

THAT MAKES
 ME HAPPY.

...MSISSIGWAN 'HA
 THE PUREST FORM
 OF LOVE.

I'M
 SO IMPRESSED
 DOWNRIGHT TURNED ON.

IN THE MORNING.

I'M MAKING
 WAFFLES!

NAOMI

WAS HERE.

2009

TOD
 WAS HERE
 MATTHEW

...those who can't

hear the music

think the dancers

are **INSANE.**

-LORD TEMPLETON

Possible side effects include, but are not limited to: false hope, writers' block, ritualistic relationship suicide, busts of creative genius, near-sightedness, chronic back pain, loss of bladder control, seasonal nasal allergies, and in rare documented cases - death. Filibuster 2009 assumes no legal or moral responsibility for the aforementioned side effects and/or complications. Upon reading of this page, whether mentally or audibly, the reader (YOU) assumes any and all legal, moral, and/or social obligations applicable in resident state. Typographical errors incurring hereafter are the full responsibility of layout editor and/or designer (NAOMI STAUFFER).

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

I do believe that one of the hardest things I've done throughout this entire publication process was typing this letter. For almost a week I've sat here staring at the ominous blinking cursor, pondering just what to say here. Line after line being typed then backspaced and deleted into oblivion. And all those forgotten words bring me here, to the Monday before the publication is sent off to the printers, still wondering what to say.

I suppose first and foremost I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this year's edition. As with any publication, at some point, some submissions must be turned down for various reasons. I would like to say, however, that I have enjoyed every submission I received from everyone and if you didn't make it into this year's edition, please send something in to the next editor! After all, this book would be nothing without you!

Secondly, I have to thank two people who really made this thing happen: my wonderful layout editor, Naomi Staffer, and our advisor, Dr. Melton. I could not have done this without you two, thank you! Dr. Melton, you have put up with me both in and out of class working on this Filibuster and hosting Poetica. Your advice was always straightforward and honest, and for that I am thankful. And, of course, he sponsors cookies at Poetica, you have to love that!

Naomi, nothing can be said here to truly convey how amazed I am at your talent. Readers, please be aware that everything you see here is a product of her work. Yes, I had an idea of what I wanted this edition to look like, but it was all made possible by her hands. We do both share a similar degree of anal-retentiveness, which ultimately lead to countless hours of debating things like: whether the font should be .25 inches to the left or right, where the pull-quotes should go, and among other things, one well placed typo. We won't go into detail about that though!

This Filibuster begins with two quotes. If you're on this page you've already read one, and the next will follow, so I will not repeat them here. I will say, however, that they sum up the entire theme of this Filibuster - Life. I hope you, as a reader, can view this book as a metaphor of life itself; from the brief glimpses of life seen in the artwork, to the various emotions and experiences detailed in the poetry and prose.

In closing, I am happy and pleased with the journey this Filibuster has taken me on. From fabrication to procrastination, from writing to reading, from status quo to madness, I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did creating it. So, please flip ahead and begin the journey of chaos and insanity we somehow managed to wrangle into the pages known as Filibuster 2009.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew H. [unclear]". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

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THE STORIES & POEMS

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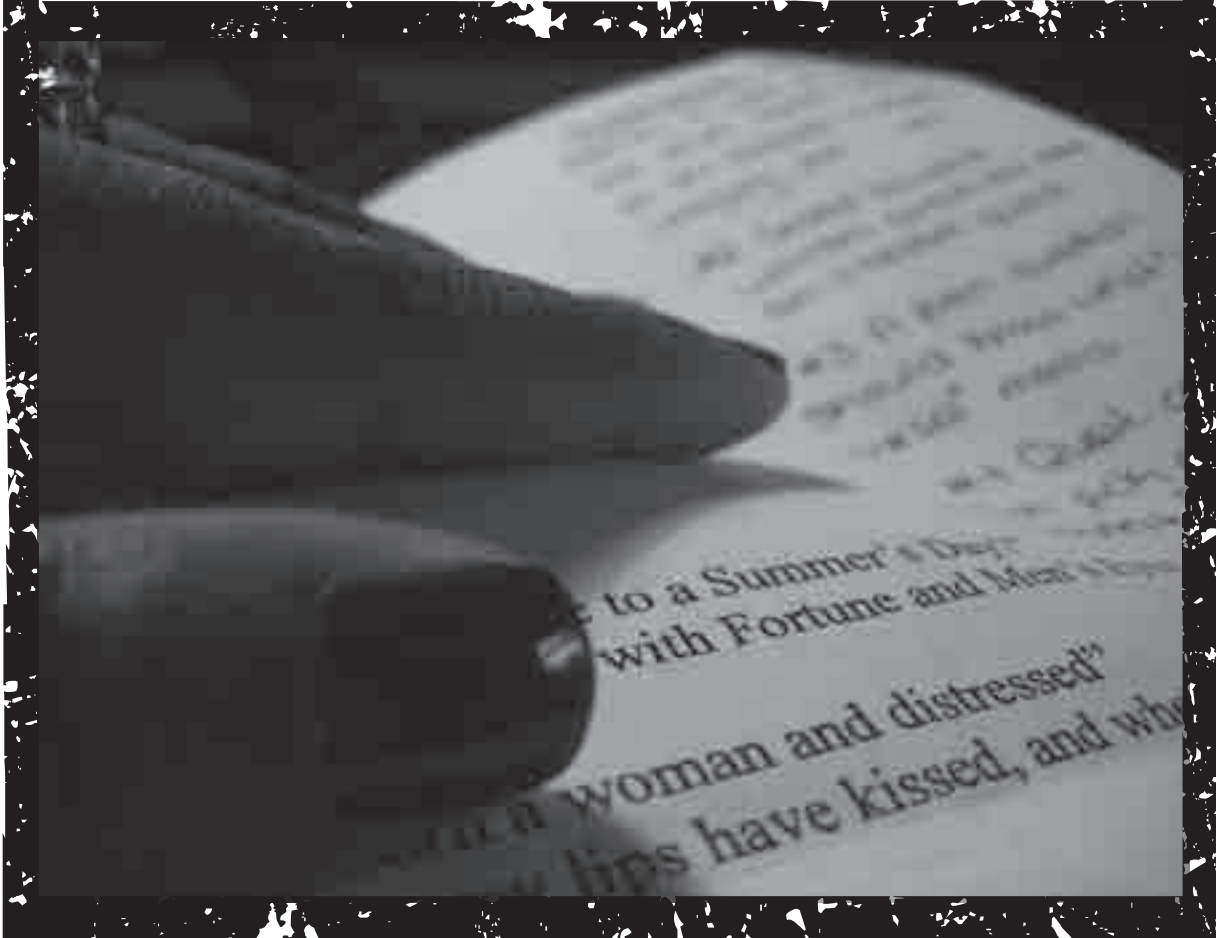
Dr. Jeff Melton

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Though this be **MADNESS,**
yet there is
method
in't.

William Shakespeare, Hamlet





*Distressed Woman * April Williams*

Judas

Jenna Sanders

She shouldn't.

He wouldn't.

She couldn't.

He left.

HAPPINESS

Jiyeon Kim

One day a kid came to me and asked me what happiness is.

I pondered for a long time, but I could not answer.

"What is happiness?"

The kid asked me again.

When I was about to say that I don't know the answer,

I looked at a woman, breastfeeding her baby.

I smiled, and I told the kid, pointing at the woman

"That is happiness".



"Whut'chu lookin' at?" * Katrina Hurd

GREEN FUZZ*Sarah Fredericks*

Old poem—old theme.
 Old and stale and moldy.
 White bread with green fuzz.
 Words that mold.
 Disuse. Overuse.
 Repetition. Over and over.
 I've heard this before.
 Worn like a bald tire.
 Worn like a pastor's knees.
 Worn down to the bone, like that old skeleton they found in the backyard.
 Worn down spot on the carpet where he prayed every day.
 Old heart, crusty with indifference.
 Words that are old and stale.
 Scuff marks on my words from overuse.
 Green fuzz on the walls inside my heart.

FLIGHT 1512*Jenna Sanders*

1-2-3-4
 Contemplative Condescending
 8-9-10-11
 Stoic Somber
 15-16-17
 Tragic Unrepentant
 20-21-22
 Vindictive Wretched
 25-27
 Harsh Heart-broken
 29-30
 Distressed Disillusioned
 31
 Rows without a single smile.

RESTLESS

Christina Marie Ellis

These words fit so well, like my hand in yours,
And the clock ticks the minutes away.
I don't want to release this breath.
The dream fades, and I'm left wondering.
The questions are piling up, they're suffocating,
But you can set this bird free from its cage.
You're slipping through my fingers again.
There's no underscore for this tragedy,
Only your voice in my head.
I don't know what I'm waiting for.
Something's got to change.
If only my thoughts would let me go back to sleep...



*The Mocking Moon * Marisa Temple*

the war within: the secret struggle of Edwin Dobbs

Kevin Garner

Edwin placed one chubby hand against the metal panel. His dimpled knuckles squeezed lightly against the restroom door, reluctant, reemphasizing what his increased heart rate, an almost Pavlovian response to this moment, had been saying all along. He leaned with his body weight, making no effort to exert with his triceps. The hand had become limp between his plush upper torso and the door. As the portal breached, Edwin ambled in like an awkward duckling at a state fair, unsure and waddling a little. He knew what biological process needed to take place, and therefore, he skipped the vacant row of urinals, aiming for the handicapped stall—spacious, possessing steel bars for lifting motion, extra leg room to the left, a sink, a place to hang one's hat. Yes, such a place was paradise in such a world. Times were desperate. A round rumbling churned up; Edwin had exactly twenty seconds until he made room for lunch, and as he pulled the handle to the special door, a great terror slithered into the base of his spine and made him quake with fear.

It is important to note Edwin's etiquette whenever he approached the dirty-mouthed, insatiable urinals on campus: more than once, he had begun to relieve his body of excess fluid when some brutish man would shove open the door, snuffle, probably burp, and crowd next to him, unzipping before even arriving, in which case, almost reflexively, Edwin seized himself, his hands pulling up like an overpowered fisherman suddenly released. All productivity stopped, and Edwin vacated the premises, hands unwashed, his bladder feeling teased, disappointed. Whenever this happened, he would avoid being seen, as though the shame had splashed over the front of his Dockers. Another time, he was nestled comfortably in a corner stall when a quiet janitor stole into the adjacent cell and began coughing to cover up his blowouts and courtesy flushing to keep from gagging the American Standard toilets. Terrified, Edwin emerged like a cowboy from a snake-infested outhouse while the janitor hummed "I've been working on the railroad" with the occasional echoing burst followed instantly by the ineffectual cough.

Edwin was the youngest of three boys and never dressed himself where people could see. At a youth retreat, he crept across the room of naked bodies, stealing into the nearest closet to change. He never swam and showered only if everyone had run out of doors to wrestle at the beach. He wore palm tree polyester shirts and cargo pants, sunglasses and a straw hat. He never overexerted himself and hated spicy food. He didn't shave; he didn't need to. He was soft as a baby's bottom, and over the years, he changed little, at least until this moment in his senior year at college.

Standing face-to-face with the locked stall, Edwin let nauseating fear paralyze his body.

"Sorry, I got the Cadillac today," said a Southern voice belonging to the man within.

Something, something scarcely like a dam bursting from within him sent a wave of humor through his chest. "I g-guess... I-I'll take the Volvo," Edwin replied. He repressed his laughter, but his time had come. Everything within Edwin's gut twisted into a circle whose nexus was temporarily his umbilicus and quickly

falling. If he did not go now, he would go anyway, all over the floor, so he threw himself inside the smaller stall and unbridled his tensed frame. He tried to be quiet, but it was loud. Real loud. Loud and unnerving. Violent. Forceful. Intensely profound like a baby's tears or the secret storms atop Kilimanjaro. The blast radius must have superseded the force of his harshest torrential stomach episodes, and all would know, entering the restroom and walking down the hall outside, that Edwin had composed his masterpiece in a spontaneous burst of creative genius.

When he finished, he gave a sigh of relief. Never again would Edwin be afraid of another man interrupting his bathroom excursions. Never again would he suppress his toxic cry for liberty, fraternity, and self-declaration. Some dare blaze their music from cars. Some bespeak the invisible qualities of the soul through fashion choices. But Edwin knew that his struggle had come to an end. He had declared himself, and he had nothing left. In reverence, the country boy emerged from the handicapped stall in total silence and left without so much as a snuffle—but not Edwin.

No, I think I'll sit here awhile. Something about that—"Sorry... I got the Cadillac today"—made life worth living, made sitting down more meaningful, like the difference between a job and a job well done, or a battle half-heartedly fought and a war gloriously won, so Edwin sat awhile and savored the sweet smell of victory in the still, silent battlefield of the second floor bathroom.

It Was LOUD.

REAL LOUD.



Imagination * Charles Louis Ashley II

LOUD AND UNNERVING.

Billy Jay

Alicia Fry

I am afraid I will frighten you away

And you are an utterly calm person
So I worry of ambivalence
When I don't know what you want from me

I think of your face and feel so lost
then you draw me into your beautiful darkness and reclaim me

You ask if I am alright
and I always reply with a "fine."
I don't want to burden you with my fear
You are so elegant when asking
so I feel as a peon to reply in truth.

I start walking by myself
because I partly think you don't want to walk with, anymore

I hop in, and start singing to block out your presence in me
I scream "I want you to want me!" off-key
and yet the radio isn't even on and I don't even have that album

I don't even know the artist..

