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Kate 2014 Spring

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Otterbein University

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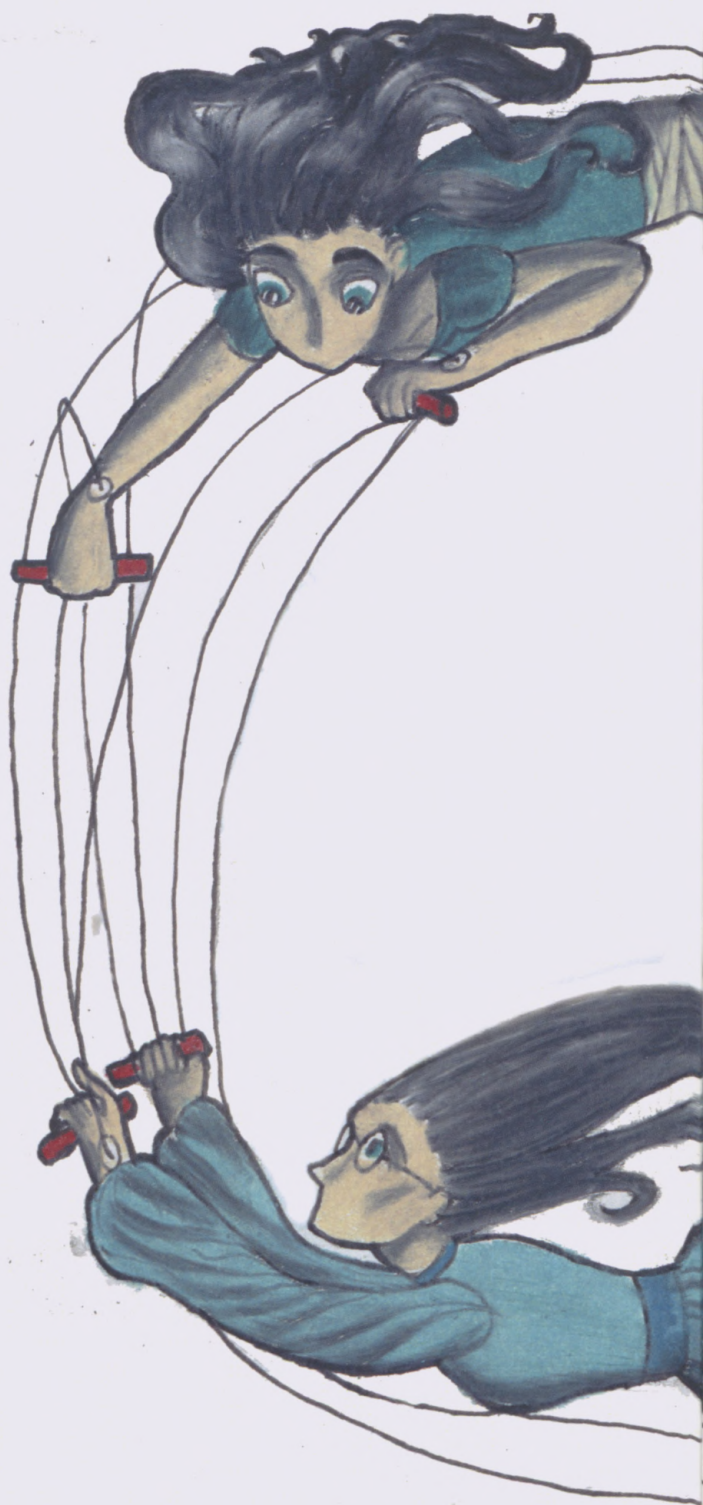
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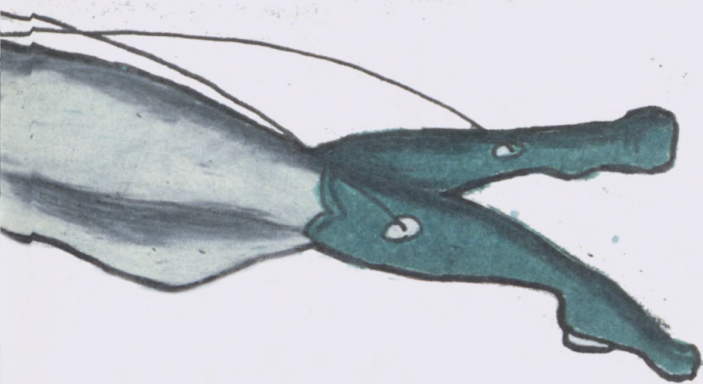
KATE

OBSESSION



Otterbein's Feminist Zine
Spring 2014





KATE

Otterbein's Feminist Zine
Spring 2014

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Darlings,

Working on kate has been sheer pleasure. Together, we subvert, we re-imagine, we dream. Best of all, we write. From our writing workshop to our weekly meetings, we have had a blast together. The 'zine that we have built together unquestionably reflects that.

Our appreciation goes out to Tammy Birk, our advisor and biggest dreamer.

