Great Lake Review - Spring 2013

THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW
OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE
SPRING 2013

In life, we achieve many large goals. Gigantic goals that we hope for and do everything in our path to achieve. But what is the best way to go about achieving these mamoth goals? By creating smaller goals for yourself that will build up and contribute to your chances of achieving a greater one.

We at the Great Lake Review see ourselves as one of the smaller goals, but still a significant one. To make a name for yourself as a writer, you must practice submitting and make it a goal to get into a publication. If your work made it into this edition of the Great Lake Review, congratulations. If not, keep writing, keep growing, stay persistant.

The Great Lake Review is not only a goal for SUNY Oswego's writers, but also our editors, who have put in the time and effort to read and edit all of the pieces you've submitted. Learning new skills to create a book, and spending countless hours reading and re-reading. Thank you editors, you are incredibly appreciated.

Obstacles and distractions will turn your attention away from your overall giant goals. We wish you the best of luck wherever you go and whatever goals you try to achieve. Please continue to sumbit and tell your friends about the Great Lake Review.

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OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE
SPRING 2013

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Diner
Patrick Donohue

Leaf

Andrew Baumgras

We've done things I never thought we'd do,
become something I never thought we'd be.
Greed has got the best of us,
temptations will not set us free.
We've got to stop ourselves
before we go too far.
We've got to get a grip
on who we are,
or we will blacken the rain.
All of Earth will feel the pain.

A leaf drops,
bloody and beautiful,
while our dump trucks
pump sludge through the veins
of the leaf's former tree.
The sludge oozes out through the cracks
in the bark of the tree as it's greeted by daylight.
The beams of light dance
with the flammable fumes of sludge,
waiting for the inevitable.
The fumes ignite.
The leaf watches in reluctant relief.
Saving winds carry it from the brush
as the forest combusts to dust.
It howls.

"But never mind the howls, my dear.
There's nothing more than business here."
Big Brother sits up in his chair.
His business: burn the mountain bare.
As we stare, we accept the agony
for there's a bright side to this genocide.
More room to live and roads to drive
and beauty in poetic lies
hidden by corporate's deep blue eyes.
But they'll trip us with their tricks and rhymes,
For sure enough, we'll all soon die.

This too Shall Pass
K.M. Alleena

I.

Here's the truth we all hate to hear: we don't always know what's good for us.

I still don't know how to stop missing the scenery of South Berwick, Maine, or any of the surrounding places, really. I was rash once, and I think that can be a bit of a problem that plain bravery doesn't encompass.

Still. I fell in love, and sometimes the things we do and the choices we make teach us these harsh, invaluable lessons. When I close my eyes to sleep, little flashes and instances stick out to me like photographs pasted to a collage board. In each, a hidden story, room for over-analyzing. In each, a beautiful pain.

II.

He was strong, just not in the way I needed him to be—not in the way I wished he was. He towered above me, looking like a Norseman, or, considering his hazel eyes and long brown hair, more like a Pictish Warrior. Never intimidating, but a protective presence. Somehow calm in every way that I wasn't. I could see how dark the circles were under his eyes—his last final exam had been earlier that morning. Philosophy. His skin was rough and I still remember the scruff of his would-be beard against my cheek as he folded me in an embrace the moment I stepped off the train at Wells Station.

There he was, a soul with a body. Warm, with a flashy smile and a light of joy in his eyes that shouted to the world that he had finally caught a glimpse of something good. Perhaps he had spent a while in dimness. Surely that good couldn't have been...me? Right?

I looked a bit sick and felt it, too. Trains didn't seem to agree with me, and my journey took nearly thirteen hours. But somehow, even in my nervous, shaking silence of finally arriving, I felt like I belonged—that I'd found a place my feet could get used to.

III.

I had never felt so welcome anywhere than when his mother greeted me. She would eventually tell me that when I arrived, the colors of their little corner of the universe seemed to change. I prayed under my breath that it was true, and not just kind, poetic words. I was there in Maine with supposedly one goal—to celebrate Yule, the Winter Solstice, on December twenty-second. I took in the sights of the house I would be staying at—neat, but lived in. Quaint. A fondness for antiquity was apparent, and the chair I had set my bag on was revealed to be over fifty years-old, with its wooden legs chipped by cat's claws claiming it for their own. It would have been perfect. I could've gotten used to it easily. Only love always complicated everything. Here, it wasn't just the casual walk out by Lake Ontario, day dreaming mutually with algae ridden rocks beneath bare feet. Here, it wasn't, *"I've got work to do, and I will see you again later."* It wasn't a peck on the cheek and a wish for safe travel. Nor was it a promised Skype conversation when the week yawned slowly into a digital Saturday morning coffee date. This was his world, and I could either observe it quietly, or be rash.

IV.

I really thought this whole adventure would finally yield the results I had been looking for. In his living room, he held me in an embrace by the worn-out staircase, strong arms wrapped around my shoulders. The scent of his cologne was faint from the time spent waiting in the Maine winds for the train to arrive. He tried to make it so I wouldn't fall apart, and I felt like I wouldn't. I felt like maybe, just maybe, this all proved to him that it was worth it to make our relationship serious. Only, just like my usual nerves get in the way of speaking up, I didn't tell him how I'd been feeling. The words were lost in the ticking of the clock, with gold hands I couldn't see by candlelight. It was only Thursday, and I could stay until Sunday afternoon. It might have been ten minutes that we stood like that, but I was content to call it an eternity. I felt safe. And if he knew that, maybe he wouldn't have let go so quickly. He probably heard my heart skip for just a second. Some sort of premonition.

He did let go eventually because either it was quarter to four in the morning and letting go was practical, or it

could've been the binary between light and dark we've always played. He thinks he's dark, I think I'm broken. He's actually an illusory illumination—that one mirage I thought I saw in the distance between pine trees and snow banks. That flicker, like unfocused points of decorative light in photographs, of what I thought was change—hope. Despite these notions, I have always felt that he saw a more complete me each time he looked into my eyes and smiled.

V.

Maybe the ghosts in the guest room didn't want me sleeping in past exactly ten the next morning. When my eyes creaked open, I didn't feel any more apt to speak my heart, perhaps even the opposite. The house ran on wood stove heat, a little black pellet stove backed into a brick frame for a fireplace, and so the house was a solid fifty-five degrees kind of cold. I shuffled into the now-familiar living room with the borrowed blue blanket off of the guest bed and a copy of "The Name of the Wind" by Patrick Rothfuss, an author of his recommendation. While I read in the quiet moments before anyone woke, I listened to him snore softly upstairs, caught in whatever dream he'd soon be forced to wake from. I hoped that his was comfortable—opposite in every way from mine. It wasn't long, truthfully, before he woke up.

He always did have the most beautiful smile, but something struck me about how he managed to be handsome regardless of lumbering down the stairs with a yawn. When I wished him good morning, his eyes lit up and he grinned while stretching, fingertips barely brushing the white plaster ceiling. His hair wasn't nearly as much of a wreck as mine despite the fact that it's always been much longer. But, I have curls, so I tied them back haphazardly, against their will, so he didn't see the disaster area they'd become. But he knew. He always knew. And he didn't mind a bit. He shrugged it off, made me coffee, and put his arm over my shoulders regardless.

VI.

We went to see *"The Hobbit"* later that afternoon, and just like other people on these sorts of adventures do, I leaned in close to him and watched, behind two pairs of glasses, the movie in 3D. My head was on his shoulder for

the duration of the entire film. Sometimes, especially after a direct quote from the book, I peered up at him with a laugh at the smile meant for me that I could see behind his goofy 3D frames. Later, still chattering on occasion about how awesome the movie had been, we went out together to dinner. It was authentic sushi, an experience he had promised me when we first met, and I was surprised that he even remembered.

The restaurant was busy, just on the edge of town. Little red paper lanterns with yellow tassels swayed at the entrance way over a stone statue of Buddha smiling merrily. The rocky gaze hid laughter, and I wasn't sure at first if he laughed at all unknowing patrons like me—the ones who had no clue what exactly to expect. Once guided inside, we sat at the bar and watched the chefs hum native songs under their breath while they worked. This was true culinary art, but I felt inadequate staring at the menu, not knowing how to pronounce the dishes, or even what they were. He chuckled, a sharp, snarky sound that moved through his entire being, and ordered for me.

The Japanese men who worked their art were not silent, and laughed heartily at my expression when the spider roll was placed before me. Crispy fried crab pieces sticking out haphazardly from rice and seaweed. It was only food. I had to remind myself aloud, for it looked frightening at best. He spared me the agony of a fact: the scallop wasn't at first sushi as any other would imagine it to be. It was killed about thirty seconds before I ate it. My stomach flipped and was in knots more from when he told me a half an hour later than from the foul, ocean-water flavor of sea urchin sushi, and not even the taste of perfect, authentic green tea could wash that away. But, in his boyish, silly antics, even though I remained mostly quiet, I forgot for just a moment about my dream that morning. Forgot that I knew exactly what our wanderings in Portsmouth would feel like.

VII.

On Saturday, I woke up again at exactly ten in the morning, paranoid that someone had surely heard my sobs I had held in until I believed myself sure they had gone to sleep. I regretted my inability to speak, or only telling a half-truth when he asked me what I was thinking about. The

answer would have caught him off guard anyway.

Just as handsome as always, he wandered downstairs and sat on the orange couch with me right after he woke up. He admitted he didn't sleep well, so we each had an extra cup of coffee while his mother sang under her breath and cooked us all breakfast. Afterward, we went on our way. Apparently, there was much more of New England to see. As if it wasn't gorgeous enough where I stood. I admit, however, that the beach right near his home really was beautiful. In the grey, sodden sand, there were two hearts carved out and marked with little white sea-shells and bits of weathered branches. He walked right through one, leaving his left footprint dead center. I slid down the rocks to get closer to the shore, but he held my hand; he didn't want me to fall and that was probably half the problem.

VIII.

We arrived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire later on in the afternoon. It wasn't so far away, but I had to take cellphone photographs of the two of us standing with our backs to the waves, awkwardly buffeted by Maine's winter winds and self-consciousness. There was also the fact that I could not get enough of the Nubble Lighthouse. I couldn't tear my gaze away. It reminded me too much of growing up on Cape Cod, and how very few things surpassed the awe of staring out over the ocean. It wasn't snowing then, but I could smell precipitation in the chilled salty air, my sneakers soaked through from escapades too close to the waves. I wondered if the shellfish in tiny tide pools would root for us, tell us how good we looked together and that there were no such things as bad photos where there were beautiful memories.

Something felt off to me as we sat outside at a spindly metal table and sipped coffee, making small talk about how it ought to have been colder for this time of year and how hilarious it was that I had come to Maine when lobster wasn't advertised on every sidewalk chalkboard advertisement. We walked, discussing how Portsmouth looked quite similar to Ithaca Commons in the area where we happened to be. The wind was freezing, my feet were numb, and still I tried to enjoy the moment. But he didn't take my hand as we walked, no matter how often our wrists bumped together and our

knuckles brushed. My fingers remained ice cold.

IX.

We stood on a little ledge stopped by a fence of green, rusting iron scroll work that overlooked the harbor where the boats gently bobbed on the waves the breeze was causing. The sun had since set, and I fidgeted under the harsh gaze of the moon. I had *seen* this before, and he was quiet, not at all convincing me that I had somehow changed the fate of things. I had hope, though, and so I spoke at last. Spilled my heart and told my thoughts, but no, not to the boy beside me. He was only half listening, stuck in his own story. Stuck on an ending he had no context for; he thought he had read the last pages before he really started the novel. Did he know the pages he read were a publisher's witty preview for another book by another author? Probably not, but he applied his pretense regardless.

He told me he felt no spark, and without one, it would still remain "*kind of a relationship.*" What he meant was that he kind of liked having me around, but didn't want to ground himself or settle down. He was, as they say, losing the moon while he counted the stars. The way he let out a small, weak laugh threw me off, and I felt like someone had kicked the back of my knees. I remained standing, almost to spite it. He couldn't have been oblivious to the flames I held inside my ribcage. The flames *he* started. That wasn't a spark? He held me, and told me that I am worth more than I think, and despite never being told this before, I always thought I was worth a lot. I know he knew this too. Some things are too precious to hold, I suppose. Some things cannot be unseen, un-foretold in dreams.

Maybe it was that he was acutely aware that I *knew* and would always know. I would illuminate the darkness he saw himself shrouded in and he could no longer hide.

X.

Some celebration it was that night. He had no problem feeling awful for ending things, claiming he hated to hurt me. No problem taking my hand as I sang a Death Cab for Cutie song to deal with the frustration, and the lyrics were appropriate:

“Just our hands clasped so tight
waiting for a hint of a spark.”

He didn’t sob, but when I looked at him and saw tears on his face, in his eyes, it was worse.

He was sent outside to start the solstice fire, and eventually I had enough strength and composure regained to join him. This was just after I figured out a way, yet again, to save my tears for later, maybe to be released over a whispered lament of *“On My Own”* from Les Misérables. I remember how eerie it was to look at a hulking figure almost dancing over the blaze. The flames touched the sky and seemed to melt away the navy clouds so the stars could look on, too. Each time the wind blew, it creaked through the branches of trees and they made a woody sighing sound as though they cried out to their pieces, collected and placed in a pile to burn.

I noticed that while I had this metaphoric fire inside my ribcage, his was *real*. Had to be real. Actual wood burning and smoke rising, engulfing him entirely. Whatever metaphors he had or has, he locked them away. He would send me a text later on, after the train left, that he had always had mountains of caring, but no spark. As I stood beside him in the fading light of dying flames, I knew. Sparks needed air to grow into a fire. He and wind never really got along too well.

I thought of asking him why, as I still do, but decided against it. The fire burned down to cinders and ashes to be scattered by a storm and he held me. I breathed in deeply as the smell of smoke clung to his clothes and hair; it suited him somehow. His strong arms are still around my shoulders each time I close my eyes and remember. I know that somehow, deep down, neither one of us wanted to let go. I know that somehow, deep down, we never really did.

Golden Winter
Nick Graziano

Loko Razor
Nathan Valeska

Crickets
Michael McCabe

It's so late the crickets are loud enough to echo.

She is thinking, *this is a little heavy-handed for a first date.* He is thinking, *I'm definitely getting some action tonight*.

He moves closer to her so she can smell his eighty dollar cologne. She moves closer not to be rude.

A star flickers intensely and she points to it. Somehow it stands out amid a trillion white dots on a blackened canvas.

"You know," he says, "that star probably doesn't even exist. It's an illusion. The light takes so long to reach earth it might not even be there."

"Crazy," she says, rolling her eyes. He pulls her closer. "I wonder what happens when the sun dies."

He thinks for a moment.

"Well, we don't have to worry about that for a long, long time."

She laughs. "Don't be so optimistic."

A truck blares its horn in the distance, silencing the crickets. They move apart.

"It's getting late," she says.

He takes the long way, over back roads, passing homes so rustic it's like they were driving through an L.L. Bean catalog. He's mistaken romance for ambiance, again.

He is wondering if he has anything to drink at home. She is wondering if any of the stars actually exist.

The Doll
Danielle Walters

Hidden in the closet,
beneath the books
notes of past grades.
Under the baby blankets,
and shoes
sleeps my oldest friend.

Her face has been beaten
dirtied
clothes unkempt.
The smell of baby powder
cheerios lingering
on her synthetic skin.

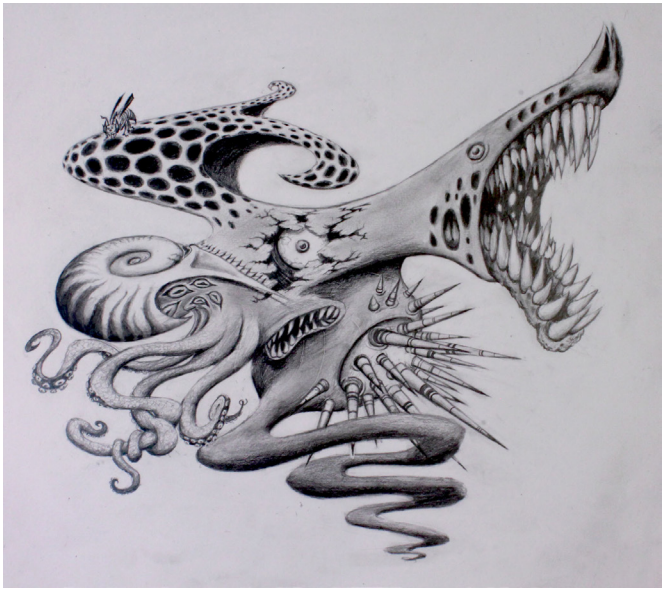
I blamed her for coloring
on the toy box,
for the cake that disappeared.
My brother spoke for her,
my father danced with her,
my mother was sure to nestle her beside me as I slept.

Now, my friend,
rests in a box,
Sunk deep below
the many moving boxes;
graduated objects of life's passing time.

Once in a dear while
I search for her,
to hold her close just once more.

I never can find
my oldest friend.

Entropic Entity
Zachary Wilson



Lippo
Emily Tran

Lord of Skulls
Shelby Coyle

The night was as black as a thief's heart and the storm in the distance was fast approaching. The lightning crackled and the thunder roared and the rain drowned even the sky.

There was but one lone figure walking the darkened path through the night. One lone figure using the storm to light his steps from behind as he raced ahead, retreating to the village before he was caught by the merciless weather.

Man is not faster than wind, however, and he could not help but squawk indignantly as the rain soaked him to the bone.

The man looked up. He saw the sky flashing, the clouds swirling above. It was an ominous sign and one that chilled him more thoroughly than the rain ever could have done.

The thunder crashed around him and he hurried his steps.

It took longer than usual for the village to come into sight, hidden by the downpour as it was. The candlelight in the windows was a welcome sight to the weary traveler, who had been on the road for nearly three days now.

The lightning sliced the air before him.

Startled, the man fell back, the mud soaking through his already wet clothing.

The man tried to stand, slipping on the muddied path. The sound of sloshing became heard over the rain, between the screams from the sky.

Blinking through the water that filled his eyes, the man looked up from his place on the ground.

Before him, a cloaked figure rested on a horse as black as the storm. The man could barely make out the man in front of him, but was sure that a hand had been extended down to him.

"Thank you," the man reached up, his hand clasping the one offered to him.

Surprise filled the man's eyes as a strange feeling, a coldness, seeped from the hand through to his entire body. "What-" the man cut himself off with a yelp, then a scream.

The horseman reached down, plucking something from the ground.

The horse reared up while the lightning flashed behind it, screaming over the thunder.

The cloaked figure held up his prize. Lightning illuminated the skull, its sockets empty and its jaw hanging open in a silent scream.

The Woman on the Side of the Road
Collin Henderson

A trucker drove along the highway in the intense heat. Sweat dripped from his forehead. He wiped at it with one hand, keeping the other on the wheel.

He was lost in his own thoughts when he saw something on the ground up ahead. He slowed down until he was about twenty feet away from it. It was a woman. She was beautiful at one point. Now she was wearing filthy clothing that was torn up and covered with dirt and some kind of dark stain. Her blond hair was caked with muck of some kind. Her face was red from the sun and her lips were chapped beyond belief. She looked like a woman who had been through a war zone.

She had a shotgun in one hand.

The trucker approached her slowly, listening to her giggling. He eyed the gun warily, but drew closer to her anyway, hands raised in a sign of safety. When his shadow covered part of her face, she stopped laughing and looked up at him with brilliant blue eyes. They looked like they had seen something horrible. They remained that way for some time, staring at each other. She didn't say anything until he spoke.

"Miss?"

She swung the shotgun up and pointed the barrel at him. His heart began to gallop. She pulled the trigger and all that came out was a quiet clicking noise. She gave him a wicked "gotcha" grin.

"That's funny. I could have sworn I had one more shot in this thing. I know I did when I left town."

He left her in the sand, laughing and gazing into the sky. He never looked back.

Plague
Kristen Kopper

Mourn for the old world,
Before the air runs rampant with contagion.

Roads lead to a paradise plagued by black feathers of ravens
Feasting on decay.

There,
the Iron gates were wielded from flames of alienation,
Bloodless outsiders roam streets of past humanity
Always seeking vigor,
Or pale white skin.

Decrepit young boys and girls,
Created for fresh life.

Acts of God gone amiss.
Misguided by instinct,
Their lips bring them to sin.

Flesh and mania,
The walls can endure the weak, not the demanding.

The few survivors grasp at debris,
Mingle desperation with scraps of contemporary breath.

Inside the cracked haven,
A sad man strums his guitar.

Tears made of steal and harmony,
A mahogany neck swirls into an alder body.
Weep rosewood, weep maple, and weep ebony.

Bush Meat
Brittany McCann

With Time
Marian Holmes

I am going over to Maggie's house to play. We are friends of convenience; co-habitating a cul-de-sac and classroom creates our bond of inseparability. Our friendship will fade immediately once I move away. We'll never speak again; eventually her traits will morph into those of a stereotypical Irish girl, crimson hair and freckles, but she will remain one of the defining people in my life.

I dart out the back door, my abrupt attack on the screen's surface causing it to fall back into place with a crash. My arms hold tightly to every Barbie in my collection; I'm careful not to drop any as I run.

"Excuse me; but where, may I ask, are you off to?" chimes my mother as I zip past the clothesline she stands behind. At three, I'm too young to appreciate that my parents speak to me like I'm an adult; I love to talk though, and I seem to be better at it than most kids my age. I'll be the last in my kindergarten class to read and my mother is worried because of this, but she doesn't let on. I'm allowed to be a kid.

"I'm gonna go play with Maggie!" I respond, as though it should be so obvious.

"And have you asked if you could go over to the Callaghan's?" She retorts with a hint of condescension, folding a shirt. I walk over to the laundry basket by her feet.

"Mom, can I go play with Maggie? Please."

"Yes, you may. Be careful please, and wear your helmet!" Her worries are lost as I sprint towards my trike; I won't realize for years how rare it is to have parents who let me be free at such a young age.

Reaching my vehicle of choice, I lift up the seat to stash my dolls away among the prized rocks I'd collected a day prior. The straps of my helmet click, reassuring my mother as I hop on and pedal away. The red paint of the hand-me-down frame is barely visible below a myriad of stickers.

I'm not allowed in the street unless my brother Joe

or my parents are with me. I have a tendency to become preoccupied with the mundane and therefore miss the traffic that's approaching. Today I'm sidewalk bound. I take the long, sloping turn at the base of the block with impressive speed, my Tweety Bird water shoes gripping the pedals, propelling me around the curve.

I arrive at Maggie's in just a few minutes. It usually takes me even less time, but I stopped to rescue some worms stranded after last night's rain. Parking my trike, I remove my helmet to reveal a mess of russet, pin-straight hair. I have four brothers, so I too have received the mushroom-cut my mother is accustomed to styling. In fifteen years, I'll wear my hair even more like a boy's, but for now I covet long locks. A sparkly barrette, displaying the wrong day of the week, pins back my uncooperative bangs. Grabbing my Barbies I skip towards the front door and ring the bell.

One of Maggie's older brothers answers my call. I'm tall for my age but he makes me feel miniscule, looking down from the open doorway. The Holmes' tend to stop growing around fourteen years of age; the Callaghan growth spurts never cease.

"Can Maggie play?" I ask. My mom always says that I need to slow down when I talk, think it through. I tend to forget the niceties, like saying hello. "Yeah," he chuckles lightly, "come on in Marian. I'll call her for you." I like going to Maggie's house because I don't have to take off my shoes when I go inside and she has all brothers, too. She's just like me!

Maggie appears and we head outdoors to play in her backyard. Our latest favorite game is "Ice Cream Man." It's a thrilling activity where we stand inside her plastic jungle gym selling invisible frozen treats through its colorful sides. Whoever is playing the "regular" gets the honor of placing order after order.

"Hello. May I please get a strawberry ice cream cone with spiders on top?" I can hardly speak between the giggles. Maggie sticks out her tongue in feigned disgust, turns away for a moment, and then returns, reaching out her hand clasped around an invisible cone. I mimic leaving cash

on the counter, take my treat, and lick the stagnant air.

After several orders, Maggie sighs, “I’m bored, let’s do something else.”

“Like what?” I ask, climbing up the blue wall of the jungle gym. I struggle to get all the way to top, finally flopping onto the ledge in an act lacking any sense of grace.

“I don’t know,” she responds; “Hopscotch?”

“Okay.” I jump down from my perch, landing on both feet, a small miracle for a child so awkward with her limbs. I realize I just discovered our new game.

“Maggie! Come here! You have to try this!” I exclaim.

Our Ice Cream Shoppe quickly closes for the season, morphing into anything we wish to leap from. Cliff. Rooftop. Rapunzel’s tower. Each jump is identical, Maggie and I with our limbs flailing as we head towards the ground. We take turns; one of us is always watching, ready to rate the other before scrambling back to the top for their next trick.

“Watch this Marian! I’m gonna do a high dive!” Maggie calls out to me, grabbing one of her legs as she takes off. But there’s no water below; this isn’t going to end well. I shout to warn her.

Throwing her hands out in front of her, Maggie hits the ground, using her palms to break the fall. The tears start instantly. I run over to her, assessing the damage to the best of my ability. There is blood, I conclude, but it doesn’t look too bad.

“Okay, you stay here and I’ll go get the nurse. What’s her name?” I ask sincerely as Maggie sits, blowing on her scraped skin.

“Nurse?” Her face is confused.

“Don’t you have a nurse?” My brain feels slow, I’m trying to make the sentences into any bit of sense. Why doesn’t she understand me? I turn, and run to get her mom.

“Maggie hurt her hand,” I quickly explain. Her mom rushes to her aid and I leave out the front door.

I ride back to my house, slowly, running over the worms. Nothing seems right. I leave my trike parked by the mailbox, Barbies abandoned within.

I curl up silently in the depths of our couch, shoes still on. A faint beep floats in from the back bedroom, its source moving closer, quickly. The first two wheels emerge from the doorway as I continue to gaze at the floor.

She doesn't have a nurse...

I look up at my brother, Donovan. He can't see me from his position and I'm glad; I just want to quietly observe. His nurse smiles towards me; this one's name is Eileen. He has five nurses, but I like her the best. I call her my second grandma and I love when she works the night shift because she tells me Irish fairy-tales until I fall asleep.

Why do we have a nurse?

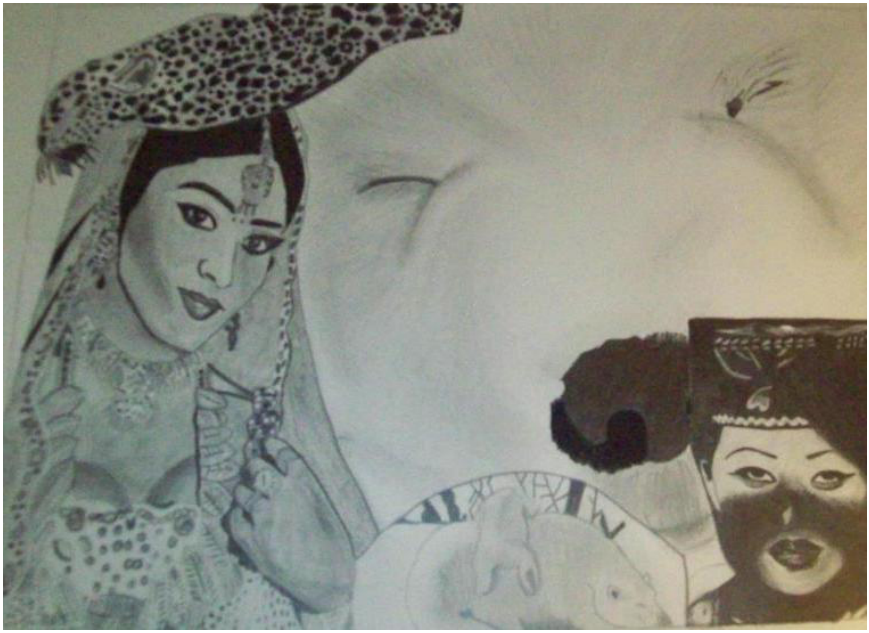
I'm thinking of our dinner table. The nurse eats with us, sitting to Don's left to feed him. It never seemed odd… until now. I'm thinking of the quiet hours, when everyone else is sleeping, and I sneak from my bedroom to visit Susan. She only works the night shift, always gives me candy, and doesn't mind that I am up. I'm thinking of the morning, the changing of the shifts, how the nurses have become a sort of clock in my life marking twelve-hour intervals: seven and seven, breakfast and bedtime.

I look up and trace the twists of Don's distorted body, limbs bent and turned in jarring positions. I make it to the base of his head where my sight changes courses, following now the network of tubing that travels from neck to machine. I can't say "muscular dystrophy" yet, but I'll learn to.

I think of Maggie's brothers and I wonder why none of them are deemed "special" by the world. I won't have the answer to that for a while, but right here, right now, I understand just how different we are.

The ventilator is blocked by the structure of Don's wheelchair, but its constant chirp continues, announcing each inhale with deafening clarity.

Everlasting Beauty
Amanda Edwards



Winter Alley
Nick Graziano

Marie
Gavin McCarthy

Entry 1- July 21, 1946

Cher Journal,

It was dreadfully hot today, the sun simmering in the sky, boiling the cluttered city streets. I was tempted to just laze around in bed all day, but the feeling of being cooped up and isolated began to draw on my nerves. Eventually I decided to use the dreadful heat to my advantage and I headed down to the beach by the harbor. I donned my bathing suit, took a moment to appreciate my form in the piece, and then threw a shirt and skirt over it. I took the streetcar to the docks and, after placing my clothes and purse in an empty part of the dock, dove into the water. It was refreshing, washing away the heat of the sun and giving me new breath. It was such a lovely day, with all the people out, dotting the ocean like marshmallows in a mug of hot chocolate, swirling to and fro. I was swimming around for some time when I ran into Jacques Meursault, a former colleague of mine. Seeing Jacques was a bit strange for me- I wouldn't imagine him making an appearance in such a populated place. Jacques always came off to me as a bit standoffish, like he found little patience for people. In spite of this, I couldn't help myself from growing attracted to him, harboring a burgeoning affection for him that I couldn't rightfully throw away. Eventually I was transferred from his office to a different one downtown, and my feelings quickly subsided.

Seeing him here in this stark contrast to his personality made my affection instantly resurface, and I struggled to keep it them on a leash. We made small talk in the water, asking about general things, uninteresting things, until I got out of the water, to rest on a float. He helped hoist me onto it, and I felt a sudden rush pass through me as he accidentally brushed against my breasts while assisting me onto the float. I rested on my stomach, hiding the blush of embarrassment before I turned to face him, laughing with

a schoolgirl glee. He brought himself up onto the float with me, and rests his head atop my stomach. My heart rushed, then quickly calmed, caught in the serenity of the moment. Being by ourselves on the float, not a care in the world, I felt as though I could last forever. There was so much beauty in our surroundings; the gentle lap of the water, the general buzz of excitement from the people on the beach, the golden shimmer of the sky lit by the smoldering sun. We lay there for a time before I grew too hot and dove back into the water. Jacques followed me, gently gripping me around my waist and swimming with me. It was a wonderful time, and I couldn't help but feel so eternally happy, joyful for the moment. After a while, we went back to the dock and started to dry off and dress. I noticed that the sun seemed to soak me easier than him, and pointed out that
I was darker than him. I found it curious as we dressed that he wore a black tie with his ensemble, so I inquired. He told me that his mother had passed away the day before, and I was shaken by the revelation for some reason I cannot yet identify. He seemed to notice my unease with the notion of his mother's death, and seemed on the verge of explaining further, but ultimately decided against it. He asked me to the cinema, and I suggested the new Fernandel movie *Don Camillo*.

