Pathos is a student group at Portland State University. All writers and artists are PSU students and works were chosen anonymously by a submissions committee. To get involved or for submission purposes e-mail pathos@pdx.edu and for more information check out the website: www.pathoslitmag.com

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade Barrier</td>
<td>Anna Tanasse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan Possession</td>
<td>Avery Hansen</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me and You</td>
<td>Taylor Rozek</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the holy.</td>
<td>Saxon Warner Baird</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typewriter Redux</td>
<td>Madeline Stevens</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow Days</td>
<td>Laura Pieroni</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Jason White</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree Composition</td>
<td>Ben Jones</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter found in my pocket while</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hiding in a Hospital</td>
<td>Adam Isham</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ode</td>
<td>Alison Lutz</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX News</td>
<td>Anna Tanasse</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for jason</td>
<td>Madeline Stevens</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Felt Love Fall</td>
<td>W.L.C. Jacob</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Isn’t Amateur Night</td>
<td>B. Duke</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my lovely lovely</td>
<td>Madeline Stevens</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Goddess</td>
<td>August Benzow</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Whole</td>
<td>Anna Brown</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boo Boo Touch</td>
<td>Brandi Campbell</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthday Party</td>
<td>Madeline Stevens</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dating Game</td>
<td>Laura Pieroni</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painted Red</td>
<td>Kasey Breuier</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Treats</td>
<td>Avery Hansen</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caravan Possession

Processions of ghost lights

Descend from the trees

Gather together in columns, pulsing

And solemnly march through the night

So how does it taste, dear

The light on your eyes

Panic is licking your cold skin, darling

You watch as they march through the night

A dirge of the lost wails

The forest air weeps

Pilgrims to nowhere are glowing, sailing

Ephemeral waves of stillbirth

Repeating dreams, bitter

Have carved out their path

Origins shrouded in footprints, bloody
By sorrow they're chained to the Earth

Now how does it feel, dear

A starry ghost turns

Fixes you in its stare, raging, silent

And sees you entrapped in its gaze

You tremble like dead leaves

In merciless wind

Frozen by terror, your eyes wide, helpless

The shining one floats toward you

It sweeps through dark branches

A menacing lamp

Flicker of spidery shadows, dancing

It softly alights by your side

Possession tastes sweet, love

Your sap slithers down

Filaments wrapping around you, drinking

Your darkness consumed by the light

You burn like a candle
Hot tears fly like rays

Feeding the ghost lights your anguish, spraying

A nebula, graveyard of stars

Fling off your perfumed veils

Come be one with us

Caravan lanterns, between worlds, haunted

We drift on the velvet black tide

Whirl naked in storm clouds

Now you're one of us

Station to station, despair and dancing

A whirlwind beheld from afar

Processions of ghost lights

Descend from the trees

Swirling together in columns, hunting

We silently march through the night
Two older gentlemen are sitting at a small table outside any other street café. One is wondering where his immunity system has gone. “It slipped out the window last night, crossed the street, flopped into the sand, and got carried out to sea by way of the rising tide!”

“Oh my! That is not good.”

“No, not good indeed!”

They cough and something disappears from each others mouths. They don’t notice.

Meanwhile, a young writer who is sitting alone just tables away is distracted. An American girl; not blond, not blue-eyed, very tan, is jogging by. She looks to be the same age as the young writer he thinks; early twenty something. Her face is shielded by sunglasses and a lowered hat. Her hair is pulled back. Her stomach is exposed. Right above the waistline an outward curve has formed. It is slight and quietly moves to the rhythm of her steps as she jogs. It’s frightened. It’s trying to be destroyed. It quakes and shakes yet holds on. One more night like the two nights before and it can get its strength back it thinks.

The writer drops his pen frustratingly upon the paper he has been scribbling most recent tragedies upon. Emotionally he tries to write of emotion without using such exact and specific words like love, hate and feeling. He doesn’t believe in any of it. “It’s all an illusion created by the world”, he says. “By literature” he says. “by poets and romantics” he says. He is going to “change things” he says. He is going to be the destroyer. “like Kali” he says. He pulls out a paper design and leaves it on the table.

He is gone, out past the group of people walking on the sidewalk and spilling out into the street. They seem angry and start as four or five, have become 10 or 12, and are gaining people by every block. They will be meeting up with hundreds more just like themselves. They’ve come to warm the city, to brighten it, keep the steel fingers rough to the touch. They are making the glow of the metro. They’re keeping the signal steady and visible from afar. All are holding bags of paper, plastic or of other
material. Some carry two or three. All brows are tilted inward while all teeth remain clenched. The bags hold the words, the bindings, and the covers which feed the fire. Inside are words of worlds written once by MR., REV., PROF., DR., and others. They all spoke of rainbows, a golden path or a green city and other such places like Q. But Q has never been found, only talked about. Families broke like porcelain; lives have been taken by others hands like candy, in search of Q. The grass has been combed, the snow sifted, the sand replaced and the water filled. The word is finally seeping out. The word that causes the fire.

