

OUR MISSION IS TO CREATE AN ANNUAL
LITERARY JOURNAL AND PROVIDE A FORUM FOR
WRITERS AND ARTISTS AT WESTMINSTER
COLLEGE. JANUS STRIVES TO CREATE AN
ENVIRONMENT TO REINVENT PROSE, POETRY,
AND GRAPHICS IN AN INNOVATIVE AND
INSPIRING WAY.

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE PRESENTS

JANUS

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Janus regrets that the following prize winners weren't correctly noted among our pages:

*Soul Made of Bread, by Emily Grand
- 2ND PLACE PROSE WINNER
Little Green Flowers, by Anna Bohn
- 3RD PLACE PROSE WINNER*

STARBUCKS

GABRIELLE DEIMEKE



COFFEE STAINS

LYNN GERRITY

Coffee Stains
On my brand new pants,
In the palm of my hands,
On the brim of my scarf,
Right above which, my mouth meets the cup.
It falls down my throat and falls down my chin.
It burns my skin
And warms my heart.
And when it's done, I toss the evidence,
But the stains remain.



NIGHT LIFE

KATHRYN LEETCH

LOST IN THE CITY

TENZING DHAKHWA



SANTA MONICA BIKE

GABRIELLE DEIMEKE

REMEMBRANCE

DANIEL BROWN-SCHURR

The look in your eyes
When I did something right
The sound of your voice
When you wished me good night

The sorrow you felt
When I came into harm
The bike wheels gave out
And you saw my left arm

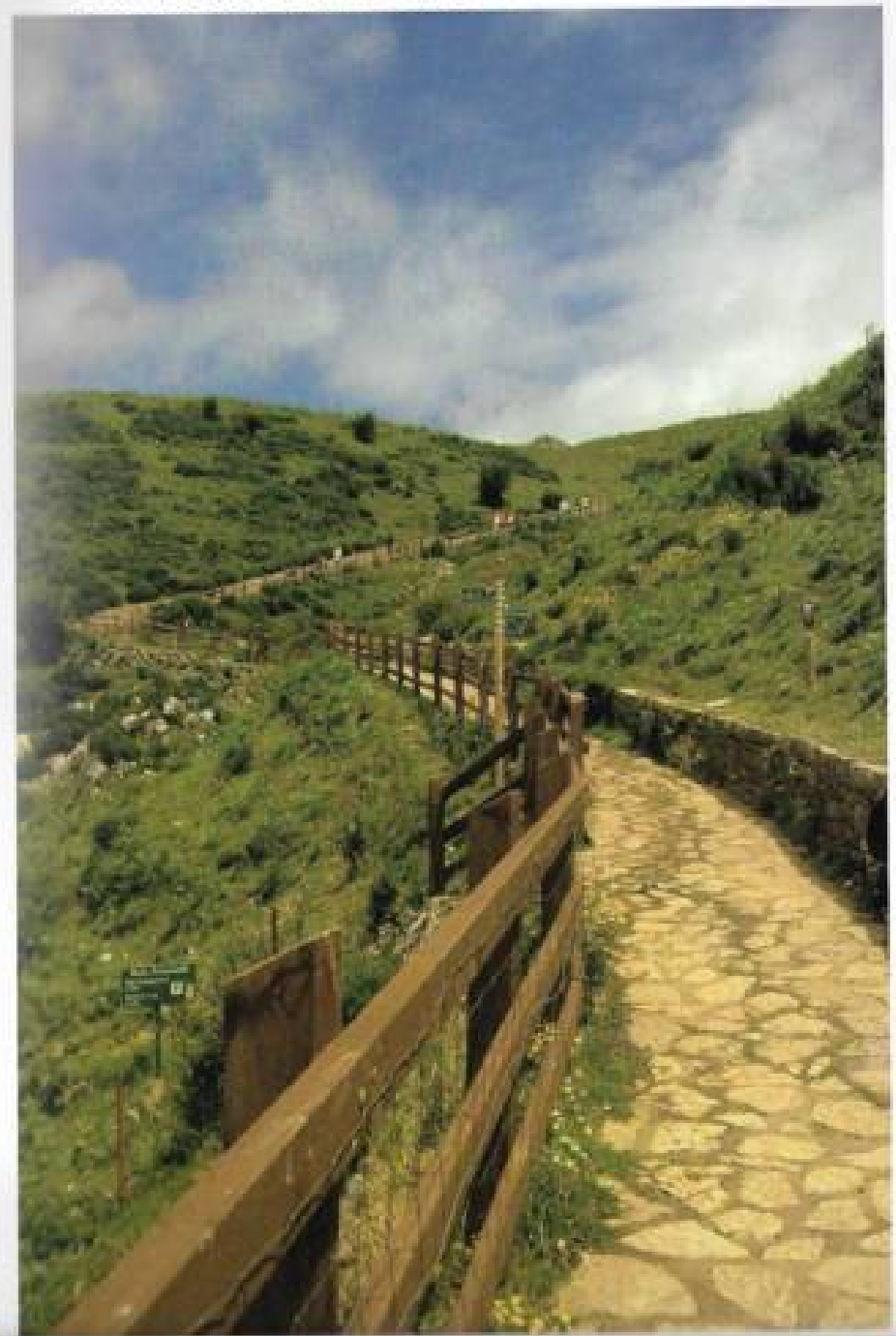
The nights you would cook
And the whole house would smell
Of promising feasts
That were sure to excel

You pressured me always
You wanted the best
You were of great values
And now lay to rest



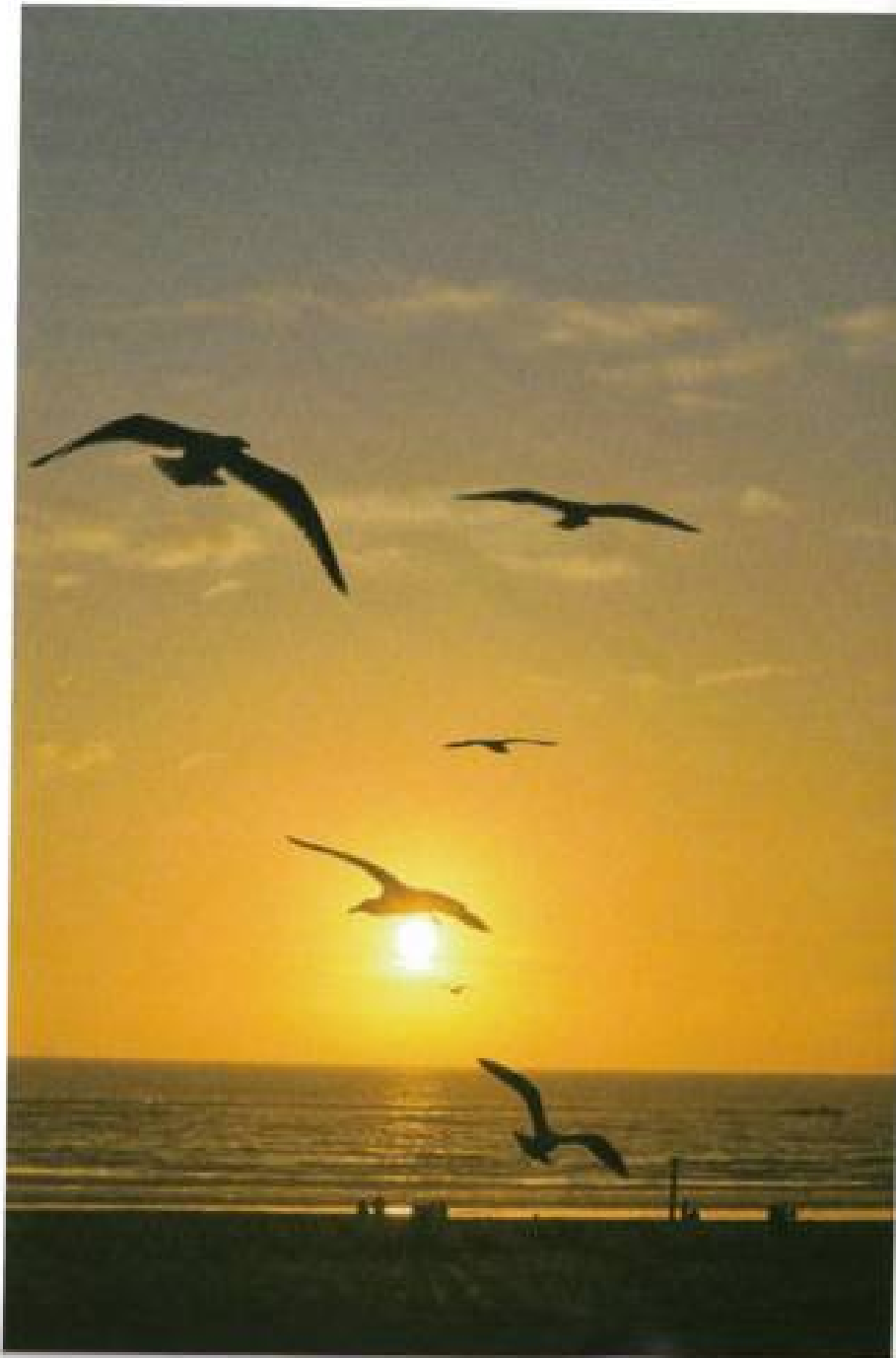
SPAIN'S ROAD LESS TRAVELED

LEE GOATLEY



BIRDS AT THE PIER

GABRIELLE DEIMEKE



WHITBY ABBEY

CHELSEA TUTHILL

A SEAMAN'S SIDEWALK JAYME PALMGREN





IN QUEEN VICTORIA'S GARDEN JAYME PALMGREN

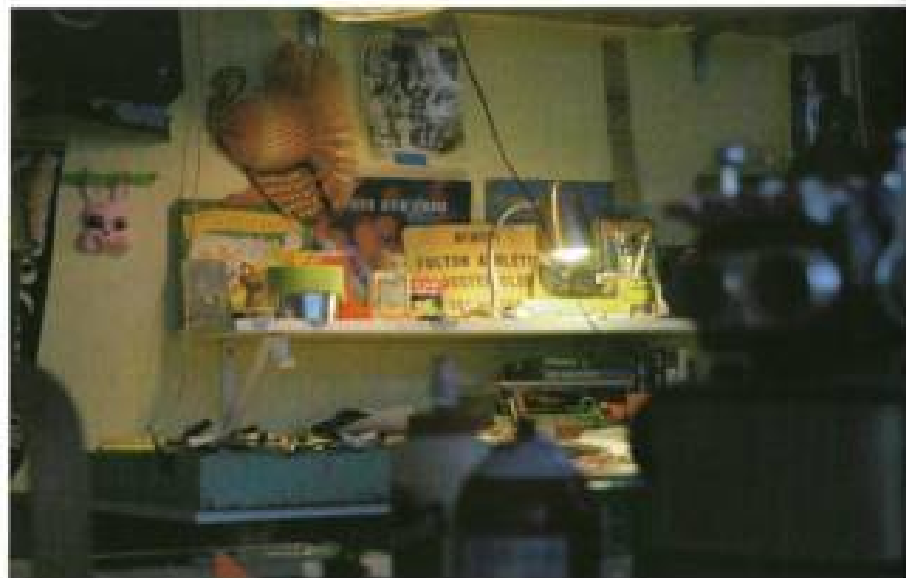
LONELY GOATS CHELSEA TUTHILL



THE ALTAR AND ITS BENCHES MATTHEW ANTONE

HEAVENLY LIGHT KATALYN STOESSEL

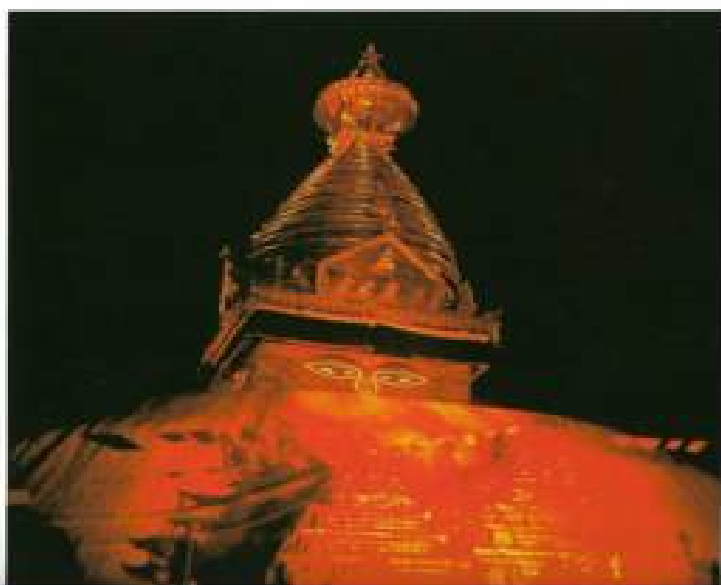




CREATIVITY LEAVES THE LIGHT ON MATTHEW ANTONE

OUTSHINED

TENZING DHAKHWA



BRICK
CANVAS



JAYME
PALMGREN

THE
TREE
OF
LIFE



SIFEI
WANG

SUNSET SILHOUETTES

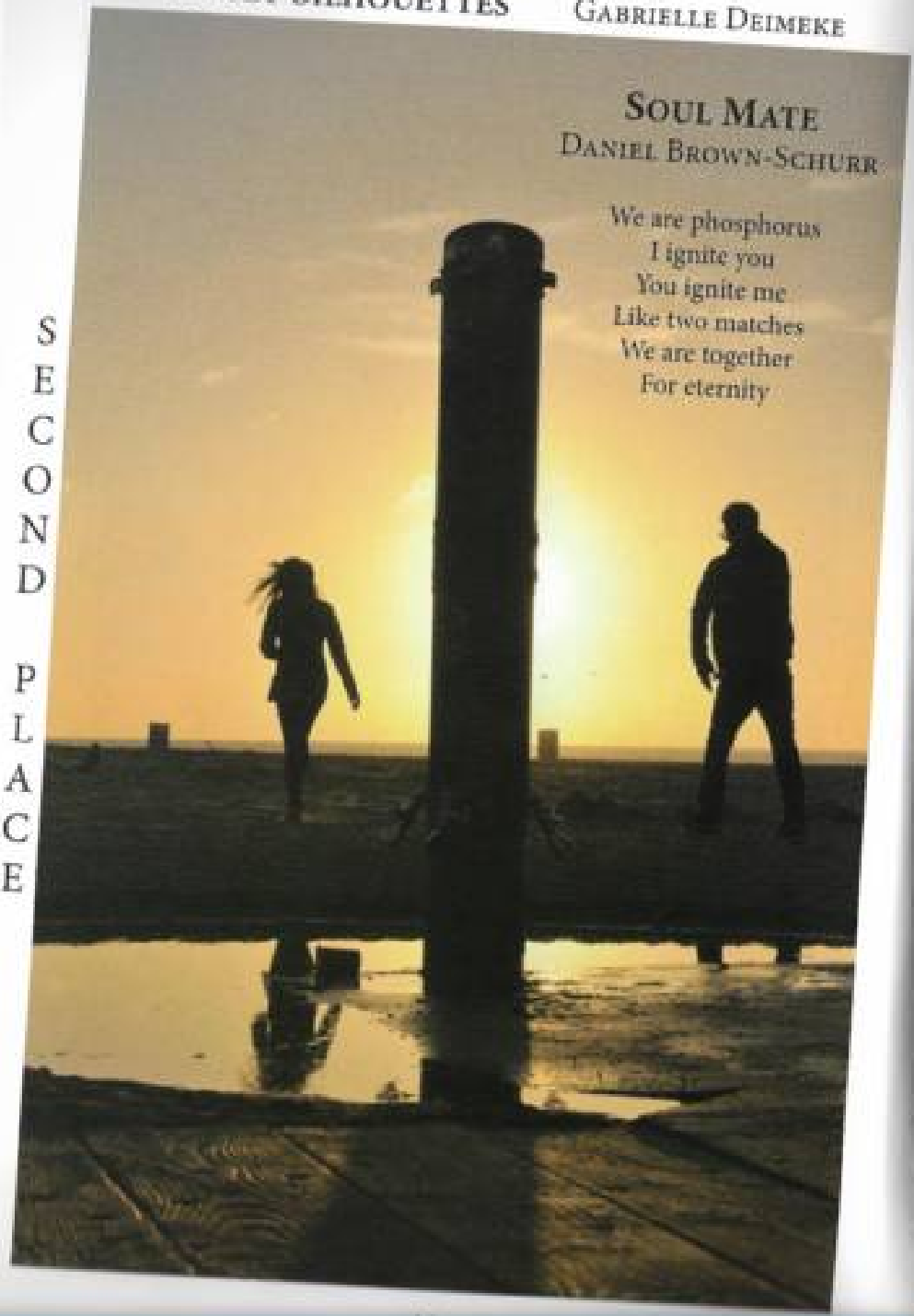
GABRIELLE DEIMEKE

SOUL MATE
DANIEL BROWN-SCHURR

We are phosphorus
I ignite you
You ignite me
Like two matches
We are together
For eternity

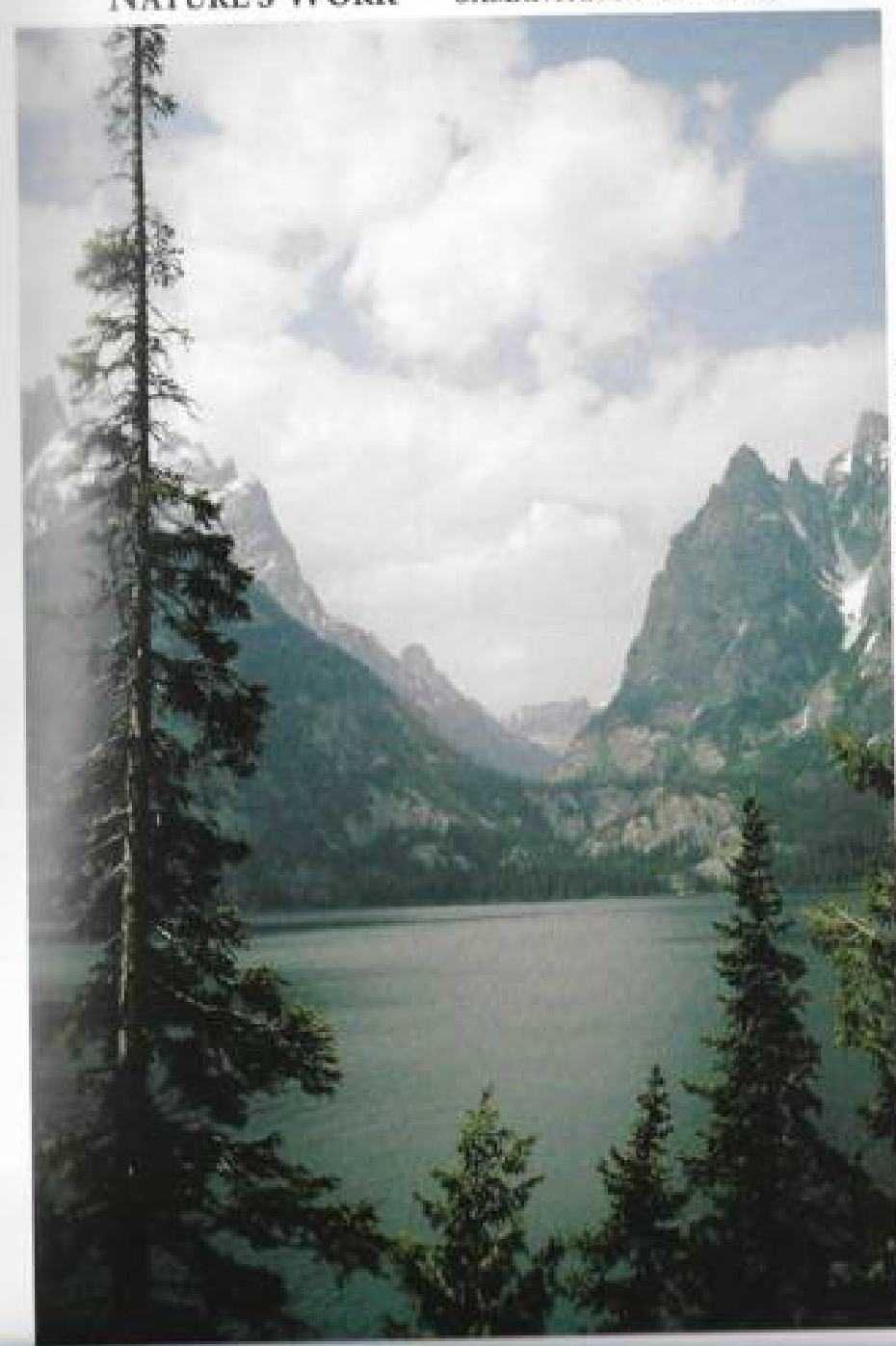
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NATURE'S WORK

SAMANTHA HOLLENBERG



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HANNIBAL LIGHTHOUSE

SUSAN YOUNG



REFLECTIONS MCKENZIE WAGNER FIRST PLACE

In front of the mirror, my body is still dripping from the hot shower. However, I can still distinguish the tears from the beads of water rolling down my face. The fuzzy, chocolate brown towel is wrapped tightly around my body, masking the hourglass figure underneath. This is both the best and worst part of my day, critiquing every flaw and imperfection that only I see. My eyes start at my face working their way down to my polished purple toes on the floor. The mirror is not my friend, but still I stand in front of it every morning. It shows me everything, paralleling with my own thoughts. The mirror never lied, and there I stood. The view is like a car accident; I cannot tear my eyes away from the scene.

