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POETRY WINNER

Ode to a Krispy Kreme

I can't resist you, Krispy Kreme
You deep-fried glazed vial of heroin that forces my body into a new spiral of addiction
I am defenseless against the beckoning of your greasy, sugary, body of perfection
My brain can see your eleven grams of fat,
but my tastebuds easily override any possibility of good judgement
I watch you roll down the assembly line of sin
underneath the forbidden waterfall of Satan's nectar
I only yearn to have the sensation of your warm, gooey body
dripping, oozing across the roof of my mouth
I can feel you slowly melt down my throat,
the warmth of your touch more comforting than any mother could ever provide
Your icing latches onto my fingers, mesmerizing,
stapelying me into nothing more than a thumb-sucking toddler
Your confection creates a realm of hallucinations in a sugar-induced high,
more potent and vivid than the worst acid trip
I can't resist you, Krispy Kreme,
you will be the cholesterol induced death of me

Josh Kim

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VISUAL ARTS WINNER



Jeffrey Hinds

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PROSE WINNER

The Little Things

Anticipation filled the air as the crowd's cheering rose. Sweaty, tired, and spent, players lined up opposite each other and prepared for one last play. I was at the head of our team -- captain, quarterback, and senior leader. I was on top of the world. Untouchable. Football, and where I was going to play in the future, were my only worries. But, at this moment, the only worry I had was the other team. I had faced tough opponents and won a lot of games, but I had lost a lot of games as well. I looked over the defense and prepared for the first big challenge of my senior season. I took the snap from the center and dropped back to pass. Everything around me sped up, but in my eyes everything was running in slow motion.

My teammates made their moves. The defense made their moves. I was moving without thinking. No need to think; I had done this many times. I saw an opening and lofted a beautiful pass, that classic just-over-the-outstretched-fingertips-of-a-defender type of pass. The ball floated through the air moving in slow motion. I saw the ball spiraling tightly towards its target. My teammate and friend reached up, gathered in the ball, and fell into the end zone for a game-winning touchdown.

Then the whistle blew and I awoke from my trance. Everything was back to full speed. My teammates were celebrating, the crowd was running onto the field. I was consumed with joy and did what I always did after a win: I ran toward the stands to search for my mom and dad. Suddenly, I dropped to my knees, knocked back to reality. My game-winning touchdown wasn't so important any more. My father wasn't in his normal spot and I was filled with grief. To be taken back to a special place, a place my dad and I had visited just a few weeks earlier was all I wanted. Floating on a quiet, lazy river was all I wanted. I wanted the past returned to me.

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9/12/98

Isn't it funny, life that is, and the events that happen throughout life? We take so many things for granted until something happens that makes those events seem very important. I lost my father on September 12, 1998. On that day, I not only lost a parent, I lost my best friend. He was my role model, my hero, my coach, my parent. My dad was everything to me. I was there for him and he was there for me -- and that was the way it was supposed to be. Forever.

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The hardest decisions I had made up to that point usually involved what to wear to school. I had a great life and my dad was a part I took for granted. I loved him and did as much as I could with him, but another part of my life had of late taken up a lot of the time that we once spent together. I had a girlfriend, the downfall of boys wanting to become men.

I was happy when I was with my girlfriend, or so I thought. When she said jump, I asked only "how high?" I knew I was spending too much time with her because deep down I felt that I should be doing other things, but to keep her happy every second of my time was spent with her. I took away time from my friends and family, but most of all from my dad. Worse yet, I didn't realize how my absence affected him until one day he asked me for some help. I didn't have to go to my girlfriend's house for another couple of hours, so I said sure.

My dad had been an outdoorsman from birth, and he wanted to spend his afternoon floating down a local river searching the riverbanks for Indian artifacts. He already had thousands but had only recently discovered that riverbanks were a prime resting spot. Dad had started searching for arrowheads when he was very young, because his father and his father's father had done the same. It is a tradition in my family to search for them, not for their monetary value, but for their link to the past. My dad loved the land and its history. Arrowheads are actual records of the history; they are the proof that Native Americans inhabited the areas where my father and I grew up. As a young child I always followed at my father's heels as he showed me the signs to look for and the best spots to search. I loved looking for arrowheads with my dad.

But on this day, I had plans.

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I helped my dad load the canoe and as we drove to the river I could tell he had something on his mind; he didn't push the issue, so I didn't either. When we got to the river and were unloading the canoe, my dad was unusually somber. I asked what was wrong and, with a forced smile, he asked if I would go with him. He already knew the answer. Sadly, I told him I couldn't go. I had to go to my girlfriend's house. I could see the hurt in his face and I tried hard to hide the hurt that I was feeling.

I was very bitter at my girlfriend after that, which was unfair to her because it was my choice to go see her. But I blamed her for my father's sadness. Early that night, earlier than usual, I went home, talked with my dad, and asked him about his day. He had missed me. He didn't find any arrowheads, but the day was not a total loss. He was outdoors and that was enough for him. He said he felt that I no longer had any time for him and I knew it was true. I couldn't remember the last time that we had sat down and talked.

Guiltily, I promised that the next weekend I would go with him.

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I woke up that next Saturday morning stiff and sore from football. Canoeing all day, searching the banks on my hands and knees for arrowheads, was the farthest thing from happiness I could think of. But dad already had breakfast ready. We ate and I half-heartedly walked outside to load the canoe. As I stepped into the morning sun, I felt a little better about the idea, almost. And on the way over to the river, my dad and I talked.

"I found some really promising spots to dig for arrowheads, the flint was thick on the ground."

"Ever looked there before?"

"No, but it looked like a great spot; besides, we're not out here to find a lot of them, we're just out here to have fun. If we find some arrowheads, good; if not, oh well. I can remember doing this several times when you were so young you had to struggle to keep up. You'll probably have to wait for me to keep up now."

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At the time, I didn't realize what my dad was saying, but I was getting more and more excited about the prospect of spending an entire day with my dad in the outdoors. Just me and him, just like the old days. I could

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no longer be the child who followed everywhere at his dad's heels, but some part of me still wanted that.

Our trip started terribly. The first thing we did was tip the canoe into freezing cold, late summer water. We came up gasping for air. We couldn't catch our breath, not because of the cold, but because of the laughter that came from deep within our bodies. Today was going to be a wonderful day.

We paddled several miles and the trip was rough. The river was low and we had to get out of the canoe and walk through the riffles for several miles. Seven or eight hours later - it was almost dark - we lifted the canoe from the water. Despite the low water, we never enjoyed a day on the river more than that day. On a "normal" day the trip would have been miserable, dragging the canoe the majority of the way and tipping into freezing cold water would normally have put me in a foul mood. But that time with my dad made it worthwhile. We talked and we looked and we spent a good deal of time in absolute silence just enjoying the sweet smells of the late summer/early fall. Talking was good, but silence was better.

Our senses alert, we noticed everything on the quiet river. The leaves had a musty and stagnant, but some how enjoyable, smell; the plants we were both allergic to didn't seem to bother us so much. The river smelled fresh and fishy at the same time. Trees hung over the river. Looking back now, I see them enveloping my father and me in their protective canopy. Shadows cast eerie designs on the rocks and on the water. Bluffs protected us from the outside world making us feel like the only people in a timeless world. No one intruded to tell us we were only searching for the past, that we hadn't somehow become the past ourselves.

I was my father when he was a young adult, and my dad was my grandfather. We were tradition. I don't know what we talked about. Nothing serious, just pleasantries. We talked about the beauty and mystique of the river where we had lived for so long. Something about that day made the river and the land seem so different. We were a part of it. We were past and present, mysteriously linked for a few hours. When I look back now, I think that God stopped everything for me and my father to enjoy each other and His majesty.

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At day's end we were both sad, but we were refreshed and reborn. Renewed, I was again my dad's little boy; he was my teacher. On the

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river we found again the link that had slipped away. As my father searched for arrowheads so often on the riverbanks or on the islands in the lake, I was searching for protection, for something that I had once had but felt that I had outgrown. I looked for the past that my dad and I had shared. I found it that day as my father always looked for and tried to find his link to the past. It was special for both of us to have spent that day together, because we both found what we were looking for. I can still picture perfectly in my mind the smile my dad had when we came up struggling for air when we first tipped over. I can remember his smiles when either of us told a joke. I can remember the little things of the day so perfectly.

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Back in the real world, I had to go back to school. Dad had to go back to work. The all-consuming football season was just around the corner. We knew all this, but we knew too that things were different. We were changed by that day. I felt a new closeness to my friends and family. I was ready for a great football season. That evening getting ready for the football jamboree (a scrimmage against three other teams), I ran into my mom and dad's room and asked,

"Dad, are you coming to the jamboree to watch us play?"

"I would love too, you know I never miss your games, but I feel absolutely terrible. I'm not going to be able to make this one, Buddy."

"Okay. Feel better for me and wish me luck."

"Good Luck."

He had never missed a game, but now he looked at me with sad eyes and admitted he was too sick to go. I couldn't believe it. The game went well. Dad told me later he had listened on the radio and he knew that the team was going to have a great year. He said he couldn't wait for our first game if he could just get well. Two days later he was hospitalized. No one could tell us what was wrong. I could stand to see my dad only once in the hospital. The pain -- my pain -- was too much. Remembering my dad on the river, outdoors -- that was the way I wanted to think of him, not laid up in a hospital bed with tubes running everywhere into his body. Dad was able to speak to us only one day that he was in the hospital, the first day. All he could say was that he loved us. I went about my life, searching for normalcy, hiding as long as I could from the prospect of losing my father. I played the role to perfection. I fought my battle on the inside, and showed strength on the

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outside. Football became my sanctuary. Nothing else mattered. I was what everyone expected me to be: strong. Inside, I was slipping away.

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My first game passed and the second game was fast approaching. You know how that ended -- the big pass, the diving catch, the game-winning touchdown. I drove home alone that night and watched the game film over and over, hiding in football. I tried to find joy from the way we had played, but all I could think about was my dad. Football fell suddenly into place, no longer a life and death affair. It wasn't what my family was dealing with in real life. Up to that point in my life, football was the hardest thing and most important thing to me. After that moment, after that play in that game, I realized that it was not so important. I hoped and prayed that dad would get well, that in time he would be able to watch the film with me, that I could go back to the simplicity of worrying only about how I had played and how I would play.

Then the phone rang and shook me from my thoughts. Mom answered. I knew what was happening by the look on her face and the way she looked at me. My father passed away that morning. My life was no longer so simple. I wanted to curse God for taking my dad away from me, for breaking up my family. Death wasn't supposed to happen -- not to us, not to my father. But when God and I faced each other, all I could do was thank Him for that day on the river, thank Him for making me realize what my father meant to me. I think that God gave my dad and me that one special day so that we could get back to the way things always had been before and should have been always. How would I feel today about that day if my dad had not been taken away from me? I like to think that it would still occupy a large spot in my heart. I know it would, and I know that because of that day, every time I am on a river I have someone there with me. Someone watching over me.

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Everyone has an event that at the time seems unimportant, but ends up at the center of everything. Mine was that day on a river with my father. I don't know why I was given the chance to spend this special day with my dad so close to his death. Maybe he knew deep down that something was going to happen; maybe I knew deep down that I wanted to regain that oneness with my father we all long for. Maybe it was a gift from God given to both of

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us. We were father and son. We will continue to be. I can't explain why we were given this unique gift or why anyone is ever given that moment that is so meaningful, but I will always remember the day on the river, and I will always remember my dad the way he was that day and all the days before that day.

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Sitting down and reliving these experiences, I realize that I am still searching for something. I walk on lonesome river banks, searching islands, and ditches for something so hard to find. An end to the pain.

I am, however, on the right track. I feel as though my father just reached down and wiped the dirt away from a beautiful arrowhead. His hand not only wipes the dirt and wear away from the stone, he wipes my pain away. I can see us still, both of us walking together, by a river's side, me behind my dad at his heels, him leading the way. Someone Else guides the two of us.

Chris Willingham

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Sunset

Purple lips of serenity
crying rebellion against grains of life,
peddling below hands of reason
and ever threatening to return...

Bright fire
dancing through true life-gold
and burning time, changing it, making it go faster...

Waves of beauty vibrating through solfège
causing hums of awe...
A masterpiece of bright, holding melody.

Bits of snow still collected in small hiding places;
the sun rarely shines in these tiny spots
(rarely will she let it);

Yet the clouded lips find ways to pass
and twilight (which is predated in the eyes) becomes night
after that bright, blushing brilliance pushes reality
changes it,
shapes it
into an everlasting gaze.

Stephen Dean



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Home is where the heart is

My heart beats with time,
New York Eastern Standard Time, that is.

Every thump, every pulsating meter is a
Honk, a yell, in a
Trafficjamoftaxis.

I sense the absolute madness
Of frantic businessmen, nannies, actors, street vendors...
Of flashing light, exuberant color,
And constant movement
In every flutter.