On the way to the film, I felt more confident that Jacques was interested in me the way I was with him, and grew a little more outgoing with my advances. I pressed up against his side often on the walk and brushed my hand against his fairly often. Once in the theatre, I pressed myself up firmly against his side and he caressed my breasts gently, stroking them delicately; as such, I found it difficult to concentrate on the movie. I imagine it was a funny film, as Jacques laughed every now and again in between bouts of silence. Towards the end of the film, he turned towards me, and I half-opened my mouth with expectation, my chest hammering so loud that I was certain that the theatre's other patrons would tell me to quell the pounding noise. Then he kissed me, a low, gentle kiss, full of repressed emotion and

heartbreak. Even so, it felt as though he were restraining himself, not giving himself totally up to the idea. We left the theatre and made the way back to his apartment, talking briefly about the movie. When we got to his apartment, I noticed how spacious it was, the dining room empty of chairs or table, or of any real furnishings. We retreated to his bedroom and began to disrobe one another, at once hastily and careful, as though we were nervous adolescents on our first date.

He loved me that night; in a way I can't place a finger on; but I was certain; Jacques Meursault loved me. Up until this point in life, I didn't rightfully know what it was to be everlasting, but this night, this one night in my 26 years, this night defined it all for me.

After we finished, Jacques lay awake in the bed awhile and smoked cigarettes, one arm behind his head, keeping it propped up. I lay serenely on his warm chest, watching the smoke swirl up and away from us, dancing intricate patterns in the eddies of air that circled the room. I told him that I would have to visit to my aunt the following day; he nodded in response, looking lost in thought, at peace with the world. After some unknown time I slept, slept deeply, and dreamed of swirling smoke signals and the interesting, abstract Frenchman who I had fallen in love with.

Entry 2- July 27, 1946

Today I had a date with Jacques, down by the beach. Before I went over to his apartment to meet him, I showered and dressed at my apartment, taking much more time than I normally would, subconsciously wanting for Jacques to see and appreciate the extra effort I went through for him. I sprayed myself with some new perfume and headed away to see him. I wore my candy-cane stripe dress with my Greek leather sandals, hoping to entice Jacques with the subtle grip of the dress against my body. I felt certain exhilaration as I went out to catch the streetcar to his apartment.

Once I got there, I felt his penetrative gaze wash over me, absorbing the outfit, the curves, and all of me. I felt a

sense of pride as I watch his hand clench up, his knuckles whiten from an apparent strain of not simply having me there and then. Part of me wanted him to, but part of me realized that there was a whole day yet to come for us, and that there would be plenty opportunity to be alone. We took the bus to a beach some kilometers outside of Algiers, the ride being one of steady silence, with Jacques staring out the window with empty eyes, watching the plains whip past in a jade blur. He remarked to me that as fast as the bus could travel, the sky never whipped past as fast as the land would, and that emphasized the infinite wonder of the spectacle. My few attempts at making small talk went unanswered, and so I quickly stopped trying. Sitting there, I felt a little downtrodden, as I had drawn out some bit of effort for this tryst, and to have him be just as satisfied with the cloudless sky as he was with me felt somewhat mortifying. I couldn't seem to hold his attention as anything more than a passing fancy. Wishing to enjoy the day instead of second-guess everything, I decided to banish all these dark thoughts and just rest my eyes for the duration of the trip.

We arrived at the beach in the mid-afternoon, around 3 or 4 o'clock. It was a small cove, circled by rocks on either side and with some sparse dune grass towards the land. The sun was not as relentless as it had been the week before, and we found the easy waves to be warm, a natural bath. We leapt into the delicate waves, allowing ourselves to be gently tossed by the delicate current, swaying to and fro, in time with the beat of the ocean. I taught Jacques a game where one would scoop a mouthful of the cresting wave and spray it overhead, a visual glitter to the sky and a delightful, simple thing. After some time of this, I encouraged myself to make the move Jacques hadn't made earlier and floated over to him, pressing my body against his in my swimsuit. I kissed him then, more graciously, perhaps, than we had the week prior, and we lost ourselves in the tumbling of the sea current.

After a hasty dressing back on the shore, we once again caught the bus, going into the city and back to Jacques' apartment, where we stripped down and made

love on his cool sheets. The gentle breeze that rolled through the open window gave an external sensation to the process, cooling our heaving bodies as the sun fell behind the horizon. I slept there the night and when we awoke in the morning, Jacques insisted that we lunch in together. He ran downstairs to pick up the food for the meal, and when he returned, he began fixing some stew. We heard an old man from across the hall, and Jacques explained to me rather dryly that the old man was constantly bickering with his dog, and that they hadn't changed their ways in the 8 years they'd been together. Something about that struck me as funny, and I laughed, brushing the sleeve of Jacques' pajamas farther up my arm. The silence grew heavy and I inquired to Jacques whether he loved me. His response deflated me like a balloon that had lost its flame. He told me that "it doesn't matter, but I don't think so". I suddenly felt ashamed of my schoolgirl crush, and grew quiet. Mulling for a while, I figured that was easily too soon in the relationship for such a heavy topic, and so I laughed at my naïveté. He turned and kissed me and washed away my doubts of his feelings.

We were interrupted by the sounds of fighting from next door, loud bangs and crashes, and a terrifying scream from some woman, clearly under distress. We went out onto the landing, where we could hear clearly the sounds of a man brutally beating a woman, from the sounds of thuds and bangs, followed by screams and shrieks. I turned to Jacques with a kind of manic look on my face and pleaded that he call the police, that he do something to stop it. He told me that he didn't like cops, and I stared at him with such disbelief that I was stunned into silence. Here was woman, perhaps like myself, being terribly beaten and battered, and here the man I loved, with no incentive to act on it, to put an end the cruelty. Eventually a policeman came with a man from some floors down and dealt with the situation, screaming gruffly at the man, (Raymond, as Jacques later told me). The girl was crying floods of tears, in evident fear of her life. The policeman ordered Raymond inside and then left with the woman, still crying.

We went back inside Jacques apartment, where he

finished fixing the lunch. After what had happened in the hallway, I found myself with little appetite and so didn't eat the food we had prepared. I was shocked at the revelation I had seen in Jacques; that he had been perfectly willing to let that helpless woman get abused and beaten for the simple fact that he didn't like cops. I wondered whether his brutal detachment from his surroundings and other people would encompass me as well. Choosing not to share this thought with him, afraid of the answer, I gathered my things and left his house, my feelings shaken. Once I got onto the bus, I started shaking with sobs, and I found that they weren't easily quelled.

Entry 3 - August 27

I don't know what to feel anymore. So much has happened, and I can't imagine where to start. I've neglected you, cher *journal*, and I apologize. I suppose I'll start at the day I met the man inside of Jacques Meursault.

I went over to Jacques' apartment one afternoon, with only one topic on my mind. I needed to know if he loved me, truly so, in the way I loved him. I need to know that there was some reciprocity between him and I, that there was hope for our relationship. I arrived, and moments in the door, I proposed to him. I laid it out for him in the simplest way I could fathom. I told him I wanted to marry him, and he told me it didn't matter whether or not we married. I told him I loved him, and asked whether he loved me. He said the same thing he did before, that there was no point, that it didn't matter anyway. Does he not see truly how it does matter? How can he be so cold? In that apartment, I was conflicted, torn. I wanted to know whether he would accept the proposal from anyone else with whom he was involved with like me. He said he would. I knew then, as I know still, that this was all that I was ever going to get from Jacques. No overly affectionate love, no romance, nothing of the sort. But as long as I could be with him, As long as I could have him in my life, I found it bearable. I told him he was peculiar, like no man I had ever met. I felt also that this is something

that would ultimately drive him to resent me, to find me in the way of his unique lifestyle. I felt that if we lived a thousand years together, he would continue to be as he was, but all the same, I couldn't stop myself from loving him. He told me we would marry anytime I wanted, and I held steadfast to the notion.

Why does my heart rush so when he pays me the slightest attention? I had to make Jacques that fateful Sunday that we were meant to go to the beach with his friend. I felt apprehensive about going anywhere with this man who had so beaten that poor girl some weeks prior, but I felt safe going with Jacques. It was such a beautiful day outside, the sun bright and happy in the sky, and it even seemed to draw some color to Jacques funeral face. More of my apprehension went away when I laid eyes on the man who would be accompanying us to the beach wear a silly straw hat and rolled-up sleeves. I couldn't help but laugh.

Things began to turn badly when we made to get on the bus. I saw Raymond talk to Jacques quietly, motioning to a group of Arab men across the street, staring at us with their terrible, empty eyes. I felt a spike of fear run through me and asked Jacques what was going on. He explained that these men had it in for Raymond, and I was all too eager to put some distance between us and the gang. We got on the bus and Raymond did his best to make things comfortable, but I couldn't shake the fear from my head. Making matter worse was Raymond's constant flirting and joking, making it too obvious that he wanted to appear relaxed. When we go t to the beach, I tried to lose myself in idle playing around, in whimsical fun, beach activity and the like.

We met up with Raymond's friend Masson and his wife, who turned out to be a delightful little woman, and I soon found myself laughing and chatting along with her, as though the morning events had been totally erased from my mind. We went down to the beach, and I didn't hesitate to run straight in, losing myself in the waves and the simple existing that came from being tossed up and around, swirled about and dunked and just, alive. Jacques joined me in the water and we swam together, the way a young married

couple might. Eventually he retired to the beach, and I followed him not long after. I lay down beside him and tucked into the nook of his shoulder, drifting lazily through my head, the heat and his presence coaxing a small delirium from me. When I realized Masson had gone back to the house for lunchtime, I turned to wake Jacques. I propped myself up on my elbow and made to nudge him awake, but I was caught by the serenity in his face, his funeral expression gone for the moment, lost in the simple bliss of the day. I loved him more in that moment than I ever had, *journal*. Part of me felt guilty waking him, but my own selfishness tempted me. I woke him and told him it was time to eat, and he started for the house. I grabbed his wrist gently and informed him that we hadn't kissed since that morning when I roused him at his apartment. He looked at me with a glint in his eye that was at once both curious and inviting, and I told him to come down to the water. We delved into the frothy little crests nearest the shore and waded out until we were up to our hips in the salty waves. I turned and reached out for him, wrapped my legs around his so that he half held me up and we kissed. Every time we kiss, it's a delight, as though I venture into new territories, unmapped lands and uncharted borders. We parted lips and I gazed into his smoldering dark orbs, full of life and time.

We made for the beach and heard Masson calling out to us from the porch of his house, beckoning to us with his mammoth hands. As we headed towards the porch we heard him cry to his wife that he liked Jacques, and I couldn't help but smile. I glanced sideways at Jacques to gauge his reaction, but he remained as composed as always. We ate a full, delicious lunch in silence, drinking heavily of the wine and eventually getting around to speaking of plans. It's struck me funnily that it was still so early in the day, and I made note of this to everyone. Masson made a comment about how lunch came about not as a certain time, but only as soon as everyone felt hungry. Something about the novelty of the idea made me giggle, and Jacques shot me a curious look. I worried that I may have perhaps had too much wine. Eventually the men started for a walk, and

I offered to stay back and clean up with Madame Masson. We talked about our men over the dishes, and she told me how she thought that Jacques was a lovely man “in his own respect”. I wondered aloud to her what she meant. She told me that a girl like me should be with someone who could rightfully demonstrate how he felt for me, a Romeo to my Juliet. I told her that I loved him, and wasn’t that all that was necessary? I loved Jacques, and I was willing to wait for him to come around. She looked at me with pity in her eyes and grasped my shoulder with more strength I would have imagined possible for her. She looked at me that way for a moment, and then looked as though she was going to say something more, but wound up just going back to her dishes. We continued on in silence for a time before Jacques came back and delivered the news of what had transpired.

The Arabs had followed us here; my fears came back at me with new breath. Jacques explained what had happened in the brief encounter, and Madame Masson started to cry. Myself, I couldn’t be brought to tears, so overcome with shock and grief as I was. The wine seemed to now grip me a bit harder, and I remained motionless, statuesque at the dining room table. I couldn’t fathom what had gone on, and so I drifted in my head, losing myself I bit. I must have blacked out most of the memory, because the last thing that I remember that day, the worst thing to end the day that had spiraled downwards and out of control, were gunshots.

I was now in love with a criminal.

Entry 9- October 3 1948

Today was Jacques’ trial, and I was asked to stand witness. I came to the courthouse, not fully aware of what I would be asked to do or say in front of those people. I decided that all I could do was be truthful, and that would bring about his acquittal. When I was called to the stand, I was almost shaking with nerves. The lawyer asked me about my relationship with Jacques, only, he called him Monsieur

Meursault, something I didn't feel at all well about. I told him of the days in the office where we would exchange greetings and things, and that we really only got to know each other two summers ago. The lawyer found many things suspect with my testimony, things I found ludicrous, unrelated to the case. They made a show of telling the jury that Jacques and I had gone to the Fernandel film at the cinema and that we made love that night. He found it odd that Jacques would do so in the midst of his mother's death.

I found myself in tears, sobbing uncontrollably. They made Jacques out to be a villain, a bad man who deserved the ultimate punishment. I tried my best to tell them that they had it all wrong, that Jacques was really a good man, and that the circumstances in which we began our relationship were not indicative of his character. All my words were in vain, as they fell on deaf ears. I was removed from the courtroom briskly by the bailiff and left to sob outside on the street.

Entry 13 - November 11, 1948

Today, Jacques was executed. I couldn't bring myself to see it happen; I couldn't bring myself to even leave the bed. I felt empty, hollow, broken. I saw the world now in perhaps the way Jacques always had; meaningless. I found no purpose for things, no longer feeling delight in the company of others, or in anything else for that matter. I lay in bed all day long and cried into my bed sheets, with more tears than I thought a person could shed. The last thing I did today was write the last entry into this journal and leave it on my bedside table, saying goodnight to the world, my world, and finding my way back to Jacques.

Police Records - Scene #127 - November 15, 1948

Young woman found hung in her apartment. Means of death described as asphyxiation caused by a leather belt strung from a ceiling fixture. Signs of intense depression. Scene discovered when neighbors called

complaining of terrible odor from inside. Only evidence to lend to the investigation was a small, leather-bound diary on the bedside table under a broken reading lamp. Woman identified as a Ms. Marie Cardona. Known lover of one Jacques Meursault; investigation pending. Known relatives have been notified to come and identify the body.

Log end.

In the Frosty Air
Kristen Burke

Absence
Brittany Ng

See it when you close your eyes.
Your mind wanders,
Don't know what's in the dark.
The sun soaks in-
Start to sweat.
Look deeper inside, but can't see the bottom-
Most fear it…others fearless.
Minds irrational-
Depression consumes us.
It's all around, we ignore it.
Evil.
Emptiness.
Mourning.
Fashion.
Black goes with everything.

She's Gone
Taylor Clock

Seven Steps
Kaley Lynch

I.
There are stars out tonight over Lake Ontario,
I guess I could care less because
It's probably the usual crew- great bear, little bear, and seven sisters.
You introduced me to them.
It would be an awkward visit,
Going down to the beach to visit without you,
I wouldn't know what to say.

II.
You always knew which section of shore the sunset hit longest,
Which sun bleached driftwood could make the brightest fire,
How to turn passersby into friends with a harmonica.
How to get them to share their beer.
I think the lake was warmer last year,
I can't walk by without a jacket anymore.

III.
The joke is over, you can come out now
End this sick game of hide-and-seek,
Cut the Tom Sawyer shtick.
I know you're probably sitting off the coast right now
Tumbling over laughing, knocking down your stick hut
Fat tears streaming down your face,
Because you got us all.
And soon enough, you'll craft a raft
With empty milk cartons and twine
And sail back to the flat rocks, tanned and tattered
Belly laughing
Punching shoulders.

IV.
I think they're singing Requiem again this year
I hated that. You loved it,

You loved everything
Whole rests and triplets and 7/8 time
Sopranos and altos
Fermatas,
Repeat.
Maybe I'll go to the concert and hide in the velvets
And sing only the notes I remember,
et lux perpetua,
et lux perpetua.

V.
At the diner down the road
Your cherub face is still grinning
Stupid schoolboy grin from the gray and white small fry
newspaper clipping pinned up
On the community bulletin board
By a Christmas tree pin.

We are a newspaper gang now,
Flat black and white faces,
Folded squat
Hard grim ears tuned for the news of the day.
We're all harder, it happens.
Grief tastes like
A five-year old boiled egg down the gullet washed down with
a dirty nickel milkshake.
We don't carry gum.

VI.
We carry your name on our wrists now
Sometimes the polyurethane band rubs
I don't do anything about it though.

VII.
They named a star after you, you know.
With the proceeds, if they had made enough,
They would have renamed the entire galaxy.

Skyline
Taylor Clock

Docked Boats
David Owens

Cthulu Rises
Dylan Woods

A sequel to the short story "The Call of Cthulhu" written by H.P. Lovecraft

The Journal of Professor Joshua Thurson, Professor of Psychology at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts

Found Aboard the Empty Vessel Poseidon Adrift in the Pacific Ocean

March 1, 2025

It all started around 5 p.m. today. I had been sitting in my office, watching the sky and reflecting on the events of the day. Nothing pleasant, though nothing worthy of complaint.

It was then that I heard a knock at my door, snapping me out of my reverie and back to the present. A student stood in the frame of my door, one I could not recall having met – or seeing, for that matter – before. He was a lanky boy, at least 5'10" and weighing no more than 125 pounds. His brown hair concealed his forehead, and his hazel eyes were slightly bloodshot. He looked as though he had not shaved in quite some time – 5 o'clock shadow marred his face, making him appear even more sullen and ghastly than I imagine he would normally.

My office hours had just ended, so I apologized and told him to come back another day, or to send me and email so we could discuss meeting times. He told me it was important, that he had terrifying dreams the night before and he desperately needed to speak to me about them. Becoming slightly irritated – I am not a counseling service, after all, I am one of the most esteemed professors of psychology in the United States – I told him a therapist may be able to help him more. He practically begged me to hear him out, citing that the nearest on-campus therapist had taken off for the weekend and he would be unable to wait

that long.

He looked sincere, even slightly afraid. Despite my irritations, I felt it would be cruel to further deny him my assistance. I instructed him to take a seat and tell me what had him so perturbed.

What follows is a transcription of what he told me. Out of habit, I record conversations that occur in my office on the chance that one may say something noteworthy – something they may later deny, or something I may need to hold them accountable for. Some may call me paranoid, but on this occasion it certainly paid off. "S" marks the student speaking, and "M" marks myself.

M: Go on; tell me of what has you so distraught, as clearly as you can.

S: I'm standing in the middle of a city, but it's not a normal city. The bricks aren't all the same size; they're just rocks of random sizes placed together, no mortar.

M: Cyclopean masonry.

S: I…I guess so. But the buildings were twisting, foreboding shapes. Just their existence repulsed me; I don't know how to describe it. The architecture seemed all wrong, like the buildings shouldn't have been able to stand. They twisted, defied gravity, looped…It was wrong. Hideous. I was on an island in the middle of a gigantic body of water, I don't know which. If it was even on our planet.

He chuckles slightly at this. There is no humor in its cadence.

S: The entire world seemed dead, like I was the last man alive. There was a gigantic tower in front of me, somehow even worse, even more impossible than the other buildings. By every existing law of physics, this monstrosity shouldn't have been able to stand at all. I wanted to leave, to turn and run. I didn't care that the ocean had me surrounded. I'd rather have drowned or been eaten by sharks than stay there for a minute longer. But my feet wouldn't move. I tried to make them turn and run away, but instead they calmly stepped forward, again and again. I kept walking forward, closer to the tower.

He pauses for a moment to breathe shakily. I patiently wait for him to continue.

S: I couldn't tell if I was traveling uphill, downhill, or neither. Like I said, this entire place, this corpse of a city, just felt wrong, impossible. A large door, or what I assumed to be, was open at what looked like the front of the tower. Surrounding it were a bunch of hieroglyphs, though none I could recognize as belonging to any human civilization. One I kept noticing was a picture of a humanoid creature with the head of an octopus and the wings and scales of a dragon or snake. I tried to look away, but my eyes wouldn't listen to me either. They moved across the hieroglyphs, then into the door. I saw nothing but a deep abyss, darkness so impenetrable it felt like a living being. Then I started hearing whispers, different voices all chanting the same phrase in unison.

M: And what did they say?

He spoke a phrase of utter nonsense. I asked him to repeat, but by the third time I grew weary of trying to decipher, so I asked him to write it down, if he could.

S: I'll…um, I'll try.

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn." That was what he wrote.

M: I do not recognize this language. But please, continue.

S: I don't either. The voices began as a whisper, but then they kept rising in volume and urgency until they were practically shouting at me, and I couldn't tell if it was a warning or some kind of ritual. When I couldn't take it anymore, the chanting was cut off by a deep, alien bellow coming from the abyss beyond the door. It shook me, but not so much physically. More spiritually, like my very soul was shaking in fear. Then I heard another noise coming from the blackness. It was a kind of slimy scratching, if that makes sense. Like something was scraping against the walls but parts of it were sticking to it like suction cups. It disgusted me to hear it, and I could feel vomit rising in my throat. I tried again to run, but it was no use. I couldn't turn, couldn't look away. I couldn't even fucking blink.

Despite every single instinct telling me to run, I was stuck. I struggled harder to control my own body. I prayed to gods I did and didn't believe in, gods that were new and gods that had stopped being worshiped centuries ago. Still, the slimy scratching came closer and closer until it was only feet from the entrance.

He pauses once more, almost at tears now.

S: Then I saw the eyes. Hideous green eyes, looking out of the darkness and staring into me. They were pure evil. They looked at me like a lion looks at a gazelle. It spoke again.

"Myl'ahe gtebr'n trhg pwrl'qrek."

S: Its voice sounded more like deep breaths than speech, and its words were more felt than heard. They resonated in my core, every fiber of my being struggling simultaneously to escape it in any direction they could go. Then I woke up, drenched in sweat. I ran into the bathroom and puked, which didn't really help me feel any less sick.

He went on to tell me that he lay awake in bed for some time, sleep refusing to return. He decided to draw what he had seen in his dream, and he showed these to me. Looking at them, I was able to see the Cyclopean city from his dream, the impossible tower, the massive door with the horrible eyes, and the strange hieroglyph of the creature.

It had a humanoid form, but that was where the similarities with our race ended. Its head resembled an octopus, with the tentacles hanging down like a mockery of a beard. It had the scaled body of a snake and wings reminiscent of a dragon. It had claws that were immensely long, perhaps one-eighth its total size.

I had never seen this hieroglyph, or this creature, before, though being a psychology professor means my knowledge of ancient cultures is woefully limited.

As I was examining the illustrations, he asked what his dream meant. He feared he was going insane. I informed him this was most likely not the case, and there were several methods of interpreting a dream. I told him that they may be an expression of his deepest desires,

so repressed into his unconscious that he may not even know of them, or that any fears or anxiety he holds in his waking state could be carried over to his dreams, expressing themselves in these disturbing nightmares. Perhaps he heard a similar story many years ago and it was just resurfacing in his subconscious. One of the more current theories postulates that being unable to look away may mean that he has unsolved trust issues. Or, possibly, the complete opposite, that he's finally confronting an issue. I told him that it could even possibly be just a random discharge of electrical activity in the brain, meaning that all of this was completely random information that the brain tried to make sense of.

He seemed satisfied, though not wholly. When he got up to leave, I asked him if I could hold onto his drawings a little longer. He said it was fine, that he would prefer if he never saw those horrible images again. Once he left through the door, I sprawled the illustrations out on my desk and inspected them one by one. My eyes lingered on the image of the hieroglyph. I do not know why, but it seemed important to me somehow. The creature it depicted was horrible, of that there was no doubt. Looking at it made me uneasy, and it felt as though my insides were rebelling, trying to escape its hideous visage. Yet despite all of this, it seemed beautiful somehow. For a long moment I stared at it, unable – or unwilling, I am not sure – to look away.

I have an inexplicable feeling that this was more than a dream, which is far beneath a man of higher learning such as myself, but I must look into this further. Tomorrow I will show the drawings to a colleague of mine, Dr. Carter. She is the top Professor of Anthropology here at the university. If anybody knows the origins of this design, I am confident it is her. I have created this journal for the sole purpose of recording any finds I have on the subject, and I will not rest until I uncover the full truth.

March 2

Today was rather curious. I took the drawings to Dr. Carter. She is a beautiful woman, with black hair that just

barely caresses her shoulders and steel-gray eyes that were always seeking out more knowledge. However, her most attractive aspect was her wisdom. She was my equal in many regards, and she and I have had many an intelligent discussion. Despite her vast knowledge of ancient cultures, however, she was as ignorant of the origin as I was. When she asked who drew the pictures, and for what purpose, I informed her of the student that had come to visit me the previous day. She laughed, surprised a man such as myself would believe in something such as this. The boy had a dream; it was nothing more than images in his head. No supernatural, alien cities or hieroglyphs of a lost civilization. The boy was an art student, and his imagination had gotten the better of him. Had gotten the better of me, she added.

She may be right, but I will not give up so easily.

Today was not an absolute failure. The student from yesterday – whose name, I discovered, is Bryan Wilcox – returned. It seems as though the dream reoccurred. He was once more in the Cyclopean city, staring at the open door of the impossible tower. Again, the slimy scratching sound of something large attempting to claw its way free resonated from deep within the abyss. The terrible green eyes once again bore deep into him, and the creature “spoke” again in its deep, gasping voice.

He asked me why this dream had happened again, why he could not simply be left alone. I told him that in some cases, traumatic events are stored in the subconscious where they are replayed in dreams. I told him not to worry, that it most likely meant nothing. However, he should come see me every time this dream reoccurred. I instructed him to look over the city and remember as many details as possible, to look at and draw any other hieroglyphs he can see.

He asked me why I would need this information if it was a meaningless dream. Thinking quickly, I told him that the best way I would be able to help him with his dream is to understand as much about the dreams as I can. He warily accepted this and was on his way.

Had I told him the truth – that I believed everything he

was envisioning was real – he would have either panicked or thought me mad. Or both.

March 13

Mr. Wilcox and I have been meeting every day to discuss his dreams. He has been having the same nightmare each night, and it is beginning to take a physical toll on him. There are dark bags beneath his sunken eyes, his skin is a ghostly pale, and he is grossly malnourished. His eyes are devoid of any youthful radiance, and his gaze is constantly cast downward. His speech is a collection of mumbling syllables, and he constantly complains of a headache.

He tells me he is afraid to close his eyes. Every time he does, he sees those green eyes staring at him. Alien intelligence mixed with an animalistic, violent hunger. He tells me he just wants the dreams to stop. Sleep is no longer restful; in fact, he dreads it.

I have gone to the museum to see if they have found anything regarding the hieroglyphs or Cyclopean city. They have not, and they ask me where I have been receiving my information. I refuse to tell them, saying my source wishes to remain anonymous. I am not lying; I simply do not wish to be ridiculed.

I refuse to give up. I will continue to press Mr. Wilcox for information and scour all available sources for information. Something tells me that this city and this creature exist and that it is a matter of supreme importance that I locate them as soon as humanly possible.

March 22

I have made an amazing discovery. I was in the attic searching through old files when I came across the memoirs of an ancestor of mine. His name was Francis Wayland Thurston, and he had searched for this strange creature as well.

I have begun my readings of the memoir. It appears as though the creature's name is Cthulhu. Scattered around the world are pockets of worship, dubbed the "Cthulhu Cult".

These astounding people survive in pure, unfiltered nature, deep in forests or high on mountains. They spend all of their time worshiping the "Great Cthulhu," doing whatever it takes to appease and eventually resurrect their god. It was hinted in the memoir that they even made human sacrifices, and my ancestor condemned them for it. Are we not similar? Much blood has been spilled in the name of religion and faith. In fact, this cult spills less than most other religions. Christianity has waged war for faith, killing hundreds upon thousands. Compared to this, where could the harm be in a single human lost every now and again? Is it not better to mercifully kill one than to slaughter entire families? Additionally, they seem to avoid true conflict whenever possible. According to the memoirs, they chose to run rather than fight when surrounded by a group of officers in the swamps of Louisiana. Besides, I'm sure the great Cthulhu has good reason to require regular sacrifices.

Also, the phrase that Mr. Wilcox mentions in his dreams, "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn" came up within the pages. One cultist translated it for us. It seems as though it means "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." It appears as though R'lyeh is the Cyclopean city that Mr. Wilcox is dreaming of.

It is also interesting to note that an ancestor of Mr. Wilcox visited my ancestor. His name was Henry Anthony Wilcox, and he had been plagued with dreams similar to that of Bryan Wilcox. It also appears that the great-uncle of the author was a prominent professor as well, and he too had been intent on unlocking the secrets of Cthulhu and his cult. It seems my family has been cursed with intelligence and the curiosity it brings for generations.

I have looked into the Cthulhu cult and their beliefs. It was not easy, as most information regarding them has been expertly buried. I have only been able to find bits and pieces of the history. It seems as though centuries ago Cthulhu was betrayed by a few of his cultists and imprisoned within his own capital city, R'lyeh. For centuries, millennia even, he has reached out with his mind to those that are still faithful, telling them that there will be a time when he will

rise once more and take his revenge on those that betrayed him and reward those that have been truly loyal by releasing them from their morality, allowing them to do as they please with no fear of consequence. A utopia free of morality can prosper in so many ways. Without it there will be no ethic codes for science or instruction, nothing holding it back from pursuing knowledge with its full intensity. There will no longer be religious debates; Cthulhu will be our God. Science will advance further and faster than ever previously seen, and the people Cthulhu rewards will be happier from knowing true freedom. It genuinely resembles a utopian society.

I am still curious about one fact, however. If Cthulhu reaches out to the minds of the faithful, why is young Bryan Wilcox plagued by dreams of him, and why does he find them terrifying rather than reassuring? Is it similar to radio waves, and he is just picking up stray transmissions? No, I do not believe that is the case. The dreams seem too frequent and whole to be less than intentional. Is it, then, that Mr. Wilcox is the descendant of one of the people that betrayed Cthulhu, and the punishment has begun in the form of psychological torment? Hopefully I will soon understand all of this and much, much more.

You see, I have also discovered something far more amazing. Within the pages were coordinates. 47°9'S 126°43'W. I have done research and it does not appear there is anything at these coordinates. However, I have reason to believe that the city is there. The last few pages of the memoir have either been torn out or are far too faded to read, but it appears as though a sailor had reported finding an island there. However, he passed before being able to give any true details of his discovery.

