

THE LANGUAGE OF ILLNESS



Poetry & Prose by the Students of Honors291
UMass Boston | Fall 2018

Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship.
Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship,
in the kingdom of the well
and in the kingdom of the sick.
Although we all prefer to use the good passport,
sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell,
to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

~ Susan Sontag

The wound is the place where the light enters you.

~ Jalal al-Din Rumi

Cover Image: “Árbol de la Esperanza” by Frida Kahlo

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Printed at Quinn Graphics | University of Massachusetts Boston | December 2018

Dear Reader,

From recent YA-sensation *The Fault in Our Stars* to the many hit TV medical dramas, there is something about illness that connects deeply and innately in our experience. Perhaps it is when we are most vulnerable that language becomes most vital. And at the same time: most difficult to express.

What is the language of illness? What “undiscovered countries” can we unfold from our personal, professional, or intellectual encounters with it?

Our class, Honors 291 The Language of Illness, is a conversation and a community. We read and discuss creative works (poetry, prose, and drama) that deal directly with illness and its themes. We deepen that engagement through creative writing, taking guidance and inspiration from our readings, from our study of craft, and from each other.

This book is a record of our work and play, of our conversations this semester: both in class and on the page. The breadth of language and perspectives found here speaks to the reach and rigor of these writers, as well as to the importance of understanding illness—in all its forms—as a universal experience interpreted through uniquely individual senses and details.

This book is our collective action against the common platitude “words fail.”

We welcome you, Reader, into this space. Perhaps you will find the imprint of your own experience inside. Perhaps you will follow one of our prompts (found toward the back) and write to discover new language. Join in. One way that language heals is through making space for expression, which brings connection.

Our conversation (*Write it!*) continues.

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Questions
By Tiffany

Why does it feel like sandpaper?
Rough to the touch
Dry as the desert
Cracked Earth desperate for moisture
Why is it able to fall like snow?
During a blizzard
Into darkness
Settles lightly
In a thick blanket
Why does it feel like scales on a snake?
Glistening Red and White
A warning for those around it
Why does it attract attention?
Stares and Glares
As if it has never been seen before
Why does it repel?
As if it were the plague
Or an eyesore to society
Why do people whisper and gossip?
Suggesting and discussing
As if it would no longer be there
If they give a suggestion
It is a part of who I am
But not my full story
Do not judge
Based on my scars.

Stay Hidden

By Tiffany

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome
Sounds intimidating at first
PCOS
Sounds like alphabet soup
To some PCOS is unknown
To those affected
It encompasses all aspects of life
On the cusp of adolescence
At the prime age of 12
Ready to face the world's challenges
Of getting through middle school
Mature beyond her years
She's been communicating for her family for years
Hidden behind a self-made wall
Devastating physically and mentally
Self image
Identity
Depleted, in crisis
Self-loathing
Your body becomes
An enemy
To your soul

Control how you feel
Keep it all inside
Everyone
Has
Their
Own
Problems
No one needs to know

Questions
How do I answer?
Truth or lies
Will they even understand?
Binary lens obstruct their view
Masculine or feminine
Who is allowed to determine that?

Patients

By Mike

They battle pain
and diagnoses
They battle with strength
and surrounding support.
The patients' patience grows,
they rest and think
and say a prayer
to the steady hand.
They are not hopeless victims
though it may seem this way;
they are human beings
placing trust in another.
Many steady hands succeed.
They triumph like rattled,
shaken soldiers
in battle.
But all along the patients remember:
First put worries aside.
They would thrive if it would heal.
And it would heal.

If the patients heal
Then the sun will shine
If the patients die
The sun will set
The patience should fear hope
More than their condition
For danger lies in hope sometimes,
When the end is so near.

You

I

By Mike

You come over time or overnight,
You may go fast if treated right.
You require attention, though sometimes
subtle.

Provided the proper treatment in rebuttal,
Of the disruption you have caused today,
So simple, so quick, yet still in the way.
You may hit soft, you may hit hard,
The proper treatment will retard,
The pain you bring when you strike,

Coughing, and achiness, and stiffness alike.
Your hardest strikes, with all your might,

Bring effects that last all day and night.
Your softest strikes, just a day we're barred,
You and I, we merely sparred.
The downturn after the fever spike,
Back to doing whatever I'd like.

Sometimes my warning
is merely just a nudge.
Sometimes you win, you just won't budge.

But when I do find a way to succeed,
Your health will begin to recede.
My goal is not to stay a while,
It just hurts to see your healthy heart smile.
My job is to come in and stir the pot,
You can push me away with all that you've
got.

I rarely cause any serious pain,
Think of me as a drizzle, just some light
rain.

Defeat me with some simple aid,
As I attempt to rain, rain on your parade.
My intent is not to come hard,
or in style,

It just hurts to see your healthy heart smile.

Breaths

By Mika

The faint breaths of an infant fast asleep on her father
in a hot room with the electric fan cooling the
sweat slowly dripping down their foreheads
As his chest rises and falls in harmony with hers
and each warm puff of air that leaves her tiny,
mucous-filled nostrils blows against the collar of
his shirt, stained with drool and baby lotion
He gently pokes at the deep dimples
which continuously vanish and reappear
As she somehow smiles in her sleep
He then closes his eyes and falls asleep with her
small, chubby fist wrapped tightly around his
index finger and her soft round head, with traces
of the johnson and johnson baby shampoo still
lingering from her bath in the afternoon,
resting against his neck

The shy, shallow breaths of a teenage girl as she
watches the boy she likes walk through the halls,
completely unaware that after several years, this boy
would be the one she chooses to spend her life with
Her quick, panicked breaths as she sits down to take
a physics test that she studied all night for but is
nervous she does not know all the answers to,
hands trembling

The final, labored breaths of an old woman
As she recalls those days of youth when she
rushed to catch the bus with the sun in her eyes
and the rocks in the dirt road that bent and twisted
her rubber flip flops and threatened to send her
toppling with each step she took as she ran so eagerly
As she recalls what it felt like to hold the rough, warm,
reassuring hands of her father and husband for the last time
and what it felt like to carry her first child in her arms
in that moment when she became a mother,
and then the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh,
all of whom were now standing around her
Tears in their eyes, not ready to say goodbye
As she smiles at each one of them, happy to have loved
and lost and created and to have shared her final breaths
with those she holds dear

What the Nurse Hates, and Loves

By Mika

She hates the dingy, late nights away from her family
She hates the endless standing
She hates how the blood clots up in the veins of her legs,
forming swollen masses of blue and green that travel
just beneath the surface of her skin like parasitic trees

She hates how some patients give no regard to her caregiving
She hates the selfish employees who say negative words
behind her back
She hates her stomach and her arms which once carried
Her beautiful daughters but now carry only the stress,
Sleeplessness and endlessness of her work

She hates constantly washing her hands,
Running them under soap and hot water
until they become coarse, broken and cracked
Unrecognizable from the once pale and slender hands that
men would do anything to be able to hold
The same fingers that wore the golden wedding ring
on the day her husband promised himself to her

But she loves caring for others
But she loves providing for her family
But she loves the days when she is off from work
so she can come stay home to bake chocolate cake and
banana bread for her babies to enjoy when they
come home from a long day at school

But she loves her three daughters who she
would do anything for, dark circles around her eyes
and legs aching all to see her babies smile
But she loves waking up in the morning to a clear,
sunless sky that makes her remember the sunrise
in the place she calls home, now nine-thousand miles away

Because she sacrifices, because she loves
She is my treasure, my mother

Vertere

By Jasline

I didn't know whether to go left or right
My body was in place, stuck
My breath kept getting caught to the unsteadiness
I didn't know whether to go back or forward

It catches up to
Drain
Fight
Tire
Me.
Swirling,

The steady process
The dizziness
The heaviness
The uncertainty

It catches up to
Tame
Distance
Devour
Me.
Twirling,

The mind tumbling
The sight moving
The regret of thinking
The days shifting

Finally there.

