In China they say
the nail that sticks up
always gets hammered down.

And would I
with my piano fingers
and bitten off nails
old haircut falling out of my hair

(and would I) space in my teeth that earned me the honorary title
of Jackolantern

(and would I) my bashed-in ear
angry eyes damn dark blue,
managable as stars,
darker than tears

(and would I) high school convictions hanging by a hair,
brazen brilliance in tenth grade

and
my feet....
they used to move like morning.

and would I
and did I
and did I
get
hammered down
flat

as my palm
on the page,
a sea of wavering white
with lines blue as veins

--Carissa DiMargo
My First Xmas Poem

I was dropped at my grandparents' for the holidays.
No GI Joe,
No plastic army guys,
So at the Nativity I drew up sides.
And the wise men fought the shepherds over who found baby Jesus first.
The shepherds had the animals,
The wise men had the angels.
The holy family huddled round the manger, caught between would-be liberators.
The wise men said, "He's a king like us!"
The shepherds argued, "He was born in a barn!"
It would always end without a decisive victory.
The "Deus ex Machina" of my grandmother's intervention would leave a few fallen on each side,
The crèche unroofed and overturned.
The livestock scattered.
The rich gifts gone.
Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus?
Refugees.
Displaced not into Egypt but into a back bedroom.
Hidden in my pocket, while together we waited for the all clear.

–William Runkowski
The Postcard

Late summer light was streaming into the main office of Cicero Public High School on the afternoon that I stole the postcard. A season's worth of dust looped down and across the safety glass like a curtain, but windows aren't my job, so they'd be as dusty when I left as they were when I came in. I had just finished the floor. The room smelled like Pine-sol and photocopies and the tile was shiny and yellow in the afternoon sun and overhead fluorescents. My gloves were shiny too. I still had them on when I took the card from the pile of papers and dropped it into the front pocket of my blue cotton smock. I wheeled my utility cart almost completely out the swinging office doors before I even considered that I'd just taken private mail from the desk of Principal Wildermuth. I just took it, as easily as if it had been one of those wide-ruled notes which I find while sweeping the hallways during the school year. The doors rushed shut behind me. I had never stolen anything before.

So now I'm standing in the broom closet with the cart I've put away and the card I've stolen and my gloves are still on so I take them off and pull the card out of my pocket. It is from Germany. I know because it says, in kind of medieval-looking letters, "Deutschland" on the front, and because that is where the marching band kids who could afford it went this summer for their goodwill, culture and music tour.

The glory side of the card is divided into six sections, each with a picture of something photogenic in Germany and the words for what each thing is—cathedrals and castles and fountains and the rest. The back has about a paragraph's worth of Jill Salzenberg's loopy handwriting, one of the drum majors. She's a smart girl, Jill, real involved, and articulate. The kind of kid I see around the building hours after school lets out, for practices, rehearsals, foreign language honor society, and all that. She'll be going places. The message is addressed to Herr Doktor Wildermuth and it looks like it says something very nice and that's all I can tell because I don't know German and he's no one to me anyway. Alone in the closet with the card pressed between my bare thumb and forefinger, I feel like I'm holding a small, thin slice of somewhere else. It feels good. I'd like to go to Germany. I will not put it back.

It is just after 5 o'clock and I'm pretty much done with everything that I was supposed to get done, so I unscrew the lightbulb, lock up the closet, and head to the loading dock. There is no one at the time clock to say good-bye to. I've taken the Deutschland postcard from my smock again, and I'm glad there is no one here to hide it from. I'm the last one out. Thrall change Monday when everyone in grounds and maintenance comes back to really get ready for the fall semesters, but this afternoon I'm still on skeleton crew. I trade one card for the other, punch out, and then slide the postcard back into my pocket.

It's starting to feel like it's mine.

When the bus pulls up it's 5:38. The streets is roaring and the air smells of diesel. It's only a little later than usual on account of the Friday rush of traffic leaving Chicago, streaming out past Cicero, out past Congress Park, and into the suburbs. I put out my cigarette. Helen made me quit a while ago, better for my health and all, but lately I've been fighting it more and more. Of course I haven't been telling her. I think she knows, but we just don't talk about it. I don't think either of us can think of anything to say really. Time seems to be passing much more slowly than usual, and not because it's almost the weekend, or because I've got something important to look forward to now that I'm done with work. I just want to get home and look at the card. Look at my card. And talk to Helen. I step up through the sighing pneumatic doors, into the air conditioning, and hand Ginny my 10-ride pass.

"Hey, Chuck," she smiles and punches rise ten. "Learn anything in school today?"

Ginny always calls me by my first name, and it always makes me happy, even though she'd easily know it even if I didn't take her route every weekday. Any one would, just by looking at my nametag. "Charlies," embroidered in bright red thread, beneath which the postcard feels like it's burning. More than that, through, more than my name over and over, Ginny always has something to say about school or Helen or the route, even though the 823 is just a local through Cicero, the same every day down ride sides, over concrete, past warehouses and rowhouses. Really, she calls all of us on the 823 by our first names. She's just good at talking in general. Big talk, little talk, Ginny can do it all. She's figured it out—talking—and keeps doing it right every day.

"Nope, nothing new today, Ginny. Thanks for asking."

I actually want to say something, to talk to somebody, about Germany or maybe even just Europe, but I'm pretty sure that Ginny has never been, or if she has, I'd suddenly rather not know about it. It doesn't seem fair for her to have gone while I haven't. Besides, if I even tried to bring any of that up, I'm pretty sure I couldn't make her understand, her or anyone else on the bus. So I end up saying something dull about Helen, and it just hangs there for a second before I fall totally silent. Ginny lets me fall, then jumps in talking to some guys across the aisle about the best methods of cards and release fishing. I get off at Stone Avenue and walk the rest of the way home. I still get there before Helen.

