

JAINUIS
WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

STAFF

SUBMISSION EDITORS:

RACHEL BOES & AUDREY SHARP

POETRY EDITORS:

CHRISTIAN MOULTON & LEA UTHE

GRAPHICS EDITORS:

CAULIN ATKINS & AUDREY SHARP

PROSE EDITORS:

RACHEL BOES & EMILY KESEL

DESIGN EDITORS:

CAULIN ATKINS, KIRSTEN CARNEY, & HAYLEE RETHMAN

BUSINESS EDITORS:

CHRISTIAN MOULTON & HAYLEE RETHMAN

COPY EDITORS:

KIRSTEN CARNEY & EMILY KESEL

FACULTY SPONSOR:

DR. DEBRA BRENEGAN

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
2013

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

EMPATHY BY KATELYN EDEN	9
ADRIANA BY DEAN MORAN	10
IN THE CALM OF WINTER BY MELISSA HIRNER	11
SENSATIONAL BY CAROLINE SLAVIN	11
*ODE TO THE CADAVER BY KATELYN EDEN	12
NET BY CAROLINE SLAVIN	17
I HATE POETRY BY BREON EVANS	18
LATE BY KATELYN RAPP	18
MY MIND IS LIKE A STORM BY MICHELLE AIELLO	19
THE FIRST BY KATELYN RAPP	21
LET IT BE ME BY RACHEL BOES	21
STUDIES IN ASRONOMY BY LAURA MESSER	22
EUPHEMISMS BY KATELYN RAPP	25
A SONNET BY TJIZEMBUA TJIKUZU	25
FIRST KISS BY KELSI STONE WATKINS	27
STRIFE AND SUBTERFUGE BY ERYK ENYART	29
**WISDOM TEETH BY KATELYN EDEN	30
GRENADA COUNTY/1930'S BY KATELYN EDEN	32
SOLACE BY JEFFERSON SPEARS	32
BOÎTE BRIOCHE CHAPEAU CLOCHE BY KATELYN RAPP	51
AT THE CORE OF ALL ANGER BY RACHEL BOES	52
UNGODLY HOUR BY RACHEL BOES	52
THE PILOT BY DEAN MORAN	56
CARNY CON BY WHITLEY WILSON	57
ABSENCE BY DAVID STRAWHUN	59
MATER'S DEATH BY PIUS NYAKOOJO	61
WHEN BY TJIZEMBUA TJIKUZU	62
***BED BY CAROLINE SLAVIN	63
NOT SO LITTLE DREAMS BY MICHELLE AIELLO	70
REFLECTION BY LAURA MESSER	70
LAKE HOUSE BY RACHEL BOES	71
ATLAS'S BURDEN BY LAURA WILTSHIRE	71
THE RECIEVER, THE PERCIEVER... BY MICHELLE AIELLO	72
I MAY NOT BE... BY MELISSA HIRNER	72
LAND-MINE BY LAURA WILTSHIRE	78
A JOURNEY INTO MYSELF BY BONGIWE SHONGWE	80

PROSE

*LEARNING TO LOSE BY KATELYN EDEN	4
A GHOST OF LIBERATION BY KATELYN RAPP	13
**BOXES BY EMILY KESEL	14

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BELONGING IS LESS OF A SOLID... BY KATELYN RAPP	19
FERRY BOATS BY RACHEL BOES	20
LASTING MEMORIES BY JORDEN SANDERS	23
***SHATTERED GLASS BY RACHEL BOES	26
MEMORY BY JORDEN SANDERS	28
SCARLETT BY TYLERE GOANS	49
SET POINT BY MARY NESTOR	53
THAT DAY BY BREON EVANS	58
THE FADING FULTON BY KELSI STONE WATKINS	59
THE MANSERVANT AND HIS MUSE BY KELSI STONE WATKINS	64
***DARE TO BE HAPPY BY RACHEL BOES	73
THE REALEST BY KATELYN RAPP	79

GRAPHICS

FIREWORKS BY SNEHA BHANDARI	33
LAZY WORKER BY YUKI GOTO	34
MT. FUJI BY YUKI GOTO	34
***UNDER THE EIFFEL BY KYLEE SOUDERS	35
BLU-HALLOW FARMS BY MELISSA HIRNER	36
NATURE IS WHAT WE SEE BY ENNI KALLIO	36
"VIEW FROM THE LONDON EYE BY KYLEE SOUDERS	37
FLYING SOLO BY AUDREY SHARP	37
EMPTY MIND BY YUKI GOTO	38
PERFECTION BY AUDREY SHARP	38
A BAVARIAN WINTER BY KYLEE SOUDERS	39
***ENDLESS GLOW BY AUDREY SHARP	40
A VIEW OF THE BAY BY ERIN WANG	41
THE MOSS TREE BY SNEHA BHANDARI	41
STRENGTH BY ENNI KALLIO	42
WHISTLING WIND BY MELISSA HIRNER	42
**WONDERLAND BY ENNI KALLIO	43
TRANQUILITY BY SNEHA BHANDARI	43
FRIGATES BY LAURA WILTSHIRE	44
BLISSFUL SOLITUDE BY SNEHA BHANDARI	44
PLAYING ON THE SQUARE BY LAURA WILTSHIRE	45
OUT OF REACH BY ENNI KALLIO	46
*LONELINESS BY ENNI KALLIO	47
SERENITY BY SNEHA BHANDARI	47
NIAGRA FALLS IN WINTER BY SURAVI SHRESTHA	48

*DENOTES FIRST PLACE WINNER

**DENOTES SECOND PLACE WINNER

***DENOTES THIRD PLACE WINNER

LEARNING TO LOSE

BY KATELYN EDEN

"If you thought medical school was rough, you're about to get your asses handed to you. Residency is the single most trying time in your medical career. Are you ready to save lives?"

The stumpy man that stood before us peered condescendingly through his thick-lensed glasses.

"Come on, doctors, I want a response here." He sighed dramatically and ran his hand over his jaw.

I surveyed the sea of men and women in scrubs and white coats beside me. We were a smart-looking group; some of us put more effort into appearance, some put more effort into looking authoritative. All of us were nervous.

We nodded delicately, keeping our eyes glued to the tacky-feeling tile beneath our shoes. I felt the same anxiety as the night I opened my acceptance letter to medical school flooding through me like electricity. I was on fire for this position and hungry to have the reigns given to me. I just couldn't articulate that at this exact moment.

"If you don't have anything to say," the stout man huffed, "I'll talk. Wear your badges where I can read them clearly. Don't do anything that's going to get me into trouble. Don't forget to untie your wedding rings from your scrubs when you leave — I've had enough of the lost-and-found wedding ring pile in my office."

I peered down at my naked hands while he spoke.

"And for Christ's sake, don't kill anyone today." He held his hands up and divided the group with his sausage-like fingers. "You four are ortho, you four are OB/GYN, you four are general surgery, and the last of you are emergency surgery. The physicians who will be babysitting you today will be here in a few minutes."

Bands of heat swelled in my chest and I felt my breath catch as he lumped me in with the last three people in the group. I thrust my hands in my pockets as the groups disintegrated. I watched the three other people I would be working with and cold fingers of anxiety clenched my stomach.

They were the authoritative group.

The first resident was a slender, exhausted-looking man with deep black rings under his faded green eyes and sharp, angular features. He was built like a long-distance runner with fine, well-trained hands. The way he held himself was feline, aloof and ready to break into action at any moment. He would easily be my greatest competition.

The second was an average-looking girl with blanching cheeks and mousy features. She hadn't lifted her eyes from the ground since we'd gotten here this morning, and she fidgeted with a tiny wedding band she had tied into her scrubs. She seemed to me to be the book-smart girl with the photographic memory who was easily crushed under pressure. I could take her down if I had to, but she probably wouldn't give me cause to do that anytime soon.

The third resident was an enormous hulk of a man who made his scrubs look fit to burst. He had the hard eyes and shaved hair of a military officer, with dark, sun-weathered skin. He stood alert, like someone would hit him if his spine wasn't perfectly aligned, and he hardly moved. He held his shoulders back with pride and his appearance was immaculate. He would probably be the obedient, prepared resident that everyone

admired. He had authority in his eyes and already appeared comfortable in his new hospital setting.

And then there was me. Ordinary Cara Holloway. Graduate of the University of Georgia for both bachelor's degree in biochemistry and M.D. with a solid 4.0 for both. Other than my medical adroitness, however, I had nothing but a bulldog, a Honda, and a small studio apartment.

I had nothing but a passion for medicine.

I hoped that would be enough.

As I finished sizing up my competition, the infamous Dr. Stanford, the hospital's most renowned ER surgeon, flung himself around the corner in his characteristically charismatic way and jumped to a stop in front of us. His eyes scanned us quickly and he flashed his too-white teeth at us. He nodded once and then turned on his heel back the way he'd run in.

We all followed.

"Surgery," Dr. Stanford began, "is very serious business. It's the closest you ever come to playing God. It's a blast when it all goes right, but it is also easily the most devastating when it goes awry. It has been my experience that big egos and hasty decisions end lives." He turned swiftly around to face us. His voice was unusually cold and exacting. "I won't have any of that in my ER." His eyes brightened again and he gestured in the air with his hands. "'Do no harm,' and all that, folks."

We chased Dr. Stanford around the hospital for what felt like an eternity, not taking more than fifteen minutes to break and eat lunch. The other residents were quite interesting to observe as we filed and re-filed charts, took notes on dictations, wrote scripts, and performed other menial medical tasks. The slender, feline physician was hard, unwavering, and patient-hungry with despicable bedside manners; the small bookish girl couldn't, in the words of Dr. Stanford, recognize the difference between shit and wild honey; and the quiet, authoritative resident was already everyone's pick for chief resident.

I was still doing my best to stand out among the sea of high-achieving residents that flowed so freely through the hospital. I had gotten to stitch up a five-year-old's knee when he sliced it on playground equipment, but other than that, I was virtually out of exciting surgical tasks. I was aching for someone to step back and hand me a scalpel, since that was where I really excelled. Surgery was my thing, and I was just hoping that somehow, someone higher up than me had noticed that.

No such luck.

Just as Dr. Stanford was about to release us for another quick break, his pager went off frantically in his pocket.

"Okay kids," he said, keeping his eyes glued to the pager, "this is the big-time."

My breath caught in the rungs of my trachea with excitement at his words.

He led us down the little hallway to the stairs and we all darted obediently like dizzy, clumsy puppies behind him. Stanford placed his hand on the metal door that separated us from our first surgical case. "Guys, this isn't going to be pretty. Your adrenaline will get the better of you. You're all going to have to work together to get this under control and everyone needs to be a team player." He locked his eyes on each of us, their usual charismatic fire completely steeled. "Don't slip up."

My mind was instantly racing back to the first time I had ever gotten to scrub in and shadow a surgeon. I was eighteen, bright, and determined to make something of

myself. The surgeon was world-renowned, with the lowest mortality rate of any surgeon I knew, and a complete jerk. Scrub protocol wasn't difficult for me to get the hang of – partially because I practiced for hours scrubbing in in my bathtub at home and practicing gloving with a willing nearby brother or parent – and I eventually got the surgical gowning process down. I was a pro at on-the-spot anatomical quizzes, and I think I could have even managed the suction if there weren't legal ramifications. Surgery felt like home, even to inexperienced eighteen-year-old me.

The adrenaline I felt that first time I heard the electric snap of the bovie pencil against my ears and the heat of the focused beams in the OR throbbed through me again and dug into my muscles as I waited to enter.

My palms were sticky as I placed my hand on the door to get through to the ambulance bay. My blood ran thickly through me and I felt my joints grow unsteady. I was immediately on sensory overload as I entered the bay. The sharp scent of blood cut my nostrils and hovered in the back of my throat. I could hear pieces of weighty metal clanking and I finally saw our patient prostrate on the nearest blue-sheeted gurney.

His long legs were twisted in unnatural angles and his clothing was shredded and blackened. I could see skin charred to the bone in his forearms, thighs, and chest. His lithe body was flaccid and collapsed pitifully on the sheets. His head and neck were secured in a neck brace that obscured his battered face. He had been intubated and a medical student was manually bagging him to keep him breathing. A nurse was transferring the thick plastic bag of his IV that had been started in the ambulance.

The cat-like resident I had been working to avoid all day seized the opportunity to pounce on the patient first. He firmly grabbed the blue sheets under the man and ordered the trauma nurses to help him, completely disregarding us in the process. I fought my way through the mass of nurses, physicians, and observing medical students to get to the patient. The haughty resident was still busy stroking his ego with spitting orders at various nurses and medical students when I made my way up to the patient in between Dr. Stanford and the mousy bookish girl.

Once I made it up to the bed, everything fell into place just as it did the first time I held a scalpel in anatomy class when I was fifteen. Working him up was as seamless and natural as breathing for me. I began checking his extremities for any semblance of nerve function or palpable pulse and found that there was a devastatingly faint pulse in only one of his legs. He had some nerve function in one of his mangled hands, but not enough to warrant one of the high-and-mighty plastic surgeons to work tediously for hours to repair. I directed my attention to his upper body and since the feline physician was already attempting to deal with the heart, I went through a battery of tests to check his nerve function. He was unconscious and dishearteningly unresponsive to even my firmest touch. I was nearly finished with my tests when I swung my penlight over his gray-blue eyes and found that one of his pupils was drastically expanded.

"I need someone to page neuro and radiology," I stated firmly. My heart rattled hard in my chest and my breaths came quickly and uneasily.

No one responded to my demand as they had with the other resident. I raised my voice and tried to get someone's attention. "Guys, I need a CT *now*. He's got a blown pupil." None of the other residents responded, but I caught the eye of a faint scrub nurse with a hollow expression on her face. Her fear was nearly tangible.

"Can you please help me get this guy a CT?" I was trying to keep the pleading intonation out of my voice.

Her eyes widened as she responded. "Maybe. Everyone's working on another patient who was involved in the same wreck. I just read this patient's chart. This guy, Ron Anderson," she said timidly, gesturing to our patient, "was brought in about ten minutes after the first guy. Apparently the first guy was reaching for something in his floorboard and hit the base of a traffic light head-on at about fifty miles an hour. Anderson swerved his motorcycle to avoid him and completely lost control. He wound up mangled under the man's car." She paused and searched my eyes, tears pushing out of her thick eyelashes. "They didn't find him until after the first guy was already here."

I was stunned. My patient clearly had priority over a few skeletal injuries and head trauma; I was looking at multiple system organ failure *in addition* to a brain injury, not to mention the fact that he's a ticking time bomb for cardiac or respiratory arrest.

"Can you just page radiology and see if we can't get a quick CT?" I begged. I searched for Dr. Stanford, who was now aiding the medical student in properly bagging the patient and overseeing our work. *Finally*, I thought, *here's my chance to stand out. This is it*. I breathed slowly to get a grip on my nerves as I spoke. "I'm worried about a brain hemorrhage and I need to keep moving here."

She nodded and wriggled out from beneath the chaos.

I could feel my cheeks blanching as the gravity of the situation flooded into me and I had to steady myself on the edge of the bed.

"Joe Blow here is a goner," the headstrong resident said harshly. "You guys better go help the other patient." He waved his hands dismissively at the nurses and doctors still hovering around.

"He has a name - Ron Anderson - and he still has heart and brain function. He's not a goner," I said, meeting his cold gaze. "He's a challenge, but he's certainly not dead. And we can't afford to think like that, much less articulate it in the patient's presence."

I searched Dr. Stanford's eyes for approval, but he was busy fiddling with some equipment at the head of the bed.

"Okay, then, you can save him. Good luck getting the liters of blood, plastic surgeons, skin grafts, and neurosurgery he needs to stay alive." He chewed his lip and tilted his head tauntingly at me.

Something in me jolted at his words. When I saw that Stanford wasn't going to act unless the patient crashed, I immediately flung commands at the frightened medical students, nurses, and other residents around the bed. "I need four units of O neg, someone from burn and someone from plastics, and I need a Midas Rex."

"A Midas Rex?" It was the same gentle voice of the timid scrub nurse.

"Surgical drill." I answered. *She must be new here, too*, I noted briefly as she passed me. In reality, I was working on approximately a twenty minute timeframe; I probably wouldn't have time to drill burr holes when the brain bleed I suspected was confirmed, but I wanted to have it just in case.

The cluster of people disentangled around the bed as each person busied him or herself with setting the man's fractures, bagging him, and monitoring his vital signs.

After what seemed like hours, the radiologist weaseled in and was able to take a CT. He scurried off with the portable machine in his hands, promising results in the next half hour.

This news settled into my chest like frozen bullets. Just as I was beginning to breathe somewhat normally, an intense electrical alarm on the heart monitor sounded. The machine echoed against the walls in the OR and thumped hard against my ears. I

froze, hoping for Dr. Stanford's directions to aid me.

"Get on it, guys," Stanford urged from the head of the bed.

I had completely forgotten about the other residents around me when Stanford addressed us.

"God damn it! He's crashing!" Words spewed out of my mouth instinctively. "Three hundred!"

The shy nurse's delicate hands gripped the thick gray paddles and she trembled as we made eye contact.

Unthinking, I pulled the paddles from her hands. "Clear!" An intense electrical humming hit me and the paddles kicked against my sweating palms.

"Still crashing," Dr. Stanford stated coolly.

"Four hundred!" The nurse upped the voltage. "Clear!" The same electrical humming and intense kick ran through me with no change.

"Five-fifty!" My body shook with adrenaline and the will to get my patient's heart beating. I was absolutely panicked by the time I spoke again. "Clear!"

This jolt punched my hands harder than the last. My body felt like melting clay and my hands tingled.

What do I do now? Jesus, somebody help me!

After about ten difficult minutes of increasing the voltage on the defibrillator and struggling against the clock to keep the patient's brain alive, the radiologist dashed back into the trauma bay with thick, translucent black films in his hands. He ran over to Dr. Stanford and the two spoke tersely and quietly.

I hovered over the bruised and swollen chest with the paddles slipping against my palms, completely frozen, as I watched the monitor. There was no change in his heart function at all. No flimsy glimmer of hope in the steady red line that blazed across the screen. Nothing.

"He's been hemorrhaging since the accident," Dr. Stanford said. His voice was strained and devoid of emotion. "The brain stem has been irreparably compromised."

The news burned in my chest and sunk into me like boiling wax. The paddles struggled against the last remaining energy I had and I placed them back into the thick black box in the crash cart. I stepped back from the patient, dizzy and sweating.

The nurse who was shifting the voltages waited vulture-like for Dr. Stanford to pronounce the patient legally and clinically dead.

My breath traveled slowly through my chest and met the onset of hot tears trapped in my throat.

Dr. Stanford shifted his chest to the monitor and shut it off. "Time of death, 6:47 p.m."

I stood paralyzed on my jellied joints and my head bowed instinctively as Stanford and the nurse unplugged the various monitors and removed coiled tubing from the patient's broken body. Stanford adeptly removed the hard plastic intubation from the patient and his neck fell feebly back into the pillow behind him.

I let the tears drip delicately from my cheeks onto my shoes and into the tacky tile. I didn't lift my hand to wipe them away when I turned my gaze to the patient. I wanted to touch his hand one last time. I wanted to comfort him. He was so battered and torn apart and weak looking in the purpled sheets and ripped clothing.

Stanford firmly placed his enormous hand on my shoulder and guided me back out of the ER for the patient to be wheeled away. "Why don't we all just go take a

breather for a few minutes?" he offered, the paternal warmth returning to his voice.

None of the residents said anything as we walked slowly back our lockers. I lagged behind the rest, letting my mind wander to Anderson's wife and children and parents and colleagues.

The feline resident's voice shook me from my thoughts.

"We did everything we could," he said brazenly. "I told you he was a goner." He let the swinging door fly closed behind him as he entered after the other residents.

His words reverberated against my eardrums as I sank to the floor outside the surgical lockers. I dropped my head to my knees and held my breath to stave off the next wave of tears.

"And for Christ's sake, don't kill anyone today." The stumpy man's words crashed over me with each new briny outpouring.

I couldn't help but feel guilty that I had not upheld that promise.

EMPATHY

BY KATELYN EDEN

I'm fourteen and stuck
in the coagulating heat of July
when it happens.

she runs the red light,
crosses the center line,
slams into a tree.

the weight of judgment
like chunks of thick glass
hits me fast.

reckless, distracted, careless.
Mom nearly drives us by
when I see her –

lithe body convulsing
neck bent like twisted pipe
arms tense like marble pillars

STOP –
get-the-phone-call-9-1-1
(but I'm only 14) (but she needs help)

my fingers quiver over the keys
my heart thrums hard in my throat
when I answer:

she's having a seizure.
someone is with her.
she hasn't stopped –

grand mal seizure, they say.
tangles of neurons misfiring, betraying her
body.
devastating. she's so young.

she doesn't remember the first time medicine
was mine,
the first time I reacted to human suffering
but I carry her with me

I wonder what caused that damn seizure
I hope that she is healthy now
I worry about her family

I won't forget her gray eyes
or trembling hands

ADRIANA

BY DEAN MORAN

Your twin sister and her 3-D pictures broke
into my imagination last night
I told them all to get off of our porch so we
could talk things out
and maybe get a little shut-eye.
but they snuck around the back and attacked
like a pack
of hungry werewolves running wild in the
decadent moonshine.
They crept into my ego
and I hardly could breath
while her bandits and her gypsies were sing-
ing me lullabies.

