



Komorebi

Issue 1, Fall 2015

Komorebi

**International Undergraduate
Journal of the Arts**

Editor-In-Chief: Madelyn Moyer-Keehn

Associate Editors: Korina Bachman, John Watts

Komorebi: International Undergraduate Journal of the Arts 2015

Cover Art courtesy of Emily Teitsworth, Susquehanna University

Cover Text set in Didot

Body Text set in Times New Roman

Heading and Subheading Text set in Perpetua

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*“I don't play accurately— anyone can play accurately—
but I play with wonderful expression.”*

- Oscar Wilde

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Nathaniel Sharer, Case Western Reserve University
Dear God

Dear God,

This is your final warning. We keep getting complaints from your department, and the project is still behind schedule, despite your initial promises to get it back on track centuries ago. We realize you had some big shoes to fill when you stepped in. There's a long line of those who have held this position before you did, many of whom had distinct advantages over you, particularly in stylistic appeal. Many customers preferred inventive appearances and bright colors as opposed to your, as you put it, 'down-to-earth' attitude, but you said you could make it work, and we took you at your word. We understand it's a difficult project to manage, particularly on your own. We used to employ a whole team of overseers for your job, but due to a combination of budget problems and an attempt to modernize, we were eventually forced to downsize to a single manager. Adapting such a huge task must have been daunting, but you performed it admirably.

That being said, you need to get it together. You assured us that none of this would be an issue, and yet your workload seems to continually get the better of you. We've had to warn you too many times before. We understand that some things are inevitable. You can't stop some people from killing in your name. It happened to all of your predecessors as well, and by this point we believe it's inevitable. However, your work ethic seems to be dropping drastically. If the position is too much to handle with your current workforce, we have extra staff who can be re-assigned to help you on a temporary basis, but as it stands now, too many customers are complaining, too many phones are going unanswered, and production is slowing to a crawl. We're losing more and more customers to our competitors as it is, and the project is still nowhere near completion.

We do realize how dedicated you are to the position. You even got your own son involved to help manage your work, which we found extremely admirable. You've demonstrated capability from day one, when you immediately began to knock down those under you who didn't have the project's best interests at heart. You've never been one to shy away

from risk either, not when so much was at stake. You've done a lot of fantastic work for us over the years, and we'd hate to have to let go such a promising employee. That being said, modernization is key to success, and if you continue to be unable to adapt to the new problems you're presented with, then we're going to have to replace you with someone who can.

Signed,
Upper Management

Nathaniel Sharer, Case Western Reserve University
Last Chance

Approaching. Exit. In One. Mile.

The monotone of the GPS cut into my thoughts. One mile until Philadelphia. Only a few more after that until the hospital.

It hadn't been my mother who'd called about him. She'd died years ago, and left him long before that. It had been a woman though, one in a string of women who weren't my mother. I remembered her words.

"It's your father...it happened again. This time they don't think... well, he's asking for you."

The burn on my hand had itched then, as it always did when I thought about my father. It had itched ever since I ran into that stove, when he'd felt that a bottle was more interesting than watching me.

I remembered my tenth birthday, how I stayed up to wait for him, even as midnight crept past and I knew he wasn't coming home that night.

"I'm on my way," I'd said, although I didn't really know why. I'd taken an address and hung up without another word.

I'd thought about my mother, and how much she'd loved him, even as she packed our bags with tears in her eyes. I remember his face when we drove off, and seeing how, at least in that moment, he wanted desperately for things to be different.

I remember seeing him again at my graduation, shaking my hand, remember smelling the alcohol still on his breath and seeing the sadness behind his eyes as he slurred his congratulations.

I remembered my mother, ten years later, still torn between love and disappointment, even as she was dying in front of me.

Approaching. Exit. In Five. Hundred. Feet.

I remembered his call last year. Remembered him talking about his heart, repeating the things his doctors told him, things he probably didn't understand. He understood the time they gave him, though.

Three years. Maybe.

"I just...I was hoping you could take a little time off work." He'd said awkwardly. He was trying to be friendly. Trying to be my father.

"Hoping we could see each other again, you know? Before..."

I'd stayed silent.

"Well, let me know, all right? It'd be nice to see my son again. Talk with you...man to man, I guess."

I'd almost laughed as he hung up, laughed at the thought that my father had any idea what it meant to be a man.

I'd seen him a few months later, briefly. I'd met his new...friend, a woman barely older than I was. I listened to him talk at me, tell me about how he wanted to make his last months count, even as he took his medication with Jim Bean. I'd left shortly after, having said barely a word.

Approaching. Exit. On Right.

I thought about my father, and the burn on my hand itched.

Recalculating...

Recalculating...

Recalculating...

Alex Bernstein, SUNY Geneseo

Angel in the Drive Through Window

“What can I get you today sir?”

He’s staring at me, the moron, with his blue hat and yellow name tag. His teeth look like he wore a crooked retainer for a decade or two. His eyes resemble the mouse I found dead in my apartment this morning. I wonder how close his genetics are to that of a rodent compared to myself. Probably a lot closer, after all, I don’t look nearly that odd.

Why is he staring at me with that goofy smile? It’s as if he doesn’t recognize the fact that he looks like a rodent and I do not. I imagine him crawling into a human sized mouse trap. SNAP. It shuts onto his back, and he squirms for a moment before accepting his death.

“Sir?” the voice in the intercom says. I realize I’ve been staring into my dashboard, parked next to the sign at Wendy’s with the menu on it. There’s a line of cars behind me.

I can’t see this voice from the intercom, but I bet he looks like a rodent.

“I’ll have the most expensive thing on the menu, please.”

