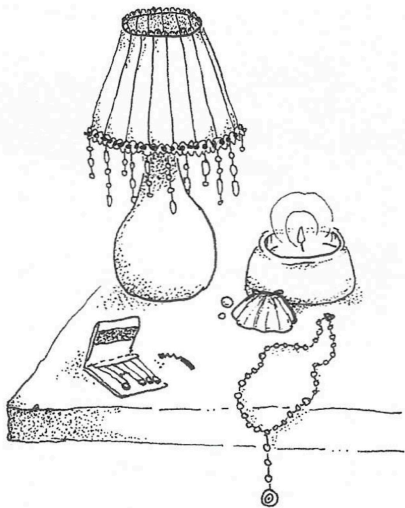


the west 4th



THE WEST 4TH

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From the Editor

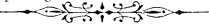


write to you now, dear reader, nearing a time of great roads crossing. Of crossroads, so to speak, a time which portends much change, growth, decline, etc. I speak of graduation and unemployment and overemployment, etc., but I wax over long. What I mean to say is that things are happening, and I both rejoice and quiver at such thoughts. This issue is shorter than previous ones, but still filled to the brim with unique, original thoughts and feelings, again exemplifying, without pause, the organic and age-defying nature of our little scene here in the city and the world. I commend all of you for reading, writing, thinking, and creating in general. It takes guts, what with so many cheap and easy ways to get distracted. So keep those juices flowing, keep strutting your stuff. We will look back on these times someday, and it will be with awe and pride, that we collectively desired something that we couldn't quite put our finger on.

Untitled

Johnny Discipline

IES - that was Galway, (days of my life gone by) Brown water walking path Irish people Slippers I lost I imagined a beach-now was that Galway or an imaginary place? Bright sun cold ocean wind walking through the little commerce streets For tourists I am older now and more confident Could go in anywhere and order a pint and talk to people. I'd like to. I took a photo of a can glistening at the bottom of some brown water Rushing I remember where the beach was in relation to the town and to the walking path. Lovely things made of wool Those slippers I wanted and got and lost Mom bought for me Put my face into my hands From this angle my wrists are impossibly small for how much they do How much weight they can suspend Quick tears just at things passing.



Liars and Affirmers

Dioigenes

IT'S sad the way people will lie to try and feel better about themselves. That's the worst kind of a lie - worse than one you might tell another person - the one you tell yourself. It makes you ugly. The same way that lying makes the world ugly, the way a society built on lies quickly becomes the most brutally grotesque thing under the sun - a person who lives a lie might put on the air of grace or dazzle with a kind of false charm, but when the curtain falls and they are left alone with themselves, they cannot escape what they've created, and they will do anything to hide their true selves from other people.

The LIAR is the most self-conscious person alive.

Usually in order to help convince themselves of their own fabricated reality, the liar will present their lie to anyone they feel will at least not protest it, as though by sheer force of numbers the truth could be altered. Whether or not the liar's audience believes them is irrelevant.

AFFIRMATION, right or wrong, is the symbiotic currency of a diseased social body.

[redacted]

To Show and Be Shown

Jimmy Climbs

WE live our lives in pursuit of something, particularly in our early lives. Out to prove something, be something, have something to say. Leave our families behind and drag our unadulterated bones across an unforgiving, yet giving, rugged nation.

In those travels we find something. A temporary artifact of time that fills a void we never understood in the first place. Then we wriggle our bones back across that beautiful weary nation to report our findings alongside a bonfire.

Hopefully along the way we open our ears, taking in the undeniable slew of information the road brings...

To show and be shown... to be shown and to show... an alternating, recurring cycle.

I find myself writing this in the town of Burrell Boom, Belize, after paddling 120 miles of the Routa Maya canoe race. In a swift moment we'd crashed the canoe and found ourselves in a proper survival moment.

But now it's the calm water I see in front of me, as I stand on this here wooden deck. Earlier in the morning I heard of another man's journey, Lumberjack. He himself had been shown a vicious life, but lives to present HIS findings in a calm, stoic delivery. I listen intently when he speaks. To be shown and to show. To show and be shown.



Woodstock or Bust

A Musical Odyssey with Jimmy Climbs and a Celebration of His Third Album, "3"

By Parker Otto

On a cold Friday in January, from the depths of East Harlem, the caravan of vans makes its way up I-87 into the depths of the Catskills. The backseats of the vehicles are filled with laughter and the comforting smell of Taco Bell picked up along the way. Musically, the caravan moves to the beats of Jim Croce, Van Morrison and Nick Drake as this group of city-slicking New Yorkers venture into the country. The road trip feels uniquely American, with 90 miles seeming as easy as a four-stop subway ride. The destination: Woodstock. The purpose: to see Jimmy Climbs and his band perform a rock-and-roll show at the Tinker Street Tavern. The driver leading this expedition: Jimmy Climbs himself with his hands tapping on the wheel.

Jimmy Climbs's Woodstock venture is not just a one-off gig. The San Diego native turned New York City rocker has been plugging away at several venues, including Gold Sounds in Brooklyn and Arlene's Grocery in Manhattan, to promote his upcoming third album. Titled "3" and scheduled for release on March 3, many of the songs on the record have already found themselves on the Jimmy Climbs setlist and have been polished, both as solo acoustic numbers and with a full rock band sound, through endless rehearsals and numerous live performances.

