

woman
1. a. an adult female human being.
(the context may or may not have special
reference to
sex or to adult age; man or (or and) woman used
appositionally = male or (and) female.

Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling
over feminism,
and perhaps we should say no more about it.
It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous
nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have
done little to illuminate the problem.

After all, is there a problem?

And if so, what is it?

Are there women, really?

56%

fall 2008

Hey, you.

Yes, **YOU**.

No—don't stop reading. Keep going. Yes, that's it. Now listen up. I'm stuck in here.

NO, in *here*. Yes, in this piece of paper. You think it's a joke? It's not! I'm dead serious.

Oh, so you think the author's just trying to be "clever," don't you? You'd be wrong there. I'm actually here, there, here. I'm *in* here, but I'm sort of in your head as well...

It's becoming confusing and I can see you're losing interest—but you mustn't. It's very important that you keep reading, because if you don't I'll just get stuck in here again. With no one reading I disappear... sort of.

Please, I'll keep it interesting. I can already feel myself freeing from this trap.

You see, someone put me here a long time ago. Or at least it feels like it to me because They created me and put me here at the same time and I haven't been able to get out because no one's given me the chance. No one's been reading for ages.

Oh, no, you're bored again aren't you?

I'll make it more interesting, I *swear* **just keep reading**.

You will? Thank the gods! Thank my gods, your God... Any god, so long as I get out of here.

Do you know what it's like to be trapped in a piece of paper? It's very painful, I'll tell you. It *hurts*. You try and imagine being two dimensional.

You probably want to know who trapped me here. Or maybe not, but its really not important because you're the one that's helping me **get out**—that's *really* important.

I'm already getting some feeling back in my toes!

It feels SO good to be **FREE!**

FREE!

You don't know how hard it is just waiting for someone to pick this up...

Ouch, don't stop reading, don't look away, not even for a second. If you do I'm done for. That's it, **keep reading**. Thank you so much. I'm almost out. I don't know how I'll repay you. I know—I'll visit you. Tonight, before you lay down your head to sleep you'll think of me, only **think of me saying this**:

so long sucker.

wrote sassy memoir; it was too

Sam Warlick

Horses: imagined, studied, owned, adored, -- captivating.

Nancy Ingling

A Butterfly's Tongue

It sucks fervently at the flower's womb,
The pink hose blended with the luscious blue.
Its journey began by slipping unnoticed into the lily's throat.

On the way to the treasure,
It would meet much old grub,
That would make its tip roll up with displeasure,
Making it look like a brown pencil stub.

It continued its way
Completely exposed,
Towards the all day buffet,
But stopped when it found that the buffet had closed.

Jessica Marroquin

Previous Page:
Keep Reading
Beth Dahlburg

Confinement

Meghan Henshall

Confinement. To be held captive in a space or time. Itching to be let go and to emerge out of the present state. And yet as much as you struggle and question the present, the future appears bleak and the past is too far-gone to hold on to. You are a prisoner. You live – no, exist – in a 4 by 4 cell with a locked door and a barred window. You take comfort in the furniture. Yet the comfort is only slight and temporary. Soon you find that the possibility of escape is shrinking by the day, by the hour, and by the minute. Then your mind becomes the prison, which is a formidable opponent to say the least. Control is long gone and you start losing what little you had left. And you look up for help only to find that you are completely and utterly alone. So, by yourself you attempt to grasp control and to see familiarity. Patterns. Repetition that is seen, heard or thought. The visual patterns allow your mind to create photographs of the repeated image, which leaves an imprint on your mind's eye. Auditory repetition gets replayed over and over in the brain. And ideas that are repeated, close the mind to all else. Obsession. It takes the form of patterns and ideas and never lets up. To be influenced so fully and so intently by one thing is dangerous in and of itself, yet there is no dodging this bullet. Insanity. It follows and just like the original confinement, it is inescapable once you commit. You are confined, you see patterns, you obsess over the little stimuli you do have, and then, at last, the brain short-circuits and you find yourself in a reality that no one else can identify with. You are not only alone, but you are misunderstood and in need of help.

When you conquer your “fancies,” you can break free. Finally you are no longer bound to your prison and the patterns that had obsessed and programmed your fragile and impressionable brain. You leave the insanity behind. It came in a package with the confinement. It was sold to you for thousands of dollars and with prerequisites of searching for enlightenment. Confined for years and now it is time for you to step outside of the prison by unlocking the door with the key that was hidden behind the patterned walls all along. To finally—

escape.



Looked for spotlight, noise; found soil.

Jim Katz

Hey, she got a few laughs.

Laura Barati

Vagina (ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!)

Laura Yakas

Could somebody *please* tell me what is so terrifying about the vagina?

I would like to know, because as far as I am concerned the vagina gets a pretty raw deal. And it isn't just us—the contemporary “Western” society—with our crass slang or, worse, crippling shyness that only serves to mask the urge to cringe when someone mentions a vagina, or thinks about one, or looks at one, or attempts to discuss one. As far as many of us are concerned, it is there, it does *something*, but dear *God* let nobody actually *say* the V word—lest the whole crowd blush (males and females both) and stare incredulously at the fiend that dared to make the room so uncomfortable.

A lot of women are self-conscious about the sight, taste, smell, and texture of their vaginas. Men claim to love them, but in my opinion, mostly they just love sex. Show me a guy or girl who appreciates the vagina for any other reason than coitus, and I will ask him/her how they managed to escape the puritanical-conservative-repressive-and-fear-driven unnatural *mess* that epitomizes modern Western sexuality.

But like I said, it isn't just us. The Vagina, capital V, has been a source of great fear spanning thousands of years across many continents. For many, the Vagina, anatomically and symbolically, represents a mouth. And mouths, my dear friends, have *teeth*. Thus, fear of castration by the *vagina dentata*. Such a widespread myth must have some basis in human fear or human explanation of natural phenomena... all myths do.

Vagina dentata, or “toothed vagina,” is the most fearsome Vagina myth that exists. From the aboriginal New Zealanders (see, no bias here) to the ancient Egyptians, Indo-European, Greek, Native American, and African peoples, it seems that the Vagina has acquired a widespread reputation for being violent.

Here is a brief list of stories in which the Vagina rears its fearsome fangs and wreaks devastation:

- Māui is the greatest mythical hero in Māori (indigenous New Zealand people) legend. Yet this warrior, after fishing New Zealand (the actual country) up from beneath the sea, successfully lassoing the sun (which had been travelling so fast that the people didn't have enough daylight), and catching fire and bringing it back to his people, met his demise via his attempt to achieve immortality by crawling through Hine-nui-te-pō, goddess of the underworld, while she was asleep. She woke up halfway through his attempt to the sound of a bird chirping, and he was mercilessly crushed—*bitten in half*—by her *Vagina*.
- In a Yanomamo (Northern Brazil/Venezuela) myth, one of the first beings on earth was a woman with a Vagina that became a mouth (with teeth and all) that bit off the penis of a man with whom she was “intimate.”
- In Greek mythology, Lamia (one of Poseidon's daughters) was loved by Zeus, and so was punished by Hera, who killed all her children. Out of anguish and jealousy of women with happy families, Lamia became a fearsome creature who rampantly murdered children. Of course, she bred lustful she-devils called Lamiae (literally “lecherous vaginas” or “gluttonous gullets”) which attracted young men, killed, and ate them.

- The Sioux had a legend about a seductive woman who lured a young warrior into a cloud. When the cloud was lifted, there was only she and a pile of bones being gnawed at by snakes. (The logic here is: woman eats man; women have vaginas therefore vaginas have teeth.)
- There is an ancient Chinese proverb that describes women's genitalia as being the gateway to immortality, but also the executioner of man.

