Memory is the only thing that binds you to earlier selves; for the rest, you become an entirely different being every decade or so, sloughing off the old persona, renewing and moving on.

-Sebastian Faulks
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Many works in this edition use the theme “Decades” to anticipate and reflect upon what this new decade or previous ones mean to them.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
<td>Sofia Gershanik</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Hands</td>
<td>Addie Lemann</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Nicholas Provosty</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Fight</td>
<td>Kayley Hill</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Giovanna Piedimonte</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brapeinei</td>
<td>Daryn Dusansky</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Krish Sadhwani</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic</td>
<td>Margot Roussel</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Work For Food</td>
<td>Catherine Cahn</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial Tears</td>
<td>Carson Oliver</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Mother</td>
<td>Isabelle Plaisance</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monochrome Desperation</td>
<td>Richard Simmons</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Mai Burrell</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Impressions</td>
<td>Audrey Brossette</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Maggie Roos</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Story, Different Time</td>
<td>James Downing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>Luc Prokop</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>807 South Wright Street</td>
<td>Cecile Oliver</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Elba and Broad</td>
<td>David Luongo</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird-Brained</td>
<td>Kate Flanagan</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>Maggie Roos</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Life of Moving</td>
<td>Jean-Paul Pertuit</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These Four Walls</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Still Things that Move</td>
<td>Sofia Gershanik</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumble</td>
<td>Audrey Brossette</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.B.R</td>
<td>Sam Zurik</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Messenger’s Etude</td>
<td>Nithya Ramcharan</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Mamba</td>
<td>Griffin Descant</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My New Orleans Summer</td>
<td>Ellie Menszer</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Are You</td>
<td>Luc Prokop</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Afternoon at Madame’s</td>
<td>Riley Palmer</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Up in a Man’s World</td>
<td>Margaret Garner</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soul Music</td>
<td>Richard Simmons</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now</td>
<td>Catelyn Coffin</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Lia Bu</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niagara Falls</td>
<td>Sam Krause</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without the Word</td>
<td>Sophia Landry</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Friends</td>
<td>Catherine Cahn</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-Teen</td>
<td>Makayla Powell</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunion</td>
<td>Griffin Descant</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandemic</td>
<td>Mai Burrell</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Me</td>
<td>Lilly Gorman</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As They Dry</td>
<td>Addie Lemann</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Listen
Sofia Gershahnik

Inspired by “Bruises” by Lewis Capaldi

Waves, breaking on the sandy rocks
Green grass, waving to the dance of the wind
Water, running through stream,
  rippling,
  bubbling, across the
  pebbles resting at the bottom
  Sinking,
  pulling away,
  drifting down, away from
  the surface
Water droplets, hanging onto the edges of each grass stem
Life, circling and circling because it never stops,
it just keeps moving
to the rhythm.
Helping Hands
Addie Lemann
Our Fight
Kayley Hill

Bruised and bloodied from our war. Our hearts torn and our Dreams crushed. We band together. To face this fight. We trudge on, fighting for our freedom. We’ve turned our backs On hate, but it follows us, hunts us. To them we are nothing; We don’t belong here or anywhere. To me, we are Undaunted. We will fight for freedom, for love, for hope. We will forgive, but not forget; for if we forget they will never learn.

Standing together, we are unbroken. Some gave up, for this fight is continuous, but Others are still fighting and yelling out, stumbling for a crutch. Floundering around like a blind man in a crowd full of people. Through the thick misery and pain, I see another life. A future for us, all of us together again.

But in all my dreams and before my eyes, It still plunges at us, grasping for us, choking us, drowning us.

If in some distant dream we could be equal in the country We fought for. We will band together; not for war, but for Peace, for light, for hope. But this is just a Dream, like the devil, it will Exist for eternity. If you could hear every scream, every Dream being crushed, would you still hate? Would you turn A blind eye to it, or would you take up arms and fight for Something, for anything? Society’s stereotypes and cruel Lies constrict us. My friends, you have the choice to change, and Spread light upon children and new generations. Instead of pain And misery, they can have the joy we never had.
As the bus driver tosses my backpack on the roof, I hope one of the five people sitting there will keep it secure. I opt not to join my backpack but finding a place to sit inside proves to be a challenge. I share a bench with a mother and her three children, jostling with every bump on the rugged road. After two hours, I see my landmark: a Savimex petrol station. I shout out banhch hob, “stop” in Khmer, and am surprised when the bus grinds to a halt. Feeling more like a local than a tourist, I smile. Catching my bag, I walk to the lake, stand on the makeshift dock, and wait.

Forty pieces of wood nailed together serve as my transportation to the island where my host family lives. I will embrace the rhythm of Cambodian life: fetching water for bucket showers, gathering live fish for dinner, and swinging in a hammock. At orientation, I was told to share something meaningful to me during my homestay. I want to teach my host family Canasta, a card game. Canasta is played with 108 cards using two standard decks, including jokers. This game has brought my family together for years. My grandmother taught my parents, brother, and me canasta while waiting for my cousin to be born. Twelve hours of labor gave us plenty of time to master the rules. The pace of the game and my family’s laughter helped me relax and eased my worry about my 43-year-old aunt.

Over the past five years, I have moved from an international school in London to a public school in New York to a private school in Louisiana. My family’s Sunday canasta game was one constant that left me feeling confident and ready for the week ahead. Playing canasta became the cornerstone, helping me connect with people and navigate new environments. The 108 cards have given me a sense of familiarity and a solid foundation wherever I call home; I hope it will be the case again on this remote island.

