

# TENTH *Muse*

VOLUME I, SPRING 2011

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## COVER ART: *UNDERNEATH*

Everyone desires freedom, inspiration, and honesty. In my work, *underneath*, the bird stands for freedom, the nest represents life and rebirth, while the flowers growing from the woman symbolize inspiration. The skeleton under her skin is the transparency that art gives us when we express ourselves through art or any other medium. It allows us to show our honest selves and represents the interconnection between us all because, at our core, we are all made up of skin, muscle, and bone. It's our ideas and words that define us as individuals.

-Emily Cotton Cram

# EDITOR'S LETTER



Writers and artists are a special breed of people. We savor every moment in life. We soak up every detail—the grooves in our grandfather's hands, the distinct smell of our sister's hairspray, the texture of our first car's steering wheel. We use these details to show the rest of the world what makes life beautiful.

But our work is nothing without an audience because the motivation behind our art is to share it with others. It is my pleasure to offer the *Tenth Muse* to writers and artists as a venue to reach their audience and to offer area readers a new and exciting publication to enjoy.

The idea for a Clarke literary magazine was born a year ago with Katherine Fischer as its driving force. In April of 2010, Anna Kelley was chosen to lead the effort. She gladly accepted and presented the task to her fall Creative Writing class.

Despite their lack of experience and knowledge of what it takes to produce a literary magazine, the Creative Writing class bravely went to work on spreading the word of the magazine and taking the steps to create a magazine that would capture the literary and artistic spirits at Clarke. After sifting through approximately 250 writing and art submissions, I believe we have succeeded. We received submissions from new and established writers from Clarke, the Dubuque community, and beyond.

I am proud to be such a big part of the production of Clarke's new lit mag. Being the first means making all of the decisions for future staffs to follow. We created a name, a mission statement, submission guidelines, a logo, and a design. Our input will forever be a part of this magazine.

I couldn't have completed this magazine without the help of my dedicated staff and leader Anna Kelley. Anna and I met at the beginning of the Creative Writing class and have grown to be colleagues and friends over the last few months. Anna's prior experience was a tremendous help as I had no previous literary magazine experience at all. She guided us in the process, but always reminded us that this was our baby. Anna continued to motivate us with her email alliterations, her sense of humor, her frequent AnnaMails (the staff's name for emails from Anna), and, when fatigue set in, the promise of food and an extraordinary completion party. She is the heart and soul of this magazine.

I also want to thank alumna Ali Herbst for diligently working with me to create a logo for the magazine. Ali implemented my specific (and sometimes impossible) requests and went beyond by deciding to incorporate the Celtic single spiral into the design to tie



our logo to Clarke's own new Celtic-inspired logo. The single spiral signifies ethereal energy radiating outward or inward. Ali quickly saw this as a statement about writers and artists. Our creative energy radiates within us to create our work, and we radiate that energy outward to others when we share our work. Ali used her own artistic energy to create a perfect logo for this magazine, and I am forever grateful for her efforts.

I would also like to thank Katherine Fischer, Ann Pelelo, and the entire Language and Literature Department for introducing the idea of a lit mag to Clarke and for trusting Anna and the staff with the task of making it happen. And, on behalf of the entire staff, it is my pleasure to honor Katie Fischer's many contributions to Clarke University with this inaugural edition, the first of many, thanks to a dedicated endowment in her name.

I would like to thank a few members of the staff who went above and beyond to help me with often daunting tasks. Thank you Sarah Lensen and Danielle Lensen for helping with the template, design, and printing processes; Jess Leonard for leading the copyediting staff; Erin Daly for creating and maintaining our Facebook page; and Will Kelly for selecting artwork.

Finally, I would like to thank all of those who submitted to the magazine. As a new magazine, we were nervous to find out if there was any interest out there. Your quality submissions proved that there is not only interest, but excitement as well. You gave us confidence and assurance, and we are proud to offer you a venue for your work in return.

Lacey Reynolds  
Editor-in-chief

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LACEY REYNOLDS

## Floodwaters and Bulldozers

They are going to tear it down. Again.

Like adding insult to injury, they will add death to injury, or maybe insult to death.

Two summers ago my family's house was destroyed in a record flood. Our home was one of three in our town to be condemned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We salvaged what we could from the second floor and the top half of the first and said good-bye to the only home I had ever known.

\*

I had been on vacation when the house filled up with water, trapping my mom inside. The water gushed up through the basement, tipping over the refrigerator and dining room table as it made its way into the house. My mom ran upstairs and tried to dial 9-1-1.

The phone was dead. She is afraid of water and cannot swim.

She tried to think of ways to escape but could find none. She ran to my room, the only room with a window facing the road a hundred yards away. She opened the window and screamed at each vehicle that drove by. The rain was too loud. No one could hear her through the pounding sheets of downpour.

Finally, a man in a delivery truck pulled over to wait out the conditions. He stepped out of the truck to watch the waters at work under the bridge by our driveway. Mom saw her chance and took it. She screamed as loud as she could and waved her arms. The man saw her, but didn't know what to do. He grabbed his truck radio and called for help.

"Then we looked at each other," Mom explained later, "We just stared. I could tell he felt helpless because he couldn't reach me. There



was just too much water. So we just waited.”

The fire department finally arrived, but the water was already receding just as quickly as it had come. Mom was able to walk out of the house with assistance from the firemen.

\*

When I returned from my vacation, I entered my uncle's warehouse where our belongings were being stored. I walked in silently, scanning the room, trying to find my mom. I saw faces. I recognized some of them as aunts and uncles and distant cousins, but I had never seen many of them before. Most of them looked up when I walked in. They quickly dropped their heads and returned to wiping away slime with entirely too much concentration. I didn't care. I didn't want to see them either with their sympathetic eyes and mud-streaked cheeks staring through me. I wanted my mom's eyes, my mom's cheeks.

Finally, I found her. She was bustling around, talking to three people at once like she always did. You would never know she had just lived through her worst nightmare. I watched as she weaved her way through garbage bags of clothes and boxes of silverware, telling people where to put things and thanking them profusely for all their help. My aunt caught her eye and nodded in my direction. She turned to me and held me. "Are you okay?" she asked. I was numb and angry. They were all looking at me from behind furniture and through piles of junk waiting for me to dramatically fall apart. I didn't deliver. "I want to see the house," I said.

\*

My brothers drove home from Milwaukee and we all piled into vehicles to go see the destruction like it was a tourist attraction. I fidgeted in my seat, leaned forward for a moment, slouched back for another. I sat on my hands so they wouldn't shake and then tapped out a song on the window, using my index fingers as drum sticks. My stomach was empty, but something inside it was turning and turning, trying to make me throw up. I was getting claustrophobic when we finally reached the house. The highway was lined with cars on each side. The people who drove those cars to my home were all down there in the valley, swarming my house like ants attacking a fresh apple core. They were coming in and out of doors on every side of the house, one after another, each removing a mud-coated piece of my life.

I looked down at my home so neatly placed in the heart of this valley as if the valley had formed around it in a protective hug. The valley had failed to protect it this time. Its hills had served as concrete walls, holding in the dangerous waters that tried to take my mother from me. The house itself didn't look damaged at all. It just looked dirty and old, like a puppy's teething toy that had been left behind in the yard.

I squinted to find my dad's face among the strangers below me.

I spotted a cluster of men near the basement door. I recognized one man's stance as my father's. As if he felt my eyes on him, my dad turned around and met my gaze. I walked toward him, letting the sharp slope of the driveway propel me forward. I lost more control with each lunging step. Before I could speak, my dad wrapped his arms around me and spoke into my hair through tears. "It's gone...the whole thing. Gone."

The rest of the family joined us and Dad gave us a tour. The smell of damp must and mold was overwhelming. Dad walked us through what had happened that day. His voice was laced with a bitter tone so strong it hurt to listen. "Here's where the wall caved in," he said as he kicked the bulging wall to our living room. "Here's where your mom was when she saw the water rising." He grabbed the back of the only dining chair left standing and threw it to the floor to land in shambles with its family. These were his memories of the house now. Memories of what the water had done to it, instead of the lives we had shared in it.

My brother Matt tried to calm Dad with false hopes of fixing the place up. What did he care if the house was gone? He had only lived in this house for a few years before he left for the city. He had no memories here like I did. All of my memories were formed here. But that was Matt, always the optimist.

I couldn't see anything positive about the scene before me. Then again, I wasn't really trying to. I was just observing, like I was looking at someone else's muddy toothbrush on the floor. I went upstairs to my room to find that everything had already been removed. How sad it looked without my posters on the wall and my piles of magazines stacked to the windowsill.

I wondered who had taken everything down. Were they careful not to fold my high school artwork? Had they made sure not to wrinkle the dresses of my porcelain doll collection? Had they found my emergency cash so cleverly hidden in a pair of socks randomly tucked in the corner of my underwear drawer?

Oh no. My underwear drawer! Who had gone through my underwear drawer? How many people had seen and/or touched my underwear!?

My sister found me upstairs and reassured me that my underwear had been packed by a woman who didn't even think twice about seeing or touching a young girl's underwear. When I asked her which woman packed my things, she didn't know, which meant she didn't *actually* know who packed my things, which meant it was likely some creepy boy from my high school class who took pictures of my underwear one by one and even kept some for himself. In fact, at this exact moment, I knew there was a group of guys laughing hysterically as they tossed my flowery drawers around in a circle like a hot potato.

What a small, petty thing to worry about at a time like this, I told myself. I should be thinking about the family photos that were ruined or how my mother had to escape from her own home or where in the world I was going to sleep that night. But those things were too painful. Creepy underwear thieves were simple, and simple was exactly what I was craving right now.

I followed Lynne downstairs, still stewing over the hot potato panty image I had created. But that image was quickly forgotten when I heard a crunch beneath my foot. I stepped back to find a plastic little girl with brown pigtails and brown skin. She was wearing a yellow silk tutu, now spotted with mud. Jennifer. Jennifer was just one of my hundreds of pieces for my Fisher-Price Dream Doll House. Santa had given me that doll house when I was seven years old and I had asked for new accessories to add to it for each holiday since then. I had played with that house until I was twelve. At some point, I packed it away and decided that I would give it to my daughter some day.

And now Jennifer was on the floor.

Only inches away, I could see a piece of baby blue plastic sticking up from the muck that was now my living room floor. I pried it out. It was the food dish for the doll house's dogs and cats. Actually there were two dogs, two cats, three kittens, and three puppies (pets came as bonus pieces with several big doll house purchases).

I looked again and found a pale yellow laundry basket that came with the dryer that had a small knob to spin the clothes inside.

Soon I had forgotten where I was and what I had come there for. I only knew that I was on a hunt for my pieces, like Hansel and Gretel in search for bread crumbs. I rescued a plastic picnic table, a broken dining room chair, a purple tire from a jeep, and a vacuum before I reached the crick. This was the end. The rest had been swept away. I looked at the pieces of pastel plastics in my hands. I remembered how beautiful the pieces had been only days ago. They were ugly now, like everything else the water had touched.

My sister was calling for me. I dropped the pieces on the ground. I didn't want those few pieces if I couldn't have the others. They were a set. They belonged together. They were nothing without the rest.

\*

Everyone had split up around the house, each of us looking at different parts. We all ended up outside together where Dad continued his tour of the yard. As Lynne and I listened, we noticed that Mom was not with us.

We found her in the kitchen, the kitchen she had just remodeled on her own a few weeks before. We watched from a distance as she scraped away the mud with her feet, slowly at first and then wildly as her emotions overcame her. She frantically tried to find the

tiles she had spent hours picking out at the store and even more time installing on her hands and knees. As she searched, she cried, "My floor! My kitchen!" She shook with powerful sobs, but Lynne and I could only stare at each other and cry. Mom was the strong one who talked too bubbly and smiled too much during a crisis. She simply does not fall apart. Not knowing what to do, Lynne found Dad. Mom turned her attention to the kitchen drawers. She whipped open the drawer beneath the sink and found her mother's scratch pads for doing dishes. "They left Mom's scratchers!" she screamed as if someone had been murdered. "What's going on?" Dad asked. Mom looked embarrassed at the sound of Dad's voice. She tried to pull herself together, but then gave up. She turned to Dad and whispered, "They forgot Mom's scratchers," as if that explained everything. Dad had never had to comfort Mom before. He helplessly looked at her, picked up a scratcher, and said, "It's okay."

But it wasn't okay. It wasn't okay for a long time after the flood took our home. For awhile, my parents slept in my sister's basement while I stayed at my boyfriend's house. Things got a little tense with everyone being under one roof, so Mom and Dad rented a camper to put in Lynne's front yard. There was still no room for me, so I stayed with my boyfriend. The utilities for the camper became too expensive for us, so Mom, Dad, and I moved into the lower level of my aunt's garage. We had a bathroom and a TV and even a refrigerator. We weren't at home, but we were comfortable and it was just the three of us together again.

We looked into buying land to build a home near our old place, but had no luck. We researched prefab housing and toured homes around our hometown. We considered renting a home or buying a camper. Building would never be finished in time for Christmas and short-term alternatives were not a solution. We wanted to feel at home for the holidays.

My parents finally found a house to buy and we moved in in October. We painted the walls and redid the floors. We bought appliances and furniture and food. We replaced our phones, TVs, and computer. We hung photos and shelves and clothes. We spent months trying to find our old things, unpacking bags and boxes, wiping mud off of family photos, replacing what we had lost. Sometimes it felt like we would never catch up. Months would go by when we thought our lives were back to normal. Then I would decide to make cupcakes and discover that we no longer had any cupcake pans, no flour, no sugar, no sprinkles on hand.

\*

Now, more than two years later, this house has all the signs of our old home.

But the old house still stands in the valley where I once called



home. The doors have been removed and the windows have been stolen. Looters have gutted the walls to collect copper wires and hauled away soggy furniture for reasons we are unsure of. All that remains now is dried mud, warped floors, and the nauseating odor of black mold laced with a hint of nostalgia.

Empty and foul as it may be, the house still stands. It stands as a reminder of what once was and how blessed we are to have survived such a tragedy. But it will not stand for much longer. The government owns the house now and will have to bulldoze it and bury it in a heap on the ground. When the dust has settled, the debris will sink deeper into the earth with each new rain and weeds will grow thicker with each passing year and soon there will be no trace of it left at all.

LISA GIBBS





KATIE GROSS



ALI HERBST



EVAN STICKFORT



Purple Ivonne

JENNY DOMINE

## Our Laundry

The evening melts into warm lumps of laundry  
And hot rum cider.  
Together, we fold mismatched socks. (Some were eaten by the laundry  
monster.)  
What an odd pair we make.  
You knot your socks into balls and fold your shirts in fourths.  
I fold my socks and hang my shirts in the closet. (There's a monster in  
there, too.)  
Outside, the groaning wind slips through the apartment's subtle  
cracks.  
It complains to my fingertips and toes.  
I don't care.  
Tonight, I have fluffy wool socks and you to wrap myself in.

JOHN BRADLEY

## The Insomnia of Radium: Marie Sklodowska Curie

Due to high levels of radioactivity  
my papers from the 1890s are considered

“too dangerous to handle.” Even  
my cookbook. Thus, they’re stored

in lead-lined boxes, and those who wish  
to consult them must wear

protective clothing. Unless you don’t  
mind shimmering blue-green

through eternity, like me.

ROBIN KENNICKER

## Giving Quilts

*This Christmas tradition belongs to my mother. She started it, carried it on, and followed it through to the end. The tradition itself would take a mere few sentences of explanation but leave out all the beautiful beginnings. One must see the bud of a rose as it awakens, to truly appreciate its gloriousness in a vase. I dedicate this story to my mother who never told us to give and think of others first, but instead lives her life embodying that belief with an attitude of joy. She has taught us well, made it part of our nature, and lived 2 Corinthians 8:7 “But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” My siblings and I are the ones who have truly benefited from her example. Thank you, Mom.*

Opening the packed wooden hump-backed trunk, I reach in to tug out one of the patchwork quilts. With the weather turning my lawn into a frozen blanket of green needles, I know it won’t be long before winter’s blistery arrival. Some of the smaller quilts go into the living room to cozy up with on the couch, and the larger ones I take upstairs to place on the beds. The corners of my mouth pull back slowly in smile of memory, as my eyes caress the polyester material of this yarn-tied quilt. This four-by-four red square was cut from my grandmother’s pant leg. She’s gone now. But, I remember when she wore them, before giving them to my mother amongst a bag of other closet clean-outs.

I don’t know how Mom came up with the idea to cut the old clothing into squares and piece them together to make quilts. Perhaps a “frugal spirit” haunted her dreams when the polyester material proved useless as an absorbent rag. Whatever the reason, my siblings

and I rejoiced when our old itchy wool army blankets were covered with a beautiful polyester rainbow array on the front side and soft sheet-like material on the back.

Even though I appreciated the end result, I remember thinking her a bit crazy to spend all her free time working on such a monotonous craft. She spent hours making sure each polyester square would fit perfectly next to its neighbor by first smoothing the material flat and then penciling around the pattern; a measured cardboard square cut from a Wheaties cereal box. When all the precisely marked squares were cut and stacked, the sewing machine was set in motion to unite each square. Bursts of humming whirled through the air between the up and down clicking of the “presser foot lifter.”

After making each of us a quilt with our name on it, I thought she’d be finished for a while, but the tragedy of a neighbor woman’s death lay heavy on Mom’s heart.

\*

“She died alone and cold; frozen to death on her own kitchen floor,” Mom explained to me.

“But didn’t she have heat or couldn’t she have covered up?” I wondered, as my eleven-year-old mind couldn’t quite comprehend “cold” as an actual way of death *inside* a house.

“They found her wrapped up in newspapers, probably trying to keep warm when her electricity was cut off,” Mom explained.

\*

*Back in the 70s, the electric company could legally shut off the power to a residence in the middle of the winter if the bill wasn’t paid.*

\*

Soon after the elderly woman’s death, the sound of scissors snip-snip-snipping and the sewing machine click-click-humming filled our house once again.

Mom made four quilts that year, one for each of the old bachelors that lived in the neighborhood. I didn’t even realize they lived where they lived. Their nameless faces were unrecognizable to me and most other people because they lived as recluses in simple, old ramshackle dwellings. Tucked away, they chose not to associate much with the outside, more materialistic world, which in return never paid much attention to their existence--until Mom found them.

Christmas proved to be the perfect time to distribute the quilts and helped Mom solve her “sender” dilemma. The quilts could be from *Santa*, she decided. She insisted that the old bachelors never know who made the quilts and sought out unrecognizable delivery people; my sister Renee wearing a wig or one of her town friends wearing a crazy Santa hat. The whole Santa charade seemed nuts to me, and I remember feeling relieved that my face and friends were

much too recognizable.

After the quilts were distributed, Mom “carried on” the *Santa* tradition until the death of the last bachelor by sending boxes of baked cookies, homemade jams, and graham cracker candy. Unbelievable, but in twenty-eight years, she never missed a year and I don’t believe they ever found out who *Santa* really was. I believed keeping *Santa’s* identity was important to Mom, because she didn’t want them feeling obligated to return a gift or perhaps become suspicious of her motives. Even though both were good reasons, but apparently not hers, as was revealed to me in a recent chat about the delivery of the quilts.

\*

“We always personally delivered the quilts Robin, just too expensive to mail... We didn’t have a lot of money.” Mom corrected my previous assumptions.

“Yep-yep, yeeeeeep that is right,” I sniggered under my grin, remembering the treat of sharing of one sixteen ounce bottle of Pepsi with my other six siblings on a hot summer’s day of push lawn mowing.

“You know though, the most important reason that we delivered them secretly and in costumes was because if they didn’t know who to thank, any person or every person could be Santa, and it might give them a better view of all mankind.”

So simple an answer and yet so profound that I had stop and ask myself if I would be content to walk or live my life “in the shadows,” for the purpose of bringing hope that the world was a much better place. She may never have been rewarded with a “thank you” from the old bachelors, but the seeds she planted then have made an everlasting impression in the minds of her children and molded them into becoming the kind, compassionate people they are today. Thank you, Mom, for giving me a better view of the world.

CONOR KELLEY

## We No Deliver

*Conor won honorable mention for "Franchise Mode" in the CU writing contest*

I shifted from foot to foot, not knowing where to put my hands, examining the chalkboard on the wall in front of me. "LUNCH BUFFET \$5.95" were the only words on the board, written in a haphazard, slanting script. Stroking my beard, I read the words over and over again solemnly, pretending to be in the middle of a crucial decision regarding my meal. I wanted to ask Kim what a buffet was. However, I doubted I would be able to hold it together long enough to hear an answer. I presented my choice with an air of excited professionalism.

"I have decided that I will try your finest *lunch buffet* this afternoon," I said much too loudly for this shoebox-sized Asian restaurant, pronouncing *lunch buffet* carefully and enthusiastically, as though it were a challenging foreign name. I was close to breaking into a smile. She wasn't.

It was an Asian restaurant because although it claimed to serve "authentic Vietnamese cuisine," it also offered calamari, orange chicken, barbecue ribs, and other items as Vietnamese as Uncle Sam. None of these were available for the lunch buffet, though. Nothing edible was. I glanced around the restaurant, but there were no other employees present to hear my schtick.

Kim was not amused. She never was. After moving to my apartment in the city the year before, I developed a pleasant rapport with local business owners I saw frequently, such as gas station attendants, liquor store owners, and fast food employees. Kim, the owner of this restaurant, continued to stonewall me. She was short, loud, and mean. I ate at her tiny restaurant at least twice a week, yet she refused to acknowledge me with more of a greeting than her standard "Hi, how you do, wha you li?"

Maybe she knew I was just coming back to see her daughter. *So what?* I thought. *I'm still a paying customer. At least shoot me a courtesy laugh.*

\*

At the end of a summer night a couple weeks after I moved to this city, I drunkenly called in a delivery order of spring rolls, barbecue ribs and a Coke to my apartment at two o'clock in the morning. That night, I told my friends I was celebrating my newfound freedom, but by the end of the night I was mourning another "it's not you, it's me." It was never me. I craved the food that would satisfy my hunger and take my mind off of my latest disappointment.

