The Red Wheelbarrow
Spring 2005

So much depends upon
a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens.
What would happen if you tried to hug Mr. Deep? CRUNCH! CRUNCH! Head Bite Your Neck!
ALL ART BY SEATON ROTHMAN

Through the hands of:
Naomi DeHart
Taya Kitaysky
Kara Krewer
Laura Nelson
Kat Reece
Elsbeth Teague

Thanks Delp.
Thanks Therese.

Alex Kahler
Old Wolves Tale

Anastasia Lugo Mendez
Catalog Blues in Midwest Midwinter

Anna Corke
This is an Ode to Volunteering

Cynthia Drake
To My Dorm House Neighbors

Elsbeth Teague
Ghazal #4

Kara Krewer
Respect for the Dead

Kat Reece
Letter to Anne Sexton #1

Sarah Resnick
Waiting for Daylight

Taya Kitaysky
Wife to Her Blind Husband, at 77

Lenore Mullins
Sear

Tyler Rubenfeld
Liquid Feem
"Well, if that isn't one of the biggest clichés I ever heard. You sure you been in advertising for that long?"

"Yeah, sorry man, but I gotta agree with Randall on this one." Prosky, not you too. You're my friend. "That is sort of a cliché. We don't really want nice. Y'know, we want... y'know, skateboards and grunge music, that sorta thing. Sorry."

So that's it, huh? You should just walk right out that door, right now. Get in your car, drive all the way to Island Beach State Park and start anew. Skateboards and grunge music? Oh... maybe they should just put me out to pasture. I just have no idea sometimes. Well... hell, at least try some Liquid Feem. Just grab it off the table and drink it. Why didn't you do that before?

Holy shit! This tastes like fucking Land-O-Lakes and fizzy water! Jesus Christ. No... no, don't you feel bad. Don't you feel—God damn, that's awful—don't you feel bad, man. You know your dreams aren't clichés. You know it's not like that. This isn't a bad day. It's a good day. A damn good day, think of it that way. You almost sold your dreams to this shit, but it didn't work out. You kept your beach and Lisa, and Liquid Feem got skateboards and grunge music. It all worked out. Can't you see?

Yeah, I guess.

Who could it be? Believe it or not, it's just me!
How can all those years be you—and you still can’t think of shit when it comes to new products? I’m trying my best. Look, Lisa’s behind you now. She’s on the other side of the world. That’s not it. Well then, what is it? ’Cause you keep talking to yourself instead of doing your job. What is it?

It’s just...why the hell did I decide to live in a landlocked shit...hole like this? Why am I so many hours away from the coast? Why the hell am I wearing a tie right now, in an office with no fucking windows? What I wouldn’t give for it to be...not March. Not landlocked. I want it to be July on Island Beach State Park and I want Lisa to be there with me, looking at the sign and asking, “Well, which one is it? Island? Beach? State? Park?” I want to be out there, breathing the salty air, with someone that I liked. Maybe I didn’t love her, but I definitely liked her the best. That’s refreshment. That’s refreshment that Liquid Feem can’t even come close to, even if it’s an orgasm in a twenty fluid-ounce bottle.

Hold on a sec.

“Okay. Here’s my idea.” This is fucking crazy. You’re putting your ass on the line, here. “Just a simple, serene ad. We have a man and a woman walking along the beach. It’s a great day. And they’re laughing away, having a great time. And this isn’t any Hollywood bullshit. These are real people...on a crowded, real beach. Nothing matters, though. They just have each other. I figure...we put Jonathan King’s ‘Everyone’s Gone to the Moon’ as the song.” Haven’t heard of it, Randall Weeks? “It doesn’t have much to do with the scene but it’s a...it’s a nice song anyway. So...this is it. This is the commercial. Just a man and a woman walking along the beach having a good time... Then I guess the guy at the end could pull out a Liquid Feem or whatever and start drinking it... Oh, and the tag line: Liquid Feem—About as refreshing as a beverage gets. Huh? Look at that. Now we have a nice...straightforward ad, with a bit of a parody at the end. Liquid Feem—it’s not the greatest thing in the world, but for a soft drink it’s the best. Just keep an open mind, okay? It’s different, it’s untraditional...but it...it’s nice. What do you think?”

Wow. I feel ten pounds lighter, like I just made this huge confession. Jesus. Oh no...that doesn’t look good. Randall Weeks...

What you don’t know is there were three brothers’ Grimm. What you don’t know is they didn’t always hate us wolves.

But then we ate one of them.

We didn’t know it was him, really. Edwin Grimm just happened to be roasting a lamb outside his cottage when we were on the prowl. It’s not our fault he was wearing wool. We were hungry—

we can’t deny our animal instincts.

He tasted like sweat and horse dung, if that’s any consolation — too stringy to actually be enjoyable. Back then, men didn’t burn calories to look good, they burned fat to get it. Hunters and scavengers, just like us.

There was no need for blame,

but the Grimm boys thought otherwise. Apparently eating kin isn’t in their natural order. We escaped, of course. Two men with cudgels and no shoes give terrible chase in deep snow. But they were civilized folk; they wrote out their revenge.

Now we’re always eating someone’s grandmother or blowing down a pig’s house. The tragedy is you almost believe it.

TYLER RUBENFELD

ALEX KAHLER
You want to hate us.

We’re hunted now. You like to say we’re endangered but that doesn’t stop the ranchers. We don’t kill you because half your population will do anything to survive, like eating what’s at hand.

That would be immoral.

We’re only safe in zoos, it seems. Left alone we’ll eat your children and their grandmother too. Your statistics say otherwise, but those don’t make for good bedtime stories.

They reveal too much.

What happens when Little Red is molested by a human, and not one of us? Is the moral the same, or do you not feel as justified at the end of the tale? We understand.

You’ve always needed a big, bad wolf.
but he didn’t. Good guy. Ugly as hell. Good guy, though. Maybe those aren’t bad acne scars on his face—maybe when he was a teenager his cheeks exploded. Spongy skin—like what Richard Pryor has now. God damn. What the hell is that Liquid Feem?

Uh-oh. Randal Weeks has a suggestion. Fucking toddler. He’s what, twenty-two, twenty-three? Looks like George Stephanopoulos… with Down Syndrome. …That’s funny. I should tell jokes sometime. “The way I figure it,” look at those Colgate-white teeth, “public’s tired of seein’ these refreshin’, tasty images of soda bottles with, like, the beads of cold water on it? Like the fuckin’ fronts of vending machines? Way I figure it, we do what Sprite did around the mid-nineties and do a series of sarcastic, not-takin’-ourselves-too-seriously sort of…parody; that’s the word. We do, like, parodies of all these soda commercials and we get some sports star—a lotta the new ones are sorta press whores so it shouldn’t be that hard to find one to do it.”

Pound your fist and cry bullshit. “Nah. Have to disagree with you there.” Pussy. “Y’see, you just can’t go for that kind of campaign from the start.” Bitch. “We have to have something singular. We can’t just copy off Sprite to begin with. We have to have something solid…some sorta logo, some sorta song…something original.” Ooh—knocked you down a peg.

“Ah. Jus’ throwin’ it out there.”

I’m sure you are.


Believe it or not, I’m walking on air…

Damn it. Go away “Greatest American Hero.” Shit. Didn’t even watch that show. I should have fucking Zeppelin in my head—something manly.