“Excuse me?” The miserable mouse responds with a squeak in his voice that makes me momentarily sympathize with every mass murderer who ever lived.

“The. Most. Expensive. Thing. On. The. Menu,” I repeat with a vehemence in my voice that I’m sure caused him to evacuate his bowels right into that dumb looking uniform of his.

“That would be the Baconator combo, sir-”

Right at the exact moment he gets his last word in, I yell out “Yes that’s correct.”

The car behind me honks its horn, and the guy driving it sticks his hand out the window in a manner that says “what gives?”

I imagine the car getting crushed by a steamroller in slow motion. I then imagine all the judges from American Idol laughing as they watch the man attempt to climb out of the car while it is being demolished, to no avail.

I wonder what brand of toothpaste Simon Cowell uses.

The car honks again. I lightly press on the gas. I hear my engine working. The man behind me yells something in a heavy accent that I can’t understand but this doesn’t matter as I doubt I wanted to understand whatever it is he had to say anyways.

My crappy grey Sedan from the 90's moves forward ever so slowly, until I reach the drive through window.

I see a chimpanzee wearing a Wendy's hat smashing up boxes and plastic utensils, wreaking havoc in the drive through window. I consider calling the police or yelling for help but I am strangely hypnotized by the ape's behavior. Every few seconds the animal will make this sucking noise with it's mouth and jump around maniacally before destroying more supplies.

Suddenly, a bug flies into my eye, I swat at my face and rub it out, and this time when I look at the drive through window a beautiful girl is leaning forward, holding my Baconator combo. She has long blonde hair that falls over her chest, like a land mermaid. I make direct eye contact with her and suddenly I feel as though I've been dunked in holy water.

"That'll be \$8.09," she says a couple of feet from my face. I reach into my suit pocket and take out a platinum American Express card. I silently appreciate my engraved name on the card, which reads "Ratchimp Monkeyface". The angel in the drive through window grasps the card with two fingers, and I notice that her fingernails are each painted with a bright red dot in the middle, like the Japanese flag. She pulls the credit card from my hand, into the drive through window and swipes it on the machine.

I want the chimpanzee back.

"Excuse me," I cry out into the drive through window, leaning my body out of my car. "When will the chimpanzee be returning?"

The angel in the drive through window gives me an odd glance. "The chimpanzee? Didn't you hear? He lost his job. Tax evasion." I nod understandingly and shed a tear. Such a good ape. Such an awful life.

"Wow, I've lost my appetite now" I yell to the angel in the drive through window. "Why would you tell me that news as I'm about to eat?"

"I'm sorry sir, I thought you knew. He had a risky lifestyle, that one."

I've had enough of this. I gun the engine and drive away, forgetting about my credit card. I won't need it where I'm going. I keep driving until I find an entrance to the highway. The streets are empty. I'm hitting sixty miles an hour. Seventy. Eighty. Frank Sinatra is booming at top volume inside the car, but my car is a worthless, a piece of scrap metal with wheels and an engine. As a result, the radio signal is mediocre at best, resulting in a mechanical whine that somewhat resembles the voice of the legendary singer. I curse at this awful vehicle and slam on the radio console with my

bare fist, until my hand begins to bruise and bleed and the radio dies from the abuse.

I've now hit ninety miles an hour.

There are no other vehicles on the highway, until suddenly a motorcycle pulls up next to me. It's the chimpanzee, he's wearing the whole Wendy's uniform, and his speedometer reads 100. He pulls in front of my car and I see him pull out a pack of Marlboro cigarettes. He sticks the end of a cigarette into the engine of his motorcycle, lighting it, and takes a long drag on it. What a badass ape. I can only wish to reach his level of style some day. My car is now approaching 100, and I can feel that the body of my car is beginning to shake and rattle: it was not meant to go this fast. The chimpanzee veers his motorcycle off onto an exit ramp, and I wish him a long and prosperous life.

I get off on the next exit without slowing down a bit. A building flies up towards me in my vision. My car collides with a brick wall and within an instant so does my head. The resulting impact causes my brain to---

Bianca Baynum, Susquehanna University
Life Magazine, 1966

The major stories, “Will he dare run in ’68?” and “How will he handle power?” Robert Kennedy’s hands are frozen in time almost touching each other in mid-clap. His blue eyes have turned gray in black and white and stare off to his right away from the articles being advertised. The right side of the photograph is blushed dark. His lips are firm and straight as if they just uncurled from a smile. Behind him is a large headshot of his brother one eye facing the camera.

I found this magazine in an antique store with other old crumpled ones. The price on the bottom right says 35 cents. I pay \$25 dollars for it. The frail old lady with raggedy hair at the counter says, “Oh, wasn’t he great?” She says it like I’m old enough to have remembered. My mother wouldn’t even remember. I smile, “Yes he was.”

Jessica Schultz, South Dakota State University

A Guide to Conquering Daily Challenges

Chapter 1: The Basics

Step 1: Getting Up

If you're like millions of other people aged five to sixty-five worldwide, chances are you've got a tight schedule of things to do and places to go. Therefore, this is perhaps the most important step covered in this guide. Overlooking this step can completely ruin any chance at having a successful day.

After your alarm goes off, give yourself ample time to get your blood flowing by rolling around in bed. Once you have determined that you are able to stand and/or walk, find the nearest mirror and tell yourself "Yes, I can!" It is important to begin digesting something during this step (the significance of which will be explained in a later step). Consider a scone or a bowl of your favorite pirate-themed marshmallow cereal.

Congratulations, you've completed step one!