A tan body stares back at me, eyes still dull from sleeping, and I see a plump-five-foot-two person. First I notice my sun-kissed skin, the home of hundreds of freckles. My shoulders are strong and proud. My hazel eyes slide down farther, stopping at my breasts, small and round, the left slightly smaller than the right. My stomach is soft, having lost all of its athletic tone. Will it ever lie flat? The jeweled ring dangling from my belly button; it acts as a distraction from the flab. The dimples on my thighs are almost as noticeable as the numerous stretch marks extended snugly across my hips and inner thighs. Now my calves — I like my calves. The three muscles toned from the years of running, volleyball, and high heels. A perfect teardrop shape is formed by the gastrocnemius muscle, and with every step I take I can see the athletic definition. The reflections are the truth, and they show every part of the real me.

I.

Until I was in eighth grade, body image had never been an issue to me.

My mom always said, "It doesn't matter what the house looks like on the outside; it only matters what the inner workings look like." So growing up I lived by that motto. I worked on my personality, making my "inner workings" beautiful. But in the eighth grade, it was brought to my attention, by John Piontek, that I was too "big." John, a very popular boy, thought it was his job to inform everyone of their flaws. It was recess, right after our lunch period, when John noticed I had not eaten very much of my lunch. I had not been feeling well, because it was that time of the month.

He asked me, "Finally cutting back?"

I was confused, and I really was not sure if he was even talking to me.

After only a couple minutes, he addressed me again, "It's probably a good thing you didn't eat lunch today, if you know what I mean." I did not know what he meant, but he was sure to inform me.

"You're just too big." He laughed as he said it and walked off.

I choked back tears for the rest of the recess, only looking up to check my makeup in the window glass. I thought, what is too big? I was athletic, and I played volleyball, basketball, softball, track, and soccer. It was not my fault I did not look like a tetherball poll like the majority of the girls in my class.

Later, in the girls' bathroom, I was looking at my reflection in the

full-length mirror. I saw something different, something ugly. I had never noticed the extra pounds around my stomach, or the double chin, or my thighs stuffed tight into my khaki school pants. Was John right? I never thought I was fat before. The self-confidence I had built up after fourteen years was gone, almost in an instant.

Katie Bruemner walked into the bathroom right when the tears began to roll down my cheeks. Of course, the biggest bully in my grade would walk into the bathroom at the moment I was bawling my eyes out. I could not have been more embarrassed or vulnerable. She asked me what was wrong, and when I told her, she looked at me and agreed.

She said, "Well, you do wear spandex for volleyball, all the time. Maybe it wouldn't hurt for you to lose a few pounds." After she walked out of the bathroom, I continued to stare at my reflection in the mirror, judging and criticizing every part of my body. I could hear the toilets continuously running in the background. The bell rang, three loud chimes, and I splashed my face with ice-cold water, taking one last look at my reflection.

This was the day I started dieting.

2.

My mom was sitting in the army green rocking chair, curled up like a sleeping cat in the sun. I had no idea where I was. However, there was an IV in my arm; it was stinging like a bee sting. My head was pounding, like every time I vomited my meals into the toilets. It felt like my eyes were going to be forced out of their sockets because of the severe pressure. Why was I in this bed?

I knew exactly where I was and why. I just did not want to admit the fact I was lying in a hospital bed.

Anastasia was playing in the background. It made me think of my first house. I was five years old, lying on the red shag carpet. It looked like the top of a circus clown's red wig. It was soft and fluffy, the most comfortable thing I had ever laid on. There were nights I would not be able to sleep in my own bed, and I would sneak into the family room to lie on the red shag carpet. There was one night I had the stomach flu, and my mom gave me the hand-made quilt and my favorite goose feather pillow. She tucked me in on the red carpet, and she put in my favorite movie, Anastasia, for me to fall asleep to. My mom was capable of protecting me and made me feel so safe, even when everything was falling apart.

The doctor walked in my room and introduced himself as Dr. Jeff Piontek. He happened to be the father of the bully, John, who considered me too big. How ironic. He talked to me like I was a child, but I was seventeen years old. I understood what was going on. I knew I was in the hospital; I knew I had an eating disorder; I knew what I was doing to myself; I knew where I was; I knew that I had messed up. My diagnosis was extreme anorexia nervosa, severe dehydration, my left lung was collapsing, and my heart was not functioning regularly. I was eighty-four pounds, and on the verge of complete organ failure. Dr. Piontek explained everything in extreme detail, and the entire time my mom had tears rolling down her face. My mom was crying, but I was staring at my skeletal reflection in Dr. Piontek's glasses.

I was an extreme disappointment to my entire family. I had not only let down my family, but I had let myself down. I was slowly killing myself, and I only weighed eighty-four pounds. I was nothing but skin and bones. I would be spending the next three months in a rehabilitation center in Kansas. It would be great. Three months dealing with something I did not want to deal with, especially with people I did not want to share my story with. I had to go, and it was not an option. It was a mandatory part of my treatment.

3.

I walked back into the waiting room I had entered for the first time a year ago. My mom walked right up to the friendly curly haired receptionist to check me in. I sat down on the parsley colored couch, and caught my reflection in the mirror hanging above the information table. My hair was much longer, but my eyes were dull and sunken deep into my skull. Now I was eighteen, about to begin my first year of college, but instead of taking senior trips or going to the lake, I would be spending another summer at rehab. Relapse was normal, but I did not expect to get caught. Skip a meal here, skip a meal there; I did not think anyone would notice.

After check-in I had to go to the group session. This was my second go around; I knew how to work the system. All I needed to do was smile, be open, act happy, and eat just enough to gain a couple pounds. Amanda taught me that the first time I was here. She was my roommate and my best friend. Luckily, she would be my roommate again. She was back for her fourth time. We broke all the rules. We stayed up past curfew; we communicated with the outside world; she smoked, and we had a scale in our room. That was the biggest no-no of them all. I was obsessed with checking my weight on an hourly basis. Every day, after my shower, I stood in front of the mirror, checked my reflection, and pulled the scale out from the closet. Completely naked, I would step on the scale and check my weight.

As the weeks went by, my weight slowly went up, and eventually both Amanda and I were released. We wrote letters and Facebooked. We were still best friends, constantly scheming on the best ways to lose weight. I loved her.

4.

Four years later, after my initial diagnosis of anorexia I sit here with a clean bill of health. However, everything has changed. I will struggle with anorexia for the rest of my life, but my story has a hopeful ending. I was one of the lucky ones. I still look in the mirror not always happy with the reflection staring back at me, but that is okay because the will to be healthy outweighs the want to be skinny. My best friend, Amanda, never learned that lesson, and died last summer because she never got better. She would not admit she had a problem.

Amanda's death allowed me to accept that I had a problem. I do not want to die, and I want to live a full life. I look at my reflection in the mirror and finally see the real me. I am five foot two and one hundred and fifteen pounds, and it is good enough for me.

My reflection is me.

I am the captain
Of my life's ship.
I choose the direction
 speed
 and power.
It is up to me to create
 The beauty
 peace
 and serenity
Aboard my ship.
Make it a place worth living.
Make my life worth living.
I decide where to
Drop my anchor,
Pause for a bit and
Marvel at the beauty around me,
And when to sail ahead
To reach a destination
That awaits along the horizon.
There will be many
Obstacles during my long voyage,
 Icebergs
 Hurricanes
 Rogue waves
That will try to stop me,
Prevent me from experiencing
A truly happy life.
But I have built my ship
To be sturdy.
To withstand life's disturbances.
To get hit
Feel the impact and destruction
And become stronger.

I AM THE CAPTAIN

KIRSTEN DUNGAN

I will not allow my ship to
Remain anchored in the harbor
Out of fear.
Fear is the enemy.
Instead, I will journey with her
Around the world,
Through the smooth and
Rough sailing.
Experiencing all life has to offer.
Be an inspiration.
Make a difference.

I am the captain
Of my life's ship.
I hold all power
 control
 and freedom.

TAXI OF TRUTH CHELSEA TUTHILL

She hailed the cab from the curb, trying her best not to get drenched in the pouring rain, but it was inevitable. As it pulled up, the tires sloshed water all over the front of her dress. The evening was not going as she had planned.

Why hadn't he shown up? She wondered as she stepped into the cab. The driver glared at her from the front seat. "Where are you going?" he demanded. "Can you just drive up the street please? I'll know it when I see it." He sighed and rolled his eyes. Another lost lover, he thought to himself.

The cab began to steam up from the high heat and her water soaked dress. She gazed out the window at the deserted street. The driver was speeding past all the things that were so familiar to her. The fountain where they had first met. The café where she had run into him again. The clothing store where he asked her on their first date after running into each other for the third time that week.

Her friends had told her that she was crazy. She knew that she wasn't. Their meetings had not been accidental. It was fate. But maybe fate was no longer on her side. They had planned this evening for a few weeks now, making reservations at their favorite place. She had waited for over an hour, but still he hadn't shown.

The driver sighed, "Seen it yet?"

"No." Her eyes filled with tears. She knew that whatever was waiting at the end of this ride would not be what she wanted.

She wanted a life with him. She wanted to know that she could spend every minute with him without the fear of him ever disappearing. As he had tonight.

It was two years ago today that they had met. It was a year ago today that he had told her that he loved her. It was three months earlier when she had smelled a perfume that was not her own. It was a month earlier when she saw a small smudge of gloss on his collar. She had never said a thing.

She sat in the taxi contemplating her life. She began to weigh the pros and cons of their relationship. I could go where I know he is. I could finally confront him. I could yell. I could cry. He could come back to me.

Apologize, tell me that he loves me, but what would that even mean? The cab driver sighed. Why do all of these women ride in my cab looking so lost and sad? It's always the same story. Why do they make the same mistakes?

"Slow down," she half yelled at the driver. He slowed and stopped at the curb and she gazed out the window. Yes, it was just as she had thought. His moped was parked outside the restaurant. The restaurant where the waitress with the long legs and perfect hourglass figure worked. The restaurant with the apartments above that the same waitress lived in. All of her knowledge based on what he had casually mentioned before, pieces that she pieced together on her own.

Her throat closed. There was a movement from the alley; he was sauntering towards the scooter, a smirk on his face, his hair tousled and his clothes wrinkled. She inhaled deeply. For once she was able to slowly release her breath at

the sight of him. She stared at him, and in that moment everything melted away.

He looked into the cab and saw the face of the most beautiful woman in the world. Then he recognized the face, but saw calmness in it where he didn't expect to find it. She looked at him and gave him a smile. He quickened his pace, but she turned away. He saw her speaking to the driver, and the cab drove away.

It's all going to be okay. In fact, it will be even better than okay. Life will be perfect now. She settled back in her seat, gave the cab driver her address, happy that she had never moved in with him.

The driver relaxed as well, happy to see that she was no longer crying in the back of his cab. Happy that she was not broken and torn apart like so many before had been. When she went to pay him he smiled at her and said, "No miss, this one is on me; enjoy the rest of your life."

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HOSPITAL LIGHT RACHEL HOLDEN

I woke to find the room was choked with light,
though sleep exuded still from every pore.
I watched you dozing peacefully, a sight
I'd seen a hundred times but still adored.
A dream was playing slyly on your face,
a daring plot of cabbages and kings
whose heroic movements only I could trace,
down rabbit holes with bread and butter wings.
A lovely place to be so trapped, my dear
so far away from disinfected halls,
where rotten fruit and paralyzing fear
have slowly bred inside these captive walls.
But here, drink me and run away, I'll come,
Fight your monster, wake, and you'll have won.

FINALLY LETTING GO KIRSTEN DUNGAN

I know I once said I loved you.
That I would never
Force you to leave
Your place by my side.
You were the only person I needed.
My only true friend.
With you I felt strong
Determined
And had a purpose.
I felt able to overcome anything.
Starvation
Destruction
And Death.
You were my everything, and
You got me one step closer to my ultimate goal:
Absolute Perfection.

But this was all a fantasy
Imagined solely as a way to escape
emotional pain
And I know that now.
You are destructive
Life-ruining,
Brutal.
Deadly.
You consumed my every waking moment
With lies
And false dreams.
You hid me from the truth
From my potential
My beauty within
And the awe of the world around me.

You told me I was strong
Though because of you,
I was getting weaker everyday.
You told me I was in control
But you held complete control over me.
You told me I was fat
Though everyone could see the
bones through my pale, lifeless skin.
You told me I was ugly, worthless,
and unable to love or be loved.
You hated me
Wanted to kill me
Loved seeing me in pain
And I failed to see this part of you.

I've moved on now.
I am able to now see who you were
And what you were doing to me.
That doesn't mean you won't
Try to come back in my life.
You will haunt the deepest part of my mind
Forever.
The difference is I now know the true you.
I know I can take care of myself
Carve my own future
Create my own destiny
Life life Happy
Free
Full of love and energy
And all without your help.
I'm sorry, but
I'm finally letting go.

SOUR MILK MATTHEW ANTONE

Hand on the good book that I never read,
Promising your freedom but I've been known to fib,
So don't mind me holding the prosecutor's hand with
another on the switch,
I've been waiting to fry you for what I did,

I swear to tell the truth,
Or at least what I feel is best,
I am the paranoia,
The reason why this wasn't different,

But the chair wasn't big enough,
Sorry for that inconvenience
But someone needed to pull the switch
While the other is suspected of treason

I am Uncle Sam's mistress,
The thought process of a homegrown insurgency

I am the leach of liberty,
Appearing through your insecurities,

I am of the legislative vermin,
The termites of your branches
The result of power hungry thieves,

Ravaging her beneath the skirt,
Her torch was put out,
In the darkness they held her down,
And cracked her crown,
Giving birthing me,
The bastard of Lady Liberty,

I am the result of an intolerant town,
The afterbirth of a King
Before the colonial clout,
I was the paranoia that cushioned crowns
I am your need for governance,
And a remedy for the insubordinate

Revolutionary, orderly and contradictory
Like the lovers of liberty who carved their
initials into father's tree
The judge, jury, and judicial jezebel,

I'm the means to an end,
The king, parliament, or insurgency,
I can be whatever your anxieties need,

FROMAGE FORT RACHEL HOLDEN

We stumbled out of the catacombs and into the nearest park, laughing in relief at the sunlight of Paris and the promise of food. We settled on a park bench between the trees and prepared ourselves for the contents of my back pack. Despite the coolness of the catacombs the smell had found us even there. It seeped out of the seams of my bag with a potency I feared would quicken the bones that had surrounded us. As we moved through the rows of skulls I could feel the empty eyes moving with us, drawn by the overpowering scent. As I moved my hand to the clasp of the bag, I saw Maria move further away down the bench. I envied her neat, clean summer clothes still untainted by the monstrosity that I had carried on my back each day since coming to Paris. I looked down at what I was wearing, my last set of clothes. The only set still untouched by the odour that seemed to have sunk into my skin. It was an outfit that I was particularly proud of; a pleated skirt matched a thin cardigan which matched button-up shoes which matched an Alice band to top it off. I never matched. The innocence of this outfit was almost aggressive.

The stench brought my thoughts back to my bag. It was crowding me; it would not wait. I held my breath and ripped the backpack open. The smell hit me with now familiar force.

Each day we did this, toting through the streets of Paris a loaf of bread and a lump of cheese so powerful it blazed a path across the city. Our after-school jobs had brought us to Paris, but they weren't going to feed us very well. It was the cheese that saved us. We wore it like armour. No longer school girls, we pulled this final barrier between us and the world. It was that absolutely potent, leave-it-too-long-it-turns-into-a-conscious-life-form kind of cheese. Fromage Fort, as the locals would say. Its name: Epoisses Berthant, and it was our constant companion. Despite its orange hue which could best be described as radioactive. Despite a taste best associated with damp feet and ammonia, we loved it. We shouldn't have, but we did.

I handed the bread to Maria and she ripped it in half - a pleasure we took by turns - I unwrapped Epoisses. The flesh was soft enough to be scooped up with the bread and we ladled it eagerly into our mouths. The pulsing life of it was almost enthralling after the dank corridors of the catacombs. Within a matter of moments we were surrounded by pigeons. This was a food only French pigeons could enjoy, and they did. We handed over our scraps resentfully. I brushed the crumbs off my skirt, careful not to disturb the pleats. But in one moment, we were pulled from our comfortable dreams of Fromage Fort.