Each ventricle somehow encapsulates
The Avenues,
The massive buildings,
The parks,
The tourist traps,
The history,
The WONDER -
Of this endearing city.

Like a subway train barreling down its track,
The excitement I feel
Runs rampant through
Every vein.

My heart beats to keep me alive,
Just as the City never ceases to give up its own rhythm -
Its demise only to occur with the absence of a pulse.
Day and night the City pumps to live.

Sensations of joy and true admiration for this healthy city
Keep my heart strong,
A constant reminder that

I ♥ NY

Katie Kramer

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They Match

They match and they catch
The same type of air
They don't care
Peroxide, denim, goodbye to Lennon
He tried, he died, could he imagine?
Oh, that's right he did.
Was he just a kid?
Was he tired of the mired uninspired masses of the upper classes making
everything the pleasure of a dollar?
Tuck in that collar. You bug
That fell in the mug and drowned in the black deep that could only be named
and famed by a celestial body and a deer?
Get it? No, I thought not.
Sip
Your lip burns doesn't it?
That smell like coffee and toffee with a hint of mint and the love of silicone
and false contentment?
Drink your water, give away your daughter, lead them all to slaughter.
You can't possibly see the dream of this so-called invisible machine.
Is this cut lean?
Shut up bitch.
Twitch and revel in the matted fact of the pact you made and displayed as the
vomit comes out of your nose to be disposed in the many rivers that shiver
and shimmer as they flow, with us in tow.
Suck us dry Dracula, flip the spatula.
Its only melting our dream, join our team
Hear us scream and feign
Where are you Erica?
Why you could, should would only be here
In America.

Andrea Wimberly

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Standing Here

Standing here, in awe of the radiance
Shining from the source of my purpose,
Contemplating reasons to live and to die
Is all I can do with this time.
Looking back in judgment
I search for some justification of my path.
Trying to make sense of it all
And how it went wrong.

Hindsight is supposed to be 20/20,
But somehow everything is blurry.
So onward I stumble through my past
Striving for some sense of closure.
Feeling along I try to convince myself
That everything was well worth it.

And now I start to see the big picture
As it comes into focus.
But that is when my light starts to fade,
And when my purpose dissolves.
Only an empty shell now remains.
A hollowed out skin of a life that once was.

Philip Stinger



**Dorothy Parker, I got
the doodads you wrote**

A doodad
Is a wound
That opens
With a laugh;

It is sadness
With mirth

In the corners
Of its mouth.

It reminds one
Of a certain
Something:

How bridges are not
Always about

Jumping.
Falling or

Nathan Kempf

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I decided to go to work

This coffee tastes like shit. It's the beans that dumbass Trent buys; the cheapest stuff in the storefront, as though it all tastes the same. Two creams and two sugars into fresh ground coffee. I feel like I'm putting new seat covers on a '76 Pacer. I really should have stayed in this morning. But I'm here because I decided to be here - to say anything else would be in bad faith. I could have been scolded for my absence. I could have been fired, but damnit if I didn't opt to come in today. The café was calling and I came here.

It should be noted that I am not an Interrogator; it is an element of my occupation. From nine to five each weekday I act the part of a Detective, and as a Detective I am occasionally asked to question a prisoner, in so doing I am at times labeled: "Interrogator." But I don't identify myself with the role. The rule does not determine my actions or my attitude - I chose to take on the job and I am free to face unemployment at any time. I am not essentially a detective, nor am I essentially an Interrogator, a Detroit Pistons fan, or a good swimmer - to accept such labels would be deceptive, an act of bad faith, an act . . . like this. Jesus, I can't even describe these things. That's the trouble with sincerity; it is just another form of bad faith. Describing, observing - I become a mere object. Defining my traits becomes denying myself when I am resigned to them, to be truly authentic I must recognize that I make these individual choices with full awareness that I am not determined by anything else, even these notions of self. My freedom is my responsibility. I am condemned to exist. But I digress. I am not an Interrogator.

I exhaust myself.

In school I read a passage by Dostoevsky. He said, "I have many times tried to become an insect. . . to be too conscious is an illness." I get that now. At the time I remember thinking it was my intelligence that would make me great; a man of action, I was going to rise above the rest and set myself apart. But now my consciousness is my anguish. I think for hours on the lack of thought in others. I stare into nothingness and take nothing from it - no meaning or value - and yet it is all I find myself doing. Simple explanations, like the one about my job, become diatribes because it all comes back to the same thing - my thoughts, my actions, my responsibility for all of it.

It's only 9:25 and I'm ready for a nap.

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What bothers me most is when they lie, when I know they are lying, and when they refuse to acknowledge their deception. Deception seems truly stupid when we all know the truth. And when it is self-deception, that is too ridiculous to wrap my head around. They're never free, these prisoners, insofar as they are here - and they are only occasionally freed of their own deception. For me, freedom is full responsibility and ultimate consciousness. For them it's the other side of the bars. But this prison doesn't take freedom, it limits options. The new situation was bleak, I suppose, but they still have freedom. We can't take that from them, even if they would like us to. It was their consciousness that was ultimately painful, and as much as they might try to circumvent it, sometimes it just can't be avoided.

A young man this morning pissed himself for lack of freedom. Pitted himself for his situation, and pissed himself for fear of death. Juan Mirbal had a terrible fear of suffering and it showed on his face. I'm told he asked his physician if it would hurt very long. He cried. He pleaded, "I don't want to die. I don't want to die." But the thing that Mr. Mirbal was lacking was ultimately less painful than all those thoughts he had. It's the calm ones who know anguish. He was like a sick man who defends himself against illness by fever. It's much more serious when there isn't any fever. Mirbal had not accepted his fate, he grasped at his past as though it weren't stream water, slipping through and passing by. He stopped being free and tried to cope with what was to him imminent and inconceivable - not having life. It was consciousness of emptiness that ought to have disturbed him. He was living in the past, not anticipating the present nothingness - he never realized how good he had it in so doing.

Tom Steinbock didn't even turn up for the interrogation. This character, Steinbock, had convinced himself he was out of options and by zero hour he was simply coinciding with himself. He was there, but an inanimate object. Mr. Steinbock didn't faint, didn't cry, didn't plead for mercy or make for a getaway - he must have spent hours considering the instance of his death and resigned himself to escapism. He tried long enough to tell himself he was not afraid, but it was the consciousness of that fear that made him act the way he did. Mr. Steinbock had pissed himself for fear of death too, but the torment overwhelmed him in the hours since he learned his fate, and when the shots were fired I suppose he was dying for a second time. Seneca said, "(h)e does not regard death with fear, as if it were a great loss; for no

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man can lose very much when but a dribble remains." That was Mr. Steinbock at the time of his death - consciously unconscious, for fear of the alternative.

Pablo Ibietta is next in line for the hot seat. I hope he comes to me in good faith.

In the time since he was notified of his sentence of death a lot of thoughts must have passed through Ibietta's head. I was a prisoner of war once and I can imagine many of the thoughts he's considered; I know the ones he must have mullered over the most. They're the thoughts that made Mr. Mirbal so hysterical, the thoughts that haunted Mr. Steinbock. I understood their reactions, I did. If you'll allow me some latitude, it is my belief that on account of our common experience I can have some awareness of their mental state. There is a better way to manage oneself in these situations. A man named Viktor Frankl once wrote:

When a man finds it is his destiny to suffer, he will have to accept his suffering as his task; his single and unique task. He will have to acknowledge the fact that even in suffering he is unique and alone in the universe. No one can relieve him of his suffering or suffer in his place. His unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden.

A smart man, Frankl spent three years in an Auschwitz concentration camp considering the methods of coping he witnessed in the men around him. These men, the most courageous among them, didn't harbor false illusions or entertain artificial optimism; they faced up to the full amount of suffering. In this, I think Frankl was properly conscious. It wasn't the original project, but sometimes in light of his circumstances a man can make such a radical conversion. Reflective choices in light of consciousness, that is authenticity. Responsibility for the conscious reflective choices we make, that is authenticity. I bring it up because it might have looked like Steinbock's approach, and Steinbock exemplifies for me the wrong approach. Accepting fate in this way is taking the responsibility out of your hands, and as free beings we are always responsible. There was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer. Steinbock had instead accepted the role of Prisoner Awaiting Execution without accepting responsibility, without remaining conscious. His self-deception came with the part. Camus' "Stranger" had it right, I suppose: "So

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close to death, . . . I felt ready to begin again." Maintain self-reflective consciousness, you men condemned, and don't resign yourself to the role. Anguish and suffering are the price of authenticity here.

I searched his eyes for awareness.

"Have a seat right there, Mr. Ibietta."

"Sure."

He sat slouched on the metal chair, folding his back to meet its curve, feet adrift around the table's legs. His cold composure: resolute. In Mirbal and Steinbock I accepted self-deception. In times such as these some men couldn't stomach consciousness. But I saw something in Ibietta that stirred up a particular obstinacy in me — it was his own. I've heard enough of this today; Ibietta would come to me in good faith or I would compel him to do so.

"So," I asked, "what have you been thinking?"

"What have I been thinking?" He looked at me as though I was wasting his time. He was wasting mine.

No, I was. Think, think. I decided to come in today, I decided to interrogate.

"Yes," I answered. "In the hours since your sentence was passed down? You must have thought a million things. What compels you to remain so determined for your cause? For your friend?"

"Is that what you think this is?"

"You tell me what it is. Why does a man go to certain death when he could save his own skin? Is the cause that important? Is Gris?"

He shot back, "I don't care about Gris and I certainly don't care about the cause!"

"But . . ."

"You think my life should mean that much to me? You think I'm maintaining my silence because something means something to me? But you don't know me for shit!"

"Tell me then."

A sudden horrible calm came over him. In his new composure I could see surprise at the passion I'd evoked in him. He was certain he was no longer capable of these things; he'd told himself that he clung to nothing. His words echoed my assumption. "I thought highly of Gris at one time," he said, "and I committed myself to the cause. But when cast in the

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disillusioning light of my new found consciousness — it all amounts to little more than a piss-soaked pile of coal dust. I know Gris is more useful to the cause of Spain, but to hell with Spain and anarchy; nothing was important."

"Was?"

"It was not for those reasons that I have consented to die," he continued as though I was speaking to myself. "Gris' life had no more meaning than mine; no life had value."

"Had?" I gestured toward him, emphasizing my inquisition. He was a Prisoner Awaiting Execution.

"What?"

"You said had; you said no life had value" I replied.

"What of it?" His stubbornness swelled in his chest.

"You are still alive. You've stopped choosing and started acting the part. But I won't take responsibility for your choice."

"This coffee really tastes like shit."

I wouldn't be dragged off topic. "A man in your situation thinks about death because there is nothing to do but think about it. Your friend Mr. Steinbock was paralyzed by the thoughts that you considered and set aside. Death will creep up from behind you, Mr. Ibietta, and you won't be able to prepare for it. You don't understand what it means, the nothing afterwards."

There! I saw it! Like a placard across his forehead, his thoughts read: "It didn't please me to think the same things as Tom." They scared him too, the thoughts we all have in such a state of affairs, and Ibietta had set them aside on account of the torment they inflicted upon him.

"Stop deceiving yourself, Mr. Ibietta."

"Deceiving myself? Deceiving myself?" Like a possum, he rolled over as the thoughts surfaced. "In the hours since my sentence was handed down I have given every thought its due."

"Don't do that. Don't deceive yourself, Mr. Ibietta. We're the only people here and you have yet to fool me."

I pierced his façade with my stare.

"You abandoned your own consciousness hours ago. Life means something to you; it means something insofar as it is not nothingness. I understand you didn't sleep last night and I understand why; you didn't want to lose life. I don't mean to tell you how to act, sir, but be authentic in your final hours, don't act the part."

"What would you have me do, sir? How would you have me live

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out my last hours?" His frustration showed in his desperation. My words compelled his consciousness, and those thoughts incubated his anguish. He thought he was being stubborn. He was right.

There is no particular way of life that I can recommend to Mr. Ibietta. I can condemn this bad faith; he pretended he was not free. And I would praise in him some authenticity - a full awareness that nothing determines our choices for us. But he had made up his mind without taking responsibility for the decision. "Mr. Ibietta, accept responsibility for everything about yourself."

"In what way am I evading such responsibility?"

"Excuse me?" I replied, surprised at his tone.

"I said, 'In what way am I evading such responsibility?' My head has been a flurry of thoughts in the hours since I learned my fate. I've considered my life as if with a microscope. My memories, my projects, my friends, my love - my life, given its full consideration." Ibietta leaned forward in his chair, sweeping his disheveled hair behind his ears and showing the whites of his eyes. I had compelled passion in him again. He paused with whimsy, almost laughing at himself. He continued, "How madly I ran after happiness, after women, after liberty. . . I took everything as seriously as if I were immortal". He spoke for a moment as though I had left the room.

"And you can still have it," I told him.

"Stop!"