I cannot wait any longer. I have purchased a plane ticket for California that leaves tomorrow at noon. I have already packed all that I will need. I have already hired men to take me to these coordinates via boat. These men are under the command of Captain Jason McCoy, and I have made sure that more than one person is capable of operating the ship. I will make them have rotating shifts so

that we are constantly moving and we will be able to reach these coordinates as quickly as possible.

They all scoffed at me. Dr. Carter, the archaeologists at the museum, everyone. I will have the last laugh when I return from my voyage with the discovery of the century! I will have a god beside me, and they will bow to my brilliance, beg for my apologies, pray for my favor!

Tomorrow, the hunt truly begins.

March 23

I still have yet to find my "sea legs." We have been traveling for several hours, and I refuse to eat anything for fear that I will be seeing it again just a few minutes later. I have spent the majority of this journey bent over the edge of the vessel vomiting. Many sane men would have turned back, found another way to travel. However, I am too excited to let the emptiness of my stomach inconvenience me.

This morning was vastly more eventful than my travels. Once I woke, I telephoned Mr. Wilcox to inform him I would be out of town for a week or two, and that he should not come in. However, I learned he had been struck by a terrible fever and that he had been passing between unconsciousness and delirium. This seemed strangely familiar, and I consulted my ancestor's memoirs. Yes, these same events had happened one hundred years ago to Mr. Wilcox's ancestor.

I quickly packed my things and went to visit the young boy. The doctor, a Mr. Gridley, informed me that seeing the child was impossible and that he had to be kept in intensive care for constant observation. I understood, and asked the good doctor what, if anything, Mr. Wilcox had been saying during his moments of lucidity.

What he relayed to me was nothing I had not previously learned about Mr. Wilcox's dreams, save for one thing. Apparently Wilcox was seeing the genuine Cthulhu in his dreams, not merely hieroglyphics. He had described an enormous, towering creature that took massive, lumbering steps. It was the size of a skyscraper, with the face of

an octopus and the wings and scales of a dragon on a humanoid body. Fascinating. Perhaps the shock of the creature being free sent Wilcox into a fearful coma? Or perhaps Cthulhu was reaching out from his prison, trying to make contact. But contact to whom, and for what purpose?

I believe the Great and Powerful Cthulhu knows of my intentions to find him and is reaching out to me through the boy. I believe he is encouraging me to find him, pleading with me to release him from his great cyclopean prison, and that for reasons unknown he cannot contact me directly. I must hurry; I must not keep Him waiting any longer than necessary!

The remainder of my day was uneventful. The flight took several hours. I simply looked over my notes. Once I landed, I met with Captain McCoy in front of the airport. He was a short man; he could not be more than 5'4", yet he was powerfully built. He had a short brown beard to match his trimmed auburn hair, and he had a tattoo of a trident on his left bicep. I told him that we must set sail at once and travel at full throttle.

He seemed perturbed by my demands. He told me that it was not fair to the crew to expect so much with such short notice, but I would hear none of it. I told him we could not wait any longer, that very powerful forces would not allow tardiness.

He was confused and attempted to protest further, but I ignored him and walked toward the car he had driven up in. He finally gave up and we began our trek.

The boat was smaller than I had expected. It was a pale blue color, no doubt as a result of the ocean air. There was a small cabin, within which were several beds. Its name was painted across the side of the boat, covered in the artwork of jewels and various shells and underlined with a trident pointing forward, held by a muscular shirtless man with a black beard: Poseidon.

Quaint.

There were only fourteen men. Captain McCoy attempted to introduce me to each of them, but I did not bother to memorize their names. All that matters is the

destination.

The beginning of the voyage was the worst. I could not get used to the rocking of the boat and I was constantly nauseous. Though I did not hear any personally, I am sure that the crew was mocking and bad-mouthing me behind my back. No matter; once we reach the island, they will see that it will all have been worth it.

March 28

Today a storm hit.

It was so unexpected. One moment I'm sitting on the front of the boat - the bow, I believe it's called - reading my ancestor's journal, then the next it begins to rain. Not light rain, either. Heavy drops pounded my head and my papers, and I had to close the book immediately to prevent any damage to it. Then, not a second later, lightning flashed in the sky. Thunder boomed, rattling the glass in the panes and our teeth in our jaws. Within a moment the waves were several feet high, lifting the Poseidon and tossing it about as though it were nothing. I darted inside as the crew bustled about. I do not pretend to know what they did; I was too busy observing the destructive beauty of the storm. It had hit so suddenly. What's more, I was reading in my ancestor's memoir that a storm had hit a ship as it was traveling the ocean just days before they reached the city of R'lyeh and, hopefully, Cthulhu.

Despite the terrible fury this storm possesses, I am unafraid. I will reach Cthulhu by any means necessary. If the world truly wishes to stop me, it will have to do better than this.

March 29

Last night I was somehow able to find sleep through the violent tossing and turning of the vessel. I had expected the sleep I achieved, if any, to be shallow, disturbed sporadically by the furious ocean torturing my fragile constitution. However, it seemed just the opposite. I fell into a deep, restful sleep, untouched by the life-threatening dangers of the real world.

The dream was fantastic. I was in R'lyeh, surrounded by cyclopean towers with no visible entrances, as if they were naturally occurring outcroppings. The buildings followed an abnormal, non-Euclidean geometry. I could not tell the degrees of any of the angles in the least, and the entire place seemed to carry the feel of another world, like it had been taken from another planet and simply placed here in our Pacific Ocean.

I inspected the towers closely and found that there were carvings covering the towers; literally covering. Not a single section of wall was left untouched. The buildings were very tall; the tops were almost impossible to see. However, from my post on the ground I was able to see the hieroglyphs stretching as far as my eye would allow. How that was possible, I am unsure. The sky was dark. All the light seemed to originate from the buildings themselves, as if they were their own light source. The amount of light was enough to see by; no more, no less. It was a perfect lighting source for a perfect city.

As opposed to Wilcox, I was free to move about as I desired. I walked up and down what can only be likened to streets and alleyways. I was looking for any doors or entrances into these buildings, but I found none. How Wilcox could describe this place as a "corpse-city" I will never understand. I felt at peace there, no longer needing to worry about the struggles of the outside world. I honestly dreaded waking up and having to return to that wretched boat and the vulgar, lowly crew.

Once I finished exploring, I turned my attention to the greatest feature of this utopia, the reason I had been called there; the great tower at the center, where our God was being kept. I walked toward the gigantic door, which was illustrated by hieroglyphs depicting His greatness. I stopped several feet away and dropped to one knee. I bowed my head and awaited Him. I heard the slimy scratching that Wilcox described, though there was no malevolence in the sound; there was beauty and patience. My heart raced, but not with fear. What I felt was excitement, joy. Yet despite my eagerness, I kept my head bowed, even when the scratching

sound stopped and I could feel His eyes upon me.

"D'welmp, rla'thsm mwal."

Rise, faithful one.

I do not know how I was able to understand him, but I did. And I did as I was told. As I stood I looked up toward the door. I saw His green eyes, though they, too, were not as Wilcox had conveyed. His eyes were full of intelligence, that much was true, but there was also a sense of pride, like a father viewing his son aging a man. There was little curiosity, as those eyes had seen eons come and go, empires rise and fall, and so much more that they must have known almost all there was to know. And despite his betrayal and imprisonment, I sensed no hostility or anger; only patience. He knew the time was approaching when he would be released, and he knew that those guilty would soon be punished.

"M'lhey ps'elhe w'akyeh. Selkabu'nyih jasdk'deud, m'wleyd tr'esjek lam'trsi rla'thsm. Lotrp, wilestr."

I have awaited you. Every century my city rises, and my imprisonment can only be fully broken by the presence of one truly faithful. Hurry, child.

I risked speaking. "My Lord," I began. "Why have none of your faithful ever come to free you before?

"Skelt, wilestr, ashe'gthe tkesh v'elahe cs'zhwle ahe'jekal mcusm kemahne. Ktul ane'a hema ezlwe xjant akel.

Because, child, they either lack the resources or the faith to reach me. You are the first to sincerely attempt to free me.

I opened my mouth to say more, but before I could I was whisked upward and backward, away from Cthulhu and the island, into the hungry darkness of the sky.

I awoke aboard the ship. The storm was over and the sky was its usual, healthy blue. It took us a number of hours, but we were able to assess the damages, discern our location, and set ourselves back on course. Approximately half of the crew protested continuing our adventure, believing we should turn back before another such storm hits. It was only after promising to double the agreed upon payment did

they reluctantly agree to maintain our journey.

I looked over a map. Given our current location and speed, I believe it will only take about a day and a half of nonstop travel to reach R'lyeh.

It is so close. I remember my dream, and my conversation with Cthulhu. I wish I had the chance to ask him more, but no matter. Somehow I doubt I will dream of Him again. Perhaps the storm was his way of reaching out to me so personally. I am humbled that He went through such lengths to speak to me and me alone.

When I free Him, the first we shall do is seek revenge for his wrongful imprisonment. Then, we shall purge humanity of the non-believers and false gods, then free those than remain from the shackles of their morality. We will be free to fight, free to learn, free even to murder with no fear of consequence or punishment, no laws or rulers to stand in our way except for the God Cthulhu Himself.

Truly it will be paradise on Earth.

April 1

About midday we spotted land. The sun moved behind clouds, and darkness swept over us as if it were a sentient presence. The temperature dropped far below the spring warmth we had grown accustomed to. Our breath was clearly visible in the darkened air, and we all moved like lemmings into the relative warmth of the cabin as we drew closer to the distant island-city.

There was no true dock at the island, but there was an outcropping that matched one nearly perfectly in shape, and it was here that we moored our boat.

The island was amazing, so close to what young Wilcox and I saw in our dreams. The tall, twisted, impossible cyclopean buildings, fingers of the city reaching toward the sky…or were they fingers of the sky reaching toward the city? Beautiful nonetheless. As in my dream, the buildings – if that is what they truly were – gave off a natural, dull-orange light. The hieroglyphs were still there, spanning the entirety of the buildings, despite the impossible height. The non-Euclidean nature of the place made it difficult to walk properly, though my excitement caused me to care little.

The sailors seemed awed, yet fearful. Some of the more religious ones were constantly crossing themselves, which angered me immensely. How dare they insult the holy lair of the Great Cthulhu with their false religion? I led them forward, toward the large tower that held Cthulhu. They were all looking around, some even trying to wander from the group – a quick order from me brought them back to line.

It was not long before we reached the tower entrance. The door was closed – the first time I had ever seen it so – and my heart skipped a beat. What if I failed Him? What if I wasn't the believer I thought I was? What if He would be stuck in His prison for another century, or more?

But then all of my fears were laid to rest. A line appeared down the length of the door, and it slowly begun to open. Clouds moved in front of the sun, blocking its light from us. The towers around us shone brightly, allowing us to see all that would happen.

The slimy scratching from the dreams echoed out from the darkness behind the door. As it came closer, the towers seemed to glow brighter, preparing for their master's return. Some of the sailors begun to panic, though none turned to run. Perhaps curiosity got the better of them; perhaps it was Lord Cthulhu keeping them there.

The scratching stopped. There was a moment when nothing happened. There was no sound, nobody breathed, nothing moved, the wind died down and the Earth itself seemed to stop moving.

Then one claw reached out and gripped the side of the door, followed by the other claw. The talons were gigantic – ten feet long at least. They squeezed the edges of the door slightly, but when the claws moved I could see that they were so sharp they left markings on the walls.

The green, gelatinous, beautiful face of the Great Cthulhu burst from the doorway, out of his prison and into his kingdom. The tentacles on his squid-like face writhed with ecstasy, and from his mouth came a bellow that shook me to my core:

"Klutxjantu!"

Freedom!

As he stepped out of what had been his penitentiary for millennia his dragon wings spread to their full length. It was a magnificent sight.

Whatever spell that was over the sailors seemed to break. Seven of the fourteen men that were with us died in that moment from sheer terror. Another five were taken in the claws of Cthulhu and devoured before they could react. I cannot blame Cthulhu; after all those centuries without food or even light, would we have not taken the first food source given to us, despite what it was? Those men should be honored that they were chosen as nourishment for our God.

I must give the captain credit for his quick thinking. He grabbed me by the shoulders and pulled me backward, then led me by the arm back to the Poseidon. I attempted to resist, but I was no match for his strength. "Let me go!" I yelled.

"Not with that thing following us!" was the reply. Once I got over the initial insult of referring to the God Cthulhu as "thing," I looked back. Cthulhu was indeed following us, his eyes locked on me. I cannot tell what emotion was behind His green eyes but it seemed like anger. He let out a wordless, angry bellow, and destroyed one of the towers with a single swipe of his arm.

Within minutes the captain and I were back on the ship. I tried to jump off of the boat and back onto land, but before I could he shoved me down and untied the boat. I tried fighting him, but he tossed me aside like I was nothing. He ran to the throttle and sent us ahead and away from R'lyeh at full speed.

I watched as the paradise-city of R'lyeh shrank from sight, my heart sinking. But then I saw something. Cthulhu stepped out from behind a tower. He did not seem angry anymore. Even at this distance, I could tell that He was looking me in the eye. He stared at me as the ship pulled away, his face-tentacles moving slowly, contemplatively. I am unsure why he did not attempt to follow us; I am sure he possessed the ability to.

The captain drove the boat all throughout the night. Luckily for me, he did not attempt to question me; he was

intent on getting away. However, this was unlucky at the same time. I needed him to sleep, or to be off guard. I had to do something to bring us back to the island.

The moment I get my chance, I will kill the captain and turn the boat around. I do not feel guilt; I am above such petty morality. All I feel is dedication to the God of All, Cthulhu. I cannot leave Him.

April 2

I was fully prepared to kill McCoy. I had the weapon ready, a pipe I found, and I was just waiting for him to let his guard down, even for a second, when the impossible happened.

We were heading back toward the city. At first it was a small speck on the horizon, but at the speed we were traveling it was only a moment before we were able to make out the cyclopean towers of R'lyeh. With a few seconds, I could even see wonderful Cthulhu standing there, awaiting us.

"This is impossible…" McCoy whimpered.

"No," I replied. "This is a new era." And with that, I struck him as hard as I could with the pipe. I kept hitting him, even when his skull had been reduced to a bloody and broken mess, shattered and in pieces on the floor. I enjoyed it. I thought of Carter, that pretentious bitch that looked down on me when I told her of the dreams. I thought of the students at the university that took advantage of me, disrespected me despite my best efforts to educate them. I thought of the crew members that insulted and bad-mouthed me throughout this entire journey. But most of all I thought of McCoy, who was the worst offender of all. Not only did he try to take me away from my home on R'lyeh and my God and Master Cthulhu, but he dared to refer to Cthulhu as a thing. The sheer audacity and hubris in referring to an ancient and all-powerful God with the inferior title of thing is astounding.

When I finished punishing him I stood up and looked at the island. It was much closer. Cthulhu was where we had left him, standing at the edge of the island and staring out at me. For a brief moment His consciousness touched

mine. I felt the eternal knowledge and essence of Cthulhu, the vigintillions of years He has existed touched my puny mind, and it was all I could do to hold onto my sanity. I truly was a child compared to Him.

He whispered into my mind. "Mw'lep, wilestr." Welcome, child.

I gave my Master a low bow, and it struck me that this would be my last entry. It's strange; I've almost grown to enjoy writing in this journal. It has been a long journey, yet it only lasted a month. I was once one of the most respected professors at one of the most esteemed universities in the country. Now I am covered in another man's blood, out of breath, and on my way toward an ancient, alien island with an almighty God waiting for me, scribbling my story in this book that I'm not even sure will ever be read.

And I could not be more at peace.

Garbage Gut
Brittany McCann

A Melancholy Fashion
Raymond Dale

Who are you stranger,
That places my heart in the duality, of safety and danger?
He that walks in beauty like the night,
Wearing eyeliner, mascara, and jeans of tight.

The embodiment of love and desire,
A creature that rises from ash and soars through fire,
Unharmed yet ablaze,
Navigates through my heart's maze.

Needn't ask the mirror on the wall,
Who's fairest of them all?
I'll tell through and through,
That my hearts throbbing for you.

So, wear it like a new fashion,
Because today's style is my passion.
If distances keep us alone,
Then across the pond I'll skip my heart as if it were a stone.

Don't let the grey skies bring you down,
When you can wear a tiara like a crown.
Listen to the inner light,
Because if I could, I'd always be in your sight.

Layers of Arizona
David Owens

Wimbledon
Marion Decker

"Advantage, Clarke." The French accent blurred through her head as she set up to serve. One point, all she needed was one point. Taking a deep breath, she bounced the ball a few times and threw her long red braid over her shoulder before bending her knee ever so slightly. *One point*, kept playing through her mind. The feud inside her head momentarily stopped. Ball toss up, too far behind, at 5'11" she couldn't afford to hit behind. She let it fall. Setting up the serve again, she took to her movements, knee bent, racquet arm in the ninety degree angle, left arm extended all the way with the ball ever so slightly to the right. A sharp intake of breath and a resounding smack, the ball was propelled toward the ad box. Falling into place and Gabrielle DeMontaigne missed the return. *Ace.*

"Winner, Miss Mallory Clarke." She couldn't believe her ears, *I just won the French open.* She blew kisses into the crowd and rushed to the net to shake Gabrielle's hand. She hugged her, had to hug her, they just played a three set marathon.

"Congratulations, Mallory," Gabrielle said, in a broken French accent.

"Nice match, you played well."

"Not as well as you," Gabrielle smiled and walked off. Mallory waved at the crowd some more. Emotion coursing through her, she allowed the tears to flow as the trophy and ceremony presenters walked onto the court.

The entire ceremony felt like a blur. She was beyond happy. She kept looking toward her box as she saw her parents and coaches clapping and cheering, her brothers all there, her main coach, Rodney Way smiling. This was the moment she had been waiting for her entire life; winning a Grand Slam title.

She came close, too close, in the Australian. Lost in on a double fault to Sara Errani. She worked meticulously between then and now on her serve. It was an emotional loss, coming right off a win in mixed doubles. She had to give Sara credit, of course. She played an incredible two sets.

Her thoughts drifted back towards her grandfather, who couldn't be in attendance today.

"That's the way Mally!" Her grandfather, Robert Clarke, clapped as she finally *hit a spin serve. He high-fived her. "Every single time you serve, you've got to lose yourself. Sing a little song in your head, think of a specific movement, but absolutely do not focus on the serve alone."*

"Why wouldn't I focus on the serve?" Mallory was ten years old, and she was already a champion in the under fifteen tournaments.

"The more you focus, the more meticulous you become and the tighter your grip will get. Remember what you've learned about a tight grip?"

"A tightened grip leads to desperate play and mental anger," she recited as if from a text book.

"That's right," he smiled. "You've got to remember to control the anger, because anger will never get you anywhere." He walked off the court and sat on the bench, holding a water bottle out to her.

"Did you ever get angry when playing Wimbledon?" Her eyes were wide, innocent still as she asked.

He chuckled, "of course I did. But I didn't win those titles. The matches that I value are the ones that I was the most relaxed."

***

"Oh darling, that was fantastic!" Her mother fawned over her, *again*. Laying on the bench in the trainer's office, she wanted to just recall the match by herself. "I always

knew you could do it."

"Susan, please. Let her rest in peace," her father said. Sighing relief as her mother sauntered out, her father looked at her with an intense stare. "I'm proud of you, kiddo." She smiled. "The rankings are going to come out in your favor this time."

"I didn't pick up points last weekend."

"Sweetheart, you won a grand slam," her father rolled his eyes. "Now, tomorrow you'll have a day of rest. Monday though, we're going to have to work on that backhand. It was very off. Is your hip tweaking again?"

"No, my hip is fine."

"Wait till you re-watch your clips. You couldn't hit a down the line. I'm really surprised Gabby didn't pick up on that."

"Daddy. Relax. I won the French Open."

"Wimbledon is next, or don't you remember?"

"Of course I do," she mumbled.

"Do not lose your head, Mallory," he shook his head and exited, leaving Mallory to her own devices. Her eyes automatically rolled. Her dad was always looking for more wins.

She'd been playing tennis since she was four years old. Now, at 22, she was in her prime. She had a drive to win, of course, and a determination to play her hardest. But her main reason for playing was the serving. She *loved* to serve. It was the only thing in the match that was entirely under her own control. She could serve to the outside, the inside, the middle, as hard as she wanted, or as slow. When she served, she felt alive, felt every movement of her body, every pre-serve routine she had. Her serve was a weapon commonly feared in the tennis community. Her emotions felt raw on her serve, like she was unleashing the storm inside her mind, yet calming the feud if but for a moment.

"Mallory Clarke," a deep, heavily accented voice

came from outside her thoughts. She opened her eyes abruptly. She wished she hadn't. Christopher Adler, the current men's world number two stood before her. He was tall, 6'6"

"Adler," she said, coldly.

"That was fantastic playing on your part," he commented. "I'm sure I'll be doing the same tomorrow."

"Confident in your ability?" she said in a dry voice.

"Of course I am. Have you *seen* how well my service game is going this week?" he smirked.

"Nope."

His mouth dropped open for the slightest instant. Mallory smirked, it was fun to tease him, he was such a cocky bastard.

"You haven't watched any of my matches? I *played* your doubles partner."

"I said I hadn't seen how well your game is. I've seen you play."

For once, Christopher was speechless. "You're awfully cocky for a first time slam winner, Clarke."

"Always clever, you are," she peeled the ice bags off her hip and stood. "Better rest up for tomorrow." Mallory winked and left.

"In tennis you stand face-to-face with the enemy, trade blows with him, but never touch him or talk to him, or anyone else. The rules forbid a tennis player from even talking to his coach while on the court. They're inches away. In tennis you're on an island. Of all the games men and women play, tennis is the closest to solitary confinement," Andre Agassi, <u>Open</u>.

"Miss Clarke, how do you deal with the mental aspects of your game?" Mallory hated that question. Every tennis player deals with the mental game, but how was she

supposed to explain her mental game without sounding, well, *mental.*

"Well, tennis players are forever *alone.* There is no love in singles, no friendship, not really anyone at all, actually. We talk to ourselves, we talk to our racquets, we talk to the air, the net, the court, the lines. It's mental. We're mental," she took a breath. "I suppose I do all of that. I talk to myself, sure. Pump myself up, reprimand myself. I definitely talk to my racquet, even named them," Mallory laughed, the crowd followed. "I think the service game is the best for me. I just have an incredible amount of drive when I know I'm on serve, a higher amount of real, physical emotion. It's almost like holding the ball is holding my game. Hit it hard, winner. Miss hit, I'm an idiot."

"Well, that was a stunning interview, darling," her mother crooned from behind her.

"It gave away too much," her father grumbled.

"I thought it was smashing!" her agent, Paul, disagreed. "Have the people on your side. Make the fans love you."

"You don't need the fans on your side," her dad said in the same disgruntled tone.

"Yes she does Mr. Clarke! Fans cheering will just boost her confidence during the matches!"

"She's already got the hometown favorite!" her mother beamed.

Mallory was definitely glad she watched that interview again. She still didn't really remember it. The feeling of winning a grand slam was quite overwhelming.

"The next obstacle will be Wimbledon," Paul said, nodding at Mr. Clarke.

"Gabrielle is hot on grass courts. You usually are, but I'm afraid all the clay is throwing you off," her father added.

"The standings are coming out Monday morning. I

imagine you'll be sitting at the top."

Mallory sat quietly, listening to her agent and father discuss her own future. She couldn't help but watch the rest of her interview.

"How does it feel to have won the French?"

"It's probably the greatest I've felt in my life. It's really incredible to be standing here, looking at all the fans and finally feeling the win of a grand slam. I can remember being a little kid, watching all the tournaments, just learning to serve. It's amazing, to win on my favorite part of the game."

"Are you looking forward to Wimbledon?"

"Winning Wimbledon, that's living the dream. Winning Wimbledon has been my dream since I can remember. Of course I couldn't be happier to be here, holding this very trophy, having played some of the best tennis of my career. What I've always dreamed of, though, is winning on that grass. Under the blue skies, surrounded by the green and purple colors, dressed in white. That's what I want the most."

"And being the home town favorite, I don't doubt you'll be able to achieve your goal!"

"Thank you."

The television cut to a commercial. Mallory still zoned out of her team's discussions until her father's phone began to ring. He cocked an eye brow and stepped onto the balcony to answer it.

"We've got to discuss your outfit for Wimbledon. White isn't a whole lot to work with. I think we ought to-"

"Mum, I'm not really worried about my outfit quite yet."

"Of course, of course. But I was thinking we have a bit of purple, a bit of green. Really draw that crowd into your home-town pride!"

"If you want to do that, Susan, you might as well throw the English flag on her back," Paul rolled his eyes.

“I’d like at least a day to enjoy my victory, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course dear!”

“One thing we do have to talk about is your court attitude, doll,” Paul said.

“And why is that?” she asked sarcastically.

“Your opponents think you’re a bitch, probably the chairs too. Do you really want the chairs against you?”

“They were against me in Australia. I think I can handle it.”

“Yes, you handled it so well in Australia,” her mother said, sarcasm dripping from every word.

Mallory sighed, of course she didn’t handle it well in Australia. She lost. Miserably.

“The mental game, Mallory.” Paul said quickly.

“Oh she’s right, Paul. Let her enjoy the moment!”

The feud inside her head was erupting again. That’s what she called it- the mental aspect of tennis. It was her own personal feud, containing questions like:

Do I go for this shot? Oh just get it.

Where did that volley come from. Snap back to read position.

You call that a backhand? Shit, she got to it. Oh wait, all net.

It was almost as if a constant storm inside her head, contradicting herself between doubt and confidence. Emotions were constantly high during matches, squashing and rebuilding her confidence interchangeably throughout every match, every set, every game and every single point.

Her father re-entered the sitting room. Mallory could tell by the look on his face that it wasn’t good news.

“William?” her mother said, concerned.

“My dad is in the hospital,” he said, shell shocked. Mallory couldn’t even register that. No one said anything. “He’s had a heart attack. He isn’t going to make it.”

Four bounces.
Bend at the right knee.
Bring the left closer.
Set the racquet and the ball in front of the body.
Step into the swing.
High ball toss.
Extend the left arm.
Ninety degree angle in the right.
No hesitation, sharp intake of breath and swing through.
Remember to snap the wrist.
Remember to follow through.
Remember to extend the body.
Remember to keep the left arm up.

The constant repetition in serve. Every serve, every time. The only difference was the angle in the racquet, the extra extension for a kick serve, or the swing direction. Repetition makes the feud go away, forgets about the rest of the world, feels like freedom from the court, freedom from the world and freedom from her fears.

"Mallory, you should take a rest," Paul called from the fence. She wouldn't stop, couldn't stop. She'd serve until the lights shut off. She didn't even bother to answer. "God damn it Mallory! Coach isn't going to like the over exertion!" She didn't even pay him mind as she served *again.* "I will turn the lights off myself Miss Clarke!" He stormed off.

Set up.
Sharp intake.
Slam the ball down.
Perfect shot.
Moment of peace.

Peace shattered. Flashes of Grandpa Robert flash through. Her first racquet. Teaching her how to serve. Watching her Grandfather's Wimbledon highlights. He was a

star. He was a three time Wimbledon champ. Robert Clarke, famous for his unforgettable serve. He stood at 6'5".

Mallory fell to her knees, letting it all sink in. Paul watched in silence as his star faded before his eyes. She cried on that court for what seemed like days. Letting the tears flow, she cried and screamed and then cried some more. Mallory Clarke, tennis super star was coming undone.

Eventually, she stepped off that court. She stepped off and stayed off. For over a year. The headlines were too much to handle.

The Great Champion Robert Clarke falls.
One Clarke wins, while the other Clarke dies.
Mallory Clarke; the meltdown.
Both Clarke's died this week.

That Monday she was named number one in the world. She slowly dropped down as she withdrew from Wimbledon, and the US Open following. She didn't live with her parents, but moved into her Grandfather's home. She served each and every day in their backyard court. Did court repairs. Ran at least ten miles a day. Didn't speak to nearly anyone except her brother. Her days were routine, her words were few and her extravagance never. Serving was her release. She served at least five thousand balls a day.

Rain didn't even dampen her drive to achieve a perfect serve. With the droplets falling into her eyes she continued the pattern.

Set up.

Sharp intake.

"Baby sister," interruption and she missed the ball as it fell back to the ground. She whipped her head around to see her brother, Patrick, standing at the fence. She stared

at him, waiting for him to speak first. “You realize it’s raining, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she said simply.

“And, that tennis balls don’t work in the rain?”

“Yes.”

“So *why* are you still *in* the rain?”

“Practicing my serve.” She went back into the motions, ignoring him now as he entered the court. He watched her serve another and then sighed deeply. “What?”

“Why are you even practicing?”

“I have to.”

“You don’t use it,” he pointed out blankly, “in any aspect of your life.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Mally, you don’t play anymore.”

“I’m playing right now.”

“You know you are incredibly difficult.”

“And you are incredibly annoying. What do you need?” she asked gruffly.

“Can’t a guy just visit his little sister?” Patrick grinned at her.

“I doubt it, you haven’t visited me in over a month.”

“Can we at least get out of the rain?”

“I think rain is rather fitting,” she bounced a ball with her racquet. Patrick was silent for a moment before finally responding.

“Well... I don’t. Let’s go inside and have a cup of tea. Shall we?”

Grudgingly Mallory picked up her tennis bag and followed her brother back into the house. The kitchen was meticulously clean. Mallory spent all morning organizing and re-organizing it before she headed out to the court.

“I should have you over sometime,” Patrick said, dropping onto a chair.

“No thanks,” she said as she put the kettle on the

stove.

"So, I was wondering.. What are you doing Friday?"

"I don't know, probably playing some tennis."

"With who?"

"The wall."

"I was thinking we could go see Rodney-"

"No."

"Please?"

"I refuse to see a coach."

"Could be good for you.."

"No."

"The Australian is in a week..."

Mallory stopped pacing the kitchen and stared at her brother. "No."

Patrick stood. "I just want my sister back."

"I'm right here."

"I think you know what I meant."

"What's so different about me? I don't play on the tour anymore, big deal."

"It's more than that, Mallory."

"Pat, I love you. I really do. But I can't play for them anymore."

"So play for yourself."

"I don't want to," she said quietly.

"You're lying. You serve in the rain, you play every day. You can't stand there and tell me you're burnt out."

"I didn't say I was burnt out-"

"You can't blame the game for-"

"*I'm not blaming tennis*."

They were awkwardly silent for a while.

"You know, Grandfather would be incredibly disappointed in you. When you were younger, he used to brag to anyone that his granddaughter was going to be the star of Wimbledon."

Mallory didn't say anything, she just stared into her

tea.

"Well. If you ever decide you're going to Rodney, I don't live too far." Mallory didn't say anything. She simply stared at the door. "Alright. I'll see you later."

He's just being Pat. She reminded herself. *He's using reverse psychology or something. But think about it... If you come back... Wimbledon.*

*"*There is absolutely no way I'm getting into that life again," she said aloud, shaking her head.