When I pulled open the door, a beautiful Asian girl in a University of Illinois sweatshirt was standing in front of me holding a plastic bag full of food in white Styrofoam boxes and a 2-liter bottle of Coke. The food suddenly meant nothing to me. I no longer felt inebriated or hungry.

Once I convinced my mouth to form words, I apologized profusely for troubling her with my delivery, saying it was necessary because I was too drunk to walk anywhere and sick of cardboard pizza covered with detachable cheese. She explained that she was Hanh, Kim's daughter, and she didn't mind coming to my apartment. She smiled and our eyes met. She shyly glanced away, and something inside of me awoke.

I spent the next minute or two leaning against my doorframe trying not to sound stupid. "So, you wanna share this dinner with me?" I asked. Laughing, she told me that nobody eats dinner at two in the morning. I told her if she ate with me, she could call it whatever she wanted. She said maybe some other time; she had to be back to work. I didn't have a clever answer, so I gave up. She glanced at the credit card receipt. "Goodnight, Ryan," she said softly as she walked away, swinging her hips almost imperceptibly. It's a good thing she didn't turn around, because she would've seen me smiling like an idiot.

After watching her bright yellow Honda Civic drive off into the dark city, my stomach gurgled. As I ate my way through the family-sized meal, I wondered how she could be Kim's daughter, and what she was doing in a city like this. Her mother was so stout and mean, and she was so lean and delicate. She spoke flawless English that landed softly in my ears. I replayed our conversation over and over again in my head while I ate. It was the greatest meal of my life. After that, I showed up at this "authentic Vietnamese restaurant" nearly twice a week, hoping to see Hanh again.

\*

Kim and I stood in silence, facing each other. I wasn't sure what she was thinking, because her face bore its standard look of mild irrita-



tion. After a couple seconds of stiff silence fit for a morgue, her face changed just a little. *Was that a smirk?* I wondered. I looked closer for verification of the look, but her eyes appeared tired and sad.

"Yeah okay, buffet fo you. I dish."

"What?" I said, looking at the plate she was holding.

"I dish! You wan litto evyting?"

This had never happened before. I was confused. Usually she just set out a plate and a silverware set and walked through the curtain that held the image of a Samurai into the back kitchen. Hold on a second. Samurais aren't Vietnamese.

"No, not everything," I said after the initial shock had worn off. She gave me a sideways look, as if to tell me to not push my luck. She proceeded to walk the buffet line with me, asking me which foods I wanted. Each time I said no to an entrée, she gave me a quick disapproving glance. Each time, I half-expected her to ask me why.

How would this awkward walk down the buffet line end? Would she bring the plate to a table for me? Would she tuck my napkin into my shirt? Set me up with her daughter? Kim cleared her throat, bringing me back from my amusing thought.

"Soup?" she asked. I shook my head no.

"Hee you go dan," she said, handing me my heaping plate of noodles, sauces and various colored chunks of meat.

"Thank you."

"Ry, you wan drink?" she asked.

"Yes, please." I responded.

I thought to myself, *did she just call me by my name?* Did she say *Ry* or *Ryan*? Could she have been saying "*Right*, you want a drink?" That didn't make any sense. "*Why* do you want a drink?" That's a strange question that would have required a lengthy answer.

Kim brought my drink from the soda fountain behind the counter and set it down in front of me. I gave her the no-teeth smile, the one reserved for situations of forced civility. I tasted my drink; apparently, she picked Coke. *Good call, Kim*, I thought. She quickly walked through the Vietnamese Samurai curtain into the kitchen, and I did not see her for the remainder of my meal.

I stayed a few minutes after I had finished eating, drinking my watered-down Coke, pretending to be casual while glancing around for Hanh. I wondered when I would talk to her again. I fantasized about her walking through the curtain and sitting down across the table from me, telling me she can't stop thinking about me either.

\*

Two nights ago, I came in to the restaurant with a friend for dinner. She was my female friend, and far from a Girlfriend. Halfway through our kabob appetizer, Hanh and her mother stormed past our table and through the front door, yelling at each other in what I could only as-

sume was Vietnamese. As she finished the conversation with something emphatic, Hanh turned her head sharply back to the restaurant.

We caught eyes for a moment, and she smiled. I shyly glanced away, at my friend, and back to Hanh. Her smile faded. She said something gravely to Kim, something that visibly shocked her, and got in that yellow Civic. Hanh threw something out of the car window onto the curb and screeched off.

That night, I persuaded my dinner partner to eat slowly, just in case Hanh would return. Kim must have asked us ten times if we would like anything else before I paid that bill. I finally surrendered as the closing hour approached, and walked out in silence as my friend lectured me on the possible benefits of a change of scenery.

\*

Giving up for the day, I left the usual eight dollars on the table and walked through the restaurant. I paused briefly when I heard something that sounded like sobbing. As I stopped, so did the sound. I shrugged and strolled through the screen door onto the street. The screen door always amused me; I'd never eaten in a restaurant with a residential screen door before I came to this town. What was the doggie door for?

I stepped through the door back into the late summer dusk. This sobering time of the day always put me in a contemplative mood. My eyes glazed over as I stared in the direction of the setting sun. The clouds were lit up pink and blue like giant wads of cotton candy. I focused my attention on the street in front of me. I was paralyzed by what I saw.

The yellow Civic wasn't there; in its place an old black Pontiac that I didn't recognize. I glanced back at the restaurant. There was a new sign that said they no longer delivered, and I knew she was gone.

The sun set and the world darkened around me as I stared at that sign. The waning orange sunlight highlighted the faded tan of the old downtown buildings, and I wondered why the most beautiful part of the day was the sun's funeral procession. I took a deep breath and exhaled loudly through my nose. I kicked an unmarked envelope off the curb into the gutter and crossed into the shadows.



KATHERINE FISCHER

## Sail

On campus, I walk the corridor leading to my office. Retrieve the mail from my faculty box. Read the Dean's announcements on the kiosk. Sip coffee. A student approaches. "Hi Angela, great comment from you in lit. class yesterday," I say. Sip. My to-do's for the day ahead—five writing lab appointments, teach class, tour visitors through the new exhibit, the reading, lunch with Cynthia, teach two more classes, go home, collapse—a tight day, time stacked like book-ends, back to back.

Birthing from this corridor, I enter an atrium of space, the center building on our campus. Three stories of glass, hollow in the center, reach skyward to cathedral arches. It is a sacred space.

Like visiting Washington D.C. years earlier when I crested the rise in the green, came upon "the Wall," and found Brian's name etched on the widespread wing of the black marble "V," I feel this corridor also lift without warning, immersing me in space. My to-do list floats away along with the predictability of this day.

The corridor gives way to banners billowing overhead like sails on the Mississippi, catching the wind, cotton cascading over the interior brick walls, softening them to tents of gauze. My own movement undulates these panels, breathing in, breathing out, inhale, exhale. Once I have passed by, stillness. Sun through the atrium glass wavers now in my eyes, now in shadow, as the fabric panels hold and releases the beams.

Sun coming through the cotton illuminates a pink Cadillac convertible on the panel ahead. Her in a white chiffon ankle-length evening gown right out of Ginger Rogers's closet, him in a black tux, bow tie, sequin-studded vest—her Fred Astair. Halted mid-step, the fox

trotters glide around the Cadillac in this frieze on fabric, a moment memorialized by the stitcher, "Thanks for the dance, Jack."

It is opening day at the AIDS quilt exhibit on our campus. 85 of the 32,000 panels hang in our college atrium. The quilt is not one actual pieced-together spread, at least not in physical space. Panels like these contain one or two sections, each representing someone who has died of AIDS. The panels travel state to state and country to country. Although the panel patches do not form a single cloth held by a quilter's cotton threads, nonetheless, they are stitched together by stronger ties.

It is October in Iowa. The weather may shift from lackadaisical shuffling to speeding alacrity as it turns from fall to winter to fall again, raising and plummeting the hopes of Midwesterners. We are not quite ready to let go of the life of leaves to make way for the stilling of snow. October, like AIDS, the unpredictability and uncontrollability—tuberculosis turns to AZT to MAI infection to Marinol to a protease inhibitor to down . . . toxoplasmosis. . . further down. . . until dying.

"No one dies of AIDS," I hear one of the nursing faculty explain to a group touring the quilt. "People die of AIDS-related diseases like tuberculosis immune resistance. AIDS leaves the blood without immune systems to fight disease and infection. But we see victims live a lot longer now, maybe ten years beyond diagnosis," she explains as I consider how short a time ten years is, all there would be left to taste, to do, to be in ten years.

Time. Back to back meetings. Class at ten. Appointments. No time to waste. I'll have to keep a close eye on managing it today.

Yet I stand still, stretch to touch Sarah Marie, age 2 ½, whose hand silhouetted in pink felt reaches from a field of green; she shadows my hand, and as I hold her in my palm, I read on her panel the letters, "We love you, Sari! Forever, sweet baby of ours. Love, mommy and daddy," and "I will always remember you, Sarah Marie. Love, Jim." Jim, I am sure, is the older brother who will never walk his little sister to her first day of kindergarten, never protect her from the neighborhood bullies, nor give her advice on dating.

Pinned and stitched to her cloth is Sarah Marie's evanescence: the Mickey Mouse bib from a child who will never outgrow fantasyland; a first pair of tennis shoes from a toddler who will never run high school track; a St. Theresa medal for a girl who will never rebel against her faith; a blue hair ribbon from a daughter who will never cut it close and dye it purple—the artifacts of a life that once was and one that will never be.

As a person of the cloth, a knitter myself, I am reverent, gently fingering her fabric, not breaking any threads—threads which knit this dead child into my living. I long to cradle her, to feel her baby-



weight chubby in my strong mother-arms, to draw in her babysmell, perfume of powder, applesauce, blankie wool, and sweet innocent baby's breath. I sway wanting to dance her around the room singing, "Hush little baby, don't you cry, mama's gonna sing you a lullaby." Even as I touch her print, her toddler's hand turns liquid and slips between my fingers with the knowing. Knowing that time could not be managed for Sarah Marie.

Knowing she left a cavity, only grave-sized at first, dug wider by the missing of those who love her; dug deeper by others, by those who saw her father holding her hand and releasing it as he tried to teach her to walk around the block, by those who saw her in the grocery cart biting through the plastic wrap on the cheddar, by those who saw her floating in a bright yellow inner tube at the shore, by those who saw her brother sobbing right in front of the lion's cage because he no longer had a little sister to roar into fright.

The cavity digs wider over the years with her absence: her not being there alongside other seven-year olds, puppy licking the face of five children instead of six; her not being there to challenge the eighth grade teacher when he tells students, "It's always been done this way"; her not being there, the third girl in the restroom to pass the cigarette to; her not sitting in my college writing class, a class now of only nineteen students which might have been twenty; her never knowing a lover's touch on her cheek; her not living a whole life before dying. Her *not-being* appears on this panel in Iowa, in California, in New York, in Denver, until absence is larger than presence.

The hole deepens to crater-size until it grows so enormous it is the earth, itself, convex to concave, the world turned inside out.

This atrium, main channel of the college stream, where everyone gathers chattering between classes, where guitarists and cellists and folk singers and poets often play and recite, where "HEEEEEEEY JULIE!" is high-fived by "Yo, Jon, babeeeee!" is today hushed, only whispers and footfalls.

I move through the panels like cutting through the holy waters of the Mississippi. Panels flow over my shoulders, my arms, my legs as I wade through. I, who swim and breathe and live pour into these sails, these still-lives.

Still-life, they live still.

Richard Johnson, born 1951, the same year as I was born; died 1989, just eight years after the AIDS epidemic was declared. Burton Lathrop, born 1963, the year the Beatles came to the U.S.; died 1983, too early to ever hear U2. Elise and Robert Heimke, their catamaran twinned sails, wedded 1973. Elise died 1985, the year our daughter was born; Robert passed away in 1990, the year Jerry and I waltzed on the verandah of the Passagrahan in St. Maartan.

Panels filled with diplomas, certificates, war commendations,

journal entries, notes from parents, recollections from sisters and brothers, prayers from sons and daughters, and letters from lovers. I read and I read and I read and I wonder if even the most red-necked, intolerant, homophobics could read such letters, some of them man to man, and not be touched.

William Woodward. Born 1940; died 1996. Mr. Woodward, Bill. Oh, Woody. I didn't know your panel would be here in your hometown, here this year just years after you inhaled . . . held . . . inhaled . . . stilled. But here you are in your three-piece suit photograph sewn into linen alongside the embroidered outline of the river museum which also bears your name, and your letter to the world, your profession of love for life.

William Woodward, one of the most prominent men in our town, William Woodward, who had the courage to "come out" among the Rotary club types, Bill pounding his fist at board meetings, Woody exchanging poinsettias for Christmas cookies with us. Richard had died of AIDS but we all thought you would escape because . . . because. . . well, face it, Woody. . . you could just be so darn ornery. But here you are at the top of the atrium, always at the top, directing the show, telling everyone what to do, always calling the shots.

Except for controlling time.

Except for dying.

The time, I have forgotten the time again. The writing lab—students will be waiting for conferences. Class at ten. Public reading at noon. Lunch with Cynthia. Tour group through the exhibit at two. Can't be late.

The quilt piecing Woody's panel to those who died years earlier from AIDS seams all the years together into an eternal present and eternal past. Recorded here, they form documentation of the people who died too early, their time stolen from them, from us. They are referred to as "the late so-and-so" and I think of how the cure will come too late for too many. Today the illusion that I can keep time, patch it in pieces, and control my living blends with these reminders of time moving beyond our ability to darn and to mend. If we could only keep death at bay long enough to come up with a cure.

I walk up the stairs beyond Woody's panel and turn left which places me at the backside of the quilt sections. In sewing class back in my elementary school, Ms. Levers had called it the wrong side. *The wrong side.*

Here on the other side of the panels, I think of all the men, women, and children deported to the backside of living, to the wrong side, because they are gay or lesbian or have AIDS or are female or black; or because they are not smart or are mentally handicapped, or because they do not fit someone's notion of fitting. Leo from maintenance tells me that the college was required to hire additional round-

the-clock guards before the quilt panels could go on display. Those intolerant ones have slashed panels in other cities around the country. Slashed to make them fit. But today in the atrium, their stories recorded on gabardine scrolls, squares in a quilt larger than four football fields, fit impeccably—flawless, pure, true.

In the writing lab and in my classes, students arrive tear-stained from having read the sails. Some hold hands to hold one another from falling apart. In voices which barely break over the hum of ventilators, they speak of a brother, an uncle, a mother, a husband—the litany of AIDS. As I hear their hushed words layer the air in the lab with Midwestern drawl, I hear other whispers as well.

Whispers. Cynthia, an adult student of mine, tells me the high school girls do not come home with her daughter because her mother is a lesbian.

Whispers. Jerry Graf explains how quickly he became a number while being tested for AIDS.

Whispers. Tested for AIDS. . . to donate blood to the Red Cross. . . to be granted insurance. Even members of the “safe” population wonder if those afternoon trysts when they were reckless and innocent remain yet in their blood like land mines. There is no safe population.

Silence. Terry’s parents in Chicago refuse to talk to him since he told them what parents do not want to hear about a middle-aged son who has no wife.

I remember one summer as we pulled into a parking lot near the Grand Canyon, I put my hand over our young son’s eyes to protect him from reading obscenity, a sign bolted to a rusted camper, a sign so blasphemous its four-inch high letters seemed billboard-sized, “AIDS is God’s judgment on those who deserve it.”

Ryan White, Arthur Ashe, Rock Hudson. Freddie Mercury. Woody.

Sarah Marie.

There’s no time for my lesson plan with more important things to write about today. Time demands that we pay attention to the quietest of voices. A steeple reverence for those being honored in the atrium tolls throughout the campus, time slipping away.

In the chapel all day and all night, we keep the vigil of the dead whose sails like shrouds spread over us, the living. We read the names of those who have died from AIDS. Students and teachers, deans and clerical assistants, maintenance workers and the college president, alongside sisters, lovers, brothers, parents, wives, nurses, bank CEOs, truckers, actors, musicians, meat packing company butchers, farmers, and I read from the list. We read and read and read hundreds of names: Andrew Lester, James Patterson, Cordelia Matheiwson, Stephen Resnic, Julia Watson, Jillian O’Keefe, Seamus Lewis, Israel

Mostpha, Leonard Brady, Christine Schulz—the names keep listing like schooners on the calm Mississippi, page after page after page.

I think of another time years ago when I protested the war by standing on the Post Office steps reading the names of those who died in Vietnam. Although everything about AIDS is criminal, today no one will arrest us for keeping the vigil, for reading these names, for attending to time.

Cynthia has just finished touring a bus group through the exhibit. We do not go for lunch after all. We have no hunger in the presence of so much death; no desire to fill ourselves in the presence of so much absence. She and I meet in front of the panel for Jardache Williams, a man we do not know until we read his fabric. Woven there we find threads—he played the piano once in a New Orleans Blues bar, he loved the Green Bay Packers and Miller Beer, and he had a daughter named Sylvie. He had dreams. He wanted to ski the Alps. He dreamed of climbing Everest and of sailing a Tall Ship in the Caribbean. He dreamed of living even while he was dying. Now his sail, this panel, sways under the touch of visitors, taking life from them, restoring some of his time.

“Can anyone get AIDS?” a boy with shocking red hair asks from the front of the tour group.

“Yes, anyone,” I tell them what I’ve been trained to say.

“Even little boys can get AIDS?” he presses, tapping his foot against the marble floor. When I repeat that yes, anyone can get AIDS, lickety-split he asks, “But kids don’t die of AIDS, right?”

“I heard you get AIDS from kissing.”

“I heard you get AIDS if you are really naughty,” says a girl in the back of the group. She is wearing a brimmed pink hat and her pigtails swish as she speaks.

“People get AIDS when their good blood comes in contact with the blood of someone who has AIDS. You can’t get it from kissing. All kinds of people get AIDS. People who are not naughty get colds, too. Same thing,” I tell them. I navigate this group of first-graders from a local elementary school through the sails. I give them the knowing so that they might navigate themselves more safely.

Their usual six-year-old’s urgency to skitter across the shine of the atrium floor, to roll about like lion cubs, and to hop hop hop today is quieted without even a “Boys and girls!” from their teacher. They sense it all, the death hoisted by the veneration of life. And even these young children carry litanies of their own— of a cousin, of a boy in their school, of a grandparent, of a father.

During this weeklong exhibit, as I course through the sails, through the waves of tour groups, humankind washes over me. Children measure their own hands against the silhouettes of Sarah Marie. One high school girl summons her boyfriend to her side and whispers,

"Jimmy, I found him. His is the orange panel," the panel synesthesia for the man she knew as Howard Tilotson.

Like the roses inserted into the crevices in the Vietnam Memorial, these tokens have been added to these banners of death, these banners of life. Two handsome young men wearing t-shirts which say, "I just want my friends back" and "Dubuque AIDS Coalition" walk hand in hand visiting every sail; on each they pin a small medal from the Gay Rights League. I see Woody's friend, Ellen. She squeezes my hand, "It's beautiful, Kate. Woody loves. . . would love this," she stumbles over the tense of the verb. I think of his mother and brother, of his former wife, and of his three adult children as I see another family touring the panels. The atrium harbor, its sails at rest, is never empty this week.

We read the names, name after name after name. And the people come, man after woman after boy after girl and even a pup named Scooter. They add up like numerals multiplying, un-stoppable. In the U.S., alone, more than 581,249 have died from AIDS. In the headlines, more numbers. 13% drop in the number of those who died of AIDS this year. This roughs out to 2,900 fewer panels. 2,900 fewer people.

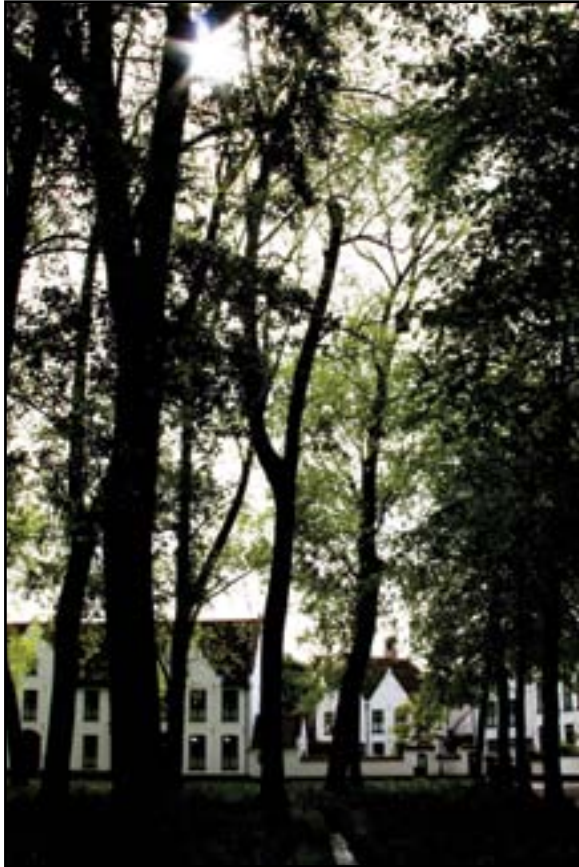
2,900 *more* people. 2,900 *more* fox trotters, mountain climbers, nurses, tennis players, teachers, lovers, fathers, wives, Sarah Marie's exhaling, inhaling, catching the Mississippi River wind at its crest, their jibs hoisted tall, and their sails billowing full in the late summer sky.

EVAN STICKFORT



Ivonne

ALI HERBST



SARAH LENSEN

## Silver Hairs

*honorable mention, CU writing contest*

I walk in and see the silvery hair  
resting  
on the bathroom floor's glare  
as if that's where an old woman's hair is supposed to be,  
right next to the red rug that matches the curtain squares.

