

TENTH *Muse*

VOLUME III, SPRING 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The staff would especially like to thank Professor Emerita Katherine Fischer, an innovator in and beyond the classroom and mentor to many, both students and colleagues. With her colleague in the English department, Ann Pelelo, Katie put the idea of a literary magazine at Clarke on the table and, largely due to the *Tenth Muse* endowment established in her honor, we'll be feasting for years to come.

WRITING CONTEST

The Clarke University Writing Contest is open to Clarke undergraduate students. The submissions are reviewed and selected by a third-party judge not affiliated with the *Tenth Muse*.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Faith Britt, cover art

"Protein Paper Model" was created as a response to a collaborative project that our graphic design class worked on with biochemistry students. I constructed this model using paper to mimic the structure of a malate dehydrogenase protein, which contributes to the body's process of making energy. Through this collaborative process, I was able to create a new visual language by incorporating both science and art into my work.

EDITOR'S LETTER KAYLA SCHNOEBELEN

A new volume evokes sensory pleasure in me as a reader: the smell of crisply pressed pages, the slick feel of the parchment, and the soft crack of the binding as I open the volume for the first time. The volume also elicits pleasure when I see the physical manifestation of my dedicated staff's hard work.

My "Musers" spend the better part of their school year in meetings—all centered on this one final product. My staff must be visionaries at heart in order to formulate in September what the magazine will become by April. Their vision and creativity is as much a part of the magazine as the authors and artists themselves. They put aside their time and put forward their effort into this meticulous process.

Many of this volume's staffers are new to the *Tenth Muse* community. It has been my deepest joy to work with these novices. We have grown and learned together through these last months. I am grateful for the opportunities available that allowed me to continue my work with the staff to produce this volume. I leave the staff in more than capable hands for next year's volume.

I look back to my own budding experience with the *Tenth Muse* three years ago. It has been rewarding and fulfilling to be a part of the *Tenth Muse's* beginning. It is equally rewarding to have been an editor with the magazine for two of the volumes. *Tenth Muse* has been an integral component of my collegiate career, both academically and personally. The entire *Tenth Muse* community has contributed to this growth: the readership, the contributors, the university, the Language and Literature department, the staff (old and new), and, of course, Anna Kelley.

Thanks to every one of you. I hope you enjoy and love this experience as much as I have.

Kayla Schnoebelen
Co-Editor-In-Chief

EDITOR'S LETTER *SUSAN VAASSEN*

Before you begin your journey through the brilliant pieces on the pages that follow, you must know that this publication is a product of more than what meets the eye. You hold a literary magazine created by a dedicated and talented staff (led by short but powerful co-editors), a fearless faculty leader, and by our valued contributors.

I am happy to say that my first year on the *Tenth Muse* as staff, let alone as co-editor-in-chief, has been a success. Going into this year, I was baffled by what a literary magazine was and all the work that was put into creating one, so this experience has definitely been a learning one for me—an exciting and memorable one at that.

There are many people who have made this magazine and experience possible. First, I would like to thank the driven and superb staff for all its dedication and creativity. Between all of the meetings, e-mails, campaigning, long days of submission selections, longer days of editing, and much, much more, the staff has my greatest thanks. It has been a memorable and successful year working with Erin Daly, Jennifer Streif, Alice Klinkhammer, Carrie Pieper, Joe Arms, Patrick Lenane, Sarah Kitch, and Enoch Warnke.

Special thanks are also in order for my co-editor, Kayla Schnoebelen. Your leadership, ideas, and *Muse* passion have not only contributed to making this the best *Tenth Muse* yet, but also pushed me to grow as an editor and as an individual.

Anna Kelley. Where would this literary magazine be without you? Thank you for your endless support, devotion, and guidance as the *Muse* faculty advisor, professor, friend, and leader. You have given staff members an experience they will never forget.

Lastly, I would like to thank the contributors, readers, and all supporters of the *Tenth Muse*. Without you this literary magazine would not have the wings to fly to such great heights.

Endless thanks and love,
Susan Vaassen
Co-Editor-in- Chief

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KAYLA CARLSON



Restitution
oil on panel

GABRIELLE BARILLAS

Barriers

She doesn't like tamales. The sudden realization of this enters her mind and exits through her mouth before she can stop it. "I don't like tamales," she says, apologizing and affirming at the same time. Her eyes shift from Abuelita Marcela to the plate, hot and steaming and smelly, to Abuelita, also steaming, and back down to the meal. "I'm sorry," the girl says, wobbling through the words. It is too late to take them back.

"Hm." One word, not technically a word, yet it holds so many meanings. The grandmother shifts her weight from side to side, cocks her head slightly, frowns and doesn't try to hide it. "Well, I don't know what to make you then," her heavily accented voice spits out. Her caramel-colored hands whisk away the platter of spicy pork loins wrapped in corn husks, folded neatly together like miniature packages just waiting to be opened. The girl, Sonja, fidgets nervously. She kneads her hands together as she watches the woman, her abuela, swiftly dump the tamales into the trash can, slide the plate into the sink, and open the sub-zero refrigerator door, all in one seemingly fluid motion. The door is cold, hard, and gray, much like the woman herself. Sonja catches herself before she also lets this thought escape into words.

"I like taquitos," she says, carefully and hopefully, pointing to the brightly-colored El Monterey box stacked neatly on top of the tub of Blue Bunny. She hopes this can serve as a type of common ground, as an entryway into this new and foreign world. She wants to know this woman, is trying to know this woman, despite the thick wall she seems insistent on keeping between them.

Marcela extracts the box and inspects it. She turns it over in

her hands, squinting to read the fine print that describes the miniature tacos as “Southwest style” and “Made from REAL chicken.” She laughs, a surprisingly high, girlish sound for a woman of her age. “This not *real*,” she intones, “but it’s whatever you want.” The “it’s” comes out sounding more like *issst* and the “want” is pronounced *vant*, but Sonja nods her head and takes the food from her grandmother, who is holding the box far away from her body as if it radiates infection. The girl slowly places the phony tacos on a plate as the woman unties her apron and throws it on the table, exhibiting disgust and disappointment. This is not the first occasion of its kind, and the girl doubts it will be the last, even for that day. *That’s how you think of me*, Sonja thinks as she resolutely warms up her Americanized food, eyeing the box. *Contagious, as if coming too close to me will infect you with my ignorance, my “gringo-ness.”* She closes her eyes and tries to block out the thought as Marcela leaves the kitchen, hard footsteps echoing down the hall and up the stairs.

As the days slip by, Sonja gets better at avoiding her grandmother and situations similar to the taquito incident. This June, hot and overwhelming and too constricting, slowly drags on, each day ending much like the last. She is quick not to dally in the shared bathroom, to speed walk to her room in her towel, lest she again encounter her grandmother in the hallway, staring at her glowing white skin, so unlike her own. She spends most of her time in her room, clinging to the sanity that is central air conditioning and glossy fashion magazines. The girl never ventures to the side of the house where the woman stays; she is afraid to step into the mysterious dark room where she knows she sleeps under a Virgin Mary icon and a postcard of her beloved homeland. She knows she should stop this, that she should open her door, go across the landing, and begin anew with the woman, with Marcela, but something inside her stops her from doing so. The mother visits the girl each day, knocking softly before entering the deep blue room and shutting the door. She pads across the snow-white carpet, sits on the queen-sized bed and talks to her daughter. Normally, she too avoids the woman, even in conversation, but on a Tuesday she decides otherwise.

“You’re going to regret not forming a relationship with her,” the mother says, treading carefully, glittering in her two carat studs and newly highlighted hair. She takes Sonja’s hand, milky like her own, squeezing it as if that will force her to do the hard things. “She’s really not that bad.” Her voice reaches a higher pitch at the end of this sentence, revealing that she herself does not believe this. The mother tries to get her daughter to look at

her, but her long, dark hair shields the side of her face.

“You just don’t get it. She absolutely hates me for no reason at all.” Sonja shakes her head and gets up, paces across the room to her enormous closet, where she plants herself on the ground to gain some space from her mother. “I *have* been trying, but she doesn’t want anything to do with me.” She crosses her arms defiantly. “I try to help her in the kitchen, but she shoos me out. I try to talk to her in Spanish, but she just laughs at me. I even asked her if she wanted to read outside on the deck with me yesterday, and all she said was, *I have better things to do.*’ I give up! I mean, how do you think she makes *me* feel?” Sonja picks up a delicately-heeled Jimmy Choo and fiddles with the straps. “I’m so sick of everyone expecting me to do all the work.”

The mother sighs, lets out a breath in a way that conveys frustration, anxiety, and gloom all at once. “We don’t expect you to do all the work, honey.” She pauses, then looks up at the ceiling as if the answer is written there. “All I’m saying is that maybe you just need to keep trying. I really think you’ll find that she’s actually a kind and valuable person.” She smiles at Sonja in what is supposed to be an encouraging way but is actually just defeated.

The girl shakes her head and tosses the sandal aside. She stands up and snatches her keys off the nightstand, heading for the door. “Honestly, I don’t get how you even think that considering some of the things she’s said to you.” The door slams shut at her exit, rattling both the walls and the mother. The mother closes her eyes and drops her head, feeling the blow.

The night is clear and cool for once, and Sonja relishes it. She walks quickly and purposefully until she is safely out of her yard, on the sidewalk, and heading toward the bus stop. She only has to wait approximately three minutes until the hulking vehicle shows up, and she gets on it without thinking twice. Settling into a sticky seat, she watches as the streets pass swiftly by, as if the world out there is nothing but a running film strip. Her head pounds with anger as she pulls the cord after a mere ten-minute trip and arrives at her stop. She gets off the bus, walks around the brick building in front of her, and finds the key hidden so carelessly under the doormat. Why they even bother hiding it, she doesn’t know, as she doubts a town as small as this could harbor anyone wanting to burglarize a law office.

Unlocking the door, she steps into darkness. Quiet and order all around. The girl finds her way to the lone light at the end of the hallway, where the father sits in his office, harrowed-looking and worn. She places herself in the chair across from his and waits until he looks up from the files, seemingly unsurprised that

she is there.

"Sonja, what is it? Do you need something right this second?" He shuffles the papers importantly. "I'll be home in less than an hour; I've just got to finish reviewing this case." He stares at her with a look that is both rueful and avoidant, showing his conflicting desires: to fix and to flee.

"Dad...", Sonja starts and then stops, recognizes the familiar gaze in his face—I *know*. Tired of the complacent sympathy her parents seem intent on giving, her calm tone yields to more fire. "Why did you bring her here? What's the point of her living here for the summer?" She tries for a brief second to hold back the fuming words, but they insist on coming forth. "I thought you told me she came here because *she* wanted to get to know *me*!" Heat stings the tips of her ears. She feels anger and rejection and sadness all at once, muddled together in a disturbing mixture that lies at the base of her throat.

The father looks down, intent on examining the details of his shoes. They are fine shoes, brown and leathery, not unlike his skin, although the shoes have been specifically processed to look this way, and the skin comes from a childhood spent working under a blazing Guatemalan sun. The first cost him a neat stack of hundred dollar bills, while the latter was seemingly free.

"You know she loves you," he begins quietly. He finally looks up, makes eye contact with his daughter, uncomfortable with the blame he sees in her eyes. *Why haven't you helped me?* are the words she doesn't speak.

"Your grandmother has had a rough time of it. Try to cut her some slack..."

"Dad! You really think I don't know that?" The girl shakes her head. "All I'm asking is that you *help* me get through to her. I'm not sitting here asking you to take her back to Guatemala. I just want to know if she really wants to get to know me, or if that's just some bullshit lie you made up to keep me around the house this summer." Sonja folds her arms and crosses her legs. She digs her nails into her palm, wondering why this is so hard. Why can't this woman just be like Grandma Irene, baking her cookies and smoothing her hair and telling her how beautiful she is? She is tired of this. Adults are supposed to act like adults, not behave like stubborn children. The woman should be trying to forge a bond with *her*, not the other way around. Though she doesn't want it to, it's beginning to affect her self-esteem, little whispers of negativity weaving through her mind.

The father shakes his head, words lost somewhere in the back of his own jumbled mind. He wants this so bad, for them, for her. It is the final missing piece, the bridge that joins his past and his

future, sixteen years in the making. It is what he thought would be the easiest part, the threading of old and young, broken and new. Plans that were perhaps not as well prepared as he thought they were are very nearly being destroyed.

He leans back in his chair. Two hundred and fifty dollars for a chair that was supposed to help his back pain, poor posture, and marriage, and he still finds himself hunching over his files in agony when he comes home at night. Proof that money is not always the easiest means of acquiring health and happiness.

"I'm sorry that she's not adjusting as well as we thought she would," he begins, then notices the tensing of her body, the flare of the muscle in her right cheek. Wrong. He switches his tone. "I know she isn't being very kind to you. And I know that you haven't done anything to deserve it." The softening of the face appears, as does the unclenching of the fist. His profession has taught him far less valuable insights than he had thought it would, but one thing he has learned is how to read people. He comes around the edge of the desk, perches on the smooth wooden barrier, forces his dark eyes to match hers. Clear tone now, understanding but stoic. "But you have to realize how hurt she is. With my dad gone..." he trails off, far away for a second, then regains composure. "She just isn't used to all this. She needs someone to be patient with her. You are her only grandchild, and she isn't sure how to act towards you yet. That's just what happens when you meet someone close to you for the first time." He pauses, thinks over what he has said. He wants, knows it to be true, but he needs his daughter to know too. Though it's not expected for a girl her age to act wise beyond her years, he hopes for it.

Sonja runs her hand over the smooth leather of the chair. She feels the acid in her throat. How could a woman refuse her own blood? The girl turns the painful evidence over in her head. How could Marcela, with her soft, warm figure and bright, cheerful clothes, turn out to be the complete opposite of what she had been led to believe? She digs her foot into the plush rug, hating herself for caring, hating the woman for dismissing her. She remembers the waiting for her, all these years, her young hand constantly reaching for the worn picture of the beautiful young woman with ebony hair and cinnamon skin. *I want you to have this*, the father had said, giving her the photo of his mother in her prime with the utmost of seriousness. *I think she looks like you*. He had smiled, an infrequent occasion at the time, as his daughter had laughed at the comparison. *Someday she will be here, and you two will be inseparable. But for now, we have to wait*. The girl remembers asking why they must wait and receiving a pat on the head as an answer, then watching her parents open yet another

of the overdue bills and realizing why. She recalls the time, years later, sitting in their brand new kitchen, when her father had hung up the phone looking crushed, her mother hovering over him, consoling him with *She will come soon* and *She just needs time*. She even considers the moment of guilty joy when they had learned Marcela, debt-ridden, frail, and defeated after the death of her husband, had finally consented to live with her son, the man who had at first made nothing of himself in the States and then had made too much of himself. The girl wonders why they have all been trying so hard, wonders what was the point of her mother firing the overpaid chef and her father working late for the new addition and her own self considering artificial tanning. The girl turns over these thoughts in her head, thinking, *But for what? For what?*

She stops thinking, makes up her mind, swiftly closes the door on the insecurities and hang-ups.

"I have to go," she says, abruptly standing and causing her father, that seemingly composed man, to start. She heads for the door quickly, fearing for lost time, lost opportunities.

"Sonja, wait. Don't do anything stupid," he says, afraid he will lose her, lose her the same way he nearly lost his own mother, the result of throwing money at a person instead of quality time and care. He knows he should chase her, let her know he cares, much like he knows he should have gone home and rescued his own mother, before she grew weary of his newly prosperous life and fresh beginnings. He follows her into the hallway, knowing his detached tendencies will prevent him from chasing her if she does leave, though he wants to more than anything.

The girl seems bent on leaving, though. Yet just as she reaches the door, she stops, looking over her shoulder at him. In him, she sees so much of her grandmother, her abuela, but she also sees herself. The stubbornness is there, as is the refusal to change one's ways because another is being difficult. She sees his hard work etched in deep lines all over his face, and knows that he has done all of this, the law school, the long hours, the time away from her and her mother, for them, all of them. She knows that he wants her to reach out to the woman in the ways that he himself is so incapable of doing.

"Don't worry, Dad." Cool air filters in through the open door. She is going to begin this change, bridge the gap that he has waited to be filled for so long. No more excuses at the first sign of difficulty, no more backing down from the formidable barriers. She crosses over to her father, hugs him tightly, squeezes his brown hand, so much like Abuelita's, yet so much like her own. "I'm going to keep at it." She walks out of the office, passing the

bus stop and opting to make the long walk home. The girl settles into a comfortable pace, preparing for the trek. Tonight she will knock on the woman's door, and tomorrow she will eat a tamale. She will continue the journey, and bridge the gap.

CANDACE BLACK

Courbet Reconsidered

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1989

Years ago, Tracy, I placed you
in these paintings: Gallic
brow in repose along the riverbank,
gritty realist surviving
the small deaths of everyday.
I know now Courbet did not
survive. He died grieving,
les Dents du Midi, beautiful as they are,
his daily reminders of exile.

