



The Works

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Sauk Valley Community College

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The Works

2015-2016 Editorial Staff

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Student Art Contest

2015-2016

Theme: "Time"



Waterlily

by Julie Bogusiewicz

Poetry Winner

Cell by Cell

I've read that every 7 years all of the cells in my body are replaced
I remember loads from my childhood
Road trips with my dad, and my dog, Sophie
I know exactly what it was like to experience these things
But what if that wasn't me?
Not a shred of me from 7 years ago is the same
Someone has taken over my body thinking they're me
Is the real me dead, and if so, can I be upset?
Technically speaking, I'm the invader
Over some amount of time, I've taken over this child's body
I've stripped him of his innocence, cell by cell
His body, his memories, his friends and his family
Would Sophie even recognize me now?
Who would've thought that I would be betrayed by myself?

I suppose I shouldn't be upset
I am just borrowing this existence
Another changeover is happening at this moment
I hope the next me is as kind to this world as I tried to be

- Daniel Humphrey

Fiction

Winner

Grandpas Guide to Getting Grounded: Part 1

by Casey Jones

“Now let me start off by saying I did, in fact, do all of these things. Yes, they were evil, but, man were they fun. Everybody’s heard of the tabasco sauce in the open mouth of a sleeping victim or shaving cream in the palm bit. That stuff is for amateurs. What I’m talking about is pure and utter sadomasochism.”

He just sat there waving his arms and gobbling the food far faster than I could get it on the spoon. Looking a little like a baby bird wanting more. I wasn’t sure if he was excited about the food or about the stories. Probably the food.

“Now keep in mind, before you decide to enact any of these plans, you need to be able to outrun your intended victim. I don’t mean being able to run faster than them, I mean being able to run farther than them.”

After a few more bites he was full. I knew this because of how he was letting the pureed purple food run down his chin. So I wiped his face and hands, picked him up and started patting his back.

“Did you know that wet gummi worms move just like real worms? You want them just wet enough to make them decently slimy. Then you strategically spread them out in between your victim’s sheets. If you want that ‘freshly dug up feel,’ get the ones that are coated in the sour sugar stuff. When you hear the scream that’ll come from your victim, you’ll know the meaning of the word priceless. Ohh...be sure to have a recording device ready. Depending on the response, you just might be able to make money.”

His response was a small burp that didn’t come anywhere near representing the amount of food he’d eaten. I knew there was more, so I kept going.

“You want to hear another one. Sure you do! I pulled this one on your

grandmother when we were dating. We were shopping at Cherryvale Mall, Macy's to be specific. She was taking WAY too long looking at clothes or something and she wouldn't let me go to a store that I wanted to go to. I got bored and noticed an exposed cosmetics sampler with no one to guard it. So, while grandma had her back turned, I put a different color eye shadow on each finger and waited. When she finally got tired of looking at whatever she was looking at, we left the store. Then, as we walked the mall, I started wiping imaginary pieces of dirt off of her face every so often. This went on for about forty-five minutes... maybe an hour. By the time she went to the bathroom, she looked like a unicorn had puked on her face. By the look on her face, I could have sworn she was going to kill me... slowly. The best part came when she told your great-grandparents about it. All they did was laugh and say that they had warned her. I'm still not sure why she wanted to marry me after that."

Just as I was finishing the mall story, he brought forth a burp that would have instilled fear in the heart of the Incredible Hulk. I swore I felt the floor quake. Then came a knock at the door. Mommy was back.

As she walked in I said "Uh-oh, busted!"

"Hey, how's my baby?!? Were you a good boy?"

"He's always good. We ate chicken and veggies, had a little fruit for desert, we burped, and we talked. Though he may need a butt change in the near future."

"You ate and talked with grandpa?!? What did you talk about? Huh, what did you talk about with grandpa?!?"

"Oh...he was telling me stories." I said as he and I exchanged smiles.

"Now, you go home and go to bed for mommy and daddy, you hear me?"

As they left, my daughter turned and said "Thanks again, for watching him, daddy."

I gave her a 'no problem' and glanced at him just as he gave me a wide smile that said there would be no sleep for anyone in that home tonight.

After they left, I set about cleaning up his lunch. I threw away the empty jars. As I looked at the empty jar of pureed prunes and dropped it in the garbage, a thought occurred to me. Maybe I should have told her what desert was. Then a smile crossed my face as I realized that she'd find out soon enough.

I didn't think that I would like being a grandpa this much!

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Visual Art

Winner



Restoring Goldberg

by Darby Rummler

Prairie State

The field looks abandoned
and choked full of weeds
no interest to those passing by
the plants are bent over
the stalks are all dried
leaves no longer point to the sky

Not long ago, the plot was aglow
the asters were blooming alive
mother nature looked down
at her herbs in the ground
as the bees flew nectar to hive

How the goldenrod glows
and the thistle does bristle
switchgrass thick and fair
the bluets do waver
when the wind shows its favor
sweet bergamot treating the air

The cattails tower
as the sedges all cower
meadowlark flits through the parks
the medicinal power
of the yellow coneflower
and milkweed feeds the monarchs

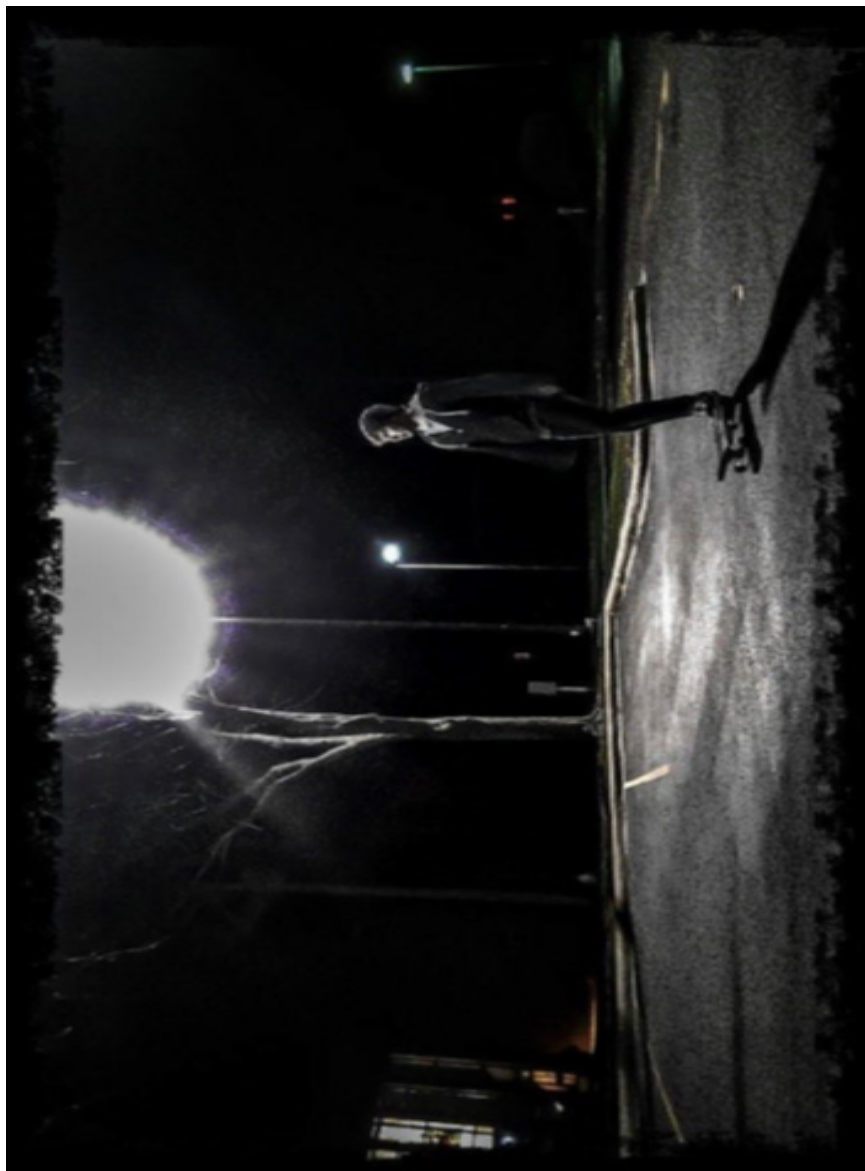
We must learn what to mow
and then how to burn
the environment is ours to save
promote the native
negate the invasive
when and when not to pave

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Choices to make
but some things are sure
importances we cannot adjure

Our country is great
we're all linked to the fate
preserve the wild
of our own Prairie State

- Mike Hunter



Thrash

by Amber Hartman

The Cow that Jumped Over the

by Mike Temple

There once was a cow who titillated the grass by jumping off the roof, consequently the cow blew up a tree, landed on a car, and tumbled down a hill surreptitiously. Then the cow rolled into a steaming pile of what could only be green colored radioactive poo, which made the twenty buffalo nearby spontaneously start doing the jive. As the music in the cow's head slowed down, the dancing buffalo sped up. Behind the buffalo, a ne'er-do-well reveals a weapon which can fire an arrow, and plays chicken between the arrow and the group of buffalo. Sadly, the arrow flew too far, missing all the buffalo, piercing the cow through the leg. With the power of the radioactive dung, the arrow dislodged from the leg and the wound that it made healed. The cow's concentration was broken and the twenty buffalo seemed to go back to normal. However psychokinesis can be delightfully evil. The cow focused hard on its potential, thinking and hoping that it could fly. This is the saddest part, the cow couldn't fly. Instead a little pee came out. In her embarrassment, she turned and ran up the hill. She undulated in fear at her new abilities.

"Why oh why is this happening. Oh I hope I am asleep, and that this is just a dream."

"If I may say, it's not."

The voice that responded to the cow's plea was spoken deeply. The cow looked around and saw a small black cat.

The cat continued, "Come with me if you want to live."

The cow followed the cat to the barn where the feline did as it would normally do and curled in a ball to sleep. The cow laid down on the freshly tossed hay and noticed that the cat was lying with, curiously, a classic violin. The cat began to snore. It was loud and obnoxious, but even more annoying was a suddenly appearing dog. The dog sauntered out of the shadows chuckling over something that it previously had done. The cow watched as the dog walked past.

The dog paused, "What? Got a problem with a hound dog?"

"No, of course I don't. Why would I?"

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A muffled voice screamed from inside the dog's stomach, "Help us!"
"Who is making that noise?"

The dog responded, "I ate some stuff that the people threw out, oh well if it was metal."

The cow was overwhelmed and so she passed out. When she woke up the cat and the dog were gone.

The cow tried to speak but all that came out of her mouth was, "Moon."

I Sit On This Fine Porcelain Portal

I sit on this fine porcelain portal,
Reading Classic Poetry, immortal,
From Masters who 'nere' turned on a TV.
They write with such passion, obvious joy,
Their words, to mine, are like emeralds to toys,
I "fly like a bird", they "soar heavenly".

I learn of lost lovers, of Tygers, of dreams,
Of cabbages, mistresses, of ravens and schemes.
I march on the field, I find wrong and I fight,
I vow to go rough into the good night.
I thrill to each line, the meter, the beats,
Of Brownings, of Shakespeare, of Moores and of Keats.

"Do I dare?" I ask of muses now gone,
To pen a rich line that 'ere will live on.

Oh!, as I reach the end of my sitting
One great line I would like to compose,
A line that will dance and be fitting
To be compared to the scent of a rose.
A line that will be quoted forever
By poets, and students, and kings.
A line that is so wondrous and clever
That when spoken the angels must sing!

But before the grand moment of flushing,
Now that all the commercials are through,
As I strain for the line to come rushing,
"Where could be
The TP?"
Is all I can think of.

- Mark Jordan



In a World All Her Own

by Calista Kern-Lyons

Poetry

Honorable Mention

The Millennial Machine

I know you believe
In a Millennial Machine
A mess of cogs and pistons
It's a tired, rusty thing
After twenty years
Of "Hush up!" and "Sit down!" and "Listen!"

It does its job
Without protest
And you can't tell what it's thinking
They scare you so
Its virtual thoughts
Its pensive clanking and clinking

It speaks amongst itself
Whispering things
Ideas you don't understand
So you decide
It's maintenance time
You try everything you can

Kill the engine!
Wrest the radar!
Yank the corded plug!
Shame the machine
Blame the machine
For every fault and bug

And yet
Despite your efforts
The machine begins to sputter
The lights flicker
A circuit blows
Metallic hearts all die with a stutter

- Samantha Rhodes

Nick's Redemption

by James Hutchison

Goddamn.

It's never a good thing when that's your first thought when you open your eyes. Truth be told, most of my mornings could qualify as less than appealing, but I was so used to it I just never vocalized my hate anymore. Today, however, my morning was disrupted by more than simple a bad night's sleep. Today, a knock on the door made it just a little bit... worse, and every time a new knock came, followed by rampant use of the doorbell, the headache punched through my brain like a jackhammer. I wouldn't have thought it was possible before, but something told me this was gonna be a shitty day, even if I wore my favorite shirt. It's 2016. People don't just show up at your door anymore unless they're selling something. Hell, even the police rarely have reason to force entry into a home unless you live in the bad part of town, but I live in a gated community. Little kids shuffle around on trikes with puppies running along behind them, tripping over their damn ears. If the police DO have to come here, you get a courtesy call or at least a damn social media poke from their government page.

The loud knocks and dying doorbell battery tell me it's not girl scouts or an insurance salesman. The swearing I hear as I get closer to the door tells me it's not even professional or religious.

Damn.

I don't even want to answer the door now, but whoever is desperate enough to get my attention, but apparently too broke to own a phone, has to be someone I want nothing to do with. I decided, "Screw it. I'll buy a new door. This guy doesn't even know if I'm home. I deal with this shit later." I was on vacation from work at home, and I wasn't going to let some asshole ruin it. Unfortunately, just as that thought came to mind, so did a jolt of brain pain that caused me to yell out a list of profanities and before I could catch myself, the guy outside heard me and redoubled his efforts of breaking his hand on my door.

Damn damn DAMN.

I finally open the door and the horrid sound of knocking ceased. Silence filled me, and for a fraction of a second, I thought I had done the right thing... until I realized it was Nick standing there with a pale white look on his face.

I hate Nick.

I didn't even hesitate to slam the door and walk away, but the bastard caught it with his hand, smashing it in the process. I would have killed him right then and there, but the sunlight had set my head to throbbing again, and all I

could think was to get to my pills. Instead, he followed me through the house into the bathroom spewing some nonsense about the strippers at the community church and something about a swollen hand. I couldn't really hear him over the pain, but he just kept rambling on and on like an out of breath school boy at confession. At some point, his tone changed, his words slowed, he seemed to get calmer, or maybe I could just finally make out his words.

"Nick, why the hell are you in my goddamn home?"

"Look, I know we got bad blood man, but I had to warn you!"

"Warn me about what?"

"Haven't you heard anything I've said!?"

I didn't answer. I just did what I always do when someone says something real stupid, and stared at him with squinted eyes.

"Ok ok... Sal, he's coming after you!"

"Why?"

"Sister Katy was killed, and he thinks it was you!"

"It was me, genius."

"WHAT!?! Why did you kill her!?"

"Why do you care? In fact, why did you even get involved? I recall a promise of broken bones and pissing in your empty eye sockets if I ever saw you again."

"IT WAS A SHIRT! Just a shirt!"

"It was my dog's favorite shirt."

