



The Windy Hill review. 2008

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2008

Windy
Hill
Review

30th
Anniversary Edition



The Windy Hill Review

30th Edition
2008

UNIVERSITY  WISCONSIN

WAUKESHA

A Campus of the University of Wisconsin Colleges

1500 N. University Drive
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53188

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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.

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Anna and Molly
Angela Linsmeyer

It is late, or maybe very early. The moonlight streams through the big bay window and I am spending another night the same as I have been. Half awake, half in a dream state. My eyes are heavy but I must keep moving, steadily rocking back and forth, just to stay awake.

More than a fifteen minute nap is all I want. It seems like ages since I have enjoyed a night of peaceful, uninterrupted slumber. I feel heavy and slow, like a lumbering giant. In reality, it has only been a few weeks since I've had a decent night's sleep. Lately my average night's sleep has consisted of barely two hours, if I'm lucky. Two hours doesn't really seem like much though.

I sit in the sturdy oak chair that has been around as long as I can remember. It was in my house when I was a child. My grandmother used to rock my father in it at night while telling him stories of days past. I can hear myself humming. No great songs, just notes, whispering little noises to go along with the steady beat of my heart.

Finally, Anna is asleep. It amazes me that my rocking is intended to lull her to sleep and at the same time it is supposed to keep me awake. I can see my bed from here. I long for the cool of the sheets and the firmness of my pillow. Dare I move? If I can only get her into the cradle without her waking. Sweet sleep is well within reach. Her cradle is only a few feet away and my bed just steps away from that.

Anna's breath is steady even though she stirs just a bit as I slow my rocking to a smooth stop. I stand and I am taken back a few weeks, just after Molly and I welcome Anna into our lives. As I close my eyes I see Molly almost floating like an angel. She is beautiful. Her almond-toasted hair that smells like April after it rains and her milky white skin that feels remarkably like that of our young daughter. I long to touch her, to smell her hair, to feel her. I ache as I remember.

The change in Molly was evident almost immediately. The past nine months were hard and long on her fragile body. She is still so tired. She sleeps as Anna wails from her cradle just begging to be held. Molly struggles to get motivated just to stand. Her eyes are sunken and dark circles surround them. She complains of achy muscles and overwhelming tiredness even though she has been asleep for almost twelve hours. I bring her some saltine crackers and cottage cheese. She takes a bird-size bite and pushes it away. She lies back down, but never goes to Anna.

I had never before done all of the housework, but it has become too overwhelming for Molly. Now I have taken on the brunt of the work. As I am washing the dishes that are piled higher than the window that looks out at the giant red maple, Anna is on my hip in one of those fancy carriers that you get from a new age store. It is remarkably comfortable and Anna seems content and secure. Molly shuffles past us without a glance. She does that a lot actually, walking around in a daze or a fog. She always wears the same thing, her unwashed bathrobe stolen from The Hilton on the night of our wedding. It hangs half open in front and reveals that beautiful milky skin. I can almost smell the vanilla perfume she would wear before, and if I close my eyes I imagine

how she would look if only she would snap out of this. Unfortunately I shouldn't be closing my eyes. Damn! I am just too tired to multitask and I break a coffee mug. I'm glad it holds no significant meaning. I wrap my hand in the dishrag to keep the blood from dripping on the floor. Molly just stares, absent from the moment. The vacant look in her tells me she just isn't there.

Anna squeaks in my arms and I am jolted back to the present. It occurs to me that my gentle sway on my trip to the cradle has stopped. I take a few sauntering steps to quiet her. As she sighs I sigh along with her. I picture Molly in her robe. *Maybe I should have washed it for her.*

Tears run down my cheeks but I hold in the sobs. I won't make a sound though. Not now, or then.

Inside I am crying as I drop Molly off, that vacant stare still in her eyes. I think she knows. She signs the papers herself, willingly. It almost seems like this is where she wants to be. As she says good-bye I receive a cold and empty peck on my cheek. Nothing for Anna, not even a look. As she turns away, the orderly picks up her bag and follows her, as if she is leading the way. I long to touch her. My heart aches, but the decision was made. I agonize to let her go, but I promise to visit, as often as I can, with Anna. And I do. We talk of the weather but not much else. She likes the pale blue color of the painted walls in her room and the soft cream carpet that she walks barefoot on because it feels nice between her toes. She is a child. But empty and hollow.

I am back in the moonlight streaming in from the bay window. As I put Anna in her cradle she makes a tiny whimper, but her breath stays steady. I cover her with her fuzzy, powder-pink blanket, turn on her mobile, just for noise, and turn toward my bed.

I quietly stumble over to bed and slowly sink into the mattress. I certainly don't want to wake Anna now. The sheets are cool, just as I had imagined, even through my old, worn, red flannel pants. I feel myself floating in that place just between sleep and awake and I drift away in my mind. I envision Molly in her bathrobe, clean though, with her milky skin that I long to touch just at the end of my finger-tips. Anna's breath is steady, and I feel the pounding of my heart. My eyes are heavy and my breath is slow. Two hours isn't much, but at least it is two hours.

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Wisconsin Winters

Michael Radloff

"I don't like winter," she says over a mug of hot apple cider.
"It's too cold and dark and I just want to spend all day curled up in bed and not do anything."

"That's what cold days are for. I love those days," I tell her.

That's the difference: loving exactly what's in front of you instead of longing for the lack of something else, some intangible distant offering we can't hold.

That's why I'm here in Wisconsin, on the Lake Michigan shoreline, late November, my 25th Wisconsin November.

The trees stripping off their summer dresses, frost collecting on the roof of my car.

Looking forward to December, January, February, and holding a mug of hot coffee to warm frozen hands after shoveling sidewalks.

I don't think about fleeing to Arizona. Much.

I'm past that.

Moved on to acceptance. The window-scraping. Seasonal depression. Adding blankets to beds. Flirting with frostbite. Scarves and fur hats. Country roads at midnight after fresh snowfall and a full moon and no headlights.

Can't do that in Phoenix or Tampa Bay.

Seasons shift like sand dunes a gentle rolling forward, endlessly measuring years that feel like days.

(A co-worker once told me, "just wait until you're twenty-seven, and see how fast time goes then." She was right. I was twenty-five and we worked in a bookstore in lower Michigan and she had those two years on me, knew what she was talking about.)

She sips her apple cider and I drink her cascading chestnut-espresso hair through the vapor off my coffee cup.

She can warm my Wisconsin winter nights to tropical heat in a heartbeat.

Where else is there to go but home?

Truth
Melodee Glatzel

A perfect poise, A knowing look
How much more interesting
the truth which makes me
cry--the tears
Surrounded by strangers
Save one
Astonished by the honesty
questions it
realizes my
truth
is the feeling of failure
All covered by
Fake, flirting eyes,
Confident stride,

they'll never know-the truth

Numbers
Melodee Glatzel

Numbers added to numbers
Divided by the numbers added
Equal average
 middle half
 Not above or below
 but in
 the center
where we all know
 is ambiguous
 can go either way
 a little frightening I say
 To think of going down
 At least there's always up
But what of being at the top?
Fail fast, falling dragging
quickly sagging, believing
 only where I was
 not where I'm likely going
back to the numbers added, then divided,

Let's stay safely in the middle

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Photo by Amanda Sadorf

Koerner Park Zach Hoeppner

I sit, huddled in the agony of a non-existent pretense, with only a bare wall to lean against. The wall is moist against my back, the tiles falling away from the mortar that once held them firmly in place. Dim, fluorescent lights flicker above me. There is a leak in the ceiling. I am kept company by the sound of each droplet that falls into a tiny puddle in the corner of the room. The reality of this cold, dark, and lonesome place precedes the knowledge that soon enough, eventual insanity will ensue. You need not ask what this place is. That is a question to which you already have the answer. Instead, you might ask, how it is that I came to this place.

When first I arrived, I was awoken from a terrible dream, only to fall into a dreadful nightmare. It was the summer after my high school graduation. My dad, mom, sister and I were on our way from Duluth, Minnesota out to the West Coast for a family vacation. It was the first we had taken in four years. We would be staying in San Luis Obispo, California, just north of Santa Barbara, with my dad's brother. We called him Uncle Charlie.

I remember Mom telling us we would be at Uncle Charlie's in less than an hour.

I woke up to a terrible pounding in my head. There was a nurse standing next to me. She had her hand on my wrist. Her fingers were cold against my skin. She said nothing to me and walked out of the room. It must have been hours later that a woman in a long, white uniform came into the room. Her voice was not soothing like I had imagined a doctor's would be. Her words escaped in short, raspy sentences.

"Your sister and parents did not survive the accident." She paused for a moment, as if to let those words sink deep down inside of me, and then continued. "You are lucky to be alive. You have suffered brain trauma and will need to be under constant supervision. It is for your safety. Your aunt and uncle have agreed to handle these matters. They are on their way to the hospital. If you need anything, ring Miss Williams." She waited, and then left the room.

In this awful silence, I noticed the dull hum of a ceiling fan barely turning above my hospital bed. As my eyes began to focus on the individual fan blades, the noise grew increasingly louder. The walls of my room were painted a pale blue color. I heard somewhere that pale blue is a soothing color. Several scratches in the wall to my right had exposed the drywall beneath. Beneath the hum of the fan's motor, I could hear footsteps echoing down the hallway toward my room. A figure stood in the doorway, then moved toward me. He wore a cap that cast a shadow over his eyes.

"I am sorry to hear about your family," he said. "I know what you must be going through right now. I lost my wife to cancer six months ago. We had been married only five years."

"Wow, that must have been a difficult time for you," the words escaping my mouth, I was suddenly appalled by their lack of meaning. "I am sorry for your loss."

"Thank you. I have to go now Bobby, but I will talk to you soon."

He left the room. Moments later, Miss Williams, the nurse came into the room.

"There was a tall man in here a moment ago. He had a brown cap on. Did you see him in the hallway?" I asked.

"No, I must have missed him," she intoned, the syllables rising and falling. "We need to run a few tests on you before we let you go, but we should have the results in the morning."

I didn't sleep much that night. The darkness of the hospital room seemed to hang over me in a thick cloud. I lay there, helpless, as the terrible emptiness of loss began to consume me.

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The door opened and lights turned on. I squinted to see my surroundings. Miss Williams walked through the door. As my vision cleared, I could see that she was glancing down at a clipboard. She scribbled a few things then raised her eyes and looked at me.

"Good morning," she said in a bright and virtuous tone. "Your aunt and uncle will be here to pick you up this afternoon."

It had been two months since the accident. The man from the hospital came to the funeral to pay his respects. Uncle Charlie and Aunt Judith have been so kind to me. We play Scrabble on Wednesday nights and go out to the lake house every weekend. I spend most of my time out there fishing off the wooden dock for trout and crappie. The doctors say I am making a fine recovery. I plan on starting college here in San Luis Obispo during the spring.

It was a Friday afternoon and my uncle was packing up the car to head out to the lake house. Henry the mailman came strolling down the sidewalk whistling some marching tune.

"I'll get the mail," I said to Uncle Charlie. I walked out to meet Henry and said hello.

"Pleasant day, isn't it?" he said.

"Yeah, we're just leaving for a weekend trip out to Uncle Charlie's lake house," I said.

"Well then, enjoy the weather. See you around sport," he said handing me a few white envelopes.

"You too," I said.

I walked back to the car where Charlie was standing with his arms crossed.

"Who was that you were talking with?"

"That's Henry. I got the mail from him, see." I put forth my hand to show him the envelopes, but there was nothing. He looked at me with a smile on his face.

"I'm not falling for that one Bobby," he said, chuckling a little.

"No, really, I'm not joking. He brings the mail everyday."

