



FILIBUSTER

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AUTHOR OF AUM'S 2015 COMMON READING SELECTION, BIG FISH

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Welcome to Filibuster 2015! Our goal for this year's edition was to use our theme "From Outer Space to Inner Space" to explore the best creative work from AUM's student body. Just as outer space can suggest creation and discovery, so, too, do we hope that this year's edition provides an inspirational space for you, not only as readers, but also as creators. This year's Filibuster is as much an invitation to examine your own creative "inner space" as it is a showcase for the best work of the past year.

We have built on the growing legacy of the Filibuster by continuing to host a Filibuster Poetica and to create our own t-shirts. We are happy to thank the Student Government Association for their support for this event. For the very first time, we have also included an interview with a nationally recognized author in the magazine. Daniel Wallace—the renowned author of *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*—was kind enough to talk to our staff when he was on campus for AUM's Common Reading program.

A profound and heartfelt thanks goes to this year's graphic designer, Alex Trott. He took our vague ideas and brought them to life in an extraordinary publication—a publication that is, in itself, a showcase of Alex's own artistic vision and creative prowess. Our co-editorial staff—including Heather Adams, Savannah Mathews, Kimberly McGuinty, and Erica Johnson—provided invaluable feedback, worked diligently, and stuck with what was, at times, a difficult and trying project. Lastly, Dr. Robert Klevay, our faculty advisor, provided constant support, direction, and knowledge. Simply put, without him, Filibuster 2015 would not exist.

So, as you read Filibuster 2015, we ask that you view it as an exploration. Enjoy experiencing AUM's creative space and the talented minds that inhabit it!

BY DERIC SALLAS

EDITOR'S NOTE

VISUAL ART



RIVER REFLECTIONS
Kaylee Hobbs



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UNTITLED
Erica Myrick

VISUAL ART



AUTUMN SUNSET
Kelhi DePace



THREE-TOED SLOTH
Kristen Vogel

VISUAL ART



CRYSTAL CLEAR
Jonathan Bozeman



UNTITLED
Meredith Foresee

VISUAL ART



ALWAYS
Kimberly McGuinty





POETRY

BY JESSE SCHAEFER

The mufflers hum,
Roaring and resonating.

With a flick of the wrist
The engine leaps to life
Potently spewing speed
Winding the wheels wildly.

The howl drowns out thought,
A chorus to consummate the excursion.

A sweeping ellipse beyond
The tires carve the corner
Leaning deep into the bend
The road reaches up ravenously.

The pipes sing a bestial tone
Phenomenal and ferocious.

The curve finally achieved
Gravity gives up gloomily
Granting an unimpaired arrival
Safely at the set site.



LITTLE BOY

13

One year
Little giggles
Little feet fall and stumble

Two years
Little phrases
Little feet running reckless

Three years
Little songs
Little feet dancing along

BY SAVANNAH MATHEWS

POETRY



POETRY

BY MAYA PERRY

She wakes up to the sound of uninspired top hits,
stretches her arms tattooed with liberty toward the sky,
and bathes in exotic items from Whole Foods.
She has an energy drink to boost her sense of female empowerment.
Then she uses a slingshot to fling leftover Fruit Loops at the television.
She doesn't believe in being wasteful.
She takes "selfies" to check her appearance (no filter, of course).
She wears a bra size "DD" with a 40" hip.
Some how, magically, she is a dress size 2.
She wears sequins to catch the flashing lights of the paparazzi.
They wonder if it's really her keeping tabs on them.
She stuffs her hair with government conspiracies.
Hand grenades are her favorite accessories.
She weeps at the feet of those done wrong from an attractive angle.
Covered in a long black cloak, she carries their shame back home to her castle
where she uses them to make gifs for tumblr.

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**PORTRAIT OF THE
AMERICAN PRINCESS**



THAT AWKWARD MOMENT WHEN

15

"That awkward moment when..."

So many Facebook statuses.

So many Twitter updates.

Always ending in something funny, something relatable.

"That awkward moment when you trip down the stairs and create a domino effect."

"That awkward moment when you make a joke, nobody laughs, and you act like nothing happened."

"That awkward moment when you go for a high five, they go for a fist bump, and you grab their fist."

So many awkward moments, and tonight I have an awkward moment of my own.

I do not think anyone will laugh, though.

What about that awkward moment when you have to write a eulogy for a parent and you realize you don't know

Anything about them?

That awkward moment when you don't know their favorite color,

When you don't know if they like to sing along to the radio,

When you don't know what flavor of frosting they like best.

Worst of all, though,

Is that awkward moment when you realize they knew everything about you, your hopes, your fears, your dreams, And you only realize upon their death that you never really knew them.

That awkward moment when it's too late.

BY JORDAN TAYLOR

POETRY



POETRY

BY ROBERT BULLARD

Standing up,
Bent over,
Cannot stop
Another
One of these,
Giving ease.

Break of day,
Bright morning
Cannot stay
The rumbling.
Without doubt,
It comes out.

Midnight comes
With a sound
Just like drums,
So profound.
All things pass:
Man and gas



IN THIS MOMENT

17

I slowly creep out of his room,
And then I hear his little voice,
"Mommy, can you lay beside me a little while?"
I lie down in the tiny twin bed
Made for one.
"Sing me a song and rub my back."
I rub his back and sing Jesus Loves Me.
His eyes are closed.
I slowly try to sit up and leave,
But his little arm wraps around me
Like a teddy bear squeeze,
So I lie back down.
He smiles.
I try to lie still and think of the many tasks
I should be doing. Reading Lysis, studying
Notes, writing a poem.
None of those matter,
Because I am where I need to be.
It's cold, my head itches, my
Hair is bunched,
But I dare not move.
He drifts off to sleep and dreams.

BY SAVANNAH MATHEWS

POETRY



POETRY

BY KIM LEIFER

Sun tinged with Tang orange
Sticky and acrid like the tar waves from the boiling street.
Perception clouded with summer fumes of sweat and ice cream,
Sugared with illusions of times gone by.
Polaroid perfect families
Matching sweaters and mimeographed smiles
Implanted imagery
Rosy hued and wistful
Scant semblance of idyllic times,
Half an image of what never quite was but claimed to be



MUSIC

19

The cacophony makes its way,
Though apathetically,
Into my blissful space
Drowning out my dreams,
My mind swimming,
Now finding,
Music

Notes dance,
Bursting forth,
Rhythm, perchance,
Strikes a chord within,
Unbound and deceiving,
Breaking all barriers to
Breathe life into all it touches.

BY JESSE SCHAEFER

POETRY



POETRY

BY LESLIE REWIS

First kiss like waves hitting the shore
Small waves, then gargantuan water wall, consuming
Hidden in the upper story
"Do you belong here, kids?"
Wandering down to the empty streets
Hand holding, nervous parents consoled
Saying goodbye, awkward final hug
Can't stop talking, phone is dying
Letters to be written, what happens next?



TWIRLING PARASOLS 21

When a pitch is thrown your way,
And it curves as you think it's straight,
You swing knowing you didn't accurately anticipate.
Another pitch is surely on its way,
But your bat seems heavier in weight,
Your grip weakens
as you feel even further away from first base.
But if you swing and swing with grace,
And the ball impacts the bat to break,
An unbroken pitch means you can't quite be on your way.
But if you sweat and feel at dismay,
And your confidence begins to shake,
Sorry there's really nothing I can do
to change the ways of the game.
I'd only hope you'd stay,
And desire to still want to play,
Though your fans at night
may not be the same ones during the day.
I hope you hold onto your faith,
Even if the entire stadium is screaming
for you to quit and save face.
When you swing,
I'll be standing right behind you
with more bats for you to take.

BY COREY CARR

POETRY



POETRY

BY STEPHEN PAUL BRAY

There's a movie about a sniper
I watched once as a child
wherein the hero stalker kills
two enemies with a single shot.

The idea of such a complex death
fascinated me throughout boyhood,
recruit training,
and eventually Iraq.

In Fallujah, several men crossed my
ACOG.
For most it was a one-way trip,
and while that sufficed at the time
I always wanted to get two with one.

I didn't but returned home proud,
failing to live up to the movies,
and wondering if such a thing
could really be accomplished.

After a few months I forgot all about it.
Then one evening a brown-skinned man
arrived to teach me what Hollywood
will never understand.

He found me in my dreams,
running at me swerving,
shouting like a man on fire.
White dress. Red turban. Blue jeans.

AK in his right hand.
My heartbeats grow louder
against the echoed cadence
of my breathing ringing in my ears.

I place my reticle center-mast
and catch him at the end of an exhale.
He crumbles quickly
and stops.

In the moment before I wake,
I swear I heard him scream,
"Stop! Stop! –
Every bullet kills two people!"

He stops by often to remind me,
to make sure I never forget.



DRIVING, AFTER WAR

23

When I drive,
I pretend it's normal to wonder
when someone will shoot me in the head through the window;
that it's okay to squeeze my legs and elbows tightly together
and tuck my chin and hold my breath,
bracing for impact in case the trash pile on I-65 explodes;
that no one notices me looking at license plates racing by,
searching for others whose hearts are purple like mine.

BY STEPHEN PAUL BRAY

POETRY



POETRY

BY DEIRVIN DAVIS

Aeolus watching
His sons are eager to play
He denies them fun

Zephyrus looks on
Tears sprinkle in his grey eyes
His desire wanes

Helios smiles
His powers are at its peak
Selene is far off

A day at the zoo
Suddenly my peers appear
Excitement stirs them

Some get in for free
Others pay out of pocket
I am one of them

Inside the winds kicks
The Anemoi have been freed
Zephyrus flies high

My peers look about
The fauna pace in their cage
A rather slow day

Helios shines on
He is indifferent to us
We sweat in his name

Buzzards fly above
The cool waters attract them
Hot land, cool water

Five regions are shown
The seven known continents
All A's are present

The simian's swing
The avions strut proudly
The quadrupeds skulk

Time flies, lunch begins
Hummus and soft pita bread
People stuff their mouths

Full mouths, avid words
Classmates happy at the zoo
I am one of them

The skylift awaits
Bird's view of the animals
Insignificant

Laughing at the beast
Our power over them
Such arrogance yes?

The love of the sky
The grace of the blowing winds
A feeling of flight

An urge to jump down
To saddle a quadruped
An apex alpha

Algae floats below
Undrinkable water, ew
Nothing purified?

I feel like swimming
Aaron tries to dissuade me
I have no worries

The lift starts to slow
Our ride in the sky ends
I felt like the wind

Feet touching the ground
The warm earth beneath my soles
My ancestors smile

My face is windswept
Aroma fills my nostrils
Exhaling sweet smoke



REFLECTIONS IN A LAKE

25

Your polished mirror surface
Silent upon stoic morning
Awaken with upside down twin
Be warmed by sun upon your skin

Fear not the dark clouds
Their own reflections frighten
Them and they will shed their tears
Into you for all their long years

We watch the rain fall
And a million ripples
Seeming to last forevermore
Yet dying as they reach the shore

Rain and snow come down
While theirs come up
Do actions here affect down there
The same way here and everywhere?

Am I staring down
Into shimmering surface
While they look up into a sky
So far below where birds will fly?

A sudden splash then
And the ripples spread
No one around and yet below
Twin child will throw another stone

Him or another me
We play our young games
But soon will not laugh anymore
For ripples die on both our shores

BY DOUG WALTERS

POETRY



POETRY

BY DOUG WALTERS

Please come back again
But not just to rest your weary head
Not just to use this road
On your way to other views
And awake from other dreams

But to see how red is our blood
The same red in a life we once shared

Your stories open eyes and minds
Our arms stay closed around you
While you sleep and dream of
Where you've been and where you're going

When you leave our tears
Will once again water the garden
It is a garden we never tended
But I pray that something will grow

I pray for a small green bud
That someday you can help us tend

When you come back
There will be a tall tall tree
With branches that reach from its feet
To its leaf covered head

And when we climb to the top
I will see all your yesterdays
As I smell the foreign wind
And hear the music that it brings
I silently promise myself
That one day
I will become you

Back down now to the Earth
Our smaller footprints
A lunar relic in the red dirt

A voice chimes the hour
As we race to the womb
To see how red is our blood
The same red in a life we once shared



ENDING

27

I often think
My mischievous reflection
The polished copycat
Knows my future
While secure in his world of oppositions
Even in dreams
He keeps his silence
While laughing to himself
A morning routine
Brings us face to face
A recitation of Yeats
Three marching songs
As we both look forward
To a life of sandals
Calendars becoming useless
Books with yellowed pages
And the quiet light
Of a lazy half moon

Will I appear
In the dreams of others
As an image
An old friend
A brief lover?
Will they think of me
Upon awakening
As I sit alone
Amidst the taunting echoes
And compare the dream
To a memory?
For of love I am
Of love I always was
I beg of you
We both do
Do not fail to love me
For I have never failed
To love you.

