Staff

Jenna Charles
Managing Editor/
Photographer

Evgeniy Slinin
Layout Developer

Eileen Farrell
Submissions Editor

Sincere Thanks to Our Faculty Advisors:

Athena Devlin
Assistant Professor of English

Maria Smith
Assistant Professor of English

If you would like to submit your work to MONTAGE, please e-mail submissions to Jared Nardilla jcnardilla@gmail.com

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Montague Street, Brooklyn Heights.

* * * * *
A Nerd’s Guide To Dating

Vincent Longobardi

As I was watching a particularly skintastic commercial for Dove soap, a thought occurred to me.

Where are the guidelines for building a successful relationship? Sure, others have attempted to put such momentous concepts in writing, but all have failed miserably! That’s why I think it’s time for me to offer my male readers (hopefully the female readers will see how pathetic this is and take pity on me) a comprehensive and “Go To” guide on the way to build a loving, monogamous sphere of loving love.

Rule #1

Do not, under any circumstances, call her friends “worthless, oxygen-wasting, comically pathetic excuses for human beings.”

This situation is made even worst if it is in the context of the dreaded ex, a hulking behemoth of 7 feet that can bend steel, cause stars to supernova, and kill you with his mind. Even if it seems like she is insulting him and wants you to join in on the bashing, DON’T! It’s just a plot to embroil you in some nefarious scheme of her own making!

Rule #2

Despite what you may heard to the contrary, your biggest enemy in the early stages of the relationship is honesty.

Rather than openly reveal the fact you are a pathetic slob who cannot function without female guidance, try to cultivate the image of a star quarterback or CEO of some fledgling company. If you lack the verbal skills to pull these off, tell her you’re “utilizing an action plan” for deciding what to do with your life.
However, it can be very strenuous to maintain this image of crystalline perfection. The following are examples of some disturbingly easy-to-fall-into patterns capable of quickly destroying your carefully constructed, spiderweb-like fantasy life.

* Playing “Neverwinter Nights” the first time she calls you and not even turning down the volume. This is only made worst by telling her the war cries of the Orcish Hordes and sound of steel clashing are “just typical neighbor sounds.”

* When she is trying to tell you something important, such as her outlook on life or thoughts on love, do not repeatedly state “I sense a disturbance in the Force” until she starts to cry, thereby giving you leave to play Jedi Outcast. You will pay for it later.

* When she calls you at an inconvenient time to inquire about your “millionaire job” do not simply turn up the volume on your sound system until “Don’t Fear the Reaper” drowns out all pretense of understanding. When asked why it is so loud do not say, “I like it that way” or “It just started doing that one day and I’ve never really bothered to fix it.”

Hopefully with my expert guidance these tips can save you from some potentially serious pitfalls.

Rule #3

The third rule can be summed up elegantly and succinctly: Do not make thinly-veiled references to what you do during DirecTV “Cinemax Free Previews.”

Rule #4

Calling her two towers Isengard and Barad-dur is not good for your health. No matter how many times she has seen the “Lord of the Rings” movie this will not go over well. Any further use of the term will
result in your nuts swelling up to the size of grapefruits.

Rule #5

Dressing up as your favorite “Star Wars” or “Lord of the Rings” character for a movie premier or convention might help you score major points with your nerd cabal and elevate you to lesser godhood status but will not help your chance of getting any sack time with a girl. You can be assured though within hours of showing up at her door dressed as Jar Jar Binks everything remotely female within the 100-mile radius will know about it.

Rule #6

Recounting tales of your daring adventures most notably how you slew the demon Ertru of the Abyss singlehandedly will only result in her backing away slowly. Also on a side note, you did not really defeat Ertru, your Epic Level 23 Elven Ranger Eldeonrathill battled him as he fell into the Abyss, not you. You were never in the abyss battling demons unless you count that time you got locked in the closet with the spider, but even then you did not win that battle.

Rule #7

Introducing the girl to your nerd cabal on the first date might seem like a good way to indoctrinate her into the cult...uh, I mean introduce her to the way you live, but it will only result in being shunned by both her and the nerds. And the ear shattering screams of “A girl, what do we do!” will hunt you forever.

Rule #8

Gloating about your massive hit list and your well-laid plans of how to bring down the school which you demonstrated in your Rainbow Six scenario will probably earn you the attention of your local FBI office, but will have detrimental effects on your relationship with the girls.
Rule #9

Even your Lord of the Rings-ophile friend is getting tired of your constant singing of the song “Ballad of Bilbo Baggins” by Leonard Nemoy in public and at random times. He is doubting your sanity and has a full wall poster of The Dark Lord of Mordor in his room. If he is doing that what do you think the norms are thinking of you?

Rule #10

Under no circumstances when you go to a party, dance or box social should you get so pissed ass drunk where you start blabbing your deepest dark fantasies, you will never ever get a date again after you give your 30 minutes monologue of what you want to do with seven of nine. Or your statement of going “I want to roll a natural 20 in bed with you” of course we all know nerds automatically lose 19 points to all hot monkey sex rolls.

* * * * *
Men-Hater

Nery Arcos

Men are like pigeons that aboard on one place
And fly away once they mark their territory
To find another face as if it were a race
Between one another just for the glory.
When we say that our body is a temple to us,
All they think about it how to get in our pants.
Men like to make a big fuss
When all they hear are our rants.
Yet it is alright for them to look around
While we are supposed to act as if nothing is going on.
Men can be at bars asking for another round
While their wives are at home taking care of their sons.

I would have just been another man-hater with a missing black glove
If it weren’t for you who filled my heart with love.

* * * * *
G.L. and the Triple B’s

Sandra Westcott

G.L. was exhausted from her busy day. She started out the day by calling her ISP, AT&T regarding her DSL service and then went to CVS to straighten out a problem she had with her PBM. On the way to the IRT, she stopped by the ATM at HSBC and then took the train to J&R to get CD’s, an MP3 player, and a few DVD’s; she even ordered a new JVC HDTV. After that, she ventured to DKNY, H&M, and DSW where she practically maxed out her VISA.

