



The Windy Hill review. 2012

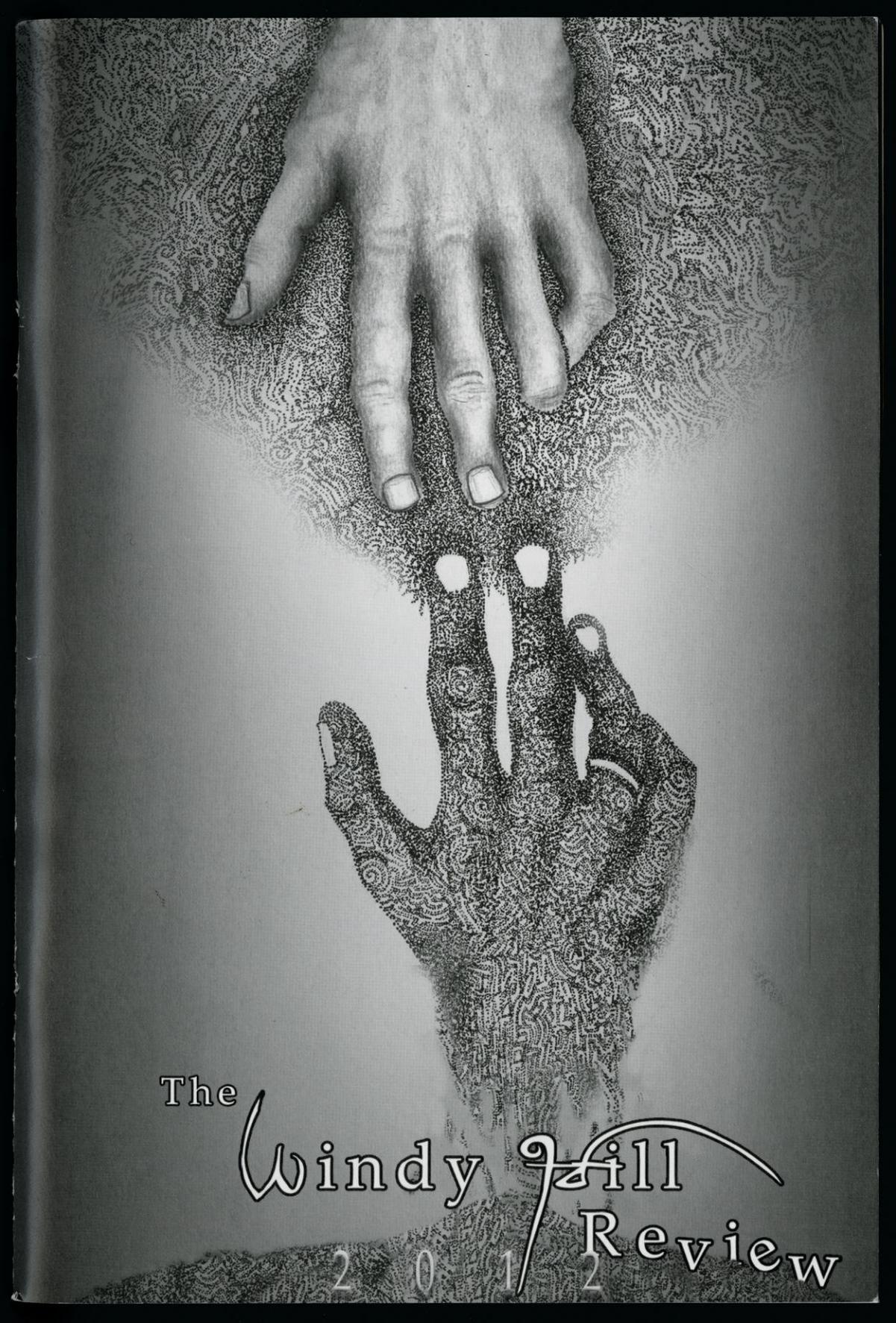
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The
Windy Hill
Review

2011



The Windy Hill Review

34th Edition
2012



A Campus of the University of Wisconsin Colleges

1500 N University Drive
Waukesha, WI 53188

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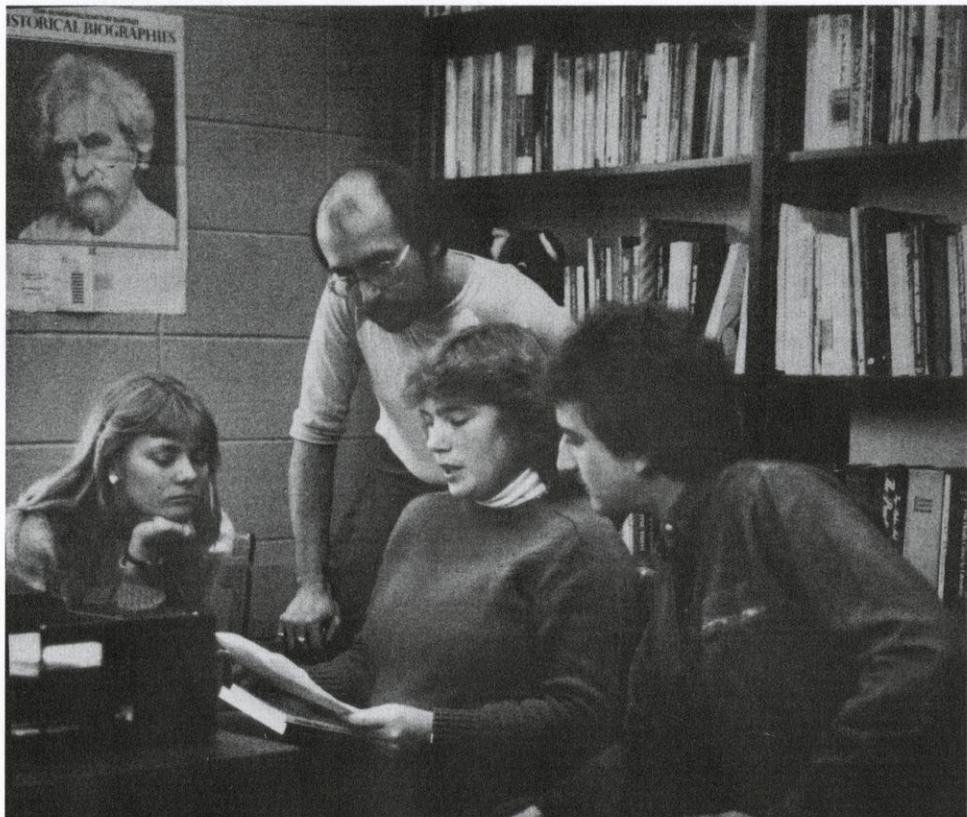
Front Cover Artwork by:

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The Windy Hill Staff would like to thank all of the writers and artists who contributed their creative works to this collection.

If you would like to contribute to future editions of this publication, please send your poetry, short stories, or art to gahrenho@uwc.edu. Please limit your submissions to no more than 5 poems and no more than 2 stories.

In Dedication To
Dr. Philip Zweifel
1946-2011



Dr. Zweifel led the English department and the campus for 35 years as a professor, an associate dean, and a father and founder to *The Windy Hill Review*. In addition to reading and editing countless poems and stories, he was responsible for overseeing 17 years of the literary magazine. Even after his time directly affiliated with the publication, he offered his expertise to those carrying on the tradition of the magazine.

We, the current staff of *The Windy Hill Review*, are eternally grateful to him. His spirit and enthusiasm for literature will live on through our continued efforts to publish the best creative works of local authors and artists.

Table of Contents

Listening	Mary Jo Balistreri	5
Ode to Phil Zweifel's Golf Shot	Greg Ahrenhoerster	6
I asked God	Katy Phillips	7
Artwork	Joe Christenson	8
Higher	Mollie Nelson	9
Laliophobia	Valerie Vinyard	13
Dancer Feet	Caitlin O'Malley	13
Scars	Emily Coonen	14
I Have Forgotten	Karen Barsamian	20
Emmanuel: The Poison of Love	Caitlin O'Malley	21
Your Song	Kathrine Yetz	22
Artwork	Matt Ahrens	23
A New World	Matt Ahrens	24
Telemarketing	Salvadore Buggeyes	31
Clouds over Babel/Without End, Amen	Salvadore Buggeyes	31
The Distance	Valerie Vinyard	32
Artwork	Sarah Krutke	35
The Gremlins	Sean Raduechel	36
Armageddon is Being Televised	Carlos Melendez	37
Hiding Out	Paula Anderson	38
E.D.	Jacalyn Nolan	39
Trapped	Nicole McMahon	44
Our Fate is Not One to Brag About	Brandon Griggs	45
Artwork	Andy Lindenburg	46
Switch	Emily Coonen	47
Anitta Rotella	Sean Raduechel	51
Winter Epiphany	Richard Braun	52
Hope	Nicole McMahon	52
On the Edge	Salvadore Buggeyes	53
Artwork	Joe Christenson	54
Anaphora	Mollie Nelson	55
Rules of the Heart	Valerie Vinyard	56
[When I was Young and You Were Younger]	Karen Barsamian	57
The Trane	John Isely	58
Artwork	Becca Larson	60
The Professor	Lydia Blaubach	61
Poetry in the Church Basement	Katy Phillips	64

Listening

Mary Jo Balistreri

for Dr. Phil Zweifel

This is the year you leave us.

Alone on the edge

of the gulf, I carry your words like shells in my pocket

not empty containers of what was,

but with the fullness of what is. I dislodge embedded sand

with its grainy texture the way you unhoused inexact phrases.

As the shoreline shifts around my feet, rearranges

itself with the incoming tide, I recall your penciled remarks,

how they revised the white space of the page.

Waves roll back and forth, lap at my feet, tease my mind, bring me to another place entirely. I like to think that the improv

of Dylan, Dizzy, The Bird did that for you—scat singing, the song of a siren, wordless scribble, soft tongued, fricative,

beyond our grasp, forever beckoning.

I hold a conch to my ear, your untainted sound as vast as the sea.

You left us, Dr. Phil, not bereft,

but open to endless possibility.

I take a moment to remember
the sound of your voice, your words and God
Feeling, listening, responding
I value your ability to be a catalyst
of an awakening, to move us toward a more
and peaceful future.
the possibility of a sustainable
the power of the human spirit, the power of love
I'll never let you forget that.

That being, we must be a catalyst
to help move and lead
just as you did for so long.

Thank you, Dr. Zweifel, for your words and your love.
And to Dr. Phil Zweifel, for your guidance in the world of grief.

Ode to Phil Zweifel's Golf Shot

Greg Ahrenhoerster

Phil Zweifel's golf shot was better than yours,
But not in a way that made you feel bad.
This was no giant blast from PGA tours,
Just right down the fairway and not in the sand.
Consistent and smooth, not unlike the man,
It made you feel welcome and want to join in.
And when you shanked yours, he'd give you a hand.
Thank God it was "scramble"; you'd drop next to him.
As part of his plan, Phil's ball drifted left,
Apt choice for this former hippie of yore.
Yet to keep the sport pure, he let his deft
Swing set the tone of "Make birdies, not war."
Hero to many, for more than his game;
We'll try to play through, but it won't be the same.

I asked God

Katy Phillips

if Dr. Phil had settled in

Yes, said God

I asked about St. Peter at the gate,
but God told me Mark Twain
was on welcome detail that day,
Said he knew the man well

I asked about the angels

That brought a rumbling laugh
and a raucous story involving Thrones,
Dominations, Cherubim and the lot,
a mad flutter of wings whose singing
gave way to the sounds of alto sax,
slide trombone and bop trumpet

Never heard such a rumpus!

Fats was there. Dizzy and Bird.

Then a Monk led him away

I asked about the links, the greens

Straight and down the middle, answered God

Feeling reassured and more at ease,

I asked God about the availability
of an American Heritage dictionary

and post-it notes,

the possibility of a thesaurus,

the necessity for a room on Monday nights

I'll get right on it, said God

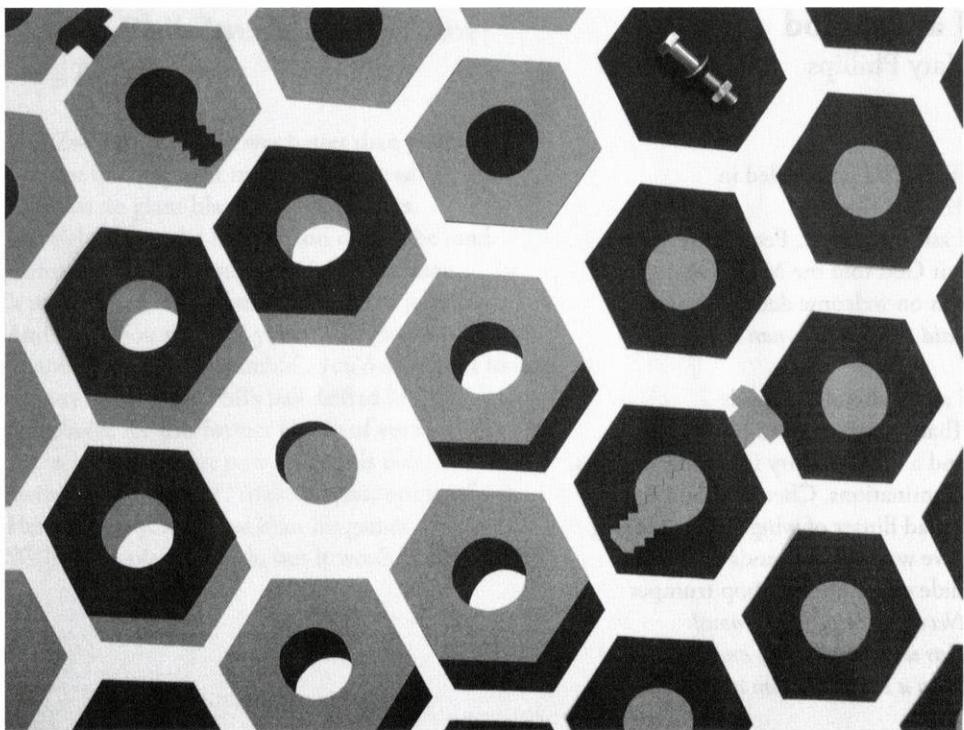
Tell him, we miss him, I said

He knows that, said God

Just doesn't want you to make a fuss.

Thanks to Kaylin Haight's poem, *And God Says Yes to Me*.

And to Dr. Phil Zweifel for YEARS of guidance in the world of poetry!



Joe Christenson

Higher

Mollie Nelson

She stood all alone, staring up at the craggy wall of sheer rock that loomed before her. When she had first started climbing, she had been afraid of the smooth stone, the mocking cliffs that stared down at her. But she was beyond fear now. It had all been numbed out of her.

She rubbed chalk on her hands, ignoring the fact that they were already dry. She stared up at the rocks, remembering the last time she had come here. They had been here on a picnic, to spend time together. His job took up most of his spare time, but he had made time for her today. She had wanted to show him her favorite place to climb.

They had spent the entire afternoon together, lying side by side on the faded knit blanket she had brought, eating the subs he had picked up at the deli. They had talked: how he wanted to travel the world, how she wanted to get a job at the downtown art gallery, how he was saving up for a motorcycle, how she wanted to someday climb Valkyrie in the Roaches.

The Roaches? Where's that? he'd wanted to know.

Oh, it's in England, she told him, smoothing her hair back and smiling down shyly. She disliked how her hair always fell in her face, blocking her view of him.

He reached forward and gently smoothed that stubborn strand of sandy brown back for her. I'd bet you'd make it all the way to the top, he said, smiling proudly at her.

"Jo!"

She was shaken out of memory's grip by Lara's voice. For as long as she'd known her, Lara had never seemed to understand the quality of a quiet voice. If anything, she'd gotten louder over the years.

"Are you coming up or not?" Lara was staring straight down at her from a rocky outcrop four stories above her, her long, frizzy hair framing her face.

Jo realized that her heart was pounding. Was she afraid of the climb? No. Not the climb...

She heard footsteps behind her, felt someone put their hand on her shoulder. Sadie's airy voice pulled at her attention. "Jo?" Sadie stepped in front of her, keeping that hand on her shoulder. "Are you all right?"