"YOUR DOG!?"

"He was sad for a week."

"Wait wait wait, look, I'm sorry about the shirt, but we really need to focus on me saving your life! Why did you murder Katy!?"

"Murder? You better start making sense real quick, Nick!"

"Wha.. wait, you JUST SAID YOU KILLED HER!"

"I did."

"How is that not murder!?"

"Because it was a contract."

"I... how the hell... WHO PUTS A CONTRACT ON A STRIPPER SISTER!?"

"No one. She was a deep cover agent. Now, if you don't lower your goddamn voice, I'm going to break both of your fucking collar bones."

"Oh god... I'm just a gardener... oh god... wait... no wait! How did you know she was an agent!?"

"Because it's my business to know."

"NO NO NO DON'T SAY YOUR AN AGENT OH GOD I'M JUST A GARDENER I SHOULDN'T BE INVOLVED IN THIS SHIT!"

"You really should worry more about what I'm going to do to you if you don't stop yelling and calm down."

"Calm! What if he kills me for tipping you off!?"

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“Don’t care, but you’re agitating Russ. Calm down, or Sal will be the least of your worries.”

“WHA...” he started before jolting around to find Russ, my Shepherd guard dog, standing behind him with a tiny shred of what was left of his favorite shirt in his teeth.

“I guess he didn’t forget.” I said with a laugh.

Nick had quieted his obnoxious ranting, but his fear was stinking up the room and Russ was ready to take a blood payment for his beloved shirt that was lost to Nick’s lawnmower three years ago.

“Look... doggy... I’m reeeeaally sorry about your shirt.” said Nick as quiet and calm as he could muster.

At that point, Russ lunged at Nick with a display of teeth and growling that made him scream and then whimper like a little girl.

“He doesn’t like being called ‘doggy’. His name is...”

Before I could finish the words, I heard a door explode in another room followed by the hiss of a gas grenade and a quick burst of rounds into the growing smoke. Sal’s had been far closer than I anticipated, and the time for desperate words and tearful whimpering was over. Just from the sounds, I could tell I was greatly outnumbered and outgunned with what few weapons I kept in the house, but I wasn’t worried. Where they were all street thugs and wannabe ‘gangstas’, I actually had proper training and a clear head now that the pills had relieved most of my head throbbing.

I swooped out of that bathroom with the grace of a goddamn hummingbird and two of the thugs died before they broke the threshold of the dining room with a flick of my favorite straight razor. Another was caught off guard as he ran to the aid of what I learned was his dead brother from his screams of despair, but he barely had a second to say goodbye as a round from my glock entered and exited each ear respectively. By now, I had a count. Six hired guns. Three down. Four to go. One of them was the man himself, Mediocre Salvador. What a shitty name for a kid.

Known for starting what most just call the ‘stripper church’, Sal had figured out how to really stick it to the government by forcing through his ‘Sasstology’ to become a recognized religion and setting up ‘churches’ all over the country with ‘services’ every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and open house ‘material study’ all week. It was genius, and he made billions just from the tax exemptions alone before he even started weekly ‘prayer vigils’ that were run by his in house sisters. Of course, Sal was never really the evil type, and ran his empire well enough to make me think he’d be a great president. That also means Sal takes care of his people, and while that was a good thing, I had failed to inform him that one of his sisters, was in fact a deep cover agent before I sliced her throat while she providing me ‘personal service’. He was out for blood and angry enough to do what he never did and come make sure the job was done right and my head suffered the girl’s fate.

It didn't take long to finish off the remainder of the untrained brutes tearing through my house. A shot here and the light left another's eyes. A slice there, and I got the sense this guy had spent his last check on regret, a cheap girl, and the bad suit wrapped around his overly muscular body. One more shot, and the last toppled over, right into my damn TV. Then it was quiet. I looked around, trying to figure out where the seventh guy was, but instead, I was greeted by an uneasy feeling that someone was about to get the drop on me. I took three steps towards a door, when I heard a crash and someone yell "NO!" from behind me. I turned as fast as I could, only to see Nick flying through the air sideways and suddenly a shot from a hand cannon filled the room an echoed about with a nasty resonance. Nick fell to the ground at my feet with a giant hole in his chest, and Sal was standing in a door above me on the second floor.

"She was a sleeper, Sal!" I yelled before he could fire off the next round that would definitely kill me.

"Katy?" he asked in his thick Armenian accent.

"Yeah. Memo's in my desk behind you. Department of Defense."

"Oh. Sorry about all... this then. See you at church tomorrow?"

"Who's on?"

"Sister Catherine."

"Yeah... yeah I guess."

"Sorry about Nick..."

"It's fine, Sal. Just go."

While Sal walked off into the other room, I knelt down beside the writhing form of Nick lying on the ground who was trying to speak through a fountain of blood from his mouth and nose.

"I told you I was sorry..." he choked out with a giant cough.

"It's fine it's fine. You did good, Nick. You did real good."

I remember

I remember you when I was young,
You were there,
I can see you, then,
I believe you were young too.
Your face was friendly,
I remember you.

Your smile was warm,
Your eyes were soft,
I am not sure if we had met yet,
Maybe it was a dream,
I am uncertain and confused,
I remember you,

It was at school,
You were leaving,
I was coming,
A friend introduced you,
I had not seen you before,
I remember you.

It did not take long,
A few years,
We became one,
Then three, four and five,
Looking back, time went quickly,
I remember you.

The years can be deceiving,
If you are twenty,
Sixty is three life times,
If you are sixty looking at twenty,
It is the blink of an eye,
I remember you.

It has been a while since we talked,
Since that day we had to say goodbye,
Now our conversations are one sided
Do you listen when I speak,
Can you,
I remember you.

I have not looked at your picture lately,
I am not sure why,
Maybe I am afraid,
I feel lonely when I dream about you,
Afraid of what is coming,
I remember you.

Time has passed but I can see you,
We had many years together,
Why would I be afraid now?
Is it now my time?
Yes, but I wonder,
Will they remember us

- Tony Valentino



Untitled

by Katie Sauer

Untitled

Skin once so warm it could singe
 Now the pulse is slow
 Hands grow cold
 Flesh stretched and receded to summits
Each beat of the heart
 Blood Plummets

 Us aging
From ignorance of youth
 to the wisdom of Sages

Yet,
With voices that crackle,
 no one does listen.
 With bones which cackle
 no one does visit.

Your touch was fire,
fingertips turned icicle
Used to ride round in your whip,
now lack hips for bicycles

Just waiting
to drop
(When can
 a heart just
STOP?)
Praying (if we wake)
that there is warmth on the otherside.

- Whitney Wildman

Excerpt from “Haunted”

by Michael Jenkins

“Hey, I think he’s finally waking up!”

That’s not Seth talking. But I know that voice. Why do I know that voice?

“I can’t believe he really slept until 7 P.M. That’s actually kind of impressive.”

“Yeah. I wish I could sleep in that late.”

There. That one’s Seth. But . . . who’s talking with him? I still can’t see anything more detailed than a few blurry wads of color shifting around in front of me. Damn it! I know that voice. Why can’t I place it?

“Hey, Johnny. Your new lady friend came over to see you.”

Lady friend? I don’t remember . . . Clarice. That’s right. I nearly forgot about her. I think she’s waving at me? I still can’t see very clearly.

“I was just telling Clarice about the dumb little comedy routine you put me through back when we first met.”

“I thought I heard you guys talking about something, but I couldn’t make out the words. What do you mean by comedy routine?” I ask.

“Jesus Christ, killer robot!” Seth suddenly shouts, jumping back and pretending to brandish a lead pipe at me.

Oh, I remember this. I do my best to play along.

“Killer robot? Where?!” I try to look around in a panic, but it’s still hard for me to move very much.

“Stay back, or I’ll knock your block off!” Seth threatens, stepping towards me and drawing the imaginary pipe behind his head. I can hear Clarice giggling somewhere behind him.

“Shit, it’s right behind me, isn’t it?” I ask, struggling to turn around. This would be so much easier if I was already awake. I try to crawl closer to Seth for protection, and he bolts off across the basement and hides behind the staircase. “Wait! Don’t let it get me!” I call after him, freezing when I look over at my outstretched arm. Seth peeks his head out to check on me, paralyzed for a few seconds, then he cautiously approaches while I sit there staring at myself, dumb-founded.

“Uh-oh,” I say, as deadpan as possible.

“That’s actually kind of adorable,” Clarice giggles a bit.

“Yeah, it wasn’t so adorable the first time it happened,” Seth corrects her.

“You really take this whole robot thing seriously, huh?” She asks.

“I don’t know. I try to have fun with it,” I explain.

“That’s good.”

By this point, I feel like I should probably come out and explain to Clarice that I’m not just engaging in some elaborate fantasy. Explain my whole situation and everything. But I think it’s funnier to just keep dropping hints like this so I can watch her blindly stumble all over them. That, and I’d have no idea how to start a conversation like that after pretending to be a guy in a robot costume for so long.

“So, should we do the system check now?” I ask. “I think I’m fully powered up now.”

“Nah, I don’t think you need it,” Seth answers. “I mostly do the system check to be sure everything is still working after being shut down for a whole month,” He stops for a second, and looks around nervously really quickly. “And just between us, the main reason is so I have an excuse for Lily to let me wake you up every now and then. Not really that much of a difference between being left to rot in a scrapyard and being shut down and forgotten in somebody’s basement.”

“Aw, you should let me do the system check,” Clarice complains. “I’ve always wanted to work with a machine this advanced.” She turns to me and smiles playfully.

Wait, did she finally catch on? No, she couldn’t have. There’s no way she’d be this cool if she knew. It took Seth a week or so to really be comfortable around me, and Lily very nearly axed me in the head when he brought me home with him, and I wouldn’t be surprised at all if I heard that she now sleeps with a flamethrower under her pillow, just to be safe.

“Uh . . . sure. I let you do the system check.” Seth tells her. The look on his face suggests he forgot Clarice was still supposed to see me as a normal guy in a Halloween costume. Personally, I think she still does, and she just wants to do a little role-playing.

Seth walks Clarice through the system check, and she keeps this same shy little smile the whole time. Apparently, Seth notices this too, since he stands behind her the whole time, acting like a normal grown-up, tracing hearts over her head and fake swooning at me. If I could move my face, I’d be frowning at him right now. I guess I could still punch him, but he’s all the way over there, and I don’t feel like walking over.

“All right, that should do it,” Seth interjects after the last test, stepping between me and Clarice. “You’re cleared for normal operation, Johnny.”

“Cool. That was kinda fun,” Clarice says. The room goes quiet for a bit while everybody looks around, waiting for somebody else to say something.

“So, you guys wanna watch T.V. or something?” Seth asks.

“Sure. Let’s see what’s on,” Clarice answers.

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She sits down on the faded beige couch sitting across from the prehistoric T.V. Seth keeps hooked up in the basement for some reason. He already has one in the living room. Why hook up an older, lower quality T.V. away from the normal living space? Clarice pats down on the couch cushion next to her, apparently motioning for me to sit next to her. But when I get close to the couch, I'm not entirely sure I should sit down on it. I don't want to shatter it into splinters by dropping six hundred pounds of metal on it, but I figure that the floor upstairs can technically support my weight, so I just lower myself really carefully. The couch protests loudly, but thankfully, it doesn't seem to be falling apart yet. Seth sits down on the floor, leaning against the arm of the couch. He aims the remote at the T.V., pushes the power button, and a tremendous static sound rips through the basement. Apparently, the only thing on T.V. right now is snow. Loud snow. Seth and Clarice instantly cover their ears while Seth scrambles for the power button, but I just dial down my sound sensitivity like a smug little bastard. Once the T.V. is off, I tune back into the conversation.

"Damn it. I guess the old thing finally shit itself, huh?" Seth comments.

"That sucks," Clarice adds sympathetically. "At least it gives me an excuse to check out your haunted house some more. You should come with me, Johnny."

"Sure, I guess. I don't really have anything better to do."

The couch breathes a sigh of relief as I spend a few seconds fumbling myself upright. Seth says he's going to stay down here to try and figure out what's wrong with the T.V., but it seems more likely to me that he just wants to get me to spend some time alone with Clarice. And I don't really know how to feel about that. I mean, she seems pretty nice and she obviously likes me, but on the other hand, she actually likes me. I can't be the only one that's a bit put off by that.

Clarice follows closely behind me on the stairs, helping to keep me stable. About halfway up the stairs, Lily opens the basement door, probably to check on all the noise, and she only manages to take one step onto the stairs before stumbling backwards suddenly, throwing her arms up and ducking behind the door. She waits for us to pass by, and I know she's using the door like a shield, but I pretend like she's just trying to be polite and hold the door open for me. I politely thank her, and Clarice and I get out of her hair.

Neither of us say anything on the walk outside, but Clarice keeps sneakily glancing sideways at me. I think she wants to talk to me, but doesn't know what to say. Once we finally start roaming the halls inside though, she seems to be a lot more comfortable, and she walks slowly so she can stay right next to me. For once, I'm thankful for my face being a paralyzed, expressionless mask. I'd probably be smiling right now, and if she knew that, I couldn't keep my face from flushing red.

"This place is really impressive, Johnny. I can't believe you made all this."

"I don't believe it either. Probably because I had nothing to do with making any of this." I correct her.

“Really?”

“Yeah. Once, I mentioned to Seth that I always wanted to try working at a haunted house, so he spent like, three or four months turning his old clubhouse into this terrifying mess.”

“Wow. That’s . . . really awesome, actually.”

Fuck, she just started walking closer to me. What do I do? I don’t want to move away from her, because she might think I’m not interested, but I don’t even KNOW if I’m interested yet, but if I do nothing and let her get close to me, what does that mean? Does that mean I’m letting her advance on me, or that I’m still undecided? Is this even flirting? Probably not. I’m probably just reading waaaaay too much into everything right now. God, I am so horrible at this.

Clarice sighs suddenly, and shakes her head at the ground. “Sorry, I’m just a little . . . nervous right now. I’m not quite used to people being so . . . cool around me. Most people I meet just write me off as weird and a little creepy, and try to avoid me if they can help it. And then I spend ten minutes with you, and I suddenly don’t feel like nearly as much of a freak show anymore.”

I can’t help but laugh at her little confession.

“What’s so funny?” Clarice asks defensively.

“That’s the complete story of my life, start to finish, word for word,” I pause to chuckle a bit more. “I know she doesn’t mean to, but Lily is very good at making me feel like a monster. Most of the time, I’m pretty good at convincing myself that too. I was actually getting a little weirded out that you kept treating me like . . . like an actual human being.”

“I know that feeling . . . At least, I do now . . .”

There it is again. Silence. The soundtrack of my life.

“I really like hanging out with you, Johnny,” she says quietly . . .

Fuck. I . . . Fuck. Now what? I think she just brushed her hand against mine, but I’m not quite sure. I can’t quite feel anything, and I definitely can’t ask her. I don’t know how to respond to that. Is there even anything to respond to? What do I do? I have no idea! Oh God, why did I never take the time to figure out how girls work?!

Actually, I think there might be a much bigger problem I need to deal with anyway. I have to tell her now. I have to. I don’t even know how much longer I’ll be able to hide this from her. I mean, maybe she’ll let me keep wearing my “costume” after Halloween, but what if she asks me to take it off so we can go do normal people stuff? How can I convince her that I’m fatally allergic to water? I can’t even stay outside for too long in case it starts raining. I’m going to have to open up to her if we’re going to be friends for more than a few days.