Sides
By Jasline

Once destroyed.		Twice destroyed.
Then it seemed to be countless of destructions.		Emotionally and physically.
Internal.		External.
With in	and	Out.
It is all being thought,	and	almost dreamt about.
Is this pain me?		Do I define myself with this burden?

Earth revolves around me with its mysterious natural ways.

I was once this	but now I am not.
This.. the past, the olden times, the memory.	

I see it as two sides.

Day.	Night.
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Anything can happen.

Positive.	Negative.
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We all experience both yet in our daily routine what will we get?
What will we enhance our knowledge on? It is part of me.
What I am trying to say is that I will not let it break me.
I will not let it pull me back.
What's giving me strength is hope.
I have always had hope and will continue to have hope.
"Árbol de la esperanza."

Where are We By Huda

Illness is an oxymoron. It is always changing its mind. Never stays the same. I now bounded by this new routine. Once comfortable, it's morphed into an unrecognizable form. Illness cannot remain committed to its activities, its emotions, and its prey.

You do not have illness, society warns to avoid it. The tales and the stories are all too real to neglect. We all suspect staying strong will keep *it* away, so we have been told. Only when we are weak will *it* come with its touch we say over and over again. The shadow slowly growing with its sharp corners getting to the bed. Hiding under the covers won't save me. He does not spread by touch. He spreads from forgetfulness. He spreads by the fear. He spreads when you are at your highest, when you do not know you are the most vulnerable.

You have illness; society says it will help build character. Now the ideas, actions, emotions are not mine or at least were not me. 'Be positive,' they said. 'The numbers are in your favor,' says the doctor. 'Stay strong,' are the words of encouragement, but for whom? Then why is it that I do not hear the same way with *it*. He has gotten to me with it all. It has become a routine that mocks me every day. The taste of cliques and helplessness is one that stays on my touch and is the aftertaste of anything else I try.

Now, I am used to his touch. It wasn't harmful before and it is not harmful now. Though he does have a control on everyone. Like we are just the puppets and he is the puppeteer. Most of you are controlled with a blindfold on your eyes. The minority have the blindfolds lowered and around our necks. We see all that is happened, there is no escape. We were fooled.

What does illness want? It is a mystery. We have no clues to solve the case. Is illness a person, an idea, an illusion? We cannot say. Just go on with the name that is always said but there is no wisdom to those who say it.

Society says they have the answers. What do they know? Society is walking just as blindly as the rest. You can drink, talk, sleep, live but nothing will let you conquer the demon, illness. You are blindfolded and falling into his wants exactly what he expects from us. Blindly, everyone carries on. The rich and the poor, the boys and the girls, the strong and the weak no one is different in *its*. Illness is winning in the dark and he is making a fool out of us. We are living with a blindfold on our eyes as if it is a cozy blanket that just came out of the dryer. What you cannot see I can see: the shoving and screaming, we fight ourselves while we are dehumanized by the one watching us, illness. We all are followers of society and society leads us on.

Leads us on to the same dark path but claims we are moving forward. Illness is not an oxymoron. Society is an oxymoron. Illness has not changed his game. In fact, he has not changed himself. It is society that changes its game. It tells us one thing one moment and when there is a fault it will claim something else. Society is the loudest of us all and we are fooled to take that as the reason to make it our leader. Illness was truthful and exposed from the start; it is society that talks the talk and then hides. Illness is not an oxymoron. Society is an oxymoron.

Behind the Light

By Huda

I watch, but only watch.
I observe, but only observe.
I long for so much to happen
But it won't.

Although longing of something
is no longer with me.
My light is only to witness.
Motion and reaction are locked
In the back door in the dark corner
That is jammed.

The spiderwebs caught in the corner
grows.
The knob remains motionless,
as long as I stay sanctioned.
My efforts remain useless,
That is what the past reminds me.

I feel as though so much must happen
But it won't.

Although the physical life is
no longer with me.
I am locked out of the darkness
To only witness my own light.
No connection or relation to others.
It is not only me that is stuck.
Behind the clear wall everyone's light
remains stuck.

Solitary life and that door reminds.
My past relations are now cut off.
We cannot reunite,
And I am only left to witness of this
curse.

Curse:
A spell casted in the darkest of nights
When the stars twinkle the brightest
And the breeze sings the softest.
Then the whirl and might of the aquatic
air
Casts the spell
And blinding electric path that
stops everything in its path.

The door is cast shut
And the dust collects from the last time
My light's outburst treacherously fails to
open it.

I want so much to happen,
I am not alone with that thought.
But I stay stuck with my pair
As does my audience that I observe.
But nothing gets past the shield of water
in front.

Others can see us,
They don't feel us.
They don't hear us.
They don't speak to us.
The shield of water reflects the reverse
to others,
But the truth to us.
You and I are left in pairs,
Only to witness our own light.

In the past,
We were untouchable.
It was the fit of Cinderella's glass
slipper.
The weaknesses of one were
complimented by the strength of another.
Now we are the shattered glass that
Cinderella and her mice can't glue back
together.

Reality

By Stephanie

“you have asthma,” said the doctor
“this is your medication, need to take it everyday”
I thought to myself “no way, I don’t need it”

I am out of breaths
As I jog to catch the train
I thought “I’m just out of shape”

I am coughing endlessly
As I sit in class to try not to cause a distraction
I thought “eh, I am getting sick”

I am wheezing
As I try sit up straight in my bed with pain in my chest
I thought “I’m fine”

I am suffocating.
As I drag myself to the emergencies,
I thought “please! it’s not my asthma!”

As the doctors checks my bloodworks, breathings, asks
“have you been taking your meds?”
“no” I said with my low crisp voice

“that’s why you are here, you need to start”
As I lay in my gurney
I thought “it’s real.”

Care

By Stephanie

For the days
you are begging for air
with every movement you make,

For the nights
when the pain keeps
you from your dreams,

For the times
when breathing
feels like a burden,

Care for me more.

What Could Have Been

By Joyce

Trauma is what *could have been*.

It is our third week out here, but it feels like the enemies have been breathing down our necks for only God knows how long now.

My squad is down too many. We have no backup. But our squad leader *insists* that we push ahead, to make sure that those damn Reds won't reach the other side of the trench any time soon. *That dumbass*.

But, what's the point of fear? We're men, chosen to die in a bullet-trodden hellscape. What do we have left to lose? *Our humanity*, I suppose.

I don't know what happened.

It seems like the Reds were down a couple of men, too. Most of them retreated, like cowards- or, decent men? But the next thing I knew, it was just me, and Charles, with this one poor Red. He was curled up, hands over his head.