I'm in the kitchen alone. I'm restless. I really want another cigarette, but instead I take Deutschland out of my pocket and hang it on the refrigerator. Die Kirche, church; die Bergen, mountains; die Plätze, town square; das Bier, beer.

The words make it look nice, like a person could go there not knowing the language, but still feel all right, maybe figure it out, get there, get good at talking, eventually. It looks so good, up there with the magnets, and the coupons for Jewel foods from the Sunday circular, and the pictures of Helen's sister, Esther's kids. Me and Helen never had any kids of our own, but we usually never mention that. I'm still looking at Germany when Helen comes in. She smells like hospital. She's in all white, in her nurse's uniform, and her hair's funny with brown flyaways. She is beautiful. She comes up behind me, and puts her hand on my shoulder to brace herself while she takes off her nurse's shoes. She studies the postcard while she does it.

"Germany, huh?"

I know she wants to know where I get the card, but I offer no explanation.

"What's in Germany, Charlie?"

"Well, the Bergen, the Platz, das Bier."

"Very funny," she says, but she's tired and hardly laughs. "I mean who's in Germany? Why do we have a postcard from Germany on our fridge?"

"Some kids in the band visited over the summer. They sent cards back to the school. Wish you were here and all that," I say and pause. "I wish I was there."

She moves to flip the card over. She likes to read.

"Herr Doktor? This is in German? To the principal. Charlie, why do we have this card in our kitchen?"

"I know. I know, it's a mistake, but I figured once I had it home, I might as well just hang it up. Enjoy it," I say, and watch her face. "Until I take it back tomorrow."
“Right,” she doesn’t want to ask questions. “Yeah, please do take it back. It’s not for you. You don’t even know German, Charlie.”

“Right. But doesn’t it make you wish you knew German. Or maybe that you could go visit Germany?”

“Maybe a little. Would you hand me the ground beef, top shelf of the fridge?” she says, and moves to the stove. “I’m just going to go ahead and start dinner now. I’ll have to wash the uniform this weekend anyway, so I might as well not get another outfit dirty in here. Goulash okay?”

I can’t think of anything else to do but agree and hand her the beef, so I do that. Then I start opening a can of green beans to go with the goulash. I didn’t think that she’d understand, but this is harder than I thought. I put the beans into a can and lean back against the counter, watching her and waiting. A few minutes pass. She puts some elbow macaroni on to boil. I try again.

“Remember when we used to talk about how much we were going to travel when we got older?”

“Sure I do,” she says, over the sizzle of the beef. “Everybody talks like that when they’re young.”

“We’re older.”

“We’re not richer,” she says, and kind of smiles the way she does when she says things like that, without using her eyes. She stirs some salt and pepper into the green beans.

“A little bit, we are.”

“Not much. Not enough to just hop over from Cicero, IL to where’s-where Germany. And why Germany? Why now, all of a sudden? You don’t even know German.”

“Don’t you ever get tired of just being where you are?”

“I thought we were happy where we are,” she says and leans across the counter for plates and silverware. “Here, look out, dinner’s ready.”

“I might be happier if we went somewhere else, and came back.”

“Charlie, where is this coming from? We can’t just do that. We can’t just go to Germany. Why don’t we think about it for a while. Read up on it. Why don’t you just take some books out of the school library? Go talk to some German teachers. You don’t even know German. Here, sit down.”

“I sit.

“You keep saying that. Lots of people go to Germany without knowing the language. The band kids went, and most of them don’t know German.”

“I know that, but I’m just saying. Maybe you could take a class at the community college if you really want to spend some money on something German. For God’s sake, I’ll make you a German chocolate cake for dessert tomorrow, if that’ll help,” she says and sort of laughs.

“No, Helen. I’m serious,” I say, and I know this exchange is going to get worse before it gets better, but I keep talking. “There’s no reason for us not to go to Germany. I think that Ginny’s even been to Europe.”

“Well, good for Ginny.”

“I can’t just take German lessons and not actually go to Germany. Helen. I’m so tired of substitutes.” I haven’t touched the goulash. “Come on, you have to be, too.”

“Where is all this coming from? What’s wrong with you lately? And, goddamn it Charlie, why do you smell like...”
smokes.”

"Please don't change the subject. I'm just trying to tell you that substitutes won't work this time. I'm tired of jewel
generic bread instead of name, and I'm tired of always going to the library and never buying our own books. Substitutes
aren't good enough. The decision not to go anywhere but Cicero, IL is not good enough. None of this is any better than
any other time you or me or both of us just didn't do what we really wanted. Why won't you listen to me?"

"I don't understand you, Charlie. Why won't you listen to me? Why are you smoking? I'm tired of being an
intensive care nurse—so is for lung cancer patients and worse—who can't even get her own husband to quit killing
himself with smoking. What's your problem?"

She puts her fork down. This is wrong and I can feel it, but I keep talking anyway.

"And I'm tired of having to look at Esther's kids, or the kids at school instead of our own," I say.

And this is really how it goes. I just keep talking, keep saying the wrong words. I say them wrong and she hears
them wrong, until there's nothing to do but wait it out until they fade.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"No," she shakes her head. "At least be sincere."

And that's the thing of it. I really am sincere. I really am sorry. I'm sorry she can't understand why I want to go to
Germany, and I'm sorry that I can't make myself understood. But the wrong words linger, and I hear them ringing all
through distance. We eat our goulash quickly and leave the table in silence. I do the dishes. Helen goes to read in the
living room, and I see her glare at the stolen postcard when she leaves. I can't get myself to take it down, though.

Later, I'm lying in bed, trying hard not to disturb her side. I wanted to stop out on the porch and smoke earlier
when I went to lock the front door, but I thought of her and didn't. I did take the postcard from the refrigerator on my
way back through the kitchen, though. It's sitting on the nightstand, next to the clock, picture side up, shining in the
light of the bedside lamp. From behind the closed bathroom door, I listen to her brushing her teeth. I hear the sound
crack and fall until I see the light go out. The door opens, and she moves toward the bed. I'm still sorry I've
confused her, thrown her off. I still can think of nothing to say.

