

TENTH *Muse*

VOLUME VI, SPRING 2016

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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.

COVER ART, "AGORAPHOBIA/LAMMERGEIER 1"

Hannah Goldsmith, '16

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Yet another year of *Tenth Muse* has come and gone and oh, how quickly! It seems like not that long ago the staff met for the first time, all buzzing with excitement over the adventure ahead. And here we are, still buzzing, but now with the excitement of producing another successful book. It brings us great pleasure to hold in our hands the physical manifestation of our hard work that carries the familiar weight and feel of past volumes.

Even though the *Tenth Muse* has reached its sixth volume, this seems to have been a year of firsts. Among them, this has been the first year *Tenth Muse* was offered as a class for credit, the first time on staff for many of this year's crew, and the first year with three Co-Editors-in-Chief!

Our favorite "first" is the feeling of publishing the volume that completes the *Tenth Muse's* first half dozen! We could not be prouder.

Abby Funke, the queen of organization, bravely lead our rag-tag group of Musers through the first semester. The Editor reigns were then handed to Mari Castillo during the second semester and Hannah Goldsmith took charge of art and design initiatives. It was a challenge for us all to go from staff members to leaders. We quickly learned just how much work goes into managing and producing a magazine! Now, we experience the fulfillment of releasing another successful volume.

We certainly have come a long way to get here. With late nights editing photographs and prose and lots of dining hall carry-outs to get us through noon-time meetings, we've finally made it! But, of course, we couldn't have done it without the time and talents of our dedicated staff. We owe it to them for facing the flurry of emails, pioneering new advertising strategies, and spending hours digging through submissions. We would also like to thank our contributors. Their literary and artistic talents fill our pages year after year.

Lastly, we would like to recognize Anna Kelley, our fearless leader. Her tireless guidance and vision has propelled us from the very beginning. We are eternally grateful and couldn't have asked for more of a rockstar advisor!

And so, dear reader, it's time to crack open this volume of the *Tenth Muse*! May this half-dozen milestone be the first of many!

Abby Funke, Mari Castillo, Hannah Goldsmith
Co-Editors-in-Chief

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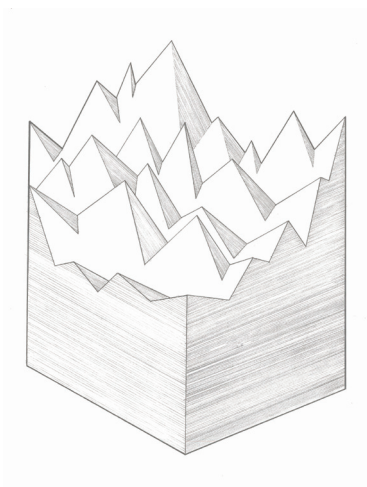
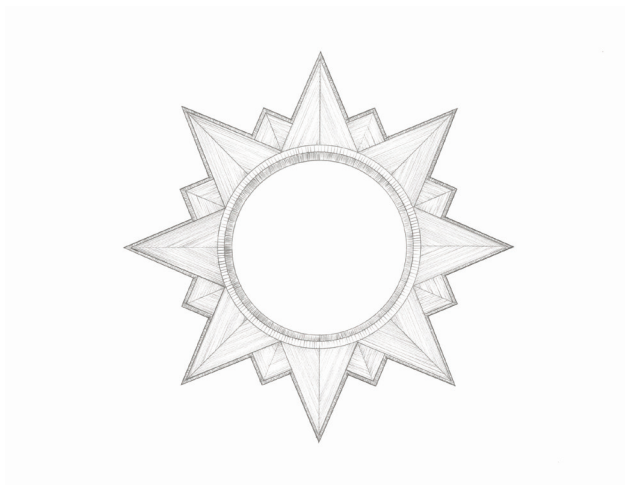
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MATTHEW MIKULICE



(untitled), and the sun said...
(untitled) mountainous
pencil on paper

MEG BRADLEY

Twelve

My feet don't know where to go. I can feel the rocks and the sticks and the harder dirt where the path is, I think, but there's more to the left, and some behind me. The rough bark of giant trees bites into me when I turn, and the leaves are crunching so loudly that I don't think I'll ever be able to hear myself think again. The air smells wet from the rain and my hair is stuck to my face with sweat. Or maybe tears.

I wasn't supposed to get up at the campfire.

I wasn't supposed to get up, even though the smoke was aiming straight at my face and down my lungs until I gagged. I wasn't supposed to get up even though I thought I might throw up all over the tray of graham crackers and chocolate next to me. Even though my little sister handed me a marshmallow that she roasted, but she squeezed it too hard and my whole hand and my arm were sticky, and my face where I touched it when I forgot. And even though I am four thousand four hundred and sixty seven days old as of right now.

The campfire smell is still stuck in my nose—smoke mixed with wet wood mixed with some sweat and sunscreen and that after-rain smell and lots of bug spray. I wasn't supposed to get up, but I'm twelve years old and I can see enough to not walk into the flames.

Lucille means "light." My grandfather thinks this is some great cosmic joke by the universe, but I think of it more as a curse my mother gave me.

"Hey, Luce!" My grandfather called from across the flames just a few hours ago. "Lucy, how many blind girls does it take to change a lightbulb?" He knows that I won't walk into the fire. He knows that I can still see light and dark.

My father hates this. "Dad, please."

"She's twelve today, she can handle it! She's a big girl. Lucy thinks it's funny, don't you?"

My mother was quiet. The next time she spoke I could hear her voice shake just a little and I knew she was thinking about how she's the one who cursed me, and how only seven hundred and fifty-one days ago I would have been allowed to get up at the campfire.

The thing about birthdays that no one tells you is that you're really only a day older than the day before. There's no magical moment, no sudden burst of wisdom. You are eleven and three hundred and sixty four days, and then you are twelve. It doesn't really change anything. But the thing about losing your sight that no one tells you, is that it changes everything. That people stop seeing you when you stop seeing them. That sometimes they forget which one of your senses you're losing, and they say things they never meant for you to hear. They turn off the lights even when you're still in a room, because they forget that you can still tell the difference.

I reach out for a tree and run my hand along the bark. They taught us in Girl Scouts to feel for moss to know which direction to go, but I forgot which direction the moss is supposed to be facing. My eleven-year-old feet always knew which way to go at this campground, but my twelve-year-old feet have forgotten. Or maybe they just need to learn again.

I take a deep breath and try to inhale the smell of Sunday dinner at my house. The conclusion to my grandfather's joke—"Why the hell would blind girls need to turn on the light, anyway?" And my father's weary response, "Dad, language. Please." It doesn't matter which Sunday this is, because they are all the same. Mashed potatoes on the upper left. Chicken on the upper right, green beans below, spread out across the whole bottom half of the plate. Gravy on everything. My mother insisting that we pray to counterbalance my grandfather's swearing, but nobody really knowing how.

Thinking about it, I drop to my knees so quickly that my hand scrapes against the bark and it's warm and it's wet and I

know it's bleeding. I can see the outlines of trees, just barely, so I squeeze my eyes shut. *God, if you're listening please help me. I'm sorry I got up. I'm sorry I yelled at my mom for cursing me. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry.*

I screamed at my mother for cursing me yesterday, when I was eleven years and three hundred and sixty four days old. She screamed at me for not knowing that she never meant for it to happen. I do know, and I am a little bit sorry. Maybe that's a twelve-year-old thing. Maybe I am a little bit different.

I'm crying, crying like a little girl even though I'm twelve, but I have to make it back without screaming. They can't know that I couldn't do it, that I couldn't figure it out. It's been seven hundred and fifty one days and I'm supposed to be able to do things by myself. I can get dressed and brush my teeth and make toast with jelly. I can take a shower and tie my shoes. I can knit a scarf—my grandmother showed me how, hand over hand over hand, when I was eleven and just three days, with the softest yarn in the world, which she gave me for my birthday.

My feet trip over something—maybe it's a rock—and they go flying out from under me and my hands reach out but I can still taste dirt in my mouth and for a minute I can't breathe. I dig my fingers into the dirt and hold on. Once when I was little and I could still see the color brown when I laid on the dirt, my father told me to hug the dirt and see if I could feel it hug me back. Now I just feel my own heart beating fast against it and it pushing me away.

The last color I remember is blue, like the sky in winter. I was nine and a half and I was bundled into my puffy marshmallow coat and buckled in in the middle of the backseat so I could see out the front window and the sky was so blue that sometimes when I think about it I can still see it in my imagination. My dreams are still in that blue, every night, so I'll never forget. My sister Hannah screamed in her baby seat and then Mom's hands slipped off the wheel and her body started jerking all over the place, and there was a screech and a crash and all the glass was flying and flying but I don't remember it hurting at all. My mother cursed me when she named me, but that was the day the curse caught up and grabbed her. It still grabs her, some days.

I push up from the dirt with my palms, and it stings where the dirt got into my scrape. The kind of sting you can feel your own heartbeat in. I don't remember which way my feet were

pointing before I fell. I hug my knees and wonder if it's time to give up and scream until they find me. But I am twelve years old and I am strong and I can do it by myself. *God, please, God.* If God is real I would take his help. No one would know. They would still think I was strong enough by myself. In the Bible, God leads people out of the desert. I only went to Sunday school a few times though, so I don't really know that story very well. I'm not sure what they had to do to get God to help them. At least there were a lot of them. At least they could see the way.

My legs are so tired. Maybe I need to make a bed out of leaves, and sleep here. Maybe someone would find me. Or trip over me. But an animal might find me first, and that would be worse than being lost.

I pick forward, because that makes the most sense, and I walk. And walk and walk. I walk so far that I must be at least twelve and one day old. The sticks keep cracking and the leaves rustle and once my face bounces off of a tree, but I walk and walk and after that I hold my arms out in front of me. I walk and walk until my feet hurt so badly I think I will topple over, until finally there is a patch of brightness, flickering. And a high-pitched sound, like screaming, like my sister's screaming. It is her, I'm sure it is, and I start to run. Hannah is screaming, screaming because she is only five years and eighty-nine days old, and I know from her screaming that the curse has grabbed my mother and I hear my father yelling to my grandpa to put out the fire in case the curse jerks her that way. And I know from their yelling that they forgot that I was gone, they forgot to look for me, they forgot that I broke the rules and walked away and walked back without even knowing how I found them except that I followed the sound of Hannah's screaming, just like it sounded the day of the very first curse.

Hannah flings herself at me and buries her face in my shirt so she doesn't have to watch, but I am twelve years old and I know that the curse only holds my mother for a few minutes and that soon everything will be okay. I run my thumb along the raised scar behind her ear; her own little piece of a curse she doesn't even remember. I feel something hard pressing into my back and I know that she is wearing my watch again—my special one with the raised numbers that my teacher found for me but that Hannah loves. I sneak a hand back to feel it.

I am four thousand, four hundred and sixty seven days old,

but it was only nineteen minutes ago that I stood up from the campfire when I wasn't supposed to. I am four thousand, four hundred and sixty seven days old, but when I hold Hannah tight and wait for when I will be able to hold my mother, who cursed me even though she didn't mean to, I think I might feel twelve and eleven and nine and a half and even two all rolled up into one.

KASSIDY HANSON



Moon Baby
earthenware

NATASCHA MYERS

Caught in the Cosmos

This must be how the heavens go,
sheltered under a canopy of stars and dark blue.
We're angels playing devil's advocate
with the notion of me and you.

How can you justify fear of our gravity,
when man dared to measure the vastness of sky?
Even if I fall in love,
I'll brave the chaos to say I tried.

Caught in the cosmos,
stranded near helios.
Your eyes are made of the stuff of stars.
One glance at you, and I'm caught in the cosmos.

We're no different than colliding stars,
a classic case of chance and echoes.
I would make my exit, but it's hard to leave
when we refuse to let go.

You don't want to lose me,
and I don't want to be lost.
So what do you say we stop chasing comets,
and stand still long enough to be caught?

ADINAH HOPKINS



Mocha
digital

PATRICK DEENEY

Shaving Face

I was four. The sun hadn't poked its head out from behind the covers of the horizon, yet I was busy trying to move a small stepstool into the bathroom doorway. Dad was inside, pulling his can of shaving cream out of the medicine cabinet and spraying a glob into his palm. I planted my rear onto the lowest step and watched, fascinated by the process, while rubbing my tiny hands over baby-smooth skin.

"I think I need to start shaving too, Dad."

He dragged his razor down the sides of his face, clearing stubble to make way for fresh, pink skin. "I think you can wait a little bit, bud."

"How long?" I asked, innocently thinking that tomorrow could be the day I finally started shaving.

"Until you have something to shave," he replied, as he deforested another patch of skin under his nose, expanding the fields of pink.

I have always wanted a beard. That statement has been true ever since I was young. I would often rub my face, hoping hair would magically sprout like leaves on tree branches in early spring. There's just something about that coarse hair that protrudes from the lower half of the face that screams raw masculinity. Beards conjure images of burly men in the woods, ripping trees out of the ground with their hands and wrestling Kodiak bears over the best fishing spots for Alaskan salmon. Beards go hand-in-hand with wizened old men sitting in lecture halls or laboratories as they unravel the secrets of life and the universe. Beards belonged on the regal faces of kings and noblemen as they ruled

empires around the world. But, alas, I am cursed with the inability to grow such hair. Scratch that, I can grow hair, but I cannot do the beard of my dream justice. After a week or two of trying, all I end up with is a scruffy patch of chin fur, a wispy mustache and the underside of my jaw lined with what looks like a forest of electrical wiring poking through my skin. It's just not fair.

November is always the worst month for someone like me. Men everywhere unite under a common cause, No-Shave November, that glorious time of the year when men let their facial hair grow wild and free. As the years have passed since its first observance, men have started to use it as a way to draw attention to cancer patients by donating the money they save from not shaving to charity.

I sit envious at the multitude of beards around me, as my scruff struggles to show and my face freezes in the chilling winds. I feel dejected, that I don't belong, that I am unable to belong, all because my cheeks grow only peach fuzz. While my family gathers for our Thanksgiving meal, I am forced to see the fruits of their labors, as goatees and mustaches abound. However, my clean-shaven face never felt all that out of place until a few years ago.

I am the second youngest of my extended family, so my lack of facial hair didn't seem so out of place. Michael, the one cousin who holds the honor of baby of the entire family, is a year and a half younger than me. To my chagrin, he stepped into the room on that chilly Thanksgiving Day looking like he walked right out of a Men's Warehouse commercial, baby face adorned with a bushy five o'clock shadow by one in the afternoon.

"Why don't you shave that thing off?" his sister quipped as he sat down at the cousin's table.

He caressed his cheeks. "Why? November isn't over yet. Plus, it keeps my face warm."

I looked around the table. At one point or another I have seen each of my male cousins sporting some form of facial hair, be it groomed or the unruly growth of a few days without shaving. Seeing Michael join these ranks only isolated me more, trapping me on a deserted, hairless island.

I believe the beard makes the man. They've accompanied faces longer than dogs have stood by our side, begging the question of who really is man's best friend; after all, beards don't get into the garbage, dig up flowerbeds or bark at the mailman as he walks by. They have been held in high regard for ages. As far back as ancient Egypt, beards were styled with gold, and fake beards were given to both men and women pharaohs as symbols of royalty, going so far

as elevating those who had them to gods. Philosophers in Rome attributed beards to higher thinking. Epictetus notably remarked that he would much rather be killed than shave his beard, forgoing his philosophical nature. And why wouldn't he? Facial hair signified wisdom in men from antiquity, so much so that modern philosophical arguments have been named after Plato and his beard.

This feature of male appearance holds profound resonance within cultures, and our ancient infatuation with beards makes it easy to see why I developed my desire to have a beard at such a young age. But there is more to it than that. We've given our gods beards, beings we associate with perfection. Zeus without a beard looks like just another random guy, albeit prone to throwing a few lightning bolts.

Ancient times were not the only age where beards (or any facial hair for that matter) resonated with the success of men. Dali, Darwin, Einstein, Marx, Stalin, and Whitman all had one form of facial covering or another. Philosophers, artists, musicians, scientists, idealists, revolutionaries, generals, dictators, kings, and gods—men who wrote history—were covered with coarse plumage. Even some women were famous for their unique beardedness; people would come from miles around to see Annie Jones and her famous facial hair. Yet, I'm stuck gazing at myself in the mirror, caressing my bald cheeks. No one wants to see just another ordinary, beardless guy. Would it even be possible to amount to anything without facial hair? Or will I be stuck dreaming of how I could one day be great if only my slumbering follicles would awaken?

"Did you see Michael?" my mom emphatically stated on our car ride home after Thanksgiving dinner. "When did he get so old!"

My dad agreed, as I silently rubbed my cold face in the back seat. Michael looked years older now that he sported a beard, while I was stuck with my smooth skin, perpetually looking sixteen.