Weak from hunger and fatigue, G.L. decided to head home. On her way, she passed by the home of her neighbors the triple B’s. The lights were on, the SUV, BMW, and VW Bug were all parked outside, and she could smell something delicious cooking; she was sure someone was home. G.L. knocked on the door, but no one answered. Fearing that something was wrong, she carefully opened the door and peeked in.

“TGIF,” she thought as she let herself into the house. She spotted three PC’s and decided to register for her CBT class with EDI before it was too late. The class would be held two nights a week in NYC. She also needed to IM some of her friends. The first computer she sat down at was a MAC. It was too different from her PC, so she moved on to the next PC. This PC was an HP laptop with a touchpad. Every time she put her finger over the touchpad, the cursor would fly around the desktop and applications would open up. In frustration, she moved to the third PC which was just right. She registered for her class and happily IM’d her friends.
When G.L. could no longer control her hunger, she went to
the kitchen to see what was cooking. To her delight, it was her Lean
Cuisine dinner. It was just right so she ate the whole thing. Tired, G.L.
looked towards the beds. The first bed had flannel sheets and was too
hot. The second bed had sheets with 200 thread count and was too
scratchy, but the third bed had Egyptian cotton, 500 thread count sheets
and was just right. She hung her cashmere sweater by the bed with care,
crawled under the sheets and quickly fell asleep.

G.L. was not aware that she had tripped the silent alarm when
she entered the house and that ADT had called the triple B’s to alert
them of the intruder. When the triple B’s came home, they looked at
their PC’s. “My keyboard is all messed up! Who could have done this?”
cried the oldest B. “Someone rearranged my ICONS!” declared the
middle B. However, the third PC was just right. The triple B’s then no-
ticed G.L. thrashing around the bed in a restless sleep. She was having
visions of MP3’s, CD’s and DVD’s, CVS, DKNY, H&M, DSW, J&R,
ATM’s, and ISP’s, dancing in her head. She awoke startled and scream-
ing. G.L. fled the house, and was never seen again. Rumor has it that
she’s in rehab recovering from an acute overdose of acronyms.

* * * * *
Defined Love

* * * * *
Love at First Sight
Yana Shchipak

Love is a
magical, blooming flower
An invisible, light bond
That connects two single soul hearts
Love is pure and innocent

Your Love
Touched the deepest part of my sacred heart
I guessed it then
That I fell in love at first sight
Your Love
Is the key to my heart.
When I saw you
My heart started to melt like ice

Love rejoices in truth
It protects, hopes and trusts
Love never fails.

You are the only one
Who made me feel for the first time in love
You will always be in my mind
Like a single sparkling light
And you will stay with me Forever…

* * * * *

13
The Working Man’s Special
(After Keats’ “La Belle Dame sans Merci”)

Philip Rafferty V

And so each Friday I’d go cash my check after the job, when the kids were still in school and the wife was still at work. I didn’t make a whole lot, enough for the bills, the basics, and a few beers. From there I’d walk up a few blocks to the old neighborhood, Hell’s Kitchen, now full of fags and bankers, not like when I was a kid. I’d pop into Rudy’s Bar, a place my dad, grand-dad, all the Dolan men had thrown a few back in. Wasn’t owned by Rudy any more, but I liked drinking there, reminded me of those old days.

Happy hour started midday and the bar, for three or four hours, was filled with Shriner types; old guys on pensions, who drank beer for lunch, and had built the city with their hands. Retired steel workers, bus drivers, gray haired guys who reminded me of those old men I loved and looked up to as a kid. Rudy’s still had the Working Man’s Special, a shot and a cheap can beer. I’d suck two maybe three down before I’d have to get back on the train to Brooklyn, for Diane’s end-a-the-week Mac-and-Cheese.

So it’s this Friday afternoon, Yankees are on the tube, two o’clock, Jimmy’s behind the bar, and I’m just sipping my beer, when I see this guy who I never seen before pacing around the back-a-the bar. I’m thinking to myself, what wrong with this schmuck? Why is he in here? And why does this guy look so miserable? He’s made three maybe four calls on the payphone, and I look over at Jimmy, and he shoots me this look, like why’s this forty dollar hair cut in some Bloomingdales suit in here on a Friday afternoon? And why doesn’t he have a cell chone?

The haircut walks over, sits down at the bar, and orders up a single malt. The guys in the place all look at him, now these are guys who drink single malt once a year on their birthdays, but they see he’s not trouble so they continue their small-talking, staring, and sipping. Jimmy pours this guy’s drink, the guy pays him. I look at him, out of the corner of my eye; the guy’s suffering, he’s one sad looking chump.
I see sweat on his far head, his suit looks like he’s slept in it—he finishes up his drink and calls for another.

He’s spending some cash, so I know Jimmy’s thinking that this guy might make his tip jar a little heavier on a slow afternoon. And Jim seeing the lucrative possibilities of this Four Train suit asks his name. “I ain’t seen you before, what you doing around here? What do they call you?”

“Oh, um, yeah I ah, kind of new to the neighborhood, live in, you know, one of those newly renovated co-op’s. I’m sorry, Charles, the name’s Charles.”

“Charlie, I’m Jimmy, that there at the end of the bar is Frankie” pointing to me “he grew up round here, isn’t that right Frankie?” I gave a nod not wanting to get involved with the suit. “Nice to meet ya Charlie—don’t worry guys round here look tough, but they ain’t. Buncha old stinks, still think the neighborhood belongs to the micks. Guys don’t realize city’s changed, do ya boys?”

Charlie’s sipping his third, when he starts patting himself, like he was on fire. Pulls out this fancy contraption, thing looks like a god-damn computer, Jimmy and I don’t realize it’s a phone till he sticks it on his ear. Charlie rushes out of the place, leaving his coat, and Jimmy and I like two school girls start gossiping. “What’s this guy’s deal?” “Maybe insider trading or something? I saw something in the Post about two guys, made millions lying.” Jimmy whispers this. “Nah, yah think? Ah that’s movie stuff.” And before we can come up with some crazy plot of this guys reason for drinking in Rudy’s, of all places, he wanders back.

