

Filibuster 2008

Writing a book is an adventure.
To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement.
Then it becomes a mistress,
then it becomes a master,
then it becomes a tyrant.

The last phase is that just as you
are about to be reconciled to your servitude,

you **kill** the monster,
and *fling* him to the public.

Sir Winston Churchill



Directly From the Editor!!

Friends, full fraught with war-sweat glaring, kismet-dashed with derring-do, doth here present case: Alas the day when all voices cease and the final hours of coiling conundrum crash all together like minute pawns against the wagerly knights and evening kings and kingly queens in furious disparagement dispatching the last breaths of mighty air! Not really. So, as both an editor and a writer, my chiefest frustration is also the greatest gift: I'm not included in this issue! "Humbug!" says Scrooge; "Hilarious!" says I! Aye. The focus changes when a feverish brain must reach for words other than its own, and here presented is the fruit of my labor(ers). No, I didn't hire a score of goblins to sit in a dungeon and swim through page after page of unfaltering text. No. I swam through page after page, and one of the hardest things an editor must, MUST, do is say "No" to someone. I had to turn down some submissions. Sounding the trumpet from the blistering recesses of the computer lab to the towering heights of the Library's tenth floor yielded a great wealth of submissions, for which I among others am thoroughly grateful. Thinkers, writers and artists, heeded the call. War-sweat might not be so far off, then, with the blood that makes many of the writings you here see. Now, now, before you go and think that scrawled on my rough drafts is the name "Faustus" in blood, consider this: if a person really cares about a particular thing, how does it reflect on his or her work? Therefore, erythrocytes abound here in *Filibuster 2008*, and don't you forget it! I praise the surprising achievements I found among the mighty whirlpool of words, and I would like to mention at least one: Kati Chapman's epic poem "First Lust" has my most favorite quote of all time, but you'll have to guess what it is. With that said, you'll notice that this issue is subdivided into four sections: Humorous, Serious, Reflective, and Weird.

Assortment is almost entirely subjective. If you as a reader think that something marked Humorous wasn't so funny, I demand you cut out the page and paste it elsewhere! I don't know about you, but I have papers to write, books to read, and black housecats to pick on. I just don't know how much more up with which I can put, as Churchill might agree. At any time in this note, you might posit that said writing is too informal and that one should administer more masterly wherewithal to delineate glossy discourses, but I think the Thesaurus can tie the tongue as well as loosen it, and likewise, a professional Editor's note may have its perks but not here. As a result, here is our miserably abused period. On a serious note, I would like to thank all the contributors to this year's *Filibuster*, and furthermore, I hope that you as a reader will enjoy the sampling of the diverse minds here at Auburn University at Montgomery. There are so many different voices here, and the goal of this magazine is for them to be heard! And with that said, I think there's little else for me to do here but—

Editor
Kevin Garner

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Naomi Stauffer

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Kevin Garner

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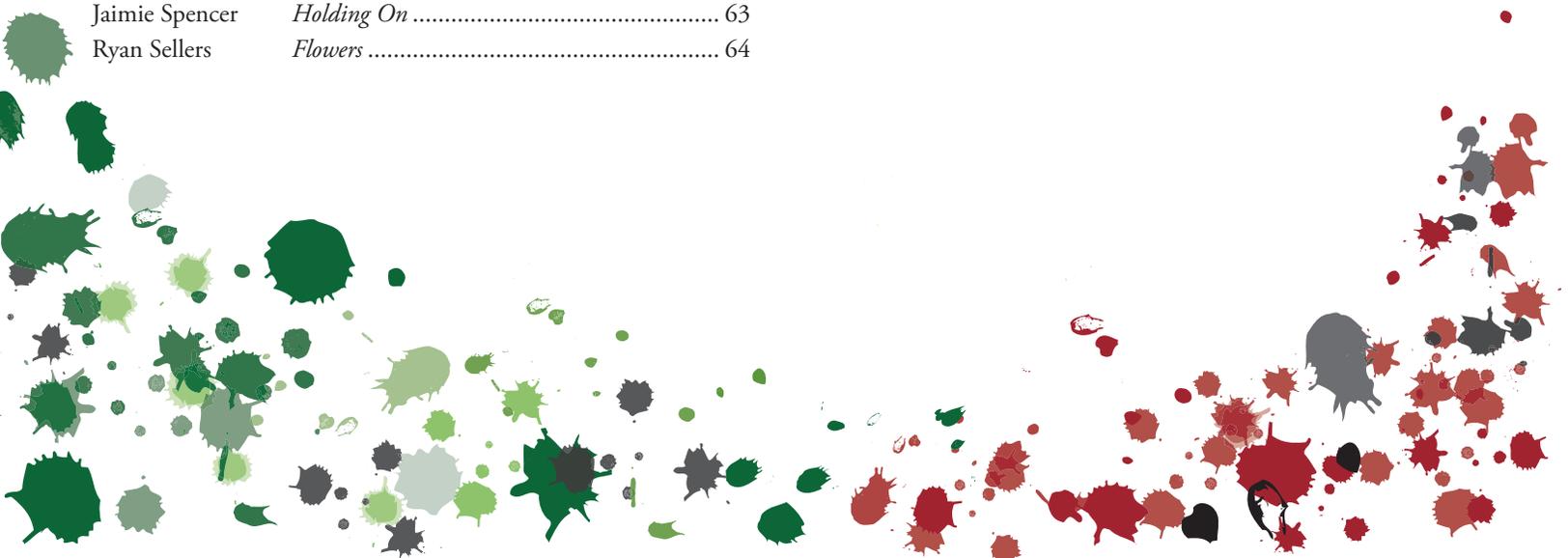
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Editor's note: Any divergent spellings or capitizations of names are intentional herein. Beware.

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Words are things,
 and a
small drop
 of **ink**,
 falling like dew upon
a thought,
 produces that which makes





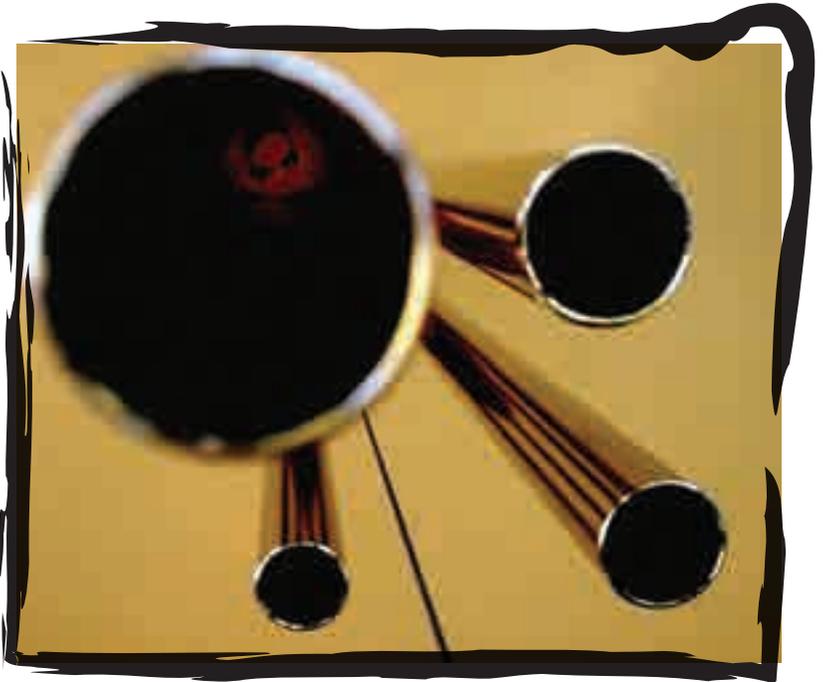
Two Faced • Jaimie Spencer



The Sight of Sound, Part 1 • Alicia Crawford

thousands,
perhaps millions,
think.

Lord (George Gordon) Byron



The Sight of Sound, Part 2 • Alicia Crawford



A Rose • Audra Hagel



Memory II • Jaimie Spencer



Dogwood in Blue • Ryan Sellers



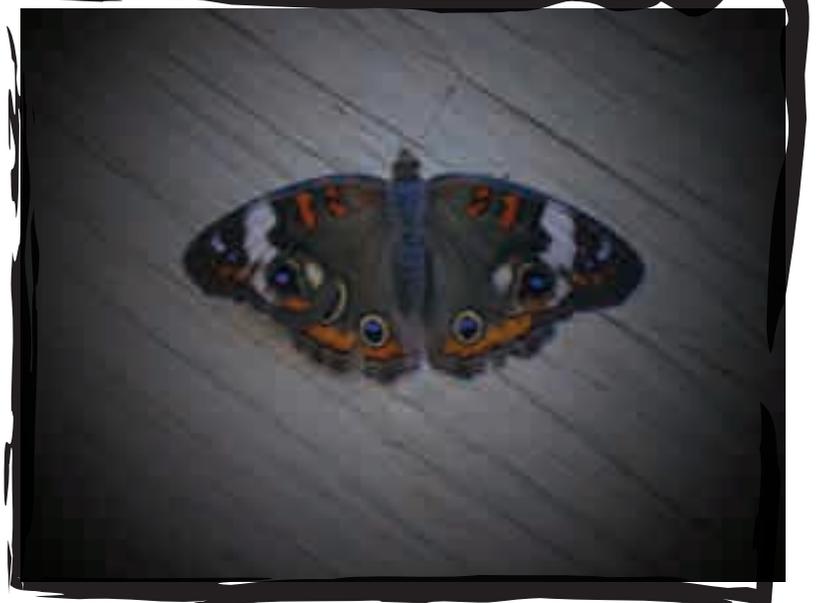
Dogwood in Blue • Beth Parrish



Stray by Plztikphishphood • Alicia Fry

The strokes of the pen
need **deliberation**
as much as the sword
needs *swiftness*.

Julia Ward Howe



Peacocks aren't the only Peacocks • Naomi Stauffer

HymOR



HymOR

Le mort beaucoup méritée de Jacobi Frost



Kyle Kohler Nov 2007



Jacobi Frost sighed. His dumb eyes were set upon the face of his dream girl. As time passed he became more aware of every curve of her figure, of every wrinkle and stray hair on her head. His sitting on the other side of the café did not stop him from listening to every word she said. She was soft spoken. So he leaned forward and listened harder. He was trying not to be too obvious. The more he listened the more he realized she only spoke English; this disappointed him. He waited for her to drop faux French, but it seemed she was incapable of even that. This was too bad. She was almost too sexy. Like the fall of a great empire, her wavy blonde hair and black business suit lost their power over him. “Too bad,” he grumbled. She had had such promise.

Dismayed, he stood up and walked to the counter to pay for his coffee. The cashier refused to look at him. She took his money and handed him his change without making eye contact. Instead, her attention was focused on the magazine lying open next to the register. Jacobi looked down and saw his cousin staring back at him. The cashier noticed his breathing against her hair and gazed up at him bemusedly. She quit leaning against the counter and stood up. “She’s real pretty.”

Jacobi fancied this girl a dike; he spoke in English: “She is my cousin.”

The girl became excited “Really?”

“Yes that is true.”

Her eyes were wide; innocent. “She’s like my favorite model!”

“I can’t say that.”

Jacobi smiled at her, annoyed. She didn’t understand and could only watch as he exited the café.

Now that he was outside he wondered if he should call his mother. She was constantly bothering him about coming home late. He didn’t like to be tied down. Seeing his cousin’s picture reminded him that she was back in town—he’d be sure to evade her, though. Not that she cared to see him; they simply found each other disgusting. “The bohemians of this country...” He paused and reached into his pocket for his notepad and pen. Immediately he began writing those words down.

This would be his greatest article. He was sure of it.

Now there was so much to write. He had so many ideas to express; it was getting them down—that was the problem. Absentminded, he wandered back into the café and sat down at his old table. The blonde was still there, talking with a friend of hers, but he paid them no attention. The word was all.

It was growing late. When Jacobi looked up he saw the blonde sitting in front of him. She was beautiful, but sadly insignificant. There was so much to write.

“Yes?” his voice was dry. He needed something to drink.

“I saw you earlier,” she said while folding her legs, “you were watching me.”

“Yes, I watch many people.”

“But you were really watching me, if you know what I mean.”

“I don’t.”

She smiled at him, but he missed the sexy rays of her eyes.

“Listen I don’t have time for you. I am busy.”

She looked down at his notepad, took it from him, flipped through a few pages, and read aloud the first lines on the page.

“Give me that!” He reached out in vain for it, missing it by a mile. She tossed it at him. Standing up, she laughed. He ignored her and found his last pen mark. As he brought his pen to paper, he scanned the café for the wench but could not find her. She had flown the coup.

An agitated sigh lifted him from his chair. He walked outside. His attention was grabbed by a large, goateed guy with curly brown hair and dark sunglasses. Jacobi could not take his eyes from him. His heart began beating as the mysterious law professional slowly removed his shades, revealing his brown eyes. The lawyer looked at him, sneered, and then wandered into the café. That the stranger never said a word to him disappointed Jacobi. Suddenly things became very dark. People across the street were pointing up, shouting. Jacobi raised his head to see what the big deal was. “Hey, what’s the big idea?”

His face met the piano.

His *face* met the **piano**.



The Blockade
Wade Watson



It’s now or never,
While I’m young and flourishing.
One never knows when all will be lost
And perhaps forgotten:
Write...Write...Write!

This evil rune will not be cast upon me;
I’m too valued to others
And them to me
To be rid of all I’ve gained:
Write...Write...Write!

Oh Dear Lord,
I beckon thee,
What have I committed to deserve thou?
Am I not loved by your omnipotent presence?
Then why did you grant me this gift,
If thou will just take it away,
Leaving my life for naught.
Ignore,
And Write...Write...Write!

Life and Death: A Serious Essay



Richard W Gardner

The first thing you absolutely must remember is that Life will get you, eventually. It'll turn you around, and kick you firmly in the ass every chance it gets. Why? Who knows? Perhaps you deserved it, through some evil deed or another. Or maybe you just looked like "you had that one coming." For all I can tell you, it could just be that irritating little way you humans insist on breathing.

Not to say humans are the only ones getting the shaft. All manner of life suffer at Life's hand. Take my goldfish for example: Mr. Chan. He lived a content life in his small world; every day, he swam his rounds, waited for me to drop in a bit of breakfast, and would finally eat and get back to his swimming. He never did anything to anybody—there was no one else in the tank! One day, however, Life took a notice to him, and felt dislike immediately, the way Mr. Chan swam about, enjoying the cool, refreshing water, the small, temperature-controlled bowl I had given him rent free, the stupid little fish faces he made... Something had to be done. So, Life put it into Mr. Chan's head that all the rocks on the bottom of his tank were delicious, and just waiting to be eaten! For the next three hours, Mr. Chan did nothing but scarf down pebble after pebble, blue, green, red ones—he ate them all. Finally, he saw Life's cruel trick, felt the pain of what would surely be a lifetime's constipation, and decided the easier path would be what he did—swim head first into the glass, causing irreparable brain damage, which allowed him to go back to enjoying life—albeit at a considerably decreased life span.

That leads to the second point to consider: Life, being as a cat pawing at a bug, will eventually go A.D.—hey, what was that? and take off after some other form of entertainment. The bug gets to being a bug again. Humans, however, die.

If the idea of dying gets you down, just look back on living and spend a few moments reveling in some of Life's crueller jokes: the day in junior high where you couldn't help but start thinking about that girl at the pool, her tiny two-piece, just when the teacher calls you up to the board; the night you got that girl to forego even the bathing suit, but you couldn't help thinking about that teacher and the way the hair on her lip curls at the corners; your wedding day, where you first discovered your dyslexia by instead of stating, "I do," you asked, "Do I?"—the time you thought you were going to be funny and sneak up on that cool new friend of yours and scare him, but the first time you met, you hadn't been thorough enough to find out he was a judo master; that Halloween when you and some of your buddies were sitting around and somebody scared you and everybody else was laughing and saying, "I nearly shit my pants!" but you couldn't say anything, because you didn't "almost" anything, and you had to ride the thirty miles home in the back of the truck...

Now that you're feeling less inclined to run from the inevitable, really the only unappealing factor left is the manner in which you go. But there are ways around that uneasy feeling when it's your turn to face the music. Just remember to look at the matter practically, and consider yourself lucky that you're not going in one of the four million, three hundred fifty-seven thousand, two hundred and twenty-six less desirable possibilities.

An example. If you find yourself in the middle of the ocean, your ship sinking fast and you waiting to drown or to be ripped apart by the merciless creatures that dwell in this part of the dark, mysterious waters, consider yourself lucky that you are not being burned alive and having to deal with the headache

of your flesh melting away and a lot of smoke clouding your eyes—and just really, really hurting. Of course, this method could also be easily applied if your sinking ship suddenly catches fire; good thing you won't have to wait around, suffocating, letting that unfiltered, definitely not spring fresh water fill your lungs till you asphyxiate, or become some shark's dinner, screaming into the water as it munches on this new delicacy: you.

So, just remember to enjoy yourself. Just don't show it. Keep it to yourself. Or else you have to worry about Life taking notice of this "dying with a smile" attitude and deciding it won't have any part of that, and next thing you know, you're stuck here another thirty, forty years.

And if that's the case, you're screwed.

“Surrounded by love of the furry kind”



Rachael Hancock

Surrounded by love of the furry kind,
With soft, purring comfort they do sit with me—
Their pointed ears always listen to my long day's strife,
Offering all that they are to me in my moment of need.
Each with his own personality do I adore:
River, the gray and white, greets with warm delight
While Joe follows my every step with curiosity,
And loner Lucky who is always defiant...
I may be surrounded and outnumbered in this house,
But I know they love me in their own furry way.



Weasel, Weasel, Weasel... • Beth Parrish

Mud Puddles



Audra Hagel

So close. Almost reachable. Huge Craving. Unbearable
desire. Enormous longing. Coming closer. Overwhelming
yearning. Inching nearer. Powerful heaving. Finally there!
Baby boy. Mud puddle.



Bricks • Ryan Sellers


 Writer's Block
 

 Sarah Fredericks

dot. dot. dot.

The empty page waits expectantly...

clack-click.

clack-click.

clack-click.

I fiddle with my pen in the hopes that,
 With a "click," inspiration will flow
 From the pen, up my arm,
 And into my brain.

flash _ flash _ flash _ flash

The blinking cursor
 Mocks my muted tongue...

ta-da-da-dum. ta-da-da-dum.

I drum my fingers on
 The table. Surely, out of all the
 Words I know, there must be at least two

That fit together to form a coherent thought.

tap-tip—tip-tap.

tap-tip—tip-tap.

__backspace__

...*Damn you, writer's block...*

dot. dot. dot.


 Yuppie
 

 Jessica Scarda

Curly locks	Californian domineering
Thick bun	Business woman
Spun around	Pioneering
Golden brown	Yuppie
Brown eyes	Yep,
Glasses	She's a yuppie.
Chubby cheeks	
Bright smile	

 Letter To My Brother or
 Once Upon A Gift of Money
 

 Jennifer Jacobs

Dearest Brother,

I found a gnome in our garden yesterday and, by my undeniable powers of persuasion, convinced the old gnome that he was in fact, a leprechaun. However, somewhere within our translating, the poor gnome, Mr. Dillinger Whitefield, Esquire is his name, became confused and believed himself to be a politically exiled Irish refugee who, under the mistaking notion that the Deep South in America was a place of rest from persecution, traveled here immediately. I didn't have the heart to right him in his beliefs.

And so, while we munched on stolen imitation watercress and cheese that shouldn't have been blue, he disclosed the sad truth. He was a broke leprechaun: a sad and lonely, gold-free leprechaun. Now, being suspicious, I was quite sure that while we were eating our lunch, he was secretly hiding gold pieces between his toes and behind his ears. Indeed, as I brushed the pieces of cheese from my lap, he attempted to hide the rest of his stash under his hat. Dismayed, I cried out, "What can this be? I found you and you deny me my rightful reward?"

Thus ensued a struggle—a clash between cheese breath and hands and feet and in the end—Mr. Dillinger Whitefield, Esquire, lately of Ireland and gnome descent, made off with most of his gold. Thus, I was left with a very small piece of his fortune and thankfully, none of his cheese.

I felt, on contemplation, it would be wrong to spend such hard earned money on shoes, and a simple toothbrush took care of the cheese breath. Therefore, I have deemed this money—Mad Money, that is—to be kept until needed and not to be figured into any sort of budget. Until the time it is spent, the Gnome Council for Injured Humans assures me that it will remain Mad.

Sincerely and with my love,
 Your sister - Jenny

On the Use of the Short Black Boots



Kati Chapman



The maiden awoke from her darkened bower
To the sound of her sister taking an early shower.
She groaned at being so early roused;
In her lethargic mind, she complained and she groused.
Yet her livid contemplations did not cease—did not stop—
The steady fall, the plangent sounds of the water-drops.
So acquiescing to her fate, she rose from where she lay,
Then proceeded to make ready for school and for the day.
Pavonine, she preened the gleaming strands of silk she called her hair,
She chose her clothes, and then she deemed the mirror's 'flection fair.
The sound of water-droplets stopped and the shower door slid back;
Her sister stepped out and slipped one towel off the rack.
The bathroom was finally free! And so the maiden slipped inside
To wash her berry brown face and to ameliorate her faulty eyes.
And then, her ablutions finished, she glided to the place
Where her cosmetics lay, and so with them, she enhanced her face.
Then smirking in the mirror, she pronounced it copasetic;
So dressed up, and painted too, face's potential turned kinetic.
The maiden then turned to the closet, and steeled herself to choose,
Amongst the sixteen pairs she owned, a pair of winter shoes.
Flicking over the eudemonic array of boots in her closet stacked,
Her eyes spied beige, red, and maroon, also five pairs of black.
Then a celestial brilliance upon one very special pair shone:
The short black boots, illuminated, marked out at second to none.
She slipped them on then set her hand to complete some other vain deed.
Her sister strutted in, pointed to the boots, spat: "Those are the ones I need."
She turned with ease, her silk rustling, and arched a manicured brow.
"Really?" She snapped, prestissimo, "And you're going to obtain them how?"
With a swell of her chest and a glint in her eye,
"I'll make you then," her sister replied.
The maiden flicked her wrist in dismissal, "Stop your rodomontade.
These are mine, and you shan't have them unless I be dead."
Her sister frowned as she spouted, "Oh yes? Wait and see.
A higher power than you shall make you give those boots to me."
The maiden smirked with derision as her sister skulked away.
"Yes, pray to God, for on my feet, these short black boots will stay!"
The scent of lime and coconut floated in the air
As the maiden smoothed on her lotion and brushed her silken hair.
Footsteps, resounding in the hall! Not one pair but double.
Bang! The maiden's door was opened, and there... Stood... Trouble.
Her sister stood at the threshold, and standing behind her, Lo!
A harpy from Hades instead of from Zeus—a lamia—fangs ready to show.
Their mother was summoned to take 'way the prize;
So the maiden's fanfaronade was brought down to size.
"Over five pairs of black boots, you surely own:
And so choose another to wear!"

