

estuary

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Stephanie Alexander

Morning Mantra

Set my soul
adrift upon
the salty marshes.

Free it
to wander
in the basin.

Let it
float upon
the decaying dikes.

Allow it
to slip in amongst
the evergreens.

Free it
to drift down
the worn, withered
train tracks.

Let it
find sanctuary
in the stillness
of the holding tide.

Allow it
to be caught
in the cool
morning mist.

Release it
from the burdens
of sorrow.

Bless it
with the ecstasies
of joy.

Kaitlyn MacPhee

Wine

A purple stain from a pour
the night before bleeds through the label
drips down in a smudge of blood
slashing through the words
Casillero del Diablo
we drank together last night
cat-eye bright our throats hot with talking
until 6 am no one else awake
you and I hiding behind the curving green bottle,
dark hunter in the shadows.
The glue behind the label
gleaming through in lilac tiger stripes
The transparent imperfections we pretend we cannot see
The acrid undertones of my lowered black eyelashes.
Your soft way of speaking is raw silk rubbed red against my eyes.
It's enough to make me fall in love
or plot the perfect murder.

Heather Longworth

Popping Popcorn

Popcorn popping

Never stopping

Pieces hopping

Rhythm bopping

Kernels dropping

Always flopping

Popcorn popping

Stop!

It's popped.

Victoria Cook

Dykes at Daylight

Waves whisper secrets
as butterflies swiftly dance
across crimson clay

JD

Quarter Life Crisis

20 Years old?

Cancer stole my grandfather,

Three months before stealing my dog, my flap eared friend.

I've not been jaded from jumpings during late night adventures.

I wear my black eye as though it is the purple patch I wore as a child, call me a pirate, mommy.

I drink beer now.

I witness disaster and evil on television like I'm 9 years old

Watching a scary movie between the cracks of my Dad's fingers.

I wish CNN was fiction.

I can grow a beard.

My cousin took her own life.

I've never thought of taking mine.

The cold wind slaps me in the face

It reminds me not of death or sleep,

But of snowboard hills and Christmas.

My brother wears a suit to work every day.

I used to play jail beneath my kitchen table;

Dinner chairs were steel bars.

I've spent a night in jail,

Steel bars were steel bars.

Quarter life crisis

Begins to strike us

Robyn Lippett

Mother

*As soon as my sister and I got out of our
mother's house,
filled with swamp water,
dark, cold and murky.
Bodies, and secrets
floating among our t.v dinners.
All we wanted to
do was fuck, obliterate,
her crumbling, ancient white body,
and spit on her ruins.*

*The men's bodies
beyond our mother's secrets
were like our father's body!
Tight and muscular,
ready to defend himself from
the stale air of my mother,
let out in slow toxic breaths.*

*The massive
hocks, flanks, thighs,
long and hairy.
Our virgin fingers moved in, around,
up and down,
exploring the shape
our mother taught us to chew completely before swallowing.
Elegant knees, long tapered calves—
the steep forbidden buttocks,
bleeding and screaming when our sharpened nails
tore their way through.*

*The cock in our mouth,
smooth, erect, fleshy.
Ah the cock in our mouth.
It filled our mouths and grazed our teeth.*

The serrated blade of my mother's bread knife,
tearing, ripping cold, raw meat,
her revenge for a Benzedrine stupor.

*Like explorers who
discover a lost city, we went
nuts with joy,
fucking out the sweet salty tears,
walled up behind doors,
in the curves of our mother's mind -
tarred, feathered, humiliated.*

*Italicized lines from "Sisters of Sexual Pleasure" by Sharon Olds

Hartley Jafine

Appreciation

“Jealousy is unique”

“I bought a car, BMW, convertible”

“They are always holding hands”

“I don’t know how much, but it was a big raise”

“What do you recommend doctor”

“My breasts are too small”

“She stands up for what she believes”

“Fastest kid on the team, never seen anything like him”

“He kissed me”

“Solid B student, driven, determined”

“You look warm in that jacket”

“And the Oscar goes to”

“It’s not a date, just two friends catching up”

“He’s going to NYU”

“I like your shirt”

“Do you have any change”

“You’re really tall”

“I just found a place, its north of city”

“She weights about a hundred and ten pounds”

“I applied for that job too”

“Look at what you have”

“Jealousy is a waste of time”

Tessa Cheng

This cake

Everything I've ever wanted patiently waits, and
It knows.