“Sorry about that Jimmy, god s’been a day.” “Ah don’t worry Charlie, I knew you’d come back. If not I would hocked your fancy coat to pay for that third drink.” They both give a laugh. “No it’s just a friend about this girl, woman really, she…” “Go on kid confess. Before we go to the priest, air our sins to God, we all got a bartender we prep it with.” “It’s just—I met this chick, got to be last spring by now. Jim she’s the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She’s the whole package. I met her one night, when I was out with a few colleagues after work, laying out a business model over drinks. We’re in the Hudson Library Bar, you know where that is?” “Yeah in the Hudson Hotel, had
a cousin who was bell hop there.” Jimmy was crouching over the bar, like he was this guy’s therapist or something. “Ok. So the guys I work with leave, and I stay back, sipping a few drinks checking out the crowd. And in she walks. There was something about her, it was in her eyes. I can’t explain, except, I don’t know: you ever see a woman, look in her eyes, and know she’d be good in bed?” “Yeah,” Jimmy now hooked “I married her.” “So you do know what I mean—ok she and I get to talking at the Hudson and in a flash, were back at my place. I swear it lasted four hour, and was the best I ever had.”

Not paying attention at first, at this point a few of us were looking over at him beginning to follow the story. “So I started seeing this chick regularly. We’d go out to dinner; I bought her this really expensive festooned Tiffany’s tennis bracelet, set me back a few days pay.” We had no idea what this guy meant “festooned?” But we were so interested in this soap opera he was telling us, that we forgave his big words. “She wore the god damn thing around her wrist every day. So we are out one night at Jean Georges, and she looks across the table at me and softly says ‘I love you.’ It was the sweetest thing I’d ever heard.” I motioned for another while Charlie rambled on. “I said it back Jim, I’d never said that to anyone but my mother.” Jimmy smiled, “Any good guy loves his mother, and tells her; and you seem like a good one Charlie. Come on let me buy you one on the house.”

The old guys at the end of the bar heard the words “buy ya one” and the drunk fools perked up. They were pissed that this kid was getting some special treatment, he was new they never liked anyone new, but Charlie looked like he needed it. “So what wrong then Charlie sounds like a good girl?” Jimmy was like a prized fighter with his customers. He knew exactly how to move around ‘em, how to ask about your guts, getting you to open your wallet instead. “Oh no at that point six months ago, I thought to myself ‘Charles you’ve met the mother of your children.’ It was only about a week ago that that changed. ” “Go head kid, don’t be shy, we all been there before.”

“Well I am out again at the Hudson Library bar for work. And I’m in the back, papers spread out, talking with a few colleagues. She walks in, in a cocktail dress, like the night I’d first seen her. But she has a guy on her arm.
. And so I’m thinking, it could be her brother, cousin, a gay guy, she
pals around with. I hang low, but after only five minutes I see they are
much more than friends. She got her hands on this guy’s zipper and her
tongue in his mouth.”

“So, like an idiot, I play tough guy, walk over to her, make a scene,
and get kicked out of the place. I’m never allowed back. Can you
believe the guy she was with threatened to kill me, what a fool. That’s
not even the best part, the guy who just called me, spends a lot of time
in the neighborhood, and he told me she’d done the same thing to a
few guys he knows, even screwed a buddy of his up so much he didn’t
make partner.” “Ah you live and learn kid, you’re young.” Jimmy lit
a cigarette and shouted to the bar, “Anyone tells the board of health,
I’ll find out who told, and make your miserable.” Charlie the dumb kid
he was kept talking, “I must sound like a fool, but it’s just she just was
like this wonderful dream, and then one day, I woke up cold and all
alone. I shouldn’t be, but I’ve been trying to reach her, just trying to
fix things.” “Ah forget about her, she's the past Charlie.” Jimmy puffed
on his cigarette. “She won’t pick up my calls, so I’ve been trying her
from different numbers hoping she might pick up then. Called her from
the payphone in the back the bar—nothing, won’t answer.” “ Ah don’t
worry kid” Jimmy feeling bad for the guy, “She’s not the right one for
ya, that’s all. Sounds like a classic New York City whore. Mommy
and Daddy just didn’t love her enough, that all. We all been hurt by one
of those once or twice, ain’t that right Frankie?” I look over feeling for
this kid, “Yeah makes us strong Jim, doesn’t it?”

The kid’s put back four doubles by now, and for a skinny guy
I know he’s gotta be hurting. Yanks are in the ninth and it’s not like
it used be. This new breed of a free-trading baseball team doesn’t feel
like home. And so I gather my thing up, leave’m on the bar, while I hit
the john before heading out.

I walk out of the can zipping my fly up, and I look across the
room—mostly old guys without a place to go, without a city, without
much but a few bucks and a favorite drink. I walk over to my seat,
and hear Charlie still crying into his glass, “So that why I am here,
can’t go to my old place, can’t get her out of my head, and just needed a
drink.” “Well you’re welcome anytime Charlie, you’re a good guy. I
like this kid—good guy right Frankie?” I give a wink and a nod, thank-
ing God I ain’t young no more. The kid tries to smile at me, but he’s all over the place. And then out of nowhere, standing up, he takes that computer phone of his, and pitches it across the bar—thing shatters into a million plastic pieces, circuits all over the bottles.

I look over at Jimmy; he looks at me wondering if he should be mad. And then this group of sad old men, the entire place jump up to their feet. I thought it was the Yanks at first, though maybe someone hit one out of the park. But it was just Charlie grinning like an idiot and all we can do was clap. This entire bar full of old guys, all who’d met a girl like this when they were young just clapped. Charlie took a bow, sat back down. And these old guys, all of us, if we listened or not, understood.