"Stop what?"

"Let me die!"

"Let yourself want to live!"

A whisper. The broken man softly spoke: "Gris is hiding with his cousins, four kilometers from the city."

He looked at me with a quiet desperation. Mr. Ibietta, in all of his reflection, had failed to be authentic and he was only now realizing it. He hadn't begged me to make him save himself, but he wanted to. He hadn't even asked but his demeanor implored me. Ibietta wanted to live, but the meaning he lost in the details of his life had somehow crept across the whole of his character. I would grant him that the majority of it was of little consequence, but life was better than nothing and he'd convinced himself they

were the same thing. I am not like those men who come before me. In authenticity I face my full consciousness and all of the anguish that accompanies it - Ibietta abandoned responsibility when he took on his role, and deceived himself all the way to his death. I was certain he had told the truth. I was certain that he realized that he was acting in bad faith; he consciously considered his fear of nothing, he accepted that he was making the choice to put himself to death and the responsibility was his. Turns out, I was not like Ibietta, not even in the end.

Russell McGeorge



God is Bigger than Godzilla

Izzy chooses her favorite candy treat from the Big Red Bowl. She watches the cartoon video vegetables while I get Vera and Owen to bed. The vegetables play characters in bible stories and then conduct follow-up exegesis, in an animated talk-show format. All their voices sound as if they had clothespins on their noses. Izzy likes the catchy upbeat songs. We all do. We sing them like a cold we all catch.

Izzy glued into position with the electronic adhesive, I herd the twins up the stairs, through the stockyard maze of toothpaste spitting and clothes stripping and potty poker and pajama ziplock, cajoling and cornering them toward the beds, the beds, the beds, and the promise of books and a story.

We read the books and then turn out the lights. I make the story up as I go along, as always. I close my eyes. I am falling asleep, wandering through my plot, until Vera gives me a Tiny Tim tug on the sleeve, and then I am back on the beam again for a few minutes, something about a weeping purple pumpkin with a jade box inside containing a little man granting wishes on the basis of certain conditions with all kinds of picaresque possibilities. I drift off again, dreaming now out loud, until the strangeness of things awakens me sharply, as if startled by my own snoring.

I am a good father, I think, for only short bursts.

Still, they make requests, they dictate, they lie on their backs and listen with their mouths open.

I finish with Vera and Owen and tiptoe out of the room, the quiet poised like a plume of smoke I do not wish to disturb. The wood stairs creak all the way down.

Izzy's video has run out, clicked to STOP and now rewinds, humming a happy business-like note. The VCR defaults to CNN, which is running footage of the airplanes hitting the towers.

Izzy sits quietly.

We might as well be watching a tugboat hitting a mountain, or a tear in a blue video-feed sky. We are all five years old, I think, watching this. We are a nation of eyeballs, blinking and not blinking as we watch the

tickertape, the snap of flags, the towers of sand in our eye.

"What is that?" Izzy asks cautiously.

"Some people crashed the airplane into the building," I say. "It's in New York City." Izzy knows that New York is a thousand miles away, but she doesn't know what this means. None of us do.

I expect her to ask more questions: Why? What about the people? I have no idea what to say, how much to tell her. Maybe if I were wearing a giant tomato suit I would. Part of being a parent is wearing a giant tomato suit from time to time, then you take it off for good, and one day your kids come across an old box full of tomato suits. You hope they will understand.

But the airwaves and newspapers are full of animated tomatoes and cucumbers, telling us stories about God and us and them. They have clothespins on their noses. They are singing songs about the monsters on TV.

I turn off the box and turn to Izzy, small in her rocking chair, her knees pursed and perched, her ragged blanket a gob of crosshatched thread up against her nose and mouth, her eyes on me, waiting for the word, for what is next.

Dr. Chuck Lewis



Virgin Thoughts

Virginity. It is a disease that my body yells at me
In harrowing overtones to cure. But Hell awaits if I do.
Rapists are such shitbags! They start in likeness, the same
Groeling position I do. But instead of waiting like I do, they
Impair others with an ill-used gun and a foul will!
No one with a fetish for fear, control and sadness

Truly deserves to live! I have done without conceding to my
Hormones for my whole life! Meanwhile, somehow
Others seem to not be able to go a fucking week without it! And
Undeniably they always get what they want! Whose
Goddamn idea was it to make having sex a sin? I am
Hating myself so much because I'm trying to find
The faith through abstinence and failing. Right now, I am
So bloody blind and lost, and that is all I know.

Theo Esser



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You are to Me

A cool breeze on a hot summer day,
Just enough to make you crave its presence.
A warm fire on a cold winter night,
You can never be close enough.
Release from a long day at the office,
Offering a glimpse of freedom.
Being trapped in a good book,
Held captive by the wonders it offers.
All these things I can find in an old love,
With whom every day is new.

Shannon

Follow Me

Children run, sneakers flashing
Lighting the path of one young girl—
She chases
her crush through the brush.

I eye her, through
my twenty-one year old eyes,
Then look longingly at my size 8 feet,
Wishing for snazzy sneakers instead of prissy pumps.
Then I could chase
The guy I like, maybe on a mountain bike.

How simple our love could be,
No longing looks or
Emails in a secret code;
I'd know he wants me when he
Trails me, like a kite's tail.

Katie Clouse

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27

Love is Awkward

It's that feeling you have when you are holding hands,
you worry that your palm might sweat too much, forcing them to pull away
you worry that you are not squeezing hard enough, to symbolize the strength
of your bond
you worry that you are squeezing too softly, giving them the impression you
don't accept their touch
It's that feeling you have when looking into their eyes,
afraid to look away, to avert your attention elsewhere so that they might
become jealous
afraid to blink, to break the moment, to strain the perfection of their face
afraid to make a sound, to cause distraction, to kill this shared moment.
It's that feeling you have when talking on the phone,
not wanting to speak too loud, to sound too stern, to suggest turmoil
not wanting to speak too soft, to sound passive, submissive, to sound
disassociated
not wanting to say the wrong thing, to spark their anger, to bring them
unhappiness...or even doubt
It's that feeling you have when you are close,
worried that you have too much cologne or perfume, that they will feel
you're trying to hide something
worried that you don't have enough, that your putrid stench will drive
them away
worried that you will touch them the wrong way, causing them to pull away
from you.
It's that feeling you have when you see them
wondering if you are wearing the right clothes, if your appearance
suits them
wondering if you are smiling correctly, if it appears sincere and comforting
wondering how you will greet them, if your wave makes you look like
a complete buffoon
Love is awkward,
An emotion so definite that it somehow brings a wave of uncertainty
It makes you wonder, even if you are sure
Love is awkward
An emotion so unbreakable that it somehow cracks itself
It makes you insecure, even if your bond is the tightest lock of eternity
Love is awkward. . .
And yet,
It makes you.

Josh Kim

JANUS
28

Imperfections

The path of life
is long and hard,
unfortunately,
the footsteps
tread on your
face.

Jamie Stewart



JANUS
29

Arbitrary

My shirt is on inside-out &
The place where you touched
My arm is still being touched.
It caught me unaware,
This morning after nothing,
With coffee at my lips &
Then my tag is showing.
This touch— it is as though
I suspected an intruder &
Now, on the floor,
I've found the imprint of Nikes &
I'm afraid of the closet.
Your fingernails grazed my elbow &
Have turned my shirt inside-out
I'm sure of it, though
I never check closets.

Nathan Kempf



Beneath Weeping Willows

I know about Missouri in July,
And girls bathing in the sun,
I remember smiles without dossiers,
whispers that turned me red,
lips that hadn't thought of wedding bells,
and curious hands-- skin-fed,
I know about oily legs in sunlight,
About coaxing and giving in,
And I remember the weeping willows,
And other groping.

Shannon Kempf



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30

Silent Echoes

The group was moving slowly. Very slowly. Eli Bates edged ahead with anticipation, wishfully glancing to the front of the crowd. As he passed the people in front of him, he caught sight of William, his good friend. Eli paused and jokingly knocked his friend's baseball cap to the ground. With a raucous laugh, Eli sped ahead, dodging a playful punch that hit nothing but air. "Wait 'til we get in there, Bates," William warned, "I'd watch out for loose stalactites, if I were you!"

"I'd like to see you try and skewer me with a stalactite, William. *I really would!*" retorted Eli from the front of the group, which was now descending the cold, concrete stairs leading to Kentucky's Mammoth Caves.

The musty smell of ancient limestone filled the damp cave air. Calcium walls glistened with slimy condensation oozing from the water table overhead. The cool air hardly stirred, amplifying the piercing silence of the cave. Save the faint echoes of wandering geology students, the cave was void of sound. Its oppressive tone rang unnoticed in Eli's oblivious ears.

"All right, guys! Let's go over the safety of cave exploration!" The instructor's voice rang clear and true in the cave, sending resonant echoes back to the far patches of emptiness. After the hustle and bustle of unloading backpacks and coolers died down, Mr. Tucker continued his speech. "First of all, I don't want any one runnin' 'round here without their safety helmets. Never know when one of those stalactites can come crashing down on ya, and I don't want any of y'all going home with any less brains than ya've got now," he remarked with a witty smile. William playfully jerked his head at Eli, who fake-whistled and pretended to ignore his friend's hint. "Next, I want y'all to pick up your trash. I won't have this place looking like your rooms do on Monday mornings. And last, but not least, remember the 'buddy-system.' Nobody goes nowhere without someone else with 'em."

Eli listened intently to his instructor's directions, nodding thoughtfully at all Mr. Tucker's demands. But as soon as Mr. Tucker released the students to prepare, all words of advice seeped out Eli's ears quickly and permanently. As the others gathered their gear, Eli threw his helmet on, shouldered his backpack, and grabbed William away from the crowd.

"What do you think you're doing?" William demanded, not entirely surprised. "Aw, let's go, Will!" Eli said with excitement. "We know the cave,

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and we'll get to the end before anyone else does. Let's have some *fun*, huh?"

"Eli. . ." William took a deep breath, and was about to explain the absolute absurdity of the suggestion, when Eli withdrew a smutty comic book from his zippered windsuit jacket pocket. "I'll make it worth your while in the end," he said slyly.

"Oh, count me in, man!" exclaimed William. They waited until Mr. Tucker's attention was redirected, then slipped off into the dark expanse of the cave.

As time drew on, Eli and William made excellent time. Around them, the cave shimmered in the dancing beams of their flashlights. Great pillars of limestone and sedimentary rock rose from the floor reaching fifty feet to the cathedral-like ceiling. Blind newts, disgusted at the brashness of splashing intruders, scurried out from beneath overturned rocks and escaped with in narrow crevices in the walls. After some time, the boys passed a cliff overlooking a deep ravine. Eli paused to peer over the precipice. William came up behind him and, while pretending to gaze into the hole, gave Eli a playful nudge. Eli jerked back from the edge. Breathing heavily, startled by the near catastrophe, he whisked his head to glare at William who was grinning. The chase was on! They horsed around for a while, and then continued on the path. Eli looked ahead, smiling with jovial humor and panting from the bout of roughhousing, and noticed a brown wall of dirt and rock blocking their way. His grin dissipated into a puzzled frown as he stopped William in mid step and gazed up at the rearing dead end.

"Um...I don't think this is the right way, Will," he whispered uneasily as a cold sweat formed on his brow.

The friends stood in bewilderment and mild horror, both hurriedly searching their mental maps for the point of mistaken direction. Eli backed away wringing his hands with an intensifying moan. He began to pace and to mutter curses under his breath. "Holy fuck, holy fuck, holy fucking fuck!"

William, calmer at the moment than the disintegrating Eli, said, "Now, let's just calm the down, Eli. Breathe, man, relax. All we have to do is retrace our steps, O.K.? Um. . . yeah. . . Well, I think we must have messed up back at that cliff back there where we. . ."

Eli exploded at this rationalization. "Calm DOWN?! How the hell am I supposed to calm *down*? We are stuck here, William. . . stuck here with *no* map, *no* directions. . . GOD! I know as well as you that we haven't been going the right way for a long time. Nothing looks familiar, William!

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And you want me to calm DOWN?! Jesus!" Eli laughed angrily and shook his head. The echoes of his laughter bounced off the curved walls and returned as a host of frantic voices.

"Well, I don't see why it's all my fault," William snapped back. "Who the hell's bright idea was this in the first place, huh? Who wanted adventure? 'Oh, we'll have *fun*, William. We'll get to the end before *everyone else*, William'" His singsongy mocking reverberated in the lonely cave, echoing the boys' misfortune like a thousand-membered Greek chorus.

"Oh, I see. This is all *my* fault now, right?" Eli advanced towards William, threatening him with a hard push to the chest.

"Back off, man! You're not right!"