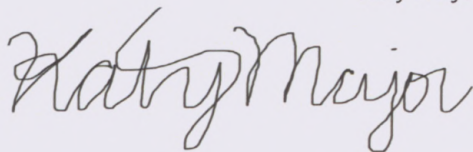
And of course, we want to extend a gracious thank-you to each and every member of our dedicated staff. In short: we are obsessed with you all.

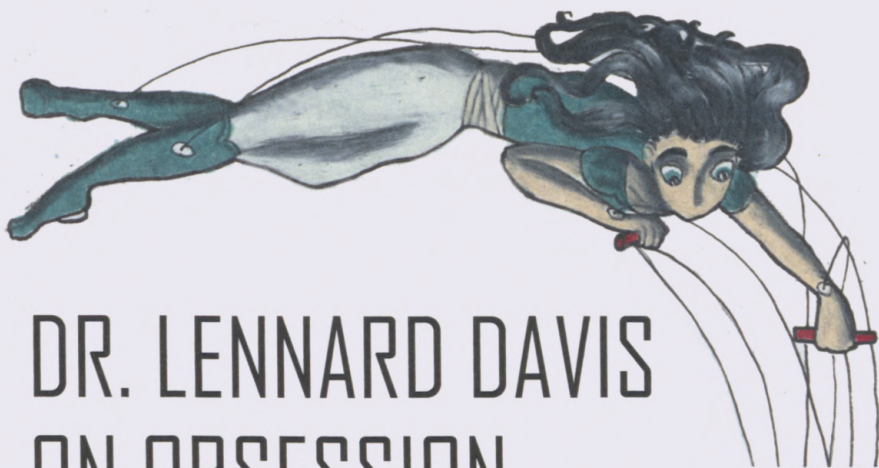
XOXO,

Jess Campbell

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jess Campbell". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "J" and a long, trailing "l".

Katy Major

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katy Major". The script is cursive and elegant, with a large "K" and a long, flowing "y".



DR. LENNARD DAVIS ON OBSESSION

Dr. Lennard J. Davis, renowned disability studies scholar and author of Obsession: A History-- as well as The Disability Studies Reader and other works of disability scholarship-- visited Otterbein University this spring for the Integrated Studies department's Symposium on Disability. Our KATE editors had the opportunity to talk obsession and disability over a cup of Westerville's own java.

J: *What led you to this work with obsession?*

LD: I was having a very random English professor thought. I thought, 'there's something that feels different about the 18th-century novel'--you know, Jane Austen, *Moby-Dick*, Dostoyevsky--in the middle of the century, something happened. What is that? I thought, 'characters are more obsessive...' I began to think *what is obsession?* I began to do literary research on it, but then I decided I had to know more about obsession: how it started and when it started.

K: *In Obsession: A History, you discuss the democratization of madness, and the language of madness. Do you see that as a positive thing or do you believe it creates a cultural misunderstanding of mental illness?*

LD: You can think of madness as a medical condition, or you can think about it as a very complex inter-reaction between neurochemicals, a physical feeling, emotions inside yourself that have no name that you have to give names to. The way that those inter-emotions affect you, and your family and friends, and how their emotions about your emotions create a complicated psychological, intellectual, philosophical problem... and you can either look at that and say, 'that's OCD', or you could look at

the complex configurations. Language is always searching. Now we call it depression, before we might have called it anxiety, we might have called it neurasthenia, we might have called it hysteria at other points. So, rather than thinking of these things like cholera—very defined—these things are culturally determined, individually determined, and inexact. We're obsessively trying to define people's various states, and we're also always failing.

I want to say one thing: When we say that someone's obsessed, there's the "good" way- 'I'm really obsessed about this guy, I'm obsessed about this work I'm doing, I'm obsessed about finding the car that's perfect for me.' The "bad" obsession is determined by culture. If you're a person who has to line shit up, put it in descending order—that's harmless. But if you're living with someone who says, 'that's driving me crazy. Why do you do that? Can't you stop?' And they're saying, 'I read about that somewhere—that's OCD.' Those scripts are out there, and they're out there for a reason. Women's magazines have checklists—you know, '10 Ways to Know if Your Partner is Depressed'— and they're paid for by drug companies. Those things are taught to us. In some cultures, there is no expectation that you'll be happy. In Greece, there's a tragic view of life—you're not supposed to be happy. But happiness is written into our Declaration of Independence. There's a default assumption in this country that you should be happy. And that's crazy.



Lennard J. Davis is Professor in the English Department in the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he had also served as Head. In addition, he is Professor of Disability and Human Development in the School of Applied Health Sciences of the University of Illinois at Chicago, as well as Professor of Medical Education in the College of Medicine.

www.lennarddavis.com

OBSESSION

kate is committed to interdisciplinary discourse and intersectional practice. In other words, we welcome work that explores and complicates not only our ideas about the study of women, gender, and sexuality, but also our ideas about the relationship between these subjects and other forms of social identity (i.e. race, ability, and class). We strive to build a pro-feminist 'zine—and Otterbein community—that risks new ways of thinking and speaking about gender and sexuality. We see *kate* as both a transformative and transgressive project. The 'zine is open to submissions that take any form: critical or creative, mainstream or experimental, verbal or visual.