"Marlon, we *can't* take any chances. He could have a 'nade on him for all we know."

"*No*, Chuck. There's no way in *hell* I'm taking him out."

The Red looks up, like a deer in headlights. Charles glares at him, then looks into my eyes desperately.

"If we let him go, he'll run back to his crew and rat our positions out."

I grit my teeth. "For *Christ's* sake, Chuck. Can't you see that this poor bastard's just like us?"

"It's either you or him, Marlon. You don't got time to say sorry on the battlefield."

He was right, as much as I hated it. *Sorry* doesn't mean anything when the enemy comes up and throws a surprise party with bullet confetti.

In fact, we had bayonets inches from our noses by the time we scrambled up and out of the trenches. It was like we were in some sort of war movie- except this was *real*, and unrehearsed.

"Damn it, Marlon. We should've shot him. We should've taken him prisoner, instead of us... Now, *we're* the poor damsels in distress."

I don't say anything.

“You and your *god damn* conscience.”

One of the Reds barks at Charles, and eyes him, expecting him to follow.

**

Charles and I, we spent a good, long stroll across those muddy tracks with those Reds poking their guns at our backs.

Once we were finally untied, and then stripped of our belongings, the Reds presumably ordered us- since it's *not* like we knew what they were saying- to chop up some firewood, because it was just *too* cold in this god damn hell.

It was just us and some other unfortunate guys, who were unlucky enough to get ambushed, and captured- just like us.

I don't know how long it's been since I saw another white guy- except for Charles, that bastard's been scowling at me ever since.

But it's funny.

Being taken prisoner by the Reds... It suddenly feels like, I'm a lot freer than before.

I don't have to point to shoot or kill. I don't have to choose... whose life is more important... mine, or the next guy's.

Then the heroes come marching in, right? And then, the status quo is broken. You'll be back to your regular old self in your regular old life.

I see that one Red from earlier. The deer in headlights. He looks wide-eyed as his squad leader breaks the news to his crew.

It seems like the Reds got news of an incoming American fleet. They were too *ambitious* for their own good.

They must've told him, *it's either all or nothing* at this point, because I watch him look down, listlessly.

That's the kind of look a man has when he knows he's got no home to go back to.

I would know.

I've seen it far too many times.

**

I look at him, and he looks into my eyes. Shamefully. Regretfully. Then he looks away, but he mutters something I don't understand.

**

Days pass by, and it seems like the Reds are even more antsier than before. The deer in headlights seems to be the reluctant bunch.

There was the first strike. Or, at least, I *think* it was, because of the panicked clamoring from the Reds.

I don't know what happened after. But I see the deer with his fellows, and they round us prisoners in the nearby tent.

As far as I know, the rest of the Reds must've been holding out for as long as they could, because *everything* was *too* loud.

**

Within the scant protection of the tent, the remaining Reds were arguing over what to do with us. And then, the deer takes his rifle... And then, there was that violent pitter patter against flesh.

Maybe it's better to be remembered as a man who died for his country... Instead of a survivor who *failed*.

"Go," he motions towards the entrance.

I look at him, bewildered.

"Go! They kill me anyways."

He looks down at his rifle, tired. He doesn't look past those bulging eyes, of his men.

"You're *not* our enemy. Come with us."

I extend my hand towards him.

He continues to hold his head down, in shame.

And in the distance, I could hear the gears of those American tanks churn through the ground. It looks like the heroes finally came marching in.

**

Only a *fool* would choose the next guy's life
above his own.

But *what's* a man without his *humanity*?

Because if every man was human, then we'd
all have *beautiful*, doting wives, with
beautiful, annoying children.

We'd have overbearing in-laws, and mildly
possessive, yet endearing mothers.

And that man would have a *beautiful* wife,
and he'd have the most *beautiful* family with
her.

He'd live to tell the tale about how some
white man pleaded for his life, in front of
hundreds of *other* white men.

And then, it turns out, that that *one* white
guy was *actually* Old Man Marlon, the
slightly senile, yet bumbling fellow next
door.

And he'd send that man's prodigy kid in
college a heartfelt hello, *maybe* even a *real*,
honest-to-God, handwritten letter, asking,

“*hey,*

how are you?”

But... *That* was what *could've* been.

Because... what *was*, was that the
Americans stormed in.

I was screaming,

"No!

You can't kill him!

Please, he spared us!

He *let* us go!

He *killed* his own *men* for us!"

I said,

"No...

Why did you *shoot* him?

He was *only* a man.

He... was only *human*.

Just like us."

But I only got so far as to say, "No."

And it was *Charles*, holding me back.

Keeping me from strangling the guy

who *shot* that poor man.

And now, it was *me*

and my *god damn* conscience,

keeping me from forgetting that day-

keeping me from forgetting

what *could have been*.

Another Day

By Joyce

**

Let's go back
to another day
Back when my momma
used to say

We'll pick up some branches
Just two and two
Back to the ranches
Just me and you

Pick up some apples
Till we're through and through
Down to the burroughs
Just me and you

*

Let's go back
to another day
Back when my momma
used to play

We'll go to the treehouse
We'll play arcade games
Away from our real house
Where momma did name and shame

Back to the *n*th floor
Where we spent the night
When momma wanted more and more
As she played through midnight

Not till early morning
The sun peeped through the curtains
Momma came back without warning
Saying, she won back millions

Momma brings us
To first-class dining
Where I want a Shirley temple
And I don't even end up crying

These fancy little potatoes
Purple, yellow, and white
Set aside on a fancy little plate
Made where momma played, all through midnight.

*

Let's go back,
with me and you
The tale of a little girl,
true and true

Where her smiles and dreams
were spent in the treehouse
Waiting for momma
to come back to you

Back at home
Where momma used to say
Honey, I love you
I'll stop and I won't play

Back at home
Where momma would scream and shout
Honey, I hate you
You all make me want to blow my brains out

*

Trapped in a chip bag
With no way out
Till you pop open the bag,
with your drooling mouth about

Till the light seeps in
Where the dark cavern was
Slimy and crowded
The chip is picked out, because...

Because it was too tasty
The light shone on it the right way
With all the creases and crinkles
It seduces you, in its own way

You need to satiate your taste
Or else you'll go into an unending rage
Where you lie about words of waste
Rip me open like a book, page by page

*

Let's *not* go back,
just me without you
Where I'm *done* with you,
through and through.

No more chips,
no more treehouses,
no more smiles,
and no more sips
of your greedy drink
for miles and miles.

We'll pack up our bags
And we'll leave and go
You'll lose everything
As it shows, and shows

Not just your mind
But your family too
Where you wanted more and more
Through the curtains, the sun shines through.

On Duty

By Michael S.

Sitting on a chair watching the tranquil waters
Have a whistle in the grasp of your hand
Staring at children laughing in the chlorine water
Two beeps from the radio and everybody is running
Not me tho as I am still staring at the vast ocean before me
My eyes are as sharp as an eagle looking for a prey
Co-worker walks up to me and tells me the news
He tells that my dad is the one that fainted
I was at first in disbelief until I saw them carrying him on a stretcher
My heart started to beat extremely fast
Forget about the sounds of screaming kids
Forget about the smell and taste of chlorine water
I can only think about my father
Is he okay? Is he fine?
The thoughts inside me are screaming
Telling me to run after the EMT carrying him
But I can't leave as I am on duty
So I will just keep internally screaming until the end of my shift

Regret

By Michael S.

