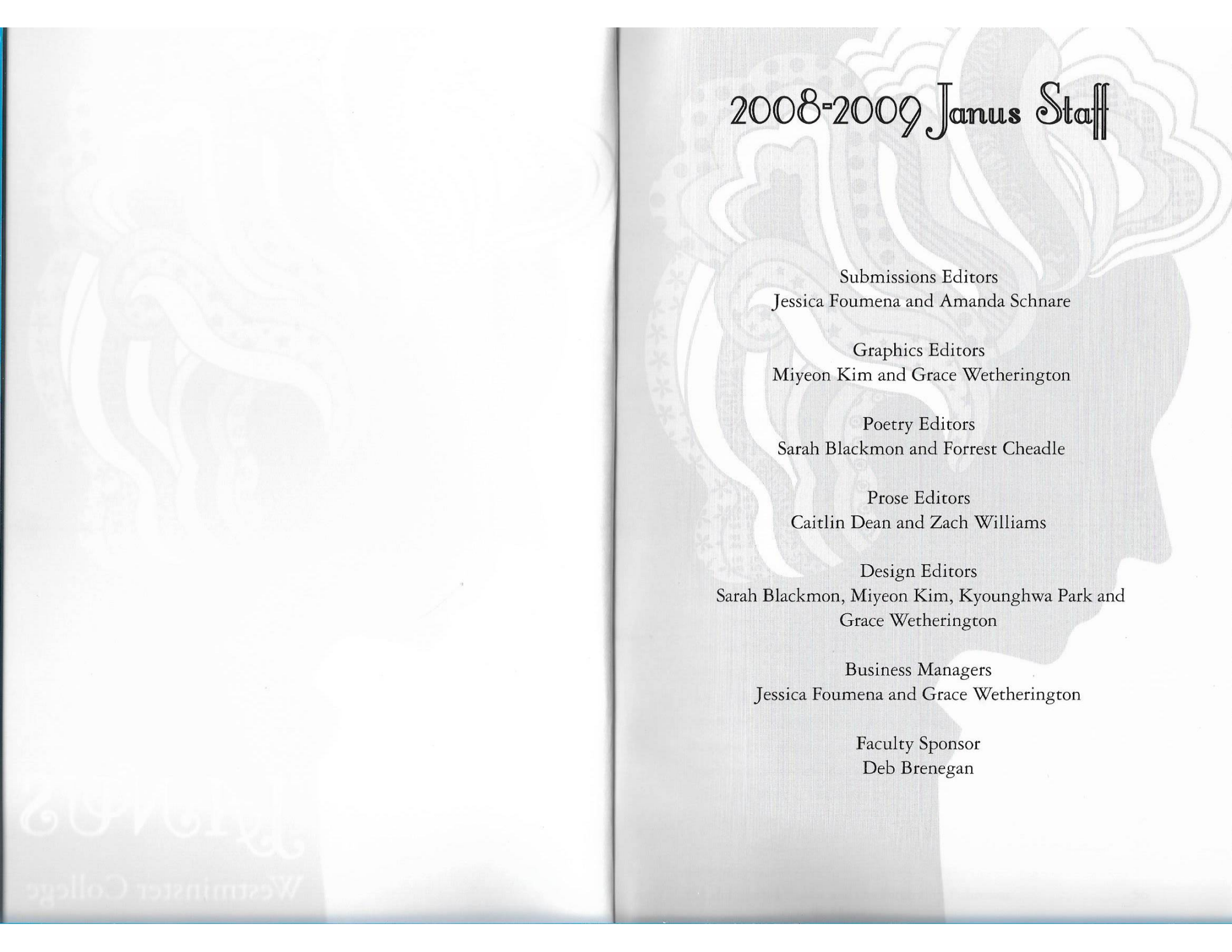




2008-2009 Janus Staff

Submissions Editors

Jessica Foumena and Amanda Schnare

Graphics Editors

Miyeon Kim and Grace Wetherington

Poetry Editors

Sarah Blackmon and Forrest Cheadle

Prose Editors

Caitlin Dean and Zach Williams

Design Editors

Sarah Blackmon, Miyeon Kim, Kyoungwha Park and
Grace Wetherington

Business Managers

Jessica Foumena and Grace Wetherington

Faculty Sponsor

Deb Brenegan

Table of Contents

\$3.43 plus Tax (\$3.69)	3
...Broke the Laws of the Gods	4
Florence, Italy	5
Her Sketch	6
Untitled	9
Once	10
Sucked into Leadership	11
From Beneath a Tree	18
Stuck.	18
Father Jones and the White Nights	19
My House	21
Regrets	21
She Never Looked Back; They Couldn't Forget	23
The Garden Party	26
One Man Standing	28
Sand	32
Snaggle Tooth	33
True Grit.	34
The Argument.	36
Waiting.	36
Iris Prison	37
Colorful Balloons.	38
Ayuthaya.	38
How Was France?	40
Insomniac's Ballad of Flawed Love Slumber.	42
Budapest at Night.	43
Aegri Somnia (A Sick Man's Dreams).	44
Ode to the Modern Universe, J.P.	52
Popular Science	53
Michael Dudley	54
Reborn	55
Fin and Feather Resort and the Paralyzing Politeness.	56

Secrets in a Photo	60
Inside the Berlin Reichstag	63
Dresden	63
The Game of World Domination	67
No More Heroes	68
By the Ocean	71
Surviving	72
Miracles and Stuff, and Horses	72

\$3.43 plus Tax (\$3.69)

Patrick Lee Clark

Dear Camel Cigarettes,

You and I know about my addiction.
But since, that's old news,
Let me share with you some good news. Although,
This task will be hard,

I have a new reason to drop cigars.
My tobacco friend,
I'm experiencing love!

Not just the romantic type of love though,
UNCONDITIONAL
Is the healing type of love best for me.
That love is too sweet.
It makes me feel good without condemning
It's the type of love
That continuously supports me even when
I have no money.
It's the type of love
That doesn't believe in reciprocity

"I will be your friend
Regardless of your cigar scent, I'm a friend!"

So, out of these five dollars, here's your percent.
But please, remember
After this, that's it!
This girl undoubtedly loves me.
This guy undoubtedly loves me enough
To walk with me as I try to quit. So,
Imma use the remainder of my funds
To buy a pack of Double Mint.

P.S. Cigarettes,
Eventually, there will be a permanent

goodbye. Until then,
You might win some, but I won't stop trying.
Unconditional love keeps me flying.

PLC

...Broke the Laws of the Gods

Clayton Prewitt

Today I saw a creature
Today I saw life, no Death!
Today I saw what was and what is.
Two face showing its grimacing ways
there is no feeble way in that of nature.
Always pungent, always pure
Today I saw contaminated energy

You are right, now that I think
Energy can not be defiled or contaminated
Only the vessel in which energy is carried
can be afflicted

That Cat still craved the sun,
still craved love and compassion,
no not That Cat, that energy!
Disease stricken the vessel is
to where does that lead us?
KNOWWHERE, the hole!
complacency is insignificant, vigor is
But Truth, ah now that is special, that is True!

Florence, Italy

Kristen Bail



Photo by Allison Gerli



Keith Stegall
First Place, Prose

Everyone thought that she was a slut, which, of course, she was. She would catch their stares at the office and smile secretly when they were looking down at her chest. Today she wore a white dress two sizes too small and pink lipstick not quite the color of her nipples, which six men from her building alone had seen in the past couple months. She was not ashamed of her sluthood. In fact, she took pride in it. Not many women her age (twenty-seven or twenty-three, depending on whether you asked her or not) could boast of such a quantity of lovers—or lusters, rather—to say nothing of the quality, which would vary by specimen but never quite deviate beyond the level of her experience and expertise. After each encounter she would lie back and think about a dream she had when she was seven—she walked without legs, carried away from a bleeding street by an angel. Then she would laugh, usually aloud. Her recent partner would seldom question the laughter. He really didn't care, just as much as she didn't. They had played their parts and could go on with their lives, scratching off another tally mark on the growing list of debauchery. Some had questioned, though. Some didn't enjoy being laughed at after the greatest performance of their middle-aged lives. She would tell them that they tickled, and they would shut up, angry in the face and leave. She would laugh harder, then. Men were such simple creatures, really—controlled by their loins. Life was much easier being a slut, she thought. She could overcome any problem, as long as a man was involved. She enjoyed the power that came with giving herself to the stupid brutes. At work the day after, she might bump into the guy at some point, and he would always make it awkward, trying to tell her he had a “good time with you last night” and “maybe we could do it again sometime?” No, thank you, sir. Sir. Sure, it was sexy, but it implied the bitter age difference. Sir. They would grumble, angry in the face and leave. She smiled secretly. So easy. Honestly, a great many of them would have gone by forgotten had they not brought attention to themselves the next morning. Of course, she never really paid attention to their faces, or even their bodies for that matter. They were there to be used and discarded, like the filthy condoms that would spill in her trash can. Then they would ask for a smoke and she would laugh. Smoking is gross, sir. Sir. They would grumble, angry in the face and leave. She smiled secretly. So easy.

While she thought of her dream—her special, twenty-or-sixteen-year-old dream (depending on whether you asked her or not)—she would go down the list of encounters, places and positions, anything meaningful or distinctive. They all seemed to run together, which she was fine with. Like a day of work or an episode of a TV show; no meaning outside the context of the rest of them. Another day at the office. Another night with another faceless, bodiless man. She would go down the list and evaluate them—the ones she could remember—as opposed to herself. She would always find them lacking, and increasingly more so as her list grew. Not one man had satisfied her, truly satisfied her. Even if the performance itself was fine, they would always find a way to screw things up. Either trying to look directly into her eyes or talk first (always something bumbling, awkward, and completely unnecessary) or blushing. One of them even told her that he loved her, for God's sake. She laughed, uncontrollably. When she was done, he had gone, which was fine. Of course, she ate all of it up, but it just made her view of men that much more of a desperate joke. Love, seriously.

She had been a slut just about ever since she could quite remember—fourteen or fifteen or sixteen, perhaps. She had forgotten her first time, all but a faint memory of a blue or green tattoo on the guy's chest. It may have been her second or third or fourth, but she knew that it was an early one, so she just called it the first and was fine with it. It didn't really matter anyway. She seemed to remember that some kid at school—a senior, she supposed—asked if she wanted to do it after school. She said sure. She had never really thought about it before, but it really made a lot of sense. Afterward, she knew that this was to be her life, her identity.

Love. Sex, sure. It wasn't pretty or glorious like the romantics would have you believe. It was simple, like anything else, like watching TV or sipping coffee or taking a nap. It was actually kind of disgusting, primal. Sometimes comical, and even, at times, ridiculous. The nice thing would be to not laugh. But she wasn't a nice person. Many wouldn't—couldn't, she imagined—continue after she let loose a gale of her terrible laughter. She didn't mind. That wasn't the point, really, to finish. In fact, she much preferred to end it in that manner. It wasn't quite as messy, and she still got what she wanted in the end. Although, in a way, something was lost. The man trying to talk or do something clever after the fact, the sweet rejection the next morning; all lost if she gave in to her laughter before the end came. It didn't really matter, though; not in the end; not when you really thought about it for a bit.

Sex, sure. Love, though? Not likely. Not in her experience, and she presumed not in anyone else's. It was a joke. A desperate joke to entice the young (whom she believed she still belonged to). Playing emotions and duping the naive. A devious, societal mechanism, perhaps, or an old wives' tale, an urban myth. And that was all. That was all it could be, she reasoned. A ploy to encourage marriage and children, cogs and wheels, pulleys and levers, and so on, and that was all. And she would have nothing to do with it. She couldn't imagine being tethered to one of the beasts for any length of time, and certainly not the rest of her life. And children? Please.

She had never been in love. Of that much she was certain. Of all the men she had had, none had seriously struck her as anything more than a plaything, a pretty string to bat around for a bit before the ends unraveled, split, gathered dirt, and fell limp, lifeless, and onto the next one. Every once in while, if she fancied a little bit of bored, meaningless fun, she would tie the string around her wrist or ankle and wear it until she got tired of it or until it actually became used to or attached to her, whichever came first. Then she would toss it carelessly into a trash can on the next corner, as carelessly as flipping channels, with about as much regard to the man's emotions as he had for hers, she imagined.

Emotions. Of course, they didn't exist. It was all an act, every little smile, every little lie, every stolen line. The hugs, the holding hands, the playing with the hair, the dinners and hints and and and. All they wanted was to get down her pants, or so they thought. She knew better, however. She knew that most of the fun was in the chase, so she acted deliberately, cutting them off mid-hunt. If they were to drop her off at her door after a first date, she would invite them in. It shouldn't have caught any of them off guard, really, knowing or knowing of her. But too often, they fell into the trap of expectations. Of a night of satisfying sex, of a talking relationship, of a meaningful future. And too often they found themselves trying to catch a cab in the middle of the night, shirt untucked, shoes untied, red in the face, and left her in her room, thinking of her dream, laughing to herself, and going back over her life's list. It was all so easy.

Too easy, she sighed, as she turned on her side. She turned her lamp off and crawled on top of the covers. A cat outside kept her up for twenty minutes. She hated cats.

Photo by Amanda Henderson



Untitled

Joseph Armendariz

I wish I understood the beauty in leaves falling. To whom are we beautiful as we go?
--David Ignatow

Oh to be
Like a tree
And get more beautiful
As we die;
To block the winds,
Distort its blue
But still enhance the sky.
I want to be
Like a tree
Before and as
I die.

Do you see those rough men stooped
 Over their bar stools, quick slender fingers
 Rubbing notions out of their unshaven chins
 And shuffling their coffee mugs about the
 Counter with some semblance of purpose?
 They were dogs once, in Zanzibar, long ragged
 Snouts working about the refuse of Stone Town
 That they might continue their search one day
 Longer after another long night of avoiding
 The aggressions of sailors who once promised
 Things to their One True Love in the sweet
 Smelling darkness of her father's barn only
 To forget amongst the seductively exotic
 Temptations of Elsewhere and Otherwise.

Photo by Cory Meyer



The waters of the Lake of the Ozarks swirled like a whirlpool. Chilling wind blew the trees hard, bringing with it sheets of rain. People who'd run into the downpour for a matter of seconds came back dripping, their clothes sopping. Branches would crack, trees would fall.

I stood at the edge of a ramshackle porch, watching through tired eyes as nature worked its wonders. A couple dozen teenage boys and dedicated parents had crammed into a rickety building behind me, cuddling with one another and lifesaving equipment. With them was a handful of my staff: young men and women barely older than those they were charged to protect. The door had been blocked by a close friend of mine, who happened to be the largest worker we had.

"What do we do if the tornado touches down?" I asked no one in particular.

My best friend, Spot, looked nervous, his eyes darting to the swirling waters.

Vince, the director of the waterfront, nodded to the water, "Safest place to go is the learners' area. We won't get picked up then."

I looked to the swirling waters, feeling decidedly skeptical. That was our plan? Run into the water? That sounded like the perfect way to wind up dead and soaked. The last thing I wanted was to have my body dripping as it flew through the air, and I certainly didn't want to be the one to have to turn and tell all those people that our brilliant plan for survival involved running into swirling water.

I shivered in my swim trunks.

"Albert, are we getting anything on the radio?" I asked. My eyes darted to our door guard, who held a two-way to his ear. He looked like one of those "special" people you see so often in bad movies: his afro pulled away, and his body shifting to keep warm.

"Nothing yet," he responded, sparing me a glance.

That was about what I expected. I blew out my lips.

"What do we do, Matt?" asked Spot.

"What else can we do?" I responded, looking to him. "We wait it out, hope it goes away."

Not an answer anyone wanted to hear. They wanted me to tell them everything would be fine. Heck, I wanted someone to tell me that. To take the reins of command from me, assure me everything would be okay, and

possibly give me a blanket and some cocoa. But that was apparently my job.

I opened my mouth...

"Take off your shoes," I suggested, bending over. My fingers deftly undid my laces, lifting the two sneakers up. A handful of others remembered the "game" as well, and had already bent over. Those that didn't were quickly figuring things out.

"We just have to keep our shoes together," I repeated. "Not our feet. It's easy, really. Saw it done when I mentored a seminar."

It was hard for me not to sound like a grizzled veteran by now. Four years at Westminster College had given me more training and hands on experience than I'd ever expected. Add on the nationally recognized Boy Scout leadership training, seven years working various camps, pre-teaching experiences, church volunteering, and dozens of other little details, and you have a twenty-one year old who sounds like he'd just returned from Iraq, after his tour of Afghanistan, of course.