Think of something, damn it. This is your lot in life. Stop being lazy and come up with something great. Look at you. You’re forty-two years old. You won a Clio award in ninety-six. You shook Jon Lovitz’s hand. Think of something. Liquid Feem…Liquid Feem. I need something original…in a field where everything has been done before. Same as it ever was. Same as it…ever

TYLER RUBENFELD

The sky is a light winter blue, or maybe

cyan or cerulean or cornflower blue, one of those catalog colors-

lighter towards the unseen horizon, washed-out

on the early morning sunlight, pushing through
tree tops, stealing color through brightness.

It’s cold, there are no summer greens or even that
discharged autumnal fire

I saw for the first time last year-

only dark evergreens fading into cold sunlight,

blinding white in the snow, except for at the edges

where it’s dirty and brown and old,

more neutral than cold, but

far from warm.

The buildings are lifeless:

tans and British khakis and ivories, you’d find

their attire in a business office

where a red tie is flax,

like trim around a roof

or an olive green doorframe

stand out here.

You’d be hard-pressed to find anything

other than navy blue or forest green or cabernet red,

the denser, darker counterparts of the base hues

seen by your eyes.

I am tiring of these colors: oak, ivy, ebony, pesto, claret—

these bleed into white button-up shirts in washing machines.

I don’t wish to wait for the next false spring
to find the sky a deeper blue, something

like French blue

or heather sea, ocean,

Lapis – Aegian, some shade to make me

write another poem.

Give me clementine, lemon, mandarin, pomegranate,

these colors that taste of summer.

ANASTASIA LUGO MENDEZ
Stan’ so tall... ping moon is gonna get ye all... yeah, ping moon.” Why the hell are they playing Nick Drake at eight in the morning?

Damn it. I’ll never find a parking space. I never find a god damn parking-

Oh. Right in front of the building. In front of the door actually. God. It’s a sign. I’m going to have a terrible day now. When was the last time I ever had a parking space this close? Probably for compacts. What did we decide, is this a compact? No... it’s not for compacts. Damn it. I’m going to have a horrible day now.

*Ping, ping, ping, ping... ping moon.*

Never thought J

Eh. I know damn well no one listened to Nick Drake until after they put “Pink Moon” in a Jetta commercial. He killed himself, right? Sounds like he did.

Don’t these people get it? You put a great song that no one’s ever heard of to a commercial, it’s a lot more effective than putting something popular that’s on fifteen other ads in circulation. Remember when that “Hey Ya!” song was on four or five commercials at the same time? Meanwhile there are perfectly peppy Badfinger numbers that go untouched. And two of those guys committed suicide. Pete Ham... and the other one.

Liquid Feem. Liquid. Feem. Look at that shit—it’s opaque. It’s yellow. What the hell is that? There’s nothing on that label that can even identify a single ingredient contained within that plastic bottle. Jesus. Look at that. They put it in the middle of table. To motivate us. Guy who comes up with an ad gets to solve the mystery of Liquid Feem. What the hell kind of a name is Liquid Feem? Shit. I missed that. “Say that again?”

“Oh. Well... how much d’you want repeated?”

Sigh. “Just gimme the gist of what was said. I’m totally zomboid today.”

I’m totally zomboid everyday. When’s Prosky going to realize I’ve been coasting on that excuse for years?

“Well, I was just sayin’ that... this is the new soda in town so it has to have something memorable, something to... y’know, give it a firm base.”

Prosky’s a good guy. He could’ve called me up on not paying attention.
to. Just as long as you’re sleeping by the end of the day, we’ll be fine.

I need coffee. No. Doctors say I don’t need coffee. Caffeine, cholesterol—and a few other Cs. Supposed to be rotting me from the inside. Jesus. I don’t smoke anymore, never been a fan of drinking. But no. Old Dr. Koharski’s always got to have something to bitch at me for. Vegan pedophile piece of shit. Looks like a pedophile anyway. Maybe a pederast. What’s the difference again?

Never thought I could be so free-ee-ee!

You are one ugly motherfucker, you know that? Look like Henry the Eighth. Maybe not. Maybe just...in his transition from being a handsome king to being a huge, bearded fat-ass. But without the handsome king part...or the beard. Never could grow one—it’s this damn Eskimo blood. Well, Lisa could look past my looks. The others tolerated it—Ashley tolerated it, the other Lisa tolerated it, Margaret tolerated it, Se...Se...Sequoia! The Muslim one. What was her name? I shouldn’t be blanking on this. It was a while ago. I guess.

Who could it be? Believe it or not, it’s just—

Me! Damn “Greatest American Hero” theme song. Be singing that all day. Could be worse. Sort of instills victory into everything I do. Like scraping white shit off my lips.

Have to say I’m glad you got a car with a sunroof. Moonroof, sorry. At least that’s what the guys at the Honda dealership called it. Red light, turning lane...

Look at that sky. It’s gorgeous—it’s so blue. Wish I could write a poem ‘cause I’d write a poem about that. That solid blue light. Like the beach. The sky at the beach, the crash of the tide—all that shit. And Lisa would be there. Lisa...fuck it, I don’t remember the last name. But the good Lisa, not the meter maid Lisa. The good one. We’d walk along the shore, getting our feet freezing wet with the low tide. It would be serene. There’d be people there, but we’d be all to ourselves in spirit. And nothing would be wrong—it’d be at the height of the relationship when you’re still walking on the safety net.

Is that a memory? God, I hope it is.

“Saw written an’ I saw say...ping moon is on i’s way...an’ nunna you

TYLER RUBENFELD
we paint walls
renovating
erasing hard months of only $15 and an addiction.
atop ladders we watch men duck under to hide in their dark rooms.
our rollers keep rolling
our brushes keep brushing

on the way home we don’t say anything but whispers:
those were little kids,
what happened to her?
and I don’t think she remembered us from last time.

we understand that something in the world is starving
the world is spinning but they are standing still.

we come to escape our reality, get away from pencils, applications, expectations
do something different to make a difference
clean up their home but not their lives
build them a house they will never own.

What day is it? It’s...the twenty-fourth. March twenty-fourth. What month comes after March again? ...April, right? Jesus. You’d think I’d have memorized that by now. Okay. Next week it’ll be April. Or the week after. Thirty days hath... ...

God damn back. It’s the damn mattress or the box spring or whatever. Stood on the bed only that one time all those months ago and now it sinks in the middle like a motherfucker. Just had to get that spider on the ceiling. I didn’t squash it. It fell on the bed. I had to rip off all the covers just to find it. Wasn’t it three in the morning or something?

Always scared of spiders as a kid. Used to get the babysitter to squash them for me. There was that one time it was crawling around in the shower. I had that Mickey Mouse towel wrapped around me when I went out and told her. “There’s a spider in the shower!” Such a pussy back then. Then after she came in the bathroom and squished it, remember, I dropped the towel a bit too early? Flashing my ten-year-old tootsie-roll? God. Now I’m forty-two and spiders still creep me out. I’m still such a pussy.

I should get up. It’s a lose-lose situation anyway. I could stay in bed, fall asleep and be late or get up and actually have to get up. Oh what a quandary.