She wants me to leave you tonight
and journey the infinite night
and pirate the heavenly skies.
and I slept better than I've slept in a while
that night.

Oh now Kelly,
as you're leaving the room,
Adriana is kissing me lightly
I'm getting so very aroused
and I'm not sure about love at first sight,
but I'm fairly concerned that we might-
be getting down.

Adriana is vivid, poetic, athletic and wild.
And she speaks with an elegant tone and is
infinitely wise.
and she smiles like you do when she's lost,
She's so lovely like you are
and I'm such a fool,
sometimes I can't even tell you apart.

Like two winding rivers but you stream the
same flow
And it seems the same woman I'm kissing.
So I'm splitting my sides, my personality
strives
to be with both of your Gemini- counter
parts lives.

Kelly-
the cool shade under the tree,
So kind and innocent and caring to me,
Through the storm of my doubt and the
hardships of grief
You've been my steady sigh of relief...

But Adriana brings the lion from of me,
Opens my eyes to supernatural things
And sends waves of whimsy to my mortal
being.
And leaves me quickly, and is never
routine.

She wants me to leave you tonight,
and turn myself into the night
and pilot the hellfire skies.
And I slept so much better than I've slept
in a while that night.

Oh now Kelly as you're leaving the room,
Adriana is kissing me lightly
And I'm getting so very aroused
Not sure about love at first sight,
But I'm fairly concerned that we might-
be getting down.

Kelly I love you, but
Adriana I want you
Oh sister I need to
quit playing around.

I shouldn't be this way,
I shouldn't be cheating
and I shouldn't always be thinking-
of getting down.

What's the matter with my mind?
Why is it so hard?
When she gives me her love
I think it's too far.

What's a matter with my mind?
Is it so wrong?
When she's playing that game,
It's turning me on.

IN THE CALM OF WINTER

BY MELISSA HIRNER

Sitting on the limbs of the tall trees,
Covered in the winter snow,
The songs of birds fill the air.
They sing in joy of their creator.

Rivers slow in surrender of the harsh cold,
The rushing water becomes a sweet calm,
Ice hides the darkness below,
It rests in thanks to its designer.

The mountains display their beauty,
A majestic backdrop to a barren earth,
Silently they stand laden with snow
They stand in awe of their sculptor.

The evergreens stand tall in the wind,

Unchanging like the Love of their creator,
Weighted with snow,
They bow in reverence to the painter.

In the calm of winter, a new year arrives,
Bringing with it a new appreciation for
life,
Initiating thoughts on the past year,
Renewing faith in the God of wonders.

I am greeted with a sunrise in the morning,
A brand new day, a new year, a clean slate,
Another day to live and to dream,
To thank God I am alive.

SENSATIONAL

BY CAROLINE SLAVIN

You sit at your typewriter, titillated by this tactile facet
of your occupation. Ten rooms down, I can still hear the

clickity-clack-clack of your rolling sentences coming
to life. For each letter you punch I strike a new position

at the barre, first second third... and accompany
each carriage return with a pirouette. When you hit the

the end of a page, I practice my pas jeté while you refill.
This time, however, you don't replenish your paper. Instead,

I know you're off to start your daily prohibition protest, so
I'll switch to my own music now. My melody fills me with

an abundance of bumblebee blue staccatos that aid in my
perfection of the pas de bourrée couru. I will work in front

of this mirror until it is flawless. I will work until my toes
bleed.

FIRST PLACE POETRY

ODE TO THE CADAVER

BY KATELYN EDEN

When You gave Your body to science,
 i am sure You did not expect
 whirring blades of a beastly bone saw
 to slice Your spinal cord,
 flaying muscle that held the weight of children,
 skin that felt the pressure of lovers' fingers.

You could not have fathomed that
 Your hands would be stripped of muscle,
 Your fingernails would be detached,
 or that the web of tendons in Your forearms
 would be saturated in phenol by
 zealous almost-physicians for further study.

Your inanimate frame is weak,
 prone on the sharp steel of the table beneath You.
 i did not make the first excruciatingly deep cut
 which exposed your cervical vertebrae,
 the base of Your being, Your ivory skull,
 but i know it as if it were mine.

i know Your muscles, in sinews and striations,
 like rubber bands stretched taut over Your bones.
 i know Your tangles of nerves, flossy and smooth,
 lilac-white, branching, buried deep in your cold body.
 i know Your cubes of bone in Your ankles and wrists,
 Your spongy spine curled with scoliosis.

i spend countless sunsets and dawns with You.
 i probe my toe into the pool of medicine with You.
 i know Your body better than i know my own:
 each delicate muscle, bone, nerve
 each heavy vein and tense artery –
 i know You.

But i will never know You.
 i do not know Your name.

A GHOST OF LIBERATION

BY KATELYN RAPP

If you're inspired to write, you have to. You have to drop everything else and just write. Those words have always been in your mind, and it's going to get very crowded in there if you don't let them flow from your mind into your heart, through the passageway that is your soul, down your arm and into your little messenger fingertips. Give that pencil everything you've got. Don't hold back. If it doesn't sound eloquent or poetic, good. But if it does, that's good too. The moment you start writing for someone other than you, is the moment that the words skip one crucial step in the writing process... the soul purification. Words aren't pure unless they are filtered through the soul, and the soul only engages under circumstances of true inspiration, of genuine feeling. Your words are like little fetuses, and it's not easy to ignore those literary labor pains. Just so, if you try to engage those words before they're ready... they won't have near the beauty and severity as if you had waited for that light bulb moment. And you can tell. If you're reading something that someone else wrote, no matter how long ago or how far away... you can identify if the words have been soul-filtered from the first letter. People think of words, sometimes, like rain droplets. Like little harmless sprinkles that mistily fall from the slightly darkened clouds. But I can't say that's the metaphor I associate with words. The soul knows no sprinkling rain. The soul is more accustomed to torrential downpours, to tornado-like whirlwinds, to crashes of thunder and streaks of magnificent lightning. If words are trickling out, it means they're edited or forced. But when you feel that storm welling up inside of you, at the base of your sternum, and then spreading all the way to you fingers... you know you're onto something. And whether you have to sit on the curb in the middle of the street, or scribble something down on the skin of a mango peel... you've got to write. Think of what would happen if the sky decided to hold in its rage. I'm pretty sure the world would implode. You've got to love the feeling of powerful words emptying from you, because it's the closest to yourself you will ever be. Whatever it is that is inside of you: *let it out*. Free yourself. The liberation of releasing a storm is nearly like nothing else. It's like a mix between everything beautiful in your own mind. For me, it's a mix between a tree on a brown shirt and late-night hair washing; torn up green sofas and opaque windows and deserted formal classrooms and moonlit woods; racing horses and circular walks and illegal statues and midnight music and fluffy stairs and minivans; eating worms and living room back flips and lime green wall paint and 2:00 a.m. brokenness; running from fears that exist inside and train tracks running through a cave; the moon at its fullest and leather bracelets and unspoken love; antiques and extensive autumn trees and the moon changing colors and childhood books; abandon parking lots and pseudo-intoxicated confessions; disregarded windows and feline exceptions and sleepy theatrics; soul-deep music and cursive letters and warm organic tea and aging books under lock and key; creeks and rusty white trucks and people with real love and strips of dusty sunshine in the mornings. And really.. so much more. I can't express, singly everything inside of me. Which is why I write. Which is why, when the reckless storm is pleading.... let. it. free.

SECOND PLACE PROSE

BOXES

BY EMILY KESEL

He woke up with a jump.

Dammit. Not again...

He had been dreaming about her. It happened every time he thought he was getting better. It seemed like she didn't want to be forgotten. She kept finding her way into his mind. He sat up in the dark, shaking. He knew he wouldn't be able to sleep in the bed for a while again. Too many memories there. Too many thoughts of her wrapped around him under the covers. He couldn't handle it. Once she got into his head, it took weeks for him to drive her out again.

He went out into the kitchen and poured a glass of water. Then he stared at his reflection in the window above the sink. He looked terribly exhausted. He was terribly exhausted. *Acting like everything is fine gets tiring.* His eyes were droopy and he rarely ever smiled anymore. He had no reason to. She had been his happiness. *And now she's gone.* With that realization, he let his head hang down and his eyes fall shut. He let out an exhale as images from his dream flooded him. *Her smile. Our first kiss. The time we stood together in the pouring rain.* He shook his head angrily, trying to force them out. But they refused to go away. They wouldn't leave him alone. It wasn't that he regretted what had happened; he could never regret the best thing that ever happened to him. He just wanted not to be reminded about what he was missing now that she was gone. He wanted the memories to quit taunting him. He couldn't get her back. There was no way. And because of that, he didn't want to remember what it was like when he had her.

Unwilling to go back to sleep and risk dreaming about her again, he sat down on the couch and turned on the television. He mindlessly flipped through the channels and landed on some old movie. *We watched so many movies together.* He missed her dreadfully as he watched the couple on the screen inevitably fall for each other. All he wanted was to look over to the other side of the couch and see her, but when he turned his head to look it was just as empty as her side of the bed had been. He let a few tears fall down his face as his chest tightened. It hadn't gotten any easier. He didn't remember if he had expected it to, but it hadn't anyway. Sure, there were now times when he didn't think about her for extended periods of time, but the guilt of that just made it all the more painful when he did. Sometimes he wished he could just have one more day with her. One more day when he could look into her eyes and hold her and tell her how much she meant to him. He wished he could feel her and smell her again, even if it was just one more day. But he knew how crazy that was. She wasn't coming back. And even if he could have her for one more day, he would still beg for another day soon enough.

He wondered for a moment if he should let her in for a while, let her fill his head again just for the remainder of the night and maybe the next day. He thought of the boxes in the closet. The boxes of things that reminded him of her. There were so many things. He had gathered up all the things once with the intention of throwing them out so he'd never have to look at them again. But he hadn't been able to do it. Instead he had tossed it all into a couple of boxes and hidden them on a shelf high in his closet, out of sight. He debated with himself about whether or not he could look at it all again. *What's the worst that could happen? You're already there anyway.* It was a useless

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

debate. He had already made up his mind.

With great care, he took the boxes from the shelf and brought them back out to the couch. For a few moments, all he could do was stare at them, trying to prepare himself for what he would find. He remembered a few of the things, but the weight of the boxes suggested that many more treasures were being stored in them. That was the problem with things. They weren't just things. They had memories attached to them. They had stories. They had feelings. He didn't even need to open the boxes to feel the feelings, to see the stories like they were happening right at that moment. They filled his mind. *The handmade birthday cards. The photo booth pictures. The bracelet she gave me.* The images swirled in his head, almost making him dizzy. He stood up and paced around, all the while keeping his eyes on the unopened boxes. He wondered if he could do it after all, if he could keep it all together as he revisited the past. *Of course I can't. But how can I walk away now?* He sat back down and took a deep breath and opened the first one before he could think about it again. *God.* There was a lot more than he remembered. His shirts and jackets she had worn. Their favorite movie. His old cell phone with all their text messages. He pulled the phone out of the box and turned it on. Their last conversation had been nothing special. Just going over the plans for the day. She was going out with some friends, he was getting a new phone. He had known it would be the last conversation he'd have with her on that phone, but he never thought it would be the last one they ever had. He smiled for a moment as he read through their messages. He loved her so much. Even the littlest things like that had always made him so happy with her. The boxes were full of those little things that had made him happy once upon a time.

It was moments like this when he wasn't sure whether to be thankful or resentful for his memory. Each item he extracted from the boxes filled his mind with images of the two of them. When he closed his eyes, he could see her just as if she was right in front of him. Only when he reached out, she disappeared before he could touch her, and he had to open his eyes again. Sometimes he enjoyed being able to see her again in his mind. But other times it was just hard. Hard to believe that even though he could see her so clearly, she was not really there. Hard to imagine how he'd come this far since losing her. Hard to think of how he'd keep this up. People had stopped asking a long time ago. They just assumed now what he had grown tired of telling them. That he was making it. That he'd be fine. And he was making it. But he wondered if he was really fine. He thought he was as long as he was keeping her out of his mind, keeping her hidden. But maybe the only time he was fine was when he let her back in for a while. He actually smiled. Smiling felt strange to him now. He rarely did it. He hated that. He wanted to be able to smile and laugh again. He watched shows and movies all the time that were made to make people laugh. But every time he ended up just blankly staring, not even really watching. She had loved to watch things like that, things he considered stupid comedies that might make you dumber. But he had forced himself to watch with her because she loved it so much. He would have done anything with her. In all honesty though, he'd spent more of that time watching her than he did watching what was on the screen. She amazed him. He could stare at her and watch her for hours and never get bored. Even if she was doing nothing, she was the most interesting thing in the world to him. He still wasn't used to the fact that his most interesting thing was gone.

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

15

Sometimes he had bad thoughts. Dark thoughts. *Why am I still here? There's nothing left for me here without her. I have nobody.* But he always pushed those thoughts away. She wouldn't want anything to happen to him, no matter how bad it got. He could make it. He could be tough. At least...he could appear tough. On the outside. But inside he couldn't hold it together. He was losing it again. The tears were coming faster and harder. He started ripping things out of the boxes almost in a rage. Suddenly he reached the bottom of the last box. He stopped. There was her notebook, with one of their first pictures together taped on the cover. She was sitting in his lap and leaning back into him and they were smiling. They were so young. They looked so happy. Nothing could have gotten in their way back then. They looked as though they would love each other through anything that came along. He still felt that way about her. His tears fell on the picture, right on the side of her beautiful smiling face. He gently wiped them away. He didn't want anything to obscure her beauty. He began to smile again himself. Her smile could always melt him. It could always bring him happiness. It was what he fell in love with in the beginning, all those years ago. He was drawn to her natural happiness, and her continued happiness had become all that had mattered to him. He was determined to give her everything she ever wanted, everything that would make her happy. He wondered if he could have succeeded.

He gently let his hand graze across her face on the picture before he went to open the notebook. He hesitated. He realized that this was her "secret" notebook. She had never let him see what was in it. She was always quick to slam it shut whenever he happened to walk in on her when she was writing in it. He always guessed that it was some sort of journal, and he didn't fight it. Even now that she was gone, he found it difficult to invade her personal thoughts. She would never know he did it, but he still respected it. But then something came over him in that moment, telling him that he needed to open it up and see what she had always hidden. Before he realized it, he had the cover pulled back. He quickly saw that there was more to it than simple writings. These were drawings, poems, song lyrics, lists. Drawings of hands, hearts, trees. Poems of love sometimes, doubt and fear others. Lyrics from songs they'd danced to and sang together. Lists of things she'd wanted to do with him. He poured over the pages as if they were the most intriguing story he'd ever read.

Hours passed before he neared the end of the notebook. He heard the alarm in the bedroom sound, signaling that he needed to get ready for work. *I'll just read one more thing.* The last entry seemed different from the others. It was more like a note. He saw from the heading that it was a note for him:

If you're reading this, I guess the fairytale wasn't meant to last. It doesn't surprise me, really. You always did seem too good to be true. I'm sure whatever happened wasn't your fault, and you should know that. You were perfect. I loved you with everything I had. Maybe it was enough, maybe it wasn't. But don't ever think that I didn't love you. You meant the world to me. You were better than anything I could have asked for. You were a dream come true. I would have given anything to make you happy. I know you would have done the same for me. You already were. No matter what happened, no matter the consequences, all you did was try to make me happy. You really loved me. And even if I never told you, I appreciated it. Your efforts didn't go unnoticed. Sometimes I didn't notice them right away, but I always saw what you did in the end. You tried so hard.

I don't know how I was ever good enough for you. You were so perfect, so loving and caring. Of course I loved and cared about you too, but I was nowhere near as perfect. You couldn't see that though. You only saw the good.

Whatever happened, I don't want you to be sad. You deserve to be happy after all you've done to make me happy. So go on. Go find your happiness. If anyone deserves it, it's you. And if I know you at all, I'm sure you're more worried about me than you are yourself. But you don't need to anymore. Now you worry about you.

His eyes filled with silent tears as they lingered on her signature at the end of the page. At that moment he was more in love with her than he ever had been. And he knew that he was going to do exactly as she wished. He was going to move on. Not to forget her, but to finally allow himself to put that part of his life to rest. He would always have the memory of her, as long as he kept the boxes, but he knew then that that was all he needed. It felt as though a weight had been lifted from his heart, that the rising sun that morning wasn't just signaling a new day, but a new beginning for him as well. She had somehow known everything he would feel once she was gone, and she'd known exactly what to say to heal him. *You were perfect, too.* He closed the notebook again to their smiling faces on the cover and he sighed a deep, contented sigh, as he hadn't done in ages. As he closed the remainder of her things back into the boxes, he knew it would be a long time before he would need to open it up again.

NET

BY CAROLINE SLAVIN

It's called that because we get caught there.

You're so naïve at first,
simply searching for a recipe
to bake cookies
for your grandmother.

Then,

Colors flash by faster than you can comprehend them
You're caught
You don't struggle
You don't care
Whipping around and around in this cosmogryal spiral
Lusting after the
bloodshed of page after page after page
cookies biscuits brownies biscotti italy espresso
cappuccino americano macchiato coffee coffee coffee caffeine stimulant drug dependent
cocaine cannabis nicotine amphetamine alcohol opium poppies poppies poppies flying
monkeys jane goodall africa rwanda genocide unidentified deceased world peace

The web.

It's called that because we get caught there.

LATE

BY KATELYN RAPP

I love you
like the moon
when it's full
and the sky is black,
and the stars are bright, broken holes
in the blanket of ebony.

I love you
like the halo of soft, misty light
that surrounds the moon
on the nights without wind,
without clouds,
without anything but breath.

I love you
like the distant crickets,
chirping a childhood lullaby
on a perfectly warm night.

I love you
like soaring specks of wheat
rushing gently in a healing breeze.

I love you
like the music of the whispers of the wind,
and the melodies of the water
falling over age-smoothed stones.

I love you like the moon when it is so yellow,
so low,
so close...
you can almost taste
the poignant richness
of melting bliss.

I HATE POETRY

BY BREON EVANS

i hate poetry
The way it lays there
The way it stares
The way it reads
The way it knows me
The beat
The rhythm
The time
The way it usually rhymes
I hate poetry
The old cat sway
It drives me away
The hip new style
It drives me wild
The beat
The rhythm
The time
The way it usually rhymes
I HATE poetry
It must be pitched
It must be perplex
It must be profound
And it must be perfect
The beat
The rhythm
The time
The way it usually rhymes
I HATE POETRY!

BELONGING IS LESS OF A SOLID AND MORE OF A PLASMA

BY KATELYN RAPP

It's lonely to think of a star burning - so far away and un-consolated, breaking silently because sound only exists when it touches our ears. But our souls are older than that when we stare at the canvas of sky. Moist and ebony. The most aged souls, our kindred spirits, they know the skies have ears - deep ones that already know what love sounds like. Controlled and desolate, we can learn, irrationally, dancing against a landscape. Maybe the stars contain our souls, aging them atmospherically, feeding out inspirations. Maybe our souls are made of stars - some humble and melodic, others too close; too bright, or falling fast and hard for a universal benefit. I'll send my soul to this earth, just for you, praying that I'm your wish.

MY MIND IS LIKE A STORM

BY MICHELLE AIELLO

My mind is like a storm,
It's beautiful yet dangerous.
It gets caught in my thoughts,
The majority, relatively painless.
A storm is gloomy, but mysterious.
The strength it contains, different from the next.
The power and destruction,
The rain, and its stillness.
My mind is like a storm,
And it fears the events before its end.
It escalates to unimaginable points,
And then drops like crazy.
In seconds things can change,
You must always be on your feet.
A tornado has just formed,
And destruction unleashed.
A cool breeze, a sigh of relief.
The storm is over,
And my mind is asleep.

FERRY BOATS

BY RACHEL BOES

The first time I rode on a ferry, I was four years old.

I fell in love with the feeling immediately; the smooth pull of the boat hauling over the water, gently rocking on the waves as the wind whipped around my baby fine, auburn curls. My grandfather, a tall, sharp, imposing sort of man, was the director of this trip. He hoisted me up on his hip and pulled the zipper of my pink nylon windbreaker up to my chin in efforts to keep the November chill from overtaking my small frame.

"Look up there," he pointed out across the river, towards the bank of changing autumn trees to our left. "Do you see that?"

He is pointing to an American bald eagle, balanced stately upon one of the highest braches of a barren Birch tree near the edge of the river. I watched that bird for a long while, as it cocked its head from one side to the other, surveying the river. I shrieked with nervous excitement when it finally swooped from its perch towards the river, dipping and gliding through the air above the quick moving water. Another soon joined in this dance, and I clung to my grandpa's neck, mesmerized by the intimidating, clandestine quality of these regal birds.

I was four years old on that day. I am twenty years old on this one. We've made many visits to the ferries of Alton over the years since that first trip, and I have still not outgrown the childish excitement incited by the tow boats and bald eagles. From the precocious four to a pragmatic twenty, I have never fallen out of love with them.