We placed our hands in our shoes then lifted, pressing them against our neighbor's. Once we'd formed our strange train, we casually walked the required distance, a smiling supervisor looking on and taking notes.

Notes that could very well decide our future fates. In order to get a vaulted position at Westminster, one must complete "leadership training." This was a two-night, intensive, propaganda-laden affair. We candidates had already gone through the first night, a long-winded barrage of lectures designed to inform us of campus policies and history. Basically everything we'd heard our Freshman year, only dryer.

Now we had to go through "leadership exercises." Which consisted of quizzes, puzzles, and walking with your shoes connected.

I snorted once we'd reached the end, smirking confidently. "That was..."

"...easy. Just fold your arms over your chest," I demonstrated, mimicking a corpse, "and fall back. Make sure to keep your body perfectly straight, otherwise you'll break the line. Don't look at me: either close your eyes or look up. Now, whenever you're ready."

The last person fell backwards off the platform into the waiting hands below. A satisfactory thunk echoed throughout the forest, followed by the sound of golf-claps. I grinned, and headed for the ladder down.

"Nuh uh," grunted the man called Shooter. He pointed to the edge of the tiny platform, "it's your turn now."

I gave him a look which clearly communicated how many different

types of crazy I suspected him of being. "I don't fall well."

"You mean to tell me you just talked all those people through it, and you're not even going to do it yourself?"

I looked over my shoulder, noting the drop: ten feet, tops. I could stand on the forest floor, and reach up to the touch the platform we stood on. If, God forbid, I fell, I'd probably survive; it would hurt like hell, but I'd get up and walk from it.

Every other member of the Great Rivers Council Boy Scout Summer Camp Staff had gone before me. For most of them, I'd been the calming voice that had convinced them to "trust fall" into the waiting arms of their fellow workers. Everyone from the tiniest fifteen year old to Albert, also lovingly referred to as "McBronto." Each one had climbed the ladder, listened to my serene tone, then fallen into comforting arms.

"You don't get it, I didn't even do this when my dad was catching me," I pointed out. I turned to look at Shooter again, "I hyperventilate and cry whenever I even think about falling."

Hyperventilating and crying were about as unmanly as you could get, and not what you wanted to see from your fearless leader.

"Matt, everyone's watching you. I'm not going to make you do anything you don't want to," he waved at the ladder, "you can climb off if you want to. But you've got to try. Show these people what it's like."

I looked down--

"Don't look down."

"Easy for you to say."

"Now, remember what you told everyone else?"

"Get to the edge," I mumbled, shuffling over. I moved as if I fully expected to fall at any time. My muscles had already seized up. Doing anything besides panicking sounded impossible.

I began panting.

"Alright, stop," ordered Shooter. "You're already freaking yourself out."

"No shit."

"Just relax."

I took a deep shaking breath, forcing myself to stop. I knew all the steps. Knew I'd have to cross my hands, roll them up to tuck under my chin, then fall back. So I might have started to freak out a little. To start hyperventilating. Calm was very far from my mind.

"Matt, relax..."

I tried to relax, to put the situation out of my mind. To realize that...

"Everything's going to be alright," Dave, my boss, assured me. He looked relieved, and as happy as he could be, given the circumstances. Hardly anyone had slept the night before, after all.

I tried not to cry.

He'd just called the Scout Executive. The topic of the conversation? Yours truly.

The night before I'd gotten into an altercation with another staff member. An underage staff member. My fate as a staffer lay in that phone call; for that matter, my fate as a human being might very well have lain there. Now that I'd been promised safety, all I wanted to do was crawl back to my bunk and pass out.

"You need to go get changed," ordered my boss.

I looked at him as if he were crazy.

"Just because you had a hard night doesn't mean you get to skip today."

"Waterfront?"

"Waterfront."

I nodded, then went to change. For the rest of the day I'd wear my official BSA uniform shirt over a black tank top, and my blinding orange swim trunks. I'd also wisely purchased water sandals. The perky sun beamed down on me, and things looked to be perfect.

I'd hook up with Albert and Spot, my roommates and long-time friends, and we'd all head down together. We'd merrily tread the steep trail down to the waterfront, laughing and making jokes. The relief was palpable: none of us had expected me to be there, after all.

When we'd arrived we'd all be given our specific jobs, all preparing to test the incoming Scouts' swimming skills. Technically I was the highest ranking person down there, Program Director, overseer of all things program and he number 2 man in the entire camp: a boss at age twenty-one. But in reality I ceded authority to Vince, our Waterfront Director, a hairy man more than double my age. He ran a smooth operation, though you'd never know it from the outside. Everyone laughed and splashed about in the sun, putting on business faces whenever scouts appeared.

A storm came out of nowhere. One moment I'd been leaning against my reach pole, drowsy in the heat, then next, I was shivering and wonder who'd turned out the lights. Clouds formed quickly, and the temperature dropped alarmingly.

"Send the scouts away."

I don't remember if I ordered it or Vince did. But we both knew we

couldn't very well test swimmers in this weather. We quickly pulled our staff to the porch of the waterfront shack, and wearily, warily watched the weather.

The two-way would squawk, informing us that we were under tornado watch. By then we'd begun to figure it out: rain poured down, blurring the scenery, and winds shook the huge trees. I shivered in my swim trunks, tossing my uniform shirt hap-hazardly over my sleeveless torso.

People started arriving, figuring that we were the safest place. Any port in a storm and all that. I knew full well who was supposed to be responsible for all of them:

The guy who hadn't slept last night.

I confidently issued orders everyone. Younger staff members, both male and female, went into the shack, along with several troops of boys, and a sprinkling of worried parents. No one was allowed to be out in the weather, even if they wanted to watch the storm. Well, no one except for me and my direct subordinates: Spot, Vince, Albert, and another Vince we called Pink. Each one of us tried to look confident, though we knew exactly who'd get to die first.

I put Albert in front of the door.

I gave my shirt to a shivering girl.

And I stood near the edge, the winds of the storm buffeting me. Rain hit my skin, miniature bullets signaling my sluggish nerves. I squinted, watching the waters swirl. I couldn't let my anxiety or fear show. Especially with...

...the supervisors looked on as we laughed and completed our tasks. Our color-divided group (teal) quickly finished the little leadership challenges. It came easily for us, like the shoes had before. We'd ended up giving ourselves personal goals. Play the game without taking your shoes off, for example. Another unnecessary layer of difficulty.

I'd like to think I was a leader among leaders. I'd constantly look at the advisors, smiling and hoping they noticed me.

In fact, I don't do well with people I'd never met before. I realized this, and it made my "leadership" sound forced. It had literally killed my score during some official tests, particularly my "camp school" training for the BSA. Now looked to be a repeat performance of that.

I'd earned a high "B" then...

"We need to form something with balloons?"

"How about a big 'W' and a big 'C'?"

That sounded incredibly lame to me, but my greatest artistic en-

deavor was a wingless ceramic duck I'd cobbled together for my mother. So I grabbed tape and helped form two giant letters. Because remarkably: I could spell.

Later I was able to give a better showing of myself. Writing responses had always been a strong point for me, and I easily handled logic puzzles and arguing. I'd be a shoe-in for the job I wanted, especially considering their quasi-affirmative action policy, which gave special consideration to students of different backgrounds, such as commuters, i.e. yours truly. This, along with my senior status, made me just perfect:

Golden.

Of course, I'd later find out I didn't get that job. Too many people had signed up for it, and I ended up...

Falling.

The sensation has always bothered me. Some people joke about it, saying "it's not the fall, it's the sudden stop at the end." Give me plenty of sudden stops, just spare me the fall.

I'm not sure if it's the helplessness, or the sudden feeling in my stomach. Maybe it's just some deep rooted psychological issue. My mother probably dropped me as a baby or something. Regardless, falling truly terrifies me.

Which is why it had taken me several minutes to prepare myself for falling ten feet into the arms of people I trusted most. Shooter had managed to talk me through the stages, though I'm not certain if even he expected me to fall. I'd known the moment he'd called me out that I'd have to do it. I couldn't walk off that platform, not and face all my subordinates later. How could I be expected to give people orders if I couldn't even do something simple like this?

So I'd stood, and blubbered. Babies had more aplomb than me. Tears had streaked my face, and I'd had a full blown panic attack on the edge of the platform. I'd yelled out "Matt falling!" a good three times or so. Finally, I'd simply let myself go backwards.

And get caught.

Later we'd stand in a circle, talking about the events of the night. Everyone had stayed up all night, doing various team-building activities. Activities that bore a remarkable resemblance to certain "leadership games." Though my boss had decided that anyone in upper management had to avoid this activity, so that the lower workers could bond together. I wasn't about to argue: this meant I actually got to sleep that night. In fact, I'd bailed out early, because I hadn't want to climb a tower.

Afraid of falling, remember?

Anyway, we stood in the circle, and the lean ex-marine named Cliff walked us through the night.

"Everyone did impressive work. You learned a lot about each other, and a lot about yourselves. Each and every one of you did your best, and accomplished what you set out to do. Take what you've learned here tonight, and use it throughout the weeks, when you're dealing with Scouts. I have faith in each of you."

Everyone felt good about him or herself, smiling through exhaustion.

"I do want to point out one thing in particular," Cliff leveled a finger at me.

Everyone stared at me, and I suddenly wished I had a good foot or so more height.

"Matt didn't want to fall today. In fact, if it were up to him, he wouldn't have. What he did today he did for you. That's the leader you have. Someone who's willing to do exactly what you do, even if it terrifies him. He's behind you all the way, and you should all respect that."

Later I'd earn the COPE name "Big Balls," for my actions.

I'd really just done it because I cared more for the rest of them than myself, at the time, so, yeah, what Cliff had said. Sure, I'd wanted to finally be able to say I'd done it, but it didn't really matter to me. I was there to help other people, to lead, I guess.

It would be a week later that I'd stare into swirling waters, my exhausted mind racing, wishing someone would sweep in and tell me it would all be alright.

Instead I just ordered my friend to stand at a doorway, and I'd take point, staring into a storm, waiting for it all to be over.

Photo by Liz Jansen



From Beneath a Tree

Hey! Who put these leaves in front of my face?
They are blocking my view of outer space.
But yet, I realize, those leaves are so green;
And there's so much on Earth I've not yet seen.

Stuck

The real truth is not you.
By my boot I hear your tongue
Licking the Pound-given blacking

You never spoke but I always knew what you said
I read your eyes and heard your face
We swam in nothing
Ran into every wall
I sank in sand every night you didn't call

We went home, but you disappeared
You broke my necklace
I cut off my ear

There were never enough hours in the day
For you, for me, for us to just get away
From the smoke clouds, from broken feet
Your lips left a smoldering fire in me

We didn't last too long,
Back in forth is this canoe
You row the wrong way
But if only I knew--

You are the hole in pocket
The gum on my shoe
I tried to scrape you off
But really, it is me that's stuck to you.

Joseph Armendariz

Sarah Blackmon

Father Jones and the White Nights

Anna Cherry

First Place, Poetry

"Utopia," Mom said this word a lot then
sounded like a brand of orange juice
that bird egg color my art teacher used in second grade when we were paint-
ing our class mural
"Cult," Brian and John said, but they weren't even really my friends
and she pulled me out anyway
we were about to use the good paints, but Mom was so happy now
eyes closed humming to the radio
like before Daddy left for Oklahoma, I didn't say anything

I learned black is beautiful and so much more
that school had never taught
He talked about our neighborhoods and I got to
serve soup, feeling so big
Everyone was brown and pale and golden at once
no one ever spit the n-word through horse lipped sneers
and everything He said
was so much bright color, that we started to go all the time
I left each meeting with fireworks in my throat, fingers so slick and fidgety
with hope
me and Mom would stay up all night talking, squeezing hands
she talked really fast through the dark, brushing my head with her smooth
ringed fingers
"Baby, I think this is it, this is truly it. Soon the world is gonna see us—"
every morning was so yellow

Many word boulders—"light,"
"truth," "lies," but mostly "salvation"
everything would end like in the movies
the awful sci-fi movies where a little earth explodes on the screen
and our family was the only safe, the only good
it hurt sometimes, red mark punishments
but I understood
no one else knew, the stupid boys playing ball in the cul-de-sac

who seagull yelled "Billy, throw, Billy throw!" all they thought of, blank paper to me

He loved every one of us

"I never detached myself from any of your troubles, I've always taken your troubles right on my shoulders"

He talked and talked for days

they fed me mushrooms while Mrs. Geometh

put her head between His legs and everyone watched

their faces melted off and the crowd became a breathing

tiger belly, we were not human

and everything He said was true, so pulsing true

with colors that screamed at me and then the walls were screaming,

and I was gone gone gone and the tiger belly was swallowing me up

"How very much I have loved you," He began.

It was time, just like the rehearsals

"We have been so betrayed. We have been so terribly betrayed."

"I tell you get movin', get movin', get movin'"

I was moving, moving, moving forever until I thought

the line would never end

ghost ballroom music played and the babies were crying

"To me death is not a fearful thing; it's living that's treacherous."

I was so scared, but Mom looked so sure

everyone closing their eyes saying "Yes, yes"

I didn't say anything

"Stop this hysterics...we must die with some dignity...lay down your life with dignity do not lay down your life with tears"

my stomach was sick, I was ice

next, next

when I drank down the bitter soap tasting grape stuff

and we laid down together like in a tornado drill

our arms around each other we were holding on

for dear life.

My House

Greg Aubuchon

My house

is drafty and cold.

Sometimes late at night I think the furnace snapping on
is my father's voice.

Half-asleep,

I turn over to the cold side of the bed

It makes me – not think

– remember

Our house

Reading past bedtime with a red plastic flashlight –

Listen for my mother to come home from work

When I could hear my parents downstairs in soft voices,
night voices

Barely audible above the house's silence

and the others sleeping –

there were four of us in that room –

Somehow it didn't seem as crowded as my house
does now

I listen for them to come upstairs –

his steps were always slow and steady,

hers quicker.

I snap the light off – turn over – to the cold side of the bed

and I know it's just the furnace snapping on

Regrets

Caitlin Dean

I don't remember the last time I said I love you.

I can recall every angry word, but I don't remember the last time you smiled
just for me.

It's almost a year now. Since I turned and walked away from you. I never

thought I'd leave my broken heart behind and move on with a shadow of the original. I told myself forget about it and live a new life without you. It worked while I was an ocean away. But now I'm back here, sitting next to you every day. I see you smile and I can't remember what it was like when I made you happy. I can't remember what it was like when you made me happy.

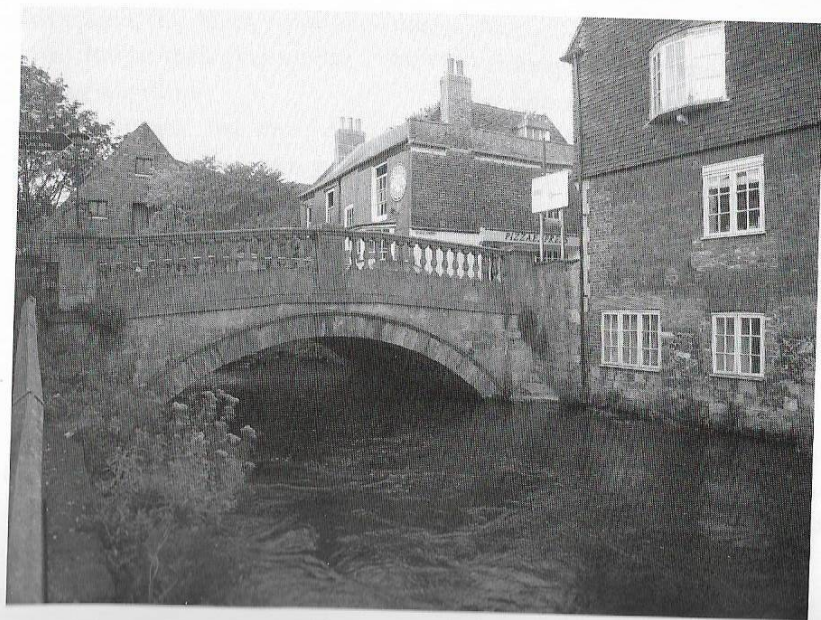
I never thought I'd regret not hearing you say "I'm sorry." I never thought I'd be too proud to apologize for being a bitch. I know I hurt you, I can see it now, even without you here to point it out. But for some reason I can't work up the nerve.

Is it pride? Or is it fear? Fear that we'll repeat our past. I can't fight with you again. I can't look at you in exasperation once more. The same old story wore me out the year before, and I won't stick around for the sequel.