Jo swallowed hard, and decided to ignore the lump in her throat. "Yes," she said mechanically. "I'm fine."

Sadie's hazel-eyed stare penetrated Jo, searched her face.

Jo looked away. "I'm fine, Sadie, really." Her voice was choked. She closed her eyes, and let a shudder run through her. She couldn't be weak. Not now. Later, when she was alone in her apartment, then she could let the dam she'd been building overflow, then she could let it break.

She pulled out of Sadie's grip, and walked over to the cliff. She pulled on the harness, checked the straps, tightened the rope—normally she was very thorough about preparing, normally she checked everything over twice before climbing. But today it was all automatic. Her body knew the motions, but she herself had burrowed away from the world, even away from what she loved. The true Jo was hiding—the rock-climbing Jo was putting on the helmet, fastening the chin-strap.

She gripped the first few crags in the rock with hands that didn't feel them. "On

belay," she said. It came out hoarse.

"Belay on." Sadie grabbed the extra rope, wove it through her own harness.

"Climbing." Jo's fingers were starting to sweat.

"Climb on."

Jo started up the wall, keeping her eyes on Lara. She stood above Jo, feeding the rope slowly through her own harness, helping her up past the hard spots. She could feel the extra strain on the rope when Lara pulled her up a bit.

"Don't help me!" Jo snapped.

Lara's eyes widened. Jo never snapped.

Jo saw the way Lara's face drooped—with her hair fanned out around her face, it reminded Jo of a dying sunflower.

Immediately Jo's heart was pinched with guilt. But she couldn't apologize. She'd sworn she'd never apologize.

She could picture him now, standing in her doorway last April. It had been a rainy day, and he'd come to tell her that he had been laid off from his job. He was royally angry, stomping around her apartment, muttering first to her and then to himself and then to her again. He even struck at her lamp in an existential rant to his boss.

She remembered trying to console him, trying to hug him, to kiss his cheek, to tell him it would all be okay.

It's all right, honey. I'm sure you'll find another job. You're so smart, so competent. I'd hire you in a minute.

No, he replied, you don't understand, this changes everything.

They had talked about their future together before, but he hadn't formally proposed yet. So she asked him: Why does it have to change everything? I still love you. It's okay, we can wait.

He turned on her then, like a cornered animal. The hostile look in his eyes had frightened her. And then he had said it: If I can't find another job, you might not have anything to wait for in a few months.

She had hugged him, even tighter than before. Fear pounded in her heart, like a fist beating at a locked door. But she ignored it. She closed her eyes and pushed it deep inside herself, where it couldn't come back out. I promise I'll wait for you, she had told him.

"What are you waiting for?" Sadie tugged on the lead rope, pulling on Jo's harness.

Jo stared down at her and briefly wondered, *who is that?*

"Aren't you going to keep climbing?" Sadie yelled, her voiced edged with impatience.

Jo turned her face to the rock again, and bit her lip. She didn't answer Sadie, but kept climbing. Her muscles burned with the effort, sweat slid down her temples and neck, but she didn't stop: she kept going, never stopping. Her lungs were stinging. Her hands felt now like they were going to fall off her arms, but still she kept on.

She put too much weight on a piece of rock jutting out from the wall. It broke with a rumbling snap and fell away.

And Jo fell with it.

Her mouth was frozen in a silent scream—no sound, just cold, bare emotion. Her hands clawed at the rock; one of her fingernails tore off. Her head slammed into stone. She could feel the rough surface of the cliff tearing away all the skin on her knees. Her elbows and head were banged countless times against the face of the cliff. She couldn't think,

couldn't breathe. She closed her eyes and let herself go limp: it was all she seemed able to do.

Oddly enough, she couldn't think about dying. Instead, images of summer grass and laughing children and a house with olive green shutters flashed through her mind's eye. A keen yearning pierced the terror that gripped her heart. She wanted—what?

She spun down the rock. The side of her face smashed into the stone's face, a rough kiss.

She could hear Sadie screaming beneath her. She twisted, let go, she was facing downward, feeling as if she were right there in front of Sadie, staring into her horrified eyes.

The sound of the twanging rope caused her to turn her head, and she felt the harness bite into her waist, felt her head snap sideways as the harness broke her fall.

Lara was standing on the outcrop, her pupils framed by the whites of her eyes. Her hands were clamping the blue length of rope, her face pale in the blonde mane of her hair.

Jo was trembling uncontrollably: her arms and legs didn't seem to belong to her anymore. Slowly, shakily, she grabbed the rock again, and clung to it like a koala bear. She could barely breathe, and her ears were filled with an irrepressible rushing sound.

She leaned into the rock, her shivering fingers splayed against the stone, her toes hugging the crags in the cliff's face. And there, her face against the cold, unyielding rock, she let the dam break, and let all the tears she'd been holding in flood out.

She was seeing his face again, how red it had looked in the stained glass of the art gallery's main hallway. It had been a difficult evening for them both: he was sullen and unresponsive to everything she said, everything she did, and it made her feel helpless and unworthy.

They were walking out of the art gallery. Her arm was intertwined with his, her gait slowed to match his. He was looking at the stained glass windows, how the setting sun lit them up and made them sparkle like the ocean.

And then, without any explanation, he pulled his arm away from hers, put both hands on the railing. She came up beside him, asked him: Honey, what's wrong?

And then he looked at her, as he would look at a stranger. It chilled her to the very core of her being. And even before the words were out of his mouth, she thought to herself, this is it.

I don't think we should be together anymore, he had said. My future is too uncertain, and... there's too many things about us that bother me—I just don't think this will work anymore.

She didn't cry. She was strong, just as she'd always promised herself she would be in a case like this. She felt her face stiffen into a mask, painted with icy blankness. The ice slid down from her mask and settled in her heart, squeezing it until it couldn't possibly beat, not under all that pressure... yet she wanted it to.

No, it's working fine, honey. Just because you lost your job doesn't mean we have to stop seeing each other. She laid her hand on his, and wanted to laugh because she'd taken such pains to paint her nails a sparkly pink for that evening. She hated painting her nails, but he had always told her he thought it made her hands look elegant. Now her hands just looked garish.

He drew his hand out from under hers, and looked stiffly at a square of blood-red glass. No, he said quietly, it's not working.

I don't understand, she stammered. I always thought we were perfect for each other. He looked her straight in the eye and then said it, each syllable falling distinctly

from his lips: You're just not right for me. You're not...enough.

He drove her home as usual. Neither of them spoke a word for the whole ride. When she got out, he didn't walk her to the door, he didn't say goodnight—but he did sit in the parking lot and watched her walk alone to her apartment door and fumble with her keys, his headlights trained on her the whole time, as if to put her on display for the whole neighborhood to see.

She opened the door, closed it, and collapsed on the floor. She stayed there, letting the cold in her heart consume her.

She hadn't really let herself feel anything since then. She wasn't even sure if she could feel anything now, dangling so many feet between her goal and her starting place. She took in a shaky breath, leaned in closer to the rock. Somehow, everything around her seemed dark, as if a thundercloud was blocking out the sun.

She looked up, and saw that, yes, there was a cloud in front of the sun. She was blinded suddenly, as the cloud moved away and she could see—light. It poured down on her, flooding the shadows of the rock.

She began to climb, not caring that her head was pounding with pain, that her finger was all bloody, that her knees were all scraped up, that her heart was broken. She kept climbing, shakily at first, unsure of herself, then more firmly as she kept on.

She paused again to wipe the sweat out of her eyes. She looked up, squinted into the sunlight. She was almost there. She was close to the top. Just a little higher.

Laliophobia

Valerie Vinyard

Fingers crack like branches
from the contact eyes don't make.
Lonely hearts shuffle around,
as together they will break.

Dark skies mask the earth;
the lost retreat to caves.

We can't hide forever here;
this silence won't keep us safe.

Dancer Feet

Caitlin O'Malley

All you see are the beautiful silky pink Ponte shoes
Underneath hide broken, bruised, bleeding toes.

Scars

Emily Coonen

When Jeremy woke in the night, it shouldn't have surprised him to find Jenna standing at the end of his bed. His heart dropped when he saw the figure standing in the shadows. It did not take him long to recognize her skinny figure, and poof of hair, the color of the inside of a grapefruit. A color you expected to see in a sunset. She was twisting her bracelet around and around her wrist. Something she only did when something was not right. Her brow was furrowed and she was staring at one spot of the carpeted floor.

Jeremy sat up, untangling his sheets from around his legs. He stretched to turn on the lamp on his desk and glanced at Mike's bed. It was empty.

"What's wrong?" Jeremy whispered, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Jenna twitched at the sound of his voice as though she'd forgotten she wasn't alone. She came around and sat lightly on the edge of his bed.

"Nothing's wrong. Who says anything's wrong?" She didn't bother whispering. Her voice seemed too loud in the dark. Jeremy wrapped his fingers around her wrist where she was still twisting the bracelet. She dropped her hands to her lap, knowing she was caught. She tucked her hair behind one ear. The roots were starting to fade back to blonde. It immediately freed itself and sprang back around her face. She didn't say anything, just pulled her knees up and tucked them under her chin. Her feet dragged dried dirt onto his sheets. It was like she hadn't heard him.

"Did you take your medication this morning?" he asked. She took one for anxiety, one for depression, and one for mood swings. Their relationship seemed to vary solely on her medication. When she took it, she was stable, and their friendship was good. When she forgot, he felt like her babysitter.

"Fuck you! Of course I took them." She snapped out of whatever funk she'd been in. She stood, then perched, tucked into herself, on the edge of Mike's bed, distancing herself from Jeremy. Her body tensed like a statue and she glared at him in stony silence.

"Are they working?" Jeremy asked, his voice balancing between amusement and exasperation.

"Probably not," she admitted, softening.

"How did you get in here?" Jenna lived in a different building. She didn't have a key to get into his, or into his room. She glanced at the window, a wry smile briefly crossing her lips. It was finally warm enough that the window was kept open at night.

Jeremy went to the window and glanced into the night. Students were still walking around. The campus seemed never to sleep. Beneath the window was the roof of the entrance to the building. Hanging over that were several thick branches stemming from an oak tree. Jenna had always been the best at climbing trees. She was usually good at whatever she did. Jeremy attributed that to the fact that she did everything fearlessly. Climbing through his window in the middle of the night was not the strangest thing he'd seen her do.

"Let's do something," she said, joining him by the window. In the moonlight his scars seemed to glow. He had one along his left shoulder and several circular burns on his wrist, the exact size of the tip of a cigarette. He pulled a sweatshirt over them.

"You already climbed in my window in the middle of the night. What more do you want to do?" He already knew that whatever she wanted to do, they would end up doing. Partly because he had trouble saying no to her. But also because she was stubborn.

"We have to go home," she said, her face turned toward the window, avoiding him.

"So go back to your dorm." He flopped back onto his bed.

"I don't mean my dorm. I mean Michigan. You need to drive me." She wasn't asking. She was insisting.

Jeremy was off the bed in one fluid movement, towering over her. He was only a few inches taller than her, but his anger seemed to make him bigger. They were so close he could smell her. She smelled like summer heat and tree bark, and something soft and faintly floral. Her scent drove him wild.

"You told me that wasn't home anymore! Why the hell would we want to go back there?" Jeremy hadn't realized how loudly he'd spoken until someone in the next room pounded on the wall. Jenna pushed him back, her eyes burning up at him through her bangs.

"I don't *want* to go back. I *have* to go back!" Her fingers went back to the bracelet. She was hiding something. For a moment they stood in angry silence. Jenna was breathing hard and frantically twisting the bracelet around her wrist. Her older sister, Amy, had given it to her five years ago when she'd left home for college. Jenna had been a junior in high school, terrified of being left at home without her sister. The wooden beads were worn, the bright paint faded. The cords holding it together had broken and been tied back together several times.

Jeremy sighed and his resolve almost visibly crumbled away. He could not stay mad at her.

"Fine. But it's an eight hour drive. We can leave in the morning. Okay?"

He shoved his pillow at her, not waiting for her response or approval. He was the one with the car. If she couldn't wait a few more hours, she would have to find another way to get there. He gave her a blanket and fell onto his bed.

"I'm not sleeping on the floor." She curled up on Mike's bed. Jeremy shrugged and didn't bother protesting. He only wished it was his own bed she was in, instead of his roommate's.

"Just don't snore," he said.

"Fuck you."

"Are those Mike's pants?" Jeremy asked Jenna, when she returned from the showers on the girl's side of the building. She was wearing black skinny jeans that looked suspiciously like Mike's.

"And his tank top. I'll give them back." She looked down at the tank top hanging off her body. It had a robot and a Tyrannosaurus Rex on it, locked in an embrace. "Are they supposed to be hugging or fighting?"

"Are you ready to go?" Jeremy asked as he pulled on his shoes. Jenna ruffled her fingers through his dark hair messing it up more than it usually was. He batted her hand away.

"I was ready as soon as I climbed in your window. The question is, are you ready?" He thought of the deeper meaning behind her question. No, he supposed neither of them would ever truly be ready to return.

He stood and Jenna threw her small neon green backpack over her shoulder. It was like an appendage. She never went anywhere without it. From its depths Jeremy could hear the rattle of pills. He rarely got a glimpse of what was inside but he knew there was a journal and her earphones and Zune and makeup and usually an energy drink.

Jeremy swung his keys around his finger and opened the door, following Jenna

through it. They stopped in the hallway for him to lock it. On the way out of the building, they passed a tired, zombified looking Mike. When he saw them he waved half-heartedly. He squinted at Jenna's outfit, smiled in recognition, and kept walking.

"Told you he wouldn't mind," Jenna said.

The sun was barely making its appearance known above the horizon. Everything had an orange glow, and Jenna's hair looked like it was on fire. Jeremy couldn't believe he was up this early on a weekend.

"So what is this all about?" Jeremy asked when they'd been driving for a while.

"My dad called and told me I have to come home," Jenna replied. She had her feet propped on the dashboard. Jeremy knew his car was nothing to be proud of. It still smelled of cigarettes from the year they'd taken up smoking, back in high school. The seats were torn and the radio had to be pounded into obedience at times.

Jenna was picking at her nails, avoiding Jeremy's gaze whenever he glanced over at her. He didn't want to bring it up, but he felt he had to.

"Does your mom know?" he asked, and Jenna bristled.

"I would imagine so. Are you going to see your mom while we're home?" Jenna asked. Jeremy hadn't stopped debating it since she told him where they were going.

His speed subtly picked up. Jeremy was the safest driver of everyone he knew. His father had died in a car crash when Jeremy was ten. He couldn't get in a car for a year afterward. Luckily, their hometown was small enough that he could walk almost anywhere a ten-year-old boy needed to get. When he got his license he was fully aware of the responsibility of driving a vehicle. Unlike some of his friends that drove too fast and didn't pay attention. His only driving flaw was that he *did* speed when he was angry or anxious.

"Are you going to be ready to see her?" Jeremy asked.

Jenna and her mother had a tumultuous relationship. She'd always been nice to Jeremy, but he knew better. By high school Jeremy knew Jenna well enough that she didn't have to tell him when they were having a bad day. Jenna seemed to wilt. Her shoulders drooped and she slept in class. Even her hair looked deflated. That was always after her mother was consumed by depression. On days she was in a rage, Jenna became a gargoyle. Stony and cold and perpetually snarling. Luckily, Jeremy also learned how to help Jenna out of whichever mood she was in.

For a long time they sat in silence. Jenna thinking about her mother and Jeremy thinking about his own scars. He'd had his own share of problems growing up. Their alienation from other children, children with normal home lives, bonded them.

When the sun was higher, hanging lazily over the horizon, Jeremy's stomach began to grumble. Jenna was sleeping, her seat reclined, bare feet sticking out the open window. He envied how easily she fell asleep. She reminded him of a cat. Wild, feline, and able to fall asleep anywhere.

Only a year after his dad died, his mom started dating another man. Paul. Paul was possessive of his mom. He feared constantly that Jeremy would come between them. If Paul had tried to get along with Jeremy, he might have adjusted to having Paul around. Instead Paul got mean, instantly instilling fear into Jeremy. He quickly learned to be on his guard, to sleep lightly at night. He still had trouble falling asleep. Sometimes he woke in terror, forgetting Paul was no longer around to wake him with the banging of pans or a lit cigarette against his skin.