However, even a musician as well-established as Jimmy Climbs can find himself in situations that still make him feel fresh-faced and this upcoming performance in Woodstock is one of those times. With names like Bob Dylan, The Band, Van Morrison, Janis Joplin, Paul Butterfield and many others calling Woodstock home over the years, it has created a level of mystique that is enough to intimidate anybody. If Climbs is intimidated, he does a remarkable job concealing it with the drive being jovial and Climbs sharing his excitement with playing his music for a new audience.

"I'm a really big believer that when you make music... when a project is done, it's no longer mine," Climbs jests. "It's kind of like a flock of birds and I'm just letting them fly."

As the town of Woodstock draws near and the sun sets over the Catskills, Jimmy Climbs and his bandmates continue to swap jokes and observations with Jimmy recounting how, on a 5000 mile cross-country motorcycle trip, he had spilled a significant amount of gasoline on himself. With no shower on the horizon, Climbs spent the next few days reeking of petrol and started introducing himself as "Jimmy Gasoline" in hopes that it would explain the fossil fuel odor. When the saga of Jimmy Gasoline came to a close, the town of Woodstock was right there, waiting for another musician to stake a claim on the land that seems to keep on nurturing the creative impulse.

While the caravan had arrived early, the last mile of travel was a hassle with Tinker Street being blocked off by police cars. "Wow! All of this for us?" Climbs asked. We never did figure out what the police barricade was about but, at the time, it seemed unlikely that Jimmy

Climbs was the reason. But after seeing the turnout for the show and its positive reception among the locals, it's possible that the police were actually there to keep some order among the motorists in preparation for a night at Tinker Street Tavern.

Opening things was New York City expatriate and local treasure Blair Baldwin, coming off the release of her single "The Hallway" in October. Before the show, she and Jimmy were singing the praises of Woodstock with Baldwin stating that the countryside made her feel "immediately relaxed" filling her move from the big city. As the opener, Baldwin entranced with a harder Les Paul sound along with covers by such instrumental gods as Link Wray. Baldwin's performance garnered much approval from the locals as they came steadily into the bar for a night of music along with the multitude of travelers from the caravan.

As Jimmy and his band, comprised of Wesley Arocho on lead guitar, Maddy Cerito on bass guitar and Jack Kontarinis on drums, set up for the show, it was clear the night would be more ambitious than their New York shows when it came to length. Their setlist, usually set for eight to ten songs, had ballooned to 17 songs with the majority being from Jimmy Climbs' latest album "3". His third effort, "3" also marks Climbs' first release in three years, following his sophomore effort, "Thanks for Coming," in 2023.

While the songs of "3" fit very well alongside tracks from his previous LPs, Jimmy Climbs spent far more time ruminating on this third effort, with all the tracks coming from a deeply personal place of nostalgia as well as his current life in New York City. "I wanted this record to capture a moment in time," Climbs said.

Spending time with Jimmy Climbs, it's clear how easily music gravitates towards him. He is constantly writing lyrics, imagining guitar licks and is usually capable of figuring out a song's structure quite quickly. But some of the songs of "3" took more time to develop, an intentional choice from Jimmy Climbs. "I prioritized being mindful [in my] writing," Climbs said. In the case of "Come to the City," released as a single on December 18, 2025, "I couldn't finish it for a year." Although a New York resident since INSERT YEAR, Climbs felt that he still didn't have enough life experience to do justice to the feeling of coming to New York and building a new life for yourself. "I hadn't lived enough to have something to write about."

Initially, "3" seems like a cute title to assign to a third album. But this number represents a deep connection to Jimmy with the digit appearing at significant moments in his life going back to childhood when Jimmy Climbs had his first live performance singing "Three is the Magic Number" from "Schoolhouse Rock." This memory holds such a special weight with Climbs that he has rerecorded the song, the only cover present on the whole album. Ever since that day, Jimmy Climbs found himself gravitating towards music, eventually becoming a part of Albuquerque's rock community in 2021, albeit with some

reservations about playing live for strangers. “I had a lack of self-worth,” Climbs said. “It’s real easy to feel the pressure. But I met a lot of good people playing rock in Albuquerque”

Through a growing community of musicians and a desire to give the audience a show bursting with energy, Jimmy Climbs was created in the vein of rock’s manic energy. ““I wanted to pick a genre I could have the most fun,” Climbs said. “To make it exciting [and] to give [you] permission to get out of your body.” Climbs also found a love for live performance through its need to improvise. “If you want perfection, stay home. If you want more than that...I like when it does stray off.” Through this live-wire stage persona, Jimmy Climbs kept upping the ante by jumping off the stage and dancing with his audience, doing “The Worm” with ease and even climbing on stage equipment like a young Eddie Vedder, showcasing his other talent as a proficient climber.

While the Tinker Street Tavern had few things to climb, Jimmy Climbs was still able to show off in the way only Jimmy can do by jumping off of chairs and moving all over the place in manner not so much punk as it was evocative of the classic rock moves, walks and steps made famous by Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Elvis Presley.

These antics had quickly endeared him to the locals of Woodstock. As part of the Bearsville complex outside of Woodstock, the property boasts a theater, a recording studio and, morbidly, the grave of Bob Dylan’s famed manager Albert Grossman along with a Pho restaurant and a Mexican restaurant. As guests at either eatery left for the night and passed by the tavern, some grew curious about the sounds pulsing in the place and, as the show went on, more onlookers piled in until the place had become packed.