Step 2: Tools of the Trade

Today will throw a number of challenges at you, so you'll want to be prepared for anything. Things you may need to conquer these challenges include, but are not limited to:

Photographic identification. Thirty-seven dollars and sixty-four cents. Pocket notebook. AA batteries. Harmonica. Gold gel pen. Chocolate milk. Umbrella. Needle and thread. Scotch tape. A guide to conquering daily challenges. Tide To-Go Stick. Fish shaped crackers. Chamomile lotion. Light-up shoes. Extra socks. Emergency candy bar. Nail polish. Bacon-scented air freshener. BIC lighter. Sunglasses. Can opener. Binoculars. Glow stick.

Step 3: Going Places

Everyone and their dog has places to go. How you choose to get there is entirely up to you. There are a number of options available to you depending on your location of residence and amount of money allocated to transportation. If you're like 99.9% of people worldwide, you don't have access to personal chauffeurs, private jets, or dragons, so you'll have to narrow down your options from a list of more conventional methods.

Personal vehicles, such as cars, minivans, and tractors, are very popular for those who are able to obtain driver's licenses. They offer you the freedom to go wherever you want, whenever you want, as long as you have gas in your tank and your parents' permission. Public transportation is a great choice if you live in a city that offers it, but always proceed with caution, for you will not be able to get off until the regularly scheduled stops. This can cause problems if you become trapped on the bus with your ex-wife, a mime, or the FBI agent that is after you.

Eco-friendly options include walking, biking, skating, gliding, and sailing. As long as you're not a lazy bum, these methods will get you where you need to be while simultaneously giving Mother Nature a big hug. Always remember that transportation, or a lack thereof, is never an excuse to miss work or any other obligations you may have. Feet were invented for that very reason, so if you choose not to use them, consider donating them to someone who will.

Step 4: Maintenance

(Alternatively: 'How to Not Get Dead')

There are a few essential things your delicate human meat will need to continue conquering life's everyday challenges. The most important is nutrient consumption. When your engines are running low, they will alert you with rumbly, grumbly sounds. That is your signal to begin consuming fuel. Although just about anything edible will do, for best results, select a healthy balance of foodstuffs from different sections of the food pyramid. A forewarning about the aforementioned food pyramid: although candy is located at the top, this does not mean it should be utilized most often. Beware.

If you forget this step, your body will begin to act up in all kinds of unpleasant ways. Although the human body can survive days or even weeks without consuming food, it is recommended that you eat several times throughout the day. The by-products of eating are unpleasant, but this is a minor price to pay for the cost of remaining alive.

Along with the proper nutrients, you must also regularly absorb water and other fluids. Imagine that you have a beautiful flower living inside of you that you must water regularly, but not too much, to keep it blooming happily. This will help you to retain the ideal volume of water within your human vehicle.

Chapter 1 Summary

It's not easy being a functioning member of society, but these fundamental steps will help you face life's challenges with confidence and ease. Getting up each day is a cinch if you know how to do it right. Being prepared with the right tools can save your bacon in a tough situation. Going places has never been easier with the wide variety of transportation methods. Maintaining your body is the key to being not dead. Once you've mastered the basics, you'll be ready to move on to more advanced steps. Next chapter, we'll go over everything you need to know to succeed in those pesky social situations you keep finding yourself in.

Samantha Sekora, Susquehanna University
(1.) Things I Never Knew

At sixteen, we found the photos, snow on sand, white and sparkly. My grandfather used to say that when snow touched the sand, everything turned blue. That fall when Sandy stormed the shore, my grandparents rested on their balcony, watching a lost refrigerator floating atop rough waves bang against their glass doors. Boardwalk fragments littered the bay view. Hours were spent lifting splintered boards, tangled in reeking seaweed, full of salty wetness. I pictured debris showered in blue snow, frostbit in color. Sandy being forgotten, left, covered. I longed to see snow shifting along sand, houses without roofs planted into the ground. Homes no longer filled with beings but belongings, abandoned, dusted.

Austin Shay, Penn State Harrisburg At a Distance

He watched the boys run down the field. They were truly remarkable. Weaving in and out between each other, sprinting as hard as they could down a straight stretch, and stopping hard to reverse directions, these boys were truly athletes. The black and white ball bounced off of feet, flew through the air, and into the nets at different times. There was one boy in particular that was different from the rest. He was much stronger, faster, braver, more confident, and more agile than the rest. This kid was incredible to watch; an athlete who made the others appear dull even when they were not. His name was Aiden Lawrence. He was the Adonis of the school, and he knew it.

“Alright boys, let’s wrap it up for today, good work.”

The boys jogged back over to the benches and began to gather their belongings. Taking off sweaty jerseys and tossing them into bags, the boys began to walk off the field.

He watched the boys go and smiled wistfully, “Oh, and boys, I need those jerseys to actually be washed by next practice, ya know.”

The boys all laughed and shouted a chorus of “yes coach” and “we know.”

He saw Aiden left behind, sitting on the bench, changing his shoes.

“Aiden, you were on fire today, you really looked great out there,” he said, beaming.

“Thanks coach, you really think so? I felt so in the game today. Like, we just were really connecting out there. You ever felt that way?” Aiden asked, grinning up at his mentor.

He nodded and laughed knowingly, “Yeah, I do. You seem really excited about today’s practice.”

“You don’t know the half of it coach,” Aiden said shaking his head.

“Oh, by the way Aiden, I have something in my office for you. Some sort of letter,” he said while putting a firm, and yet gentle, hand on Aiden’s shoulder.

“What’s it about?” Aiden said puzzled.

“Well, since opening it would be considered fraud because it’s addressed to you, I felt you should get the first glance at it,” he said smiling mischievously.

Aiden laughed and walked beside his coach, “I guess you’re right.”

As the two entered the school together, they made their way to the athletic office.

“It’s in this drawer somewhere, where did I put it?” he said milling through a top drawer.