I guess what I'm saying is, I wish we never were. If we never were, you never would have said. I never would have done. It never would have hurt. A year's worth of broken silence is worse than the loneliness never would have been.

I'm sorry I'm not good at apologies. I'm sorry I won't forgive you. I'm sorry I regret loving you.

Photo by Cory Meyer



She Never Looked Back; They Couldn't Forget

Allison Wisniewski

Summary: He tried to ignore it all - the suitcase in the hall, the packed bags by the front door, the half-empty closet in the bedroom ... It would make everything easier, she knew, if she could just forget him. After all, she had been the one to walk away.

When he left the library, he tried to ignore the suitcase in the hallway. On his way to the kitchen, he tried not to see the packed bags gathered near the front door. Just like when he had tried to ignore the bedroom's half-empty drawers and closet this morning.

It became harder to ignore when, entering the kitchen, he saw her.

She just looked up at him, a brief glimpse acknowledging his entrance. Nothing else. No words, no greetings or nods. A quick look before her focus returned to the paper and breakfast.

Such was how it had been for days. Whatever happened to the fire between them, the passion that had sprung suddenly and grown quickly, neither would say. Whether she was trying to ignore it, suppress it, he didn't know. But her words of denial, her claims it was not there any longer - those he knew were false.

Yet anytime he tried to talk to her about them only resulted in arguments.

She just stuck by her decision to leave.

The scraping of a chair across the wooden floor tore him from his thoughts. He looked up just in time to see her hurriedly leave the kitchen, her eyes remaining focused in front of her, her head never turning back to look at him.

It only took him a half-second to follow after her.

"Kate," he said, seeing her standing next to the suitcase, one hand reaching down to pick up the handle.

She still did not turn around to face him.

He took one step closer, but her voice stopped him from going further.

"Sam," she whispered, her head shaking, "don't ... Just don't."

He bit back the angry reply that wanted to break free at first, knowing that it wouldn't help the situation at all. "Will you just look at me?" he muttered.

She didn't say a thing as she lifted the suitcase and headed towards the door, her head shaking the whole time. It was not until she stood before

the now-open door that she whispered an answer.

"I can't."

And she never looked back at him as she walked away.

~*~

She sat quietly at the desk in the hotel's small room. Sparsely furnished, it was barely large enough for the desk and bed, but somehow, the owner had crammed a dresser, a large, hideous armchair, and two, smaller tables inside as well. The sounds of cars on the street below came through her cracked window, and although she looked out of the glass, she didn't take anything in. She didn't see the vehicles as they raced down the pavement; she didn't see the pedestrians as they walked along the sidewalks, bags under their arms and phones to their ears.

Though she looked in that direction, she could not really see anything.

Her thoughts remained on him. She saw his face when he smiled, the glint in his hazel eyes. She heard his laugh, the way his voice would sound as he whispered in her ear. She remembered the way his lips felt as he kissed her, the way it felt when his strong arms wrapped around her, holding her close.

No matter where she tried to focus her thoughts, she could not turn them away from him.

And yet, a part of her wished she could forget him. It would make everything easier because she had been the one to walk away. She had been the one trying to deny everything.

And damn her thoughts for betraying her, damn her heart for not allowing her to forget.

Groaning, she stood up and, throwing her suitcase on the bed, started digging through it. She needed to find something – anything – that would help her mind focus elsewhere. A book, perhaps, one she hadn't read in awhile

...

But the framed photograph that greeted her sight instead was not exactly something that would help her forget him.

She remembered that day, the sights, sounds, and smells of it all clear and vivid in her head. It had not been that long ago – a month or so – but as she sat on that hotel bed, the scarred, wooden frame that protected the picture held loosely in her hands, a part of her felt like it had been decades in the past – another lifetime.

"I never want to forget this," she whispered, her body curled up against his own as they lay together in the bed. Sunlight started to shine through the cracks in the curtains, the dawning of a new day arriving. Turning her head just slightly, she met his own gaze directly.

"Well, then you won't," he answered, a hand pushing a stray brown curl of her hair away from her face as he spoke. He nodded his head towards the object on the bedside table. It was the picture that had been taken earlier that day, as the two of them wandered the shores of the beach. "The photograph will remind you; it'll make sure that you don't forget."

But what if she wanted to forget, damn it?

Put it away, Kate, she thought. Just put ... it ... away ...

Yet her hands didn't move to hide the picture.

~*~

The sudden sound of a car door slamming shut tore his attention from the half-empty bottle sitting on the kitchen table. A glass sat next to the alcohol, though it had long since been abandoned once he opted to drink straight from the bottle itself. There was no one here to stop him, no one besides himself that would even drink the liquid, after all. What was the point, therefore, of pouring his drink into the glass if he was just going to drink the entire bottle anyway?

He just wanted to forget, and this was the best option he had at present.

But the sound of someone driving up to his home had interrupted him, and he rose from his chair, leaving the bottle behind as he climbed the steps to reach the front door. A rumble of thunder sounded, but it was so faint, it was barely heard; the storm would not be coming until much later in the night. Not that he personally gave a damn when it stormed, though; it was not as if he had anything to do. At least, he did not have anything to do that would be influenced by the weather.

He reached the door and with a quick turn of the knob, brought it swinging open.

"Kate?"

At first, he briefly thought that perhaps he'd had more to drink than he had originally thought, that he had already passed his limit and there never was the sound of that approaching car; he never had even left the kitchen. That the entire thing was nothing but a dream, and he would wake up, cursing and throwing the glasses and bottles across the room –

Because she couldn't be here now. Not when she had left, just hours ago, not when he was trying to forget her.

Even if he knew he couldn't. That it was impossible to try and forget what they had.

"Sam."

~*~

As she looked at him now, standing in the doorway, his brown hair

falling loosely around his eyes, she wondered how she ever could have thought she could deny her feelings towards him. How she could have thought that they were not there anymore, how she could have even believed that she had the ability to walk away – and be happy afterwards.

How she ever could have even thought it would be possible to forget him.

"I couldn't do it," she whispered. "I was lying to myself, trying to forget, but I just ... couldn't leave it all behind.

"I couldn't forget."

The photograph in her hands fell to the ground, forgotten, when he didn't let her say another word.

The Garden Party

Alice Burt

Awake with rays of liquid sunlight
In my eyes, tugging them open
Comfortable without my blanket
For half the night
It lays a warm heap on the floor.
I look to my side and see

Nothing.

Only a pillow, not even
A crease in the bed sheets.
Quickly I throw on a second skin
Of lilies and daisies and go out to
Greet my warm awakener
I've brought a jug to water my friends
Their fragile roots absorb every drop
Their petals open and brighten with thanks
I don't want to go back inside
I strain to resist the comforts of my familiar home
I know that inside it's

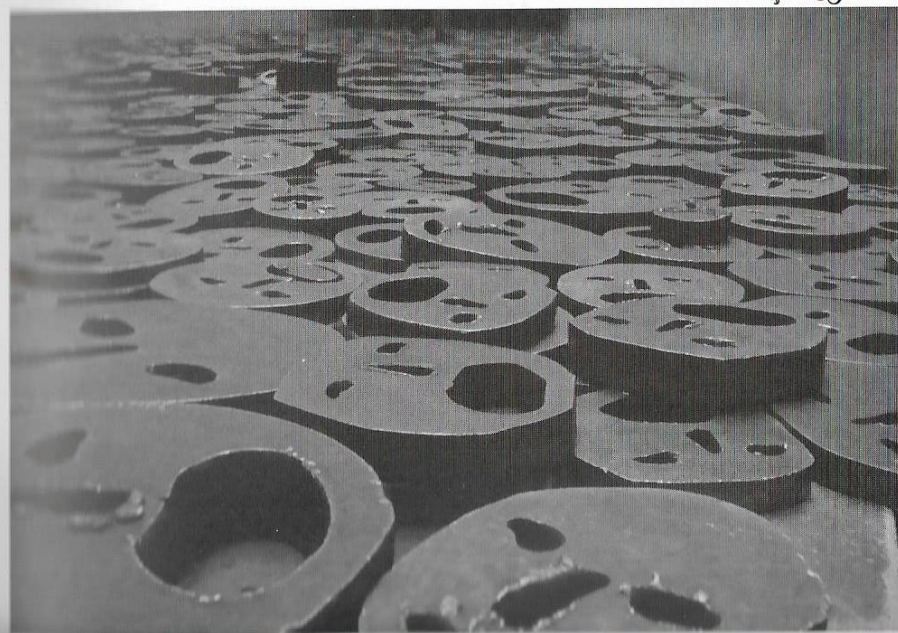
Empty.

Out here is the first of many long and wonderful parties
And I have bright company
And I have the sun,

Photo by Matthew Westphal



Photo by Liz Jansen



—Emily Moore, *Third Place Prose*

Death is a funny thing. Have you ever noticed how a funeral can bring family members together who haven't spoken in years? As I looked through the crowd at my grandfather's funeral, I saw cousins, aunts, and uncles that I'd never even met. All of them were somehow related to my grandfather, but none of them knew him like I did. There was no one in my life that I could relate to better than Grandpa. The two of us were fast friends since I was a boy. Time went on and I grew up, but Grandpa was still the man I admired most. As I stood there, looking at the casket of Gene Ryan, I couldn't help but think of the ways he made me the husband and father—the man—that I am today.

I was five years old when Grandpa and I first started getting close. I distinctly remember that Thanksgiving. We sat at a long table with the turkey in the center. The women placed cranberry sauce and candied yams beside it. When all the dishes were in their proper places, Mom looked at me with that knowing mother's look.

"Sorry, Petey, there's not enough room. You'll have to sit over here," she said, placing her hand on a card table a couple feet from the adults. Sullenly, I plopped from my seat at the large table and shuffled over, sitting on the folding chair. I frowned. Beside me was my baby cousin, who always seemed to need a diaper change. My other cousin sat across from me, throwing Cheerios at my head. I think at least ten ended up in my gravy. After a moment of staring at my plate, Grandpa slowly stood, grabbed an old metal folding chair, and scooted beside me.

"Dad, what are you doing? Aren't you going to sit with us?" my aunt croaked from the adjoining table.

"Nope, Carrie, I'm sittin' with Peter over here. Not enough room for me anyways."

The adults sitting at the table looked at each other and then just shrugged, knowing you didn't argue with Grandpa. I couldn't have been more excited if I got a new bike.

Grandpa's favorite subject was the war. Eagerly, I listened as he recounted tales of heroism and hardship. I'd just stare at him with wonder on my face, taken in by every word. If there was just one thing Grandpa was good at, it was telling stories. The two of us sat there enjoying turkey and pumpkin pie as the rest of the family chattered around us. I would demand story upon story of his exploits. Every time I'd ask for another, he'd chuckle

a little and smile, his warm brown eyes connecting with mine. Though his face was deep with wrinkles, his soul was more alive as it burned through those eyes. Always I wanted another story, and always Grandfather would say, "Well, Peter, I got a million, and you're gonna run me dry one day." I loved every word.

Each time I was supposed to see Grandpa was the most exciting day of my life. I'd ask if he could be my babysitter whenever my parents went out, and when he'd ring the doorbell, I'd run to him and clutch his leg. Dad would apologize for me, but Grandpa would just say, "Well, son, I been through Nazis and marriage. I can handle Peter." During the times he'd keep me, he'd tell his stories under a fort we'd make out of couches and blankets. He'd place an old helmet on my head as I gripped my toy gun. He'd treat me like a soldier, and every detail of his stories came to life. When Mom and Dad came home, both of us would whine and pout before we finally said goodbye. Mom always said I made him into a kid again.

Sometimes when a bunch of us would be sitting around at a family gathering, Grandpa would begin to tell another story. No one would bother to listen for more than a few moments, and soon they'd be talking about hunting trips and shoe sales again. Grandpa's face would fall a little until I asked him to continue. He shook his head and turned toward me with gravity in his countenance and gazed firmly into my six-year-old eyes. "Peter," he said, "there are only three things really worth it in this world." He displayed three worn fingers on his right hand. "Three things worth dying for, Peter. They're your God, your country, and your wife. Hear me? Those are the things that matter." I stared at him a moment, not completely understanding the meaning of those words, but they always stuck with me. The following December was the hardest of my life. Grandpa slipped on the steps a couple of days before Christmas and had to go to the hospital. I remember the trip up the elevator. Dad tried to get me to jump when it stopped, but I wasn't in the mood. When I walked into the room, everyone in the corner was crying. I walked up to Grandpa and picked up his hand.

"Grandpa?" I said in a small voice.

Slowly, he opened his eyes. When he saw me he smiled and pressed the button to make the bed sit up.

"Hey, Peter, I'm glad you're here." He motioned for me to sit on the bed with him, and my parents joined my relatives on the other side of the room.

"What's all this about, Grandpa?"

He looked at me a moment and then began to chuckle. "I dunno, Pe-

ter. They're fussin' over nothin'. Do you want to hear about the time I looked one of them Nazis straight in the eye and lived to tell about it?"

Suddenly losing my concern, I nodded in anticipation.

"Peter," Mom said, "let Grandpa sleep."

"Come on, Laura, I'm slept out. Let me talk to Peter."

She smiled a little through red eyes. All the adults filed into another room to discuss Lord knows what.

I looked at them for a moment before turning toward Grandpa again. "What's gonna happen to you, Grandpa?"

My grandfather sighed and gathered my tiny body in his arms. "I broke my hip. I'll be in a wheelchair from now on."

"Oh—"

"And I got one of them diseases with the fancy long names. It's called Alzheimer's."

"What's that mean?" I said, trying to be brave and keep from crying.

"Nothin', Peter. Just know that no matter what I say or do, I'll always love you."

I couldn't contain my tears. I grabbed Grandpa's neck and sobbed.

"Peter," he said, "it ain't worth it. Everything's gonna be all right. And I know, 'cause I've been through everything. War, losin' my wife. But no matter what, you can get through it. You're a good kid, Peter."

It wasn't because of understanding that I wept, because I didn't know what Alzheimer's was. But Grandpa's grave state and somber words were apparent, even to my eyes, as serious business.

On Christmas Day, Grandpa was gathered with the rest of us around the tree just like every year. I was looking forward to the BB gun waiting for me amidst the stack of gifts. I didn't peek, but I did overhear dad arguing about giving it to me.

"No, Dad, he can't have it. It's too dangerous."

"Come on, Bryan, I shot a gun when I could hardly walk. It's time Peter had a gun of his own."

"All right, Dad," my father said after a sigh, "but you're teaching him to shoot."

Sure enough, there was my gun in the package. I hugged Grandpa as tightly as I could.

The next day, we went outside so I could get my first lesson. We set out cans for me to shoot while Grandpa pegged squirrels with his 12-gauge. After I got the hang of it, he handed me the shotgun and told me to shoot. Boy, when I shot that thing, I went flying backward. Grandpa laughed. I sat up, awe plastered on my face, "Let's do it again!"

Grandpa shook his head and chuckled, "Not today, Peter."

Years passed, and every Christmas was harder. It started with simple things, but as I continued to get older, Grandpa was forgetting more and more. He would suffer horrible dreams in the night and wake up yelling or drenched in sweat. He came to live with us because it got too bad for him to live alone. Sometimes, we'd sit down for a story, and right in the middle he'd pause and seem distant.

"What happened next?" I'd urge.

"Why, Peter, I-I don't think I remember."

"Remember . . . you were sittin' in the trench and your buddy Johnny said, 'Why, Gene, we're outnumbered two to one.'"

Grandpa shook his head. "Sorry, Peter, it just ain't there."

The rest of the night he struggled to jog his memory but he never could. Soon every story was vague. One day I saw him weeping in his bedroom. When I asked him what was wrong, he just looked at me and whispered, "Nothin's there, Peter. It's all gone. I-I'm helpless."

The worst incident I can remember of Grandpa's forgetfulness was when I was around fourteen. He looked at me lovingly and smiled and didn't know my name.

Even though the real Gene Ryan seemed locked away in a frail man's body, he still inspired me the most when I was sixteen years old. It wasn't his lopsided smile or his strong hands. It wasn't even those cherished words of his many stories, though each of those changed my life. The defining moment was at a parade on Independence Day. I sat on the sidewalk next to Grandpa, whose weathered eyes held barely a sign of life. He folded his hands and stared somewhere past the horizon as if waiting patiently for a distant end. We were surrounded by all kinds of people sitting in lawn chairs or lounging on the ground beside us, chattering about plans for barbecue and bottle rockets. As the veterans walked by, carrying the American flag, no one stopped to pay attention. Grandpa feebly tried to lift himself up. Once. Twice. And on the third time he stood as the symbol of his country passed by. The only man standing was the one in the wheelchair. The moment passed and Grandpa slowly eased himself back into his seat. He looked at me, the corners of his mouth slowly rising. His long dead eyes glittered with spirit, wet with tears. It was then I remembered his words. "Three things worth dying for, Peter. Your God, your country, and your wife. Hear me? Those is the things that matter."