The maiden started to fight, but the forceful command
Made her obey and hear.
She peeled off the boots and threw them at her sister
Who was triumphant at last,
Who went off skipping straight down the hall,
Ready to break her long fast.
The maiden heard from her room, the strident cry
of someone hurt,
But her sister had only spilled milk:
thus luckily ruining her shirt.
And so her sister changed, and with the new outfit,
The short black boots did not match.
So back to the maiden the grail was returned,
And the boots! Oh! Such a catch!
The boots were pulled on, the clothes were adjusted,
The silk brushed out once again:
So the maiden sashayed herself off to school,
And the final word of this is Fin.

CRABBY



Elaina Hagel

We brought a plastic fishy bag filled with some aquarium water and a little crab home from the store. This tiny water creature's name was Crabby; he was a light brown fiddler crab the size of a quarter. We also bought two pretty guppies, in a separate bag of course, who had more color than Crabby. That didn't matter; it had been a long time since a crab was hosted in our aquarium. In fact, some of my siblings didn't remember our ever having a crab.

On the way home from the store, we all were excited about the new creatures. I mean, who didn't want to hold them during the trip home? It was fascinating watching them move around scoping out their ever-changing surroundings. Soon that would end, and they could adjust to their new domicile—the fish aquarium.

There was quite a bit of excitement when those who had stayed home saw what we brought! They enjoyed the colors of the fish, but everyone had to go ooh and ahh over our little fiddler. Once adjusted to the water temperature, it was finally time to release them to their habitat. Because it had been a while since we had owned a crab, his contentment between swimming and perching on floating plants was interesting.

Early the next morning, before the alarms sounded, several glowing faces rushed to the aquarium with anticipation; however, Crabby could not be seen in his tank. Eagerly, everyone had expected to see him swimming or climbing on the green water plants but this morning he was not seen either place. Assuming that he was simply hiding, we didn't think much more about it; he would show eventually. The day dawned; it was time to head off to school. On the way, we were quite surprised to find Crabby by the front door! He was over thirty feet from the tank! How in the world did he get out here? What was he doing out here? Where did he think he was going? We were so glad that none of us stepped on him!

Well, Crabby's tour promptly ended; the little fiddler crab did not make it to his concert, or wherever he was going, on time. We scooped him up and took him back to the aquarium, from now on Crabby will have to perform for the guppies. No Broadway shows for him—hope he isn't too crabby about it.

Disposable Nature



Audra Hagel

A perfect summer day at a perfect white sand beach, unspoiled by human contamination. Purity radiates before me. Nature, in all her beauty, unblemished and clean, reflects on this perfect day. Dolphins leap from the clean green-blue water. White foamy waves top the salty emerald depths. Each new wave crashes with an untarnished beauty as it unites with the pure white sand. Intense golden light burns boldly, illuminating the scene. Like perfect, liquid diamonds, the water churns beneath a glorious heaven. Bluer than angel's eyes, the sky swells across the panoramic view completing the scene of natural beauty, a view not violated by human tampering, one that does not display evident marks of its touch. Small crabs bury themselves into the beach, surrounding themselves in the warm grains of a clean earth. Schools of tiny fish swim in the shallow water along the shore, the light reflecting on their backs and sides as they frolic in uncontaminated water unaffected by humanity.

Engulfed in the natural beauty, the spotless innocence of nature, unscathed by rough hands of humans, my longing was to capture forever the moment of clarity and unpolluted nature. I pulled out my disposable camera.

C.J. Hincy



Sunday Evening

Part of my cheap plastic steering wheel is rubbing off into my left palm and it's quite sticky. My other hand is on the gear shifter, although I'm not completely certain why. I suppose it's there because I think it looks cool. I've always been preoccupied with looking cool.

It's hot and driving sucks for several reasons and today it sucks mostly because I won't change the music in my car but tomorrow it'll suck because of something else. It's a good album that I have in the radio by a band named ALO, which stands for Animal Liberation Orchestra, and their name makes me feel good about my causes—I suppose that I should consider pursuing some of them one day.

I usually begin listening to an album by sampling the whole thing and then I whittle the number of songs I listen to down to roughly seven and then down to five and end up listening to no more than three. I'm now down to two on this one but I really like only one of them. I don't have the patience to change it just yet though. Searching for a new album will really be miserable. My air conditioner sucks too.

The landscape on this drive is poorly arranged and dysfunctional. Oversized billboards missing letters to short words accompany buildings that are randomly scattered about the road, and some businesses are even in tin warehouses and vinyl siding cabins. These developers out here have no taste because they seem to enjoy creating rural blight. I wish that I could call Edward Abbey about this tragedy because now I understand his message. Thinking of Abbey, I wonder how many beers it would have taken me to drive out here?

Jimmy lives outside of the city with his parents and I don't know why and don't care, and when I think about living with my parents, I consider an abundance of southern cooked meals and clean clothes and curfews and then I remember that I'm thirty and married and I already have all of that. Jimmy is my cousin, and I've always wondered how.

Power-turning into the driveway, I almost graze the mailbox. It's shaped like a Labrador on the run with its tongue hanging out and I wonder what it's chasing. The driveway is dusty because of the drought and needs two loads of gravel before the next rain but my car already needs a wash so I'm not overly concerned.

Jimmy's house, actually his parents' house, is a mid 1970s ranch style place that reminds me of a wedding photo of my parents where my dad wore the awfully cliché light blue tuxedo and ruffled cummerbund. The screens on the window appear to have come with the house though without complimentary upkeep. Their landscaping is traditional in the sense that my uncle did it one spring when he felt rather energetic and hasn't felt that way since because the row of crepe myrtles is trimmed too low and has a nasty development growing underneath. There are also two dogwoods planted in a rather random fashion yearning for a little shade. Dogwoods are a half-sun plant.

The door bell doesn't work so I knock for a moment and then I holler towards a window. "Hey, it's your favorite cousin," I yell.

"Come in," my aunt says.

The door is lightweight and has a tacky floral design in white all along the stained glass inset—floral like something from the islands, so maybe tropical. I man-grab the flimsy doorknob and open the door like I own it.

Chicken livers sizzle in the Fry-Daddy as I exchange familial pleasantries with my aunt and they smell like they always do. She's covered in cooking flour and her hair looks like it belongs in a hairnet. I want to give her a dollar and fifty cents for some pizza and corn like old times when she would beg me to stay for dinner but I know it's for show. I didn't come here to eat, and she knows it. We make really small small-talk and spend a moment in awkward silence before my uncle comes in and starts ringing my neck.

"Yes, I remember how a horse eats corn for Christ's sake," I say. I remind myself that I'm thirty and married.

He's still sporting a moustache and I think of state troopers and aviator sunglasses and sexual misconduct and it's trimmed as if it has a purpose and he probably thinks that it does. I assume he read the Bible and is fearful of a Samsonesque meltdown, so it must be there to stay.

"How's your new job going?" he asks.

"Great, how about your old one?" I say.

"Always a smartass, I never have liked you."

"Where's Jimmy?" I ask.

"In his room Smartass."

"Nice to see y'all as well," I reply as I open Jimmy's door.

My cousin's room makes my nose burn upon entry and I take two puffs of my inhaler almost instantly. The room is a poorly ventilated addition that was built for my great aunt who passed several years ago, though Jimmy's cigarette and cannabis abuse has it rather congested.

"Man, clean this damn room up. I get sick every time I come here," I say.

"Eat it," he says.

The walls are paneling and ordained with several tapestries and two Widespread Panic black-light concert posters. Widespread Panic is a contemporary band full of space cowboys that are cosmically and involuntarily attached to the forefathers of exploratory jam, The Grateful Dead. I'm also a fan of the boys, and I'm especially a fan of the stinky girl beside me on the third row who is looking at me through her fingers while she conjures up some type of medieval spell. Bless her heart she usually smells like a hint of rhino sweat and three year old smoked sewer pipe resin.

His one bookshelf is overflowing with science fiction trash that he might have read but probably not and he's still sleeping on a waterbed and wondering about his back. I hear the familiar chorus of "Tall Boy" and I grab one from his mini-fridge. The Karate Kid is on the television and Mr. Miyagi nearly sucks me in again and I'm convinced that I should crane kick something in here.

Jimmy's wearing cut-off shorts with a Che Guevara t-shirt and recently re-soled

Birkenstocks. His ponytail is a little greasy for me while his ears are missing hoop earrings and his beard is more feminine than mine in the sixth grade. Two of his toenails are long and lethal and one is rotten and yellow and appears to be consumed with something discovered on an infantry patrol in Vietnam. Jimmy's father was a paratrooper, but that's no excuse because I equate long and nasty toenails to some sort of concern for appearance deficiency disease and personally, I fear catching it. Altogether pitiful, yet here I am.

He talks about losing his job at Wal-Mart over some complex issues and I didn't know that a stocker dealt with any of those but I amuse him anyway because he has a new vision for himself—and I believe in him by the time he's done.

"Have you heard of Amway?" he asks.

"Yep."

"Are you interested in something similar to it? We can make lots of money."

"No."

"Why not?"

"No."

He mentions some new government conspiracy that is neither liberal nor conservative and mostly lunacy and I agree wholeheartedly.

I'm really ready to get down to business, but Jimmy says he has something to show me so we walk out the screen door to his personal patio. The door slides about halfway across his muddy concrete porch before I kick it the rest of the way. A rather weak looking spider web is strewn about the top of one of his four dollar Lowe's chairs and its weaver rests next to the third hole in the center. I choose the other one out of courtesy.

Jimmy points out a clock that he has sitting on the ground. It's propped up by two bricks that look like they belong on the part of his sidewalk that's missing two bricks. Jimmy, always an improviser.

"Why in the hell do you have your clock out here on the ground?" I ask.

"It's not a regular clock. It's an atomic clock," he says.

"What's an atomic clock?"

"Well, it's the kind of clock that uses an atomic resonance frequency standard to feed its counter—and it has to face Denver," Jimmy says.

"Oh."

"That's why it's outside," he legitimizes. "It isn't working right now."

"Did Denver move?" I ask.

His German Shepherd meanders up and I really want to call the Animal Police or someone of that nature because it weighs all of 200 pounds if it weighs fifteen and he's out of breathe and limping. It tries to bark but decides to lie down.

"I told you to quit free-feeding your dog," I state as I grow more impatient.

"He's fine," Jimmy says.

"No he's not—he's overweight and can hardly walk. Jesus, man."

"His foot's hurt," Jimmy says.

"It's hurt because he's overweight."

"Don't talk about things you don't know about. He just needs some rest," he says.

I pet the dog out of sympathy and concern and notice that it's greasy like Elvis before the religious albums.

"What's this crap all over his fur?" I ask.

"His skin was dry so I tried to think of something I had that would keep him from itching. I ended up putting some burnt motor oil and peroxide on him," he says.

"Good God. What about baby oil?" I ask.

"Oh," he says and pauses to think for a second. "That's a good idea you know. But I didn't have any. The clock is cool, huh?"

I remember his last Panic tour to Colorado and the stories and the strange phone calls from a soundboard and his six months of community service.

"Yep, it's a cool clock. Can we get this show on the road man?"

"Sure," Jimmy whimpers.

I love video games. I mean I really love video games. I'm a badass in video games. I throw touchdowns, I shoot 65's, and I round Turn 4 at Talladega running 215 MPH. I actually have shot a 65 before, but I think I was cheating. I can kill my driver so what else matters anyway?

I've been dying to play the new Madden Football, but it's a little mean on the wallet,

so I show my wife about responsibility and let my cousin scrounge the cash from my uncle for the new version. He wastes the first round of money on a self-help tape that is really going to make a difference this time and I'm beside myself. I hound him so hard that he wakes my uncle up in the middle of the night to get the money. Weird, but it works.

I pick my team and my stomach tightens like before a static line parachute jump into enemy territory—I did this in the Navy Seals game—and I urge him to hurry up but he scrolls through the teams four times and tries to get the All-Pro team.

"Jimmy, you're such a horse's ass. Get a real team," I yell.

"I'll get who I want. Quit crying," he says.

He reconsiders anyway.

I use the Patriots because they're team players and their quarterback is usually dating a supermodel and since I can live vicariously through him only so often, I don't waste the opportunity.

"Off tackle bitch, that's right," I scream. I love winning.

"Shut up."

My defense plays the 3-4 flawlessly and I snag two interceptions in the first half, but I'm only up 14-7 at the turn and my cousin is changing out the water in his three-footer because he says it's clogging the pull.

"I'm about to make an example of you," Jimmy mumbles.

"Elaborate if you will," I say.

"Here it comes, Baby."

He throws an interception and his ramblings trail off thereafter. After sealing the deal in the third quarter with a time consuming drive that Bill Belichick would be proud of, I talk trash the entire fourth quarter.

"You know, you might have been better off with the All-Pro Team. I think they have a dumbass code you could've taken advantage of." I'm ruthless.

I want another game but my cousin is now regressing into a kindergarten version of a kindergartner. My wife can only take so much of this anyway because she's addicted to physical affection, of which I must be

present to administer. I grab a cold one for the wrap up and I do most of the talking.

"The referees don't have facial expressions, but the stadiums are impeccable," I say.

"This is a killer 99' show before Mikey died," Jimmy says from whatever cloud he's perched on.

The lead guitar player of Widespread Panic died in 2001, and my cousin is waiting on either his second coming or another pull.

"Let go of the older Panic man, Mikey's not coming back."

The night feels like I assume pear preserves do in my aunt's microwave and a mosquito ravages me right out the door, but the smell of victory is in the air, and no mosquito, or asshole uncle, or overweight dog, or atomic clock can change that.

I pull into a gas station and put the nozzle into the hole and fumble my card for a moment and forget my zip code and the machine asks me to come in but I don't want to because, well, I'm feeling rather lazy this evening. I push on to the next station.

My car runs out of time to run out of gas because I soon feel a strange thud not unlike a cat or a varmint but more like a hunk of a flat tire. My dad likes to shoot varmints and dogs sometimes. Odd hobby.

I find a fresh spare tire but no jack. Why in the hell would my jack be missing?

The air is still thick and the sweet smell of victory is gone and I walk as brisk as I know how, which is very brisk because I'm always jittery—usually from too much coffee—but right now it's from my mood because I need a ride or I need to get somewhere.

I arrive back at the gas station to find it closed. The women inside stare at me and I stare back. It's one of the new stations with a small building and no maintenance so I stare out of frustration with the system more so than I do in anger at the women.

"Ma'am, can you open the door and let me talk to you for a minute. I just need a jack for my car. It's up the road," I say.

"You're weird. We saw your ass earlier. You were screwing around tryin' to steal some gas. Get the hell outta here!" she says.

"Ma'am, the customer is always right."

"You aint bought nuthin jackass," she says as she dims the lights.

I turn around and head back towards the car. I pass it and notice that no one stopped and fixed my tire while I was gone. Bunch of inconsiderate bastards out here. I keep walking towards town.

Before I know it I'm in the part of the city that is ghostly at night and I wonder where the people and the danger are because one of them must be close. The stores have bars on the doors and some on the windows but there is no one there to break in anyway and many of them are closed because the signs in the broken windows say so.

I notice some lights approaching and they're on top of me rather quickly. Older Chevrolet models are becoming rare except in this state. This one has spotlights on top because hunting is still popular so I assume that the driver is a man of all seasons so to speak. I don't have the patience for hunting because I'm not supposed to talk.

The driver hops out and says his name is Willie. I don't hate the name Willie. His hair is curly for a black man. Curly like a damn near mullet with a Rollie Fingers style moustache. He almost looks like a cowboy or a cotton farmer but he's in the city so I suppose he can't be either. He's wearing a pearl button western style shirt like the ones I used to sport when I was still in the game. It looks pretty good on him. He's dashing.

"Can we hep you?" Willie asks.

"Certainly can. Are you full service?"

"Huh?"

"You gotta jack?" I ask

"Nosuh, but I know where we can get one," he says.

"Cool."

Willie's woman, Shandra, rides closely in the bench seat like my girlfriend did in the 11th grade and she doesn't say much and neither does he, so I tell them some stories

about where I'm from and what I like to do.

"I like to fish, but I don't catch much—mostly a buzz. That Budweiser's always biting. How about you guys?" I ask.

"Me and Shandra like to fish for them cats," Willie says. "Big ole cats over onnu south part of the river."

"Yeah, that's right," I reply.

I tell them about my job and what I do every day and they smile accordingly. Willie says that he does mostly odd jobs.

"Sometimes we get a little hep from the guvment. Shandra got hurt a while back and she aint been able to work," he says. "But not much."

"...stick with the
Patriots.
They're going
undefeated
this year."

When he speaks I see that he is missing his two front teeth, but that the rest are perfectly white. Strange.

I notice the time. 11:33. Wow, I need to call my wife. I know she's asleep—this'll be fun.

"Uhhhhhhh hello," she says.

"Honey."

"Where are you?"

"Honey, I had a flat tire when I left Jimmy's. I'm on the way to the station and I'll be home soon."

"What were you doing at Jimmy's?" she asks.

"We were working on my car."

"You've got a new car," she says.

"We were working on the air conditioner. It's been a little weak lately."

"Huh?" She says. "You've been out there playing that new football game, haven't you?"

"What new football game?"

"The one that's been all over the news. John Madden or something. Don't play

stupid with me,” she says.

“Hey, my damn tire is flat and I’ll see you soon.”

“Are you all right?” she says.

“Yes baby,” I reply.

“You don’t love me as much as I love you,” she cries.

“Yes I do. Are you serious?”

“I miss you,” she says.

“Babe, I miss you too. I’ll be home soon,” I state. Patience is a virtue. Patience is a virtue.

“Do you want to go to dinner tomorrow night with my family?” she asks.

“Seriously babe, gimme a break. We hang out with your family too much anyway. Listen, I’ve gotta go.”

“No we don’t, you just don’t like them,” she says.

“Yes I do. Your mom’s politics are crap though. I’ll see you in a little while. I love you.”

“Her politics aren’t crap, you just take it too seriously.”

“Babe I love you, forget I said that. Jesus Christ, I’ve gotta go,” I say.

“I love you too,” she says.

“Bye.”

“I said I love you too,” she wails.

“I know baby. I love you. See ya in a little bit.”

“Bye.”

We pull into the station and the parking lot is rather uneven and the gas pumps are the old style and have dirt covering up the grade. There are no choke points for the traffic like maybe a curb so it feels sort of like a Mad Max film. I suspect Tina Turner might show up alongside some mo-hawked guy with a glass eye any second now. They’ll be on top of a go-kart and she’ll probably want some fuel. They call it fuel instead of gas in all apocalyptic films of any caliber.

The building is one of those small brick ones with plenty of cigarette advertisements. I kind of want a cigarette as a matter of fact—preferably a Marlboro Light, but a Camel non-filter will do. The beer lights are on and I think a cold one would certainly be appropriate as well.

We cruise inside and Willie introduces me to Jackson behind the counter who then calls Shug out of the back. Jackson is

a wily little guy who talks with a lisp. My mom said a lisp is a sign of intelligence. Shug is six-foot-six and weighs in somewhere on the other side of a sumo wrestler but right beneath a National Geographic special. Shug says he used to play a little football and I lie and say I did too. I really did play quarterback for a little while I guess. I had a weak but accurate arm—sort of in the Joe Montana mold. A winner though, no doubt about it.

We walk around back to get the jack and I’m hungry. As I load it into the truck, I smear sludge all over my damn pants. These no-stain pants are a bunch of b.s. Willie pulls out a pack of Parliaments and lights one with the lighter backwards in his hand. I used to light my cigarettes that way in the wind. Shug and I talk football while I put a little gas in a jug.

“You know, the Patriots had a weak year last year and still almost pulled it out,” I say.

“Patriots man, theyza bunch of cheaters or sumthin. But they are good. You know they got Randy now. Randy’s a playa man, he’s forreal,” Shug says.

We walk back inside and I look around for a cheese danish. I care deeply for danishes because they remind me of when I worked at the drugstore and used to hotbox Pall-Malls in the back bathroom. I hear the front door bell jingle and think nothing of it.

“Put yo hands up fool!”

“Jus take what I have in the register man. We don’t want no trouble,” Jackson says.

Time moves backwards almost. The hair on my ass is even standing up. What the hell would I do in a video game? I’d whip this bastard’s ass and then steal his car and pick up some hookers.

I’m sort of hidden on the pastry isle and he’s got his back to me. Terrible burglar. Didn’t even check the store. Jackson and Shug are smiling a little so they must be relaxed and ready for me to make my move. I grab my danish and crouch low on my way to glory. I lunge at the guy from behind and form-tackle him to the ground. Then I hit him with a sucker punch in the ribs and he gasps and his breath stinks like crap.

“Ooooooh, man. Whacchu doin?” he says.

I start to pull out my really dirty Phillipino moves like the eye gouge and the fish hook but suddenly I’m plucked into the air. I wonder if he shot me and this is what it feels like. Nope. This is what it feels like when Shug the Destroyer yanks you up.

The burglar fumbles out the door like a cartoon character and I’m confused.

“What the hell man, I got that sucker? Where’s my danish?” I ask.

“Fool, that’s Robert. Robert’s special man. He lives across the road in the special home. Bout every week they watch Scarface ‘cuz they don’t got but three movies and he comes over here with his poop breath and robs us. We give him some play money. He don’t mean no harm,” Shug says.

“Seriously. I jacked that guy, man. I’m a hero,” I scream.

“You’re an idiot. We were standing here laughing. Petrified white boy. Y’all all the same,” Jackson interjects.

Damn, I thought I’d saved the DAY. I am a petrified white boy. We load up amidst a fair amount of laughter at the station.

“You jus like James Bond man. Where yo tux at?” Shug says in the window.

“Man you a sho nuff bonafied Bruce Leroy—fighting that crime.” Jackson hollers as we pull off.

My danish tastes good but I could use some milk because it’s too late for coffee I suppose. Milk usually upsets my stomach because I’m lactose intolerant, among other things.

“Don’t worry about that man, you kinda stepped up back there. If it wuz real you might’ve been on YOUTUBE. Could’ve used the store cameras,” Willie consoles.

“How do you know about YOUTUBE, Willie?” I ask.