It is the prettiest cake you could ever see,
And a single slutty slice got loose.

The single slice is pointing at me,
Nestled on a white lacy doily.

It sits before me,
Very still on the table.
Such a privileged place for such a cake.
It's looking at me,
And I can't stop looking back.

How did this fork get in my hand?

The clock ticks a prompting tick.

Vile! Vile cake!
Don't you know how to behave?
Like a woman who shamelessly flaunts herself,
This cake needs modesty.

Tara Hurlburt

Sea Souls

The grey mist that engulfs the wharves at night,
Lets the ocean touch every shore-person, to their delight.
In the early morning hours the fishermen rub the sleep out of their eyes,
After being stirred by the gentle ebb of the tide.

Refreshed and awake, their sea faring hands caked
With the salty residue of the previous days take.
They have the souls of their fathers, forefathers too,
But now pearly white sails aren't what urge their vessel to move,

And as the thick black smoke battles the resident fog,
The men still use their hands, and their souls belong
Back with their roots, even though all the oily soot
That man's machine creates is hanging aloof.

Humble skin still cracks and crows' feet still nest,
On the bodies of these men the ocean has blessed.
The ocean's kiss is harsh but they stand strong,
And swagger a bit, and speak with a south shore drawl.

These men are young and supple when they follow their calling,
Every wave, every catch, easily leaving its mark on their body,
So that in the blink of an eye they look beyond their prime,
And remain the same until the day they die.

Blood, pain and heartache are also caught in their nets,
And everyday they wake thoughts lay heavy in their head.
All of these hardships are etched into their being,
And they share the same pride until their souls take their leaving.

Jennifer Knoch

Dinner for One

In an attempt to escape the thick, smoky tension of the room, Mia got up from the sofa. “I’m getting a drink. Want one?”

Her mother sighed. “Just some ice water dear. And maybe take a peek at the roast when you’re in there.”

Mia wanted a gin and tonic. But it didn’t seem appropriate to get sloshed in front of her mother. Her feet padded along the cold tile floor to the fridge as she blinked away the rising tears. She opened the freezer and rooted around for ice cubes. She pushed past the frozen containers, all labeled with a neat, even print. Strawberry Rhubarb Jam. Curried Chicken. Bolognese Sauce. And then – rows of them, stacks of them – Lean Cuisine, Michelena’s. Frozen entrees that had never been permitted in the house of Christine Blackburn, who could have taken up a career in the culinary arts. Cooking appealed to her meticulous nature, and she excelled at it.

Mia found the ice cubes, then hastily recovered her mother’s stash. Christine Blackburn, culinary wonder, was eating frozen entrées made for one.

Mia poured two glasses of water and went back to the living room, ice cubes clinking. She needed a new topic. Then she remembered.

“Hey mom, I bumped into John Cascone at work and he said he saw you at Club Joe on Saturday. But I told him there was no way.” She waited, hoping for a vehement denial. None came. “You weren’t were you?”

Christine flushed red. A deeper colour than Mia had ever thought possible. “Well...”

“You were at a club? What, picking up?”

“Well, Liz said I should get out there you know? ‘Get out there’, terrifying words for someone my age. I don’t even know if I remember how to flirt. I have this feeling it’s not like riding a bike.” Christine laughed nervously and gazed at her hands, now both naked. “It’s not supposed to be like this.” All traces of humour were gone.

Mia stared at the tiny, curling vines on the wallpaper, her insides so heavy she thought she would slide right through the sofa. She took a sip of water, but it difficult to swallow. No woman over forty-five should have to go through that again, especially not her mother who she couldn’t picture leaning against a bar, pretending to be engaged in a menial exchange of trivialities over pumping music and toonie shots. She didn’t want her mother reduced to some desperate groupie, clamouring for a man’s attention, swaying to a beat that she couldn’t feel and didn’t understand.

When Mia looked up her mother's downcast eyes were glassy. Mia knew this was a moment a time when she should reach out and hug her. Yet it seemed like her mother should still be hugging Mia - Mia when she skinned her knee, Mia when her heart was broken for the first time. Nevertheless, Mia slid along the couch and wrapped her arms around her mother. Christine felt awkward and skeletal, and the moment her daughter's arms wrapped around her, she started to tremble.