On this day, like the first, it is just my grandpa and me. When I think back to that first day and recall the sturdy man of my childhood, standing tall, his dark hair contrasting with the boat's fresh white paint, I wince to see his stooped frame leaning against the railing of the rusting commuter boat.

He forgets my name now, often referring to me as my mother. He asks about Dallas, about my job at the bank, about my husband and his job as the manager of the local branch of Best Buy. He asks how I can afford to fly home so often, and I can only smile, ignorant of the answers concerning my mother's life before me. I do not live in Dallas. I do not work at a bank. I am not married, but my grandfather does not remember any of this. He does not remember playing whiffle ball with me on the diamond in my grandparents' three acre backyard, or the afternoons I spent sitting on his lap in the dining room as he filled out the crossword puzzle before dinner, or attending any one of my twelve dozen dance recitals, and on many days he can't recall my ever being born.

So on this day, I lean against the railing next to him, picking at the peeling red paint for a moment before looking out over the water. "Look up there," I say pointing to an eagle poised in the high branches of a bank of barren trees near the edge of the river. "Do you see that?"

LET IT BE ME

BY RACHEL BOES

That friend

the adventurous, spontaneous, gregarious
person

you seek

The one you wish

to laugh

and play
and go to war with

the one whose hand
you wish to hold
on a crowded sidewalk,

on a sunny day

let it be me.

There was a day

not long ago

when I was wrong
and pushed you along
but you did not go.

That night

in the park
on the swings,

it was snowing
and you moved me.

My soul is changed

tainted
forever by your mind.

If there is ever a day
when you look back my way,
Remember the snow
and the wind
and the dark winding roads
at night,
and if you feel
as changed as I was
let it be me.

THE FIRST

BY KATELYN RAPP

relax,
he says.
chill.
stop.
just stop.
stop being in control.
stop caring.
stop being perfect.
stop everything-
all but peace.
hear harmonies
from skies
from earth
from us.
listen.
breathe,
he says.
foreign concept.
softly
are my footfalls.
softly
are his strums.
sing softly
sing melody.
he does.
and i listen.
just listen.
i can see
chords in the air
twirling around
like black ribbon.
warm atmosphere
like
peppermint tea
steeping
in our lungs.
melody.
listen.
relax.

STUDIES IN ASTRONOMY

BY LAURA MESSER

In this room,
there is a black
abyss of a chalkboard,
a yellow ball with
eight arms attached—
Pluto having been
disqualified—
all holding smaller orbs,
and a sprawling chart
with a spray of
constellations.

The purpose of
this space
is to educate—
to inspire knowledge
and expand my understanding
the way the universe
is constantly growing.
But frankly,
I'd be better off
studying you.

You remind me of—
Stars, planets, and space.
Your mind is,
to me,
as mysterious and
far reaching
as the outer limits
(if that's a thing)
of the universe.
It cannot be

contained—
and I sure as hell
don't understand—
yet, that is.

I wait expectantly
for your smile
flashing by and
temporarily blinding me
like one of those
rushing rocks
that we are all
frivolous enough

to wish upon.
It gives me a boost
like the vitamin D
that sunlight brings.

But—mostly,
it's your voice—
deep and a little dark.
The words you speak—
sometimes rambling,
sometimes concise—
are like the countless
galaxies that were—
perhaps—created
for a purpose.

I can measure the
distance between us
in arc seconds—

even light years
when you murmur
about equations,
but your poetry has
a gravitational force
greater than that
of the sun.

We are binary stars,
Revolving around each
other.
My velocity is not
great enough to escape
you.

And now I find myself
often thinking of you
the way that
I used to get lost
pondering the splendor
of space.
And it's all the same,
really.

I'm in love with
the idea of something
bigger than myself—
in love with the
majesty of creation,
and in love with
you—or so it seems.

LASTING MEMORIES

BY JORDEN SANDERS

Elizabeth Eckford will never forget September 4, 1957, the day she attempted to integrate Little Rock Central High School. The Arkansas National Guard lined the streets and doorways to keep her out. A mob followed her for blocks screaming, "Go back to Africa!" "Lynch her!" Her dress, white and gingham, was soaked with spit when she finally got home. Her ears rang with the sounds from the day. Now, at 69, Elizabeth still feels the effects. She can no longer stand loud noises or crowded rooms. Applause is out of the question. To walk down the street, as she did 54 years ago, makes her cry bitter tears of fear and anger. She relives the taunts and jeers, memories best left unearthed.

The African American Community retells the story of Central's desegregation from generation to generation. Books have been written to commemorate the struggle: *Warriors Don't Cry* and *A Mighty Long Way*. Grandmothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins marched with King. They faced the dogs, the hoses, the policemen. They bear the scars, both emotionally and physically. To tell their grandchildren, nieces, and nephews to forget is not only insensitive; it's cruel.

I have heard others, both those of my race and those outside it, say it is time to forget the past, because America has moved past it. Maybe America has, but my grandmother has not. She sits at the kitchen table remembering. Time has weakened her ability to perceive the present. Her chair is as old as her memories. The chair's paint is cracked and peeling. The arm is unhinged and wobbly. She remembers scrubbing floors and packing suitcases so others enjoy opportunities that were closed to her and her children. She packed suitcases of boys headed to Westminster College, and now she sits and smiles as I pack my bags each fall to return to Westminster College. "Show them," she tells me. When I graduate, it will be a testament to my past, a past I cannot forget.

I was one of few Black students in my second grade class, and I would go to school each day hearing that I was an exceptional black student. My grandmother would remind me that my recognition was an opportunity given to me by the Elizabeth Eckfords, Minnie Jean Browns, and Ruby Bridges of the world. She would button up my sweater and say, "You have to work twice as hard to get half the recognition, so I need you to work four times as hard, so you can get the recognition you deserve."

Summers were my favorite time of the year. My cousins and I would spend long days at my grandmother's house playing, doing homework, and listening to stories. The week of July 19th was always my favorite, because that's when everyone celebrated Juneteenth. The older kids in the neighborhood, my older cousins included, would dress up, but I was too young to join them in the streets. Instead, I would sit with my great aunts and grandmother. "Ninth and Broadway used to be the Black business district," she would begin. Segregation in Little Rock necessitated that Blacks have their own banks, barber shops, beauty shops, and the like. The last lynching was on that corner. A Wendy's now stands where that tree once stood.

For those in the streets, Juneteenth is a night to remember and a night for remembering. I asked my aunt once how Juneteenth got started and why it was so important. She sat me on her knee, and with eyes the color of mud, said, "You need to know your history." Juneteenth is a celebration of the abolition of slavery, she told me. Slaves in the Deep South heard the North had one, and a celebration ensued. "We remember and celebrate in the streets much like they did."

Minority groups succeed my remembering, not with hatred or bitterness, but just with an understanding of facts as cold as the dead who lie in their graves. Learning to behave in public is an example. My cousins and I would run around the store until a family member told us to join the family. The times that we delayed obeying, I would hear my mother's heels, feel her hand grip my arm, and see her angry face. My aunt would say, "Temporary insanity. She forgot who she was" in reference to my disobedience. On those outings, I learned what an embarrassment it was to forget who I was, and I was more than Jonathan and Judith's daughter. I was Glori-Anne's granddaughter. (My grandmother's name is Gloria Anne, but people her age seemed to run it together. I always called her Gran.) I was Black, the descendent of slaves. My ancestors corrected their children quickly and harshly before the master would, because they knew the master could kill. My mother had not "progressed" from that practice. All of that was implied in who I was, and I felt it. My past was brought to bear on my present experience, and my behavior continued to improve.

Gran always says, "It's not that you have to proclaim your blackness, but don't forget that you are Black." The memories should be there, but without the emotional intensity of past years she explains to us. The memory of slavery, segregation, and civil rights should be an inspiration to glory. Knowing our sordid, painful past should make us proud of how far we've come. No bitterness, no anger, only resignation to a legacy that must be upheld and to the fact that our lives will be spent proving our ancestors did not die in vain, so we must remember. As Zora Neale Hurston said in her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," "Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid through my ancestors for it. No one on earth ever had a greater chance or glory."

It is often said that I'm too White, that I don't act Black. My Great-Aunt Dorothy would often tell remind me that when I look in the mirror, my skin is just as brown as theirs. When I walk outside, I am judged by the same standards as others of my race, but more importantly, I am of the stock and legacy of those who were abused and belittled. As long as I remember my legacy, I don't have to prove how "Black" I am. It runs in my blood.

Some things are easily remembered, like the day I addressed my peers for the Column Ceremony at Westminster College with my grandmother sitting in her wheel chair on the lawn. Two strokes have taken her vision but not her hearing. Her head arched to the sun and strained to hear my words. I saw clearly that day. I delivered my address and placed a gentle kiss on her tear-stained cheek. "Thanks, Gran."

"You're welcome, Jordi."

EUPHEMISMS

BY KATELYN RAPP

Scale my memories from piece to piece, loving all the way--all the way down.
Tangled in these truths that are fantasy--a deception sleeping with integrity.
Abandonment. Our only hope. Our fears burned away at the stake of oblivion. We shall sacrifice.
Nepenthe recollections streak down our faces, into our souls - begging to drug these sinless outcasts into love.
Tamed is our perspective of the world in window view - stuck in cages of normality. We may be the only escape for ourselves.
Onward stretched desires of your eyes and mouth and hands. Creeping to corners of my un-graphed mind; a smile of immortal extents.
Naked, our hearts fall to their knees, facing frigid brutality, martyrs for forbidden love.

A SONNET

BY TJIZEMBUA TJIKUZU

The war came rushing over me like a storm
Of clouds and paralyzed every chamber of my weak heart;
Squeezing every bit of emotion out of my helpless form.
I lie there on the dirty floor like a piece of art,
With the blood red moon light illuminating the dark night,
And the thick threatening cold air singing
Songs of those left at sea to surfer from the delight
Of the pain that might set them free from the shivering.
The war came hard upon the holy golden town
With the Dark Witch carrying her staff of pain,
And shot my dear David upon his sacred heart that used to be mine own.
He went, gone, left me in a lonely house with nobody to complain
About the pain of my forever wounded soul.
Yes, indeed she came, left ruins and despair.
The smell of blood-stained sand was left hanging in the air.

THIRD PLACE PROSE

SHATTERED GLASS

BY RACHEL BOES

The first chapel of the Immaculate Conception of Dardenne Catholic church was built back into a field, surrounded by acres of small sloping land, dusted with large, mature trees. When the old chapel was built, there was really nothing else around on Route N save for the few modest homes that have long since been torn down to make way for the shopping centers that now line the re-paved old highway. My first memories of this church were of the old chapel, with its sand colored, rough stone exterior and bright, saturated stained glass windows spattered around the building.

My four year old self remembers this chapel as grand; tall and domineering, the rich colors of the stained glass windows encouraging the light filtering inside to reflect the window scenes like water color on the stark white plaster walls inside. The same warm stone was exposed in the foyer walls and the floor of the old chapel, creating a contrast with the rich cherry-stained pews bolted to the floor. Each of the pews had a bible scene etched into each side, scenes my grandmother would ask me to describe, quizzing me on my Sunday school knowledge.

The old chapel was one large room, and a foyer created by the two sets of large oak double doors in the back of the building, opposite from the altar and steeple. Perhaps this created the feeling of unity in this building; there was no place to get lost, other than in a throng of neighbors, all of whom were very familiar. The congregation was made up of families that had been in the area for years, sent their children to school together, and most of whom exchanged yearly Christmas cards.

I don't recognize most of the congregation during Christmas mass in the new chapel anymore. Perhaps this is because there are at least four services to accommodate the growth of the parish. Perhaps the families that I remember from my childhood lived in those houses that were torn down when the highway was expanded so many years ago. Now instead of midnight mass on Christmas Eve, or an eight o'clock service Christmas morning, we have seven or eight services to choose from for the holiday, and I suppose it doesn't so much matter which we attend anymore because I know I will be crowded into the new chapel with strangers.

The new chapel has a separate nursery room for parents that don't wish to have their young children in service with them; a library for the priests' texts, as well as a long hallway of all of their offices; three different rec rooms for parish events and a basement full of forgotten classroom equipment: so many places to hide. This two story building was built with the intention of keeping the parish together, allowing us to grow as the area developed, but really the sense of community in this place was smothered by the overzealous swell of the population in the past ten years. The yellow oak benches that are lined up in the new altar room can be moved easily if some over-eager worshipper stands up too fast, and the skylights cut into the dome ceiling create drab shadows against the beige walls. There are no stained glass windows.

I returned to the Immaculate Conception of Dardenne Catholic church this past winter for the first time in years. It was a gray February morning, wet and cold, the wind

throwing around the rain and ice and snow in an unforgiving manner that infiltrated even the sturdiest of winter coats. The foyer of the new chapel smelled of wet wool, and the halogen light bulbs in the fixtures above glared harshly off of the vinyl tile of the floors. I didn't recognize the priest speaking that morning, and when I asked my grandmother about him, she answered that they were on a rotation now, with the twelve or so priests that now presided there.

At this, I thought back to Father Peter, and his associate Father Mark, who presided over all of the services in the old chapel; two Fathers standing before their congregation. Two steady lines would form in the wide center aisle between the two rows of pews, of friends and neighbors waiting to receive communion in the old chapel. Now six priests arranged themselves in front of the six aisles leading to the wide altar, and six lines of strangers spilled out of the pews upon the signal from the master of ceremony giving the sermon this cold February morning. I found out later that Father Peter and Father Mark had left the parish shortly after the reconstruction. I wonder if they did so because they felt as alienated by this new place as I do.

When the presiding priest finished his service, I walked my grandmother down to one of the first floor rec rooms for her social dancing class, and bundled myself back up to set out across the parking lot. About three hundred yards away from the new chapel's entrance, across the pavement, and past the new playground, rests the old chapel. I wandered over and walked around the building, pulling at the cold brass handle of the side door when the double doors in front couldn't be pushed open, to find the building completely locked. In disappointment, I glanced around at the snow laden building, and there, near the parking lot's edge, were pieces of red glittering dangerously in the snow and the sludge. I walked over and gingerly bent to pick up the largest piece of glass; upon a closer inspection, I realized one of the tall stained glass windows on the west side of the old chapel had been shattered.

FIRST KISS

BY KELSIE STONE WATKINS

Remember when two sets of lips met?
That exploration, hesitation.
How could we guess that meeting
Would lead to days, weeks, months
And another meeting of lips,
This time to seal the pact of forever
Until death will depart us.
We sealed our future the same way we started in the past,
With the meeting of two sets of trembling lips
My lips meet yours
And together we create
Days, months, years, a home, children, and grey hair.
Give me another kiss to remember when the days are long,
Just like you did the first time.

MEMORY

BY JORDEN SANDERS

Six hundred people packed in blue cushioned seats wait for the first performance. Clean, white keys break the bleak darkness of the stage. Their brilliance sparkles in anticipation of the gentle caresses of intent fingers respecting the value of each key, the strength of each chord, and the connection to each pedal incased in polished black wood. Under this pressure, the piano submits to the will of the musician, bending the souls of onlookers and listeners until tears flow from their eyes leaving salt stains on their cheeks.

My soul yields to the music,

*The song you played on the white and black keys of the piano,
Lyrics written in black ink on white paper,
The black and white dress I wore on our first date.*

My eardrums dictating my heart's fluctuating beat as each crescendo pulls it to my throat.

*It was you who first placed your full lips on mine and swore to never hurt me.
I remember - I remember too much.*

Breathing becomes difficult – impossible – and in one desperate gasp for air my eyes pop open. Complete darkness. Complete silence. My ears stop, heart slows, tears choked.

Make me forget

I am alone: one person surrounded by empty blue cushioned seats, and no one is coming. The piano stands, bathed in an almost holy light whence I see no source. The ghost of my boyfriend sits at the piano, not in the tux he last wore in this room but in the blood-soaked jeans and sweater he wore in drunk-driving accident that took his life. "You came to see me." I seem to hear.

Break my heart.

Halt its steady pounding; slow its racing pace.

Break my heart so I can hate you enough to forget,

Forget I ever loved you,

Forget I ever felt your arms around me,

Forget I ever saw your smile,

Forget I ever heard your voice.

I stand to leave, reach the door, and then look back. Memory imbues a place with a power over the mind that no person could wield. Memory plays tricks on the heart.

I want to cry, but since I can't, I'll write.

I'll write until my fingers go numb and my joints fall apart.

I'll write about someone else's broken heart.

I'll hide my story in the words of another's tragedy.

You'll be my fame.

This will be my triumph:

That on the night when I remembered, I forgave.

On this night I surrendered to a braking, breaking heart.

I promise the room I will never return, and I close the door on my past.

STRIFE AND SUBTERFUGE

BY ERYK ENYART

The doubt in my life,
disrupts the love:

The Melody entices my soul.
My heart yearns to be loved,
to be understood.

I must be strong
and strong must I be.
Insanity afflicts my heart;
How can I know the Truth?

The song of my spirit screams to be heard;
Yet it is silenced

and hides in the shadows
of the coming Dawn.

Sing to me
my Warrior,

my Hero,
Love of my life.

We were born to be great
and great were we born to be.

The harmony flows like rain,
flooding the tributaries,
the recesses of my unending, dark abyss.

The nectar of my life turns tart with age,
fermenting like toxic wine
and soiling the earth with blood.

**Glee tinted with hope
and shaded with despair
leaves an umbra of gloom
a penumbra of anxiety.
Can anyone see the Agony?
the Apathy?**

Must I wriggle and writhe as a snake,
cut by the grass,
once an ally,
now a foe.

Softly now, gently too
I stumble as with a curse of inebriation.

Yet I have not drunk
Glory, Honour, Gold:

A mangled corpse,
my once living God,
Decapitated.

My spirit sold to slavery,
shackled with chains.

The key is my own,
yet I do not free myself,
the act too foreboding.

My Bravery dismantles itself
and submits to subjugation.

SECOND PLACE POETRY

WISDOM TEETH

BY KATELYN EDEN

I.

I did not want to do it.

My brother did it before me
shimmying with ease
under the knife and out again.

I wasn't confident of the same outcome,
but they had to come out
or my orthodontia would be for naught.

Calcium bicarbonate,
twisted-yarn-nerves,
curling-wire-vessels -

my wisdom teeth
were probably exquisite.
(I will never know.)

When my name was called,
my breath caught. I saw stars.
No. Not stars -

Blood, and the electrocautery tool, and a horrific IV
dripping s l o w l y,
Chinese water torture behind my head.

The nurse placed cold rubber electrodes
like thick Elmer's glue to my chest
to monitor my tachycardia.

Prodding clammy fingers did not comfort me.
Breathe, the nurse told me.
You can't get your IV until your heart rate slows or you will pass out.

(please pass out)
(please pass out)
(please pass out)

II.

Then the mask, heavy as wet concrete,
falls like a hand over my mouth and nose
steaming with pale NO₂, suffocating me.

It isn't working. Is the machine on? I need more.
The nurse jibes for the trillionth time:
Just breathe.

He tries to coo at me,
attempts to soothe me,
but I am inconsolable.

Surely my eyes are wide with terror -
surely my heart will burst -
surely this is what drowning feels like -

nitrous oxide like wet fur prickles in my lungs,
an itchy caterpillar curling up,
pouring my candle wax body into the leather beneath me.

I have nearly sunken beneath the surface
when the nurse caresses my antecubital fossa,
a sudden snake charmer, coaxing my veins to the surface.

He taps a couple times, testing, before I hear him smoothly warn:
Just a pinch here, sweetheart.
And the last thing I remember before I sink completely is

I did everything I could.

SOLACE

BY JEFFERSON SPEARS

Wrenching feelings as affections were forcibly removed;
Inconveniences no longer tolerable, made harmful by betrayals all too common
and frequent, resulting in pain that permeated everything with persistence.
The slap in the face of perceived blatant inadequacy a coup de grace to any chance
of previously ever-springing renewal, logic finally triumphing in the one sector I had
forbade its presence.
All that remains is civility, and maintenance of distance, flying in the face of events that
warrant more war-like mentalities.
In the resulting solitude there is an inherent solace:
The solace provided by the fact of indicative pain.
In the purposeless world, where apathy often rules the day,
the pain after betrayal indicates that even if no one else cared,
I did.