Such texts are no longer printed. No one will carry them, no one will buy them. There is no market. Instead, the shelves of decaying bookstores, clothing stores and restaurants owned by mother and pop are being filled with the text of others who found dissatisfaction of the search early on. Their words are beginning to replace the sides of trains and subways, are being painted across billboards and brick walls, re-engraved upon statues and tombs. The crowds move silently closer and closer. The fire chants their words.

A young man trips on a crack in the sidewalk while watching the crowd move into the distance while on his way home. A neon glow flickers upon the clouds. A small dog pees on a trash can which a passed-out body lays nearby. Televisions are off. Shades are being pulled in curiosity. Human touch is becoming stagnant in its familiarity. A woman is crying in the back of an apartment complex, two stories high. She is alone. Her partner has left, bought in, believed the full-page ad on page 3 of the Times. He left her to the overly bright bulb formed upon her kitchen ceiling to constantly expose the rotten objects of reminders. It lies in the warm hum between the refrigerator and the wall, saccharin images of the past, smoke and glass. She stops her whimpering to the sound of voices outside her door. She rushes to it, places her wet cheek upon the four or five layers of mauve and is still. Her right hand firmly pressed against the door. Her eyes close. Footsteps.

"...my second step out of bed this morning I fell down! I slipped on the wet, bathroom floor."

Sigh. Eyes are blurry then clear. Blurry, clear. Glasses. It’s a couple in the hall. One finds the key and stick in door number 122(123?) Their prize is another dark room like the rest. Their tongues are green from spirits.
They sway with the floor and fall to the ground. Moments later their howls can be heard throughout. Moths fail to fly. Paint ages with the seconds. The smooth sidewalk and the cracked concrete resist a reaction.

Everything is uninhibited. A slow, consistent oil spill begins to darken the sky. The clouds now look grey and the air is algid. Eyes and lips foretell of rain but it never comes. It remains that way stuck in transition with unsure footing...hesitant, or maybe just a tease.

"No"
"Come on baby..."
"No, no."
"Just once?"
"No, no, no"
"Please?"
"No."

A candle is lit, the electricity is cut. Windows are opened. A cigarette exhales. An old lady is putting on makeup without the use of a mirror or unnatural light. The overwhelming blue and red hues of her eye shadow and lipstick are smearing across the deep ripples of her sagging skin. It's beautiful. She is beautiful. She is more beautiful than any one else's body, laugh or smile, ink or sound at that moment.

Startled she suddenly stops at the sound of teenagers yelling out profanities. The old lady looks out her window down and smiles. It falls out and splatters across the sidewalk seeping out into the street affecting anyone who nears the loose flesh smeared in makeup.

The teens walk through it and it sticks to the soles of their shoes. They are leaving their names on road signs, bus stops and thin street shop glass in various mediums. Marker, paint or semen, their presence is undeniable and their strength is magnificent, even in its misdirection.

Bottles sit snug preparing to be emptied, while other related vices ready themselves for usage. Bugs that are uncomfortably still between thin, decaying walls will soon move with the sound of moans and screams exploding from mouths in moments of hate, anger, ecstasy, love and other things that don't exist.

She calls him then hangs up. She quickly calls again. She wants to tell him that she misses him, but she is... is she ready for this again? Does he feel? The same?
A loud folk song spits out her stereo. The sky shrinks and expands at the last sigh of daylight.

“Hello”
“Hey.”

A young man gets up from the seat by his window.
a forest of wine glass stems;
an army of crickets.
Snow Days

The day it snowed, you weren't there so she walked alone, coffee cup in hand up the streets to watch children colliding into parked cars as they sled down blanketed asphalt it was beginning to melt, already and the ice slid through her boots dampening her socks but she didn’t mind, and kept walking making sure to step on only perfect snow turning to see the deep scars she made on the pure white arm of the sidewalk and you said, and you said, Maybe I'm just the leaving kind of guy across a warbled phone line and she thought maybe it's better you're not there to piss your name into the snow in the only cursive you bother with like when you stopped the car for her she slid her hands into your socks so she could throw snowballs without the burn at you, hard in the center of your retreating back.
November

The thing about the trick is
Didn’t I love you enough
I want you to spin
she said
to me, just like that, yes,
crying then in the arms of her friend,
so just take a drop, one at the tip of your tongue or
I didn’t want to see him in the jail again
both of them on the floor
wrapped around each other
amid the wails and crashing of my manhood so
maybe I can inject it into your eye if you want,
but spinning to me
in this place
is the goal, and the method isn’t as important so long as
at my feet has never been a place I’ve needed you to go
it’s now itching over my skin
you realize it’s a trick, what I’m saying to you, right now
and a year with this knowledge of my true self
where you’re sitting on velvet
so I can feel Dad looking at me again
flicking a lighter ‘cause your lungs still
have some distance left to travel
still, the black phone at his face
down the street from
his too stern jowl boring through the glass
has killed me
like you wouldn’t believe
where we are, where I lived at 12,
with Grampa and
so accusingly
that smell from the garage but he wouldn't say what it's all about

and I have nowhere to go as his eyes burn right into me.

then the belt came down

even if my body wakes each day and made me scream November.

and there's no reason why.
Letter found in my pocket while hiding in the Hospital

I slid to the floor next to the battered locker and decided to search my pockets for clues about my arrival in the hospital. I found dust, a broken pencil stub, and a letter in what seemed my handwriting. In the flickering light from the main room I began to read it.

