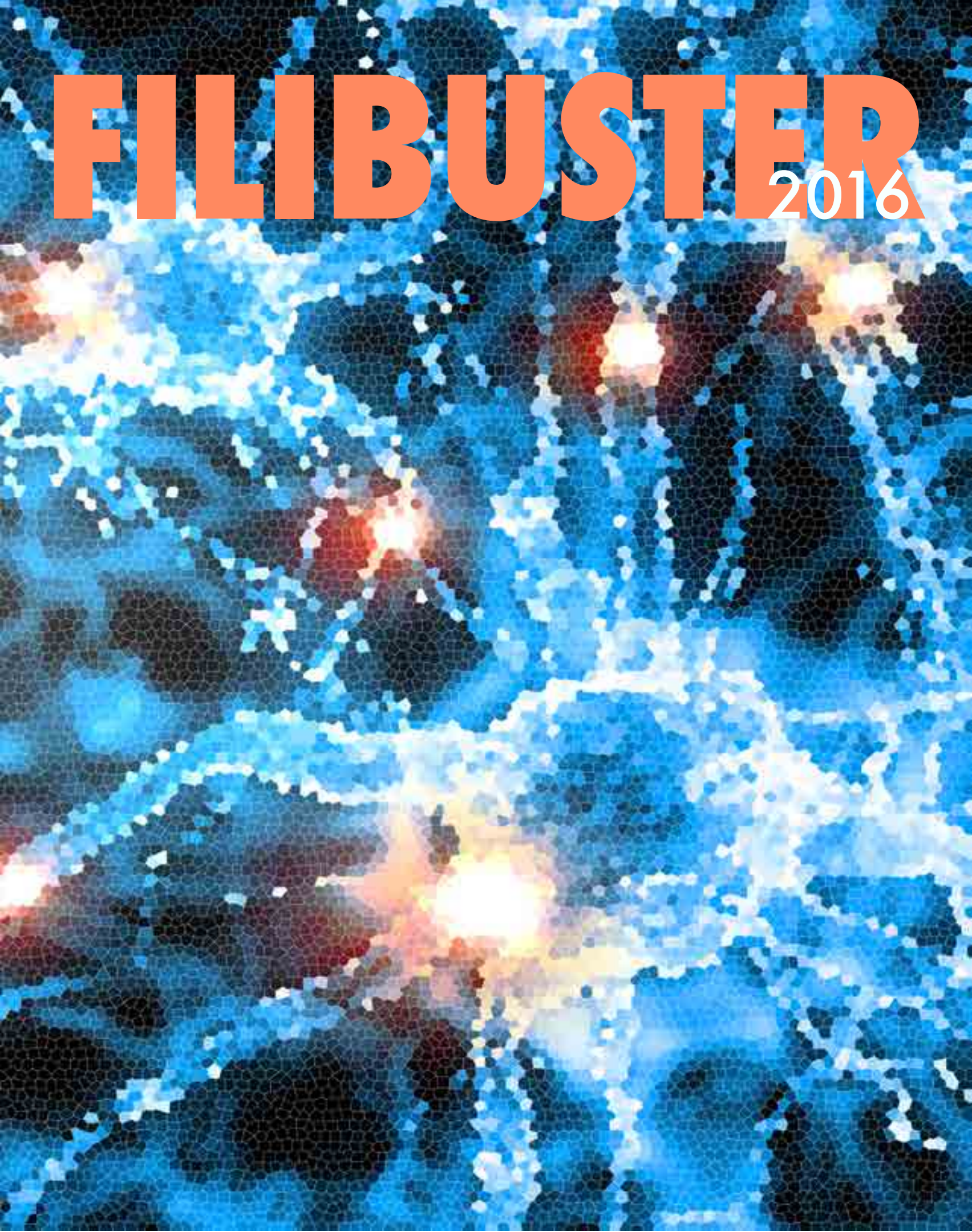


FILIBUSTER

2016



EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to Filibuster 2016!

Our "Speculative Fiction" theme this year focused on the idea of the fantastical, or things that reach for a higher platform than the mundane. This type of fiction generally encompasses fantasy, horror, and science fiction. However, the goal was to do more than simply extract the elements of genre fiction and, instead, channel the "fantastical" into all types of poetry and fiction — without the constraints of labeling works based on category.

I think we did quite well achieving that goal here.

Through the help of Filibuster's co-editors — Juanita Barrett, Sabrina Blaum, Kim Leifer, Matthew Shoemaker, and Leslie Rewis — and, of course, Dr. Klevay, we have managed to continue the legacy of the Filibuster. Our talented graphic designer, Megan Stanley, assiduously worked on making the magazine look professional, bright, and energetic, three words that describe both the 2016 Filibuster and herself. Without the aforementioned people, this year's edition would not have been possible.

Thank you all.

Editor-in-Chief

Jacob M Lambert

IN MEMORY OF ALEXANDRA JURUŚ—SHOEMAKER

“Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything.” — C.S. Lewis

Alexandra Juruś-Shoemaker passed away on December 29, 2015. She graduated from AUM in the spring with a Bachelor of Arts in English, Magna Cum Laude, and was a member of a number of honor societies, notably, the national English honor society, Sigma Tau Delta, national leadership honor society, Omicron Delta Kappa, and the honors society Phi Kappa Phi.

In addition to her academic achievements, in the spring of 2013 she participated in the 5 in 48 film contest put on by the Capri, in which she and her team won first place, and her work was screened at the Capri. The next year she entered and won the Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald museum’s annual short story contest for her story entitled “Dust After Rain,” and the year after that she presented this story at the annual Sigma Tau Delta conference.

And as well, these last few years, she struggled against mental illness. However, even as this occurred, her fortitude did not fade, but increased. She became an outspoken advocate for mental health awareness. During mental health awareness day and week, she would stand on the campus Quad, for hours at a time, often by herself, holding signs, handing out ribbons, talking to anybody who stopped to listen, and at anybody who didn’t. It was important to her that others who also faced these challenges know that they were not alone, and that it was okay to open up. She turned a challenge in her personal life into an opportunity to help others. In the face of adversity, she carried in her an unconquerable light, and she met whatever life put in her path with unparalleled grace.

Her example is one that inspired those who knew her, and she will be forever missed.

ALEXANDRA JURUŚ—SHOEMAKER

Poetic Self-portrait: I Am From



I am from mud pies and candles,
from Epsom salt and Neosporin.
I am from the little brick house with the gray steps,
and the fireflies caught in mason jars,
in the warm, orange glow of dusk,
among the dandelions and overgrown weeds
that bloom with tiny, delicate, pink blossoms.

I'm from Christmas dinners with Mom
at that old Chinese place downtown,
from the bitter taste of her hot chamomile tea,
and the marshmallows we roasted over a gas stove.

I am from the Holy Spirit
and from sing His name on high,
from the glimmer of streetlights,
their reflection staining the rainy streets at nightfall.



I'm from the blistering sun of summer,
and the cold hardwood floors of winter,
from the song for my grandmother
that my grandfather burned,
and the poems that my mother lost.

I am from the never boxes, forgotten,
never opened, never mentioned,
my father's moth-eaten sweatshirt, his last letters
and the school pictures he never saw.

I am from the childhood books that shaped my identity,
packed away but ever-present,
housing creatures born from ink,
from mousetraps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness,
from dryads, and jabberwocks, and gnome kings.