With Jimmy’s set, it was the kind of controlled rambunctious fun befitting a man dressed like a South-Western Robert Plant and everyone became sucked into the energy of a Jimmy Climbs show. It was an atmosphere of excitement and comfort with newcomers finding their footing immediately, including a young musician named Lukas Kolega, who we had just met the day before and promptly invited up to Woodstock. “I didn’t think I had the goods but I fit right in,” Kolega said. Old friends, new friends and strangers all were intermingled as the songs grew more intense and the wooden floors pulsed with foot-stomping and all manner of steps.

By the time the band were on their fourth song, a cover of Buffalo Springfield’s “For What It’s Worth”, it would be hard to find a soul who wasn’t dancing. One of the most vibrant members of the audience was an old man named Basil who everyone seemed to know. This man was clearly a local treasure. While others in our scene imitate the lifestyle of hippies and counterculture fun, this man had lived it. And when Wesley lit off the opening riff to Chuck Berry’s immortal “Johnny B Goode”, Basil’s eyes might as well have shot through his glasses.

But it wasn’t just rock classics the band brought. Out of their 14 original songs, five had come from this new album and two songs in particular, “Toothy Grin” and “Rope Swing,” were given a stripped back approach with Climbs on guitar and accompanied solely by dear friend Charles Stacy on the violin. There was a deep-rooted sentimentality to this portion, a sense of permission to contemplate. The passage of time. The fun we have. The nostalgia for simpler times even if they weren’t that simple. Where we’ve been and where we’re going. All themes of this new album that the audience now had the chance to ponder. But when the existentialism seemed too much, that was when Climbs and the band went back into full rock mode.

After the show, this mighty caravan that had ventured from New York slowly splintered. Some of us were bound for the city that very night to return to work. Others were staying upstate and taking their time with the beautiful Catskill countryside. Jimmy Climbs and some of our tribe would be staying in an “alleged” haunted house where an ax murder took place in Poughkeepsie because, at this point, you’ve just got to roll with Jimmy’s crazy ideas. They’re almost always a recipe for an unforgettable trip. Skinny Dipping in a frozen lake was also on the docket before enjoying the snowfall and making the trip back to East Harlem.

What an onlooker will no doubt gather from a Jimmy Climbs show, as well as this new album, is a sense of earnestness. “It’s cool to care, don’t let it be passive”, Climbs said. “If you believe in it, show it off”. There’s something so infectious in his honesty and a sense of fun that you can’t help but love it, a feeling Jimmy Climbs has for what he does in general. “I love that it [writing music] reminds me to be me,” Climbs said. “When I write, it lets me process. It’s grounding. If I don’t play, I get antsy.”

At this point it’s hard to imagine Jimmy doing anything else but his brand of rock music and fostering a community of rag-tag friends and strangers. It’s baked into his character. He’s a musician through and through. “Some go to yoga, others do rock-and-roll.”



03072026

by Asal Azari

it is the seventh day of war. i bought a twenty-seven dollar journal and designated myself to the pedestrian aspect of this never ending highway (sixth avenue). i felt the acid in my gut choke on itself and the dire need of sitting down. barbara told me to keep a diary and i know why. i consider myself maybe depressed, but the grace period is over now. i checked in. i checked out. yes, friends! this is my great return! a triumph amongst all odds! i am meant to say something important. my mother has been sober, the entire time. the first time, the second time, the third time, and all the time before and in between. on the first day of war, i granted my body permission to leak but it would not. by the third day of war, the acid in my gut had had enough. on the sixth, i realized i don't have nightmares when i don't sleep in my bed. i am learning i might be a sadist. lovers, friends. a recurring war of opportunity against the opposition. i was asked too many ice-breakers on the seventh night, but loved on right. on the eighth night, i sat by the water and heard a helicopter pass by. i imagined it was the same one crossing the east river ten minutes prior. this time, it was flying higher than it did when it was first on the way to where it was going. which, i imagine, was the airport. probably jfk, by its course. did you know that you can uber to the airport via helicopter? what if i walked into the ocean? it's raining oil now. homogenize! not here, but there. the streams are on fire. the streams and gutters are actually on fire. i'm not kidding it's not a metaphor they're on fire. i'm not sure what you're supposed to do about it but i thought you should know.

Clock

by Melissa Cooperman

Funny morning with running out to bring out the trash - putting boots on the wrong feet / toes cramping / pants slipping down under my sleeping dress. I hear the jurassic dumpster on the other block so know they haven't come around to me yet. Pull out the dumpster with wheels with a good yank from it's iced muddy ruts by the side stairs. These stairs have painted handprints from anyone that has lived and visited here with their initials. Darkened glass top of an old porch table falls to the ground covering the trash can spot like a trap door - doesn't break. Think I can bring it down to middle child at art school - maybe paint on it. Dodge the potholes on the driveway filled with crusty old snow and mud. Wrestle with it to it's spot not at the end of the driveway just in case I forget to bring it back before I back out on my way to something with just enough time that jumping out to move it would make me late. So we dance side to side like monster steps or how a child feels on her father's feet at a wedding, rocking it left/right to get wedged into place in the leftover snow bank. I see the rocker that was blown off the porch in last week's gusty wind storm. "Blowin' a livin' gale!". Step over dried hydrangea stems - some cut those off to put in vases - so as

not to break the branches - no idea how or when to trim them for next season. There's one tip of the runner still with its toe on the front porch. Rocker rests on the ground in a position like the Falling Man out of the World Trade Center on his back looking up. I push it up, the old wooden thing that came with the house, heavier than I thought, slides up easy enough on the rail and left at an angle to hold someone - a guest/family another day whenever it gets warm enough again.