The girl you were
is gone, killed in degrees
by the ruthless
pruning of change: divorces,
crazies, breakups, cancers,
lost jobs, drunks. All the clichés
are truer than we want to admit.
Loss, and more loss,
stimulates new growth.

Some days the cuts
are deep, some days superficial.
I still see you
in the *Franche-Comte* or Normandy coast,
though not as model—more as woman
behind the scene, buying
pears at market
that become the still life.

CANDACE BLACK

After

Without the familial safety net beneath us
we fly or fall. That's what experts say.

Then what do they call this? This stumble
three steps forward, five steps

back, this swerve into minutiae
or laughter that hiccups into tears,

these check-off list decisions about hymns
and scripture and catering that feel

like bursts of speed, a whirlpool
of doing. Flight looks easy, pure

glide over distance. In these early days we move,
mostly forward. The fall, when it comes,

won't be spectacular. Daily failures will weigh
us down, a comfortable paralysis.

ELEANOR LEONNE BENNETT



High Simple
photograph

CARRIE PIEPER

Preparing for Departure

February has the highest suicide rate. I learned that “fun fact” in the front seat of a taxicab in Dublin. It was a rainy day in the beginning of August, or really I could rephrase that as “it was just another day in Ireland.” To say that rain was a normal occurrence that summer would be a major understatement. According to my Irish history professor, it had been the wettest summer in recorded history in Ireland. That summer my raincoat had become a second skin, one that I was more than happy to shed. This taxicab ride had come at the end of a summer that I could never forget. Rewind six weeks and I was navigating the Tube, looking like the tourist I was with multiple copies of the route map lining both the inside of my purse and the palm of my hand. In the following weeks, I would slash up the English countryside with my mother. In our little red car, we risked getting lost with every turn we made and somehow made it to the ferry port in Holyhead, stopping along the way for a cup of tea, and once to pay homage to the sofa that Emily Brontë died on. We would cross over to the Emerald Isle and make our way to, what I heard a bus driver refer to once as, the “Heaven of Ireland.” After a few short days in Heaven, we made our way to our final destination, Cork.

In Cork, my mom helped me check in to my month-long accommodation before she left to get back to real life. I then sat in my room waiting for soon-to-be roommates. I had no idea of what was to come. I unpacked my things into the dresser and my desk and went to sleep with a strange mixture of excitement and terror. As it would turn out, my time at University College Cork would be some of the best fun I have ever had. I met some great friends

and drank some really great beer—a lot of really great beer—and learned a few phrases in Irish. The completely random group of students who found themselves taking this course would transform into an inseparable entity in a matter of days. However, as our month wound down, the inevitable separation approached. We jokingly made plans about how we would all refuse to leave and continue living in our little community. With enough Guinness in our systems, some of these plans may have been more serious than others, but joking or not, reality always has the final say, and due to the dates printed on our thousand-dollar plane tickets, we were forced to move out of the Brookfield student accommodations and go our separate ways.

Some people got on a plane back to the States, but others, like me, were the lucky ones who were able to postpone this just a little longer. Still, one by one, we each rolled our bags down the driveway that led out of the Brookfield complex. The wheels on the asphalt were audible even within the buildings, like a song commemorating the departing.

I have always felt that life prepares you for the difficult things it will throw at you, or it simply helps you through them. Take death, for instance (gosh I am morbid today). I have always thought you can't die unless you are in some way able to accept it. I like to imagine that before you die, you have the realization that it is going to happen, even if it is just a millisecond before, but in this millisecond or hour or month or year before you die, you have the chance to come to terms with it and be at peace. Now this probably sounds crazy, and there are probably a thousand arguments against this, but I think this "personal philosophy" is what keeps me sane at times. I was not dying by any means as July turned to August, but I definitely wasn't ready to make the difficult transition back to my real life when my suitcase wheels scraped across the asphalt. As it turned out, I soon would be.

So instead of boarding that plane home, I got on a bus headed toward Dublin. From Dublin I would catch a flight to Edinburgh, Scotland and meet up with a friend. My expectations for Edinburgh were high. This would be the grand finale of my trip. At the same time that I held these high expectations, I also doubted the possibility that this could ever top any part of the past month. Boy, was I right. The whole time that I was in Edinburgh I was exhausted. It was to be expected after a month of going out to pubs and late night homework sessions. My body had just run out of steam. My friend and I wandered around the city; we had no plans and no energy to make plans. All I could think about was going back to Ireland. I tried my best to enjoy myself, but I couldn't. Our trip had a few memorable moments, including a 3 a.m. visit to a

disgusting club in town with some crazy Londoners, but nothing in Edinburgh could entice me to want to stay longer than the three days that we had planned. On the last day that we were there, Josh and I sat in a big park that was located in the middle of town. We talked some small talk and watched the people around us. The whole time I was just hoping for the minutes to pass faster and faster, but they didn't.

Finally, it was time to leave, so I got on the bus that took me to the airport, and I happily boarded the plane. I was going back to Ireland, and I just knew that everything was going to change. Those less-than-spectacular three days were going to be in the past. Getting back was all I had thought about for those three days, and when the plane wheels slid to a stop on the runway, the sound was oddly reminiscent of my final march out of Brookfield. This time, however, the sound meant a welcome home rather than a departure. I got off of the plane and walked through the airport to collect my bags. It was late, and the airport was fairly quiet. I hurried out the automatic door, still waiting for the feeling that I was back to hit me. Instead, I stepped out into the chilly drizzle that accompanied the night air. I ignored this chilly omen as I looked for a taxi to take me to the hotel that I had booked for the night, but I was about to find that in three short days Ireland had changed, or at the very least, I had.

So I got in the taxi line, which was empty, and I wove around the barriers to get to the man who would get me a taxi. He asked me where I was going, and I gave him the address of my hotel. He waved the first taxi in line up to where I was standing, and a man got out of the driver's seat (the passenger seat for the non-Irish or English reading this). He was around my height (around 5'9", 5'10") and looked to be somewhere around sixty years old. He took my bag and hoisted it in the back of his cab. He wasn't a weak man, but he had some trouble lifting it into the trunk. I then got into the front seat and situated myself in the seat with my backpack between my feet. There wasn't anything very interesting about the cab; it looked the same as most, with the fare display glaring red against the dark interior. The man got in behind the wheel, and for the first time, I was able to see his face. There was nothing out of the ordinary: He wasn't young, but he didn't look ancient. I noticed that he looked tired, not in the way that he hadn't slept, but so that it seemed that the few wrinkles that appeared on his face were battle scars from a hard life.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"The Travellodge," I said.

He then muttered something under his breath and said in a very loud and annoyed voice, "Well, I only have thirty minutes to

get there and back.”

“How far away is it?” I said, not knowing what he meant, and worried about what the price of a thirty minute cab ride would cost.

“It takes about ten minutes to get there, if we hit the lights right,” he said as he pulled away from the curb.

For a few minutes, as we made our way out of the airport complex, the cab remained silent, or should I say, I remained silent. He muttered under his breath as he drove. We slid along the streets; the drizzle outside of the car had become a more constant rain, and he seemed much more confident in his driving skills than I did. When we got to the motorway, he tried to merge into a lane with a line of three cars. They didn’t let him in, and he was forced to cut back on the gas and allow them to pass before he changed lanes.

Once we were “safely” in the other lane, he said very audibly, “He should have known what I was doing!”

Again I remained silent. I didn’t know what he was doing.

“So I bet you are glad to be getting out of here.”

Now the pleasant old man wanted to make conversation (great), so I answered truthfully. “Dublin? Yes.”

“So are you flying out tomorrow?”

“No, I’m taking a train to Limerick and then a bus to Shannon, and then I fly out on Friday.”

“That sounds like an excessive amount of travel.”

“I’ve done it before; it isn’t that bad. The plan sounds complicated, but it isn’t. It’s also a great way to see some of the Irish countryside.”

“I wouldn’t go to all of that trouble.”

Silence.

“Did you know that February has the highest suicide rate of any month?”

“I think I’ve heard that before.”

“Well, with this weather I think that every month’s rate is higher. The weather and the economy.”

“My professor said that it was the wettest summer in recorded history.”

A pause.

“Now, I’m not suicidal or anything like that. I have a wife, a family, and grandkids.”

And I totally believe you.

“You would never want to live here, would you,” he said.

It wasn’t really a question, but I answered. I should have lied, but I didn’t. “Actually I would. Not here,” (Dublin), “but in Cork. I studied abroad down there over the month of July. I really like it.”

Another pause.

“Well, that’s because it’s a novelty to you.”

What was I supposed to say to that? He had already decided that I was just a spoiled little American girl whose mommy and daddy had paid for her to come to Ireland.

Silence.

We said nothing of importance for the rest of the ride. I got out my wallet and pulled out a twenty euro note, ready to escape the gloom that hung in the cab as soon as I could. We pulled up to the curb in front of the hotel. The red lights of the fare meter read something around the thirteen or fourteen euro mark. I handed him the twenty and said, “You can just give me a five back.” Obviously, I was that spoiled American girl if I didn’t need all of my change, but I was so desperate to get away that I didn’t care what he thought. He got my bag out of the back of the trunk and handed me a five, got back in the cab and drove away into the foggy night. There was now only a slight mist of rain, but I didn’t feel it. I was still trying to process what had happened.

I then went into the hotel, and the woman at the front desk began to check me in, or should I say, the man and the woman at the desk checked me in. He was in training, and I stood there for five minutes as they went through the process. I was tired and ready for a bed, so I listened to her directions about food and checkout times with only half my attention. The rest of me had already checked out. I got my key and made it to my room and let go of my bag and crawled on my bed.

I cried.

My body literally shook with sadness, anger, and terror, and for the first time on the trip, I was homesick. “Home” meaning small town Iowa, where there wasn’t the chance of adventure at every turn, where I couldn’t go out with my friends to a pub every night, and where I would have to finally accept that the best summer of my life was over. Once again the world had proven me right and prepared me for what I was about to do.

The next two days I still felt a sort of sadness about leaving, but it was nowhere near the desire that I felt to be going home. I was surrounded with reminders of this change within me. The rain was no longer just a friendly nuisance; it chilled me to the bone and weighed down my every step. The people on the street were no longer interesting spectacles—they were strangers and nothing more. And just like my plane ticket said, on August 2nd, I was on my way home.

CONOR KELLEY

Bears

*As Kurt Vonnegut wrote: "All this happened, more or less."
This story is for Susanne and Bo.*

Did y'all need anything?" Kim asked, in her southern drawl, as she poked her big, fat head into our office.

The three of us looked up at her from our rolling chairs clustered in the center of the room. I tried to give her my most genuine smile. Kim, the office secretary, was a round, pink woman. I'd describe her as hefty. She had glasses and a couple chins. She wore lots of scarves and shawls. She looked like the Midwestern Housewife Potato Head.

"No, no, we're just fine," Bo said. "Thank you."

"Well awlright. Now Jackie's gone today, so y'all just let *me* know if you have any needs. Or questions. Okay?"

"Sounds good!" I said, too enthusiastically.

"Oh, bless your hearts," she said with something like a smile and walked out.

"Buh-bye," Susanne said after her.

The three of us looked at each other. Susanne quickly put a finger to her lips. She pointed at me and pointed to the open door. Then she pointed two fingers at her eyes and pointed those two fingers toward the hallway. I nodded and crept to the doorway. After taking a deep breath, I peeked my head out and looked up and down the hall. Clear.

"Ahhhh my God she's so creepy," I said to them as I sat down again in my chair.

"I wonder how much of that she heard..." Bo said.

"You know, that 'bless your hearts' thing..." Susanne said.

"...her and Jackie are like a two-headed monster..."

"...that 'bless your hearts' thing is, like, the southern way of saying 'fuck you.'"

"Really?!" Bo and I asked.

"Yeah!"

"Remember that party we had to celebrate her twenty years with the company?" Bo said. "I almost felt bad for her, twenty years and no promotion. Every couple years, watching a new idiot like Jackie become her boss. I almost felt bad for her; I almost did!"

"Yeah," I said loudly, getting excited now. "She gave me a creepy look last Thursday, and I almost shit my pants!"

Susanne and Bo looked at me silently. Susanne shook her head. Bo chuckled.

"Okay, so what were you guys gonna tell me?" I asked.

"Let's start here, Casey—how much do you know?" Bo asked.

I waved my hands in front of my face and made a motorboat-ing sound. "I know nothing. Zero things. I'm a blank slate."

"And that's how we like you," Bo said with a laugh.

"K, so you know how Jackie's gone today?" Susanne said. "It's because her husband..." she looked around and leaned forward, "*her husband is dead.*"

"No," I said quietly.

"Oh yes," Bo said.

"*He was found dead this morning,*" Susanne whispered.

I was silent for a few seconds. They studied my expression.

"How?"

"*Poisoned.*"

"No."

"Ohhhh yes," Bo said.

"So," Susanne started, "I'm not sure how much you know about Jackie...how much do you know about Jackie? Right, blank slate. Okay, so Jackie and her husband have been separated for a while. They just started the divorce process. Now, you know how crazy Jackie is around the office."

Jackie, our boss in the proofreading division of our textbook company, was an honest-to-god sociopath. She felt threatened by everybody in the office, so she tried to take credit for other people's work and turn people against each other. She used to bring baked goods in for everybody, but kept them in her office so she could corner one of us in a weakened state of hunger. What exactly would have happened in there is a mystery, but nobody tried.

Jackie dressed her three kids up in costumes for a month be-

fore and after Halloween. We pitied her kids. They were mostly silent and looked at their shoes a lot. Her oldest, Damien, looked just like her husband. We all felt bad for Damien. He was a sweet kid, too.

"So, apparently Jackie hasn't been letting her husband see the kids since he moved out. I feel so bad for those kids. Especially the one that looks like him. God, the one that looks like him!"

Susanne tipped her coffee cup all the way back, then took it away from her lips and shook it.

"Wanna go down to the café?" she asked me. "I'll buy you a coffee."

As we walked down the stairs to the café, I couldn't speak. The month I had been interning there, I thought I had a crazy boss. Like, crazy with only a dash of dangerous.

For instance, the previous week Jackie had gone on a low-cut shirt craze. Now, Jackie was an attractive woman. She was tall with long legs, blondish/brownish hair, dirty blonde, if people say that. But you know the saying among guys: 'You don't stick your dick in crazy.' I'm sure there's a saying like that among women.

Anyway, one day she dressed like she was giving a seminar on the power of boobs. And she was just bending over for everything, trying to catch somebody looking—really inappropriate stuff. So, on a little whiteboard in our office we wrote "BEARS." 'Bears' was our code word for boobs, because you can't write BOOBS on a whiteboard in your office, and because direct eye contact with either boobs or bears is dangerous.

That afternoon, we were all working, heads down, door open, when a voice behind me asked me about the whiteboard.

"Well, bears..." I swiveled in my chair and started to say, and found myself staring directly into Jackie's cleavage. Couldn't have been six inches away.

"BEARS!" Bo yelled when he saw.

"Bears?" Jackie asked me with a cruel smile.

"Yeah," I said to Jackie's shoes as I felt my face get hot. "Bears. Are. Aggressive? And...rrr...ruthless animals who, ah...quickly...move in for the kill, which is. Something. We...strive to be? But with spelling mistakes."

I looked up at Jackie's face. She seemed pleased.

"Is that so?" she asked.

"It's like a motivational thing," I said.

"Hmm," she said. "I think I like bears."

Jackie turned and walked out.

Bo put his head in his hands.

"*She's got the fucking place bugged,*" Susanne whispered.

Now, I don't know what you call that. Not sexual harassment, but something.

But this was more serious than anything else she had done. This was murder. It usually doesn't get more serious than murder.

"Remember our code word BEARS?" Susanne asked as we reached the counter. To the barista: "Two coffees, medium, black, room for creamer."

"Yeah, actually I was just thinking about that."

"You were just thinking about boobs, huh?"

"I was thinking about the whole situation, not just boobs, thank you very much."

"Okay, so remember how well you executed that secret BEARS mission?"

"...I mean, I was thinking about boobs a little bit."

"Focus. Okay, this situation needs, like, three times the effort you showed with the BEARS mission. Four times more. Because there's more...thank you, no, no, keep the change, thanks...because there's more to this situation."

We took our conversation to the creamer station, and as I poured skim milk and hazelnut creamer, I asked, "How much more?"

"We're talkin' motives here."

I looked around. "You mean, beyond custody?"

"Those supervisor evaluation forms we trashed her on? *Her* bosses set up a meeting with her about them. Looks like she's gonna get canned. But if she's bereaved..."

"Sympathy."

"Exactly."

We were almost to the top of the stairs by now.

"None of this gets talked about in the office, though. Too much risk. Especially with Kim lurking around. Kim's just as dangerous as Jackie. Plus, she's been here for about a century. She knows all the secrets around here."

"Yeah, what's her deal today?" I asked.

"Um, she's the devil, Casey. Try to keep up."