VISUAL ART

7

SUMMER SINGING

Bobae Kim

8

A FALL OF PASSION

Jennifer LyAnne Peacock

9

AUSTIN GRAFFITI PARK

Meredith Foresee

10

AUSTIN CITY SKYLINE

Meredith Foresee

11

INTO THE NIGHT I TRAVEL

Sarah Sterling

POETRY

13

POLLOCK'S CHAOS

Kim Leifer

14

PSILOCYBIN

Matthew Shoemaker

16

THE WORLD'S FIRST FULLY FUNCTIONAL HOMICIDAL ARTIST

James Prenatt

I ONCE

Jerieieissa Graves

17

DARK THOUGHTS

Tye Devore

UNSTEADY IN THOUGHT

Matthew Johnson

18

DEFINE:LOVE

Adrienne Spivey

19

DISCOVERED

Taylor Iman

TIME BOMB

Carson Craft

20

TIME CAN BE PATIENT

Andrew Barnett

21

I AM A LEAF

Ashley Callahan

22

SUNDAY MORNING

TeNikka Roberts

23

FIGUREHEAD

Jonathan McNulty

24

NOT A MOMENT LONGER

Caitlin Celka

25

FOREST OF FAULTS

K. Jordan James

26

HOKUSAI AND I

Caitlin Celka

27

MOONLIGHT LADY

Jerieieissa Graves

FICTION

28

**TALKING TO THE
MANED WOLF**

Matthew Johnson

29

JULIET

Leslie Rewis

30

ROBBY

Amy DeCal

31

CHILD OF THE CORNFIELD

James Prenatt

A LIAR'S SONG

TeNikka Roberts

32

ON BRUEGHAL'S *ICARUS*

Matthew Shoemaker

33

DOING TIME

Taylor Iman

34

I WOULD LOVE...

Camille Cain

38

WHILE YOU SLEEP

Juanita Barrett

43

BLINDSIDED

Sabrina Blaum

47

DESIREA WALKER ROACH

Cailín Gafa

49

WRONG SIDE OF HEAVEN

Heather Ralson

51

REYTS

Lakevia Davis

54

LETHAL LIPGLOSS

Megan Stanley

55

UNITED AT LAST

Sarah Sterling

56

PICATSSO

Erin Mills

57

REFLECTIVES PAST

Sarah Sterling

58

SUNSET OVER MONTGOMERY

Juanita Barrett

59

A STILL AND QUIET CONSCIENCE

Jennifer Johnston

VISUAL ART

VISUAL ART



SUMMER SINGING | Bobae Kim



A FALL OF PASSION | Jennifer LyAnne Peacock



AUSTIN GRAFFITI PARK | Meredith Foresee



AUSTIN CITY SKYLINE | Meredith Foresee



INTO THE NIGHT I TRAVEL | Sarah Sterling

POETRY

POLLOCK'S CHAOS

Kim Leifer

This stylized sonnet was inspired by
Jackson Pollock's painting, *Mural*.

you

spread

your

demons on the page and make them dance in

shadows

blue

and black.

the sun scorched

devils

reach and grasp and

tear and

snake

their

claws entwined throughout your mind

and stun

your

soul.

You were so bright so free and wild

your colors jumped and played. They

lusted

for that tease and tempt and torment

you reviled. Such

Chaos scattered inhibitions

more

you're creating visual

cacophony with inhibitions swirling out

your

rage

you beg the

monsters

please to let you be

you close the door and try to lock that cage

your cravings have you in their

thrall

your hate your mind your

Chaos touches all.

PSILOCYBIN

Matthew Shoemaker

Bitter Bitter Bitter

the dread neon mushroom taste

is m e

l

t

-ing

you/I/we

become Bodies become Bones be

f l

-come

u i

d

-this chair/world/self/mind

a

sink-

ing

w r a p p e d

a r o u n d

feeling

—! a YELLOW¹

snap!

then—

mo -tion²

mus -ic³

-lights⁴ and

(it is looking at me as it—⁵)

WAILING⁶!

(laughter⁷)

then—

breathe

in (andoutand in and out and in

and out and in and

out and

i n)

and rise

s o f t

-ly

back

to life.

¹breaking-lightning sound
and then the ground—is gone
falling through scintillating spirograph eyelids
to ancient antediluvian altars and
stone beast communion whispers it says
—“The Door is open. The Door is open.” Then a

²—the tidal push of speakers
drowning crushing round in my mouth
blue on my tongue deep in my lungs
then bursting out of my puppetstring limbs and I
dancedancedancedancedance to the

³In a silent room
—ear to the ground I can hear the SPHERES
Medieval divine resonant crystal celestial chorus
music in my atoms (there are no words)
I am unmade (the BEAUTY of it)
Nothing left, only—————

⁴flashing out of time. I see—
A mighty titan dips his hands into the flat circle.
—Pulls out clocks and eats eternity.
—His teeth are grinding bloody gears.
—He is chewing on my life. He is, he is

⁵slithers from the Void—great terror thing—it is
a thousand kaleidoscope naked sexbodies,

writhing
It knows—It knows! All secrets all lusts
It is sharptooth smiling siren songsinging
But CHRIST!, O CHRIST!
—is my sword!—is my shield!—is my soul!
—————and it is gone,

⁶as I hold it, watch it
vomiting screaming Muse-blood on the page
I hold my pen like a lash and whip-crack
words across empty space
But the thing is mad—it is mad
It is chaos screeching

⁷and nausea and nausea
I am stomachheaving
sicksicksicksicksicknonononononotnow
and the man with the big hair only
laughs
and reaches out—out of my brain—out of my face
to gentle me and we get in his
Nite-Brite Rasta space ship
and we are love and fly away

She wears American-Tit lingerie.
Says things like, “Let me lick that athletic sweat
wet ‘til I choke,

THE WORLD'S FIRST FULLY FUNCTIONAL HOMICIDAL ARTIST

James Prenatt

She wears American -Tit lingerie.

Says things like, "Let me lick that athletic sweat

wet 'til I choke,

watch you drool.

She whispered in my ear:

"The answer to the question

is the question to the answer"

I ONCE

Jereieissa Graves

and,

"Boy, you gotta cut yourself some slack.

Gather around as I tell you this —

About a bond that no longer exists

Cut from your womb, I was given life —

The one you almost took with a knife.

Your problems are too great for me to solve,

My love for you is now blocked by a wall.

Never could I love you ever so tender.

I lost you on the twenty sixth of December.

Portrayed as a true woman, loyal, my best friend,

I once called you mother but never again.

DARK THOUGHTS

Tye Devore

Dark thoughts weigh heavy
Like an albatross hanging
Off my young shoulders.

UNSTEADY IN THOUGHT

Matthew Johnson

When I have time to sit and stare a while,
These multitudinous reflections rise.
And some bring back the fondest type of smile.
While others rend my thoughts with foul surprise
Those utter sink holes seem to always grow,
As seconds drag us strongly by the wrist.
Internal: there is not a place to go.
Awake or dreaming: in a constant triste.
Although I focus on those thoughts; so few,
Those brilliant crimson images of life,
Can I feel fire dulled by drops of dew?
These ever-present drops make sadness rife.
Through good and bad, one scene will always stand.
Let's make snow circles as you hold my hand.

DEFINE:LOVE

Adrienne Spivey

Is this love?

This sickness?

I thought love was the princess and the prince.

Kiss the frog and make your life more than an existence.

Not crying on the bathroom floor,

Contemplating death behind locked doors,

Wondering if life will ever be more.

Is this love?

This cancer?

I was told that love was happily ever after.

Wish upon a star, then start a new chapter.

Not covering up puffy eyes,

Constantly asking why,

Grasping at straws just to feel alive.

Is this love?

This hell?

I didn't think love was full of doubt.

The anxiety bleeding you out.

I wanted love to be sugary sweet.

My dream man to come sweep me off my feet.

My demons to finally admit defeat.

Is this love?

Or is this death?

DISCOVERED

Taylor Iman

In the vastness of it all

through the galaxies

while the axis rotated

as the sun burned

despite cloud cover

during the confusion of time

You managed

to find me and

set me

Free.

TIME BOMB

Carson Craft

Society is like a clock,

In the way changes are made.

Just as the hands travel from 12 to 12,

History repeats itself with new taboos.

As a ticking clock cuts silence,

Self-proclaimed renegades slice the norm –

Surely the first of their kind.

An identical hour begins,

Same as it ever was.

TIME CAN BE PATIENT

Andrew Barnett

To take the time to keep inside your mind
Is very hard when you just want to shout!
But time and time again you seem to find
That patience tells what life is all about.

If time is pain and hard for minds to bare
Then you should look for options made for
peace
Or maybe look for those who can have care
And they will find a way for pain to cease.

Today is perfect for your plan to start
But please be careful when you make your way;
Be sure that you will find inside your heart
The tasks will soon be done to end the day.

No time to wait today's the day to go
But time will wait for you to start to grow.

I AM A LEAF

Ashley Callahan

I am one small leaf upon a family tree, yet when a leaf falls now and again, the tree continues to grow.