Tears pierce my eyes as I finally connect why  
grandma is balding  
like grandpa  
again.

I tend to avoid cleaning their extra bedroom  
because I hate going back there.  
Hidden and tucked away in her closet's gloom  
is a person I can't stand to bear.

I twist the doorknob and behind the thick wall of stench, it's there.  
Next to last year's Christmas lights and grandpa's old t-shirts of non-  
whites.

It peacefully rests there in a dusty bin  
on the head of an emotionless, white nothingness of a Styrofoam man-  
nequin.

The milky eyes she fashions  
show the chilling emptiness of zero passion,  
that my grandma's head was once bald like an egg.

This stupid mannequin's silvery gray hair is flat now  
since it's been in the closet for almost nine years.  
It lacks the smell of my grandma's hairspray;  
instead it smells like mothballs and dusty decay.

The curls of her old wig refuse to give out  
as every ounce of those wrenching memories begin to re-sprout.

CAROL TYX

## Learning God Like Spanish

I learn God like I learn Spanish,  
which is to say, slowly,  
and with a lot of repetition,  
knowing a word I find today  
may disappear tomorrow.

The language of God  
is not my native tongue.  
Over and over I must practice  
the most basic conjugations:  
to love in the singular  
and the plural, in first and second  
and third person.

CHRISTINA BOLGREN



Día de Los Muertos



ALI HERBST



YAZMET MADARIAGA

## Tres Micro relatos y un sólo final

*Todo lo que es profundo ama la máscara.*  
Friedrich Nietzsche

### *Imago mundi*

Abre y cierra una vez más la puerta para asegurarse de que no haya nadie. El paisaje desierto y largo del pasillo le reconforta. Siempre le acosa este inútil pudor. El espejo de su habitación le recuerda perenne el insondable vigilante. Vértigo que fascina y espanta. No tiene escenario. Los espacios campestres facilitan el buen humor. Su papel empieza desde el interior. Reflexión sobre mi, reflejo mío. Me observa desde ahí, cree que no me doy cuenta. Está hilvanando mis quehaceres, armando de retazos mis dolores para formar un telón colorido. Desde lo más hondo, con los hilos me manejas reflejo mío, con mis carcajadas me ensordeces...

### *Demiurgo*

Mi poder invierte la creación. Las fronteras que parecen silvestres las delinea yo. Son ustedes el resultado de todos mis simulacros. Porque en mi sueño me vi representando esta obra...

### *Theatrum mundi*

Cuando me asomo veo a todos los hombres. Todas las acciones se conjugan en todos los tiempos. Son un instante eterno, mi tablero tiene todas las jugadas, las mismas que reposan en mis manos. Es un sólo final para todos. El jaque no disculpa ni al rey...

...ES NACER, ES REPRESENTAR, ES MORIR.

Fin

KAYLA SCHNOEBELEN

## Personality Quiz

6:15 a.m.

Ew! Jimmy slobbering on my face is not an appropriate wake up call. I roll onto my side, which allows Jimmy freedom to pull my ponytail.

“Jimmy, go get Daddy.” His feathery tail winds up and it looks like he is going to take flight. “Daddy has bacon.” At the mention of bacon, Jimmy is gone. Silly pup. I reach over and turn on my laptop. While it’s loading, I wrap my blankets around me better. Now, it’s Facebook time.

What superpower do you wish for? Don’t need one. Do you like being inside or outside? OUT! The devil offers you immortality for your soul. You say: I don’t have a soul to trade. My soul color is red because I’m an eager person and excited to do things.

Do you like sledding? Awesome. Do you like running? Yes. Do you like swimming? Yes. A Siberian husky is the dog I like.

What’s your favorite color? Green. What’s your favorite music? Rock. A hot dude/chick comes up to you in the hallway. What do you do? Blush, turn, and walk into something. I’m a loner: not smart enough to fit in with the nerds and I avoid the preps. Well, that’s accurate enough. I do avoid the jock hall and the nerds look at me funny when I ask to explain the joke about algorithms and matrices.

I consider myself: fun sized. What are your hobbies? Tanning. What’s your main drama consist of? Grenades. How’s your hair? Poof! I’m Snooki. Who’s that? I open up a new tab and begin a search to learn more about the Jersey Shore. That’s so not like me. Maybe I’d be cooler if I looked more like her.

\*

6:40 a.m.

“Honey! Your breakfast is getting cold.”

Mom, it’s cereal. I don’t think it can get cold. I log out of my account and crawl out of bed, getting tangled in the blankets in the process. Wait. I’m an eager person. I switch to skipping down the hall, down the stairs, and almost skip right into the wall. It would be safer to wait until after I’m off the stairs to start skipping. Man, my cereal is going to be so soggy.

Jimmy greets me at the bottom of the steps, but I ignore him. I like Siberian huskies, not a fat Maltese. I skip into the kitchen and sit down. I eat my cereal fast because it’s Cheerios when I wanted Captain Crunch, but my red soul says I’m going to grin and bear it. Mom is staring at me.

“You seem different today.”

“Thanks? I gotta get ready. Love you, Mom. Bye.” I hop out of my chair and skip back up to my room.

\*

6:50 a.m.

Where would you most likely go on a vacation? Home. Which sentence fits you best? Live, Laugh, Love. What’s a perfect first date? Random and fun. Carrie Underwood’s “All American Girl” is the country song that fits me best. I need to buy that on my iTunes. I hope I have enough money on my account for that. I’ll listen to it while I get ready. Now, what does this website say about poofing my hair like Snooki?

\*

7:45 a.m.

My hair has poof and I’m looking good. I’m pumped and ready to start the day. Humming the lyrics to “All American Girl,” I look forward to school as I grab my backpack. Today is going to be different. I’m going to be different. But when I open the front door, all I see is rain pouring down. I run to my car and frantically try to get in before the rain ruins the poof. The door won’t open! Shit! For some reason, I feel like punching my car will make the door unlock. I punch it. Nothing happens. I spot my keys in the passenger seat on top of some magazines. *Seventeen*, *CosmoGirl*, and *Teen Vogue* lay there, mockingly, adorned with beautiful models and their airbrushed perfectness. I punch the car. Again. Again, but the door doesn’t unlock, the magazines are still there, and my hand hurts now.

\*

7:55 a.m.

I thank God for the rain to cover up the tears. Maybe Daddy can give me a ride to school. Nope, he already left for work. Mom, too. I see a reflection in the window. It’s all blurry from the rain, but I’m pretty sure that I wouldn’t want to look at it anyways. I drag myself back into the house, strip off my wet clothes, and crawl back under my covers. Jimmy jumps up and slobbers my face. I let him.





STEPHANIE GOEDKEN

## A Depression of Skin

Scar.  
It is still there.  
I could not feel anything.  
Perhaps it was better I could not.  
Like an empty glass.  
There was nothing I had to fill it.  
I cried five times a day with no relief.  
Still, nothing was inside that empty glass.  
How I hated that taunting glass.  
It gave promise and hope of life.  
I scratched it.  
Filed and grounded to make my mark upon it.  
There it was, growing in size.  
Nothing on the inside, but on the outside.  
I stopped without knowing why.  
Perhaps I could feel something after all.  
Some pleasure maybe, at the scratch there.  
But I was too numb to really know.  
I picked at the blotch for days on end.  
There was not a chance I would let it be fixed.  
No matter what, that taunting glass would not win.  
Break it completely I would do, just not quite yet.  
I no longer have such an empty glass.  
But it is still there on my skin.  
That mark I made from that time.  
A forever imperfection on my hand to remember.  
What they can do.  
Fingernails.

Erica Jong, an American novelist, once said, "If you don't risk anything, you risk more." There is no way I can claim this for myself. If not this exact quote, most of us have heard similar sayings. The following is the story of me and my two largest risks.

I grew up in a family that worked hard to prove themselves, staying strong and silent. It was never easy for one to admit they needed help. Everyone struggled on. Younger, I was amazed by the strength of my father, a man who once worked outside all day, in the winter with a flu bug, throwing up and continuing on. I was amazed, while my mother was appalled. Both my father and I did not see the issue as our resident nurse did. Why bother others when it was not their problem, but yours?

Society says for you to "Do your best" and also sings "Lean on me". However, one can never stand completely alone and you never want to be always depending on others. There is a fine line between the two. Everyone needs a little of both, right? When is that time that you say your best is no longer good enough, or not working, and that you need someone to lean on?

It was hard enough to even *admit* what was wrong with me, much less to ask for support.

If I did not risk it though, I may have more than just a scar on my hand today.

If I did not risk it again, I *know* I would not be doing so well today.

I suppose I should explain. My mother has it; my grandmother has it; my great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother had it. A few others of the females on my mother's side have it. Some of them have died because of it. I am the fifth generation of having it. And while today's society looks on it with better eyes than in the past, it is still rather difficult to hear of someone being depressed.

That's right; I have depression.

Everyone can feel depressed. But yet, when you have sadness and all the other symptoms of depression for long periods of time, this can be a sign of clinical or major depression.

This was my first risk, admitting I did have depression.

My admitting it was very difficult. It took days, weeks after I permanently marked myself on my hand with my fingernails before I said something. When speaking about why my hands were scarred, I lied. In fact, I did not even say that I had depression out loud. I could not do it. I wrote my admission down in a text message to my mother. That small message took me a few minutes to write down, but nearly an hour to actually send it. I had no energy to do much. This seemed like too much. I lay in my bed, curled up, with tears rolling down my face, as I finally admitted it.

To feel better, I began taking pills to help the chemical imbal-

ance. There is no way to know how well the medication will work for you. You try one kind for a couple of weeks and if it doesn't work, you try another. I went through more than a few. Sometimes it seems like such a long time ago and other times, it feels like I could fall right back into it. But I keep a piece I wrote from when I started trying pills. I wrote it to get negative feelings out and I keep it now to remember.

*"I want to die. I know it is unhealthy to be thinking or saying this, but too many avoid the topic of death. Why? Everyone dies someday. So many are scared of death. I am not; it is a part of life. Only...I want to die now."*

It was also suggested to me to have some sort of therapy. Being hard enough to admit to my having depression, I said I was okay. The pills would help balance things out and I would be okay.

I was okay.

The truth was that I was better, but not okay. I just did not like having people worrying about me. I still felt I was unimportant in life. That is why I never admitted how my depression became bad enough that I injured myself. It was a secret I never wanted to reveal.

*"But it got so bad a month ago that I clawed a pair of scars on my hands. I knew it wouldn't kill me, but I just had to do something. I was crying five times or so a day for no reason. The scars are still on my hands. No one knows the real story of how I got them. That is my secret. ...They don't need to know about how bad I got."*

The spring semester ended and the summer began. Everything was beginning to look up and it seemed to be that I found a pill that worked for me. The fall semester started and I moved back into the dorm rooms, ready to dive back in. After awhile, it became pretty apparent something still was not working. I may not have been at the low I was at the end of the spring semester, but it was clear to me and several people around me that what I was doing was not working.

My advisor at the time suggested I look for a different career path. But I could see that the same issues I had now would affect me in any other place. Besides, I did not want to go for a different career. I loved going into the school and helping out the young students. Despite not finding help for myself outside of schoolwork, where it was accepted, I really enjoyed helping others when I could. I especially enjoyed helping out young students. I could do it, I had that potential, but there was a large personal block standing in front of me.

This was my second risk. The risk I took that if I had not taken, I *know* I would not be doing so well today.

I told my advisor I wanted and was going to take the spring semester off. It was fought against. I would have winter break before the spring semester. There was no need to take the spring off. I would take the spring off and waste all my schooling by never com-

ing back. “No,” I said. I just needed the time to figure out what pills worked best, find support in my life, work on my organization, and make some changes that needed to be done before I could be my best. I needed other people’s support to make me my best.

That moment was my time to finally say my best was not good enough, it was not working, and I needed to lean on others. I needed to *learn* to lean on others because for years, I never allowed myself to do so.

To make everything clear, I set up a meeting with my advisor and parents. No one could really see why I was ‘suddenly’ saying this. I had been saying I was okay for months to my parents, but they did not see me every day on campus. Since I needed back up on where I was coming from, I asked for two others to come to the meeting. My two professors that were in charge of my education block, who saw me every day, could really see how I needed to have this break. They felt it was well worth it for me.

It did not come as much of a surprise to my parents that I never said anything. However, having everyone talk to each other about what I was proposing to do set their minds at ease some. So, I got my spring semester off. I reduced my stress levels on class so I could focus more on me. During this time, I only took one class in the spring and then two more in the summer, none of them at the same time. It was not school I was focused on at the time.

I changed my pills a couple of times. I read several self-help books for confidence, organization, and setting positive first impressions. These were areas I needed help with in my life, so I worked on them. I set things up in my life to have and use support from others. While my mother and I will never see eye to eye on everything, she was my largest help at this time. She is still one of my largest supports. With friends and family behind me, an improved confidence, the ability to attack problems with help, and more skills behind me for dealing with issues...I headed back for my fall semester.

Today, I no longer feel tired and restless all the time. In the past, I always felt worthless, but now I have a new confidence to break that mantra. My concentration no longer feels like an attention disorder, and I can focus on what needs to be done. All my interests feel like interests again, ones that I can enjoy. The most important one, the thought that had followed me around for years, is almost nonexistent except when I remembered how bad it got that I contemplated suicide. After all the thoughts of it, I even did something to my body that went in that horrible direction. That mark on my hand will always serve as my reminder of how far I have come since then. I will keep improving myself so I never go back to that time of my life.

This scar is never going to be a secret. It may have faded in time, but it is still there, a discolored blotch resting on my hand. A

blotch, not unlike any other scar I may have received in my life, but the reason behind this scar is very different and significant. I can and am able to share how bad my depression got for me. People do need to know how bad it can get. I never want or wanted pity like a child hurt on the playground, but to have others there to help me through a bad time. To be hiding the sadness of depression causes more sadness because it closes you off from everyone around you. It did not happen all at once, but after I took those two risks to open myself up, there was a definite change afterwards that helped me face my depression.

My advisor for this year, one of the two professors that backed me up on taking the semester off, said upon my return how much more relaxed I looked; I could feel it. The support changed everything. I am keeping everything organized and getting things done. I am calling home to talk about my problems, things I never would have said before; before when I preferred to say I was okay over bothering someone with my issues. I also have friends to talk things out with to make it easier on me. As something new for the fall semester, I have a weekly meeting at the counseling center to help with any of the added stresses of school since I have returned. I am doing my best with all of their support.

I love them all for it. In just a year from saying I needed a semester off to get a support system and to figure myself out, to have their support for everything during that year... I love all of them for it. It gets better, it truly does.

Take that risk.

My current advisor calls this last year of my life a success story. It seems strange to think of my life that way; a story to give others hope. If it is, I hope that passing on my story will help others feeling closed off from the world, take that risk of opening up.

RUSSELL JAFFE

## Bomb shelter

I won't fail. I'll slam all the drawers I keep my clothes in  
and write a poem for every stuffed animal I've won in a  
claw machine. I'll boom shut this window and ask  
your opinions about  
shrapnel. White light, cut the red wires in your eyeballs awake.  
I will not forget you and there will be cans, mornings, bombs,  
row of houses. Car tires are hissing and you only have  
time to be  
jumpy. Young suburbs. Repeat your white prayer to judgmental stars.  
Today wants to be fearless.  
Carpet bombs are morning dogs.  
Christmas grenades and empty boxes. Movie friendly ash ribbons.  
I'm sitting on the porch squinting tires on their way to work  
into black  
bombs rolling.  
I do this to landfills so they're butterscotch mounds.  
I'll navigate ways around eating and the sun. I'll try on paper  
clothes torn from textbook pages every day. I'll always  
call you  
a butterfly. Inside myself are portals panicking men crawl through.  
I'm missing a rifle and a drain in the floor. What counts is just  
above  
us, walking, sifting. Look up to dangerous light.  
What's more scary than the thin layer of water wafting  
above your eyes?  
Fear yourself.

DANIEL SHANK CRUZ

A dream:

At the philosophy party  
constructing    deconstructing  
  
her in a black dress

JESS LEONARD

## Scratch

*honorable mention, CU writing contest*

*Jess also won honorable mention for "Prison Coffee"*

She's sitting in a battered leather armchair with holes and cracks in the leather that poke out and stab her through her thin terrycloth robe. She keeps rolling a cigarette between two fingers, letting it ash all the way out and drop onto her lap. When it's gone, she just lights another one up and keeps going.

When the song is almost over, she reaches out with a long finger, yellowed like the page of an old book, and moves the needle on the old record player back: an endless, imperfect loop. Her eyes are blank and it's hard to tell what color they are anymore; she doesn't think it really matters all that much, though.

The paint in here is peeling badly, even worse than in the rest of the house. Bits are flaking off everywhere like on a dead person's scalp. No one bothers to come over anymore to fix it up; he doesn't give a damn, and because of this, she's decided, neither does she. When he comes in, sometimes he's sweet; most of the time, though, he treats her like a ghost. He doesn't care about her any more than he cares about the rest of the shit in this house.

There's a lamp to her right, next to the record player. It's older than the house and she doesn't know how it got there, but when they moved in, she decided she liked it and was going to keep it like a pet. The lampshade looks like it's made of paper, but when she touches it, it keeps its form and barely moves. That's why she likes it. It's stronger than paper, stronger than skin. Skin, which ends up bruised from the stairs because she fell, or wasn't looking carefully enough when she went through the door. Skin, the kind that tells the truth even if she lies to herself. Not to others, though; she doesn't really go out any-

more. She's thirty-three now, growing old within the careful shell of this house, and it loves her for it.

The light from the grimy lamp in the hallway outside is filtering in when he comes back at three, four in the morning; she can't tell because after a certain point at night, everything looks the same. The door creaks; the floor creaks; the house sounds like it wants to lie down and die a dramatic, melancholy death, which means it can't--it's not wise enough, for all its years, to just let go gracefully. Neither is she.

Her hands are shaking.

She hears the boots coming up the stairs, which whine in time with his steps. *Jesus H. Christ. He sounds like a goddamned elephant.* She thinks this but barely notices because it's what she's been thinking every single night for years.

She hears him say it, or maybe not; maybe she's heard it so many times that it's natural. Maybe tonight, he didn't say it. *I'm going to kill you.* But "kill" isn't the right word, is it? He used to say "hurt," or even "fuck," if the drinking and long hours put him in that particular frame of mind. In any case, she just shuts up and puts up. That's the secret to a happy marriage; it's what she taught herself long ago, though that lesson is fading.

She wonders if maybe this was how everything was supposed to turn out all along, but then he's in the doorway and he's blocking out the light so there's not really time to think of much anyway. In two long steps he's in front of her and she can feel the calluses on his fingers around her throat, but it doesn't quite hurt. She is the chair, the lamp, the walls. She laughs and he's surprised, lets her go. She runs past him, barefoot and light, down the hallway. She almost--almost--makes it to the top of the stairs when she realizes she can't move anymore; he's grabbed her streaming hair. She feels the familiar wall on her back and blanks everything else out. She starts to think instead, as if thinking were a substitute for feeling.

She remembers the last time she went out of the house--maybe a week ago, or was it longer? She went to the store, and then down to Rosie Hall's place, that little bar next to the junk shop. What was the name of that store? Something strange... "This, That, and the Otherthing." That's it. She remembers because there was no space between the last two words and it struck her as odd.

Rosie owns a bar; she used to run it with her husband, Jim, but Jim died a few years back. Train accident, though the exact details are murky now. She remembers the phone call from Rosie, sobbing, saying that it was a mess, it was all a mess, and she had to come down there right now and help her pick Jim up in a laundry basket--

Or maybe not. At this point, it's hard for her to tell what's real and what's made up. Billy Joel keeps fading in and out of her con-



sciousness, and whenever she opens her eyes even a little she can see that maddening light. It's flickering now; she wonders if it's going to burn out completely. Then, she'll be alone in the dark, but not really alone--her husband is still there. What's he doing now? She tries to ask but can't move her lips all that well anymore.

Rosie tried to tell her the last time she came down that she could get out, could come stay with her. But all she would say is *no, no, I can't. He'd find me, there's no hiding in a town this small. He'd know where I am; you're the only friend I have.*

Rosie said she'd end up dead; what she said in response was, I'm almost dead already.

"I can help you," Rosie said, and poured her a beer. But by then, they both knew she was beyond that. She sat there, staring into the glass until a fly fell in. Then, she watched it drown in the thick lager.

She'd met Rosie in grade school, when they were both knock-kneed little girls with untucked shirts and untied shoelaces. Rosie had gotten her first bra a full year before she had, and the boys were always snapping the band and leaving ugly welts. She remembered the withered look Rosie'd gotten, recognized it because it was there again, on both their faces.

Her knees started to shake. She had to decide what kind of beating she'd get, what kind of night it was going to be. "Order off the menu, baby, or it'll be chef's choice again tonight." That's what he always said to her if she'd done something wrong; it could be short and brutal or not as bad, but much longer. Usually, she just wanted to get it over with. And maybe it wasn't so bad, because he always told her he loved her. She enjoyed that part, like a stray dog enjoys being scratched behind the ears after it's been kicked in the belly.

"He loved me once, Rosie. Sometimes, he still does." And that was all she said on the matter before she bolted from the little bar, ran back to the groaning house and lost one of her shoes on the way and caught hell from him for it.

\*

Right now, he's dragging her through the first-floor foyer but something about her arm doesn't feel right. She hopes it's not broken, because she knows he won't hang around to move the needle on the record player back or light her cigarettes for her.

Tomorrow she'll be back in that chair and just like the record, everything will lather, rinse, repeat. Eventually, something in her will crack and she'll start to skip like the old music. They're going down the stairs now, and her head bounces off the bottom step but it feels more like a soft poke that doesn't match the crack she just heard.

Maybe Rosie was right. Maybe he's going to kill her. But maybe she was wrong, too, and she'll wake up to a clean, new house with a nice husband who works in the yard on his days off and comes inside

for a glass of lemonade and to kiss her on the cheek. Maybe it can be okay even though she only married him just-because, when she felt like time was running out and she panicked like that fly in the glass of beer.