* 

I wanted to call you and tell you what me and Cherynn saw. I would have picked up the phone and said, "Hey this Ion (your ex-boyfriend, I know) I saw the most horrifying and ominous things today.", but I can’t pick up the phone today. Or probably tomorrow for that matter, for it has turned to stone, crusty clumpy stone.

Me and Cherynn were walking down Fillet Street (why is not important now) and we saw this girl change. Her arms became giant blocks and she fell forward, and then turned into these weird blocky shapes. I got lost in pondering for a split second about the permanence of the human form in this new turn in biology. Then we both realized how scary it was and shared this surprised, scared look on our faces, and both took off in the opposite directions, me through the park.

In the middle of the park was this huge ominous thumb sticking out of the grass. Fully formed and detailed and not clumpy like the girl, and I couldn’t help but think about how much more obtuse could the universe be at this point.

So I thought about safety of home, comfort of phoning you. But now the stone thing is catching in the already inanimate sector. So I realize my options are few at this point, I may as well go a party.

*
My feet seem to be melting into the pavement, but looking down I realize it's only a sewer grate sucking at my feet. Then huge buzzing, screaming birds start swarming at me. Then focusing I realize it was a torrent of cars with no use for my safety. Screaming heads in every window, raging against inconvenience. I shuddered in their endless noise. Then I had a dream, but it was a weird kind of dream that just materialized out of thin air in front of me, helicopters with scarecrow men piloting them, flames vomiting out of the helicopter snouts coating the buildings and cars in waves of molten aggression., then a thousand years of silence, a star filled sky, wolves pulling burned bones of ashy dirt. I was pulled onto the hood of a car, my feet pulled off, me screaming, and trailing blood. The driver looked dismayed but unapologetic.

* Then it was a blur for awhile. Then I was moving in a bed down a glowing hallway. Some story about my feet being sucked down the sewer kept getting brought up. I wondered if my feet sang as they swam with the fungus and octopi on their journey out to sea. Wait, feet can't sing. The hallway seemed to stretch for miles, doctors wearing scary clay faces in the baby ward, a line of coffins being pushed the opposite way, a man with a tube covering his mouth, his hands grasping the air, screams of the burn ward, bottles filled with preserved eyes. The doctors discovered that I didn't have insurance so they attached this rickety wheel thing to my feet and sent me out the door.

* I considered going home and masturbating while listening to cartoons, but I decided my new wheel feet would be a blast at the party. But things started to get strange on the walk or I guess my drive over there. Buildings would vanish for a couple of seconds and these new strange shaped buildings and bridges would appear in their place. Then they would vanish and everything would be back to relatively normal. I could see groups of men on horseback. The horses looked sickly and the men seemed to be wearing owl masks, but all pulpy and meaty like the masks had melted on. Windows on houses seemed to melt right in the middle forming a bubble that looked like a surprised face.
Of course the party didn’t have handicap access so I had to crawl up the stairs. I began to regret the entire journey a couple minutes later. The party was a nightmare. I mean literally some nightmare reality had attached to it, contorted it, and not in a way that was fun to dance to. A mountain of beer cans had tipped over on this moaning old lady; she was reaching her broken limbs out pleadingly. Some joker was masturbating and shitting on the toilet like the bathroom door was closed. A couple was trying to dance to a multiplication/division prog band in 78/34 time, their ankles snapping like twigs. The record slingshotted of the player and beheaded the male. I decided to jump out the window for safety.

Home wasn’t much better. My apartment structure had become an ancient stone monument from another time, and the elevator didn’t work. I wanted to steal a car and come to you, but all the cars in the street are on fire. So I sitting tottering on my wheel unit wonder what I can do with the rest of my day off, but I’ll sit here writing this letter till I can think of something better to do.

The lights began to sputter more and more as I reached the end of my letter. I reached between my pant leg and the top of the sock. My feet from right above the ankle were some alien material, definitely not the flesh I was born with. Maybe I had come in for a reconstructive surgery on my feet. It didn’t seem to getting any clearer as I sat in the steadily increasing shadow.
ode

joyce
eliot
please men,
gather round my mind
dance in through my ears
swim in these
dirty veins to
the fingers that
hold the pen
and trace
something
beautiful on this paper
that expects
just nonsense.
hughes, kiss sylvia
on this sheet.
in your mind you are a bundle of
army scarves, an orange lamp,
gaudy buttons on a velvet coat.
a heart doodle, felt tipped pen.
you are a constantly orgasming
tube of glitter in a five-year-old’s hands

i am an ink stain shaped like jesus,
a pale, thin orphan of a doll.
i am a tissue box
catching your mess in my floating cotton palms

we are siamese twins together,
we trade sicknesses and cold sores like tea bags.
we are licking cats cleaning each other
in a silent house. i get my body
confused with yours.

we sit through the winter together,
struggling under a broken polka-dotted umbrella,
a thin blue blanket,
a fogged up bus window,
an empty porch with christmas lights
that used to be red.

it’s dark out at four-thirty,
you’re talking about post-modernism,
the ceiling fan and i wait for summer,
the sweat on the small of my back.
I Felt Love Fall

Something slipped, deep inside
I can’t tell if it was a gradual
Slide, or if it dropped all at once, down.