The sudden parting of the pigeons heralded the arrival of a middle aged man who I had noticed oozing around the park for some time. His over-average paunch was constricted by a waterproof jacket which seemed odd given the heat of the August day. With a soft voice he introduced himself, cutting through our fromage fortress, first in French and then, after our protests, in English. He explained to us that he was writer. He had written a story he was making into a film and maybe, he suggested, we'd want to be part of it? He'd pay us of course. A hundred Euros for half an hour. With the dusty alarm bell, never before needed in my sheltered life, lying useless in my benign smile, I

enquired about the plot. He paused and looked thoughtful. How best to phrase it? "Well, you would be a maid."

-Silence- "and I would find you stealing my things."

-Nothing- "and you'd say" He put on a high voice: "Please don't call the police. I will do anything you want, but don't call the police!"

I heard the faintest of ringing.

Being British has never let me down so badly.

"Oh I'm terribly sorry" -glancing at my watch- "I think we have to meet our parents. Maybe another time."

"Oh. Well, maybe twenty minutes?"

"No." Maria said, her large eyes cold behind larger and colder sunglasses.

"You speak for her?"

"Yes." She said.

We left the park.

"Was he asking...?"

"Oh yeah."

"Oh."

The fromage fort, no longer an armour around us, clung to my pleated skirt, headband and matching cardigan -in retrospect the school girl look is not to be advised.



WITHIN BORDERS

TENZING DHAKHWA

LITTLE GREEN FLOWERS ANNA BOHN

Janie felt the crisp October air sift through her curly brown hair. She looked up at the bleak grey sky, then closed her eyes and took a deep breath, smelling the dead leaves skittering around below her. She could hear the shrieks of laughter and clink of swing chains drifting over from the schoolyard half a block away. She was supposed to be with them, playing before the school day started. But she had an important job to do. So she kept her eyes closed and thought about Nora.

Nora, with her big blue eyes, sat at the stumpy-legged little table in the playroom, wearing the puffy princess dress she had gotten for her birthday. The teddy bears on the wallpaper looked on enviously as Nora neatly arranged Janie's dolls around the table. When everything was perfect, Nora clapped her hands imperiously. "Oh, servant girl! Bring the tea!"

Janie handled the plastic teapot carefully as she walked slowly around the table. It was her turn to be the servant. Nora had said that since they were at Janie's house, Janie had to be a good hostess and serve her guest.

Filling each cup with the grape juice "tea," Janie made her way closer to Nora. As she leaned over to fill Nora's cup, she wobbled on her too-big dress-up heels, and the teapot dropped square into Nora's lap, splashing deep, sticky purple all over the pink ribbons and tulle of the beautiful dress. For a moment, the two girls looked at the mess, and then both burst into tears. "Mrs. Hilson!" Nora sobbed, and Janie's mother came running in from the kitchen. "Mrs. - hic - Hilson, Janie - hic hic - ruined my dress! She did it on purpose!"

"No I didn't, mamma!"

"She did, she did! Janie wanted to be princess, but it wasn't her turn, and she spilled the tea all over my new dress!"

Janie was struck dumb. Maybe she had wanted to be princess, but she knew she would have gotten her turn. It really was just an accident. But Janie's mother mistook her pensiveness for a tacit confession, and sent her off to the corner while she gently shushed the whimpering and blotchy princess.

In the time-out corner was a small, framed square of fabric, with the words, "Treat others as you want to be treated" stitched in glittering gold on a cream-colored background. Even before Janie could read, she knew what these words said. Her mother had taught her, so that she could think about them when she had done wrong. Usually, wrong meant pulling the dog's tail or throwing a fit about having to finish her asparagus at dinner. But now, Janie tasted for the first time the bitterness of injustice. She had been too shocked to defend herself. She felt betrayed by her mother's imperceptiveness, and cheated by her friend's unfair accusation. Nora went home for the day not long after Janie's incarceration ended. Janie had longed to push her right out the door. She ate her vegetables quietly that night, and resolved always to stand up for herself from then on.

The two girls had lived next door to each other for about a year. Nora's family had moved into the neighborhood and were quickly befriended by the Hilsons. They threw Nora and Janie together as often as possible, to give Nora a friend in her new neighborhood. They played together most afternoons, and they

walked to school together every morning. Except for when Nora went to Disney world for her birthday, and got to miss a whole week of school. Janie walked the two blocks to Roosevelt Elementary by herself that week, and rather enjoyed it. She marveled at the beautiful princess dress from the Magic Kingdom when Nora returned.

The day after the tea was spilt, Nora was over for after-school playtime again while her mother and father were at work. The weather was warm, so Mrs. Hilson let the two girls play in the yard while she weeded the pansies in the window boxes. Nora played with her Skip-it while Janie drew chalk flowers on the driveway, her head bent intently towards her work. Nora took a misstep and the Skip-it skidded away into the grass. She looked over at Janie's flowers and said, "Janie, you're doing it wrong. Flowers can't be green."

Janie raised her head up warily. "Green is my favorite color. My daddy's eyes are green, just like mine. And when he comes home from his trip tonight, he'll like them."

"He won't be able to see them if it's nighttime. And besides, he'll probably think they're ugly, and just say he likes them because he has to. Nobody likes green flowers."

Janie set her little jaw and went back to work. But when Nora turned her back, she picked up the blue chalk and began to scribble over the green lines. Mrs. Hilson stood up at the other end of the yard and called over to the girls to say that Nora's mother would be home any minute, and that they should clean up.

Janie did not want to leave for school the next morning. "Can't I go to work with you, mom?" she begged.

"Sweetheart, if you're not sick, you have to go. Everyone has to go. It's only fair."

"You're mom's right, baby," said Mr. Hilson. "You have to go to school just like we have to go to work."

Janie thought of Nora's birthday trip and knew this wasn't true, but she didn't argue. She walked outside and saw Nora, with her Lisa Frank backpack and light-up tennis shoes, waiting at the end of the front walk. The weather was chilly, and a light mist was falling. Janie dragged her feet as she walked with Nora - or rather behind her. Nora bounced happily along and jumped in puddles left from a rainstorm early that morning. Their route to the elementary school passed by a house with a retaining wall out in front, right along the sidewalk. It started low - only about two feet - but it got much higher. Nora stopped to look at the wall, and then hopped up on the low part and stepped higher and higher, until she was towering high above Janie's head.

"Nora, you should get down. My mom doesn't let me climb that wall. She says it's dangerous."

"You can't tell me what to do," said Nora, tossing her blonde hair. "Your mom probably said that because she knows how clumsy you are. I'm much more graceful. I take ballet." Nora began to do pliés on top of the wall.

Janie felt her face get hot. Tears jumped to her eyes. She was angry. She

wanted to shout. She wanted Nora to fall off that wall and learn her lesson.

And suddenly, Nora lost her footing. For a moment she wobbled back and forth, her arms flapping as if she were a baby bird trying to take flight. But she didn't fly. She let out a sharp yelp as she tumbled over, falling towards the sidewalk ten feet below, instead of the soft grass only inches behind her. Her arm and shoulder hit first, but Janie could still hear a thump when her head made contact with the pavement. Janie stared, wide-eyed, for only a moment, before running to the nearest door for help.

Nora went to the hospital, and Janie was late for school. She didn't play much at recess, mostly sitting near the fence and staring down the block, towards the wall. When she got home, her mother told her that Nora had a broken arm and a small crack in her skull. She would have to stay at the hospital for a while. Janie nodded and cried, and Mrs. Hilson told her that it was okay to worry for her friend, but she was sure Nora would be fine in time. Janie went into her playroom and sat in the time-out corner.

Janie was afraid of this power she had discovered inside herself. She had made Nora fall. She had wanted Nora to get hurt, and that's exactly what happened. It was her fault. But she didn't know how to confess this to her parents. They might not love her anymore, knowing that she had done such a bad thing.

The gold letters in the frame on the wall sparkled and jumped out at her, in the light streaming through the gauzy curtains. She hadn't treated Nora the way she would have wanted Nora to treat her. Janie had broken her family's biggest rule, and she had broken Nora's arm, and scraped up her rosy round face, and broken her shiny blonde head. Janie thought about what it must be like in the hospital. That's where babies came from, but it's also where they took Grandpa when he got sick. He never came back from the hospital. Janie knew Nora wasn't old like Grandpa, but she wasn't sure whether her mother really knew that Nora would get better.

Janie had to make things better. She had broken the golden rule, but there was no one to punish her. She had put herself in time-out, but Janie realized that time-out wasn't enough when she had hurt someone so bad that she had to go to the hospital. She had never done anything this bad, so she didn't know what a fair punishment would be. Janie sat in the time-out corner for a long time and thought and thought and thought. In the end, she knew what she should do. It was only fair.

The next morning, Janie walked to school alone. Her father had offered to walk with her, so that she wouldn't be lonely without Nora. But she told him she could do it herself. "That's my big girl," Mr. Hilson beamed. "Next thing I know, you'll be asking for my car keys!"

Janie kissed her parents goodbye and walked out the door with purpose. The weather was overcast, like the day before, and the wind had picked up. The green flowers in the driveway had been washed away by the previous day's rain.

Now, as she stood at the top of the wall, the wind nudged at her back, breaking her out of her reverie and reminding her of what she had come to do. Her eyes had been squeezed tight, and she had seen pink, purple, green and blue behind her eyelids. But now she saw the grey sky, the brown leaves, the sand-colored sidewalk. Janie took a deep breath and jumped.

SOUL MADE OF BREAD EMILY GRAND

My wife and I are walking through the aisles of Sam's Club, lost between giant boxes of cereal and even bigger packages of toilet paper. I push the cart as she runs through the grocery list, meticulously organized on a spread sheet and printed fresh this morning. She mumbles to herself while we move through the rows; I'm lost in thought as usual, taking in all this stuff in the store. That's what gets me about this place, the sheer amount of stuff. Piled high to the ceiling, the boxes watch as their predecessors are yanked from shelves and tossed roughly into oversized carts. I imagine them in the same way I did when I was a 16 year old stock boy, as old friends wishing each other luck before they go. Maybe it is the boxes' way of saying goodbye while acknowledging that this is what they've been created for, to hold up to the fast paced lives of the people around them. "Hurry up," my wife chides, "or we'll miss the movie." I push the cart on towards the bakery, moving fast to make her happy.

The marriage of flour, butter, and yeast perfumes the air around the bakery, and I breathe it in reveling in memories. It reminds me of my preparatory days, the smell. My ivy-coated campus was just down the road from a busy bread factory full of blue collar workers and wonderful aromas. In good weather, I would lay in the grass, eyes closed against the sun, nostrils taking in the smell of fresh baked bread. The smell of the workers' pride, rising up through the vents to ensure me I was not alone in my new and unfamiliar white collar world. A smell that wrapped me in the knowledge that there were others near me who toiled for their food and took nothing for granted. The smell became my greatest comfort, my only friend amongst wealthy boys who took no notice of me. The bakery here isn't like that though; it has no pride. I can watch as a tired looking worker wearing a coat thick with flour and sweat loads loafs into the oven. Her worn expression reminds me of mine after a long night stacking produce. Her coat reminds me of the one I used to wear when I worked in the grocery, a tired blue smock thick with grime.

"Hurry up," my manager chides, "that old bread isn't going to arrange itself."

It's such a stupid comment that I don't even bother to respond. He lumbers away in his familiar gait, laughing at his own joke. He's probably off to harass one of the girls working the register, but at least he's left me alone to get back to work. I sigh to myself as I pull out another loaf of stale rye from an abused box. The box looks like I feel: miserable. I hate this job. I hate this smock. I hate my manager. I hate the florescent lights and the scent of bleach which doesn't quite mask the stench of used diaper. I hate the way the costumers treat me like an idiot, just because I work the midnight shift. I hate the way they pull me from my reprieves to ask if we've got any of that new Hamburger Helper their next door neighbor told them they simply have to try. I hate that I am here.

I had seen the help wanted sign on the abused bulletin board in my hall. The cracked cork and exposed cardboard was usually reserved for poorly veiled

advertisements to score drugs, which made the ad for workers a misfit, like me. I was the only boy in my class on scholarship. The only one from a broken home held up with the sweat from my mother's brow. The only boy with a single, tattered suit jacket and no tie. Everyone had money; everyone knew that one day they would know power. I wanted to know their world of scotch and old cigars, wanted to talk business with starched old men who really knew a thing or two about making money. Their world was a glamorous one I felt I could be a part of, if I became an expert at hiding my poor beginnings. The dull yellow paper advertised for a graveyard stock boy. Graveyard, where no one of note would ever find me.

I was the only person to apply for the shift. The hours were long, the pay was awful, and the labor strenuous, but all I could see was a saving grace for my mother and me. I called her after my interview, just to let her know she wouldn't need to worry about paying for board the next semester. I could hear a hint of shame in her voice when she said she was proud of me, shame from the knowledge it was her fault I needed to work at all. She wished me luck before hanging up so she could make it to her own graveyard shift at a small diner. A part of me wished she would have told me she was sorry instead.

I started work the next night. My manager handed me an old, sky blue smock in his dimly lit warehouse office. He looked me over, scanning me in a way that made me nervous, made me fidget a bit in the confined space. I'd never had a man stare at me like that. It was a stare that was intent on taking in all the features and details of my body. I cleared my throat to break the silence and I watched him startle, awakened from some subconscious daydreams of me.

"It'll be good to have some new meat on staff," he grumbled. "I've got a good feeling about you kid. You remind me of a boy I used to know." I nodded my head and left the cramped space, eager to be away from him. Safe from his eyes, I removed my shirt and threw the indigo cloth over my head. It smelled of soured milk, rancid and old. I imagined that one day the jacket I donned before work might be made of fine wool instead of polyester.

Stocking wasn't too bad most nights, as long as my manager didn't come over, running his mouth. He only ever talked to me about fucking. Who he'd fucked, where he'd fucked, which one of the high school drop outs working the registers would be best to fuck. Every other word was profane and foul. Every other word lashed out at the unfortunate women who had crossed his path and the lucky ones who managed to get away. I kept my head down, my eyes set on my work as he railed against them, goaded me to join in. Eventually he would get bored and leave to bother someone else, mumbling under his breath, talking away to a ghost only he could see. All I could I see was the way he stared at me on the linoleum floor, eyed me in the same way he had in his office. Eyed me like a hungry dog eyes a bone.

I worked four days a week, stocking aisles from 9 at night to 5 in the morning. I worked alone; I got good at avoiding my manager. To keep myself occupied, I would imagine the lives of the produce I piled under mirrors and misters. I wondered where that tomato had been, what kind of soil it rested upon until it was ripped from the vine. It used to live in paradise, but now they had come to visit me in

hell. I imagined the tin cans as they once were in the factory, large sheets, proud and whole. I thought of their sorrow in being cut down and stuffed full of tuna, carrots, and beans. I narrated their stories, assured them as they were piled one on top of the other that I was listening. Assured them I understood where they had been and where they would go.

There were always a few nightly interruptions from these fantasies, little moments of human contact. A tired looking mother with a screaming baby on her hip wanted to know where the wine was. A drunken teen and a drunken old lady wanted to know where we kept the Twinkies. Two men held hands next to the raspberries, but dropped them when I came near. Only one asked where we kept the condoms while the other fiddled with his wedding band. They all adhered to my imagination. They made it seem like the world was unchanging, as though they would always be in transition from exhausted to rested, drunk to sober, fearful to proud. They didn't seem to know what my mother used to tell me, that the night is at its cruelest just before the dawn.

It's 1 AM and I'm still stock piling stale bread and damaged goods onto the discount shelves near the butcher shop. I hum quietly to myself, imagining I'm an ambulance driver who has brought these injured products to the hospital. I tell them they'll be cured on the shelves, that they'll like the dim lighting in this area, so different from the bright white in the rest of the store. I hear a rushed yet familiar stride behind me and prepare myself to listen to another vulgar story. The footsteps are close now and suddenly he's locked onto my neck. He is dragging me like a baby doll, pulling me away from the discount section. He's dead silent as he jerks my body around, covering my mouth with his hand. He tastes of sweat and iron as I bite at his palm. I kick my legs, I try to scream. My heart rages and thunders into my chest, desperately trying to escape. We're close to the packages of chuck roast and ground beef when he stops pulling me forward and climbs on top of me, pinning me to the floor. I stare up at the weathered face of my manager, into his crazed and distant eyes. He slaps me hard across the face, my head spinning as he pulls close to my ear.

"You God damn piece of shit, I'm tryin' to save your life! I told you to get down in that ditch and that was a God damn order. Them Chariles are everywhere, they're hiding in this whole fucking jungle so when your CC tells you to get down, you get down!"

He hits me again and my vision starts to blur, the fluorescents pounding into my eyes like hammers. He starts to hit his own head instead, psychotically pounding his skull with his fist. I see then where the taste of iron is coming from, from deep slashes on his left arm effusing blood. A thick trail of red shows our path to this part of the store, the light blue of my smock is now a wet black. He stops hitting himself and starts hitting me again, raging against my chest and my stomach, whimpering to me that it will all be alright, because he is my company commander and he's not going to let me die in this tropical hell. He calls me a name that doesn't belong to me as he drives a fist into my side. I feel a rib crack and close my eyes against the white, letting my body fall towards the black.

The strong scent of smelling salt fills my lungs like acid thrusting me awake.

It takes a moment for me to steady my breathing, to adjust to the pain in my side from the broken rib. I think that my shirt and pants must have been removed because I'm so cold. I feel a steady draft of air over my body; I hear heavy breathing just above my face. My eyes flutter open a bit with curiosity, but all they can manage to convey back to me is a large, blurred mass above me.

"You alright kid? You'd taken quite a beating when I found you."

My manager's voice alarms me. It's too gentle, too caressing, a different being from the one who attacked me. I'm suddenly very aware of my body and how frail it seems. I'm very aware that I shouldn't be here right now, that something is wrong. I push myself into a sitting position on the couch, use all my strength to hoist my head up and steady it on my shoulders. I try to speak, but my lips don't seem to move yet. My tongue sits thick and useless against my teeth.

"Easy there, take it slow. You can rest up on my couch for as long as you need. I promise to take care of you." I see his hand reach for my hair, covered in bite marks from my useless retaliation. It reaches for my pale body covered in our crusted blood. As though electricity has restarted my heart, my tongue springs to life and my whole body is wide awake, buzzing with anticipation.

"My clothes, give me my clothes." There's a tone in my voice I've never heard before. If he is a dog eyeing a morsel of meat, then I am the master, telling him it belongs to me. I've never felt this power before, though I know it's only in my head. I'm not stronger than he is. He stares at me, his softened but frightening expression taking in my form with more thirst than ever. I see the sorrow in his eyes as he watches my chest rise on his couch. I stare back into the drooping eyes of my savage attacker, my predatory rescuer, until he moves toward the haphazard pile of my things, clearly removed in fervor.