Eli answered William with clenched fists and a growling yell as he lunged at his friend, knocking him down. They struggled until Eli got his feet under William and kicked him off. William rolled over and got up, ready for more. Eli, having already recovered, charged at his friend once again. William began to brace himself with his back leg for support. But his foot met emptiness as it slipped off the edge of the gaping chasm, carrying the boy with it. William reeled into the abyss, unable to secure Eli's grasping hand, and plummeted out of Eli's sight screaming.

Eli stood gaping at the darkness that enveloped William, listening as long as he could to his friend's tormented descent. Finally, as silence reigned once more in the cave, Eli sat back on the chilled dirt in wide-eyed, dry-mouthed shock. He felt feverish and surreal. Focusing on remaining still and intact, he listened with an unconscious intensity to the drip of condensation striking a nearby puddle. Silence, drip, silence. . . drip. Eli's body trembled as his mind raced. Silence, drip, silence. . . drip.

Eli rose to his feet. He took a breath and released it as he smoothed his shirt and pants. Silence, drip, *calm*, silence. . . drip. But despite his attempts to remain composed, Eli's mind grew warmer and warmer as panicked thoughts exploded in his brain replacing any serenity. Silence, drip, *panic*, silence. . . drip. And, as red-hot impossibility, confusion, and fear welled up in him, Eli gulped and gasped and stumbled off in the direction from which he and William had come. Silence, drip, *panic, hot*, silence. . . drip.

He blindly continued on his path, guided only by the now dim glow of his flashlight. Silence, drip, *panic, hot*, silence. Away from the puddle and the dripping and the empty hole he ran. Silence, *panic, hot*, silence.

Tears streamed down his face as tried to navigate the

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tight labyrinth. Silence. *panic, hot, mad, silence*. He tripped, unable to judge his footing through his tear-blurred, searing vision and lost consciousness after hitting his head on a ledge jutting out from the cave wall. Silence. *hot, panic, mad, BAM*. *pain, cold, calm, silence*.

* * * * *

A rescue party emerged from the mouth of the cave. An ambulance's red beacon blinked soundlessly, casting crimson flashes on the objects in the wet rainy dark. Police tape surrounded the area, keeping the anxious crowd at bay with a bright yellow plastic barrier. Behind the team rolled a stretcher. On the stretcher lay the lifeless body of Eli Bates, his highlighted hair stained with a matting of thick black blood. His chalk face, scratched, bruised, and smudged, juggled at the opening of the rubber body bag. The crowd shushed from a whispering calm to a dismal silence as the rescue workers loaded the stretcher into the ambulance. The emergency vehicle eased forward, past the tormented, shining, red-flashing faces of the audience, crushing the brilliant reds and yellows and oranges of fall leaves littering the ground. And, as it ended, all was silent once again in the deep dark cave.

Erin Luke

JANUS
34

The Pain of In-between

The pain creeps up in my dreams
I feel it when I'm half awake
A strong wave of sorrow covers me
My void,
My darkness
My protector from this pain
Leaves my dreams untouched
It seems I have to be fully awake
To keep the pain in check
During that time of in-between
Half dreaming half not
That's when I feel the pain
That's when my emotional callus is gone
That's when I can't hide
That's why I feel no comfort in sleep
I understand now why my mother takes her pills
Why others drink and others take drugs
It's their way of keeping their darkness that much longer
Their in-between has grown larger
And it's a way to get their darkness back
Even if just for a little while
I pray my darkness doesn't desert me again
I don't want to end up like my mother and father before me
Yet I see a similar path unfolding itself
A path I wish to avoid
But there is so much pain to deal with
And my darkness is growing thin

Vincent Spezzo

JANUS
35

Almighty God

The apartment was dark save the feeble beams from the lamp over a desk in the corner of the "efficiency" room. Hidden in the shadows lay the wreckage of smashed mementos, torn photographs, and the clutter that accumulates when too many loads of laundry go unwashed. A half-empty bottle of gin rested prone on the floor, its contents above the open mouth trickling into a growing pool on the carpet; Jack had never been much of a drinker.

In fact, Jack had never been much of anything. A little bit of a freelance writer, a little bit of package delivery man...most recently, a little bit of a high school counselor. Never much; but always something. The small lamp blazing above his desk came not from a hard earned paycheck, but as a gift for perfect attendance at his delivery job. If nothing else, he tried to make something of himself.

"God knows I've tried," he muttered while resting his head in his hands. His latest attempt at creating something beyond the meager amenities afforded by his unstable employment had abruptly terminated but two days prior...coinciding with the last time he shaved, ate, or went outside. "But I tried!" he screamed, standing from his chair and gesturing wildly in the lamplight. Love, compounded by complementary failures, was again his downfall.

"All I want is someone who cares. All I want is someone who gives a shit if I come home or not," he protested in a quivering voice while cocking his leg. "Is that *too much* to ask?!" he bellowed, following with a mighty kick that caused his bed to shudder and his foot to hurt. The old lady in the unit below banged a broom into her ceiling to protest the disturbance.

Jack sat down once again in his wooden desk chair, glass crunching into the threadbare-carpet beneath his throbbing foot. He bent over and fished a smashed picture frame from the shadows.

"Why?" was all he could mumble through his clenched jaws. His word fell silent upon the ears of the woman in the picture. To the right of her heart-warming smile and ocean blue eyes was shredded photo paper where Jack rubbed his own image out with a coin. She was now as alone in the picture, following his violence, as he was in his apartment, following hers.

His phone rang, jarring him from his reverie. He glanced away from the hypnotic stare into the photograph to look at his caller ID: Jane.

"It's midnight. I wonder who she fucked this time," he mumbled with ice in his voice, his stare returning to the picture. The rings grew louder in his mind, thundering across the room and impacting his brain with the power of a trumpet overture announcing his defeat. Jane's stare in the picture seemed to harden, grow sinister as her call rang the telephone continuously.

At length, the moment passed and the phone was silent; the picture lay once again on the floor, now more violently deposited than before. Jack ran his fingers through his greasy hair and thought about the gin discarded hours before. The thought of returning to the foul embrace of hard liquor no longer enthralled him like it had earlier...and even then, only for a few moments could he stand its gasoline flavor.

A different release was in order. On the scattered occasions he awoke with hangovers, things were always the same as they had been. The bills remained stacked on the edge of the desk, precariously close to the yawning mouth of his aluminum trashcan; his floor was still as dirty as he left it, and his jobs were still as hit and miss as before he had tipped the first bottle. No, alcohol was not the solution, and unlike in college he now knew that with certainty.

Jack stared into the darkness at the movie in his mind...her naked body entwined with that beast, her clothes in a rumpled pile in the corner of his room...Jane's mouth moved in the movie, but no words came out. The score to this film was recorded in digital surround-hate, no expense wasted on music or dialogue; just the fury of a man betrayed. The scenes skipped through the darkness of his room, projected into space by his mind, close captioned for the hearing impaired by the interpretive gestures he made with his fists upon his desk and feet upon his bed. Again the thud, thud, protesting thud from downstairs.

The reel broke; the film ended; the question remained. Now, as the day before, as the hundreds of times in his life he had been rejected, betrayed, fired or failed... now what? Face the blinking red light on his answering machine - listen to that voice try in vain to explain her actions? Answer the call of the enveloping bed that beckoned him to sleep...knowing well that aside from the sun chasing away the night, nothing would be different in the morning?

In answer to this unspoken question, he subconsciously moved his hand to the top drawer of the desk. In a motion seconded by his heart

and unanimously approved by the council of his soul, he condemned his will to live and removed a matte black handgun from the file-lined cavern. It was not his first exploration of death; perhaps this time *should* be the last, he surmised.

Jesus, in plastic effigy form, watched from his crucified perspective below the lamp. Jack removed the magazine from the pistol, leaving one round in the chamber. He locked eyes with the figure of Christ, the symbol of his faltered religion, and sighed.

Hours ago the lights illuminating the Almighty God Tabernacle sign blinked out for the evening; presumably, no soul needed a blazing invitation to salvation after eleven o'clock. A solitary car napped in the shadows under an oak tree. The good Reverend Clive A. Mathews owned the car, and occupied an office that evening in the administrative building. He glanced from his paperwork to the clock on the wall; in bright red numbers it blazed 12:18 a.m.

"Lord," he said aloud in his jovial, always lighthearted manner, "when will you ever let me be done with Your work?"

He smiled to the picture of Jesus above his door, the feeling that he truly loved his job secure in his heart.

Reverend Clive, as his congregation knew him, looked down upon the forms on his desk; a stroke had claimed the life of a good man, an honest man, and the forms below his swift pen where the last pages on this life that would ever be written. Beneath the kind words transcribed from his eulogy, Reverend Clive wrote the date of the burial service and signed his name. Unpleasant as his work was at times, he truly appreciated the opportunity to ease the hearts and minds of "all God's children," as he described the Faithful he served.

"Lord," he addressed the Almighty again, "Thank You for the opportunities that You have given me to help those in need. I know that not everything can be pleasant in this world, but please help me to bring life and love into the hearts of others. In Your mercy, Amen."

A voice in the back of his mind suggested he call his wife and explain that he was ready to leave; it was already late enough. No sense she worry about him further.

With an electric click he pushed the speaker button on his phone. His fingers, guided by memory, flew across the keypad while he looked

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over the paperwork one final time. Once, then twice, his fingers absent-mindedly stumbled while performing their task; Clive continued to inspect the file. He entered the seventh digit and pushed slightly back from his desk, heaving a sigh of relief. The phone rang through his speaker once, twice, three times; no answer. He had no reason to suspect that the phone in his bedroom remained silent. The Reverend thought in passing that his wife must have already fallen asleep, and without a second try he rose from his chair and strode towards the door; his work, for the evening, was done.

Jesus stared through lifeless plastic eyes back at Jack.

"Why should I expect you to be there for me now?" Jack sneered at the statue. The metal grip of the pistol was warm in his clutch now. Warm, like the embrace of a friend; comfortable, like the feeling you get when you know in your heart you have made the right choice; powerful, like his desire to finally escape the cycle of job hopping and loneliness that entrapped him.

The pistol was a present from his father, just before he died.

"Take care of your gun, and it will take care of you," he said. How prophetic those words were, Jack thought as he cocked the hammer.

He did not leave a note on his desk, for there was no one to read it; he did not leave his affairs in order, close his accounts, or even place his mail on hold.

"The world will go on without me," he thought as he lifted the gun towards his mouth. Indeed, the sun would rise the next morning without him, just as it always had, and just as it always would. The buses would run their routes, the stock market would open on time...nothing would change with his absence; just as his presence did not seem to change anything either...including Jane's sexual proclivity.

Not a single thing would change if he died explosively in that apartment. He entertained the image of his head jerking backwards, body slumping to the floor...with a heavy heart he realized that it could be days before anyone discovered him. All the more reason to remove himself from a world he was ambivalent to, one that was equally unconcerned with him as well.

"God," he said as he jammed the muzzle of the pistol into his mouth; his next words came, horribly slurred from the obstruction, "if you really care, give me a sign. Be the first person in my life to show you care!"

The phone rang; Jack glanced at the caller ID: "Almighty God" it read in yellow letters.

Somewhere under the heavens Reverend Clive's wife slept soundly next to a silent telephone, and a lost cause found salvation in the face of death from a 12 digit caller ID screen.

Dave Norman

JANUS
39

Trash Can

Soured key lime light pie tines, sweet, sticky, and corroded
refused, empty of frizzbee dreams
Melted in temperate summer forecasts
Low-pressure upwelling
condensing emotional losses
Recorded in Sunday morning sports pages yellowed by years
gone, lost, forgotten, unimportant
Concerns and agendas of corporate lobbyists, bottom lines
cut into neglected laborers hands scared and scabbed
Blood flowing across clotted views of equality
judged on triple beam unbalanced
Political power centers revolving charismatically on misappropriated spindles
guarding stairs long broken and left rotting
Accompanied only by dust shown on beams of sunlight piercing broken home
foundations built upon the verge of antiquity

James Cocayne

JANUS
40

Piscean Autumn

As the fruit of this crooked tree, I have ascended to the clouds and I
can see no higher. Senses quickened by this glorious pain of numbness, and,
so close to the end, I have no guarantees - yet I live! Agony and suffering
and love and joy are all but indifferences to me now. Only life is real.

Vinegar tastes like shit; how I thirst for more! Such things are memo-
ries from my old world, my old life. The experiences I had were the greatest
of gifts and the sweetest of fruits. I have new experiences now, though. Far
superior to those of the land I hover above. I am a mighty hawk gazing down
upon mice.

"I am not your Elijah! He will not save me while I have nothing to be
saved from! Sufficient and superior is my spirit to he." The sun quickly dries
out your mouth on days like this. It makes no difference though, for their
ears are barren. Listen to them jeer and spit from their love for me. The
ignorance of the masses is their blindness of sight. They are asleep - copaset-
ic and drunk on fickle pursuits. I care for them no longer. They only mock
themselves. I am the macabre messiah spilt for all to see, but this is no spec-
tacle.