A woman wearing a bright floral dress waves at me, looking as excited as I feel. My host mother’s warm smile invites a hug. Insisting, she takes my backpack, and we walk to her home side by side to meet her husband, children, and extended family. My host family and I attempt to communicate in Khmer and English. We use our hands and facial expressions to get past the language barrier; our interaction resembles charades. Later that evening, I take out my decks of cards and begin to shuffle. The familiar sound of 108 cards falling on top of each other makes me feel at home. I do not know enough Khmer to explain the game, but we begin counting the cards first in English, then in
Khmer. While we never play a traditional game of canasta, we do create our own version, filled with laughter, channeling the spirit of play that I treasure with my family.

Early the next morning, my host family takes me to their Buddhist temple. I am touched that they wish to share their rituals with me. As we climb the steps, my six-year-old host brother wants to continue our game from the night before. With each step, I first say the number in English and he repeats it in Khmer until we are standing before the temple on the 108th step. I later learn that the number 108 is sacred in Buddhism, representing the wholeness of existence, another reason this number will forever be with me.
Transformation
Krish Sadhwani

Changes while we sleep
Becomes something else entirely
Makes us want to weep
It is much higher than we.

The brightness slowly dissolves
Into something shaped different
The moon soon calls
But the unknown is something magnificent.

To tell this transformation
Is to close one's eyes
And explain the story of creation
Because it seems like it changes in size.

It seems long ago
That we didn't think twice
It is flying low
And will soon pay the price.
Decades are taught in history by people in perfectly divided segments that cut culture into parts with equal width. They get a reputation, a single-word legacy that minimizes the millions of stories into one single narrative. Prosperity, depression, war, conformity, drugs, disco, neon, internet. Translation: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s.
Will Work For Food
Catherine Cahn
I do not look like myself. I am not polo shirts and khakis and side-swept hair. Your face is not yours because you can see the scar on your chin and the stray hairs in your eyebrows that need to be plucked.

I am not myself. I am only a projection of myself.

At 3:00 Mom gathered us in the living room for a rosary. It felt comforting. Going bead by bead around the rosary. All of our eyes were closed except for my mom’s. Her eyes were wide open as she watched me go along from bead to bead and from mystery to mystery.

But while I prayed I couldn’t help but feel That I didn’t deserve

If thy right leg offend
   Cast it off
   Into the fiery pit

Do I too, have to sacrifice?

What am I? Except for human, except for bursts of rainbow light?

   In a world
   Where I am full of light
   How is it
   That the only answer is to smother it?

Bead to bead, mystery to mystery. My prayer is finished.

But worry not. The light still burns.
Our Mother
Isabelle Plaisance

Life is a mother.
It has nurtured us before — we have learned, we have grown.
Today it suckles us.
Humanity hesitates, already dawned and matured; nonetheless
We crave maternal touch,
We crawl into the cliffs of dependency,
We cradle the coaxer of our own ignorance.
As you clutch your phone and scroll miles in length,
You grow obese with thoughts that are not even your own.
What has this life fed? What have you consumed?
You sit and stare, gulping opinions and copying in other words, spewing recycled waste
In a gluttonous routine.
Only you do not recycle. You waste in excess.
The ease
Satisfies you.
Humanity opens its palm and begs for more.
Gluttony, consumerism, cowardice, laziness.
Our lives are being lived for us, the
Very ideas we claim to breed
Are forced down our throats,
Fed to us by the spoonful.
We are drugged, intoxicated.
You may laugh at the trickery of a billboard sign, too wise to fall,
Too aware to be caged,
While you ignorantly abide illusions and patterns,
And cuff yourself to every post.
Monochrome Desperation
Richard Simmons
Time
Mai Burrell

It started... as a picture within our minds
A vision, that grew over “time”-
Too intricate to be expressed through design...

“Time” is divine

Yet, the sensitivity of “time” is in its prime
“Time” is begging to DECLINE
“Time” is infinite
It cannot be defined:
“Time” is free
It cannot be confined
Yet are we fine?
“Time” is UN-kind when it UN-winds
So is the diagnosis of humanity’s demise benign?

Is change a sign?
“Time” kills!
“Time” heals.
“Time” consumes!
“Time” gives.
“Time” takes away!
With “time” there is a price to pay...
First Impressions
Audrey Brossette
Concert
Maggie Roos
A few beers… a birthday dinner… Bourbon Street… an Uber uptown… F&M’s patio bar… a nice quiet house next to the park… the back of a police car… a microwavable burrito… a bed that was comfortable but seemed to spin.

And a college student whose parents were out of town that weekend lying in bed at 1:00 in the afternoon.

She walked into the house through the garage door and looked for the spare key above the washing machine. She had been sent over to the house by her sister who was concerned that her son hadn’t responded to her texts. The key was gone and the door to the house was locked. She exited the garage and went through the side gate into the backyard. She climbed into the kitchen through the window above the garden, careful not to step on her sister’s hydrangeas. She later said the first thing she noticed was the smell. Beer, whiskey, piss, and vomit with a hint of breakfast burrito. She didn’t care. She just needed to make sure he was okay. She grabbed a garbage bag from under the sink. Her mother had always kept them there and she was right in assuming her sister did the same. She whipped open the trash bag with a flourish and hurried up the steps to his room.

He had left the house around 8:00. His parents were out of town and he had made plans to go out for a friend’s birthday. He was dressed for the occasion. He had let his hair grow out during the first semester of college, but he kept it neatly combed so he didn’t look unkempt. He wore navy blue dress pants and a white shirt with no tie, but he topped it off with his grandfather’s grey coat, a coat he loved to wear. It was a shame what happened to it.