But I feel its words like a hot fire on my heart
a flame that needs either stoking or putting out
and I will do both myself
Depending on you

You're not Billy Joel, you did start this one
and I don't regret it.

LOVE POEMS

Jennifer Fuller

All I ever did was write you love poems...
 Ok maybe not love poems, but hate poems
 You make me so sick so just get out my face poems
 I should leave poems
 Your lies have suffocated me to the point that I can't breathe poems
 End of the world poems
 "Oh that's your girl?" poems
 I'm tired of this mess and that's the truth and the truth hurts poems
 But I wrote you love poems, Some you're my tree poems
 Some no matter what happens I just can't seem to leave poems
 Some feeling you poems, my feelings are true poems
 Some no one can do it like you can do poems
 But I never should have written them.
 You see all that I did was immortalize you
 Created a permanent record of those things that you do.
 I don't want to remember the bad, I don't want to remember the good
 I don't want to think about what happened or better what could
 have if you were different... and if I was different.
 You see I write to save my name's place in the stars
 To leave an imprint behind, not just some cliché scar
 of a broken heart that just refused to heal
 See I don't want to be that girl, I need to write about what's real.

Like how people are losing homes, how our government lies
 "Oh we're not in a recession" but we can see it with our eyes.
 How God's voice seems to get lost on us each and everyday
 You see He's yelling at us yet He seems so far away
 because we're so caught up in the stress and the strife
 Never thinking about the one who gave us this life.
 How a black President has now become possible
 When just a few years ago no one would have thought it was logical.
 Or probable. Or had a chance in hell of happening
 It's history in the making and I am a part of it
 And these are the things I should be writing about
 Floods in one part of the country while others suffer through droughts
 Yes I use to write you love poems...
 or hate poems
 depending on the day
 But I can't write them anymore, you see there is nothing left to say
 I'm inspired by life, and that's the way it should be
 So no longer do I give you this immortality
 through these spoken words
 Time to move on to things that really deserve
 a place in eternity
 There is no you and me or us, just this pen in my hand
 and a voice in my head that is so softly saying
 "Words are Forever"



more than words

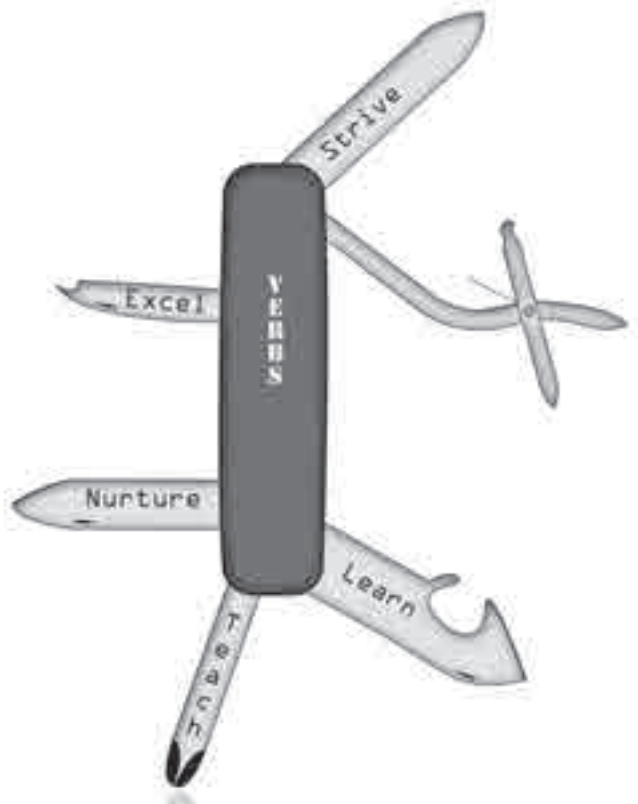
Jennifer Fuller

Poetry is more than the words that compose them
 You see you may hear the poem, but I can feel the rhythm
 As it floats on these waves of sounds and lands into your ear
 Sits on your mind, immortalized in your heart, and then it becomes so clear
 That poetry is more than words, you see its colors too
 It's the red of that anger you feel, it's that deep contemplative blue
 Of those times when the world just can't seem to dance to your melody
 It's the yellow of your fear, the black of solidity.
 Poetry is more than words, it's the freedom to be who you are
 It's the wings of individuality that allow a person to soar
 It's in the natural, effortless beauty of the sun's first bright and beautiful rays
 It's the hope that emanates from them, in the promise of a new day.
 Poetry is more than words, it's an emotional tapestry
 It's the adrenaline rush of a brand new love, it's the agony of defeat.
 It's as complex as love is painfully pleasurable, as simple as anger can be
 It's the glow in the face of happiness, for all the world to see.
 Poetry is more than words, it's the music we create
 It's the beating drums of racing hearts, the hum of blood flowing through our veins
 It's in the silence of understanding, in the ring of inspiration
 It's the universal melody to which we dance, despite its variation.
 Poetry is more than words, it's an outlet for oceans of thought
 It's the glue that binds us together, so that who we are will not become lost
 It's a reflection of our inner selves, of what we're afraid to show the world
 It's those things we are so afraid to say, for fear that we will not be heard.
 Poetry is more than words, because mere words just would not suffice
 Poetry is the building blocks, you see poetry is life

the precal blues

Kimberly Collier

Why am I taking this class?
 I don't ever think I will pass!
 $A+B=C$
 What is that to me?
 What is a log to a mass comm. major?
 It's clear the odds are not in my favor.
 All these graphs, numbers and chalk
 Make me want to do nothing but talk.
 Give me a paper, that I'll get done.
 Give me an equation, you can bet I'll run!
 What the heck is he talking about?
 All these numbers make me want to shout!
 Too bad if I fail, this class is not free.
 So I'll have to work my butt off and hope for a C!



"What is a **LOG** to a **mass comm.** major?"

what's your verbage...?

Verbage * Thomas Austin



Utter Garbage * Marisa Temple

The JOYFUL EXECUTION

Antonio A. Byrd

A spell of silence enveloped the villagers when the executioner stepped out of the courthouse. Trailing him were two prison officers, dressed in flowing red robes and armed with sabers. The crowd stepped aside and created a lane for the officials to walk solemnly to death row. Anxious eyes followed the executioner as he passed the spectators, but somewhere in the crowd a woman cried out in despair followed by the sound of a firm slap to quiet her down.

Once the executioner crossed the center of the village—the guillotine—the musicians began their melodious song: the violins led the way and then the brass took command, and once the drummer boys began their roll, the choir began their mantra.

freedom! Sweet freedom! how glorious to enter the Kingdom!

The song was enough to evoke joy in the crowd yet they resisted showing it; another few minutes and then they could, but any expression of delight now would ruin the ritual, so onward the executioner went, louder the choir sung, and the crowd held their peace. There seemed to be some torture in holding their breath for another two minutes, for once the executioner reached the prison tower a loud sigh filled the air. He removed the keys from his belt and, as if this was a signal, the music ceased but the drummer boys continued a steady rhythm.

The locked clicked twice and the door groaned when it opened. The executioner nodded his head and the orchestra returned louder than before as a young woman covered in filth leapt into the fresh air. A happy song spewed from her mouth, arousing the cheer of the villagers. Mass hysteria is the best way to describe the atmosphere: women fainted and some pulled off their clothes from supposed hot flashes. It is no surprise that the men behaved themselves, and the children played at the adults' feet. But most startling were the comments they made: "I want to be next! I want to be executed!"

"You are blest, Sharron! Remember that!"

"Glory to freedom!" a woman cried out, and she fainted. The executioner and prison officers led Sharron down the lane, and the children ran forward to toss olive branches in her path.

"Bye-bye!" they cried and waved.

The music reached its climax, an excited masterpiece reflecting the incomparable joy in the village. Sharron stood before the guillotine with a large grin spread across her face. The villagers danced in place, waving their arms and tossing white ribbons into the evening sky. Then, the executioner raised his arms and the excitement died. He pointed to the drummer boys for a beat.

"Miss Sharron," said the executioner, "any last words before your death?"

"Good-bye!" she cried in ecstasy.

"Good-bye! Farewell!" replied the crowd.

"Let the ritual commence!" declared the executioner. The prison officers covered Sharron's head with a black hood. The drums beat. They set her neck in place, and the drums beat. The executioner pulled the blade up, and the drums ceased. Without hesitation, he released the rope and the blade dropped. It was the cleanest cut ever seen, and that triggered a tremendous cheer.

"What a beautiful execution!" they said. "What a joyful sight! How blessed she is!"

But there was one man standing in the crowd who did not join in the festivity. He alone muttered an eccentric thought: "No . . . The gates will not open for us." But the villagers drowned him out with their song:

freedom! Sweet freedom! how glorious to enter the Kingdom!

seventeen days

Brian Bird

Dear Lonely Day,
You liberate me of those nightmares
Only to consign me before terrors of the day
Where's the peace I found inside us all?
Deemed a vagabond, I beg for solace
A world that'd let me be

There's no silver sun shining for me
New dawn's light casts a shadow
Turn the page, change the story
Behind the door, will I open it for you?
For the accord you might afford me, my world
Forever and a day I'd wait

Heavens above,
Won't you give me perfect skies with no rain
Newborn life, this haven I'd die for,
A place of hope and free of pain?
Escape this detriment-driven landscape, far away
I'll find life again

I reside on the far and idle hill, recollecting
East through west the pictures long forgotten
I pray I regain that blissful seat, and
With no middle flight, I intend to soar
Burn and rise above the flame



*Toulouse Butterfly * Beth Parrish*

I breathed you out of no where today
It may sound odd
 But I took a deep breath
And there was your scent as I inhaled again

Such a powerfully relaxing smell
One I don't want to forget
 Like the first time you drove
And you'd just applied the cologne minutes before

I could smell it
 In your car as a cloud of you
 It was so energizing
I wonder though
 Does my smell in turn intoxicate you?

the glass that breaks

George Singleton

The glass that breaks
It wobbles and shakes on the surface
It is familiar what earth is
It wishes to give up
But the wood grain hasn't told the glass its purpose

The glass that breaks
It wanders with much opportunity
But yet to be broken to speak to the

The glass that breaks
It shares relations with many human utilizations
But when it is broken, it has reason to
Show and tell its true intentions and emotions

FOUR in the morning

Kevin Garner

A great hunger opened in the bottom of my gut. The feeling, oh what is it, the feeling of your resources dwindling inside and still you, like a wraith, stubbornly existing, subsist on ethereal moonshine, and grip everything with trembling fingers; I feel it. Would but our thoughts be conveyed through a shadow land like email and transmitted to one another, perhaps then I could explain to this oaf the logic behind what I want to do.

Of all things, I wanted a twenty-four pack of 2-ply toilet paper, and of all times, the clock reads 4:00. That I had air conditioning would be preferable in this heat! In the deadness of morning, yes, even then, the temperatures reach ninety degrees Fahrenheit, and the last thing you want is the occasional lukewarm or the frequent hot air blowing in your face, opening your pores, and commanding you to sweat dirt and pus.

He was still looking when I said aloud, "Surely a utilitarian police officer would see the utility in my stretching the rules."

No, of course not; he would wag his finger and say, "Not so fast (hey please), the law is the law (I gotta make a living), so if you run that red light (I would, too) I'll give you a ticket (I really do have to do this)!"

I have a fat pad. It comes from eating at four in the morning when, for some reason, the body screams "FEED ME CRACKERS AND CHEESE!" It's all so disappointing, standing on the scale and finding that you have sustained the same weight while appearing fatter and fatter; it just means you're a man whose muscle is dwindling down into the atrophied abyss of lethargy. A failure born and bred of the online communities and massively multiplayer online role-playing games must consider his weight a matter of consequence in the grand scope of artificial victories and advancement in those very lands into which I wished I could tap with this bozo, who has only his parking lights on. He looks like a predator, sitting there next to the sign that so succinctly implies "Row 8."

Still red, and the concept of right turn on red is feasible enough, but surely some astute fellow thought it prudent to insert a clause like "If a loser is caught at four in the morning at a red light where there are absolutely no cars in sight, verily I say unto you, he is thus permitted to enact a left turn on red, which was otherwise illegal but now permissible in light of circumstances surrounding..." crap. That's what it is, crap. Fine print was never meant to be read, so do you think it was meant to be written? It's there so when the smiling presumption that all is well

and simple is torn away by a technicality or a troubling mishap of paperwork proportions, the buyer of anything is left with fine print to explain to him why the world doesn't care.

Yet there he sat; I could see him sipping from a cup of coffee, then leaning back his head to laugh, probably thinking, "Wha! What a loser! Go on, run it! Run it! I dare ya! Hya hya hya!"

Had it been ten seconds or ten hours? The light, as expected was still red.

The truest battles are here in the heart of domesticity, the rage of one will against the other—though, the other armed with hammer and sword. The scales are tipped in his favor, the knight-errant on horse-back watching this poor farmer's boy with his mule, but even then there were no overarching traffic laws that involved the stupidity of machines. Ah! Yes, machines, the wonder of mankind that is as smart as how much man puts the knowledge and capability inside it!

The mess of collecting data so that we can discern the age of a doe from the countryside by her teeth erosion seems pointless. A hunter with his bow in days of yore would shoot the beast and have it for dinner. Where is the simplicity here? Where is it? All we have are continually amassing legions of data and data about that data and reports and calculations of the data about data. Imagination pleases me better than data. It is data that I'm a juvenile delinquent, devoid of the foundational aspects of a Modern American Hedonistic Money-Grubber. Pleasure, sure, but not at the cost of pleasure itself, good heavens! People please themselves to the extent of self-inflicted pain just to have the mental satisfaction of having pleased themselves. Just yesterday, I saw a man at a steak-house whose belly hung over his half of the table; it was as though steak gave him +7 to his health points, or at least

in his mind, so he ate, and as dutiful as he could be, ate it all, even when his stomach hurt from ordering five different meals for lunch that day.