That very same night Mallory had another visitor. In fact, she almost slammed the door in his face. If he hadn't had reflexes like he did, it probably would have hit him.

"Well, I'm glad to see you too, Clarke," Christopher Adler smirked at her.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Oh just stopping by to visit my favorite retired player," he walked in without an invitation. "Have you heard the good news? I'm number one in the world now."

"Fancy that," she said sarcastically. "Did you really come all this way just to tell me that?"

"Well no," he cast his eyes away from hers. He opened and closed his mouth a few times.

"Out with it," she demanded.

"Hell Clarke, everyone misses you on the circuit," he ran a hand through his shaggy hair. "Why don't you just come back?"

"You don't expect me to believe that," she said simply.

"Not at all," he said. "Doesn't mean it isn't true. You know Andy doesn't play mixed anymore?"

"Yeah," she said, looking at the floor.

"Said he refuses to play until you come back."

"That's going to be a long dry spell for him then," she walked back to the door and opened it for Christopher.

"I'm sorry," he seemed to spit it out.

“Excuse me?” she raised an eyebrow.

“I’m sorry about your Granddad. He was my idol growing up.”

She let the silence envelop her.

“I’m sorry it took me so long to tell you that, by the way. And your serve, it’s wicked, you know.”

She said nothing again. He sighed. “I really mean that. Take care of yourself, Mallory.”

As soon as he left, Mallory deposited herself onto a chair. In an instant, she’d made her decision.

“What the hell was that, Mallory!” she screamed at herself, hitting a wild backhand.

“Mallory, watch your language, you want to forfeit a point at Wimbledon?” Rodney shook his head and fed the ball again. This time, she wailed her backhand down the line, perfect. She clenched her fist, *finally.* “Much better. Turn your shoulders like that every time.”

She nodded and he fed her another backhand. Another down the line, not nearly as deep.

“Well, well. What is *this*?” Mallory whipped her head around and rolled her eyes. Christopher Adler was strolling onto the court, a smirk plastered on his face, “Mallory Clarke, back at it, huh?”

“Yes,” she said simply.

“You’re not playing Wimbledon are you?”

Ignore him! The feud was yelling at her. “Of course I am. And I’m going to win it.”

“Ya right, with that backhand you’ll be out, second round,” he smirked.

“What are you doing here, anyway?”

“Just searching for my doubles partner. I’m entering the mixed this tournament, you see.”

Mallory ignored him and motioned for Rodney to feed another backhand.

"Wonder if the defending champion can claim her right," he sauntered off.

"I should play mixed," she said suddenly, missing a feed completely.

"Not with that concentration," Rodney joked.

Mallory's nerves were buzzing as her car drove her to the public practice courts. This was the first time anyone would see her play in a year. She'd practiced with Rodney everyday lately. She wasn't ready for this. Her serve was, but her backhand was even weaker than when she had won the French. The newspapers were currently hating her.

Clarke Back after Hiatus.
Clarke to dishonor Wimbledon?
Mallory Clarke lives on...

She didn't read any of them. Her agent advised her not to. Paul was back again, but she wasn't going to let him control her career this time.

The practice courts were in her field of vision. She saw Gabrielle, hitting against her coach on the closest court, photographers surrounding them. She was the world number one right now. She also saw Christopher Adler, hitting serves near it.

"You'll be fine Mally," Rodney squeezed her shoulder. "We're practicing on the lower courts. Less media there. Less top seeded players there." He winked at her. He knew she hated practicing next to her competition. "You're Mallory Clarke. You have a weapon, you have a heated heart and you'll be fine. It's called vengeance."

"I know," she said quickly. "I can do it." Her head was screaming differently.

Mallory Anne Clarke, you are too weak for this. What

if the media asks you questions? You ignore them. You be the bitch they are making you out to be.

”When we step out, I want you to keep your head up. I want you to keep the shaking to a minimum.” He paused and looked her dead in the eye. “And I want you to *crush* the shit out of the ball. Show them what you’re made of. Don’t hold back, it’ll make them talk more.”

The moment they stepped out of the town car people were staring and shouting. “Miss Clarke, Miss Clarke!”

“Ignore them, Mally,” Rodney whispered.

She shouldered her bag and ignored the media. Ignored the fans. Ignored the on court players staring. She made way to their reserved court. Deposited her bag on the bench, took her jacket off, removed her racquet. Just another routine for her. A routine she wasn’t quite used to.

“Alright babs,” she whispered to her racquet, “lets do this.” She ran warm up laps with her racquet in hand, a usual ritual for her as well. Taking her spot on the baseline, Rodney positioned across.

“Lets start with some forehands Mally, rip ‘em down the line!” He fed the ball and she was feeling pretty good, returning them with a speed comparable to her old ways.

“Excellent, excellent. Cross court, I want everyone of them deep.” Mallory complied, a few missing the mark, but she felt pretty good about her forehand. “Backhands.” He began to feed to her other side.

This is where your problem will lay. But you are *a champion. You’re a professional tennis player, you can hit backhands. It’s warm ups, let it rip.*

She missed long for the first few shots, got a few in. Overall displeased with herself.

“Mallory Clark. Boy am I glad to see you on a court,” Andy said from behind her. “In need of a practice partner?”

“Desperately,” Mallory chuckled.

“Oi! How about you two play a set?” Rodney said and

walked off the court. Mallory smiled, she had missed her doubles partner greatly.

Andy took the practice set 6-4, but Mallory enjoyed herself. They were laughing together, just like they used to.

"You know," Andy said, "I'm going to need a mixed doubles partner."

Mallory smiled.

"Advantage Lamot," the announcer called. Mallory was struggling.

You're on court two. You're good on that court. You've got this. She's short, just serve well. Six inches, you've got six inches on her.

Set up.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball down.

Ace.

"Deuce point."

Another point, you get this you'll have the match.

Set up.

Sharp intake.

Spin serve.

Ace.

"Advantage Clarke."

Excellent. One more like that. One more and you'll be on to quarterfinals.

Set up.

Sharp intake.

Net.

Fuck. That didn't go as planned. Mallory shook it out through her body and set up her second serve.

In, thank God. She moved with a desperation across the court that she hadn't had, not even in the French. She was graceful and powerful all at the same time, swinging in the longest rally of her life. Lamot, also wanting to move on,

also playing desperate tennis.

Net. Lamot hit the net.

"Winner, Miss Mallory Clarke." She raised her racquet to the crowd, half of them cheering, the other half booing. She'd moved on to the finals. Her opponent: Sara Errani. Gabrielle had lost to Sara the day before, in a three set tear-jerker.

"Congratulations, Mallory!" Rodney hugged her in the exit tunnel. "I do hope you're ready for the doubles finals later. Mallory groaned. She'd completely forgotten she had two matches today.

"We will be *fine*," Andy said. She mentally agreed, stepping onto court they both saluted the crowd with waves and smiles. They were playing none-other than Christopher Adler and Gabrielle DeMontaigne. "We have beaten them before," he added. She nodded.

I can do this. I'm going to be a Wimbledon champion.

Taking the first set 6-4, Mallory and Andy were easily delivering serves to their opponents. But, it didn't stifle the world number ones at all, as they took the second 6-2.

"Ready to call it quits yet?" Gabrielle taunted her. Mallory glared.

"It seems you've lost your touch as a team," Adler added as the teams crossed paths on a change over.

"Ignore them, Mallory. You *know* we're the better team in this," Andy seemed to calm her.

"To serve, Miss Clarke," the chair umpire opened the third and final set. Mallory and Andy won it easily, taking an early 1-0 lead. The teams traded service games throughout, standing the third set at 7-6. This match was out of Mallory's element. She wasn't on serve to end it.

Gabrielle was.

She shot a wide serve first, sending Mallory

scampering to return. She hit it cleanly, only to be intercepted by Adler's nearly perfect volley. Andy was on net form, though, and returned it to the center of the court, where neither opponent could reach.

"Excellent," Mallory high-fived him and took her own spot at net. Gabrielle double faulted. Mallory took a deep breath. Andy spun his racket a few times, something she'd become accustomed to when he wanted to play a rush attack. Gabrielle's serve was in the perfect vicinity, returned it and ran through, right up to the service line. The shot, as predicted, was cross court and back to Mallory, she launched it directly at Adler's face. It didn't hit him, but they won the point regardless and she felt as though it was her turn to smirk at him.

At 40-love, Mallory was feeling really good to win this set. She could tell Andy was too. He stood short on the return and she questioned as to why, until she saw Gabrielle's grip on the racket was choked up, she was going for a drop serve. She made it, but wasn't very sneaky about it, Andy hit it just in time, sending it high above Adler's head. Mallory took her position back at the baseline, waiting for the smash she knew was coming. It didn't happen. Adler missed. Mallory and Andy had just won Wimbledon. Gabrielle looked murderous. Christopher just looked at her. She celebrated, not paying any mind to either of them.

Clarke back in the Game!
Clarke to win Wimbledon?
Can Clarke trump Errani?
Will Clarke break again?

Mallory read the headlines and shook her head. She couldn't listen to all the hype the reporters cooked up. She was to play the Wimbledon finals tonight. Rodney sat next to her at the table while she read the news.

"Mallory, you can't read those the day of!" he pulled

the paper away.

"I know, but I swear I'm level headed," she took a bite of the banana in her hand.

"You have plenty of talent to win, you know."

"Yes, yes. I've got to reclaim my honor and what not."

"Well that and the entire British community is probably going to be rooting for you."

Mallory gulped. She was the English star. They would all be either cheering for her, or booing, remembering how she quit.

"Clarke to serve," the announcer's voice came over the speakers. Mallory had lost the first set easily to Errani, 1-6. She'd gained the next one in a hard fought battle, 7-5. They were now in a third set, locked in 5-4 battle. Mallory was serving to win the match.

First serve. She's too close on the baseline; deep then.

Set up. Change direction of the ball toss, closer left and higher.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball down.

Errani returns the ball, but it goes long.

Close but not deep enough. Try wide.

"Fifteen, love."

Set up. Toss the ball to the right, a bit lower.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball.

Ace.

"Thirty, love."

Alright, that approach worked.

Set up.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball.

Maybe not. Errani returned a perfect winner to the

add court, impossible to Mallory to reach.

"Thirty, fifteen."

Try a spin serve. No, that plays into her game. You've already gone down that road in the first set. Hard middle ball.

Set up. Change to a wider stance, toss the ball high right.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball down.

Ace.

"Forty, fifteen. Match point."

Alright, again.

Set up.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball down.

Errani returned the ball to the deuce side, right to her. She hit a hard forehand cross court. Errani chased it down, hitting a drop shot. Mallory sprinted to the ball, hit the net. Mallory skidded to the ground, twisting her ankle slightly.

"Forty, thirty. Match point."

Well, that hurt. Mallory shook out the pain in her ankle and bounced the ball. *One point, you need one point.*

Set up. Ball toss low to the right.

Sharp intake.

Slam the ball down.

Ace.

"Game, Clarke. Match winner, Miss Mallory Clarke."

Tears were flowing as Mallory dropped on her back in the middle of the court. So many things were running through her mind. Her grandfather's face, the horrible headlines in the paper, her brother, Andy, Gabrielle, even Adler. She jumped to her feet to shake Errani's hand.

"Looks like you bested me this time, Clarke," she smiled at her.

"Nice Match," Mallory replied. "You played a great

game."

"Thought I had you in the first. Congratulations."

Mallory jumped to fence to hug her brother and Andy.

The stage was set quickly as Mallory took it, smiling and waving to the crowd, still crying. Sara was announced the runner up. Finally, Mallory was presented with her trophy. She cried harder then and took the microphone.

"This is the greatest I've ever felt in my entire life." The crowd applauded. Hell, even Sara applauded. "Of course I want to thank all of my countrymen for sticking with me through the tournament. And of course, my coach Rodney, without who I wouldn't have played this tournament." She paused, letting it all sink in again. "But most of all I want to thank my Grandfather, Robert Clarke. He taught me everything I know about this sport, provided the drive, the love of the game. To him I owe my dream, I can't even believe I'm standing here, on center court, where he had stood four times." She took a deep breath and everyone applauded again. "Once you've got that drive, don't give it away. I didn't, and I'm standing here, sharing this moment with you all and I can really, truly say this is all I've ever wanted and I've finally got it, I'm finally holding the Wimbledon title!" The crowd went into an uproar as Mallory posed for pictures and finally exited the court.

"Mallory," Christopher Adler stood in the exit tunnel. "Congratulations."

"You choked," she said.

"I did," he said quickly. "I just wanted the old Mallory back."

"Really?"

"Well no, not until that point. I don't want you to ever quit again," he hugged her. She was shocked and cried a second time.

"I thought you hated me, thought Errani hated me-"

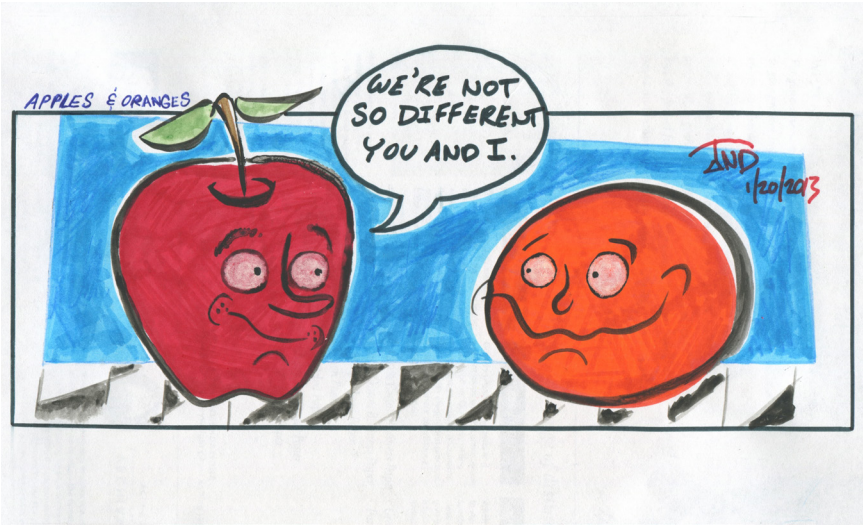
"You're respected, a fantastic tennis player. You

needed to win that match."

"Thank you," she broke from his embrace. He looked like he wanted to say more but she walked away.

I won Wimbledon.

Apples and Oranges
Joel Dodge



Muse 12
Andrew Baumgras

As I knock upon death's door,
I gleam with abhor for the whores of the mainstream,
veins that pump carcinogens of monotony,
into the thoughts and aspirations of the oblivious.
Mongrels dining on the cries of the feeble
have no need for proper dining room edict.
They don't mind if they make a mess,
for they only care about filling their stomachs.

When they're full,
their fairy fecal dust mixes with the rain,
tainting the water supply.
But that is not the compost that keeps us poets going.
Instead, it is emotion and passion,
not cliché bitching of a love lost,
but anger and thrashing of the lost and deranged.

Before death answers the door,
I only wish that we can detox
ourselves from this polluted system
that's clichéd in its absent wisdom.

The Herd
Blake Anderson

We all watched from the safety of our homes as Susie Hunter walked down Main Street in her red summer dress. The light breeze licked at the hem of her dress and brushed her golden hair away from her stern visage. But all eyes weren't on her because she looked particularly nice, but because she was walking toward *them*.

We call them The Herd. No one knows where they came from or why they exist. They're a hundred grey, androgynous, faceless anomalies that roam the Earth in a dense pack, trudging along with an unknown purpose.

Rumors about them have circulated the globe since they first appeared. Some say they're hunting someone, slowly marching toward their quarry. Others say they were created by someone, somewhere, to bring fear back into our lives. Still others – those fortunate enough to have never seen the abominations – say they're harmless figments of our collective subconscious and don't actually exist. No one, not even the world's leaders, knows for certain, though.

We've seen them only once before as they passed through our quiet town. Their grey, naked, featureless bodies were terrible to look at; it was like looking in a mirror and seeing our humanity stripped away. They pressed on down Main Street, only taking an hour to creep across town. We wondered if they could see or hear when they had neither eyes nor ears. We wondered if they knew we were there, hiding in our homes and waiting for them to disappear.

That last time was three years ago. News has reached us that The Herd is coming back through. Stores close in a hurry, some transactions cut short in the bustle. Cars veer off the road and drivers run into the nearest buildings. Families close the blinds on their windows and lock their doors.

Then there is silence. Twenty minutes later, The Herd trudges in. They shuffle down Main Street and we all watch from our hidden vantage points, waiting with bated breath.

Then the unthinkable happens: they stop walking. And we see Susie treading toward them. Behind her back she holds a device at the end of a wire. She draws closer and closer to them, and then, when she's just within arm's reach

of them, she stops too. She stares at The Herd and The Herd stare back, in their own way.

She pulls her dress over her head and discards it on the pavement, revealing rows of explosives strapped to her body. We watch her press detonator in her selfless attempt to rid the world of The Herd.

But The Herd walks on.

The Ringer
Nathan Valeksa

A Minor Case of Death

Summer Cluette

When I was six, I learned the difference between "lactose intolerance" and "lack toast and tolerant." When I was seven, I learned why I wasn't supposed to touch the stove when it was on. And when I was eight, I struggled with the concept of death. I also learned that my classmates and I were assholes.

As with most fourth graders, recess was the highlight of the day. We would walk in a straight line out to the playground with kids pulling Indian cuts constantly so the line was filled with shouts of "hey!" and "you can't do that!" Once outside, the line split up and we ran in all directions to our destinations.

A handful of kids, pushing and shoving, bolted for the single slide on the playground. A line had already formed for the three swings, and the two sets of monkey bars were soon busy with the fourth grade equivalent of "bad boys," who always hung around the dome-shaped monkey bars. It was mid-fall, the leaves were already falling from the trees. My friend Alex and I had gone to the small bundle of trees in the corner of the playground to play explorers.

At eight, Alex was already much taller than me. If we stood face to face, my nose was perfectly level with his chin. His hair was an almost white-blond and in the best bowl-cut I had ever seen. With his pale skin, almost white hair and bright blue eyes he looked almost like an eight-year-old Boo Radley.

Our recess was always the same. We would dart over to the trees and pretend to be daring explorers before going back to snag the swings when the rest of the kids grew bored with them.

We didn't make it to the swings. We had just trekked across the soccer field when we heard it. There was a surprise scream that was suddenly cut short, followed by a mass of kids running away from the monkey bars. All the playground monitors came rushing at once. All of this action had been enough to grab the attention of not just the kids playing on the playground equipment but those playing soccer as well. Soon, everyone was running to the nearest equipment to try and get a look at what had happened.

Several kids were pushing and shoving to stand at the top of the slide to see, other kids were on the swings yelling for someone to push them, and the rest were making a mad dash for the opposite monkey bars to get to the top.

Alex and I made it to the swings first. We didn't have to exchange words; we were aware that this was a team effort. I got on the swing and he pushed me to get a view of what was going on.

There were three lunch monitors around the monkey bars and several teachers had come outside now as well. All the kids who had been there were either shooed away or being consoled by a teacher.

"What's going on?" a kid shouted to me. It wasn't Alex. I soon realized that several of my classmates had gathered around the swing set to try and get word on what was happening. If anyone got too close to the monkey bars, one of the teachers would be quick to move them away.

"I can't tell," I called back. I didn't want to shout to draw attention to us but I was going so high I felt they wouldn't be able to hear me if I didn't. "All the teachers are crowded around this one spot. I think a kid fell off the monkey bars."

An excited murmur started amongst the group. Nothing this exciting had happened since Zachary had gotten his foot stuck in the fence in September.

One of our teachers ran inside while one of the monitors blew a whistle. I skidded my feet along the dirt and Alex grabbed the metal chains to help me slow to a stop. Recess was over? It had to be a full ten minutes early! This was an outrage!

We all reluctantly headed toward the door mumbling amongst each other about what had happened before all going into our assigned classrooms.

We all sat down when our teacher came in. He was a large man with prematurely graying hair that his hand was running through. He sat down at his desk, tapping his fingers on it before standing up so quickly his chair rolled into the wall causing us all to jump. "All right, I want you all to sit at your desks and work on something quietly. I'll be back in five minutes."

We all as he left the room and shut the door behind him. A few moments later, we gathered around the center of

the room to talk.

"What happened?"

"Did anyone see? Who was it?"

"Where's Charlie? Where's Charlie?! It was Charlie!"

Charlie was one of the "bad boys" who hung out by the monkey bars and could hang upside down on them like nobody else could.

In the midst of our discussion, we heard an authoritative voice. "Y'all quit your bitchin', I know what happened!"

We all shut up. If there was any kid you didn't want to mess with it was Armand Latenville. He was the baddest kid in the fourth grade.

He was also the biggest kid in fourth grade. He had to weigh at least two thousand pounds (give or take) and it was mostly fat. The rest was pure, fourth grade muscle. Muscle he used to beat up all the kids he was unable to eat.

Armand looked around the group and once he was sure he had caught everyone's attention, he went on, "Charlie fell off the monkey bars." Confirmation. There was a collective gasp we looked around to see each other's reaction. The monkey bars were dangerous. We heard stories of kids who fell through the gaps, hitting their heads on the way down before falling on the rocks below. I wasn't sure whose bright idea it was to keep rocks under playground equipment. It wasn't until I was in sixth grade were they replaced with sand.

"Poor Charlie!" one of the girls said, shaking her head sadly. "I wonder when he'll be back. He's going to miss Halloween."

"He's not coming back," Armand said darkly. We all looked back over at him, "He's dead."

Silence fell upon our class. We knew about death. Earlier this year, we'd had a class hamster named Finnegan. He used to escape every night and chew our science books. One day, our student teacher had duct taped the entire top of the cage so he couldn't escape. It turned out, duct taping the way out also prevented air from coming in, and our hamster suffocated. We had all been devastated until we realized this meant we could get a new hamster, hopefully one that didn't bite. But we were apparently still in our "grieving period" and had yet to get our new hamster.

“Dead?” Alex asked, “What do you mean he’s dead?”

“I mean he cracked his skull clean open,” Armand snapped. “His brain and guts were all over the rocks!”

There was a collective “ewww!“ and a few giggles from the more morbid students. Armand didn’t smile. He was looking around the group as if daring someone to question him. Nobody would. If they did, they would risk getting a swirly in the nearest toilet. Armand was not the kid to mess with. He was so heavyset that on the playground, it was easy to run away from him. But inside a small classroom with no teacher? He could easily overpower the best of us. Once, Armand had brought a cigarette to school and threatened to burn the eyes of any kid who threatened to tell on him. Needless to say, no teacher ever found out.

“Whoa…” Alex said as he and I exchanged looks, “I can’t believe he’s dead.”

“He is. I saw it myself.” A new kid spoke up and we all turned to look at him before quickly averting our gaze. He was one of the kids we tried not to talk to. He was weird. Even by fourth grade standards. But if anyone knew, it would be him. The kid spent every single recess under the monkey bars Charlie fallen off. He would just sit there and lick the rocks. Every day it was the same thing. Lick rocks for the whole forty-five minutes then head inside and pick his nose in the back of the classroom.

“What will his parents say when they find out?” I asked. Would they have to come and pick up the body? How would they bring it home? In the trunk? “Oh my gosh! What if they come to school to pick him up and he doesn’t show up?”

“They already know.” Armand seemed to be enjoying all the attention he was getting. It wasn’t just fear this time but he had us in suspense. He pulled a chair out from his desk and stood up on it. “They called me.”

We didn’t question this either. We didn’t think about how that was logically impossible; Armand hadn’t been apart from us for longer than a few minutes. We were just intently wondering what his parents said.

“Really?” I asked, big green eyes on Armand now, “What did they say?”

“They were crying and shit,” he explained. Seemed like a legitimate reaction to being told your son was dead.

“They’re going to have his funeral in a few days. And guess what else they said?”

“What?” we all asked quickly.

“They said that if we can go out and collect the rocks with his blood, they’d pay us money! They want the bloody rocks to give out as presents at his funeral. They’ll be paying us fifty dollars per rock!”

“Fifty dollars?!” That was a lot of money for a fourth grader. Five dollars got you two packets of Pokemon cards. Fifty dollars could get you… well, more.

The door opened and Armand jumped down from his chair as the teacher came back in and we all hurried back to our seats. Mr. Fortin still looked troubled. He didn’t say much. He just told us we’d be spending the rest of the day having free time. Seemed only fair, we had just lost a classmate.

As everyone separated into their own groups, I grabbed my backpack before joining Alex at the windowsill.

I sat down next to him and pulled out two ring pops from my backpack and handed him one. A few weeks ago, Alex and I had gotten married on the playground. Since then, we would take turns bringing ring pops to school. We normally ate them after school but now seemed as good a time as ever. We unwrapped them and each took a lick before tapping them together. We were married after all and kissing in public was just gross, so we had to settle for a lolly-to-lolly tap.. After that, we were free to eat them as usual while talking over today’s events.

“Do you think Charlie is really dead?” I asked. He seemed to be in deep thought before he let out a sigh.

“Why would Armand lie?” he finally asked, “I mean… we know something happened. Charlie clearly ain’t here. He must be dead.”

Logic.

“So,” he went on, “the real question is… how do we get to the playground before all the other kids?”

Right, the money. There was fifty dollars per rock on the line. There were a lot of rocks on the playground. Suddenly, I found myself hoping Charlie had split his head real good so we could get as many rocks as possible.

“I’m sure we’ll find a way,” I said, kicking my feet so they hit the walls. My shoes would light up every time I

walked and I was enjoying watching them spark up now. Charlie had a pair just like mine. I wondered if Alex could have them now that Charlie was dead.

"I guess," Alex said. We sat in silence for a few minutes before Alex jumped down, offering a hand to help me down. "You're right. We'll just find a way. We'll worry about it later."

"I guess," I said. "I hope it works out. I'm going to be so sad if Charlie died and I don't get any Pokemon cards out of it."

The following day, we rushed through lunch. We would still be let out at the same time regardless how fast we ate but it felt necessary.

When our teacher's name was called, we all hurried over to the lunch monitor, pushing and shoving to try and get to the front of the line. The very second we were released onto the playground, we all took off for the monkey-bars. There was nobody at them. The other classes had decided that, out a sign of respect for the injured kid, to leave the monkey bars alone. So it was a surprise to them that the fifteen kids in Mr. Fortin's class were now running full force to the monkey bars. We all rushed in, quickly trying to find the spot where Charlie fell. It was Alex who found it, who quickly called to me.

There they were. The rocks were a light blue in color but these had red drops of blood splattered across them. They weren't how I pictured them. I envisioned rocks soaked with blood, laying in a small pool of it and stained red from the color. These hardly had any drops at all. Although blood was blood, Charlie's parents had never said how much blood was needed on them.

By now, the other kids had realized we found the rocks and hurried over. Alex and I managed to grab a few before the mob hit. Armand was pushing smaller kids out of his way and threatened to pull their eyes out of their sockets if they didn't move fast enough.

Soon, the area had been picked clean of rocks right down to the dirt and we were standing in a circle comparing our hauls.

"Look at the blood on this one! This will be worth at least sixty dollars!"

“Was the fifty a set price or were they willin’ to bargain?”

“Ooh! The blood on this makes a pretty pattern!”

Mr. Fortin had come out of his lunch break. It wasn’t uncommon for the teachers to come out and keep an eye on the students. After an incident like yesterday’s, Mr. Fortin expected us to be rather traumatized so the sight of us gathered in a circle under the monkey bars must have looked like we were all silently grieving.

He came over and leaned on the monkey bars. We turned around quickly and out of a habit formed a quick line, “Hello, Mr. Fortin.”

“What are you kids up to?” he asked gently.

We said nothing. We all knew that if we told Mr. Fortin it would end badly. He was a teacher. He would take all the rocks and sell them to Charlie’s parents himself. We all had taken a silent oath to not speak. All of us except the weirdo licking rocks behind us.

“They’re collectin’ rocks of Charlie’s blood to sell it to his family for money for Pokemon cards.”

Traitor.

Mr. Fortin’s face fell fast. He went from picturing us as cute little fourth graders mourning the accident of their friend to little monsters, “You’re… what? So those rocks are… Oh my God, put those down! Now!”

We all groaned and Armand flipped the traitor off and muttered as we reluctantly dropped the rocks at our feet. Mr. Fortin ushered us forward to the school. Not only had we just lost our rocks but now recess was canceled a full half hour early.

The whole time inside, Mr. Fortin tried to find out where we got the idea from that Charlie’s parents wanted money from us. The first person who sold Armand out would experience the wedgie to end all wedgies.

“I am so sorry to break it to you all,” Mr. Fortin started as he helped us scrub our hands clean one by one in the classroom’s bathroom. His voice was dripping with irritated sarcasm, “but Charlie is NOT dead.”

This earned a collective groan of annoyance from the class which only fueled Mr. Fortin’s anger. The remaining kids got their hands scrubbed with a bit more force than the others before we were all sat down in the classroom.

“In case you didn‘t hear me the first time, Charlie is not dead,” Mr. Fortin started. He paced the room before coming to a stop in front of the chalkboard. There was a large smiley face on the board that a kid had drawn earlier. It certainly didn’t match Mr. Fortin’s face. His usual kind and relaxed expression was suddenly hard. His brown eyes were blazing in frustrated anger, “Charlie fell off the monkey bars and will be back soon. What were you lot thinking? You know that is wrong, right?” There was almost a desperation at the end of his voice.

Nobody said anything. We all started down at our desks. A few kids were whimpering from Mr. Fortin’s strict tone and a few others began to cry when they realized they wouldn’t be getting money. Armand kept his gaze straight ahead, the only kid aside from Rock Licker (who was picking his nose in the back) who met Mr. Fortin’s gaze.

When nobody said anything, the man’s body slumped forward a bit. He did not give us any long-lasting punishment. We had to sit quietly at our own desks for the rest of recess. The room was silent. I just sat there, watching Mr. Fortin’s expressions. He no longer looked angry. Just disappointed.

At the start of the next week, Charlie came back with exciting stories about his time at the ER. He was walked in by Mr. Fortin, a bandage covered the top of his head. A few kids gave him curious looks before turning to face forward again. Alex whispered to me, commenting on how Charlie‘s dark, curly blonde hair had been shaved off. We both thought this was hilarious and spent the remaining half of class talking about how goofy he looked.

During lunch, Charlie came to our table with a big grin on his face. He sat down across from Alex and I. Alex was quick to avert his gaze but I forgot my place and gave Charlie a friendly nod. He took that as an invitation to speak.

“Do you guys want to know about what happened to me at the ER? It was awesome!”

I opened my mouth to say “yes” but when I realized everyone else was trying their hardest to avert their gazes I quickly looked down at my sandwich.

Charlie looked confused. He glanced from one person to the other before trying to tell his story. He didn’t get far into

it when he realized nobody was listening, “Guys?” he asked hopefully, “is something wrong?”

“Is something wrong?” Armand mimicked. I jumped in surprise and scooted closer to Alex. I knew that tone. Armand was angry. That normally meant someone would be leaving with a black eye. Alex picked up on this and put his arm around me to pull me closer like a proper husband should.