* * * * *

On the Way... Roosevelt Island
The Line

Mitch Levenberg

She stood out. Standing there in her long, black cape, her not so much disheveled but windswept hair; she looked like she might have wandered in from a shipwreck – I think that describes her best, at least
that’s the word I think of when I think of her. She has the look of someone who has been or should be windswept all her life. Windsweptness becomes her. She belongs always with the windswept, among those who stand at the edge of cliffs overlooking the sea, waiting for their loved one to return, or those who stand at the corner of Lexington and forty-second eternally hailing cabs. No way she’d get picked up. She looked deadly. But she was deadly only in the sense of making one feel too alive, that one has missed or is always missing something all the time. She wasn’t young but her age, and the way it showed itself, the lines along her forehead, the bags under her eyes, showed years of monstrous pleasure. The very gravity that surrounded her, that pulled her down or against which she pulled herself up, was promiscuous. She looked all excess. There was an “enough is enough” quality about her which disgusted me but only in the sense that I am easily disgusted by what is unattainable.

I stared at her, assuming she would be gone soon; people like her are usually flitting in and out of somewhere, just as in my imagination. But she didn’t move. And no one dared approach her, thinking perhaps that some fictional companion must have gone off to refill her glass she no longer held. But despite her inapproachability, I decide, due to the fact that earlier I had come up with what I thought was the greatest line of all time, to approach her. Before I knew it then, I was walking towards her, though with as much uncertainty as the day I learned to walk, and suddenly I was there, within her gravitational pull. I immediately felt sorry for myself as if one of the great challenges or opportunities in life had opened up for me for which I had no qualifications. But there was the line. My old line – “Would you like some more ice?” – had its limitations, especially for someone not drinking at the time. No, this was fool proof. “You know,” I said, “I’ve been staring and staring at you for a long time now and I realize that I don’t know you.” “My name is Jacqueline,” she said. “Jacqueline Connors.” It was then my eyes shifted and I caught Jerry Grabbit staring at us from behind the big table with all the liquor on it, one hand grappling with some ice, dropping far too much of it into his glass from far too high an angle, causing the wine to splash on his shirt, just above the waist which itself was just above his infamous groin.
Jerry Grabbit: I should have known. Was he the fictional character who went off to get Jacqueline the drink? Or had he just spotted her himself and would soon be shooting out that hot forked tongue at her, searing me on his way? So there I was, talking to the future beautiful victim of Jerry Grabbit who is rumored to have a Murphy bed behind one of his office walls. No, Jerry Grabbit was master; I was out of his league entirely; I didn’t even know what a Murphy bed was and there I was face to face with Jacqueline Connors, the seconds ticking down, perhaps already past the two minute warning, Grabbit soon to be bearing down at me.

The pressure was enormous, especially after realizing I had nothing to say after the “line.” I had always dreamed it would be enough to carry me through, to the goal line you might say, but Jacqueline was tough; there were blockers everywhere and it would cost me. I was exhausted already. My glass needed ice and I lifted it chin level so perhaps she herself might suggest I refill it. My God, I was depending on her to use my old line. I was doomed. I needed a month to reassess things, a time out, a trip to the sidelines to think things over. True, the greatest coach in the world was in the room, but he was now my greatest enemy. What did women want from me anyway? I decided to wing it:

“Jacqueline,” I said, “What a beautiful name!”

Thank you,” she said as if she had said it once too often and that I had, like thousands of others, caused her pain. Then something wonderful and strange happened, like breaking a tackle.

“You know,” I said. “I’ve always liked that name. Ever since the Kennedy administration.”

She laughed. I felt good like I had eased her pain, not to mention my own. Was I on a roll? The line about the Kennedy administration seemed to come out of nowhere and perhaps that was from where I worked best. I had to admit the Kennedy line was a pretty good one, one I never would have thought of under normal, unstressful circumstances, and she thought so too, and as I feared, so did Jerry Grabbit because I spotted him now, his eyes twitching, his tongue moving slowly across the top of his mouth.

Jacqueline,” I said. “I bet you everyone calls you Jackie instead
of Jacqueline, right? I never liked the name Jackie. I always thought it such a waste to call someone Jackie when their name was Jacqueline, don’t you?” The wine had hit hard now and I was slurring. For instance, I think I pronounced the word “you” as “shoe.” But it didn’t matter.

“Would you excuse me?” she asked and after that something inside me which always dies at times like this died, and I was sorry I had used up the line about the Kennedy administration for certainly it had taken me down a path I had no business coming down. My reserve had fumbled on the five yard line. “Of course,” I said wondering if I should grab her and swear that my life depended on seeing her again sometime. But I quite didn’t have the resources for that one, thinking that perhaps there’d be other games with less formidable opponents, that perhaps I would get to see her again some time, under different circumstances, which kind of false but comforting hope is always enough to get me through the next day and the next function and when I looked up there she was already scooped up by Jerry Grabbit’s tongue and soon to be deposited behind the table with all the liquor on it.

“Jackie!” cried Jerry Grabbit, grabbing both her hands. “Jackie! Jackie! Jackie!” he said, always knowing just what to say and how many times to say it.

“Do I know you?” she asked.
“Yes, of course,” insisted Jerry. “Gerald Grabbit, last function?”
“Yes, of course,” she said. Gerald, how good to see you!”
“How good?” insisted Gerald.
“Very, very good,” answered Jackie.
“Would you like some wine?” Gerald asked.
“Yes, please,” Jackie answered.
“Red or white?” asked Gerald.
“White,” answered Jackie.
“Ice?” he asked.
“No, Gerald. No,” she answered. “I don’t like ice.”

* * * * *
With my thumb poking out this tattered contraption of a cast held in an upward position, I attempt to wave down any of these blurs of light that are passing me by at uncomfortable speeds. I’m hoping one will stop. I feel the wind smack my face from these automobiles that leave me stationary on this grass off the New Jersey turnpike, still without a way home. I scuffle through my pockets to count the change that I have, digging the best way I can into them. Not even enough for a cup of coffee, no chance for me to catch a bus to get away from here. I’m left here to continue my thus-far failed mission of hitching a ride. It then begins to rain. Wonderful! It’s Mother’s Day. Thing is, she has no idea that I’m coming home.