GRENADA COUNTY/1930S

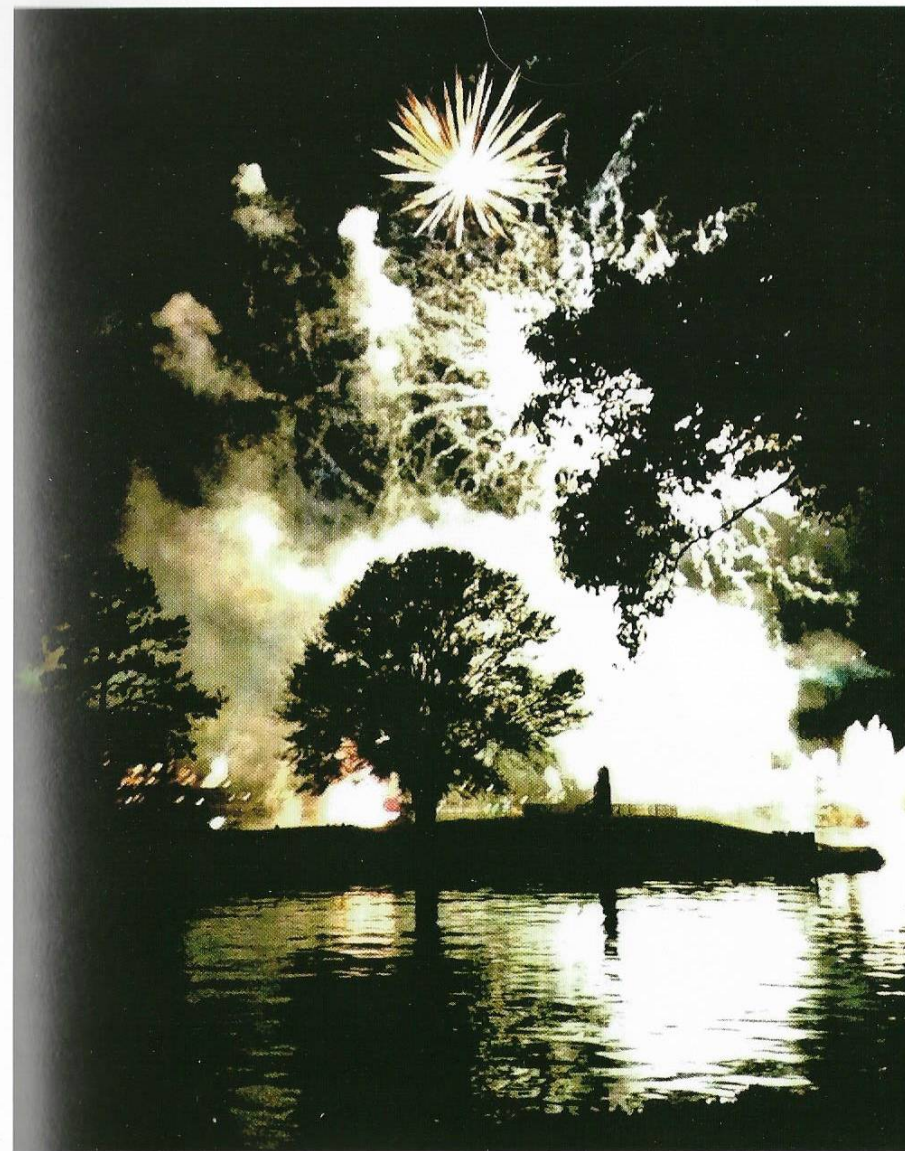
BY KATELYN EDEN

Watermelons, yellow-green with summer dust. An old rooster, slowly sauntering. Pots of
clotted roots, decaying thyme and rosemary, fraying in July heat. Curling sycamores with
low-hanging boughs. Thin shelves hovering in slanting angles, tipping this jar and that.
Rotting, vacant barrels that held who-knows-what who-knows-when. Bleached, deep
wood with gnarled edges polished by winter freeze and spring sprinkle and autumn gust
and summer swelter. Gentle weeds tangling their roots in the flaky dirt as if planted on
purpose, poking their noses up through Alka-Selzer gravel. Soft metal mosquito screens
plucked from some porch door with tears like old denim knees. Plucked peaches covered
in contusions the size of dimes and sticky fur.

And you, exhausted bones, weathered work shirt, and thick suspenders, resting and
sweating on the shoddy porch your granddaddy made with his own two hands and nails
he got by blood and tears. You, with your roadmap wrinkles that tell the story of dismay
and betray happiness. You, with your laughing eyes and their crinkled corners, your
graying eyelashes and misty irises from years of work in midday Atlanta heat. You are
youth and age at once, sitting here on your porch. You are remembering and forgetting,
layering and chipping away, weaving and ripping seams. You are then and there, here and
now, gray and easy, just sitting on your porch, melting in summertime Georgia, watching
hot dusk set in.