I stood there thinking of a way to show him that I wasn't joking around. I couldn't understand it, where had the envelopes gone? Maybe I hadn't taken the envelopes from Henry, only shook his hand.

"Well, that's everything. Bobby, would you go inside and let Judith know we are ready to leave," Charlie said to me.

We arrived at the cabin later that afternoon. After everything was unpacked and we were settled in, I went for a walk down by the lake. It was dusk and all around the chirping of crickets could be heard. Through the trees I could see the sunset reflecting off the water's glassy surface. As I approached the shore line there were two figures standing out on the dock. They were looking away from me out toward the lake. Just as the sunlight faded, they turned toward me. I ran out onto the where they had been standing, but there was now one there. I called out, "Mom, Dad, are you guys there?" There was no reply. "Where are you?" Again, there was no reply, just the stillness of night.

On the following Wednesday we were back from the lake house, sitting around the kitchen table immersed in a game of Scrabble. I told Charlie and Judith I would be back in a minute and that I just needed to go get the mail. Uncle Charlie chuckled, to Judith, under his breath.

"You're really having fun with this one aren't you?"

"He's real, come see for yourselves," I said confidently.

I walked out the front door and down the sidewalk. Henry was walking toward the house.

"Hello Henry," I said.

"Lovely weather we're having. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes, quite nice. Do you have any letters today?"

"Why you're in luck, sport. I have one with your name on it."

I took the letter and thanked him. It was addressed to Bobby Turner. The return address was Mr. and Mrs. Turner. I started toward the house. Charlie and Judith were standing on the porch.

"It's a letter from my mom and dad," I said.

I could see that they were talking to each other, but could not make out what they were saying. I stuffed the letter into my back pocket and went inside the house. They stood out on the porch for quite some time, talking in low voices just as my parents used to do when had gotten myself into trouble. Amidst the drowning and whisper of their voices I made out the words, "This has been really hard on him... Maybe he needs therapy?"

It was a late evening in the fall. I had registered for classes and was to start college in one week's time. From my bedroom window I could see the sun had almost set; its light gave one last flicker of hope before disappearing beneath the horizon. I started out of my room, through the hallway and down the stair case, running my hand along the wooden railing. Once downstairs, I could see Charlie and Judith sitting in the dim light overhanging the kitchen table.

"Bobby, would you come in here? We need to talk," said Charlie in a tone of resignation.

"If this is about my therapy, I promise you I have been doing better lately."

"Bobby, I know you have been trying. We spoke with the doctor this afternoon. He said that it might be best for you to be under more immediate supervision. He recommended a place that we think will be a good fit for you."

"What about college?"

"College will have to wait. Right now we need to focus on getting you better," Charlie replied.

The next morning we drove out to the place Dr. Gibb recommended. We turned down a long and winding drive way. There was a row of trees on either side of the road that created a thick canopy. We neared the building. It was an old brick mansion with numerous chimneys jutting out of its roof top. A sign next to the front walkway read, *Welcome to Koerner Park*. We stopped in front of the mansion and got out, the towering brick walls looming over us. An attendant came down the walkway toward us.

"We'll be back to check on you in a week," said Judith.

"We love you Bobby. This is for the best," said Charlie.

I followed the attendant inside. We walked down several long hallways. He opened a door and led me inside.

"If you need anything, ring the bell," he said, then walked out of the room, his footsteps trailing off down the hallway.

There was a single bed against the wall. I sat down and remembered the letter in my back pocket. I opened the letter. Inside, there was a piece of paper. I removed it and began reading.

Untitled
Melanie Gust

Small green buds blooming,
frail, helpless brown branches thirst
for quenching rain.

I feel the warm sun
glistening my happy face
water skiing on the lake.

Jumping in the leaves
almost suffocating
red, orange, brown.

Snow covered branches
beautiful, sparkling white,
black blizzard wind howls.

Nimbostratus Sky

Melanie Gust

Morning dew falls,
the tall giant oak tree
drips of wetness.

The sun rises bright orange,
gentle gray storm clouds move through the sky.
Suns rays shine through the clouds

the sad sky cries down toward the green earth.
The drizzle of rain slows,
in the distance a faint band shows.

Can you see a rainbow?
Red, orange, yellow, blue,
indigo and violet, slowly the colors show.

The sun's golden rays
cheerily shine down to
play with the children.

Open the door to step outside,
smell the freshness
when the wind blows.

As you walk through the opening
the wind snaps the door handle right out of your hand.
the door crashes back.

You stand in the soft rays of the sun,
the heat warms you with a smile.
You look up to see the intermittent blue of the sky.

Rain Dance
Amanda Belsha

The parking lot two blocks away from her house was empty. The abandoned distribution center hadn't seen human life in almost four years. The parking lamps still shinned as brightly as they always did. That is perhaps why she chose it.

It was raining. Pouring is a better word. Not a torrential downpour that can be destructive, but it was hard enough to have her soaked before she was able to make her way to the parking lot.

She danced. Oh she danced. Not in a happy way. She danced in sorrow. She danced in pain. She danced to lighten the load on her broken heart. She stretched out her arms, faced her palms to the sky. She tilted her head back so the rain could cover her face. It washed away her tears. Her thick black eyeliner left streaks down her face, around her ears, and into her already black hair.

The streets around her were almost dead. The occasional car drove by spraying water around it. Not like she was really listening, but it faintly reminded her where she was.

And why.

It wasn't fair. It just wasn't fair. It wasn't supposed to be like this. It just wasn't. She knew in her heart that it should have been different. He left. Before she had a chance to tell him, he left.

She screamed. She screamed for the sake of screaming. She screamed his name. She screamed profanity. She screamed what she always wanted to say, but was too weak to do so.

She crumpled to the ground in pain. Tears stained her face more than rain. She brought herself to her knees. She was already wet; she didn't care about the river forming around her in the deserted parking lot. She brought her arms up and over her head. She bit the necklace he gave her for her birthday to stop herself from screaming again.

It was almost two months ago. He showed up at her house that night. He had perfect timing. Her parents had just finished with their "family party" of gift giving, singing, and cake. She went up to her room to get ready for bed. The doorbell rang. She thought nothing of it. In less than a minute there was a knock at her door.

She looked up at her door, her parents never knocked. She took her time opening it, worried it might be some relative she just really didn't want to see. But would they knock? Probably not. She wrapped her small hand around the doorknob. It was made her shiver. She peeked around the door.

There he was. Her dream. Standing outside her door. He brought his face right next to hers. She could smell his clothing, his hair, his aftershave. They smelled so sweet to her.

She was at a complete loss for words. She never thought that he would ever just come over unannounced. They were friends, yes, but he always called, never just showed up. There was something about this day that made it all different.

"So are you going to let me in or leave me out here with YOUR birthday gift?" his smile awakened his whole face. His deep-set eyes begged her to listen.

"I'm sorry! Yes, come in, please."

"Sorry I'm so late. I meant to be here earlier."

"No, no, it's fine. You just caught me by surprise, that's all."

"Surprises are good, at least this one is."

He took out a small box from his pant pocket. It was a jewelry box. A long jewelry box. Those ones they use for necklaces. He held it for a few seconds all to himself, then took her hand and set the small box in her palm. She looked up at him and looked right into his eyes. He looked so calm and peaceful. How could he be so calm? Her heart was pounding, she couldn't see straight. Her vision was blurry.

"Well, aren't you going to open it?"

He brought her back to present time. She had no idea how long she was just gazing at the box. She nodded at him and gave him a small smile to let him know that she was okay.

She lifted the top of the box. Inside was, of course, a necklace. It was silver; he knew she never wore gold. And it was Egyptian. Her name in hieroglyphics. She saw one like it at the local mall. When they had actually gone together. She didn't think he was really listening when she said she liked the idea of the necklace. The store was so heavily perfumed she didn't even remember anything else about the place, just the necklace.

"It's beautiful. Absolutely beautiful." And it was. The small handcrafted "letters" were made up of birds and other symbols. The necklace itself was warm unlike how metal usually feels. It was supposed to be cold to the touch. But this was an unordinary necklace. It was from him; of course it was warm.

"I'm glad you like it." He was watching her the whole time she was admiring it. "Here, let's see how it looks." He took the necklace from out of her hands and stood behind her to lock it around her neck. He picked up her black hair off of her shoulders to let the necklace fall naturally.

"It's perfect," she couldn't say anything else. It was nothing less than perfect. Before she realized what she was doing, she had nearly jumped on him to give him a hug. He wrapped his arms around her to hug her back and picked her up and twirled her around. After he set her back down, she held her new necklace

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in both her hands. She looked at him again and gave him a genuine smile. It's not something that many people get to see. It was all for him.

“Thank you” was all she could say to him.

“You’re welcome. I should go. It’s getting late. I’ll see you tomorrow.

Bye!”

“Bye! Thanks again.”

He told her the following day that he was leaving. He was going far, far away. He was leaving her alone. And it was all for someone else. Nothing was for her. She avoided him at all costs. Completely. She didn’t return his calls. She ran the other way if she saw him. He stopped trying after a few days.

And now he was gone. She would probably never see him again.

She was still crying. But she had sat down “Indian style” instead of on her knees. Her hands were stained with black from her eyeliner. The rain was showing no signs of subsiding.

She regretted everything she didn’t say to him. She started to hit the ground with her fists. The layer of water on the ground slowed down her power but it was not enough. She began to bleed.

She didn’t care. She started screaming again. If anyone was listening, they would have thought her crazy. She knew what she was saying. It’s not like anyone was listening anyway. No one ever did.

She began to shake. Not on her own will. It was as if someone was actually shaking her. Now she screamed in physical pain.

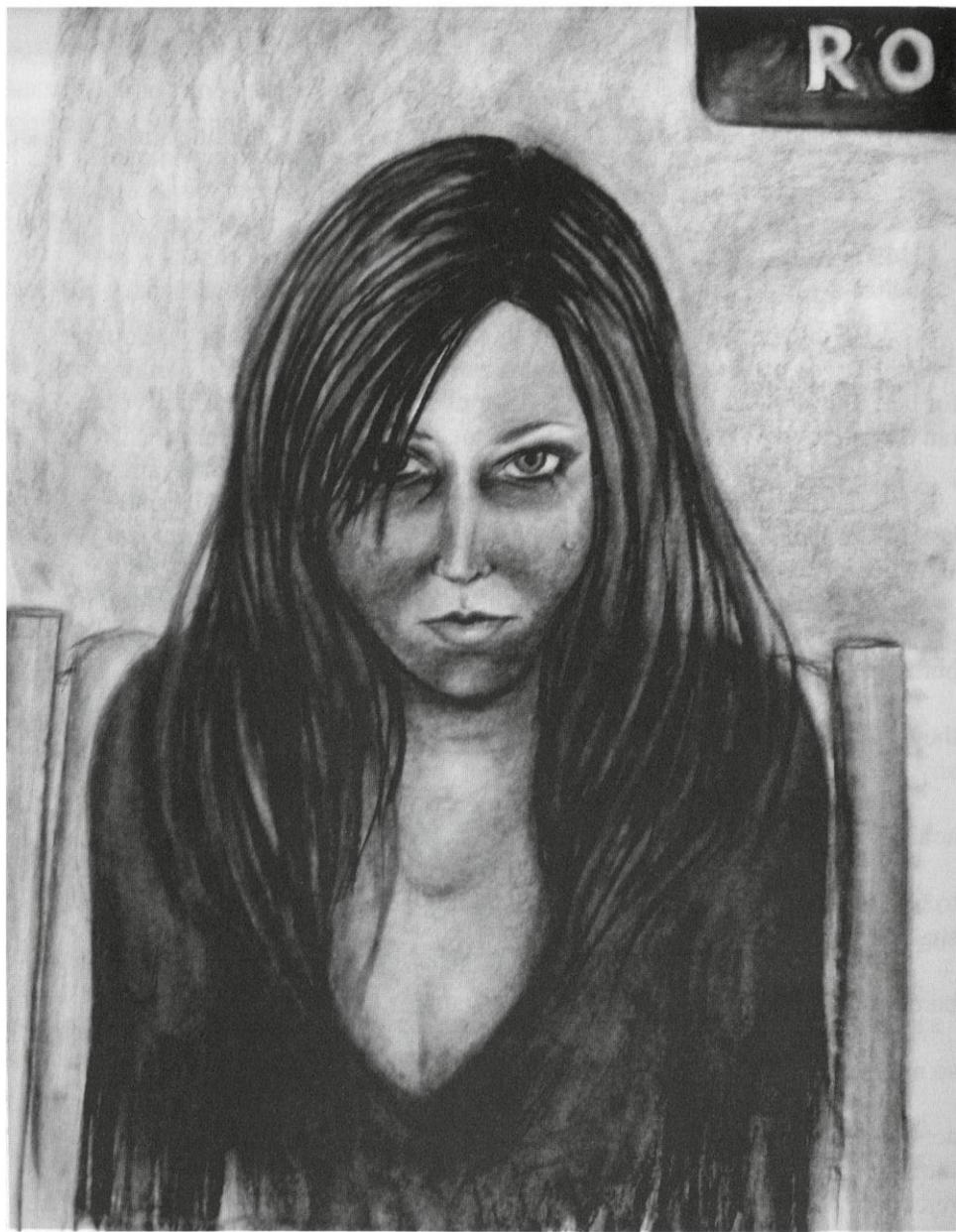
“Hey. Hey. HEY!” she stopped shaking and looked up at who was talking to her. It was her mom. Her mom was holding her. She was the one who was shaking her.