We all got an email later that day saying Jackie would be gone the rest of the week. We looked at each other wide eyed, then put away our work and began a discussion of grunge music that took us right up to closing time. Susanne was in love with Eddie Vedder.

The next day, we took a two-hour lunch at a little sub sandwich shop down the street and discussed all the possible outcomes. The most obvious one was that Jackie would be convicted, sent

away, her children put up for adoption. We agreed that would be in everybody's best interest. We talked about plea bargains, witnesses, all sorts of things we had seen cops discuss on TV shows.

The three of us finished our food pretty quickly. It was a good place, down on Main Street...what's the name, ah, they might be closed now. Anyway, so we're sitting there with balled-up napkins and wax paper in front of us. Bo slurped the ice at the bottom of his Styrofoam cup and solemnly said:

"What if she gets away with it?"

Susanne and I looked at each other, then at Bo.

"Bo, come on," I said. "She'll get caught. She's got all the motive in the world, and she's a nut. The cops will see all that."

"That's not enough, though. What if she planned it outright or didn't leave a shred of evidence? I bet she had Kim help her, like some twisted little assistant, like her fat little Igor. Now think about how crazy Jackie is already. Now picture that same psychopath with the added confidence of GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER."

He said it with a little smirk on his face. It was all a little too unbelievable for us to take seriously.

Still, though, my sandwich wasn't settling well.

When we arrived back at the office, the lights were a little dimmed. It was quieter, like some people went home early. The reception desk was empty. I could hear Kim's voice, though.

Giving Susanne and Bo the five-finger stop sign, I followed the voice. It was coming from Jackie's office.

"Yes, of course I'll tell 'em, honey," she said. "What's that now? Your *fingerprints*?...uh huh....my word...An extended leave of absence?...Uh huh...uh huh?...well, he sounds like a good lawyer...of course, of course...God bless your little heart. Bye now."

As I heard the phone cradled, I crept a little closer and peered around the corner. There were cardboard boxes lined up just outside the office. I bent down to take a better look. Poking out of one of the boxes were sheets of paper and the nameplate from the office door:

MANAGER OF PROOFREADING DIVISION

JACKIE HENDERSON

I looked up and craned my head to read the frame on the opened door. The piece of paper, in neat handwriting, read:

INTERIM MANAGER OF PROOFREADING DIVISION

KIM LIND

And there in the office was Kim, reclined in Jackie's chair with her feet crossed on the desk, holding a folded newspaper open to the crossword puzzle with her fat fingers tapping a pencil

to her chin. She looked like she had moved in.

The next week, a professionally printed plaque replaced that paper.

A couple weeks later, I hugged Susanne and Bo, and they wished me good luck at my next job and told me to stay in touch, and they meant it.

On my way out, I stopped by Kim's office to say goodbye. Kim had baked chocolate chip cookies for my last day and made me take one as I left. When I walked out the door, I dropped the cookie in the garbage. I hoped the next city wouldn't be full of bears, too.

BEATRICE SCHARES



Butterfly Woman
ink on paper

ALICE KLINKHAMMER

Your Words

For Andrea Gibson

You speak truths.

Your words resonate to my core.
They vibrate through my skin like
an earthquake, shaking the
ground I stand on in
my bones,
creating ripples
in my soul.

You rhyme like it's a
lifeline. Like every word is a
pulse, like every note
that matches one you wrote
is a spike on the EKG.

You connotate like
a politician. Calculated, you
break,
giving meaning
that fills me with
laughter, then you
break
me with your
words when you
set me straight.

Your words turn sharp.
Like a long-needed medicine,
they pierce my veins
like an IV and seep
into my blood, pumping
into my heart, becoming
part of me.

Your words are
power flowing from
your lips with such

intensity my vision
tunnels around you.

You are haloed, like
an angel of the
unholy
that you fight for,
screaming the unspoken—
the evils that dwell
inside of us all,
silently.

GARY ARMS

The Rev. Clinton Arms

He taught that inspiration quietly comes,
As like as not when one is twiddling thumbs
Or preaching, as he was one summer's day.
Above their drowsy heads, it made its way.

A happy whim of God's, a butterfly,
Flew in the window, flew past Mr. Fry,
But paused at Mrs. Johnson's flowered hat.
Frustrated there, it spread each wing out flat

And sailed until it landed on his hand.
Transported from his thought, he started, "And —,"
And lost his place completely. "And, I say —."
The placid, gorgeous fan began to sway

Across his wrist and perched upon his watch.
"And, and —," he said, and then commanded, "Watch!"
And watch his wakened congregation did
As my grandfather, smiling like a kid,

To the open window strolled and, bending, blew
Till, spreading out its dappled wings, it flew
As if transported by the breath of God.

COURTNEY HICKSON

The Resting Place

This once tall and proud barn was someone's legacy, the heart of a family, but it has sunken into a pile of dirt and rubble, forced to withstand the elements and time. Boards that are no longer supported lean on each other in a colossal, heaping pile of debris. Only scattered nails, rotting wood, and other useless habiliments remain, but when looking more closely, a story unfolds.

I spent almost ninety percent of my childhood in this barn. I woke up every morning to see it standing tall and crimson against the cerulean sky. The cows had to be milked twice a day, and I remember my dad walking me down to the barn. I also remember that he was working a Fu Manchu mustache and a mullet at the time. I wore his boots so I didn't ruin my shoes. The suction in the mud would always pull them off, and I would find myself barefoot. After we finally got to the barn, my dad set me in the bulk tank room where a screen door barely hung on its hinges. I can still feel my stomach churning and then rising to my throat with fear as the cows ran up to the barn. This is my first memory.

After the cows were rounded up, my dad hooked them in their stanchions, got them some grain, and led me into the barn. He set me on the old concrete countertop next to the ancient radio where I sang along to country tunes. I sang (or screamed) at the top of my lungs with everything I had. Dad was always kind of annoyed by it, but he smiled and kept up with his work anyway. After all the cows were milked, he sprayed the floor of the barn with the garden hose.

We made our way, passing by the "James Hickson and Sons" sign, back up to the house, where my grandma and my cousin,

Caitie were waiting for me. I had no interest in breakfast or even the books my grandma wanted to read to us. We played a couple of rounds of hide-and-seek, and then made our way to the barn. We stayed on the upper level this time, not where the cows were milked. You had to climb a short rock wall to get up to the door that was held shut by a bent nail. Every time we made that climb, we opened the door to find a new adventure.

The ceiling was high in the barn, and rafters ran from the ground up. A ladder was nailed to one rafter, up to the crossbeam. We searched through the huge mass of things on the floor. Among a gun, unopened coke bottles, a weight set, baseball cards, and a million old books, we found some ropes. We tied them to the rafters and tried to swing from them like Tarzan. After failing the attempt to swing from the ropes, we settled on the baseball cards which were very old and belonged to my older cousin, Stevie, but we were not worried enough about how much trouble we were about to cause. We took each one out of its slot in the book and slid them through the cracks in the floor. The floor of this room is the ceiling of the milking room, and when my dad found the cards, I thought his head would explode!

We got bored with this, so we moved to the corncrib, which was just south of the big milking barn. The boards on this barn were about two inches wide and placed about two inches apart. We had never been on the second story, and it was screaming with new adventures. The only problem was that the stairs had begun to fall and were only attached on one side. We knew better than to climb the dangerous stairs, so we climbed the wall. When I reached the floor, as if that wasn't stupid enough, I held the stairs up while Caitie climbed them. We were busy playing when my aunt pulled up the driveway, caught sight of us, and scolded us for our stupidity.

We returned to the ground level, promising to never do it again. This level of the barn had a little section in the wall where there was a rectangular hole, and that day, the hole was a drive-thru window. We prepared salads from the leaves of underdeveloped cocklebur plants, and we made pies out of cow manure with red mineral sprinkles. Our only customers were the horses, who never really cared for dessert.

The next day, the process would repeat, but instead of the baseball cards, we'd dig up an old bike, a dresser full of pictures, or maybe just a bag of rain-hardened cement. The corncrib was a grocery store or a house. The possibilities were endless. But today, everything has changed.

The greatness and pride of the barn is long gone, and now that I have had a taste of how easy it is to lose your roots, I know

how sad that really is. There is no room for miniscule dairy farms anymore. The dampness invading the wood can be felt, just by glancing at it. A long metal pole distends out across the barn like a sword, its final deterrence against the cruel world. Behind the blade, two of the sun-bleached walls have caved in, broken off at the point where the stone foundation begins. One, to the north, still stands, but the fourth has crumbled to the ground. The bottom fourth of the walls, wearing the colors of burnt orange and pink from years and years of rain, make up the limestone foundation. They tumble away from the building like crumbs from bread, leaving rocks, nails and soggy, decaying drywall all over the ground. Newspapers and wallpaper cover each of the windows lining the wall. One window in particular steals the show because of its teal, floral print, and another because of the ad from a time when flour only cost thirty-five cents. It all looks so decrepit. Weeds and trees penetrate the foundation, floors, and walls, and green appears to force its way into the faded red barn like a long, fierce battle. The barn's defense grows tired and weak. The foliage takes over.

Under years of an accumulation of hay and grains lie many objects that meant the world to someone. A tiny, pink shoe rests where a door once stood. A bike retires under the dirt and dust, just barely visible. Glass bottles, a weight set, coolers, books (so many books) and a million other things camp inside this dilapidated building. Rats and mice chewed the books to pieces. The weight set has no weights. The coolers can't keep things cool, and the glass bottles are shattered all around. The roof fell in; the shingles melted off onto the ground. Only one wall remains in its post, exposing all of the contents to the elements. It shows. Not a thing here can be salvaged, except for maybe the collection of baseball cards stuffed in an old dresser.

The floor decays more every day. Holes all around lie in wait to swallow whoever or whatever dares to come by. Bright sunlight passes through where the roof should be and down into the holes, revealing the lower level.

The main room of the lower section of the barn lies in ruins where an old milking apparatus remains, untouched for years. Inside, the stanchions rusted themselves shut, and manure fills the gutter all the way to the top. An ancient radio sits on a makeshift concrete countertop near the door. It is torn into a million pieces like some crazy, mechanical puzzle. That was my radio. Faint musty smells waft from the huge silver bulk tank but become almost completely overpowered by the stench of dust. No word can describe the smell, and I wouldn't have taken it for granted had I known this would be the last time I would ever smell it.

As the sun fades, so does the unique aroma it magnified. Everything darkens slowly like a dying flame. The figures and shadows in the barn morph into creatures of the night, reaching out for prey. All the colors fade into a million shades of grey, almost as if everything is beginning to disappear.

The boards and beams of the barn begin to mesh into one solid heap of black and grey. Dew starts to shimmer on the long grass as well as on the stone foundation of the barn. The wetness changes the discolored stones to a brilliant, dark pink, and seeps into the drywall, making it swell. A gust of wind causes everything to groan in pain.

A final sliver of light shines on the lonely, pink shoe, adding to the pathetic appearance of this place. The objects in the barn disappear into the night as if hiding will take away the pain of being forgotten by the world.

To the east of the barn grows a huge patch of thick, dense grass. Nibbling on the blades is a small, shiny, brown horse. Her jet-black mane and tail flow gracefully in the wind like a proud flag perched high on a pole. She appears as though she eats out of boredom rather than hunger. A sudden BANG! frightens the horse. A burst of wind breaks a board, sending it crashing to the ground right at the horse's hooves. She darts off like an animal one-tenth her size trying to find safety.

Clouds start moving in as the winds begin to pick up speed. The barn moans in agony at this unwanted guest. The serenity of the night disappears, as do the stars, which are now hidden by thick, angry storm clouds. A loud crack of thunder makes the whole barn tremble in fear of being destroyed. The final remaining wall catches the wind, protecting everything left inside. Minutes go by, the wall still waves in the wind, fighting harder than ever to stay up. It has grown weary, and the wind has only grown stronger. The wall gives in. CRRRACK! The wood breaks in the middle, and the top half of the remaining wall crashes into the floor. Dust puffs out from under the wall like smoke from a rocket. The wind swoops through the dust and whips it in circles around the barn, taunting it with its victory. The cruel world has finally won.

The wind begins to calm as a steady rain sets in on the farm. The dust settles onto the soaking grass as the barn begins to settle in on itself. For the first time, the barn rests. Exhaustion sets in, and the strong walls begin to bow, letting gravity do its worst. Defeat.

The sun returns the next morning, as it always does, oblivious to the battlefield it is about to shine upon. Nothing but the silo remains standing, and part of the barn leans into it, almost

thanking it for its protection over the years. Everything lies in ruins. Everything fell into the lower section of the barn, which sits partially underground like a basement, like a grave. This is it. This is how it all ends.

Men come to clean up the mess, and they begin to inundate the barn with dirt, burying it, laying it to rest. Although this is the end, the barn no longer looks sad or decrepit. It looks almost artistic. Peaceful. The process takes days, but after it's all over, the silo stands like a tombstone at the end of a freshly dug grave. A little white and orange sign marks who lies at rest under the dirt. Not only did the barn cease to exist that night, but so did the birthright of a family. The tombstone is marked "James Hickson and Sons." After the grass grows back, no one will have any inkling of what used to stand next to the silo. People cannot see that someone's soul was laid to rest right under their feet. They'll see the sign, the tombstone, and wonder what it means, but no one will ever understand.

FAITH BRITT



Paper Protein Model
photographed paper sculpture with digital manipulation

SARAH LENSEN

one drop

she has three eye lashes.
there's more.
just too much black on the brush.

and it's not accidental.

she's the child of
Him needing to wear an Armani to trim what's Green
and
Her watching zoila scrub caked China.

born a product,
she was bred like a Brand.
Planned, Designed,
and it's not accidental.

her tiny feet at a young age
held timid reflections in the Gold, Marble-Trimmed Floors.

wonders collide from the outside, too worn out to understand.
how can such a tall house
stand
on delicately crumbled foundation
that's only covered with
Silk Rugs
and
Cashmere,
layered on Rouge and clouds of fermented Fragrance.

three eye lashes, though layered under inches of the blackest-black
manipulated and stiffened like starched cotton,
have capabilities of
snapping
like
twigs & spider legs.

from the sky or within, one drop of water
ruins
her Foundation. her Face.

then behind those closed Gold-Trimmed Doors,
her being crumbles as fast as they say
it's not accidental.

BRETT FOSTER

The World was all before them, where to choose

Wow, these October elegies, the days
abundant with showers. Sunken-garden crowds
applaud our union, usher in an era
when gift-bearing cousins offer lingerie.
It shapes your worry even as ring-quilts
veil your adolescence, dignified fadeaway.
Are we bored? Sacrifice is always felt
before joy. Look, your bedroom—an empty town.

I, too, dread the aphasia of the heart:
all the old feelings bodiless, our fears
wearing their jesters' caps. Who has withstood
the urge to covet these rooms of childhood?
Cobwebs on their familiar armor,
sentinels wait patiently at the door.

BRETT FOSTER

Diagnosis, Masonicare

Depression? Post-traumatic stress? That's all
they call it now?

All I know is what I hear—
there's a pack of wild dogs behind that wall.

And don't you tell me what you think
I want to hear.

You have your theories
and throwaways. So shovel it elsewhere, shrink.

TESSA CRIST



Joy Cometh in the Morning
oil on canvas

KAYLA SCHNOEBELEN

Part-Time Nanny

No” is what she says when I ask her to help clean up the toys. The toys she recently finished throwing on the floor, one at a time with decisive precision. The toys left splayed across the carpet and, sometimes, tossed under coffee tables lying just out of my reach. The toys I often discover after I step on or trip over them. The toys plucked from sore and tender muscles in my feet, back, arms, and, most often, the soft tissue of my butt.

“No” is what she says when I say it is nap time. Nap time, which is always preceded by me chasing her around the house first. Nap time, when I’m badgered with “Rella, Rella!” until I place the Disney DVD in the player. Nap time, when I’m subjected to rocking her to the beat while I sing along to the film. Nap time, when she sneaks out of her crib and plays with her toys. Nap time, when she wakes me up from my unplanned nap.

“No” is what she says when I ask if she has to potty. Potty is what she does in her crib, in my lap, in her chair, in her pants, in her skirts, in her underwear, but rarely in her toilet. Potty is what she does in her room, on her jungle gym, at the goat’s pen, but mostly on the bathroom floor. Potty is what we both prefer over the poopies. Poopies end up on the floor, on the outside of the toilet, on her feet and hands, in my hair, and on me. Poopies make us both say, “Yuck.”

“No” is what she says when I ask her to eat her dinner. The nutritionally-balanced dinner that was so carefully portioned out by her mother and me. The dinner mashed and stirred and mixed into a mound in the plastic dish. The dinner picked and prodded at, but rarely consumed. The dinner splatted upon the floor and

quickly lapped up by one or two hungry dogs waiting at her feet. The dinner flecked through my hair and hers.