Away from his office, I stumble into a bathroom and lock the door behind me. I wash my face with warm water from the tap, slowly unveiling the damage as I clean. My left eye is swollen shut and bruises are sprouting all over my body, blooming like black and blue flowers. I carefully lower my thin t-shirt over my chest, wincing as I move my arms, and walk towards the entrance of the store. A familiar smell makes me pause for a moment just before I exit the doors, near the bakery. It was always empty when I worked, but now there's a bright-eyed girl slicing layers of fresh baked bread and laying them carefully into cellophane bags. She's quietly humming to herself, gently raking a knife through her livelihood. I tuck one of the fresh loaves under my arm and walk out, its heat warming my body through my shirt.

It's been a long time since I worked in the grocery. I wear a nice jacket to work. I send money home to my mother. I spend my days dreaming up lives for clients rather than tin cans. I've placed the blue smock in a nearly-forgotten memory. The half naked boy with a broken rib only floods my mind when the smell of bread floods my senses. We stand together in this Sam's Club for the first time in many years, admiring a nice loaf of sourdough. "Hurry up," my wife chides, "or we'll miss the movie." I hurry to catch up and make her happy, giving the scarred teenager a nod, assuring him the night is at her cruelest before the dawn.

**CONCRETE CONFINED**

MATTHEW ANTONE

JANUS

GABRIELLE DEIMEKE

**LONGING FOR CHILD PROOF** CHELSEA TUTHILL

Time moves by so slowly,
 I sit and wait by the clock.
 Tick, tick, tick, there is no tock.
 Dried remnants of baby food and Goldfish crumbs.
 I don't want to get up for fear of stabbing my foot with a Barbie shoe.
 I listen. Close, long, hard.
 No sound but the tick, tick, tick.
 The time is approaching. I should really move from this couch.

5:25.

What am I waiting for?
 The freedom to hop spontaneously in the car and take you away from here.
 Dinner and a movie. Simple enough.
 A weekend in the mountains, listening to streams and birds,
 Even better.
 What about a baseball game? That used to be our favorite.

5:27.

Should I cook dinner?
 A stir comes from the other room, just the slightest creak.
 Tick, tick, tick.
 I wait still.
 The metronomic tone soothes me.
 I lay my head back on the spit up stained pillow and throw a Beauty and the Beast
 blanket on.
 One eye open.

5:31.

The garage door opens slowly and I hear your car pull in.
 I pretend to be asleep, in the messy, child torn living room.
 Maybe then you'll understand my day.
 I feel your warm breath, the scent of your aftershave, a soft kiss on my temple.
 You kneel next to me, I inhale sharply, hoping that this is it,
 That you'll pick me up and take me away.
 "Honey, where's dinner? I'm famished."
 Another gentle kiss. You leave.
 Tick, tick, tick.

MY LIFE BREON EVANS

I awake in a queen bed, with red fittings barely clinging to the corners. I sit up. There, as I swipe the crust from my eyes, my vision slowly focuses on the image of myself. Then, my arms stretch toward the ceiling, hands clenched, and face contorted as I try to catch my breath. Soon, my cover will be tossed in the air and my body would be instantaneously energized with the rising of the sun. First though, my hand will have to probe the floor for my glasses, which were nonchalantly discarded the night before. With my newfound strength, I walk over to the mirror, which faces my bed and mouth to myself, "Today is the day."

After a shower and a review of my wardrobe, I am ready to start my day. The plastic wrap over the yellow carpet squeaks as I glide down the stairs. Light shines through the window, hailing into my eyes as I round the corner, through the dining room, and into the kitchen. Turning my head away from the light, I make my standard breakfast: pancakes, eggs, and sausage. As I flip the pancakes, my mind flips though possible reactions. With every crack of an egg, my resolve cracks. When the sausage sizzles, my emotion sizzles. I eat quickly due to my nervousness and decide to watch television to relax until my grandmother returns home.

At three o'clock the familiar jingle creeps closer to the back door. The shiny silver handle slowly twists to the right. My grandmother's petite, skinny body strides through the door as the sun twinkles off her long, sleek hair, smooth skin, and professional sky blue suit. As she passes me, we exchange hellos before she proceeds up the stairs and into her room. I focus back on Sailor Moon, resolving to tell her after dinner.

Once the last of the potatoes are cooked, mashed, salted, peppered, and devoured along side of the buttered corn and baked chicken, my grandmother retreats to her room. As the moon creeps up the sky, I decide it is now or never. I venture up the stairs and into my grandmother's room. She sits in her big cushy red chair, wearing her black robe and watching Rising Sun.

"Oh, hey Breon. What do you need?" I stroll past her bed while she takes her feet off her footrest, pushing it away from her to give me a place to sit. Not one to sit when nervous, I stand in front of the footrest and look down upon my grandmother like an angel. Here in the moonlight, I see the fat in her face, the dead ends of her hair, and the wrinkles of her skin.

"There is something I have to tell you." My speech grows slower though the sentence.

"What is it?" she questions.

"Well, I don't know how to tell you," I reply.

"I'm sure whatever it is you can tell me. You can tell me anything." My mind doubts this for a moment, but I decide to go on.

"Well, do you know what it is called when a guy has no interest in dating?" I inquire.

"Oh." She smiles a loving smile. "Breon, sometimes it is hard for a young man to meet a nice girl, but I am sure there is one out there for you." Her

misunderstanding of my subtle hint throws me through a momentary tizzy, but I recover smoothly and realize that I would have to be more direct.

"Well, Grandmother, I don't think that the right girl is out there; I don't think any girl is right for me." I stress the word girl the second time I say it.

"Nonsense!" she exclaims.

"No, Grandmother, I don't think there is a girl out there for me, but there may be something else..." I leave room for interpretation.

"What do you mean something else, like what?" A tension in her voice starts to build, but I must carry on.

"I don't know, just not a girl..." I don't realize it, but my voice softens.

"Breon, are you gay?" The tension, as well as the tone and volume of her voice grew to a screech.

I want the question to go away, for it dawns on me that I was not ready to tell her. Yet, the question lingers in the air like a soap bubble that would not pop. My mouth grows dry; my tongue shrinks and slithers into the back of my throat.

"Yes I am," I say in a whisper barely audible.

"What?" She raises from her chair a little to confirm what I said.

"Yes, I am." Then, it seems as if she begins sucking up all the air from the room. Her eyes grow huge, her mouth hangs agape, she lunges forward, and reaches her hand out. A hot flash streaks across my face as her nails dig into my skin; blood pouring from the slits they leave.

"Get out!" Her voice rises to a high-pitched shrill. I back away, tripping over the poorly placed foot rest, and falling on my back. She, like the god of war, stands over me ready to unleash her wrath.

"Get out now!"

I scramble to my feet and run out of her room. In a fit of tears, I stomp down the stairs as the plastic moans. I reach for the dull knob of the front door and fling it open. The moonlight rests on my face. I stare into the night and walk, never turning back.

I finally stop at a park bench, with bird poo still clinging to the sides. I lay down there, as I swipe the tears from my eyes. My vision slowly blurs on the image of the night sky. My legs hang over the side, hands as my pillow, and face puffy. Soon, the freedom granted by the moon would subside and with its departure the sun would shine life's realities at me; first though, I would have to probe my phone for a friend who would understand and help. With the newfound freedom of being myself, I roll over on the bench, and think to myself, "I'll be alright."

THAT FALL FEELING

JENNIFER WHITE

Stillness.
 In the air.
 Of the air.
 Consuming every noise.
 Every barking dog.
 Every squealing car.
 Every chattering squirrel.
 They do not belong in such stillness.
 Even the crinkle of
 a
 falling
 leaf
 is too much
 and the air eats it as the dead organism drops to the earth.

ICE QUEENS KIRSTEN DUNGAN

Their glassy blue eyes pierce
 Through the skin of onlookers.
 They cannot turn away.
 Their ghostly pale skin,
 Shimmering silver hair, and
 Haunting aura
 Freeze people instantly where they stand.
 They are the Ice Queens.
 We are the Ice Queens.
 We choose beauty over all else,
 But beauty deceives.
 On the outside we look innocent,
 Unable to harm the world

Or ourselves, but
 Our beauty is our mask, our
 Distraction from our true selves.
 We are bitter cold with hearts of
 Ice, and souls of darkest stone.
 We hate much more than we love,
 Destruct far more than we help.
 Our blood runs blue and often, being
 Exposed through our own violent acts.
 Life has made us unbreakable,
 Shame has made of us a frozen existence,
 Far worse than death itself.
 We are numb, dead.
 We are the Ice Queens.

FORBIDDEN

JAYME PALMGREN

My revered sin,
 Keeping me in limbo
 Somewhere between the light
 And the dark,
 Between white
 And black,
 Casting me in shades of gray.

My symbol of transition
 From something cool, dark and jagged
 To the soft, smooth, luminous me
 Of tomorrow and beyond.
 Keeping me balanced,
 Keeping me grounded,
 Too tempting to be an angel,
 Too tender to be anything less.

Enveloped in your arms
 In the early morning hours,
 I find comfort and hope
 Refusing to be confined
 By the days to come,
 Numbered as they are.
 I live, instead, in the now.

I think not of the moons to come
 But of the moon as it is tonight.
 Light shimmers
 Through the window pane
 Onto the contrast of cream and umber
 Resting peacefully side by side,
 Satisfied and liberated
 By the now.

THE IDENTITY I DIDN'T CHOOSE: THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE LIFE OF A GINGER

KATHRYN LEETCH

Let me start by saying that I hate that stupid word: "ginger." I'm not a funny looking, tan, bumpy vegetable, if it can even be considered a vegetable. It stinks, too. You don't shave my skin into your cinnamon - infused hot cocoa in the winter-time. I'm not an object. I'm not a toy. I'm not a punching bag that has a hole in it that makes it easier to destroy. I am a woman. I am an independent, responsible, dedicated person, who just happens to have a different hair color than most. I'm a human being, too. So please, refrain from using that silly word - it offends me.

Most people wouldn't understand that being blessed with a gorgeous head of red locks would be a good thing, and I would think you were nuts if you had said that to me when I was five, but I have learned over the years to embrace it, for more than one reason. The first being quite obvious: I would simply look ridiculous with any other color of hair on my head, and I would have to dye my arm and leg hair, my eyebrows, my eyelashes (everything) to match the ridiculousness. The other reason I have come to accept my auburn (not orange) hair is hard to put into a few words, but mainly I have realized that it has made me who I am today, and I love myself, so why change it?

When I was a little girl, I can remember being made fun of for my hair color. Keep in mind that I didn't choose to have red hair. It's not like I told the man upstairs that I wanted to have freckles and pale skin to go along with the rare color of hair. I didn't say, "Hey, God. So, I was thinking, I want to be the one idiot in the classroom that has bright orange hair, freckles, and plaster-white skin. I think I wanna be the only kid to have red hair in my family, too, so people can call me the 'red-headed step-child' and be close to accurate." That's not how it happened.

I don't know how it happened, really. My mom and dad both have brown hair. My big brother has dark hair, and my little sister has close-to-blond hair. Why did I get screwed? They say it skips a generation. They say "we" will be extinct in less than 50 years. Really? Are we animals? EXTINCT. Do you know what this means? This means that there will be no redheads in less than a century. Wait, does this mean I won't live past 70?

Anyway, these were the thoughts that would go through my head on a daily basis when I was in grade school. I couldn't go a day without hearing some kind of comment about my hair. I would go home and tell my mom about my day, leaving out the things that really mattered, the things that tore me up inside. I didn't understand why I was different from everyone else just because of my hair color. It didn't seem fair. It still doesn't.

People wonder why I grew up with a close-to-zero amount of self-confidence. Well, you idiots, it's because you made fun of me every day for something that I physically didn't bring upon myself (Of course I don't mean YOU,

personally. Unless, obviously, you ever did make fun of me...). If I had chosen to dye it this color, then alright, maybe I would understand because it was my decision. People don't choose to be black or white, to be short or tall; it just happens.

I used to try and find things wrong with myself that would distract people from my hair- but it didn't work. It's not that I tried to be fat, but I didn't care as much as I do now, anyway. I figured if I was bigger, then they could make fun of me for that - because that's something I could fix if I wanted to. It's difficult to try and fix something that is impossible to fix. Have you ever tried it?

I think it was around sophomore year of high school when things began to change. I would hear comments from people that were positive instead of negative - something I wasn't used to. At first I thought they were just being sarcastic and making fun of me by being nice. I thought they were just saying what I wanted to hear- though I didn't ask. The majority of these nice comments came from people who were older than me; too bad my peers didn't like my hair. As I became a little more confident, my body began to change, and I didn't look to change things like my appearance to distract anyone from my hair color. I didn't care if anyone made fun of me. It's my hair, not theirs. Sorry I'm not like every other girl in America with blonde hair, big boobs, and tan skin. My bad.

There is something about being a redhead that is refreshing. It has its benefits, actually. I'm sometimes seen as a little extreme, sassy, and original. All of which I will admit to, and I love that about myself. If something as simple as my hair color can accurately tell someone about my personality- that means less talking for me about something that can be seen in other ways. At volleyball tryouts, coaches would easily remember a redhead over a brown-haired player. My hair gives people something to remember me by. What does yours do for you? I have never been one to fall in line with the rest of the crowd, possibly because I will always be different, no matter what I do.

I have found, unfortunately, that I still cannot go a day without hearing something about my hair color. This makes me wonder: do people comment on brown-haired people's hair every day? Do they say things like, "Dude. It looks like you have poop on your head- that must suck." Or "Girl, your hair is the color of my cabinets, haha." I'm going to assume that these things aren't said. Why has it become okay for redheads to be made fun of, and blondes even a little bit, but mainly redheads, and judged to a point that it should be considered a hate crime? Okay, a hate crime is a little much. See. I told you I'm extreme.

Most people probably think I'm nuts for complaining about being made fun of, and for having red hair. If that's what you think I'm doing, you can stop reading. I am not trying to write a diary entry, I've written too many of those about this topic. I'm simply stating that I love who I am, and because of my red hair, I have something that 1-2% of the human population has. Yes. You read that correctly. 1-2%. There are over 6 billion people in the world. You do the math.

People ask me what it's like having red hair. They're surprised when I say my leg hair is red, too. Am I an exhibit? People wonder how I got my red hair. People ask if I was adopted. People think it's funny to call me ginger when they

know I hate it. I don't hate many things in life, but that word - oh, it gets under my skin like you wouldn't believe. There's just something about it that makes anger come to the surface. It's just like any other derogatory slang for any race or ethnic background - to me anyway. Now, don't go judging all redheads because of what I've told you. Just take it into consideration next time you think it's funny to make them feel dumb for something they didn't choose- like you chose to be an asshole.

SAY THE WORD

JEREMIAH JOHNSON

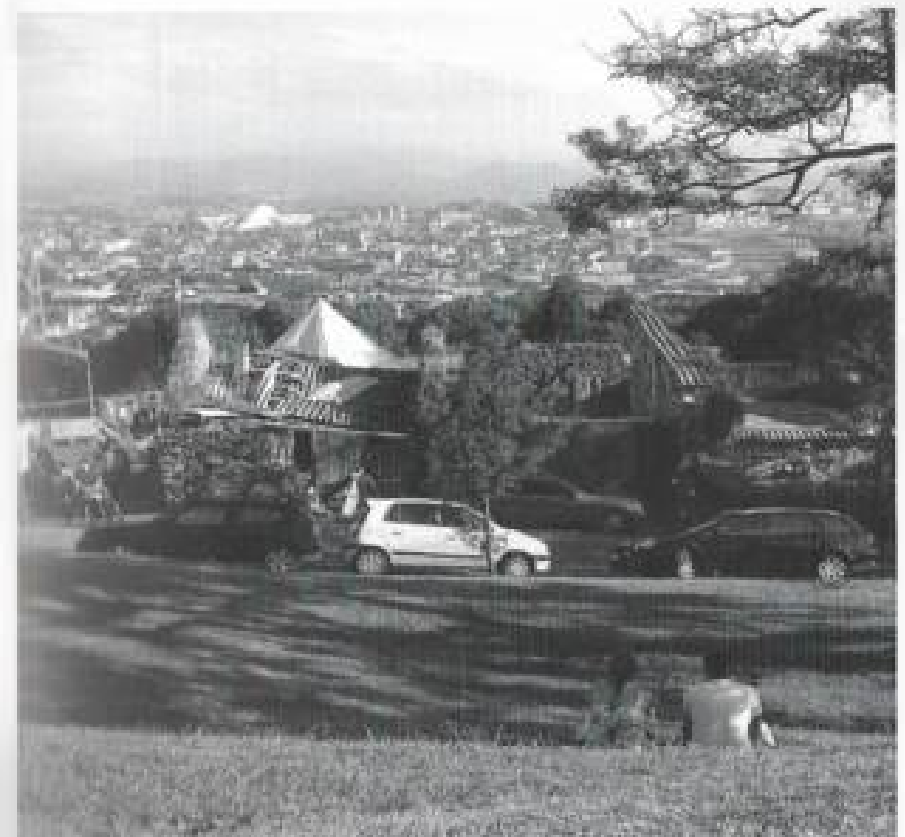
Just say the word, just say one word and
You can believe without a shout of a doubt that I will show you
What this boy from the
South...Is...About
If you give me a sign, just one sign
Like my mommy used to say
I'll show you better...than I can tell you
Because while I can use my verbs as words
Aren't they better off put into action?
Because saying and doing are two....different....things
But if you say it
Say that you'll give me a chance... to treat you
To pleasure you...to excite you
To care for you...to be there for you
If you say that, I'll be there faster than
Deion Sanders when he was running his 40
At the combine, because if you say that we can
Combine... and have a chance to make two complete halves
One complete whole, then you'll give this country boy
A kool-aid smile, the red one to be exact
Oh yeah!!!
You say that you're mute because
You're shy
But c'mon now, even Moses
Said something

THE FEMALE SEX

JORDAN BRANTLEY

The Female Sex
Chromosomal marking: XX
Primary hormone: Estrogen
Cultural symbol: a mirror
Mirror is the symbol of Venus
Venus was the goddess of fertility and love
The was the first duty of women
To be fruitful
As a result: enlarged mammary glands
Wider hips

Less aggressive than males
More nurturing towards young
But they still like to fight
Just in different ways
Its is more mental than physical
Wars of words rather than fists
They use their wiles
To ensnare a man
And bend him to her liking



LOVE'S ESCAPE

LEE GOATLEY



SUGARY DELIGHT

TENZING DHAKHWA

THE HILLS SET

MATTHEW ANTONE



FAMILY HEIRLOOMS ANNA BOHN

It's really quite lucky,
that they both went so quickly,
one after the other.
The doctor said,
that my father couldn't live without
my dear mother, and his heart
simply gave up.
The nurses thought it was romantic.