BY DOUG WALTERS

POETRY



POETRY

BY KELHI DEPACE

Beside the sea you wash
your hair.
But you will not heed
my word!
Thus my mother did, you say, and hers before her.
But what do I know?
For I am only he who has the king's ear.
And at all times, is
his hair
not flawless?
Much like
my advice.
You say it will keep you safe beyond
my understanding.
But surely you are beyond
my understanding!
So I shall leave you and
your hair
as over the sea I go with
my king.
Keep yourself safe from the salt and the waves, if not
your hair.
So it was that the advisor and
his king
boarded a sea-going vessel
that later washed ashore.
Washed ashore, as she washed
her hair.



DEATH'S LAMENT

29

Violent winds howl in protest
Death's ghost lingers here
Absent heart beneath this breast
Pricks life from laden tears

Wonder led to the discovery
Of that hollowed bastion
Its skeletal remains besieged
For a moment, my emotions

Inside I stumbled upon
A box of hidden secrets
Its keeper's life was gone
Preserved by past regrets

At my feet a photo fell
He then smiled up at me
'Ah,' said I, 'To you I'll tell
What curse drives my sanity'

'Time holds you captive
To which I can relate
For many years I've lived
One thousand to this date'

'To fortune you are bound
Your fate has been fulfilled
The reasons I'm confound
To Hell for those I've killed'

'A priest's blood turned to wine
He fell before the altar
It began the repeated crimes
Admitting this I falter'

'The loved ones of my past
Are buried beneath an oak
Their health declined fast
From the moment I awoke'

'Life from mortals I have drained
Sweet elixir I strongly thirst
Mere satisfaction only obtained
By succumbing passion's curse'

'A blessing this may seem, my friend
Yet Eternity has no avail
At dawn, this life shall end
When sings the nightingale'

'Once its song strikes the hour
You will know me as a myth
As the sun rises, I shall not cower
I will, at last, remember bliss.'

BY KIMBERLY GRAY

POETRY



POETRY

BY CHARNELLE SCOTT

"The sound of trumpets and clarinets flow in my ears
As I sit outside eating fresh, red strawberries
Writing my thoughts and feelings down
The breeze of the wind sway back and forth around me
Watching butterflies and gnats swarm the earth
Thinking winter has finally bloomed

The birds chirping, flowers blooming
Airplanes and cars sounding off in a far distance
The sweet smell of my strawberries attracts ants
Kids playing off in a distance
Dogs running around barking at cats
The aroma of charcoal and barbecue fill the air

But I see nor hear these things around me
It's just me, my thoughts, and the sound of jazz music
I feel as if I'm temporarily alone in this world
Alone with nothing but my thoughts, lost in my thoughts
As I sit outside, enjoying nature around me
I look around and see that winter has bloomed "



CHRIS

31

Let's not talk about that.
Let's talk about the Byrdman.
We were making our way to Tanner's land.
Suddenly, Keith jolted through the wires;
His song was "Courtesy," and ripe for parody.
I thought in audacious vulgarity.
My jest was for your scrutiny.
Then, I heard what couldn't be.
I heard a laugh so vivid,
That it now shakes my weary frame.
That laugh will stand the test of time.
For, when I first toyed with rhyme,
Byrd, you were there.
Now that you're here, I'll stop and speak.
Never again will I say, " Nah. Meet up next week."
So, whatever happens, I'll let you know.
For you, I'll heave a hearty laugh as I go down this road.

BY MATT JOHNSON

POETRY



POETRY

BY STEVEN PARKER

The great thing about poetry
Is that you can talk about something you have never felt
You can surmise, improvise, dramatize sensations
That you have read about or recall from the movie on tv
But are empty echoes of the true feeling
Like a prosthetic limb trying to flail and act like a real arm
It can reach out to make that connection
But it can't quite give a proper handshake
Some of us romanticize the idea of what love may be like
Reciting one-liners in a cool hook to express an idea
A concept for an emotion that would drown us if we actually attempted to swim in it
We speak and rail on about the heart
As if we knew the truth, preachers of passions screaming from the pulpit
When we have never stepped beyond that threshold
Afraid that our romantic dreams will crack and shatter
We want so desperately to believe that love conquers all and words can change the world
That somehow if these childhood fantasies are untrue
Our world will fall out from under us and throw us into the grey

That is not to say a poet is unfeeling or has never felt
But as one poet has said, poets are liars
We spit a truth that we want others to hear and know
Like a hashtag feed for others to pass on by word of mouth
To go 'oooo' and 'aaaa', snap a few fingers, and say how 'we get it'
We do not, however, want you to know the truths inside
We want you to see a blockbuster film or romantic comedy
Not the trainwreck amateur film festival that can be our feelings
I want to write about love at first sight staring across a subway line
Not talk about the bitter sensation of waking up in bed and feeling that empty fucking spot next to me
The reason I can't sleep at night because I feel this void
Reminding me that each day I grow disenchanted with fairy tale endings
That my words are cheap regurgitations of a rock ballad
That I haven't fallen in love, only had crushes that only I talk to myself about
That for all the potential I believe I have in myself, I don't have the self confidence
To ask any girl I ever met to go on a date
Because of that fear not just of rejection
But also the shuddering apprehension that I waited for nothing

32

"I'M A POSEUR"

INSPIRED BY CHAD ANDERSON "LIARS, ALL OF US"



“I’M A POSEUR” CONTINUED 33

This isn't a poem about love or lack of love
This is about that bitter knowledge that I know nothing
I do not know the heart, I do not know emotion
That for all that I ever will try to scribble and scratch across paper
That these words are just pale attempts to say what every person feels
What screeches inside my brain, hiding inside this shell of college rule and ink
I don't have hooks, I don't have rhymes, I don't even have a pattern or meter
I just have the same thing every person around me has...feelings
Feelings that I'm afraid will eat me from the inside out and reveal a truth that I do not want to see
Every day I take a look in the mirror, I don't see me
I see a mask of self deception so deep
That if I tried to rip it off, I'd be pulling bone
That fear that makes me feel the core of me is filled with oblivion
Not deep and meaningful depression or beautiful sadness
But a black hole that pulls everything in
Just to feel something inside me
That someday, I can put my name down on paper
And say that I'm not posing at poetry



POETRY

BY SERENA BUSH

I had a California dream that ended in Jersey
My mode of transportation may have you wondering
But don't worry, I was floating
Not at first
In the beginning I was hitting a few traffic lights and you could sometimes see me looking in my rearview
California made things possible that I thought I'd never do
I never believed in fairytales or happily ever after's but California seemed to be the only thing that mattered
Unexpectedly shattered
What I got from California was happening suddenly then all at once
Foolishly I thought it was real just because it was different
I was coasting at first
My California dream was sand in my toes , the sun in the background, your hand on my thigh, and my skin glowing cause
I'm ridin' in my bathing suit
It never crossed my mind to hesitate cause it was you
I would let my hair down during the day, let it fall upon my shoulder, and sweat it out at night
Roll over and ask you, 'This is love, right?'
Would you be scared if I lied..
If I told you this was exactly what you wanted only because I made it that way
And my dream was going another way
It didn't take long for my California dream to turn into a nightmare
Because when I awoke you weren't there
And everything was...a blur
I had dreamed of California for so long that the smell of the ocean was a part of me and I could feel the breeze blowing across my cheeks
But I woke up..I woke up floating



YEDASENTIENCE

CONTINUED

35

I was floating and ended up in Jersey
It had to have been the best accident that I'd made thus far
I didn't get there by bus, train, or car
Because I stopped dreaming
I stumbled upon a road that led to a reality that I didn't know existed
If I would have been anymore distracted I probably would have missed it
This time I didn't open my heart
I couldn't in Jersey
The heart I wore on my sleeve was covered because it was logically impossible to be in sync emotionally
Speak to my mind first and stimulate me intellectually
Like a modern day love jones
The words that rolled off your lips felt like home
Spoken like a true gentleman was the truth we're afraid of
That every emotion doesn't need an action
And every satisfaction doesn't come from physical arousal
Become connected to me in a foreign way
In a way that means your kisses reach past my lips and brush against my heart just to dance with my soul
Make me whole
Come to me with your arms around my waist firmly but gently
With your face in the crease of my neck
And I float
Come to me
And I float
Come to me, I float
I had a California dram that ended in Jersey



On Sept. 5, 2014, the Filibuster staff—including Richard Price, Heather Adams, and Kimberly McGuinty—had the opportunity to talk to Daniel Wallace, the author of *Big Fish*, when he visited AUM’s campus in connection with the Common Reading Program. The staff would especially like to thank Dr. Lee Farrow for helping to arrange this interview.



INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL WALLACE

CONTINUED 37

RP: I read in an interview that you had tried to publish several books prior to *Big Fish*. What became of those? Did you ever go back to those and try to publish them again, or did you just let them go?

HA: What about those twin millionaires you wrote about?

DW: I have them. They exist in the world, but I have not published them because they're just so bad. They're just bad books. I've tried to do it. I've tried to get them—no, what I want to say is, I was momentarily distracted, I want them to be good, but they're not.

I wrote a number of books before *Big Fish* was published, and since I didn't go to any kind of writing school, I think of them as my education. It took me a really long time to figure out what not to do with a book and how to write like myself.

RP: I was curious as to whether or not one of your parents attended Auburn because of the use of Auburn in *Big Fish*.

DW: Well, yeah. They both did, and that continued in Birmingham. Most of our friends were Alabama fans, and the whole Auburn/Alabama dichotomy was a big part of growing up there.

RP: In an interview in the back of the edition we all seem to be asking you to sign, you said that *Mythology* by Edith Hamilton was one of the best books in the world. I was wondering if you still felt that way or if there was a new favorite book that you found.

DW: I have moved on, not that one needs to move on from Edith Hamilton. But I think there

are different great books out there, placed in your life, different times of your life, and that, in high school, was one of the books that I always had with me along with Kurt Vonnegut and then J.D. Salinger. My favorite authors are always changing. It's always different. I don't know if there is one person I would look to now as being a favorite author. I'm more a fan, honestly, of books than I am of writers. If I read one good book by somebody—I know this is a terrible thing to say—I don't necessarily read their other books.

RP: I read that you did hours of research doing the jokes for *Big Fish*, and I was wondering if there was one that still stuck with you after all this time. Do you have a favorite joke?

DW: Well there is one joke that sticks with me, because it was the only joke I've ever had edited out of a book that I've written, and it's a—do you want me to tell you the joke?

RP: Absolutely!

DW: Okay, so there's this really, really old cat who lives in an alley way, a gross alley way, behind a bar. It just lives off all the bones and trash and stuff. One night it thinks, "I'm going to try to go inside. The food has got to be better in there." And one night the bartender is opening the door and throwing some trash out there and the cat tries to get into the bar, but the screen door slams shut and severs its tail and the cat has a heart attack and dies right there. The bartender sees the cat and shoves him out into the alley way and goes back to work. And about three a.m. that night, after everything's closed, the bartender's shutting up shop and throwing all the trash away, and he goes back into the alley and the spirit of the cat is there holding its tail. Now it can talk, of course, and the cat says,

"I'm dead. I lived a great life. I'm not bitter, but unless my tail is reattached to my body, I'll be wandering the spirit world forever, and I just want to rest in peace. So, if you could put my tail back on my body, then all will be well." And the bartender says, "Well, I'd like to be able to help you, but it's against the law to retail spirits after two a.m." Can you believe that was cut from the book?

HA: No. I demand another book based entirely on that joke. It's going to be the next movie, and then there's going to be a musical.

DW: It's like money in the bank!

DO YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU THE JOKE?

RP: Are Ewan McGregor and Helena Bonham Carter as attractive in person as they are on screen?

DW: Yes, they are, probably much more so, but they're different than they are on screen. They look different. The world is a different place than the screen. It's interesting, actually, how different those people look in real life.

RP: Of course. I guess you visited Wetumpka, Alabama where some of the film was shot?

DW: Oh, yeah.

RP: I was wondering what you thought of the town.



DW: I love that town!

RP: That's my hometown.

DW: I've got my Wetumpka t-shirt with me. Big orange, bright t-shirt. I was going to wear it. I'm going to wear it tomorrow, I think, to the Capri. I had a great time in Wetumpka. So, you're from there?

RP: Yes.

DW: So, you know everything they did to the town to make the movie?

RP: I was in eighth or ninth grade at the time, so yeah. We had to direct traffic around from the downtown area around the school, so that was fine with me. It took longer to get there.

DW: They built a second story on that house.

RP: We have a painting of that house in my house now. So I was wondering, I read in an interview, well, you just talked about it in there, too, that seeing a movie acted out is very boring because of how many times they shoot the scene. I was wondering how many times they had to shoot your particular eight or nine second scene.

DW: Not that many times.

RP: So, I guess you're a pretty good actor.

DW: I guess I'm good.

HA: You're really good at being a teacher.

DW: I'm really good at being a teacher. Well, if

you look at the scene, have you seen it? It's not a tough shot. I would have loved for it to last longer.

HA: At least you didn't get cut out. In the John Green movie that just came out, they cut his scene.

DW: My wife was in it, and she was cut. She was cut from the movie.

HA: That's got to be so disappointing.

DW: She said she didn't sleep with the right guy apparently.

HA: Just enough to get her into the film but not the final version.

DW: That's right.

RP: So, what was the story with Jenny? Was the reason he couldn't stay with Jenny because he felt like he wanted to be a big fish, or he felt like he was being a big fish in a small pond?