I am my parents' loving daughter, a forgiving sister, and devoted friend from birth until the end.

I am the sass of my grandmother, the tenaciousness of my mother, and the silent thoughts of my father.

I am the quiet, yet I am the storm.

The pain of loss and the cruelty of others tear into my heart

And yet my heart astonishes me how it does not burst.

The love and care that I receive help keep it strong.

My rage and anger are less seen but are as turbulent as a thunderstorm.

If I could show you what's in my heart, it would fill the sea.

I shall laugh and smile or weep and mourn just as you would do.

Morning dew and sunrises let me know God has blessed me anew,

So I may find my home in the vibrant colors of

fall, and all the time they beckon to me.

Come walk under my rainbow of colors and lay upon my blades of grass,

Feel my crisp cool breeze push the clouds above for someone else's eyes to see.

Beauty of nature wraps itself around me in a gentle embrace.

I am not just one moment.

I am much more; I am parts given to me by nature, family, and life but all make me ... me.

SUNDAY MORNING

TeNikka Roberts

You are like Sunday morning, refreshing
Cotton filled skies to impress me
Smells of fresh buttermilk biscuits in the air
Letting me know the day would be fair

My Sunday paper, I wait all week for you
Reading all your details and comics too
Every part not needed
But for you, I take my time to read it

Like getting dressed for church
Finding the right dress is an endless search
You are my communion
Body and blood, union

I'll pay my tithes for your tenfold
Smiles that reach my soul
Your words are my Bible
Your eyes won't let my mind be idle

You are home where I belong
Warm, embracing, and strong

Wrap me in your blanket
Monday, I don't think I'll make it

FIGUREHEAD

Jonathan McNulty

A maiden's face,
So fair to me,
Her gaze parting
The deepest blue sea,
Her beauty I can scarcely take,
My heart, red surf, churns in her wake,
Such rich, dark hair,
As soft as down
Abyssal eyes
of familiar brown,
Her mind so keen!
Her voice so gentle,
She cares for, and nurtures,
this love transcendental.
By the Sun and the Moon,
Is our course sure and plotted,
I'm bewitched by her so,
This sailor besotted.
As we travel together to exotic shores,
She murmurs to me
"My love, I am yours."

NOT A MOMENT LONGER

Caitlin Celka

I could see the foggy shore getting closer
and hear men shouting a language I couldn't
understand.

The lights along the beach were brilliant and
glistened across the water,
like we were sailing to heaven.

My family was getting more anxious by the
second

until our excitement engulfed us.

This was it — this was the moment we waited our
entire lives for.

As I stepped onto dry land, I wept.

I never knew what it was like to be free until that
moment.

This was the moment when the chains fell off —
when doubt and fear were pushed aside,
when the captive was released —
the bird escaping its cage.

We were made for this moment.

FOREST OF FAULTS

K. Jordan James

Self-effacement is like uprooting a tree —
Not with a convenient tool, but with your bare
hands:
The work is dirty, hard, exhausting,
Seemingly unrewarding,
Only so much can be dug in one effort;
The dirt cakes under your nails,
People see it, you see it, it's revolting;
You try to wash your hands, rest,
But there can be no real rest until the job is done;
The roots on the top soil are easily dug around.
Progress — perhaps it's not as hard as you
thought;
Then, you realize, from under that root
Two more are revealed;
The earth gets harder, more stubborn
So you get harder, more stubborn;
The focus, the dedication, the sleepless nights,
The removal becomes an addiction;
All site of everything else is lost
The roots' unearthing is everything;
Friends and family don't understand
And why would they, on the surface

All seems right, fun and play
You toil for nothing, wasting your days;
And when the work is done,
The tree is still there, and now,
There are more and more roots;
Digging and digging, washing and resting,
time, like the dirt, crumbles around;
And when you've finally loosened all the earth
The tree, the thorn in your earth, ready to go
You realize: you're too old —
To surmount such a thing takes a Herculean
youth
You're feeble bones, knotted and brittle,
Taxed from the years spent digging and digging;
The strength to move such a thing is long gone
And, by some grace of a storm,
If the tree is knocked over,
There it is, another, and another,

Everywhere you turn a tree;
When one realizes they are a forest of faults
What can one do but dig, and dig, and dig?

HOKUSAI AND I

Caitlin Celka

Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave* inspired this poem.

We were given all of Nature and
so often we turn our backs on her.
She knows when her monstrous tides
violently crash, making the poor ships
below struggle to continue sailing.
She's aware that her great waves
of emerald destroy the homes of thousands.
And she knows when her winters
are so cold the hands of men crack
like glass shattering across tile floor.
Her blueblack winters and seas
make her who she is.
She's indifferent.
One day the mountains and
the seas will become one.
The waves will calm and all the cold
in the world will melt.
The Great Sphere will go up in flames and fire
will engulf all of what was given to us.

But Nature and I will not fear.
She will soon cease to exist,

for her Maker will call her home.
And with my Compass in my grasp, I will
see the Light ahead.
My ship will keep sailing out past
the horizon and into the open
floodgates of Heaven.
"Well done good and faithful servant,"
the voice of God will say to me.
I was made for this — I was made to come home.
The mystery of our God is done — It is finished.
There is no turning back.

MOONLIGHT LADY

Jereieissa Graves

Here in my heart lives a woman honest and true —

If you wanted a falling star I'd catch it for you.

I'll ride ten thousand days and ten thousand nights

To have one moment with you in the moons light.

No living eye of human being shall tear us apart

For only we decide if love no longer lives in our hearts.

So why do I write to tell you such things?

Life can change in an instant, who knows what tomorrow may bring.

I'm not here to change your mind or persuade you in another direction,

I'm here to love you with my unconditional affection.

TALKING TO THE MANED WOLF

Matthew Johnson

Red, he is a placid wildfire.
The black line jars his curled back
A white-tipped tail fans dreamy desire,
Then the ears perk, as if under attack.
His head rolls around to look.
The scanning coal of his eyes
Sees me, the friendly crook.
He's no longer surprised.
Now, as a greeting,
His tail thumps the ground.
Our happy, sleepy meeting
Was nearly stolen by my sound.

JULIET

Leslie Rewis

Juliet,

she was all of ours.

Splitting time between three houses,
she belonged to four generations —
connecting the first to the fourth.

She cavorted between our affections,
using the same tiny trail
all the way to Granny's stoop,
her final resting place.

She had a lion's gruff, was as strong as an ox,
hit by a car, survived four times,
but in the end,
it was her heart that gave out.

Pop promised to bury her right
near where she buried her biscuits.

They all agreed — she was the last we would
have.

Irreplaceable.

ROBBY

Amy DeCal

Frozen stiff —
Feeling all the hearts in the room racing —
While the Man,
who, like a bull through a red cloak,
welcomed himself in,
screaming about money and dope,
waving that heavy metal in his hand at us.

Robby was brave.
He reached to his side
to grab his own metal piece —
it didn't make it out
before the bullets made it in.
The Man snatched from the table only
a broken phone and ran away.

Motion finds us again,
taking towels,
applying pressure.
Then the sirens begin.

CHILD OF THE CORNFIELD

James Prenatt

holds his daddy up by the index finger.
A light shines in his blue eyes.
How could he be anything but innocent?
Wouldn't hurt a fly, I bet.
S is for superb,
S is for save us from our sins.
Give us this day our daily dose
of red wind. Feel the whoosh of hope.
People don't like to look up.
They need someone to look up to.
It's a bird,
it's a plane,
it's a virgin born beauty
in the shape of an angel
with no wings.
The myth, not the man.
Not Earth's God, but close.
God is green.
Jesus is blue and yellow and red,
demi-god farmboy given free will:
them and you or just them or just you.
Forsaken by his father to move Earth's core.

So give them what they want.
Give them save us from this shock doctrine.
S is for hope.
S is for so what does hope amount to?

A LIAR'S SONG

TeNikka Roberts

Everything is fine
Hiding like groundhogs in Spring —
Lies to mask the pain

ON BRUEGHAL'S *ICARUS*

Matthew Shoemaker

Poets have remarked on the lazy scene
with the tragedy — epic but unnoticed — in the
corner.