Jeremy absentmindedly scratched one of the circular scars on his wrist. Sometimes

it felt as though they were still burning. As soon as Jeremy stopped the car Jenna snapped awake. She pulled her feet in the window and sat up.

“What are you doing? Why are we stopping?” she asked looking out the front window. They were stopped in front of a diner. Jenna ran her fingers through her curls, tugging them into submission.

“I’m hungry.” Jeremy got out of the car and Jenna raced after him. He grabbed her wrist and started pulling her along but she resisted.

“Let’s keep going. I don’t want to stop.”

“You always want to eat,” Jeremy said, surprised. “We’re going to have to stop eventually.”

Jenna relented, and allowed him to pull her toward the diner. Hanging flower pots swung on either side of the door. A bell rang when they pushed the door open, and the rich smell of coffee and grease greeted them. The waitress behind the counter told them to sit anywhere. Jeremy led them to a booth in front of the picture window, where they could see cars rushing by on the road in front of the diner. They had barely settled back in the plastic booths before a waitress appeared, a smile spread nearly from pig tail to pig tail.

“You two are adorable!” she said, placing glasses of water in front of them. “Are you dating?” she asked, handing them menus. From the glint of interest in her eyes, Jeremy could tell her day was going slowly. The diner was almost empty.

“Just friends for now,” Jenna replied, opening her menu. The waitress smiled at them and said she’d give them time to decide. When Jenna looked up, Jeremy was staring at her in amazement.

“What? Stop staring at me like that.” She began tapping her fingers anxiously on the table, sending crumbs skittering.

“I don’t know if I’m more amazed that you were civil, or that you just said ‘for now.’ She just called us adorable. Shouldn’t you be fuming right now?” Jeremy continued to stare at Jenna who didn’t look up from her menu.

“I can be civil. When I want to be. Besides, it’s true. We both know eventually we are going to end up together. You’ve liked me since high school. The time just isn’t right yet. I’m getting pancakes.” She set down her menu and finally looked up at Jeremy. Her confidence annoyed him. The way she assumed he still hadn’t moved on.

“You amaze me. How long have you known we’d end up together?” he asked, condescendingly. Jenna did not like his tone. Jeremy often didn’t trust her.

“I don’t know. Before you even started to like me. We couldn’t be together now. It’s hard enough for you to be my friend. Things will work out though. Figure out what you’re going to order.” Jenna twisted her bracelet. That’s when he realized that she was acting. Everything she was saying was true, but Jeremy knew she was only calm and controlled on the outside. Inside something was raging.

Jenna seemed to know what he was thinking. “I took my meds. Sometimes they’re just not enough. They can’t control everything.”

Jeremy still wondered what was going on. Why were they going home? A place that held unhappy memories for both of them. It was likely this trip was going to undo years of therapy for Jenna.

Jenna was halfway through her huge stack of pancakes when she started talking.

“Mom made the best pancakes. She’d throw all kinds of stuff into them. One batch would have strawberries, chocolate chips, bananas, almonds, all in the same pancake.” She

smiled and stuffed a huge bite into her mouth. Jeremy wondered where this was coming from and if she'd continue. It was a rare occurrence for Jenna to talk about her mother.

"But some mornings I would wake up and find her curled up in bed. She'd say 'Jenna, life is hard. It's too hard today.' So she'd spend the whole day in bed. I'd bring her food but she wouldn't touch it. I'd read to her but it was like she didn't hear me. I tried so hard." Jenna's eyes were staring blankly out the window, her fork resting next to her pancakes. She continued, "Amy told me to just leave her alone. She knew there was nothing we could do to make her happy. Amy was trying to keep me from beating myself up over something I had no control over. But I knew that if I didn't try, the next day she'd be so angry with me. If I didn't try, it meant I didn't love her. Not Amy, though. She could do no wrong."

Jenna quieted as the waitress cleared off the table next to theirs. The clinking of dishes and silverware filled the silence. Jeremy watched as Jenna twisted the bracelet around furiously. She was going to wear away the skin on her wrist. When the waitress moved away to a different table, Jenna continued. It almost seemed as though she was talking to herself.

"Some mornings she was so angry. She'd be in the kitchen, waiting for me to come out. Everything was my fault those days. I was too skinny, I wasn't smart enough, I didn't help her enough." Tears balanced on her lower lids. Seeing Jenna cry was an even rarer occurrence than her talking about her mom. "I never knew which mom to expect. The exceptionally happy one, the exceptionally depressed one, or the exceptionally angry one. I never knew and there was never any in-between. I never knew. I never knew." By the time she finished, her voice was so quiet he had to lean in to hear her. She wiped the unfallen tears from her eyes. Jeremy placed a hand over her bracelet and stopped the cycle of spins. His wrist pulled out of his sleeve and his scars were visible. Jenna placed a hand over them and Jeremy remembered his broken leg and the muscle pulled in his wrist, the scar on his shoulder. Jeremy always said they were accidents. He knew that Jenna was never fooled by that. She smiled at him, sadness for the both of them, clear in her eyes. "I guess we're both damaged."

Back in the car Jeremy couldn't stop thinking about what Jenna had said about her mother and the way she never knew what to expect. It didn't take him long to realize that it reminded him of himself, after his father died. Had his mood swings affected his mother the same way Jenna's mother had affected her? She'd tried hard to be a mother and father to him and he'd hated her for it. No wonder she'd latched onto Paul so quickly. Her husband was dead, and her son was unreachable. It gave him a lot to think about.

Several hours later, when they reached the sign that announced their arrival in town, Jeremy pulled to the side of the road and stopped the car. Jenna hadn't stopped twisting her bracelet for the past hour. The closer to home they got, the more anxious they both became. Jeremy hadn't gone less than ten over the speed limit in miles.

"Why are you stopping?" Jenna wailed. Her eyes looked like caged animals. "We're so close!"

"I've decided I'm going to see my mom when we get in town. We have a lot to talk about. Do you remember after Dad died how I became wild, and unforgiving of everything?" Jenna nodded and he continued.

"Mom tried so hard to connect with me, but I couldn't connect with anyone. She was so busy trying to help me grieve that she never did herself. So when Paul came along and when he... I thought I deserved it. Every time he intentionally hurt me, I thought it was my punishment for being so horrible to her." Jeremy's face was hard. It wasn't easy for him to think about the past.

"I was just eleven when he started, though. It wasn't my punishment. He was just a bad person, and I understand that now. What I never understood was that she never seemed to notice him abusing me. I never forgave her for that. So I'm going home to apologize, but also to forgive her. Why are *you* going home?"

"Jeremy," Jenna said, her eyes cast down. She was pleading with him not to make her say it.

"Tell me Jenna or this car isn't moving."

She sighed and looked around as though waiting for something to save her from this situation. She kicked at the garbage on the floor of the car. A van slowed next to them to make sure they didn't need help, but Jeremy waved and they kept going. For several minutes Jenna kept her lips tightly shut refusing to look at Jeremy. Finally she sighed again and looked at him, her blue eyes dark, but also soft with fear.

"I'm going back for her funeral."

Jenna's words knocked the breath out of Jeremy. The first thought was that Jenna was free. He felt terrible thinking it, but they both knew it was true.

"How am I supposed to feel, Jeremy?" Her voiced quavered. "I feel almost relieved, but I feel terrible for feeling it. She made my life hell, and yet I loved her. How am I supposed to feel?"

"How did it happen?"

"She was out riding. Dad said she hadn't even been near the horses for a month. She just woke up one morning and decided she wanted to go on the trails. Something spooked Daphne and she threw her. Mom was in a coma for five days. They had the funeral planned before they even took her off life support. That was late last night. Dad called me and I climbed in your window and now here we are." Her voice was heavy with tears and emotion.

Jeremy took her hand and she didn't shake it off. He started the car with his other hand and maneuvered it back onto the road without letting go of her.

"Since I was a little girl I've only been terrified of one thing. She always told me we were alike. I have always been terrified of becoming like her. Now she's gone, and maybe I'm free. I don't know."

Neither of them said anything as they drove through the familiar roads. At the church Jeremy asked Jenna if she wanted him to go with her. She told him to go home and see his own mom. Before she got out of the car Jeremy grabbed her arm and pulled back.

"You are not like your mother. She didn't listen to anyone when they tried to help her. You're already dealing with your problems. You have been for a long time. What you said in the diner about it being hard to be your friend. Sometimes that's true. It's not always easy, but it's always been worth it."

For the second time that day Jenna wiped away tears. She smiled and kissed him on the cheek. When she got out of the car he yelled after her.

"I knew you liked me!"

She leaned her head back in the car.

"Fuck you."

I Have Forgotten

Karen Barsamian

I am sorry but I have forgotten your face,
and name and teeth. I do not recall the thunderclaps
outside our window in April or
the times you carried me over oil-slick rainbows
in parking lots.

I have forgotten the deceiving blue of your eyes
and the shows you watched on TV.

I'm afraid I have forgotten you,

and all that remains is a strange ghost of a feeling when I awake in the tangle of a blanket – weaved through every limb – and mistake it for a more loving you.

Emmanuel: The Poison of Love

Caitlin O'Malley

Whisper your sweet poison with
your cracked crooked smile.
I hate everything I love about you

Fists talk a mile a minute
while soft lips part for bitter breaths,
whisper your sweet poison.

Keeping me safe by suffocation
saying it's all for love,
whisper your sweet poison

The whisky fingers that touch my skin
feel warm and smell of stale cigarettes,
I hate everything I love about you

Save me from your reflection
my knight in shining horror.
When you whisper your sweet poison
I hate everything I love about you

Your Song

Kathrine Yetz

“Our best songs are body songs.” -- Stanley Kunitz

You inhale, exhale.
Your chest rises, falls.
You breathe in the night through your nostrils.
A slight wheeze with the cold breeze,
a melody I love.
Your symphony of sleep
calls me to covers,
to comfort.

I inhale, you exhale.
Your stomach groans with the wild rice I made for dinner.
You turn to your side, let out a sigh
that leaves your mouth to cross the house,
giving life to dim silence.
I bring you closer, feeling your heart beat
sync with mine, a duet that turns into a solo.
In the center of us sits a single beating heart.

We inhale, exhale.
You turn on your back, our heart breaks.
I place my ear on your chest and tap my thumb
to drum the beat, trying to keep it my own.



Matt Ahrens

is an artist and writer, involved with many creative projects including film, animation, and music. He has exhibited his work in several countries and has received numerous awards and grants. Matt is currently working on a new film project and is also involved in a new theater company and several other creative ventures. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and currently resides in New York City. He has been the subject of numerous articles and monographs, including *Matthew Ahrens: A Retrospective* (1991) and *Matthew Ahrens: The Art of the Object* (1993).

A New World

Matt Ahrens

The sun was already dipping to the west, casting gold luminance and long shadows upon the world below. Tall oaks and maples rose majestically, high above the ground. A gentle breeze breathed life into their limbs, the leaves whispering a secret to those that would listen. It was a truth that had come to fall on deaf ears, and Frank Simmons knew it all too well. Below his vantage point, nothing stirred in the park. It had long since been abandoned, un-kept and left to its own ways. Though, it would not be long, Frank knew, before the peace would be shattered. Before the machines arrived to do what they do best.

“Simmons.”

Frank spun to face his supervisor. Roy Bronson could have sooner been mistaken for a gorilla than a man. Upon meeting him, Frank had sworn that he'd once seen a picture of him on the cover of a National Geographic. He towered over Frank, his hairy arms folded across his torso. He was dressed in his normal casual business attire. It was a uniform that matched his general informality.

“Yes, sir,” Frank replied.

“You finish that billing report I asked you to do?” Bronson’s voice was stale.

“Uhm, not yet, sir. I’m almost done with it, though.” Frank tried to sound cheery. Bronson let out an irritated breath as he unfolded his arms to look at his watch. “You’ve got one hour, so quit daydreaming and get it done. And don’t half-ass it like the last one.” Frank could feel his jaw tighten.

“I’ll do my best,” Frank answered flatly. Bronson gave him a condescending glance as he turned to leave. Frank’s eyes stabbed like icy daggers into Bronson’s wide back as the beast returned to his lair. With Bronson out of sight, Frank risked a moment’s attention back to the park below, the scene helping to defrost his disposition a little. He then returned his sight to the workstation in front of him, his 3-walled little world of monotony. Folders, papers, and a small computer monitor were the only landscapes in this otherwise barren realm, white, gray and manila being its only colors. A fitting shrine to his life, Frank thought to himself.

A half-hour later, Frank arrived at Bronson’s office, report in hand. Bronson was sitting at his desk in a plush revolving leather chair, holding a cellular phone to his ear conversing with... someone. It mattered nothing to Frank who it was. Bronson noticed Frank walk in with the paper, and reached out his empty monkey paw for it. Frank reluctantly placed the document into it. Bronson turned in his chair to face the window, away from Frank. He dismissively tossed the document onto a pile of other random papers and laughed at something said over the phone.

“Yeah, aint *that* the truth?” Bronson boomed, now resting his feet on the corner of a nearby table. “Same thing here...” The gorilla hooted again.

For a moment, Frank simply stood there watching his ‘superior’ with a quiet, tired disgust. It was always like this. The bastard never did appreciate Frank’s work, and never seemed to do any himself. It was usually up to his subordinates to carry his excessive weight for him, and Frank was the mule he often chose for the task. Frank said nothing as he drifted out of the office.

Frank had just finished shutting down his computer when he saw Lisa McCarthy rising from her work station, quickly gathering her things. She looked up, and for a brief moment, Frank was caught in her gaze. She wore a form-fitting black business suit, the top button undone. Her face had an almost child-like quality, with small, delicate features. Her red hair was trimmed short in a wavy bob-cut, which suited her perfectly. But it was her eyes that were her most striking feature. They were a bright emerald green, as if lit from within by a soft green fire. Suddenly caught in their gaze, Frank felt small and exposed. She quickly glanced back at her work

station, perhaps to spare him the discomfort, or more likely to pretend she hadn't noticed him. He couldn't blame her, if it was the latter case. He watched as she silently gathered the rest of her things and proceeded to the elevators. He decided he would take the stairs today.

Frank walked through the front door into the dark of his house. He flipped the light switch near the door and the room illuminated in a gentle amber glow.

"Home," Frank sighed. "Zeke! Come here, boy."

A few seconds later, a medium sized husky/German shepherd mix trotted from down the hall to greet Frank. His fur was thick and long, a mottled blend of black and brown. White fur ran down his chest and inside his legs, with patches around his face, eyes, and tufts inside his long pointed ears.

"The vicious guard dog arrives, eh? You hungry?"

Zeke cocked his head far to the side on mention of that last word. "Alright, let's get you some *food*." Zeke let out a growly woof at mention of his most favorite word. Frank couldn't help but chuckle. He walked to the refrigerator and found a plate of leftovers from the night before. He scraped some into Zeke's bowl, along with a good scoop of kibble. He added a little drizzle of water, stirred it all together, and placed the bowl into the microwave for a few seconds. Zeke licked his chops and sat, attentively watching as his meal was prepared.

"Here we are." Frank set the bowl in front of Zeke, who eagerly snatched up the good bits of his dinner first, and only after which methodically picked at the kibble.

Frank walked over to his answering machine, and pressed the playback button.

"No new messages. All message play back."

The voice of Frank's mother came through.

"Frank, honey. Please come right away. He isn't doing well. I don't--"

Frank skipped ahead to the next message. This time, Lisa's voice rang brightly through the tiny speaker.

"Hi Frank! I'm going to be free to meet up later tonight if--"

Frank skipped ahead. Next came Bronson's hairy voice.

"Simmons. Hey, I need you to come in this Saturday. Be here 8:00 shar--"

Frank forcefully ground his finger into the delete button, the message dying with a loud beep. Zeke, who was now standing at Frank's side, cocked his head at the sound. Frank had only just noticed him there. Zeke was always a very sneaky canine, when he wanted to be. Now having Frank's attention, the dog stepped over to the front door, and began to pant, his tail wagging slowly. It was apparently time for a walk.