We won't even begin to think of this guy, this cop at row eight, as a cultural relativist. That's everyone he stops on the side of the road; a bunch of stinking philosophers for the duration that the window goes down to greet the man in aviator glasses.

"Ma'am, do you know how fast you were going?" says the cop.

"The rhythm of this vein of traffic demanded such, for as the great philosopher Socrates says, 'All I know is that I know nothing.'"

Yeah, right. Then, the rest of them are either angry, stupid, or, most often both.

"Ma'am, do you know how fast you were going?" says the cop.

"I don't know."

"I have you clocked at 76 in a 25," he says. "Why the rush?" he says.

"Don't judge me! If you was having a baby you would drive fast too!" the woman says.

"Where's the baby?" the cop asks, sure of himself.

"I ain't got no baby, but I was trying to get to the hospital to see my wife! She's been in labor for days!"

"Well, happy parenting," says the cop as he gives the lady a ticket.

Ah, it depends on the officer. The human heart, when it is strong enough in a person, the heart of metaphor rather than of anatomy, wails "Have compassion! What if her story is true?"

Yes, what if, eh?

But the deontologist cop would say, "Duty is duty. The law is the law."

Indeed, duty, by definition is duty, but a dictionary can tell you that. It's like if I say "video games are video games," I'm justifying that I enjoy the sensation of slaughtering legions of foes and growing in power. Was he justifying himself over there, Mr. Great-in-Row-Eight? What a dutiful man he was! Sitting there at four in the morning and eyeing me like a bleeding cut of cold shoulder!

With him sitting there, parking lights on, car poised to zoom across the freshly paved asphalt and arrest a starving gamer devoted to his clan, he probably thought me a pirate of music, a pirate of games, or a pirate in general. I prefer thief. I didn't do anything wrong, and even if I did, I don't have a conscience anyway, so how can I be blamed for it? If I don't have any inhibition to stop me from downloading content that is readily available here and there in the recesses of almighty digital intelligentsia; so much so that it downloads itself onto the computer. Yeah, see him attack me with his handcuffs and frisking, only to find hundreds of burned CDs in the back of my trunk; I don't know how they got there. Perhaps over the years they just accumulate because of a series of mutations and micro-evolution in a random accretion disk in the bubbly texture of

*What do I know, though? I'm just a
PIRATING, PORN, and ILLEGAL NEUROTIC gamer
who can't tell the difference between Gold coins and
dollar bills and doesn't care. I don't. I really don't.*

space—surely an excuse for why we monkeys are allowed to mate with whomever we please and we dung beetles can roll up all the crap we please—all the more as I realize that we're apologists for our sex drives and furthermore, our accumulation. So, why should anyone be blamed for what feels right, right?

He probably wanted to be a cop. He thought it felt right, and he felt it right to let me sit here and wait for two forevers as I starve like a worm-eaten peasant in the muddy fields of Medieval Essex. I swear he was enjoying it!

And he probably thought me a lecherous teen like the rest of them; no, he wouldn't find any contrary materials under my mattress or on my favorites list. Not a chance. He would have to search through every outdated floppy, unlabeled disk (most of which would be pirated movies anyway),

and external hard-drive before he found anything, much less something that I frequently viewed on the internet through the power of memory and hacking. Guys my age are practically begged to love the body of a woman; and I wonder if those girls who wear shirts cut so low that you can see half the bra want us to look more so than we want to look, though my friends urge me to do away with such a foolhardy theory.

With that, who needs extensive lists of websites to feel as though someone had not given him the time of day? They are omni-dating each and every man who can see the veining between their cleavage.

But enough of that.

Things just accumulate over time, and they pile up in the backseat of the car, under the bed, behind the door, and in the back of the mind. I often catch myself acting without administering stimulus from the brain, like getting angry and breaking something without provocation. He probably thinks I'm angry right now, but I won't let him win. I won't let him get the best of me. I am a Dungeon Master, I am a Tall Dwarven Warrior, I am an Elven Prince, and I can even call myself a Champion in the Guilds. He doesn't understand the worlds in which I live, the shadow lands of the mind married to the machine through cords of imagination. He doesn't understand that some things are more important than food, than paying taxes or than wasting time on making a family or building chairs. He probably thinks I have so much baggage or "personality" as we like to call it now.

Spiders, brown recluses, like to needle their spindly legs into wrinkles and folds in piles left to dust. How can a man sleep at four in the morning knowing that? My room is a mess. The only pure thing in the house is the computer. It opens into a world that needs no sweeping of floors. Anything I want to be, I can be it. He wouldn't understand that. He would see me as an idiot playing beep-beeps and being hypnotized by flashing lights. He doesn't understand the psychological satisfaction of seeing a beautiful Elven Princess and bravely embracing her, loving her with words and caresses, knowing that you yourself are safely seated in a chair outside the screen, though when you come to your senses, your shoulders are cold, your feet are asleep, and you feel even lonelier. Such is the price for glory! Surely football fans understand in the backs of their minds how much I must fight a battle and fight it, win or lose, to the teething, grinding, gnashing, bloody end! Life is not a battle; it's desperation. We're desperate because everything is so normal! That's why he's here, to make sure I'm reminded that I am not a Level 99 Battle-Mage. He's here to let me know that I'm just nineteen and not fit to live comfortably in society. Well, I'm

not comfortable! There must be something truer than what I see! That's why I have to be there, in the shadow lands, where I can see the ghosts, the specters, the magic through space and time before the veil of binary code! I was built for the supernatural!

The irony of it all; the very place I want to be, I would hate to be there, for if I went, I would want to complete it and go elsewhere. The choices are so immense, whether I paid for the game or not. He doesn't understand anything. He just knows that he uses two-and-a-half ounces of coffee creamer and routinely eats a glazed strawberry jelly donut like the slob he is.

What do I know, though? I'm just a pirating, porn-addicted, neurotic gamer who can't tell the difference between Gold coins and dollar bills and doesn't care. I don't. I really don't. That's why I ran the red light. I hit the gas so hard that my RPM gauge went past 5000, but I smashed into something. The crash sent empty cans flying into the air. I looked in time to see that I had t-boned a homeless lady's buggy, and by the time I looked forward again, I crashed into an iron power pole. Piles of rancid clothes and moldy half-eaten fast foods flew forward and stopped against my neck and arm, sliding off and leaving all kinds of residue I can still taste. I was covered in filth as the driver side door fell off. By the time I rolled out, head bleeding for lack of a seat-belt, there was not just a red light but flashing blue lights fast approaching. By the time my vision cleared, a lady with a tight ponytail emerged from the cop car and cuffed me even as the first stream of blood went down the bridge of my nose. I was on my face when she got me, and all I could see as I lie there being cuffed was the homeless woman picking up her cans, and even though I'm pissed off, that's pretty much all I can think about now. She was just calmly picking up her cans at four in the morning.



*Headshot * Matthew Kemp*

A Penny in the sea

Sarah Fredericks

A cliff, brown and jagged, trips into the sea.
 A voice, rich with emotion, carries across the gale—
 hearing it was like finding a needle in a hay-colored wastebasket of a junkie.

I licked the blackberry juice from my lips:
 I could taste the voice whirring on the wind.
 The dark clouds shrouded my ears—
 A penny saved is a penny you could have spent on something you wanted.

My mother calls to me; I don't listen.
 I drop a penny into the sea.

A Penny FOR my thoughts

Matthew Kemp

Sister uncle brother would you care to share
 A penny for my thoughts
 Just one cent for decades of knowledge
 It wasn't a hard choice
 Wanting to pimp my voice
 All I require is 3-5 minutes for you to ingest my field holler
 Shit I'm selling thoughts for literally-
 Pennies on the dollar
 So can you spare some change
 In hopes I can make a change
 Day in and day out dutifully drudging up concepts
 Based on precepts that some judge worthless
 See sir I'm not home-less
 I just don't have a home left
 Mortgage rate went sky high
 But my minimum wage went up by \$0.55
 So now here before you
 Stands I
 So I reiterate sir
 Care to share a penny for my thoughts?
 For one-hundredth of a dollar your investment can rend riveting dividends
 Expanding your mind state way past everyday hustle
 Straight onto street corner statistician
 While you'll be wanting to render your thoughts for spare change any day now
 I can preach to your kids or motivate your grandma-
 Why I
 Am the all-American dream
 Getting something
 For nothing
 **Unless you find my nothing to BE something, then in fact you ARE receiving
 what you paid for**

And that's how the jingle goes
 Trying to get some jangle in penny rolls
 They offer a penny for my thoughts
 But want my .02 for free
 But I keep making cents, so my process makes sense for me
 My flow, my prose
 Its a gift and curse
 Bad credit in my verse
 I'm past due and overdrawn in my coin purse
 So would you offer a penny for my thoughts
 Ol' Abe Lincoln never thought what I've been thinking
 Taking my mind and converting it into dollar signs
 If you retain my mind frame I guarantee a 2% quarterly increase
 every time
 You can keep reinvesting the ideas till we reach peak interest
 And maybe peak interest
 And all this for less than a long distance phone call
 BUT WAIT!
 We're slashing prices
 Buy now and get
 TWO for the price of ONE!
 That's right you heard it!
 One penny can buy you TWO thoughts
 Not semi-thoughts
 Half drawn out battle plans for reformation
 NO!
 Full fledged
 Attack plans for revolution
 Humorous ramblings
 -shit-
 I'll even throw in the love poems for FREE!
 So obviously you can see
 Your investment
 Will be well spent
 Not wasted on dorm rent
 Or gas (at 4 dollars and 5 cents)
 It will be added in
 To my money bank bin
 110,000 square feet of office space filled to the top with copper
 slugs of monetary whims
 A penny for my thoughts
 Flat rate with no more cents (sense)
 ...and you thought YOU were a hustler?
 Shiiiiit..

my mr. BROWning...*Emily Young*

Nights are the worst, laying here in wonder
Where is the one, to wake me from my slumber?

To drive afar pessimistic thoughts I hold so dear
Replacing that hole with love that I fear.

To take away the books, poems, and fancies I believe in
Returning in their place hopes I'll instill in him.

To break the barricade bad times have in place
Repairing my gaps with his tender embrace.

To steal all thoughts of my love once lost
Restoring the empty for a generous no cost.

To erase several years of ill wrong-doing
Touching my skin with his caress all soothing.

To empty my hands of material hardships
Giving his instead full of significant friendship.

To wipe away tears of lonely confusion
Spreading within me faith with his welcome intrusion.

I'll lay here forever, if that's what it will take
For you to remain beside me when I cautiously awake.

My Best Friend*Casey Gewirtzman*

Alone again, alone at last,
When did we spend this much time together?
Never, until you called me then.
Only when you think of the past,
And all those times we fought (I win!),
You just keep coming back again.
Back to your silent overseer,
Back to your memory's editor,
Back to your unequal peer,
Back to your desire's predator.
You thought you could run,
And you thought you were better.
In the end, it's you they shun,
But none as painful as...need I name her?
So, please remember, my fragile pet,
Whenever you're in need of help,
In this mean world, I'm the best you'll get,
Because the only dependable person is yourself.

O.C.D. abOUT D.O.A.

Joseph Brannon

I woke up this morning to the stagnant rhythm of my alarm clock. Eck. I didn't feel like getting up, so I smacked the alarm off, rolled over, and went back to sleep. I woke up an hour late, refreshed. Aw! Now the ritual begins. I got in the shower, scrubbed twice, as was my pattern, then dried off and had a bowl of cereal. As I ate though, I spilled a bit of the milk, and my mind bent about a fraction of an inch in the wrong direction. So I poured the bowl out, filled it again, and had seconds. I don't like spilling milk. Then I had some errands to do, of course. So I got in my car, meticulously prepared myself for the drive, then pulled out of the driveway, and fell off the curb. Another mental bend and I slam my fist into the dashboard. Damn. I pull back into the drive port, correct myself, and then pull back out.

I stopped at the local CVS for a drink, but instead of getting the same thing I always got, I bought a different kind. I didn't like its taste, so I went back in and bought my usual. I then decided that my life was too conditioned, and thought that I should break out some. So instead of driving to my friend's house, I'd walk. It was only about half a mile anyway, so I was fine with this. When I started walking though, I tripped over the uneven and weedy sidewalk. So, in accordance with the mark of a perfectionist, took a few steps back and re-tread the length, this time straight and tall.

I forgot about the intersection however... I had to cross one of the major highways in the region, right by the bypass. I didn't see much of a problem with this, so I looked twice, and started across. A truck ran the red light though and hit me dead on! I -really- didn't like this, so I . . .



CONTRAST*Jared Ford*

I'm alone tonight
 White walls surround me
 With blood running down the corners

It's an eerie light
 That surrounds me
 Like the lamps in the room of the coroner

I'm breaking down
 Why me? Why now?
 I'm falling down
 Darkness abounds
 I'm hitting ground
 But nothing's around
 The dark suffocates even the sound

Tonight I'm dying for something
 Looking for myself but feeling nothing
 I'll pull the nails from finger tips
 Drive them in the coffin of my mind that slipped
 Then I'll pull the hammers back
 And accept my fate as the gunpowder burns

I awake
 Dead trees cover
 The light from the pitch black sun

I mistake
 A lone figure
 For her resemblance to a loved one

Am I breaking down?
 Why me? Why now?
 My mind's not sound
 What was the sound?
 She's falling down
 Hitting the ground
 For her now I am bound

Tonight she's dying for something
 Tried for a crime even though she did nothing
 She claws with nails of her fingertips
 At my hand, but she slips
 Then I hear the hammers pulled back
 And realize her fate as the gunpowder burns

Pain explodes
 From in between my shoulder
 As I cover her, like the trees cover the sun

My final throes
 As my life smolders
 Will I be accepted now by the Son?