Tomorrow, she thinks, she'll go out to This, That, and the Otherthing and buy a long, sharp knife from their moldy display. She'll lie in wait, crazy like a fox, and then this nightmare will be over. She'll move in with Rosie and they'll be just two, taking care of themselves and the business. She'll never have to go back to that house and it'll be like her life never happened at all. But first, she has to get off the floor and out of the cellar.

And then, and then, and then.

COURTNEY BRYSON

## Have You Heard

*first place, CU writing contest*

Saturday nights were reserved for their cocktail parties. You could see them through lit windows, scattered in huddles throughout the parlors, living, and dining rooms. They'd be wearing the new suit coats or dresses they purchased that week, the ones specifically picked for that evening. Brightly tailored jackets and beaded gowns floated throughout the homes while noise from the record player could faintly be heard outside. The host, a platter of hors d'oeuvres in one hand, the other on her hip, would travel from room to room tossing her head back and laughing at the many conversations she was shortly included in. High heels and loafers scuffed across cherry oak floor boards, chosen to match the mantel of course, while cigar smoke lingered through the air creating a slightly fogged look to the party.

"I heard from Vinny, down at the theatre, that Frankie met Maureen as a dancer over in New York. She was shaking her tassels when he asked her out for coffee and the rest is history." Found in each corner of the house were the wives, gossiping as they delicately fooled with their dry martinis.

"Don't be ridiculous, Gina, she may have the goods but she does not have the foot work to be a dancer," said Rita, always with a pinky perfectly upright and twisting a cocktail spear in the other fingertips.

"Take it easy, Rita, like you'd know foot work anyway." Tina was never very good at knowing how to filter herself. Mickey would often times take her by the elbow and escort her to another room. The back of his hand usually reminded her to "watch the mouth." "Anyway, my cousin Carla was at her church potluck the other day and she heard that he snuck her out of one of those all girls schools down in Connecticut. They met only a couple a times and then one night

he has his car packed, suitcases filled, and a tank full of gas waiting outside for her."

Until the group grew bored with disinterest or something different became more exciting to discuss, everyone new faced the wrath of judgmental eyes and untrue whispers. If you could just hold out long enough for either of these things to occur, you'd be safe... that was until it once again became your turn. However, it had almost been a year now for Maureen and her name still traveled from lipstick stained mouths, perhaps just as much as ever.

"How typical, just look at her. We all show up in black, navy blues, even dark purple on Rita, and look at her; red. Not very flattering, if I must say," said Tina.

"Yes," said Gina, her eyes growing as she took a quick sip of her drink before continuing. "I'm so glad you agree. What a bold color and the shape does absolutely nothing for her figure." Gina always waited for one of the others to comment first, attempting to conceal the fact that outfit critiquing was one of her favorite parts to their parties. This was perhaps a habit picked up from Jimmy. About a month ago, Gina's left shoulder found its way into a sling after she wore a dress different from the one Jimmy had picked; at least that's what people heard.

"And what figure would that be, Gina?" Giggles heard in unison then created the idea they were actually talking about something humorous. "Just look at her over there," said Rita.

Most of the time at these parties, in the center of the room where the cigar smoke was the thickest and the smells of whiskey were the heaviest, stood Maureen. Her curls, the color of sweet honey, always stood out along with her almond shaped baby blues. Their eyes couldn't help but to gravitate toward her as she entered a room. Locks that color were rare around here. Surrounded usually by men, Maureen could be found at the focal point of the party, the area everyone kept their eye on, strategizing as to how to become included. It was here that the most chatter brewed, the loudest laughing was heard, and where subtle caresses of flirtation occurred; usually a hand rested upon the shoulder of another guy's wife or a playful rub of the lower back as if it were all part of the storytelling. Maureen received most of these gestures, sometimes even the grace of finger tips along her backside.

Even though she felt most comfortable talking with the husbands, Maureen couldn't help feeling as though she was doing something wrong, especially when she noticed the wives turning their heads all at the same time. Anyone who watched Maureen socialize could tell she was made for something different, something other than what was holding her up at that moment. A petite frame and a classic face never stopped her from owning the party by the end of



the night. Still, the stares she continued to receive always hurt the same way.

"Maureen, when are we going to do the Charleston? Louie over here wants another shot."

"Oh no, not this weekend, boys, I'm going to go chat with the ladies for a bit."

Groans were heard as Mac nudged Frankie asking how a rough Boston boy managed to find such a broad. Frank was used to being asked this question. He'd simply keep his hands in his pockets, lift his chin, and smile. It was normal to grant a smack here and there to your wife, just to make sure things were clear. It was perhaps just as much expected from a wife to receive a blow as it was for a husband to deliver one. However, underneath Maureen's red party dress laid numerous bruises, coincidentally about the same size as her husband's fists. And the ankle, the left one that Maureen kept lifting every ten minutes, was most likely fractured. However, moving her way through the crowd, she put just as much weight on it as she ever did before.

"Hello ladies, how are we doing tonight?" asked Maureen.

"Oh, just lovely, darling," said Rita, starting at the top of Maureen's head and quickly doing a sweep down to her feet.

"Well, that's great to hear. You're all looking wonderful by the way."

"Oh, you too, sweetie. We were all just saying how much we love you in that dress," said Gina.

"Oh, thank you." Maureen had been around to hear them do the exact thing to Tommy's wife once, they seemed to have forgotten she was their friend that night. "Well, I'll be leaving here shortly. I just wanted to tell you ladies goodbye."

"Already? You and Frankie never leave this early."

"Well, Frank has had a lot to drink and it's just getting to be that time. You all take care though. And don't talk about me too much." Her sarcasm was greatly unappreciated as she turned and left.

A few months later the chatter about where Maureen Bennett had disappeared to started dying out a bit. For about a week the wives were convinced that Frankie had the guys take care of her. After they thought it over they realized he needed someone to do his laundry and would never make such plans without having a back up ready. They were still seen at the parties, found in the corner, fondling their martinis.

"Have you heard about where they found Maureen? Sammie, down at the butcher's, told me that Frankie tracked her down in Jersey with some guy, little tramp was shacking up in some motel, can you believe that?"

"Don't be so naïve, Rita. Everybody and their brother knows to

never believe a story from Sammie. Besides, my sister's hair dresser told her that her cousin ran into Maureen down on 18th street last weekend. Yeah, she has a sick uncle she's been taking care of. Probably trying to sucker some money out of the dying fellow."

The thought that a wife would wait and slowly slide out from between the sheets, quietly tip-toe over to the dirty trousers sprawled on the floor, swiftly remove the keys from the front right pocket, anxiously coast past the iron on the counter, the one that was introduced to her back only three months ago, and quickly reverse the car down the driveway leaving her husband, had never crossed the minds of the women.

"Well, wherever Maureen is, at least we're no longer spectators to her hunger for attention."

"You're absolutely right, Gina. I'm glad we don't have to deal with her anymore."

Maureen Bennett gave this crowd the ultimate gift. Nothing again was ever more interesting than the disappearance of Frankie's wife. And because of this, they always had something to talk about.

ELAINE HART

## Bittersweet Prelude

I am sitting at a piano in the practice room when I get the phone call that my great aunt Naomi died. My dad, her nephew, is on the other end. "The doctors say it was Alzheimer's. She was old and weak, and she died peacefully," he says. I stare at the keys before me and nod my head, not that he can see me. A part of me isn't really surprised. She had moved to North Carolina five years ago to live near her son when her health began to fail and senility was setting in, so a part of me always knew that she wouldn't last forever. I hang up the phone and absently stroke the piano keys with my fingers as I take in the news. "I wish she could know you're pursuing music in college," my dad had said. "She would be proud."

*We pull into the driveway at 5:00. There she is at the window, our "fancy" relative, standing in her usual spot with pursed lips and kind eyes. We pretend not to see her as we pile out of the car. "Don't get your nice shoes muddy," my mom scolds. I walk slowly and deliberately up the front walk to the door and ring the doorbell. I am nervous, just like I am every time we visit. The elegance of her quaint home always astounds me, and I am terrified I'll turn around and send something breakable falling to the floor. Still, excitement outweighs my nerves. She leads us into the living room where a silver tray of her special hors d'oeuvres rests on the coffee table and offers us the traditional drinks: white wine for my parents, and pop in colorful tin goblets for my sisters and me. I plop down on the couch and reach for the hors d'oeuvres.*

She was 97 years old when she died. I had privately hoped that she would live to be 100 so we could submit her name to Willard Scott on the *Today Show* for the Smucker's birthday segment.

I always thought she would do it, too. Age never stopped her from doing anything in her life. She loved to travel, and many summers she would seek a new destination in the world in which to spend a few weeks. She continued traveling into her late 80s, and it always made me smile when I thought about the fact that while most of her peers were residing in nursing homes, she was off enjoying *Soufflé au Fromage* in southern France. After each trip she would return home with a unique wind chime and hang it carefully in her entryway. There must have been at least twenty. I used to love to slip away during social hour in the living room and tip-toe into the kitchen so I could run my fingers through her wind chimes and revel in a thousand different pitches of sound.

*I trace the toe of my shoe along the grooves of the white carpeting in her living room. Mom had warned us about the white carpet. She told us that Aunt Nan never had kids, so she didn't know what we were capable of and we should try very hard not to destroy it. I stand up and cross over to the picture window to look at the collection of glass birds that line the windowsill. I'm not allowed to touch them, but with my eyes I begin counting each delicate piece. I reach 200 before we are called into the dining room for dinner. Two hundred unique glass birds.*

Two o'clock is music theory class. I slide into my chair at 1:59 and open my workbook just as class begins. Secondary dominants cover the page. I sigh and begin correcting my work. I forget what brought me here, to this class, to this minor. "I wish she could know you're pursuing music in college," my dad had said. "She would be proud." To say music was her passion is an understatement. She began teaching private piano lessons when she was just 16 and didn't stop until 76 years later at age 92. Somewhere in the middle she graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in music. I glance down at my secondary dominants, now bleeding with green correction pen, and wonder if she ever struggled in her music theory class.

*Her bony, wrinkled hands clasp themselves around mine. She asks me how my piano playing is coming and if I like my teacher. She is standing so close I am struck with the scent of her perfume. I nod yes, and my mom tells her how much I would like to play something for her. Aunt Nan smiles, but I frantically shake my head. No. Not in this room. Not in the only living room in the country that contains an upright piano, a concert grand, and an organ. This room is worthy of so much more than the rudimentary Alfred's Basics tunes I can play without even shifting positions. The enormous grand piano sits menacingly in the center of the room, and I shy away. Finally, they let me sit down, and my performance is forgotten.*

I get another call from home. This time, it's my mom. She tells me that Aunt Nan's son is making arrangements to ship the legendary

grand piano to our house. My mom has never played music, and she is worrying about where the enormous thing will go in our already crowded living room. I smile. My dad took years of lessons with Aunt Nan on that same piano and started all three of his daughters in piano in first grade. I think this is why she entrusted the beautiful instrument to our family; she wanted us to excel, to embrace and carry on the very passion she held closest to her heart. The piano is a Mason Hamlin and made of mahogany. I do some quick research online and find similar concert grands selling for \$40,000-\$65,000. I feel my heart skip a beat. My mom is still anxiously plotting ways to rearrange the living room in time for the movers, but I am too excited.

*"Will you play something for us?" My dad always tries to convince Aunt Nan to play her organ, but she rarely does. This time, though, she sighs and stands up. She moves quickly to the bench and sits down, running her fingers delicately along the keys as she decides what to play. No sheet music is necessary. After a brief moment, the opening chords of a Mozart sonata envelop the room with their full, grandiose sound.*

I walk quickly back to the practice rooms, freshly printed music in hand. My favorite room is open; I waltz in and gently seat myself in front of the piano. I consider for a moment, then place my music on the bench beside me. My fingers settle upon the keys, and with a secret smile, I begin to play.

COLE CRAWFORD

## priest set

toes tipping, heart of lead clicking like a top  
perched on the rickety wooden chair, bird sagging the branch  
shirt like night and collar like day  
shifting of light, enter, creaking door and wicker screen  
suddenly, the whole seems awkward  
who gave you the power to immortalize, fantasize,  
remove and return and beget?  
a ladybug creeps down a bouquet of your hair  
suspended, chiroptera, unnaturally  
but, naturally, your eyes transcend the transient  
focus on my less ephemeral soul  
would you strip away her spots?  
or do they make her as she is?  
scatter plot, paint by dot  
let's shoot craps with eternity  
i'm leaving your table, doc  
time to make or break the bank

SARA MCALPIN

## Encounter

I spoke.  
A snake leapt out  
and spat,  
stunning me.  
I listened to the silent sounds of hurt,  
crawling like wounded fingers.  
I crept slowly with the snake  
learning our similarities.

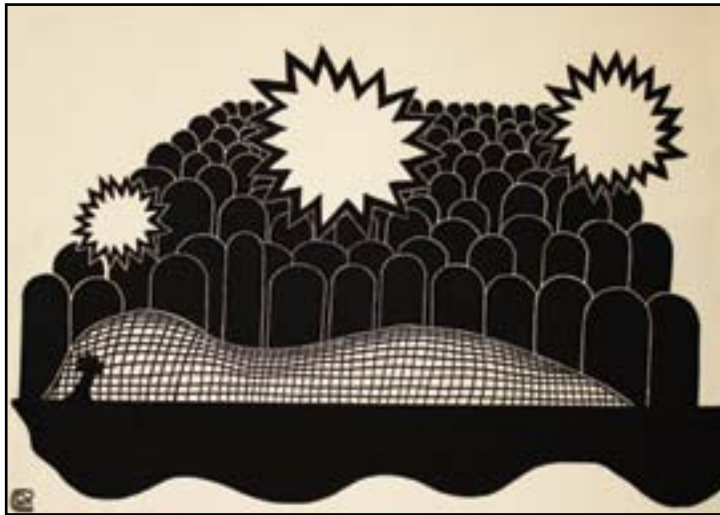
Poison spreads under the surface,  
but cannot survive in light.  
Dawn, shine.

SUSAN SANTEE-BUENGER



Young Mother

WILL KELLY



The Crowd Gathers

STEPHANIE KRONLAGE



STEPHANIE KRONLAGE



BARBARA NYHEIM

## Nighttime Maneuvers

Sometimes it's daunting,  
    maintaining the pretense.  
    Whatever hasn't happened between us  
        hasn't happened again, and I feign  
        it's all coincidence and innocence.

I'm asleep when you finally appear,  
    or I stay up to see the end;  
        this after-hour silence that I defend,  
        you don't believe and your  
        eyes haunt me—but I persevere.

In the sun, a light kiss and the usual words spoken,  
    but if a word falters and no one hears—  
        does it make a sound, was it even there?  
        The words unsaid sear and tear  
        at the fabric that once bound us.



KATELYN RUBENZER

## A Little Queen and Her Rocket Man

I lived with my mother on Liberty and Prospect. The apartment, white and accented with punched-in holes and chipped paint, was decorated with cardboard boxes that served as coffee tables. My form of entertainment was watching my neighbor doing transactions in the back alley, as mom passed out on the floor with a bottle glued to her right hand. I sat at the cracked window, staring at the distorted world I grew to know. One August evening, after putting the lawn mower away, I quietly snuck behind the garage and lit my Marlboro, inhaling and exhaling, appreciating the buzzing sensation after each puff. Helen was locking up her bike at the chain link fence that snuggled up to my garage and the lilac bushes.

"What does your dad sell?"

"What?" she asked glancing into the darkness.

"I said what does your dad sell in the alley?" She noticed my cigarette glow during my inhalation.

"Fishing lures. Pretty gay, huh?"

"I wouldn't know. Want one?" I asked, holding out my pack of Marlboros.

"Not here."

"Fine. Let's go someplace then. Go get your bike."

"I already have mine, dumbass. Get your bike."

I grabbed my trusty steed, the old Univega I bought off a man's lawn for forty bucks and saddled up. Wind rushing past our faces, we were free. I was lost in the emerging soft colors of sunset when Helen's delicate voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Here. Right here. Turn left."

"What?" I asked glancing off to my right where she was riding.

"LEFT! TURN LEFT!"

I noticed her disappearing into the darkened gap that existed between Dixie's Deli and Golden Records. I heard the faint sloshing of tires as she weaved around pot holes and puddles. Turning into the alley, I started up the incline. The broken gravel weaved upwards, heavily guarded by the gray slabs of concrete. When it leveled out, I saw Helen disappearing around the corner, continuing up the labyrinth. I followed, remembering my childhood days that consisted of follow the leader and hide-and-go-seek.

"Jesus, stop!" I panted.

"The name's Helen. Helen Breckdal. And we're here!"

We halted at the top of the concrete wilderness and laid our bikes next to the ledge. As we clambered on the ledge, dangling our feet above the city, the brilliant flaming reds and oranges of the summer sunset illuminated the windows of Orson's Apartments across from us. The reflecting windows stared back and laughed as they turned us red, then orange and finally back to normal as stars waved across the two-toned sky. The breathtaking view of the city made me feel small, though a feeling of weightlessness traveled through my body. Surrounding us, the old brick buildings stood like soldiers at attention, unwavering in their stance. The street lamps flickered on, a domino effect of passing light from one bulb to the next, as light's radiance traveled toward the river. The rustling wind played with the leaves, a swirling vortex that could only be seen from up above. Finally, the wind laid to rest like a child ready for bed, and the leaves nestled in the corners of gutters and broken tiles.

"Beautiful, huh?" she asked, never glancing at me.

"Where are we?"

"The ramp."

"The ramp?"

"Yeah. *The* ramp. You know," she said confidently. "Or maybe you don't. In any case, you will after tonight."

Helen stood five feet five inches. Her auburn hair sat straight at her shoulders and framed her face. She had immaculate hazel eyes that told a person anything and everything. Her red lips sat in a slight smile, though most times, it looked more mischievous than content. Her athletic build instantly made my body tense, stirring sensations deep inside my fifteen-year-old self.

"Right here's good."

"Right here for what?" She noticed the confusion spread across my face.

"For a cigarette. You owe me one."

I took out my smokes and handed her one. Then, I took one out for myself and struck the match, watching the flame flicker into full force then gently recede into nothingness. All evidence of light van-



quished, leaving only smoke as its clue to existence.

"So, I know your name's Helen, but did you know you're beautiful?"

"You're not getting into my pants."

"WOW! Nice way to take a compliment."

"Is that what that was?"

"It was supposed to be."

"Thanks, I guess."

"Doesn't have the same effect anymore."

We sat in silence, listening to the passing car honking at the young couple pausing for a kiss in the middle of the street.

"Tell me something; what does your dad do?"

"What?"

"Your dad. What does he do besides sell fishing lure?"

"It's lures."

"That's what I said. Lure."

"No. Lures. With an S. Anyway, he's a contractor, but he's laid off right now so he's focusing on his lures business. Getting ready for winter ice fishing. That's where the money is. Why?"

"Just wondering. I don't have a dad."

"Oh. Sorry."

"Don't be. I guess I was just interested in what a man does. You know, I'm just curious."

"About what a man does?"

"Yeah."

"Ok," she said, inhaling. The smoke encircled her as she exhaled. The spiraling, transparent ghost danced toward the sky, dissipating as it slowly branched out and finally ceased to exist. "He's not around much. He hides in the garage. It's his sanctuary."

"Oh. Do you wish he was around more?"

"Sometimes. But I like my privacy. Gives me more time to be me."

"And who is that?"

"What?" she asked, flustered, a reddish tint settling on the cheeks of her fragile face.

"Who are you?" I asked, stretching out my legs, inching my hand closer to hers until they grazed. Helen moved her hand and started playing with her mood ring, blue—the color of happiness.

"You already know that. I'm Helen."

"And who is Helen?"

"Umm.... I... uh... I'm fifteen."

"Yep. Know that. Come on. Get real."

"I like pictures."

"Taking or looking?"

"Both. I actually like this French photographer named Brassai.

He takes these amazing pictures of France's lower class. His pictures are filled with prostitutes, transvestites, drug dealers, and outcasts; they are beautiful, though. The pictures are just filled with life and vibrancy. Everything was beautiful to him. That's why I like pictures. They capture something."

"Yeah, your soul."

"Cynic."

"What?"

"You heard me. You are a cynic, a pessimist. You have a negative outlook on life. Want me to continue?"

I took a drag. "Nope. I got it. You don't like me."

"I don't know you."

"You think you do."

"You wish I did. Maybe...." She paused to inhale. "Or maybe you wish you knew yourself. Or maybe you're trying to impress me."

"I'm not trying. I already did."

The lamplights sparkled in the settling fog. The day's humidity hung in the air and shadowed the light's beam, creating a world distorted by the lamp's glow and unsettledness. A 1950s green Ford pickup parked directly under our feet; its headlights blazed forth into the fog. A lonely bench called to the driver, who exited the left side and quietly closed the door. The quiet click of the hatch reverberated off the ramp's walls, intensifying the sound by thousands of decibels.

"Tell me something. Do you know how to be a man? Without a father, I mean?"

"I'm trying. Why?"

"Just curious, same as you."

"Oh," I said as I took another cigarette from the pack and lit it. "Curiosity killed the cat."

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

"Another one bites the dust?"

"Queen? You're quoting Queen?" she gasped; the very notion knocking her over and taking her breath away.

"It seemed fitting."

"It seemed gay."

"I like Queen. And besides, Freddie Mercury was totally gay. Come on, 'Somebody to Love?' It was his tribute to being gay."

"Just like Elton John's 'Rocket Man.' But come on, Queen?"

"I like Queen."

"I like Elton. Doesn't necessarily make them good, though."

Down the road, we could hear the river lapping quietly over the rocks. Helen and I rocked rhythmically to the water's drumming beats.

"I don't have a mother, either. She's never around. She's dating a man named Jack Daniels." I shrugged off the statement as quickly as I

said it, making the idea seem unimportant to me.