The morning sun is rising. Jim woke up in his soft gel-like mattress to the loud alarm clock buzzing next to his ear. He slammed the alarm clock hard and then walked to the bathroom to take a shower. The shower hit him with water that is cold as the waters in Antarctica. After the cold and refreshing shower, he dried himself up and got dressed up. Leaving the bathroom wearing his favorite dress shirt and pants, Jim opened the refrigerator to grab the milk and then set it on the table. He then grabbed his favorite cereal, Frosted Flakes, from the top of the refrigerator. Combining the two items together, he concocted a match made in heaven. Each scoop of cereal and milk to his mouth brought him fond memories of his youth. After finishing that delicious cereal, he made his coffee with the Keurig coffee machine. However, his tongue is like a cat and is sensitive to heat, so he set the coffee down and let it cool down. Grabbing his remote, he set it to Channel 7 where a news reporter was reporting breaking news about a car crash on Route 16. Shaking his head, he quickly shut the TV and drank the coffee. Grabbing his coat and satchel, he headed towards his car, a simple 2012 Honda Civic. Driving his car with the scenic buildings and skyscrapers in the background, he puts on his go-to playlist which is 90% Ed Sheeran songs. He enjoys Ed Sheeran because he can feel the beauty and emotions that Ed conveys through his songs. This beauty soothes the pain in the heart and makes him feel free from the pangs of regret. Sadly, the drive was over, and he was at his workplace, Gerlandic Middle School. He walked towards his classroom and he sits at his desk setting his satchel on it. From his satchel, he takes out the first class's stack of graded papers. They did so horrible on the recent essay assignment which was about Mesopotamia. Their papers were filled to the brim with grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. Two papers got a zero because they copied exactly word to word from the Wikipedia page. Student after student started to trickle into the classroom before the school bell rang. When it finally rang, there was this one student who ran into the classroom panting extremely hard because he was late. The whole school day was uneventful except the times when the star students of the class would come up to him disagreeing with the grade they got.

Near the end of the day, he is just too tired to deal with these students. It is near the end of the school day for the kids and they just want to go out to play. Finally, the school bell rings, and the kids busted out of the classroom like there is no tomorrow. Looking outside the window, he watches a group of children playing catch. Watching the kids, he was reminded of the times when he was young when he used to be a pitcher on his high school baseball team. His dreams of being a major league pitcher was crushed when he injured his arm due to a car crash. He admits that it was due to drinking and he was stupid back then. Jim has high hopes of having his son play minor league baseball soon. Once the boy gets older, he will start teaching him the basics. He grabbed his car keys and headed to his car. He took a long drive from school to the hospital where his son

Tom was hospitalized. After locking his car, he walked towards the hospital entrance. Taking the elevator to the fifth floor, he slowly walked down the hallway passing through each door. Each room was filled with a child surrounded with their families. Standing in front of door said, "THOMAS WALKER," he walked into the room. Tom was too busy reading his book to notice that his father was there. Thomas loves to read as it allows him to imagine traveling to places that his own body can't handle. By removing his eyes from the book, it made him feel back to his sad and vulnerable self. Jim's mother (Thomas's grandmother) stood up from her seat and hugged Jim. Jim's mother watches and takes care of Thomas when Jim is away at work.

Jim's mother: "Tom. Your father is here. Put down the book."

Thomas: "I can't. I am currently in the best part of the book."

Jim: (*Taking a seat next to his mom*) "Its fine. (*Points at Tom*) Keep reading."

Looking at his boy's intense brown eyes, it reminds him of his late wife, Meredith. Two years ago, Meredith lost her battle with cancer. She was a feisty person not letting cancer bring her down and define her. Sometimes looking at her, you couldn't even tell that she was stricken with cancer. Both the boy and her have the same love of reading. Their house is filled with stacks of books that were left behind unread waiting for Thomas to discover them. Thomas was in the hospital mainly since he is constantly sick with fevers and headaches. Five days ago, his pediatrician recommended them to head straight to the hospital, as it seems to be something very serious. Then, the doctor walked in and told Jim that Thomas was diagnosed with Leukemia. He had the doctor repeat the word "Leukemia" 10 times because he was wondering if his hearing was okay. After an hour of shock, he looked at Thomas and started to cry. After two whole hours of crying, he could only stare at Thomas full of regret. As the sun sets down from the window, he can feel the dreams and hopes he had for his son dwindling away. Then, he remembered Meredith's passion and feisty nature when she was first diagnosed with cancer. She was not afraid and said that she will give cancer a fight before it claims her life. She was strong, and he was the weak one. He is the one that always cried when sadness consume him. Jim realized that he must not let his hardships define who he is and only stride forward so he won't have more regrets.

Duality

By Meghan

“You’re so strong!”
“You’re so brave!”
Do they realize
You’re headed towards
An early grave?

Your bones they ache
Your head it spins
As they say
“You can beat this!”
“I know you’ll win!”

You sit alone
And count the hours
Wait by the phone
Sitting in your tower
Listening to the dial tone

It finally rings and to the phone you fly
Hoping to be able to vent and cry
Only to hear those words even on the
phone
“You can’t even tell you’re sick!”
“I never would have known!”

They praise and praise
As you count the days
But they do not feel
The loneliness of being wheeled

Down a blinding hospital hallway, miles
away

They only see the surface
They don’t see what lies beneath
or how you’re unsteady on your feet
The difficulty for you to even get out of
bed
The effort it takes to look like you’re
ahead

Ahead of the ball, on top of your game
When in all reality, you don’t feel the
same
In fact you feel worse,
Expecting a hearse
Yet again, they bellow

"Have you tried herbal tea?,
It sure worked for me
When I had headaches!"
Your body, it shakes,
You’re not sure how much more you can
take

You internalize
And you avoid their eyes
Their intentions, though good
Don’t do what they should
You are made more alone

Lipstick

By Meghan

The reds, the blues,
I have all the hues.
The corals, the greens,
My colorful dreams

The purples, the oranges, the blacks,
The collection grew as the days passed.

But now, I succumb,
To the beat of a drum
I did not ask to play.
And so
I wake up,
every day

And I no longer toil til I'm near sick
Over which lipstick to pick

Though the colors,
they were so bright,
Even the ones dark as night
Just now,
not so much
I dare even put on blush

The makeup,
it seems,
As well as the concealers
And the creams,
Simply fail to wash away
The clear burden of the days

Silly makeup,
I adored,
I coveted,
I wore.
But now, it sits in solitude
It sits quietly, in my room

Is it because, I have seen
That I am no longer a queen?

Not something to paint
Not something to display
Just something
Or someone
Trying to get through a day?

Why would I spend hours getting ready
When my hand cannot stay steady

I sit here, and try
To accurately find
The day when it changed,
The hour it came
When my war paint became a reminder
That I just am so fucking tired
My shimmers, my shades
My infinite color range
went from my pride
To being a way to hide

I went from a piece of art
To a sideshow clown,
as I filled my online cart.

And there's no beautiful verse
About how things changed
And the colors returned.
I just decided, one day,
That the colors became grey.