What the hell is this shit on my lips? This white shit I have to scrape off with my fingernail? Dried spit? Jesus. Fingernails too long. Look at that black filth in the corners. Used to eat that as a kid. It’s a wonder I’m still alive. Where’d this black stuff come from? Dirt, cocaine, Play-do, jizzum—whatever the hell I touch on an ordinary day, I guess. ...White shit’s not coming off. Looks like I rubbed my lips with lotion. Liquid Feem—that’s what that white shit looks like. Or something that would be called Liquid Feem. It’s not really liquidy though.

Believe it or not, I’m walkin’ on air...

Shit. Liquid Feem. Still haven’t thought of shit for the Liquid Feem account. Think of something on the way to the office—take one of those old commercials and spice it up for the 2000s. God damn, I don’t want to do that. Humans need sleep, I need sleep. All the aspirations I have in my life right now have been replaced by the need for sleep—at least for today. Oh well. Fail if you have
and still tracking hot red on the dry parts of the carpet, and us still flicking matches onto the curtains and deeply carved mahogany furniture. We were both panting hard and touching each other between match-flicks, heading up the curved stairway and laughing while it hurt our throats, watching the peeling walls and bright God start down below the both of us.

The ceilings were covered in ash-clouds of their own by now and Meredith was playing with the necklace I'd given her, whispering little curses and prayers to our God and nuzzling my neck where I had been starting to scab over. We'd left the great bedroom untouched because Meredith liked the sheets, and I could never deny her one thing, even if it was blasphemy. It was clogged with the black ash smoke and our breath was coming up a little short in the heat and bright.

We stood by the window and I held her hand tightly, kissing her cheek and forehead where some asshole had split her open in a fight years before, panting hard and hugging her tighter than I ever had before, making her kiss me, a thing all teeth and tongue and mouth before she broke the window with the back of her hand and pushed me hard, told me to run like all fuck. I scrambled down the woodwork-ivy clinging to the wall and slipped, hit the ground hard, splinters in my back. I gasped up at her like a fish out of water, seeing her messed-hair and the bright behind her, white grin shining out of the shadow. She darted in for a moment, then she leaped after me and swung down on the ivy, highlighted against the bright while it poured out the windows, blackening into the sky.

Ash was dripping on us in hot wet rain and it filled our mouths when we laughed, panting hard clean ash-air into our aching lungs and running on our gasoline feet. The gate was nothing to us now and we slid up and over it, Meredith clutching the side of her face and the cloth of her shirt she was holding to it sticking tight like it was glued, pale white lumps of melt bubbling up from under the thin fabric. She was grinning and her chin was dripping blood. She was marked and this time we could not hide it under thin cloth or jewelry, a note pinned to her to those who didn't understand. I kissed her other cheek and helped her into the truck, telling her I loved her anyway. This was the life, this was our gospel. We pulled the truck out of the driveway, Meredith in my lap and kissing my jaw, my cheek, my blackened face, behind us smoke bursting into the sky in exultation.

LENORE MULLINS

I thought you'd be cool when I first heard Guns & Roses from the other side of the wall, but your tastes have digressed, and so has my patience—my roommate's too. Us angels don't fall for your constant bass, your relentless guitar.

I understand getting pumped up for your next gig at night, but why all the hate, man, at 7am? I am right

when I say you will believe I am sweeter than what I am. I'll put my hair in pig tails, leave you a note: please stop by.

I will shake your hand and kiss your cheek when you accept our—my roommate's and my—invitation to witness your trash through the cinderblock slabs.

Don't forget every rose has its thorn. Please grab one of our butterfly chairs, take off your shoes to enjoy our plush purple carpet. We'll close the door behind you, just to be fair.

With that, you say it might be a little bit loud. But it's too late; you've really pissed us off now.

Welcome to our jungle.

When you woke us this morning with the first few bars we were already sharpening our spears, dipping them in poison.

CYNTHIA DRAKE
b. 

so far; they were little jokes, puns almost. They hadn't laughed at the hinting so we'd give them what they wanted: Big. Sensationalist. Let them salivate over the ashes and understand the truth; we wouldn't mind sharing it all. Meredith was panting and something wet was trailing down from where her nails hit my wrist. She leaned in and nipped me where my neck met my ear, hard, and I felt her teeth click together and the force of her moan. There was a gate in front of the house but we'd scale that easy, no problem after the others. The man living there didn't appreciate anything, owning a solid white building, bland and indulgent. Meredith had plucked a half-burned newspaper out of a trashcan and showed me the name two days ago, his crusade for his lord, savior, the virgin conception. He didn't know he'd forsaken the one God by choosing the one bound in paper, the consumed. On my side Meredith was licking my neck with her damp, pink, rough tongue and hugging me tighter, mons pubis pressed hard against my hipbone. I smiled. We were the fucking prophets and we'd bring them perdition.

Night is the best time for it because they can look but not find us, and it shines the brightest then. Meredith was carrying two cans out to the truck and I had a lighter and nine books of matches. The sun was setting, the damp putting down its foot on the grass while the heat vanished into the purple of the sky. We were barefoot and the rocks of our unpaved driveway were bad until we got into the truck. I drove and Meredith sat in my lap, playing with the lapel of my shirt and undoing the buttons, ripping them out while I concentrated on the striped feel of the pedals.

The place was huge and white against the sky, the top of the metal gate tipped with tiny metal thorns, designed in like leaves but leaving our feet tracking blood on the soft-cut grass. A dog barked but was outside and far away. The dark was begging to be changed. Meredith pulled a bobby pin out of her hair and picked the lock, letting me carry the gas inside and spread it on the thick expensive carpet, up the staircase, coating the tiny statuettes and leather sofas until everything glistened in rainbows and we couldn't smell the gas anymore. Meredith was kissing me again and I pulled her close, our hands still wet with the gas and both of us giddy. I fumbled with the matchboxes behind the soft scarred small of her back, then pulled her along by her wrist to start the fire.

We ran and splashed through the puddles we'd made, my feet burning.
We had vodka that night, something to calm us while we waited for the full of evening and then midnight, kicking the TV because it was crap and needed a jolt once in a while. Meredith rested her head on my thigh and pressed my hand into her rough hair until I stroked her scalp, combing out the mats slowly with my fingers for her and caressing the dandruff off her head. Reports showed the fifth fire in a week and all arson, too hot a summer and the rains still gone probably not coming back for a while. Better watch the house, don't leave the oven on, don't lock the pets inside.

The last can of gasoline was rubbing up against our garage wall like a bulky red cat. Meredith came back in the door with two half-cans lifted off some poor sap two roads down with a huge truck and three riding lawnmowers for his fucking huge dying brown yard. Compensating for something, obviously, so we laughed about it over a cigarette and played with our matches, flicking their luminous heads onto the dead grass.

Don't let anyone see you on the way or they'll tell you have the power. The best way to keep it hidden is with nonchalance that Meredith had mastered and I had not, carry yourself like you belong there, what do you think you're looking at mister-stranger-on-the-street. We headed down the road with the people around us like a flood and held hands tightly, her nails digging into the palm of my hand, five smooth red beetle-shells pinching the flesh. She had a scar on her wrist she liked to touch, a thick red-brown band raking down towards the elbow. She got it from the fire when we did our first, but our task was dangerous and we should have expected a couple problems.