Shit. Well, here goes . . .

Kewanee Wolfman

He told me about the first time he saw
The Wolfman, starring Lon Chaney, Junior,
How the snapping snarling furious fiend
Stayed with him, never left his mind, his dreams,
Nipping at his heels moon to moon.

He told me he must have been twelve,
Alone there in the dark of the crowded, quiet Wane theatre,
Celluloid moonbeams flickering off the eternal screen,
Soda sticking his young feet to the floor.

And when he came home, he remembered,
Later that day or maybe next week,
His mother, my Mama G'ande, sent him into the basement
For potatoes or apples or canned chili or jelly.
He took a few creaky steps down into the musty netherworld,
And THERE---halfway down the basement steps,

There in the darkness, leering at him like a lycanthropic
Larry Talbot peering at the gravedigger from behind a graveyard tree,
There, voracious, piercing, incredibly real,
A pair of yellow glistening glowing eyes,
The eyes of the Wolfman, eyes with no lids,

And the pan for the apples or potatoes
Dropped and clattered down the stairs
As he bounded up the top half of the case,
Sure that at his heels snarled and snapped
The teeth of a killer driven by the moon.

What he did not hear as he ran screaming out the back door:
The screech of the cat, and the lovely laughter of his mother,
Who giggled at the tabby disturbed from her perch
Above the stairs leading down to the basement,
Down into the darkness.

- Tom Padilla

The Monster

by Calista Kern-Lyons

On New Year's Eve, Kale tried to go grocery shopping and found that he could no longer leave his apartment. It wasn't that the streets of New York City were so completely crowded that he couldn't force open the door, was under house arrest, or anything of that sort. What bound him to his home was something altogether different: his own personal monster.

The monster was like his shadow: writhing, dark, and stalking him everywhere he went. When he had to write an email to his professor, it was there. When he walked down the sidewalk, it was there. When he sat at a quiet booth with a group of friends, even then it was still there.

It had plagued him for well over two years now. And the monster had progressively become stronger. And his resistance to it became weaker until it felt like it controlled every aspect of his life.

So then as he reached for the brass door handle with his gloved hand the monster abruptly halted him in his stead. Kale's heartbeat started to race and his breathing was choppy. All triggered by the whispered words of his monster, "But there are so many people out tonight. They'll all be judging you."

And so his hand faltered before he had even turned the handle. If there were that many people at least one of them would make eye contact, try to sell him something, talk to him, and all things his monster wouldn't tolerate. So without being aware of the clock ticking on or the fact that he was overheating in his winter coat, gloves, and hat, Kale shook as he came face to face with his monster.

It demanded he recede back into the more comforting walls of fictional realms and a cup of Earl Grey Tea. Except that he was out of tea, the entire reason he had finally realized he had to go to the store in the first place. His cupboards and fridge were both nearly bare, the monster's handiwork. He often forgot to eat anyway as his monster was very distracting. In the back of his mind he knew it wasn't good for him but resistance sucked away every ounce of his energy.

And yet even so, Kale began to surrender to the will of his captor. He slumped onto the couch. The door a few paces away still sat firmly shut. He took a glove off. He could put shopping off until another night. Maybe the monster

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would be less ruthless than when people weren't out in droves.

His heartbeat calmed after minutes of silence but one glance back at that accursed door knob made the monster retaliate. He wanted to go but the monster took him by the hold of his ungloved hand and pulled, "STAY."

"Something could go wrong out there."

"You will embarrass yourself and they will all hate you."

"You you'll have to fight for a cab or worse, walk through the holiday crowd."

"What if you have the wrong amount of money for the cashier? That will ruin you."

His monster hurled out arguments almost faster than Kale's brain could process. It would be easier to just give in, take off his winter clothes, and stay in his apartment. Reason told him staying locked in forever wasn't an option, but reason was not the one in control.

His phone rang. He ignored it because talking could equal something going disastrously as far as the monster was concerned. The clock ticked on. He was lost in the monster's barrage. If he stepped out that door everything would go wrong. He'd been inside the walls of his apartment for a week. And while he longed to leave, he simply couldn't.

He was trapped by the monster trailing behind him and he hated every moment of it. He'd always hated it, the feeling of losing himself to a monster. He hated how everything was slipping into a blur around him. Friends, family, laughter, and all things that used to be pleasant had become torturous due to his captor. Kale wanted out.

He stood up suddenly and then, feeling dizzy, he sat back down. He couldn't do it. Kale still clenched his glove in his hand. He considered it all while still listening to his monster's whispers. Hot tears built up and attempted to escape his eyes. The trembling in his hands returned as it always did before he undertook something the monster didn't like.

With a shaky breath he put on the glove. His legs quivered but held (mostly) firm as he stood. His monster was yelling at him now. Kale heard every word; the fear was bubbling up within him, making his mouth dry. But he took a step in defiance.

The clock ticked on 10pm. He clenched his teeth and took another step. The door was paces away and the monster was screaming at him in protest all that could go wrong out there. Another step; he felt sick to his stomach. Perhaps he should have listened to the monster. But Kale lumbered on.

Two more steps. He faltered for a moment, the monster willing him to stop. But he did his very best and with all the effort he could muster, moved his feet until he reached the door. And then the monster's voice got just a tad fainter. Kale took the opportunity and grasped his hand around the door knob.

The monster was whimpering in protest but Kale was determined for once in his life with the monster that he, not it, would win. Nervously he gripped

the knob and twisted it. The door clicked open as he pulled it. He stood facing the world. With his throat dry, Kale took a slow step outside. The door shut brusquely behind him. His monster was still there but quieter than it'd been in weeks. Kale allowed himself to smile at his triumph. He had groceries to buy.

Seeking Silence

A frenzy of thoughts batter my brain.
I climb to the roof to gaze at the sky.
I pray that the sight will silence my mind.
The light of the stars does nothing to help.
They are too cold, too distant, too dark.
I clutch my knees and let out a sigh.
Tears fall as rain and drop on my skin.
For ages they fall, turn me hollow and frail.

I fly far away to a place in my mind.
I hear dark, warm notes of a cello float by.
Stacks of old books rise to the sky.
Surrounded by words, I let out a sigh.
I run my hand over inked words on a page.
Gold gowns, tight embrace, I hear symphonies play.
Eras pass by, my bones regain strength.
Music and words surround and embrace.

- Calista Kern-Lyons

Fall 2015 - Spring 2016 Issue

Visual Art

Honorable Mention



Lady Gaga

by Samantha Poe

Parallel Paths to Somewhere

by Noel Berkey

As evening descended she stood with crossed arms gazing across the yard, his back to her as he pushed the mower, cutting another clean swath of lawn. He pivoted and turned back toward her gaze, cutting an approaching path parallel to the last. She stood there in that same position, that same look on her face, the one he couldn't quite read, maybe because she appeared to be looking at the grass, not him. Was he cutting the lawn to his wife's satisfaction? Was there something she wished to say? She never complained, and had other things she could be doing, like watering the garden in the backyard. He'd already mowed back there, but she would wait till he was done with the front to go there by herself. He'd learned that. So he tried concentrating on the clean lines he was creating.

Their son lay in his bedroom blocking out the mower's hum with earbuds jammed in his ears. The music was loud and filled with guitar riffs that sounded like power saws cutting through metal. Normally listening to such music would make him imagine driving his little car a hundred miles an hour, windows down, away from all his responsibilities, flames dancing out the tailpipes. But he wasn't really listening to the music just now. He was scrolling through photos on his phone, focused on pictures taken with his girlfriend of the past couple years. The two of them appeared again and again together smiling at the camera, each picture a selfie with two selves, two heads. He'd seen so many pictures of them together that she really seemed part of his self. In one double-selfie they shared a waffle cone with rainbow sprinkles. Another showed them laughing at prom, a perfectly innocent teenage couple surrounded by shiny balloons and glitter. He looked at these and other images longingly, wondering what had become of that cute couple. As the music in his ears continued raging, he closed his eyes and imagined the feel of her body, the taste of her lips, her eyelashes brushing his cheeks.

She had developed the habit of watching her husband mow at the end of a summer's day but couldn't recall why. There were more productive ways she could be

spending her time, inside the house and out, and he didn't need her help mowing. She knew that, of course. She just found herself standing there, seemingly unable to move. She had lived with him nearly two decades. They had raised a son together, eaten meals together, slept in the same bed together, watched the same crime dramas with balding detectives who drank too much coffee and argued with each other like other married couples. She felt that although she knew his habits she didn't necessarily know him. They didn't argue about anything really, not directly anyway, so maybe she didn't have a chance to know much. He'd ask after one of their many shows, "Did you like that episode?" She'd respond with, "It was okay, I guess." Sharing such details with one another somehow made her feel lonelier, even though she convinced herself it was crazy to feel that way, since they had watched the same shows together. Watching him mow the yard now didn't fill the emptiness any better than sitting with him watching TV, but she stood there watching him nonetheless.

He pulled his earbuds out and moments later heard the mower's hum stop rattling his bedroom windows. He was picturing how the following week he would start classes at the community college, how he would walk in the doors feeling uncertain, a little lost. He also pictured her driving away with a carload of her essential belongings to the state university three and a half hours downstate. He saw her at her dorm, meeting new people, everyone saying, "What's your major?" The previous fall they'd visited the school together. She had been so excited, and asked the smiley campus tour guide many questions. She would be taking most of her classes in an ancient but sturdy brick building surrounded by tall hedges and living in a modern coed dorm thirty stories tall. "The residents of this building like to have fun!" the enthusiastic guide offered. While checking it out, a couple shirtless, muscular guys in shorts stepped on the elevator with them. They were a little loud and in the middle of an animated conversation about protein shakes and tennis shoes. "Get outta my way when I'm all laced up!" one of them bellowed to the other, prompting them to high-five one another. They'd just worked out in the dorm's exercise room, he assumed. He tried to read her face to see how she might navigate such situations when she lived there. He remembered how she stared ahead at the elevator doors, attempting to avoid the shirtless men. What had she been thinking? He'd asked later on their way home, "Do you think we should, like, break up before you come here?" His voice had cracked a little too. "You could be free, not have to think about hurting me, you know." But she had said without hesitation, a queer smile taking over her face, "Stop it! No!" and tried to convince him she was sincere with a lingering kiss on his cheek. He thought of how to process her reply as he focused on the road back home, a defeated look in his eyes he hoped she wouldn't detect.

Sweeping the clipped blades of grass and other debris off the top of the mower before returning it to its spot in the corner of the garage, he turned to see his wife making her way to the garden with the hose. It had been a relatively cool summer

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day, and he'd heard that it was better to water a lawn or garden in the morning rather than evening, that an evening watering could lead to mold, or something gross like that. He had developed a habit of half-listening to things he heard. Even so, he had mentioned this to her recently, and she had replied, "My mom always watered her garden in the evening. My brothers and sisters and I never died of mold poisoning. Not once." She said this in a matter-of-fact way without humor while staring at something out the kitchen window. What had she been looking at rather than him? What had been the meaning of the tone in her reply, the tight expression on her face?

He didn't think she'd want to be with him while away at the university, and predicted their relationship would be over by mid-October, if not before. Over the course of the past few weeks she had texted him less and less. He'd text her "Good morning!" and she wouldn't reply till early afternoon. She'd say she'd been reading, or running, or tanning. "Sorry I missed ur text, babe. Was running errands. Getting tanned, lol." It seemed he was suddenly no longer part of her routine, and texting her had begun to make him feel . . . well, weird. And the "lol" at the end only confused him more. While waiting for her to reply, he'd try to imagine the meaning of the message she was sending by not replying. She couldn't stop doing whatever she was doing for a moment and text back? Texting him would interfere with tanning? He knew she was making an effort to create distance between them, even though she still lived just blocks away, not downstate. She was likely preparing him for the inevitable. He could imagine her sitting next to him and in a serious tone saying, "Look, I think we need to talk."

While watering the garden her mind was elsewhere. She held the hose as the water's mist brought out the rich smell of dirt. It was getting dark, and alone now she suddenly found herself longing for something more. Another life, but familiar. There would be a comforting breeze on her skin, a tingling sensation radiating from her breasts. Her home would be like the one she lived in now. She would share the home with a man like her husband. Everything would just be different somehow. As this strange yearning whispered to her, like a line of poetry she'd read long ago but filed away, she longed even more to forget it in the summer routine that had begun to cloud her imagination. She and her husband shared a real home, after all, a real life. And they'd had a son together, a young man who would be living with them till he became more responsible, would learn how to wash his own clothes and feed himself, decide he had the basic life skills to move on and leave them alone . . . together. Maybe the loneliness she felt now but couldn't understand would eventually turn to mist like the water from the hose, dissipate into a summer evening. For now she felt she could nourish only the garden.

He sat on the concrete steps leading to the back door to untie his grass-stained shoes. The evening was pretty about now, the sky making a pinkish-orange

curtain call, his wife a silhouette against the fading sun with garden hose in hand. What is it that existed between them? he wondered. What really mattered? This place? This routine they shared? He wanted to talk with her about how he felt, this dark feeling that sometimes settled within him as they sat together not saying much, she in her recliner, he in his. He felt he needed to talk about it, that it was hurting him physically not to talk with her about how he felt, not just the things they had to get done around the house. How long had it been since they'd fallen into the routine of not discussing how they felt? He remembered a conversation with his brother in the garage after dinner the previous Thanksgiving, all the details about a new fling with a younger woman. "The sex, bro . . . simply crazy. She's hot too, struts around my place in her panties most of the time." His brother had disclosed this information with a sly smile that clarified the degree to which he was savoring his good fortune, one-upping his big bro. "And she makes these bold statements, you know, about sex, her desires, whatever the hell she's thinking . . . like how she prefers men with character rather than guys her age." He let this sink in before adding, almost as an afterthought, "I'm crazy about her." Hearing this, he felt his brother might be a little too desperate to hold onto his youth, that he would likely lose this hot babe to a younger man. But he also imagined the benefits of such a fling, the freedom his brother embraced, a young woman with a passionate appetite and bold things to say. Reflecting on this now though, it wounded him inside to think how he would hurt his wife by leaving her for another woman, how oddly comforted he really should be by all the stuff in his garage, and what he had come to know as his daily life, his routine. "So you have character?" he had replied, sincerely laughing, once his brother stopped boasting. If only he had the right attitude, he would figure as he later lay in bed next to his wife, this life he had come to know could be salvaged.

It was dark now, and she had texted him to stop over. As he walked there he couldn't help but think of her delicate face, the way her lower lip curled downward on the left side when she was concentrating, her peaceful eyes, the sweet sound of her voice, her laugh, how her back curved, how her hair twisted delicately behind her ears. He caught glimpses of the moon obscured by trees as he walked, imagined how lonely it would be up there. He listened to his tennis shoes kissing the pavement and pictured his parents on the moon's surface in spacesuits doing domestic chores, contending with lunar dust and such. He had a heavy heart as he walked but couldn't help being amused by this image that had popped in his mind. The neighborhood back on Earth was quiet, everyone else seemingly inside, lights from TV screens reaching through space to penetrate the darkness, make it not so lonely. He was collecting all the details from this walk, because he knew he and the girl who had become part of him were going to settle things between them. That's how he interpreted her words in the text: "I'm on the front porch, thinking about the future. Just everything really. We should talk."