“No big deal, memory loss happens with old age coach,” Aiden said, stifling a laugh.

“Well aren’t you just a comedian?” he said shaking his head.

“I’d like to think so,” Aiden said while turning to look at the many trophies along the walls. “Wow, you were pretty decent, huh coach?”

“I was a little more than that,” he said sarcasm lying within his voice.

Aiden became mesmerized with the various trophies along the walls on shelves, the plaques mounted everywhere, and photos of soccer teams in a wide array of uniform colors. He looked at each picture, finding his coach easily in every one; Aiden smiled.

“Ok, so you were pretty good,” Aiden said, shrugging his shoulders.

Suddenly, Aiden was constricted from behind and felt a cloth go over his mouth. He began to struggle and thrash, fighting his hardest. He coughed and gagged and did everything he could not to breath in the substance of the material. He soon felt his body begin to give in so he tried to cry out one last time. But at this point, his loudest shout was no louder than a whisper and he went slack in the man’s arms.

“Oh Aiden, I still am good.”

Austin Shay, Penn State Harrisburg
Sapphire Eyes

I could hear my mother's voice echoing down the hallway. Her steps getting closer to me, and I can feel the moment her eyes meet my figure. I was still standing there in my bloody suit. She slowly put her arms around me and I immediately burst into tears, sobbing against her shoulder.

"They don't know, Mom. They don't know if she'll make it."

"She is going to be just fine, love," my mother spoke to me, rubbing my back.

"How do you know?" I snap back wanting to believe her.

"She might seem vulnerable, but she is a fighter. No doubt about that. Come on, let's go sit down," she says managing to guide me away. She leads me to the private waiting room, where the rest of the wedding party sits quietly waiting and wondering. I curl up into my mom's lap and before long was fast asleep.

I twiddled my thumbs as I got ready to see her emerge from the doors. The ode began and my heart jumped in my throat. It was about to happen. I was about to married to the woman I loved. That's when I heard it. Even the sound of the organ couldn't drown the gun shots.

I awoke with a jolt. The surgery was over. Luckily no major organs has been hit, but she lost a lot of blood. She was going to be in shock when she awoke. No doubt. She would be hazy from the painkillers. On the suggestion that I go home and get some rest, I look up to my mother, my eyes still wet with tears. "I won't, Mom. I won't go home. I'm staying here with her." My mom looks up at the doctor, knowing I wouldn't budge. Finally the doctor replies saying they'd put an extra bed in the recovery room. My mother looks at me and I give her a slight smile. "I knew I could stay, and that doctor couldn't resist my charm," I say trying to be funny to lighten my mood.

"Come on, honey," my mom says nudging me, "It's going to be another hour or so until they move her. Let's go get you cleaned up and get some dinner in you."

"I'm not hungry."

"Will you at least eat something in the café here? I will bring you

something to sleep in. I'm not going to try to make you leave because I know you won't."

"Deal."

"Alright. I will back in an hour or two. I love you," she says kissing my forehead goodbye. My eyes start to wander around the room. I see the white walls, and I try to locate a speck of dirt. Being unsuccessful, my ears pick up on the sound of the vending machines' fans turning back on. Without much excitement, I decide that it might be a good time to rest my eyes.

The plane landed earlier than it was supposed to so I decided that I would go exploring while the other boys headed to the hotel to relax. It was Paris after all and even fame couldn't dull the excitement of seeing the Parisian streets glisten. I started to walk down the street towards the Eiffel Tower. I kept my head down so people wouldn't recognize me and surprisingly enough no one did or cared to say so if they did. I spotted a cozy looking café called Café Constant. I walked through the door and saw that there was only one girl sitting alone at a table in the corner. I found it shocking. I was in the heart of Paris! But then again, I wasn't complaining. I was a celebrity after all and solitude was a rarity. I walked up to the counter and ordered myself a nice hot cup of tea before I headed over to the girl.

"Is this seat taken?" I asked cunningly.

"No it isn't." the girl answered without looking up from her books.

"So do you come here often?" I asked, noticing the way her auburn hair laid perfectly along her slender shoulders.

"I come here almost everyday to get my work done," the girl answered again, still without looking up, not even paying attention that someone was actually speaking English to her and not the typical French.

I noticed her American accent immediately and knew she must be an exchange student. "Where are you from?"

"Hershey, Pennsylvania."

“I did a concert there last summer. Lovely place, great chocolate,” I said. This made the girl look up from her book. I could tell that she recognized me.

“Lincoln,” she said with some hidden excitement in her voice

“Yup that’s me. May I ask your name?” I said trying to keep my excitement in as I saw her eyes sparkle like sapphires.

“Jacqueline.”

“It is nice to meet you, Jacqueline,” I said casually, pleasantly surprised that a fan could be this calm in my presence. She kept talking, but my mind started to drift of in the waves of her sapphire eyes.

I don’t know how much time had gone by, but my mom pats me on the shoulder, guiding me to the room where the doctors had moved Jacqueline. My mother leaves to go home, but made sure she had my bloody clothes in her hands. Ryker walks into the recovery room shortly after my mother left, where I was sitting in a chair watching the slow rise and fall of Jacqueline’s chest. Ryker just sits down in another chair silently before speaking. “I had just seen her,” Ryker finally mutters, “She was stunning in that dress. Stunning. So in love with you. Then one minute, just barely one minute, and I see her. Like this.” Ryker finally cracks letting his own tears spill out. “I’m so sorry Lincoln. I’m so sorry.”