The risk was part of what made it so powerful, so full of the truth. When the hurting stopped from our mistakes we were scarred; we were reminded of those who were consumed and how easily disciples could be cast away. They could understand the motives, the people from when I was young and they told me I needed to stop, the threat of a steel lock between self and flame and the tight white jackets. But they wouldn't. Such sad small things in soft white clothes like unruffled feathers. No hurt, no conflict, just supple and gentle and nothing imaginative, no mind behind it. We hurt to show them why, and we were martyrs.

This was a big one. We'd show them all. The small ones meant nothing.

LENORE MULLINS

When I was a kid I used to obsessive pack. I lost my favorite pair of shoes that way
They're in a suitcase somewhere, waiting to be discovered, to be worn again.

Isolation. Out in a cabin, miles away from the nearest human being
Or in a group of your closest friends wishing you were out in that cabin.

There's a mood I get into where all I want to do is run, run, run. What I'm running to or
From is unclear. I run until I feel stupid or wear out. Stand, trying to regain my dignity.

There's this girl that I can't get away from. She follows me everywhere, into my Thoughts, into my dream, into my fantasies. But I follow her too. Mostly around campus.

Being sixteen is like being forced to be the star in a movie with a badly written script. I
Have no control over my actions, I want. I can even control my feel...
Across the kitchen floor Meredith had spilled salt with the gasoline and the flames were licking up green on the peeling walls. The wallpaper was flaking off in huge chunks, slipping off the walls like Meredith was slipping out of that tight tight dress. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the whole building burning up in a tense ball of red and orange, bright like we liked it, lots of smoke, the needles on the nearby pine trees curling up and dying all around us.

The beaten blackened truck was weak, low on fuel, and I could still taste gasoline in the back of my throat from where I’d siphoned it out, to spread like butter over the now-toasted walls. Back at our house there was the stink of the septic tank leaking through the floor and we hadn’t taken out the garbage in the last week. Meredith was still naked, had thrown her dress into the house-fire and pulled me back by my wrist. The bed smelled like sleep and old sex, the sheets crunching just slightly beneath us. She was still soft-scented like clean sweat and the wood-ash from the burned-down cabin last week. The air was humid and thick with summer; it stuck to our skins when we stirred.

Summer was still heavy in the wind and made the sides of the houses bend with the pressure. Morning made the smell go away when Meredith made coffee and brought it to our unwashed bed, steam in our lungs and caffeine for the blood. We sat on the porch with all the windows open and pretended we could feel our capillaries filling, widening with the chemical influx.

Her movements flickered along in the red-orange rising of the sun, and she folded her hands in a benediction, their cupping curve resting in her lap. On the horizon was Ra, Apollo, the slow pink spread of watercolored heat through the former darkness of night. Meredith leaned forward so her hair fell over her face like a veil, lifting her hands as if to kiss them and opening them slowly, spreading the gift out to those who would take it. In the sky slippery blue was starting to show, and it was the color of her eyes.

I pulled her tight with arms around a gaunt waist and told her we’d spread the gospel everywhere, more tonight especially. She laughed and her tongue was a dancing rouge between our lips, her skin hot and pale. We leaned against each other and killed the time with indolence and sharp talk while the hot of the sun was rising. Out in the woods a plume of black was bursting out of the skin of the forest.

LENORE MULLINS
both of us terrified. I shut my eyes and cowered under the sky, that blue coat holding me like a nylon bag holds pieces of soft fruit.

Then, of course, I got inside the car, clutching my dry yellow receipt against the cool steering wheel. I thought of all this gas I'd bought—for what? Where was there to go now? Back home to you, back to watching that lake that could freeze anybody just by looking at it. I wanted to stand there with you until grey water flooded into our eyes—until neither of us could hear or see anything.

My first playgrounds were graveyards, my friends stone sentries.

I tripped over angels' feet and slipped between married couples' headstones.

Homemade memorials were made of grainy concrete with backwards letters and misspelled *eternities*, or names where spelled out with cats eye marbles, quieted ribbons of color embedded in the rock.

How can they be so demanding, asking to be remembered?

Their seconds dip into years and yet they still say,

*pull back my chest, count my ribs, make sure there are none left behind.*

You think a cemetery is like a theatre where the dead watch us throw lilies, how they call for a standing ovation are you're sure it is all over, the same way they tugged at my angles with feathered hands, pulled me back each time to climb the marble markers and play on the restless grounds.

*TAYA KITAYSKY*

*KARA KREWER*
Eyeballs frozen, you looked at the lake down our road. Then your tongue, that raw red rat, began to do the thinking: you heard a young man approaching on a boat, and I could see his arms, black against the white sky. Your gray hairs pulled tight on your scalp, wanting to warn him against the cold. I waved at him for you, waved like crazy, but your tongue didn’t make a sound in the rush. He passed us by, the wind hushing itself onward.

Later that morning we sat together in the kitchen, the lake muted through glass. Light slipped around the corners like a mouse. We’re just an ‘old married couple’ now, so old we can’t remember if we’re married. I guess how are you sounds like who are you across the table, you turning your left ear toward me like an owl—owls hear all the wrong sounds, only the movements of things trying to be silent.

Last night at the gas station it was cold, I had on only that thing blue coat you gave me. The man’s eyes swung at me behind the sliding window. I took my receipt and walked away. I remembered pulling up to gas stations with you after long dinners with friends—you were driving, still able to see. I’d wait in the car while you filled up the tank, wine smiling in the dark of my stomach.

But in that parking lot last night, when I wanted some silence to feel lonely without you, a plane flew so low it was like a whale cannoned into the air, charging white and dry, spinning round and round.

TAYA KITAYSKY
We have our Gods and our clocks
and when we are lucky
we have our dreams:
a bullet cuts through the front door
to catch my brother under his shoulder,
sky crashes into my bedroom.
The daughter I will have someday
gathers her life at the base
of my neck to watch, to whisper.
I hide my notebooks
and yank the covers up
but her breath stays cold
in my ears—when?
and why?

This, I know:
Morning will arrive
and her legs will twist back
into made beds
but I won’t notice,
what with all that sun. Every face
we have forgotten will rise
and fall behind my father’s eyes,
and that daughter with her dreaming bones
will not wait quietly:
say it, she will say, go ahead,
pronounce my name.

I just reread “Admonitions to a Special Person” and realized it was snowing outside. I finally registered how cold it was, or how cold I was, but I guess that’s what blankets are for, after all. I wouldn’t trouble myself with a blanket, though. There’s that rush to consider, that I get with the cold, the sense, I tell everyone, that brings me, from this goddamn asylum, home, of all places. It’s not really the truth. My home is very cold, but it doesn’t quite have a monopoly on the temperature, nor in my mind to the point where some small invisible strand of fluid, wanting nothing but freeze, sits waiting to pull me home with every sign of frost.
No, I like the cold because of that sick pride that plays on the edges of my lips and my fingers and my toenails, the parts that are too cold to keep their color, that are abandoned by the rest of my body with the chill penetrates the flesh. They are fun to watch turn red, then white, purple. And blue. I like the feelings of hollowed bones, the core that is also, finally wonderfully cold. And I love the connotations that come along with it, idea of perpetuity sending me off, higher than any drug induced, speed laced flight. I am proud of my body’s ability to give in, and I pay it fair respect for what I find to be noble, worthy cause. I’ve come to a sad point of appreciation, knowing what I do, which is very little, that this, far from weakness, is what I never could do.
In bed, my arms
kindle gas fires
and the headlines of the world
want to know my name.
No one honks
and the Dixie Chicks
skip on the same words
every time: love you
love you love you.
I fold my waiting prayers into the pillow case
and worry the wrinkles
in and out of mourning.

