

**BROAD!**

**WINTER 2012**



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*KWAIDAN*  
*Shevaun Brannigan*

I learned you were haunted when we first talked. You lay thin in the grass  
and told me in gaps of your father. Beneath that layer of tight skin,  
your intestines rebelled and constricted. I ran Bermuda grass  
over your belly and wished the blades were my fingers.

Then snow was a fine static. I knew the long walk to your attic despite  
the blinded lights, the whited signs. Despite turning back and back again.  
When I threw pebbles up at your window, snowflakes flew from the pane  
like tiny birds. When you opened the window, I saw your breath as clouds.

We made a seismic love. Used words like heat, friction, and destroyed.  
I subducted beneath you, then melted. I was older, denser, had more ghosts.  
You were the volcano forming. But I made your magma, I forced this rock.  
Ash settled around the room. Ghosts fled for higher lands.

At an old age, we drink tea together and are not haunted.  
In my cup I see your face, reflected. Reflected in your cup  
is my face. I drink your mouth. I open mine to speak, apologize—  
just a tea leaf for a tongue, and that, brittle as bones.

**MARRIAGE**  
*Joan Colby*

Thorny, that's how it was  
you and me  
never giving the proverbial inch  
always on the lookout that no advantage  
be taken. Like breaking  
horses. Lip chain or twitch  
the war bridle, lunging whip  
we were no whisperers though we  
could have learned something.  
Instead kicking chains or cribbing straps  
spurs and crops. Getting our way,  
not getting hurt.

Hurt: like a cloud of angry wasps  
nesting in the handle of the spreader,  
the power take-off where the 12-year-old  
son of friends got caught and shredded.  
Watch out. We wore that talk like  
undershirts. We wore that out.

Now you fondle the feral cat  
who acknowledges you alone—a feeling  
anyone would like to have,  
and decline to unearth whatever is tunneling  
under the stock tank—that's its habitat.

I could cut back the chokecherries  
that forest the fencelines  
but the fact is I like it wild  
the way my bare legs cruelly scratched  
by canes, I'm gathering berries  
my pail brimming, those juicy globes  
so ripe, so ready, all you have to do is touch.

*Joan Colby has published widely in journals such as Poetry, Atlanta Review, South Dakota Review, The Spoon River Poetry Review, New York Quarterly, the new renaissance, Grand Street, Epoch, and Prairie Schooner. Awards include two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards, Rhino Poetry Award, the new renaissance Award for Poetry, and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She was a finalist in the GSU Poetry Contest (2007), Nimrod International Pablo Neruda Prize (2009, 2012), and received honorable mentions in the North American Review's James Hearst Poetry Contest (2008, 2010). She is the editor of Illinois Racing News, and lives on a small horse farm in Northern Illinois. She has published 10 books including The Lonely Hearts Killers, The Atrocity Book and her newest book, just out from Future Cycle Press, Dead Horses.*



***Graehound** is a mixed-media art student who consistently tries to make the standard calendar day 30 hours instead of 24. She's currently fascinated by traditional comic illustration, giant squids, muscle cars, kickboxing, and her Nikon, but that list will have evolved by the time this prints.*

**NAUKAR**  
*Rudrani Sarma*

your photograph was taken down last week. komal was yelling at the kabaadiwallah, he had stolen a few thousand. from the windowsill. by the cardboard sign that reads Future Perfect.

he drinks. swilling and swishing and swimming. mumma was afraid that night and she held my hand. the refrigerator broke again, the old godrej. that aunty's kulfi melted. you weren't watching any more, though. your photograph was in the steamer trunk.

he keeps talking about china; they're coming. through the mountains in Garhwal, he says. and you didn't teach him how to pray in time. naani says it's the poison. don't be too intelligent, she told me. eat some cloves. I go to your pantry and sit on the concrete. your check shirt from 1998 is still there, hanging. and the matchboxes full of sealing wax. everything is gone now. but it's still there.

one last cup of tea, he says. we'll sit together on the drawing room floor. tell me about amreeka.

mamaya said alcoholics are liars first.

you would play with my earlobes as a child, he told me. you sat with a palm full of lychees on the ground and you couldn't sound out 'chuh'. and I told you stories about maharanis.

one last cup of tea before I leave, okay? there were so many filthy cups. chandra didn't clean them well. they smelled of boiled milk. he took everything with him.

nobody will buy the brass. I'll take it all. hire a tempo, I'll take it to the village. there was a fire in the fields. the cattle died but the children survived. what happened to the forty thousand? what forty thousand? I don't know. I don't know.

your tulsi plant sits on the veranda. it's still alive. I pass by it and tear off a leaf, the way you taught me; gently, gently. it is sour-sweet. the air smells of jasmine. it always smells of jasmine when I think of you.

*Rudrani Sarma is a first year at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. Her prose and poetry have been published in numerous journals, including the literary magazine Blast Furnace. Rudrani is from New Delhi, but currently lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.*

***IRREVERENCE***  
***(A WASHINGTON GIRLHOOD)***  
***Sam/antha Collier***

i.

I want to kiss you in that great cathedral 'til the angels  
come down in a hot fury, kiss you  
in all their sacred chapels, all their private corners.  
Bathed in the stained-glass color spill, steeped  
in holy incense, I'll press you up against  
that hallowed stone, cool and smooth as god's palm,  
and pull a profane prayer from your lips.

god! listen!

We'll shock the purple docents, flirt with tourists,  
echo down the corridors, kiss each other hard  
and laughing

we are your daughters!

I'm choosing my own gods  
from now on.

ii.

Lady Liberty, let down Your emerald hair:  
You owe nothing to wall street and broadway. Come south  
to DC where the air is warm, and let me take You out.  
We'll eat empanadas and injera, dance in the streets,  
and unlock all the cages in the zoo. While Zebras trot  
through adams morgan, Giraffes peer into grand hotels,  
and Prairie Dogs carve tunnels in the south lawn,  
we'll pour dish-soap in the fountains. We'll steal  
the Cherry Blossoms, pluck the million flowers, float  
them down the Anacostia: a river blooming pink all morning.  
We'll charm the statues off their stones, start a parade,  
led by Joan of Arc and Archer Alexander,  
Marilyn will slip from her painting, lions will prowl the Potomac,  
Duke Ellington will jazz up U Street once again.

iii.

Statue of Freedom,  
put down Your sword.  
Get down here off that Dome.

*(continued)*



You're fooling no one,  
the roses are in bloom,  
the Carousel turns children  
on the mall. Get down here  
and rest Your feet.  
I'll buy You  
a firecracker  
popsicle, red white  
and blue; You  
tell the tourists  
of the slaves  
who built You,  
out of bloodied  
marble, crowned You  
in laurel, before  
these humid summers  
could be quenched.  
Help me sell some tickets  
for this Brand New Tour:  
we'll visit rotting schools,  
we'll drink from poison pipes.  
I'll drive the bus, You speak;  
a century and a half  
of holding Your breath  
is long enough.

iv.

Come on, America. Kiss me like you used to  
with your knees in knots and your wild roaming fingers  
crush my mouth with fruit. Send the senators home.  
Drown their flags in the tidal basin. Kiss me,  
and we'll have the city to Ourselves again.  
Before they came with cameras and pens  
to stripe and star your streets and paint your skin,  
we always woke together. I'm still here.  
I'm down here burning dictionaries. Come on. Kiss me.  
The sun is sinking and already I can hear the angels,  
ready to pounce.

*Sam/antha Collier is a playwright and poet from Washington, D.C. Her plays have been staged by Theater Nyx, PTP/NYC, and Theatermakers. She is a first-year graduate student in the Iowa Playwrights Workshop.*

grin muffled but  
sneaky, slithering  
out like his penis  
did in the Drive In  
a June before I could  
imagine anything so  
slippery sliding up,  
let alone inside  
me after months of  
Saturdays in my  
mother's grey apartment,  
my sister giggling  
behind the couch,  
a tongue pressing  
between lips should  
have been a warning in  
the blue Chevy I felt  
he was all whale  
crashing with his  
now you've done  
this to me, you have  
to, everything in  
me sand he  
collapsed on

***THESE ARE NOT RECIPES***  
***Robin Jennings***

This is not the last word

I know you prefer whiskey, so you'd have no reason to make this drink. You wouldn't pour a shot of gin with a shot of lime juice a shot of Chartreuse, and a shot of maraschino liqueur into a shaker full of ice and shake shake shake before you strain it into a chilled cocktail glass with your sweet sweet sugar on the rim and serve it to her.