As we pulled onto the highway, the engine protested, but slowly it warmed and reached the speed limit. The lights of the highway passed rhythmically, creating hypnotic patterns of shadows on the interior upholstery.

"It's not fair," I said. "Michael can grow a beard like that and he's only eighteen, yet I'm stuck with nothing."

My parents laughed. "Don't worry, bud," Dad started. "I couldn't grow any either when I was your age."

"Oh great, so I'll be sixty before I can even get close." I'll be an old man before I finally meet my dream beard. While, in the

meantime, my friends will have grown so accustomed to their facial hair, they'll want to be rid of it.

I live in a house with three other guys: Tim, Tom and Tyler. Aside from all of their first names starting with the same letter (leading to massive confusion when calling out to one of them after a few beers) they all have one commonality that excludes me: facial hair. Every so often, they will talk about how their beards itch or how it's time to shave, while I sit on the couch poking fun at how I know exactly what they are talking about.

"You shave?" one of them usually quips back after my attempt at conformity.

"It's more for motivation. I want to give my whiskers something to strive for." They all laugh while inside I cringe. They don't realize how true this statement actually is. Every week or so, I lather my face in soft, white shaving cream, make a quick face in the mirror, remark how I look like an extremely skinny Santa, and then proceed to try to remove all the hair from my hairless face by finagling my razor around my awkward jawline to clear away the stubby electrical forest. It's a depressing process, watching what few hairs proudly exists on my chin quickly fall before the overkill of my five-bladed razor.

Hannah gingerly sweeps her hand back and forth over my chin, fingers mimicking shaving techniques and brushing the nubs of hair just starting to poke through. "It's growing so much better!" she says, commending the little stubs at their progress towards the light.

Instinctively, I run a hand across the sides of my face, "Only forty more years till I can grow an actual beard."

She pulls it away from my face, "But hey, it's gotten a ton better since we started dating. Maybe it won't actually take that long."

"Yeah...but I really want one now." I laugh, my impatience getting the best of me.

"What can you do about it?" she says.

"Nothing, sadly, I just hate looking young. Plus my cheeks get cold."

Our car finally started heating up even though we'd been driving for about twenty minutes down the same highway. The shadows in the car continued their monotonous cycle as the streetlights flew by. I had tucked my face into the collar of my coat to try to warm my cheeks back up.

"That's completely fine," Dad continued, "but it will grow. I

learned to deal with it and so will you.”

“Just look at your dad,” Mom continued.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Dad replied through the salt and pepper caterpillar sitting on his upper lip and the soul patch clinging for dear life from his lower one.

“Yeah, Dad. Why didn’t you go for the full beard?”

“I just thought that this look would suit me better.”

Mom laughed, “Your father can’t grow hair on parts of his cheeks very well so he had to settle with that.”

“Well it’s more than I can grow,” I quipped back, trying to imagine myself at sixty.

“Like I said, bud, it will grow. You just have to be patient.”

Ever since I was a child, I have always wanted a beard. I connected the image of facial hair to the idea of success, to the epitome of what being a man meant. But genetics and luck have not been on my side, making me confront the harsh reality that I may never be able to grow that sublime stubble of my dreams, and no medicinal remedy, magic pill, or dark ritual will change it. But maybe I don’t need a beard to become the man I want to be.

My dad doesn’t usually have a beard, but my mom still loves him. He is able to get by in this world full of chin scruff and lip hair without feeling inadequate. Maybe one day I will find similar confidence in my life. Who knows, I might even find someone who loves me for who I am, hairless face and all.

“Merry Christmas!” Hannah says as she hands me a hastily wrapped gift she had forgotten to put in the mail. “I hope you like it.”

I take the lumpy gift and begin to unwrap it. Inside is a hand-crocheted hat I had watched her make a few weeks before. I grab its grey yarn, dropping the paper to the ground, and start to examine it. A brown thread poking out from inside catches my eye. I pull on it and out comes a copper-colored crocheted beard.

Two loops on the sides serve to hook around my ears. I slip it on and feel the warmth cover my face as a smile stretches underneath its interlaced yarn. “I love it.” It may not be real, but it’s mine. For now it’s the best I’ve got, and I couldn’t be happier.

EMILY PAPE

Pablo

Some things in this world are unspeakably evil. My mother's cat, for example. A morbidly obese creature with fur reminiscent of the dust bunnies beneath the futon, the thing that stared intently at the door that led to the closet beneath the stairs.

His name is Pablo. Pablo likes to rake his non-declawed paws along just about everything I own, ranging from the comforter on my bed to the shoes on my feet. No one else's belongings, just mine. This is Pablo's equivalent of wiping his Cheetos-cheese-covered fingers along the back of my t-shirt and smirking while he does it, a signature to be discovered later in big obnoxious streaks that seem to say "Pablo was here."

Pablo also enjoys sitting on the TV remote when I am beating the last dungeon boss on my Xbox 360. Not just once in a while, not just occasionally. He does this at every possible opportunity. Pablo watches me patiently, measuring the focus I have diverted from his button-clad target in favor of the TV screen. Then the TV goes dark because it is always the power button he hits. At this point, after wrestling the remote out from beneath his fat ass and discovering that my character is dead and that I have not saved the game in three hours, Pablo and I look at each other.

I imagine my face says something like: "Why have you done this to me, Pablo?"

Pablo gazes back at me with ease and blinks slowly. Then a small smile creeps onto his face and he shrugs casually: "Because your misery is delicious."

So, because Pablo is a manifestation of furry malevolence, and

therefore enjoys shredding the precious little details of my life, it was only natural that he assumed the role of snitch this particular morning. His tail twitched steadily, his posture alert with his stare nailed firmly to the closet door. I watched him from the futon stationed at the bottom of the stairs, right next to the entrance to the closet, my fingers frozen on my controller, my animated warrior standing idly on the TV screen.

I could hear my mother walking out of her room upstairs. Her footsteps creaked down the hall, growing louder. All the while, Pablo stared at that stupid door.

You see, Pablo knew. Pablo knew just how utterly dependent my moodswing-prone mother's mental state hinged on being able to follow his orders. In his mind, she was a perfectly obedient meat puppet and did not require punishment in the form of claw shredding and button pressing so long as she continued to do his bidding. This meant that my mother would walk down the stairs, spot her angelic Pablo, and see that something behind the closet door was bothering him. And she would open it. And Pablo would smile.

I know that Pablo is evil. Pablo knows that I know. However, Pablo also knows that no matter how fat he is, he still resembles something that does not deserve to receive equal retaliation in response to his atrocious deeds. I don't know why an image of an innocent, defenseless creature comes to mind when I think about beating Pablo furiously with pillows. It just does. Most days he walks around the house, knowing full well that I outweigh him by more than a hundred pounds, and believes he is untouchable.

Today was one of the rare days Pablo was wrong. I came prepared.

I turned up the volume of the TV and brought up the pause menu, blaring generic adventure music; my mother had paused at the mirror at the top of the stairs, so luck was in my favor. I retrieved the spray bottle from beneath a pillow.

Pablo tensed. He turned his head and looked at me. Pablo's eyes are bright orange, like the evil Lord Sauron's eye from *The Lord of the Rings* movies. His pupils dilated, as if tempting me to stare into their collective dark abyss and cower in fear from the horrors that lurked within. He was testing me, judging whether or not I truly had the backbone to oppose him and receive the punishment he was sure to dish out later.

I got him right between the eyes, the spray bottle set to full blast. He did that funny little dance cats do when they get a jolt of surprise, jumping about ten feet back with his limbs and tail rigidly straight. Then he scrambled towards the laundry room, where he would probably sulk in his litterbox and plot revenge.

I hastily tucked the spray bottle back beneath the futon pillow as my mother determined that her hair still looked like hair before descending the stairs. She was dressed for work in brown slacks and a pale pink blouse.

"Turn that down," she said as she walked down the stairs. I scrolled the volume on the TV down to zero, abruptly cutting off the game soundtrack.

She paused on the last landing. "Dylan, try to get some of your laundry done today, okay?"

"Kay."

She frowned at my slouched form. "I mean it."

"I know."

She raised her eyebrows skeptically. "Mmm." She walked down the remaining four stairs, her heels clicking as she reached the stone entryway floor.

"Do you want me to start supper tonight?" I asked.

"Yeah. I won't be home until five at least. You know how it goes."

"No problem."

She slipped into her coat and retrieved her purse from the coat rack. Then she stopped her off-to-work shuffle, pausing to look for a shin-high feline.

"Where's Pablo?"

"I think he's in the litterbox."

"Oh." Her expression fell, just a little bit. I sort of felt bad and sort of didn't.

"He'll be here when you get back."

She sighed. Pablo had her under his complete control. "I'll see you later."

"Bye."

She took a final glance around for Pablo and reluctantly walked out the door. It clicked shut behind her and the house was suddenly very quiet.

In the laundry room, I could hear Pablo scratching around in his litterbox. Upstairs, my mother had forgotten to turn off the radio on her alarm clock and I could discern what sounded like Kenny Chesney echoing down the hallway. In the closet under the stairs, there was a muffled *thump* and an "ouch." I shuffled down to the "save" option on the pause menu and saved over my last checkpoint. I exited the game, switching back to the Xbox home menu.

The loose gravel in the driveway crackled beneath the Trail Blazer's wheels as my mother backed out. The door to the stairway closet cracked open. I waved him back; she might have forgotten something.

Pablo peeked around the corner, watching the closet door with shrewd speculation.

The Trail Blazer paused as my mother shifted out of reverse. I waited until she had driven down the hill towards the main road and was out of hearing range.

“Okay, now you can come out.”

Alex stooped out of the closet beneath the stairs, rubbing the back of his neck. I wondered why his mother, Ellen, hadn’t picked up on the fact that Alex had walked out to the bus stop still in his pajamas. She hadn’t though; he wouldn’t have made it out the door if she had, much less have been able to skip the bus stop altogether and walk the few hundred feet from his driveway down to my house. The public schools weren’t out for Thanksgiving break yet, but Alex had a tendency to stretch his breaks by a day or two.

“She said she was working until five, right?” he asked. I had let him in when my mom was still in the shower, since it wasn’t warm outside, but he couldn’t exactly reveal to my mother that he was skipping school; my mother and Ellen were too friendly for that.

“Yeah. Did you call yourself in?” I asked. Alex had a deep voice and could easily pass as a parent whenever he called the admissions office at school, if it even really mattered.

“Yep.” Alex grinned. Suddenly, he felt a hostile presence behind him and looked over his shoulder. He found Pablo still peeking around the corner, watching him.

“Hello, Pablo,” Alex said.

Pablo grumbled deep within his chest, his orange eyes blazing with annoyance.

“Yeah, I hate you too.” Alex turned back to me. “What do you want to play?”

I gestured toward the TV stand and the shelves on the side that housed my Xbox 360 games. “You pick.”

Alex lumbered over to the shelf. Pablo slinked out from behind the corner and glided over to stand behind him.

“Hmm... This one—”

Alex turned, game in hand, and very nearly fell flat on his face as Pablo wove in-between his legs and sauntered off.

A red flush crept up Alex’s face, his eyes darkening as he watched the high-held tail flash up the stairs. Then he looked back to me, questioning.

I held up my hands. “Pablo can do no wrong, in my mother’s eyes.”

Alex let out a sharp breath and opened the disc tray of the Xbox.

Over the course of the next few hours, it was strangely quiet upstairs. Perhaps I should have taken that for a bad omen, but Alex and I were too preoccupied making twelve year olds cry on Xbox Live. The sunlight streaming through the window grew brighter and glared on the TV screen.

“What time is it?”

Alex looked at his phone. “Almost one.”

“Seriously?” We were in a game lobby, waiting for the match to start.

The springs in the futon creaked as I got up and wandered over to the pantry in the kitchen. There were water bottles on the bottom shelf that were meant for packing lunches. I grabbed two and handed one to Alex when I sat back down.

The other people waiting in the lobby chattered on their mikes. Thirty seconds until the game started. The country station was still buzzing upstairs.

Alex seemed to notice it the same time I did.

“What is that?”

“My mom’s alarm clock.”

“No, not that...”

Then I heard it.

The wet, gurgling sound. It was coming from right above me, halfway down the stairs. There was a sinking feeling in my stomach even before Pablo emptied the contents of his onto my upturned face.

Alex gasped and flinched away. The futon shifted abruptly as he leaned back.

I numbly wiped the cat vomit away from my eyes and stared up at the cold, orange orbs that gazed down upon me. Pablo watched me the way a spider watches a particularly juicy fly, a self-satisfied smirk stretching across his features.

Alex fumbled with the controller and turned off the Xbox.

“Dude, *why haven’t you abandoned that cat in the woods yet?* That thing’s demonic.”

Pablo still stared down at me, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

So I looked straight back at Pablo and said, “Let’s do it.”

“What?” Alex asked.

“Let’s take a walk out to the woods.”

Pablo stopped smiling.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH



Agoraphobia/Lammergeier 1
mixed media

CRYSTAL LINZY

Impasse

Julian:

I'm not a hand lick
I'm not a hand lick
But you make me feel like I'm begging for scraps
At your feet
If it were any other soul
I would turn away from you with
A bloody snarl
The kind that only hellhounds can communicate in
But you have already reached the parts
Of me that even I fear
Close enough to my heart to pierce an artery
I give you the key to my destruction on a lazy Saturday night
But you all shrouded in steel and silence could barely care
You keep me at an arm's length
Knocking me to my feet with the fury of a hurricane
"Well what about me?"
Well what about you?
I could devour you whole
If only you were open to consumption
But you only pretend to be
Yet you stay kind enough to drip curses at me
from the corners of your lips
To the roots of my ears
I'm not a hand lick
I'm not a hand lick
What have you done to me
Willful child
Convolutd woman

Corrine:

Isn't my voice my own
To do with it as I please
Then why is it so difficult
For me to air it without
A mutation of my character
A twist of my soul
I want to be

As warm as a Sunday morning
And always have the right thing to say
But the right thing isn't the true thing
And my mother always taught me to speak the
True thing
Well sir
You say you love me in spite of being
A colored girl
As long as I'm not
too dark
too loud
Or *too proud*
No sir you don't love me
You want a watered-down version of me
Where the melanin is so translucent
You can see the eurocentric beauty standards shine through
No sir you don't love me
You love an idea of me
That is a reflection of you
The one you've been taught to love since birth
The one I've been taught to love & covet since birth
But no sir you don't love me
So yes you can pass right by me
And I'll sit on these rickety steps near places
Where the carpeting has been torn
And hum to myself 'ain't I too a woman?'
While you find the magic and the wonder, all that life has to offer
I'll sit and I'll wonder 'ain't I too a woman?'

Both:

Do I want you?
Or do I want me?
Was it ever possible to have both?
The thing between us
Is a shared heartache
A tricky void
I never saw it as it was
Nor did you
We only saw it as
We were

COLIN P. NIEMER

The Alte Mutter

Children, children: beware the Alte Mutter.
Tall it stands, in a wood of its own,
a mother of trees young and old.
Black is its bark and gnarled are its branches;
knots, and curls, and breaks, and furls.
Loathing, is she, of children who fuss;
who fit, and fight, and bicker, and cuss.
Out from the wood, this old maid of oak
comes with barrow, and spade, and spite,
to find girls and boys to eat on this night.

The boy ran ahead, eager to count the numbers on the number trail. His mother followed behind him as he blissfully went along the path. They were on a hillside that overlooked a valley. Directly below was a crick. Oh how the boy loved the crick! He loved how the water moved and churned, taking twigs and leaves down the stream. It was mid-October, and the sun was hidden behind a thickness of clouds. As he ran, the wind stung at his face. His cheeks were bright red.

“Don’t go too far,” his mother called after him.

“I won’t,” he replied, pausing to look at a new number he had found.

Then, they came to a small bridge. This bridge crossed a stream that ran down the hillside into the crick below. The boy tromped across the bridge yelling out, “Who’s that trip troppin’ across my bridge?”

From behind, his mother hollered, “It’s me! The third billy goat gruff!”

He decided that he would wait for his mother to catch up: he wanted to show her a new number he had found.

"Look, Mom, it's number twelve! I found it!"

"Very nice," said his mother, smiling.

With an overwhelming air of achievement, the boy ran along in search of the next number. After a time, the boy and his mother came down to a crossing. It was here that they inevitably had to make a choice: to cross the crick, or to take the path up the hill and continue on this side. The boy knew that the hike would be shorter if they crossed, but he wanted to continue on, up the path, a way he had never taken before.

"Let's go up the hill, Mom!"

"Alright, but we'll have to be quick. We don't want to be late for dinner."

As he climbed the hill, the boy imagined he was climbing to the heights of the tallest mountain. The rocky trail bent and curved as he climbed, higher and higher, until finally he reached the top. Here, the boy looked at the crick below and wondered what it would be like to fall. To him, it seemed like you could fall forever, like the leaves that floated from the tree tops.

