

# TENTH *Muse*

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

## COVER ART, "FORGOTTEN"

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# EDITOR'S LETTER

Five years. A big milestone for any literary magazine, and as the year closes out on this amazing volume, I see nothing but potential for the future of the *Tenth Muse*. The previous four years have been filled with fantastic artwork, poetry, and prose, yet I believe (a little biasedly, I do admit) that this edition tops them all.

This past year, I have had the privilege of serving as head of this magazine, and even though there were times I wanted to tear my hair out with stress, and multiple nights spent awake wondering if we would get submissions or if tasks would be completed on time, I don't regret a single moment of it. My only regret is not joining sooner. Being a senior, this is my only year on staff, so unlike the editors who came before me, I don't have the pleasure of experiencing this again.

Before joining the *Tenth Muse*, I surrounded myself with the sciences, and though I am a biology major in a writer's world, I never felt out of place. The *Tenth Muse* staff felt like a second family in the way that they accepted me as one of their own. While my name is the one at the bottom of this letter, it would not be there if not for the many people I have to thank who made this volume possible.

First, the staff. Every single one of them brought something new to the table. We learned to collaborate to achieve our final goal, to have and share ideas, and to make them happen. As you can tell, it worked quite well. Ours is a creative and spirited group, committed to our mission of promoting written and artistic expression at Clarke and "by Clarke." We are proud to publish twenty-seven current and former Clarke students in this volume!

Secondly, our faculty advisor Anna Kelley. If it hadn't been for her, I doubt that I would have pursued a writing minor here at Clarke. She has proved an invaluable resource, leader, guidance counselor, and friend to this magazine and everyone on the staff.

And finally, to you—the reader, the contributor, the artist, the writer, the poet—whomever you are. Without support from the Clarke community, especially, five years might have just been a distant dream. Because of you, we are enjoying the reality.

My sincerest thanks,

Patrick Deeney  
Editor-in-Chief

# CONTENTS

## POETRY

EMILY PAPE The Creator of Worlds	1
CAMERON FRASER Matricide	15
CARRIE PIEPER By a Dead Girl	22
ELIZABETH SCHEER The New Place	24
JOE ARMS Childhood, Adulthood	36
SHANNON KELLY Of Time Travelers and Chocolate	44
HELEN BISIOULIS Water	57
JACK COLE underwater glass	74
ABBY FUNKE He is the Whiskey <i>CLARKE UNIVERSITY WRITING CONTEST: SECOND PLACE</i>	84
MAGGIE MAY Skin	91
CARRIE PIEPER (waiting)	108
MAGGIE MAY Where I'm From	115
JOE ARMS Apathetic	116

## FICTION

ABBY FUNKE Tell Her I Love Her <i>CLARKE UNIVERSITY WRITING CONTEST: THIRD PLACE</i>	2
JENNI GLAWE Christmas Traditions	11

EVAN HEER Macy	17	MELISSA HOSCH Rope and Chain	21
MADISON RHYMES Bob and the Best Birthday Gift Ever	37	HANNAH GOLDSMITH Emotionally Emaciated	23
PATRICK DEENEY Where is Away	59	JENNA MICHEL Indiana Bat	25
EMILY PAPE The Giggle	69	KASSIDY HANSON Senses of Self	35
KATHERINE FISCHER Until the Fat Lady Sings	75	MELISSA GABER A Little Overboard	43
LOUREN KILBURG For Al Carter	86	EMMA DUEHR Skulls	49
RACHEL MANS Collapse	99	HANNAH FARREY Skulls	49
GREG WHITE My Broken Television is a Metaphor	109	KRISTINE COOPER Pensacola Pier Sunrise Fog	56

#### CREATIVE NONFICTION

MELISSA HOSCH Wild Fire	26	JENNA MICHEL Frail	73
MARISA DONNELLY Tuesday Night Hockey	46	EMMA DUEHR Owl	85
PATRICK LENANE Where the Truth Lies	50	MELISSA GABER Rat's Nest	90
ERIN DALY A Change of Faith	93	KASSIDY HANSON Self Portrait	92
HANNAH GOLDSMITH Mortal Flesh	119	EVAN VENTRIS Patrol	107

*CLARKE UNIVERSITY WRITING CONTEST: FIRST PLACE*

#### ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

SAMANTHA HILBY Forts	VIII	ELIZABETH COURTNEY Untitled	118
HANNAH GOLDSMITH Self-Portrait #27	10	<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	123
EVAN VENTRIS Awaiting	14		
RHONDA LAMPE Time Will Always Entangle You	16		



SAMANTHA HILBY



Forts  
*wood, plaster, and wax*

EMILY PAPE

## The Creator of Worlds

Worlds were brighter, clear cut with golden haze,  
Over a chipped glass table filled with shells, blurred by memory.

And living was everything; it was breathing it was here it was raw  
Focus, my hands covered in chalk, knees pressed by pavement,  
crafting memory.

A creator of worlds, effortless impulse, a second heart beating  
when  
Building with thoughts, building what aged rulers can't dream,  
can't summon from memory.

That tiny room and daunting attic door knew no boundaries; I  
knew  
What adults didn't, what they couldn't see, imaginings that fade  
from memory.

When skinned palms and yellow stripes and buzzing wings were  
Astounding, when dark rooms were fended off by pink outlet  
lights, carved in memory.

Abstract walked right-side up with easy smiles, waking dream  
That crumbles under memory.

ABBY FUNKE

## Tell Her I Love Her

“Let me come with, Clara. You know I have sufficient training for this.” Standing in the morning light of Sharpsburg, I anxiously eyed my cousin’s back and prayed she would understand. She stopped arranging medical supplies in her wagon, contemplating the request I had made hundreds of times the night before and twenty times since we woke this morning. The Battle of Antietam ended the day before, and the reports arriving from the field one mile away weren’t positive. Clara’s hospital had been flooded with soldiers, and she had spent the entire day and half the night in the hospital.

I, on the other hand, hadn’t been allowed in.

“Hannah,” she began, turning around. She didn’t show her forty-one years like others her age, but, in times of stress, the shadows of future wrinkles appeared around her eyes and on her forehead. “I love you dearly, but I am responsible for both your physical and emotional well-being. The death that’s taken place on that field...” she trailed off, her eyes traveling to a far-off place. “The people still on the field lie there for a reason, Hannah. It’s too much for a nineteen-year-old girl to see, even one in training to be a surgeon.”

I walked towards her, begging, “Clara, you know as well as I that I’m at the point where I can’t learn any new material from books. I need real, high-stakes experiences.” I swallowed hard, stomaching my emotion as I prepared for the next sentence. “And I need to see Isaac. I want to be the one who tries to save him.” Clara had been watching the hospital beds for the dark, wavy hair and cool, blue eyes of Isaac Ashlock, but he hadn’t appeared yet.

She stared into my eyes. “The things you could see on that battlefield...” She shuddered. “Don’t you want your last memories of Isaac to be happy ones?”

“If Isaac is going to die out there, I want to be with him, trying to save his life,” I quickly responded. Our engagement hadn’t been one of love in the beginning, but, after many long afternoons spent walking the gardens of his parents’ Pennsylvania estate, we had grown to love each other, and he was the only man I’d met who supported my dreams of becoming the first female surgeon in Maryland. Shots fired on Fort Sumter might as well have been shots fired on our relationship, though—the moment the call for soldiers came, Isaac dropped his law books, picked up his gun, gave me a kiss, and promised to return in a few weeks for our wedding.

That was one year, five months, and five days ago.

Clara sighed. “Hannah, I know you are upset about the continual postponement of your wedding...”

“It’s not about the wedding, Clara, so please don’t try to make it about the wedding.” In fact, I was delighted at the wedding’s multiple postponements—I loved Isaac and wanted to marry him, but I didn’t want the pomp and circumstance of a large, Pennsylvanian, aristocratic wedding. “I want to help, and I want field experience in the career I’ll be pursuing. You said I’m the prime candidate for Chief of Surgery at your hospital; how can you let me hold such a position after only learning from books?” I searched her eyes for some fragment of understanding, some signal that she knew I was right, and then saw her resolve falter.

“Alright. I have an extra apron in the upstairs closet.”

The ride to Miller’s Field was bumpy; my head ached from the jostling of the road, and my fingernails left marks on my palms from anxiously clenching my hands into fists. I sat between two nurses about Clara’s age, both with faces set in stone. From the few words I had pulled from them, I gathered that they arrived at the field immediately after the battle ended yesterday and knew that our journey today wasn’t a rescue mission—it was a gathering of the dead. I shifted anxiously, and that’s when the smell hit me. A mix of sweat, gunpowder, blood, and something unbeknownst to my young nose drifted towards us relentlessly, and I looked to Clara for answers, her eyes sparking with determination the moment the stench hit her nose. The nurses next to me tensed as the smell reached their noses, and, when we reached the crest of the hill, I understood.

I took in the scene before me. Men were strewn everywhere, some in one piece, others not. Some moaned in pain, and others

laid there, silent, their uniforms a rusty shade of brown. I realized the source of the putrid smell burning my nostrils: death.

It was like nothing I'd ever seen before.

"Hannah." My cousin's steady voice beside me shook me from my shock as the nurses sitting next to me sprung out of the wagon, grabbing their kits and sprinting towards the battlefield. I tore my eyes from the gruesome scene before me and looked at Clara as she said, "Now is not the time to panic. Get the kits out of the back, and let's go. They need us."

I nodded and did as she said. Grabbing my medical kit, I rushed onto the field where the men lay helpless. The numbers had to be in the thousands; I had no idea how to even begin helping them. I internalized my emotions to maintain a professional attitude, but more feelings were running through my body than ever before in my life. Fear coursed through my veins as I realized how great the possibility of not finding Isaac was; it burned as I doubted my medical skills, something I had never done before.

"Hannah, what are you doing?" Clara, carrying a box into the medical tent, yelled from across the field. I didn't want to disappoint her, so I gulped nervously and walked towards the field. I approached a man lying face down in the dirt, and I suffocated a scream as I rolled him over. An eye rolled onto the ground beneath him, and his cheek, marked by a single hole, now served as a window to his mouth. His shoulder was torn to pieces.

He was dead.

Shaking, I stood up, looking for someone who showed signs of movement, praying to God that Isaac didn't meet this fate, that he still laid somewhere, waiting for me, on this field. Twenty feet away from this soldier lay another, retching into the grass beside him, his gray uniform pants covered with red splatters. He looked twenty-five years of age, with muscular arms and legs, and an unwrinkled face that grew paler by the second. As I got within speaking distance of him, though, the retching stopped, and he grew still.

I sprinted the remainder of the distance, breathless by the time I reached him. "Sir?" I examined him, felt his cold, clammy skin, and addressed him once more. "Soldier, can you hear me?"

He summoned the strength to raise his head and look me in the eye, his eyes the same ice blue as Isaac's. "Tell...tell..."

"Tell what, soldier?" I looked down at his legs and saw the cause of his pain—his femur was protruding from his leg, the skin torn open, exposing his body to hundreds of infections. I turned around to grab the water, used as a disinfectant, and bandages from my bag, and when I turned around, he was still staring at me, attempting to croak out his sentence.

"Tell...Elizabeth..." Before his sentence was over, his entire body went slack, his head falling to the ground and his eyes glassing over.

He was dead, too, and I didn't even know who Elizabeth was or what he wanted me to tell her.

I fell back onto the ground, sitting next to this dead man, as tears formed in my eyes. My practical exams were going so well—in school, I could help people. In school, I could inform people why they were sick and do something to cure them. No one ever died in class, and now, in a matter of thirty minutes, two people had died under my care. Nothing was in my control.

Just then, one moan rose above the others: my name. "Hannah Barton!" I turned my head, trying to see where it came from. The call came again, weaker. "Hannah!" I stood, surveying the field of lifeless men, and then, weaker yet, my name flew towards me on the Maryland wind. "Hannah..." Whipping around, I pinpointed the sound: lying in the center of the field, his arm bent like the broken branches on the trees lining the field's edge, was Isaac.

I burst into a run, and threw myself onto the ground next to him the moment I reached his mangled body, my knees digging into the dirt beside him. I didn't think about why the ground was so soft or dark beneath me, for all I could see was Isaac's condition—his blue coat was turning the same rust color as the others lying around him, and his face was a ghastly shade of white. The fear in my veins turned to panic as I realized that, although his condition was better than the previous two soldiers' I'd met, without immediate medical attention, he would die.

"Oh, Isaac, I'm so happy to see you," I touched his dirty, tired face as he tried to gather the energy to speak.

"Hannah...my chest..." I immediately tore off his heavy coat, and my hand flew to my mouth as I took in his condition. His arm wasn't the most pressing medical issue, for a Confederate bullet had left a single, ominous hole in his white shirt, and blood slowly seeped from it.

"Hannah, we have to take him to the surgeon's tent," Clara came up behind me and grabbed Isaac's shoulders. I nodded determinedly and grabbed his feet. Together, Clara and I carried him from the battlefield to the surgeon's tent, the large, red cross on the side matching the blood staining his white shirt. As we set him on the table, I prayed the surgeon's techniques were sophisticated enough to save him, that they were as sophisticated as the surgical methods I dreamed of performing. The surgeon in the tent looked at us with shock as Clara wiped her hands on her dress.

"Ms. Barton, you have an assistant?"

Clara nodded. "My cousin, this soldier's fiancée." I was always

being introduced as his fiancée, as “the Future Mrs. Ashlock.” Usually this bothered me, but in this moment, I didn’t care—Isaac was dying, and my mind was running through the hundreds of things I had seen in the hospital, trying to find a way to save him.

The surgeon, a man about Clara’s age, eyed me up and down and shook his head. “Get her out of here. She’s too young for this.”

Hearing this, I turned and flung the tent door closed and then looked the surgeon in the eyes. “I am this man’s fiancée, yes, but I am also a medical student studying under Clara and the next in line to be the chief surgeon at her hospital. Now,” I walked over to stand next to Isaac and crossed my arms defiantly, “operate.”

The surgeon eyed me suspiciously, but my gaze didn’t falter. Shrugging, he walked to Isaac and ripped the remaining shirt off of him, extracting a guttural scream from him as he did so. Clumps of blood matted down Isaac’s chest hair, and his chest heaved sporadically around the hole left by the tiny piece of metal. “Clara, bring me the water.” I watched as my cousin obediently retrieved a jar of rusty water from the top shelf and handed it to the surgeon. He screwed the cap off, never once taking his eyes off of Isaac’s wound, as if he could will it to heal. Then, he dumped the entire jar onto the wound.

“Ahh!” said Isaac. He squeezed his eyes shut and breathed through clenched teeth, the pain overwhelming his features. The doctor stuck his hand out, prompting Clara to set a long tool with a hook on the end in his open palm, and then he inserted the tool into the bullet hole. I rushed closer to Isaac’s side, muttering what I hoped were soothing words, but he didn’t even know I was there. The doctor pulled the tool out, a tiny bullet in tow, and handed it to Clara. He dumped more water on the wound and stared at Isaac’s chest for a few seconds, and as he stared, the heaving slowed to a normal pace, and Isaac’s whimpers grew quieter and quieter. Pleased with those results, he turned his attention to the arm that swelled more and more as each second passed.

He poked around, causing Isaac to cry out in pain, and then looked at me. “Stay there. It’s not broken, just out of place. We need to snap it back in to its correct position. You stand by his head and talk to him; Clara and I will fix this.”

“But, Doctor, can I help with any of the—”

“Do as I say!” the doctor barked at me, and a glare from Clara, who was wrapping Isaac’s chest in bandages, told me to push the matter no further.

“Fine,” I obeyed, and I looked down at Isaac’s face, distorted in pain, and smiled gently. “Hello, dear.”

“Hannah, the pain...”

“I know, Isaac, but it’s going to get better.” Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Clara put the remaining bandages away and walk

over to the surgeon. “Then, once it gets better you can come home, and we can—”

“GAH!” He screamed again, his back arching, as Clara and the surgeon snapped the arm back in place. I jumped at the sudden movement, silently questioning their methods—weren’t shoulders supposed to be snapped back into place?

“It’s alright now, Isaac. We’ll just need you to go back with Clara and Hannah, so you can be put in a real hospital. You need better care than I can give you in a makeshift tent.”

Without warning, Clara and the surgeon picked Isaac, still crying in pain, off the table and started walking to the cart. They pushed through the heavy, canvas door without muttering a “follow me” in my direction, and a strange cocktail of emotions overtook me. I felt relieved that Isaac would get the care he deserved, happy that he was alive, but, yet, I was disappointed in not helping with the procedures. What the surgeon did seemed barbaric—rusty water as an antiseptic? Snapping arms back into place? But the surgeon’s attitude toward me, the look of disapproval he gave me when I said I was both a fiancée and a student...that chilled my bones.

“Hannah, come on,” Clara yelled from outside the tent, and I followed her voice to the wagon, piling in with the other nurses and few patients we had retrieved, my resolve stronger than ever: I would finish medical school, take over the operation room at Clara’s hospital, and discover improved operation methods, all while training the next generation of female doctors.

Our arrival at the hospital turned into three hours of blurred activity. Clara ran around, performing her duties as president of the hospital, herding nurses with live patients into operating and recovery rooms and nurses with sheet-covered patients toward the morgue. Nursing students ran from room to room handling the sudden influx of soldiers, and I delivered supplies to the operating rooms, all of which were in use. I finally took my post at Isaac’s bedside around midnight, ensuring he wasn’t laying on his wounds incorrectly, and slipping more medication through his mouth when he whimpered in pain. After he was sound asleep, I sat studying my medical school books, searching for improved methods for battlefield healthcare.

This was my daily routine—help out around the hospital during the day, sit by Isaac at night—until he woke up two weeks later.

He coughed loudly and squinted around the room, taking in his surroundings. Finally, his eyes reached me as I put my books on the table beside his bed. “Hannah?”

I smiled and leaned my elbows on his mattress, scooting for-



ward in my chair. “Hi, Isaac.”

He struggled to sit up, so I reached behind him and adjusted his pillows. He smiled sheepishly at his weakness, and then spoke. “Where are we?”

“Clara’s hospital.”

He looked around, seeing the place in a new light. We sat in one of the private rooms of the recovery unit, and the walls were painted a light shade of ivory, so light it looked white at some moments during the day. The floor, only two months old, shone with the cleanliness special to new floors, and the window looked out over the quiet meadow behind the hospital. The stars shone through the window, and Isaac looked back towards me. “So this is where your job offer is?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

His eyebrows shot up. “Hannah, you have to work here.”

I blushed. “Yes, but with the wedding approaching...” I looked down, my sentence trailing into silence. With Isaac back from the war, the wedding and our life together would take precedence over any of my personal plans. I wanted this job more than anything, but the pressures to marry and begin a family would win. Isaac would take over his father’s law firm, and I would return to Pennsylvania to stay home and take care of the children I didn’t even want that were sure to come sooner rather than later. It was unheard of for a woman, especially one from such prestige like me, to give up her status, move across the country, and become a surgeon. Girls from my social class went to school, yes, but it was all in vain—they only went to buy their fathers more time to find them an acceptable, wealthy husband.

“Forget the wedding.”

I snapped my head up from my thoughts. “Excuse me?”

“We don’t need a big wedding. Let’s get married right now.”

I cocked an eyebrow at him. “Right now?” I looked around the room, surveying our surroundings. Construction on the room finished only two months ago, but dust was accumulating in the corners. The window was smudged. I looked at Isaac. His hair was messed, his arm was bruised and in a sling, his chest was heavily bandaged, his face was puffy and tired. “You want to marry me from your hospital bed?”

“Well, it’s not preferable, but given the circumstances...” He motioned towards the bandages wrapped around his chest and the sling holding his left arm.

“Isaac, our parents will be furious.” In my mother’s absence, Isaac’s had thrown herself into the wedding planning more vigorously than I’d hoped. I didn’t want a big wedding—I didn’t like crowds, and I despised the classist attitudes of his parents’ and my father’s friends. Any attempts to voice my opinions, though, had

been promptly stifled with dress fittings and housewife lessons.

“They’ll also be furious when I move the law firm’s headquarters to Maryland, but that’s not stopping me.”

“Moving the law firm to Maryland? Isaac, what are you talking about?”

He sighed. “Look, Hannah, I know you aren’t happy about returning to Pennsylvania, and, to be honest, I’ve always wanted to get away from those money-hungry aristocrats my parents call friends. The market for lawyers is booming up here, and, with the name attached to the business, people will follow it. Hannah,” he paused to make sure I was listening, “I want to move here so you can have the career you deserve.”

“You’re moving the law firm to Maryland?”

“Yes.”

“So I can take the position at the hospital?”

“Yes.”

“You want to get married right now and break every rule we’ve ever been taught to follow?”

“Yes, and all it will take is your consent.” He smirked, enjoying my speechlessness.

He was never like this—he was a lawyer; he did everything by the book. When we courted, the butlers were our chaperones. When we went out, he opened doors and pulled out chairs for me. When he proposed, he did so in typical aristocratic fashion—told my father his intentions, and then had my father tell me that I was getting married. This suggestion of uprooting the family business was so unlike him that I didn’t know what to say.

“Isaac, I don’t know what to say. You’re never this...this...spontaneous!”

“Going to war teaches you something, Hannah,” he said quietly, and I looked at him, noting the new sense of sadness and maturity in his eyes. “I watched men be blown to bits and never have the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones. I listened to so many men tell me, ‘Isaac, tell my wife I love her,’ that I don’t want to take anything for granted. Let’s get married, right now. I’m tired of waiting.”

Tell my wife I love her. The words of the Confederate soldier flashed into my mind: “Tell Elizabeth...” That’s what he’d been trying to tell me, to tell his wife that he loved her. That could’ve been Isaac, was so close to being Isaac that I almost burst into tears at the realization.

“Hannah?” Isaac looked at me with loving eyes. “Hannah, what do you say?”

I smiled and nodded. “I say yes.”

HANNAH GOLDSMITH



Self-Portrait #27  
*oil on canvas*

JENNI GLAWE

## Christmas Traditions

It was Christmas Eve and the whole house was full of excitement, Christmas cheer, and all that happy bullshit. The kids were in their flannel pajamas sitting in front of the flat screen, watching, *A Christmas Story*. I sat at the kitchen table in my robe, taking slow drags off my cigarette and staring into the mirror on the fridge. My eyes were bloodshot with dark circles to match. My hair was in a messy bun on top of my head, dark brown tendrils framing my tired face. I looked like I felt; I couldn't wait until this holiday was over—all this Christmas cheer was making me sick. I poured another glass of Jack Daniels and sat back, waiting for the movie to end. The boys convinced me to get a Christmas tree this year after complaining about having no decorations in the house. So, I went out and bought one for \$12 at the thrift shop on Elm. We didn't have anything to hang on it, so the boys made some ornaments out of colored construction paper. They even took some of my cigarette ash and dumped it on to look like snow. This was Christmas in my house.

Once the movie was over, the boys brushed their teeth before bed and came back to the kitchen.

"Now, have you boys been good this year?" I teased. "Santa doesn't bring gifts to little boys who dig holes in the front yard and break windows."

"But, Mom!" my youngest Joey exclaimed, "you know that was an accident, and I didn't mean it, honest—I really want a present!"

