okay to join those boys that ran off the boundaries of the playground—maybe I would have shifted out of my awkward, nervous-girl phase a little earlier if I’d been doing something else during all those years of passivity and behaving.

If I’d been paying closer attention, I would have been able to take this note from my father. One of the things he’s always tried to teach me, through actions and words, is that everything I don’t like is up to me, individually, to change, and it’s my fault if I don’t change it. If I’m in stupid classes it’s up to me to get out of them or switch schools, and if I feel isolated and removed

Sugar Island
By Julie Buntin

The sprawl of it, a cabin set deep between hills, rooms added like thrown stones or fallen leaves molded by the wind.

Or maybe, built by deer, the way they linger near the edges of the tilting porch, suck the husks of Indian corn with their leather mouths, lip-skin tough as the soles of my feet, eyes blacker than the charred wood that carries all our fires.

Even on our most civilized nights we eat our meals with dirty fingers, spear reddened steak with the sharpened tips of our nails, swallow each mouthful without chewing. The deer look on through the rain.
coursing down each window, eyes black stars against a white sky of snow. They alone have found what we search for here, the buried reasons for a place built by no man's hand, this place where even leather-bound books bare damp spines we have never cared to open. Now, tiny mushrooms sprout from between each page, thumbprints of neglect. Those perfect, ribbed caps choke the air with the tang of fungus and old wood, yet underneath still that crisp odor of paper.

All along, we hold one secret close under our actions — soon, tomorrow ten minutes, three hours... We will get back inside our awkward, boy, with Dana officiating each ceremony. They carefully planned how to cluster around so the teachers wouldn’t suspect any kissing on the four-square court. Noah followed Dana because he was her husband, and the boys went along with whatever Noah said.

My friend Judith and I used to hang out with Dana and some of the other girls, but it became rapidly clear that if you weren’t married you weren’t welcome as one of their friends. They were quickly the “popular” ones, and we spat the disdain out of our mouths, scraping our hair back with our fingernails, rolling our eyes. We stood up by the trees watching with the other left-out girls and appointed ourselves leaders of the spies. Infiltrators were sent to the edge of the four-square court to get the scoop on the latest plans. We snuck glances at the Seventeen magazines they consulted, made fun of girls who had to practice how to kiss.

And we were not above tattling. Once, they hatched plan to force a wedding with Judith to a geeky boy we knew from chess club. I overheard the plan at lunch: they’d attach a rope to her head, force him to propose, jerk her head down so that she’d nod, keep pulling the noose tighter until she kissed him or died. We had no shame and went straight to the teacher, causing a flurry of tears and more bickering and broken friendships.

In all the afternoons huddling by the trees, watching old friends blush the color of lips and stand on their tiptoes to kiss, we never once, ever, admitted to each other that we wanted to be married. When we weren’t spying or gossiping about the popular girls we stuck faithfully to the State Game, a version of tag on a map of the United States that we made up in third grade. It wasn’t much fun anymore.

We wrote poetry about missing our childhoods, carefree days blown away with the wind. Our parents asked what happened to all the people we used to hang out with, but we just shrugged, sighed that they were too cool for us now. We were positive we were in the moral right, railing against the popular girls.

A couple months later we all graduated fifth grade and I left for a different middle school, but sometimes I still hear about what the “kissing girls” are up to, through word of mouth. One is a leading swimmer for my old high school’s arch rival, one is apparently addicted to just about every drug out there, and one just spent a year in Israel.

This summer I kissed a boy over and over again, under a flagpole, and sitting on a bench, and lying in the grass, and outside of a library, and never once did it feel exactly natural. It was what happened when there wasn’t anything to say, instead of silence. All my life I’ve been friends with girls, the kind of friendships where you walk into someone’s room and lie down on her bed without even saying anything, start braiding her hair. Friendships of planning; not of futures that involve husbands necessarily, or glamorous jobs, but of schools we plan to start, trips to Israel, tall trees we’re determined climb.

That’s not to say I don’t like being around boys—I’m certainly attracted to them. Sometimes the gossip and daily drama of living in a girl’s dorm can get to be so suffocating all I want is to spend the night wearing a flannel shirt and scrambling in a poker game to prove to my male
bed to do her circuits around the second floor, daily exercise.