I think it was pinned
Between my spleen and heart.
It was a grape-fruit sized tumor or
Maybe a golf ball-size nuisance.

Either way it falls, it slipped before
I truly realized it was in me.
I thought I was holding it in my arms,
Outside of my self.
The rookie is called Rookie because this is his first feature and he’s in no place to be saying what he’s saying, saying threats of going to fag films and saying it’s not him that wrote “still dripping” in the script and saying he’s not the one that lubed that little bitch up.

These things he’s telling are right after he’s dropped Thumbelina for the third time in a row, this time bouncing her fat-head off the bed and onto the already cracked glass of the hotel-room mirror, her naked pear-stub of a body glowing in a greased bloody shine. But tough Thumbelina stands and brushes shards off her tiny self, her toughness coming from her former title as heavyweight champion of the dwarves-tossing-dwarves contest. She won the belt the same night she was hand-picked by the director and wears it before each take.

Rookie doesn’t ask if she’s ok until the director wipes her off with the one dry towel found, the rest in the room still damp with previous guest’s fluids, and when Rookie does, she waddle-trots to the bed’s edge and swings herself up like the angel-wings strapped to her back aren’t nylon. She tosses him a tennis-ball tube and a bicycle-pump and says stalling is only going to make it worse.

Where the bed is smells more than the caked baking-powder on the carpet and all the trash cans are filled with empty bottles of hand-sanitizer and cut-off pony tails from between Thumbelina’s legs. She takes a big as possible breath before folding herself, stumpy-knees-to-chest, inside a gator-skinned suitcase sitting in the plastic-wrapped center of the mattress.

The director yells action and in comes Rookie, red-faced and still warm, trying to be sexy without lip-licking at the camera, cradling her out of the suitcase and setting her down like a flat-backed-turtle while he stands knees-bent at the edge. This the only position that fits their organs, he does as he told and places his fingertips on the thumb-rest set of bullseyes tattooed at the bottom of her bloated gut. They’d done a rehearsal with Rookie on his back but he’s so tall that an on-top Thumbelina had
nothing her stubby-arms could reach, nothing to stop her from toppling over lop-sided head first.

Hands gripped, Rookie rocks back and forth, grinding and never finding rhythm, not even when Thumbelina moans patterns, not even when she heel-hooks and moves his hips for him. He jack-hammers and pounds until on-camera bruises form on her thighs, and when he tries for real sexy and rubs her armpit stretch-marks in a trail up to her mouth, sticking his sweaty finger inside, she gnaws his pinky nail and cinches her tiny pelvis.

She whispers you're fucking professionally now, so act like it. He gives nothing new, nothing but cork-popping sounds that pop louder when Thumbelina holds her chub-hidden ankles to stop a cramp, Thumbelina finally rolling her eyes at the director until he holds behind the camera a flashcard that has “drop the bomb” written in capital letters. Rookie shouts and barks, his legs stiffening as Thumbelina stands and pulls him down on the bed, Thumbelina never once having sucked anything out of anyone’s body, instead leaning over and finishing him off with her baby-fat hand, saying here it comes baby, here you come.

When he does, she bobs to the left and bends her wrist, aiming the cobra-spit stream of milky drips intended for her in a guided splash across Rookie’s neck and face. At first he heaves like he’s giving birth from his mouth, tongue-scraping in a panicked, smearing roll over the plastic, the director laughing and saying that in the industry, that is what is called a crotch sneeze. But then Rookie finger-mops the pool from the bottom of his neck and says it’s nothing. He says he’s too much of an artist to talk about his own juice as disgusting. He winks and says it’s a part of him. He says he loves it too much.

Thumbelina tells him that’s something that takes a while to get over, but it will. She says you just have to wait until you start dreaming about all the children you haven’t had.
my lovely lovely

there was a boy who was not a boy
but an old man feeding pigeons,
an omniscient narrator spewing tulips.

and this boy, who sometimes
smelled of peppermints and
sometimes tasted of stained glass,
wandered around parking garages
while a little girl waited
inside her mother's closet,
next to a blue wedding dress
with dreadful descending rhinestones.

and when this boy who was not a boy
found this girl, she could not breathe
except the pretend cigarette smoke
that is breath in the cold.

and she could not eat
except the crooked line of his spine
and those mad stumbling fantasies
like flying machines and miniature roses.
August Benzow

The Goddess

I stand before the naked hour
all broken up with desire, fearful
as the tides of darkness lick the doorway
of the empty room where once a stranger sat
and wept in between strange fits of laugher,
her eyes all bloody with tears as she wrote the first line
on the page that would become her life.