The two continued down the concrete path, periodically bathed in the tan colored glow of street lamps. They were no other people on their path, and no cars drove past. They would often pass bits of randomly discarded trash, which Zeke would show great interest to investigate. Each time, Frank persuaded him to continue past it with a tug of the leash.

Eventually, they came to the edge of their local park. There were, at most, only a half-dozen trees scattered about the rough half acre. The grass was baked and dead in large patches across most of the area. Leaves from last autumn still lingered among the matted tangle of dry earth. On the opposite edge, an apartment complex stood nearby. The windows were dark. Frank crossed about the area while Zeke circled to find the best spot to perform his duty. Frank didn't bother to pick it up. No one was around to care. And hell, he figured, maybe it would help the grass grow.

They wandered over to a nearby bench, where Frank sat down with a heavy sigh. Zeke lay at his side, staring out into the distance. Frank attempted to wipe away the weariness in his head, but his fingers could not reach the ache. He stared out across the dark land before him. Out at the apartments to his side. At the deserted road. The air was still, lingering with an old, stale smell. The stench of industry. Of society.

"I'm sorry," Frank said to Zeke. "You deserve better than this." Zeke turned to him with a look that Frank had never seen before. It was a look filled with deep knowing, and yearning. Zeke's eyes brimmed with the wild instinct of his ancestors. Frank felt as if time itself was turning back. Primeval man, meeting the first wolf. The truth reaffirmed itself in their ancient eyes. The same truth the leaves had whispered of before. *This world is rotting.*

The two returned home, and Frank unclipped Zeke's leash. Zeke trotted into the kitchen, and Frank could hear him lapping up the water in his bowl. Frank entered his living room and fell heavily onto the couch. He turned on his TV, and began searching the channels for something interesting.

Sitcom? "No." News? "No." Sports? "Hell no."

Eventually he settled on a documentary. It focused on the natural environment in one of Venezuela's national parks; it was named Canaima. Frank had seen this episode once before, but was glad to see it again. The TV showed images of wide rivers, thick tropical forest, red streams, open plains, and the distinct, flat-topped mountains of the area. Tepuis, these mountains were called. Angel Falls, the world's tallest waterfall, resided here as well. The water from these falls would blow away as mist before it could even reach the bottom. It was said that local tribes claimed this place was evil, though Frank couldn't possibly see how. It looked like heaven to him.

Frank looked down at Zeke, who had again managed to sneak over to his side undetected. "Too bad we weren't born there, eh?" he said to Zeke. Zeke's eyebrows rose, casting an acknowledging sideways glance up at him. Frank turned back to the TV. He closed his eyes, and sighed.

It was then that Frank remembered he hadn't gotten the mail yet. Stupid of him, since he had passed right by the box after he got back from the walk. Frank opened his eyes and looked around the room. The TV screen was black now, and the room was dark. Zeke was not at his side either. *Probably off sleeping on the bed again*, Frank thought.

He got up and moved over to the front door. He opened the door and he felt his blood turn to ice. Gone was the front yard. Gone was the street. Gone was the entire neighborhood. The entire world. He saw before him an endless expanse of complete empty glowing whiteness. Frank turned to flee back inside, but the house too had vanished. Nothing.

"Come," a voice came from all around him. Frank spun around to see a black table standing near to him where there was once nothing. Seated at this table was a man, or what he assumed was a man, dressed entirely in black. Black coat, tie, gloves, shoes, and a hat with an enormous rim that blocked a clear view of his face. Frank tried to see around the rim, but could only glimpse the smallest patch of white, only enough to suggest that a face might actually be there. The man rested his elbows on the table, his fingers loosely woven together in front of him.

"Be seated," the voice echoed again. Frank looked beside him to see an empty chair that had somehow appeared from nowhere. He slowly sat, his eyes never leaving the man in black. For a while no one spoke, the shock still stinging at Frank's heart. He could barely breathe. Was he actually breathing? What was this place? How did he get here? Who was this person sitting before him? A thousand questions flooded Frank's mind all at once, and the emptiness around them began to gray.

"We have business to conduct," spoke the voice.

"...What business?" Frank asked in a small voice.

"The nature of this has yet to be determined."

Frank's mind twisted into further disarray. "What do you mean?" he asked. The man unfolded his gloved hands, and pressed on the middle of the table. White light shone out from the table under his fingers. From the light formed what Frank could only imagine was a blank holographic screen, floating in mid air. Wispy images began to swirl like clouds on this screen, slowly lining up into rows and columns of small boxes. They began to sharpen and the images

within faded into clarity. Arranged in these rows and columns were scenes Frank recognized, filled with people and places he knew.

“Memories?” Frank asked. Frank saw the man slowly nod through the empty transparent spaces of the screen. Frank glanced downward. “...I spend enough time with my own memories.” The man didn’t respond, but reached for the screen and touched one of the boxes. It grew to fill the entire screen.

Frank glanced up to see himself sitting with Lisa in the lunch room of his workplace. A knot tied in his stomach. He heard Lisa speak.

“So, how is your mom doing?”

“She’s alright,” the Frank of the memory replied with a smile. “At least that’s what she tells me. We do talk pretty often, especially now.”

“It’s good you’re there for her. I’m sure it must be pretty difficult for her sometimes.”

“Yeah, she, uh... She took it pretty hard.”

“How about you?”

Frank grew quiet and nodded. “It’s just not the same, you know? Never will be.”

Lisa nodded lightly, glancing down at her plate. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to pry.”

“No, it’s alright. Don’t be.” Frank tried to smile reassuringly. Still, he wanted to change the subject. “Uh, so, it’s really been 10 years, huh?”

“Yeah, I know,” Lisa said cheerfully. “I can hardly believe it.”

“You know, you look just like you did in college,” Frank said. “Wish I could say the same for myself.”

Lisa giggled quietly. “You’re such a brown-noser!” She playfully shoved Frank and laughed.

“No seriously, you could pass for like, 20, easy!” Frank tried to sound as if he were joking around. But he meant it; she really hadn’t changed at all. She still looked young beyond her years, and strikingly beautiful. That she had even paid attention to Frank in the first place amazed him to no end. But that she went on to consider him as pleasant company was more than he could have hoped for. For some inexplicable reason, she and Frank had become best friends all those years ago. And now, after all that time of separation, she was back, and at the same place he worked, no less!

“God, you always could make me laugh, Frank,” she said, wiping at her eye.

“It’s pure luck, I assure you.”

“You’re a good guy, Frank.” She smiled sweetly. “Always have been.”

The image on the screen dissolved into a swirling pool of color, which slowly began to reform into a new scene. The image now showed the bar where Frank and Lisa sat. They faced each other in a booth near the front. Frank was speaking to her.

“Care for a drink?” he asked. “My treat.”

“No, that’s OK,” she said, politely.

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Thanks, though.” She glanced at her watch.

“You know I’ve never been in here before,” Frank said, looking around the booth. A frosted, multi colored stain glass lampshade hung overhead, with dim light shining through. The table had a glossy yellow oak top, and in the middle sat a small red glass mosaic candle holder, a flame glowing within. “Pretty decent place.”

“Yeah I come here all the time,” she said with a tiny smile. “It’s always seemed more—Oh, hey...”

She had trailed off, focusing on something behind Frank. She reached her hand into the air and waved. Frank’s smile faded as he turned around to see a tall man in his twenties approaching the table. The man wore a fancy polo style shirt and neatly ironed khaki pants. His face was

clean and well shaven, and his physique appeared strong. His short, dark hair was neatly trimmed and groomed. Lisa smiled warmly at him. He reached the table and stood at Lisa's side.

"Hey, babe. Sorry I'm late," the man said. Frank's heart plummeted as he saw Lisa rise to kiss him.

"Hi, honey," she said to him. She turned back to Frank, and the man followed suit.

"This is my friend, Frank." The man extended his hand in Frank's direction.

"Hey man, Lisa's told me all about you. I'm Richard Johnson. My friends call me Dick."

Dick. *Dick Johnson*. Under different circumstances, Frank might have actually felt bad for the bastard. Slowly overcoming the weight in his arms, he offered his hand.

"Nice to meet you," Frank lied as the two shook hands. He tried to harden his grip, but his strength had evaporated. Lisa turned back to Dick.

"So where's Marie?" she asked him quietly. "Isn't she still coming?"

"Yeah, she's just tied up with work," he said. "I'm sure she'll be here soon." Lisa looked a little worried.

"Maybe I should give her a call," she said. "I'll be back in a few, guys." She turned to leave out the front door behind Frank's view. Dick took what was previously Lisa's seat.

"So Lisa tells me you guys work together," he said. Frank glanced down for a second.

"Yeah," he replied flatly.

"You don't like it there?"

"Not really." Dick regarded Frank with a confused look. "I spend my time sorting order forms, keeping records of transactions, and basically pulling my boss's weight for him. All the while, the main branch of the company goes out and tears up huge tracts of good land just to plant more parking lots. There's an old park nearby my office, in fact, that's scheduled to be leveled soon. I used to go there before..." Frank realized he had become caught up in his own thoughts. Why was he telling this usurper about his life?

"Yeah, I hear you," Dick said, nodding his head lightly. "So then, what keeps you working there?"

Frank clenched his teeth. "No other options, I guess,"

"Nah, don't tell yourself that. You've always got options, man! And well, worst case scenario, suppose you don't. Working with Lisa must still be pretty nice, right?" Dick chuckled.

In the deep recesses of Frank's mind, a spark ignited. Fire began to rage throughout his body, but in his eyes dwelled an unfathomable coldness. Dick's smile wilted away.

"Let me ask you something, *Dick*." Frank's voice was quiet and cold. "Imagine yourself as an outcast. You face each day alone. No one but your family really gives a damn about you. You keep your chin up because you want to believe things will get better. But the world around you only continues to get worse and worse. It becomes a place you no longer know or understand. Especially when your father begins to waste away from cancer. You know it's because of the conditions of the job he worked at, but the company twists the truth, and so, holds no 'responsibility' for it. So then, you have no choice but to watch him transform into a ghost until he fades away entirely. Having fun so far, *Dick*?" Dick said nothing, his jaw slack.

"But then, you run into this one perfect girl again after many years," Frank continued. "You know each other from your earlier days, and by some miracle she still seems to like you. After all the failed attempts you've had with others, you think you've finally found someone who can understand you. Someone who can appreciate you for who you really are. So you do things differently; you take your time and prove you're a good and decent man whose only wish is that he won't have to be alone anymore. And then one day, you're sitting with her in a bar, and you gain the distinct privilege of watching some god-damned pretty boy, born with a silver spoon up his ass come along, snatch her away, and then rub it in your face. Now tell me, *Dick*. Do you think you'd be in any kind of mood to pass petty small talk with the prick responsible for ruining

your life? Well, let me tell you something." Frank could feel his voice wrapping around Dick's throat. "I haven't gone through all the shit in my life just to watch some *Dick* take her away at the last second. She means more to me than she ever possibly could to an insignificant, self serving little punk like you, and I damn well guarantee it. Go buy some other woman."

The look on Dick's face was indescribable. Frank could discern humiliation, fury, disbelief, and something else. Dick said nothing, but made a tiny glance to the area behind Frank and swallowed hard. Slowly, the ice in Frank's eyes sank down into his stomach. The horrifying realization washed over him. She was there. She had heard it all. A cold sweat broke on his brow. His fingers tingled. Dizziness swirled in his head, and his breath abandoned him. He turned with great strain to face Lisa, who stood trembling, with tears in her eyes.

"Frank," she said in a stern and quiet voice. The sound of his name cut shame into him. "I'm only telling you this so there won't be any confusion. I knew how alone you were, so I invited you here tonight to meet a friend of mine. I thought she would be good for you. Thank God she couldn't make it." Frank felt himself shrinking. He could hear the blood pulsing in his ears. His mouth was dry, and welded shut. He was utterly paralyzed.

"I thought I knew you, Frank," she said. "But I was wrong. I don't ever want to see you again." The words shot like a thousand needles into Frank's heart.

"Lisa." She said nothing. "I--"

"Just go." She turned to Dick, and began to sob quietly. Dick rose to console her in his arms. He glared hard at Frank. Slowly, everything within him began to numb. Frank managed to pick up what was left of himself, and walked out the door, never looking back.

The screen dissolved and reformed into the rows and columns of memories. Frank was slumped in his chair, gazing down at nothing. He could feel a lump in his throat growing. The man in black said nothing, staring ahead, hands folded.

"Why are you showing me this?" Frank's voice was weak.

"Your faith in mankind has been extinguished," the voice said. "That is good."

Frank sharply looked back at the man. "You're insane."

"Now, the nature of our business becomes clear."

"To hell with your business!"

"I will grant you what you truly seek."

The man rested one of his hands on the screen and the images swirled once again into a cloud. It began to reform into an image of a wide natural landscape. Frank saw as various such scenes formed and dissolved. Hills and valleys, covered in a rainbow of wildflowers. Tall, orange canyons and the lazy rivers running within them. Thick, green rain forests with flat-topped mountains in the distance. One after another, the scenes changed to show different environments all over the world. But in all of them, Frank saw not one person, not one building, not one sign of humanity.

"This is the world as you desire it to be. The world as it once was." Frank stared at the man in black. "The world as you know it is a rotting shell of its former glory." Frank began to tremble. "And so, I will give to you a new world."

"A world without people?" Frank asked.

"The human form is responsible for all suffering."

"No..."

"You will not suffer in this world."

"No! I won't let you!"

"You have already chosen the new world. All you must do is realize it."

Frank leapt from his chair, and threw the table to the side, where it dissolved into the emptiness around him. The man hadn't flinched, staring straight ahead. Frank grabbed him by his black collar.

"Whoever you are, whatever this place is, I don't care! Send me back! Now!"

The man in black slowly looked up at Frank. Under the brim of his hat, intense white light blazed out of his eyes, shooting into Frank's.

"See," the man's voice echoed.

Frank closed his eyes and screamed. He perceived the emptiness glowing brighter and brighter. Soon it became blinding. He could endure the searing light no longer.

He forced open his eyes. The light in his eyes faded. The man in black, the emptiness, now gone. Before him lay the world as he had never seen it before. For the first time in his life, the fear, the pain, all barriers had been removed. He could see far and clear. He breathed deep and smiled.

Saturday, 8:00 AM. Frank walked into the office with a manila envelope under his arm. He was dressed in his finest suit and was impeccably groomed. He passed by rows of empty cubicles and marched confidently into Bronson's office. The man sat, as usual, in his leather chair, filing through a stack of documents. He looked up as Frank entered the room.

"Damn, Simmons," he remarked. "You actually clean up pretty good."

"Thank you, sir," Frank replied, a smug grin on his face.

"There's a lot you'll have to finish before you'll be caught up," Bronson said, returning his attention back to the documents. "I'll need you to get started right away."

"I'm afraid that's not true, sir." Bronson looked up at him with a surprised and irritated look. Frank took the envelope from under his arm and placed it on the desk. "I've filed a request with the main branch for an immediate cessation of my duties."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"It means I quit," Frank replied. Bronson grabbed the envelope and pulled out a set of forms. "Don't worry, everything is already approved. You'll have to do your own work from now on." Bronson stared dumbfounded at Frank. "Have a nice life, Roy." Frank turned and walked coolly out of the office.

Something still lay inside the envelope. Bronson pulled out a copy of a National Geographic magazine with a gorilla on the cover.

"The hell...?" Bronson muttered to himself.

Telemarketing

Salvadore Buggeyes

Came to work late today, hungover, tired, full of spite.

Made a call. Guy asked who I was. I launched into an enthusiastic sales spiel. He cut me off halfway and told me to fuck off.

Made another. Same story.

Made a third. Guy on the other end said "hello." I told him to fuck off and hung up.

Called my parents. First time in years. Dad picked up and asked who I was. I launched into an enthusiastic sales spiel. He cut me off halfway and told me to fuck off.

Telephone lines running from no place to nowhere.

Clouds over Babel/Without End, Amen

Salvadore Buggeyes

I want to change the world.

To tear it all down and put in its place something different. Something better.

But I suppose that is the mark of all mad men. Rather than change ourselves to suit the world, we will change the world to suit ourselves. History has made that clear, time and time again, and our reign will never end.

I've watched as the tower rose—

As the curtain fell,

As the seas caught fire,

As the people became radioactive dust.