My privilege is the same fate as the rest, as beautiful as the rest. They
will claw at their eyes, though, and deny the vulture's birthright. Blind to
the sea of skulls on which they walked, they strolled here, to Golgotha, lust-
ing for my agony. They wonder what I will do. Craving to devour a piece of
me or a drop of my blood they unknowingly participate in this play of pas-
sion like lambs marching towards God's butcher. It is all just lying and
deceit. Death is the only reality. Death is the only guarantee.

I am speeding towards the autumn of my soul without trying, while
they yearn for the horizon of their being without moving. I am not dead.
They were never alive.

A Dark Wind within my breast has drawn me to this fate, this unavoid-
able future. It is this same spirit of holiness that will guide me forward, for-
saking the future only to bring further absurdity to my reality. Here I have
found my only embrace. This is my protector, my Father. Nothing can
destroy me as long as my Will remains. It is my eternal flame.

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Because of this I can accept my sufferings. I am worthy of their grandeur. Here is my joy. This is my stinging crown of achievement, which draws crimson from my brow. The torment of hell is the greatest of my tasks. Suffering, through Will, is my freedom. It is inseparable from me and offers me meaning in the muck of absurdity. But, it is not unique to me.

We all have this potential of a guiding Dark Wind, Will of self, and only must realize it. To give in. To not sense and create, or reveal, Will is to rot. This is why I do not perish for them. I do not even pity them. I live for my Will - they have their own.

"Do not be so jealous, yours will be just as sweet!" Hopefully they can hear me over the wind. The salty sand is massaging my open flesh.

"Oh, no! You deserve the best of all! The King always deserves the best. This is your Kingdom after all. Even your flesh trickles with the rich colors that the best whores wear!" Stones as taxes, I wonder - which one is groveling now? The crowd is but a blur to me. Not because of the sandy wind, no, it is merely a gift from my soul. My eyes are frolicking like ghosts of children.

Disguised as a chimera, beauty is hidden from them. All they must do is awaken from their daymare. "But the Kingdom is *ours!*" I insist, "You may reap as much wealth as I!"

The voice is quick to respond, "You are reaping your spoils, fool, your carcass is spoiling before my eyes!" How generous of my spectator to point this out. I can indeed smell my own decay now; at least I hope that it is mine. This incense of sweat and urine is a sensual perfume raised by the sun. It praises Isalah, blessed be he, and is the most joyous of experience. How lucky am I! I have no one to envy.

"Brothers, reality is not fallow! All must be appreciated; it is ripe for you! The milk and honey and hail and boils, all of this we must..."

"Damn you! Shut up! Won't you please shut up! I can't face your insanity any more!" My neighbor interrupts. I had almost forgotten that he was there. Is this one to my right? Yes, yes the one perched to my right. His form is so beautiful; I wish for a moment that I could see the details. He resembles a pagan God carved by the most thoughtful artisan. Struggling to maintain stature against his broken shins, I wonder if I appear as majestic. If my legs were also broken, then I just might have achieved perfection.

"Do you despair? Is this not the most beautiful dream you have ever known, only more full - because we are perfectly awake to enjoy it?" Surely he has seen his Dark Wind, his Will, by now. Surely he has accepted it. How could it be rejected in this flood of senses? How could he blaspheme existence? How could he set will against Will?

"What is your problem? Have you taken poison?" His voice is fast and bitter, as pleasant as vinegar. "The pain, this pain, I cannot take it any further. I am so alone! It only gets worse and worse, a throbbing nuisance as I beg God for death. He is not even with me! Oh, goddamn this agony! Centurion, I beg of you, run me through, I beg!"

I don't think the soldier heard him.

How may I explain to him that this is needless pain on his soul? It could be so much to the opposite. "What is it that you solicit? What good will it bring you? To request death now is to forfeit the greatest of pleasures!"

"I cannot face my torment any more! The only caress I have pierces my wrist!"

"Do not allow reality to bleed away from this moment! Analyze what you are feeling and embrace your senses." I wonder, "Fate cannot be avoided, so why do you fight it? Love it instead."

"That's easy for you to say, you're a fucking anarchist! You tried to overthrow the empire! But I did nothing! I did nothing of the sort and still I end up here. At least allow me to use free will and request death - of my own volition! Give me one last choice, one last freedom to spit in the face of fate!"

The soldiers seem remotely interested in us now. Wearing red and bronze, I can make them out better than the crowd. Some are feeling the beat, though. Almost half have moved to the shade of a tree, one without criminal ornaments.

"You claim free will, and yet, you say that you did nothing to bring about this marvelous situation - but now you despise it? You despise what you claim to have created through inaction?"

"Quiet, Nazarene, you contradict yourself. You claim I must accept everything, and yet I have a choice to except it. Foolishness!"

"But we are certainly free to choose things which are not matter-of-fact. Things like values, and interests, we create. If this is not so, then

what difference does it make anyway? If we do not create our thoughts then why do we argue any further? No. We do create our thoughts, but our environment is out of our control, we are determined in things outside of our mind."

"Would you two fools stop with your chatter? It is worse than the wait for this to end!" Apparently the eavesdropping third of our company has a voice. My debater does not seem to recognize this scolding, though, nor does he complain about the pain anymore. He has found numbness in his rage. I am sorry that I have stolen the sensation from him, but I am in a similar state, and unfortunately cannot feel the throb of my limbs any longer.

"I curse you and your joy, Nazarene. I certainly could have avoided this. It is only out of foolishness that I didn't. I could have been friendlier to my accuser, and then all of this wouldn't have happened. My free will would have saved me from your companionship!"

"But you are mistaken, there would be no more freedom in that dream than there is in reality! Even if you had free will, to choose the friendship of your accuser would only enslave yourself to your assumed free will. Your intercourse with this person would be determined from that point onward - whether you remain friends or not!" Surely he must see the absurdity of it all.

"And if we are not free to choose our circumstances, then we are all better off dead!" I fear that his spirit has been broken. "I should have killed myself painlessly years ago. I would have been free to do that; it has nothing to do with my circumstances."

My voice has changed since we began. It is coarse from the desert of a throat that I now possess. "Most certainly!" I say. "If you choose not to embrace the absurdity of reality - the only real choice you have in the matter - then you would have been better off stillborn. But obviously you have not killed yourself. Why?"

Apparently our acquaintance had had enough. "Who the hell are you to tell someone else, who happens to be dying at this moment just..." he said. "who the hell are you to ask him why he did not just kill himself years ago? Shut up you bastard son!"

It is hard to see this man to my left. This must be the east, for the

for the sun is a halo to his matted scull. There must be ten hours or so until the Sabbath.

My angel had not yet finished his diatribe. "Kill myself. I definitely would have killed myself. We all should have killed! Suicide common. Even you, Rabbi you are no holier. I work, I have a family, I have the joys of my wife." A pause has come to his anguish, though his eyes are dry beyond sweat and blood. "You, you are just a transient beggar. All of your time was wasted fishing for foolish men. The Nazarene should have killed himself long before me! A miscarriage!"

"Why didn't you, life is absurd and you fight it - but you are sure to lose!"

"If it so absurd then why should I embrace it? We are all dead in the end after all... Well... Life is then but an unavoidable misery!"

"So why didn't you kill yourself?" I beg. "Why not end it all rather than have to go through another unforeseen day?"

"Why the hell didn't I?" Contemplation seems to have brought serenity. The man's head turns to face the stained dust beneath us.

It seems as though some of the soldiers have left their spot in the shade to meet others who are escorting more prisoners. At least, that is the best that I can make out by my poor vision and the ravings of the crowd. "Thank God," my comrade says, having awakened from his stupor, "the wait is nearly over, we are nearly done."

Oh dear! I have nearly forgotten of the man to my right!

It has never felt like this before, I have never been so aware of my motions as I am now that I turn my head. I am in perfect control, and none at all. I am omniscient and omnipotent, yet nothing. I can feel every precise millimeter pass. The landscape resembles the view from an ass. Nauseating.

I don't believe that this one is with us any more. Grace be upon him. I do hope he found Will, his Dark Wind. I hope that he was lucky enough to experience his reality slipping into something new - his rebirth. That would be priceless. Peace be his.

"Nazarene," my remaining mate is calling me. "I did not destroy self, 'cause I didn't know what was next. Every second brings something new, a thing unforeseen. Joy and suffering. I didn't know."

This fellow is awakening, though not an angel anymore. The sun is above him now. "So, you were willing to accept the future, the blind nothingness, because you did not know what it would bring. And, because existence is better than not, you decided to accept your fate - to choose fatalism - and accept the future." I can hear bronze clad soldiers removing our comrade's body from his stick. They are silent, like him.

"I think so. Absurd. The very statement is, but it is also true. Choose to not choose. Free will... by determinism. Absurd. Indecisive futures." He is quiet now. Peaceful, almost. I cannot see him, though. I don't know how long. I don't exactly know what I am looking at. I have never seen anything like this before. It is as stream, a cool running stream. I have been immersed.

My thoughts are as sharp as ever, my senses more so. "This is Will." I tell him, "This is your Dark Wind. Choosing to be in harmony with that which you cannot choose. Moving on, and accepting the hand you are given."

"Beautiful."

"Everything is beautiful. Suffering as well as joy. It is all the same. Existence itself is true joy. Wonder. Do you still fear passing time, and your pain?"

"It doesn't make any difference," he responds. "I don't know what will come. Both you and I could be raised from our deaths to walk the earth again, like in some children's fairytale. Understanding this, this Will, I will find joy in what has come. This suffering, you are right, Rabbi, this suffering is better than to not feel at all. Both, suffering and joy. This is not free will, but there is no other way. We choose acceptance or grief. Grief is no better than giving up. Ones who grieve but do not hang themselves are cowards. Suffering and joy. Both must be my life's work. If not, I am dead, and guilty of having not killed myself."

I feel perfect. I feel nothing and everything all at once. He must feel it too. My eyes present a dazzling show of lightning. I can see my spirit. I can see my life. Surely, we cannot alter circumstance, but Will can show us the pleasure of absurdity. Allow us to embrace absurdity. Suffering,

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like friends, come and go from our present. Despite this, the Divine Wind leads us to the joy and greatness on this island called self. Inside this labyrinth of determined reality we find inner freedom and choice. The loving touch of absurdity!

My being cannot think otherwise. The Dark Wind of my Will has stripped me to the nakedness of a child, free in the moment and fearing not the trials of tomorrow. Such are the birds of the sky. Cultivated Will leads me towards the next present. That is all I need. That is all I have. Without it, I am dead.

I am perfectly alone now. Solace. I see not. I hear not, but I feel everything. The most perfect feeling, more so than anything before. I was transfigured into a withered fig, but I am perfect. I am existence.

Tired. My body will feed four thousand crows tomorrow. I think it would be nice if this would happen. It would be nice to feel them.

It is finished.

Jon Todd



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Photos of Pain

I pull out old photos
Taken what seems like an eternity ago
But the pain they bring are as fresh as a razor's cut
I flip past friends I don't know anymore
Long gone, but never forgotten
I move past my trip to Wilson's creek
Filled with chilled memories of many winters ago
I push aside an old high school crush
Her smiling face stirs no emotion now
Past plays, the lines still in my head
Past birthdays, years that came and went
But I stop at pain
I take a deep breath of reassurance
I tell myself I'll be okay, but I lied
I feel the tears creeping up to my eyes
It's always her photos that do that to me
They're the one's that bring the most back
Not just the way she looked
But the way she smelt,
So nice, a sporty perfume,
They way she sounded,
Her laugh could make angels smile
They way she felt
So warm and soft, not a trace of the hard life she lead
But it also brings back the heartache
The silent shattering of my soul
I force myself to look at these pictures
Half weeping as I do
There's a man who I don't recognize beside her in them
It's me, a happier me from a time now past
A me that has her in his embrace,
Forever frozen in time.

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He has everything I every wanted
He is everything I will never be again
I pull out the few photos of her that I have
And spread them on the floor
I pick out the one that causes the most pain
It's a photo of her on the night I promised my heart
The night I gave her my soul, in a tiny trinket that said I was her's
She had no such promise for me, but I didn't need one
It is this photo that I would like to burn
If only this memory that causes such pain
Could be so easily erased from my mind
Yet I dare not harm even a photo of her
For each old photo is a precious memory that I don't want to forget
Even when they cause me such tremendous pain,
Like the ones of her do.

Vincent Spezzo

Thoughts from Physics

Have you ever stopped to think
about the wonders of paper?
Mashed up splinters bound with
glue. Pulpy tree fibers combined
into a thin, solid, soft square.
Grooves catch shavings of graphite:
coal turned into twisting shapes,
forms of words written in thou-
sands of languages across conti-
nents. White, translucent sheets of
dried Dead Tree. Cherish the words
you scribble; protect these rectan-
gles of starched mesh that you love
so and buy so much of and crave
for so many uses. Why is a sheet of
paper more pleasant to you than a
rainforest of tremendous trees?
Because the sheet belongs to you
and Nature is its own being.