DW: You mean in which he buys the town, and he has this family with her and house with her? Well, the reason, the whole essence of that chapter is more about the son's growing realization that his father isn't this superhero. That he's a real person and he has flaws and foibles and all that. And one really big one is that he's a philanderer, and he's trying to explain that fact in the context of the way that children see their parents as being remarkable and not human. And so that story, really, if you boil it down to its real life components, would be, man has an affair, affair ends, and he goes back to

his family. That's essentially what happens there. The other woman is always going to be left behind. Somebody's going to get hurt.

RP: Well, that satisfies a personal question.

DW: TMI. Ha!

RP: Back at the time, when I was in eighth or ninth grade, I had not read the book, of course, because what kid reads-

DW: Yeah, what the hell, man.

RP: And there was like this sort of mythology around the town, because people were seeing the guy who played "Karl the Giant." And everybody in school kept saying there's this guy with 10-inch long fingers and all this stuff. I just thought it was neat, now growing up and reading the book, that the mythology of the book spread into another mythology that became real. I just thought that was really cool.

DW: That has continued to happen, actually, in a lot of different ways. One of the ideas in the book is that stories have a life of their own and that the truth can never really fully be known. It changes the moment it happens, so there are no facts and there are just perspectives. And that's happened in lots of different facets of this. And that again, you know, that's one of them. His fingers were really long.

RP: I always wondered because I thought 10-inches was too much.

DW: But, I mean, even if—you always have to add an inch or so, but I bet they were at least



that long. He was a sad character, though. He was a very sad person, because he was, I mean giants—which he was one—are basically actively dying. Aggressively dying. They're aging so much faster, and their bodies are growing out of proportion to what they're meant to be. And their hearts can't, their bones just can't carry them, and their hearts can't. So he died five or six years after the movie, I think.

RP: I remember hearing about that.

DW: He couldn't walk very much in the movie. Most of the scenes in which he's in, where he's moving, he's being pulled on a cart, kind of. He has these long gowns on. Any way that they could keep him from walking. It was so painful.

HA: That's something you don't really think about when you watch the movie. It adds a deeper, sadder level.

DW: Well, no. You don't think about that, of course, and why would you really? It's not anything you'd want to think about, but he was just a mess. I think he was also a lawyer. He got his law degree. And the guy you saw when we were in there, the little clip I played, the giant who got into the truck and sped away, I spoke to him at some other point, and he said that, and this is before he died, of course, that they were always up for the same parts. They were both giants. How many people are going to go in for a part like that? "I'm here for the giant." And this other guy usually got them, because he was so much more giant. The other guy was just a big guy, a burly big guy, whereas he was a real giant. So, there was a little jealousy there, a little competitiveness.

HA: It's sad that he was the only other person who could probably understand what he was going through as well, and they had to be competitors.

DW: Yeah. Exactly.

KM: Well, my main question was, I'm also a teacher, and it seemed like when you were

lecturing that you kind of do what you do with this book, which is why I think our common reading program chose it. You bring the allusions and the kind of high craft down a little so kids can get it. And it seems that is kind of your style as a professor, too. How important is it to you to bring kind of high literature down a little so that more people can get into it.

DW: Obviously I want more people to read the book and get it and enjoy it and not be intimidated by it. I mean, I could work up a ten-page paper from it about the Greek mythology in *Big Fish*. And talk all about the mythologies I took from that, from Edith Hamilton, and read about those. You know, I just think that can be really boring, and there is so much in every book that you should be able to appreciate on so many different levels.

I'M HERE FOR THE GIANT

And one is just very superficial adventure. This happens and that happens. Then there are other things that happen beneath the surface that if you're interested you can pursue, but it's important to me not to present a book or the idea of literature in an exclusive way that is—I think that in all clubs, whether it's literary club or a doctor's club or lawyer's club or whatever it is, people are exclusionary. They have their own little nomenclature, and if you don't know that then you can't be a part of it. And I think that is more about the people who are in the club who want their own special place than it is about anything else. So, I want as many people in the *Big Fish* club, or the literary club or book club, as possible. I do think things are made unnecessarily foggy and hard to handle sometimes, but also, it's just who I am. It's not something I have to try to be. I'm just bringing me into this discussion. This is who I am. I'm not anything different than...I'm this way in class.

KM: That's kind of what I was asking. Your style as an educator is more like, "This isn't some, like, big scary thing that you have to be terrified of."

DW: Every little bit helps, you know. Make the bigger basket. I think that's a really good idea.

KM: You talked a little bit in there about the, and I hope you expand on this in here, about adapting and how each art form is different and what it can do. The book is totally different than the movie.

DW: Right, sure.

KM: The book is, you know, respected and admired for completely different things. It can do things that the movie can't do, just like the screenplay can.

DW: That's exactly how I feel.

KM: Awesome.

DW: Who knows, depending if anybody asks a question after the movie, but there was a country song writer who got in touch with me before the movie came out and wanted to write a country song inspired by the book, and I thought that's great. I'm a huge country music fan. It never—I don't think she actually finished it, it was never on the radio, but I did imagine that had she done it, and there was a *Big Fish* song on the radio, sung by Reba McEntire say, because that's who she wrote songs for, that it is just as conceivable that somebody could—I mean, it's inconceivable, but it's the same thing—somebody would hear the song on the radio, come up to me at some point and say, "You know, I heard that song, that *Big Fish* song on the radio, and the book is better." Comparing a song and a book is the same as comparing a book and a movie. They're just completely different art forms in that one does something really well and the other does other things better, and that they have to exist on their own. If you have something, it doesn't matter. It really is. It's like saying my rat terrier is a better cockapoo than my cockapoo. It doesn't make



any sense. It really doesn't make any sense.

MUSIC FROM THE FILM BEING SHOWN IN THE AUDIOTORIUM PLAYS VERY LOUDLY.

DW: Is this the one? Oh, yeah. I've already missed Miley Cyrus. This was her first movie.

HA: Oh, I didn't know that. It's been a while since I've seen it.

DW: You would never recognize her. She's just this little baby girl.

HA: Back when things were different.

DW: When Miley was Miley.

HA: I did theatre as a kid, and my good friend is up in New York City doing the singing and acting thing. She saw *Big Fish* the musical and loved it. Did you get to go up and see it?

DW: Absolutely, yeah.

HA: Did you see it in Chicago or New York, because I know there were some differences.

DW: Both. I saw it in both places. Sort of like the movie, I was kept in the loop of how everything was going on, and I got to see practices and all that stuff.

HA: Norbert Leo Butz is a huge star in the Broadway world, so the fact that he sort of originated the role is an honor for you.

DW: He totally did originate it.

HA: He did a great job. I'm glad you played the

song, because I didn't have a chance to listen to all the music. That was really nice.

DW: You can get it online now. It's good.

HA: Since you saw both of them, did you enjoy one more than the other? Or do you judge those as two separate things as well?

DW: You mean the Chicago and the Broadway version? No, I think of them as the same. They are just, they are the same thing. One is just changed around, a few songs. You know, cutting here, a little adding there. It's basically the same thing. I thought that definitely the Broadway version was better, as it should have been, because the reason they had it in Chicago was to practice and see what happened.

HA: To get it to Broadway?

DW: Yeah.

HA: So, you mentioned that someone wanted to write a song about it. There's the movie. There's the musical. Since you're an illustrator, have you ever thought about doing a graphic novel?

DW: Graphic novel? Um, no. Graphic novels are really interesting to me, but most of my illustrations are just spot illustrations. I think it's a fun idea. I don't know if you've ever seen my work.

HA: I went to a website, one of your children's illustration websites. It was very interactive and cool.

DW: Oh, the Rosenfeld! Yeah. So, all of my

drawings, no matter what I'm drawing, all look like a really talented five-year old. And I don't know how that would work in a book, but I do have a children's book, an actual children's book, that's coming out this fall that I illustrated and wrote. So, I don't think I'd do a- it depends how hard. This is the sort of thing that happens when you lose your house and everything, and you say, "Oh, I'll do an illustrated version of my book."

HA: Well, I'm torn, because I want to see the illustrated version, but I don't want you to lose your house.

DW: I'll do it. Give me some money. [Said jokingly]

HA: The book was translated into, I can't remember, but I think it was over twenty-seven languages. That's quite a lot. You have a lot of international fans. I lived in Korea for a little while, and some of my co-teachers would come up and ask, "Have you read *Big Fish*?" When they found out I was from Alabama in particular, they would get really excited.

DW: Really? That's so exciting!

HA: Yeah. I noticed that several people who first came up to you today were Korean, so what is it like to have fans from so many different places?

DW: It's insane and awesome.

HA: Do you ever get letters or anything?

DW: I do. I get emails and I used to get some letters. And sometimes people send me the book to sign. And I can't read any of the



languages that it's in. Just sometimes thinking about the possibility that somebody in Turkey is reading the book now...

HA: Well, and one book that can speak to people of so many different cultures. Korean culture is very different than American culture.

THE BOOK WAS TRANSLATED INTO [...] I THINK IT WAS OVER TWENTY-SEVEN LANGUAGES.

DW: Right.

HA: But the book speaks to people there as well. Did you have any idea that this book was going to speak to so many different people when you wrote it in between your child's naps—I think is what I read.

DW: No. I had no idea. Totally shocked.

HA: Have you ever gotten to do any publicity overseas? Have you done any book tours or speaking?

DW: I haven't done any-- I did something in France, but I haven't done any world tour. That would be a good idea, though, to go to all the countries where it was published. The Big Fish tour.

HA: The Big Fish tour. And then you could write a book about it.

DW: That actually is a fun idea for sort of a

mockumentary or a documentary sort of thing, to go to all these countries where the book has been published. Because nobody really would care. It'd be one of those things like, "Yeah, I wrote this book," which happens in America, too.

HA: I remember seeing the cover in Korea, and seeing it in Korean. I mean, people just loved it there.

DW: Oh, you saw it while you were there?

HA: Well, my co-teachers would come up with the book in their hand. And I don't know if it was required reading for the English program at that time, because they were reading it in English, but they were covers I could recognize in the store. My friend had a co-teacher who did the same thing to him, so a lot of people read it in Korea. You should definitely go there.

DW: That is so...I should go to Korea.

HA: Anyway, a lot of writers say they need quiet or they need to not have an Internet connection. Is there anything that you really need to get good work done?

DW: It's changing over time. It used to be that I needed complete quiet. I didn't even want anybody in the house, and lately I've decided to make it less precious. That is, make it, make me be able to write wherever I am, wherever I have time to. Getting so specific with these kind of, you know, peculiar needs, is one way of limiting your ability to write in a sense. "Oh, I can't write now. It's not sixty-five degrees! I can only write when it's sixty-five degrees." So, I've been moving around a lot going to coffee shops and that sort of thing. And I have been able to write doing that, surprisingly. It would be much easier for me to write now than I think it would be to be at home with just my wife there, probably. Because if I'm at a coffee shop nobody is going to be talking to me, whereas Laura might say, "Hey honey, do you need anything?" Even that bothers me; even people being nice to me

bothers me. I just want to be able to look at my work. So yeah, I used to feel like it had to be one way, but now I don't. I'm opening it up.

HA: Do you do it directly on a computer or do you do it longhand first?

DW: I do it directly on a computer. And I do think having an internet connection is a problem.

HA: I tried to do NaNoWriMo before, and I had to disable my internet or I couldn't do it. I know you did an interview with some NaNoWriMo people, the National Novel Writing Month. Have you ever done that? Have you tried to write 50,000 words in one month?

DW: No, I would have. I would have probably.

HA: Well, November is coming up.

DW: Would have. At, you know, twenty-five, when I started out, I probably would have done it. I don't think they had it then. I could have done it then. I wrote a lot then. I could do five thousand words a day easy, but not anymore. It's iron man competition stuff. Are you going to do it again?

HA: I have tried it a couple of years, but I only won one year. I only did the 50,000 one year, and that was the year I learned to like coffee, so that was helpful.

DW: That sounds like a good title for a book.

HA: Do you think there is value in just pushing yourself to do as much as you can?

DW: Absolutely. I don't think that a great book will come out of it probably, but writing is really important. Getting used to being in one place, typing, and thinking about story is really important.

HA: It's mental exercise, which is how Big Fish



came about, right? You were just trying to work out your-

DW: Stay in shape. Yeah. And I think that we do, the cliché is that we all have a novel inside of us, and I think there's really a lot of truth to that. But the distance between what is inside of you and the computer screen or the page is vast. One of the goals of being a writer, learning to write, is how to take what's inside and put it on a page so that it makes sense, so it's compelling and beautiful. That's hard to do. And so spending that time typing is a way of kind of whittling away at that distance, I think, between you and the screen. So, I think it's very valuable.

HA: I read, and you mentioned it as well, that Kurt Vonnegut was very important to you growing up and as a writer. He has his eight rules for writing. Do you have any rules that you think are really important? I read that you said there is a difference between a good story and a good story told well. Is there any way that you try to get a good story?