Presently, I watch a stone kicked in frustration come to rest in the center of the road.

The Distance

Valerie Vinyard

Howard's old radio alarm went off at 6:30 a.m., and he instinctively slapped the snooze. Five minutes later the radio came back on.

"Another hot day here in Phoenix as temperatures are expected to reach a high of ninety—" Howard hit the snooze again.

Every five minutes until 7:00 he delayed the start of his day. For the past several weeks he fought the morning. Remembering the hungry dog in the kitchen he began to open his eyes. Howard let the radio keep talking as he slowly climbed out from a pile of blankets. He sat on the edge of the bed, pushed off the covers and felt around for his glasses on the nightstand. Pepper-mint candy wrappers fell to the floor beside empty beer cans and unopened mail. He sighed as his eyes focused on an old picture frame that contained the daily reminder of his greatest loss. Inside was a photograph of him and Maggie on their wedding day, nearly forty years ago.

Howard looked down, settled into his house shoes and shuffled into the bathroom. He took off his glasses, set them on the sink and splashed his face with cold water. Eyes closed, he reached for a towel and buried his face, hoping to emerge a younger man. Slowly he lifted his head up to the mirror and lowered his hands as he let out a sigh. The lines around his eyes had grown deeper in the months since she left.

He put his glasses back on and made his way into the bright, open kitchen. Everything was white in his home, even the dog, making the filth more apparent. Howard let Maggie's little Westie out of the crate and it danced around his feet.

"Yeah, yeah. Quit being so happy."

He let Charlie outside into the square, walled-in backyard to pee on the brown grass, and went inside to finish getting ready.

After frowning in the mirror in his plaid shorts, Hawaiian shirt, and canvas loafers, he stepped into the garage, lifted Charlie onto the bench seat of his grandpa green pickup truck, and rolled down the windows. Another simple, yet agonizing mission to the store.

A few minutes later he rolled to a stop in a shaded parking space. *Stay*, he told Charlie with his face. Charlie sat with ears perked and watched, whining, as Howard made his way into the big supply warehouse alone.

Ever since Maggie's absence he dreaded these shopping trips. Everyone knew him because everyone knew Maggie. *Always blabbing*, Howard would think to himself. But now, even stronger than before, was the feeling of being small and exposed in her territory. He was ashamed to be alone.

Once inside the building, he was greeted by the owner's fat golden retriever who lay passed out on the cold concrete floor. It wasn't the cleanest place; nearly everything was covered in dirt or dust, and spiders made homes in neglected shelves. But considering a staff of five ran the business, he let the lack of tidiness slide.

Most of the time he never made it past the front entrance anyway. He always found the brag board and business card wall more amusing. Howard would stand around and pretend to read the outdated newsletters and flyers over his morning coffee while Maggie shopped with Charlie and made new friends.

"Hello," a small voice echoed as he made his way into the store. "Did you need help finding anything?"

Howard looked up and around but couldn't see anyone. "No, no. I'm fine, I'm fine," he said, as he continued to glance around. *Damn ventriloquist girl*. He just about circled the entire store before he found his way to the dog food aisle and was bombarded by a rainbow of bags.

Which kind is it now? He pulled out a folded yellow paper from his pocket and squinted at the scribbles.

In the dimly lit store on the dusty shelf, the place where the bags of Charlie's dog food should sit was empty. He didn't even bother asking if there were any more in back. Howard took a different bag that at least said "chicken" on it, and trudged up to the front counter.

"Hi again," the girl said with a smile, now standing at the register. "Did you find everything ok?"

"Yeah, yeah. Fine," Howard lied.

She rang up the small bag of dog food, scanning over Howard's grumpy face out of the corner of her eye. He was scrutinizing the tangled harness display on the other wall.

"Ok, that's... \$20.96."

Howard absent-mindedly handed over his Visa, still staring in the other direction as if he was thinking about something important. Nothing exciting was going on, but still he pretended. This was easier than the small talk.

"Debit or credit," she asked, unknowingly reminding him that he was actually paying for something.

"Credi—wait, what? Twenty?! For a *six* pound bag?" He turned and squinted at the register. "What in the hell? Maggie used to pay—I... I mean we got..."

A line was now forming behind him. Young boys were bending under 40 pound bags of dog food and tiny children tugged at their mother's pants, begging for quarters to use in the candy machine. Their agony was ignored as the parents clicked away on their cell phones, never even peeling their eyes away to answer the default, "Not now. Mommy is busy."

"Maybe you just took the wrong kind," she said helpfully. "I think I remember you getting the green bag last time?"

"No, no I—we... get this now. I forgot," Howard lied again, half saving the girl some trouble, and half saving his own face.

"Ok," she said doubtfully, turning back to the register. She continued the transaction, handed him the card back, and stood waiting, as Howard struggled with his wallet. An uneasy smile was exchanged. Everyone knew Maggie left him.

Howard fumbled with his wallet for what felt like an hour, trying to smash the Visa back in its spot.

"Oh, I almost forgot," she said, interrupting his concentration. "Did you need your receipt?"

Howard shoved the card into his pocket and snatched up the little bag of dog food. "Just let me walk out the door," he grumbled, and turned away.

Howard couldn't help but miss Maggie in this moment. Humiliated, he marched out to his car, clutching the bag of dog food against his body. All he could think about was the last time he saw her, in the very same parking lot.

A couple months ago she had finally talked him into an adventure, one like they used to take. It had been a few years since their last journey, and their retired life with no grandchildren was turning stale. She wanted to revisit the Grand Canyon, the place he had proposed to her all those years ago. As if to solidify the adventure, she bought him a GPS for his 60th birthday. Still to this day he had refused to touch it.

When the day finally arrived, Maggie made her way outside, smiling like it was her wedding day all over again. She sat down in the truck, swinging her feet as she sat waiting to leave, and pulled out the GPS. Howard's blood pressure began to rise.

"Could you just put that away, please?" His voice was tense. "We got the map right here." He pointed to his forehead and gave an irritated smile. "And I think I still know the fastest way there."

"Well, it's just that if we'd use this computer map, we could be there by four," she said, innocently poking at the little screen. "I mean I think this is better for us, don't you? Just to be safe."

Howard started to drive and pretended like he didn't hear her.

Maggie frowned and looked out the window, trying to forget about the GPS.

After a while she couldn't resist speaking up again. "I mean I just don't want anything to go wrong. It's our first road trip in a while and I don't think occasionally glancing at your old map is the best way to get there."

Howard's face crumpled. "I don't need a GPS!" He pounded his palm on the steering wheel. "Now quit buying all this stuff we don't need, Maggie. Quit wasting our money—what's left of it, anyway!"

Maggie went quiet and stared straight ahead and the stretch of road they conveyed along, trying not to cry. It was worse when he yelled in the car; she had nowhere to go.

After a moment, Howard's frustration cracked the silence. "We didn't have kids for a reason," he burst. "And then you went and got that Westie dog and spoil it rotten!" Howard took a breath; his face was starting to match the burgundy interior of the truck. "Then we finally settle in somewhere nice, get this new house, and you still beg for an adventure week? Haven't we done enough? Can't we just relax? Now I don't need this computer telling me where to go, and neither do you. And while we're on the subject, I don't want that new dog, I don't want this new house, and I don't want you telling me what to do anymore!"

They were only two miles out when Howard pulled into the parking lot and turned around. The ride back home was silent. He went straight into the den to fix a drink, and sat in the backyard until the sun went down. The next morning, he didn't have to open his eyes to know Maggie was finally gone.

Out in the parking lot he could come to grips with gone. He was an isolated thunder-storm with nothing to rain on. Howard climbed into his prehistoric Chevy, started the engine, and turned to Charlie. "Damn dog." He sat for a moment, looking around like he just got into someone else's car by accident. The faded numbers on the radio told him it was 9:00 a.m., but he felt beyond time and place. He scanned a few stations, but nothing good was on. He needed something. He looked over towards the glove box. It was still in there. It was the first thing he checked for the day after Maggie left.

Howard took out the GPS and paged through the saved destinations. It was a library of Maggie's hopes; abandoned adventures. The corners of his mouth went lower thinking about all the places he never took her. All the roads left undiscovered for nights alone with a cigar and a bottle of gin. He knew where she was.

Howard thought for a moment, looking past the store at the mountain backdrop, watching the clouds lift as the air warmed. There was a whole day ahead of him.

He drove out of the parking lot, but turned away from home, instead following the GPS north; up a familiar highway he used to travel to get out of town. Even though the map showed right where he was, and where the other roads could take him, he still had no idea what he'd see along the way.

Howard turned to Charlie, feeling the tickle of hope for the first time in months. "If we use this computer map, we could be there by four."



an introduction to the artwork

and the people who made it

the question is being asked

and cannot wait to begin

Sarah Krutke

The Gremlins

Sean Raduechel

In the late watches of deep sleeping night
With gizmos and gadgets all clicking
Like wisp mothers haunting in misty dusk light

And to half woken eyes an imagined fright
As their ratchets and sprockets keep ticking
With quick nimble fingers they work through the night

Taking the bolts and widgets bound up all tight
With their clever little wrenches spinning
Stealing the triggers wound taut and sprite

With barely a whisper again fade from sight
Leaving not a wind up spring twitching
For what would one find in emerging sunlight

But a thing quite so queer for morning so bright
One might think a strange dream was bewitching
For dismantling the images bound in our sight

Lie the violated hulks of mechanisms bright
Undone by their small wrenches twisting
It would seem that in the absence of light
The Gremlins had spoiled our material delights

Armageddon is Being Televised (in respect of Gil Scott Heron)

Carlos Melendez

Armageddon is being televised

It's two thousand and eleven, there's no way of changing it

All the revolutionaries are lazy and losing their virginity

Spending the weekends with orange women

With two syllable nicknames and a flair for the dramatics

Armageddon is being televised

There's nothing wrong with love songs

But there's something wrong with the lovers

Healthy skin, tight clothes, and pendulum heart strings

Romantic evenings on the dance floor always start with a clean slate

Becoming mothers and fathers before the third date

Armageddon is being televised

Let the machines think for you

In the future they'll eat, drink, and breathe too

Let them into your homes

It's good when you're off guard and confused

In the future, we'll be set aside, used

Armageddon is being televised

How's the troubled singer these days?

Turn to a major news channel for a full update

It's on before and after the war coverage

A hundred men died today but the album is late

We need priorities, that old battle is out of state

Armageddon is being televised

Everyone is losing faith in religion, in hope, in the value of life

Life is a joke and death is the punchline that nobody hesitates to laugh at

Hours that could have been better spent can be traded for dollar signs

There are no tradebacks while on a gurney to the last room you will ever see

There is no switch in reach when the room becomes progressively darker

There are no hugs or kisses or cheesy movie scores to keep you up

When the microphone is unplugged and you've run out of material

Armageddon is being televised

And we watch with a smile

Armageddon is being televised

And I cannot wait to laugh

Hiding Out

Paula Anderson

Struggling with the particulars of my permanent record
is like walking in the junkyard barefoot
heels and toes finding the details
cracked aluminum pots and pans
auto fresnels flash sun in my eyes
an inquisition or plaiting divinity
I step onto tossed doors that crack and split
tear at my legs with wooden slivers and the dog—
a bated look ready to jump push me into
oily auto parts and latent injury,
when all I wanted was to prove I could do it
find salvation in the salvage yard,
ready to pose, a Calliope, scarves and dress swirling,
standing on a pouffy cloud—
I cross the fenced yard of non-known things
celebrating by massaging my feet in the mud of road shoulder—
cool in rain-snow ready to take my Pink Pearl eraser
adjust my permanent record to read: Living—
an embellishment because the junkyard
dog has a dog's life.

E.D.

Jacalyn Nolan

Eeeeeh! The alarm clock screamed in my face. My head was groggy, and it ached with a dull pulsating pain. Reaching over to switch off the alarm, I grabbed my list.

4:18—wake up

4:36 to 5:26—work out (crunches, push-ups, squats, triceps, jacks, running)

5:26 to 5:44—stretch

5:44 to ?—shower

End of shower to 7:06—free time (read, music, pacing, computer)

7:06—drive to school

7:30 to 2:30—school

2:38—drive home

2:56 to 5:26—homework (make list)

5:26 to 10:12—free time (music, pace, read, relax)

I pushed myself up and off the bed and stretched, painfully aware of every muscle knot, bone crack, and body ache. Slowly I made my way to the bathroom. Fuck, I might as well just sleep there. Everything important happened there. It was my cruel refuge, my sarcastic sanctuary. It was all mine. With all its mirrors, bright lights, spotless counter and sink, and standard primping and cleaning tools—toothbrush and paste, hair brush, heaps of makeup, all neatly organized into compartments in a clear plastic separator container—at the entrance, and further in, behind a closed door, the shower, porcelain bowl and my shrine of judgment—the scale.

98.6. Fuck. The glowing red numbers stared back at me, laughing and sneering at my failure. I had gained, again. Goddammit. I hadn't purged in a while, but yesterday Mom and Dad were both home and they had insisted on dinner together. So I did. And I really tried, but I couldn't keep it down. It was too much. So I purged. But obviously it hadn't been good enough.

Stepping off, I went back to the mirror. I started my checking automatically. Hands around my waist, neck, thighs, upper arms. Measuring it all. Pulling at the flesh and fat everywhere. Distended stomach, double chin, massive breasts, overlapping, rubbing thighs, and balloon arms. Sickening. So dirty and disgusting.

Back in my room the clock read 4:30. Six more minutes until 4:36. $4+3=7$.

$7+6=13$. And $1+3=4$. My favorite number. In the meantime, I dressed in my over-worn black sweat pants and a loose navy T-shirt. I used my hair band—which permanently lived on my forearm to keep track of my arm size and sodium/water retention—to tie back my hair.

4:36. I began. I went through my entire exercise routine—crunches first, then push-ups, squats, triceps with 5lb weights, jumping jacks, and then some running in place—just as I had done the day before, and the day before that. I had until 5:26, and it took me the whole time to finish it. With every move I made, my muscles screamed and my body lost more energy. But I couldn't stop. I could never stop.

When I finished my exercises, I went into my stretches to cool down, and then headed to the shower. Steam swirled around me as I stood under the showerhead. I shivered. It was a constant movement for me now—the shivering. It never stopped. Being cold was standard, and it never stopped no matter how many layers I put on. I turned the heat up as hot as it would go, but I couldn't feel it—couldn't feel anything.

As I shampooed, washed, and cleaned my face, I went through my calories for the day: one Oats & Strawberry Fiber One bar (140 cals, 3 grams fat, 9 grams fiber, 90 milligrams sodium), Salad with two tablespoons of vinegar (20 cals, 0 fat, 2 grams fiber, 70 milligrams sodium), two carrots (50 cals, 0.1 grams fat, 1.7 grams fiber, 42 milligrams sodium), and one small apple (75 cals, 0.3 grams fat, 3.6 grams fiber, 1 milligram sodium). Giving me a preliminary total of 285 cals, 3.4 grams fat, 16.3 grams fiber, 209 milligrams of sodium. 285 calories plus 5 cals for every cup of black coffee which I would drink throughout the day to keep my energy up and my mind going.

Finishing my shower, I quickly towed off and dressed in my customary loose jeans and baggy shirt. 6:20. Plenty of time to relax and have some coffee. In the forty-five minutes I had before leaving, I cleaned my room, re-organized my bathroom and wiped and scrubbed the sink and the toilet, read the paper, and listened to some Three Days Grace, Flyleaf, and Superchic.

* * * * *

When I got to school, I went straight to my first class, U.S. history with Miss Marsters. I never really liked it; I don't think anyone did. We had done U.S. history year after year since eighth grade, and it was getting boring. I still got an A every time though. I hated it, but that wasn't an excuse to do poorly. Grades were important. Mom and Dad both got As all through high school. They were also in student government, and Mom was valedictorian of her class. She was accepted to Harvard law, and dad went to Yale for neurology. And that was what I was expected to do—get perfect grades and join every academic based extra-curricular there was so I would be able to go to a good college. So I did. Until last quarter when I got a B in history, and a C+ in British lit. They hadn't been too happy about that. That had been the focus for the majority of the conversation at dinner last night.