After the ultrasound confirmed it would be a boy, my mother admitted that's what she had been hoping for. My parents pulled out boxes of hand-me-down clothes from my sister and I, separating the dresses and the flowers from the gender-neutral stuff. The baby-naming book came out and the discussions were endless—Adam was a good solid name but my father never liked it, Benjamin was nice except it could be turned into Benny. My father advocated Ephraim, a Hebrew name that always reminded me of frying pans, but my mother shrieked that anything she couldn't pronounce was out of the question.

The shlog of March kicked up at our heels and out Caleb came; eight days later a hundred people from our synagogue showed up at our house for his bris, the Jewish circumcision ritual. My mother was horrified at what was being done to her baby and hid upstairs, but I was too enthralled to stay away. It was a boy, in our family. I was twelve, and I was so disgusted and fascinated with my brother I placed a washcloth over him so I wouldn't see anything when I had bath duty, then peeked when it floated away.

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My friends didn't have crushes on boys in our school, they had crushes on James Dean and John Lennon and men that worked in used bookstores. The boys they claimed to have kissed went to the arts high school and had girlfriends with bleached hair and pierced faces. We roamed the streets of downtown Pittsburgh after school, rented movies from sleazy video shops, talked to men on city buses.

Once my friend and I went to the apartment of some 25-year-old man we met on the 64A. He had a sword collection hung up gleaming on his wall. I knew it was stupid and dangerous as we were walking and while we were there, but my friend liked the adrenaline-rush of trusting strangers and I was too shy to say I wouldn't come along. I spent the hour cowering on his couch positive we'd get raped and discarded in some gutter, while my friend drank the man's orange juice and talked with him about bands I'd never heard of.

I was the shy girl that smacked lip gloss after she left the house even though the taste made her gag, the one that clipped her thick bangs to the side of her face and wore tank tops instead of bras because that was all she needed. I spent sleepovers hugging my knees to the side of my bed, while my friend drank the man's orange juice and talked with him about bands I'd never heard of.

My life with my friends was completely different and separate from my life at home. My mother was a lawyer and my father was the principal of my school. Every week we celebrated Shabbat with my grandparents and I read the Torah portion with my father. We had a dog and a rabbit, four birds. NPR was always on in the kitchen. Sometimes, we discussed math problems over dinner. While my mother was pregnant, she migrated upstairs when my sister and I went to
The Man Boards the Bus With His Heartbeats

By Cynthia Prust

He steps to the beat as if limping across a giant drum.
The bus rocks, and something small taps the window,
an unending click click click, like a heart monitor.

after the old man sits down
I can still feel his pulse through the red plastic seat,
sticky and cracked against my bare legs.
His hands look like the vinyl of the seat; old and creased,
worn from too many years of searching his pockets
for letters to his brother asking for money.

I know the paper he must have used.
A manila color with perfect corners that dig into your palms
and never wear smooth. It's the same kid my mother signed
away my father with, the same ones I stared at for hours
until my sister's tears became a thin crust across my cheeks.

My fingers are numb now, they shake to the man's pulse
as I lift them to my chest searching for my heartbeat.
I press harder and harder but there is nothing.
but the shaking.

How can this man’s heart beat be strong enough to shake the bus when there are so many heartbreaks in his eyes as blue as mine?

---

Modern America

by Nick Simmons

The turkey vulture’s black raincoat of feathers drapes, in an unintentional arc over the rusted blue of our 1949 tractor.

And I am not sad.

After all, I did not kill this bird and a turkey vulture is not a turtledove.

No curse will come upon me if with my slight arm I pick up this dead bird hang it by claws by leftover, twisted wire, from a tree limb in the back yard.

Strange polka music spills from the radio as we return, and I don’t know what to say.

You take what you can get.
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*Mailing Spiderman*

*Sarah Resnick*

*I was a kid that you would like, just a small boy on her bike, riding topless yeah I never cared who saw. And so I tell the man I’m with about the other life I lived, and I say ‘Now you’re top gun, I have lost and you have won.’ And he says ‘Oh no, no, can’t you see, when I was a girl, my mom and I we always talked, and I could always cry and now even when I’m alone I seldom do, and I have lost some kindness, but I was a girl too.’*

—Excerpt from a song by Dar Williams
bed to do her circuits around the second floor, daily exercise.