GOODBYE, WINTER

Josh Brandon

You must know that I've tried to flourish in a place that has repeatedly told me I am never enough - that I will never escape its grasp. You must know I've spent an eternity wondering what I can give to this world and what I will get out of it. I've spent years locking myself away from the corn stalks and cow shit that littered a place with the potential to be beautiful, because I had to appease a population that didn't know gay, from pan, from asex, from bi, from queer faggity fag fag from straight. I've lived with a dead Father, emotionally dead Step-Father; Mother, that has never seen me at eye level because she's two inches shorter than me.

You must know that I deserve solace when I'm living a reality in which I constantly run from demons. You must know it's taken me years to realize that I am not the one responsible for my trauma. I've spent too many hours pandering to the notion that I'm half-person, half-hand-bag. I've spent too many hours being somebody's sassy gay best friend queer-homo-fagslut-fucktoy "let's go shopping" asshole to wait for approval that may not exist in your eyes.

You must know I've had to squelch my anger, because my voice sounds "really fucking gay" when I get passionate. You must know I've had to turn all this anger in on myself to the point where hot tears were the only things to put me to rest. I've had to sit in an orange-lit office offering up confessions and money just so somebody in the universe could hear me unskinned; my breakfast now comes in a teal-white capsule and is the only thing keeping me from carving runes into my body. You must know that the sun burns twice as bright in my eyes because it brings joy to those around while for me it melts snow in dark corners that covered shadows I cannot bear to see. If anything, you must know that despite my identity, I *am* capable of feeling - I'm still human.



VIRAL

Kari Highman

Beats pulsing through your veins
at the height of chaos
Minds race and hearts stop
If only for a moment
to see the light.

But before the dawn,
there must be darkness.
Another day passes by,
as the virus spreads.

Each thought is time ticking by;
every move is a game of chance.
The disease is potent, it's real:
obsession thrives inside of you,
Only to be seen by viral souls.



227.2.13.

Amelia Gramling

227 passengers, 13 nationalities, 2 infants tomorrow morning departed or will depart or are departing against the wee hours somehow different from mine, already lived, as simple as the when, these hopes I would or will still pin. Malaysian bound, I think, to the in between, the plane sits, steadies somewhere the rain and sleepy wind can't bear to hear again Hello? Hello? Report to ground control, Hello? This the heart-burst of the time-lapsed triangle zone. If we were honest, we would speak lost out loud. A piano-- tusk-wrought ivory forgetmenot is both sung and sings-- if we are honest, this too sounds like grief. If we are honest, the latitude-by-longitude-by-land-or-by-sea Columbian grid is imagined, is teeth-skin, the spillway of centuries come undone. The vertebrate shifted, the whale-sung-way-down-deep up-held beneath the soles of 227 lovers and birds born to cage or by clipped wing. 13 the headline reads. Would Facebook, its late night well-wishers, card-carriers of 140-character sympathies send as far or full their prayers if those 2 infants, 225 mothers, hunters, tellers, the others-- were singularly Korean? Sri-Lankan? Chinese? Sir, madam, excuse me --have you yet composed a demographic of blue-to-green-to-ink-blot-black lived lives through which the missing can or can no longer see? From The Washington Post I read this story, on the cusp of sleep, the lost or of the not yet un-found, the story that is not a story we can speak of, our ears as they are against the ground. I slept unreasoned, I slept anyway, I slept till just before the blue haze of wee hours bled yellow-morning the light. No one can dream of faces their hearts never will or haven't yet burnt ashen into the wood of their ribs, (2 infants, 13 different nationalities, 227 sitting, quiet now, against the ink-bidden sky). My dad still dreams sometimes of landing planes he, unlike his father, never flew atop green-brown islands, skirting just barely out from under the cut-Vietnam shadow like he did. If I have ever dreamt of flying it was two feet above my bed. I woke this morning, instead, to your face, the familiar cut grass and ginger fir-root caught against the lamplight of quickly-receding sleep. Before I thought better, I prayed the only prayer I am able, from a girl who puts too much stock in what she cannot dream, this affixed to tides, to trenches of trans-oceanic, unthinkable wind, a tragedy that is not mine. That is not spoken. That is not a poem at all. 227. 2 infants. 13 nations. Please, let their heads be buried in the crook

of a better dream, of a long lost love, of whoever they may arrive to see,
of a landing that comes with the warm beckon of the Westerlies and the
blessing of the sun rise I, even now, forget to see.



LOST OBJECT

Mackenzie Thomas

Clambering, Clanging, Clinging metal
Dragged across the wooden surface of the table.
She lifts me tenderly, curiously,
Searching for an answer to who I am, what I am.