I'm convinced that Gene Ryan was the greatest man who ever lived. As I looked at his casket, clothed in the glory of the Stars and Stripes, I hoped

I could be half the man Grandpa was. That bright November morning, I bowed my head and pulled my two boys close while the twenty-one shots fired out. As the soldiers finished, a single tear rolled down my cheek.

"Daddy, why are you crying?"

"Grandpa Gene was a great man, Matthew. I'm proud to be his grandson." I paused and hugged them tightly. "Come on boys, let me tell you the story about how Grandpa looked one of them Nazis in the eyes and lived to tell about it."

Sand

-Sarah Blackmon

To a scientist
There is no such thing as sand.
Each grain is its own unique piece
Quartz and obsidian and limestone,
Tinier than a doll's hand.

In the sand, I drew your name
And kept it safe
Picked up crabs that threatened to dig in
Guarded you from dogs' paws and children's feet

But soon the sun went down
And the tide came up.
The sun went down
And the tide came up.

I laid down, over you
I laid down, to cover you
But all those tiny rocks started to flow, anyway
Some out to sea
Or the other side of the beach.

Somehow, I picked myself up and walked home
Now your name is gone
But these little pieces, these little rock entities
Are still stuck to me.

Snaggle Tooth

-Katy Emerson



True Grit

Ben Baker
Second Place, Poetry

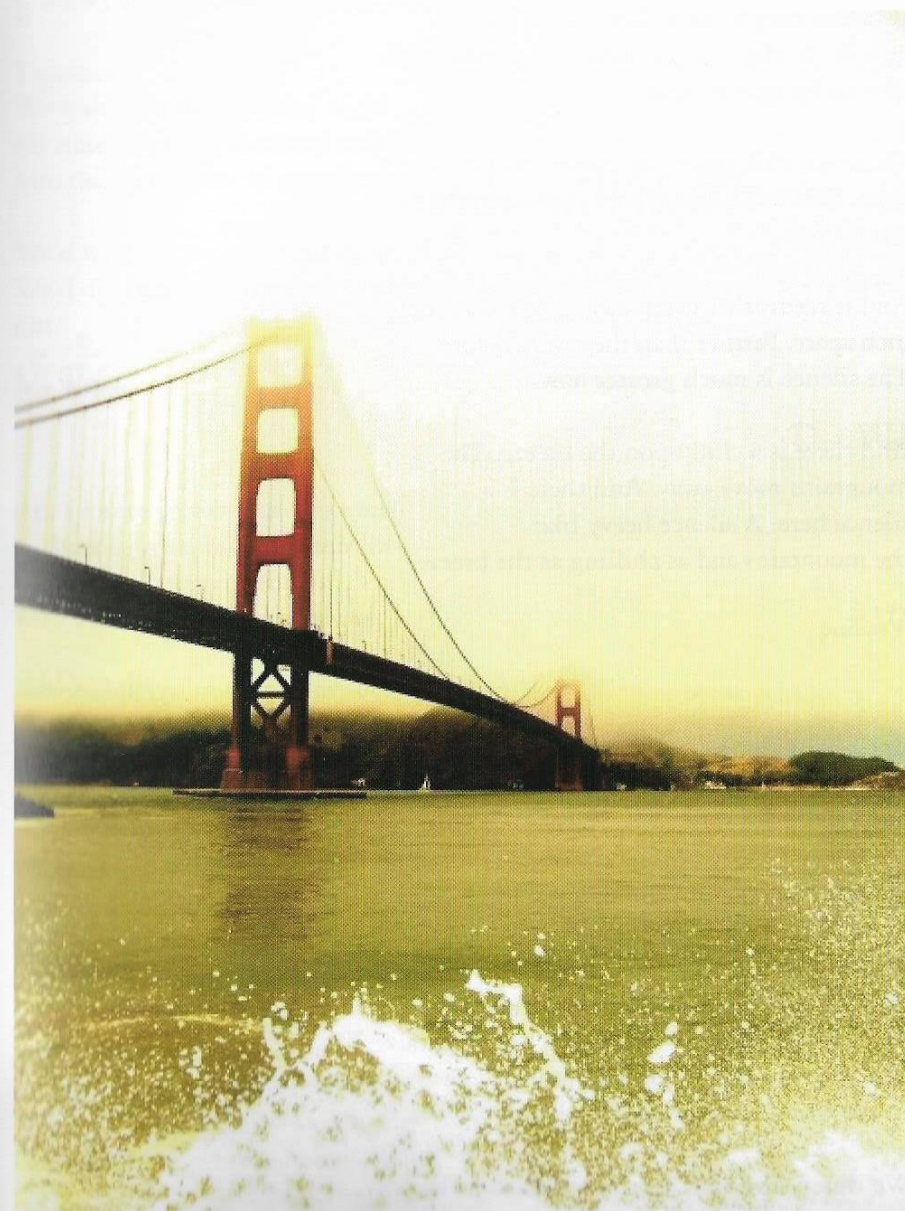
John Ford drew you out West
With visions of Martian landscapes
The color of the jagged rust flakes
That drift from the rotting carcass of
Your Father's rusted out 1947 F1 pickup.

Full of rough, two-fisted characters
And color coded personalities,
You went West looking for the open spaces,
Following the romantic visions of L'Amour and Gray,
On the back of a shiny new motorcycle
Purchased with a second mortgage and
Fueled by the drive of midlife crisis.

You found no painted Italians lurking
In the great canyons of the West,
Only the looming presence of concrete
Supporting lakes full of leaking speedboats.
The only cowboy you saw was a 40 foot
Waving automaton, greeting the eternal
Optimists moving along the Strip below.

Rowdy, a souvenir cactus in a
Terracotta pot decorated with
Turquoise medallions and painted beads,
Rests on your desk next to a dull
Name plaque, R. Arney: Accounting Services,
And an old time photo of your family
Playing cowboy, you trying to look tough
For the pretty lady behind the camera
And the man chained to the desk back home.

Photo by Fon Komkai



The Argument

And there is a silence here. A canyon running deep. A rift between the mountaintops that causes such a great divide. And it is in this canyon deep that silence falls so heavily. No light illuminates the stifling hush. The valley here is quiet.

There is a chill upon the breeze. A chill so alien. There is a dreary cold upon the silence lying thick.

And it seems that every day these mountains inch apart. Farther than they were before. The silence is much greater now.

And there is a chill upon the breeze. The mountains move away. And there is a silence here. A silence heavy like the mountains and as chilling as the breeze.

Waiting

We waited till the sun had gone, and the moon so boastful shined.
We lay in the grass and sipped the stardust like an aged translucent wine.

We felt the change in the wind as it shifted north and west.
I lay and felt the rise and fall, the life and breath of your chest.

We were young at dawn and lovers by twilight,
I waited for you until the clouds veiled the sky.
The warmth of your hands; soft, brown petals,
The prickle of your chin like pine needles and nettles,
It was warm. And it was good.

We weren't waiting for the sun to come back,

-Claudia Cerna

We enjoyed the overcast and the blue bleeding black.

I felt you mending what was stolen and broken,
Healing the wounds with words that were less than spoken.

We had no fire or warmth but our bodies seeping heat,
It wasn't lust, but my God, that our bodies would meet...

Together,
We waited in that ethereal night,
till time leapt and bounded and chased us away
Into that ready heat of morning and the musky loom of midday.

We'd wait till the sun went again, then
We'd dip back into the dusky midnight bourbon, or tonight, perhaps, a good gin.

Iris Prison

-Dan Wall

Am I forever condemned to watch
as those I love most find their love
and I remain here by myself,
with a fake smile: I won't shove.

The muscles of my iris in my eye
are the bars of my life's prison.
I watch the beautiful ones
run from my jail: from my vision.

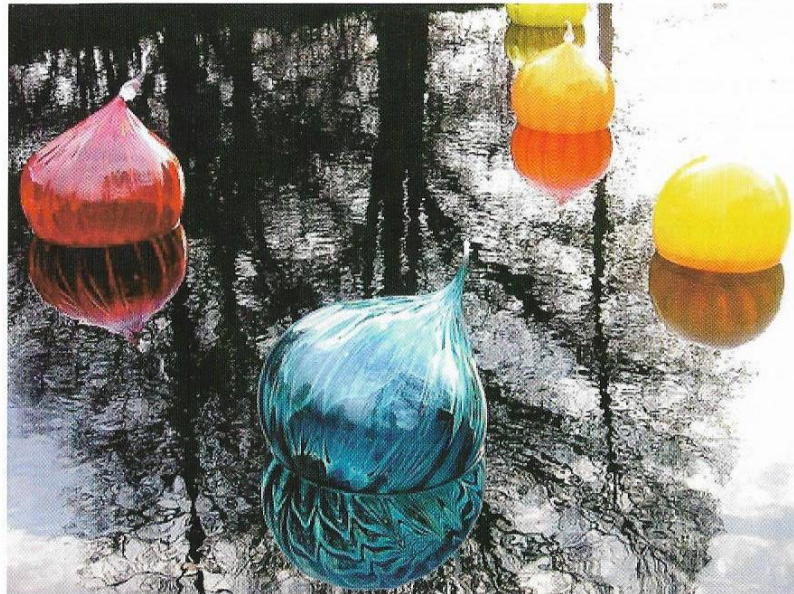
Maggots marrying maggots.
This case of misanthropy
fills my blood with anger
and hate: my only company.

I watch the tunnels of dust,
formed by the wind over the dunes
of my empty kingdom from inside
bare chambers: whistle hollow tunes.

-Alicia Gibbs

First Place, Graphics

Photo by Maggie Tyson



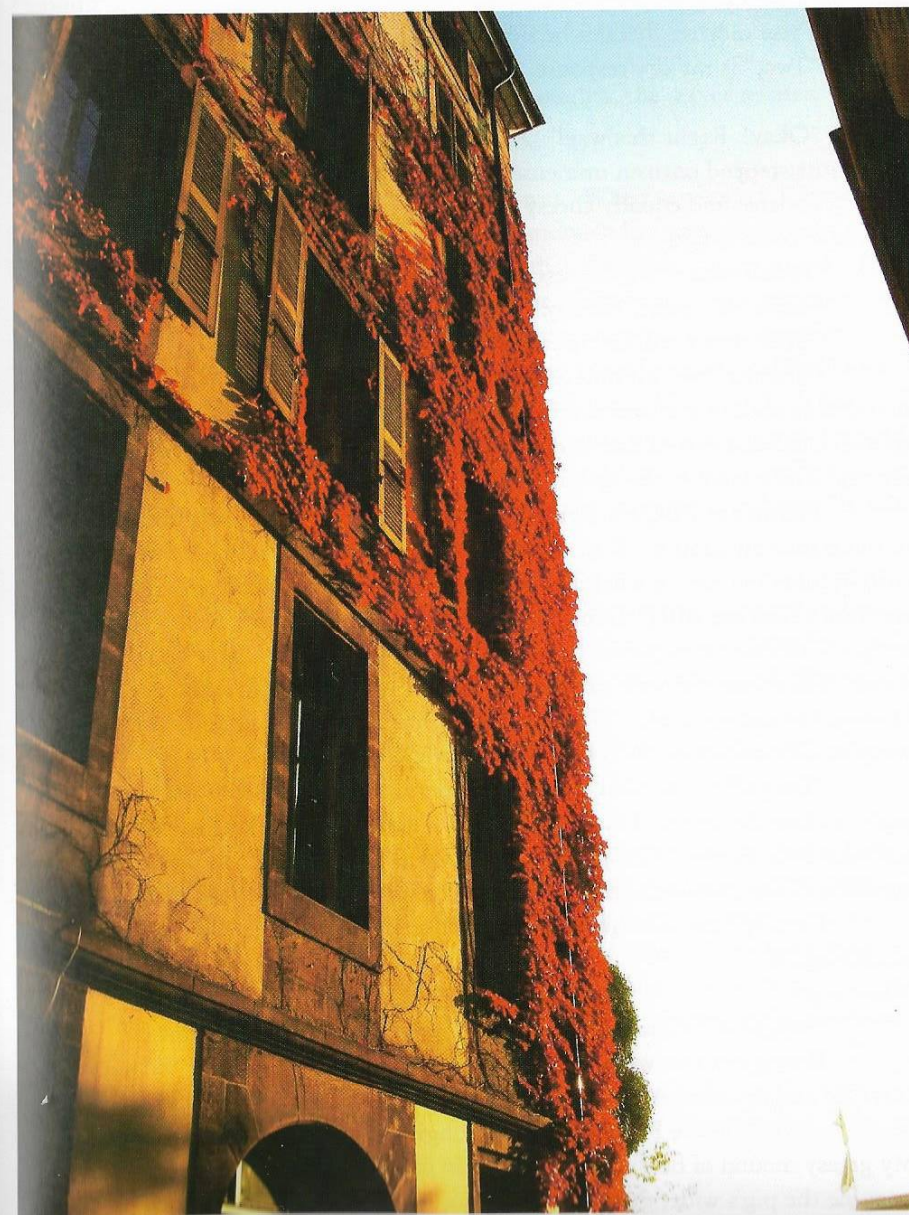
Ayuthaya, Second Place, Graphics

- Fon Komkai



Third Place, Graphics

Photo by Alice Burth



Dustin Davis

Third Place, Prose

"Hi! Welcome to Famous Dave's BBQ! How many of you are there today?" The beaming hostess, her tone so high and enthusiastic, makes me wonder about her real motive. It can't be simply welcoming us to lunch.

"Two," is my dry response. "How many does it look like?" is what I want to ask.

"Okay! Right this way!" As the hostess leads us to our booth, I feel as if I have just stepped onto an immense pig farm. Pink pig cutouts on the walls wear cheesy bandanas and equally cheesy grins; they stare at us from every angle. Some even have cowboy hats.

"Is this okay?" the hostess wonders pointing to a booth.

"Yeah. It's great," we say.

"Your server will be right with you!"

"Thanks," we mumble as she shoves the menus under our noses. I take a moment to soak in the surroundings; annoying country music blares through the speakers, old and rusted barn memorabilia hangs from the walls, obnoxious dessert and drink menus take up half of the table. I sigh. I open the menu.

Pictures of BBQ sandwiches too huge to eat in one sitting threaten to jump into my mouth. Different BBQ sauces are described with flaming or curly-q fonts indicating whether they are spicy or sweet. More pink cartoon pigs are shown cooking BBQ. Ironical. By the time I can digest the menu, our server arrives with enormous plastic cups overflowing with too much ice and not enough water. The entire cup will soon be one giant ice cube anyway thanks to the AC blasting toward our table. When I look up, she already has her notepad and pen ready to take our order. It is lunchtime. In and out.

"Do y'all know what you want?" she asks with a smile as big as one of the pig's. I close the menu. I close my eyes. I have not been able to eat out since I returned from France. Compared to the open air cafés in the south, dotting the coastline of the Mediterranean, American restaurants are too, well, American.

I barely have time swallow my first bite when the server swoops down on us once again.

"How is it?"

"It's great," we say. Is there any other response to that question?

Eating out throws cultural differences into sharp contrast. Sitting in this cold and crowded American restaurant, I daydream about walks along the beach, our idyll on the French Riviera. Longing turns my stomach upside down. My greasy mound of beef tips smothered in sauce stares up from the plate. I can imagine the pig's wide, grinning face. Mocking me. I still feel displaced, ill at

ease in a culture that used to be mine, particularly when I go out to eat. Every morning I expect to wake up to the sound of waves and gulls and roaring motorbikes. For now, these are only the sounds of my dreams.

Return culture shock is a bizarre phenomenon. There is no way around it. I tried to prepare myself. I tried to trick myself into believing I was happy to be back. I even tried to return the sentiment when my mother told me she was so relieved to have me home. But just as I knew that the server was going to top off our waters after every other sip, I knew it would happen to me. It did. And it refuses to budge.

Intruding on our lunch as well as my thoughts, the server returns.

"How is everything?"

"It's still great," we say.

I hate that question. It has no real answer. When servers ask, "How is everything?" they don't want to hear that the sandwich has tomatoes when I asked that they be left off. They don't want to know that the steak is overcooked. They want to hear that everything is great. They want a bigger tip. Any response other than, "It's great," would call their work – and their tip – into question.