This is not a recipe for split pea soup

Do not measure out your split peas into a glass cup, checking carefully for other women and tiny pebbles that could crack your teeth. These are not instructions on how to sauté carrots bought together at the farmers' market with celery from the back of your refrigerator and onions picked too small from my garden. Don't bother remembering to not forget to stir the onion skins out after you add the water and bring it, salted and peppered, to boiling. This is not a poem telling you to let the faded green split legumes tumble rattling into the steaming water, to leave them until soft, to wait and wait until it is clear that no hope remains before carefully – don't bother being careful – portioning into the blender and hitting puree.

This is not delight

Don't mix two delectable tablespoons of heavy raw cream from local cows with imported vanilla custard powder. Don't slowly turn up the heat, bringing the rest of my cup of cream to a rolling boil, or softly add the perfect cup of sugar, slowly, sleekly among the bubbles. Don't stand there watching with your eyes warm and patient, loving, until the sugar dissolves, adding, slowly, slowly, those tablespoons of thick vanilla cream. Don't stir, so slowly, looking nowhere else, until it thickens. Don't remove it from the heat without warning and leave it to cool without once looking back. Don't rudely dump the mango puree into a large bowl and beat the cream until it can't stay separate any longer. Don't pour into a clear glass serving bowl and hide it from all other eyes in the refrigerator. Note: Don't shave delicate swirls of passionfruit atop just before it chills entirely.

**OPENED**  
*Theodosia Henney*

In ninth grade, the honors biology class  
went to the University of Utah  
cadaver lab. I thought  
it would be all looks, no  
touching, but the medical students  
gave us gloves, pointed  
to the eye-wash station,  
set us loose.

There were twelve corpses,  
men and women who donated  
themselves, signed  
the appropriate forms  
while they could;  
one set of fingernails  
painted soft pink.

Demonstrations followed;  
a lung pumped  
full of air with a miniature bellow,  
a heart passed around—I held it  
in my hands, surprised  
at its thickness, how much a muscle  
like all the others, how dark in color.

Left to my devices,  
I became enamored of a liver,  
larger than the other eleven livers,  
with a single, precise  
divot where a tumor had been  
removed, apparently  
with a small ice-cream scoop—perfect

*(continued)*

and round and smooth.  
There was a ribcage;  
more exactly, the thin sheets of tissue  
stretched between the ribs,  
which caught the light in flecks  
of rainbow, like fish scales or roast beef  
sliced to paper; eyes full of cataracts  
silver as mist and dissected  
through the retinas to show the layers  
of what makes seeing possible;  
a torso preserved in a tank, rare situs inversus  
with the internal organs reversed,  
so the heart conducts  
its business from beneath

the right breast—how convenient,  
I thought, if someone was to aim  
for your heart—a brain,  
halved and delicate-looking,  
like the jello molds in crash-helmet  
test videos.

Through my membrane  
of latex, the organs were cool, solid,  
almost the texture of lichen  
grown over smooth wood. Not quite soft  
or alive; but once, yes.

*Theodosia Henney is a circus enthusiast who enjoys standing in the spaces between raindrops. Her work has appeared in over a dozen journals, including Dirtcakes, Grey Sparrow, RATTLE, and Fifth Wednesday.*

**MONSTER WOMAN**  
*Janna Layton*

In the hospital, the mottledness  
was only revealed in freakshow flashes--  
thin gown lifted by doctors,  
then covered with bleached sheets.

But back at home, readying  
for a bath, and there it all is:  
thighs, stomach, arms enveloped  
in the scaly patch of rash,  
red dapples like mildew over marble.

Lizard woman, lizard girl, lizard maiden.  
The monster woman of classical mythology  
and vintage pulp.

What is the nature of the fascination there?  
That the monster dares to be beauty,  
or that beauty dares to be monster?

Some dark femaleness that has the temerity  
to bring repulsiveness to the breast.

*Janna Layton is a writer and receptionist living in San Francisco. Her fiction and poetry have been published in various literary journals, including Bartleby Snopes, REAL, The First Line, The Pinch, and The Vocabula Review. She blogs at [readingwatchinglookingandstuff.blogspot.com](http://readingwatchinglookingandstuff.blogspot.com).*



A decade has passed since I stood waiting at Logan  
for you in your tiny Korean diapers, your lack  
of self-containment at once noticeable  
as you began to punctuate the limousine's chatter  
with howls from your miniature milking mouth.

I never imagined then you'd be such a tough critic  
unsympathetic to my plight, my need to win you over  
You were born in my heart, I tell you  
but as for your own, I've had to inch my way in  
bit by bit, and I can feel I'm just about there.

Our porch strewn with bits of herbs  
we set each tiny piece of vegetation curling upwards  
having chosen a spot behind bushes  
so our New England native neighbors  
don't freak out at the unmoored smell of smoke.

You sneak a bug and this I don't like  
If you hurt that bug I won't play, I whisper  
So you gloss over this telling me moist grass won't work  
and how you don't lie anymore now that you're growing up  
as you sear a tiny piece of bug hoping I'm distracted.

I cringe at the poor bug lying crisp  
Ahimsa! I beseech  
Sorry, you say, I like to eat ants, they're crunchy.  
You have always liked your tea out of heirloom china  
toy pistols slinging from every pocket.

Smoke curls off a rosemary sprig toward sky  
you hand me the magnifying glass and I sear some mint.  
You smile, do you actually like this? you ask, deeply pleased.  
Mmm I love the smells, I say, wedging  
myself tightly inside your voluminous gaze of approval.

*Christine Tsen is a published cellist and poet. Her symphonic experiences are rich with poetic inspiration, and her poetry has put the muse back in her music. Her poems are in THRUSH Poetry Journal, The Bark, Utmost Christian, and Defenestration among others. More at [www.christinethomastsen.com](http://www.christinethomastsen.com).*



**POLYGLOT**  
*Michelle Ornat*

Our guide at a museum of masks and costumes in Sardinia  
speaks French because my cousin can't understand Italian.  
She talks about significance,  
most of which I forget,  
and how scholars have discovered a folkloric  
connection between Sardinia and the Balkans,  
their respective masks carved of chestnut and walnut,  
cloaks sewn of sheepskin and goat hide and cloches.  
The waists of the cloches are made of brass,  
the clappers are of the bones of a bull or boar, something four-  
legged.  
The guide says she knows a few of our English words:  
boots, tomato, running.  
She knows the word bell but continues with cloche,  
the sexiest French word ever.  
Cloche, cloche, cloche.  
I mouth the word as she does.  
She talks and my lips move,  
anticipating the words she'll form next.  
When she says cloche, I am flush.  
Unbelievable. It starts  
at the notch between her clavicles  
and rises to just under her jawline,  
her throat tightening as she forms the 'o.'  
I want to cover her mouth with my mouth,  
for her words to replace mine.  
I want to laze about on her tongue,  
to be incubated between her  
hard and soft palates,  
there, a sanctuary.  
She asks if I want to try on a mask.  
Of course. I'd love to.

*Michelle Ornat is a public librarian working to develop services for teens in an urban, economically comprised area. Originally from Fairfield, California, she has lived in Kentucky, Virginia, and Italy. She resides in Western New York with her husband and two beagles. Her poems have appeared in The American Poetry Review and The Examined Life.*

The first is blonde and I am sixteen. We see a scary movie I don't remember the title of. I am not old enough, so we buy tickets to *March of the Penguins* and sneak into the scary one. I am embarrassed by this, but he doesn't seem to mind. He may even find it funny.