Jason rolled his eyes, "I'm not worried, Joey. Santa always brings us presents when we leave him a peace offering. Remember that year I shot the neighbor's cat with a slingshot and it couldn't

move? Even though it got run over by a truck, I still got that Gameboy!”

“We need something to bribe Santa into giving us presents. Last year we gave him whiskey and Oreo cookies,” explained James.

Joey ran to the kitchen looking for a fresh bottle of whiskey and some kind of snack. I was delighted to see my boys working together to bribe presents out of a fat man in a red suit. I was also excited to have an excuse to drink another glass of whiskey before I went to bed. Joey came back with a bottle of Black Velvet and a can of Pringles.

“I couldn’t find any cookies,” Joey explained, setting the bribe on the table. “You guys think this will be enough to get that Xbox I want?” Joey asked.

I laughed, “Get to bed so you can find out. Good night, boys.” Finally, I would have some time to myself.

I sat down in the faded green chair and lit up another cigarette. I had to wait awhile to get out the presents. Those boys are sneaky like their father, and they might try to creep out and catch a glimpse of Santa taking a shot of BV and trying to stick his fat hand in the Pringle can. I would like to see that myself. The boys were each getting one present from Santa. For James, I stole a bike from a kid on the next block. I painted it bright green, so no one will be the wiser. For Jason, I found a basketball left abandoned at the park. It looks almost brand new; he won’t even know the difference. I even made him a hoop out of an old bucket; I cut out the bottom. In the spring, I plan to nail it to the tree in our front yard so he can practice. Joey was a tough one; I couldn’t find many toys at the park that were in good shape. I did find a Tonka Truck that, after a good hosing off, had some potential. But I didn’t feel right giving him a Tonka Truck with nothing to haul, so to solve this, I gathered some rocks from the neighbor’s flower garden. I was excited to see all of their faces in the morning when they opened their gifts. I know they really wanted an Xbox, but I’m not going to raise a bunch of spoiled brats. When their father walked out on me, I knew it would be tough, but not this tough. My children will have to learn the hard way that in order to get stuff, they need to work for it. If they aren’t willing to work for it, or you just can’t make enough money, then you need to take what you can and make do. “I am doing the best I can,” I tell myself, crumpling my half-smoked cigarette into the tray.

I got up from the chair, slammed the glass of whiskey, and went to place the presents under the tree. After arranging the stolen goods, loud knocking echoed through the silent night. I went to look through the peephole, only to discover the boys’ father

standing on the other side of the door.

“Let me in, Jessica!” he exclaimed. “I know your drunk ass heard me knock. Unlock the door.”

I leaned against the wall and slowly slid myself to the floor. “It’s a Christmas miracle,” I muttered to myself.

EVAN VENTRIS



Awaiting  
*oil on panel*

CAMERON FRASER

## Matricide

Where there was once a gleeful child, such pain has taken hold.  
No more does he frolic, only lurch on broken toes.  
Crippled by a heavy burden—the guilt and shame and pity—  
for once he had been a son, now an orphan of the city.  
His mother's eyes burned into his soul, the cause of so much pain.  
A young boy turned murderer, with only himself to blame.  
Regret stalks him like a shadow, ever a reminder of his sin.  
Never again will he see his mother, only her eyes etched beneath  
his skin.



RHONDA LAMPE



Time Will Always Entangle You  
*digital*

EVAN HEER

## Macy

“I’m going after Macy again.”

“I’ll get the next round,” Kelli said, trying to ignore Beau’s comment.

“How many more times are you going to do this to yourself?” Logan said.

“Until she realizes that we belong together. I love her,” said Beau.

“She is not the right one for you, man. She wasn’t four years ago when we were all at Colombia, and she won’t ever be. I’m sorry, but I can’t keep seeing you like this. It’s pathetic.”

Beau grabbed his seventh beer from Kelli and tore the napkin between his fingers as he sat slouched in the worn-green leather booth. After several failed attempts with other girlfriends over the past two years, all he could think about was her chocolate brown hair and big blue eyes. He thought about the times they spent together in his uncomfortably small dorm room at Columbia University in New York City, shooting baskets into the Nerf hoop hanging on the door, and sleeping in until two in the afternoon, hungover from the previous night at Micki’s Pub.

“Did you invite Macy out tonight, babe?” Logan asked.

“Yeah, she said she already had plans with Tony,” Kelli said.

Tony. He was this new guy Macy had been seeing with a chinstrap beard, who wore designer jeans and diamond-studded earrings, and he always repped a flat-bill hat tilted toward the sky. Beau wasn’t one of his greater fans.

Work seemed to drag on longer and longer each day at the office. Beau went outside to get some air and grabbed a quick bite

at a diner on Liberty Street. As he ate his undercooked hamburger, he looked up at the North Tower of the World Trade Center, where Macy worked as a secretary. Memories of her flooded his consciousness yet again. Beau flipped a quarter to the vendor on the corner and grabbed a newspaper. He looked at the date; it was September 10th, 2001. *Wow. It's already been a week since I saw her last.* He flipped through the paper trying to forget her before his mood would catch up to his last thought. "Seno's Pizzeria: Lenny's Specialty Pizza, only \$15.99!" Macy's favorite date night destination. *I need to call her,* he thought.

Just as Beau flipped open his phone to dial her number, he saw that she had sent him a text twenty-six minutes ago.

*Hey, Beau, we need to talk. O'Doule's at four?*

*Sure, I'll see you then.*

As Beau walked into O'Doule's, he looked across the room, and there she was. She sat in the booth holding a glass in her hands, looking at it innocently. Although Macy was afraid of commitment the last time she dated Beau, she now realized that she could no longer ignore her feelings for him. Beau's heart punched his rib cage as he looked across the dimly lit Manhattan bar at her. It felt just like the first time he saw her at a house party on Fifth Street in 1996. That night she was wearing jeans and a Sublime t-shirt covered by a flannel, her long, wavy hair resting on her shoulders. She looked up at him and his life changed in an instant.

"Hey, Mace, how's it going?" Beau asked.

"Hey, Beau. I'm okay. How are you?"

"I'm doing alright. How's Tony?"

"We broke up last night."

Beau looked around the bar deciphering through thousands of possible responses to demonstrate his feelings. He glanced at the table in front of him as his clammy hands left prints. Beau grabbed her hand that had rested on the sticky bar table, just asking to be held.

"Macy, I know things haven't been normal between us lately, but I really want to let you know that I think about you every day, and I can't help but think of a future with us together. Do you want to get dinner tomorrow night?"

"Yeah, Beau, I'd like that," she said, squeezing his hand.

"Great, how about Seno's Pizzeria? I'll pick you up at seven?"

"That sounds great," Macy said with a smile and slight hair flip.

At 6:04 a.m. on Tuesday, September 11th, Beau woke up and placed his hands behind his head with a huge smile. The smell of Logan's coffee crept under the cherry oak door and the sun began to pres-

ent itself through the blinds. He thought about the first date he had ever taken Macy on. They went to see *Jerry McGuire*, and he awkwardly grabbed her hand as she rested her head on his shoulder. Her hair smelled like cherries as it tickled the scruff of his chin. At that moment, he had completely fallen for her. That was five years ago, and that fire still burned in his heart every time he looked at her.

At 8:46 a.m., a hijacked plane collided with the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The news traveled quickly throughout the city and the entire world.

Beau heard the deafening boom of a Boeing 767 crashing into a skyscraper. Everyone in his office filed into the lobby to look at the television. Beau's heart dropped to his toes as he read the screen, "HIJACKED PLANE CRASHES INTO NORTH TOWER." *Oh my God. Macy.* He backed away from the crowd and ran to a garbage can, gripping its rim as he vomited. He ran out the door toward the tragic scene. The streets were chaotic. People were running, screaming, recording and talking on their phones as smoke filled the air around the building. Red and blue lights darted toward the tragic scene and a man with yellow tape closed off entrances to the building.

Beau was stopped by a police officer as he tried to run into the building. He dialed Macy's number, but there was no response. The world became silent to him as he looked around. An elderly woman screamed as she cried into the shoulder of a man with a badge over his heart. The sky darkened as the smoke covered the sun overhead.

People were filing out of the building like bees flying out of a beehive. Macy's desk was on the seventy-fourth floor, about twenty floors lower than the gaping hole and the flames that resided around it. Looking up at the seventy-fourth floor, tears formed, and rested on Beau's lower eyelashes. He dropped to his knees and put his hands over his mouth hoping to God that he would get to see her again. At that moment, another plane rocketed into the South Tower, demolishing into it a familiar hole.

Beau's phone rang. *Unknown Caller.*

"Hello?"

"Beau?"

"Macy?"

"Beau, I'm so scared."

"Me too, Macy. Where are you?"

"I'm under my desk. There is no way for us to get down; the elevators and stairs are both blocked. Beau. If I don't make it down, I just want you to know that I love you and I've missed you so much."

"I love you too, Ma—"

At that moment, the building crumbled and began to collapse. Beau stood and looked at the building as people tried to escape the mass of smoke chasing them. Their shrieks struck Beau to his core as they rushed by him, grabbing his arms. His phone dropped to the ground, ending his call with Macy. Beau's mind filtered through thousands of life experiences in the matter of a second. He saw Macy walking down the aisle, two brown-haired children jumping on a trampoline with Macy leaning against it and smiling at him, and her holding his hand as he laid on his deathbed with a Seno's pizza on the table and a Nerf basketball hoop on the door. His whole world was destroyed, just like the building before him. What was his reason for living his life if she was no longer a part of it? Beau wiped the tears from his cheeks and tried to swallow, but his mouth was dry from all of the dust.

It's been twelve years now, and on the evening of each September 11th at 7:00 p.m., Beau arrives at Macy's gravesite. Now, he sits on the cold, freshly cut grass and pulls out Macy's favorite Seno's pizza with pepperonis, mushrooms, and extra cheese. This visit is different than past years, however. This year, Beau did not come alone.

"Hey, Mace. I hope all is good up there. I'd like you to meet Mason. He's my son."

MELISSA HOSCH



Rope and Chain  
*photograph*



CARRIE PIEPER

## By a Dead Girl

In my arms I hold  
a child  
pried loose from the  
stiff cold fingers of a  
dead girl.

I cradle the tender  
spine  
caressing it  
gently with my  
fingertips.

Its mother is gone  
but the child remains,  
a permanent heir  
of her unfulfilled  
longings.

Motionless it lies,  
forever calling  
out for  
its mother. Words that  
a child should  
never know.

I sit, constantly waiting  
for the words to stop  
and the child to  
end,  
but my mind keeps it  
living,  
breathing life into  
its paper thin body.

In my arms  
I hold the dead girl's  
last hope.  
A fearful weight added  
to my body.

Clinging to the  
edges of my mind,  
a fear grows in me  
as it nestles in my  
thoughts.  
Knowing that  
one day this  
motherless child  
could belong  
to me.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH



Emotionally Emaciated  
*oil on canvas*

ELIZABETH SCHEER

## The New Place

There are two color choices  
for the reconverted building:  
beige or black. The painter  
doesn't have any other ideas.  
Nearby, the piazza is leaking,  
and the woman in the lobby of the complex  
complains of a strange gap between the windows.  
She relishes, however, the arugula flatbread  
that is served in the "cellar."

Some combination of risk and sentimentality:  
That's what I'm after. Imagining, then,  
the new place embellished with figurines;  
the idea of the farm and the idea of the table  
whipped together in an airy froth.  
Equally, however, the new place's atmosphere  
should conjure something along the lines of childhood.  
Grooved with the whole past  
and covering the mind like a shag rug.

JENNA MICHEL



Indiana Bat  
*oil on panel*

MELISSA HOSCH

## Wild Fire

As I led him out of the pasture, I couldn't help crying. I couldn't put it off anymore. I needed to make sure Dad did something, and I knew what that something would be. As I glanced at Wild Fire, I knew that this was the end. He didn't have much time left. As much as I wanted to keep him around, I needed to make sure that today my Fire would no longer suffer. My eyes stung, and the world around me was blurred. Occasionally, a drop would leave my eyes and travel down my cheeks. Inside my chest, my heart was breaking.

It was a Wednesday night, and I had to go to my fifth grade CCD, religion class. That night all the classes went to church for mass. I don't remember much about that, but I do remember kneeling and silently praying, "Please, God, let Dad be getting the horses tonight. Please, please, please. I won't ask for anything else. Just please, oh, please, let Dad decide to go pick up the horses tonight." My older sister had gotten a horse as a present one Christmas, and I eventually became interested in horses as well, and my dad had decided that I could have one. After months of searching, he had finally found not one, but two new horses. Dad had plans to pick up the horses that night unless something happened on the farm that would require his attention. I had been waiting for what felt like forever to get a horse, and I was desperate to finally see them. I repeated my silent litany for the whole mass.

During the ride home, I couldn't sit still. Would the horses be there? There was no way of knowing until I got home because my mom, who was driving, taught the fourth grade CCD class. Would

I finally see the horse that Dad had gotten for me? What was this horse like? What color was he? Was he pretty? Would he be nice and wonderful or a miserable grump that required a lot of force to convince to do anything? So many questions whirled in my mind, and my stomach felt like a hard rock.

Finally, the interminable ride was over, and I was home. I rushed through the door into the house and Dad told me, "Go check the floor," a location just past the backyard. The backyard sloped down, had a brief flattened area, then sloped again to the land that contained the machine shed, granary, pastures, and the floor. The floor was cemented with a roof over part of it. At times, it has been either a pen for weaned calves or connected to part of the horse pasture. After making sure the yard light was on, I ran down the hills to see the horses.

In a circling mass were three horses in two groups. Socks, my older sister's horse, was moving by himself, and there were two brown horses moving around on the opposite side of the floor. They were all agitated—Socks, because there were newcomers to his pasture and the other two because they were in a new place. It was like watching a synchronized dance as they looped around the floor—circling the pen and each other. Both chasing and retreating, they would sprint as a group and then stop and whirl. Then they would be dashing off again. Around and around. Spinning, stopping, swirling. Again and again.

They were dazzling.

The next morning, I was told I could choose which one I wanted. I knew just enough about horses to think I knew about horses. I had read many books about them. I knew about the different breeds: the morgan, saddlebred, thoroughbred, and many more. I knew that to make a horse go, you clicked your tongue and kicked his sides. To stop, you pulled back on the reins. I figured I wanted the younger one, who was fifteen. This horse was the gelding, or neutered male. "His name is Wild Fire," I was told.

I loved that name. While I could have changed it, I never considered it. He has always been and always will be my Wild Fire.

Even now, I'm still absolutely convinced that Wild Fire was the smartest horse we've ever had, but we didn't realize his brilliance at first. He just seemed like a troublemaker. When he was saddled up, he wanted to do one thing: run. My dad told me to stop being timid and "show him who's boss." I couldn't manage it. By the end of any ride, Wild Fire would take control and dash back home, and I would be clinging to his back, trying not to fall off.

One morning, Dad sent me out to the cow pasture with Wild

Fire to wait for Jessica and Socks to round up cattle. I was impatient for Jessica to arrive because Wild Fire was easier to control with other horses around.

But she didn't show up. The sun rose higher in the sky and Wild Fire became agitated. His gait was rough instead of smooth. He was constantly fidgeting. I walked him in circles and tried to soothe him, but I was getting worried. I wanted off. I tried to get him to hold still so I could dismount. I thought I had him under control, but once my attention had gone from holding him still to swinging my leg over his back, he yanked the reins from my hands and was in full gallop. The horse pasture was next to the cow pasture, with an electric fence separating them. Wild Fire ran right through it. The electrical current traveled through him and shocked us both. He started bucking, I lost my grip, soared through the air, and landed in the dirt.

When I opened my eyes, I noticed that it was a very pretty sky. Nice and blue. White, fluffy clouds roamed through it. I could hear Wild Fire greeting the other horses, and they went further into the horse pasture. I could hear the fence making some zapping noises. My back ached from my hard landing. It wasn't supposed to be like this. I didn't want to get up. I had failed. Horse riding was awful.

The second summer that we had Wild Fire, I learned about the Dubuque County Trailblazers and the horse camp they had at the Dubuque County Fair Grounds.

"Dad, can I go to horse camp?"

"You don't even ride your horse."

"Maybe I could learn to ride there?"

"I'll make you a deal: you ride every single day this summer, and I'll consider it."

I agreed and took up his challenge.

I didn't do anything fancy when I rode Wild Fire. I took him on the same trail each time. It was a really good trail for me because the first part was level with a wide, clear path through the corn field and I could let Wild Fire run. Eventually we'd reach the hill, and he'd run out of steam climbing it. He'd then be happy enough to walk and trot for the rest of the trail. The first few times I was uneasy, but eventually Fire and I settled into the routine. I started to fall in love with him.

Riding Wild Fire at a gallop could either be terrifying or awe-inspiring. At the beginning, it was terrifying. It was a reckless, heedless, push of muscles, and I had no idea what he was going to be doing. The ground sped along beneath us while his

pace changed; it would quicken, or stutter, and at any moment he could stop, swerve, jump, or slow down. It was unpredictable. But when I started to work with Wild Fire, it was amazing. My heart sped up, and I could hear, "thu-thump, thu-thump." Eventually I'd realize the sound wasn't just my heart but the sound of Fire's hooves, pounding into the ground. His motion was similar to that of a rocking horse with a back and forward motion and a consistent rhythm that made it easier to shift my weight along with his. Meanwhile, the landscape zoomed by, and it was the closest thing to flying I have ever felt. Wild Fire showed it to me.

I loved horse camp. I returned four times, and I began to understand just how amazing Wild Fire was. We formed a truce. Dad hated when I said that. He insisted that, as a rider, I should "show him who's boss." I stopped arguing the point and just nodded and ignored him. I realized that if I worked with Wild Fire, then I had a more enjoyable time.

My favorite moments at horse camp were when it was time to get our pictures taken with our horses. The professional photographer who came was the one who took yearly photos for my mom.

"Hey there, Missy!" he would say—he was one of those adults who felt that my name should be shortened from Melissa to Missy. "Are you going to smile today?" I usually hated getting my photo taken.

Most of the horses became frightened when they saw the photography equipment, and every year, the photographer had different ideas to distract the horses and help keep them controlled. My first year at camp, he brought alpacas along, and in my last year there were assistants to help control the horses.

The first year, I was nervous. If the other campers were having trouble with their horses, I was certain that Wild Fire would be trouble as well. I was shocked when he calmly entered the studio area, posed himself perfectly, dropped his head onto my shoulder, and pointed his ears towards the camera.

"You're the only camper who is worse about taking a picture than their horse is," the photographer teased me. I still can't believe what a big ham that horse turned out to be.

As I became more confident about riding Wild Fire, I began to try new things. At horse shows, there are several different events. There are classes where the judges decide which horse looks the best, which horse behaves the best, and which horse and rider can follow a set of directions that was posted beforehand. Then there were the games, such as running a pattern around some barrels or poles.



The games were the events for which Wild Fire lived. I especially loved the poles event. In the event, a line of six poles were set up in the arena. The poles were set up like posts, and a rider could touch the top of a pole without bending down to reach them. The pattern was a straight run from one end of the arena to the other. Then the horse and rider would make a turn to head back the way they came, but instead of going straight, they would start to weave through the poles. On reaching the end, it would be another turn and more weaving. Once the poles had been woven through, it would be time for another dash to the end of the arena. When it was my turn to run the pattern, I would turn Fire towards the poles and yell, "Yah!" I didn't need to kick him. He knew what those poles were and was just as eager to go as I was. He'd go from a fast walk to a run as soon as he was turned in the right direction and would be in full gallop as soon as the words had left my mouth. Fire would make a dash to the end of the arena where the first pole had both our attentions. He would slow just enough to make the turn and then begin weaving through the poles. When we reached the end, it was another quick turn and back through the poles we'd weave. One last turn and then the race to the end. Running the poles was amazing. I'm convinced Wild Fire could have run the pattern on his own, but he graciously shared the experience with me. I'd hold onto the saddle's horn with one hand and the reins with the other. I also gripped Wild Fire as hard as I could with my thighs.

Running poles was like entering another world. It was one where only Wild Fire, myself, and the next pole existed. There was a world of people outside the arena that didn't exist for Fire and me. It was intense, and all of Wild Fire's and my focus was spent on the poles. For those precious seconds, our minds were in sync. We had one goal, and we both knew what it was: the next pole. When we were making our mad dash at the beginning of the pattern, I would be leaning over Fire's neck, moving with him, running with him. When we hit the first turn, I would lean back and shift my weight into the turn. The poles would go by quickly. We'd shift left then right then left again. Quickly and without pause. Moving as one being.

Eventually, we would finish the pattern and our private world would be shattered. Other people would exist and the connection between the two of us would be broken. I would try to stop Wild Fire before we ran into the fence. He always managed to stop or swerve. I, on the other hand, wasn't so lucky and crashed into the fence a time or two. The laws of gravity can be rough on a person.

The winter of my junior year in high school, I noticed that Wild

Fire looked different. His fur coat was curly. I couldn't recall his winter coat looking like that before, but it had been a rough winter and the fur didn't seem that unusual. Spring came, and although Wild Fire shed his winter coat, his fur was still curly instead of smooth, and it wasn't shiny. After a visit from the vet, I was told that Fire's thyroid was the problem. I was supposed to give Wild Fire senior horse feed and mix in a powder that was supposed to help. Wild Fire didn't particularly care for the senior feed, but he ate it, and aside from the curly hair, he seemed fine.

As the spring and summer flew by, I began to notice other things. He wasn't himself. He was so mellow. I can still recall the last time I took him for a ride. It was late summer or early fall. I knew I'd be starting my senior year soon. I took him to our favorite trail. It had been some time since we'd ridden it. Usually we'd work on something in the arena or ride the other trails, but I felt a need to take him onto our trail, the place where Fire and I began to build our friendship. He perked up a little when he recognized the trail and went from a sedate walk to a trot, and even a few strides at a canter. I could tell that he was really trying. Then he gave a big sigh and started walking again. This was not Wild Fire, not my little horse so full of energy. I could feel an ache in my chest and tears in my eyes. I knew his time was short. We didn't make it to the hill. My Fire's walk was so slow that I couldn't bear to take him through the whole route. I turned him around and headed for home.

Even though I didn't ride Wild Fire any more, I still spent as much time as I could with him. Every day, I had to bring him in from the pasture to feed him his powdered medicine. In the mornings, I had to rush so I could make it to school on time, but the afternoons were a different story.

I would walk out to the horse pasture and call, "Hey, Wild Fire!"

His head would come up and my favorite moments were when he would look up at me, whinny a greeting, and then start walking towards me. When I reached him, I'd stroke his neck and pretend to clip a lead rope to him. I'd begin walking and I knew that his head would be at my shoulder, even though I had nothing to connect him to me but trust. He was a well-mannered horse when he was being led. Instead of trying to pull ahead or not move, he'd follow along at the pace I set, and he was always at my right shoulder. If I stopped, his nose would touch my arm, but he would not encroach into my space, and I was never worried that he would trample me. He would simply be there, waiting to see where I would go next.



I'd lead him out of the pasture and tie him to the hitching rail. I then gave him his bucket of grain and grabbed the brushes and hoof pick from the tack shed.

"Alright, handsome. Let's get you cleaned up."

Humming quietly, I would work the first brush in soft circles through his fur to dislodge any dirt. I'd start at his shoulder then move to his chest. Next I'd brush his belly and back and finish up at his rump, all while Fire was eating his grain. "Time to get your other side," I'd tell him, as I kept one hand on his rump and moved behind him. I'd then repeat the process.