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I think that to understand best what it means to be a boy or a girl, you have to watch little kids. This summer I spent a month babysitting my brother. It was ten hours a day every day with a five-year-old kid who talks all the time about the other kids he's going to squash into a pulp, and goes around the house collecting my mother's jewelry so he can wear all of it at once. He's obsessed with money and scrounges under couch pillows for hours finding coins, but it's to buy beads, of all things—"scary" devil beads or shiny glass ones, to add to his collection.

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I don't remember the moment I "realized" I was a girl, but I do remember when I started to feel the panic that all my friends were getting married and I'd be left behind—fifth grade. For months the girls sat on the ground at recess diagramming which girl would match with which.
coursing down
each window,
eyes black stars
against a white
sky of snow.

They alone have
found what we
search for here,
the buried reasons
for a place built
by no man's hand,
this place where even
leather-bound books
bare damp spines
we have never
cared to open.

Now, tiny mushrooms
sprout from between
each page, thumbprints
of neglect. Those
perfect, ribbed caps
choke the air
with the tang
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be married. When we weren’t spying or gossiping about the popular girls we stuck faithfully to
the State Game, a version of tag on a map of the United States that we made up in third grade. It
wasn’t much fun anymore.

We wrote poetry about missing our childhoods, carefree days blown away with the
wind. Our parents asked what happened to all the people we used to hang out with, but we just
shrugged, sighed that they were too cool for us now. We were positive we were in the moral
right, railing against the popular girls.

A couple months later we all graduated fifth grade and I left for a different middle
school, but sometimes I still hear about what the “kissing girls” are up to, through word of mouth.
One is a leading swimmer for my old high school’s arch rival, one is apparently addicted to just
about every drug out there, and one just spent a year in Israel.

This summer I kissed a boy over and over again, under a lamppole, and sitting on a bench,
and lying in the grass, and outside of a library, and never once did it feel exactly natural. It was
what happened when there wasn’t anything to say, instead of silence. All my life I’ve been
friends with girls, the kind of friendships where you walk into someone’s room and lie down on
her bed without even saying anything, start braiding her hair. Friendships of planning: not of
futures that involve husbands necessarily, or glamorous jobs, but of schools we plan to start, trips
to Israel, tall trees we’re determined climb.

That’s not to say I don’t like being around boys—I’m certainly attracted to them. Sometimes the gossip and daily drama of living in a girl’s dorm can get to be so suffocating all I want is
to spend the night wearing a flannel shirt and scrambling in a poker game to prove to my male
boy, with Dana officiating each ceremony. They carefully planned how to cluster around so the
teachers wouldn’t suspect any kissing on the four-square court. Noah followed Dana because he
was her husband, and the boys went along with whatever Noah said.

My friend Judith and I used to hang out with Dana and some of the other girls, but it be-
came rapidly clear that if you weren’t married you weren’t welcome as one of their friends. They
were quickly the “popular” ones, and we spat the disdain out of our mouths, scraping our hair
back with our fingernails, rolling our eyes. We stood up by the trees watching with the other
left-out girls and appointed ourselves leaders of the spies. Infiltrators were sent to the edge of
the four-square court to get the scoop on the latest plans. We snuck glances at the Seventeen
magazines they consulted, made fun of girls who had to practice how to kiss.

And we were not above tattling. Once, they hatched plan to force a wedding with Ju-
thid to a geeky boy we knew from chess club. I overheard the plan at lunch: they’d attach a rope
to her head, force him to propose, jerk her head down so that she’d nod, keep pulling the noose
tighter until she kissed him or died. We had no shame and went straight to the teacher, causing a
flurry of tears and more bickering and broken friendships.

In all the afternoons huddling by the trees, watching old friends blush the color of lips
and stand on their tiptoes to kiss, we never once, ever, admitted to each other that we wanted to
be married. When we weren’t spying or gossiping about the popular girls we stuck faithfully to
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to spend the night wearing a flannel shirt and scrambling in a poker game to prove to my male
friends that girls can bluff just as well. But for as long as I can remember I have craved the soft
and quiet love of my close female friends, comfortable understandings.