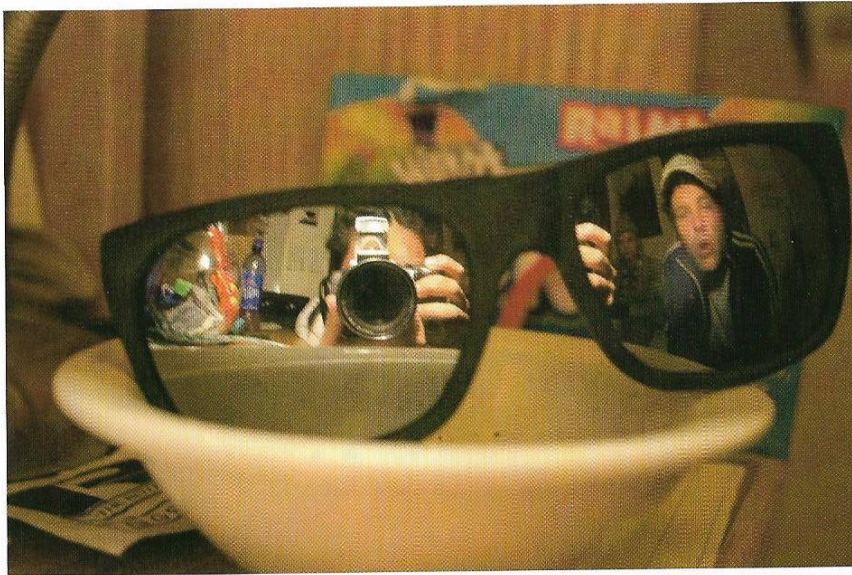
FIREWORKS

BY SNEHA BHANDARI



LAZY WORKER

BY YUKI GOTO



MT. FUJI

BY YUKI GOTO



THIRD PLACE GRAPHICS

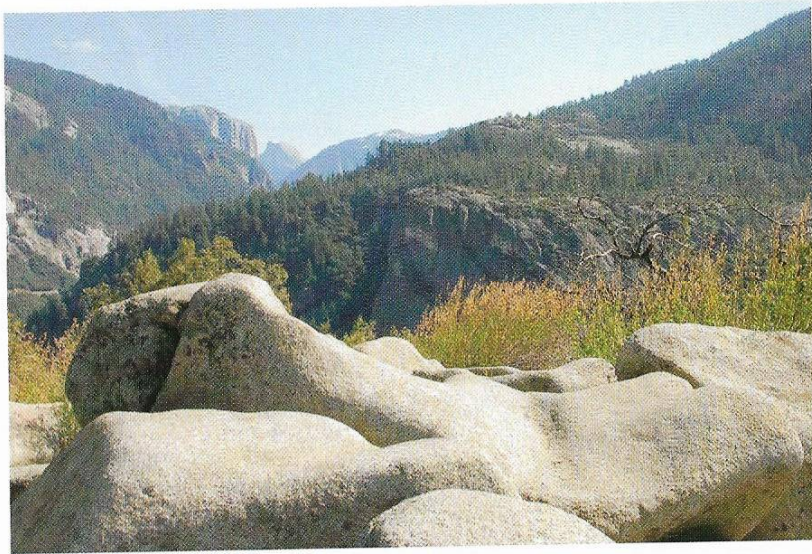
UNDER THE EIFFEL

BY KYLEE SOUDERS



NATURE IS WHAT WE SEE

BY ENNI KALLIO



BLU-HALLOW FARMS

BY MELISSA HIRNER



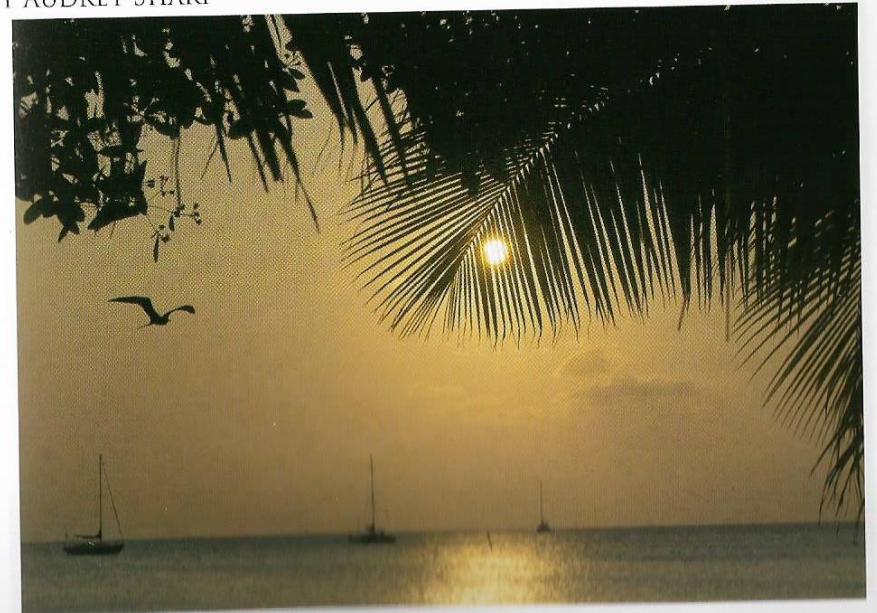
VIEW FROM THE LONDON EYE

BY KYLEE SOUDERS



FLYING SOLO

BY AUDREY SHARP



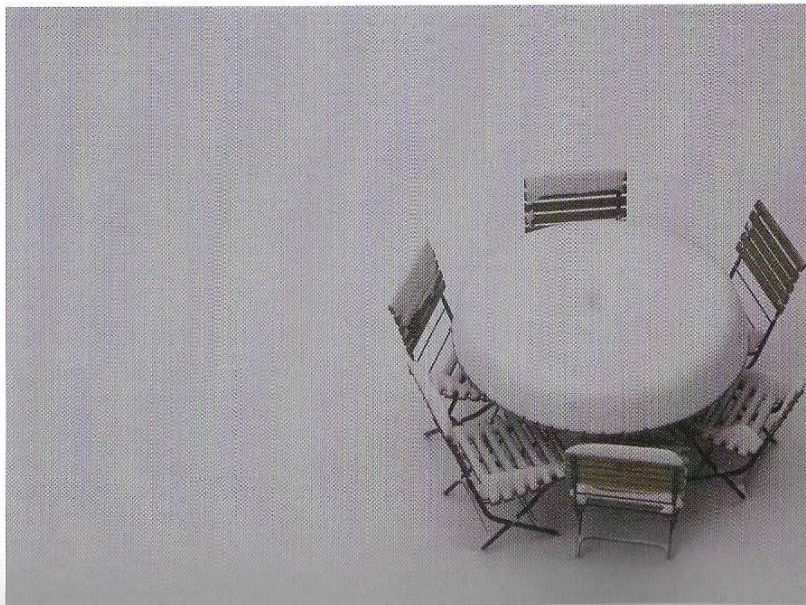
PERFECTION

BY AUDREY SHARP



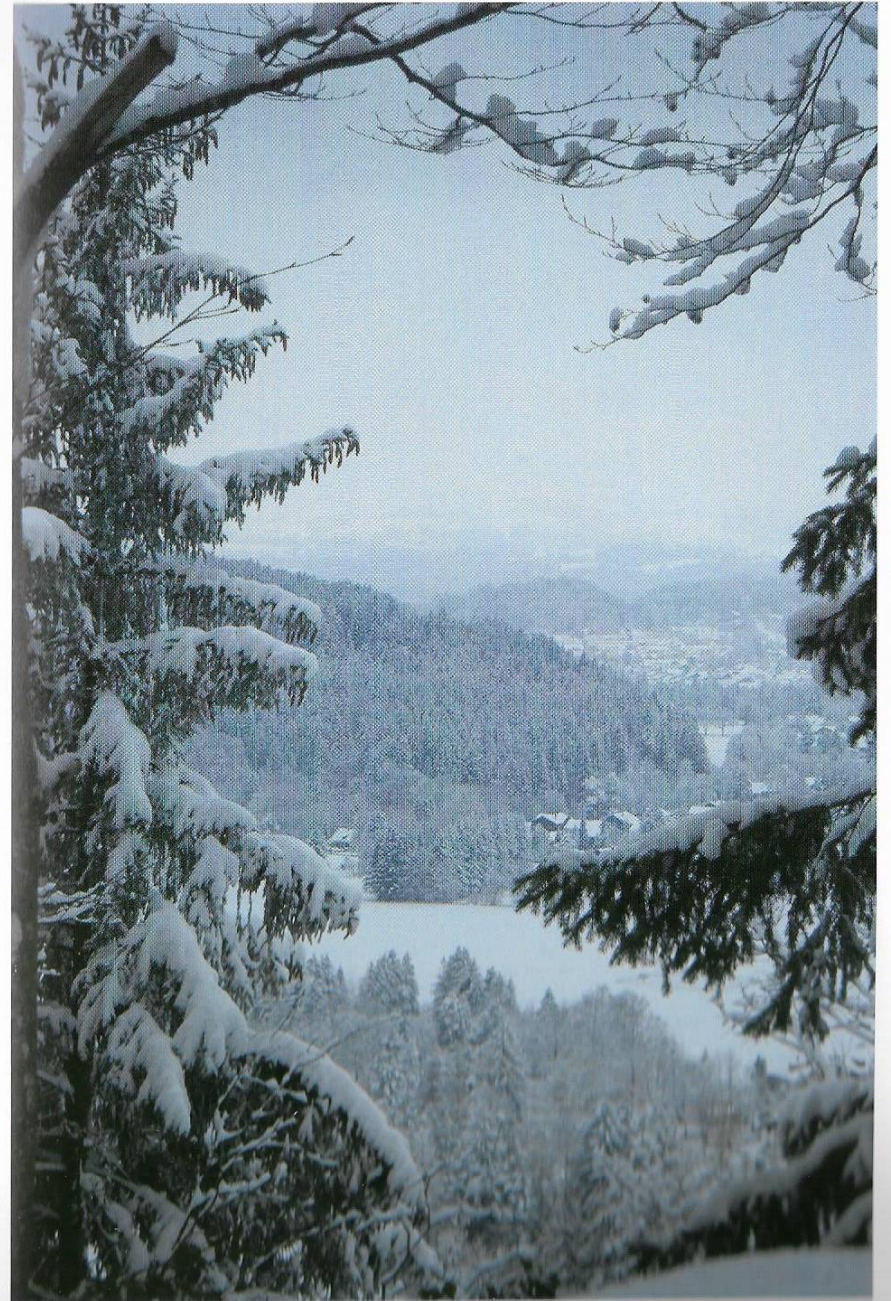
EMPTY MIND

BY YUKI GOTO



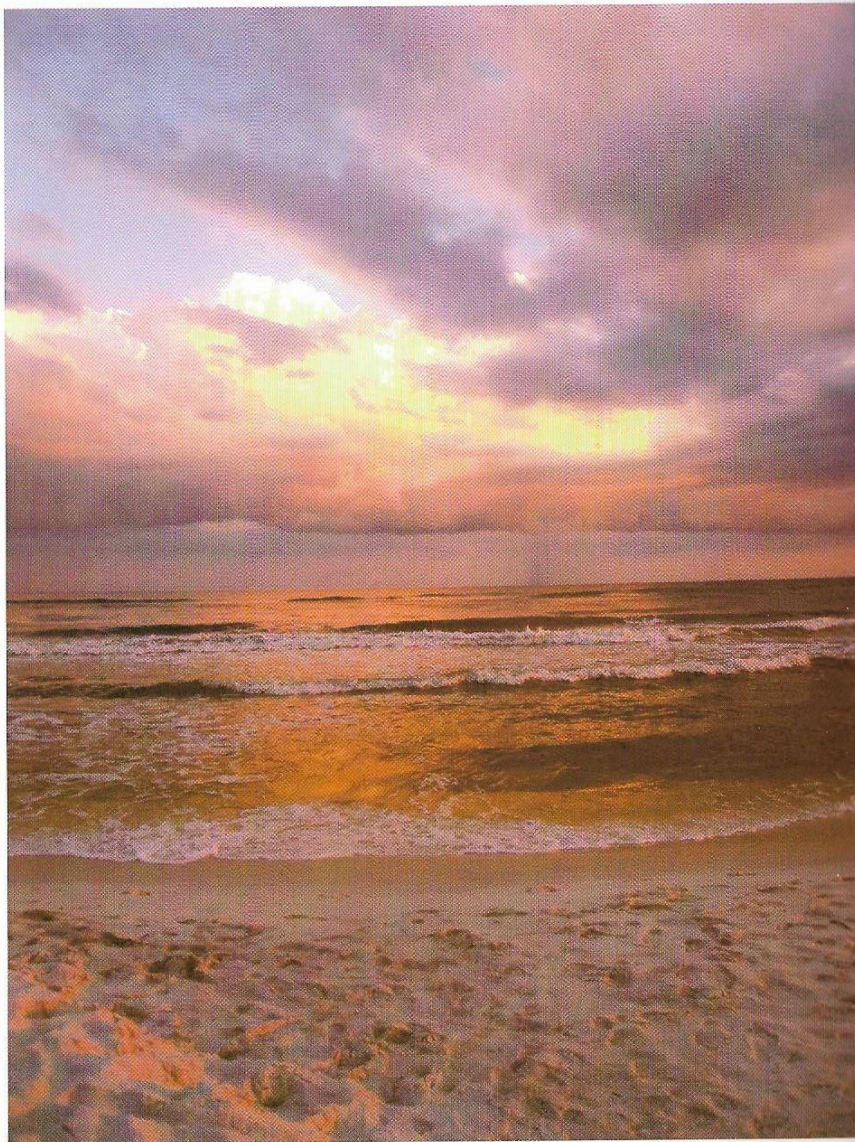
A BAVARIAN WINTER

BY KYLEE SOUDERS



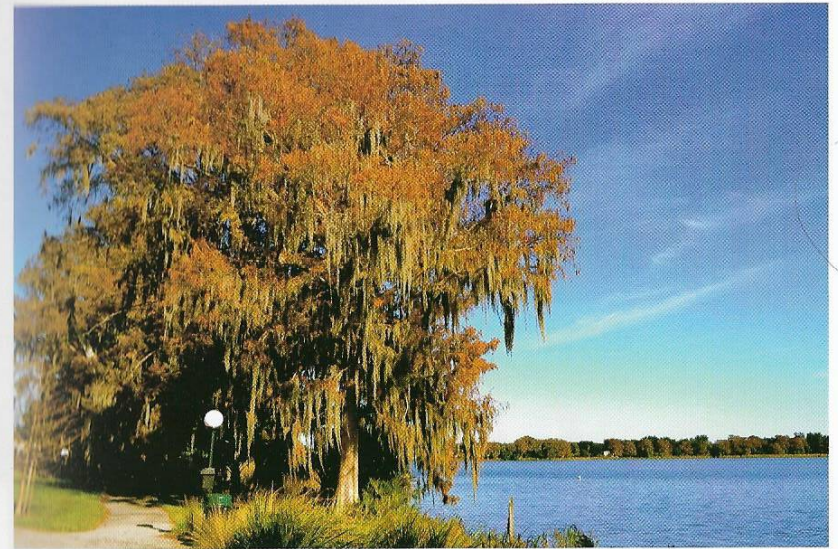
ENDLESS GLOW

BY AUDREY SHARP



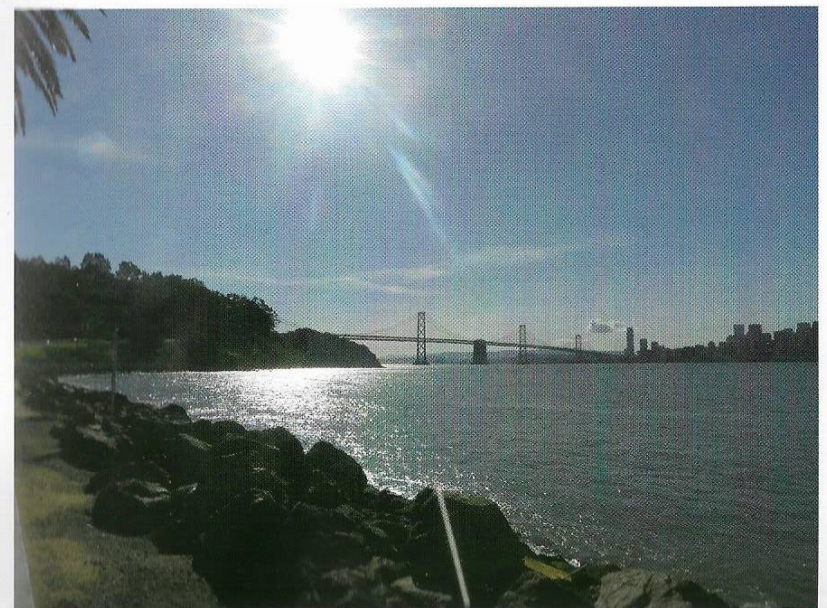
THE MOSS TREE

BY SNEHA BHANDARI



A VIEW OF THE BAY

BY ERIN WANG



STRENGTH

BY ENNI KALLIO



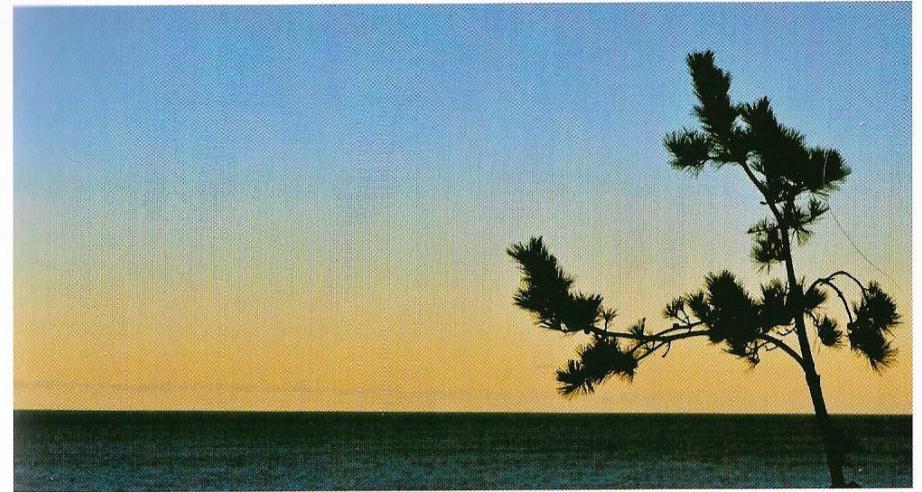
WHISTLING WIND

BY MELISSA HIRNER



TRANQUILITY

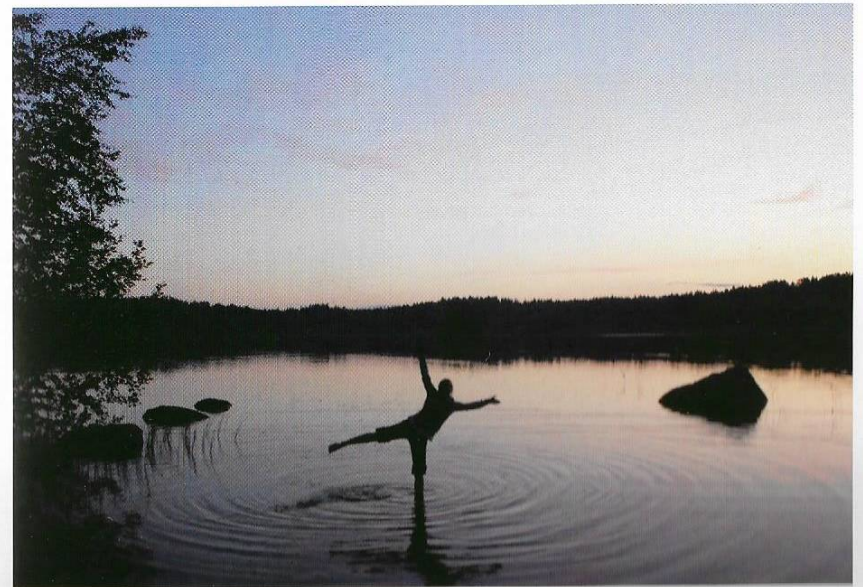
BY SNEHA BHANDARI



SECOND PLACE GRAPHICS

WONDERLAND

BY ENNI KALLIO



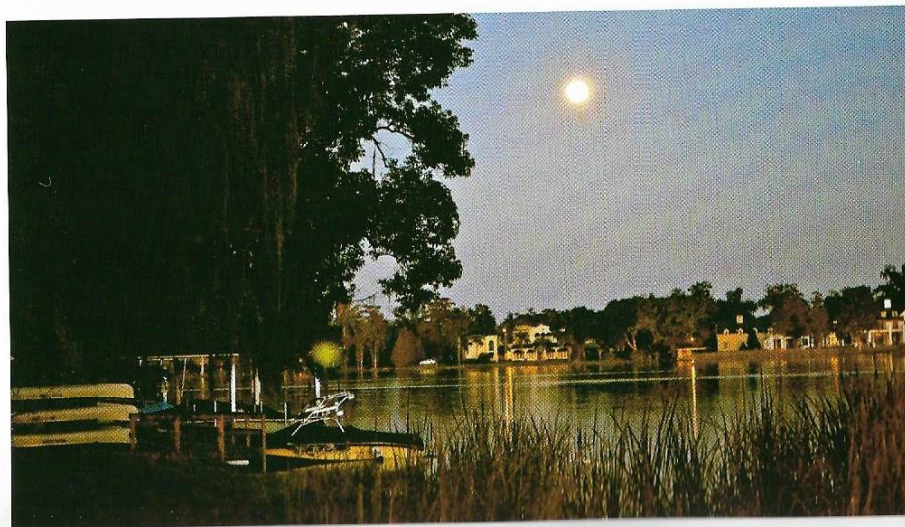
FRIGATES

BY LAURA WILTSHIRE



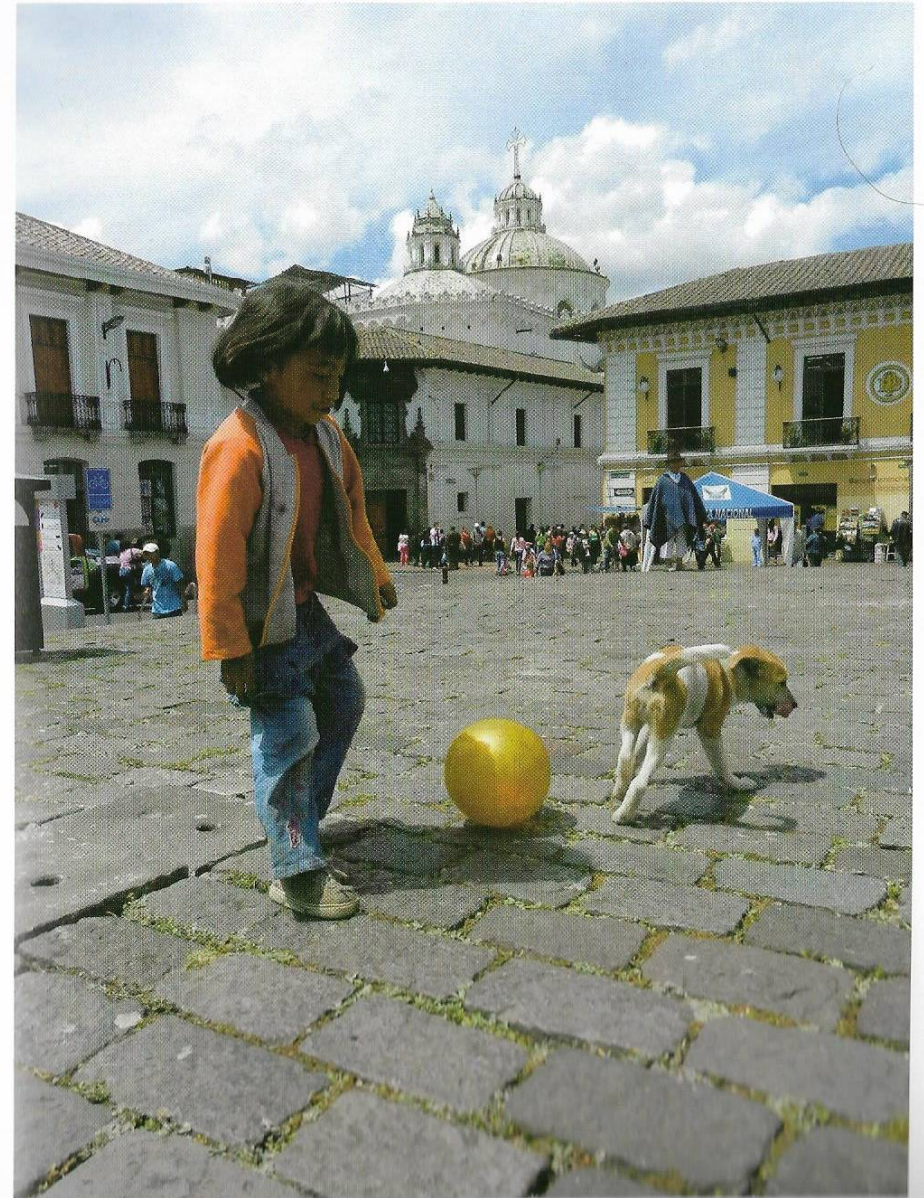
BLISSFUL SOLITUDE

BY SNEHA BHANDARI



PLAYING ON THE SQUARE

BY LAURA WILTSHIRE



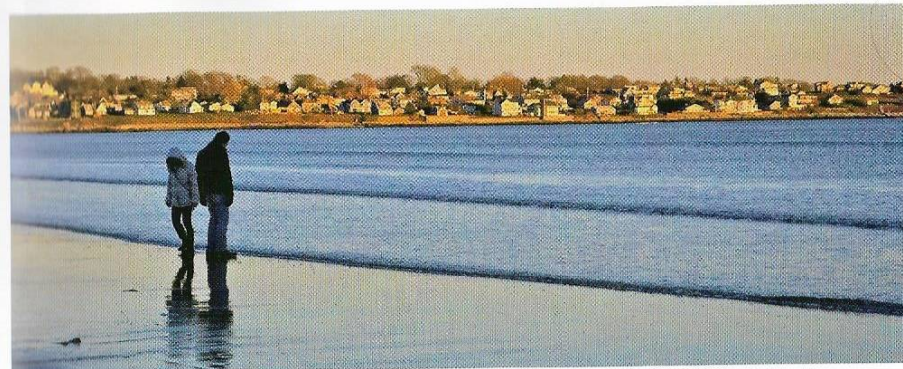
OUT OF REACH

BY ENNI KALLIO



SERENITY

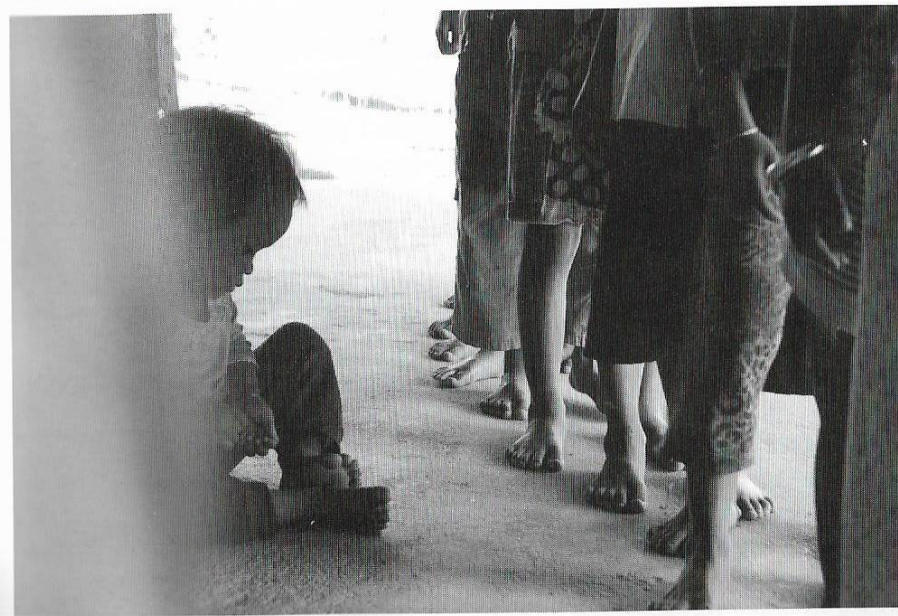
BY SNEHA BHANDARI



FIRST PLACE GRAPHICS

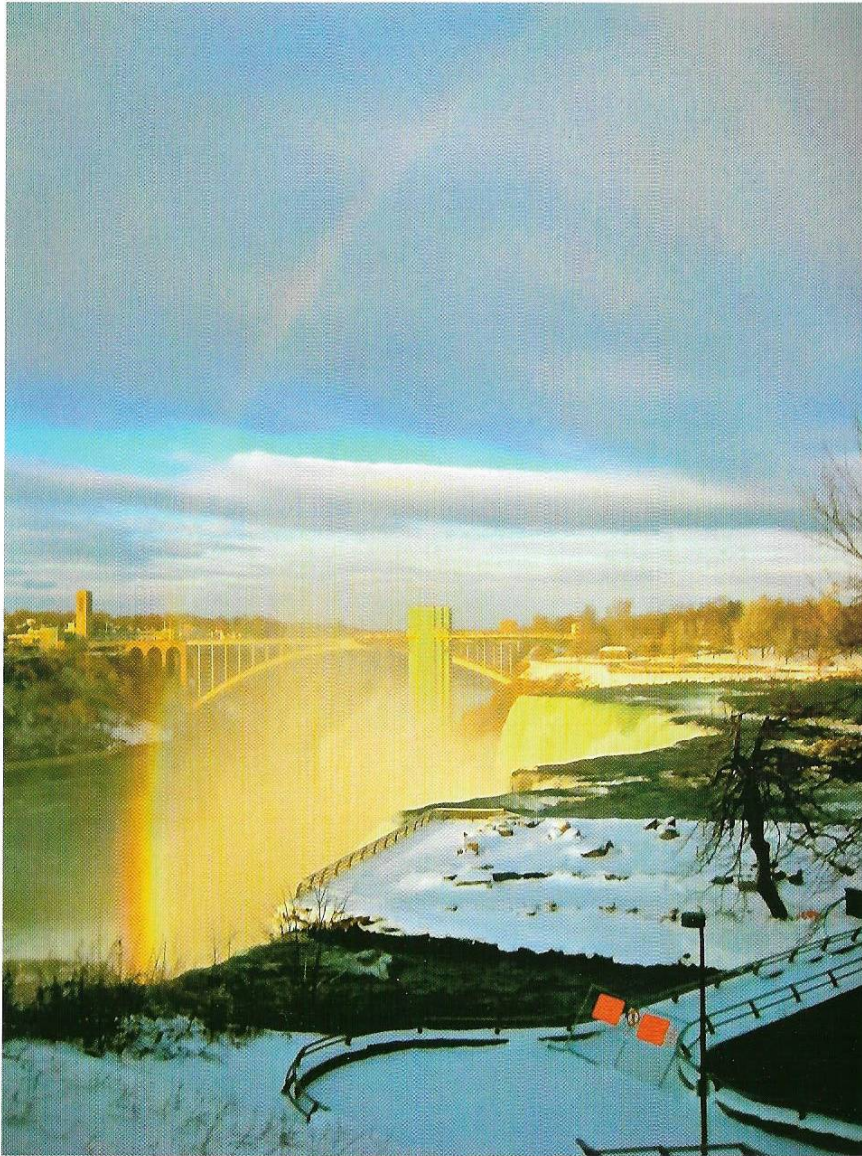
LONELINESS

BY ENNI KALLIO



NIAGRA FALLS IN WINTER

BY SURAVI SHRESTHA



SCARLETT

BY TYLERE GOANS

My daughter, three years old, was staring up at me. Her big hazel eyes begging me to read just one more story. It was late, and she knew this too. I leaned down next to her, and said our evening prayer. I kissed her soft forehead, and as I did so, her hand reached up to my face. With the tiny pinky of her right hand, my little girl traced the deep jagged scar that lead from the top of my eyelid down to the bottom of my chin.

His breathing was slow and quiet; every so often he would let out a low sigh. He held me close with his arms wrapped around me. My cheek rested against his shoulder, with his chin placed upon my forehead. The top of his head slightly touched his headrest, and if I rolled my eyes upward, I could see the no-shave November beard that outlined his face. The room seemed isolated and cold, but when our bodies lay together, I felt a warm luxury. My toes crinkled against the cold light blanket and rested against his warm calves. He was always warm compared to me, always. I knew he hated that I always felt so cold. I would lean up against him and the frigidness would cast a shiver down his body. He had to have the soft murmur of the fan to fall asleep. Unfortunately for me, it was spinning on full blast, which only made my body lean in closer against his hold.

I knew he was not asleep yet, because he had not started snoring. As I lied cuddled up to him, he shuddered softly, a sign that he was close to his first stage of sleep. I took a deep breath, knowing that shortly after falling asleep he would turn on his side away from me. He had a problem sleeping cuddled up next to me throughout the night; however, I had a problem sleeping away from him.

I sat up, stirring the sheets to go get a drink of water. As I was sliding off the bed he pulled me back, whispering to me, asking what the matter was. I sat on the edge of the mattress, silent, until finally I looked at him. His eyes were a deep hazel, and his gaze was intense. Not a bad intense, a good intense. It was as if he was searching my face for any sign of what I was thinking, of what I was going to say next.

I leaned down and kissed his soft lips. The slight smell of a long night out with the boys, dosed with whiskey and Skoal was still light on his breath.

I took a deep breath, one that hesitated halfway through, instinctively touched my stomach, and choked out two simple but irreplaceable words.

"I'm pregnant."

He sat there, not moving, his face serious. The time seemed to drag on infinitely. Say something I thought. Anything. He slightly popped his knuckles, and sat up. He looked down, and tears swelled in my eyes. This was all a mistake. I knew it was; this wasn't supposed to happen. Here we are in college, trying to make something of ourselves. My life was just beginning, and now, my life has taken a halt for the worst. I did not want to raise a baby on my own. Tears slowly fell down my face, and I knew that I would soon take the label of being a single mom.

Finally, after five minutes that felt like five hours, he grabbed my hand. He shifted his weight to my side of the bed, and placed his arm around my waist. He leaned his lips toward my face and gently kissed my cheek. He pulled his face to look at mine, and lifted my chin to look into his eyes. He smiled. He brought my hand up to his lips and lightly kissed the top of my left hand.

"I love you. And I know we weren't expecting any of this, but I'm ready. I want to be with you forever. And I want to have this baby with you. You are the best thing that has ever happened to me. Will you marry me?"

With tears in my eyes, I pulled him close to me, and clung to him. I had not expected this, but I could not have asked for a better response. I smiled, my tears turned to joy, and I excitedly whispered yes into his ear. He leaned in close, kissed me, and then pulled me back down to bed. We lay in silence for a long time. As I thought about the discussion that had so abruptly been brought up, he opened his hand out to me. This was his way of telling me to come lay closer to him. I was shocked at the amount of love that he always gave me. I tried to fall asleep, but knowing that I would soon be a mother, and the man next to me would soon be my husband, made any type of sleep impossible.

The next morning, we packed our bags to head to his hometown to tell his family the news. He ran to the car, acting like an overgrown child, and waved at me to hurry up. I laughed, knowing that I could always count on him to make me feel more at ease. He threw our bags in the car, slammed the trunk down, and swung himself into the driver seat. I know I started fidgeting as soon as we left, popping my knuckles and tapping my foot against the floorboard. I switched the radio station every two minutes until as I reached up to change it again, he grabbed my hand and held it tight to his. He never did get stressed or worried. He was the most laid back person I knew, and always went with the flow. He would always say it made his life more fun and easier when he did not have to get stressed about really anything. I wished I was more like him, especially in moments like these. I tried to be cute leaning over towards him, and gave him a swift kiss on the cheek. He moved his eyes from the road to mine, and smirked with a grin that always made me uncontrollably smile. He winked at me. I will never forget this moment, it seemed so perfect. The sun was setting and hit his face just right.

As he leaned over to kiss me back, his hand tugged on the steering wheel too fast. The look in his eyes was one of pure fright as he tried to over correct it sent us flailing through the air. The last thing I remember was him grabbing my arm as I held on for life. It happened so quickly, and there was no way to fix the accident or prepare for it. When I came to, I was sitting in the car trapped, unable to get out. My eyes were swollen and I could not see him. I asked for him over and over again, but he never responded. I could hear other people telling me I was going to be okay, but all I cared about was him. And our baby. What about our baby? I was overwhelmed with alarm. I was overwhelmed with the unknown.

I kissed her soft forehead, and as I did so, her hand reached up to my face. With the tiny pinky of her right hand, my little girl traced the deep jagged scar that lead from the top of my eyelid down to the bottom of my chin.

I got up and prepared my way for the door.

"Goodnight momma."

"Goodnight Scarlett."

"Momma, why is my name Scarlett?"

I peered at the small circle mirror that set on her child beauty shop. From the glimmer of Scar's nightlight, I was able to see the mark that raced down my face. I looked up at my child and opened my mouth to answer.

"Because every time I see you, I am reminded of what a beautiful miracle can

come from such a sad tragedy."

My daughter, acting as if she completely understands, nods her head in agreement and lies down on her pillow. She turns to her nightstand and looks at the picture that I have placed there of her father.

"Goodnight daddy," she whispers as she blows a kiss.

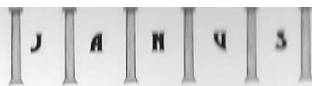
I smile, and tears swell in my eyes. It has been three years since the accident. Three years since he died. I remember how he would dance with me, sing country to me, or cuddle up to me on movie night, I would always miss him. I would miss his kisses, his laugh, and the way he called me lady, but I would also always have Scarlett. The accident was the worst thing that ever happened to me, but Scarlett was by far the best. He was not perfect, he had his mistakes, but he was still perfect for me. And he gave me the perfect gift. A beautiful hazel eyed girl that has her father's humor, bravery, and laugh. She's perfect, pure, and shares all the qualities I loved of her father. I touch the outline of my scar, and start to close the door of her room, but first, I peek my way back in and whisper,

"I love you Scarlett."