“What is it? Give it to me. Let me see my baby.”

“It’s a boy, a beautiful and healthy baby boy. If I might add, he looks just like you. Congratulations!”
“He does look like me doesn’t he? I’ll name him Robert.”

A car pulls to the side where I’m standing. A feeling of salvation pours through me. I’ve been rescued! Saved from drowning or rather my dampness. Inside the car sit a few teenagers. They stare me down for a couple of seconds, windows open and before I know it they’re honking at me fiercely and speed back into the flow of traffic, laughing at me. In a rage of disappointment, I throw them the finger and once again raise my thumb and proceed on my miserable venture.

“Look at you, you’re a mess! What were you dong? Playing in the mud again?”

“Yes Mom, but all of us were. Don’t worry though. I’ll change before dinner.”

“Come on Robert, you’re the oldest. You’re supposed to be a role model for your younger siblings, not encourage them and dirty yourself up. They’re only children.”

“But Mom, I’m only ten. Linda is only three years younger than me and Paul is five.”

“Don’t you talk back to me like that. I just don’t know what to do with you. After dinner no television and you get the privilege of washing the dishes, you hear me?”

“Yes Mom. I understand.”

When I hit the proper age, I was sent away to Military school. I remember that day clearly, waiting for the bus, my brother and sister telling me not to go. Their eyes were watery (ready to spill out with tears like balances with too much weight applied to them.) With a frown, confusion flowing through my body, goose bumps forming along my arms, I looked up at my mother for one last time. There was no emotion in her face. A callous, inanimate expression lingered without any attempt to form either grimace or a sign of recognition that her first born was going away. I didn’t fully understand then, and I still don’t quite understand now why she was so cold to me. I blame myself for my fate, that it was my fault. I waved goodbye to my family as I entered the bus and continued waving from my seat as I took off. My siblings waved, but she just stood there, barely an “I’ll miss you” demeanor. That’s the last physical memory I have of her since I left.

“Mommy, when I grow up I want to fly.”
“Really honey? Now that’s a nice dream”
“Well it can happen. I want to be in the clouds, see the world look like leg’s from high up”
“That’s nice sweetie. I’m sure you can make it happen if you work hard enough or you can just jump off the roof.”

Midterms are nearing. We’re not suppose to leave the school, but I have to do this, I have to go home and see her. I need to hear her say it. I want answers, closure. I miss my family. The small amounts of phone calls that I’ve gotten to make just aren’t enough. They could have my head for sneaking out, but I don’t care about the consequences. I have to see my mom, today is for her.

The rain seems to be getting worse. I’ve been carrying a book bag that contains my essential belongings in it. There’s some clothing, a toothbrush and other toiletries, as well as a few books. There’s also a potted plant that I was able to afford nestled among my clothes to keep stable, so the dirt won’t spill out and line the bottom of my bag. Due to the rain, I am forced to tuck my bag away within my jacket. I’m uncomfortable and wet, my hand tired from being raised for so long and my blood cold and exhausted. Finally, an angel in the form of a disheveled Oldsmobile appears before me. It pulls over my way and stops, headlights gleaming brightly in the darkness lighting up my face. The driver an older man, probably in his mid-fifties, greyish hair and aging features rolls down this window and asks me where I’m headed. With a sigh of relief, I tell him “Home...please take me home.” I then begin to explain to him how to get there.

After a decent ride, I thank the man, graciously wishing I could’ve given him something for his good deed. I tell him that I believe in karma and that he’ll one day be rewarded. Through the downpour I see it, my house, or what I hope would still be considered home. The front porch light is on, flickering a little every so often. Nervously, I walk up the steps. So long has it been since I’ve gone up them, yet there are so many memories of me running up them. When I get to the door I pause before extending a finger to ring the doorbell. It rings and I wait. The hallway light comes on and I can see her figure approaching the door. I take in a deep breath. It’s now or never, Robert. A myriad of feelings rush through me. I’m unsure how to feel. Should I be excited?
Scared? Happy? Angry? Or overjoyed? Should I be optimistic or pessimistic about this? She opens the door and hangs halfway in and halfway out of the house to see who is outside without getting wet.

“Robert? Is that you? What are you doing here?”

Using my good hand. I scavenge out of my bag the plant I had gotten for her and present it to her in a fashion that must’ve looked like me pleading for my life to be spared.

Without having been invited into the house, I prepare what I’ve been rehearsing over and over in my head through all this time I’ve been traveling, the main reason for my coming.

“Mom. I came all this way, hitch-hike..”

“Hitch-hiked? Are you crazy? You could have been killed, and why aren’t you in school?”

“That's the thing mom, I had to see you. It’s Mother’s Day, but not just for that. I need closure to convince myself that I’m not crazy, to see if this is where I belong. I came here to tell you that I love you. Can you tell me that you love me?”

For some awkward seconds there’s only silence between the both of us and I receive no response. I begin to get realization, a horrible realization that only a pariah would feel. A feeling that none should ever get. I fall to my knees and begin tugging at her pant leg pleading for her to respond. In mass hysterics, I no longer can control myself.

“WHY CAN’T YOU SAY IT, MOM? WHY? I’VE HEARD YOU SAY IT TO LINDA AND PAUL BEFORE, BUT NEVER TO ME! WHAT DID I DO WRONG? PLEASE MOM, TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME! TELL ME THAT YOU CARE! WHY CAN’T YOU MOM? WHY CAN’T YOU DO THIS FOR ME? I WAS ALWAYS A GOOD BOY. MOM, I LOVE YOU!