In elementary school, I was the obnoxious little girl who folded her hands before the
teacher asked and was terrified of accidentally breaking a rule. I worried all day that my sister
or I would miss the school bus home. After school, I worried that I wouldn't have time to finish my
homework, and in the evenings I worried I'd fall asleep too late and be tired the next day. I woke
up at 6 am every morning, before anyone else in my family, to get in a half hour of practicing on
piano and clarinet each. I stressed for weeks when the cafeteria lady yelled at me, and broke
down sobbing on a school bus when the driver threatened to take us all back to detention be-
cause we were misbehaving so bad.

I don't know if this nervousness was entirely a result of my gender—maybe I would have
been just as uptight if my father had sent alone a Y chromosome. But most of the little boys I
know aren't like this, and most of the little girls are, to some degree. My brother's friends play
hard and fight hard and cry hard. They break rules and aren't afraid to be yelled at and when
there is fun to be had, they have it. Most of the little girls I know seem to me only interested in
making adults happy, and that's one of the most choking interests to have when you're five years
old.

I helped run a writing club at a public elementary school last year, and was struck at
how much more fun the boys seemed to have—running around the cafeteria until they were
physically caught, testing us with words that verged on cussing. The girls vied for our attention
by pulling on our arms and involving themselves in intricate disputes they wanted us to mediate.
The boys wrote about dragons conquering kingdoms and Easter bunnies switching their insur-
ance companies to Geico; the girls wrote about cats that painted their einkernails and went on
dates. But it was the girls the teachers praised—for sitting still, for telling them when someone
else was bad—and the boys who were sent to the time-out room and told they needed to get a
hold of themselves.

I figured out the bell schedule at my school by first grade, and have squirmed watching
the seconds of boring class time drop past ever since. Six-year-olds are getting robbed of part of
their childhoods, plain and simple, if they're taught it's okay to wish away the day as long as they
do it quietly. I waited for an ecology class in my senior year of high school to actually get out and
learn through experience about the natural world, and it's my fault for waiting, I know. But I
wish someone at school, early on, would have told me it was okay to join those boys that ran off
the boundaries of the playground—maybe I would have shifted out of my awkward, nervousgirl phase a little earlier if I'd been doing something else during all those years of passivity and
behaving.

If I'd been paying closer attention, I would have been able to take this note from my fa-
ther. One of the things he's always tried to teach me, through actions and words, is that every-
thing I don't like is up to me, individually, to change, and it's my fault if I don't change it. If I'm in
stupid classes it's up to me to get out of them or switch schools, and if I feel isolated and removed

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Sugar Island
By Julie Buntin

The sprawl
of it, a cabin set
deep between hills,
rooms added
like thrown stones
or fallen leaves
molded by the wind.

Or maybe,
built by deer,
the way they linger
near the edges
of the tilting porch,
suck the husks
of Indian corn
with their leather
mouths, lip-skin
tough as the soles
of my feet,
eyes blacker
than the charred
wood that carries
all our fires.

Even on our most
civilized nights
we eat our meals
with dirty einkernails,
spear reddened steak
with the sharpened
tips of our nails,
swallow each mouthful
without chewing.
The deer look on
through the rain.
is glazed with dark and shining blood.
The mineral stain drying in the afternoon.

Legs and claws
bent stiff as wire, dry fleshed.
The smooth jawed reptile head thrust out,
glued onto asphalt.

But the neck, the open neck,
held gently to sky,
through the skin of it,
the sunlight enters.

The other half of the house
passes.

In the poem, these two things are similar.

The gust of wind dies down.

As for each part of its own—
I have no idea what happens next.

The sunlight rises in the dust
of passing cars.

strung up, almost.
glowing in the shifting current,
filling up the wind.

from the “real world” living at boarding school in Northern Michigan, then I better start volunteering in the community and stop complaining. This is not exactly an easy lesson to learn, and my father, who starts charter schools in Pittsburgh and doesn’t whine about anything except the shrill voices of his wife and kids, wears shoes that are big to fill.

I learn almost the same lesson from spending time with my brother—namely, to do exactly what I want to do with my life, to do it fully and well, and then to stop the over-analyzing and be happy. I spent most of my summer barefoot, squeezing spiders with my brother to see what color their stomach guts were, racing him around the track at the gym and beating him every time because I wanted to and I knew he can take it, even though you’re supposed to let little kids win. And why not take a nap in a fort built out of sheets and chairs, or only consent to learning how to read if it involves potty words? Why not bike around the park and scrape yourself up so bad you cry for an hour, but then get back on the next day, for another loop around? This has nothing to do with a misguided attempt at recreating a childhood, and everything to do with wanting to experience life now, with all of my senses, as passionate, 17-year-old girl.