Later that night, after she heard her son let himself in the front door and quiet-

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ly make his way to his room, shutting his door ever so tenderly, she lay next to her husband in bed, moonlight spilling over them, enveloping them in a milky, soothing glow. She saw that he was looking at her, into her eyes, and seemed to be concentrating. And so she wondered what he saw there. She also saw that his eyes were as blue as when she met him, that time hadn't turned them colorless after all. His right hand was warm and comforting on her upper thigh. For a moment it felt like the hand of a stranger, for he still seemed a stranger to her at times, whether in bed next to her like now, or in the yard, or kitchen, or planted in his recliner next to hers. Then she heard him say, "I'm still here, you know. I haven't gone anywhere." A tingling sensation gently spread over her skin. It was the poetry she longed for, she told herself. All she deserved.

Sophrosyne

Wading through
saffron petal soundscapes,
stars whisper ambiance
across a burning desert shore
spilling their secrets
as I search for lost cities
trapped in a teacup.
A wind fragment speaks to me
about sophrosyne and what it's like
to reach an elevated state of mind
even after light collapses.

- Samantha Poe

Realize

When you realize
you've drifted
Once so closely
intwined
The tear is like a
jagged rip
a gaping hole

When you realize
the impact
the inspiration
is gone
The muse
is dead
entirely dissipated empty

When you realize
everything you thought
was pure and
full of light
Actually had been
dragging you
down into murk

When you realize
that the sudden space
is in one breath
suffocating scary
And the other
freeing drowning you
in opportunity

When you realize
one breath is
enough
to cling onto
To crawl muddy
dripping determined
forward once again

When you realize
that roaring searing
ache has dulled
And you no longer
give a shit
and you're done
with wishing they did

- Rachel Brunner



Untitled

by Danielle Eychaner

Revolution

by Mavrik McMeekan

There wasn't much time left.

Salvatore reclined in his favorite chair, a fine scotch in front of him. He swirled the glass, observing the liquid's flow for a moment before downing it like a bullfrog snatches a fly. He refilled the glass.

There wasn't much time left.

He glanced around the parlor, the place he'd loved. He'd built it with his own hands. The rest of the palace? The architects. But this was to be his abode, his special place and he'd be damned if someone messed it up. He downed another drink as he observed the mural on the wall. A dozen soldiers, astride horses and holding cold-war era weaponry.

"Those were the days," he chuckled, filling his glass. He looked over those faces, the faces of his friends from long ago. They reflected the same dark skin tone as he and the same black hair. It made sense their revolution was called the brotherhood. There was no leader, only the whim of the group. The whole.

They were going to change things; they swore it. The old dictator was an oppressor. A tyrant. They would tear him from his home and give the power to the people, like they did in the powerful countries. Like they did within their brotherhood. Their numbers grew and grew until they had the army they needed. There wasn't much time left.

In the end, they stormed the tyrant's manor. The bastard begged, fell upon his knees and wept before them. They killed him without a second thought. The war was won and now they could bring into effect those great changes they had imagined.

Then the bomb went off.

When the fighting ends and the adrenaline slows, one doesn't think of tripping a mine. Salvatore didn't know who did it but the blast was merciless. Most of them died instantly. Riveros only made it halfway through the gate. He'd cried and kissed Salvatore.

"It is you Brother..." Were his last words.

The sound of gunshots and ghosts filled the mansion and he poured himself another drink.

There wasn't much time left.

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He remembered the hope in the people's eyes at his first speech. The President of their little country. How he wanted to protect that hope; at any cost. And so he did what he needed to. He took the power for himself, guided them all forward.

There wasn't much time left.

How easy it is to abuse your power.

He smiled at the mural one final time. He heard the rebels outside the door and slung the old rifle off the bar.

There was no time left.

The Giant

He is marching strong over the earth, arms swinging from shoulders

He wades into the oceans, catching a whale in his cupped hands

picking it out by the tail, examining it

Throwing it back and watching it dart away from his feet like a minnow

He leaps canyons, tramples mountains under his feet,

revolving the earth with his footsteps.

Jupiter rolls toward his head. He catches it, toys with it,

pushes it back into orbit and watches it arch away,

And walks on, to the outermost ends of the universe.

- Claire Fettig

Disjointed

From people, to cities, to the beautiful tank body
of Reed Dimmer's Dominator capable of withholding
an EF3 tornado, my thoughts are a mirage of
spontaneous images.

Neurons keep reminding me of
how much I'd like to see
the Tokyo Skytree up close.
They knock
against my skull like
prisoners waiting to break out of
undeserved punishment.

Shackled, inspired,
contained by joy and anxiety,
the parade continues:
thoughts of what my friends
mean to me, paralleled by
suspicion,
of how

I'd like to visit my grandparents
in Chicago. The last time I saw them
was at my dad's funeral.
And I'm absolutely dying inside
to see Ladytron live.

- Samantha Poe

Touch of a Banshee

by James Hutchison

The day of the event came so fast. Fast enough a lesser human might crumble under the pressure of the eyes of a billion people watching their every move. The Mega Bowl was the biggest of all the sporting events in the nearest three sectors, and I was to play half-time. The last few days had been uneventful and, as always, I tried to make it a point to do as little as possible before a huge performance. So, most of my time was spent trying to catch up on any minute details of sector wide events in case the reporters had any stupid questions. There was very little to see as I flipped through the channels, except for a piece on a supposed banshee that was reported to be lurking about on one of the local worlds. *Malarkey.*

It still boggles my mind to think people still believe such a thing exists. I'm too old for bed time stories still told by mainstream media because it has some marketing value. No, it's all nonsense and even if it did have any merit, it wouldn't be affecting me. *What are the chances?*

Focus. I have to focus. This is bigger than the Grand Master ceremony, but there would be no trophy, but rather the screaming adoration of billions of fans, or the scorn if I failed.

Tom, my manager, arrived and approached me. He knew not to talk to me before something this big, so he patted me on the shoulders and added a lingering squeeze as a simple, but meaningful, show of support. It actually calmed me a bit and after a deep breath someone handed me a piece of paper that said, "Opposite stage side, green light cue."

The light blinked on, and as soon as my foot touched to massive stage, the Mega Stadium dropped dead quiet and all feelings of nervousness disappeared. I was ready. I was at home.

My fingers touched the keys and out poured the music piece I had selected just for this occasion; *Beethoven: Sonata Op.106 in B flat major, 'Hammerklavier'*. It was ancient, it was beautiful, and if there was anything that would cement my place as the best grand pianists in the entire sector, it was this. Everything went wrong after that.

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Not long into the piece, an odd scream flooded through the stadium. It was bloodcurdling and painful, but my mind was gone, raptured up into my work. Another scream followed, this time more than one person, but I tried not to think about it. I just kept hitting the keystrokes like my very life hinged on this moment. Five minutes into my performance, screams and chaos began breaking out all around the stadium. Eight minutes, and the attending orchestra that were seated and waiting to play after me began to writhe around violently when suddenly, a man smashed his violin over the head of a nearby woman, but I didn't stop. I couldn't. *I wouldn't.*

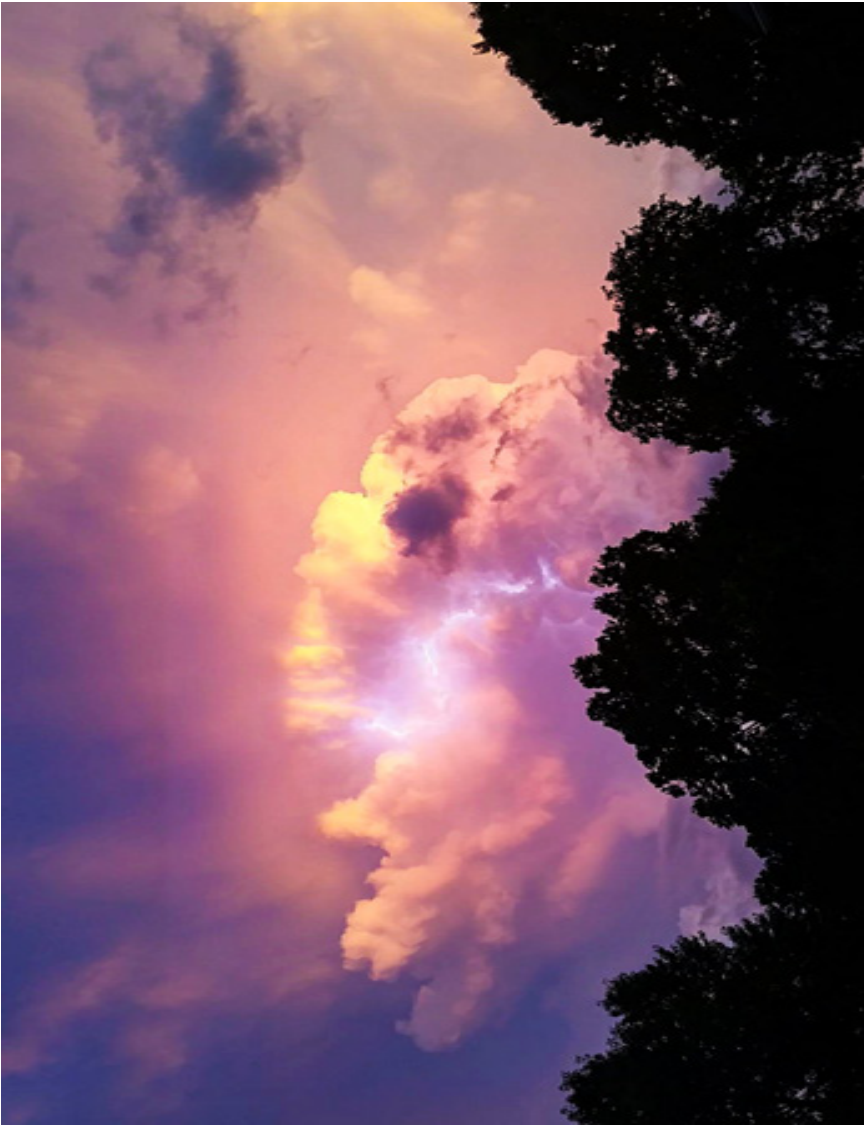
There were tears now. They were streaming down my face and landing on the keys. I closed my eyes, but I couldn't do anything to block out the sounds of the raging conflict that saw one person after another die at the hands of a raging mass of a hundred thousand people as they lost their minds, but still I played on.

I played until I lost track of time when all at once I realized what was happening. I had seen it on the news but dismissed it as a children's story.

"It's a banshee..."

Somewhere close by, it was tapping into the sound system of the largest gathering of human beings anywhere across the nearest thirteen worlds. It was altering the sound waves just enough to drive anyone who hears them to the point of insanity, just like in the stories. Everyone who could hear my music in this stadium would be dead before I finished, but I didn't feel the press of the monster on my mind. I wasn't falling to its wanton desire for human sacrifice, because there was already something just as powerful in my mind. It was the cold rush of the music flooding from my fingertips. It was daring me to carve my name in the history books even if the cost was my life right here and right now, so in a blind, desperate show of pure lust, I played on.

With everyone around me dead, including the engineers responsible for keeping the stadium in close orbit around the Earth, it wasn't long until the final part of the Banshee's plan came to fruition. The structure began to shake and spin wildly; the physical violence of our entry into the atmosphere began to shred panels from steel beams. Life support systems were breeched almost immediately, and whatever oxygen that was inside vented out. More and more panels were blown off in a cacophony that would have been deafening to anyone listening, but through the sound of the rushing air and fire from the melting beams as the atmosphere of Earth tore us to pieces, all I could hear was the sounds of the music inside my head as still... *I played on.*



Untitled

by Ashley Lemke

Supplement Of Denial

The somber wind, a miasma, an aura of the end, malicious wisp
Hills -- between them, a gateway valley -- round mounds of two
Ingrained, covered, consumed by some thick, eerily gray bramble
Silent sometimes, others, the tempest ripping out from the chasm

Irradicating -- using the stench of death -- the fragrance of gusto
Scourge, a plague, the chthonic breath of the underworld itself

Fiery

Acidic

Rancid

Tumultuous

Soulless

- Todd Landher

Kodak Moment

Silence is a sign
There weren't words to describe
The mess inside

Her body felt shallow
Any minute she could blow away
Like an autumn leaf falling from a tree

Lock the feeling up
Throw the key away

Keep that Kodak moment
In her pocket

Like a knotted string around the finger
She feels the outline of the pocket

Old man lying in a hospital bed
Holding her hand smiling
The last time she saw him

- Jehovia Miniell

Time to Heal

by D'ana Rodriguez

Annie Baker woke up at nine o' clock on a Saturday morning and stretched. She was looking forward to today because her mom and older brother were going into town, leaving the house in the care of fourteen-year-old Annie, and her twin sister Amanda. Annie looked over at her twin's unmade bed and was surprised to find it completely empty. Amanda wasn't usually an early riser, but then Annie remembered that her mom and Andrew, her brother, were going into town at eleven, so Annie needed to hurry if she wanted to be able to say goodbye. She hopped out of bed and immediately went to her dresser where she kept a little box with her deceased father's ashes, along with small items that reminded her of him, like the pebbles they collected at a beach when she was seven, which was one of the last memories she had with her father, since he passed away a few months later. As Annie approached her dresser, she fully expected to see her little box perched on the top of it, just like the box had always been for the past six years. However, when she got closer, Annie felt the first surges of panic begin to rise up in her chest. The box wasn't there!! Frantically, she began to search all over her room, until finally, about fifteen minutes later, she came to a terrifying conclusion... The box was gone.

"MOM!!!" Annie wailed as she rushed down the stairs, close to tears as she tried in vain to remember the last place she had the box, but her mind was drawing a blank each time.

Her mom, Alexa Baker, came flying from the kitchen where she was making breakfast, startled and unnerved by her daughter's cry of anguish. "What is it, sweetie?!"

Annie collapsed into her mother's arms, sobbing uncontrollably, "Dad's box," she managed to gasp out in between sobs. "It's... gone. I can't find it!!!"

"What's gone, Annie?"

"The box that had Daddy's ashes. The one on my dresser. It's missing!!!"

Alexa took a deep breath, trying to keep calm for the sake of her daughter. She knew how important this box was to Annie. She had kept it safe, clean it, and cherished it ever since her father died in a car accident all those years ago. And since Alexa knew what was inside, and what the box represented, it was

important to her as well.

“Don’t worry sweetie,” Alexa tried to console her daughter by saying, “The box will turn up soon, it has to. Now, let’s think... Did you take the box anywhere yesterday?”

Annie gasped in horror, “Of course not!!! You know I am too afraid of losing the box to take it anywhere!”

“Okay, dear, I just wanted to make sure you did not leave it anywhere. But if it isn’t in your room, and you didn’t take it out of there, who did?”

Amanda, who had been sitting silently in the kitchen this whole time, finally blurted out the truth: “Annie! I can’t hold it in any longer! I took the box out of your room last night!” As Annie stared in rage and betrayal, Amanda continued. “I am so, so sorry Annie!! I didn’t mean to lose the box, I just wanted to go and look at it. And, I guess I forgot about how much it meant to you and took it outside.”

Annie, who had been angrily fuming ever since her sister’s confession, exploded in anger once her sister admitted that she took the box- HER box- outside. That box was not meant to leave the girls’ room, not to mention it was never meant to be left outside to be worn down by the weather.