There is no pain in recalling these dead memories,
like dessicated leaves that a November wind harries
before winter’s raging fever; there is no pain in being here
in this desecrated temple, meticulously piecing together
the shattered idol, a grotesque rendition of the thing (object)
upon which love grinds its teeth, that thirsty beast
that gently drinks our blood with sweet commingling.

And now I smile as my solitude flagellates my exposed skin.
I am almost god-like in my submission. If only you could see
me, sitting here half-swallowed up by the azure eventide, swimming
in the ghostly vestiges of your pen’s arcing grace while I struggle
to resurrect your face: you would laugh so loud that this vain temple
would be driven to dust and I would still sit in its ruins, chained to some
stone across which her hand had passed as you said,
“When you suffer I know you exist.”
I am whole

I am whole

My heart is on fire

but still I am whole.
Brandi Campbell

The Boo Boo Touch

Lilly slid her slender fingers down through her pajamas to clutch a handful of thighs, gathering them like a ball of silly-putty, pushing them toward the special sweet spot between her legs. From there she laid on her tummy and bopped up and down like an ocean buoy, pushing her fanny in the air and back down again, pressing her sweet spot against her warm thighs in a delightful explosion of secret gems and colours. She must be a very special girl to have this special feeling, and how lucky was she to be five years old! I am Lilly!, she thought loudly to herself at the very end, and then, recovering from the whole thing, quickly fainted into the land of dreams and nod.

She found new and fun places to do it all over the house. She rubbed against the ottoman end where it came to a point of it’s cubical shape. She curled her little fingers around the other side and pumped-pumped-pumped until she got sleepy and needed a nap. Mommy was in the other room vacuuming as Lilly finished while watching Sesame Street, curling up with her velvy blankie after the fun was done. When she was alone in her room, she would lay on the corner of her mattress with the point between her legs. She didn’t even need to bounce on top of the thighs for that one. The point tingled her sweet spot to excitement, catering to her every whim and motion, as each breath she took was alive and beautiful. It was better than chocolate tootsie-pops.

She would imagine McGuiver with her, or Uncle Jesse from Full House. She would giggle to herself as she bounced on her boo boo and pretended that these two were pushing on her boo boo with their boo boo. Uncle Jesse’s boo boo was with her in her dreams, rubbing against her, hugging her with his arms and giving her sweet faerie kisses. Sometimes she used her little stuffed alien doll from the Space Jam McDonald’s kids pack to bounce on top of instead of her hands. Sometimes she used her little black channel changer, but handfuls of thighs were the best.
Lilly had just gotten over chicken pox a year previous, faint scars still sprinkling her body, all over her legs and on her special part, like candies on a cupcake. She had to go to the hospital because the boo boos were so bad, and her mommy said her fever was too high. She was there for a very long time, and mommy and daddy cried. The owies left red marks, then slippery grey areas, and then little circle scars on her special parts. Her special parts were covered in boo boos, so then her entire special part was a big boo boo. It’s new name became boo boo, even when it got better, because it was covered in boo boos for so long that the name stuck. She was fine now though, and her boo boo forgave her for all of the pain from chicken pox, by giving her a new joy every day, bopping up and down.

“That’s dirty dirty dirty! I hate that Demi Moore and her naked picture! She has no respect for herself!” Lilly heard her mommy yell as she awoke one morning. She got up to see what Mommy was looking at— an old picture of the pregnant lady who showed her belly when Lilly was very little. Mommy was cooking breakfast and staring at the TV on the kitchen counter.

“She has NO respect for herself, that Demi Moore! She’s a horrible example for the kids!” Lilly’s mommy yelled as she piled some bacon and eggs on Lilly’s plate and stared at the old magazine picture shown on the kitchen TV. Lilly squeezed her thighs together even as she poked her fork into her first bite— felt the special sweet pumping like a nice little secret as she chewed the fluffy eggs inside of her mouth.

“Chew with your mouth closed, sweetie, it’s not ladylike to keep it open. You want to be a lady, don’t you?” said Lilly’s father, poking his head over the newspaper. She gulped her bolus bits and kept her special secret to herself, now chewing with her mouth closed. She didn’t know exactly why, but somehow she felt like a very bad girl for doing the boo-boo pump next to Mommy and Daddy— she waited until they left the room to bounce up and down with her hands between her legs at the kitchen table, and then sniffed the sweet sweaty scent on her fingers after it was done. She sipped her orange juice as she looked at the lady with the swelling belly, shiny skin and big boobies, and decided that the boo-boo touch should definitely,
definitely definitely remain her special secret.