"I heard he's lousy in the sack."

"I heard he's mean."

She puffed, illuminating the end of her short cigarette. "I don't have a mother either."

"What happened?"

"She died in childbirth. Guess I was something special, huh?"

"I think so."

"Look, it's getting kind of late," she said, snuffing out her Marlboro on the concrete. "My dad likes his usual late night snack, and I better grab something for him. Race you down."

"Okay," I said, flicking my cigarette over the edge, watching it drift toward the world we would soon enter. After mounting my Uni-vega, I said, "Just tell me when."

"Okay. Ready, set, GO!"

My feet quickly left the ground for my pedals. I was flying down the pavement; each pedal seemed to lift my bike off the cracked gravel, making my body soar like a stallion during a full-blown gallop. I glanced behind me. Helen was inches away, moving centimeters closer to the lead. Abruptly, she halted to a stop. Just as I glanced back to see her dismount her bike, I heard the wild honking of the Mustang closing in the gap between us at an alarming speed. Dodging left, and then swerving right, I steadied myself, sighed, and flew down.

"You're late, and you lost," she said at the foot of the dimly lit stairwell.

"What the hell? How.... Wait! You cheated! Jesus Christ. You fucking cheated!" I said as butterflies returned to the pit of my stomach.

"No rules and no regulations. Anyways, it was very nice to meet you...."

"Rory. Rory Erickson. Everyone calls me Rick, though."

"Well, it was very nice to meet you, Rory. I have to get going now, though."

"Well, good night."

She turned left out of the ramp, heading toward Gordy's Market. I watched her leave, silhouetted by the passing street lamps. I think I heard her whisper "sweet dreams." But then again, it could have been the wind rushing against my ears. The young couple now occupied the bench that called to the driver. They sat, the female resting her head gently on the man's shoulder, each intertwined with the other, their bodies forming one.

"Good night, Helen. Sleep tight," I whispered into the darkness. Then, I turned toward home.

BRYAN ZYGMONT

## I Believe in Cologne

I believe in wearing cologne. Every day.

To be certain, there are other things in which I believe. I believe that good beer is perhaps the greatest beverage man ever invented. I believe in the inherent goodness of people. I believe the greatest aspiration one can have is to love, and to hope to have love returned in kind.

But I believe in wearing cologne above all of these.

This was not always so, despite the steady appearance of bottles of cologne under the Christmas tree throughout my adolescence and early adulthood. But my perception of cologne changed on December 21, 2000. This was two days after my mother lost her brief yet fierce battle with ovarian and liver cancer. My father, understandably overwhelmed with grief, asked me to enter their bedroom and to clear off my mother's dresser. On top of this was a glass-covered tray, upon which rested several small items. One of these objects was a bottle of Shalimar perfume, my mother's favorite fragrance.

I gazed at this bottle for some time, even through the tears that eventually returned to my eyes after two days of nearly non-stop crying. Although it has been over ten years since that Thursday morning, I can still see that small scalloped glass bottle in my mind's eye. Despite the ways in which I can still vividly see that Shalimar bottle, I have no idea as to what the fragrance within smelled like, for I could not bring myself to open the bottle.

The reason? It was still sealed; my mother had never opened it.

I sat on the edge of the bed and stared for an indeterminable amount of time at that unopened bottle of perfume. And I was overwhelmed with simple questions: What was she waiting for? What

forthcoming special occasion would warrant the opening of this bottle of perfume? She was dead at the age of 51, and neither she nor anyone who loved her would ever have the pleasure of smelling that scent as she swiftly walked across a room.

And so, I believe in wearing cologne. Every day. I believe in wearing cologne, but not for the benefit of others. I believe in wearing cologne for me, for the memory of my mother, and as a small attempt to embrace Today. So when I flash by students in the corridors of Clarke University, and they catch an ever-so-slight whiff of Burberry Brit (“...a blend of Green Mandarin, Ginger, Bergamot, Wild Roses, Cedarwood, Nutmeg, and Oriental Woods,” thank you!) what they really smell is a lesson my mother unknowingly taught me two days after she died. Today is special because we have it, and tomorrow will eternally be shadowed in uncertainty. Don’t save things or words for special occasions. Today is always special enough.

IAN LIVINGSTON

## Grinding through the Blues

*Strip away the layers and reveal your soul, you gotta give yourself up and then you become whole.*

Matisyahu

A heaping mountain of sandpaper is growing on the table in my basement. The only thing accumulating faster is the blue-white dust that swirls down my throat and across the room, leaving a film of powder over my parents’ book collection. My dad’s gun safe stands tall next to me, although it looks as if it has gathered a hundred years of dust since I started my project. Despite my best efforts, the shellac coating over the metallic blue paint on my Ibanez RG won’t give way to the gritty paper in my hand. The friction of the sandpaper inconveniently rubs my right ring finger as I furiously scrub the smooth back of the electric guitar, setting the stage for a nasty blister in the coming days. “I am now a broke college student who has \$30 invested in what is potentially becoming a really bad idea,” I think as the rich, sparkling bright blue of the guitar fades, giving in to thousands of tiny scratches. I keep on sanding. It’s too late to turn back now.

I purchased, or rather, my dad purchased, my brand new metallic blue Ibanez RG about seven years ago, along with a small Behringer practice amp. The total, including a new guitar strap and guitar stand as well as some new strings and a dozen picks was a staggering \$500. For a thirteen-year-old, almost nothing tangible can cost \$500. The only reason I was holding my very own guitar was because I had spent about the last three months playing a very crappy Fender Squire rented from Uncle Ike’s music. The cord connecting the worthless pickups to the amp was faulty, meaning that a slight amount of pres-

sure in any direction would often result in a blaring CRACK, followed by a harsh static sound until the player rediscovered the right position. As I sat in my room strumming awkwardly on my new guitar, I marveled at how close and precisely the strings hovered above the fret board. My fingers would clumsily bump the strings at the wrong place and time, but even mistakes sounded better through the 10-inch speaker on my right. School was going to be torture tomorrow, and homework could wait until another day.

Perhaps my dad bought me my guitar not because I had persistently destroyed every Green Day album at top volume for nine weeks until I could play enough chord progressions to play some songs through until the end, but because he himself is a lover of blues and rock, and surprisingly even a little reggae.

Somewhere, at some obscure point in my childhood, my father and I were sitting in his crappy white Hyundai Excel listening to the radio in a parking lot. I don't recall what was said, and I don't recall my reaction. What I do recall is the bluish-black faded plastic of the radio. I recall my father mentioning the word "blues," and my mind comprehending with a flash of blue, a word I understood. The music most certainly was audible, but I was not struck by the low growl of the singer's voice as he howled away or the squeal of the guitar as strings were bent to hit impossible highs, climbing octaves as the whammy bar cheated the strings out of any possible give. I remember blue.

As my arm succumbs to the pain constant back and forth motion manual sanding requires, I think about Menards, where I work. I wonder how many people walk into Hardware, my department, and buy the most expensive belt sander on the shelf with full intentions of returning it the following day. I visualize one such character. He has a white beard with a red baseball cap bearing the logo of some local construction company, and his breath stinks of jerky and beer. He goes home and sands an entire project in one evening, burning half the life out of the heavily abused tool as he drinks a case of Busch Light, giving the bruised tool a final celebratory kick before heading inside and passing out. This man will be hung-over, giving his face the uncanny impression of frustration and pain, as he stands at the returns desk complaining about low battery life and the Chinese. Genius. I picture the expressions on my manager's face wishfully imagining holding a brand new sander in my own hands, shearing off the unforgiving layers with long sweeps of my arms.

After a full hour and a half, the majority of the back of the guitar is bald of its proud deep blue. It was a blue that seemed to go on forever, sparkling and glinting. Surely the color was meant to capture the darkest night sky. Now the beauty is in the light-colored wood, in all its natural grains and stripes that lay bare in front of me. My hope

in the project is restored, although fear still lingers in the front of my mind. Even if I do manage to sand my way through the big chunks of paint, how will I remove the paint around the delicate knobs and neck? I begin the process of removing all the hardware, and sand around the edges, slowly curving around until only the front-side of the guitar maintains its factory blue.

As I grew up I began developing my own tastes for music, and slowly started identifying my own general tastes along with those of my friends. I was the first in my class to buy Blink 182's *The Mark, Tom, and Travis Show* after convincing my dad the parental warning was irrelevant, although he likely knew the social perks that came with such a purchase. As I began developing my relationship with my new favorite band, my best friend did the same with Green Day. Both of us had developed our own taste for similar music, but we were no longer choosing songs strictly based on popularity. We were beginning to acquire personal preferences in our music, oftentimes reflections of our own values. We were breaking deeper into our separate appreciations for music.

My new guitar lost its glory as soon as this same friend's Fender Stratocaster began losing paint at an alarming rate and the factory replaced it with a \$600 upgrade free of charge. Still, I continued to tear through songs, always delving three layers ahead of my skill level instead of patiently working through songs note by note. A couple years after playing I was finally able to play songs that I liked, or maybe I was beginning to like the songs I could play. In either case, I began listening to the classic shredders like Eddie Van Halen, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, and AC/DC. I began to see that underneath the distortion, the blues were still at work in this group of musicians. I began to see that most of the solos were often based on the same patterns of notes, the pentatonic scale. Seeing this core, I began to sound out my own simple blues rhythms. I was seeing deep into the hearts of the bands that I was trying so hard to mimic. The surface of these bands, the lightning-fast fingers and mysterious sounds began to turn into something I could almost see.

As I squint through paint-dust induced tears I quickly think up a thousand excuses for why I didn't do the sanding in the garage. None seem reasonable, so I give up. The entire level looks like a scene from a documentary covering the extinction of the dinosaurs. The sun, an old clamp-on work light, shines past but not through, millions of tiny blue dust particles as they dance through the air, creating a collective shadow on the table that breathes as I breathe. The glimmering, probably toxic dust wafts through the air, coating everything, including my hair and my mouth, but my eyes stare past at the bald body of the guitar. I uncover the paint can, finally prepared to add the first layer of creamy white primer to the exterior, covering the natural

beauty of the wood with my personal foundation for creativity.

As I learned songs on my guitar, I would struggle to bend uncooperative fingers into place, slowly repeating difficult parts until the motions of my hand became natural and fluid. I would copy the motions and sounds of others until I broke through their code, their secrets, and I could replicate every motion. As I grew bored with the classic rock anthems of another generation, I began trying to find a sound that was more fitting for me. I became attached to reggae-style bands with rock influences. Sublime was an easy choice, as were the followers. I learned the simple back and forth laid-back chord progressions, followed by the lazy, wailing solos. The technique was not difficult, but there was nowhere to go. I slowly began to play less and less guitar throughout college, picking it up to learn and relearn favorite songs. I am now going through a rough patch as far as playing goes. I have what it takes to create music, but I don't feel the color of originality coursing through my fingers. Like my guitar, I feel as though I have been stripped down to the core, and now I sit in a stage of waiting.

My musical preferences went from pop-punk icons Blink 182, through the gods of rock, into the realm of rap and hip-hop, Cali surfer-bands, and even into some reggae. I am searching for what lies ahead. My next album could be anything, although my last three have been reggae. Perhaps that is why I chose green, yellow, red and black as the colors for my guitar.

I am now a broke college student with an ever-increasing grand total of \$70 invested into a project that has left my basement looking like nuclear winter. My un-played guitar sits with a two-day-old single layer of primer on it. I have looked online for design inspirations, but nothing comes to me. I feel as though I'm at a musical standstill. I hope to finish painting my guitar by next week. The colors of the Rasta flag will be bright and optimistic, added by me rather than a machine, painted boldly on the body of my guitar. I hope, possibly in vain, that the paint job will connect me more to my guitar, as well as to my own musical tastes. For now my guitar and I both sit with a layer of primer, the old paint scraped away, waiting for a coat of fresh paint to begin the next chapter.

DEVLIN HARRIS

## April

She is a rebirth,  
new beginning of fertile earth,  
blessed with rhythm and style,  
alluring aromas refreshing the senses,  
aphrodisiac au naturel.

Her existence dispenses frolic and flirtation,  
color her earth tones and rainbows with gray skies that cleanse,  
beauty personified, a temper exemplified  
through storms and engulfing tornadoes,  
winds of strength exerting change,  
the result of an operatic crescendo.

Bringing excitement to the mundane,  
hers is a body of sisterhood, motherhood, and passion.  
Feel her exquisiteness caress and entice.  
Welcome the warm advances; her time is not everlasting.

So celebrate and appreciate the wonders that she brings;  
it was God's perfect plan to crown her Mother of Spring.  
She represents all that is new, beautiful, and young  
like an angelic choir performs;  
never a more lovely song been sung.



## Autumn in the Fields

Autumn arrives in the fields  
with wrinkling puddles in mud  
as the air howls,  
and skeleton stalks rattle and shake,  
brown and gold and dry,  
with the glass-pane terror  
of old age.

Autumn arrives in the fields  
with towers of sawtooth  
sabres shooting out in symphonies  
of discord, of disharmony, of dissonance  
and disquiet,  
as stained-glass concertos  
shatter to the ground in  
seas of rustling and musty breath.  
Autumn arrives with the thresher,  
Blades spinning and clicking –  
a great insect creeping across  
mires that stink of cattle.

And those that work set their mouths  
straight; their eyes slow, sharp, steel.  
They all nod in agreement –  
the quiet understanding of the slow fury  
of the harvest, the reaping;  
frost comes with starving and merciless  
fingers, sharp needle-teeth.  
And the stink will fade; and night  
will stumble in drunk screaming of discord, of  
disharmony, of dissonance and disquiet.  
the wind will chant, and the men will nod, knowing  
that the reedy voice screaming across the fields  
is the summoning, the ritual of shivering bones  
in un-dug graves; that  
you, winter, you will kill.

BRENDEN WEST

## Band-Aids

*third place, CU writing contest*

One day, at school, a boy pulled my hair and I cried and told my teacher, Ms. B. She put him in timeout. My daddy said sometimes boys and girls hurt each other because they like each other. I said, “Ew,” and stuck my tongue out.

Even though my daddy’s a boy, I like him. He’s the only boy who ever plays Barbies with me. He makes his voice really high like a girl when we’re playing pretend. I named my Barbie Molly because my name is Molly. He named his Barbie Owen.

“You can’t do that!” I said.

Daddy said, “Why?”

“Because Owen is a *boy’s* name!”

He said *someone* already stole his favorite name.

\*

I started school in August. My dad drops me off every morning and picks me up every day. One day my teacher asked, “How come your dad picks you up from school every day?” She’s pretty.

“He can’t wait for me to tell him everything I did today.”

“How come your mom never picks you up from school?”

“My mom is in heaven,” I said. “So she can’t pick me up from school.”

My teacher nodded her head. She grabbed my Barbie and said it was very pretty. I said her name was Molly, after me.

She gave me a note, one time, and said, “Can you give this to your dad, and promise not to read it?”

I nodded my head, but I opened the note the second she turned her back. It was pink. It smelled nice. It had lots of pretty flowers. I tried to read it, but I haven’t learned cursive yet.



When I gave it to Daddy I asked, "What's it say?"

He said it said, "Dear Mr. Wade, Your daughter is the prettiest most awesome little girl in the whole wide world. You're so lucky to have her..."

I said, "Really!?"

Daddy said yes. He never lies. Lying isn't what grown-ups do.

Daddy smiled and wrote a note back. I couldn't read his note either – cursive. He said the note said "Dear Ms. B, Molly is so smart! She can spell her name and count to ten backwards! I love her very much."

I took the note and tried to read it anyway. "What's that word?"

I said, pointing at one of the loopy ones.

"L-O-V-E," said Dad. "Love..." He pointed at each of the letters.

\*

Boys don't like pretty things like girls do. They're not as sophisticated. Daddy's note smelled like paper instead of flowers. When Teacher read the note, she laughed. Her face was red.

She writes my dad a note *every day* it seems! All of her notes smell pretty. Daddy's notes smell pretty too, but it's different. All of his notes say, "Molly is so smart!" I guess I must be *really* smart.

\*

When it's too cold to play at the park, Daddy and I go to Chuck E. Cheese's. One time, I asked Daddy what heaven was like. He said it was the most wonderful place in the whole world, even better than Chuck E. Cheese's. Maybe it has a really big slide.

Daddy took me to Chuck E. Cheese's one time, and my teacher was there. She said it was because she likes to play Whack-A-Mole. Daddy hugged her, and she ate pizza with us. I asked if she wanted to play in the Play Place with me, but she was wearing a dress. Daddy can only fit in the Ball Place, but he chases me outside of all the tubes and catches me when I go down the slide.

\*

In spring, Teacher let us go back outside for recess. I always take my Barbie to the swing set. I don't even need to be pushed anymore because Daddy taught me how to kick my legs. Tommy stole my favorite swing once. I always play on that swing and Tommy knows that. When I want something, Dad says it's always good to be polite. "Can I please play?" I said.

Tommy said, "I was here *first*."

He's a stupid boy. I told him that.

"I'm going to tell Ms. B that you're not sharing!" Tommy said.

Then, he pushed me, I fell and I bumped my knee. I looked at it and saw it was bleeding! I started to cry.

Ms. B put Tommy in timeout. He's the one who pulled my hair before. She said one more bad thing and Tommy was going to be in

timeout for a very long time. She gave me a SpongeBob Squarepants band-aid, and kissed the spot where it hurt.

My dad's the only one who ever kisses me when I get hurt.

By the time Daddy picked me up from school, I wasn't crying anymore. Ms. B told him what happened. Daddy smiled and said, "Well I guess it's a good thing you were there, Ms. B!"

\*

Ms. B came over to my house one time. Maybe Daddy's starting to think she's pretty. He calls her Brittany now. We ate macaroni and cheese, shaped like SpongeBob, and put hot dogs in it. Ms. B ate hers without hot dogs because she's an herbivore like a stegosaurus dinosaur. We watched *Finding Nemo* and Dad let me stay up past my bedtime. He stayed up way past his own bedtime that night. The next morning he was really, really tired.

Now Ms. B sends me home with less notes, but we watch more movies with her. She always wears pretty dresses, makeup. She cooks for us sometimes, just like Mom used to.

One day, I woke up, and I went into Daddy's room. He was reading one of Ms. B's notes. He had a picture of mom on his lap. His eyes were red. Sometimes my eyes get red when I cry.

I looked at the note, and it said "L-O-V-E" in fancy cursive letters.

I said, "Are you ok?"

Daddy said, "Yeah, baby, Daddy's fine."

"Did you get hurt?" I hugged him. He's always warm and big. His arms are hairy and they tickle my face.

"In a way," he said. "But I'm better now, sweetie."

I went to the bathroom and came back with the band-aids.

"Where does it hurt?"

Daddy pointed at his arm. I kissed him where it hurt and put on the band-aid. "You should be a doctor," he said. "Because I feel all better now!"

"I didn't know grown-ups got hurt," I said.

"Everybody gets hurt, sweetheart," he said. "Sometimes you can't put a band-aid on and make it hurt less either."

I think Ms. B hurt Daddy.

She must like him.

MAGGIE MILLER

## Loss of Hope

This doctor's office is so white that it makes my head hurt a little; there isn't even a drawing from one of his patients on the wall. Instead on his desk is an array of clown figurines which I am sure is supposed to be cheery but instead will give me nightmares for days.

"I understand you have some family problems? That your mother committed suicide?" he said. What an ice breaker! The man had the conversational skills of a goldfish.

"Yup," I said.

"How much quality sleep have you been getting?"

"I am sleeping some," I say. Which is a little bit of a lie; I sleep a couple times a night mostly plagued by dreams of my mother. He looked at me as though he could see through me, which I am sure he could. That's what you study in psychology--how to spot the lies.

"Okay not as much as you or I would like, but some."

"Is there anything you want to get off your chest?" He says. I think for a minute; my life is seriously screwed up, but it's not something I want to talk to this unfamiliar psychiatrist about.

\*

I remember leaving the note by my pillow and decided that I would go on an adventure. They would probably want to know where I was going on this adventure, but not even I knew for sure where that was. I swallowed again and again, each one tasting acidic and bitter. Little pieces of me were floating away. Soon I began to realize that this adventure was taking a turn for the worse, and everything went south from there. My mind spun and I began to remember bits and pieces of her, of the weeks leading up to her death. It is something like a dream, like the world had ended in an apocalypse and only I was left. There

was a humming in my head that just would not go away. Maybe I was in some cosmic blast kablooy! No that wasn't it. I looked down and there was a hand there. It looked 80 years old from the liver spots, but it actually belonged to my 55-year-old mother. Someone told me, but the buzzing had made me forget, that the liver spots were due to dehydration as her body shut down after taking too much insulin and sleeping pills, putting her in a diabetic coma. This memory became clear to me as I swallowed again and again, and I felt like maybe next time I swallowed, the memory would go away and I could be at peace again.

\*

My dreams bring me back to days with her, times that were good and sweet. We are biking through Mother's Day, a 42-mile trek that at my young age I fear will kill me. Sunny skies are gathered for us as we gallop across the paved yellow brick road. Birds sing us songs and grass waves in the luscious breeze. It couldn't be a more perfect spring day. However, by the time we get to Redwing, our destination, the skies are starting to frown. First, the baby blue is swept away by rolling clouds. A little farther and the sky is as dark as the inside of a basement, and soft splatters of rain are falling. We pedal faster, partly due to the incoming storm, partly because the rain feels so good against our sun warmed backs. She laughs and challenges us to go faster, leading us home. We are soaked, our shirts sticking to our backs, and the thunder is after us like a crazed giant. We bike almost 20 miles in a pounding storm and end up at a K-Mart. She and I wander the aisles looking for sweat pants and socks to calm the chills of 20 miles.

\*

Well I was right; everything went south from the moment I tried to take that adventure, and now I've ended up here, where I said I would never go back to...the psych ward. The walls are the wrong color, the rooms are always too hot or too cold, like a goddamned nursing home or something. The nurses are just a little too cheery for a nut house, and here I am again. No roommate this time, thank God. The last one ate crayons all day. The only good thing about her was that she tried to share the orange one with me; I might have taken it if it were a purple one.