“No” is what she says when her mother asks her to say goodbye to me. Goodbye, when tears and screams or giggles and smiles can happen. Goodbye, when she runs full speed to my waiting arms and knocks me to the floor. Goodbye, when my cheeks and lips will glisten from wet and sticky kisses from her. Goodbye, when her whole body waves me away. Goodbye, when she says, “Buh-bye, Kee-wa.”

“Yes” is what I say when asked if I love her. I love her even though she treats my body like a jungle gym or trampoline, depending on her mood. I love her even though she thinks I live for drawing cats, dogs, stars, suns, moons, trees, flowers, and balloons repeatedly in her sketch pad. I love her even though she kicks and screams at me when I turn off *Sprout*. I love her even though she prefers Cinderella over Belle. I love her even though I barely know her. I love her even though she’s not mine.

PATRICK LENANE

War

War.

Just a word.
One that youth can twist.
One that children can play at home.

I sit inside with only
my memories as company
and watch from this
constricting chair.

Ancient battles of glinting steel blades
and sturdy crested shields
imitated
by limp foam pool noodles
and plastic bucket lids.

Frontier wars on the plains
between settlers and natives
played out
with the plastic rifles and bows
purchased by their parents.

Machine guns and grenades
fill the air with their screams.
Fox holes and barricades
become useless
as the bombs drop.

The children run and laugh
with patchy grass stains
in place
of bloody wounds.

The suburban streets
and winding yards transformed
to hills and valleys littered
with the bodies of fallen friends
like cut wheat in a silent field.

The game is over.
All are victorious.
Now they simply drink
lemonade and return to reality.
This is their vision of the world.

I pray for their safety,
though it is futile.
If this is their childhood,
what hope do they have?

ELYSE SCHULER-CRUZ

On the Death of Florence Green

Last surviving veteran of World War I

Tonight I drink for Florence,
whether I am alone or with those
who know her story, its tenor
and themes, its bittersweet images
of gears and steam and laboring machines.

Tonight I drink for Florence and
the story of the girl she once was and
the infant world that sparred so viciously
against the eras and dynasties that gave it life,
hurling fists with a force it could not comprehend.

Tonight, when I drink for Florence,
I drink for finality.
Though I don't drink to forget,
I will place a period and put
this period of suffering away to rest.

And when I drink for Florence,
I drink for me. I drink for us, for youth,
for nativity. I drink for fond,
erroneous memories. I drink for
the "good ol' days" that were so good, weren't they?

Tonight I drink for Florence
with silent self-awareness and
a nod to similarity. She knows as well
as I do. She knows and will not say.
One of these nights, they'll raise a glass for me.

WILL KELLY



Living Room, Andrew, IA, 2012
photograph

JESS LEONARD SCHENK

Mexico

Draw the curtains.

"It was dark back then. Right when the open burns started, I mean." Dannigan scratches at the scraggly hair on his chin and peers at Yvonne from across the table.

"Yeah, but what was it like?" Yvonne is impatient. She keeps flipping a card, the three of clubs, between her fingers. Dannigan thinks that if she sped it up just a little, it would sound like an airplane propeller when it starts to move. *Thhhhhhhfffffp.*

"There's not a whole lot more to say, kid. Right before the open burns, during the change-over, you saw a lot of weird shit. Weird headlines, mostly. 'Hi, neighbor!' and 'Area church welcomes you,' that kind of stuff. They weren't weird all by themselves. They were weird because they were so different than everything that was coming out before. It was enough to make your skin crawl." Dannigan hopes that'll be enough to keep her satisfied for a while, but of course she wants to hear more, know more. Some days, he swears she wants to crawl inside his head and watch it all playing on the backs of his eyes like a movie. But hey, if he doesn't have to watch it himself...

Yvonne yawns, her jaw cracking loudly. She twirls a strand of dirty hair around her finger. Dannigan hopes that means she'll fall asleep soon and leave him alone. He has guns to clean. Besides, she shouldn't even be awake right now. It's not even her shift.

Outside, the old cypress tree adjusts itself, stretching out its branches hung with broken necklaces and old clothing. Shoes, mostly. Dannigan wonders how in the hell so many pairs of shoes got up in that tree. He thinks it's like a tribe of shoe-people came

stomping through here one night and left their clothes behind in the morning when they left. *Except that there were no shoe people*, he reminds himself. *Just a growing-old man sitting here telling stories to himself to pass the time.*

It was different when Desiree was still hanging around, before she left to go off to God-knows-where. He hopes she's doing well, but he can't help but hate her a little bit sometimes for not saying goodbye. When the hate comes on, it's strong like dark coffee boiled over a low fire, and he wishes all sorts of horrible things on her. Desiree laying at the bottom of a pit with her legs broken. Desiree hanged from a tree. Desiree falling on her own metaphorical sword.

Dannigan sat by himself in that house for a long time before Yvonne came along. Poor kid was delirious, running a fever of a hundred and three and barely able to speak. He took her in, patched her up. Now, as much as he likes to pretend she's a pain in the ass—and truthfully, she is often a pain in his ass—she's his. He bundled her up like a stray kitten and made sure she had everything she needed. It's nice to be able to sleep sometimes, too, though most of the time it's not good sleep.

He hates it when Yvonne asks what it was like before the open burns because he has a hard time remembering how it started. When there's no clear starting or ending point, the chronology gets a little bit fucked up and, well, he's just too old to get creative and cute with it anymore. If he thinks hard enough, Dannigan can be pretty sure that it started the day the teenage girl died in that horrible accident. It was either a car crash, back when people still drove cars, or something with farming equipment, before all the fields were dark and blistered. At any rate, the world had already ended, had already been dead for a couple of weeks, but the people in this part of the country didn't care until things got personal. Once that happened, there was no going back. *In a lot of ways, he thinks, it was like an orgasm or the killing blow. You can try your damndest, but most of the time you can't pull yourself back from the brink.*

About a week later, the newspapers started to change, and there weren't as many people on the streets. *But nobody really paid attention to any of that because you can count on that sort of weirdness once a decade or so, anyway.* Dannigan's doing it again, putting the pieces together in some kind of logical order, trying to reason with himself.

Ah, hell, he thinks, resting his head against a rotting wooden beam. *Too old to remember what happened.* But he knows that's just a cop-out, like when something hurts or embarrasses Yvonne and, instead of facing it, dealing with it, she'll say "I'm tired." The

first time she did it, Dannigan had asked her a question, and she'd stumbled over her words for a moment. It wasn't a big deal, just a momentary lapse. *I'm tired. Wow, I'm tired.* When he said she could lie down for a little bit, really, it was okay, she shook her head and went about her business. But for the rest of the day, he'd watched her get lost in thought for a minute or two, then hang her head and mutter those two maddening words: *I'm tired.* It took him awhile to figure out what it meant before he started to notice a pattern.

Like when the open burns first started. It wasn't just the newspaper headlines that tipped him off, other things did, too. These made it seem like the whole world had been knocked slightly off-kilter. The dead girl's funeral was pretty weird all by itself, even if you ignored everything else that was going on at the time. Dannigan had gone to the funeral home a couple of hours before her wake to deliver a wreath and had seen the shrouded mirrors, the body stretched out on a table and covered with a plain white sheet instead of in its coffin, where it belonged. The candles and the smoke and the thunderstorm outside. Rain came in through the open windows and soaked the dead girl's body. For five days, this went on, until everyone either got tired of it and left or decided that five days was long enough.

He didn't start to put the pieces together until much later, like with Yvonne and "I'm-Tired."

Stop all clocks.

There had been an article in the paper several weeks before the teenager died, something about civil unrest in a faraway city to the east. Nobody paid much attention to it; it was much too far away from their safe little nest to even bother worrying about. The mayor, a man who favored a worn tailcoat, stood on a stage in the center of town and addressed the crowd on a windy afternoon.

Dannigan thought he looked awfully familiar, but he couldn't place where he'd seen the man before. A red balloon floated against the grey sky before tangling itself in a power line and bursting. No one seemed to notice.

"Things are going to be wonderful," the man said. "Pay no attention to the news from other towns; all resistance has been successfully suppressed, and the General is firmly in control of this fine nation and its fine people. The world is safe again." And for a while, nothing seemed to change. News of the trouble spreading to a neighboring city began to wind its way through the town, but few people paid attention to it. There were minor disturbances;

a few blocks on the north end experienced minor power surges over the next few days, and some homes lost power altogether. But most people, knowing that the north end was where the *poor* people lived, simply assumed they'd forgotten to pay the electric bill again.

The next day, the north end was a dead zone from Melrose Avenue down to Mansford Street, and the loss of power began to creep slowly uptown. The man in the tailcoat returned to the makeshift stage in the center of town and told the people not to worry. A momentary lapse, but certainly no cause for any real concern. That night, six storefronts in the area between the north end and "uptown" were boarded up and abandoned by their owners. A pack of boys wandered through the midtown with two-by-fours, smashing in car windows and terrorizing stray animals.

Dannigan had lived on the north end of town his entire life, in a small shotgun-style house near the docks. The people there stayed inside all day after the loss of power, but by night, they poured into the streets, human scabs dressed in black and gray and brown. They stole from their neighbors and threw good-intentioned gawkers from uptown into the murky waters of the nearby river.

Before it happened, he and Desiree had taken a certain pleasure in looking through outdated travel brochures from the rest stop where she worked. One day, they agreed, they would go down to Tijuana and laze in the sun and eat tequila worms all day. Desiree said the first thing she wanted to do was see a donkey show, and Dannigan had laughed, explaining that it wasn't anything like the circuses she had been to as a child. In the early days, Desiree could still smile.

On the seventh evening after the grid failure, a pack of boys rediscovered fire and incinerated a tall stack of newspapers and assorted Tupperware (gathered from the offerings of the uptown citizens) in the streets: the first open burn. One boy, the biggest one, had slit his palm with a rusted tack and poured a bit of blood into the fire—not enough to complete any misguided ritual or do any permanent damage to his own body, but enough to prove to the others that he was, indeed, swinging the biggest stick. They threw batteries and soda cans and anything else they could find into the flames, and though city ordinance prohibited any sort of ruckus past ten o'clock, no policemen came.

Uptown, Dannigan heard, was not much better. There wasn't the wholesale chaos of the north end, but the newspapers were slowly going to hell. Most of the staff lived on the north end and hadn't been to work in over a week. In their absence, common uptown rabble drifted into the newspaper headquarters and began

to print word-salad bulletins and leave them on street corners, in vacant convenience store bathrooms and shopping malls: "Area church welcomes you!" and "Why no one shakes hands anymore."

The national government had fallen curiously silent. There were whispers on the streets that the man in the tailcoat had been seized and burned alive by north end thugs, and the rest of the local authorities were too frightened to leave the relative comfort and safety of their homes. Out of their silence, family members of the teenager who had died in the car accident formed their own version of government, cobbled together from various religious texts, children's storybooks, and their own rudimentary understanding of government. They called themselves the Church of Amy, after the dead girl, and they absorbed the packs of boys that roamed the streets at night.

The open burns continued to spread. On the rare days when there were no burns, the entire city loomed dark and expressionless below a thick layer of piss-colored clouds. Desiree stopped leaving the house. She hung pots and pans around the outside of their house, claiming that they'd make noise and wake her up if anyone came too close in the night. After a while, Dannigan stopped leaving the house, too.

Meanwhile, people continued to vanish, as if snatched from their own homes in the middle of the night. There were more rumors, ones that suggested that the man in the tailcoat had either become a part of the Church or that the Church had arranged his disappearance because he was to blame for Amy's death, that it was all a big conspiracy and that the failure of the grid was part of the reason she died. The more likely explanation, Dannigan thought, was that he'd just left town before things really went to hell.

On the eighteenth day, when the entire city had fallen dark, Desiree had packed her bags and left in the middle of the night. She took most of her jewelry, half their food, and all but one gun. When Dannigan awoke in the cold grey hours of the early morning, the bed beside him was bare and cold. He howled into the thin air until he realized it wasn't going to bring her back. Then, ashamed, he had slunk back into the remains of their house.

Allow three to four days for distant relatives to arrive.

Yvonne has awoken and wandered through the bombed-out shell of the house, calling for Dannigan. When she gets close enough, he grabs her by the forearms and scolds her for making too much noise. Her chin wobbles, and she mumbles, "I'm tired," and in that moment, she looks so much like a lost five-year-old

that Dannigan hates-her-hates-her-hates-her. Then, he sends her back to bed, drinks the rest of a beer he found resting inside a blown tire the other day, and resigns himself to staring into the distance.

Quiet night. No rabble. No burning in the street, which is a rarity. Most of the city's population either left or died within the first few weeks, but still, he watches. Even the Church hasn't been much of a problem, and this makes Dannigan feel weary. The old calendar he'd kept for so long no longer makes any sense, and the thickening scruff on his chin is the only way he can tell one day from the next.

Weak, Dannigan thinks. *Clinging to something, anything, because they don't know how to live on their own.* But he can't blame them, not really, because he knows he would do the exact same thing. And he almost had. A few days after Desiree left, one of the women from the Church had come by with a stack of pamphlets. "The Church welcomes you!" He looked into her face, covered with scabs and bruises and shut the door.

That night, a group of them had come round the house, howling like a pack of dogs. They set fire to his old car and covered a child in pitch. Before Dannigan could stop them, they'd thrown the child and a cluster of radishes and a stack of books on top of the blazing heap.

Dannigan had shaken his head and put a few extra boards across the door before going to bed and dreaming of warm beaches and sunburns. Sand in his hair, in his mouth, in his eyes, and still he was alone.

Hang a wreath of laurels on the door.

Dannigan had met Desiree when they were barely out of their teens. She'd been raising hell in a dive bar and he'd been out for a walk, minding his own business, when she grabbed him by the collar of his jacket and pulled him into an alley.

"You!" she said. "You're coming with me. I just started a fight, and I don't know how to finish it." Then, she shoved him into the smoky pit of the bar, where he fought a man twice his size, and afterward, Desiree pulled him back into the alley and admitted she'd been watching, and then she kissed him. And then, Dannigan thought his broken nose and black eye were worth it. Desiree and her bony shoulders and chapped lips were worth it.

Place photographs of loved ones face-down.

Dannigan creeps into the room where Yvonne is sleeping and places a battered postcard next to her head. *Tijuana*. He doesn't know if he'll be able to find Desiree again, but he wants to try.

Maybe Yvonne will find them one day. Maybe she'll stay in the house forever. Maybe she'll join the Church. Dannigan doesn't think it matters all that much. *Yes*, he thinks. He'll go to Mexico, and then nothing will matter at all.

CARRIE PIEPER

Poem 35

Stinging laughter
after I finish
the half full bottle
warmed by
time. Opened by
the side of an
old red trailer,
a childhood relic.
Visions of
neighborhood heroes
and passing parades
still cling to my mind
like chipping paint to
dew-covered hands.

Summer was over
following youth
out the door as we
sat like children,
toasting to the
early morning moon.
Our farewell
cut short by the
silhouette of a
man in pajamas
clinging to the stair rail
as he called out
to the night.

A shortened walk,
or lengthened legs,
brought me back
to a yard illuminated
with the yellow glow
of street lights.
I turned around
to see a restless
porch lamp finally
retire, giving in to
the approaching
morning.

I crept back through
my own door to
hide the empty bottle
in a paper sack,
covering up the
evidence of my
narrow escape.

An escape from
a world that once
knew me and loved me,
but would not ever
be able to welcome
me back.

PHYLLIS PETERSON



Waterlily
photograph

WILL KELLY

Plaza

It was raining when the chartered tour bus pulled off at the Belvidere Oasis, some 67 miles short of downtown Chicago. For Professor Rosenberg—seated at the front of the bus and sipping something pinkish from a bottle previously occupied by Nature’s Crystal Spring Water—the wet though unseasonably warm weather was a clear mandate for his proposed all-indoor itinerary. He had accompanied many a bus full of unappreciative students on this same route over the past 15 years, and never again would have been much too soon. But alas, though not a member himself, he had been entrusted through a series of personal connections to guide a group of Tajik Rotary Club members on an outing to the city—a packed schedule of museums, sightseeing, and shopping intended to counterbalance the picture of small-town America they had grown accustomed to during their month-long stay. Dr. Rosenberg had taken up the offer before falling on hard times, and it was much too late to back out at this point, the last full-service rest stop before the westernmost suburbs began.

His colleagues had been full of advice for the day’s programming, but no consensus could be reached on which museums to visit and how much time to budget for each. Deanne, who had stood by him throughout the divorce proceedings and pledged to remain his sister-in-every-sense-but-the-law, suggested they avoid downtown altogether, that perhaps “the foreigners” would prefer a full day of shopping at Woodfield Mall and the nearby Ikea. Having neglected to make arrangements for either scenario, the professor had settled on something else entirely: a thick cross sec-

tion of America and generous array of cultural accoutrements in one convenient location.

A 10–15 minute pit stop at the Belvidere Oasis was standard for groups headed into the city on I-90. When the bus had come to a complete stop in front of the eastbound entrance, Dr. Rosenberg whispered something to the confused driver whom he patted on the shoulder before informing the group—via translator—to take all personal items with them and leave nothing on the bus. The last passenger had barely debarked when the bus started up again and rolled away towards the onramp.