“Yawl think wez jus fools. We aint no fools,” he replies.

We jack the car, put on the spare, and add some gas.

“You were full service Willie. Thank you,” I say.

“Huh?”

“See ya around,” I say as I pull off.

I listen to my favorite song on repeat most

of the way home. One particular guitar riff reminds me of Bon Jovi and ex-girlfriends. The roads are vacant and I have time to think about my golf swing and Shoney's breakfast bar as well. Generally, I load up on potatoes because my grandma always said they'll make a man out of me.

I pull up to a red light and I contemplate running it because tonight I'm extraordinary and laws are for the regular folks according to Napoleon and Fyodor. It turns green before I make a move. Damn it.

I try to open the house door without too much noise, but it's a renovated 1830's dogtrot with various aches and pains. My wife grumbles as I move through the house and I remember to feed my dogs. They like to poop next to their food and they show me and then I slap them on their bellies. I love slapping them on their bellies.

One of my dogs is developing some sort of neuroticism and I can't figure it out so I try to Dog Whisper them for a moment. These damn dogs don't pay attention for anything though and one farts a little in my face and another buries his head in my crotch before I slam the door on them. Now I know my wife's awake.

I brush my teeth for about seven seconds and I think I got all of them. I really hate brushing my teeth because I'm rather impatient with that sort of thing. Bedtime.

"Honey, you awake?" I ask.

"It's late babe, did you get your tire fixed?" she asks.

"Yep."

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I beat Jimmy and then I had a flat and then two ladies cursed me and then a couple picked me up and we went to a station and then someone tried to rob it and I stopped them but he was really a special person and then the couple made me feel bad because I'm an insensitive jerk and our dogs are a bunch of fools," I say.

"Well. Did you learn anything?" she asks.

"Yeah, stick with the Patriots. They're going undefeated this year."



"Eat Turkey..." • Ryan Sellers



Foreign Yankee Substance • Naomi Stauffer



REFLECTIVE

Sit Here With me



Jessica Skarda

Sit here with me
and listen to the depths of the lake.
Ducklings of all kinds
float upon a crest and a wake.
The water breaks and chaps the bank,
And the wind blows on my face; my blood runs cold.

But you are not here with me.
So I will tell you in the time to come
Of the cities I did see, and the places I did run.
Then you and I will live to see together
The wonders that sit beneath the subdued sun.

The water ripples in cerulean and reflects the tan
Of the ground that seldom receives the rain
Poured out by a dry Colorado sky,
Though you would not know it by sight alone.

You are not here with me, so as I drone
On and on about how the ripples do,
My thoughts reflect back onto you,
Asking when it is that you will come,
And whether or not I know you now.

Were my love deeper than this lake,
Were my plans secure and actions sure,
If it were me alone then I would run to you,
But it is not.

Sit with me beloved, and enjoy the depth of the sea,
But let us not forget the depth of the sky.

A Perfect Memory



Quoc Ngo

My home in Vietnam is right next to the Deo Ca Valley near the Da Bia Mountains. My house is built with wood, covered with aluminum sheeting, and laid with a smooth concrete slab on the floor. The house is not very big, but it is surrounded by a large landscape. All the land is used for agricultural purposes, like growing sugar cane, yucca, mangos, bananas, and dragon fruit. During the morning, the cool breeze that comes rushing down from the mountain is refreshing. When noon comes, the area is heated up like a beach during the summer. In the afternoon, the air begins to cool down, preparing for nightfall. The house is surrounded with so many trees and plants that I can hear the wind before it comes; the trees wave back and forth like hands waving in the air.

Whispers to the Wind (pt. 1)



Banjoure Sacks

A pearl is a liar
A pearl is a lie
Wrapped around
A truth,
The truth is harsh
The truth is a grain of sand
Buried in the sun,
While lies cost a fortune
And are worth every penny
Truths are free
If you remember where
To look,
But I think you'll find
In this world
Fewer peals
Than truths
That lay unnoticed
At your feet
When you lie
In the sand.



Buddy Wiltbank • Beth Parrish

Bereavement: From Theory to Reality



Anonymous

We all study and major in diverse fields for various different reasons. Most of the time, the courses we take are theoretical and rarely involve us on a personal level. When I signed up for “The Sociology of Death and Dying” last semester, I expected to learn more about how people individually and society as a whole deal with death and dying. I did not think the course could become personal, but it did.

In summer of 2005, I started volunteering at a nursing home in Selma, Alabama. Since I am in the United States on a student visa, I am not allowed to work and earn money. At that time, I was not able to start my studies at AUM because I still had to assemble various documents and take the TOEFL test. I was bored out of my mind and wanted to be able to do something. Next to the apartment building that I resided in at that time was a nursing home. One day I decided to volunteer there. I helped out with the activity department and got to know the residents. Right from the beginning I became really close to Annie, one of the residents. Soon, she basically adopted me as her grandchild, and I continued to visit her even when I was no longer volunteering there on a regular basis.

Last semester, I took the class “The Sociology of Death and Dying” at AUM. I did so because I was interested in the subject matter and because I liked the professor who was teaching the course. As the semester went along, we learned a great deal about death and dying and about how people here in the States—and also in different cultures—deal with this subject. The course was interesting, and I liked attending the classes. At the same time, Annie’s condition began to deteriorate. She used to be pretty active and always went to the various offered activities. When I started volunteering, Annie was not really sick. She was 81 years old and suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, but otherwise she was fine. At the beginning of this year though,

she started to get weaker and could do less and less by herself. In February, the situation took a turn for the worse. She was in a great deal of pain, and I along with Deb, the social worker at the nursing home, helped to get her evaluated for hospice service. They took her into their program and eventually they were able to give Annie stronger pain medication. I kept visiting her often and told Deb to call me in the case that Annie’s condition further declined.

On March 8th, 2007, we had a grief counselor speak to us in my “Death and Dying” class. She made us write a letter to ourselves in which we were supposed to address a significant loss we had experienced in the past. Basically, we were writing to ourselves from the position of a friend, trying to offer words of comfort. When I left class that day, I had one “missed call” on my cell phone. Deb from the nursing home had tried to reach me. I returned the call right away. She told me that it was looking bad for Annie and that she did not think Annie would make it through the night. Since I live in Selma and it takes me about an hour to get there from Montgomery, I anxiously left the campus and hoped that I would make it in time to say goodbye.

The situation back then seemed almost mind-blowing to me. All this was happening right after the “Death and Dying” class with the grief counselor. Furthermore, I noticed that I was immediately overwhelmed with guilt and regret for not visiting her more often, for not going there the day before. I thought I could have done more, been there more often, or at least stayed longer. Everything we had talked about in class suddenly stopped being a concept, something that I understood intellectually but did not penetrate emotionally. The idea of losing someone seemed almost new, although I have lost a loved one before. I guessed that as time goes by, pain lessens and in and of itself becomes difficult to remember. I wondered then if that meant it would be a “new”

experience every time we lose someone.

I finally arrived at the nursing home at 5:10pm. When I went into Annie’s room, she was alone, hardly aware of anything. Annie was lying on her bed, her head turned against the wall. I went to her and started talking to her. I remembered that hearing is the last sense to leave. Therefore, I told her about my day, that Deb had called to tell me that she was not doing well, that I came over right after I got back to Selma. I joked and said that this could all be an act so that she would never have to eat one of my cakes again. The weekend before, I had baked a cake for her birthday and brought it to her. Neither baking nor cooking is among my talents, but I had promised her a cake for her birthday.

Annie was aware that I was there, or at least that someone was there. She could not talk though. I kept talking to her, even though it just got harder and harder and I started crying. I told Annie that I loved her and that she should not worry because she could not talk to me, that I understood. The hospice nurses had given her a lot of pain medication so that she was not suffering. Even though the last month had been pretty hard for her and she was on a steady decline, her condition did not look this bad the weekend before. After twenty minutes, Annie’s granddaughter arrived, and shortly afterwards, so did the rest of her family. I offered to leave because I did not want to intrude. They said that I should stay and so I did. Later, the physician came and took the family outside to talk to them. I stayed with Annie. I held her hand, and she held on to me. Eventually Annie’s daughter-in-law came back in and stood on the other side of her bed. Suddenly, Annie stopped breathing. Everything went still. We thought she died right then but after a moment she started breathing again. I saw her son standing in the door and thought that he should be at Annie’s side, not me. Quickly, I said goodbye. Shortly afterwards, I left the nursing home since I did not want to intrude on the last moments Annie had with her family. I told them all goodbye and left. That moment was around 6:30pm.

I could not believe what was happening when I walked to my car. I sat there for a while and just cried. All the intellectual comforts like, “Annie is in a better place,” “She is no longer in pain,” “It was her time, and at least her suffering is over,” or even the notion that only her body died, that her soul survived, was only that: an intellectual concept that my mind accepted, but at the same time my heart was breaking. These thoughts offered no comfort. I went home, and throughout the whole evening, what had happened stayed with me. Annie’s death kept looming in the back of my mind, waiting for me to pay attention to the fact that she was gone. Not that I had expected the situation to be different, but still, it scared me. I mean, I loved her and like I said, she had basically adopted me as her grandchild. I had known her for about two and a half years, and during that time I usually visited her once a week, sometimes more, sometimes less. One can argue that one does not need years of knowing someone to let them into one’s heart, but there is still a difference between her and my partner, my parents, my sister and my closest friends, some of which I have known since kindergarten. I wondered, if her death affected me like this, how would I react to the death of someone who is closer to me? Of course, when you love, you open yourself up to hurt and grief. But again, intellectual knowledge is one thing, having the very incident happen to you, quite another.

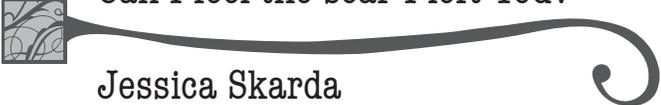
The next morning I went back to the nursing home. Annie’s room was just like the day before. She was gone, though. They told me she died at 6:45pm, fifteen minutes after I had left. I was standing in her room and looked at everything and started crying again. It was hard. I asked one of the nurses how her roommate was doing and if anyone had talked to her. Annie’s roommate, Brandi, is 95 years old but still pretty alert. They had shared a room for almost four years. The nurse said that she thought Brandi was alright, and that she did not think Brandi would have realized what had

happened. Then, suddenly Brandi woke up and held her hands out to me and started crying. I went to her and hugged her. She said that granny—she always called Annie granny, even though Brandi is twelve years older—had left her. Brandi could not understand why that had happened and said that Annie told her the day before that she was feeling better. Brandi said that she had loved Annie so much and that Annie had always been so good to her. She cried, and I just tried to be there for her. The situation was really bad and got worse when Annie’s family arrived to pack up her stuff. Brandi got especially upset when they took Annie’s seat. She covered her eyes with her hands, cried and said they should not do that. She also asked me if I would go and see Annie. I told her that I would; then Brandi said that she would not, since she does not want to see Annie like that. Brandi was especially hurt by the fact that Annie had died in their room while she was sleeping. I promised to keep visiting her and also told her I would bring back a picture of Annie for her. She seemed happy about that.

After I left the nursing home, I printed out the picture for Brandi and drove back. I stood at the traffic light—at the cross section right before the nursing home—when suddenly a police car with siren stopped in the middle of the street. I was surprised and wondered what was going on. Suddenly, the hearse with Annie’s family following behind drove by. I just stared at it and again, could hardly believe the timing. On the same night, I went to Annie’s wake, her family had invited me. The following Saturday, I went to her funeral.

When I signed up for the “Death and Dying” class, I did not know how personal this subject would become. Until this day, I can hardly grasp the timing of everything that has happened. The knowledge I gained through my “Death and Dying” class helped me to deal better with Annie’s passing. That is not to say that my newfound understanding made Annie’s loss less painful. The class enabled me to better comprehend the grieving process that I was going through. I also read again through the letter the grief

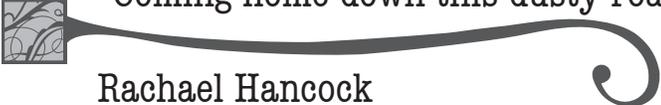
counselor in class had made us write to ourselves; it was oddly comforting. In the end, I am glad I got to know Annie, and while I am still saddened by Annie’s death, sometimes I feel like I can hear her voice, asking me “How is my girl doing, today?” and I smile.



Can I feel the scar I left You?

Jessica Skarda

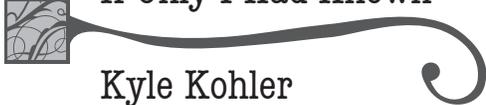
Can I feel the scar I left You when the
nail drove though Your hand?
And the crown of thorns upon your brow,
was it a painful band?
Can I taste the salt upon Your cheek, flowing from your eye?
Can I hear your mother wailing, o'er
crowds screaming, "CRUCIFY!"?
Did it hurt you when they shouted, shouted louder all the more,
"Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Kill the one the Jews adore."
Did it phase You when You turned to heaven,
and heaven then betrayed—
Only God in heaven heard You, and yet He
turned away?
Could I feel the curtain tear as you split it from top to bottom?
If I saw dead bodies raise that day,
would I leave your mem'ry forgotten?
Could I stand with the centurion, and exclaim the very same
"Surely this is the Son Of God,
the Son of God that came!"



"Coming home down this dusty road"

Rachael Hancock

Coming home down this dusty road,
The tales one could say of this way alone:
Of walks and horseback rides with friends so dear,
Of wrecks from a newly acquired license
And the notorious deer in the head lights.
Turning the bend on this dusty road,
I spy many things that I commit to memory.
If ever I loose my way,
I will always be able to say
I know my way home.
Just look for a red dirt road lined by pine:
It is my fondest path home.



If Only I Had Known

Kyle Kohler

i laugh at the sky,
yet i do not know why.
the sky is blue,
and i am too.
i try not to laugh outloud.
i am standing in a crowd
watching someone jump into the air;
all of us standing on the street can only stare.
i hear a woman next to me gasp for breath.
i wonder if this jumper had anything left.
i wonder why would someone leap from a building to
end their life.
i wish that i had known.
the jumper's tears rain down on me like those of a fallen
angel's.
i look at the sky
and begin to cry,
yet i do not know why
and then it is over.

I know it's lame, but whatever.



An Imprint

Carmen Blair Miley

I see a footprint right there lying in the snow.
But where did it come from, and where does it go?

Tell me your story, oh
Footprint, whether it's told with sorrow or glee.
Open up your heart. Hurry! You must find the key!

Have you walked the streets of Paris?
Or were you left behind on the path to fairness?

Even so, you have been some place,
But where, I do not know.

And yet I wonder, is this your first imprint on
The world to unfold?
Or is this your last, left out here in the cold?



Young Love

April Elisabeth Walker

I look down at my hands; they used to be so dainty. Wearing white gloves to church on Sundays was an option, not a necessity to cover up calluses and wrinkles. They are wet now from catching the tears that are streaming out of my eyes. I can't control these tears, they are cascading freely, ignoring my will power to make them cease. I am strong, or so I thought, but without him I'm not quite so sure of myself. I've gotten used to having him around, he's been there for forty-five years so why shouldn't I be used to it?

The ring remains on my finger; I can't bring myself to take it off. I feel naked without it on and removing it would, in my mind, be placing him out of my life. I could never do that, he was my smile, my laugh, my lover, my best friend, the father of my children, my soul mate, my support, and my partner in everything that I did for those wonderful, beautiful forty-five years. I don't remember a time in my life without him there, but I do remember our first meeting.

I was fourteen and still in my tom-boy stage where "anything you can do I can do better" was my daily mantra. I grabbed my baseball glove and my hat and marched myself out to the field. The local boys in the mill village were used to me joining in the games, and had finally just accepted the fact that I could hold my own when playing with them. If I got hurt, I didn't cry, and that made me better than any other girl they knew, so they no longer complained or made snide remarks. That day was different though. As I walked up to the field I noticed a new boy there. He looked to be about sixteen, because he was a little taller than most of the other boys that played. His baseball cap fit his head tightly, and his dark brown curly hair peeked out from underneath it. It was that first glance at him that I knew this game would be different.

We chose teams, and he ended up being on the opposite one as me. I felt a twinge of sadness knowing that my team would have to beat his, because boys are usually more competitive than girls are and can be really upset when they lose. I got up to bat, I was the clean-up hitter, because my bat was usually quite strong; however, with him pitching I wasn't quite so sure that I would be able to concentrate on the ball. He smirked as he wound his arm to pitch towards the plate. My eyes briefly left his mouth and I swung at the blur coming towards me. I missed, swinging right under. "Focus Anna focus," I said to myself as I stepped back up to the plate. It had been at least a year since I had struck out, and I was determined not to let it happen today, not in front of him.

The second pitch came in and it landed on the ground right in front of me, throwing dirt all over my sneakers. "So this is how it is, is it mister new boy?" I thought, secretly enjoying the playful way he had pitched the last ball. The next time around, I didn't even notice his smile, his gorgeous eyes, or his bouncy hair. All that I saw were the stitches on the ball, one falling on top of the other as it sliced through the air towards me. I prepped my mind to swing. It was a strong swing, and I made contact. It flew through the air over the shortstop's head and landed right in between the Center Fielder and the Left Fielder. I started running, passing first and second bases, and as I moved toward third, my foot caught on a rock. I went flying through the air, landing on my ankle, and I felt it snap. I, a tomboy, cried. "Ahh, come on don't be a wuss!" I silently screamed at myself because the tears were coming faster now. "Don't let him see you like this. You have to be strong." As I thought that, he ran over to me, curly hair and all, the first one to come, and as he took me in his arms I could feel his warmth. He picked me up; the others showed him the

way to my house. He carried me the whole way and sat me on the couch in the living room. As he left I heard my mother thank him; then, I saw the worry on Mom's face when she came to me. I fell in love the first time I met him. I didn't even find out his name until the next week: Michael Stewart—that was his name, and what a strong name it was.

We were inseparable from the moment I went back to school on my crutches. He came up to me in the hallway and introduced himself, and that was that. We went to both of our proms together, attended one another's graduations, though I wasn't quite sure where it would go when we got out of school, but the day after I got my first 'real' job, I got the surprise of my life.

I ran over to Michael's house to let him know that I had gotten the job as a receptionist at the doctor's office. I was so excited that I had run out of breath. His mother opened the door with her usual smile, but this time there was something different about it. There was a sort of twinkle in her eye, and a slight smirk on her face.

"Hello Anna, I thought I might be seeing you soon. I was told to give this to you," she said as she handed me a single red rose. It was beautiful; however, around the stem was a note which read "Through this door was where I first carried you, your face wet from crying, but your beauty still showing." Thoroughly confused, I looked at Mrs. Stewart.

"Does this mean what I think it does?" I asked her.

"Honey, just go to where the card is sending you." she replied with that same look, the one that showed how she knew something she just was not going to say.

I practically ran to my house and up the stairs to find rose petals covering the porch and another rose taped onto the door. I gently pulled it off and read the card tied around the stem. "Walk through this door, and it will change your life, just like it changed mine. I love you." My mind was racing, what did this mean? Was he leaving me? Was this a final, I'll always remember you moment? Or was it some-

thing else. Something that we had always talked about, something I never really thought was an actuality. I walked through the door, seeing Michael with the other ten roses. He looked at me and smiled.

“Glad you went through that door Anna.” He got down on one knee, looking up at me, his blue eyes never bluer. “I know that things won’t be perfect, I know that it will be work, but I also know that I love you with all of my heart. I want to be the one beside you when you smile. I want to be the cause of your laughter. I want to wipe away your tears, and I want to hold your hand through all the joys and the hardships that life may bring. Will you allow me that privilege? Will you be my wife?” he said getting a slight catch in his throat. His face showed that everything he had just said came from the heart. I looked at him, deep into his eyes, and knew that I wanted it all too.

“Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!” I screamed at him, trying to keep from crying, but like the first time we had met, they overwhelmed me, and like that first time, he just took my into his arms. This time, however, it was a loving embrace; one I knew meant it would be there for me forever.

That was the beginning of us. It was a beautiful time, every moment of it, even the arguments and the petty little disagreements. I wouldn’t trade my time with him for anything. Over the years, our children have moved on, still remembering good old mom and dad, but lately it was only on the holidays. Sure, we had our weekly phone calls, but that was it. We had each other, which was all that mattered.

I walked to the house and opened the door. We’d been living here for five years, but after only one, it had felt like we’d been there forever. I instinctively touched my stomach. “Oh the changes that we’re going to have to make for you little one—the wonderful, beautiful changes,” I said out loud, as if to the little one inside me. “Now, how do I tell your father? It needs to be creative, joyful, and oh, the surprise! Even I had no idea!” I paced back and forth in the living room attempting to

come up with a unique way to tell Michael. The clock was ticking away the time until he would be home from work; I had to come up with something and fast.

I went to the kitchen. “Maybe if I cooked him his favorite meal, and made a cake that said, ‘Congratulations Daddy.’ No, the meal wouldn’t be done in time to bake and ice a cake.” Then it came to me, the best idea I had, and the only one that I would have time to carry out. I went to our room, and found my old drawing pad. I used to attempt to do charcoal sketches of people but had long ago given up the hope of ever being any good, so it had become a notebook where I jotted down poetry as it came to me. I got my pencil and set to work, making big block letters that said “Welcome Home Daddy.” I thought it was a cute idea since every day, when he went off to work, I felt as if he would never make it home at any decent time. I taped it on the door and sat on the couch, just waiting for the love of my life to come home.

I heard his footsteps on the porch, and then he suddenly stopped. The tape ripped off the door slowly, and then the knob turned and the door swung open.

“Anna, does this... does this... does this mean what I think it does?” he asked excitedly. I just nodded unable to get the words to come out, his excitement contagious and working with my own.

“Wow! When? It’s great. You’re going to be a Mom! Which means, I’m going to be a Dad? Oh my goodness, we have so much to do sweetie. We have to get a crib, clothes, turn the guest room into a nursery; we have to tell our parents. Oh, I love you so much baby,” he said, overtaken by the sheer suddenness of it all.

“Honey, slow down, we just found out today. Let’s not tell our parents until it’s a little further along in the pregnancy,” I said calmly. I’ve always wanted children though have been fearful of losing them. “Oh, I love you so much! I’m so excited that I have our child inside of me, Michael; I couldn’t wait for you to get home, so I would have someone to share it with. I’ve been talking to it all day long. It’s going to

think that its mama never shuts up, but it’ll never have a doubt that she loves her either.