Mornings, my dreams are socks
scrawled into drawers of old love letters
which everyone knows are best
read once. I stitch notes
into my quilt to the woman
I want to be
though suddenly
I find all I own
are my questions.
My father tells me
he can't remember the books
he read in high school
and he won't remember
his night stories either.
I should have known that,
because doors in my house
open and close quietly
and we keep our baby pictures
stacked faces together.

SARAH RESNICK
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Eyeballs frozen, you looked at the lake down our road.
Then your tongue, that raw red rat, began to do the thinking:
you heard a young man approaching on a boat,
and I could see his arms, black against the white sky.
Your gray hairs pulled tight on your scalp,
wanting to warn him against the cold.
I waved at him for you, waved like crazy,
but your tongue didn’t make a sound in the rush.
He passed us by, the wind hushing itself onward.

Later that morning we sat together in the kitchen,
the lake muted through glass.
Light slipped around the corners like a mouse.
We’re just an ‘old married couple’ now, so old
we can’t remember if we’re married.
I guess How are you sounds like Who are you
across the table, you turning your left ear
toward me like an owl—owls hear all
the wrong sounds, only the movements
of things trying to be silent.

Last night at the gas station it was cold,
I had on only that thing blue coat you gave me.
the man’s eyes swung at me behind the sliding window.
I took my receipt and walked away. I remembered
pulling up to gas stations with you after long
dinners with friends—you were driving, still able
to see. I’d wait in the car while you filled up the tank,
wine smiling in the dark of my stomach.

But in that parking lot last night, when I wanted some silence
to feel lonely without you, a plane flew so low
it was like a whale cannoned into the air, charging
white and dry, spinning round and round,

TAYA Kitaysky
both of us terrified. I shut my eyes and cowered under the sky, that blue coat holding me like a nylon bag holds pieces of soft fruit.

Then, of course, I got inside the car, clutching my dry yellow receipt against the cool steering wheel. I thought of all this gas I'd bought—for what? Where was there to go now? Back home to you, back to watching that lake that could freeze anybody just by looking at it. I wanted to stand there with you until grey water flooded into our eyes—until neither of us could hear or see anything.

My first playgrounds were graveyards, my friends stone sentries. I tripped over angels’ feet and slipped between married couples’ headstones. Homemade memorials were made of grainy concrete with backwards letters and misspelled eternities, or names where spelled out with cats eye marbles, quieted ribbons of color embedded in the rock.

How can they be so demanding, asking to be remembered? Their seconds dip into years and yet they still say, pull back my chest, count my ribs, make sure there are none left behind.

You think a cemetery is like a theatre where the dead watch us throw lilies, how they call for a standing ovation are you're sure it is all over, the same way they tugged at my angles with feathered hands, pulled me back each time to climb the marble markers and play on the restless grounds.

TAYA KITAYSKY

KARA KREWER
Across the kitchen floor Meredith had spilled salt with the gasoline and the flames were licking up green on the peeling walls. The wallpaper was flaking off in huge chunks, slipping off the walls like Meredith was slipping out of that tight tight dress. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the whole building burning up in a tense ball of red and orange, bright like we liked it, lots of smoke, the needles on the nearby pine trees curling up and dying all around us.

The beaten blackened truck was weak, low on fuel, and I could still taste gasoline in the back of my throat from where I'd siphoned it out, to spread like butter over the now-toasted walls. Back at our house there was the stink of the septic tank leaking through the floor and we hadn't taken out the garbage in the last week. Meredith was still naked, had thrown her dress into the house-fire and pulled me back by my wrist. The bed smelled like sleep and old sex, the sheets crunching just slightly beneath us. She was still soft-scented like clean sweat and the wood-ash from the burned-down cabin last week. The air was humid and thick with summer; it stuck to our skins when we stirred.

Summer was still heavy in the wind and made the sides of the houses bend with the pressure. Morning made the smell go away when Meredith made coffee and brought it to our unwashed bed, steam in our lungs and caffeine for the blood. We sat on the porch with all the windows open and pretended we could feel our capillaries filling, widening with the chemical influx.

Her movements flickered along in the red-orange rising of the sun, and she folded her hands in a benediction, their cupping curve resting in her lap. On the horizon was Ra, Apollo, the slow pink spread of watercolored heat through the former darkness of night. Meredith leaned forward so her hair fell over her face like a veil, lifting her hands as if to kiss them and opening them slowly, spreading the gift out to those who would take it. In the sky slippery blue was starting to show, and it was the color of her eyes.

I pulled her tight with arms around a gaunt waist and told her we'd spread the gospel everywhere, more tonight especially. She laughed and her tongue was a dancing rouge between our lips, her skin hot and pale. We leaned against each other and killed the time with indolence and sharp talk while the hot of the sun was rising. Out in the woods a plume of black was bursting out of the skin of the forest.
We had vodka that night, something to calm us while we waited for the full of evening and then midnight, kicking the TV because it was crap and needed a jolt once in a while. Meredith rested her head on my thigh and pressed my hand into her rough hair until I stroked her scalp, combing out the mats slowly with my fingers for her and caressing the dandruff off her head. Reports showed the fifth fire in a week and all arson, too hot a summer and the rains still gone probably not coming back for a while. Better watch the house, don’t leave the oven on, don’t lock the pets inside.

The last can of gasoline was rubbing up against our garage wall like a bulky red cat. Meredith came back in the door with two half-cans lifted off some poor sap two roads down with a huge truck and three riding lawnmowers for his fucking huge dying brown yard. Compensating for something, obviously, so we laughed about it over a cigarette and played with our matches, flicking their luminous heads onto the dead grass.

Don’t let anyone see you on the way or they’ll tell you have the power. The best way to keep it hidden is with nonchalance that Meredith had mastered and I had not, carry yourself like you belong there, what do you think you’re looking at mister-stranger-on-the-street. We headed down the road with the people around us like a flood and held hands tightly, her nails digging into the palm of my hand, five smooth red beetle-shells pinching the flesh. She had a scar on her wrist she liked to touch, a thick red-brown band running down towards the elbow. She got it from the fire when we did our first, but our task was dangerous and we should have expected a couple problems.

The risk was part of what made it so powerful, so full of the truth. When the hurting stopped from our mistakes we were scared; we were reminded of those who were consumed and how easily disciples could be cast away. They could understand the motives, the people from when I was young and they told me I needed to stop, the threat of a steel lock between self and flame and the tight white jackets. But they wouldn’t. Such sad small things in soft white clothes like unruffled feathers. No hurt, no conflict, just supple and gentle and nothing imaginative, no mind behind it. We hurt to show them why, and we were martyrs.

This was a big one. We’d show them all. The small ones meant nothing.

LENORE MULLINS

When I was a kid I used to obsessive pack. I lost my favorite pair of shoes that way
They’re in a suitcase somewhere, waiting to be discovered, to be worn again.

Isolation. Out in a cabin, miles away from the nearest human being
Or in a group of your closest friends wishing you were out in that cabin.