I hope he finds it funny.

I spend the entire movie pretending to play with my hair but actually shielding my eyes from the screen. I was afraid to tell him horror movies are not my thing. So much not my thing. Even with lights on, hand held, tiny screen. I can't handle the suspense. I can't separate myself from the action. I am that helpless girl, that naïve couple, that poor man in the shower.

And so, I preoccupy myself with the braille of chewed gum beneath my seat and chew each popcorn kernel twenty-three times before swallowing. The sounds are okay. I can handle the sounds detached from the visual. My ears are braver than the rest of me.

He enjoys the movie, even laughs during the climactic scenes of gore. It is childish, but in a good way. I wonder if he will try to kiss me, but he doesn't.

We go for ice cream afterwards. I prefer this part. He has a coupon for a free cone and tells me that mine is the one he pays in full for.

We sit in small black chairs; the walls are painted murals and the chair's feet scrape against a fun tile floor. He makes me laugh, which I appreciate. He makes me laugh a lot but the next week, he kisses someone else and makes me cry.

The second one is Puerto Rican and I am still sixteen. He skateboards, and I think that is cool.

I go to the high school homecoming dance even though I hate dancing. I do it to see him, and he sees me. The dance is held in a gym, everything is casual. We walk around the track outside of the music and he confesses he hates dancing too, though I'm pretty sure he's only saying it to lay out common ground.

My friends see us walking circles and somebody gets my brother's attention. I can see him peering through the window into the darkening space we are in. He does not look happy. He is one year above me, has known high school without me. He does not love that we share friends.

He sees who I am with and he comes outside, feeling purposeful. They are friends, he makes things uncomfortable. I lose the battle and that is that.

\* \* \*

The third one kisses me in a closet. I like it. His hair is down to his shoulders like mine and he braids them together until what grows from my head grows from his.

He is into Buddhism but doesn't really know what that means. He is a vegetarian and I become one as well. We are seventeen.

He takes me to vegetarian dinners. I begin to like green things and I eat macaroni and cheese at home when my family has burgers. I eat pounds of carrots.

I take him home and my parents tell me they are impressed. My dad makes a joke about our matching hairstyles and my mom calls him adorable. They both think my meat-eating days are not over. I prove them wrong.

My brother is neither hot nor cold to him.

There is a blizzard in January and school is canceled. He walks to my house in an insufficient amount of clothing and I warm him with the space heater in my bedroom. I am not allowed to close my door but he kisses me anyway and to my surprise, an alarm does not go off. We eat tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches with homemade pesto from the freezer. He decides it is time we venture into the snow.

I give him my brother's snow boots and we walk around the deserted neighborhood. Stores are closed, sidewalks are mountains. We climb.

He pushes me over first and then we are both down in piles of white. He presses his face to mine for warmth and fun. His tongue is a furnace.

We get too cold too quick and have to return to my house to dry. We shower, separately, and dip celery into hummus while we listen to whatever records we find in the basement.

He brought a few beers, and this is new to me. We chill them in the snow in my backyard and after two cans I feel like I know what being drunk really is. He is an experience that I have.

One month later, he eats a steak and I am okay with it. He cuts his hair, and I lose interest.

The fourth one is six feet tall; we meet in class, international relations. Fresh to college. We play an awkward name game in class, and we are introduced in a public manner. I feel something immediately, and we are pulled to each other. We are in a small school, and before I even understand myself, new friends are asking if I am interested.

I laugh uncomfortably and say, "Oh, I don't know." But I do and so do they and so does he.

We are assigned tedious weekly current events, and when he

passes me in a hallway he asks if I want any help on the assignment. I don't need it by any means, but I tell him I would love it. He comes over and we spend an hour on cnn.com without accomplishing anything. I discover he is hilarious.

"I don't think anything happened in the world this week," he says.

I giggle harder than I mean to. The buzz that goes from him to me is distracting to us both. I don't know what to call it, but I settle for a crush.

"Well then," I say. "We can present on the new cookies in the dining hall this week. I would say they were pretty internationally related."

I don't know if he laughs to make me happy or because he finds me funny, but I like it when he does. His hair is red, which somehow adds to the excitement.

We finally get the assignment done, and he spends the rest of the night looking through my music collection and pretending to judge me by it. I don't even know what he's saying half the time, I am just expanded by his presence. I have never felt this way, and I don't sleep thinking about it.

The next two days I am afraid to contact him and he doesn't contact me. I wait for class and we sit at a long oval table, across from each other. I am a child trying not to look at him and we catch each other a few times. He blushes easily against his pale cheeks, and the sight alone makes me do the same.

He is one of five lucky students called on to present his current event. He is a terrible public speaker. His hands shake the printed article in his hand, and I lose count of his um's. He mumbles through something about the Middle East and breathes heavily when he sits back down. I don't look at him in fear of inflating his embarrassment.

I am surprised when he catches me after class.

"Same time, same place?" he says.

I nod and hurry away.

He comes as planned and we plant ourselves on my tiny bed, backs against the wall. My feet don't come close to the floor, he is a tower on my side. I am so strongly compelled to touch him.

He opens an article about oil and the president and we both pretend to read it for whole minutes. He is red, and his fingers won't stop moving. I'm afraid for anything. The anticipation is thick.

I turn my body slowly, inch by inch. He follows. We play a middle school game, we don't use words. I breathe silently. He waits for my lead, which drives me crazy. We are closer and closer. I lift my head, our noses touch, and I push my lips to his.

He uses too much tongue, and I don't care. I am so happy to be in

contact. He is careful not to push me. We do not part for some time. My roommate returns from the library and he goes home. Current events are insignificant.

He starts coming over more often. Each time we don't get far into work or conversation. It is not a sexual thing, but we cannot help but be sexual.

We are alone in my room. Clothes come off, and breath picks up. For the first time, I am faced with sex. His skin is comfort, I want to run through it. I let him in. A dorm room bed; a persistent squeak that makes us both laugh.

"Are you okay?" he says over and over.

I smile when I can and say, "Yes."

We do this again. We can't seem to stop, even though I don't enjoy it yet. I enjoy him, however, and that is enough for me. We take my minivan out to quiet roads and undress each other in the backseat. We drive to the parking garage downtown, wind our way to the top and park overlooking the city. He sits on the hood against the windshield and I peer over the edge of the structure, and imagine sailing to the tiny strip of sidewalk below.

"Come here," he says, and I am comforted because I want to rest my hand on his chest. He uses his funny voice and kisses the corners of my face like a compass: north, south, east, west. We move to the concrete in need of a solid surface, and leave the garage with memorable bruises.

Weeks pass this way.

We are in his room, it is starting. I am sitting on his lap in a desk chair: clothes on, hands moving. He stops.

"Hey," he says.

"Hey," I say back.

I move in to touch his lips and he pulls away. I wait while he tries to say something.

"You ever notice how we never just hang out?" he says.

I don't want to answer. I can't help it that I'm slightly hurt.

"We're hanging out right now," I say, though I know it is not the right thing to say.

"You know what I mean," he says. I know what he means. "Just talking or whatever."

He's right but I defend things. He reminds me we never had the time to be friends first. I reach for his hand and he lets me hold it.

We agree to take some time. "To get closer," he says. He makes a joke about abstinence, I try to laugh like we're on the same page.

We get dinner together, try to build things up. Friendliness. It's a bit awkward and he doesn't do awkward very well. Without touch,

we don't communicate the same. Two weeks go by and we still struggle; I worry I have lost. There is still something about him I need to be a part of.

We are at a party; our social group is often one in the same. I am wearing the same shirt I wore in class that first day. When people started to wonder. He is wearing one of the five shirts he owns that circle in a night-out rotation.

I watch him drink and am careful not to beat him. No mistakes is important to me. I don't approach him for a while. I let other boys flirt with me because they've heard we are not entirely on and I am not flattered, just watching him. Girls drunk-slap his biceps and tell him they love his ginger hair. I have seen it before.

He doesn't talk much all night, and is calmer than his friends. He sees me, and he leaves the space there. Not quite time. When half the crowd has gone, I come to him.