Around 5:00 in the morning the Pikes, a family with a house on the park, woke to some quiet knocking on the door and movement in the driveway. The noise ceased within a matter of seconds so they dismissed the event and went back to sleep. Around 9:00, Mr. Pike checked the security cameras expecting to see some animal from the park, possibly the neighborhood possum. The animal on the screen was 5 foot 11, 185 pounds, and wore navy blue pants and a white shirt.

The second she opened the door to his room a smell worse than the one in the kitchen hit her. The food, alcohol, and bad decisions from the night before were leaking out through his pores. He smelled like the morning after a parade. At that moment she got a text from her sister. She opened the phone and saw pictures of her nephew from the night before that her sister had gotten from his friend’s mom. The pictures looked normal at a glance, but upon closer inspection one could see that something was clearly wrong.
His eyes were glazed, his pupils wide, his shirt was untucked, and he wasn’t exactly looking at the camera. She saw the pictures and immediately began to laugh. If it hadn’t been for the cellphones, vapes, and smart watches in the picture, she could’ve believed it was her brother decades before.

He woke up in a haze at 1:00. He felt surprisingly good. He walked downstairs and began to make himself something to eat. He was hungry, but for some reason he couldn’t open the box of Lucky Charms. After some time fumbling with the cardboard he realized he was still drunk. He reached into the drunk drawer and pulled out the breathalyzer his mom had threatened him with in high school. Blow… Calculating… 0.12.

Street lights ahead… get your bearings… need something to drink… streetcar tracks… streetcar tracks… streetcar tracks?… St. Charles… right or left?… need something to drink… rip the Juul to clear your head… tree root pick up your foo- SHIT… Why does that sound familiar?… the world is red and blue… “Yesss, I’m ff-fine… Yesss… Sev-seven-seventeen twenty-nine Octavia”… Why are there bars in the back of this cab?

The staff at F & M’s patio bar found an assortment of items at closing time. A flip with no flop to match, a cowboy hat, a fake Rolex that the bouncer was convinced was real, and a grey jacket with a smashed iPhone and an empty wallet with an unknown liquid on the back. The owner sitting at the bar drinking his coffee didn’t think twice about the items. He had seen far stranger things over the years. He told the bouncer he could keep the fake watch if he wanted. The rest they threw away.
Downtown
Luc Prokop
807 South Wright Street
Cecile Oliver

She’s a house. Their dream home.
She is built up
The walls 50 feet high,
Filled with spiral staircases,
And grand fireplaces.

Yet they want the walls to be 70 feet tall
With marble floors,
And crystal chandeliers.

They overcrowd the house
With lavish parties,
To flaunt her beauty,
To make her seem perfect.

But the floors creak,
The ceiling falls in,
Crash. The house collapses to rubble.

How could they expect her to stand
When the home is without a foundation?
The shop sits at a quiet intersection a little before noon. It’s comprised of red brick walls and a shallow, triangular roof of mottled shingles which, slightly backlit by the sun, casts a short shadow over the storefront. A sign centered on the façade to the right of the service entrance and left of the door reads as follows:

- Car Repairs
- Discount Gas
- Used Tires

A few wire chairs sit outside. In one slouches a man. His face is angled to the sky and his jaw is slackened. His arms dangle at his sides and his legs, spread wide and stiff, extend far out to his feet, which are pointed upward.

Another man, well dressed in a suit and tie with a camera hanging from a strap around his neck, walks down the shop’s adjacent sidewalk. He stops and stares at the red bricks, the roof, the dark, square hole in the wall. After a moment, a third man, hunched over and holding a cigarette, emerges from the darkness. He wears jeans and a tattered red shirt that is unbuttoned, revealing a dark, hairy chest and a silver cross. He glances first at the sleeping man, still slouched in his chair, then turns his back to him. With his feet planted and back arched, he starts a long drag from his cigarette. The photographer raises the camera to his face and takes the picture. The smoker turns his eyes to the photographer. His head follows.

“What’d you just do?” The smoker calls out.
“T’ll took a picture.”
“Of me.”
“Of this.”
The photographer gestures in front of him.
“Why’d you do that?”
The smoker tosses his cigarette at the foot of the sleeper, steps out of the shop’s shadow and joins the photographer on the sidewalk.
“I don’t like it.”
“What?”
“The picture.”
“Well why not?”
“Nobody asked.”
“Nobody asked?”
“It’s my face.”
“What is?”
“In the picture.”
The photographer pauses for a moment and looks over the smoker’s shoulder.
“I didn’t take a picture of your face.”
“Like hell you didn’t.”
“I took a picture of this,” the photographer responds, gesturing again. The smoker looks back.
“And what’s special about this?”
“I don’t know. I just thought it would make for a good picture.”
“Well I don’t like it and I don’t want it and as long as I’m alive I get to choose who takes my picture and when they take it and how they take it.”
The photographer glances over the smoker’s shoulder again. “Who’s he?”
“He doesn’t matter.”
The photographer looks down at the smoker’s chest. He watches the cross. The polished silver shines in the sun.
“What’s with the cross?”
The smoker hesitates to answer.
“What do you mean?”
The photographer smirks a little and the smoker looks around. First at the intersection, then behind him to the sleeper and the dark hole in the wall, then at the door, then back to the photographer.
“I don’t want someone else with my picture.”
“It’s my picture.”
“I’m the one in it.”
“I took it. I took the picture so it’s mine now.”
The smoker shuffles forward a few inches and makes a few fruitless attempts to maintain eye contact. The photographer stares back, unwavering.
“I’ll pay you for it.”
The smoker’s jaw clenches. He exhales from his nose a little and shifts just back into the shade. “How much?”
“Ten dollars.” The photographer reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bill. He extends it to the smoker, his arm just crossing into the shadow.
At that moment, the shop door swings open. In the doorway stands a woman, tall and with a strong brow. She wears a wig and heavy makeup.
“Get back in here,” she calls out in a low voice.
The smoker scowls at the photographer before turning and following the woman into the shop. The photographer slowly lowers his arm, slides his hand into his pocket, and continues on his walk. He crosses the intersection. From the opposite block, he turns and stares at the wire chair and the man sleeping in it. He hasn’t moved.