There’s a mood I get into where all I want to do is run, run, run. What I’m running to or
From is unclear. I run until I feel stupid or wear out. Stand, trying to regain
my dignity.

There’s this girl that I can’t get away from. She follows me everywhere, into my
Thoughts, into my dream, into my fantasies. But I follow her too. Mostly
around campus.

Being sixteen is like being forced to be the star in a movie with a badly written
script. I
Have no control over my actions, I weep. I can even control my feel

ELSBEETH TEAGUE
so far; they were little jokes, puns almost. They hadn’t laughed at the hinting so we’d give them what they wanted: Big. Sensationalist. Let them salivate over the ashes and understand the truth; we wouldn’t mind sharing it all. Meredith was panting and something wet was trailing down from where her nails hit my wrist. She leaned in and nipped me where my neck met my ear, hard, and I felt her teeth click together and the force of her moan. There was a gate in front of the house but we’d scale that easy, no problem after the others. The man living there didn’t appreciate anything, owning a solid white building, bland and indulgent. Meredith had plucked a half-burned newspaper out of a trashcan and showed me the name two days ago, his crusade for his lord, savior, the virgin conception. He didn’t know he’d forsaken the one God by choosing the one bound in paper, the consumed. On my side Meredith was licking my neck with her damp, pink, rough tongue and hugging me tighter, mons pubis pressed hard against my hipbone. I smiled. We were the fucking prophets and we’d bring them perdition.

Night is the best time for it because they can look but not find us, and it shines the brightest then. Meredith was carrying two cans out to the truck and I had a lighter and nine books of matches. The sun was setting, the damp putting down its foot on the grass while the heat vanished into the purple of the sky. We were barefoot and the rocks of our unpaved driveway were bad until we got into the truck. I drove and Meredith sat in my lap, playing with the lapel of my shirt and undoing the buttons, ripping them out while I concentrated on the striped feel of the pedals.

The place was huge and white against the sky, the top of the metal gate tipped with tiny metal thorns, designed in like leaves but leaving our feet tracking blood on the soft-cut grass. A dog barked but was outside and far away. The dark was begging to be changed. Meredith pulled a bobby pin out of her hair and picked the lock, letting me carry the gas inside and spread it on the thick expensive carpet, up the staircase, coating the tiny statuettes and leather sofas until everything glistened in rainbows and we couldn’t smell the gas anymore. Meredith was kissing me again and I pulled her close, our hands still wet with the gas and both of us giddy. I fumbled with the matchboxes behind the soft scarred small of her back, then pulled her along by her wrist to start the fire.

We ran and splashed through the puddles we’d made, my feet burning
and still tracking hot red on the dry parts of the carpet, and us still flicking matches onto the curtains and deeply carved mahogany furniture. We were both panting hard and touching each other between match-flicks, heading up the curved stairway and laughing while it hurt our throats, watching the peeling walls and bright God start down below the both of us.

The ceilings were covered in ash-clouds of their own by now and Meredith was playing with the necklace I'd given her, whispering little curses and prayers to our God and nuzzling my neck where I had been starting to scab over. We'd left the great bedroom untouched because Meredith liked the sheets, and I could never deny her one thing, even if it was blasphemy. It was clogged with the black ash smoke and our breath was coming up a little short in the heat and bright.

We stood by the window and I held her hand tightly, kissing her cheek and forehead where some asshole had split her open in a fight years before, panting hard and hugging her tighter than I ever had before, making her kiss me, a thing all teeth and tongue and mouth before she broke the window with the back of her hand and pushed me hard, told me to run like all fuck. I scrambled down the woodwork-ivy clinging to the wall and slipped, hit the ground hard, splinters in my back. I gasped up at her like a fish out of water, seeing her messed-hair and the bright behind her, white grin shining out of the shadow. She darted in for a moment, then she leaped after me and swung down on the ivy, highlighted against the bright while it poured out the windows, blackening into the sky.

Ash was dripping on us in hot wet rain and it filled our mouths when we laughed, panting hard clean ash-air into our aching lungs and running on our gasoline feet. The gate was nothing to us now and we slid up and over it, Meredith clutching the side of her face and the cloth of her shirt she was holding to it sticking tight like it was glued, pale white lumps of melt bubbling up from under the thin fabric. She was grinning and her chin was dripping blood. She was marked and this time we could not hide it under thin cloth or jewelry, a note pinned to her to those who didn’t understand. I kissed her other cheek and helped her into the truck, telling her I loved her anyway. This was the life, this was our gospel. We pulled the truck out of the driveway, Meredith in my lap and kissing my jaw, my cheek, my blackened face, behind us smoke bursting into the sky in exultation.

LENORE MULLINS

I thought you’d be cool when I first heard Guns & Roses from the other side of the wall, but your tastes have digressed, and so has my patience—my roommate’s too. Us angels don’t fall for your constant bass, your relentless guitar.
I understand getting pumped up for your next gig at night, but why all the hate, man, at 7am? I am right when I say you will believe I am sweeter than what I am.
I'll put my hair in pig tails, leave you a note: please stop by.
I will shake your hand and kiss your cheek when you accept our—my roommate’s and my—invitation to witness your trash through the cinderblock slabs.
Don’t forget every rose has its thorn. Please grab one of our butterfly chairs, take off your shoes to enjoy our plush purple carpet.
We’ll close the door behind you, just to be fair.
With that, you say it might be a little bit loud.
But it’s too late; you’ve really pissed us off now.

Welcome to our jungle.
When you woke us this morning with the first few bars we were already sharpening our spears, dipping them in poison.

CYNTHIA DRAKE
we paint walls
renovating
erasing hard months of only $15 and an addiction.
atop ladders we watch men duck under to hide in their dark rooms.
our rollers keep rolling
our brushes keep brushing

on the way home we don’t say anything but whispers:
those were little kids,
what happened to her?
and I don’t think she remembered us from last time.

we understand that something in the world is starving
the world is spinning but they are standing still.

we come to escape our reality, get away from pencils, applications, expectations
do something different to make a difference
clean up their home but not their lives
build them a house they will never own.

What day is it? It’s...the twenty-fourth. March twenty-fourth. What
month comes after March again? ...April, right? Jesus. You’d think I’d have
memorized that by now. Okay. Next week it’ll be April. Or the week after.
Thirty days hath....

God damn back. It’s the damn mattress or the box spring or whatever.
Stood on the bed only that one time all those months ago and now it sinks in the
middle like a motherfucker. Just had to get that spider on the ceiling. I didn’t
squish it. It fell on the bed. I had to rip off all the covers just to find it. Wasn’t it
three in the morning or something?

Always scared of spiders as a kid. Used to get the babysitter to squish
them for me. There was that one time it was crawling around in the shower. I
had that Mickey Mouse towel wrapped around me when I went out and told her.
“There’s a spider in the shower!” Such a pussy back then. Then after she came in
the bathroom and squished it, remember, I dropped the towel a bit too early?
Flashing my ten-year-old tootsie-roll? God. Now I’m forty-two and spiders still
creep me out. I’m still such a pussy.
I should get up. It’s a lose-lose situation anyway. I could stay in bed, fall asleep
and be late or get up and actually have to get up. Oh what a quandary.

