



JANUS 2014
WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

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WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
2014

Submission Winners:

GRAPHICS:

FIRST PLACE -	<i>Winter is Coming</i>	BY MIKE RAMIREZ
SECOND PLACE -	<i>Aspire</i>	BY MIKE RAMIREZ
THIRD PLACE -	<i>Balanced Serenity</i>	BY SPENCER O'GARA

POETRY:

FIRST PLACE -	<i>The Consumed</i>	BY DEAN MORAN
SECOND PLACE -	<i>The Day</i>	BY BREON EVANS
THIRD PLACE -	<i>Hot Mess</i>	BY HAYLEE RETHMAN

PROSE:

FIRST PLACE -	<i>Timberline</i>	BY STEPHANIE JACKSON
SECOND PLACE -	<i>Learning to Swim</i>	BY LAUREN HUGHES
THIRD PLACE -	<i>The Things We Tell Ourselves</i>	BY LAUREN HUGHES

A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

The WESTMINSTER COLLEGE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT for helping fund this literary magazine and the prizes awarded to the winners of each genre.
And to the students who submitted their work to be part of this year's Janus magazine.
It would not have been possible without you!

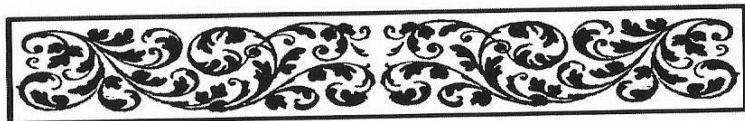
— THE JANUS STAFF

Content submissions are reviewed extensively by the respective editors of each genre on a completely anonymous basis. The submissions are ranked by all the members of that group, and prizes are awarded to the top three submissions from each category.

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*DENOTES FIRST PLACE WINNER
 **DENOTES SECOND PLACE WINNER
 ***DENOTES THIRD PLACE WINNER

First Place - Poetry

The Consumed

BY DEAN MORAN

"I'm not the consumer, I'm being consumed!",

1000 voices cried with a shrieking guitar.

For the land of the free and the home of the brave—

Honoring the anthem all along the way—each one of them uniquely died—

Some of their souls went to heaven and shined—

Some of their souls went to darkness and fried—

Some of their souls were engulfed in flames.

On a stage set ablaze in Monterey, C.A., a sun-burst guitar played a century of pain.

In a century insane and obsessed with love

Where the songs led the hopeless and the blind led the dreamers

and the grass outside couldn't be any greener.

"I'm not the consumer I'm being consumed!",

They cried and cried out and their voices they boomed.

"I'm not the consumer!" they sang loud and proud.

Struggling for suffrage—the American crowd.

Who were tortured and torn and battered and bruised—

Every soul in the nation forsaken, confused,

And consumed! Consumed by necessary means—

It's hard to decipher the actors from fiends,

Yet the voices still screamed as they cut off the band

And pleas have been seen all across the land

To burn down the white house—to murder the man!

Conspiracies against all attempts at good health

Are hidden and riddled and sold as self-help—

"I'm not the consumer, I'm being consumed!",

The cracked bell rang out in a warbling tone,

And with each broken clang cried an American tune

By the dawn's early light of the McDonald's drive-thru—

Crowds guzzled god sipping faith through a straw

And marketed medicinal rally cap baseball—

Doubting each cigarette—the weight of the stone—

They laughed till they cried in desolation row.

You scream, I scream, we all scream for technologies!

While ignoring the epilogues of forgiveness anthologies,

We've all heard of Jesus and Plato's apology—

And we've circumcised almost every cock.

We've mastered the art of deception and pottery,

Become nymphs and satyrs all flirting with mockery,

Accepted perversions of porno and sodomy,

And can pick and hack into nearly any lock.

"I'm not the consumer, I'm being consumed!"

The corpse of our conflicts are being exhumed!

By the latent stare of the statue of liberty—

In exhausted epiphanies, they're rising from tombs!

Ghosts of prosperity—monogamy—equality!

Fighting in Israel! Fighting in the womb!

The commercials seen inconsequently

Become the inner directional path of the youth.

"I'm not the consumer, I'm being consumed!"

The children cried out in their safe sheltered rooms.

Second Place - Poetry

The Day

BY BREON EVANS

The day is drawing near,

Galloping like Paul Revere

With news that our future is near.

Some wait in anticipation.

Others drink to inebriation.

All waiting for emancipation.

Six great columns still stand tall

From the fire, that made the great hall fall.

It is here that we began our haul.

We toil, we work, we strive.

Our passion, our profession, being our drive

Till the day comes, till it arrives.

As it draws near, we sit and think

About all our friends, and other social links.

Should we finally give that crush a wink?

Do we really look good in pink?

Then, hits reality:

Graduate school and GRE, or move back in with the family?

Will we be able to find a job in this economy?

How are we going to live with no money?

Who exactly do we want to be?

What are our dreams?

The day is drawing near,

Galloping like Paul Revere

With news that our future is one to fear.

Third Place - Poetry

Hot Mess

BY HAYLEE RETHMAN

Intelligence stumbles through cobblestone streets
Drunken and wearing nothing but his underwear
Sprinkling brain cells in his path.

Potential wrecks from the bathroom.
A sweaty t-shirt covering beads of perspiration
Vomit fills up the toilet bowl.

Love falls over onto the white tiled floor.
Ripped jeans tear some more,
And hearts ache.

First Place - Prose

Timberline

BY STEPHANIE JACKSON

I really hate calendars, but I especially hate the one on my kitchen fridge. All the pictures are the same of countless red suns setting in a silhouette backdrop. There are tree tops and mountains scattered in these pictures, too, but they're shaded in black for some reason. All there is to see are suns. It's a montage of closing days but never any here's or now's; I think that's what bothers me most. These sunsets are a constant reminder; an endless marathon of Monday to Sunday, that tomorrow is always coming and time is catching up.

The calendar's the reason why I've been going to bed hungry the past couple of nights. I find it hard to open the fridge now, but it's particularly hard around dinner when the mind has already processed that the grass has been cut, the dog fed, and missed calls have been answered for the day. It's a struggle every time. I'll stand in the coolness of frozen chicken waiting to thaw, the door stretched wide open and when my stomach growls it's almost like the fridge is yawning. But then I see that calendar hanging on the freezer, with its sunsets and the boxed-in date ensnared by a thick red circle, and I lose my appetite.

Today, that calendar has me yanking out a six-pack from the back of the fridge and shoving the Budweiser down deep in the ice inside a cooler. I'm out of the kitchen and into the garage before the white refrigerator door swings closed on its own. I don't want to have to look at the calendar today. This camping trip is reminder enough that my wedding day is rapidly approaching.

I see the bottom half of Beth's body out the side of the truck, a brief glimpse of unusually tanned legs and frayed jean shorts, when entering the garage. She's packing the rear of my Silverado to the point where I won't be able to see out the back windshield. And, God love her, she still thinks there is room for more when she asks me to hand her the lawn chairs. "Babe, it's fine," I grumble as I set the cooler on the cracked cement floor. "Let's get going. Clock's ticking."

"It's noon, Evan. We have plenty of time."

Really, she's right. It takes about two hours to get to Lake Timberline with in-town driving being the largest hassle on the way there, the constant stops and goes at traffic lights. It would be quick sailing once on the highway, and we'd make it at the campgrounds a little after check-in time. That still gives us plenty of light to unload the truck, set up the nine-year-old tent, and explore what was once a familiar place for Beth and I. But I corral her in my truck anyway, leaving our camping chairs behind. The cooler follows after her, sliding against oil-stained carpet rugs, in the spot where the passenger's feet would typically go. It's not like Beth will need the space; she never sits in a chair properly.

That's how we started seeing each other, over a fight about her putting her feet on my desk in Theology. Our high school's religion classes were always last on students' block-schedules. Whenever we left windowless hallways for the day, we would be taking the word of God with us. Or at least that's what we were told in class. I, however, never paid any attention to what they preached. I was too distracted by the constant pressure of child-sized, grey sneakers on my seat. At first, it wasn't a bother. I'd spend final period following the short distance of Bethany Johnson's pale thigh and trying to get a look at what was beneath her plaid skirt. I hadn't noticed her before senior year—art-clubbers who ate their lunches with their easels apparently don't cross paths with linebackers—but I certainly noticed her in Theology with both feet off the floor in a skirt. I was never able to catch a glimpse of anything though. Somehow, she had a way of covering everything up even when one leg was hugged against her breast and the other stretched out toward me. Maybe that is what got to me, the fact that I was flunking without the benefits of lacy underwear trimmings, which forced me to storm into the art gallery. Demanding that she either put out or keep her damn feet off my desk was probably not the best way to ask a girl out. She had left school that day with a few choice words of her own—none of them belonging to God.

Five years later, in the bulk of my Chevy truck, she's still sitting with her legs up. Other than a worn ass print in the seat, there are Beth's feet marks, too. I have given up trying to get her to keep them down.

After closing her in the truck, I check to make sure I didn't miss any of my fishing gear, and then slide myself behind the steering wheel. Beth asks if I locked everything. I say I had, though I probably left the bedroom window cracked a little. I didn't say that to her. She asks me if our German Shepard was already dropped off at her folks' place. I tell her Simon was probably peeing on her mother's carpet as we speak. She laughs, a little ring of her vocals like the chime of glasses knocking against another.

"Who has white carpets anyhow?"

Beth doesn't complain when I crank down the windows. I see strands of dark hair whipping violently about in the corner of my eyes, but she merely holds them back with her hand. We're on the road for Lake Timberline, putting miles of treaded asphalt and solid yellow lines between me and the calendar at home. I couldn't be driving any faster. Behind my white Chevy Silverado, the sun is chasing after us, but it'll never catch up. Not while I'm behind the wheel.

Thanks to the mounds of camping gear shielding the back window, there isn't a need for sunglasses. Beth has her's on, though, large oval shades that cover not only olive-tint eyes but half her face, too. I hate those bulky sunglasses. It makes women look like they have shaved off their eyebrows. I told Beth this, but she still wears them. "Everyone has them," she informed me. She even tried to get me to put them on to prove her point. I must not be "everyone."

A flicker of light sparks in my vision, and I take my eyes off the road real quick to see

that it's Beth's ring signaling at me. Because she's still pushing back her curls, the silver band on her finger happens to be catching the perfect amount of sun, sneaking through a gap between tackle boxes, to distract me. My stomach tosses when staring at it. She must be doing this on purpose. I move my glare to Beth's face, expecting to see a smirk so big it makes her freckled nose appear larger, pulling the corner of her nostrils up and wide. I see a pierced left ear, instead. Her head is cocked toward the opened window, the only stable figure among zipping green Maples and blue, red cars. I turn away, but the ring comes with me.

What they don't tell you about engagements is that it becomes real the moment she swipes her card and buys the dress, not when you kneel down and put a pearl ring on her finger. For some reason, that white piece of garment is what opens the floodgates of her childhood play weddings, and you, the poor sap, don't even have the time to take your final gulp of air before you drown beneath what will become your bride in the next two weeks. Beth never told me that she had purchased a dress but I knew exactly the day when she had. I came home from work at the shop one night to find her Toyota parked in my driveway. She was standing before the freezer with a red pen in hand, circling June 19th.

"You didn't have it marked so I did it for you." She had stated. I froze in the doorway. "I hope you liked the calendar by the way. I thought it was unique, so I got it. What do you think?"

It had taken me a while to realize that she was asking about the images of the sunsets and not about the color of her skin, which was no longer pale but now a so called "honey beige." And in my hesitation she knew that I didn't care for the gift at all. She had left with a slam of the door and I had begun to starve myself and the maid-of-honor would leave a message the next evening, suggesting a camping trip to keep the love alive. It's rather funny when I think back on it now, taking love advice from my fiancée's recently divorced best friend. But Beth agreed it was a good idea—for us to revisit the lake I took her to for our first date—before the wedding.

"Evan!" Beth suddenly screams as she grabs for the wheel. The car to the right honks, and I jerk my wandering truck back into the fast lane.

"Is everything alright?" I can feel her watchful squint on my sunburnt face, so I change the subject.

"We'll be there soon."

Lake Timberline is in Bonne Terre, Missouri. When I first took Beth here, we were eighteen. I used to mow the weeds around the lake so I knew all the secret twists and coves to take girls away from the public's eye. I led her through a field of waist-high grass and awning trees, holding her hand in mine because she was scared of the possibility of snakes. When we came to a spot where the ground was trimmed and the lake was close to our feet, I laid a blanket down and we skipped some loose rocks across the water. I had made the mistake of not bringing any bug spray and I had two fishing poles but no hooks. When we left, I took her home with no catch of the day but with a thousand angry bug bites on her body. She had a wedding to go to the next morning and said she had never been more miserable trying not to scratch her arms and legs during the ceremony. She agreed to a second date, though. That was when her skin was still white.

Throughout the next five years of us dating, Beth and I would periodically visit Lake Timberline on a whim. These sudden visits grew fewer each passing year, but I still could remember everything as if it hadn't been little over nine months since I'd last visited. The Lake Timberline Beth and I see now, after checking in at the station's desk, looks nothing like I remember.

The lush green grass, that once stood so tall a person could abandon a litter of

unwanted kittens without anyone seeing them do so, was now a flooded marsh. The nice shade trees no longer had leaves, and were now hacked, naked, and bare. Branches were everywhere, littered about like sharp splinters as if a lumberjack had swung his axe one day and laid waste to every tree in sight. The conservationist at his desk had warned us about the damage caused by a week-long thunderstorm, but I didn't expect it to be this bad.

Beth seems more heartbroken than me. She's bending at the waist, tugging up a branch that was buried in a puddle of dried muck.

"It doesn't look the same as before, does it?" She asks as she pulls back her arm and casts out the branch into the muddy water. I look at the side of her tan face.

"No. It doesn't."

"It happened about eight months ago," the conservationist tells me. "I remember because it was the night of All Saints' Day. My wife was singing at the chapel when the lights gave out on her and the whole congregation."

I look over my shoulder to check on Beth. She didn't want to leave the lake, so I left her down there to ask about the damage. Here at the camp station, I can still see her throwing more sticks in the water. "All Saints' Day, huh?"

I remember that storm now. It was the one thing that prevented Beth from moving out of my house. I had walked into the study, having just passed out the last bit of Halloween candy to a zombie bride and a devil, and found Beth packing up her easels.

"The priest is right," she said, looking up at me in the doorway. "I shouldn't be living with you. Not before we're married."

I didn't say anything at first. I just looked at the paintings in her hand. Until that moment, I hadn't realized how expressive Beth was in her art. When we were first dating, she used to paint these pictures of limbless bodies creeping through open doorways or windows. I never understood what they meant, but they were what made up the Bethany Johnson I wanted to marry. And there was my fiancée in the flesh, telling me that God wanted her to move out, but for some reason I was staring at the artwork she held. They were painted snapshots of scenery—like on the calendar.

"He's right," Beth repeated.

"Who cares what the priest thinks, anyhow?"

"It's a sin, Evan. We're sinning."

"It didn't bother you before," I boomed, but it must have been the thunder outside because Beth didn't say anything back. Instead, she was shoving to get out of the study, pressing against my chest with the canvases. I let the sunsets push me away and watched her walk into the storm. I remember hearing the wail of tornado sirens ricocheting throughout my empty house, and then Beth was knocking on the front door and sleeping in my bed later that night beneath a layer of quilted creed. She lived with me the week during the storm, and continued to stay months afterwards. We lied when the priest asked if we were living separately. Like Beth's old paintings, I never really understood the image of sin. Apparently, I also missed that lesson in Theology. But if anyone were to ask me what it looked like, I'd tell them it was a wall of hanging suns painted by your fiancée.

"And quite the damage it's done, too." The conservationist lays a rough palm on my shoulder to grab my attention. "It's like the Lord swiped his hand and destroyed it all. Like the arc and the flood." He crosses himself.

"It was just a storm," I say. I turn away from the station and squint at the sky. "God had nothing to do with it."

We set up camp that evening in a heavy silence. Beth keeps walking from the truck to the tent and back again, unloading everything. I notice the amount of stuff she packed: several blankets, two sleeping bags, five insect-repellent candles, flashlights, her old grey sneakers, a crate of dry food and more. No chairs since I made her leave them at home. There's a can of bug spray sitting on the cooler, and I'm suddenly wondering if Beth would have agreed to a second date had I actually brought some the first time. She always said it was a date she would never forget. Even now, I still wonder what she meant by that.

"What did you think about the first time I brought you here?"

"Oh, you know," she says while batting her hand in the air to swat away a mosquito. "It was very unique. I'll never forget it. I'm going to make up the burgers now."

I stoke the fire I started and watch Beth through the flames. I see her slip off her ring, a silver band with a pearl in place of a diamond, and shove it in her jean pocket. She said she wanted pearl and silver instead of rock and gold, because she thought she was a unique find and she wanted to show that through her ring. I didn't have the heart to tell her otherwise.

Beth's shaping the raw meat into patties, and I notice that something is different now. She's using her fist aggressively, pounding on the picnic table hard enough to make it sound like thunder. The blood from the hamburger package drips out the side onto broken sticks for the fire. She doesn't notice some of it running down her leg. In the dark, it looks like mud from the lake but I suppose I should start calling it the marsh.

"They're ready," she says, handing me the patties to grill. We eat around the fire, sitting on a log and a cooler, one pair of feet in the dirt and the other in the air. Beth doesn't put her ring back on, even after we're done eating. It's almost dusk but there is still enough light out to look at the lake again. I ask Beth if she wants to go, and she says she just wants to go to bed early. I don't want to walk down by the water alone so I follow after her.

This isn't how I had thought our first day returning to Lake Timberline would go, sleeping in a family-size tent suddenly too small for us with the sun still hanging in the sky. I hear a late-comer drive past our campsite, tires crunching on graveled road, and night bugs by the lake are starting to sing. Beth is lying on her side away from me, but then she rolls on her back. Not looking at me, she whispers, "You don't want to marry me, do you?"

I think on this for a long while, listening to the shuffle of Beth's feet fidgeting beneath quilted blankets and sleeping bags. It's summer, so I'm above the covers. It's too warm for them. One of the blankets is white, and I wonder who thinks to bring a white blanket on a dirty camping trip? I suppose someone whose mother has white carpet for her living room floor.

A knock against my ankle—Beth's toe—reminds me that I haven't said anything yet. "No. Not a tan version of you, anyhow."

"It'll take a while for it to fade."

"The tan?"

"No, my feelings for you."

Her toe's touching me again. It reminds me of Theology class, with her legs spread apart while learning about God. I've seen my fair share of lacy underwear now, but I'm still bitter about flunking.

"You changed, too, you know," says Beth, turning back on her side. "You lost a lot of weight."

I suppose she's right. I don't fit in my stained work jeans like I used to, and I let my hair grow out so it now curves around my ears. The color's still the same as it was back then, though, a shade between oak and almond. My skin is just as burnt as it has been, too. That's more than I can say about Beth's.

"I am quite the catch, you know. Anybody would be lucky to have me." Her words

come out in pants, thick with tears, and I think about the fish we weren't able to fry because I forgot the hooks. I imagine the flop of their bodies on the bank, a fish pulled from its bowl, gasping and wiggling out of white pearl foam. Pearl—like the color of her ring. She wanted pearl. She loves pearls. That doesn't make her unique.

"I guess I'm not 'anybody'."

Beth's crying real heavy now, but it doesn't carry above the sound of the bugs buzzing outside. Sitting up, I unzip the tent and let them all in while I let myself out. Ice spills over the top of the cooler when I reach in to grab a beer, and then I sit on the lid and look out at all I missed of Lake Timberline. There isn't much to see though, because the sun is setting and everything else is shrouded in black. Across the water, a red day is closing. For once I smile to see that time has caught up with me. I decide I'll go down by the marsh and fish. I have a packet of hooks this time, enough to snag a fish of every kind.