I perk up a little. I can hear a bubbly voice around the corner, the kind that makes you smile all over no matter what the circumstances. She came in holding up her pants in one hand and cradling a Tupperware container in the other.

"They took my frickin' belt. I have no ass; what the hell am I supposed to do without a belt?" I glanced over at one of my fellow patients sitting at the same table. He was staring off into space, but I could only imagine what he would do if he got his hands on that belt.

My lovely friend sat across from me, hitching up her pants like an old man.

"I brought you diabetic puppy chow."

"Diabetic puppy chow?"

"You know, so sugary it could put you into a diabetic coma. It has twice the peanut butter, twice the chocolate, and twice the powdered sugar."

I stuck my hand in and retrieved a small square. It melted on my tongue, but she was right; it was so rich it made me feel all jumpy inside. Suddenly Ann punches me in the arm, hard.

"Don't ever do that to me again." She sits back in her chair and crosses her arms, doing her best to give me a glower, but on that sweet face it is hard to believe. "Promise me."

"I-I'm sorry." I look down at the table and wipe up a small sugary bit that my hands have left behind, "I don't know what I was doing."

That was all that was ever said about my attempt, and for days I could still feel her punch but it made me remember that there was someone out there who cared enough to make me a bushel of puppy chow, which to a girl is true love.

\*

I go back into my now too cold room, and lay down in my too hard bed. The only adornment on the wall is a crucifix with blood dripping from Jesus' hands and feet. It creeps me out so much that I look away. I lay awake for an hour, then two until suddenly sleep finds me like a trickster in the dark, and without knowing it I am shoved deep into a memory that only my subconscious remembered.

\*

She and I are shopping, loaded with bag after weighty bag. People pass us in a rush as we shuffle through the parking lot. Stranger after stranger stands before us. White strangers, yellow strangers, quiet strangers, loud strangers. None of these, however, is our trusty Jeep. We search amongst the masses, our freezing hands nearly crying for the warmth of the heater. We stop at each row desperately exploring, but come up empty-handed. Fairly soon an hour has passed and we stand, with snow pressing its frosty lips to the sides of our cheeks, with no car to be found. I start to cry, the salt mixing with the snow like the streets after a big snowstorm. She looks at me and starts to laugh. Big valiant sounds pour out of her, and we both are laughing now. As I dry my tears, we look over together and there is a red fender peeking out from a monster, its left light cracked open from where my dad backed into it.

\*

"Game time!" she was the one we hated because she had the perkiness

of a four-year-old on too much sugar, and when someone is depressed it doesn't help to send in the clowns. Sigh. Again with the games, those goddamned games they love to play here. I shuffle my way to the end of the hall in my plastic-gripped hospital socks and peer into the room. Sigh again. I hate life right now. I am about to play Scrabble with Joel, a real savant, not just a really smart person but someone who can name pretty much every word in the dictionary. He is small and mousey, his hair forever in spikes because he runs his hands through it so much, a nervous tick I guess. Joel is a high functioning savant; the only signs of his condition are these nervous ticks, like running his fingers through his hair. He also has a thing for drugs, which led him here in the first place. Soon I am so frustrated I want to take his Scrabble pieces and throw them against the wall. I have come up with horse, while he has "suqs" on a triple word score. I ask him what it means and he says "an open market in an Arab city" without looking at me. My vocabulary isn't as limited as horse, but it reminds me of the times I flew, when the air was pure and sweet and I was far away from the crazies and the Joels of the world. I had a red horse named Roy, a sorrel to be more exact. He was a quarter horse, but, man, when he stood with his head turned, he looked like a million dollar thoroughbred. He and I used to breathe together we were so close. He knew me so well I simply had to shift in the saddle and off we would go. Of course, when I think of Roy, I think of those times when I would show him, and then she pops into my head far more easily than makes me comfortable.

\*

It is my horse show, the first one, and I am writhing inside. My horse is prancing, my boots are shining, but there is one small problem. She is huddled under the backside of my horse, cringing against the possibilities that could be emitted. She is trying desperately to braid my horse's tail, but the thick black strands I had found so splendid before, are proving impossible for her. She is turning and twisting, coaxing obedience from the unmanageable tail. Little by little she gathers it together, and after a half hour she has a magnificent masterpiece of art. She sits against the stall door, beaming at me, knowing whatever happens, nothing could be as bad as that tail.

\*

"Hey, dumbass, it's your turn," Joel spins the board around so I can see that he has scored about a bazillion points and I have about five.

"Go suck it, Joel." I was beyond frustrated at this point, but I notice that I have a z and a couple of o's so I spell "zoology" and grin at him. He just spins the board around, and without even a pause, puts down "ixia."

"I call bullshit," I say.

"Look it up." He hands me the worn out dictionary that someone

has written "Nurse Herman is a cock sucker" in. While I agree with those sentiments, I don't think she is bad enough to defile a book. I am about to look up the word (which is an African corn flower by the way), when Miss Perky Herman herself walks in and taps me on the shoulder. She is wearing garish Tweety Bird scrubs that are so out of place she might as well have been from outer space.

"Dr. Zopher would like a word with you." As she said it, she grabbed my shoulder a little more firmly. I shrugged it off but let her lead me out of the chair. "Sorry, Joel, I guess the two of you can play again some other time."

"She was losing badly anyway; she has the vocabulary of a horse," he said. I knew that it was a joke between us, but Miss Perky just glared at him as we walked away.

Dr. Zoloft, as we called him on the ward, had a cramped office off of the game room. The walls were as white as the other doctor's but this time, instead of the clowns on the desk, there was a giant velvet worked picture of Jesus on the wall. This scared me more than the clowns and I did not feel comfortable sitting with him behind me.

"Why did you take those pills? Did you want to end up like your mother?" Wow, bombshell; this guy doesn't come out softly.

"I don't know," I mumble. I look down at my hands; my dad always said that they looked exactly like my mother's hands.

"Why don't you tell me about her," he said.

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know her anymore." I choke back a sob, which is odd because I never cry. Must be that stupid Jesus picture behind me.

"Try anyway."

"She was a nurse, someone who would care for a patient one minute and stand up to a doctor for them the next. I wanted to be a nurse too when I was little because, to me, she was perfect. I don't remember her being unhappy. I don't remember times when things were bad. I just remember now and the anger and sadness and guilt and betrayal." Geez, this was unlike me, these were things I wouldn't tell anyone, least of all stupid old Dr. Zoloft. I don't remember much of the days leading up to it, but I can remember every fucking second of the days and weeks after.

\*

I came home from school that day and was a little worried by the fact that she was home from a job that usually kept her till 6 p.m. or later. She was alone more and more, mentally gone to a world she had created for herself. She had become severely depressed, but extremely good at covering it up. Of course my mind always went to the worst in these situations. I didn't know that in as little as two weeks I would

be holding that mottled hand that looked like it was 80 years old, that I would be hearing that humming in my head. Her body shut down quickly after we made the decision to pull the plug on her food and water that she was getting through an IV. Those were the things I remembered, the way the quilt that someone had stitched for her laid over her body or the way my dad cried silently, as if he couldn't be seen with tears on his cheeks. His hands were old looking just like hers, only his from working day in and day out in a demanding job. Her eyes were open the slightest amount and I tried to push them shut with my hand. As always, the movies lie and I could not close her eyes. I remembered those things then, not the cheerful moments of fun we had, not the horses or bike rides.

\*

"I just can't stop thinking about what she did to my family, to me. How she probably screwed me up for the rest of my life."

"If you know all that, why did you try to commit suicide?" he said.

"I guess I just lost all hope." I said.

"Then maybe she did too."

KRIS DORN

## wandering from moment to moment

i often wonder while wandering  
whether life is to be tethered,  
why restriction overrules abstraction,  
where defeat demands attention,  
when courage falls short to fear,  
who will persevere,  
what will coax resolve into returning,  
worthwhile battles resurface.  
i often wander while wondering  
weathered life is to be tendered.

DODIE MILLER

## The Moms of Drug Addicts (1970s)

She is pacing the hall of a mercy hospital—  
Maybe she is a widow, husband in the ground,  
Younger children at home—  
But she paces the hall of a mercy hospital,  
And she hopes for it,  
Because,  
That older son (maybe oldest),  
The one with the long hair  
He's done it again--  
With his drugs.  
And now he's here,  
In this mercy hospital,  
And his mother is crying so hard  
In the linoleum-lined, window-filled hall,  
That she almost forgets to pray for mercy.

Her son was the one sitting on the curb.  
His legs a denim arch over the gutter.  
He was nothing special around here.  
But then, everybody saw—from little kids  
To old people,  
They saw “the nod” go too far,  
And as he fell over his knees into the street,  
The life kicking out of him,  
Somebody called for help.

A year or two before,  
This boy's spirit was on the stage,  
Asking in a calm tenor, “Where Do I Go?”  
He rationalized with “Walking in Space,”  
And he asked the essential question,  
In two-part harmony: “Why don't my mother love me?”

He dropped out to keep himself from war,  
And now his mother's in hell.  
She's pacing the hall in one of those outfits,  
You know the kind,  
70's mom outfits—a beret, a tam, or turban on her head,  
Her body wrapped in Halston-esque dress, cable knit sweater, or caf-  
tan,

Maybe a plaid skirt, and those orange-brown leather boots that zip on the side,  
Or earth shoes.  
Whatever she wears, she makes a pitiful figure.  
She beseeches the doctors in the accents found around here—Irish, black American, Italian, Hebrew--  
And they snatch their arms back, and answer her the same: “Wait and see.”  
Which translates to “fuck off” in any language.  
So she will pace these halls,  
Boots, berets, and all,  
Because her oldest boy, well, he ain’t doing too good,  
And she pauses in front of one of the windows,  
The city of millions writhes under the gray,  
And she knows there are other mothers,  
Whose sons sit in the alleys and gutters,  
With belts around their arms,  
On their way to the mainline,  
Instead of the frontline.  
And she sniffs back her feelings,  
And realizes dead is dead.

JESSIE REBIK







ANDY BISHOP

## In Postrema Memoriam

It's over here!" he shouts softly. The others are bent over and scattered across the cemetery looking for the stone as well. Apparently they don't hear him. May 31 is much crisper than he expected, and he is glad Angela's mom suggested he bring a jacket. His mind wanders to the tombstones in the vicinity, from the serene seraphs in mid-flight to the lonely rectangles perpetually fighting back weeds, revealing the neglect of Memorial Days past.

\*

"So what was your favorite memory of Grandma?"

"Huh?" he responded, coming out of his daze.

He gazed blankly upon the picture above the fireplace, one of those holiday pictures with a log cabin covered in snow and smoke coming from the chimney, only lightly revealing the hurt he felt inside; little did they know that the cause wasn't Grandma's death.

Jo had been his first "long-term" girlfriend: six months, including the past three over the summer. Did the surprise summer trip to see her show mean nothing? He was told by her friends that she would *freak out* and think it was totally cute! Instead, he received a timid hug and the fake, "Oh, I missed you so much!" used on the cousins you haven't seen in years.

He was patient, certain that if he remained silent, his indifference toward the conversation would be seen as grief. Still no one spoke.

Guilt.

"I remember playing cards at the foot of her chair, and then Max would walk in and try to give me and Jerry kisses. I think us just being there, and having a dog around, really made her feel better. I'll

miss that.”

Silence.

\*

He’s finally within earshot of Angela, and so he tries again. “I found it, over here.” She straightens up with a sober smile on her face and manages to signal her parents. As they approach, he slips his arm around her waist and caresses her hip. The march trudges on until they stand above the stone: a name, date, and a place for flowers.

\*

His brother’s memorial returns his thoughts to Jo. “I’m a nice guy. I have lots of girl friends who would love to go out with me. Maybe I should just beat her to the punch and break up first...but what if she comes to her senses? How could Jo do thi...” a kick in the back from his sister brings him to the reality of the room. Tears roll down his mom’s cheeks, and his eldest sister is doing everything to keep composed. It is the last goodbye to Grandma; he missed it.

He leaves the room feeling a tightness in his chest. The girls excuse themselves to the bathroom, and the guys just lean against the walls. His heart is numb, and his mind repeats the words, “She’s gone.....she’s gone.” Even he can’t decide which “she” he misses more. Once the girls return, it is a quick walk out the doors and into the car. He breathes in and smells the musty odor of the nursing home for the last time. His mom stops to thank the nurses for all they did through the years, but he keeps walking. He slides the silver side door of the SUV open, inserts the headphones into his ears, and turns the volume up.

\*

Silence. He may be marrying their daughter, but standing over the grave of a grandfather he never knew makes him feel alone, like the tombstones covered with weeds. He remembers his own grandma and the trip a year ago. He pulls her closer. Angela’s grandma struggles to kneel down with her cane. Shaking, she places the flowers in the urn, and tears start to fall. Angela’s mom rhythmically rubs her husband’s back, knowing how hard it is for him to see his father buried, how hard it is to remember. Angela quivers gently, refusing to cry. He rubs her back, mimicking the motion seen across the grave.

“It means so much that your wedding will be on his birthday,” Angela’s grandma comments, looking on the couple.

His hand squeezes her waist tighter, looking at the date on the stone for the first time: June 25. Smiling, he stares at her with warmth and comfort. Her eyes, pools whose surface tensions refuse to break. Her parents linger a little longer, but they walk back toward her parents’ car.

LISA GIBBS





MATT NABER

## To My Son

A war of words laced with crimson venom and muddled tempers in the violet sky. This war that billows inside every boy wanting to become a man. It has been waging long before either of us came into this new world. This new society. A culture where family means little, success is everything, and life is killed before thought can enter its mind frame.

I was on your side once. Yes, fighting against what you call me now. I was young as you are and, like you, rage, not patience in understanding, obscured my heart from its true desire. Bullets of defiance I shot at my enemy through my muzzle of scorn. But he was cunning. Cunning like the enemy he defied with your age and on the very same side as you. Yes, it was he who was my opposition. He learned like his combatant learned, and he from his antagonist. They learned from each other, and down to my enemy from many generations came his erudition. He snatched my fiery metal I had shot and put it down his own barrel, aimed, and sent it back.

My enemy was dealt wounds the same as I harbored during those encounters in which the burning metal bore through flesh and sinew to rest near the heart. The heat aggravating it. Tormenting it. Tormenting me.

When the fire within me burned stronger, the affront intensified. It would never end, I came to know, until I looked at it. Understood it. Thought of the reasons why it was there in the first place. Only then did the metal cool and turn into a seed. A seed of wisdom.

This is how we pride-filled beings must come to learn. Confrontation. Humiliation. Realization. It is the only way we come to understand the ways of the world.

Is this what you wish of me to do to you? To strike and pierce your armor multiple times, hoping the next will finally be the last? To finally defeat you and leave your body broken and barely alive? Your mind shattered? Hoping? Hoping you will be able to rebuild it into something that can handle the world's actions?

I will not follow that line.

I refuse to hurt you, my son, simply so you may learn the hurt of the world through me. Through one who loves you. Through one who never wants to see you injured. Through one that in the past has hurt his sons so they may endure the world on their own.

But not I.

You stand defiantly before me in your battle gear ready to fight. Red in the beginning of eerie half-light paints the scene full of your emotions. Mine not even making a stroke across the sky for yours are blindingly powerful. Your pale phantom forces arise from the plains and hills, obscuring all of visible soil. They in themselves are my weapons. But I refuse their handles when thrust at me. I stand waiting your onslaught. Ready to endure every blow.

To remain and endure. A tactic never before used to my knowledge.

I fear for you now. I have feared this day every hour before it arrived. But not because of the damage you would do to me. Because of how I would turn your blade of words into my shield and sword and harm you more because of it. I have found a new path though. So now I fear for you. I hope my endurance prevails over your blindness. I hope your battering of a figure looked highly upon your whole life will not dominate you with contrition after the final blow. My enemy, my father, and his before him—they all picked up the broken pieces if their opposition could not regain himself anew. If they had left us, we would be less than we are, and the line would have breathed its last. But it lives, so we must continue to pick up our shattered sons.

But I will not. I cannot. Where my father struck me, you will hopefully strike yourself. Where my father picked me up, you, I desire more than anything in this world, will put your nose in the bloodied gravel and push up with your own fists and torn knees as your own man. I wish to say that I am my own man through this act that is playing before me. But I am not. I am my father's reflection distorted in a new light. I followed him. Learned from him. Became him in my own version on my own terms.

Forgive me, but I desire more from you. I have struggled with this thought. Wept over this thought for fear of losing you. Of losing you to yourself. But this is what I wish I had for myself. To not be programmed like an upgrade of the sir before me. But if I should wish this for you, is the question. I do not know yet at this moment of confrontation, when the choice is hard as your will to defy me. I

wish I knew for your sake. I wish you to become your own man and not something of this material world. I believe it is one of the reasons my forefathers have done this. They feared of losing our minds, their sons, to the world. Losing our hearts to *things*. Blanching at the idea that we would *need* this world.

Your weapons arc in front of the reddish sky now. They rip open the ground before me. Dirt rises in the thick air. Their hilts try to seduce my hands upon them.

I know you. Sometimes better than yourself, for I was just as you are but entangled by the wisdom of experience now. You will pull through this. You must. For both our sakes. If you don't, you will lose who you should become unknowingly. But you will eagerly lose me, therefore, allowing me to lose myself.

Your eyebrows. Their center weighed down by your feelings. I desire more than air that soon they will be enlightened with reason. Not mine, but your own through mine.

Your spear is intended to drive through my heart, and it shall. It shall, along with the one thousands of phantoms, those false conceptions of yourself, grip who know of what I am doing. They keep reason from you. They must be destroyed. But I have come upon something from tales of those before me. They are as tangible as fear. Only you have full existence to me. Only you can endure my hurt toward them. Only you can endure the pain you will cause yourself. Only you can wipe them from your mind.

Your howl shutters my soul from what I could be doing to you. Destroying you. It also closes on the fact that you may ruin me. But I have realized something. Those before me, back to the very first of us, have already undone me. If you prevail, you will be far worthier of life than I or anyone of those before you.

The rain of shafts looks so pointless.

I know you will do it.

Even now as I see your carnivorous smile widens with glee at the start of what you think is just, what you believe to be right, I know your abilities will prevail over all. They will continue to do so as this morning dawns. I know you are strong enough. Worthy of this blessing I am giving you. I foresee great feats pouring out of your future dedicated in a name you will come to hold so dear.

But first the phantom shafts. Puncturing my lung. Shattering bone. Ripping arteries. Tearing sinew. It is not nearly as painful as it would be to break you, I believe. So I endure. My soul is rattled by the impacts, shaken by your scornful words and examples of my own wrongs that further your cause. You bring out everything. You tempt me to fight back, handing out armaments for me to fight with, to shield against you. But I let you progress forward. I catch in your eyes the confusion. *Why?* your mouth, but the onslaught continues.

The pain is becoming overpowering. I want to retort. To put my son in his place. To tell you how to be, but I will not. I will let you learn for yourself. To learn, to come to know what that man who is my ancestor learned on his own and forced into the throats of his offspring and down to every descendant following him. I hope you learn something I cannot. Something I cannot because of my past programming. My upbringing.

But what if you lose yourself to the world? Do I rescue you? Do I search for you and then hammer my ancestors' beliefs into you?

I will not. You will become lost. You will wander in a wasteland of uncertainty and sin. You will search for answers. With luck, you will come to me one day. I will tell you what I know. And you will become your own man.

The time has passed away though for any more subsequence. It has finally happened.

I gaze downward. The metal protrudes from my left chest. Your hands are slid to the top of the hilt. Face a mask of apprehension. Eyes dart frantically from the two of mine to the deed.

It hurts so much. The hate you have finally spoken of me was the final blow. I fail. You finished the war. I can no longer sustain myself. I crumple too hard, bloodied ground gasping for my life. My son.

My world has fallen on its side. I only see your feet and the phantoms praise behind.

It was my risk. It was my life and yours. I chanced them both. And lost.

I hear a roar with enough force to shake feeling into my half-conscious head. I open my eyes. I did not realize when the darkness took me. Through tilted slights I see you, my son. My son in all his glory. You scream your defiance. But not at me. At the world. At those phantoms of yourself.

Your old self.

You charge toward them. And they to you. Their purple hues clash with your magnificent light enveloping the land. I only see bursts of collisions. White that becomes stronger and stronger. Then illumination erupts from the midst of your soul, parting the sky with its monumental force. A shock wave of might powerful enough to change the land. Turning rocky plains of phantoms to open fields of grass. Scarlet skies burst into clear blue. And in the center from you, my son, a tree, so full in bloom a word such as beautiful could not match its intensity.

Out from the thick trunk a vine weaves down the hill that was our battlefield. It flows underneath me, I see, like a cradle. No. Around me and into my slashed flesh. My wounds heal by white petals engulfing my body. And the biggest one protrudes from my whole heart.

JESS LEONARD

## Aunt Petrovina

*second place, CU writing contest*

Aunt Petrovina  
always liked to clap gloved--  
a pale  
yellow sound, as we remembered it.

Stubby, well-fed fingers locked in lace;  
We never saw her skin.

A great beauty once, was our  
Auntie--  
or so "They" said.

In the kitchen  
or digging in soil  
(and even in the bath),  
That white tatted plating  
never budged.

Her life,  
muffled, as by the thousands of tiny strings;

we

dissected

her.

We said,  
kitchen fire. automobile accident.  
A verbal vivisection, day by day by day.

But dense mesh grew from  
cloistered flesh like fingers of  
pale mold.

And Auntie smiled, a Technicolor myth, and  
kissed  
babies, our fevered foreheads,  
but never a mustachioed mouth.



And we wondered  
as children do  
And never stopped until  
one day, years later.

Aunt Petrovina, in her lovely fragile safe,  
still smiling;  
We peeled back her armor to find  
  
fingers whole, and just like ours.

