

# estuary

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# Jennifer Dibble

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## Until You Fall

1. Does she make friends easily?
2. How did she meet her best friends?
3. Who taught her about love?
4. How did she learn about loss?

1. Your mother's answer is automatic:  
an emphatic, defensive of course  
and a frown. While the other kids sit in clumps  
on the plush grass outside the museum, you eat  
lunch with the skeleton of a triceratops  
in the echoing lobby, and watch dust fluttering  
and glimmering in the soft light.

2. You build a fort in your basement and spend  
the day reading books with dusty covers. You find  
your friends hiding  
between the pages and spend hours dancing  
at a ball with the Bennet sisters and walking  
on red sand beaches with Anne Shirley, until you fall  
asleep beneath a thinning flowered comforter.

3. Your sister smirks when you ask, presses  
a two dollar bill that she stole  
from your mother into your palm  
(so you won't tattle) and sneaks  
out the side door in three-inch heels. You wait  
until the screen door creaks shut and clamber  
upstairs to tell your father.

4. At your grandmother's funeral your mother holds  
your hand and tugs at your scratchy wool skirt, admonishing  
you for the scrapes on your knees. You brush  
her hands away, and when you finally ask  
why she always nags, she only says  
my mother never did. She cries  
over the bathroom sink and you know  
the tears are not for you.

# Lauren Gingras

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## She Was a Poet

Something I didn't know  
until I searched through her books  
and papers and receipts, hungry for any  
scraps I could get. Often I don't remember  
the things I long for in her. What I do  
remember is the panic she left in our lives  
with her absence. We all saw this reflection  
in her garden, on the trellis. Who would look  
after the tangled clematis? When my aunt  
Jeanie came with that disbelief in her eyes  
my body overflowed with grief and I spilled  
onto the floor. I feared and prayed I would  
melt and slip through the cracks in the new  
pine floorboards, the ones she picked out  
with her careful eyes, her dry and dirty  
fingers. But I stayed together, stood up,  
washed every dish in the house three times  
over. I still find myself sitting in her garden,  
burying my hands deep into the forgotten,  
cool earth, composing epitaph after epitaph.

# Erica Johnston

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## Tender the Bed

Cover the embarrassing naked sheets,  
the sunflower pattern you don't want to see.  
Pull up the blanket pushed down in heat,  
but kept enough to warm the feet,  
that end the body you keep next to me.

Cover the embarrassing naked sheets with your back  
to me you stay,  
discreet in your rejection  
but you emit nothing I can feel.

Pull up the blanket pushed down in heat,  
I'm cold.  
But you're not and you get up, out,  
and you make yourself neat.  
Shoes tied, you kiss my head  
but your lie is empty.

Cover the embarrassing naked sheets,  
with my body. Pillow, blanket, my bed is  
complete,  
practically, but I leave it empty.

Pull up the blanket pushed down in heat  
and draw it smooth.  
Admit defeat.  
Fluff the pillows. Beat  
out my emotion.  
Cover the embarrassing naked sheets,  
pull up the blanket pushed down in heat.

# Kaitlyn MacPhee

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## Lamplight

Streetlamps seeking  
stray cats and crushed cigarette cartons  
Blusey moonlight seeping clouds weep out the day's remains  
Yellowed fridge at curb edge looms  
we click by smokey whispers at my ear lobes, uneasy,  
apartment door bangs a reverberating clang picks up the notes  
on the hallway table in a shower of white wings that scatter

"Take off that dress you won't freeze"  
My white dress  
He earnestly wheedles wet hands  
damp on my skin, sticking in my side,  
a soft and flabby missionary of love  
Wheezing promises turning under his tongue,  
masticating meaty innuendos  
I am shaking them off

Irritating raindrops

# Brittany Parrott

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## Angel Food Freestyle

Some days in my life, the icing's too thin.  
The milk was let loose, and the bowl wouldn't spin.  
Some days I live, the cake falls quite flat.  
The oven was opened before it had sat.  
Some days my cream goes sour in the tin.  
It curdles, and clumps, until rotten within.  
Some days the batter goes flatter and flatter;  
Until it doesn't quite matter about all my splatter.  
The beaters won't beat and the heater won't heat.  
The burner only burns and the arches on my feet—  
Make me feel older than my twenty-one years.  
So I sit back and freestyle until my mind clears.

# Tara Woodworth

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## When You Die

In a hole in the ground  
under old barrow mound  
where skin bone and blood  
turn to jelly-soft mud  
and the rotting world sings.  
-Tad Williams, The Dragonbone Chair

Alive in the grave  
where you died,  
breathing the dirt  
when you wake.  
In a hole in the ground  
God abandoned you  
there in the earth  
or sent you to hell  
you sneer unwillingly  
as kisses from maggots  
bare your teeth clean.  
under old barrow mound  
boneless fingers caress  
your body tenderly  
then sharply burrow  
as you are helpless  
to the advances of worms.  
where skin bone and blood  
turn to jelly soft mud  
you become bedding for  
the beetles' passionate  
mating in your mouth  
leaving behind round  
white eggs in your care  
you feed their children  
from your breast:  
they chew away  
the last of your flesh  
and the rotting world sings.