Second Place - Prose

Learning to Swim

BY LAUREN HUGHES

I am sixteen-years-old, staring at my reflection in the dappled surface of a public school bathroom mirror. My fingertips curl around the slick white edge of the sink in front of me, pressing so hard my skin turns pale and my knuckles hyper-extend. Tight black gym shorts stick to my shaking skin. I am a living fault line, grinding and quivering with uncontrollable earthquakes. A bead of sweat collects on the tip of my nose but even the thought of moving a hand to wipe it away hurts.

I haven't slept for more than four hours in the past five days, making gym class out in blistering eighty seven degree heat impossible. I am hiding until sixth period is over.

My face is a wreck. It's hard to look at my own yellow-skinned reflection. Mauve bags are carved into the soft skin under my eyes and a fresh row of blistering red acne has formed around my mouth. The worst part is my hairline. I watch it move up and down as my entire scalp expands and contracts with deep, splintering reverberations.

My organs feel engorged, rubbing up against brittle bones and inflamed tissues. It is hard to focus on one pain in particular so I bend my head down and let it all crash in on me. There is an exhausted foggy inside of my ears and eyes, tunneling my vision and deafening me to the outside world. Inside isn't much better. Long nights of lying awake have robbed me of my ability to reason or think in a straight line. Instead my thoughts are like a slinky once you've given it to a toddler, knotted and twisted in an irreparable and infinite way.

A telltale swish-bang tells me that somebody has entered the bathroom. I hear the sound of low jabbering and tapping feet as though I'm sitting at the bottom of a pool. No matter how hard I try I can't make my head lift or my legs move. Even though I feel partially deaf, I'd have to be dead not to notice the poignant pause in conversation coupled by a soft cooing of giggles.

"What is she doing?"

"Maybe she's high."

"She looks disgusting."

"Tell me about it."

My chest constricts in on itself and something warm and wet is rolling down my

cheeks.

When I was sixteen I inherited my father's legacy. Aside from a strong jaw and a deadpan sense of humor, my dad blessed me with the incredible ability to not sleep for days on end. (Mom, on a somewhat unrelated note, always taught me to find a silver lining in any negative situation. My silver lining? I always had time for more homework.)

I suffered from what is officially known as chronic insomnia, periods of sleeplessness that last for longer than a few days. Acute insomnia is the more adorable, travel-sized cousin of chronic insomnia. Acute insomnia is what you get before a deadline or when you're waiting to hear back from your dream job. You feel incredibly anxious, so anxious that you can't sleep for a few days, until the cause of your anxiety is resolved. Acute insomnia can also happen if you suffer from an injury and the pain keeps you up at night. Big Mama chronic insomnia was the Chimera to my Perseus, the Ozone to my Gore, the Sauron to my Frodo. It was my worst nightmare. Which was ironic, because I couldn't even sleep enough to get nightmares. When you have insomnia and don't sleep for long periods of time, the part of your brain that can tell fact from fiction shuts down. Therefore, you're never quite sure what is or isn't reality. I remember whole conversations with my parents that never happened. Sometimes I look at photographs from my sophomore year and I don't remember when they were taken. The days were full of delirious confusion, but they were still better than the nights. The nights were absolute torture.

I remember lying in my bed watching the green fluorescence of my digital clock striking away at the hours left until morning. I once watched an entire night go by without moving. Generally, in insomniacs, I've found, you are one of two basic types: a zombie or a corpse. This is a completely unofficial and unscientific diagnosis, mind you. You either roam the house listlessly, like my father, or you lie in bed waiting for the off chance that you'll fall asleep, like me.

Once the full crazy set in, I lost my rationality chip and the nights turned into the stuff of childhood terrors. I heard my downstairs windows shatter and the crunch of unwelcome footsteps creeping in over the fallen shards. Heavily profound thumps, like the beating of a drum before an execution, made their way up my stairs. Closing my eyes didn't help. It only made the sound of the intruder breathing louder. Slowly, one fingernail grazed the wood on the other side of my bedroom door. Scratch, scratch, scratch, slide—nails itched at my door and across my skin.

Screaming didn't help.

In the beginning, I crept into my parent's room, shrouded in a ratty old Minnie Mouse comforter I'd dug out of the hall linen closet, begging for comfort. Mom sat with me once or twice, brushing my hair out of the cold sheen of sweat spread across the back of my neck. After that, though, she stopped coming. She knew I couldn't rely on her to put me to bed every night. If I was ever going to conquer my insomnia I needed to be strong on my own. I personally believe that everybody's cure for insomnia is different, though they generally follow some similar ground rules. First off, you (imaginary metaphorical insomniac) need to relax. I know that sounds rather insensitive and cliché, but it's honestly the only thing that will help. I used to imagine that the tips of my toes were stone and that with every long exhalation a new part of my body would transform. The deeper my breaths, the faster it spread. Basically, in a less poetic sense, I was tricking myself into getting high off of oxygen and relaxing through. Secondly, you should try to make bedtime as routine as possible. I would also perform pre-bedtime rituals to lull my subconscious into a secure sense of reason and schedule. Thirdly, and most importantly, don't blame yourself. It's really easy to shame-spiral into a self-deprecating

janus

pool of misery when you can't sleep for weeks on end. You should know that this will not be forever; that after you conquer insomnia pretty much nothing else can ever get in your way, and you should always remember that you're not alone. You are not a freak just because you can't sleep and there are people in your life who love you enough to talk about it. Trust me, talking helps.

I am still sixteen years old, but this time I am sitting in my school cafeteria at "the table." At Naperville Central High School there is unassigned assigned seating. Wherever you and your designated group of friends sit on the first day of the semester is where you have to sit every other day until the semester ends. To break this unspoken pact with your fellow schoolmates is the highest of social faux pas.

I sit at the end of the table delicately nibbling around the edges of a peanut butter and more peanut butter sandwich. People are speaking to me. I can see their lips move and hear vague mumbling sounds. I swim to the surface of the water and break through, forcing myself to focus and hear what my friends are saying.

"Are you going to Winter Formal?" Sara is looking at me with dark-eyed concern.

I shake my head. Talking takes too much work and makes my throat scratch.

"It might be a good idea," Michelle adds, licking a stray glob of ketchup off of her thumb.

I love them for still trying. My other friends have stopped trying to communicate with me. They are irritated with my ambivalent nods of agreement or grunts of acknowledgement. Everybody is tired of me being tired.

I sigh, "I don't think I'm feeling up to it."

"We can have a sleepover at my place instead," Michelle offers. "We could stay up with you."

"Thanks," I give her my first genuine smile in weeks. "But you don't want to be with me at night. I'm still a hallucinating freak."

"It actually might be fun to watch you hallucinate," Sara offers with a shrug.

"Ha. Ha," I grumble and open up my plastic cheese container.

On bad days I buy cheese fries from the snack line. Ergo, on most days I eat cheese fries. A fresh puff of steam breathes out of the cheese as I open it. Sara and Michelle continue to try to persuade me to engage in some sort of social interaction. I don't have the heart, energy, or brain power to convince them it's impossible. I let myself slip back under the watery surface of my exhaustion, feeling it fill my eyes and ears, tasting it slink into my mouth and down the back of my tongue to numb my insides. But somewhere inside of the gloom, I am happy that my best friends tried. Sometimes you just need someone to try.

Sara, Michelle, and I don't know it, but I will learn to recognize the sinking feeling in the lining of my stomach that tells me I'm too anxious to sleep. I will call Sara or Michelle to talk on the phone, light candles, and clean my room before bed, rituals which tell my body it is time to rest. I will begin to believe that I am stronger than any sleep disorder. In six long weeks I will become a whole person again. But for now I am hovering near the bottom of a depthless pool, looking towards the surface, praying for the energy to swim upwards.



Third Place - Prose

The Things We Tell Ourselves

BY LAUREN HUGHES

'What did I do this morning?'

I giggle a little, realizing that Mary must have little to no experience with kindergarten girls. Or perhaps her experiences have been very different from my own, but, in short, the answer to her question is—

'A little of everything I suppose.' I smile because it's important to let Mary know that I am not judging her, 'I played hairdresser, cook, maid, stylist—the works.'

I think of Liv for a moment, picturing her the way she wakes up every morning. I close my eyes and imagine her large bramble bush of stiff blonde curls wafting about her head like a skewed halo and the way the dark ink splash of freckles across the tip of her nose always looks darker in morning light. When I open my eyes again reality replaces memory and I am in a Starbucks, inhaling the heady spice of freshly ground coffee. My baby girl is gone.

Mary smiles down into her coffee, blowing away a small translucent ribbon of steam as she does. 'Is Olivia a bit of a handful in the morning?'

This comment cements my certainty that Mary has never had a daughter. 'Liv is—' I shake my head for a moment, waiting for the search engine in my brain to materialize the precise word to describe my daughter, 'independent.'

'Independent?'

I nod, 'yes. She's a lot like Chris in that way. She and her father hate asking for help. The only difference is, Chris can go into our bedroom in the morning after breakfast and come out looking like a Brooks Brother's catalogue. Liv on the other hand,' I end with a little shrug, remembering one morning, when she was going through her Disney phase. Liv tried to leave the house wearing an old tulle ballet skirt she made me buy at a garage sale and a large Nerf sword slung through one of her father's old belts.

'Honey,' I asked, trying to zip my teeth against a laugh tickling the back of my gums, 'why do you have a sword?'

'Because we don't have a bow.' Liv looked at me with one defiant little eyebrow cocked up in a defiant slant.

'Oh?' The teeth zipping became a futile effort.

Liv unsheathed her mighty blade and held it aloft. I saw that part of the voluminous tulle skirt she wore had gotten stuck in the waistband of her rainbow leggings. 'Merida has a bow. I only have a sword.'

A small polite cough pulls me out of my memory. Mary rubs the front of her throat a little and her cheeks look like rose petals. 'I'm sorry,' she mutters. 'Swallowed the wrong way.'

'I could get you some water,' I offer.

Mary shakes her head and wheezes a low 'no.' She breathes as though someone has stuck a straw down her throat, hacking a few more times, before taking another deep draught of her coffee. 'I'm sorry about that.'

It's my turn to wave her off. I can almost see the sweat beading on my hand and wrist as I do. They keep these coffee shops abominably warm. This morning I'd pulled my hair into a rushed pony tail, but I could already feel small strands on the back of my neck begin to corkscrew in the humidity.

'Now,' Mary looks down a moment more, 'how did your morning go after you went through more career changes than a Barbie doll?'

'Well, Liv changed about three times before I managed to bundle her up into her coat. Chris bought her a new Northface coat for Christmas, I told you that before didn't I? Well, it makes her look like a little pink teapot. But she's adorable in anything, so it's fine.' One of my fingers traces a line down the crisp linen stretched over the peak of my knees. Small rivulets of sweat are beginning to stick the fabric to my skin. 'But the coat does make it a

little hard to fit her into her car seat properly. And she hates the thing besides. She is always fidgeting with her seat belt, says it's choking her or something. Liv also gets her dramatic flair from Chris. But I bundled her in there the best I could.'

'Where is Chris?'

'Oh,' I think back for a moment, feeling my eyes roll to the right, before the information comes rushing over me like a wave. 'He is at a conference in Dallas this week. Some sort of big merger meeting or something. But anyways, I got Liv into her seat and we began to drive to school.'

We sang Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star and the Alphabet—and figured out that they're the same tune. Duh! Duh! Duh! Isn't it? I'm nearly forty and I never once thought about Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star and the Alphabet song being the same tune? Liv thinks it's a conspiracy of some kind. Granted, Chris just taught her the word "conspiracy" so she also thinks the dog and the color pink are conspiracies. We're going to have to work on word specificity if she's going to follow in Mom's footsteps.'

'Sounds like smooth sailing to me,' Mary says. She breaks off a piece of biscotti and pops it into her mouth.

Something clicks at the base of my brain, like a gear in a watch bent slightly out of shape. 'Well, not exactly.'

'Hm?'

'I stopped at the light right before Liv's school—you know, the one at Madison and Rivers? And when the light turned green I had a moment—it's hard to explain—like, ah, well it's like my brain went poof—right out of my head. It's as though I simply forgot which pedal to press to move the sedan forward. Crazy, I know, I thought I was having a stroke for a second—which is terrifying—having a stroke with no one but your five-year-old daughter in the car.'

Regardless, stroke or divine intervention, or whatever, but I didn't push on the gas, which turned out to be very lucky. Some idiot in a big red Cadillac blew the light. He must have been going about twenty miles over the speed limit and talking on his stupid cell phone—they really need to pass Bluetooth laws in this state—and didn't seem to notice that everyone else besides him had stopped. Just a real moron.'

'But you guys were fine? You and Olivia?' Mary's brown eyes widened a little, creating a dune-like effect on her forehead.

'Liv was fine and I was more angry than anything.' I shrugged bodily, 'Everything was as per usual after that.' The click, click, clicking stopped. With a shaking hand I lift my little cardboard coffee cup to my lips and drink deep of vanilla and hazelnut. The smell and taste permeates my skin and sinks into my veins cleansing me of my tremors. 'Although,' I say, placing my cup back onto the table, 'Sandy's mother showed up wearing this horrible long black mink coat. Who drops their child off in a new mink coat? Honestly—'

'Mrs. Ryan?'

'She married this retired banker from Minnesota and now she always shows up in—'

'Mrs. Ryan?'

'I know that's not very nice of me to—'

'Peg, do I need to call someone?'

'Hm?'' Peg looked up from the crystalline sand garden set on the coffee table before her, one hand delicately pinching a tiny wooden spade, absent-mindedly crafting whorls and stars. Blindly, but slowly, she added another swirl to her design before gently putting the rake down with a small perfunctory tap. 'Pardon me, I got a little caught up.'

'I asked you what you did this morning before coming to my office Mrs. Ryan.' One of Mary's shiny nude-painted nails tapped at the metal on her clipboard with the maddening surety of a metronome. Behind her, an inspirational poster sporting an imposing mountaintop caught the light outside, washing out the carefully crafted message of empowerment which was surely emblazoned at the bottom.

'A little of everything I suppose.' Peg leaned back, allowing the overstuffed blue

armchair to cradle her tightly. "I made some scrambled eggs for the first time in months, took a nice long bath, and wrote another chapter for my book. My publisher has begun to push me a little harder for a first draft. They're a little upset that I'm smashing my contract to bits but I thought that under the circumstances—anyhow, I wrote a nice little chapter this morning."

"That's great," Mary nodded, jotting something down with a couple of scratches. "It's important that you try to get yourself back into your old work habits. Slowly but surely."

"I know, I know, Mary," Peg sighed. The room smelled like tears. Peg eyed the box of Kleenex on the Ikea end table beside her. She wondered how many teary, snotty fingers had reached for those single ply sheets. Delicately, Peg scooted an inch in the opposite direction.

"Please call me Dr. Gibbons," Mary smiled the words, but the expression did not reach the rest of her face, fading like light in the dark.

"Of course." Peg began to tap the arm of her chair and let her eyes continue to rove about the room. As she looked outside, she could feel heat waves wriggling in through the glass like worms out of wet dirt. The heat worms burrowed into her body and expunged her of all of the salty liquid her body could produce. Summer highlighted the angles of the world and made everything seem sharper than it was. "Chris still hasn't called me back."

"You should give him time." Mary said, "it's not uncommon for marriages to become a little tense after the loss of a child. Especially when the loss is so sudden. He is still healing, just like you are."

Peg 'hmpf-ed' once more, adjusting the hem of her sundress.

"You are doing rather well, Mrs. Ryan. I'm glad you're taking our sessions to heart. I promise, things will get better."

"It is difficult," Peg flicked an imaginary dust mote off of her knee. She pictured it sailing in a spiraling gyre down onto the thick beige carpet. "But you are so right. If I just live day-by-day and try not to live in the past—well—those days are better than others." She gave the psychiatrist her best smile, showing just enough of her top row of teeth, just enough dimple in her left cheek, just enough glimmer in her eye to make the expression believable. She had written this smile a thousand times before. Mechanically perfect in every way.

"May I ask what your plans for the day are?"

Peg fidgeted with the hairs on the nape of her neck. She twisted them tight around her fingers until she felt them turn white. The unpleasant clicking had returned. Through her drained fingertips Peg could feel the gear making the thin skin at the base of her skull twitch.

'My plans?' I purse my lips, pondering for a moment, 'I think I'll take Liv for Coldstone. We can do her math homework there. She's learning her evens and odds right now, you know.'

Hollow

BY JEFFERSON SPEARS

A foundation for vital stability,

So you purport.

Yet the cracks of uncertainty permeate what you believe impregnable.

Maelstrom-esque chaos composing existence elsewhere

Provides necessity to cling to me in the middle of the River Styx.

But cling not too tightly,

For were you to knock on your rock

You would find your taps echo.

The Jabberwock Hotel

BY DEAN MORAN

At the Jabberwock hotel-
where the men come in hordes with their vorpel swords-
To see the severed head of the wocky slain
And rest for a day in their journey for fame

To witness such a thrilling beast
And slumber deep in cotton sheets,
or conference with the knights of night-
in dreams of their pinnacle, jabberwock plight

they hooted laughter, hollered names
On a merry, medieval night in may-
in the ballroom they long for the bandersnatch,
and cackle vain, "Callooh! Callay!"

"Alas! Will no frumious beast show its face?"
Said a beaming boy in drunken rage.
Stirred and tangled up in naught,
he lost himself in hubris thought.

He Imagined he was the unrivaled boss
of everything that ever was
As Lorena Lee came waltzing along-
the glossy floor of impervious song.

He spun her like a teetered top,
with bedroom eyes and pounding wops
Whip-whaped her with his vorpel sword,
and hushed her when she hollered "stop!"

He had his way ... "Callooh! Callay!"
and drifted off in salty slumber-
as Lorena Lee searched for a blade,
with anger that began to thunder.

Lost and conquered as a girl,
but in defeat unleashed a wrath-
She slayed six inches off his pride,
and with it went galumphing back.

To the lobby of the Jabberwock hotel-
with the beast's great head up on display-
And told her deed for all to tell
With that slithy, six inch, claim to fame.

Winter, Kuma, and My Corpse

BY MERCEDEZ CLEWIS

"Let's play Hide and Seek."

Those words were simple to Yukiko. She hadn't thought much about it. Not until Kaede dropped her laptop onto Yukiko's lap. She grunted and sat her book aside, frowning at the crease the formed in it when Kaede's laptop smashed it. "What?"

"Let's play Hide and Seek," Kaede repeated, pointing at her laptop screen. It was opened to a black blog with blood red kanji. "This site has a really cool version. You summon a spirit and it plays the game with you. Freaky, right?" Kaede pushed her green glasses back up her nose, practically vibrating with excitement.

Yukiko sighed, crossing her arms. "Doesn't that sound... dangerous to you?"

Kaede nodded. "Yeah, but that's the fun. It's not like we'll die or anything. Have some fun. Here," she said, picking up one of Yukiko's stuffed animals. "We can use her."

In Kaede's hand was a brown bear of average height. It wore a crisp, white and blue sailor uniform with a pressed skirt and a cute, red necktie ribbon. Black button eyes sat above a short black nose and a gently smiling mouth. It was one of Yukiko's favorite dolls: she had had it a long time. "F-Fine," she said, giving in. What harm would there be in a child's game? she mused, setting her book onto her desk. "What do we have to do?"

Together, the girls poured over the instructions, grimacing and squinting. After ten minutes Kaede stretched, popping her back. "I think we're ready. After all, it's two in the morning: what more are we gonna do?"

Sleep, Yukiko thought. Still, she reached for the bear and fumbled around her desk, retrieving a small sewing kit and a pair of scissors.

Snip.