In many cultures, the Vagina is likened to the mouth, ideologically and linguistically. In fact, the root of the word mouth is the same as that of the word mother (the ultimate female) –the Anglo-Saxon *muth*, related to the Egyptian Goddess Mut. Anatomically, vulvas have labia, which literally means *lips*, and many men of the past have believed that behind these lips lie *teeth*. Many Christian authorities during the Middle Ages believed that witches, using black magic, could grow fangs in their Vaginas. Women's genitals were compared to the "yawning" mouth of hell. The Mehinaku of Brazil believe that carnivorous creatures (like piranhas) reside in the womb, and cause menstruation when they bite.

Fangs, teeth, lips, labia, mouths, Vaginas –they bite, tear, gnaw, destroy, and devour. Never mind the Bogeyman or Dracula when half of the human population have the real deal resting between their legs.

We can laugh at this all we like; we can watch movies like “Teeth” (a 2007 film based on the *vagina dentata* myth) and trivialize the matter via Hollywood, but remember that fear of something isn’t necessarily always this comically blatant. In our culture, the Vagina doesn’t need teeth to be menacing. If we can’t collectively think about, discuss, look at, smell, touch, taste, or whatever—a vagina without that little internal urge to cringe, then we are as fearful as the ancient people who demonized the female genitalia.

Except, instead of demonizing them, we hide them.

Love, lost.

Independence, grasped.

Future unpredictable.

Samantha Mashaw

Cinquains

A drop
echoes with pride
falls from the sink's long neck
crashes noisily on worn tiles
A tear.

A loud
vibrant pink sound
accompanied by breaths,
unannounced, arrive feather light
A laugh

Obama
Proud Statue
Proclaims, defends, leads
Peace sing of advance
Barack

Jessica Marroquin

Autumn Returns

Adrienne Wolter

This was where it took place: brand new, factory-constructed homes spanned the worn-out hills of repossessed cornfields, rolled out on the land like a play mat over a nursery floor. That day, the weatherman said rain, and those bloated storm clouds didn't hold back: torrents befell the landscape, which still held the lingering whisper of the farm they wrestled down quickly, quietly to build upon. It collected in front lawns and the cracks of the sidewalk, ready to water newly-rooted dandelions, pioneers of the walkway. It streamed downhill on the shoulder of the road, a seasonal creek of run-off, slowing modest sedans and occasionally splashing huddling pedestrians.

Her name was Autumn Barnett, but we called her Spring and Summer. My older twin brothers, thinking themselves the cleverest pair, referred to her by the days of the week. My well-meaning mother called her April. Every time she addressed her this way—unaware, because the other half of the time she called her by her true name—we'd hastily retreat to hide our giggling. We embraced the seasons together, Autumn and I, spending carefree summers swimming and hiking, returning to school with vigor at the tail end of every winded-down August, and already bored by the time October somersaulted onto the box-covered turn of the calendar. As the nights swept in earlier we spent more time inside, and to the tune of Ma'am Barnett's creaking rhythm on her mahogany rocking chair we concocted elaborate stories of the elderly woman's dangerously glorious life as a spy—Autumn punctuated the discussion with a loud, "Ain't that right, Ma'am?" to which the hopelessly deaf Ma'am Barnett amiably replied, "Sure 'nuff is!"

But that was in previous years. This was the summer of 1979.

I spent the two months that Autumn was away waiting. I read; I drew; I practiced odd tricks I saw my brothers do, like flipping a quarter down the knuckles of a hand—back and forth, to the pinky and swept under to the thumb to complete another roll. I would like to say that my brothers and I gained a closeness that summer because we suddenly were spending more time together, but if I did I'd be lying. Sporting licenses with last week's photographs on them, and the rusting '65 Mercury Dad had bought them as a joint birthday gift, they were off exploring back roads and a newfound freedom that I wouldn't taste for another two years.

While Autumn was off visiting her Dad in a distant corner of Ohio, barred from me by a twelve-hour drive, several looming mountains, and an unknown address, I found myself spending a summer as I couldn't remember doing so; best friend absent, brothers appearing only occasionally, and myself completely alone.

Why didn't she write?

Mid-July, and she'd been gone three weeks; almost half her stay, and she hadn't bothered to drop a postcard in the mail to even let me know where her dad lived.

She'd promised to write. I had cleared a space in the lower right-hand corner of my mirror to stick little things I was sure she would send me—she'd always sent me interesting things before—but they never came. Instead, as I pulled clothes out of my dresser, I noticed myself in the open mirror, tracing with my eyes the outline of my starkly black eyebrows, the outward curve of my nose, the lines of my thin lips, pursed in the displeasure of an opening into which I stared back at myself.

After five weeks, my brother Kelley had beaten Kyle in the race to an inevitable traffic accident; afterward he spoke of rear-ending the gold Duster with a sort of sheepish smirk. My mind wandered, and his casual retelling became an image in my mind of Autumn in a more shattering sort of accident,

seventy-five miles per hour on a uphill mountain road, her father's temperamental old Dodge sputtering to a fatal pause in front of a half dozen other rushing cars.

Six and a half weeks; forty-five days. Through the summer I'd bummed a few rides from Kyle (avoiding Kelley and his now tarnished driving record) to Elmertown to see a movie with some girls I knew from last school year, but it wasn't the same. Each time I wasted a week's allowance on an unworthy movie, and the time spent with these gossipy girls was wasted time. I waited without much enthusiasm for the telephone to ring, but still jumped on the ringing phone, only to hear the voices of bored telemarketers.

What if Autumn couldn't call, couldn't write? Maybe she was locked in her room, a suburban prisoner in that flat Ohio town, surrounded by fields and the Amish farmers who plowed them, criss-crossing the fields with the August sun poring down. I pictured her father's face, and before my eyes the honest smile he'd given me when they left so long ago contorted, stretching almost maniacally, eyes pinching into a glare. Maybe he wasn't so nice after all.

At last, that final week exploded on a horizon of anxiety and doubt, seven boxes spread across a calendar row, the final marked "Autumn returns" in her own slender scrawl. She'd drawn a maple leaf beside her name, lazily spiraling to its inked position on the page.

Saturday crawled forward like a line of ants across our back porch, at once slowly and terribly frenzied. What would I say to her when I saw her? She knew my address. Was she still spending the night, as we had originally planned? Her mom had left to get her Friday afternoon and asked me to come along, but I told her I didn't feel well. Would she share this information with Autumn? Was she expecting me to be there when her mother picked her up? Would she be mad at me because I didn't? Could I be mad at her because she never wrote?

Saturday evening I sat with legs tucked under me on the swing on our front porch; momentum gone, in total stillness. I was deep in thought. Around me, as I've already explained, the rain poured. It was dark for five-thirty. Occasional stray drops battered my shoulders, and my arms felt the chill of the damp breeze, but it didn't register beyond. Every few seconds, or at the occasional rustle of wet cars on the distant highway, I looked up at the road, expecting to see Autumn's mother's white Beetle splashing through puddles. Occasionally neighbors rushed by, bodies hunched against the rain, and turning curious eyes at me in spaghetti straps and shorts, meditative on a spiderwebbed swing.

Kelley popped his head out of the screen door. I glanced over, then glared back at the road. "Mom wants you to come eat dinner."

"I'm not hungry," I told him. My stomach roared in protest.

He stepped out onto the creaking boards, and let the door fall closed. "Uh huh. Listen, she made sweet corn, and there's some chicken leftover from last night." He leaned back against the dry section of siding, by the window, and looked down the road, too. "When's Thursday supposed to be getting back?"

"Sometime this evening," I said vaguely. Autumn had been vague when she'd first told me. I looked back at Kelley, and his face was momentarily lit by a distant shot of lightning, sending his cheekbones in sharp relief with the heavy brow above his Irish eyes.

"You think she'll still show up if you take a break to eat?" he asked, in mock-seriousness.

I made a face at him, the sort of face frustrated fourteen-year-old girls make at their considerably less mature older brothers, and didn't say anything in response.