I regress to a state of adolescence. Uncontrollably, tears run down my face mixing together with mucous and leading to my watery mouth and I swallow. If any moment could define a man’s loss of dignity, this would be it. I demand an answer, I need to hear her say it, NEED.
“I...I...I...am sorry Robert. So very sorry for how I’ve treated you, but you see, I wasn’t ready for you. You took away my youth, took away my dreams. You were always there, precious little you, always reminding me of myself and what I couldn’t be. You were my fault, my flaw, my accident and I never knew what to do with you, wasn’t ready for you, didn’t want to keep you. I’ve hated myself so much and you were so much like me. Now please, get up from your knees, be a man. I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? That’s it. If my own mother doesn’t even want me, what’s the point? You sent me away mom, got rid of me so you didn’t have to see me. All this time I’ve held onto my love for you and at times when I should’ve just accepted the truth I denied and hated you. You filled me with doubt, with fear and left me broken.”

Defeated, I step away from my “home,” away from this woman and walk into the street, away from the house. I stop and stand there, unconcerned about the rain, I’m already soaked. She stands on the porch, watching me with concerned eyes, worried eyes, unsure of my motives. From the side a truck approaches, lights nearing, horn honking and I scream out to her one last time “HAPPY MOTHERS DAY.”

* * * * *
Martini Mix, Roosevelt Island

* * * * *
Hi, how’s everyone doing today? I’ve been good. Life’s been alright.

It’s just the other night I was having dinner with my family, and my wife told me I need some more culture, some more class in my life. Well I was insulted, but in order to shut her up I agreed to go see some plays. So I saw Grease first. Yea that was a good one. A bunch a whiny teenagers singing and dancing. If I wanted to see that I would hang out with my daughter and her friends. Yea then I decided to check out Cats. Whoa creepy. So I was off to a bad start. Then a guy at work told me about an American classic called Death of a Salesman. God you’re really going to get people in the seats with a title like that. Let me tell you this was quite an experience. I bet you can’t guess how it ends huh?

Anyway the main character’s name is Willy Loman. HE’S THE SALESMAN! Talk about a bonified loser. The guy comes crawling across the stage with his bags in hand.

Buddy pull it together, it can’t be that bad. For crying out loud the Guy can’t even drive his car with out falling asleep. Can you say retirement? Well at least he gets to come home to his loving wife Linda. Yea loving but useless. Hey Linda if we’re having money problems why doesn’t your ass get a job. It’s the 20th Century for god’s sake. Just when you don’t think this story can’t get any worse we find out the refrigerator is breaking. Jeeze, Willie comes home from crashing the car again and the poor bastard can’t even get a cold drink. They should change the name to “Suicide of a Salesman,” and Willie should have just done us a favor early on and saved everyone two hours.

Wait the story is about to take a turn for the better. We find out Willie has sons living in the house. Oh how nice, at least he has two little boys. No wait these two are in their thirties, and they are still living at home. Where are the bunk beds?

At least they both have good jobs. Oh no, wait, they are both unemployed losers who spend all their money on alcohol and hookers. Hey Willy, you are really doing a fabulous job here.
I have to say the only positive was Willie’s imaginary brother Ben. He was imaginary right. Anyway, this guy’s cool. Nice suits and a cane. See me I would have had him smoking a pipe and wearing a monocle. Ben does something Willy should have done a long time ago, he throws Biff a beating. And then he tells Willy to end it. Bravo, Ben, bravo.

All in all, I don’t feel like I have gained any class. But Willy has made me feel better about myself. At least my fridge works.

* * * * *
Dimensions of Reality

Alex Gallo.

A man common and content
One in the same with nature
the world around him the source
of all knowledge, perception and
ideas. His life, ordered at his feet
every beck and call, every wish
every dream at his fingertips.

In the world of his mind, disarrayed
and broken, scattered, and lost, his
personality shifting from hellish burden
to tranquil love.

Anger transforms the body reflects the
behavioral duplicity of himself, the personality
overriding the better judgment of his soul.

Frozen in Stone, Brooklyn Heights
Falling apart at the edge, his personality traveling to the depths of an underworld where no rule, authority, or stability can be found.

The world he is in, a bleak image of our own, towers exploding, international wars transpiring, and people without the guidance of the light

Man’s hell is to be indifferent, his hell is manifest. The crowds of soulless people, working, hating and screaming for relief.

The world populated by the threat of nihilism, depression, and communism, will one day be restored to its former glory. Of days where the man’s soul and mind can once and at the same time become whole.

* * * * *
Golden Bridge.

* * * * *
A Peace of Heaven, Brooklyn Heights.

* * * * *
Mary Full of Grace

Marie Marchiano

Characters:
Mary
Joe (Mary’s brother)

Time:
6:30 p.m.

Place:
Mary and Joe sit alone at the kitchen table. Joe sits at the head of the table and Mary is right next to him. The kitchen looks brand new with black marble counter tops, light cherry wood cabinets, wooden molding all along the ceiling, and neutral tiles. All appliances are stainless steel. Burned pots and pans remain on the stove. There is a wine rack on the floor underneath the large window that looks out into the garden. The grape vine dominates the view of the fig and plum trees. Tomatoes and basil plants are gated in the white fence along with a small rose bush climbing over the right side. The opposite wall in the kitchen is opened with an interior window. On top of the window ledge is a statue of Mary and baby Jesus, the window is an opening into the dark dinning room. The kitchen is dimly lit; barely visible to see the beautiful china and plates that read “Mangia.” Mary and Joe are both silent until Mary speaks.

Mary: (turning to Joe) Sorry I burned almost every meal for the past month.

Joe: (eating and looking down at his plate) It’s ok.

Mary: Too bad I neva watched Ma cook. I coulda learned a thing or two.

Joe: (still looking down) Yea.
Mary: (turning away almost whispering to herself) I still can’t believe she is gone.

Joe: (looking up now) Can’t believe both of them are gone.

Mary: I still wake up in the middle of the night thinkin she’ll be next to me.

[Joe is still looking down and grabbing seconds after being almost done with his meal. Mary has not touched her plate and begins biting her nails. They are practically stubs and the cuticles are bloody and torn.]

Joe: (bossy) Stop biting ya nails!

Mary: (with attitude) Take a look at your nails before ya comment on mine - and stop actin like Ma.

Joe: (sharply) Just shut up already.