The girl fell into her mother’s arms farther and held onto her. She cried harder than before. She told her mom how unfair this was.

“I know sweetie. I know. Why don’t you just call him? I think you’d feel so much better.”

She didn’t respond. She knew it was the right thing to do. But would she actually do it? Was she that strong to force herself to speak the words she never thought she’d say? Would she bury all fears and tell him without fear of rejection? With bloody and black hands, she wiped her eyes and took hold of her necklace again.

“I want to go home.”



Artwork by Lauren Louralde

Villanelle with a Slant

Mary Jo Balistreri

In the lush tropical night
the moon slid toward the sea,
a diaphanous lady of light.

The old man held her tight
loved and bedded the sprite
so lush in the tropical night.

Entwined 'till dawn was in sight
she quietly slipped away,
diaphanous lady of light

blushing in rose delight.
Now as I write of that flight
of love in the tropical night

Sea woke up in a fright
rose in waves of full height
to sway the lady of light.

But time she said must be right.
He said he would wait, hopes bright
with dreams of tropical nights
and his diaphanous lady of white.

**Sonnet for Zachary
Mary Jo Balistreri**

Until I trod among the forest trees,
I did not hear their sigh of letting go
Or see the happy sailing of those
leaves
To sow new life: to darken and to grow.

Eyes alone deceive, for there is more
As earth receives those leaves and trees pull back.
Creation is at work though we deplore
Its striking loss, the frost of Winter's lack.

And as I look at you, your quiet change,
I lost you in the only way I know.
I think like seasons, we must look long range
To summer that returns from what lies low.

Though at first I may not know your sign,
I will not give death the final line.

Betrayed
Brennan Rowe

Opened. Closed. Either way the only color I knew was black. My mouth was dry and gagged by some sort of cloth. Another cloth covered my head and was tied at the neck, restricting the muscles in my throat. The ground... cold, wet – face nearly pressed against it. My nostrils were intoxicated by the stale smell of the cloth. My head, O God, felt as though it were about to burst out of my skull.

The moment I realized I couldn't see, the moment I began to lose control of my emotions, is the same moment I realized it was not only my neck and mouth that were bound. I tried to reposition my arms from their place behind my back, but the cold, sharp bindings around my wrists only moved a few inches as the chain between them was stretched to its limit. And my legs. It was as though they were glued together. I could bend my knees and move my toes, but the restraints – the pressure – on my ankles bound my legs as one.

...How?

In fact, prior to my recent awakening, I couldn't remember anything, and I couldn't decide which scared me more: not knowing my own name or not knowing why I was here. The strain on my shoulders reminded me the answers would come easier outside of these bindings.

I curled my back and reached my hands towards my feet. I hoped to be able to undo the bands around my ankles quickly, but the restraints were made of something much more foreboding than rope. Metal. The bindings around my wrists clinked against the one around my ankles as I began to frantically search for some magic way to open them. Solid, apart from the three two-inch bars that tightly held the cuffs together. The blood began to travel through my heart faster as my hopes of escape continued to diminish. And then like a flash of blinding light, I remembered.

My shoes.

I couldn't remember who I was, but I remembered something about my shoes. There was...empty space...between the soles of the shoes. I had put something in those spaces.

I strained the muscles in my arms, shoulders and back even more as I felt for some anomaly near the damp cloth material that composed my laces. When I found the small circular embossment on the heal of each shoe; it felt oddly familiar. I pushed the small circles in, half believing they would instantly solve all my problems.

Although my hopes were quickly crushed as nothing extraordinary happened, I could feel something fall from my shoes. Then I heard what sounded like a bottle rolling away and stopping soon after. I must be in some sort of confined space. A cave?

I wiggled around until my desperate fingers found one of the objects which fell from my foot. It was smooth and elongated and I could feel the uneven surface between the smooth sides that held it together. A switchblade?

After a few moments of concise finger movements, I realized a more appropriate title for the object was a Swiss Army knife since it contained not only a small knife, but also a small paper-thin wire extended on a slightly larger metal attachment.

Without another lost moment, I left the thin wire extended and positioned it in my left palm, facing the handcuffs. I secured the location of the left handcuff's keyhole and attacked the small space with the wire.

Releasing my arms from the cuffs was easy. Too easy.

What kind of person am I, that I could pick a lock without a moment's hesitation?

What kind of person am I, that I would be engaged like a rabid animal?

These thoughts played over and over as I used the knife to cut the rope binding my neck and the cloth that invaded my mouth.

Now I had full access to my senses. The taste of the stale cloth lingered in my mouth, but my nose detected the faint smell of algae and my eyes perceived the place of which incased me.

My assumption was correct. It was a cave. A poorly lit cave. The light came from a few cracks in the ceiling of the cavern. It suddenly felt more like a grave than a anything else.

Rolling myself from my side, I bent my knees. My jeans had been ripped just above my ankles, allowing the leg cuff to be as secure as possible. I inspected the one-piece cuff to find, to my horror; it had no keyhole of any sort.

I laid on my back, with my legs extended and stared towards the roof of my prison, trying to calm my thoughts. There must be a way out, this can't be my end.

After some assessments, I realized the height from the floor to the ceiling must have been less than five feet and if there were cracks in the ceiling, perhaps I could force my way out?

After a few failed attempts, I was able to balance myself to my feet and felt somewhat weak by whatever drug must have also robbed me of my identity.

I had a son. He is nine. And a wife.

Now was not the time to awe in my newly discovered relatives, I must concentrate on my current situation.

My back was slightly arched and my neck stretched to its limits as the ceiling was not high enough to accommodate my head. I reached my hands to the roof of my stony cage only to realize the surface was composed not only of rock, but a metal meshing and the dirt above the metal net began to crumble and fall the moment I touched it.

Deciding the amount of earth that was about to fall on me would be minimal, I grabbed a hold of the metal and shook it, causing the earth to rain down on my face. No more than two inches of dirt must have covered the metal grating, as it soon covered the rocky ground around my feet and revealed the beautiful blue sky above. I estimated my cage must have been nearly seven feet in diameter, but from my compromised position I was also able to make out the immense amount of lush, strong, tall trees that haphazardly guarded the perimeter of my prison.

Though I was now able to see the world again, I was no less engaged. The mesh vibrated, but was securely fit into its current location. The knife too small and the metal too thick for it to be of any use.

I had put something else into my shoe.

I winced in pain as my knees came in contact with the ground. I anxiously searched among the fresh, brown dirt for some sort of round or cylinder-shaped object.

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After exhausting the entire surface, I finally came across my goal. A small bottle, the size of my thumb. It was white, had a black cap, contained a clear liquid and had no label of any sort.

I opened the bottle and put it near my nose. The fumes set my nostrils ablaze and I gagged, nearly dropping the open container.

Use it on metal.

I slid two fingers, the bottle and my thumb between the grating and let a drop of the liquid fall onto the metal.

As though the metal were nothing but paper, the liquid fire disintegrated the metal with frightening ease. In less than five minutes, I was able to destroy enough of the metal near one of the pit's sides and finally claim freedom.

Before resurrecting myself, though, I used the rest of the acid to break the links between the bindings on my legs. Running would be difficult, as the rings still made contact as my legs met, but at least movement was possible.

I killed my best friend. I let him die. I betrayed him.

I pulled myself out of the hole only to be surprised by the oddly familiar click of the cocking of a gun behind me. A shotgun. Only ten feet away.

Point-blank range.

The gun extended from the shoulders of a man who had a sickening grin on his face. I was more captivated by the dual barrels of the gun, though, than the man who was clothed completely in black.

“It’s a good thing I found you.” He said, not allowing the gun to move away from my general direction.

“Who are you, what’s going on?!” I requested, frozen in place.

“Wow, Baxter, they really did a number on you, huh. Don’tcha recognize me?”
“No.”

“Well, hate to leave ya hangin’ like this, but you’re too much of a risk. Ya know, nothin’ personal.” The man said as he put his finger on the trigger.

But before he was able to fire the weapon, a bullet ripped through his skull and lodged itself somewhere in his brain. The man fell into a heap on the ground.

Perceiving I would be next, I dove behind the nearest tree as I heard something buzz past my ear.

The shooter needed to reload.

No longer caring why I knew that or anything of recent memory, I got to my feet and moved as quickly as my legs would allow through the seemingly endless maze of trees. Nearly tripping over my own feet as the metal around my ankles clanked together, I hoped to God there was only one sniper.

*I am an expert on the mechanics and usage of most combat and urban weapons.
My name is Bill Baxter.*

I finally came to a clearing only to be stopped by a cliff. Halfway down the twenty-foot drop, water poured out of the rocks into a small basin which fed a river that zigzagged into the depths of the forest below. As I peered over the edge, a bullet tore through the side of my calf.

I muffled a yelp, but the blow was enough to misplace my footing. I plummeted towards the small body of water. When I made contact, it felt more like a solid wall than a liquid.

Southeastern Russia. My assignment wasn't complicated, it wasn't supposed to be difficult – I wasn't supposed to still be here three years later. Myself and another agent, the only man I've ever considered to be a true friend, were to infiltrate the group known as 666, learn as much as possible and get out – we were told two months tops. Getting in, becoming accepted was easy, when we wanted out, however, they grew suspect.

The 'specialists' of 666 interrogated me for three weeks, gathering forms of torture from all around the world. Although I never told them anything of U.S. operations, I knew my own contacts in Russia would value the mission and secrecy over my own life. After a month of questioning, 666 had grown tired of my partner....

I gasped for air as I burst above the surface of the water. I swam towards the shore and dug my fingers into the soft, muddy dirt. I hobbled into the cover of the trees. I tore a piece of my tan shirt and tied it securely around my bloody wound. Heading into the endless wooded unknown, I increased my pace as I adjusted to the pain.

"Baxter, aint'cha nervous?" My superior enjoyed mocking me.