What the hell is this shit on my lips? This white shit I have to scrape off
with my fingernail? Dried spit? Jesus. Fingernails too long. Look at that black
filth in the corners. Used to eat that as a kid. It’s a wonder I’m still alive.
Where’d this black stuff come from? Dirt, cocaine, Play-do, jizzum—whatever
the hell I touch on an ordinary day, I guess. ...White shit’s not coming off.
Looks like I rubbed my lips with lotion. Liquid Feem—that’s what that white
shit looks like. Or something that would be called Liquid Feem. It’s not really
liquidy though.

Believe it or not, I’m walkin’ on air...

Shit. Liquid Feem. Still haven’t thought of shit for the Liquid Feem ac-
count. Think of something on the way to the office—take one of those old com-
cerials and spice it up for the 2000s. God damn, I don’t want to do that. Hu-
mans need sleep. I need sleep. All the aspirations I have in my life right now have
been replaced by the need for sleep—at least for today. Oh well. Fail if you have

ANNA CORKE

TYLER RUBENFELD
to. Just as long as you’re sleeping by the end of the day, we’ll be fine.

I need coffee. No. Doctors say I don’t need coffee. Caffeine, cholesterol—and a few other Cs. Supposed to be rotting me from the inside. Jesus. I don’t smoke anymore, never been a fan of drinking. But no. Old Dr. Koharski’s always got to have something to bitch at me for. Vegan pedophile piece of shit. Looks like a pedophile anyway. Maybe a pederast. What’s the difference again?

Never thought I could be so free-ee-ee!

You are one ugly motherfucker, you know that? Look like Henry the Eighth. Maybe not. Maybe just...in his transition from being a handsome king to being a huge, bearded fat-ass. But without the handsome king part...or the beard. Never could grow one—it’s this damn Eskimo blood. Well, Lisa could look past my looks. The others tolerated it—Ashley tolerated it, the other Lisa tolerated it, Margaret tolerated it, Se...Se...Sequoia? The Muslim one. What was her name? I shouldn’t be blanking on this. It was a while ago. I guess.

Who could it be? Believe it or not, it’s just—

Me? Damn “Greatest American Hero” theme song. Be singing that all day. Could be worse. Sort of instills victory into everything I do. Like scraping white shit off my lips.

Have to say I’m glad you got a car with a sunroof. Moonroof, sorry. At least that’s what the guys at the Honda dealership called it. Red light, turning lane... Look at that sky. It’s gorgeous—it’s so blue. Wish I could write a poem ‘cause I’d write a poem about that. That solid blue light. Like the beach. The sky at the beach, the crash of the tide—all that shit. And Lisa would be there. Lisa...fuck it, I don’t remember the last name. But the good Lisa, not the meter maid Lisa. The good one. We’d walk along the shore, getting our feet freezing wet with the low tide. It would be serene. There’d be people there, but we’d be all to ourselves in spirit. And nothing would be wrong—it’d be at the height of the relationship when you’re still walking on the safety net.

Is that a memory? God, I hope it is.

“Saw written an’ I saw say...ping moon is on i’s way...an’ nunna you

**TYLER RUBENFELD**

mondays we ride the bus, our faces trying to sleep
or understand the meaning behind grey slush and hibernating trees.

my friend draws footprints on the fogged windows and I draw my shoe in a notebook.

the other passengers are headed for malls and cafes, movies and bookshops,

money spent.

we go to paint walls.

the Whiting Hotel is the upstairs of an old building on Main Street

hidden carefully between Women’s Department Store #1 and #2.

it would go unnoticed but for the blue awning that drips on the pile of cigarettes

at the entrance.

some days a lady huddles clutching a cigarette in her hands.

each week she asks us where we’re from?

next town over.

was it hard to get here?

not for us.

the sign next to the little glass door:

No Smoking

but for them nothing’s easy

the smoke-stained walls have stopped protesting.

below the entryway:

sometimes a man and his mutt watch us quietly as we enter the hotel—

an old woman gone mad.

dumbwaiter compartments and outdated wallpaper a testament to better years.

what would those ladies in mink coats think if they saw their hotel now?

suites inhabited by men and women whose last chance is to keep breathing.

**ANNA CORKE**
stan' so tall... ping moon is gonna get ye all...yeah, ping moon." Why the hell are they playing Nick Drake at eight in the morning?

Damn it. I'll never find a parking space. I never find a god damn parking—

Oh. Right in front of the building. In front of the door actually. God. It's a sign. I'm going to have a terrible day now. When was the last time I ever had a parking space this close? Probably for compacts. What did we decide, is this a compact? No...it's not for compacts. Damn it. I'm going to have a horrible day now.

*Ping, ping, ping, pink... ping moon.*

Never thought I could be so free-ee-ee/

Eh. I know damn well no one listened to Nick Drake until after they put "Pink Moon" in a Jetta commercial. He killed himself, right? Sounds like he did. Don't these people get it? You put a great song that no one's ever heard of to a commercial, it's a lot more effective than putting something popular that's on fifteen other ads in circulation. Remember when that "Hey Ya!" song was on four or five commercials at the same time? Meanwhile there are perfectly peppy Badfinger numbers that go untouched. And two of those guys committed suicide. Pete Ham...and the other one.

Liquid Feem. Liquid. Feem. Look at that shit—it's opaque. It's yellow. What the hell is that? There's nothing on that label that can even identify a single ingredient contained within that plastic bottle. Jesus. Look at that. They put it in the middle of table. To motivate us. Guy who comes up with an ad gets to solve the mystery of Liquid Feem. What the hell kind of a name is Liquid Feem? Shit. I missed that. "Say that again?"

"Oh. Well...how much d'you want repeated?"

Sigh. "Just gimme the gist of what was said. I'm totally zomboid today."

I'm totally zomboid everyday. When's Prosky going to realize I've been coasting on that excuse for years?

"Well, I was just sayin' that...this is the new soda in town so it has to have something memorable, something to...y'know, give it a firm base."

Prosky's a good guy. He could've called me up on not paying attention
but he didn’t. Good guy. Ugly as hell. Good guy, though. Maybe those aren’t bad acne scars on his face—maybe when he was a teenager his cheeks exploded. Spongy skin—like what Richard Pryor has now. God damn. What the hell is that Liquid Feem?

Uh-oh. Randal Weeks has a suggestion. Fucking toddler. He’s what, twenty-two, twenty-three? Looks like George Stephanopoulos... with Down Syndrome.... That’s funny. I should tell jokes sometime. “The way I figure it,” look at those Colgate-white teeth, “public’s tired of seein’ these refreshin’, tasty images of sodor bottles with, like, the beads of cold water on it? Like the fuckin’ fronts of vending machines? Way I figure it, we do what Sprite did around the mid-nineties and do a series of sarcastic, not-takin’-ourselves-too-seriously sort of... parody; that’s the word. We do, like, parodies of all these sodor commercials and we get some sports star—a lotta the new ones are sorta press whores so it shouldn’t be that hard to find one to do it.”

Pound your fist and cry bullshit. “Nah. Have to disagree with you there.” Pussy. “Y’see, you just can’t go for that kind of campaign from the start.” Bitch. “We have to have something singular. We can’t just copy off Sprite to begin with. We have to have something solid...some sorta logo, some sorta song...something original.” Ooh—knocked you down a peg.

“Ah. Jus’ throwin’ it out there.”
I’m sure you are.