The ploughman minding his work,
the ship minding its path.
They would have us believe
our suffering is our own,
ignored by the world.

But — O Muses! — remind us
of the cloud-laureled father,
architect, inventor, wing-maker,
just out of frame.

Not even a hand
reaching down.

He sees his son:
Caught in the crushing waves,
plunging naked into the blue,
a life — his hope — scattered
with feathers in the wind.

He has forever on the canvas

a front-row bird's eye view
to those last fleeting moments
before the death of his son, his boy.

But Brueghal leaves us the languid view
full of those who don't look,
those with no stake.
He does not paint upward
to break the pastoral scene,
for there flies Daedalus,
screaming.

DOING TIME

Taylor Iman

The Prison Clock on the wall is merciless.

ticks despite tears

tocks despite appeals —

He decides your fate.

numbers of us, pleading silently

when we are here — move slow

when it is time to go — grant us more.

we humble ourselves to You.

He does not care about your child,

or that your father is dying,

Even that your sister needs you.

you belong to Him forever more.

for the Prison Clock on the wall is merciless

and no matter the good you now do,

unfortunately, for you

He decides your fate.

I WOULD LOVE...

Camille Cain

I would love to buy property anywhere I can easily afford and be welcomed by my neighbors.

I would love to know I am receiving the same quality education as non-minorities across this great land.

I would love to be able to eat anywhere I choose to.

I would love to be able to stay anywhere I choose to.

I would love to be able to visit anywhere in America or any other country I choose to.

I would love to be able to play golf anywhere.

I would love to know about my heritage and why my legs turn so creamy beige in the winter. It's hard to go back because all of my great-grandparents were slaves and it gets muddled before that.

By the way, where did your ancestors come from?

I would love to know why I love jazz, gospel, South African and Indian rhythms and bagpipes and Celtic music.

I would love to trace my family roots to the "old country."

I would love to know why the language, traditions and religions of my "dominant" culture were stripped from us as we were forcibly brought to the Americas.

What was the religion of my people anyway?

I would love to know why it is easier to glare at me in a store with all of the exasperation of me being in your way when a simple "excuse me" would suffice.

I would love to shop in an exclusive mall (or any mall for that matter) without sales staff coming out of the woodwork to service me and get me out of there as quickly as possible, to make sure

I don't take anything unpaid and so your other customers won't see me in there.

I would love to purchase a home and/or hundreds of thousands of acres of property for logging and farming without worrying about whether I am paying a fair price or worrying about the "knights of the night" killing me, and my destroying my property.

I would love to farm with you side by side.

I would love for each of us to receive the same fair price for our crops and timber.

I would love to fellowship anywhere I choose, with anyone I choose and know I would be safe and that our united purpose is serving God and not man.

I would love to know my family and I will be safe, no matter where I am in this country and in this world.

I would love to be treated with respect. Not with guns, tasers, dogs, hoses, or spit.

I would love for you to talk to me and not at me. We can both learn and grow that way.

I would love to be viewed as an equal with goals, ideas and dreams for myself, and my family, and not be viewed as 3/5ths of a person.

I would love to know why I can't wear my natural hair freely, as ALL other cultures in the United States do.

I would love to know why all other cultures in America have been able to retain their language and traditions.

I would love to know my home will not be fire-bombed or a cross will be burned on my lawn.

I would love to know what really happened to Kendrick Johnson, Lennon Lacy and countless others.

I would love to be embraced as a full person, not just picking, choosing and duplicating many envied features i.e.: thick hair, full hips and lips, fuller noses breasts and tanned skin.

I would love to understand how you preach and teach love, respect and all but I am not welcomed into your church. Perhaps the God you serve is different from the one I serve?

I would love to better understand how you're welcomed into our churches, communities, schools, homes and jobs but the same is not only not reciprocated but great efforts are made to keep us out of every aspect of your lives.

I would love to understand why in 2015, so many efforts are being made to take voting rights away from minority American citizens.

I would love to know and understand what were your ancestors thinking as I look back at old photographs of lynch mobs and see the smiles, cheers and looks of sheer joy as my family hangs from the tree, is burned, or mutilated. As we conclude 2015, I can see things haven't changed much ...

I would love to know why you look at my culture with such hatred.

But I would love for you to look at me, not as your enemy, but to be able to call me friend.

FICTION

WHILE YOU SLEEP

Juanita Barrett

Hello there. Let me introduce myself before I tell my tale to you. I'm not intimidating by any means. I'm quite short by today's standards. I might be described as "pixie-ish." I'm observant; you'll never hear my voice. Oh, and red is my favorite color; it's so ... Christmassy. My name? I am Mr. Twinkle Peppermint, but you can just call me T.P.

My tale...It starts long ago before I worked in Administration. Back then, I was important. I was in the Scouting Department. Basically, it was long hours and many miles of travel every day, and absolutely no rest...at all. Thankfully, I only had to work one month like that. Boy, did I ever love it!

Then, the inevitable happened. I got too attached, and it all went bad from there. Now, I'm stuck here, reporting statistics and filing paperwork. It's punishment; I'm sure of that. You be the judge though. My boss...*the* boss...told me last week to tell my story—as a warning for others like me, and those like you.

My workplace was comfortable. Every day I had two jobs: observe and report. I was allowed to take some liberties—nothing too extreme, of course, and all in fun. It's for the kids, after all.

The first time I met the kids, they loved me. That first day is when they named me. Twinkle Peppermint. It's silly, I know, but they're only four. Twins. Bobby and Betty. I loved them too. That was the problem.

"Mommy, Mommy! He's perfect! He's just like in the book. I'm glad he is ours. Can we name him?"

"Yes, Bobby, you pick his first name and, Betty, you pick his last name. Think of a good one; it'll be with him the rest of his life."

My eyes were opened then; the first day on the job went well. I watched them all day. That night, while the house was silent, I began my journey north for the reporting part of my job. All good reports that first day; the newness wouldn't wear off in the first week.

With my first day's work complete, I could have a little fun. I remember seeing a delicious plate of decorated sugar cookies on the kitchen counter before I left. They were for a party the next day, but a couple wouldn't be missed — or six. Ahhh! What a wonderful sugar rush! Enough so that I passed out in a pile of crumbs. Bobby and Betty found me there the next morning.

"Twinkle ate *all* the cookies!"

"No, Bobby, look! He left two just for us!"

"Do you think he told Santa that we've been good?"

"What do you think he'll do tomorrow? I can't wait to see. Let's go play puzzles!"

Days passed. My twin charges were full of endless energy. They had a few behavioral mishaps,

but nothing to warrant losing their standing on the Nice List.

Slowly, presents began to pop up under the tree; I, always watching, knew what was hidden under the festive paper. Our family was well off this year. I wasn't going to benefit any except in knowing the joy they would experience the morning after my job ended.

The mounting happiness didn't last long. I wasn't prepared for it. The morning the twins found me enjoying a rendezvous with Barbie in a hot cocoa tub shattered my view of the kind I was instructed to watch. After the family left for work and day care, I relaxed in the hot tub a while longer.

Just as I dozed off, a cracking noise woke me. I watched the kitchen door frame splinter and then open. A stranger walked in; his eyes glided over me, then came to rest on the tree in the far room. He stealthily walked through the kitchen and began tearing paper off the gifts and throwing it aside.

I wanted to stop him, but I couldn't. By day my limbs are frozen; it's the law of my kind. I could only watch in horror as this *Grinch* sorted my family's presents for one another into two separate piles. His purpose finally dawned on me.

One pile held a Nikon camera, the newest model; diamond jewelry, studded with sapphires; an iPod Touch, loaded with songs; and, a Rolex watch. The other pile held stuffed animals for the twins, a tan goat and a pink unicorn; board books; and, a few noisy toys that they would love. He separated them by expense. Of course, a robber, a true Grinch! He escaped with our joy, undetected, and I could do nothing. His face burned in my snowflake-filled brain.

My family was devastated; so was I. They had

been violated, and while under my watch. Police came and took a report, but they had no evidence to chase. Neighbors had been working and had also been visited by the same Grinch. He was careful. The only witness sat silent and forgotten in a bath of marshmallows.

Fear forced the family to a relative's house for the rest of the week. They left me. It saddened me to be forgotten, but I was pleased at this development. I had a new mission, and I needed to be free of my job for a few days.