That fallacy is not how I want to live
The reds, the blues,
My beautiful hues,
They are all grey.
They are least of my concerns.
My heart, it no longer yearns
To be coveted, to me adored.

The thought of
getting dolled up
just makes me bored.

Lung Transplant Floor

By Rumaiisa

My feet felt like daggers in the earth as I tried to keep my balance on the crushed dry
rocks

Some of the ground was golden and speckled with dry branches

Some was pitch black with hints of bright green moss

What a privilege it is to breath in cool, crisp, air

To hear the crunching of the leaves beneath your feet

And to have your lungs burn for such beautiful sights

It was a steep climb but something told me it would be worth it

Hours later and my heart was pounding with every step

When I made it to the top I thought for sure I would pass out

And they would write about me

“young traveler’s lungs give in and falls at the sight of fall”

Nonsense, I had never smoked a cigarette

I walked everywhere

I didn’t live a sedentary lifestyle

I thought back to every patient I had met without these tokens

Their lungs were burning too

But in the midst of the loud beeping heart monitor

And in their periphery, nothing was golden

White-gray walls surrounded them on 3 sides

And a window overlooking more concrete buildings

I smiled at the sight of families bringing in flowers

Only to find that flowers were a danger to lungs

And their flowers had to be left off the floor

Colors fading in the break room

And every night I ended my shift, I said goodbye

Hoping their lungs would one day burn

For prettier sights than these

Waking Up to a Loved One

By Rumaiisa

I awoke and you were there
Sitting in your uncomfortable blue chair
I wanted to reach my hand up
And wipe away the droplets on your cheeks
They looked so wrong resting there
But your eyes soon met mine
And the moment was lost in time
As you scrambled with the sleeve of your sweater
And quickly wiped the evidence
And covered the trail with a smile
What was left felt like shards of glass
Criss-crossing themselves into my chest
And they remained there as you spoke
“Oh honey! How are you? How do you feel?”
Like thin ice on a frozen lake, cracking
Like the universe had sat itself down on my body
Like I was sinking slowly into the hospital floor
And I wished no part of me would remain in sight
But I replied
“I’m okay, how are you?”

Hypothyroidism

By Diana

Being fatigue at a young age
didn't stop me,
nothing could stop me.

The ends of my thick coarse hair
started becoming dry,
and thin, falling out in clumps.
Water becoming my enemy.

My weight spiraling out of control,
my feelings as well.
I knew what was coming.
The same problem that cursed my family.

My mom passed it down to me,
and I'll pass it to my future daughters.

At the age of 17, diagnosed,
Living among danger,
Right after the war

Waiting, waiting, waiting,
Praying, crying,
Preparing for surgery

Soon I'll have the same scar,
Across my neck,
Reminding me,
Never letting me forget

Barely motivated,
Barely affording medication,
but I know I have to leave,
I have to make a future for myself.

The Misconception

By Diana

To the young woman like me,
Striving for an academic degree,
While living in the shadows of stereotypes

Cook for the man who
brings home the money
Clean the house, it's the least you can do
Care for the children, it's your job honey

The same lifestyle your mother tolerated
But a new country equals new opportunities
But instead they grew frustrated

The new country classifies our people as
criminals,
Thieves who steal jobs and are
Unable to afford a higher education

Don't get me wrong,
Our people have their own strong,
And false perceptions of the perfect
woman

Don't expect everyone to understand
How your mind wanders at night,
How restless your sleep is,
How you can't explain the way you feel,
You'll be called crazy, it not acceptable
And God forbid you talk to a professional

Other woman suffered in silence
They had no guidance,
They were scared of being seen as strange
You don't have to be,
Be the change.

Don't accept these stereotypes,
Don't let them control your life,
But don't be ashamed of your roots

Skin color and complexion
Beautiful to their own degree of perfection
Traits inherited from a long line of
beautiful woman

The comforting smell of fresh pupusas,
The smell of coffee infusing the air
Triggering memories of the beautiful land

Maracas and drums booming,
Fiery red lipstick,
Becoming homesick,
Regardless confidence is key

R's rolling swiftly off the tongue,
Many songs yet to be sung
The beauty of our language and the
history

Our women were made to believe
They were nothing without a man
That mental health was a sin
To grow thick skin
It's our job to change that state of mind
For other younger girls

But always,
Love your culture,
Stay true to your heritage
Love yourself,
Be the change.

A Display of Glass

By Abigail S.

As I walked through the streets of Boston, I pass by a store, a store of glass. It shimmered and shined throughout the whole store, like a never-ending sea of water, crystal and clear. At first it looked normal to me, just a store upon many stores but as I stayed there for one- no three minutes- it flashed through my eyes like a ray of sunshine and through that ray, I looked away, away from the pain of looking beyond the pain I saw myself dealing with: depression. I could not look at it because it shined through my eyes, trying to break through my irises but only reflecting to its original spot. It took three minutes for the beams of light to cut through and light the darkness within me. Glass upon glass reflect the feeling within me until it turned into a storm that felt like I couldn't drown in and a better day ahead of me. So, I got the inspiration to write and write out all my feelings inside me until nothing, but light showed through.

Fall

By Abigail S.

I reach
But yet
can't have
Cells surround me but
Yet
Can't find any to reach me
I'm lost in a sea of blood

White T cells try to help me
Yet
The darkness within swallows it up
As the dark angel rises,
Taking everything within me

Reach
And I fall
Drift around
Without water insight
The swirls of dreams I'm deep within
Touch has no feeling
Sight has no seeing
Yet
I hear walls crashing around me

Reach
And I fall

Tired

By Abby B.

Rubber bands snapping in my thighs
And calves
And tightening around my head
Sprouting knives and
Boring into a vulnerable crevice
A snake constricting
And wriggling in my chest
Threatening to show its face
Before caving into cowardice
The ting of a bell
Constant until my eyes close
Then silenced by the
Muffled nothing
The depleted vacuum
The space between here and Mars when Mars is a resident of a distant galaxy
And I'm not quite sure where 'here' is
The silence after the applause
The incognizant echo of unrealized thoughts
But before all of this
One brief parting query:
 Do you understand?
 This is what I mean when I say
 Tired

Sea Glass
By Abby B.

A man in a dark coat and a fedora sits alone on the ground, his wing tipped shoes digging into the sand. The hem of his grey trousers is flecked with salty droplets. The cuffs of his coat sleeves bear dark rings where the sea took hold of them. His shaky fingers twist a green clump of sea glass.

The midday sun shines down on multi-colored umbrellas shading sticky faces and plastic pails. Children race to the edge of the water only to dart back with screams of fear and excitement at the cold lapping waves. Teenagers clamber over rougher tides, pushing deeper and deeper into the surf, a contest between false bravery and common sense. Young couples roam the damp sand just past the reach of the waves, ambling aimlessly down the infinite stretch of beach. Their older counterparts slump in folding chairs clutching a cheap novel, cell phone, tube of sunblock, half-empty beer, a partner's inattentive hand. The man sees none of this. He twists his sea glass and smiles. A nearing shadow catches his eye and he looks up expectantly. The young woman smiles politely as she continues up the beach. The man twists his sea glass.

As the sun begins to drop and the beach begins to clear, a middle-aged woman in a crisp white shirt and matching slacks approaches. The setting sun reflects off her gold-plated name tag. She rests a hand on the man's shoulder.