In no hurry, I would switch brushes. The second one would be worked in the direction his fur grows and remove the dirt. With his fur clean, I would switch to removing the tangles from his mane and tail with the last brush. Wild Fire barely paid attention. The grain was more fascinating than the process of a grooming, but he would stand quietly with only the occasional shift of weight or the swish of his tail.

The last tool from the shed was the hoof pick. It's a piece of metal that's got a sharp but broad point on one end and a bend a little ways down from that point. It's used to remove dirt and stones from a horse's hooves. When cleaning a hoof, you have to be very careful. You want to remove all the dirt without digging into the hoof and causing pain or, even worse, an injury. It requires a careful hand. Wild Fire was good about shifting his weight so that I could pick up his hoof, but I would have to work quickly because if he became impatient, he would try to shift his weight so that I was supporting him. He could get pretty heavy.

Once the hooves were cleaned, I was finished grooming Wild Fire. Sometimes I was completely finished with him and would return him to the horse pasture. But sometimes, I would grab a five-gallon bucket, set it near him, and use the bucket to climb onto his back. I had never ridden Fire bareback. He was a handful, and the security of a saddle helped prevent me from having more falls than I did. But it was nice to just sit there.

He was warm. I'd run my hands down his neck. "I wish I could take you for a ride, Ponyboy. It'd be nice to feel the wind again. But I suppose that's asking too much. I'm worried about you."

I'd continue talking. It didn't really matter what I was saying. Wild Fire's ears were turned back to me. I had learned that a horse's ears tell a lot about what the horse is thinking. If they have an ear turned to you, then you know that he is paying attention to you.

Other times I would scoot back and lie down on top of Wild Fire. I'd close my eyes and just feel myself and him. He'd just

quietly stand. Occasionally, he'd shift his weight from one foot to another. His tail might swat at a fly. We were together in that instant. It was so peaceful. I could have stayed that way forever.

As the year progressed, I noticed that Wild Fire ate less and less of the grain. His coat remained coarse and curly, and every day, he seemed to have less energy. He was fading, and fading fast. I knew that he would be gone soon, but I didn't want to admit it. I couldn't imagine not having Wild Fire waiting for me.

I told Dad that something needed to be done about Wild Fire. He kept putting me off. "Sure, I'll get to it," he'd say, and then become so busy he'd forget. Secretly, I was relieved. I hoped there might be a miracle cure for him, and every day he was still around was another chance for that miracle to happen. But one morning, I looked at Wild Fire, and I knew. This could not continue. I could see his ribs, his hips, and all of his bones. His head hung almost to the ground. He didn't greet me. And his eyes. They were so dull. So listless. I began leading him from the pasture. He moved so slowly. Each footstep seemed to take an eternity, but I wasn't going to rush him. School was unimportant. There was just him. It took me over half an hour to journey with Wild Fire from the pasture to the hitching post. A journey that used to take about a minute. I knew without even trying that Wild Fire would eat nothing. So I wrapped my arms around his neck, buried my face in his fur, and cried. They were not silent tears, but big, heart-wrenching cries. I knew that this was it. This was the end, and, although I knew it was coming, I wasn't ready. I didn't want this. The Fire just stood. He didn't have much interest in anything. His head hung low to the ground as if the weight of holding it was too much to bear. I couldn't stand it. This was not Wild Fire. As much as I didn't want for him to be gone, I knew that I couldn't do this to him anymore. I hugged him close one last time and then I left. And I couldn't bring myself to look back at him. That was not how I wanted to remember him.

I walked into the house and found Dad. I had to make him understand. Understand that it was time for Wild Fire to go. "You need to do something about Wild Fire."

"OK. I'll get to it."

"No, now. He's tied up at the hitching rail. You need to do something about it today."

I took Dad by surprise. I rarely stand up to him, but I couldn't let Wild Fire continue on like this. It wasn't fair for him. I could feel more tears in my eyes, and my chest hurt, but I knew that I had done what I could for him.

Then I went to school.

The whole day I wanted to cry. My heart was breaking. I didn't tell anyone what was going on. If I did, I would break down into tears. I couldn't let that happen. I didn't think anyone would understand. I knew when I got home Wild Fire would no longer be there, but I also knew it was for the best. I couldn't stand to think about him fading like that. My horse who loved to chase the wind could no longer do so.

When I got home, I learned that I was right. He was gone. I didn't really care to know more than that.

KASSIDY HANSON



Senses of Self  
*three panel watercolor and ink drawing*

JOE ARMS

## Childhood

A hummingbird flaps its wing  
and the world stands still.  
A cool, summer breeze pushes a swing.  
A hummingbird flaps its wing.  
I hand you your dandelion ring.  
We dream of dancing, of driving, and of drinking till  
a hummingbird flaps its wing  
and the world stands still.

## Adulthood

Hot tears drop to the snow, steaming,  
as they hand me your dandelion ring.  
I begin to dream of dreaming.  
Hot tears drop to the snow steaming.  
Your granddaughter won't stop screaming.  
While angels begin to sing,  
hot tears drop to the snow steaming  
as they hand me your dandelion ring.

MADISON RHYMES

## Bob and the Best Birthday Gift Ever

Thea had known the day was going to suck. She just hadn't known how. The hands on the bank's clock indicated that another hour had passed. It was going to be a long day.

"Stop giving me that look," Naomi whispered from behind her. After dealing with her sister for some thirty-odd years, she could sense Thea's look of brooding contempt, and she was beginning to lose her patience.

"I'm not giving you a look," Thea hissed back. "This is just the face I perpetually give to prissy, paranoid-assed idiots."

"*Language!*" Naomi said, offended by her sister's blatant lack of social etiquette. "And *I'm* the idiot? We wouldn't be in this mess if you knew how to follow basic cooking instructions. The dinner for Mom's birthday could have been done by now."

"I told you that I didn't even wanna be part of our parents' stupid get together in the first place. If you could use a credit card like a normal human being, we could have just gone out for food instead of needing to buy more ingredients, but noooo! You have to go to a bank for change every freakin' time you leave the house."

"Credit cards leave a trail that enables salespeople to track your purchases and makes it harder for you to regulate your spending. Using cash is much s—"

Another gun fired in the air. "QUIET!" The robber shouted. "And keep still. Nobody try to be a hero."

The sisters and the others had already been stuck with the robbers for two hours now. Thea guessed that the men, with their dark clothes and masked faces with large mouth slits, had origi-

nally planned to successfully be in and out of the bank within a few minutes, but the police had surrounded the establishment almost as soon as the robbery began. Guess their day wasn't going according to plan either. Good thing the men had so many hostages, huh?

*But yeah, Thea thought. Using cash is so much safer.*

The mass of customers and employees cowered together before the mighty robbers in a plea for their safety—which naturally meant that Thea was going to say something, because Thea could never keep her mouth shut.

"Trust me," she said. "I wouldn't dream of trying to save anyone. The Princess over here is not worth a bullet." She expelled a loogie on the floor for emphasis.

"Why do you have to be so disgusting?!" Naomi looked on the verge of fainting from the sight of the offensive blob.

"Why do you have to be so damn dramatic?" Thea retorted. "We're being held hostage but you wanna faint because of some stupid *shit*? Get your shit together, Princess."

"I told you to stop calling me 'princess'!"

"Well, maybe if you'd stop acting like one—"

"For the love of God, shut them up!" The first robber shouted. He was the more muscular of the two men, with a large chest and arms that he had likely labored over in an effort to compensate for his smaller stature. Thea called him The Short Stack.

"We already tied them up after we got here," said the second robber.

Through his eye slits, he looked down on the sisters with an expression that could rival Thea's contempt. He seemed a little pretentious, but there wasn't anything special about him—Thea called him Bob.

Yes, despite the glares they made at the sisters, the other hostages were compliant and remained unbound as they sat on the floor surrounded by the far-from-bulletproof plastic bank desks and chairs that had been painted to look expensive, but the indifference the sisters had shown after the first few bullets had been fired made the robbers wary of them, and they were tied to a nearby desk for good measure.

"Maybe you should gag her," Naomi politely offered, doing her best to jab her sister despite the desk wall that separated them.

"Maybe they should gag you," Thea retorted, jabbing her sister back. "That way we don't have to hear your stupid—"

The Short Stack pointed his gun at Thea's head. "I'll shut both of your mouths permanently if you don't quit talking right now!" He seemed a little trigger happy.

The sudden ringing from one of the bank's phones startled

him into almost firing his gun.

"Shit. It's the police," The Short Stack said.

"More hostage negotiations," Bob agreed, his arms crossed over his chest contemplatively. "We need to think of something else to say."

"They need to start taking us more seriously," The Short Stack said, as though the two of them were discussing their neglectful employers at dinner on a Friday night. "Maybe if we pop some heads and take a few people hostage as we leave it'll get them to listen."

"We don't need the extra weight," Bob replied. "It would be better for us to try to escape with just a bit of cash."

"Fuck that," The Short Stack said nonchalantly as the phone continued to ring. He pointed his gun at Thea's head again. "This will make them take us more seriously."

"We're in this together, remember, buddy?" Bob reminded him. "We agreed to both be on board before making any serious decisions unless it was absolutely necessary."

"I know, I know," The Short Stack said. "But this is necessary." He took the safety off his gun.

"Oh, I don't think you want to do that," Naomi said. The robber had made a technical error, so of course, know-it-all Naomi had to point it out. "Don't you watch *Law and Order*? You're already looking at quite a few years for armed robbery and assault," Naomi continued. "If you start killing your hostages, not only will it add time to your sentence, but—"

"Will you quit trying to be an expert on everything!" Thea yelled.

"I'm just trying to help!" Naomi yelled back.

"You're going to get us all killed!" The Pregnant Woman cried.

"Daddy, are we going to die?" asked The Boy with the Missing Teeth.

The phone continued to ring.

"Shut them the hell up," shouted the Old Man at the far end of the crowd.

Bob and The Short Stack looked at each other.

The phone continued to ring.

Bob nodded and looked away.

The Short Stack glared.

"Fuck it!" he shouted. "Just take them to the back while I answer the phone and we're overrun by the cops," he added dryly.

Bob ignored his snarky undertone and complied. He couldn't see his partner glaring at him as he took the sisters to a nearby storage closet.

The minute they were out of sight en route, Thea jabbed her

sister in the arm.

"Why did you hit me?!" Naomi shouted as Thea put her in a headlock.

"I just saved your life, you ungrateful troll!" The Princess indignantly elbowed Thea in the kidneys.

"We both know that's not the reason your smart ass said anything!" Thea shouted while Naomi rammed her into the wall.

The bang of the impact and their battle cries could be heard on the other side of the bank by the rest of the hostages.

"I-I think I'm going into labor," The Pregnant Woman sniffled.

Bank Teller #1 began rocking back and forth.

The Old Man looked up at The Short Stack. "I'll pull the trigger for you," he said.

The Short Stack merely released a seething sigh into the phone while the police listened to the chaos on the other end.

The other hostages couldn't tell which was worse—the sisters or the robbers—but Bob had his own idea. By the time he managed to pull them apart, both of the sisters had torn clothes, Naomi's lip was bleeding, Thea was missing chunks of hair, and Bob had what he knew was going to be a black eye. He finally shoved them into the storage closet.

"What the hell is wrong with you two!?" Bob exclaimed. He could already feel his eye swelling. "I have a gun pointed at you and you still won't shut up!" He sighed. "Look. I really need this money, and you're making us look bad out there. Can you please shut up so I don't have to shoot you?"

"Nothing you can do could make this day any worse," Naomi said. Thea rolled her eyes. "It's our mother's birthday, and it's been completely ruined...the food will never be ready in time now, even without all of this." She gestured to their surroundings.

"I'm so sorry I can't be as gracious as you, Your High Horse." Thea wasn't sorry. She rubbed her bald spot and tried to hide a grimace. "If we'd just gone out to eat like I suggested, I could have added some years to your life, seeing as that's the only reason why you need me."

"Psh," Naomi responded, "I do *not* need you for your terrible cooking skills." Her tone suggested a condescending laugh at the thought. "I needed you there to help so it could be like how we used to make food together when we were younger. It wouldn't have been the same if we'd gone out."

"Yeah, right," Thea said. "You hated doing that, so did all of us—especially me."

"It's been years since we've all been together though, and Mom and Dad aren't getting any younger. I just wanted it to be

like old times, back when we could get along, before I realized how annoying you were."

"You mean the old times when you annoyed me by rubbing it in my face about how much better you were at everything than I was?"

"I never—"

"Wait," Bob interjected, pointing the gun at Naomi. "Let her finish. You," he said, pointing the gun to Thea, "keep talking. Why do you feel like that happened?"

Thea swallowed, and continued, "Because she was the sweet one, the one on honor roll, on all of the sports teams, in all of the plays. She was the one who cooked the best food, while I burned everything I touched. Mom and Dad's little princess. How do you think it feels being second best all of the time?"

"Is that why you didn't want to cook with me?" she asked.

"Thea, no one cares about how bad you are at—"

Bob cocked his gun.

"Okay, maybe I care a little," Naomi admitted, "but that's only because I had to. You were Mom and Dad's favorite, the confident, assertive one. It was your grades that they hung up on the fridge and your trophies on the shelf, not mine. I only acted that way because I had to. It was exhausting."

"Isn't it possible that your parents just showed their affection towards you two in different ways?" Bob suggested. He shrugged sheepishly, with a hint of a knowing smile showing through the mouth slit of his mask. "How far has fighting about this issue gotten you? I mean, look at my partner and I. We have our disagreements, like what happened out there, but we try to talk things out to help each other be a more effective team. Wouldn't it make more sense for you to encourage each other like that too, instead?" This Bob guy was alright. Maybe he could be a psychiatrist one day. He might have even been robbing the bank to help pay off his college loans.

"I guess you're right," Thea said, looking at her sister. "We can make the food over again if you want to."

Naomi shook her head. "I'm fine if we go out to eat."

There was a sudden commotion on the other side of the door, followed by gunshots and screams. The door swung open, and Bob fell to the ground, dead as the victim of the last round of bullets. Thea and Naomi looked at the perpetrator: Short Stack. His face twisted into a cynical smile, the kind of smile children have when they become gods as they burn mortal ants with a magnifying glass.

"Change in plans," the man said as he tightened his grip around the Boy with the Missing Teeth. "I'm beginning to realize,



these 'hostage negotiations' are getting us nowhere. It's time for me to get rid of some of this dead weight." He pointed his gun at the sisters with his finger on the trigger.

Exhausted, for the first time in decades, the sisters clutched each other. "You know what? Those old farts can starve for all I care," Naomi said.

"Yeah," Thea nodded. "It's their fault we're in this mess in the first place."

MELISSA GABER



A Little Overboard  
*watercolor and ink*

SHANNON KELLY

## Of Time Travelers and Chocolate

Nothing can save you except yourself  
you're falling so gently through to me like  
telephone wires that don't quite connect to  
the bark of the trees  
they stand so tall on one leg  
and you—you are too busy pretending to sip  
hot tea that you cannot look up  
from that book you never read to  
meet my eyes halfway and tell me  
there's still time for reality but  
right now we're just window shopping

now you are nine years old and  
afraid because there are stars in your eyes  
and you can't see tomorrow because  
nighttime is so bright  
it's blistering! your head is spinning  
with lights and all the magnificence of the new age  
life is old and you are new and your hands are soft but  
they'll do

tell me now what were the words to that song  
that you played when we swung from hammocks  
remember that we used to have time?  
when did we decide that money was better spent on  
clocks than paintbrushes  
you used to skip class every day  
well, and I will never *really* know where you are

somebody told me once you cannot alter the past  
because the moment you do, the future will alter with it  
and so how do we know there are not blips on the  
space-time continuum whereby  
people are constantly stepping back and changing my world?  
and who gave them the right?  
well, and it's not like I ever owned time

but sometimes there were moments when  
the light was *just* dying and we both had eyes  
and those eyes were unhampered

and I swore that the time travelers were sleeping  
and the Now was just happening for the first time in my life  
and I vowed to myself that I would replace all the clocks in the house  
with bunches and bunches of paintbrushes  
and your eyes were so  
chocolate and nice

MARISA DONNELLY

## Tuesday Night Hockey

I have always known two versions of my father: #1—Pleated pants belted just under the stomach scar from his motorcycle accident as a teenager, polo shirt tucked in, hair wet in an attempt to slick it back, glasses. #2—Corona tank top, some form of cartoon character pants with an assortment of holes and/or paint splatters, white grass-stained Nikes, baseball cap.

Both of these versions make me proud—they define who he is—a business man and the handy, hardworking (though sometimes slightly embarrassing) dad. But last night, I saw my father on the ice for a hockey game, and I saw a completely different version of him. A version that made my heart swell with pride more than it ever has.

When I stepped into the Rocket Ice Arena, a rink I've been to several times before as a teen chasing boys and as a child actually trying out for an all-girls league, it felt and looked the same as it did in high school: cabin-wood floors and ceiling beams, a center check-in area, concessions stand, two glass viewing areas, and that pungent, sour milk/sweat smell that only hockey players can generate.

My father was on the rightmost rink, and he was the best-looking one out there—black skates with red laces, white socks with red and black stripes in the middle, black shorts, red and black jersey with white trim, black gloves, and a black helmet with red accents. He headed out onto the ice for warm-ups, skating and stretching, moving his stick around, loosening up. I watched him from just behind the viewing glass. On his first skate around the rink, he stopped by my window and smiled. It was

almost like he was a little kid again, winking at the girl who was there to watch him play, fist-pounding with old buddies, chasing the puck around the ice.

When the game started, he was right in the heart of the action. His first shot was no more than a minute into the game. It was a breakaway; his stick flew back and forth across his body to propel him forward, his knees were bent, body leaned over, eyes squinted in determination. He faked left, then his stick cracked against the ice—slap shot. It just missed.

I watched him turn, pivoting away from the net; it was a split second motion, a sheet of ice flying up around his skates. I swear he must have played the first five minutes of that game, which is actually a pretty long time for hockey, and was back in only a minute later. I had looked away when he first went to the bench; I hadn't wanted him to think I was pitying him for being tired. But I had to wonder when he was back out after only a small rest, if he was trying to impress me. After all, I was the only fan in the whole place. Since the older men's league wasn't a priority compared to the more competitive leagues and club practices, they were given the late night times—thus no visitors. So I had to wonder if he was pushing himself even harder, wanting to make me proud.

From behind the viewing glass, I could just make out his voice—it's always like that with people you love; you can hear them even in an arena with twenty other guys. I could hear him shout as he got closer to the net, as he tried to get the attention of his teammates so he could pass them the puck. I watched him gain speed, moving the puck back and forth around opponents, tricking them with his fake-lefts, fake-rights. I watched him move; it was almost effortless. It reminded me of when I run or when I lift and feel the pull of my muscles. It's beautiful that I have that connection to my father—muscles, strength, athleticism.

He made five goals, about six assists that night, and he fell once. After he fell, he avoided eye contact as he skated past my spot behind the viewing glass. As he skated by, eyes forward, I felt this strange sense of protectiveness, like I wanted to save him, keep him from falling again, make sure he was okay. It was almost a role reversal, and maybe he could sense it too. It's the parents who should be nervous, wanting to save, to break every fall. It scared me, in that moment, to realize that one day my father would need me to take care of him.

The funny thing about seeing another side of someone is that you start to realize there's so much more to people that even those closest to them don't know. Watching my dad play was seeing him doing something he truly loved—a side of passion that was



new to me. I've seen my father cry on the day of my high school graduation, when he and my mom got into it pretty good, or when he read a really poetic hand-written birthday card from me. I've seen him be proud after fixing our family washing machine, after trimming the trees, after fixing car brakes. I've seen him laugh along with my sister, or laugh at a joke in a movie. But this passion on the ice, it was new to me.

In that moment, sitting just behind the glass watching him push himself, watching him skate down the rink again and again, sweat dripping from his forehead, there were a thousand things I wanted to say: how I love that he still does what he loves, that he is strong and agile and funny, that when he dyes his beard much darker than his hair he looks like a bear, that his cross-eyed faces and embarrassing antics in public only half humiliate me, and that in this moment, watching him shoot and laugh and chase pucks around with other 50+ year-old guys on a Tuesday night, I couldn't be more proud.

EMMA DUEHR



Skulls  
*charcoal*

HANNAH FARREY



Skulls  
*charcoal*

PATRICK LENANE

## Where the Truth Lies

The sun was still up. We wanted to make it to the statue before nightfall so we could see it before our only source of light was a phone screen. The crimson sky of the waning sun bathed the headstones in an inviting glow. We walked down the middle of the paved path meant for the vehicles of those who knew where they were going. After five minutes of walking down this path and scanning the horizon of the cemetery, we stopped.

"You have no idea where we're going, do you?" my friend asked.

"I told you I've never been here before. I wasn't expecting the entire city to be buried in a single graveyard," I replied.

"This place is big. How many people do you think are buried here?" he asked, scratching the beard he'd been growing to show off back home.

"A lot. I'd rather not think about it though. We should just keep walking and find the statue."

"You know what we should do? Come back at midnight and read some Poe. We could be dark and brooding and wear all black."

"Maybe— if she doesn't kill us first. If we make it out of here alive, then I'll think about it," I replied with a nervous chuckle.

I knew the stories well enough. I also knew the history. A few days earlier when I decided to investigate the Black Angel, I did a little background reading to prepare. The University of Iowa's Main Library is a massive building, just as a major collection of human knowledge should be. As I ascended the stairs, I watched students with arms full of books scuttle past me, and others pay-

ing such close attention to their phones that they almost missed steps, barely catching themselves on the hand rail. I silently laughed to myself, thinking about the near comical dichotomy of the students here. Finally, I reached my floor and stepped into the Special Collections room and asked if any information existed on the Black Angel. I was assured that they had something. I filled out a small slip and took a seat at a table near the reception desk.

After a few minutes of waiting, I was handed a tan folder with the words "Black Angel" scrawled on the tab. I opened the folder and immersed myself in a wave of newspaper articles and various documents of the past. Dozens of myths regarding the angel bombarded me. I began to learn a few of the stories of Iowa City's past. The Black Angel hosts numerous tales on the menacing darkness which engulfs the statue. Many claim that the angel was originally white and some evil deed cursed the sculpture to show the sins of some devilish being. Some stories say that a preacher murdered his son and tried to hide his sin by erecting the statue over the boy's grave. The angel, however, transformed from a bright white statue to a deep black to reflect the preacher's evil-doing. Other myths claim that the woman buried under the white angel was anything from an adulterer to a murderer and again the angel's change in color reflected the malevolent being beneath it. Another story, this one less evil and more loving, claims that after a man buried his wife, the angel turned black to reflect his grief.

While these legends bring some fun to the Oakland Cemetery, none of them tell the true story of the Black Angel, officially known as the Feldevert Monument. As I read each article, the pieces began to connect and the story cohesively linked to give the angel's history. The Black Angel marks the graves of Teresa Feldevert, her son by her first marriage Eddie Dolezel, and her second husband Nicholas Feldevert. The abridged story is that Teresa, born in 1836 in Strmilov, Bohemia, came to Iowa City and became a midwife. Her son, Eddie, passed away at the age of eighteen in 1891, and twenty years later, her second husband also passed away. Teresa then commissioned a bronze angel to be built as a monument for her family (with a bronze statue, oxidation would chemically alter the monument to the black color it keeps to this day). On November 23rd 1924, a few years after erecting the monument, Teresa passed away.