"Hi," I say.

"Hi," he says. And all of a sudden it is easier. I can tell it is not just the alcohol.

We chat, it is comfortable. I only want to lean into his t-shirt, subtract the distance between our feet. He walks me home and we whisper in my bed for an hour while my roommate sleeps unknowingly. He is so goofy in these baby beds, and we start with the fingers. Playful hands touch each other and then our arms and legs and we are kissing. Neither of us know what this means but we keep kissing, and that is all we do. It is slower than before, and we are pouring out.

When it is over, early sunlight peeks in through the edges of the window shade, and we smile. Something is different and though I am afraid sleep will make it go away, it does not. I wake up and he is still there, still close.

I fall in love with this one. He falls in love with me. It stays like this for quite some time.

A year passes: we are sophomores and we think that makes us old. Academic interests are focused, school is less novel. Our best friends start dating, and we do not approve. They shout and split us into sides that we hate to take.

When they break up after two months of imbalance, he goes on a spring break cruise to some Caribbean islands to cheer his half up, while I answer phones at my father's law firm and text happy thoughts to my half underneath a wooden desk. We are supposed to mend them.

He makes out with a girl from Alabama on the cruise and tells me.

"I don't know why I did it," he says. "I had to tell you, I am so sorry."

I ask him what she looks like so I can picture it.

“Don’t do this,” he says.

I tell him he did this. I am wearing sweatpants and wish I wasn’t.

I am flattened. I make him leave. I do not forgive him, and it takes all that I have.

The fifth one I meet abroad in Barcelona. He is dark, energetic and older than me. We are awful together.

I miss most of my classes, drink to messiness and sleep in his loft. He screams at me and I return the noise. We are loud, filled with broken English and inconsistency. He is too attractive and I wear too little clothing and I think about the first four frequently.

I return home filled with secondhand smoke and I am trampled.

I am alone for two years.

I think I’m going to marry the sixth one. We fall in love fast. We are in a movie. He is clean and handsome and my parents are sweet on him. We are in New York City.

He works in finance, and I stop asking what that means. I am still looking for myself, and I don’t pay rent in his apartment.

I have come to the city after spending too much time at home post-graduation. It is impulsive, and I love this. Friends from several bits of my life are scattered around the boroughs, and I float on couches, take in favors.

I have met him at a bar like the rest of the city. I love that the first time I saw him he was wearing a tie. He doesn’t believe me when I tell him a suit does wonders for any man, but he takes me home anyway.

Weeks later, it becomes apparent I have no place to be.

“Do you live here?” he asks me. We are eating breakfast before he goes to work and I don’t go anywhere. The park, maybe.

I turn the spoon in my yogurt and lick the back before the front.

“Yes,” I say.

And he says, “Okay.”

I thank him without words.

I invest in used cookbooks and spend hours between cover letters experimenting in his kitchen. I learn that I love capers, bluefish and quinoa. I am still a vegetarian but he is not, so I indulge in cooking meats for him. I enjoy this, too. He certainly does.

He is a few years ahead of me, but still enthused about the things I am.

He comes home from work. I am so familiar with the rhythm in

which he unlocks the bolt, lower lock, turns the knob. A slower beat means he is tired, or distracted on the phone, but he always makes sure to finish a call before greeting me.

I try to greet him but he always greets me first.

“Hey, babe,” he says. “Miss me?”

I do tonight and I tell him so.

“Eat this with me,” I say. I do not eat dinner alone, lunch is enough.

We sit down with clay colored plates and pastel cloth napkins. I was ambitious with risotto and it pays off.

“Tonight is for wine,” he says, and so it goes.

We share a bottle of red, which I am growing accustomed to. We spin around to no music and forget things. I pull novels off a shelf and we read passages to each other out of context. Together the string of paragraphs starts to make sense and I am telling a real story.

“Tomorrow I will find the ending,” I say.

He agrees and takes me to bed. We make dizzy love for as long as we can. The covers are sloppy, and he is tangled in them but too tired to remove himself. I kiss him and he says he loves me three times before I say it back. We sleep heavy on the mattress.

I finally get a job as a teacher’s aide in a private preschool. The kids brighten me. The order in which they put words is wonderful; I am an ambiguous adult in their lives. One day at work tells me I am doing something real.

I cut carrot sticks, peel glue off of fingers, make penguins out of construction paper. I blow noses, wash hands, break up a fight of tiny hands and tiny light up sneakers. I read: I do so much reading. I push three swings simultaneously and learn how to sing ‘good morning’ in five languages. I recite each one over dinner.

He is excited by my excitement.

I buy patterned scissors, jumbo packs of colored pencils, the makings for paper mache. I bring home photos of my kids and show him just how small the zippers on their sweatshirts are. Just how much they love to sit next to me at snack and even more so at lunch. He puts them on the refrigerator behind matching silver magnets. I still have plenty of time to cook.

When I get my first paycheck, I stare at it for three days before bringing it to the bank. The line is long and filled with busy looking people. I stare at my watch once or twice to fit in. I feel underdressed which I was not expecting.

“I can help you over here,” someone finally says. I practically run to the counter.

“Hi, how are you?” she says, but she does not care for the answer



so I don't give it to her.

"I'd like to make a deposit, please," I say. I haven't spoken these words in almost a year.

I hand the teller a pre-filled form and the signed check. My signature is ugly.

"Wait," I say. I make a last minute scratch mark on the form and decide to cash half the check. I bring the money home and leave it on the kitchen table for him. I want him to have it more than anything.

He is confused when he sees the bills sitting there too casually.

"What is this?" he says.

"Money," I say. "For you."

He picks up the cash and counts it by habit. Sometimes I imagine this is what he does all day in a cubicle.

"I know it's not much, but it's a start," I say. "I am a contributing citizen," I say. I think I'm being funny.

He doesn't laugh, and places the pile back in my hand.

"Please keep it," he says. "This is your money."

I tell him no way. I tell him he has done too much for me as it is, and he says that he wants to do all of this. That it gives him pleasure.

"And giving back to you gives me pleasure," I say. "I can't mooch forever."

But he refuses to take it and things grow hostile very quickly. He tells me he can support me and I start talking about resentment and expectation. I think I mention gender equality just to prove I went to college. Then I cry.

In an angered burst of energy he runs to a kitchen cupboard.

He is down on a knee and I realize he is proposing. I realize I have somehow ruined an elaborate romantic plan.

The ring has been hiding among tea bags. A place he knew I would visit at some point before, during or after dinner. It holds one stone, but it is the size of a plump blueberry. I look down at it, then down at his face, then back to the blueberry. It is too large; I am still crying.

It's not right. I love him deeply, but I can't be this forever.

I close his fingers around the ring and kiss each knuckle. I gather my things from each layer of the apartment and fold into him hard, afraid that I will not see him again. I leave my teaching supplies, and find it strange that otherwise my belongings fit into the same bag as when I arrived.

I close the door and wait painfully in the hallway out of the peephole's range. Minutes pass and he finally approaches the door to double lock it from the inside. It is time to go.

I don't stop crying and will not for days. I make a phone call and

revert back to generous couches.

I spend days in a simple state of hope: that I made the right decision, that he will be okay, that I will be okay.

I continue to go to work because I have to, and the preschoolers are miniature ego boosts. They depend on me for funny things and I am responsible for that. I zip up their coats, and their runny noses make my chest beam.

A week after I leave him it is Shapes Day at school. Circles and trapezoids are everywhere, though I am the only one making trapezoids because even the name is too much for a three-year-old to handle.

I am at a worktable with two beautiful little girls and they have decided it is time for hearts. One of them is significantly better at it than the other, and this causes toddler tension. The less artistic of the two steals a heart from her classmate and when they struggle over the construction paper, the tip at the bottom of the heart rips off.

Tears ensue and I am left to console the original heart cutter-outer. In seconds she is a ball of snot and her world has ended. I tell her to use her words like we practice at school and she takes in dramatic breaths to prepare herself.