"Charlie," she says, and lies down beside me. She's using my whole name now, trying to soften things, trying to
understand. She smells like toothpaste, and when I look at her face her eyes are soft like her voice. She looks tired.

"Listen, Charlie," she starts again.

"I'm listening."

"Honey, I didn't mean to get that upset earlier. Over the postcard. Over anything."

"I know."

"All right?"

And it's not quite all right. Not yet, but I nod, and turn out the light. She pulls the comforter up over both of us.

"Everything'll look better in the morning," I say.

"I know it will. I just don't want to talk about it any more tonight, though, okay? I'm so tired. You must be, too."

"I am," I admit. "Tired, but not sleepy."

"I just want you in here, Charlie. I want you here while I fall asleep. I want you here while I sleep," she says and
settles her head on her pillow.

"Sure thing," I say, and of course I stay. The last thing I want to do is leave her.

"I don't mind if you watch TV or something. I just want you here, okay?" She says this, and then turns over so
her back is to me.

"Good night, Charlie."

"I love you," I say and it's the truth.

I wait until her breathing gets even, and in a moment she's asleep. I grab the remote from the nightstand and flip
on the TV. The set hums and the picture grows to fill the screen. It's already tuned to Channel 11, PBS. Helen and I
watch public television together sometimes, when we're too tired to think or talk or do anything else. The volume is
very low, and I can tell it's a program I've seen advertised on the channel before, something to do with the birth of
nations. I lean back into the pillow and watch.

"...people must unavoidably become citizens of nations," says the voice of the announcer. He sounds sort of
British.  

"...thereby committing themselves to lives filled with horizontal and vertical dividers."


"National languages are almost always just such semi-artificial constructs, inventions almost never suited to every
purpose."

I keep watching. Helen begins to snore lightly.

"Almost everyone feels, at some point, at odds with their fellow citizens," the voice keeps talking and the screen
flickers, but it moves me no closer to sleep.

"They are the inhabitants of the same country, people speaking mutually incomprehensible languages living side
by side..."

I turn the TV off. I know I won't be able to sleep tonight. I lay flat on my back, and let my eyes readjust to the
darkness. Orange streetlight slides through the thin crack beneath the window shade, and the postcard still shines on
the nightstand.

It's almost September, and school will be starting again soon. But that's not what I'm waiting for. I'm waiting for
the morning, for Helen to wake up because I'm going to tell her, really tell her, that I know things are going to change
for us.

—Kathy Rooney
Consumption

Start with the fingers
(they are the most familiar)
the kiss
of brittle fingernail
at the back of the throat

knobby knuckles
delicate wrist
soft, faint animal fur of the arm

nibble the deltoid
marvelous scapula,
curving bumps of vertebrae
(felt more than seen)

dormant womb,
touch to get down,
twisted and dried stomach
(at last silent)

legs of bone
and flaky marrow
for which the tongue salivates eagerly

exquisite, pink extrusion of ankle bone
(malleolus)
sturdy heel and gentle toes

eat the lips away
fold the tongue back,
and at last
be silent.

—Vani Murugesan
With inhalations of warmth
We swallow fireflies
And I once again
Radiate

Engulfed within
They illuminate
Elastic caverns
Once guarded

Pulsing flashes
Beating wings
Circumnavigate
The heart

You secure
My traces of self
Gingerly
Within your jar
For capturing

—Amanda Ely

—Lisa Viscidi
Metamorphosis

Takes awhile for this diamond to form.
for the light to penetrate through the rough exterior
and dazzle its darkness with color.
Memories basted the line of light
that dived through the pitch pool
and caught the promises of something
Grandiose.
For all mountains must give way
and all must give in,
and I am just one in a current of coal
that has slowly evolved.
It’s a sweet, slow pleasure that
I’ve succumbed to;
a tiny dream, sparked sometime past,
finally realized
in the shining of your eyes.

—Lauren Silberman

Earth

The girl
cold to the touch
frail
bones jutting out
where they shouldn’t have been
and wearing nothing
but her underclothes
sat in the dirt
as they crowded around her
she cradled
her head in her hands
and gasped for breath
with such a force
no one could believe
she let out a sob
her whole body trembled
and it took from her
all that she had left

—Kelly Lambo
Siren

It all started the day Carl Baker became a partner. Carl, an associate with the firm, was not like his fellow lawyers. He wasn’t ambitious and he did not openly speculate and analyze his future with the firm. He did his job, satisfied his clients, was impeccable thorough and understood the meaning of a deadline. He had joined the firm straight out of law school and was entering his fifteenth year. His office moved only twice, the difference between the two a mere window. Carl liked his black coffee early in the morning. He drank an average of two cups a day. He, unlike many of his fellow lawyers, was ever aware of the harmful after effects of too much caffeine. He made sure to say good morning to all he passed and he kept his secretary happy by being meticulous and consistent in his pleas and thank yous. He was like the plaque that hung squarely on his door; clean, honest, and straightforward.

After 15 years of consistent and tidy service, the firm decided to make Carl a partner. And as expected the decision evoked little controversy. His secretary congratulated him. He thanked her. A few of the younger lawyers joked of a future weekend home in Aspen. Carl smiled and nodded. Afterwards he promptly called his wife.

"I got a raise, Arlene."
"Great. Carl. I’ll help out with our vacation."
"Where are we going?"
"Florida."
"Oh."
"Remember to pick up some cold cuts."