It was Lilly's first year at school, and she got to be the Native in the Thanksgiving play, because Mommy was one-sixteenth Blackfoot, and Lilly had big brown eyes that Mrs. Kunes said looked like they came from a doe. She got to wear a hat with feathers on it, and carry a basket of corn ears and cucumbers-- how she loved their shapes. She was late in the show, because she was in the bathroom stall touching her boo boo to the toilet seat. The night before, she came up with a new name for it-- the Boo Boo Touch. She had gotten very good at it lately, and whenever she was sad, she would think to herself; it's okay, we'll do the boo boo touch when we get home, and everything was better.

Finally someone called her in the bathroom, "Lilly! You're on!" She was nervous and got stage fright from all of the pilgrims, and all of the parents in the audience, chewing gum-gum and looking at her, mommy with the camcorder and the little red camcorder light staring the hardest, and Daddy smiling proudly, extending his neck to see over the crowd. She stumbled and mangled her lines. It was okay though, because she did the boo boo touch right after she got home and brushed her teeth for bed.

In school the next week, a police man and a nurse came in to talk to the class about good touching and bad touching. They had plain white dollies and sticks, and were poking and prodding them where the boo boo touch felt the best. Lilly wondered if the dollies liked the way the sticks felt. She would have. But, the police man and nurse both told her that the dollies thought the sticks were very bad, and Lilly felt suddenly very bad about the boo boo touch, worse than when Mommy yelled at the Demi lady on TV.

"God said that's very bad too," said Brianne on the bus as Lilly rode home, "Those places where the dollies were being touched are very bad places, and God will punish us for them," said Brianne as Lilly listened.

"But how does God know?" asked Lilly.

"Oh, you don't know. My mommy said you don't go to church. That's why
you don't know that God sees everything. You might go to Hell for that too.” Lilly was very quiet for the rest of the ride home. She wasn’t sure what Hell was. Mommy never mentioned anything about that.

When she got in the door, her mommy was pounding steaks with a cleaver, and Lilly sat at the kitchen table to watch the TV that was on.

“Mommy,” she asked.

“Yes honey?”

“Does God see everything we do?”

“Yes, God is everywhere honey.”

“But God won’t tell on us for bad things, right?”

“No, of course not, but God talks to Santa, and if you’re a bad girl, you might not get any presents.”

Mommy giggled nicely and patted Lilly on the head, handing her a glass of chocolate milk, and said,

“And Santa might tell Mommy and Daddy the bad things you do too, but you’re such a good girl, you don’t need to worry about that sweetie.”

“But she did worry about it. She worried about it for the rest of the night and had bad dreams about it. She woke up the next morning and wasn’t able to finish her breakfast all the way, and had trouble concentrating on her school work because if it. Would Santa tell Mommy and Daddy about doing the boo boo touch? Was it okay to do it, as long as she didn’t tell other people about it, or was it bad for even her to know? Finally she prayed again and made a promise with God and Santa-- Guys, I promise not to do the boo-boo touch for the whole month of December for Christmas, as long as you don’t tell. So that was settled-- she could do the boo-boo touch as much as she wanted, pounding her boo-boo against her tiny fists as she laid on her
tummy, until December came.

The flurries got heavier and the thousand twinkling lights on the houses lit up the streets. Mommy put the Christmas tree up and decorations on the walls. Carolers strolled about outside, and Lilly’s sweet feeling wouldn’t go away. She tried staying up really late so that she would be so tired, she couldn’t even think about the boo boo touch when she went to sleep? But Mommy and Daddy made her go to sleep at eight o’clock, every night. Every night she laid on her tummy. The pumping got more and more powerful until she couldn’t take it anymore, and had to push out the sweetness with her hands, smooshing out all of the goodness until the very burst end. She asked God to forgive her. She put her little dimpled hands together and prayed like she saw on TV, and like the other kids in school talked about, to ask God to stop the boo boo touch. She felt yucky and dirty and hated the boo boo touch very much.

One day on the weekend, Mommy took Lilly to the mall to sit on Santa’s lap. His deep voice and red velvet gloves made her very nervous, and she didn’t dare do the boo boo touch when she sat on his lap. He had very stinky breath and large craters in his face, but Lilly was too scared to say that she didn’t like him, even though she didn’t like him, didn’t like him at all.

“Why hello little girl. What is your name?” he asked with yellow teeth that looked like little pieces of corn.

“I...I...I don’t know,” said Lilly, wishing she could ask him if he was going to tell Mommy and Daddy about the boo-boo touch. This man watched her doing the boo-boo touch. He knew that she’d been bad, because he’s seen her sleeping and awake, in bed pushing on her boo-boo. She was so embarrassed about it that she started to cry, right there, on Santa’s lap. Mommy ran up and removed her, and the camera ladies gave her a sucker as they left.

“It’s too bad you couldn’t tell Santa what you really wanted,” said Mommy on the car ride home, “He probably would have given it to you if you did,
honey.” But Lilly didn’t care about that. What she wanted was for Santa not to tell. Why did he have to tell? What was going to happen when he did tell?