I trundle back up the driveway folding to tie my boot that's come undone in my haste to run out - didn't double knot - my Dad wanted to invent Velcro shoes for me cause I was always running with my untied sneakers. Didn't want to stop the-fun-the-run-the-game to tie my shoes. I hear the garbage truck still on the other road behind my backyard where the naked christmas tree waits for a spring burn pile. It's so quiet here, its engine circles the area pushes me like a runner's stopwatch.

Miss Dottie pokes her head out of her kitchen window. "Think they've passed?" "Nope, I hear them back there." My head flicks back towards the can, a gesture for her to go and toss - she dumps her half bag of remnants every week in my trash. Helps her not to pay another bill while surviving on her SSI check.

I prop the glass back against the porch and think if the art student has enough supplies - how has she made it through art school this long - working with found windows + doors + rolls of photo paper. Does she need anything. I'll call her to ask. Probably better to text.

Dogs barking inside wanting their breakfast and relief outside. I snap each one in turn onto the rope leading them in their own arc. Are the chickens dead? Got a new bag of grain but haven't brought it to them yet....water?

Mission coffee - dogs fed - they quiet down. House is clean from a hyperfocused Sunday to get out of chaos and put things "away".

Teaspoons of grounds in the sieve for the one cup espresso maker. Like this morning ritual / Back to bed to start writing - the coffee smell of hazelnut nudges me to rise before I burn the pot. Flame off. Grab some creamer - not expired milk or the questionable condensed milk from Thanksgiving, some misbought "fat free" half in half package tricked me - didn't see the faded words. Cat drinks it as my royal taste tester in a little bamboo dish. The steam from the faded mug bought while summer camping a few years back drops my shoulders / reminds me to breathe like incense curling up to an offering. Shouldn't eat a whole bowl of popcorn - imagining how it was breaking down in my intestines - slowly working its way through my stomach. Shouldn't eat popcorn for dinner. A friend had asked in her suburban tone "do you put butter on it?" Yes I put butter on it! It's winter up here - I need the fat in my hibernation. Put expired milk back in the fridge, sell by 12 days ago - not chunky yet. Grab coffee + go back to warm sheets to grab a few more minutes before day actually starts. I hear the garbage truck stop in front and cartwheel my wheeled cart - dropping it down turned around with handle facing towards the house, making it a direct line to drag back to its spot, waiting to fill for next Wednesday; avoiding Miss Dottie's texts each Tuesday night "Tomorrow's Garbage Day!" Success, I made it and it's 7:42am.

Peace Loving Soul

by Chandra Prakesh

Long before memory could hold names, there are two kingdoms Argos and Kalinga.

They fought out in the wide plains between them. Year after year, generation after generation. Soldiers marched. They clashed, they died. New ones took their place. No living soul remembered how it started or why it dragged on, but it kept going.

Up on a hill between the kingdoms sat a small village, older than any war. The villagers didn't belong to either side. They watched from far off dust swirling, swords clanging, voices shouting and then falling quiet. They felt the loss, but never picked a side.

Years slipped past. Then decades. The armies started running out of men. Replacing them grew harder. Eventually, officers from both kingdoms climbed the hill and came to the village. No threats. Just asking.

At first, the villagers said no. But honestly, time wears people down. Temptation and fear are patient. Slowly one by one, people started leaving. Some went for promises, some for survival, some because they were afraid. They chose sides, and just like that, vanished from the village.

Except for one boy. He tried his best to stop them. He begged them to stay, choose peace, refuse a war that meant nothing anymore. Nobody listened.

At the start, the silence felt heavy. But after a while, it became part of him. He learned how to live alone.

He tended the remaining cattle, kept the fields. He listened to the wind to the birds to the steady pulse of the ground. Each day found its own rhythm. Up before dawn, watching the light spill across the hills. Working through the morning, resting by the pond, ending up at the cliff edge as the sun faded. From there, he could still see the war

Tiny shadows in the distance. Dust. The flash of steel now and then. Sometimes, just a still hush after the fighting. He kept watching.

The years drifted by. The boy grew up. Then grew old. He talked to the animals as if they got it. He greeted trees like old buddies. Sometimes he laughed, all alone, at nothing really. He never felt abandoned. The world around him was enough. But one hope never left him. Maybe one day, the war would end. That the ones who left might come back. They didn't.

One evening, just like any other, he sat at the cliff's edge. The sky burned bright orange, then faded to dusk. The sounds of fighting floated up, distant and almost comforting. He watched as the last light slipped away. Then he went home, lay down, and closed his eyes. Sun rose again but the old man didn't.

The animals gathered around him, quiet. The wind drifted through the abandoned village. Nothing disturbed the calm he'd spent his life guarding.

Far below, between Argos and Kalinga the war kept going.

Black Hole Blues

by Joseph Apuzzo

Talk about a reason to leave. When a black hole insatiably devours everything you've come to love and worked your entire life to build. From the moment you started making up songs as a little boy and through every other successive moment that each became a brick in the edifice of your life, your name, your art. Gone with one careless word.

What accounts for a black hole to come along and destroy everything?

Are black holes generous? Hospitable? Loving? Are they victims of anything other than themselves and their own destructive natures? Or is a black hole none of these things, existing only to negate life, operating on nothing but the impulse to kill?