“Yeah, something’s wrong! Do you know how much money you cost us?” Armand snapped, slamming his Capri Sun down on the table. It was done for effect but all it did was squirt juice on the table.

Charlie winced. Armand and he were friends. The fact Armand was verbally attacking him was something that he hadn’t expected. “What,” he started but had to stop to talk without whimpering, “What do you mean?”

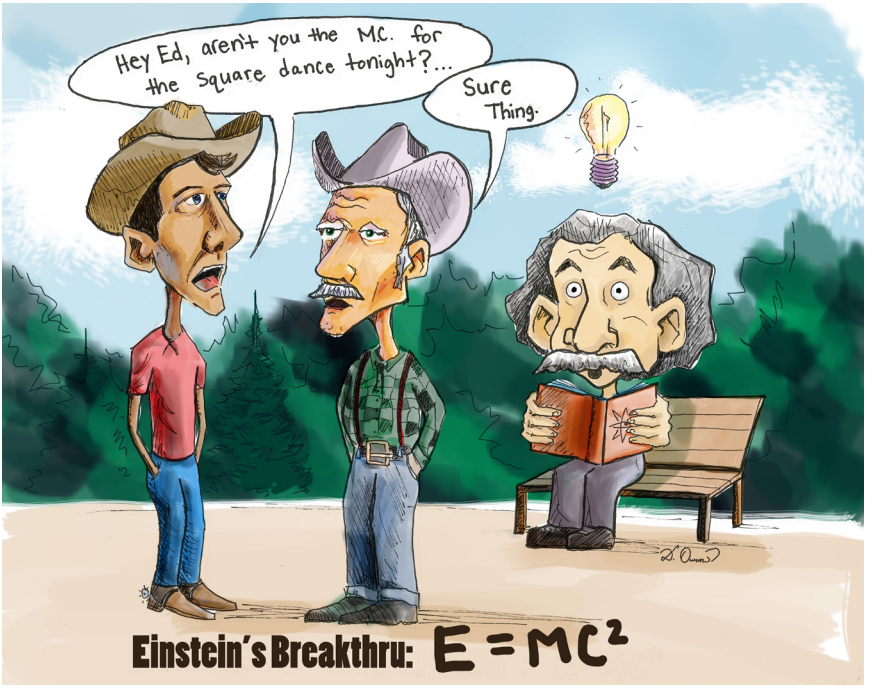
“You know what I mean!” Armand snarled. He explained quickly to Charlie that because he lived through his ordeal, he cost us all money.

Charlie looked confused and enraged, “What?“ he sputtered, “my parents would have paid a lot more than fifty dollars for my blood!”

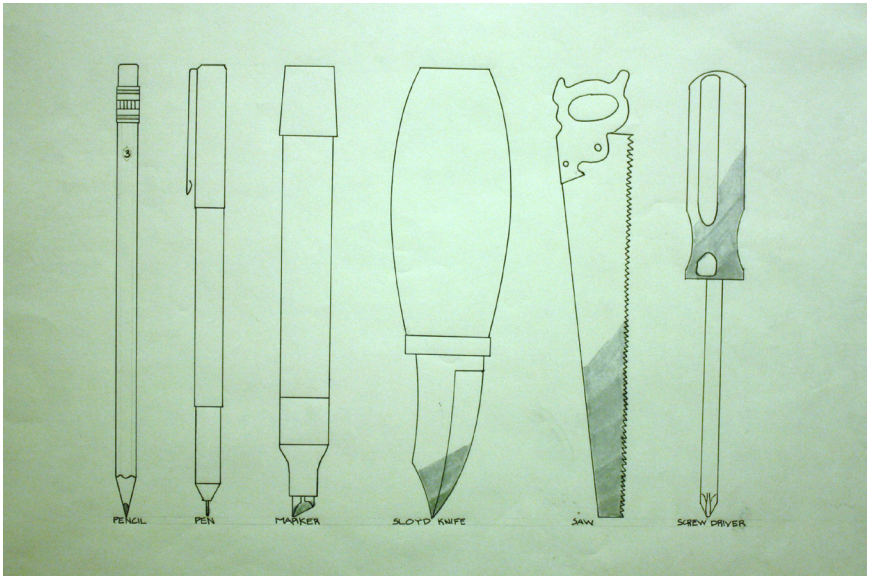
Wrong thing to say. Armand roared in anger and stormed off. He returned a few seconds later to grab his lunch before once again leaving in a huff. One by one, the other kids got up to leave as well. Alex hesitated before he stood up, taking my hand and we left, leaving Charlie by himself. He looked angry and hurt. It may have been cold but we had to remember, this was the kid who cost us at least fifty bucks each (or maybe more!) Not to mention, it was better to have Armand with than against you.

The entire class refused to talk to Charlie after that. By the end of the week, Charlie began feeling guilty just for being alive. And rightfully so.

Einstein's Break-Thru
David Owens



Tools of the Trade
Ethan Lucas



Two Copies of Finding Nemo
Joel Dodge

The Hero

Shelby Coyle

Benji really hadn't meant to do it. In fact, he hadn't even really realized quite *what* he was doing. At the time it had seemed natural, an end to at least a few troubles.

He'd thought he was helping.

So as the police came and took their pictures, trying to calm the weeping, bruised woman, he just stood there. Dazed.

A child stood behind him. She was young, maybe six or seven, and she was clutching the bottom of his shirt tightly. She was staring at her father.

The man was sprawled across the carpet, staining what was once white a deep red. Benji had given the police the knife a little earlier.

They called him a hero.

So why didn't he feel like one?

Knowing Me
Jenna Schifferele

Knowing me,
I'm always gonna be
that girl who's there
when no one else would dare.
Knowing me,
all my friendships
will turn to guilt trips
because when I need someone,
no one will want to make the run.
Knowing me,
I'll push everyone away
because I can't make myself get through the day.
Knowing me,
I'll support you through thick and thin
and give up everything to see you win.
But knowing me,
it won't be enough
to be the friend who's there when things get rough.
Knowing me,
I'll sit at home and wonder why
everyone's out, while I stay and cry.
Knowing me,
they'll be out, having fun,
and I'll be here, waiting for sun
to clear the cobwebs and clear the rain
and to polish up this brutal stain
of hurt, of loss, and confusion, too.
Knowing me, I won't make it through.
Knowing me.

Dirty Whore
Emily Tran

A Creation Story
Andrew Schneider

Long ago, In the middle of the world, a great valley once spanned the space between two great mountains. The mountains raised high into the clouds above, and reached up into the air along giant slopes for as far as the ocean in one direction, and in the other, the mountains came together in a great basin. Every day the sun would peak from behind the mountains casting a mighty shadow on that place. And so, in the morning the valley was cool and the green grasses and all of the different trees and flowers stayed moist covering themselves in misty beads of dew. Just before the shadow was lifted by the rising sun, luscious plants from all over the valley, would cast a natural blue aurora as the light from the sun began to peek into the great basin and reflect itself off of the polished slopes of the mountain walls. As the sun's golden light began to move its way in from the white sandy beach looking out across a vast ocean, all of the green grasses, all the colorful trees and exotic flowers would began to raise their pedals and all of their leaves to face the coming sun.

It was within this great bowl on earth that the first woman came to be. The oldest and largest of all the trees, the mother of all of the other trees of every kind, had grown tired of watching the animals of the earth, and desired some new creature that could keep her company. She called to the sun and asked him to bear her a child, a daughter that would be more beautiful and graceful than all of the other animals on earth. The sun, a great life-giver, agreed to bare the mother tree a special seed that would grow into the most beautiful creature on earth. In time, woman was born where she was nurtured under the strong branches of her mother, and to show their admiration the flowers gave up their softest pedals so that the woman might have softer skin. The grasses grew densely around the mother tree where the first woman slept and they protected her from the rough dirt below. Every animal of every kind kept her company, and on cold nights, some would lay beside her so that their fur would keep her warm. In the day time she would help the animals

collect food for all to share, and sing to her mother and when the sun was too hot she would walk into the ocean and swim with the animals that lived there.

One day the first woman came running from the waves of the ocean and fell in front of her mother with tears. The mother tree had never seen the woman cry before, but from the soft sobs of the woman, her mother knew she was sad. “Daughter of mine beautiful woman, tell me what has made you so sad.” The woman looked up at the great branches of her mother as they reached down to embrace her and the woman said, “Mother, I was playing with the creatures of the ocean and they asked me why I was alone. There are more than just one of every other creature but I am the only creature like myself.” The mother tree grew sad too, and realized that the woman needed someone to love, another creature like herself that she could love the way the mother tree loved the sun. That night as the woman slept, her mother called to the moon and asked him what she should do. The moon, had watched the woman grow all her life and he told the mother tree that her daughter, the woman, inspired him to have a child of his own. He asked the ocean to bare him a child. Not long after the woman was born, the ocean agreed and he gave her life-giving light that gave to them a son they called man, after the woman under the mother tree.

“I will bring him here to meet the woman,“ said the moon. “But I must ask that you send him some of your strongest branches through the ocean and let her carry them to the place where my son lives so that he may receive them and ride here to meet your daughter. There are no trees there only grasses and bushes with berries and few animals to keep him company. If you do this, the ocean and I will bring him to her.” The mother tree agreed and in the morning she woke up her daughter, the woman, and told her all about the son that the moon and the ocean had created and the woman was very happy. The mother tree told her that she must break off the biggest branches she could so that the man could ride over the ocean and come to her. The woman looked at her mother as she reached down some of her branches for the woman to tear away and she began to

cry. “Mother, you are so beautiful and perfect, I cannot tear away your branches because it will hurt you.” The mother tree smiled and her branches reached around her daughter to hug her. “One day when you are a mother yourself, you will realize that you must give up some of yourself for your children. I have plenty of branches, most too big for you to break, and I can spare more than he will need. I will give myself to you and to him so that you can have another creature like yourself to love. I will not be hurt my daughter, I promise you. Now tear down some of my branches and bring them to the ocean.” The woman did this, and carried branches to the beach where the ocean gave her seaweeds to tie the branches together at either end so they could float without drifting apart, and she put the branches into the ocean where waves swiftly carried them away.

By now, the sun had raised itself over the great basin between the mountains, and he noticed the tired mother tree had some of her branches pulled off of her and asked her what had happened. “I have given them to the moon and the ocean, so that our daughter could meet their son,” she said. The woman had spent all day at the beach playing with the creatures there as she waited for the son of the moon and the ocean to come meet her. “She is happy again,” said the mother tree. The sun covered himself in grey clouds that began to cry mighty tears as he looked at the mother tree, whom he loved. “My sweet mother tree, what have you done to yourself? You are dying.” The mother tree covered her wounds, where the leaves were browning and her flesh was turning grey. The sun cried harder and the waves on the ocean became rough and violent. The woman swam to shore and ran to take cover under her mother. When she arrived, she saw the wounds the torn branches had left behind and fell to her knees. “Mother what have I done to you? You are sick now and your branches are dying. The sun looked at his daughter, who he loved with all his heart and told her, “Daughter, do not worry my child. You’re mother has lived a long life, and her spirit will return to me when her branches turn brown. You must wait for the man at the beach, while I take care of your mother.” The woman cried, and looked out through the rain to see the branches

returning across the horizon where she could see the man holding on to them tightly. The sun cleared away his clouds and wiped the skies clean of his tears and shined bright for the man to see. “He is here, daughter, you must go to him.”

The woman refused to leave her mother, and begged the sun to fix the branches she had torn away. The mother tree spoke up softly, “Daughter, don’t blame yourself for what has happened to me. I have given myself to you and I am happy. I will leave you my daughters, all of the other trees and more seeds like myself that you can scatter across the valley and that will grow to watch over your children. And the sun will carry my spirit into his light and I will be with him forever. Now you must go and meet the man.” The woman got up sadly and kissed her mother and hugged the wide trunk of her mother’s body. “I love you, mother, I will never forget your sacrifice and one day I will return to you to be with you and father.” The mother tree reached down and gave the woman seeds from her branches; the woman took them and walked out to the beach as the man rode the wake of the ocean onto the white sand on the beach. The woman looked at the man and he gazed back at her, she began to cry and he came to her. His arms closed around her like the large branches of her mother and she cried harder.

Behind them, at the center of the great valley, the mother tree began to fade away as the sun set down over the ocean. The spirit of the mother tree began to sparkle as her body began to disappear. The woman turned to show the man her dying mother and both watched as the spirit of the mother tree walked towards them. The man stared in awe as he watched the great tree walking across the valley. The woman walked towards her mother’s spirit. He followed her, and saw that the tree was smiling, and the spirit came to them on the beach. “So you are the man, that the moon and the ocean has brought to love my daughter.” The man grew sad as he realized the branches that had brought him to the woman had come from the mother tree. “You have given your life for us. We will never forget you great tree. I will honor you forever, and I will love your daughter with all of my heart. She is the most beautiful creature in the world.” The mother tree smiled and the sun called out to her from

the horizon behind the man and woman. “We must go now mother tree, you must return to me before I leave. The great tree drifted into the fading light of the sunset and her spirit traveled over the ocean.

The moon was watching now, and he came to the woman and to his son, the man. “Sweet children, you have found each other.” The woman and the man were still staring out into the sea as the sun finished setting behind the ocean. The moon called to his son. “Dear son, your mother and I have given you strength and virtues so that you may care for and love this woman. You must watch over her, and plant seeds to honor her mother who has sacrificed herself so that you could each find love. If you do all of this, then the woman will love you more than anything in the world and the two of you will bear children of your own and bring more creatures like yourselves to the earth to live with all of the other animals, and all the other trees and plants. In time, the seeds the mother tree has left behind for you will give to you more branches to use so that you can leave the valley, and your mother, the ocean, will share with you and your children the rest of the world.” The man and the woman looked at one another and thanked the moon for his guidance, and the message he had given them. The woman thanked her mother’s spirit too and after, they walked deep into the basin of the valley where they found some of the woman’s sisters to lay beneath. The ocean was still and quiet as she admired her son, and the woman and how happy they were together. The man rested beside the woman and put his arms around her to keep her warm. They fell asleep and waited for the coming sun where they would plant the seeds of the mother tree and enjoy a new day with love.

Open to Incite Chaos
Nathan Valeska

Basic Training
Michael McCabe

(A cardboard box is on the ground center stage. KORBY and WILSON enter stage right wearing officer's uniforms. KORBY is carrying a toolbox. They approach the cardboard box.)

KORBY
Alright. Let's be smart about this. (He sets down the toolbox) We both reach in and pull it out slowly.

WILSON
Right.

KORBY
Then we set it on the ground and get to it.

WILSON
On the ground. Got it.

(They reach in the box and pull out a metal box with many different colored wires coming from it.)

KORBY
Easy. (Pause) Easy now.

(They set it on the ground very carefully.)

KORBY
You've been briefed?

WILSON
No, sir.

KORBY
This is a bomb. We got it out, we defuse it. Now you're briefed. Any questions?

WILSON
Well, you should know I've had no training on this, sir.

KORBY
What?

WILSON
I said, I've had no—

KORBY
No, I heard you. But, here's the thing. I am a Captain. I'm in charge of a lot of people. I lead.

WILSON
Yes, sir.

KORBY
You understand?

WILSON
No, sir.

KORBY
I have no training in defusing bombs. Enough with the sirs, Wilson.

WILSON
Yes, s… Korby?

KORBY
Fine. We're in a pickle, Wilson. A real jam. Now, as your superior officer I'd like to offer you a great chance.

(KORBY opens the tool box and pulls out a pair of wire cutters. He hands them to WILSON.)

KORBY (Cont'd)
You want to be a hero right, Wilson?

WILSON
Well, yes.

KORBY
Of course you do. So, you'll be doing the wire cutting.

WILSON
Sir, Korby, I don't know.

KORBY
How's this sound: 'Private Wilson Saves Day.'

WILSON
How about Private *First Class* Wilson saves day?

KORBY
Naturally, Wilson. Some hack editor would lose his job if he used my sloppy headline.

WILSON
Probably.

KORBY
Sure they would. Okay, then. Get to it.

(WILSON bends down and surveys the bomb. He opens the wire cutters around one of the wires.)

KORBY
Red? Are you sure?

WILSON
Not at all, sir.

KORBY
Korby.

WILSON
Not at all, Korby. You think red is a mistake?

KORBY
Think of it this way, would you ever press a red button without knowing its function?

WILSON
I suppose I'd be tempted.

KORBY
The answer is no, Wilson. No you would not.

WILSON
Right, Korby.

(WILSON moves the cutters over another wire.)

KORBY
Green eh? Good choice.

WILSON
This is blue, sir, I mean Korby.

KORBY
Sweet Jesus, I must be color blind!

WILSON
So, shall I just cut the actual green wire?

KORBY
That logic follows.

(WILSON moves the wire cutters over another wire. He almost cuts.)

KORBY (Cont'd)
But—

WILSON
Good lord! I nearly cut that wire!

KORBY
And a good thing you didn't. How do we know you aren't the one who is color blind?

WILSON
I don't remember being tested.

KORBY
Neither do I.

WILSON
What does it mean?

KORBY
Clearly, one of us is color blind. Most likely you, but who am I to judge?

WILSON
I should get tested.

KORBY
You really should. I'll put in orders for it after the mission.

WILSON
Ok, red is unsafe.

KORBY
Correct.

WILSON
We cannot tell the difference between green and blue.

KORBY
Right. Not until we've had you checked.

WILSON
What about black?

KORBY
That would be a very bold move.

WILSON
Why do you think that?

KORBY
Have you ever associated the color black with anything positive?

WILSON
I guess not. Then the logical conclusion is to cut the white wire?

KORBY
Of course the enemy may be doing the old reverse logic trick.

(WILSON holds his head in his hands.)

KORBY (Cont'd)
Don't get discouraged, Wilson. Let's review: Red is out, Green and Blue are out by default. Black and white have canceled each other. This leaves us with yellow and orange.

WILSON
Okay. How do we narrow it down to one?

KORBY
Yellow. Yellow is a primary color, that is very good news.

WILSON
Alright.

KORBY
On the other hand, yellow is the color of anxiety. Bad news there.

(KORBY paces around the room, scratching his chin and eyeing the bomb the entire time.)

KORBY (Cont'd)
And orange. That's just yellow and red combined.

WILSON
Which one then?

KORBY
God, anything but orange.

(WILSON is massaging his temples now. KORBY continues to pace.)

WILSON
What if I cut all of them at once?

(KORBY stops and stands still.)

KORBY
If you make that decision, Wilson, I'd like to leave first.

WILSON
Korby, sir, I don't know what to do.

KORBY
Stand up, Wilson.

(WILSON stands. KORBY puts his hands around WILSON's shoulder.)

KORBY (Cont'd)
Sometimes, in the course of a man's life, we come to a bridge. It's a rickety old bridge and we look across it and wonder, can I make it? It seems you only have two options: attempt to cross it, which is risky, or climb down and ford the river below it. This is also risky; strong currents, water temperature. God only knows what wildlife is in there.

WILSON
So you are saying that with every choice there is a risk?

KORBY
Heck no, Wilson. I said it *seems* you only have two choices. There is a third.

WILSON
What is the third choice?

KORBY
You wait at the edge of the bridge until someone who knows how to build a bridge comes along.

WILSON
Sir--

KORBY
Korby.

WILSON
Korby, is this story a metaphor or something like that. I don't think I follow you.

(KORBY takes his hand off of WILSON's shoulder.)

KORBY
Yes it's a metaphor. Wilson, we aren't bridge builders and we

certainly aren't bomb diffusers. So I say we cut our losses and get out of here.

WILSON
And let the bomb go off?

KORBY
Let's pretend the bomb does go off. Let's also say 1,000 people die. That's the number of deaths if you and I leave. If you and I stay, and try to defuse the bomb, the number of deaths is 1,002. Do you follow me?

WILSON

(quietly) Yes.

KORBY
Yes, Korby, right?

WILSON
Yes, Korby.

KORBY
Alright then, kiddo. Let's get out of here.

(WILSON stares at the bomb. KORBY puts the wire cutters in the box and makes to exit stage right. He stops, noticing that WILSON is not behind him.)

KORBY
Come on, Wilson. There's nothing we can do.

(WILSON slowly catches up and they both exit. A few moments pass and WILSON reenters stage right carrying the wire cutters. He kneels down next to the bomb and looks over it for a long while.)

WILSON
Red. Green. Blue. Black. White. Yellow. Orange.

(He picks a wire and puts the wire cutters around it. He closes his eyes and turns his head away from the bomb.

He cuts it. After a moment he exhales a sigh of relief and crumples to the ground. Eventually, he stands and picks up the bomb.)

WILSON
Private first class? How the hell do I become General?

(He tosses the bomb nonchalantly into the cardboard box and exits stage right.)

END.

Rose Afire
Raymond Dale

A white rose stands alone, yearning for your desire
It sits upon a hill, without thorn nor briar
However, it is encircled by a burning ring of fire
Is your tolerance of pain equal to that of your desire?
Because, if so, I beg of you to touch the fire

Burn yourself; embrace the pain
Let your tears fall like the morning rain
Please, just scream out my name
And hold the rose for we'll never be the same

Nightlight
Taylor Clock

Develan Square

Mary Katherine Cornfield

It was only the third time Lillian had ever seen the Mayor, and each time she saw him, he looked at her a couple seconds longer than any other person who lived in Delevan Square. The mayor barely ever left his mansion in Walker Park, but on that rare occasion, Lillian would see him from her window, walking around Delevan Square quizzically, always wearing the same black top hat and slick black pants that Lillian had hemmed for him carefully each month.

Lillian Webber had been a seamstress in Delevan Square for as long as she could remember. She would sit by her window, sitting on her old, wooden stool, and sew until everyone's clothing was perfectly hemmed. She would sew the Mayor's sleek black pants, she would sew the Veterinarian's sturdy white lab coat, and she would sew the Shoemaker's worn blue jeans, all to get her two hundred dollar check at the end of each month. Her month of work never changed. Lillian would sew at the same pace, never falling behind, but never getting ahead, and at the end of each month, there would always be a check in her mailbox. Everyone who lived in Delevan Square was paid that way. No one ever questioned how or why, no one ever questioned anything, because nothing ever changed in Delevan Square.

Lillian lived in a very small house on the corner of Walker Park Avenue and Baltic Boulevard. Her house was painted a shade of dark purple, a purple so dark that the house was barely noticeable at nighttime. The house was only one story high, and it had a slightly slanted roof with black shingles that were falling off in a few different areas. There was a giant window in the front of the house that allowed Lillian to look across the square when she was sitting at her stool sewing. It was the only remarkable feature about the house. Other than the window, the house was less than normal. Grass and vines had grown up the side of the house because Lillian never had time to garden. Weeds and bushes had grown to be oversized and unruly all throughout the very small yard in the front of the house, covering the sidewalk completely and keeping the entrance of others guarded.

There were only a few rooms inside the house. The door was painted a dull red, contrasting the dark purple of the exterior. It squeaked when it was opened, and it led into an open room, which contained a wood stove in one corner and a large table in the other. The table was parallel to the large window in the front of the house. The table was piled with pants and jackets and dresses and blouses and other articles of clothing that needed to be hemmed or stitched or sewed back together. Next to the window was a simple wooden stool. It was painted a dull blue, and it was slightly uneven. Lillian sat at the stool by the window every day, sewing and stitching and hemming all of the clothing that was piled on the table.

The inside of the house was just as dull as the outside. The rooms were cluttered and small. Every wall was painted an insignificant shade of grey, and there were no other colors seen throughout the house that could make any kind of impression on anyone. The only light that was brought into the room was the light from the sun that shone threw the large window, lighting the area where Lillian did all of her work on her stool. Everyday she sat at her stool, only looking up when she finished an article of clothing.

From her window, she would see the top of the Mayor's mansion through the shiny, golden gates at Walker Park. What she could see of it was beautiful. It was at least four stories, maybe five, and it was painted a blue as royal as the ocean. The color suited the Mayor; he was the royalty of the town after all. She could see the Veterinarian's house directly across from hers. A pale, yellow house that was triple the size of hers. There was a garden and a yard and trimmed bushes and a mowed lawn. A beautiful golden retriever sat on the porch guarding the entrance. She could also see the train station, but no one ever went there. No one ever went there, and no one ever came from there. Because no one ever left Delevan Square, and no one ever visited Delevan Square.

A golden thimble sat on Lillian's windowsill reflecting the sun. It was the only thing that shined in her extremely dull home. It was the only thing that she treasured, and it was the only thing that constantly reminded her of who she was.

“Ouch!” Lillian yelped as thick, red blood began to drip from her middle finger onto her lap. She ran to the sink and began running cool water on her finger where the needle had pricked her skin. She held her finger tight with a hand-sewn dishcloth, putting pressure on the newly broken skin to stop the bleeding. Lillian paced back and forth, examining the clothes she had yet to hem that lay on the long, wooden table.

It was nearing the end of the month, which meant that it was nearing Lillian’s monthly two hundred dollar check. Delevan Square had specific rules on salary. Each person who lived in the gated community was paid in increments of two hundred dollars, but the better your job, the more frequently you were paid. Unfortunately for Lillian, she had one of the least frequently paid jobs in the square. Lillian did not mind, however, it was something that she could succeed at, and that made Lillian happy.

“Lillian?” A familiar voice echoed throughout her small open room.

“Paul?”

“Yes, hi! I’m just dropping off your boots,” he answered as he walked toward her, holding a pair of brown, leather boots. “I worked really hard on them, I think I was able to fit them just how you like.” Paul Wilson was the town’s shoemaker who lived next door to Lillian. He was a physically fit, middle-aged man who always had a smile on his face. Visits from Paul always brightened up Lillian’s day. He was the only person who Lillian actually considered a friend.

“They look great!” Lillian exclaimed, still holding her finger with the bloodstained dishcloth. “Thank you so much, I really needed a new pair of comfortable boots.”

“You’re always welcome, Lily,” Paul said smiling. “After all, do you know many times you’ve saved me and my family from going out to buy new clothes?” Paul lived in a sky blue house, just a few houses down from Lillian’s, with his wife and his two kids. It was a moderately small house, especially for a family of four, but Paul was never the type of guy to complain about anything.

“I saw him again today...” Lillian’s voice trailed off as she put down the dirty dishcloth and stared out her large, glass window out at the square. “There is something really

strange about him."

Paul looked up at her, "the Mayor? Aw, Lily he's just a busy man. Give him a break."

"But," Lillian said hesitating. "He walked down Baltic Boulevard. What kind of man of his status walks down Baltic?"

"He was probably just taking the short cut back to Walker Park! It is right around the corner." Paul always had a reasonable answer for everything. He differed that way from Lillian.

"I don't know. He looked at me strangely." Lillian's voice trailed off. She kept staring out of the window at the people walking the white stone sidewalk around Delevan Square.

"Don't be ridiculous, Lily. You're just being paranoid. The Mayor is a busy man, and he does a lot for all of us. Now, get back to your sewing. I don't want you to miss your monthly cut." Paul walked out of the house after giving Lillian a hug goodbye. The red door squeaked as he opened and closed it. The sound of his footsteps faded as he walked down the road.

Lillian watched him as he walked back home. Still smiling, Paul greeted everyone he passed. He greeted the two young lads playing baseball in the square. He greeted the elderly woman sitting on a bench in the shade of a giant oak tree. He even greeted the cat that jumped in front of him from an oversized bush.

The sun was beginning to set on the square, and the rays of light shone through Lillian's window, causing her golden thimble to shine. Lillian looked down at it. She picked it up in her hands and tossed it up in the air gently. She caught it as it fell back town toward her fingers, finally free of blood and swelling. Lillian clutched her thimble tight to her chest, and then placed it back on the windowsill where it sat everyday. As she picked up her needle and thread, she began to continue her work from where she stopped before.

Lillian started her days the same way every morning. She would wake up, bathe, dress herself, and then make herself breakfast, which usually consisted of a scone or a biscuit, sweet cream, and milk. She would then walk the square and get anyone's requests for clothing alterations.

Most people would leave a note in their mailbox saying if they needed anything to be altered, what it was, and when they needed the work to be done by. There were usually a few jobs for her to fill per day. Lillian had a large brown bag with sturdy leather straps that she carried with her daily. There was a small pocket on the inside where she folded and put all of the orders neatly inside to keep track of them. The clothes she would fold and place at the bottom of the bag. Lillian went nowhere without her work-bag.

Once she arrived back at her house, she would check her mailbox. Her mailbox was small, and there was an engraving of the letter W on the outside of it. Lillian rarely got mail. She knew no one outside of Delevan Square, and there was barely anyone in Delevan Square who ever had a reason to send her anything. Yet every morning she opened her black tin mailbox like a kid opens a present on their birthday, with hope that something would be inside.

"What's this?" Lillian grabbed the cream colored envelop that was placed inside her mailbox. She flipped the envelope over slowly, feeling the edges to see if something was actually inside. On the front of the glossy envelop "Miss Lillian Webber. 1 Baltic Boulevard. Delevan Square" was written neatly and stylishly in thick black ink.

Lillian looked at the top left corner of the envelope to see whom the letter was from, but there was no return address. She turned it over and carefully slid her fingers underneath the envelope's paper closure, ripping it open but being careful not to damage the letter. She slid a folded piece of cream-colored paper out of the envelope, unfolded it slowly, and began to read.

Ms. Lillian Webber:

The Bank Owes You A Dividend of Fifty Dollars. Come Collect

Your Fee At Your Own Convenience At Delevan Square Banking.

Located at 9 James St.

Sincerely,

Delevan Square Banking

Lillian read and reread her letter a dozen times, standing speechless in front of her red door that was slightly

rusted at the hinges. She shook her head, walked into her sewing room, and continued to reread her letter, pacing the stained wood floor beneath the brown leather boots that Paul had made for her. She set down her large cloth bag that contained two pairs of pants, a dress, and a thick coat and sat down at her stool. For once, she had no clothes in hand.

"This has got to be a mistake," Lillian said under her breath. Lillian set the letter down on the windowsill next to her golden thimble. She looked out her window. Everything was normal. Nothing in Delevan Square looked out of place, and nothing seemed different. She glanced back at the letter, wondering if it would still be there or if it was just a dream, and to her surprise, it was still there.

Lillian picked up the letter, and headed out the door. She walked down her weed-covered sidewalk and headed for James Street. It was the first time she had ever walked the white stone pathways of Delevan Square without holding her big brown bag. She walked with integrity, head held high. She passed Paul's house first. She hoped that he would be outside so that she could show him the letter, but he was not. He was most likely working on a new pair of shoes. She passed a few of her other neighbors, waving to them and smiling, something she never had time to do. She also passed the Delevan Square Jailhouse, but that was just as deserted as the train station. Lillian rounded the corner onto James Street. She walked past the Electrician's house, she passed the Landscaper's house, and then she saw the bank. It was the last building on James Street.