Erin Luke

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The Quest for the Perfect Sandwich

Ever since high school I've had a quest: the quest to find the perfect sandwich, one that is perfect in everyway, from top bread through all the goodies down to bottom bread. My quest has taken me many miles and has yielded some great finds (and others that aren't worth the cellophane that they were wrapped in), whilst they waited to fall from the vending machine spiral gadget. Some problems do arise when one decides to embark on a quest for sandwich perfection because, as things tend to do with age, taste buds change. In the early days of the quest I was focused on sheer number of toppings, which tended to overwhelm the taste bud and leave little room for individual toppings to shine and do their duty. Now, after trying everything from cream cheese and carrot shavings to yogurt and cashewbutter, I have concluded that too many toppings confuse the senses and take away from the overall impact of the sandwich.

At times my quest has focused on barbequed beef in my search for the perfect barbeque sandwich, which after much research I have determined depends on quality of sauce above everything else. The best I have found comes from "Sammy Smokes" B.B.Q. on Lemmon Avenue in Dallas, Texas. In and of itself, it is a basic sandwich. However, the beef is of supreme quality, and the sauce is just the right mixture of spicy, hearty and that special "just right" quality. The fried pickles that accompany the sandwich are a rare southern treat. Even though the perfect sandwich might be impossible to find, I can recommend a few that would give any sandwich a run for its *toma-atoes*. Nederland, Colorado's very own Moontimes Grill has a sandwich of note. It begins its life as a simple hoagie roll; however, that is where simplicity is left behind as four spicy chicken strips are added, followed by long pickle spears, two kinds of cheese, bacon and some secret salad dressing. Simply amazing. As for a traditional sandwich, New York Subway in Dallas, Texas is pretty hard to beat. With fresh baked bread and supreme quality meats and cheeses, this deli wins for its extra factors, such as the chip selection that at last count over Thanksgiving Break, contained over 75 varieties of chip. Some of the highlights of this massive chip library are: Boulder Chip

Company's "Habanera", Texas Chip Kettle's Dill and many others. This deli also has excellent ice, which is a major factor for a soda lover such as myself.

As for the overall quest of the perfect sandwich, I have decided that I need to have different categories for different types of sandwiches, to allow more sandwiches a shot at the top honors. I think that I would divide them into categories like Hot Sandwich, Deli Sandwich, Specialty Sandwich, and Exotic Sandwich. As far as my S-I-Q goes at this moment these categories would cover most genres of sandwich, while at the same time not give the distinction of "perfect sandwich" to just any old P.B. and J. There are many factors that determine the quality of a sandwich, such as bread, meats, toppings, freshness of veggies, and the sauce, among many others, including non-sandwich determinants like ice and chips. I don't really think I have a goal with my quest, which might mean that it's not a quest. However, I love sandwiches and that's all that matters.

Mark Lamoreaux



Cliche

It is beautiful because it equals life, and once it's said or realized or celebrated or found, life becomes you and is all around you and is deep down inside you, raking over and stirring up heavy bold embers in your stomach and commanding:

"BREATHE!"

and you answer, "Yes," and this is love, and the loved are kindred spirits, and this and they are what is good and what matters in life.

Erin Luke



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Snowfall

I've lived down south all my life, so I've only seen snow on TV. When I woke up one December morning to see it actually snowing outside, a shiver of excitement ran through me. I moved up here over the summer, and I had been looking forward to seeing snow ever since. I stood at the window watching it fall. It wasn't quite the same as it is in the movies. There were little snowflakes falling all over, but it wasn't a blizzard that people could get lost in. And they weren't those dry, plastic-looking snowflakes either. It wasn't at all like snow on TV, but it almost reminded me of one of those snow globes with glitter in it.

Outside, the snow was not covering everything evenly. It was gathering on the grass, and even on the trees, but everything else just seemed wet. I never thought about snow clinging to trees before, but it does. It looks like one of those Christmas cards I always thought was too pretty to be real. I saw a few people bundled up in huge puffy coats scuttle by like enormous beetles. Didn't they want to pause to look at how beautiful the snow was? Maybe they couldn't see it anymore, having lived here all their lives.

The next time I looked, the snow had changed from tiny flakes to larger snowflakes. They weren't just slowly floating down anymore either. Now the wind blew swarms of snowflakes at the earth like angry bees ready to sting. It didn't look quite like a snow globe anymore and was starting to resemble the deadly blizzards I had seen on television. It had mostly covered the ground and was starting to be noticeable on the pavement too. Soon all I could see of the grass were a few spikes poking above the whiteness.

By evening, the snow had finally stopped. It was starting to get dark outside, but I had to go out and see how the world had changed. I grabbed a coat and left the house to see what snow was really like.

Everything was covered in white. Cars looked like small hills. The trees looked even more beautiful with whiteness covering the tops of their branches. Even the sidewalks and roads were covered in snow. It was as if everything had disappeared beneath this strange, cold white stuff. I took a deep breath of air and realized it was so cold that it almost hurt to breathe too

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deeply. Taking small breaths, I tried to place the smell of the snow. I didn't expect it to smell like anything, but you get almost the same smell if you stick your nose in a cup of really cold water, or even ice. That's not very surprising, I guess, but I never realized that it would have any smell at all. It also gave me the impression that somewhere miles away, someone had a fire burning. I could smell some kind of wood smoke, but it was so distant that it was barely noticeable.

Bending down, I scooped up a handful of the snow on the ground. It felt almost soft, not at all like a snow cone you get in the summer. I can't think of anything else like it. The only thing it's similar to might be frozen cotton candy. I've never had frozen cotton candy of course, but it had that light, fluffy quality that very few other things have. I took a bite of it, and the texture was the same before it melted in my mouth. It tasted like very cold water, but the texture made it amazingly different. This was a solid, not a liquid. That changed the whole experience of eating it.

The cold was stinging my hand, almost making it go numb, so I squeezed the remaining snow in my hand and threw it against a tree. Some of the snow stuck to the tree, and the rest scattered to the ground. I wiped my cold, wet hand off on my coat and put it in my pocket. I was getting cold, but I wasn't quite ready to go in yet.

There was a group of little kids across the street, and they were doing all kinds of things with the snow. Some were throwing snowballs at each other, while others seemed to just be rolling around in it. I spent a while trying to make a snowman, but it didn't turn out very well. So I just made a few miniature snowmen and set them around the yard. Looking across the street again, I noticed that the kids had gone inside, but there were snow angels on the ground, mostly trampled by small feet. By this time, there was only one smooth space on my yard, about as big as a queen-size bed. So I stood with my back to it and let myself fall back. Snow immediately fell down the neck of my coat, into my shoes, and against every other bit of open skin I had. I thought it would just stay where it was! It didn't seem to bother all those kids sitting in the snow over there! I quickly moved my arms up and down and my legs back and forth and stood up, teeth chattering. My snow angel looked all right, but they looked nicer from a distance. The wings were uneven.

And the head-mark was too small. But I didn't feel like sticking my head back in the snow again.

The snow had changed the town's whole atmosphere. It had never been a loud place, but there was always some noise around, even if it was just cars in the distance or squirrels dropping acorns. But today, it seemed completely silent. The children's shouting sounded clear but quieter, and they worked harder at playing than at talking today. When a car went by, it sounded horribly out of place. Nothing should have disturbed this silence. The snow even muffled the sound of my footsteps.

However, all good things must end eventually. After a few minutes, I was too cold to stay outside any more. I went back to my room on the second floor and changed into some dry, warm clothes. I looked out at the scene being illuminated by streetlights. Everything was so white and smooth. Suddenly all my footprints, snowmen, and snow angel looked wrong on the perfect white surface.

I heard a muffled sound coming down the road, and saw that an old red truck with a huge shovel attached to its front bumper was coming down the street, clearing the snow away. It piled up a big mound of the whiteness in front of it, and left behind a dirty gray street. Even the snow on the sides of the road was now flecked with gray. On the next block over, one of my neighbors was shoveling her sidewalk. She cut a neat path through the cover of white, leaving the wet brown sidewalk behind. It seemed like the desecration of a holy place. How could anyone ruin such perfect beauty? Couldn't their lives wait for a while?

Not feeling like watching the snow anymore, I turned away from the window and went to make some hot chocolate.

Alexandra Heath

Julie

The thing about Julie that everyone talked about was the fact that she claimed to be a lesbian. I always told her it wasn't true. As if I knew people better than they knew themselves.

"What? You're not a lesbian. Why do you think that?"

"I just am. I don't know why it's such a big deal to everyone. I didn't ask to be this way."

"Please," I said in ridicule, "that's just stupid."

"I don't find guys as attractive as women. There's just some things a man can't offer."

"What?" My voice registered the confusion my mind felt. I had never met someone, especially a girl, who openly admitted to being homosexual.

She still dated men. She had boyfriends, and those boyfriends often left love wounds on her body. Hickies to be exact. Hickies all over her back and on her neck and chest. One would think she had been abused. Not so. Sometimes she put on her own mini "show and tell," a few brief moments when she went over the events of the previous nights with the employees.

One of the girls would say, "What happened to you? Did he hit you?"

And she would reply, "No, he just kept sucking and gnawing on me. I got him back later."

I wasn't impressed. Neither were the girls. But the other guys appeared intrigued. I just never understood the joy in receiving hickies. Of course, I had never received one.

I grew up in a Baptist home. My parents were Baptist, and their parents before them. When we moved to Texas, my brother and I were three years old. My father took a job transfer to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Eastman Kodak was in need of more field specialists and I think my parents were ready for a life away from where they grew up.

I'm not sure exactly when we started attending church after the move, or how we decided to travel all the way to the northern side of Irving. Of the hundred or so churches in the city how could we choose the best? Was it an intuition my parents had? Maybe my parents met someone when they

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were out shopping or saw an ad somewhere that convinced us this was our future "home." Somehow we wound up at MacArthur Boulevard Baptist, and that is where we have attended ever since.

I remember when we arrived for our first Sunday morning service; several people greeted us and welcomed us into their lives. Good things happened from there on out. We found members of the church who lived near us, who eventually had us over for dinner and invited us to parties. We played with their children and eventually grew up together. My parents found new friends who shared their interests, others who introduced them to new interests. It was a good thing, a good place that happened to us.

At some time, exactly when has long since been lost to memory, the "Cereal Group" just happened. Originally, it began with the DeWitts, the Cliftons, the Adams, and the Philpotts. Later, the Longs, the Joneses, the Meadors, and Thompsons came along, but they remained always on the fringe. Ours was a circle that expanded and contracted according to the rhythm of our hearts. One could say we were exclusive, an elite, secret society, but we never tried to portray ourselves as such. In my mind, we were honest, open to everyone, and acted with great humility.

Accountability . . . it was accountability that brought the original four families together. Perhaps the idea sprang from a sermon about faithfulness, trust, obedience, love or humility; whatever the case, one set of parents felt moved to invite others to share, to pray for one another. Cereal was just a way to bring us together, to make the Sunday evening meal easy on everyone. "It's not going to be much," they said. "Just bring a box of cereal for yourselves. We've got milk and juice already at home." Maybe the sermon that prompted all this was about giving, and the closing hymn ran something like, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God has done." No one really remembers how it all began and I like that. I do know that somehow everyone left church that day in that same frame of mind: "We need to get back to the basics."

When any family was in need, they turned to the "Cereal Group." One day my mother asked the women if anyone knew of a good "first job" for her sixteen-year-old son who had recently acquired a car and needed to begin paying his own way. Georgia had a daughter who worked as a manager at

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Beltline Station, a small family entertainment business with go-karts, golf, an arcade and a snack bar. She recommended I go up there and apply. Within the week I did.

Beltline Station, a more than usually successful business, was owned by a good-hearted, family man late into his years, a deeply religious man my parents could relate to. I remembered the Saturdays we spent up there with family and friends when I was a kid. For eight dollars you got twenty tokens, a round of golf, a hot dog and a coke. What a deal! And, of course, they held putt-putt tournaments throughout the day—hole in one contests, closest to the hole contests, or fewest strokes per round. The place was always teeming with kids' birthday parties and church parties. Everyone knew about Beltline Station in those days, the only such place within the city limits. Good clean fun.

December 6, 1996, was my first day of training. I woke up hoping my first day would be just as exciting as my childhood memories.

Ironically, it was at Beltline Station that I met Julie, self-proclaimed lesbian, mistress of the hickey. Together we dodged the routine. We hung out in the clubhouse on rainy days and slow nights, avoiding the security cameras, sitting together on the floor. Not that it was easy, escaping responsibility. We were expected to clean the kitchen, patrol the game room, check the trash barrels, organize the parties. Busy work, always busy work. Fortunately, the managers rarely emerged from their closet sized office. With a television, a computer and a phone bill they didn't pay, why would anyone get up from the easy chair?