You can't reason with a black hole. There can be no compromise, patience, or peace with it. It will never be the star that it once was. Maybe that's what drives its carnage – knowing that the beauty it once possessed will never be theirs again.

Talk about a reason to leave.

Untitled

by Anonymous

It doesn't so matter all the intricate ins-n-outs of my affair with Oddy. All I care about now is tyin up loose ends. So here goes.

From the very get-go, I knew I was muckin about. What bothered me most was how the man did not seem to care, to learn what I enjoyed as a lover. It didn't take long for me to get completely fed-up. I deduced that my involvement with Oddy was purely fodder-filler for my inner hedonist-heather whose most persnickety proclivity is fallin, for projections of her own darkest corners of the spirit. So I approached Harlette and lamented of my entrenchment in this current mess, and against my possessive inclinations for Oddy, I dared suggest "GO AHEAD and shoot your shot with the troubled beaut."

It took her no time to do so. A matter of hours later she went to the bar/burlesque club where he worked and hung around til after close. He was drinkin and ever-reachin for the lovin comfort of a woman's arms, and so it came easy for them to fall together onto the mattress in the back of the 1987 Dodge caravan - his livin quarters - where they did the most intimate deed.

Kamen Stonebone and the Perilous Journey

by Robby Zahradnik

ACT I

In the moss-hung mouth of a limestone cave at dawn, where pale gold light spills in like liquid honey, **Kamen Stonebone** the cave gnome fastens his stone-buttoned vest over his pale blue chest and pats the granite charms braided into his beard. Cool air smelling of damp earth and ironstone brushes over his leathery gray skin as he steps from shadow into the rolling green hills of the Shire of Devon. Behind him, the cave glimmers with faint crystal veins, catching the first sun like distant stars. **Kamen** squints toward the far-off meadow, his pebble-dark eyes bright with anticipation, and mutters in a gravelly voice,

"**Eddie**'ll be strummin' already, I'll wager me best rock."

With a final tug on his coal-black cap, he stomps off along the dew-slick path, his heavy boots crunching grit and pebble with every determined step.

In a broad clover meadow under a sky the color of polished sapphire, **Eddie Spaghetti** lounges atop a flat sun-warmed stone, his lanky gnome frame draped in a patched red waistcoat as his fingers dance over a battered but beloved guitar. Larks wheel overhead and the breeze carries the smell of wild thyme and distant woodsmoke while the sun glitters off the bronze tuning pegs like tiny coins. As **Kamen** pushes through the knee-high grass, droplets of dew splattering against his boots, **Eddie** breaks into a lively riff and grins wide enough to show the gap in his front teeth.

"**Kamen**, you old boulder-hugger!" he calls, voice bright and musical. **Kamen** plants his fists on his hips with mock severity, his beard-rings clinking softly, and replies,

"Playin' to the butterflies again, are ye, Eddie? Or d'ye save the best tunes for proper company?"

The meadow hums with bees and birdsong as **Eddie** shifts to a jolly, stomping rhythm, and **Kamen** joins in, clapping his thick stone-knuckled hands in time so that each clap sounds like small rocks striking. **Eddie** belts out a merry tune about wandering roads and bottomless pints—

"To Devon's hills and York's far lanes, we follow smoke and friendly strains!"

—while **Kamen** rumbles a low harmony that vibrates in his chest like a quarry drum. Flowers tremble with each of Kamen's foot-stomps, sending up tiny puffs of pollen that dance in the sunlight, and a pair of curious rabbits sit up to listen at the edge of the field. Laughing between verses, **Eddie** winks and sings,

"And if we find pipeweed to share, we'll sing 'til moonlight frosts the air!"

Kamen throws his head back, eyes crinkling with vibrational euphoria, and answers in song,

"Aye, and stones will roll and hearts be light, as friends walk on from morn to night!"

As the final chord fades into the soft rustle of the grass, the sun now a bit higher and warmer on their faces, **Eddie** lets his guitar rest against his knee and leans back on his hands, chest still rising from the singing. The air smells sharper now, tinged with crushed clover and **Eddie's** faint tobacco pouch, and somewhere a cow moos lazily in the distance.

"So then," **Eddie** says, tipping his black velvet hat with a theatrical flourish, *"shall we trade this fine meadow for the long road to Yorkshire and the legendary merchant of pipeweed?"*

Kamen snorts some fairy dust, stone beads in his beard clicking as he nods.

"Aye, lad. Me pockets are jinglin', me feet are itchin', and me pipe's as empty as a goblin's conscience. Let's be off before the best leaf's all bought by duller folk."

Eddie strums the guitar over his back and belts out a merry tune, adjusting the strap of his small but bulging magical satchel. Together, they set their boots onto the dusty Briarcliff Pass that leads out of the Shire of Devon toward distant, hazy Yorkshire. On the Briarcliff Pass beneath a broad afternoon sky streaked with feathery clouds, **Eddie** and **Kamen** walk side by side, trading puffs of a fairy dust and tobacco spliff that leaves glittering trails in the air while **Eddie** picks wandering melodies on his guitar. The road winds between low hedgerows and bramble-clad banks buzzing with insects, their boots scuffing up little ghosts of dust that hang shimmering in shafts of sunlight.

Around a bend, a squat stone arch straddles the path, and beneath it stands **Flucious Wendt** of the **Toll Troll Order**, a burly gnome in a mossy tabard, arms folded over his barrel chest, nose like a chipped boulder.