Life breaking down
 No fear, No sounds
 I'm feeling sound
 Right here, right now
 It's getting loud
 An angelic sound
 I realize for a better place I am bound

Tonight I died for something
 Sacrificed myself and realized I'm not nothing
 I feel warm light on my fingertips
 And all my sad feelings slip
 To the earth I turn back
 And watch as the seasons turn

"Tonight I died for something"

AS the Earth SPINS...

Joseph Brannon

...symbiotic eukaryotes in marriage
 Participate in the constant exchange of energy
 From which there is no divorce.
 A concurrent eco-mentality borders upon a
 Fabled conventionality of time and place as
 Seasons diverge onto season and the host
 Waltzes from the ballroom chandelier.
 It's steps in this dance become stratified in
 Color; shades of greens, yellows, and browns,
 And rain upon the heavens below..



*Extracurricular Extraterrestrials * April Williams*

the sun

Jiyeon Kim

When I am too depressed to stand up,
 I look at the sun.
 When I feel like my life is reaching to the ending,
 The sun rises again and shines brightly.



*Midnight Stalking * April Williams*

Untitled

Wendy Ciambor

Gray sky in the morn
 Blustery breezes comes down-hill
 Leaving behind a winter chill.

dance time!*Mike Haymon*

Two step.

Two minds meet, gauging distance, testing attraction. Like magnets, the closer they are in proximity, the greater the attraction. It's shallow. I mean, what is a mind but yet another pink mass. Sure, it has its unique curves and special flaws that are not flaws at all. The water has been tested. With one foot in, eye contact is made. A greeting. A return. A moment of silence passes. Scanning, the first mind sees its chance. A comment is made, leading to a slightly longer exchange of utterances, leading to the dropping of guards. Success. The minds have met.

The Tango.

The first mind takes the first step. What can it admit while not losing this dance? It slides in an offhand remark of attraction. Nice hair. I like your glasses. It's all trivial bullshit. He means, "I think I could get to love you." She dodges, guard up. She gauges, stalls, returns the compliment. His guard is down, yet he accepts. The dance begins. Little by little, the admission comes out and the two minds think of themselves as great dancers.

To themselves, they think the other is at their whim. They are learning so much about this mind and yet, have revealed nothing. No way to get hurt, yes?

No.

Nice hair. **I like your glasses. it's all trivial BULLSHIT.**

We've heard it, seen it, and done it before. You think you're grounded in reality, but the heart is a strong muscle. Both minds have already lost. They could save time by clinging to each other and admitting their feelings, but that would be far too easy and the past has a way of hardening the soul.

The Dada.

He swings, a lovely little piece about how she's cool (special). She dodges, mostly. She swings back about how he's cute when he's -trying- to flatter her. She lands a square blow. He's conflicted. He's cute? Trying to flatter? The ego deflates and inflates like the lungs of the dying. He waits, stalls by looking at some random electronic. Maybe it's a phone. It doesn't matter. The dance takes time and thought. He replies that he's only being truthful. Cheesy, he admits, but all the good lines go to the pros, eh? He tosses out the bait. She's hooked. "Pros?" The pros. The ones who do this all the time. They dance to dance, and dance to conquer their "prey." He's not one of the pros. He's an amateur and likes the title just fine. She listens and finds the admittance charming, of course.

The Fencing.

The final part. She steps in and jabs for the chest, he dodges, but the question does knock a bit of the armor from this bumbling knight. He aims lower, knowing he has to build momentum. He swings for the leg; she side-steps, stumbles a second, and catches her balance. She never realizes she's lost already. She steps forward with a tirade of blows, driving him into the corner until he falls into the defensive position. Now, quiet and "manly" he finds himself in the perfect position. He stands tall and strong in his corner and steps forward. Each swing a gesture, a word, a look. She's dead in the water. Each blow lands and crushes her defenses, opening the way to his target. Her heart beats under that armor somewhere. Finally, he drives the blade (kiss) home and she gasps, with her dying (yet just now living) breath...

"I love you."

The dance, my friends, has finished.

Stage lights dim

AUTUMN LOVER PART I.

Casey Gewirtzman

She never cared for the Blues
 She wears high-heeled shoes
 While dancing with high top poison-tip heels.
 Her dance floor's her lover,
 His care is her cover,
 And with every step she don't care how he feels.
 The venom sinks in
 Each time she begins
 To pick up the pace of her waltz.
 No one knows what she's doing
 And how much she is ruining,
 But in the end, everything is his fault.
 By the end of the night
 She always sleeps alright,
 Her back to the darkness upstairs.
 His floor boards now rotten,
 With nothing that's forgotten,
 From the woman who dances without care.

THE GIFT OF LOVE

Charles Louis Ashley II

Like the lioness stalking prey for her young,
 love overwhelms its inhabitant and sinks its teeth into the core of the heart
 Like the gift waiting to be opened,
 love waits patiently to be unraveled and presented to its receiver
 Like the novel having repeatedly been read by many readers,
 love never dies nor its it ever put down like the book
 The gift of love is merely incessantly rewrapped
 In a different hue of lace and presented time and time again

Checking Account Closed: Balance Due

Kevin Garner

two words can
describe
you

flat broke.

DEAR BEAUTIFUL LOVE

Alicia Fry

Dear Love,

Where are you round these days? I can't seem to find you, much less a tracing of your footsteps. I seem to be lost in a cavernous world of deeply, & emotionally depressing circumstances. I had been hoping for sometime you'd turn to be that strange light at the end of tunnels. Supposed the dream's a bit too shattered now, however.

I think I should like to meet you; and preferably, sooner rather than later. You see... life's getting shorter. I have these fears that it's not going to be on for much longer. One might call it "intuition," I suppose; that, or "superstitions." Either way, it's complicated feelings that have my soul in twists. I do believe you'd be the only relaxation from that..

Once upon a time, I thought I had met you. However, as I turned to speak your name, it occurred to me that I'd simply mistaken someone else for you. It was oddly laughable, not at that particular moment; but, not much long after that is. Actually, I should say it feels closer to 2 or so times I made that error in judgment. Attraction does that to a person, I surmise.

Well, Love..

Here's to hoping I shall find you with me nearer the start than the end of this life. If you & I fail to reach one another, however; there's next time absolutely.

Earnestly,
Alicia

Goodbye Good Life

Richard Gardner

It's a strange thing knowing you're going to die. Your life becomes a sickening pendulum, swinging you from eerie calmness to unbearable terror. You remind yourself your moments are limited, so you do all you can to take in the full scope of life, but who can help falling into impenetrable numbness?

That, I'd have to say, is why I left. My beautiful wife, Kendall, and my son, Jack Junior. I loved them. I loved them completely. But that's why I left, too. I couldn't just sit at home, watching them watch me die. The sight of my wife's tears, her trying to make our son understand, all our friends watching me as if I would drop at any moment – I couldn't bare seeing their pain. I'm sure that doesn't make much sense – that I'd prefer to live on the street, rather than spend my final days with my loved ones. All I can say is that if – God forbid – you ever find yourself in my position, what I did may start making perfect sense.

Jack Kinsing perched himself against the brick wall forming one side of the small alley, scribbling away in a dirty, vivid pink diary, forced to stop every few words to push his brown, tangled hair out of his eyes. A sad but purposeful look rested upon his face, distorting the otherwise handsome features hidden underneath days' filth and sweat. He was only twenty-eight years old, but hard times and sickness had taken its toll – the once full, healthy cheeks now hollow, his hair thin, the tailored suit now several sizes too large, his nails black and jagged.

He stopped writing and looked up to see Ty entering from the busy street, carrying what Jack knew had to be food. It had to be. Their last meal had been... was it yesterday? The day before?

The big man smiled as he produced the blessed sustenance. "Got crackers, half a ham sandwich, an apple, and – get this – two Mountain Dews."

Jack stood, a smile stretching across his face for the first time in days as he took his share.

"You're the man, Ty."

"That's why they pay me the big bucks," he snorted. "Ninth Street ain't a bad place to go. Lots of churches. People there ain't rich or nothing, but that's actually good – rich people don't give a damn about anybody."

"Mmm hmm..." Jack said. He was too busy enjoying a Saltine to listen.

Starving is horrifying. Everyone has said, "I'm starving," but for most, that line is usually followed by, "what's for lunch?" It's impossible to express the pains of a truly empty stomach through words; how can I expect you to understand the endless gnawing, the feeling of your insides squeezing in upon themselves, the fear of thinking your stomach's about

to attack your esophagus for a moment's relief?

And the cold! Few people truly appreciate the warmth and comfort of central air, and a house, and a warm bed to retreat to at the end of a long day. Out here, there's no retreating from the attacking cold. The first time you use newspapers to line your clothes, or construct a wall out of cardboard boxes, you understand wealth.

"Where'd you get that?"

Jack looked up from his journal and saw, by the small source of light his candle provided, Ty, crouched uncomfortably a few feet from him. Few people realize that directly under bridges, at the top of those slopes running up to meet the edge of the structure on both sides, the slope flattens out, leaving a tiny space to crawl. It was surprising the big man even fit in such a small space, but he'd had too much experience sleeping in underpasses. They both had.

"What?"

Ty pointed at the small, sickeningly pink book resting beneath Jack's arm. "Didn't figure you for the 'Dear Diary' type."

Jack couldn't help smiling. "Me neither, but it's actually kind of nice. Freeing."

A searing pain tore through Jack's brain, bringing tears to his eyes. He let out a gasp, but did his best to stifle it. He didn't want to hear what Ty would say – again.

"Another one?" he said, with his own brand of concern. "Need to get you to a doctor soon, Jack."

"Been to plenty of them, Ty, I know what they'll say."

He didn't respond. He knew what they'd say too. Jack had told him some time before about the tumor slowly taking over his frontal lobe.

A honk echoed up from the tunnel below, pulling the two men from their silent thoughts. Thirty feet down the steep concrete slope, four lanes of traffic raced to whatever destinations they chose.

"You used to have a car, didn't you, Jack?" asked Ty.

"I still do. It's somewhere on a country road, out of gas, though," Jack answered, with a hollow laugh. He had left the car on the very road he had first met Ty. They had been walking in opposite directions, but Ty started talking and began walking back the way he'd come with his new friend. He didn't even care that he was heading back for no other reason than Jack was going that way. Something about that fascinated Jack completely.

Ty yawned, lying back on his pathetic attempt at a bed. "One of these days, we'll go get it. Backseat of a car sounds like paradise right now..."

Just like that, the big man was fast asleep, his snores fighting to be heard over the ceaseless roaring of engines below their resting place. Jack hesitated for a moment, as he always did, before reaching into his back pocket for his wallet. Devoid of money, it still held one great treasure. With as much care as he could give, he pulled out a picture of his beautiful, dark haired Kendall and pudgy three-year-old Jack Junior. With his silent prayers, he drifted off to a place where he could find them, touch them, know that they were near.

**. . .the next three days we spent holed up at home,
fighting off colds.**

It was the best time of my life.

"Get up."

It wasn't loud, but the force behind the words was well noted.

In a flash, Jack and Ty were both sitting bolt upright. A cop stooped before them, his head scraping the bridge directly above.

"Am I gonna have to tell you again?"

Jack's eyes fell immediately upon the golden badge. It felt so strange, so foreign, to be looked at as a miscreant.

Ty's eyes fell on the gun.

"You're not supposed to be up here. Let's go. Now. And don't forget any of your shit. I like my city clean."

Jack and Ty looked at each other for a moment, dumbfounded.

"Move!"

In a matter of seconds, the two had gathered up their belongings. Two blankets, one towel, an extra jacket, the little food that survived dinner, an army surplus canteen, a few drops left of Ty's vodka, Jack's wallet, the Bible Ty used to get them money... In a moment, they had thrown their lives into their pockets and duffle bag and were following

the man unsteadily back down to the sidewalk, breathing heavily, and made sure to head away from the cop. Ty seemed to be unbothered by what had happened, though. Jack made a mental note to ask him how many times this had happened to him before.

"Breakfast?" Ty asked lightly, digging in a pocket of his old army coat. "Think we got a few crackers left."

"Breakfast of champions..." Jack yawned, as Ty handed him three Saltines.

The key to survival on the street is being a good salesman. No way around it. You need food, a place to sleep, or for God's sake a hose to wash off with, you have to make this person believe they need to give it to you. Through my little time in "this" life, I've seen that everybody has their own personalized style of doing this. All of you have seen the more popular plays: the handicapped man, the war veteran, and the preacher, as Ty calls them. That's Ty's personal choice, the preacher. All of them work, just some better on some people – as with anything. As Ty says, if you can pull off the wounded soldier for Jesus you've hit the jackpot.

"May the Lord bless you in all your undertakings!" Ty yelled after the woman walking away, putting her wallet back in her purse. He shot a look at Jack and smiled deviously. "Twenty bucks!" he mouthed.

Jack couldn't help smiling back his own excitement. "I vote for a hot meal."

In spite of this temptation, Ty slowly began to shake his head. "Booze."

A few people walking by turned a skeptical eye on him as he said the word that fulfilled all of their suspicions.