BOÎTE BRIOCHE CHAPEAU CLOCHE

BY KATELYN RAPP

We've learned to put dreams into boxes
 "I love yous" into less than three words
 Our ambitions--half-read and half-imagined
 Responding like time-warps
 Taking nouns with meaning and "verbing" them
 Exactly
 Outdated synonym books sit four feet from our fingertips
 Calling out to bud-deafened ears
 We can't talk
 Can't remember
 Can't single-handedly discover
 Mundane letters, shocking our lost poets
 Slipping feelings in between casual vibrations
 We are the essential bifurcated man
 Focus-shot, with a curtain call at every drama
 Originality is wasted like half hour personal rains
 The squares in our hands have stolen who we are
 Our identities; littered with pseudonyms and
 Sky-reaching wide eyes outlined in demise
 Shall we not scream in fear at the trample of inspiration
 Shout in the painful recognition of depleting beauty
 Cry in the streets of tossed out creativity
 Curse into the very face of the one who captured our minds
 And never gave them back
 These fleeting awakenings are contagious



AT THE CORE OF ALL ANGER

BY RACHEL BOES

At the core of all anger
Lies a need that is not being fulfilled,
Or so I've heard.

It started with communication.
The hours spent together,
You and I
Pondering life.
Learning family trees and histories
Mannerisms and catchphrases,
Swapping stories of experience.
Evenings spent driving the streets at dusk
And taking in the only world we both know.

One year later, miles away,
I'm people watching
In a crowded, din filled room with strangers
And I slip out of the moment,
Chaos and laughter becomes white noise,
And I think, perhaps,
Its shared experience
That we need, to feel close to someone.

In any case,
I feel you slipping away
And I'm not angry anymore.

UNGODLY HOUR

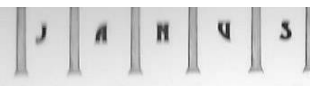
BY RACHEL BOES

Three a.m. is no stranger to me now,
And though I've so much left to lose,
There is much I wouldn't give to sleep through it;
Escape in a dream, away from the present reality
Of infinite apartment viewings, with slimy agents trying to sell space
in some of the more questionable neighborhoods of an unfamiliar town.
They are not really options, despite their affordability.

And the used car salesmen that are indisputably living up to their cliché,
in any effort to earn a commission.
But really, it's the steady stream of doctors visits,
where, inevitably, the cold steel of hypodermic needles will be lodged into my skin,
and I'm so desensitized to it now that I forget to squirm at the discomfort.

But the proverbial straw breaking the camel's back,
triggering fresh, racking sobs at three a.m. is his cancer.

My mother's father,
a strong, sharp, bear of a man,
who completed the daily crossword religiously through my childhood;
Now a stooped, fragile creature,
confused enough to ask me, his first grandchild, if his cancer is contagious,
worried about making his new granddaughter, barely a week old, sick.
And I can't really justify putting him through chemo.



SET POINT

BY MARY NESTOR

Enduring a long term relationship is like playing in a high stakes tennis match.
The crowd is watching, perched on the edge of their seats, just waiting for one player to
make the wrong move. Double fault, drive a ball straight into the net, or hit a lob so far
out it lands in the stands. Thousands of fans around the world are anxiously taking bets
as to who will give in first, who has the most disciplined mental tenacity, who will fight
until the last possible second.

But winning this match is possible. Yes, all of the odds are stacked against
you. You're playing the number one in the world and you're the wild card. Statistically,
you don't stand a chance. The opponent is five foot nine, a hefty one hundred and sixty
pounds. Her serve, on a good day, can whip past the returner at an insane 110-120 miles
per hour.

*Yes, he may be 17,055.4 miles and an ocean away, and yes, that figure may
have been Googled a time or two, but this is possible. Ignore the sweaty, bulging armed
opponent staring at you from across the net.*

The ball toss is up, the opponent wrenches her body into the air, arches her back
just so, her arm up, reaching, swinging, ready to make contact. The ball is smacked and
a perfect top spin serve flies over the net and lands right in the corner of the service box.
I manage to pluck it out of the air as it comes up from the bounce and it sloppily lobs
over the net, giving her the advantage. I race backwards anticipating a killer volley. I
was right, but she was smarter and she volleys it into the far left corner of the court, and I
cannot force my feet to move fast enough to make it. "Get there!" is what I can hear my
coach shouting from the sidelines. That game is over. Opponent 1- Me 0.

*He has not been able to call in almost a week. He has not had internet access
either. I guess, realistically, Wi-Fi is a rare commodity in the desert.*

*"How do you do this?" My friends always ask. "There's just no way I could
survive not talking to him." I just shrug and walk away. I'm wondering how I do it too.*

Standing next to the net on the side switch, I swish the water in my mouth from
side to side and stare at the green, hard court. I'm down 3-4, with only two more games
left in the first set. If I can just pull back and win this set, I might have a chance: there is
still hope.

*My phone rings – an unfamiliar number with a strange area code flashes across
the screen as it vibrates and bounces across my desk. I grab it and inhale a deep breath.
"Hello?" I gasp way too quickly. A familiar voice answers and a smile appears across
my face and, from his tone, I can tell he's smiling too. We make small talk and I tell him
what has been occupying my time, since he really can't tell me what has been occupying
his. He assures me I wouldn't want to know anyway. After that phone call, I feel better.
See, that wasn't so bad. Only one week with no communication. You got this.*

Back in the match, it's my serve. This is my opportunity to get back in this,
since it's unusual to lose a service game. "Love all" I call as I bounce the ball. Tennis is
the only existing scenario where love always equals zero.

*It's Valentine's Day. Today, I think that maybe love really does equal zero, since
obviously my Valentine's Day will not amount to much. But as I come home at the end
of an awful day, a surprise awaits me. A bouquet of red roses sits on the counter and my*

roommates are crowded in the living room giggling in my direction as I walk in, anxiously waiting to see my reaction. I grin and blush as I tear open the little card attached to the plastic stake in the middle of the flowers. A simple "I love you, babe. Happy Valentine's Day" is all I needed to see. My day is made.

I bounce the ball on the ground a couple more times, par my usual routine. I toss it high, just like my coach told me to do, and swing. A good, solid, quick serve lands in the box and my opponent returns it. A rally ensues. The ball goes back and forth, back and forth.

Finally, my consistency pays off. The opponent flicks a forehand that lands straight into the middle of the net. I breathe a sigh of relief and go back to the baseline. Score 40-30. One more point to go. My first serve goes straight into the net and rolls back to the center of the court. I jog forward to pick it up, and then quickly reset myself for my second serve. Up the ball goes and lands about three inches back from the service line. The opponent calls it out. Deuce – the score is tied. Double faults are tricky. They should be prevented, but they inevitably happen.

I know the anger I feel should be avoidable. I shouldn't be so mad. But I am. I'm angry at him, the situation, and the world. When I cry, it is tears of anger and frustration that burn their way down my cheeks. Why is this so hard? Why is everything working against us? Why did he have to get sent there, of all places? And for six months? Other people got their loved ones sent away for only three months. Why couldn't I be that lucky?

The score is tied and we go into ad. I win the first point with ease, so the score is now ad-in. I have the advantage and I'm determined to win this last point to win the game.

My grandma asks me, "Why do you date only one boy? You're so young! You have your entire life to be settled down."

"Joe is a really good guy, Grandma," I sigh in reply. It seems that more often than not, people are sharing their doubts and pessimism with me about my relationship. Opinions from an outsider about something so complex you barely understand it yourself are perhaps the most irritating part of enduring a long distance relationship. Their doubts encourage me even more to prove them all wrong. I will make this work; we will last.

Equally frustrating cheers from the crowd, rooting for the opponent, cackle in my ears as I raise my arm to swing through my first serve. Their taunts and insults echo in my head as the ball spins in the air and I make contact. All of my aggression towards the opponent and her rude fans erupts as I smack the ball with insane force. My momentum pulls me into the court and I bounce back on my feet ready for the return. To my delight, the speed of my serve caught the opponent off guard and she stumbles to catch it as it flies just out of reach of her backhand. That's it. I win the game.

I quickly win the next two games and, ultimately, win the set 6-4. I'm insanely focused on the task at hand, which makes the games pass quickly even though the sweat pouring down my face reveals the true agony I actually feel.

It has already been five months. With homework, exams, a job, and friends to distract my ever wandering mind, time has been moving. Every unoccupied second, though, my betraying mind thinks of him and once again my heart aches. Yes, time is moving but at every family function when someone asks, "Have you heard from Joe? How's he doing?" I get reminded of how much longer we actually have to go. But the

determination to make it still burns inside me after every negative thought. One more month to go; we're in the final stretch. Only a mere thirty-some days stands between us being back on the same continent again.

The match is almost over. The score is Opponent 6- Me 6. We will have to play a tie breaker for the set. A typical ten point tie-break is the last obstacle in my way to victory.

The opponent has the first serve. She will serve one point, then I will serve two, then she will serve two and back and forth it goes. Whoever gets to ten points first wins. Winner takes all.

A return date has been announced. His mom called me and told me to meet at her house at 3:00 PM, four days from today. When I got off the phone with her I cried, but this time, the tears streaming down my face were out of relief.

I'm up 8-5. It's easy to get cocky and over confident at this stage of the match, but I cannot let that happen. I must remain focused, because she sure is, staring at me from across the net. She won't let me win this easy.

I'm standing in the airport; it's around 11:00 PM. His plane is delayed. I'm tired, with aching feet and all I want to do is lie down and sleep, but my adrenaline is forcing me to stay alert as I blink out into the darkness, waiting for a plane to land.

Match point. This is it. One more point and I win the match. I am serving and my ball toss is up...

I can see it! There it is! The red blinking lights in the sky move closer and closer as the plane prepares to land on the runway.

My first serve lands in and the opponent hits it back over the net straight at me. I slice it back.

The plane has landed and the passengers are beginning to disperse into the terminal. I stand on my tiptoes and crane my neck, trying to spot him.

My mind is racing as the rally continues. (Win it, just win it, one more, keep going! Almost there!)

A familiar figure finally emerges from the crowd. I begin to run, this time tears of joy, fall down my cheeks.

He sees me at about the same time and opens his arms as I race into them. We are together again, at last. We made it.

My opponent hits the ball straight up and it's coming down close to the net. I raise my racket and prepare for an overhead. I smash the ball with all my might in the far left corner. The opponent just can't make it there in time. Match point. Match. I win.

THE PILOT

BY DEAN MORAN

I believe in the autopilot
The stewardess is offering me drinks
Yup, yup, yup, yup she said-
I asked her why she is yupping at me.

She stood firm with a lovely face.
I ask her questions where the answer is yup.
I know they all feel safe with me.
I talk proud on the overhead machine.

Woo-hooh!
Oh Yeah!
I'm flying-
Us around!

My feet don't touch the ground,
My wings don't need to flap
I'm higher than the sun.
I'll talk to anyone.

Through clouds
And sky
Oh yeah, Oh my.
Too much, Too high!

I'm feeling kinda drunk in the wind
But I'm confident in my direction
I am not concerned about my lifetime sins
Cause girl I graduated with a pilot's license,
Yeah!

I believe in the autopilot.
not really me but I've seen it all before.
I can relax and think it over.
Take a pill and put up my tired feet.

I always looked at the illustrations
And always stopped for the decorations
A full paid mental vacation
From Maya, my whole family and me.

And I'm not really me,
And God see's everything
So I will be just fine if I believe

It's gonna be alright ,
(It's gonna be alright)
Smooth landing...
Smooth landing...
Smooth landing ...
Smooth ride.

I believed in the autopilot,
The whole world is still offering me drinks
I always get to my destination
I'm livin' well and I always fly for free.

CARNY CON

BY WHITLEY WILSON

Step right up,
You're just in time.
The show is beginning
With a long, long line.
I hope I amuse you.
You want to play a game?
I'm a hipster,
A trickster,
A picture-less frame.
Think you can fool the guesser?
Yeah, so did your predecessor.
But go on, boy
And give it a try
A toss, a spin,
But never a win.

Ha. Ha. you sucker,
You poor sorry fucker
This old soul has forgotten,
More than you'll ever know.
But keep it up baby,
Learn to love the woe.

Wait?
You found a better deal?
I don't care,
Just another spoke in my wheel.
But I'll keep on rolling,
With a click and a clack
It's only sometime
Till your back and with crack.
One more try?
The deception is riveting.
Did you catch it that time?
Keep up with the pivoting.

Damn. The odds aren't against you.
But hey, don't look so blue.
Because trust me, yeah trust me
It's not worth the screw.

I bet you a floating,
goldfish in a bag,
no heir will remain
with my last, final drag.

THAT DAY

BY BREON EVANS

I opened the door to my house and walked into the bright sunlight. The day was beautiful, the birds sang, the clouds cast shadows on the ground which created the perfect protection from the intense sunlight and summer heat, and the breeze blew just enough to dry the sweat off the children playing in their yards, teens doing yard work, and construction workers whose comments upset the young women and occasional young man who happened to stroll past. I took my usual route to my usual place to hang with the usual persons of interest. Yes, there was nothing special about that day, or so I thought.

On my way back home, on the route that I had taken so many times before, something different happened. It may have been due to the fact that I had had a fight with my father earlier that day concerning you, or that I did not look where I was going, or that the sun was in the driver's eyes. Well, whatever it was that changed in that split second, changed my life forever.

Now, I would like to tell you that after I was hit by that car, the driver stopped and called for an ambulance. Then, I was taken to the First General Hospital, where I was rushed to the emergency room. I would like to tell you that I heard the doctors talking as I weaved in and out of consciousness, only to reach the brink of death and be saved in the last moments by a shock to my still beating heart. Afterwards, my family visited and I got a chance to apologize to him for the stupid nonsignificant argument we had before my departure, and to hold you in my arms. I would like to tell you that on that fateful day, on that fateful street, it was fate that made me see what I needed to change in my life and granted me the permission to do so. Yet, I cannot tell you that happened.

I can't, because it would be misleading you. I can't, because it hurts me too much, telling you now. I can't because it would hurt you more later if I don't tell you now. So, in spite of what I would like to tell you, I was hit by the car; yet, I watched as the S6I6N6 faded into the distance till either the car was too far away to see or my eyes blurred due to blood loss. My blood slowly followed that car, trying to catch up to tell the driver exactly what they had done to me. This is when I weaved in and out of consciousness till a voice happened upon my ear. It was my father. It seemed he was worried that I had not returned and went looking for me. The ambulance siren caught my ear next, then the doctors, next the crying, and finally the slowing of a beeping noise till a white light. Well, you'll know about that part someday.

So, this is why I had to leave you; I did not want to, I swear. Please forgive me, my child.

ABSENCE

BY DAVID STRAWHUN

Absence

Beckons

Circular

Deliberation.

Everywhere, but here, something may reside--we surmise

Finally, rounding itself, finitude flashes its potential with a Spring

Guzzling, savoring, then spitting, and God-willing remembering the

Hallowed treasure of harnessing

I can see the sky beneath my feet

Just

Know this—

Look into my eyes,

My dear.

Never will sunlight

Open you, pouring through that great tectonic mist without

Poking holes all around

Quiet, now.

Rain pours

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

Turn, adjourn—the

Universe

Vibrates

With

Xylols under

Your

Zodiac distensions

THE FADING FULTON

BY KELSIE STONE WATKINS

I am breathing heavily as I dismount and lock my bike to rack. It's just the beginning of another day and another morning in which I have biked across town to my school. I didn't always bike, but now that I do I can't stop myself from doing so, just as I cannot stop myself from seeing the town as I zip by. The county seat, a city that once was the largest and most prosperous of its kingdom. Most of it comes in snatches, an impression there, a glimpse here, but after the day is done I bike home more slowly and see more clearly.

I go past the line of historic houses, freshly painted in bright colors, proudly displaying their plaques that show passersby they truly are as old as they look. The sidewalk is smooth; no bumps or cracks to distract me from the jewel colors of my

surroundings: emerald greens, ruby reds, navy blues all trimmed in stark white or bold maroon. Each bears a bold, black plaque declaring its age back to when the city was the center of the region. There is nothing to dodge while riding during this stretch. The lawns are all carefully manicured; shrubs trimmed so as not to offend the onlooker.

I turn my head back to the road as I ride on. Grass sticks up from the cracks in the sidewalk, pulling at my tires. I steady myself over the uneven parts, swerve around the gaps. The houses on my right are still historic, but run down or falling apart. There was no grant to save them or any interest to otherwise. Across from and around them sit more modern houses, humble in their origins and owners. They never seem to fit next to the historic ones, as if they are uncomfortable sitting next to one.

The nicer of the modern houses give way to the poor ones. Here the sidewalk requires your attention; that is, where there is sidewalk. I dodge large chunks of asphalt, swerve around miscellaneous containers, broken bottles and soda cans. Dogs snarl as I pass. They strain against the chains that hold them back. Some people sit on their porches watching the world go by. They do not call out to me when I pass, but when our eyes meet, theirs are wary and carry a hint of defensiveness.

This attitude doesn't start out this way. When I first head out most people do not notice me as long as I keep moving. I see them working in their yards or grilling on their decks, oblivious to people outside of their world. Sometimes there are children playing in the yard; their eyes lit with interest as they see me on my bike, backpack on my shoulders. I wonder how many of them will run to the garage for their bikes, inspired by my passing, or wish that they too could ride their bikes if they were allowed. The people's reaction to me gets worse the further I keep going, until I reach my neighborhood full of silent watchers with hard eyes.

I encounter other wheeled travelers like myself occasionally. We are defined by the car riding populous as "other". A woman drives her motorized wheelchair up the hill. I don't know her name nor does she know mine, but we smile and nod at each other as we go past. We haven't spoken to one another, yet are kindred spirits, both seeing the same sights and having the same experience of travelling the streets off the main drag.

There are people who walk. They meander towards their destination at their own pace. Some eye my bike with speculation, others ignore me completely, their heads moving in time with whatever is playing in their headphones. I wonder what they are listening to; if their feet hurt as much as my legs when they get to their various destinations. Sometimes they speak, but not to me, never to me. They talk on the phone, accomplishing the feat of walking and talking at the same time. Other times they talk to themselves and I give them a wide berth. There's no need to interrupt thoughts so deep you have to share them with yourself.

The distance I travel back and forth between school and home does not change, but it does get shorter or longer depending on the day. There are days where the sunlight dances through shadows of branches. Some days, each drop of rain that hits your face feels like a personal slap from the heavens. When these kinds of days occur a grim relief fills me to see the sight of the windows all lit up and welcoming, even if the welcome isn't necessarily true. These keep people going as they travel through the nasty day, just as they give me the oomph towards that final stretch for home.

This city is a home for many. For many more of us it is a home only for a short while during the spring and fall. Yet even when the college kids go the locals stay, the

"others" stay, watching as the businesses that opened so briefly also go. The names of shops are in a constant rotation. They are never the same as I speed by week after week. Folks come here with a dream of opening some new restaurant in the building that used to be another failed restaurant. They fix it up, open and wait for the money to roll in. They wait until they roll out of town in the hole and the restaurant stands there again empty and unused, baring the mark of its new facelift. No made what the theme, there's simply no big money to be had here. The big spenders have all fled to neighboring towns to the north and south. The failed restaurant remains empty, a testament to the lack of funds needed to open it. It will remain this way until some new foolish dreamer comes to town and the process will begin all over again.

You see all these changes, not in a day or a week, but in a collection of days and weeks that build up over time. It's seen by the old woman sitting on her porch, riders and walkers like me, the mailman and the policemen. The animals would tell you the same story, if the animals in question were inclined to speak. None of this matters as you speed along, but when you stop to put away your bike the thoughts float in the back of your mind like a shadow.

My ride comes to an end, as it always does, when I reach my house and stop at the back step. Legs aching, I wheel my bike into the basement where it will rest until the morning. Then the whole event will begin again. I don't think about that now; try not to think about the people and places I've seen. There's homework still to do, dishes to be done, dinner to be cooked.

I push my reflections out of my mind and tie up my hair for work. The windows are open and I hear a dog bark, a car passing by with its radio blaring. The sun is setting as I pull the curtains closed. Just for a moment I see it. An old lady sits on her porch. She was glorious once, a real beauty, someone people would flock in to see. She remains where she is; fading little by little till the glory of her is no more than an echo. I blink and the cityscape is again at the window, sunlight fading away.

MATER'S DEATH

BY PIUS NYAKOOJO

Streams of tears, the face is filled;
Troughs of sorrow, deep with guilt,
Tomorrow's beauty soaked in pain,
For mater will feel nothing again.

Here exists beloved chance,
To learn, laugh, sing, and dance
What will lose, surely gains;
A happy slave with earthen chains.

Oh river beds and flowing lakes,
Bleed your last drops from my face.
Release me to this lively meth,
Not to mourn for Mater's Death.

WHEN

BY TJIZEMBUA TJIKUZU

When I can no longer feel the breeze upon my skin,
When the angels in heaven have ceased to sing
The graceful melodies that they sang through my life,
When the air in my lungs can no longer sustain my lifeless self.
When the cracks had torn the wall of the Hardap Dam
And water came out gushing like untamed horses.
When the white Brahman cow no longer comes home
And when the cows in the kraal no longer have milk.
When their milk in their ducts have turned to yellow powder
That runs out of the nipple and mocks and laughs at you
While running down the hot Kalahari sands.