"No passin' without payment, lubbers," he grunts, voice like grinding gravel, as **Kamen** steps forward and suggests, "What say ye to a toll in song, Master Wendt?"

Eddie launches into a persuasive jig, lyrics praising **Flucious's** wisdom and magnificent nose, but the toll gnome merely snorts and jabs a thumb at a painted sign that reads

SEASHELLS ONLY, growling, "Music's fine, but rules is rules—no shells, no road."

Later that same day, down at the pebbled shores of Oyster Bay where the Briarcliff Pass descends to meet the sea, **Kamen** and **Eddie** pick their way between slick rocks under a sky washed with silver clouds. The bay smells of brine and kelp, waves lapping gently at the shore and clattering shells together with a hollow, tinkling music of their own. Near a driftwood log sits **Sally Sprout**, a small gnome with sea-glass beads in her hair and a blue apron, her wares—spiraled and ridged shells in pearly hues—arranged on a faded net.

"Seashells for luck, seashells for song, seashells to pay the troll all day long!" she sings as they approach, and **Eddie** laughs, bowing low as he offers a twist of fine tobacco leaf while **Kamen** sets a small pouch of twinkling cave crystals at her feet. **Sally's** eyes gleam as she trades them two of her largest, most lustrous shells, saying,

"These'll charm even a Toll Troll's granny; mind you don't waste their shine," and the pair tuck the shells safely away before turning back up the path, humming with renewed purpose.

Returning to the stone arch on the Briarcliff Pass as late afternoon shadows lengthen, the air now cooler and tinged with sea-salt from the bay, **Eddie** and **Kamen** stride up to where **Flucious Wendt** still stands guard, lantern at his side beginning to glow faintly. Without a word, **Kamen** draws out one gleaming shell while **Eddie** flourishes the other, both of them holding the treasures up so their pearly insides catch the waning light in soft rainbows. **Flucious's** stern face cracks into a grudging smile as he takes the shells, turning them over reverently and muttering,

"Fine currency, this—good ring, good weight," the gruffness in his voice softening. "Right then, toll's paid. On ye go, and may your pipes burn slow and your paths be clear," he declares, stepping aside with a formal little bow. **Eddie** strums a jaunty chord as they pass under the arch, and **Kamen** tips his coal-black cap in thanks, both gnomes breaking into a marching tune as the road carries them farther toward the misty promise of Yorkshire.

By the time they reach the borderlands of Yorkshire, the sun is sinking, painting the sky in bruised purples and ember-orange while a queer hush settles over the landscape where strange odors and lights seem to ripple without sound. Twisted hedges and leaning stone walls frame the narrow lane, and faint, shifting glows—green, blue, and ghostly white—flicker between the stones like will-o'-wisps, accompanied by wafts of pungent, unfamiliar smoke that tickle their noses but arrive in eerie silence.

"Smells like ten kinds o' wizard's plued brew," **Kamen** mutters, sniffing the air, while **Eddie's** fingers tighten on his guitar neck as he whispers, "Or ten kinds of legendary pipeweed."

Their boots crunch on gravel that somehow makes no noise to their ears, and both exchange a wary glance before pressing on, their songs turning quieter, more cautious, in this strange mute twilight. Every now and then **Kamen's** beard-charms chime faintly, the only clear sound in a world where even the distant town noises seem swallowed by the valley's uncanny stillness.

Deeper into the outskirts of Yorkshire, under a sky now streaked with stars and the last smear of sunset, the lane widens into a rough clearing where flickering neon glyphs glow on rusted signposts and a chorus of enchanted motorbikes purrs silently, chrome gleaming. From the shadows swagger the ruffians of the **Sons of Shrek** biker boy club—broad-shouldered gnomes in swamp-green leathers, tusk-shaped earrings jingling—as they roll their rune-etched bikes closer, tires crunching leaves in perfect, ominous quiet.

"Oi, pipe-chasers," snarls their leader **Cleaver Wormspaun**, a scarred gnome with a toadstool tattoo on his cheek, "this here's **Shrek** turf—pay a growl tax or turn back ye fiends."

Eddie only grins, swinging his guitar to the front and launching into a fierce, quick-tempo tune that twists between battle-march and jig while **Kamen** stomps and claps, each heavy motion sending out visible shockwaves of dust and light. The music's magic rattles the ruffians' bikes, making handlebars jitter and goggles flip, until, cursing in a stream of colorful vulgarities—

"We'll be back with the whole swamp, ye tuneless pebbles!"

Pumpkin Guts

Maxwell Quinn

I'd stop it if I could

I'd save those words till I meant them more

But I meant something at least

I'd stop him if I could but

I was miles away and stewing in a pot of
beatings I didn't deserve and so were you

I'd save it if I could I'd do what you wanted

I'd give you blood and safety if I could but
You were miles away and burning under
sorry coals who didn't mean a thing but
have the power of a sentence

I'd sentence it to bits and hope it sees itself
through your eyes

I'll plea to every jury and I'll carve a
thousand pumpkins for your holiday smile

True words won't touch a thing and if you
push them hard you'll still never see them
win

True love is on the stand and fighting with
it's evening
It's had a hell of a night and didn't know
what it was doing

It didn't know what it was doing

These lights have nothing to say so stop
trying to get a word out of them

Those dickheads have nothing to give so
stop giving them your last words

Your dying words will make no sense and
it'll be a shame to be there I know it I know
it

My dying words will sound like tires
screeching and spiders crawling into a
thorny nest where nothing looks beautiful
and nothing sounds true

I'd do it all different honey
I'd do everything right

One Nice Day in the City

Celina Chase

My friend Fiona sang to me "what does it all mean?"