After about an hour of reading these articles I looked up at the wall and checked the clock. I had plenty of time before the collections closed. I stretched my arms and back and heard a loud, somewhat alarming, crack. My eyes widened and I darted my gaze to the woman at the desk who looked at me with a worried expression as she brushed her gray hair out of her face. I gave an

uncomfortable smile and awkwardly looked back at the papers in front of me to alleviate my embarrassment. I started sifting through the articles to see if I could find any useful information I missed. I planned on getting up and leaving soon, but spotted a sheet of paper I had neglected to look at earlier. The sheet, aligned horizontally rather than vertically, pulled me to a legal document I could barely read due to the archaic use of cursive. I looked to the top and spotted the words: Johnson County Census—Iowa City, 1885. I found a document over a century old. It may not have been the real thing, but I still got goose bumps thinking about the lives documented on this paper. I scanned the document, reading over the names of citizens who once crossed the same streets I do, but who are now most likely resting in Oakland Cemetery where I would soon trek. I then found the names I searched for: Teresa and Edward Dolezal. For whatever reason, seeing the names in this time-locked document revitalized my will to look over the articles.

This second reading showed me a few new aspects. The first article about the Feldevert Monument, written in 1939, hooked the reader with some of the myths regarding the angel. The majority of the article, however, was the simple history of Teresa's life and the reason for the monument. Seven years later, when the next article on the Black Angel appears, it becomes less about the history and more about the superstitions. The history is presented as a murky set of events and the legends make up the bulk of the story. Already, the sensational becomes the major priority of the statue's tale. As the years go on, nearly every decade has at least one story on the Black Angel, even into the new millennium. The focus of these articles varies between the true story of the Feldevert Monument and the mythical legends of the Black Angel. One thing stands true about each piece, however: no matter the focus of the story, the myth always finds its way into it. In every story, no matter the seriousness of the content, at least one legend strategically hooks the reader to continue.

While the fact that writers used a hook never threw me off, the fact that every author chose the ghost story made me think. Each article used these legends knowing the instant attention they would draw. This idea threw numerous queries at me. I began questioning this constant recurrence of these legends simply for the people. The readers seem to want them. They give people a feeling of the unknown. They create a feeling that more exists in this world than we know. Pondering these ideas, I leaned back in my chair, an audible creak echoed in the room, and again the woman at the desk looked at me sharply. I again gave an awkward

smile of apology as she swept a few strands of gray hair behind her ear and turned to her computer. I decided to end these uncomfortable exchanges before I upset the woman at the desk any further. I handed in the file, gathered my things, and headed out to greet the cool autumn air as I walked home. As I paced across the perfectly perpendicular and parallel grid of streets that make up Iowa City, the thoughts from the library still haunted my mind. I thought about the unknown and the fascination of it. It seems natural for people to think about it. What do we know and what do we not know?

I passed a church on my left. A monumental brick building with stained glass adorning every wall towered over me. I stared for a few seconds then stared at the sidewalk to focus on my thoughts. What do we know about the afterlife? Religion allows us to look at that question and create an answer, one which we crave and we love solving. We question whether life exists beyond our planet. We dedicate some of the planet's most brilliant minds to scour the galaxy, the universe, for any signs. We have no idea and so we must do everything we can to find out. Even my most irrational fear spawns from this question of the unknown. Deep water has always instilled a sense of fear in me. What exists beyond the depths I can view? Oceans and seas terrify me due to this question. Even in a swimming pool I fear the deep end. Is a shark going to emerge from the bottom of a chlorinated pool and attack me? Of course not. But I can't see that far down, so something in me refuses to submit to reason. When I realized I was back at my apartment I asked my roommate to join me on my trip to the cemetery and we planned to head out at the end of the week.

We walked for five minutes, stopping whenever the rustling of a branch from a scavenging squirrel or the voices of other visitors shattered the hollow silence we shared. Our eyes constantly darted, not in search of the statue but to make sure we were still alone. We occasionally locked eyes with each other, but never said a word until a looming black mass appeared a few yards away.

"There it is."

We approached the statue, stepping more slowly and deliberately as it began to tower over us. Standing on the tomb, the angel must have been ten feet tall. Thus, it was given the perfect position to stare down upon those who visit the grave. The angel, which I originally imagined would have open arms, looking to the sky to direct the dead, instead curled her figure over the grave as though she were keeping something from leaving. She stood above us, her right arm and wing outstretched, as if she were beckoning us closer. We accepted her invitation and stood directly below the waiting arm. Her entire being seemed like the purest black I had

ever seen, as if this object in front of me was a void, completely empty of any physical properties. As I looked up, I met her eyes. She stared down with countenance lacking any human emotion.

I took a step back to look at the entire grave. Two names were written on the stone, both with birth dates from the early 19th century, but only one had the date of death. Most likely, after the last survivor of the family was buried, no one inscribed a date because no one was around to do it. The feeling of despair and unease began to subside as logical ideas ran through my head. I then took a second look at the statue and saw the graffiti of what appeared to be initials carved into the left wing of the angel. I couldn't make out what letters these jagged marks formed, but I thanked the creator for helping me back to reality. I looked at the statue, which first appeared as a hauntingly perfect black, and saw the weathered statue as the dingy, lichen-covered mass it was.

"So, we're supposed to die soon, right?" my friend asked from behind me.

"As long as we don't touch her we should be fine. The stories say you die weeks or maybe just days after that."

"Well now I feel like I have to."

I turned to look at my friend as something appeared in the corner of my eye then disappeared just as quickly.

"The hell?" I said.

"What?" my friend said as he looked over both his shoulders. "You see something?"

"No. Nothing. Maybe we should go. It'll get dark soon and I don't want to get too cold on the way home."

"Sounds like a plan," my friend said, scratching his beard as he looked over his shoulders.

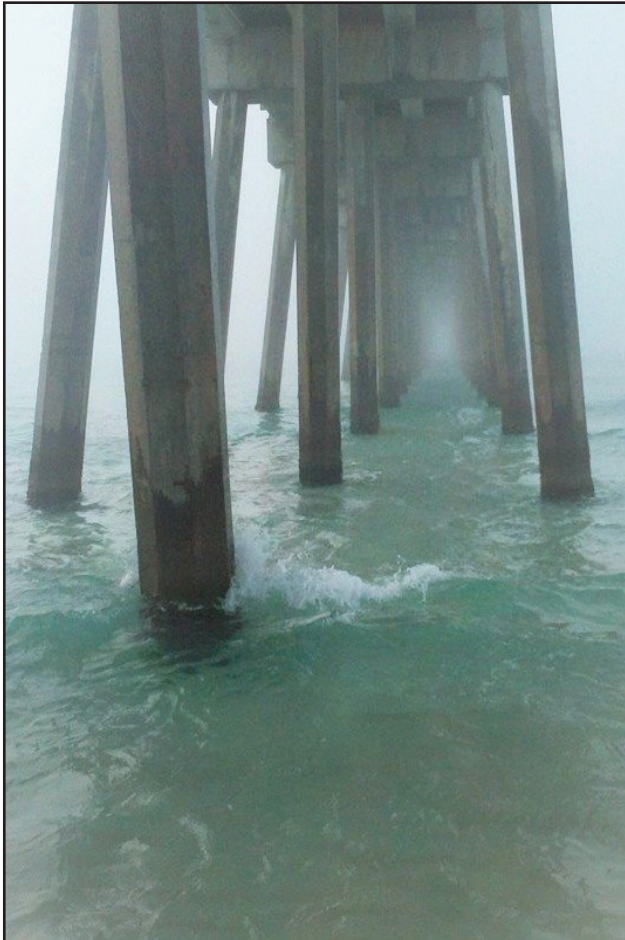
I took one final look at the angel's dark figure as the sun began to set behind it. She still stared with those emotionless eyes. I resigned from our contest and quickly turned around. As my friend and I walked out, I constantly restrained myself from turning back. I focused on the gravestones lining the path back to the city, knowing that each one we passed would lead us closer to the exit. I shouldn't feel this fear again. I dispelled it, but something brought it back.

I know the facts. I know Teresa Feldevert is buried with her son, Eddie Dolezal, and her husband Nicholas. I know that despite the missing date, Teresa died in 1924. I know Teresa commissioned the angel out of bronze and the oxidation over time morphed it into a sickly black. I trust the things I know. I trust my mind. But sometimes I'm not so sure. Because as we stood in front of that statue and I turned to look at my friend, I know what I saw. Directly

behind him was an old woman. Clad in a black dress. Her hair, a silvery hue, fell in a tangled mess across her face. In that split-second I saw her, she stared at me. Her eyes, black as the statue, connected with mine, and she was gone.



KRISTINE COOPER



Pensacola Pier Sunrise Fog  
*photograph*

HELEN BISOULIS

## Water

Water whispers like a silent guardian,  
opens like God's hands,  
and watches over you at all times.  
Yelling like a quiet child, unheard  
but as clear as the morning sky.  
All the while moving like a ballerina,  
graceful and beautiful.

JOE ARMS



Bird Nest  
*photograph*

PATRICK DEENEY

## Where is Away

Houses flew past as Rei ran down the narrow alleyway. Her eyes locked on the slanted rooftops, watching as a flock of red darted back and forth, the last robin of the fall. It chirped happily as it flittered against the pale grey sky.

Behind her, the footsteps were growing fainter by the second. She turned quickly to see how close they were. The red scarf around her neck flailed in the wind, partially blocking her sight. Two men were entering the alley, frantically trying to catch up. She smiled and turned her eyes back toward the sky. The bird had moved faster than she had anticipated, landing on a house halfway down the next alley. She giggled, watching it peck at a few of its feathers and take off towards the next rooftop.

The alley ended, opening up to a larger thoroughfare crowded with dozens of people. Rei dodged inbetween the groups as she sprinted towards the next narrow corridor. A dog had stopped a few feet in front of her. She leapt into the air, taking care to not graze the dog with her foot, landed softly, and continued running.

A man stepped into the alley's entrance, effectively blocking it from her. She sped up, hoping to break past this blockage and continue following the robin, now just a red speck in the sky. She lowered her shoulder and prepared for impact.

"Hold it now, missy." The man picked her up and spun her, taking away all her speed. "What're ya doing out 'ere?"

"Let go of me!" Rei started kicking.

"fraid I can't do that, missy." The man set her down on the ground, but kept his hands on her shoulders. "Y'ur father already paid us to get ya. We wouldn't want to disappoint 'im now, would we?"

The two men that had chased Rei down the alley had finally caught up with her. Both were panting heavily.

“Oi, what’re you two thinking! Bein’ out ran by a girl.”

The taller of the two caught his breath first, “Sorry, Chez.” He placed his hands on his knees, doubled over, and resumed his panting.

The other man was larger. He wiped his sweat-covered forehead with a meaty arm as he struggled to talk, “She’s just too fast.”

“Pathetic. Head back. Boss will deal wit’ ya later.” The two men nodded and started down the street.

Chez moved, steering Rei into the thoroughfare and in the opposite direction. The two merged with the midmorning foot traffic, making their way towards the mansion sitting quietly at its end.

They walked in silence, passing the guards patrolling the front gate. The ivory walls of the mansion reflected the gloomy sky, casting a pale light down into the busy courtyard. Men and women, all wearing the uniforms of butlers, maids and gardeners, strode through the courtyard going about their daily business. The front doors of the mansion stood open with a balcony jutting out into the air directly above them. The doors towered over them as they passed under and into the great hall.

A man stood in the center of a red rug that ran the length of the room. He charged over as soon as he saw Rei and Chez enter. “Rei Alistor!” The purple bathrobe that was wrapped around him billowed out around his legs as he moved. “How dare you try to sneak out again! Do you know how much this cost me?”

Rei avoided eye contact. “You didn’t have to spend anything, Father. I always come back.” Sometimes she wished she didn’t. Sometimes she wished that she could be gone forever.

“That’s not the point! You are the daughter of one of the most important men in the city.” Her father gestured to himself.

Rei rolled her eyes. Whenever she was in trouble, her father would always start off this way. He had inherited a metal works company from her grandfather. The company made everything from fences and iron bars to the very nails that held the majority of the buildings together. That metal works business took off and netted her family a fortune. Her father had always had a big head, or so she had heard in whispers every time she snuck out, but it grew even larger once he owned it all.

“Do you know what could have happened to you out there?” her father continued, “You could’ve been raped, killed, or worse—kidnapped and held for ransom! You’re just lucky that I found you first.”

Rei mouthed the last few sentences of the speech her father

gave. It was always the same speech she got whenever she was brought back after sneaking out. Her father was always more worried about him losing money and losing face than the safety of his daughter. He never really cared about her, just about how bad she made him look.

Her father gestured toward the man that had accompanied her home. “Thank you, Chez. You did a fantastic job.” He then stared straight at Rei, “This is your new bodyguard. Wherever you go, he goes.”

“But, Father!”

“No buts! You seem to want to wander around the city, so he will accompany you every time you do and make sure you don’t get hurt.”

Rei stayed silent. Protesting wasn’t going to get her anywhere: it never did. Once Father had decided something, he never went back on his word. How she detested his bullheadedness. Her mother had too.

“One more thing.” He clapped his hands. Two servants walked forward, carrying a rather large object. They stopped next to her father, struggling to keep whatever they held, up. “You’re lucky I love you so much,” he sneered as he pulled off the covering, revealing an oversized, ornately decorated birdcage with a single bird sitting inside.

Rei took a step toward the cage. “Is that a lark?” They were her second favorite kind of bird, the first being robins. It sat on a small bar that hung from the top of the cage, cleaning its light brown feathers. Its head lifted from under its small wing and looked around at the people surrounding it. Rei placed her face near the cage to get a closer look. The bird locked in on her face and stared at her for a moment.

Then it started to sing. Its sweet melody echoed throughout the room. Soon the chirps echoed off the walls, surrounding them in a fugue of cacophonic bliss.

“One of the few,” her father shouted over the noise. “Cost me a pretty penny. But I know how much you love birds.”

Rei stood up. “I love them because they can fly. They are free to do whatever they want, and don’t have to stay in one place if they don’t want to.”

“See, but this is better. Instead of leaving here and going outside, now you can watch it fly from the comfort of your room! I got it a big cage so that it can have lots of room to fly.”

Rei looked back towards the bird, “That’s not what I meant. What’s stopping me from letting it go?”

Her father motioned for her to come closer. “Look here,” he whispered. His breath stunk of tobacco, another nasty habit of his.

A brown droplet of spit clung for dear life to his lower lip and his face was covered in a patchwork of morning stubble.

He placed a hand on the birdcage, jiggling a sturdy padlock wrapped inbetween the metal bars. "I locked the cage door. That way you can't let this one go."

"I'll find a way," Rei whispered back, staring at the droplet of spittle on her father's chin.

"I thought you'd say that. And if you do somehow release it, you're going to wish you left with your mother. Got it?" He spat out the last two words, sending a few more drops rocketing from his mouth. His breath stunk. "I have spent enough money over the years to try and keep you happy and I'm getting sick of it. I don't care what I promised your mother before she left, but this is the last time." He stood up and gestured towards the other man, "Chez, please escort my daughter to her room."

"Aye, Mister Alistor." His rough hands clasped Rei's nimble shoulders and gently pushed her towards an open door on the side of the hall. A staircase led towards the higher levels of the mansion. The two servants followed them, careful not to let the birdcage fall or hit against the marble walls. They climbed slowly as the lark fluttered in the cage, chirping softly.

"Y'ur father seems a bit strict." Chez removed his hands from her shoulders.

"Isn't that an understatement?"

"'e seems scared that 'e'll lose ya. That ya never will come back."

"I wish I didn't have to. But he always sends someone after me. It's all because of Mother..."

"Y'ur mother?" The lark stopped singing. Its last chirp reverberated off the stone surrounding them in its high-pitched din.

Rei stopped walking. "She left when I was just a little girl."

"I'm sorry. I 'idn't know."

"It's fine. It's been so long I hardly think about it anymore..." Her voice caught in her throat. Why was she lying to a man she just met? She thought about her mother all the time.

"What happen', if ya don't mind me askin'?"

"She flew away. At least that's what I tell myself."

"Do ya know where she went?"

Rei stared at the cool stone steps. Her mind had strayed into territory not easily abandoned. "No... When I was younger, I often had dreams that she turned into a bird and flew away. So when I was little I thought that if I followed the birds, they would lead me to her. That they would lead me to 'away,' wherever that was." The lark started to chirp again as Rei continued her ascent.

They reached the top of the staircase and started down a long

hallway. Rei's room was halfway down its length.

The curtains from the balcony wafted inward as they opened the door. Rei entered slowly, reluctant to return to its affluent embrace. She sat down on her bed on the opposite side of the room and watched as the two servants gingerly placed the birdcage on an empty table near the door, bowed and left.

The bird inside chirped occasionally as it paced the inside of the cage.

Chez whistled at the extravagance that surrounded him.

"Why would ya want to leave all this?"

Rei flopped backwards, letting her feet hang off the edge of the bed. "It's not the place I hate." She gazed at the surrounding purple walls, hoping they would break away and set her free. In here she felt like she was on display. Just a novelty to keep locked up, only taken out when her father had any desire to interact with her. He didn't love her as a daughter; he loved her because she made him money. If she hadn't been born, her grandfather wouldn't have named her father as his successor and her father wouldn't have all the money he pined for when he was young. Her father had already started planning what was next for her: marriage to a wealthy family's son so he could get more money and power.

Rei didn't want that. She didn't want to be tied down to someone just because she was told to. She wanted to be free, to experience all that she could, to fly away from it all, like her mother did.

Chez walked out onto the balcony and whistled again.

"Whadda view!" It was about midday now. The sun was high in the sky, filling the city with light.

Rei got up and joined him, "See that building there?" She pointed to a rooftop about ten feet away and a few feet below them.

"Whadda 'bout it?"

"I often dream of jumping onto it. That's how I would escape from here."

"Ya'd never be able to clear da gap. And if ya don't, it's at least a two story fall."

Rei leaned against the metal railing. "A girl can dream, can't she?"

"Aye, that she can."

The two stood for a few moments. The lark continued to chirp occasionally, begging for its release. "Why would ya tell me 'bout y'ur escape plan? Ya know I can't let ya do it."

"Because all it is, is a dream. Who knows if I can actually make it?" She paused. "If you don't mind, Chez, I think I would like some alone time."



"Course, ma'am." He walked off the balcony and towards the door. "I'll be waitin' jus' outside if ya need anythin'." He grabbed the door handle and started pulling it closed behind him.

"You don't have to, you know."

"Sorry, ma'am. Y'ur father's orders."

Rei scoffed. "Of course." Her father wanted to keep her on an even shorter leash this time. She turned to face him. "Thank you, Chez, for listening."

He nodded and closed the door behind him.

Rei moved from the balcony to the birdcage. The lark noticed her coming, and started pecking at the cage door. Rei stuck her finger in between the narrow bars and scratched it on the head.

"Sorry, little buddy; I wish I could help. But if I do, that means bad things for both of us."

The lark stopped pecking and looked at her. Desire filled its eyes, a need to get away from here. To get to wherever away was.

Rei stopped petting it and headed to her bed. The lark started to call, but its call had changed. The soft sweet chirps that had filled the hall earlier had gone, replaced by raspy squawking. The sound assaulted Rei's ears as the tiny bird pecked harder at the cage door, relentlessly trying to open it. Rei curled up on her bed and threw a pillow over her head to block out the noise as she tried to dream.

Familiar images from her past formed before her. The air was saturated with the smell of cooking meats and the light from lamps hanging across the thoroughfare. Rei shuffled her short legs as fast as she could to keep up with the hand she held. Birds fluttered in the late summer air, darting between the strands of lights, playing a musical game of tag.

The courtyard was filled with people celebrating the coming of the fall. They dashed between groups, chatting quickly and moving on to the next group. To Rei, they seemed to be mimicking the birds.

The hand that gripped hers pulled a little harder. "Quit dawdling, Miss Alistor. Your father wanted you back a while ago. He'll sure to tan my hide for this!"

Rei started to slow down even more, "I want to watch the birds, Nanny!" She tried to retract her arm from her nanny's meaty hand that encompassed it, but the grip was too strong. She struggled against it, for any sort of freedom.

"Miss Alistor, please. We have to ge—"

A scream shattered the calm chatter that had surrounded them. All the eyes in the crowd shot upwards towards its source. The mansion that sat at the end of the courtyard reflected the yellow-orange light on its ivory walls. A woman was standing on

the railing of a balcony directly above the massive front doors.

An awkward silence blew into the courtyard, as she stood stalemated between Rei's father and nothingness. Two voices could be faintly heard passing through the void.

"Darling, please. People are watching." Father took a step forward gesturing for her to step off the rail.

"Just shut it. I've had enough. Its' always about impressions with you. That, and money. That's all you ever care about."

"Not true!" He inched a little closer. "I care about you!"

"Bullshit. You only married me because your father didn't want to give away everything to a son who was a dead end to the family name. I'll give you credit though, that was some acting. Pretending that you loved me just long enough for your father to name you successor and then die. I wish I had just stopped and thought about it earlier."

"I— I—" He paused. "I love our daughter."

"Do you really love her?" She glanced over her shoulder at the crowd gathered below. Rei made eye contact with her. Her mother was a beautiful woman. Her face was always painted with make-up, making her skin look flawless. The blonde hair that adorned her head always seemed to bounce when she moved. But now, her face was pale, a dark purple bruise cradled one of her eyes and her hair hung listless by the sides of her head, straightened and disheveled beyond all recognition. She didn't look the same.

The man paused again for a second. "Of course I do! What kind of monster do you think I am?"

"Then prove it."

The man paused a third time. He took a step backward and scratched his head. "How? What do you want me to say to get you off that railing?"

"Promise me you will make her happy."

"Fine. I promise, now get down from there, or else people are going to start talking."

"That's not good enough. I want you to promise me that no matter the cost, you will try to make her happy."

"You know I don't go back on my word."

The woman nodded, stepped down from the railing, and walked towards the man. The two started to move inside the building. His hand slowly crept up the back of her slender neck and gripped it tightly. The woman fell to her knees in pain as the man muttered something to her, then threw her to the ground and walked away. The woman slowly staggered to her feet and stared after the man. "I hope that if you ever treat Rei as badly as you did me, she leaves you, too!"

The man turned around laughing. "Leave me? Where are you

going to go? You wouldn't survive a day without your life here."

The woman turned towards the balcony. "I'm going away. I just can't do this anymore. I could handle your arrogance, your selfishness, your stubbornness. I could even take the abuse to a certain point, because I keep telling myself that it was all for her. But I just can't do it anymore, I just can't go on, knowing that every remaining day would be the same for the rest of my life. It literally is breaking my spirit. You promised to take care of our daughter no matter what. So I know she will be all right; she's a strong girl."

"What do you mean?" The man stopped walking and turned to face her. "Where are you going!?"

"I told you, I'm going away." The woman started running for the railing. She leapt into the air and spread her arms out like wings as she dove like a swan into the open air.

For a moment, she flew. Rei watched as her mother soared into the night sky. The nanny quickly moved in front of Rei, attempting to shield her from the sight.