The photographer walks on as behind him the shop front slowly enters into sunlight.
Bird-Brained
Kate Flanagan
A Life of Moving
Jean-Paul Pertuit

Five-year-old me got on the plane with excitement, not knowing that my family and I would be overseas for ten years. My parents had said we would probably be in the Netherlands for four years, and then come back to the US. That wasn’t quite how it turned out.

The Netherlands welcomed us with rain, windmills, and cheese; it was different from what I knew. There were no suburban neighborhoods, no octagonal stop signs, and no extended family for about 4,800 miles. Instead, we lived on one side of a “twee onder een kap,” which directly translates to “two under one roof,” or a half house; we rode bikes to school each day, and it got cold during winter – something we weren’t used to coming from Texas. After four years I became accustomed to the changes; eventually, Holland became somewhere I felt at home. I had some help though.

I went to the American School of the Hague in a town named Wassenaar. My school had students from over 70 nations. No matter where they originated, they spoke English in a surprisingly similar accent to everybody else at the school: a generic midwestern American accent. A crucial part of acclimating to this new place was the people at my school. Almost everyone was welcoming, helpful, and cheerful. Most of the students were also in a similar situation to me: expats that tend to move every 3-4 years to a different country. This made it hard to create strong relationships with friends, but I managed.

During my first years at the school, I didn’t have a big group of friends. There were around 5-6 people that I would sit with during lunch that I became quite good friends with, but I would go on to become best friends with two of them. I am still in touch with them today despite a bit of an obstacle: moving.

After almost four years of being in Holland, my parents said that we were going to move to Brunei the following year. My brothers and I, hearing this unfamiliar name, reacted with a combination of confusion and wonder exclaiming, “Where’s that?” My dad proceeded to show us the small island of Borneo on which the even smaller country of Brunei was located. I was initially excited. I wondered what it would be like in southeast Asia. What sort of wildlife would there be? What would school be like? However, leaving the people who had become my friends was not something I was looking forward to. How would I keep in touch with them? Being only nine years old, I didn’t have a phone or any social media. I was also not looking forward to leaving.
Holland itself. It was the first place I went to school; the first place I can fully remember events from; the first place I spent more than three years of my life. I would miss the cheese, the ice cream, the school, travelling to old European cities, and the seasons. I would miss a lot, but there was nothing I could do.

My time in Brunei was wild, quite literally. With the lush tropical vegetation, venomous snakes, beautiful hornbills, aggressive monkeys, 4-foot-long monitor lizards, and 80-85-degree temperature year-round. It was more than a bit of a change from Holland where the most exotic wildlife were the domestic hounds and annoying seagulls. One time, while we were doing research in the library, a monkey found its way into one of the classrooms in my grade. In a combination of fear and aggression, the monkey successfully peed on every square foot of the classroom, flipped chairs, and threw papers. Eventually, it hid itself on top of an air conditioning unit inside of the classroom. It was then cautiously removed from atop the unit by clearly experienced staff.

While I was in Brunei, my family and I travelled to places ranging from the urban areas of Singapore and Dubai, to the beautiful rainforests and coasts of Thailand and the Philippines, to the ancient temples of Cambodia. We would travel somewhere just about every long weekend or week-long holiday we got. It was quite an adventure.

After 3 years in Brunei, I had pretty much moved on from the Netherlands. I didn’t really miss it; I was starting to lose my memories of it. I had a close relationship with a few friends with whom I would have sleepovers and play videogames, ping pong, and other sports. Then my parents told us about the option of moving. My dad had said there were two main options: either we move back to the Netherlands or move back to the US. The choice was up to the family. I was torn. Three years ago, I would have wanted to move back to the US, but now it was a hard choice choosing between being with family and being with old friends. In the end, we ended up moving back to the Netherlands.

Moving back to Holland was like a river of memories rushing back: Albert Hein (a local grocery store), the school, the park next to my old house, and old friends. The surge of memories made moving back worthwhile. I was looking forward to living in the place I grew up. The second time was better than the first. This time around I made a lot more friends than I had before. I was friends with the people that were still there from the last time as well as new people. I was able to do a lot more with my friends as well, due to my age. My friends and I would walk on a street called the Langstraat to get lunch or ice cream; we would go see movies at the theater in the Hague, a city about fifteen minutes from Wassenaar; we would go to an amusement park next to my house, just to name a few activities.

As usual, however, after three years we moved again. This time it was to New Orleans, where I will finish high school. At this point, moving became something that I
was used to. By this time, I had social media and other forms of communication to keep up with friends.