PAULA GIESEMAN

## Birds

I find dead birds while I run.  
An indigo bunting last week,  
a goldfinch today;  
bright roadkills I break stride to collect.  
Their weight in my hand is light but constant,  
like my memory of you has become.

I carry the dead birds home,  
cover their colors with soft earth  
at the edge of my iris bed,  
and think my flowers will draw  
their colors from under the earth,  
and bloom next year with the beauty of birds.

The birds teach me.  
I run and dig and stand,  
always on earth that reaches  
away to the place where you are buried.  
I draw your colors from the ground under my feet,  
and bloom at any moment with the beauty of you.



PETE DUDEK

## Flight

*Bastard!* Emily had been getting ready all day: the salon appointment, shoe shopping, and finding the sleek obsidian blouse that cost way more than it should. An anniversary is a pretty damn good reason to go all out. Thrilled about celebrating a two-year relationship (and suspecting a ring may be in order), she was less than excited when she saw her boyfriend walking down the street with another woman, hand in hand. Following many tears and a gut-wrenching phone call, Emily decides that she needs to get away from the apartment, the apartment filled with wasted memories.

*I need a drink.* Not wanting to waste her recent purchases, Emily heads up North Rush Street. She saunters along in her heels, skirt, blouse and overcoat. Chicago in November, the wind takes her mind off earlier events. After crossing the Chicago River and several blocks she comes to The Drawing Room, a pricey little lounge with some of the best mixologists in the city. The lounge is packed but she finds a seat at the bar and quickly orders a drink. She wants to sit in the corner and sulk, to decide how she would get through tomorrow, but then he walks in.

He has a sharp, clean look about him- he's athletic and his clothes fit snug, showing off an impressive physique in all the right places. His blue eyes shine through the intimately lit lounge and meet hers. It's enough to make Emily blush and shy away. He carries an unmistakable confidence that radiates off him as he moves about the crowd. As he gets closer, she notices the other women's futile efforts at stealing his attention. He doesn't waver- he's the type of man who, when his mind is made up, there is no changing it. She is usually a good judge of character- mannerisms, posture, voice- she picks up on

these things. When he speaks his words are liquid silk.

He says his name is Kingston. She doesn't care if it's his real name or not, she believes every word he says.

"I'm Emily," she replies, her voice quivering.

His hands have a roughness that suggests a hard worker, but his touch is soft, suggestive, as he gently strokes her forearm.

"What brings you here all by your lonesome?"

"I just broke up with my boyfriend."

"His loss."

"What do you do for a living?" she asks, needing to take control after feeling so broken.

"I imagine and create," says Kingston.

Chad the bartender arrives, asking the couple what they'd like.

"I'll have a Manhattan, and a Mojito for the lady?"

Emily nods in approval.

"Very good, sir," Chad says. He goes over to his mixing station, taking a few more orders along the way.

"Where were we?" Emily asks.

"You were making small talk to decide if you want to sleep with me," says Kingston. "To be specific, you asked what I did for a living."

Emily blushes, "Am I that transparent?"

"No," says Kingston, "It's completely natural. You want to make sure you're making a wise decision."

"Am I?"

Chad arrives with the drinks. Kingston leaves a hefty tip and hands Emily her drink. Everything about him makes him seem twice his age: his "old man drink," the more than generous tip, he picks his words deliberately, his salt and pepper hair, everything. Emily is as intrigued by him as she is attracted.

"Ask your question again."

Emily is so wrapped up in his features that she forgets her question momentarily. Embarrassed, she hurriedly asks him what he did again, taking a big sip of her mojito in the process.

"I blow glass- making sculptures, jewelry, whatever my heart's content. But enough about me, what do you do?"

Kingston shows more interest in Emily during the hours at the bar than her boyfriend ever did over two years. She finds herself more and more open to him, or at least the thought of the perfect stranger.

"It's getting late; you want to get outta here?" He asks; again, so confident.

Emily has zero qualms about leaving with him; she knew even before they reached this point that she would be leaving with him, the man who picked *her* over every other woman there.

Leaving the bar she puts her arm in his, feeling the bulge of his muscles underneath his tight shirt. Emily never does this, but some-



thing about this guy takes her back to high school, getting all doe-eyed over the football players during practice. She decides *what the hell* as she leads him around to the alley behind the bar.

"This is a night you'll never forget," he whispers in her ear. Carnal urges wash over her as she thrusts her body against his, forcing his mouth open with her tongue. Kingston rips the front of her blouse open as she undoes his belt. He presses her against the fence, one hand caressing her breast and the other around her throat. Her eyes close, feeling every nerve tingle as she feels him swell; her body aching with need.

Her legs wrap around him; she hasn't felt this way in years. Their bodies find rhythm. She looks into his eyes, but the smooth, seductive look that was present at the bar is nowhere to be seen. She tries to scream but his hand, still around her throat, cut her off.

\*

The porcelain sink runs red as Kingston washes his hands, but he doesn't notice. His eyes are focused on the mirror in front of him, a stranger staring back. Every week the same loathsome, yet vaguely familiar eyes slice through the plane of the mirror, staring into Kingston's being. The figure's face changes, something between a smirk and a smile. It nods, like a proud father showing approval. Bile rises in Kingston's throat; he chokes it back while wiping the tears from his bloodshot eyes. The stranger laughs in a voice all too familiar to Kingston.

"FUCK YOU!" He lashes out at the figure, smashing his already bloodied hand into the fragmented mirror. The stranger disappears, but the laughter lingers.

He can see his hands in front of him, feeling the blood run over his knuckles. Kingston feels illusory, as if he is not there. Something horrible is happening inside him. "Why me?" he asks to no one in particular. He desperately wishes someone would reply, but is afraid of the answer.

The alarm buzzes from the other room, breaking his thought; it's 6 a.m. and Kingston needs to get ready for work. He places his self-disgust aside. He needs to focus on the day ahead, to keep his mask of sanity from slipping even further.

DANIELLE LENSEN

## Big Ben

*honorable mention, CU writing contest*

My toes feel like frozen peanuts.

Almost all the snow is cleared outside the front door by the Halifax Humane Society sign when suddenly the bells above the front door ring. I stumble in my oversized work boots in order to escape a door in the face.

"TAAAATE! GET IN HERE NOOOOW!" screams Don.

"Don," I laugh in disbelief, "I'm right here—literally, right next to you."

"I know," says Don impatiently, covering up his mistake. "Get in here and help your stupid friend with Boomer, now. Tell her she needs to work on her chi. That dog can read it, I swear."

Violet's blunt personality doesn't mesh well with Don's, our boss. He's more...well, rude I guess, which *does* mesh well with Vi. I actually think he just doesn't like her hair color. She dyed it neon orange two years ago, and it's been downhill since then.

The shovel chinks the sidewalk as I set it down and walk into the barking craziness that is the Halifax Humane Society. My black rimmed glasses fog up immediately. I take my hat off and muss up my hair.

"Do you ever brush your hair? Like seriously, I'm curious. It looks like a black mop vomited four inches above your forehead," says Don at his desk. That's Don for you.

Don's big, and by big I mean he could definitely "John Cena" any customer who got rowdy if he didn't approve them as a suitable pet owner. I respect that about Don. He's the nicest, scariest guy I know.

"Thanks," I say as I walk over to the dog kennels.

When I open the back doors leading to the dogs, I don't know

what hits me first: the symphony of dog barks or the smell of hair and dog crap.

I itch my eyes under my glasses. "Relax, guys, jeez," I say in a low voice. Most of the dogs stop barking except kennel twenty-two. Schotzie, the new German Shepherd. His owners brought him in because he "couldn't adjust to apartment life." I sigh and drag my thawed feet to his kennel. He hasn't adjusted well here either.

\*

*"He obviously hasn't been adjusting well, Lara," he said.*

*"Yea, and what do you expect me to do about it?" she snapped. She's doing the dishes. I can smell the soap.*

*"You know him better than I do. Can't your side of the family deal with it?" he argued.*

*"Deal with it? Deal wi- that's what you're calling him? He's not some problem, Adam. Jesus, he's a six-year-old boy."*

\*

"Are you going to keep barking?" I ask Schotzie to shake my mind off of things. "That's okay, then. Keep going. I know you're mad. Let it out, dude." I look him in the eyes. He keeps barking from the corner of his kennel. "I get it," I shrug. He stops to take a breath. "No, man, you're mad. Keep going—I'll listen." I open his kennel door, and he gets ticked off. He stays in his corner, yelling. I sit down between his bowl and his bed, like last time, and wait. He keeps barking until he wears himself out. Finally, he lies down.

"Are you serious?" I hear. "You're going to sit down and have tea with this dog, while I get stuck cleaning Boomer?"

"Hey, Vi," I say as I get to my feet.

"Do *not* 'hey, Vi' me, okay? Help me with this social disaster," she says.

Vi hates Boomer. Even more, she detests cleaning up after him because she thinks he's a "conformist to society." He's a teacup Chihuahua, but good God, don't let his size fool you. That dog craps like there is absolutely no tomorrow; he's a nervous bloke. Vi doesn't see it.

"You realize you were bred to fit into Paris Hilton's purse, right? I'm not kidding. That's the only reason you're around," I hear her tell Boomer as I slowly make it over to kennel number fourteen.

"Stop talking to him like that, Vi," I say hiding my smile. "He knows you hate him."

Her tangerine hair and clunky boots turn around. She's wearing a long-sleeve fishnet ensemble underneath her pink "Halifax Humane Society—Friends Reuniting Friends" t-shirt.

"Can you work with him? You get him, I don't," she says as she drops the shovel.

I look at Boomer. He's shivering next to a pile of his own crap. His floppy ears and bug eyes plead with me to let her go. I laugh.

"Yea, I'll take him," I smile.

"Thank you," she sighs. "Actually if you could finish Don's list for me, that'd be great," she says quickly, handing over her clipboard and walking away sheepishly.

"Vi!" I say frowning, watching her "run-walk" toward the door.

"Taaate," she drags my name every time we get to this conversation. "Just do what you do," she says as she waves her hand in the air and turns around to face the door.

"Only if you work on your chi, ok? And change your hair color—Boomer hates orange," I say sarcastically. I laugh when she flips me off before shutting the door behind her.

"How are you, Boom?" I ask as I enter his kennel and start to straighten up his bed. Talk to Boomer before you look at him, I remind myself, or he'll start shaking so bad he can't walk. The kennel door clinks as I close it.

\*

*Lara's at work. He swings the door open and drags me by the arm to the kitchen. My superman socks get wet as he runs me into Big Ben's water dish.*

*"Do you see thiz?" he slurs.*

*I don't say anything.*

*"DO YOUZ SEE THIZ," he states, rather than asks.*

*There's dog poop next to the empty bottle of vodka he just set on the counter.*

*"He's jussa puppy," I whisper, pushing my glasses up my nose with one small finger.*

*He grabs my neck and slams my face in it. My nose. Blood blankets the counter and tears cover my eyes.*

*"Now you see it. Train that dog, or I kill him," he seethes into my ear.*

\*

I try to shake it off. "Did you eat all your lunch today?" I ask when I see Boomer's half full bowl. "C'mon, Boomer. If you don't eat, how do you expect to get any bigger?" I ask. I finish cleaning up the numerous piles of Boomer crap before I finally look him in the eye and sit down. "Somebody will find you, Boomer. No worries. You're too cute. But I'm with Vi, if some chick comes in here with a big purse, there's no way you're goin' home with her, okay? You deserve better than that," I say as he walks over to me and sits on my kneecap. "Chin up, okay?" I finish as I scratch his neck and get up.

Don's handwriting says that kennel twelve is next. Akia Maria. Still a weird name, I think when I open the door to a spotted Great Dane. You can't talk to Akia; she goes nuts. She got here four years ago because her owners "couldn't handle her clinginess." I go to the left side of her kennel first because I know she's peering at me from

her bed on the other side. I tap my right foot twice and turn around before going to the other side to clean. She knows I'm coming and goes to the opposite end. I hum while cleaning out her bed, and she finally chills out. After finishing up with cleaning and changing water, I brace myself and sit down. She's shy at first, like always, and then I tap my hand on the cement floor. She jumps a bit and walks over. She, and all her Great Dane-ness, sits on my lap. A huge sigh escapes her mouth as she sets her head on top of my feet. I sit there, not moving, for fifteen minutes before my knees go numb. Once I start petting her stomach, she gets up. I smile at her before leaving and close the door. She has a long way to go, but she's trying, I think.

\*

*It's dark outside. I hope Lara's home.*

*"Can I use your phone?" I ask the waitress behind the diner counter.*

*"Whoa," she says taking in Big Ben's size. "Dog's aren't allowed in here. You need to go outside if you're with him."*

*"Can I use your phone first? We just wanna go home," I mumble.*

*"What?" she says, leaning over the counter. The bells above the door ring and a large group of big kids come in.*

*"Just use the phone if ya need ta, but hurry up. My boss sees that thing in here, and I'm gone," she says, annoyed. My small feet walk me around the counter. Big Ben follows. I can't reach the phone, so I walk back around and drag a chair over. I don't know my numbers yet, but I know how to push the buttons to call Lara. Up, down, over, over again, down, up, up again. Aunt Lara picks up.*

*"Tate??" her voice cracks. She's been crying again.*

*"Can you come get u-?"*

*"Don't. Touch. Me," she fumes away from the phone. Adam must be home.*

*"What? Where are you guys?? Where did he leave you both off this time?" she asks quickly. I hear her drop her keys.*

*"By the road. There were too many trees. I couldn't find home," I say. Tears sting my eyes.*

*"Oh my god," she whispers. "Where are you now? Is Big Ben with you?" I hear her walk out the front door.*

*"Yea, he's here. We're at the restaurant by that playground," I say.*

*"How far did you walk?! Jus-I'm coming. You stay by Big Ben, okay? Don't talk to anybody you don't know," she finishes.*

*I hang up the phone.*

\*

I rub my eyes, and look at Don's list. I've been reading the same line eight times. Kona's next on the list of dogs to clean up. I jump four times outside of his kennel; mainly to get warmed up, but mostly to

get my mind off of things. "Here we go," I say. I open the door and immediately start jumping. Kona sees me and starts sprinting around his kennel. "How are you, buddy?!" I say excited after I finish jumping. Kona's a rat terrier. He needs happy people because he's a happy dog. "Good, good, good, good, good!!" his eyes tell me. He has to be kept busy or he'll do the talking, and he's loud. I make random small talk as I throw his toys in the air. He knows the drill. He jumps and catches each one. I give him a snack as I sneak out the door. "I'll see ya tomorrow, Kona. You stay happy, okay?"

I open the door and walk out into the office area. There's a giant pile of snow in front of Don's desk.

"Wh-", I start.

"Do *not* start with me," he says between gritted teeth. "Your stupid orange friend had a tantrum after I told her to go shovel the yard."

I feel the color drain from my face immediately after Don says the word "yard." The pet cemetery is a service that only Halifax Humane Society offers. People's dead Fluffies and Fidos are everywhere out there.

"Go out there and help her please," he says without looking up from his reports.

"Vi is pretty capable, Don. I think she's got it," I say as I start to head over to check on the cats.

"Tate," Don says gently as he peers over his glasses. "You know you need to. Go."

My heart beats fast.

I head like I'm going to the cats, but grab the shovel instead. Don lifts one eyebrow. *You just shoved this in my face. Don't expect me to be happy about it*, I think. I go outside and head to the yard. My black rimmed glasses fog up again.

Vi has the front two rows of headstones done. She left me the back five.

"Tate! Oh my God. I'm so happy you're here. I was just gonna go look for you. Did you know that my hair color changes with the cold? Serious. Look. This strand is brown," she says, looking for the strand with her fingerless gloves. She's wearing her stupid puffy coat.

"You got these rows done, right? So I can just start right away over there? Get it done quick?" I ask, fuming.

"Yea. Go ahead," she says quietly.

It takes forever, but I get rid of the snow in front of all the headstones except the fourth one in, five rows back. My feet are freezing.

\*

*The air conditioning is on. It's November. He's just thrown the picture frame with Lara's photo in it through the window. I'm sitting on my Captain Planet sheets in my room with Big Ben. He's sitting on my*



*feet because he knows they're cold. We're both looking at my bedroom door waiting for my uncle Adam to bring his drunken tirade in here.*

*Adam is so drunk he's past slurring words—he can't even form them anymore. He's mad because Aunt Lara left. I found the note in my backpack when she left me off at the school bus this morning. I showed it to him because I couldn't read.*

*I knew what it said though.*

*Adam left and came home drunk. He smells like whiskey and the cream Aunt Lara used to put in her coffee. That's when I ran to my room, and Big Ben came with me.*

*Adam throws something big through the picture window two doors down. That's when I go under the bed and peer at the door, crying. Big Ben doesn't. Stoically, he lowers his Neapolitan Mastiff body off my bed and sits right between me and the door. The glass breaking gets louder. I cover my hand with my mouth. My Spiderman door flies open. Big Ben doesn't move.*

*"Wherezhe..." my uncle mutters. He throws my sheets on the floor. Big Ben doesn't move, just watches. "I hope you tookem withew," he slurs for no one to hear. His feet stop to the left of me. That's when Big Ben shows his teeth. Big teeth. He barks and howls at the top of his lungs. The short hair on his tail and his back frizzes out, and he lunges at my uncle. Adam falls, and Big Ben jumps him. He doesn't bite, but he's inches from Adam's face. His paws are on my uncle's chest, inches from Adam's neck. Big Ben's barking in his face and sending spit everywhere.*

*"GETOFF," my uncle screams. It takes every ounce to throw Big Ben off him. He leaves the room. Big Ben follows him to the doorway.*

*"Come back here, Big B," I sob.*

*It's over.*

\*

My feet are freezing. I can't feel my hands. My chin touches my knees as I shiver in the snow. I'm lying in front of the headstone four in and five rows to the back. Red snow—I think I'm bleeding.

"YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO LEAVE," I scream. The tears are freezing as they race each other down my face. "People leave, Big B. It's what they do," I whisper into red snow. I lift my head up. I yell as I punch the thin headstone, cracking it in half. More blood stains the snow. A hand is on my back. I get up and cry into something puffy.

"Let's go, Tate. You tried. You got farther than last time. Let's go. C'mon. I have you," a voice says. I stumble back into the building. "Don. Order another new headstone for Big Ben, will you?" Vi says. "He's okay. Just call an ambulance."

JESSIE REBIK



DANIELLE LENSEN



Writer's Block

LISA GIBBS





ALI HERBST



BILL PAULY

Alzheimer's birthday  
each slice of the cake  
takes part of her name

*Haiku Poets of Northern California [HPNC] International Contest  
2007*

the beached whale  
carries an ocean  
still in its eye

*Cicada 2:3 1978*

WILL KELLY

## Turkmenistan, My Love

We get as high as we possibly can, and the world starts to spin. It takes the right kind of click in just the right place to reach an appropriate velocity, and following several clumsy maneuverings of the mouse, we're off and spinning. After about ten seconds, someone yells "STOP," and we begin our rapid descent, closer and closer until our view is enveloped with blue, and the imagined splash occurs. Another ocean landing. We do the obligatory shot.

I can't remember how exactly this turned into a drinking game, but it's nearly 3:00 am, and Julia, myself, and several of our friends are amusing ourselves on Google Earth by spinning the globe as fast as we can, and zooming in on wherever we stop.

It's my turn, and as I watch the big blue ball spinning on its axis, I hope and pray for dry land, because I think another splashdown will make me violently ill. I breathe a heavy sigh of relief as Asia comes into view, and we plunge downward towards the continent's center. And the winner is...

Turkmenistan.

"Turkmenistan? That's not a real country!" says my friend, slurping every word.

I tell everyone it is indeed real. I attempt to explain something seen on a blog recently about this great big pit of fire in the desert there. Some kind of mine that caved in and ignited, and has been burning ever since. They call it "The Gates of Hell."

A few minutes later I cannot remember if I related the story coherently, but Julia is sold in any case. Her face lights up. She wants to know all that there is to know about Turkmenistan.

We're always talking about how much we'd love to travel, but

with student loans, insurance, and other expenses, it's unlikely we could even spring for the passport fee at this point. Still, one of our favorite things to do is plan detailed itineraries for imaginary trips, and we already have dozens lined up. They run the gamut from conventional (London, Paris, Rome), to exotic (Albania, Bhutan, Tristan da Cunha), to pure novelty (a week in Saudi Arabia followed by a week in Amsterdam).

\*

I'm thinking about all this an hour later, as we're huddled closely under the covers and the remaining guests have crashed in the living room. Right as I'm about to black out, she wraps her arms around me, turns me on my side, and stares at me with those crazy drunken eyes I've grown to know and love.

"Honey, let's go somewhere."

"Where would you like to go?"

"I don't know. But let's go somewhere for real this time," she says, twirling my hair around her finger.

"Okay. Anywhere you had in mind?"

"Let's go to Turkmenistan."

"You really wanna go there, huh?"

"Yes."

"You wanna go there before any other place?"

"Before any other place."

\*

The following morning, as we nurse each other's hangovers over a round of coffee and recreational Wikipedia browsing, we read more about the mysterious and reclusive nation of Turkmenistan. We learn all about eccentric former dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, a man who made the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-il seem modest by comparison. Did you know he had all the months of the year officially re-named after himself and family members?

"Niyazov banned the use of lip syncing at public concerts in 2005, citing a negative effect on the development of musical arts incurred by the use of recorded music," I read aloud.

"A world leader dedicated to the cause of preserving live music? Sounds like a pretty cool guy," she says.

I read on:

"Niyazov requested that a palace of ice be built near the capital, though Turkmenistan is a desert country with a hot and arid environment. The palace was never built."

"So he's a dreamer. A visionary. What a great man."

"I'm sure whoever was tasked with building that ice palace would agree."

"If he's still alive, and in one piece," she adds.

We laugh.