# Jenn Young

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## When You're Older

There are no more faeries now  
to come at night and make the world  
look beautiful.

The leaves have fallen,  
stripped bare,  
no more magic to hide behind.

I see the world for what it is,  
naked,  
vulnerable.

White, wet, whispering winds  
dance around this little world,  
and with icy fingers, stroke our skin,  
sending shivers of honesty.

Only some of us brave these cold truths,  
bundled up in chats  
we keep each other warm.

We know we're not to blame  
for your empty bottles,  
but it's hard not to  
when we don't know the reason why.

The far off hoot of an owl  
in the dead of night  
reminds me the world is still alive  
under its white blanket of hibernation.

It will bloom again...

# Jennifer Dibble

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## A Kindness

It is only a kindness, he says, as strangers rumble past in dirt covered pick up trucks, their eyes on the hem of your skirt or the hollow of your throat, instead of the curve in the road. You tell him you don't need him to protect you, but he just smiles, slow, like the rain gathering in your backyard in late spring, beside the maple where the land dips, or like daybreak. You stop to pick blackberries from the overgrowth in the lane and the juice stains your fingers like blood. It hasn't rained in days. The moon glows paper-white in the dry heat, and the uncut grass snaking down the center of the gravel road tickles your sandaled feet. He bikes in circles around you the whole way home.

# Jennifer Dibble

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## Lost and Forgotten

After the search party left to look for Brian, Bobby and I were alone in the curling club with Mr. Kenilworth. We sat on the edge of the ice, spinning the rocks by their handles. I thought about the bike with pink ribbons that Dad had hidden at the back of the garage. He had forgotten to give it to me.

"I'm sorry about your brother," Bobby said. The cold made each word into a white cloud, and they got stuck in the heavy silence between us, like flies trapped in a spider's web.

"You're just saying that 'cause your Mom told you to," I said.

"Still."

"What if I don't want them to find him?"

"Don't you miss him?"

"Everything is always about him."

For a while the only sound was the rocks gliding across the ice as we pushed them. It sounded like thunder.

"They've found him! He's ok!" Mr. Kenilworth grinned at us, leaning halfway out of his office doorway and waving the phone.

"I guess we should get ready to go home." Bobby got up and wandered toward the coat rack. "Oh and happy birthday," he smiled, before ducking his head to pull on his toque.

I smiled. I wouldn't be able to ride my bike until spring anyway, and maybe twelve was too old for ribbons.

# Sean McGee

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## The Alley

Impossibly, inhumanly, stickily, fucked beyond belief. The most demented of states, completely despondent. Deprived of reality the mind reels to reconstruct its surroundings. To put that which is real in its place. Feng-shui the mental space, spring cleaning. Migue was drunk.

To decide one night to reset one's ways, changing that which really drives you, can be a troubling experience. Faced with the crises of self image and congruence, our ill fated hero absorbed the dark alley around him. The blue moon shone bright on his back, lighting the doorways and dumpsters before him, but casting long shadows as well. An eerie paranoia crept up his as he looked on the blue world before him. A leisurely baby blue and navy blue tabby crept along eaves troughs beside him, and had now come down to stalk him outright. Emerging into the alley to confront her prey, now in the moon-shadow of that freakishly tall beast, the cat began to think her feline eyes had failed her somewhat. Decidedly changed, this little stalker tensed a second, then flew off dumpster, eaves, window and onto roof, skirting off into the night.

When your friends start lining up to tell you you're an asshole, you start to think about change. Change as a general process, perhaps one you should even seek. Yet then the inevitable question pops up, 'what have my intentions been?' Now, if you've traveled many roads to happiness, you've traveled the road of ignorance. It is easier to be sound in sight than sound in mind, so see only that which you wish to see. Ignore the world and the world will ignore you. Not so. The problems just pile up while we all go on with daily life, as unaware as Wylie Coyote, with a piano hanging above his head.

This was the dingy front entrance of La Gabana, now abandoned as entrance had now moved to the back truck service door. The waterfront shone ahead from the attainable end. The walk along the water ahead, a meandering river, was all white plaster and stone, brightly lit and sparsely populated. Yet this groggy state might not appear so fine once interaction became a necessity, proximity might even be too much for many. Migue knew he was drunk. How drunk, uncertain. Prognosis; maximum forty minutes of consciousness remaining without re-hydration or caffeination.

Fumbling down the short hill finally came upon the brink of the soft sodium lamps. He crossed and felt their warm glow more as a piercingly painful forced dilation, causing him to reflexively recoil back from the nearest light. Seeking what he knew he needed, he proceeded to a lone cart at the edge of the promenade.