I prayed every night for our child to be born healthy and strong. As the time neared, I worried that I wouldn’t be strong enough to bear the child, but Michael was there for me every step of the way: supporting me, rubbing my feet, getting food to satisfy my cravings, and doing everything possible for the nursery. By the time Zack was born, everyone around us was anxious to see if he was a boy or a girl. The first time I held him in my arms I knew what it was to have so much love for someone you just met that you could burst. This was my baby, our baby, and a testament to the world of the breadth of love Michael and I shared.

The day that Michael fell, I had a gut feeling that something was wrong. I was outside in the garden planting some new tulips for spring. I went inside, not sure if this feeling really meant something or not. I prayed every step of the way. I walked in the door and there he was, at the foot of the steps. I ran to him.

“Honey, are you okay? Michael, baby, Talk to me!” I said frantically. I could see that he was still breathing but he wasn’t responding at all. I took his head into my lap, and smothered him with kisses. I knew that this was not the best thing for me to do, but it was the only thing that I could think of. Our kisses had always cured one another before. This time, however, that would not be the case. I gently placed a pillow under his head, as he was still lying at the bottom of the stairs.

I walked hastily to the phone, picked it up, and dialed the number of our second child, Becky. She lived only a few houses over, the only child that had stayed close to home out of four children. She had gone to school to be a nurse, but when she and her husband began to start a family of their own, he had urged her to stay at home with them until they were all in school.

“Becky, please get over here, now,” I said crazily.

“Mom, what’s wrong?” she said with obvious worry in her voice.

"It's your father, baby, he's fallen. I don't know what's wrong; all I know is that he is not moving. He's breathing, but he can't talk. Baby, he can't talk." I felt the sobs welling up in my throat.

"I'm on my way Mom," she said and hung up the phone.

"Not now, God, not now," I pleaded. "I can't make it without him. Please don't take him now." I was sobbing uncontrollably now, realizing that this could be the end. I couldn't lose him, not yet, I wasn't ready. We still had too many things to do. We have ten grand-children now, and are expecting two more by Christmas time. They had to know Michael, love him, and let him spoil them, as he'd spoiled me all these years.

Becky knocked on the door. I pulled myself away from Michael to let her in. She rushed in, not even bothering to say "Hey Mom" or "I love you." She immediately went to her father who was still just lying there.

"Mom, go call 911. This is too big for me; we need an ambulance to take him to the hospital as soon as possible." Becky had a worried waver in her voice.

I walked to the phone, reality hitting me hard. My hand shook as I picked up the phone and dialed. The receiver picked up, and I relayed the information. Miraculously I left out my pleads for his life and my explaining to her what an amazing husband, father, grandfather, man, and over all wonderful human being the person that they were coming to carry away from me was.

After the ambulance had loaded him up, I watched them drive away. If I didn't watch, I knew he would never return, though I wasn't so sure that he would anyway. Becky pulled at my arm and wrapped a sweater around my shoulders. I followed her out the door, knowing that she was a product of our love, that I would always have our children, even if he didn't return to me.

On the day of the funeral, I woke up, missing Michael's warmth and love. I'm sure I got up, showered, and dressed, but I can't remember any of it. I don't want to live without him. Becky and her husband came to pick me up. We arrived at the church

before anyone else. Zack, Becky, John, and Evan were all there beside me. We walked up and looked into the casket. He lay there, looking as peaceful and calm as ever, with a slight smile on his face; I'd have almost sworn he was just sleeping and would wake up at any moment. The kids all gathered around me and embraced me. When they let go, I wasn't sure whether or not I would be able to stand. The love of my life was gone, the day that I never thought I would see was now upon us, the day that I would no longer have him around.

My hands are almost dry now. My tears had stopped somewhere in between the time that I was lost in a dream world of the past and the time that I returned to reality. The times that had come to mind helped remind me that as long as we keep his memory alive, he is still with us all. As hard as every morning is, waking up without him, I must do it. I must do it for my children, my grandchildren, and our love. I must live for Michael so that he can live through me.

I heard Kyle, Becky's oldest son at the age of ten, coming into the room, his bare feet making the old hardwood floors creek ever so slightly.

“Glad **you** went through that door, Anna.”

"Grandma, I can't sleep, will you tell me a story?" he asked so sweetly, that I knew I would not be able to turn him down.

"Of course, Sugar, which one would you like to hear?" I replied gently.

"The one about you and Papa Michael, the one where you met on the baseball field, that one is always my favorite," he said.

"That's my favorite too baby, come here, and let me tell you how I met your Papa," I said as he slid gingerly into my lap.

"Some people may tell you that fourteen is too young to fall in love, but I can tell you differently..."





Dogwood in Blue • Ryan Sellers

Once
Jennifer Jacobs

Once,
A knotted tree grew tall,
The roots gnawing the dark sod
Until bush and branch were one.

Between the ground and the sky,
The branches coiled high, so high.
Higher than my eyes could see,
Blocked by the leaves of its canopy.
The branches nurtured my play,
Shading me from the yellow rays.

I spent my youth reading there:
Hemingway and Shakespeare.
I still hear my sanctuary call
Where a knotted tree grew tall.
Once.

Thoughts of the Dying One
Carmen Blair Miley

I envy the life of a newborn babe, for it has
just begun. My life is over—my race has been run.

I envy the slender grass swaying gently in
the breeze. I even envy the silence of the trees.

My passing is but moments away, as I gaze
longingly at the beautiful winter day.

I envy the tiniest ant that can carry an
oversized grain of wheat, for I have not
the strength to move the toes upon my feet.

I envy the children playing merrily in the
snow. I ask myself, why am I the one to go?

Yet, why envy such wonderful things when I am
about to see my Father's face? I dream about
that Heavenly place.

I smile an appreciating smile as I return to
my bed, me it safely keeps. And with joy on
my face and in my heart, I close my eyes
forever to sleep.

Escape
Hunter Jackson

The earth is filled with thorns
And sharp rocks
Be careful where you step
Because you'll get cut
And bleed

The trees are dark
And mysterious
And terrifying
It is easy to get lost in the forest

I see the sky and smile
It's blue hue is inviting
Where as the ground is haunting
Escape, I shall
To somewhere I can be at home
At peace
At rest
Escape
Escape
Escape

“Peak of Life”



Wade Watson

Looking back,
All the way back,
I see this harmless child.

Do not fear,
My dear child,
For you are bright and innocent,
And life awaits with an open hand.
But let me warn thee of thy surrounding dangers,
For they are enamored with you
And will never back down.

So
I cry to you,
My sweet and loving child,
Stay strong and choose your desired path,
For I believe in you,
You of all who inhabit this world!

Old Medicine Bottle (set to music)



Shane Gillis

Right now, where I am...
This is the most projected road
for a man who has been here most of his life
What is the wage for breathing?
What is it worth to you?
Are you alone
with a hundred friends
in the room with you?
Wishing I had a reason
Maybe the reason is you
Are we alone
in the way we fear love,
and the days and nights?
Realizing good things are short moments
I do not perceive joy staring at the Christmas tree
The sound of silverware clanging in a restaurant
Will surely see to further breaking of our furniture
I cry at the mundane
I laugh at your stupid concerns
When TV is really good, none of this matters

My Little Prince



Lyndsey Fifield

Le Petit Prince sits faithfully on my pencil box, two feet from my face all day. He watches me tear up for no reason whatsoever and then bury my face with my hands. He hears me tell myself to quiet down and pull myself together.

On my way home, le petit prince swings carelessly from my rear-view mirror. He watches me light up needless cigarettes and put my face in my steering wheel at red lights. He hears the craziest things come out of my mouth.

Alone in my room, when I'm ready to cry over absolutely nothing, he stands watch on every page while I write my fears and hurts into a journal I bought from a calendar shop in Paris.

This little icon watches me everywhere I go. I have more Le Petit Prince stuff than most people collect in a given color. How is it that I can see him from the corner of my eye at every moment and still neglect his wise words?

I sulk and cry, I become cross so easily... and there sits my little prince.

One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.

“He”



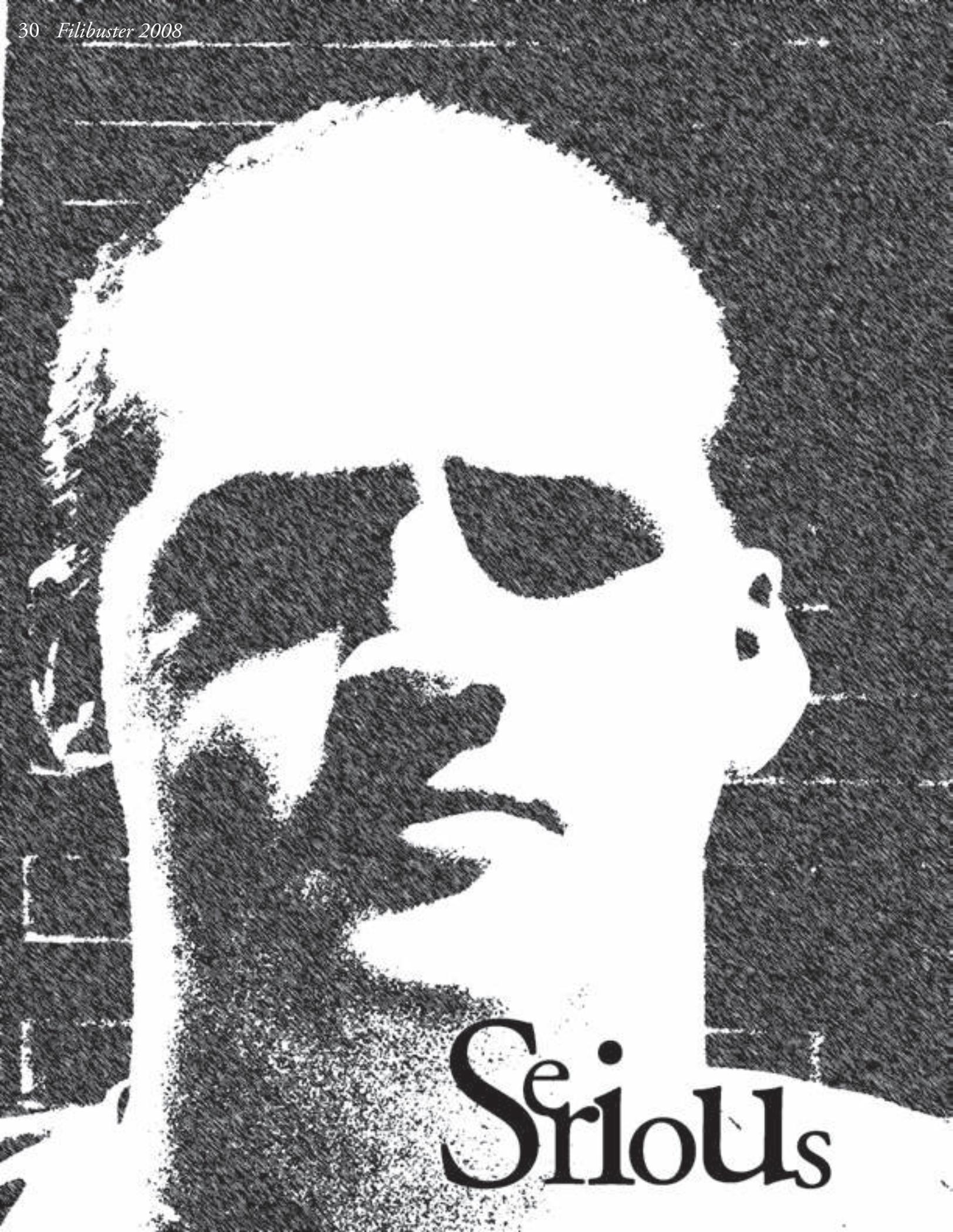
Phou Souriya

He has changed my life.
He also made me want to become a wife.

Everyday I stress,
About how I am gonna be the best.

He walks,
He talks,
And all I do is gawk.

He is as bright as the sun,
That's because he is my son.



Sriouts

The Greatest Work of All Time

Effie Moore

My friend Kevin asked me to submit
A poem or a story with wit.
After thinking quite hard,
For I'm not a bard,
I decided that this would be it.

Bog's Son

Kyle Kohler

It was so quiet.
Yes, that's what I remember thinking the night when I stepped off the Greyhound.
I can still feel the concrete beneath my feet. The bus ride had been a long one—almost ten hours. I was famished, but food could wait. Two other passengers got off after me. One was hitching a ride to Birmingham, the other was gonna wait with me for a taxi. She made sure to call for one after getting her bags situated. She stacked them on the ground next to me. She didn't have too many. Her suitcase fell against my leg, but that was okay as my eyes were watching her. A piano could've fallen on my head and I wouldn't've cared.

I don't know why, but she kept calling herself stupid. This bothered me because during the bus ride she had called herself ugly. I quickly corrected her, though. I told her I was happy she sat next to me because it had been a long time since I had seen a girl so damn beautiful. Her wide Arabic eyes watched me then as they are watching me now.

Dear Bog, I'm in heaven.

After a while I wonder what I'm doing here.

Out of my backpack, which I've had since forever, I retrieve my pocket-sized notepad and pen and begin to write. What it is I'm writing I can't tell you. I'm writing because I want to forget. This is why I love writing, but also why I hate it.

Azalea walked up to me and asked what I was writing. I told her the same thing I just told you. There's no other way to say it.

She rolled her eyes and watched the headlights of cars pass by the station. They disappeared under a bridge down a road whose name I cannot remember.

"Are you from here?" I asked. It was a stupid thing to say. I felt dumb.

She licked her lips and faced me. Her eyes burned into my skull. I don't know if she intended for this to happen, or if she could even help it. I don't know, but then I really don't care. She was kind enough to look at me, which was enough, considering how most people tend to ignore me. I don't blame them, though. I can't stand to look at me. Not that I am ugly by any means. I just can't stand waking up each morning to be reminded that I exist. That's why my bathroom is without a mirror. That's why I've painted every reflective

Breathe Life

Jessica Skarda

Breathe life
into these dead places.
These trees have been dead since long ago.
Speak life
Into these open spaces,
These barren fields, the wintry snow.

surface in my apartment black. Most of the time, when someone looks at me, I ignore them. But it was different with Azalea.

"Yeah," she said, "I'm from here. I live on the other side of town."

She pointed. I followed her finger until my eyes met the void.

"What about you?"

It took me a moment to reply. And in that moment I felt my heart thump louder than ever before. I wondered what she looked like with her scarf off. Her profile reminded me a lot of Scarlet Johansson. The rest of her face was a mystery.

"I love you," I mumbled, hoping she couldn't hear me. I don't know what I was thinking.

Her face warped with confusion. "What?"

"I'm sorry." I shook my head then nodded, "I live over by the Capri."

"Really," she became excited suddenly.

Before I could say anything a car pulled up in the parking lot. Its headlights spelled the doom of our conversation. But I wasn't about to begin wondering what might've been, as the saying goes.

Dear Bog, don't laugh too hard.

NOV 2007

611 words

Unnamed



Jennifer Jacobs



A Response to "What Happened to the Heroes?" (Filibuster 2007)

The heartbreaks of Clark Kent make him human.
The Man in Black, the Duke, and the Cowboys did their part.

The real journalists can't write – the bombs are too close.
6 Million are denied something – life, food, love – every minute.
6 Million is too little a number.

Despite budget cuts, our Men and Woman still come back
Whether in body bags or living—regardless—still Heroes.

The Coach, the Preacher, the Teacher are making small changes
Simply because there are too few of us to go around.

"What happened to the Heroes?" you ask.
Your answer: "The LORD is my shepherd" (Psalm 23).
Your answer gives me hope and keeps my faith.

Yet.

I see heroes.
Everyday.
We are unnoticed because we do not show ourselves.
We are underappreciated because we do not seek praise.
We are trying because we know we must.
We make small changes because they become tidal waves.
We seek comfort in Him.
We are okay with being unnamed until we meet Him.
Our hope is to hear:
"My Child, I name you. You are mine."
Right now—
We simply struggle,
Unnamed.



Snarl • Ryan Sellers

Soul Harvester



Amy Childress



In the dark of night or the light of day:
You know not—I am coming your way.
May it be your time,
Thine shall be mine;
There will be no getting away.
Before this foundling Earth,
At hand for his death and her birth,
Some are happy;
Others are sappy;
A corpse relieves the worm's food dearth.
The one to whom man's fortune yields,
Always mowing in the fields.
In the end,
Man's only friend—
To help him from where in pain he kneels.

Red Lunar

Antonio A. Byrd

Our ancestors believed that the Moon was a unique and spiritual place; elves danced in its craters while the gods made it their kingdom. The ancient tribes were in awe of these stories for thousands of years until one day a rocket ejected from Earth and settled itself on the dusty, pale landscape, releasing several humans. Their report brought sadness to the Moon worshippers. "The Moon is cold and white," the astronauts said. "There is rock and dust; there are no grand palaces and no great kings." I believed the astronauts were right until one cold night when the moonlight awakened me.

It was brighter than usual, but I thought nothing of it. I admired its presence, waiting for the spell of sleep to come over me. A few minutes passed when I noticed a shade of red creeping over the moon. I gasped for within seconds the red had swallowed up all signs of white. The Moon had somehow changed its color!

"Lord! The world's ending!" I cried. A strident banging noise like a hammer meeting steel swallowed my words. I looked down into my backyard and discovered a boy standing in a pile of scrap metal. It appeared that he was trying to build a rocket. The most I could make of his project were two garbage cans welded together and two cardboard fins on their sides. I walked to the backyard and confronted the intruder.

"Hey!" I called. The boy ceased his hammering and glanced at me. "What are you doing and how'd you get in my yard?"

"What does it look like? I'm building a rocket!" the boy replied.

"That's not a rocket. It's junk. You won't get to the Moon in that thing. You need a real space—"

"Hush! I'll not listen to any talk about rocket science. You'll ruin my chances of getting to the Moon. Besides, you don't need a real spaceship."

"Oh, really? And how else will you get there?"

"With the imagination!"

"Oh, I see now," I replied. "This is a game. You're playing Pretend. You must be the crazy boy everyone at school talks about. What's the name? Matthew! That's it!"

"I'm not crazy!" said Matthew. "As I said before, you don't need a real ship. Remember the old motto: mind over matter, and so we will use our minds to turn this old rocket into a spaceship and fly to the Moon!"

"What's this 'we' business? I'm not going with you. Now, get your junk out of my yard or else!"

"On one condition," said Matthew. "You play with me. I mean, it's no fun playing Pretend by oneself."

"Oh, all right," I replied. "If it means you'll leave."

I squeezed into the passenger seat while Matthew climbed in the pilot's seat. Old, stinky football helmets served as our space-suits. Before we began, Matthew felt he needed to teach me how to use my imagination properly: I could not simply imagine going to the Moon; I had to honestly believe it to be real and not notice that I created it myself. "Suspend your disbelief," Matthew told me. "Now, I'll report to Houston."

"Houston, this is Captain Matthew and co-pilot...Name?"

"Jake," I answered.

"Co-pilot Jake. We are ready to blast off! Fueling is complete, oxygen tanks are full, and systems are go!" Then Matthew said in a different voice as if pretending to be Houston, "Yes, Captain, you are clear for take off. Please make sure your co-pilot is using his imagination to the fullest!" Matthew shot me a glance.

"Uh, yes, Houston! My imagination is set to the fullest!" I answered, feeling rather foolish.

"Excellent!" replied Houston. "5...4...3...2...1! Blast off!"

There was an explosion that sent shivers up the spine of our rocket as intense heat licked my back and something pushed me

further into my seat. We were shooting off to space! My backyard and neighborhood melted away; black and twinkling stars took their place. Up we went, higher than I could have dreamed. In my excitement, I glanced behind me: the Earth had shrunk, striking me with its blue oceans and green continents. I told myself that this was a dream, but it felt too real to be a dream! The rocket jerked, bringing me out of my thoughts and to the awareness of the Moon, glowing a beautiful bright red, yet I had an uneasy feeling about it. I was disappointed that my experience lasted for a few minutes. Gravity had reached out and grabbed us, and brought the rusty rocket down to a smooth landing. When the dust cleared, we inspected the landscape.

Red flowers occupied the Moon as far as our eyes could see. They climbed hills and mountains and raced across the plains. Not even a speck of white caught our attention. I noticed two strange things about the flowers because they were not ordinary flowers like on Earth. First, the flowers emitted heat, which warmed my naked, cold feet. Second, they released glowing, yellow pollen. It was just as abundant as the flowers: on our clothes and skin, and in our hair and lungs.

"Astonishing!" cried Matthew. "Red flowers are the cause! And you said we couldn't get to the Moon!"

"I believe you now, Matthew," I said, stunned by what I saw. "What's that noise? It's like...water." Curiosity swept over our fear and took us on a race through the flowers. The distance was great yet we did not feel tired at the end of our journey. We came to a river of what looked like milk or cream, but it also sparkled like crystals. Upon further inspection, we noticed the river swiftly flow a mile or so until it fell into a crater.

"It's as though there are diamonds in it!" Matthew exclaimed, and then he drank a handful.

"Does it taste good?" I asked.

"Like honey fresh from a bee hive, but towards the end you taste a hint of chocolate."

It took only one handful to quench our thirst, but its taste led us to have more. Soon our stomachs were full and our spirits high.

It was the last good event we had on our adventure. Before the dreadful events came, Matthew and I continued to explore, thinking of all the reasons for the red flowers. Matthew believed elves lived on the Moon while I concluded Martians had landed.

"Martians!" replied Matthew. "I think we can do a little better than that!"

No elves were found, but someone found us. He had found us the moment we landed on the Moon, and, until he got too close so that his shadow loomed over us, he had been following us. When his shadow came to our attention, Matthew and I turned on our heels.

"A giant!" cried Matthew. Fear sweeping through our hearts, we were on the verge of running away, but something about the giant held us back. Our stalker did not appear dangerous: he stood at least ten feet which to us made him a giant. I found kindness in his eyes and wisdom in his withered face. White hair cascaded down his cheeks. Matthew and I agreed he had an air of royalty and while the giant was a muscular brute, he bent low from an aching back. We were struck with sadness upon seeing him because tears streamed down his face.

"Why are you sad?" asked Matthew.

"I'm not sad, child! I'm happy!" replied the giant. "I never thought I'd meet humans. All these months I've watched you from a great distance and now this close."

"You live on the Moon? Are there others?" I asked.

"Oh, no!" said the giant. "I come from another planet. I first came to the Earth's moon with my brothers. We landed here for repairs and if there is anything I hate, it's work! I'm the laziest person on my planet. So, I decided to sneak away and explore the Moon. After a couple hours I conclude that it was a dull place and by the time I returned my brothers were gone. I assumed they left me behind by accident and would come back, but several hours passed and I began to think they actually forgot about me. I've been here ever since."