Carl did not like Florida. The last time he had been there was as a child. Despite the evident wonders of 60’s Disney World, he could not recall many redeeming qualities. It rained. And Carl was not fond of rain. It reminded him of death. And it was humid. His hair, seemingly straight and fine, in great humidity puffed out like a mushroom of curls. But his wife probably had already started making arrangements. He would just have to remember to bring a hat.

Carl looked down at his desk planner, he was free from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. He checked if Carol had put additional post its on his computer. He browsed through the latest slew of e-mails. Bad lawyer jokes, another plea for money from his alma mater. Free CDs. No appointments. Carl twiddled his thumbs. A blind date once told him, "You are the only man I know who really does that." When they finally said goodbye, she did not so much as kiss him on the cheek.

He stopped twiddling and noticed he was wearing the wrong tie. He usually liked to alternate, so he never wore the same tie twice in a week. He had three red ties. The one with dots and the one with little fishing boats were almost indistinguishable. He was supposed to be wearing the fishing boats. Agh, he sighed. Dots.

"I’ll be back in an hour, Carol," Carl took the elevator down to the lobby. He usually picked up a hot dog and coke from the vendor on the corner. But the mid-July heat nauseated him and the idea of eating a hot dog and ketchup did not settle well with his stomach. He passed by the vendor, paranoid even that the vendor would notice and sneer, "Where ya’ going?" But the vendor was busy with a long line and did not notice Carl pass by.

He walked about two blocks. His armpits, to his chagrin, were drenched in sweat. He sighed at the thought of the circles growing exponentially larger. And his blazer, supposedly made for the summer seemed ridiculous. Carl’s stomach was twisting. He passed a pizza place. Joe’s famous chopped liver and spinach pie. Homemade Ethiopian food. "Gastronomically Challenging but Tasty as Hell!" Finally Carl came to a small sandwich shop near the subway station. He wondered why he had never noticed it before. Morty’s Home of the Sandwich. Even though the slogan was a bit idiotic, it still made Carl curious. He opened the doors and was hit violently by the air conditioning. That can’t be good for you, Carl thought. The line, moderate for 12:30 looped around two poles and almost reached the door. Carl looked up at the menu while smoothing out his dotted tie. Adjusting his tie became a reflex. He had once accidentally left it flipped and the memory of that humiliation compelled him to check every so often.

Salami. Corn beef. Too heavy. Turkey. He was hungry. Maybe something more substantial. Chicken pastrami? Perfect. When he got his number, he realized that he would probably need something to drink as well. He glanced over at the fountain sodas. Even though no one was there, he sensed someone was at the counter. They were probably grabbing something from below. He looked at the clock on the wall just to check if he should eat there or take his lunch to the office. When he glanced back again the cashier was waiting to take his drink order.

Pretty. She looked as though she were in college. You never know though, he thought. You shouldn’t assume everyone that age is in college. She had rich brown skin, black eyes, and thick fall lips tinged with a hint of crimson. She had round shoulders and small, smooth hands laden with silver rings. Her neck was wrapped in small white shells. They were the color of bursts of light, purity, and sea foam. She was not impatient. She got him a large ice tea. She asked him if he wanted lemon in it. Her voice. It moved in circles along the tip of his skin. He fumbled while collecting himself and moving to the side. He almost forgot to grab a straw.

His sandwich came out even enough. She handed it to him and with a broad, unnecessarily generous smile she said, "I have a nice day."

Carl, cradling his sandwich and ice tea gave back a large and sloppy smile. He couldn’t control it. He knew he should not beam like that at a cashier. Only men who want something do that. He hoped she did not think he meant anything by it. Next time he would control it, maybe not even smile. Maybe he would nod. He always nodded. It was like breathing. Before he could say thank you, she was already in the process of helping another customer.

Carl glanced at the time. It was too late to eat there. He grabbed his bag and headed back to the office. Carol greeted him with, “There’s an emergency meeting. Someone’s lost a file.”

“Oh,” Carl sighed, “Just give me a minute.” He closed his door and stood still. While his one hand clutched the door handle, his other held onto the bag. Folded too many times, the bag was merely an outline of the sandwich. Carl leaned against the door, almost afraid to move. Before he took a step he repeated; three blocks down, make a right, next to the subway station. He replayed out the scene and saw her broad smile envelope the city skyline. His hand slowly slid off the handle as if were he were extending it out to someone. When the door handle clicked, he recalled the sound of her voice.

Each afternoon Carl returned to Morty’s. Sometimes there was a line, sometimes there wasn’t. There were only a few instances he considered leaving to avoid the line, but inevitably he would glance over and be reminded of her. She was always pleasant and warm-a stark contrast from the other employees. The salad man always barked, “What do you
want? And once he was shoved by the woman who bussed the tables. He was able to look past their rudeness and roughness because of her salvaging smile. But, unfortunately, he didn't always get rung up by her. Sometimes the line would be chaotic enough that he would be pushed over to the next register. He would wait for a second in front of her, hoping the man with the salad next to him would get frustrated and move to the next register. But more often than not, it was unavoidable. He'd smooth his tie and reluctantly give his money to the woman with thick stubby hands and artificially orange hair.

But when she did ring him up, she smiled as if she knew him and he'd intermittently make eye contact. He wondered sometimes if she noticed how his body relaxed when she took his ticket. He wondered if she knew how his jaw, the jowls in his face, the muscles in his stomach were relieved to the point of collapsing when he stood in front of her register. He never spoke though or tried to make chit chat like the other men. He would try to think of something to say. Hot out there. It was July! So are you going back to school in the Fall? If she wasn't in school, he'd only embarrass her. And what if she was going back in the Fall? He chose in the end to say nothing.

He figured eventually, owing to the fact that his order always came to the same amount, to give her a five and get back change. He did not scramble like the other customers for change. He left his change purse at the office. He knew that when she handed back his dish and three pennies she would be gentle and considerate. She would not dump it in his hands or drop it coldly like a coffin. She placed it softly in his palm, almost caressing it. She did this every time. No matter how rushed, or what the line was like. All the while maintaining eye contact and in a voice that somehow broke through this world and the crowd and the smell of a grill, she reminded him to have a nice day.