“The doctors say she’ll be okay. But all I see is her right now. She is so pale and this stupid machine,” I say motioning angrily to the monitor, “Her heart is so slow. I keep listening and sometimes I freak out because it sounds like it is flat lining.” The tears pool at the corner of my eyes yet again, but I snuffle to try to hold them back. I was trying to be hopeful, but all I felt was pessimism. The doctors couldn’t possibly be telling me the truth. “Thanks for being here, Ryker.”

“I’m here too,” Hendrix says poking his head in. I look back to see my best friend smiling at me sadly. The tears began to fall again, but I stand as he embraces me. “Anything you need Lincoln.”

“Here we brought you some things,” Hendrix says revealing a bag. “Just an extra pillow, blanket, some snacks. Your favorites. Just to get through the nights here.”

“Thanks. But I don’t know how well I’ll sleep. I’m worried sick.”

“Don’t worry. We will make some stops by,” Ryker said rubbing his shoulder, “Hendrix and I are staying right across the street.”

“Alright. We will circle back later. We just wanted to let you know we are only a phone call away,” Hendrix said as he grabs Ryker’s hand and waves goodbye. I sit back down again in the chair, the voices of my friends becoming less coherent as my mind wanders back.

I moved without thinking. I ran to the room. No. It couldn't be. This wasn't supposed to be happening. I entered the room to see a body on the ground, which vaguely appeared to look like my sister, Mya. I then saw what I feared. Blood staining the white dress that Jacqueline was wearing. Blood. Lots of blood. Ryker was holding her with tears in his eyes. I immediately replaced his arms, cradling Jacqueline in his arms.

I quickly snap back when the nurses come in and run some tests. Temperature. Blood Pressure. The usual. At approximately midnight, the doctor do one last check up to make sure all the procedures had gone well.

“Lincoln, I know it will be hard, but try to get some rest. She is recovering fine. Nurses will be in and out tonight to check on her. Don’t worry. She is under very heavy painkillers and might not wake up until morning,” the doctor said as he leaves the room. I refuse to go to sleep quite yet, but feel myself nodding off.

The doors were closed and that didn't stop me from trying to push past, but all the boys held me back as I collapsed in their arms and just cried. My shirt covered in her blood. I couldn't do anything. Mya had defeated me even though she was dead. I thought she was supposed to be my sister. I listened to the sirens drift off in the distance and the further they got, the more I felt like I had lost the one person I truly loved.

I didn’t know what time it was when I hear someone mutter my name. I am still sitting in the chair beside Jacqueline’s bed, when I hear the almost inaudible whisper escape her mouth and saw her eyes flicker up at me.

“Lincoln,” Jacqueline says weakly.

I am already up on my feet and softly holding her hand. “You’re awake,” I say grateful.

“I love you.”

I leaned down and kissed her forehead, “I love you too.”

“Go to sleep, Linc,” she almost laughs, but was too weak to.

I smile gently. Only she could manage to say something like that in this situation. I walk to the other side of the room where the small portable bed was set up. I push the bed a tad closer to hers, and rest my body. I am close enough where I can reach out and grab her hand. I interlace my fingers in hers and she gives it the lightest of squeezes, which only reminds me of how much pain she would be in once all the painkillers wore off. Despite all of my efforts, I am unable to keep my eyes open, she was breathing beside me and that was enough hope for me to fall asleep.

I gazed across the back end of the studio. I didn't see Jacqueline. I looked again and again. Something wasn't right. The interviewer was trying to ask me another question, but everything seemed silent. Where did she go?

“Lincoln,” Hendrix nudged, “the question?”

“What question?”

“We're in the middle of an interview.”

“Oh, I'm sorry. I don't feel well. I have to go,” I said, bolting from my seat.

“Sorry folks, we are going to take a quick break. We'll be back with some more questions with the boys and then we will move on to some of our big winners of tonight. Stay tuned!” The camera's quickly turned off and Hendrix ran over to me as I was looking around the studio.

It is the only time I remember exactly. 3:47 am. Jacqueline wakes squeezing my hand tight. She is in hysterics.

“Lincoln, Lincoln, it hurts,” Jacqueline says breaking out into a cold sweat. “What exactly happened? Why does my side hurt? Why am I here? I should be getting ready for the wedding. We're getting married today right?”

So many questions spilling out of her mouth as I try to wipe the tears away spilling from her cheeks as she felt the freshly stitched wound.

“Lincoln?”

“Jacqueline, love. You...you were shot by Mya. Right before walking down the aisle. We didn’t get married,” I say as she looks at me with blank eyes. I remember the nightmares Jacqueline had after her fight with Mya. This was much worse than that ever was.

“No,” Jacqueline replies as her lip quiver. She sobs heavily against my chest. “No. No. No.”

“Shhh. Shh. It doesn’t matter. You are alive. That’s all that matters,” I say patting her forehead with a cool towel. “Come on. Go back to sleep. You need the rest.”

But her hysterics start again and her breathing is hitching. Panicked. The nurses soon enter pushing me away as they reissue more painkillers and lay her back down, pushing back her dampened strands of hair off her forehead. Once the nurses got her heart rate back to a normal pace and ran a small checkup, they finally spoke to me.

“This could happen from time to time. She won’t remember right away. It can be hard for people. If you need to ever leave, we understand.” I understood alright. If only they knew the things we had to battle as a celebrity couple.

“I won’t be leaving,” I say stubbornly. “I can handle it. She needs me here.”

“At least go back to sleep,” the nurse replies leaving to attend to other patients.

I curled back up on my bed, but I was unable to sleep. I just stared at the ceiling wondering when I could leave this cold and dark hospital with Jacqueline in my arms.

* * *

“That is what happened on the first time your grandmother and I tried to get married,” I say to our grandchildren during their weekly story time.

“Why did you end up getting married after all of that?” one of my grandkids questions.