A new smell drifted in from the kitchen. It was smoky and charred. The roast was burning.

Emily Younker

Moses Mendelssohn

There once was a man with a great mind. His name was Moses Mendelssohn. Moses had a small home. His parents were poor, but they taught him to read books and think thoughts. Moses was Jewish. He studied and grew and became a Rabbi. He became a great writer, and a grand philosopher. Moses was brave when he wrote, and clever when he spoke, but most of all, Moses had a quick and tender heart. He was not handsome. His nose was long and wide, his body short and broad. He always walked, but never ran, for he had a large hump on his back. At times Moses would travel about to meet, and greet, and fight and write, always with important men. One day, in a merchant shop, in a city not far from the sea, Moses met a man and his exquisite daughter. For all his wisdom, and books, and words and thoughts, Moses was silent, and fell quite in love. The merchant's daughter was named Frumtje. She was lovely, but could not bear to look at his great hunchy back. Moses was quiet. He worked his mind, and he worked his courage. Finally he spoke to Frumtje and this is what he said: "God makes marriages in heaven Lady, did you know that?" Frumtje replied "Yes", but looked at the floor. "God chooses a girl for each boy before he is born. Did you know that my Lady?" "Yes" she answered again, with her eyes still down and away from the hunchy backed man. "And did you know, dearest Lady, that when God made me, he showed me who my wife would be?" Frumtje was still. She did not answer, but Moses spoke on. "Lady Frumtje, God showed me my wife, and he showed me you. He said this will be your beautiful wife. She is warm and fine, and sweet and kind. But, said God, she will have a large lump, a great hump, so heavy on her back." Frumtje looked up at the twisted man. His eyes were bright and filled with love. Moses told her he had cried to God "Oh Lord, what a great sorrow for my wife to have a hump. Give me that back instead." Frumtje was crowded inside with love and laughter. She took his hand and never let go. She knew she would be the wife of Moses Mendelssohn, the hunchy backed Rabbi.

Jennifer Dibble

Of Empty Rooms and Imaginary Friends

It has been front page news for three weeks now, spelled out in blunt, clipped sentences for the whole world to read. You're still getting letters from strangers, some with food or flares or a wilderness survival guide, as if your now-empty house is some isolated island in the middle of the ocean. You don't read the papers any more, but you see your face or your family portrait on the kitchen counter every morning and can't help wondering how they've managed to find twenty one days worth of material when they can't even get quotes from the only survivor.

At first there is just static and a muffled creak of leather as someone shifts in their seat. The other sounds aren't distinguishable yet, unless you know to listen for them.

"You must have been terrified," a curt male voice cuts over the faint ticking of a grandfather clock.

"No," a second voice answers after a moment. This one is softer, younger.

"Not even a little bit? At the beginning?"

"No, I wasn't alone."

For a moment the scratch of a ballpoint pen is the only sound.

"Who was with you?"

There is no time for a reply before the clock's vibrating chime announces the end of an hour. The tape screeches as the recorder is turned off.

Sometimes you sit on the back deck in the middle of the night, staring at the sky. It is smaller here, cut up by rooftops and lampposts and the blurry, jagged lines of airplane exhaust. You don't like the sharp stench of the pulp mill that drifts across town; it makes the night seem that much more foreign. Aunt Lydia says you'll get used to it, but you've been here for almost a month and you miss the salty moisture of the ocean air. In the morning she asks you how you slept and if your room was too dark, but she's always asking the wrong questions. Everyone is, these days.

“Have you been having trouble sleeping?”

“I had this dream – a nightmare. I’m on the beach and there’s this body floating in the surf. I stumble out to try and pull the girl to shore, but by the time I get there she’s gone, like those puddles on the highway when we used to go driving in the summer. Dad used to borrow Mr. Arnold’s car and... Anyway, I never find the girl, and I wake up after I fall asleep in the sand.”

“Who is the girl? Is she someone you know?” the male voice asks. It can’t really be heard above the siren from outside, but he’s writing things down again, and the leather sofa whines as the girl leans forward, as if she can read the tidy blue scrawls from across the room.

“It was Emily. But I didn’t know her yet, I only – what’re you writing?”

“Is Emily someone you know from,” the male pauses, “from before?”