There were five more little chocolates to eat in the calendar on the wall before it was time to open presents for Christmas. She worried and was very nervous leading up to it. She planned to stay up on the final night to meet him, but the sweet feeling was so strong she had to do it the hardest on Christmas Eve, pushing against the side of her bed, and this time, she accidentally let out a loud “Oh!” at the very end. It had to stop, but she couldn’t! It was so tiring and stressful that she fell asleep right on Christmas Eve after the boo-boo touch, and didn’t wake up again until the morning when she smelled corned beef and hash frying. She got up very quietly and thought that maybe, if she pretended not to notice the presents under the tree or talk about Christmas at all, Mommy and Daddy wouldn’t notice either. But it didn’t work. She walked into the kitchen, and right away, Mommy said,

“Merry Christmas Lilly! Time to open presents!” Daddy ate the corned beef and hash sitting in his big papa chair while she tore through them and Mommy smiled with the big camcorder on her shoulder. She went through her stocking and received trinkets and baubles galore, with chocolate and other candies too. She went through her presents, first slowly from the nervousness, but then rapidly tore through them as they got more exciting and she thought that maybe, just maybe, the praying worked! She got a new pink Barbie car and a mini trampoline! She got an easy-bake oven—what a neat machine! She got fake tattoos to go on the skin with water, and even a little make-up table. The little plastic hair brushes looked like the perfect size and shapes to press against her boo-boo at night, and oh! The exploding jump ropes of juniper and gold! Hula-hoops moving a-round and a-round and a-round her waist, as she stepped in and out of them, penetrating the hole with vigor! Little pound puppies fresh from the tummy of the pound mother, yelping and barking in Lilly’s imagination. She was free, free, FREE from Mommy and Daddy finding out! She swam about in her candy spilled all over the floor, happily relieved from all of the tension. That was, until...
A small red box was hidden in the very middle of the tree, almost underneath the red skirt-- a tingling, gleaming little tight box of surprises, excitedly awaiting Lilly’s little fingers to glide across the opening and slip through the front. It had thin silver snowflakes on top. Each one mockingly represented a special sweet explosion of fulfillment with six sides of happiness. Lilly was in very big trouble for being such a naughty, naughty girl. She looked at the box and didn’t move for a little while.

“Open it up, Lilly! It’s for you!” exclaimed her mommy. Lilly imagined inside of her head a note that said:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jensen, Lilly has been doing the boo boo touch for the past year. Every night after you give her a kiss and hug goodnight, she lays on her tummy and bops up and down on her thighs until the good feeling gets so sweet and tart that she falls asleep. She even does it in December, when Christmas is near.

Her hand shook as she moved it between the plastic branches, thin rectangles of green tree-leaves sliding across her small dimpled digits. The jungle of ornaments sparkled in her eyes, as her proud parents stood by watching with gleams in their eyes, honest and humble in their work, to as see such a beautiful little girl open her gift on this special day. She was so sad, thinking about disappointing them. Slowly she inserted her fingers, gently gliding across the slit to reach the secret inside. She opened the top, and removed the tissue paper covering the present inside her box...

Inside were six metal bangle bracelets, each of a differing colour. There was no note at the bottom. There was no letter. There was no secret revealed. Lilly jumped up, placed the little bangles around her wrist, and jangled them with pride, chanting, “Merry Christmas everybody!”
Dating Game

The bell rings and he’s reciting the familiar preambles
keep it clean, girls, a cool clean fight
with your eyes and thighs
oh, but they’re careening out of control
lacking that subtle fear of heights that hinders fallers
and now they’re going with eyes tied and hands closed
in taffeta uniforms
and lace gloves
and they cross, criss-cross sun dried thighs
and cut their neck
line lower and lower
until they’ve reached the ground, sprouted root
in some guy’s eyes
such a sight for sore hearts
trying to decipher if its lust or disgust
that runs their hands
and the crowds are gawking
at raised knees and swinging breasts
One ends up on top
and the ref is counting to ten
the whistle blows, as she blows
and that’s what wins the fight.
As the loser walks off,
man on her arm
the winner gasps
for a rematch.
The bathroom, the kitchen. The bathroom, the kitchen. Which one? Traditionally, most people would choose the bathroom because it would allow for easier cleanup. Call it one last act of compassion or thoughtfulness in an act committed out of selfishness. The kitchen . . . or the bathroom? She’d always loved the kitchen. It was big. Not huge, but big for a kitchen. Nice hardwood floors, marble countertops, a gas stove. Sage colored walls. She had picked out the paint when she and Reed had gotten married. He had told her to do whatever she wanted to do with the kitchen because that was her room. At the time, she had been happy to oblige. She loved kitchens. She loved what you could create in there, the tastes, the smells. Looking back now, she realized what he had meant: it was her room. It was the room she belonged in. It was where he wanted her, where he wanted to keep her. Barefoot and pregnant, in front of the stove.