She has not given me a name.
Almost all things on Earth have a name -
A tree, a horseshoe, a bullet, a smile -
But she has not given me a name.

Fingers tracing my corroded frame,
Curving and winding along my spine.
I may not be the smoothest now,
For time has withered and worn me.

She notices the coral texture of
My deteriorating body.

I am rusted a reddish brown
Though I remain an antique beauty
For metal that curves like a clover, or a snake
Surely means someone took their time on me.

What am I? Who am I?
An object without a name.

An object cannot name itself;
I was created by the hands of humans
So must be named by the lips of humans
Who had a specific and special purpose for me, but
Now in the present, I have lost my place.

I can see something on another table,
Another object like me,
With curvy and smooth metal like a snake,

Though not as wavy as I.
Could it be my lost counterpart?
My missing piece?
Will the two of us make a whole?
Will I then have a name?

No, my name is lost in these times.
I will not have a name
Given to me or found again like lost treasure,
Not here, not today.



GOING IN FOR THE KILL OR: THOUGHTS OF A WÜNDERKIND

Katy Major

maybe you will feel differently
when you realize that a little witch

cursed you
in the night.



THE AWAKENING

Josh Brandon

I keep my anger inside until my innards
become salty, and shrivel from the brine
of the sea. My keep was
to feed my family - a career killing to live,
but nobody pays much attention to life when
its skin is speckled with pale blue scales.
They named me The Fisherwoman, because I was
one of a few. The ocean is a man's world
explored through hapless bows, sterns, and masts.
Nobody cared to ask for my story,
because only history matters to the
bureaucrats with rods and nets,
but when the wave rose like a giant
standing from his seat, these men cowered
in fear to await the inevitable.

I, on the other hand, accepted what was coming -
even embraced it as my eulogy might say.
Diving off the edge, I whispered to my children,
"Mama's not coming home this time."
I blew a kiss to the wind and dove in head first
letting my body give way to Poseidon's grasp
as he squeezed the air out of my lungs.
This was, perhaps, the only time in my life
where my decision was truly mine.





GAGGING ON MY CROWNING GLORY

Cassidy Brauner

AN OLD CIVIL WAR GRAVE OUTSIDE OF NASHVILLE

Amelia Gramling

Ordinary people died and were
buried, here. In Franklin,
Tennessee. There is a wide stretch
of iron-wrought shallowness,
and among them --these century and a
half of genteel gent-ried decay-ed sons-- a budgie
named Bouregard my mother --at twenty as I am--
laid between an unearmarked West. To be
venerated, the
decorated, African-descended
feathers. "A good man lies here."
this thing called a man,
you used to hear once keep
is it only
as good as
it sleeps?

NPR onbehalfof Peter Lanza claims
unbuttoned not rebroken but nevertheless news, this is March 10th
two years come November (has it been that, Jesus) since
we homesteads, we great spools of the mid-west collective ----- ly
choked scooped-fulls of mashed potatoes ashen hollowed pits canned
land filled young peas with, unspeakable so
we
bellowed beneath cracked windows, locked home screens--

*Was this kindergarten or first grade? Did most children see it coming
long enough to quake? More black or more white? The sons of terrorists?
The daughters of the gays? When is it kosher to call this hate? Tell me,
please, what and where and what with and why.
Send me the photographs of his eyes*

we remember somewhere we have hands and use them
we
collaged old and early stills from the Lanzas' 8th grade
yearbook, stolen
a hundred thousand flip-cuts full, that so-very-ordinary blue,
we
papered, no blitzed
fridges gas stations stalls wet tissue to wet newsprint like this you teach
your someday baby the look, look here
lies thirteen-year-old *doesn't get more evil than what Adam did.*
this thing, do we call it, a man? And
what about good? Is it
Peter who split, Peter who took his sons hiking on Sundays, Peter who
says both, *it's both* his youngest
was hard to hold, hard to keep steady eyed for long but otherwise an-
other
normal little
weird
kid, and
were he able, if he had known,
would never
"chilling look at newtown killer fathered but still
no 'why'
at all

this thing called a man
better these days, how weary it gets, to sleep than
my son,
my someday,
begin.



STATIC

Meghan Crawford

If you lose weight people will like you.
You'll finally be popular.
Guys will want to go out with you, girls will want to be your friend.
You'll be perfect.

I never thought that I would develop an eating disorder. I always equated anorexia with models and actresses, the occasional professional athlete whose job it was to be and stay skinny. My middle school friends and I would gossip freely during our lunch period about the Olsen twins, how unhealthy they looked, how we could never do that to ourselves. Self-starvation? Please. I never saw it coming because I never considered it possible. I was a smart girl and smart girls didn't starve themselves. Anorexics were stupid and shallow and I liked to think I was above such folly. I underestimated the influence of the eating disorder (ED), the tantalizing web in which it entrapped its prey.