The first night I was alone I flew north with one room on my mind — the warehouse. The Technology guys stored all their extras there. I had heard of the special items guarded in this room, but one in particular held my interest that night. It was a device, much like an electronic book, that stored the faces and information of children from the naughty list through their adulthood until they ceased to exist.

The Boss uses it to check on those who, despite his yearly warnings, never progressed onto the good list. I think he feels like a failure, like somehow it's *his* fault they were never visited by him as children. *Their* Christmas came from their parents, nothing magical from him.

I needed that device to find an address for the face blazoned in my mind. I found my way to the warehouse easily enough, but upon entry I was immediately detained.

"What are *you* doing down here, Scout? This is restricted to you unless you have the proper documentation."

"I ... I do," I stuttered as I dug through my standard issue invisible backpack.

After finding the tattered piece of brown parchment, I shakily handed it to the guard. He perused it faithfully; it was his job after all.

Thankfully, I'm an observer. I spend my time always watching, even when I walk through the building to the Reporting Hall. A few trips ago, I stumbled across the unimpressive paper and picked it up. It was Papers of Admittance into the dungeons. I kept it, not thinking it would come in handy at all.

"I see you are in order, Scout. Be about your business and be quick about it! I don't trust your kind down here with your shifty little eyes, watching me."

"Yes, of course. I will be gone soon. Thank you, sir."

I felt him watching me as I tried to nonchalantly stroll toward my destination. I didn't want to draw any more attention to myself than necessary. It would hinder what I had determined must be done.

There! I saw the sign declaring "Warehouse" ahead and to my left. I entered and stopped. The room was cavernous and filled with so many of the magical devices our kind used regularly. I methodically began my search. I knew what the device looked like, but I didn't know where in the room it would be stored. I assumed it would be on some pedestal close to one of the aisles that wove aimlessly through the items.

Some of the things in the room were antiquated reminders of how others did it times long past, before my kind took over: balls that shone with images of children in their homes, ticker tapes that spouted out names of the naughty and nice, and mirrors that reflected the behavior of the young ones we watched now in their own homes. Everything was much more efficient now. We were spread out and could watch more children at once.

Other piles contained extra pieces of our current

devices, like my Tinsel 4.0 which contained all my magic. It is my lifeline, much like a mini-computer. The extra parts stored here were used by the Engineers to fix broken parts. The journeys north tended to be hard on most of our equipment.

Finally I saw it! My search was partly over. Now, all that was left was to find the face I hated. I booted up the device, and bright light covered my face. I flipped quickly through the images, so many images of naughty children who had grown into naughty adults. I never knew there were that many. I searched for hours with no luck. In the third hour, I spotted a familiar face. My fluffy blood boiled. Hatred coursed through my veins. I had his address, and I was very pleased with myself. I took a picture of the address with my Tinsel 4.0, then closed the book and left the room. I was done here.

I nodded to the guard on my way past. He didn't seem happy that I'd spent so much time down there, but since I'd had the proper paperwork, there wasn't anything he could do. I started my long journey south again, arriving just in time at my family home for the sun to peak over the horizon. I didn't even have time to have any fun, but that was okay; I didn't care. I curled up inside Betty's Barbie house to catch some shut-eye before night came.

Darkness fell that second night after the incident. I was free to complete the next stage of my mission. I pulled up the address on my Tinsel. It wasn't far, a few streets over, maybe. I would be there in no time at all.

A few minutes later, I was waiting outside. Adults stayed up later when they didn't have children in the house. I would have to wait longer in order to get in without being seen. I hid myself in an evergreen tree close to his window so that I could

watch him. My anger at him intensified when I saw him bring another load of stolen gifts into his house: flat screen TVs, more portable electronic devices, and even several pairs of shoes.

Soon he closed the blinds and the lights flicked off. It was time to make my move. Locked doors or windows are never a problem for my kind, thanks to the Technology Department. Their gadgets are unbelievable, by your standards, of course. We are too accustomed to them to be wowed anymore.

My Tinsel searched for the alarm code and disarmed it long enough for me to slip in and begin my work. Where should I begin? I wanted him to feel the pain my own family felt that day. Ah, yes, all the coveted gifts he had attained earlier in the day. That's where I would begin.

Daily I was allotted enough magic to make the journey north and south again. This day I wouldn't need that magic, so I used it elsewhere. I melted his new toys into puddles. When I was done, the floor resembled an ice skating rink. The slick swirls of plastic, glass and metal were beautiful to me. With my first job done, I hid close to the wall above the kitchen cabinets. It was dusty, so I knew he wouldn't look there. Then, I waited until morning.

His anger and horror were music to my ears. He searched for the cause of this phenomenon, but I was too clever. There was no one he could call. All of what he had there in his den had been stolen; and, on top of that, what would he tell them — that he woke up to find a melted sea covering the floor of his house? No, he had no one. He was scared; I could sense it in the air, so afraid that he didn't venture out to rob good citizens that next day.

The next few days continued this way. At night, he tried to stay awake, but I always outlasted

him. Maybe it was a little of magic that shuttered his eyelids each night. While he slept, I ventured out from my hiding place. I moved all of his glassware from the kitchen cabinets into the floor; he tripped and fell over them the next morning, receiving a nasty cut across his hand. I was proud of that — the pain I caused him. He spent the rest of that day getting stitches.

Another day I made his clothes vanish, down to the last pair of underwear. He checked the locks of his house, in the nude. I should have thought to send the blinds along with the clothes. He made makeshift clothes from paper towels just to get around the house. He didn't attempt to leave any that day either. I knew he couldn't go long without his clothes. The next night, new ones reappeared. Pink ones. With sparkles. A few of the shorter shorts even had "Fresh and Hott" or "Bootylicious" written across their backs. I was having fun.

The fun couldn't last forever. Eventually, I would be missed in Reporting. I needed to enact the last phase of my mission. I knew I would be stained. I would have to face the punishment. I didn't care anymore. My family was all that mattered, getting vengeance for them.

By now, my Grinch trembled nightly as he felt himself drifting off. He had nowhere to go. I was pleased that he was stuck there under my tortuous whims. The last night would be epic. I planned to break the one rule my kind was forbidden from breaking — being seen moving.

I didn't even have to wait for him to sleep. This plan could be carried out as soon as it was dark enough for me to move. The sun set, and I crept to the edge of my hiding place. There he was, sitting at the kitchen table, rocking and muttering to himself. I grinned, happy at the mess I had made of him. I checked beside me for my tool.

I had taken it one night and hid it here with me. Shiny like tinsel, but sharper than pine needles. It was bigger than me, but I had magic on my side. I pulled it to my side and leapt down onto the table in front of the shriveled beast of a man. His eyes widened.

"You don't know me," I said. "A week ago, you came into my family's house and ruined their Christmas. I've been here with you since then. Paying you back for hurting them."

He was speechless. It's not every day an eight-inch-tall elf jumps down onto your table. He checked his cup to see how much of the rum he had finished—not enough to be having hallucinations.

"Who ... What are you?"

"I'm Twinkle Peppermint. And I'm here to make sure you don't hurt anyone else again."

"What was in that rum?" he mumbled to himself.

I chuckled. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

He started to stand. The table corner caught his leg and he stumbled forward across it. I knew he wasn't drunk; he'd only had a few sips from his glass. Maybe the feeling was psychological. He steadied himself and glanced at me again; he rubbed his eyes, then squinted. I grinned wildly. He startled backward.

With that, I lunged. The blade caught him directly below his ear. I twisted hard, letting the magic guide my hand. Bright blood flowed down. It was red. *How appropriate*, I thought. *Merry Christmas to me*. And I smiled. My mission was complete. This Grinch wouldn't be climbing down from his mountain anymore to steal someone's Christmas. He wasn't going to die. No, I only wanted him to remember me. Before I left, I made sure to leave everything as if I had never

been there. All of these stolen gifts were restored. His clothes found their way back into his closet, and the pink clothes disappeared. Broken glasses were pieced together again and stored back in the cabinets where they belonged.