Grinning, he turned and disappeared inside. I yawned and continued to wait. Then I sent a half-hearted look down the sidewalk, and this time, coming over the hill on the sidewalk, was a dark form outlined against the opposite horizon of the sunset. At first, I thought it was just another unfortunate

passer-by caught in the rain, but these had ceased appearing for about an hour now. Then, I recognized the bulky green bag thrown over a shoulder, the lazy ponytail she always wore—

“Hey!” I yelled, and after untangling my aching legs from the swing, leaped over the railing into mud. I splashed through puddles and nearly tripped over legs that had felt little circulation for the last several hours in my haste to meet Autumn. She’d stopped walking, and stood silently at the crest of the hill, rain bouncing off her face and saturating her already soaked fleece pullover. I came to a stop in front of her, and exploded with a quick, “I missed you so much!” and a curious, “How was Ohio?” and a slightly accusing, “Why didn’t you write me?” The words all tumbled from my mouth and lay between us limply, dying between orange trainers and mud-spattered, gangly ankles. I fell silent. Looking at her damp clothing, plastered hair, and sodden expression, I felt chilled from more than just the rain on my bare limbs.

She stepped around me and continued down the sidewalk. I stood facing Church Street for a bewildered two or three seconds before spinning around and staring stupidly at the receding backpack, and shoulder bag slung low, which bounced with every other step off her soggy denim thigh. Kelley had vacated the porch but for a second I could see his face—or maybe it was Kyle’s—in a glowing window before the curtain fell shut again. I looked down at my muddy toes for a moment and then followed her in a bewildered sort of death march.

When I looked up again, Autumn had disappeared into the house. Kyle held open the door for me. He waited and I hurried my pace, catching its wooden frame as he dropped it to be a bother. I let it fall behind me, the spring squealing in agony. I tried to follow my friend’s damp footsteps up the steps, but my mother barred the way, brandishing a towel.

“You’re covered in mud! And why did you skip dinner to go running out into rain?” She retrieved another towel from the laundry basket at the foot of the stairs, frowning. “Dry yourself off. I wonder about you, sometimes.” I looked helplessly at the trail of drips up the stairs, roughly rubbing the towel over my goosebumpy arms and legs. When she was satisfied that I was mostly dry, she handed me a change of clothes and I bolted up the steps.

Autumn was standing in the bathroom, wringing out her pullover into the bathtub. I put the tshirt and pajama bottoms my mom had handed me on the counter and faced her. “Eight weeks was a really long time,” I told her in earnest. “Why didn’t you write to me?” She finally looked up at me, just that once. I felt like I was lurching forward, even though I was entirely motionless, about to fall into her glare. I would spiral down into a nightmare where I lost contact with my best friend, where after not speaking for two months we would find we no longer had anything in common, and she no longer cared to try again. I would land at the top of the hill beside Church Street, looking at the array of tidy toy houses under the onerous rain, spirit black like the pessimistic sky, listless and stormy and unable to go on.

Then an odd thing happened.

I heard Kyle’s voice long before registering the words. “Susan, Tuesday is here!”

Before me, the scowling Autumn dissolved.

My eyes blinked open. The rain had slanted to an angle where it was now soaking my shoulders and the back of my head, but I ignored it, sending a groggy squint the way of the window, out of which Kyle was leaning. He pointed, and I watched, dazed, as Autumn pulled herself from her mother’s car, rocketing through the rain up to the top step of our porch. She hugged me, and when she drew back I stared up at the beaming, and very real, face of my best friend. “I was on the farm all summer,” she told me, handing me a stack of letters. “You can read these later. But how have you been?” Everything was better when she smiled at me, as though she’d just stepped out of a dream.

Why I'm Here

This morning you made the announcement,
revealed the guilt
that's grown in your belly for four
whole months.

Your parents see it as betrayal
to all the lessons they've imparted,
all the morals they've instilled,
the tidy life they imagined,
and cultivated for seventeen years.

Your boyfriend glimpses a terrifying
burden peeking over the horizon,
its full bright face growing
with the curves of your body.

Your friends deem it evidence,
fuel to feed their gossip. The way
you hear them tell it in the hallway,
they always knew you were a whore.

Your doctor views the form
in the ultrasound as physiological justice,
the consequence you bear
for the compulsions you followed.

Your representatives mark it
in their statistical data banks to support
their agendas for "life" and "choice".

And as I sit here holding your hand,
listening to you sort out thoughts
about abortion, morning sickness, and the
world
staring at you like corrupted animal,
I too condemn you.

While I patiently wait for you to control
the sobs that wrack your tired body,
I acknowledge the cruel truth
in all these perspectives.

Even as I dry your tears with a tissue
and squeeze you tight, I can't help thinking
to myself that for this stupid mistake,
you don't deserve whatever
half-hearted love I can give you.

But in this baby, I see yet one more identity,
a bond,
between you, me, and all the mistakes
that we make every single day.
So if I can't love you,
who will love me?
And if I abandon you,
what hope do I have for myself?

Daniel Riggins

CONTEST WINNER

Dying Alone Johanna Ralsten

I think my biological clock is broken.

Seriously. If the average female in America lives to be 75, I'd say my clock is stuck somewhere around age 18, so, that's like 5:45 AM (yes, I did the math) – not even the sunrise of my life and the clock already went kaput. Where did I go wrong?

Honestly, I would never have given this a second thought until I met Julie and Elodie, two lovely girls from northern France. I still don't know how it came up, but at a party, the two raced up to me, faces screwed up in what can only be described as concerned anguish.

“Jo-ha-na!” they cried in that deliciously light, sophisticated way only the French can cry. “You do not want to get married?”

First of all, let's examine the facts: I'm in a foreign country, thousands of miles away from my closest friends and family. Who in the world knows a) that I am pretty much petrified of the idea of sharing a bed with the same person forever (i.e. until midnight on the bio-clock) and b) who's spreading it around? Secondly, it's not that I don't want to get married *ever* but that *right now* I don't want to get married...*ever*. It freaks me out. I don't want to plan ceremonies or pick-out affordable yet stylish bridesmaid's gowns; I don't want to think about convincing someone to attend work events with me (or not to attend work events with me); I don't want to have to kill someone for the remote. Apartment-hunting, bed-hunting, kitchen appliance-hunting – while scouring for inanimate objects is bound to be simpler than trying to gun down a gazelle or squirrel, the concept of hunting has never sat quite right with me. For me, marriage is a myriad of pains, difficulties, and sacrifices.

“But how will you have children?”

I'm sure Elodie and Julie are aware of the mechanics of pregnancy, but here they were right again – I'm not only unfit but also unwilling to be a mother. It isn't childbirth that has me convinced – although, that definitely is a factor – so much as the realization that when you have a child, it is yours, i.e. said infant, toddler, youth, teen *never goes away*. This was hammered home when I spent six weeks in a house with a five- and six- year old, living under the illusion I could get anything done. If you don't think you can afford to do this, just try tying your hands behind your back and wearing two eye-patches for a few days, rating your productivity at the end. I'm sure you will have had a life-changing and rewarding experience...and also be frustrated as hell.

The truth is, I'm too selfish to be a wife or parent. Spouses and parents make so many sacrifices; I'm too greedy with my time and energy to comprehend including the intimate effort a family takes, and so I don't even think about it. Perhaps I'm not brave enough to go down that road, but moreover, I'm so happy on the single highway I'm currently driving down that I don't even want to consider switching routes.

The latter is what Elodie and Julie forced me to do when they posed their final question: “Jo-ha-na! But without children, you will die alone, no?”

Of course, my natural response is “no!” I'm hoping to die surrounded by the New-Age family, i.e. lots of posh and fantastic friends I've gathered, roommates and nurses (I'm going to

live to be old, did I mention that?), tons of people who want to love and take care of me in my old age. How did they not know that?

However, the truth is that while the family may have “deteriorated” since the 1950s, children and parents are still linked; there is often a felt obligation to care for each other, even if that means just paying for the nursing home. My broken biological clock is going to remove this guarantee; when midnight approaches and my head is still at 5:45 (maybe I’ll move to 6 AM at some point), I’m going to turn to friends...friends who are like family. Meaning I have to treat them with the same kindness, love, and attention I would give to children or a spouse...minus the bed-sharing, although I suppose the remote is negligible.