Over the next two hours, we pour over the articles like high school biology students prodding and poking at the dismembered frog pinned to their dissection tray. Here we are, the sociopolitical analysts, the armchair anthropologists, clicking around the Internet and receiving a crash course in just about every aspect of Turkmen life and public policy.

\*

*In 2001, Niyazov banned opera, ballet, and the circus, because he thought they were “unnecessary” for Turkmen culture.*

\*

Later that afternoon, I’m at the grocery store, rounding the corner into the frozen food aisle, when I spot an old friend with whom I haven’t spoken with since graduation; someone who all but disappeared off the face of the Earth. Her name is Christine Brigham.

Christine was one of the most all-around talented people I’ve ever met. She was ridiculously smart, one of those rare individuals who seems to possess no filter or separation between the right and left hemispheres of her brain. She was a musical theater major, but could have just as easily been a physicist. She had an absolutely beautiful singing voice, and an even more incredible stage presence. I thought I had heard something about her being accepted into grad school in New York, but don’t know if she ever went, and seeing her here today casts further doubt on the matter.

I race down the aisle to catch up with her, and although she’s delighted to see me, something has changed. She’s much quieter and more modest than I remember, but this could just be the effect of several years’ worth of increasingly diluted interactions through the social media circuit. I’ve come to realize lately that it’s damn near impossible to stay in touch with people you were never fully in touch with in the first place, but I’m doing my best regardless.

“So did you ever go to New York?” I ask.

“Uh, no, not really.”

“Not really?”

“I was going to, but it never really worked out. I have a lot going on here at home, and thought it would be best to lay low for a while. That, and Isaac would hate to live in a big city like New York.”

I gather this is her boyfriend, and the way she emphasizes his name, it occurs to me that she may be misinterpreting my intentions. I quickly clarify by casually mentioning how things between me and Julia are going, but I’m not sure if this helps.

On a whim, curious enough to carry the discussion out from between the banks of freezers, I ask if she’d like to get a cup of coffee or something. She seems nervous. Am I being awkward? She’s reluctant at first, citing a number of petty excuses, but just as I’m about to give up she agrees, and fifteen minutes later we find ourselves at Maddie’s,

a quiet little café down the street.

\*

*In 2004, Saparmurat Niyazov passed a law banning long hair and beards among men. He also forbade women from wearing make-up, because he thought Turkmen women were “already beautiful enough.”*

\*

As it turns out, there aren’t as many things to talk about as I thought there would be, and I’m wondering if this whole thing was a mistake.

Her cell phone rings.

“Excuse me,” she says, digging through her purse.

I sit back and look over the menu, even though I know it inside and out. I pretend I’m not listening, but in such close proximity it’s difficult not to. It’s clearly her boyfriend, and it sounds like a pretty benign and unremarkable conversation.

And then, by some strange twist of what a religious person or citizen of Turkmenistan might call fate, the waitress arrives to take our order. Ignorant of the situation, I loudly order my usual beverage, and Christine nods indicating she’d like the same. Just as the order has been placed and the waitress is walking away, the volume of either her phone or the person on the other end increases considerably.

I can make it out clear as the Turkmen night sky:

“WHO ARE YOU WITH? WHOSE VOICE IS THAT?”

I look up at her, her head drops, and she bites her lip in defeat.

“What are you talking about?” she says.

Before I can pick up any more of the conversation, she bolts up out of our booth and begins walking towards the restroom, fast enough to turn several heads at nearby tables. She returns as if nothing had happened and smiles awkwardly. That voice. The tone. I’ve never heard anything quite like it. I’m closely surveying every square inch of her body looking for a sign, a bruise, anything. My heart is pounding. At this point I don’t care if she thinks I’m checking her out.

The waitress approaches with our coffee but she gets up again.

“I’m sorry, I really have to get going. Something came up.”

\*

When I get home Julia is reading on the couch, and I immediately sit down and bury my head in her shoulder.

“Feeling any better?” she asks.

“A little. You’re not gonna believe who I ran into today.”

“Who’s that?”

“Christine Brigham.”

“Really? Awww, I haven’t seen her in years.”

“Yeah. I convinced her to go to Maddie’s with me, you know, to catch up and whatnot. But she was acting really weird the whole time. I’m not sure what her deal was.”

"Hmmm. Well, she does have that weird boyfriend, you know."

"Weird boyfriend?"

My heart rate speeds up again, and suddenly I'm sick to my stomach.

"What exactly is weird about the guy?"

"I don't know; I've never actually met him. I've just heard he's kind of creepy. You know, real possessive and whatnot. I think he's some kind of religious nut too; a Jehovah's Witness or something."

\*

*Saparmurat Niyazov wrote a book known as Ruhnama (Book of the Soul), which is still taught as a religious text to Turkmen students alongside the Koran. Somewhere in the capital city of Ashgabat stands a giant memorial to the work, an enormous, colorful statue of a book surrounded by fountains and trees. Every evening at approximately 8:00 pm, the big book opens up to reveal a video of the late ruler reading from the text. A number of foreign corporations desperate to do business with Turkmenistan have graciously helped out by having Ruhnama translated into various languages.*

\*

"Are you okay darling? You look terrible."

"No, I'm fine," I lie. "You know what I've been thinking?"

"What."

"Let's go somewhere. For real. I'm completely serious this time."

"Where to? Turkmenistan?"

There's a brief pause, and the smile on her face gets wider as she gradually realizes I'm telling the truth.

"You really are serious!"

"I am."

"Well... Where do we wanna go then?"

"Let's go somewhere happy."

"Happy? Like where?"

"I don't know, somewhere like Denmark or Sweden maybe. In fact, yeah, let's go to Sweden."

GARY ARMS

## The Moth

The Moth is dull and drab, with dirty wings.  
The Air, who only cares for dainty things,  
For lace-winged Flies and Butterflies and rare  
Beige Seeds that float in clouds of mazy hair,  
Does hate the Moth.

"Oh, sweetest Moth," says Air,  
"Do condescend to meet my friend, the Flame."

"Who, me?" asked dazzled Moth. "I meet the Flame?"

"Poor Flame is starved. He has no friends at all.  
Sad, bluish thing, he drinks—pure alcohol,  
You know."

"I didn't know!" cries Moth, and flies  
To meet poor lonely Flame. Through Air's dark skies,  
She drives her dirty wings to meet poor blue  
And drunken Flame.

From out his bowl of glass,  
Up leaps the Living Flame, so hot and bright—  
For Living Flames are tall and upper-class,  
Not poor and dull at all.

Poor Moth in fright  
Does want to fly away—but who can fly  
From bright, exquisite Flames? "Good-bye! Good-bye!"  
She sings. But never does she go. Around,  
Around the Living Flame as if she's bound  
By golden string. With every round, she closer flies.  
She dives. She nearly nicks the lovely Flame.

"Oh, pretty Moth, do KISS the Flame!" Air cries.

And so Moth does. She dives to kiss the Flame.

"Oh, pretty Moth, I love your Blazing Wings.  
For I am Air, and only care for Dainty Things."

ANDIE BRUCE



Lakeside dreams

# CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

## PROSE AND POETRY

GARY ARMS

Gary Arms' first play, *The Duchess of Spiders*, was produced by the Black Swan Theatre Company in Asheville, NC. His second play, *Emily Dickinson's Birthday Party*, was a finalist in the Mill Mountain Annual Play Contest. His third play, *The Arranged Marriage*, was published by the Eldridge Publishing Company and has been performed many times. It was translated into Dutch. His play *The Porn King's Daughter* was one of the winners of the Iowa Play Contest and was performed at the Civic Center in Des Moines. The Princeton Review has published two of his books; the last one won a Parents Guide Award. Gary Arms is a professor at Clarke University in the Language and Literature department.

ANDY BISHOP

Andy Bishop is a math, English, and secondary education major at Clarke University. He is a senior, looking forward to a great semester of student teaching, and hopefully finding a job in the surrounding area! He heralds originally from a small northern suburb of Chicago called Niles, and in his spare time he likes to play volleyball and go bowling.

JOHN BRADLEY

John Bradley's poetry has been published in *The American Poetry Review*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *College English*, *Lake Effect*, *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Sonora Review*, *Switched-On Guttenberg*, and other journals. He is the author of *Terrestrial Music*, *Curbstone Press*, *War on Words*, *BlazeVox Press*, and *You Don't Know What You Don't Know*, Cleveland St. Univ. Poetry Center, winner of their poetry prize last year. He is the recipient of two National Endowment of the Arts Fellowships and a Pushcart Prize. He currently teaches at Northern Illinois University.

COURTNEY BRYSON

Courtney Bryson is a senior at Clarke University majoring in English. She has recently begun the process of submitting her work as she is interested in pursuing an MFA in creative writing. She loves to travel, read, and, of course, write.

COLE CRAWFORD

Writing is an interpretation of every experience that is authentic to the human condition. Whether through poetry or prose, authors should strive to capture that authenticity. Cole Crawford's favorite extracurricular activities are cross country, track, Ultimate, show choir, amateur film, and working at YMCA Camp Wapsie in the summer. His favorite winter endeavor is curling up with a good book and a mug of hot chocolate. He enjoys learning for the sake of learning; knowledge should be actively sought after, not impassively absorbed.

JENNY DOMINE

Jenny Domine loves Clarke University and has missed it since graduating in 2006. So, what do you do with an English degree? Quite a lot, actually. After an internship at the Belleayre Music Festival in Highmount, New York, paint-



ing backdrops for Rosanne Cash and schlepping sound equipment for James Blunt, Jenny got her first writing gig as associate editor for *Music Inc. Magazine*. There she learned all about journalism and guitar humbuckers for three years. Currently, Jenny is a marketing writer for The Pampered Chef Home Office and lives in Elmhurst, Illinois. What an honor to be part of the first-ever *Tenth Muse*!

#### KRIS DORN

As an undergraduate student, Kris Dorn studied art & psychology at Taylor University. He is now the head coach for Clarke University's men's volleyball team. He has had several paintings and two photographs win awards at art shows, but he has never submitted any writing piece or poetry before. Writing is often a release, where his emotions or logical paradoxes can't stay inside any longer. Give him a good cigar, a chilly night where stars shine brightly, and he can develop a piece while walking around nature talking out loud to God.

#### PETE DUDEK

Pete Dudek, notorious procrastinator, has serious regrets about not giving himself enough time to write his bio.

#### KATHERINE FISCHER

Katherine Fischer is an award-winning author whose books, *Dreaming the Mississippi* and *That's Our Story and We're Sticking To It!* are acclaimed by both the national and international press. She is also a newspaper columnist and Professor of English at Clarke University.

#### PAULA GIESEMAN

Paula Gieseman has a degree in English from Loras College. Writing is one of her lifelong interests; she works with poetry, haiku, short stories, and non-fiction prose. In 1976 she was hired as a patrol officer by the Dubuque Police Department; the second woman to be hired locally. She retired at the rank of Captain in 2007, and now works part-time, writes a little, walks a lot, reads avidly, and cherishes time spent with friends and family.

#### STEPHANIE GOEDKEN

Stephanie Goedken has been telling stories of personal events and made up fancies for years, but began writing all of these down in numerous notebooks in fifth grade. Coming from home an hour's drive west of Dubuque, she came to Clarke with the hope of writing professionally, exploring the idea to see if her written words could become more. As time went by, she found her love of teaching was greater. However, she still enjoys writing on the side.

#### DEVLIN HARRIS

Devlin Harris was raised in the Chicago, Avalon Park community and currently lives in Dubuque, Iowa with wife, Kischel and their two children. He is a father of five and grandfather of two. He and his family moved to Dubuque in 2007 for a fresh start and better school environment for their kids. He and his wife are non-traditional students seeking to further their education. Devlin will graduate from Clarke University in May 2011 with BA in business finance. He has been writing poetry for twenty years and attributes his inspiration to Langston Hughes, Haki Madhubuti, and Edgar Allen Poe.

#### ELAINE HART

Elaine Hart is a senior at Clarke University from Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

She is majoring in English and elementary education, minoring in music and special education, and working toward a teaching endorsement in reading. She is also contemplating taking on a third major in overworking oneself for unknown reasons, because what she has now just isn't enough. Elaine would enjoy reading, writing, and watching *Lost* if she had any free time. She is especially excited to kick off her super-senior year in '11-'12.

#### RUSSEL JAFFE

Russell Jaffe is an English teacher and installation artist living in Iowa City, Iowa and working at Kirkwood Community College. His poems have appeared in *La Petite Zine*, *The Portland Review*, *elima*, *Horse Less Review*, and others. His chapbook *G(\*)D* is forthcoming from Pudding House Press. He is the founder and editor of *O Sweet Flowery Roses* literary journal.

#### CONOR KELLEY

Conor Kelley is an English major and writing minor at Clarke University. He is from the great city of Seattle, Washington. He is a catcher on Clarke's baseball team, and enjoys writing, reading, and working out in his limited free time. He likes *Seinfeld*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Ernest Hemingway, steak, the Seattle Mariners, Mac n Jacks, Arnold Palmers, smoked salmon, and Kanye West. His favorite movie is *It's a Wonderful Life*. His major influences include his encyclopedic father Dick Kelley; his incomparable grandfather Ed Doyle; his cousin Dan Kelley, who is playing baseball and studying pre-med at Occidental College; his amazing mother Theresa Doyle; and his brilliant older brother Michael Kelley, who is studying at the Seattle University School of Law.

#### WILL KELLY

Will Kelly is a studio art major and writing minor at Clarke University. He has been so far unsuccessful in discovering a "unified theory" of his various creative pursuits, and the best he can come up with is this: "When I'm in the mood to draw, I draw. When I'm in the mood to write, I sit down, stare at a blank screen, get distracted by the wonders of the internet, start ripping my hair out, go for a long walk, and, occasionally, write." Some of his hobbies include making lists, watching silent films, doodling on the backs of notebooks, attempting to lucid dream, and acquiring more music than he'll ever have time to listen to. He is currently hard at work on his debut novel, *Sustainability*, which, at the current rate, will never be completed in your lifetime.

#### ROBIN KENNICKER

Robin Kennicker is currently working towards the completion of a master's degree in education at Clarke University. She is the eldest of six children raised on a small farm in Balltown, Iowa. A simple life woven with threads of hard work, generosity, and frugality have created a colorful tapestry of experiences which are used as a "backdrop" or a reference for information for many of the short stories she has written. She currently resides only three miles from the farm in which she was raised and has also raised her own children on a farm there continuing the tradition.

#### DANIELLE LENSEN

Danielle Lensen is a senior at Clarke University majoring in English and minoring in studio art. Although she doesn't live on campus, she commutes from Cascade, Iowa. When she's not working or at school, you will find her reading, drawing, or hanging out with her dog, Bruiser Jones. She loves all art, and she



loves filling up her time making it. She will graduate in May of 2011, and as of now she doesn't have any solid plans after graduation. However, she is a big believer that with time and hard work, everything will fall into place. Until then, long live art and books.

#### SARAH LENSEN

Sarah Lensen is from Cascade, Iowa and is currently a senior at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa. She is an English major with a double minor in psychology and writing. She loves combining her fields of study and writing about subjects that make her use the emotions she learned from psychology and organizing them into genres of poetry or nonfiction. *Silver Hairs* is a poem she wrote from the perspective of her "high school self" the day she found out her grandmother's cancer returned.

#### JESS LEONARD

Jess Leonard is a 22-year-old English major at Clarke University. She lives in Dubuque with her husband and their two children (if by "children" you mean "cats"). For inspiration, she draws upon personal experience as well as interesting details in otherwise unremarkable everyday life, such as a misspelled sign in a shop window or the smell of old books.

#### IAN LIVINGSTON

Ian was born on November 14, 1988 in Boulder, Colorado. He moved to Dubuque with his family when he was six years old. He will graduate from Clarke University this May with a double major in Spanish and English and writing minor. He realized he liked writing in eighth grade when he wrote a funny story for one of his classes. He is proud to be a part of the *Tenth Muse*. He still hasn't finished painting his guitar.

#### BRICE LORY

Brice Lory was born and raised in Platteville, Wisconsin and is currently studying at UW-Platteville to earn a professional writing major to add to his Bachelor's in music. He enjoys writing poetry and prose; he is working on a novel when classwork permits. His future aspirations are to become a published author and professor of English or possibly novel editor. He lives in Platteville with his brother and cat, Archimedes.

#### YAZMET MADARIAGA

Yazmet Madariaga was born in Mexico City. She moved to Montreal, Canada in 1996. She received her college education at Concordia University where she obtained her BA in Hispanic Studies (literature and culture) and French literature. During this time she contributed with poems, short stories and illustrations to a literature student magazine called *Tinta y Papel* from the Department of Classics, Modern Languages and Linguistics from the same university. She has performed her poetry in multilingual literary festivals such as Festivalissimo and Noches de Poesia. A selection of her poems was recently published in a collection of multilingual poetry named *Le dépanneur café* by Éditions Adage in 2010. Yazmet Madariaga is currently completing her master's degree in translation studies.

#### SARA MCALPIN

Sara McAlpin, BVM, taught in the English Department at Clarke University and is now Professor Emerita. Currently she serves in the Clarke Archives Of-

fice. She holds a BA from Clarke College, an MA from Marquette University, and a Ph. D from the University of Pennsylvania. Having spent most of her life working with words, either in literature or writing classes and research, she is delighted to know that current Clarke students are sharing their gifts with words through the new publication, the *Tenth Muse*!

#### DODIE MILLER

Dodie Marie Miller lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She has a BA and MA in English (literature and writing) and an MFA in creative writing (fiction) from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her work has appeared in *The Flying Island*, *Scavenger's Newsletter*, and *Apostrophe*. She is the 2006 first place winner of the Robert C. Wright Award for Excellence in Creative Writing. She teaches creative writing and composition at a community college in Fort Wayne. She is diligently at work on several novellas and short stories. Dodie is also a frequent contributor to several encyclopedia series published by Salem Press, for whom she specializes in popular music, television, and literature.

#### MAGGIE MILLER

Maggie Miller is a senior at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire majoring in English creative writing and minoring in library science. When she graduates she hopes to become a librarian at a public or university library and keep writing on the side. She lives with her husband Ryan, cat Oliver, and dog Piper in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She would like to dedicate this story to her mother, who was her inspiration.

#### MATT NABER

Currently a freshmen majoring in math and secondary education at Clarke University, Matt Naber's love for literature came after being introduced to the *Harry Potter* series. His favorite authors include Terry Goodkind, Christopher Paolini, Suzanne Collins, and Kenneth Oppel. After seeing their work, his imagination began to go into overdrive and this contributed to his involvement in writing. Having completed all the outlines and wrapping up the first book, Matt is currently developing a five book series. It was all an attempt to satisfy his mind's hunger for the impossible, but it only seems to be the unending fuel.

#### BARBARA NYHEIM

Barbara is a senior majoring in English at Clarke University. She spent eight years in the Navy and has five children. She is employed as a librarian's assistant at the public library in Dubuque, Iowa and plans on pursuing a master's degree in library science.

#### LACEY REYNOLDS

Lacey Reynolds is a senior communications major with a journalism emphasis at Clarke University. She lives in Potosi, Wisconsin, and works at a publishing company in Dubuque, Iowa. She served as the body and soul writer for *MyDisfunkshion* online magazine and has been published in the *Woman Hunter* magazine. Upon graduation, she hopes to continue working in the publishing industry while freelance writing.

#### KATELYN RUBENZER

Katelyn Rubenzer is a senior English major with a writing emphasis at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin. After graduation in May, Katelyn hopes to continue writing short fiction and poetry. She would like to acknowledge

the artwork of Brassai, the French photographer who inspired this piece.

#### KAYLA SCHNOEBELEN

A junior English/education/writing/little-free-time student, Kayla Schnoebelen enjoys the little pleasures in life like chocolate, coffee, *NCIS* re-runs, book sales, quality rock music, and Monster energy drinks during late-night writing sessions (or last minute cram sessions for that big test).

#### DANIEL SHANK CRUZ

Daniel Shank Cruz grew up in the Bronx, New York City. He is a Ph.D candidate in the Department of English at Northern Illinois University. His work has appeared/is soon to appear in *Rhubarb*, *Crítica Hispánica*, and *Italian Americana*.

#### CAROL TYX

Carol Tyx teaches American literature and writing at Mt. Mercy University in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. During her off hours she practices yoga, volunteers at a CSA, and tries to stay in touch with her young adult sons and her cat. During the summer she volunteers with Christian Peacemaker Teams serving communities at risk for violence.

#### BRENDEN WEST

Brenden West is a 22-year-old journalism major originally from the Chicago suburb Mokena, Illinois. In 2010, he placed second in the Clarke University writing contest with the short screenplay *Super Villain* and won the Beatrice Blood-Reudy award for best feature writing. Brenden currently doubles as both a freelance reporter in the Northeast Iowa region and an active member of the nationally ranked Clarke men's volleyball team. His parents, Margy and Brad, both graduated from Illinois State University and reside in Mokena, and his sister Amanda will graduate high school in May. Between volleyball, reading and writing, West lists photography as a hobby.

#### BRYAN ZYGMONT

Dr. Bryan J. Zygmunt is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Clarke University. He completed his Ph.D at the University of Maryland in 2006 and is the author of *Portraiture and Politics in New York City, 1790-1825: Gilbert Stuart, John Vanderlyn, John Trumbull, and John Wesley Jarvis*. He also believes in his beagle Romey, the University of Arizona, and regular trips to Italy.

### ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

CHRISTINA BOLGREN (studio art/painting emphasis, '13); ANDIE BRUCE (graphic design, '14); EMILY COTTON CRAM (art and theater, '14); LISA GIBBS (communication, '11); KATIE GROSS (art, '12); ALI HERBST (communications, art, and philosophy, '10); WILL KELLY (studio art and writing minor, '11); STEPHANIE KRONLAGE (graphic design, '12); DANIELLE LENSEN (English, '11); JESSIE REBIK (assistant professor of art); SUSAN SANTEE-BUENGER (art education and anthropology, University of Northern Iowa); EVAN STICKFORT (art/painting emphasis, '12)