In addition to purging Mom's homemade (aka: fat filled) lasagna, I had stayed up late to work it all off. My head started to bow forward, my eyes were so heavy. I was so tired.

"Sasha?"

I looked up, startled and dizzy from being yanked out of my dozing off; I saw that Miss Marsters was staring down at me.

"Are you all right? You look very pale. Maybe you should see the nurse."

"N-n-no, I'm-I'm fine, really," I managed.

Looking around, I saw that I was the only student left in the classroom. Apparently the bell had rung already.

"I really think you should. I'll call down there and tell them to expect you." She reached for the phone.

"No. I'm fine. I don't need to go to the nurse," I said forcefully and a little too loud.

She gave in reluctantly.

"Okay, but take care of yourself, Sasha. You've gotten very thin," Miss Marsters pointed out. *What the fuck do you know? Screw you.*

"I'm just stressed," I reassured her. "I haven't had a lot of time, and things are just really hectic right now." *Not true*, I thought. I had ditched yearbook club, hadn't gone to art club in two months, and had stopped going to student government meetings. Of course, Mom and Dad had no idea. They would be so angry if they found out.

Students started filing in for second period. "I have to go to my next class," I said on my way out the door. "Bye."

In the hall, I walked through the confusion of passing period. People pushed and

shoved others to blaze their way to whatever class they were headed to. Before I got very far, the hallway started to empty as students settled into classes. I was on my way to bio with Mr. Bryant. The bell rang to signal the beginning of second period. *Shit, I'm late. I hate being late.* Everyone always stared at the late students. It was so embarrassing, and I was all the way in the front row.

I snuck in as quietly as I could manage—which wasn't very, since Mr. Bryant had already started the lesson, which meant that most students were silent—and took my seat. Everyone saw me. I thought I caught Serena, Carly, and Mark snicker in the corner. I knew I was huge—I didn't need anyone else to point it out to me. *Fuck them.*

Mr. Bryant took a second to glance at me, but thankfully kept talking. I tried to focus as my cheeks burned and I felt small vibrations jolt my body from embarrassment. He was talking about the role of keystone species in a given ecosystem, but I couldn't concentrate on the concepts. Instead I re-calculated my calories and mindlessly drew in my notebook.

For the next twenty minutes, I sat scribbling and ignoring the lecture. Glancing up for a moment, I looked at the board to try to get a sense of the general idea of what I was missing. It read: wolves are an example of a keystone species, blah, blah, blah. They have an important role in their ecosystem, blah, blah, blah. I couldn't make myself care.

I was sitting in my chair staring at the board when things began to change. My vision tunneled, closing in on me. I felt myself snap and disconnect from my body. The front of the room started to stretch forward as it reeled backwards and up to the ceiling. Laid out in front of me, I saw the room as if it was far off in the distance. I floated weightless with no control. An illusion of wind blew through me and spun my mind around in a sickening momentum. Jerking me forward, back into the classroom's normal position, the scene morphed into a distorted nightmare.

The students I had been sitting with in the classroom had huddled around my body that had slumped and fallen to the floor and begun to convulse and seize. I felt my heart racing, I hyperventilated, I panicked. Everything surged and I could hear a horrible loud buzzing in my ear, getting more and more intense until it was a deafening roar. I could vaguely hear Mr. Bryant tell someone to call 911 as he commanded everyone to stay back and not touch me. And then it all went black.

“Sasha. Sasha. Can you hear me?” I didn't recognize the voice. My body shook. Slowly coming back from the deep nothingness I opened my eyes a little, as much as I could and realized that a man in some sort of black uniform was kneeling next to me and shaking me.

“Sasha, I need you to open your eyes for me.”

Above me were Mr. Bryant and another man in a uniform, holding a kit. It took too much effort to keep my head up; my eyes were sticky and thick. There was too much noise. Everything was glaring and unbearably bright. It was all too much. My eyes closed again.

“John, we're going to need the stretcher.”

I felt hands reach underneath my back and support me.

“Okay. On one, two, three.”

My body was filled with wet sand. I had no strength. It took so much effort to move even my hands or to shift my position at all—it was energy I didn't have. So I just let them lift and carry me to a stretcher, which they rolled out into the humidity of the late morning sun and into an ambulance.

While the siren blasted outside, the man who had stood over me in the classroom put in an I.V. and asked me questions that I couldn't remember. Nothing seemed real. My brain wouldn't work; I couldn't form coherent thoughts. I was shivering uncontrollably and my teeth chattered. It was all very surreal, and at times I couldn't really decide if it was real or just a horrible dream. A few minutes into the ride, I fell back into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

When I woke up, I was in a gown lying in a hospital bed with busyness all around me. Things felt a little clearer and my head was less groggy. My muscles moved again, but they were so sore I didn't try beyond shifting my leg a bit. I felt a hand comfortingly rubbing my own. I looked up and saw my mom. She didn't say anything, but I saw a tear roll down her cheek. She was looking out through an opening in the thin curtain to a man—who I assumed could only be a doctor—talking to my dad. He looked distressed, angry, and—sad. I couldn't make out everything they were saying, but I caught bits and pieces.

“Her levels are all off and...her throat is...her knuckles show evidence of scarring.”

“What does that mean? I understand what you're saying, but the implications...I don't—”

“Her potassium is so low, she's orthostatic. Her blood pressure, pulse rate, and temperature are significantly below what they should be. Her potassium and sodium levels are all off and her heart is very weak, it could—”

I lost the rest of what they said after that. Soon, though, the two of them came in to the makeshift room. The doctor's face was expressionless, but Dad was actually crying. He looked down at me, and gripped my hand.

“Sasha, the doctor says...Well, he says that...that you have been...”

The doctor filed in with my dad close behind him and sat on a cushioned stool with his hands laced together in his lap. “Sasha, I need to ask you some questions, and I need you to be honest with me. Have you been eating enough?”

“I...yes, of...of course,” I managed. I stopped breathing and my stomach dropped.

“Okay, well, why don't you tell me, for example, how much you eat on a typical day?”

My heart skipped and thudded in my chest, the pulse up in my ears. *He knew. They knew. Fuck.* “I don't know, I eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with some snacks. For breakfast I usually have a breakfast burrito, lunch I get from the cafeteria, dinner I eat whatever is in the fridge, and snacks I might eat an apple and a protein bar. That's a typical day. That's what I eat.” This was my speech, the one I practiced in my mind a hundred times, just for this question, for this...interrogation. I went over it so much, sometimes it even felt like the truth.

“The problem I'm having, Sasha, is that your tests and your weight aren't showing that you are eating those things. What you just told me would roughly add up to 2,000 calories, and you can't be eating that much. Are you keeping it down? I mean, have you been throwing up after you eat?”

“No! God, that's disgusting. I do not throw up. And for your fucking information, I just got over being sick, so I wasn't eating a lot because I was nauseous,” I told him. *What a pompous son of a bitch. He doesn't know me. He doesn't know anything about me.*

“I'm not accusing you, Sasha. Believe it or not, I have seen this before. I see a sufficient number of girls with eating disorders and—”

“I do not have an eating disorder.” I felt my cheeks flame up and my chest tighten.

"I do not have a fucking eating disorder!" My heart began to race and skip. I started to lose my breath.

My mom reached over and put her hand on my head. "Honey, it's okay. It's not your fault. We know this is an illness, you are not responsible for this," she offered.

"What do you care, Mom? You don't, neither of you do. You just want the perfect daughter. Well, here she is! Your fucking perfect child! I get good grades, I have lots of friends, I do extracurriculars, my teachers love me. I do everything for you. Are you happy now?" I couldn't breathe and started to hyperventilate.

"Sasha, you need to calm down," the doctor interjected.

"This is what I have for me. The only thing that's mine! I did it, I'm in control now." Tears trickled down my cheeks. "I can't... I can't..." I couldn't get any air. The room was a blur, I couldn't stop crying, and my body shook. "I can't do this anymore!"

"And you don't have to," the doctor said.

My body started to relax and release the built up tension. My breathing began to slow. I couldn't believe what I had said. But at the same time, I felt lighter and a little bit relieved.

"Sasha, there's an eating disorder unit upstairs here, and I've suggested to your parents that you be admitted," the doctor told me.

I looked up hesitantly to my mom. I didn't know what to feel. She seemed so confused and hurt. And, it was strange; I actually felt a sense of—relief. I didn't have to hide it anymore.

"Honey, I think you should go. The doctor says that—well...your father and I think it's best," my mom said.

My throat closed up, and I knew I wouldn't be able to get anything out, so I just nodded and looked at the floor. I would try.

* * * * *

As I was wheeled through the doors of the unit by an on-staff nurse, I saw her. She was so thin. The girl (woman maybe?) sat in a cushioned chair covered in a flannel blanket, her eyes fixed out the window. Next to her was a silver pole with a thick faded brown box and a clear hanging bag—a vitals machine just like mine. As if she could feel me staring, she slowly turned her head to look at me. I realized that there was another machine with a small tube connected to it, which curved up and into her nose. Tape above her upper lip held it in place. A feeding tube. It was horrible. But she smiled over at me. I asked the nurse to take me over to the window next to the woman.

"Hi," I said. "My name is Sasha."

She looked at me. "My name is Annie," she replied, quietly, hoarsely, almost a whisper.

"It's nice to meet you, Annie." I smiled at her. I wasn't sure what would happen, and I was terrified. But for a moment, I felt a determination to fight back against the voice of my eating disorder.

Trapped

Nicole McMahon

Will this internal monologue
never end?
It keeps me up all night.

Wondering. Thinking. Hoping.

Will they ever hear
me again? Voices
keep me up all night?

Praying. Wishing. Hoping.

Will I be able to tell them
I've heard everything?
Keeping me up at night.

Deceiving. Lying. Hoping.

Will I be able to escape
the machines?
Keeping me alive all night.

Revolting. Yearning. Hoping.

Will I ever be me again,
the way I was?
Staying out all night.

Reborn. Fresh. Hopeful.

Our Fate is Not One To Brag About

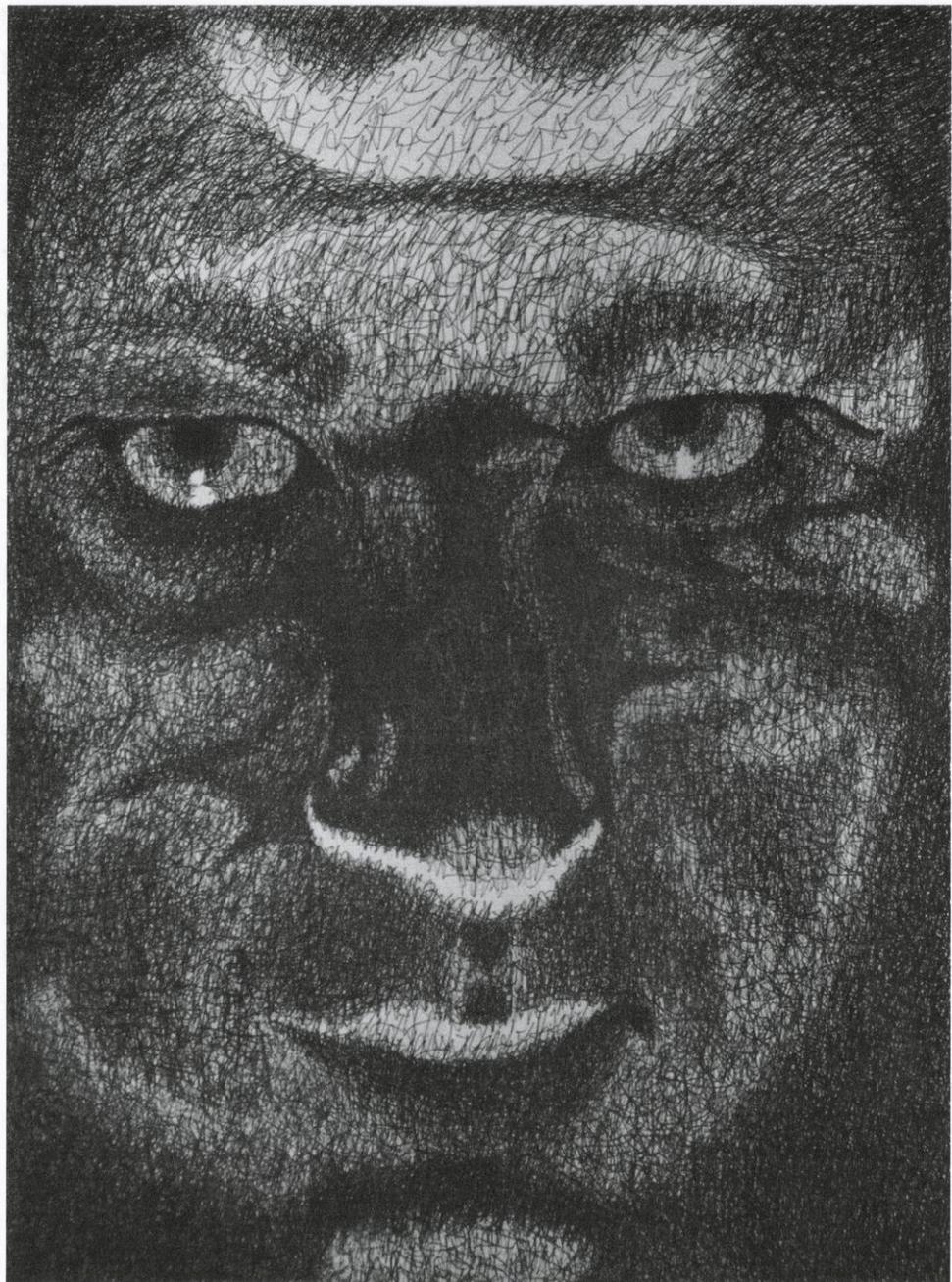
Brandon Griggs

Perhaps all there is, is now
The organ's melody mourns a passing;
These men, these women, one deathly destiny,
As fleeting shadows dance to their epitaph.

The organ's melody mourns a passing;
These men, these women, one deathly destiny,
As fleeting shadows dance to their epitaph,
March on, grim phantoms, to obscurity's drum!

Nations negated in life's equation,
Knew they not their fate, as they toiled onward?
March on, grim phantoms, to obscurity's drum!
Is life but a dead end, a bargain with time?

Knew they not their fate, as they toiled onward?
These men, these women, one deathly destiny,
Is life but a dead end, a bargain with time?
Perhaps all there is, is now.



Andy Lindenborg

Switch

Emily Coonen

From the roof outside May's window, I watch her pull into the driveway, home from dance. It is clear just from the way she walks that she is a dancer. Perfect posture, her shoulders pulled back, her strides confident. I light a cigarette and inhale deeply. A few minutes later I hear her climbing through her window, knocking stuff over on her desk. I turn when I hear her shoes grinding against the shingles.

The wind blows dead leaves across the roof, until they tumble over the side. It is the kind of wind that comes before a storm. The leaves are just beginning to fall from the trees. They are the same golden orange color of our hair.

"What are you doing?" she asks, waving the smoke from my cigarette away from her face. She begins rubbing her fingers over the grainy surface of the shingles. Half the time she doesn't even realize when her fingers start rubbing something. She has an incessant need to be feeling the texture of the world around her. It is something that Mom and I will never understand, but have come to accept.

"I'm avoiding Mom. I forgot to do the dishes and when she came to yell at me I told her I was you." I push my cigarette out against the roof and flick it into the gutter. My fingers are crusted with paint. No matter how hard I scrub, there always seems to be flecks of it beneath my nails or in my hair.

"That hasn't worked since sixth grade."

"Why do you think I'm on the roof? She was not happy. She said she's going to make us get different haircuts so we can't even try switching."

"What would be the fun in that?"

"That's exactly what I said."

I scoot toward the edge of the roof and dangle my feet over the edge. I pull another cigarette from the pack and my Zippo from my pocket. Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to fall from a tall building.

"Those things are going to kill you," May says, scooting to the edge of the roof so she's next to me. She snatches the cigarette from my hand before I can light it.

"Lots of things can kill me." I grab the cigarette back.

"Would you leave a note?" She lays back, and when I look down at her questioningly, her eyes are closed against the sun.

"What are you talking about?" I flick my lighter open and closed.