When all hope is lost and the birds can no longer build their nests;
When the hour hath come,
When the hour hath come.
I am unprepared;
Running through the streets of the old town
With houses falling apart and sinking into the sand.
The clay surrendering itself and becoming part of the soil
And I, about to become part of the soil too;
Running from one block to the other, street to street, hoping to save my soul.
My soul is dangling by a threat; thin and daring;
Smiling at me as if it would care less if I were to save it.
In the streets I call. I rage into churches like a mad man.
"Where is the priest," I asked.
"Upstairs," said the altar boy.

I ran upstairs, my soul hanging on a threat and I rushing to save it.
It is funny that all these years I have lived like a pig,
Slept around like a bitch and drunk wine like it was the last time
I will ever smell its heavenly smell or feel its touch on my ravenous tongue.
I had neither wife nor children.
Life was a wild ride without stallions, but only my heart
And bodily desires guiding it in the dark and eating fruits of wisdom
And bathing in ephemeral happiness.
Now, when my heart can no longer desire and by bones have begun to crack
And the ligaments have begun to tear.
When the hour hath come, here I am.
Looking for a priest to save my soul.

When I was about to open the door to let the priest baptize me
In the name of Christ the son of God, my heart failed me.
It skipped a heart-beat or two and stopped.
It ceased to pump and I saw her slipping on the threat, smiling at me,

Wearing a matter-of-fact smile as if she is not going to hell.
I try to utter a word or two to the priests who seems to be in complete shock.
I grope my left breast and began whining in agony
And before the priest could dip me in the holy water,
My soul was already gone.

She was gone and I could not save her.
When the time raced like a jet
And every sound became tangled waves of languages I did not understand;
I lost her and never found her.

THIRD PLACE POETRY

BED

BY CAROLINE SLAVIN

*"I fell in love the way you fall asleep; slowly and
then all at once." -John Green*

I fell in love the way you fall asleep; slowly and then all at once.
Loving you wasn't on my radar, but drooping eyelids have a way

of sneaking up on me. The caffeine kicked in long ago, and
it's been hours since I checked the clock. The natural light

is gone. Only you remain. Have you been here all this time?
I have a weekend's worth of work left to do, but

the warm mug you're holding smells like Christmas and it's
beckoning me to bed. It's not just the nutmeg, however,

that's hypnotizing. It's your haberdasher hearsay and
kilogram cologne. It's this damn down comforter that

just became. so. heavy. The funny thing is, I never
remember falling asleep. All I know is reality is in

the past and now I'm in dreamland and I love you
and it's raining chardonnay. I've been pulling allnighters

my whole life. So, let's sleep in tomorrow.
I have an awful lot to catch up on.

THE MANSERVANT AND HIS MUSE

BY KELSI STONE WATKINS

Stevens had worked for Mr. Dupliss ever since the strange man had bought the house. He had worked for the owners of that manor all his life and that didn't change just because the owner had. It was this steadfastness to the old place that caused the locals to joke about Stevens coming with the house. "I'd buy it, but that would mean taking on Stevens on too. Lord knows what use I'd have for him."

As for Stevens himself, he really wasn't sure what he was. There was no denying the fact he was in his twilight years, no matter how he acted otherwise. When Dupliss had bought the manor, Stevens was certain that he would be released. Dupliss had instead eyed him up and down on their first meeting. "Can you cook?"

He had cooked for many years and said so. "Can you clean and keep both the house and the yard?" Stevens felt his brow begin to crease with confusion, but smoothed his features to a polite blank mask with the ease of long practice. "Yes, I have served as both as the housekeeper and the groundskeeper over the years."

Dupliss had nodded, once, curtly. "Well, then, you can stay on. The pay won't be much, but as long as you work, you can stay and eat for free." He turned to go upstairs, but suddenly whirled around. The intensity of his features caused Stevens to take a step back. "There is one rule that I demand you must follow if you wish to stay. You stay out of my office upstairs. Don't come in it! Don't disturb me while I am inside! I can't write with people in my personal space."

The intensity of the man robbed Stevens of his voice. He settled for nodding dumbly in agreement.

"Good." Dupliss stated and turned, climbing up the stairs. He had reached the landing by the time Stevens found his voice.

"Sir? You haven't said which position you want me to fill. Which will you want me to do?"

Dupliss hadn't even stopped. Waving his hand in the air in ardent dismissal he called back. "You'll do it all. You're going to be the only staff I have. No more people." Stevens thought he heard Dupliss mutter something about not being able to work with people around before he heard a door slam.

"I guess I'm the all-around manservant," Stevens said aloud to the empty corridor.

It was in that manner that several years had passed. Stevens lived only in his little cobblestone cottage outside the Manor and worked each day in basic solitude. There was no extra work to do. He cleaned and weeded and passed most of each day as if he was the only occupant. It was a rare occasion for Stevens to run into Dupliss. In fact, if it weren't for the dirty plates and crumbs on the counter and the occasional string of loud talking upstairs, Stevens had no evidence that Dupliss ever came out of the large room on the third floor that served as his office.

The only thing that had changed over the last few years was the fame of the now illustrious writer Dupliss. He had churned out best seller after best seller and more and more people came to the house now. Stevens had strict orders from Dupliss to send them away. Dupliss saw no one within the Manor. Instead he went out to meet his agent and editor, refusing to have them in the house. Stevens, red with embarrassments had

turned away Dupliss' very confused and hurt agent several times after his first novel came out.

They all put up with Dupliss' strange behavior -- his agent, his editor, his fans and collages. "It okay. He's a genius writer and is bound to be a little odd. The talented ones often are." Dupliss' agent, Lisa Mills, had assured Stevens after he had once again had to turn her away, with much shamefaced apologizing on his part. He wasn't even allowed to offer her something to drink or any other form of hospitality before shutting the door in her face.

Somehow Dupliss fans stilled loved the man, despite or perhaps because of his many quirks. It was well known among them that Dupliss Manor was off limits. Only a few foolish ones had attempted to visit. Dupliss accepted no house calls and refused to do any interviews at home, choosing instead to conduct them at his publishing office in the next town or over the phone. Finally the pressure from his clamoring fans and harried agents pushed Dupliss to leave his Manor for an extended period of time and go on a book tour. He would be gone two months, not that this bothered Stevens any. Nothing really changed for him, whether Dupliss was home or not.

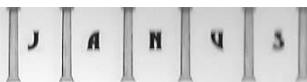
Stevens did take the opportunity to do some detail cleaning he had not been able to do on the third floor at Dupliss' insistence that he couldn't work with all the noise. The large curtains had been taken down and now swished back in forth in the wash. The scattered dust motes floated in the sun as Steven applied his broom to the floor. He had made good progress and had almost reached the end of the hall near Dupliss' office, when he heard a noise differing from that of his broom's scratch against the floor.

He paused, and heard the noise again. It was coming from Dupliss' office. Stevens' muscles tensed. He knew Dupliss was gone. He had packed his bags in the car himself. It could be a burglar, but the chances of that in the middle of the day were slim. Perhaps it was a crazed fan, who in their obsession had climbed the trellis that led to the third floor window. Knuckles white, Stevens gripped the broom handle. In his aged state he probably couldn't take a fan fit enough to climb up three stories on a trellis, but he damn well could try.

He paused, his hand hovering over the doorknob. He wasn't allowed into Dupliss' office he knew, but did that rule hold true when Dupliss wasn't home? And something was inside. Stevens quietly turned the knob. It was locked. "He must have locked it out of habit." Stevens muttered to himself under his breath. He took the ring out of his pocket that held the many keys of the house. He moved each silently till he came to the one he needed.

Slowly, holding his breath, Stevens turned the lock as quiet as he could. It made a soft click. Gripping the broom so tight his hand shook, he slowly opened the door. Peering through the crack, there was no one in sight. He threw open the door with a bang, holding the broom like a quarterstaff before him. He saw no one in the room. Emboldened, he puffed out his mustache, 80 year old muscles creaking. "Come out you! I know you're in here!" The sound of metal against wood came to his left accompanied by a chuckle.

He turned to find a woman lying on a pallet near the empty hearth. He was even more shocked to find her ankle bound in a heavy chain. The sound of it dragging against the floor when she moved was the noise he's been hearing. The chain was large, looked to be made from very old iron and anchored to the stone floor.



"Umm...Excuse me." Stevens stammered, taking a step back. He tried to make sense of what he was seeing. There was a woman chained to the floor in his boss' office. What in the world? The woman on the floor glared up at him with eyes that reminded him of the Manor's frozen pond in the winter. "Oh, you are never excused foolish man!" She said, her eyes never leaving his face. Stevens tried to think how he should act in this situation, but his brain had come to a lurching halt. He had seen some weird things in his time, but nothing quite like this. "Are you okay, Ma'am? Why are you here? Are you unwell?"

The look she gave him made him take another step back. "Do I look well? Don't bother answering!" She snapped. As Stevens just stood there, stunned, she grinned wryly. "Perhaps you are not able to answer regardless." Scorn lacked his voice black and hard. "Umm. Uh." Stevens desperately tried to regain the tongue he'd swallowed. "Why...Umm you ..." He floundered for a moment more before years of habit kicked in.

"Can I get you something to drink, Ma'am?" As strange as this all was, hospitality was always needed. She looked at him like he had lost his mind. Perhaps he had, as much as it was spinning.

"No," She said slowly. "Unless you have some ambrosia hidden in this dreadful place."

While Stevens' mind raced, he fell back on old manners. "Allow me to go check to see if we have that vintage stocked. In the mean time I will go fetch us some tea."

Before the woman could say anything more, Stevens beat a hasty retreat. Ambrosia. He had never heard of that label. Maybe Dupliss had some stocked somewhere in the kitchen. The time it took to make tea gave Stevens a chance to collect himself. It occurred to him that the woman hadn't answered why she was there or explained who she was and what she was doing chained to the floor of Dupliss' office. All three facts were too important to ignore. He intended to find out.

He half expected her to be gone when he arrived. The other half of him wished that she was nothing more than a figment of his imagination, a symptom of overwork or dementia. She was something unexpected and unexplained, interrupting his usual routine. He knocked lightly on the door before entering this time. The woman remained where he had left her, though now she had brought arms around her knees. Unsure of the proper etiquette required of eating on the floor, Stevens placed the tray he was carrying on the floor. It probably wouldn't do to have tea with a guest... thing, but he needed a drink after all this, and since he wouldn't drink liquor until he was off the clock tea would have to suffice.

"Here's your tea. Would you like sugar or cream?" He asked. She said nothing so he simply placed the cup down in front of her. He fixed himself a cup and settled down on the floor in front of her. He was unsure of where to put his legs so he ended up setting Indian style on the floor. "I'm sorry to have to ask this, but who are you and why are you chained to the floor in Dupliss manor's office?"

The woman eyed him balefully before she turned to look out the window. The silence stretched so long that Stevens thought she wasn't going to answer.

"I am Melpomene, daughter of Memory and Jove. I am a patron to those of the arts, especially those versed in tragedy."

Stevens was so confused it hurt, but he knew he should probably look impressed.



Melpomene had glanced back at him and finding his expression suitable she continued. "I was visiting the island of Delos for the summer, watching and laughing at the tourists, sometimes letting myself be seen, other times not. This was, of course, until I came upon a man further towards the center of the island. He knelt near the sacred stream and burned incense. He prayed for the muses to come, calling on them to grant him their blessing. I was flattered. Such invoking hadn't been done for over 200 years and I missed the ceremony of it. It was part of my purpose to answer such prayers. In my folly, I decided to grant this mortal's wish and let him see me."

She gave out a long sigh. "I wasn't afraid of him. After all, if he tried anything I could just whisk myself away. The man cried with joy and poured compliments upon me. Again I was flattered enough to come closer. The man continued to sing my praises, commenting such on my beauty and wisdom that when he asked if I could grace his humble head with my touch I thought nothing of it. I stood in front of the man, hunched over and crying and reached forward to touch his head to bestow my blessing. Suddenly he surged forward and, before I could disappear he had clamped this dreadful thing around my ankle."

Melpomene shook the chain at her feet with helpless anger. It's Adamantine and cold iron, the same metal used to chain Prometheus to a mountain and Andromeda to her rock. Finally dropping the chain back to the floor, she let out another sigh, this one seeming to come from the bottom of her soul. "Why didn't you just disappear?" Stevens asked. She let out a short bark of a laugh and again grabbed the chain. "I could not, with this thing on me. With this clamped around me, this mortal made chain, I was bound to the mortal world. I could not whisk myself away and what's worse I could be harmed."

Using these facts and the ways of force and trickery, Dupliss had also made me give my sacred word that I will not remove the chain. Otherwise I would be attacking it with anything within reach in the hopes of breaking it. He then transported me here by what I can only assume was illegal means. At least the men flying the planes didn't seem to think having a chained woman as cargo was odd. "

Stevens nodded. It made just as much sense as anything did in this crazy story.

"But you, you could release me from this accursed chain." Seeing Stevens shocked look, she pressed on. "I could give you fame, wealth and the power to go with it."

When Stevens finally spoke each word was drawn out and thoughtful. "Could you give me immortality? Be truthful please. I will know if you lie. That itself was a lie, but Melpomene might not know that, bluffing seemed the best option."

She bit her bottom lip. "Yes and no. I could give you life eternal, but you would continue to age until you were nothing but a voice left. I could give you eternal youth, but you'd appear young even on your dying day. It is only in my power to grant one."

Picking up the cups and the tray, Stevens turned to leave, noting she hadn't touched her tea. "I'm sorry Miss, but none of..."

Melpomene interrupted him, rising to her knees with passion. "Don't Answer yet! Think about it more tonight and come back tomorrow with your answer."

Stevens told her he would and set again to finishing the cleaning around the house. But his thought continuously strayed to the woman in the office and to her offer.

When he retired to his cottage that night, he had laid staring at the ceiling thinking about Melpomene's offer. The fortune he didn't need. He had built one up over

time, investing in what the owners of the manor invested in. They had gained such a fortune that they had left the manor to find a bigger one. Stevens remained, collecting a modest profit each time. As to the fame and power, he played out a tantalizing fantasy of light bulbs flashing and people calling his name, but he dismissed it as quickly as it came. He was the type of person to value his privacy and solitude more than anything. That was part of the reason he lived at the manor. It gave him the privacy he sought along with the solitude he craved.

After his parents had died leaving him alone in this world he had never returned to his home town. And he was always so busy working at the manor were he started that he had never gotten involved with women on a personal level and he felt too old to start now. No, there was nothing that woman? Muse? or Melpomene offered him. He enjoyed living at the manor and releasing her against Dupliss' wishes would most definitely get him fired in the least. He didn't doubt that Dupliss would kill Stevens whenever he saw him next if he released the woman.

But was it right that Dupliss was profiting for a woman he had abducted from her home? Stevens wasn't sure if she was what she claimed or if she was just a crazy person, but he didn't doubt she was the source of his stories. A lot of Dupliss' strange behavior was making sense now. Most of his rules were to keep people from finding out about Melpomene. Stevens was sure that Dupliss hadn't known he had the master key to his office; otherwise he would have never left. But what was he to do about the woman?

Stevens went back the next day to give Melpomene his answer. They stood there in the awkward silence of his refusal, before Melpomene began to ask him other things. She asked him about his family and his life. She refused to talk about hers prior to Dupliss, but they talked about many things. Each time Stevens would get up to leave Melpomene would again offer him riches, fame and the power that came with it. She would also request that he think it over that night and return the following day.

Many days passed in this same way, each time Stevens refusing the muse's offer. He did enjoy talking to her, though, and often spent a good portion of his day conversing with her instead of tending to the house. At night, he laid awake in bed, thinking about what she had said or how the light from the windows played on her brown hair and creamy white skin. She didn't act as desperate as she should. It was like she was waiting for something, and she had all the time in the world. What was she waiting for? Eventually he would fall asleep wondering what manner of feeling inside him was growing and dreaming of women singing so sadly it brought tears to his eyes.

One night after he left the manor to his small house in the side he sat watching the dying sun from his old chair on the porch. He studied the manor in the fading light. Over the years the paint was beginning to peel and the mortar was coming loose. Some of the statuary was missing, never getting around to being replaced. The foundation was beginning to sag, but so was he, so he guessed that didn't make him and the manor so different.

Stevens had done what he could over the years, but he couldn't fight against the march of time. Dupliss had refused to fix the house when he moved in. For him it looked fine, but Stevens had seen the manor in its glory days. He would have used his money to restore it, but he had been raised in the beliefs that you didn't mess with something that didn't belong to you. It was a damn shame that house would never see those days again.

He and the house were slowly dying together. Something about that didn't

sit right with him, the feeling that had been growing in his chest nagged at him. Why should he have to remain? He had enough money and he certainly didn't owe Dupliss any loyalty. Why was he staying instead of finding a nice place of his own to enjoy his fading time? Was it because that was what he had always done? Was it too late to change?

As the soft darkness of the night settled over him, Steven sat on his porch chair. Something he couldn't quite name had grown inside him; some unknown sense of something had called him to act. He was afraid of the change leaving the manor would bring, but it was time. It was either stay and serve others until he passed or to break away and enjoy his twilight years. He sat there for a while more, enjoying the calm air and reminiscing, knowing it would be the last night he would be here. As the star's silver fire was snuffed out by a rosy light from the east he went inside and began to pack.

The next morning, Stevens' old station wagon was filled to its ceiling with the belongings he couldn't leave behind. He had fixed himself breakfast and had walked up the stairs to the third floor, carrying the old tools he had used in his younger days as a groundskeeper. He had expected Melpomene to be shocked at what he was carrying, but she sat on her pallet, dark hair shining, blue eyes glowing as she smiled a knowing smile. He crouched beside her and began to work on the chain, unsure of what she would do when she was freed. "Just to let you know, I still don't want any of that stuff you offered me." The iron link gave way under the force of the hammer and chisel.

She stood, brushing herself off as she did so. She smiled at him again. "I already have given you something in return." She smiled. There was a rush of air that stirred the curtains and she was gone. Stevens swore he felt a brush of lips on his cheek and a voice whisper in his ear "the inspiration to change". But as time passed he was no longer certain.

He left the manor that day, never looking back. He drove and drove, filling up his tank twice, until he reached an area he liked the look of. The same day he arrived he had bought a small cabin near the lake, plunking the entire amount down on the corner much to the shock and awe of the amazed realtor. Stevens spent the rest of his days serving no one but himself. He walked around the lake, read his novels and ventured into the nearby little town on occasion. The last time he had went to get his groceries he had saw a tabloid with Dupliss' picture on the cover. "WORLD FAMOUS AUTHOR GOES BUST," the headline declared. "AUTHOR'S FAILED ATTEMPT AT SUICIDE AFTER ANOTHER OF HIS NOVELS FLOPPED. DETAILS INSIDE."

Stevens hadn't bothered to read more. Dupliss had got what was coming to him, according to what Melpomene had said. None of that affected Stevens though. He was free. He enjoyed his days in quiet comfort and after the sun had set and he retired for the night, he dreamed. Often it was of Melpomene and of other women dancing and singing, their voices raised in joy so beautiful that salt tears stained his pillow.

NOT SO LITTLE DREAMS

BY MICHELLE AIELLO

The little girl,
With not so little dreams.
Seems lifeless now,
As she lies down to sleep.

She prays that the lord,
Will give her the strength,
To remain strong, pure, and sane.
As she progresses through the upcoming
days.

Lying in silence, alone with her thoughts,
The darkness creeping in.
A tear streams down her cheek,
The usual nightly routine.

No one knows,
That she lives this way.
That she fakes a smile each day,
And cries herself to sleep.

No one knows,
That she acts as if there is no pain.
That she listens to others problems,
As her own eat her up inside.
The little girl is not yet a woman,
With her eyes now glazed.
She glances back to her not so little
dreams,
That now seems so far away.

REFLECTION

BY LAURA MESSER

There are creases now
around his eyes
where the skin was once smooth—
a battle scar of the wise,
or, at least
that's what his father
used to say.
But, still, when he gazes
at his dim reflection
He watches as he grows—
younger!

The miracle unfolds
and his heart swells with joy.
The man staring back at him
is bald, sagging, and ashen
in the pale moonlight.
Inside, though,
he is a child.
quick to smile and in awe
of the world around him.

In the fall,
he stops to gaze longingly
at a leaf—
and gropes at the slant
of the sunlight through
a tree ablaze with color
like a child in a 3D movie.
In the spring,
he looks at the buds on
those trees with the
same anticipation
that he felt 23 years ago
in April before his son
was born.

He grins and hums as he thinks—
Ah, but I was so much older then,
I'm younger than that now.

LAKE HOUSE

BY RACHEL BOES

The best days
Are summer days
That begin after the morning is gone
And proceed with dancing in the kitchen before breakfast.

And later
A few hours
Spent reading in the chaise,
Listening to the water lap at the shoreline behind me.

A quick rain
May drive me inside
The afternoon spent watching the thick drops stream down the glass door,
Reviving the waning foliage.

Supper is light
And best if followed with ice cream
While sprawled across the sofa
And watching Casablanca.

And before long
The warmth of my skin
From hours in the sun
Lulls me into a sweet fatigue.