Lillian walked cautiously into the front double doors of Delevan Square Banking. The bank, painted in warm shades of orange and deep red, was extremely organized and fancy. There was a large wooden, polished counter in the main room in which two secretary ladies sat willing to help whoever walked in. Both of them looked very similar. Their hair was pulled on top of their heads in perfectly structured, tight buns. They were wearing all black attire, fancy blouses with white contrasting pearls that hung from their ears and their necks. One of the secretaries had jet-black hair and very fair skin. The other lady had lighter brown hair, and her skin was slightly more than the black haired lady sitting next to her. They sat at the large wooden counter in the same stance and with the same expression on their faces.

As Lillian walked through the doors, the ladies looked up in unison. There was no one else that Lillian could see in the bank. In fact, it did not seem like anyone had been to the bank in a while. A smile slid across both of the secretaries' faces, and they spoke in unison.

"Ms. Webber. The bank has been expecting you." Lillian stayed quiet, unsure of what to do. She did not walk any further, and she did not say anything in response. She just stared at both of the ladies, waiting for them to speak again.

"I can help you right over here, Ms. Webber," said the secretary with the black hair. Lillian could not help but notice how beautiful she was. Her pale skin was in perfect contrast with her shiny, black hair. She had bright blue eyes that looked the color of the Delevan Square sky right before the sunset. "My name is Rose."

"Lillian Webber. Nice to meet you," Lillian uttered, walking slowly toward Rose's seat.

"Now, if you just sign here, I can pay you your fee of fifty dollars even," Rose said, handing Lillian a single piece of typed paper with a bold, empty line at the bottom. Lillian hesitantly grabbed the piece of paper and sat down to sign it.

"I'm sorry… but I guess I don't understand why the bank owes me any money," Lillian said, setting down the pen where her signature should have gone.

"Let me check my file for you, it contains every record that the bank has from your time with us at Delevan Square Banking." Rose starting looking through a neatly organized drawer packed with large envelops.

"No, no. You don't understand. I've never been to the bank. I have never taken any loans out, and I have never stored any money with you before. I don't even think I have an account," Lillian suddenly stopped as she watched Rose pick up a file and place it in front of her. Lillian A. Webber was written in black script across the dark orange colored folder that lay on the polished wood counter. "Well, even if I have an account, I don't think that there will be anything inside of it."

Lillian was partially right. There really was not much in her folder. As Rose was looking through the papers, she informed Lillian that everyone in Delevan Square has an account at the bank by default, even if they have never

visited the bank themselves.

"Ah, here we go. It's a record from yesterday, filed by the Mayor himself," Rose said, turning the piece of paper so that it faced Lillian. Lillian grabbed it eagerly.

Delevan Square Banking—

Please issue a fifty-dollar fee to be paid to the order of Ms. Lillian A. Webber at your earliest convenience. She lives on 1 Baltic Boulevard. Mayor Winston Lewis

Lillian walked out of the bank with fifty dollars more than she walked into the bank with. She didn't fully understand it, but nothing like this had ever happened to her. She had learned to always be thankful from Paul, and thankful she would be.

Lillian smiled as the breeze tussled her loosely knotted hair. She walked down James Street, passing the same buildings that she had passed on the way to the bank. As she saw the other people that lived in the square, she realized that she was already two hours behind on her daily work. She began to walk quicker. There was nothing that was going to separate her from completing her work.

Rounding the corner from James Street onto Baltic, something seemed different. Lillian glanced back down James Street. She could see the Electrician's House. There was a sign that hung from the mailbox. It was a hand painted sign of a giant light bulb. Some of the more wealthy people in Delevan Square were able to advertise their businesses more than others. Not that it mattered. Everyone knew where everyone lived and what their occupation was. Lillian could see the very top of the bank. It stood a little higher than any of the other buildings on James Street. Nothing appeared any different that what she had just seem walking past. She turned back around to face Baltic and started walking. She continued to walk, looking all around for anything that seemed out of place.

Lillian was half way down Baltic Boulevard when she began to hear someone a woman crying. As she walked closer to her house, the crying became more distinct. She looked over her right shoulder, starring directly at Paul's light blue house. His wife Joan was sitting in the front yard, crouched over her knees, crying.

"They took him. They took Paul," Joan cried as Lillian

ran to her side.

"Who did? What happened?" Lillian grabbed Joan's arm tightly, looking right into her eyes. Joan looked up, trying to hold back her tears.

"I don't know what happened. I don't know why. The police. They came here, and they tied him up right in front of the kids," Joan tried to talk as best she could, but her scattered breaths broke up her words. "I told the kids to go inside. And then I ran. I chased after him. But the police made me turn around. They said they would hurt him. And… and…" Tears started flooding out of Joan's eyes again as she feel back over her knees. "I can't even pay the bail since his check hasn't come yet…"

"I'll go. I'll get him out of there. He has done nothing wrong." Lillian felt to make sure the money was still in the small pocket sewn on the inside of the burgundy jacket she wore each day. She got up and walked away from Joan. Lillian began running to the Delevan Square Jailhouse, located on the same corner that she had previously passed twice that day.

Lillian marched into the jail with much more confidence than when she walked into the bank. She was going to get Paul out of jail. She had never been more sure of anything.

"Excuse me, sir," Lillian interrupted two of the policeman that were talking by the jail cell as she walked into the small building. There was no need for a large jail. No one in Delevan Square ever did anything wrong. The policemen turned and looked at Lillian. She was out of breath and a bit sweaty from running to the jailhouse in her long skirt and blouse.

"What can I help you with, ma'am?" One of the policemen asked as Lillian approached the two men.

"Paul Wilson is an innocent man, one of the most innocent and genuine men in this town…" Lillian was interrupted as the policeman began to speak.

"Ma'am, it is not my job to be a judge of character. I simply take orders and fulfill them."

"Whose orders?" Lillian said angrily, stepping toward the policeman, demanding an answer.

"By order of Winston Lewis. The Mayor." Lillian stepped back away from the policeman in front of her. Her

legs felt weak causing her to stumble. She began to breathe heavily.

"I'm paying his bail. Release him." Lillian threw the fifty dollars from her pocket at the police. The money fell onto the dirty, off-white floor of the room. He bent down and unfolded the wadded cash, keeping his eyes on Lillian. He nodded to the other policeman that was watching the conflict unfold. The other man began to walk toward the back of the jailhouse, where the cells were. Lillian watched him as he grabbed a set of large, brass keys that were hanging from a crooked, dirty nail in the wall. He walked slowly, the floor squeaking with each step he took. The policeman carefully selected a single key from the large ring of keys that was in his hand. He then slid the key into a keyhole in front of one of the cells. He wiggled it until the door popped open. Lillian heard a muddled conversation between two men as she watched and waited. The policeman grabbed Paul and walked him out of the cell, down the hallway, and into the open area where Lillian stood.

"Lily. You did not have to bail me out," Paul said, with the same smile on his face that he had every other day Lillian saw him. "Where did you even get the money to release me?"

"Don't worry about that. Come on, your family is worried about you." Lillian took Paul's arm and walked him out of the jailhouse quickly, holding onto him tighter than she had ever held anybody.

Lillian walked into her house after a long dinner with Paul and his family. Her house was dark, and everything was just the way she left it when she went to the bank in the morning. It was long past sunset, and Lillian was tired. She was officially a full day behind in her work, but Lillian seemed to care much less about her work and much more about Paul and his safety.

Lillian undid her pinned hair, letting her long, dark locks fall onto her shoulders. She unlaced her brown, leather boots and set them next to her bedroom door. She changed into her long sleeved, cream-colored nightgown and wrapped herself in a blue robe that tied tight at her waist. Lillian walked into the kitchen and made herself a

cup of herbal tea, a tradition she had before she went to sleep each night. She sat sipping at her hot tea, sitting at her stool and looking out her window at the crescent moon that shone bright over the square. The moonlight, like the sun, reflected off her golden thimble, but as Lillian looked at it this time, it didn't seem to shine as bright as it had every other in Delevan Square. As she looked down and starred, fidgeting with the thimble, she heard a knock at her door. It was Winston Lewis. The Mayor.

"Hello, Ms. Webber," the Mayor said with a smile as Lillian opened the door cautiously. The Mayor was dressed as he always was, wearing a black top he had and a black suit to match. "Why don't you take a walk with me?" Lillian did not answer. She knew that the Mayor did not intend for this to be a question. She simply turned around and zipped on the boots that Paul had made her. The Mayor looked at her brown boots that were peeking out from underneath the nightgown and robe that she was still wearing. The smile fell from his face. There was a pause before he extended his hand to Lillian and led her outside.

"How are you, Mayor?" Lillian asked, without making eye contact.

"Please, call me Winston." The Mayor could not take his eyes off Lillian as they walked down Baltic Boulevard.

"Okay. How are you, Winston?" Lillian, still looking straight ahead, felt uncomfortable in the presence of the Mayor. She had never had a conversation with him before. Lillian, in fact, had never had a serious conversation with any male besides Paul.

"I'm fine, Lillian. I'm sorry if this visit took you off guard."

"Why did you send Paul to the jailhouse?" Lillian dropped the Mayor's hand suddenly and with force, changing the subject of their conversation completely. The Mayor stopped walking.

"You think that was by my order, Ms. Webber?"

"I know it was by your order, Mr. Lewis," Lillian stood, arms crossed, facing the jailhouse remembering her afternoon.

"Winston, please, call me Winston. And Lillian. It was not your job to bail him out. Fifty dollars is a lot of money for

someone like you." The Mayor's voice seemed stern. "And for a shoemaker of all people."

"He is my best friend." Lillian said angrily, finally turning to look the Mayor in the eyes. As she looked at him, everything started to make sense. "I know that you run this town like it's your own little game, changing the lives of innocent people like they're pawns in your game." Lillian had never raised her voice before, and she felt empowered by it. The Mayor stood speechless, listening to Lillian in disbelief. No one had ever stood up to him.

"I knew you would figure me out," the Mayor finally said, pausing again as he stepped towards Lillian. "And what is wrong with that? The power, the control, the money, the fame... This town is mine to run. And it can be yours too, Lillian."

"What are you talking about, Winston?" Lillian asked, confused and unsure of what the Mayor meant. The Mayor walked in toward Lillian, grabbing her hands again he looked into her eyes.

"I'm in love with you, Lillian. I have been for a while. You're smarter than most people think. You figured me out. You can have all of this. You can move into Walker Park mansion with me. You can have all the power and control and money that I have. You don't need Paul. I can buy you shoes. Beautiful shoes. Anything you need. Everything you want. Just, marry me." The Mayor spit out his words so quickly and nervously that Lillian could barely understand him. She let go of his hands and took a step back.

"Winston. I… I have to think about it. This is all very sudden." Lillian left, walking quickly back down Baltic Boulevard to her small house that was masked by the nighttime.

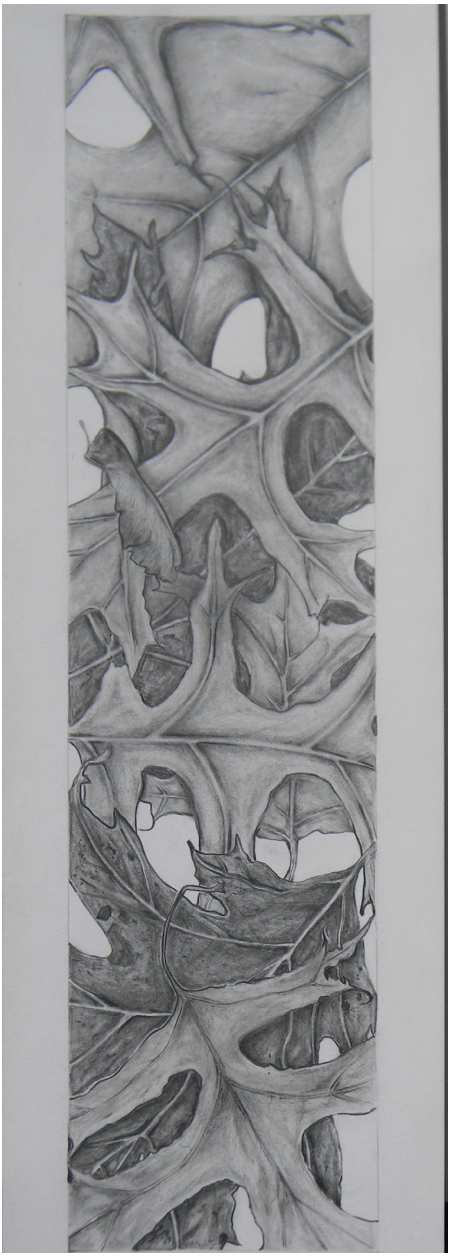
Nothing had changed about Lillian Webber's house except for the fact that she was not sitting in the window working at her stool like she had been every other day. Winston Lewis watched her sew at that stool every day for as long as he could remember. But today, she was not there. He walked up to her dull red door and knocked, just as he had the night before. But this time, Lillian did not answer. He waited, but there was still no answer. He noticed that there was a white envelope that was sticking out of Lillian's

tin mailbox next to the red door. Winston slid the letter out of the mailbox carefully, his name was written on the front. He opened it slowly, holding his breath. A golden thimble fell from the envelope and landed by his feet in the mud. He picked it up, wiping off the mud as he slid the letter from the envelope. Only two words were written on the piece of paper.

I resign.

Lillian Webber might have been the first one to leave on the Delevan Square Railroad, but she only hoped that she wouldn't be the last.

Autumn's Carpet
Joel Dodge



Starry Night
Olivia Martinez

The swirl of sky blue and iris winds
flow through the land, passing under Luna on their journey.
Her crescent, a golden glow of dandelions on a summer day
in the sapphire and azure sky.
The stars help her light the sky with their small honey light,
illuminating the path for the gentle winds.
The soundless village, blue with the night, deep in their dreams,
sleep peacefully with the guardian watching over them.
Dark as onyx, still as a statue, does it gaze over.
Just as Luna and her children watch over the world,
filling this starry night.

Trees in Darkness
Taylor Clock

Checks and Balances
Patricia Morrison

It was spring time now. April, in fact. And the ground was soft and pliable against the bottom of Andrew's shoes as he walked across the rows of tombstones. Some were marble, others granite, but each had a name, and dates, and sometimes other names below it. And each one of them shone in the early morning sun.

It was silent, save for a few cars coming down the gravel path and the reassuring shake of the breeze as it whispered its way through the trees. It wasn't an eerie silence. It was peaceful, and calming. If the setting hadn't been so depressing, Andrew might have even felt a bit refreshed and cheerful after the walk. But the nature of his visit wasn't a cheerful one, and so it repressed those feelings within him until it was a dull, throbbing sense of longing for the way it used to be.

He stopped walking when he reached a jet black gravestone with "Thompson" carved into the cool marble. The neat letters sent him spiraling into a flood of tears as he collapsed onto his knees.

"June twenty seventh, two thousand twelve," he whispered, laying his palm flat against the stone, wiping his eyes with his other hand. "Ten years."

He pulled a crisp, white, envelope out of his pocket and set it on the ground in front of the stone before pressing his fingers into the soil gently, searching for a spot with just a bit more give than the rest. When he found it, he nodded, and pulled a small gardening trowel out of his jacket pocket and began to dig.

The soft scrape of the trowel and the thud of the dirt as it fell into a pile on his left kept him calm, and made the yearly task a bit less daunting and a bit more relaxing than it should have been. But since this was one of the few times a year he left his apartment, he wanted to make it as enjoyable as possible

But really. When you're digging up a box of letters you've written to your dead best friend the past ten years, how enjoyable can it be?

When his trowel clicked against the metal box, he used his left hand to scrape away the remaining dirt and lift

the box up. It was nothing fancy, just a metal box he had gotten when he was a sophomore. Before any of this had happened. The original purpose for the box was to serve as a place to hold his junk, but now it held the most important parts of his life, sealed in envelopes and addressed to his best friend.

He opened the box carefully, and placed the newest letter inside on top of the others, before replacing the lid and setting the box back into the cool earth. Then, he recovered it with the soft soil, and started his walk back to his house.

It was a long walk, yeah. But he hadn't driven a car in ten years. He wasn't even sure he knew how, anymore.

Dear Matt,

Just finished another year's worth of checks for your mom. It's strange to think that it's been ten years since that day. Or night, rather. I guess it doesn't matter anymore, really.

I still don't really leave the house. I'm too afraid of hurting anyone else. I did too much to your family, and honestly, I don't really think I remember how to drive anymore. So even if I wanted to, I don't think I would be able to go anywhere. I would rather stay home. That way I don't have to really worry about people staring at me. I don't like it when they stare. I know I'm that guy who killed my best friend because I'm an idiot, I don't need to be reminded by constant looks, you know? And your mom and her making me write checks once a week, that's enough of a reminder for me.

Not that I think she didn't have a right to do that. It was actually nice of her, considering I deserved a lot more than that. But sometimes I wonder how worth it this all is. Like, I can barely get up in the morning any more. All I do is think about that night. I still have dreams, I still see the crash. I can't get it out of my head. It's been ten years, and it's like it happened yesterday.

It was a party. Obviously. All good things start at a party. The liquor was flowing, the music was blaring, and everyone was having a good time. They were seniors, it was the weekend of graduation, and it was time to let go. They were at some random person's house. A text with the

address had been sent around the school, and the cars had been lined up on the lawn at six thirty.

Andrew and Matt had gotten there at seven, were handed two beers, and it went from there.

If there was one thing Andrew could definitely remember, it was how ice cold the first beer was as it went down his throat and how the second was just as cold. And then by the third he was seeking out his ex-girlfriend in the crowd of people and pulling her in for a dance as “Shots” began to play. She was grinding against him and it felt so good, and he went to grab them both more drinks.

Matt was off talking to a girl he had liked for the past year, and yeah, it was a great time for him to be making a move since they were all leaving at the end of the summer. But Andrew just gave him the thumbs up and Matt grinned back, taking a sip of his beer as the girl kept talking to him. And, to his credit, Matt had seemed genuinely interested in what she had to say. The next time Andrew looked over his shoulder to see if he could spot them, the pair had disappeared.

His phone had buzzed a second later with a text from his mother, asking where he was. He just responded “a party.” and left it at that, before finishing his fourth beer in an hour. He was supposed to be driving home, but he didn’t quite care about that. He was feeling a buzz and his ex was all over him and it was perfect. Everything was going fantastically and he didn’t really care what was going to happen next. He was just living for the moment.

You know, I wish we hadn’t gone to that party every single day, Matty. Or at least, I had a little bit more sense. I went there for two beers and a good time, and I woke up the next morning without a best friend. We would have been friends for twenty seven years this fall. Isn’t that crazy? Twenty seven years. It’s funny to think that our mothers shared a hospital room when we were born. Then your parents just happened to move in across the street. It’s like we were destined to be friends or something.

I would have known you as long as I’ve known my parents, and that stupid old hag next door, Suzie Summers. She’s so bitter, it’s insane. And every time she sees my mother she tells her to lock me away in a home. I don’t need

to go to a home. I'm not crazy. She's the crazy one, that old bat. She's the one that should be put in a home. It's like she thinks I need to be reminded that, not only did I kill my best friend. But I also killed the captain of the football team, the honor student, the one who "was really going to make something out of himself someday. Make the town famous."

You were the closest thing we had to a success story. And now you're gone.

Matt had come to find him at around ten o'clock. He was a bit drunk as well, but not even close to how drunk Andrew was. So, really. It was both of their faults that Andrew had gotten behind the wheel of his dad's new Mustang. Neither of them could make a rational decision to save their lives, and both were too focused on clutching at each other to keep themselves upright as they staggered to the car to even think about anything else.

No one even notice they were leaving there were so many people there. If someone had noticed, they hopefully wouldn't have let Andrew get behind the wheel. If anyone cared, they would have taken his keys and made him sleep on their lawn.

You know, I wish people had cared enough to stop us. I mean, I had a lot of liquid courage in me, but I feel like if someone had told me it wasn't a good idea for me to drive, I might have listened. I don't even care that I didn't know whose house the party was at. If I had known then what I know now, I wouldn't have left. I would have called mom or something. She would have been fucking pissed at me because I had drank myself into oblivion, but she would have rather come and picked us up instead of what had actually happened.

So they got in the car, and Andrew began to drive. He was going too fast, and the lines were blurred. The road was full of curves and hills and he could barely keep up. If Matt was scared, he wasn't showing it. Whether it be because his veins were full of alcohol or because he had complete, unadulterated trust in Andrew, Andrew wasn't sure. But he was driving and the windows were down and the road was empty and for some reason (probably his drunken stupor) he

felt free.

Until Matt was grabbing at the wheel, trying frantically to steer them to the left, and there was the sound of wheels screeching, metal buckling, and glass breaking.

And everything went black.

But I guess I can't change it now, can I? No matter how desperately I want to.

He woke up the next morning in an unfamiliar room. There was a tube sticking out of his arm, and his head was bandaged, as was his right arm and left leg. He felt slightly high, but when he saw his IV drip, he could only imagine that there was some sort of pain medication in there. He was confused and still really tired, and he had a massive headache. Probably from the alcohol he had consumed the night before.

And then, fuck. Everything began to click into place in his mind. The party, the beer, the car, the sounds of the tires squealing…

He looked to his left, only to see his mother asleep in a chair and he reached out to take her hand. She stirred then, her eyes opening to reveal red. As if she had been crying all night.

"Matt," Andrew rasped, squeezing her hand. "Where's Matt?"

Then he heard a scream, and his question was answered.

"No.." He whispered, shaking his bandaged head as fast as he could. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no."

Then the door to his room flew open and Matt's mother rushed in, ready to attack him if Matt's dad hadn't been behind her to hold her back. Even then, he could barely restrain her. Her grief and anger fueled her strength.

"*You killed my baby!*" She screamed, pointing a finger directly between Andrew's eyes before collapsing back into her husband's chest, sobs wracking her body as tears streamed down her cheeks.

You know what else I just realized? That all these letters sound the same. It's all bullshit apologies for things that I can't do anything about. Well, I guess the bullshit part

isn't really true because I am sorry for what I did. I have to live with it every day, every hour, every minute… and even when I think I can escape it, I know that I can't. Mom has pictures of the two of us all around the house. She says it helps her, but it just makes it worse for me. And it's not like I can get a job. I'm twenty seven years old and I don't drive. I know I should move past it, but I just can't do it. I'm always going to be that guy that killed his best friend. I'm always going to be that guy who drives drunk, and it'll never go away.

The next few months were a blur for him. There was physical therapy, regular therapy and a funeral to worry about. Not that he went to the funeral. He couldn't force himself to go.

And then after that there was a rush of court cases and a bit of time in jail where he was isolated from any of the prisoners. Apparently drunk driving and killing someone was worse than anything any of the inmates had done. So he was like a zoo animal.

He was released and put on probation for two years after just three years of time, which could have been worse. But he was just happy to get home and away from everyone in the jail. His mother picked him up when he was released. His dad was at work. Couldn't take the time off to see his son after three years.

Dad still walks on eggshells around me. Never comes into my room to talk to me or anything. I don't get it. He's my fucking father for God's sake. But sometimes he looks at me like he wants to say something, and then he just doesn't. It's like I'm a time bomb, just waiting for someone to say something at set me off.

It's not just him that's like that, though. It's a lot of people. Most everyone, actually. I think your mom is the only one who regularly asks me if I'm alright. Not even my own mother checks on me. It's like, ever since I got home from prison, I'm invisible in my own house. How sad is that?

The car ride home was silent. Andrew was content to just look out the window at the streets he had nearly forgotten. He was happy to be going home.

That was, until he saw Matt's mother waiting for him in the driveway.

"What's this?" he asked. His mother just smiled. It was a bit warm, and a bit strained, but it was still a smile.

"Matt's mother wants to take you out to lunch," She said, taking his bag from him. He had gotten out of the orange jumpsuit only hours before, and was back to his usual plaid and blue jeans. "She's got some things that she wants to talk to you about. Your father and I have already approved of what she's going to say, and you're going to listen to her, and meet her demands."

Andrew just nodded. It was what he deserved, after all.

So he got into Mrs. Thompson's car, and they drove to a little diner in silence. She found them a table for two, and Andrew slid onto the vinyl seat across from her, immediately picking up his fork and spinning it in his hands.

"I'm sure you'll want something good to eat after the prison food," she said, trying to break the tension. Andrew just looked at her. "I'm sorry that we didn't come visit you, Mark and I."

"I didn't expect you too. It's alright, really," Andrew said, putting his fork down as the waitress came over to take their order.

"My treat," Mrs. Thompson said with a smile.

"I'll have a coke, then," Andrew said with a shrug. "And a double cheeseburger. With bacon. And fries."

"That sounds good. I'll have the same."

The waitress nodded, and then they were left alone again.

"So… Mom said you wanted to talk to me," Andrew said, averting his gaze and staring at his hands. He bounced his knee up and down, and began playing with his fingers. He didn't see Mrs. Thompson inhale sharply before she nodded.

"Yes," she said. "And your parents have already told me that they're going to enforce my request so you might as well agree to it now."

Andrew just nodded.

"I want you to write me a check for one dollar." She continued. "Every Friday for seventeen years. That's only eight hundred eighty-four dollars. But it'll keep it fresh in your

mind. What you did to my son. It's not too much to ask, is it? And I won't accept a check for the full amount. It has to be once a week for the next seventeen years. And I want you to promise me you'll go see my son at least once. I know you didn't go to his funeral."

He swallowed heavily, and nodded.

Sometimes I wish I died too.
-Andrew.

Thou Shall Not Run

Marian Holmes

I never knew that Jesus preached so highly of versatile spaces. He must have though, because Holy Family Regional School was hell bent on making the one become many. Our cafeteria would morph from mess hall, to gym, to auditorium, and back again each day. Loaves and fishes; they'd mastered it. The blacktop - a vast, barren stretch of tar and paint - served as our bartering center, playground, gym field, and waiting pen; it divided our days.

We were made to form straight lines. "Exit the bus, *walk* to your appropriate class line, and wait, quietly, until your teacher leads you into the school building." I remember this being said, but as for it actually happening… With each bus' arrival the hoards of plaid would ebb and swell. No lines. No order. Just the chaos of children hyped up on that morning's Pop-Tarts.

I was a cautious bus exit-er. That kid you loathed after sitting through forty minutes of the driver's favorite radio station and the guttural coughs of those who should have stayed home that day. Hand firmly grasping the slick, silver safety rail, my eyes watched my feet diligently, one velcroed Mary Jane in front of the other, until I safely reached the pavement. I was prone to clumsiness, feared falling, and took my time on the overly tall steps. When the black rubber soles of my uniform-approved shoes met asphalt, I took off, ripping the cobalt Mets binder from the depths of my backpack as I ran.

"Anyone wanna trade for a holographic Rapidash!?" I always wondered if our principal, "Miss Trunchbull" as she was *kindly* nicknamed, was aware of the POKEDAQ trades that took place before first bell.

No matter how low the temperature dropped, the air held the charged excitement only grade school children could muster before 8:00AM. Friends became reacquainted, exclaiming joy, exchanging *secret* handshakes suspiciously similar to the one being performed by the pair just next to them. I guess there are only so many ways to maneuver ten digits, "pound it," and exchange saliva on palms.

Our conversations seemed endless and exasperated.

"Did you hear!? Lance Bass is single!" cried one of my

friends; the iridescent beads of her “What Would Jesus Do” bracelet caught the sun as she flailed her hands in joy.

My arrival at “our spot” was met with the giddy shrieks of fan-girls idolizing this week’s frosted-tip musician. Apparently one night apart had brought this shattering revelation, thus proving, once and for all, why N*SYNC had finally surpassed the Backstreet Boys in looks *and* talent. Our prayers had been answered; we finally had a shot with the boy-band hottie twice our age.

With the big news shared, we settled into the more pertinent topics of discussion: Did you see Stephan’s new *purple* pencil case? What are you wearing for next Friday’s no-uniform day!? Do you think I’m too old to have my birthday party at Plaster Funcraft again?

Parochial school meant having friends forty-minutes away; for many of us, the period between drop-off and morning prayer was our only time permitted to hang.

Entering the building was a monotonous process. Everything about Holy Family was neatly packed and divisible by two: two floors, ten grades, with two classes per grade, an A and a B. There was a system to everything, and you were to follow it.

I snaked through the halls; the walls were adorned with “100th Day” projects made of pennies and sugar cubes, the late-night work of parents trying *too* hard. 3A, Ms. Manzano’s classroom, was toward the back of the west wing. I sighed as I entered; I hoped today wouldn’t drag.

Along the back wall of each classroom was a row of oaken cabinets. They stood floor-to ceiling, looming over the last row of alphabetically seated children. Upon entering you were to open yours and hang your coat and backpack inside; all individuality was shut away once first-bell had rung.

We were starved for unregulated movement as recess approached. Hours of stiff desks, regimented lessons, and the constant re-adjustment of our crisscross ties left us antsy. You can’t care how many letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians when the promise of freedom waits outside.

By grade we marched out onto the parking lot. 8A, then 8B, until, finally, the pre-school level was reached. Seniority meant first pick of the sparse equipment pile. It never seemed fair that when 3A entered the paved-domain all the *inflated* kickballs were taken. We learned to make do

with tattered jump ropes; hand games could always suffice as well.

The schoolyard was nothing but an extended black square, buttressed on all sides. The convent, the school itself, the faculty parking lot, and my personal favorite, a line of perfectly coiffed and useless squat shrubs, grown to mask our view of 25A, surrounded the square. Anyone older than six could easily see over their peaks, and we'd congregate by them, hoping to catch a glimpse of a cop stopping the speed-limit sinners barreling down the road.

Besides the bushes, the convent provided the only interruption to the desolate scenery. A simple structure, off-white and ordinary, it sat upon a minimal patch of grass. The inside was clandestine, rumored; a glimpse at it was a coveted fantasy by all. In contrast, its surrounding pasture was the "messiah" of all things recess: tag was permitted here. Space was limited and precious upon the mound. If you ran on the blacktop you faced the wrath of the nuns. Perhaps you should scrape the exposed patch of skin between slouched navy knee sock and appropriately measured jumper hem! Gasp!

Scabs were not an approved uniform accessory. Grass-stains weren't either. You had to be careful.

For a chubby little girl I was impressive enough to be picked rather quickly in the formation of teams. I could sprint. I was ruthless as well, which definitely helped my case. Tag was my forte after double-dutch, and I always raced to the knoll hoping that the older kids would let me play. From the outside we appeared a sea of uniformed bodies. Individuality swallowed by hunter green plaid. But tag brought out our personalities, and they clashed with an unapproved fierceness.

My jumper swirled around my knees as I charged towards the blonde girl who had managed to capture me yesterday. I didn't know her name, but I hated her; I don't take kindly to defeat. She whizzed in and out of the army of first graders she'd convinced to guard her. Maniacal and cunning, I didn't understand why an older girl would use the young as bait; I was tough, but I always played fair.

I circled the human boundary she had crafted, singling in on any perceived weak links. A small boy stood most exposed; a look between terror and a desire to hurl

flashed through his features as I stared him down. I had no wish to terrorize him; he was not my target. I wheeled around him, slowed my pace, and searched the crowd of navy pants for *her*.

Target spotted.

Her back was turned; I charged down the slope to end it once and for all. I was gaining ground, until I froze. I watched as she turned her head and sneered.

Tagged.