It started out as a game, you know, to see how long I could go without eating, how many crunches I could do without stopping. I attributed it to sheer boredom. Something to pass the time. Despite my leading the t-ball league in glove-chewing at age five and following my grandpa's example of always bringing a good book to my brother's football-baseball-basketball-soccer games, I was infused with a surprisingly competitive drive. Apparently one that didn't translate to the court, as my scoring a single free-throw in my entire 6th grade basketball season would suggest. No I was only competitive with myself, always pushing, always trying to better myself. I later learned perfectionism is common amongst eating disorder patients.

That summer I didn't think twice about what I was doing, the dangerous game I was playing. I finally found a game I excelled in, a game I could win. It was entertaining and strangely satisfying. Before I knew it, that satisfaction had grown to an addiction. I was exercising every chance that I could get: running, aerobicizing, walking, and doing thousands of crunches over the course of a single day. I began to see every minute I wasn't working out as a waste of time. I grew fidgety and

anxious, worried that if I rested I would somehow gain weight. I ate the bare minimum. I counted calories constantly. I began to fear food. Although the number on the scale continued to drop, I was still dissatisfied with my body. When I looked in the mirror I zeroed in on the tiniest ounce of fat and figured I could still lose another pound or two. There was a fury inside me that couldn't be tamed, a thirst that couldn't be quenched, a growing voice that couldn't be silenced.

You're fat you're ugly you need to lose weight. Just skip lunch no one cares.

Don't eat lunch no one cares! You don't need it. It will only make you gain weight.

Food is bad food is evil food is the enemy.

Keep exercising 100 more crunches 50 more pushups.

Look at you, you could still lose some weight.

Food food everywhere I turn. Greasy, fried, fattening food. Onion rings, fried chicken, funnel cakes, burgers, fries. The nauseating scent floods over me. Crowded. So crowded. So many people. So many people walking, talking, sitting, eating. Eating the greasy, fried, fattening food. My parents tell me I have to eat something. Fuck them. Fuck this. I don't want to eat. I don't want that gross, greasy, fatty food. Morbid Obesity. Diabetes. Rolls of flab hang from their bare arms, jingle as they wattle along to the next food stand. For what better way to wash down that funnel cake than with a foaming glass of fried Coke? My parents push, my stomach growls defiantly. Traitor. Fine. Whatever. But none of that gross, greasy, fatty food. I get a sub from the Subway booth. 6in Turkey Sub on wheat no cheese no sauce. 280 calories. Plus the 100 from dried Cheerios at breakfast. 380. I ran for 30 minutes this morning. I did what 400, 600 crunches? I can eat a sub. When my parents aren't looking I throw half the turkey away in the trashcan. I tear and rip and break the bread into little pieces, dropping the breadcrumbs from time to time, when it's safe.

My mom thrusts a water bottle upon me. I take a sip. Water has no calories, so they say. But it's best not to risk it. When they aren't looking I pour half the bottle on the pavement. I'm not really thirsty anyway. I'm not hungry. I've had 380 calories. The streets are crowded. So crowded. Why did I want to come to the fair again? Everywhere I turn people are staring. At me?! Why? I suck in my stomach, try to catch a glimpse of my reflection in the glass doors. I shouldn't have had the sub.

It's hot and humid and crowded, so crowded. Sweat, sweating bodies surround me as we walk from building to building, show to show at the Ohio State Fair. Dizzy. Just a little dizzy. Shake it off, keep moving,

keep going. I stumble, my head is spinning. Why is everything spinning? Oh God I am going to get sick. I am really about to get sick. Get the hell out of the way! I begin to wobble. We're almost to the entrance gates... Spit up. Clear liquid. Still dizzy. Dehydrated, must be dehydrated.

Mom is on the phone the next morning. I strain to hear the conversation. Doctor. Help. Wake up call. Worried. Weight loss. Barely eating. Got sick. Almost fainted. Help... Anorexic... Anorexia?

After the Ohio State Fair Incident (it will always be The Ohio State Fair Incident in my mind), my parents took action. It wasn't like they hadn't noticed the changes in diet and exercise, the striking physical transformation. My parents weren't negligent. They picked up on the changes in time. I remember going to the pool with my mom and little brother. I remember how my mom tried to get me to eat a slice of watermelon, how she told me it was fruit, it was healthy, it was low cal. But she didn't take me to the doctor then. I remember going on vacation to Virginia Beach, putting on my bikini and laying out on the sand. I remember my mom saying I looked like a concentration camp survivor or was it a victim? But still she didn't call the doctor; she didn't force me to eat, then. Maybe they didn't want to believe it to be true. I guess it took a public episode for them to act. My mom took me to our family physician where I was told I had anorexia nervosa. I was told to stop exercising. I was told to eat a ridiculous amount of food each day. *To gain weight, to refuel my body, to get better.*

Anorexic; they don't know what they're talking about.

You're not underweight you need to lose weight. Eat less, exercise more.

Look at yourself you're not skinny; you're fat you're ugly you're hideous.

Lose weight be perfect lose weight.