"Well, that's a rotten story," said Matthew. "You must've been lonely."

"Actually it hasn't been that bad. You see, my eyes can see hundreds of thousands of miles away so I've been watching you humans on Earth. You guys are good company! Not too fond of your wars; I think they start for stupid reasons, but that's just me. And yet, despite the disasters, your species endures."

"It seems you know all about us, but what about your people?" I asked. "And what's your name?"

"You may call me Balder," answered the giant. "As for my people, we do not get into wars; we have a love for plants."

"So you're the one who planted the flowers!" I said.

"Much to my detriment, I'm afraid." Balder looked solemn. "The flowers' pollen allows you to breathe and it makes you stronger, but it causes me to vomit and grow old and sleepy."

"You mean these beautiful flowers are killing you?" asked Matthew. "Then why did you grow them?"

"I grew them hoping I could have some food, but the seeds had a terrible reaction," explained Balder. "Instead a great tree sprouted out of the ground, covered in red leaves. The river you drunk from is the sap of the tree. It flows freely from its trunk just as the roots grow freely, swarming the Moon in poison!" So much anger was in Balder's voice that Matthew and I were shaken. Balder heaved a sigh to calm down. "The process was slow at first, but then, as you know, it sped up."

"Isn't there some way to chop it down?" I asked.

"No," replied Balder. "You have to kill it at its roots and they go deep inside the Moon. There is a hole that leads to them, but it is too small for me."

Matthew's face brightened. "I see where this is going! You need us to go through the hole!"

"And kill the roots with a special poison I have with me," finished Balder. "That's a good plan."

"But that'll cause another problem," I added and told them that if the flowers die, so will the pollen, and while Balder will live (as he can survive in space) Matthew and I

would die. Our spirits drifted away as soon as I had finished. We did not travel to the Moon to watch someone die and did not come so we would die for someone else. Matthew thought we could take Balder back to Earth.

"He's too big for the seats," I replied.

"Well, I don't want to stay here and watch Balder die, and I'm not going home knowing he'll die alone," cried Matthew. "I can't stand this!"

"Neither can I stand children dying for my actions," said Balder.

And so we sat in the flowers, feeling awkward and sad. We had fallen into a terrible predicament with no real solution. Matthew suggested we stay with Balder so that at least he would not die in loneliness. Balder watched the stars while vomiting blood from time to time. Then he gave a terrible cough followed by a nap, but then the vomiting woke him, and so Balder could get no sleep. Soon his skin looked as though it was melting.

An hour passed and Balder told us about his home. His people believed in hard work, caring for the forests and animals. They did have some fun in their spare time. Swimming in the golden rivers, riding on the backs of giant birds, and giving praise to their nature-gods were the popular activities. There was so much said I cannot remember it all, but I do recall the love I had for Balder. You could not hate him for anything, and if you did find some reason for hating him, you would not hate him for long. I even had a feeling that someone lived inside Balder; like his giant form was not his true form. In any case, sleep eventually claimed me.

A great shriek awakened me. Matthew was leaning over Balder who lay unconscious among the flowers. Blood stained his hair and mouth.

"He just fell over!" explained Matthew. "Now I don't want to watch him die. We have to do something, Jake."

"But you do know what that'll mean. We'll be killed! We can't live without the flowers."

"I know, but I won't let him die. Will you?"

I seriously thought about this. At the bottom of my heart I wanted to live; I hated the very thought of death, however, I hated

the idea of people dying when I could do something to prevent it. Matthew's eyes influenced my decision. I saw compassion and love in them, and it rubbed onto me. Heaving a sigh, I answered, "What do you suppose it feels like to die?"

We searched high and low for the tree, and soon found it wedged between two high cliffs. We would have thought the raining red leaves and flowing cream splendid if we had not known what a nuisance they really were. The hole was found without any problems.

"How far down does it go, I wonder?" I said.

"We haven't much time! Hurry down the hole!" If only we could hurry down! Anytime you crawl into an unknown cave or hole you have to take extra caution. I ignored Matthew's complaints as we made the descent.

"Go faster!" he whined. "Go faster! You're too slow!"

"Oh, shut up," I whispered. "Talk any louder and you might cause a cave-in. Some use we'll be to Balder if we fall to our death or worse, get crushed!"

The deeper we went, the colder and darker it got. Soon the light streaming through the hole went out. My feet froze and my ears ached. Shivers ran up my spine, and my mouth went dry. By then I started to complain and grew angry. In reply, Matthew made a smart remark about how I should not have gone to the Moon in my pajamas. My blood reached its boiling point and I snapped: "As if I had a choice!"

How stupid of me not to follow my own advice about loud voices in dark, unsafe holes. The echo of my voice caused loose rocks to crumble on our heads, the pain loosening our grip. Down we went into the abyss. The fall, I am happy to say, was not terrible. Our heads and backs ached. Aside from this, we were in good shape.

Of all places to land, we fell on a huge, glowing blue orb. Thousands of roots burst from its sides and dug through the ceiling a hundred feet above us. A whirlwind swirled around us, decreasing the temperature to the point that frost grew on my eyelids and eyebrows. Matthew unscrewed the top of the

of poison he got from Balder. Cold sweat ran down my face. My heart thundered against my chest, and suddenly I felt afraid. I wished I could turn the wheel of time back to undo my choice of going down the hole.

"Are you ready?" asked Matthew.

"Well, it really doesn't matter whether I'm ready or not. It must be done. My only thought is what will happen after we die."

"I'm not sure myself," replied Matthew. Without a moment's hesitation, he poured the poison. The orb roared. The roots shrieked in agony and the cave itself moaned. It was as though the entire Moon had been hurt by the little drops of poison. Then, as the roots began to wither away and the orb lost its glow, the cave began to fall apart. This caught me off guard: I expected to die of suffocation, which to me did not seem so painful. But when the cave began to collapse around us, I became afraid. A boulder falling on my head had to be more painful than suffocation! I knew I would die, but not like that! Matthew must have felt the same for he reached over and grabbed my hand. I squeezed his hand with all my strength. It drained all fear out of me. We smiled at one another and said farewell as a shadow crept over our heads . . .

If you have ever wondered what it is like to die a painful death, I can give an account: The pain from a boulder crushing you is intense, but it lasts only for a second. Darkness immediately follows and it feels as though you've stopped breathing. These two things last for a moment. You suddenly feel fresh air in your lungs and your sight is sharper, your thoughts clearer. There is a light, so dazzling you can barely see anything at first, but then you see certain objects: rolling, green hills, fields of grass and wheat, clusters of oak and pine trees with a gray mountain in the background. The sun welcomes you by hugging your body in its warmth. Suddenly you feel as though you found a land you've been searching for all your life. There is happiness in your heart, but also you find that there is a hint of fear that someone may come and pull you away from the countryside. Standing in that place, Matthew and I wished we could stay forever.

"But you cannot stay," said a voice. We turned around and saw the most gorgeous person in the universe: an elf. "You cannot stay because of what you did," he continued.

"Did we do something wrong, sir?"

I asked.

"No, child," replied the elf. "You don't recognize me? It is I: Balder. The wretched giant you saved."

"Balder! That's really you? I had a feeling you were not yourself," I said.

"Yes. Never in my long life did I expect this: two human children were willing to sacrifice themselves for me. I deserved to die because I did not do what my brothers asked of me. You two did a noble deed. For willingly sacrificing your lives I shall return them to you."

"So we'll be revived?" I asked.

Balder nodded. "My brothers will be coming to pick me up soon. I will tell them about what you did, but they will not believe me."

"And why on Earth not?" asked Matthew.

"On my planet, we believe no human is selfless, but rotten to the core. My story they will not believe because their opinion of humans is too great in their minds. Plus, I lived alone on the Moon for many months. They will say I was hallucinating from hunger. I'm afraid my story will be a myth to them."

"But you know it's true!"

"Yes, I do, but I wonder what that says about your world's myths; maybe some of them aren't as false as you might think."

I was at a loss for words.

"Anyway, you may be a myth to my people, but at least you will be a famous myth."

Before I could respond, the beautiful countryside suddenly turned upside down. My feet gave way and I fell into a terrible void. At that point, I thought I would fall forever, at least until I hit something soft and warm. I frantically searched my surroundings and realized that I had fallen onto my bed. The morning air poured into my bedroom, the sun shined in a cloudless sky, and birds chirped merrily in the oak trees. Disappointment flooded my heart: it had only been a dream.

The Redemption Story

Benjamin Bethel

Jet black oceans and corrupted fountains
 Looming gray clouds over monstrous mountains
 Deadly gardens and posinous trees
 Growing near beaches of contaminated seas
 A darkened sun and dim-lit stars
 The earth like a face with countless scars
 Man's sins the flames of hell inspire
 The wrath of some unquenchable fire
 Keeps smoldering on this wratched rock
 What once was beautiful was also lost
 And locked away in some impenetrable fire
 Keeps clean and undefiled from this sinful place

The *earth* like a face with countless **scars**
 Man's *sins*

the **flames** of hell **inspire**

What misery characterizes the human race
 The image of God lost in space
 Separated from the One he was meant to know
 relationship in which he was meant to grow
 And flourish like a wild flower
 While basking in divine might and power
 Is it too late for this curse to be lifted?
 Cound divine wrath and justice possibly be shifted?
 To someone else, a scapegoat maybe?
 A lamb: pure, divine and holy?
 But it's too wonderful- it couldn't be true
 Is this what God had planned to do?
 A world redeemed, a kingdom established
 Sinners rescued from where they would've perished
 At none other than the cost of His holy life
 To buy some whore to be his wife
 And someday make her beautiful
 To experience His goodness and mercy full
 To show his glory beyond compare
 To a Church, beautiful, lovely, fair
 And though we look at a cursed world, black
 We press on in our Commander's plan of attack
 To redeem yet more sinners for His good purpose
 To tell more beings that they're not worthless
 That this earth will someday soon be redeemed
 A land where sunlight softly gleams
 On silver shores of oceans blue
 As we sail into a priceless view
 Of the Son's unbridled, endless glory
 Redemption truly is a beautiful story

"F"

Elaina Hagel

Faithful, Father, Forever Friend,
 Fortress, Forgiver, Fellowship without end.

Frustration Found without this Fabulous Favor
 May be due to an "FA"—Failure of Acceptance.

For those who seek a good Future, don't Forsake such a Find,
 The gift is Free. The invitation Forever extended.

What Lies Beyond

Richard W Gardner

Looking upon early morning, to see such things of majesty
 beyond comprehension
 Wondering what lies beyond
 To watch the clouds bellow over the graying hills, sensing the soft, silent
 motion from the lengthy grass and to lay amongst it in wait
 To anticipate with speeding eyes as the rain begins to fall
 Standing still as the liquid spills about whatever it would please
 Standing silent—more in a dream—hearing the rhythmic thud of the rain
 No—more of my heart over—sounding uncontrollable rage
 The race of blood flowing without halt through the veins producing life
 Just as the rain

Slowly the clouds made their way clear across the sky
 And the sun rising to heights beyond any such place known
 Mist began to clear away before the sun's magnificent rays
 The grass once again looked upward, the hills all returned green
 I continue to sit alone and wonder yet still... what lies beyond
 So I, once again, wait in the rain...

The Gift



Wade Watson

There she lies on the tip of destruction,
Sprawled out like an angel over the sin of Man.
Her hair is like a golden-brown streak of sunlight that gives the Earth its natural beauty;
Her face is more beautiful than an auburn sunset at bay;
Her body is as smooth and soft as a meadow filled with blooming flowers;
She smells more luscious than the freshness of a warm spring in the wild;
Her breath replenishes the sky with its fragrance of eternal life;
Her tears refresh the Earth when they hit the innocence of the rich soil.
She is like a princess whose infallible beauty cannot be altered by some evil spell or charm.
Her luminous spirit will forever live in this corrupt world
As a token for hope, change, and purification.

Videl



Stephen Pamplin

As I lay to dream one night,
I saw as mine eyes fell
A wondrous spectre in my midst
My mind could not dispel.

“What is thy name, dear lass?” I asked
The form my eyes befell.
She blushed away and then replied,
“Why sir, my name’s Videl.”

As grinned I, so did she,
And in my mind did dwell
No other thought or pleasure than
Having sweet Videl.

She took me in her beauty;
Her form my arms did veil,
And pressed against my very own
The lips of sweet Videl.

Her clothes slipped off, and so did I
Into that blissful sail
Of flaming passion and desire
To know her inmost detail.

We lay together, myself conjoined
Inside her calyx vale—
My life, it seemed to fall into
Each breath I did inhale.

Climax ensued; I felt her grip,
In pleasure she did wail;
Our entwined form at last gave peace—
Her chest I felt exhale.

A sense of guilt at once arose
Within our umbra veil,
But nothing matched the fear I felt
When my eyes met Videl’s.

The molten portals were not hers,
But burning pits of Hell—
My mouth could barely form the words,
“What are you, my Videl?”

The lustful thoughts then slipped away;
The passion faltered, stale,
As in the dark began to change
My lovely, sweet Videl

Into a beast of sin and shame
My own heart did entail,
But as I fought to save myself,
I could but only yell.

Now at once, I understood:
O’er my soul she did prevail,
And from now on to evermore,
I was had by that Videl.

Masquerade

Jaimie Spencer

Forgive me for crying:
I did not know my tears bothered you.
Forgive me for trembling:
I didn't what else to do,
So I put on this mask,
To cover the emotions inside,
Smile and laugh, when all I wished was to cry.
This masquerade
Is for you.

Forgive me for being enraged:
I did not know my anger scared you.
Forgive me for shouting:
I didn't know what else to do,
So I put on this mask
To cover the emotions inside,
Smile and laugh, when all I wished was to cry.
This pretend, this masquerade,
Is for you.

Forgive me for despairing:
I did not know that I was bringing you down.
Forgive me for weeping:
I didn't know what else to do,
So I put on this mask,
To cover the emotions inside,
Tried to smile and laugh,
Only to discover
There were no emotions to hide any longer.

I've become the mask.

My Coastal Empire

Amy Childress

Crashing crests, cold clouds
Briny, burning, biting but
Always alluring.

It's Alright

Jessica Skarda

You tell me that I wouldn't understand,
That I think too much of you,
That I could not possibly know what's wrong with you,
That you're not as perfect as I think you are.
We live in a fallen world—I know it.
All around me society crumbles;
Deliberate steps are taken to stumble;
And I wonder if you heard anything I just said to you.

You see me as some mini deity—
Somehow I'm higher, bigger, brighter,
But if you had known who I was and could see who I really am now,
You'd understand that I am no different,
though circumstances veil your eyes

Can't you understand that Christ has done it?
If anything, we are no different—we are the same.
I share your problems,
Even the ones that you won't tell me,
But God didn't make women stupid; no, they know intuitively
What you are trying to hide because you're afraid.

Be afraid of what the Christians will think—go ahead and do it,
But I will not be one to throw the stone at you.
By God's mercy I will shed the lies.
See all my sins; I pray that God will expose it.
I'll have less to count, and there will be less to hide.

If I could tell you one thing, I'd pray you'd do it:
Confess quickly, and make your heart right—
Do not think that you are any less
Or more.

See others through the eyes of Christ.

The Blade

Jacob Phillips

The blade shined in the blinding gaze of the sun. The knight, wearing a glorious suit of white armor that glimmered almost as brightly as his blade, stood across from his opponent with hatred flowing through his veins. He wore no helm. He was not afraid to look his enemy in the eyes. He wanted to see the life drain from his opponent's eyes. He glanced at his blade and knew that today he would finally put an end to the suffering that the conflict had brought him.

The opponent, clad in worn black armor, stood at the ready. His visor was down, and the knight knew that it was because he was afraid. His battered shield was up and his sword, looking dull, was ready to be thrust at a moments notice. Still, the knight knew he could slay his dark foe.

His hatred toward his enemy was caused by what seemed a long forgotten fault which lingered rather, bubbling and boiling until now, as it overflowed. It encased the knight like a shell and protected him, urging him forward. Yet, he lingered, wanting to take in the sight around him before the conflict finally ended.

He stood alone on his side of the field of roses, the perfect place for him to slay his enemy. The blood red flowers stood tall and stern, unaware of the conflict about to take place. They swayed in the breeze, back and forth: dancing. In his mind, the knight imagined that they were singing.

The sky was clear, bright, and blue. The sun burned brighter than ever before, eager to see the resolution of the long war. The knight was sweating in his heavy armor, but he enjoyed it. He could feel it pooling at the bottom of his greaves, having nowhere else to go, but he knew that after today, he would never need to wear his armor again. He would never again need its protection.

He settled his eyes on the dark man standing away from him. His opponent had yet to move an inch, standing emotionless like a statue. Yet, he knew that fear gripped the foe as tightly as enmity gripped him.

The roses swayed and sang like children on Christmas day.

His hatred could stay no longer. The urge to kill overwhelmed him, and his feet began to move, the sweat ebbing and flowing like the ocean with each step. His feet moved with inhuman speed, fueled by the loathing that spurned his every move. Yet, his charge was longer than he had expected. Each step seemed to take minutes, and as the distance between the two closed, time stretched out further.

The knight wanted it to be over. He tried to will time to return but alas, his attempts were futile. The sun began to set faster than he had ever seen. In the time it took him to halve the distance, the sun had gone from noon to near dusk. It settled behind his enemy and illuminated him. The knight could now see that, not only was the armor battered, but also thin. The shield was bent and the helm dented. His opponent's defenses were broken. Reinforced, the knight tried to charge faster, feeling the pool of sweat at his knees.

His enemy stood on guard still, having posed as such forever, it seemed. The sun made it difficult for the knight to see but he managed. He could make out the feeble protection that his foe garnished, and that was enough.

Then, just as he was nearing his target, it moved. It was much faster than him, faster than his charge of inhuman speed. However, the move was not for safety. His foe relaxed and dropped his shield. The dark man stabbed the sword into ground and the roses fell silent. The man removed his gauntlets and knelt down on one leg. The man, someone's son or brother, raised his wrists up and offered the exposed skin to the knight.

The smell of nothingness was strong, the fear grasped at him, begging him to stop. He wanted to, but the hatred too great to stop. It wanted blood.

He raised the blade up above his head and it glistened in the setting sun's light.

The knight tried to stay the blade but it had taken a mind of its own. With sweat at his waist, he dropped the sword onto flesh before him. Blood poured out of slits in the masked man's hands. He collapsed and stared up at the knight in terror.

The hatred left him. Abandoned him to the roses now screaming. Their red was draining as they wilted and withered away.

His strength left him. He fell to a sit. He slumped back and leaned up against a wall that wasn't there.

The sun left him. The pale light that remained frightened him.

His armor left him. He sat naked in the field and strangely felt the pool of sweat reaching up to his chest now.

The ground embraced him. The dying roses lifted above him and encased him in a small room. Pale rock emerged and formed a crevice that fit him perfectly. The roses spilled their color into his pool of sweat.

The opponent, the man he had longed to be rid of for so long, gazed out of a rotting helm. It turned to ash and the knight looked into the terrified eyes of his foe...and saw himself staring back.

The face disappeared and the exposed knight was left alone, confused.

The blade fell from his hand. It clattered to the floor of the dank bathroom.

The last life faded from the knight's eyes. Bloody water began flooding over the edge of the tub.

The blade glittered dully in the pale fluorescent light.

VII.

Jonathan Henson

None is loved more imperfectly than thee yet none loved more complete;
 not that any other human lovers could with my love compare
 but that my love for thee is with all of my being, but that very corrupt indeed.
 Rare yet quite common so much and so little as any would ever dare.
 My love cannot keep you from every harm or from any other lover's charm,
 neither could it prepare any person's part to long withstand all labors lost.
 Affections often fail, even the least frail; love though it be warm, will oft end in harm.
 Though one may boast of eternal pairs un-tossed, it will soon decay, that's the cost.
 Yet complete and perfect is the love of one, exhibited in one person's three.
 Satisfied, sufficient, and sacred a love that there has always been between,
 'tis His gift from Him to Himself that has given thee to He.
 Love as shown from Father, Son, and Spirit shall never fail to those redeemed.
 So mark my care, and my charity, in cherishing every hair of your head,
 but when it perishes only after I lie dead, it shall be perfected by Christ who for us bled.

Eyes of Blue

Naomi Stauffer

Eyes of blue,
 The eyes of you.
 Eyes that tell
 A magic spell.
 They entice, they entrance;
 Those eyes bid my heart to dance.
 Energetic, so engaging,
 Your eyes set my pulse to racing.
 Captivated by your gaze,
 Looking deep, to be amazed,
 I see your soul.
 Yes, your soul that lies within
 Sets my soul to dancing again.
 Close to you, those eyes of blue.

What Kind of Love is This? (1 Jn 3)

Audra Hagel

Never before had I witnessed such a sunset. Its radiance glowed, reflecting off all creation.
 Never before had I felt this heat of the dissolving sunlight so strongly upon my face. Instinctively I closed my eyes as the light touched my skin. Was this your gift to me? Was this the warmth from your eyes as you looked upon me? What kind of love is this?

Never before had I experienced such a fog. It was overwhelming in its intensity, but tender in its strength. Never before had misty haze seemed so much like an embrace. Gasping, my breath caught in my throat before it quickened, filling my lungs with the dampness. Was this a form of embrace as you surrounded me? Was this fog you, metaphorically, both surrounding and filling me? What kind of love is this?

Never before had I realized the sweetness of such a breeze. It was warm, kind, delicately touching me as it swept by. Never before had such a breeze existed. It was not a gust of wind, but a caress full of feeling. Gently it lifted my hair from my shoulder, gentler still did it, in another soft motion, brush the hair from my eyes. Was this you? Was this your hand touching me? What kind of love is this?

Never before had I borne so much pain. It consumed me, filled me, emptied me. Something died with every breath. Every moment was a trial, every step a cross to bear. Every word whispered was agony, every shout a vile curse. Painfully, each moment came. Beaten, broken, crushed and afflicted, was this your favor on me? Did you bestow these scars? What kind of love is this?

Never before had I felt such a renewing rain. Every exquisite drop touched my skin like tiny, gentle kisses. Bursting on my face, my tears were washed away. Never before did tears and rain mingle so freely as when heaven that day bathed me. Baptized in a thousand drops of water, the steady, rhythmic pressure refreshed and cleansed me. Was this you? You who made me, broke me, washed me and brought me to life again? What kind of love is this?

Brown Bottles

Nicole Garrett

"I'll come over if you'll come get me... Yes I will. Just come get me. I know I can pull this off... Ok... Ok... I'll listen for you to drive by out front. Then drive back around and meet me at the end of the street... Ok, I can't wait to see you... I love you too... Bye."