Out where the baseball and softball bats hung, the helmets on the wall, hundreds of brightly colored golf balls were stacked in pyramids and spread the breadth of the counter top. Pushing aside the golf clubs sized from toddler to too-tall adults, that's where Julie and I disappeared. That's where we talked over just about anything. We discovered things about ourselves through our conversations. I enjoyed the other workers well enough, but between Julie and me, it was the differences in our lifestyles that brought us closer.

We talked about schools and how I felt she was lucky to have a choice of where she went. I found public school fascinating. From my safe distance I imagined a world where there would always be something to do, somebody's business to be in, a reason to cut class, a variety of relationships to pursue.

"Not in a class of 31," I disagreed with her remarks about all

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schools being the same. At Texas Christian Academy there was very little variety. We didn't have any choice in what classes we took. We didn't have honor courses or college preparatory courses. Our sports program was limited to the basics, ROTC? No. (Not that I would have joined.) No swimming team, no soccer team, no drill team—and certainly, no dance team. Clubs or organizations for extracurricular activities were out of the question. Worse yet, the administration required us to wear uniforms—nasty, could-stand-on-their-own starched, uniforms—that set us apart from public school students. Ours was, you see, a Baptist Church school. Big "events" occurred in our all-too-plain gymnasium. No dances could be allowed, not under any circumstances. The idea of a prom . . . well, there was no idea of a prom. The best we could hope for was a dinner banquet.

Whenever I reminisce about the job I used to have, my thoughts go back to one Sunday when the rain began early in the morning and fell steadily through the day. The go-cart track seldom opened on rainy days. Getting a wet track operational was a difficulty. Not that the managers didn't push us—Squeezy it off! Blow it off! Pump it off! Rarely did anyone come to Beltline Station for the arcade. The mall had a better arcade. We needed that track to hold on to the customers.

What with the rain and so few customers around, we had no real need to disappear. Still, we vanished inside the clubhouse as we did so often.

She wore her hair up, dark mascara, dark eye shadow. I don't remember her lips, but I know she wore lipstick. More than likely it was a plum or dark red, purplish, maroon variant. With fair skin and the dark make-up she spotted an almost witchy, gothic look. Even more so, her shorts were the center of her sense of style. Those short shorts worn even on the coldest, rainy days, the ones with frayed ends, the "coochy-cutters," they held a mesmerizing power over the mind of a young Baptist boy. So much so that even a Baptist boy of sound character would be have been looking to explore far more than conventional regions of human interaction.

Sitting on top of the counter, she said "I don't want to be here."

"Where would you be? Somewhere not getting paid for nothing, that's for sure."

She mentioned a guy's name. I don't know who it was.

"You two went out last night?"

She knew what I was asking and crafted her response. "I went to

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his house. And stayed there."

"Really?" This could be interesting. I laughed to myself as I said, "And you slept in separate rooms this time?"

In return, I got that look. "I'm not a tramp." But she still didn't say no. "He had some cute friends."

"Guys or girls?"

The clubhouse lights were off. We were sitting alone in the shadows. Not even the surveillance cameras could spy us out. The face of each was missing that small, lit, red pimple light. They were off duty today.

The floor was hard, too hard for the make-out session I was beginning to imagine. But as the minutes passed it began looking better and better. The words were on the tip of my tongue. I had rehearsed them more times than I can count—the exact lines I needed to score. For weeks I had been constructing a personality profile; I had her weaknesses outlined. I knew this girl. My mouth opened of its own volition to speak, but she kept looking out the window and back into the kitchen and onto the front counter. Anywhere but at me. I looked for her eyes and caught them a couple of times. Once, noticing how intensely I was staring, she lost her train of thought. Julie nervous? I wondered if she was thinking what I was thinking. Was she considering me as much as I was considering her? Cat and mouse—but I was no longer sure who was which. Her lips twitched as if to say, "What is it? Why are you looking at me that way?" The mood felt right. My mood, at least, felt right. But seconds later Julie looked down and away. "This day is gonna suck," she said.

I snapped out of my reverie. "Yeah, but at least it will be slow, or it should be. I hate when people come in on these days."

"I have a party to host. I should be setting up for it."

"Just one?" I asked.

"Yeah. You want to help me set up? C'mon. That way you can say you were helping me if Micah starts looking for you."

Still speaking, she dismounted with perfect form from the counter. I'm not sure, but I am fairly sure I remember her speaking about gymnastic lessons she took while growing up. She moved like a gymnast. She often joined with the other co-workers who shared about their experiences as drill team members. On slow days like today the girls often put on simplified

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routines from their next half time show and vied with one another for "Miss Flexibility." If Julie wasn't a gymnast, wasn't a member of the drill team, I never would have suspected it.

An hour later, Julie found me in the kitchen. "Micah is sending me home."

"Why? They're letting people off?"

"Yeah, I asked to go. But I'm gonna be here until my shift would have ended 'cause I don't have a ride."

"That sucks." I felt bad for her.

"Yeah, well, at least I won't have to be nice to any more brats. Ugh!" She filled her cup full of soda and went into the kitchen to put a pretzel in the microwave. On her way she said, "Unless I can get ahold of someone to come get me."

Another two hours passed. The clock neared three and I was bored out of my mind. At least two people had already been sent home. I went ahead and asked if I could leave too. Micah had no objections.

Punching out, I noticed Julie.

"You're still here? Couldn't get ahold of anyone?"

"No. What are you doing? Are you off?"

"Yea, I'm tired of being here."

"I told you this place sucks. Even the games."

I didn't think so. I wanted to hit up a few games before I left. Make sure my name was still high on the leader board. But I was rapidly losing interest in that idea and warming up to another. "Do you want a ride?"

She didn't care where we went. Weeks ago we had discussed each other's churches. Each wanted to bring the other "home." I wanted to see her at MacArthur Boulevard Baptist because I felt the people there could reach out to her. She wouldn't do it. She wanted me to come to her church, but compared to mine it sounded more like a club. There would be no missionary attempt unless I yielded first. And so, as we drove away from Beltline Station, we talked churches—a far cry from the concrete floor I had envisioned for us just a few hours earlier.

For a few hours we drove aimlessly from one township to another. Julie, I discovered, rarely made it out of her territory; she barely knew

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the next county over. So I became the guide and we drove to the Ballpark in Arlington, a magnificent structure modeled after several famous ballparks. From there we drove just down the street to where I went to school. I wanted her to gain a better understanding of the places that had made me. From the school we made our way back towards work. Our time was running short and her mom would soon come.

As I grew up, I noticed my crowd behaved differently. My brother and I were well behaved. We always had to check in before we went anywhere. We couldn't stay out late. We were not allowed to stay over at friends' houses without an invitation, and we were not supposed to invite ourselves. This was inappropriate, unmannerly, and reflected poorly on our parents and on ourselves. We should know better.

At Sunday school we learned the important things in life. We constantly had teachers and guest parents giving us the woes of life. "Right now you all are bright, intelligent, some creative, some funny, but all of you are precious in God's eyes. And He desires the very best for you. You are still young, you have a lot of choices left ahead of you. Some are not going to be that easy, but if you ask God's help, He will help you overcome any doubt life will bring you about the choices you have to make."

Somehow I felt a few of these parents and teachers regretted or resented the consequences of their choices. Not only did they want us to avoid making harmful choices, that they now praised God for, but their idea of safeguarding our minds and bodies would inevitably prevent us from growing up. Following their rules, we would never mature, make mistakes, ask the wrong questions, hear the wrong answers, and discover ourselves in our choices.

During the 7th grade our youth group encountered the True Love Waits movement. A beautiful thing. Its plan was to confine you to courtship for the rest of your life, until the day you're married. Parents were hyped about it. Chris' mom told him, in addition to the sexual abstinence commitment, that, if he could commit to not kissing a girl until his day of marriage, then she would give him five thousand dollars as a wedding present. Five thousand when you're thirteen years old sounds great, but when you're going through puberty and longing for a girl to snuggle and smooch with on stairwells

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and in closets, it's a hard burden to bear.

At this stage in my life I knew nothing about sex. I knew only that other adults, people whom I trusted, were telling me I really didn't want it right now, that at this point in my life it wasn't what was best for me, nor would it be until I was old enough to understand the responsibility of it.

There were other things the youth group knew to be unacceptable. We should never drink nor ever try alcohol. Smoking was always prohibited. Drugs were the bigger no-no. Drinking and driving - no. Driving fast - no. Staying out late - no. Lying about where you had been and what you were doing - no. Watching R rated movies - no. Hanging with the "wrong crowd" - no. Skipping church or Sunday school - no. Doing anything that would poorly represent yourself and your family - no. If you could think of something the Bible didn't mention specifically and the parents hadn't listed themselves, something probably questionable, whether or not it was harmless - it was wrong, could not do it.

I met a college girl on a plane not too long ago. I could tell she was a Christian. I tried not to introduce myself, but eventually we fell into a discussion about morality. For my own pleasure I withheld the fact that I was also a Christian: one of more years in the faith than herself. I had no intention of letting her in on the secret. We dove through various topics, mostly the common ones like smoking, drinking, drugs, sex, etc. I was not surprised at the differences in our perspectives. Although we both carried the same basic beliefs, the composition of our faith and lifestyles very different. She had never drunk an ounce of alcohol nor would she, never smoked tobacco products, never tried drugs, and certainly would never have sex outside of marriage. I told her I had committed a few of those acts. She was appalled and began witnessing to me. We argued over reasons for doing "wrong" things. I questioned her assertively. Even said, "Sometimes doing these things are necessary to get you where you need to be with friends, family, even God." She disagreed. I was hoping she would learn from my experiences and depart from our encounter with a little more knowledge for living. She wouldn't let herself. I wouldn't let myself either. I disagreed with her reasoning too. At the end of the plane ride we both went our separate ways unscathed by

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each others' best intentions to bear witness to a better life.

When I look back on my life, I think about the coreal group, my first job, and the choices I would soon encounter. I thank God for allowing me to explore my options. Usually it does not match up for a religious man to choose wrong. It just does not fit in with some core ideological beliefs of Christianity. Those past Sunday school directors would never be able to protect us in our youth because by trying to protect us they more or less inadvertently prompted us to make the wrong decisions. We were enticed at the first "no."

Thinking of Julie, the inspiration for this piece, she was in a way Heaven sent. A corruptor of youth, but also a deliverer of bliss. I often view myself as treading with one foot in the light and one in the dark, the only gray is the matter in my head. More simply put, I enjoy playing in the mud as much as I enjoy staying clean. If I had ever stayed completely innocent, sheltered, inexperienced, then I feel I would have lacked the potential to be something great later on.

Julie has changed as well.

One day some friends and I went to Fuddrucker's to eat. To my surprise, she was working as a cashier. It had been years since we had seen one another. On her left hand was a ring. Noticing the ring when she asked for my order, I smirked and made a whimsical comment. Something jogged her memory. She realized that it was me and confided that she had found "someone." I being curious, she pointed to a male cooking in the back and identified him by name. Apparently, they had been together for some time and things were serious. "Good for her," I thought. Then I laughed to myself. Our lives were so unpredictable back then, and they still are today. It's funny for me to think how two Baptist kids like us would grow up searching, reaching out for whatever opportunities would take hold of us, and in turn, come out as well off as we have.

Wes Philpott

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War Business

The devil is in the ground,
And he's coaxing them in,
They harrow his way,
It's not war, but the way thieves play!
For crude and land (God and Country as a guise),
There is profit in the desert,
And the poor pay with their lives!

The devil is in the ground,
And he's coaxing them in,
His supply is running low,
He needs more men!
Laid out across the desert (to die and toil),
And in a few million years...
He'll give them back as black oil.

Shannon Kempf



Incantation

I am here,
But you do not see.
I speak,
But you do not hear.
The world moves on, but there are
few who care.

The trees are silent, for they once
spoke.
But I dare not say that he has forsaken
us yet.
While time still moves like the slowness
of tides,
I say, be there
So I can see.
Speak, so I can hear,
The world moves on, but I do care.

Stephen Brown

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Sport

The air is heavy and moist with sweat. The crowd, gathered in rickety wooden stands, slowly sucks in its breath, afraid to exhale and shatter the moment. I wipe the perspiration from my forehead with a wristband and then hurriedly drag my hands across the back of my shirt. Hunching over, I twirl my racket slowly in my hands and away back and forth, as my opponent prepares to serve. She sights down the centerline, unconsciously aiming for the ace-spot, raises her racket behind her body and leans slightly back to gain momentum. Sweat rolls down her cheeks to her pursed mouth, tightened in determined concentration. Her gaze then shifts to her other hand, which is slightly lowered, poised to toss the ball gracefully into the air. I gradually quicken the revolutions of my racket and rise from my crouched position to meet the attack, jumping from foot to foot in anticipation. And a smile curls from the sides of my mouth.