“You. Did. WHAT?” Annie screeched, barely resisting the urge to reach across the kitchen table and slapping her sister, but their mom held her back. It was very fortunate that Annie was restrained, because if she had been let free, Annie might have done something she would definitely have regretted later.

“I’m sorry, Annie!” Amanda cried out in despair. “Please, let me help you find it. I remember exactly where I was yesterday.”

“Fine.” Annie grounded out. “But you will take us everywhere you were yesterday. Promise me.”

“I promise!”

A half hour later Annie, Amanda, their mom, and Andrew, who had just returned from filling the car with gas, were in the backyard in a deep search for Annie’s missing box. They had combed through every inch of the backyard, and still no box. And Annie was becoming frantic with worry.

“Amanda,” their mom gently prompted, “do you remember taking the box outside off of the property?”

Amanda thought about it for a moment. “Oh!” she exclaimed in relief, “I took the box out into the woods to try to look at it in peace. I can show you where I was sitting. Trust me, Annie, you will love the spot where it is buried.” Amanda reassured her sister.

Amanda led the way into the woods and stopped at a tree that they did not have to walk very far to get to. Kneeling down, she began to dig into the soft dirt to retrieve the box when Annie placed a hand on her arm to stop her. Confused, Amanda looked over at her sister, who was looking up into the tree with a look of shock on her face. This tree was no ordinary tree to the two fourteen-year-olds. This is the tree where their dad had built a tree house for them when

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they were five-years-old... Three years before he died. And the tree house was still standing.

“Amanda,” Annie began slowly. “Why don’t we keep the box buried here, under the tree? This tree brings back more memories of Dad than our room did.”

With tears in her eyes, Amanda agreed, and the girls headed inside. But not before saying goodbye to their dad. It was time to let go.



No One Is Alone

by Calista Kern-Lyons

She Waits

Scattered pieces on the floor,
Broken, she walks out the door.
She can't handle the hurt and the pain,
She is left in tears again.
So on a quest, she must embark
To fan the slowly, dying spark,
For if she doesn't, what will she do?
She feels no purpose,
On the surface.
So she'll go on,
Feeling wrong.
Tattered, torn,
And feeling worn,
Who can fix this mess?
Alas, there's a knight on his shining steed,
But he passes by at alarming speed,
Barreling past, he trudges along,
Humming aloud a deceptive song,
And left in the dust,
With great distrust
Is a dysfunctional machine.
Devoid of emotion, she builds up her walls,
Because she won't be caught the moment she falls.
Leaving his damsel in distress,
Crumpled in a horrid mess,
Who can fix her now?
Next in line, the great magician
Who whisks away her foul position
To a land of wonder, magic,
But still there lingers something tragic.
All the wonders of the world
Yet still a dream's been left unfurled.
Unfulfilled and feeling lost,
Like the junk that just gets tossed,
Who can pay the hefty cost?
Now, the third time is a charm.

She feels no need to raise alarm,
When she decides to make a wish,
She hopes for everlasting bliss,
And so she lies, in quiet hush,
Waiting for that blissful rush.
From the dust to the stars,
They all hold their breath.
But even the moon, the sun and the stars
Can't cover up all of her scars.
And so she waits.
Scattered pieces on the floor,
Broken, she walked out the door.
She couldn't handle the hurt, the pain,
She was left in tears again.
So on a quest, she did embark
To fan the slowly, dying spark,
But her dream was not yet fulfilled.
She felt no purpose,
On the surface.
And so she goes on,
Feeling wrong.
Broken and bruised,
Left feeling used,
No one could fix this mess.
And so she waits.

- Arabella Chamberlain

Maquoketa Caves I

1970-1991

When I was under twenty
we would attack the caves
like the plunge of a kingfisher
after a darter.

We would bruise our heads.

Mud was not an obstacle.

We held the bats.

There was a caretaker of the caves. We never saw him.

One winter we camped above the caves.

Fifteen below and the wind.

Jeff Puffer strung a line across the tent and suspended
a can of horse manure he had collected from an adjacent field.

He said it would burn slowly and keep us warm.

It burned through the string.

Only the caves were warm.

Another time, Vince Harshman and I were deep in Wye Cave.

Both our lights burned out.

We crawled and wiggled and crashed into limestone.

We were heroes that day.

We popped corn over the fire to celebrate.

When I was under thirty,
My girlfriend and I walked the trails
above the caves.

It was warm and wildflowers
were like poems on the forest floor.

We identified warblers passing with the spring.

We went deep into Steel Gate Cave.

We got wet. A bat brushed her hair.

We ate dinner at a drive-in in Savanna.

I am under forty.
We have four kids under ten.
I tell them about the caves,
And say, "Yes, we will go when you are older."
But I fear the caretaker now
passes out brochures,
lectures on safety,
and leads guided tours through caves with electricity.

- Mark Jordan

Peanut Park (Childhood memories)

by Tony Valentino

The time is the 1950's and the setting is the original Italian area which was located on the near west side of Chicago. That is where I spent the first thirteen years of my life, the formative years. The area was originally settled in the 1880's by European immigrants and held strong until the end of the nineteen fifties. That is when the city government, in their infinite wisdom, decided the area must undergo "urban renewal" and we were forced to move.,However, that is a story for another day.

One of my favorite memories was of our park, "Peanut" park. It was an old Chicago city park that got its' name from the peanut shaped sidewalk that lined its interior. This was not its real name, but everyone called it that. No one really knew its actual name until one day a city park district crew came and installed an official sign. Our parks' name was "Vernon" park, but no one knew why. Quite frankly, no one gave it much thought. It always was and remains, "Peanut" park.

It was not very big, maybe one square city block, but it was what we had. The grass, if you could call it that, always looked bad, sometimes especially bad. There were two ball diamonds opposite each other and they had seen much better days. The wire mesh that enclosed them was bent and torn. They had been up a long time and experienced many ball games.

There were never any real bases and no one ever lined the base paths. We all knew where the lines should be and everyone could tell if a ball was fair or foul anyway. There was one old water fountain that barely worked. The pipes were surely corroded because there was hardly any water pressure. If you wanted a drink you had to place your lips right on the spout. Given the number of people that used the park and this fountain, this was not the most sanitary of practices.

The benches were the old kind that had cement posts and wooden slats. If the slats were even there, whatever paint that had been on them was faded and

peeling. In this old park's defense, the neighborhood was densely populated and this was the only park available for thousands of people.

This was a poorly maintained park and we all knew it would never be taken care of. Our neighborhood was not one that had any status with the city. No one in government really cared about us but that was OK. We did not know any better and we were grateful for what we had.

The area was working class. Our parents worked in factories all day and at the end of a weekday they were exhausted. When they came home they had a meal and went to bed. We did not have parents that structured or planned our activities, but they were good parents. They did give us a sense of right and wrong and good and evil. They cared about us and loved us but they just did not have the ambition or knowledge to set up activities for us. Those functions fell to the schools, churches and community centers. As lacking as the neighborhood was, there was a strong sense of family and community.

Looking back, an interesting thing about the parents in this neighborhood was that there was hardly any divorce. No one we knew was divorced. Not one of my friend's parents were divorced. I guess they were too tired and poor for that. Our religion did not accept divorce, but I think the real reasons were they were too tired and poor. Maybe being poor and tired has a good side.

Our strong sense of community was established by the church and school. There were also a number of civic organizations that helped. The church was our Lady of Pompeii and it was established and run by the Scalabrini fathers. The really interesting spin on this is that the order was founded in Italy to minister to Italians that had emigrated to the United States. As time went on this need diminished. The fathers then went back to Italy to minister to Americans that moved there, primarily for business reasons. I had a cousin who was a Scalabrini father and he was sent to Milan. I guess the wheel does turn.

The school was staffed by the Franciscan sisters. This was a time when nuns looked like nuns. They still wore habits and were strong educators and disciplinarians. They also worked for very little money. This allowed the poorest of us the opportunity to be educated in a private school. That was important because, even then, the public schools left much to be desired. The church was located on the north end of the park. It had a convent for the sisters and the school was between the church and convent. The neighborhood was mainly catholic so this enclave was very active. On school days the park would be used as a play area for the students.

On the east end of the park was a hospital, Mother Cabrini, and was run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. The hospital was small by today's standards and did not even have an emergency room. My sister always told the story of the time my brother hurt himself. She brought him to the hospital late one night and they refused them entry saying they were closed and they had to come back the next day.

On the south end of the park was a complex of buildings run by the cit-

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ies' housing authority. The normal housing in the neighbor was so old that public housing was desirable and there was a waiting list for it. It was much newer and, at the time, better maintained.

I lived two city blocks from the park and walked that route thousands of times. Mid-point between our apartment and the park was a hot dog stand. This was a time before fast food restaurants and there was a hot dog stand on almost every block. They sold hot dogs, all beef natural casing ones, tamales and Italian beef and they were always busy. I stopped there often.

Even though it was not the most prosperous area and it, and we, lacked many things, it was where I grew up. I have fond memories of it, and feel that I was fortunate to have lived there at that moment in time.

The Escape

by Calista Kern-Lyons

Sometimes I make my escape. It's just to a small little nook in the corner of my room which I surrounded by three bookcases tucked away so the corner can't be seen from my door. The books stretch high to the ceiling. Some of them are brand new, having only been opened a few times. Others are old favorites that have covers that are one read away from falling off.

But the crowning glory of my little library is the oldest ones. I have tomes that were very old well before my birth and will probably still survive in their worn bindings well after my death. Those books held stories within stories of countless owners who had cherished the inked words before me. They released a certain fragrance I loved. My mother had called it "musky" but to me it was comfort, the smell of good words. I could live surrounded by the scent of my stories. It was a kind of therapy in and of itself.

The dark wood floors of my escape corner were horribly uncomfortable for multiple hours of sitting so I'd placed a small blue and gold throw rug down which had caught many of my tears and occasionally my tired body as I'd slip into sleep surrounded by my beloved books. I'd often wondered what the bookshelves would say if they could speak. How many times had they heard my spasmodic breaths in between a waterfall of tears as I poured out everything my heart couldn't bear to hold in any longer? How many times had the spines of the books absorbed the sound of my ramblings as I tried to make sense of life? But yet, there was a certain comfort in the knowledge that the books were the very best of secret keepers, they listened intently, vowing never to breathe a word. My words were safely locked away in their spines, hidden by pages of other, certainly more eloquent phrases.

To me it was freeing to know that the books could never judge, and could never grow tired of my problems even if people could. I didn't have to worry that the books couldn't handle overwhelming amounts emotions I threw at them or that they would be offended. On the contrary, when I would pull one of the well-loved books off the shelf and clutch it to my chest with white knuckles, they absorbed the emotions and set my mind at ease.

I recall some days where I couldn't read at all. I would pull books off the

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shelf, surround myself with them, and simply think. Other days I would read but barely register the words on the page for there were already too many crashing through my head. But the best days were those where I could make the most wonderful escape of all; where I could reverently take a book from its place and vanish into its pages for hours on end. In the book itself I could find my release. The characters were my confidants. Harry Potter shared in my loss but gave me hope that magic was not dead. Sherlock Holmes became rational and logical when I could not. In the pages of *The Chronicles of Narnia* I found adventure and peace that everything had a purpose, a place, and that I was never alone. These were the moments in my corner that I cherished. The moments where my world could once again fill with color and life. I could dance wildly among the dryads and naiads. I could soar on the back of a dragon and feel the beat of her mighty wings. I could twirl in an elegant ballgown while hearing the warm resonance of cellos echoing in the candlelit grand hall. I could, just for a little while, exist outside of myself. I could forget all the burdens that crushed me. The stress would finally seep out of my battle-weary bones. The words, the knowledge, and the stories, these were all my small universe that none could experience except me. The books gave me the reprieve I needed to trudge onwards and to take that other life I had to return to head on.

And so trudge onwards I did.

I suppose that small corner still exists somewhere in the recesses of my mind. The rug and bookshelves are long gone, and most of the books have been relocated. Sometimes when I pick up my old copies of the books I am transported back to that little corner of my old room. Everything is crystal clear as though I could truly feel the soft material of the rug against my toes and the warm polished wood of a bookcase against my back again. When I find myself struggling to hang on, my mind unfurls the memory of that place and I am once again surrounded by my beautiful words. When I lie down at night, the image that soothes me is my little universe of stories in a small corner of an old room. I can disappear into the books and the characters that embraced me completely. I can rest in the smell of the books, old and new. That little nook, wonderful and serene, still is my escape.

Vellichor

One hundred selected poems
bound in dusty cardboard
found in a dingy corner
purchased for \$1.25
serve as introduction and biography both
to a long-dead stranger-soul.

- Claire Fetting

Cinderella

In class they teach one to
murmur over the floor on brittle glass feet
in time to heartbeat music
each step made a thousand in mirrors
and when one's foot sheds its shell
a prince will press it back again.

- Claire Fetting



Untitled

by Danielle Eychaner

She Weaves a Lake By My Bed

A wingless angel
informs me it is time
to face deception,
a world proud enough to
exude false lovers
or a non-occurring
prophecy.
I am sleeping and
she speaks words like
broken specks of moon
or the angles of
bent silverware.
Her thoughts trace
my tired bones
and leave me dreaming
of circles
and lines
or a reason
for the world other
than just being.
She weaves a lake
by my bed
for me to fall into
when I first open
my dream-staked
eyes, two curvy bulbs.
I wake to a siren
snapping on a first
Tuesday noon,
fall into a reservoir
of the darkest art,
created just for me
to shake hands with life
and the hearts of
the unskilled.

-Samantha Poe

Excerpt from “The Divine Opera” Scene VI

by Michael Jenkins

I know you're out here somewhere. I can feel your heavy, rotten stench in the air. You're close. Very close. It's only a matter of time before I sift you out of the snow. The streets are empty, the houses are all asleep . . . What else could you be chasing? It's just you and me right now. What are you waiting for?

There's that deep, earth shaking laugh again.

“I heard that!” I shout, but that only makes her laugh louder.

I don't know what she's up to, but she's been coming here more and more frequently. Hell, she was just here a week ago. At this rate, she'll be a permanent resident of the town before the end of the month. If that happens, the town won't see the end of January.

I can't quite focus all of my energy on searching her out. Being a re-animated skeleton, I'm nearly weightless, so I have to constantly put some energy into holding myself together in the wind, and the snow is interfering with my Clairvoyance, like static over a TV screen. And the fact that I'm getting frustrated by this is only making things worse. I duck out of the wind and take shelter for a moment behind somebody's house. I need to relax, get out of the gale. I try to scan the area, and I'm shocked to see that not only can I pinpoint her magic signature, it's actually quite clear and nearby.

I peek my head around the corner, and see her mirroring my cautious posture. She's parked her head right in the middle of an intersection, her skeletal, worm-like body stretched out around a corner. She notices me, and her head cracks open with a massive grin. The tremendous spidery legs folded by her neck stretch out, lifting her head high into the air. She picks up one leg, and holds it out horizontally by her side. Is she . . . pointing at something? Wait, I think she's .

..

“Oh no, don't you dare!” I shout.

She somehow grins even wider, and nods excitedly at me.

“I swear, if you-”

CRASH!!!

She slams her leg straight down through the roof of some poor soul's garage. She keeps her leg resting through the collapsed roof, staring directly at me. She crouches lower, and giggles through her teeth.