Rei watched as her mother disappeared behind the nanny's head. For a second, all was quiet. Then, a small robin fluttered out from behind the nanny.

The little bird caught Rei's attention as it fluttered among the lanterns that hung above her. The bird glided gently toward her, circling her once before flying off into the night sky.

Hours had passed while the lark screamed for its freedom. A knock at the door stirred Rei from her dreaming state. Her father entered with a tray of food.

"Good, you're still here! I see Chez has done a fantastic job at keeping an eye on you."

Rei sat up and nodded, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. The sun had sunk low in the sky, casting horizontal beams through the open balcony door.

"Excellent! I brought you some food, in case you were hungry." Her father set it on another table near the balcony and made his way over to the birdcage. "He is a noisy little fellow, isn't he?" The lark started to squawk louder as he put a finger through the bars.

Her father reached to scratch its head. The lark dodged and bit his finger. Her father pulled it away, swearing violently. The bird started to fly around the cage, smashing its head into the sides as it did so.

"Nasty creature isn't it?" her father laughed as he wiped his finger off and walked over to the bed.

"What do you want?" There was no emotion in her voice.

"Can't a father bring his only daughter dinner, and only hope for some love in return?"

Rei didn't answer. The lark started shaking the cage bars with each hit of its head.

"I see. Nothing I do is good enough for you. Is that it? Nothing is up to your standards?"

Rei looked away, "No."

"What do you want from me? I've given you everything you have ever wanted! I have spent so much damn money on you and all you give in return is a cold shoulder? Everything I have ever done for you is for the best!"

"Best for who? Huh?" she snapped back, "You don't even care about me, do you? All you ever care about is making more money for yourself, without even considering what I want!"

Her father clenched his fist, tensing the muscles in his arm. He took a few deep breaths, trying to calm down before he spoke, "What? What do you want?"

"I want my mother back!"

"You can't have her back!" he shouted as he walked back towards the balcony. "She's gone away. She left us. She left me because she hated me." He stood, looking out over the city. "She left because of me," he repeated, slower, "Now you want to leave me too, but I won't let you. I won't be left alone! I will make you love me if I have to!"

Rei didn't respond, she could feel the leash around her neck growing shorter. The lark started to hit the cage harder, rocking it on the table.

"I have tried doing things the nice way, buying you whatever I thought would make you happy. Now I have to take more drastic measures..." He looked over at the tray of food sitting on the table near him. "Let's see how a couple of days without food does you." He picked it up and threw it over the balcony railing. The food sailed over the side, dropping between the balcony edge and the neighboring roof.

Her father marched towards the door, "Stay in here for a few days. See how well you do without me. You'll come crawling back eventually. Then you'll appreciate me. Then you will love me!" He stormed out, slamming the door, and left Rei and the bird alone.

The lark had beaten its head bloody. It desperately tried to fly, as it slowly collided with the cage walls again. Its screeching stopped as it fell hard against the base. Its breathing slowed as the blood poured from its head. Soon it was still. It was free.

"I'll find a way." She looked at the bird lying still at the bottom of the cage. "I'll find away."

The sun had sunk below the horizon, letting darkness fill the

room. Rei stood up and walked towards the balcony. The roof was only a few feet away. She could make the jump. She had to make the jump.

The night breeze gently blew against her face as Rei passed through the balcony doors. She climbed over the railing, holding on tightly.

The door slowly opened as Chez knocked quietly. “Ma’am?” He looked over to where she stood.

Rei looked back and smiled. Then she flew.

EMILY PAPE

## The Giggle

“Well, that looks pointless.” It was a cold voice, sharp while smiling.

Ella stopped mid-shovel and let out a seething breath. She stood up and turned to face the repulsive old man from down the road, assuming an unconvincing neutral façade. He had stopped on the edge of the recently cleared pavement. The snow was falling so fast that it was hard to see anything far beyond her driveway, so there was nothing to distract her from the thin lips stretched taut over teeth yellowed with age, or the cool black eyes glittering underneath his ragged mad bomber hat. She wasn’t sure what color it had been originally, but it was a dingy shade of gray now. His coat was just as worn, like he had bought it fifty years ago and never taken it off.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Peterson,” Ella said, her voice stiff. “How are you today?”

“Quite well, my dear.” His smile widened into a manic, unsettling thing, paired with a gaze that bore with unparalleled focus. It wasn’t what he said. It was how he said it—sly niceties delivered with a toneless edge. Ella thought it was odd, how clear his voice was; older men were supposed to have rough, aged voices.

Ella’s skin crawled. This town had a lot of old people living in it, the sort of place where the kids had all grown up, moved away, and never come back. Some of the neighbors were nice and some were rude. That was how neighbors were. But not this guy. This guy occupied a category of unpleasant that was all his own. It wasn’t just the way he acted, like being a malevolent creep was an unconscious tick he couldn’t seem to shake. It was the way

he looked; he was skeletally thin, his skin so tight over his face you could almost see the skull beneath it. As he watched her, he was unnaturally still; Ella didn't know anyone else who stood like that, like he was made of stone. And she knew that when he started walking again, it would be more of a quick scuttle than a painful hobble, despite those brittle limbs; he was like a spider, the way his thin limbs carried him faster than should be possible. He passed by here every day at one o'clock on his daily walk, but Ella had forgotten to wait for him to pass before coming out.

Ella nodded sharply, her jaw clenched. "Good." She turned her back on him and resumed shoveling the driveway. The narrow path she had cleared had already drifted over, but she kept going, refusing to acknowledge his barbed comment. She had to give a considerable effort when tossing the snow over the snow bank if she didn't want it to slide back down into the driveway; at this point in the season, it was taller than she was.

"Little girls shouldn't be out all alone in weather like this. It's dangerous, especially here."

Ella didn't think seventeen was all that little. She caught him gesturing to the woods that bordered her house as she looked over her shoulder. She had played along that tree line when she was a small child. She knew every twist and turn, where the trees were the thickest and thinnest, and that the tallest brushing against the right side of the house was being choked to death by parasites. There was nothing 'dangerous' about those trees. "Okay. Bye." Some spiteful corner of her mind hoped the road was slicker somewhere along his route.

"I've lived here my whole life you know, my dear. They used to say strange things lived in those woods. Of course, you probably don't know about all that; no one believes in such things anymore. No one even talks about them. Too smart for superstitious stories."

"Hm."

"People used to go missing. The search parties and police always decided they got lost in the storms. Never did find any bodies though."

There was a pause. He stared at her. She stared back. Ella realized he wasn't going to go away until she answered. "What really happened?"

The corner of his lip twitched at his petty victory. "Some people blamed the wolves; even when the hunters kept it so that there were fewer of them in Michigan than there are now, they weren't as uncommon as you might think. Seem to like it around here, those wolves. But wolves leave trails and bones, my dear. No, it wasn't the wolves; most people knew it was something else."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it's been this way since people have lived here, my dear. This town was built for lumber, right on the edge of the forest. Every once in a while, someone would vanish. Some said that they could feel something watching them from the tree line, or that they heard things that weren't there; children laughing and the like. Seemed like people would go to investigate and disappear. A few even said they saw a child, but not many."

Ella raised an eyebrow. "A haunted forest?"

He shrugged, "I wouldn't go that far. But folk should still be careful." The corners of his mouth twisted slightly, a hint of a smirk.

"I'll keep that in mind," Ella replied dryly.

Mr. Peterson paused. For once, his face matched his voice when he said, "You don't believe me. Do you, my dear?"

Ella shrugged. Mr. Peterson looked at her for a moment before regaining his composure.

"Take care, my dear." Mr. Peterson gave her one last hideous smile to remember him by and scuttled away as suddenly as he had appeared, disappearing into the blizzard like a shade that had never been there in the first place.

Silence followed in his wake, the kind that often occupies winter. It was broken only by the rhythmic, uncomfortably high-pitched scrape of Ella's shovel sliding across the concrete driveway at a steady pace. Over the next two hours, she managed to clear out most of the snow. It always drifted over, but it wasn't as thick.

When she had only about a fourth of the driveway left, she went inside to warm up; the cold had soaked through her gloves and boots. She turned on the kettle and made some hot chocolate. While she was inside, she looked at the calendar; her mother wouldn't be off work until eight tonight. Frozen pizza it was. Ten minutes later, she walked back outside and resumed shoveling, her fingers and toes no longer numb.

The wind had died while she was inside but the branches from the nearby pines still creaked, as if they had taken on enough life to complain about the cold on their own. There was nothing soft about the rigid trunks and sharp needles, nothing comforting about the shadows that shrouded the forest floor. Ella cursed psychotic fossils and their stupid stories. Then she shoveled faster.

She finished shoveling the last part of the driveway in record time and let out a sigh of relief. Trees were just trees. She walked up onto the porch and opened the door, almost not hearing it.

The giggle.

Ella froze. She stared at the door for a few seconds, her mouth going dry. She could feel eyes on her back.

Slowly, she turned her head and looked over her right shoulder.

A small, pale hand clutched the bark of the diseased tree.

Ella's eyes crept from the hand to the white face half concealed behind the bark, red hair bound by pink ribbons motionless in the now dead air. It was an innocent sort of face, the face of a small girl; small nose, full lips, curious eyes. But that one eye just looked at her intently, a dark iris empty of anything childlike, consuming every coherent thought and numbing the world away.

The officer stood knocking on the old man's front door for some time, broad shoulders hunched against the cold, before Mr. Peterson decided to open it.

"May I help you, Officer Riley?" Mr. Peterson smiled. As was his habit, his words and smile managed to unnerve.

The officer swallowed. "As you may have heard, Ella Greene has recently been reported missing. We are asking neighboring residents to give their accounts of that day."

"Oh yes, I heard. Poor girl. Tell me, Officer, has anyone considered the wolves?"

JENNA MICHEL



Frail  
*oil on wood panel*



JACK COLE

## underwater glass

I was there.  
And you were there.  
And we were both under water  
and you looked at me scared  
And I looked at you  
and you said in my mind  
that you couldn't breathe  
and I opened my mouth and could breathe  
and then we both could breathe  
and so then we walked on the bottom of the ocean floor together  
smiled  
and then I fell apart  
or disintegrated into a million shards of glass  
and the swirled mad whirlwind of fortune somehow built me back  
together  
and then I decided to disintegrate again,  
and did this numerous times.

It was a million years before I saw you again.

KATHERINE FISCHER

## Until the Fat Lady Sings

“Her name was Lola, she was a showgirl.” As long as Henry kept it to Barry Manilow and Garth Brooks, they were all right with him at the Rainbow Lounge on a Friday night. But as soon as he shifted into “Climb Every Mountain” in his best Julie Andrews falsetto, the rotund guy at the end of the bar nursing his glass of Rebel Yell stood up and cruised over to the stage. “If you ain’t gonna sing like a man, then you ain’t welcome here,” he spat his words at Henry who winced under the gripping of his collar.

The Rainbow was a place where real men and real women went to hang their sorrows on the mike, singing along with Tammy Wynette and Johnny Cash. They had no time for irony. It wasn’t Henry in particular. Tom Fischer, one of the regulars, had also been removed from the stage for singing “Edelweiss.” By the time Henry walked out the door, a top-heavy blonde was belting out, “Make the world go away.” He didn’t even pause for one more bite of cheesy fries, the chief gastronomic delight at the Rainbow.

Henry was pleased by his success. Getting the boot at the Rainbow was the highest compliment he could hope for. When he signed up for songs like “Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, I’m begging of you, please don’t take my man,” he was courting it. This had happened before. Frequently. He kissed two fingers on his left hand and transferred the gesture to the neon palm tree on the window outside the bar. It was his signature farewell for an “efficacious evening” at karaoke. Although there were such joints closer to his loft in the loop on State Street, he preferred the long El ride up to Lincoln Square. Drinks were cheap. With a cop shop within a block, the neighborhood was safe enough. Best of

all, the crowd granted him the anonymity he yearned for. There were enough hipsters from Wicker Park slumming alongside the regulars that he fit in well with this mixture of misfits. He'd learned that if he actually wanted a spot at the mike on Friday nights, he had to slip the karaoke jockey a few bucks. Otherwise, he would wait all night—a peculiarly unique experience for a man whose voice was always in demand on stages across America as well as in Europe.

Call it a busman's holiday, if you will. At work, Henry took things seriously. He sang in Italian conniving Popolani into poisoning his wives to music halls full of men in tuxes and women shimmering in evening gowns. Some of the older dowagers even held diamond-studded lorgnettes that they bobbed against over-generous bosoms, beating time with sopranos. With his richly tuned baritone voice and commanding tall stature, Henry frequently landed leading male roles, yet life at the opera no longer held the thrill for him that it once had. Thus, those reckless karaoke nights. At least at the Rainbow Lounge he could count on someone to spill beer or jeer—or both without creating a nauseating rhythmic aria. Opera singers were such divas, himself included.

He even took his last girlfriend to the Rainbow. She joined him in singing, "The Love Shack is a little old place where we can get together." It should have been downright embarrassing—a man of his position and age. A week later when she unbuttoned her shirt, he knew it was over. Just above her left breast appeared "Jesus saves" in teal script. The tatt artist ignored the noticeable birthmark at the end of the sentence. Henry could never make love to a woman who caused him to envision Jesus stashing stacks of birthmarks and blemishes in a safe and locking them up against intruders. He ended it before they ever got to the Love Shack, baby.

"You're too picky, Dad," Lannie told him, but what did she know? Not exactly a woman of the world, his daughter had been living in Schaumburg ever since her mother divorced Henry ten years ago. Schaumburg, for god's sake. She may as well live in Wisconsin. Wanda had turned her into a burb brat, but at twenty-three, Lannie was finally growing out of it and he could nearly forgive "her-mother-my-ex." Wanda had done a decent enough job of keeping father and daughter in contact.

He had to admit, there was some truth in what Lannie said. Once he got on a thing, he had a hard time finding the "off" switch in his brain. "You're like a dog on a sore," Wanda once told him. There were times when it was better to live in the shadows rather than in the crystalline fact of absolute certainty. Denial

was a beautiful thing.

A shadow emerged in the vapor rising up from the exhaust grates in the sidewalk as Henry walked toward the El station. In it, an image—a boy stands next to a woman whose lips gleam blood red under the flood of footlights. She unlatches his grip on her arm and places a hand on the back of his neck, whispering, "Go on. They can't hear you unless you go out there and open your mouth. Remember to E-Nun-Cee-Atel!" The boy resists, but it is useless. He emerges from the churlish darkness of the backstage into a light so bright it sears through him like shards of glass piercing through the crown of his head and down through the back of his throat and out his neck. Henry shivered. It was, after all, only a mirage, a morsel of the past.

He turned up his collar against the late fall chill and headed for the Western Avenue station to catch the Brown Line back to his loft downtown. His life wasn't that bad. There were certainly those who envied his acclaimed appearances at the Met and the Lyric Opera. His quick rise in the world of breastplates and horned-helmeted Vikings left many breathless would-be's in his wake. At first, he'd gotten a kick out of it all. Being selected as Glimmer Glass's rising star in the Young Artist program, singing alongside Renée Fleming and Pavarotti, walking on carpets of flowers strewn from one end of the stage to the other—even the outrageously ugly costuming and makeup of the opera—it had excited him. His world on stage was full of extremes—dancing gypsies, singing barbers, suicides, and tasty pies made of human body parts. Present always among the actors was the melodrama, the constant attempts of one voice to outdo all others.

Conversations at home could not compare with those early robust years on stage. He had lost his marriage over it. Yes, you had to wear tights, but I mean, really, could you expect scrubbing dinner dishes would ever match the panache of sinking your fiberglass sword deep into the hero's chest? Predictability and unpredictability were always at odds for Henry. He wanted both. He wanted neither.

With such extremes rocking his workaday hours, however, there was now little that excited him anywhere. It had been like being in electroshock treatment 24/7. At times, he fantasized about painting woodwork or dusting each individual piano key. Perhaps watching soap operas. But predictability is hard to judge. If your world is all about drama, even the unpredictable becomes predictable.

This was Henry's conundrum.

"Hey, señor, I bet you a buck I know where you got those shoes," the boy pounced out of nowhere. He was about ten, rough



around the edges, and clad in a raggy gray sweatshirt and torn jeans. Henry surmised that the boy was one of the many con men-kids that crawled out of the mortar between El stations throughout Chicago although not usually along the Brown Line. Brown Line kids were decked out in North Face fleece. They rarely interacted with anyone since they were too engrossed in texting.

"That's ridiculous, kid. There's no way you know where I got these shoes."

"You scared, señor? You think I'm going to rob you?"

"You and what herd of thugs?" Henry asked.

"Maybe you afraid I'm smarter than you, señor?" the boy pressed.

"Listen, kid, I just don't want to bilk you. Hell, you probably don't even have a quarter, much less a dollar," Henry replied.

"Then what are you afraid of? Like I say, I bet you a dollar."

Henry glanced down at his shoes. He rummaged through his thoughts to recall exactly where he had purchased them. Not Allen Edmonds, not these. These were his boat shoes, not that he ever wore them on a boat. They'd gotten him through dozens of late-night walks to the El. Then he recalled. He'd been performing Don Jose in *Carmen* in San Francisco. It was the matinee. The shoes the costumer provided were ridiculously cheap vinyl, two sizes too small. After three hours, his feet were dying for a breath of fresh air. Scheduled to fly immediately out of San Francisco to get to New York in time for the night performance of *Don Giovanni*, he halted the limo at a small cobblery off Market Street. He needed leather.

"Today's Special: Boat Shoes" the sign in the window beckoned him. They were the last pair in his size and at \$199 a real steal. There was no way the kid could guess it.

"Ok, kid, I'll bite. Where did I get these shoes?"

The boy scratched his head, walked around Henry, checking the shoes from a variety of angles. Then he looked up at the night sky as though the answer would be written on Orion's belt and answered, "Señor, you got those shoes on your feet!"

He stared down hard at the lad. Henry exhaled, the condensation forming small puffs as he did as though he were sending out smoke signals to make this boy vanish. He breathed in deeply, held his breath a second, and again exhaled. Had he been smoking cigarettes, there would have been rings. Finally, he felt in his jacket for a bill and produced a ten. He gave it to the boy, patted him on the back, and said, "Good job, amigo. Now go find a few more suckers." As he watched the boy jog down the street, he mused to himself, "Señor, indeed. He's probably from Winnetika."

With five more minutes before reaching the station, he

paused at a shop window decked out in jack-o-lantern splendor with manikins wearing masks, one with a bright fuchsia plume shooting out of its Cubs cap. The words "Trick. . . or Treat?" were painted on the window in bloody red. He knew that by the end of the week, the downtown bars would be streaming with Twilight vampires, French maids, bespeckled Harry Potters, Cat Women, and too many Jedi knights. Why didn't anyone dress like Jabba the Hutt? All the costumes. All the makeup. God, he hated the holidays. It reminded him too much of work.

Henry was not a snob about his occupation, at least not in his opinion. Only rarely any more did he language-shift into Italian or German. He hadn't corrected anyone on the pronunciation of Wagner's name in years. In fact, he had taken to purposely trailing off the ends of his words in order to disguise hundreds of hours of elocution lessons. Just yesterday when the man in front of him at Starbucks asked if he had ever been to Europe, he responded, "Nope. Only been as far as Joliet." If he let on to the masses what he did for a living, one of them would say, "Oh, you mean like Celine Dion?" Or they'd regard him with as much endearment as road kill.

More than anything, Henry wanted to be left alone.

How maudlin, he thought to himself as another image of that boy crosses the footlights in his mind. The boy sits alone in a schoolyard, the last to be chosen for the ball team. *I am becoming Ebenezer Scrooge all alone in his boarding school, abandoned by father and playfellows. Pure sap.* Sure, he had felt alone as a child, but really, wasn't solitude better than dealing with humanity? All their sad stories. All their needs. They wanted too much. Henry pushed back the shock of hair that had crossed his brow, pushing back the memory with it.

"Misanthrope" was such a melodious word, Henry decided.

Waiting for the light to change, he thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He could feel winter making its way through the last breaths of Midwestern fall, although the days had been unseasonably warm this year. Crossing Western Avenue, he heard someone approach the curb, sighing. Labored. A woman? At least the voice sounded like a woman, a gravelly contralto. What was she doing out past midnight? Henry was only mildly curious. Anything more would be too much effort. He had already had one meaningful encounter with a street person and that was enough. More than enough. He could feel her getting closer—could actually smell some godawful cheap lavender toilet water. The light changed. Henry was grateful. He picked up his pace as he crossed the street.

"I said, can you give me a hand?" the woman—he was sure it

was a woman now—demanded more than asked. Henry pretended not to hear. He could feel her hurrying, closing the gap between them. Then he felt the tug of his coat. “C’mon, you sonovabitch. Give a lady a hand.”

He didn’t bother to tell her that a lady wouldn’t curse at strangers. What was the use? It would only prolong the exchange. The “walk” sign was flashing and he didn’t want another death on his hands. There had been too many already, most of them in the theater.

Henry paused.

He turned to see a wisp of reddish gray hair bending over an array of canvas bags. A shoebox slipped out from beneath her arm. Henry stooped to pick it up, but the woman slapped his hand, “Not that one, you idiot. Take the bags.” He did as he was told.

“The light is changing,” he said, attempting to hurry her along.

“You think they’d run over the two of us? It might dent their fancy SUVs and Beamers,” she said.

Henry glanced at her sideways wondering how this unkempt, poorly-spoken woman even knew the slang term for BMWs.

“Still,” he continued, “I think we should move it.”

“Name’s Sylvie,” she said without glancing up at him. Henry did not respond. He had no intention of offering anything other than his begrudging gentlemanly duty of carrying packages. As he hoisted the bag in his left hand, however, he judged it weighed at least thirty pounds. While not an exorbitant burden, at fifty-five he was no longer the young buck who might have tossed a couple of these over his shoulder without a second thought.

“What do you have in here? You knock off Fort Knox or something?” he asked.

“Something like that,” Sylvie answered. “I used to work at Fort Knox, you know. I poured melted metal into molds. See here, I’ve got the burn marks to prove it,” she said as she pulled up her left sleeve to reveal dark blotches above her wrist.”

“Is that so,” Henry said. While her claim was questionable, it did not warrant any further investigation. Besides, hadn’t he read that coins are not actually minted at Fort Knox? These were probably just age spots.

“Yep, I was part of the SSS. That’s the Solo Security Squad. I’m the only living person who knows the combination of the vault,” she continued. “Hey, you’re not FBI, are you? CIA?”

“No. I was a Boy Scout for a brief time in the 1960s, however,” Henry offered.

“Boy Scouts? Well, that’s not always all that safe. O.K., well just checking. See, they killed off the rest of the SSS, but I’ve been

hiding out for the last twelve years. Got them believing I’m in Manchu Pichou. They’ll never find me.”

Here she was riding the El in the middle of Chicago. Not even nose glasses as a disguise. Besides, this was the digital age, after all, and no one would care if she knew some ancient tumbler numbers for an outdated, defunct combination lock. They reached the turnstile at the El. Sylvie ransacked her pockets but couldn’t come up with anything other than pocket lint.

“Allow me,” Henry said as he swiped his fare card. Guess the price of working high level security at Fort Knox is abject poverty, Henry thought to himself.

They caught the last train for the night. Henry parked himself in the seat closest to the door. It’s always best to position oneself for a speedy exit.