It was then that he noticed the tree: an Alte Mutter! The boy shuddered at the sight of this ancient horror. His Oma had told him stories of the Alte Mutter: an old mother, and a watcher of the woods. She was said to come after dark to take naughty children in her wheelbarrow and eat them for dinner. He resolved not to be one of those.

For the rest of the hike, the boy was less spritely, less joyous. He had seen the black bark and was reminded to be good. He found more numbers, but he did not yell. He crossed more bridges, but he did not tromp. His spirits were lessened by that looming monster in the forest.

That night, before he went to sleep, he thought of the tree he had seen. Would it come for him with its barrow and shovel, to take him away? No. He had been good. It would not come, but his mind did wander.

Countless times after this, when the boy came to the crossing, he would not hesitate to cross the bridge. He would cross and walk into the valley, for there he knew he was safe. Safe and away from the aching limbs of that tree, his fear, the Alte Mutter.

SAMANTHA HILBY



Rooted
earthenware

MADDIE DONAHUE, PAIGE PETERS, AND
COLIN P. NIEMER

Crossroads

“Crossroads” is a collaboratively-written short story inspired by The Road, a post-apocalyptic novel by Cormac McCarthy. It tells the story of, arguably, the third main character who is mentioned occasionally but never a direct part of the novel’s narrative: the wife of the protagonist and mother of the protagonist’s son. In The Road, the Earth has become desolate, reeking of death and cannibalism. A man leads his young son through this destroyed landscape alone, after his wife surrenders to the hopelessness of the world by committing suicide. “Crossroads” imagines the woman’s story had she failed to take her life, after discovering that hope still remained in her.

The woman knew that the darkness did not matter. Whether she could see or not made no difference. Her world was dark either way. Empty. There was nothing that could save them. Nothing could save her from the darkness she felt and lived in. The woman knew she brought her son into this world, and for that she blamed herself. She could not live to see him die. She could not watch them suffer. The woman was making the right decision. One less mouth to feed, one less person to take care of, one less vulnerable target.

When she looked back, she saw nothing. The campsite and her family seemed to have disappeared. The dim lighting of the lamp was lost in the darkness of this world. She stumbled over the cold, ruined earth trying to distance herself from those who had her heart.

Finally alone, the woman sat down. A single tear fell down

her face, tracing its own path through the permanent filth of ash. She sat staring at the obsidian flake. So thin, yet so strong; she knew it was capable of her destruction.

I can do this.

Holding the obsidian in her left hand, she prepared for her final action. As she positioned it close to her throat, she thought of her son. She thought of her husband and what she was doing to him. Abandoning him to protect the boy alone. No. This is the right thing to do. Now that the Earth has been destroyed, there is no meaning in this life. Now that there is no meaning, trying to hold on to life any longer is hopeless. There was nothing left to hold on to. No food, no water, no humanity. Pointless. She must. The woman sat shaking, her unsteady hand bringing the blade up to her neck once again. Her plan for exsanguination.

Dear God.

The woman angled the rock and could feel the slight pressure against her throat. She flexed her arm in preparation for a sharp jerk back. She took a deep breath, tears falling.

Dear God, please forgive me.

She heard something in the distance. A dog barking to her left. Quickly, she let go of the contrivance and took off running until she was so weak she could not run anymore. As she fell, the darkness overtook her.

She dreamed of her son. The light from the lamp seemed to glow around him giving him an almost angelic halo of brightness. She sat on her knees a few feet away, arms outreached towards him in preparation for his fall. Behind him the man sat watching with a smile on his face; a rare sight to see.

Come on, you can do it.

Go to your mother.

They encouraged him as he took one weary step forward and let go of the leg of the chair. One more step. Then another. Slow and uncoordinated. The man and woman gave the boy words of encouragement as he took his fourth step and tumbled forward, caught in his mother's arms. She let out a small laugh and looked at her husband as he came closer to give them each a kiss on the head.

She woke in a panic. Freezing cold, she looked around, searching for the man and boy, but she was alone. She remembered the night before and her argument with the man. The woman knew what she had to do in order to save herself from this world, a world filled with destruction and evil. Yet, now she was second guessing herself. Was living so selfish? Was she allowing fear to end her life too soon?

The woman used to trust God. Throughout the workday, she

would say prayers of thanks and guidance. But now it was different. Everything was different. God had abandoned them. The man always told her that He was still there with them. That this was all part of God's plan. That they had to stay strong and carry the fire. She didn't agree with him. Not anymore. Before wickedness had consumed the Earth, she would have prayed and been confident that He was still there. Now, after everything the woman had seen, she did not pray. Somewhere deep down she knew the man was right. She just did not want to believe it. In her heart she knew God was with them, but her heart was no longer there. The boy had her heart. He took it from her the day he was born.

You cannot give up. You mustn't give up.

You need to find them.

You need to go find your heart.

As she approached the campsite, she looked around frantically. The dark ashes from the fire were cold and black as the night. She could feel the ground pressed down where the man and boy had slept two nights before. Looking around all she saw was darkness. The absence of light in the sky was not welcoming; nothing was ever welcoming.

She knew they wouldn't be there, although for some reason, she had hoped.

They were gone.

She headed south.

She awoke on her tarp wrapped in a damp blanket. All of her belongings had been acquired throughout her journey. Each one told a story of lives passed, uncovered by the woman on a never-ending treasure hunt. She looked up. What time is it? The sun was stifled by the grayness of the sky.

It didn't matter anyway.

Nothing mattered.

Gathering her few belongings, the woman left the shelter she had inhabited for the past three nights. Tarp. Blanket. Shears. Ever since she left her home, the woman has been on a search of something, a something that cannot be found on this Earth. A search for hope. Why couldn't he understand?

The boy was too young to remember, and much of the past seemed a dream now.

This was a nightmare that still haunted her. The black of the night reflected off the flake in her hand. She could feel it dig against her skin. She had convinced herself that all that lie ahead for her was worse than facing death. God had turned His back and it was her turn for control. She pressed harder, just how he had shown her. Razor sharp.

This was the right thing to do.

The boy would soon forget, right? Forget that his mother loved him, forget how she held him, forget the world of the past.

With blankets and belongings packed, the woman walked in search of her next home. There was a constant fear clouding the air.

A fear of starvation, a fear of people.

The woman was living on whatever she could find, but the hunger never truly went away. She was heading south. There was safety in the south. They were going south. She approached a house that sat surrounded by ashes. The white picket fence was now a shade of gray. She couldn't help but think of the lives that were lived here. Happy lives that were now destroyed, just like hers. She glanced at an open window as she stood on the porch. She twisted the doorknob. Unlocked. The floor creaked under her shoes that were nearly worn through. When she left the campsite that awful night, she wasn't prepared for anything other than death. She wasn't prepared to go back. She wasn't prepared to want them. Need them. Death was the only thing that was certain anymore. And even that, she couldn't be sure of.

Five more steps. A mirror hung crooked on the wall. She stopped to face herself. She hadn't seen herself since they left the house together. Her cheeks had already begun to hollow out. The furniture was all charred and ashy. Nothing here.

Must find food.

She looked outside. A shed. There was a patch of yard that was disturbed. Chopped. She carefully tread through the barren yard. A yard where children once played on green grass. A mattress sat nearby. She approached and saw a plywood door with a missing lock. She slowly lifted the door. There was a long, dark staircase. Her lighter lit the darkness just enough to see the stairs below her. She took each step gently, almost expecting them to break under her. She paused at the last step and looked around. Beds. Cans. Pears. Someone had been here. There were empty cans stacked in the corner. Someone was here. Someone could be here. Someone had wanted her to come.

She opened a can of pears. The sweet syrup revived her dry throat. Just one can. They won't mind if one can is gone. They would want her to have it. She finished the pears and laid on the cot. She rolled over on the pillow. It smelled familiar. It smelled of home.

In the morning, she awoke in complete darkness. Feeling for the lighter, she made a decision to leave. It's not safe to stay. She gathered a few cans to carry and left the bunker. Finding them was more valuable than this safe haven.

Must keep going south. Must find them.

There were no shadows. The ash and the soot hung in the air like a woolen blanket over the Earth, blotting out the light that used to be. The woman could not remember the last time she had seen her shadow. In the old days, the woman's shadow gave comfort in the midst of loneliness, but now there was only her and death and ash. And fear. Before she set off, she checked her pack to see what was left of the meager food she had taken from the bunker. All she had was a single can of beans and some pears that were both wrapped in the blanket and tarp that she slept on. In her jacket pocket she felt the pair of shears, her only defense.

Why didn't you do it when you had the chance?

You couldn't.

It wouldn't have been right.

You would have lost everything. You would've lost your soul.

Would it have mattered?

The day was cold and gray as always, and her coat was damp from the snow the night before. As she trudged down the road, she kept a lookout. Always on the lookout. She kept her hood up and her hair tucked carefully inside so men could not see what she was. Down the road, she saw nothing but an old car and some trash. It was safe. As she approached the car she could see three bodies inside, charred beyond recognition. Two were large and the other small. A perfect family of death. She took the shoes from one that seemed about her size. They were too big but it was good enough. They would do.

This is how it has to be.

You know this.

Keep moving south.

Keep searching for them. They're somewhere.

You need to find them.

Okay.

The smell of his hair was sweet and his face was innocent.

The boy sat in the yard and played a flute that he had found in their attic. The melody was sweet but sad. Like someone trying to explain a world that they had never known. She called his name and he came running to her through the grass to hug his mother. But as he ran towards her the boy got farther and farther away. The color ran away from his face and his eyes turned obsidian black. He faded into shadow and was gone.

The woman jolted awake. She pushed away the tarp and sat up from the cold ground that she had slept on. The woman heard a noise coming down the road like the squeaking of small tires that had been worn down over the years. Men. Gathering all her en-

ergy, she trekked up the hill to a round that overlooked the bridge below where the men would cross. This gave the woman a vantage point. The nearly lifeless creatures passed on the road below. One was tall and one was smaller. Could they be? Had she finally found what she had been searching for? These thoughts passed through her mind, but there was a darkness that lingered there. If they were still alive, what had they done in order to be so? Would they still be the same men? No. There was no room for hope such as that. For all she knew they were dead. She hoped that they were. Common robbers, they looked like. Vandals. Rapists. Cannibals. When they had passed and their backs were towards the woman, she allowed herself to peer over the fallen tree she was hiding behind so she could see the forms more clearly.

As she did so, the smaller one looked back. All he saw was a hood and a single strand of golden hair that had managed to push its way into view before it disappeared into the ash. For a moment, the small figure felt a swell of memory he knew to be long dead and gone. Before the word Papa could come out of his throat, he decided it was nothing, for hope could not live in a world that was forsaken.

The woman's heart beat faster than ever. Her hand was numb and bleeding from clutching the pair of shears in her jacket.

It didn't see you.

Stay still. Stay hidden. Don't breathe. Damn the hair. Cut it off.

Okay.

Okay.

MADISON RHYMES



Autumn 6
digital

MADISON RHYMES



Winter 6
digital

EMILY PAPE

Winter

Cold creeps
Slowly at first and then,
Then it holds tight, sinks deep
Into flesh, into the world.
Sharp, biting, colorless, life leeches away
And smothered in quiet, muted-winged voices.
And those flat, pale skies stare down, they betray
No empathy, nothing at all.
Wind that cuts, blinding, and I hate
The stiffness of shoulders, those clenched teeth.
I dream of color, of warmth, and I wait
For the birds to slink back into the haze, shimmering pavement
And easy smiles, sun-baked cats and a slow pace.
But when that constant noise moves back in, I find myself
Missing that eerie silence, that sharp hunger that creates
Those bright eyes, that vivid feeling of just breathing
When the air burns into your lungs and claws its way back out
Into flurried air, a pitiless vision, seething
Against clutching scarves and bloodless hands.

DON ANDRESEN

A Letter from Underneath the House of the Bishops

I have been sitting on this pile of bricks in the ruins of Panama La Viejo, staring into the cloudy sky, trying to think of the right words to write my mom in my first letter home. I think of all the events that have happened over the past week since we parachuted into this country from an altitude of 500 feet. Thus began 'Operation Just Cause' the invasion of Panama. Almost all the events I have been in or seen have been frightening, and many have been tragic. I know I must be careful of what I write; I'm sure that all my family has been worried, but they know that I can take care of myself. It is my mom that I am concerned about; it wasn't more than a few years ago that she was still becoming frantic if I was late getting home at night. I wonder how she would react to me overthrowing a dictator.

It is New Year's night, and I can hear the celebrations going on in the neighborhood below me. The Spanish holiday music has been playing loudly for a week and a half now, rejoicing over the overthrow of Noriega and celebrating the season. As one song turns into another, I hear a familiar holiday tune that reminds me of all the Christmases and New Year's I had growing up. Even when I was young, I had always thought those holidays were special, and I also knew that someday, as I grew older, my holiday settings would change. However, 3,000 miles from home and in the middle of a triple-canopied jungle being shot at wasn't exactly the yuletide transformation that I had expected.

As I begin to write my mom, I decide that I'll just have to sugar-coat the events a little, maybe to the point of lying. I want

to make sure that she doesn't suspect that I have changed because of the scenes that I have observed or been a part of since coming here.

Dear Mom,

Merry Christmas. How are you doing? I'm O.K. I guess. Well, if you have been watching the news you know where I am at. Sorry I couldn't call you before I left. They cut all the phone lines at the barracks to make sure that the word didn't leak out that Panama was going to be invaded. That would have taken all the fun out of it for Noriega. (Ha Ha!) It sure is beautiful down here. It's like a paradise. This is probably the best Christmas present I could get. The people down here are very friendly, always waving at us and smiling...

After we jumped onto the Rio Toccamen International Airport, my Battalion from the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, along with the 2nd Battalion Rangers, suppressed any resistance coming from the Panamanian Airborne Unit (Pumas) stationed at the airport. At first I worried that the resistance in Panama would be like that of Vietnam, where the civilians would carry on aggressions along with the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF). I was the squad leader of 1st squad, which consisted of myself; my assistant squad leader, Specialist Taylor; my gunner, Specialist Longmuir; my assistant gunner, Private First-Class Laury; and my ammo bearer, Private Miller. I was extremely proud of my squad. Longmuir was the fastest gunner in our battalion, and no one could ask for a more responsible assistant squad leader. There was, however, one deficiency that continuously got us all in trouble; we were all a bunch of kleptomaniacs. For example, if we needed any military items for accountability inspections or to prepare our equipment for deployment, the entire squad would wander off in different directions, only to return a little while late with three times as much of that particular item as we needed (oddly enough, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th squad were always missing that same item when inspection time came).

We, along with 2nd squad, were to take part in a mission that included Alpha, Bravo and Charlie companies. Seventeen Blackhawk helicopters were to drop us in on Landing Zone (LZ) Jaguar, which was set up about 2 kilometers southwest of the Panamanian Special Forces compound. We were then to move on foot to their headquarters and barracks, and secure the area of operation using minimal force. This would be the first step in securing the Atlantic side of the Canal Zone.

Two of the Blackhawks were diverted for another mission,

and one was shot down soon after it left base, so we had to cram into the remaining 14 to travel to our destination. As we flew over the land, I could see Panamanian civilians, whose breakfast we probably were interrupting, step out of their hovels and wave to us from the street. Any fear that I had soon vanished. Maybe this wasn't going to be another Vietnam after all. These people really seemed to like us.

I guess you have a lot of questions and concerns, and I'll answer them as soon as I get home. I plan to take leave sometime in late February. (If we are back in the States by then.) I am taking a lot of pictures so when I say how beautiful it is down here I can prove it when I get back home.

My \$22, 35mm camera was my diversion from the combat that always seemed to find its way to where we were. I thought of myself as an informal photojournalist, in a place where the news pool correspondents from the big time networks had access only if we accompanied them. Running out of film was no problem. With the former occupants dead or captured, the Panamanian Special Forces barracks stood deserted, and two days after our clash with them, Taylor walked the 150 meters downhill from our position, to their former barracks, and scammed a dozen rolls of film he found in one of the footlockers. I knew that it was my duty to discourage this type of looting, so I confiscated the film from him. And besides, he didn't have a camera anyway.

I had taken photos of the inside and outside of Noriega's house long before journalists were allowed near the compound. When my unit was done liberating the 31 hostages at the Marriot Hotel in downtown Panama City, the hostages conducted a group pose for me, all with their arms around each other and smiling. When Specialist Jaurez from 3rd squad was wounded in the knee by a fragment of shrapnel from a grenade, I took a photo of him being carried away on the stretcher, smiling and giving me the peace sign while his crimson blood was soaking through his field dressing.