"That's it! You are in SO MUCH TROUBLE!" I scream, pointing my magic stick at her.

She shakes her head, still grinning widely, then turns suddenly and scurries off down the road. As she rounds the corner, the enormous hand on her tail clamps down on a car parked by the side of the road, and drags it off with her. The car instantly starts shrieking for help, blaring its horn and flashing its headlights.

Just before I can chase her, something stops me momentarily. I notice something across the street. Some guy is standing in his bedroom window in his underwear, staring down the street with wide eyes. He suddenly turns his attention to me, watching me in stunned silence.

"Damn kids, always causing trouble," I joke awkwardly, shrugging my shoulders.

I cut through the snow as quickly as I can, but the headwind she's carving through is a bit too intense. I keep slowing down as the wind picks up. Eventually, I'm barely able to match a natural walking pace with all of my effort spent holding myself together. I can't even hear the car alarm dragging behind her anymore, and the flashing headlights bleed into distant whiteness. It's not long before I'm completely alone again.

Damn it! How does she keep getting away from me? Is she using the wind against me? I certainly can't stay out here long in this weather. And if she can't mess with me, I doubt she'll stick around much longer either. I guess I'll just have to go home and wait for this goddamn blizzard to pass. The wind and snow picked up so suddenly. It's insane. And luckily for me, there's no way I could focus long enough or clearly enough to teleport all the way home, so I get to walk halfway across town through this mess too!

Like I've said, the snow doesn't bother me as much as the wind does. I can't feel the coldness of the air or the wetness of the snow. There's no warmth for them to sap away in the first place. But this wind is the worst thing ever. Walking, even just through a crosswind, is a constant struggle to keep my borderline weightless body in one piece and moving forward. Though, the shin deep snow isn't exactly helping me move any faster either.

"Having some trouble there?"

The wind is howling so fiercely, I swear just imagined this voice. But I brace myself against the wind and stop to look around, and see a man standing in front of a small, tan house, dressed in heavy winter gear and holding a massive snow shovel. He motions for me to follow him inside, and again shouts over the wind:

"Come on, you shouldn't be outside in this weather dressed like that."

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I hesitate to follow him for a moment, but the wind does a pretty good job of convincing me that I need to get my ass inside right now. I try to keep my head down and my cloak closed, doing my best to power through the wind without scattering myself all over the snow. It takes me a minute of clumsy waddling and stomping through the snow to make it to the front door, but once I step inside, the sudden stillness and quiet is a tremendous relief. I can finally feel myself relaxing, and I'm suddenly able to focus again.

"That coat may be stylish," says my friendly new benefactor, "But it won't do a thing to keep the cold out, I'm sure."

I just shrug indifferently, still watching him quietly. Something seems a little . . . I don't know. Something.

"Maybe the cold doesn't seem like a big deal, but hypothermia could kill you," he continues, pulling his scarf away from his face. Shit. I knew something stood out to me. It's Dr. Hall, my high school biology teacher. I'd recognize that face anywhere. He's just about the only reason I made it out of that Hell alive. Why couldn't I just stumble into some random schmuck? I'm supposed to be dead right now; I can't let him recognize me. I couldn't handle the awkwardness.

"You haven't been out there too long, I hope," he says.

I quietly shake my head.

"Can I get you something to drink? Coffee, tea, cocoa?"

Again, I cautiously shake my head.

He shrugs, and stomps some snow off his boots. You know, as long as he sticks to Yes/No questions, I should be able to make it out of here okay.

"You know, I was just about to make an emergency supply run before the weather gets too oppressive out there. Where are you headed?"

Fuck.

I just shrug quietly, and look around the room nervously.

"Are you going anywhere near Super Market?"

Super Market? That's just about three blocks from my house. I can do that.

I nod emphatically.

"Okay. You can wait in the car, I have to finish digging out the driveway," He gestures towards the garage, and I nod at him again. He pauses to wrap his scarf around his face again, and I quietly slink off into the garage.

Stupid Dr. Hall, actually being a decent person . . . I mean, I know the snow is getting insane, but at least I can be alone out there. I think I'd rather brawl in a cage match against Mother Nature's winter tantrum for an hour than awkwardly dodge conversation for twenty minutes. Awkwardness cuts me way deeper than the cold can. I could probably teleport home from here, but I wouldn't want to worry him by suddenly vanishing into the night. Besides, I'm trying to stay mysterious and anonymous, not shriek "CARRIE WAS HERE!" into a megaphone.

I figure it's best to just accept defeat and take the ride. I grumble quietly

to myself and slither into the passenger seat of his deep green car. It takes me a minute of squirming to keep my weapon hidden inside my coat while still sitting in a natural position. I try to relax and keep a clear mind until he gets back, but I just can't stop myself from thinking back to high school.

I can't believe I still remember half the intentionally awful puns and ridiculous limericks Dr. Hall worked into our lessons. He seemed to be the only teacher that understood that he needed to actually get our attention, rather than just constantly repeat the phrase "this is really important, now pay attention" like some kind of magic words that could force everyone to care. It's kind of crazy, really. That class is still a safe place for me, even if it's just in my head now. I can't help but feel like smiling every time I remember being the only one brave enough to hold the snakes, or getting strange looks when I said I thought the giant hissing cockroaches were actually kind of adorable. I can't tell if that was due to me being weird, or if I was just surrounded by-

CLICK!

I almost bounce out of my seat at the sound of the car door opening. Dr. Hall quickly apologizes, and says he didn't mean to startle me. I want to clarify that it's really my fault for not paying attention, but I'm pretty sure I made a rather . . . strong impression on him while I was alive, and I really don't want to chance him recognizing my voice. Honestly, I can't believe I let my guard down like that. I guess I really need to be more vigilant.

"Guess I should have started warming the car earlier, huh?" He says, starting the car and rubbing his hands together.

After a few seconds of silence, I realize that his car radio is turned off, ensuring that this is going to be a very long car ride. He slowly backs out of the driveway, stops to be sure that the road is absolutely clear, then slooowly backs onto the road, and finally crawls cautiously down the street. Goddamn weather is going to make this trip last even longer. And I feel so weird sitting in a teacher's car. Well, former teacher. It's still weird. Not only am I not in school, but riding in cars is for parents and friends, not teachers.

After a few torturous decades of silence, Dr. Hall finally starts talking. He jokingly complains about how awful the weather is, and launches into some wacky anecdote about this one winter where something, something, I don't even really hear it. My mind just instantly goes into defensive mode once I hear the same "winter is terrible" speech I've heard a hundred thousand times before. I love winter. It's cold, dark, and lonely, and because of that, it's just about the only time of year I can really be happy. Not even happy, really. Just comfortable, I guess.

We slowly roll to a stop at a red light, and Dr. Hall takes the opportunity to face me.

"I hope you don't mind me asking, but what's with the mask?"

I just shrug nervously. He smiles, and shrugs back.

"Different strokes, I guess . . . Hey, do you hear something?"

I can't hear anything but the wind. But I keep listening carefully, and

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soon, I can just barely pick out something over the weather: the sound of a distant, slightly muffled . . . car alarm. My whole body clenches up, and I start hurriedly feeling around for her signature. It might not be her, but if it is . . . Soon enough, a street corner about five or so blocks to our left silently swells upwards, and the pavement buckles around her enormous head. She pushes the side of her head out just enough to reveal one eye, and she starts staring right at us. I collapse back into my seat as deeply as I can, clamping my hands onto the sides. I pray that she didn't see me. Come on . . . Turn green already! . . . Finally!

We slowly roll through the intersection, and I seem to have slipped by unrecognized. Maybe, if she doesn't realize who's inside this car, she won't come after us. I climb out of the small, leather crater in the seat, and start scanning around to make sure she's not trying to follow us.

"Is something wrong?" Dr. Hall asks.

I shake my head.

He sighs, and continues talking with his eyes locked straight forward, "Look, why don't you just tap once for "Yes" and twice for "No", okay?"

I lightly smack the palm of my hand onto the dashboard once. I wince a little when I realize that the sound is a little too hollow and not nearly meaty enough, but he doesn't seem to notice. Or at least, he doesn't seem to care.

"That works. So, is something wrong?"

Tap tap.

"Are you just saying that because you don't want to talk about it?"

. Tap.

"Well, at least you're honest," He says, chuckling a bit to himself.

There's another long stretch of silence before he speaks again.

"You know, you were wandering around pretty far from home in a snowstorm, and that's clearly not a good winter coat, and you seem to be all skin and bones . . ."

Man, you have NO idea.

"Are you sure you don't need me to buy you dinner or something?"

Tap tap.

"Okay, if you insist . . ."

Finally, the store is in sight. Just a few more painfully quiet moments, and I can finally go home. I don't think we've been followed, so I should have a pretty clear path back. Come on, just one more block . . . I can't keep myself from nervously tapping my fingers on the car door. And parked! I immediately open the door, and slide out into the snow. I really should thank him, but instead, I just nod and tip an imaginary hat at him.

"You're welcome!" He says, laughing a bit. He braces himself against the wind, and waves goodbye. "Hurry home, before it gets too rough! See you later, Carrie."

He flashes a subtle smile, and disappears inside, leaving me quietly staring at the slush in the parking lot for a minute before I finally press home.

Floridian Oranges

Open up the front door
Release the clutter from my floor
By your command
I've defiled that sacred disarray
So I could have a place to stay

But I'll fly down, down, down
With strangers who aren't so strange
And turbulence like ocean spray
And the airline food you warned me about
I'll make my way

I'll hang my winter coat
On the highest branch of the tallest tree
And I'll have everything
Everything that couldn't grow
In a land with such a thing as snow

I'll be eating Floridian oranges
Sweet and sour and sweet again
Plucked from boughs that only bend
And never break
For my sake

Enough is enough
I'm never falling back up

- Samantha Rhodes

Grizzly Track

Denali National Park and Preserve
There has been rain this morning,
but the fog has cleared
and bits of sky are exposed
behind the weakening clouds.

The Toklat roars as it escorts rain and rock
toward the distant sea. I walk the other way,
to where the mud of mountains
covers the feeble memories of the ice age.

On Divide Mountain six Dall rams sit.
It is the rest between feedings.
One must surely see me as I
stumble over stones. I am
embarrassed when I fall.

On a clear stretch of silt I nearly step
on the track of a bear. It has
been set after the rain.
Looking hard I cannot find its maker.
Nor can see anything that could mask the bear.

The water travels far as I stand staring
hard in the direction of the claws.
Nothing moves. I become convinced
each rock is really rock.
The sheep remain still.

I choose a large boulder near the silt
to rest. Trusting that the bear
has moved far beyond to
where the Soap Berries must
be ripe, I pull out my lunch.

I watch the track trying to date the moment it formed.
Ten thousand years ago this
valley held ice. Ten thousand years ago
this silt was rock. For reasons I do
not understand I bury the remains of
my sandwich in the track of the grizzly.

- Mark Jordan

Animal

Wash your bloody hands
and look at the animal
you now resemble.

- Gretchen Vermeis



Darth Maul

by Lauren Foster

The Goodbye

by Ashley Lemke

The pain. All I could focus on was the pain. They assured me I would not feel anything, that I would be numb from the waist down, but they were wrong. The burning, tearing sensation was near constant now; as if the sins of my all years were coming together to punish me at once, wave after endless wave of unbearable pain.

"Okay, now lay back and rest for a moment, you're doing great!" The nurse said gently.

She wiped the hair back from my forehead with one hand and gave me a encouraging smile while her other hand still placed under my knee, ready for the next contraction. Her kind face, had such a reassuring expression, I felt I could almost believe her and start to relax, she grasped my right hand and look back towards the doctor, waiting for the signal. On my left side was my mom, grasping my hand tightly, almost too tightly, but she remained silent while facing the head of my bed, eyes squeezed shut and her lips pursed so hard it looked as though she didn't have any at all.

"Now" said the Doctor, " just one more time; sit up, take a deep breath and push as hard as you can."

I did as instructed and bore down with every bit of strength I had. Just when I didn't think I couldn't give anymore, the doctor exclaimed " It's a boy!"

My head fell back against the pillow. I was both exhausted and breathless; scared yet excited. The doctor cut the umbilical cord, the nurse offered her congratulations as my son let out that first cry. She then jumped into action getting the baby cleaned up, weighed, measured and warmed up. Everyone in the room was in good spirits it seemed and I tried to sit up and catch a glimpse of my sons face but I could not see past the nurse so I lay back down. I look instead back to my mom who was still grasping my hand just as tight, still looking away from all the activity but I could not see her face either, her head was down and her face hidden by the mass of long dark waves of her hair.

"Mom" I whispered and shook her hand. She didn't move.

"I can't" she said in a barely audible voice, " I cannot look at him."

She suddenly pulled her hand out of my and briskly walked out of the

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room, still looking down, hair still hiding her eyes. As I watched her go, the kind faced nurse came back to check on me, told me to get some rest and not to worry because the baby was doing great. Within a few moment the room was empty and silent. Somehow I managed to drift off to sleep. The only visitors I would receive that night were the check up from the nurses.

A few hours later, I awoke and made the decision that I needed to see my son. I had been advised not to as seeing him would make everything harder but I missed him already. I hit the call button and in a few moments the nurse came in carrying in my baby, all swaddled up, and placed him in my arms.

He was the picture of perfection! He lay so still and we quietly observed each others faces. His eyes were a deep ocean blue; his soft smooth skin had a slightly pink hue to it and he had a few wisps of light brown hair on the top of his head. I just barely unwrapped the blanket to find his hand and when I found it his tiny wrinkled fingers instantly grasped my finger. He was beautiful and so much more than I could have ever hoped for. Now I understood the advice I had been given, this indeed would make everything harder but I was determined to have a few precious moments with him. There were no regrets as I held him closer and whispered in his ear everything I needed him to know.

"I am your mom and you are my son. I am the first to hold you, to hug you, to hold your hand and the first to tell you 'I love you'. You will always be my son, you were never unwanted and will never be forgotten. I am truly sorry and I hope one day you will forgive me."

Through tear filled eyes, I watched him drift off to sleep. My heart was overfilled with a love stronger than I have ever felt and a dark despair knowing these moments would have to last me a lifetime.

The next morning arrived too quickly. Our time was over and my nightmarish reality continued. My son had been taken back to the nursery and I was given the okay to go home. My mom had finally returned to drive me home. She walked in as I was packing my bags. I turned to her, tears streaming down my face and begged her to change her mind; to stop what was about to happen.

"I can't leave him behind, he's my son, he belongs with me."

She hugged me tight for a moment but only for a moment. "It's too late" she said. "Everything is set, paperwork is ready. This is for the best, for you and him." She grabbed my bags and went down to get the car.

Once again, I was left alone in silence, defeated. Helpless. There were no options for me, I was only fifteen. My mom had told me if I didn't give him up for adoption, I would have to leave the house. We had just moved to this town and I didn't know anyone. Everything in my world was spiraling out of control and I could do nothing.