They wanted to be cremated.
They wanted to be together,
in death as in life,
the perfect pair.

So I had them burned,
and then pressed,
and pressed,
and pressed,
and set,
and now they glimmer from my ears,
on only the most formal of occasions.
Really quite beautiful,
and still the perfect pair.

T
H
I
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D

P
L
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C
E

THE NIGHTHAWK AT 9-5 JACK (JONATHON) PARR

He shrugged into his thin coat and turning, heaved a deep sigh. He raised a hand to his damp face, and swept it downwards. He felt the heavy droop of his dark eyelids and yawned. He found the dead snakeskin of his tie, and draped it over his neck, catching it and pulling it tight in front of him. He bowed his head, feeling the cotton of the tie tight against his throat.

He stood in front of the large window that was the frame to the basic-cable show in which he was the central character; he could almost hear the canned laughter and knowing shrieks of mock-horror.

Outside he heard a police car twittering in the distance. The sounds of traffic seeped in through the glass, like coffee grounds muddying the clearest of water. Through the window, he watched an empty paper cup float across the car park. A heavy gust of wind picked it up, and carried it away into the wooded patch of land just beside the motel.

He looked inside, at the bed; at the figure lying on top, draped in a thin, white sheet that did little-to-nothing to protect her modesty. Still, he didn't suppose that she cared too much about that anyway. He reached down to the low table in the middle of the room, and picked up the half-empty bottle of cheap wine and took a long draught. He winced and then took a few more slugs, before dropping the bottle to the floor and allowing what was left of the liquid to dribble out of the neck and stain the white carpet. He reached into his pocket, pulled out three ten dollar bills, and dropped them onto the table, just where the bottle had been. He took one last look at the bed, and then placed his hand on the cold door handle and wrenched it open.

He stepped out onto the cement and drew his thin coat tightly around him. He felt the dead-weight of his wallet fall against his hip. He sighed, mostly change in there now, he thought. He reached into his right jacket pocket, and pulled out a carton of cigarettes. The carton was dog-eared, flapping at the edges. He fingered inside it, and started to withdraw one of the three remaining cigarettes.

He was just placing it into his mouth and fumbling for a lighter or matches, when he heard a bird singing softly in the breeze. He paused and looked around in the now still air. The siren was far-off now, and scarcely distinguishable. He listened for the roar of traffic that covers up so many discretions during the daylight hours. Instead, all he could hear was the same bird, pouring forth sweetly in the hazy pink gloom. He looked down at the scratched face of his watch, in the half-light, he vaguely made out half-past 5, or thereabouts. A tiny wisp of air ran through his hair. He looked around him, trying to see the bird that was keeping him company in this strange hour. After about a minute, he heard the bird serenade him again, however, there was no sign of it anywhere. He took the cigarette from his mouth and returned it, silently, to the carton. The bird stopped singing, and he thought that he heard a slight flap of wings as it went on its way. He pocketed the carton, and wandered, unsteadily down to the road.

He tried to remember where he had left his car. He'd driven it to the bar in

the first place, it must still be there. He wandered, unsteadily, down to the road, with no definite plan as to how he would actually make it back to the bar.

They had taken a cab out and it had been a long ride, long enough for him to learn and forget her name three times. Besides that, he wasn't even sure what direction it had been in. He could just about remember the name: Phillice's or Phil's Phillies? Phil had been involved somewhere down the line however you square it.

He stood by the side of the road, trying to stop himself from swaying into the ditch that ran parallel to the cement track. The ditch contained a filthy mire – the result of the spring showers. Above him, the sky was rapidly becoming a paler and paler mauve. He pulled his thin coat around his shoulders again, even though he was not remotely cold. He reached into the pocket and once again pulled out the carton of cigarettes. He struck a match and was just raising it to the end of the cigarette, when he saw a pair of headlights in the distance coming toward him. He debated whether to thumb for a lift or not. It was a long way to town, in which direction he was still not entirely sure. He dropped the match into the ditch and returned the cigarette once more into the pack. He looked up and down the road, trying desperately to remember which direction the town was in. The headlights were getting nearer. He stuck his thumb out and got himself closer to the tarmac. The car drew up, and as it did so, he recognised the familiar oblong of advertising on top that denoted a cab. He smiled, and the cab slowed down and stopped. The passenger door was swung open and a head poked out, over the seat, to meet his.

"Need a lift?"

He nodded and slid into the seat, pulling the door behind him. The driver checked his watch and then swung the car away, back onto the road. Kent took one last look at the vanishing motel and then turned his head back to the road.

"Where is it you want to go?" The voice asked, from the other side of the cab.

"A bar named Phil's or Phillies or something..."

"Oh sure, I know the joint." He had a thick accent that made most of his t's into d's and left the other letters virtually indistinguishable.

They were headed westwards, back to the centre of town. Without warning just like the steam from a boiling pot of coffee, the sun crested the horizon and steadily rose behind them, flaring into life, the silhouette of the city in the bay below.

The bottle shaped buildings gave Kent a parched feeling in his throat and also reminded him that he ought to have a shower. He looked across at the driver: Creased trousers; Black socks and polished shoes; A clean shirt; freshly shaven; Well-oiled hair. He looked at his own image: Mud-splattered and worn brogues; damp and ruffled suit trousers with more than two creases running down each leg; sweat soaked shirt with a dark, burnished stain running down the side from the whiskey which he had spilt on himself a good few hours earlier. He craned his neck to look in the rear-view mirror at his visage. Already dark stubble peppered his chin; his hair was matted and unkempt, and he extricated a few specks from it; the worst part was his eyes.

The tiny pupils darted around as though trying desperate to be free, red lines were scored deeply into the yellow-whites of his eyes. He reached into the inside pocket of his jacket, pulled out a thick pair of dark glasses and slid them onto his face. He stared out at the reflection of the rising sun in the glass of the city; the nighthawk and the 9-to-5er, careening together into the new day. After about 15 minutes, he said, "Why are you out so early?"

The driver, who had assumed that Kent was asleep, jumped visibly and as he did so, flicked on his indicator by accident. They were coming into town by this point and the traffic was beginning to build. They reared past a side-road and, looking in the mirror, Kent saw the car behind swerve wildly and the driver stick up his middle-finger at them as he righted himself into the lane, having assumed that the cab was pulling off. The cab-driver drove on, regardless of the shrieking horns, and maintained a good speed. Kent reached over and flicked off the driver's indicator. The driver jumped again.

"Calm down," Kent reassured him, "just because I look like death and feel like he would on a bad day doesn't mean that I'm going to bring him out on you. So why are you out so early?"

The driver seemed to settle down at this and squared himself in his chair.

"I'm just on the way to start my shift, might as well get an early fare in, off the books of course." All this in his heavy accent, Kent nodded his assent and settled himself in his own chair.

They bumped down the hills toward the bay and, after turning down four or five side roads in quick succession, the driver pulled over and into the granite square outside the bar from the night before. Sure enough, Kent's car was waiting for him, just out of shot, on the left hand side of the building.

The bar was shut, unsurprisingly. It was a small, cheap place, with a long, faded bar-top running in parallel to the four walls. The outer walls were mostly glass, but they hadn't been washed properly in a very long time from the looks of them. They were covered in grime, and under that, many scratches from a lifetime of heavy living. It was understood that at some point it had been a fine establishment, however, that was long ago, when men wore fine hats and women, red dresses. Now it was like a mangy dog limping hopelessly up the street, hoping for some cure to its ailments, but really just waiting for the end.

The cab grumbled to a stop in front of the longest window, and the driver shut the engine off with a rumble. He looked over to Kent and then down at this watch.

"That's \$2.50." He moistened his lips, and pulled a bottle of water out of the little pouch on his door and took a drink.

Kent reached into his pocket and pulled out his heavily distended wallet. He flipped it open and began rooting around the change compartment. He pulled out a dollar bill and four quarters and began to count out the last 50 in small change. He managed to make up 37 cents. He sighed and began to root around in his pockets for any loose change he may have misplaced.

His fingers teased over a metal circle, he pulled it out hopefully, it felt about the size of a quarter. He opened his hand, and sighed deeply with disappointment. All that he held was his gold wedding ring. The driver saw it and coughed uncomfortably.

"You know, it's early, it wouldn't be fair to charge full price, make it \$2 and we're square."

Kent nodded and shrugged. He handed over the \$2 and shoved the remaining coins back into his pocket. He jacked the door open and got out. Before the it had even banged shut behind him, the driver was roaring back onto the road.

Kent began to cross the otherwise vacant lot to his car, and fumbled for his keys. No luck, they must have fallen out in the room or in the ditch or something. He sighed resignedly and looked from side-to-side up and down the road. He needn't have bothered, the only people who frequented this part of town, as a rule, wouldn't care about seeing what he was about to do. He went to the back, driver's-side door and pumped the loose handle which made it flop open. He hunched inside, and flicked up the lock on the driver's door. He began to get back out of the car again manoeuvring his broad shoulders, with difficulty, out of the door.

The car had been beautiful once. It was shining in the light; a classic white Cadillac that had become yellow with age. Its front fender was almost dragging along the ground and the muffler was held aloft with an old belt. The wheels had large, grey patches on them and there were metallic scratch-lines, like closed eyes, on virtually every surface. In days gone by, it had been the envy of everyone he knew, and had been his first purchase once the money had begun to come in. It was also the first place where he had made love to his wife. All of these thoughts ran through his mind as he looked at it, and he smiled a short, small smile.

The spare set of keys was, as he knew it would be, in the glove compartment. He tapped it open and they fell onto the floor along with a few dusty maps and used-up lighters. He looked at the maps, the route in red, which they had traced and planned for so long, for their first vacation. He traced the route with his finger, and the small smile once again broke his lips. He folded the map, and the smile vanished quickly. He flicked each of the lighters in turn and one lit, he put it in his pocket, along with a small fortune in change that had accrued in the compartment. He took the rest, along with the maps, and got out of the car. He walked over to the small trash can, and dropped the whole bundle in. He crossed back to the car, and roared out onto the street and away.

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trash can, and dropped the whole bundle in. He crossed back to the car, and roared out onto the street and away.

Kent drove fast and hard, not hearing the sickening scrapes as his muffler scudded over the bumps in the road. He had the window down the whole way, not that he had much choice; the mechanism was shot, so the window was either wholly up or wholly down, there was no middle ground.

The sun was perched on the horizon now and an orange light burnished the day. He rolled up the hill to his house, a small place on the edge of town, but with a beautiful view of the bay. He wrenched the car to a stop and kicked the car door open, pausing on the crest of the hill, giving her time to hear that he was back. He looked down at the bay. This had been their favourite view, and he breathed it in.

He heard the swish of the bug screen behind him and, sighing, he turned to look up at the house. Mr. Hapson was hurrying, red-faced down the three steps to the driveway.

"Hello Mr Hapson, over again I see."

"Oh, Kent, hello, I was..."

"Mr Tate is fine, thank you Mr Hapson."

"Oh yes of course... Mr Tate, I was just helping..."

"Helping my wife, I know Mr Hapson. What was it with this time? The fridge again? Or maybe the garden hose?"

"Well, you weren't here so..."

"So you came over to fuck her."

"Mr Tate, there's no need for that sort of language."

"I think that there's every need for that kind of language. You've been fucking my wife so cut the pretence cos you and I both know it."

"Well you're one to talk Mr Tate, we all know about you picking up with whoever you can find and..." He continued, whilst Kent, finally, lit a cigarette and poured smoke into Mr Hapson's face, just like he poured garbage into his yard.

"But you see Mr Hapson," Kent said, blowing a long, spiralling stream into Mr Hapson's face, "I'm not stupid enough to pick up with married women."

Mr Hapson stared into his eyes, trying to stare him out, or at least save face, but eventually his nerves just gave out and his face crumbled as he sped back to his own home. Kent looked up at his own house and saw his wife at the window, she vanished back into the house's interior just as their eyes met. Kent finished his cigarette and made a point of throwing it into Mr Hapson's yard, across the street. He then walked up the paved path and up to his front door, which was still hanging slightly open.

He slammed the bug screen to with a rattle and pushed the door into place. He looked at the smiling figures in the photos on the walls and dropped his keys onto the small table by the door. He could hear her shuffling about upstairs. The swishes as the sheets were ripped from the bed and the running of water in the bathroom. Kent turned into their small kitchen at the end of the passage and filled the kettle with water, leaning heavily against the sink, the marching band was

eyes. He put the water to boil, and replaced his glasses. He heard the soft pad of his wife's feet as she descended the stairs. She entered the kitchen, rubbing her long hair with a towel. As she entered, he hastily slid his wedding ring onto his finger. She came over and began to pour the water into mugs, after stirring in coffee, she handed him one of the mugs.

"You shouldn't drink coffee if you're hungover, it dehydrates the brain even more."

Kent nodded, and took a long drink from the steaming cup. He set it down on the plastic-coated table, and got a frying pan out to make pancakes.

She busied herself cutting up some oranges. "Mr Hapson was here, he very kindly agreed to have a look at the fuse in our bedroom, the lights wouldn't turn on."

"At this time in the morning?"

"Well it was last night that they actually stopped working."

"So why didn't you have him come over last night to help you then? You knew I wouldn't be around."

"It didn't seem proper for a married woman to have a male friend over at night."

Kent crossed the room and went out. His wife buried her head in her hands. Kent went up the stairs into their bedroom. It was a nice room, a bit small but like they'd always said, they'd get a big place as soon as possible; nothing too fancy but somewhere nicer than here. That had been five years ago and even though the money had begun to come in soon after that, they still didn't have any plans to move elsewhere. He crossed to the bed-lamp. With a deep breath, he reached out to flick the switch but his wife entered before he managed to.

"I'm sorry," was all she said.

"How long for?"

"Not long after you did."

He nodded and took a hold of the knob of his chest-of-drawers. He opened it and began to rifle through his clothes, pulling out a few shirts, trousers, shorts.

"Why did you do it?" she asked.

He looked up at her; there were tears in her eyes. He stopped getting his clothes together, and went over to her. He put his arms around her and she reciprocated. They stood there for a while, not speaking. At length they let go of one another and she sat down on the bed. He drew a faded bag out from underneath and began to pile his clothes into it. She just sat there.

When he had packed all of his clothes, he twisted the ring off of his finger. He placed it under the lamp and, as he was straightening up, he flicked the light switch, the lamp buzzed on. Without looking at her he said, "So I guess he did fix it then." And with that, he left, shutting their bedroom door, and hurrying down the stairs, he just wanted to be gone. She did not follow him.

He jolted the car door open and threw his bag into the back seats. He got into the front and roared the car into life. He threw it backwards and headed down the hill, though not before he ran a few circles into Mr. Hapson's yard.

It didn't make him feel any better, but he had always wanted to do that. He

sped off down the road and back into town.

Once again, he drove with the window down and his sunglasses on. Kent drove for nearly an hour in no particular direction. He just wanted to be gone, out in the world, maybe take that trip that he had been putting off for so long, to find a house. He snorted in derision. He ran a hand through his hair and felt the roars of the engine and the wind intertwining around him. The sun was high above him now and he began to get hungry, should've made those pancakes after all.

He was driving along a relatively barren tract of road, a few scrubby bushes poked out from the gravelled ground. After nearly another hour, he came across a small diner. He pulled up the Cadillac, which coughed into the parking space out front, and got out. The orange earth groaned beneath his black shoes, and the light scorched his tired eyes. His head throbbed like that classical piece with cannons in it. He reached into his coat pocket to pull out a cigarette, but even as he did so, the heat began to make him sweat and he thought better of it; returning the cigarette to his pocket, he entered the dark diner.

There were no lights on inside, and due to the aspect of the building, little light actually entered the diner at all. Behind the bar Kent could just about make out a middle-aged woman who looked as though she ate more of the food than she actually served. She put down her nail file and scurried up to the counter to take his order. The choice was small and Kent ordered a sandwich and black coffee to go.

He took his glasses off as she went into the kitchen behind, and placed them on the counter, rubbing his eyes; watching himself in the mirror behind the counter. His cheeks looked ruddier than normal, but also thinner and more drawn. The dark stubble was now spread across his face, and the red lines in his eyes were becoming more prevalent than the whites or the pupils themselves. As the woman shuffled back in, he hastily replaced his glasses, too slowly; he noticed the downward curl of her mouth as she entered, so he paid the bill and hastened back out to the car.

That must have been how Christ felt at the last supper, everybody watching and judging. He snapped open one of the back doors and squeezed in, he laid himself out on the flat chair and ate the sandwich; the coffee was too hot to drink yet. He placed it on the almost level floor of the car.

After he had finished eating, he placed his hands behind his head and simply stared at the ceiling. He thought about this and that and tried to decide on where to go, when he heard the door slam, and awoke with a jerk. He had kicked the door open and it had sprung shut and he had spilt the coffee. He sat up, hitting his head on the roof as he did so.

He brushed the long-cold liquid off of the floor, and out of the door. The light was beginning to fade and he gave his eyes a rub, but at least he felt more rested now. The sun was just blinking away over the bay. He got out of the back seat and opened the front door. He looked about him, and took a cigarette out of the pack and lit it. The sun was virtually gone as he pulled out of the diner's car park, the diner remained unlit. He kept his glasses on. There was no one to care whether he had them on or not. He thought about this as he drove away into the dark.

In the distance in front of him, he could see the humming glow of the city, doubly bright as it reflected in the bay. He sped towards it; he could hear the sound of it from here. As Kent drove through the streets entering the city, he looked around him at the people with places to go, he noticed that most of them were considerably more groomed than he was, not that this was particularly difficult. He saw a small, black building with bright lights burning inside. Next to it, a small side road reached out into blackness.

Kent pulled the car down the side road and flicked off the lights, disappearing into the darkness. He walked round the corner to the door of the bar and pushed it open, feeling himself washed inside. It was not a large place, but the combined mixture of stale smoke and spilt liquor was familiar to Kent, to the extent that he thought that he recognised some of the clientele. He looked up at the large clock that hung behind the bar. The time was just past 9 30, and the bar was relatively full. Kent rifled his way through the crowd. He reached the bar and smiled at the old bar-tender. The bar-tender had even more exhaustion in his eyes than Kent. He looked at Kent without any emotion except fatigue. His eyes looked as though they would fall out if the sockets drooped any further. Kent was taken aback. He coughed and ordered a beer. The bar-man flipped open a bottle with an opener on his belt which forced Kent's beer into an uncomfortably close proximity to the barman's balls. He slopped the beer onto the bar, leaving more residue to contribute to the already sticky table.

"That's a dollar."

He threw some odd coins on the bar and hastened away. There was a small table by the window. He slouched into it, and surveyed the scene in front of him.