Although I was supposed to be in recovery, my weight continued to plummet. I became angry and hostile, maddened even. I yelled, I screamed. I hated everything, everyone. The fury raged upward, onward, destroying everything in sight, until all that was left was ashes and dust. I resisted recovery. I refused to see myself for what I was, for what I had become. I looked in the mirror and still I was not satisfied. The fury, the anorexic persona could not be quelled.

Come on Meghan, just a little more to go. Just eat a little less, just exercise a little more, we're almost there, I promise.

You've almost lost enough weight. You're almost there. Just a little more, people are staring. Don't you want the

kids to stop staring? I can make them. I can help you. Just lose a little more weight. Come on now.

People are staring. You need to lose more weight. Don't eat around them don't eat at all.

Food is bad food is evil food will make you fat. Fat is evil fat is disgusting fat is failure.

I was in over my head. What started out as a game, a bit of entertainment for an otherwise monotonous summer, had developed into a perilous lifestyle. In a matter of months I was unrecognizable. My clothes hung off me like potato sacks. My cheeks and chest were shrunken. My hip bones jutted out in a most ghastly fashion. I was growing emaciated. I was starving myself to death. You know when I look in my bedroom mirror I don't see someone who is overweight. That whole distorted body image thing doesn't work that way. I've seen the pictures of girls who are rail thin staring in the mirror at a hefty stranger they think is them. There is no funhouse phantasmagoria, no ballooned figure staring back at me. I gaze at myself in the mirror, gawking at the emaciated stranger staring back at me. The stranger with protruding green eyes, sallow cheeks, and pale skin covered beneath tangles of dirty blonde hair. The despairing zombie, the living skeleton. I trace my fingers along my jutted ribs, pinch at the tiniest ounce of fat, or is it skin? I know I am not fat. But you see it really is not so much a matter of being fat as it loathing any bit of fat I can find on my body. I know I am not fat but I have fat. I have fat and I hated myself because of it.

Food is bad food is evil food will make you fat.

Fat is evil fat is disgusting fat is failure.

Failure is bad you must not fail you must be perfect you must be...

By the fall, I had lost over forty pounds and was at the brink of hospitalization and yet I still was trying to lose weight. *If I could just lose another few pounds...* I began exercising secretly. After school, I hid in my room and did crunches until my mom got home. I hid food in my napkins, fed my meat to Buddy under the table, dumped supplements down the drain. The game I realized had not terminated but merely postponed and I resumed play stronger, fiercer than before. Each restriction, each exercise was an act of rebellion against my recovery. The fury, the beast within me purred in satisfaction, momentarily. ED had me won. I was convinced it would all be worth it if I just lost a few more pounds. Just a few more pounds and life would be bliss. It's easy to become deluded when you're starving yourself to death.

A bagel with butter and jam and a yogurt. 200 calories for the

bagel, plus another 150 for the butter and jam. 350. The yogurt has 150 more for a grand total of 500 fucking calories. I've been having big breakfasts for a while. Big lunches, dinners, snacks too. To gain weight. *To get better. To reach a healthy weight.* To stop the doctors from institutionalizing me. Mom made breakfast today. She microwaved my bagel, all soft and doughy. I always have it toasted. She gave me whipped yogurt. I prefer regular. Well light, but seeing as how light yogurt was suddenly unhealthy... Disgusting. It looks disgusting all wrong. Butter and jam ooze out of the bagel, practically bubbling. I push the 101 Dalmatian plate aside. I won't eat it.

You have to eat my mom insists. Oh really, do I? I shake my head no. She nods her head yes. She pushes the plate toward me. I push it back. That's when the yelling begins. I can't remember the last day we went without fighting. Our voices rise. She shouts, I shout back louder. She backs away, so that she is standing at the other end of the table. My dad rushes into the room, takes one look at the untouched breakfast and tells me to eat. Won't-eat-it! EAT, EAT, EAT. NO. NO. NO. The fury rises. Maddened, possessed I throw my plate across the room. The 101 Dalmatian plate I've had since I was three. It misses mom's cheek by inches. The plate shatters, shatters onto the kitchen floor.

Mom's crying, her expression horrified. Dad's yelling, cursing my ungrateful, selfish ass he proceeds to smack. I stand frozen. I barely feel the blows as they come, again and again against my bony, selfish ass. What did I just do? WHAT DID I DO? The fury, the anger subsides. The horrifying reality sets in. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry, I whisper. But Mom's running upstairs crying. Dad's face is disgusted. He thrusts a rag in my hand and hurries upstairs after her. Fat tears stream down my burning cheeks. The 101 Dalmatians plate lays shattered in several large pieces across the kitchen floor. The bagel lays by the fridge, butter and jam smeared across, creating a trail. Whipped strawberry yogurt is splattered across the floor, table and chairs. I clean up the mess, I try.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I'm sorry. I'll eat the bagel. I'll eat the yogurt. I'll eat anything, everything you want. I won't argue any more. I'll do whatever you want. Please just look at me. I'm sorry. Look at me. Please look at me. I'm sorry... Institutionalization ...