Though she tries—with her whole body at once—to throw herself into words, she cannot. The depth of her little sadness has forgotten where its come from, and she climbs my body like a tree in need of my adult arms.

She sits on top of me and I sit on top of a tiny chair and her tears fall onto my stained t-shirt. The crumpled piece of blue construction paper falls from her hand to the floor, taking no shape at all. I rub her back with one hand, and lean over to pick up the paper with the other. I stuff it into my pocket and kiss her on the forehead.

We rock until the sniffles slow.

*Eva Jablow is a recent graduate of Connecticut College, where she studied Creative Writing and Human Development. She lives, writes, eats and plays in Brooklyn in between long commutes to answer phones for a nonprofit. This is her second publication and she is probably still crying about it.*

***I AM NOT GOING OUT TODAY***  
***Melissa Dias-Mandoly***

i am not going out today, i've decided: no feathered  
bait may lure me out, no drugged hook: your eyes  
are just organs, you said: i think of you as a fleshy  
machine of reactions: i say, you say: i like my tombed  
bed, womb like a flesh grave: i am staying in my  
head, today: the skull cave: i've decided: to cook,  
clean: i might be pregnant: my feet are swollen: the  
cat's quietly lapping in the kitchen: she is barren:  
we broke in: stole the uterus, ovaries: she is overly  
tired, after the spay: i am not: going out today, i'm  
staying in: carving you out like clay from my brain: i  
am: Gregor and you: are Grete: please, send me the  
apples to eat: i am on the ceiling, on my feet: i am  
not going: out today, i've decided: i'll stay in this cage:  
with my meat.

***Melissa Dias-Mandoly is currently a senior at the University of Pittsburgh with a double major in Film Studies and English Writing: Poetry. She is the marketing director and an editor on Three Rivers Review Magazine. Her work has previously appeared in Collision, Apercus Quarterly, and Storm Cellar. In 2012, she won first place in the University of Pittsburgh's Undergraduate Poetry Contest.***



## *INSIDE THE ROSEMARY BUSH*

*Jessica Tyner*

Early in the morning, while the tea is steeping,  
I put out the ashtray full of seeds and bread  
crusts for the quetzels and yigüirros.  
The rosemary bush shakes underneath  
the clothes I forgot to bring in from the line,  
little fat brown balls roll out  
who have no shortage  
of food, no predators, a backyard in Moravia  
all to themselves. Their water pump to bathe  
in, the cas tree dropping sweets  
at their feet. This is what I left you for.  
Watching overstuffed birds,  
Beggars tapping at the gates calling upe!,  
the huevos man barking prices from a rusted van,  
while I sit and write  
page after page about you.

*Jessica Tyner* is from Oregon, a member of the Cherokee Nation, and has been a writer for ten years. Currently, a travel writer with Yahoo!, the entertainment columnist for Hound the Press, and a contributing editor at New York's Thalo Magazine. She has recently published short fiction in India's Out of Print Magazine and poetry in Slow Trains Literary Journal, Straylight Magazine, Solo Press, and Glint Literary Journal. Her first novel has been picked up by Swift Publishing House. She enjoys teaching yoga and has a bad habit of collecting first editions.

*THE COLLECTED POEMS OF BONNIE PARKER*  
*Joan Colby*

That poems could be their legacy,  
not in a journal she wouldn't  
recognize, but in newspapers  
that chronicled their escapades.

More ballad, though she knew little  
of such distinctions, imagining gunfire,  
robbery, wrecked cars, fire, disfigurement  
could be absolved with the cliché

Of doomed lovers: Romeo and Juliet,  
Tristan and Isolde, Heloise and Abelard.  
Unlikely emblems in those  
dreary east Texas towns.

Newsboys shouted their latest  
exploits to readers sick of the black  
slag of depression. Her nervy paeans,  
jejune, almost touching, preserved

For years after their riddled bodies  
were laid out for exposition: a coda  
to her rhymed renditions of  
how they would go down.

*Joan Colby has published widely in journals such as Poetry, Atlanta Review, South Dakota Review, The Spoon River Poetry Review, New York Quarterly, the new renaissance, Grand Street, Epoch, and Prairie Schooner. Awards include two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards, Rhino Poetry Award, the new renaissance Award for Poetry, and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She was a finalist in the GSU Poetry Contest (2007), Nimrod International Pablo Neruda Prize (2009, 2012), and received honorable mentions in the North American Review's James Hearst Poetry Contest (2008, 2010). She is the editor of Illinois Racing News, and lives on a small horse farm in Northern Illinois. She has published 10 books including The Lonely Hearts Killers, The Atrocity Book and her newest book, just out from Future Cycle Press, Dead Horses.*

*IN THE DREAM*  
*Lyn Lifshin*

My mother says look,  
I'll show you why I  
can't go to the party  
tonight, takes off  
her blouse, back  
toward me. I see no-  
thing, a dime sized  
bump I never would  
have noticed with a  
cut across it. My  
mother, who never  
complained, cooked  
venison when the  
hurricane blew a  
roof off a friend's  
house and thirteen  
people slept in our  
beds the day some  
thing was cut out  
of her, blood still  
dripping. My mother  
who could open jars  
no one else could,  
who never stayed in  
bed one day, says  
the small circle  
hurts. I press her  
close, terrified  
I'm losing what  
I don't know

*YOURS, THE GIRL WHO BUILDS YOUR PYRE*  
*Jade Liu*

it should not take the unforgivable  
to pull your hands from his.  
he is not your father—

he has stayed longer than your father ever would or did,  
his smile is easier and more wicked,  
a product of dents and belt-lashes  
from when a man held him down and etched  
cruelty onto his soul.

he is not your father, just a silverware reflection  
of your own inheritance, your father's spark  
in your bottle-green eye saying:  
"go on, then."

it's a spark that has almost killed you  
more times than you can remember,  
more than you can piece together  
from recollections of almost arrests,  
cellphone photographs that blur  
the bruises on your hips.

i am not your lover  
though there are lives where i must have been,  
lives where i threaded my fingers through yours  
and you believed me when i said you were worth saving.

but in so many more i am the girl  
who holds your hair back as you vomit,  
who drives you home as you babble in the backseat;  
making apologies and curses and promises  
that you are genetically predisposed to break.

he is not your father, and he is not your god,  
even when he makes you small  
and sinks his hands into your pockets.

*(continued)*



he takes more than money, more than sex,  
he makes you weak the way that you make me weak,  
the way that i need you to be,  
but wrapped around a different finger.

he is not your father,  
though he will always let you down.  
i am not your lover,  
though i hang on every reckless word  
and come running when you call for someone else

because there is a spark,  
an undying glimmer in your eyes—  
maybe a tear, or maybe not—  
and i can see infinity reflected through the murky green,  
your lips mouthing:  
"maybe next time."

and this is what i will not forgive:

*Jade Liu is a Chinese New Zealander with an unrequited love for the present tense. She is an angry old man at heart, which greatly aids her hobby of shouting at things about other things. Lady things.*

there was a girl, once

i barely knew her, but  
i knew her by heart –

she went out to fields, at night  
(her friends, they saw her sit on a  
ritzy sofa with cheap beers, but  
they were on the outside, really; stainless  
steel shield i slithered through like  
water)  
and picked flower  
after flower  
after flower;  
twilight tastes like the blues,  
lonely in high heels and tangy on  
young tongues

twilight  
she went out to fields and loved  
the corpse-shimmer stars, wrinkled  
and forgotten already; violets  
a substitute for fuel exhaust, this  
ophelia never learned  
how to catch on,  
with saturn-sorn circles adorning her eyes  
(jaded and jagged, same as the stars)

i knew a girl, once  
she went out to fields at twilight  
tasted absence and ripped petals off  
flowers, because they were beautiful  
and she wanted  
to want them

i never knew her, but  
those petals sure faded  
one by one

*Camille Thigpen* has lived in France, Pennsylvania, and Sweden, and is currently acclimating to something resembling adult life at Bard College (New York). Her work has previously appeared in Taft College Literary Magazine, Gutter Eloquence Magazine, Stone Highway Review, The Commonline Journal, Unshod Quills, The Missing Slate, Everyday Poems, Literary Orphans, A Handful of Stones, and Full of Crow Poetry; more is forthcoming in Inscape.