As Albert Einstein once said, “Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.” Overall, there are lots of things that I loved about moving abroad for two thirds of my life but also things that I appreciate about staying in one place. I was able to see cultures, cities, and nature that I would not have been able to see if I lived in one place, but I was never able to get entirely familiar with or feel that I truly belonged to one place. I was able to meet people from all around the world with all sorts of personalities, but I couldn’t develop friendships to the degree I would be able to if I lived in one place my whole life. However, there are ups and downs to everything, and my life of moving is something that I would never take back.
These Four Walls
Anonymous

A chill runs down my cheek
    As fast as an Olympian
A warmth walks down my chin
    As slow as the hour hand
At the center of the room
    I can’t hide

Sitting in the shackles you strapped to my wrists and ankles
    Freedom is five feet away
But you built a glass wall in between us
    Tantalizing me
    I tried screaming
People hear me but don’t listen
    I sit here waiting for someone to free me
But waiting for others is like waiting for a wall to shatter on its own
    It is time to fight this war on my own
And as I wipe away the deluge of tears
    And stain my white sweatshirt with red blood from my lips
I am not afraid anymore
The Still Things that Move
Sofia Gershanik

Looking out a window,
Water bubbles,
  hanging on by a thread,
just like we all do
lightly bouncing along to
the rhythm of the car,
following the flow,
tagging along to the cadence of the car,
bobbing to its light,
unmeasured tempo,
the dance of the still things that move.
Tumble
Audrey Brossette
April 27, 2019. Focus on your breathing. 2 seconds in. Hold. 5 seconds out. Repeat. All periphery was gone as I took those 15 steps towards the plate. Each step taken was one step closer to a moment I knew I would remember forever. 2 seconds in. Hold. 5 seconds out. Repeat. My arms began to shake unlike they had ever before. My stomach felt as if I had swallowed a bottle of Draino directly before, tearing away at the tissue of my organs. 2 seconds in. Hold. 5 seconds out. Repeat. My left foot finally left the perfectly green and clear cut grass and reached the newly placed brown dirt. My worn-down cleats slowly dug deep into the once perfect soil. 2 seconds in. Hold. 5 seconds out. Repeat. Silence unlike I had ever heard before. My eyes wandered from the ground down the third baseline. My vision came back as I refocused on the situation at hand. Arm, chin, nose, thigh, swipe across the chest. All of this was merely a distraction. A lie. Fake. It meant nothing, but the other team thought it meant everything. 2 seconds in. Hold. 5 seconds out. Repeat. The silence was broken as I heard a call from the other dug out, reminding me of my failures the day before. His loud crisp voice echoed throughout the field for everyone to hear. His red hair and dark freckles perfectly resembled his fiery personality. He was known throughout the baseball community, but not for his talent. My mind shifted focus to the pitcher and his clear sunburn from a week at the beach. A tan line formed a ring around his neck where a chain would usually hang. His hat was slightly crooked as a result of quick movements. He came towering over me with his long build. His arms longer than my legs, with hands that could grip a basketball. The rest is a blur. Pitch. Swing. Contact. Crowd noise. Running. Like a cliché in any sports movie, my mind wandered to the past. I thought of Mr. Riley as I reached second base. He was the baseball father figure I never had. His fiery personality represented his endless passion for not only Newman, but the game. His energy was unmatched and looked up to by many. It was those late Friday nights and early Saturday mornings he sacrificed for us. It was the game plans he meticulously planned for hours. It was the sprints, the workouts, the ground balls, it was everything he went the extra mile for, it was him. His constant reminders of what lay ahead, the challenges that awaited us and how we would prevail. His sayings that were used to motivate us like “Sulphur” and “State Banners.” It was these characteristics he will forever be remembered for; it was these pieces that will never be forgotten. It was his love for his mom, his family, and most of all, for us.
He was special. We knew it, our parents knew it, every other team knew it, he just was. They saw how we looked up to him. They saw how we acted around him. They saw everything, they thought, but they didn’t see much. They didn’t see him strive to make us better men. They didn’t see him teaching us life lessons. They didn’t see his constant dedication in the classroom. They didn’t see his joy from seeing us succeed. They didn’t see him creating a bond with his players that would last a lifetime. They didn’t see the sadness that wrapped over not only his players, but the entire Newman community. They didn’t see his ceremony, and they didn’t see the millions of tears that were shed. They didn’t hear the stories. They didn’t see the long hugs, the extensive talks, and the long mourn. They didn’t see what he truly meant to us, they didn’t see Shawn Riley. While he was not there in the flesh, I knew he was looking right over my shoulder. That one was for you, I muttered. That one was for you…
Distracting yet mundane, the colors flash perfectly in sync to the girl playing Beethoven on the grand piano. The all-too-familiar headache throbss; I’m overload-ed, blinded by color. She plays well, but I scowl because I feel like I’ve heard “Sonata Pathétique” a million times. I get the same response whenever I hear anything in A-flat major: maroons, burgundies, wines. It’s like trying to learn painting from an artist who only flaunts the globs of paint on his palette.

This is why I didn’t want to attend my little brother’s recital. Like the girl, he’s good — they all are — but there’s nothing I can make sense of or lose myself in. Pretty color schemes jolt me to every tune, and that’s all they are. Just hues. Nothing else but a distraction I have to bear, one that sounds cute when described to others.

The next kid taps out a painful bubbly lemon-yellow tune that doesn’t have much variety. Afer that, my brother performs one of Chopin’s nocturnes with its familiar navy and turquoise waves. Another plays a bubblegum pop track, which is as pink as it sounds.

Then a boy steps up, plops himself on the stool and nervously taps his foot. Poor thing — this must be his first ever performance. Poor me — the vibrant cacophony that attacks with each mistake a novice makes is unbearable.

He eyes the piano with something like dread, gingerly sets his fingers on the keys. Taps his foot more vigorously. The audience grows restless. I can feel my brother’s haughty sneer.

Then the boy plays.