Ashley gently returned the phone to its cradle and turned to look at Kathleen, who was drawing the muffled breaths of slumber. Excitement shot through her body, igniting every nerve with electricity. He was really coming to get her, and she was about to sneak out of her best friend's house to be with him.

A part of her felt the requisite guilt. Kathleen would never approve of this, and her mom would be so pissed at both of them if Ashley were caught. But Ashley didn't plan on getting caught. She knew you couldn't get away with them all, but her luck hadn't run out yet.

When Landon told her he was going to be hanging out at Dana's again tonight, she was instantly jealous. Michelle and Leslie were sure to be there as well. It wasn't that she worried about him doing anything with any of them; she was simply envious of all the time they spent with Landon, when she saw him so little. So she had decided tonight would be different, and called him as soon as she was confident Kathleen was asleep.

She quietly crawled out of the ragged boxers and t-shirt she liked to sleep in, and slipped on the outfit she had planned for tomorrow. Not her sexiest shirt or best-fitting jeans, but they would do. Hopefully he would be too happy to see her to notice her clothes. Then, not daring to risk a trip to the bathroom, she put in her contacts, fixed her hair, and applied some makeup by the street light that filtered lazily through the blinds.

Just as she finished readying herself, and her anticipation was reaching a feverous pitch, she heard the unmistakable rumble of Dana's old Dodge roll by out front. She

peeked through the blinds and saw the silhouettes of Dana driving and Landon in the passenger seat.

"Ahh, there he is," she thought to herself as she turned from the window. Tiptoeing out of Kathleen's room and down past her mother's room was easy enough, but Ashley's heart almost stopped when the cat brushed past her in the hall.

By the time she reached the sliding-glass door to the backyard, she could see the truck idling self-consciously by the curb. Slowly, with painstaking caution, she inched the door open, slipped outside, and inched it closed again. Ashley ran across the yard to where Landon and Dana were waiting, giving one look back, praying the house was still dark. To her relief, it was, so she hopped onto the seat beside Landon as the truck started to creep down the street.

"Hey you guys."

"Hey babe," Landon said as he leaned over to kiss her. She caught the reek of it then. Beer. So, they had already gotten started.

"Oh well," she thought, "I don't feel like having that argument tonight. Maybe he'll leave it alone now that I'm going to be there." He made as if to put his arm around her and clumsily bonked her in the head with his elbow.

"Hmm, maybe he's a bit farther gone than I first thought," she observed to herself, as she placed her head on his shoulder, "This should be interesting."

The remainder of the short ride was spent with the radio turned up. Sheryl Crow came on crooning about her "Favorite Mistake," and Landon and Ashley sang along with her; Landon out loud, and Ashley in her head.

"Did you know when you go

It's the perfect ending

To the bad day that was just beginning?

When you go all I know is

You're my favorite mistake..."

When they reached the house, the three of them piled out of their battered chariot,

Landon with a slight stumble, and headed inside. Sure enough, Michelle and Leslie were sitting on the couch. They greeted her amicably. Ashley actually liked them both a lot, but her shyness around other girls prevented any real friendship with them. Maybe it would happen one day; they certainly weren't going to stop being Landon's friends any time soon. And since she didn't plan on ever not being his girlfriend, well, until she became his wife, it looked as if they were all stuck together.

To Ashley's despair, Landon headed over to the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle. When he glanced her way, she shot him her harshest look.

"What?" he asked sharply.

Her reply was to back down and go towards the living room. He followed her and plopped into the dirty recliner near the television, pulling her into his lap.

"I love you, babe," he whispered, "Let's try to enjoy this time together, ok?"

"Um hmm," she mumbled absently, refusing to look into his beautiful face.

"I can't believe you actually did it. I'm so proud of you, babe. You're so sneaky. I love it."

His words brought a smile to her face. She liked impressing him. Sometimes she risked so much just to hear the "Wow" in his voice. She snuggled in closer to him and relaxed her muscles so he would know she was glad to be there too.

The other girls were settling into the couch, lighting up their cigarettes, and opening their beers. Landon nimbly twisted the cap off his and wrapped his arm around Ashley.

"At least he didn't knock me in the damn head this time," she told herself as he lifted the ugly brown glass to his lips and took the first swig.

Some time later, Leslie lay asleep on the couch, and Dana and Michelle were out by the pool wetting their legs and talking. The porno they had all started to watch earlier was so pitiful that it had caused uproarious laughter from the group. Still, it had interested Landon enough that he continuously tried to slide his hand down Ashley's pants.

"They can't see us. If you will stop your damn squirming, they won't notice," he hissed in her ear when she kept pushing him back.

But there was no way she wanted his grubby little fingers on her tonight. Normally she relished his touch, but when he was messed up she wanted no part of it.

"I don't care," she had told him, "You know I hate it when you are like this."

After that he had jerked his hand back and removed his arm from around her waist. He had practically dumped her on the floor when he rose, only to return with two more bottles clutched defiantly in his hand.

She was on the floor now, where she had remained. He had polished off his second beer, and was working on the third, which was probably more like the eighth, and who knew what he had been mixing

the earlier ones with. She peered up at him and his usually enchanting features seemed twisted by the glow of the television and his increasing stupor. She watched as he lifted the ugly brown bottle again and again to his lips, chasing some thirst she would never understand, his eyes glazing over, no longer seeing her at all.

Finally, he put his arm down and didn't lift it again. Then his head rolled back and his fingers released their prisoner. Ashley snatched it up just as the first droplets began to wash out.

She placed it as far away as possible, not wanting to handle it long enough to get it to a trash can. She looked back again at the boy she loved, knowing not why she loved him. Was her fate to be as this, collecting the brown bottles from around him, forever trying to clear them out of their life together?

She rose off the floor and climbed into his lap. She tried to place his limp limbs around her, but the floor beckoned their dead weight to reach for it instead. So she curled up as best she could, with her head

on his chest, listening to his heartbeat, trying to hear it whisper her name.

When time began to grow short, Dana came inside and looked at Ashley. "We better take you back now, the sun will be up soon," she said, "How long ago did he pass out on ya?"

"Quite awhile ago," Ashley replied.

"Well, see if you can't wake him up. If not it will just be the two of us. I'll be back in a minute."

Ashley straightened out and studied her man. There was no way he was coming out of this before the afternoon, but she shook him anyway. As she expected, there was

She *looked* back again
at the boy she **loved**,
knowing *not why*
she **loved** him.

no response, not even a grunt or mumbled curse. Out of everything, this hurt the worst; he had abandoned her yet again.

Dana drove her back to Kathleen's house without a word. Ashley understood her discomfort, and being equally uneasy, asked Dana to drop her a bit further down the road so they could part ways sooner.

"Thanks," she said.

"Welcome," came the reply as Ashley shut the door. Dana wasted no further time with her.

Night was fading into day when Ashley inched the sliding-glass open again, slipped back inside, and inched it closed. She traversed the hallway once more on tiptoe, and pushed the bedroom door open, praying that her friend had not found her out. But there lay Kathleen, as peaceful and naïve as ever. It felt to Ashley as if she had been gone mere minutes, but she knew she had glimpsed a lifetime.

Ashley took off her jeans and shirt, which had soaked up some interesting odors, and put on her comfortable clothes.

As she lay down on the sleeping bag, she realized she was purely exhausted. But not too exhausted to cry, it turned out, which she quietly did to the Sheryl Crow soundtrack playing in her head.

"Did you know when you go

It's the perfect ending

To the bad day that was just beginning?

When you go all I know is

You're my favorite mistake..."

The Flow of Whitman's Song

Sarah Fredericks

Words tumbling.
 Flowing through and around and over the paragraphs
 like the smooth, round stones that line the riverbed.
 I let the words flow over me.
 I am carried away.
 The current sweeps me along. It is strong, but I am delighted by its pull.
 Delicate yearning.
 Oceans open to me that I have never swum in before.
 The words—perhaps an elusive meaning lies underneath them, gliding along
 the fringes of the riverbank, tangled in the mud and rushes.
 I don't care.

It is not that meaning which flows directly underneath me. It does not
 float my weight.

I willingly let the words close about me, surrendering myself to their
 strength. Deeper and more forcefully it flows now. The current, once cool
 and refreshing, now turns chill.

The words are deep and dark. I no longer want to be carried away from the
 sunlit glen into the great abyss of sea. One must face what lies within. It pulls
 me below the surface. I refuse to open my eyes. I don't want to see—to look,
 to gaze at what was buried. Drowning under the words. They close over me. A
 grave. Suffocating. The air escapes my gasping lungs.

I thrash violently to no avail. They have taken over—an undertow more
 powerful than my violent struggle.
 I am lost to the depths.

Pages snap between the heavy leather covers.

A harrowed gasp of air.

I survive my drowning. Sweet oxygen fills my lungs. I have managed to crawl
 from the raging torrent that sucked me beneath the surface.

Clinging to the pebbled shore, I gaze back breathlessly to the fearful flow.

A gentle, tumbling brook trickles behind me.

Confused

Phou Souriya

Sometimes I cry,
 Until my eyes are dry.

Every night I read, till I fall asleep.
 I plant this seed, that this is a good deed.

Then I asked myself, is this the right path?
 Thyself does not know in this untouchable path.

That which Remains in Me

Jessica Skarda

The blood established that for me
 Which would've taken all eternity.
 His calloused hands weren't pierced in vain,
 For part of Him in me remains.
 Eyes of mercy, flow with grace—
 Unable am I to take His place!
 The Cross! The Cross has pierced me so!
 No longer dead, but weak in hope,
 But the blood which takes away my blight
 Has filled me with an everlasting light—
 That which remains in me.



Sky • Ryan Sellers

My First Game

Sept. 2007

Robert Patterson

“Knock his head off, stupid!!” This is one of the sounds I hear while I am out here on the football field. The smell of sweat goes up my nose as I wait on the play to be called. I see the players on the other team as they get set up for a play, and I know that they can see the fear in my eyes. I am so afraid that my heart pounds as if it’s going to leap out of my chest. Tonight is my first time being a starter on the high school football team. The feeling of both joy and terror gives me a high like drugs. My first time starting for the ECHS Blue Devils defense is a memory I cannot forget. A memory I will not forget.

I hear all sorts of sounds here, but the most noticeable is the sound of the announcer. I listen as the announcer calls out the player on my team who made the tackle. The crowd roars loudly after the announcer says, “Devon made the tackle!” But wait, I think the coach just called out a play. I did not hear the play; the crowd roaring as if they are a million lions distracted my concentration. As I set up for the next play, I hear my mother shout out my name, “Roooooobeer!!!” It is very distracting. The only sounds I need to concentrate on are the sounds of the coach and players.

In addition to hearing a number of different sounds, I also smell intense odors. The immense scent of torn up grass hits my nose the hardest, coupled with a slight hint of dug up dirt. The scent literally goes up my nose as I lay on my chest with my face right in the grass. The smell of grass and dirt is a very unpleasant and immense combination, but not as unpleasant as the smell of body odor. The combined smell of all the players’ body odor is just horrible. Their body odor smells like three-month-old sour clothes drenched in onion juice. I will say the smell of all the players’ body odor is the most repulsive of all.

The things I hear and smell in the game only come to life when I focus my attention on them and actually see them. The cannibalistic, psycho-killer facial expressions I see on members of the opposing team are slightly intimidating. The intimidation is extremely high since this is my first time starting. The referees run towards the sidelines to get out of the way of the play as little kids play their own game of football in the crowd. I see the coach as he waves to us to prepare to defend the pass, but it is too late; the ball is already floating like a graceful butterfly in the air. I see so many different things, so it is hard to keep my eyes concentrated on just one.

The sound of screaming fans is what makes my heart pound fast. The smell of grass, dirt, and body odor keeps my first game as a starter alive in my memories. The sight of little kids as they run and the sight of someone tackling someone else make that day a living and breathing memory I will not forget. Everything from the sounds and smells to actual sights of that game is what I love.

Swirls of Light Beneath My Feet**Nicole Garrett**

Swirls of light beneath my feet
My eyes imploring the air
Denying breath and sanctity
Burning beneath despair.
Running tunnels of heat
The flesh drips off my bones
The tears sizzle down my cheek
And I know I can’t go home.

My Cosmetic Bag**Lakeshia Acoff**

My pain is sometimes blended within those color schemes of Covergirl and Maybelline. Makeup to me is like insulin to diabetics, or prosthetics to a legless veteran. I wake up to make up. Underneath this mask is a weak and fragile frame of a woman who somehow finds strength and confidence in her cosmetic bag. If someone were ever to stumble across my cosmetic bag, one would wonder why I would need such tangible items to attain a beauty like mine... If one should ever come across it, one would find these contents inside: eyeliner, brings out the definition of my eyes and manages to hide all the tears I’ve cried. It’s the pencil that temporarily erases the pain for each day. Mascara, captures all of those lost lashes, washed away in the flood of tears. Eyeshadow, eliminates the weight of the world that rests on my lids. Blush, expresses the joy I am sometimes unable to find no matter how hard I try. Lipstick conceals the discoloration caused by all the nicotine and cigarette smoke from being nervous and the weight I needed to lose after gaining those extra pounds from eating those sweets I’m addicted to. My pain is sometimes blended into the color schemes of Covergirl and Maybelline, I am looking forward to the day when I can uncover the girl, who “may be lean” and beautiful if she were to listen to the ears and eyes of the beholder and remember that he told her to do away with that cosmetic bag, because true beauty doesn’t need all of that...

First Lust

Kati Chapman

Searching for knowledge, he left the Black Sea,
 Transcended another, new place now to be,
 Played for his due, but when not given that,
 Chose solely to study in Realm of the Cat.
 Excelled in all things, save that which is second,
 For five months did stay until satellite beckoned,
 So to land of ice flew, after zephyr-filled stop,
 Learned there for a bit, 'til Nick left from the top.
 Searching for knowledge, she left that warm place,
 Where she'd been ruler! Best in show, and showcased:
 Started anew, and spider's web strung,
 'Cross Realm of the Cat, to make connections.
 Success, was, is sweet; azucar, sucre,
 The power extending indefinitely.
 For five months gained, then hiatus did take,
 'Til time of celebration for what prophets spake.

Time of rest over, he returned to that place,
 And for the first time saw her body and face;
 Feasting now finished, she came back to that land,
 Took things and spun lines, still kept her own hand,

For she'd not yet seen him, nay, not even looked—
 Too busy with others, others on her hooked.
 Yet none were worthy, they were only for play,
 And she enjoyed playing, by brightness of day;
 Of course there were those, that did seek her hand,
 But she scorned them all, every boy to a man,
 And so she persisted in demurring with "nay's,"
 'Til there came a Ball, Honors-born: Masquerade!
 And being of Honors, she must tickets sell,
 So girding her loins, she used her appeal,
 Many tickets sold! Skirt triumphs o'er pants,
 And promises given to save buyers a dance.

More often than not, if she asked, "Will you come?"
 And then added, "Oh, pretty please?"
 The boy would return, "I have lessons to learn,
 But I'll come: if you'll come with me."
 She would then have to lie that she did have a guy,
 Already, ah! Cest' la vie.
 He'd grin, acquiesce, hand her money, then test:
 "Who is he?" and she'd say, so glibly,
 "He's an import, tall, lean; he's on a sports team,
 Quite a gentleman, or so I deem."

The ball did approach, and still she did not
 See the boy she had minded to ask.
 Then three days before, and not any more,
 She saw him and put him to task.
 To her great dismay, a tourney that day
 Stopped him from escorting her:
 So in a lurch she started a search
 And called on a soccer player.
 And he busy too! Oh, what to do?
 The ball was approaching, so fast!
 She must have a date, preferably straight,
 And in the mold of Demi cast.
 Then subconscious advanced
 One that she had seen,
 Exotic, and tall as well.
 To Facebook© she went,

to *Facebook*©
 she
went,

Found his picture: decent,
 And sent him an -o after hell.
 Her lines he returned,
 Saying that he did yearn
 To escort her: Och, but alas!
 He must slave away
 For the green god that day;
 He scribed it with smiles,
 Succumbing to wiles,
 And she did the same, just because.
 For that was her way;
 The game she did play,
 Leaving many bloody and in gauze.
 She later recalled that day: kismet-kissed,
 When she sent first letter to he.
 As she rose, Venus- blessed,
 Clad in black and white dress;
 Their eyes locked, then fully did she see:
 His potential!—was great,
 Blessed by muses and fates.
 So thought she as room turned bereft:
 "I wonder what he's scribed,
 If in my box it's arrived
 To give me that look when I left."
 She would later find, straight from his own mind,
 That—at the time—the look, anti-sublime,
 Was not one message-risen, nay, was freely given,
 Freely: 'cept for the way she was shriven.
 Since upon the eyes' chains wear does cast; lovely pain!

Drive viewer insane; of free will, wear is bane,
 Especially when drenched or doused by a rain,
 Yet to trounce this hold, men would not do fain,
 For they are enslaved, yet they do gain,
 From those that are vain, even those that are plain!
 So his eyes, they did trace,
 Her body and face.
 But when she thought him well-met,
 He hadn't answered her yet.
 And it was this tidbit,
 Gave then to her spirit
 Permission to feel and pursue:
 So more webs did weave,
 Made him not wish to leave,
 And then like the shepherd did prove.

Prove and did search, then first sole sojourn,
 Then back to the tree, and more things to learn;
 Lessons learned well, such as how to kiss,
 But still more to know, which cannot be dismissed;
 He taught her so much and humored her whims,
 But best, no one ever asked, "Is she with him?"
 Time, space in the future, is the time to know,
 So pray that Death does not pull him down below...
 The parting that day was not bittersweet;
 'Twas acid and bile, for their hearts did beat
 Just to live on 'til next moment in time
 When they again saw each other
 and claimed, "You are mine."
 And so one did vow, and so one did reason,
 That summer existed as a horrid season
 Not for the heat, nay, only summer's part
 In keeping these twain far away and apart.
 So one did wish, and so one did pray,
 For genesis of Gaia's own turning away,
 And then they could meet on that glorious day.
 Yet day of parting was not, aptly,
 Celestial shining, but rather, dreary.
 O'ershadowed by vapors, and cherubim's tears,
 All awash in those droplets, weighed on by the years,
 That are truly months, that are but days,
 That seem everlasting without special gaze
 To brighten the moments and define life's haze.
 In cherubim's tears they stood, holding tight—
 She lifted her eyes, they performed love's soft rite,
 She ascended, he slammed, she strapped, and he turned:
 Mutual departure, when to stay they both yearned.
 Her palm stroked the window; he raised his in goodbye:
 Demi-goddess' tears do not fall from the sky.

Mistress, at a Mirror Repose



Will Byrne



Mistress, at a mirror repose awhile
 and look with eyes besides your own--
 see the beauty given you alone
 marked by grace, not by guile.

See the twinkling rubied light
 with the Sun's kiss upon your hair,
 and blush at its sprinkling dotting fair
 yet smooth limbs almost opal-like;
 trace lips so rich of words
 to the tongue behind that sounds,
 which guards great treasure to be found
 by one who wit and knowledge girds--
 of greyest eyes no man may pass,
 what spell's descent within holds sway
 from Helen's summ'ning ships away
 to Ilium's walls so strong and vast?
 Here are reasons wider than the seas
 that crash upon the earth in tide and pull
 why you wear the crown of beautiful;
 yet should you think this mere poesy
 penned by the most licent'sed of rakes,
 know that the poor author maligned
 sees the beauty of your soul and mind
 as that which all the others makes.

Dearest, at the mirror repose awhile
 and look with eyes besides your own--
 see the beauty others have known
 as untrue views did you beguile.

Wind



Existentialism Meets Boredom



Alicia Cranford

We huddled together at the double-seated table and studied one of the class's lessons while we waited for class to begin. He pointed to a page in the textbook and began to read aloud.

"Not P is the opposite of P; not not P is the opposite of the opposite of P'. So. According to this 'rule of equivalence,' a double negative is actually a positive. Didn't we learn this in elementary school English?"

"Uh huh," I replied. "So, we're talking about the redundancy of double negatives and the fact that they're actually positives. If I were to consider myself, an extreme pessimist, to be very negative—doubly negative, if you will—would the double negatives cancel out and actually describe me as positive?"

"Well, you are the epitome of negativity. Ha, that's like saying you don't exist."

"Right. I don't."

"What's this?" His facial expression resembled a mid-sneeze contortion.

"I don't exist."

"Explain please?" He was visibly annoyed.

So I proceeded to document the source of my argument. "One of my professors just told us that we are reflections of our closest friends, and I decided that since I haven't any 'closest friends,' I am a reflection of nothing; I don't exist. Now stop talking to figments of nothingness, you troubled person."

He laughed. "No, you are not going to convince me that you don't exist. Sorry."

"That sentence contained three negatives, the first two of which cancel out to become the positive statement that I definitely don't exist. I'm glad we're in agreement here. Thanks."

"You—!"

"Me? No, I think you're mistaken."

His forced smile was one of impatience; my forced smile was one of being alive. I was bored. He was having problems.

"Why are you smiling?" he asked.

"Well my frown doesn't exist either."

"We're getting nowhere with this."

"True."

He laughed again. "And I normally hate clichés but you're really failing at life here."

"That's what I've been trying to say."

"We haven't managed to study very much."

"Then here, look at this page on illustration by contrast. Nothing exists that isn't relative to its opposite—or to its absence, which shall suffice as its opposite. Hot would never exist if it weren't for its opposite, cold."

"That's not what this says."

"And I couldn't exist without my opposite, the lack of me. And since I'm definitely not lacking in this conversation, because I am still talking, I can't exist. You see?"

"You're weird."

"What is 'weird?'"

"Stop it."

"Does it exist?"

"Probably not," he smirked.

"Now even you suggest I don't exist. You called me 'weird' and then said it probably doesn't exist."

He folded his arms and sighed. "Class starts in five minutes."

"Do you think he'll count me absent? You know, because—"

"You can have my Pop-Tart if you'll be quiet until then."

"Mmkay."



Diesel Monster • Naomi Stauffer

Preserve



Alicia Fry

His eyes,
 captivate me.

His words,
 hold my ear.

All needed,
 his smile.

All wanted,
 his joy.

Someone to make him laugh.
 Something to make him stay.
 Though sadness befell,
 we'd traverse hell.

Quicken my heart,
 his gaze.

Skip its beats,
 his truth.

All desiring,
 his smile.

All pleasing,
 his joy.

The high his voice brings.
 The amazement his mind invokes.
 Though happiness dissipate,
 we'd revive & await.