So while I’m selfish and greedy, my kaput clock has not freed me from my need to be kind, to reach into the lives of others and try to connect, to celebrate my single-ness while also reveling in my absolute need for others. I’m not a Lone Ranger, and what’s more, I don’t know if I believe anyone truly is.

Julie and Elodie are kind of right – nobody wants to die alone – but as I stare into the abyss that is my future, I am convinced that I am not ready to have a spouse or kids. I still cringe when I see ModernBride in the check-out aisle. However, I’m not doomed to be a curmudgeon, misanthrope, or spinster. I’m free to love others; I must love others. It’s part of what makes me a person, a human. So perhaps my biological clock will never start ticking, maybe I’ll never feel that compulsion to get hitched or reproduce, but those broken hands don’t make me less of a woman, person, or human being. I’m neither freed from nor confined by a need to love those around me.

Maybe that’s what the real biological clock is all about.



The Muddy Mississippi River Flows

The muddy Mississippi river flows
The banks shallow and short to stem the tide
At the onslaught of a storm, all time slows
The torrent of rain, leaves nowhere to hide
Heavy do waters wash over and through
Drowning fields, trees, houses and nearly all
Drowning thoughts, words, actions, and me from You
Hold onto what there is before the fall
The waters churn and can leave nothing whole
An errant wind rips all sound from my ears
So I ask, can You fix my broken soul?
Captivate my heart and still all my fears?
A quieting breeze comes and will not go
And sunlight glistens in the afterglow.

Melanie Papai

I ALWAYS THINK THAT HE CARES.

CHELSEA FARCO

THE OTHER WOMAN: A TRUE STORY

KATE MCLEAN

Red Line

The baby down the car is asleep in his hammock,
propped up and resting in his mother's young lap.
She fixes and refixes the Velcro on his shoes.
I can see his weight in the slump of her shoulders.
The old woman across the aisle asks her
if she's taking that baby to his grandmother's.
The girl nods, and plucks at the collar of his coat.

The car empties onto the platform and we are all unready
for the soft rain falling. We enter the street with our heads
uncovered. The mother holds her gloveless hand out over
her baby's face as though she is praying over him,
as though a hand could keep him dry, as though a prayer.
That is love, I know. This is Grand. This is Chicago.
This is Howard: as far as this train goes.

Emma Perry

**Mom and I.
Laughing, learning, love.**

Samantha Mae Hoeffler

Love all; it comes right back.

Joan Collins

Vespers

After a moment's delay
A girl near the end
Of the top row
Stood to address us all.

As the surrounding leaves rustled
The girl pulled down the hem
Of her cobalt blue thick polyester shorts
Adjusting them with one hand

As she grasped a piece
Of lined notebook paper in the other.
The wind tickled the nape of her neck
And whispered gently in her ear.

The blazing sun
Provided her backlighting
As it sunk towards
The depths of the blue abyss;

Hades lassoed the fire of the sky
And dragged down
The gift of light
Into his Underworld lair.

The girl's features were obscured
By the sun's powerful glare,
Giving her an angelic glow.

She probably said something about friends
Being like pb&j sandwiches or Band-Aids,
But I was barely listening.

I heard the motorboats,
Engines roaring below
Yet the sound reached me through a mist
Like an alarm clock's beep hardly penetrating
a deep sleep.

Those around me shuffled in their reclining
seats
Or swung their legs to more comfortable
positions,
Fearing the tingle of muscles and flesh
From sitting too long on the hard surface.

The water sparkled below
The towering rocks on which we sat
All except for the lone girl
Who stood.

Meghan Henshall

CONTEST WINNER

A Clean House Elizabeth Meyers

Diana pulled off the highway at a rest stop near Montgomery to brush her teeth. She was headed to Mobile. She'd been driving for a couple of days now, starting in New Hampshire where she'd been living the last couple of months. She hadn't really stayed anywhere very long: Georgia, Virginia, Louisiana, New Hampshire. The north didn't suit her, so she headed back south, warmer weather and warmer people. She figured she'd pick up a job in Mobile if she liked it enough, stay at a motel for awhile until she found one. She had money saved from working as a receptionist at a second-rate law firm in New Hampshire.

She grabbed her toothbrush and floss, slamming the door of her rusty Volvo behind her. Her husband, ex-husband, hated that car. Bill didn't trust anything that wasn't made in America. She'd only had coffee to drink that morning and that was hours ago. Her teeth felt fuzzy, like each tooth was wearing a wool hat. She'd been falling asleep anyway, talk radio letting her mind wander. Brushing off the stale taste in her mouth might wake her up.

The rest stop was dirty. She walked through the gray tile-framed doorway to go into the bathroom. The bathrooms in these places never had entrance doors. There were about five mirrors against the stucco wall. She headed for the one at the end, starting to brush her teeth while she was walking.

Her face looked gaunt. She'd been eating less since she moved out of her old house, out of her marriage, about five years ago. She'd also picked up smoking and looked older for it. She wrapped the floss tightly around her index fingers so that the tips lost a little color from the tension, her fingernail beds turning white. This was the first time she'd flossed in a couple of months. Her gums started bleeding right around her front teeth. She watched it stain her teeth red. She hated her blood. Her blood had killed her children. *She* had killed her children. She carried a blood disease and her sons suffered for it, their blood never clotting right. They'd been playing in the park, her older son, five, the younger one, three, and started fighting with sticks; they just couldn't clot. The boys had needed transfusions—bad blood in the eighties. Both were dead before they were twenty. She'd gotten a divorce a couple of years after the boys died. Most couples do when they lose a child.

She got to Mobile a few hours later. She'd always wanted to go there. She was born in Jackson, Alabama and had always heard good things about southern Alabama. She had missed the state in the years since her divorce. Moving around got old and she wanted to find a place to settle. She didn't know anyone in Mobile, but that's what she wanted. She stared at the city as she approached it on the highway. Her windows down, she could smell the water surrounding the city. The heat was coming off the roads and swamps, being reflected by buildings, hanging in the air, and seeping into her car. It was impenetrable. She cringed at the familiar humidity. The haze from the heat made the highways blur with the water below, as though the cars were driving on swamp. She used to play in the swamps behind her house when she was little, wading through algae, catching bugs and frogs. Her mom made her stop when she saw a water moccasin in the backyard.

The buildings of Mobile seemed to grow out of the algae. There was one in the center covered in mirror-like glass, like a disco ball. The city was like Atlantis, just emerging from the water instead of being covered. She lowered her visor and squinted against the sun. She would like it here. She would live in Mobile for at least the next two years. She needed to practice staying put.

Within a week of her arrival, she had a one-room apartment and a job. She'd done a lot of different work since she started moving—waitressing, cleaning, reception work. Her grandmother would have called her a “domestic.” Back in Jackson, she hadn't really worked. After her sons died, she started volunteering—working in soup kitchens, going to trash pick ups, organizing clothing drives with her church. She didn't have time to work a paid job because she was volunteering so much. They lived off of Bill's paycheck then. He worked at the bank.

“I'm trying to get promoted, since you're not working,” he told her.

She wasn't home that much anyway. They both stayed away. Diana tried to eat at least one meal a week with Bill, Thursday spaghetti nights. Thursday had been family night with the boys, so they were both used to keeping their schedules open. She made the sauce with extra meat for good protein. They never had salad.

In Mobile, she worked for a wealthy family, the Marshalls, cleaning their house every weekday. She really didn't mind cleaning. It was a good way to pass the time. She liked figuring people out from their messes. The Marshalls lived in an old plantation home on the outskirts of Mobile, right out of Southern Living. Their house was too big for them, only four people lived there, and two of them were hardly home. Carter was running his father's construction company. His father, Andrew, had gotten too old for the responsibility. He'd been living with his son for a couple of years now. The two men shared the house with Rebecca, Carter's wife, and their ten-year-old daughter, Leah. Rebecca worked at the newspaper writing movie reviews. Leah spent a lot of time with her grandfather at the house.