“Why wouldn’t we?” Jacqueline answers as she grasped me hand.

“But was it all worth it?” the other asks.

“Worth it! Of course it was worth it” is all I could say, but I will never forget seeing her eyes that first time in Paris, and then that day in the hospital, it reminded me that I could have missed them so easily in the crowds of fans around me. There are so many things I took for granted. But she certainly was a gift that I didn’t deserve but am so glad that I received.

Austin Shay, Penn State Harrisburg
Nadezhda Sergeevna Alliluyeva*

The thunder shuttered
the floorboards,

as my memories went
back to my childhood

when he saved me from
drowning, during his time

of exile. A proper Bolshevik,
I thought of myself, so

I walked hand in hand
with the party leader.

I was 18 when I became
his wife, but my mind

was made long before
when I had first met him

when I was 10. My bipolar
disorder made me a mad woman

in his eyes, and
after I told him how stupid

he was acting I was found in my bed
with a revolver at my side.

The doctor said
I died of appendicitis,

so to my dear husband
why did I have a gun?

He said he loved me,
but all I can remember is

his relentless tongue,
like steel and vanilla.

* - Nadezhda Sergeevna Alliluyeva is the second wife of Joseph Stalin.

Austin Shay, Penn State Harrisburg
Red Shoes

His knock echoes throughout the house
my grandmother's words run through my head
"Don't open the door for strangers."
The shoes were vibrantly glowing through my window
they seemed to be calling my name.
My hands reached for the knob.
The rusty hinges squealed in agony. The red shoes
now in full sight. My eyes slowly look up at my visitor.
My legs tremble as he stares back toward
my little body. The cold winter air blows past him
allowing my nostrils to take in his alarming aroma.
The grey haired man took a step into the house
knowing what he wanted. He knew I was alone.
My eyes once again wonder, but this time
he sees my grandmother's old silver Cadillac
pulling onto the street,
and those red shoes turn around, but his azure eyes
stare into mine. I could read them clearly,
telling me he would be back.

Riley Thomas, Mansfield University
Call me Selfish

I want my hands to
embrace the body I am
loving, like my heart
has embraced
their heart.

I know my body seems greedy
and desperate as I grasp at the
physical manifestation
of a feeling that words
could never quite capture, but
god their skin against mine
makes me believe in something again.

Riley Thomas, Mansfield University
Alone

One of the coldest
truths of being an introvert is that
we feel our hearts break in the same
space we need to heal them.

Aradhita Saraf, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Chasing Stars

I retreated back from the speeding life,
Turned my defeated back to the window sill,
Lay down and sank deep into the earth.
I dare not open those eyes,
But they got the better of me.

The first sight
And I was swallowed in by the gigantic fullness of the sky.
Stuck in an eternal pause.
Time seemed to have come to a complete halt.
Twilight burst from the purple haze,
The red mist drifted through, ever so lightly,
While the sun paved its gloomy path down,
Fatigued by it's bright blaze.

Not knowing where to rest my gaze,
My eyes scanned over the blue shades.
Beclouding the buttermilk sky,
Wafting and curtaining paradise,
Gliding through and through and yet so still,
Those glistening stars seem to fly.
Blinding me in surmise.

A twinkle caught my eye,
I looked up to two golden lights so far beyond and yet so close by.
I reached out to hold them.
My brain fumed out –
“Now to catch two stars, will you try?”
I noticed my outstretched palm.
Those five tiny fingers, which just about played an octave on the piano and not a key more,
Now were marking the distance between the illuminating yellow lights.
Those soaring twin lights,
Ever so bright.

I watched him chase her.

Never catching up.
Never giving up.
Peeking and peering through the orange float,
Swimming across the horizon,
Patrolling the gates of Heaven,
Leaping beyond its ken,
Oblivious to the spying onlooker,
Who was ogling at them.

Aradhita Saraf, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Assembling Love

If Attraction were neon colored,
You would see it smeared all over,
On a moonless and starlit sky.

Added to which is a pinch of Selflessness,
Sprinkled like fairy dust,
Glimmering endlessly,
Drowning in buckets of Selfishness,
Drenching,
And flickering uncomfortably.
Sinking.

Together it forever attempts to outshine and gleam,
With Irrevocability and Unconditionality.

Its heart thumps with Happiness,
Only on an irregular beat.
Tied to a sagging sack of Needs,
Draped over,
Like a white sheet,
It strives to be Satisfied.

When Fulfilled it longs to be Free,
When at Liberty, we call it Unrequited.

Rachel Roupp, Mansfield University
Roots

Once, I wanted to be buried beside you so badly
That I began to dig my own grave

I thought that I'd crawl into the ground with you
And we would wrap our roots around each other

I didn't realize then
That gardens don't grow that way

The very best plants
Grow with space between them

They are able to blow in the wind and touch
But grow all by themselves

I had to take myself apart
Replant away from you

But now,
I'm growing like a weed

You're wilting without me
And I don't even feel bad

Ellen Howes, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Annapolis

We watch the world over a bowl of Chesapeake crab dip
Calves touch, and my body radiates towards yours.
All the serene dark in the sky is quietly rising—
Pale moons bloom over assorted oaks and beeches
A hand brushes my thigh
Driving down dollhouse ocean lanes
And we get drunk
On five dollar Riesling under basement guest room blankets.
Tracing your browned skin—a gift from some bygone babushka
Trembling, trembling and
Touching, touching.
Sweet honeyed longings pass between us
Carrying us to sleep till Sunday's harsh light.

You navigate waters backwards
Oars groan through muscled maneuvers
And I'm so turned on by your ease.
Words don't always glide out but laughter
Refreshing, rings across the bay.
I think on the way
You kissed a chocolate truffle into my mouth
And how the salt water teasing my fingers
Has touched a world we've never known.