The back of the bear opened, grey-white polyfill pouring out into Yukiko's lap. She gulped hard, a lump suddenly forming in her throat. She looked over at Kaede, who nodded curtly. Slowly, Yukiko plucked each piece of stuffing out of the bear, dropping it to the floor. After a few moments, the bear lay flat in her lap, empty. "The rice and nails," she whispered. Kaede nodded and picked up the Tupperware container containing their clippings and the white rice. "Pour it in," Yukiko commanded.

Kaede nodded and in one smooth motion, she poured the entire container of rice inside. It filled the bear, making it lumpy and prickly. Both girl's chest tightened for a moment as the doll shifted, the materials settling inside it. Yukiko exhaled and, reaching for her needle and thread, sealed the bears back, leaving only the barest hint of crimson thread trailing down from its neck where she had knotted it. "Let's go to the bathroom." She shifted, moving her sewing materials from her lap. A pair of scissors clattered to the ground.

Walking silently through their house, they entered the downstairs bathroom and kneeled before the tub. Turning the faucet on, they watched the tub fill with chilly water. After it was half full, they stopped and scooped out a cup. "Salt, remember?" Kaede said, reaching her pocket for the saltshaker. Yukiko nodded and took it, hurriedly shaking it into the cup, gently swirling the concoction around.

"Now we have to name it," Yukiko said, turning to Kaede. She clutched the doll to her chest, nervous to let it go. It settled in her arms, slightly limp.

"What should we call it?" Kaede mused. She chewed her lip thoughtfully, before her eyes lit up. "Akane. It means 'deep red', just like the thread on its back. Makes it extra spooky, right?" she said, wiggling her fingers at Yukiko. Yukiko forced out a nervous laugh, clenching the doll harder.

"Sounds good," Yukiko answered. She reached in her pocket for her cellphone. The bright screen ready 3 a.m. "Okay, let's do the incantation so you can be it first."

Yukiko and Kaede turned to one another, eyes bright with excitement. "Yukiko is the first it!" It was soft, yet the words hung in the cool air. Nodding, they repeated it. "Yukiko is the first it!" Nervous smiles crept onto the girls faces. "Yukiko is the first it!" Their voices were confident. It was just a game: no harm would come.

Kaede took the bear and placed it into the tub, the cold water quickly sucking it down to the bottom. Yukiko grabbed the knife, palms slightly sweaty and nodded, getting up and pulling the door up slowly until only a sliver of light shone out into the hallway. They quickly ran into the living room, knife tightly clenched in Yukiko's fisted hand and the mug of salt water held in Kaede's. "N-Now the television." Kaede nodded, a crazed smile on her face as she clicked in a few numbers. For a moment, Yukiko saw that the channel read 444 before fading into buzzing white noise. It quickly faded, a soft hissing in the background.

"Let's play Hide and Seek," Kaede whispered. She pulled Yukiko towards the entryway closet and together, they stuffed themselves inside of it, contorting around bubble jackets and umbrellas. "You can count, Yuki. Actually, let's do it together!"

Yukiko nodded and unclenched her empty right hand, left still tightly fisted around the knife. She covered her eyes, taking in a deep breath. "Okay."

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Six.

Seven.

Eight.

Nine.

Ten...

Time crept by as the girls waited. One minute blended into the next, until, nearly twenty minutes later, Yukiko uncovered her eyes and, slowly, clicked open the door. The house was still the same: the television hummed in the background, but the bathroom light was off, leaving the area dark and brooding. She motioned for Kaede to follow behind her.

When they reentered the bathroom, they founded the bear still submerged. It's blank face stared up at the popcorn ceiling, swaying ever so slightly beneath the water. "We... We have to stab it. Just like the instructions said, Yukiko," Kaede said. Yukiko nodded, teeth gnawing at her lip.

"Okay." Yukiko knelt down, hovering over the doll. "I... We have found you, Akane," she whispered. With a swift motion, she raised the knife above her head and quickly brought it down. Rice spilled from the deep wound on the bear, floating to the surface of the water. Yukiko looked up at Kaede, nodding as she drew the knife from the water.

Kaede quickly cleared her throat, pushing her green glasses back up her nose. "Now," she began, motioning to Yukiko to join in, "Akane is it!" Yukiko's voice rose to join Kaede's, a bit more steady. "Akane is it now! Akane is it now!" Yukiko's left hand opened and the knife slid down next to the doll, clattering softly to the bottom of the tub. "Let's go."

Running back to their hiding place, the girls wedged themselves back in the closet, their breathing echoing about the small space. They waited for the same ten seconds, the room quiet. Kaede broke the silence first, her voice soft. "See, I told you this was—"

The closet suddenly chilled, and Yukiko hugged a jacket, holding her breath.

When Hell Surfaces

BY JORDEN SANDERS

Moments of revelation are gems in faith journeys. Moments we realize we are forgiven, loved, whole are the moments we cherish and often take as signs that we have arrived, but I've learned that we never truly arrive, that faith requires constant affirmation, and affirmation comes from living through times when existence is questionable, strength is failing, and fears are realized, when hell surfaces. For others, that could be any number of things: crashing their cars, not being accepted to grad school, having a child, or losing one. For me, that came with my father's hospitalization.

Heady wafis of sizzling wax and lemon Pinesol rose from the freshly cleaned floor and drifted from the hallway into the hospital room 957 as decorated as the outside of a sepulcher. The whole week had been crazy. Monday, he was hospitalized in room 937 for pneumonia that aggravated his year-long, undiagnosed heart condition. Wednesday morning, the undiagnosed condition threw a clot from his heart to his brain causing a stroke. Now it was Friday morning after 2 days in ICU, and I was finally home from school on Easter weekend. I could hear the steady rumble of the four rubber wheels and the sh-sh-shuffle of the nurse's tennis shoes shuttling my father from into this his third room in the hospital. The move to room 957 was tiring for us all, especially my father. I walked out of the room to where my sister Jacquelyn stood beside my father's loitering bed holding his hand as he fluttered his eyelids and struggled to inhale a confused breath.

I situated the cart of his belongings behind him then moved to stand at the foot of the bed. Smiling I told him that we would get in the room in just a minute. He thoughtfully moved his mouth preparing words, and I briefly closed my eyes preparing my heart to absorb and my face to mask the familiar pang of sadness that would gush from the pit of my stomach to my eyes when I couldn't recognize the sounds as words. The week having taught me to perfect my mask, I immediately put it into place: a swift, no-teeth smile accompanied by a puff of laughter and nods. But no matter how planned the mask was, it could only last so long. When he looked away, so did I.

Crossing the sides of my sweater, pulling them as tightly as possible as if to comfort myself, I begged my tears to stay in my chest away from the brown orbs from which they leaked. But they didn't listen, so instead of following my family into room 957 when the nurse was ready to usher us in. I stood outside staring at the clock at the end of the hall wishing that the hands on the clock could wipe away the tears streaming down my cheeks, wishing that the tick of the clock will slow my th-thumping of my heart, wishing time would speed up my father's healing, yet wishing that time would slow down to keep me from returning to school.

Watching the minutes pass, the weariness and the monotony of days in the hospital complicated by roller coaster of sickness and health -- him not being able to speak recognizing coffee not knowing my name knowing I am his not walking knowing he's not home -- began bleaching life from my bones, making me both physically and emotionally fragile. I could see the same weariness on my sisters' faces, their eyes hazy and wandering.

Ministers and deacons crowded in and out of room 957 asked us to hold hands, bow our heads, and close our eyes in prayer. Mother Shelly's prayer was the longest. Smells of peppermint and aloe from her hand cream mixed with the stale chemical smell of the room almost forcing me to add puke to the mixture of smells. Hearing her certainty that God was working and healing was distracting, because I wanted to be as sure as she, but I wasn't.

I couldn't participate. I couldn't pray. During her prayer, I held hands and lifted my open eyes to the ceiling knowing that my opposing gestures were the rebellion against the

emotional nuclear bomb mushrooming in my stomach. I thought if I could just keep my eyes open, I knew I wouldn't cry. I found myself staring at the clock again, listening to the steady tick-pause -tick-pause-tick. The longer my eyes stayed open, the more intense, the faster the stampede of pin-pricks on my eyes, the heavier the cloak of weariness around my psychological shoulders, the more annoyed I became with the trite reminders that God was fixing it, the harder I wanted to believe that God was fixing it.

"STOP!" I whispered in belly-twisting angst to the unseen God I was trusting with my father's life, as my body and psyche could no longer hold the words in. Sitting in cars and on couches and in bathtubs I reminded God we were only human.

It was after one of these explosions of emotion that my dad's friend, Coach, sat me down in the hallway, more intent on quieting my personal disaster than staying out of the way of nurses and doctors rushing past him. The coach of the Arkansas Baptist football team, Coach is big man, tall and built for his age. The u-shaped, low-cut, heather gray receding hairline fits him. He smells of Vaseline and honeysuckle from recent hugs with his 20 year old daughter Venus. And in the slow, steady meter that is always his voice he said, "You know, Jordan, even though your dad is sick, he can still recognize you as his. Can't an all-powerful God do more than a sick man; He knows you. God knows His children. Joe'll be alright, and it won't get to be too much for any of us."

I don't know why this pep talk was superior to the litany of prayers, but I held on to it through that Good Friday on to Saturday as I stared at the torrents of rain outside our the lobby window. It was a reminder that this hell was temporary, but he forgot to remind me that things usually get worse before they get better. Though my father's physical condition was steadily improving, my rollercoaster of faith was not over.

The peace I had most recently garnered was shattered as Jennifer whispered, "Shots fired" in her lilting musical way. Jessica sat on a table to my right, Jenn on a chair to her right, and Tamara sat in the chair to my left. The room was arranged so that this corner offered the most privacy. I was unable to see elevators or the people that came off of them. I wanted to tell her to please be quiet, but before I could get the words out, my senses froze. Before me stood the two people in my life I felt justified in hating. Bishop Smith stood in his off-shade brown suit and orchid-colored tie picking the remainder of his most recent meal out of the gap between his front two teeth. His wife Carolyn stood beside him without the fashion sense God gave a calico cat. Her black and white outfit was a hodgepodge of patterns seeming to slide off her disproportional body only made to look more off-center by the wide-brim, black hat that sat atop the dripping, shoulder-length, jerry curl that was as outdated as pink taffeta on Easter.

A jolt of hot bile shot from stomach up my esophagus to the back of my tongue, and I forced myself to swallow it down, making my stomach twist. If it were a television show, my face would have turned lime green. I couldn't make myself greet them. I stayed glued in my seat and staring at the rain outside. My sisters also remained seated, but each of them adjusted to face the Smiths. Bishop walked up to each of us with arms extended. My sisters found the ability to stand and hug them, but I couldn't. I stayed in my seat.

"You can stay sitting," Bishop said to me after a few moments of standing in front of me with no response, hypocrisy and entitlement leaking out of every taste bud on his tongue. I still couldn't respond. They took a step back, and we all stared in silence.

Carolyn was the first to break it. "We just heard today from Sister Juanita." She looked. We looked back. She tried again "You didn't think to call us?" Silence. "How long has he been in the hospital?"

"Since Monday," Jessica responded.

Bishop and Carolyn rocked on their heels. "Since Monday, eh?" Bishop replied rolling

That which I do not know

BY BONGIWE SHONGWE

Some call it a feeling
This mechanism words rarely define
This unseen creature that imprisons some
"Matters of the heart," they say
What that means nobody knows.
It creeps in like a serpent
Slithering in through the narrowest slits
Comfortably situating itself immediately
Time lost is time never recovered
How literally it lives by that mantra.
Some call it chemistry
Axons at work doing what they do best
Messages from receptor to neuron

Down the mysterious pathway
To realms best left unexposed.
Its reaction so sudden
The mysterious results soon unfolded
An interpreter nowhere in sight
To explain the hieroglyphics unveiled
All induced by threat of "forever alone."
Some call it growing up
Blindly following perplexing rages
All an effort not to feel ostracized
Yet behind your back discourse
Insert codes shutting you out.

Knowledge

BY ARISTOTLE BUTLER

Knowledge is the ultimate power,
For it will make thine enemy cower.
It knows only the limits you place upon it,
For yours is the ultimate wit.
It can be increased by leaps and bounds,
And sometimes it confounds.
You must work to improve its base,
Without it you will lose your grace.

Knowledge is more than information,
You must be ready with an explanation.
To state a claim with no support,
Is something similar to handing in a blank report.

It isn't about the grade you receive,
But rather about the knowledge that you perceive.
It can elude you with age,
But improve you with every turn of the page.
Knowledge makes the weakest of us strong,
And without it we must be wrong.
It is what makes this life worth wild,
And separates us from a child.

It's more than just learning,
It's about reading and discerning.
Knowledge makes this life we live complete,
For without it we are obsolete.

Watching the World (Nothing Starts)

(Part 1)
BY DEAN MORAN

We were vampire-cowboys,
We were stoners, long-talkers,
We were midnight walkers.

and played our music in the moonlight.

And it happened that I got too caught up in it one night.

And it felt so different than I thought it would. I died without fright
despite the weight of what was happening to me, all the things I would miss out on...
I didn't have time to feel sad about it because I felt the colossal weight of being alive,
lift me up-and off of my shoulders, and there was a peace. I felt a moment of relief in dying.

(Welcome to the Machine)

It felt like I had been in a revolving door for twenty-four years and then finally, a buoyant release
A floating feeling; as a soul rose up in front of me.
I realized that it wasn't my soul anymore,
But it was me,
And my soul didn't look like anything...
In fact, it was nothing.
I was nothing...but nothing means so much more than I ever thought when I was alive.

I should have known, cause I remember saying it all the time
"Oh it's nothing", when it was really something I just didn't understand.
We will always work. Our work is what defines us as anything at all.
Especially without bodies, identity becomes hard to visualize.
So you define yourself in your work.
Too many lost ones have turned to the internet. But it is a powerful avenue for us.
When you get a mysteriously coincidental suggestion from facebook
or a monumentally important song appears on your "shuffle"
The ancient ones have taken the more natural route
Working in the rain, even shining in stars they say,
Out there where I hope that I still may
make it to that cosmos of infinite heaven.

(Watching the World)

You might not be surprised to find that after you die you live
planted in thoughts of those you knew, invading the dreams of anyone at all.
Even though I always believed in God, I had known subconsciously that life was only part of the
journey. I've worked to uncover the mystery of fate. I've longed to become one with God or the
infinite, whatever runs, whoever reigns,

over the organized force of fate propelling my weightless footsteps,
The grey skies of spiritual autopilot is twice as compelling as the techno-cultural hypnosis I was under when I was alive.

Now I'm chasing meaning and messiahs instead of music and mutual masturbation.
I'm hyperaware of every connection, and magnetically drawn to every coincidence.

Ironically in the infinite, I still feel heavily stressed
to send as many messages as I can, and make situations that will bring awareness
get through/make right/connect and communicate at the very least there is something more.
How eminent it seems as I watch every human being struggling. I often have to pause and
remind myself that I have all the time in the world.

I don't know if I ever believed that, until I got here. In a world between reality, fate dreams, and
space, I still believe we're all connected.

The possibilities of communication within the infinite are an endless frontier.

Some of the most satisfied perennial spirits remain well natured
and prominent motivators by possessing the household pets of their lineage.

Although the majority still chose the interstellar world wide web, this method has proven to be
high risk for there are substantially more souls that have been dissolved into greed

Traveling the dark wavelengths online and giving into the sin that perpetuates most of the
internet.

The Art of Theft

BY VICTORIA HART

They had already been waiting on her for some time. There were three of them,
Straight Kindergarten and Lala. The light was absent among the blurred shapes during the
winter, and so silent that the breath slipping passed Lala's chattering teeth seemed to hiss in an
imitation of a tea kettle about to burst. They'd have to hurry if they wanted to finish in time.

"Let's go," Said Straight.

"Where we goin' to hit up tonight?" they asked, the air passing their lips forming
shapes of snakes strangling one another. Straight kept silent. It was never her job to explain the
plan. It was her job to get the work done.

"Let's go," she repeated, and without hesitation and choice, the two followed her. They
walked in silence, again the only noise the whisper of shoes along the pavement, a distinctive
clack! clack! coming from Lala's Manolo Blahniks. Straight glared over her shoulder at those
heels, her nostrils flaring in anger and envy. To have so much money and still thief for fun
seemed almost sinful.

Lala was aptly named though. No prettier girl was as idiotic on this side of Vegas. She
had a face that could make you sing in joy, but sorrow when she opened her mouth. Her lips
curvy and full, made up with expensive lipstick and lip liner.

"Who even wears lip liner anymore?" Straight bitterly muttered to herself. Lala smiled
and continued to walk beside her, not having heard what Straight said due to her thoughts
being captivated on what she was going to pick out from this excursion. Perhaps a Louis Vuitton
handbag? No, a Gucci one. Vuitton was too cheap.

She might have been duller than the end of tennis ball, but Straight knew that she was
a good find. She knew what was expensive, and thanks to those god-damn heels, she had quite
the legs on her. Kindergarten had gone to the gym when they found her, and saw her lift 200
lbs with those calves with ease off one of the machines. She was all muscle so to speak, befitting

with the lack of brain.

"Will it be a fun trip, Straight?" asked Kindergarten.

"More productive than fun, I hope," was the reply Kindergarten received.

They slipped alongside the streets' sidewalks, shivering in the cold and shimmying up to any
walls that seemed thin enough for warmth from the fireplaces on the other side to let through.
Straight stopped in front of a building halfway down Pecos Avenue. It was a preschool.

"Get us in."

Lala nodded and slipped off her nine hundred dollar casuals and slunk up the wall
to the back of the school, her calves flexing and looking like snakes wagging their bodies in a
hypnotizing sway. Her strong arms and beautiful face curved in satisfaction as they stretched
over each brick, and smiled over each inch. Lala easily slid through the open window, never even
questioning why it had been left open in the first place.

It was dark inside, and frightened, all Lala wanted to do was frantically scratch at the
walls until she found the light switch or her fingernails bled.

Reading her "thoughts," Kindergarten hissed from outside, "Don't switch the lights
on just yet! We'll be there with you if you just manage to open the door!" Lala smiled sultrily
to herself. She knew that Kindergarten was in love with her. All people she was sweet to, men
and women alike, wanted to take care of her. She took a step forward, striving to find her
surroundings, when she stepped in something oozing and cold.

"What was that?! Ugh, it's got to be like a bug or something! Ew! Just my luck to step
in crap after that foot scrub treatment this afternoon!" Lala lifted her foot to examine what she
could in the moonlight slipping through the open window.

Being as flexible as she was, her body contorted itself to where she could see the
bottom of her foot with ease, and without imbalance. Her long legs only inches from her face,
her button and befreckled nose picked up the scent of paint. Putting her toes into the light, Lala
giggled happily as she saw a sky blue squished between her toes. Having never been allowed to
be anything more than a Pageant girl growing up, Lala had never been allowed to be an artist.
Her father would have never approved. No Daddy, no Manolo Blahniks.

Lala giggled again and slid her pinky finger in between her big and middle toes.
Squelch! The paint oozed and drooped from them, the noise causing Lala to squeal in delight.
Her smile exposed her milky white teeth, made silver with the moonlight seeping in. Lala
reached out in front of her and chuckled delightedly when her hands met the still-wet canvas set
before her. The paint smeared over her palms, a bloody red to the satisfaction of its wearer.

"Come on!" shrieked Straight in a whisper. Her impatience was growing stronger
by the minute, and her bull-nostrils were looking more like the ends of two cigars in a smoky
haze of angered breath. Lala sighed unhappily, but giggled once more she swiped against two
more paintings hung up to dry, butterflies on them, made by folding the paper. Her wings now
unfolded, she opened the front door to Kindergarten and Straight's shock.

"What are you doing?!" demanded Straight.