Well, that’s technically what the others have been doing, but he’s not just skittering his fingers across the keys. No, he’s playing with us, with me. He beckons to me cheekily, taunting me before slipping away into a game of hide and seek. I see deciduous greens, woody browns. Faint sunny yellows reaching through the copse. Pine needles scent the air; twigs snap under my feet. A mysterious, provocative tune plays somewhere in the background. I try to find him amidst the vegetation, but the whole time he’s in front of me, playing the piano with such an intense expression you would think he is fighting a battle.

His song takes hold of me again. This time, he has led me out of the forest and into a scrumptious village with gingerbread houses and chocolate cobblestones, raspberry stop signs and root beer fountains. Cars made of multicolored jujubes.
Flowers of pink fondant. I can taste all those variegated flavors at once. The boy darts inside a tawny cottage – perhaps it’s his – and I feel a strange sense of disappointment. I should’ve asked his name or thanked him for bringing me here. Now it might be too late.

But the music, the environment, the sheer lusciousness of it all emboldens me, so I follow him and disregard the sign with the caramel calligraphy that says, “NO TRES-PASSING.” It’s dark inside — almost pitch black — and reeks of secrets and subterfuge. I’m not surprised when a hand clamps over my mouth, even as a spike of fear shoots through me.

The music envelops me, traps me, chokes me. I find myself in a room so tiny and dingy and gray I can’t tell if it’s the walls I’m touching or my claustrophobia. Somehow, the boy stands above me without hitting the ceiling, his face so apologetic, chestnut eyes so sorrowful I feel his emotions in waves of watery blue. The energetic melody has become somber, weepy. I feel damp from all the tears I don’t shed. For some reason I just know he had to do it: lure me, trap me here. I had to experience his pain, his misery, the feeling of being confined every day amid pleasure and playfulness. Someone must be holding him captive like he has me now. As the scene fades, my heart pounds with a painful familiarity.

Feverish and parched like I’ve traversed a desert, I notice I’ve been released. Now I’m all alone. I’m in a verdant valley with trees speckling the otherwise grassy landscape. Funnily enough, everything seems to have the consistency of a crayon drawing. Waxy dust emanates from the lime green hills and taints the placid baby-blue sky. Green and blue: the colors of repose and complaisance. Their agreeable tones put me at ease as soft, lulling music whispers to me faintly. As I lie down on the grass, I find myself drifting off…before I recover with a jolt.

The music has stopped. Reality hits me as I become aware of the cold press of the hard metal chair, the unpleasant chill of the air conditioner, the lukewarm applause of the audience. The boy rises and faces us, displaying his features for the first time. He flashes a lopsided smile, copper eyes glinting with satisfaction. And I swear he looks straight at me — no, behind me. At a row of framed artwork made by younger students. One of them is a crayon coloring of an emerald valley, a bedraggled stick figure.

Shaken, I turn back to the stage, but the boy has left. The only one who speaks my language, vanished into the sterile white of silence.
Black Mamba
Griffin Descant
My New Orleans Summer
Ellie Menszer

All the college kids come home,
Memories and experiences are shared.
   Everyone reconnects,
   Like a family reunion,
   And we feel like we were never apart.

   A time for fun and friends,
   With no responsibilities.
   Days of swimming, sailing and water skiing,
   Tubing and driving boats and coaching.

   The only way to survive the deadly southern heat,
   Is by staying in the lake
   And eating thousands of snowballs.

   I wish I could freeze time,
   But ultimately the end comes.

I try holding onto the last moments of freedom,
   But it seeps through my hands like water.
   I wish school would never start
   And people would never leave for college.

Summer runs faster than the speed of light.
   A whole ninety days long,
   But the end comes way too quickly.
   Until next year.
Where Are You
Luc Prokop

where are you?
Madame Perez’s Salon and Boutique, called Madame’s for short, was a square black building tucked into the corner of Grey Street. It had two front windows and plenty of natural light. One small but heavy door stood in the center and attached to it was a sign: “Appointments only. No walk-ins.”

Inside, the woman’s long body curved as she swept the swirls of hair into one large pile. She was attached to a black bob cut sharply below her chin, and it weighed and wore her. She swayed toward the far corner of the room and gathered her scissors and tools. She rested them on her hip like a woman carrying a child through the store.

The bell above the door chimed and a girl walked in. Her moon-shaped eyes lowered to the floor and she picked her nails.

“Are you my three o’clock?” the woman asked.

“Yes, but my mother said to wait for her,” the girl replied.

“You know what you want?” she asked after a moment of silence.

“I don’t know—ask my mother.” She sat down in the styling chair with her arms crossed.

The woman didn’t reply. Her eyes darted to the clock hanging above the mirror, then gazed downwards at the watch on her wrist. The woman flicked a thin hand through her black bob and sat in the accompanying chair with a grunt. She glanced at the girl, eyes locking on the baby-fine hair attached to her head. It glinted like a shiny new dime and was draped across the chair. Beautiful. The woman’s slender fingers itched.

Hair is very old; it grows as a girl. It grows as a woman. And it grows as an old woman. Every inch of hair is a year of growth and each cut a fresh start.

The girl gazed at the mirror underneath the clock. She rubbed the scars on her thighs and counted the years on her fingers.

“Your hair needs to be cut...It’s too long and dirty,” said the woman as she grabbed the scissors.

The sharpened metal blades opened around the first white lock and the girl sank deeper into the chair.

“Will you wash it first? We should wait, my mom’s not here yet...please don’t cut much.” Her voice trailed off after the first pieces fell.

Chains of hair rattled to the floor. The long woman seized a handful of hair, tight-
ened her grip, and sliced. The sound of scissors continued past the waist, shoulders, and jaw. It stopped at the ears.