***SOMEWHERE IN SAN FRANCISCO***  
***Shevaun Brannigan***

The watermelon sits in halves on the table.  
One half seeded, the other, the indentation from seeds.

You slice off your share, bite into the mouth of it,  
roll the seeds around on your tongue—I can  
feel this, your tongue rolling, your mouth  
sticky, your hands sticky, I can feel you.

You eat it down to the rind, its whiteness  
stark against the vibrant green, the memory of red.

***TORTOISESHELL SHADES***  
*Jen Wilson Lloyd*

In biology class I learned that if you put a tortoise in an enclosed area and wait; nine times out of ten it will go right over to the fence and push into it, testing the perimeter, exploring the boundaries of its circumstance.

It was a Tuesday night youth group. We both raised our hands and said we'd get the Bibles. A minute later while we groped for each other in the dark of the two hundred year old closet, twenty teenagers sat cross-legged on the floor of the church meeting room singing "He is the Light of the World."

The newfound smells of cologne and baby-powder-scented perfume entered our still childish nostrils. Images flashed before my eyes; magazine pictures of men and women lying on beaches, skin glistening, gazing over their expensive shades with all the knowledge of the world. There were days when my want opened up and tried to swallow everything else around me. A tortoise is cold-blooded, and it warms its body by drawing heat from the environment.

He stroked my cheek with his fingertips. He rubbed his hips against me and I reached down, exploring what I could feel through the thin fabric, and wondering if anyone would ever come looking for us. It felt like we knew what we were doing, when we kissed like that, but if you'd asked me what his name was, it would have taken me a moment.

And it could have been an hour or a day or a week or a minute before the sound of footsteps came from the hall. Wiping saliva from my mouth I picked up as many books as I could hold, tasting the dust, and followed him back out into the light. And no one said a word as we returned and bowed our heads in prayer, hunched over, seemingly protected.

*Jen Wilson Lloyd is a freelance writer and the author of the novel Witch (2005). She has worked for BBC Magazines in London, Seal Press in Seattle, and several independent record labels. She is a contributing editor for the online arts journal (m)other voices and mom to boy/girl twins in second grade.*

***TWICE***  
***Theodosia Henney***

Twice in my life  
I have been in shock  
and carried myself home.

The first after a collision  
on a back road in Guatemala—  
the mirror in the bathroom  
held the familiar blue of tiles,  
my eyes, my shirt; the stain  
dried brown over my left breast;  
the blood on my arms  
not  
my own.

The second came  
after she told me  
what he did  
to the red-haired girl.

We sat on the bed cross-legged, empty  
tea mugs bracing open  
the arrowhead space  
between our thighs and calves.  
“There's something I need  
to tell you,” she grabbed my hand,  
pressed it to her sternum—  
our heartbeats, suddenly wild, collided  
at the crux of my elbow,  
“it's about your ex.”

I believed her  
account, passed down  
from the girl who lived  
it

only months before.

the blood  
not  
my own.

*Theodosia Henney is a circus enthusiast who enjoys standing in the spaces between raindrops. Her work has appeared in over a dozen journals, including Dirtcakes, Grey Sparrow, RATTLE, and Fifth Wednesday.*

## **GETTING UGLY**

**Ellen Estilai**

“The camera never lies,” my mother would say. She would offer this bit of wisdom whenever I complained that I didn’t like a photo of myself. Like it or not, she seemed to say, this is what you look like. Deal with it.

In Mother’s case, the camera never lied. With her blue-black hair, full eyebrows, sensuous lips, and luminous skin, she looked beautiful from any angle. The camera loved her, but she didn’t return the sentiment. She may have believed in the camera’s truthfulness, but she distrusted its long-term fidelity.

It was she who lied to the camera. She feigned indifference. In group photos, she is never part of the gang. She is the one pretending to ignore the camera while playing to it, smirking, arching one of her killer eyebrows, striking a pose inside herself.

Her edgy relationship with the camera developed gradually, even as her beauty deepened. A photo of her at eleven or twelve with her younger siblings shows her laughing unselfconsciously. But as she moves into her teens and beyond, the girl in the photos is tense and tentative, alone and isolated. In her thirties, she begins to snub the camera, turning her head away from it, as if it is keeping her from more important business. In her forties, she dismisses it entirely. Like a jilted lover, the camera, ever truthful, records both her disdain and her insecurity.

Age eventually caught up with Mother. She looked fantastic well into her sixties and seventies, but in her eighties, she acknowledged that her luck had finally run out. “It happened all at once,” she said, a little bewildered, as if her face had suddenly collapsed like a soufflé.

Cameras may not lie, but mirrors do. Over the years, I have come to see myself from a limited number of comfortable vantage points. My household mirrors reflect the abridged version. I have become used to a tactful angle of light, to a respectful distance from the mirror. It’s not that the mirror lies; it’s just that I don’t allow it much to say.

Separate me from this familiar environment, and the mirror is suddenly forthcoming, unabridged. The sunny window in my daughter’s guest bathroom uncovers a hitherto unexplored highway of crows’ feet. The security camera above the bank teller’s window reveals fifteen pounds that were not there that morning in my full-length mirror. That mirror’s reflection is mercifully backlit, like the rich attorney’s elderly, ugly daughter in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Trial by Jury* who “may very well pass for forty-three/In the dusk, with a light behind her.”

Sometimes, the tactless mirror is another person’s sensibility. Years ago, when I was in my forties and hadn’t yet begun to

worry about getting old, my husband Ali, our two daughters and I made a summer trip to Vancouver to see his Iranian relatives. They, like Ali, are natives of Kerman, a provincial capital in southeastern Iran on the edge of the Lut Desert. Visiting Ali's Canadian relatives is like being sucked backwards through a wormhole into Kerman—a far easier way to get from Southern California to Kerman than the conventional method, an embolism-inducing eighteen hours in coach, a stultifying six-hour layover in Frankfurt, and a trepidatious encounter with customs officials in Tehran. To prefer the wormhole to exploring Toronto or Vancouver is to favor the exotically familiar rituals of Iranian family life over the quotidian adventures of the Western metropolis.

Never mind that I've spent twenty years in arts administration, or that I love to try new cuisines. Our priority on these Canadian visits is never cultural or gastronomic tourism. Our goal is to recreate that Kerman feeling.

I can see Stanley Park or the Royal Ontario Museum anytime, but outside of Iran, where else will I have the chance to have my favorite herb stew and buttery saffron rice lovingly prepared by an Iranian sister-in-law who may never be able to get a visa to the States? Where else will I get a front row seat for a living-room film festival featuring the latest Iranian DVDs or see my children gently teased into speaking Persian by their Iranian cousins? Where else can I pretend that I am back in Iran? I stow my travel guide and stop worrying about what to say when friends and co-workers ask how Canada was. I tell them, "I don't know. I went to Kerman instead."

One night during that trip, we ventured out to an Indian restaurant in North Vancouver with our hosts Negeen and Amin, and Negeen's mother Soheila—Ali's cousin—who had just arrived from Kerman. Sated with curried salmon and basking in that Kerman feeling, I surveyed the group, taking inventory of family resemblances and mannerisms, watching my daughters delight in the warmth of renewed relationships, savoring new Persian idioms, joining in the laughter, and feeling happy to be part of this extended family.

We were still lingering over our dinner when I heard someone say my name. It was Soheila, seated two chairs away, talking about me and my early days in Iran, twenty years before.

"Ellen was very beautiful," Soheila said in Persian.

"She still is," said her gallant son-in-law, sitting next to me.

"No," replied Soheila. "She's ugly now. As women get older, they become ugly, and their daughters become beautiful."

In the silence at our end of the table, I stared at the congealed remains of my curried salmon. Until that moment, I hadn't noticed that I was ugly. That fact had eluded me somehow. I was too mortified to say anything. I didn't know if my family had heard what Soheila had

said, but I wasn't about to ask. I just wanted the evening to be over.