'Water bottle', or something like that, he thought he mumbled. He dug for change while trying to focus on the man just a few feet before him. The most difficult task came in trying to judge distance and hand the man the money without scattering it to the floor, throwing it in the mans face, or generally unintentionally blundering yet another basic social exchange. He looked away and let the man find his hand and strip the change; Migue never even looked at the coins.

Three clicks and the cap was off, and as he slowly, steadily brought it to his lips, he caught a gleam in the side of his eye. Finally from the distorted image refracted in the bottle of water he recognized Santi. Just in time to Santi's hand rise to hold the water- bottle for him.

“Drink up! Che, you know you need it.” Santi moved to Migue’s side carefully holding the water bottle, as Migue struggled to move it away from his lips, but was caught up in the drunken fear of spilling it all over himself.

“Thought I lost you; going off to the VIP rooms without even telling me, the nerve. C’mon, polish it off, all that liquid.” The final quarter began to guzzle down as Migue took the bottle himself. He finished and took it from his lips, not so distracted by the taste of water to forget he had some recent reason to be angry with Santi, but so contented as to forget why.

Somewhat human again, Migue took in the world around him. Five AM and the night was young, couples were still arriving at the disco: Walking up a dirt road to the truck delivery door. How strange were these low culture trends of conspicuous elitism.

“Choose your path down the rabbit’s hole,” Santi, looking straight ahead at the incoming perception, offered two pills in his hand, one red the other blue.

Migue thought of his mood and took the blue.

Santi swiftly took the red and they took off down the walk.

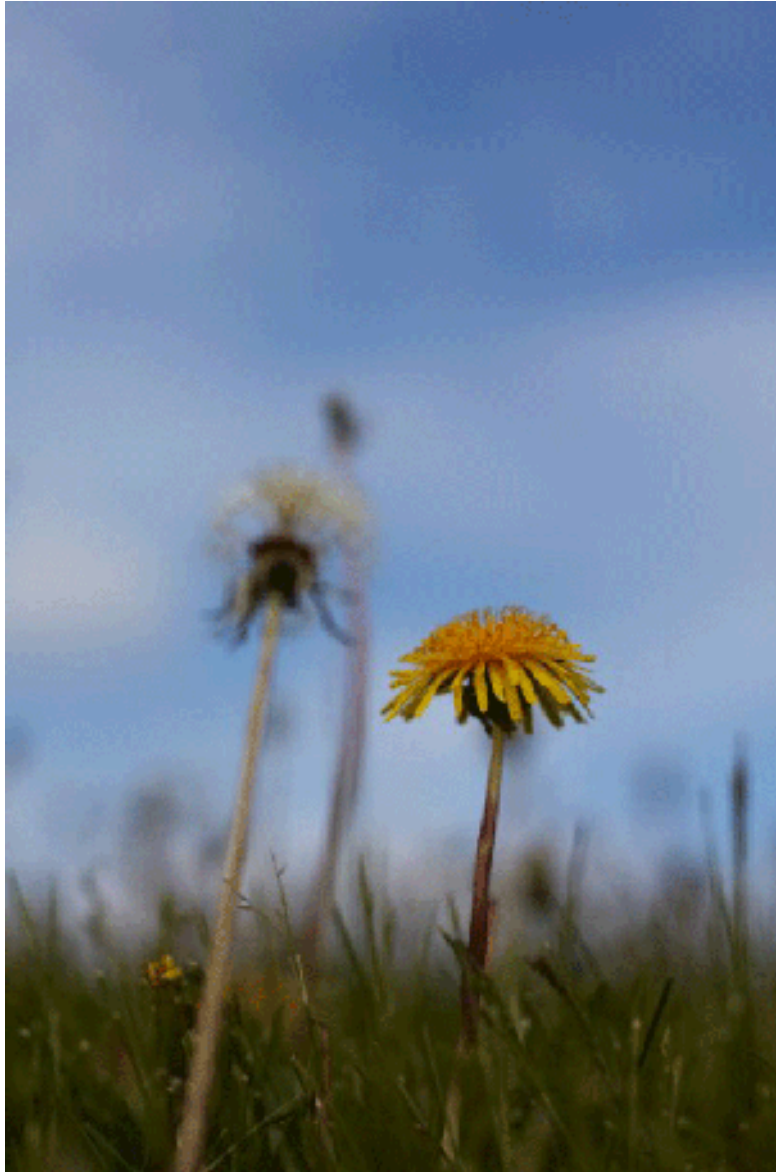
Completely reenergized at the prospect of whatever now seeped into his system, Migue exuberantly put his arm around his dear friend, “Mercutio you fiend, I should have known you wouldn’t leave me dry. I suppose we should go crash some fancy party, and find us our Queen Mab.”

“I suppose.”

# David Emmett

Life

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# David Emmett

Mud

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# Chaojin Hu

Agrippa

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