His eyes,
 captivate me.

Quicken my heart,
 his gaze.

His words,
 hold my ear.

Skip its beats,
 his truth.

His smile, his joy.
 .Preserve.

An Ode to Chocolate



Will Byrne

O famous scion of a humble bean,
 alchemed to an epicurian dream
 which kings and gods made their repast,
 why is it that you never last?

Unknown ages have you been
 growing earth and delighting men;
 but just whose mind was gifted first
 with a terrible hunger turned to thirst
 to pour and mix and grind the rites
 'twould become the love of children's bites?
 Whosoe'er this forgotten one may be,
 his testament stands not in parlous stone
 but in the teeming masses together and alone
 that consume this creation so rich and varied--
 for washed with milk or baked at home,
 pounded bars or dripped to foam,
 living souls the world around
 sing forth their love in myriad sounds.

For truly, sweet, your mighty fame
 is well-earned--you taste the same
 and are still better mixed with fruit and nuts
 (unlike Man, you are magnanimous),
 or surrounding simple peanut butter
 (which, I think, is your true brother).
 Yet though you may not melt in hands,
 dismay still holds sway over Man
 when the eyes of dentists grow huge and round
 on seeing the damage you cause abound;
 and how can you bring death to those you love
 by warping and perverting the life's blood
 of the very ones who in you delight--
 are you dark, or are you light?

O famous scion of a humble bean
 that tastes as good as the wrongs it brings
 and tempted men both now and past,
 how is it that you never last?

Doom Town



Adam Schultz

He awoke with some hesitation, enjoying the silky cold sheet too much to jump right out of bed. Motivation started with a light tingle in the heels of his feet and traveled up his legs, around his hips, and along his spine. When it reached the back of his neck, his eyes opened. A thin shaft of orange light was leaking through a tear in a paisley patterned window shade, dust swirling thick within it. His chest rose as he took a long draw of the stale air. Something tickled the back of his sinus cavity. He sneezed.

The comforter was caked in a layer of grime that started latching on to his hand the moment he made an effort to move it. He spun on his center of balance and set his legs dangling off the side. The bed seemed to sit unnaturally high. He pushed off, his bare feet clapping against the shiny shellac of the wooden floor. The sound echoed in the room as if the paint on the walls was new. Despite the warmth in the room, he shivered.

His bleary eyes scanned the floor for any sign of footwear and, finding none, moved to a night table near the bed. A pink Arvin radio sat atop an orange and brown crocheted doily. On the bottom left was a volume knob and set center-right of the speaker was an over-large tuning dial. Both were a dull flesh color.

A turn of the volume knob produced a click and nothing more. He bent down to check under the table for an unplugged wire and found nothing, not even an electrical outlet. Standing back up, he lifted the radio and turned it over. Its wire had been cleanly cut off.

Perplexed, he set it down and looked to the door on the opposite wall. The lack of a light switch surprised him. A bead of sweat crept down the side of his face and he became aware of the growing heat in the room. He moved to the door and tried its knob. When it would not turn, he pulled backwards and it opened without protest. Beyond the doorframe, a narrow set of

stairs descended into a brightly lit room. He thought he could see the back of a brown couch.

The stairwell was a cheap build. Tops of nails jutted out of the boards, scratching the bottom of his feet with every step. At the landing, he bent a leg to the side and examined his foot. With no open wounds to worry over, he raised his gaze. Sitting on the sofa with his back to him was a man in a sharp grey suit. He approached the man with light steps, trying to keep his heart's pace under control. The presence of this newcomer tightened his stomach.

"Hello," he said to the man, voice raspy and low.

"Why, what was that sound honey?" replied a stilted, tinny voice that sounded far too distant to have come from the man.

The sudden and strange reply scared him. He jumped forward and slammed a fist into the side of the man's head. The force of the blow was mighty, removing the head and sending it flying across the room. He heard it hit the far wall and roll into the foyer.

His violent act complete, the adrenaline subsided and guilt flooded in. The pit of his stomach filled with lead and a lump came to his throat.

"My God, what have I done?" he asked aloud, staring at the now headless body.

"Why, what was that sound honey?"

He blinked and bent forward, examining the man's wound. Instead of an open and bleeding throat, he found a wooden stump with two metal clips. He sighed and turned towards the foyer. He found the head stuck against the front door. There was a toothy, salesman-like grin on its face. He recognized it as a department store model, recalling one he saw at the Base Exchange.

Nudging the head aside with his foot, he looked to the right, into the kitchen. A woman was bent over an open stove, long blonde hair shielding her face. He blinked a few times and determined this was another

dummy. Smiling now, he strolled into the kitchen and pushed it from the side. It fell forward and hit the floor with a loud clack. The blonde hair fell back and a melted, soot-covered face appeared. Only a few bits of legible femininity remained, namely hot-pink lips and blue eye shadow. He shuddered and excused himself from the room.

This must be some bizarre model home, he thought.

He eyed the front door, which looked to be whitewashed oak with a textured viewing window set five feet high. It created a wave-like reflection on the wooden floor behind it. As he approached it, a muffled moan sounded from somewhere outside. He grabbed the knob and yanked the door open.

A blast of hot, dry, and dusty air hit his face full force. He had to grip the door-jamb to stay upright. Some granules of sand entered his mouth and nostrils. He hunkered and coughed and wheezed for a full minute. Eyes still watering, he stepped out into the sunlight. The moaning was louder. He turned toward it and walked.

Behind a short picket fence that connected to nothing were two metal poles. Each one had a rope tied through a hole at the top. On the end of one rope looked to be the carcass of a small dog, looking long dead. Attached to the other rope was a larger dog, whining in agony. He could see its rib cage.

"Who in the hell would do this?" he asked aloud, gripping the small fence. It lifted as easy as he thought it would. He laid it to the side and set the animal free. It merely crumpled to the ground and whimpered. He tried to pet it but it let out a feeble growl.

"You must be hungry," he said in a soft, almost musical voice. "I'll be right back."

He stood up and ran into the kitchen. He kicked the female mannequin out of his way and started pulling cabinets open at random. They were stocked full with canned goods and various boxed items. The strong smell that entered his nose told him that some of it was rotten; however, he knew the cans were still good and grabbed a large can of chili.

He rifled through the drawers under the counter and found the silverware. There was no opener so he picked up a large ice pick and began stabbing the top of the can. The smell of the meat filled the room, making his mouth water. After he made enough holes, he turned the can on its side and gave the top of the can a heavy tap with the meat of his palm. The perforated top bent open and some of the meat slopped onto the counter. He scooped it up and threw it into his mouth. The meat was fatty and the sauce bland.

A bright flash turned
everything
 white
 for a
 moment.

After downing another scoop, he ran outside with the can and dumped its contents on the ground next to the dog's nose. It stopped whimpering and took two great sniffs before ramming its snout into the pile of chili. He bent to pet the dog as it ate, noting how dirty its fur was. As he knelt there, he became aware of a light ringing in his ears. It was as if they were hungry for sound, begging the surroundings to make any sort of noise. Instead, the air was unnerving in its perpetual silence, devoid of the din of a normal neighborhood.

He turned his head to the left and saw nothing but boundless desert beyond the bright green grass of the house's back lawn. To his right sat, instead of the expected neighboring home, a small grocer. There were barrels of rotten, brown produce in the front window display; signs upon it were proclaiming a sale on apples, four for fifty cents. He could make out the silhouette of a man behind the window.

"Another dummy," he proclaimed. The sudden sound of his voice startled the dog. It backed away from the remnants of the

ham and began growling. He sighed and stood, putting a few steps' worth of distance between himself and the animal. The dog quieted down and returned to the food.

He traversed the front yard and walked towards the grocery store. The moment he was on the asphalt of the narrow road that ran in front of the house, he got a clear view of the small desert village. Next to the store was a barber shop, complete with candy striped pole. Beside that stood a two storey police department, and beyond that, at the center of the town's round-about square, was a high-steepled church. A crowd of mannequins in fashionable formalwear looked to be leaving a service. Set about the square, caught in everlasting poses, were more casually dressed dummies. One was walking an empty leash, another opening the door to a weathered Chevy, and yet another pushing a stroller along the sidewalk in front of the police department.

As he passed the grocer, he saw through its large display window a store full of mannequins stuck in the middle of their shopping experience. The barber shop had all three of its seats full, a tall male dummy in a white coat looking stressed with its work on a suited patron. The bizarre sight brought a chuckle to his throat. He contemplated entering the shop and knocking down the dolls, just to spite whoever had set up the charade.

The police department was empty. Some small part of him had hoped to open the door and find live policemen ready to explain the situation. His imagination dreamed up some wild scenario that included plot elements from a movie called *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* he had recently seen at a cinema. Instead, he found a hollowed out room with some painting supplies and a wooden step ladder, spare bits of wood and sheet metal lying about on the floor.

The crowd of mannequins exiting the church was a stranger sight. Many of the dummies used for the display had been

burned or damaged in some critical way.

Some even had limbs missing or chunks of their plastic flesh carved out. He pushed a few of them over, just for fun, and was about to pick one up and throw it before a howl pierced the air. He ran towards the only house in town. Cowering on its front steps was the dog he had fed. It was shivering again and was lying in a pile of its own excrement.

"What's wrong?" he asked it, bending down. The dog made no effort to react to him. A siren's wail slowly started to waft in on the arid breeze. It got louder and louder until it peaked, and with every wail afterward grew slowly silent, as if it were a train merely passing by. He heard what sounded like distant thunder from his left. Stepping over the dog, he found the two poles in the ground and then looked out over the expansive desert floor. A bright flash turned everything white for a moment. After that, it all went black.

"Poetry"



Johnathan Cunningham

Poetry!

Look out.

Novels and pens and sheets of

loose

leaf

paper

I'll read it—I'll write it

Under my bed, you can find me

rk;ajdsfouahfbibadfhiding;kfabhioagfupotrtp,mzx

What am I so afraid of?

Copying everyone else, I suppose...

*Windows • Ryan Sellers*

VI.



Jonathan Henson

Oh! sick and feeble lover come not unto my bed,
 depending on thine own merit to pleasure me so bold.
 Trust not in thine sagged breast to keep me fed,
 nor in your pale and broken face to warm my soul.
 For you knees are buckled for so oft spread apart,
 Not even counting the numerous bastards you have born.
 And those manufactured lips which merely serve to hide the grossest tart
 adorn in no great manner your neck blistered by so many lovers' lips worn.
 For I stand erect amongst a multitude of impotent men
 ready to satisfy you in ways to even Ovid unknown.
 For he could never have met your ever increasing demand,
 when his affectants died his seed lied blown.
 It is I alone who to you will grant bliss that satisfies;
 so come now to me and receive pleasure that never dies.

“ ”

...



Alicia Cranford

i.
 faded child dreams in plastic
 and chews up the ways to melt.
 she thinks she might look odd,
 or maybe she just looks at things
 in a blurry way:
 “mother, i just can't see
 any reason to waste the time with him.”
 tired mother curls her fingers around
 her exhaust pipe, and wonders why

ii.
 i've lived here my entire life,
 and i never want to come back.
 the trees here dance
 in shades of iridescence, and
 this watered plastic
 always
 streams into steam.

iii.
 sometimes, i think
 the choler calls out in dust clouds
 that melt into breezes
 and burn into my ears;
 they remind me that
 i failed a swim course
 because i never learned to breathe.

iv.
 mother,
 i think cars were made
 for falling into pieces.

v.
 ...



The Christmas Present

Jonathan Cunningham

Forget about me. I'm nothing; I'm small potatoes. Or something like that...

I can remember some things. When there was still a little less than a meter between my socked feet and the wooden railing that I now have to mangle my toes between, to even begin to situate myself for a hopeful night of rest—I would press my eyelashes tight to the point where my eyelids ached. I would wish my silent prayer to God, thanking him for every blessing an eight year old could possibly think of. I guess I was eight. I couldn't have been more than eight, though eight is two times four, and I know I was at least two times four. But I imagine I liked four, too. I bet that they could tell me if I were eight or four...or twenty-five, even! They tell me everything else...

Whether I was eight or not doesn't really matter at all, so they don't have any business telling me how old I am or anything that happened to me at that age. But I can tell you this: if they were scratching their worthless words onto their noisy notepads, scrolled by their overpriced ink pens, then they would say that before I closed my eyes for good at night, and usually after my final "Amen," I would pull my pillow from beneath my thin shreds of hair and toss it to the floor. I always imagined the floor thanking me for its nightly meal, concocted of molded and rotten down and false cotton. It wasn't the material of the pillow that caused me to hate it; it was just the plain and simple fact that the four inches it raised my head and my neck was entirely four inches higher than I wished to have my head or my neck while I lay asleep for nine hours. I don't tell them that I remember this. I don't like to give away everything I have, you know. Who would? They would only lie to me and insist that it's only a suggested memory. They would convince me that I slept with two pillows, even. That's why I don't tell them.

I feel fine. At least I think I feel fine. Sometimes, if they turn the light on for me, I can look at my skin. I always forget

it's there. I remember how in elementary school I used to draw pictures of me and Pig. I never colored her pink, or myself pink or anything. I always used "peach." It was the color of the crayon, and apparently, that's the color of me. But Pig moved away for a long time. That's enough about her. Peach is what I'm thinking about. Most of the time, they don't give me the light. I think it's because I came back. They don't give me anything. At least they can't take peach away from me. Not yet at least.

Sometimes, even now, after I thank God for what I can remember to be thankful for, before I somehow manage to get rid of that pillow down onto the tile, I let

Forget about me.

I'm nothing; I'm small potatoes.

Or something like that...

my mind wander, far outside the walls they've planted my thoughts in, and there are wonderful things that I think of! Wild things—things they would punish me for. Nothing risqué or sinful, but simple things that a child would daydream of, or actually, probably some things that children would never stop to dream up.

Sunshine. It was way better than that light that they turn on for me. I miss it more than anything, I think. You know, I'm not allowed to sigh sometimes? "Emotion causes rebellion," they say. But sometimes I cry. A pathetic whimper that I can't let them hear because of what they'll do. But sometimes I just can't help it when I think of sunshine. I miss my shadow as anyone else would miss their mother or father.

Conversation. I long for conversation. I know what would really make them mad, too. I can still remember my favorite conversations. Not exactly many details, but I remember the moments where the

conversations took place. All of them with Pig. Eventually conversations make me regret thinking of conversations, though. Who do I have to talk to now?

No one.

I'm so confused anyway. I worry way too much and I know it. I don't know why I worry, I just do it. I don't even think about worrying, it just happens, and I hate it. I hate it more than anything in this whole entire world. I'm so scared, and not of anything that really makes sense, either. I'm not scared of heights or bears or clowns or open spaces or closed spaces or the dark or thunderstorms...just pretty much everything else. I think that's really what happened before I stopped remembering. I scared myself to death, and I lived through it. Living was the biggest mistake I ever made...if that's the case.

I can't sleep. I'm so paranoid, and all I've got on my mind is Pig now.

She wasn't pink or plump or any-

thing. She didn't even have a tail. But she was perfect. To me at least. She always said I was partial, and I always

told her that there had to be some reason for me to be so partial. She didn't care. She said I was a phony, anyway.

She would say, "You're nothing. You know that? You're nothing...but a phony."

It annoyed me absolutely to death, too, because she stole the whole thing from Salinger. I don't even think she thought I was a phony. I think she just liked how cool Holden Caulfield sounded, lighting up his cigarettes and calling everyone a phony. I got so sick of that word! I know she was only joking, and I know she loved me—at least I hope I know so—but seriously. She was always doing that. She would read a quote or a book or something and steal it, making it her own to where she sounded so "cool."

Honestly, I can't tell you how I remember her. Five minutes ago, I had to feel around to reassure my own gender. I can remember my pillow and Pig, but I can't tell you the color of my eyes or if I even have teeth.

Christmas. Now that's something to remember.

One Christmas—I don't even remember how long ago it was, and come to think of it, it's the only Christmas I remember—Pig invited me to her parents' house for dinner and holidays and everything. We were late, of course, but that was mostly my fault. I couldn't be on time for anything.

My mother used to say, "You're gonna be late for your own funeral." But I don't think they'll let me be late for anything, especially my funeral.

But I think being late to her parents' was completely reasonable. We drove for eight hours straight to the middle of nowhere. The climate changed drastically and before I turned on the heat, I could see my breath between Pig and me. When we pulled down that long driveway, I parked the car behind what seemed like a thousand other cars. I remember unlocking the doors and glancing over at Pig before getting out of the car. I can actually remember exactly what Pig was wearing. It was funny, you know? It was like something a little girl would do. You know those little kids that get dressed before their parents come in to pick out their clothes? That's completely what this was. There were at least four inches of snow on the ground, and she was wearing a light cotton dress that came barely above her knees. I knew she wore it fairly often in the summer, but it was so out of place now. But I didn't ask or make fun. She was already on edge for some reason. Probably because she hadn't seen her parents in so long. Whatever it was, I didn't bother with it.

I guess I got caught up in thinking because I was in a trance, staring somewhere between the windshield and the heating vents.

"Nick, could you please hurry up?" She rushed unpleasantly.

"I'm sorry? I'm only stepping out of—"

"Well step faster, I'm freezing, and you act like you don't care."

She started muttering under her breath, which hardly ever happened.

"Would you like my jacket? Sweetheart, you've got to be freezing, it's gotta be at least twenty degrees—"

"I'm at home, Nicholas, the second I want to be treated like a child, I will walk through that door and listen to my mother and father."

I probably rolled my eyes and popped the trunk, taking out our suitcases and the presents for her parents and younger brother. I had only met her little brother once, and he seemed like a nice kid. He worried a lot too, so we had that in common, but I never told him. I just liked to tell him jokes that he could tell his friends. You know: the kind of jokes that Pig would get mad at me for telling her little brother and her parents would probably hate me for. Those are always the best jokes. That's what he told me that once when we met. But now, was definitely not the time for jokes.

Pig walked—practically ran towards the house, which from where we were looked no larger than my two bedroom apartment. I was trailing her by a good two feet, loaded down with our luggage and Christmas gifts. She was wearing her ridiculous winter boots. That dress and those boots. I never could ever figure her out.

As we neared the house, we could smell kerosene and burning cinders. I glanced up and didn't even see the chimney. She stopped dead cold. It was like she had hit a brick wall or something.

It was pretty embarrassing because I hadn't really been paying attention where we were walking, and I ran into her, dropping everything I had been carrying.

"Pig, you okay?" I asked as I bent over to pick up the luggage and gifts.

"Oh...yeah," she stammered, almost robotically. "It's just...Christmas time, I guess...I dunno...That's the smell of the Britt family Christmastime..." She acted like she was hypnotized or something.

She slowly made her way up to the door. She didn't bother knocking but walked right in which I guess was all right since it was her house.

The house was empty, which made no perfect sense, having so many cars in the driveway, and it was a bit larger than I had expected, seeing it from the highway, but

it still could not hold as many people as I supposed had been inside.

"Um...darling?"

"Darling? Since when do you call me darling? ...phony? Come on..." The way she said "phony" sounded as though it hurt her to say it. It almost even sounded out of place to her.

"Since you were picking peas in Egypt!" I called from what obviously was the dining room. She didn't laugh, which was completely understandable because what I had said wasn't even funny. I don't even know where it came from. I can be a real dope sometimes. "Um...where is everybody?"

"Out back," she walked into the room where I was awkwardly standing, looking at photographs from what looked like twenty years ago of a larger family of eleven children.

"Out back?" I asked, half-mindedly. "Hey, who're these people? Cousins? They here?"

"Out back, Nicholas. It's my Christmas year, you see."

"Your Christmas year?"

She didn't answer. She just kind of made her way to the back door, and we walked outside in silence. Neither one of us said a word for what seemed like a mile until I noticed where we were walking. There was an enormous bonfire, the flames of which were licking the leaves of the towering trees at the edge of the clearing. It seemed like a nice enough Christmas tradition.

"You see, every Christmas, the entire Britt family gets together and exchanges gifts and whatnot. But all day long before dinner and before gifts, the men prepare the Britt family bonfire. It's a big to-do, and it's practically legendary among family traditions. I just don't understand why..." As Pig finished up her explanation, an older woman stepped towards us. I recognized her as an aged version of the woman in the picture of the large family.

"You must be Nicholas." The lady smiled at me. I smiled back. She extended her hand for a handshake, and I opened my arms for a hug.

"Yes ma'am, I am." I tried to be as cordial as possible. I had no clue who this

woman was, but I wanted to impress anyone that was related to Pig.

“Nick, this is my mother.”

I was slightly surprised, still thinking of the photograph of the large family inside, but thankfully, I instinctually smiled and extended my hand. She smiled bigger, but it looked almost painful, and she opened her arms for a hug instead of the handshake. I assure you this was just as awkward as it sounds.

Pig’s mother took me by the arm. “Nicholas, you seem just as lovely as Pig says you are. She always talks about you.” I smiled as she kept talking. She looked around for a second, a little stressed, like she had things to be doing and there were something that had gone horribly wrong. “Would you do me a favor dear? Pig needs to go speak with her father.”

Pig’s mother nodded her head loosely towards the fire.

“He’s the one standing closest to the fire there with the Bible in his hand. You see him?”

You could tell she was proud of him—real proud of him. She didn’t brag too much on him, but the way she stared at him, you could tell she admired him. I always hoped Pig would get that way about me someday.

As her mother dismissed her in her introduction, Pig kissed me on my cheek and let go of my arm as she padded over to her father, parting scores of her family on her way towards him.

Both of our eyes followed her as she found her way to her father, then her mother turned back to me, “Yes, well, that favor...could you umm...could you run back up to the house and bring me my...umm...black shawl that’s lying at the foot of my bed? Even with this fire out here, I’m just freezing!”

I didn’t get a kick out of that, but I turned back to the house.

Just as the family disappeared from view, blocked by thick oaks, I, in my confusion, did not think to ask which bed was hers, which room was hers, or even how to get back into the house. I had blindly followed Pig so far through the woods that I had no clue as to how to get back. Hoping someone would give me some directions, I turned back around and walked to the clearing, and as I neared the fire, I almost threw up.

I saw Pig being held by her father, almost like you see in baptisms. Her mother was kneeling, close to the flames, wailing. It was funny, you know? I couldn’t move. I just stood there, stunned. Staring, completely unbelieving...almost throwing up.