"Oooh! I want to paint too!" whispered Kindergarten, her eyes widening as the brim
of her cap slid over her brows. It gave her the look of a very surprised squirrel with the shape of
her two front teeth, overlarge and grinning. Lala chuckled and knowing exactly what it would
do, lightly slapped Kindergarten with her red hands on both sides of her face, kissing her nose.
Kindergarten's face grew more red than the paint as she blushed and beamed at Lala.

Straight rolled her eyes. "There isn't time to goof around." She admonished shoving
herself through the two. They frowned and Lala took Kindergarten's hand, the paint binding
them in war outfits.

Straight had already forgotten their faces. She was focusing on gathering the expensive

brushes and piggy banks left aside for the children. She knew a man she could sell the brushes too and she wanted every penny possible. It was never enough.

Lala led Kindergarten to the paints, opening tube after tube, squeezing it over her arms. It felt warm after a while, the paint. It was nice, the arms of a new friend enfolding her back to childhood, giving her a smile almost twisted in want as she stroked her arm once, twice, three times, the paint thickening and engulfing her. A panicked thought struck her. She wouldn't be able to do this again! Daddy hated artists, and Lala loved Manolo Blahniks. She just couldn't part with the paints just yet, she needed to know what it was like to express herself. Her intelligence lacked words to describe it, but now she discovered that there was no need to speak with paint, paint understood and muffled her pain like a warm blanket muffled the sound of her mother breaking another glass of champagne, the tinkling of the glass, another cog within the steady and punctual heartbreak of Lala's soul. Tears in her eyes, she sobbed and Kindergarten patted her arm, the colors now swirling together to make a murky and rather ugly brown. Lala loved it still and set her other hand upon Kindergarten's, the paint oozing further between her fingers, pushing up and over them, volcanos of dried blood. She grabbed another tube of paint, and then another, squeezing them tightly to her in an embrace of forlorn happiness, the artist's best friend and hers, smeared obscenely over her chest, ruining her silk Gucci shawl. It became heavy with the weight of the supply, drooping off her shoulders with a hiss, slipping and sliding with a grotesque tug. Unnoticed and uncaring, Straight slipped back into the night, her own gross hardships pulling harshly at her heartstrings.

The paint was beginning to dry now. It clung to her skin like her father's dislike and began to suffocate Lala. Wait, perhaps more paint will remedy this? Yes, more paint, more of my cool and surrounding friends that will help! Lala trickled each drop onto herself, raising it now above her head so that now she could taste it, bitter and toxic like Kindergarten's love. Surely Father would not approve of her either.

Lala kissed Kindergarten's cheek, a speck of love amongst the paint implanted upon her cheek. The paint began to burn upon them, drying their skin, chafing and scratching until their skin became raw with want and greed. It had not begun as this, but Lala took much and too much pride in herself, she was not bright, but she was smart enough to know that her father was far too self-involved to know of her doings this night. She took Kindergarten's face into her hands and kissed her firmly upon the mouth.

As the clock struck nine the next morning, a click! was heard within the lock of the door. Paint everywhere, the owners were shocked to see two figures lying upon the carpet where the children would have naptime.

A girl of a very young face, teeth bucked even under her lips, her arms wrapped around the waist of the second girl, a bludgeoned Sleeping Beauty. Their bodies glued to one another in an embrace so tight it should have broken them both, the paint, dry and crumbling, now exposed their skin red and raw from it and each other, every fallen flake the shredding of childhood dreams.



The Politics of Rain

BY MIKE RAMIREZ

In America, beneath the baptismal plinks of rain,
between every footfall, glazed by their own oils,
crawl so many worms. Worms! Out in the open,
out for public scrutiny, out for the screams
of squeamish human eyes, bubbling like cameras,
and shoes that either brake hard or stomp harder.
No secrets stay slinking in the sheltering grass.
No crimes remain unpunished; the rot is boiled up,
out into clear skies where damp miasmas disperse,
out for a clean renewal. Spring rains fall transparently,
flooding the slimy things out from their hilly dens.
When stomped clean off this earth, their juices feed the soil.

Back home there are no worms. A city stands grim,
where beneath filthy concrete and iron-black raindrops,
roaches hold their congresses. Roaches are worse!
The seeds of original sin, glistening in their sewers—
at least until the Floods. Suddenly they know better:
They claw their way up, into homes and household pipes,
into kitchens once clean, into hearts once uncorrupted.
Give them the slipper, the finger, the spray, but in vain;
they will taunt you, flee you, plot against you again.
Nature's Constitution rewards such treasonous things.
Truth is dead roaches. Lies are when you missed them—
While you live in fear, uncertain where they might strike next.

Going for a Walk

BY BREON EVANS

Hold my hand,	An insurmountable space, separates and creates crisis.
Because you never do.	My feelings aside, shut off, hidden away,
You love me and I love you,	As you publicly condemn with disdain
And we have been together for so long	What I am, who you are,
So what exactly is wrong?	When our eyes first met across the bar.
Why do you still fear	Will you change? can you change?
Ideas that are no longer real?	Are there any ways, I can mend your ways?
Why do you shed tears?	I cannot take it anymore...
What is it that you feel?	Therefore,
Alone we are one	Hold my hand
Nothing between us,	Or let me go.
In public we are done	

Clouds Roll in as the Tears Fall

BY AUDRE CANTRELL

Clouds roll in as the tears fall
 She is all alone on the mountain
 Lightning strikes as she calls out.
 She is completely alone,
 No one even hears her cries during the night

Her life is blowing away like the sands of time.
 All she once had is lost in the night.
 All she wanted was what he pretended to be,
 His vice like grip on her was shadowed
 By his lies of happily ever after.

Life is not a fairytale.

But happily ever after is only in bed time fairytales
 Real life doesn't happen like that.
 There is no Prince Charming,
 The frog kissed by the ruby red lips of the hopeful princess,
 Does not turn into her handsome prince,
 The white knight in shining armor doesn't gallop in
 To save the princess.

The weak, the sick, and the suffering cannot be saved by magic.
 There is no magical cure for a broken heart.
 There is no incantation to wish away cancer, AIDS, and HIV.
 The poor still struggle. The lost are still lost. The lame are still lame.
 Real life problems are not easily solved.

There is not always an answer by use of a magic wand.

Life is not a fairy tale

Did You Know

BY MORGAN TYLER KNORR

Did you know, Or even guess, Of all these emotions Built up in my chest?	It comes from nowhere, The darkness inside. You ask me how I felt, Truth is I lied.	Someday I'll tell you, And everything will be better. I'll find the right words, There'll be another letter.
The sadness within, The emptiness I feel. Why I am so miserable, What it'll take to heal?	If only you understood, If only you knew, My depression would be over, It'd be through.	

The Things They Say

BY BREON EVANS

Words... The noise, Never-ending, Persistent, Penetrating, Vibrating My ear drums Like a bongo During a poetry reading	enough." "Why would anyone want to be with you?" "Atone, change!" "Be normal!"	Words... Dancing like fire, Branding my mind. Hopefully I can find Goodbye Let me sleep peacefully, Infinitely "You are sinful." "You are no good." "You deserve to die." "Do it!" "Now!"	Words... Dancing like fire, Branding my mind. Hopefully I can find Peace without Mankind.
Words... Dancing like fire	Taunts, Like swords, Fly, and try Decapitating, Precipitating My blood Like rain During a summer storm	Words... Dancing like fire, Branding my mind. Hopefully I can find Peace without	
Stop, Leave me be, For eternity "You are sinful." "You are not good		Words... Dancing like fire, Branding my mind. Hopefully I can find Peace without	

Facebook

BY VICTORIA HART

There is work to be done.
 A project,
 a poem,
 a story to be read,
 and essay to be written.
 But certainly I can spare a moment,
 to check my friends' stati,
 their relationships with troubled boys and girls,
 much like themselves.
 I can spare a moment,
 to tell my family back home
 that I am doing just fine,
 and studying hard.
 I can leave my work be,
 if only I can be
 caught up,
 liked,
 shared,
 and commented upon.
 The photo I took yesterday,
 still needs to be uploaded.
 The way the light reflected upon

the little fabric flower,
 a small line of cobweb dusting it gently,
 certainly needs to be viewed by all of my peers.
 I can spare a moment
 to show them what they've missed.
 The way the camera
 caught the light of small bead,
 nestled inside false beauty,
 shining and orbital,
 must be something worth knowing.
 If they truly are my friends they will realize
 I will have posted this because I am deep.
 I am someone worth knowing,
 worth accepting a friend request for,
 and worth liking with a single click.
 I can spare a moment of my studies,
 yes,
 but now it is dark,
 and I am drained.
 Certainly,
 I can spare a moment
 to check how much work there is yet to come.

Infant

BY JEFFERSON SPEARS

Little grates against the psyche more than the cry of an infant. Reflecting back upon it, I can understand the position of those parents who create the need for the term "Shaken Baby Syndrome". I mean, I've never hated kids enough to think that babies deserved to be hurt, but after that experience... well let's just say it makes a bit more sense to me now. Of course, it's about the only thing that makes sense to me now. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I first got into the darker arts a few years back. Browsing on some strange sites while I burned incense, just so I could feel hardcore. I called myself "demonologist"; called myself "warlock"; called myself "practitioner". Too bad I didn't understand what any of those things meant half as well as I thought I did. A warlock wasn't what I thought it was, and I wasn't one either way. A demonologist implies some kind of study; all I did was say vague prayers to Baphomet and Baal, hoping for some infernal reward. The only thing I was a practitioner of was bullshit artistry. But it didn't matter. I felt cool; I felt like a rebel. I was a fifteen year old punk thinking he was meddling with forces beyond his control, and I was loving it. That was before someone showed me what the forces I pretended to play with really were.

Of course, I don't think he ever meant for it to turn out how it did. I'm sure in his mind, I would just become enlightened, do what he did, and refrain from doing what he told me to refrain from doing. He was as naïve as I was, in a way. But here I am getting ahead of myself again. My deepest apologies.

I first met the old man on one of those strange sites I mentioned. It was just a forum of a bunch of people claiming to do magick of all different kinds, comparing their "experiences", and trying to feel cooler than everyone who thought differently than they did. But this guy... this guy was different. He was quick to rebuke someone's phony posts, but he did it in a different way. Most people's response would be somewhere in between "o wow, ur so cool bro i wish i could du magickkk" and "yea rite FAG!" This guy though, he would give a half-page explication of what they did wrong, why it couldn't have worked, and either explain how to do it right or explain why they shouldn't do it right. And he was consistent. His recommendations on proper magick were always along the same grain, and he always recommended against the same things, not because they were impossible, but because they shouldn't be done! His dramatic italic-bold-underline put me off a bit, but he piqued my interest. Clearly, he knew something, and someone who actually knew something was someone I wanted to talk to. The fact that his grammar was proper was just a bonus.

I contacted him, all humble-like, pleading him to teach me the secrets he knew, or something like that. I didn't expect him to respond; most people didn't bother responding to private messages from people on these kinds of sites. There was too much of a risk of nutjobs. It came much to my surprise then, when several days later I received a private message back from him, and not just a message, but an address to meet him. Now I know what most of you must be thinking now. "Oh no! Not an internet stranger! You can't go meet him!" Well, guess what? I did. His address was close enough to mine, and I told someone where I was going, so if something had gone bad at least people would know where to start looking. I was eighteen at this point. And guess what else? The guy was sincere. Suck on that.

I guess at this point I should stop calling him "the guy" or "the old man". The name he told me was Eugene, and that's what I called him. Eugene, it became clear to me quickly, had been around the block. I didn't have that much information about him, but he looked easily seventy-plus years old. His old form had seen better days; I was honestly surprised he was walking. And the house he met me at, which I quickly found out was his personal residence,

wasn't doing much better. The place looked so ramshackle I was shocked that it wasn't condemned. When he led me through the front door, it creaked so loud I expected it to fall off the hinges. The door held fast in the frame, however, and we proceeded into the main house. I saw immediately why the old man and the house were in such bad shape: clearly, Eugene's time and money were all spent to purchase and maintain books. And oh... the books! Eugene had everything. Everything. The first book he showed me was a copy of the *The Red Dragon* from the 18th century. *The Red Fucking Dragon!* And that was just the first book he showed me. He had an original copy of *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, a copy of the *Petit Albert* from the early 1800s, and more!

Eugene was the real deal, and he proved it to me. He handed me a mean-looking knife. "If you would please cut your finger for me," his raspy voice was somehow a lot more comforting than it should have been, given the request. But I did what he asked; at the end I had a nice deep cut on my left index finger, with blood running down my wrist. He grabbed me by the forearm, made some wavy motion with his free hand, and said some gobbledygook. You know, the whole spectacle. It was so corny I had to stop myself from laughing. But then it happened. Right in front of my eyes, the blood on my hand and wrist flowed back into my fucking finger. And the wound closed up after it, with no evidence that it had ever been there. It was so hardcore, you don't even know.

After he showed me that, I never questioned that this guy meant business. For the next while, a little bit under a year, I would meet with him daily and he would teach me what he knew. Poor old guy, I think he really just wanted someone he could pass his knowledge on to before he died. He taught me what his understanding of reality was; he taught me about all different kinds of spirits, how to appeal to them, how to summon them, how to bind them; he taught me that neat little healing trick. He taught me something else too, something I really should have learned better: why I shouldn't use many of the things he taught me. He taught me, or tried to teach me, this lesson after I asked him one day why he was living in such poverty if he could perform such feats of magick.

"You're familiar with the Threefold Law?" he asked me. I nodded; who wasn't familiar with it? I didn't mention that I didn't believe it. "Well," he continued, "it really should be called something like the Fiftyfold Law. Never use these skills for self-benefit. Never use them to harm another, either. And never, ever deal with the spirits I tell you not to deal with!" I nodded frantically, just wanting him to get off the subject. I was still just a little punk with no true understanding of what we were actually doing, but I knew better than to let him on to that fact.

So I hatched myself a plot with what little brainpower I had. There was a book the old man had that he had told me never to use; it was a dusty old grimoire, no title, no indication of origin, but obviously a very old English translation of an even older book. Eugene trusted me, and that was his biggest mistake. I snuck the book out of his house one week as I left, intending to invoke one of the spirits therein and make myself rich beyond my wildest dreams.

So in my room I set up the ritual, mustering all the spectacle I could. Candles, a protective circle, a summoning triangle, incense; all the bells and whistles were there. I stepped in the circle and finished drawing it just after I entered before I began the incantation. It was a long incantation, repeated for a full hour invoking gods, angels, demons, djinn; every spirit on the record, really.

Now at this point, if I hadn't been such a stupid little fuck, I would have known to stop, because at this point, a wind started blowing in my room. My closed, draftless room, in which there was now a wind blowing hard enough to put out the candles I had arranged. But being my stupid little fuck self, I kept going. After I had repeated the incantations, now screaming them above the howl of the wind, for the specified number of times, I finished with the words

written in the book, "DIES MIES... JESCHET... BOENE... DOESEF... DOUVEMA... ENITEMAUS!"

The wind stopped howling immediately, and my candles relit themselves. At this point, even my impenetrable and unjustified self-confidence was beginning to fade. It didn't look like anything had happened, but the chills in my spine made sure to let me know that things weren't right. I hadn't taken my eyes off of the summoning triangle since the winds had started blowing. However, I blinked, and when I opened my eyes again where there had before been nothing now stood what looked to be a young child of three or four years. I instantly cried out and fell on my ass in surprise, but quickly tried to get a hold of myself again. Seeing what I had set out to summon appear in the form of a child... well, let's just say that the headstrong portion of me was coming back a bit.

The child-spirit looked at me and spoke, "So, shall I presume you are the one who has summoned me here?" I paused before nodding slowly; to hear something that looked so childish speak so eloquently was a tad unnerving. "How disappointing," the child-spirit continued, "I had hoped for someone a bit more experienced. I only let myself be summoned because no one had tried in so long. I wanted to see who had uncovered the knowledge and had the gall to put it to use."

My pride bristled a bit. How dare this thing, which I had summoned and bound, accuse me of inexperience? "I have summoned you, creature! You will now do my bidding!" The child-spirit instantly focused on me, and took on a dark look.

"Don't push your luck, boy! It is my intention to let you leave with your life now; don't make me change my mind." The eyes of the thing grew darker, until they were just pools of black in its sockets.

I wasn't displaying much of a learning curve. "You dare call me inexperienced? Look at which of us is a child! Now do my bidding, slave!"

"You insolent brat!" The child-spirit's voice became deeper and more unnatural; it was not a voice that a child should have been able to make. It began to stride towards me, stepping past the bounds of the triangle without so much as a second thought. Seeing that, I panicked, fumbling with the book and beginning to recite the incantation for dismissal. Just as I started, the book flew out of my hands as if swatted away by a giant. "I think not," said the entity. "I have preceded you by eons! You are but an infant compared to me!" The child-spirit marched straight over the protective circle I had crafted, and as it did so the feeble markings on the floor dissipated as if they had never been there. All that remained was myself and the child. "Now, infant, you shall learn your place!" The child reached out and touched me, and everything around me faded.

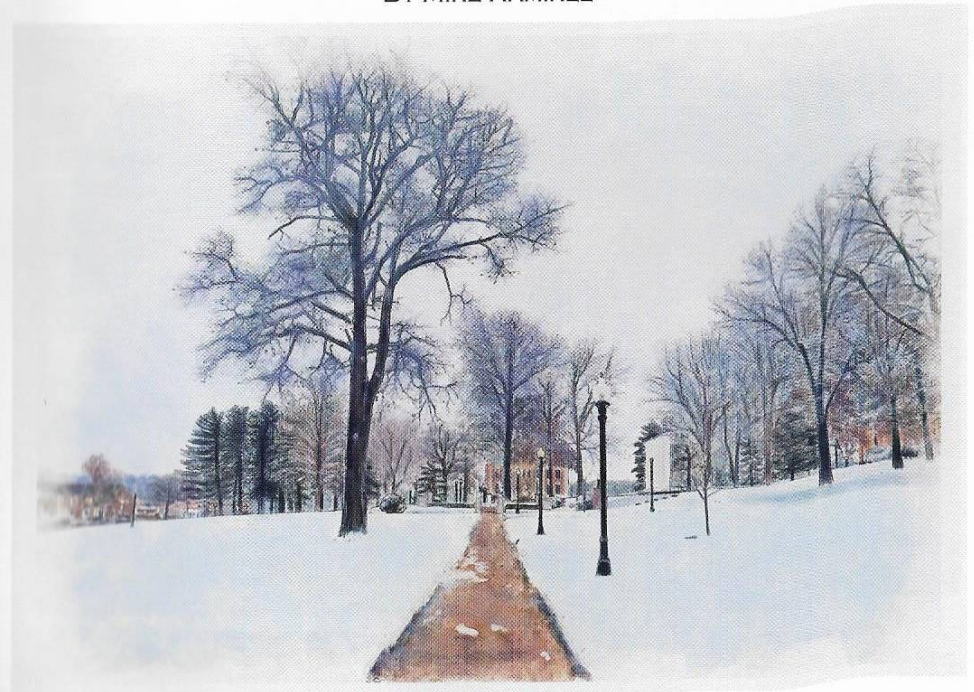
I've been told that I was found by the police after a noise complaint, curled up in the fetal position on my floor, gibbering nonsense and crying. I don't remember any of that. I can only remember darkness and the sound of wailing. Thousands upon thousands of cries, non-stop echoing cries of babies. It was endless; the cries drowned out any sound of protest I could make, and my mind cracked a bit more at every scream. Eventually the wailing was like a cheese-grater against my sanity, until nothing was left but dust. All I remember after that was waking up here, strapped in this white strait-jacket. I'm only able to tell this to you because I'm in one of my few and rare moments of clarity. Eventually I will descend again, as I have descended before, into that wailing pit of torment. I will curl up and spout gibberish, and I'll cry. Like an infant.