Here were the clean ones, the responsible drinkers who, even though they were out tonight, would still be at work the next morning, and probably get a promotion too. He gulped the beer impatiently which, surprisingly, did not make him feel any better. A few people would glance over at him every now and again, the pity evident in their eyes, looking at the poor drunk with nothing left. They didn't know all that he had done, everything that he had made, and they never would. Kent finished the beer and stepped out of the bar.

He returned to his car, and with it, vanished back into the darkness, back to where he would not be judged by people who had never met him, nor by those that had met him, he would simply be with those who had never met him. He turned the final corner and found himself back at Phillies. The bar was almost empty, but the bar-man smiled at him here. Here they didn't know what he had done, but they knew that none had done any better, or any worse. It was here amongst the deadbeats and dropouts that he was safe. He ordered one bourbon, one scotch and one beer. The bar-man smiled and Kent nodded his thanks. He handed over the keys to his car.

"She's old... but aren't we all?"

The bar-man smiled.

"Some of us more than others."

Kent smiled this time. He took off his glasses and lit the last cigarette.

The bar-man stayed with Kent as Kent drank, not saying much. Eventually Kent finished his drinks and looked at the clock, it was 3 am.

"You know where I'm going, don't you?"

"Nope."

"You aint gonna stop me?"

"No."

Kent smiled, "can you lend me a cigarette... for the road... I need something to do with my hands."

The bar-man nodded and handed him a cigarette. Kent took it and without turning back, headed outside. He put his glasses back on, and headed to his car. He stroked the side of it, and said a quiet goodbye. He left his wallet on the hood of the car, open on his driver's licence. He laid a small row of loose change on top of it. He took the empty cigarette carton out of his pocket and looked inside, still empty, he fumbled in his pocket for his lighter and put it into the carton, along with the book of matches; he placed the whole thing on the wallet. Then he headed back into the darkness. Suddenly he returned like a single lighter streak against the night, his sunglasses in his hand. He snapped the arms around the small bundle on the hood of the car. He replaced it carefully and fell back into the night.

A mangy dog stepped into the light from the bar where the bar-man leant on his bar, puffing on a cigarette. The dog wandered up to the trashcan by the building and relieved himself. When he had finished he wandered over to Kent's car and crawled underneath it. He fell asleep. It too vanished into the dark.

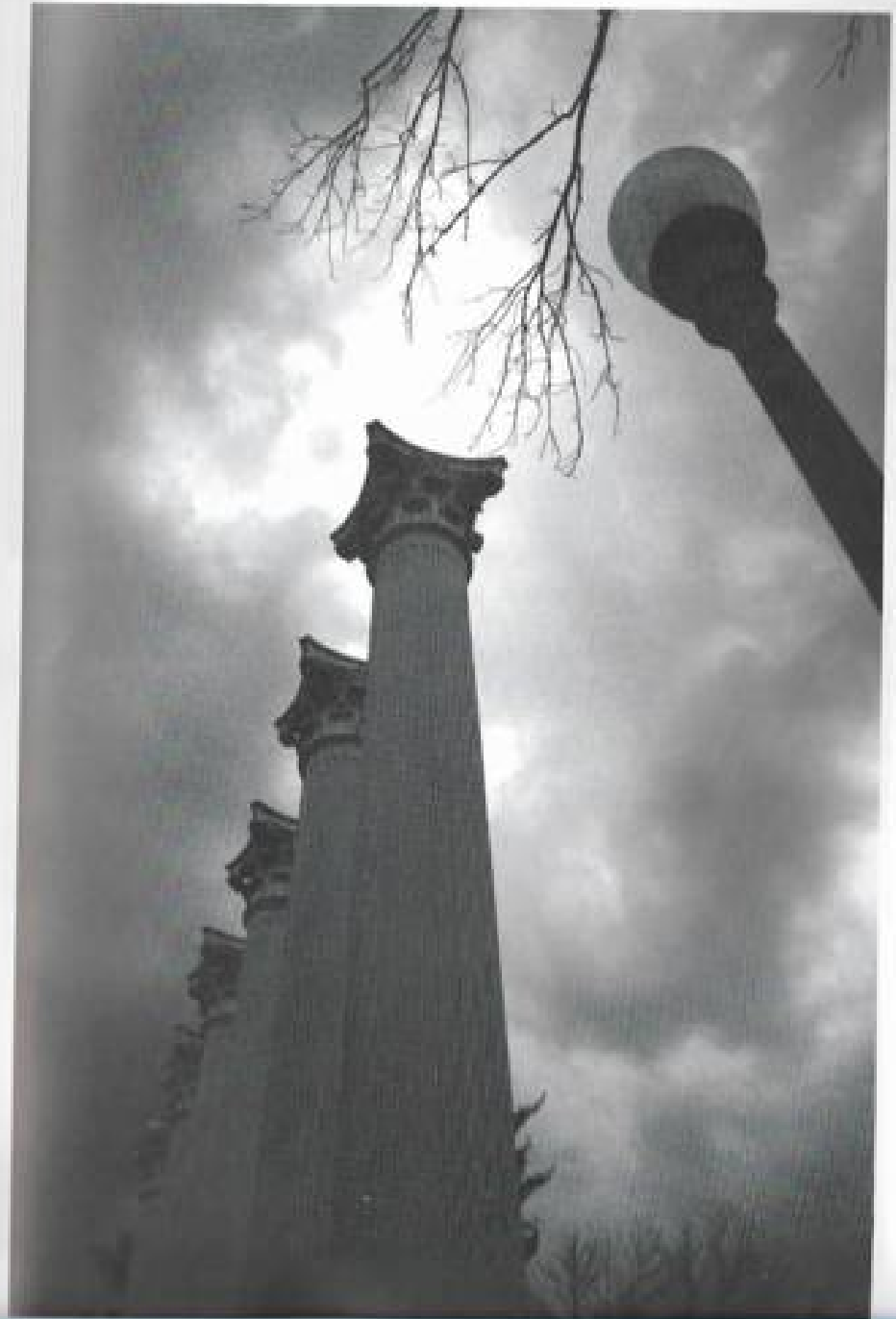
It was almost total blackness now. Kent looked at his scratched watch; the time seemed to be about half past three. He strode down the slope to the bay. He had his shoulders back, and his head high. He blew the final puff from the cigarette and put one foot and then the next onto the sand.

He smiled up at the stars and vanished into the gloom.

He heard the canned laughter in the wind.

THE COLUMNS

MATTHEW ANTONE



GETTING LOST

CHELSEA TUTHILL



ODE TO MY FATHER

DANIEL BROWN-SCHURR

From his belt that brought fear
When I did something wrong
To the shed of his tears
From my poems and songs

From anger to laughter
Depression to jokes
He felt better after
His Marlboro smokes

A medical chemist
A father, a cook
If only I witnessed
The last breath he took

A STORM UPON US

JAYME PALMGREN

LETTING GO

BONGIWE SHONGWE

"Tell me Nicky, and be honest," I said, "Am I really different?" As I asked the question, my eyes stared intently into hers, as if I could read her thoughts.

The way people stared at me every time I left the house frightened me. Once I even contemplated never to leave the house again. Would that have been a wise decision? To be honest, I would rather not know.

"Nicky," I call out, "wait, don't leave. I need you." Tears start to fill my eyes and soon fall in torrents. I am not ashamed to cry. I'm human, and sometimes I'm overwhelmed with emotion.

Nicky, the only person who never judges me. The only one who believes in me. A true friend - the only reason I'm still alive. Sometimes, when my mind lies idle, I reminisce about the past - about what could've been, but never will be. This provides a wonderful escape from the lonely reality which brings back the pain that threatens to destroy me. The pain that will surely be the end of what I call me.

I hear a voice, very distant and almost inaudible. I turn away from it, but something keeps me rooted to the spot. It's Nicky, with that look in her face that I know so well. The look that says, "look and listen hard, you might learn something." God, if only she knew how hard this is.

But I know at the back of my head that she is right; I will never be free. No, not unless I come to terms with the truth, no matter how hard it is. Well, at least that is what she says-even the doctors say the same thing.

Ah, the doctors! The very same people who gave up on me. They passed their verdict and never once considered the consequences. Look away they did, and how well did they do that!

"She's mentally unstable," they said.

"She can never lead a normal life," one said.

Oh, and the most considerate of them all: "pardon my tongue, but she's a nutcase," he said. How touching and thoughtful!

All these words cut me like a dagger, shattering me into a millions pieces. How could they be so cruel? What was a normal life? I asked myself these questions over and over again, but an answer I never found. Gradually, I let their words and pessimism control me. I released my hold and began to stumble. Had it not been for Nicky, I surely would have hit the ground. But she steadied me. She took my hand and helped me grow. She nurtured me until I blossomed.

Well, at least she says I have blossomed. I improved. Most importantly, I had a friend. Nicky edged me on; like a proud mother watching her child take the first step. The months did not feel long in that naked room. Grudgingly, the optimistic doctors admitted I was well and discharged me. At last I was able to return to my family. Nicky was there waiting for me. Ever faithful Nicky- where would I be without her? I wonder.

The voices cut into my thoughts again. This time there's no ignoring them. Faceless voices from the past, all recognizable but unwelcomed.

"Remember, remember, remember," they chant.

"Remember what?" I ask.

"Remember who you are," they say. "Remember who we are," they continue.

I shiver, not from the cold, but from the chill running down my spine.

"Why," I cry, "why should you do this to me?"

"You did this to yourself," they reply. Their words are like a sword piercing my flesh.

"Nicky, Nicky! Help me!" Nicky looks at me with sorrow in her face.

"Be strong," she says, "you cannot turn back."

Her words are the final straw. Is she deserting me as well? But I know she isn't. I glance into her eyes. In them, I see a flame burning so strong. Suddenly, a figure emerges from them. It's me. The figure is me on the day of the accident, in my new green dress, ready for the party. I had truly believed it was a party, little did I know that it wasn't. As planned, my boyfriend had picked me up. He was already drunk, and judging by his appearance, he was already losing it in cocaine. I wanted to get out, but I didn't. I went on with him.

The place was crowded. Everywhere I looked, there were strange faces. I was given one drink after another, but that was the way things were done at the parties I went to. Unfortunately, this was not like the rest, and being the naïve person that I was, I never suspected I was drinking lethal chemicals I still cannot name. I felt happy. I felt nauseous. I felt numb. I went to Tye and told him to take me home. He did. Well, he almost did.

Tye was stoned. I knew that, but I did not care. He drove hazardously, as usual, and paid precious little attention to traffic lights. We argued. I don't really remember what we argued about, but I know it had to do with his lifestyle. He got angry. He said he'd kill us both than let me walk out.

"Nicky, I can't do this. It hurts too much," I say, with tears streaking my cheeks. She holds my hand. I return to my memories.

Two blocks away from my house, he floored the accelerator, passing my house. I begged him to stop. He said only if I will stay with him. I hastily agreed, hoping he would believe me.

He looked me straight in the eye and kissed me. At that point, everything went blank. That is, until I found myself in a strange place which I later learned was the hospital.

I cry. Suddenly, I am faced with what I had been trying to avoid; the truth. I killed Tye, and did this to myself.

"No, that's not true," Nicky says. "You did not know. Tye did this."

Somehow, I believe her.

"You did well," the voices say, "you have finally admitted the truth."

To be honest, my chest feels lighter, as though a huge weight has been lifted from it.

"Now you are ready," Nicky says.

"Ready for what?" I ask, confused.

"You know it in your heart, you always have."

I look at her, trying to block out her words. She smiles, then turns away from me. I try to call out. My voice is gone. She disappears with the voices. I stand alone, feeling lost and on my own. Yet, at the same time, at peace with the world and myself. I smile for the first time in a year.

A MEMORY OF GREAT-GRANDMOTHER, *IN HER MEMORY* JENNIFER WHITE

Memaw lays on the ground,
soon to be under,
and my mother stands above her.
Quite a drive to get here
for such a
brief
moment.

My mother holds a ribbon
which she will keep for at least a year,
if not longer, on her dresser
the worn honeyed wood
melting into baby bottle pink,
a fancy many layered bow, out in plain sight,
for at least a year before placement in a drawer,
lovingly placed but placed away all the same.

The wording matches the sunshine yellow
blanket my mother made her.
Her smiling face stitched on black yarn
and echoes of delighted exclamation
moved with me
to a new house she has never,
will never hear of.
She is draped across my couch
and comforts my heart in chilly times.
Crinkled eyes peering over gold rimmed glasses,
listening to the chatter around her,
and depending on your position,
claiming a bad ear.

DANGER ELYSSA MANN

It's silent. Dead silent. It's so silent I can hear myself think. It's so silent that I'm actually not exaggerating with the "I-Can-Hear-Myself-Thinking" thing. This is the Chicago Art Institute. And it is dead silent.

It's so silent I've contemplated how much that overly ornate grandfather clock from eighteenth-century France with the solid gold face and hand-painted pendulum cost in the era it was made. I have converted that price to how much it might cost today in the United States. I've converted that price into Euros and British Pounds, respectively. I've tried very hard to figure out how much the damn clock weighs and therefore, how long it would take me to die if it fell on top of me and crushed my feeble body.

It's so silent I've sung my way most of the way through John Mayer's *Continuum* album and about a third of the way through the *Spring Awakening* Original Broadway Soundtrack in my head. Every so often a hum pops out and people whip their heads around as if to say, "How dare you break the sanctity of museum silence?" In my head, they say this in pompous French accents. I am attempting to sing my way through a John Hiatt CD, but 'Footloose' keeps popping into my head at random intervals, so I'm not sure how successful I'm going to be. And unfortunately I only know the "Loose, footloose, kick off your Sunday shoes," bit so it's getting fairly aggravating very quickly.

It's so silent that the last four rooms of furniture have passed by in a complete blur because I've taken to debating whether or not the furniture in France (or whatever country's furniture we're looking at) actually changed from decade to decade. My sister and I wonder to each other in hushed tones if we morphed all of the couches together if they would resemble one of those shape-shifting effects you see in sci-fi films. The old couple from across the room throws us deliciously scathing looks as our discussion escalates to whether it would be more of a bad-guy-in-Indiana-Jones-face-melting-off sort of morphing scenario or a Brad-Pitt-aging-gradually-in-Benjamin-Button sort of deal.

"Please, Louise, pull me dadadadada..." What words go there?

It's so silent I've contemplated the perfect man, the perfect date, where I want to get married, that I don't want to have a wedding so I'm going to elope, where I'd like to have a honeymoon, what I want to do for the rest of my life, the fact that I hate yard work and will therefore be living in an apartment for the foreseeable future, the name of the children that I'll never have because I hate children, and whether or not there is a mathematical formula that could calculate how many licks it takes to get to the middle of a Tootsie Pop.

"T'll ah dooo we doo wap doo do. Oooh oop daa tear up this town." What are the WORDS?

It's so silent I've realized that I don't think I could be a Journalism major. I have no idea what I want to do for the rest of my life, I hate working at Subway. I may very well just have to work at Subway for the rest of my life. I'll probably never get married, when I die I won't have made any impact on the world because there

are six billion other people out there, my family will most likely cremate me even though I'd rather be buried in a coffin, and I'm afraid that when I have the chance to take the first step towards really starting my life I'll be too frightened to do it. But why do any of those things even matter? We'll die in the end anyhow and— Have to stop this train of thought. I can't be having an existential crisis in the middle of a museum. Especially at age seventeen. Aren't people supposed to have those in middle age? I refuse to go down that path. I refuse to think about things like that. I refuse.

"Yah da dadada in your heart, you're yearnin' burning for some, someone to tell you that life ain't passin' you by." Too true Kenny, too true. Now get the hell out of my head.

Trying to think about something else. Thinking about clothes. Thinking about how I might not have enough shirts to last the rest of this vacation. Thinking about how I need to update my availability at Subway when I get back from vacation. Thinking about sandwiches, not work. Thinking about food in general. Thinking about work again. Thinking about my future jobs. Shit.

"Lose your blues. Everybody cut footloose." God, I hate this song.

It's dead silent in the Chicago Art Institute. Silence is a dangerous thing. I think I hate silence.

IN THE MINDS OF STRANGERS JAYME PALMGREN

MOTHER: Kids, come get dinner!

(enter FATHER)

(MOTHER and FATHER greet one another)

MOTHER: How was work, dear?

FATHER: Great. And yours?

MOTHER: Fabulous.

If you consider working, grocery shopping, and slaving over a hot stove fabulous.

FATHER: Good. Kids!

(enter KIDS)

(Family sits down and begins to eat in silence)

FATHER: How was school today, kids?

KID 1: Fine.

I haven't been in three days, but oh well. I've been able to forge Mom's signature for years.

FATHER: What about you?

KID 2: Good. I'm learning about the modern caste system.

And how I am at the bottom of the totem pole, so to speak. The cheerleaders taped my locker shut again, bitches.

MOTHER: When do you leave for your business trip, honey?

FATHER: Tomorrow night. I should be back by Tuesday. I am showing the new guy the ropes.

And by new guy, I mean the new accountant Tom. We're sharing a hotel room. He's

got such a nice ass.

(Mother nods)

MOTHER: What do you kids have planned for the weekend?

KID 2: I have a study group with some friends.

I'll probably end up staying at home and chatting with this guy I met in a chat room. He's teaching me everything I need to know.

KID 1: I am going to head over to Brandon's and watch a movie.

He scored us some ecstasy. It's going to be awesome.

FATHER: What about you, dear?

I wonder what Tom's doing tonight.

MOTHER: Oh I'll probably run a few errands, maybe read a new book I picked up last week.

Escape from my personal hell for a while. Pretend I am someone else for a few days. Like that could ever happen.

FATHER: Would you mind dropping off my dry cleaning?

I hope she doesn't notice that stain.

MOTHER: Of course not.

Like I said. As if I don't have something better I could be doing. Like thinking about how I should have stayed in college and gone to law school.

FATHER: (to KID 1) Speaking of clothes, what have I told you about wearing those jeans with the holes in them?

KID 1: I didn't wear them to school, Dad.

Like I'm taking fashion advice from him. At least I didn't lie since I didn't go to school today.

MOTHER: What happened to the new jeans I bought you last week?

No one ever thinks that I might want to shop for myself now and then. Instead I spend the afternoon buying everyone else things that they HAVE to have.

KID 1: I think they're in my closet.

I returned 'em for forty bucks and bought a sack.

KID 2: Mom, can I have some lunch money for tomorrow?

MOTHER: I just gave you money for the week on Monday.

Yea, I'll just go out back and pluck it off my money tree.

KID 2: Well, I have to get a new notebook.

The cool kids threw it in the toilet...after they stole my lunch money. I've starved all week. They'll pay.

MOTHER: I'll leave it out on the counter.

The ones that I wiped off earlier today and are already covered in everyone's shit.

FATHER: And I'll give you your allowances before I head to San Francisco.

I'm feeling pretty generous. What can I say? I am excited. San Francisco is supposed to be crawling with available men.

MOTHER: You kids need to remember how lucky you are that you get an allowance. I actually had to work.

KID 1: We appreciate it, Mom, really.