"The helicopter hasn't landed yet, you or Sams just say the word and we'll jus' spin this baby back'round!"

"I didn't know you liked lying, Sir." I replied.

"There are plenty o' things you don't know about me Baxter... just remember, if this mission goes sour, you're both on your own." The small aircraft shook violently as the pilot attempted to keep the helicopter as close to the trees of the valley as possible.

"We'll be fine, right, bud?" I looked calmly into Sams' dark blue eyes. Sams gave an enthusiastic thumbs up.

"You had better be... you signed your lives away, remember? You are nothing but ghosts until mission success. If you two mess this up... and manage to live, don't bother going home." I could always tell when my superior was being serious. He pronounced every syllable.

I glanced at Sams...lucky bastard. He didn't have anyone back home. Nothing to worry about. Nothing held him back. Nothing for him... to look forward to.

"Let's jus' say, as of today, you've become enemies of the State. Nothin' personal o'course, but we can't let it be known that the U.S. was involved..."

The next twenty minutes were spent in silence.

"Casper, Spooky! Looks like we're here."

Something rustled in the trees nearby. I froze.

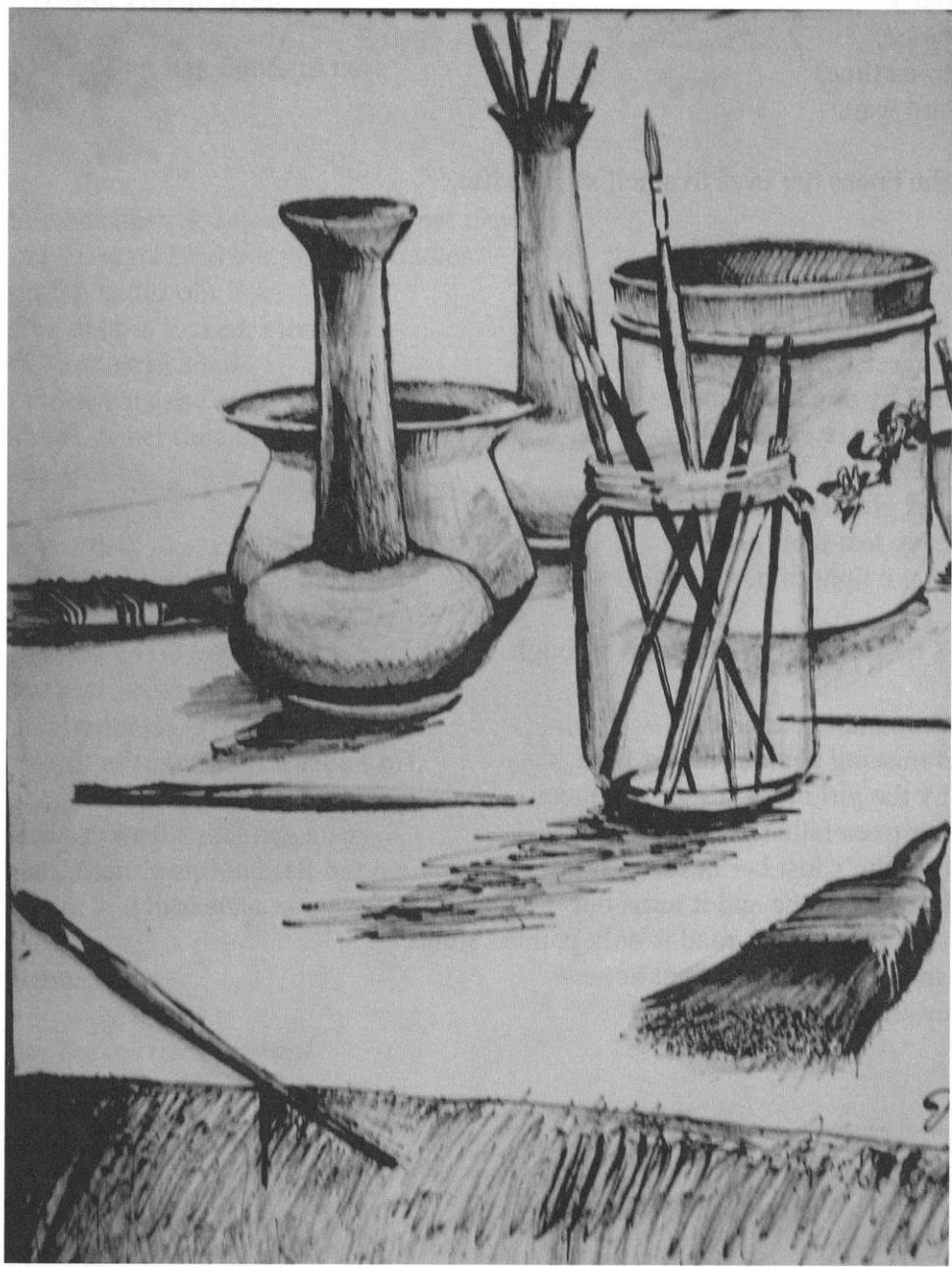
A deer.

I don't think I was followed...

I'm nothing but a wandering spirit.

Bill Baxter was dead.

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Artwork by Jack Wang

painted stone
Teraesa Hermanson

she clicked her heels
and wished for home,
once,
twice,
three times
and wait.

she opens her eyes to a hellish paradise.

her blood before her
collapsing in ruins,
falling hard like statues—
no resistance.
one by one the branches
of her tree crack and fall
at her feet.
and glitter red shoes
have lost their luster
in the light of her disaster.

it looks like a twister blew through.

irreparable damage.
a missing persons report filed
by the girl in the glitter red shoes.
her trees fallen dead,
and she's lost her head,
because in the end it turns out
the yellow brick road is only painted stone,
and her home's just not home
anymore.

Teenage Tragedy
Teraesa Hermanson

She spilled her makeup case

on
the

floor

and her lipstick *smeared* across her cheek,
her mascara bled her pain to puddles
on the bathroom floor.

The door is locked, blocked
bolted, barricaded

(she swears she's not jaded)
she rests her face on
the

cool

tile

and lets the warmth of her life
slip from her pores
it's just not worth it anymore
her nail polish is chipped
and her dress is torn,
in a fit of rage she tears it all off,
she pries it from her hidden skin
and scrubs the makeup away
until there's nothing left but her--
naked and broken as she came.

No

more

lies

but the mirror is unkind.

It blinds her with truth.
she heaves her tiny frame
against the unforgiving glass
and

she

shatters.

Stick With Wishing

Teraesa Hermanson

I'm ready to scream now,
Sir.
Until I'm blue and purple and red
all at once.
nothing else has proven effective,
and I'm tired of running in circles.
(The scenery is getting old.)

The neighborhood didn't change,
but we did.
No more kick the can
or ghost in the graveyard night games.
Now it's just alcohol
(She's such a good friend)
to release the pressure in our temples.

We're walking five feet apart,
because you know how I feel
and I know how you feel,
and we're afraid to catch what the other's got.

This could mean any number of things
but we'll skip the psychoanalysis
and just stick with wishing
the world would stop at midnight
when we're 21 and loving life.

Broken Thoughts

Teraesa Hermanson

Pencil falls-
resulting in a hardly-noticeable
tap against tile flooring.

Writer's block has her wretched
fingers wrapped around
my writing hand again.

Outside my window, it's raining.
It's just started, so it doesn't
smell like worms yet.

My mind is scattered.
Too much sleep leaves me
aching for activity.

My hands are pale, it's spring.
I'm waiting for a reminder
of what it's like to paint
myself in vibrant colors.

Breathing for a Miracle
(After viewing Nancy Charak's
***Bougainvillaea and TV*)**

Teraesa Hermanson

Mascara-stained tears streak
black across hate-red heart,
anger swells and billows.

Overwhelming emotion leaves
her
throat beyond parched,
her lips beyond chapped.

Dry heat suffocates ever-patient
lungs,
oxygen no longer offers
relief- just another aching pain in
the chest.

Muscles cry out for mercy,
tired of treading dusty roads on
endless scorched summer nights.

Blue Rags

Ryan Dunn

The snow crunched under his feet as the man ran across the field away from the black car with silver tinted windows. The moon hung high over his head projecting an eerie glow onto the frozen tundra below. Flashes of light came from inside the car as gunshots quickly rang throughout the hills causing dogs to bark wildly in the background. The man hit through the back with a bullet. He gargled the blood that filled his mouth, bubbled out through his lips, and ran down his black hoodie as he struggled for breath. The man dropped to his knees as gunshots continued to ring out profusely with a violent hatred from the black car. The bullets continued to fly through the man, splattering his blood and brains yards across the freshly fallen snow. As the bullets stopped for a moment, a cruel laughter erupted from inside the car.

"Yeah, that's right, homie. You can't mess with us. Now you know," shouted a middle aged Caucasian man sitting in the passenger side of the car, just before he pulled the trigger and let two more shots spray into the shredded back of the mutilated body. The tinted windows rolled up as the car lurched backwards and peeled off down the road into the distance leaving a warm smell of burnt tires and cold flesh to fill the air around Prairie Fields.

Travis woke in a sweat, salty tears stinging his eyes. He pushed the blankets off of him and sat up in his bed, careful not to wake Christina. Careful not to wake the one person he trusted, who had been there for everything, the only one who knew what Travis was, and consequently the one Travis put the blue rags away for. This was the second time in two nights his friend's life had been twisted into his untimely death during an alcohol-induced dream. Putting his head in his palms, he silently let his hands fill up with the tears that were flowing freely from his callused eyes. Cars honked in the distance, and the moonlight danced into the room reflecting off bottles and casting eerie shadows onto the walls. "It's time, it's time. I'll get them sucka's back before you're buried Devin, don't you worry," Travis promised to someone who now only remained in the very fibers of his heart and fading memories.

Travis was not a very big man by any means, only about six feet tall and 180 pounds. He was athletic, but the smile that always stretched from ear to ear across his face never allowed anyone to be intimidated by him. That, however, was before, before two nights ago, before his best friend had bullets burn his skin mercilessly by members of the Midnight Riders.

After drying his eyes unsuccessfully with his tear-covered hands, Travis pulled on his tight worn out blue jeans and moved down the hall, past the living room where so many nights were spent laughing, drinking, just kicking it with Devin. Down the hall over the empty 151 bottle that fell to the ground empty when Travis had gotten the call, down hall into the past, into the storage closet, down the hall into the future.

The smell of fresh cut grass slowly drifted up Travis's nose. Devin's car had just pulled into the driveway and the clunk of the door shutting quickly brought Travis snapping back into reality. Rolling his eyes open Travis set his empty glass on the soft green ground besides his chair. Rising slowly up out of his chair, and squinting his eyes in the setting sun, he walked towards Devin.

"What up pimpin'," Travis said raising his hand to receive Devin's.

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"Man shut the fuck up you know I hate it when you call me that," Devin said grasping Travis's hand in his and bringing him in for a quick embrace.

"Well hey you know that's why I do it... PIMPIN'," Travis replied stepping back. "Ha whatever man just be happy I like you."

"Oh snap, so now you only like me? Shit, last I heard you were dying to die for me."

"Yea don't make me regret my words, now let's go, we can't be late for your date," Devin said pushing Travis lightly and turning back towards his car.

"Oh yeah let's go," Travis said smiling as he jumped for a brief second on Devin's back before running ahead to the car, "Can't be late for my own one year anniversary."

With the smell of the country quickly fading into the distance it was readily replaced with the smell of heated asphalt and tar. Travis took out a cigarette and lit it, quickly cracking the window; he blew the smoke out and coughed a bit.

"Ha, man don't be dying on me now," Devin said looking over at Travis and smiling.

"Fuck you, pimpin', I kill you," Travis said laughing.