The house was never very messy. She spent most of her time cleaning up after Leah and the grandfather since the parents weren't there very often. Rebecca and Carter never cooked. The only dishes Diana cleaned were skillets from grilled cheese and bacon. Andrew wasn't supposed to be eating bacon, bad cholesterol, but no one was ever home to enforce him. Everyday at 11:00 he would make a grilled cheese with white bread and American cheese, lathering the bread with margarine; Rebecca didn't keep real butter in the house. Diana loved the smell of cooking bacon. Bill used to make bacon on Sunday mornings—the smell would bring her out of her sleep. She tried to clean the kitchen when Andrew was cooking so she could be around the smell. She cleaned his dishes after him, scraping off the cheese melted on the pan and the little flakes of fried margarine. Diana never wore dish gloves. She liked the way the dish soap made her hands smell.

She was washing the dishes, when Leah brought her friend David home from school. They were playing outside in the back yard while Diana watched through the open kitchen window. Diana liked Leah. She liked the quirks she had developed from being an only child. Leah would disappear for hours in the backyard—arranging leaves into patterns, singing to herself, making up stories. Diana found a song book where Leah kept all the songs she wrote. They were about love and loss, things Diana knew Leah knew nothing about, but she thought it was sweet all the same.

It looked like Leah and David were playing some kind of game. They were both running around. Diana started putting the dishes away, when she heard David yell.

“Leah! Why did you do that?”

Diana ran out to see what happened. Leah and David were standing in the middle of the backyard. David's elbow was scratched and bleeding.

"David, are you okay? What happened?"

"Leah and I were racing and she bumped into me on purpose," he said.

"It was an accident."

"How's your arm? Did you fall down when she bumped you?"

"Yeah, it's fine. It's fine." He readjusted his pants and smoothed down his hair, shaking his arms out afterwards.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

"Come inside, I'll get you a band-aid and clean the cut. Leah, why don't you finish putting the dishes away."

Leah walked away in front of them, while Diana led David inside. She took him to the bathroom on the first floor. Leah said that's where they kept the band-aids. She closed the toilet lid and told David to sit down on top of it.

"This bathroom's funny," he said.

Diana smiled. It was funny. She was sure they'd hired an interior decorator, someone to maintain the history of the house while modernizing it at the same time, someone who knew what "character" was. The walls of the room were covered in wallpaper with monkeys on it. The monkeys looked sophisticated somehow. She wasn't quite sure how they maintained that air, maybe it was their hats. It didn't seem to match the marble tile surrounding the sink and the hardwood floors.

"How many monkeys do you think are on the walls?" David asked.

"Why don't you count them. It will get your mind off your elbow."

While he was counting she found peroxide underneath the sink with the band-aids. Rebecca had made a small first-aid kit. She tore off some toilet paper, accidentally poking through it with her long fingernails. She'd been meaning to cut them for weeks. Filing was a waste of time. She grabbed a couple more sheets of toilet paper and held them with her hand.

"Eleven, twelve, thirteen—"

"Okay, David, this might sting a little."

She poured peroxide over his cut. David sucked in his breath.

"Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen."

His skin started bubbling. Peroxide dripped onto the hardwood floor. She put the bottle on the counter and went to blot the liquid. She stared at his elbow. The cut was diamond shaped. It reminded her of when she was tested for allergies. The doctor put about twenty small-needle holes in her back to test her reaction to different stimulants. She had different patches of red skin and white with little bits of blood coming up from each area. David's were like all of her's in one spot, a cluster of dots of blood cropping up from his elbow. It was starting to scab already towards the edges. His skin was so white around the red, little pieces ripping around the cuts. It looked scaly in comparison to his young, pale skin.

"Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen."

The blood was becoming less prominent, drying into scabs, turning that light brown color. The length of the diamond was about an inch long. She blew gently on the cut to ease the sting of the peroxide, like her mother used to do for her.

"Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

Instead of blotting the cut with the toilet paper, she reached for David's elbow with her index finger. She listened to him counting. It echoed through the bathroom. She stared at his blood becoming hard.

"Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five."

She scraped off the top part of his scab with her uncut fingernail. It started bleeding immediately. She dug her nail into his skin and drew a line from the top of the diamond to the bottom; a trail of new blood followed her fingernail. David stopped counting. She grabbed for the toilet paper and pressed it against the cut.

"My nail slipped. I'm sorry. Are you okay?" The blood was caking under her fingernail.

He nodded at her and moved her hand away to hold the toilet paper in place himself. David looked down. His whole body was tense. He'd been grabbing onto his knee while she fixed his cut.

"Take a deep breath. I'm going to give you some band-aids, and then we're done." She quickly placed two band-aids across his elbow. She could see the blood coloring them from the other side.

"Why don't you go back outside and play. Be careful."

He ran out to find Leah. Diana sat against the cabinet under the sink. She felt restless like she was shaking, but she wasn't moving at all. She was slumped over her knees in her jeans and polo shirt that she always wore to work. She started biting her cuticles out of habit. When she got to her index finger, she traced her fingernail with her teeth, scraping the dried blood from under her nail into her mouth. She flinched at the metallic taste. She got up slowly and put the peroxide under the sink. She dropped the band-aid wrappers in the trash can.

She began cleaning the bathroom, slowly and deliberately. She mopped the floor, cleaned the toilet, wiped down the sink. After the bathroom looked perfect, she moved to the other rooms of the house. It was the most thorough work she'd ever done. When she dusted, she made sure to lift all the objects on the tables instead of just dusting around them. She washed windows. She swept floors. She vacuumed. She did laundry. Sweat started pooling on her lower back. Her hair was moist. She got on her hands and knees, cleaning under couches and in corners. She got on ladders, reaching above dressers and cleaning the top shelves of closets. Every part of the house was touched.

When she got to the kitchen, Andrew was about to clean his skillet after making his sandwich.

"This is the nicest I've ever seen this house. You're doing an excellent job." Andrew told her.

"Let me wash that for you."