DW: Well, when I teach—there are professors who say, "I don't want this. I don't want you to do this," and there are a lot of things that you shouldn't do as a writer. The list is pretty long. Clarity, to me, is the thing that comes first before everything else, because if you don't understand what someone is saying then it doesn't matter what they're saying. That is the biggest issue young writers have, not believing something is clear when they write it but hoping that it is. They're just keeping their fingers crossed, because a lot of times you like the sound of words and get attached to them.

One of my students the other day wrote, "a ferocious metallic hum." I think that's what it was. No no no, that actually makes sense, but it was something like that. It just sounded really good but didn't really make any sense, and I had to sit there and think about it, like, "I guess if it were a plane or under water," and all these different things.

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You have to really be conscious and objective with your own work to understand whether it's making sense. If it doesn't make sense, just on that very superficial level- subject, verb, object, and all that, then it doesn't matter what you're writing. So, I like that and I like action. I like sensory writing, you know, writing that is engaged with the world that you can use your senses to understand. That to me is really

important. I'm not interested in how people [think], particularly, or what they think. I'm just interested in what they do.

HA: I know you teach at UNC Chapel Hill, which is one of the top creative writing programs in the country for an MFA.

DW: No. Actually, correction, it's one of the leading undergraduate. It's not graduate. We've never had an MFA program. UNC is the flagship university of Carolina, but the other universities, UNC Wilmington, UNC, NC State, UNC Greensboro, they have MFA programs, but we just concentrate specifically on undergrad.

HA: Oh! That's a lot of UNC's.

DW: Yeah.

HA: As a teacher, if you could have your students only walk away with one thing, obviously you want them to walk away with more, but if your writing students only walked away knowing one thing, what would you want it to be?

DW: Just to be interesting, I guess, to be compelling. There's so much to know. There are so many different ways to mess up a story, but if you can't keep our interest then, again, nobody is going to spend enough time with your story to care.

HA: So, you have to keep people curious?

DW: Yeah! Keep people engaged. It's so easy not to be writing and reading. There are so



many other things- it's so much easier to be engaged in a webisode. It's hard, I really do think it's hard to take people away from a screen, and so it's important for you to be engaging.

HA: What is the last book that you read that really stuck with you and impressed you?

DW: The last book I read? Um. Let's see. I'm just going back through my brain here. Any book? Fiction? Nonfiction?

HA: Yes.

DW: Let's see. Sorry, I'm just moving backwards in my head trying to remember the last book that I actually read that wasn't one to write a blurb for.

HA: I do that, too. What is the last book I read for pleasure and not for class?

DW: Exactly. I read, I'm trying to think...it was about Jesus. It was a book, this book that just came out, about historical Jesus.

HA: Was it Reza Aslan's book?

DW: Yeah! I really liked that!

HA: What was the title of that? I can't remember.

DW: It was something like Revolt [Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth—ed.].

HA: I know which one you're talking about, though, because they had that delightful Fox news interview!

DW: Yeah, I thought the book was really, really well done and interesting. And allowed for an interpretation of Christ and Christianity that allows for a lot of people's opinions to be validated.

HA: Do you read a lot of nonfiction as well as fiction?

DW: I do, yeah. Fiction is harder for me to read, because I find things not to like about it. I don't want to find them, but I'll find something that I don't like about it.

HA: Do you approach writing something that you know is going to be in a visual medium differently than something that you know is just going to be a book. Do you have to get into a different mindset for writing something like that? I know you're an illustrator already, so-

DW: Yeah, it's almost two sides of my brain. In a screenplay, things really have to move. You can't dawdle. You can't just sit there and think about things for a while like you can in a book. Things have to, from scene to scene, propel the story forward, so it's much tighter. And there is absolutely no room for description. You have just one or two sentences and you have to be in and out. It's much briefer, and again, a book is a thing in and of itself. It exists as this regardless of whether there's a movie or not, but a screenplay really can't be existing, so much, without a movie. No one reads a screenplay. So, it's really directions of how-to. It's like a recipe for making a soufflé.

HA: It's probably really fun to see how the visuals turn out from what you've written, because they can be totally different if the director says, "I want to do it this way."

HA: Well, if neither Richard nor Kimberly has any more questions, then I think that's all we have for you. Thank you so much for your time!



FICTION

BY KAY TIPPETT

Awkwardly she glanced around the spacious auditorium. The loss of tradition, of formality, bothered her, but not as much as the realization that her age was the true origin of the unsettling discomfort. The younger crowd with their Bluetooth devices and tablets had no qualms about the women wearing slacks and the men without ties.

If she viewed these ceremonies the way her daughters did, with starry eyes and baited breath, these trifling things wouldn't matter. She could barely remember the days when her heart filled with joy and wonder, hope and faith, about the coming future. Her friend John had been right: she couldn't single-handedly change the world. He had told her that one late night over dinner, when they were discussing her dreams. She had brushed his comment into a quiet, dark corner of her heart.

Now, in that same dark place her memory of him resided. He had battled pain and sickness for so long. Pain, she thought, had made him wise. Sickness

had made him dead. Now she was left to contemplate his comments. What was the point?

She was jolted from her thoughts by music. It wasn't the traditional arrangement. Instead it was some new contemporary song with words that she felt took away from what should have been a solemn ceremony. Everyone stood as the young woman started down the center aisle of the room.

Her mind wandered again, this time to her own trek to that appointed point in the room. She had been so happy, with a wonderful future ahead of her. Nothing was out of her grasp. She loved the man—didn't think she could live without him.

Love was such a curious thing to ponder. She still felt a connection to him—when she saw him across the room in a public place she felt a pull toward him. But things were different.

There was a shuffling as people again took their seats. She didn't really listen to the preacher. She'd heard it so

many times before: the stumbling over unfamiliar words and the pledges to vows that were really unfathomable.

The young woman wouldn't know to what she had pledged until the first time he didn't come home or the first time he hit her. The first time he lied, or neglected to do the things he promised to do, she would get a hint of what lay ahead, but only a hint. She wouldn't understand until she found the lipstick on his collar or smelled perfume on his undershirt. Of course, she could be a lucky one.

The lucky ones didn't find the lipstick. She wasn't sure if that was because it wasn't there, or because they didn't look hard enough. The candlelight caught her eye.

They were at the point in the service where they pledged to be one person and lit a candle. Some more modern couples mixed sand or some other new thing. This was probably the truest part of the entire service, where they emptied all the sand or blew out the candle. She'd been empty, blown out, for a long time. There



THE POINT

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were moments when the flame flickered, and even burned, but they were short-lived, because the flame came from somewhere else, no longer from within her.

From somewhere else her thoughts returned as the service came to an end. Applause rang out as the couple kissed. People rose from their seats as they were introduced and joyfully left the sacred place arm in arm. The preacher invited the congregation to join them for a reception.

Despite her desire to leave, she followed the crowd around to the fellowship hall. She made cordial remarks to a few whom she knew. She smiled spuriously when deemed appropriate. It still surprised her when she was alone, that she could be alone, in a crowd. Loneliness needs no nourishment; it feeds off itself.

Her mind took another journey, back to her childhood, when she was alone, but not lonely. Lying in the grass she stared at the clouds, as they became poodles, snowmen, and flying pigs. Her puppy licked her nose, and she giggled with delight. The sun lightly baked her skin. The grass tickled the backs of her bare legs as she devoured the spring air. The clatter of dishes broke into her revelry, and she realized people were moving toward the parking lot.

Jumping in the air, girls fought and scratched for the bundle of flowers tossed their way. One girl emerged victorious, with tussled hair, imagining her upcoming wedding. The young men swaggered up nonchalantly to catch the garter, a symbol of conquest they desired but pretended to shun. The gallant warrior emerged with the garter on his bicep and a smirk on his lips.

Birdseed flew through the air, some getting in her hair, as she made her way to the car. She slid into the passenger side of the car and waited patiently. She looked at the keepsake she'd been given, knowing it would find rest in her wastebasket at home. Mentally she ticked through the list of tasks she had to do when she arrived home. Nowhere on the list was anything that brought joy or relief. What was the point?

The rattle of keys pulled her back once more. He slid into the driver's seat, put his Bible on the dash, and dropped an envelope into her lap. JUDGE OF PROBATE was printed on the outside. "Could you take care of that for me?" he asked dully. Of course she would. She would add it to her list of joyless tasks. What was the point?



FICTION

BY HEATHER ADAMS

"Is all of her in the jar?" Mila asked. Her quiet voice held the lisp she'd inherited when she lost her two front teeth. Audrey didn't know what to say. How do you explain cremation to a seven-year-old? She looked to the man sent to drive them from their home to their next of kin—grandparents they'd never met. Audrey was surprised it had taken Mila this long to ask. They'd already been in the car for four hours, but she'd slept most of the trip. She hadn't been sleeping much at night. "Yes, Mom is in there," said Audrey. She twirled her mother's engagement ring around her right ring finger, a new habit. The ring had a thin gold band and an emerald instead of a diamond. It didn't fit perfectly, and she found that it felt good to keep moving, even if it was only in a small way...like twisting the ring. Stillness scared her. It was almost like being dead. "How does she fit?" "It's kind of like magic," Audrey said. "And now that she's in there she doesn't hurt anymore. And she's safe, with Dad." It was hard to talk about it without the rushing urge to cry, and she didn't want to cry. She had only cried the one time, when she woke up in the hospital and the nurse told her that her mother died. Mila was in another room. Audrey was only sixteen,

but she had to be a grown-up now, for Mila. It took less than a week for their whole lives to be packed into boxes. Even the urn had been put into a small box for the trip.

"Have you ever met the Christmas card people?" asked Mila. Though they'd never met anyone from their father's family, they'd received many Christmas cards from relatives every year. Their mother didn't have any family.

"Not that I remember. Mom and Dad didn't talk about them. I think they had an argument before we were born or something. They didn't even come to Dad's funeral." Audrey looked at Mila. "I'm sure they're very nice, though. They have lovely smiles. People with lovely smiles are usually very kind." She hoped it was true. Mila curled against the car door, turning her face away, her shoulders shaking slightly. Audrey unbuckled her seatbelt and slid over to Mila, wrapping her arms around her and kissing the top of her head.

"I know it's scary and it hurts, but I promise that you are safe." Mila put her small hand over Audrey's and squeezed it tightly.

"We're nearly there," said the driver. He didn't reprimand Audrey for

not wearing a seatbelt, and he smiled sympathetically at her through the rearview mirror. She nodded.

"Mila, do you remember the game Mom used to play with us whenever we were scared of something?" Mila turned to face Audrey, tears still rolling down her face, and nodded.

"The pretend game?" Whenever they were scared to face something, their mom would give them a character to pretend to be so that they could think of the scary thing as a game.

"Yes," said Audrey. "Let's play now. Who do you want to be? What would make you feel brave?" Mila wiped the tears away and sat up straight to think.

"Could I be a dog?"

"A talking dog?"

"Audrey, dogs don't talk." Her concerned look made Audrey laugh out loud, something she hadn't done since the accident. She felt the cuts on her face stretch so she reached for the Neosporin in her bag. She was still healing from the accident. Mila still had marks too, including the black eye from where her head had slammed into the car door.

"That's a good one, but let's try to think of something you could be that can talk. We want to make a good first



THE CHRISTMAS CARD PEOPLE

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impression with Grandma and Grandpa." Grandma and Grandpa. Those words felt funny in her mouth. Maybe she should call them by their names, Evelyn and Leon. Yes, that would feel less bizarre.

"Then could I be a dog trainer?" They spent the next ten minutes coming up with a backstory for the dog trainer—English, famous, rich, brave, world traveler. Audrey gave Mila the silver chain that their mom used to wear. It had their father's wedding ring on it and Mila had asked to wear it everyday. The chain was long for an adult and almost comically long on a child, but Mila clutched the chain to her chest. It was the last piece of their mother, and they shared it.

The car pulled up to the house. It was bigger than anything Audrey had ever seen, including the hospital in the small town where they grew up. The white mansion with immaculate landscaping didn't look like a place where people actually lived. The driver unloaded their suitcases and a short, round woman appeared with a cart to take them away. An older woman crossed the lawn and walked towards them. Evelyn looked just like her Christmas card picture, perfectly styled white hair and a flat smile that didn't reach all the way to her eyes. "Hello," Evelyn said, her smile fading the closer she got. Her eyes scanned over the cuts on Audrey's face.

"Hello," said Audrey. Mila didn't say anything. She just hid behind Audrey.

"You must be Audrey. You look just like your mother." Evelyn's eyes narrowed a bit and her lips were straight. Audrey decided to take that as a compliment.

"Thank you." She stood up as straight as she could. She had dark brown hair and eyes, like her mother. Mila had lighter hair, very light brown, and green eyes, like their father, who died right before Mila's first birthday. Evelyn seemed to notice the resemblance too. Her smile returned, and she bent down to get a closer look at Mila.

"And you must be Marilyn. You don't look like her at all. You look just like Timothy." She didn't comment on Mila's slightly faded black eye.

"Don't call me Marilyn," Mila spat. "My name is Mila. Mee-lah!" Evelyn stood back up and turned cold again.

"There's your mother." Her eyes pierced Audrey, as though she was to blame. Before anger could bubble up, Audrey thought of how her mother would want her to react to this cold, harsh woman, and she decided to try to ease the tension.