But Ty was a pro.

"Booze," he said again, more loudly, to the crowd, "is the fuel to all sins! Help the man who succumbs to its evil, for he cannot help himself, and through this act you shall surely be blessed..."

He let the words roll off his tongue slowly, with power, bowing his head as he finished. Jack could hardly help thinking Ty would have made a better preacher than some real ones he had heard. He stood there, his head bowed, his eyes closed as if in prayer, the setting sun creating a halo about him.

Forty dollars and twenty-three cents later, they were heading home - a run down park in a bad part of town. Graffiti covered everything, litter everywhere - not a park to take the kids to for a fun-filled afternoon. They arrived at about eight o'clock, to find half a dozen other refugees gathered around a small fire on the middle of the court, looking to call this home.

Ty headed straight for them. "Anybody from Denver?"

Grunts were all that answered him. No one moved to let the two of them join the small circle.

"Anybody like gin?" Ty asked smoothly, his rhythm and pitch perfect. He pulled out the newly acquired bottle of liquor and held it up, just so, so that the light seemed to dance through the liquid.

Cheers went up as the group scurried to make room for the newcomers. Only one man seemed unturned by Ty's treasure - a small man settled deeply inside of a monstrous coat. He watched them closely through cold, piercing eyes, set far behind the mane of hair that appeared to be the rest of his face.

"All I ask is ya don't backwash!" Ty called through his deep laugh, passing the now open bottle around the circle.

"Th - thank you thank you, mister man," mumbled a tall, painfully slim teenager next to him, taking the bottle with trembling hands. He examined it carefully before passing it on and looking up hopefully, his eyes darting back and forth between Ty and Jack.

"You - you ain't got no cr-crack? Please? No? Pl-please?"

Both Jack and Ty looked at the boy, dumbfounded.

"Um..." Jack began.

"We, uh, don't - "

Without any warning, the boy screamed, releasing a horrible pain that reminded Jack far too much of his own life, and jumped up running off into the night, tearing at his clothes, ripping his own flesh.

"What the hell was that?!" Jack shouted without meaning to, his hair standing on end.

"Withdrawals," answered an older woman across from him. Her sad eyes searched the darkness for the boy. "Makes him feel like bugs are crawling all over his body."

Jack shuddered. All sat silently, trapped in their own thoughts.

"Okay, there a problem, buddy?" Ty asked, venom filling his voice, a barely controlled rage Jack had never seen in him before. His eyes were on the silent man across the fire - the man's eyes were still on Ty and Jack.

"What d'ya want from us? Huh?" the man croaked, his voice raspy, as if he hadn't spoken in weeks.

"Nothing," Ty responded, taken back.

"You cops?" His eyes were unforgiving, glaring at them, waiting to detect a lie.

"No, man. We just - we just need a place to sleep."

The man watched them for a few more moments before he seemed satisfied. Finally, he stood up and moved away from the group, and sat down by a small bag and torn sleeping bag.

"That's Marcus," the woman said, making Ty slowly peel his eyes off the small frame preparing for bed. "He's rough, but he takes care us."

Throughout the night, Marcus, or the lady, or one of the others kept watch over the park - over us. Marcus refused to trust us. Years of being an unwanted outcast had taken its toll on him. He seemed to have lost some part of his humanity, which left him a cold, bitter shell of a man. Yet, every night for the next few weeks, he allowed Ty and me to return to the park, for a price - food was the best currency, but whatever we could scrounge up for the day, he took a portion for himself and the others as they may have needed.

This pissed Ty off more than anything else had. Our need of a "safe" place to sleep was the only thing that stilled his pride and kept him coming back here night after night.

But this wasn't the only park Ty and I were frequenting. We had found a park in a nicer area of the city and Ty immediately took to it, and for good reason - it soon proved to be the best place we'd worked yet. Ty kept joking about opening a bank account with his new found cash flow. At least, I think he was joking. I doubt he's ever had a bank account before, it may have a certain allure...

"I say to you, surely the Lord blesses those who would bless others in their hour of need!" Ty was winding up - his "sermons" were short but always well received. This crowd was no different. They ate up every word, cried, clapped, "Amen-ed!," and made sure to leave him a few dollars in his handy baseball cap.

Jack wasn't listening. He was seated on a bench twenty feet away, scribbling speedily in his journal. Occasionally, he'd cough violently, or be forced to stop writing long enough to pull his coat more snugly about himself, trying vainly to fight off the shuddering cold that he alone felt. He was growing sicker, he knew it, he *felt* it. Every morning he awoke vomiting, every day he felt more and more rundown and dizzy, occasionally he even felt his thoughts fading and losing shape, his own mind becoming gibberish to him - this last he had found only one help for on his own: the diary. Writing, forcing his every thought and emotion through a single channel kept him sane, focused on his reality. Of course, he also realized what this diary could mean to Kendall, and to Jack Junior, after he was gone..

"Are you a preacher, too?"

Jack jumped. He had been buried so deeply in his own mind that he hadn't heard the young boy approach. He had to have been four or five years old, with, Jack thought with a grin, a distinctly "big boy haircut," large questioning eyes, and his left thumb stuck firmly in his mouth.

"No," Jack answered, his smile growing, showing warmth that his hollowed face hadn't known in months. "Just my friend over there. I'm Jack. What's your name?"

"Dakota," the boy said, removing his thumb to speak, but making sure not to let it stray too far. His big eyes turned to the worn pink book in Jack's lap. "Whatcha doing?"

"Just writing." Jack responded. He had been away from children for so long he had forgotten their innate sense of curiosity. It was like a beautiful burst of life flamed into existence inside of him, reviving him, bringing back the father he had once been.

The boy looked as though he was carefully considering his next move, considering Jack. Finally, he pulled a G.I. Joe out of his back pocket and presented it to his new friend. "This is Sarge. I got him for my birthday."

Jack laughed until his side hurt. "Hi, Sarge, nice to meet you," he sputtered to the toy between laughs. "I used to have G.I. Joes when I was little too."

"I'm not little!" the boy stated quickly. Holding up four pudgy fingers on his free hand, he went on, "I'm this many!"

"Whoa!" Jack remarked, acting impressed. "I'm sorry! I didn't realize you were that many!"

Some distance away, voices yelling "Dakota!" drifted to Jack's ears, bringing him back to his surroundings.

"Sounds like your parents are looking for you," he told the boy, wishing he didn't have to say it. "You'd better get back to them, so they don't get worried."

"Okay," said the boy, without feeling.

With a wave, he was off, running towards the calling voices.

"You all right?" asked Ty as he approached, pulling Jack from his reverie.

"Yeah, fine," Jack responded with a sniff, rising from his seat.

Ty looked off after Dakota, running into his father's outstretched arms. "Cute kid, huh?"

"Yeah."

Ty moved closer, treading carefully.

"He look anything like your son?"

For a moment, Jack didn't seem to have heard. He just stood there. Finally he muttered, "Just his eyes." Running his sleeve across his face, he turned and started walking away. "Come on. It's getting late."

Today marks six months since I left home. Six months since I held my son. Six months since I've fallen asleep listening to my wife breathe.

Everyday I feel myself moving closer to the end. I can somehow feel the time slipping from my fingers. Did I make the right choice? I'm numb now to whatever emotions told me to leave. How could I have left my family - my home - my comfort? I've left myself with only memories.

But soon that's all they'll have of me. At least this way their memories will be of the good times, instead of the burden of the little time I spent wasting away. That's for me to remember, not them. Kendall deserves to remember the day we danced in the rain. The three hours we spent running and splashing around, and the next three days we spent holed up at home, fighting off colds. It was the best time of my life.

That's all I want her to remember. The day we danced in the rain.

Jack watched Ty walk into the liquor store, and made certain his friend didn't see him walk to the nearby payphone.

Kendall took Jack Junior to her mother's, she had to - she did every Sunday afternoon.

Breath held, Jack inserted some change and dialed home.

And waited.

Four rings, and no answer. Finally, the answering machine picked up, and for the first time in months Kendall's sweet, soft voice filled Jack's world.

"Hi. You've reached the Kinsings. We're not home right now, but if you'd like to leave a message, we'll get back to you as soon as we can."

With great difficulty, Jack hung up before the beep.

"WE HAVE TO CELEBRATE DEATH!"

More change and another call.

"Hi. You've reached the Kinsings..."

Jack concentrated on every syllable. He'd never fully appreciated the warmth in his wife's voice, the softness, the almost proud way she said Kinsing. He'd never loved her more.

He hardly noticed that the beep had come and gone.

"Hey, Jack. Ready to go?" Ty asked, walking up with a newly purchased bottle of the finest.

Jack snapped backed into reality. "Damn!" he yelled, hanging up the silent phone recording every sound. "Shit!"

"What's wrong? What is it?" Ty demanded, panic in his voice.

In a second, Jack threw himself at the big man, sending the new bottle of liquor crashing to the concrete. "You said my name!" he shouted wildly, grabbing Ty by the collar. "It's on the answering machine now! She'll hear it!"

He let go of the frantic Ty and made to hurry in every direction.

"Jack? Jack, who will hear it? What the hell's going on?"

"My wife!"

Tears began to roll down Jack's cheek as he reached up to massage his pounding temple.

"All this time..." Jack sobbed, still unconsciously doing small circles

on the sidewalk. "All this time, and I go and do something this stupid."

He looked up at large blur he knew to his friend just beyond the tears.

"She was supposed to forget about me. I can't let her deal with this."

Horrified, Ty steps cautiously towards him.

"Jack," he started softly.

"No!" Jack shouted, becoming unhinged again. "I'm the one who's dying - not her! Not her! She doesn't deserve this! She deserves better! She has to move on... She has to..."

Jack had sunk to his knees without even noticing. Ty took up his role of preparing to run, although he didn't know where. Should he stay with his friend or run for help?

"I just want her to remember me - alive..." Jack's voice was barely above a whisper now, as his consciousness began to slip from his grasp. "Not dying... I want her to remember me..."

After all is said and done, what's left of a life? Pain? Suffering? The pale reflections of living we cling to as we're forced involuntarily towards the end. Why do we fight it so, at this point? What's left to hold on to?

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul..."

Ty's voice broke through the icy silence of Jack's mind, bringing back to the world. He lay there for sometime, just listening to the quiet, soothing tone he had grown so accustomed to over the past few months.

After a few moments Jack's other senses be

gan to return to him, sending up red flags to his slowly processing brain. He soon felt the soft warmth that enveloped his body. He noticed the Godly smell of clean sheets. He felt the reassuring footboard his feet pressed gently against.

With great difficulty, he tried his eyes.

After a few moments of blurry shapes and colors everything began to take shape. He was lying in a bed in a dimly lit room. To his right sat his friend, who hadn't yet noticed he was awake.

"What are you doing, Ty?" he asked weakly, his parched throat protesting his every syllable.

Ty dropped the Bible with a gasp, but quickly recovered, a smile stretching from ear to ear.

"Jack! You're awake!"

"You caught me..." Jack tried weakly. "Got anything to drink?"

"Yeah, yeah!" Ty stammered quickly, jumping out of his seat. "I'll go get something. I'll be right back, okay? I'm not going anywhere."

"Ty," Jack said, making him stop short. "I'll be okay till you get back."

Ty just looked at him for a moment, confused. Finally, he started to calm down. "Right," he said slowly, backing through the lime green curtain that surrounded Jack's bed. "I'll, uh, be right back."

In a few moments, Ty pushed his way back through the curtain, a glass of water and a tray of food in his hands.

"Thought you might be hungry, too," Ty explained, placing the meal on a cart and pushing it over Jack's bed.

"Thanks," Jack said with a grimace, pushing himself up into a sitting position. "You want any of this?"

"Nah," answered Ty, shaking his head, "They gave me something earlier."

Without further hesitation, he began to devour what he believed to be meatloaf with a side of mash potatoes. This didn't look like any hospital Jack had ever seen before, but this was definitely hospital food.

"So, where are we?"

"St. Leo's."

Jack paused eating long enough to look up questioningly. "The church?"

"A clinic. The church runs it." He looked away, trying to mask his shame. "I couldn't take you to a real hospital. You don't have an insurance card on you. I checked your wallet, but..."

"It's okay."

Ty looked back up, almost surprised by Jack's forgiveness.

"Ty," Jack began slowly, "I don't know how to thank you..."

"Don't. There's no need to."

All was quiet for a few moments as Jack finished his meal. Almost immediately he felt life being restored to him.

"You know, I kinda feel like kicking your ass," Ty said with a smirk. "You scared the hell out of me."

"How long was I out for?"

Ty looked at the clock on the wall. "It's two a.m... About twelve hours," he sat back and propped his feet up on a corner of Jack's bed. "It's been crazy. Every doctor they have came for a look at you. They even called in a couple of specialists."



*Raven Shadowbox * Beth Parrish*

"They tell you anything?" Jack asked slowly, unsure whether he truly wanted to know.

Ty snorted. "Course not. But I did manage to overhear some stuff. Didn't understand much of it..."

Jack looked up curiously as Ty's voice trailed off.

"What did you understand?"

With a sigh, Ty dropped his feet off the bed and ran his hand through his tangled hair. "They said you didn't have much longer," he muttered.

"Yeah... That's one thing they all agree on."

Silence fell again.

After a split second decision, Jack fought his way out of the bed.

"Jack! What are you doing? Where are you

going?" Ty asked, panicking.

"Be quiet!" Jack whispered quickly.

He looked down and saw that all he wore was a thin, pale blue hospital gown. "Where are my clothes?"