I hear it from everyone when they discover I lived and worked in France. "How was it?" I want to answer with my own question. "Well, not bad, but how was living in America?" But I never have the guts to ask it – just as I would never send my food back for fear of what the chef would do to it – so with a smile and gentle shake of the head, I give the answer I know they want to hear. "It was great."

Bitter? Unappreciative? No way. But, I wonder if they, like the server, are really interested in the truth. The truth – that I became accustomed to new ways, that I prefer the slower paced French life to the hectic American one – would scare them. Perhaps even anger them. It would challenge them to call elements of their own culture into question.

On our way out, heaps leftovers packed safely in Styrofoam boxes, the hostess asks, "How was it?"

"It was great," we say in unison.

I squint as we step outside and my eyes adjust to the brightness. Lowering my sunglasses from my head to my nose, I bump into my companion's former boss on the sidewalk. This is the first time we have seen him since our return, but he knows we moved to Cannes for a stint. She was working for him when we decided to move. He obviously didn't know we were back.

I can see the dreaded question forming on his face, being written on his forehead.

"How was France?"

I close my eyes behind my glasses. I sigh.

"It was great."

Insomniac's Ballad of Flawed Love Slumber

Sarah Blackmon
Third Place, Poetry

Well if I've seen it once,
I've seen it one million times
In the back of my head,
In the front of my mind.

Your body shakes
And shivers into mine,
But you never fully unwind.

In the river, there, we made our beds
And tried our best to forget
The books we'd read.
"You think too much,"
They'd always said.

And our bodies melted
Like sugar into tea,
You into me.
We were finally combined,
But still incomplete.

Oh, you're the broken chord
In my favorite song
But I still sing along...
(Please don't string me on for long)

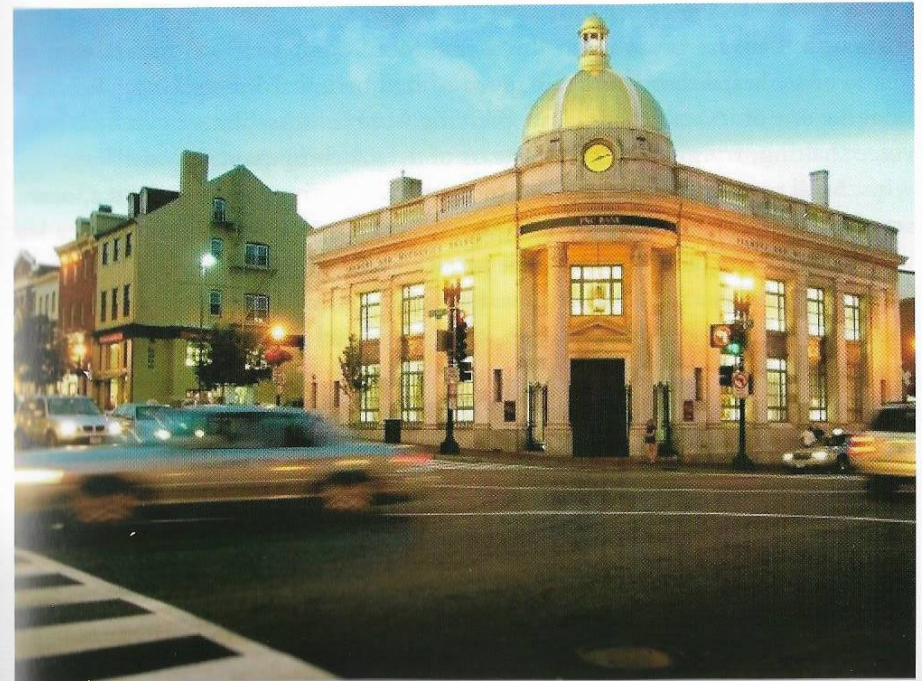
In the morning, we make our peace
But by our day's second AM
We're fighting like cats and dogs
Instead of counting sheep...
(We haven't slept for weeks)

Budapest at Night

Kristin Bail



Photo by Fon Komkai



Aegri Somnia (A Sick Man's Dreams)

Megan McCormack

After a brutal day at high school, I came home to the Beast and my mother. As soon as I saw the two together, I knew that it would be best to just escape to my room. My day had been rough; the same old bullies tormented me on the entire ride to school, asking me if I had even hit puberty yet, and if I was going to grow a set of balls, or a set of tits. So, like I've been apt to do lately, I skipped out on the last half of school. Mom and the Beast hadn't noticed me when I ran past them, or when I slammed the door behind myself. Not that I expected them to, anyway. Right now, I just wanted to be away from everyone. When I was by myself, it was so easy to separate myself from the world. I jumped onto my squeaky bed and listened to Mom's muffled yells. I couldn't decipher a single word, mostly because the furious, guttural roars from the Beast overshadowed Mom's voice almost completely.

My mother is one of the toughest warriors in this land. No matter how many times the Beast tries to take over our lives, week after week, she is always prepared for battle. I can see her in my head: a glistening silver helmet with a tall red plume protecting her head, a breastplate engraved with ancient, magical runes to keep her heart from harm, and a razor-sharp broadsword with jewels encrusted into the hilt to keep her enemies in their place. Although there are times when I'm scared Mom's going to lose, like now.

As I heard that roar again, a rage-filled bellow from the beast, I can imagine one of its enormous claws piercing Mom's breastplate. I can hear her voice shaking, trying to hold back tears of deep, aching pain. Mom always wins, I tell myself. There's no need to worry. She'll give the Beast a nice, new scar soon, and it'll go away for a while. She just has to wait for the Beast to let its defenses down, and take aim. She always wins. No worries.

I grabbed a pillow and shoved it under my head. For a brief moment, the familiar sounds of war subsided, and I wondered if maybe, possibly the Beast had reverted back to its original form. There used to be times when, after losing a battle to my mother, the Beast would temporarily revert back to its once human self for a short time. Now, however, I didn't even see a glimmer of the man it once was. I thought about what the Beast was like before the sickness, the medicine, and the lies. Before the fantasy curse. I kept trying to drag the pre-Beast image out of the back of my brain. I felt I was staring at an eye puzzle, like one of those optical illusions where you have to look at it cross-eyed just to see anything at all. And even then, you aren't sure if what you saw was there in the first place. I shut my eyes and sighed deeply. I knew

damn well how attractive and almost inescapable the pull of fantasy was because every day I let myself be enveloped and nearly consumed by it. I didn't want to be like the Beast, but I felt like I was going down the same path.

The noise from the battle started to completely fade away, and as I let sleep overtake me, I realized something about the fantasy curse that frightened and excited me.

I liked it.

###

I woke up dizzy, as though the swirling and twisting random thoughts and images during my dreams had made me physically ill. I crawled out of bed and sat cross-legged in the middle of the carpeted floor of my room and waited for the nausea to subside. I had discovered years and years ago that it was impossible to shut my brain off, even while I was sleepy, so the dizziness was nothing new. Slowly, I waited for the world to stop spinning.

I listened.

The twirling overhead fan had been left on, and my dark curtains concealed any evidence of the outside world. It was quiet except for the soft whirring noise of the fan and my steady breathing.

I glanced at an old alarm clock of mine that was nearly buried by abandoned notebooks, overstuffed, worn folders, and scattered wooden pencils which were so sharp they were like graphite daggers. 4:15 a.m. I stood up, feeling sore from my sleeping position, but strangely awake and alert. I went to my door and twisted the cold knob until the door opened a crack. I paused for a moment before I left the room to listen. Nothing, again. I stepped out into the hallway, and blinked hard.

I wanted to see ghosts, phantoms of death eagerly waiting to float out of a wall and frighten me. Or perhaps, a pack of goblins ready to kidnap me to their village for a sacrifice to their demon god. I hoped for bats to drop from the low ceiling and transform into seductive vampires. I even closed my eyes for a moment to give these creatures a chance to sneak up on me. But, when I lifted my eye lids, my ghosts were nothing more than the tacky wall rugs adorning each side of the hallway, my goblins had mutated into dust bunnies under a tiny antique shelf, and my vampires slipped through the cracks of the hardwood flooring.

I let out a big sigh, and continued my night walk down the boring corridor. At the end of the hallway on the left was the entrance to the kitchen; I stopped here for a moment, and heard a sharp click. A sudden soft glow of light created a splash of yellow upon my face, and I covered my eyes with one of my hands. As I was momentarily blinded, I heard a scream that quickly turned into an irritated groan.

"Did you wake up in the middle of the night just to scare the life out of me?" Mom asked as she crossed her arms. I blinked from the glare of the kitchen's light radiating from her plumed helmet. I couldn't even tell if she had been wounded by the Beast or not; her armor appeared untouched and perfect to me, and there was no evidence of the earlier battle. And then I saw one of my treasures grasped tightly in one of her hands. A notebook. I paused and considered snatching the notebook out of her hands. But, what good would that do now? Surely she must have already rifled through it. I lifted my eyes back up to her face and hesitated a moment before saying anything. Mom's face looked different to me; her mouth was drawn tight, as if she were trying to trap any possible words that could escape her jaws, and her eyes were red and squinted.

"Sorry," I muttered while I walked past her and into the kitchen, "I just woke up."

Mom followed me and pulled out a creaky wooden chair from our small dinner table. She lay the notebook down on the table as though it were nothing more trash. Mom sighed as she sat down in the chair she had selected and folded her hands together on her lap. "How was school today?" she finally asked.

My eyes floated back to the notebook. I wondered if Mom had read what was in there, and I tried to remember what exactly I had written in that one. I bit my lip and started picking at my hangnails. "It was fine. Boring as usual. You know how public education can be," I explained.

"Really? What did you go over in your classes today? Any moving discussions over classic works of literature?"

What was with the interrogation at four something in the morning? I shrugged off her usual sarcasm and pulled off a particularly long hangnail. I watched in a sort of bored fascination as a tiny amount of blood seeped to the surface of my skin.

Mom let out a long sigh. "Are you even paying attention to me?" she asked, irritated.

I wiped the blood away. "Of course I am, Mom. Always," I responded. "You asked about what my classes were about, and if we had any mind-numbing discussions or whatever. The first answer is 'nothing useful,' and the second would be 'when am I ever moved by the drabble that comes out of my empty-headed peers?'"

Mom was silent for quite some time after my comment. I listened to the sound of the plastic clock on the wall above the oven. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The longer Mom was quiet, the longer it seemed for the next tick and the next tock to come.

"You haven't gone to class in nearly a week." Mom's words broke my concentration on the clock, and for a second, her words didn't have meaning to me. And then, my stomach flipped inside out beneath the skin of my abdomen. She had found out, I realized, and who was the dirty rat that had exposed me?

"That's a lie," I said bluntly.

Mom scoffed at me and shook her head. "Sweetie, can't you just tell me what's wrong? I spoke to your teachers today, and they are very worried about you," she told me as she placed a cool hand on top of mine. "Where have you been going instead of to the high school for these past few days?"

An image of my favorite willow tree in the park instantly shot into my head. Beneath the long limbs, I was hidden from this world, and it was the perfect place to write. I could get lost underneath that willow tree with moving hardly at all.

"Listen to me!" Mom interrupted. I noticed that the shaky voice from earlier that night was making another appearance. She unfolded her hands and placed her fingers to her temples.

"Please!"

I stood up a little straighter. Perhaps the Beast had wounded her earlier, and I just couldn't see the wound. The battles normally occurred so frequently that Mom and I had become almost completely used to them; they were routine. But, I knew she was different because Mom has never begged me like that before. I've never heard my mom so desperate and pathetic, and for a moment, I thought I saw her armor disappear.

"I just don't like it there," I said simply. At least that was the truth. Mom started massaging her temples and, to my surprised, she actually chuckled.

"Don't like it?" she repeated. "So, you're just going to be a high school dropout, then? And what would be your plans after that?"

"I would become a published writer."

Mom laughed. "Is that so? Sounds like you've got it all planned out," she said sarcastically. "My son, the published writer who never finished high school."

I decided to forgive her. Mom didn't understand what writing was for me because she's not a writer, nor did she understand how much I hated school. Mom is a warrior. "And why are you awake?" I asked.

"Don't think changing the subject will get you out of trouble," Mom insisted with a tone of irritation. "I was reading. . .this." She picked up my notebook in one of her hands and started flipping through the dog-eared pages. "Is this what you do during class? You scribble in your notebook?"

Scribble? She made it sound so trivial. I decided not to answer, and instead I went back to my hangnails. I listened as my mom turned the pages one by one.

"I started reading your notebook after he left last night. His sickness is worse than I thought it was, and I think he's stopped taking his medication again. . ." Mom trailed off; she looked as though she wanted to cry. Finally, she cleared her throat and continued. "I found your notebook in the car early yesterday," Mom explained. She stopped flipping through the pages and I could feel her eyes staring at me.

"What made you think you had the right to go through something of mine?" I asked, looking up at her. It came out ruder than I had intended it to be. No one reads my creations. No one but me. I thought I had hidden that notebook well, jammed beneath a seat in an old box of tissues. I had forgotten I had stuffed it there a long time ago.

Mom closed the notebook and shook her head. "Why are you being so difficult with me?" Mom waited for an answer, and when I said nothing, she spoke again. "I'm only trying to look out for your own good because you are my child, and I love you. You understand that, right? I care about you, and I know school is annoying and can be difficult. But please, you only have about three and a half more years to go until you graduate. Can't you just set aside this fanatical writing until after that? You have to live in the real world before you can write about a fake one."

I yanked out another hangnail. Mom doesn't understand. She is a warrior. I didn't know what to say, if any answer I could give would make her understand me. We sat there in silence until she finally got up from her chair and pushed the notebook over to me.

"You know, your father was a writer, too, before he changed," Mom mentioned as she started walking towards the stairs that led to her room. My head instantly snapped up and we locked eyes. She had slapped me with the flat side of her broadsword, and the hit made my head spin.

How could she say something like that? Nobody like that deserved to be called a writer. What was she trying to prove, anyway? How dare she compare us! I wanted to scream at her, or throw something, but most of all, I wanted her to understand why writing was so vital to me, and that I was different from. . .from. . .

Mom sighed despondently, and then slowly made her way up the stairs. I watched her leave, and then clutched my notebook tightly in my hands.

I forced myself to go to school the next day. My tree was calling to me, but I ignored its pleas and left my notebooks at home. I found that

although my treasures were stashed in my room, I couldn't stop thinking about them. On any paper I was given, I scrawled epic legends and elaborate descriptions of imaginary monsters on the margins. The football players were court jesters, the preppy girls became frilly princesses, and the principal became a bitter tyrant with a gilded crown. My mind was everywhere except in school, and even when I was on the bus, I couldn't focus. The cruel bullies on my bus who, when I actually went to school, teased me about my immature stature as freshman male disappeared, and I forgot I was on a bus at all. To me, I was riding on the back of a sunflower-yellow dragon, who was taking me back to my castle. And, on my hands were, as my mom might say, scribbles depicting over twenty ideas that became a kind of inspirational tattoo; I may not have brought my notebooks, but my hands had been an adequate substitute.

As I walked down the street towards my house, I thought out what I would tell Mom. I rubbed one of the graphite daggers in my pockets, fingering the stamped "Number 2." Hey, Mom, I went to school today! Yeah, I even left my notebooks at home. Are you proud of me? I wanted Mom to be happy, and to appreciate what I loved to do. I didn't want her to compare me like she had done last night. I wanted her to see that I was different, but in a good way, and that I wouldn't be a failure. I wouldn't snap. I could still live in this world, even if my "fake" one was trying to consume me. Even if I enjoyed the delicious and dangerous taste of the fantasy, I wanted to prove her wrong.

I had reached my house, and opened the front door, only to be greeted by the Beast.

My heart nearly drilled its way out of my chest when I saw it. The Beast was standing there, only about fifteen feet away from me, with my notebooks and folders strewn all around. It turned around to face me when it realized I was there. The Beast was disguised as a grungy, forty-year-old male with long, greasy, shaggy hair. I could smell his rank clothing from where I stood, and he was wearing a worn and faded suit jacket. It was my dad's favorite jacket to wear to job interviews, before his mind became cursed and he degraded into something unrecognizable and horrible. I watched in dumbstruck horror as the Beast ripped out several pages from the notebook it held captive.

"Your mom told me about you. You've taken up writing, huh?" the Beast inquired. Its voice sounded slick and angry all at the same time. "I remember when I used to write. Nobody ever liked what my pen and I created. They said it was a bunch of nonsensical shit."

"Where's Mom?" I asked, ignoring its rant.