The locker room is empty and dark. Old defeats and ancient victories permeate the dank quarters. I sit down on one of the red benches, its paint peeling with age and wear, positioned between two strips of rusted metal locker, and plop my gym bag on the floor next to me. Slipping off my shoes, socks, and school clothes, I don my game apparel. First, I pull on my lucky red wind suit shorts with the white stripe along the bottoms of both legs. My loosely flowing white game T-shirt follows, and tall ribbed socks envelope my bare feet. I replace my clunky brown boots with white tennis shoes that have neon green slashes up the sides, and twist my long, curly hair around a plain rubber band, creating a tight bun at the cleft of my neck. Finally, my white Adidas wristband slips on my right forearm, and I pull on my white headband, positioning the bright red Winston "W" in the center of my forehead. I stand and run my hands over my clothes, smoothing the wrinkles as best I can. With my duffel in hand, I head out into the dusty afternoon sunshine.

I can actually feel the steam rising from the red clay of the court, evaporating in the heat of the blaring sun, as I step out of the locker room's shelter. I squint to acquaint my eyes to the abrupt change in setting and

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see my opponent already practicing her backhand swing on the court. She jumps up and down, rotating her racket in a vertical circle with one hand and then the other, enhancing her flexibility for the upcoming game. The enemy then swings her racket from side to side, holding the face of her racket with her left hand and the handle with her right. Her obnoxiously positioned ponytail bobs up and down and sways side to side with each of her intimidating gestures. She looks like a practiced player who has realized that she is the best at what she does. I become a little uneasy.

I reach the edge of the pure green, white-striped clay court and drop my luggage by the chain link fence that separates one set of players from others. Automatically, I begin to prepare for battle, answering my opponents threatening exercises with my most fearsome ones. I lunge back and forth, stretching my thigh muscles. I then jog in place to condition my ankles and prepare my lungs to the necessary operating capacity. Hitting a few balls at the tall metal barrier conditions my arms to strike accurately. Once finished with preparation, I stand with my hands on the small of my back, flexing my spinal column, and gaze at the subdued crowd, which is slowly trickling into the stands. Suddenly, I see my opponent out of the corner of my eye. She is approaching the middle of the court, smiling facetiously, a coin glistening in her hand. I give one final rotation of my arms around my shoulder blades, snap my head from side to side, and make my way to the net. We toss the coin. She wins the call and chooses the side of the net that places the sun behind her, giving me the side of the court where I will be forced to face both her and the bright glare of the sun.

As we begin the match, I foolishly allow my mind to wander. Did I do well enough on that chemistry test today? What about that paper I was supposed to write yesterday; would I turn that in at some point? I wonder if my mom is in the stands, and if I fed my cats or not, and if I should have really told my brother that he was a geek. I start to lose points steadily to these distracting thoughts. The enemy begins to silently smile, obviously prematurely congratulating herself on an easy match won against an inferior opponent. As I mistakenly discharge another ball into the net, costing myself yet another match, I adamantly decide to stop worrying about the rest of my life.

My decision creates a clear state of mind, a world in which only the

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court and myself exist. I have no time to spend calculating my next move or worrying about what grade I received on which test. All I have to do is move and hit, slide and tap, jump and slam the ball to my opponent. No thought is necessary; everything relies on instincts in my new world. All I am required to do is react to the ball.

The beginning of the third match rolls along. One more victory for my adversary means doom for my athletic reputation. As I prepare to serve the yellow orb, I begin to diffuse my problems. I almost notice them physically trickling off my shoulders like the drenching perspiration caused by the afternoon heat. I close my eyes and draw in a full, deep breath. Exhaling, I feel at peace and I am ready to show this girl on the other side how to really play a tennis match. I stretch like an extended coil to serve, and with lightning speed, I release my pent-up energy into a fearsome explosion that sends the neon ball streaking onto the magic ace-spot on my opponents side. An automatic point excites the crowd to admirable applause, but I do not acknowledge it. I care not about winning or gaining points; I only wish to play the game well and enjoy the thrill of demanding aerobic exercise. As I continue to play, everything is blocked from my world of clarity. I play each point as an instant adrenaline rush. Each volley becomes a matter of mere reaction and pure instinct. The crowd is silent with awe, and the only sound is the soft grunt of my opponent and the thwack of the ball as it connects with my racket.

My opponent serves the very last point of the set, and I am thrilled. My excitement overwhelms me and I realize that this feeling defines an animalistic craving essential to me. This flash of insight invigorates me as the girl on the other side releases her final blow for victory. The ball shoots toward my left side. Before I know what is happening, I return the ball across the net to the left side of my opponent. She returns with a stunning backhand up the sideline; the crowd gasps. I feel electricity jolt my veins as I lunge and strike the ball in my best attempt to return it to the other side of the court. I crash on my hands and knees into the green clay as my opponent easily reaches the ball on her side and sends it back to the far left corner of my side of the court. Determined to show my athletic ability, I feel

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my sneakers ignite as I fly to catch the ball before it bounces twice. I reach it just in time and smack the sphere into the air. Horrified that I had miscalculated the power with which I returned the ball, I watch, gasping for breath, as the ball sails in slow motion toward the back of the court. My opponent, cockily judging the ball definitely out-of-bounds, grins and follows the ball with her eyes to the back of the court while situating her hands on her hips. In a moment of pure suspense, the ball connects with the base line and the judges' silence proves that the point is good. The crowd, cheering for a game well played and a spectacular surprise finish, rise and clap for the two girls on center court. I jump up, punching the air and screaming, "Yes!" adding to the intensity of the moment. I am not so glad I won the set but am enthusiastic about the terrific experience that came from allowing myself to become enrapt in the game and losing touch with worldly frustrations. As I move forward to shake hands with my peer, I feel confident that if she had shared my secret of disengagement, she would have no cause to look so glum.

Erin Luke



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I Wait

It's a Tuesday afternoon
And, like everyone else around me,
I wait.
The television is on, but no one is
watching.
We all pretend not to listen, but we are.
A magazine or two sit untouched on each
table.
We want to flip through the ad-covered
pages
Looking at the pictures
But our hands are bound beneath the
table
Resting on our knees
Or perhaps holding up our long faces
So heavy and bleak.
Our eyes are busy though,
Quickly glancing from face to face-
From person to person
And then away again into the empty
space.
No one wants to get caught
For meeting eye-to-eye would be too real
So we all just sit.
Letting time fly by
And we all wait.
For what, no one knows. . .
But I wait.

Kasey Hames



China From the Air

Green mountains emerge from the sea
Like hats floating on crystal waters.

Katie Kramer

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Ushing

"Hi!" I said brightly, handing three programs to a middle-aged man and woman and a little boy wearing green. "Do you need help finding your seat?"
"No, I think we'll manage," the patron said with a smile.
"Okay, enjoy the show!" I was enjoying the cool breeze on the July evening. The orange sun was setting behind the distant trees and it was slowly turning cooler. Hopefully I wouldn't get too sunburned. All in all, it was a pleasant night aside from the hoards of children invading the theater. The other side of the aisle I was standing at was a different story, however.
"Here," was all my fellow usher would say as he grudgingly gave out programs to those who insisted on having one.
"Your seat's down there," the usher with wild black hair told an older lady, glancing at her ticket and vaguely pointing somewhere at the section of seats in front of us.
"Oh, down... there?" The patron gave him a vague look. A small girl tugged on her arm and stared up at us.
"Here, I can take you to it," I said quickly. I took her ticket and carefully led her to her seat in the lowest section of the theater. She smiled and thanked me, but unfortunately she wasn't grateful enough to tip me. I handed her a program and went back up to my aisle. Senui was still leaning on his rail, holding a stack of programs and looking down at the stage. Although his hair was always an overwhelming mass of black spikes, his purple usher shirt and khaki pants were impeccably neat.
"I knew she wasn't going to tip you. See why you shouldn't take people to their seats? It just wastes time," he said, sounding vaguely derisive.
"She needed help, though! And that's what we're supposed to do. What if she went and complained to Deb?" The big usher captain loomed over the whole right side of the theater, her blue vest sticking out against the purple shirts of the ushers and the multicolored patrons.
"Did you see how old she was? I'll bet she wouldn't remember what she was doing by the time she got to Center Aisle. Besides, she's probably too blind to read my name." He grinned. His nametag read "Edward" tonight. After his first night when he had nearly been fired twice, he learned to

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take off his own nametag and swipe an extra from the usher captain's office to wear. That way when patrons went to complain about him, they ended up accusing someone entirely different. Besides, no one could pronounce his Egyptian name without asking for help.

"I think Deb's starting to catch on," I said, rising my eyebrows. He just scowled at me. A big group of children followed by two exhausted adults filtered in so I put on my big friendly smile and gave each of them a program. Senui stood on the other side of the aisle with his darkly tanned arms crossed over his stack of programs, holding them close like treasure. His smoky blue eyes sized up each person who passed and obviously found each one lacking in some way.

Behind us a camera flashed. Senui whipped around and stalked up the steps to a woman quickly putting a camera in her purse.

"Have you visited the Munny before, ma'am?" he asked condescendingly.

"Oh yes, we get season tickets every year! My son's in the show tonight, maybe you've seen him. He's one of the Lost Boys, and he has the cutest outfit!" the proud mother gushed.

Senui was unimpressed. "No. But you should be familiar with our camera policy by now. We don't allow photography."

"Well, I just thought I'd get a picture of the beautiful set to show Sam later! The show hasn't started yet," the woman said defensively. If I hadn't been so busy with other patrons, I would have gone up and tried to smooth over her hurt feelings. Senui wouldn't get in trouble anyway, and patrons are just stupid about things like cameras sometimes. But we have an image of friendliness to uphold, so a patron who gets angry should be calmed down. Some of us take up these social obligations. Others have no such interest.

"Look, the set's copyrighted. If you take another picture, I'll have to take your camera." Senui and the patron glared at each other for a second before he turned without another word and went back to his box of programs.

"I hate patrons," he muttered, grabbing a few more programs from his box.

Behind us a scuffle broke out. A boy dressed as Peter Pan and a little girl in a Wendy dress both held half of a big soft pretzel, and were quickly being separated by their father. The girl turned quickly and her pretzel

knocked into an older boy in front of her. The blond boy let out a shriek of protest as his plastic dagger dropped and clattered down under the seats, coming out on the landing next to us. I reached for it, but Senui was faster. He held it up and looked at the boy.

"Oh, now you'll never get it back," the exasperated mother with the camera commented from a few rows back. Senui glared at her and made as if to throw the dagger at her, but didn't let go of it. Then he looked back at the boy and tossed it to him. The boy just barely caught it, but he had to stretch his arm all the way back into the next row to do so, making the girl who had bumped him throw her cup of soda backwards. The whining camera-lady was now covered in grape soda. She sat there sputtering for a minute.

I quickly ran up to the sticky, wet patron. "Are you all right, Ma'am? Would you like me to get you some wet paper towels?"

I got a murderous stare for my concern. "No, don't bother. I'll do it myself."

The indignant mother got up, glaring at Senui as she passed him, and stalked to the bathroom. We're required to carry a rag with us to wipe off seats, so I took mine out and wiped the seat dry, though it was still sticky. Stuffing it back in my pocket, I meandered back to my spot.

"Aren't you going to get those wet paper towels?" Senui asked in a very fake innocent voice, with an evil grin.

"No, she wanted to do it herself," I said, smiling and telling an elderly couple to enjoy the show before turning back to him. "If you had done that on purpose, I'd have to kill you."

"Who says I didn't? That'll teach her to take pictures here. I hope some of it got in her purse," Senui said with a snort.

A loud voice interrupted everything and the theater quieted before it. As the stage manager's voice poured through the loudspeakers, welcoming people to "Peter Pan," I silently smiled and handed out programs to latecomers, letting them find their own seats. Senui stood on the other side of the aisle rolling his eyes and bobbing his head back and forth, silently begging the announcer to get on with it. Towards the end of the recording, the camera lady returned looking slightly less sticky. I smiled and automatically

stuck out a program, which she narrowed her eyes at. Senni caught sight of her and smiled smugly as the announcer stated, "We would like to remind you that the taking of photographs and use of any other recording device is strictly prohibited by the Actors' Equity Association. And now ladies and gentlemen, please rise for our national anthem."

Alexandra Heath



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A Note From the Editors

First, we owe you all, our readers, a big thank you just for picking up this year's Janus and creating the audience for the artists and writers within the Westminster Community. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

Another big thank you goes out to the college, the English department and SGA for their monetary and moral support that made the literary magazine possible. We only hope that we've fulfilled your expectations and you're pleased with your investments.

Special thanks go to our faculty advisor, Margot McMillen, for all the time that she spent with us both in and out of the Pub room doing everything she could to keep us on schedule and paying close attention to detail.

We also would like to thank our new friends at Modera-Litho Printing, especially Kim and Tammy for their efforts to keep us within our budget as well as within time constraints.

Most of all though, we would like to thank all of the artists and writers that contributed their work to the literary magazine; we only regret that there is not enough space to fit more of your work.

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