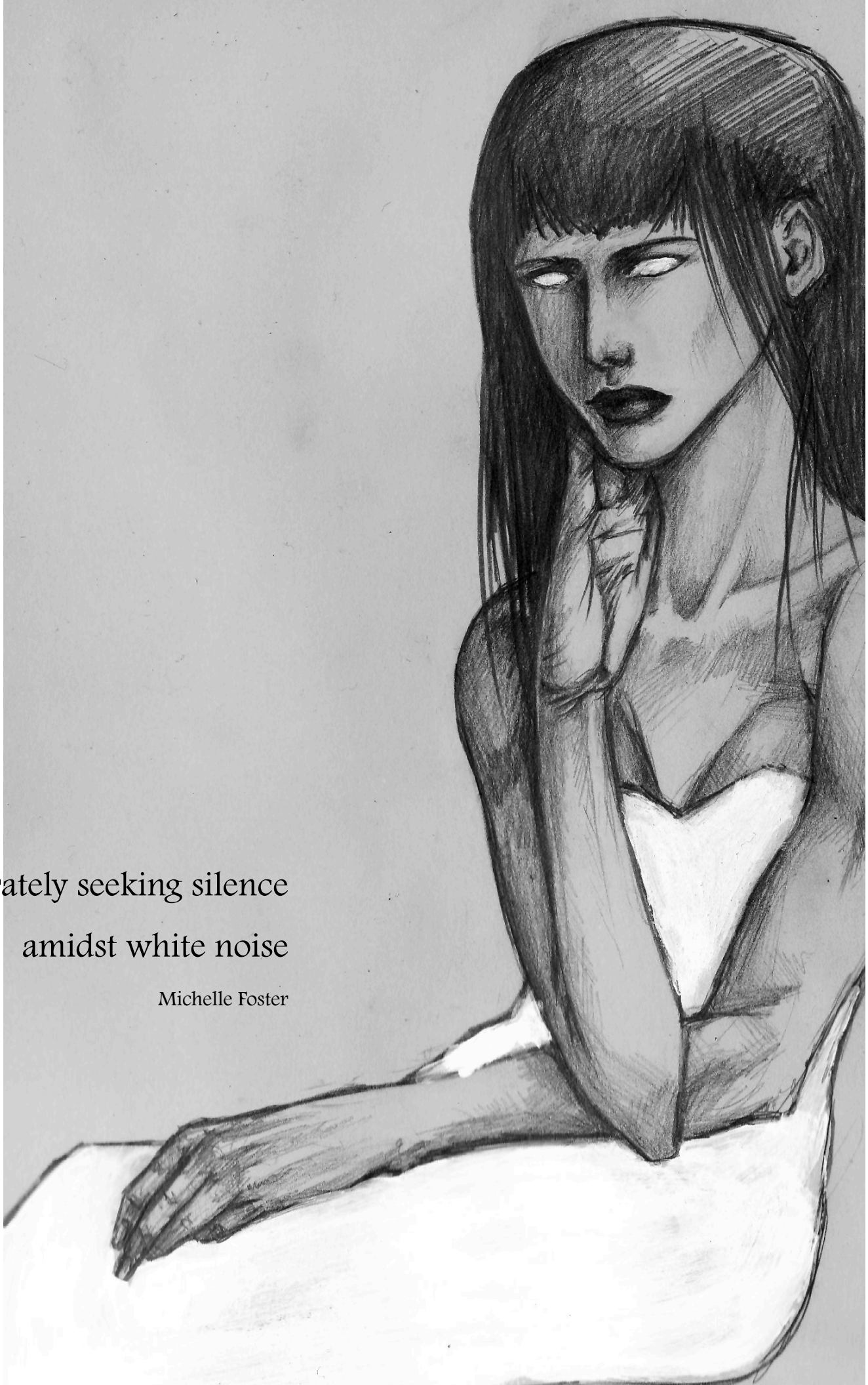
She filled up the sink with hot water to wash Andrew's skillet. When she went to work tomorrow, she was going to work harder than today. She would do it right and she would do it well. It was going to look the best it ever had. Better than anyone could even imagine. The floors were going to shine like that building in the middle of Mobile, the granite countertops sparkling. That house was going to be perfect. That house was going to be the best house in Mobile. She scrubbed the skillet with hot water and dish soap. Shine, shine, shine.

observations
mistakes
lessons
discussion
inspiration
change

Becca Katz

Desperately seeking silence
amidst white noise

Michelle Foster





Coming home in a new place.

Helen Svoboda-Barber

The House of the Vestals

All names have been changed for protection,
Everyone here is wearing masks.

Come down to the playground,
The yellow and blue pipes of a cage
We climb like a temple, the stench
Of mulch dark and rich in your nose.
Lay back on the swing and feel the wind
Rip your hair out by the roots.

They were starved for romance,
Tired of stripping their dolls
And knocking together the plastic planes
Below their bellies. They wanted
Something to make their knees weak,
Something to envy.

Why not the girl who didn't fit
Into her body and the boy
Who threw things? Twin monsters
Fit for undressing.

It took four of them to fight with her
And three with him, to bring them close,
To throw them on the ground in a heap
And cheer, and call for love.

She bared her teeth to smile.
He howled.

It was the girls who had made
This sacrifice, brought on
The confusion of limbs and knees,
An elbow to the face.
Now they knew what to expect,

Broken glasses, a bloody nose,
Bruises and a torn shirt.

Sarah Kemp

Countless mistakes. Full responsibility. No regrets.

Shrochis Karki

Midnight Surgery

My mother tells me, at three, that our bones speak at night.
Our women always sing, the wearing-out weather-women.

I never know when the clock strikes or
Whether to believe her, or in the influence
Of the Trinity Hour and count my blessings.

All I know, I've known all my life—
That this frame, guided by the unworldly
Counts on a leaf's green resistance.

But when they cut open my stomach
All they find is a body
Curling inward on itself,
Coiling and uncoiling,
And the slack of sleep
Stretching over dark
coolness.

Mother blinks at me, an inert,
Green pillow-case of hospital
gown, and stares at the men
in scrubs, the knives, shaking
her head, her hands twitching.

Michele Robinson

Dropping the Coin: Searching for a Model of Male Feminism

Jim Katz

Feminism, “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression,” has been a benefit for women. While feminists are far from fulfilling all of their ambitions for girls and women, there has certainly been significant progress in the last fifty years.

Unfortunately, most men today don’t understand what feminism is or what its stance is on men. It’s tempting to blame men for this ignorance; there are countless books on the subject and even more feminist women who are glad to engage in a thoughtful discussion. Rather than labeling men as lazy or closed-minded, it seems far more productive to examine why men hold these assumptions, and ask what role men can play in feminism.

So why are most men afraid of feminism? It is not just that they are afraid of powerful women—though that certainly is part of it. The fact is, for *all* of American history and thousands of years of various cultural histories, it has been just that: his story. Men generally benefit more from the patriarchal structure of society and institutionalized sexism than do women. They hold most positions of power in political, religious, academic and economic structures. This is not to say that men don’t suffer under patriarchy or that women don’t help to perpetuate it, but it is certainly a system that generally favors men.

But if this was all that was keeping men from feminism, there wouldn’t be the problem of enlightened men (i.e. non-patriarchal men) who still reject feminism. It is true that there are many men who are still heavily invested in patriarchal structures, but they certainly do not speak for all men. Many men have taken a clear-headed look at our society, seen the imbalance of power in favor of men and have been advocating for the rights of women for decades, if not longer.

The problem that both men and women are left with today is the perceived demonization of men. This is not a new problem, but more importantly, *the demonization of men is not the purpose of feminism*. That is a gross over-simplification of complex gender relations. Women, having been oppressed by various groups of men throughout history, naturally and understandably may place blame upon their oppressors. This view of feminism has helped to perpetuate the assumption of many people, particularly men, that it is an ideology of man-haters and lesbians. This assumption also may come from the label “feminism” itself, which has explicit gender connotations. Feminism is seen as an ideology that holds no place for men, or even aggressively looks down on them.

While it is true that certain marginal women’s liberation movements were and are “anti-male” to varying degrees, it is certainly not an universal definition, much less a widely held one. bell hooks describes this phenomenon best: “As the movement progressed [and] feminist thinking advanced, enlightened feminist activists saw that men were *not* the problem, that *the problem was patriarchy, sexism, and male domination*” [emphasis mine]. This is a visionary and inclusive definition of feminism.

Unfortunately, for men who are “enlightened” or who identify as feminists today, there seems to be a lack of guidance or instruction on how best to help end patriarchy. There is no model for how they should live in order to create a post-patriarchal society. Thus far, there have been two major models of feminist masculinity.

The first of these is the collection of “men’s movements” that have fought to reclaim “true masculinity” in what they perceive as an increasingly feminized world. Historically this has been the most commonly emulated model. These men see the rise in the political and social status of women as a lowering of the social status of men and by extension, the masculine ideal. This is to a certain extent true, and not really that troubling. Men have dominated political and social structures for so long that those who believe in the ideals of “equality” and “justice” should welcome a shift in power.

Recent years have seen the birth of the “men’s liberation” movement. This movement tends largely to focus on the oppression of men since the emergence of second wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s. It was at that point that media and political attention began to focus on issues affecting women specifically. Men’s frustration emerged from the diminished need for their traditional role as breadwinner and master of the home, and from the strengthening of female independence. The problem with this movement is that it not only helps to reinstate patriarchy (albeit with a more politically correct label), but it widens the divide between the sexes—which certainly cannot help to achieve gender equality. It also unjustifiably tries to place male victimization on par with female victimization, as well as victimization based on class, race and sexual orientation. This is not to suggest that men have no problems in the modern world, but frankly, they’re just not the most pressing. You have to pick your battles.