[Mary is silent for some time and begins to bite her bottom lip. She stares out into the dining room then looks back at Joe.]

Mary: (nervously) Joe- I ah- I ah gotta tell ya somethin.

Joe: Yeah? Wha?

Mary: (quickly) Promise ya won’t get mad or hit me.

Joe: (sort of laughing) What the hell, are ya pregnant or summin?

[Mary looks at him completely silent, terrified and unsure of what his next reaction may be, but we can tell it not going to go over that smooth.]

Joe: Mare ya betta be freakin kiddin me or I’ll killya I swear.
Mary: (working up a nerve) Yeah Yeah, you’re always swearin that, I shoulda been six feet under by now with Ma and Da.

Joe: (angrily and loud) What the hell are ya tryin to tell me?

Mary: (almost yelling) Yes Joooeee, it’s true- OK- I’m PREGNANT - - pregnant outta wedlock- but I’m 21 Joe, you can’t…

Joe: (intensely) I can’t wha? Kill ya and that spic of yours. Cuz when I see Pedro riding up in front of the house here I’m gonna break his face. He thinks he can hide unda those tinted windows makin deals here and dere, but I got business to attend with him now!

Mary: (choking up) Stop accusing him of always dealing and don’t call him a spic- and his name is Peter- I love him!

Joe: Common Mare, we both know he didn’t get no Bentley workin like the Mexican that he is. Ya love him? You dunno what love is, you're only 21.

Mary: (crying with almost hysteria) That’s right Joe I’m 21. I’m an adult, a woman! I can do whateva I want.

Joe: (raising his voice) Not unda my roof! You have no appreciation for what I’ve done for you. Where else were you gonna live huh? I quit school to get a full-time job while Ma was sick. What did you do? You went to school and hung out with Pedro all day. Now I got all the bills to pay and the mortgage. I’m sure you forgot about all the loans I had to take out for you to finish college. What are you gonna do now huh? You gonna quit school and raise a kid by yourself? I won’t have a little Javier running around in his diaper here.

Mary: (shaking and crying) I’m not naming him Javier- You’re gonna be an uncle- you’re gonna have a nephew. I’m four months- and I’m keeping it!
[Joe looks at her with a stare that burns her eyes like rays of fire shooting at them. Mary begins sobbing.]

Mary: And I’m naming him Juda after Peter’s father. If you won’t accept me, my baby, and the man I love, than I’ll move in with his family. At least it’s more of a home than here, and they love their son enough to accept it.

[Joe gets up abruptly and ignores what Mary has said. He stamps up the stairs to his bedroom and slams the door behind him sending a vibration throughout the whole house. Mary begins to cry. She wipes her tears and begins biting her nails looking blankly at the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus statue. She gets up to clear the dishes from the table, lightly banging them into the sink. She begins rinsing them off before putting them into the dishwasher.]

Mary: (looking up with a sparkle in her eyes) Da…you’re the only one who cared. Ma would of killed me - and Joe…he’d kill me right now if he could. (Sighing and holding the cross around her neck) I wish you were here. (Pausing and pondering) I wonder if Joe is really gonna kill Peter… (Indifferently) Oh well, whataya gonna do? I dunno if I really wanna name the kid Juda. Maybe I’ll name him after Joe, maybe that’ll shut him up. God how he was Ma’s little pet, how she spoiled him and was so hard on me; it’ no wonder he can’t deal with criticism. (Catching her breath and smiling)No Da it’s you – you - I’ll name him after you.

[Mary continues to rinse the dishes. The lights fade and land on the Blessed Virgin Mary and baby Jesus.]

    The End.

    * * * * *
Explain

Stef Morisi

So, after all said and done,
I say, “I give up.”
Yet, you’re still the one.
I ache and I break;
and I say, “Let me go.”
Yet, I’ve done that already.
And I kinda regret it.
But, what should I do now?
‘Cause not hearing everyday from you.
I just can’t stand it, somehow.
Maybe I’m not as strong as you.
But, then again, maybe that’s jealousy.
I thought you may be jealous
since a week before June.
Yet, I’m the one in need of an anvil.
Yeah, just like the ones in every cartoon.
C’mon. Gimme something.
You’re killing me here.
I’m dyin’, ya hear?
I’ve taken enough...
or so it seems.
I’m sick and I’m tired.
Just be a part of my Duo Team.

Perceptions,
Brooklyn Heights
Up Above, Brooklyn Heights

* * * * *
The Enchanted Black Rock Forest
Kathleen A. Nolan

“Can we buy these cookies?” and “We really are going to have pancakes tomorrow?” were questions that arose on our shopping trip for our overnight at Black Rock Forest.

After stocking up with food for four meals, the misty mountains appeared around the bend as the van wended its way upward in elevation toward Black Rock Forest. Our group of St. Francis College science majors, teachers, and high-school students honed in on our destination sixty miles away from the campus, in Cornwall, New York. The lush greenness was a respite to the crowds and traffic of Brooklyn Heights. The Black Rock Forest Consortium educators Jack Caldwell and Bill Schuster greeted us and showed us to our rooms adorned with slate nameplates such as “Chestnut Room.” They gave us the history of this place, started as a research and demonstration forest by Dr. Ernest Stillman in 1928 and acquired and set aside as a preserve by Harvard University in 1989. The Consortium is now comprised of a host of other institutions including the American Museum of Natural History, Columbia University, New York University and Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Our purpose was multifold: to learn about the ecosystem of the forest and our interactions with it; to assist in surveying the turtle populations in the ponds, to assist a graduate student, Justin, in his quest to learn more about leaf litter in the forest by helping him make baskets to trap fallen leaves, and, to simply enjoy the outdoors together as a mix of high school, college students and teachers. Lauren Witter and Kalib St. Ange (high-school students) and Jenna Charles and Wendy St. Juste, two of my counselors from the SFC Summer Science Academy, especially needed a little break before the hectic school days ahead.