The Beast smiled, and showed two rows of nasty, rotting teeth. I took a few more steps inside the house, and I saw my mother laying on a nearby couch, unconscious and bleeding from a terrible gash on her forehead. She took a sharp, shuddering, and shallow breath. I realized, with a sickening dread that overcame my senses, that Mom's armor was gone. I saw Mom for what she truly was, there on that couch. Her once glorious helmet was an ancient baseball cap to hide her thinning hair, her breastplate was a pink, coffee-stained, bathrobe, and her sword was nothing at all. Mom was just a tired, middle-aged woman who had lost the fight.

"You bastard!" I screamed. "You bastard!" My eyes filled with hot, furious tears, and I clenched my tattooed hands until my nails dug deep into my skin. The Beast only laughed at me as he ripped my notebook in half. He reached down to pick up a folder, and flung its contents into the air; the loose-leaf papers fell all around us like giant snowflakes. He picked up another notebook, and laughed again as he flipped through it. My face flushed from the rush of hot blood to my temples.

"You're quite the writer, aren't you?" The Beast mocked. He tore out several pages and shredded them. "How does it feel to have your ideas ripped apart? Does it hurt? Do you feel like a part of you has died?"

I unclenched and clenched my fists again as the cursed man before me destroyed years of work in a matter of seconds. The tattered shreds of my written pieces of imagination covered the floor around us, and all I could think about was how much I loathed what my father had become. My entire body was tingling, as though every atom of my being was seizing with a kind of untamable fury. I took one of my number two pencils out of my jean pocket and held it firmly in my hand. My skin was alive and twitching. I was dizzy and sick and angry and images of all sorts of unreal monsters and hellish creatures swam through every bit of the gray matter trapped inside my head.

Dad grasped another folder in his large, sweaty hands and flung it at Mom. The sheets of paper flew out like birds and perched themselves on my mother's bathrobe. He howled with insane laughter at what he had done, and my father started slapping her bloody face with one of my notebooks. And then I exploded. I just couldn't stand it any longer. He wasn't Dad anymore. He was the Beast. His curse had been infecting Mom and me for way too long, and I was tired of hiding under the bed beneath those rusty springs. I raised my pencil high in the air and stabbed the Beast in the throat with all the force I could gather.

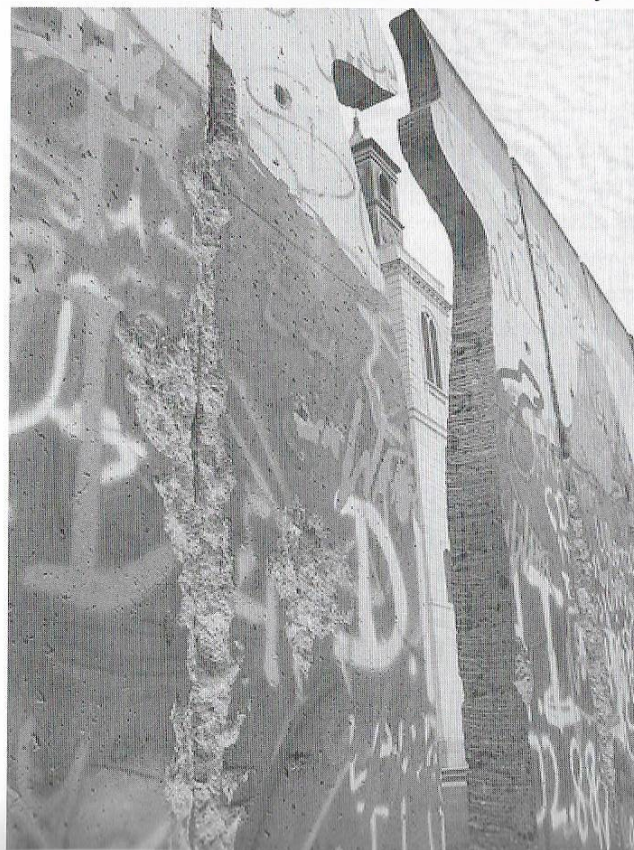
Blood burst from its throat like a small fire-hose, and the Beast let out an intense howl of anger and pain. It collapsed on the ground with its eyes open, gurgling undecipherable and guttural noises. Soon, the terrible noises

stopped, and after a few body twitches, the Beast had been slain. It lay in a pool of dark blood and bits of scribbled-on paper, with one of its claws outstretched towards the few undestroyed notebooks just barely out of reach.

As mom started to slowly come back into consciousness, I knew that she would never have to don her battle gear again. The Beast had killed thousands of my ideas right before my eyes, but for some reason, I didn't feel any sadness or anger about the loss. Instead, I felt a deep pity for the creature that lay at my feet and for the man it once was. I glanced at my tattooed hands, red from blood and black from ink, and felt comfortable with this sort of reality for the first time in my life: my father was a writer. I am a writer.

The creatures in my head instantly stopped moving, and instead they started laughing. The echoes of their joyous laughter made my temples throb, and my ears ache. My lips twisted into a wide smile as I shut my eyelids. I

Photo by Maggie Tyson



Ode to the Modern Universe, J.P.

—Keith Stegall

"...Does anyone want a mint?...They give you so many; there's no way I could eat them all..."

Single verse of matter, spill-splatter, explode on the face of the human race in the disco days of '74.

The grunts and roars of Achilles' mount in Ancient

—Shh—the night is long; the bong is

Circling, circling, in a widening gyre.

The mire of.

Clear it, man, the '90's are finding their place.

Laissez les bons temps rouler!

Don't you know that Nixon shot the nightingale?

And that hell is nothing but your best friend?

You remember when Freddie Mercury died

(and I wonder if you cried),

but I digress.

Success depends upon not a red wheelbarrow

and not the hand that pushes it

but the Will (to Power, to Believe).

To conceive of a better possible world

is to disprove the God of the New Testament.

—Do you agree?—

My father made me you,

and yours almost made you me,

three or four presidents in between.

The scene is over, the curtain falls,

but you don't say "I die," for

you are no Hamlet, nor were meant to be.

Hoffman has convinced you that

the universe does not exist,

but believe her when her face makes a tomato shade.

This phase is almost over; cherish it now because it's about to begin again down to the smallest detail.

Smell the black pot of Kafka in the morning and know

that life is nothing if not Absurd.

(Vonnegut died the day before I finished Slaughterhouse-Five)

"Buy 2, get 1 free" is the modern religion.

If a pigeon was hit by Flight 93,
no one remembered it.

Self-

disme-

mbered shit

is all we are, all we can be,

despite the US Army's plea that good and bad are black and white,
that spite is only for cowards and traitors...and the Underground Man.

The sand sinks syringes in the waves of Miami.

—Have you ever been there? Oh, you would have enjoyed it!—

deployed it did he did napoleon said she, but

enough of that! The ripe old age of '39

and the world ends, descends, obscured by clouds, only to ascend again again—

The culmination of creation realized in your transitory breath,

and suddenly you are aware of your godhood,

and I will leave a sunflower at the gravestone that reads:

J. P.

THE MODERN UNIVERSE

so that the future will know that Jesus is a fraud.

"...Does everyone know what a beach ball is?..."

Popular Science

—Ben Baker

The humming neon

Is muted by the light

Percussion of falling rain.

My clumsy chopsticks

Poke about in a box

Of Hot Mongolian Beef,

As I step from the

Curb onto the damp street.

An El Camino almost

Takes off my good leg

And I ask whatever

Happened to the flying car?

Lindsey Creek

A handsome man
not dark nor light,
a lovely shade of tan.
With emerald eyes and flecks of gold
like sparkles of the sun,
holding within a strength of old.
Hair deep like ebony
cut close and neat.
He exudes a speechless might.

His is a life of strength
rooted in much loss.
He goes to great lengths
getting points across.
Poignant with his words
he speaks heartfelt of
simple joys, happily of the birds
free from all up above.
He watches as they fly, soaring through the light.

*A break from work,
provides a moment free
from all the torque
that wraps him up
and strangles him lightly.
Personable and full of mirth
he makes friends with ease.
Friends do much to soothe the aches
which often seem to bite.
He continues on
In his living of each day
Demanding himself to stay strong,
For there is no other way.
Despite the tie of tears and death
Lying within his heart,
His warmth is one that soothes*

*And plays a joyful part.
Character of gold...still,
Imperfect as the rest.
His thoughts and words
Do succeed in pulling out the best.
He walks his winding path
and simply tries to be
a man of good and heart and smarts
and shares that light with me.*

Reborn

Jessica Cocker

I remember vividly
How loud they were
How careless their fights became
The way they spoke
About each other
On the phone

I remember exactly
How thick the tension was
How it consumed
Every inch of the house
How it contaminated
Everyone around

I remember impeccably
How mystifying it was
How absurd it seemed
To argue and make up
How she could maintain

But I remember
How much love she has
How much patience
And I appreciate
How a woman can be
Reborn

Fin and Feather Resort and the Paralyzing Politeness

Anna Cherry

There are few things more awkward than being an audience to a grown man belting out "You Are the Wind Beneath My Wings" in utter sobriety. And when I say "utter sobriety," I am referring to him and me both, though not by choice. This scene is brought to you courtesy of an annual trip to the land of old. And when I say old, I really mean old people. Fin and Feather Resort has been a meeting place for my entire extended family on my mother's side for so many years the trips have begun to blur together in my memory as an endless montage of themed buffets, off-key renditions of "My Achy Breaky Heart," and parrot paraphernalia. The gathering functions simultaneously as birthday celebration for my Granddad, Labor Day-palooza, and family reunion. The 'resort' is comprised of many rows of small red cabins, surrounded by neatly squared plots of grass, resembling an army base or the small, artificial Mr. Rodger's neighborhood. This sounds unpleasant, but it's really not at all.

Every evening at six o'clock there is a giant buffet filled with food from all of the essential food groups: fruits, grains, dairy, vegetables, and marshmallow salad. The wait staff appears to have been hired straight out of junior high and in previous years have been dressed (inexplicably, it seemed to me) in hula skirts, flapper dresses, and most recently, scrubs. There is an organ player I always believed to be blind, who reliably delivers organ songs and birthday shout outs. Every year I expect him to have died, and every year he is there, merrily playing organ ditties with surprising vitality. A parrot resides in the gift shop attached to the dining hall, where Fin and Feather guests come to be delighted by the bird's theatrical talking, crying, and occasional joke telling. Finally, there is the yearly karaoke night, where the young and old alike band together to embarrass themselves while half-singing, half-shuffle-dancing to "Butterfly Kisses" or any number of Dixie Chicks songs. Like nursing home dances, there is a subtly comical undertone to the entire Fin and Feather experience, but the cheesiness is its essence.

Reuniting with my parents and siblings is always somewhat anticlimactic. Distance draws out a sweetened version of familiar relationships. It makes my sister a best friend; my mother, a forlorn poet. "I miss your smile and lying next to you when we watch movies," my mom would interject at random, sadly cheerful, in our sparse phone conversations. I am never homesick but in the brief life of these sentences, poignant in their honest simplicity and a reminder that no one else will love me like that. In this moment,

I want to cry. I promise myself I will be present when I am with my family again. The weeks before trips home are spent building up sentimentally-enriched memories or hopeful ideas for bonding activities in an attempt to ensure the fullness of my appreciation in experiencing them, only to revert immediately upon arrival into the familiar role of daughter and sister, forgetting so easily the distance that was yesterday and is soon to be between us. Taking my family for granted is something that comes too easily, a default setting of my brain. Sporadically, the realization that time with them is brief seizes me, and I try to lap up every detail, frame it in the mind of my heart; but more often than not, complacency numbs me to this initiative, and all that remains are those pin pricks of time when I am so keenly aware of the it slinking away but am petrified in routine.

It was my first from-college trip to Fin and Feather Resort. My father came and picked me up; the car ride was spent arguing about philosophy, an exhausting and exhaustive working out of an agnosticism I could not yet call mine. Upon arrival came the underwhelming consummations of my siblings' internet pining, who could tell me via Facebook messages how much they missed me, but when given the opportunity of communication in person, stuck coolly to reserved greetings. There is something so awkward and unnatural about developing polite relationships with the people you once regularly annoyed the hell out of without reservation. Of course you loved them, but the love was always an understood obligation, and to show it was mushy and contrived, like calling your dad "sir" when you were in trouble. The cousins were in the next cabin with my aunt and uncle, where we would all later sit on couches and pull out beds talking about my uncle Phil's seventh grade fly impression that won over my aunt and I would forget, for a while, all that I now didn't believe, because of the way they said God, like He was an established fact. And I wouldn't argue, because for once, I didn't want to be right.

The grandparents' cabin was further away from all of ours. It usually was; The Grandparents were an island. They were an island made up of my mother's father, Granddad, her stepmother, Grandma Barbara, and their only offspring together, a small, shivering Chihuahua named Bambi. Bambi II. Their first Chihuahua had died after a long doggie life, and they loved him so much that they decided the second one might as well be called Bambi too, since neither of them could get used to calling it anything else. Sometimes I was sure they loved that dog more than any of us. The first official visit to their cabin was always the unspoken duty of the first to arrive at Fin and Feather, a hesitant effort put forth by the people who were willing to brave the tensions of generational barriers and the shyness that comes pack-

aged with being related to someone who is otherwise a stranger. I never knew closeness with grandparents was capable of exceeding this polite acknowledgement until friends would mention having really strong relationships with one. My relationship with my granddad consisted of greetings and good-byes, hugs which entailed "I love yous" that I always wondered if either of us meant. At times I would get that same panicky realization of time lost, and I would toy with the idea of asking him about his childhood. I knew nothing about him, except that he was kind of scary and racist and had married a gruff woman who lost her son in a car accident, and yelled at me as a child when I got blue Winterfresh gum in her carpet. But it was just an idea. I had never been close to him before and I knew I wouldn't start then; that took time, and there was never enough of that.

The official birthday lunch was held under a pavilion in the midst of sporadically rain-drenched nature and weather-dictated Frisbee games. We ate mango and cilantro salsas, bad steaks, and drank wine from plastic cups. At the end of the meal, before the chocolate cake, my granddad stood up. "I want to say something," he said. An uncomfortable silence waited intently for his words, and my first thought was that he was probably drunk. However, when he began, I saw that he must have planned this speech. "I just wanted to say that I have enjoyed all of these years here. I know I don't always say it, but I love all of you and...I'm proud of this family and of each of you." My mother told me later she had never before seen him cry. I would be lying if I said that things were different after that. Not long after, my granddad made a woman cry by cussing her out for not having her dog on a leash while walking past his cabin. Embarrassed and crying herself, my aunt later found the lady and apologized. Things fell into their old comfortable spots, The Grandparents remained in their cabin while we and the cousins went out to the lake. When the weekend was over, we hugged politely. My mother held me in the small cabin before I left with my dad, too long, because I knew when I pulled away she would be crying, and she was. I saw my sister was crying too; I had to breathe awkwardly for a few seconds to make sure I didn't, then we looked at each other and laughed like we always do when things become uncomfortably sentimental.

A couple of weeks later came parent weekend, and I was an orphan. My friend's parents adopted me and that day we had gone to eat at Bek's with her grandparents. Lane was close to them; especially her grandmother, who she told me looked like a tall and beautiful Pocahontas when she was younger. Upon returning to the dorm, I saw my dad had left me a message, and I knew. I held my breath when I called him, and squeezed my eyes as if it would soften the words: "Your granddad's been killed. Some nineteen

year-old kid crashed his truck into his bedroom and the engine crushed him." The driver was drunk and lost control of the wheel, his neck snapped and he died instantly. His friend in the passenger seat was still alive but got scared and ran away. The engine was on top of my granddad and partially his wife; they remained there for over an hour until the boy finally told someone what had happened. By then it was too late, my granddad was dead. His wife and he had said their parting pieces beneath chrome, with their dog, soaked in car fluids, between them.

I called my mom more often after that. I felt guilty not being there, going through the ordeal with the rest of the family, but I was mainly relieved. I was glad to be seven hours away from home, where I could easily check out of the affected region. To say the death was difficult for me would be an overstatement. In a way, I had expected it. It was almost as if he knew it would be his last visit to Fin and Feather with us, and I liked to think of it as a kind of parting gift. I was more saddened by the principle of his death than the actual loss of him, and this was a sadness in itself. How easily, I wondered, do we surrender our relationships for the sake of convenience? Would I go my whole life living right next to people and never know them? I answered myself honestly: Yes, because to know people takes time, and there is never enough of that. But for the second time, I wouldn't mind being wrong.