There were days she was not there. He'd console himself by thinking logically. She could have shifted. People get sick. You can't work all the time. But there was no pattern, no identifiable rhythm to her absences. Some days she was just not there. Erratic, absurd images came to him. He'd imagine her alone, covered in a sterile white sheet, entombed in a bed; her luxurious champagne skin now fused by a translucent blue light. The beeping of the respirator—it was a quiet so unlike he had ever seen her in. Caustic! Of course, she wasn't dead or dying, he reassured himself. There was no car accident, no cancer. Even so, he'd check the news and thoroughly examine the paper and sure enough he'd go and get a sandwich—quick steps, breathe slowly—and she was there as if she had never left.

St. Patrick's day was a nightmare. At around 9 a.m. a snow storm began to overwhelm the city. Schools were closing like a row of slamming doors. The collective glee could be heard and felt in schools through out the city. And despite the evident severity of city streets blanketed in white and jagged skyscrapers dulled by snow, Carl Baker found himself in a panic. With a rapid persistance he was twiddling his thumbs, checking out the window and looking at his watch. How could he go to Motry's on a day like this? The weatherman didn't mention a snowstorm. And why the hell did he accidentally put on his green tie this morning? She would think that catty. But it didn't matter. No one in their right mind would travel three blocks in this weather for a chicken parm. He would pop in the elevator at his convenience, not worry about time or whether to eat there or not, and get his lunch from the basement cafeteria. Good chill, Douglas had once told him. It was also a hell of a lot cheaper. Carl looked at his wing tips. They were shined only a day ago. Their normal ruddy brown was now a rich caramel. They wouldn't hold up, he'd have wet feet.

—Catherine Resler
It was ridiculous.

The cafeteria, although he had eaten there sporadically through the years, never seemed so sterile. The forks, the potatoes, even the servers’ faces were imbued with ash undertones. On the walls hung faded paper four leaf clovers. It was busy that day. The cafeteria was a mixture of regulars and those, like Carl, who did not dare recklessly venture outside. The quiet roar of the cafeteria (“Fyank got a raise!”) was such that Carl could not even hear his own moan.

Sandra. They wore name tags. The old woman with the chipped tooth and shaky hands was named Sandra. He wondered what the girl at Morty’s was doing. Were they waiting patiently for the customers to no avail? Were they charting the course of the storm, wondering frantically when it would end? Or would the owner be so devasted by the storm that held decide to close shop forever, and let her be buried by the storm.

Carl rushed up the stairs and out the lobby door. He hailed one of the few taxis coming around the block. The snow was indeed pretty deep by 1:00 p.m. His shoes, once that glorious caramel, were now wet and limp. Carl padded his green tie down and shivered. He had no coat and no umbrella.

Morty’s, as expected, was submerged in snow. Its giant awning, Carl noticed, made the sandwich dive look almost like a villa in the Alps. Or were they chasing? Carl got out of the taxi, lipped the cabbie appropriately and darted into Morty’s. His hair, covered in flecks of snow looked as if he was wearing a net. He stomped his boots, shaking off the residue and walked in. Morty’s wasn’t as vacant as he expected. A few people from nearby buildings had also stopped in. He quickly scanned to see if she was there. There was no line. Instead of ice tea he ordered coffee.

“Still brewing, sir. It’ll be a few minutes.”

“That’s fine,” he didn’t mind waiting and standing near her relatively near.

“I like your tie,” she said.

“Thank you,” Carl looked down and picked it up and laughed, “I didn’t mean to wear it today.”

“Don’t worry. I think everyone’s forgotten all about Sr. Patty because of the snow. The snow is pretty though.”

Shortly after Carl agreed with her, she passed him his sandwich and coffee. He ate his lunch by a window. He blew for a while on his coffee. The steam warmed his lips and he closed his eyes for a few moments. He didn’t feel like himself today. His heart had been busy pounding and his hands had been trapped in an awful clamminess all morning. Maybe he was just tired. Not worth worrying about, he thought. He stared out the window, not once looking at her again. He did not have to. She was automatic. Like waking up at 6 in the morning or closing the bathroom door her image was immediate and perfected. Carl sat for an hour. He was not going to rush today. He peered out the window. He could not get over the snow. His children probably got the day off and were in the house watching television and his wife was probably talking to her sister. The whole world seemed to be together, locked in a confined space for an indefinite amount of time. He finished his coffee and left half his sandwich. He wasn’t that hungry. The snow was falling so softly it troubled him. Once outside, he wondered if it would carry him away.

The difference, Carl figured, between him and those other men who chased after young girls, or at least had the appetite for them, was the illegitimacy of his attraction. He would never act on his feelings. He did not regard them with much seriousness. He enjoyed watching her. He would even go so far as to admit that Morty’s was the highlight of his weekday. But she was not part of his real life. Real life started the day he was born, like a gun shot from the sky. Everything had consequence and nothing was without choice. Those brunches on the street, even the people who were always dying on the news they had real lives too. But they made their choices, as misguided as they may have been. They lived their lives as if danger were a mere flirtation. Their problem, Carl figure, was that they didn’t take it seriously enough. They didn’t notice the pattern in the game, the essential rule to life. They screamed, not while they were falling, but when they realized there was a bottom to it all.

But Carl recognized it was ok to dreamer dream every now and then. Life wasn’t interesting enough to always be paying attention. What an incredible thing the human mind is, Carl thought. We entertain ourselves privately, understanding and observing the fine line between reality and fantasy. He felt rather giddy and slightly clever for having found this girl. To her, he was probably only a regular: polite, unassuming, and friendly. He came in everyday at 12:30 p.m. and ordered the same thing, received the same amount of change and always gave the same slightly curled cordial grin. No harm done. Other men, they were such fools. Where as Marshall embarrassed himself openly by clawing at his 20 something secretary openly. Carl’s elation was private, consistent, and intoxicating. She was not as complicated as a retirement plan or flippant as the stock market. She was a siren luxury that exhilarated him when surrounded.