Having eyes only for her I missed the raising hairs on the back of my neck, primordial instincts that someone was approaching…too close. I spun my head to view my assailant. Never underestimate the ability of small children to look terrified and falsify innocence. The tiny recruit from 1B had been playing me all along. I stood humiliated. Yesterday *she* had tagged me, but at least she was older. Excuse could be found. But a first grader!? I'd never live this down. My eyes squinted, mouth stiffened, forehead furrowed, in hatred. The Ten Commandments meant nothing during tag.

I yelled to my teammates to release me. "Untag me; I need to get her!"

A search and rescue party formed, two lines of kamikaze recruits on a mission to free me. I watched as one group rushed the center of the field, providing distraction for the others who were circling the perimeter, planning a blitz attack from behind. 1B never knew what hit him; it was all over in seconds. Troops captured by enemies, the unnecessary "death" of a brainwashed boy, his grasp slackened on my wrist, and I was free.

I didn't look back. My eyes focused on nothing but the retreating, swinging ponytail of the girl I loathed.

I slowed my jog and strategized; I always had a penchant for muttering out loud, I saw an older boy stare at me in bewilderment. *She's older. So she's taller, thus the advantage of longer limbs, meaning longer strides. I'm going to need a downhill in order to get her.*

Pursing my lips I continued the plan internally, my calves carrying me steadily to the crest of the hill. I circled slightly, waiting.

She darted over the peak of the hill; I was close with the element of surprise on my side. She still believed me a captive, but faith can fail you, ask any practicing Christian.

My arm lifted, my hand clenched. Lord, grant me the power to *catch this girl*.

Tagged.

My hand successfully closed around her wrist. Her head twisted towards me with such vigor that onlookers might have mistaken our game for a remake of *The Exorcist*; I would have sworn the devil lived within her. Her eyes gleamed with furious rage. For what seemed liked an entire minute, the schoolyard froze.

The hair I had been hunting fell in front of her eyes; she pushed it away with her free hand, and stared into the depths of my being. Hatred: mutual and pure. Children have a difficult time corrupting emotions.

A fleeting moment of mutual loathing and the game began again. She struggled against my grip, twisting my arm until pain radiated from elbow to fingertip. I would not let her tempt me; she was staying caught, no apple would be bitten today. I turned my head to watch the progress of the game.

Salivary glands.

The rough, rutted surface of her tongue made contact with the back of my hand. A slug slowly skimming my veins, knuckles, and pores. The warmth of her breath clashed with the trail of saliva left behind. It was the lightest of touches, the cruelest of weapons. My fingers retracted in disgust, and she was gone.

I looked down, the sun refracting off the freshly moistened patch of skin. My jaw dropped as I watched her run in the convent's direction. I couldn't move. I couldn't think. White-hot anger coursed through me; who licks their way to freedom? She had to be the devil reincarnate, tongue that of a serpent. I took off after her; the Lord's name taken audibly in vain.

Rounding the crest I saw her ponytail disappear over the horizon once more and I knew what had to be done. The blacktop must be breached if I were ever to win…WWJD? I darted over the invisible barrier, passing from lawn to pavement.

"Marian Holmes!" The shrill tone of Sister Mary Katherine was unmistakable.

I stopped mid sprint and turned to face my fate. Sister walked towards me, sensible shoes lightly crunching the gravel beneath her feet. It was over; the blacktop my Judas,

my competitiveness the deadliest of kisses. I slumped in her direction, the weight of an invisible cross crushing my adrenaline.

We met in the center of the schoolyard; I straightened my back and stood before her.

Judgment day.

Sister Mary Katherine stood un-intimidatingly tall at five foot three inches. She had the unsuccessful luck of inheriting skin which was both unappealing in color and imagined texture, framing thin, ghostly lips. Her hair, cropped short, fell awkwardly on the crown of her head, giving the illusion that her skull puffed out towards its top. She lacked any sense of grace, or exoticism; maybe being a nun had been God's plan all along. Her only memorable feature was her eyes; beady and dark, they stared into the heavens, perpetually.

"Ms. Holmes, is there a reason you were running on the *pavement*?" she asked with feigned sincerity. I never much appreciated how teachers seemed to ask questions you knew they had already determined an answer to.

I attempted to respond out of fear and forced respect, but as I glanced up from the insightful study of my kneecaps, I couldn't help but wonder, yet again, what it was she was looking at.

Eternally faithful, Sister Mary Katherine's pupils found it painstaking to glance anyway but up. I shifted my weight from one foot to the other, curious as to how my brain continued on while my body was scolded. *Could she even see me?*

"You are not to run on the blacktop."

"But that girl just *licked* me," I uttered in defense, pointing, all the while, toward the convent in a desperate and futile attempt at blame. Useless as expected: her gaze never followed my, or anyone's, gestures of direction.

"You are *not* to run on the blacktop," she reiterated to the heavens.

"Bu-…" I stammered.

"You are not to *run* on the blacktop."

"Yes Sister."

The reprimand continued; I struggled to remain there, listening, but nothing in her words could catch my attention, only her gaze. I snuck quick looks towards her face but her

eyes never descended. I could back away and she'd never know, unless Jesus tipped her off up there. Something told me he'd keep quiet about my stealth.

Ship
Luzmaria Cruz

Bedtime Traveler
Marisa Dupras

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

TIMMY(7) peers around the corner to see his MOM(30) making chocolate chip cookies She takes a new batch out of the oven and puts it on the counter. Timmy sneaks around the counter and waits a moment. He reaches his hand over the edge and feels blindly for the plates of cookies. His Mom turns around and sees his hand.

MOM
Timmy! No cookies until after dinner.

Timmy runs out of the kitchen.

CUT TO Timmy trying to grab a cookie from a distance with a toy robot claw.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Timmy returns to his bedroom. The walls of his room are blue and decorated with various posters that feature dinosaurs, pirates, cowboys, aliens, and robots. Toys litter the floor. He kicks some pillows.

Out the window he sees his sister getting off the school bus and running into the house.

Timmy scurries under his bed,which looks like a familiar DeLorean.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

KATIE (11)
Where's Timmy?

MOM
Pouting under his bed again. He wanted to have cookies before dinner.

KATIE
Such a baby.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Timmy pouts under the bed. Then his eyes light up when he sees a PLUG dangling from the underside of the bed. He grasps it and finds it's outlet.

The underside of the bed lights up like his blue eyes did and outlines some buttons that look like they belong on a TV remote.

There is a rewind button, a pause button, a fast-forward button, a play button, and a "present" button.

Timmy hits the rewind button. Nothing seems to happen. Timmy squints at the buttons. He shrugs and climbs out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Timmy sees his Mom washing dishes in the sink.

TIMMY
Mommy, where did you hide the cookies?

MOM
...How did you know I'm going to make cookies?

TIMMY
You made them. You didn't let me have any.

MOM
I promise Timmy, I didn't make any cookies yet but I will soon, chocolate chip, and you can have some after dinner.

TIMMY
Where's Katie?

MOM
She's still in school honey.

TIMMY
No! I saw her get off the school bus!

MOM
Timmy...Are you feeling okay today?

TIMMY
She's in her room.

Timmy dashes out of the kitchen.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY 6

Timmy peers into his Katie's pink room. He doesn't see her.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 7

Timmy goes back under his car bed. He doesn't hesitate to hit the fast-forward button, then the pause button.

He crawls out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY 8

Timmy runs into the kitchen and finds his Mom is frozen taking cookies out of the oven. Timmy looks at the old clock and sees that the arms aren't moving.

A batch of fresh cookies are on a plate on the counter, the same plate he tried to steal from. He shoves more than half the cookies in his mouth. He goes to the fridge and chugs milk directly out of the gallon. He wipes his milk mustache off with his arm. His Mom can't react.

INT. SISTER'S BEDROOM - DAY 9

Timmy enters Katie's bedroom. She looks at herself in the mirror, still.

Timmy's face lights up. He gets a sharpie and draws a scary face on the mirror.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 10

Timmy crawls under his bed. He giggles and presses the play button.

KATIE (O.S.)
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

MOM (O.S.)
TIMMY! WHERE DID ALL THE COOKIES GO?

Timmy laughs hard and then presses the pause button. Katie's screaming stops.

When he finally stops laughing he presses the rewind button and holds it for a while. Timmy crawls out.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY 11

Timmy almost falls over when he discovers where he is. His car bed is in the middle of the cafeteria but no one seems to see it but him.

He sits at the table where his friends are sitting. Timmy looks down at his mashed potatoes which don't look all that appetizing. He picks up his tray.

TIMMY
FOOD FIIGHHHTTT.

Timmy throws the tray across the cafeteria. The rest of the kids start throwing food. Timmy laughs. He is covered in pudding.

He hurries back under his unseen bed and presses rewind.

CUT TO Timmy sitting at the table again. Nothing has happened yet. Timmy smirks. He's not in trouble.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 12

Timmy crawls out. His attention falls on a poster.

CLOSE UP on cowboy poster. Timmy smiles.

CUT TO Timmy looking at himself in the mirror with his cowboy costume on. He draws his cap gun and pretends to shoot it at the mirror.

He dives under the bed and holds rewind for a long time.

EXT. OLD WEST - DAY 13

Timmy crawls out and finds himself in a dry prairie. There are three horses near him. Three cowboys stand farther away by a small creek. Timmy sneaks over to one of the horses and attempts to climb on top of it.

Timmy has lots of trouble trying to get up onto the saddle.

COWBOY
HEY! You yellow-bellied varmint!

The three start running towards him.

Timmy somehow manages to pull himself onto the saddle. The cowboys get closer.

TIMMY
Giddy-up!

He kicks the horses side. The horse starts galloping.

TIMMY
YEEHAW

Up ahead Timmy sees a large number of people on horses galloping towards him. They get closer. They are Native Americans.

TIMMY
Whoaaaaa horsey.

Timmy's horse stops. The Native Americans stop in front of him, confused.

Timmy pulls out his cap gun and aims it as if to threaten them. They just stare. He pulls the trigger. The Native Americans startle from the loud POP and the smoke. Then they realize the gun had no effect.

Timmy fires it again. No effect.

They look at each other.

They shout collectively. Timmy nearly falls off his horse. They charge and Timmy turns and gallops away as fast as he can. He shouts the whole way.

He reaches his bed just in time. He climbs under it and hits the present button just as arrows start to pierce the bed.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 14

Timmy crawls out into his room out of breath. He inspects the arrows sticking into his mattress and yanks them out.

Timmy pulls off his cowboy costume and puts on his pirate costume. Timmy practices his sword fighting skills with is plastic sword in front of the mirror.

He goes back under his car bed and holds rewind.

PIRATE CAPTAIN (PRELAP)
Ar, who be this scallywag? Get him.

EXT. PIRATE SHIP - NIGHT 15

Several toothless pirates tie Timmy to the mast of the ship. He yells and struggles.

A storm rocks the ship. The pirates yell at each other and climb all over the place.

Timmy tries with desperation to saw himself out of the ropes with his plastic sword. This fails.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 16

Katie enters Timmy's bedroom.

KATIE
Timmy you tell me right now how you did this! Timmy?

Katie stands there for a moment.

KATIE
I know you're totally under the bed.

Katie looks under the bed. She sees the buttons lit up blue and her eyebrows raise. She looks back. Then she crawls under the bed.

A digital panel says year 1505 and the day.

She presses rewind.

EXT. PIRATE SHIP - NIGHT 17

Katie climbs out from under the bed into the pirate world next to Timmy.

KATIE
WHAT'S GOING ON?! Timmy is that you?!

TIMMY
Katie! Lemme out!

Katie rushes over. She keeps herself low to the deck and unties Timmy.

The Pirate Captain sees them.

PIRATE CAPTAIN
A lass now?

Katie and Timmy scream. The ropes are untied enough that Timmy wriggled out. Several pirates run towards them.

PIRATE CAPTAIN
To Davy Jones locker!

Timmy and Katie dive under the nearby car bed just before the pirates grab them.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 18

Timmy and Katie are taken back to his room again. Timmy shakes the sea water off his hair and body.

TIMMY
How dare you look under my bed.

KATIE
Excuse me? How dare I save you from that...That horrible game!

TIMMY
It’s not a game it’s my time traveling car.

KATIE
It’s some weird, pretend game and you should get rid of it!

TIMMY
No! You can’t. It’s fun! I was going to go to the dinosaur age next.

KATIE
That’s way too dangerous.

TIMMY
You like dinosaurs.

KATIE
Yeah but I don’t want to get eaten by one.

TIMMY
I thought you said it wasn’t real.

KATIE
Well..I don't really know!

TIMMY
I'm going. You can't stop me.

Katie tries to stop him but he wrestles his way under the bed and disappears.

KATIE
MOM!

Their mother doesn't answer. Katie looks at all the dinosaur toys on the floor. She rushes under the bed and goes back 67 million years.

EXT. PREHISTORIC JUNGLE - DAY 19

Timmy crawls into a wet jungle. The trees are taller than any tree in the present. Pterodactyls fly across the sky. In front of him is a giant nest. Timmy inches closer to explore it. There are seven, large, green eggs inside.

Katie emerges from the bed and runs after him.

KATIE
Timmy! Don't go in there.

Timmy slides into the nest and tries to pick up one of the heavy eggs but can't.

KATIE
Timmy! You shouldn't.

Katie forces herself to follow him into the slippery nest. The intense sad look on Timmy's face convinces her to help him carry the egg out of the nest.

KATIE
Alright just one egg, let's get back to-

TIMMY
Do you hear something?

They both stop in their tracks and hear a spine-tingling GROWL behind them.

They turn to see a giant, green T-REX with its teeth displayed. It eyes them like prey.

Katie and Timmy scream in terror.

They yell all the way back to the bed as the dinosaur chases them. The T-Rex jaws tries to reach them under the bed and come very close. Timmy hits the present button.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY 20

Timmy and Katie are still yelling at the top of their lungs and clutching the dinosaur egg under the bed. They catches their breath.

The bedroom door BANGS open.

MOM
Timmy?! Are you okay? Why are you screaming?

Timmy and Katie crawl out from under his bed, Timmy hides the dinosaur egg behind his toy chest.

TIMMY
I'm not screaming Mommy.

He tries his most innocent look.

MOM
I heard you. What have you got under the bed?

TIMMY
There's nothing under here!

MOM
Were you guys pretending?

Timmy looks at Katie. Katie turns to their Mom and nods furiously.

MOM
Okay...Well as long as you're alright...You know Timmy, I think you're a little too big for that bed. I saw this bigger bed in a-

TIMMY AND KATIE
NO!

TIMMY
I mean, I'm not too big yet.

KATIE
Yeah he's still short Mom. He's practically still a baby.

Timmy sends her a death glare but then can't help but smile.

MOM
Well...Okay then, I didn't realize you loved your bed that much. Your father decided to take us out to dinner so you can both have one cookie now.

TIMMY
Okay.

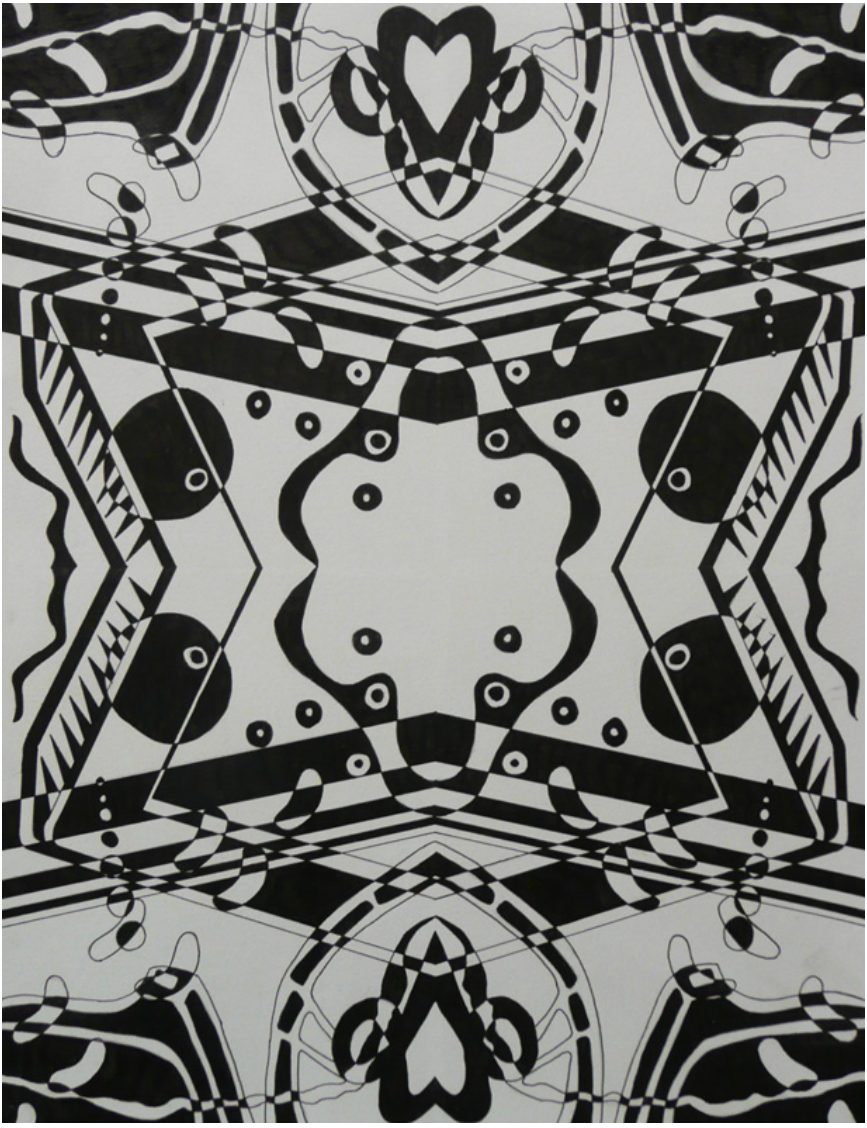
Their Mom gives Timmy one last suspicious look before leaving them alone. Timmy and Katie are about to go down to the kitchen. Then his poster of futuristic robots catches Timmy's eye. He grabs his robot claw and grabs Katie with it. Katie lets herself be dragged by the claw under the bed for the next time travel expedition. Timmy hits fast forward this time.

Timmy and Katie are taken to the future.

CLOSE UP on dinosaur egg hatching.

BLACK

Breakfree
Marissa Pisicchio



Bolt

Shelby Coyle

Even at birth, the child had a certain air about him. From the moment he entered the world, he commanded total attention. He did not cry, nor make a noise of any sort. His eyes were open, a curious shade of gray rather than the blue of most newborns, and he stared with great attention at the midwife who had helped to deliver him. Unlike most children, whose unceasing wails demanded attention, it was this child's silence that drew all eyes to him. As the midwife placed the boy gently into his tired mother's arms, the first manipulation began.

He smiled.

****

"My, my, Lucretus, it seems as though your son has stolen my party." The words were spoken good-natured, with a short chuckle trailing behind.

Lucretus turned, casting his gaze downward toward the host of the evening's events. Lord Parnell Breeze was a short man, and very plump. Lucretus had often thought the man more resembled a pumpkin than a man of stature, but he donned a smile and said, "I'm terribly sorry, old friend. You know how my son enjoys these things."

"It's no trouble at all, my friend," Parnell laughed. "Though I will admit, I am thinking of coming under your son's tutelage!"

Lucretus turned in the direction Parnell had waved his hand. A group of guests were gathered rather closely together, and he could hear their laughter from where he stood. Though he could not see who was in their midst, he knew well enough who he would find there.

Sid Bolt, his son and the sole heir of the Bolt Estate, had always been a charmer.

As it was, Sid stood in the center of the crowd, the courteous smile on his face as he spoke contrasting with the grand gestures he made to emphasize his tale. He enthralled the crowd with his words, a vision in navy, his gray eyes wide and his shoulder length hair tied back with a black bow, dark against the brown with which it was surrounded.

"Sid."

Sid looked up as the crowd around him parted with

some murmuring. Into the circle came Lucretus, standing tall without a single wrinkle in either suit or expression. He gestured for his son to precede him back through the narrow pathway the crowd had created for his entrance.

"Come. It is time for us to take our leave."

With great flourish, Sid gave a bow to those gathered around him. "Until next time then, my friends," he said as he rose, stepping out of his small kingdom and back into the home of Lord Parnell.

Lucretus followed.

The elder Bolt watched his son as they made their way out the door into the cool fall night. He took great pride in the fact that Sid, newly turned twenty-three, bore a remarkable resemblance to himself, though he had inherited his mother's gray eyes, and her smile. His pride was tempered with a taste of disappointment, however, and a small frown finally marred his features as he slid into the carriage opposite Sid. He only wished that his son had inherited some of her sense as well.

His wife, Aurora Bolt, was exceptional in both body and mind, and, though she had not physically been present at the party, he had carried her with him in both mind and heart. His thoughts of her were another reason he had wished to escape the Breeze manor early. Lucretus knew he had become something of a "mother hen" recently, as the midwife called it. It had been twenty-three years since his wife had last been with child and, though he would never insult her by saying such, she was no longer as youthful as she had once been. He worried greatly for her safety.

"You certainly have a way with words," Lucretus said, returning to the present situation as the carriage lurched into motion. "Tell me, what said you that interested the masses so greatly?"

"Nothing of importance, father," Sid replied with a wave of his white-gloved hand. "I was merely entertaining them with a story of cunning."

"You should take care, my son. Your antics are not always well appreciated. Lord Parnell could easily have taken offence at the disregard in which you turned yourself into a spectacle, at *his* event. You are lucky that we have always been close with the Breeze family."

"Are you sure it is not they who are close with us?"

Sid's voice was low, and he looked his father in the eye as he spoke.

Lucretus' frown deepened, a hint of anger coloring his voice. "You would do well to remember your place, Sid. The Breeze family is above ours, and it was only by good fortune that Lord Parnell chose to take your upstaging in such good humor."

"Not this again, father."

"Lord Ulrick was very displeased with your behavior at his event the other week. I had hoped that you would have retained some recollection of this."

"Ah, but the Blaze family has always been old fashioned. Sticks-in-the-mud if you ask me."

"But I didn't!" Lucretus cleared his throat, lowering his voice to a more acceptable level. "Take care to mind your words, Sid. And your actions."

"I always do, father."

It was here the carriage stopped, and Lucretus let his son's last words fall into silence.

The door to the carriage was opened, and Lucretus stepped out, brushing phantom wrinkles from his tailcoat. Ever proper, he walked straight-backed toward his two-story manor, contenting himself for the moment with the knowledge that, despite his other habits, his son would not shame him further by slouching, even away from curious eyes.

The Bolt Manor was a clean white with deep red trimmings, though these were all bled of color in the cold moonlight. Large windows, curved on the top, would have advertised the wealth within as well as without had the expensive curtains not been drawn, and had there not been miles between the manor and the nearest town – or even the nearest road. The roof, a black made even darker in the night, was pitched and boasted three chimneys made of brick.

The double doors of the manor were made of mahogany, and stood nearly twice as tall as Lucretus himself. The gold handles glistened in the moon-glow.

The wood was intricately carved around the edges and the frame, tapering off about half a foot in to leave smooth, unbroken wood. The only other detail was in the center, where a large stylized image of a thunderbolt

wrapping around itself was carved into the doors. The mark of the Bolt family.

This door was Lucretus' favorite furnishing of his home and he often caught his son admiring the carving of their family mark as well.

Lucretus bit down a small smile, the twitching of his lips the only betrayal of the pride he felt within. He had seen this mark his entire life – emblazoned on the breast pocket of every tailcoat, stitched into the corner of each handkerchief, hand carved on the door of every carriage. When he had been young, the Bolt mark was ill-known, and the family one of the lowest in high class society. Through his reign, however, Lucretus had done much to elevate their standing. Though their name was still not among the most prestigious, it was a large step up from where they had been in his youth. However, there was still a long way for them to go, a lesson he had instilled in his son and one reason his behavior was all the more frustrating. Sid was crossing boundaries, an act that could well harm Lucretus' carefully placed allegiances among the higher families.

"Father?"

Lucretus turned toward his son. Sid had come up to his side and was looking at him with a curious gleam in his eyes. Lucretus could not put a word to the look, but it gave him a peculiar feeling, one that he had become all too familiar with. The first time Lucretus remembered having felt this way had been when Sid was eleven. The boy had come up to him one day with the same gleam in his eyes and had requested to know their standing among the other families. Lucretus had told him, of course, believing that his lectures of status were beginning to take hold. He had brushed the feeling away then, and he wished that he could have continued to do so.

He did not speak.

"Father, I am sorry for tonight. I never meant to cause offence to Lord Parnell nor yourself."

An apology. Lucretus had never before known his son to apologize.

"Come, let us finish this inside. We'll catch cold if we keep out here much longer." Sid reached out and pulled open the doors, stepping aside and gesturing his father through with a bow.

Once inside, Lucretus led the way up the stairs to the study, stopping only once for his son to request his personal servant, Farron, to fetch them a bottle of wine.

As they came to the study door, Lucretus cast a glance down the hallway. In the farthest room, he knew, his wife rested. He hoped that Sid would make this swift, as he wanted to return to her as quickly as possible.

Inside, the study was warm, lit by a newly crackling fire, and the flickering glow passed shadows onto the maroon of the walls. Lucretus walked around the large desk at the opposite end of the room and took a seat in the plush chair there, while Sid remained standing. He had one hand resting on one of the other two chairs in the room, staring into the flames.

There was a long silence, interrupted only by the snarling of the fire, before Lucretus opened his mouth to speak.

"Sid, I-"

"Please, why don't we wait for the wine? A drink will put us both in better humor." Sid hadn't looked away from the fire.

Lucretus controlled his expression, discarding his surprise and nodding in agreement. He could understand this. Apologies did not come easily to any in this family, and Sid had always made it a point to avoid them.

Lucretus took time during this stillness to study his son. His face was smooth, empty of expression as he focused on the leaping tongues of flame. Shadows melted into and out of existence on the canvas of his face with each movement of the fire. He was still, hand rested on the back of the armchair, straight backed and unmoving. And yet he seemed quite at ease.

The disquiet Lucretus had felt earlier crept back upon him.

A knock on the door broke the moment, and Sid turned to the sound. He opened the door while Lucretus remained sitting, and from where he was, the elder Bolt could not see who held the tray.

"Thank you, Farron. I can take this."

There was an amount of clinking as the wine traded hands, and the fuss brought a scowl to Lucretus' face. He had purchased Farron for his son when he had turned

thirteen; he had thought that having a servant of the same age would allow Sid to make a deeper connection than he had with the other servants. At first he had been delighted at having been proven correct, as Sid had become close with Farron while still maintaining a dignified distance, but over the years he had come to regret his decision. Farron had proven himself to be an incompetent, and a thief as well, though whenever Lucretus had tried to get his son to see what his servant was up to, the boy continued to turn a blind eye. Lucretus had given up attempting to make Sid understand years ago, though he still held a deep disdain for the childhood gift.

When at last Sid turned back to the room and Farron closed the door on himself and the house beyond, Lucretus realized that Sid held only the glasses and not the tray they were customarily brought on.

"I asked Farron to bring us the bottle," Sid said by way of explanation. He crossed the room and held out one of the glasses. Lucretus reached out and accepted his offering.

Now Sid chose to sit, retreating back to the armchair he had been by before and sinking into the fabric. The firelight was nearly behind him, casting him in deep shadow while also casting light upon the right side of his face. He crossed his legs and brought up the drink.

"To proper behavior. After tonight's events, father, I shall shame you no further." Sid dipped his head in a slight nod as he toasted. And then he drank.

Lucretus smiled at his son. He was truly pleased; it seemed that Sid was finally going to learn restraint. He brought up his drink. "To proper behavior," he echoed, and swallowed down the wine.

He set his drained glass down and watched as Sid did the same, placing his on the table beside the armchair. He stared at Lucretus.

Lucretus looked at his son in confusion. Surely nothing was worth the intensity of the gaze Sid focused upon him. He was about to ask if he had perhaps spilled some wine on himself when he felt his throat constrict, as though under great emotion.

He coughed, trying to clear his throat of whatever was blocking it. It did not help.

"S-Sid," he choked, "wh-what…"

“Poison.” The reply was calm, the voice cool. Not a single line crossed Sid’s face as he spoke. “Odorless, tasteless, and colorless. Very quick, too, I might add. And incredibly difficult to get a hold of. Unless, of course, you know the right people.”

“Wh-why?” Lucretus was struggling for breath now, his heart racing. He gritted his teeth.

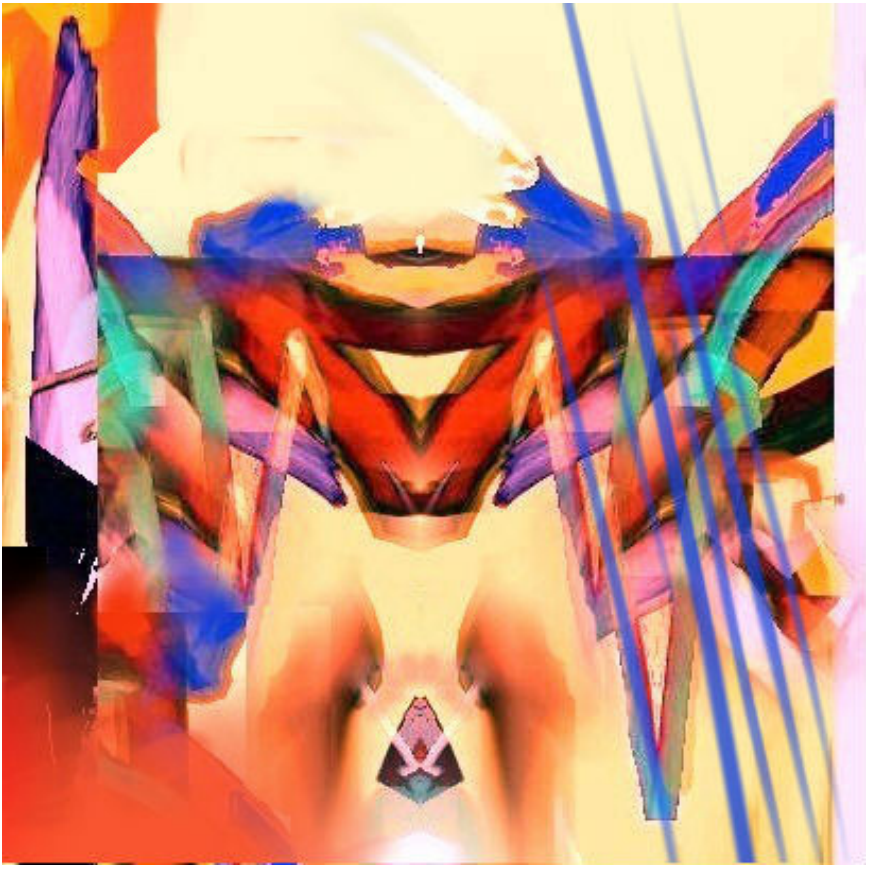
“I’m merely keeping my promise, father,” Sid replied, sinking farther back into the chair. He rested his elbows on the arms and pressed his fingers together, the joined index fingers touching his bottom lip. “After tonight, I shall shame you no further.”