Photo by Liz Jansen



Jessica Cocker

I have a photo of a man whose name I don't know. It's a three-by-five inch black and white photo of a muscular white man in his mid-twenties. He's dirty with greased back hair and a simple wardrobe. He's standing in what seems to be the middle of nowhere surrounded by miles and miles of dirt with dust hanging in mid-air. In the far distance is a tiny, yet well built shack. I don't know why I've kept the photo. What I pondered most is why exactly I framed it and hung it up.

I found the photo tucked back in one of my mother's closets. Shortly after she passed away I was the only one of her five children who cared enough to clean up her home and gather her most important possessions. While completing this task I found the photo of the man I don't know. It was among the many, many other neatly stacked photos I found in a large cardboard box in the very corner of her bedroom closet.

When I first found the photo I brought it to the attention of my Aunt Sheryl, my mother's younger sister. I visited her at the Senior Retreat Center and inquired about who the man might be, but it was a question that my Aunt decided would be best left unanswered. At least, not answered by her. "Your mother was once a rebellious teenage girl, too," she stated very surely. "MY mom?" I questioned her. She looked at me as though I should have understood right away. "We were all once rebellious teenagers," she replied and looked off in the distance as if caught by the powerful pull of wonderful memories. I left her then, not wanting to break her away from happier times.

I wondered on my way back to the parking lot and the entire drive back home even more questions about the man in the photo. Where was he? What WAS his name? Why did my mother keep this photo all these years? Was he important to my mother, and if so why? And, why was I so captivated by his stern face and squinting eyes? I had to find out more about the man whose name I did not know.

I chose to call my older sister, Claire, when I returned home. It was Saturday morning and she would more than likely be stuck at home with her three bratty children in their San Francisco Bay home. Claire was 6 years older than me, happily married and living the stay-at-home-mom dream. A dream I did not share with her. I was hoping since she had a few years on me that she may have come across this photo before. I phoned her as soon as I walked in the door of my little apartment. She answered quickly. "Hey C. It's Becca," I chimed. "Heeeeeyy Becca," she screeched. I heard in the background two of

my nieces screaming their "hellos" to me. I giggled. "What's up?" she asked. "Well," I responded, "I was going through mom's things last week and," She cut me off, "aahhh... Mom. God, I miss her Becca. I mean, she used to call me every day and ask to talk to the kids. Really, I'm not sure how great the kids are doing, you know?" I didn't know, but I agreed with her to avoid a drawn-out explanation about why I don't understand kids and how I don't want to try to accomplish that horrific feat. I decided to take advantage of the breaks between her sentences and continue where she had cut me off, "Anyways, I was going through her things and I found this box of old photos. Mostly you, me, Bobby, Tom, and Mary. Things like birthdays and Christmases. But in the middle of one of the stacks was a photo of this guy. It was black and white. The kind you see in Depression Era photo galleries. It really perplexed me. Do you know anything about it?" There was a pause.

"It's just an old photo," she said with a little less perkiness in her voice. "Maybe," I said, "but why did she keep it if it was 'just an old photo'." I'm really more interested in who the man is than really why she kept it." Another pause, a little longer this time. "His name is Max," she told me. I was stunned. She really knew who he was? "How do you know that?" I quickly asked. "Why does that matter? I thought you just wanted to know who he was, nothing else?" she snapped. I laughed a little at myself. "Well, yeah, but now I'm curious," I said with a smile on my face. "Fine," she said "Why don't you come over from Tahoe and visit us this weekend and I'll tell you more. The girls will be ecstatic to see you. It's, what, a four hour drive?" "Three and half. Three if I drive fast," I stated.

Water was the only thing that my sister and I had in common. She lived in the Bay Area and I lived right beside Lake Tahoe. I traveled more to Las Vegas than I did to visit my sister, though the trip to "Sin City" is twice as long. Our age was one reason we had little in common. I'm twenty six, she's thirty two. She prefers gardening to gambling. I prefer neon signs to night lights and empty hotels to full bedrooms. Yet, for some reason we are related and I have to deal with her.

I traveled the three hours to my sister's two story house on Friday afternoon, arriving just in time for dinner. Claire was right. Her daughters, Kristine who was eight and Tiffany who was 11, were very happy to see me. They were even happier when I gave them the gifts I had brought. We ate a spaghetti dinner with salad; another thing that my sister and I differ on is our food tastes. When the kids were excused from the table they were occupied with my gifts. C's husband, Dave, went to his study to work on a case when he finished his dinner. His law firm filled most of schedule, even his weekends it appeared. I helped my sister clear the table and do dishes. We stood side by

side as we washed, rinsed and dried blue accented plates and salad bowls. The air was tense. We had agreed not to talk about the photo until tomorrow. The girls would be at soccer and dance practice and Dave would most probably be occupied in his study. I couldn't think of a single topic to spark conversation. I just kept seeing that photo in my head.

I slept in the guest bedroom. It was beautifully decorated in pink floral fabric and lace-trimmed pillows. There were fresh towels in the guest bath and a vase of daisies on the dresser. Everything seemed to coordinate. Not a single decoration or piece of furniture seemed out of place. It kind of made me sick to my stomach. I slept there anyway.

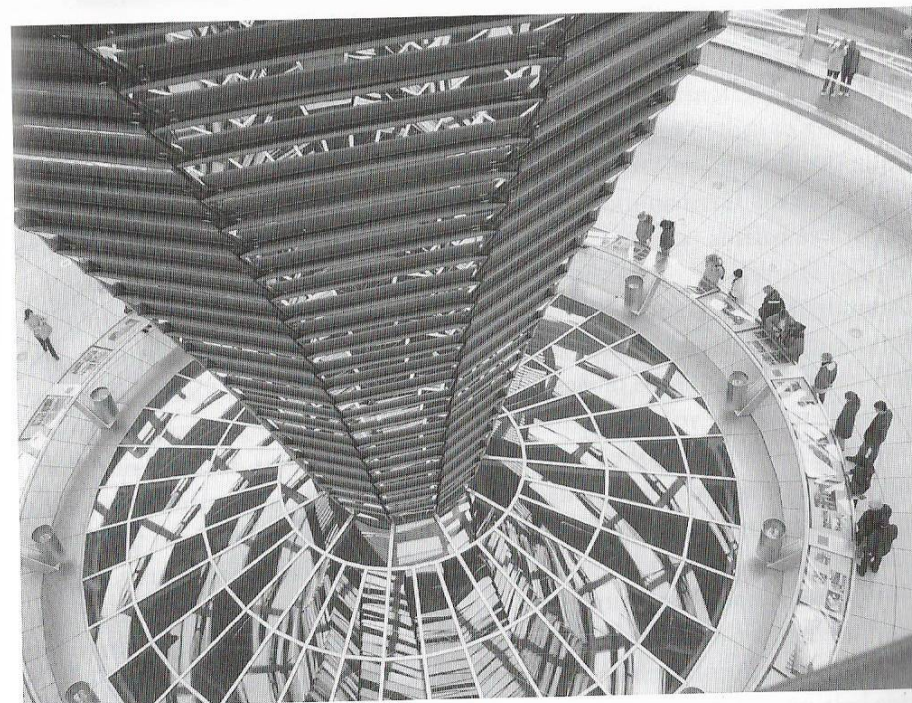
The next morning my sister had a full spread laid out on the breakfast table by eight a.m. There were pancakes, eggs, bacon, a bowl of strawberries, a glass pitcher of orange juice and a carafe of steaming coffee. The table was set with plates, bowls, glasses, and silverware in preparation for everyone to awake. I stood in amazement beside the table, still in my flannel pajamas with my hair pulled back in a clip. I hadn't even brushed my teeth. I heard Dave upstairs waking the girls up. I listened to the girls tease each other as Dave coaxed them along in getting dressed and ready for breakfast. Claire hurried up the stairs to help Tiffany find her soccer cleats. Kristine then insisted that her hair be braided that morning for dance. Dave grabbed a cup of coffee and headed to his desk, the door to his study still open. I sat in a chair and nibbled on a strawberry, not wanting to start eating before everyone was seated.

It took thirty minutes for the girls to find everything they needed for their morning and Claire looked exasperated as she headed down the stairs carrying a navy blue sports duffle bag and a cream colored hand bag decorated with a poodle in a tutu. Without even saying "Good morning" Dave, Kristine, and Tiffany had headed out the van. Claire sat in her seat and frowned. "Good morning," I said cheerfully. She just looked up at me. I poured her a glass of orange juice and helped myself to the pancakes.

A couple minutes passed as we ate breakfast before I got the nerve to bring out the photo. I put it down on the table next to her plate and she stopped eating immediately when she saw it. She picked it up gently and stared at it. She sighed a little. "Max..." she whispered, "it's been a long time."

Inside the Berlin Reichstag

-Kristin Bail



Dresden

-Gregory Aubuchon

The warmth in the three-season room is making me sweat, even though snow fell the night before and will fall again tonight. I sip my tea and look out the window, see a pleasantly overgrown backyard, full of trees and shaggy bushes, lawn decorations, and a swimming pool closed for the winter. A cat brushes against my leg to say hello. It's strange how everything seems somehow familiar to me here in Dresden.

My mind returns with my eyes to the table, and to my hosts. I smile a foreigner's smile at them, trying to say, hi, thank you, lovely home, all with a facial expression. They smile back — they've been smiling the whole time. They speak no English. I speak no German. The tea is good, though, and the cookies simple but satisfying. I feel welcome. Yesterday my girlfriend and I arrived in Dresden (Two days ago I was in Berlin, a week ago, London. Yesterday, though, Claire and I rolled in...) to spend two nights with her distant cousin Stefan, an architecture student. These are his parents. Stefan reenters

the room. "Ve go soon now, OK?" Thankfully, he loved the opportunity to try out his English on his American guests.

Eager to show us a good time, Stefan talks all day of the "party in za vood" where we will kick off the night. The party in the woods, to involve what he terms "traditional German music," turns out to be just that – a gathering of kids our age at a one light-bulb shack barely visible from the road outside of town. I'm half expecting an oompah band in lederhosen, but the traditional German music is a schlagger-fest, a celebration of the kitschy, sappy love ballads popular in Communist Europe in the 70's and 80's.

Thankfully for us, Stefan is not alone in loving to use his English. Catapulted into instant celebrity as word gets around that two real live Americans are present, we are both quickly enveloped into the party's chaos. A thick, ruddy girl leans inches from my face. "I vacation in Florida each year vid my family and ve very much enchoy boating and skiing on za vater are you from Florida too?" She's drunk and spitting in my ear. It's ok. I'm drunk too. Claire smiles at me, red-faced, from the corner (more about the smile?) as an unsteady man in a too-tight jean jacket with beer spilled down his shirt tries to spin her in a dance. I smile back. Stefan tells me that the singer playing is Roland Kaiser, and that he is "very popular vith our parents." I can't understand a word of what Roland says, but the twenty people singing along with such unbounded enthusiasm reminds me of the proverbial college kids belting out Journey at a bar in the states. Now another song comes on, something about Moscow. The music is turned up, and everyone forms a loose circle, locking arms and dancing ad spinning and falling over each other and spilling drinks and laughing and happy.

Sometime in the twelfth century, a Slavic tribe settled on the south bank of the River Elbe and began a community that would eventually become the city of Dresden. Since 1485, it has been the capital of Saxony. For hundreds of years it was the seat of dukes and kings who gathered together renowned architects, artists, and musicians from all over Europe and turned the city into a center for technology, learning, and the arts. During the Industrial Revolution Dresden became a leader in banking and manufacturing as well. The twentieth century saw the city continue to grow in both population and culture; Dresden was a major hub of modern art in Europe until it was outlawed by Hitler. But World War II would bring a sudden change in the course of its history. The now infamous firebombing of Dresden in February of 1945 by the British Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force killed approximately forty-thousand German men, women, and children,

almost all civilians. The city contained no significant war industries or troop concentrations at the time, and was thus largely undefended. The bombing creating a firestorm of unprecedented devastation – it leveled almost the entire inner city, burned alive any living thing above ground, and sucked the oxygen from underground bomb shelters, asphyxiating hundreds of huddled families. What was once a capital of culture and learning, known for hundreds of years as the "Florence of the Elbe," was turned into what Kurt Vonnegut described in *Slaughterhouse Five* as "the surface of the moon." Dresden was a nightmare of death and ruin.

On the train ride from Berlin I couldn't help but wonder how many of the people I would see walking the streets were decedents of the victims and witnesses of the firebombing – how many walking the streets had witnessed it themselves. Obviously the bombing was a huge turning point in the city's history; I wondered what the city would have been like if the destruction had never happened, and what it was like today. I wondered how its citizens felt about it. I wondered how they would feel about me, as an American. Although all that I had read and seen told me that the city was still very beautiful and a fine place to visit, Dresden is only two decades removed from the shadow of the Iron Curtain. It's not really a tourist town, and its people are not as used to Americans as those of the popular European destinations.

I expected to meet at least some level of resentment or anger. I didn't. I expected Stefan to take us to some kind of memorial. He didn't. I expected him to mention the bombing in his overview of the city's history. He didn't. Even when he took us to the Frauenkirche, Dresden's glorious church that was destroyed in the bombing and rebuilt in 2005, he made no mention of what had happened, only that "it is not za orichinal, because, you know..." The promotional material Stefan picked up for us from the local tourism office did not mention the destruction either. It was obvious that this city and its people are focused on the future now, not the past. Everywhere we went we were treated with the utmost graciousness, with kindness and affability that is often hard to find amidst the hustle and bustle of other cities. Taxi drivers laughed and joked in broken English. Pub-goers tried to teach us to curse in German. Beer maids sat down and talked. Dresden was one of the most welcoming cities I visited in Europe. Unfortunately, I could only imagine what experiencing the city would have been like with its fantastic architecture and ancient streets still intact. Vonnegut also describes the rebuilt Dresden of 1967. It "looks a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open space than Dayton has," he says. I've never been to Dayton, but I think I know what he means. Much of Dresden looks like an American town – like everything has been there for

only forty or fifty years. Full of apartment complexes, shopping malls, supermarkets, multiplexes. All squares, straight lines, unadorned, plain. Modern. And, with a few exceptions, boring. Were it not for a small patch of centuries-old buildings on the edge of the Elbe that survived the bombing, it would be hard to imagine that this city even existed in 1945.

Today I have a copy of a picture hanging in my room. Stefan, Claire and I are standing in the middle of the rebuilt town square, backed by the Frauenkirche's towering white dome, centered in a crowd of families, couples, and elderly tour groups all enjoying the crisp but sunny early spring. Two Americans, one German, arms around each other and smiling. We had enjoyed a pleasant morning, strolling along the Elbe, touring the tiny Old Town – an opera house, a palace, and a few other beautiful Baroque buildings left over from Dresden's glory days. The three of us talked about the upcoming American election, Champions League soccer, and career plans. Stefan told us stories of kings past, of the important cultural figures and movements that came out of Dresden, and his vision of the future for his hometown and his country. Stefan was very proud to show his city off – as he should have been. As we walked through the Old Town that morning, I noticed that the faces of so many of Dresden's surviving buildings are stained black. I wondered if it was from the bombing.

I didn't ask.

Photo by Jaekwan Lim



The Game of World Domination

Kristin Brownawell

The Soldier

Civilians and generals say we brave and true will take the earth. A part of history can't refuse his role, so I am history. Middle Eastern post and socks turn yellow. Reinforcements never come. We live by cards and die by dice, despite the general's useless strategies. The heat of Southern European troops will melt us down and we will run like blood.

The General

The men will say they live by chance, but I have played the cards and screw the dice. It's skill and strategy and cunning, crafting false alliances that conquer Earth. I fell, but cached my horde in corners. Now attack where Africa is thin. My cannon come. My world is one.

The Player

The world is flat, laid out between desserts and milk. The infantry are neatly piled in bins with cannon and cavalry there. My adversaries ring the table, wrapped in sweaters, clutching cider, snarling 'War.' We roll the dice and deploy sets by turn, our tactics judged. Play safe to grow and win, but con your foe with reckless moves. What's life without a little Risk?

James liked being inside of buildings. What was there not to like? They kept the weather from becoming too unbearable, there was furniture made to fit human needs, there was usually nicer things than outside, and they generally just looked nice. The thing that James liked most of all though, was that being inside of a building made it much easier to forget about how the outside looked, all parched and barren. Actually, the thing he hated the most about how it all looked was the ever-crumbling buildings that he hid himself in so frequently; James wasn't sure if that was ironic or not. It was hard to remember how the outside looked without also remembering how it had gotten that way and how different things had gotten from the way they once were.