She was not the first though. In his sophomore year in college, he worked with a black girl named Betty. They talked about books and sometimes they would exchange lab answers. They never talked outside of the library, but they always said hello on the street. She wasn’t very pretty, although perhaps she was and he just couldn’t recall . He felt comfortable with her though. And when they moved to different information desks, he was sort of disappointed. Betty. The last time he ever saw her was at their graduation. She was standing in front of him, holding an explosion of daisies and cornflowers, laughing and hugging everyone around her. Carl was leading his family to their brunch reservations. A part of him was relieved that he ran into her, knowing that they’d probably never see each other again. But he was with his family and she was hugging people with such a jubilant determination. At best, they could shake hands vigorously. He was afraid that his parents would misconstrue his heartfelt goodbye and good luck. They would take it out of proportion, they would make long assumptions. They’d probably think that she was his lover. They would jump to that conclusion, he was sure of it. He remembered how she moved seamlessly through the crowd, embracing everyone, trusting everything. He let her pass. He did not follow her figure or her flowers as they faded into the haze glow.

In early June he found out her name. He had heard it before, but could never quite make it out with all the surrounding noise. But that day for one brief moment, it hit him clearly and concisely. What an odd name for such a young girl, he thought. While waiting for his sandwich Carl grew annoyed. The name did not suit her. And it wasn’t the name he imagined her having. Perhaps he heard incorrectly. He tried to think of a more suitable name, but was distracted by the chaos around him. It was abnormally hectic that day. The number system, never immune to an occasional mishap, was in complete disarray. Sandwiches were coming out with no owners.

“33!” an employee screamed. “33!” As the line grew, and the restaurant became a cacophony of conversation, disgruntled moaning, impatient shuffling feet, and that horrible yelping. “33!” “34!” “35! Carl’s eyes darted to the cash
register and he sensed the dull rumble of an avalanche.

"This is the worst service I have ever experienced! I am NEVER coming here again. And I'll be sure to tell all my associates to avoid this establishment. Give me my money back."

Carl did a double take. The man was screaming at the girl. Her hands were visibly unsteady. Her eyes raced from the register to the man. She kept wiping her brow with the side of her hand and apologizing for the confusion. Even the bastard's heavy breathing and incredulous sighs could not distract from the restaurant's abrupt silence.

"A little faster please," the man barked. She was about to give him his money and then she hesitated. For only a brief moment she looked out into the crowd. Her eyes floated waiting to be caught. When they finally fell, Carl could feel his body convulsing into a sputtering of excuses. It wasn't his place. He would embarrass her. It had been awfully inconvenient and disorganized that day. But there she was, so beautiful and kind-always, impeccable and perfect. This man, this colossal monster was ruining lunch. But what could he do? It would be best to let the moment pass and just disregard it as a freak occurrence, something that unfortunately happened but could not be avoided. He watched the bastard collect his money and flash one last scathing look. His attaché brushed the sides of the crowd as he pushed his way through. Carl closed his eyes and hoped she did not think he was part of the quiet blur. When he returned from Florida he was sure the day's events would be all but forgotten.

"Carl, what has gotten into you? I plan this entire trip, I leave you in charge of one simple thing—a crucial thing at that—and you forget! It just doesn't make any sense." Arlene was puzzled.

Carl forgot the travelers checks.

A week before they left for Florida, Carl went to their neighborhood bank, Horizon Trust and ordered 2,000 dollars in travelers checks. He even counted the crisp checks twice because their odd texture made him nervous. He went home immediately and put the checks in the safe. The morning they left for the airport Carl went through a check-list in his mind. Medication. Underwear. Batteries. Camera. Tooth brush. Hat. But for some inexplicable reason travelers checks never came up.

"How did you expect us to pay for things," Arlene was now sulking. Carl shifted in the airplane seat and finally realized why people splurged for first class. He wished his wife looked more than a thin plastic armrest away. When they finally landed Carl went straight to the bank inside the Orlando airport. The line there consisted mostly of couples. They dressed like Carl and Arlene. A small pouch, mostly in neutral blues and browns, hung from their heads. Cameras hung from their necks and a visor or baseball cap sat on their heads. Carl wondered how many different kinds of plants there were in the world. They wore, as if in uniform, khaki shorts and comfortable sneakers. He focused on the man in front of him. Carl wondered if his shoulders slumped like that? No one looked terribly happy to be in Florida. They gripped their pens and pouches as if they were bracing themselves for battle. Carl could see Arlene and the kids in the distance, resting on their suit bags. He shuffled his feet. The line wasn't moving. The computer was down. Why was everyone in line? Why had they come to Florida? Carl moved to lose his place in line and then thought about what he was doing. There were reasons why people used travelers checks. A myriad of good reasons. Carl scrunches his face. He couldn't think of any.

"Ready to go?"
"Did you get the checks?"
"No."
"Why not?"
"Because we're using cash, Arlene."
"But..."
"Let's not argue about this, OK? I think they accept cash in Florida."

Carl grabbed two bags and waited for the kids to grab theirs. They were staying at a resort by a lake. An enormous lake. The largest man-made lake on the continent. At least that is what the brochure read.

Their last night there they took the midnight ferry across the lake. Modeled after a Louisiana show boat, the walls were draped in burgundy and the band played New Orleans— or what Carl at least thought was New Orleans jazz. At midnight everyone rushed out to the deck to watch the firecrackers. Carl scanned the night scene. To his right in the distance he could see the resort Shangri-la. Each villa looked like a pagoda and the main building was made to resemble the Forbidden Palace. He looked to his left and saw the resort Bahama Paradise. The white and coral stucco bungalows were illuminated by the moonlight. And centered in the middle was his own resort. He never quite understood its theme, although all of the drinks in the bar had tiki somehow attached to them. The first firecracker went up.