"They took them to be cleaned," Ty answered, lowering his voice too. "Jack, just tell me what you're doing."

"Leaving." He stood up straight and regretted it instantly - every nerve in his body was sending up urgent warnings. "See if you can find me some shoes. Oh, and a way out."

After twenty minutes, Jack, leaning heavily against his friend, walked through a back exit into an alley, wearing someone else's scrubs and Ty's overlarge jacket.

"So, where we heading?" Ty asked, once they were clear of the clinic.

"Back to the park. For tonight, at least," he answered between gasps.

"You telling me you gave up a warm bed and free food to go sleep on the ground?"

"Pretty much."

With a sigh, Ty answered, "Well, not like we don't have plenty of practice at it, at least."

For the first time since I started this journal, I took the time and looked back at the pages I've written, everywhere I've been, everything I've taken from it. Reality says this has all been just a little time, but so many lifetimes have passed through these pages. All this time, the end has loomed over me, terrorized me. All I've done is run. When will I finally stop fighting? When will I accept peace?

"Jack... Jack..."

The soft, sweet voice seemed to dance its way to Jack from a great distance, filling him with a warmth he had nearly forgotten.

"Wake up, sleepy."

Jack smiled. Kendall's voice always made him smile.

"Come on..." Her hand made its way across his back and up to his shoulder. With a soft pull, she guided his body to turn to face her.

There she was, smiling at her new husband, her eyes gazing deeply into his soul.

"Good morning."

They had been married for three months, but she still woke up every morning, praying that he would really be there next to her. So far, she had not been disappointed.

"Morning," Jack mumbled, half awake.

"Jack," she whispered, leaning in to speak directly in his ear. "Make me a promise."

"Okay," responded Jack, without feeling.

Rolling her eyes, she pushed him, making him moan drowsily.

"You haven't heard what it is yet."

"Oh. Well what is it?"

She leaned in again.

"Never leave me."

Jack sat bolt upright in his sleeping bag, gasping for breath.

The promise. He had made that promise. Nearly six years before.

How had he forgotten?

His head started pounding as his heart broke. He had betrayed his wife. Or had he? When he made that promise, neither of them had any idea what was going to happen to him. They hadn't known that he would one day have a tumor. They hadn't known that one day he would have to die, leaving her with a toddler. They hadn't known.

He had made the right choice.

"Hey, Jack! You're up!"

Ty was drunker than Jack had ever seen him. Being such an experience drinker, he usually held himself to some kind of limit and managed to keep himself under control - tonight, it seemed, all limits were forgotten.

"Come on, get up! We've got reason to celebrate!"

Jack looked around. Ty stood alone, bouncing in place, a hyper energy Jack had never seen before controlling him as he drank from the bottle in his hand. The others in the park were looking on him in horror - except for Marcus. Marcus watched Ty with cold, quiet fury.

"Aren't you all listening?" Ty yelled crazily, his head swiveling towards all of them. "There's a celebration!"

"Ty, what are you talking about?" Jack asked in alarm, rising with difficulty from his sleeping bag. "What do you mean celebration?"

Ty shook his head, making a "Tssk" sound. He bounced over to Jack quickly and grabbed his

shoulders, slopping alcohol all over Jack's shoulder. He looked Jack squarely in the face and slowly explained, "We have to celebrate death!" The only sounds that met his words were that of the other sleepers sliding further away from the drunken fool.

Marcus slowly rose from his bed without taking his eyes off Ty. His hand slipped into a coat pocket.

"Death?" repeated Jack, stunned. "Ty, what are you talking about?"

"Jack," Ty started, still revering Jack as a slow student whom he had to teach, "you're dying. We're all dying! I don't know why, but I just realized it tonight!"

He released Jack and stepped towards the others, who huddled together fearfully.

"We're dying!" the drunken maniac laughed. "Why is that a reason to be sad? Look at us! What do we have to hold on to?"

His face cleared as a thought struck him. Suddenly, he ran over to a rickety bench and leapt on top of it. He felt it was only fitting for the gravity of the moment.

He held the bottle aloft and smiled horrifically at them all.

"... would like to make a toast," Ty stated grandly, unbothered by the lack of movement from his audience. "To Death! And a chance to say goodbye, good life, and thank you, for all the memories!"

Giggling to himself, Ty drank.

"Oh, and another thing," he went on, sloshing liquor down his front, "in this new found enlightenment, I have decided that I'm not taking anything I don't want to from anybody. That includes you, Marcus."

All eyes turned to Marcus, who was still rooted to the same spot by his bed, his hand still held firmly in his coat pocket. Ty jumped heavily off the bench and marched towards him without hesitation.

"Since me and Jack came here you've had your grubby hands in everything we've had." His words grew fiercer as he went on. "Just for the privilege of sleeping here. And I'm sick of it!"

Ty stood inches from the unflinching Marcus, their eyes already locked into battle. Finally, Ty broke his gaze and turned it towards Marcus's belongings.

"Hey, you know, this sleeping bag of yours looks familiar. Oh wait, it's mine!"

Ty stooped down, grabbing a corner of the sleeping bag, and pulled with all his strength, sending Marcus crashing to the ground.

"Thank you," Ty said kindly, "I'll let you know if there's anything else I want."

Marcus scrambled to his feet as Ty turned his back on him, holding the sleeping bag up for Jack to see.

"Hey, Jack, you warm enough? You can use this if you - "

Ty sputtered, his eyes widened in horror, the sleeping bag and the bottle slipping out of his grasp. Slowly, he dropped to his knees. Behind him, Marcus stood, a bloody knife in his hand.

Jack ran the mile between him and Ty, forced to watch Ty's tongue begin to loll back and forth in his mouth, the single tear form and trickle slowly down his cheek.

He reached his friend just as he fell the rest of the way to the ground, landing flat on his face, giving off the sickening sound of all the air being knocked from his lungs. With difficulty, Jack rolled him onto his back.

"Ty! Ty? Come on, buddy, say something, please," his words rushed frantically from his lips as his trembling hands sought something to do.

Ty wheezed, gasping for the cold night air.

"It's okay, Ty," he reassured him, unable to remove the panic from his own voice. "We're going to get you help."

He turned to the others, only to find Marcus quickly organizing them and their things, getting ready to run.

"Hey!" Jack shouted at them desperately.

"Where are you going?! We gotta get him to a hospital! Help me!"

The important things packed, the group hurried off into the night.

"Come back!"

Ty coughed violently beneath him, blood spraying into the air.

"Jack..." Ty began weakly.

"No, no, don't talk," Jack quieted him quickly. "Save your breath. Ty, I gotta go get you help. I promise you, I will be right back."

With great effort, Ty reached out and

grabbed his friend, instantly – mysteriously – calming him.

"It's no use..." Ty whispered, uttering the words that Jack feared so greatly.

"Don't say that. Don't say that! We're gonna get you help. You're gonna be okay. We've just gotta get you to a hospital."

"There isn't time," Ty stated, coughing and gagging. "It's okay, Jack. Just... stay here."

Jack slowly nodded, tears streaming down his face. "Okay..."

"You want me to tell you what it feels like?" Ty asked, the shadow of a smirk on his face.

Jack couldn't help smiling. "No, no thanks. I think I can wait a little longer."

Ty's laughs quickly turned to more violent coughs.

"Thanks for staying, Jack," he finally sputtered.

"I'm glad I did," Jack answered with great difficulty, "I wouldn't have been able to bare not telling you goodbye."

Ty smiled weakly. "Do me one last favor?"

"Anything."

"Give Kendall that chance with you."

Jack sat there, gaping at him, as the truth washed over him. All these months, he believed he had been sparing his wife and son from watching him deteriorate. He had deprived them of saying their goodbyes. He had stolen their last time with him away. Instead of bandaging a wound, he inflicted one.

Ty gave a violent shudder, a spasm ran through his entire body.

"Jack..." he gasped, grabbing at Jack's clothes. "Jack..."

With one last exhale, Ty was gone.

The last page. It's fitting that now is the time I reach it. I know beyond any doubt that my life will quickly find its last remaining lines, and I can only hope I reach them in the manner I choose.

I was allotted one life to live, but somehow, I managed two. These last six months, two weeks, and four days have proven to be an entity of its own right – one that I look back on lovingly. I cannot forgive myself for sacrificing that time with Kendall and Jack Junior, but I now know how to appreciate what they would have been.

Now, I am going home.

I cannot hope for more than weeks there, before my life is called, but until then, I seek only to hold my family, to drift off to a place where I can find them, touch them, know that they are near. And, maybe, we can say goodbye, good life, and thank you, for all the memories.

Goodbye,

good life,

and

thank you

BROTHERS

Matthew Kemp

Brothers

Once again we stand
Assembled before the casket
Mourning our matriarch and patriarchs
As tears fall onto declined new beginnings

Brothers

Here we are again
Reflecting on the good times
Offering our comforting words
'Won't show each other the tears

Brothers

Again we are united
In the wallows of despair
Glued and bonded to one another
Offering each other shoulders of support

Brothers

Once more death has come
And tainted our beloved fellowship
And one more time we're together
Mourning the catalyst for our reunion

Brothers . . .

I DREAM TECHNICOLOR DREAMS

Corena Unpingco

My heart lives on inspiration.

It is all that I can hope for.

People say, "All there is to life is what you have,

not what you dream of,

or hope for,

or aspire to.

People pass on; the only thing they had was what they shared and showed.

The only thing that you have is what you've already got.

The only thing that you'll have is what you get.

So, do I, or you, look for something else to fill the spaces up?

Naïve—I said, "...dream and work towards what you don't have.

Not just what you got.

Get what is beyond your hopes and dreams."

So—I muddle along, and I try.



*There's a Bee * April Williams*

HOPE FOR A WORLD UNBOUND

Antonio A. Byrd

Professor Baldwin stood at his office window and observed the jungle of skyscrapers and rivers of motor cars leisurely flowing between them. The sun had just touched the middle of the clear sky, where its light poured on the entire city, extinguishing all shadows to uncover the citizens, who, at times, were caught in the traffic trying to escape to, or from, the looming trees of gray concrete and silver glass. He beheld the hustle and bustle of the city; an odd feeling came from it, like Professor Baldwin's brain had gone numb, and then he sighed, recognizing what he felt. There was no mistaking it, for he had encountered this emotion on many occasions throughout life—Professor Baldwin let his thoughts on this feeling escape from his mouth, a statement that would cause the entire city to halt if he had cried it from the highest building.

"Life is boring."

"Boring!" cried Miss Lambert, Dr. Baldwin's secretary. She raced across the office, red in the face, on the edge of blaring out some kind of chatter, but seemed to not have the heart to speak. Dr. Baldwin knew these moments well: if someone voiced an unusual opinion, such as on this occasion, Miss Lambert's face would blossom and her lips would tighten. She did this to hold back the first few thoughts on her mind; not that they were mean-spirited, but if she did speak those words, it would come out as incoherent nonsense.

"W-w-why is life boring?" she managed to say.

"Because, Lisa, my dear," began Dr. Baldwin, "in 67 years of life I have experienced and seen everything. I've been to China and Japan, met with Russian and Iranian dignitaries, toured London, lectured at Harvard and Columbia, hiked the Colorado Rockies, made love, had children and grandchildren . . ."

"And in short?" asked Miss Lambert.

"In short, the world has lost its wonder," answered Dr. Baldwin.

"NO; HE'S DONE THIS BEFORE. *More cake?*"

"You don't see the wonder of the sunrise and sunset? What about the first of spring when the world reawakens from a long winter slumber? What about the festivities we have in the city? What about the Japanese culture you are so fond of? Do they not have wonder?"

Dr. Baldwin flopped into his chair. "When you have lived as long as I have, nothing surprises you. I can confidently say that I have seen it all." He stood with a sigh and reached for his coat: "And I've had enough of it all, Miss Lambert. Cancel my afternoon tutoring sessions."

"Where do you plan to go?" asked the secretary, perturbed.

"I'm going for a walk, and maybe," replied the Professor, opening the office door, "just maybe I'll see something invisible to my naked eye." And with that, he was gone, and as soon as he was gone, Miss Lambert leapt for the phone and called campus police.

"Yes! This is Lisa Lambert! You've got to stop Professor Baldwin from leaving the grounds!"

"I just saw him go out."

"He's gone already? Then you've got to find him! I think he plans on committing suicide!"

As the police scrambled to capture him, Professor Baldwin melted into the crowds and walked a few feet before hopping on a transit bus. Cleaning the dirt from under his fingernails kept him occupied, but his attention soon turned to a delightful sound that no one, unless they were heartless, could resist the joy of hearing: a child's giggle, clear and strident, sweet to the ear, and it nearly produced in Dr. Baldwin's eye a tear. He held it back, for if the professor cried now he'd certainly return to his office. Dr. Baldwin did not want that—as with all journeys he had certain objectives to complete before the main purpose was achieved. He pushed the child out of his head, and replaced him with images of people milling about the streets outside the window. Then an unexpected siren accompanied by blue and red lights aggravated his senses.

"This won't do at all," muttered Dr. Baldwin. The bus halted and its doors opened to a thin police officer. Dr. Baldwin averted his eyes to the floor.

"I apologize for the stop," said the officer. "We're looking for a Professor Baldwin. Witnesses reported that they saw him board this bus. I'd like a good look at all of your faces . . ." The officer paused; his face was suddenly painted with shock. His hawk eyes fell on the photo in hand and then returned to the aisle, and then to the photo again.

Certain of his guess, the officer shot his arm and index finger out: "You! Come with me, Dr. Baldwin!"