“Are we ready to go Mr. Harmon?”

The man smiles warmly and pats the woman's hand.

“Oh, not yet Gloria, dear. She isn't here yet.”

Gloria winces. She kneels in the sand beside Mr. Harmon.

“Mr. Harmon, I don't think your wife is coming today.”

Harmon waves her off with his lip curled, a knowing smile.

“She's coming, dear. When Penelope says she's going to do something, the hand of God couldn't stop her.”

He holds up the sea glass.

“It matches her eyes perfectly. Sea foam green. I'm going to make it into a necklace in my workshop. Not a bad anniversary present, eh?”

Gloria closes her eyes and exhales slowly. She opens them to find Mr. Harmon eyeing her with concern, his luminous smile finally faltering.

“Are you alright, dear? You don't look well.”

Gloria braces herself; prepares for a battle she has fought hundreds of times. Her voice wears the strain.

“Mr. Harmon, Penelope's not coming. She never was. She died. Ten years ago.

The pair's eyes meet. Penetrating brown oaks searching desperately for understanding in faded blue wafers.

Harmon turns away and gazes out to the water, his face empty and gaping. By the sea's edge, a young woman plucks a shell from the foam. She presses the shell into the

palm of the young man at her side. He twists the shell in his nimble fingers before tucking it into his chest pocket.

Harmon turns abruptly back to Gloria, his eyes alight.

“Gloria, you’re right. I am terribly sorry. It seems I have mistaken the day. Please forgive me; my mind’s not what it used to be. My wife is not coming today. She is coming tomorrow.”

Gloria’s eyes glisten, “Mr. Harmon…”

“I am terribly sorry about the error. I do hope I haven’t inconvenienced you.”

Gloria whispers hoarsely, “Not at all, Mr. Harmon. Not at all.”

Gloria rises and carefully pulls Mr. Harmon to his feet. As the pair trudge through the sand, Gloria murmurs, “I’m sorry your wife couldn’t come today.”

Mr. Harmon scoffs, “Don’t be sorry, dear! Today is a good day; when it is over, I get to see my Penny again and while it is here, I get to dream of her iridescent green eyes.”

He leans in conspiratorially and gives her a wink.

“You know, they say the anticipation is almost as good as the real thing.”

Gloria returns a watery smile.

“I hope that’s true, Mr. Harmon.”

To People Like My Sister

By Allison A.

This is for all the people like her
Who feel as if the world around them is faster than a blur
Who at times can barely choke out a word
Without feeling that every syllable will be spurred

This is for all the people like her
Who can't help when falling tears occur
Fighting to blink them back in shame because
They're told that they're stupid for them without pause

This is for all the people like her
Who suppress every thought they think to confer
Because someone once said their passions were annoying and pointless
And now feel stupid and allow their interests to depress

You are not solitary
Amidst everything, people understand, do not be wary
When at last you are tired of being sad and wish for something more luminary

Do not feel hindered as you let these things go
Letting go of your chains and following the rainbow
To proudly rant about your interests and to cry just as so
You're being yourself, just go!

Auto-Pilot

By Allison A.

When my head is addled
with the heaviness of sleep,
my legs without fail will

carry me from the time
my alarm sounds to the
time in which I must set

it again; When my head
is full of every thought,
every worry, every fear

every plot, every joy,
My legs will carry me
to where I need to be

I think someone once told me
“What you’re doing is dissociating”
but I just thank my body

every day for faithfully
going on “auto-pilot” mode
when my brain has

wandered from its duties,
allowing me to just think.
Just think of anything

and everything.
Think of how every novel
I read will be wasted

When I eventually meet
my inevitable end
How everything I feel is

pointless, how humans evolved,
How people who are dead
might feel or not feel

because an afterlife is
not guaranteed and how
this information scares me--

...

But before I know it,
I am in front of my friends
I am at school and smiling,

all these terrible thoughts
that could incapacitate any
sane person had not hindered

my daily commute at all
And I can only think,
“Thank you auto pilot”

To Those Who Helped Me Through

By Jess

To the night nurse who hand fed me
Mouthfuls of medication
At 4 am – making sure to barely wake me.

To the surgeon who repaired my gait
And left behind three surgical
Screws after my pelvis
Was cracked like a wishbone.

To my parents who can't bear to be
In the same room together,
Who did just that.

The 10 months of physical therapy,
The wheelchair that carried me,
And the friends and family who supported me
When I needed them most.

To my cheerleaders
my unsung heroes
and my saviors

Take solace in the fact that
You helped
Save a life.

To My Apartment Stairwell

By Jess

Who would think ascending
the 13 steps
From floor one to floor two
Would roll my weary
Joints out of place.

Like a wave
Approaching the shoreline and
Welling
With ferocious intent

To start an earthquake in my
Belly the tide is rising
The ground is shaking and it
Will drown.

Pass through my lungs and
Up my throat and
Out my heaving breaths.

Godspeed my health
and strength.

You're
By Allison P.

Always there for me, whenever I need someone
Dressed so hypnotically, I can't get enough of you
Dreams after a nightmare, shining brighter than the sun
In me forever, I hope you will never be gone

Calming to my heart, despite what they say
Taking over my life, our love so strong and true
In my head, on my mind every single day
On my dresser, seducing me over for a taste

Not supposed to be here, but I won't ask you to leave
Someone who will kill me, yet you make me feel so free

Survival
Allison P.

So I'll ask myself how, why
Did it take so long
So I'll tell myself don't cry
They are gone

It's been so long since I've seen myself
Since I cared for myself
It's been so long I don't recognize her
But I'll try to remember
I'm already shattered so it doesn't matter
I can only go up now
I'm shaking but no longer breaking
I'll manage somehow

Beach Day

By Yasmine

First approaching the bottom of my foot,
As I step into the soft yellow sand,
The small particles engulf my foot,
As the weight sinks and the heat reaches in between my toes.

And also up top of my head,
The sun shining as bright as ever,
Emitting sizzling rays penetrating the melanin on my skin,
Skin goes from, light, to beige, to tan.

The heat works its way to the center of my body,
The warm fuzziness submerges into the depths of my skin,
Satisfied with the outer sensation,
Slowly making me feel complete.

Free

By Yasmine

At last the strength I've given through
The long months have been a noted,
The work nurses do is far more
What I have seen that goes much devoted.

That breath of fresh air I now consume is
What I see as the first of many,
I am free finally I don't know to do now
I am much too tired it has been a wary.

Into the new world I come here with open arms
Stronger than ever,
Nothing will control me from now on
Nothing never.

Everlasting

By Abhi

The sun was barely on the horizon. The last rays of those bloody orange sunset filled the clear dark blue autumn sky with a peaceful silence. The aesthetically pleasing clouds spread all over the sky with tints of orange and red highlighted on their tails. On that battlefield they stood, all of them, beaten up, exhausted but not yet finished. Still fight left in them. Everything against these cancer warriors. The monster was walking towards them from the edge of the cliff where the field was ending and the earth was becoming one with the sea below it.

There was an aura of tiredness and lethargy all around the battlefield. But each of them helped the other out. After all, they are fighting against a common enemy; a creature, genetically modified, scarier than anything that ever existed on the face of the earth. The impending battle was looming. As the black silhouette of the giant monster turned towards them, they got prepared for an encounter.