The Oasis itself was an impressive site for the uninitiated, one of seven such locations operated by the Illinois Tollway Authority and among the nation’s very few rest stops suspended over the highway on a specially designed bridge deck. At each end of the main building was a parking lot with an identical gas station and convenience store for traffic moving in either direction. The current Oasis had been built less than a decade ago when the original Eisenhower-era structure was torn down, and it shared many characteristics with a newish mall or airport terminal: shiny floors, sweeping panoramic windows, exposed white girders, and an astonishing variety of fast food kiosks and other amenities.

After a restroom break and samples of various items from the Starbucks menu, the Rotary members were greeted by none other than the general manager of the Oasis, who despite his apparent misgivings (“Where exactly is Tajikistan?”) agreed to give the group a thorough tour of the premises.

He took them to a concealed basement level under one of the parking lots and showed off its storage rooms, freight elevator, and employee facilities. In his office, he showed them pictures of all seven locations over the years, from bold and futuristic concept drawings of the 50s and 60s (when the Oases were anchored by Ed Harvey restaurants), to the grittier reality of the 70s (when Howard Johnson took over—lots of brown and lots of woodgrain), to the subtle horror of the 80s and 90s, when carpet was ripped up, concrete poured, molded furniture bolted in place, and the full-service restaurants ceded to fast food vendors before the Oases were returned to some of their former glory with the construction of larger, sleeker, and more inviting structures for the new century. It was unclear to Dr. Rosenberg how much, if any of this, was getting through to the Rotary Club members, most of whom had experienced Soviet occupation, independence, civil war, and authoritarian rule within the same timeframe.

The manager explained that when the Oases first opened, they were considered world-class destinations in and of themselves,

with families from across the state and beyond driving hundreds of miles for no better reason than to dine at restaurants overlooking the very highways that had made their journey possible. It was the manager's personal opinion that those had been better times. He then spent several unprovoked minutes casually downplaying allegations of corruption and cronyism during the Oases' reconstruction process.

Once the rain had subsided, the manager took them outside and showed them the Oasis' hidden access points for employees and distributors. He took them up a narrow spiral staircase to the roof, which boasted an even greater view of the Interstate and surrounding farmland. He pointed out a factory a few hundred feet away. Several years ago, an explosion at that factory sent debris all the way up to the westbound parking lot, killing a man. The translator relayed this information to the Rotary Club members, who nodded in a rare moment of wide-eyed understanding. Dr. Rosenberg looked mildly amused.

At the end of the tour, after he thanked the manager and tipped him from a large roll of bills in his pocket, it was time for lunch, which was to be the biggest and most elaborate meal of the day. All nine vendors provided the group with samples from their menus—the largest selection of American cuisine yet experienced by the Rotary members during their stay. Several vendors offered tours of their kitchens. After lunch, an Illinois Tollway representative delivered a lecture hawking the state's I-PASS, explaining the benefits of open road tolling.

As promised, the Rotary members were given two hours of free shopping time, which Dr. Rosenberg figured would be enough to pursue the wares at the Oasis' Travel Mart, as well as both convenience stores and the new Best Buy Express vending machine. At 4:00 they were to meet back at the table behind the Starbucks kiosk for an impromptu art history lecture, delivered not by the professor himself (who was beginning to slur his words), but by a friendly trucker he had met near the Travel Mart's magazine rack, deeply knowledgeable about the evolution of airbrush techniques and the effects of the digital revolution on modern day centerfolds and swimsuit issues.

A beer tasting was arranged in the westbound convenience store stock room, where a large selection of all-American brews were made available to willing Rotary members, including Bud Light Platinum, Bud Light Lime, Bud Select, MGD 64, Keystone Light, Michelob Ultra, Natural Ice, Colt 45, and Steel Reserve 211 (the clear winner among participants, as well as Dr. Rosenberg).

Back in the Oasis, it was almost time for dinner, an unstruc-

tured affair in which Rotary members were allowed to return to their favorite eateries from earlier in the day. The Oasis staff and food workers seemed annoyed by the continued presence of the tour group, and Dr. Rosenberg was forced to peel off increasingly large amounts from his endless roll of bills to cancel out their troubles. It was imperative to keep them off for at least the next two hours because more activities had been planned.

After dinner came one of the most anticipated events of the day: taking turns using the pair of coin-operated massage recliners near the restrooms. At some point Dr. Rosenberg stepped outside for a smoke and did not immediately return, though his absence went largely unnoticed among the Rotary members, who were still buzzing from the beer samples and the massage chairs' Shiatsu rollers.

The day had flown by faster than any in the group could have imagined, and when the bus driver finally showed up—immediately followed by a pair of state troopers—the entire Rotary delegation from Dushanbe, Tajikistan had arranged themselves in a neat row overlooking the twilit expressway, watching the sunset and digging into the massive pile of Illinois Lottery scratch tickets purchased by their host, who was nowhere to be found.

TESSA CRIST



Dentistry
oil on canvas

ERIN DALY

Beale Street

Before visiting Memphis, Tennessee,
I thought cities were built
with concrete and asphalt,
glass and steel.
That skyscrapers, sports arenas, and towering hotels
were their backbone.

But a few hours on Beale Street in Memphis
told me that the essence of the city
lies somewhere inside the cigarette-smoked juke joints
tucked away between glitzy gift shops and bars
that line the street, that men like B.B. King
and Muddy Waters hold the city together
more than mortar and concrete and steel beams ever did.

Its soul isn't in the home stadium
of the Memphis Redbirds or the glamorous Peabody Hotel;
it seeps from the cracks of Beale Street's bricks,
where legendary bluesmen once stood to play their first shows.
It's etched into the faces of old blues guitarists
who play on street corners, their riffs paying homage to their
favorite musicians in order to keep that soul alive.

Soul can't be bought at a souvenir shop
or captured in a photograph
or stitched into a twenty-dollar "I Love Memphis" T-shirt.
Those things can be lost or misplaced.
The soul of Memphis became one with my own,
and every now and then, I find myself
humming or stepping in time to some tune
that I heard on that warm spring night
when I first visited.

Music Both Sacred and Profane

*I am bound to walk among the wounded and the slain
And when the storm comes crashing on the plain
I will dance before the lightning to music sacred and profane
—Stephen Schwartz*

Dissonant shadows and sunbeams sparring,
 chiaroscuro dancing in the sky.
Staccato thunder cracks, my hair rising

to brush against the clouds. The wind screams, warm
 no more. Alone against the tempest, dripping
tears and dreams, eyes narrowed, I face the storm.

A *forte* beat of phosphorescent rain
 lashes down, a *vivace* piece performed
across my tense back and rolling wicked plains.

Dark seas cascade, waves of watery wind
 howl in a raucous timbre. Marked by Cain,
I roam the earth, angry, forever pinned.

In each drop, illumination imbued
 reflects my sad face—stained by ancient sin—
and copies crystal lightning, split and skewed.

Roiling trees snap all chords, tossed by the air;
 percussive bullets spit from onyx hued
skies. Will God still hear my tainted prayers?

I forsake fear and dance before the damning
 dawn. Clouds churn and red light catches a rare
smile: I face the spray, *mancando*, laughing.

ELYSE SCHULER-CRUZ

This is What You Asked For

Gillam's ears still rang from the first RPG that took out the lead humvee in the convoy, and from the second RPG that destroyed the rear vehicle. Sgt. Roper screamed for the grunts to pile out and seek cover. He grabbed Gillam's collar and chucked him out before the gate was even down. After scrambling through the door of the shop in front of him, Gillam found himself alone. Not a single Iraqi was in the shop; maybe they knew.

Gillam peeked out of the doorway and saw some of the other grunts taking cover in an alley, peeking into the window of another shop and crouching behind chest-high walls. Rifles popped in an irregular rhythm. Gillam heard a zip, pop and fizz near his face followed by a spray of tiny stone bits. He ducked back into the shop and his rifle's charging handle.

This is it, he thought. This is what you asked for.

He poked his right side out of the doorway and sighted in on the men on the rooftop ahead of him. They wore no uniforms, no flak, no Kevlar. He could count them on his fingers and still have digits to spare. Three with AK-47s taking controlled shots at the Marines. One had slung his rifle across his back so he could fire an RPG-7. Gillam held his breath and squeezed his trigger. Three pops, and the rounds seemed to miss their intended targets. One of the men pointed his way and the other raised the RPG to his shoulder.

Gillam ducked back into the shop and dove behind the counter. He heard the RPG explode into the wall and doorway. Chunks of stone rammed into the counter, sending shards of wood flying. Bits of wood and rock pelted him. His flak and Kevlar hel-

met protected him though something grazed his cheek. It nicked his skin and droplets of blood crept out of the abrasion.

He crawled back to the doorway determined to make his first confirmed kill. It would be his souvenir he could show off to his buddies back at their tents. When he returned to Okinawa and then to Hawaii, he could regale the boots, those baby Marine fresh from the School of Infantry, with the story of how he had become a real Marine. They'd see his ribbon rack and know that he was somebody. He wouldn't be PFC Gillam the boot anymore. He envied the guys with the huge stacks of ribbons. Flashes of color they wore over their heart that meant they had been somewhere, done something.

As he neared the doorway, he saw a couple of Marines advance through the street to close in on the enemy. Moments later, one of the Marines in the shop across the street stumbled out of the doorway, looking down at his hands. He pulled the pin from a grenade, flipped the spoon off and threw wildly like a tired pitcher. He ducked back into the shop without bothering to see where his grenade landed. First, there was shouting, then there was the bang of the grenade, and finally a scream.

"Corpsman!"

Doc Ferdowski sprinted past the shop and the smoldering row of trucks. When Gillam arrived at the crumbling remains of the door and nearby wall, he looked out and saw Doc dragging someone towards him. He shifted to the window near the door and sighted in on the men on the rooftop again. He squeezed off a shot and watched as the man with the RPG, reloaded and ready, crumpled. The man next to him turned to his fallen comrade. Gilliam squeezed the trigger again and that man dropped like a ragdoll. The other two ducked down and out of sight. Doc dragged the wounded Marine through the door and laid him out on the floor.

"Grab his I-fak," he screamed to Gillam. Then to the wounded Marine, he said, "What's your name?"

"Glen McCoy."

"You gonna be okay, Glen McCoy. We'll fix you up. What day is it?"

Gillam emptied McCoy's I-fak. Bandages, QuikClot, burn ointment, water purification pills and a tourniquet scattered on the floor between him and McCoy. He recognized that name, the square jaw and the bright green eyes. McCoy was in his boot camp platoon. He was an Eagle Scout and a contract PFC. He marched off the parade deck at graduation as the honor graduate with a meritorious promotion to lance corporal. They went to

SOI together. Some Sundays they played basketball either together or opposing, depending on how the teams worked out. He looked at McCoy in his bloody cammies with shrapnel lodged into his flak. McCoy wasn't screaming in pain but staring at the ceiling. Gillam took a moment to admire his toughness. Then he saw the mess of blood, fabric and sinew that had become McCoy's right forearm.

"July...July..." McCoy trailed off each time he began.

"Shit," Doc said. "Elevate his feet."

Gillam took McCoy's Kevlar and put it under his feet. Doc pulled out a pair of scissors and cut the sleeve of McCoy's blouse. He grabbed the tourniquet and began cutting off circulation a couple of inches above the wound. McCoy reached over to touch his wounded arm, but Doc pushed his hand away. The thought of toughness faded from Gillam's mind as he loosened McCoy's flak and clothes. He dipped a finger in McCoy's blood and wrote a "T," for tourniquet, on his friend's forehead. Next to it, he wrote the time and date.

"I need security," Doc said to Gillam.

Gillam readied his rifle and took up security by the window. He watched the rooftops and streets as he listened to Doc Ferdowski tell McCoy that everything was going to be okay. Gillam repeated this mantra to himself. It's going to be okay. With his rifle shouldered, he looked out over the iron sights, resisting his gnawing urge to look back at the "T" on McCoy's forehead.

It's going to be okay.

There had been a coppery taste in Gillam's mouth, but that was beginning to fade. In its place, he could feel his cheek sting where the bits of rubble had nicked him. He raised his shoulder and wiped the blood away. His line of sight was clear, and outside, the firefight was dying down. The time between shots grew longer.

It's going to be okay.

Then, there was stillness. The Marines across the street ventured out from their cover, walking tall and invincible. One of them howled into the air. He shouted, "Combat Action Ribbon, baby!"

Gillam slumped down away from the window. Doc Ferdowski knelt over McCoy, holding the wounded Marine's hand. Gillam could see McCoy's eyes; they were still open, gazing around like he was trying to figure out what had happened. He was hanging on. At least there was that. Gillam ran the fire fight through his head, trying to reconstruct the fractions of moments. He searched for his mantra, but all he could think was, *This is what you asked for.*

TAYLOR KUETHER

spirituality

we talk about spirituality in class and somehow it disintegrates the
walls around us and we fade into
someplace more important.
anxiety
grips me as i try to sleep and i count the years until i'm not young
anymore.
can i just spend all my time getting high and sneaking into crowd-
ed bars? or lying on the living room
floor, listening to records spinning themselves to sleep?
spirituality
is what happens when you make it home safely, uncaught, and
linger on your front porch as you turn
the key,
whispering "yes, yes"
to the warm night air.

TAYLOR KUETHER

tangible things

sometimes when i turned on the air conditioning in this car
it smelled like him at first, fleetingly,
mint and roses and the inside of a book.
the air conditioner died the spring after he did.
she wasn't long after that.

every time i visited her,
she held my hand. her veins
were ridges, mountain ranges, on a tiny topographical map.
but her skin,
her skin was the softest.
next my mother's,
then my own.

when i was in the fourth grade
a boy broke my nose with a baseball.
it hurt,
and i cried myself to sleep under a blanket she crocheted with
those violet-veined fingers,
tall and white like gates to a garden.
i lie beneath it now;
it is as soft as i remember her skin.

GWEN GROSS



Victorian architecture
earthenware and mixed media

MARK DAVID MCGRAW

Mayan King

Lo supe en aquel momento, María. Lo supe el instante en que Miguel contestó, “Sí”. La pregunta fue inocua, sencilla. Pero lo supe. El vendedor le murmuró, “¿Puede ver este lugar como su base de operaciones?” y Miguel contestó, “Sí”, bien quietito como si estuviera drogado. Lo que realmente me molesta es que sea la memoria más fuerte que tengo de Miguel. Y no quiero que sea así.

Era miércoles. El vendedor caminaba al lado derecho de Miguel y yo los seguía uno o dos pasos atrás. Caminábamos al lado de una alberca enorme, una alberca con forma de grandes burbujas que medía, no sé...unos ciento cincuenta metros de largo. Sí, una cosa impresionante. El colmo de lujo, ¿no? Albercas grandes al lado del mar. Como si el mar no bastara para bañarse. Y esa fue una de las muchas que había en el resort. El complejo de albercas estaba rodeado por palapas con sillas de playa alineadas con precisión milimétrica. Se veían los techos de los edificios del resort contruidos como las pirámides mayas emergiendo como templos desde la selva. Sí, de veras. Pirámides tan grandes como las de Chichén Itza, pero hechas de concreto pintado o algo así, no sé. Aún no hacía demasiado calor y los meseros comenzaban a traerles bebidas y hasta cócteles a los pocos clientes que tomaban el sol a las nueve y media de la mañana. Yo me sentía incómoda caminando allí. Trataba de enfocarme en el sonido de las olas y el olor del mar.

Y en esa belleza, en la perfección del resort, el vendedor le preguntaba a Miguel, “¿Puede ver este lugar como su base de operaciones?”

Le habían regalado una semana en ese resort por haber cumplido los veinticinco años de servicio como policía municipal. Hubo una ceremonia. El jefe del departamento en Guanajuato lo felicitó y le estrechó la mano, y el fotógrafo oficial de la comandancia sacó una foto. Todavía debe estar por allí. El jefe tiene puesta su sonrisa oficial, una sonrisa varonil y plástica bajo su bigote de Pedro Infante. Miguel se ve bajo y moreno, con una sonrisa de mueca dolorosa, intentando chuparse la panza. El jefe le dio un broche para su uniforme y un certificado. Luego el jefe levantó las manos y con su voz de don Francisco anunció, “¡y también una semana para dos en el resort Mayan King en Cancún!”

Bueno...nos habían tocado con la varita mágica. Conseguimos que mis padres cuidaran a los niños y nos fuimos manejando para llegar al resort en el día indicado. Conversamos muy poco en el viaje. No sabíamos ni qué hacer ni qué decir. Jamás, ni siquiera en la luna de miel, habíamos tomado unas vacaciones así. El presupuesto y el horario de trabajo siempre dictaban que pasáramos un par de días aquí y allá, en la casa de sus parientes o los míos.