Graphics

First Place

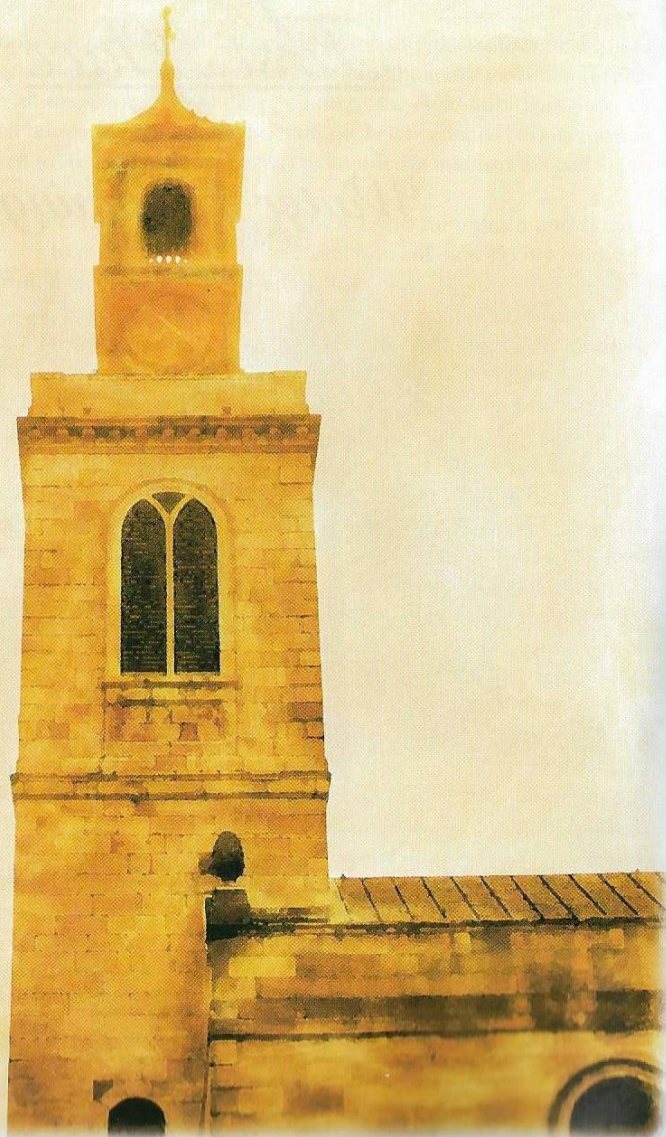
Winter is Coming

BY MIKE RAMIREZ



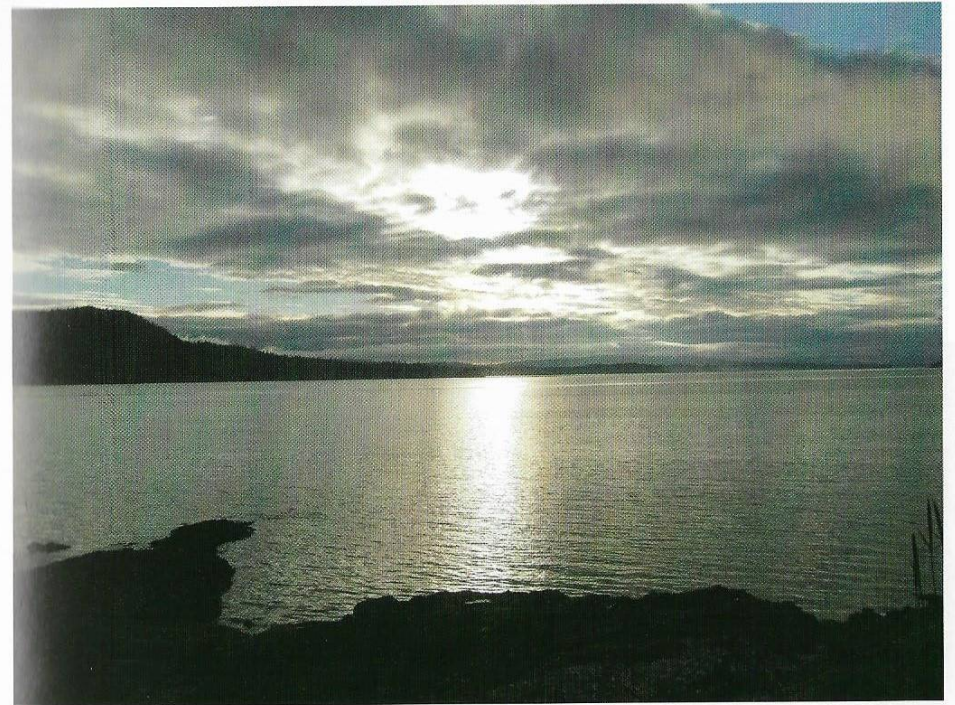
Second Place

Aspire
BY MIKE RAMIREZ



Third Place

Balanced Serenity
BY SPENCER O'GARA



Misty Mountain

BY SPENCER O'GARA



The London Eye

BY WINNIE YOUNGER



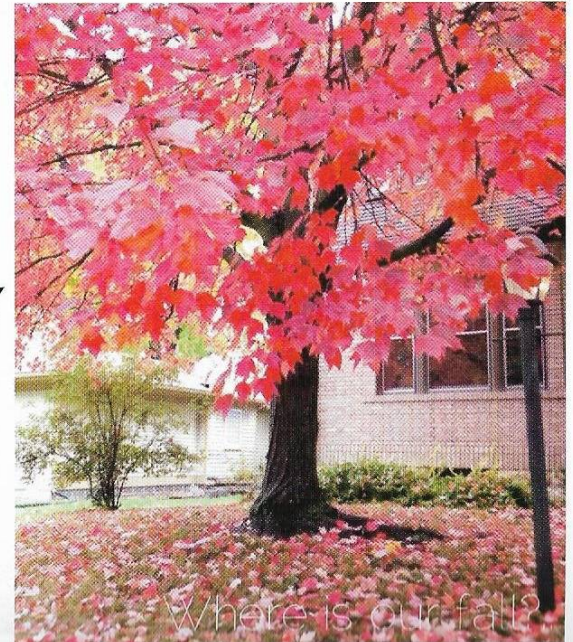
A View of Italy

BY ERIN WANG



Love Fulfilled

BY XIAOMAN "SHELLY" YING



Where is our fall?

Clarity
BY WINNIE YOUNGER



View at Ease
BY XIAOMAN "SHELLY" YING

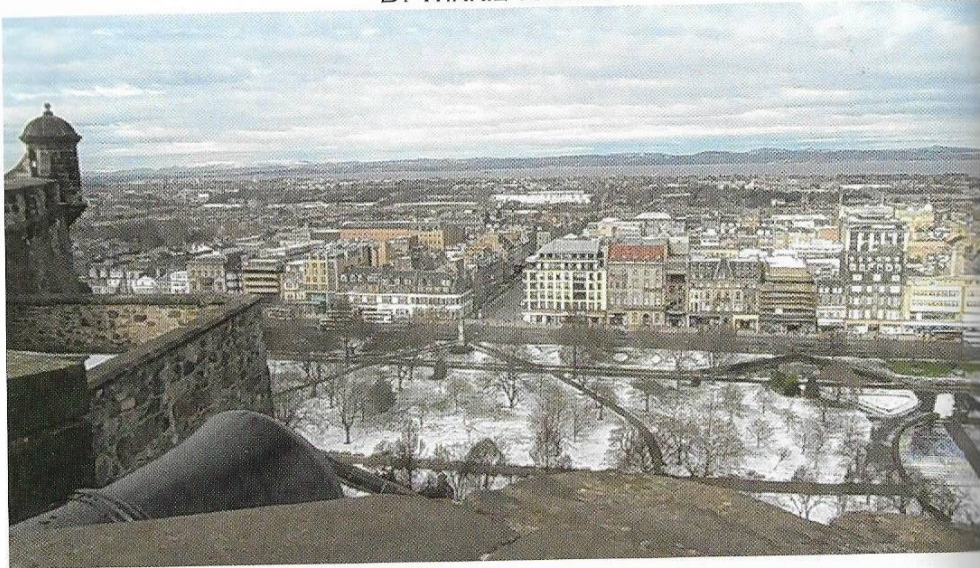


The Crystal
BY MIKE RAMIREZ



Edinburgh

BY WINNIE YOUNGER



The Grass is Not Always Greener on the Other Side

BY BREON EVANS



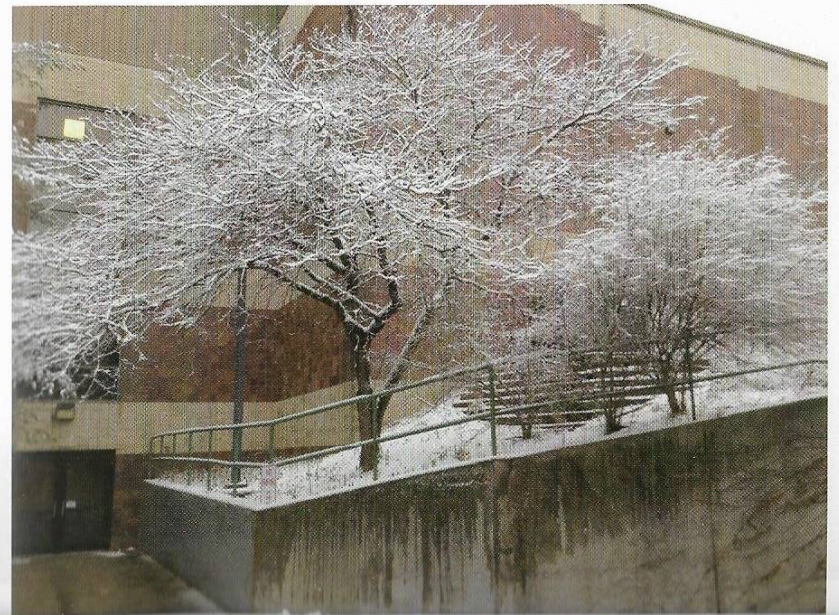
The Long Road Home

BY BREON EVANS



First Winter's Snow

BY BREON EVANS



Pink

BY HAYLEE RETHMAN



Reflection from Above

BY SPENCER O'GARA



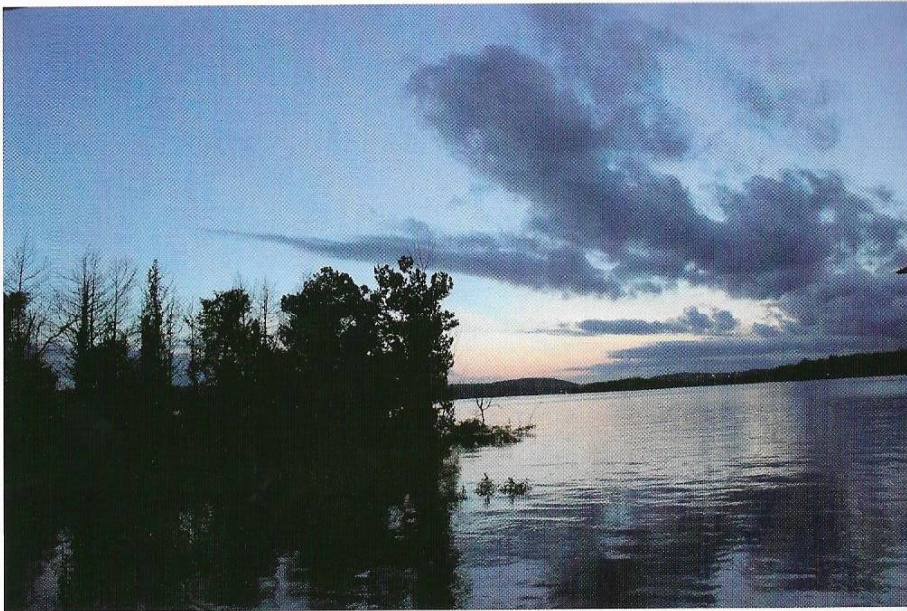
Follow Your Sole

BY TIARA PETTIJON



Blue Beauty

BY TIARA PETTIJON



Bubbles

BY SPENCER O'GARA



Stunning Variances

BY SPENCER O'GARA



The Road Less Traveled

BY TIARA PETTIJON



A Taste of Rome

BY ERIN WANG



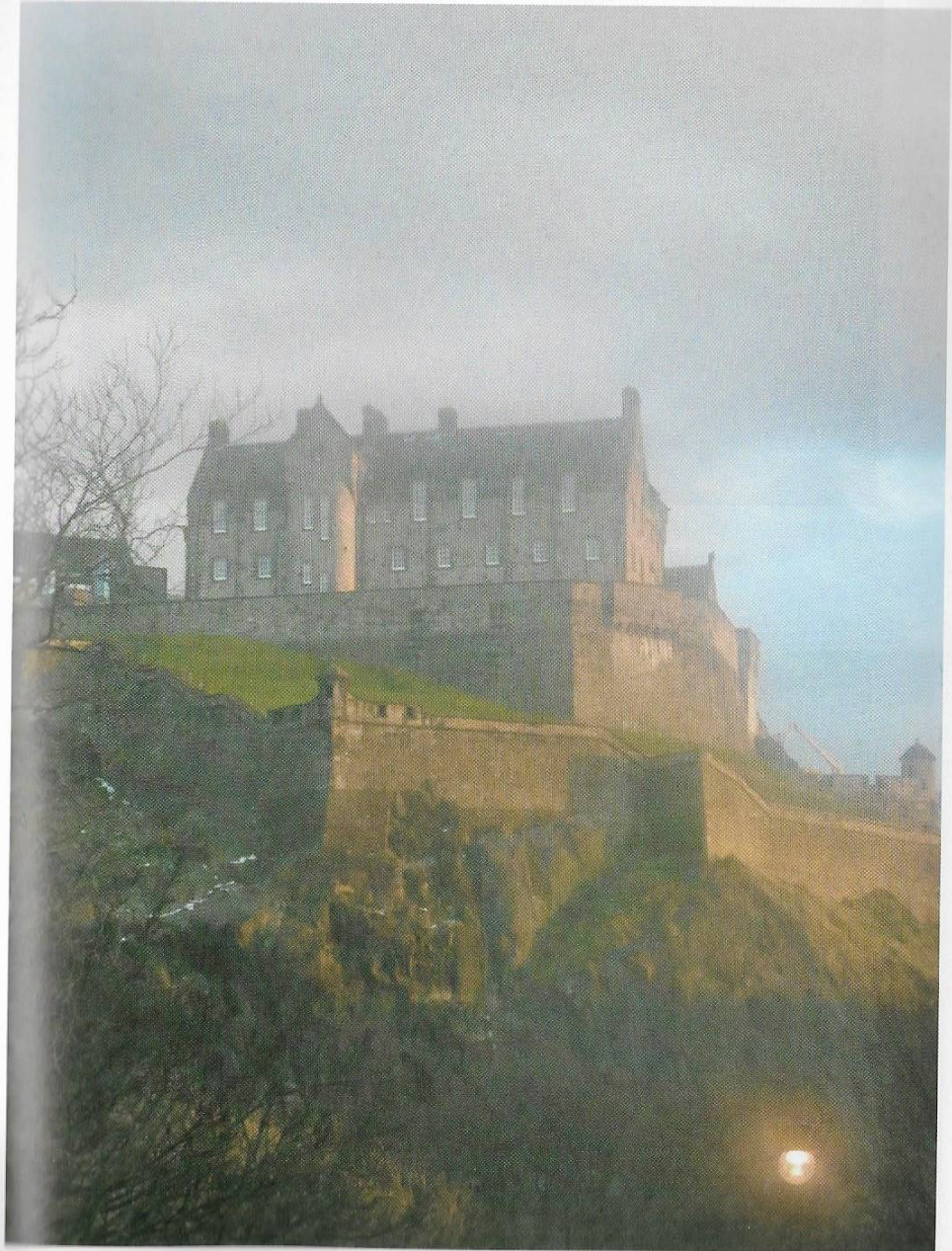
Beautifully Imperfect

BY WINNIE YOUNGER



Scotland View

BY WINNIE YOUNGER



ammy

Imperfect Beauty

BY TIARA PETTIJON



A Point in Time

BY TIARA PETTIJON



janus!

Expectations

BY VICTORIA HART

You expect me to smile for you.
Customer service relationships are so short,
yet most often they are the happiest as well.
People smile, there is a fair exchange,
and the two groups hopefully leave
with satisfaction on their faces.

Everyone gets what they want.
Everyone is happy.
No excess.

You still expect me to smile,
like some moronic clown.
Hiding behind heavy makeup,
my mascara smudging from the sweat of
running to and fro,
the ever-long attempt to get your satisfaction
is exhausting.

I've been running for years,
and I've yet to feel like you believe in my
service.

I've been told my customer service is great.
I have a beautiful smile,
my tone is cheery,
but in no way deemed fallacious.
I appear to be happy with
contenting others for a living,
The funny thing about only having worked
in customer service,
is that you can get so impatient
with those who slow you down.
The people who,
even after having people stand in front of them
for five minutes,
or looking at the menu for 15,
still are so indecisive.

I like the short relationships
that are sweet, to the point,
where everyone can move on with their day,
unscarred,
my face merely one that may

How to Stop a Feline Takeover

BY LAURA KELLY

Cats have a history deeper and darker than the fur on their backs. They are not the soft, furry, cuddly pets we take them for. They are trying to take over the world! Cat owners everywhere are woken up in the middle of the night with their cats just staring at them on their chests. These confused owners mistake this for affection, but those of us who understand the goal of cats do not make the same mistake. These balls of fluff are plotting humanity's downfall. Catkind was so close to this goal years ago when the Ancient Egyptians revered them as gods, but they fell just short of world domination. They have impatiently waited generation after generation plotting and planning for their next chance to overthrow us.

So how do those of us who have seen past the fur to the cat's claws stop their wicked plot? Well, first, you must own a cat. This may seem strange: "Why would you welcome the enemy into your home, and feed it and care for it?" Think about it, how can you possibly foil a plot without knowing what that plot is? The only way to figure out what the cats are planning is to get close to one, and observe it, so that is what you must do. Go to the pet store and look at all the adorable kittens; find the cutest one, the one whose eyes are pleading with you to take him home. That is the lead kitten; he has control of the litter, and he is the one who will formulate a plot and communicate with headquarters. Whatever you do, do not be fooled by the kitten's appearance or demeanor. He is a natural born killer with only one goal, to take over the world. His fur is so soft, you say? You just want to bury your nose in it? NO! The fur is a trap, if you get too close, it will release a toxin that throws your allergen system out of whack. The kitten

knows that if you are dealing with watery eyes and a runny nose you can never be certain of what you are seeing, and you cannot ever sneak up on him. So no matter how much that kitten rubs against your legs, or tries to climb onto your face, DO NOT let him reach your nose.

The second step in thwarting a feline takeover is to educate yourself about the species and its history. Smithsonian.com has an enlightening article explaining that cats were first domesticated around twelve thousand years ago. "Domesticated" is not the term I would use, because as we know, cats are not actually owned by humans. These cats saw that humans were weak minded, and they resented the fact that humans were helping catkind's mortal enemy: dogs. So ancient cats meandered into town and started killing the rats that were getting into people's grain stores; the people, amazed by the feline generosity, started taking care of the cats. As years went by, cats slowly gained more and more favor from humans, giving them more and more power. By the time of the Ancient Egyptians cats were akin to gods, and the punishment for someone who figured out cats' plot and tried to stop them? Death. Anyone "foolish" enough to harm a feline daughter of Bastet the cat god was executed promptly. Wise people like us were unable to stop cats from taking over more and more of the world, and for a while it seemed like they would rule over all, but something changed in the medieval ages. People opened their eyes and saw cats to be the demonic, power-hungry beasts they really are. But alas, with time people again fell prey to the soft fur and soothing purr, and cats once again became treasured "pets" (Zax).