And it echoed in my head all day

Through my stomach, as the hunger pains pinged.

In my chest,
traveled to my head.

The smoke hugging my face.

My eyes tighten in fear as I saw a man pass by with the
eagerness in your eyes i remember so well.

It's what drew me to you,

And what keeps you in my mind a year later.

His unkept shirt just like yours

His eyes soft with worry.

I wondered how often you pass by me without knowing.

I'll write words about you for the rest of my life
and I'll never get over anything.

Any love.

Any crush.

Anything that's ever happened to me.

And I'm ok with that now.

As I entered the train car already at capacity,
her voice echoed as a siren through my skull.

the traveling, the money

The weather

The wondering

Lost love and love taken and given

Chances and lessons learned

Warm weather wasted indoors.

What does it all mean?

The poems,

the sayings-

Things we tell ourselves and each other just to make it
through.

It's a human trait.

Quotes and promises, games, lies, and truths.

Just to live another day,

Make it through and teach out lessons.

Figuring out life's meaning is different to everyone.

Or that none of it matters as long as your kind.

It's an impossible question

With endless answers and follow ups.

But at least I have my dog and my best friends

And the warm sun to clear my skin.

The Breaks

V. Sebastian

I slept in late
and burnt my toast.

I kissed her cheek
and hit the road.

I had the perfect process
to go.

But when you see
what you didn't calculate,
what you couldn't formulate,
everything can change.

I hit the brakes.
I hit the brakes too late.

I saw it all replay.
I saw you drift away.

If I go again,
I'll go a different way.

I might make the same mistake,
but that's the way we make our way.

It never comes in time,
the unexpected imperfection.

You might try your best,
but you're the little fish.

If you don't make time for rest,
might have to use your final wish.

Might be nine lives on the kid.
Here we go again.

Can't risk this love I found.
I should slow it down and chill.

And hit the brakes.
I hit the brakes too late.

I saw it all replay.
I saw you drift away.

If I go again,
I'll go a different way.

I might make the same mistake,
but that's the way we make our way.

It never comes in time,
the unexpected imperfection.

I Nailed Myself In A Room

Parker Otto

I nailed myself in a room just to scratch a few words for you
I can't think on the fly and I need to say something true
A shattered looking glass can't spoil this woman that I see
And all I can wonder is what she sees in me

A bag of dollars to stretch, a rent's got to be on time
Not a nickel to spare but endless painted rhymes
A dried rose on the wall in an off-kilter frame
And the loveliest thoughts when I just say your name

Work I can take and words I paste to shape
A little poem for you or a song if you will wait
I need to let myself out, don't know why I was so mad
How can I think that way when I ponder what we've had

I nailed myself in a room because I don't want a scene I
wanted alone and to write down what I mean
My piece of paper and pen used as sharply as a knife I cut
myself raw and finally let you in my life

I nailed myself in a room because it had no windowpane
And I can't even think since I have the sight of rain
But if that rain's all gone and the sun is shining through I'll
pry open the door and share what I wrote with you

I see him

Mia Vongsavang

I see him.
I see him everywhere and in every thing.
As i look into the nothingness of the sky,
I can see him.
And he looks back at me with a smile.
He has the most beautiful look on his face,
I love to look back at him.

I hear him.
I hear his voice in every thing around me.
His laugh echoes through my mind,
And i welcome it with a chuckle in return.
His voice tickles me.
To me, his voice is music,
And i've never heard anything sweeter.

I feel him.
I feel his life and soul around me.
All of his love for the world sits with me,
His kindness holds me when i'm hurting.
When i breathe, i take in his thoughts,
And when he thinks of me,
I can feel him.

II/Swing Around Pass

Henry Baker

stand up now cat
on that turn

around,

take the blue fork
blue note
thread like velvet

stripe on backs,

dragged out
the dangling cradle
heart puppet of the souls

for da doing swing do.

expulsion, devotion
the velvet white this time
thread on,

the dangling cradle,

like the cat and the cradle
the orient erect
like the vein-full Wurli

to take down eleven
take me down to eleven
and let me hand the cradle-hand
and take the four,

right before I grace the
Hawthorne
drunk-moon,

you and I are quite similar,

my Monday friend.



I'll Never Get Over Anything in my Life

Celina Chase

Johnny I always pegged as a liar.
A wannabe mommy's boy who didn't want to be told no,
But liked it when I did.

I was too tough.
Too New York for his soft, beachy, washy waves.

I told him no to help him grow
He didn't want that.

He is content in his unmoored sense of self.
Self-induced misguidance.

I'll give him this
He never denied anything.
He just got upset when I told him what he didn't want to hear.
He didn't like me knowing myself,
and wanting him to develop his own ways of living.

He never once got mad at me.
He did exactly as I said.
He left because he listened.
He knew there was no other way around it,
I could not be controlled.

He has nothing to himself.
His money loaned by his school or his mother,
His clothes, styled by a friend made because of me.
His apartment is sublet—cosigned by his father.
Decorated by me.

All of what he knew was because of Natalie
I'll always have her to thank.
She turned him into the amount of man I needed to know I
could survive the summer.

He then watched me shine,
Reflecting my light off of himself on future women.
Showing them the idea of what he could be.
His ivy league brain rotted by his so-called friend
that only repeated information it learned through him.