The girl's eyes widened and her fingers trembled.

The woman sunk onto the fresh pile of hair and sighed. The girl's mother did arrive, eventually, but she was late. Much too late.

Madame's was closed and had been since three.

It's important to be on time.
Black shapes surround me
It all seems so scary
They circle me in their ordered form
And create something of a perfect storm
I am in the dead center on the ground
I haven't accepted that they won't listen
I will continue to try them
Accepting the consequences that I might face
Putting your neck on the line isn't lady-like
People tell you to give up the fight
“Don’t say that,” someone says
“Why?”
“Just don’t,” they say impatiently
They continue, “You might embarrass me”
What about yourself?
Did you forget who you were?
I don’t.
It’s hard
To know what you truly believe
And watch as you continue to
mislead

Listen to me now
If you want justice but continue to bow
You will not achieve what society does not allow
Soul Music
Richard Simmons
Now
Catelyn Coffin

Maybe now we forget
Maybe now we’ve lost
Now holds everything
Now makes no sense

How does everything happen
How are you and I here?

You will never see now again
Read that again and disproved it?
Think
Did you breathe the same? Did the same person across the world die?
No.
They didn’t
You didn’t
Now only happens once

Answer me this then

Why focus on before? Before now?
It happened, and it will never happen again, so why worry?
Why focus on after? After this? You can never truly predict the future

Jesus lizards walk on water
I’m a Virgo
Pancakes are panqueques in Spanish

Are you really going to fight with your past self?
No, you didn’t think I was going to say that
Don’t argue with me here
Look
I know it’s hard, watching the world through a screen
Watching helplessly as a timid citizen of the dying planet Earth
A small child crying for their mother as the patrol drags her from the land of the free
A shaking, sobbing teenager sitting in a classroom, listening for the footsteps, listening for the gunshots
A grieving mother watching a news report of an innocent African American teenager shot on the way to his car

Our spirits may be quashed
Our efforts may misfire
Hope may succumb to this void era
But
We watch this together
We see this together
We fix it together
This is our world
We are not alone

But

Just focus on the now
What’s happening?
Are you alone?
Is there music?
Are you hungry? Go eat if you’re hungry
Drink water, it’s good for you
Look at the sun, if there’s sun
Stop reading, just for a moment

How was it?
Good?
Did someone die? (yes)

Now you’ve learned
Now you’ve realized you learned
Incredible

Now
Watch
Think
And goodbye
The two Polish girls draped in black sat down in front of the chessboard. Instead of fighting like their brothers, they danced around each other until one gave in.

“I do wonder what could happen if he survived,” the younger said while moving her pawn forward to begin the game.

“What does it matter? The sickness took him like it took the rest of his group.”

The eldest child yanked her bishop backward.

“But you must realize that you could have done wonderful things together, no?”

Her knight reared behind the other’s rook, storming the other’s black castle.

Both stopped to hear their brothers fighting outside with plastic swords.

“Hey! You can’t do that! That’s cheating!”

“All is fair in love and war!”

“Is all fair in love and war?” The elder pushed her pawns forward in unison as an army. “Is it? If so, why was he taken from me and without warning?”

The younger retaliated with her bishop but chose to concede her rook. “You do know that he had to leave, right? To defend? It wasn’t his choice.”

“Well it wasn’t mine either, was it? The man across the Oder* made that decision for us.” Her black army was struggling, half of them taken by her sister.

“That man still makes decisions for us. But at least you can sleep at night knowing it wasn’t your fault.” Her white army was close to victory.

“That’s not the point!” the elder roared and flipped the chess table over, scattering the pieces. “He didn’t die in combat! He wasn’t needed! We continue to lose, defending a weak border, with few men and fewer supplies!”

It grew deathly quiet. The boys stopped their fighting after they heard their big sister shouting. “I was to marry him in a few months’ time! Now, we cower in fear out of discovery, all because our country loves peace. We need to pursue a different tactic, not one of submission!”

Her speech petrified her younger sister. “You aren’t thinking of resisting, are you? His men patrol the streets all day and night!”

The two youngest siblings came in, captivated by their older sister’s words. They had long dreamed of glory, no matter how small or insignificant it was.

“I have to think about it. Otherwise, his death means nothing! No, I refuse to
sleep knowing that I can avenge him.”

The woman picked up the chess pieces and rearranged them back for another battle. She then gathered her frayed coat and left her siblings, ring glinting on her left hand.

*River splitting the Polish-German border*
Niagara Falls
Sam Krause
Chère NOLA,

Good morning. I know you’re tired from last night, but I have so many things to say about you, and I really need you to listen to me. As my year ends, I watch my friends prepare to say goodbye to you. Yes NOLA, I know that I’m not leaving for over a year, but I need to start saying my goodbyes now, so I can make sure you do not get left out.

Here it is: NOLA, you raised me. You taught me not to wear black to beignets. You taught how to race trains. You taught me that Diet Coke and Aquaphor are the only cures for crawfish-lips. You taught me that a sneaux-ball is always better than a snow-cone. You taught me that Tony Chachere’s is superior to Old Bay and to correct anyone who refers to the latter as “cajun seasoning” because it is NOT. You taught me not to talk to strangers and not to trust somebody just because they smile. But strangers who offer to share a blanket with you at JazzFest can end up being your best friend. You taught me how to cross my legs like a lady at Christmas Eve dinner with family on Royal Street. You taught me how to dance like someone is watching, because someone probably wants to dance with you too.