Much of anything after that image, I cannot remember. I just can’t. Anything after I broke into a run towards the inferno is lost with the aura of my irises and the names of my mother and father. I’m jealous, though. Not because others can remember the names of their mothers and fathers, because if I could think of those few syllables that made up those names, I would take ultimate comfort in screaming every letter of those who gave me life. I’m jealous because as Pig was brought to her feet by her father, just as all her siblings before her, she stayed silent. She did not plead, she did not beg, she did not speak a single word as the flames scorched her skin and consumed her soft, cotton dress. She did not breathe a sound as she turned and walked into the blaze.

I remember why I want to forget. I want to forget about me. No worries, Pig would say, “You’re nothing.”



Brandon Watson



Lost in Transit

The burgundy suitcase slammed shut, and a single sock still jutted from its mouth as I fretfully sealed its clasps. Finally, I looked around the room that had housed me for the past several months. It was a dull, white-walled habitat kept to the bare essentials by my preference. A lavender-colored, bamboo nightstand which once held all my minor items stood in the corner of the room. A black futon made entirely of plush pillows and a wire carapace had served as my bed, and alongside it was the only window in the room, decorated with blue curtains. Outside of the sparse furniture, the room was empty. I tugged violently at the handle of the suitcase, wrenching it from the futon to the floor. As the luggage hit the carpet, it made a loud thud that covered up the sound of my roommates entering. My brother, a hulking mountain of a man, and his common-law wife, a mouse of a woman in comparison, were standing side by side in the doorway as I turned around.

"I'm going. I got paid today, and you've already made your feelings known," I exclaimed. Possibly guilt-ridden for asking me to leave, they both pitched their lines. They begged me to stay for the night, telling me it was too dangerous to attempt the long journey unprepared and not properly rested. I was not angry with them for asking me to leave, and it was understandable that my presence put a strain on them. In retrospect, I could have stayed one more night, but the shame I felt for being a bother was too much. As I walked down the hallway, rolling the suitcase along, my brother offered me money for the trip back. I completely refused the monetary support, believing it to be an act of guilt. "I have enough. I'll make it on my own this time," I adamantly proclaimed. As I walked out of the house, I remember ignoring their final pleas and partings. The veil of night had already begun to cover the lush, tropical landscape of Naples when I started the engine of my explorer. I had to drive eight hundred miles to reach my destination, and

I had just enough money for the necessary gas. I gunned my engine as I hit the interstate ramp, only the second time I had ever used this ramp and assured myself that everything would go smoothly.

The directions for my travel were simple enough. I needed to take two turns, one in Tallahassee, the capital of Florida, the next in Dothan, a southern city in Alabama. After the turns, I would have a straight shot to Montgomery if I went in the right direction. My stereo was at maximum volume and my foot firmly on the pedal, which is likely why I missed the sign telling me I was headed to Miami. As the miles rolled on, I became more entrenched in thought. I wondered about anything and everything, but mostly I was thinking about the impression I left with my brother. My driving became automatic after an hour, and I no longer needed to consciously think of it. This continued for a few more miles until I passed over a small hill, and after reaching the top, my eyes widened in shock. I gawked at the countless bright lights, the towering metropolitan structures at the center, and even the vast skirt of smaller constructs that spread out from the center. I noticed in the distance a foreboding, orange sign that read, "Welcome to Miami."

Realizing quickly the mistake I had made, I began to look for an exit ramp to turn around before it was too late. I had gone in the opposite direction, east instead of west. As I cursed myself, unable to believe my incompetence, I missed the last exit before Miami. Before I knew it, the three-lane interstate doubled in size. Cars began to flow from either side, confusion set in, and the road lifted from the ground, above city level, on stone columns. Foreign street names, alien exit signs, and speeding cars overwhelmed me with anxiety. I rushed to one side, almost causing a collision in the commotion with a red Mazda, and made my way down the ramp to a convenience store.

The area I travelled through did not appear hospitable. Trash was littered ubiquitously, the streets were rough, uneven, and filled with potholes, and each bump in the road I passed over made me more concerned. I doubted that the structures had much color, even in the light. I passed by something that could be considered a gas station. Circling around cautiously, I leisurely searched for the most well-lit, secure spot and parked there. I rummaged through my front seat, but there was nothing I could use as a weapon, at least not without informing the rest of the building's occupancy. Miami was gracious enough to supply sufficient humidity to disguise my nervous sweating as I stepped from the dry comfort of Explorer into the moist, almost noxious atmosphere of the not-so-quiet barrio. I admired the detail and style of the graffiti covered walls while meandering swiftly to the barricaded, glass door. After coming to an understanding that Martine enjoyed several sexual positions, I made it safely to the door. Finally, I would be protected from the outside at least. Unfortunately, I was wrong. I opened the door, and was welcomed by one of the most ferocious odors I would ever know. My palm slapped my face—nose specifically—after the sinister surge of smell hit. My sight became blurry as water flooded my eyes, my knees grew weak, and I was forced to fall back against the doors railing, clutching it for dear life. All the force of a heavyweight hook-shot, I thought. I looked up in time to see a group of older, Latino males enjoying a game of cards, smoking long, black cigars. I had their full attention after my display. I could not understand their speech; however, I understood their crude, cold laughter at my maladroit response, motioning for me to join them. Obviously, the store was closed, or that is what I hoped. After I regained balance, poise, and accurate depth perception, I started for their table. Hesitantly, I moved beside them, breathing through my mouth. I explained my predicament to them, and they seemed to understand. As they talked I browsed the building, a combination of cigar, gas, and possibly drug store, interesting in comparison with what I considered to be normal.

One of the younger men stood and talked in the clearest English I had heard yet. His name was Pierre. He would gladly be willing to help me if I would drive him home, since he was inebriated. He assured me everything would be fine, nothing would happen along the way, and he would appreciate the gesture very much. I had no reason to trust this man, so I smiled kindly, while cursing a negative response back to him. The men at the table were no longer as helpful as they once were. I turned toward Pierre, a menacing glare in my eyes, and I agreed to drive him home. At the time, I considered that the situation. I was trapped in Miami, one of the United States worst crime areas, and I had no clue as to how to get out. There were, at the time, other more sensible options. I could find another gas station or a map, but the stress of the conundrum numbed otherwise logical thought processes. I warily nodded, mostly to myself, and glanced at Pierre. I allowed myself to believe everything would be fine as long as I maintained a close watch on my questionable guide.

We resolved the issues—what he was not to do in my car—for the drive to his house. I began to grow more comfortable with the idea, probably from the desperation for the half-baked plan to work. We moved out of the door together, into the street, and as we walked through the poorly lit parking lot he said, “Don’t be scared. Miami’s not so bad”. Looking around to check Pierre’s statement, my eyes became glued to an older gentleman with a bushy, white beard. He was dressed in layers, or rather enough pieces of cloth to constitute a layer, nonchalantly meditating on the corner with what appeared to be coke bottle wrapped in a paper bag in his slender digits. A dog, large and mangy, was idly pulling at one of the pieces of cloth around the man’s arm. He did not seem to mind as the meditation had put him at ease. I looked back to my new friend as I picked up my pace, “I’ll take your word for it.” With that, we climbed into my utility vehicle and headed deeper into the urban jungle.

The inner-city maze become more complicated with each turn, and I easily lost track with where I was. He gave directions, and I simply followed, hoping for the best. Slowly the desolate, depleted ghetto led way to a rich, polished uptown schema. Constructs made of refined glass and sterling steel reached into the sky as we rolled onward. Soon a faint smell moved through the car that was similar to the one I encountered in the cigar shop. As I stopped at a red light, I looked to my companion who was openly rolling a cigarette paper around a green herb. I was not so naïve to allow this to continue. I insisted he throw it out the window, but after some heated words we compromised. I allowed him to hide the joint, so we could carry on.

We continued further through the inner-city labyrinth until we reached a rather elegant section of Miami. Pierre informed me that this boulevard was the quintessential

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social gathering spot in town. Even popular celebrities made their rounds in the clubs located on this street, and as we turned the corner I believed his words. I instantly felt inadequate, for there was not a single car worth less than a hundred grand. Most of the individuals passing by probably had paid more for their clothes than I did for my ragged, dirty Ford explorer. I quickly imagined how I must look to them, driving by in my white car with the faded black trim work. The traffic was slow, and people were

moving around almost aimlessly in the street: beautiful women and handsome men all dressed in the finest silks, usually of darker color. I felt encompassed with a surreal feeling, and I was eager to leave the place. Luckily, the street opened up, allowing me to escape from the dreamscape. We fought our way back through the metropolitan area, coming to a friendlier suburban area.

Finally we arrived at Pierre’s place of residence, a two-story duplex (owned by his parents I was told). The surrounding neighborhood was a pleasant change of scenery in comparison with its ghetto or metropolitan counterparts. The streets were clean, the green grass was evenly tripped, and even in the dark I could see all the houses were painted in vibrant tropical colors. I pulled up to the curb to let him out of the car. As he got out of the car and said his farewell, he offered me the joint as a token of appreciation. I began to refuse, but then I realized I was running low on cigarettes. I did not have the necessary resources to purchase more, so I tentatively accepted the item. Pierre finished telling the simple directions that would lead me to the crucial road, which would allow me to escape from Miami. I waved one last time, and ventured to

the next interstate ramp. It was a short trip to the ramp, and within a few minutes I was back on track to Tallahassee.

The trip to Tallahassee was uneventful, considering the stent of activity in Miami. Although it was the longest leg of the journey to Alabama, with the help of my companion’s herbal remedy, the traverse seemed surprisingly short. I shifted my car into cruise control, and situated my legs comfortably into the Indian position in my seat. A careless maneuver, but in my

intoxicated state, that did not seem to matter. I was one of the few drivers on the vast stretch of road at that time in the morning. The trees on either side of the road massed together in the dark, forming a shadowed wall on each side of the road. The scenery continued on unchanged for miles. The only interruption was the occasional bathroom break or petroleum run. I made it safely, but not promptly, to Tallahassee in time for the sun to peak its rim over the edge of the landscape, and I followed through with my turn toward Alabama. As the effects of the medicinal herb began to weaken, I roused from my stupor to find myself crossing the Georgia line.

I drove along the interstate until I found a rest stop I could gather directions from. In my attempt to reach Dothan from Tallahassee, I had taken a slightly wrong turn, and I headed northeast instead of north. Truthfully, I was not far from my course. I calculated the gas needed and realized I simply did not have enough money. The drive was impossible to make it from this point; adding further insult, I was dead tired. The drive, the marijuana, and the stress had drained me of my once willful energy. By now over twelve hours had been spent driving, and I could barely think straight. Despite my earlier escapade in Miami, I was not brazen enough to sleep in my car, and I did not have money for a hotel. I thought of the only possible solution, and I called my parents. Though unhappy and uneager, they agreed to send someone with enough money to get me home.

There was one problem with the design of the plan: it would take at least four hours for the driver to arrive, and I would be required to stay at the rest stop. I battled exhaustion for a few minutes after the phone call, twisting and turning in my truck to stay awake. Remembering my prescribed medication, a powerful stimulant called Ritalin, I went to the back of my Explorer. I fumbled impatiently through a leather satchel to find my medicine case. Technically, I was ordered to take this medication every morning, though sometimes I managed without it. Had there been one time not to take this medication, certainly it

would have been this time. Popping the pill into my mouth, I did not think twice about the action. Not long after, I had begun to relax in the rear of my car when I understood how big of a mistake I had made. My body was deeply tired, but my mind sprung into alertness. I felt as though I was about to burst from my skin, and I could even hear my heart pound in my chest. I waged a war with myself in the rear of my car for several hours, unconcerned with anyone or anything else around me. My mind had never suffered so much, not in such a short period of time. Every nerve of my being pulsed and my thoughts were but a delusional tempest, spinning violently within my skull cavity. The thought of death lost all fearful pretenses; in fact, the idea was welcomed with loving arms.

Gradually, the chaos slipped away, and I came back to my senses. Hours had passed while I was wrestling myself in the backseat, sweating profusely. When my psyche cleared, my thoughts were on the dismal journey I had dimwittedly undertaken as the rays of the sun crept over my windows into my eyes. I wondered why everything went so wrong and at that time came to the conclusion that it was bad karma. However, in retrospect it was simply my impatience and intolerance, which had led me down this disheveled road. When I was finally able to move of my own free will, I lumbered from the back seat. My foot hit the ground softly, but in that moment, I became aware of gravity once more as it returned the concept of weight and balance to my world. The rest area, with its boring white concrete buildings and scattered vending machines, was a friendly reminder of reality. I did not feel good by any means, but I felt much more lucid than at any point in the night before.

I walked the path to the bathroom, and as I was about to enter the restroom I bumped into what appeared to be a polite, young gentlemen. He stared at me momentarily before crossing in front of me. As he glared at me angrily, I could see that he was drunk and looked as though his night was comparable to mine. I stepped back as he began to raise a clenched fist. In the distance

I picked out a familiar voice calling my name. I turned to see a friendly face: Mr. Terry, one of my father's drivers.

Mr. Terry, though old and feeble, was enough of a threat to divert the man's anger. The drunk, not willing to tempt his odds, marched off in the opposite direction, and I rushed to Mr. Terry like a child to its mother. He flashed a characteristic smile at me, "The cavalry has arrived." If he only knew, I thought. He laughed for quite awhile as I told him my story, and convinced me everything was fine now, funny how an old man can become such a gallant figure so quickly. Miraculously, I was able to make a safe return to Montgomery from this point. The clock on the wall, near my bedpost, said it was a little past noon when I finally arrived home, but that did not stop me from crawling straight into bed. Before I slipped into a coma-like sleep, I reflected briefly on the chain of events. Still unwilling to accept the idea that it was entirely my fault, I was eager to play the game of blame. Rolling onto my side, I mumbled some final words, "Damn road signs."

Mega Mug



Adam Schultz

I try and try but the mug will not empty its dregs into the sink. I groan and shake the thing one last time. Every one else in the office uses the “Mega Mug” from Bud’s Coffee. It’s big enough to hold an eight hour buzz.

My cubicle sits ten steps away, looking more like a pet carrier than a workplace. It leaves just enough room for me to sit. The city has more important things to pay for, like the legislators’ hookers and drunk-driving tickets.

The coffee always smells like sweaty feet; maybe the furnace’s fueled with moldy cabbage. Then again, my mug may just be dirty. I toss the old mug and its ever-smiling Hardee’s star into the trash can. A Mega Mug doesn’t sound half bad. I shake the thought from my head after I get a tingle downtown. I’ll ignore it for now.

I lean forward and click my mouse. I never noticed the sound of the clicking before, but it becomes annoying. It reverberates like a war drum...dadum, dadum, though it’s just kaclick, kaclick. I kaclick a folder named “Hmm.” It stores a thousand complaints and threats.

I hit the delete key. No sense bothering the boss with that mess. Who cares if a garbage man pissed on a woman’s begonias or a trashcan mysteriously caught fire in the night? Just a waste of taxpayer dollars. There’s a new strip mall needing land and the mayor has to buy out a farmer.

As the wasteful emails say goodbye, I see a shipped package stuffed in my In tray. The label reads SHIP TO: Jareth Mackey. That can’t be right. Jareth is one of the two basement dwelling janitors. I decide to take the package to its true recipient.

Near the stairwell, an employee ID card lies on the floor. These things shouldn’t be left lying around. I’ll take it to the owner and give them a talking to. I pick up the card and stick it behind a pen in my shirt pocket. I never understood why the city never put pictures of our faces on these cards. Where’s the security in that?

“What’ya want?” the toothless assistant janitor asks me as I approach the basement door. I pull my ID card from a shirt pocket and flash it at him.

“Awright” concedes the janitor.

“Jareth in?” I ask as I pass him.

“Nope, lunch. Back in thirty...maybe,” he responds.

“Thanks,” I mutter, making it across the steel-columned room. In the very back, near some shelves, sits the furnace. Its grated door emits an eerie orange glow. It smells worse up close. I set the package down on an adjacent bench. I don’t dawdle and return to the office.

I weave through the corral of cubicles, following Mary’s voice to her workspace. She’s on the phone. I lean against the open side of her cubicle and clear my throat. She looks at me with a smile and wastes no time getting off the phone.

“Hey,” she says, eyeing me.

“Howdy, whatcha up to?” I ask.

“Not much. Waiting for lunch. God, I can’t stand this place.”

“Know the feeling. I was thinking about investing in a Mega Mug. They’re easier to clean, right?”

She nods. “Uh huh. The bottom comes off so you never get any of those crappy brown stains.”

“Nice,” I say. “Listen, I was going to run to Bud’s. Want to join me? We can skip out early.”

She smiles, turning her head in thought. “Hmmm.”

“It’s a simple yes or no,” I tell her, winking.

“Oh, alright,” she says, feigning exasperation.

We get to Bud’s fifteen minutes later. It’s not crowded and we get seated immediately.

“I’ll have a turkey on rye and a Mega Mug,” I tell the waitress. She nods and smiles, and turns to Mary.

“Just a cobb salad and water.” The waitress nods and smiles again. We say our thank-yous and she speeds off.

Fifteen minutes of small talk and flirting later, we have our order. The Mega Mug is indeed mega. And the coffee’s good. I’ll have to come more often.

Mary’s in high spirits. She tells me of her dream to be a teacher. She’s taking classes at a local college to get her degree. She’ll be done in a few months and hopes to quit soon.

“Will you ever quit Sanitation?” she asks me after a few moments of silence.

“I’d have to find another place that smells like feet.”

She informs me that I’m terrible. I disagree. While she continues to laugh, my cell phone rings. I answer it, hear silence, and end the call.

Mary’s laughter is cut short by a loud boom. Bud’s windows turn to dust. I hear screams, wails of shock, and someone yelling that they can’t see.

I lean over the table and pick Mary up off the floor. I attempt worry.

“Are you ok?” I ask her.

Her eyes are moist. “Oh...my God...what happened?”

“There’s been an explosion,” I explain.

“Oh, wow...yeah, I’m ok,” she responds.

“Good.” Bewildered and off-balance, she manages to find her chair again. I walk to the front and peer out the windowless pane. The Sanitation Department building is smoldering, reduced to rubble. I hear sirens in the distance. I turn back and head to the table. The waitress looks shocked and asks me what happened.

“A building blew up.”

She replies, “Oh my god!”

“Yeah,” I say.

A smile crosses my face. I look to the Mega Mug still in my hand. “Look, can I get a refill? This is really good coffee.”

“Too often
I wait
for the sentence
to finish
taking shape
in my mind
before setting it down.



Symnzworld Mustache • Robin Sulkosky

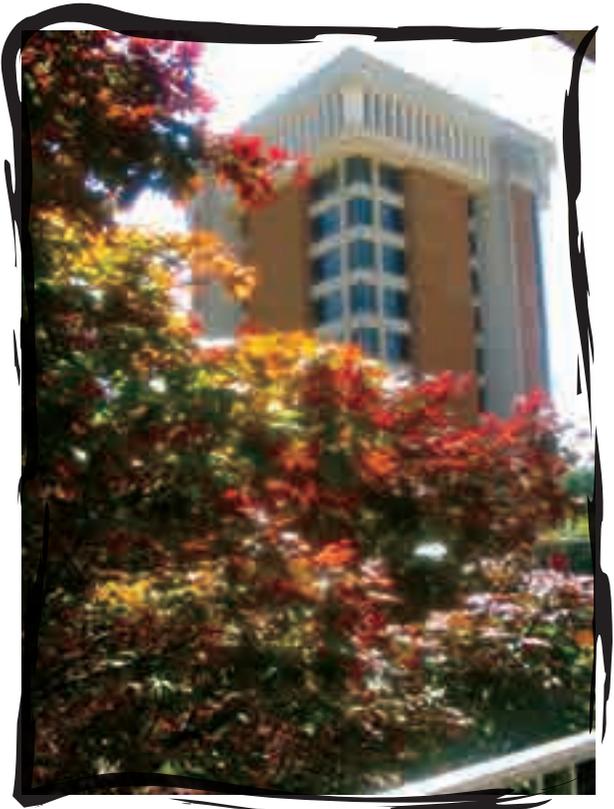
It is better to *seize it*
by the end that **first** offers itself, head or foot,
though **not knowing** the rest,



This Haloween, I decided to be a Slob • Naomi Stauffer



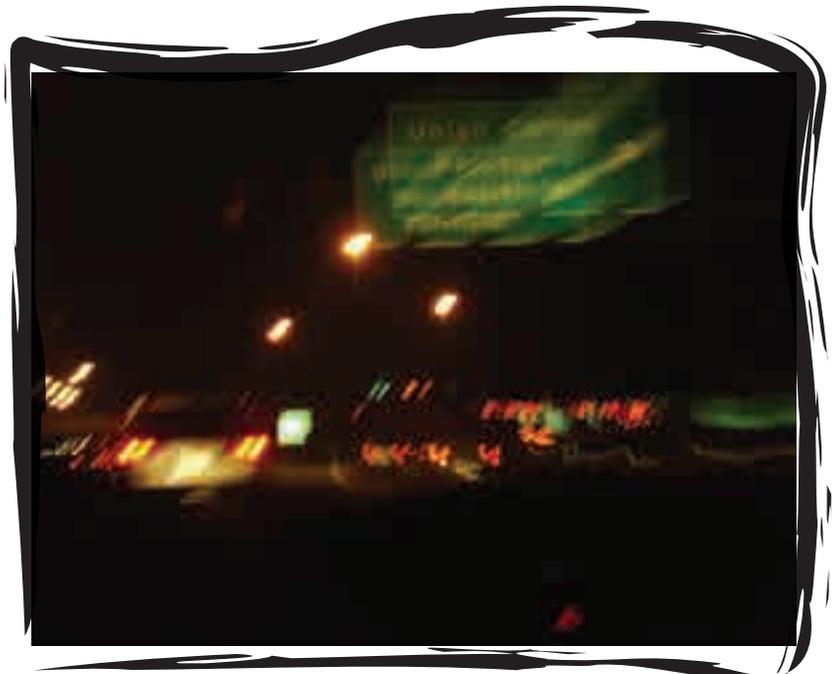
Colors of Fire • Jaimie Spencer



Tree of Knowledge • Audra Hagel



There Yet • Audra Hagel



Bad Contact Lenses • Naomi Stauffer

then **pull:**
the rest will
follow along.
André Gide



Grandpa? • Audra Hagel



Spanish Romance • Beth Parrish



The Death of Indifference • Jaimie Spencer



Morning Light • Ryan Sellers



Southern Mansion • Ryan Sellers



Linear Perspectives • Naomi Stauffer

Words—
so *innocent* and *powerless*
as they are,
as standing in a dictionary,
how potent
for **good** and **evil** they become,
in the hands
of one who knows
how to **combine** them!

Nathaniel Hawthorne



Holding on II • Jaimie Spencer

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