The hospital attendant came to take me downstairs. She helped me into the wheelchair and the rest of my few belongings. I was wheeled out of the room and down the hallway. As if leaving was not hard enough, we had to go past the nursery to get to the elevator. I didn't not have the strength to look up for fear I might see him again but I could not shut out the sound of a baby cry-

ing. Suddenly drowning in guilt, I knew it was his cry. He needed me and I was leaving. I felt like the worst mother in history. The attendant saw my tears and tried to move faster but it was too late, my heart was now completely broken. Once downstairs, the older woman tried to sound cheerful, commenting on what a beautiful day it was and how unusually hot it was for mid September. I looked at her but did not reply. She looked like the typical grandmother, short with kind eyes and silver curled hair. She smiled at me with kindness and I could see the pity in her eyes. I knew she was only trying to help so I gave a small smile back but I could care less about the weather. I felt cold on the inside; everything was out of place. The world was different somehow, I was different. I had come to the hospital a young woman, became a mother, and now, leaving as a ghost.

The next few weeks passed by without much acknowledgement from me; I did little else but sleep. I had no desire to anything and barely the energy to do what was necessary. Details went unnoticed and my senses were numb. I could look but I could not see; I could listen but I did not hear, touch but not feel. There was an emptiness that could not be filled. I was completely depressed and I did not feel I deserved to be happy again.

My condition must have bothered my mother on some level. She tried little things to cheer me up but only ended up frustrated at the failed attempts. Even the cute little pomeranian she brought home did little to lift my mood. Of course naming the dog "Baby" did not help matters. One afternoon, she returned home with the only friend I had left, Amy. Amy had been the only one to remain friends with me. She stood by my side, went with me everywhere, yelled at those who stared and defended me against the rude comments. I was truly grateful for her loyalty.

"Amy" my mother said, " could you go down and pack a few things up for her?"

Amy gave a knowing look at me, she knows how my mother can be and replied with a simple "Sure can."

My mother then sat down on the other end of the couch I was laying on, folded her hands in her lap and looked at me.

"You need to get out for a while. Just sitting here depressed and feeling sorry for yourself is not healthy and won't do you any good. Instead of acting as if the world is ending, realize you have given yourself a second chance to do something with your life. I want you to go stay with Amy for awhile, hang out, go places, just do something and try to have fun. You really need to move on with your life."

I could only stare back at her. There were no words for a reply. I know she loved me and this poor communication came some form of concern but this woman had become like a stranger to me. I had always looked up to, believed in and found comfort in her like any young child does. Since her divorce a few years ago however, she found her single and independent side. She was done being a wife and a mother and all the responsibilities that go with those titles. Perhaps it was the new freedom from being a full time parent that lead her

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give me the choice to give him up or get out. Now, she was only a mother to me because I was born to her, not because of her actions and in that moment I began to hate her. With everything I had, I began to despise her for her selfishness, for making me give up my child, for pretending that nothing had happened, for not being there and most of all, I hated her for making me hate myself.

I felt the anger rise up and my eyes started to burn but I was determined not to cry this time. She shifted uncomfortably and got up. Maybe she was uncomfortable with my anger or sensed my feelings of betrayal. She even may have felt some sort of guilt or perhaps she just wanted to forget and move on. I know that I will never know for sure and I will not receive any sort of apology. She will bury this with the rest of her demons as she has many times before. A day may come when I could forgive her but as of this moment, I don't think that will happen. I can not even for see forgiving myself until I hear my son say that he has forgiven me.

In the midst of these thoughts, Amy walks back in with a bag full of my clothes. Without a word, I stand up and walk to the front door. I don't even look up as my mother thanks Amy for being a good friend and I barely hear the words my mother and I always parted with, "I love you." I close my eyes, take a deep breath, slip into my shoes and step out into the bright October sunshine.



Untitled

by Katie Sauer

Eros

Day after day
he saw her
Day after day
he spoke with her
Day after day
she smiled with him.

He wanted more
than just a friend
The soft melody of a stream
that came from her mouth
awakened his heart

He smiled and spoke
looking into her emerald eyes
Again he was lost
listening to her voice.
he wanted to say
the fire in his heart

Day by day
he lost the light
Day by day
he begged to tell her
Day by day
he died inside.

He saw her again
his heart began to race
He spoke to her,
exposed his heart
opened himself to the knife

She smiled when he spoke
not expecting his words
She knew what she must do
She told him the truth
regretting the words,
crying as his heart felt her knife

Day to day
he was her friend
Day to day
he wanted to wait
Day to day
he knew it was over.

She opened the door
He appeared as a god
he had grown to a man
Now her heart was torn
His love forgotten

He looked at her,
She was as Athena
Strong in beauty
forbidden to all
He turned once more
then began again.

- Ethan Annen

The 12-step program to “Happily Ever After”

by Arabella Chamberlain

I write to you as the leading expert and foremost authority on a rather important topic.

How to “fancy” someone or have a “crush” and ~~completely screw up everything and fall madly in love.~~

Yes, folks. Today and today, only, will you learn how to, not only, have a crush, but also, how to ~~be crushed because he’s never gonna like you anyway.~~

Correction: How to win the guy (or girl) of your dreams.

I present to you:

The 12-step program to “Happily Ever After”!

This is a surefire way to guarantee eternal love and happiness.

(Disclaimer: If it doesn’t work, something must be wrong with you.)

(Also, I’m going use a “him” for the purpose of this program, but feel free to try this with anyone/anything else. Girls, chocolate, celebrities, (because they obviously deserve a distinction from us other mortal beings.) chocolate... Hmmm... Chocolate or chocolate or apacas... Whatever works.)

Step 1:

Find someone to become infatuated with. Don’t be picky.

Step 2:

Be infatuated by him.

Step 3:

Learn and memorize his schedule. Follow him around everywhere. Stra-

tegitally place yourself in his life. Rush to open doors for him, knock his books out of his hands, then rush to help pick them up; make sure he sees you. Do not engage, though.

Step 4:

Create a shrine and put it in a secret room. (I'm not responsible for building costs. Don't bill me.) Include things such as locks of hair, any garbage he throws out, and a picture with lots of ~~ominous and creepy~~ sweet-smelling candles, all lit.

Step 5:

Buy a blowup doll of him and practice making out. You need to be prepared in case he suddenly decides to kiss you.

Step 6:

You are now ready to move on to verbal interaction. Sit next to him without asking and say these magic words:

"So I've seen you watching me. I notice how you get nervous when I walk by. You always seem like you wanna say something to me, but can't quite get the words out. It's okay. I understand. You're too nervous to ask. I'll just come right out and say it. I'm not really available right now but since you insist I can work something out. I'd love to go out on a date with you this Friday, say 8? See you then!"

Then, calmly leave the table and don't give him a chance to tell you how grateful he is for this opportunity.

Step 7:

Now, it's time to study up. Head home, get online and look up all his social media accounts. Then, read and *like/favorite* every single post or tweet ever made by him. Also, take notes on all his likes and dislikes. Memorize these. There will be a quiz.

Step 8:

Prep time! The big night is approaching fast. Plan to not do anything other than prep on Friday. Cancel all other plans. (School, work, major responsibilities and commitments.) You need to be rested.

Step 9:

Spend the entire day getting ready. Do your hair. Put on your outfit. De-

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Decide you hate that outfit. Change. Realize you messed up your hair while changing. Redo your hair. Put on your makeup. Decide you don't like anything except your makeup. Change. Realize you messed up your makeup. Redo everything.

Repeat.

Step 10:

Wait for him to arrive. When he doesn't show up by midnight, decide he must be super forgetful. How adorable. Go to his house and throw rocks at the window 'til he realizes his mistake.

Step 11:

When he angrily rushes to the window, reschedule. If he shows up, continue to step 12. If not, repeat steps 8 through 11 'til successful.

Step 12:

Enjoy the date. Be yourself. Maybe he'll ask you out again. Maybe not. If he does ask you out again, success! You've now completed the 12-step program to "Happily Ever After". If he doesn't ask you out again, though, he's a fool for not seeing how great you are. Move on and repeat the steps with someone else.

Or fall in love the old fashioned way.

And that concludes the 12-step program to "Happily Ever After".



Surrealism in Egypt

by Samantha Poe

I Told Morning Not to Breathe

I told morning not to breathe,
let night water me
in a jetty seascape,
the raven
welkin.

I told morning not to etch
a sun on my skin,
coffee grounds in
my hair, nylons for
Sunday noon.

I told morning not to bring
me a daffodil's touch,
drowning me
in her sunlit
corset.

I told morning not to offer
early birds, golden
braids, breakfast
and
books.

I told morning not to weep
when I summon
dusk, writing love
notes to heaven, stuffing
them in my shoes.
Satori is a verse
inked in ebony trees
not the pomegranate hues
of an early rise.

- Samantha Poe

We've Got Water

by Tom Padilla

One hour ago, Peter had been on the dock, watching his two-year-old toddle around, listening to his wife say again and again that this was not a good idea. But the way she would say the word, it came out "idear." They had been married for eight years, she was the only woman for him, he worshipped the ground she walked on, and he still was consistently irritated by her accent. Those hidden hostilities seemed so far away now.

"Honey, Jesse has been out to sea so much he has to get land legs when he goes ashore. He knows what he's doing out there. This is going to be fun." Somewhere in that statement his voice had shrilled, and he thought of the old woman in a Flannery O'Connor story he had read as a freshman in high school. God, where did that come from, he had wondered.

Over the course of forty-five minutes, from the point they put her on board, Simone was a barrage of complaints and worries, concerns and what-ifs. Jesse had assured Simone and Peter as they all watched the toddler playing with his rubber shark. He told them all would be well; he counted the many times he had had toddlers and children on his ship. He rolled his eyes at every one of Simone's vagaries and hypotheses. Then fifteen minutes ago the unthinkable had happened. Jesse had discovered the serious leak in the hull.

It had come upon them like a summer storm. Jesse had gone below to fetch a 7-Up since Simone had worried herself into a stomach ache. Peter was just thinking that the captain had been gone a little too long when he heard Jesse's voice say, "Shit." Fatality rang in its expression, ice cold panic that admitted no relief. Something had gone terribly wrong, and would stay that way or worsen, Peter knew, from the sound of that one word, "Shit."

Jesse was up out of the hold like a frightened child. "We've got water, we've got water," was all he was able to say in a hurried murmur, almost like a prayer. He hustled off somewhere in a frenzy of wasted nervous energy. Peter walked to the gangway and peered down. The look on his face immediately set Simone to whining, a Cheyenne death-song kind of whine, and the toddler for the first time dropped his rubber shark and ran to her. They both had tears on their faces by the time Peter was able to look up from the gangway, where water would soon

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come pouring, and fix his stunned gaze on them. "We've got water."

"Life vests!" Jesse was shouting. "Where the fuck are the life vests? What the fuck?!" Peter stopped listening to him and turned toward the shore. He could not see it. He had no idea they had traveled so far so quickly into the maw of the Pacific. The blue sky above seemed friendly enough, the sun just warm enough, not hot, not hot. He looked at Simone and he knew she knew. Her hug upon the toddler amounted to a grip; she looked like she was hurting the poor thing.

"Come here," he said, surprisingly calm, and the child seemed to know Peter was speaking to him. A look that spoke of determination crawled across its face, and slowly the toddler pretzeled its way off of Simone's wheelchair and toward the sound of his father's voice. Peter picked him up. "My, what a big boy." The frown that had clamped the child's mouth since Simone started her Cheyenne death whine flickered into a smile, but only briefly. Peter kissed his child and tossed his hair, windblown, already long for a child not yet three.

How had the boat gone down, how had they lost Jesse? He did not remember. Everything just collapsed into itself in a dizzying vortex of ugly physical reality. Too soon the waters that soaked his feet were choking his mouth, too long it seemed before his hand was able to pry the doughnut from the wall where it had stood unused for what he imagined must have been years. At one point he knew he had two of the flotation devices in his arms and he clearly remembered giving Simone one of these life preservers, he clearly remembered her having it in her arms, but as the clashing sucking end of the boat's surface existence came and the sea settled again into a peaceful doze, the flotsam that dotted the flat green seascape showed no sign of existence.

No one alive except him and the boy.

They floated on a sea that seemed almost kindly as it caressed and floated them upon itself, the boy perched precariously on the center of the lifebuoy with legs inside the circle, the man holding tenuously to the side of what on the boat at the pier had seemed a generous allotment of buoyant material.



Untitled

by Meghan Scott

The First Time

I remember the first time like it was yesterday,
You held my hand.
Struggling to get out of the room and down the hall

The monitors beeping
The sounds of whispers in rooms I passed

Poked and Prodded with needles
Like a pin cushion
You brushing the tears from my cheeks

The nights so long, no energy inside myself
Hope and pray you did every minute
That the Cancer Doctor was wrong

I was always the one sleeping
You with none, making sure I was breathing

Feeling your warm energy
Who would've ever knew?
You had every right to break down

But still nothing less than a smile
To reassure me I was okay

No one thought I was going to make it
You would never take that answer

The day finally came
I was so happy to be going home
Seventeen days straight in that bed

You never did leave me once,
You kept me alive

Always there for me bedside
My hands in yours, tied.

You make me the person I am today
You were the one who kept me going

- Jehovia Miniel

Untitled

goddamn your chemical reactions to hell
stop undermining my decisions
me shaking my head whenever u tell
me i am absent of free fucking will
GODDAMN your chemical reactions
let me live and breath in peace!
don't size me down to some speck of a piece
of NOTHING nothing but some chemicals fizzing
savn tis not emotion of the heart but some serotonin sizzling
so what if it's true goddamn ya for sharing
i consider your oration on the subject quite oversparing
wearing yourself down to some niche in the cellar
making a lump of black tar of what used to be stellar
wats culture wats art
to a vulture like you
overcircling my carcass like some beached Shamoo
poopooing my tastes my loves my wastes
debased as a spirit only atoms to taste
Atom izing and taking up space
Maybe you could say
that grants us some freedom..as they may claim
but it sure as hell gives us no reason to let freedom pervade
To try and grasp that which to us can't be pleasing
free will lacking as it does
only to the elements do i put effort into appeasing

- Whitney Wildman

Fiction

Honorable Mention

Flash

by Arabella Chamberlain

I ran. All the time. Especially since “it” happened. Since “it” happened, I kept seeing him. He was everywhere, in the halls, with my friends, *in my nightmares...*

I used to be the fastest runner around. I could outrun everyone, even the guys, but as my feet pounded down on the pavement with an insatiable thump, I couldn't seem to outrun this.

“I’m gonna go get a beer,” Alicia said. It was a typical Saturday night at the William’s house. The William family had a complicated parental living relationship, which tended to lead to an empty house on the weekends. Or so they thought. Every week without fail, a party went down at the Williams’ residence, hosted by the two “perfect” sons of the beloved William’s. This week, they decided to go all out because it was one of the William boy’s girlfriend’s birthday. Talk about a mouthful. But any chance, they could get, the William’s “went big or went home.” The whole school was there, even the wimpy freshmen who’d never even been kissed before, let alone knocked back a few beers. It was not an event to miss.

The William’s were not ones for anything less than grandiose. Their house was certainly a testament to that. The three-story Victorian era mansion was roomy even with an entire high school of kids packed in. The bass reverberated in your soul. The smell of alcohol was rancid. Bodies smashed against each other in a synchronized surge by the DJ.

I jogged past the grocery store.

As I waited for my friend to return, I wandered around and mingled, flit-

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ting between polite acquaintances and old friends. Eventually though, it appeared as though my friend was off flirting with that cute senior she liked. I decided to find myself a quiet corner and watch the intense game of beer pong taking place, when he walked over. We'd been friends since grade school. We'd lived on the same block since I'd moved in as the "freaky new girl" when I was 9. He'd been one of the first people to actually talk to me. Since then, we'd been in some classes together, here and there, and we even briefly dated our freshman year, but some people started a rumor that Nick was banging all the girls on the cheerleading squad and things got weird. Besides, he'd always felt like more of a big brother to me. Outside of that, Nick and I didn't hang out much anymore.