He told the police about a tiny stuffed elf who attacked him. Of course, they didn't believe him. The newspaper picked up the story the next day. That was part of my plan as well. The verdict was he did it to himself; the guilt of stealing Christmas got to him and he tried to kill himself. He was moved to a special hospital for observation. Unless he changes his story, he'll stay there for a long time. Even if he gets out of the mental hospital, he'll be convicted for burglary.

So, there you have it. My story. The reason I'm stuck here behind this desk. The reason I'll never see my beloved twins again. Do you see my reasoning behind what I did? I taught him a valuable lesson. He was naughty. There are so many naughty ones out there. The Boss didn't want my actions to set a precedent. He put me somewhere where I couldn't physically hurt a human again. My Tinsel is gone, and along with it, most of my magic. I can still move papers across the room, but no more flying or getting through locked doors. Life is boring now. I hate it.

For those of my kind, think of me. When you think you'll benefit from making contact with a human, with breaking the rules, don't do it. You'll end up like me. Humans, just remember, while you sleep, we are watching and reporting who is naughty and who is good. There will always be rogue ones among us, who *do* break the rules to correct *you*.

BLINDSIDED

Sabrina Blaum

"That's \$25.45."

Johnny pulls out a crumpled twenty dollar bill before digging into his pants pockets and fishing out an equally rumpled ten dollar note. "Here."

Ring up the purchase, the cashier hands Johnny a brown paper bag.

Kicking gravel up the dirt road, Johnny ambles toward Crescent Hill. "I'm so done with this crap," he mumbles, chugging at his bottle of Jack. "'I'll be better,' sure, right. 'I'll never do that again.' Does he really think I'm that thick?"

Sweat trickles down Johnny's back and his breath hitches, but he marches on, taking several sips along the way.

"Idiot! Really thinks he can keep doing this to me." Johnny stomps and fine orange dust flies up in disturbance.

Grimacing, Johnny sighs when he sees Davis Bridge up ahead. He flops down at the edge, his legs dangling free. He swigs a few more mouthfuls before hitting his chest with his fist. Focusing on the orange-red spiel of the sky, Johnny fails to notice a car pulling up.

"Johnny!" Robert rushes closer.

"What are you doing here? I thought you were at work." Johnny places the bottle on the ground.

"I was, but I'd gone back to pick up my prescription. I'd left it on the table and I saw your letter."

Robert clasps his hands in front of him.

"Ah, OK," Johnny nods before ripping out a weed budding between the last cobblestone and the concrete slab of the railing.

"You don't have to do this!" Robert treads closer.

"I know, but I can't..."

Slumping down next to Johnny, Robert sighs, "I don't want to lose you. Not like this."

"It's not always about what *you* want, Rob."

"I get that, and that's not what I mean. There has to be another way. Why don't we go back home and talk? We could make an appointment with a counselor, or let's sleep on it, and if you still wanna go through with it tomorrow, well... you can."

"Are you sure?" "Of course."

"You promise you'll let me go if I want to?"

"Yes."

"Bo—"

Robert laughs. "You haven't called me that in ages. Gosh, Johnny, do you remember when your dad took us fishing when we were eight?"

Johnny smiles and nods.

"That's when he wanted to bring along the girl that had just moved in next door, right? You were so upset, crying, 'Daddy, no, please don't take the girl.'"

Johnny chuckles.

"What ever happened to her?"

"Huh, beats me. I think she married the Thompson kid down the road."

"It had been a good trip. You had such luck. All fish would flock to your fishing pole, and you, remember what you did?"

"I dropped them back in the water."

"Man, your dad was so mad. Do you still know what you said when I asked you why you let them go?"

Johnny shakes his head.

"You said they looked so sad."

"They're just fish." Johnny throws a pebble into the water.

"Maybe, but Johnny, you've always felt so much. You were always so ... I dunno, like, you know how people feel?"

"So what?" Johnny yanks another weed from the soil.

"Nothing, I just ... Look. I know you're hurting, and I'm sorry for not always being there for you. I can be better, pay more attention and all. Just don't go." "It's not about you, Rob."

"I know that, and I'm not trying to make it about me. Come home, please." Robert's hand brushes Johnny's shoulder.

"How did you even find me?" He shrinks away. "I didn't just meet you, Johnny."

"OK. I come back home, but I don't wanna see a counselor. I just... I guess we can talk some more. But Rob, I don't think I'll change my mind. It's been too long and nothing ever changes."

"You'll never know." Robert pulls Johnny to his

feet. "Let's go. I parked right over there." Robert points at his police cruiser.

Plodding ahead, Johnny hugs his chest and kicks at the pebbles on the road.

Approaching the car, Robert's gaze scans their surroundings before shoving Johnny against the back of his car.

"What the hell?" Johnny shouts, his chest colliding with the car trunk.

"I'm sorry, John, but I can't let you do this." Robert loosens his cuffs and slaps them on Johnny's wrists.

"You promised!"

"Yeah, you should know by now that some promises are meant to be broken." Robert thrusts Johnny into the back of his car.

"Don't do this, man," Johnny begs. "It's not right. This is some kind of ... unlawful entrapment or something."

Robert ignores his friend and gets in the car. The door slams with a low thud and after fumbling the keys into the ignition, Robert snatches his radio.

"Dispatch, 10-56A, heading back now."

"Affirmative," a female voice responds amidst crackling static. "Let me go!" Johnny shouts, slamming his body against the door.

"Stop that!" Robert glowers at Johnny through the metal bars separating the back and the front of the car. "The doors are locked, and you're hand-cuffed. There's no way out."

"I hate you," Johnny chokes out.

Robert nods grimly.

"I'll never forgive you."

"I know." Robert starts the car.

The sun has begun to set and Robert turns on the lights as the last rays of sunlight make room for the night to fall.

The muffled mix of whines and curses spilling from Johnny's lips makes Robert shift in his seat.

The roads are empty and the wet ground reflects the car-lights as the police car silently turns onto Broad Street. Robert's jaw clenches and his eyes flicker between the road and the hunched form in the back of his car.

"Let me go, let me go, let me go..." Johnny chants.

Robert's knuckles turn white on the steering wheel. Licking his lips, he directs the car onto the freeway ramp.

Ten more minutes pass and sweat cumulates on Robert's neck and forehead. It drips down his temples into his eyes. He wipes his face before lowering the window and grunts as the humid August air spills into the car. Closing the window, Robert pulls at the collar of his shirt, cursing that the AC had chosen this morning to die.

Robert startles when Johnny kicks his backrest and hurls his body toward the window before banging his head against metal between them.

"Stop it! You'll hurt yourself!"

"What do you care?" Johnny's his foot once again finds the backrest of Robert's chair, while straining to free his hands from the shackles.

"It's reinforced with steel, John. You won't hurt me, only yourself."

"Stop calling me that." Johnny thumps the seat. He clenches and releases his fists, pain rushing

through him from the torn skin.

"I hate you," Johnny whispers.

Robert's eyes narrow. "Then we have something in common." He navigates the car into the driveway and stops.

"I'm sorry it came to this, Johnny."

"Whatever." Johnny lolls back and closes his eyes.

Shaking his head, Robert exits the car before rushing to the back entrance. He darts to the nurses' station.

"Is the patient in the car?" The nurse behind the desk asks. "Yeah, and he's livid."

"I'd imagine." She nods at two orderlies and the four of them leave the building, heading toward the police car.

Robert unlocks the car and drags a spitting and screaming Johnny out of the back seat.

"You can't do that! You have no right. This is imprisonment." Johnny loses steam when his gaze falls on the rest of the group standing next to the car.

"Please calm down, sir. Everything is set up and a doctor will see you tonight."

"I don't need no doctor and I wanna leave. You have no right to keep me here. I'm an adult, and I have rights!" Johnny struggles to escape but freezes when the orderlies seize his arms.

"We have every right to detain you, as you've put it, sir. You are a danger to yourself." "Why? Because I never want to see this brute over there again?"

"No. You're being admitted because you've

attempted to commit suicide by jumping off Davis Bridge," the nurse explains.

"That what he told you? He lies! I didn't want to kill myself."

"Then why were you sitting at the edge of that bridge?"

"I was thinking. The bridge is one of my favorite places, OK? I go there when I need to think and I wanted to sort out my life. Decide what I'll do next." "What about your suicide note?"