"Her middle name is Elizabeth and we call her Mila. It's supposed to mean sweetheart or something in Bulgarian." She laughed uncomfortably. Evelyn didn't seem amused.

"Leon and I thought it only proper that we have a memorial service for your mother, even though she took our Timothy away from us." She no longer looked at the girls. "He is at the club. The guests will arrive in one hour. I hope you have something nice to wear. Antonia will show you to your rooms." She walked away quickly without looking back at them. Antonia was dressed in a black and white maid's uniform, which Audrey didn't realize was still something people wore in real life. Antonia's face would never suffer from laugh lines in her old age.

They followed Antonia obediently.

"I don't think that lady is very nice," said Mila. Audrey hustled from one task to another in their shared bedroom. Antonia had tried to insist that Mila take the room across the hall from Audrey, but Mila refused. She wanted to be with Audrey, and honestly, Audrey wanted to be with Mila too. It was easier to keep busy when Mila was around. Unpack the clothes. Find the black dresses. Make sure to lint roll the dresses. Make sure Mila's favorite toys were all accounted for. Find the shirt Mila wore to sleep, one of their mother's. Brush Mila's hair. She kept adding things to her list because it kept her moving and moving was good. She carefully placed her books on the windowsill. It was the only shelf in the room. Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner, all authors from her old school's advanced summer reading list, sitting together almost made her feel at home. Almost. "It's very important that we're both on our best behavior," said Audrey. "We have to make Mom proud today. Do you understand?" "Yeah." Mila didn't look at Audrey. She was watching the urn, which Audrey had removed from the traveling box. She looked as though she expected it to do something. Audrey tried to remember how she felt when their father died. Their mother had cried and baby Mila had cried and Audrey had watched people cry.

Evelyn and a small army of maids and waiters scurried around making last minute adjustments when the girls went downstairs. The room was large and decorated very traditionally, with lots of gold and beige, ornate patterns, and more chairs and tiny tables than could possibly be needed in one room. Audrey held the urn reverently with both hands as she and Mila walked up to Evelyn, who hadn't heard them.



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"Where should I put this?" Audrey asked. Evelyn jumped and turned to face them. She had been holding a picture frame, but she laid it face down on the table when the girls startled her. Audrey had seen her father's smiling face in the photo. Evelyn wiped her eyes quickly and snapped her fingers in the air.

"Antonia, please place the urn with the photo," said Evelyn. Antonia materialized out of nowhere and scooped the urn out of Audrey's hands. She placed it on a small end table in the corner, next to one of the many floral, wing-backed chairs in the room. A small photo was also on the table, but an expensive looking vase was placed almost right in front of it. In fact, the only thing about the room that did look like a memorial service was the plethora of flower arrangements. The smell was overwhelming. Since the hospital, flowers made her want to vomit, and she couldn't imagine ever smelling flowers without thinking of death.

"Will there be more photos of Mom in the other rooms?" Audrey asked.

"It's the only photo I have of your mother. It's very respectful."

"I would have brought some for you if I had known about the memorial."

"I expect you both to be polite to my guests," Evelyn continued, ignoring Audrey entirely. "Marilyn, you will stay with the other children in the conservatory. Audrey, I expect you to socialize with the adults."

The doorbell chimed loudly, echoing through all the different rooms.

Audrey smiled and pulled Mila against her side before she could yell about being called by her real name. Evelyn nodded and went to greet her guests. Audrey thought about what her mother used to tell her. It's easy to be angry and rude. It's so much harder to be kind to people who are not kind to you. And strong people aren't afraid of hard things. Evelyn didn't make it easy at all.

"I can stay with you and the other kids if you want," said Audrey. The conservatory was right next to the room they were standing in, the living room.

"I think I can be brave by myself. I have the magic ring." She spoke in her best imitation of an English accent. She clutched the chain around her neck and walked into the conservatory with her head held high.

In less than five minutes there were more than 50 people roaming about the stuffy house. Audrey thought that anyone rich enough to afford a house that large should certainly be able to afford a fan. Most of the guests were women, though the few men who came with their wives soon joined force and conquered a corner of the room. She overheard something about golf and "the Asian market." The women all wore matching skirts and jackets either made of tweed or other heavy fabric. The clothes were all sorts of colors—pink, green, orange—and they reminded her of a box of jellybeans or some other candy. She was introduced to them all within the first half hour but she couldn't remember

anyone's name. She only remembered that they all had the exact same nose, thin and turned up to almost a point. Some surgeon in that town made his living on the women in that room.

"Oh, my dear, what happened to your face?" asked one of the pointy-nosed, jelly-beaned ladies.

"Um, the car accident," she said, confused. She thought these people would know that it had only been a week.

"You poor thing. Thank goodness it wasn't anything worse. Car accidents can be so dangerous. Oh, excuse me. I see someone I must go and speak to." Audrey stared at the woman's back as she walked away. An older man walked towards her. He wore a dark green sports jacket with a matching vest. She could see a pocket watch chain clipped to the vest. But what really made him stick out was the kilt. Or maybe it was the sandals with socks. It was all bad, to be honest. He was smiling, however, and it was a great big smile that made his eyes crinkle. It was the kind of smile you returned whether you intended to or not.

"Do not pay any attention to her," said the man. "Evelyn's friends are careless people." He stuck his hand out for her to shake. "My name is Rover. I am so terribly sorry for your loss. I loved your mother very much." His eyes were very wet, and Audrey had never felt more affection for someone she'd just met.

"Thank you." She cleared her throat and blinked her blurry eyes. "I thought you might be Scottish." It was all she could



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think to say. He laughed and ran his hands through his gray hair.

"I wore this to honor your mother. She was obsessed with Scotland as a girl. She and Timothy used to talk about traveling there all the time. I always volunteered to accompany them."

"Are you a relative? I'm surprised I never met you before." She twirled the ring with her fingers.

"My wife, Elizabeth, was Evelyn's sister. Liza was very fond of Timothy, and your mother, too. We traveled for several years and fell out of touch with many people, unfortunately. Your mother would email me every once in a while, though. I loved to hear about you and Mila. You know, I met Mila just before I came over here, and she said she liked my name because it was a dog's name," he let out a great rumbling laugh, but stopped abruptly. "Oh dear. She doesn't look happy." Evelyn was making her way towards them through the sea of tweed.

"Does she ever?" Audrey mumbled. Rover smiled at her again, and she felt somewhat cheered, though it didn't last long.

"Could you please make your sister stop speaking with that dreadful accent. People are going to think she is slow." And she hurried away before Audrey could even answer. Audrey thought it must be a habit of Evelyn's to spit her words out and then march away before anyone could argue.

"Why don't I go teach your sister some British slang?" asked Rover. "I spent some time in London. I could coach her on her accent." Audrey smiled again, pain prickling the edges of the cuts on her face

as the skin stretched tighter. Despite the discomfort of smiling, she was grateful to have an ally. She was trying so hard to make her mother proud and not let her anger fester. Before he could leave, a loud clanging echoed across the room. Audrey felt it that something was wrong before she saw it.

"Mila! What happened?" She practically shoved people out of the way to get to Mila, who stood over the spilled urn. Ashes covered her feet and shins. Mila was frozen, staring at all of the people who were staring at her. For a flash of a moment Audrey felt angry with Mila for making everything worse, but it didn't last. She had never seen Mila look so terrified.

"I'm sorry," Mila sobbed. "I thought maybe she was stuck in the jar, and I wanted to let her be with daddy. I thought she was trapped in there." Audrey could barely understand what Mila was saying, but she felt a crack somewhere inside her and she knew she was finally broken. Everything was still. She forgot about the ring, though the emerald dug into the side of her finger.

"Please don't be mad. I didn't mean to drop it. I thought she was stuck and--" Mila was hyperventilating and shaking violently.

"It's okay, Mila. It's okay. You're not in trouble. It was an accident." Something large in her throat made the words sound funny, but she scooped Mila up and held her tight. "She's not stuck, I promise. It's all—it's okay." She turned around to face the room full of people, hoping someone could help her explain to Mila that everything was okay, but Evelyn's friends weren't moved by the hysterical

child. They stared at the two of them sideways and whispered. The crack deepened. Rover came to them quickly and whispered kind words to Mila.

"If everyone would move into the dining room, there are cocktails. Don't worry. We'll have the mess cleaned up very quickly," Evelyn said to her friends in her frilly hostess voice. The people moved quickly once they heard "cocktail." Once they were gone, she turned to the girls.

"How could you let this happen? I'm so embarrassed, I—" Audrey felt something come out of the crack, and it was hot and it was loud. She glared at Evelyn and clenched her fists, trying to bury the anger. Breathe in. Breathe out, she told herself.

"That is quite enough, Evelyn," Rover growled, his voice harder and lower than normal. Evelyn's face reddened as she marched into the dining room. Rover softened as he spoke to Audrey. "We'll make her right as rain. Come along, Mila, and I will tell you a story." Mila reached out to Rover and let him carry her. Audrey saw Rover hand Mila a handkerchief before disappearing down the hall. Antonia rounded the corner with a vacuum cleaner. A vacuum cleaner, like someone had knocked over a potted plant or something. The anger came and was not pushed aside this time. There were no other emotions inside of her anymore.

"Mrs. Anderson said there was a mess to clean in here." It felt like an explosion inside her body, and she was surprised that Antonia couldn't see the change.

"It is not a mess. It is my mother." Her voice was low and unnaturally steady, but she could barely hear it. The pounding in her ears was too loud. "Go. Away." Antonia left with the vacuum. Audrey looked at the ashes on the floor and tried to remember what her mother had said



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about being kind, but all she could think about was the hot, rushing anger coursing through her. She felt every thump of her heart and heard the blood rushing through her own body. She scooped up the ashes with her hands and put them back into the urn. Her hands and dress were gray. She clutched the urn to her chest and grabbed the expensive vase from the table with the miniscule photo. She glided quietly into the dining room and climbed up on a chair by the wall. None of Evelyn's guests noticed her because they were all facing the bar furnished by the caterers. She held the vase high above her head and threw it to the floor with all the force she had, which was considerably more than normal. It shattered very loudly into hundreds of pieces, and there was a collective gasp in the room. The effect would have been comical if she wasn't so full of rage.

"What are you—" Evelyn started, but Audrey cut her off. It thrilled her to make Evelyn shut up.

"You are awful, ignorant people. Not a single one of you cared about my mother, who was good and kind and loving," She tried to breathe deeply, but she had so much she wanted to say and it spewed out of her so everyone could hear her, even over the margarita blender. "This is supposed to be a memorial service for her and you act like she didn't matter. She mattered. It's no wonder she didn't fit in here and it's no wonder my father left this place the first chance he got. You are hard,

careless people, and when you're dead nobody will miss you except for the doctor who makes a living shoving plastic into your old, ugly faces." And she was done. She couldn't think of anything left to say, so she grabbed another vase and smashed it too before stepping off of the chair. Mila and Rover stood in the doorway. She hadn't seen them come back. Mila clapped her hands together excitedly, and Audrey held her head high as she led her sister out of the cocktail room. Rover winked at them as they passed him.



ANOTHER STILL LIFE

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The pair comes out of the darkened theatre to be enveloped by cool autumnal air. They pause to inhale the season's mix of decaying summer and softly sweet fermenting fruit before lapsing back into giddy conversation, charged by the performance and the foggy chill of dusk. She bumps him with her hip as they clumsily make their way towards the car, her heels grinding the grainy pavement as she moves. The smell is intoxicating. It's the brief moment before holiday nostalgia, the precipice between fall's gentle reality and winter's surreal blur. She waits by the passenger side door, not yet ready to retire and caught up in the night's charm. He opens the door for her and she happily collapses into the car. They silently slide into the pleather seats. Her leg catches as it makes contact with the sticky-cool material, sending chill bumps up her back and arms. As the two settle into the drive home, conversation dries up. She prefers it when he drives. She looks out the window as shadows cast by the glittering urban

landscape creep into the car. She retreats. She looks out over the city's vastness and feels small. She allows her thoughts to wander, imagining where the cars that pass are headed. It abruptly occurs to her that the vastness is not an impression of the city but is instead internal, she feels spread out over the city. She sits there, seat belt gently pressing against her chest, feeling not small she decides, but rather infinite, in the way that falling and flying are the same. She eases back into her seat ceasing to think and electing instead to capture this moment, on the edge of something she can't name, ascending and descending, expanding and condensing, absolutely certain and disbelieving. All of this she feels as she looks through the windshield where the blinding brightness of oncoming headlights stops her short of what must have been revelation. The glass shatters and there is nothing, and everything.

BY KIMBERLY MCGUINTY

FICTION



FICTION

BY HEATHER ADAMS

It was an impossibly bright day. A group of teenagers were sitting under the bleachers in the shade. Agamemnon and Achilles were the stars of the Achaean High School football team, the former as quarterback and team captain and the latter was the running back. They were practically royalty in the football-obsessed town, and they were well aware of their popularity. Agamemnon was a brutish, hulking boy with dark eyebrows stretching desperately across his face in an attempt to reach the other in the middle. He'd been the biggest bully in two counties before he started playing football in eighth grade. He was still a bully sometimes, but football had mellowed him for the most part. Achilles was the real talent on the team and everyone knew it. Agamemnon was reminded of that fact daily as he struggled to maintain his position of authority.