Weak and tired from his continuous battles before this one, he looked up to the monster from the ground. Just like everyone else he is fighting against this monster to survive, in the world he came to know as home. He knew survival would be because his platoons' courage and also the mercy of the monster. Clearly worn out, he felt the tears streaming down his face, mixing with the blood pouring from his skull, he knew there was almost nothing he could do to change what was about to happen but nevertheless; he gripped his sword, he looked into the hollow dark void that stood in front of his face.

He looked at the people beside him. "OK," he thought to himself, "you might be tuff, but there is no way you are taking me out without a fight. Not me. Not anyone of us. Not tonight. We as one will give it our best. Do you think you will just come here and take us away with you?" He spit on the rough and ragged ground. Turned his head left and right, he could see his brothers and sisters, parents and friends, and other like him. He nodded his head in agreement along with the rest. With all different sorts of weapons with them, they looked ready to fight more. The blacksmiths are still working on a weapon that will defeat the monster once and for all, but there was no progress yet. But that didn't stop the soldiers from fighting it. No one, not one person was done yet. "Sure it might seem like you will win the battle, but will you have an easy time? Absolutely NOT." Just as his own words rang inside of his head, he found himself running towards the monster and all the other warriors following close behind him.

But the monster would eat them in the end; slowly, taking it's time. Some faster than the others. It's won countless of wars and battles among people all over the world. Children, adults, and elders. Nobody was safe from this dreaded being. Hurting the rich, the poor. Without discrimination it picks its prey and makes them its victim. There have been efforts to find the right weapon to fight this monster for years and years now but

still without success. You could see the wrath and deaths the monster was carrying on the back of itself. So many bodies it took credit for. The monster seems to be everlasting.

To One Shortly to Die

By Abhi

You're waiting. You're waiting for the world to stop. You've given everything you can to live this life and now it's almost over. The life you've lived has been amazing. The moments you've had with your family, with your friends were why you lived this far. The memories from your travel. The memories from your time with your beautiful wife. The memories from your time with your children. They are what you and they will cherish until the end of your time.

How would other people remember you, how would you bid goodbye to the world. Not much of a legacy you get to leave when you're a carpenter, but hope you have done your profession proud. But it wasn't the carpentry you cherish more, it's the countless hikes and backpacking trips you've been on. They are the ones you enjoy the most. The ones with your friends, the ones with your family, and the ones you went on yourself. Strolling through the streets of Granada licking an ice-cream with your children and trapped in the winter city of Reykjavik taking the warmth of the fire and singing songs with your friends; those are the fruitful memories. Hiking to the top of Sulphur Mountain alone during autumn season and looking at the colorful pine trees in the Canadian west or riding to the top of Mount Washington with your family in a tiny car, those are the things that will keep you in peace.

But now you've got to give in. Your illness has made you incapable of moving from the bed. All you can do now is just stare at the ceiling and ponder over these memories. Hope that your children and your wife can live to a life after you. You hope to have left that spirit of exploration for your children, so it's fine now. You can let go.

Crossing the Rainbow Bridge

By Amirah

When I am six feet underground
How will you remember me
Will you recall the glimmer in my eyes that sparkle when I smile
Or the way my ears turn red when I lie

When I cross the great divide
Shut out the memories of hospital beds and beeping machines
Remember me for my flaws
My stubbornness and my ignorance and my temper

When I have kicked the bucket
I want you to banish the images of my final days from your mind
Remember that I am at peace
I am me again

I am begging you
Don't let this nuisance erase the good times
Do not cry for me
Unless they are tears of joy

Goodbye beautiful world
I shan't forget you
When I climb the stairway to heaven
Or whatever it is kids are calling it these days

Goodbye cruel world
How could you rip me away from you so abruptly
The joke is on you though
For my legacy lives on.

The Doctor's Magic

By Amirah

Stepping out of the never-ending hallway with the green carpet and the vibrantly painted walls and into the dimmed, dull room with the never comfortable desk chairs and the always a week behind magazines was always a difficult adjustment. My father, a man who up until now believes that mental illnesses are something to be prayed away rather than treated by a doctor and prescription meds, looked at me with a raised eyebrow and dubiously asked, "Are you sure you want to do this? I think medication should be a last resort and I don't want you to become zombie-like like your brother did on his meds."

I sighed, as this was nowhere near the first time my father had expressed his doubts regarding me going to counseling sessions and his stubbornness was getting on my last nerve. I looked at him and responded, "Dad, I know that you were raised in a time and place that often ignored mental illnesses, but you have to listen to what the psychiatrist has to say and maybe you'll change your mind."

He glanced at me, and I could've sworn he had rolled his eyes. Before I could retort, the psychiatrist called us into the room. I described what a typical day was like for me, how I struggled to get out of bed and how everything was dull and dark. As I spoke, something changed in my father's eyes. Realizing the direness of my situation, my father opened his mind a miniscule amount more than usual and asked to speak to the psychiatrist privately. He emerged fifteen minutes later with a prescription in hand, and I beamed. It had been so long since I'd felt any happiness. Finally, I achieved what I had set out to do. With the help of the psychiatrist, my knight in shining armor, I'd taken the first step towards destroying a huge stigma in my culture. One person down, an entire generation to go.

No Escape
By Michelle

it's hard not to wish the feeling would melt
away it scorches my flesh and singes my hair and burns
at my feet and makes me want to run

but I can't run out of the straight jacket that
makes me sweat and I wiggle and thrash and steam
comes out of my frustrated ears

I look around me and see nothing
but flames and burning and terror and I can't
leave the hellscape that I'm in

this skeleton this flesh it burns and I think
that escaping would solve the problem but
I realize it's me that creates it and these things

that I sense aren't real and that I am
ruining this world for the body
that so kindly houses my burning thoughts

If I Had To Say Goodbye
By Michelle

goodbye to the mountains I never
climbed goodbye to the ziplines I
never rode and the motorcycles I
was afraid of my whole life

goodbye to the sand on the beach
that I hated for so long and to the
sun that I was afraid of and to the
sharks that were really harmless

goodbye to new year's resolutions
that were never accomplished and
the unused gym membership goodbye
to the self-improvements unmade

goodbye to the poems unwritten and
the stories untold goodbye to the art
not painted for fear of the result and
goodbye to devaluing the process

goodbye to change and to routine
both of which I dreaded and
craved goodbye to the unexplored
regions of the world and of myself

The Car
By Danny

The stifling heat of a parked car
in the middle of the summer.
Do everything you can to avoid it
but it greets you all the same.

So you wallow in it
and try to ignore it
by focusing on something else.

Maybe a drive would do you good.
But the steering wheel
lets its discomfort be known,
lashing out at your hands
so that you share its pain.

But a trip without pain is no heroes journey at all.
So you drive anyway.

At least the AC is there for you,
as little help as it is
at first.

And as you drive upon the distorted road,
through the shimmering air,
you think of a time without the heat.
When it was not swallowing you,
and the sweat
wasn't following you everywhere.
When you actually enjoyed the car.