“You ain’t handicap,” Sylvie barked at him pointing to the wheelchair emblem overhead. She plopped down in the seat next to him and began arranging her bags snugly around her feet and ankles.

“There’s no one else on the train. Besides, my dear woman, you, yourself, have the use of all your limbs. Neither are you handicap,” Henry said taking special care to pronounce the final word in his best British accent as he looked down his narrow nose at her.

“Oh? That right? Well, just so happens I got a certificate here that says otherwise,” she responded and began rifling through her bags. “It’s here somewheres. It says plain and simple that I got me a dis-torder.”

Henry didn’t need to see her certificate to believe she had several “distorders.” He stared out the El window into the dark tunnel walls hoping, praying, she would get off at the next stop. The train pulled into Damen, and Henry shifted to make space between them so her bottom, now spilling onto his own thin hips, would no longer be touching him. Too much contamination.

“Is this your stop?” he asked hopefully.

“Damen? Nope. Not Damen.”

A skinny girl dressed neck to ankle in black stretch lycra punctuated by white earbuds stuffed into her ears stood on the platform directly across from the door to Henry’s car. Although she kept flicking her waist-length blond hair to the side to check the watch attached to an armband on her upper bicep, when the doors slid open, she didn’t get on the train. An older man approached the platform in what, to him, must’ve felt like a full out running stride but appeared to Henry as a shambling limp-walk.

“Going to Sheboygan?” he yelled at no one in particular. Sheboygan? He may just as well have asked for a train to Saturn. The

doors shut.

Sylvie had filled the space Henry made earlier and leaned into him as she peered out the window.

"Pretty sure he was FBI."

"FBI?" Henry asked. "The guy was on death's door. FBI doesn't send out old guys with spittle on their jerseys who ask about Sheboygan," he sneered.

"Shows what you know. One time when I was on the lam up in Saskatchewan, they sent out an agent who was a real dog."

"Oh? Golden Retriever or Poodle?" Henry couldn't help sarcasming. The whole night had been a series of small melodramas. He had wanted only the predictability of going to karaoke, of having a beer or two, and of being tossed out of the lounge. Then he would ride the El back into the city, unlock the door of his loft, pour himself a brandy, and be glad nothing had changed. Instead, here he was on a train saddled with the queen of freaks. Believe me, this is saying something in a city like Chicago.

As the train pulled away from the station, Henry caught the reflection of a lad of sixteen staring back at him through the window. He blinks once at Henry and then again before turning and sprinting down the tunnel. He is obviously running away from something, maybe a jerk father who never could understand having a son with the vocal chords of an angel, but whatever. That was yesterday and Henry was not given to sentimentality.

"Not that kind of dog," the woman answered as she retrieved a turkey drumstick from one of her sacks and began gnawing on it. "That agent was a real cur. Where are my manners?" she asked looking over at Henry. "You want a bite? You look hungry, all skinny bones."

Henry's palm stood up signaling clearly that he would not partake in her late-night feast. Put on too many pounds and you'd be typecast as Falstaff for the rest of your life.

"Anyways, he was a young guy. Had some of them piercings in his eyebrow and lip. You know the kind. I never figured him for FBI. But then I seen him reach into his pocket and I knew he had a pistol. Just shows, you can't be too sure."

"Did he actually produce a pistol?" Henry asked.

"Nope. But it was there. Couldn't fool me," she winked.

"It could have been quarters," Henry said. "Hell, for all you know, he was reaching for a frigging cough drop. You ever think of that?"

"He never coughed."

Henry turned to look at her. She must be kidding, but no glimmer of humor crossed her face. What on earth did she feel she had to hide from the FBI? She probably hadn't even worked for the

government. How did people get this crazy?

The train rolled on, each mile closing in on Adams and Wabash. At Montrose, Henry waved his finger like a magic wand to spirit her off. No luck. Irving Park, Addison, Paulina, Wellington, and Armitage. Sylvie didn't stir from her seat. Ahead was Henry's stop. He resolved that he would not get off for fear she'd follow him. One divorce under his belt, too many long ago forsaken friendships that had turned sour, and coworkers who thought he was a curmudgeon. Relationships. This crazy woman traipsing after him was the last thing he needed.

"Next stop is mine," Sylvie said. Henry was silent. "You?" she asked.

"I switch to the Red Line," he lied.

"Too bad. Hard times for you?" she asked.

"Sort of."

"Well, never mind. Here's my card," she said as she handed him a wad of paper folded down to business card size. "Look me up," she continued. "You never know when you'll..." she glanced at him and finished, "Well, you just never know when."

She began gathering her packages and again glanced at Henry, patting his hand. "Nothing to be ashamed of, Mr. Whoever You Are. Keep the rest of the turkey. It'll tide you over." With that, Sylvie plopped the rest of the drumstick into his lap and stood up.

She slid between the open doors of the car. Startled, Henry barely managed to get off before the doors closed. Henry paused and turned to see her lumbering away.

"Name's Henry," he called standing under the lights on the platform. He watched as Sylvie made her way across the nearly empty platform. She limped to her right and scratched her left hip as she headed toward the stairs. She tagged a young man and harnessed him into carrying some of her bags. "At least you're nicer than that last sonovabitch," she said.

Henry stared down at the business card. The dog-eared mess unfolded into a full 8x11 sheet. In tiny print on the center of the page appeared "Sylvie Sylvania, Psychic," followed by a phone number and Facebook ID. Henry began to crumple the sheet until he noticed yet smaller letters scribbled in green ink at the bottom: "Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul."

"Fair enough," Henry muttered to only himself. He crunched the sheet in his palm and thrust his hand in the pocket of his overcoat. Henry walked on toward Wabash and the night closed in around him.

ABBY FUNKE

## He is the Whiskey

His presence comforts me,  
my wild anxieties now tame.  
I am the tea, and he is the whiskey.

He spins as a compass navigating the sea.  
I am an arrow, with only one aim.  
His presence enlightens me.

His feet turn the earth, while I walk carefully.  
His spark ignites me, causing fire on the plain.  
I am the tea, and he is the whiskey.

We clash—a wasp and a bee—  
intrinsically different but the same.  
His presence challenges me.

Two leaves off the same tree,  
two cards from the same game.  
I am the tea, and he is the whiskey.

Our genetics are the key  
that unlock doors the same.  
His presence comforts me.  
I am the tea, and he is the whiskey.

EMMA DUEHR



Owl  
*ink drawing*



LOUREN KILBURG

## For Al Carter

Once again I was stuck with the middle seat, my legs knotted like a pretzel between two rather large individuals. I was nearly asleep when the lights flashed, jerking me from my slumber. My father let out a wild scream as we sailed down the highway, beneath yet another graffiti-covered overpass.

Our annual family road trip had certainly become an eccentric event, evoking gaping mouths and quizzical looks from many a passerby. My parents had fully decked out our 1983 Ford Aerostar with any light, gizmo, or gadget that blinked, honked, or shot confetti.

The fact that I was seventeen years old did not deter my unconventional parents from dragging me along on our yearly adventure. I hated every minute of it: the family sing-a-longs, the three a.m. wake up calls, the matching neon shirts, the sour smell of Aunt Lorna's too sweet perfume and Uncle Jim's greasy onion breath, asking me for fourteen solid hours why on earth I didn't have a girlfriend.

Gee, I couldn't imagine why not...

Somehow, this year felt different than all the others. Nothing had changed...except maybe me. The older I got, the more aware I became of how different my family was (the Aerostar was just the beginning of our eccentricity). I was no longer oblivious to the stares and whispers about my dad.

I can still remember the first time it happened; I was in the third grade. It was Parent's Day. A grown-up version of every kid would march into the school building, mixing the worlds of school and

home, cramming their adult-sized legs under child-sized desks, a pressed smile on their lips. They would stay for the morning, admiring their child's worksheets, pretending to enjoy an impromptu round of BINGO, and making only the polite amount of small talk with other parents. Then they would leave, sending the world back to its state of normalcy.

Jimmy Hanson (who *had* been my best friend since preschool) was one of those kids that probably had undiagnosed ADD, or something like that. He was the most popular kid in class; everything he did was hilarious, regardless of whether it was actually funny or not. So when he yelled out "retard" across the room, what did I expect the other kids to do? They all laughed and said it too.

I watched my dad staring in confusion, biting his lip, not quite sure what was happening. I remember fighting back the tears, then shifting from sadness to anger, hating, not Jimmy Hanson, but Al Carter, my dad, for being different, and for making me be different too. Anger turned to shame and embarrassment as I tried to imagine coming to school every day, my third grade reputation tarnished. So I laughed along with the other kids, said that word too, rolled my eyes, and explained that he was my weird Uncle Al, not my dad.

I didn't look in his eyes. I didn't have to. I could tell from the way his body was hunched, folding into itself, and from the way his body shook, that he, Al Carter, was crying. I wanted to go to him so badly, to sit with him, and take him away from here, where he didn't belong. But I couldn't. So I curled my toes deep in last year's sneakers, and laughed some more, ignoring my guilt as Jimmy playfully punched my arm in approval. That was the first time I was forced to acknowledge that my dad wasn't like everyone else's. It was the first, but certainly not the last, time I was ashamed of him.

Growing up, Mom never missed an opportunity to remind me that Dad hadn't always been like this. She said I was still in diapers and I couldn't even walk at the time of his accident. He had been coming to pick me up from the babysitter's when a semi had hit him head on.

Ever since, he hadn't been 'all there.' He would act like a kid, running everywhere, throwing tantrums, not able to dress himself properly.

There wasn't much he could do well anymore. Honestly, he just kind of followed Mom and me around. Since the accident, I had to take over his jobs: taking care of Mom, mowing the lawn, and helping to pay the bills every month.

It's not that I was mad at Dad for being like this, I mean, he



couldn't help it. I just wanted to be a kid sometimes. I wanted to go out on weekends and not feel like I had to babysit my dad.

"This is it!" my mother practically sang as she screeched the Aero-star's wheels to a halt.

Stepping down from the passenger's seat, my father let out a satisfied sigh, stuffing his oversized hands into his undersized pockets, smiling toward the sky.

He spoke in a slew of hurried words, never stopping for air, "I never was sure if we'd make it here, but look, here we are! Isn't this great, Nate! Haha great-Nate! It rhymes, wouldya look at that! Come on, let's get a move on!"

He ran a hand through his thinning hair, bouncing heavily on the balls of his feet.

"Cool. Great, yeah. Where exactly are we?" I asked, somehow unaffected by whatever fumes the Aerostar had released to the rest of the family.

Aunt Lorna took my hand, leading me aside. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes as I followed the neon-clad troop that marched ahead of me.

We were in what appeared to be a classic, All-American small town. Locally owned shops lined the eroding street. Cars did not drive by at a constant rate like back home. Everything about this place was slower, calmer. No one seemed to be in a rush, and everyone seemed to be looking out for everyone else. Waves and smiles came quickly and easily from the locals.

"This is it, Nate," my mother set her hand on my back, sending a smile in my father's direction.

Looking up, I could only stare in amazement. Lost in my own thoughts, I hadn't noticed that before us stood an enormous baseball field, complete with gates, arches, and stadium-quality seats.

I watched a slow smile spread across my father's face. He laughed, wrapping me into a bear hug. He held me for a moment, enclosing me inside his grasp. After a beat, his arms fell, he pushed me away, and sprinted through the gates to the field. He kicked the dirt, stomped on every base, all the while laughing maniacally.

Aunt Lorna pulled me toward the fence. "Read this," she urged, gesturing toward a plaque near home plate.

*For Al Carter, Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher (1995-2001).*

I stared in awe. Beneath the caption was a picture of a handsome young man. Familiar dark eyes shone with excitement, not a glazed-over daze. His hair was not ruffled in patches; it swept

across his forehead: Al Carter before he became everything I perceived him to be. I had lived my entire life in shame, fearing that someone, a friend, a teacher would connect the two of us. It had never crossed my mind that he, Al Carter, had been—was—capable of incredible things.

As I stared at my family, encircled around me, everything came together. All those years of road trips, the endless hours spent together had all been leading up to this moment: the day Al Carter was no longer a name we tiptoed around, the day we could be proud of everything he was, everything he had done. Here we stood, an emotional jumble of Carters, in a brand new baseball field, opening today in his honor.

"I never thought this day would get here," my mother spoke, trying desperately to hold back her tears.

"I wanted to tell you, I really did. The timing was never right, and I just couldn't bring myself to talk about it... Before the accident, your father really was something special. Not that he's not now," she added quickly, laughing at herself along the way.

"I know you don't always love these road trips exactly. But they're what your dad needs. He needs to see you, to be with you. You're a good kid, Nate. Give your dad some credit, though. He loves you; he just doesn't know how to show it anymore."

I stared at the ground in disbelief, wondering just who Al Carter was behind the confines of his mind. For the first time I can remember, I didn't think about how ridiculous I looked. I ran out onto the baseball field built for my father. I grabbed his hand, allowing him to pull me behind him. Our laughing voices chorused together, rising and falling in unison as we sprinted lap after lap around the bases.

MELISSA GABER



Rat's Nest  
*watercolor and ink*

MAGGIE MAY

## Skin

Those bubble-bearded babies  
in the tub giggling and splashing  
vulnerable  
kick me in the gut

KASSIDY HANSON



Self Portrait  
*pen and ink stipple drawing*

ERIN DALY

## A Change of Faith

It's 8:30 a.m. on a sunny Saturday in August 2012, and I've been awake for two hours, fueled by pancakes, eggs, and a Mountain Dew from a mediocre local breakfast joint. I'm sitting on a curb a few yards from the only high school in Dixon, Illinois, surrounded by a small collection of strangers who are chatting about how far they've traveled. There's a father and son from the eastern U.S., a young woman who looks my age from Toronto, a mother and her teenage daughter from Minneapolis. They're also chatting about why we're all gathered in this new town on this summer Saturday: Mumford & Sons, our favorite band, is putting on a music festival, and we're waiting for the venue gates to open so we can secure front-row spots for their performance that evening. I occasionally jump in and contribute to the conversations I hear, but most of my attention is focused on the high school grounds, my eyes darting to every new human form I see. I'm trying to discern if they resemble Mumford & Sons, because from what I've learned from fans on the internet, it's possible to meet them before their shows. Suddenly this town has become my personal Lourdes or Guadalupe, and I am one pilgrim among hundreds hoping for a personal encounter with the band that changed my life.

On a similarly sunny August day a year earlier, my dad dropped me and a suitcase off at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago for a four-day conference dedicated to helping young Catholics discern a life of service to the Church. For years prior this conference, I poured everything I had into being a living saint. I was in love with all things Catholic and spent much of my free time

absorbed in prayer, studying Catholicism's holiest souls, and begging God to rid me of any trace of worldliness or pride left over from my decidedly woeful former life. I spent much of my teenage years struggling to understand what role my faith should play in my life, but after attending a retreat when I was seventeen, it all finally made sense to me. For the first time in my life, I was certain of why I had been put on earth: I was here to live a life of prayer and self-denial, to tell others about Jesus, and to reject the moral relativism that western culture had been feeding me and my generation. I carried this belief into my academic and professional life in college. Halfway through my first year, I decided that I'd rather work for God than for a company or corporation, so I switched my major from communication to religious studies. Dreams of being a young adult minister or a theology teacher had replaced my longtime wish to be a journalist; I figured that instructing people in the ways of holiness was a more righteous pursuit than reporting news or writing columns. When I first learned about this conference in Chicago early in the summer after my sophomore year, I jumped at the opportunity to better understand God's will for my life.

Only a few weeks before my arrival in Chicago, however, I no longer felt that sense of calling, that conviction. Nothing traumatic prompted it or caused me to start questioning my faith. Quite simply, one day, the thought of living a saintly life no longer filled me with joy. Such thoughts were instead met with an awful sense of numbness and nothingness. It was the first time in years that the idea of holiness filled me with something other than ecstasy, and the only way I could think to respond was to panic. I wanted to feel something for it, but no amount of prayer or pleading with God brought that joy back. I feared I was being tested, or that I was entering what many holy people have described as the "dark night of the soul," when God's presence seems hidden. Activities that were once effortless became difficult and unfulfilling. The sermons at Sunday masses suddenly rang hollow in my ears and seemed to bounce right off of me instead of sticking to my soul. Prayer felt more like talking to thin air than talking to the maker of the universe.

As I sat through the panels and sessions at the conference a few weeks later, I questioned what I was doing there. The other young adults who attended didn't have much doubt that they were being called to do God's work: some were earning degrees in religious education, some were training for ministry with children and with prisoners, and a few were considering entering seminary or a convent. And there I was, attempting to swap my confusion and hurt for enthusiasm so I didn't feel like my money and time

were being wasted. I was optimistic that the conference would help me reclaim my passion, but as my days in Chicago counted down, that feeling of nothingness and indifference persisted.

Realizing that my usual methods of beating boredom—prayer, researching holy people, writing letters to God—were becoming boring themselves, I decided to fill my downtime at this conference with YouTube searching. One day, in between conference activities, I remembered Mumford & Sons, an English folk-rock band that I had discovered a few months earlier. I had mixed feelings about them—I liked one song but disliked another—but their song that I did like, "The Cave," was good enough to warrant a second listen. So I searched that song again. The triumphant lyrics about holding on hope, combined with the joyous horns and furious banjo picking, made me want to hear more.

As I continued my Mumford & Sons search at the conference, I was stunned by the unabashed emotion in their lyrics, as if their hearts had been spilled directly into their music, uncensored by logic and reason. They sang of love, hope, a thirst for authenticity, disappointment, and fear—feelings I didn't even know that I wanted (even the ugly ones) because I thought that living a God-centered life left no room for them. A desire for romance or authenticity or truth could only be met by the love of God, I had been taught. Trying to find them elsewhere was foolish and even dangerous. Troubles could only be eased by seeking solace in God; any other source of comfort was off-limits. But as I listened to Mumford & Sons, desires for something other than God were brought out of hiding with an intensity that frightened me at first but that I soon grew to relish. I went from weeks of feeling nothing to suddenly feeling everything that I had been stifling for years. Even though the music didn't give me those high-on-God feelings that I had been missing, it just felt good to feel again. I felt human, not holy. The black and white picture in my mind of who I should be had been repainted in several shades of grey. I didn't know who I should be anymore, but I did know that a singular focus on holiness had been preventing me from experiencing all the beauty and ugliness that the human heart could perceive. All these new feelings were perhaps sweeter than the bliss that prayer once brought me because I had nearly forgotten what it was like to feel much else.

The more I listened to Mumford & Sons, the more I started to find that their lyrics were a reflection of the troubles and doubts I was facing. Their first album is filled with uncertainty and inner conflict, and I couldn't have found it at a better time. The comfort that I found in being the good Catholic girl was gone, leaving me feeling unsteady and vulnerable, and I was unsure of whether

to keep pursuing that old self or to try on a new identity. But wondering about it only plunged me into deeper confusion, and even anxiety. In Mumford & Sons, I had found kindred spirits who were just as disillusioned and frightened by life as I was, men caught in the tension between a comfortable, familiar past and an ambiguous future. They didn't profess to have all the answers to life's big questions, but they weren't afraid to ask them, and they weren't afraid to dive into that confusion. The solace I once sought in prayer and Christian music, which offered a one-size-fits-all answer to life's big questions, I was now finding in a secular band that didn't have any definite answers. I didn't mind that, though. As much as I wanted answers and to find comfort in the certainty and stability of God again, I also just wanted to know that I wasn't alone in the confusion I was feeling in the aftermath of the collapse of my religious fervor. Mumford & Sons made me feel less alone.

Through Mumford & Sons' music, I also felt less ashamed to question what I thought I knew about God. They sang openly about faith, though not in the way I was used to. Their music is not explicitly Christian, but references to God and religious imagery abounds. Their music expressed more doubt about God than assurance, which was at first shocking to me, but I quickly found comfort in that doubt and honesty. One line in particular from the song "Winter Winds," which sings about shame causing the singer to replace God with a woman, shook me more than perhaps any other lyric on the album. The lyric was a bit blasphemous when I first heard it, as the belief in the importance of God in one's life was still fresh in my mind; "who tries to replace God with a lover?" I thought. But I was moved by it nonetheless. It revealed a man who was questioning the comfort and joy that God once offered him and who doubted his ability to maintain faith, much like I was at the time. There was something utterly romantic about someone willing to sing about something so private, and perhaps even shameful. I clung to that vulnerability because my previous faith life denied me such openness and doubt and depth of feeling; I was led to believe that such things were a sign of finding God insufficient or not trusting him enough. But Mumford & Sons assured me that it was okay to question. It was okay to be unsure of the place that God had in my life.

As the weeks after the conference wore on, I became more and more consumed with Mumford & Sons. I learned all their lyrics, watched interviews and live performances, and had memorized the personalities and the senses of humor of all four band members. The fervor of my fangirlishness rivaled that of my previous religious devotion and even teetered on the edge of idolatry. What

I had scolded myself for when I put other things in competition with my love of God, I was now beginning to grow comfortable with as I grew in my love of Mumford & Sons. I wasn't bothered by it. In fact, I wholeheartedly embraced my new-found identity as an adherent to the Church of Mumford & Sons. Their songs were my hymns, the pictures I began adding on Pinterest were my icons, and the fans I began connecting with were my congregation. I grew zealous (and jealous) with determination when I heard of fans who had the good fortune of attending their concerts and meeting the band members. I wanted to be one of those fans whose devotion was rewarded with a face-to-face meeting with the people who had changed my life.

As fate would have it, in the spring of 2012, the band announced that they were bringing a music festival to Dixon, Illinois, a mere hour south of my hometown. Any inhibitions my faith may have instilled in me about getting too excited for something as indulgent as a concert had been tossed aside, and I didn't think twice about whether I'd go. More than \$175 and two and a half months later, I made the short trip down to Dixon, wondering whether I'd be lucky enough to meet any of the four Sons.

As I waited in line outside of Dixon High School on that August Saturday, it had crossed my mind a few times that I was perhaps taking this whole fangirl thing a bit more seriously than I should have been. It had been about a year since my faith life had taken a tumble and since I found Mumford & Sons, and I had begun to wonder if I had been trying to fill a God-shaped void in my life with something I knew could never make me as happy as faith used to make me. A year earlier, I probably never would have done something like this unless Jesus himself was making an appearance somewhere. It was utter foolishness, treating these four men like deities, worshiping the ground that they walked. And I knew it. I even felt anxious and guilty as old warnings about the dangers of putting other things above God began to play in the back of my mind. But I trusted that God would forgive me for one day of self-indulgent idol worship.

After about twelve hours of waiting, Mumford & Sons took the stage at dusk to the adoring cries of about 15,000 fans. For two hours, they led the crowd in what felt like a prayer. We sang songs in unison that we had memorized from album booklets that were as sacred to us as hymnals. We raised our hands when we felt moved to. We listened in hushed awe when the band spoke to us between songs. And it was in these moments that I realized that perhaps music and religion aren't so antagonistic, and are perhaps even similar. For music, like church, had drawn me to Dixon with thousands of others, all of us motivated by a common belief in the power of Mumford & Sons. Dismissed by family and friends who scoff at our devotion to the



band, at this festival we found a sort of kin, people who believed in what we experienced and who were willing to share their own stories about how the same band made their lives a bit better. I realized at my first Mumford & Sons concert that being a fan meant I was part of something greater than myself: a whole web of people, united by the holiness of our own humanity in all its ugliness and goodness, who knew what it was like to put so much trust into music's ability to heal and to help make sense of life.