Hand occupies mine
A promise of adventures yet to come.
Cooing at cats chasing black-tipped butterflies
And slurping ice cream cones before they plummet to sidewalks.
This has become our own brand of commitment—
Clasping the hook and eye of my Sunday's best
Folding down your collar
At the diner, the museum, the corner store.
And I know that when these bodies hit bed tonight
We'll find that deep-rooted, needy-magic
Beyond wrinkled lemony sheets and hushed movements.

Simple joys transcribe onto other seasons—
Letters through long ocean distances
And wool coat laden airport pickups.
A finger, a second,
Your hand,
Finds mine.
My eyes chase faint stars outside the sleepy car window
And they tell me
we will make it.

Ellen Howes, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Amsterdam Autumn

I want a van Gogh speckled love—
mesmerizingly bright sunflowers and looming horizon crows
dusky Moroccan lamps jading dull sunrises
glistening canal wanderers
redundant milkmaid dolls in antique window shops.

I want a tulip rich affair—
vendors and sewer rats chattering
a bustle of bicycles screeching without care
stumbling across little cobblestone oak parks
customer service girls quipping in quick Dutch.

I want a wheel of smelly cheese to hold up to my brother's nose
little pest in me unraveling
after lady-like suppression from all these grown-up years
he'll ruin my braids and push me
onto the yellow leaf sprinkled sticky sidewalk.

He'll read me Tolkien and I'll whisper Pushkin
our mother's scolds echoing up in the back of our mind
but the Amsterdam chill beckons us
so we'll hover above cafes and crosswords
yearning for whatever treasures we've buried there.

Alysha Walters, Mansfield University
Natural Wonders

I would first take the sun

And place it in your heart

To make your body feel the warmth of my touch

I would take the mountains

And place them in your bones

To reveal the strength that you carry

I would take the rivers

And place them in your veins

To show the force of life that courses through you

I would take the earth

And rub it on your skin

To show the pureness of who you are

I would take the lightning

And place it in your mind

To show that your brilliance only takes a moment to be revealed

Lastly

I would take the stars

And place them in your eyes

So the world will look at you, the same way I do,
As one would admire the nighttime sky on a cloudless night.

Arden Lee, Susquehanna University
Fountain Thoughts

Tell me there's beauty in bell shaped curves
that tails slightly to the left. Tell me statisticians
love impossibilities. Tell me this even though you
never even took pre-calculus.

Tell me there's someone watching the sun
shine off my hair and the concealer run off
my nose but don't tell me it's you. Tell me to calm down
when I forget the chemical structure of acetone.

Tell me about the balloons children release
into the atmosphere, about the graveyard
of latex and string. Do astronauts ever find
them and bring them inside? Tell me yes.

Arden Lee, Susquehanna University
My Plus One

Your prime numbered views
always slice up skies with jagged
edges. Casualties of tied up half balloons
still flying at half-mast. You call the sun
the moon at night and I shake my head.

Your silhouetted veins struggle to connect
to my atria, accidentally leaving fingerprints
on the coronary. I didn't stop you.

My parents always worried that I would find
someone like you because you're raspberry
flavored chapstick to my spearmint gum.
Because you're Georgia but with a touch
of Helvetica. Because I dance on the walls
while you hallucinate about Mount Everest.
I'm the balloon still trying to reach the top.

Arden Lee, Susquehanna University
A Chemistry Lesson

They said that if I ever had a headache
I should just do a line of caffeine, aspirin,
and acetaminophen. The mocha latte
withdrawals without your cedar
smell, though, defeat the chemicals.

You convinced me to come upstairs
to breathe helium and watch stars combust.
But they said I had to learn the difference
between methanol and ethanol
because one gets me drunk and one kills.

Kathryn Bockino SUNY Geneseo

An Octopus in a Rip Current

My attacker had red sheets & a Beatles poster on his wall that my eyes went back to throughout the five minutes I was there. I was only in there five minutes you know, or most likely you don't, since these words have never met paper before. You know, or really don't, that I've tried to make word & paper congregate, but it's like when I was a kid & used to get those fake tattoos that only require water to skin contact. They never lasted. They never lasted more than a few days. These words never last more than a few hours.

So he has red sheets. So what? "So what?" I said when I was given to the floor & all I can grasp is the red from the sheets mixed with her blood
her red blood that looks so dark I wonder where the line between red & brown categorically expires. Blood red sheets tinged with brown caked blood
is my entire world
right now because my mind can't articulate any other thoughts.

When I was young my mom & I got caught in a rip current. She held my hand as I dangled in the water like an upside octopus with its limbs flailing everywhere. I looked up & fondled the air that was leaving my lungs
but I only saw the dusty water & igniting light & the pressure my mom kept driving onto my hands so I wouldn't float away.

When oxygen unknowingly consents from the lungs it also leaves the brain
because as I felt ten long nails dig harder & harder I felt so tranquil that I immediately knew I was slipping. No reflections passed through my head but as I swung left & right & tried to use my own nails to pry his off I saw that Beatles poster against the wall. Four thumbtacks held it up but one was teetering away from the herd & if one falls they all fall because the weight of the poster will bring it crashing down.

Eyes static on the poster I realized I don't know much about the Beatles & I never would. Because ten long nails dug harder & harder & my fingers began to tumble away & I knew the oxygen was almost all absent. She sat on the bed, the three of us in the room, & didn't & didn't
even budge because all of her oxygen had turned into alcohol steamed hiccups that left foggy fingerprints on his bed.