On the phone the other night, my brother told me about rocks he was collecting for my return from Michigan, and offered to mail me his Spiderman superhero if I promised to bring it back over Thanksgiving break. I solemnly gave my word. “If I tell you one more thing about my day, can we be done?” he asked. “I’m in the middle of building a bad guy out of Lego.” I listened to his tale of some escapade in Spanish class and swore to myself that some day I would end a telephone conversation in the same way.
The completed body, weaving the memory inside, its silk and venom, like a spider's, feeding on the single moment. She sits enormous on her bed of eggs. In this way the day begins:

4

A boy walks slowly up the hill, along the asphalt shoulder of the highway. The constant breeze of passing cars at his back. Sparse plants grow in lines of gravel and in dust. A great and sudden wind swells up, wrapping the boy and his clothes like a river. A caravan rushes by: first two cars with each a sign on top: OVERSIZE LOAD in great black letters, and half a building follows on its truck bed, a town house, bisected and covered in one white plastic sheet, loose and flapping in its own torrential wind. The truck rumbles by like a train. The poet, now seen stooping down to pick a half smoked cigarette beside the road, finds a turtle torn in half, lying on its back. A single fly lands on its brittle entrails. The road between each half
Each path draws back to the source.

The sloshed weight of blood filling the heart’s first chamber stops. Holds its place beneath the pulse.

isolated, the one cocoon between two heartbeats splitting open from the center, opening the very moment

I am at the edge of:

I sit in the shade of cedar branches,  
The wind pulls each wave to shore.

Motionless,  
I watch a black wasp  
begin its crawl across my hand.

Thought swings its speech like an arm.  
The heartbeat drums in the distance,  
pulling closer.  
Like any two red centipedes in a coiled ball of human bone,  
Like the single sip of blood held still between them.

The heart—  
The very nexus of the plant and roots,

[soil of flesh  
and warm metropolis  
of human blood]

flows both toward and through the center.

By the shore  
I watch the crashing wave  
slide back from its watermark  
in the sand.

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More than anything, Thomas was cold. He had hit some black ice deep in Boulder Canyon, and now his car was stuck in a snow drift. The engine was off, and Thomas had been sitting in the car breathing steam and shivering for at least an hour and a half. Outside the snow was blowing hard enough to make everything the same, moving, white. The cold coming into the car from the cracks around the windows and doors felt like it was squeezing his hands in a vice, but that was only a little worse than they always felt. Since birth, Thomas’s hands had hurt whenever he moved them. His fingers felt like they had hardened and turned brittle, and when he tried to grip something or spread them apart there was a pain like they would snap off and turn to dust. Everyone he knew, excepting his mother, called him ‘hooks’ because the only way he could hold his fingers was half-curl. He wore mittens instead of gloves and kept his hands in his pockets as often as he could.

To pass the time before another car drove by to help him or the snow let up, Thomas did his best to remember what was around him. He was trying to spot a church on one of the foothills around the canyon; it was the only landmark he could remember from all the times he had gone along this road, but he still couldn’t quite place it. The church he was looking for (he was pretty sure it was a church and not a house, but he wondered about that sometimes) had two large wooden pillars holding it up against the slope of the canyon. When he looked hard enough, he could see two little bars somewhere in the snow, but sometimes they were to the left and sometimes to the right and once they were actually only smudges on the windshield. After an hour and a half of looking, his eyes hurt, and he started wondering if the church was in this part of the canyon at all, if it was in any part for that matter.

When Alex Holder pulled over to the side of the canyon road to help, Thomas didn’t even notice until there was a rap on his window. He cranked the window down with his palm, and squinted against the snow blowing in.

“hooks?” Alex asked. “I can’t even see your face. Is that you?” He stuck his head inside the car, and Thomas saw that it was twice the size it normally was. His cheeks were swollen and bright pink.

“It’s Thomas,” he said after looking at Alex’s face for a while. “What the fuck happened to your face?”

“Wisdom teeth. I got ‘em out a few days ago. Just before this snow started, actually. They were growing in sideways or something, so the dentist had to really dig ’em out.”