"What suicide note?"

"The one you left for Officer Morgan." She narrows her eyes.

"That wasn't a suicide note! God, damn it, let me go!"

"What about your hands?" She points at Johnny's bruised and bleeding wrists.

"I got angry and tried to get out of the cuffs."

"Because Officer Morgan didn't let you jump off the bridge?"

"No, lady, listen, I've told you. I didn't want to jump. I. Was. Thinking. Is all, OK? And I was angry because this *idiot* here detained me! He shoved me in his damn car and dragged me here."

"This is for your own safety. I'm sure everything will sort itself out. One of our doctor's will evaluate you and we will see." The nurse turns to Robert. "You still have the suicide note?" "Yeah, let me look." Robert returns to the car, rummaging through the inside. Joining the others, Robert's runs a shaky hand through his short cropped hair. "It's gone. I must have lost it or dropped it in the commotion."

"How convenient, Rob," Johnny scoffs.

"I'll look tomorrow. Maybe I'll find it once it's bright outside."

The nurse nods. "Let us go inside, we don't want to keep the doctor waiting." She strides ahead while the orderlies drag Johnny along. He cranes his head when they shuffle him up the stairs of the hospital to glare at Robert, who stands frozen, a small smile tugging at his lips.

DESIREA WALKER ROACH

Cailín Gafa

I twisted my hair into a ponytail, tucking it under my cap and lowering the brim. Then I took a final look around the room full of strangers, wondering which of them would help me escape, and which would try to kill me.

The door was blocked, and I knew I needed help to get out of here. Many of the people had evil eyes and the others had kind eyes. I didn't know if the kind eyes would be deceiving or real. I took a seat in a nearby chair and waited. A man came up and took the seat across from where I was sitting. He looked nice from this angle, but looks are very deceiving.

He turned and faced me. He looked as if he was in his twenties, a young age to be in this place. It seemed so much like a prison to me. The chairs were normal wooden ones and the tables matched them perfectly. The floor had no carpet and was a plain layer of concrete. The building itself looked dilapidated. The walls looked like they were once white, but the color was faded to grey today.

"I can help you get out of here," the man spoke, bringing me back to reality. "But you will have to help me once you are free." I knew there would be some kind of catch. He probably will just use me, but I can get out then ditch him after I help him. I will be able to live free for once. That is something I'll always look forward to.

"I'll be willing to help you as long as you get me

out of here first." I spoke in a quiet monotone voice. I hoped my grey eyes pierced into his chocolate brown eyes. I want him to know that I'm not afraid of him and I never will be. I grew up strong, and I plan on staying strong. No one will break me down.

The man stood up and reached into his coat pocket. He pulled out a badge and gun. He shouted, "I am taking this child with me. Anyone who tries to stop me will be shot instantly." He held his hand out for me to take it. I grabbed his hand hesitantly. He pulled me up, and we headed for the door. One of the guards tried to grab me. The man shot the guard and picked me up. He carried me out the door, and we waited until a black car pulled up in front of us. We sat in the back and buckled up as the driver pulled away from the place I hated.

Many of the guards ran outside shooting in our direction. No one was able to even shoot near the car as it sped down the road. The driver took many turns driving farther away each second. I looked over at the person who helped me escape. He glanced my way and then smiled.

"How old are you, kid?" He asked after a few minutes.

"Sixteen," I answered. I wonder why he would save someone he doesn't know. Well he might know one thing, and I'm sure that anyone would try to get me for the same reason that I was stuck

in that place for so many years.

"What's your name? I'm Benjamin." He introduced himself a little late than what normal people would have.

"Hello, Ben. I'm called Caitlin." I tried to introduce myself formally.

Benjamin woke me up by shaking me lightly and calling my name. I don't remember falling asleep. I looked out the window and saw a beautiful brick house. It had at least three stories and an attic. I walked up to it when a butler opened the door for me to go inside. It had a grand staircase leading up the stairs. I followed another butler up the stairs to a room with a black door.

I opened the door and stepped into an all-black room. I heard the door close behind me at that moment. I heard a small noise in the corner of the room. I tried to turn the lights on to see what it was, but, to my luck, they didn't work. Instead of checking out what room I was in, I walked over to the corner. When my foot hit something, I stopped moving. I felt a cold hand grasp my upper arm. I tried to scream at first, but then a hand was over my mouth. I noticed a cloth was in the hand over my mouth. Before I knew it, I was fast asleep.

I woke up to the same alarm clock I have had for centuries. Startled, I sat straight up in my bed. The last thing I remember was walking into the black room. I was out of here! The door opened, and in came my father with a black folder in his hand. I'll be on my next assignment in just a few hours now. I thought I'd never have to do those things again. I guess I can't ever get away from here now.

"Did you have a nice trip with Benjamin?" My father laughed as he spoke to me. "It was all a

test to see if you'd leave and if the guards could stop you."

"You tested me?" I asked him bitterly.

"You failed. Now you get the missions to go kill again."

I grabbed the black folder out of his hand and left the room. This is how my life has been since I could shoot my first gun.

WRONG SIDE OF HEAVEN

Heather Ralson

I open my eyes to a pitch-black room, emptiness. I momentarily forgot where I was. My body is on its own internal alarm clock now. I feel exhausted; I don't really sleep that well any more. The slightest noise awakens me, and I immediately grab my rifle, Old Faithful. I keep her at my bedside when I sleep, and she is always within arms reach. I reassuringly reach over to feel the cool metal underneath my fingers. I know the sun isn't up yet, but I know it's time for me to get ready and do my duty. This place isn't like home; there are no birds chirping, no children laughing. This place is evil and we shouldn't be here. I quietly put on my uniform, pull up my hair. It feels so brittle between my fingers. The water over here has made my skin rough, and my hair dull within a month. I don't bother putting on makeup because I was told not to and to make myself look as unattractive as possible so I don't get kidnapped, or so I am told. I step out of what I was calling my home at the time. Which was a small box (like the ones you see on train cars), and I shared what little space I had with three other women. It's February of 2014, the fresh snow from last night crunches under my boots. My days are blending together, but I've been here for 42 days now, 42 of 170. I grab all of my gear; it's heavy on my shoulders and too much for any normal civilian to carry. The cold wind is blowing briskly as the snow continues to fall. The air smells like something harsh, almost sulfur like. This country is toxic, trash is everywhere, full of human waste, and sometimes people even defecate on the side of the road in public. The smell is

overwhelming and musty, especially when there are twenty Afghan men in the same room, and none of them use deodorant.

I think of home as we drive to our destination. I shake the thought of home from my head. I need to stay focused because I am in the turret today, and I have to keep my head on a swivel. I look around, and in the distance, I see the city of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. We leave the FOB (forward operating base) the same as we do every time we have a mission, but something is wrong. I have a bad feeling in my gut about today. The trash on the side of the road has been moved since yesterday. My heart feels like it was in my throat. Could it be a bomb? I have seconds to decide whether to have my team continue or not. I took a chance I shouldn't have. I don't say anything to my driver because there aren't any wires or any sign of disturbed earth or signs of an IED. That didn't stop me from holding my breathe and cringing as we drive by. As we pass, I slowly breath out and thank God for looking out for my team.

This day in particular is permanently etched into my memory. Today was an important day in Afghanistan; women were finally given the right to vote, and it was the opening election day. My team was one of three that were protecting each voting poll. We were to stay on site until voting stopped for the day. This whole job seemed like a suicide mission. We were miles from our base and at least 2 miles from at least one of the other teams. We were being stared

at by all of the locals. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. Sweat dripped from the end of my nose even though it was 28 degrees out. I became so angry out of nowhere. In my head, I screamed, "Why are we here? This is not our fight; they don't even want us here!" That was when the first RPG hit, the first of three. We couldn't see the building in front of us anymore. All I could hear was screaming "KOMAK! KOMAK!" (Which means HELP! HELP! in Dari). My team rushed forward, all of us were tripping over debris because we couldn't see through the smoke. Women, men, and children could be seen through the smoke, mangled, some in pieces, and some buried under the rubble. The smell of burnt flesh will permanently be etched into my memory. We tried to save who we could, but command called us back. They were worried we would be attacked again. My leadership didn't want to take the chance with losing any of us. We learned when we were on the way back to the FOB that another one of the locations had been rocketed as well. I looked down at my blood-covered hands, my body shaking. I whispered, "I want to go home."