He didn't have himself
So he needed me.
Never growing taller,
Only planted firm.

But he was kind where I needed it.
He was kind when he saw I needed it.
And he is the closest person to ever understand and see me.
More than past prospects and his Californian neighbor.

Johnny knew just what to say.
His empty promises dripped from those adult-retainer-teeth.
A beautiful smile,
Softening me with his midnight brown eyes.

I'll give him that as well,
I'd still get lost in the idea of them.
I know his game.
I was playing it too.
We both were the player and the gamemaker.

That was our issue.

And that's what he doesn't know.
It ended exactly as I played it out to.

Me- the helpless, soft spoken angel.
Him, the blunt forceful caretaker
The do-gooder.

That is what we both needed.
He needed the confidence boost.
I wanted to know I still had the power.

The memory of his warm smile got me through the winter, I'll
be honest about that.
And I will always love him for that.

Button

Parker Otto

In my front breast pocket lies a small, silver button
It fell from your bag months ago as you were sewing patches and
rags into grandiose garments There were many other buttons
nestled alongside needles and spools and other treasured
knick-knacks
I had meant to give the button back but how it makes me smile so
It reminds me of simple bliss
It reminds me that out there stands a beautiful woman who carries
around beautiful buttons It reminds me that a woman loves me

A woman with buttons

Untitled

M.E. Link

Repair the split
So it will last
Stitch by stitch
Patch by patch

Handle her tender
Don't rob her bare
Even a rat-race treadmill
Has enough to share

Rational mystic
Techno-lordship
Fascist power trip

Post-modern contraption
of a woman just draggin
her piles

Instead o lettin a sleepin dog lie
I take off atta run w him by my sode
into the country, thick as thieves
feelin the trail beneath our feet

Luggin around my leaky bucket
Into your sweet lovin

It's a mystery to you
and a mystery to me
Clandestin language hiss'n away like steam

Sobriquet
Deathbed
Discernin intellect
Numbed by the meds

amphetamine mind
amphetamine mouth
amphetamine scabs
amphetamine scowl
amphetamine sands
amphetamine smile

Untitled

M.E. Link

Dear Devastation,

Where do you hail from?

The explosive beginnin of a new adventure? From the tousled hair of a lover?

As he musters the willpower to rise from bed and get on with the day.

From a now-faint recollection of a man who might've been a methhead yet who never quite revealed his habit?

I know you don't dwell in the elegant glasses sticky inside with red wine residue, that which was sipped in good company.

Do you travel with the rodents as they scramble across grimey pavemnt? Oblivious to the artificial wit-i-cisms of America's upteeth hundredth ad campaign?

Do you jump from one musician to another as they sit opposite each other, silent and blank-faced as a head without dreams?

These musings I wonder to myself in the midst of strangers and subway cars, impending woes that float above my grasp until perhaps tomorrow.

Yet, Devastation - if I do know one place you often haunt, it's in that which I take for granted. And I admit, I am bound to do so; to lazily perceive what is presently happening without even an ounce of awe. Yet in cultivating faith like a modest garden, oscillating from summer to winter and back again, myself I seek to release sabotage, and steadfastly embrace new beginnins in everyday odds n ends.

Excerpts from Merchant's Diary

Richard Cocks, Cape Merchant, 1616

This night past, about midnight, our small skiffe of the Hoziancr was stolne away and, as the shipp's company sayeth, per a Hollander which ran away from the great shipp, being one of the two I wrot in favour of heretofore, and that they saw hym upon our bridg in the night about midnight; so out of dowbt I think they let hym goe away with the boate, one knave helping or winking at an others escape.

For truly I neaver saw a more foward and bad leawd compauy then most of them are, and the cheefe ringleader, a master mate called Dorington. This Dorington hath said in open company amongst them all that nether captain, master, nor no other had authority to punish men with ducking nor whiping, geving it out with othes that he and the rest would have victuels as they list, without controle. Once he is a drunken, unruly, mutenouse fello, and not fit to serve the Worshipfull Company.

We are quite out of money & occation to use much daylie.

And yisternight, very late, came one Jon Shippard, a tapstar as I understand, and in very deed a shuffling fello, not worthy water for his bier. He is a turbulent fello, a make-bate, and sett the master at odds with others per meanes of his smouthie tong, and yet a drunken fello, as most of the rest are the lyke; and came againe into the kitchin to quarrell with our cooke at supper tyme, I desyring Mr. Osterwick to put hym out of the howse and send hym aboard the shipp;

but he fell upon Mr. Osterwick, and puld his clothes afe his back, and misused hym, for which I put hym in the bilboes to cowle his feete till mornynge

How quickly I fall

Celina Chase

Me and Carmela
Alone at drop off service-
Guinness and the game.

Not my usual routine,
Time,
Or place.
Not my usual crowd.

Her light brings out a new side of me
Everyone wants her photograph
They all have a version of her
Familiar
Beautiful
Warm and safe.

It makes everyone here someone I know
Memories from when it all first happened and friendships formed.

Familiar and foreign,
accents and energies.

Untucked oxfords and slight sweat stains from the work day.

She made friends with the man next to me -
The man who quickly beat up my pulse
when I loved and lost him in our 1 hour of speaking
His gentle demeanor and unpressed button-down.
Messy hair from a days work
Strewn peacoat across the table and loafers loved and worn.

A gentle touch to wish me a good night.

Nothing is too big
or too soon
except I love you

It won't make the tombstone,
But it'll keep me grounded enough for now.