My favorite photos had nothing to do with the invasion, the people of Panama, or my friends. Instead, the photos that I was most proud of were ones that I took of a flock of vultures. When we first arrived in Panama La Viejo, we noticed that between the ruins of the old Panama City where we set up, and our temporary command post, there were stables holding around 45 horses of different breeds. While walking around the stable to take note of any possible PDF avenue of approach of sniper position, we saw a beautiful Brazilian steed who was lying on its side and, as we neared

him, we quickly found out why. He was a casualty of that morning's battle to take over the barracks. A stray round, probably from a 60mm mortar, landed near the horse as it was grazing. Shrapnel covered the horse and crippled him on the spot. Although it was one of the hardest things I had to do in Panama, I knew that there was no hope of the horse recovering, and we had to shoot him.

After the horse was shot, Miller and Laury retrieved two 5-gallon cans of fuel to cremate him for sanitary reasons. Soon after we left the site, a flock of large vultures came from the sky to pick at the remains. As one bird would come down from the sky to feast, its brothers would see it descending and follow. Soon there were a few dozen vultures lining up at the horse's carcass as if it was a salad bar line. When I walked down to get a photo of them they didn't seem to mind my intrusion. Then they started fighting amongst themselves to get at the horse. Soon, my fascination turned to revulsion as they tore at each other's throats. Somehow, in the middle of the melee, the birds must have thought I was competing with them to get at the few remaining scraps of food on the horse. Several charged me from behind with their wings extended. It seemed as though they were trying to intimidate me by dragging their enormous wings on the ground until they got within a couple feet of me then flapping their wings forward, spraying me with the arid dust and dried dung. Physically they weren't a threat, but the debris they were slinging at me was intolerable. I backed my way through them until their focus was back on the horse. After I took a few more photographs, I headed straight for the barracks to take a shower.

The next day, on the 23rd of December, 2nd squad was guarding the access road to and from the barracks that we were transforming into the 504th temporary command post. An old bus was being used as a road block, and anyone wishing to pass through or stop and see the field commanders would have to answer some questions as to their intent. If their credentials were correct, they were allowed to pass through. About 11:30 that afternoon, I was walking down to the barracks to pick up the squad's rations. From my right, I heard several people shouting, "alto alto." When I heard them yelling at someone to stop, my attention was naturally drawn to that area. A silver Toyota pickup swerved around the bus barricade and was sped toward the barracks. Although I was sure that the driver would be stopped before getting this close to the command post, I dropped to one knee and pulled my M-16 off my shoulder and flipped my firing selector switch from Safe to Semi. As the pickup neared I could see the soldiers between the road block and myself run out to try and intercept the truck. When they were unsuccessful, one young soldier, against our unit's

regulations, fired warning shots in the air. The 4x4 then picked up more speed and headed straight for the barracks. I raised my rifle to my shoulder, but I was not confident that I could shoot at a person who was not shooting at me. Then I thought of the 220 Marines who lost their lives in Lebanon when a suicide driver crashed his truck full of explosives into their barracks. The driver didn't give me too much time to weigh the many more pros and cons of pulling the trigger. As the left flank of the truck became fully exposed to me, I aimed at the driver's-side door, still not knowing if I should take the initiative and risk shooting a civilian. Just then, the machine gun that I had completely forgotten was on top of the barracks roof opened fire. I don't know whether I saw their firing as a signal for me to fire, or if the noise startled me into pulling the trigger, but my shot tore into the truck's door and I was the man inside for the first time. He jumped off his seat, hitting the ceiling of the cab, then his whole body spun away from me. His truck swerved toward me, and I watched it slam into one of the 5 cubic chunks of concrete outside the barracks. I flipped my selector switch back to Safe, reslung my rifle, and reached over to my other shoulder to unsling my camera. Although I was probably the closest to the truck, our medics were there before I was. One medic, who had been watching the action all from inside the command post, came running in bare feet over broken glass to tend to the man. Despite all the rounds fired at him from the machine gun nest, he received only an entrance and exit wound in his right shoulder. My round entered the truck door at chest height and the trajectory path was deflected downward. When it came out of the door, it imbedded itself in his left buttock.

Later, I found out that he was not our enemy, and did not intend for his actions to be interpreted as hostile. He had been out with some friends ever since the morning of the invasion to celebrate the ousting of Noriega. After a 2 day drinking binge, he took the route home that he usually took. He was only semi-conscious when he wove around the bus and passed the guards.

While the medics worked on him, I stood at the head of the stretcher and took photos of him. When I went to take a step back to get a better angle, I bumped into someone standing behind me. When I turned around, I found myself looking down the business end of a video recorder and several 35mm lenses. An escorted flock of reporters were interviewing our commander before all the commotion had happened, and rushed down to cover the event. All the big names were there: CNN, ABC, *Newsweek*, and *The Army Times*. When I turned around to get the shot I wanted, I found that I couldn't. Something felt voyeuristic about me being there in the first place. Here I was, shooting photos of the man

I had shot, and to add to that, others were shooting photos of me shooting photos of the man I had shot. As I turned away and started to walk out, I almost knocked over CNN's cameraman, but at that point I no longer cared. All I knew was that I had to take a shower.

This place sure does have a lot of oddities to it, Mom. Did you know that Panama is the only place in the world where the sun rises over the Pacific Ocean and sets over the Atlantic (just look at a map)?

The worst part of this whole venture is finding out that despite all the training that we have done, there are still a lot of problems we are having that we never counted on. But I am sure that once we get all the little kinks worked out of our organization and communication problems, the confrontations missions should go smoother.

The position at which we set up was in the middle of the ruins in the oldest European urban areas set up by the Spanish conquistadors in the new world. Balboa used this area in 1513 as a starting point before heading off to discover that the Pacific is on the other side of this isthmus. The Old Panama City was destroyed by fire when the English buccaneer, Sir Henry Morgan, sacked the city in 1671.

We set up our mortars around the base of the tallest structure, which was once a cathedral called The House of the Bishop. Now all that remained of the once grand building was a 3 story, shelled-out stone bell tower and the walls around it that made up the apse. It was the area that was once called the sanctuary.

On the afternoon of December 24, I leaned against the walls of the cathedral talking to Specialist Bartrum, from 2nd squad. We were just about to eat our MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) when we heard a sporadic volley of shots being fired about 75 meters down the hill by the roadblock. Our conversation was never broken. In the past few days, we had gotten used to the sounds of gunfire, and we could now easily distinguish the sound of gunfire travelling away from you, from the sound of gunfire being aimed toward you, and these particular shots were the former.

Before we exchanged too many more words, we heard the sound that I always thought would be reserved for the end of the world. A near deafening sound of more than one .50 caliber machine gun being fired in our direction. The guns were so close I could hear the slamming of the bolt between each of the rounds that were fired.

We heard the rhythmic throbbing of the weapon for only a

fraction of a second before our reflexes kicked in. We both dove for a spot behind the stone wall, at the same time jamming our helmets back onto our heads.

Because there was a grove of palm trees between us and whoever was firing, I couldn't see any of the enemy; all I saw were American uniforms running for cover and a couple American vehicles down on the road. As I put my head back down behind the cover of the wall I had pictures running through my mind of a horde of the PDF running up to our position, each carrying a 165 pound, .50 caliber machine gun.

Although common sense told me not to, I knew I had to compromise the safety of my wall and run to another about 15 feet away so that I could get a better view of what was happening. With one quick glance at Bartrum, I jolted to my feet and sped to the far wall.

As I was only a few feet away from the safety of the wall, I saw something that I had always thought was impossible to see. A .50 caliber fires a 2 and a half ounce round with the velocity of 1800 feet per second, and that is what I believed I saw whiz a few inches in front of my face. My mind must have told my body to stop long before it told my legs, because the belief that a round had just flown in front of my face resulted in the same effect physics would have if a boy rode his bike into a clothesline at neck level.

My back slammed onto the moss-covered stones that were once the roof of the cathedral, and curled up, covering my head from the chunks of stone and mortar flakes that the bullets were chiseling out a few feet above me.

Forty seconds after the firing had started, it stopped, leaving a thunderous explosion of silence echoing through my head. The air stood still and time was frozen at that moment until I cautiously uncurled myself and peeked over the wall. The only movement I saw was the swaying palm leaves of a tree that the rounds had cut through. One of the leaves dropped, and floated gracefully toward the earth. Then suddenly turning nose down, it plummeted into the earth. And as hard as I looked, I still couldn't see any of the Panamanian Defense Forces' jungle-striped uniforms. Only American uniforms running around in commotion.

About 5 minutes later, Sergeant Major Rath came by and told us what had taken place beyond our view. A Delta Company from another battalion came through on their vehicles to get to the capitol of the country. Since our communication wasn't set up yet, no one had gotten word of their crossing our perimeter, and they were unaware that anyone was up on the hill. As they were

halfway through our sector, a white van down the road, about 150 meters from us, fired a couple shots at the bus we were using as a road block. When those at the barracks fired back, Delta Company thought the shots were coming from their left flank instead of their rear. After having one man already killed by a grenade that was tossed out of a moving vehicle, Delta Company was not going to take any more chances. After they opened fire on our position, our Bravo Company who were on the other side of the road saw all that was going on. Someone in Bravo Company knew we were up the hill where the Delta Company was firing. Someone in Bravo Company decided to stop Delta Company from firing into, and possibly killing, those from his own Battalion by shooting at those who were shooting the .50 caliber at us.

"By the way," Sergeant Major Rath informed us, "two men were shot, both from Delta Company, both in the head. Specialist Taylor died instantly, the other was medevaced by helicopter to a hospital at Fort Amador. He'll live." Then he turned away and started walking down the hill to the command post. "Merry fucking Christmas," I heard him mumble as he descended.

Well, Mom, I guess that I should be going now before the rains start. It always rains during the dry season at 1:30 in the afternoon and around 2:00 at night. I'll write to you soon again I hope.

Just halfway through the line I was writing, I felt a hand grab my shoulder. I spun around to see the grinning face of my Platoon Leader, Staff Sergeant Turner. "You coming over to join us?" he asked.

"What? Are we having a platoon meeting?"

"No," he answered. "Longmuir was rummaging around the barracks pantry and found a few bottles of rum and a couple of packages of Kool-Aid. We figured that if we can't celebrate New Year's at home we'll have a little party here."

I looked down at Longmuir's hooch and for the first time noticed that he was gone. "Yea, I'll be there as soon as I get done writing this letter," I said, and at the same time I laughed to myself and thought how maybe Sir Henry Morgan and his crew could take lessons from my squad on how to loot and pillage.

As he turned away, I continued to write my letter, but my mind was on the small celebration that part of my platoon was taking part in 50 meters behind me.

But I can't say when will be the next time I write. It sometimes gets dangerous down here and we don't have a whole lot of

*time for frivolities. It's not like this is exactly a party down here.
Take care of yourself.*

Don

I carelessly shoved the letter in my cargo pocket and started walking to where the quiet laughter was coming from. Over the Atlantic, I could see clouds creeping in. Then a bolt of lightning made a scar across the starless night, like a dragon's tongue licking the ocean. I turned around and rummaged through my duffel bag to get my spare poncho.

I then pulled the letter from my pocket and wrote what I was trying to say all along.

P.S. I love you.

Then I folded the envelope and walked toward the rum.

MEG BRADLEY

Down the Rabbit Hole

The rabbits, they whispered to me. *Play with us*. I would reach my chubby six-year-old fingers out to touch their long ears, their puffs of tail, their long, soft fur—but they would always hop just out of reach, their purple irises glinting in the afternoon sun. Purple was the color of my favorite sticky grape popsicles, the wine sparkling in my mother's glass, and when I looked into their eyes I felt safe.

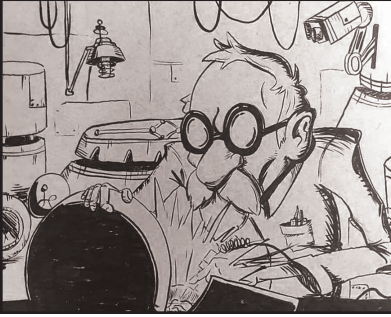
I would beg my mother to come and see them. Until they whispered again: *secret, secret*. Just for me. Their whispers grew louder. *Play with us—only us*. I dreamed of them hopping into my bed, snuggling, nuzzling my fingers. Hoping for the last bites of the mushy carrots I stole from the dinner table just in case, hidden under my pillow until the smell of cooked vegetables soaked the air.

Their purple eyes faded to blue, then clear. The color of the vodka never in my mother's glass for long. Their fur grew thinner, fainter, until all that was left was the whispers. *Never enough*.

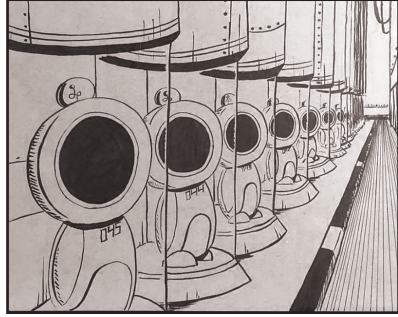
Now the invisible man with translucent eyes and a stubble of furry whiskers sits with me on the train, holding my bag, at the table, holding my spoon, at the edge of my bed, holding my breath, whispering.

JACOB MANTERNACH

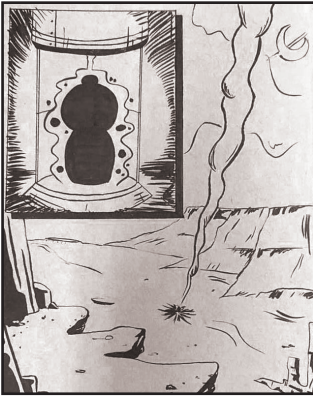
Blink the Robot



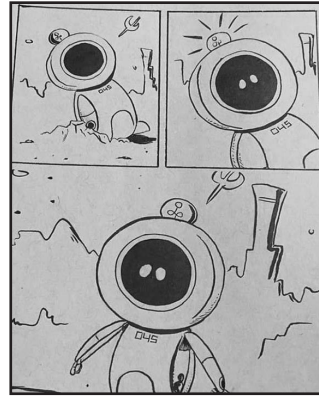
Professor J. Parker programs the last Blinker Bot before the crew of robots teleport to a seemingly desolate planet to search for life.



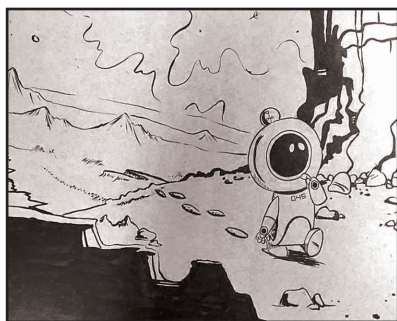
All the Blinker Bots are lined up in teleportation tubes before being sent to their assigned planets.



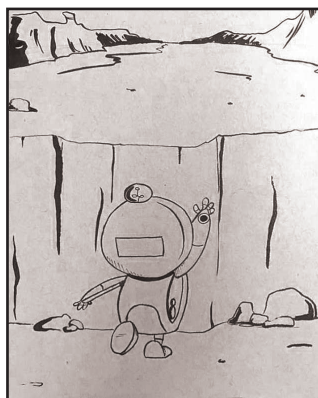
Blinker Bot 045 has been teleported to desolate planet XY7063, a.k.a. 'Vinobbes.'



Blinker Bot 045, a.k.a 'Blink,' is booted up and begins to wander around planet Vinobbes.



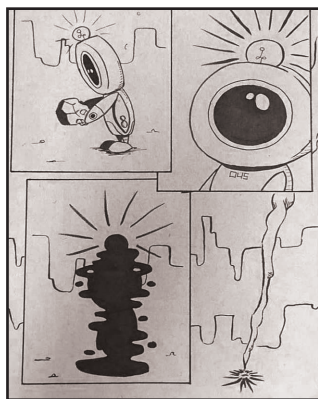
Blink descends deep into the canyons of the planet.



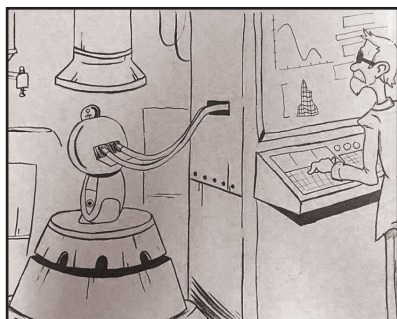
Traveling the rough terrain is hard for the small robot.



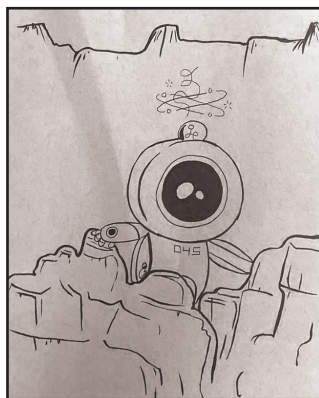
Blink scans a rock for any traces of extraterrestrial DNA. So far, all scan results are negative.