"Let's go back to our house for tea," Negeen said. As Ali and our daughters—who were becoming beautiful as I was becoming ugly—drove to Negeen's in our own car, I willed myself to be silent, not to let anyone else know what embarrassment I had just suffered. Soon after we arrived, Negeen put the tea on, disappeared into her bedroom and returned with a small box which she handed to me. Inside was a gold ring in the shape of a six-petaled flower with three delicate filaments forming its band.

"I brought this back from Kerman last year," Negeen explained. "I meant to give it to you months ago, but I put it in the bank for safekeeping and forgot about it."

I knew exactly why Negeen was giving this ring to me. She felt sorry for me. She was embarrassed for both me and her mother. For an instant, I considered thanking her politely and giving it back to her, but I knew that would be rude. Refusing any gift would start a family feud. So I slipped the ring on my finger and thus became complicit in this charade. Now, I was not only ugly, I was also compromised.

In what culture would Soheila's behavior be acceptable? Surely not in Iran, I thought. In social situations, Iranians are polite and deferential. They are especially adept at *ta'arof*, an elaborate, courtly system of pleasantries and compliments which they heap on each other, one after another: "May your shadow never lessen"; "I am under your shadow"; "I am your inferior"; "No, of course you are welcome to stay for a month. Your foot upon my eye"; "You have become more beautiful"; and the one used by Iranians and Westerners alike, "You haven't changed a bit." Candor is never part of this ritual.

Over the next few days, I tried to understand what happened. I didn't know Soheila well, but nothing in our brief encounters had prepared me for this attack. Why had she said this? She had been seated close by me, but she had spoken as if I weren't there. Did she think I couldn't hear her? Did she think I couldn't understand?

Perhaps she had forgotten that I speak Persian. Or perhaps she thought I didn't catch what she was saying because she was not speaking directly to me—an unfortunate misconception many Iranians have. If they are not facing the non-native Persian speaker and enunciating purposefully, they think they will not be heard or understood.

Soheila was not the kind of chic Iranian woman one might see in Tehrangeles or the San Francisco Bay Area—the well-coifed, bejeweled, manicured matron in a shiny leather jacket, stilettos and skinny jeans. No, she was a quiet, sweet-faced, unsophisticated provincial mother of eight, in her fifties, with a world-weary smile, a woman whose long hair and simple dress had not changed for forty years. Like many small-town Iranian women who came of age in the 1950s, she married in her teens



and did not have more than an elementary school education. But it was this very simplicity that gave her words credence. She had made her pronouncement as if it were God's own truth.

It was years before I was able to talk to my family about the incident. My husband, who recently had to have this story retold to him because he didn't remember it ever happening, is sure I'm too sensitive. "This is the way Iranians talk to each other," he said, "especially in the family. No one takes it seriously."

"If that's so," I said, "why was Negeen so embarrassed that she had to give me a gold ring? If this behavior is so commonplace, the gold merchants in the Kerman bazaar must be very busy."

"Negeen probably thought that since you're an American, you might be offended," he explained. "If you were Iranian, you would have understood that Soheila was actually complimenting you. Didn't she say you were very pretty once? Didn't she say your daughters are beautiful?"

"I think you're missing something here," I said.

"Listen," he replied, "you have to remember that Iranians are forthright about things like aging and death."

"Then why do these same Iranians avoid telling someone that a relative has died?" I asked.

"Nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news," he explained.

Seriously? Isn't it bearing bad news to tell someone she's ugly?

Ali espouses the noble view that there is no shame in getting old. When he first came to the United States as a student in 1965, he was appalled at seeing older women wearing heavy makeup. He thought women should accept old age instead of trying to mask it. Iranians revere their elders, all the more so when they accept aging with grace.

He is right about Iranians' acceptance of aging. When I lived in Iran, I frequently saw old friends—usually men—greet each other after a long absence with a jocular, "You've gotten old!" But there is another side to this acceptance. The average Iranian woman's life expectancy is 72 years, versus 81 years for American women. Not so long ago, Iranians used to die much earlier. While many Iranians now live well into their 80s, many women of Soheila's generation have an early-death mentality. After fifty, some are ready to pack it in.

Their life expectancy shorter, they also expect less from life. One of Ali's nieces told me that she wished her parents in Kerman could take part in activities like those for senior citizens in the US and Canada instead of sitting in the corner contemplating their mortality. Many older Iranian women do not have the mindset, social infrastructure, or, in many cases, discretionary income that allows older middle-class American women to cultivate their own interests—tai chi, trekking in Nepal, tap dancing, or even pole dancing. While some educated Iranian women in their forties and fifties, especially in larger cities,

enthusiastically embrace yoga classes and *The Artist's Way* discussion groups, most Iranian women do not see late middle age as the gateway to new adventures. Most see it as a gateway to babysitting their grandchildren.

A few years ago, I attended a party in Palm Springs hosted by Negeen's in-laws. I had been sitting with the hosts' grandmother and elderly aunts when I got up to dance with the younger guests. The hosts provided the drumbeats while we snaked around the room in a conga line, improvising regional dances. When I sat back down, the elderly lady next to me said, in a decidedly chilly fashion, "*Khasteh nabashid* (don't be tired)," a standard pleasantry when people exert themselves. But here, that pleasantry seemed disapproving, as if I had done something unseemly—like breaking ranks with the elderly and dancing below my station. The damage already done, I got up and danced again.

A couple of years ago, Annette Bening graced the cover of the Los Angeles *Times* supplement *The Envelope*, which featured a story about her role in the movie *The Kids Are All Right*. The 52-year-old Bening looked fetching, but the high-tech color close-up revealed every line in her face. How did she let these wrinkles happen? My own skin-care routine is limited to whatever I can find at Target for which I also have a coupon, but if there's a cream out there that will banish wrinkles, surely Bening knows about it and can afford it. There probably is no such cream, and she probably doesn't care. That's the beautiful part. She doesn't need to. She looks her age, and she looks wonderful.

Later, when I saw *The Kids Are All Right*, I realized that Bening had taken not caring to a new level. Apparently, neither she nor the film's director, Lisa Cholodenko, were concerned about concealing the actors' ages, about their good sides or bad sides. Bening lets her face go slack when her character is thinking or reacting. She does not pose. She does not lie to the camera. She simply becomes the character and lets the camera do whatever it wants.

There is something right about this lack of pretense, particularly in the context of this movie. Bening plays one half of a lesbian couple who presumably should not have to care how they appear to men. Traditionally, the camera lens has given us the male viewpoint, turning women into objects, demanding that they be young and dewy, taut and supple. In this film, the camera is less a lover than an old friend, one that accepts a woman unconditionally, wrinkles and all.

Of course, my instinct has been to put off the need for that unconditional love as long as I can. When I was a junior in college, I decided to use a hormone cream under my eyes. I had no immediate

need for it; I just wanted to get a jump on this aging thing. In twenty-four hours, my eyes swelled to little slits. I put on sunglasses, hopped on my bike and pedaled furiously to the student health center. The doctor who examined me was a no-nonsense woman in her sixties with a crisp British accent. She looked at my unlined skin and asked me why I felt the need to slather myself with hormone cream.

“I just don’t want to get wrinkles,” I told her.

She leaned over me as I lay on the examining room table, her sagging, deeply creviced face just inches from mine, and looked directly into my eyes. “My dear,” she said, “one can never stave off the ravages of old age.”

Still, for years after that, I had only a hazy idea of what it would be like to grow old. I imagined an elegant, bohemian old age with little changing except my hair color. My model was a professor in the UC Davis design department who was married to one of my art professors. She was fiftyish, tall and thin, with great bone structure and long, straight, silvery hair held back by tortoise shell combs. I was sure I could pull that off. I rejected any thoughts of what my genetic heritage might hold—the wattles and gray sausage curls of my parents’ doughy, elderly aunts, their thick tree stump legs and flabby upper arms peeking out from their housedresses and flowered aprons.