"If you killed yourself. Jumped off a building or something." I smack her arm.

"This is exactly why mom worries so much about you. You ask weird questions."

"I can't help it. I'm a brooding artist!" she says in a dramatic voice. I pull her hand from the roof. Her fingers are raw from rubbing them against the shingles.

"So am I and Mom doesn't worry about me twenty-four/seven."

I put the cigarette in my mouth and flick open the lighter. Before I can light it, May sits up and grabs it from me and throws it off the roof.

"Hey!" I yell, but she is already climbing back through the window and I am quick to follow.

"I'm doing it for your own sake!" she laughs as I fall over her desk.

"Girls!" Mom yells up the stairs. I am jabbing her with a paintbrush when Mom appears in the doorway. She gives us a look that says knock it off, and we do. Then she looks at May's room in distaste. It is a mess of sculptures, Coke cans, and art supplies. I hit one of the many mobiles hanging from the ceiling, sending it spinning.

Mom picks her way through the room, avoiding the things hanging from the ceiling, and hands the phone to me.

"It's your dad," she says. She continues talking to May as I take the phone.

"Hi Dad!" I say, shooing May's ferret, Bimbo, away from my feet. It scampers back to the cage in the corner.

"Hi Jo. How's May doing?"

Everyone thinks May is so fragile. Just because she's a little weird they think she needs taking care of. They assume she needs me more than I need her, which is untrue. We are two parts of a whole. Neither can survive without the other.

"We're both fine," I assure him, annoyed that he didn't wonder about me. Nothing is ever wrong with me. I'm the stable one, of course, so what could possibly ever be wrong with me?

"You girls are coming over tonight? Sarah and I are thinking movies and Thai for dinner. How does that sound?" I can hear Sarah, our stepmom, talking at him in the background.

"That sounds great," I say, rolling my eyes at May who is clearly bored by whatever Mom is talking about.

"Okay. You girls better leave soon. It's supposed to storm."

"Yeah, Dad. We'll leave in a little bit," I assure him.

"Love you, Jo," he says before hanging up, and I smile with joy. Hearing anyone tell me they love me gives me intense pleasure. For May it's easy. Everyone instantly falls in love with her. The only problem is that she keeps people at a distance, so that's where they love her from. I have to work to receive it. I'm not graceful like her, and my mouth often gets me in trouble. I hand the phone back to Mom and she instantly begins talking again.

"I have to go, girls. Call me before you leave. And when you get there. It's supposed to storm later. Be careful," she adds. She starts walking out the door then turns back and looks at me.

"I love you. Don't forget to empty the dishwasher. And feed the fish." She is so constantly busy that she often has to remind herself to tell us she loves us. She turns to May.

"I love you, too. Clean your room. Do not let Jo drive the whole way there."

"Bye Mom!" I yell after her as she descends the stairs. I turn to May, an idea forming in my mind.

"Stop. Whatever you were scheming, I don't want a part of it." She flings herself onto her bed.

"Let's see if Dad notices when we switch. I'll bet you anything he doesn't notice." I kneel next to her on the bed and bounce up and down. She sits up and I can tell she's debating it.

"If he notices I'll give you fifty dollars. If he doesn't you have to stop smoking."

I stick my hand out and she shakes it up and down. "Deal! I'm totally driving there. I'll actually get us there *today*." I begin to go through May's closet, looking for an outfit that will be convincing.

"No way! I'll get us there *alive*," she says, picking up Bimbo.

We easily slip into each other's personalities. I like taking May's personality. It allows me the mystery I've never been able to obtain in my own personality. Sometimes it's not nice to be me.

"Slow down!" May yells, but I pretend not to hear her. The music is loud enough that it's convincing. She shifts in the passenger seat, clearly uncomfortable in my clothing. I see her rubbing it between her fingers from the corner of my eye. I turn the music down a bit as she starts talking again.

"It's going to start raining. I will haunt the shit out of you if I die." She sucks on the straw extending from her Coke can. Through the windshield I can see the clouds, dark in the night sky.

"You better!" I change lanes and swerve around a minivan, blowing smoke out the window. I suck on a cigarette again, enjoying the burn at the back of my throat. The first drops of rain splatter on the Toyota's windshield. We're still at least 45 minutes away from our exit.

Lightning illuminates the evening, quickly followed by a roar of thunder. I shiver and smile in anticipation of the storm. I flick my cigarette out the window and roll it up. We both love a good storm. May switches off the window so we can listen to the storm. Soon it's pelting down faster than the windshield wipers can whip it away. The cars around us spray water from their tires and are reduced to blurred headlights. The wind is animalistic.

My fingers tighten around the wheel instinctively. The rain is so blinding that following the tail lights of the car ahead of me is the only way I stay on the road. Lightning fractures the sky and I barely blink. I flinch in surprise as May places a hand on my arm. Being connected to her calms me. I take a deep breath and sit back in my seat, not even realizing I'd been leaning forward. Thunder rattles the windows and we laugh nervously at the thrill of it.

"I love storms. I hate driving in them." I switch to the slow lane, allowing the SUV behind us to fly past.

"What an asshole," she says, propping her feet on the dashboard. I can't help but look at her with irritation. "I'm glad you're so relaxed."

"You're the one who insist—" She is cut off by the screeching of tires as the car ahead of us slams on its brakes. My heart drops as I hit the brakes. May pulls her feet from the dashboard and finally her body is as tense as I feel. The A.B.S. kicks in as the wheels slide and I hear May let her air out as we slow.

I glance in the rearview mirror and my heart misses a beat. In the rearview mirror I can see the car behind us, unable to stop, sliding closer. The rain echoes through the car; lightning illuminates May's face and in her eyes I can see she knows what's about to happen. The taillights in front of us glow through the rain. Our car has no place to go.

The crunching sound of the car behind us colliding with ours makes my teeth ache. May cries out as our bodies pull against the seatbelt. I let out an involuntary scream, trying to swerve away from the car in front of us. I'm hardly breathing and my fingers tingle with adrenaline as fear tightens around my chest. My stomach drops as the car slides off the road. May's head hits the passenger window with a sickening crack. I'm turning to look at her when the steering wheel connects with my face.

We're on a beach. I settle myself next to May in the sand. It is warm and shifts beneath my legs. I hand her a Coke and crack the Sprite I brought for myself.

"Where are we?" May asks. Her words come out slow, confused. She looks around with a lost look in her eyes.

"Does it matter? We're together." I smile at her and dig my toes into the sand. The truth is, I am just as lost as she. The waves lap rhythmically at the shore, pulling and tugging back to the water. The sun is directly above us, burning our fiery hair. The sand grinds against the back of my legs. Wind tugs at our hair and seagulls dip down over the sand, searching for scraps.

My chest is tight with anxiety. I cannot place it, but I feel like this has happened before.

"May?" She looks towards me and I continue. "We're two halves of a whole, right?" She finds my hand on the sand and links her fingers through mine.

"Of course we are." She smiles and it comforts me.

"I love you," I say, squeezing her hand. The bubbles in my soda burst against my tongue. Realization breaks over me. We are in a memory. Seven years old, our parents just announced their divorce and nothing is certain in our lives.

Something drops on my bare shoulder. A raindrop. I wipe it off, then look toward the sky just as it opens, dumping water on us. I release May's hand and jump to my feet. I start

running toward the direction of our cabin. The sound of rain hitting the surface of the lake is overbearing. It isn't supposed to be raining. This is not right. I look back at May, but she is lying on the beach, unmoving. I go back to her, wiping rain from my eyes.

"May?" Her eyes are unblinking. I kneel beside her and wet sand sticks to my legs. Her hair is fanned around her in wet, sandy strands. I shake her and pull my hands away in shock. Her skin is cold.

"May!"

The first noise I hear is the tinny sound of rain echoing through my head. Something drips onto my cheek. The second noise is my own breathing, ragged and uneven. Then a pounding in my ears. As I am forced back to the present my breathing becomes gasping. My lungs are constricting with each breath, and a sharp pain stabs my lungs with each intake. My body is pressed against the steering wheel and my seat belt digs into my skin. I smell blood, and suspect it is coming from my own head. My temple is throbbing against the steering wheel. Rain drips through the cracked window.

I wiggle my fingers and toes, trying to fight off the panic that is winding around my limbs. When I try to move my neck, a small noise of pain escapes me. The small noise unlocks my chest and I begin whimpering; tears burn at the back of my eyes. I hold in my sobs for a moment, searching for a noise from May. There is none. I try to whisper her name but can't for fear that she will not respond. My chest burns with cries. In the distance I hear a siren, like a noise from a dream.

I find my voice and scream May's name. The noise makes my head throb. I force open my eyes but the darkness is too thick. Lightning tears apart the dark and I see May just for a moment but it is enough. Her eyes are open but she isn't blinking. I scream at her. We are two halves.

I'll get us there alive.

I cannot scream anymore. If she'd been driving... I can't let myself finish the thought. My stomach churns and I throw up on my lap. I am silent when they pull me from the car. There are rapid flashes of lightning, but I quickly realize it is the flash of the lights on emergency vehicles. They strap me to a stretcher. Everyone is yelling over the rain, but I don't understand what they are saying. I shake so bad my teeth rattle. An EMT places his hand gently on my shoulder. His eyes are soft, delicate wrinkles at the corners. The hair near his temples is gray.

"What's your name, sweetheart?" He continues fitting the straps around my shoulders. As soon as he asks, a thought takes root in my mind. Two halves of a whole. I've seen myself dead. The body had my face and wore my clothing and even had my wallet tucked in the back pocket of my pants. It's me in the passenger seat, eyes unblinking.

Maybe it's because I can't stand the thought of thinking of her in the past tense. Maybe it's because she is a part of me. Maybe deep down in a place I didn't know existed I've always wanted to be her.

They're loading me into the back of the ambulance when I answer. "May. My name is May."

Anitta Rotella

Sean Raduechel

The bittersweet copper of a sip of Earl Grey
Swirling about in the dusty old cup
As pale green lights of rot and decay
Dancing about as if on a stage
Reflecting upon the dead sculpted skin
Of Anitta Rotella that cold winter's day.

Cruel reminders of that black wicked day
When all of the land was cloaked in storm gray.
Much like the blisters that crept on their skin
Or the festering fluids that drained to a cup
When plague had devoured this scene on their stage
And left her dear family long in decay.

But dear sweet Anitta would not soon decay.
A strange little curse seemed to strike her that day.
The whole of the manor had become her own stage
To gaze upon with empty eyes gray.
She sipped yet again from her gossamer cup
The cool golden liquid to her porcelain skin.

Gently a bead of it rolled from her skin
Its snowy white shimmer free from decay.
With meditative pace she set away the cup
Turning her gaze from the warm rising day
And setting their cool empty pools of gray
Upon the floor of the decrepit stage.

For down had it rolled onto the stage
A soft trail left upon her clay skin
A pale bleak residue of shale born gray
That seemed alien to that realm of decay
As it caught the light of emerging day
So did the tea still set in the cup.

No more did Anitta pay mind to the cup
As her lifeless gaze was set to the stage
Where forgotten to her had been the day
When mother collapsed with boils on her skin
Her cries would echo as body decayed
And fell to a ravaged husk of gray.

A doll cold and pale cared little for that day.
She felt not for mortal skin left to decay
Just for her stage and cup of Earl Grey.

Winter Epiphany

Richard Braun

Seduced in the fury,
The swirling emotions
Engulfed by its chilling grip.
Only once lost, can one be found.

Hope

Nicole McMahon

Peaking past gloomy
skies, and dying
grasses, quietly emerges

A single yellow daisy.

On the Edge

Salvadore Buggeyes

Start from where you are right now. Start from here, and then work your way back.

I'm in somebody's guest room in the small town of Pahoa, Hawaii. I have three hundred dollars in my pocket. I'm unemployed. I don't know anyone but the couple that's letting me stick around in their home. They found me wandering around and thought I was lost. I'm on an island. I'm unemployed and on an island and I have three hundred dollars in cash; meanwhile my bank account at the small town bank back in the Illinois is overdrawn. They're charging thirty dollars per day until I pay back the dollar that I overdrew, and I'm in Pahoa, Hawaii.

There's a gecko on the wall.

Center yourself. Restart life from where you are right now. Sort out the bank account, somehow. Get an income. Maybe I'll steal a machete, climb trees and harvest coconuts. Crack them open by the touristy beaches, cliffs. Sell them to visiting yuppies. That's what the other riff-raff does. I'm lost, like I fell off the edge of the world, but I don't know how to panic.

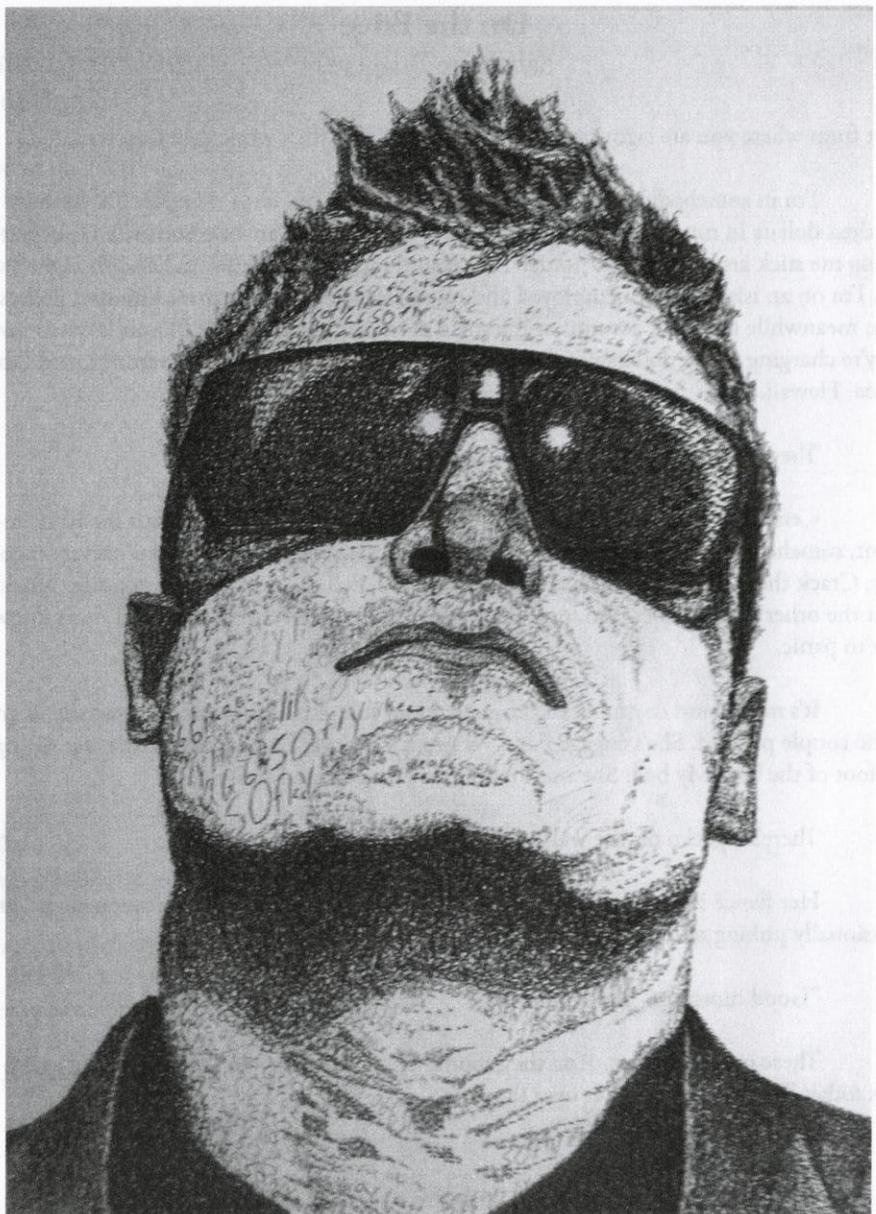
It's my second day here. In the guest room full of paintings that I guess the woman of the couple painted. She's engaged and very much in love. I woke up and she was sitting at the foot of the bed. My bed. She was looking down at me and smiling.

There's a gecko on the wall.

Her fiancé is sleeping outside, overdrunk, lying on a rock wall between lawns, and occasionally puking over the edge into the neighbor's bushes.