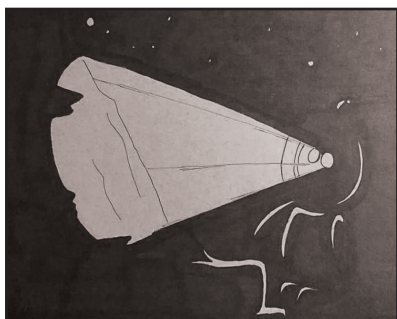
Periodically, Blink is teleported back to Earth for the scientists to retrieve any information it may have found.



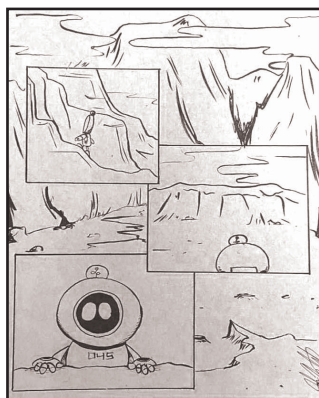
Once back on Earth, all of Blink's information is retrieved for scientists to examine.



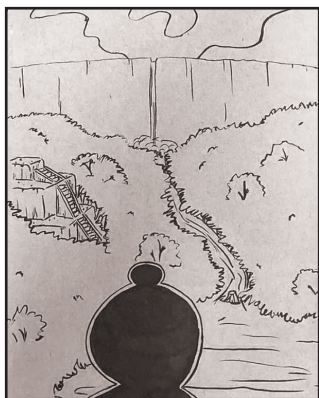
Blink teleports back to the planet Vinobbes. Whenever Blink returns to the planet, it is transported to a place not yet explored. Often, the new area is hundreds of miles from its previous location.



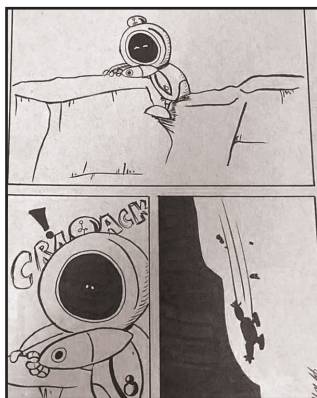
During the dark nights of Vinobbes, Blink continues to work.



Months go by without any trace of life forms. Never having traveled over the tallest ridge, Blink climbs the mountain and peers over the other side. It is amazed at the discovery.



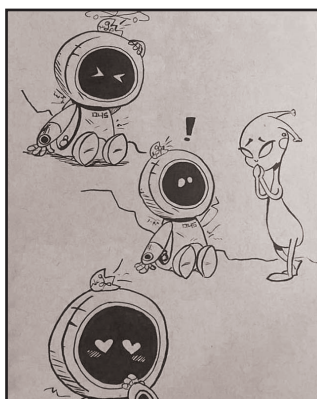
Atop the mountain ridge, Blink looks down upon a rich valley of life.



Eager to witness possible new life forms, Blink climbs over the ridge to trek towards the valley. A rock below Blink's feet cracks, and Blink tumbles down the rigid mountainside.



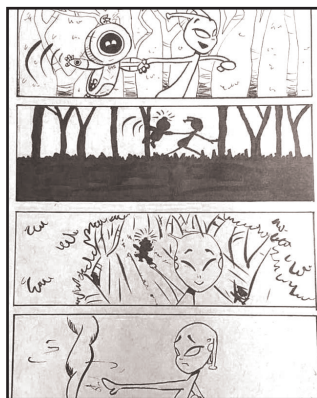
THUD! Blink slams into the ground, catching the attention of someone.



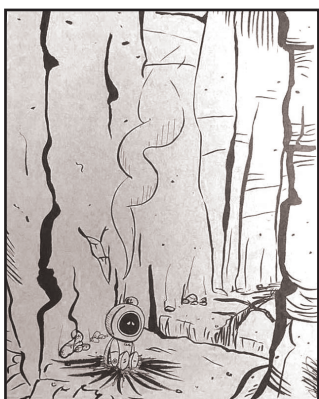
Love at first sight.



Blink is helped to its feet, but communication immediately becomes a problem between Blink and its new friend.

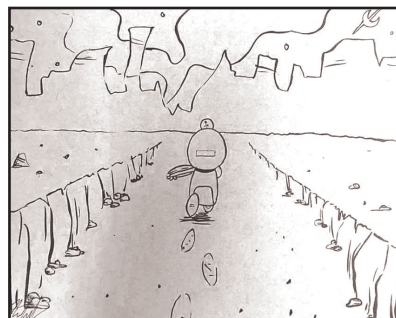


She grabs Blink's hand to show him the world she lives in. However, along the way, its blinker goes off, sending it back to Earth.

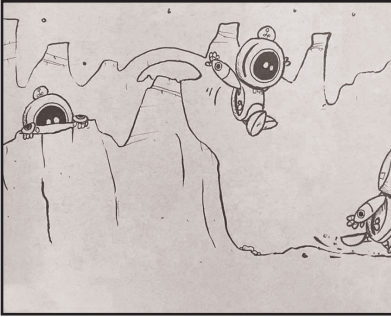


Blink is teleported back to Earth once reports show the bot is damaged. No data is retrieved due to the damage from its fall.

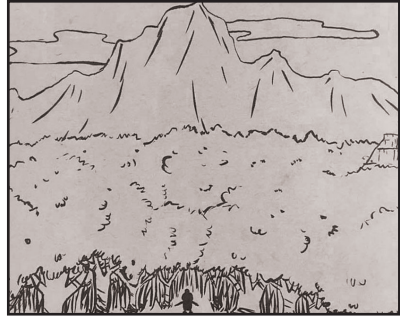
Unfortunately, when Blink is teleported back to Vinobbes, it's on the complete opposite side of its new friend.



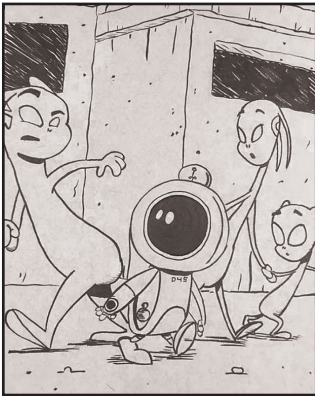
Determined to find its love, Blink makes its way out of the canyon and runs to find her.



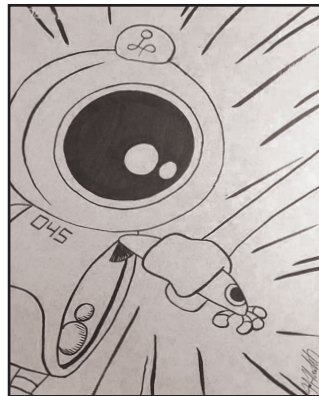
Blink rushes through the terrain to journey back to the area it first spotted its love.



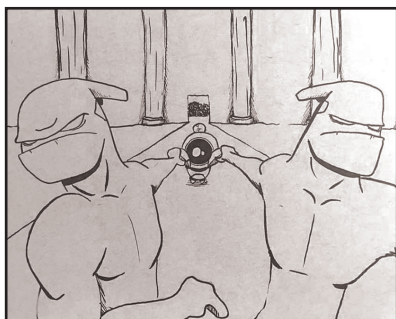
Blink finally reaches the rich environment. Now it must find its love.



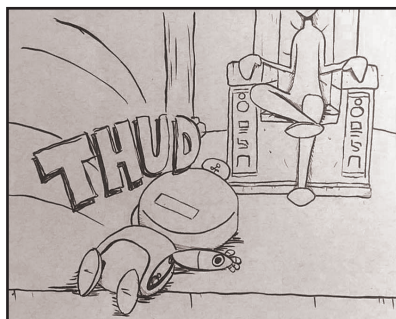
Blink wanders the village streets and natives are stunned and afraid to see the small robot.



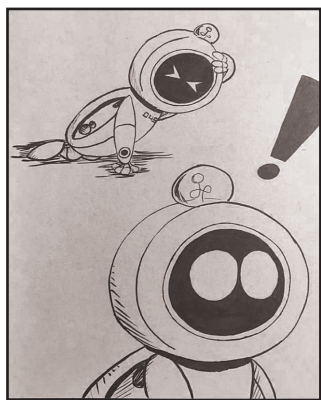
While walking amongst the natives, an arm reaches out and grabs Blink!



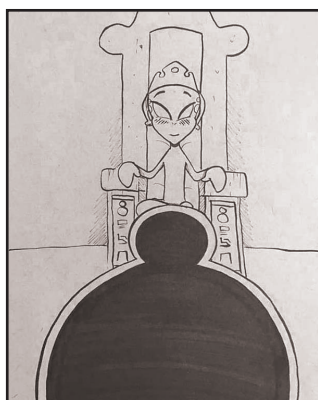
Villagers do not take kindly to strangers. Two guardsmen drag Blink to the temple to receive punishment from the ruler.



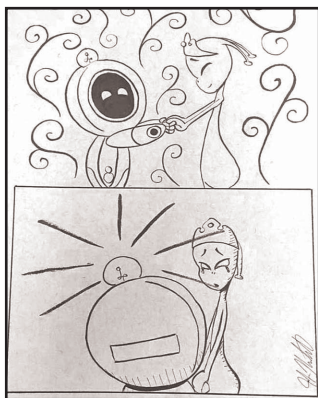
Blink is tossed at the ruler's feet to await its fate.



Blink lifts its head only to be incredibly surprised with what it sees.



After being grabbed by guards, dragged to a temple, and thrown to its face, Blink unexpectedly finds its love and she is thrilled to see Blink again.



Reunited. The couple embraces, when suddenly, the teleportation blinker goes off.



In a panicked frenzy, Blink rushes to find a way to avoid teleportation back to Earth. Blink makes a fist to smash the bulb on its head. Seconds before Blink vanishes, the bulb shatters and Blink remains where it is.



Once the blinker is destroyed, the couple knows they can be together forever.

ADINAH HOPKINS



GMO3
digital

ABBY FUNKE

Reminiscent

The house stands sandwiched
between the road and its neighbor,
tan siding and green shutters
faded from lifetimes of sunny
afternoons.

Leaves dance down the street,
twirling and tumbling over the
footprints of memories imprinted
on the cold, cracked,
dry concrete.

Children's laughter followed
by adolescents' excited
screams and teenagers' flirtatious
giggles echo from the past, trailed by
whispers of goodbyes muttered on late
summer nights.

A face appears in the window, a face
that shouldn't belong to this house.
Blinds swing closed, but they're the
wrong color. They should be ivory, not
chocolate brown.

I stare at the house—
full, but empty—sandwiched between
the road and its neighbor. Visions
of a past life sting my eyes;
I put my hands in my pocket and
leave.

COLIN P. NIEMER

On My Honor...

Throughout the experience of life, one major question continues to rise to the top: “What is the meaning of it all?” While many people profess to have an absolute answer to this question, there are so many different answers that it seems obvious that not everyone can be right. Several people even devote their entire lives to the pursuit of this ultimate knowledge. Perhaps the answer is found through God, and perhaps the answer is found through science. Maybe they’re one and the same, but regardless of your personal beliefs, you have probably found yourself staring up at the stars and pondering what everything could possibly mean. For the meaning of life is the question that answers everything, and it is a question that should never have been asked.

What is the meaning of life? For real? Nobody really knows the answer to the meaning of life, but we do have ways to find meaning in life. For me, this meaning in life comes from the message of the Scouting Movement. While this message does not reveal the deep secrets of the universe, it does offer us a way to conduct our lives so that they are purposeful. Scouting not only explains that meaningfulness can be found through self-improvement, but that meaningfulness resides in devoting yourself to a life of selfless, cheerful service towards others and the world. I argue that instead of trying to answer the question, “What is the meaning of life,” we should ask ourselves, “How can I make my life meaningful?” If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that my life would not have the sense of purpose that it does without the Scouting Movement.

The origins of scouting can be traced back to the United

Kingdom where, in 1907, Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell sought to create a movement focused on building youth and community through “woodcraft.” In the preface to his work, *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell describes the purpose of the Scouting Movement as “filling up certain chinks unavoidable in the ordinary school curriculum.” In this sense, scouting teaches youth character, fitness, and handicraft in a setting outside of their regular schooling in order to make them better individuals who may, in turn, better serve their community. While scouting has incredibly humble origins, it has expanded and changed over the last century to create the organization that exists today. The messages, however, have stayed the same.

I joined scouting when I was in first grade. At that point in my life, I had no idea what this movement was all about. In fact, it wasn’t until after I graduated high school that I began to really understand what scouting meant. In those early years, I was drilled on the memorization of the Slogan, the Motto, the Oath, the Law, and the Outdoor Code. These were professions that we would recite at least once every meeting. They seemed like words that I was simply regurgitating, and I had no idea how much importance they really held. Over the last two years of my adult life, however, I have learned the importance of the values that scouting teaches. In fact, it wasn’t until I was challenged with that ultimate question of the universe, when I entered the responsibility-laden world of adults, that I realized what scouting was trying to tell me.

An old motto of mine is that the meaning of life is a life of meaning. This statement seemed to satisfy me until I realized its one, serious flaw: it doesn’t explain what a life of meaning actually is. That’s where the message of scouting comes in. First come the Motto and the Slogan. They are, respectively, “Be Prepared” and “Do a Good Turn Daily.” Simple as they may seem, they have a much larger meaning than being ready for the day ahead or helping an old lady across the street. To be prepared means to be ready for anything. This comes with accepting that there is both good and bad in life, and being able to deal with both in a positive way. In life, as some of you may have already discovered, a lot of things will not go your way. Your alarm won’t go off at eight a.m. for class or work; you’ll forget about that important meeting you were supposed to attend; or your computer will self-destruct and you’ll lose an important paper, presentation, or memo (or three). These things will happen. Being both mentally and physically ready for them is what it means to “Be Prepared.”

Being prepared isn’t everything, though. The slogan tells us to “Do a Good Turn Daily.” On a base level, this means to do some-

thing good for someone else every day. This creates a meaningful life because it gives you a mission. This mission could vary from picking up a candy wrapper off the ground, to donating a million dollars to the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Whatever your good turn may be, making a conscious effort to do something good will motivate you through each day, including the bad ones. When you feel overwhelmed by everything you have to do, just think of one objective: doing your good turn. In both being prepared and making an effort to do something good, your day-to-day life will be filled with purpose. While this may not be the meaning of life, it will definitely add meaning to your life.

Beyond the motto and the slogan, scouting puts forth an Oath. This Oath demands responsibility to one's self and one's community. It tells us to be "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight." It tells us to take care of our bodies. No matter your level of athleticism, you can always make a conscious effort to better your health. The body you are in is the body that you will be in for your entire life, so take care of it! The second part tells us to be "mentally awake." I have found that I succeed the most in my day when I wake up at least one hour before I have to be anywhere, and I eat a sufficient breakfast. The days that I perform the worst are the days that I get little sleep, wake up late, and have to rush to get ready for the day (usually resulting in me having to scarf down a Pop Tart). The third part is slightly different. It tells us to be "morally straight." While this is up to interpretation, I believe it urges us to have solidified and ordered beliefs. Whether it be believing in socialism, true democracy, or anarchy, believing in something is what is important. Believing in nothing will leave you with far too many questions, and will draw your focus away from your daily goals. Following these points will help you achieve that same meaningful day that the motto and the slogan showed us earlier.

Next comes the Scout Law. The Law has twelve points, which are as follows: A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. While this may seem like a lot, all point towards one major theme: being true to one's self and one's community. Like the Oath, it tells us to be "loyal" to ourselves through physical, mental, and moral readiness. Overall, it stresses that we should place an incredible amount of responsibility upon ourselves and what we do. It shows forth that, not only do other people rely on us, but we rely on ourselves to do the right thing. Acting out the twelve points of the Scout Law in your life will help you check up on yourself. Doing this will not only help you succeed in what you do, but it will help you find a greater sense of purpose in your

daily activities.

If you were to walk down the self-help aisle at Barnes & Noble, you would find a seemingly infinite number of books that discuss how to fill your daily life with purpose and intent. I argue, however, that the most helpful method of finding the answers does not come from a book, but rather, from the world around us. At this point, it is only fitting to introduce the Outdoor Code. This part of scouting I find to be the most helpful in coming closer to a greater sense of what the meaning of life entails. The Outdoor Code goes beyond being responsible for yourself or your fellow person; it tells us that we are responsible for the stewardship of the earth. This stewardship includes an acute awareness of the fragility of the world in which we live. Thus, I urge you: do something in the outdoors. Leap into the world beyond the boundaries of your Wi-Fi walls. Participate in a conservation project at the local nature center, clean up a highway, tend to a garden, or simply take a hike. Doing such things will take your daily meaning beyond self-improvement and community building to that of worldly stewardship. Making it a part of your daily life to care for something natural will allow you to realize that life has more meaning than being responsible for yourself or being responsible for the development of your community. It teaches us that we have a greater purpose: to care for the world in which we live.