Institutionalization? No you have to fight it you can't let them.

They'll make you gain weight there.

They'll make you eat.

They'll try to brainwash you.

Don't let them.

Fight it, fight it!

You are so close you are almost there you just need to lose a little more weight.

A little more weight and everything will be perfect just a little more...

It was a bagel with butter and jam and a yogurt that left me broken. I was horrified by what I had done. No matter how hard ED tried to make me forget, no matter how hard he tried to twist the scene in my head, the 101 Dalmatian plate, the plate I had had since I was three, lay shattered on the kitchen counter. I couldn't bring myself to throw it away. My parents threw the plate away eventually but the plate's absence for a time reminded me of what I had done. After six months I forfeited, acknowledging defeat. I gave in to my parents, the therapists, the doctors. I gave in to recovery. I began to gain weight and the talks of institutionalization abated. The ED voice was still there, but he grew feebler, and I actually believed I would defeat him. I moved across the chessboard freely, ecstatically, but he was only bidding his time, waiting to make his move, waiting to go in for the kill.

As clothes began to grow tighter, the desire to diet and exercise grew stronger. The ED voice began to grow louder. No one's home today go for a run do it do it no one's around no one will know and you'll feel so much better come on just do it doesn't this feel nice doesn't this feel good speed up go faster push yourself you're fine keep going don't get sick keep going don't be weak keep going you have to finish you have to keep going push it don't you want to lose weight don't you want to be perfect now run the stairs do it one two three four five times repeat repeat repeat keep going keep running up down up down up down up down now crunches go one two start over one two three four keep going repeat repeat that one was bad start from the beginning that's weak keep going keep crunching you have to do it lose weight now stairs again up down up down up down repeat up down up down up down repeat repeat repeat repeat...

I found that it was much easier to give in to the disorder, to skip snacks and exercise in secret. Recovery meant resisting the anorexic urges; it meant fighting the fury within. And the disorder, that inner demon didn't go quietly. The noise, the constant battle in my head between resistance and recovery, ED and my parents was unbearable.

This isn't healthy. You can't exercise. No walks, no runs, no

crunches. No crunches. Your door stays unlocked Throw away your snack don't eat it you don't need those calories you don't need it it will make you gain weight throw it away *Eat. No hiding, no dumping. Eat. Eat your snack.* don't listen to them you don't need all this food you could eat less you need to eat less throw that snack away no one's looking no one's here to make you eat it just throw it away do it *You're beautiful. You're smart. You're cute and kind and fun to be around. You have friends. You have us. You have people who care about you.* Don't listen to them don't trust them trust me I'm your friend I'm here for you I help you you need me *Eat. Please. You need to eat your snack. You need to be healthy. Food is your friend. Everyone has to eat. It's all about moderation. But you need to gain weight, this isn't healthy. Your body is shutting down. Eat!* Don't listen to them they'll make you fat they'll make you eat they'll make you fat stay with me me I'm your friend, trust me *Listen to the doctors. Trust them, trust us. Don't listen to the eating disorder.* Don't listen to them they're lying they're liars they want to split us up they want to get rid of me they want you to gain weight they want you to get fat stay with me trust me *Your body image is distorted. You aren't seeing or thinking clearly. This isn't rational.* I know you I can help you I can give you everything you want *Be logical, be rational.* I can make you lose weight I can make you thin I can make you perfect don't you want to be perfect trust me *You're not fat. You're tiny. Look at yourself* fight them resist them don't leave me you need me. *Look at yourself.* Don't listen stay don't go stay stay with me I'm right I know the truth I show you what's real *You're 89 lbs.* see look at yourself you need to lose weight *You're supposed to be in the hospital. The doctors want you in the hospital. We don't want you in the hospital..* see you see it you need to lose weight *Fight* they're the delusional ones they don't see things clearly *Fight.* don't listen to them I'm right *Gain the weight you need to live. Food is your friend* I'm truth *You need to eat to live..* don't let them brainwash you *Trust the doctors. Don't listen to that voice* don't leave me you need me *Don't trust it. Trust us. Trust yourself.*

Trust myself? I had stopped trusting myself, being myself long ago. I started skimping on my meal plan, doing extra exercises when no one was around. It was easy, far easier than I thought to fall back into my old habits. If I just lost another few pounds, this would be it. ED would be satisfied. But he wasn't. It was never enough. Every snack I skipped, every lie I told was for ED. I did it all for you. I gave up my friends, my family, my life for YOU. My parents' trust gone. My dignity gone. I did everything you asked. I gave it all. And you never held up your end of the

bargain. You said we were almost done, just a few more pounds to lose, just another inning to go. But the inning never ended, the game raged on. I had straight As, I was valedictorian. I received countless college scholarships.

But you weren't number one in the class. Sure you were valedictorian, along with what twelve other students? Your speech wasn't good enough to read at graduation. You didn't get in to Notre Dame. You need me. You are nothing without me.