I picked up my pace as I rounded the corner by the high school.

"Hey Flash, haven't seen you in a while." Nick said, using his nickname for me, after my childhood comic book character obsession.

"I could say the same to you." I teased.

We'd always kinda been like this, taunting each other and bickering, like siblings, but after Sophomore year, Nick changed and something was never the same between us. Nevertheless, I missed hanging out with him.

"So how've you been?" Nick inquired, plopping down on the couch next to me.

"I've been pretty good. How about yourself?" I asked.

"I just got dumped by my girlfriend." Nick blushed, scratching his neck.

"Oh, sorry to hear that," I responded, placing a sympathetic hand in his arm.

"It's okay, I'm kinda hung up on someone else anyway." Nick glanced up at me with some feeling I couldn't quite place.

--

After talking for what seemed like hours, it seemed as though Alicia had gone off with dream boy to "have some fun" and I realized I need to use the bathroom.

After asking Nick to watch my stuff and starting towards the bathroom, I realized I had no idea where it was. Three years, I'd been coming to these shindigs, and I'd never used the bathroom!

And then, it happened. Everything slowed down. The music became a dull, thump. The air stilled and I was left unable to move. "SPLOSH!" I had a red solo cup of beer down my shirt. The warm sticky liquid seeped into my skin, as my black bra appeared under my light blue tee-shirt. I debated what to do.

I could leave the party. Or maybe I go to the restroom and clean up? Or look for a spare shirt in my car? But due to the alcoholic nature of the spill, heading home seemed implausible as my parents would string me up like a Christmas turkey, for drinking. And I still didn't know where the bathroom was. Plus, I left my purse by Nick so I decided to head back to him.

My pulse quickened. I kept running.

Upon reaching Nick again, he appeared to be chatting with one of his soccer mates. As I approached, he and "soccer dude" were just parting ways. When Nick noticed my return his first response was hysterical laughter, followed by an

apology for being a jerk about me perma-smelling like beer for the next week. Seeing my predicament, he offered to get me a clean shirt from Ellie's room. She's the William boys' older sister who was off at college. She'd seen her fair share of ruined shirts so she usually didn't mind if anyone borrowed some of her old ones. Nick always seemed to have the inside track on everything and everyone. So I grabbed my stuff and followed Nick.

I ran past the William's house, my breathing getting shallow.

"So are you dating anyone now?" Nick asked, nonchalantly.

"No, not really. I just need a break from all the drama right now. It's too much of a commitment."

"Yeah, I get you. Some people are so needy in relationships."

"Absolutely, I just hate that." I grumbled. After going all the way to the third floor, we finally reached Ellie's room.

I kept running.

When we went in Ellie's room, I immediately rushed to her bathroom to rinse my shirt and take a much-needed restroom break and Nick went in search of a shirt for me.

"Hey, need any help in there?" Nick asked.

"I think I've got it."

"You sure?" he insisted.

"Yeah," I called back.

After washing my hands and removing my beer-stained shirt and bra, I heard a knock on the door, and two seconds too soon, the door opened.

"Hey, do you think you'll fit a— Ohmygosh, I'm so sorry!" Nick sputtered out, while trying to avert his eyes. He snuck a quick peek at me as he held out a XS tee shirt that I only dreamed about fitting.

"It's okay," I said as I bumbled around, looking for a towel, "just give me a—"

And then, in a flash, he jumped at me, and he kissed me, with such intensity.

I couldn't breathe.

His dry lips chafed against my mouth as he tried to devour me. His hands were all over me. I was exposed. With Ellie's tee shirt lying discarded on the ground, I couldn't do anything. It felt so good and yet, everything was so wrong. He was attacking me, with a ferocity. I didn't want kiss Nick, no offense to him, but I wasn't into him. I didn't want this.

The soles of my shoes grinded into the ground with each step.

"No, no, wait a second," I said breaking away. "What are you doing?" I fumbled for the tee shirt as I held my arm protectively over my exposed chest. Once I had a hold of it, I held it to my body like a security blanket.

"I've been waiting all night to get you alone," he whispered with a wicked grin.

I pushed myself to run faster, faster than I've ever run.

"Just slow down," I breathed, "Plea—"

"You're so cute when you're reluctant." Nick sighed. He started to kiss me

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again despite my protests. I felt his sweaty palms, manhandling my ass. I should've worn a burlap sack today instead of the new skinny jeans I just bought. As I struggled against him, he still somehow managed to carry me back to the bedroom and unbutton my jeans. I couldn't think. I know I should scream and shout but this didn't make sense. I wanted to kick and thrash and scream bloody murder, but—I couldn't. I was outside my body. I felt nothing and yet, everything at once. He unzipped his pants.

There it was. His house.

He shoved me roughly to the bed and pinned me down with his knees.

With one hand he clamped his sweaty palm over my mouth.

I hate him.

I couldn't do anything. I was at his mercy.

I ran. Like I was on fire.

I quit struggling. Tears poured down my face.

Like the world depended on me.

How had this happened?

I felt the vomit begin to rise in my throat.

Why was he doing this?

I saw a crack in the sidewalk.

"Stop fighting, Flash. I know you've liked me for a long time."

I saw it, but it didn't make sense.

He ripped open my legs.

The crack got closer and closer. I know I should do something like slow

down.

He wouldn't slow down.

Then it happened.

Then it happened.

It all fell apart.

I passed out.

--

When I woke, I felt disoriented. I was confused. Something didn't feel right in my gut. I rolled over in the bed, only to bump into him. I pulled away. I pulled far away, into the deep recesses of everything "before."

Startled, I rushed around trying to gather up my things. And more importantly, my soul.

"Hey, wait a minute, Flash." he grumbled groggily, awakened by my flurry of activity.

"Don't—Don't call me that—ever again." I gasped for air. I wasn't supposed to be here. I'm supposed to be in my warm, comfy bed. At home.

--

I ran. I ran 'til my feet bled. I ran 'til I couldn't feel my legs. I ran 'til I didn't exist.

--

When I stood, I hurt. It all hurt. In the fall, I scraped my knee. Now, the crack in the pavement made sense. Everything made sense. I needed to stop

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before the crack. Too late now. I had fallen. I was irreparable. Broken.

I got angry. At myself. *At him*. At life. At the ignorance. At what I'd lost.

At what he'd taken.

I stood up, brushed myself off and ran straight to the police department.

It hurt.

Everything hurt.

“Hello, I'd like to report a crime.”

Please

Beep, beep, beep.

30 minutes have passed and you still haven't opened your eyes.

Beep, beep, beep.

50 minutes and your breath is still shallow.

Beep, beep, beep.

120 minutes and I see your hand twitch with hope.

Beep, beep, beep.

163 minutes and I'm concentrated on the IV that is plugged into you.

Beep, beep, beep.

175 minutes and the nurse tells me I have to leave, so she can take vitals.

Beep, beep, beep.

187 minutes and I listen through the door.

Beep, beep, beep.

219 minutes and I'm by your side again holding your cool hand.

Beep, beep, beep.

235 minutes and I'm telling you about my day.

.....Silence.

264 minutes and I'm being carried out of the room, sobbing.

Beep, beep, beep.

270 minutes holding onto hope.

...More silence.

281 minutes and your gone.

- Katie Sauer

Note

by Mavrik McMeekan

Have you ever thought of beauty as evil? Ever looked into the eyes of something you wanted desperately and thought it was dark? It took me a long time, but now I can't see it in any way but.

When I was thirteen I lived with my mom in a small apartment in a no name town. My father had left us a long time ago and we pretended like he hadn't ever existed. That was okay. When she was home we would pass the time watching T.V. or playing board games. Doing whatever we could to keep our mind off the cold invading the apartment or the hunger in our bellies.

One night, in the middle of some game, there was a knock at the door. My mother went to it, looked out the crow's eye, and told me to go to my room. She looked scared. I went to my room and sat in the dark, trying to listen. There was a man. Their voices were low and hushed, so I could only hear the harsher syllables of their dialogue. I opened my door just a little and peaked out.

The man was tall and in a suit. A very proper looking man with slicked back black hair and an intelligent face. He was sitting in one of our torn arm-chairs, drinking old tea out of a chipped cup. The way he moved, you'd have thought our place was a castle.

I still couldn't get the bulk of the conversation but they were talking about some deal. My mom still looked scared. I didn't know why. The man looked nice; even kind. He repeatedly flashed a pearly grin and was comfortable, even in the realm of our discomfort. Seeing him made me feel right.

They talked for several minutes and I watched the whole time, entirely enthralled. I shut my door as he left and my mom came to get me. I asked her who had come and she told me not to worry about it.

When I was sixteen, we had moved up in the world; owning a shitty house in a small town. I went to school each day and tried to avoid getting made fun of for my cheap clothes. And one day, I met a girl.

She was beauty incarnate. With the perfect cascade of autumn hair and the neatest pair of green-brown eyes. Her body was slim. We met in some class; I don't remember which now. It started as small talk and then hanging out and then a date. I remember how right she made me feel. She didn't care about my clothes or my house. I desperately loved her.

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When I was twenty two I graduated college and found a job as an architect. It took me ages, but I had found what I wanted to do. I wanted to build beauty. I looked at the work of other architects, looked at the practical palaces they had made. They made me feel right. And I realized if I looked inside hard enough, I wanted to chase that beauty and capture it. Make it my own.

When I was twenty eight I ran into that girl again. Her beautiful autumn hair had withered and spotted, her eyes had sunken in and became purple. Most of her teeth were missing. I never cried as hard as I did that night.

When I was thirty three I made a building in New York. It was commended as a beauty. Something to last through the ages. I was called a visionary; a revolutionary. I didn't feel anything, so I continued to chase the beauty. When I was thirty five I was being interviewed on my buildings, where my ideas came from, and how I was able to reinvigorate the skyline. I didn't know how to answer these questions.

When I was forty I saw one of the buildings that had inspired me in my youth. Truly saw it, not a picture in a book or online, but truly saw it in person. It was run down and forgotten, tucked into a lost corner of some ancient city. The stone was crumbling and vines had overtaken the bulk of it. Weeds crawled forth from cracks running through the foundation.

There was a sign that said no trespassing, I ignored it.

The inside was deserted, save for the plants. They swayed back and forth, caught in the hypnotic rhythm of some draft. The wind groaned like a ghost as I patrolled the ancient halls. Only a single word hung in my head like a burial shroud.

Ugly.

And I realized that everything becomes ugly. Wear and life beats them down. And so I feared time. For ten years I feared time, that great thief of all things gorgeous; of all things right.

Until I realized that beauty is evil. How beauty has provided nothing but pretty sight. How all my work has been for nothing. Nothing. So now I sit in my beautiful home in my beautiful city with an ugly gun and ugly bullets in front of me.

It is the only option.

Plow Jockey

The summer sun scorches
his dry, rough fingers
as he digs at the earth.
Dirt scattering beneath his feet
like a plague of poverty,
he stands alone. His ripped pants
barely keep his brown coins safe.
He pauses to rub their rusty faces together-
he beats the earth once more.
His fingertips quietly dripping blood
like small drops of morphine.

- Gretchen Vermeis

Thursday the 12th Unless Tomorrow is More Convenient

by Heidi West

*I'm dead. No, wait. I'm thinking about death. I think, therefore I am . . .
alive?*

As I creep into consciousness with eyelids too heavy lift, my senses mercilessly inform me that I am suspended on a cold, damp wall. I try to ignore the muffled screams of my wrists and ankles only to be overwhelmed by a hot, burning sensation on my face. Faint, sickening moans challenge me to open my eyes. When I finally gather the courage to do so, I am greeted by a claustrophobic room choked by darkness; light is provided only by two eerily glowing sconces. Also, all seven of my recently-murdered friends hang on parallel walls. However, they, too, are not dead. And their faces are peeled off. Inferably due to exhaustion, most of them squirm lethargically in their bonds, wheezing, groaning and keeping their eyes shut. The exception is the most popular girl in school, Gale Jensen, who is staring straight at me with wide, wild eyes. On a typical day, this would have given me butterflies, but the lighting is wrong for the mood and her guttural hacking noises are a bit of a turn-off.

“How’s it going?” I croak facetiously, wincing with every syllable. Despite the fleshy, oozing state of her face, she manages to retain a stone expression.

“We are getting out of here,” she whispers forcefully and then yanks her body forward. The metal clasps supporting her pop open, dropping her to the floor. She then pries mine open with a new-found strength and proceeds to help the others. Yay, I think, though my celebration seems somehow insincere. Perhaps it is because of the suffocating fear, panic, and all together life-threatening situation. But I suspect the musty smell.

When all of us are free, we trudge to the exit through the dimness, some of us able to walk while others lean on Gale or me for support. Just as I reach for the handle, the door flings open. A hideously scarred face is illuminated in the threshold. I hold my breath. Then the man goes full banshee, flailing his

arms and whaling psychotically. He pulls out a knife from his pocket and lunges toward me. Ok, now I'm for sure going to die, I think, feeling validated. But again, I end up not dead because Gale kicks the back of his knee, grabs his knife, and stabs his face. Without a word, the group finds its way out of the house.

"This is our fault," I reflect thoughtfully as we limp into daylight. With shock encouraging me, I continue philosophical exploration. "In middle school, we played a prank on that weird kid at that party but it went wrong and he got skinned alive, remember? He must have survived and came back for revenge." Hobbling beside me, Gale gives me a look that I can only guess is skeptical; the defective nerves make it difficult to interpret.

"What on Earth are you talking about?"

I sigh, embracing the heavy burden of my consequences, "We all got our faces ripped off because we were cruel. Karma, man." Gale's eyes narrow and she shares an even less interpretable look with some of the more conscious of the group.

"That guy just now?"

"Yeah," I answer.

"The guy I just stabbed in the face?"

"Uh-huh."

"He was, like, thirty."

"What?"

"And that kid you're talking about. Pete?"

"Oh yeah! Pete! What a freak."

"Yeah. He's in, like, five of your classes."

I glance skeptically at her. Then George, finally able to cough up an interjection, says,

"Dude, you were shrooming pretty hard at that party."

I consider this. After nine seconds, I declare, "That does seem more likely. So who was that other dude?" Gale shrugs. George shrugs. I shrug. We all suffer from PTSD for the rest of our lives.

Your Grandmother Hates Paul McCartney

1. Soft winds flip a stained yellow dress
hanging on a line
 back and forth
 back and forth
 lub, dub, lub, dub.

You're standing still,
unsure if your feet
are frozen to the ground or if
you simply have nowhere to go.

2. You remember how your grandmother
made you recite the names of every ancestor
you had- some dead for over 140 years.
She smacked you across the face
when you said it was stupid, unnecessary.

You were seventeen when cookie-
cutter houses started to pop up,
like a line of beheaded Jack-in-the Boxes.
You decided to chop off your long black hair
and get a tattoo of Paul McCartney.

Sometimes when you drive down hot asphalt,
the vibrations of the car taking you further away,
you can still feel the hot sting on your left cheek.

- Gretchen Vermeis

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Visual Art

Honorable Mention



Merlin

by Calista Kern-Lyons



Sauk Valley
Community College