All of this I have learned through scouting. So, what is the meaning of life? Well, it's not that simple. I don't have the answer, but I do know a few things for sure. Each of us has a responsibility to ourselves, each of us has a responsibility to our community, and each of us has a responsibility to this planet. This, I know for certain.

SAMANTHA HILBY



Turmoil
stoneware, oil

CONOR KELLEY

By the Bend

Did not show up for work today due to intense hangover. Claimed an old person illness of more legitimacy. *Having circulation problems*, I said on the answering machine. Ha.

Spent the afternoon in the bathtub. Unsure about this whole diary idea. Seems foofy.

Called in my usual order from the café on the corner. Brought the food in with me and put it on the tray Alice bought me for my 50th. Refreshed the water three times. Could not think. Ate the baked potato quickly. Phone ringing startled me, spilled the broccoli cheddar soup down my chest. Little chunks of potato in the water, too. Christ. Got out. No voicemail.

Now sitting on towel on bed. December wind blowing through the cracks of these old walls. Today is a relative's birthday, I know it.

Work today was exhausting. Retail is hell. Holidays, hotter. These people snap at you for taking a second to think. Everyone is so busy now. If you're too busy for K-Mart, why not buy on-line? They have a web page.

My manager Tanyon—a young guy, nice, embarrassed to be in charge—told me the first couple months are the hardest.

You'll settle in, he said.

Said he's been here four years. How?

Good potato tonight. Must have been all the pepper I spilled in it. Shaky hands.

Miss: our old place in the city.

Do not miss: the noise.

Miss: the old office down there.

Do not miss: the rent.

Also do not miss: disappointing Alice. God, I miss her. Two decades together, almost a year apart. What a hole this is.

Forgot to put extra pepper on the potato tonight. Did not taste as good. That is okay. I am okay. But: I am running out of whiskey.

It is Saturday and the sun is out, but still too fucking cold. I did not set an alarm and slept through till 11. I forced myself back to sleep. It is 3 now. No way I sleep tonight. Wonder what Alice is doing, whether I should call. Maybe not.

How do you run out of potatoes? That's what I asked Tim.

He said, *We just did, lots of fries got ordered today.*

I suspect Alice bought them all up so I would have to leave my apartment. She treats me more like a child than an ex-husband. Though she doesn't know what I eat anymore. Sometimes the past finds its way in. Look at all this foofy talk.

I told Tim I'd call back.

I'll try the onion rings, I said on the second call.

Are you sure? he asked.

Don't try to talk me out of it, I said.

These onion rings taste like something. Have not figured out what.

On the drive to work, remembered the time she turned to me at a red light and told me she was waiting for me to stop being ashamed to be alive. She gave up waiting, I guess.

Tried to be nicer to customers. Smiling felt uncomfortable, did not go over well. Thought the whole day of onion rings. Couldn't make myself stop. Don't like it. Don't know why.

Have it now.

The smell is mint. I swear it. Wintergreen, Skoal, the brand Dad dipped on vacation. He would open the can, *thwack* like a soda bottle cap, and the station wagon smelled like hot Christmas. Did it right as he put it in PARK on the gravel driveway. Before we unloaded and went inside the River House.

I can see it: the leather chair in the living room. I can hear it: the river bubbling as we went to sleep on the wood floor.

Those nights, I dreamed I was a world-champion swimmer. There was always sun. There were always sunburns. There were always mosquitos. There were always four of us there.

I can see me—on the front steps, just like in the photo Mom

loved.

And I can see Dad—stout, bearded, khakied.

And I can see Mom—trim, loud, skirted.

And, um.

Work today was better, quieter. Hid in the lawn care section. They found me. These people are bonkers. Some turtlenecked father clipped me with his cart on the knee, did not stop to apologize. I am back in the tub. The pages may get wet soon. My hands are shaking again. Bad this time.

I forgot about my delivery. When I got out, the food was waiting by the front door. They are good to me.

I saved the onion rings for last. I tore open the greasy white bag and stared at them while I spooned the soup. The smell has covered my apartment. Have them in front of me now so I can record what they taste like. They are—let me see if I can get everything down:

murky

dark

hard

wet

under

I ordered two more servings. Tim sounded surprised. It would take too long to explain. A drink while I wait.

The new rings were still hot when they arrived. Maybe they heard the urgency in my voice. Shoved one in my mouth as soon as I closed the door. My tongue is burned.

That is okay.

I am there. Oh, they are taking me there again.

The River House was boarded up and sold off forever ago.

Why? What happened? Think.

I won't go to work tomorrow.

This morning I sat at the dining room table with my address book. There was no one to call. How many people in the pews at Dad's funeral are even still alive? And could remember the River House? Or know what happened?

I cannot go myself. Montana is too far and I am too beaten. I waited too long.

I forgot to order the soup with my onion rings today.

The delivery boy is new. Where is Tim's kid? Andy, I think. He must have grown up. Lucky. Anyways, *Good rings, huh*, the new kid goes.

There was a cup of the soup inside the bag for me. NO

CHARGE, it said with a smiley face. Tim is good to me. Why? Who knows.

I stared at the onion rings in their tray for a while before touching them. I poked them, waited. Got a glass of water, watched them. Then I stacked them in my mouth—one, two, more, more.

I cannot close my mouth now. I am drooling. I am almost falling out of my chair.

But, oh God, I am there again: dark mint, Dad's vacation beard, Mom swinging me, swinging us, he was there, yes, come on, who was it, it was Owen, it was Owen! The freckles, the red hair he would have outgrown like I did. Owen. Owen.

Mom and Dad went into town for groceries. I was in charge. I was ten. I was good.

Can I go to the river, he asked.

I said yes.

Can I go on the raft by myself?

I said promise you'll stay near the bank.

He promised, he did.

I'm on the grass a moment, stalking squirrels, seems like a moment, now I'm up, where'd he go? My toes are in the water now. Owen?

I see a hand grabbing up out of the water downstream by the tire swing. I feel the river rushing around me. I'm swimming with it, pushing it, carried by it, it's taking me.

Sharp rocks clip my feet, get my ankles, as I go. He's further. Go faster. I fall and my knee slams on something. Wild splashing. I'm at the swing. He isn't. Downstream. The river turns. Logs and branches by the bend. Go down, down. Look. Go. He's there. He's caught. He's heavy.

He's purple.

(No words today.)

I will go in to work tomorrow. Eye drops to cover up the redness. I will not hide. I will help Tanyon.

He is still just a kid.

EMMANUEL EGWAOJE, JR.



GMO Arctic Apple
acrylic on cardboard

PEGGY CURRAN

Alma Mater

Divergent eras
in echoed halls.
Years shared.

Faith foundation.
Liberally learned and loved.
Confidence and compassion conferred.

Bittersweet procession.

Gratias tibi ago, mater.

to Charleen Reilly O'Connell



class of 1950

EVAN HEER

Cold Showers are...Cool

I don't know for sure, but I am willing to bet you take lukewarm-to scalding-hot showers every day. For the first twenty years of my life, I did too. Why *wouldn't* I? The warm water bouncing off of my skin tingled and held me like a blanket fresh out of the dryer. Then something changed. Once I turned twenty years and one day old, I started taking ice-cold showers. Why *would* I? The cold water stabbing my skin felt as if Frozone from *The Incredibles* was repeatedly punching me in the face while screaming (or maybe that was me screaming). Every day since I turned twenty years and one day old, I have continued to take cold showers. You may say it's crazy, but my life has improved in several ways over the last 196 days, both physiologically and psychologically, from this freezing morning ritual.

The day after I turned twenty, I started to evaluate my life. I looked back at the first twenty years of my life and wondered what I had done to truly feel alive. I began by asking myself critical questions: What have I done to make myself proud? What have I done that I am ashamed of? What CAN I do to live my life more fully? A "ding" went off in my head. I realized that I needed to overcome the idea of being uncomfortable (example: when a beautiful girl says "hey" to me in the hallway, I want to be able to do more than mutter "hello" and wave my hand like a goat with a wounded hoof out of nervousness). I remembered reading on Reddit about people taking cold showers to "challenge" themselves in the morning. There is a complete subreddit, or "channel" on Reddit, dedicated to a community of people that take cold showers and share their experiences.

This community of cold shower advocates was full of positivity and motivation. Also, I had read that Spartan warriors used to take ice-cold baths before battle to get them mentally and physically prepared. Yeah, it was at that moment that I thought I would give it a try. I mean, it can't be that difficult. It's just a shower. I've seen those dudes on the Discovery Channel do the Polar Plunge in the Arctic Circle and they make it look pretty easy, right?

Wrong.

Those Polar Plunge dudes are superhumans. Remember the ALS Bucket Challenge fad? Well, taking a cold shower is just like that, but for three to five minutes instead of two seconds. The first time I tried an ice-cold shower, I screamed like a howler monkey with a winning lottery ticket. The water numbed my skin while I hyperventilated, and I started to jump up and down. It was... incredibly uncomfortable. I hated every minute of it, which added up to about three minutes. I didn't understand the point of torturing myself that early in the morning. It didn't make sense. Then, I got out of the shower and the way I felt when I dried off was nothing short of extraordinary. I felt more awake than I had ever felt. My skin was tingly and weightless. I could see life more clearly. I felt alive. That's when it hit me. If I could put myself through that feeling of being uncomfortable every morning, nothing else during the day could compare. That three minutes of complete discomfort and frantic dancing/screaming in the shower was like a cheat code for life; it made the rest of the day feel better.

This feeling didn't just last for a few minutes; it was the key to a new mindset. We often find ourselves drug down by stress, baggage from the past, and doubt. These showers allowed me to see these hindrances newly; I felt I had complete control. I felt like Bradley Cooper in the movie *Limitless* when he takes the NZT-48 pill for the first time. However, just like NZT-48 in *Limitless*, this feeling of complete mental and physical comfort began to wear off at the end of the day. Doubt in my self-confidence began to creep its way back into my mind.

Despite all of the benefits I felt after the first shower, it was much more difficult for me to jump into the freezing cold stream of water the next morning. I began to ask myself, what's the point of taking these showers? I should just take a hot shower. I'm not prepared to deal with this right now. Remember how shitty that cold shower felt yesterday? This doubt made my body feel heavy again, almost like when the dental hygienist puts a jacket on your chest for X-rays. Doubt is like a tick; it latches onto you without your knowing, and it becomes more and more dangerous as it burrows into you. I knew I needed to distract my conscious stream of negativity in order to defeat doubt. This is when I came up with a

set of guidelines to take my mind off of ideas of doubt in myself. I needed some instructions to follow so the process was less of a decision and more of a daily routine. These are the guidelines I came up with to motivate myself to continue cold showers:

1. TURN ON THE WATER TO THE COLDEST SETTING:

This is rather self-explanatory, but make sure there is still a good amount of water pressure as well.

2. TURN ON SOME TUNES (LOUD): This step is very important. If you have a stereo or Bluetooth speaker, bring it with you to the bathroom. Find music that gets you pumped up, as if you were going into battle with the ice-cold water. (I like to listen to music with a heavy beat. Some of my examples include: “Covered in Chrome” by Violent Soho, “Lithium” by Nirvana, “No Way” by The Naked and Famous, and “Reflections” by Balance and Composure.)

3. WAIT UNTIL THE RIGHT MOMENT TO ENTER THE FREEZING COLD WATER: Enter the shower after you start a song, but keep the shower head pointed away from you. Prepare yourself to enter the cold stream of water by taking several deep breaths. Once the song reaches its climax, turn the shower head toward you and put your head/face into the stream of water.

4. AIRDRUM THE SHIT OUT OF THE AIR: In order to sustain the initial shock of the freezing water, you need to flail your arms around like you have no arm bones. Don’t worry, nobody is watching you—go crazy. Airdrum, dance, jump up and down, do whatever you need to do to combat the shock of the cold water for the first thirty seconds. No matter how ridiculous you look, this step will allow you to distribute the cold all around your skin and increase your adrenaline in the process.

5. ENJOY THE RUSH: Once you get over the initial shock, the water will continue to feel cold, but it also feels soothing. Enjoy this feeling and make sure to keep the flow of cold water on your head, face, and shoulders for the best results. Oh, I almost forgot, put some soap on at some point in this process.

6. TAKE ON THE DAY. OVERCOME THE IDEA OF “UNCOMFORTABLE”: Begin the rest of the day with a smile. Use that energy that you have to promote positivity. Tell others about your cold showers and notify them of the benefits you have experienced.

I was wondering if this was actually physically healthy. I mean, I was basically freezing myself to the point that I could not breathe. It seemed very extreme, but the sources I researched said otherwise. According to an accumulation of scientific studies in an article on menprovement.com, cold showers and baths are physically beneficial in several ways. Cold water can improve skin

complexion, increase testosterone and fertility, decrease levels of brown fat in the upper chest and back, strengthen the immune system, improve one's sleep cycle, and cause an increase of energy.

These physical benefits are a mere bonus to the psychological benefits of cold showers. One month into cold showers, I began to feel more comfortable in everyday life. I was never a candidate for depression, but like any other person, I had days where I would be sad for no apparent reason. After that first month of cold showers, the amount of those sad days decreased tenfold. I had an easier time talking to people I had never talked to before. My attitude in the weight room was like that of an unchained beast, and I was suddenly always going for that extra rep. My confidence skyrocketed as I realized I was able to overcome being uncomfortable. My relationships with the people around me strengthened as my overall mood increased. I was no longer worried about the "little things" and I looked optimistically at problems when searching for a solution. These benefits are still present today. It still isn't easy to get up and jump into ice water, especially on Mondays, but that small victory that is associated with the accomplishment of taking a cold shower in the morning prepares me for whatever curveball that day might throw at me. I am comfortable.

REBEKAH ROSS

Her Shoes

She wore them
with good-natured resolve she wore them
They did not fit
their only gift—chafed, pained heels
yet, they were hers
she wore them just the same,
absent of complaint

In delight she arrived
to my home she arrived,
discarding the orange shoes to be worn again,
worn once more to find replacements—shoes that fit
Her generous eyes indeed found shoes
first, Mary Jane's for Abigail
Niece first, then
a pair for Auntie

Her smile
She wore it
better than her new shoes, she wore it well
Like sun rays, it illuminated her face
when she wore it, which—she always did
A radiant thing,
her familiar smile
It banished any darkness
And she wore it
as she offered the old, orange shoes as a gift
to one whose feet they fit

The forgotten gift sat on the floor
left by the young visitor
Her smile erupted,
and I saw, as she touched the old pair,
How forgiving and kind it was!
She left the shoes on the floor
She would return for them

She didn't return
neither did her smile
The shoes, not understanding, waited
for nothing

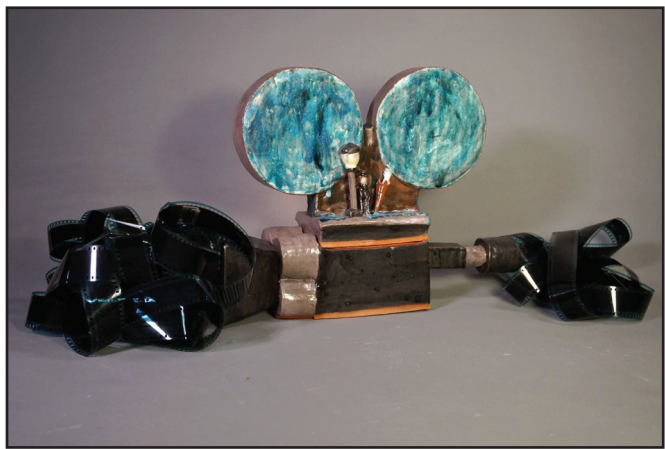
I returned to them, alone
With a pain I saw them waiting—and remembered
The shoes!
She wore them!
The pain...the empty pain,
a tear—no, never a single tear.
With silence the shoes greeted and were greeted
So light! but too heavy to hold
I moved them, to my bedroom floor
by her lonely bag, I set them

On the floor, the shoes now sit
in silence, waiting
for her it seems
The bag, of late, returned to her parents
but the shoes, no
the shoes she hadn't wanted—not important
“You may keep them. No one wants them.”

So there they remain
on the floor, I see them now
I see them wait
her shoes—stubborn things
If only they knew
If only I could explain to them...no,
it wouldn't change their waiting
just perhaps the purpose for it
For we all wait
for something better
Like Morgan's shoes
we wait with patience
but, with different patience—a hope-filled patience
Patience, hope, perseverance
to see her again, and her smile
For we will! one day—
one bright day, where her smile will greet the light,
a warmth finally seen by all
and embraces, without tears—these tears forgotten
Peace! Abundance! Joy!
Death swallowed up in victory!
That is why we wait—our hope

The shoes, I see
as a gift now, for me—for anyone
a gift of hope, a reminder—
her shoes

KATIE MARTER



Film Series
earthenware, glaze, film

SARAH ALDRICH

Tinta

Pequeño y silencioso me parece este cuarto; tengo ganas de llenarlo con sonido. Saco mi oboe de su estuche; no tengo partitura pero puedo ver claramente las notas en mi mente, todas ellas compuestas por mí. Mientras mojo la lengüeta, recuerdo las secciones de la obra, pero todas llegan a mi mente sin cohesión alguna; por eso necesito ponerlas en orden.