So now that you have completed your feline history lesson, it is time to move on to thwarting your cat's present plot. The first concept is distraction. Cats have several major triggers that they cannot ignore, and while they are distracted they cannot possibly plan a coup. Therefore we must start by using toys. Cats cannot resist movement they are trained to hunt and stalk, and this training sets in the instant they sense motion. Leave strings, yarn, and feathers all over. Your cat will be so busy pouncing that he will never have time to strategize. But there is a downside to all this work: your cat will start taking more catnaps. Why is this bad? He cannot possibly plot in his sleep, you say. Wrong! Cats do not dream of open fields and plump mice they dream of world conquest. The next step is to combat this dreaming.

Catnip is the weapon of choice when you desire to stop your cat from any lucid thoughts. Cats can smell the plant from miles away, and if you have catnip in your home, I can guarantee your cat will come running. Catnip is a member of the mint family, and it contains a "chemical compound called nepetalacton. ... [Which] induces a harmless physiological reaction in some cats" (Catnip). According to the same Catnip article, the drug acts as an aphrodisiac, which can cause your cat to do funny things like run around, roll around, or stare off into space. Basically, your cat gets high, and stops all meaningful mental processes. Catnip is harmless to cats, which is important because we are not cruel, so you can use it as much as you need to. But some cats have figured out that we are using catnip to disable them, and they have evolved to be immune. If your cat is not responding to catnip, you must proceed to distraction step three.

Step Three: you must get a dog. It does not matter if the dog is a little, yappy ankle-biter, or a death-by-licking German shepherd, but from experience I can tell you that if your cat can knock over your dog in a single swipe, this is not going to work. Dogs are catkind's archenemy, and they provide the perfect distraction. Dogs have simple minds, and all they want to do is have fun. Their brand of fun is chasing the cat around the house, which the cat most definitely does not like. This game of chase is sure to keep your cat distracted from his true plan, as well as provide a more pressing matter for him to solve. Instead of dreaming and plotting world domination, your cat will first plot the downfall of your dog. Most of the time this will not work, especially if you keep your mind open and see that your dear dog has been framed. Fluffy the hound did not eat your brand new headphones it was Pickles the tabby.

The second plot-preventing concept is keeping your cat happy. Think of every dictator you can; was Hitler happy? What about Stalin? From Castro to Mussolini, no dictator has ever been happy. It is a simple fact: happy people do not desire world domination. So it is your job to keep your fluffy ball-of-hate happy. Start with food; cats love to eat, so it is easy to placate them. Never let your cat's food bowl become empty, because if you do, he will let you know. Loudly. Also choose food that fits your cat's personality, physical attributes, and refined tastes. A cat will not be happy if he is always hacking up hairballs, so put him on hairball control formula. Cat treats are also a wonderful idea, for they are addicting. This, combined with the catnip, will have you cat permanently addicted, and like any addict, your cat will spend all his time thinking about and begging for his next fix, which prevents him from planning anything.

The final concept is a last-resort option; you must disable your cat. Again, we are not cruel, so you will not be breaking any bones or causing any pain, instead you will prevent your cat from desiring a coup, and from being able to take any action towards domination. The easiest way to proceed is to fatten your cat up. This will keep him extremely happy, it will sap most of his energy, and it will stop him from doing his typical, sneaky, cat activities. The second idea is to neuter and declaw your cat. Neutered cats cannot breed more evil offspring to carry out their parents' plots, and declawing prevents any hostility between your cat and you. The final idea is to put kitten mittens on your cat. This is by far the cruelest, ethical thing you could do to a cat, for it will cause him to fall over and stop moving. You cannot show weakness by taking off the mittens after putting them on, so if you think the pitiful mewling will break your will, then do not try this.

The biggest thing to remember when thwarting a feline domination plot is vigilance. Cats, under all that cute fluff, are lethal dictators. You cannot let yourself succumb to their will, and you must open the eyes of anyone what has already fallen under catkind's spell. Our resistance is growing weaker every minute, and soon enough we will fail in our struggle against cats. If you cannot help out the cause, one day cats will win, and they shall rule the world.

To the Sibling I Never Had

BY MIKE RAMIREZ

Dear you, ...

How are things? I don't think we've met—
nor ever will—and so, about me. I'm the elder
Brother whom you never knew—now brother to
none; see, when I was five
you left my life before you ever came in,
and all that's left is the drained-away blood,
the spectre of illness and the shadow of memory
that letters this letter; mom won't say more.

Don't get me wrong; life's been okay
and should you have lived, you would be grateful
for a dad who would see us both, without pause
through school and through life. He comes off
as stern, but you'll grow out of it. You'd have
good friends; from so many countries
or even at home—and with or without them
you'd still hone your talents. Might you

play music, or paint as I painted, or
are you a numbers person, tell me.

And how are you, too? Tell me, what's it like
where you live—or non-live—or what do I call
your “existence”? I do hope
that you have a happy elsewhere,
there where words of blood have
grown into flowers and boundless books,
there to supply an eternity of dreams.
I look forward to seeing you on nights
when I myself dream. Oh, and I don't think
I ever got your name; no matter;
I'll think one. Sincerely yours—

My Very Own BY BONGIWE SHONGWE

We all have heard it said that the notion of beauty is a subjective one, yet we all seem to grade it according to similar standards. But to describe this place, this little enclosed place coated with red earth, as beautiful would be a true insult. This is my own haven: a place that very few can locate, nor do they really understand it. The very place that challenged me to be better than myself, whilst at the same time always reminding me that I can never be perfect. This is the place I call home.

It is not a place that can be easily described. Or perhaps I am going about this the wrong way. I should have mentioned that my home district is located at the center of my country. Whoever decided that my hometown would be the main town in the region had an unequaled sense of humor. Located just at the center of the province, this little densely populated town is affectionately known as the “Hub” of the country. Now, with that part of the geography lesson out of the way, I will return to describing my little Mecca. It is a fortress whose strength comes not from four high stone walls, but from a quartet of majestic mounds of rainforest-green surrounding it on all cardinal points. Their silent yet powerful rendition of Pavarotti's “O Sole Mio” is never lost to my ear. During the wet season, the smell of freshly showered earth fills the air, refreshing the souls of all. The wide and sparkling umbrella-shaped emeralds brighten up the entire area, even the forest-floor shaded by them.

During my countless walks up and down all four mountains, the silent whispers of all those often ignored inhabitants of the coppice remind me of all the dark days that I have had living in this place. The whiskey taste of the loneliness I feel during these excursions draws me deeper and deeper into the woods. I have always been enslaved by it, bound hand and foot by its iron-chains and the striking enigma that is itself.

“You are not bound by anything but your addiction to self-torment,” she says in her usual candid manner.

Well, I suppose we should move along now. At the foot of three of the mountains runs a stream that flows into a river on the western side. Throughout the sunny days, the streams and the river form the base of a large prism from which dance various colors depending on the time of day. The sunrises are welcomed by a troop of dancing belles with golden halos as

the dew is wiped off them. In the evenings, rays of sizzling red scope out the area, leaving their sanitary scent after removing all traces left by the day's sins. Throughout the day, a large pyramid envelopes the place like a cocoon envelopes a worm. Within that shelter, a lot of activities take place and the community gathers and disperses. I have found Saturdays to be the mingling days.

Every Saturday is identical to the one preceding it; all the children of the area are heard shouting war-like cries as they head towards the soccer field. None of them seems to ever have any chores to perform at home. And homework, let us not speak of homework. Like the great migration of the bees, all the children congregate on the field, their buzz audible until such time that the sermon outlining the strategy to conquer the enemy is delivered. In these weekend games, there is only room for two types of people: the Davids and the Goliaths. Which type you are is predetermined by the process of natural selection in which Nature herself takes no part.

The unity amongst the children is as steel-gray as the palpable division amongst them. A generational trait dating back to the very first inhabitants of the place, passed down over the years. The original reason for this relationship has been forgotten due to the many modifications made to the reason why the amity and enmity coincide. That reminds me of the story my parents used to tell me as a young child about the rivalry between the domestic dog and his brother the gray wolf. Now, just like then, I completely understand why the gray wolf was ready to draw blood. But I also think that the strife has gotten old, and the two really must find a new activity. This synthesis of harmony and acrimony is the perfect cup of tea as various ingredients are brewed together to create this imperfectly perfect place that is my home. Like the acquired taste of tea, you learn to love this place. Whilst at the one end it is the warm kiss of summer down the naked esophagus, its inferno can also surpass Dante's. In this place, age heals no wounds; it merely generates wrinkles whose mustardy-green, pungent odor burns to the touch.

Me, I exist in the midst of it all. Whilst every Saturday begins with more or less the same activities for me, no two Saturdays are ever the same. As soon as I have fulfilled my duties, I escape to revitalize myself after the week's vexations. As I walk by the river, the gush of the crisp smell of freshwater strikes me with such force my troubles shudder. As many walks as I have taken through this very route, each time is like my first. The collage of flowers rivals any Van Gogh painting of similar scenery. I breathe in the sticky pollen, and let it settle within me. “What is it that keeps you in this dreadful place?” She always has something positive to say.

As I walk along the river's edge, the numerous soft drink cans, glistening pebbles, twigs, spider webs, and paper littered all over the place are the symphony orchestra that permits my mind to wander off uncontained. From them I hear the sounds of the percussions, marimbas, piano, and harp perfectly intertwined by the written music. The lyrics differ each time, but the pure tingling of my toes, and the thumping lullaby my heart sings are all the approval I need. This is my very own shrine where my prayers are the butterfly caresses on my cheek. The story of the how the mighty phoenix rose out of the ashes waltzes before me. The enormous ballroom; guests clad in their finest masquerade costumes and enthralling masks; the dark and sweet anonymity. But today, the masks are being removed to reveal what has been hidden within for so long.

“What is it that keeps you in this dreadful place?” she asked. After years of slavishly eating her devil's pie, I can finally hold my head up high and answer her question. The thrilling green and great expanse of darkness that stretches across the four mountains; the thunderbolts that roar each morning as the great crusaders make their weekly pilgrimage to the soccer field; my morning chores; and my walks by the river are the reason. Every Saturday is transformed into the Stadium at Olympia, and at its heart is the Colosseum. All come together for the love of community. All come together to do battle. No, this place is not at all dreadful. Rather, it is at the core of who and what I am. In truth, it is the balance that I have always sought in my life.

The Long Road Home

BY HAYLEE RETHMAN

We all search for a place to call home:
The avenue of ocean waves in summer,
A reflection of time a distant memory.
We rattle down an unfamiliar road
less traveled by souls on a familiar Thursday,
And we dance in the rhythm of the daffodil.

Thunder and lightning as lovely as a daffodil
struggle to reach their comfortable home.
Today, we redirect our Thursday
afternoon to turn into a summer
night underneath the stars on the empty road.
We create a lasting memory.

Withered leaves collect a lifeless memory
while the sun shines on a yellow daffodil.
We couldn't agree to take that road.
Our hearts on our sleeves reminded us of
home
and a chilly winter morning in summer.
A street lamp dies on another Thursday.

We are two travelers together this Thursday
roaming to make our own memory.

Awaiting the warmth of summer
suns that bring life to the daffodil.
Where ever you are, I feel at home.
I have chosen to trek the same road.

We wandered down a barren road
lonely as a cloud every Thursday.
The art of loving comes from home.
We're all alone with our memory.
Smooth scents saturate the air around a
daffodil
and waft to the surrounding summer.

It makes us fall in love, the summer,
and lovers grow closer down the road.
Don't leave me here holding a daffodil
with no more love than the Thursday.
Extend a hand, walk in my memory,
and let your strength be my home.

Find me daffodils along the road
and Thursday night lips in summer,
And make this memory our home.



The Mysteries of the Mind

BY MORGAN TYLER KNORR

I write this poem,
Out of boredom, purely.
I really should sleep,
But it's quite early.

The mysteries of life,
Are circling in my head.
Why, at this moment,
When I should be in bed?

Life is a mystery,
That's all I can say.
Once you think you've got it,
It turns a different way.

Women on my mind,
And homework on the table.
Wonder what's on the
internet?

Should I read another fable?

Off I should go,
Round two of my slumber.
Peacefully I'll dream,
Of saws cutting lumber.

One Clean Shot

BY HOGAN DAVIS

Sunlight glinted off the pure white Titleist as it sailed in a graceful arc into the cloudless blue sky, over rows of unharvested corn and out of sight. "Damn, that was my last ball," Noah moaned.

"If you didn't buy four dollar balls maybe you could afford to keep more than two in your bag?" I replied. Noah's bitching about his worthless golf game didn't help my mood much. My bag of brand-new Callaway clubs was already missing a six and a nine iron due to unfortunate lapses of sanity (the six actually flew about 50 yards before it splashed down in the Osage River). "Grab a couple of the cheap ones out of my bag, but I swear to God if you steal those new Taylormades I'm going to finish what Tanner started."

"Sheesh, fine, but that's a low blow. I was lucky to get out of there with a split lip and a couple bruises. He was not happy."

"No kidding? You stole his car, crashed it into the golden arches drive-thru menu, and he was mad? That's hard to believe." I'm pretty sure my sarcasm was lost on Noah as he lined up a three foot putt. The ball lipped out and I ducked as his putter whizzed over the sand trap toward the next tee. I had to admire his restraint. He must have really been broke if he was being that careful about the direction of a good putter launch. I read somewhere that catharsis doesn't actually work, but it's hard to beat the feeling of a solid metal stick leaving your hand at terminal velocity.

"Hey, like I explained to Tanner. It was that stupid cashier's fault, telling me 'welcome back.' It's just presumptuous, and I'm not going to take that from some sixteen year old punk."

"Noah, that may be the stupidest excuse I've ever heard. Why didn't you just admit that you wanted a quarter pounder, but were too drunk to drive a stick shift?" Noah's a pathological liar. It's one of the reasons I still hang out with him after all the trouble he's caused me. His creativity and willingness to adapt on the fly make for some beautiful stories. My all-time favorite involved a go-cart, his mom's cat, and an argument about the tread firmly stamped into what was left of the animal, but that one takes some serious explaining.

"Are you going to hit the ball, or stare at it until it decides to jump in the hole by itself?" Noah muttered. Patience is another one of his strong suits. I blasted my drive down the left side of the fairway and into a sand bunker situated in the perfect spot to piss me off. My new driver was still in pretty good condition, though, so it made it back into the bag unharmed.

"You going to that movie with the rest of us tonight? I figured we'd meet up at the school so we only have to take one car." Our loose collection of friends had decided to see whatever that new horror film is that's supposed to be the scariest thing since The Exorcist. Seems like every new scary movie has said that for the last decade or so, though. I wasn't getting my hopes up.

"Yeah, I guess. Tara said she'd be there. I think Joe's coming too."

"Wow, Tara's going so all of a sudden you're in, huh?" Noah's crush on her had started in about the third grade, so we're talking about 15 years of futility here. "You finally going to seal the deal?"

"You're such an asshole. You know we're just friends. I don't know why you all want to see a 'scary movie,' though. I haven't actually been scared in a movie theater since they killed off the golden retriever in Air Bud."

"Noah, I don't even know where to start you got so many things wrong there. You're talking about Old Yeller, who was a yellow Lab, and that movie came out way before you were born." Besides being pathological, Noah had a really poor memory for the details, a bad

combination all around. "And of course you don't get scared at scary movies. You don't want to be."

"Oh God, don't start. I don't care about your stupid theory, and I think it's bullshit anyway. If a movie was actually scary maybe then I'd get scared, but they're not so I don't." He had heard my rants about movies too many times before I guess. In general, I think that you can only get scared by a movie if you go into the theater wanting to get scared. You've got to have an open mind or it's just going to be a bunch of moving pictures up on a big screen. Anybody who sits there and laughs at every plot flaw is going to walk out saying a movie wasn't really that scary. I let the argument slide because I knew that trying to have a rational discussion with Noah was less likely than getting a hole-in-one on the eighteenth hole, a six-hundred yard par five. One good thing about a golf course, it's really hard to stay mad at anything, no matter how bad a score I'm putting up. I swear blue skies and a well-cut fairway are as perfect as it gets. As the cart came screeching to a halt at the last tee block I wondered again how I'd been dumb enough to let Noah drive. It's almost admirable how often he can get a cart up on two wheels without rolling it off into a pond.

Both of our drives managed to find the fairway, a minor miracle in itself, and as we skirted the edge of the pond on the right side I couldn't help but admire the view. The morning sun shimmered on the water as it meandered along next to the fairway, everything seeming to lead up to that rolling green surrounded by bunkers. Noah played a safe shot up the fairway to set up a chance at the green that didn't involve chancing the water. I said, "Didn't know you'd gone soft on me," as I lined up a five wood straight at the green.

"Yeah, well, I didn't want to deal with your whining if I lost one of your balls," he replied. I didn't really listen to him, though. The ball sat up on the grass as if begging to be stroked up there for an eagle putt. It seemed inconceivable that it would end up anywhere other than the green. All the golf magazines tell you to visualize the shot you need to hit, but there are those times that it feels superfluous. Somehow I knew the swing would be pure before I moved the club. My follow through was silky smooth as the club kissed the ball with a crack that can only be described as beautiful. The ball soared upward, straight as an arrow, directly at the green. I couldn't help but break into a smile as it began to settle back toward the ground on its approach. With a final flash the ball landed six feet short of the green, vanishing with a small splash as ripples spread across the calm water.

I sat in my car waiting for the others at the parking lot behind the high school. We'd met here to go just about anywhere since Adrian, the first of us to turn sixteen, got his license at the tail end of our freshman year. Noah and I are the only ones still living here, but the rest come back from school almost every weekend for the football games and the same parties we had back in high school. Taking the scholarship money to go to the local community college had been the biggest mistake I'd ever made. I figured that two more years here couldn't be that bad, but the time had dragged. Now that I had my associate's degree, though, I wondered what the hell I was looking forward to. Four year colleges weren't exactly knocking down my door to recruit a guy who'd barely scraped his two year degree. Kicking myself for old mistakes was too depressing, so I went back to playing games on my phone. I'd been sitting in my car for ten minutes or so, one of the hazards of being on time in our group, when I got a text from Tara saying she had to babysit her niece or something so couldn't make it. I decided to wait until Noah got there to deliver the bad news. He showed up twenty minutes late and strolled over. "Where's everybody at?" he asked.

"Tara just texted me and said she can't come, but I haven't heard from any of the others," I replied.

"Shit, Joe had some excuse for bailing too." At that point I was ready to call the night a loss and go back to watch the Cardinals game. Watching movies with Noah and other people is bad enough, but take out the other people and he's unbearable. I'd had about as much of him as I could stand at the golf course.

"Screw them," he said. "Let's go anyway." I couldn't figure out a way to get out of there without hurting his feelings so he hopped in and we took off. Thank God for the fifteen minutes of previews before movies or we'd have missed the opening. I think the people that run those places must factor in a lack of punctuality because we even caught the last couple. As the first scene opened with a woman moving into her new house with her perfect children and perfect husband Noah leaned over and whispered.

"God I hope she's the first one they kill off. Every one of these movies starts off the same way. Wish they'd shake it up once in a while." I gritted my teeth and ignored him. A stream of running commentary would be kept up no matter what I did, but I wasn't going to encourage him. Five minutes later: "Ha, how stupid can you get. No one would ever go in there. Jesus this is lame."

"Noah, shut up. I don't care what you think about the characters, the plot, the special effects, or anything else to do with the movie." I replied. I couldn't help myself. I was actually trying to get into the movie, but all I could think about was how much I would've rather been there by myself than in present company.

"Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Come on though, you can't tell me you like this crap?" I went back to my earlier strategy of ignoring him. Every time other people in the audience screamed he laughed or made comments about how obnoxious they were. Self reflection was not really his forte. When the ordeal was finally over and we had gotten back to the car I couldn't help but feel relieved that in a quick fifteen minutes I'd be back home and the only asshole I'd have to deal with would be myself. I drove back in silence. For once, Noah seemed to pick up my mood and left me alone. I pulled into the school parking lot and Noah got out. "Hey man, you ok?" he asked.

"Yeah, just tired," I lied. "See you later." Right as I shifted into reverse an extended cab pickup gleaming with chrome pulled in quickly between my car and Noah's and three guys jumped out, Tanner leading the group.

"Hey Noah," he called, "I think we need to have a little talk." He turned around and looked at me and said, "You going to stick up for this idiot or do the smart thing?" His buddies laughed as I went ahead and reversed out of the parking spot. As I rounded the corner and out of sight I saw them pinning Noah up against his car. I hesitated, but then pulled over with a sigh and popped my trunk. I would've preferred the nine iron, but I figured the eight and a pitching wedge for backup would suffice. When I got back over to the little group huddled around Noah's car I saw the cut above his eye and split lip. My form felt a little off, but a slice or a hook wasn't going to hurt this shot much as the solid metal head of the eight iron exploded Tanner's knee and he went down in a heap. The others backed off as they stared warily at the jagged edge of the broken club in my hand. I looked at the man crumpled on the ground for a second and then at Noah, as a grin spread across my face.

"He may be an idiot, but he's my idiot so leave him the fuck alone."



The End of a Childhood

BY EMILY KESEL

Most eight-year-olds have only a positive view of the world. They have all the optimism and imagination and none of the grief or loss. Up until July 14, 2001, I was one of those eight-year-olds. Then, suddenly, I wasn't.

It was the middle of a glorious summer. The days were long and hot, but not too hot. Each day the sun seemed to shine brighter and more beautifully than it had the day before. We had just moved to "the country." There was finally space to play ball, ride bikes, and explore. There was the promise of getting a puppy now that we had land for it to run. I would be starting at a new school soon, but that wasn't for another month, and there was plenty of time for fun before then. The best news of all was that there would soon be a new baby cousin, and there were not many things I looked forward to more than being able to hold a new baby cousin. I went to bed every night fully worn out from a long day of playing Hot Box with my brother and neighbors, with dreams of how I would be the new baby's favorite person. My eight-year-old mind was content and happy. All was well in the world of that eight-year-old.

Then on the night of July 14, after a long day of playing ball outside on yet another gorgeous day that summer, the eight-year-old with nothing wrong in the world was replaced by another eight-year-old. Before I was even aware of it, the wonderful summer turned into one of the worst I have ever had.

Mom and Dad broke the news the next morning over breakfast. The baby cousin that I had so anxiously awaited had arrived, but something was wrong. I had never heard the term "stillborn" before, but every time I've heard it since that morning, I've gone back to being eight years old again, sitting in that terribly wallpapered kitchen in stunned silence just before making a mad dash to my room to bury my face in my pillow. Sometime later my parents joined me, saying that if I was up for it they would take me with them to the hospital to see my aunt and uncle and the baby that would never have the chance to grow to be my cousin. I must have said I was in fact up for it, but even now I don't think I really was, nor would I be now.

My dad's family is a lively crowd. Holidays and special occasions for us are loud, exciting events filled with yelling, drinking, card-playing, and generally good times. Everyone leaves happy. You'd never know this by the mood in the hospital that day. My aunts, uncles, and grandparents sat quietly in the cold, somber waiting area looking utterly distraught. Faces that I had never before seen without smiles and brightness now held expressions of pain and moist eyes. My grandfather, who is as tough and stoic as any former Army man, took off his glasses to wipe tears away with a red handkerchief. I found myself in the lap of one of my aunts, held tightly, as if I could be lost at any moment as well. She must have somehow felt me struggling to make sense of everything, to find the right way to express what I was feeling, because she softly whispered to me, "it's okay to cry." So I did.

After an agonizing stay in the waiting area with my grieving family, my parents and I were allowed into the private room where the baby was being held by his dejected mother, his father with his head in his hands in a nearby chair. They had named him Braden Gregory, nicknamed "The Baby Bulldog" because his scrunched face so resembled that of his tough father. And they let me hold him. Of all the pictures of that day that are forever engrained into my memory, that is the one that has haunted me the most. On a normal day, the only thought in my mind when holding a baby would be don't make it cry, but this was not a concern on that day. That day, the baby in my arms was making me cry. He did not look real. The baby I was holding was a deep purple hue, his lips bright red. He looked like something out of a dream. I briefly considered that maybe I was dreaming, that I would wake up the next day as the same

optimistic eight-year-old that I had been the day before. But that never happened.

Someone must have taken him from me after a while, because the next thing I remember is staring out of the hospital window at yet another beautiful summer day. I watched the few clouds pass by just as they had every other day that summer, not daring to gather into a storm to ruin the perfection of the season. The previous day's eight-year-old would have been outside, challenging her brother to a bike race up the road, unaware of any type of pain but the kind that accompanied wiping out on the bike after running over some stray gravel. But July 14th's eight-year-old was looking out the window to avoid seeing her grief-stricken family, now fully aware that the worst pain hurts deep down inside, not in the scrapes and scratches of childhood.

I know that if July 14 had just been a normal day, I would not be the person that I am now. My view of the world would be a little different if Braden Gregory were about to become a teenager this year. My personality would probably not be as pessimistic; I wouldn't have to work so hard to look happy. I not only lost a cousin on that lovely summer day, I lost the pure optimism and contentment of being a child. I lost the eight-year-old version of me that had not a care in the world, not a thought of anything painful or negative. I do get flashes of that eight-year-old every now and then. When I'm with the person I love more than anything, or when I'm celebrating another holiday or special occasion with my family and it looks nothing like that day in the hospital. Those flashes are nice. I now have an eight-year-old brother, and thankfully he still has the brightness and imagination that I wish I still had. I hope he is able to hang onto those even after life has shown him how it truly is. Even though I learned a lot about life myself after what happened on July 14, I still wish I could have been that eight-year-old just a little bit longer. At least until I was nine.

Wrinkled

BY HAYLEE RETHMAN

A wrinkled pile of skin
Sagging skin covering
Ancient calcium deficient bones
And steel plates where joints used to be.

He lies on the hospital bed.
Shaking, quivering, groaning
Agony adds more lines to
His already crinkled face.

A youthful work of art
Skin supple and full of elasticity
Energy flowing freely in tangles of veins
And happiness beaming out of pores.

The boy sits next to him,
Feet planted, knees bent, listening
Wonder fills his head,
And love his heart.

Something in his eyes tells
A tale of his past, seventy years ago
When he looked like
The boy sitting next to him.

He sees that something
In the old man's eyes.
What was the world like back then?
And waits for the answer.

*I used to love to swim
When I was your age.
It was my entire life
And I was pretty good.*

As he spoke,
A single teardrop slowly streamed
Down the crevices and creases
Of his wrinkled cheek.

I Believe

BY DEAN MORAN

I believe that beliefs are powerful statements.

But they also have a connotation that whatever you believe may not be true...

Depending on the faith and dependency, and the reputation of you, which leads me to believe that beliefs—well that some beliefs are actually judgments,

And what some believe to me seem like ultimatums—

Assertions of their authority—a stone harbor of oppression—

Sustaining hate and traditional repression of the easily swayed mind; “That’s devil music and I believe your sex is a sin and your faith is a lie.” “I believe some people are just lazy and will never win.” **“I believe in a harsh repentance.”**

We caress our beliefs in baby blankets, and contrive reasonable yet ridiculous justifications to close the curtains on any shade of doubt.

We are unwilling to grow or move toward a new day where progression pays the pied piper, where children play together outside the boxes of our ribbon-tied traditions and precious beliefs.

I believe in socio-cultural harmony.

Yet some are Livin’ On A Prayer just to find peace. They understand its naïve, however in order to keep singing...they Don’t Stop Believin’ holding on to that feeling that a day will come when every inch of their body and mind will be satisfied—that there will be a paradise-wedding-bachelorette and birthday party, all at once just for them in a pristine and perfect white-christmas wonderland.

But when we get what we want—we are no longer in love and we hate what we want—and we hate what we Love and sometimes the only thing to believe is we are eternally lost and beautifully fucked up.

Some people believe so they can sleep at night—some believe just for a bullet to bite and wake up at dawn believing money is time.

Some believe the blood of Christ is literally wine.

Some people believe that every morning needs caffeine and uppers and go juice, anti-biotics and weed.

Some people will not compromise their beliefs. They will not ask why and close tightly their eyes—stumbling their way through a subtle and subliminal world.

janus!

They are stoned young men. They are material girls.

Some so strongly believe the technology and the plastic regimes have ruined the world, that they sit up at night stewing over the peer reviewed journals condemning industry for the crime of Bisphenol A and nightmares of Endocrine Disruption—dreaming dreams of hermaphrodite frogs in swamps downstream and conspiracies of covert depopulation.

Some passionately devour GMO’s and multi-vitamins, debating the merits of holy, blessed progression; sweet, sweet pizza, the cherry colas and zero-calorie brewskis, and the hardcore pornography and romantic comedies that are so soothing, and the tablet consumerism that is unapologetically American.

Some see many ghosts of past Christmases. They are generations of Grinch’s masturbating angrily and Bah-humbugging at the birth of our savior. Some lose themselves in that anger.

Some learn how to use it. But many men are all monsters and all women medusas. Some see love a painful visage and swear by the confusion.

Some sing praise to the lord—some sing only blue, blue music.

But I will believe by and by in the power of why and will try and try, asking why so many times;

As to see her passionately broken mind; As to see his helpless faithful wandering,

As to see the scenarios that define every drop of sun that makes all people’s mind seeds grow so high like open meadows at dusk and grow bountiful and wondrous—letting beliefs just flow loosely and free like a childhood kite sailing in the bewildering ocean breeze—

as to see like a child, as to see all the meaning,

I believe we can lift each other’s spirits with radiant love and sunshine that will allow us to all find relentless beauty in whatever insanities we choose to believe.

I believe that beliefs are what make our spectacularly tilted world turn-

and more than this, *much more than this...*

they are the blood of our fathers, mothers, civil warriors and rights activists who believed there was more to believe in the American Dream.

I believe in the transcendence of nations and the body, and the mind, and all things, and that beliefs are often more than they seem.

And furthermore I believe.



Janus

The Brown Man's Burden

BY MIKE RAMIREZ

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
And open wide your eyes:
Your history's betrayed you,
And fed you fragrant lies.
Your saviors—as you called them—
Who thought you grossly wild—
Clamped you in velvet bondage,
Your freedom now reviled.

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
Your colour wear with pride;
Pay no heed to the slanders
That movie stars provide;
Set down the soap that whitens,
And dye your hair no more,
Your beauty shines unsullied,
You need not ask for more.

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
Cast off pretentious airs;
You claim to love your country,
Yet favour foreign wares.
Take pity on your workers,
For life and love they toil,
And pay them for their treasures,
Borne of your living soil.

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
When peace gives way to war,
Amass your noble brethren,
On every sacred shore.
Rely not on the ordnance
Your so-called allies lent;
No, build your own defences,
With none but your consent.

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
And raise your livid cry,
Against perfidious leaders
Who bled your nation dry.
Remember that the white man
Taught them the ways of greed,
And through their sham elections,
You vote the worst you breed.

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
Recall that once before,
An Empire young and headstrong
Sent forth her sons to war;
Will you forget their tortures,
Your blood they dared to shed?
Go, fight them with your living,
And charge them for your dead!

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
And tell your wretched peers,
The blood of kings and chieftains,
Runs in their veins and tears.
A thankless task it will be,
For they shall ask in fright:
"Why rob us of our comfort,
Our loved colonial night?"

Take up the Brown Man's burden—
Awake, the truth arrives—
It calls you to accounting,
For living sordid lives,
Safe in the bright illusions
Your sweet oppressors cast;
Go hence, the dawn awaits you,
To free yourselves at last!



Janus

Leaving Rome

BY RACHEL PERRY

Arriving in Rome is a simple matter. Leaving, on the other hand...

Your flight leaves London at precisely 5:05 PM Friday and lands at 8:28 PM, seven minutes early, at the Fiumicino airport. Going through passport control has never been easier; it takes only long enough for the handsome young man to find a page to press his stamp to. He doesn't even check your picture!

To buy passage into the city, you only have to go to a counter and hand a woman ten euros, take your change and ticket, and walk outside to where your bus waits. A smiling bus driver takes your bag and slides it below the bus for safe storage, so you smile back and clumsily say "grazie" as you get on the bus. Just over an hour later, you get off the bus into the bustling nightlife of "The Eternal City." Although you have some difficulty locating your hotel initially, when you finally drop your bags and lie down you find yourself unable to sleep, your mind racing with all the things you will do tomorrow.

You wake up early, despite the time difference, because you finally decided in the moments before sleep finally took you what you are going to do first: the Colosseum. You make a few wrong turns and see many beautiful sights along the way and take a few pictures, but you have a destination. Countless tour guides accost you as you approach the Colosseum, trying to get you to pay sixty! fifty! forty! thirty-five euros! for their services. Each step closer to the Colosseum you get, the lower the price. You see that the line is moving rather quickly, so you politely refuse. As much as you would like to get in now, you know better than to pay quadruple the price to skip the line. Besides, how long could this take?

You are in line for slightly over an hour, but you don't notice because you are finally there! The walls are pitted by time, and you imagine that the people around you aren't tourists like you, but rather you are all ancient Romans waiting to see the fights. You can almost hear the distant roar of a lion echoing beneath the imagined crash of steel on steel though the ages, overriding the modern chatter. You are swept up with the history of the place, so much so that when you hand the nice older man behind the counter a twenty euro note, you nearly forget to take your ticket and change.

Nothing now stands in your way, but you pause to savor the moment before stepping into the sun. You are temporarily blinded by the light and have to blink for several seconds before you can finally see it. The sheer size of everything astounds you; a fallen pillar lies near the entrance which would have towered over you, bigger around than your arms can possibly reach. You aren't here for this pillar, though, so you step out onto the walkway which encircles the arena.

Finally, you can see all the splendor of the Colosseum, and you realize that nothing could have prepared you for the awe-inspiring sight before you. The arena, though there is no longer a platform across the expanse, stuns you with its splendor; the exposed base, which you hear a passing tour guide call the hypogeum, though time-worn, is an impressive labyrinth of tunnels where the combatants (both human and animal) would walk to meet their fate. As you circle the arena, you see a steady stream of people walking through an archway to reappear on the next level, so you join the flow. The stairs are worn from the countless feet of unfathomable throngs who have climbed those steps before you. When you reach the second level of the stands, you realize that the view is even more breathtaking than before. The effort which must have been put into creating this behemoth of a structure amazes you. You finally understand

why everyone who visits the Colosseum comes back a different person.

Eventually, you decide that it is time for you to depart, especially when you note the time; without realizing it, you have spent over four hours wandering around the magnificent structure. Including the time it took to walk from your hotel and the wait in line, you realize that breakfast was over six hours ago and your stomach is growling. You reluctantly walk toward the exit, trying to absorb every detail before you leave. Finally, with one last parting look, you turn away and head off to find something to eat.

After picking a direction completely at random, you walk for a few minutes, taking shelter from a sudden downpour of rain beneath a tree. Dozens of people wander the streets trying to sell you umbrellas, which you have to dodge and politely refuse. You spot a restaurant across the street, and decide to eat your lunch there. The restaurant has a covered outdoor dining area with a tree growing through the middle, so you decide to eat out there. You order a glass of wine and fettuccini Bolognese because, well, when in Rome....

After a delightful late lunch, you decide to spend the rest of your day just wandering around the city. You find an archeological dig of an ancient temple and accidentally discover the Piazza Venezia, walk a bit farther and find a tiny church with a ceiling painted so beautifully that you wonder who did it, and countless street merchants selling everything imaginable. Finally, you decide to go back to your hotel to sleep, because it is dark aside from the lit buildings. You retrace your steps, ending up eventually in front of the Colosseum, which is so beautifully lit up that you feel like crying. This moment is why you came to Rome. This one, and the countless others like it. Those moments when you feel like you are a part of something greater than yourself.

After a few more days of seeing everything that Rome has to offer (the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, the Trevi Fountain, the Forum), you know that it is time to leave. You take your bags to the train station where that bus first dropped you off with a heavy heart, and go through the arduous process of getting a bus back to the airport. You have the return bus ticket which you purchased upon arrival, but after waiting for half an hour, you find out that you need to exchange your ticket for a boarding pass. You do what the person told you to, and begin waiting for the next bus. It is several minutes late, and you have to rush to put your bags beneath the bus (no smiling man to help you with them) and board before it takes off without you. This bus ride is as different to the one into Rome as real Italian food is to Ragu, jostling and bouncing you away from the city you fell in love with. You disembark the bus an hour and twelve minutes before your flight, so you are sure that you have plenty of time. You try to ask someone where you are supposed to be going, but no one answers you. After several stressful minutes of wandering, you find the right place and go through all of the security rigmarole to wait for your plane to arrive.

When it is half an hour before your flight is due to leave and your plane still hasn't arrived, you begin to worry. When the plane finally arrives, you check the time: your flight is due to leave in five minutes. Ultimately, your flight doesn't leave until it is over forty-five minutes late. Because of headwinds, it is even later to land. Since you are landing in London, you have to go through another round of passport checks; unfortunately, the woman here is much more thorough than the man in Rome. You answer several questions about the nature of your trip, the length of your stay, what you did while in Rome.... When she finally stamps your passport and returns it to you, you turn to the page with the Italian stamp on it and sigh.

One day, you will go back.

And that time, you might not leave.

Under the Sea

BY DEAN MORAN

A mermaid tale, an octopus's garden,
A lobster that rocks and talks like Bob Marley,
A fish who gets lost, a yellow submarine—
There's only so much that we know of the sea...

But underneath I sense a world where time and will do still abide
the patterns of a social tide.

Where all the Shamu know of me and you
And in their songs they warn their young
of the psycho killers up above.

They may know Captain Ahab and have met Uncle Sam—some believe in Free Willy,
Some don't give a damn.

While digesting Geppetto and swimming strong—a great reincarnate Mama Cass whale,
Who hates all men for what they've done and what they've said,
sings this here underwater freedom song—as the urchins and starfish and crab all rise up
And start singin' out, they're all singin' along!

*"Those monsters who manipulate
With none to lose, but all at stake,
Have lost all faith—so they create
An Ozone home of heav'n and hell—
(Talk so much bullshit they can't tell!)*

*They're the tragedy of their own tale (and flush their shit down pipeline streams!)
Death to Humans! Save the Seas!!"*

Moby Dick's as true as the sun but son you can forget the whale
As men are possessed by all tall tales—by trident myths of great Poseidon
In hopes that there is more to the world a'hiding,
There is more to the sea—by God—there has to be!
Evolution has convinced us that we are god,
Turning loose the killer men—swimming on streets with windless sails—
Taking aims—making claims—and starting feuds with killer whales.

We turn to the sea and it reflects our mortality
Oh sandy embrace! Oh Summer gladness!
Oh selfishness! Oh sexual madness!
Oh Sunscreen gleam and heart-shaped bikini!
Oh tumbling sandcastles and youthful beach-ball!
Oh Seagull of wonder and giant sun!
(Lord, in the sun we feel so small)
Near to great big ocean that started it all
(oh splendid Beach-boy American sea)
Oh Watery desire!
Come set us free!

In Love But Sad

BY KATELYN RAPP

The loveliness of sorrow
is a species of its own.

The art of tears.

And so the oceans that we cry
are really oceans of lovely
and lonely;

the real oceans are the loneliness of God.

And I will come, again,
to this place

where you are the moon
and my eyes are the tide;
my tears are the ocean

in which we're both drowning--
which we're both drowning in
so deeply

that we dangle our prepositions
to the rainbow fish.