"For your sake I sure hope not, I mean you need me, who else is gonna keep your dumb ass out of trouble?"

"Keep me out of trouble? You? Ha, you're the one who bought me my first gun, and taught me how to shoot."

"Yea but I also introduced you to Christina."

"Yea that's true, but just cause you introduced me to a girl that happens to keep me out of trouble, doesn't mean that you keep me out of trouble," Travis replied taking one last drag and flicking the rest of the cigarette out the window. "Speaking of which, drop me off here," Travis motioned to a flower shop, "I need to pick up some flowers and I can walk the block to her house."

"Aight man, well have fun tonight. I'll see you in some months; remember I'm heading to Atlanta for a bit," Devin said pulling in where Travis had motioned.

"Yea I know, I'll miss you, Pimpin'," Travis said embracing Devin one more time and hitting his own chest before he got out of the car.

"Hey. Take care of Christina while I'm gone. Give her anything she wants or there's bound to be consequences when I get back," Devin shouted after Travis.

"Don't worry bout it homie, I take care of those I love... Even if they share the same blood line as you," Travis said, turning his head back towards the car throwing up a peace sign.

"That's cold man," Devin replied returning the sign and turning the car around, "I'll see you when I get back this winter."

Quietly opening the door, Travis stared soberly at the only two items he had in the closet. In between the mess of Christina's summertime dresses and t-shirts of all colors, his black vest stood out like a demon in heaven. Reaching into the closet, Travis pulled the ten pounds of lead off the hanger and strapped it around his chest ignoring the cold that made his skin shiver and Velcro that bit into his skin. Brushing the thin layer of dust that had built up on the vest, Travis bent down to the second item in the closet, a portable safe. With a bit of effort, Travis pulled up the safe and started heading downstairs into the basement cringing every time the stairs decided to scream out to Christina.

The combination to the safe was 9-17-04, the day Christina and Travis had met, the last day it had been opened. The safe opened with a bit of a sucking noise, projecting the

smell of sulfer and dark air into the already cold and musky basement. Inside were two other boxes, the first one Travis pulled out and set on the ground. He flipped it open and wrapped both hands around the cold steel the box contained. Pulling out two chrome plated Desert Eagle .50 cal handguns, he gently set them on the same table his safe was on. The second box soon placed next to the guns contained one silencer and two cases of .50 cal shells wrapped up in a blue bandana. Twisting the bandana up like Travis and Devin had done everyday in high school, he wrapped it around his wrist and proceeded to click 16 bullets into each gun. Grabbing a white hoodie from the laundry and his old shoes from the basement door, Travis sat at the table to prepare.

Heavy breathing filled the air as visions once again filled his eyes. "Time to go, time to do work, time to end my dreams," Travis mumbled to himself, raising off the chair and tucking the guns into the back of his waistband, causing them to sag slightly, and his hoodie to barely cover the handles. Opening the door, Travis slipped off into the moonlit night winter air stinging his lungs. He knew who took his best friend from him although he no longer knew where they stayed. He did, however, know someone who would.

Hal's gas station was really not a place anyone ever wanted to be; especially at three in the morning, but for Travis it was the perfect place to start looking for revenge. Hal, the owner, was a fat dirty man who lived above his gas station, but realistically probably didn't know what his own bedroom looked like. Since Hal was too despicable to have a social life, he always left it open for business. Hal always knew what went down in the street if not for any other reason then he had the only 24-hour store around in miles. Whether or not he would talk remained to be seen, but Travis had a pretty good idea that he could convince Hal to spill his guts one way or another.

Pausing at the door, which still needed to be replaced from bullets Devin had sent into it four years prior, Travis pulled out his silenced Desert Eagle then proceeded to silently slip through the front door, catching the bells before a noise could be heard. Hal, who was sleeping with his head on the front counter, was unaware that anyone else was inside the small decrepit gas station. Travis, taking a Snickers bar off of what was left of the front counter and opening it, coughed to get Hal's attention. Slowly raising his head, unsure if the cough was part of his dream, Hal tried to shake the sleep out of his eyes, but only managed to succeed in offering a fresh coat of dandruff to the already white counter.

"Who the hell are you?" Hal grumbled hostilely, still not grasping the fact he was looking down the barrel of a rather big gun.

"It doesn't matter who the hell I am," Travis calmly replied taking a bite out of the Snickers bar. "I have some questions for you, and if you appreciate what little health you have left you should probably answer them to the best of your ability."

Hal stared at Travis, bewildered that some little punk would have the nerve to come up into HIS store and threaten HIM. Hal took a step back and started to slowly reach underneath the counter for his shotgun.

"Don't even think about it," Travis commanded Hal, cocking the hammer on his gun back at the same time.

"Wait, wait don't shoot. I'll answer whatever you want just please don't shoot me. I got kids to feed man. Kids, MAN please!" Hal pleaded, as he stood straight up and stepped back holding his hands out in front of him to stop any bullets that might come flying out of the gun and try to pause in his body. In response Travis finished the Snickers bar, paused to wipe the chocolate off his lips and let the wrapper fall onto the old yellow tile floor. He pulled out his other Desert Eagle, cocking the hammer back, and pointing it at Hal.

"First off, you better tell me what you know about the murder down at Prairie Fields two nights ago." Travis spoke solemnly and quietly, pronouncing every syllable correctly.

"I don't know anything about that man, I swear," Hall said, eyes glancing quickly at the blue bandana wrapped around Travis's wrist.

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“Don’t fucking lie to me, I know your greasy ass knows something. Do you want some slugs to find a home in your chest? You know who I am; you know I don’t fuck around. That’s why there are those holes still in your door.”

“Alright, the murderer at Prairie Fields, I don’t know much about it, some guys came in here yesterday. They were babbling about some punk kid who tried to rip them off of some drugs. They were laughing and bragging about how his blood splattered on the snow, and how they left his body to freeze in Prairie Fields. There were three of them I think. Actually I’m pretty sure they live down the street a few houses, the yellow one on the corner if I remember right.” Hall answered shaking nervously, and still waving his hands at the guns, as if the motion could somehow persuade the bullets not to come charging out of the gun.

Travis knew where the house was, and it was actually a few blocks off, but Travis still thanked Hal, released the hammers and walked out the back door with the guns still pointed at Hal. Putting the guns back into his waistband Travis let out a sigh of relief, and walked down the alley, making sure to stay out of the watery substance running down the center, to the yellow house on the corner. Walking to the back door, Travis noticed that there was a light on. Taking his pack of cigs out and sparking one, he took a hit as if it was a joint and knocked on the back door.

“Man it’s about time you got here,” a man’s deep voice came protruding from inside the house, “You know you don’t have to knock, just come in,” the man finished saying as he opened the door to Travis standing there smoke burning his lungs, and a fire burning in his eyes.

Obviously stoned or tripping on some drug, the man continued to try to invite Travis into the house stumbling into the door frame and using it to support his feet. Exhaling the smoke from his mouth right into the face of the man, causing him to close his eyes in a stinging pain, Travis pulled out one of his Desert Eagles keeping it behind his back; he cocked the hammer and just stared at the man in the doorway trying to wipe the smoke out of his eyes.

“Hey who’s at the door,” a man yelled from somewhere inside the house?

“It’s just the pizza” the first man replied. “Sooo do you have the pizza or what?” the man asked Travis, noticing that no Pizza Hut box was present.

Travis just stood there, snow peacefully falling all around, melting on Travis’s face and blending into the silent tears building up at the sides of his eyes. *Give her anything she wants; take care of Christina while I’m gone.*

“Hey boy, where’s the pizza?” the man asked taking a step towards Travis.

“Huh,” Travis responded looking the man in the eyes, releasing the hammer silently, and replacing his gun back into his waistband.

“Where...is...the...Mother fucking pizza...I ordered,” the man repeated.

“I’m sorry,” Travis replied, “I have the wrong house.”

“You don’t have the pizza?”

“Nope wrong house,” Travis said pulling his sweatshirt over the guns.

“Do I know you from somewhere?” the man asked Travis leaning back onto the doorframe.

“Nah man you don’t know me,” Travis said turning and walking away from the house.

What the fuck am I doing? I can’t fuck up. Devin wouldn’t want that. His word was all he ever had; he’d expect the same from me. I can’t hurt Christina anymore; she’s already lost too much, Travis thought as he untied the blue bandana from his wrist and let it fall to the ground



Artwork by Jack Wang

Janet Leahy

Silo silhouettes
stand tall in sunset's echo
punctuating night.

Dancing dots of snow
hang suspended in dawn's light;
Seurat paints the sky.

Love Blooms
Janet Leahy

Jeremiah presses the flowers into my hand
and says *I love you.*
There are at least a dozen
maybe thirteen exquisite blooms.

We have known each other
less than a year
but long enough
to fall in love.

He is charming,
lively and entertaining,
honest with his emotions,
enthusiastic about new adventures.

I am surprised
with this unexpected gift;
it isn't my birthday,
just a beautiful spring day.

Do you like them
he asks,
eyes dancing with delight.
Oh yes
thank you I say
giving him a hug.

I can get more he replies.
Teacher
there's a million out there
I can pick more.
He holds up his hands
yellow from the yellow blooms.

Tomorrow I say
bring some tomorrow.

About Taking Time

Kathleen Hayes Phillips

It is Saturday morning and 'Tis is playing at the coffee house. Chai tea, mocha grandes, lattes and scones are made and consumed to the beat of the Irish drum, flute and fiddle. But today I notice a newcomer, a girl about 13 sitting next to her father at the table of musicians. She plays the fiddle. So does her father. She is learning the music, listening to the rounds, the repetition of the melodies. She listens and joins in the jigs and reels when she can. That is how she learns to play, in the old way, passing knowledge from generation to generation.

That is how we used to learn...next to an adult who knew. We did not always read the instructions or go to a class. I love making pies because my grandma taught my mother who then taught me how to use the pastry cutter, how to roll out the dough to avoid sticking and lift the pastry into the pie tin without breaking it apart. How to repair it if it did. I also watched mom as she made bed after bed, day after day with perfect hospital corners. I listened to her hold her own in a political discussion. I can do both today.

One day I missed an opportunity to learn from my aunt. It seemed such a little thing then. But it wasn't. Aunt was my dad's older sister, a formidable woman who raised 8 children under difficult circumstances: the Great Depression, poor health, war and no money. She baked bread every day. Whenever I saw her, at whatever family gathering, she would give me a loaf of bread. Wonderful, homemade bread with a high browned top and soft center that could feed my family for days. I had asked her about her secrets: what measurements she used, how long she kneaded the dough, how long she let the bread rise. But her answer was always vague...*I can't tell you*, she would say, *after a while you just know. You can just feel when it is right.*

One day she offered to teach me how, calling early one morning to ask if I was free. She had time to teach me if I had time to learn. She was always that unexpected. No muss, no fuss. Either do it or don't. It was very early and I was busy that day. Busy with children and a house and a husband. And she understood. *We'll do it another time.* But of course we didn't. So I missed the chance to stand next to her to measure out the flour and talk about her childhood. Or follow her instructions of how to knead and talk about how she survived the death of a daughter and son. I didn't help her shape the loaves and watch them rise while I listened to stories about her brother, my father. Smell the yeast-filled room. Or eat the bread we made together.

For the girl learning to play the fiddle, it was always more about the music than the notes. And I know now that for me and Aunt Eloi, it was so much more than learning to bake bread.

Light in My Darkness

Fraser Hartig

I wage war within myself;
Fighting my own demons of despair,
I fear they are winning.

At my wits end,
My heart's a blood drawn battlefield,
Ravaged by rejection.

Darkness consumes me,
Despair marks my heart,
The soul starts turning to ash.