"Good morning," she says to me.

These people are lost. And they should panic. But they don't. She's taking me to the cliffs today. To watch the sun set over the ocean.



Joe Christenson

Anaphora

Mollie Nelson

hands,
shaking, nervous, directionless
hanging limp in shock
staining the paper with damp spots

hands
stretched out, pleading, bone bare
in the frosty winter's chill
yearning for warmth

hands
grasping nothing, and hating it
curling into fists, covering damp lashes
catching hot tears

hands
resigned, defeated, scarred with lines of dirt
shoved into coat pockets
the only warmth they'll know
—for a while

Rules of the Heart

Valerie Vinyard

I remember grasping the wheel of my car for the first time.
They say you have control, but I knew better.
Just like I take your hand in full confidence,
control can easily be taken away
by slick streets,
slick words.

For miles, for months, no signs to be seen—
but I know this car, its history.
Now you, I must trust, won't keep much from me.
The clutch slips
our eyes meet
my heart skips a beat.

Hyper aware, suddenly
I don't know everywhere you've been,
where you can take me—but I know where I can go.
Forget the dozens of people who sat in this seat
I only hope you choose to follow me
your engine, your ticking source of heat.

Endless territory to explore can leave us overwhelmed.
We can read a map, but who has time for that?
I just know we all have a past,
and when it's time to go, you go.
Start the car.
Figure it out along the way.

[When I was Young and You Were Younger]

Karen Barsamian

When I was young and you were younger,
we endured the awkward silences of evening, the clinking of silverware
on stoneware. And, in the morning, the alarm clock of fighting parents.
I carried you around the pool on my back
and told you that we'll move away someday – just you and me –
to Seattle or Chicago,
as long as the grunge music was authentic
in our new town.

When I was young and you were younger,
I drove you to my college drunk and left you in the library,
I introduced you to Keats.
We smoked Lucky Strikes with the shower
running and talked about the boys in my classes.
I remember you not liking them.

Now, I'm not sure where you are or
if you smoke or if you've forgiven Mom and Dad.
I don't know if you like boys or girls or both,
or if you still have that poster of Kurt and Courtney
in your room, wherever that may be.
I'm not sure if you still have love for your sister,
but now, in the evenings, I think about how I
said we'd be friends forever
when I was young and you were younger.

Trane

John Isely

theres this thing out there
this thing that keeps me awake
awake on solitary moonlit nights
wondering
thinking
considering
anything but
sleeping
theres this blue train comin
comin over those thick humid valleys
comin this way
blowing that horn
bewitching every passerby
picking up countless passengers
yet never slowing down
right over that way... you see it?
oh you gotta hear it
theres this trane comin
comin through the fog-infested alleys of neon light
splattering sound against blood-covered doorways
its getting closer
yea that tenor sax
theres this trane crashin
that smack got you down
you were there
there with monk
there with davis
there with diz
liver cancer
expiration date: july 17 1967
pulverized brotherhood
theres this thing out there
this thing that keeps me awake
that love supreme
that way you did my favorite things
notes swirling like
the clothes of yesterday
the old washer keepin that beat
thud thud smack slap
washing the filth away for contagious tomorrow
that drum beat
theres this trane comin
pouring smoke over yonder

smoke so dense you could swim through it
birdland is the local swimming pool
blowing that horn
so good trane... so precise
straight? sober?

...and the man who had been found to have it. The reader is invited to identify the recipient of the poem and the author of the song. A girl who, a commercial theorist would insist, is the author of the poem and the author of the song who had brought it, although not yet typed, to the publisher of the commercial anthology, is her creation and thus holding within her heart the meaning of both and, more, the love which often outlived. At another, more spiritual level, the author of the chanson, the dust jacket and an anonymous woman with a great love of art and people who had been held up to the public gaze began employing a language of her own, one she had learned in preparation to teach. However, Mehrae passed her hand against the back of the singer's skirt and held open her nostrils a deep breath, inhaling the smell of her hair, which was laced by the poised pen of the poet. She had written to be held for a long time, her voice to sing no matter, being Mehrae had taken her chanson to the grave.

The extract above, Miss Pittman has written to the publisher and author of "Song," who became anxious to do the same after her plan of closing her senior high school graduation with a comprehensive class of her works, including "Song." The last chapter had been given over to the business induction, with the mentioning of what she was going to do, and only closing her diary with "It gives me such satisfaction to appear and to sing, for which the last year she waited, for her father had well discouraged her from singing before, for that it wasn't good, those were the days when her dad had given her permission to sing in church, but why he had asked it's not because he was afraid of any cross country and had a brother in the army, but she used to tell her father and had told her dad that she would be singing, when she looked over the program it turned out his introduction, "singing and writing" chapter. She was really tired.

"We stand at a history full, History of the United States, from Civil War to Present," she began. "My voice is faltering. I believe that it is a failed attempt of reciting, this section, that," she said, holding up a stack of piano music, "is the same edition which we will now cover extensively so that you will all know more about it, because of you, I have lived and worked as



the beginning of the beginning, the end of the end, the end of the beginning.

the getting older
yes that never ends
there's this time again
that snuck get me down
you were there
there with a smile
there with a devil
there with the
best sadness

expiration date July 17 1967
selected brotherhood
there this there, out there
the thing that keeps me smiling
the love you are
that way you did my favorite stories
now's evening nice
the clothes of yesterday
the old winter people that beat
the cold and crack open
wearing the fish eye, the long gone tomorrow
the down best
there this same people
pouring smoke over you of

Becca Larson

The Professor

Lydia Blaubach

With a shaky breath, she pulled her sweater hood over her hair and stepped out of the car. Shutting the door gently, Melanie turned to get a clear view of the vast complex stretched out under the grey and rumbling sky. Four immense concrete buildings with intimidating Latin lettering printed at the peak stood before her. Determined to remain positive, Melanie reminded herself of her purpose here; four years of studying and focus stood between her and a future of some promise. Though the buildings were distant and cold, they would provide safety and security and that was all she was needed. She locked the car door and began dodging rain bullets in her walk toward the main entrance, struggling to carry her new leather book bag while trying to keep her black dress pants from dropping into the forming puddles around the parking lot. The automatic doors opened to a large maroon furnished lobby where she found herself lost in a buzzing sea of students. She caught a glimpse of herself in a nearby mirror and fixed her neat brown hair from the mess of the rain and her hood. Following the room signs, she turned left down a hallway full of students scrambling to find their classes. She weaved in and out through the bustling crowd, offering barely audible excuse me's and apologies, finding a pathway on the outskirts. She slipped on the rain-slick floor but caught herself on a nearby bubbler. Steadying herself, she inspected the banners on either side of the corridor announcing school functions and inspirational slogans in the school colors of blue and gold. She looked at the room numbers and memorized the directional signs for future reference.

She found her history class and sat in the front row of the crowded lecture hall. The bright fluorescent lights beamed to the front center of the room, fitted with a small stage, complete with a table and podium and white board behind it. The students booted up their laptops, checked their phones, and made small talk. A girl with a gymnastics sweatshirt sat next to her and told her she liked her briefcase and asked where she had bought it. Melanie told her it had been a gift and smiled as she remembered finding it on her doorstep two days before with a note from Jeremy, wishing her well and letting her know that his offer still stood. After a few more minutes of nervous chatter, the door opened and an impressive woman with a pearl necklace and pencil skirt, high heeled up to the podium and began emptying the contents of her briefcase onto the wobbly table in preparation to teach. Fidgeting, Melanie patted her hand against the desk, tapping the ring her mom had given her. She took a deep breath, inhaling the smell of her new notebook and freshly sharpened pencil. She had wanted to be here for a long time, ever since her favorite teacher, Miss Thomas, had taken her class here in 8th grade.

“Be extraordinary!” Miss Thomas had written in her yearbook and that was exactly what Melanie wanted to do; however her plans of coming here after high school graduation hadn’t fit in with her dad’s plans of her working at his shop. The last five years had been spent learning the business inside out, never mentioning what she really wanted, and only sharing her desire with Jeremy. He had understood her aspirations and encouraged her to tell her dad what she wanted, but her father had only discouraged her from seeing Jeremy after that. It wasn’t until three weeks prior that her dad had given her permission to enroll in classes. Jeremy had asked if it was because he was transferring cross country and had asked her to go with him, but she stood up for her father and had told Jeremy that she would be staying. Melanie looked up as the professor turned on her microphone, dismissing any forming doubts. She was finally here.

“Welcome to History 102, History of the United States from Civil War to Present,” she began. “My name is Professor Whitlin and this is my fourth semester of teaching this section. This,” she said, holding up a stack of pink papers, “is the course syllabus which we will now cover extensively so that you will all know exactly what is expected of you.” She smiled and winked as

she handed Melanie the first of the stack and she passed them to her right. The smell of freshly copied paper greeted her as she scanned over the course work, mentally breaking down each day's work and fitting the various projects in her schedule. Professor Whitlin began talking again and Melanie followed attentively, taking copious notes with her straight, symmetric handwriting in her ready notepad. As class let out, Melanie straightened her papers into her bag and decided to use her half hour break before Calculus to write out her history assignments in her planner.

The library was humming with new and returning students, comparing schedules and coursework. The ancient room of carved wood and musty air was in stark contrast with the modern students using their ipods and laptops. Entering, Melanie considered the center area inhabited by a small group of students. The girl in the gymnastics sweatshirt from her last class invited her over, removing the backpack from the seat beside her, but Melanie declined, raising her hands in timid apology, and walked to an empty table near the door to begin her work.

The half hour passed quickly, as did Calculus for which Melanie was thankful. Time had been painfully slow since her goodbye with Jeremy. It seemed like four years rather than four days since he had met her outside her work, an extra ticket for her in his pocket and a bouquet of dandelions, her favorite flower, in his hand. As he had driven away that afternoon with the ticket still in place, Melanie begged the sun to set and give her some rest.

Her final class of the day was Lit 250. She headed down the now sparsely filled hallway with a more solid step, her shoes squeaking in the remnants of the day's rainfall. In the last four hours, the overwhelming banners adorning the corridor failed to intimidate and she grew confident that she would excel in this environment. She would listen, do as she was told, and get the degree she needed to take over Martin's position at her dad's shop, just as was planned. She stopped to orient herself to find the correct direction to take. The sign to her right was a Marine telling her not to take the easy way out. She assured herself that she was taking the responsible route. She thought about how Jeremy had asked her if it was responsible or just safe. On an impulse, she halted in front of the business office door; maybe they had answers to the questions she had not yet asked. She tapped her smooth fingernails against the doorknob, wondering what she could ask about. Not wanting to ruin what she had worked so hard for, she turned to go to her final class but her eyes caught a small sticker at the corner of the door proclaiming "BEE Extraordinary!" with a bumblebee holding a diploma. Taking it as a sign from above, Melanie turned back and opened the door with a burst of enthusiasm.

The busy sound of the room and the disturbed look of the secretary sucked all the sudden composure from within.

"What do you need?" asked the secretary wearing a wilted flower in her frizzy hair, not glancing up.

Trying to conjure some valid reason for coming in, Melanie said, "Umm, do you know where my class is?" shaking her head with a flustered blush.

The secretary looked up with a half open mouth and blinking eyes and asked with an impatient sigh, "You want to tell me what class that is, hon?"

"Lit 250 with Professor Janger."

"Janger?" a puffy woman from a corner office peeked her head out and asked, "Are you in her one o' clock?" As Melanie nodded, the woman scrambled out with impressive speed for a lady of her girth and pulled Melanie by the arm to the whirring copy machine. "She has a family emergency and won't be here this whole first week. If you could just take these," she handed her a thick stack of green syllabi, "and explain what has happened that'd be great. Tell them to check their emails." She smiled and walked back to her office, already forgetting the hesitant creature standing in the middle of the busy office, arms full of teacher's instructions.

"Uh, thanks," Melanie said and fumbled out the door with her bag and armful of papers. She walked down the deserted hall toward the classroom, trying to formulate some little

speech to convey the proper message to her classmates. She stopped outside the classroom door and looked through the smudged window, taking a deep breath. The rain on the roof soothed her stage fright and she decided to just get the little speech over with. Some kids inside saw her and started preparing for class. She let out a small laugh when she realized they thought she was the professor, but was sobered with her next daring thought of what she could do. Be extraordinary. Jeremy would laugh if he knew what she was considering. He would tell her to go for it. Once again, Melanie found herself filled with an unknown courage. Hair in place, shoulders back, chin up, and a firm grip on the stack of papers, she opened the door and walked quickly to the podium. Her steps echoed in the sudden silence of the lecture hall. The drop of her papers on the lectern resounded in a thud, bringing all eyes to her in the center of the room.

She put her bag next to the table and began, "I am Professor Janger and this is Lit 250, Introduction to Literature," Melanie took a quick breath, hoping the mic wouldn't pick up the deafening beat of her heart. "This is my third time teaching this course and I love this area of literature." She folded her hands on the podium and caught the eye of a nervous girl with a pink sweater in the first row. "I am known to be a very tough teacher, but also, I think, a very fair one." She dropped her hands to her side and began pacing the floor as she continued. "Most people who complain about the difficulty are those who don't do their work."

Her voice was quieted as a young man packed up his things and left from a back row of the audience. "Have a nice semester!" Melanie called out to him. Turning back to the class, she folded her arms and continued, "If you work hard in this course, you will be rewarded." She turned back to the front. "Working hard and being disciplined are..." Melanie's words slowed as she looked down at the podium. What are they? Good tools? For her, they had been her whole life; they led to consistency and a comfort zone. Is that why she had chosen to stay? She twisted the ring on her finger and looked up at the students, struck with the irony of being afraid of the uncertainty with Jeremy, yet standing in front of an attentive crowd that thought she was a seasoned professional. What was she doing up here? The thundering of rain on the roof pushed her heart to race faster. Her mind was made up. She saw the girl in the pink sweater staring at her with pen in hand, prepared to copy down any inspirational message given by her new professor. Melanie gave a short laugh at her own ridiculousness and lamely finished, "Uh, they are important." She shook her head to rid her smirk and straightened the pile of papers before her. "Now, due to my tardiness, I was unable to grab my notes from my office. If you could begin the reading on page 36 in your text, I would like to discuss the poem on the right hand side." Not checking to see if there was anything on page 36, she started to walk off the platform, hesitated, and turned back to write a grand 36 on the chalk board. Ridding her hands of the dust with a clap, she gazed up at the mass of students before her, smiled, and walked out, leaving the green syllabi in charge of the class.

Passing her "office," she walked toward the foyer she had entered hours before, slowing only long enough to rip the "Bee extraordinary" sticker off the door next to the business office. The automatic doors opened to a torrent of rain that she strode through, letting her hair get soaked and her pant legs dip into the puddles. Halfway to her car she realized she had forgotten her bag, but she didn't return for it. She didn't need it anymore. She was going to go find Jeremy.

Poetry in the Church Basement

Katy Phillips

It's the kindergarten room
and we are reading Billy Collins
who, of course, would write
a delightfully wry poem, mentioning
the rules written on the wall,
starting with BE POLITE,
redundant directions considering
the setting

We dim the sputtering neons
and light a candle to soften
the atmosphere, a gesture I think
Collins would find amusing, though
he is a great one for atmosphere,
his candles, flickering on the patio

It's then I notice the white aprons
stretched across the concrete blocks
"Why aprons?" I ask. "Robes,"
whispers the woman next to me
"Joseph's coat Many colors, you know."

And so they are . . . dream coats
filled with smiling suns and
glitter stars, a stickman greeting
his stick brothers and tidy sheaves
of wheat, newly bundled

We needed candles and words
These artists drew dreams

— trying to compare what could be coming to the young girls in the basement to what had been left behind but reflected in the faces of the women gathered around the table. "It's like we're all here to help each other," Melinda said, "but we're not here to judge each other." She reached over and took a hand from the woman next to her. "We're here to support each other." She turned and walked back to her office, already beginning the last few minutes of her day.

"Uh, thanks," Melinda said and reached out the door with her bag and a stack of papers. She walked down the dimly lit hall, passed the elevator, walked to the main entrance, and stood in the middle of the lobby, looking out over the city at night.