El plan fue manejar por dos días enteros para llegar al resort el lunes, pero se nos echó a perder la transmisión en Veracruz y perdimos un día de viaje y setecientos dólares. Resulta que la semana de vacaciones fue, en realidad, cinco días, del lunes a viernes. Y como te dije, perdimos el lunes con la reparación del coche.

Cuando el martes en la tarde por fin llegamos al portalón del resort, el guardia de turno nos dijo, “No hay estacionamiento para los empleados dentro del resort.”

“Somos huéspedes, güey,” replicó Miguel. Así se lo dijo.

El guardia llamó al lobby y nos dejó pasar. Dejamos el coche en el estacionamiento entre los BMW y Mercedes nuevos y alquilados.

El lobby era toda una belleza, María, créeme. Largas columnas, mostradores el tamaño de elefantes, todo hecho de mármol. Y cuando nos registramos en el mostrador, no tenía la reserva bajo nuestros nombres, lo que provocó unos momentos de ansiedad, claro. Pero apenas Miguel dijo el nombre de su jefe, el muchacho encontró la reservación y nos trató con mucha amabilidad. También nos dijo que había un desayuno gratis a las ocho en la mañana, y que el desayuno era parte de una presentación sobre las oportunidades de ser socios al resort. Bueno, claro que no le prestamos mucha atención. Seguramente un desayuno gratis se trataría de un pan dulce de hace un par de días y un nescafé. Un joven botones intentó cargar nuestras maletas en una carreta y le preguntó a Miguel nuestro número de habitación. Pero Miguel le dijo que íbamos a llevar nuestras maletas nosotros mismos. El

cuate hizo una mueca y se marchó despechado. Nos fuimos a la habitación, cansados del largo viaje. Lo único que queríamos era relajarnos. La habitación que nos tocó era realmente bella. Fría como un refrigerador, de verdad, el aire acondicionado estaba a lo más frío. Todo limpio, nuevo y ordenado con mini bar y una tele de pantalla grande. El baño olía a cloro. Pero fuerte. Miguel se sentó al pie de la cama a menos de un metro de la pantalla grande y trató de encender la tele para ver los resultados de los partidos de fútbol. Yo me paré mirando a un cuadro que tenían allí sobre la cama. Enorme, el cuadro, de oleo, supongo, porque se veían los trocitos de pintura que formaban las olas del mar. En toda la extensión de la playa había una sola persona caminando. Una persona tan chica que no se veía como hombre o mujer. Apenas un puntito de pintura negra y me quedé mirándolo por mucho tiempo. Miguel no supo cómo usar el control remoto. Y menos mal pensaba yo. Yo quería unos días sin tener que escuchar la tele todo el día. Tú sabes, María, que cuando Miguel llegaba a casa en la tarde tenía la tele prendida todo el tiempo. Deportes, noticias, programas de realidad. Hasta que salía a la chamba en la mañana.

Encontré en la mesita de noche un menú en inglés de “Room Service” e inmediatamente quedé fascinada con la idea de pedir comida a la habitación. Pedimos un bistec cada uno y una botella de vino tinto como si fuéramos unas estrellas de telenovelas. Y después, nos duchamos y nos reímos al vernos en las batas blancas del resort que nos quedaron demasiado grandes. E hicimos el amor como antes cuando estábamos recién casados. No...pos, sí... qué quieres que te diga.

En la mañana el día siguiente nos levantamos y bajamos por un cafecito y el periódico. Y lo curioso es que no había nada. Hasta los pinches hoteles del D.F. tienen donde tomar desayuno allí pegadito al lobby. Una muchacha vestida con el polo del resort que andaba con portapapeles nos agarró. Bien bonita la chica. Una especie de Barbie mexicana. Se veía que venía de una familia pudiente. Bueno, se nos acercó y nos preguntó si nos habíamos apuntado para el desayuno gratis de ese día. Nos miramos y no le dijimos nada y ella se puso a hablar súper rápido y nos dijo que deberíamos ir al desayuno porque iba a estar bien pero bien padre y tendríamos que escuchar a una charla de unos cuarenta y cinco minutos mientras que comíamos y nada más y no había obligación de comprar nada. Y ya que teníamos hambre hicimos cola en la banqueta afuera del lobby y quince minutos después, ya íbamos en un carrito de golf manejado por unos empleados a una parte del resort que no habíamos visto.

Nos dirigieron a un buffet de desayuno como algo de otro mundo. Enorme, te digo. Fruta, chilaquiles, machacado, migas,

café con leche, jugos, todo, todo, todito. Llenamos nuestros platos y fuimos a una mesa a pesar de que normalmente no comemos mucho desayuno. Miguel me susurró, “Hay que aprovechar”. Se nos acercó un tipo, bien fornido y elegantemente vestido, uno de los tantos jóvenes, vestidos más o menos iguales, que andaban por allí presentándose a los huéspedes. Nos preguntó nuestros nombres, abrió una carpeta de cuero que llevaba y nos dijo que era nuestro guía. Se llamaba Daniel.

Se puso a hablar sobre el hotel, que en realidad es parte de una cadena de hoteles que hay por todo México. Y comenzó a decirnos, bueno, decirle a Miguel sobre la oportunidad de ser socios del resort, poder volver todos los años, ser inversionistas en los bienes raíces en la industria más rentable de México: el turismo. Terminamos el desayuno y Daniel nos llevó a una habitación más moderna y más padre que la nuestra. Nos dijo, “Esta es una de las nuevas. Si llegan a ser socios, ustedes pueden alojarse en una de estas la próxima vez que vengan.” Hablaba muy rápido y muy seguro de sí mismo, pero nunca mencionó los precios. Y luego nos llevó en un tour caminando por gran parte del resort. Volvimos a un salón grandísimo. Mesas y mesas con otros huéspedes y otros vendedores. Daniel nos puso en una mesa con vista al mar y se sentó con nosotros al otro lado de la mesa. Le explicó a Miguel los porcentajes y proyecciones y ganancias y no sé qué más. El sol empezó a pegar el vidrio del salón y ya hacía calor. Daniel sudaba la gota gorda. Yo no prestaba atención a su conversación. El sonido era como el murmullo de los coches que pasan en la carretera en el silencio de la mañana cuando te levantas temprano para preparar el café.

Bueno, nos ofrecieron un precio especial. Daniel dijo que fue porque Miguel era policía, una forma de agradecimiento por su servicio. Dijo que era un precio reducido cuya oferta caducaba ese mismo día. Terminamos firmando un contrato y nos regalaron una beach bag de lona que tenía impresa la caricatura de un jalapeño con sombrero puesto y botella de mezcal en la mano. Cuando salimos era la una de la tarde. Ya no había carrito de golf para llevarnos de vuelta a nuestro edificio. Nos costó trabajo encontrarlo. Mientras que buscábamos nuestro edificio pasamos por la construcción de una pirámide nueva. Había un centenar de trabajadores allí con cascos, muchachos más o menos tan bajitos y morenos como nosotros, subiendo y acomodando las piedras como ladrillos grandes. Me extrañaba que no tuvieran máquina para hacer eso.

La verdad es que la pasamos requetebién el resto de la semana. Comimos en restaurantes todos los días, caminamos por la playa y dormimos como chanchitos en la sombra de los palapas en la pla-

ya. Nos bañamos en el mar, lo que me asustó un poco ya que no sé nadar. Y fuimos con los turistas en el bus del resort a Cancún. Te digo una cosa: Cancún, no me lo gustó. La playa que está en lo que se conoce como La Riviera Maya es muy bonita, hermosa—diría yo, ¿pero Cancún? ¡No! En Cancún nada más hay dos cosas: bares y tiendas de baratijas y chucherías. Para hacerte el cuento corto, me da vergüenza ser mexicana. Cancún es un México de caricatura en donde se venden camisetas y tequila que hasta el más borracho no tomaría. Yo sé muy bien que la zona vive del turismo y todo eso...pero si los gringos vienen a comprar la misma basura que tienen allá...eso no habla bien de ellos. O de nosotros, no sé. El penúltimo día allí en vez de andar por Cancún tomamos el bus a Puerto Morelos, un pueblito pesquero mucho menos turístico. Y la pasamos muy bien. ¿Y sabes qué? No hablamos de lo del contrato. Ni una palabra. Pero no creo que yo dejara de pensar en ello en todo el resto de la semana.

Volvimos a Guanajuato y el mes siguiente nos tocó comenzar a pagar los plazos del resort. Fue difícil, te digo, pero claro, queríamos volver el siguiente año. Lo pagamos por casi un año, hasta el día en que Miguel murió en la comisión a Sinaloa. Una cosa increíble, María. Miguel me dijo que nunca había disparado su pistola en sus veinticinco años de servicio en Guanajuato. Y lo mandan como una especie de comando a pelear con los narcos... Supongo que eso es lo que quiere decir “mano dura”. Bueno, como sabes, fueron varios los que murieron en Sinaloa. Pero no puedo dejar de pensar en qué estaría pensando cuando estaba muriendo. ¿Pensaría en mí? ¿Se sentiría solo?

Ah, en fin...no vine a hablarte de eso. Lo que pasa es que... quiero que me hagas un favor, María. Sé que la familia querrá que yo sea enterrada al lado de Miguel en el panteón municipal de Guanajuato. Pero yo no quiero que me entierren allí. Yo quiero ir a Mayan King cuando me muera. Miguel lo entendería. Quiero que me cremes y me esparzas en la playa del resort. Es el último lugar donde fuimos felices.

PHYLLIS PETERSON



Cades Cove Tree
photograph

JOE ARMS

The Squirrel Who Lives Under the Roof of St. Anthony's

Carry on little squirrel, carry on.
For life is now and always will be.

Now,
you are

running reckless between random raindrops.
Under gray skies and over black asphalt.
An explosion of light,
unexpected.
The power of flight, blessed,
but only for a moment.

Now,
you are

landing with innocence.
Surrounded by innocents.
Soft sounds in the soft linen.
Petrified in the rigid box.

Now,
I will

bury you as if you were of my body.
Tell your story as if you were my history.
Love you because you are my family.

JOE ARMS

To the girl across my calculus classroom

I am here
claiming this temporary space at this time and it is mine.
Let that be known!

I am here
posing scholar, with a few casual questions
who sat in scattered spots around my origin.

I am here
not finding the variable,
as more disposable points are inputted.

I am here
with my passion depleting as duplicates keep appearing
and more identicals walk through the door.

I am here
with a formula drenched in waves of sin,
but I am easily bored with this obvious pattern.

I am here
now soaring through sky, roaming the known and unknown
worlds.
Bird droppings on the window.

I am here
studying a round, ticking wall ornament
that has just traveled 42 minutes.

I am here
with a formula drenched in waves of sin.
Searching for something to increase the values exponentially.

I am here
stupefied
because I've just found the figure I've desired.

I am here
yelling over these sharp lecturing winds
and making no sounds.

I am here
with a formula drenched in waves of sin.
No longer searching for something to increase the values exponentially.

You are there.

COURTNEY BRYSON

Covet: A Love Story

Oxford, Michigan, a community that was never really anything to start with, ending with such rigid nothingness. Another rail-and-trolley line town in the district of Detroit, whose slow disintegration, caused purely by uncertainty, quickly destroyed the only blanket of optimism that kept its inhabitants warm. Stripped of its feeble confidence, it was left exposed to stumble over the tattered dressings below its feet. Over and over again, newspapers printed such articles as “Disappearances Rock the Town of Oxford,” as well as “Unexpected Mysteries Shatter Oxford Community.” In later years, the headlines would transform to “One Pub, Four Dead,” and “Townspeople Protest Recent Suicides.” If it were not for the night of July 23, 1929, perhaps the ill-fated town of Oxford would’ve evolved into the progressive kinship it had yearned to become, if only for the abductions of the four Michigan Minors.

In the mid 1920s when everything screamed class, the town of Oxford was made to feel left out. The dirty gravel roads, scattered paint chips left to lay below verandas, and of course the rusted chain link swing sets that had long ago been abandoned by any respectable child, left the town to resemble a deserted novelty. One which you could’ve sworn was once charming and entertaining, but had at some point been rejected and thrown to the side to rot. Whoever initiated the urge for transformation, nobody knows. However, at some definite point in time, Oxford began what they believed to be the necessary alterations.

Broken windows were soon replaced with bargain glass discovered in the surrounding Detroit area. Peppermint candy awnings

and neon light fixtures (those of which were also cut-rate from nearby vendors) now hung outside of the local businesses on Main Street. Shopkeepers were suddenly the best dressed in town, and although they were as desperate as ever to persuade their buyers and to close deals, they disguised themselves with an air of confidence and grace that had never before been seen. The City Council had even approved the renovation of what had once been a textile factory, the very one that had survived only eighteen months in Oxford, into a small movie house. Patrons surrounded themselves with wheat-colored wallpaper and sat in cherry-velvet seating, hoping that the mere act of attending the pictures established something in particular about their lives. Unlike the gold chandeliers and scarlet carpeting found in other Detroit theaters, Oxford silently acknowledged that its local movie house was by far the most striking building in town, and at this point in time, was the best that they could do.

Although there was talk regarding the arrival of paved roads and mostly all verandas, as well as swing sets, being revamped with a good washing and a coat of paint, Oxford still was not perfect. Along with this movement of glamor came rather provocative behavior—behavior that could also be regarded as cutting-edge for the town of Oxford. The smuggled whiskey poured heavier, the tasseled dresses hemmed shorter, and the heavy insecurities grew deeper. Still, the cosmetics were added and the physique of Oxford would certainly not go unnoticed. Cheap paint colors splattered around town, fragile light bulbs radiating from blocks away, and the distant sounds of fashionable music heard from every street corner still could not conceal the generic and needy tones of Oxford; and so they made one more attempt.

It was no secret that every community at the time, noteworthy communities that was, housed traveling carnivals in their region for weeks at a time. Side shows and steam-powered rides would stop in for a worldly visit and be on their way, of course never leaving without putting their name on the map. And so, a carnival it was, a five-day celebration to really mislead the unbalanced hearts of Oxford.

The show rolled in on a Tuesday morning and was gone by Sunday. It managed to cast a hazy cloud of magical realism upon the town of Oxford. Popcorn kernels and candy apples floated throughout the air while over-sized carbon microphones hung down from the sky. Amplified voices announcing ten cent shows and “never before seen acts” could still be heard while children restlessly tried to dream for the night. Blonde locks and fabric skirts twirled, as if in slow motion, as carousel ponies lapped over and over again. Young couples bobbed out of their carts when the wooden coaster ascended its drops, subtly dangling above their seats like puppets, and then gently placed down again. Fathers stood in lines all day to

trump one another's Test of Strength, an innocent yet cutthroat way to challenge each other's manhood. And, of course, there were more lights.

Each morning, families crawled out of bed exhausted, yet exuberated, from the night before. Over flap jacks, restocking tobacco from the store, and hanging clothes on the line, everyone loved to recap the happenings from the night before. And for three splendid days, they made plans for what kind of devilry they could accomplish again that night. This is what Oxford wanted and thought it needed.

Along with all the chaos and the enchantment came scandal. Townspeople soon learned how to hustle the cigarette tables, young ones snuck into tents far more mature than their life spans, and the forbidden tradespeople began to resemble prince charming for the daring and the lonely. These were the things left unmentioned over breakfast and laundry.

Sunday, after the equipment had been packed up, workers had rinsed the powdered soap, and the magic had charged out of town, there was more missing than the dignity of Oxford: four children. It took a while for Oxford to come down from its demanded high, but once children's absences were noticed, the town once again returned to its disintegration. Teddy Lang, Christopher Marcs, Martha Strom, and Doug Berkowitz had vanished. Local authorities were hopeless, and so Oxford summoned the final attraction the town would receive.

Guy Warren arrived from the most urban section of Detroit and came highly recommended. He spent exactly sixteen weeks in Oxford. He discovered that the four minors, all between the ages of ten and thirteen, had been the closest of friends. Classmates since the beginning, they were together almost more than their families saw them. Warren gathered that at five o'clock the four were seen at the Freezy Shoppe eating dinner and talking about their adolescent plans for that night.

"Two of them ordered a grilled cheese sandwich and the other two a hot ham and cheese. They each had a chocolate malt. Very popular with young ones right now, but a pain to make, I'll tell you that."

At 6:30, the four bought tickets into the carnival. "Cliff Lewis was already getting thrown out for drinking too much and touching too many women. Two of us had him under each arm and tossed him right out. I even left him with a swift kick on his rear. He nearly toppled over onto the Strom girl. Her buddies grabbed her out of the way. Listen, I tell you, I would've never planted that kick on him if I knew he was going to just miss. And that's the honest truth."

Warren even questioned some buddies of the minors. Some saw them on the Wheel of Wonder, others sat close while watching the Man Without a Stomach and Rattlesnake Joe. Wayne Howard said he saw the Lang and Marcs boys playing the Penny Toss.

"The little shits were good. At first they really got my goat, but after a while, I'll tell you, I just stood back and watched them win. Other fellows were getting their feathers in a ruffle, but after about twenty minutes of them leading the show, I stood back and had myself a grand laugh."