Mumford & Sons had become a sort of Messiah figure for me in the past year, and while I may have questioned whether or not that was a good thing in light of my religious convictions, knowing I wasn't alone in those feelings comforted me as I sang my way through every song in their two-hour set. The worry and confusion about my purpose, faith, and my future that I had been battling for a year had faded into the background of my memory on that August night. I felt free, as free as I did when I discovered Mumford & Sons' music a year earlier. Even though I never did meet Mumford & Sons that weekend, basking in their presence and absorbing the energy from the crowd for two hours was enough. After the show was over, a few fans stayed at the barrier to try to claim relics of their experience: guitar picks, drum sticks, setlists, anything that the stage hands were giving away that the band had touched. I didn't have the good fortune of claiming any of these tokens, but I felt that my faith had been rewarded. My quest was complete and I left the venue feeling restored. As I walked from the high school grounds into downtown Dixon, I looked back at the still-lighted stage and smiled, my final "amen."

RACHEL MANS

## Collapse

At the end of August, Dillon took his yearly pilgrimage to Sutton, West Virginia. Like a photograph left on a shelf, the place hadn't changed at all, only collected dust. He stopped at a payphone off of Exit 67 to call Alice. Even the receiver sounded like it was coming through a filter far away. "I'm there," he said.

"Come home soon," Alice said. "There's no one to make the bed."

His family would be heading to the mine in the morning for the memorial ceremony. Of all of the sixteen families, his had been pictured in the Charleston newspaper ten years ago. His mother cut the article out with a knife at breakfast the morning it came out and hung a copy on her bedroom door. He'd almost felt lucky back then, being singled out. The paper read 'Collapse,' and the picture was of Lee, his mother, and him all standing by the shale hills on the day of the funeral. The caption read, 'A family remembers.' It was the only time he'd ever been in the paper, but he felt guilty for vainly touching it every time he passed. There hadn't been a funeral, really. Not really, when the bodies already had been buried under a ton of earth, maybe cremated too in the heat of the coal dust fire. Dillon used to have dreams that his father would come home, sooty and smiling, and say, "Fooled you all." He'd give them all paper-wrapped pies they used to get from the day-old bakery, and all of them would laugh and laugh. He still had the dream sometimes, except that his father came to his apartment in Philadelphia, and Alice opened the door and they all drank bourbon at the kitchen table. He had to think his dad would have liked Alice.

His mother's house looked nearly the same as it had the day Dillon drove off five years ago, but drooped, somehow, like a wilting flower.

The paint on the shutters and the doorjamb was scraped off. Each time he returned, the yard was half crabgrass and half dandelions. The tree out front had already lost its leaves though it was only August, and the tar paper roof peeled back like scabs.

Only his brother, sitting on the porch swing, looked different. Seeing him only once a year was a flip book of puberty; Lee finally looked something like a man. He stood up when the car pulled close to the house and waved the hand that wasn't tucked into his pocket.

Dillon waved a hand back, and leaned against his car. "Hey, Lee."

"I was starting to think you weren't coming," Lee said, his long legs taking the porch steps in one stride. He stood in front of Dillon's car and rubbed its warm, red hood. "Nice Beamer. New?"

"Leasing it," Dillon said. When Lee whistled, he added, "But trust me, it's nothing but trouble." Lee peered in the windows at the interior. The crickets in the neighbor's tree chirped and Dillon lit a cigarette. Lee probably was more handsome than he was, Dillon thought. He'd always had that handsome potential as a kid. He looked like their father: the sharp hairline and the small nose like an old movie star. Dillon took a slow drag and asked, "You've been waiting long?"

"I don't know. Long enough to wonder."

"I told you I was coming," Dillon said.

Lee ran his eyes over him like a kid standing in front of a row of TVs. "It's so good to see you," he said.

"Where's Mom?"

"Inside," Lee said, straightening up. "Don't make her upset."

"Look who's giving orders."

After a minute, Lee smiled and started toward the porch. "We gave in and ate. She wrapped up some roast for you. You better put out that cigarette before you go in. She quit."

"Again?" Dillon said, but he crushed the butt under his heel. He had taken up smoking to have something else to do in Sutton besides sit or eat, or walk by familiar houses again and again. From the day he turned sixteen, he bummed cigarettes off of his mother and they'd swing on the porch, watching the kids do laps around the block on their older brother's bikes.

"You're old enough," she'd said. She was as distant as he was in those times, sharing a lighter and not much else.

Lee tramped up the porch steps. Dillon had forgotten that sound, the way that after their father's death, Lee used to be so lonely for the sound of his work boots hitting the steps that they'd have to go stomp up and down them before dinner. He nearly mentioned it to Lee, but the kid was already halfway in the door.

It was awkward anyway, those kinds of memories. Lee had been six when their father died and Dillon, eleven. Dillon had been old enough to remember his father's stubble in the morning, how he'd rub it against Dillon's cheek to wake him up. Dillon remembered the way he would put their shoes in the freezer on hot days. He used to draw pen lines connecting the freckles on their arms and said they were skin constellations. Dillon doubted Lee would remember that. Once, he'd traced Alice's freckles that way, and she'd gotten annoyed that she had to use rubbing alcohol to get it off.

The house smelled like his mother had been baking. He took in the cinnamon on her skin when she threw her body into his arms. There was less of her, except that smile. Always was too big for her face and her front teeth turned in like two boxers squaring up.

"You look healthy. Good drive?" she asked. Her smile widened further, stretched to the edges of her dimples until it contracted back a bit, caught taut like a yo-yo.

"Easy drive. Really easy, Mom," Dillon said.

"Hungry?" she asked. Without waiting for an answer, she gestured him into the kitchen.

"I had something on the road," Dillon said, following, "but I could eat."

She warmed a plate of pork roast and diced potatoes and served spice cookies for Lee. She grabbed three glasses from the cupboard, filling them with ice and water. She stirred in a few drops of lemon concentrate and set them on the table. She could afford real lemons, he knew, but the settlement money had remained nearly untouched except to pay for mortgage payments. She could afford new clothes, and a new roof, but she always called it blood money. Blood money, blood money, blood in the dust money. His mother had always looked sideways at the widows who suddenly bought new houses after the accident.

"You know I'm heading up the refreshments tomorrow," his mother said, "so don't eat all of those cookies. But have a couple at least, Dillon, because they're good fresh. I should've made them in the morning."

"I'm sure they'll keep," Dillon said.

Dillon ate, and his mother Saran Wrapped plates of cookies on the counter: long strips of red, green, and blue wrap. Lee walked in and out of the room, popping a cookie into his mouth on each trip. He'd always been fidgety, and he couldn't sit in the chair for too long. He wandered into the living room and returned with a copy of the yearbook, a paper he'd written about Crazy Horse, a picture of a girl in a poppy dress. Lee presented these things to Dillon and finally settled against a counter near his mother's work. Dillon paged through the yearbook, the checkerboard of faces staring up at him. He couldn't

find his brother, and so shut it. "I don't want to grease up the pages," he said.

"How's Alice?" their mother asked.

"Good," Dillon said.

"You should've brought her," she said.

"Wedding season. She's busy. Lots of portraits and things."

"Then Thanksgiving." She turned to face him. "We'll set a place."

"It's hard to get away."

She paused in her work and wiped her hands on her apron.

"Well, tell her I'm doing some photography, too," his mother said.

"The ridges off of the Elk. The Sutton Dam. Got a book from the library of Ansel Adams."

"I'll tell her."

"Even of the mine and the trains full of the coal off for coking. A woman at the depot said they might buy a copy of it. One of the widows said she loved the print."

"I'll tell her," Dillon said again. "I might go bring my things in and go to bed."

"It's early," Lee said. "We could go driving or something. I've got a car, too, you know."

Dillon shook his head and his brother slumped against the counter. "I can't believe my little brother can drive. Makes me feel old."

"I'm almost eighteen," Lee said.

"He's been on the road all day, Lee." His mother sat by Dillon. "At least you missed the heat wave. It was hell on earth last week."

"Remember summers when we were kids?" Lee said. He swilled his glass of water around and cleared his throat. "Remember we used to freeze army men in the middle of ice cubes?"

"But their guns stuck out the top," Dillon said. "I remember."

"And it'd make us want to drink our water to keep the soldiers from drowning, and we'd race."

"I remember that," their mother cut in. "You two were always peeing out in the front bushes even though you knew better."

Lee started laughing. "And Dillon froze an ant in the ice cube one time. When it defrosted, I swore it swam in my lemonade. Right, Dillon?"

"How that thing survived, I don't know," their mother said, laughing.

"Dad did that," Dillon interrupted. "Not me. Don't you remember?"

"That's right," she said. "God, that sense of humor." She smiled at him, something like a Sunday school teacher. When

he came home, she was always morphed like this, from the woman smoking to some different character she tried on. Once, she'd taken in renters to fill the empty rooms. Once, she stayed in her room the entire time he was home.

Dillon looked like his mother, moved like her with a military-like stride. Their parallels always proved fodder for their differences. They'd fought on the porch after he'd stolen her wallet once, in lowered tones so Lee wouldn't hear. Once, after she had left him to watch Lee, he called her a bitch. She'd cried in his arms for an hour, tearing at his hair like a fussy child. She wanted him to work in Sutton, never understood why he'd wanted to leave her so fast. She said he didn't respect his father. When he left at eighteen, a sense of amnesty drowned him even as he drove away. She lived off of the self pity of his death for years, he'd realized as a teenager. So had he. Too much sorrow for two people. They agreed too little, especially on Lee. Lee was always a cheerful kid and too sweet for his own good. He wished Lee were a little less naïve.

"I'm going to bed," Dillon said.

"What's the matter, Dillon?" his mother asked. She reached across the table and laid a hand on his.

"I'm getting a headache. Maybe it's the air down here. I don't know." He stood up.

"Lee'll help you with your bags," his mother said. "Won't you, Lee? Dillon, don't worry about it now. You get some rest and we'll talk more tomorrow after the service."

Dillon's bedroom smelled like cedar chips. He opened up the drawer next to the bed and saw a pile of them laying on top of a stack of folded shirts. The next drawer down had pants. His father's shirts. His father's pants.

It was better with the renters, when at least he could get a room at the motel up the road. He was angry for a moment that they'd done this, moved him in with a ghost. He ran his fingers through the chips and flipped a row of them like charcoal briquettes. His father used to use cedar to get the sooty smell out of his clothes. He remembered the heavy coat his father had worn in December, how the wood had ingrained itself into the threads. It had even gotten into his father's skin. He wondered if his mother had put cedar chips in there just to lay on the bed just to steep in the smell of him.

He opened the window and looked out at the dark backyard. The night after the collapse, when neither he nor his mother could sleep, they slipped on his father's thick shirts and walked laps around that grass. She had told him that she had loved his father. She had told him that his father had loved him and Lee, and she hadn't cried, not even at the funeral. Sitting in the pews at church, she grasped their hands like they were walking through a big crowd. Don't get lost, her

hands said. Stay. When the article came out in the Charleston paper the next day, the knife had sliced the paper so hard that it nearly ripped in half. He wasn't sure that that wasn't exactly what he'd really wanted.

He lay on the bed with the lights on and pushed on his eyes. His skull hurt. The smell of cedar was so strong he had to bury his head in the pillow to sleep. When he dreamed, he dreamt of army men and the sound of boots and an ash blue sky.

When he woke up, he collected his things and stepped into the hallway, the cedar scent trailing along with him. It'd gotten into his skin and his hair, into his shirt and his socks. He dropped his bags by the door and walked down the hall. He heard water running in the bathroom. Lee was shaving in front of the sink, and when he saw Dillon watching him in the mirror, he turned around.

"Morning," Lee said

"Why are you shaving when you don't have a bit of facial hair?" Dillon asked.

Lee laughed and rinsed the rest of the cream off of his face. He looked down the hallway. "You going somewhere? Your bags."

"I don't know. I'm thinking I should get back to Philly after the service."

Lee followed him down the stairs, buttoning up his dress shirt. "Does Mom know?"

"She probably guesses." He stopped in the front hall. "You want to drive? I can pick up my car after."

"I just don't get you," Lee said. He stood still, for once, and he blocked the door. "Hell, you know he doesn't care if you come, Dillon, but she does."

"And what about you?" Dillon shoved past his brother, knocking him against the doorframe. "You miss me?"

"Fuck you," Lee said, shoving him back. "You probably don't even think about us when you're not here, but you're ours anyway."

It was a quiet drive, and Dillon spent most of it with his head half out the window like a golden retriever. He watched as the sun got caught in the trees of the Appalachians. Lee kept turning almost sideways to look at him, his eyes and the car drifting off the road for a moment, then both righting themselves on the rumble strips. Dillon knew he should say something, but his tonsils had turned themselves inside out. The more he looked sideways back at Lee, the more he kept seeing his father's profile. Lee's car did most of the talking. The air conditioning pattered out in a consistent, foul way, like a kid blowing raspberries at them.

They were getting closer to the mine. The fence started a few

miles away and circumscribed the shafts. The land was flatter here. The sun had nowhere to hide except behind the sun visor. When Dillon pulled his head back inside of the window, he said, "You got a girlfriend yet?" What did brothers talk about? "Alice is gorgeous. Maybe you'll meet her sometime. Thin, legs for hours. You want me to give you the sex talk, or have you got it all figured out on your own?"

"C'mon, Dillon," he said.

"You should come to Philly," Dillon said, unsure where the idea came from. It felt right in his mouth.

"I've got to finish high school," Lee stammered. "And there's Mom."

"Mom's fine. Like everyone else here, she can't get out of these hills. Save yourself."

The crinkled ridges passed them. They were getting closer to the mine.

Lee turned to him again. "Is it nice in Philadelphia?"

"Beautiful," he said. "Different kind of beautiful."

"I don't know," Lee said.

Some of the widows camped out near the granite memorial. Their family had done that on the third anniversary. Lee helped their mother pitch a tent, and he and Dillon wandered off to throw their empty pop cans near the shaft entrances. They had played Crack the Whip with the other children on the wide stretch of land which Lee pulled into now, parking alongside a scatter of other cars.

It was early still for the memorial, and their mother was standing in a clump with some women; the sun-dressed little girls crowded with them, pressing themselves against their mothers' thighs and pulling on skirts.

"Excuse me, but my boys are here," their mother said as he and Lee approached. She stepped between the two of them and they walked toward the memorial. Lee shuffled his feet on the grass and kicked up puffs of dust.

"Good turnout," Lee added. "Better than last year."

"Well, those big anniversaries like ten and twenty-five drive them out here," she said. "I hear Brigi's daughter came from Colorado, and you here from Philly. Philly's not as far as all that, though."

"Far enough," Dillon said.

Lee looked at him, then away, on toward the mine. He redoubled his scuffing and the dirt caked the toe of his dress shoes. They joined the group gathered around the memorial. There was a podium and a large wreath stuck on an easel and wrapped round and round with blue ribbons. Every ceremony was the same: a reading of the names, a speech by Pastor Rictors, whose nephew had died in the accident, and a chorus of "Amazing Grace" sung by a local girl. The song was melancholy and went sharp halfway through. Dillon stared at the

wreath and wondered who would sell something so terrible, so gaudy. Their mother snapped a photo with her camera. It was a nice camera; Alice would have had something to talk about with her, after all.

The group made a wavy semicircle around the monument. The granite memorial blocked the sun. A tall man in a suit rose to read the list of names; the hands of the circle closed in and connected. His mother reached for her sons' hands. A thin man with his dress shirt tied around his waist grabbed Dillon's other hand.

It'd been his family pictured in the paper, much like this: hands together and faces blank. Dillon always wondered why their bodies had been cropped into the article, their blank faces rather than the blank faces around him. He wondered if other families had the clipping in their family books.

His mother squeezed Dillon's hand as his father's name was read. Dillon didn't squeeze back, still thinking about the wreath, now about Christmas. When he was ten their father had given him a pair of thick boots and a snow shovel. He told him to take care of the house if it snowed, clear the walk so their mother wouldn't trip on the ice. He took him out and they cleared away the half-inch that'd fallen in time for Christmas, and it'd been so warm that he didn't have another opportunity to use it that season. He grew out of the boots before the next Christmas, gave them to Lee who only used them to tramp up and down the front stairs and yell that he was home. He was home.

When the group broke up, Lee and Dillon walked toward the fence surrounding the compound, mother trailing a few steps with friends, carrying the carnations to thread through the fence bars.

"Consider it," Dillon said sideways to him.

Lee nodded. "You still leaving?"

"Yes."

Their mother caught up, laughing and handing them flowers. "I'll take a picture of you," she said. "Put them through. Smile."

Dillon nested the stem in the metal, and it hung there, an absurd green thorn. Dillon put an arm around his brother's shoulders and squeezed him, tight. Two brothers, blank faces and beyond the fence, the hills beaded like a necklace into the distance.

EVAN VENTRIS



Patrol  
*digital*



CARRIE PIEPER

## (waiting)

silence  
like nothing you've  
ever heard  
interrupting every  
thought  
pacing around the  
room  
waiting  
for a break

in the silence  
fingers go  
numb  
pounding on  
soundproof  
walls  
with nothing  
on the other side

silence  
lies on  
an empty  
bed  
so still  
and quiet  
it may as  
well not  
be there  
at all

then all at once  
silence breaks  
a tiny bell fills the air  
the voice of a savior

dead legs given life  
a body leaping to  
the ring in the air

but what  
has begun  
is just as  
soon over

an answer  
to an unasked  
question  
permeates  
the room

everything  
goes quiet  
again  
air thick  
and noiseless  
as fog

then  
a corpse  
falls  
down  
without a  
sound  
and silence  
caresses  
fresh bruises  
stamped  
dark blue  
across pale  
white skin.

GREG WHITE

## My Broken Television is a Metaphor

I'm not suicidal, but I've been going through the motions, and that might be just as bad. I don't love my wife. I doubt I ever did. But we got married because we were at the age when people should get married. We don't have any kids, thank god. We rarely have sex and when we do, it's a pale imitation of what sex should be. We're just two relatively out of shape people rubbing up against one another, grunting rhythmically to make our partner believe it feels great, all the while picturing someone better, or mentally balancing the checkbook. During sex, our shadows look like they have early onset diabetes. I'm fat. Not fat, but flabby. It's horrible. When we orgasm, our bodies convulse and we lay down, our sides slouching with the excess weight of our late 30s. Nobody says anything. It's a routine, a chore, no more enriching or depleting than taking out the garbage. It's terrible.

Our marriage was never the most romantic or fiery of partnerships. We met at a get-together and it was a relationship of convenience from the start. She was willing to sleep with me regularly. I was willing to let her dictate the décor of my home. It got to the point where we either needed to get married or end the damn thing, so we got married. What pushed it over the edge was my need for health insurance. It made financial sense. Nothing big, just a trip to the courthouse and dinner with family and friends. Over time, any of the convenience disappeared and was replaced with a hefty dose of resentment. I resented the fact that she never cleaned up the messes she made, she resented everything I did. We've mostly stopped talking altogether.

The last few weeks, she looks less plump than me. Her New Year's Resolution was to lose weight, get in shape, reignite our marriage, and have a happy life. That's what she resolved for both of us. I watch TV

while she's at the gym. Sometimes, when I'm sitting there, I rub my pudgy sides and remember when they used to be firm. She's in better shape but we still don't have much sex. Not that I mind. It's a lot of effort to pretend I enjoy it. She's been happier, too. I began to think she was having an affair, and I think good for her. That's my reaction when it dawns on me she's probably screwing someone from work, maybe some nice young guy from the gym who has a thing for older women. I'm okay with it. And I'm not okay with the fact that I'm okay with my wife screwing some other guy. I don't love her, but I should at least have enough respect for myself to be angry at the betrayal. But I'm not. I actually want her to be fucking someone else.

I tuck the thought away and think she's probably too nice and/or stupid to have an affair. She's not clandestine enough to have an affair with any success. She lied about forgetting to record one of my shows once, and before she could even get to the "I swear!" part of the lie, she broke down in tears. She explained that she was sad not because she forgot to record the show but that she tried lying to me and it pained her to know that we were now in the lying phase of our marriage. So I think there's no way she's having an affair. She would have called after the first kiss to confess.

I run through this exact same thought process every night when we eat dinner in silence, hoping that I'll work up the effort to say something over our take out. She doesn't cook much and neither do I. She's looking in her glass of wine when she says, "I'm having an affair." As I process what she says and think about how to react—feigned anger culminating in a few broken dishes, perhaps a few tears from sadness, or something more volcanic—I hear the worst possible sound emanate from my lips.

"Hrmph."

It's the sound I make when I try to squeeze out a fart in front of her. There's no Old Testament rage, no heartbroken wail, no accusatory tone, just complete and utter indifference. I realize here that I'm screwed when the divorce proceedings begin.

"Did you just fucking fart when I told you I was screwing someone else?" she says. I avoid making eye contact. My wife just told me she's sleeping with someone else and I found a way to turn myself into the bad guy. I don't even have to fart just now.

"No, honey, I did not just fart."

"Well, it sounded like you just fucking farted, Daniel," she says.

"I'm just trying to process this. It's kind of a big thing."

"You sure are acting like it," she says.

"It's a lot to take in," I say. And then I raise my voice, trying to make her feel better. "You are, after all, fucking another person!" I yell, but it's obviously insincere. That makes it worse.

"Are you—are you pretending to be upset with me?" she says,

stretching out the syllables in 'pretending' and emphasizing them for maximum impact. "What is wrong with you, Daniel?"

I adjust myself in my seat. I hate it when she gets mad at me because then, after everything she says, she bookends it with my name. It's exasperating. I actually do have to fart now but think better of it. I have a home and some money to protect. Since anger as a simulated emotion is out, I try sadness to equally disastrous results. I don't cry well, since snot makes me gag and I produce a lot of saliva as is, so I never perfected the fake cry. She spots this act with ease.

"I really don't know how to respond to this," I say.

"That's pretty fucking obvious," she says. "Anything—literally anything—would be better than this."

I get up to refill my drink—cherry cola, the cheap knockoff stuff—and sit back down. "Who is he?"

"Someone from the gym." She's not making eye contact with me.

"What does he do?"

"He's in college."

I knew it. I knew it. I feel the beginnings of a smile start on my lips but I fight it back.

"Good for you," I say.

She looks up at me now and I see a shred of happiness in her eyes. She's happy I'm taking on a sarcastic tone. It implies anger, anger which I'm not used to showing, and it's revealing itself through caustic jeering. It shows her I'm willing to fight back. If I play the rest of this conversation right, I think I can perhaps save my marriage, this whole affair business being an unfortunate hiccup on our road to redemption and a loving marriage. Doing so would require a lot of energy, though, and it's more energy than I think I'm willing to exert.

"What did you say?" she says, hope in her eyes.

I can't hold it in anymore. I fart.

"I said good for you. I think it's good that you found someone who can please you."

The fart wafts up into my nose and it smells like the inside of a pumpkin.

"I've grown to care about you over the course of our relationship and it's been clear for quite some time that I haven't been giving you what you need. I think it's good that you've taken the initiative and found happiness somewhere. I hope he treats you well."