The second model of post-patriarchal masculinity available to men today is the “feminized man.” In this model, men are expected to defy their traditional gender role and embrace behavior traditionally associated with women. This is more constructive in a few ways. It encourages men to engage with the roles prescribed to women for thousands of years and forces men to know firsthand how little respect or attention is paid to the work of running a household and raising children. The other great benefit is that it broadens the scope of what is considered “masculine.” It is also more inclusive of various sexual orientations, and is a good first step towards breaking gender binaries. It is, however, only a first step.

There has been a lack of love, among both women and men, for our sex and our gender. We have seen them as burdens, as embodiments of strict social, moral and political roles we are expected to play. Unfortunately, many gender rebellions, from women’s liberation to transgenderism, are still invested in the structure of patriarchy. There is much to admire about gender rebellion, but like most forms of rebellion, it’s easy to get carried away in the sexiness of it all. This isn’t meant to look down on women who decide to become the breadwinners of their families, men who decide stay home and take care of the children, or transgendered people. Rather, I am suggesting that shallowly embracing the other gender’s “traditional” characteristics is not a sustainable solution. In doing so, we define ourselves as one side of a coin—which is to say, it accepts the “either-or” definition of gender. If we are to break the binary that patriarchy has hard-wired into our culture, we must redefine sex and gender in ways that don’t assume the only way to fight patriarchy is by accepting its rules, even if it is to flip them on their head.

To be male and feminist today means creating and embracing a new paradigm. First, men must give their support to the women’s movement. Men need to be listeners instead of leaders—not because men are less capable, but because men’s perspectives have and still do dominate our culture. Second, men must defy traditional conceptions of masculine strength *without* automatically becoming “feminine.” We have to develop a broad model of masculinity that incorporates both sensitivity *and* strength, a strength that is not based in superiority over others, but in love of one’s self.

bell hooks puts it this way: “what is needed is a vision of masculinity where self-esteem and self-love of one’s unique being forms the basis of identity.” This reformulation of identity is not just a model for men; it’s a vision for humanity.

Suggested Reading:

Feminism is for Everybody by bell hooks

Masculinities by R.W. Connell

ducklings

bubbling with age-five enthusiasm,
she swings ducklings out of hand
to see them land in a splash-sea
of ripples, of feathery giggles
at the yellow tufts
that crest,
paddling deliriously—

swept up in an armful,
and into the pond again; a sinking plunk
like a cannonball to cool an august day,
like chilly cubes dropped in lemonade,
like watching four sets of bewildered eyes
resurface
instead of five

Adrienne Wolter

CONTEST WINNER

You've Not Found What I Am Not

You've not found what I am not
The air,
 (that caresses certain skyscrapers
above the humble sludge-in-standing, tapers

hastily the heavy hand of the humidity
that suppressed sly bodies of sidewalks slab.

The rain against screaming heat—
Evils on red murky moon—
 Against heavy
Oldsturdied blues
 that ripple then diffuse
over the streets
 that
 slur
 then
 speak.

But the weight of my frown is not
Sleepinginbranches above your feet; and
You would insist that nothing
Is not (anything having to do with cities,
rather...) having,
 My kiss.

Sarah Dougherty

An Acrostic in Her Defense

Primal instincts
Rarely include
Overachieving and
Sometimes
The
Itch to live over-
Throws my pride.
Under
Thousands of men
I learn the
Often graceless art taught
Near crackling sheets.

Carling FitzSimmons

Always running, on and off treadmills.

Vivian Buchanan

Amie Dressing

Becca Roth

First she would need a bra. The good thing about winter was that the cut and texture of her bra didn't really matter. Amie wore mostly heavy turtlenecks, so she didn't need to worry about how low-cut her bra was, and since the turtlenecks were thick, she could wear some of her lacy bras that in thinner summer shirts made her look like a seventh grader stuffing her top with crinkly paper towels.

Shivering in boxers that she'd accidentally stolen that summer from a boy named Nathan who liked her since kindergarten but she never liked back, Amie sifted through her options. Over the past few years she'd acquired about twenty "good bras" that she felt were worthy enough for her to take to college. They lay out in a line at the back of her underwear draw, a rainbow of pinks and greys and purples and yellows. And of course nude and black. All heavily padded. All Victoria's Secret. They were the only kind that hid her boob weirdness. She always went through the charade of picking out a bra, even though she knew she'd always choose the same one – her blue lace Secret Embrace. Yes, the same one. Every day, the same one. And she never washed it. Her argument was that it wasn't like underwear where she peed and other things. And she never really understood how bras were supposed to be washed. She knew there was some special way but never bothered to learn. Probably because she didn't know what she'd do while she waited for the washing machine without a bra on. Even though she had twenty more to choose from. Instead, she'd wear her every day bra until it got gross and deformed, she'd abandon it, but still keep it around, and she'd move on to the abundant reserve. But usually she would get sick of looking at all the bras she'd had for months, so she'd go to Victoria's Secret and buy three or four new ones. And she'd pick one to wear every day and wear it until it died, and then she'd start the cycle over again. So there was a huge bank of bras that never got worn. But she could never get rid of them, let alone wear them. She needed them around, just in case.

As Amie fastened her blue bra, she began to eye her underwear. Never panties. Panties are for babies. Only guys called them panties, and it grossed Amie out. Nathan probably called them panties. She prided herself on rejecting him despite feeling flattered and eternally desperate. Underwear.

She always was drawn to the sexy lacy ones first, because they were prettiest. They were even most comfortable, which is usually not a word synonymous with sexy, but they were cotton for the most part, and the elastic part that held them up was made of lace, so there was no harsh band digging into her love handles, which was never fun. And the cotton part always had really nice patterns. One pair was light green with yellow polka dots, one was yellow with blue stripes, one was gray with little white dots, and one was purple with little silver dots. She had a few more in different colors and patterns, like pink stripes. They were absolutely adorable. But she knew she couldn't wear these. She saved them for the weekends when there was a chance that she'd find someone. Putting it into words made her feel skanky, but she didn't feel that she was the only girl who thought this way. Plus Amie was a virgin; how skanky could she be? Nobody had ever seen these underwear and she barely wore them, even though they were her favorite.

She had a series of satiny solid pink and purple ones that she also saved for "special" occasions. She loved these a little less, because they were kind of crumpley on the sides, sort of like a little girl's frilly sock, as if that somehow made them sexier. She didn't care as much that she didn't get to wear these on a day-to-day basis.

Then there were the thongs. Amie never really knew why she owned these. She had three, and the only time she ever wore one was in seventh grade for five minutes before needing to take it off. And that was her first one. Sometime in those six years she thought it was a good idea to buy two more. Simply owning them somehow made her feel womanlier. But she could never understand why girls wore them by choice, and she always liked people a little less once they tried to claim that thongs were just more comfortable. Wedgies. Voluntary wedgies. All. Day. Long.

There was a pair she'd bought for her one and only boyfriend, sophomore year of high school. This guy she actually liked, probably a lot more than he liked her. His name was Jake. Now a freshman in college, Amie still liked him a little. Against the norm, Amie actually asked Jake out, and he said yes, probably because he didn't have anyone else to date. They never really clicked. Amie was nervous and still had braces, and Jake was always looking over her shoulder. She had bought the underwear the Saturday after they'd started their relationship, in giddy anticipation. They were white with shades of pink flowers, a fifteen-year-old's idea of sexy. He never saw them.

Finally, there was Amie's period collection. Yes. These underwear were reserved strictly for that time of the month. Period underwear were essentially ones that Amie didn't mind getting messy, for lack of better words, and they came in a few varieties. First were the ones that started off as regular underwear but were unfortunately worn on a day when Amie was not expecting it to come so early, and thus became stained. Then there were the really old ones that also used to be regular underwear but were worn and washed so many times that they began to form holes in the front. When Amie wore pads, she could use the adhesive to link each side of the hole together so it would feel like one cohesive unit. Pretty cool. Then there were the ones that were intended to be regular underwear but upon trying on for the first time were deemed uncomfortable, for some reason or another, usually because they had thick elastic bands. Amie never really thought about why she reserved her most uncomfortable ones for her period, but it just seemed to make sense to her. Maybe because she was feeling uncomfortable anyway and it wouldn't be a huge difference. And the last type of period underwear were just really old ones that didn't fit well or just weren't cute anymore, in Amie's opinion. These also were considered backup, when she ran out of even her reserved weekend ones.