Set against a perfect starless sky, the firecracker spread itself above the ferry. It was larger and brighter than anything he had ever seen. The fireworks show was the grand finale of the night. They shot up one after another. Carl enjoyed the sound of their ascension and explosion. His chest and shoulders tightened as he listened to the small piercing sound in the darkness amplify upwards. A man in a striped jacket and bowler hat asked him if he wanted a family photo taken. Carl watched Arlene scan the boat. Most of the families were getting pictures taken. They stood in proportion to one another, taller members always in the back. Carl could already see the picture on his desk at work. He would have his arm around his wife, although he’d never remember how it got there. His children would be standing in front, one bored, one happy. Perhaps they wouldn’t remember how many rides they went on or the ten piece band or even that Carl had forgotten the travelers cheques. But that moment. That is what they’d remember.

Arlene paid the photographer ten dollars. They gathered together by the side of the boat. Carl curled his fingers tightly around the edge. Behind him the sky lit up on time. His wife took out a small comb and his kids assumed their places. The photographer said on the count of three. Before the flash hit his eyes, Carl looked out onto the lake and wondered how deep it could possibly be.

On Carl’s first day back at the office he wore the blue tie he bought at the resort. Adorned in golden golf clubs and a windsor knot, it went well with his navy blue blazer. While walking to Morry’s he wondered if he would notice his tie and think to ask about his vacation. Had she noticed his absence? After all, he did go in every day at the same time and ordered the same thing. She must have noticed. Morry’s was unusually busy for a Monday. He noticed an exorbitant number of children running through the line. He glanced. A man was blocking his view. He arched his neck to see past and saw the owner taking orders and ringing people up.

She was gone.

He frantically scanned the restaurant. He checked the other register and even tried to peer into the kitchen. The owner, so distinctly out of place, was working the register. No one seemed to notice him, no one seemed even remotely disturbed by his sudden appearance and the girl’s disappearance. Carl watched as the owner nervously scanned the crowd and broke the roll of pennies incorrectly. He muttered underneath his breath and tried to smile graciously at the customers. Carl walked out.

He knew she was gone. He would never see her again. It flashed in front of him like the time on the alarm clock, a spelling error in a memo, Arlene’s vacant smile. Maybe it was for the best. He had gotten sick of her chicken parm a long time ago. And like Douglas said, the cafeteria was a whole helluva lot cheaper. It was silly. Maybe he would finally now start packing a lunch. No inflation there. Consistent. Economical. Maybe it was for the best. She was gone. Maybe he would leave work early and get his shoes shined. Maybe he would catch up on his cases, wash the car, cut the grass, have cocktails with a few friends.

Carl stood on the street corner near the subway station and could only hear the oncoming wail of a siren. He let it run through his body and then finally fade away, leaving him shaken. A building was burning somewhere, someone was probably trapped. He hoped everything worked out for the best. He would have to find somewhere else to eat. He had to get back to the office. Carl remained quietly among honking horns, hundreds of windows that reflected like mirrors, trees that held up the pretense of being a part of nature, and people who constantly transformed themselves. They disappeared and emerged, never really staying the same. They transfigured and seduced. They walked the streets at night and knocked on your door during the day. So blithe, you sometimes forget who you are.

—Casey Reivich
Urban Cages

Morning burned
over her wild tongue
consuming each syllable--
frugal potential utterance--
like peach daiquiri from the moon's drunken courtyard,
Dawn slaughtered the glass of
the eastern window
and the number
six-hundred beat steadily its infrared rhythm

Once
Twice

The glare
of the beady numerical monsters
set into existence for the sole purpose of catching her off-guard
was not intimidating enough to scare
her dreams from their playground in REM
Traveling through a cornfield
they dance
in the kind of majestic Eden
where stars can be safely taken for granted
and Capitalism and Knowledge find no reason to battle

Once
Twice

Saxophone sings the songs of homelessness
but its master, he's only in it for the money
Not ashamed to beg
from the uniformed executives
traveling in and out of the microcosm of their cubicles
each day
every day
The ones who hire professionals
to snap pictures of their children
in hopes of remembering their faces by the
hour they finally return home from work.
Just in time for graduation

Once
Twice

And still he said theater
That's what she should go into if she wishes
to save herself from the office world
Public Speaking is a transparent art, he explained
Theater actually fools
Fools

Once
Twice

—Peter Chun

—Sara G. Wernick
little debbie lifts her voice

Fathers of America,
feed your kids junk food
for short will be the season you may make them
happy with a meal.
Hardworkers you are, you hardly have time
to enter their hearts,
so appease their mouths.

Their mothers,
whether anyone likes it or not,
will likely spend more time with the tykes
than you.
So what better solution than to do your utmost
to make what little togetherness you share
seem just that much sweeter?

Do not, with well-intended dietary restrictions,
give the little ones cause to resent you
more than they already will—
missed birthdays, unnoticed haircuts, work-truncated vacations—
when you know love
may be only a Swiss Cake Roll
away.

Do not allow their small fresh souls to spoil,
aging bland and dull, their sweetest years spent roasting
room temperature before a television screen—
Willy Wonka a bright saccharine surrogate father—
when with caffeinated energy you may send them
outside all day to bound on legs
more elastic than springing cheese curls.

Do not drive them early into the sedans
of elazing strangers,
sweating syrupy promises of sweet treats inside—
candy-coated courters of faccelious children,
who will whisk them unbitterly out of sight—
praying upon your own
undelicious warnings.