"You've grown to care about me? What the fuck is wrong with you? You think it's good I've taken the initiative? Am I a fucking employee? I swear to God, Daniel, you'd better make me understand this," she says.

"I want the best for you, I really do."

"What the hell is wrong with you?" she says.

"I'm just trying to be pragmatic about this entire situation. I don't

think me getting angry will help anybody right now. If we stay level-headed, I'm sure we can have an outcome that will be mutually beneficial."

I struggle with fighting. I have never been good at it. I want the tension to go away, so I adopt the typical HR persona in which I attempt to minimize any animosity with carefully chosen words. I used to lie, but I stopped because I was told that it is not conducive to creating lasting, impactful relationships. What my wife wants, though, isn't an HR rep. She wants a fire-breathing asshole of a husband, castigating her for her adulterous indiscretions with someone who she's almost old enough to be the mother of. If it were an ideal world, I would be that person for her, but it's not an ideal world.

"Oh, fuck your pragmatism, Daniel."

"I really don't know what you want from me," I say, and there it is. I lie again. I haven't lied in years, but I comfortably slip into it. It's here where I think we both know the marriage is no longer salvageable. I know exactly what she wants—a fight—but I am unwilling to give her one. Fucking someone else is one thing, but me lying is another entirely.

"I want you to fight for me," she screams. She throws the wine glass at the wall. My only thought is that was a twenty dollar wine glass and those curtains are positively ruined.

"I don't think I can do that," I say. She's standing by the counter now, arms up against it, supporting her weight.

"I want you to fight for me, Daniel. I want you to scream that you love me and you can't believe I would do that to you, betray you like that. Scream like you're actually angered that the woman you love fucked someone else," she yells. She's got a shrill voice. The neighbors must be upset at their dinners being interrupted by this.

"I don't know if I ever loved you, to be honest." Like the fart that wouldn't stay in, this just falls out.

"I want a divorce," she says.

"I can understand that. I think that's probably the best idea for both of us, considering the circumstances."

"You're a terrible person. I want you to pack a bag and leave."

"This is my house," I say. "I'm not going to leave."

"I'm not leaving," she declares. If I would have been a bit less stolid, I would have at least some power in this discussion, but I forfeited all of it through my sheer indifference.

"Can't I just stay in the guestroom? I'll be very quiet," I say. Surely this will appeal to her sense of reason.

"No, you can't stay in the fucking guestroom. Given what's just happened, how can you even suggest that?"

"But what about my TV?" I whine. It's a literal whine, that of a kid. I have no earthly idea why I say that, but I do. It's a lovely TV, the last big purchase I made. Wonderful picture and outstanding sound. It's got some sort of slick sound doohickey that balances everything so when I watch my action movies there isn't ever a drastic change during the explosions. On all my other TVs, the loud explosions would be so loud in contrast to the dialogue that it was maddening. But not this TV. This TV was special. I loved that TV.

"Tell me you're not going to fight for that fucking TV." It's an understandable request. I don't want to point out why I would fight for it, but if she presses the issue I may have to. "I swear to God, I'll put my fucking shoe through that thing."

"Don't say that. That's outrageous."

"You're outrageous. I'm disgusted. I'll kick a hole in that thing, I swear."

She's crying. I'm upset that she's crying, but now I'm worried about my TV.

"It's a discontinued model and I doubt that the sound doohickey you know I like has been held over on newer models since high-end sound is all the rage now," I say.

Her face changes when I say this, the hurt and pain written in the wrinkles above her eyes. She stands up and makes her way towards the TV. I don't want to watch, so I stay put. I hear her kick the TV, but nothing shatters. The Japanese make solid products. She lets out an exasperated howl, and then I hear it. The glass makes a loud crinkle sound and I know my marriage is over. She walks back into the kitchen, tears streaming down her face, little pieces of whatever constitutes a television screen these days trailing behind her.

"Not the TV," I sigh.

"Pack your shit and get. The. Fuck. Out."

I pack a bag and leave.

I really liked that TV.



TNT Chair  
*wood and metal rods*



## Where I'm From

I am from bell-bottom blue jeans,  
from Spic n' Span cleanser and Motown on the record player playing  
loudly.  
I am from marijuana hidden away in little pouches from the kids and  
the law  
(earthy, pungent, it smelled like spicy dirt).  
I am from homegrown tomatoes,  
warm and red planted by my father,  
which we ate all summer on sandwiches.

I'm from riding on repaired motorcycles, holding on tightly,  
from Jim and Patty, married young and divorced even younger.  
I'm from hard workers and hard drinkers,  
from go outside to play and take care of your brother.  
I'm from if I can't do it, at least I'll read about it,  
and an education is needed to make it out of here.

I'm from Shirley and Dorothy,  
greasy salmon patties frying, and stiff after-work cocktails.  
I'm from strong grandmothers and Christmas Eve traditions.  
Under the tree was a ceramic nativity set with an adored baby Jesus,  
promising hope and consistency,  
for remembering on days when these could not be found.

I am from happy moments—  
days at the lake traveling in a converted school-bus hippie camper—  
but the trip ended much too soon.

*Thanks to George Ella Lyon for inspiring this poem.*

JOE ARMS

## Apathetic

Gap-toothed and barren,  
this creature would spread her legs  
and offer up religion  
to anyone paying tithe.

This creature could be found  
on any intersection  
injecting tar and ingesting fire,  
stripped of her imagination  
and of her humanness,  
ever searching for the means  
to reach beyond  
her suggested dimensions.

Born into concrete captivity and  
raised in smog and oppression will  
inspire flight from any creature.  
She was no exception.

When an eighteen-wheeled chariot  
with a driver  
adorned in salty cottons and  
fossil-fueled denim presented himself,  
he was given gifts  
from the creature,  
which he carried with  
his jewels and his faith.

The creature was then filled with  
liquefied hallucinations and  
sticky, starving children,  
all in exchange for a  
highway escape  
from a never-sleeping city  
made of meat and memories.

After falling to her knees  
in thanks  
for her arrival in a new world,  
she threw her open palms  
to the ground and  
heaved through the heavens,

emptying her body  
of temporary fulfillments.

Bile, earth, and  
a packaged, granular friend  
were then displayed in front of the creature.  
She overlooked the past and the present  
and chose to take in  
the drowning parcel of friendship.

With a snort she deemed  
her friend unexceptional,  
proceeded to produce a  
flame from her fingertips and,  
like a good host,  
welcomed her guest to stay  
until she could see light again.

When an authority with badge and moustache  
lifted the creature from the side of the road,  
she willingly followed for  
she misheard an offer of a “rest.”

She traveled light-years  
in flashes of red and blue,  
only to come to a screeching halt  
on some chunk of rock  
after hearing  
squeals of pleasure  
emitted from the mouth of a pig.

After rising from the rock,  
she realized  
everything that she will do  
has happened again and again forever.

After rising from the rock,  
she kicked her rubber sole  
to the ground and  
flew over the highway.

She traveled light-years  
in flashes of broken headlights,  
only to come to a screeching halt  
on some chunk of rock  
after hearing  
squeals of silence  
emitted from the mouth of a god.



ELIZABETH COURTNEY



Untitled  
*photograph*

HANNAH GOLDSMITH

## Mortal Flesh

It's been about six months since I was last here. It was early spring then—dead vegetation littering the ground, a chill running through the air, and a general dampness about everything. Now it's early fall and I find it funny how it pretty much looks the same, except what was then a bump in the dirt is now a shallow depression. That's what happens when buried corpses decompose, I guess.

I nudge a few leaves out of the dip with my foot, wondering what's left of my cat, Gravel, who was buried there half a year ago. I'm sure by now he's mostly gone—digested by bacteria—like the bacteria that live in people's small intestines, digesting their food for them and working with enzymes to break down their dinners. Right now my intestine bacteria is working on breaking down a PB&J. Though those bacteria and enzymes aren't the same as they were six months ago; I'm probably missing a few since I decided to become a vegetarian and my body stopped needing whatever microorganisms digest meat.

It was Lent back then and, in accordance with the Catholic Church, I wasn't eating meat on Fridays anyway. So I decided to stop eating meat altogether as my "giving something up for Lent"—an arbitrary religious practice that somehow is supposed to make us better people by saying no to a single worldly pleasure. All my friends at our Catholic high school were sitting around a lunch table discussing our "giving up something for Lent"-s. Some decided upon the typical practice of eliminating sweets, others were going to walk the two blocks to school instead of driving—like glorified New Year's resolutions that they only had to keep up with for a month. They were all met with way-to-goes and good-for-yous. When I said I was going to give up eating meat, I was only congratulated with a single, sarcastic, "good luck with that one." When I expressed that it wouldn't be that hard,

one of my friends made the mistake of saying, “I bet you can’t do it,” which I obviously took as a challenge.

And so I spitefully passed up steaks and cheeseburgers in a piss-ing match to prove I was a good enough Catholic. This ended up not being that difficult considering I couldn’t look at a hunk of meat without picturing my dead cat in it. When ground hamburger starts resembling festering wounds and pork fat like chunky puss, saying no becomes a hell of a lot easier. Raw, ground hamburger and pork fat—that’s what Gravel’s fuzzy little abdomen was made of.

I found him like that in a field, three days after he had gone missing. I wouldn’t have known that he was even there if it wasn’t for his weak and disoriented mewling. It took me almost fifteen minutes to locate him in the overgrown weeds, but eventually I found him flopping around in the grass like his head was too heavy for his body. When I picked him up, I could feel something wet and squishy, but it wasn’t until I took him back to the garage that I noticed the oozing lesion on his stomach. It looked like a silver dollar-sized patch had been skinned, revealing a hunk of rotting meat.

I kept him cozy in a cardboard box lined with old towels until Mom and I could bring him to the vet the next day. The following morning, it had spread enough to cover the majority of his abdomen—churning, seeping, exposed flesh almost visibly creeping up over his sides. He slept on the car ride to the vet’s office, and after a quick examination and a lab test, the doctor made her diagnosis. A middle-aged cat lady with a stethoscope and a face lined with witnessing too many pet deaths delivered the news that Gravel had contracted flesh-eating bacteria. I almost didn’t believe her. Flesh-eating bacteria is something that only exists in sci-fi novels and hospital-themed TV dramas, not rural Iowa. But after being assured there was nothing that could be done, Mom making the decision to have Gravel put to sleep, and a steep veterinary bill later, I guess I had to believe her.

But I refused to believe my ninth-grade religion teacher. Standing at his pulpit in front of the classroom, he spent the hour preaching about heaven and the immortality of the human soul. It was the same kind of sermon we’ve all heard since baptism, so I had checked out early and instead contented myself with doodling in the margins of my notes. But my interest piqued again when one brave, yet idiotically argumentative, student raised her hand.

“Yes, Ema?” Mr. McGrane groaned, preparing for the bombardment of questions she was notorious for asking every other class period.

“What about animals?”

“Yes...? What *about* them?”

“Don’t they go to Heaven?”

“No. Just people.”

“Why not?! They have souls too, don’t they?”

“Yes, but mortal souls. Animal souls die with their bodies.”

“That’s stupid.”

I straightened up in my desk. Ooh, this was going to be good!

Ema leaned forward, “What’s the difference? Why are human souls immortal, but animals’ aren’t? That just seems unfair. Animals should be able to go to Heaven.”

“Well, God gave us immortal souls because He made us after His own image. We’re like Him, animals aren’t. We’re also given free will and reason so we can make our own decisions between good and sin. Therefore, we deserve to go to Heaven. Animals just run on instinct.”

“Mr. McGrane, have you ever watched a dog? They totally have some kind of logic. You can see them make decisions... and they have feelings!”

“It’s instinct. They don’t know what they’re doing. They don’t know the difference between right and wrong. They just have mortal souls, okay?”

“No, it’s not okay! Why would God waste all that time creating all these animals if He’s not even going to keep them around? You know, if I did all of this work making something, I wouldn’t want it to just go die.”

“It’s because God made it all for us. Remember Genesis? God made all the plants and animals and gave it to us to use and eat. Okay? Now let’s move forward...”

The rest of class ended up being difficult to pay attention to because I kept imagining myself standing up in the middle of the class to continue the argument, storming out of the room if need be:

*Mr. McGrane, that’s outrageous! Why the hell would God do that? Yeah, I get it... She loves us. But saying that She made animals just for us to use is absurd! Just because we’re the top of the food chain doesn’t mean we’re any more special! Hell, the world was a perfect place until we came along and screwed it up. It’s probably better off without us. You know, Mr. McGrane, I bet God sometimes regrets making us just because we’re so self-centered. We think the whole world was made for us. But you know what? We’re at the mercy of nature, just like everything else. I bet if bacteria were at the top of the food chain, they would think that everything was made for them to eat, too, huh? So get off your high horse and explain to me how exactly we’re different because I don’t see it.*

It’s been about six months since I was last here, and it’s funny how everything is pretty much the same. I brush some debris out of the depression in the ground and just stand here as a breeze sneaks through my cotton-blend sweatshirt. My stomach gurgles as my vegetarian lunch moves through my digestive system. My watch tells me it’s about time I start getting back to the house.

“Bye, Gravel. I’ll see ya later, buddy.”

# CONTRIBUTORS

JOE ARMS is a communications major and writing minor at Clarke University.

HELEN BISIOULIS is a junior at Clarke University. She is a transfer student, having gained her Associates in Arts at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, Ill. in 2013. She helps manage the Facebook and Tumblr pages for the *Tenth Muse*. Helen hopes to work as a manager at a nonprofit organization.

JACK COLE is a Clarke University opera student and Dubuque native. He wastes most of his time drinking coffee and attempting to do his homework. In the time he has left, he writes things. He was homeless for a few years, and he misses it, but society is okay. He is grateful to his friends and family for helping him wage daily psychic warfare and is not a fan of mindless self-indulgence.

KRISTINE COOPER is a 31-year-old junior. She is a secondary education and English major. She was in the military for 12 years. She lives in Dubuque with her 3 cats. She loves the outdoors and being home with her girls. Whenever she gets the chance, she heads to the beach where she can spend countless hours. Her goal in life is to teach middle or high school English.

ELIZABETH COURTNEY is a portrait and wedding photographer currently based in the Midwest. She is in love with photography and cannot remember a day that she didn't pick up her camera to take a photo. She has been shooting professionally for eight years. Her philosophy regarding photography is to keep it simple and raw. She loves capturing real people, real life, craziness, genuine moments, and authenticity.

ERIN DALY hails from Rockford, Ill., and graduated from Clarke University in 2013 with a B.A. in religious studies and a minor in writing. She relocated to West Virginia in 2014 for a youth ministry gig with the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. She has the coolest job ever, leading camping expeditions, operating zip lines, filming a Video Catechism episode in NYC, road tripping to San Antonio for a youth ministry conference, and traveling around the state of West Virginia to teach kids about their faith. In addition to ministry, Erin enjoys social media, beer, concerts, road trips, record stores, and writing.

After being published in the fourth edition of the *Tenth Muse*, PATRICK DEENEY'S confidence in his writing ability was boosted. A senior biology major at Clarke University, his free time consists of hanging out with friends, writing, and stressing out over what he forgot to do that led to the free time in the first place. He thought he

would try once again for publication, even though his biology capstone tried to take over his life.

MARISA DONNELLY, originally from Naperville, Ill., is a senior creative writing, secondary English education, and English triple-major at Waldorf College in Forest City, Iowa. In 2013, she won the Salvesson Prize in Poetry and her works appear in Waldorf College's *Crusader*, Loras College's *Catfish Creek*, and the *Briar Cliff Review* among other journals.

EMMA DUEHR is a sophomore at Clarke University studying art history and studio art. She discovered her talent during her senior year of high school and plans to receive a Master's degree in both majors after graduating from Clarke, with an ultimate goal of becoming a professor of art. She is inspired by and thankful for her current professors who helped shape the confidence in her art and herself, leading her to success, and the positive attitudes they bring to their profession every day. The first two years of her schooling gave her the confidence to pursue any direction she desires. She is looking forward to every new semester, skill set, and experience she may encounter.

HANNAH FARREY is a freshman studio art major at Clarke University. She has always had an interest in art but did not get seriously into drawing until the eighth grade. Her goal in life is to become a tattoo artist. Her biggest inspirations are Tim Burton, Kat Von D, Megan Massacre, and Halo Jankowski.

KATHERINE FISCHER is an award-winning author ("Dreaming the Mississippi," "That's Our Story and We're Sticking To It!") and Professor Emerita at Clarke. A featured columnist in various newspapers, her work also appears in magazines like *The Cream City Review*, the *Iowa Review*, *A Room of Her Own*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. She graduated from Clarke (English, history, and secondary ed.) awhile ago and from Goddard College with an M.F.A. When not engaged with her Muse, she can be found crick-stomping the backwaters of the Mississippi or creating a fiber festival with needles and wool.

CAMERON FRASER is a novice writer, philosopher, and shaman, and is in his last year of university, majoring in psychology. He is enchanted by bohemian thought and holds the personal belief that conformity to dysfunctional but socially sanctioned patterns of living can be combated through the development of phenomenological awareness and self-reflection.

ABBY FUNKE is a sophomore English and secondary education major at Clarke University. She is the Social Media Guru for the *Tenth Muse* and utilizes her writing skills as the secretary for

Clarke's Campus Ministry groups, ALIVE and Crusaders for Life and Justice. She enjoys reading books of all kinds (especially those by Jane Austen and F. Scott Fitzgerald), writing, and volunteering. She recently won the Pat Nolan BVM Scholarship in English, the Richard Sherman Literary Award, and the Mary Blake Finan Literary Award. Someday, she would like to teach college-level literature.

MELISSA GABER is a Clarke alumna from the class of 2012 (B.F.A. in painting, B.A. in philosophy). She currently lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Her work is primarily illustration, with whimsical or fantastical subject matter. She draws a lot of inspiration for her work from storybook illustrations and fairy tales, particularly those that appear innocent at first glance but have darker undertones.

JENNI GLAWE is a senior at Clarke University. She is a social work major with a sociology minor. She loved to write when she was younger, but when she grew up she found it hard to find time. She took a creative writing class this year and really enjoyed it.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH is the Art Team Leader and intern for the *Tenth Muse*. She moved to Dubuque to work towards a B.F.A. in painting and sculpture with minors in philosophy and writing at Clarke University, where her written work and art was published in the *Tenth Muse* and shown in exhibits like the Nash Gallery and the Kirby building. Hannah has received the John and Carolyn Gantz Art Scholarship, Clarke Art Faculty Award, and the Art Slam People's Choice Award. After graduation, she hopes to write and illustrate graphic novels and exhibit work in galleries across the country.

KASSIDY HANSON is a junior at Clarke University, but she is originally from Garner, Iowa, around the Mason City area. She attended Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa for a year and a half of her college experience and then transferred to Clarke in the middle of her sophomore year. She is a studio art major, and her emphasis is in painting. She loves portraiture and figure works, and her favorite medium is watercolor paints. Her future goal is to become a tattoo artist or portrait painter.

EVAN HEER is from Lena, Ill., and is currently in his sophomore year at Clarke University. He majors in biology and minors in writing. He presented at the 2014 Streamlines Conference and is a member of the Clarke Scholars Program.

SAMANTHA HILBY studies art at Clarke University.

MELISSA HOSCH is a student at Clarke University majoring in English with a minor in writing. She has published an article for the summer 2014 Sisters of Charity newsletter, Currents of Change, and was a staff writer for the Clarke Courier during the fall 2014 semester. She



also had her creative fiction story, "Beginning of a Frost Knight," and a literary analysis paper of a production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest" selected to present at the 2014 Streamlines Conference. Melissa was also a member of the fall 2014 *Tenth Muse* staff.

SHANNON KELLY is currently a junior at the University of Saint Thomas. She is from Lincoln, Nebraska. She is an English major with an emphasis in writing. Apart from writing, she enjoys writing and performing music. She plans to go to graduate school after graduation.

LOUREN KILBURG is currently a junior at Marquette Catholic High School in the small town of Bellevue, Iowa. In her spare time, she can often be found in the company of her four siblings, losing herself in any activity in which they engage. In the future, she plans to major in psychology and become a school psychologist.

RHONDA LAMPE is a small town girl from Savanna, Ill. She picked up her first camera in 1989 and was self-taught in capturing images on film. Many years later, she discovered the digital side of photography and the magic of enhancing and compositing her photos to create an imaginative world for others to enjoy. She is currently working full time at a professional photo studio and, in her spare time, she creates her own fine art images, which she displays at various local galleries.

PATRICK LENANE is currently a student at the University of Iowa, but spent two years at Clarke University where the faculty, especially Anna Kelley, instilled a newfound love of writing in him. He is majoring in communication studies with a minor in English, all while acquiring an undergraduate writing certificate. He plans to continue writing after college, no matter where he ends up.

RACHEL MANS is a 2006 Presidential Scholar in the arts for fiction and an alumna of the Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts. She attended Creighton University and Iowa State University for degrees in English (B.A.) and Literature (M.A.), and her work has been published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *KneeJerk Review*, and the anthology *The Way We Sleep*. You can follow her @rmckennyisu.

MAGGIE MAY is a non-traditional second degree student at Clarke studying elementary education. She has worked in the past as a newspaper reporter, para-educator, substitute teacher, and stay-at-home mom. She lives in Dubuque where she juggles parenting, marriage, writing lesson plans, teaching, homework, housework, and all that is her life. In her free time she enjoys reading and writing poetry, and she does laundry, which she really doesn't enjoy.

JENNA MICHEL is a senior art and education student at Clarke University. She is originally from Bellevue, Iowa.

EMILY PAPE is a student at Clarke University. When her school work or job is not keeping her busy, she enjoys reading and writing fiction, as well as drawing in her sketchbook. She is currently a sophomore and is pursuing majors in art and English.

CARRIE PIEPER is a 2014 Clarke graduate. Since graduation, she has been on the move, literally. In September, this Iowa native took a huge leap and moved to New York City. In the short time that she has been in the city, she has worked on a few theatrical shows and found work in a bakery. In between shows and the carb-overload, she enjoys taking in the sights of the city. Always on the lookout for inspiration for her writing, she looks forward to the adventures that await her.

MADISON RHYMES is currently a double major in graphic design and psychology at Clarke University. She hopes to use the experience she gains in her two majors and elective classes to help her make her own comics one day.

ELIZABETH SCHEER is currently a Ph.D candidate in English Literature at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She holds a B.A. from Haverford College and an M.A. from Oxford University. Her work uses Romanticism as a lens through which to consider contemporary visual culture. Before moving to Madison, she was a middle school art teacher in Philadelphia. That city continues to influence her work, both creative and scholarly. As the artist and filmmaker David Lynch said, "something clicked in Philly;" she believes that it was in Philadelphia that she really came to see the intersections between politics, poetry and art.

EVAN VENTRIS received his B.F.A. from Clarke University in 2012. Evan works primarily in oil paint on panel but has also produced digital art and sculpture. He focuses on landscapes and surrealism and is influenced by his rural, eastern-Iowa surroundings. Evan is fascinated with photorealism and enjoys the challenges this technique offers. Evan has exhibited in various shows throughout eastern Iowa; his surreal digital work has been published in *EXPOSE* and *Direct Art*. Evan is married and has three cats, but he wishes he had one dog. Evan lives and works in rural Dubuque county.

GREG WHITE is a Clarke graduate. He learned a lot there. He's taken that knowledge and has applied it to his career. Sometimes he writes.