I raise my head,
And see a light,
Pure and bright.

The Light comes closer,
Burning away into me
Saving me from myself.

Chasing away the darkness
Erasing despair's mark
Restoring my soul.

Thank you light,
Because of you I see in
My darkness.

Because of you
My demons are pushed
Back to where they came from.

Because of you
My soul is restored,
And I am alive once more.

Attraction

Fraser Hartig

She stands near,
So close I could almost touch her.

Her eyes shine,
With a deep fire.

A passion so fierce,
It blocks out all the world.

Her scent I smell,
And my mind explodes with beautiful things.

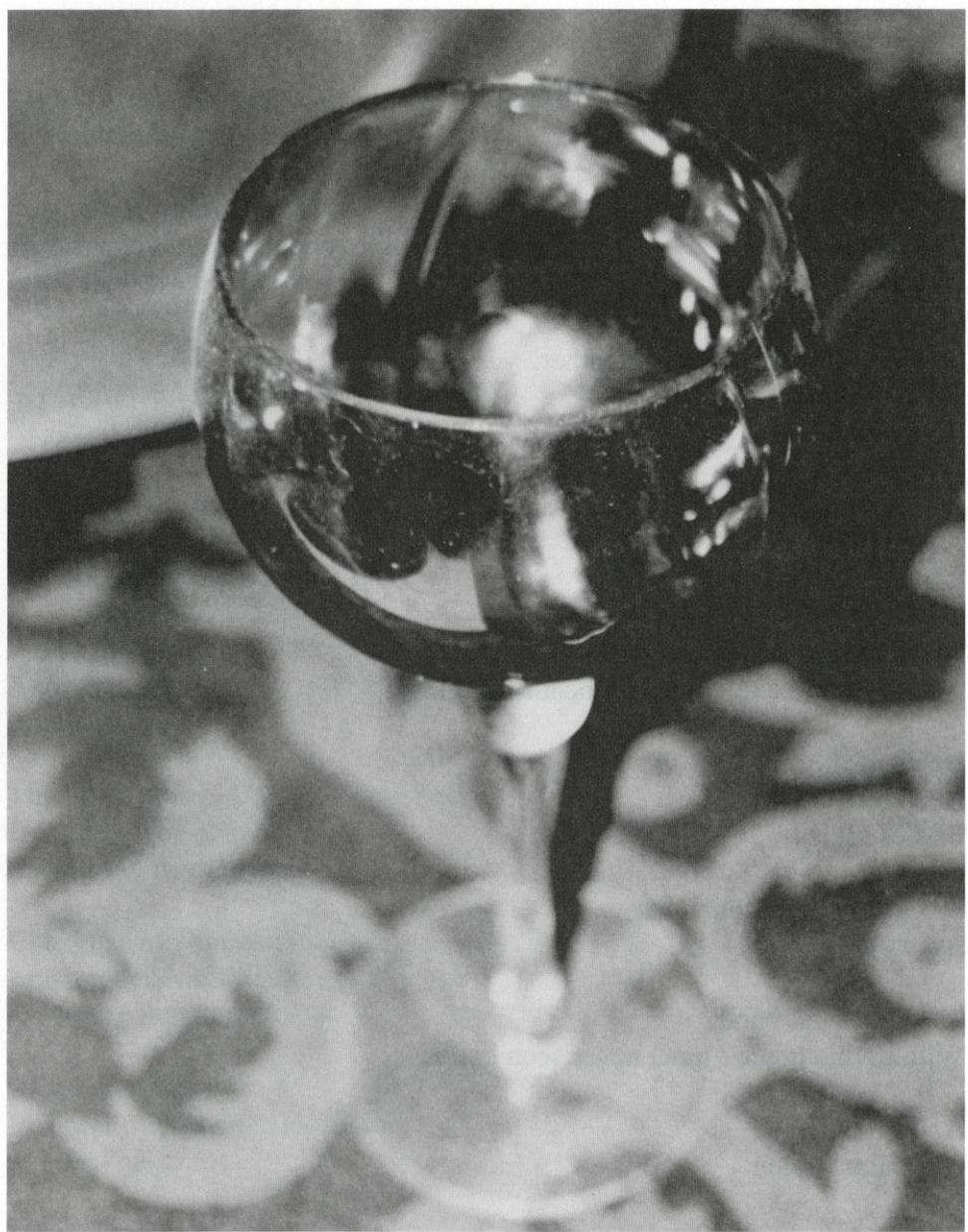
Brilliant flowers,
Deep blue oceans,
Endless skies.

So close I could touch her,
But I dare not.

She raises her hand,
With divine grace I have never seen before.

And I raise mine
Our palms touch.

And I felt a calm rush of excitement,
For now I know she sees me,
As I see her.



Photograph by Stephanie Gorski

May

Barbara Bache-Wiig

red tulips green grass
a dandelion carpet nearby
white clouds in a blue-blue sky:
sunshine highlights a
Wisconsin springtime palette

Got a Match?

David Pulkowski

I utter "tut tut" in the back streets of San Francisco where garbage cans lay in dark alleys. I find food scraps here. It's not dumpster diving. All I do is bang on the back door of a restaurant, and a dishwasher tends to come out. The door is usually closer to the dishwashers than the cooks.

I'm near Lotta's Fountains so I walk through the ally, and look down at the grime on the concrete. I walk up the three stairs to the back door. Bang, bang. I look up and see the blue sky and breathe the deep fried air from all the restaurants on Jackson Street. The two dumpsters in front are full of slimy food.

A man in his twenties opens the door, in an apron stained yellow and soaked with dish water all the way through. He is standing in the middle of the doorway with one foot in the restaurant and the other on the landing to the alley.

"Hey."

"Can you leave me some bits out here? I got a bag." I pull a Trader Joe's paper bag from my side.

"Just in the bag, friend?"

"Yeah, that be great."

"Ah." He waves his hand at the bag. "I'll find you a plate, man. Throw it away when you're done though. Otherwise they'll know." He points to the kitchen with his thumb like he's hitchhiking. "Come back in about two hours. I'll have a chance to get some then."

He walks back in. I lift my arms at chest level and do a little shuffle with my feet. I don't know why, because it really isn't a big deal to get food in this town, food is thrown out all the time.

Walking out of the alley, I decide to turn up Pacific Avenue towards Front Street. It's a nice 32 block stroll in the early afternoon with a warm breeze off the ocean in a city that never sleeps, so I don't mind. I forget about the smog, and look at the people in store windows and outside restaurants as I walk. The clatter of people's voices fills the sidewalks as the doors open and close. I look at the traffic humming car horns and diesel busses. I put my hands in my pocket as I stand and wait; it's an old habit I got, when I stand still. I watch the lights change from Don't Walk to Walk. On my slow stroll, I find some teenage kids looking for someone to buy them cigarettes. The boss is a stiff. He abides by the 'we card everyone under 30.' I approach the three.

"What do you need?"

The middle one looks at me confidently. "Can you buy us smokes?"

I shrug. "Sure."

"Nice. Yeah, you can keep the change."

I gaze right, and watch a bus whiz by. I tell myself I have food on the way. "No, just a couple of smokes will do."

"Here."

He hands me a wrinkled twenty. How strange. It's an old twenty. I finger through the old bill, and see it's one of those that don't look ironed, washed, and faded. How'd he get this bill? I thought all the old bills went out of circulation.

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“How many packs?”

“Three of Marlboro Lights.”

“Ok.” I assure him, and hold out three fingers to him.

I walk in. The bell jingles on the old wooden door. Immediately, I feel like I’m in the 1930’s. The shop has a creaky hardwood floor, dimly lit, and has dust from families that traveled to pick grapes in nearby cities during the great dust storms. I walk the twelve feet to the back of the store and find only dry goods. I turn right for two aisles and the store ends. I walk up to the wooden counter where the old man sits. Behind him are the smokes and bottles of booze.

He’s a short old man of sixty five or so with patchy white hair, grey trousers, and blue button up short sleeve shirt. In his Mississippi blues voice, he asks me.

“Can I help you?”

I can’t help but look at a pint of Jameson. My taste buds burn at the sweet thought of whiskey. I forget about having the twenty from the kids. I have a twenty in my hand and drink right here. I’ve stayed away too long. A small fix? One swig. I put my hand to my cheek, and look at the old man and ask, “Can I have a minute?” He looks at me. I look up and down at him and notice I’ve set the money already on the counter.

“Can I have three packs of Marlboro Lights and a book of matches?”

The old man goes on to ask, “I see those kids linger around my store, what do they want?”

I look back down at the counter, “The usual, someone to buy them beer.” I look up and see him smirk at me.

“Not in my store. I’d have the end of that.”

He turns around, and must have given the kids a sneer through the window, because they begin taunting him with hand gestures. He sighs a moment and grabs the packs. He takes the three boxes and examines each one before placing them neatly stacked on the counter.

“Thirteen ninety-five. Out of twenty.”

He sets the change on the counter. He gazes to the back of the store and sits back down with his back to the window. I grab the change and smokes and walk out. I hear the bell jingle as the door closes. I immediately walk to my right away from the kids and walk slowly down the street. They follow me, and I hear one of the kids say, “Did you see that son of a bitch look at us?”

“Yeah, he must have thought we were going to rob the place.”

I look at the one who gave me the money. “Here. The total was thirteen ninety-five.”

“Ok.” He takes the change.

I hand him the packs. He passes them out to the others and starts tapping the pack in the palm of his hand, for a few smacks. He tears the cellophane off, pulls the tab, and shoves those in his pocket. He sniffs the fresh cigarettes and sighs. He pulls out a small stack, so I hold out my hand, and they drop one by one in my grasp.

“I appreciate it.” They start to walk away. I pull out the paper bag from my side and rip a portion of the bag. I wrap the four smokes up in it and have them secured in my front pocket.

I see the kids happily lighting up. They complain about the old man. I look and see a clock on the street corner. It’s half past five.

"Ah, I'd better start on back," I mutter.

I cross Pacific Avenue at the next stop light. I put my hands in my pocket. It's rush hour, the traffic is getting congested, and more people are mingling in the streets. With the setting sun, it's getting cool out and shadows are getting larger than the bridge. I make it back to Lotta's and hear a bell ringing. Bing, bing bong. Bong, boo, bing. Bing, bing bong. Bong. Bong. Bong. I'm on time. I walk down the alley and see the bag or the plate isn't there. I look up at the two brick buildings and then at the grey door.

"Shit." I wait five minutes. A door opens, and a short heavy set cook with the traditional white pants, shirt, and hat walks out. I look at his dark brown eyes glaring at me. He has the door open completely, and he looks at me with a stained cleaver in his hand.

"Hey you. Come here. What are you doing here?"

"Nothing, I thought I'd smoke along this alley." I fumble for my wrapped up smokes.

He folds his arms. "You can't be here."

I stop looking. "What are you talking about?" I lift one palm up in the air to him. "You want me to go on the sidewalk?"

His eyes grow wide and he says, "Tanking food from here is stealing."

"What are you talking about?" I look back up at the brick buildings. "When did I take food?"

"I fired the dishwasher!" He chuckles. "The one who left a plate for you."

"You fucking asshole." I turn my head slowly at him. "That food gets thrown out."

He spits to the ground! "I'd rather feed the rats than a dirty rat bum."

"Fuck you!"

"Get!" He points to Pacific.

I turn around and walk back up the same way I came on Pacific. I pass by the store; the old man is still behind the counter. The shop hours says, open at 5:00 am and closed at 8:00 pm. Poor bastard. He never gets a break. He sits there all day dealing with punks. I wave in the window to him, but his back is to the street, so he doesn't see me.