The memories --

wind biting your face as you ride your sled
just a little too fast, ears colored with life
as the pristine blanket of twinkling snow
makes your gloved fingertips tingle,
sports games that are never long enough
under the sun that is being roused
by the laughter of children and the cries of coaches,
the dying leaves that put on their makeup
for one last show, and the crisp smell
of the air beginning to mourn them

the gentle smile of your mother,
the booming, tobacco-tinged laugh of your father,
the yips and yaps of your dogs,
the safety of hugs
and the comfort of cuddles,
the taste of hot chocolate
that burns your tongue
but warms your heart
the floating, weightless feeling that you get
when you look at your friends
and realize how amazing
how truly amazing
they are --

The memories
are your only comfort.
And you realize,
you finally realize,
that they have been all along.
The ones you've already made.
And the ones you're eager to make.
And they will be forever yet.

The Garden
By Danny

I've had a garden for a while now
But I wouldn't call myself
A gardener.

I mean, the ground it's on has been there
Longer than I have.
I just wanted to get closer to nature.
Or the idea of it, anyway.

So I've been gardening for years
And let me tell you,
It's not very fun.

But it's useful.

When I first started there were weeds
And the dirt was all rocky
And it had been picked clean
By animals and weather.

Where to start?
Do I get rid of the weeds first
Or do I get new soil
Or do I find a way to shield my own bit of nature
From itself?

I don't remember how I started.
But the weeds got picked
And the dirt was made anew
And I decided that a sheltered garden
Is no garden at all.

It's been years now
And I still cry
Upon the turning of the seasons.
Because I lose that which I have planted.
That which I have fostered and grown,
A father no more.

But in time
They are reborn
In soft petals
And pliant stems

And colorful faces.

The night sky of bellflowers,
the daffodils that serve as my own little stars,
the sunset of poppies
and the cloudy petunias.
All the heavens are cared for
until their gates close
and I go with them.

And some are lost before their time.
Animals ravage the earth,
Weeds steal life for their own,
Weather reminds everyone of its dominion.
But I don't blame them.
They have their own gardens to tend to.

So I've been gardening for a while now.
It's tough work
And some days are easier than others.
But my garden is still there.
And will be,
Gardener or not.

STUDENT WRITING PROMPTS inspired by C.K. Williams' *Falling Ill: Last Poems*

Give a body part the ability to take control and change your outlook about something negative.

Write about something you take for granted and wish that you could get back.

Take an idea—a spirit, a religion, or a dream—what would happen if it were lost? How would you react? Would you still be yourself?

Use your poem or story to question a natural reflex (i.e. thirst, hunger, anger).

Write a poem or story that opposes a common cliché about illness.

Close your eyes. Think of one word to say what life is. Write a poem from it.

If you were on your deathbed, how would you say goodbye to the world?

Write a poem or story in which a character reacts to a specific diagnosis.

Design a poem around a single word located in the poem's center.

Write a poem or story focused on a particular sense, perhaps one you rarely use.

What unspeakable thought would you want to keep your eyes closed (or open) to avoid?

Personify something (give it voice) and then take that voice away, shifting the power.

Personify an emotion to show how it affects you or makes you feel.

Write a poem based around a question word (i.e. What, Who, Where, When, Why...).

Write to imagine forgetting.

Write about a time when you felt out of this world (in a positive or negative way) and describe the physical and mental sensations that you felt.

Write a poem of bitter peace.

Hon291 The Language of Illness with Aaron Devine

FEATURED MUSIC

“Clouds” by Zach Sobiech, “The Body Breaks” by Devendra Banhart, “Box of Rain” by the Grateful Dead, “Silent House” by The Dixie Chicks, “And the Healing has Begun” by Van Morrison, “Will I?” from RENT the musical, “Mission” by Lupe Fiasco, “Breathe Me” by Sia, “Comfortably Numb” by Pink Floyd, “Broken Fingers” by Sam Baker, “I’ll Fly Away” by The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, “Crystal Bowl Healing Jam” by Ayumi Alma Ueda, “Dust Bowl Pneumonia” by Woody Guthrie, “Moanin’” by Charles Mingus, “Ronan” by Taylor Swift, “White Cedar” by The Mountain Goats, “Troubles Will Be Gone” by The Tallest Man on Earth, “Gracias a la Vida” by Violeta Parra, “Nobody’s Empire” by Belle and Sebastian, “Helplessness Blues” by Fleet Foxes, “Disintegration Anxiety” by Explosions in the Sky.

FEATURED ART

“Science and Charity” by Pablo Picasso, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” by Pieter Bruegel, “Acceptance/Rejection” by Evelyn Berde, “Big Self Portrait” by Chuck Close, “I and the Village” by Marc Chagall, “Árbol de la Esperanza (Tree of Hope)” by Frida Kahlo, “Red” by Mark Rothko, “Hope” by Hertz Nazaire, “La Perruche et la Sirene” and “The Sorrows of the King” by Henri Matisse, “Melancholia” by Albrecht Durer, “Portrait of Dr. Gachet” by Vincent Van Gogh, “The Scream” by Edvard Munch, “La Poetesse” by Joan Miro, “The Urologist” by Jose Perez, “Morning Sun” by Edward Hopper, “Doubtful Hope” by Frank Holl, “Untitled” (sculpture) by Judith Scott from *Re/Formations*, “The Sick Child (Self-Portrait)” by Salvador Dali.

COURSE READINGS

Essays/Craft Nonfiction: *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft* by Janet Burroway, “On Being Ill” by Virginia Woolf, “The Aquarium” by Aleksandar Hemon, selections from *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, “How Poetry can Lift Us from our Troubled Times” by Jennifer Imsande, “Telling Suffering: A Brief Interview with Donald Hall” from *The Hedgehog Review*, “On Lightness” by Katrina Vandenberg, “Curiosity and What Equality Really Means” by Atul Gawande, and “Souls on Ice” by Mark Doty.

Poetry: *Falling Ill: Last Poems* by C.K. Williams, “Why I Write” by Terry Tempest Williams, “Introduction to Poetry” by Billy Collins, “Between Walls” and “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” by William Carlos Williams, “I Have a Terrible Cold” by Fernando Pessoa, “S-T-R-O-K-E” by C.K. Stead, “Ode to the Hotel Near the Children’s Hospital” by Kevin Young, “Kindness” by Naomi Shihab Nye, “Summer Solstice” by Stacie Cassarino, “To One Shortly to Die” by Walt Whitman, “After an Illness, Walking the Dog,” by Jane Kenyon, “Her Long Illness” and “Without” by Donald Hall, “Strange Little Prophets” by Barbara Perez, “Bipolar” by Cristina Garcia, “Fever 103” and “You’re” by Sylvia Plath, “The Nurse’s Pockets,” “What the Nurse Likes,” and “The Body Flute” by Cortney Davis, “Sheets” by Fanny Howe, “Notes from Dialysis” by Hugo Williams, “Chemo Side Effects: Memory” by Elise Partridge, “Musee des Beaux Arts” by W.H. Auden, “Shake the Dust” by Anis Mojgani, “Ode to Buttoning and Unbuttoning My Shirt” and “Becoming a Horse” by Ross Gay, “Holy Sonnets” (10 and 11) by John Donne, and “A Display of Mackerel” by Mark Doty.

Fiction: *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, “People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk” by Lorrie Moore, an excerpt from *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch* by Leo Tolstoy, and an excerpt from *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride.

Drama: *W;t* by Margaret Edson.