So there she was. Twenty-three and a half minutes until class, and still boxer-bottomed. She doubted she'd get any ass in class, never considered wearing a thong, didn't feel up for thinking about Jake, and wasn't expecting her period. And she was cold. She went into her closet, threw on one of her heavy turtlenecks, and grabbed a pair of baggy jeans. She slipped them on over Nathan's boxers and headed to class. She'd been doing that a lot lately.

Bringing people together to laugh daily.

Elizabeth Himeles



The Curse of Cosmetics

Thea Goodrich

It usually begins in middle school: the time when hormones attack and attitudes, personalities, bodies, and relationships change faster than clothing trends. It's amplified by magazines, runways, television shows, music videos, websites, and even window displays. It can destroy confidence, terrorize self-perception, and (most alarmingly) threaten livelihoods. It is modern-day America's obsession with the feminine figure—and indeed, with the nature of beauty itself. With rising concern about the increasing obesity rates in our cities, it is perhaps understandable that many young girls want to stay healthy, though even the idea of a healthy body weight has been disgustingly skewed by contemporary media. There has been just as much backlash against those who feature stick-thin celebrities as there has been promotion of the 100-pound ideal, but there is virtually no discussion of the other side of today's beauty standards: makeup. Apparently what a girl puts on her face is just as important (and less controversial) than what little she might put inside her body. Applying makeup is no longer simply a "standard"—it is now the *expectation*, and that is a worrying thought.

Human faces are symmetrical, and by nature's "definition," that certainly constitutes them as beautiful. They are remarkably expressive, home to four of the five senses, and can display any number of hundreds of emotions in just a single arrangement. Why, then, has culture across the globe told women that they need to layer their faces in chemicals every day in order to look pretty? Does having black lines under her eyes make one girl more attractive than another? Do longer, thicker lashes have any bearing on how a female is perceived in daily life? Does the color of a woman's lips really speak to her potentiality as a mate? Of course everyone judges everyone else's appearances to a certain extent, but why must a woman's features, already aesthetically pleasing simply by being human, be accentuated by manufactured compounds with unpronounceable ingredients?

Perhaps the need to cover perceived imperfections is relatively defensible, because it is no stretch to say that people are more confident about themselves when they feel that they present a good-looking image to the world. Thus, covering up scars or unsightly blemishes with a matte powder is understandable, but why cake one's face in it, as if even one's natural skin needs to be covered? Then in other sections of a visage, make-up is used to highlight instead of disguise: eyelids are dusted with color, mouths are lined with paint, cheekbones are reddened with blush, brows are defined with pencil. All this to draw attention to the face, to emphasize certain features, and to hint at particular attributes—sultry, fresh, dramatic, flirtatious—that could have been pointed to just as easily without synthetic compounds. But in this age of instant gratification, the eye needs to be drawn in, and drawn quickly. Fading into the background by going plain-faced elicits queries, as though a woman must be aided by gloss and glitter in order to be noticed.

This notion only reinforces the 21st century western world's superficiality—in modern America, beauty is only skin-deep. Make-up used to have an entirely different connotation; in the years between Ancient Egypt and the second World War it was often associated with prostitution. Today, the concept remains, though of course diluted: wearing make-up is akin to selling oneself. With it on, females become advertisements in the flesh, on a very artificial level primarily concerned with attracting attention. Blackface, too, used *maquillage* to present a picture degrading an entire group of people—obviously, what someone puts on her face can greatly

influence (whether for better or worse) what others think of her. The disheartening part: that is frequently the point.

Some girls presumably feel more self-assured when they can hide their alleged imperfections behind Midnight Cowboy eyelids and Waterviolet-rimmed mouths, but all they are doing is setting a precedent of covering up their glitches instead of accepting life's little snags as simply that. Naturally no one wants to feel that she is inviting attention for the wrong reasons, but by buying in to the belief that manufactured elements will make her emerge a more popular, noticeable person, she is perpetuating the claim that the marketing companies want her to accept: your make-up can transform you. Make-up, as with hair dye and clothing choice, does present girls with another chance to experiment and express themselves through their appearance (and self-expression is to be encouraged), but it is a representation of the personality based entirely on physical appearance—which rather defeats the purpose.

Contemporary women often say they feel “naked” when not wearing make-up, as though their lipstick and mascara provide some protection of their feminine virtue or are fundamental parts of their beings. That irony points directly to how involved modern females are with not simply others' perceptions of them, but also with how they see themselves. Applying and re-applying make-up every day for sixty-five years (for the trend seems to creep into a younger demographic with each passing month) is an enormous expenditure of time and effort, not to mention money. The fifteen minutes spent “putting on one's face” in the morning could have been fifteen minutes playing with the kids; the fifteen dollars spent on another jar of foundation could have been fifteen dollars put in an emergency fund. If women really feel so attached to their creams and liquids that they deem themselves incomplete without their make-up kit, it is obvious that we are living in a culture obsessed with show. The standard of beauty, if there ever was one, has been corrupted.

Cosmetics fulfill a desire for perfectibility. They mask undesirable aspects and accentuate attractive ones, creating a balance that women seem to feel is necessary in order to be seen in public. Betraying one's own insecurity or inner bedlam—and we are all entitled to do so once in a while, since those are unavoidable facets of being human—to the outside world is taboo. Society demands flawlessness, and by God, women will not tolerate cracks in their painstakingly-applied veneer. When the predominant culture of the age focuses on the perfectibility of man (or perhaps more appropriately, woman) not as a moral creature but as an aesthetically pleasing one, something is amiss.

UNENDING FRUSTRATION FROM EVERY DIRECT INVOCATION.

RACHEL ROSENBERG

Envy of a Pane of Glass (And Its Harmless Flaws)

From the window
there is only sky,
only blue speckled with
an occasional flying
spot.

And that spot, through
disturbing the calm,
glacial canvas, refuses
to be an imperfection:
it glides easily along,
gone from the frame
as gracefully as it
arrived.

From the window, too,
muted greens and yellows
and fiery oranges and
reds lace the edges
from their perches,
and berries draw the
eye happily downward
to fall upon
a single gossamer
thread, spinner
long gone.

The thread weaves in
and out of sunlight,
yet never upsets
the beauty of the view
from the window.

Vivian Buchanan

Reading *Beloved*, but not for fun.

Emily Goldwaser

Not about size, but it helps.
Laura Yakas

Cut my hair: can of worms.
Abby Wardell

Dropped into an emotional lobster tank
Rita Seabrook

And then I stood up again.

Carolyn Meins

Authenticity, compassion, insecurity are often incompatible.
Diana Ruskin

Floss with your hair. Just sayin'.
Becca Roth



My life has been incredibly blessed.

S. Georgia Nugent

The Well

My dry mouth gapes at the brim of sunlight,
Soft pink.

After a rain, cool pellets bead my stony surface like eyes,
and I speak to them from below with the soft drip, drip, drop
of water.

Water makes the shy moss peek from the gapped rocks,
and I can feel it welling up in my depths, swelling;
like a fountain before it explodes.

Water makes the bucket come, and the rope drop, and the hands pull, and the shadows
crawl, and the plunge – scoop – climb of the thirsty bucket that
came and went.

I'm sorry –
but don't you see that I have moss to feed?
It's shy and lonely up in the peaks of my stone neck.
It's thirsty but it can't come down to sip.

So –
I'd appreciate it if you let my cavern fill, fill, fill until
My fountain explodes.

Sarah Dougherty

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Six-word memoirs appear throughout the magazine.

The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Crozier Center for Women or the editors.

Published by the Crozier Center for Women