But believe me, we have had our fair share of rough patches. You decided to cry and cry one fateful Monday in August for weeks and weeks. You cried so hard you broke the levees. We had to leave. Everybody who could had to leave. Some people went so far for so long that they have never returned. Finally, when you decided to dry your eyes, some of us came back to help rebuild you. We worked hard rebuilding houses, jobs, and lives again. Fifteen years later and you are stronger and more beautiful than when we first met.

When I leave, people are going to ask me about you because you are kind of a celebrity. I know what to say now. NOLA, you raised me resilient. NOLA, I have watched you fall down because you’re not perfect. But your most admirable trait is your ability to take a direct hit, dust yourself off, and then stand up taller. You are defined as much by your architectural significance as your resiliency. Your citizens personify these traits: strength with grace.

It is with a heavy heart that I will soon have to say goodbye to you. Goodbye to 6:00am runs with Chatty Cathy through the golf course as the sun peaks over Loyola’s spire. Goodbye to Zydeco and boudin, goodbye to an entire week off to celebrate an
end to all of the gluttony named after the day of the week and fat. Goodbye to potholes obstructing my ability to drive. Goodbye to The Classic on Holy Saturday. Goodbye to your parades for no reason and to my weekend black and gold uniforms. Goodbye to crawfish with my friends at the Fly as we try to get the barges to honk at us. John Goodman said there’s “an incomplete part of our chromosomes that gets repaired” when you are in New Orleans. But for those of us whom you’ve raised, NOLA, you are already part of our DNA.

With love,
Sophia
Six-Teen
Makayla Powell

Mom, I’m only sixteen.
I really don’t know what I want to do or where I wanna go
After all, I’m still in high school
I still have to pass chemistry and learn all about genetic rules.
Maybe touch a cold frog or two?
Heck, I don’t even know if I want to paint my nails pink or blue!

But there’s so much stress.
People tell me,
life is a mess.
People tell me my future should be in order
That I’m going to need money in the bank,
That the world is dangerous and I need to be safe,
That I’ll need a car, a home, even a husband to call my own!
But mom, I’m only sixteen! I still have Dreams,
I still would like to see things no one’s ever seen
I want to travel
I want to see to life beyond the extremes
Or whatever that means.

Why can’t I just be sixteen?
Why can’t I just live my “teenage dream”?
Why is everything not what it seems?
Oh Mom, I just want to be sixteen!

I still can’t see past the silly things.
I still need to learn how to prioritize
Oh, shoot!
Should I go to a party or write this paper?
Does Siera really like Justice Tabor?
What dress should I wear?
How should I style my hair?
Who really cares?
I’m only sixteen.

Happy birthday to me,
I’m finally sixteen.
All my plans, all of my dreams
I’ll be something new the world has never seen.
"Take On Me" was playing on cheap speakers near the back of the gym. The murmur of conversation drifted over the group of people. The man in the ill-fitting suit made his way over to the refreshments. Walking back to the other side of the gym he bumped into an old friend.

“My god, is that really you?” the man in the suit asked, reaching for a handshake. “I haven’t seen you in years” the friend responded, pulling the man into a hug. “Has it really been since High School? How have you been?” “I’ve been great,” the friend responded. “I’m loving this reunion, haven’t seen some of these people in years.”

“Me neither.” “I love the music, it’s bringing me back to high school.” “I guess.” “I don’t care what other people say, music from the ‘80s is perfection, y’know?” “Yeah,” answered the man. “So what have you been up to?” “Nothing much, graduated college, got married, I have kids now,” the man responded. “I almost went to college.” “You almost got the-” “Football scholarship, yeah, I just wish they could’ve seen me in a game, and not just at tryouts,” the friend responded. “You still living in Missouri?” “Yeah, I’m still in Reed Springs actually.”

The song changed, and with it the party lights started flashing in a different sequence. The two old friends made their way from the half court line to the side of the gym.

“I love these lights, it reminds me of prom,” the friend exclaimed. “I think these are the same lights,” the man said, chuckling. “Prom was great, you got so drunk.” “I barely remember it.” “Come on, you were the man in high school!” “Not really, I was an idiot,” argued the man.
“Whatever,” the friend sighed. “So what are you doing for work?”
“I’m an accountant for a firm in Chicago”
“Didn’t you want to play in that band?”
“I did,” the man responded. “What do you do?”
“I’m on this really great football team and—”
“Pro?”
“Oh, I work at the drycleaners. Dad retired, so it’s just me now.”

The night carried on and they continued talking. By 11:30 most of the people had gone home. The acquaintances made their way into the parking lot.
“Well, I need to get going back to the hotel,” the man said.
“Already?”
“It’s late.”
“Well, you can crash at my house,” offered the friend.
“My family is in the hotel.”
“Oh, you wanna do something tomorrow?”
“I can’t, I’m taking my kids to my parent’s.”
“The day after?”
“I’m leaving for home in Chicago.”

The men exchanged goodbyes and made their ways to their cars.
“What has he done with his life?” he thought to himself, starting his car.
Pandemic
Mai Burrell
Defining Me
Lilly Gorman

Her life exists in these phrases
Her dreams are made of these words
Her mind is their chamber
Her thoughts are their wings
Sentence upon sentence, word after word
They flow from her pen when they can

She breathes in the rhythms
She basks in the flow
She puts pen to paper
And crosses all borders
She dictates her life
On what she can write

Her imagination carries her
Until the end of time.

She lives in poetry.
She lives inside her head.
She lives her life-
Not knowing who she is
Until the words stare back at her.

Until her world is created by the stroke of a pen on a page.

She lives in the poetry she cannot write.  -Oscar Wilde
As They Dry
Addie Lemann
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