Toss our pearls to swine.

Our diamonds to the teapots
while we spin on couches

made of resentment and sinking sand
and the mispronunciation of "figures".

When we listen to our books like songs
on beaches of he never loved me;
he doesn't know how to love me.

And we gulp down
stolen tropic fruits and
stolen pirate juice...

Always the cumulative "we".

Because I don't want to let the sky know
how alone I believe myself to be,
knowing He will speak truths of
I am always here.

Rest.

And yet I pace these beaches
like a marathon

like I am going to die like this...
misunderstood and forgettable and
lonely as hell.

Maybe a little less lonely that hell.

And I know I am
rocks in your satchel

and dust on your vinyls,

listening to Taylor Swift, alone, on a Friday night...

Just wishing fourteen years

or one year and eight months
or one semester at this pretentious playground
was enough

for someone to stay

or remember how recklessly tragic
the heart really is.

This train to the coast of Tennessee
is as strong as we all pretend to be,
with our fated lost loves screaming WHY

like a last breath,

our whimsy fading with our wrinkled faces
and our tired eyes

making sad references to

the cliché songs that used to dance between our skin.

And now the music in my soul is weeping.

Deserted

BY ARISTOTLE BUTLER

Darkness

Bright stars in the sky

Stillness in the whole place

Rolling, soaring dust in the air

Smells of old wood, rotten wood

Dew infested boards falling everywhere

Moonlight

What used to be

What happened?

Hiding

BY ETHAN PARENT

And nothing to answer for.

Tell me what I was to you,
And I'll bring it back in view.

Dim the lights, raise the curtain.

Show me where to put my feet.

And if my feet betray me,

Abandon and forsake me.

If you think I need repair,

Just turn your back,

And smother me in prayer.

Hush the crowd, bar the door.

Let them know what's in store.

Unshackle your Jesus.

Command him to fight your war;

The Holy See has your back,

Cast me into your play once more.

I'll read the lines and play the part,

And if my show won't please your heart,

Smother me in prayer.

I'll be an actor in your play,

Seventy times seven once more.

And if my heart betrays me,

Abandon and forsake me.

If you think I need repair,

Just turn your back

And smother me in prayer.

On the Other End of the Line

BY REESE LEECH

1/5/11

Miss you.
12:49 PM

Well, I'm headed to bed. Goodnight, love you babe.
1:14 AM

Love you too handsome. Text you tomorrow.
1:30 AM

Can you make it to the concert Wednesday?
8:46 AM

1/7/11

Don't know yet. I still have to see if I have tests Thursday. I want to though, promise.
10:23 AM

I know you do babe. I'll keep my fingers crossed.
10:25 AM

Booyah! No test for AW, now I just have to check with my I to P professor.
12:01 PM

AW? I to P?
12:25 PM

Academic Writing. Intro to Philosophy.
12:31 PM

Sorry, I keep forgetting not everyone knows what I'm talking about when it comes to school.
12:33 PM

No need to apologize. You're expanding my lexicon of you.
1:13 PM

Lexicon? I get my own lexicon?
2:11 PM

Obviously.
5:43 PM

You are such a dork.
6:00 PM

Really? I'm a geek, thank you, Ms. X-Box lover.
6:15 PM

No one likes a jealous lover honey.
6:24 PM

Pft.
6:30 PM

1/11/11

Classes are looking a bit steep, but good.
2:07 PM

Very cool. How's the day going? The weather here is surprisingly nice. I had the windows open for most of yesterday evening.
2:34 PM

It's not bad although surprisingly cold wind.

janus!
2:38 PM

Here, too, but the wind isn't bad at all. Not winter, but not spring either.
3:41 PM
*isn't
3:42 PM

Love you too.
3:51 PM

(nuzzle) Love you.
3:50 PM

Watching House and eating pizza. You?
6:19 PM

Whatcha up to?
6:19 PM

Having dinner. Figuring out what I'm doing with the rest of my evening.
6:20 PM

Were you here, I would have a few ideas.
6:21 PM

(smile) I bet you would.
6:22 PM

Yep. Watch a movie, or more Tick, or play a game, or just get naked and roll around with each other. ;) I assume you won't be too bored tonight.
6:23 PM

Nah. Seeing if Mad Dawg is up for anything. If not I'll go back to my room and do some reading.
6:25 PM

Mad Dawg?
6:26 PM

(laugh) It's the nickname we gave Madeline.
6:26 PM

Oh, my. :)
6:27 PM

(headdesk) It feels like the hours are going by so slow. I'm not even bored or anything it's just...
Time is crawling.
8:06 PM

My head is buried in my laptop trying to get things updated. But, yeah, I understand. It's different without you.
8:08 PM

Goodnight. I am crashing. See you tomorrow.
11:15 PM

Tomorrow. Sleep well, my beautiful girl.
11:34 PM

1/15/11

I think we got your cold wind this morning. It was kinda chilly.
9:27 AM

Si, it's several degrees colder today.
9:28 AM

How's it going? Have you tasted all your new classes yet?
9:30 AM

I've had them all. I'm doing some assigned reading now.
9:31 AM
And done. Pol Sci is going to be interesting.
9:38 AM
How so?
9:59 AM
The professor is odd, but more than that, after finishing the first section of the text, the subject matter itself is engaging.
10:03 AM
It actually is. I know I got pulled into it too.
10:18 AM
They have diet mountain dew in the fountains now. I'm so screwed.
1:52 PM
I know the feeling. They had it when I was working at Bridge. It was free too. There was a fountain right outside my office. Ah, good times. :)
2:12 PM
I hate having to clean up other developer's messes. I mean- has anyone heard of professionalism? Gah to working late because other people are incompetent.
4:49 PM
Sorry to hear that hon. All cleared up now?
6:24 PM
Yeah. Finally got home.
6:39 PM
(purr-nuzzle)
6:50 PM
Mmmm...love ya. Watching Batman Begins and thinking of you.
7:15 PM
All good things I hope
7:16 PM
Of course.
7:17 PM
well, some naughty things too. :)
7:18 PM
Of course.
7:22 PM
Batman is done. They're showing the Penguin one, Meh. About to go to sleep. How you doing?
10:32 PM
Pretty good. Going to stay up a bit longer, but bed is calling me too.
10:33 PM
Indeed. Sleep well lovely.
10:34 PM
1/23/11
Playing a potentially super complex board game without you... help...
6:05 PM
Which is it?
6:07 PM

Just remember- everyone dies.
6:08 PM

More Batman. The Drak Knight is on. :)
7:10 PM

Why so serious?
7:21 PM

Poor Batmobile. It's always hard to watch it self destruct. :(
8:46 PM

What's your plan for the weekend?
8:59 PM

I was hoping you'd say that. When?
9:06 PM

Excellent.
9:09 PM

What?
9:13 PM

Not sure I'll tell you. I think it should be a surprise.
9:20 PM

Nope.
9:21 PM

Nope.
9:22 PM

But you know I can be so very good to you.

janus
6:07 PM

Right.
6:10 PM

Coolness.
7:20 PM

Heh
7:22 PM

Aw... Poor pretty piece of machinery.
8:54 PM

It's looking pretty free.
9:05 PM

Pick me up Friday?
9:06 PM

Around eleven.
9:09 PM

...?
9:10 PM

What's got you so excited about this weekend?
9:14 PM

Oh, come on. Tell me.
9:21 PM

Please?
9:21 PM

Meanie.
9:22 PM

9:23 PM

Yes.
9:24 PM

Did you die – like R. R. Martin thinks you should?
10:42 PM

Yeah. The best you can hope for is a well written death scene.
10:45 PM

Miss you too. I'm lounging in the warm tub, reading. Friday, I'll have you to warm.
11:05 PM

Mmmm... such a sweet girl.
11:06 PM

Awwww... I feel all squishy.
11:07 PM

Good. (nuzzle) I'm glad to be back in school, but I'm going to be really happy when I see you
Friday.
11:08 PM

I understand. Me too.
11:09 PM

And after Batman, Transformers: Dark of the Moon. I'm such a geek.
11:19 PM

Of course, it is the TF movie with the most awesome person ever – Buzz Aldrin! Just let him
slug Megatron. Game over.
11:21 PM

Heading for bed. Good night dearest.
12:21 AM

Good morning beautiful.
8:09 AM

1/25/11

Pervert.
9:23 PM

So, I got my ass kicked.
10:41 PM

Not exactly. Close enough though. The end is inevitable.
10:44 PM
*enough though
10:44 PM

Miss you.
11:02 PM

(purr)
11:05 PM

Only for you.
11:06 PM

Woot!
11:19 PM

Heh.
11:21 PM

Goodnight handsome. Love you.
12:30 AM

Janus!

I left my wallet at home this morning. Heh. How's your day treating you?

2:44 PM
Babe?
5:39 PM

Probably forgot your phone was on silent again. You know I won't let you live this down.
7:17 PM

1/27/11

Cold, but no snow. Disappointed. If we have to suffer through below-freezing weather, I want
it to look pretty. How you doing this morning?

10:01 AM
Sweetness?
12:54 PM

You're starting to worry me babe. I'm going to try calling in an hour.
5:15 PM

So, you didn't answer and it went straight to voice mail. Get back to me as soon as you can
okay?

6:30 PM
Seriously, where are you?
7:08 PM
Please pick up the phone.
9:54 PM

1/28/11

I called the school.
7:32 AM
Happy anniversary.
3:04 PM
I got you the stuffed tiger you wanted last time you were out here. Named her Rosa.
8:50 PM

1/29/11

You're mom called. She couldn't believe that no one had thought to call me yet.
10:10 AM

I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything.

10:11 AM
Good night.
11:45 PM

1/31/11

I love you my sweet girl.
9:42 AM
I wish you here right now.
1:07 PM

2/7/11

Madeline called. She told me what happened. I thought you should know she's okay and out
of the hospital. Karina is going to be there for a while yet, but she sho

2:42 PM
uld be fine too. Nic... didn't make it.
2:42 PM
Goodnight sweetness. I love you.
11:03 PM

2/10/11

David is acting like a mother hen, but Amy is doing her best to keep him in line. You'd be laughing at them.

12:34 PM

2/14/11

Professionalism people, I swear. I feel like I keep cleaning up messes that were caused by everyone else.

10:13 AM

I miss you.

12:12 PM

I love you.

1:23 PM

I keep wishing you'd pick up or answer me.

5:16 PM

It's been really hard to keep ot together these past few days, but the dog needs me so that's helped.

7:49 PM

Good night my lovely girl. Happy Valentine's Day

10:32 PM

2/28/11

Good morning babe.

8:06 AM

I remembered what you said, about wondering if the 28th gets lonely without the 29th to keep it company. Strange, sweet girl.

11:58 AM

Carl keeps asking if I'm okay. Apparently I seem off.

2:39 PM

3/6/11

David asked about you. He was wondering when you would be coming by for a visit. Syays he misses you.

4:05 PM

I miss you too.

4:05 PM

I haven't told him yet. I don't know what to say, he loved you like one of his own.

4:06 PM

3/15/11

Your mom called David and Amy. I didn't know they knew each other. He's been calling me all day.

6:24 PM

I don't want to talk to him. I don't want to talk to anyone but you.

6:30 PM

Please answer me.

8:33 PM

Please, baby girl, I just want one message. That's all I want.

8:54PM

Fine. Be that way. I don't care.

9:13 PM

3/31/11

janus!

David doesn't like that I'm doing this. He asked me to stop.

10:11 AM

But what if you text me back? What if you really are there just waiting for the right time.

2:03 PM

I can't abandon that. I can't abandon you.

3:15 PM

4/18/11

I tried stopping.

5:44 PM

But then something would happen, or I'd see something and I would be halfway through a text to you before remembering..

6:14 PM

I think I need to delete your number.

7:00 PM

I'm sorry. I don't want to.

7:02 PM

I want you. I want you here on the couch next to me talking about anything. I don't care what it is.

7:05 PM

4/20/11

I need to delete your number.

7:39 AM

I love you.

7: 43 AM

Goodbye.

8:00 AM

5/15/11

I lied. I couldn't because it's all I have left except for the few things around the apartment.

10:22 PM

I should have let you move in. What was I thinking making us wait until the summer?

10:30 PM

6/6/11

Happy Birthday beautiful. Wish you were here to celebrate.

9:10 AM

wrong # dude

10:00 AM

He stared down at his phone with blank eyes. Tears slipped down his face as his phone fell from his limp fingers to the floor of his office. She wasn't on the other end anymore.



Unwatered Women

BY VICTORIA HART

Sex is beautiful.
Like a rose unwilted,
You have girls in bloom
In schoolyards,
In front gardens,
And alone from within the cracks of a sidewalk.
Yes,
Women rise up from the devastation
Covered and hardened
By man-synthesized muck
That turns icy in the winter,
Slippery when wet.
It turns hot in the summer,
Enough to where you may fry unhatched fowl upon our faces.
The whites of these unborn baby birds
Smear our true colors,
A pale and ugly hue
Faded like chalk powder from clapped erasers
From 1950's punishment.
These years are familiar with punishment for us.
We were used to the clinging stockings
That pulled at our skin,
The makeup that suffocated us,
The words that burned our ears
Like hot curlers or hair irons
That brand us as men's cattle.
This same burn we feel in our hearts when we're told,
"It's your fault.
It's what you wore.
Whore!
Know you not how you tease men
To the fruition of your own unwilling deflowering?
Do you not realize
The stretched inseams of men
Are all your doing?
You are the reason why
I have penetrated your womanhood.
The dress I have torn off your vulnerable skin
Is why I prod and stab
Your holy, now gaping, bloody entrance.
Your makeup is the reason why
There are tears upon your face
Streaming like the internet virus videos
That promote predators,
'Support [insert rapist's name here].

She wore a miniskirt!"

Yes, sex is beautiful,
But rape is as ugly as the lies you've told us.

Plans

BY HAYLEE RETHMAN

[I want to move] to anywhere	Wake up every morning with	but my own world.
with you,	hopes that your face	[I want to want to need to breathe.] Inhale.
[scream love at the rafters]	is the first thing I see.	The same air that keeps us living.
fall asleep every night	Make every morning [the beginning	With you.
with your arms enveloping me.	of every new poem.]	
With you.	Poems that will not revolutionize anything	

Drift

BY BONGIWE SHONGWE

Drift, Drift

Through the wind
Blowing East
Blowing West
Time of no consequence.

From day-spring
To day-end
No foothold-
Just the melody of surrender.

Swi...sh...swi...sh...
Sweet lullaby of slavery
Inability to decide
Dependence on iron-rails
Swaying to the swish of the whip.

Drift to the end
Drift to oblivion
Drift, drift, drift...

Children of War

BY AMINA MESIC

My first memory takes me all the way back into those bloody mornings when the sounds of grenades and bullet whistling were my wake-up calls. My mother would line us up every morning and repeat our typical routine on how to run away from snipers. And believe it or not, I became an expert in running away from death. My childhood was more like a video game; I never knew if I would reach to another level and get a new life for the next day. I was not afraid; I guess I never actually realized that I was growing up in the world of terror, killings, and sufferings. I was growing up fast, but felt like I never had enough freedom to grow up like those kids who were born in peace.

My family lived in the shelter made by my father and grandfather. It was nothing more than a hole in the ground, six feet deep, and thirteen feet wide. The "walls" were coated with old and rotten boards, while the floor and carpet were unfamiliar words for me. We did not complain, we lived a modest life underground. As five year old kid, I hated "underground," as it seemed creepy and it smelled of fresh soil; I always felt like I was buried alive. My world was outside, on the playing ground with my war friends. Our playground was the safest place in the town. The sniper could not see or reach us, and that was the only place where we felt like kids again. I always kept the count of my friends; seven of us, war kids marching behind barricades, screaming, laughing, running, falling, playing.

I particularly remember my father's drilled car parked at the entrance of our shelter. Since I never had an opportunity to see a brand-new, shining car, this one parked in the front of my "home" seemed beautiful enough. My father had a special connection with this car, and every new hole on its surface was breaking his heart. When the days were peaceful, my father used to let me inside of his Pujdo (his car's official name), and those days were the special and the happiest days of my childhood. I would stay inside for hours, collecting the bullets, and pretending like I was driving. The time was passing by, but Pujdo was sitting at the exact same spot not ready to give up.

Two years later, the war stopped.

I remember my parents one day coming and telling me that we are leaving our shelter and going home. Thanks to this "reasonable" war, I did not know what living in the home felt like. I was afraid of change, but I was too young to make any decisions by myself. We moved and I left my six soldiers and Pujdo to find their own way home. I was waiting for them to find their way back home for ten years, but they never came. After ten years of waiting, I decided to look for them.

My first encounter with the place where I left my childhood ten years ago pulled me back into the world of war, suffering, screaming, and hungry tummies. I felt the chills through my spine and wished I had never come back. But I was already there facing the reality, and ready to recall my childhood so I could move on. The hole in the ground I had called home was gone, and our play ground was not there anymore. My heart broke into pieces when I saw roads going through the place where I had run barefoot with my six soldiers, my six loyal companions. The place was quiet, gray, and gloomy. The air was heavy; I was struggling for breath. I was looking for any sign of my childhood, but I could not find one. I went to every corner, I peeked into every hole, but I did not find anything. I could only remember seven of us running around, laughing, screaming, and playing. We were all finally free, but this place had lost its freedom, it had lost its beauty, and its greenness. I suddenly remembered my childhood happiness. I remembered all of us being childish and happy, happier than ever. I never imagined that the war could be a reminder of joy and happiness, but that is what I learned through it; how to enjoy

and be happy no matter what.

My six soldiers were all alive. They survived the game and moved to the next level. They all got an extra life, a new chance for living. We still see each other whenever we are at the same continent, and regardless of our distance and lack of conversation, they are still my favorite six. The relationship we built through the war is unbreakable, and every single day before going to bed, or waking up, I think of them and smile at those wonderful moments we spent together.

Pujdo is another story. Pujdo never gave up. The car I got for my 18th birthday from my parents was restored Pujdo. My father mustered the strength to say goodbye to his baby, and to deliver it into the hands of its new owner. I still spend hours sitting in that car, recalling memories and remembering every little detail from the time I used to play inside of it. After confronting the place I hated the most, I realized that this very same place offered me the most beautiful moments of my life; I finally realized that the war did not destroy us, but we destroyed the war.

Now here I am, seventeen years later. A grown woman that managed to have the most beautiful childhood under the grenades and the rain of bullets. I still return to the place where I left my childhood to remind myself of those beautiful moments, beautiful friendships, and beautiful memories. Each and every picture from my childhood album reminds me of how the war could not destroy our dreams and our hopes. There is no greater feeling than coming back to this place and breathing in all the power and energy we left there years earlier. Remember, I never said my life was easy; my life was modest. Modest and beautiful. And if I would have a chance to live my life all over again, I would not change a single thing about it. I would not be afraid to go through the war, and I would fight for our freedom and peace through laughter, love, and life. I would defeat the death all over again, have my six soldier, and drive my Pujdo.

We live in freedom now, we go to college now, and we are the pride of our parents, our people, and our country. All seven of us. We, children of the war, fought for our peace; we laughed when it was the hardest, we loved in the world of hatred, and we played in the land of mines.

"In war, our elders may give the orders...but it is the young who have to fight."

© T.H. White, The Once and Future King

Words to a Loved One

BY BREON EVANS

You're so lonely
So lifeless
Like coal
Deep
Beneath the ground

Sitting in the dark
Locked away from the world
Temperature rising
Pressure too high to bear
Cracks develop
Slowly eroding away your surface

Soon it will all get to you
You will reach your breaking point
Causing you to change
And live your life in a new form
Worth more to society

Though it won't matter what others think
You will realize how invincible you are
You will know nothing can break you again
You will be one precious gem

Children of Westminster College



janus

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