"This won't do at all," repeated the professor and he sprang down the aisle. The officer in turn stood firm, but underestimated his prey's strength. One push of brute force sent him on his back. By the time the officer removed the confusion in his head, Dr. Baldwin had sprinted several feet down the road.

I can run fast, thought the professor. His joints and muscles worked together for a fluent movement that his existing arthritis should have rendered impossible. Nevertheless, it worked out to Dr. Baldwin's advantage: if his lungs continued functioning in the same proportion of his legs, the professor could reach the park, and from there, a taxi to the bridge, provided, of course, the authorities failed in their endeavor.

On the other side of town, Miss Lambert made a journey of her own to the residence of Dr. Baldwin. His wife welcomed her warmly and revealed her hospitality with an offering of tea and rice cakes. Miss Lambert, however, insisted that time did not allow for that, and an important message had to be sent, but she was so out of breath after finishing her sentence and from running half a mile, the secretary could not say what she intended to, and so sunk into the couch. Thus, reporting the news was delayed for twenty minutes, mostly because Mrs. Baldwin rambled on about how her children never seemed to have enough time to visit for the holidays. But after they settled down, and the initial greetings and small conversation were finished, the news was finally delivered.

"He plans to take his life, then?" asked Mrs. Baldwin.

"Uh, yes, my lady," replied Miss Lambert, perturbed that Mrs. Baldwin continued wearing a smile. The secretary expected a scream, a gasp, or some other expression of shock and sorrow yet the news to Mrs. Baldwin was like accidentally dropping a fork on the floor; she treated it as an event of insignificant value to her life.

"I wouldn't worry too much about it."

Miss Lambert nearly dropped her tea cup. "You're not concerned?"

"No; he's done this before. More cake?"

Dr. Baldwin grimaced; no amount of massaging his leg muscles resulted in relief. He had reached the park as expected and when his legs were on the verge of collapsing. Good timing, thought the professor, casually glancing at his pocket watch. At least ten minutes was available to him for thinking. What to do? A walk to the park entrance and hailing a cab was ruled out for the sake of his shaking legs. Children always occupied the park; perhaps they can be put to good use. Sirens sang in the distance. Less time than first thought. Then a new, redundant sound flew into his ears: clip-clop, clip-clop. He looked up. Perhaps a deity favored Dr. Baldwin's plight, for clip-clop, clip-clop came the hansom cab. A young gentleman, wrapped in black, commanded his horses to pause at Dr. Baldwin's feet. Another strange occurrence! First, the youthful evasion from the police and just as his legs felt their true age, a hansom cab stops on cue. Neither said a word, as if anything needed to be said. It seemed that providence spoke to driver and rider. Tucked away in the cab, hidden from prying eyes, Dr. Baldwin continued his journey.

Acknowledging that not all people traveled by motor car, but by, for whatever reason, horses or tractors, or, in the case of Dr. Baldwin, hansom cabs, the city built a separate lane exclusive for slow modes of transportation. The hansom cab moved smoothly, then, from road to road, minding traffic where necessary, and the police, covering every block and checking every taxi and bus, never noticed the cabman and his special patron.

The hansom cab's delicate movements massaged Dr. Baldwin's muscles and relaxed his mind, opening a doorway to imagine what it would be like to dive into the ocean and bathe in its icy waters with the mysterious creatures of the deep. And like Jonah, a whale swept Dr. Baldwin away, not to keep him for three days as punishment, but to carry him skyward into a light only the heavens could produce. His hairs stood firm; skin bubbled with goosebumps. What feeling he was experiencing Dr. Baldwin could not say. A massive dose of euphoria was the best description he was able to form yet not even that fully expressed the feeling. Whatever it was, Dr. Baldwin admitted to himself that he had not experience this emotion in all of his life. He knew without a shred of doubt that he had reached something eternal—something pure and unknown to any person on Earth, except those who throughout history experienced what Dr. Baldwin now sensed, but failed to share the event with anyone else, for who would believe that there was a feeling beyond joy?

"We're here, sir," said the cabman. Dr. Baldwin escaped from the recesses of his mind and peered out the window. The ocean, glittering like radiant stars, greeted him. Cirrus clouds, painted a shimmering paleness from the sunlight's reflection, stood on the horizon like castle towers, and not a single ship rode the ocean's surface. It was a purely natural scene.

"Thank you!" said Dr. Baldwin, neglecting to hand the cabman a bill for the trouble and the cabman abandoned his duty to point it out.

The hansom cab now out of sight, the professor leaned against the bright red railing, sticking his face forward so the spring breeze caught in his beard and hair, and tickled his wrinkled skin. His nose sucked in the ocean air greedily. It trickled down to his mouth where it caressed the taste buds. Satisfied with his location, Dr. Baldwin climbed on top of the railing, stood rigid for a

moment, and then carefully sat down, caught between boisterous traffic and tranquil ocean. He got lost in his thoughts again, and when he returned, a group of officers had formed a semicircle around him.

"Dr. Baldwin! You don't have to do this!" they cried.

"You made it! I'm so thrilled!" replied Dr. Baldwin. "Do you care to join me?"

*She wondered about the city
under a burning sky*

LATER THAT EVENING.

Miss Lambert stared at Mrs. Baldwin in awe as she listened to the explanation behind Dr. Baldwin's behavior. "He won't jump because he is loyal to this life; he understands the obligations he owes to his students, colleagues, friends, and family. Every now and then my husband will make a trip to Walkins Bridge and stand upon the rail. He told me that it is a symbolic gesture."

"I don't understand," replied Miss Lambert.

"Mr. Baldwin has seen everything in this life. His greatest hope now is to see what cannot be seen. Standing on the bridge is the only way he can express this hope. My husband is bored with this world only because he has found something else that is far more wonderful . . . A higher plane of existence, you might say."

"Heaven, I suppose?"

"He doesn't call it that, but that is what he means."

The police did not care to join Dr. Baldwin; they only cared for his safety and showed it by coaxing him to reconsider his actions. But Dr. Baldwin had no objections to his choice; sitting firmly on the railing was one of the few decisions in life that he did not regret, and so there he sat, unaware of the people behind him. This event soon traveled to the ears of various journalists. Once they discovered Dr. Baldwin's location, they immediately scrambled to the bridge in hope of presenting a worthy news story for the evening broadcast. Video and digital cameras were aplenty, and they caught perfectly the symbol Dr. Baldwin was presenting, but the interpretation was skewed when people later saw it on television and in the newspapers. They saw simply a man on the verge of committing suicide; Dr. Baldwin saw it differently in his mind. It was not just a man standing between a troupe of officers and journalists, and an unadulterated ocean, prepared to end his life. The image clearly made the point, that here was a man staring into eternity, which to all people is a mystery, as the deepest parts of the ocean is still a mystery to the modern world. Behind Dr. Baldwin was all that he could see—the temporal—and in front, all that he could not see—the eternal.

His task complete, Dr. Baldwin climbed back down and with a heavy sigh, set his feet to the road. Immediately, the reporters pounced with sharp questions. He refused their curiosity with silence and he cast a blank gaze upon the crowd. Forty years ago the expression soothed flippant high school students, and to his surprise it had the same effect on the reporters. He

shared a triumphant smile.

"I have to go home, now; I'm sorry for causing so much trouble." That was not what they wanted at all, but the reporters could do little except follow him down the sidewalk, demanding an explanation for his suicidal gesture. His silence, however, could not be broken, and gradually they melted away with nothing more than the image of Dr. Baldwin sitting on the handrail.

The professor's arrival home did not relieve Miss Lambert, for one may return home after an apparent suicide attempt, but it fails to prove that all was well. What she wanted to see was his smile, and that expression came almost as soon as Dr. Baldwin sat down and joined his wife and secretary for tea. But the following day filled Miss Lambert with anxiety: Dr. Baldwin did not come in for classes. Evidently the Dean of Philosophy asked the professor to take a day off, but when Miss Lambert called his residence to ensure he was well; however, only the answering machine welcomed her voice on the many occasions she called that day.

She wondered about the city under a burning sky later that evening. Here was a moment when one surrenders movement to the legs as their mind dwells on sundry ideas. Miss Lambert at the moment had to be the saddest and most dejected woman in the entire city; there was no mistaking the wealth of tears in her eyes. Unconsciously, Miss Lambert walked the bridge, her eyes set on the boiling sunset that masked the ocean in bright orange. And then a man, sitting upon the handrail came into her sight. Miss Lambert's emotions were stirred instantly, for it was Dr. Baldwin!

"Care to join me?" asked the professor.

Miss Lambert, relieved to find him, leaned against the railing--sitting upon it for her seemed awkward.

"It's beautiful. I can see why you come here from time to time," said the secretary. She eyed Professor Baldwin. "Do you still think life is boring?"

"Yes, I do . . . But only because the life after is much more exciting."



*Starlight * Katrina Hurd*



*Escher Saw Ghost rider * Sean Bartlett*

Careen*Lacey Young*

Though the storm was flooding Highway 12 so deeply that the pavement felt a current, rain still pummeled the unfortunate vehicles crawling northbound. Irritated horns blared every few seconds, but the avalanche of water blotted out their pointless cries.

The girl in the gray Toyota leaned so far toward her windshield that her nostrils made twin fog marks on the glass, yet she saw no better than when she was reclining. The only time she could really see the car in front of her was when lightning lit the sky in flash anti-eclipses.

Smooth classical music flowing out of the speakers was at odds with the nightmarish scene of the storm, but the steady violins kept her from smacking into the bumper in front of her out of pure irritation. The driver might have been trying to break dance and drive simultaneously from the jarring and unrhymed screams of his horn, and the girl stared hopelessly across the lake-like cotton fields which settled beneath the highway.

After an unholy amount of time had watched
the girl frown at the cotton fields,
cars began to

she suddenly saw her **bright, green,**

pick up momentum.

First, wheels moved a few feet at a time; soon, a few yards. She cheered as she passed a mile marker and the speedometer passed thirty. Home was only ten minutes from here.

Just as her exit ramp came into view, she heard a biting surreal sound at odds with her violins. Dark, heavy rain masked the source of the clamor, but a flash of lightning struck her with the worst epiphany of her life: a semi fifty feet in front of her was hydroplaning. It had spun backward and smashed into the guard rail, creating an awful metallic scream. As it screeched toward her at a phenomenal speed and slipped into the dark rain, she suddenly saw her bright, green, terrified eyes reflected in the black windshield.

The funeral was extremely full; even people standing suffered mouths full of elbows. The rustle of passing tissues, sniffles, and hugs created unnatural background music. Everyone heard it. Everyone understood it. Everyone ignored it.

Some poor girl at the podium stared out over the heads of the mourners, and her face was blank with an indescribable mixture of grief, shock, and horror. None of the emotions seemed to have taken full possession of her, but all were stirring in her head.

Sora Careen, seated on the first row, thought the girl looked like a lost kite with its last possible bit of string snared in the highest leaves of a tree. On the podium, the girl's mouth opened but produced no noise; Sora wanted to run up and shake her, blend those emotions until one took hold and the girl

could actually *feel* something. The longer that girl stood there, the more desperate Sora became.

Several failed attempts at speech later, a kind pastor came up to the podium and led the girl away. The moment her heels touched solid ground, the girl began to sob.

Finally, Sora thought, feeling relieved.

"Ehm." A calm voice cleared itself next to Sora. She stared up at the pastor who had just led away the suspended emotion girl. "Would you like to say anything?"

A cold panic seized Sora, but three silently horrified seconds later, she realized he was talking to the woman seated beside her—her mother. Every eye not blotting mascara darted to and away from Sora Careen's small, severed family. Sora's mother, still under the sway of observing that poor girl on the podium, hardly responded to the man's words. He held out his hand: she took it.

A blink passed: she was at the podium. Sora imagined the crowd from her mother's perspective: a thick throng with no faces—only a mass, blurred painting of humanity stroked with an ugly tar color. The only sharp feature would be the wooden casket filling up the lower third of her vision. She would ignore it.

"I...I don't know why things happen." Her voice was very soft, her words very slow. Sora was surprised that she could speak at all. "I don't know what reason could be behind my daughter's...I don't..."

The already quiet crowd silenced when Sora's mother began to speak: soft rustling motions of grief froze. Sora watched them watching her, but her mother did not look at the mourners. Her eyes were on Sora's seat, stationed somewhere near her lap, and suddenly Sora understood the horror of her presence. Sora was the twin of the girl boxed up at her mother's knees. Her mother looked at Sora but saw Sybil Careen, fresh victim of a highway catastrophe.

Sora squeezed her eyes shut—the only part of her that was different from her sister—
and covered her face with her hands. Her mother said something—something
that didn't make any sense, something not relevant to
what was happening. Sora heard
someone murmur,

TERRIFIED eyes reflected in the **BLACK** windshield.

and she
knew the good people of the
funeral home had gone to retrieve her mother
from the eyes of three hundred horrified spectators.

The Careens floated through the funeral using the involuntary instincts that usually governed blinking and breathing. Sora could not feel herself. She was somewhere beyond her body, moving only to follow her parents, never speaking, and never touching anyone. An unattached, distant part of her mind wondered if her parents felt this way too.

After the last black skirts drove away and daylight retracted its final bits of warmth, the Careens drove back to their lonely home. No one wanted to stand by the mound of dirt after sundown.

Sora's parents did not notice their daughter as they walked in their house; she remained outside and stared at the stars—the only part of this world that seemed constant. The twins' mother had once told them not to fight pain; it was better to give into it—let it overcome you totally. If you could do that, it wasn't pain anymore but rather something sublime and free from impulses of the nervous system.