Thomas laughed. “I’ll bet that hurt like a bitch. Your face looks like a fat fucking cherry.”
Alex laughed and pulled his head out of the car. When Thomas couldn’t see him anymore, he said, “I can’t pull you out today, but I think I’ll be able to take you back to my house before the snow lets up a bit. Worst comes to worst you’ll have to stay the night and we’ll get the car tomorrow.”

“You’ll have to clear some of this fucking snow out of the way of my door,” Thomas said. “I’m trapped in here.” He turned his head and spit out his window. Alex let out a light-hearted yell of disgust.

“You spopt on me, Hooks.”

“Sorry fat face, I didn’t see you there.”

They didn’t talk on the way to the Holder house. Alex was focused on trying to see the road right in front of him, and Thomas was looking out for the church. He knew that it was impossible to see and every time he saw two pillars, they were sitting still even though the car was moving. When they got to the house, Thomas saw Alex take a clear orange pill bottle off the dash and put it in his pocket.

“What’re those?” Thomas asked.

“They’re pain pills,” Alex said. “The dentist gave them to me for my gums.” He patted his pocket and looked into Thomas’s face.

“Think you could share?” Thomas asked. “For my hands, I mean. They hurt like hell today.”

“Aspirin, maybe.” Alex said. “I can’t give those out. I need all of them.”

Thomas didn’t say anything, and they went up the stairs to the front door.

The Holder family was sitting on the couch watching TV. Alex’s mother got up to talk to Thomas, but his father and sister stayed on the couch.

“Alex, you took forever. Who’s this you brought with you?” She looked worried, and probably a little annoyed. She didn’t spend too much time looking at Thomas.

“This is Hooks, mom,” Alex said. “Thomas. He lives about ten miles to the west of here.”

Alex’s mother was pleased to meet Thomas, and stuck her hand out for him to shake. He pretended not to see it, and went up more stairs and into the kitchen. Alex gave his mother a hug and followed. Coffee was already brewing on the counter, and Alex poured two cups. Thomas cupped his mug with both hands and brought it to his lips. The heat of the coffee hurt his hands less than the cold. Ideally, he thought, he wouldn’t feel anything in his hands at all, but this was better than the cold in the car. He drank the coffee and smiled but never said “thank you”.

The discarded bags and broken bottles gradually touch down in the ditch beside the road.

---

I once sat down to build set of bones with words alone. A skeleton of green glass only, carved perfect in a tide of salt, worn smooth, its ribs protruding from the sand.

Its poetry could have once been both a carapace and nest of human echoes, planning a city from the ground. Standing up for once, its head became a seagull caught like a kite off the ground, its neck a ten foot string...

[In a dream, I watch my own self down the highway moving through and towards the city.]

A single plant grows up through a crack in the pavement. It’s thin leaves shudder gently in wind of passing cars.

3

The shape of the event remains inside, As uncarved glass:

I feel my jaw loosen its grip.

Breath turns in the chest like a spool, twisting its threads in a spiral,

The blood itself is spilled by a pulse to its tunnel-the thirst, entangled in a vine made of skin. Each spinal clasp of bone locks into place on their own, closing the body.
that appears to be missing. Speech is the articulate
chain of echoes wrapped in circles
around its invisible neck, its links
scrape the dirt from its path:

I whisper accidentally.

I begin to write a poem in which
I whispered accidentally.
In which the ground runs out
and leaves the tree roots hanging
in midair.

Softly, they begin once more
to build a nest.

I approach the memory in broad daylight:
a highway on the hill,
and my self walking down it. Cars
stir the dust as they pass,
and a single face stares out
from each advancing window.

The city like a hand of rust is slowly
opened, palm towards the sun,
its people spread the fingers outward.

The arm is stone and reaches up the ground.
We enter its streets like a pulse in its vein:

Moving like a line of blood
through the intersection.

"You know, Hooks," Alex started, sitting down across the table. "I haven't really
talked to you in a while. We used to hang out all the time in Middle School. What've you
been up to these days?" He took a drink and looked right at Thomas. Thomas turned his head
and looked out the window. The snow wasn't letting up at all; he could only see a faint trace
of the asphalt driveway through all the white outside.

"I don't really know," he said. "This and that, I guess. Homework." Thomas didn't do
homework. When he came home from school he either spent the evening smoking cigarettes
on his roof or arguing with his mother about what TV shows were the best. Every night before
he fell asleep he would try to remember everything he'd done during the day. The events
always blurred together a little bit because none of them stuck out.