And fear not:
there will be world enough,
there will be time for
apples and water and supplement pills,
and brussels will sprout with each passing year
as both you
and they grow inevitably
old.

No, no one can force you to take this advice,
but I say
if not always in their young lives,
then be paternally at least
in their young stomachs.

Then, perhaps, when you lie
pale and wan on your deathbed,
hospitalized, hunched, alone, and hungry,
they may look back and recall culinary kindnesses of the past;
that they may remember and become truly their father's children once again;
that they may sneak chocolate chip cookies
and—maybe—martinis past nurses
that you
may enjoy
your last snack.

-Kathy Rooney
Seductive Smoke

The seductive smoke elusively coils around her fingers as she pulls the cigarette away from her mouth and with these inhalations, black turns pink, ironically, as she breathes catastrophic life back into her skeletal remains that were desecrated long ago by his departure, which she thought of often as she walked down the sunlit sidewalks wondering why she never had chalk to write their names so that she might add some permanence to their fleeting moments that she would later rewrite, as the revisionist of their history, which would weigh heavy on both of them and possibly crush his replacement with expectation, so that when he violently pulled her out of her self-imposed exile, it was to his surprise that when in the solitude of a crowded elevator she would still think of his predecessor, that she would still dream of his shadowy image contrasting her spot-lit surroundings, that when she heard his voice through the wires a wanted wave swept through her, and unknowingly, her footprints still resonated within him when he used the word umbrage, though she did not notice that another was slowly changing and restoring her words from their foreign fatality, and that her transparency was only clear to him, and like glass she would crack a bit when he too left, and her fault lines would once again be warnings of the earth quaking within her, as they both sat trapped inside her molten core, desperately trying to escape her waves of conviction, so cyclical in motion that they may have been foreseen on these lonely nights if only she had not been so consumed in smoke.

—Amanda Ely
Fall of Ninety

In the fall of ninety.
In a small town cop bar with my brother the small town cop.
We pass the time with his cohort.
He is a young Ajax, strong in battle.
The old tales are told:
How in the county jail he toughed it as point man on the goon squad-Broke the riot and some heads.
How he bridled this big townie with his nightstick and rode him down like a bronco as he tried to run.
How he tired of talk and just lost it on some swinging drunk.
The one story I tell:
How he breathed and beat life back into a dying neighbor.
They don't follow and return to the recount of knockdowns.
Silent, my young brother just nods his head.
And I barely can recall many falls ago,
When a small boy beagled the coming cold.
Smiled and said how much the world smelled
like Halloween.

—William Rutkowski
The Third Hepburn

she wears a leopard skin hat,
rattlesnake boots, three pounds
of clay to cloak her frizzled skin,
and twelve different rings and none
of them committing her to anyone
but her pocketbook, tight blue jeans
that hug her peaking, brittle hips,
an old black top that flies like a flag
-calling attention to her pointed bra,
an open, black bomber from the year
she met someone who died the year following,
and she's standing on the curb with
one name brand suitcase, thick and heavy,
waiting for a bus that's twelve minutes late,
and she wonders, is it gonna rain?
for she left her purple, plaid umbrella
back in her tiny Floridian cell, while still
clutching a ticket, and headed to Hollywood.

—Lauren Silberman

—Ken Pao
Contributors' Notes

Peter Chun is a senior with a major in Marketing. Photography is a hobby of his that he has been doing for a long time.

Carissa Di Margo is a sophomore journalism major. Her hobbies include blatantly generic activities such as writing, reading, trying with computers, and walking in the park on clear autumn days. She is in the process of setting up a web site to help women learn to help themselves.

Amanda Ely is a sophomore English major who is currently wasting her time working for an accounting firm. She is very good at finding alternative uses for closet space, but spends most of her time staring at the sun.

Ben Ferry received his BA from GW in 1998. He is now a Fine Art graduate student here.

Jennifer Lynn Headly is a second year graduate student pursuing a MFA in Photography. She would like to travel the world and photograph her surroundings, and one day teach art and photography on the college level. If this path does not work out for her, she will own a beef farm in Tahiti.

Kelly Lambo is a sophomore in the business school. Besides writing, she is also a singer and a runner. She is determined to be successful and as long as she continues to run, write and sing she will be happy, and for her that defines success. Her poem is dedicated to Julie and Amy with whom living is inspiration unparalleled.

Katy McQuillen opened a fortune cookie today that read: "life twists."

Vani Murugesan is a person of few words.

Casey Reivich is a wolf in sheep's clothing who knows how to keep a straight face. She would like to thank Willy and Duffy for being a constant source of inspiration.

Catherine Redler is a junior from Ohio...yes, Ohio right near the Kentucky and Indiana border. She still lives by the Dar Williams anthem, "You preach that I should save the world, you pray that I won't do a better job of it." She asks for everyone's support for her present endeavor.

Ken Pao is very flattered that his photos were chosen for Wooden Teeth. If you like what you saw here, there is more where that came from! His favorite subjects to shoot are portraits and intimate objects. He plans on minoring in photo and dreams of working in commercial photography.

Kathy Rooney is a sophomore. She writes things.

William Rutkowski is the Staff Instrument Maker for the Physics, Chemistry and Engineering Department. When not constructing scientific apparatus he works alongside his three-year old son, creating complex, alternative worlds from a variety of Lego building sets.

Lauren Silberman an international artistic superstar, met her longtime lover, Didier, an Italian soccer player, in the Uffizi in 1969. Living in a hotel room that served as a safe haven for bohemian junkies, they traveled the world, signing autographs and denouncing capitalism.

Lisa Viscidi is an aspiring photographer who joined Wooden Teeth just this year.

Sara G. Wernick is a sophomore in the Columbian School. She likes waterfalls, star gazer lilies, playing outside, rainbow sprinkles and the Backstreet Boys. When she grows up, she does not want to work in a cubicle.