I veer to Stockton Boulevard and walk to Market Square, where it's the loudest part of my day. People are delirious with how they spend their money here. You walk in with a hundred dollars, and by the time you walk to the end of the market you're not sure how much you spent. The moon is rising in the eastern horizon off the water, and the evening air is filling the streets.

In the square I walk to Dylan's café. It's my last resort. Mostly good people linger around here. Dylan's has an outside window you can order food at, which adjoins the kitchen. The cooks are preparing the orders as they come. There is a sweet woman of about twenty five who is working the register. She has soft brown hair that touches her shoulders when she turns. Her lips move softly as she asks, "Can I help you?"

I look at the outside board that has their entire menu on it. "I would like a cheeseburger, with pickles, and onions, no tomatoes." I look for the extras. "Also can I have relish, mustard, and ketchup on it. Does that come with fries and a drink?"

"Yes." She stops writing.

She looks at me in a daze, but I realize she's watching the traffic drive by.

"All right. Can I get a Coke with that?"

"Ok."

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She writes that down and hands it to the cook; she turns back around to type it into the register. I glance behind me and see a line has grown. I take too long to order. I pull out my wallet, and finger through my paper receipts, notes and find no money.

“Your total is three thirteen.”

She looks at my scraps of paper and I can see how her eyes grow wide. I give her a look of embarrassment, but I feel confident. The man behind me hollers, “You poor ass tramp, what’d you do, lose your wallet?”

“No, I misplaced my money.” I fumble through my empty pockets again.

“Yeah, we all do that from time to time. Hey!”

He steps next to me and almost knocks me over. He stands six inches taller than me and is nicely dressed. He looks at me and smiles.

“Let me buy this for you.”

“No, it’s fine.”

“Nonsense you free loader. These people are waiting for us.” I look back around. “It’s on me.” He pulls out his thick wallet. “If you complain, I’ll throw your scrawny ass in the bay with cement on your feet.”

“How can I say no to that?” I tell him.

“Damn right kid.” He looks at the menu for a minute, and faces the waitress. “Can I get a burger special, Chicago dog, fries, and a coke?”

He puts his arm around me, looks at me, and lets out a laugh from the bottom of his belly. This makes me smile.

She rings it up. “Nine seventy two.”

He hands her a ten, and she gives him the change. We each grab our food, and he pats me on the shoulder, so I do the same. With a Midwestern smile he starts biting into his burger as he walks away. I walk the opposite way on Stockton Boulevard, and I find a bench to sit and eat. I sweep the dirt and small leaves off the bench as I watch the flow of traffic, as a soft breeze blows by. Two little kids walk by, one of about three and a half feet tall and the other about four feet tall. They stop and look at me. I look at them and tilt my head slightly.

“Am I supposed to know you?” I unroll the bag, and the heat rushes to my face.

The little one on the left asks me, “Do you have any spare change?”

I can’t look at him. “No.” I dig in the bag and feel for the fries.

“Ok mister.”

I drop the fries; they’re too hot. The two kids, side by side, bounce their heads to a beat as they walk away.

“Hey, wait.” I shake the bag. “Are you hungry?”

The two walk back, and grab a seat on the bench next to me. I wipe the grease from my fingers on my pants.

“What’s in the bag?” He turns sideways to read, “Day-lons-kaf.”

I look at the tops of their heads. “It’s Dylan’s Café. It’s a burger and fries.” I hand the older one the bag.

“Thanks mister.”

I place the soda next to the littler one. I stand up and look at the two thrashing through the bag and pulling everything out. The taller one starts on the burger and picks the onions off and sets them on the wrapper and lets out an “Ohhhh.” The littler one is devouring the fries. I turn back up Stockton and head home.



Photograph by Kate Hensleigh

Why Every Day is That Night

Kristin Alberts

You tell and retell your story.
Sometimes, there are machine guns,
sometimes not.
There are mortars below the dam—
or was that above the dam?

True tales never change,
but details of your ambush do.
There is always the tail end Charlie
whose name you can't recall.

There's the starlight-scoped gun's
weight in your hands
and the way it thumped your shoulder.

You say you were alone for hours
under cover of a boulder;
I picture you cowering in fear
beneath a rock of bravery.

Then there's your tracking sense—
why the Sergeant called you at first light
to follow of blood trails.

How you forgot what happened
when you found them,
only knowing you still had your knife.

You think there'd be peace about that night
if you could remember the exact story.

If only you could forget why you cry.

North of Somewhere

Kristin Alberts

There is a north to every place—
a Wayfaring Lane, a Dogwood Road,
a stretch of lonely pines standing straight
along some sandy road.

There is a lake with shining silver fish
and a little boat tied to a rickety dock,
the one with the loose boards that always
seems to give somebody wet feet.

From here at the cabin there is north
to some other place, no doubt the same.
There, we find the possibility of
ice cream pails waiting to be filled
during wild blackberry season.

We head up on vacation, and those who
live there, travel farther north for theirs.
North is filled with infinite possibilities.
We go north for relaxation—
for the sound of the loon at night,
those resounding cries over the water,

for quiet nights like this one
that I spend writing, taking comfort
in knowing there is more road to travel.
But, I settle now and write in peace,
knowing that I am north of somewhere.

Dear Bird,

[A letter to Charlie Parker, 1920-1955]

Ramon Kitzke

With that alto sax in your hands, you were a lark winging your way up to heaven. Your bebop chords taunted and seduced us. We fell in love with those extended intervals birthed in the after-hour Harlem clubs. We should have known you were too good to last, Bird. But we never dreamed you would leave us so soon.

Even as a kid in Kansas City, you knew where you were headed and how to get there. You got to New York City and made it big with Art Tatum, Fatha Hines, and Dizzy Gillespie. You learned from them and they learned from you. You played bebop the white guys could not play. And we all loved it. We loved it, Bird, so much.

We remember your “Cherokee,” “Lover Man,” and your soaring, fast improvisations. We remember your plaintive ballads, like “Embraceable You.” The beat generation adopted you for its own and you played right along. You belonged to the times. You belonged to us. We demanded more. And you gave us more, lots more. Too much.

We remember when the devils came and claimed you. The seductive she-devil heroin and your slave master, devil drink. Only in your early thirties, it was a time of triumph. All of the jazz world was under your sway. You were a king. Others worshipped you, emulated you. But the devils bought your soul, Bird. It was too soon.

Flash

Brennan Rowe

“Have you seen the cat, Susan?”

Her morning already busy enough, she simply replied “no” to her dear grandfather and hurried out the door, nearly forgetting her purse on her way out.

George Hermann, a man of considerable years, sat quietly at the circular wooden table, intensely watching the steam rise from his fresh cup of decaf, as he listened to the fading *click-clack* of his granddaughter’s over-priced shoes.

The man was instantly taken out of his daze the moment he heard his quaint home bombarded by the all too familiar *rat-ta-tat-tat*.

Damn bird! That's the third one this week!

...And it's only Tuesday...

The man would never admit it, but a part of him enjoyed the annoying birds. They helped him ignore the thoughts that tormented his brain.

Mister Hermann was not a happy man. To say he had a few regrets would be an understatement. There was a time when George was a hopeful man, a dreamer; but that part of him died the same day as his wife. His granddaughter came to live with him, but that only made him feel worse.

She's a grown woman...she should go live her own life!

The brown and orange leaves crumbled and crunched beneath the man’s feet as he slammed the door behind him. The bird was not fazed. The beast, with its red head, black and white striped back, sat too high to be reached by any stick of manageable size, yelling failed to deter the red devil and the old man knew he would only embarrass himself by trying to throw anything. He did own a ladder tall enough to reach the elusive critter, but he’d rather watch the slow and painful destruction of his home than try to climb those eleven stairs of death.

The quickened pace of blood running through his tired veins may have rejuvenated him, but a part of him still remembered his true age, otherwise the nearby maple tree would be perfect for conquering the pint-sized terror. And that’s when the man realized his troubles would soon be over.

In the leaf barren tree, up about fifteen feet or so, was the man’s greatest ally. The fury, four-legged creature moved with such grace and swiftness that the man affectionately named her Death, for she never missed her mark.

The cat stealthily neared the invader. The foul beast, fortunately, chose its place of invasion near an outstretched limb that would make it an easy target for anything willing to take on the challenge. Death fixed her yellow eyes on her prey and moved in for the strike. Finding her claws were not long enough to reach the elusive winged-thing, the fuzzy wonder dove towards the woodpecker. Once the beast was captured, the cat had hoped to clasp onto a limb a few feet below, but to the man’s horror, she had miscalculated. The poor companion overestimated her own abilities and plummeted towards the orange-brown ground. The man had seen the cat take falls like this before, but he also now saw the bluish gray rock directly between the cat’s path and the ground. The thud echoed through the man’s weary ears causing him to grasp for his heart and his legs felt weak, causing him to lose his footing.

George began to fall and knew only black.

“Opa! Opa!” His granddaughter exclaimed as the old man awoke to find himself in the safety of his own bed.

“It’s a good thing I’m so careless and had to come back to the house!” She smiled as she put her hand to his forehead. “I know how you hate doctors, but...”

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“No!” George quickly snapped. “I will be fine...and I don’t even know why you stick around with me, you should move away from here, I can take care of myself.”

“You could have died if I hadn’t brought you in!!...You could at least show some gratitude, Opa.”

The man was silent for a moment. “...Thank you. Now there is something I must do.” George said as he began to push the solid blue covers away.

“You should rest!” Susan begged.

“...Don’t tell me what I can’t do,” he said as he left his granddaughter alone with her thoughts.

The man carried the box which incased Death near the tree line behind the house. As George drove the shovel into the hardening earth, he heard the hum of his granddaughter’s car as it headed toward the world the man had closed himself off from so many years ago.

Autumn, the season of death... how appropriate. George threw the last bit of dirt upon the freshly dug grave. He returned the shovel to the small brown shed near the house and decided a walk might rest his uneasy mind.

The brown and black leaves crinkled beneath him as he began for the single path that led away from his home. The tire-treaded path was not designed for the feet, but he never gave that a second thought. Hands in his pockets, he strolled calmly in line with the tire track. The man became lost in his thoughts: deciding the value of his life, how he ended up in Maine instead of where he really wanted to live... if he would be remembered. He became so enraptured by himself, he did not notice the eerie fog that was slowly descending around him. After what the man figured must have been an hour, he turned around, preparing to seek home, only to discover this had become nearly impossible. For the instant the man changed direction, a thick fog blocked his way. Straining his eyes, the fog had somehow invaded everything in sight. The bluish gray mist soon enveloped the sky, the ground and the dying trees. Save for the faded red of his coat, the man knew only gray. It soon became difficult for him to see his hand after he waved it in front of his eyes. Confused more than concerned, George continued undeterred. Feeling the indent of the tire track the man thought oddly little of the strange fog. But after a few minutes, his confidence began to wane. The old man could no longer feel a difference between the tire trail and the rest of the path. The pace of his feet began to slow while the pace of his heart began to increase. The weary man used both of his hands as guides, fearing he may collide with a bark-covered structure or misplace his footing. As he continued on, he found the fog difficult to inhale and his current direction doubtful. Eventually, George did encounter a tree and he could no longer find the path which had brought him there.

Tired, hunched and exhausted, he rested one hand on the tree, George clasped his chest with his left hand and could feel his heart begin to weaken. He nearly gave in to his red vessel of life, when something caught his eye that gave him reason to continue living.

The man noticed the gray smog had dispersed somewhat, clearing a path to a strangely open area, a forestry oasis. The man cautiously stumbled towards this place of seeming sanctuary, only to realize his place of entrance was no longer visible.