“No, we were on the boat too much, and in the winter we stayed with Aunt Lydia. Mom home-schooled me. I didn’t really get a chance to meet new people.” The girl’s voice is animated for the first time.

“Hannah, where did you meet Emily? Hannah?”

“She said her parents died too. She said we could be friends, that we wouldn’t be lonely now that there were two of us.”

By the time Aunt Lydia gets home from the grocery store you have already swept the long tendrils of molasses brown hair into the garbage can in the bathroom. You don’t answer when she calls for you from downstairs, and the strangled scream she gives out when she sees you sends a shiver crawling up your spine. It reminds you of the way your mother screamed when the boat was swallowed by a wave, only you’re not sure if you made that up because you don’t think it would have been possible to hear anything over the roaring sound like blood rushing through your ears. You remember thinking you had gone deaf.

“Hannah, sweetheart, why did you do this?” Lydia stands completely still, mouth gaping like an open wound, her small body framed by the bathroom doorway.

You can’t help thinking that the answer to this one is easy. It stares at you from the stack of newspapers by the back door, from the news on the television, from the pictures on the mantle in the living room, and especially from the mirrors.

“Why don’t you tell me why you cut your hair?”

"The salt water dried out the ends."

"You need to understand that everyone grieves in their own way, Hannah."

"I used to have this haircut when I was little. We had pictures of me and mom from when I was three. We were sitting on the deck and she's squinting from the sun, and my hair looks like this, but I had bangs. They were always getting in my eyes."

"I see."

"Emily's hair was short too. She said it was easier that way. It didn't get tangled as much. Mine kept getting stuck on the buttons of mom's sweater."

"Is that the sweater you had with you on the island?"

A glass scrapes the table and there is a dull clunk a moment later as it is clumsily placed back in its spot.

"Did Emily help you cut your hair?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"She said I would be ok, now that I'm with aunt Lydia."

"You don't see her anymore?"

"Nine year olds don't have imaginary friends, Dr. Sam. Not when there are other people around."

The tape runs out.

On the way back to civilization the snarl of the helicopter drowned out what you assume were murmurs of shock and disbelief. You ignored them, focusing on the girl standing on the beach, waving as the wind billowed sand around her like a miniature sand storm. You stared at the spot where your father's ship had disappeared beneath the surface and tried to leave a part of you behind to keep Emily company; that was before you knew she could follow you, if you needed her.

Sadness has buried itself so deeply inside you that it has created a chasm between the person you used to be and the one you have become. If you stare in the mirror long enough, sometimes you can see the old you. She has her mother's long, wavy hair and there is no trace of a friend (that only you can see) lingering over her shoulder.

This new world of blinding camera flashes (for they have found out where you live now) and empty rooms and screaming silence is enough to make you wish you were back on the island. You spend a lot of time sitting in the tiny train station at the edge of town, watching greetings and goodbyes just to make yourself feel something besides the dull ache of hunger.

Emma Vost

Ants and Banana Popsicles

My childhood reminds me of those clean cement sidewalks that have dandelions growing through the cracks and of the soothing spring breeze that is just cool enough to light your cheeks and pinch your nose, and it makes the trees blow so that their shadows trace pictures on your bare feet that are lying face up because you're sprawled on your stomach studying the ant who's carrying a crumb that's twice the size that he is, and you try to imagine being that small and doing something that big, and then you realize that it wouldn't be fun to be an ant because crossing the street would seem like crossing a country and you'd never know what was beyond your eye-level; and then you sit up because your mom just called your name, and she's holding a banana-flavoured popsicle, and you sit on the porch steps and eat it, and the sticky juice runs down your arms, and you don't really care because you don't know about hygiene, or about how you're supposed to shower everyday so that someone will procreate with you, because children aren't supposed to know about that kind of thing, and all they can remember is how to tie their shoes and count to ten, and the way bananas are the best flavour, and that it wouldn't be fun to be an ant because life is perfect enough already.

David Emmett

Abandon



PHOTOGRAPH

Nick Sutherby

Bowline



PHOTOGRAPH

David Emmett

Fence



David Emmett 2005

PHOTOGRAPH

John Housser

Night



Nick Sutherby

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PHOTOGRAPH

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PHOTOGRAPH

Josh Campbell

Still Nude in Ink



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