"What about you?" he asked after a while. He was still looking at the road out side in
the snow. It seemed like it was showing through, but he wondered if it wouldn't do the same
thing the church was doing before: popping up somewhere else every time he turned his
head.

"Not much. How's that girl of yours doing? The one in Durango you always used to
talk about. You two still together?" He smiled and wiped his mouth when a little string of
drool came out. Thomas didn't do homework. When he came home from school he either spent
the evening smoking cigarettes on his roof or arguing with his mother about what TV shows
were the best. Every night before he fell asleep he would try to remember everything he'd done
during the day. The events always blurred together a little bit because none of them stuck out.

"She's just fine," he said, still looking out the window. "She calls me every fucking
day. He looked at the road fading into the snow, and heard Alex drumming his fingers on
the table.

"You should call your parents," Alex said after a while. "Looks like you'll be here all
night."

Thomas looked away from the window and back at Alex's swollen, pink face. He felt
like Alex could drive him back, but that he was keeping him here for the company. He was
impatient with Alex for keeping him from whatever important things he felt like he did at
home. He stood up from the table and Alex pointed him towards the phone. He dialed his
house number with his thumbs. From the Holder house, he had to dial the area code, because
the county line was between the two houses. His younger brother, Erin, answered the phone.

"Hooks? Is that you? Where are you?"
Thomas. My fucking car got stuck and now I have to wait here for the
snow to let up. Put mom on the phone.

"Don't get pushy, asshole. Mom's watching TV. I'll tell her for you. She'll be pissed if
you're not back tomorrow, though."
He hung up and looked at the back of Alex's head. "What's tomorrow?" he asked. "The twenty-third, why?" "My mother wants me home. That's weird." "Well, some people do their shopping then. There's a big rush at my work of people that don't want to admit they've put off Christmas by shopping on Christmas Eve." He laughed. His parents and sister turned off the TV and went into their rooms. The house was dark and cool, and without the sun up Thomas could only see tiny balls of snow flying against the window.

When he was sure that his parents would be staying in their rooms for the rest of the night, Alex opened a liquor cabinet and asked Thomas if he wanted a Gimper. They'd been best friends in Middle School, and had come up with this as their specialty drink. Alex's older brother, who was in college now, had thought of the name. The reason, he'd said, was that after two or three of them, Alex and Thomas would walk around the house like they had limps. Thomas had never been able to get rid of the idea that it had something to do with his hands. He had Alex mix him one, then two, then three. They drank them looking out the window, and Thomas was starting to feel a thick, dark drunk when Alex started talking.

"That girl from Durango, she's," he paused for a second and scratched his temple. "She lives in Durango, so of course you don't see her around too often. Besides, it's not like we're best buds or anything these days."

"Okay," Alex said. "Okay. That's not all I wanted to ask though, just a little question. Now, well, you've screwed her and all that, right? I mean, that's true too?"

"Of course it's true. It's all fucking true. Is that what you're getting at?"

"Okay, it's true then." Alex was smiling. There was a little spit on his chin. "What I need to know is, now don't get offended here, I just always wondered something. Your hands, and that, did it ever get in the way? I mean, how did you get her bra off, or any of that?"

Thomas knew that there was something he said to this. There was a sentence in his head somewhere that he'd answered this question with time after time after time. He looked past Alex for a while before it came to him. "She took them off for me," he said.

---

Highway Ars Poetica

by Cory Ferrer

"this is my arm
that on its own refused to be a wing."

-Cesar Vallejo

1

Sunlight rises up from the edge of a wave
just now, entering the shore.

I sit down one day to write a poem,

the white page opens up before me,

bright with shapes of sunlight
from between the leaves
shuddering gently above me.

I hold a book smeared both with ink
and ash

between my hands. I sit-

the day opens up as well.

In the poem they are similar.

----

Again the voice inside the skull

 grows a voice inside its own,

Thought swings its speech like an arm,

inventing a second mouth to sleeve the sound in,
then opens the jaws with its fingers.

The air turns white in its breath. The brain gets

carried off in its dog teeth.

My mind has made an animal
in the dark. It finds your heart.
The rock hardens and softens like a fist.