The biggest game of their lives was fast approaching. Trojan Academy was 30 miles away, and the two teams had always shared a reciprocal animosity. It went far beyond rivalry. Ten years earlier, a prank had gone too far and someone ended up in the hospital. The two counties had suspended the annual rivalry game indefinitely, but both teams were in the running for the big State game that year, so meeting on the field was inevitable. Despite the many creative threats issued by the school administrations, the pranks began a full month before the game was scheduled to take place. Agamemnon's brother, Menelaus, was the first to lose

As Homer's Iliad begins, the leader of the Greek army, Agamemnon, is forced to return a Trojan captive named Chryseis to her father, a priest of Apollo, in order to end a plague that is devastating the Greek ranks. Unhappy about losing his potential concubine and seeking to save face, he decides to take a similar Trojan captive, Briseis, from Achilles, the best warrior in the Greek army. This decision angers Achilles, who is only stopped in his desire to kill his commander by the goddess of wisdom, Athena. Instead, Achilles decides to withdraw from the battle with the Trojans, leaving the Greeks to suffer terrible casualties. Heather Adams imagines a more modern version of this story.

his girlfriend to a senior from the other school. The girls didn't care as much about the bad blood. They just liked boys who had cars to drive them places and part-time jobs to pay for dinners at Ruby Tuesdays. Agamemnon came up with the plan to start talking to the girls from the school in between Achaean High and Trojan Academy. Agamemnon convinced Chryseis and Briseis to meet him and Achilles behind the bleachers after school. Others were there too, on the other side of the bleachers, but they didn't matter much. They were the followers who just did whatever Agamemnon told them to do.

"So, like how often do you guys practice? Don't y'all get tired?" asked Chryseis, popping gum loudly at the end of every sentence. She wore more make-up than anyone Achilles had ever seen. Briseis watched Chryseis out of the corner of her eye, like she was bracing herself for something. Briseis was beautiful. Achilles wanted to brush one of her brown curls away from her face, but he didn't dare move. She turned to him and he looked away quickly, reddening slightly around his

jaw line.

"We practice everyday," said Agamemnon leaning towards Chryseis and twirling her hair around his finger. "We've got great stamina." He winked and Chryseis giggled. Achilles was glad to see that Briseis looked disgusted. It wasn't noticeable to anyone else, but he saw it.

"Oh my gosh!" Pop. "You are so bad!" Pop. Achilles felt very anti-gum at that moment. Before Agamemnon could respond, Calchas, the team strategist, walked up to the foursome. His face was grave.

"I need to talk to you two for a minute," he said, nodding to the boys. Calchas was never the class clown, but he seemed even more serious than normal. Agamemnon and Achilles followed him to the other side of the bleachers, closer to the other football players.

"What's up?" Achilles asked.

"Do you guys know who that girl Chryseis is?" asked Calchas.

"She's hot. Who cares," replied Agamemnon. He flashed a smile over Calchas' shoulder and they could hear



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Chryseis obnoxious giggle as it echoed against the aluminum above her.

"Who is she?" Achilles wanted to know all that Calchas knew about both girls.

"She's the Rev's daughter."

"The crazy fire and brimstone Reverend?" asked Agamemnon, suddenly serious.

"Yeah. I heard from Odysseus that the Rev is driving around looking for her. He told someone he's about to go to the cops because she's supposed to go home straight after school. And I heard that she's not allowed to date."

"Damn," Agamemnon muttered.

"If he calls the cops on us we may not be able to—" Achilles started, but Agamemnon cut him off.

"Don't you think I know that? Calchas, tell her to go home, but tell Briseis to stay." Calchas walked towards the girls.

"That kind of ruins your plan, doesn't it?" asked Achilles.

"No. It just changes things. I'll ask Briseis to be my date to the game."

"What? I was going to ask her."

"Don't be stupid. I'm the team captain. She's mine." Achilles felt the anger flooding through him. He'd been good. He hadn't done anything wrong. They'd agreed that Agamemnon would take the obnoxious blonde from the very beginning. It wasn't fair! They had agreed. Achilles felt hot all over, like his body might burst into flame at any moment. His nostrils flared as he pushed all the air from his lungs.

"No," he said loudly. The other players nearby saw what was happening and shuffled over to where Achilles and Agamemnon were glaring at each other, each standing as straight as they could to appear taller. Agamemnon laughed derisively, but the old bullying gleam flashed in his eyes. He got so close to Achilles their

noses almost touched.

"What are you going to do about it?" Agamemnon asked. Achilles didn't like how close Agamemnon was, so he pushed him back. Agamemnon stumbled and narrowly avoided falling flat on his butt. He looked murderous.

"What is going on here?" Mrs. Athena, the guidance counselor, appeared around the corner. "I think you boys better go home. I'd hate to have to tell your coach I found you fighting." The boys scampered away. "Achilles, could I have a word with you?"

"Yes, ma'am." Achilles watched as Agamemnon walked over to Briseis and put his arm around her. She looked back to Achilles, but she walked away with him. Fire ran through his veins.

"I'm disappointed in you, Achilles. I never thought I'd see you fighting someone on your own team."

"Sorry," he muttered.

"There are better ways to settle an argument. I hope you are a bit wiser in the future."

"Yes, ma'am." He turned away quickly, but Agamemnon and Briseis were already gone. He pulled out his phone and sent a text message to Agamemnon.

If you ask her out, I won't play in the game. You can't win without me and you know it. Agamemnon sent a response immediately, but it was only a picture—a picture of him and Briseis. Achilles wanted to smack the stupid smile off of Agamemnon's face.

"Are you sure you don't want to play?" asked Achilles' mother, Thetis. They had an evening Skype date planned every night when she was working out of town. Her job as an environmental biologist kept her traveling often. Her concern was clear on

the screen, but Achilles was looking at his own image in the bottom corner.

"I'm sure," he grunted. "I hope they lose."

"I'm sorry you're so upset, sweetheart. I wish there was something I could do to help."

"Mr. Zeus could do something."

"I could talk to him when I get back in town if you want." Thetis cuddled Achilles, and would do anything to make him happy. He only took advantage of that once in a while, to his credit. His phone buzzed in his lap. Unknown number.

"Thanks, mom. I gotta go. Love you."

"Love you more." He closed his computer and answered the phone.

"Hello."

"Hi Achilles, this is Briseis."

"Oh." His pulse quickened. "Hi." He felt awkward. Should he have said something else? Something cooler?

"I heard you pulled out of the big game. What made you do that?"

"Uh- Agamemnon's a jerk. I don't want to play for him."

"He said it was because he wouldn't let you have me. Is that true?"

"Um," Achilles stammered. He didn't know how to respond to that. "I asked him not to ask you out, because I wanted to take you to the game." He felt red again. "We agreed that he'd ask Chryseis and I would ask you. And then he stole you."

"You're an idiot," she said. Disdain dripped from her every word. "I'm not an object. He asked me out and I said no, because he's obnoxious. If you had asked me out instead of acting like a moron, I might have said yes. You're an idiot." She hung up, and Achilles felt like someone had just smacked him upside the head.

"Well," he said aloud, though he was home alone, "I'm still not playing."



FICTION

BY BRystal BUTLER

Tell me, Medea, daughter of Aietes, and my dear sister, what is this madness you plot? What treachery are you scheming in the name of this foreigner, the son of Aison? Have you lost all your senses? Can you not see you are being tricked? You seek to deceive your family and risk your reputation to win the love of this one man. Do you not remember all the thoughtless acts done in the name of love? Ariadne was abandoned as thanks for her love and sacrifice for Theseus. That honored woman also gave her love away too swiftly, without thinking. She is only redeemed by the whim of the immortals. You, Medea, even with all your devotion to Hekate, may not be as fortunate as to be rescued by the gods.

Can you even say for certain that this is love you feel? Do not subject your family to such shame and sorrow if this is merely infatuation or lust. These things are not equal to love. Do not let your passions get the better of you. I fear you have been confused or tricked, either by your own preoccupation or by the interference of some cruel god. If it be the second, please sister, do not be so willing a tool. I can almost see Eros' arrow burning in your chest from all the pain it causes you. Do not forget your family and good name so quickly.

And speaking of quickness, if I may ask you sister, out of brotherly concern, how long have you known this Jason? Have you spoken to him? Are you even aware of any other intentions aside

In Apollonius of Rhodes' retelling, it is the goddess Hera whose schemes force the young sorceress Medea to fall madly in love with Jason, the leader of the Argonauts. Hera wants Jason to get the Golden Fleece from Medea's far-off homeland of Colchis and return with it to Greece to humiliate one of her enemies. Medea's obsessive love turns her against own father, Aietes, who has made the tasks to gain the Golden Fleece impossible without his daughter's magical assistance. When Aietes chases Medea and Jason as they escape, she murders her own brother, Apsyrtos, to create a distraction. In Euripides' version of the myth, she dismembers his corpse and scatters it behind their ship so that her father is forced to stop and collect all of it for a proper burial. In return for her aid and sacrifices, Jason will abandon Medea for a conventional Greek princess, and Medea will murder their children in revenge. Brystal Butler offers her own version of a Suasoria speech, a Roman rhetorical exercise in which a student would give moral advice to a mythological character on the brink of an important decision, often from the perspective of another character connected to the myth. Here Apsyrtos gives his sister advice on the question, "Should Medea deceive her family to help Jason get the Golden Fleece?"

from his quest to attain the fleece from our father? He and his companions only rested their oars a short time ago in the Phasis. I refuse to believe you can be so in love with someone so new and so foreign. For all your cleverness, sister, do not be so easily tricked by desire. However, if you must be led by love, think of your love for your family and your home. If you succeed in helping the son of Aison with these challenges, you are betraying your family who loves you, and always cared for you. Does this family not also deserve such devotion and care from you?

But do not let me overstep my bounds, or contradict that which may be true. If you are right, and this is indeed love you feel, by all means, go to the son of Aison with your schemes and magic.

After all it is nothing to give up for one man. Merely a homeland, a good reputation, a family, and everything else you hold dear, now, here in this life. Jason can surely restore and replace these things, so go! Run to your new love and worry not for us left behind. We can only mourn so long the loss of a sister and daughter who would deceive us and may never return home. This foreigner is certainly more important.

On the contrary, Medea, if this is not what you think, if you are simply the means to an end in this plan, remember and keep in mind what you lose in this scheme. If you do not help the son of Aison it is possible his courage and strength may fail him and he could lose his life to the challenge. But if you do aid him, you will certainly lose your life. Aietes, our father,



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will not have you as his daughter if you lead and take part in this deception. Who will have you then? Unless your Jason is willing to take you, there is no one else to offer you safety. Your name will be scorned and no longer can you claim this as your home. Even if Jason does not die because of your interference, you are still no better off as he will be the hero to claim his prize and you the girl who betrayed her family.

Now, please, believe me because I know better. I am your brother, trust me. These men like the son of Aison, for all their glory and greatness, are fickle. Even Zeus, on whose name Jason has sworn his loyalty to you, has been disloyal time and again to his own immortal wife. What will happen to you when you have out-lived your usefulness to this man? This Jason, what if he tires of you in the same way Theseus tired of Ariadne? You will be alone with no home to return to, no sister to cry to, and no father to care for you. What will all your talents with drugs and magic be worth then? Can you heal such a wound left by a selfish man or can you only hurt in the way you plan to hurt now? It is Jason after all who is in Hera's favor, not you. The goddess, too, only uses you for her own purposes, not for your future and good name but for the son of Aison's. You will assuredly be left behind, with nothing to show for all the love you say you feel.

When this happens, when all your talents are used up and there is nothing else to tie you to him, your so called love for Jason will turn to bitterness and shame. You

will hate him then more than you love him now. If you consider such deception as this out of love I am afraid to consider what you could do out of hate, what horrors scorn could bring to a bitter woman's mind. I see the madness beginning in you already, the way you pace through the halls and how you weep in your rooms as though you have already lost a husband.

Please, hear me and heed my warnings. I only ask that you not act in haste, and see the signs for what they are. You have confused love with desire; because of this you consider bringing destruction to yourself and your family. You will only be harmed in these endeavors, only used for your talents and deceptions. It would have been better if the Argonauts had not landed here at all for all the conflict and misery it has caused you, my poor sister. Remember your family and your home and all you treasured before, do not be fooled by those who would only use you. To see you so abused in such a way would certainly rip me apart.



FICTION

BY ERICA JOHNSON

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra confronts Cassandra, a young woman with a gift of prophecy, whom her husband, Agamemnon, has brought back as a slave from the Trojan War. Jealous of Cassandra's beauty and angry at her husband's earlier sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigenia, so that the Greeks could sail for Troy, Clytemnestra plots to kill her husband and his new concubine. Cassandra foresees Clytemnestra's intentions—and the eventual destruction of the family by the Furies, vengeful spirits who attack those who murder their own kin. Erica Johnson's version of this scene is set on a Southern plantation before the Civil War.