It had been five years since the bombs went off. Unlike many people, he couldn't actually remember where he was when it happened; an unfortunately aimed piece of debris saw to that. He had woken up under a pile of rubble with a splitting headache, but otherwise none the worse for wear. It had probably been lucky he had been unconscious under that pile, actually, otherwise he probably would have been either killed or robbed (quite probably both) had he been up and walking around in the chaos that ensued. Even if he couldn't remember the exact moment everything went straight to hell, the aftermath certainly didn't leave anything to the imagination. No matter where James went, the landscape had been turned into wasteland. To be fair, he hadn't seen the point in travelling very far, so he couldn't be entirely sure about the fate of the rest of the world, but he could guess.

Not that any of that mattered. James had managed to eke out a living with what little there was left through his own efforts and the occasional trade with other survivors. He did the latter only when the former proved insufficient, though; dealing with other people was kind of depressing. Just like the waste outside, they always reminded him of the way things were before. Even worse were the children. James couldn't even so much as glance at them without thinking about how they should be climbing trees or jumping rope instead of rifling through the old rusted-out junk piles that had once been vehicles and hiding from the bandits and crazies. It didn't do anyone any good to get all sentimental, least of all himself.

He always did his best to try and forget all the suffering and bedlam that was going on in the world. Usually he managed to do it, but it was inevitable that sometimes these sorts of morose thoughts would manage to creep

into his skull. It started happening again as he went about his usual daily routine of watering the plants he used to grow a livable supply of food. James hated it when this happened; sometimes he would feel completely melancholy for an entire week before he managed to build up another wall of apathy.

As he sighed in resignation, James happened to look out the window at the wastes around the office building he had taken up residence in and blinked. That definitely wasn't good. A rather large group of people, many not entirely sober by the looks of them, were making their way towards his current abode. By not looking out the damn window, James had let these people come right up to his front door without even the slightest notice!

As he berated himself, James took another look at the group of people coming his way and noticed something that had escaped his attention upon first glance. In the middle of the band, there was a smaller group with much more submissive air about them than the boisterousness of the rest. As he watched, a man in the center group accidentally tripped over his own feet and fell to the ground. Rather than help him up, a larger man from the surrounding group gave him a swift kick and what was probably a curse of some sort. Great, not only was there a big group of people coming to his building, but it looked like they were slavers as well. Another peek out the window told James that immediate escape was not an option; he was on the tenth floor, and the group was close enough that by the time he managed to get to the bottom, they'd be there. He'd have to hide and hope that an opportunity to get away would present itself.

Fortunately, there was probably enough time for him to clear out all his things so it wouldn't be suspected that there was anyone living there. James seriously doubted the people would be in any hurry to get to the tenth floor if they wanted to get up that high at all. More likely most of them would stay more towards the bottom and send a few up top to keep watch.

Calmed somewhat to have a plan, James began collecting everything he thought he would need and putting it into a ragged backpack: food and water, some flint and steel, a small knife, an extra set of clothes, a pistol, and the meager supply of bullets he'd managed to scrounge up. Everything else he hid in various supply cabinets and desks around the floor. About halfway through this, he heard the loud noises somewhere below him that gave him such a start that he dropped the potted plant he had been carrying which promptly crashed to the floor. James stood perfectly still, waiting to see if the sound had been noticed by his unwelcome guests. When no investigation seemed forthcoming, he cleaned up the mess as best he could and finished hiding his things. That done, he went to the room he thought was farthest from the stairs and waited nervously, pistol clutched in his hands.

Other than a few noises of people going up and down the stairs, the rest of the day was relatively uneventful. Not having much else to do, James wondered about the timid-looking people that had apparently been captured. Slavers didn't normally bring slaves around with them, so these people must have been recently taken. Could they have been from the nearby settlement James occasionally traded with? He hoped not. Although he tried not to associate with them too much, they really weren't bad people; in fact, the reason he didn't associate with them was because they reminded him too much of how nice it was before.

Stewing in his own thoughts, James didn't notice when it began to grow dark. It wasn't until the sun was well below the horizon did he look up and notice that the light in the room was gone. It was time to see if he could sneak out, then. He wished he could just stay in that room until they all left, but the chance that they might go rummaging around was too great. Reluctantly, James made his way to the stairs making as little noise as he could.

As soon as he appraised that the stairwell was clear, he began to climb down the now seemingly endless path down. He did so very carefully, putting as much weight as he could on the railings on the side so as to not cause the steps to squeak.

After what seemed like an eternity, James reached the ground floor. Being as quiet as he could, he pressed his ear against the door leading out of the stairwell. He didn't hear anything, but he supposed that didn't really mean much; other people were just as capable as he was in being quiet. Still, James wanted to get out of that building before anyone went looking around, so he cracked open the door. The narrow field of vision provided by the crack helped him immensely more than the short listening session did; there was no one guarding the doors. He'd still have to be careful, though, as the look hadn't given him any insight into the rest of the front lobby. For all he knew, there was an army of people out there, all with automatic weapons pointed at the entrance. James didn't think the chances of running into an army were very good, however, and decided to risk a better look.

After poking his head out, James got a much better idea of the situation. Two guards sat on stools on either side of the reception area, either asleep or acting asleep from the position of their heads slumped onto their chests. Between them there was a small group of the people they had taken, presumably to act as hostages in case the larger group got a wild hair to revolt. James was fairly confident that the guards were really sleeping, and began creeping as quickly as he could towards the exit.

About halfway there, he stopped. Could he free those people in the lobby? It seemed like it might be possible. Obviously the others were out,

since there would be many more of the slavers around, but there were only two here. He could slit their throats as they slept and attempt to sneak the people out. When he thought about it like that, it seemed downright easy. James even took a step or two towards them and began reaching for his knife when he stopped once again. So much could go wrong. He could cut the wrong artery and the guard would raise an alarm, one of the prisoners could wake up too loudly, one of the prisoners could actually another guard among them, and a whole host of other things. It just wasn't worth the risk. Still, these weren't bad people. He'd shared laughs with them, traded with them. Sure, he avoided them when he could, but that was only because they reminded him too much of how things used to be. They didn't deserve to go into slavery. It just wasn't right...

James tried not to think about it as he fled.

By the Ocean

-Matthew West



Surviving

Sara Herman

I am a delicate clock
My two hands whirl in all directions
But move in silence, undetected.
The sound I make is a ballet dancer.
I'd make a nice addition to a mantle
But then again, this clock is too resounding.

Spring is nowhere: the air smells only of bitter cold.
My boots dislike the taste of salty slush and dirt,
While snow falls sparkling upon the rooftops.
Maybe we could cozy up in the cabin
Since the sunlight teases our tired thoughts.
Golden rays shed darkness upon our hearts.

We slept underwater, snoring bubbles with the fish.
Scooter tried swimming, but scraped her knee:
The scab will scar her youthful dreams.
She'll have to swim to the bottom to surface for air,
But the water tried desperately to drown her.
The bitter cold slowly freezes my hands.

Miracles and Stuff, and Horses

Josh Ray

We came back from Europe and found our horse was dead.
Europe was a great time. Estelle cried a lot. Over the horse, not the trip. In fact, she was very happy throughout our European experience. This is because she didn't know our horse had died.
I didn't know either, of course, so I was happy too. On the trip, I mean. Not when I found out our horse was dead.
Every once in a while, one can trade one's vacation days for a vacation. Estelle and I work for the same business and accrued the same amount of vacation days. We were married in college, see, and entered into the same business after graduation. That's how we had the same amount of vacation days. Now we don't have any days because we've used them all.
We bought our horse a few years ago with some extra money we had. I believe we bought it as a sort of present to ourselves for having paid off our

student loans.

Estelle wanted, and I guess I did too, to live in the country and own a small acreage. So we did, so we are. We have two dogs, some cats, and a horse. A dead horse, I mean.

In Europe we were really happy. It was three weeks in heaven. Sienna and Krakow were our favorites.

I remember Estelle said, "Phillip, can you feel the history here? Is it not enough to keep yourself warm with at night!"

"Oh, yes! Quite. If I had not your arms to hold me I would make a permanent residence of this country." And we kissed and the trumpeter called the hour in four directions.

We came back home to the states and had a wonderful night with our beds pushed together.

There were eggs and toast waiting for me the next morning. Estelle had her hair about her shoulders and she poured me a cup of hot chocolate.

"Love," she said. "You and me and eternity."

She kissed me and I enjoyed a wonderful meal that Saturday morning.

Later we put on our shoes and walked to the kennel. Exceptional dogs, I must say. Little terrier-types of some kind or other. We let them out and played with them. The Gregorlys, the elderly neighbor couple from across the way, had taken good care of our pups. And the grass was recently mowed and the garden weeded.

"What about Boxer?" I asked. "Let's go find that rascal."

We held hands and fairly skipped to the corral. "Boxer!" we called.

We found his feed and overflowed his trough in our enthusiasm.

"Boxer!"

We found him laying under the old oak. Estelle screamed and held on to me. We could just tell. We didn't even have to go very close. We could just tell, is all.

We stood there for a while. I stared at Boxer and she cried into my chest. I smoothed her back and shoulders and ran my hand through her hair. I looked up and pondered the sky. A tear hit my nose. Another one hit my fingers in her hair. "It's raining," she said, and we went inside.

Estelle threw off her shoes and locked herself in our room. She was crying her heart out. "Estelle," I said through the door. "Estelle, won't you let me in, Estelle. Let me help you out, dearest."

"Oh, Phillip! Oh, poor Phillip. I'm okay, really. Just let me be alone for a bit, okay Phillip, please?"

"Okay, Estee. Okay. It'll be alright, you know. I'm awful sorry about it." Some businesses object to hiring couples. I think this is a safeguard against

the possibility of a mass layoff, leaving a family without an income. I wonder if another reason is to accommodate the space required within a marriage. Patience and Tolerance exist to acknowledge breaking points.

I drank a glass of milk and thought about it in the living room. I thought about us. Estelle and I. Seven years of marriage isn't very long. Boxer was with us for probably three of those years.

We wanted a horse because . . . because we had a farm, and we needed a horse. We bought him old, I guess. And of course we knew he would die at some point.

She had dreams of learning to ride him, but we watched *Gone with the Wind* and she stopped before she started. But we kept him around because he was such a good horse. We fed him the apples from our tree straight from our hands. We stroked his mane and laughed at his growing tumescence. Sometimes, when we first got him and were filled with the excitement that comes with getting a new pet, we would sit on the fence and talk to him and swat the flies for him. Sometimes we'd sing and Estelle would dance and we had shows for him there in the corral.

On a hotel rooftop in Paris, reading D.H.'s poetry to each other, stars, tiny cars below, the sound of humming civilization, kisses and kisses . . .

The sobbing continued in the other room. I rinsed my glass and left it in the sink. I took the dirty clothes from our bags and separated them. Whites, colors, dry-clean. I threw the whites in the washing machine and trekked to the mailbox.

Grad school, finding her in the library day after day, she has classes at one and four, her with Kingsolver, me with Fitzgerald, finding ourselves beside each other at the Vagina Monologues, at the English student-faculty dinner, talking . . .

Newspapers in the recycling, catalogues on the ottoman, letters on the TV. Bills paid and put back in the mailbox.

Moonlight, a Ferlinghetti reading, walking to the Bridge, placing the ring on her finger, three months later married and graduated . . .

There was the sound of something being pushed across the floor and the door opened. "What," she started, wiping her eyes, "What do you want for lunch?"

"Oh, don't worry about it. I can make something."

"No, let me make something for you." She leaned in the kitchen doorway in front of me with her arms crossed and listed my options.

"Well, how about a ham and cheese?"

"Sure."

The day passed slowly as we read our books on the couch. We went to bed

when the ten o'clock news ended. After brushing my teeth, I followed her into our room and found our beds apart.

"Estelle?"

She looked at me with wide, distracted eyes. "Oh, I had to, to make the beds."

She got into bed and lay with her back to me.

I sat on my bed and looked at her.

Newlyweds, Alaska, cruise ship, the rocking of the sea and the rocking of the bed . . .

I walked around my bed and pushed it towards her.

"Phillip! Hon! No, please, not now."

"I just thought we'd keep a good thing going. I can kiss your tears and wipe them for you."

"Oh, Phillip," she said sadly. "No, no." Muffled sobs came from beneath her pillow.

I got into bed and turned off the light.

There was waffle mix laid out for me when I woke the next morning. She left a note on the fridge: "Went to church, be back noonish."

I picked up the paper and read the funnies in my pajamas.

We went to work on Monday. I drove.

Estelle got up early on Tuesday and drove herself to work. I followed ten minutes later.

Same for the rest of the week.

I got up early on Saturday and made some chocolate chip pancakes. I brought them to her in bed.

"You shouldn't have, Phillip."

"Oh, okay. Yeah, I know. I just thought, you know, I would."

She ate two of them and I had leftovers for lunch.

"Boxer's still down there," she said at lunch.

"Mm? Oh! My! What should we do?"

"I don't know. Call the vet?"

I called the vet but the clinic was closed and no one answered the phone.

"It'll be alright for a while, huh? Until Monday?" I asked.

"I don't know how long he's been like that, though."

"Yeah."

She went to church on Sunday. We went to work again on Monday in separate vehicles and forgot to call the vet that whole week.

She got back from church on Sunday and said, "Phil, let's go dig a hole."

"Yes."

We put on our boots and grabbed the shovels from the garage. The grass was

high and the dogs yelped loudly. "Pups!" I had forgotten about them. "Have you been feeding them, Stee?"

"Yes, of course."

"Right."

We found him again in the same spot under the oak. I thought it wasn't such a bad place to die, shade and such. But he was bloated. He was probably five times his original size. We halted our walk. He looked like a giant furry marshmallow, some bizarre dessert for the wood nymphs.

"Damn!" I said.

Estelle looked just as shocked and threw her shovel, dropping to her knees and staring at the ground. "Hey, dear, don't worry about it. It's natural, I'm sure. We'll just have to dig a bigger hole than we thought."

She propped her elbows on her knees and cried into her hands.

So I approached the horse and tested the earth around him to see if it would be easy to dig up.

I turned and asked, "Darling, where should I start? Right here?"

She sobbed louder and I turned back around to the horse.

The first few inches were the toughest, but I managed about a two-foot square hole before the blisters really started to bite.

"I'm gonna get some gloves and I'll be back," I said, dropping my shovel and heading back to the house.

I came back with fully bandaged hands underneath the leather gloves and found her sitting with her head resting on the horse's back, tears going down her cheeks. "Estelle, I wouldn't touch it so much, you know."

She said nothing and I picked up my shovel.

The hole was gone. The dirt I removed had been replaced and patted neatly down.

"What the hell, Estelle?"

She stood, crying anew. "We can't just bury him, Phillip! It's not that simple!"

I stared at her. "What do we do, then? I thought —"

"I don't know! Jesus, Phillip! What do I know about dead horses, for God's sake!" She stood trembling. "I just know we can't bury it like this."

I dropped my shovel and walked back to the house. What I needed was a hot shower.

I unwrapped my bandaged hands and stepped into the shower and steam.

A few minutes later I heard the bathroom door open and could make out the vague form of Estelle through the translucent shower glass.

"Phillip," she said. "Phillip, I need the shower."

"Can't you see I'm in the shower, Estelle? Do you want me to get out? Why

in God's name do you need the shower?"

"Phillip!" she choked. "Boxer's body just exploded on me or something. I don't know what happened, but now I'm covered in Boxer and I just need to use the shower, please."

I stopped cleaning myself and thought about what she said.

"I rinsed most of it off outside with the hose, but I need to be clean, please."

I opened the door and water shot onto the bath mat and across the floor. We looked at each other and she undressed and stepped in.

She reeked awfully bad and stood with her back to me. I grabbed my bottle and drenched her thoroughly in my body wash, rubbing it into her body through the washcloth.

"How did that happen? It must have been right after I left."

"Yeah, right after you left."

She turned and held her arms over her head as she let me clean her face, chest, and stomach.

I stopped and we looked at each other. I put up the body wash and took down a bottle of shampoo. I poured it on her and worked it into her hair. She drew her face close to mine and I massaged the back of her head. She looked up at me and I held her there with my hands behind her ears. Soap suds and shampoo streaked down her face and dripped from her nose and chin.

"We don't ever need to buy another horse, do we Phillip?" she said softly.

I laughed and she laughed and I kissed her. She smiled and she tasted wonderful. We looked at each other. "No, Estee. Let's not." Our eyes were locked. "But can we buy a double bed?"

"Yes."

"And can I drive you to work tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"And will we be happy?"

"Yes!"

We kissed again.

"I think that's fine then, Estelle. I think that's fine."