You cannot see your body anymore. You know only that the wind has passed through your heart, is waiting on the other side. It does not die, it opens.

The wind, holding close, hesitating on the other side of your heart.
"Alex," Thomas said. "I gotta tell ya. I lied. There's no girl in Durango. I made her up completely." He stood up and realized that he was naked. There was a towel hanging next to him, but he didn't want to wrap it around his waist so he just held his hands over his crotch.

"Sorry I lied."

"I don’t give a fuck," Alex said. "My pills. Where are they?"

Thomas shook his head to wake himself up. "I took four of them. I'm sorry. There were so many in the bottle I didn't think you'd notice four. I was drunk, I guess."

"Four my fucking ass. You emptied my whole fucking bottle you fucking asshole. I can barely even move my fucking face." Thomas didn't think he'd ever heard Alex curse, and even though he'd been good friends with him in middle school didn't think he'd ever been that angry at all. This was new for him, and Thomas couldn’t make much sense of it. It looked like an act, some kind of joke Alex was pulling.

"You're a liar," he said. "Now let me go get some clothes on. I'm sorry about the girl from Durango and I'm sorry about the pills." He put his pants and shirt back on without hearing whatever it was that Alex was yelling. He washed his face and looked at himself in the mirror. It still hurt, but he could bend his fingers just enough to dry his face off with the towel. "I think the snow is letting up," he said, "we should go get my car so I can get home. I haven't done my Christmas shopping yet."

"You lying son of a bitch, you call your fucking mom and get her to help you with your car. I'm fucking done having you here." He yelled a little with pain and kicked the base of the sink. Thomas went upstairs to find the phone. He called home and told his mother what happened.

"You took his pills?" she asked. She sounded like he'd woken her up.

"Only four of them," he said. "I'm sorry if I bothered you, but I need to get home. I'll be waiting on the porch."

The snow was still falling outside, but had let up a bit. He couldn’t tell where the sun was shining from, but there was daylight all around, so it was up somewhere. If he couldn’t even see the sun, he figured, he couldn’t see a tiny church. It was out in the canyon somewhere, and was comfortable with that. He was comfortable all around, and was still feeling a little remnant of how he’d felt last night. One of these days soon, he thought, he’d find a girl. She wouldn't be from Durango, probably, and she might not be all that pretty, but it would be nice. If he talked to her right she might think his hands were pretty interesting. He tried to remember how many pills he’d taken. It was four. It was four pills and he was sure of it. Alex, or someone, was a liar, but it wasn’t him. Whatever anyone had to say, he didn’t know what happened to the rest of them.

The Rock Inside Your Heart Inside You

by Taya Kitaysky

The rock in your heart:
there was nothing they could do.
Your arteries had already grown around
it like roots, you blood loved it
as a river does its stone.

Inside the rock is a crystal
shining secretly to itself.
It is shy, it blushes
light unborn from the dark.

The light inside the crystal inside
the rock inside your heart
inside you,
and now you will never rest,
there is nothing you can do.

Think of your body.
A vague outline standing alone in a field.
The madman who tore yellow flowers
out of the ground for you
is gone.
You are alone, the wind near.
Even in their slow clear bleeding,
the flowers forgave you.

The wind finds the tunnels
into your body, going too fast.
What happened to the rest of them didn't matter. What mattered was the he had chewed four of them and vomited in the sink. He knew that much and that was all he needed to know because it was the truth.

I went to the party of my life
and John Ashbery was there,
as well as Russell Edson, who hid
very nicely beside a bowl in the corner,
and Jorie Graham
who took four men into the bedroom
and howled very nicely as well,
those four men of course
were: Ginsberg Tate Strand Simic
and also Atwood who is a man
when she feels like it,
she can just write herself
out of her body, I know.
Whitman ate the whole room
after which Rilke pricked himself
on a rose thorn and as he died
Olson, Roethke and Baudelaire
swam by in his blood
shouting poems,
while Eliot, Eliot
swished the moon around
like a yolk-less egg
in his bowler hat,
and oh Marquez,
he tossed it
into the garden
where it of course
became a woman.
Edited by:
Olivia Murray
Jesse Littlejohn

Thanks so much Therese and Mr. Delp. Couldn't have done it without you.

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The Red Wheelbarrow
William Carlos Williams

So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
 glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.
The Red Wheelbarrow

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