You know, or really don't, I wasn't supposed to be there but just came to pick her up when everything rocketed. 1 minute I was there scared, 2 minutes I yelled, 3 minutes with ten long fingers, 4 minutes released, 5 minutes a knock on the door ushering the three of us out.

It doesn't matter if these words last because I have lasted & he hasn't & the Beatles will last & the sheets will last because anything made of matter can never be broken down.

He isn't matter anymore

Nathan Frontiero, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
THE COMET

I walked three hours
in the dead of night
on Christmas Eve

holding each breath
a little longer than I should
so that the emissions
were more distinct

I had the dull temptation to tell you
that you look like a full person.
How do you do that?

Did you get over these types
of long sad walks
through the streets
you know too much?

Is it the ink you've
taken to your body
that makes your thoughts
more important?

Or is it something that you have
only convinced yourself of,
with perhaps another subsidized loan
and a new haircut?

Why do I respect you more than
I've ever myself as soon as
you enter the room

and why am I convinced that
your celebrations evoke a level
of refinement that I can't imitate

or that you walk through the late
dark hours after a meager meal
feeling just as hungry but not as tempted
to admit it?

Or is there no admission since you've
already been admitted, and all I've
been is committed to finishing this
acid-baiting slog across town
to wish you well?

Why does it seem impossible
to congeal myself into something as
apparently defined as you

We've never spoken, but I've
privileged your voice with some
token measure of grandeur
it seems it must deserve

Why else would you be here?

Why else would I trod along,
frigid, at your heels?

Nathan Frontiero, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
THE JEALOUS CITY

Here where eyes live watching
from concrete, wires, windows
their voices whisper after you

We love what we are used to
and look after our own
shaping friends from our favorites
in a fickle shifting image that
kills you if you fall from fashion
without slashing your wrists
as words escape their lips

Culture claws make claims
colonizing success of citizens
who have made the exodus

Here where honor is built
with the prettiest shapes and smiles and
the blood you spend in inky toils is bottled
and sipped and spat back sweeter and quicker

Quiet profundity is praised on sight
by powerful ignorant arrogance that
spills drinks on your codes of conduct
and caresses your cares and leaves your
heart slowly turning on a spit

Where you differ it dilutes you or
bares its glittering teeth if you follow suit
with the complicit silence that erases
the visage of names who defy its stasis

Here where they keep you
on shoulders or in hands or
below and what you will never know

is who walks in the shadows with
shiny metal ready for you and who
quietly beckons beyond the woods
to melt you into their kiss as sounds on
their mouths ostracize your curious ears
and taste the salt under your forming scabs

It takes you in, turns on you, and traps you
this place you must call home.

Liza Brackbill, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Some things I have wanted for a while now

I want a banana phone
and I want my best friend, Andrea
to have a banana phone, too

that way, we can call each other
and I want to hold an American flag high above my head with my arms stretched up
but a little bent
and the sun in my hair and soft on my skin

I want an imaginary friend
that I actually believe is real
so if you know one,
please tell him/her to submit an application
to my mailbox as soon as possible with a response to the following essay question:
what makes a good friend

I want to walk on a plane and
end up in Belo Horizonte when I walk off,
even though I didn't mean to

I want to know why endorphins are good for you
I mean I know why, kinda,
but really, how do they work?

I want to know someone cares about me as much
as I care about them
ugh I want a boyfriend

I would want a banana phone for him, too
because then we could three-way call with Andrea, him, and me
or he and I could just talk on our banana phones
while I let my hair dangle off the side of my bed
I guess that would mean that he and Andrea could just talk, too
with Andrea's hair dangling
well let's not think about it

I want to end a speech with a really controversial thing
and have everyone in the crowd get rowdy all at once
and for the authorities to have to escort me off the stage

I want to tell Alanis that I think she's the shit and her song about one hand being in her
pocket and the other doing a bunch of hippie activities is very relatable to me

I want to tell my childhood best friend I'm in love with him

I want to get a good grade on my linear algebra test
without studying

I want to play the ukelele for twenty-four hours straight without even stopping to eat or
sleep or explain to anyone
and I want there to be no social consequences for this

I want to get really close to some people and not break their hearts
I want to name an important roadway after something other than myself
I want to wear clothes that other people think are ugly but I myself like

I want to know why we exist
and I'm interested in the order in which the people leave the party

I want to be able to take the stairs when I am one-hundred
I want to live to be one-hundred
I want to tell my roommate that she actually did wake me up
when she came home at three thirty

I want to email president Obama
and receive a timely response

I want someone to make me laugh until I can't even repeat the joke because I'll just start
laughing too hard

I want to have summer goals
I want to know what it is like to be a boy
I want to discover a conditioner that actually works
I want to take the blame for something I didn't do

I want to tell everyone I have ever known
why I am happy I knew them

more immediately,

I want to fall asleep before two AM tonight

Liza Brackbill, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Things I heard the dishwashers say (tuesday)

have you ever seen the Statue of Liberty?

no, have you?

no.

Liza Brackbill, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
My Roommates are Religious

my dog is disobedient
my garden is overgrown
my music is sophisticated
my jeans are “disgusting”
my parents are sober
my boyfriend is drunk
my shampoo is slimy
my apple is shiny
my tattoo is permanent
my hair dye is not
my shower is icy
my veins are lightning
my t-shirt is cool
my friends are lame
my pen is purple
my hairs are splitting
my piano is overworked
my washing machine is dying my brother is lying
(god damnit) my cup is empty my room is messy
my cat is stressing
my liver is nervous
my heart is feral
my mind is vacant
my journal is full

Liza Brackbill, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Things I heard the dishwashers say (friday)

so, you're going to see your mom tomorrow?

yeah.

how is she, anyway?

the same.