How else am I supposed to afford to get fucked up every week?

KID 2: Yeah, we do.

I am saving up. Have to protect myself. Those kids will never see what hit them.

FATHER: You kids want to watch a movie after dinner?

Pearl Harbor is supposed to be on. Josh Hartnett is a certified fox.

KID 1: Ummm....Brandon and I were going to work on a group science project tonight.

A little herbology followed by some anatomy.

(FATHER looks at KID 2)

KID 2: Sorry, Dad. I have got to run to Wal-Mart and get that notebook.

and some piping and whatever else is on the list Bomber187 sent me.

MOTHER: But I have my book club tonight, I'll need the car.

Not like anyone actually cares.

FATHER: You can take mine, Kiddo. I'll just lounge around the house tonight and relax.

Watch Josh Hartnett or call Tom....decisions, decisions.

KID 2: Thanks, Dad.

FATHER: No problem.

And no, thank you.

KID 1: What are you reading, Mom?

A little kiss ass, and no questions asked tonight when I come back to the house blazed.

MOTHER: Pride and Prejudice.

Why can't my life be a novel?

FATHER: What time do you think you'll be home, babe?

How much time do I have for a little privacy?

MOTHER: Around 9 or so.

Not like it matters. He doesn't care. He hasn't even touched me in months.

KID 1: May I be excused? I want to get my notebook so that I can get my homework for tomorrow finished.

Are pipe bombs considered "homework?"

KID 2: Me, too. I have to get to work on that science project.

I better pick up a blunt on the way to Brandon's house. Should I get strawberry or banana?

FATHER: You kids go on.(checks his watch) Be home by 10.

This is awesome. I might have time for both.

(KID 1 and 2 start to EXIT)

MOTHER: Scrape and rinse your plates before you go.

They barely touched their dinner. Who cares that they actually get real meals and not that shit that comes in a bag, not them. Sometimes I don't even know why I try.

(KID1 and KID 2 scrape their plates and rush out.)

FATHER: I am going to head upstairs and take a nap.

Put on that movie and day dream about me and Josh in Hawaii, secluded beach...

ahh.

(FATHER and MOTHER both rise. FATHER nears MOTHER and she puckers her lips for a kiss. FATHER turns her head and kisses her on the cheek.)

(FATHER exits.)

(MOTHER gets up and begins to clear dishes from the table)

MOTHER: Sometimes I wish I were dead.

FATHER: (from the next room) What's that, dear?

MOTHER: Nothing.

CONTEMPLATING DEPRESSION

DANIEL BROWN-SCHURR

Depression can be sadness
But contemplation too
From the mourning of a loved one
To a person you once knew

A soul now dark and saddened
To nostalgia of the past
From something like a bad friend
To the laughs you had in class

While depression is unhealthy
It gives you point of view
A new form of perspective
On things that you once knew

MARKED

JAYME PALMGREN

It is days like today
That I know if I do not
Put pen to paper
I will die.

That paper,
Etched in those blue lines
Becomes my target
of destruction.

I look to it
For comfort
As I mark upon
It's pages,
Its pristine innocence
marked upon
just as I
have been marked upon.

I turn its potential
Into regrets
As it is wadded up
Next the pages before it
To be discarded
Like yesterday's trash.

My pen looms upon it
Menacing,
Threatening,
And yet the outcome
Is always the same.

WHEN IT WON'T GO UP

JEREMIAH JOHNSON

When It Won't Go Up
I was caught up in the moment.
The deed was almost done.
I had pushed all the right buttons, but
I was stuck at level one.
Why wouldn't it work?
I was so confused.
I was oh so sad when I had to
tell my partner the news.
I didn't know what was wrong, and
I made sure I did everything right.
I guess nothing would be going
up or down tonight.
I couldn't get the job done, and
I began to hate her.
Until I called the man, and he let
us out of the elevator.

THE GARDEN BED MATTHEW ANTONE

Subjugate the irritation,
The potentially,
These cognitive possibilities

Beyond the muscle of belligerence,
It takes more than a rock-hard core,
To settle a score of intellectuals,

Siphon beyond those we need,
The cure is deeply comforted by ancestral genes
Open up those ligaments to eradicate the irritation
Prepare for the radical to become the remedy

Thinking you'll disagree
Hoping you'll realign,
Indicative of my irritation,
Seeing you behave the way I want you to

Than how hard you can punch,
When the remedy is only of this mentality,

Toxic tangents,
And your ability to mend this worldly womb,
Because this subjugation,
This irritation,
Will leave intellectuals to settle the score

Beyond the dumbbells and pushups
The bar has been raised,
When you educated my ancestors
When the common man took control

Beyond my physical apparatus,
It's the thoughts within my head,
That may leave you beneath my garden bed,

Flush with red,
As though your heart had yet to forget this rhythm
Death leaves you unattractive,
So hopeful,
That I will never see you,
Beneath roses of the garden bed

STORYTELLER RACHEL HOLDEN

My mother makes jam that tastes like summer. It wasn't until I went to university that I began to miss that season; at home it is captured in raspberry seeds and spread onto toast all year round. It wasn't until Christmas that I questioned where it came from. Copying out the recipe, I reached the instruction asking me to crush the berries with a silver fork, it took me aback.

"Where on earth did this come from?"

"My grandmother's ladies-maid," my mother replied, unmoved by the wealth in that answer - a distant reality for her, to me a fairy-tale. I know little about my grandmother, barely enough to wish I knew more. She was disinherited for marrying the wrong man, an Indian army officer who helped her escape to the other side of the world. When I knew her she frightened me, by that time she was old and strict. I was too young to ask her about the life she'd led. All I knew about her were the ornamental Indian swords on the wall and the recipes she'd passed on. It was for this reason that I first began my interviews with the family, trying to find out things about their past - and mine.

An antique Chinese chest lurks in the hallway of my house. The front is carved with birds and flowers which in shadow look like twisted faces and gnarled hands. I live in a cottage. There is nothing but shadow. The cottage has insides that are less than intimidating; the cupboard is in fact a hall cupboard only. Housing board games, wrapping paper, yards of string somehow wrapped around everything and all of the photographs not good enough to frame. Somewhere amongst these mundane items hides an unassuming plastic bag whose contents I am hunting for. I find it just in time for a familiar voice to announce the arrival of my grandparents; I pull out my prop and hurry into the kitchen to meet them.

The mask is heavy in my hand. The eyes stare up at me through metal slats and there is something in the way that the eyes twist down at the side that makes them look forlorn.

"Dad says that this is blood." I hand the mask to my grandfather, the chainmail mouth guard creaking slightly at the unaccustomed movement. He takes his glasses off and squints to get a better look. He hands it back.

"Yes; it could be." He leans back in one of our antique dining chairs in a way that my mother tells me not to. It groans and I grimace.

"This was Da's wasn't it? He wore it in the tank battle." Da was my father's grandfather, but everyone called him Da, related or not. I grew up listening to stories of him told by the fireside, stories that changed from teller to teller, some more reliable than others. It's for this reason that I've asked my grandparents to come round today. Although Da is my grandmother's father, it is of my grandfather that I ask the questions.

"Yes, I should think so."

The kettle clicks and I get up to make them coffee. We keep Nescafe in a special cupboard with the sugar for when they come round. I'm more of a tea person but granddad can't stand it. I get the special mug down for my grandmother. The

gold edge has disappeared in most parts and the flowers are faded but it's the lightest so I half fill it and take it back to them. I should probably offer my grandfather a sherry, but I can't quite bring myself to take out the delicate carved crystal; the image of it in a thousand pieces on the floor limits me to non-alcoholic beverages only. I hand him the coffee and know that he won't be offended.

"So what happened in that battle?"

He tries to sip his coffee but to do so he must stop scratching the head of my dog who will not allow the lapse in concentration. He stares at it longingly for a while before answering:

"Da always told me to volunteer for everything."

From what I understand of Da already, he had had no sons. My grandfather, the closest of his son-in-laws, was the closest he came to one. My grandfather in turn adopted him. He never seemed to speak of his own parents, just Da.

"The tanks were new back then, I think it may have been the very first tank battle, part of the Somme." I scribble this down despite the carefully arranged dictaphone and nod my head knowingly as I think of black and white men wading through a black and white landscape.

"He was working as a gunner and they asked if anyone wanted to work in the tanks and he volunteered." My grandmother's head bobs up and down in agreement. I can't help smiling; it's one of the few stories that can not bore her. If I'm lucky she may join in.

"I thought he was driving."

"He was later. Those things were built less sturdily than your dad's four-by-four. When they were hit, the bullet would shatter the walls. The shrapnel damage killed most people."

"He had shrapnel in his head," my grandmother chimes in.

"That's right, Ma used to comb his hair in the garden and pull the bits out that were coming to the surface." He flicks his wrist in a catapult-like motion and they both laugh. I can't help wincing at this flippant description and wonder why they smile when he was almost torn to pieces.

"But how did he drive it?"

"Oh he was the least injured. I believe that one person had died, another was hurt?" He asks my grandmother. She smiles happily and nods.

"Almost everyone died in that fight; he got lost behind enemy lines and spent the next few days driving around shooting things until he got back."

Bored, my grandmother tries to stand; I pull the chair out for her and take her arm so she's balanced.

"Are you all right?"

She smiles benignly.

"Oh yes, I hate it... you know." She waves to the chair.

"Sitting?"

"Yes, I don't like to sit too long."

I watch her sway around the kitchen, just looking at things. But as I watch her move along the stone floor, I wish she'd sit down. My home is not a place that

you can fall. My grandfather sits happily juggling coffee and dog and I hover halfway between the two of them. The rest of my time is spent swooping arthritic cats out of my grandmother's path. I can feel the anxiety like a tight knot in my gut. I'm relieved when my grandfather decides they should go, realizing that there isn't an offer of sherry to follow the coffee. The fist in my stomach twists into guilt and I feel bad for not asking them to stay a little. Can you serve sherry in a tumbler?

After they leave, the mask sits on the table, its expression frozen as though with the things it's seen. It doesn't seem right to keep it in the hall cupboard, wrapped in a plastic bag surrounded with the unloved and the everyday. I try to think of all of the other places I could put it: the glass faced chest, on top of the piano, on the mantelpiece. Each idea horrifies me in turn. I cannot frame this history. I feel like its projecting into the room the things that it has seen and I wonder if he kept it on the whole time. I wonder if the metallic smell of the chainmail would distract him from the smell of blood, or whether he was used to both by then. The man that was injured, how bad had that been? Did he scream when he was hit? Did he carry on screaming across the torn up ground of the Somme? The soil badly tortured, copper stained with blood, potholed with metal; it seemed as though nothing would ever grow there again. Before I put the mask away I slide it over my face. It fits comfortably around my eyes and nose and the chain cascades down from it just past my lips. There are bars across the eyes and my vision is split into horizontal slivers. I feel quite removed from everything around me, and somehow the rich color of the carpet seems tacky through the dark bars. The idea of putting this on the mantelpiece still horrifies me, but I wonder if that's a good thing. If I left it up there long enough, would I still see it with horror. Would I notice it at all?

When I enter my grandparents' house it is as though I've walked into the desert. The cold wind outside whipped my hair into my face and the rain has stung me, but the walk flushed my skin with warmth and the inside of their house has me sweating uncomfortably under my coat. I dump it onto one of the chairs by the door, tip my boots onto the mat and release the hell-hound from her lead. She shoots out of sight like a miniature greyhound and a moment later I hear the squeal of my grandmother's excitement.

"Hi," I call through to the next room.

"Hello, sweetie." I rush to their cheeks before they have a chance to stand and pin them down with kisses before I head to the sofa. My dog has her head in my grandfather's hands already and I sink down gratefully, glad to have surrendered responsibility for my miniature beast.

"I spoke to Edith last night," I say to them before anyone can mention the weather.

"Oh, really?" Edith is my grandmother's older sister and she has the unusual and not unpleasant habit of being impossible to keep on the phone.

"I asked her about what happened to Da when he got back from the battle." All night I'd had ticked it over in my mind: the mud, the blood, the metal. My

JANUS WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

parents had listened politely but did not seem to share my new-found obsession.

"Oh, well, yes, they gave him a medal."

"I know, but I wondered if they'd sent him back afterwards and they didn't. They put him on rest for a few weeks before sending him out into the trenches." I could see in their faces that they had never wondered what had happened when the story ended. To me it'd always seemed as though the war had ended with the story. "Their rest care was burying bodies."

My grandfather laughed.

"The army would make it worse than going back into the trenches." He rolls his eyes. "Did I ever tell you about the time that he woke up with something warm and furry on his chest? He thought it was a cat, looked down and saw that it was the biggest rat he'd ever seen."

"Urgh," my grandmother squeaks and laughs. "I hate rats." I pull out the notepad and jot it down.

"I was wondering if you could tell me anymore about Da?" I had the story but was still unsatisfied; I needed to round him out, to understand who this half-known great-grandfather really was.

"Would you mind if I wrote it down again?" My grandfather looked surprised and pleased and settled back in his armchair, ignoring my sulky looking dog until she gave up and went to sit by the fireplace.

"Well you know he grew up in the mines?"

I, in turn, look suitably surprised and he is satisfied.

"He looked just like your grandmother." They smile at each other for a moment and I imagined a five foot fiery haired Welshman. "He kept on being promoted and demoted for fighting in the trenches."

"I thought you were meant to fight in the trenches?" My voice was laced with loving sarcasm, forgiven in a pompous grandchild in a way a parent would not suffer.

"He was bare knuckle boxing for money, apparently it got boring. All that waiting." They laugh again, with timing so precise I wonder if they practiced it. "He kept on saying though..." and I watched my grandfather's eyes glaze a little as he assumes the standard posture for remembering.

"What?" I was used to this from my grandmother; from my grandfather it was a little disconcerting.

"I remember when he died he kept on talking about this trench that he was in for a while. He was with his best friend from school and they came to a split in the path. Where the trenches used to circle round."

He drew it in the air with this finger. I could picture it as though with that movement he dug the trench away.

"He went one way and his friend went another, and by morning his friend was dead. He kept on asking 'Why me? Why did I survive?'"

ISHUFFLE ANONYMOUS

632 miles to go. 632 miles from home.

I lean my seat back as far as it will go in a GMC single cab pickup truck, circa 1996 model. This is limited even more by the wrinkled up clothes, empty green tea bottles and can of Febreze all squished behind the seat. Its mid-May, post graduation and post the best two years of my life. The sun is slowly setting in a West Texas sky, the last one I'll be seeing for a while. Most students were gone a week ago, packing as fast as they could to leave this shit hole. We didn't. We waited. Box by box, bale by bale, dragging it out as long as the RA would let us. They came down to the arena and we said our goodbyes. They kissed Alibi farewell and drove off so I wouldn't cry. I double-check everything a third time and finally bid adieu to the worn out patch of grass my trailer had been parked on for so long. I gradually ease over the speed bumps I flew over so many times, passing the empty baseball dorms I snuck into so many nights. I take a deep breath and put my right blinker on. I start heading east, away from it all. Away from all things exclusively dedicated to the west: sunsets, Allsup's and cacti. I don't cry, so I swallow the swelling in my throat.

I pop in the mix CD that Karlee made me as a last goodbye and let Randy Rogers fill my petite truck and double pierced ears. Like most embarking freshman, Karlee and I wanted to do something rebellious to kick off college. My mom had advised my new friend and roommate of two things; I was always going to be running late and not to let me get a tattoo. So, we settled for a second piercing at Wal-Mart instead. It was a small gesture, but it set the tone for our next two years together.

Suffering from musical attention deficit disorder, song ADD, I quickly search for the next song. To no surprise however, the next is yet another Randy Rogers tune. "This is hard, this hell. This is pain like I have never felt" make up part of the lyrics. This song about goodbyes was unmistakably true. Leaving is always a bittersweet hell. I think back to all the "Randy" moments me and Karlee had shared. I caught our favorite musician's guitar pick at a concert we ventured to together; I gave it to Kar. She lost it, go figure. She lost everything. Randy was also the name of the biological father she hasn't seen since she was seven. We still plan on making a trip to Oklahoma City and finding that bastard. Randy was also the name of her incarcerated ex-boyfriend. Before his three-year sentence, they would stay up talking into the wee hours of the morning. (Not only did Karlee and I share a room, our beds were practically on top of one another. Most girls had theirs on opposite ends, dividing their rooms with curtains and separate TVs. Well, not us. One TV, one channel, LMN). I remember how annoying their late night chatter was; a Lifetime murder scene would be rudely interrupted by her flirtatious giggling and a sappy, "Ohh Randy." Ohh how I wished they would just give it a break so I could pay attention and learn how to kill three future husbands, take their money and still have a nice ass. Sadly, that wish was granted the next semester. Not the killing of husbands, but a supposed armed robbery he swore he had no part in. She doesn't talk to anybody like that these days. She doesn't fall in love. Randy was also the name we gave our Betta fish.

I pull off the highway just a few miles from the Oklahoma state line. A cop follows me into a gas station and pulls up next to me. Shit.

"Were having a big storm roll in; you might want to be getting home little lady." Perhaps he didn't notice my year's worth of "college junk" through the gooseneck window of my horse trailer, but I was far from home. "Thanks officer" I reply, "I'll be alright." I'm always all right. This is the tenth time I have made this tri-state haul with Alibi, my sorrel hooped comrade. I'd have one of my dogs with me, but my rodeo coach made it very clear that nothing with paws was allowed at school. I broke this rule a few times, and every time I got caught.

Once back on the road, I plug in the ol' turquoise iPod. Never quite knowing what I'm in the mood for, I set it to shuffle. The thing I like about "shuffling" and the radio is that you never really know what's coming next. The mystery is a bit of a thrill I suppose. The pod picks Marty Stuart's "Burn Me Down." The homeless guy I once picked up loved that song. His name was David.

I was driving back to school after a weekend of rodeo in Amarillo and saw him peddling his wobbly bike up the side of the highway 287. It was cold and the hill was steep. I felt this sudden urge to stop and offer him a ride. So I did. He accepted and put his bike, raggedy bag and card board sign in my horse trailer. I wish I hadn't been too nervous to read what it said. He looked around eighty years old but could have been sixty. My whole leg was shaking the first couple of awkward miles, but Colt soon broke the ice. Colt was the black, great dane/lab looking puppy I also plucked off the side of the road. He had a white "C" in crested on his chest and had been my traveling partner for the past week. He sat in between me and this stranger and started chewing on the hobo's sleeve. I scolded him to stop, but David haggardly whispered, "Oh, he ain't gone na hurt nothin" through crooked teeth and patted the puppy on the head. It was then I realized his sleeves were already tattered and torn. We drove for three hours, sharing stories and a pack of cigarettes. He had a job, you know, but lost it. He also had a daughter, but lost her too. I bought him a steak finger basket at Dairy Queen. I have never met anyone so grateful in all my days. He had a few crumpled dollars to his name and offered to buy me an ice cream cone. I politely declined and we hit the road again. David was heading to Dallas in search of work and a motive to live, but I could only take him as far as Vernon. I pulled off the exit and helped get his bike out. I wasn't naïve enough to show him where I lived and went to school - hell, he didn't even know my last name. David thanked me numerous times for the ride and restoring his faith in humankind, referring to me as his "Guardian Angel." I'm sure that was just the years of crack abuse talking, but it was still sweet.