Some people in town told the detective they saw the four hop on a boxcar that night, that the children had most likely left town the next morning with the show. Other rumors had surfaced about the four witnessing something they shouldn't have. Therefore, it must've been the Mackey brothers who had taken care of the friends. They were always good for getting rid of unwanted things in Oxford. Warren had searched the bedrooms of each child, trying to find something that their parents had overlooked, but nothing ever panned out to be a lead. Oh, the parents. They were the first ones in town to go.

Pinned curls came down and were replaced by snarled strands of madness. Dust settled on the shoulders of suit coats hung in hallway closets, and the records that once spun on living room phonographs ceased to play. The grief and suspicion soon leaked from these homes and began to infect the town. Guy Warren left Oxford.

As time went on, Oxford continued to diminish. Shattered glass lay where light bulbs had been broken by thrown rocks, store windows were left smudged and grew dirty with time, and to hell with that paved road story that had once existed. The four minors had been considered ordinary children in the community. No particular charm or wit had surrounded the group of friends. You could've easily considered them to have blended in with the distracted hustle of Oxford. Yet, their no-longer-existence seemed to brew speculation and doubt like nothing ever had. Or was the disappearance the source after all?

As for the ground on which the carnival had once thrived, it was the most lifeless spread of land in town, perhaps in all of Michigan, a wasteland. Shortly after the story of Oxford had been made public, passers-by would sometimes visit the area to get a look at what was considered to be the crime scene. And, of course, they'd shortly be on their way, in a hurry in fact. The corrosion that had suffocated Oxford quite oddly stopped at the borders of every nearby town. Yet, while most consider it to be a tragedy, with the town of Oxford and its community perishing in embarrassment, some consider it to be a love story. After all, Oxford obtained everything it ever wanted.

KAYLA CARLSON



Eliza Kelly
digital media and photography

HEIDI ZULL

On being at New Melleray Abbey after your father died

rumbling bells resonate a hollow clanging
sounding long enough, until it almost whispers out
only to be lighted again in somber deliverance
a canal of sound
faces the wall
and in singing to something unseen
this cathartic chorus seems disquieted

(I am without language to help you)

in my silence
I kept still
but my yellow shoes were screaming
echoing off the shadows
from the slate of stone and the humble
wood

these black and white animals
in a castle built of sounds
bald heads bow and white whiskers
hang over concave chests
collapsing into the heart
with voices singing in unison
the words lost with emotion
suppressed by shifting beards

(God was forgotten for a moment)

they sang for you
for your father

DANIELLE LENSEN

Groceries with Grandma

My chin feels tight as it rests on top of my car's steering wheel. It's another Saturday afternoon. A beautiful Saturday afternoon to any other blissfully normal person. The sun is just starting to peek over Margot's Family Restaurant across the street. The smell of fluffy waffles lingers through the air from Margot's weekly "All You Can Eat (Limit of 8) Waffle Buffet." Kids are riding their bikes. Birds are chirping. I even watch as a dad tries relentlessly to help his daughter take her first few spins on a bike without training wheels.

It's all disgusting.

My faded jeans bunch up as I shift in my seat. A sigh forces its way out of my mouth, and I let my head fall against the headrest with a thump. I've been stalling time by sitting in my car in the parking lot of Pa's Grocery for twenty minutes now. Not outside enjoying this disgustingly beautiful Saturday afternoon—nope. Here, at Pa's Grocery on another Saturday taking my grandmother to get her weekly groceries. Maybe if I stayed in the car long enough, she'd forget I was even here. Another dramatic sigh leaves my mouth. Doubtful. I've been sighing intensely for the past ten minutes, hoping to build up enough fog on my windows to write "Save. Me. Please."

I'd just built up enough fog on the windshield to write "Save M—" when Joey Moretti's blurry face appears behind my half-written "e." Joey's the new kid who works at Pa's on the weekends. He was introduced to the wrath of my grandmother only a few weeks ago when she violently used her cane to knock over a whole display of Spam after Joey told her they didn't carry the

lower sodium kind. I'm pretty sure he cried. I squint at him.

His maroon and white uniform hangs off his thin figure. A weird stain is on his black apron above his left pocket. He looks scared. I think he's actually hyperventilating. I roll my window down.

"Taylor, you need to come in," he says quickly and with his bottom lip quivering, "Your grandma just threatened to kick Stan because she said he isn't slicing the meat correctly."

A broken sigh leaves his mouth. "You know how Stan is, Tay. I won't be able to hold him back if she actually hits him, and I don't know about you, but I would be perfectly happy not seeing an overweight butcher take down an elderly woman. Please."

"Oh my God. This is not my life," I say out loud, pounding the steering wheel with each word. Joey opens the driver's side door and reaches across me to unbuckle my seatbelt.

"Let's go," he says. "I'm pretty sure I left right before she was going to throw the ham." He laughs through his nose. His left knee gives a nervous twitch as I get out of my car. I am two steps slower than him as we walk toward the front entrance of Pa's. My Converse shoes scrape against the cold concrete.

"I should be eating waffles, Joey...waffles," I say as the front doors slide open.

"You and me both," he murmurs as we step inside.

I've been driving my Grandma Cecilia to the grocery store for over a year now. Don't underestimate her, though. She's able to drive. It's just that she got her license taken away last year after she angrily sideswiped a stop sign as she left the DMV parking lot. The DMV guy refused to renew her driver's license due to her poor eyesight.

"A normal part of aging," he told her. She didn't take it too well.

"This is America isn't it?!" she snarled to the skinny man behind the desk, "You'd sure as heck let Barack Obama renew his license if he wanted to, wouldn't you—huh?!—and his eyesight is terrible. He can't even see how bad the economy is."

The guy behind the desk quickly looked at me with a Really? We just went there? look.

The police waited until midnight to tow my grandma's car. Chickens.

My grandma's a tough lady because, according to my dad, she grew up with no other choice. Her father threw her around quite a bit because he was heavy into alcohol, and her mother wasn't ever really around with thirteen other kids to look after. The only man who ever got through my grandma's callousness was my

grandpa, Theo. He teased her in that way that married couples do. He'd smile big, showing the deep crinkles around his mouth.

"Gee, ya know, Cecilia, I really missed you yelling at me today. I just...I couldn't wait to get home from work today because I knew you'd be here," I remember him saying one day when I stopped by my grandparents' house after school. I always stopped by to eat supper with them after Grandpa would get back from work. My grandma would always be bustling around the kitchen when I came over.

"This corn mush is overcooked," he'd say as he played around with the food on his plate. He complained about all of my grandma's cooking, but he would never eat anybody else's food. Never. Not even mine, and I considered myself as one of his favorites.

"Isn't it overcooked?" he'd ask me with a big smile on his face. He always had this look in his eye that said I'm about to tick off your Grandma and it's going to be funny, so you better laugh.

"You want some milk, Tay? To, you know, get that mush down?" he'd say with a wink, "I can get Grandma to get us some milk—CECILIA, WE WANT MILK!" He'd give out a thick laugh and squish up his nose so the wrinkles above his eyebrows grew big. He'd grab my knee, and we'd both wait for Grandma to yell at us.

"SHUT UP," she'd yell. "I don't have my hearing aids in, and what you're saying isn't worth trying to hear." My grandma always wore her hearing aids. She loved my grandpa.

Grandpa Theo died this past January. He had liver cancer, and the doctors just couldn't get control of it. On top of that, his lungs were bad because of the pneumonia he had caught during the war. The doctors said all they could do was make him comfortable and wait until he died. I was in the room with him and Grandma when he signed the form telling the doctors he didn't want them to resuscitate when it came to that point. His hands, once strong and able to do anything, were thin and shaky as he signed his name. His breath was quick and short. I couldn't tell if it was because he was trying not to cry or if it was his bad lungs. He looked so small, and Grandma looked so angry.

My grandpa died three days after that, and that's when my grandma got really uncontrollable. She didn't cry at the funeral. She didn't blink or talk at the wake. Her mean streak hit its all-time high a few weeks after the services when all the funeral plants were delivered to her house.

"Who decided that ferns were a funeral flower? I have fourteen ferns sitting in my living room. I hate ferns. The leaves look like ugly pieces of toilet paper," she yelled at our whole family as we sat in the sunroom. They were all there because they felt

they were obligated to be, not because they felt she needed them. Later that night, my dad got a call from Mr. Crowlie, my grandma and grandpa's neighbor. He called complaining that my grandma wouldn't stop throwing plants through the windows of her house.

"Make her stop or I'll call the police to make her stop," he hollered through the phone.

My dad stood frozen in the living room, not knowing what to do or say. He didn't want to call the police on his own mother, but at the same time, he was too afraid to go over there to make her stop. Completely fed up with this family, I immediately grabbed my keys and drove to her house. Sure enough, glass shards were all over her front porch, glittering in the moonlight, as I walked to her front door. I caught two ferns mid-throw until I finally talked her into getting into my car. I stuffed all the ugly ferns into my trunk and drove her to Furrow's Lake outside of town. The water was calm and looked as smooth as glass—totally undisturbed.

"Get out," I snapped as I put the car in park on the bridge overlooking the lake. For a half second, she looked at me in shock as if I had the guts to yell at her.

"Go," I yelled. She glared at me as she got out of my car. I ran around the back and grabbed all the stupid ferns. I dumped them on the side of the road where she was standing, looking down at the lake. I got a running start and let out a primal scream as I threw the first fern with all my strength into the lake below, shattering the calm water. Grandma and I stood staring at each other for a minute before something clicked with her. We spent the next three hours throwing ferns into the lake. After that, I drove her home and swept up the glass on her front porch.

The vent above the sliding door whooshes and flattens my hair as I walk into Pa's Grocery. Joey quickly points in the direction of my grandmother and runs into the back room. I roll my eyes and walk slowly over to the meat counter.

I look down at the floor and itch my nose before the yelling reaches my ears. It's muffled, but I hear Stan yell something about a meat shredder and my grandma retaliate with something inappropriate. I take a deep breath before rounding the corner.

"The machine won't slice meat that thin, Cecilia!" Stan yells, "You can't just barge in here and disrespect the employees of this store every time you're in here! We know how to do our job. I've had enough—we've had enough! You need to leave, right now. Leave!" He's pointing toward the front entrance. His face is crimson and sweat glistens his forehead.

"Don't talk to me like that! The customers are always right! If it wasn't for me coming in here every week, you wouldn't have a

store, Stan. I'm the reason you're still in business," she sneers.

"You need milk don't you, Grandma?" I ask loudly and lock eyes with Stan. He shakes his head and turns around.

"What? Well, Jesus, it's Taylor. It's about time. Where did you go to park the car?! Chicago? Jesus," she finishes. She whips her cart around and throws her package of meat on the floor. I grab the skin between my eyebrows. Stan's voice makes me open my eyes.

"When is it going to stop, Taylor?" he asks calmly, "I mean really. I dread coming to work because I hate the idea of seeing your grandma. I fight with her every time she's here. I can't do it anymore."

I laugh through my nose and quickly glance at the floor. I take a deep breath and smile at Stan before grabbing a cold block of cheese from the front of the counter.

"Taylor," Stan says, "Something needs to change."

"Do you think I don't know that?" I spit out. "Do you think I'm honestly okay with the fact that my grandma has been acting this way for months and that I've been the one who's had to deal with it while the rest of my family thinks everything is okay? Don't talk to me like you have any say in this. You don't even know who she is." I storm off and turn the corner, almost running into Joey. He grabs my shoulder.

"Taylor—"

"I don't want to hear it right now, whatever it is. I don't care," I say, trying to walk around him.

"No, you—she's in aisle five. She—," he takes a deep breath, "I don't know if she's okay." His breathing is heavy, as if he's been running around. His pupils are dilated, and his hair is all wind-blown.

I run past the aisles and dash around the center freezer. I nearly knock over the a tower of Gatorade before rounding the corner by the milk. I stop in my tracks, and I feel Joey run into me. My grandma is lying helplessly on the floor. Several broken gallons of milk lay on the floor. Milk is everywhere. A weird sound is coming from my grandma's direction.

She's crying. My grandma's crying on the floor. I feel every bone in my body shift, and my heart falls to my feet. Hot tears singe my eyes. I quickly wipe them away and feel Stan and Joey behind me.

"Are you guys closing up in a few minutes?" I ask, my voice cracking as I continue to wipe the tears from my face.

"We can," Stan says as he briefly grabs the back of my elbow.

Joey reaches into the left corner of his apron pocket. I hear a jingling noise. I walk toward my grandma as Stan strolls toward

the front of the store and flicks off the Open sign. The jingling noise gets louder as I see Joey fumbling with the locks. The sounds coming from my grandma make my heart break into tiny pieces. She's still lying on the cold linoleum as I walk over and lie down next to her on the chilly floor.

"He's not going to come back, is he?" my grandma asks, looking up at the ceiling. Her voice is hollow. Lonely.

I scoot closer and feel icy milk drench the back of my shirt. I hold her hand and decide not to let go.

ANNETTE MARTIN

Failing to Answer the Worst Question in the World

Oh no. Not this again.
I quickly set to rack my brain—
but nothing stands out.
I try to catch hold of something,
anything,
which I can pull out,
polish,
set on display—
but I only snatch at fog.
'They call me sinister
because I write left-handed—'
No, that is no good.
'I love listening
to the pattering of rain—'
But no, no one cares.
I sit.
My mind is blank.
It is my turn to speak.

WILL KELLY



untitled
photograph

CONOR KELLEY

In Amber Sun

What are you gonna do all day tomorrow while I'm at class?" my friend Dave asked me from across the booth at an Irish pub in Milwaukee called The Black Rose. He looked a little concerned.

"Oh, you know, just wander around. I love Milwaukee," I said.

He gave me a look. I smiled. "Dude, I'll be fine," I told him.

Dave and I split a pizza—thin crust, pepperoni. It was trivia night, so we got a sheet and played. I flirted with one of the bartenders and asked her if she had any beers from New Glarus, a local brewing company. We had a couple of their Spotted Cow beers. She walked to the other side of the bar. So I asked the other cute bartender if she had any Schafly beers. It was a little company out of St. Louis. If she knew good beer, she'd spring for that. She said she'd never heard of that company. I asked for the bill.

"Dude, hey, I'll get you back for that," Dave said as we walked out. I patted him on the shoulder and nodded.

Two cute brunette girls walked by, and we watched.

"Hey, you're going the wrong way," they said as we passed.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," the taller one, a brunette, replied. "We're going to Water Street. You guys wanna come?"

I looked at Dave. He shook his head.

"Sorry, girls," I told them, and we walked away.

"It's just that I've got class in the morning, and I'm broke," Dave explained.

I scowled. It was too dark for him to see.

"We can go take dips and play video games," he said.

The ground was wet, and there were puddles everywhere; evidently it had rained during the day, before my flight from Seattle got in. It was not raining now, but the wind was biting hard for September.

That night we talked, took dips, spit in used beer bottles, and flipped around TV channels. Dave loved to talk and had no shame talking about the past, so we talked late into the night even though a part of me resented talking about times when I was happier.

The next morning, I woke up alone on the couch in Dave's apartment. He and his roommates were in class already. I showered and got dressed. The sun shone through the window on their dingy tan carpet. I walked down East Locust Street toward Oakland Avenue to find something to do. They had a little Subway sandwich shop, so I sat at the counter and did some people watching while I ate my breakfast. Lotta fat people out that day. Then I cruised around the musty-smelling Goodwill thrift store. Down the street was a tobacco shop that didn't sell any smokeless, and I tried on a shirt that I looked like shit in. Then I headed to the head shop.

My morning continued this way—I just wandered. A couple hours later I returned with a six-pack of Dale's Pale Ale, a used Killers CD, a DVD movie from the Redbox machine, and an *Esquire* magazine from Walgreen's.

Our plan was to drive into Dubuque, Iowa, that night to see some old college friends and celebrate our friend's twenty-first birthday. I was excited to see my friends, but I was more curious to see if Dubuque was anything like how I had romanticized it. These past few months I'd spent at my parents' house since graduation, Dubuque had started to seem better and better. If it really was that great, I might stay there. I knew it wasn't, but I still wanted to be sure. I wondered what Dave was going back for. Maybe he really just wanted to visit our friends. Dave was a sweet guy.

I spent the afternoon sitting on his second-floor creaky wooden deck, in a brown folding chair with that little sliver of padding on the ass, surrounded by crushed red keg cups and empty Leinenkugel's Summer Shandy beer bottles. The drink was half beer and half lemonade and tasted just like summer, but the bottles were beginning to smell old and sour.

The street was lined with tall, beautiful trees, not yet changing color, strong and healthy. I didn't know what kind of trees

these were. I wish I did.

With my feet up on the railing, the bright yellow shorts Dave lent me were riding up high on my thighs. Students walked by on their way to class, on their way home, wandering about. When girls walked by I flexed my ab muscles and lifted my chin in the air while I pretended to read my magazine. None of them looked up. That's kinda the way my summer had been.