We arrived back on the FOB just before dusk. We rode back in silence, complete silence. We got out of our trucks and were told to go clean weapons then get chow. I stopped at my room to wash my face and hands. Shaking my head, I punched the wall. I had forgotten our water has been out for over two weeks now. I grabbed a bottle of water instead and started washing my hands over and over again. I didn't even realize I had rubbed them raw. It just felt like the blood was still there; I could still see it. The only reason I stopped is because my roommate laid her hand on my shoulder to calm me in a way. She told me, "There was nothing you could do." I nodded then quickly splashed some water onto my face. Thankfully, we lived by our-

selves as a team on our own football sized FOB. For once, I was grateful for being so secluded. We are the only Americans or NATO forces over here besides our General on our FOB. My team was walking around like zombies. Yes, we'd been bombed, but nothing like that chaos that had engulfed us. I had to snap out of it and be myself again no matter what because I was about to FaceTime my mother. I walked back to my room; it feels like it is freezing. My boots were soaked from the soft snow that hadn't settled yet. I picked up my iPad, hit the FaceTime button, and listened to the annoying ringer. My mother finally answered; something was wrong. The look of pain on her face was an instant stab at my heart. She told me my grandfather had passed away during the night. He was older, and I knew it was eventually going to happen, but I just didn't want it to happen while I was gone and away from my family. I felt like I couldn't breathe; I needed to calm down. In the distance, my team was sitting around a bright, warm, crackling bonfire. I walk up to warm my fingers; no one says anything to me so I head back to my room to crawl into bed, still smelling like bonfire.

I awake abruptly to the air raid siren and throw on my boots, tripping over random things in my room because I can't see anything in the darkness. I reach out for my gear but instead my fingers brush across the cool metal of Old Faithful. "This is it," I thought, "this is the day I might die." My gear is on and I am sprinting full force to the nearest tower we are receiving fire from. The cold air is burning my lungs and face as I run. Climbing the tower steps, my footing was quieter than I expected, my steps were muffled by the continuous gunfire. I set my sights, take aim, FIRE!

I just want to go home.

REYTS

Lakevia Davis

Every Wednesday morning at precisely 10:30 a.m., you will find her in the café on the corner of Elm and Montague. It is a modest brick building that's small town charm has kept it thriving despite the arrival of larger chain establishments. As she enters, she will smile at the friendly young woman (now referred to as a "barista" she recently learned) who will then smile in return.

"Hello Mrs. Reyts!" the barista will say. Mrs. Reyts will nod in recognition of the young woman's greeting.

"Is he here yet?" Mrs. Reyts will ask. "I'm always running late, I don't see how that man even puts up with me!" Mrs. Reyts and the friendly barista will laugh the same laugh they've laughed every Wednesday morning at exactly 10:32 for the past five years. This is their Wednesday morning ritual.

"Mr. Reyts is waiting for you in the usual spot!" Mrs. Reyts emits a giddy, girl-like laugh that sounds out of place coming from this small, fragile looking woman in her mid-seventies.

There is a row of booths toward the back of the café — four to be exact. Tucked away in the farthest corner of this row is a small booth that rests against a rustic looking brick wall. This is "Reyts's Booth." Every Wednesday at 10:35 Mrs. Reyts meets her husband here, the smell of bergamot and nutmeg filling her nostrils as she takes a seat on her end of the booth. Mr.

Reyts's coffee sits across from her as she smiles and takes a small sip of the tea he always has waiting for her.

Mr. Reyts was a small, quiet man, nowhere near as enthusiastic and sociable as his wife. Despite being nearly eighty years old, Mr. Reyts would still rise every morning at 5:30 a.m. to prepare for work. By the time he was dressed at 5:50, he would have a quick breakfast of toast — one side buttered and the other slathered with a thin layer of peanut butter.

At 6:00 a.m. he would finish his toast and make his way to his job at the local library. On Wednesdays he would arrive at 6:15 and work for precisely four hours taking inventory and making note of any books that were unaccounted for. It was a simple job — slow and menial — perfect for a man his age who had always had a passion for books.

After the first four hours of his shift, at precisely 10:15, Mr. Reyts would take a break and make his way to the small café where he and his wife had met at 10:30 every Wednesday morning since they'd met nearly thirty years earlier.

At exactly 10:25 a.m., he would enter the café and smile at a friendly young man. The young man always smiled in return.

"Hello Mr. Reyts!" The young man would exclaim. Mr. Reyts would shyly smile

and tip his hat in response to the young man's greeting, the same greeting Mr. Reyts been met with every Wednesday at 10:25a.m. since this particular young man had begun working at the café three years earlier. "Mrs. Reyts hasn't made it in quite yet, but of course you can go ahead and take a seat!" Mr. Reyts would chuckle softly. He'd already known that Mrs. Reyts would not be there, as she had not arrived before him on a Wednesday morning in the past thirty years. It was a part of their Wednesday morning ritual.

Mr. Reyts would make his way to a row of booths at the very back of the café and at 10:27a.m. he would take a seat in the very last booth, tucked away in a corner against a rustic looking brick wall. As soon as he was seated, Mr. Reyts would wave to the young man, politely indicating that he was ready to be served. The young man would nod in recognition before disappearing for a few moments. At 10:32, the young man would return. In front of Mr. Reyts he would place a steaming cup of bitter, black coffee. At the opposite end of the table he would place a cup of Mrs. Reyts's favorite tea. Its steam would fill the small booth with the aroma of bergamot and nutmeg, completely overpowering the scent of Mr. Reyts's coffee.

At exactly 10:35, Mrs. Reyts would make her grand entrance, placing a gentle kiss to the side of Mr. Reyts's cheek before taking a seat. She would take one small sip of her tea.

"Oh you! You still remember my favorite after all this time!" Mr. Reyts would smile and silently nod his head as Mrs. Reyts immediately launched into a story about the latest gossip with Bernadette Jones or perhaps how she just knew Marjorie Lawrence had been cheating at their weekly bridge games.

Mrs. Reyts stands.

"I'll see you at home, dear. Dinner will be ready at 5:00 p.m. on the dot! I hope the rest of your day at work is wonderful." As Mrs. Reyts makes her way toward the exit, she once again smiles at the friendly barista before stepping out onto the sidewalk and merrily making her way home.

After Mrs. Reyts leaves, the friendly barista releases a heavy sigh as she moves to "Reyts's Booth" and begins clearing the table. She carefully balances Mrs. Reyts's empty cup in one hand as she grabs the cup that sat on what was once Mr. Reyts's end of the table. The cup was untouched and completely filled with lukewarm, bitter, black coffee. Five years ago this cup would have been just as empty as Mrs. Reyts's. Despite its emptiness, the young man who previously worked with the friendly barista once told her he could still feel the warmth from Mr. Reyts's hands gripping the cup as he sipped his coffee, emitting the occasional amused chuckle at Mrs. Reyts's never ending tales of the gossip and mayhem that plagued her weekly bridge games and book club meetings. Five years ago Mr. Reyts would have been sitting across from his adoring wife at 10:35. It was their Wednesday morning ritual.

VISUAL ART



LETHAL LIPGLOSS | Megan Stanley



UNITED AT LAST | Sarah Sterling



PICATSSO | Erin Mills



REFLECTIVES PAST | Sarah Sterling



SUNSET OVER MONTGOMERY | Juanita Barrett



A STILL AND QUIET CONSCIENCE | Jennifer Johnston

OUR STAFF

EDITOR

Jacob Lambert

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Megan Stanley

CO-EDITORS

Juanita Barrett

Sabrina Blaum

Kim Leifer

Matthew Shoemaker

Leslie Rewis

FACULTY ADVISOR

Dr. Robert Klevay

WANT TO JOIN IN?

Interested in joining the Filibuster staff? Email Dr. Robert Klevay at rklevay@aum.edu to ask about available staff positions!

We are already accepting submissions for the 2017 edition of the Filibuster. Think you have what it takes to roll with us? If so, send your creative works to: filibuster@aum.edu. Don't hesitate to ask us questions!