Chorus 1:

What great terr' has befallen us
'cause of this lust for familial blood
within the plantation's house walls.
It calls—it cries for some sort of justice
and beats within the hearts of the justice bringers—
the Furies. And furious they're gonna be!
And with this here bringin' of justice
shall destruction be brought with it!
I pray that my fears prove to be wrong
and die and never come to know its birth—
To take away what is left of our meager mirth.

Chorus 2:

What's that?

Chorus 3: (Ignoring Chorus 2.)

A man's blood, his source of life, is mortal too.
It has a powerful song once it has wet the ground
and the song cannot be unsung—
it can only be sung over by another song.
How many more times must this singing be resung
under the name of a different victim.
No spell, no magic, no song of rite
can return a man's soul to his blood and his life.
And all this spilling of blood is to curb the spilling of another's,
which in turn spills the blood of some other.
And here I am, swarming with madness,

reaping the diseased crops they sow,
hoping for hope that never comes.
Madness is all we have!
Madness is the only gift we receive from the gods.

CLYTEMNESTRA, a southern belle, emerges from the palace and goes to CASSANDRA, who is still sitting in the chariot.

Clytemnestra:

Oh, yoohoo! Cassandra! Sweetheart, do come inside
out of this blistering heat that will blister your hide!—
(Aside) Or else I will blister it myself.
I do declare! Sweetheart... Cassandra.
Our dearest Lord, Zeus Christ has brought you here
And wants you to come on inside for some special
Refreshments with the rest of our house.
You, the special slave my husband has brought
Shall lead the rest of slaves into the celebration
For his...arrival.

Cassandra makes no movement toward Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra:

I said, come down out of that carriage and come inside,
My dear Cassandra, this is not the time for pride.
Why, even Josephacles was sold into bondage,



THREE GREEK MYTHS RETOLD

A SOUTHERN AGAMEMNON

CONTINUED

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And had to do his time in the Pharaoh's house.
So, you ought to be grateful as he was,
For you have found yourself masters of great wealth
Therefore, we have no need of cruelty to our servants.
Really, we are as sweet as apple pie!

Cassandra remains in the carriage.

Leader:

It is to you the madam speaks, girl.
You ought go with her, you got no choice.

Clytemnestra:

My, she acts as if she is deaf and mute.
I speak as plainly as I can,
she must obey me—my argument is not moot.

Leader:

Go with her, little slave. Make the best of it—
She don't lie about their retirement of cruelty.
Step down, miss, and obey as she say.

Clytemnestra:

Do it now! Now, I say, you vile—
I have no time to spend outside in this,
this blistering heat! There is a special ceremony and—
Speak to her, give her some hand sign,
Tell her to come with me.

Leader:

I think she cannot hear,
or perhaps she still speaks her native tongue.
Maybe she is still a wild creature, freshly caught.

Clytemnestra:

No, she is mad! Mad, I tell you.
Though she be a slave, she has genius of evil—
Demons murmur in her ear.
She was not brought from the barbarous land of her color,
She comes from a city, you idiot.
She hears me not? Fine.
She shall hear the sound of the whip against her flesh.

I will not waste any more precious breath
On this, the lowly, honorable slave.

Clytemnestra bursts back into the plantation house.

Leader: (To Cassandra.)

I have pity on you, so I will be gentle.
Come, you scared, poor thing. Leave this carriage,
Of your own free will, try and taste what remains of her kindness.

Cassandra: (Crying.)

Aieeeeeee! Earth-mother-
Curse of the earth- Apallah, Apallah!

Leader:

Why cry you for Apallah?
He is not the god of Salvation!... Nor the god of 'merica...

Cassandra:

God of the treacherous journey—you, my destroyer.
You have destroyed me once, now you destroy me twice!

Leader:

I think she, like a wild bird senses it--
She senses the doom dealt to her.
Slave that she is, some god or demon must live inside her.
She knows without being informed.

Cassandra:

What house is this? What house have I been brought to?
My destroyer, Apallah, answer me!

Leader:

This is the house of Agamemnon, son of Atreus.
Really, you don't know? Sir Agamemnon has brought—

Cassandra:

No...this so-called house hates any god.
Its walls echo the song of the spilled blood of kinsmen.
I see it! I hear the song of severed heads. The song
Of the tortured kinsmen sings into my dizzy brain,
And now my heart knows the melody.



FICTION

Leader:

She is like a bloodhound, sniffing out the house's
History of murders so vile.

Cassandra:

Ah! You know of what I speak.
You know the songs I repeat.
Babies... charred and served
Do the one they called Papa.

Leader:

I had heard that you were a seer,
But now I know it in truth!
The gods do only bring madness.
I'm sad to say that there is no help for you.

Cassandra:

Aiee! Is there no justice in this world?
No justice in this house or this bloodstained land!
Will the furies ever come to avenge—
Aye, do you see it? See it there?
The spider has lain out two more traps.
One for her man and one for his tramp.
It matters not, this is my curse.
I am never to be believed, though I only speak truth.
There is no point—there is no leave.
Aiiieee! To know the truth—and to never win!
It burns and tears and rips at my heart!
Sir Agamemnon... he will be caught in her web.

Leader:

Shh! Dear girl, enough of this!
You shall work yourself into a stupor!
God, forbid this from becoming true.

Cassandra:

Yes, yes. Pray, you fly.

While you offer supplication, she spins her victim—

In she brings—there she kills him.

And yet... my words have lost their way.

Once departed from my lips, how can they go into your ear?

You do not understand, though you hear.

Ahh! Oh, the sweeping, terrible, fiery pain!

She, the spider of the web.

She lays her sticky thread like a tapestry for my feet.

She will catch me. I will be beat.

All because he brought me home.

All because....

God of death, let it happen quickly and cleanly.

Let me only close my eyes and sleep

And see no more.

That is my justice.

Leader:

Oh, what great terr' has befallen us all,
And all because of the lust for familial blood.
The girl's cries, I fear, are only the calm before the storm.

CLYTEMNESTRA enters, holding a whip.

Clytemnestra:

Now girl, tell me plainly.
Will I need to use this, or will you come with me to your pen?

Cassandra:

I will go with you.

Clytemnestra:

Ah! She speaks after all!
Just as I thought, the thought of a whip causes a thrall.

Cassandra:

(To herself.)
Your husband likes it too,
He just never told you.





NON-FICTION

BY JACOB LAMBERT

I had just exited the ramp leading into Syracuse, New York, and the snow, once gently falling on my silver Kia Spectra, was beginning to threaten my vision of the road, blinding me to any surrounding traffic.

The fact that the sun was starting to go down didn't help either, but I didn't care. I had great company. Parker, a true optimist and fellow hostage in Uncle Sam's Army, had braved the trip from Fort Drum to Syracuse along with me, but not for the conversation and secondhand smoke that I provided. He had other motives.

"Jesus, watch out, man," Parker shouted, leaning back in his seat.

Apparently, I had nearly clipped the curve as the light ahead of me turned green.

"Relax," I said, taking a final drag from my smoke and tossing it out the window. "Do you have any idea how to get to the place?"

"Just keep to the right lane, I think."

Parker's face contorted into its typical half-depressed, half-apprehensive state.

On both sides of the road, spanning the length of my vision, was fast food, gas station, fast food, gas station—greasy mirror images of each other.

And, scattered on the streets, wearing everything from the out-of-season-leopard

spandex to the urine stained jogging sweats, were beggars, drop-outs, and, the worst of the worst, Pubic Servants—or, if you prefer, ladies of the night. At first, I thought this was an odd thing to see. Then I remembered some of the people I'd known back in Alabama, and I felt at home. After all, the bums in New York and Alabama share one defining detail: terrible personal hygiene. The realization made me smile—a rare commodity in a place where everything is the color of talcum powder and smells like a professional wrestler's jock strap...or soured sock. Whichever sounds the worst.

I removed another cigarette from my pack and, once the light turned red, lit up, breathing in a mixture of lip cracking, freezing air and menthol. "I don't think I'm going to go in, okay? I'm just going to grab a sixer and head to the hotel."

"C'mon, Lambert, if you don't see something you like, or you're not comfortable, we can go, but just give it a chance," Parker replied, his attention focused to the right side of the street, the tension in his voice childlike—almost giddiness.

Shuffling in my seat, for my hip—that was still recovering from an injury last October—had begun throbbing, making

any position unbearable for longer than a minute. Inside, I knew what Parker was doing: leading me into a false sense of choice. We both knew what would really happen once we got there, but I played along. After all, I did just drive an hour from safety so that Parker could enjoy himself, and forsaking him at this hour seemed cruel. Nodding, I took another drag from my smoke and smiled. "Okay, okay, bro. But I swear, if this place is anything like that other one back in Drum, I'm walking to the nearest bar and—"

"Oh, damn, I almost forgot," Parker interrupted.

"What?"

Turning to me with his face drawn into a grimace, his pale, heavy features telling me what his eyes whispered, Parker coughed into his palm and raised his brows into an arch. "I forgot to tell you that they don't serve beer there, man. I'm sorry I didn't tell you before, but I was, you know, preoccupied."

Disappointment number one, I thought, as I felt my face grow warm, making my eyes water—the latter possibly caused by the cigarette smoke in my own eyes, but more than likely not.

"Damn, man. What do they have then, and don't tell me—"



PARADISE FOUND

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“Umm, Red Bull and Pepsi, I think,” Parker answered, once again interrupting me and proving my suspicions—that this trip (among other things) would not favor my needs.

I still couldn't believe it. I had driven all this way for what? Something I could get anywhere? Evidently, the great state of New York (Syracuse and Watertown to be more exact) didn't believe in the combination of alcohol and pleasure, if one could really call Paradise Found pleasure, that is. But the alcohol? Why not have a drink and relax, enjoy the show and fade into numbness? “I don't understand.” I took my last puff and tossed the butt out the window.

“When you see it, you'll understand, man. I promise.”

As I rolled up the window, trying to retain what little warmth remained in the car, Parker, nearly shouting, grabbed my right arm, causing the vehicle to swerve near the sidewalk.

“What the hell, man? You almost—”

“There! To the right,” he replied, still squeezing my arm.

I could see the massive billboard above, the one proclaiming the obvious: we were there. However, the scene seemed a little redundant. Right below the sign was the actual place, its front illuminated with an assortment of fading Christmas lights, which, given the spirit of the building, seemed odd, almost comical.

“I've got to stop by an ATM before we go in,” I said, pulling my wallet from my pocket, stalling.

Reaching into his own pocket and producing two twenty-dollar bills, Parker, his grin

swallowing his neck, shook his head. “I got you, bro. Let's go,” he said, walking ahead, treading the snow with such enthusiasm that I thought he might float to the door. I walked slowly, knowing that, in a few short minutes, I would want to leave. The gas station across the street was calling my name, the need for something stronger than Pepsi and Red Bull becoming a necessity. Even if Paradise Found was the palace that Parker said it was, there were other things to do, other places to explore, and as I reached the door, apprehensive and semi-sober, I turned around, surveying the area behind me.

The sun was now gone, the traffic still meandered, and everywhere, on the streets and sidewalks, people buzzed by with either the memory of summer or the reality that winter was coming on too soon. And me, well, I was about to start another journey, one that would take me into the darker world of Syracuse and leave me stumbling into the light the next day, hung-over, smelling like stale booze and sweat. A typical morning after in the treacherous fog of upstate New York.

Somehow, and for whatever reason, I will never forget the woman that took our money and turned us loose. She looked about fifty-six, her makeup resembling a multi-colored, feathered mask, which could have easily been a prosthetic rescued from the streets of New Orleans after Mardi Gras. Her voice, deep and petite, pounded through the small meter box she haunted.

“Twenty for the both of ya,” she said, holding her frail, tattooed hand out.

Without hesitation, Parker handed her the money and smiled. I could tell he wanted to ask her something, but for both our sakes, I'm glad he didn't.

“My, you're such a handsome man, best looking all night,” the woman said, showing us the rotting checkerboard behind her desiccated lips. The first thing I noticed, other than the woman, was the smell of the place. Sweat. Maybe piss. And the thick, liquid scent of a fog machine hidden somewhere behind door number one.

There was also music in the background. Motley Crew, I think. But the most distracting thing was posted on each of the four walls of the room: Miller Light signs. What a strange thing to see, I thought. Maybe they had beer after all? Maybe. However, something told me they were just for show— something to get you inside and through the door. Possibly a crude joke?

“Have fun, and be careful in there. Things get a little hot, if you know what I mean,” the woman said, backing away from view and snickering under her breath.

Parker turned to me and smiled, anxious. “You ready, man?”

“Sure.”

“Are you alright?” the gesture nothing more than perfunctory.

“I said sure, didn't I?”

“Just remember what I said, bro. I'm ready to go whenever you are, but if I go in the back, will you wait?” he asked, his right hand pushing the door open, his head involuntarily turning in the direction of the music.

“Well, I would at least like to—”

But it was too late to respond. He was already through the door.

On the other side, lit only with black lights and



NON-FICTION

the reflection of glitter, was the goal of Parker's night. And that goal, covered in nothing more than flavored body oils and grey C-section scars, gave off a musty odor—one that not even an SOS pad soaked in bleach and turpentine could fix. Bodyguards were everywhere, as if someone would actually storm the massive, empty (for the moment) stage in the center of the room. And to make matters worse, there was a bar to the right of the entrance, complete with Jägermeister banners and a woman too old to bag groceries at Winn Dixie. Overall, the place was a foggy dump, fit for the old and washed out—a citadel among garbage heaps.