Cierro los ojos, empiezo a tocar y un murmullo nostálgico me invade. Me conmueve: no solo toco música; la música me toca a mí.

Pero es un dueto irreal.

La segunda parte verdadera falta; siento una pena; siento que la música debe ser más, que he perdido algo. En realidad yo he perdido algo.

Veo la cara de mi hermana cuando cierro mis ojos. También la veo en fotos, en el espacio donde estaría si estuviera viva hoy.

Veo su rostro cuando miro hacia la nada: una pared en blanco, el cielo despejado, una acera vacía. Quizás sea así porque ella ha caído en la nada; ahora no hay más que una pila de cenizas en su tumba.

Imagino la cara de una mujer que se ha perdido en el tiempo.

Hace dos años que ella nos dejó, pero la música me transporta rápidamente al pasado como si fuera ayer.

—Ven conmigo, Lina. Necesito que me lleves a la playa —mi hermana me dijo, tomando su traje del baño del cajón.

Asentí y estuve en el vestíbulo pidiéndole prestado a nuestra madre el coche por unas horas.

—Quizás venga yo con ustedes —mamá me dijo.

—Por favor, mami, queremos ir nosotras dos, si no te molesta... —yo dije. Quería atesorar todos los recuerdos.

Laura y yo fuimos a la playa. Volvimos al acantilado donde íbamos de vez en cuando a mirar la puesta de sol. Pero ese día fuimos por la mañana. Recuerdo el rocío en el césped, la frescura de la arena.

Lejos del borde, ella y yo nos sentamos en nuestras sillas. No pudimos ver el agua desde aquella altura, pero no nos importó.

— ¿Lina? —Laura murmuró.

Todo el recuerdo está presente otra vez; estoy en el cuarto. Estoy escuchando atentamente el rastro de la voz de mi hermana, esperando que sus palabras tengan más significado, un tipo de importancia nueva.

—¿Quieres estar aquí por siempre? —me preguntó.

No sabía si ella se refería a este momento o si estaba hablando del acantilado. Aun así le dije—. Sí.

—Se siente el infinito, ¿no?

—Sí.

—¿No tienes miedo del infinito?

La miré, estudiándola. Quería aún más tiempo con ella.

—No — dije. Sosturo su mano en la mía sin decir nada hasta que Laura rompió el silencio.

—Pero este momento ya es infinito para ti. Puedes recordarlo.

Supuse que ella tenía razón, pero ese día su pregunta me hizo enojar. Yo estaba confundida. No dije nada.

—¿Sabes que no recuerdo la navidad pasada? —dijo.

Miré fijamente a mi hermana, con expresión vacilante. Finalmente dije —Claro que recuerdas. Recibiste los blue jeans caros de mamá y papá; fue su único regalo.

—A veces no puedo recordar por qué me siento así. Esto me pone nerviosa. Olvido cosas que no debería olvidar, Lina.

—Laura, no sé que decir.

Miré las nubes que desaparecían detrás del horizonte. Quería de vuelta nuestras risas, nuestros chistes, pero aquellos que se perdieron con el diagnóstico.

—... Mis recuerdos son pasajeros, los tuyos perduran. Entonces, estaré contigo por siempre.

—No puedo hablar con un recuerdo, Laura.

—Li, es lo mejor que puedo hacer. Ya sabes lo que dijeron los médicos.

Mis lágrimas cayeron en mi regazo. La amaba. Y estaba desapareciendo en frente de los ojos míos. No quería ver la degra-

dación de sus facultades y me sentía desesperada por su condición.

—Me pone nerviosa tener el infinito en frente; no quiero estar enferma el resto de mi vida.

—Debemos salir —le dije después de una larga pausa.

Sus palabras me dieron miedo; un escalofrío recorrió mi cuerpo. Vi que ella estaba en franco deterioro.

Laura rió. —Pero estoy cómoda.

Era su propia contradicción.

Antes de su enfermedad, mi hermana había sido fiel a sí misma, pero vi cómo el cáncer la estaba cambiado. ¿Y por qué?

Yo tenía una palabra en la punta de la lengua, una que no quería articular. Entonces le pregunté —¿Quieres morir, Laura?

Recuerdo su cabeza, sin pelo rubio, como un pájaro mudando la piel. Recuerdo sus ojos, ya sin brillo. Recuerdo su piel, pálida y cenicienta. Recuerdo como era antes y me dio pena.

Laura inhaló y exhaló con fuerza. Estaba mirando el borde por donde se descendía al lago. —Me gustaría poder salir de esto.

Dejo de tocar el oboe. No puedo respirar. Mi corazón está latiendo con fuerza dentro de mi pecho.

Recuerdo el sentimiento de la cercanía de su muerte; estaba anticipando lo que pasaría.

La vi como un cadáver, un fantasma.

—¿Crees que deberíamos escoger cuándo morir? —me preguntó.

Sentía mi garganta atorada con la palabra que me asustaba pronunciar. —Estás insinuando: ¿suicidio?

—Todos tenemos el poder de decidir, ¿no?

—¿Y tú, qué has decidido?

—Nada.

Su teléfono sonó y nuestra conversación paró.

Aunque dijo que no había decidido nada, no le creí. Quería escapar, quería que mi hermana fuera la misma persona de siempre, antes del cáncer, una persona sana y viva.

Laura discutía con alguien, pero parecía como si peleara con ella misma. La miré por un rato mientras ella caminaba hacia una fila de árboles. No podía dejar de sentir que algo estaba quebrando a mi hermana.

Entonces, fui al coche, busqué mi tele e intenté llamar a nuestra mamá. Laura estaba a cincuenta pies de mí. Estábamos respirando el mismo aire, bajo el mismo cielo. Y mientras mi tele sonaba, oí algo.

Creí oír que algo rompía el agua. Pero, en realidad, era el agua

la que estaba rompía a mi hermana. Me sentí destrozada.

Y en el momento en que pienso esto, quisiera poder adormecer mis sentimientos. Comienzo a tocar el piano. Las notas cambian, también el ambiente del cuarto y mi humor. Las notas son más profundas—no en tono, pero en significado—y toco para liberarme.

No interpreto una canción. La siento.

Es para mí, y para Laura.

Es una canción que nadie ha oído antes, solo yo la he sentido. Quiero eliminar el silencio donde vive la pena. Me destruye tocarla, pero a la vez, me permite ver las rasgaduras para que algún día las pueda coser. Pero no tengo hilo. La canción es tan pequeña, tan insignificante.

Se disipa el sonido y rozo las llaves del piano sin intención. Empujo algunas llaves hasta que sus tonos me infunden esperanza. Mientras toco, el ruido de la lluvia que golpea en el techo se confunde con las notas. Me distraigo de la tormenta que llevo dentro.

Una partitura en blanco y un lápiz están en frente de mí, y antes de que pueda procesar lo que estoy haciendo, empiezo a escribir las notas. Sin embargo, estas no parecen ser perdurables en el tiempo. El gris claro del lápiz, como la vida humana, no está hecho para permanecer en la tierra.

Tiro el papel a la basura y en una hoja nueva, escribo con un bolígrafo de tinta negra. Imagino que si algunas gotas de la lluvia que moja mi ventana se mezclarán con esta tinta, la hoja sangraría. Así no se borraría la canción de mi ser ni del papel. El sentimiento no podría ser diluido, ni blanqueado de mis venas.

Escribo la nota final. La tinta mancha los dedos míos. Por un momento, miro esta mancha. Extiendo los dedos a unas octavas más altas y la tinta negra ensucia las llaves.

Es igual en la vida.

Aquello de lo que estamos hechos marca y mancha las vidas de las personas más cercanas a nosotros. La marca de mi hermana se queda conmigo. Reside en esta canción.

Sus restos están en todas partes, diseminados, esparcidos; su memoria permanece en el mundo.

Aquí estamos mi hermana, la música y yo, escritas con la misma tinta.

RACHEL SPURLING



Fine Dining
mixed media

TIA VERGAUWEN

Hidden Things

In the forest
that's gone quiet
as death comes,

the wind whispers;
my other side appears
and destroys.

The world changes.
They come out from hiding.
Paranormals return.

The world changes,
they hide no more.
Be prepared.

Two fall
into darkness,
come out light.

ALYSSA RAVER



Millworking District
digital

EMILY PAPE

What Papa was Saying

Clocks have a way of highlighting silence. The one in the dining room was especially effective this way. It was a cuckoo clock, a genuine one that never worked right. Always too fast or too slow, telling you it was five o'clock when it was eight in the morning. But it didn't do that now. Now it just ticked away, caught between the hour marks, punctuating the quiet with mechanical precision.

I looked outside, through the back door's window, and let out a sigh.

"Outside." A conversational tone that seemed louder than it was.

The response was immediate; the house erupted and echoed with the sound of scrambling paws, barreling towards me with unchecked excitement. Steve bolted down the stairs and slid around the corner; he was running so fast that he almost crashed and burned on the hardwood floor of the kitchen. It didn't faze him. His bright, buggy eyes were glued to the back door by which I stood, looking ahead to the waiting yard and a few hundred feet of freedom.

Then he was standing there, pressed against the doorframe. Muscles tense and alert. Nose shoved into the door. Eyes on the doorknob...sort of; Steve was cockeyed, so his eyes didn't seem to rest directly on the subject of his focus. He was a cute sort of ugly that managed to be endearing.

"You're an idiot, you know that?"

The tail flickered slightly.

I nudged Steve back with my knee so I could open the door

without running over his paws. The doorknob stuck and he shuffled impatiently, like a little kid waiting for his parents to give him the ice cream cone already. As soon as the door opened, he slithered through the gap and flew into the cold. I stepped into his wake, snow crunching under my boots.

Winter feels like paper cuts, but slower—that's what I have always thought. That's what it felt like now, the cold of the wind sinking into my face like disinfectant into broken skin. I hunched my shoulders, pulled the hood of my coat down lower; the horizon hovered just below the edge of the waterproof, plastic material. The icy rain from yesterday now acted as superglue, snaring snow against the tree branches as the flurries crashed down from the sky with feather-light grace. I blinked away tears, flinched from the brightness. It was a cold light, that white.

The florescent bulbs illuminated the sunken crags of Papa's face. His legs were concealed beneath the hospital sheets, but the sharp angles of his knees showed how the muscle had wasted away and disappeared.

Everyone sat around the hospital room in a nervous tension, visiting small talk and memory backtracks. Remember when Sonya was five? Remember when she covered the walls in crayon? Remember how she insisted she hadn't done it?

It wasn't funny then. It's hilarious now.

Steve bunny hopped through the bright snow, dashing towards the ice-encrusted pines that bordered the back of the yard. He didn't give me a second glance, but I knew he would not go past the trees. Steve was not the most intelligent beagle in the world, but he was strangely obedient that way.

"Steve's at home all alone." Papa's wrinkle-scarred face creased dramatically at his small frown.

"We've been stopping by. Letting him outside and feeding him," my mother assured him. She looked at her watch when she said it.

Papa nodded. He knew this. He still frowned. Mom and Dad moved onto the next subject, away from worry. Do you want us to bring you something? Something sweet? The nurse doesn't have to know. Are you sure? We could bring you some peanut brittle from home.

Papa doesn't care about peanut brittle right now, Mom. He cares about the dog sitting alone in his house, in the dark. I don't say it, but Papa gets a rueful gleam in his eyes when he looks at me. Papa and I didn't see each other more than five times a year,

but we could read each other perfectly.

I knew Steve wouldn't stray from the yard, but still I watched him. The flurries had distorted his silhouette into a blur that bounced happily through the white. He paused once, lifted his leg by one of the trees, and probably missed his mark completely.

He started to trace the perimeter of the yard and his sprint slowed to a brisk jog. Did it bother him that the neighbor dog occasionally wandered into our yard and peed on the pine trees too? I suppose it did. The alert body language and swaggering stride certainly said so.

He was asleep, when he disappeared. It was peaceful. But it was at night and the room was dark. Was he really asleep when it happened, or was he waiting? Did he listen to the clock down the quiet hall by the nurses' station? Did he listen as the fragmented seconds passed by, watching the ebbing remains of his life tick away?

Steve passed the shed on the right side of the yard. He paused behind it for a moment, most likely to sniff some unremarkable patch of snow. My chest tensed and eased only when Steve reappeared.

"We don't need a dog in the house. We just got new hardwood floors," Mother said.

"We can't take Steve to a shelter." My father wasn't angry, he was just stating what was known. Papa had been in a bad way for a while before he died. Had they already thought about this? Probably.

I left them talking and walked out to my car. There was a blanket in my trunk. I retrieved it and covered the passenger seat with it so Steve wouldn't leave fur everywhere for the next person who sat there. The digital numbers hovered green on the dashboard, six minutes ahead.

Steve was starting to pick up his paws, flinching from the cold. It was starting to become apparent to even him that he was not running through powdered sugar, but half-frozen water that stung smartly. It was then that it occurred to him that I was standing there and that I had thumbs capable of letting him back inside.

They met me at the entryway. Were they angry? I think so, but it didn't sway me.

Steve scrambled inside and sniffed at the unfamiliar house. He

smelled pork chops in the kitchen and ditched us for the enticing smell.

“What are you doing? We’ve been over this, Sonya, we can’t—”

“Papa wasn’t saying ‘Steve’s home all alone,’ Dad. He was saying ‘don’t leave Steve all alone.’”

I teased him a bit, before I opened the door. He was as eager to get back inside as he had been to get outside a few minutes ago. I placed my hand on the doorknob but did not turn it immediately and he wriggled with impatience. He snorted, his breath shooting out in irritated white smoke. But he waited. He waited for me to let him back into his new house.

And so I did. And I always would.

EMILY PAPE



Reclining Gertie

CARRIE PIEPER

Fear

It's always easy
to jump feet first.
It's the landing
that is hard.

That first
breath-taking
rush of
gravity
pries open
your eyes.

The best view
is always
during the
fall.

The world
beneath you
as you've
never seen it.
The Big Picture
becoming larger,
more real.

There is a freedom
in the
weightlessness,
the loss of
control.

The sweet taste
of excitement
dances on
your tongue.
It permeates
the blood
running red through
your face.
Your hands

float by
your sides,
playing cheerfully
with the chill
in the air.

You see.

For the first time
you see
yourself
free from the
burden
of choice.
Unattached
body and mind.

A beauty revealed
with such clear
vision, you could
almost be convinced
it was not
your own.

As if you were outside
yourself.
Moving about like a
slight breeze
caressing every
curve of
your body.
Feeling.
Totally aware.

Then, all at once
your vision blurs
and you seep
back inside
yourself
as rogue
thoughts
fly past,
swirling around
like dead leaves
catching in

the red knit
scarf tied
round
your neck.

The warmth in
your hands,
the color in
your cheeks,
the moisture in
your lips
retreat,
pooling together
in the corners of
your eyes.

This is Fear.

The type that
ushers in the
inevitable
unknown.

It holds you
still.
Suspending
your body
inches from
the ground.

Questions drown
out answers.
The Why
What and When
surround an
empty mind
and heavy body
dying
to be
firmly
planted
on
the
ground.

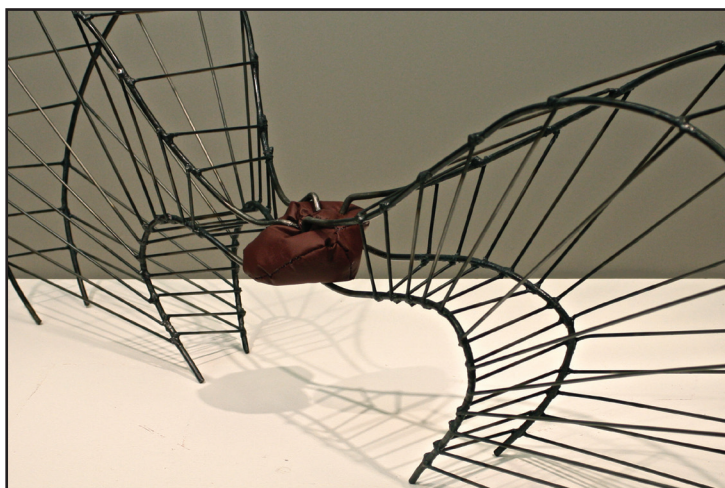
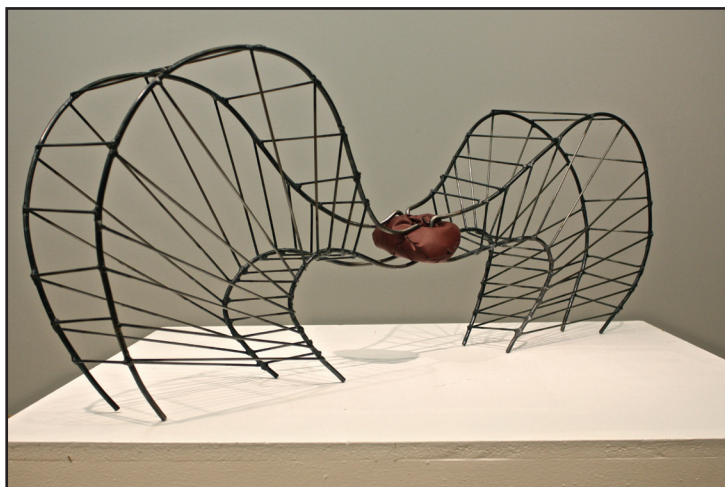
And then,

A quiet pressure
crawls up your spine.
You are standing
upright.
Your feet
able to
move again.