Awkward silence. Look like you’re thinking. Look...that direction. Yeah. Blink several times. Move the finger to the lips. Sigh in impossible thought.

Believe it or not, I’m walking on air...

Damn it. Go away “Greatest American Hero.” Shit. Didn’t even watch that show. I should have fucking Zeppelin in my head—something manly.

Think of something, damn it. This is your lot in life. Stop being lazy and come up with something great. Look at you. You’re forty-two years old. You won a Clio award in ninety-six. You shook Jon Lovitz’s hand. Think of something. Liquid Feem...Liquid Feem. I need something original...in a field where everything has been done before. Same as it ever was. Same as it...ever
You want to hate us.

We're hunted now. You like to say we're endangered but that doesn't stop the ranchers. We don't kill you because half your population will do anything to survive, like eating what's at hand.

That would be immoral.

We're only safe in zoos, it seems. Left alone we'll eat your children and their grandmother too. Your statistics say otherwise, but those don't make for good bedtime stories.

They reveal too much.

What happens when Little Red is molested by a human, and not one of us? Is the moral the same, or do you not feel as justified at the end of the tale? We understand.

You've always needed a big, bad wolf.

---

Think!

The beach... Not the fucking beach again. Yes, yes, Lisa was beautiful. She was great, she was... she understood you. When you couldn't think of anything to say, she understood. She talked for you. The blackout of 2003, when you sat on the porch and just talked. "Have you heard that song 'Everyone's Gone to the Moon'?” she'd asked, high reedy-voice. Cute. "It's old. It's from the early sixties. Haunting melody." That's definitely her—“haunting melody.”

You'd never put those two words next to each other. I know, I don't know why. "Yeah, I was listening to that song during this big Toledo blackout. I stayed home from school that day and I was just sitting on my bed at nine in the morning with the radio. 'Streets full of people... all alone... everyone's gone... to the' zap! Lights just went out just like that. And I was all alone and it was really creepy. It felt like everyone had gone to the moon." Oh, but you just had to be the old music expert, didn't you? Fucking telling her that the guy who sang the song, Jonathan King, became this rich record producer only to be arrested for child molestation. Did you need to tell her that? Why the fuck do you know that anyway? Do you have a sick child molestation fixation?

She didn't mind. She thought it was creepy but it didn't ruin her childhood memory or anything. I wasn't this pretentious, know-it-all music expert, neither did I have a fucking "child molestation fixation." God. I wasn't responsible for the breakup. She said that. You know that. I know that.

Just fucking think of an idea! Stop fucking around here or they're going to make you go into early retirement.

What the hell is that shit? Yellow. Opaque. Liquid Feem. Feem? What's fucking Feem and why's it in a liquid form? How do I sell something that I can't even identify? Citrus? Not the right yellow. Shit. Are there even bubbles in that thing?

Think of something!

How can you be forty-two years old? How can you be all those years?
How can all those years be you—and you still can’t think of shit when it comes to new products? I’m trying my best. Look, Lisa’s behind you now. She’s on the other side of the world. That’s not it. Well then, what is it? ‘Cause you keep talking to yourself instead of doing your job. What is it?

It’s just...why the hell did I decide to live in a landlocked shit...hole like this? Why am I so many hours away from the coast? Why the hell am I wearing a tie right now, in an office with no fucking windows? What I wouldn’t give for it to be...not March. Not landlocked. I want it to be July on Island Beach State Park and I want Lisa to be there with me, looking at the sign and asking, “Well, which one is it? Island? Beach? State? Park?” I want to be out there, breathing the salty air, with someone that I liked. Maybe I didn’t love her, but I definitely liked her the best. That’s refreshment. That’s refreshment that Liquid Feem can’t even come close to, even if it’s an orgasm in a twenty fluid-ounce bottle.

Hold on a sec.

“Okay. Here’s my idea.” This is fucking crazy. You’re putting your ass on the line, here. “Just a simple, serene ad. We have a man and a woman walking along the beach. It’s a great day. And they’re laughing away, having a great time. And this isn’t any Hollywood bullshit. These are real people...on a crowded, real beach. Nothing matters, though. They just have each other. I figure...we put Jonathan King’s ‘Everyone’s Gone to the Moon’ as the song.” Haven’t heard of it, Randall Weeks? “It doesn’t have much to do with the scene but it’s a...it’s a nice song anyway. So...this is it. This is the commercial. Just a man and a woman walking along the beach having a good time.... Then I guess the guy at the end could pull out a Liquid Feem or whatever and start drinking it.... Oh, and the tag line: Liquid Feem—About as refreshing as a beverage gets. Huh?

Look at that. Now we have a nice...straightforward ad, with a bit of a parody at the end. Liquid Feem—it’s not the greatest thing in the world, but for a soft drink it’s the best. Just keep an open mind, okay? It’s different, it’s untraditional...but it...it’s nice. What do you think?”

Wow. I feel ten pounds lighter, like I just made this huge confession. Jesus. Oh no...that doesn’t look good. Randall Weeks...
“Well, if that isn’t one of the biggest clichés I ever heard. You sure you been in advertising for that long?”

“Yeah, sorry man, but I gotta agree with Randall on this one.” Prosky, not you too. You’re my friend. “That is sort of a cliché. We don’t really want... y’know, we want... y’know, skateboards and grunge music, that sorta thing. Sorry.”

So that’s it, huh? You should just walk right out that door, right now. Get in your car, drive all the way to Island Beach State Park and start anew. Skateboards and grunge music? Oh... maybe they should just put me out to pasture. I just have no idea sometimes. Well... hell, at least try some Liquid Feem. Just grab it off the table and drink it. Why didn’t you do that before?

Holy shit! This tastes like fucking Land-O-Lakes and fizzy water! Jesus Christ. No... no, don’t you feel bad. Don’t you feel—God damn, that’s awful—don’t you feel bad, man. You know your dreams aren’t clichés. You know it’s not like that. This isn’t a bad day. It’s a good day. A damn good day, think of it that way. You almost sold your dreams to this shit, but it didn’t work out. You kept your beach and Lisa, and Liquid Feem got skateboards and grunge music. It all worked out. Can’t you see?

Yeah, I guess.

Who could it be? Believe it or not, it’s just me!

TYLER RUBENFELD
ALL ART BY SEATON ROTHMAN

Through the hands of:
Naomi DeHart
Taya Kitaysky
Kara Krewer
Laura Nelson
Kat Reece
Elsbeth Teague

Thanks Delp.
Thanks Therese.

Alex Kahler
Old Wolves Tale 3

Anastasia Lugo Mendez
Catalog Blues in Midwest Midwinter 5

Anna Corke
This is an Ode to Volunteering 7

Cynthia Drake
To My Dorm House Neighbors 9

Elsbeth Teague
Ghazal #4 11

Kara Krewer
Respect for the Dead 13

Kat Reece
Letter to Anne Sexton #1 15

Sarah Resnick
Waiting for Daylight 17

Taya Kitaysky
Wife to Her Blind Husband, at 77 19

Lenore Mullins
Sear 21

Tyler Rubenfeld
Liquid Feem 25
What would happen if you tried to hug Mr. Deep?

CRUNCH!

He'd bite you.
The Red Wheelbarrow
Spring 2005

So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

Where do you think you're going?