Looking back now, I see that when I knew them, these great aunts were not much older than I am now—well into their sixties and seventies certainly—but they had too willingly crossed a line many years before from middle age into old age. Never having had the advantages I had—a college education, foreign travel, a job outside the home, a gym membership—they had no expectations for themselves beyond twilight years with grandchildren and perhaps a train trip to California to visit Hadley’s Date Farm or Death Valley. (For years, I eschewed those shrink-wrapped wicker trays of shrunken California fruit because they reminded me of old ladies in shapeless dresses and orthopedic shoes.)

The gold ring that Negeen gave me has aged along with me. The three delicate filaments that formed its band have, with wear, fused into one. It is ordinary now. I rarely wear it, but whenever I see it, I remember that night when I stopped thinking of myself as beautiful.

I don’t really need the ring to remind me. I have thought of Soheila’s words every day for the last twenty years. They re-adjusted my mirror. They fiddled with my inner camera, substituting my imagined self for her version of me.

I was cursed.

Growing old is not a curse, but being reminded of it every day is. Let’s say that Soheila meant no malice, that she believed there is no shame in growing older, that it’s merely a fact of life. True, there is no

shame in growing old, but there is plenty of regret. I don't know any woman of any age who does not, in some small, silent way, mourn her younger self. It would have helped my grieving process if, along with her candor, Soheila had imparted some wisdom about how to make the transition from beauty to ugliness.

People tell you how to diminish the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, but they never tell you how to get old. "It happened all at once" is not helpful. It's a cautionary tale, not a roadmap. It's not even accurate. Your aging will be a series of barely perceptible treacheries, those of your genes and those of your own making: too much sun, not enough sleep, too many negative thoughts, not enough water, too much wine, not enough blueberries.

We think of the loss of beauty as a disease, and then we blame the victim. How could she let herself get this way? How could she let her muscles sag, her expression sour? How could she allow her face to form that dreadful mask?

"You'll freeze like that," my mother told me when, as a child, I twisted my face into a rebellious mask. But of course, my face didn't freeze. Youthful faces are in constant motion, outwitting gravity and despair. Faces are much more likely to freeze at forty or fifty, along with expectations.

But the victim must shoulder some blame. We allow our failures and anxieties to tarry too long on our faces, turning us into people we barely recognize. Who has not glanced up from a department store counter and seen the face of a dour, frowning stranger in the mirror, only to realize that stranger is herself?

Whenever I begin to worry about getting older and uglier, I am reminded of a little sprite of a woman I met at an artists' reception in Twentynine Palms, California. I was a stranger there, an interloper in a tight-knit arts community, but as soon as she saw me, she reached up and gave me a hug that put me at ease. With her puff of white hair illuminated by the gallery lights, her energy, her spirit, her love of the arts, her openness to new people, she looked twenty years younger than her ninety years. She was light. She was motion.

I doubt that my daughters will ever become ugly as their own daughters grow beautiful, but if they were ever to need advice on growing old, I would say: Don't confuse getting old with getting ugly. Keep your illusions. Feel beautiful.

*Ellen Estilai received her B.A. in Art from the University of California, Davis, and her M. A. in English Language and Literature from the University of Tehran. A former executive director of the Riverside Arts Council and the Arts Council for San Bernardino County, she has taught literature and writing at the University of Tehran, Cal State Bakersfield and the University of San Francisco's external degree program. Her essay "Front Yard Fruit," originally published in *Alimentum: The Literature of Food*, is included in *New California Writing 2011* and was selected as a *Notable Essay* in *The Best American Essays 2011*. Estilai is currently at work on a memoir of her years in Iran.*



*AT THE CAFÉ DE LA PAIX*  
*Shoshana Kertesz*

The first day you took me on a date  
to the Café de la Paix  
you fed the pigeons  
because you thought they were  
reincarnated sinners

We listened to the accordion  
and I choked because I couldn't handle  
the illegitimate beauty of it  
It was a nervous cough,  
I wanted to get rid of my guilt

The paintings on the wall  
became a swirling mass in my eyes  
a kaleidoscope of horses, trees and clowns  
The dancers jumped off the walls  
to warn me of some impending loss

I just stared at them with glassy eyes  
and you stared at me,  
the woman, who is a painting herself  
a portrait of your desire  
a lady in red

I will come back as something  
worse than a needy pigeon  
I will come back as a fine duck  
roasted in a fine French oven  
before she knew what life was

*(continued)*

And just as I was contemplating my doom  
it occurred to me that time was not linear  
And the dancers danced back to their frame  
And the horses jumped back into the brush of Franz Marc  
from whence they came

And the mélange was served with croissant  
then the waiter went back to his mother`s womb  
the pigeons repented and were richly blessed  
I have not walked on the shore of the Seine  
In the spring of two thousand ten

and I never, never met you

***Shoshana Kertesz** was born in Budapest, Hungary. She started writing poetry and short stories at the age of fifteen. She studied visual arts in Budapest and moved to Jerusalem, Israel where she lived for seven years before her recent immigration to the United States. Her English poetry has been recently published in the literary magazines L.E.S. Review, Lily, Foliate Oak, and Everyday Genius. Her art has been exhibited in galleries throughout the world. More about Shoshana can be found at [www.shoshanakertesz.com](http://www.shoshanakertesz.com).*

February 7, 2013

Dear Reader,

Happy February. Welcome to the third issue of *Broad!*, Winter 2012! In some ways, this is the coming-of-age issue. It wasn't a theme we were aiming for, exactly, but in rereading the pieces behind you as I put the pages together, it seemed plain. Which works, since *Broad!* feels as though it is coming of age.

Eighteen months ago, I didn't know if *Broad!* would last past the first issue. A year ago, I didn't. But look now! We're listed on Duotrope, EWR, *Poets & Writers*. We're working to build a stronger community for our writers, readers, and editors on our website — for the female-bodied, female-identified, trans, cis, queer, straight and their allies. And "we," of course, means something different than it did last summer: we have a new staff. **Fiction editor Brittany Lynn Goss and poetry editors T.R. Benedict and Hannah Baker-Sirotty are wonderful people.** They deserve hundred thousand thanks for putting in the effort and putting up with my neuroses. So: thanks. Thank you for being awesome.

And thank you to the contributors. When I read some of the pieces in this issue, I feel again the way I did the first time I realized I was in love, like I'm on the pirate ship ride at the amusement park near my grandparents' house — the one that swings back and forth gradually, more and more vertical, and your stomach jostles for space up by your lungs only to drop when the ship swings forward, and you're terrified because you scare easy but you also love the sensation, even as you think you might puke up the candy pretzel you just downed, puke all over the heads of the people in the row before you — but you don't, and you won't, and you never do.

Other pieces made me feel like hugging the person who wrote it, or sitting back and saying nothing for a long time.

It should be noted that we received a lot of submissions for this round that I wanted to accept, but ultimately could not. To those people, I meant what I said. Please submit again. To those who have not submitted, please do; I would like to read your work.

Here in Boston, the winds are gusting snow outside my windows. Not much accumulation yet, but the forecast calls for two to three feet. Is there a storm near you? Are you safe and warm and stocked with groceries? I hope so. Oh, and don't forget batteries like I did.

Stay warm, and love,  
Heather



**SHEVAUN BRANNIGAN**      **JANNA LAYTON**  
**JOAN COLBY**              **LYN LIFSHIN**  
**SAM/ANTHA COLLIER**      **JADE LIU**  
**MELISSA DIAS-MANDOLY**      **JEN WILSON LLOYD**  
**ELLEN ESTILAI**              **MICHELLE ORNAT**  
**GRAEHOUND**                **JILLIAN RUBMAN**  
**THEODOSIA HENNEY**      **RUDRANI SARMA**  
**EVA JABLOW**                **CAMILLE THIGPEN**  
**ROBIN JENNINGS**          **CHRISTINE TSEN**  
**SHOSHANA KERTESZ**        **JESSICA TYNER**



**{ WINTER 2012 }**