Black Rock Forest is a 4000-acre stretch of forest owned by the Consortium and dedicated to environmental education. The land contains nine ponds, seven of which are man-made and contain turtles and fish. This woodland abuts West Point. The two-year-old lodge we stayed in was a delight to everyone, as it spared us the mosquito bites and fear of bears in the middle night we may have experienced while
sleeping in tents. The Consortium provided us with our bedding including velour blankets that made us feel toasty in our cozy bunk beds.

Since the Lodge is a “Green Building,” it uses geothermal and solar energy, and actually sells some of this energy back to the town of Cornwall nearby. The composting toilets were a curiosity - Jenna Charles thought they seemed a little scary as the holding tanks went down deep into the basement. They use no water and they honestly did not smell, probably because of the daily “covering” with wood chips. The waste is digested by worm and microorganisms. They seem to have cleared up the tiny red bugs which nagged them in the bathrooms last year.

It was cloudy but hot the first day we arrived. After we downed our ham and cheese sandwiches and learned a little about BRF, it was time to get out there and trap turtles! We followed Bill Schuster, our host, to the basement and he fitted us with waders, rubber overalls with boots attached to them. Now that we looked like aliens from outer space, it was time to pile into the van and head to the ponds! We baited hoop nets by throwing opened cans of sardines and/or cat food into them, and then staked them down to the pond bottom by sinking a pole attached to the trap into the mud. A hoop net looks like those tunnels that little kids crawl through, except that it is made out of mesh wire and is, of course, see-through. Peter Warny, a naturalist, joined us at the pond with a few hoop nets of his own. He had two additional basking traps, which are rectangular traps that would attract turtles that would see them as a platform to lie on and then “drop into” the trap below. A couple of us “fell” into the water and “swam” to shore (We are not allowed to officially “swim” in these waters!). Peter took us seining (fishing) with a 30 foot seine in another pond. We caught tons (well, a lot!) of killifish and a few other types of fish such as pumpkinseeds, and even caught a few salamanders. The sun peeked out for a bit, and cast a nice glow on our late afternoon there.

Then back to the lodge for dinner. With help from Lynda Kessler, the other teacher, we whipped up some salad, and some hamburgers that I cooked on the commercial gas stove on this cast iron long rectangular grill with raised wooden handles that I’ve grown to love. I shooed the students out to go rod-and-reel fishing with Peter. They
caught a few bass and brought one back for me to cook. They ooed and awed when he gutted it, (which he spared me of doing) and each of us got to have a delicious bite after it was fried in olive oil!

As the rules were “No electronics,” the students had to content themselves with the games we brought. Out came Macala, chess, and cards, good ol’ fashioned fun! The day was complete with sundaes with Hershey syrup! (Peter did cajole an intrepid few to go out for a night hike in which everyone listened to the sounds of silence. None to be had with the myriad bugs outside!

Lynda and I went on a short morning hike over cute bridges over a creek before putting the coffee on. Next came blueberry pancakes (unfortunately store-bought berries, on past trips we’ve actually picked them!) and the students were surprised by Dr. Nolan’s deft flipping technique! Since it was a rainy day, we needed to warm our insides. On to retrieve the traps - we recovered fourteen turtles in all! Many had pit tags that could be recorded on a bar code reader. The students resembled grocery store check-out clerks with the readers, but looked hilarious in their waders! They also measured the turtles with large calipers, and weighed them with a spring balance. They were skittish about handling the painted tattles at first, but soon became adept at it. Bill showed us later how to calculate the total population number in the pond, which was over 300! Nobody swam that day - wet and muddy enough already! Our time at Black Rock came to a conclusion with a PowerPoint lecture about the history of the forest by Bill. I didn’t know many of the facts he told us about one of our newest invasive species, the Asian Long-horned beetle. This pest, unfortunately, has destroyed many trees in New York City, including Brooklyn, but has not yet made its way to Black Rock Forest. Let’s hope it doesn’t.

After a sumptuous lunch of sandwiches and leftovers, we dozed on our way back to New York City (fortunately, our van driver, Bruce was quite alert!) As the tall buildings of the city rose before us, we couldn’t help but miss our enchanted forest. Hopefully we’ll be back next year!

* * * * *
Promenade, Brooklyn Heights

* * * * *
The State of My Mind

Jenna Charles

Where can I find my mind?
How can I utilize it in the right way?
Not your way or the way society says but the Right WAY!
You Know
The way in which a true definition shines.
What is the correct state of mind?
Is it like a calm lake with the most enticing ripples for every movement
Or is like a volcano that never finds a moment of peace regardless of the season!
Is it like the rain that makes me smile for no apparent reason
Can it compared to an ice cream that slowly melts away with time!
I like chocolate to me its Divine!
But really how can I appreciate my mind besides the biological importance that sustains my life
what else can I say about my mind?
Maybe its MAGIC!
Could it be the simplicity of the ESSENCE
That is me!
Creative, Invigorating, Imaginative
Can I use these words to describe MY State of MIND?
Within the calamity that is life
Along the abandon way sides behind
the many projects
Tucked in a corner in the most revealing position
I find myself
And I discover my wonderful state of mind!
The Equation

Jenna Charles

If \( X + Y \) equals a number
What is that number?
If \( X \) was me
And \( Y \) was our society
What will be the results of my future?
If life was an algebraic equation
What symbol would I be?
Will I be the odd
Or would I be subtracted from society?
If life was a linear equation
What line would I represent?
Would I be used to divide
Or just another plain old example!
What if I was just me
No equations, no equal signs
What would you see?
Would I be a problem
If I told you my soul could not be set free?
What if I lack the numbers or signs
Would you go out your way and help me?
Why can’t I be who I am
Without using symbols to form my identity.

* * * * *
Problem Experiment Calculation

\[ a = \frac{F}{m} \]

1. \( v = \frac{1}{2} at^2 \) for \( t = \text{given} \)
2. \( a = \frac{v^2}{t^2} \)
3. \( a = \frac{F}{m} \) for all cases
4. \( v = \frac{1}{2} at^2 + \frac{1}{2} vt^2 \)

**\[ v \] \**