I had the *Esquire* magazine in my hands flapping in the breeze, what was left of the six-pack in the shade underneath my chair, and the sun on my chest. It was almost warm enough to feel like summer. The sun warmed me through, but was not hot enough to make me sweat. This was the best feeling I'd had in months.

When I came back to Seattle, I was single for the first time in a while. My first week there, I met a girl named Alyssa through one of my friends. I danced with her, got her number, and took her out the next weekend for drinks. She was a sloppy kisser and her skin was soft. We were still sweating and grunting together on top of her bed when the sky started to turn gray and the sun began to stir. She was too into drugs for me, had a couple extra pounds on her here and there, but I would definitely see her again. She never texted me back or called me again. The next time I saw her out, I refused to acknowledge her presence, like she was a ghost I couldn't see. I may have taken her rejection a little hard.

In that magazine there was an interview with Clint Eastwood. He seemed like a pain in the ass. People respected him, though. And I knew, somewhere inside of me, I was still that guy, that tough guy people respected. It was just that lately, I had been crying a lot during romantic movies and sleeping late into the morning in my childhood bedroom. I was tired. Something had deflated me.

I didn't miss school. I think I missed being sure about something.

There was a girl waiting for me that night in my hotel room in Dubuque. That summer, we'd been texting all day and talking late into the night. She said she missed me and would head out West to start her life with me if she could. She had always wanted me when I was in Dubuque, but I was always taken. I broke up with my girlfriend a month before graduation, and we had each other a couple times. But this girl, she had a boyfriend now, and she loved him. So it goes.

I shook my head and pulled myself from my thoughts. Whenever I came back from a daydream, I wondered what it was that changed. Like how they say there's always a reason you wake up in the middle of the night, even if it was just a drip from the fau-

cet. I looked down at my torso. The shade had reached the deck, crawled across my legs, and climbed up my body. My stomach looked soft and pale. It was getting cold. That perfect moment I had in the sun was gone, disappeared while I was lost in the past, worried about the future.

In Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, one of the aliens from Tralfamadore remarks to the protagonist: "Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no why." When I read that, I understood him. But that September day I spent sitting in the sun, I hadn't read that book yet.

The leaves shuddered in the wind. Suddenly, I didn't want to go back to Dubuque that day. I wanted to go somewhere else, I just didn't know where or when. I missed something, I don't know what, but I missed it like hell.

I picked up my things and walked back inside to find one of Dave's roommates had returned from class.

"What's up, bud," I said. I didn't know his name.

I gestured toward the TV with the six-pack, two cans of which remained.

"It's this?" I asked.

"Transformers 2," he said.

I grunted and opened a can. "Beer?" I asked, jiggling the last can in the six-pack.

"You sure?"

"Yeah," I said and tossed it to him.

He cracked his open. I cracked mine. Cack. Cack.

I hoped Dubuque would be sunny. I hoped it would be a good time.

TOM UNGER

Rain in Texas

We had all forgotten these colors exist.
Blossoms of yellows and pinks, purple
lilac after months the brown of
singed straw. Mountain laurel sweetly
turning heads for trespassers
slipping in a gorged stream bed.
In an oak-wooded vale I hear the ents.
Ants are line dancing on peonies.
The grass rejoices with arms upwards.
A yellow house plays peekaboo
in mesquite, cedar, and
cottonwood with childish blue silos.
Grackles hang from boughs like a singing,
Hackling fruit. Two blocks away I hear a
Mother screaming Griffin, don't get wet!

TOM UNGER

Persephone

When the evening chills
in August while stones still
release heat; when the cloud
of breath comes familiar
like steam from cider; when
snow falls for the apotheosis of
angels and men; when a daffodil
grows bright in the death of late
February; how sublime a gift,
how precious the choice, to
dwell with Hades.

EMILY SCHLUETER



Billy Mitchell's High Score
digital

MATT NABER

When Darkness Comes Crawling

When the lights turn out and the room goes still,
The creatures come crawling from the twilight.
You see them staring and so grips fear's chill,
While innocent eyes widen in full fright.

But I will tell you something my dear one,
A spell shielding darkness black as can be,
Bearing light greater than the brightest sun,
Passed down from my father's father to me.

It will bring you courage so you won't break,
Making night's sleep a comfort without fuss,
Revealing the true demons amongst those fake.
Now listen closely for it goes as thus:

"Mind's phantoms cannot hurt me, so don't shed a tear,
Long as I know just whom and what I fear."

CONTRIBUTORS

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. He is a professor at Clarke University in the Language and Literature department.

JOE ARMS never really attempted to write until he took a creative writing class with Anna Kelley. Confidence in his skills wasn't exactly overflowing, but when he was assigned to create a few poems to workshop in class, he found that there was a generally nice response to his work. Under Anna's helpful guidance, he entered the poems into the Streamlines Conference and was selected as a presenter, a wonderful surprise for his first attempt at writing poetry. Joe has decided to see where these newfound skills will take him and has switched his major to communications and is now minoring in writing.

GABRIELLE BARILLAS is a junior at Clarke University majoring in Psychology. When she's not writing, she enjoys puppies, baking, and remaining devoted to the Los Angeles Lakers. "Barriers" is her first piece to appear in the *Tenth Muse*.

ELEANOR LEONNE BENNETT is a sixteen-year-old international award-winning photographer and artist who has won first places with National Geographic, The World Photography Organization, Nature's Best Photography, Mencap, and The Woodland Trust. Her photography has been published in *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, BBC News Website, and on the cover of books and magazines in the United States and Canada. Her art has been exhibited in places such as London, Paris, Indonesia, Los Angeles, Florida, Washington, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Canada, Spain, Germany, Japan, Australia, and at The Environmental Photographer of the year Exhibition (2011). She was also the only person from the UK to have her work displayed in the National Geographic and Airbus run of "See The Bigger Picture" global exhibition tour with the United Nations' International Year Of Biodiversity 2010.

CANDACE BLACK'S poems have been published in many journals, including (most recently) *Hubbub*, *New Madrid*, *burnt district*, *American Life in Poetry*, *The Saranac Review*, *Pearl*, and *Blood Orange Review*. *The Volunteer* was published by New Rivers Press in 2003. Her chapbook, *Casa Marina*, won the 2009 Thomas Wilhelmus Award and was published by RopeWalk Press in 2010.

FAITH BRITT is a sophomore graphic design student at Clarke. She has always been drawn to art, so it was a logical decision to incorporate this passion into her field of study and future goals. She enjoys creating artwork that is functional as well as clean in appearance. She also likes to express her personal voice through her artwork, as most of her peers tell her that her work has a "happy" tone, which reflects her personality. After graduation, she hopes to open a small graphic design business or find a job locally in the surrounding area.

COURTNEY BRYSON is a 2011 graduate of Clarke University. She currently teaches speech and English at Hempstead High School. Even though she would desperately love to still be a college student, she's enjoyed her time visiting "Adult World." She believes she may even stay awhile.

KAYLA CARLSON is a junior studio art major with an emphasis in painting at Clarke. She is also working toward K-12 art education licensure. Born and raised in rural Maquoketa, IA, Kayla attended K-12 at Andrew Community School where she had the outstanding opportunity to grow in art through the tutelage of Steve Lucke for thirteen years. Through her parents' consistent support and encouragement, she began to carve her path in life through art. As a wife and mother of two young children, Axel and Zelma, Kayla's career as a student is both challenging and rewarding. It is her aspiration to continue her development as an artist while providing a curriculum to her future students that challenges them to think divergently and broadens their perspectives of the world.

COLE CRAWFORD is an English and computer science double major in the Honors Program at Creighton University and a member of the selections staff for *Shadows*, Creighton's undergraduate literary magazine. He enjoys writing poetry both as an exercise and an outlet; literature has also been a passion of his. In his free time, Cole loves creating websites, running, lifting, hiking, and hanging out with friends.

In the fall of 2010, TESSA CRIST enrolled in her first painting class. It was the beginning of a wonderful learning experience. Two years later, she completed her senior painting exhibit entitled "The Bright and Beautiful." She will be graduating in May 2013 with a BFA in studio art with an emphasis in painting, a K-12 teaching certificate and minor in art history.

Originally from Rockford, IL, ERIN DALY is a member of Clarke University's class of 2013 who will graduate with a BA in religious studies and a minor in writing. She enjoys blogging, playing her guitar named Ted, eating Oreos with peanut butter, and pinning on Pinerest all sorts of calorie-laden goodies she'll (thankfully) never find the time to bake. Sometimes she does all four of those things at once. She writes about music for an online magazine called *The Write Teacher(s)* and about self-love for a site called So Worth Loving. An avid music lover, Erin is impatiently awaiting the day she gets to see U2 and Mumford & Sons in concert again.

BRETT FOSTER'S first book of poetry, *The Garbage Eater*, was published last year by Triquarterly Books/Northwestern UP, and a second, smaller collection, *Fall Run Road*, was awarded Finishing Line Press's 2011 Open Chapbook Prize. His writing has lately appeared or is forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Cellpoems*, *The Common*, *IMAGE*, *Kenyon Review*, *Measure*, *Pleiades*, *Poetry Daily*, and *Shenandoah*. Brett currently teaches creative writing and Renaissance literature at Wheaton College.

GWEN GROSS is studying sculpture at Clarke and will graduate in 2014.

COURTNEY HICKSON is a freshman at Clarke University who is new to the writing world. She is pursuing a BA in social work and is the mother of a four-month-old girl who was born just two weeks before her freshman year began. She loves to write about her daughter and feelings that move her. "The Resting Place" was written shortly after Courtney found out she was pregnant and realized she was losing a huge part of her youth. When she is not doing homework, sitting in class, or working as a waitress in Maquoketa, IA, she enjoys reading and singing to her little girl.

CONOR KELLEY was born in Seattle, WA, to human parents in a hospital filled with other freshly hatched humanoids. He attended Clarke from 2009-2011 and was thankful to study English under Anna Kelley, Katie Fischer, and Gary Arms. His favorite authors are Hemingway, Vonnegut, Sedaris, Palahniuk, and Watterson. For recreation, Conor enjoys bowling, driving around, and the occasional acid flashback. Conor built the room you're in right now with his bare hands. He graduated from The University of Dubuque in 2012—oh, boo, yeah, act like it's a real rivalry. He is a staff writer for the baseball section of the Dobber Sports fantasy sports site and has upcoming publications in *Foliate Oak* literary magazine and *Slow Trains* literary journal. He now lives in Seattle; you should come visit.

WILL KELLY graduated from Clarke University in 2011 with a BFA in doodling and a minor in procrastination, which he now

considers his true calling. One of his most notable achievements is the shocking discovery that "The Decline," an eighteen minute track by California pop-punk band NOFX, syncs up almost perfectly with Un Chien Andalou, though he has yet to share this finding with the internet due to a fear of being implicated with NOFX in any way shape or form (it was part of an experiment involving lengthy songs by many different artists, just so you know). He also enjoys buying discarded photographs of total strangers from antique stores and appropriating them as miniature works of found art, a hobby which may or may not lay the groundwork for some future writing project. He is currently at work on his debut novel, *Sustainability*, which he promises to complete sometime before Turkey ascends to the EU.

TAYLOR KUETHER is a senior majoring in journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. After graduation, she hopes to pursue a writing and editing career at a news magazine and reside in a major city. She loves cats more than almost anything.

ALICE KLINKHAMMER is a senior at Clarke University. She is pursuing a major in studio art and minors in both music and writing. Many moons ago she believed she would graduate in 2013, but now she knows it was only a pipe dream. When she finally succeeds at graduating, she longs to attend graduate school to earn an MFA in creative writing and then achieve her goal of becoming a well-established writer while she paints and illustrates on the side. If that doesn't work out, she plans to run off to one of the coasts, start a band, and become a sellout. She also enjoys dressing up like Pinkie Pie to make people smile while she saves them from the walkers because it's the family business.

PATRICK LENANE is a sophomore at Clarke University and plans to write someday. He has enjoyed reading and writing since a young age, all starting with Dr. Suess' *Green Eggs and Ham*. Though Patrick wouldn't normally submit any of his writings, he has gotten more confident in what he has written thanks to his creative writing class and his supportive professor, Anna Kelley.

DANIELLE LENSEN is from Cascade, IA, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English from Clarke University in May of 2011. Currently, Danielle fills up her time working as a library specialist at Northeast Iowa Community College. When Danielle isn't writing or painting, you can find her spending time with Grandma Leona, the kindest and funniest woman Danielle has ever known. "Groceries with Grandma" is affectionately dedicated to her grandpa, Raymond Manternach, the most unpredictable and funniest man Danielle has ever known.

SARAH LENSEN is a 2011 Clarke University alum. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English and double minored in writing and psy-

chology. She is currently a Business Operations Program Manager for the Business & Community Solutions department at Northeast Iowa Community College. When she's not at work, you can find Sarah oogling over cupcake recipes and hoping to one day create her own food blog. She enjoys everything about literature, traveling, Jamba Juice, and baking anything that calls for extra frosting.

JESS LEONARD SCHENK is a 2011 Clarke alum who recently moved to Cross Plains, WI. She continues to work on her collection of post-apocalyptic short fiction, which may eventually become an actual novel, depending on where the story and its characters take her. Her contribution to this year's edition of the *Tenth Muse* is part of this ongoing project, tentatively titled "The Means to an End."

ANNETTE MARTIN hails from Southern California, but has fallen in love with Midwestern seasons. Members of the philosophy, chemistry, and mathematics departments at Carleton College all think she is an official member of their department—but, of course, only the philosophers have it right. When not contemplating tricky philosophical questions, beautiful mathematics, or cool zeolite models, she is frequently found laughing or Social Dancing (inclusive or). Occasionally, Annette steps back and writes poetry.

MARK DAVID MCGRAW is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Hispanic Studies at Texas A&M University. He has published poetry, essays, creative nonfiction and is the translator of *Heart of Scorpio*, a novel by Joseph Avski published by Tiny Toe Press in Austin, TX last summer.

MATT NABER is a junior math and secondary education major at Clarke University, graduating in the spring of 2014.

PHYLLIS DUNFORD PETERSON graduated from Clarke College in 1969 with a degree in biology. She has worked as a science teacher in middle and high school. Phyllis has enjoyed photography since her youth when she would help in her father's darkroom. She participates in photography clubs, teaches photography and currently has her work on display in the Belk Gallery in Charlotte, NC. She was named finalist in the Outdoor Photographer Magazine's American Landscape Photo Contest in 2012. She married Bob Peterson in 1980, and they have four sons and one grandchild. They reside in Charlotte, NC.

CARRIE PIEPER is a junior drama and English double major at Clarke University. Her aspirations lie somewhere between creating gore makeup for major Hollywood productions and sitting on a mountaintop writing poetry. When she isn't acting, doing school work, writing, or running around like a crazy person (seriously,

she is on Clarke's cross country and track teams), she enjoys knitting, reading, and traveling the world.

BEATRICE SCHARES is a Clarke alumnus currently working as an illustrator in Seattle, WA. Her current projects include a series of oil portraits concerning synesthetes and in-book illustrations for A.R. Kahler's post-apocalyptic fantasy *Martyr*, to be published by Spencer Hill Press October 2014. She encourages all artists to travel the world and would like to thank her professors for all their help!

EMILY SCHLUETER is a sophomore art student hailing from the sunny regions of Southern California. After years of being warmed by the sun of her native land, she decided to uproot and relocate to the Midwest in order to attend Clarke University and earn a Bachelor's degree in fine arts and a minor in graphic design. Her supreme goal is to become an illustrator, more specifically, a concept designer for video games, subsequently filling both the industry and world with her own strain of exotic madness.

KAYLA SCHNOEBELEN is an English/education major from Des Moines, IA. She has spent her time at Clarke consuming large quantities of chocolate, Wild Cherry Pepsi, thought-provoking novels, and diverse teaching strategies.

ELYSE SCHULER-CRUZ is a native of Streator, IL, but currently lives with her husband in Sioux City, IA. She served for five years in the United States Marine Corps as a linguist and currently attends Briar Cliff University. She is a secondary education, history, and English major. Upon graduation, she hopes to teach at a high school in a low-income/inner city area. Elyse has been published in the 2005 and 2012 issues of the *Briar Cliff Review*. Her work is forthcoming in *Lyrical Iowa*.

In the midst of all our advancements, TOM UNGER still believes that the profound joys or sorrows we face still come from the same simple sources: humanity and nature. He tries to recognize both of these forces in his life and draw others' attention to the same.

HEIDI ZULL was born in Detroit, MI but lived there for only six months. Her family moved to Switzerland thinking she needed to see her homeland. She was left in the Alps in a cabin, with an old man, goats, an alpenhorn and a kid named Peter. A girl named Clara saved her. She knows how to milk and roast a goat, yodel, and play an alpenhorn. Heidi now lives and works in Dubuque, IA as a marketing specialist. She received her undergraduate degree at the University of Dubuque in English, communication, and sociology. She is now working on finishing her Master of Arts in communication at the University of Dubuque.