Is it over?
For something
has surely
begun.
You walk
steadily on,
looking back
only to see
snowy footprints
being
filled
in.

Quite possibly
never to be
seen again.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH



Tug of War
steel and leather

PATRICK DEENEY

52-Hertz

Fog. That strange, low-lying weather phenomenon that isn't quite clouds, like breath escaping from lips on a winter's day isn't quite a soul. Yet, no matter how ethereal it can be, it still blocks our vision and traps us within its wall-less labyrinth.

My car barrels down Highway 218 in Northeastern Iowa, speedometer fluctuating between seventy and eighty miles per hour and windshield wipers rhythmically floating across the glass, clearing it of accumulating water. The radio statically gargles "Today's Hit Music" broadcasting from somewhere near Waverly. Normally, I use the car's CD player, but for some reason it rejects my attempts at listening to good music, leaving me stuck with tedious radio songs.

I sing along out of boredom; the fog has cloistered me away from whatever scenery exists amid the cornfields and silos, and I need to keep myself entertained as the third hour on the road crawls by. This isn't the first time I've driven through fog, however, it's much thicker than I'm used to. The yellow line on the side of the road fades in and out as the clouds shift aimlessly like spirits in the wind. I try to stay alert for other drivers who are also lost in the fog.

Slowly, the scratchy tunes fracture even more and white noise fills the car. "Damn!" I punch the radio dial. Silence embraces me as static stops. I realize how alone I am.

My car presses on as I anxiously urge the gas pedal further to the floor. The constant drone of the rubber tires on the road mixes with the silence inside the car to create an atonal cadence. How is it that sound waves can travel to space and beyond but not reach my car through fog?

Ahead, two lights cut through the milky curtain. I switch lanes

as my car careens past like a comet. There are others lost out here, trying to find their way. I wonder if they're in the same position I am, and if they think they are alone as well.

Once I pass, I switch back and continue on, watching the headlights slowly fade into the mist. From their perspective, my taillights might have appeared like stars shifted red, shooting away from their location at a million miles an hour. Redshift, the observable phenomena of starlight appearing at a longer wavelength than the light the star itself emits, occurs when the movement of a star lengthens the time in between light pulses, which typically happens when the star is moving away from a point of observation. Considering that most stars are shifted red and running away from our existence, it is easy to see how alone we are in the grand scheme of things.

I pick up a CD and insert it into the malfunctioning player. This disc whirls and skips, much like the ones I tried at the start of my trip. The player ejects the disc and I toss it into the empty passenger seat beside me.

I check my mirrors and scan the fog, but no more lights can be seen shifting their way through the blanket of white. My car continues shooting down the road, searching for any possible sign of civilization, for any signs of life to prove to me that I am not all alone in this fog. Apparently Fermi and his paradox hold true for even relatively small distances. Fermi built his paradox of the postulation that, even when making the most basic assumptions about finding life out in the vastness of space, and achieving a ridiculously staggering probability in favor of encountering these otherworldly beings, we have yet to find any evidence of their existence. Thus, the existence of the paradox and my inability to locate any sort of civilization.

Much like my car, wandering on a predictable course through the vastness of a grounded cloud, Earth, our little blue marble, cycles around on the same course it has for 4.54 billion years, equivalent to about 7.94 trillion trips from my home in Minneapolis to my school in Dubuque, Iowa. The closest thing from our celestial home is the moon, orbiting around our planet in a heavenly dance at a minimal 1,261,200,000 feet.

With the closest thing in our universe being over 200,000 miles away, how can we say that anything we have done matters? *Voyager 1*, the farthest man-made object from the earth, snapped a picture as it passed by Saturn, showing the earth as a quarter of a pixel in size, at a distance of six billion kilometers. We really are just a pale blue dot lost in a fog, separated by millions of miles of nothingness.

Yet within that, here we revolve. Within this fog my car still travels forward, spurred on by the gears and the heat from the energy generated. This round marble in the middle of such a vast

wasteland has contained every person, from kings and tyrants to peasants and cowards, and even gods themselves, all rotating on a dust mote suspended in a beam of sunlight.

I have often laid awake at night trying to comprehend this distance. The distance between my car and the next town, the distance between the earth and the next planet that has life, even the distance between my mind and those of the people I choose to associate with. No matter how close we are physically, an expanse of infinite light-years still separates our thoughts, leaving us screaming out at frequencies only we can hear.

Out in the unknown depths of the oceans swims the loneliest whale in the world. It frantically wanders, searching for anyone that can understand its call, screaming out with all its might at 52 hertz, a pitch too high for other whales to hear. No matter how close it may be, others will never understand the message. It parallels our attempts at communication with what exists outside our earthly borders, with my attempts to learn what is outside my car as I meander down the highway. We all want nothing more than to join in the loneliest whale's call and scream into the void, "We're here, we exist! We matter!" To validate our existence with the discovery of others like us.

But we still try; the motors that drive us relentlessly push forward like the gears grinding together in my car. Our eons of isolation have formed us, molding us into the species that built cities and empires, ships that sailed between continents looking for new lands to rockets preparing for interstellar voyages—the species that controls the planet. All those lonely nights I spent awake shaped my thinking about who I actually am, about how I fit into this world. The complete isolation I endure as I pass through this fog molded these thoughts revolving in my head.

I push the radio dial in one more time. Static gives way to sound as human voices push past the wall of white noise. Soon the melody picks back up, relieving the tires of their extended solo, and fills the car with a pulsating drum beat. My foot relaxes off the gas as the car slows back down to seventy and the anxiety dissipates. Rarely do I get a chance to just think, the fog that still clouded my vision seemed to help clear my mind of the daily distractions that get in the way. The red gleam of a car's taillights appears and I shift lanes again, passing by in a fraction of an eon. I shift back, my taillights glow red in their windshield and quickly disappear. The dust mote carries me another hundred miles through space as my engine spurs forward another mile through fog, both separated by emptiness, with only a general idea of where we are going.

EMMA DUEHR



Snail-Man
earthenware

CONTRIBUTORS

SARAH ALDRICH is a sophomore student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She currently studies Spanish education with a minor in teaching English as a second language. It is her dream to teach English in a Spanish-speaking country for at least a year after she graduates. This summer she will travel to Spain to be an au pair for two months, and she is very excited for the experience!

DON ANDRESEN is a native of Dubuque. He attended Sacred Heart Elementary and graduated from Hempstead Senior High School in 1985. Don joined the Iowa National Guard in Dubuque (A Company 1/133rd Infantry) in 1983. He went through Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training during the summers of 1984 and 1985. After high school, he joined the Army and went to Jump School in 1985. Soon after, he was sent to Fort Bragg where he was assigned to 3/504th Parachute Infantry Regiment. After he left the Regular Army in 1990, he re-enlisted back in A Company in Dubuque. He then enrolled at Clarke College as a communications major with an art minor. He retired from military service in 2006. Currently, Don spends his days as a co-owner/co-manager of several small businesses in Galena and Dubuque, and lives a quiet life in the country.

MEG BRADLEY is a junior at Clarke University studying elementary and special education. In the rest of her time, she teaches preschoolers, plays with her cat, waters her plants, and tries to make time for adventures.

PEGGY CURRAN and her mother are proud graduates of Clarke College. Peggy graduated in 1979 with an B.A. in English. Her mother, Charleen Reilly O'Connell, was a 1950 graduate with a B.A. in foods and nutrition. Her mother loved her years at Clarke, homecoming weekends, and get-togethers with her many lifelong Clarke friends. Peggy grew up around Clarke, the place and people, so when it came time to select a college, Clarke was a comfortable fit for her. It was a great joy for her to walk through Eliza Kelly Hall and see her mother's graduation portrait and know that some day her own would be hung in the same hall not too far away. Peggy's mom died in December 2014. What she and Clarke instilled in Peggy resonates daily as mother, wife, and librarian. Peggy is grateful for the lessons and love from both of these wonderful "mothers."

PATRICK DEENEY is a recent graduate of Clarke University. After his stint as Editor-in-Chief of the *Tenth Muse*, he got a job test-

ing water samples for an analytical company. When not working, sleeping, or out with friends, he tries to work on some of his unfinished writings.

MADDIE DONAHUE is a first-year student at Clarke University from Iowa City, Iowa. She is currently pursuing a degree in nursing. She also enjoys studying Spanish culture and language, and looks forward to earning a minor in Spanish. In her free time, Maddie enjoys baking cupcakes, hiking, and drinking slushies. She is very excited to have her work published in the *Tenth Muse*.

EMMA DUEHR is a junior at Clarke University pursuing a double major in art history and studio art, with a double emphasis in painting and ceramics. Throughout her first three years at Clarke, she has branched out into many different media and methods of creating art, such as clay, oil paint, acrylic paint, digital design, wax, plaster, welding, woodworking, and other drawing media. Her desire for her future is to continue school to pursue a Master's degree and become a professor of studio arts. She is thankful for her support systems including her talented professors, loved ones, and the *Tenth Muse*.

EMMANUEL EGWAOJE, JR. was born in Matteson, Ill. Chicago, a well-known city where the arts are embraced for entertainment and enlightenment, acted as a creative catalyst for Emmanuel's love of art. His artistic style was influenced by the visual arts of Chicago and anime from Japan. He is a philosophy major with a graphic design minor. Emmanuel believes the best aspect of being an artist is self-expression and sharing your eccentric, weird, and unique ideas with the world.

ABBY FUNKE is a junior majoring in elementary education at Clarke University. Teaching little kids is her greatest passion, but when she's not doing that, she can be found indulging in her other great passions: reading, writing, and sipping chai tea lattes. She received second and third place in the 2014 Clarke Writing Contest, had two works published in Volume V of the *Tenth Muse*, and served as the social media guru for the magazine during the 2014-2015 school year. This year, she served as an Editor-in-Chief.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH is in her third year as a member of the *Tenth Muse* staff and is a B.F.A. student in sculpture and painting at Clarke University. When she hasn't locked herself away in the studio, Hannah spends her time bragging about having artwork accepted at the Sharon Arts Center in New Hampshire, dreaming of being a roller derby queen, wishing she could take a nap, and trying to figure out what to do with her life after graduation.

KASSIDY HANSON is a senior at Clarke University majoring in studio art with an emphasis in painting and a minor in art history.

She grew up in Garner, Iowa and then enrolled at Morningside College after high school. She transferred to Clarke in the middle of her sophomore year. Her preferred medium is watercolor paint, which she used to execute her senior show.

EVAN HEER is a biology major and writing minor at Clarke University. His interests include fishing, woodworking, music, movies, wiffle ball, and meatloaf. He writes sometimes too.

SAMANTHA HILBY is in her last year at Clarke University studying studio art and art education. When she is not in the studio creating sculpture, she loves to be outside enjoying nature. This appreciation for nature has influenced much of her artwork. In the future, she is excited to share her passion for both art and nature with her students.

ADINAH HOPKINS is a freshman majoring in graphic design. She did not become interested in art until her freshman year of high school when she helped design her high school's yearbook. She usually likes to create colorful and bold pieces.

CONOR KELLEY'S work has appeared in *Word Riot*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, *The Artist Catalogue*, and more. His first book, a baseball instructional book titled *The Catcher's Handbook*, was released by McFarland Books in 2014. He is in the Creative Writing M.F.A. program at New York University, where he is at work on his first novel and a short story collection.

CRYSTAL LINZY is an English major at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill.. Writing poetry has always been something that she both enjoys and is passionate about. She is originally from the heart of Chicago. Being an African-American woman has had a profound effect on the way that she sees the world and what she writes about. Chicago is a generally segregated city where there is a strong presence of racial enclaves. Being from one of those enclaves, she has always been extremely interested in people of different races coming together and the effects that it has on certain relationships.

JACOB MANTERNACH is a graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa. He was born and raised in Cascade, Iowa. Ever since a young age, he has always drawn pictures. His style doesn't deviate too far from a cartoon look very often. His recent drawings appear on his Instagram page, JMillustrated. Even though he is studying graphic design, he has high aspirations to one day become a character designer or animator for a company such as Pixar. It would be a dream come true for him to create characters to be loved, recognized, and enjoyed by masses of people, just like the ones he cared for as a child.

KATIE MARTER is a sophomore graphic design and computer information systems double major. Her hope is to find a career where she can combine the creative and logical in a seamless manner.

MATTHEW MIKULICE finds value and wonder in the drawn line. He creates drawings that are austere, precise, concerned with process. Pencil is applied to paper in a systematic and meditative approach. The result: calm, subtle work of detail and design. His recent exhibitions include Mini Masterpieces at the Freeport Art Museum; Clay, Fiber, Paper, Glass, Metal, Wood at the Octagon Center for the Arts; a solo show at Nash Gallery in Dubuque; and a show of new work at the Dubuque Area Arts Collective.

NATASCHA MYERS is a junior music major and psychology minor at Clarke University. As a singer/songwriter, she's often seen with a pen in her hair, ready to scribble whatever lyric randomly pops into her head. Natascha plays guitar, piano, and banjo, but is especially talented when it comes to air drumming on her steering wheel and dancing terribly to her carefully-crafted Spotify playlists. In addition to being a music enthusiast, Natascha has a thing for the stars, reading whatever she can get her hands on, and running. She is currently working on releasing her first record and hopes to pursue a career as a professional singer-songwriter in Nashville following graduation.

COLIN P. NIEMER is in his third year at Clarke. He is studying English and writing. Sometimes he performs improv with Clarke's "Playmakers." He enjoys long walks on the beach, but despises clichés.

EMILY PAPE grew up in Dubuque, Iowa. She graduated from Hempstead High School in 2013 and is currently a junior at Clarke University. Emily is pursuing a major in English, with minors in writing and art. She enjoys writing fiction (of course), drawing, and watching too much Netflix.

PAIGE PETERS is a junior at Clarke University. She is a biology major with plans to attend dental school following graduation. In addition to writing, Paige enjoys biking, ballet, and reading the occasional biology textbook. Paige is also a member of the Clarke Scholars Program.

CARRIE PIEPER is a 2014 Clarke graduate trying to survive in New York City. Her talents include being able to name over twenty different types of bread and carrying multiple tote bags of laundry up and down her fifth floor walk-up—at the same time! In her free time she likes to travel and watch Netflix. Most days she has to settle for Netflix since it's cheaper.

ALYSSA RAVER is currently a freshman at Clarke University pursuing a B.F.A. in graphic design. Growing up in Ankeny, Iowa, she was inspired to pursue a career in design by her art teachers and father, who majored in lighting design. She usually likes to plan out her pieces, but is always open to spur-of-the-moment changes to make a piece more meaningful and interesting.

MADISON RHYMES is a graphic design and psychology major at Clarke University.

REBEKAH ROSS is a music education major, currently in her third year at Clarke University. Voice and piano are the major focuses of her study, but she also enjoys participating in Clarke's ensembles with her flute, violin, and jazz skills. Though originally born in British Columbia, Canada, and in possession of dual citizenship, Rebekah considers Dubuque to be her hometown. Homeschooled through high school, Rebekah was dual enrolled to take music and French in the Dubuque schools. Although Rebekah is studying to be a voice teacher, she has a wide variety of interests including cooking, backpacking, drawing, creative writing, and extreme winter sports.

RACHEL SPURLING is a junior pursuing a B.F.A. in studio art with an emphasis in sculpture and a minor in graphic design at Clarke University. She was born and raised in Dubuque, Iowa and has been involved in many local artistic programs. She has a passion for cinema makeup and prosthetics and hopes to further explore these interests in the future. She also hopes to travel and discover as many artistic possibilities as she can.

TIA VERGAUWEN is a graphic design major with a writing minor at Clarke University. She is from Marshalltown, Iowa. She likes to draw, paint, read (fantasy, sci-fi, fiction, and romance), write her own stories, and be outside in nature. Except when it snows. She also loves to spend time with her family, friends, and cats at home. There are times when she is also just really weird, but the people around her have learned to just go with it.