And that was what she had done. She had done just what he asked, what he demanded of her. After three months of being married, she had gotten pregnant. It wasn’t planned, not in the least. It wasn’t in her plans. She had wanted to work. To go out and have a career. She hadn’t been sure what that career would be, but she was young (all of 19) and she could figure it out along the way. Three months after the happiest day of her life and her plans were ruined by a stick that she had peed on. She and Reed had discussed it (if you could call it a discussion, as it had mostly been a one-sided conversation, with Reed being the one-side) and agreed to keep it. Honestly, she wasn’t sure. She wasn’t sure she was ready to keep the parasite. Something that would feed off of her day after day. Something that would make her body deform and contort into something she wasn’t familiar with. And when it came out it would be there, screaming and crying and begging for attention. She couldn’t do it. She knew that. She wasn’t ready, not for this.

But they had kept it and nine months later she gave birth to a baby girl. All eight pounds five ounces of her. The first time she had laid eyes on her she had fallen in love with her. It was so clichéd, but it was true. She
was beautiful. And within the first month of Kaylin being born, it was de-
cided that she would stay home with the baby. Kaylin was the first of three,
all born within five years of each other. She wasn’t sure how that had hap-
pened. Even though Kaylin was the love of her life, her pride and joy and
reason for being, she had only wanted her. She hadn’t wanted any more.
But they kept coming. The pregnancy tests just kept coming back positive
and they inevitably ended up keeping it. She couldn’t understand it. Grant-
ed, she wasn’t on birth control (Reed didn’t believe in it), but they did use
condoms. It confused her until a couple of years ago, when she walked into
the bathroom and saw Reed poking holes into the condoms. She had been
furious. He had known that she didn’t want anymore children and there he
was, sitting on the toilet with a sewing needle, poking holes into his rub-
bers. He had looked up and given her a look. Not a sheepish one, not one
that said that he was ashamed. Nothing of the sort. He looked at her and he
looked blank. Absolutely and utterly blank. No emotion, just a “what the
hell are you looking at?” expression. Yes, she had been furious. But what
could she do? Other than not letting the bastard inside of her which wasn’t
hard seeing as how he was, well, a bastard. Eventually, the freeze-out
yielded results: Reed gave in and let her get birth control.

Ten years. She was 29 years old now. A mother of three. A house-
wife. What had happened to her? What had happened to the outgoing,
hardworking, industrious young woman? She had had plans. She was going
to go places, do things, see things. Instead, she was here. In Raleigh, North
Carolina. In an empty house that at one time she was sure she loved.

Silence. She wasn’t sure she could remember a time when the
house was this silent. She wished she knew where her kids were, where
Reed had taken them, but for some reason there was a part of her that
didn’t care. Yes, there was a part that wanted to track him down, beat
him with something heavy and hard and take the children, but there was
a larger part of her that simply didn’t care anymore. She was tired. Look-
ing in the bathroom mirror, she realized that she didn’t even recognize the
person reflected in it. This woman looked worn. Fragile, even. Definitely
older than 29 . . . Her curls were limp, her eyes sagged, her mouth drawn
and tight. What happened to her? The thought brought tears to her eyes,
the hopelessness of the situation, of what her life had become, of what she
had let it become. It was pitiful. She was pitiful.
She looked down at the kitchen knife that she held in her right hand. She was already in the bathroom. Funny, she didn’t remember going to it. It was as if she had woken up and there she was, in the bathroom. Maybe that was what she should go with: the bathroom. The room that wasn’t hers, the room that wasn’t made for her, the room that Reed hadn’t designated as anything. Just a bathroom. A place with candles and a claw footed bathtub, cream colored paint coating the walls. Her African violets. Yes, the bathroom. But she wasn’t going to be courteous.

Tightening her grip on the knife, she ran the blade down her left forearm. Watching the blood drip down, she lifted her arm and began smearing the walls, painting them red. She knew that he would return home. It was in him. This house, this place. It was his and his alone and he would return to it and she was going to be sure that he remembered her. She would haunt this place, if not with her ghost then with her blood. This cream colored palace painted red. She sliced her right arm, making an even deeper gash so that the blood flowed more freely. Dropping the knife, she ran her arms along the sink, the tub, the rug that covered the tiled floor, everywhere that she could think of, any place that wasn’t already touched. This was hers now. Amazing how fuzzy everything was turning. So much blood everywhere. For some reason, it was almost comical to her. Laughing, she leaned up against the wall and began to slide down. She was so tired. Staring at the floor, at her pink arms, she lifted her index finger and dipped it in one of the pools of blood and began to write.

When Reed returned, he would find the house silent, still. He would wonder where his wife was, and once he found her, he would enjoy telling her that he was in fact leaving her for that cute little flight attendant that he had met on his previous flight to France. He would look everywhere, stopping at the open door to the bathroom, not sure where to focus his gaze; at the walls, the sink, the body of his wife slumped on the floor. Or at the large, red, bold lettering that spelled out \textit{mine}. 
Spring Treats

Beautiful couples bounce

Smooth skin gliding down the street

Like fertile petals on the wind.

My eyes stick to bare shoulders,

Peel away with hot syrupy discontent

Lids, tongues, sensitive inner taste buds

Licking old pungent wounds

Bouncing from petal to petal

From back to naked back, perfumed walls.

I’m tongue-tied by barbed wire,

Choking on poorly aimed smiles, and starving.