My reminiscence of that drive is interrupted by a bright bolt of lightning too close for comfort. Its loud clap startles me and I imagine its God's door slamming in the face of the too far-gone. I have been caught up in my mind, looking at the road in front of me and following its curves, but not keeping track of the miles passed. The rain is raping my tiny truck, cat eye marbles trying desperately to penetrate my windshield. I switch to radio and tune into the National Weather Service Doppler radar. I know I'm in Oklahoma by now, but can't make out the mile marker signs

though the brief interlude of clarity my wipers provide. I'm going twenty miles an hour and the road stripe is nothing but a mustardy blur. I replace the wretched sounds of the storm with Blink 182. I've loved the punk rock band since I was old enough to curse behind my mother's back.

Branden Duff. That was his name. The name of the boy who introduced me to a paradoxical way of life. He was a calf roper. A skater boy. Interchanging cowboy boots with checkered Vans. I thought I loved him. Maybe I did. We grew up together on the rodeo circuit, but I always had the hots for a more mature Jesse Hinkle. It wasn't until my teenage years at the MRCA finals in Sedalia, MO that I really acknowledged him. Now, I could go into a bunch of hoopla about how we "fell in love," but I'm sure it's no better than any other modern day Bonnie and Clyde (great song by the way).

I will say this though, the instant he playfully grabbed me, all awkwardness between us went away. The instant he kissed me, my first real kiss, everything but him went away. From that moment on he was all I could think about. We texted each other the whole way home and he called me when we each reached our distant dwellings. We stayed up talking into the teeny weeny hours of the night, playing twenty questions and occasionally tumbling across the word "babe." Only days went by before "babe" turned to "baby" and we were attached. My mom once heard us talking around two a.m. and furiously took my cell phone away. I didn't think twice to sneak downstairs and seize the house phone to call him back.

Fifteen was an embarrassing age for me, braces and acne included. Although Branden never had a single blemish, I never felt self-conscious around him. He sort of adored me and I could do no wrong: my flaws weren't defects in his eyes. I thought I was the luckiest girl alive and that no other boy had ever loved a girl as much as he loved me. The only other thing we had a passion for besides rodeo (and each other) was music. We liked a lot of the same, but would get so excited when we had something new to share with the other. For some reason, and I really can't remember why - perhaps it was our seemingly long-distance relationship - our song (yes, we had song) was "Far Away" by Nickelback.

In an attempt to stab myself in the heart, I find the dated song on my iPod. I can feel myself slipping into gloomy, self-pity mode and before I can do any proper reasoning I start belting out "I LOove Youu, I haved LoVED you all alooong! and I MISS you, been FAR AWAAY for FAR too Loong! I kEEp dreeaming you'll be with me and you'll NEVER goO! StoOp breeathing if I don't see you ANYmooooore!" I feel the sudden urge to cry again but stop myself and realize how stupid I probably look to any passers-by. As if there are any. I'm alone on this road with my thoughts and regrets. I put the iPod back on shuffle and hope for something happy. It is. Well, maybe not happy, but uplifting atleast. "Hair of the Dog" temporarily halts my tears and makes me feel more like a badass. For those musically underprivileged, it's a rock song from the 70's by Nazareth. The title is a play on words: "heir of the dog," i.e. "son of a bitch."

Good stuff.

I pass through many more stop signs and melodies without any depressing

notions, in part thanks to Robert Earl Keen, Jr.'s "The Road Goes on Forever (and the party never ends)." When most think of "the party" they reflect on whoopin' and hollerin' good times. I indeed feel the same, but what about the party where you pass out before midnight clutching a border collie pup on a dusty old couch in the middle of a barn with a hundred of your closest friends and enemies laughing and taking pictures? Or the party you spend a good hour getting sexy for and show up to find a couple of grubby chubby guys playing pool? The party where you try to pull an amusing joke and walk out with a few cowboy's cases of beer and they end up getting pissed and throwing your driver's keys in the middle of a field and you can't find them till morning? The party where your boyfriend says something "funny" that for some reason hurt your feelings bad enough to make you think it was okay to hitchhike back to the dorms and it got the whole gang livid at you for not answering their calls when you went MIA in a selfish drunken getaway? The party where you know you've reached you're limit but still give into that last shot of Jack Daniels thrust in your face that eventually leaves you peeing and calling dinosaurs in a very public bush? (Sorry Mac D's) That's a party. That's life. The road goes on forever and it never ends. Just when you think you could have made every mistake possible and learned every lesson there is to learn, another party comes along to teach you another one.

The harsh rain is a mere drizzle now and I make my way through Oklahoma City and Tulsa. I choose to travel this route in the middle of the night because the alacrity of traffic scares me. It's just me and the eighteen wheelers on I-44 now. I've often considered investing in a CB radio to chat in some trucker jargon, but after seeing "Joy Ride" I think I'll pass.

I go through a few pay tolls and wonder why it costs so much for four axels. I don't like to worry about money because there never seems to be enough. My friends and I in Texas were always broke. Not broke like the homeless guy, but broke enough to think putting Hot Cheetos on ramen noodles was flaming fantastic. We didn't mind it though. While backroading one night we came to the conclusion that the best things in life really are free, or at least dirt cheap.

I love my friends in Texas. All of them. The cowgirls, the city dwellers. The pot smokers, the church goers. My close group of buds would always get together to do homework (basically I would do all theirs for them), dye each other's hair, watch scary movies in the basement of the dorms, lay out in January and even sled down a hill on a giant Exxon sign we conveniently "found" at a gas station. We were a family.

Lacy is your typical small town southern beauty queen, with thick thighs and hair to match, but a gorgeous girl who will probably be the first to marry and start poppin' out babies. Erin is the youngest and smallest, but can out drink any man I know. Her dad was an alcoholic and they often shared a thirty pack just between the two of them, just before he went to jail again. She tries too hard to please guys and lets them continuously break her heart, but she's learning. Danielle was the only local of the group, so her grandmother's old house was often a hot spot for Zumba and drinking games. She aspires to be an actress and thinks her life is like a movie, thriving on whatever drama that gets stirred up in a town that small. Chelsea came to Vernon from Wyoming, following after her boyfriend and his dirty laundry. It didn't

take long after hanging around us though; she dropped the ungrateful load and is now becoming a nurse. Paige is a bit of a psycho, she practiced Black Magic our first year being suitemates. She is still a crazy loon but has saved my ass many times and always provides some priceless entertainment. And then of course there's Karlee, who is sure to be one of my best friends far beyond college.

When she first found out she was rooming with a girl on the rodeo team (me), she figured I was a wrangler-wearing hick from "Missoura." She's an athletic trainer from Fort Worth and had never been on a horse until she met Alibi. We're polar opposites if you look at our backgrounds and dress sizes, but for some reason we just "clicked." She says it's because we both have good hearts, but I don't know about any of that.

I'm sure the girls would say that I'm "the smart one" (considering we went to a junior college) and "the one that runs away when she drinks whiskey" and "the one that will give Travis another bloody lip if he ever makes them cry again."

Miranda Lambert's "Famous in a Small Town" comes streaming from my poor old speakers. I turn it up and the sound quality goes down. I don't care. I sip on a Big Gulp fountain drink and light a Marlboro Red, realizing this is the life. All of my friends are most likely sleeping, in Texas and in Missouri, but I'm out here on the road between. A girl on her own. Just driving. Just driving and dreaming.

The exit for Miami, Oklahoma comes into view. Home of North Eastern Oklahoma College and the late, great Branden Duff. Well, he's not that great. When we were younger and so in love, I broke his heart. It was kind of an accident though. I don't know if it was his voice, just one pitch too high, or his too precious demeanor that eventually got to me. Or, maybe, it was the sexy football player from my high school that showed an unexpected interest in me. Point being, I was just a little bit bored with Branden's un-masculinity and very fascinated with the hunky funky football player.

I thought if Branden and I took a little break and just stayed "best friends" for awhile, I could do some guilt-free exploring (please, judge me). It didn't just blow up in my face; it exploded into a thousand tiny pieces of my heart. And his too I'm guessing. Branden didn't want anything to do with me for four years and the football player only wanted something to do with me for four minutes. Classic.

When Branden wouldn't even speak to me I sort of...turned into a crazy person. My friends at the time witnessed a side of me I hope no one ever, ever has to see again. To this day they still bring up how hilarious and awful it was. I practically stalked Branden for a year. I would leave him numerous voicemails with nothing in return. If he ever did answer it was to tell me to stop calling him and that he had a new girlfriend and she didn't want him talking to me and that he didn't love me anymore. It was pitiful, I even wrote a song entitled "Branden Duff is an idiot because he chose Anna Cate who I really hate." I'd have to say the lowest point though, was when I cornered him in a stall at a high school rodeo just so he would talk to me. He called me a psycho bitch. It was at that point I realized that he was not worth acting this foolish over. No guy was. If he was all that great I wouldn't have broken up with him the first place, right? I wish "you never know what you have until it's gone"

wasn't such a cliché, because I hate clichés. But I do love that phrase.

So, Flash forward a few years to me molting into the charming young lady I am today. (I'm pretty sure molting is some type of bird behavior, but it sounds right. Maybe the word I'm thinking of is "molding." Yes, that's it. "The act of creating something that is different from the materials that went into it." Thanks, Webster. And lad usually refers to a boy, but it went so well with "charming," I guess I'm not really charming though either...)

So, Flash forward a few years to me molding into the bitter young lass I am today. Relationships have turned into this type of game now, and no one ever wins for very long. There are definite natural feelings involved, but they get overridden by jealousy, manipulation and trying to "have the upper hand," because no one likes to feel vulnerable. I like to pretend I don't mind. I don't mind appearing at risk, but under it all I can't feel weak and expose myself to that kind of danger. I have to care less; it's the number one rule in dating. In a type of self-defense mechanism I have managed to keep a small part of me, perhaps the most important part, detached from anyone else. Don't get me wrong; I still get hurt, but nothing a bottle of cheap whiskey can't fix.

I stop in Miami at the college arena and let Alibi out of the trailer. The school is already closed for summer and no one is here. No lights. No Branden. Its dark and the parking lot is vacant. I stumble around through the stall barn and fill a bucket up with water. I hear ruckus down the ally way and pray to God it's only a raccoon or some other fur bearer. I give Alibi the time he needs to eat and walk around, then load him onto the trailer as fast as I can. I hop back in my truck and get the hell out of dodge. I'm alright. I'm always all right.

The iPod rummages through Paramore, Kings of Leon and The Police as I cross the state line. Back in Missouri, it feels good. Too bad no one is awake for me to call and share the good news with. I fill the void with Mumford and Sons, Old Crow Medicine Show and Bob Seger. "Here I am, on the road again..." I get caught up turning the page and the miles just seem to turn as well.

I'm running low on gas and need to stop soon. My night on the main highway is over and I'm trying to make my way up through Lebanon to get to the Lake of the Ozarks then over to Columbia to my parents' house. My eyes feel heavy but I see a gas station at the upcoming four-way stop. It's off to the left and looks a little deserted, but there are a few flickering lights over the pumps. I figure this is one of those gas stations that closes for the night but keeps the pumps on for those with credit cards. I second-guess myself upon pulling in. It gives me the creeps immediately. An old broken down school bus and other rusted lawn ornaments aren't helping. I quickly jump out, slide my card, and start pumping gas. 1 cent...4 cents...7 cents...off. The pump shuts off. I try and try again but the pumps are off for good. Now I'm getting nervous. It doesn't look like there's another gas station close by. I get back in my truck and lock the doors. I press lock again and even try to open my door from the inside just to make sure it's latched.

The four-way stop has a sign pointing towards Lebanon but doesn't say how many miles. With no other feasible plan, I go that way. I feel like I'm driving deeper

and deeper into some woody wasteland. There are canoe rental and camping signs around every bend stuck in front of double wide trailers with broken down swing sets. It's foggy out and the road seems to end where my headlights do, which isn't very far. I catch a reflection of water around one of the turns - it's a lake. Around every curve of the narrow road I see it off to the side of me, haunting me. It never ends and I'm thinking it's a river now. The trees are holding hands over the road and my own hands are clutching the wheel tight. One little mistake could land my truck and trailer in the depths of the water, whatever it is. I'm scared.

This looks like a scene from "Deliverance" and I am driving on pure gas fumes. I quickly glance down at my dying phone, no service. Why hasn't anyone called? How can my loved ones just be sleeping so peacefully while my life is flashing before my eyes? Is nobody worried about me? If I die will they even realize it before morning? If I run out of gas do I sit in my truck and wait till it's light out or try walking to one of these unsettling "cabins" in the dark? What if a big crazy bearded man gets a hold of me? Should I try to get my horse out and saddle him and ride to the next town? Why do I feel so alone right now? I didn't mind it the previous part of the drive; I was actually quite fond of it. It's different now. It's terrifying. I want nothing more than to have a friend to share in my anxiety. I left those friends in Texas. I have some in Missouri but I haven't seen them in months, and they are still hours away, sleeping. I unclench my jaw and take a deep breath. It's just me now and I have to be tough.

I pass a shabby sign reading, "Buffalo, MO." Sweet. I think I've heard of that before...I think. I start to catch glimpses of civilization around every turn. I just keep pressing on the gas and eventually pull into Lebanon. I putter into a very well-lit gas station. I turn my truck off and just sit for a second. I don't know how I managed to get off on such a detour, but I have made it to where I was headed. I chuckle a little at how scared I was before. I had been alright. I'm always all right.

The sun is starting to rise and bounces its encouraging rays off the trees and rocks that fill the land near the Lake of the Ozarks. The shops, the boats, the lake itself, everything is so pretty. I call my parents to tell them good morning and that I am almost back. I've made this drive before (well, not this exact drive) and each time I come back to Missouri I notice how green everything looks. It really isn't such a bad place to live. I never appreciated its splendor till I lived in a very dull and dusty Texas.

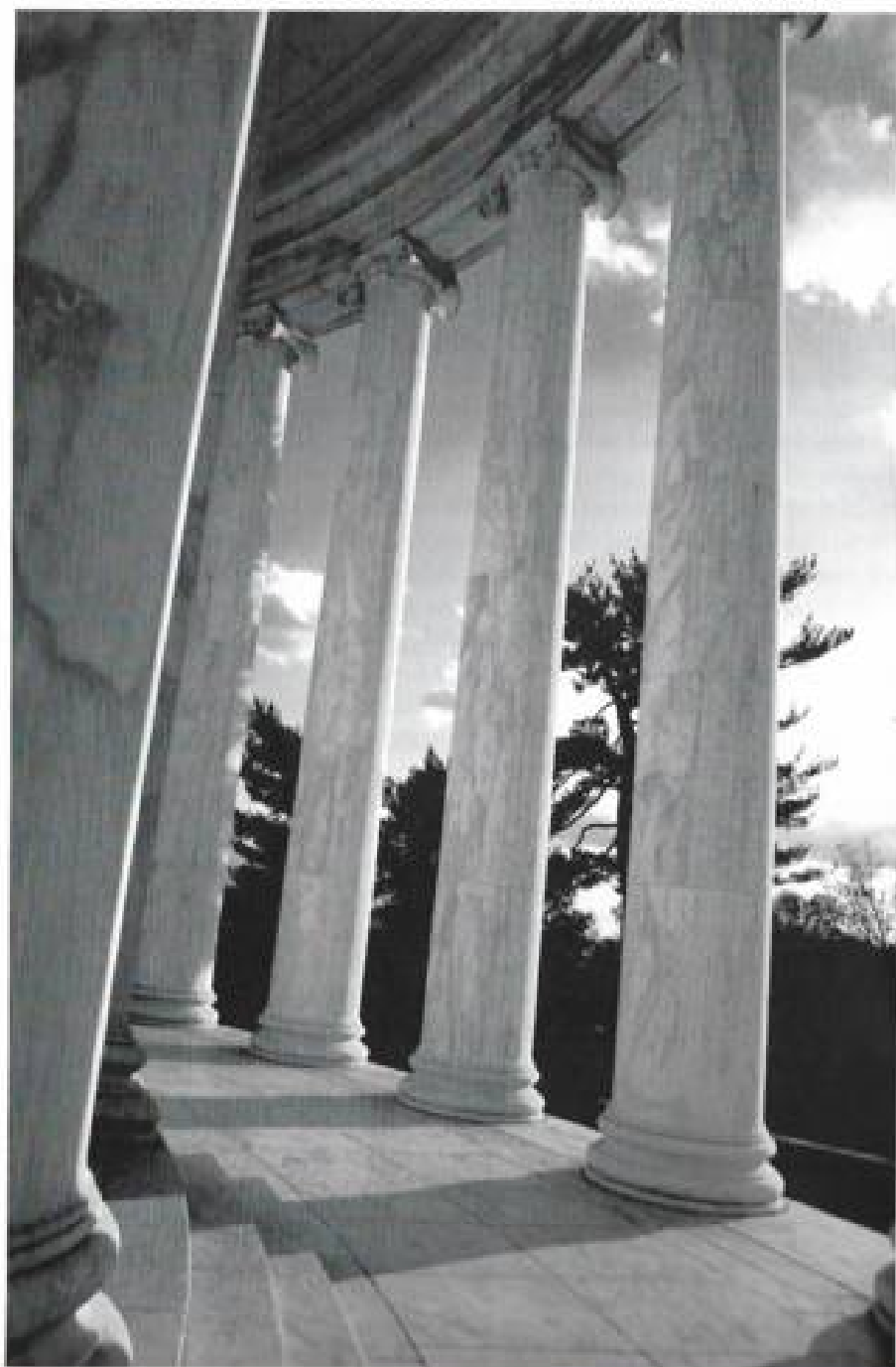
Every trip back I noticed this, but now this feeling is strange. This is my last trip back. I did my time in Texas, now what? Is it too green here? Will I miss the red dirt and cacti? What about my friends?! Holy shit. Lord, I want to turn around.

I make the decision to just keep driving and not worry about it. I let Jo Dee Messina's voice carry me the rest of the way home. "It's a beautiful day not a cloud in sight so I guess I'm doin' alright!" I'm always all right.

Only a few more miles to go, still 632 miles from home.

PILLARS OF STRENGTH

TENZING DHAKHWA



PLANTED IN MEMORY OF RUSLANS PETROVSKY, CLASS OF 2013.
"WE ABSORB THE WORLD BEST IN SOLITUDE. OUR THOUGHTS ARE WHERE
WE LIVE MOST VIVIDLY." -RP
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