If the man had not found the thick fog strange enough, the place he now stood alerted his senses. The area around him, nearly circular, was about an acre in size. Stranger yet was the greenery that covered the surface of the area. Grass. Thick grass. Healthy grass. *Cut* grass. How such grass was sustained by natural means was beyond the man, since he knew no one else lived near this area. Beyond the fog that blocked any escape or view of the sky, the man gazed upon two of the most captivating trees he had ever seen.

Perhaps built by some force other than nature, these mighty pillars stood straight, limbless and as the man soon discovered, were as smooth as carved marble. The bewildered man looked for the tops of the two immobile beasts, but realized they were somewhere beyond the fog. The elegance of their placement in the middle of this seeming oasis captivated the man. He paced around one tree, sensing the incredible silky-smoothness against his fingers, until one stood at his left and the other at his right. He stared straight between the trees, only to discover he did not see grass, as he knew was there, but something radically different.

Blinking, looking away, rubbing his eyes – all attempts failed to rationalize what he now saw.

Past the living pillars sand lessened and diluted the impact of the waves and water beyond. Slightly out of the man's narrow view, a small hut – lacking a human counter-part – rose up from the sand, avoiding the water and providing shelter for whomever dared pass through the void. The calls of seagulls were heard as they fluttered above the glistening waves. The dense smell of the fog was replaced by the smell of salt. The water stretched on further than the height of the trees which guarded this dream world. The moon floated high in the sky, reflecting its bluish glow onto the shimmering water below. Dolphins broke the surface of the water and became white as the man's eyes when the moon caught them in its rays. A crab scuttled across the sandy surface – seemingly gliding on the grains, and was spotted out like a criminal by the moonlight. None could escape the ominous light.

The man crept closer towards paradise. For once in many years, he felt at peace. He crept closer and in awe, the man knelt down. The man was mere inches away from his goal. He reached his shaky hand into paradise and aimed towards the ground.

The instant his fingers felt the sand, he knew something was not right. The grains did not slide through his fingers – the sand did not act how sand should. The grains in the man's weathered fingers were not grains at all.

The man soon realized he had only accomplished to pluck a few blades of grass. As he struggled to his feet, George saw his vision disappear.

The iridescent crab dissolved into the air, the dolphins disappeared forever under the surface of the water, the smell of salt once again became that of the constricting fog, the voices of the seagulls were silenced. The hut slowly sank into the sand, the shimmering water soaked into the ground, the sand sank beneath the greenery. The moon and its rays diffused into the fog, only making the surrounding fog thicker and more constraining on the man.

Overwhelmed by his vision, the man pressed the grass to his face, fell back onto his knees and began to weep. He was quickly interrupted, however, when a bright white light broke through the fog from the sky between the trees of perfection. George slowly rose and walked towards the light.

The moment his body entered the light, he lost control of his legs and plummeted towards the earth. And in this moment, was struck with immense chest pain. As he began his decent, the man blacked out, only to awaken on the ground – in a very different location.

The shock to his heart came not from his recent view of paradise, but from the loss of his greatest ally, Death, which he now saw once again. Collapsed into a wilted heap, the man's fall had been softened by the dry, dead leaves.

George Hermann saw the woodpecker skitter away from Death's non-existent grasp as his vision faded to black.

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Photograph by Rebecca Jonas

She Announces to the World

Kathleen Hayes Phillips

It's a perfect day
as she walks
across the library parking lot
pink sundress swinging,
to the slapping rhythm
of jeweled flip-flops swishing

She's talking at her mother's back
with contented surety
A stiff back that says
hurry up
we'll be last
watch your brother
don't drop your books

She walks oblivious to all
but the moment,
her perfect moment

And I recall another mother
Another little girl and wonder
how often perfect happened
when I was walking
away.

Lullaby of Nightmares

Rachel Kuehl

Rock a by, rock a by
fetal in the place you lie
descend upon a wakeless eye
trying to climb the mountain high
piled from the devil's lies
I hear an emptiness in your sigh
as you try and try and try
but no longer can you hide
from that mountain so high
that bounds the shackles' tie
disabling you to fly
sweet child, please say goodbye
so no bloody tears are cried
and then, I will sing you a lullaby.

Sensation

Tanya Rakowski

The silence goes on for hours, especially at night. It creeps in through the walls and surfaces in my room. I do nothing about it, not because I like it, because I can't. Every so often I can hear the thumps echoing from footsteps in the hallway, never entering my room. In here it's motionless.

But there is one noise that filters away the silence of the air; the repeating beeps of the heart monitor letting me know I am still alive. Why I am still alive and why they bother keeping me this way, I don't know. But I got used to the beeps and eventually tuned them out of my brain, so I still hear nothing, silence. However, I've been used to the sound of nothing for quite some time. Before the cancer took over, I was still alone, not in a room but a full house filled with no noise from other human beings since my wife had passed away two years ago. Silence isn't what I chose, but it seemed we were meant for each other, and I feared we'd never escape each other's company.

Most of the time I sleep; very rarely do I stay up for long. I hate being awake. When I'm awake I am reminded of my loneliness and the silence. Dare I dream back to a time when I wasn't confined to a cream room with blue flowers painted on the wall? Why should I, when days will never be like that again and haven't been for so long? My life until the end is in this bed, in this room.

During the daylight hours, the silence breaks in the hallway and I hear the noises drifting into my room. I hear the running footsteps of small children and the parents adding to the noise by yelling at them to quiet down. During these hours I cherish what left of my life I have, while some soap opera plays on the television.

As I was lying in bed today, I drifted to a half sleep state when a new nurse came in. I turned my head to see a very pretty lady most likely in her thirties checking out my charts. Her brown curly hair was pulled back out of her face, and her rose-colored cheeks and painted soft pink lips reminded me of Mildred.

"Who are you?" I managed to ask.

"Emily. Sarah, your regular nurse, got caught up in something where she couldn't come here, so I'll check up on you."

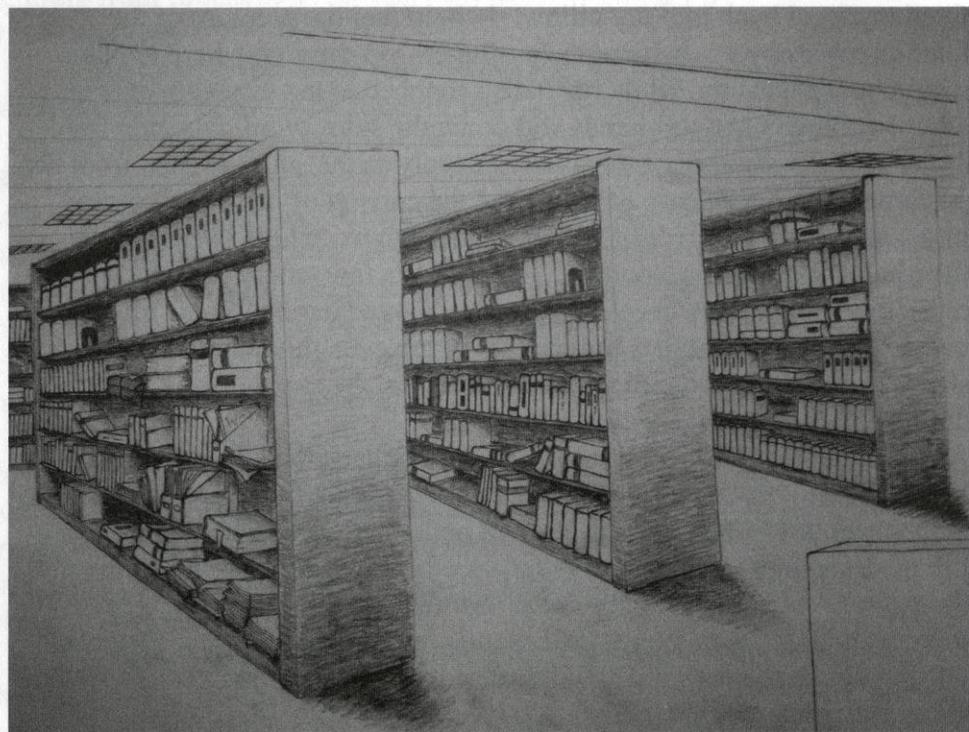
"I'd rather you check me out of this place," I said but began coughing because my throat was hurting so much that it was difficult to say anything. Emily just smiled at me, put down my charts and then

walked over to the side of the bed. I could feel the pressure as she sat down beside me, the sudden movement in the mattress made my body tilt toward hers.

“Now why would you want that?” Emily said in a soft whisper.

I could feel her touch embrace my face, as I closed my eyes and tilted my head back into my pillow. I could feel the pressure of the thumbs run along my hairline as her fingers ran through where my hair would be if I had any, while her nails scratched along my scalp ever so slightly. Slowly her soft hands slid down the sides of my face moving down towards my chin. I breathed in deeply as the smell of lilac from her perfume tickled my sense of smell and the corners of my mouth curled into a slight smile. A cool feeling ran through my whole body and the little hairs on my arms stood up. Finally for a few tender seconds she just rested her hand on my cheek. She then removed her hand but still stayed beside me and I could feel her stare upon me even though my eyes were shut. The pressure from the mattress eased as she stood up and then the door clanked shut and she was gone.

Her touch reminded me of the days outside the silence, days that I had spent with my wife. I hadn’t been touched like that since she left me. You forget how much the sensation of being caressed is needed in your life until suddenly you don’t have it. As for now, Mildred and Emily are both gone, and I’m back with in the tortured silence of my life. I let my mind wander to sleep in dreams I spend with my wife, hoping that this will finally be the dream that will refuse to let me wake so I can forever be along side my beautiful girl.



Artwork by Paul Burgermeister

As I was trying to find a book to read, I realized that there were many new titles, and I began to wonder if the store really had more books to offer than the books I had on hand. This is a common question I often ask myself when I'm in a bookstore, and it's a question that I have been asked many times, including the day I visited the store.

"Do you have any new titles?" I asked the store owner. "Yes, we do," he replied. "We have many new titles in our store, and we are always adding new titles to our collection."

"I'm interested in the new titles you have in your store," I said. "I would like to buy a few books to read, and I would like to know if they are any good." "Yes, we have many good books in our store," he said. "We have many books that are well-written, and we have many books that are well-researched. We have many books that are well-reviewed, and we have many books that are well-liked by our customers."

“Raging Sax Dream”

Joshua Sellnow

In a dark room a saxophone
wailing out syncopated midnight rage
forming notes, resonating, pulsating
melodies pouring into my ears
smoke pouring out of my nostrils,
the music can't stop. I'm breathing it in like air; I'll die
if it stops. It has to keep on raging, indefinable
unpredictable, unashamed, unabashed, and unbeknownst
to the world outside where people go home
at night and watch sitcoms and pro-wrestling
on cable TV, work overtime at their mid-level
insurance salesman jobs and play solitaire
on their computers, unaware of this beautiful beat
that breaks down reality into a place
where demons feed on blood in the streets
and dancers dance on flaming tight ropes
and singers still sing with their lips sewn shut,
a world of dreams and nightmares
glorious chaos, flowing through me, around me
and finally fading until all that's left
are the prismatic memories of that sound,
that feeling, burning like solar flares
in my mind. The desire to capture the
essence of the sax inside a syringe and mainline it
until I can't take it anymore, while the
player just keeps on raging.

Tick, Tock, Gone

By Joshua Sellnow

Time's sleight of hand
tricks you into complacency;
look away for a second
your life is gone.

The tick tock trickster
laughs at all your wasted moments,
time spent hoping for more
as you slip into the grasp of fate.

Years become footsteps,
following the road
that leads to a better or worse place.
No one knows which.

The tick tock clockwork world
that counts the memories you have left
forgets all of a sudden
and leaves you trapped in that instant forever.bg