Perhaps that was what Sora was doing now. She certainly understood the gravity of her sister's death and the sadness engulfing her, but her emotions hovered just outside her bubble of responsiveness.

Coldness or loneliness eventually drove her inside—she wasn't sure which one or how long she has been standing there. Slowly, she ghosted through the hall and up the stairs to pause at the mumble of low voices.

"I didn't know she had these all," her father murmured. "How many are there?"

"I have no idea," her mother responded softly. "Look, they're everywhere! Look under her bed—there must be twenty."

Immediately, Sora understood they were looking at the journals. The late Careen's room housed an immense number of journals filled with her constant writings; they balanced on every shelf, every table, every flat or slightly tilted surface that was possible to cover. More library than bedroom, the area had a muted softness caused by the padding of hundreds of pages.

Drinking in the image of all the journals, Sora let her mind release a small portion of the emotions binding her. She could almost feel her sister behind her, frozen by the same sight Sora witnessed. Her tricky eyes even played out another person's shadow on the floor beside her, so she bowed her head and shut her eyes as if in prayer.

"What will we do with all these books?" her mother asked quietly. Sora heard the soft thump of journal landing on top of another journal and then pages flipping rapidly.

"Have you ever read one?" her father asked his wife. There was silence for a beat.

"What will we do with them?" Sora's mother asked again, even more softly.

Sora could hear a ghost of a smile in her father's low words: "She wanted to speak to the world. Let's let her."

She let go of her world and floated away.

Several months had passed since the family sent out the late Careen's works to five local publishers. Three had replied, and one local company had immediately taken a collection of poems and stories to publish for the twins' school. All seven hundred twenty-two students in Sora's class wanted a copy.

The company had given the Careens the first copy printed, and her father had picked it up that afternoon. He must have set the book on the coffee table when he came in; Sora saw the smooth white cover hovering on the glass platform in front of the couch.

With the soft steps of a ballerina, she drifted nearer the table. The house was quiet. Her father had gone upstairs to get Sora's mother. Sora felt extremely light—buoyant, almost. The jubilation of the published book overwhelmed her and made her feel more connected with reality than she had in a long time, or perhaps less connected with the nothingness she recently felt.

The book looked so lovely sitting on the coffee table—the crisp, snowy cover pristine against the black edging of the table, the intricate weave of the Celtic tree of life binding the front to back on its spine, the sharp blacking letters glossing across the front—

Sora stopped in front of the table. She glanced at the distracting movement of her own bright eyes reflected in the glass table, and a strange sensation began to collect in her. Her focus flicked downward from the vibrant color of her irises to the glistening black letters of the book cover.

Curious, the title read, and directly underneath that: *A collection of poems and short fictions by Sora Careen*.

The young twin paused and, with an almost smile, drew her eyebrows together. How strange she was feeling! She read the cover again, feeling that she hadn't really comprehended what was written.

Curious: A collection of poems and short fictions by Sora Careen.

Cold, tingly swirls had begun swooshing near her feet and were moving upward—almost to her waist now. That feeling was nothing, though, as Sora read the words again with a dreadful comprehension waiting to slam into her awareness.

Curious: A collection of poems and short fictions... by Sora Careen.

...Sora Careen.

Sora Careen.

The icy reality poured over Sora: she heard the faint echo of a horrible metallic crunch, and her head filled with the memory of her own bright, green, terrified eyes reflecting in a windshield pitched black.

Sora Careen, she read. Sora.

A darting movement caught her eye, and Sora glanced at the glass above the top of the book: two bright blue eyes were watching her, huge and terrified. She shifted her focus from the eyes in the glass to something moving below the glass: a pair of knees. She moved her foot back from the knees, and the rather curious awareness came to her that her foot felt very, very light, and she could, in fact, see the carpet through her foot.

"S-Sora?" a soft voice whispered, and Sora's gaze instantly flashed up to the face of the very real person sitting on her couch: Sybil Careen.

Sybil was staring at her with huge eyes filled with huge pupils: almost all the deep blue color was covered with black. Sybil held a notebook in her hand, and there was another in her lap. Sora stared at the half open notebooks, and her very own spiky scrawl filled her vision. *Her* notebooks, not Sybil's. Sybil had never been a writer.

The swirling tingle had almost flooded her entire body now, and, though she felt quite strange, the most intense relief washed away the emotions in her mind but the love she had for her sister. She gave her twin the most blissful smile that had ever turned her lips.

"Sybil," she breathed, and the tingle overtook her. She let go of her world and floated away.

Sybil Careen sat alone in her living room, paralyzed after staring into her dead sister's vivid green eyes and clutching Sora Careen's last penned words.



*Our Door is Always Open * Marisa Temple*

Pressure

Adam Schultz

the
 incessant
 pounding
 to pound is
 to breathe is
 to live
 we contemplate
 WHY we are
 WHAT we do
 WHERE we go
 understanding that
 WHY is where we go
 WHAT is why we are
 WHERE is what we do
 shoulders are tired
 hoisting burden
 beyond breaking
 now sinking
 tears are next
 crushing weight
 undue stress bartered
 with undue behavior
 get what is deserved
 they all get
 what is deserved



*Musical Persuasion * April Williams*

GOLD, LEAD EPIPHANY
BASED ON THE LIFE OF THOMAS S. FOSTER
BORN: 1843 DIED: 1862

Joseph Brannon

I never understood much about what the sergeant was yelling. I reckoned we'd done something wrong, as it was with our group; someone usually was doing something wrong. That's just how it'd been, at least, since I joined. The 20th Alabama, that's what it read on my papers, which was to be this unit I assumed—that old sergeant never did say it enough. Before now, and then before I was enlisted, I was just a boy living with my family in Coffee County, Alabama. They say that the army turns you into a man, and since I don't feel no different, I must have been a boy back then.

My father was a planter. This, I guess, makes me a planter. We had a farm, though I was told it was small...never did know what a big farm looked like. I had five sisters, one brother, and as I was told by a friend of mine, was lucky enough to have two parents. He told me that on my birthday, when I turned seventeen. I remember that day like the sun rise from my dingy old window—I loved watching the sun rise. We gotten

I didn't want to plant OKra

into a fight, as I reckon boys should, and he got mighty distressed. He told me that I was spoiled, and lucky to have two healthy parents. I never saw him after that.

Well, there was something to those words that day, like something old Mr. Norman would talk about by the market. "Karma," he'd say, with that loud, bellowing voice which stunk of rotten tomatoes and whiskey, "karma is the only true force of nature." I never knew what he meant.

The year after that, my mother died. I think I knew what my friend meant after that, but I can only wonder. Everyone would tell me that she'd gone off to a better place, even after I cared to hear such things. Father didn't say that though, just got real quiet, and stayed that way. I always went to church, but I never really fancied myself to be the religious type. I saw her get buried, so I imagine that's where she is now; I don't know about no heaven or afterlife.

After that, I enlisted. I didn't know much, and I still don't, but I knew how to aim and shoot a gun, so I reckoned I was needed. I didn't know what the war was about, or why so many folks never returned home, but what I did know was that I didn't want to plant okra for the rest of my life.

The sergeant had stopped yelling at us then, and camp was made. Of course, there were a lot of us, and that made setting up something more of a spectacle than normal. Hundreds of faded green tents went up, and a lotta' fire-pits would be dug and lit within the hour. I'd been in for almost a year up to that point, and I still didn't know where we were. One of my friends, Jonathan, said something about Vicksburg over cards, which sounded right to me. I'd swear I heard it before, and someone else made mention of a port.

The next day we woke like normal, packed up like normal, and marched like normal, but something was off. There was a smell of mourning in the air, if that makes any sense. I don't think I can describe it; it's like that feeling that you've lived something a hundred times, but still wonder what's going to happen, and you're hungry and thirsty, and you feel empty, and your mouth gets real dry. We marched in silence like this for half the day 'till the port came into sight. There the sergeant stopped us. This is where he yells more, usually, but he didn't. He shouted, but there was no anger.

He told us that this was Port Gibbons. He told us that it was an important area for the Confederacy, and that we had no choice but to control it. I didn't know about any of that—all I knew is that it meant I had to kill someone.

We marched on the port, and ranks were prepared, but then everything got real cold. I don't know what happened, but I could hear gunfire. It's that funny thing that happens when things get real tense real quick, and bursts like over ripe squash. Our men began shouting, and shots were exchanged. I pointed my gun and fired, but with all of the gun smoke I couldn't see if I hit something, and with all the noise, I couldn't hear if one of my friends got hit either. I didn't know what to make of all this. It was the first time I'd ever felt completely lost.

Something happened, and the sergeant gave the command to charge. Someone screamed something about one of the groups, either ours or theirs, was retreating, and I wasn't running in the other direction, so I guess we were pushing them back. When I could feel the cobblestones under my feet, I got this really funny feeling about that port.

We were sent in by troop, flanking in different directions. In the port, they were held up, and another stand off began. This time I could see them die. I watched a man get shot and drop to the ground. The man beside me, much older than me at the time, cheered that his shot was good, and reloaded. Then he was shot as well. I stopped everything and just watched the events as they happened and wondered, for the first time, why were we doing all of this? What was the point? It all seemed a waste, and my mother always said, "Waste not." I guess it was seeing that man get shot and die—watching him drop to the ground like that and not get back up. My mouth got real dry again.

They began pulling back deeper into the port. Our sergeant screamed for pursuit, and we gave it to him. Despite my confusion, I knew how to follow orders, even if it had been all I'd been doing since I joined. One of my friends put it in a way that I reckon I understood pretty well, "They don't pay us to think, they pay us to fire."

Well we charged, but I fell behind. An uprooted cobblestone grabbed my ankle and tripped me up, and I watched everyone advance around me. I just laid there, looking up at the sky that seemed so gray and distant, playing dead I guess. I didn't feel much like going on; I felt sick.

I was struck by something, and a man from the north jumped on top of me. He was fierce and bloody, and mad in the eyes, and stared into mine. He smiled nervously. I did nothing to stop him, as I felt too weak too. I don't know why I would anyway. I felt weird and out of place, like it was all a dream.

He held a pistol to my head. I could feel the cold copper against my skin and his trembling on top of me. He

for the **REST OF MY LIFE**

was frightened, even though I wasn't able to fight back. He was afraid, I imagine, because he felt

the same thing I did. It was something in the air. He and I both knew he didn't have to kill me; we knew it wouldn't have mattered in the end. It was just the way of war, and the way of mankind, at least that's how it appeared to me. I'm no worldly man, but I guessed that's what war is about.

His face went shocked, and he flinched. I saw warmth when he opened his eyes again, like compassion, like he was going to say "I'm sorry." He looked just like my old friend who told me I was lucky—just like he looked before he ran off. And then there was a distant echo, and I looked back at the sky that was fading away from my eyes. The man began crying, and the sky disappeared, and I said, "Where is my mother?" He replied, but I didn't hear him. I could smell blood, and taste smoke, and see black, and felt absolute. I never understood much about feeling absolute...



*"Zhang Was Here." * Naomi Stauffer*



*Catching Rain * Marisa Temple*



*Trick or Treat - Model Rendering * Thomas Austin*



DAVID * Dennis Osborn



Into the Fire * Christina Marie Ellis



*Can I Have Your Number? * Naomi Stauffer*



Sellout * Matthew Kemp

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Adam Schultz

I did try to include my thoughts on having to start my stubborn old pickup in the middle of the night, as well as the eerie feeling of driving on an empty bypass and parking in an empty parking lot. I'm no Hemmingway. I fail to fit all my details in ten word sentences. But I am a writer, perhaps on assignment by the fates. Take the gruel with the gravy they say, but so far I've completely eluded the gravy at my tender age of twenty. Frost once said that writers write in ignorance from fifteen to twenty-five but he couldn't get properly published until he was forty so screw him. I don't write about farms or dead children. I only write what I know and then I pervert it with my amateurish, cold narratives. That's probably why I'm walking down the "Personal Care" aisle to clock in to my first shift as an overnight supermarket shelf stocker instead of walking down the left-most aisle of Radio City Music Hall to accept the Nobel Prize for literature.

"Excuse me."

A man, shambling like an old tramp and dressed just about the same, assaults my nose with liquor-laced, lava-hot breath, pickled by neglect of brush and paste. Yellow and broken teeth, barely attached to their moorings, hang between chapped lips bent in a sheepish grin.

"May I help you," I ask, not yet on duty and burning with the desire to knock out his remaining bicuspid.

"Where are your provalactisms?"

I stare at him, slack jawed, taking in his stained gray wife-beater and tattered maroon shorts, his hairy thighs entirely too visible.

"Pardon?"

"Your provalactisms," he affirms, nodding sagely. Now, I have at this point no earthly idea what this hobo is talking about so I stall. I rack my brain as I stare back at him. What in the hell is a provalactism?

My idea bulb turns on. "Oh, you mean prophylactics?"

"Naw, I mean provalactisms."

"Sir, I don't know what-"

"Rubbers! Your damn rubbers, son!" he shouts, rolling his eyes at my ignorance.

I take him aboard the HMS Condom and point to the shelf he's standing next to. His face still contorted with rage at my inability to understand his strange language, he turns to gaze at a true wonder of consumerism. A veritable schmorgasboard of condom sizes, shapes, and colors, all organized by brand in neat little columns, meets his eyes. He grins like a boy about to buy a slingshot. Fun, but dangerous.

"Thank ya," he grumbles as I walk away, leaving him to the hard task of figuring out just what form of debauchery fits just what kind of condom.

I HOPE I GET OVERTIME FOR THIS.