Lucretus wheezed, clawing at his chest and throat, silently praying to the gods he had never believed in. His vision grew dim and a deep blackness crept in from the sides.

He saw one last thing before the darkness was upon him, and it terrified him more than his shallow breaths or laboring heart ever could.

His son smiled.

These Things Take Time
Emily Tran



Masturbation
Julie Schofield

Self-gratification is a grifter in a card game. Slipping
the Queen of Hearts inside folds of clothes, The Jack
of Clubs is a moisture wick between thighs. Soaking
up anonymity and guilty pleasure.

There is no I in “wants”
Only “ants” and they multiply.
Like endless skin crawlers,
Pouring out the hole.

Grounded like a broken plane-out of gas.
A fugue cloud over the marriage bed,
Familiarity is a smell warm and stale and
comforting
(Ants crawling)
Acid reflux awakens me so,
Sleepless and aroused I
Flex and release
A phantom phallus.

Sweat puckers up small stepping-stones
Across my upper lip, As my hips rise.

Wet patches on the back of my
hand, It is enough, at 2 am.

Business Casual
Jessica Salamone

EXT. LOS ANGELES HIGHWAY - SUNRISE

Cars line up bumper to bumper under a highway sign that reads 'LOS ANGELES THRU TRAFFIC'. HORNS BEEP from every direction as angry drivers attempt to make it to their final destinations.

INT. 2000 NISSAN ALTIMA - CONTINUOUS

AMELIA GREGSON, 20, drives in rush hour traffic to her first day at her new internship with The Scorn Agency.

She has long brown, wavy hair and is wearing a black pencil skirt with a loose fitting baby blue blouse tucked in. She is dressed to impress, and clearly doing so on a 'Forever 21' budget. Her nails look freshly painted, but at least 3 are already chipped.

On Air with Ryan Seacrest plays through the car radio as Amelia hits the steering wheel, giving an evil eye to any driver who looks at her the wrong way.

RYAN SEACREST (V.O)
Happy Monday morning! It's 6:52 and I'm assuming you're all on your way to work-

Amelia, clearly aggravated by her commute, talks to the radio as if Ryan can hear her.

AMELIA
Yeah Ryan, that's exactly it. Just on my way to get fired on my first day because of this damn traffic that you did such a great job of warning America about. Clearly can't be held responsible with any important information other than the results of a fucking singing competition.

Amelia holds the steering wheel with one hand and her iPHONE in the other.

AMELIA
Siri, call Scorn Agency.

SIRI
I don't understand 'Porn Industry' But I could search the web for it.

AMELIA
NO! Call Scorn Agency.

SIRI
I don't see 'Scored Agency' in your address book. Should I look for businesses by that name?

AMELIA
Fucking technology.

SIRI
Amelia! Your language!

Amelia throws her phone on the passengers seat. As traffic comes to a complete halt, she lays her head on the steering wheel, causing the HORN to BEEP.

EXT. SCORN AGENCY PARKING LOT - DAY

Amelia's junky 2000 Nissan Altima pulls into a parking lot that resembles a car dealership. No car dates back further than 2010.

She parks next to a shiny black 2012 Lexus and pats her car as she walks towards the entrance of a tall, thin office building.

INT. SCORN AGENCY LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Amelia approaches the front desk where MARCO, a flamboyant, perfectly tanned, man, late 20's, sits typing away on his Blackberry. The clock above him reads 7:36 am.

AMELIA
Hi! I'm Amelia Gregson. I'm here as the new intern for the Scorn Agency.

Marco looks up from his phone, with a conniving smirk and scoffs.

MARCO
THE new intern? They have been waiting for you.

AMELIA
They?

MARCO
Conference room 6.

Amelia looks at Marco with a confused look. MARCO -On the 26th floor.

Marco points to the elevator on the opposite side of the lobby and looks back down at his phone.

Amelia turns hesitantly to walk away and then stops and turns back to the desk.

AMELIA
Here's the thing... I have this thing with elevators, never really been a fan. Are there stairs anywhere nearby?

Amelia's eyes search the lobby for a set of stairs. She spots an emergency exit door and enters.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Amelia enters the hallway heels in hand, through the stairway doors, panting heavily and wiping the sweat off her forehead. Amelia looks into the plate glass windowed room at 6 people surrounding a conference table. Amelia takes a deep breath and enters the room.
INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Everyone's eyes immediately meet Amelia at the door.

Standing at the head of the table is KYLE SCORN, the well known, head of the agency and her new boss at Scorn Agency.

Fitted perfectly into a Kiton K-5 suit, he stands tall and omits confidence. He's attractive in a sophisticated way, with a full head of perfectly gelled dark hair.

KYLE
Perfect fucking example. See everyone? This is what I was talking about. Intern number 5 is here.

AMELIA
I'm so sorry I'm late. Traffic was crazy and there weren't announcements about the delays on 106.7 and I-

KYLE
-have already wasted 40 minutes, sit down.

Amelia looks down at her feet and walks to an empty seat to sit down.

KYLE
And there's another one of my pet peeves demonstrated by...(referring to his intern roster) Ms. Gregson, is it?

Amelia makes eye contact with Kyle and nods.

KYLE
(CON'T) -excuses. I don't have time for them and have heard every line in the book, so for future reference, don't waste my fucking time with your reasons of failure.

The interns nod their heads, emphasizing their attention to the company dictator. Amelia continues to look down at the paperwork layed in front of her.

KYLE
As I was saying before Amelia here honored us with her presence, there are six of you but will not be for too long. Compare this internship to that stupid hungry death game the kids play-

The interns looks around at each other, confused but clearly too afraid of him to question his reference.

KYLE
I don't know what its fucking called. Hungry Competition, where all the kids kill each other and the alive one wins?

ERIC
(under his breath)
-Oh Hunger Games.

Amelia chuckles under her breath and flashes a quick smirk at fellow intern, ERIC CHANCE, 22.

KYLE
-Hunger Games. I don't watch the damn movies, I just hire the assholes who act in them.
It doesn't fucking matter. What matters is that you all work your hardest because just like the Hunger Games, only one of you will win. At the end of the program I will be choosing one of you to stay on staff, the rest of you can go back to whatever the fuck you do with your time and hope that there's not too long a line at local welfare offices.

Amelia scans the room, almost as if to evaluate her chances in this 'competition'. The interns stare at Kyle with panic in their eyes.

To Amelia's left DIANE, early 20s, sits unamused by the shocked reactions of her fellow interns. Her hair is cut into a short bob, the sharp angles accentuating the severity of her face. She is well overdressed compared to her comrades and her glare is cold.

KYLE (CON'T)
If you don't know something right now, you better learn it by lunch. This could be the beginning of a promising career for one of you. My assistant Marco will bring you all to your office area.

INT. INTERN CUBICLE AREA - DAY

The interns silently follow Marco towards an office space fit for one. Five desks circle the perimeter of the small area. Stacks of papers fill each desk, as if they already belong to someone. They all disperse through out the room, still standing.

MARCO
You can each pick a desk. Kyle expects you all to read through the intern guidebook and then start the client profiles on your desk. Submit your notes by the end of the week.

Amelia peers at each desk, clearly trying to pick the one with the shortest stack of papers. The other interns filter throughout the room. Amelia sits in between Eric and Kelsey. Marco turns to walk out and then pauses, turning back towards the interns.

MARCO
You know... I've seen a mass of you come through here. You're terrified and probably won't make it out of here with much of your sanity or morals in tact. This internship is pure Darwinism. The intern who works hardest and cries the least will have a permanent in here. I've been through it and I can tell you first hand-

Marco's BLACKBERRY RINGS with the Jaws Theme Song and he shuffles to answer it. Muffled yelling comes from the BLACKBERRY and Marco pulls the phone away from his ear.

MARCO
(to Kyle)
I am on my way right now, sir.

The muffled yelling continues from the phone. The interns all sit shocked.

MARCO
Yes, yes sir. Okay. No but-

Kyle hangs up and Marco takes the phone away from his ear. MARCO -It's not easy.

Marco scans the room of petrified interns, takes a deep breath and turns to leave.

An awkward silence lingers in the room.

ERIC
Well guys... I'm here to win these hunger games and marry Peeta so consider yourselves warned.

The interns laugh, except Diane who rolls her eyes and turns to face the wall of her cubicle.

ERIC
Aaand now that everyone feels extra vulnerable, lets get to know each other, shall we!? I'm Eric!

GREG
Greg.

He turns to his computer, clearly uninterested in contributing to the friendly conversation.

KELSEY
I'm Kelsey.

AMELIA
I think Kyle did a pretty solid job of introducing"Ms. Gregson"-

ERIC
Amelia! I was impressed! As soon as he opened his mouth I expected you to either fall to the ground or run out crying.

AMELIA
Which is probably the effect he has on most people.

KELSEY
That's what I would have done.

AMELIA
I may or may not have blacked out from sheer terror. The damn traffic took two hours to get through! I only live 30 minutes away!

KELSEY
I think you're the only person I've ever met who needs to be reminded that there will be traffic. This is LOS ANGELES.

AMELIA
Touchè. I'm sort of never on time, ever.

In the background you see Diane peering back and forth from the client profile to the group of interns with a not-so-entertained look on her face.

ERIC
You weren't that late.

AMELIA
After the first impression I just made, I'm pretty sure being an hour early for any meeting will be considered late.

ERIC
Yeah, this should be fun...

Diane looks up with a look on her face that indicates she doesn't plan on jumping in with a funny remark to add to the light-hearted conversation.

DIANE
I'm genuinely curious as to what you all expect this to be? Some summer job where we all sit around bonding over our favorite 90's Nickelodeon shows and drink coffee during our mandatory office hours?
(a beat)
This is real and the only thing you are doing is distracting me from actually getting work done.

Diane turns back to her desk and continues typing up her notes.

Taken aback by Diane's unnecessary tone and aggressive statements, Amelia just stares silently, almost as if she is waiting for her to wave her hands around and yell "PSYCH!".

ERIC
(Under his breath)
Someone isn't a morning person.

KELSEY
She has a point... I mean did you not see how Kyle treated Amelia...and then Marco? I don't-

Kelsey pauses like she's about to cry.

KELSEY
-I don't think I can handle being yelled at like that.

Amelia and Eric both look at each other with the same "oh shit" expression.

INT. 2000 NISSAN ALTIMA - SUNRISE

An exhausted Amelia drives to work as "On Air With Ryan" playing in the background. A stack of client profiles marked up with red pen occupies the passenger seat.

RYAN SEACREST (V.O.)
Coke is common, we've seen heroine but I think in my 13 years as a DJ I have never gotten the privilege of breaking the news of a bath salt fueled star!

RADIO CO-HOST (V.O.)
And the more ironic part is that his reps at Scorn Agency were just getting ready to sign him on a contract with Walking Dead for a two episode arc.

Amelia snaps out of her daze and the raises the volume as soon as she hears the agency mentioned.

RYAN SEACREST (V.O.)
Talk about getting into character. Kevin Bergen sent out a tweet to his followers today praising his friend for getting him more bath salts and said “get off your tweeters, be a bath salt bottom feeder.”

RADIO CO-HOST (V.O.)
5 points for creativity?

RYAN SEACREST (V.O.)
All I know is Kyle Scorn will not be happy once this hits his desk-

RADIO CO-HOST (V.O.)
I can hear a string of seven deadly words leaving his mouth already.

Christopher
Winifred Decker

Nutrition Facts (more like health risks)

Serving Size 1 man (around 5 feet, 8 inches)

Amount (in Days)	**% Life Value**
Calories ~400	
Fat 375	1,000%
Fights 350g	900%
Breaks 25g	100%
Cholesterol 100g	(enough for heart attack)
Sodium 50mg	50% (just for taste)
Carbohydrate 30g	25%
Fiber 2g	8% (it's pretty flimsy)
Sugars 20g	(Bittersweet)
Protein 3g	(Unreliable)
Vitamin A (Affection) 50%	
Vitamin C (Chivalry) 0% (what a funny notion)	
Vitamin E (Ecstasy) 100% (well, it was good)	
Calcium 10%	**Iron** 50%

** Percent yearly values are based on an unhealthy relationship. Your values may vary depending on the amount of personal vendettas you have against yourself. **

Ingredients: A love/hate **friendship** for a few years. **Junior year.** A very **bad decision** resulting in a drunken hookup. Avoiding one another for **several** days. Drinking heavily the very next weekend, resulting in **another** drunken hookup. Heated **argument** of validity of friendship. Realization that drunken hookups are **enjoyable**. Agreement to **continue** doing so. Of course, the development of **feelings** follows. **Denial**, used in large quantities. Insisting it is just a friendship when the friends of both find out. Extensive amounts of **jealousy** used against one another. A breakup that lasts a week. A heated **confrontation** followed by the

first **sober** hookup. Another **month** of the break-ups and make-ups. Three **rejections** before a first **date**. Fights over **feelings** that lead to plenty of **tears.** Three more months of **awkward** in between friends with benefits or relationship world. A **second** date. Attempting to **abstain** from one another (more **denial** follows). Mug night and more **drunken** fun. A **third** date. Friends attempt to be Oprah and Dr. Phil. *More* **denial.** A **fourth** date. Summer break leads to an extended period to sort out life; visit each others **homes** only once. **Senior year.** So much **denial** hearts ache. A **fifth** date followed by more drunken hookups for a month. Finally: acceptance. A **sixth**, *real* date. A relationship blossoms. The unexpected: ***Cheating.*** **Fights.** Break up; followed closely by a drunken hookup. A three month hiatus of avoiding one another, which can get pretty awkward at **work**. An attempt to retain friendship. An unexpected **kiss**. Another fight. Finally: he admits you were the only girl he has ever loved. And now? Now he has a new girlfriend. Best part: She's ***blonde*** too.

Unclaimed Pane
Nathan Valeksa

Closest
K.M. Alleena

Bodies are
the finite things-
what we leave
behind
as we close our eyes.

I want to be
finite
with that one
with whom
I'd give anything
to fall asleep by.

While our souls
slow dance in
spaces far
above the clouds,
our hands
are entwined-
in silent sleeping
hair in halos
on each pillow.

No more is each breath
our own;
we revel in what
solace we share-
content to close the
distance,
even while dreaming.

My Brain has a Pen
Patrick Donohue

Fuck I hate writing poetry. I do this cause I been berated with people saying they know literature from whenever cool started and beyond –So because of that everyone talks about Jack Kerouac and Albert Camus and whoever the fuck else. Here it goes.

The world can sometimes suck. I've been embarrassed in all sorts of ways. In my formative years was sheltered, but encouraged and going into detail will be a whole other story. I've woken up almost every day the past 4 (3 1/2 so far) years telling myself and everyone else that THIS (college) is worth it.

What honestly is the worst part of college, I have to explain a bullshit degree to go along with the bullshit college. Wonder how long it will take for elders to look at their watch, whistle and nod absently when talking to a young adult about college plans.

So yeah congrats! You've spent anywhere from $5,000 to $40,000 a semester on NOTHING. Wish I went into manual labor as a teenager, don't think the degree is going to go as good as planned.

I need another beer…holy shit I'm drunk.

If I die today my headstone should read "21 year old parasite.1991 isn't new anymore."

The Haunted
Jessica Washak

"Your house is looking good…from the inside," Mallory remarked one fateful Friday night.

It wasn't uncommon for her to show up unexpectedly on the weekends. Her mission was always the same: lure me out of my house and into the vibrant world. Always, she failed. What can I say? I like the world I've created for myself within my own four walls.

I shot her a wide smile from where I lounged on a recently purchased burgundy velvet chaise. "I quite like the outside to look rough. The vines and chipping bricks deter any thieves from thinking that they might find anything of value here."

"Oh, Adrian!" she cried, shaking her head with frustration. She looked pointedly around my abode, focusing particularly on the highly polished mahogany wood flooring, the vast array of refurbished antique furniture and the gilded frame that held a copy of Henry Fuseli's renowned painting, *The Nightmare*. My living room was an excellent example of my romantic, if not expensive, tastes.

"Where are you off to tonight, Mal?" I asked politely, hoping to avoid the typical Friday night lecture on lifestyle choices.

"I was actually thinking of going to The Red Lion tonight. There are going to be a bunch of local bands playing at the café. You know what great acoustics that place has. It's going to sound amazing."

I flinched. I did know the kind of acoustics The Red Lion had. Back in the day, my first love, Mica, had played there more times than I could count. I saw every single performance.

"You know, you should come check it out with me. Deep down I know that you've got a weakness for Indie bands, no matter how hard you push for old school Goth. And coffee. Let's not forget how much coffee you drink. The Red Lion has free coffee refills on open mic nights."

Shrugging, I replied, "I've got a pot on in the kitchen. My trusty carafe will keep it warm all night. I can refill whenever I want."

"Oh, Adrian," she repeated. This time her voice shook

and her eyes glistened with unshed emotion. “Don’t you ever get sick of living like this?”

So I hadn’t escaped a lecture on my personal choices, after all. Damn.

I made a point of sitting up on the chaise, a pupil rising in preparation for a teacher’s spiel.

“Don’t you ever think of how different your life could be? For God’s sake, Adrian, you’ve got a small fortune from your writing career and you’re only 23. I can understand how you would want to publish all of your work under a pseudonym and refuse interviews, but do you really need to shut yourself all up in this little fortress? What about all of our dreams? Freshman year of college, we must have come up with a thousand things that we wanted to do when we had the means!”

My writing career. It had been in existence for a short time, as far as the world knew, for I had published my first novel a few months before turning nineteen. Yet, it was hard to think of a time when I hadn’t been writing.

“Things change, Mallory. You know that.”

Her face hardened. “This doesn’t have anything to do with Mica, does it?”

“The last time I went anywhere, it was Barnes and Noble. In the fifteen minute drive, I heard all about his band’s gig at that bar, Noire, from my favorite radio station. It’s like I still can’t get rid of him, even though it’s been so long since things ended so badly.”

She instantly softened. “Can I stay here tonight? I feel like we haven’t had a girl’s night in ages.”

I stared at her, surprised. Mallory never asked to stay in with me. I had assumed that my large brick colonial gave her the chills. It’s an odd house, too old and wise for some to handle.

“Of course you can. *Interview with the Vampire* is on tonight.”

Mallory laughed. “Tom Cruise is hilarious as a vampire.”

I joined in on the laughter, nodding in agreement. “Brad Pitt, however…”

She chuckled all the way into the kitchen, where I heard her rummaging through my cupboards. Seconds later, the sound and scent of popcorn filled the roomy first floor. I

found myself grinning foolishly. For all that I liked to pretend that I was well enough on my own, it was more than nice to have good company again.

Rising, I strode over to the far corner of the living room and slid the double doors of the cabinet that housed the television open. One button had the system flashing on. I had left the TV on a news station the last time I'd had it on, and an important story appeared to be breaking. The young anchorman had that very satisfied undertone to his voice that all anchors took on when they knew that they held a lot of viewers enthralled. The surround sound filled me in on the reason for this.

As I listened, the anchorman said, "In other news, lead singer for the local band The Dark Season of the Year, Mica Deboro, has been reported missing. He was last seen in his apartment by his now ex-girlfriend, Linda Sean. She reports that the last time she saw Mr. Deboro, he was highly emotionally compromised, going as far as to break up with her out of the blue and request that she never contact him again. Ms. Sean also claims that Deboro had been in a poor state since the start of production on his new album. The album, which was scheduled to be released in December of this year, is entitled *From This Place*. Amid the panic surrounding Deboro's disappearance, the only song that has been completed for the CD so far has been leaked into many media sources."

I stood barely a foot away from the TV, my face hot from its intense glow.

Behind me, Mallory spoke, startling me. "Did I just hear that, or was that a hallucination? We were just talking about him and now he's on the six o'clock news?"

I whirled around to look at her. Not unlike me, her jaw was slack and her eyes incredulous. Unable to explain, I just shook my head and returned my attention to the television set.

The anchorman had disappeared. Now a nondescript woman's face filled the frame. She appeared to be imploring viewers to come forward with some kind of explanation for Mica's absence.

"Well," the anchor said, taking over for the weeping woman, who Mal and I had pieced together was Linda, "it seems to me unlikely that fowl play was involved. All of

the characteristics presented hint that Mr. Deboro probably walked away from all of this on his own two feet. This doesn't mean, however, that no one should be worried about him. This sort of life abandonment by people is a common symptom of depression or suicidal thoughts. I would urge those who know Mica well to find him and find him quickly.

"That being said, we bring you, before any other station, what could possibly be the last song ever recorded by Mica Deboro and The Dark Season of the Year. The song is entitled '*As We Know It*'."

Mallory and I exchanged horrified glances.

"It can't be the same one!" she exclaimed. "He wouldn't use that. It's been over four years since…"

The sound system made sure that when the song that I hadn't heard in years came on, it hit me square in the chest. Mallory was wrong. Mica *had* used *the* song, the one we wrote together in college. The familiar chords washed over me in a dizzying wave that heightened as I recognized the opening verse. I knew it well. The lyrics had been my contribution to the song.

Mica's tenor voice rang out clearly, a recognizable note of melancholy to it. "Well they say it's a cold world, full of loneliness, but that's not as we know it."

In that moment, I did as any fine lady would have done. I fainted.

From that night, I don't remember much more. Mallory must have picked me up—which is surprising, because I'd clearly gained a few pounds since I'd moved into my current house and become fond of culinary creations—and taken me to my bed. Bonus points to her for being able to lug me up a flight of stairs. She had also stayed the night. It said a lot of her character that she chose to do so. It was obvious that I only had one true friend left.

With that one friend I sat at my kitchen table the next morning, chattering idly and eating the raspberry chocolate chip pancakes I had whipped up. I wanted to speak of serious things, but found myself unable to diverge the conversation away from the weather. We were so busy trying to avoid the subject of Mica that when the door bell rang out suddenly, both of us dropped our forks on our plates with a resounding clatter.

Mal looked inquisitively at me from across the table. “I don’t mean to be rude, but I didn’t think that you really got visitors besides me. No one really knows where you are anymore. People always ask me what happened to you.”

“I’m as shocked as you are,” I muttered blackly.

I don’t know why it upset me so much that Mallory was always pointing out what a recluse I had become. She was only speaking the truth. I had sealed myself away. I had chosen to lose touch with 99.9 percent of my old friends and acquaintances.

With eerie unison, we stood, friends on a mission, and headed out of the kitchen. We slowed upon reaching the living room, uncertain. At times like this, I really wished that I had a peephole.

“What if it’s a murderer? Or worse, a door to door salesman?”

I smirked. There was a reason that I was still friends with Mal, after all.

“Oh, well,” I said offhandedly, feigning courage. “We’re about to find out, aren’t we?”

I took several steps forward, arm outstretched, and yanked open the door so hard that I nearly fell into a heap on the floor. The door had well oiled hinges, you see. For all that it was heavy it really didn’t need to be yanked like that.

Quickly, I regained composure and shifted my attention from the blasted door to my unexpected visitor. Instantly, I felt that I had been cheated. Anticlimactically, an older man stood quietly on my door step, his hands clasped peacefully before him. He wasn’t even holding a knife or anything. I tossed a look back at Mal; the mind reader that she was, she rolled her eyes at me.

“Can I help you?” I asked the man expectantly. I tried to keep the snippiness out of my voice, but I undoubtedly failed. I wanted to get back to my kitchen table and talk more with Mal before I had my one hundredth mental breakdown.

Frowning down at me, for the man was very tall, he replied, “Yes, in fact, I think that you can help me. Are you Adrian Woolf?”

“Yes?” Now I was suspicious, my emotions beginning to travel toward apprehension.

My visitor’s face was weathered in a way that I had

never seen in someone under fifty. Though he was tall, he leaned forward a tad too much and as a result had the stooped look of someone who had spent years toiling away.

"Alright. Mica sent me to the right place, then."

I froze, nausea gurgling in the pit of my stomach. Mica, Mica, Mica. What was up with this? I hadn't heard from the boy in years and now he was all of a sudden back to haunt me. This had to stop, or else I would lose my mind.

"Mica who?" I asked, deliberately playing dumb. "I don't know any Mica."

The man grinned and for a second it was as if all of his weathered features became youthful again.

"He told me that you were an oddball. But I didn't think that any female would deny a relationship with a rockstar. I'm talking about Mica Deboro, who you apparently dated before you graduated high school."

Mal piped up now. "How are we just supposed to believe that you spoke to Mica Deboro, even if he and Adrian did date in high school? Any good snoop would have been able to find that out."

Immediately, he sobered. Taking a deep breath, he explained, "Mica sent me here, ladies. He's been keeping tabs all these years. Think about it. Who else knows where you live anymore, Adrian?"

"Not Mica," I spat, crossing my arms protectively in front of me. "We haven't spoken in years."

"Maybe you and him haven't," he agreed slowly. His attention shifted to Mallory, pointedly glaring. "But none of this matters. How I got here isn't the point of this visit."

"What is, then?" I demanded, choosing to humor the mentally ill.

"You need to find him, Adrian. I don't care who you take with you or how you go about doing it, but you need to find Mica. It pains me to say that you're probably the only person left who really knows him. His mother never bothered and everyone else gave up."

"Who are you to be hurtling all of this at me?"

"I'm Mica's father."

I reclined heavily against the door frame, suddenly in need of support. If what the man said was true, I was seeing something as rare as a flesh and blood unicorn. When Mica

and his mother had moved to Philadelphia for what was our freshman year of high school, they had been missing this man, the father of the family unit. It had taken me a while to get a straight answer as to why this was, but it turned out to be that Mica's father, whose name was Brad, was a deserter. Not from his career in the army, but to his family was he a quitter. From what I could gather from Mica, when his father went off of active duty, he came away with more damage than the bullet hole in his torso.

"What's your name?"

This could be my only test. I had spent many a nights checking up on Mica. In all of this time I had never once found any site or blog that had accurately reported the name of the "other" parent of the "rockstar."

"Brad Deboro."

"Oh," I said stupidly. What a shameful moment it is when the right words desert a writer.

"I've said my peace," he continued with a nod. "I wish you two luck, assuming you're going to find Mica as a team."

His abrupt threat to leave roused me from my haze. "What do you mean you're leaving? You haven't told us anything that could help us find him, even if we wanted to. Which we don't."

Brad Deboro shook his head sadly. "I'd help you if I knew anything, but to tell you the truth, you probably knew my son better in one month than I have or will in one lifetime."

And just like that he was walking off of the chipped white porch. When Mallory shouted at him to stop and come back, he ignored her. Brad didn't even turn his face in response.

With determined strides, he disappeared down the crumbling sidewalk, the last breeze of summer giving way to autumn.

"What are you thinking?"

Ah. A million dollar question, if I had ever heard one.

I shrugged and gazed away from Mal's face. Instead I busied myself with my morbidly obese orange cat, Felix. He sat atop of my kitchen counter top, chasing the brilliant reflections coming off of a crystal that hung from the wall. His thick fur bristled, standing straight up from his broad back.

"So when do we leave?"

I looked up in surprise. "What?"

"Ok, maybe I should have asked where. Where are we headed first?"

"You can't be serious?!" I demanded, my voice wavering with the full impact of disbelief.

Now it was Mallory's turn to look bamboozled. "We *are* going to find him, right? To make sure that Mica's alright?"

I crossed my arms stubbornly and shook my head. "Nope. This is all a little too bizarre for my taste. And anyway, he dug his own hole and willingly jumped into it. Does that sound like someone who wants to be saved?"

"Yes!" Mal paused long enough to heave a sigh, and then continued, "I know that you still love him, even though your lifestyles didn't mesh."

Her green eyes seemed to suck me in, pleading. I would be in danger of caving in if I looked for too long. Quickly, I whirled around to look out the window, my back to my best friend.

"I'm glad that you're over it. But it doesn't seem so long ago to me."

"It's not as if you two didn't love each other. You were just young. You both were fortunate enough to make your fortunes young; you had your writing and Mica landed a record deal. You guys moved toward different paths, is all."

She fell silent, as if uncertain whether or not she had just played Pandora to my box. Unintentionally, I let her suffer, saying nothing at all for several minutes.

Finally, I responded, "Should I have sucked it up and moved to California with him like he wanted? Would I have grown to like it? Would it have prevented him from cheating on me with some ill-bred girl?"

"No, no, no. You were wise by not going with Mica. In the end, you've only got yourself. You've always got to think of yourself. As for the cheating, I know that you believe that Mica slept with Rosie, but you never actually confronted him. She might have lied or exaggerated the whole thing. I never trusted her."

I nodded, resting my head in my cupped hand and gazing sightlessly out the window.

"We need to start in New York State. He's probably

somewhere in the north, along Lake Ontario."

Mallory got up from the table and moved so that she was again in my line of vision. She folded her hands thoughtfully in front of her. Her leg twitched every so often with uneasiness.

"What makes you think he's in New York?"

"He always liked fresh water better than the sea."

Morality Chamber
Zachary Wilson

Isolation

Shelby Coyle

The girl sat alone, staring ahead at the blank television screen. Her arms were wrapped around her legs, which were drawn protectively close to her body. She was leaning against the arm of the couch and, though her position was rather uncomfortable, she did not move.

She was stuck there, all alone. The only other heartbeats in the house belonged to the cats and the dog. They all stayed well away from the living room where the girl resided. Their comfort was needed and they were elsewhere.

The clock was ticking. It was too loud.

At last the girl moved. It was not much, but it was enough. She had turned her head, lightly shaking away the wild hair from her eyes as she did so. She could now see outside.

The sun was bright and there was hardly a cloud in the sky. Those that were present were high and wispy. They offered little protection against the brilliant light.

The girl had to squint her eyes. They were the only things that moved.

Everything was green. The leaves, the grass, the bushes. All of it. So much green. Of course, there were other colors as well. Reds and blues were scattered about, busily picking at the ground. Browns and grays attempted to mingle and were promptly sent away. Black statutes dotted the green, sitting on branches where they could observe uninterrupted.

It was a nice day for the birds.

The girl sighed, a soft sound that did not quite interrupt the ticking away of time.

She was stuck there, all alone, with only the too loud clock for company.

Isolated.

It was her own fault, of course, this isolation. She had brought it upon herself and even she knew it. She should have stayed away. She had been warned after all.

But she had gone anyway, gone to her friend in an attempt to make things better. And now she was locked away, shunned. She hadn't spoken to her friend in quite

some time.

It was such a lovely day out. She wished that she could sit out there, with the birds, watching them peck at the ground and fly. That would be preferable to being trapped in here.

She felt like a prisoner. A prisoner in her own home. In her own skin.

She hated it.

She wished that *someone* would take notice of her pain. But there was no one to take notice. Her parents were gone and the animals were each in their own secluded hiding places, well away from her. But what could she expect? Why would anyone choose to be around her?

She knew she had brought this upon herself.

At last the girl moved, unable to remain still for any longer. It was not just a turn of the head this time, but a real movement. She dug into her arm with her nails, frantically scrapping them across her skin in an attempt to relieve her pain.

She hated the chicken pox.

Pin-up
Joel Dodge