ATLAS'S BURDEN

BY LAURA WILTSHIRE

Beautiful, sweet,
and full of deceit.
Restricted, refined,
and desperately free.
Broken promises,
Perfect lies,
I should've known
that you'd be my demise.
I hold the world in my hands-
Yet, here I am- I am
Alone.

I am betrayed.
I hold your secret, your key.
Trapped, confined, but totally free-
'tis the truth that separates me.
My head in caelum,
my feet- infernum.
This is the weight, the load, the baggage.
This is the pain, the hurt, the shame-
I hold the weight of Atlas's Burden.

I MAY NOT BE

BY MELISSA HIRNER

I may not have heaps of gold,
But I am the richest person you'll meet.
I may not live on a mountain,
But I have the best view from my seat.
I am rich in family and friends,
None can compare to my wealth.
I am in harmony with nature,
And it shares in my health.
I may not be a doctor,
But I can heal.

I may not be a prayer warrior,
But I know how to kneel.
The medicine I bring,
Is from God above.
And I can heal,
By a simple prayer full of love.
I may not be the most faithful,
But I trust in God with every breath.
I may not be a missionary,
But I will share His love until my death.

THE RECEIVER, THE PERCEIVER, AND THE DECEIVER

BY MICHELLE AIELLO

The eye, the looking glass, the window to the world.
The receiver, the perceiver, the deceiver.
The sponge of your own.
Absorbing memories throughout your life.
Your eyes, the lenses,
Capturing images as life passes by.
Gathering images, representations of truth,
Our perceived visions of a perceived reality.
We question our eyes to the fullest extent.
And question whether there is more to life,
Than what our eyes perceive.
The eye, our sight, we find it a necessity,
Yet others wander within the shadows
Unable to witness the visual world.
Are the images perceived reality?
Maybe the pictures we see deceive us.
And perhaps it's the only the blind that witness reality.
The reality only seen when you look beyond the eye,
The reality seen only by those with the inability to see.

THIRD PLACE PROSE

DARE TO BE HAPPY

BY RACHEL BOES

"And so you dare to be happy. You do that thing. You dare."—Steven Millhauser

Their laughter echoed down the empty hall when they stumbled off the elevator, startling an older couple standing a few feet away.

Taking note of their presence, Claire subdued her laughter and attempted to right her disheveled appearance. Straightening the bust of her strapless red dress, she brushed his hands from her hips and set a steady pace down the hallway, counting the door numbers as she passed. 723. 725. 727.

When the staccato of her heels on the polished marble was interrupted by the *ding* of the elevator doors closing again, she felt his warm hands grip her silk covered hips once more and pull her body back against him.

He dropped a soft kiss on her bare shoulder, and then continued up the smooth column of her neck. When he reached the hinge of her jaw, he spun her around so she was facing him and backed her up against the door.

"I'm so glad you called," he murmured pressing kisses down to her chest, his teeth grazing her collarbone as he went.

She gasped at the sharp contact, slipping her hands under the lapels of his suit jacket and running her fingertips along the soft, fine cotton of the dress shirt underneath. She felt his breath hitch and his forehead dropped to her shoulder when she reached the waist of his pants and continued down, dipping into his pockets in search of the key card. Grinning, she retrieved it with her right hand and pressed it into his chest.

He reluctantly removed one hand from her body and jabbed the card into the door, ripping it back out hastily, only to have the electronic lock flash red. He groaned in frustration, repeating the action to no avail.

Placing her small hands on his shoulders, she pushed him away from her and took the key card from his hands. Spinning around, stumbling a bit in her heels, she inserted the key card and withdrew it with a small flourish. She grinned as the lock clicked and flashed green, and pushed the handle to let herself into the hotel room. Taking a few steps into the room, she paused and turned to call over her shoulder, "Coming?"

The soft red glow of the alarm clock on the end table flashed 3:27 in the darkness when Claire awoke. This always happened when she was with him; sometime, in the early hours of the morning, she would wake up with a heaviness washed over her, a tightness in her chest that reminded her she still had a conscience. At first, her heartbeat would sound slow and heavy in her ears, reverberating in a calming, almost numbing manner.

In these moments, the soft comforts of home invaded her thoughts; the smell of the fabric softener she used on their linens, the plush Berber carpet they'd installed last winter under her bare feet, her favorite coffee mug resting upside down on the counter next to the coffee pot, clean and ready for its next use.

The longer she laid there in the strange bed of a quiet hotel room – before the

rest of the world woke up and provided some distraction – the more anxious she became.

Eventually, she carefully removed his arm from her waist, slid out of the bed, and padded softly into the bathroom. She flipped on the light and gazed at her reflection in the mirror for a moment, running her fingers over the small mark forming on her collar bone. She grimaced and her hands began combing through her auburn curls to pile them on top of her head. Securing them with a pin she retrieved from her small clutch propped on the counter, she proceeded to carefully slip her wedding rings from her finger and set them in the soap dish on the bathroom vanity, before turning on the shower tap and stepping under the spray. She stood there for a while, letting the warm water run down her body.

When the water ran cold, she exited the stall, and wrapping a plush hotel robe around her body, she left the bathroom. Stepping back into the room, she paused at the foot of the bed wondering if she should try to lie back down, or maybe slip her dress back on and return to her own room two floors above. Watching his chest rise and fall with slow, easy breaths, she discarded both ideas and moved across the room. Stepping through the sliding glass doors, she walked out onto the small balcony adjacent to his suite.

The hotel that was hosting the conference they were attending that weekend was nestled well into downtown Chicago, a safe distance from her quiet neighborhood in the suburbs. She took a deep breath, inhaling mostly smog, but the chill of the night air provided the shock she needed to get a grip on her nerves.

She walked out to the edge of the balcony and leaned her forearms on the thick concrete of the railing, looking out over the skyline. For the most part, all she could see was building after building, and streets lined with taxis, still whizzing around despite the hour.

The stark contrast of this scene to that of the neatly uniformed rows of houses that surrounded her home was refreshing in that moment; a city littered with the noise and activity of people living, as opposed to the quiet streets lined with sedans and rose bushes, the only real noise created by the shrill bells on children's bicycles late in the afternoons before their mothers called them home for dinner.

When she and her husband had first moved into their complex, she was comforted by those scenes – by the families walking their dogs around the small lake, the mothers jogging, pushing stroller in front of them, and the little girls playing hopscotch on the sidewalk in front of their houses. She had hopes for her future—their future—in those scenes.

Those dreams were fading now.

She straightened up once again, and then turned and slipped back into the hotel room.

"This weekend was fun," he said at breakfast the next morning.

The pair had ventured a few blocks down from the hotel and found a small 'Mom and Pop' diner with sticky vinyl seats and pungent odor of grease, but which appeared devoid of tourists. They settled into a small booth in the back of the restaurant and ordered a quick breakfast, enjoying the last few hours they could spend together before she had to catch her train.

"It was," she agreed with a soft smile before taking another bite of her omelet.

"The conference—that was great," he said with a teasing smirk, before turning back to his plate.

Claire rolled her eyes; they had both only attended one session of the communication seminar her boss had sent her on before she noticed his name on the directory of participants, and decided to give him a call. "We're both screwed if anyone asks about the speakers," she stated wryly.

"So worth it," he chuckled, shoveling another forkful of pancake into his mouth.

She smiled, casually looking between his face and her fork as she softly pushed bites of food around her plate.

Seizing a rare moment in which her guard was down, he reached across the table to take her hand in his. Watching his thumb slowly stroke over her fingers, he said, "Really though, tell me why we can't do this for real?"

Her body tensed and he looked up. "We've been through this already," she said, pulling her hand away from him.

"Claire—"

"No, we're not talking about this," she said shortly, "You've already brought it up and we've already decided that we can't do that."

"We didn't decide anything," He responded angrily. "You decided that this can't work, but damnit, Claire," he dropped his voice, "You're the one who called me again."

"Do you want me to stop calling you?" she asked defiantly. "Because I can stop if you want. We can leave here today and pretend like none of it ever happened." Her heartbeat sped up at the thought, but she couldn't determine if it was from relief or remorse.

"No—shit, I don't know," he blew out a frustrated breath. "No, I don't want this to end, but I can't keep doing this if there's no future, Claire. I'm thirty-two years old, and I want things...I thought you wanted them too."

"I did," she said after a long pause. "But, I don't know what I want anymore."

"If I'm not it, I need you to let me know," he said staring intently into his plate.

"Okay."

Claire fumbled to get her key in the door as she tried to maintain her balance with the three large bags hung precariously on her shoulder. She cursed as one of the totes shifted, sliding violently down her arm and snapping against her wrist as she finally got the key to turn in the stubborn lock.

Pushing the door open with her shoulder, she immediately dropped the bags next to the bookcase in the living room, and rather than the warm flood of relief she was expecting upon arriving home after this tumultuous trip, she felt her stomach drop and shoulders tense as she surveyed the living space of her home.

One of the plush cream cushions of her sofa was propped haphazardly against the coffee table in front of the television that was displaying the logo of her husband's gaming system. There was a pizza box sitting on top of the coffee table, accompanied by three empty soft drink cups, and many more empty beer and soda cans littering her normally clean space.

She walked further into the room and plopped onto the sofa. Sinking back into the cushions, she closed her eyes and thought back to the state she'd left her home

in Thursday evening; the carpet fresh with clean lines generated from the vacuum, the afghan neatly folded over the back of the couch, the room filled with the warm smell of the apple spice candle she burned during her afternoon of packing. This was the image she'd carried with her throughout the weekend, the place that haunted her during those evenings in the hotel, the home that she rushed so desperately to return to this evening. However, it appeared in her absence, this place had been overrun by a fraternity.

She heard the toilet flush from the hallway, and the quick rush of water from the tap being turned on and off rapidly before her husband emerged from the bathroom. He smiled when he spotted her. "Hey babe, did you just get in?" he said as he walked over to her and took her hands to pull her off of the sofa and into a hug. She wanted to be angry, but her own conduct over the weekend forced her to swallow the lump in her throat.

"Yep," she responded weakly, though she allowed the embrace. "Daniel..." she started scanning the room again, "What happened in here?"

"Hey, sorry about that," he responded quickly, releasing her from his arms and beginning to collect debris from the coffee table and taking it into the kitchen where she heard him unfurling a garbage bag.

"I just had a couple of the guys over last night, and hadn't gotten around to picking up yet," he called from the kitchen. "How was your weekend?" he asked, poking his head out of the kitchen as he continued to clean.

Wonderful. Overdue. Heartbreaking.

She knew the pang she felt upon his question was a product of her own guilt rather than of his suspicion, so she cleared her throat and replied, "Fine," in a steady voice. When he didn't inquire further, she exhaled and began collecting more cans from the table, carrying them into the kitchen to be tossed.

He was transferring dishes from the counter into the sink as she added the cans to the garbage bag.

"Did you make any head way on the job search?" she asked quietly, keeping her eyes on her hands. She looked up when he stopped clanging dishes together in the sink, and she saw that he'd tensed at her question.

He stood, his hips pressed against the counter, his hands gripping the edge of the sink hard enough to turn his knuckles white. "Babe, it was the weekend," he said stiffly.

"I know, but you could still be looking, lining things up for the week," she countered softly, carefully moving to stand next to him.

He turned to face her and stepped away from the sink, his eyes glaring hard at her. "I've been looking for months, Claire. Nothing new popped up in the last three days that won't be there tomorrow," he said roughly, before stalking out of the kitchen.

Claire held her breath, leaning against the counter for support until she heard the bedroom door slam at the end of the hall, and then deflated. She looked around her kitchen longingly for a moment, and then began filling the sink with warm soapy water. She rolled up her sleeves and, in a reflexive motion, made to pull her wedding rings off her left hand to set them in the dish resting on the windowsill.

Her finger was bare.

She proceeded to wash the dishes and wipe down the white cabinets and dark granite counters of the kitchen overcome with a numbing sense of calm.

Maybe this is the time.

As she worked, she wondered if Jason had discovered them himself or if he would receive a call from the hotel after he'd returned home. Or if, perhaps, the person on housekeeping sent to clean the room after their departure was desperate or greedy enough to slip the platinum set in their pocket to later pawn...

Claire went through the motions of preparing dinner, and setting the small bistro table for two, before walking down the hall and rapping softly on the closed bedroom door.

"Dinner's ready," she called through the wood barrier. When no response was made, she walked back down the hall and sat down at the table, thinking perhaps he had fallen asleep in the past hour. Then, as she spooned some rice onto her plate, she heard the click of the door unlatching and the shuffling of his sock covered feet on the hardwood as he came down the hall. He sat down across from her and surveyed the table for a moment, before saying, "Could you pass the salad?" They ate the rest of the meal in silence.

That evening, Claire took pains in going through her routines; she gave the kitchen another once-over after dinner, and took the book she was reading to the overstuffed armchair in the corner of the living room and attempted to read for an hour before she decided it was futile and began turning off the lights and making sure the front door was locked.

When she entered the bedroom, he was already stripped down to his boxers, watching a syndicated sitcom on the television. She grabbed her night shirt and went to the bathroom to wash her face and change. When she re-entered the bedroom, her bedside lamp was the only light remaining as he had flipped off the television and gone to sleep.

She looked at his form, rolled onto his side so that his back was to her when she went to sit on the edge of the bed. She rubbed the same lavender scented lotion onto her hands that she'd been using for years, hoping the familiar smell would trigger a conditioned response to ease her body into sleep, to no avail.

After she flicked off her lamp, she lay awake, wide-eyed, in the dark for hours before the sounds of his even-breathing beside her began to feel suffocating; like he was stealing each steady breath straight from her own lungs.

She slipped out of the crisp white cotton that plagued her the previous nights, and crept quietly back into the living room. She grabbed her cell phone from her purse and then settled herself back into the soft red velvet of the over-stuffed chair in the living room, turning the phone over in her hand, contemplating making the call.

He didn't give her much time to worry over it though. At 11:43, her phone vibrated in her hand, and she reflexively accepted the call, grateful she didn't have to make the first action herself.

"The hotel called," he said quietly, in a controlled manner that instantly made her stomach drop.

His tone made her feel as though she swallowed dry cotton.

"Before I got home," he finished.

"What?" she gasped, a soft strangling sound escaping the back of her throat.

"Yes. Karen is staying with her mother until we can work something out, contact a lawyer. She wants a divorce. Claire, this is our chance," he pleaded.

Her heart fluttered wildly in her chest. His acceptance of the situation pained

her, as she was forced to confront the consequences of her own deceit.

"He was my best friend once. I can't leave him now, it wouldn't be right," she responded quietly.

"It wouldn't be *right*?" he asked angrily. "We've been sneaking around for months, Claire. Sneaking around like two teenagers that have nothing more at stake than a broken curfew," he sighed. "I know we didn't go about it in the best way, and I'm sorry for that, but I've been more honest with you, more honest with myself these past eight months than I've been in years. Every minute we've spent together since August has been stolen and rushed and came with a fair dusting of guilt, but I still feel like I came out of it a better man."

She inhaled sharply and covered her mouth with a clammy hand. The pair sat in heavy silence for a few long moments.

"Don't you feel better, Claire?" he asked.

"I don't know," she whispered brokenly.

After a moment, he cleared his throat and said in a quiet, business-like manner, "Then I guess I'll have a messenger send the rings over to you tomorrow morning. If he asks, you were having them cleaned."

"Jason—"

"Good luck, Claire," he said briskly, hanging up the phone.

LAND-MINE

BY LAURA WILTSHIRE

i don't need promises,
i don't need blood.
i need something else;
to be sure of your love.
while it's true that nothing
is guaranteed to last,
i can't decide if what i need is you-
if it's you i want-
or if i'm even any good for you.
i can't let go.
i can't move on.
i can't hold on,
i think i'm holding you back.
you're my life-line,
my land-mine,
the bane of my existence.
i never knew that love
could feel like this.

THE REALEST

BY KATELYN RAPP

Laughing wildly, running through the forest without shoes, just like she always had. Moss tickled under her feet as the soothing, cool current swept over them, just like it always had. Looking up, she saw a stunning blue sky accented with blinding rays of yellow, beautiful just as it always had been. The forest floor felt the same to her wandering feet, the water felt the same to her restless soul, the sun felt the same to her free spirit, and she was convinced that the world would always look the same through her unblemished perception. Other people may change, her life could be turned upside down, but she would never grow up. Just as the soil was firm and moist, just as the stream was steady and cool, just as the sun was hot and bright, she would stay the same. Time could continue right on, but she would simply stand on the shoulder of the tracks and wave.

"You'll change your mind," they all said with a condescending smile. "You'll change your mind." But she just wouldn't. She was so in love that she never wanted to leave where she was. She had fallen in love with the feeling of laughter: how it started as a tingle on her lips then moved down to her throat in a tight bundle, eventually reverberating in her stomach right before it flew out in a frenzy of colorful ecstasy. She had fallen in love with being silly and having fun, and wasn't ready to sacrifice that to the pressures of life. So even as she gained years, she denied that she was older, and held on to the thread-barren blanket of childhood.

Then it hit. She had no one—everyone had moved on without her, and she felt alone. If laughter was the best feeling in the world, loneliness was the worst. It's not that she was alone that bothered her, it was that if she didn't want to be alone, there was no one to not be alone with. They still smiled their teenager smiles, but they weren't real. Their mouths were the red, glossy color of blood. "It represents the death of their freedom," she thought angrily. Their eyes were dark like evil—the evil of pretended perfection and masked hearts.

What had they abandoned her for? Things that she never dared think about. She blamed them. Her laughter had faded, her happiness diminishing with it. Why? Because of them. Because they had departed on the Train of Time months ago, without even saying goodbye. "LET THEM GO!" she thought. "It's not *my* happiness that's being carted away with time." She thought she was strong enough to hold onto her vitalizing laughter and her empty hatred at once, but they were stretching her, pulling her further and further away from herself.

Only one thing felt like laughter had used to, and that was crying. She walked. She felt the water. She saw the sun. She relished in her tears. She thought of everything she'd lost—her friends, her genuine joy, her unadulterated view of the world, her essence. Her feet lost the desire to wander. Her soul was no longer restless and didn't desire adventure. Her spirit was caged, imprisoned in a confusion and depression. Everything had changed. Even her.

Life had lost its luster. She had been forced to grow up, forced by such a cursed thing called the world. Her eyes were heavy from too many tears and not enough sleep. Her body was weak from being crumpled up like a tissue. Her heart, which had once been full of rich soil and fresh water and vivid sunshine, was hollow. Who was there to love if she couldn't love herself? And how could she love herself? Who could love a girl who had grown up against her will? She smiled a fake smile and laughed a vacant laugh.

The true love that had been so close to her was calling her back, but her sorrow-filled mind wouldn't hear. There was no correlation between growing up and being in love with laughter.

She decided not to care. "If the world tries to take me, I'll just take it back. I will resign from my desire to be young, and I will grow up," she thought. So she did. She relinquished the thing most significant to her and tried to spin the hands of the heartless clock forward. Growing up could not break her, she would, instead, fit the mold exactly. Involuntarily.

This decision was not hers. A cruel blend of hurt and anger folded their perverse fingers around her once-free spirit and took control. Slowly, gradually, yet in an instant, they turned her into what she once hated—to what she still hated. Blinded by deceptions, she continued living secretly resentful against the world. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. You gotta do it 'cause it makes you feel good." And it did—it did make her feel good, a shallow kind of good. Until one day.

She went to the creek. She ran there, barefoot. She felt the familiar soil under her familiar bare feet. She stepped in. She felt the familiar current flowing steadily against her bare ankles. She looked up. She saw the familiar saffron shining down from the familiar sapphire and onto her face. And teasing about her lips was the familiar tingle of laughter—her lost love. Suddenly, it was more than a tingle, but a robust flavor of childhood unexpectedly thundering into her soul. She walked further, and lay down in a pasture—the bed of nature.

She fell asleep in a bed that wasn't her own, and she woke up as a person that was exactly her. Turns out, she'd been denying that recently. She'd been denying who she was. And she woke up in this bed that was not her own as a person that was exactly her, and she decided some things. "Sometimes," she said to the world, "growing up can hurt. You can make me grow up," she said looking Time square in the eye, "but you cannot stop me from being young and free."

A JOURNEY INTO MYSELF

BY BONGIWE SHONGWE

My life is patterned like a leaf blade;
Different routes leading to different destinies,
My life is a labyrinth on its own;
If I get lost, help me find a way out.

My life is complicated-
Like the veins on a leaf;
Not parallel, but spread-out-
A touch of every aspect of nature.

My life is a constant adventure;
A choice has to be made soon-
Venture out and discover;
Stay put and forever be curious.

My life is like a lesson in class
Nature my teacher and mentor
Sometimes he is hard on me
But, in the end, I'm stronger.

My life is a constant enigma;
Every day brings a new lesson;
Every situation an eye-opener;
Each day a precious gift-
Like the green of a leaf.

**"GO AND MAKE INTERESTING
MISTAKES. MAKE AMAZING
MISTAKES. MAKE GLORIOUS
AND FANTASTIC MISTAKES.
BREAK RULES. LEAVE THE
WORLD MORE INTERESTING
FOR YOUR BEING HERE. MAKE
GOOD. ART."
-NEIL GAIMAN**