"Over here, Lambert," Parker said, pointing to a small booth near the stage.

I followed behind him, taking in the mixture of fog machine and musk, and once he sat down, I sat across, my hands sweating as I zipped up my black wool jacket. The place, compared to the icy wind outside, felt like a sauna, and I was the dumbass wearing thick blue jeans and insulated socks... It was very hot. Sticky. "Can I smoke in here?"

"I don't think so, man, but you can ask someone," he replied, his eyes never resting on me, but floating around the

room.

Looking around, I quickly realized that nobody else was smoking, so I accepted it. I wasn't about to ask one of the bouncers. Every one of those meatheads, from what I could tell, was thinking the same thing. Hell, they probably had it all planned, too. They would wait for one person, just one, to screw the whole thing up, and crack his teeth in. It was obvious. In fact, the six-foot-four Chrome Dome behind our booth crossing his arms was ready, able to break the spine and sever a toe in one punch. Paralyzed. The game ending before it ever started.

"That's okay," I said, drumming my knuckles on the dirty tabletop.

Parker didn't respond.

He continued scanning the room, but just when I started to relax, when I finally gained some sense of composure, the most awful thing happened, and it came, walking bow-legged with a slight lisp, to our table—toe-headed with make-up seemingly applied by a kindergartener: smeared, dark, and, distinctively, water colored. A trash animal from a trailer park existing in the outer realms of shit city. Her name was Carol.

"Hey guys, can I help you with anything?" Carol said.

Smiling, his chubby cheeks red, Parker, turning to me, nodded. "You sure can, ma'am, but it's going to cost ya." I felt my stomach turn, yet I managed a smile. Why was Parker talking to the woman this way? Was he really attempting a respectful gesture, in this rat hole? I didn't understand.

"Oh really?" Carol replied, walking over to Parker, sitting in his lap—Parker's shocks taking the full brunt of her weight. Then suddenly, she leaned over, her blue eyes on me, and started whispering in Parker's ear. It felt erotic, in a strange way. But I wouldn't be fooled. No, sir. I had seen my share of loose women, and let me say this up front: I felt no joy in that stare. None at all.

Once again nodding, Parker then turned his attention to me, and I knew exactly what was about to happen: he was going to disappear. But for how long? An hour? Five? I didn't know. The feeling made me feel sick to my crotch.

"Hey Lambert?"

Here it comes.

"Yeah?"

"I'm going in the back. Carol has a VP room, and I'm going to hang with her, okay? I won't be long, alright?" Parker said, the double question in his voice told me two things: one, it would be at least an hour; and



PARADISE FOUND

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two, go ahead and get the hotel room. I'll meet you there.

I was fine with this. After all, I wanted a drink, and Paradise Found, though a haven for the weak, didn't serve alcohol. It was a perfect moment. All I would have to do is let him disappear for a while, and I could walk next door, to the gas station—grab a beer or six.

"No problem, man. You had better have fun. After all, it's your birthday, right?" Standing and taking his lady by the hand, Parker's smile widened. "It sure is, bud, wish me luck."

"Big dicks, my man," I replied, seeing if I could startle Carol, but she didn't budge. She was solid—at least in her intentions. "You don't even know, Lambert. See you in a little while." Parker walked away—to the back—becoming another ghost in the dream fog of the dingy room.

I sighed, exasperated, and drummed on the table again. It was only then that I realized the gravity of the decision to let him go. On that strange night, I found myself in a wonderful situation: finally, and most pleasing, I was alone, time mine and mine to waste. But as I was scooting out of the booth, my own grin widening, another obstacle presented itself in the form of purple spandex and abnormally slanted eyes. Her name was Madison—which, of course, besides the harelip and awkward teeth, I thought was cute. In any case, I was trapped, forced into the corner of the booth. And somewhere behind me, from Chrome Dome, I heard a laugh, one telling me that it was too late to escape. However, I knew how to deal with this, considering my

background in lying. It was the rope a dope. Pure and simple.

Doing my best to avoid eye contact, which was hard, considering the intrusive hands climbing up my inner thigh, I reached into my jean pocket, removing my cellphone—its silver plastic cracked due to too many drunken nights—and started dialing my mother's number.

Madison, however, seemed not to notice the sudden LED light next to my ear: she continued moving closer to me, those seasoned hands reaching to my chest—the memory of a thousand other men buried beneath her eighty-six dollar manicure. Given the situation, you may ask why I called my mother. Well, in a place like Paradise Found, a person tends to cling to what they know best—a little piece of reality, a type of solidity needed that only someone who has ever popped fifteen cough and cold tabs could understand. I needed a familiar voice. And since Parker was out of service, I created a distraction.

"I'm going to be a minute. You should probably get a Red Bull," I said, still holding the phone to my ear, hearing the stutter against my head.

"You want me to get you a Red Bull?" Finally, she had proven to me another thing: she was an idiot. Either that or deaf. Which one I couldn't decide at the moment, but giving her the benefit of the doubt—the music was above the threshold of conversation—I let it go and simply nodded, widening my eyes and pursing my lips. And then another terrible thing happened: the call went to voicemail. But I didn't freak out.

No, sir. I did the exact opposite.

"Hey, what are you doing?" I asked into the phone, and if the voicemail didn't time out at a little over a minute, my mother would have thought I was crazy.

"Who are you talking to, baby?" Madison asked, but I quickly placed a finger into the air and silenced her. I needed time to gather my thoughts. There had to be some way to escape, some way that I could—

And then it came to me: I could motion for her to scoot out of the booth, and when she did, I could slip by, telling her that it was too loud inside and that I needed to step out for a moment, to talk and have a smoke. Surely, Madison would understand, right? If one thing was certain, I wouldn't have to worry about her following me, not in that purple crime scene tape she was wearing. But what if Parker came out and realized I was gone? What if something or someone swallowed him whole, releasing him only after all the money disappeared, leaving him alone to fend for himself?

Ah, I thought, who cares?

He got himself into this mess, and he was a big boy, right? We did reserve a hotel room, and he did know where it was at, didn't he? Yes, he did, and if he was smart, he would save ten bucks to pay the taxi. I could text him later, remind him. Yes, and after I stepped out of the club, well, I could walk across the street and grab a beer, couldn't I? Oh, yes, I sure could.

"Hold on, mom, I can't hear you. Give me a minute," I said into the now deserted mouth of the phone, already motioning for Madison to move, but as I tried, she remained, her oversized head—along with her equally oversized body—propped on to her right hand, a perverse glare in her malevolent eyes.



NON-FICTION

"Why you don't tell her to call back later, that you're with your girlfriend?" she said, a smile forming on her thin, splintered lips. My first thought was to push her, hard, out of the booth and run, but something told me not to. Chrome Dome lurked just two feet away. And if she wanted me caught, busted up, or, possibly, skinned, I was helpless. Sure, I could hit the guy one time, just one, solid time, but then what? Recoil in fear as he laughed it off? I didn't want any of that, so I smiled back, choking on the obscenities, and placed the phone to my shoulder, shaking my head.

"I really can't. You see, this is my wife, and if she even thinks I'm fucking around, she'll divorce me, and you have no idea what the Army does to a man getting divorced, do you?"

She frowned, shaking her head—I could see that she was lost.

"I didn't think so, but let me tell you, it's not pretty, okay? Now, please, I have to take this phone call, so if you don't mind," I said, once again motioning her to move, and, as I did, something extraordinary happened: the freak moved, sliding out quicker than a jar of mayonnaise covered in vanilla flavored lube. I was finally free,

but I would have to hurry. I could see hunger seeping back into her eyes. I placed the phone back up to my ear, mouthed a few words, and slid out of the booth, my thoughts focused on the door ahead. But as I started walking away, I felt a hand grab the back of my jacket, halting my progress.

"You are coming back in though, right?"

"I planned on it," I replied, pulling away and walking to the doors.

"You had better. I've got plans for you, handsome," she said, her voice drifting as I sped away.

"Looking forward to it." I tossed my arm into the air, waving, passed the Chrome King, and pushed open the door. She had been saying something else, but I ignored her. It was, after all, too late for her henchmen to close in on me.

I was safe.

Now out of the main room, the display of atrocities behind me, I was a foot from the final door—one-step closer to the necessary libations needed to wash away the filth—when I heard one more voice.

One familiar to my ears as well as my wallet: the lady behind the glass, the one who forgot to tell me to abandon all hope

before I entered.

"You hurry back to us, sweet heart. And don't forget to tip the ladies," she said, probably smiling—chuckling to herself as she disappeared.

"Fuck you," I said, pushing open the door and walking out, the bitterness of the cold bringing immediate color to my cheeks. But I didn't ruminate on the past hour or so standing outside the door. No way. The old witch had probably alerted one of the bodyguards the minute it slammed behind me. So, placing my hands in my jeans and pulling my jacket collar to my chin, I started walking across the street, set on exploring the dingy streets of Syracuse, but first and foremost, a beer was in order—or maybe six.



CARTER

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His name was Carter. I am comfortable enough using his name because it is just one step away from being as common as Smith or Jones. Carter was one person in my last group of Soldiers in the Army, and one of my two 10% Soldiers*. Carter didn't have issues as much as he had subscriptions. His worst problem was his hygiene. He'd been counseled before on this issue, and had cleaned up his act right before I arrived in Korea. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before one of my other troops came up to me and told me that he was getting smelly again. The exact words were much worse, of course, and for good reason. So, one of my first actions as the new Platoon Sergeant was to write up a statement for his official record, and then I had to talk with him about it. Now, it doesn't seem logical to have to explain hygiene in writing, but it happens more often than I am more comfortable admitting. I wrote how showers must be conducted using soap upon the body (focusing on the naturally smellier of bits), and shampoo on the little hair he had left. Conditioner, of course, was an optional choice. I continued with discussing dental hygiene, and how a toothbrush must be

used twice a day, with toothpaste. On his teeth. With his own toothbrush. There was a discussion on laundry, and how Febreeze was not an alternative method of cleaning. He was also required to change to a fresh t-shirt and underwear each day. Laundry was to be done with a washing machine and proper laundry soap, and every piece of clothing he owned was to be run through the cycles once a week at minimum. Bed linens and towels were to be considered part of this routine. The entire chat was horrifying and infuriating. The hygiene bit was the tip of a very large iceberg. It was obvious that Carter was a few rounds short of a full magazine. Every other day I was yelling at him to keep office supplies out of his mouth - his favorite were strings of paper clips. He would cram 50 or so in his face and pull the chain out of his mouth like he was pulling a ripcord. Pens were fair game, so everyone knew to keep them in their pockets. With nothing to keep his mouth occupied, he would randomly meow or mumble to himself. He would also talk about playing video games with people... people who had no recollection of ever seeing him in the game.

Out of uniform, he was a touch stranger. One event happened during the summer while we were having a unit BBQ. There is no hotter place on the planet than Korea in August, and when I saw him walking down the street in his black leather jacket, I cringed. If you squinted, you could almost see the fumes coming off of him. I imagined that they were a sort of lime pea green, and knew that he would smell like stale cigarettes, junk food, and sweat from the previous three days of morning physical training. I was certain no cleaning had ever been done to that jacket, and had the vision of moldy leather on the inside.

"Did you know there is only one song on his iPod?" Knapp asked.

"Oh god," I mumbled, "do I really want to know?"

"In A Gadda Da Vida" was the snickered reply.

And that's when I noticed the plug on his iPod was dangling and dancing behind him as he jammed his way down the street. Rock on, Carter. Rock on.

One morning, a few months after I had given up the Platoon Sergeant position to a

*It is said that a leader will spend 90% of their time on 10% of their people.

BY KIM LEIFER

NON-FICTION



NON-FICTION

guy who outranked me, my phone rang. It was Rob, the new PSG.

"You're not gonna believe this shit," he said, cracking up.

"What's going on?"

"Get in here, there's no PT," and he hung up the phone.

After I arrived, I was treated to the following tale. Apparently the entire installation had gone on lockdown because of the loss of a set of night vision goggles.

Inspections were being conducted, and when they got to Carter's room, they found his door unlocked. This is not a good thing and you can get in trouble for leaving your belongings unsecured. It also allows leadership the right to go into your room and rummage as they see fit.

Carter did not have the NVGs. What he did have, though, was a long, blonde wig and size 11 1/2 wide pumps. In white. As big a surprise as that was (don't get me wrong, it was a horrible mental image - combined with the hygiene issues, he would have made a hideous woman), the bigger surprise was his bed pillow.

It wasn't a pillow at all, but dozens upon dozens of pairs of women's underwear.

All stolen from the laundry room. Women had been complaining for at least two years about missing scanties. He had been suspected, but there was never any proof. None of the women who were still there wanted to reclaim their items.



VISUAL ART



ROLLING MIST
Jonathan Bozeman



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Kaylee Hobbs

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FLATIRON
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Erica Myrick

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TIGER LILY
Kristen Vogel



THE MAN IN THE MOON
Kaylee Hobbs

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THE HAND OF GOD
Kaylee Hobbs

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