He was right. He is right. He...

Oh, ED, why do I hold on to you? Why can't I just let you go? You, you shoot down my achievements with the arrows of dissatisfaction. I cower behind you, unwilling to try new things, fearful of failure. Oh how I want to take a deep breath and relax, content with knowing I tried my best. But thanks to you my best must be the best. Some days I think I have finally gotten rid of you. I feel pleased and proud. Yet each time you somehow creep back into my mind, staining it like a bottle of permanent black ink.

It was a half a cup of trail mix. No biggie right? Except that after a stuffing breakfast of waffles drenched in sugary, caloric maple syrup, having to eat a snack only an hour later was a bit ridiculous. Midmorning snack, please. Who needed that? Apparently me. Since I was once again in need of gaining weight, once again on the porker diet. I mean anyone would have done it right? I was stuffed. I had just eaten breakfast. I didn't need a snack on top of it. The snack I threw away every day when I was at school, the snack my Dad was forcing me to eat now. He left the room. He left me alone. That was his first mistake. I stared at the bowl. I looked around frantically. Dump it in the trash. But he would look there first. Then the toilet. True the toilet was always an option but the flush. He would know. The garbage disposal? Same problem. Shit. I could...there was no other option. It was the only way. But it was so disgusting. Was I really that desperate? I looked at the bowl of trail mix, the 300 extra calories I would have to eat if I was too weak. Weak. Soft. Fat. Failure. Sometimes a sacrifice has to be made for the greater good. Yes. He would never think to look there. We could get away with it. No. We will get away with it. The power of positive thinking. Checking that no one was coming I pulled down my sweat pants quickly. I grimaced as I proceeded to dump the trail mix into my white cotton Hanes for Hers. Get a grip, Meghan. Do you want to have to eat your snack? I sat carefully back on the couch and waited. Dad returned. He stared at the empty bowl. He asked if I ate it. I said yes. I could lie straight to his face now. He smiled. He told me good job sweetie. I got up to go dump the trail

mix down the toilet when it fell. A single peanut. Out of my sweatpants. Dad didn't notice. I could still get away with it. I moved slowly, gingerly. I reached the hallway. I tried to casually grasp my crouch. That was when Dad yelled. I turned around fearfully. A trail of nuts, raisins and m&ms lined the carpet. A trail of trail mix. Oh the irony. Fuck irony. Dad's face was livid. He asked again if I ate my snack. Again I said yes. He pointed to the carpet. I shrugged my shoulders. I tried to think of a lie. The hesitation did it. He knew. He grabbed me with one hand, looked me sternly in the eye and asked one last time. I mumbled incoherently, trying to squirm free. I had to get to the bathroom. I had to get rid of it before...He asked where it was. I turned out my pockets. Empty. He checked the trashcan. Empty. I smiled. He wouldn't find it. But he did. I shouted and cried. I told him I hated him. I told him to go to hell. He said nothing. I shouted louder. He remained silent. I hated the silence. But then he spoke and I would have taken the silence back gladly. He spoke quietly and heartbrokenly. I lied to him. I lied to him over and over. He couldn't trust me. He couldn't... I'm sorry. I'm so sorry Daddy. But it was too late. He handed me a new bowl of trail mix. I ate every single bite.

I had lost my parents' trust. I had lost any sense of dignity I might have still possessed. So much for making progress. For getting better. In that moment I realized that my path was not linear but circular. Maybe I just couldn't help it. There were some things you could control in life and some things you could not. Maybe my eating disorder was just one of those things. I mean it is categorized as a mental illness for a reason. I can't help myself. I have no control. I am anorexic.

You're anorexic. You're nothing without me. You need me.

I am an anorexic named Meghan. I am inanimate, I am an object, and I am nothing. Visibly anomalous yet fundamentally wasted. What is there left but a million little pieces, a million little shards of my shattered life? What is the point of trying to put it all together again? It didn't work for Humpty Dumpty and it probably won't work for me, so why bother trying? Wouldn't it be easier just to wave the white flag and acknowledge defeat? Why continue fighting in a war I'm not invested in winning? Why not just say you win anorexia, you got me. Another life you can add to your bounty of mortality.

How was therapy? Is it helping? The conversation was always the same. Is it helping? I don't know? Do you feel better? No. Do you feel different? No. Are you cured? As if one productive therapy session could cure me of six years as an anorexic. My parents were of the opinion that if I really wanted to get better, I could. Yes we know it's a disease, but you could stop if you tried.

I *could* stop if I tried. I could stop counting calories, stop measuring out my food in exact proportions. I could sleep in on Wednesday mornings and skip my run. I could eat a Strawberry Pop Tart for breakfast and wash it down with a can of Cherry Coke. I could go to Dairy Queen and binge on a Nerds Blizzard. There are a lot of things I could do, but I won't.

You're not underweight you need to *lose* weight you need to eat less you need to exercise more.

Look at yourself you're not skinny you're fat you're ugly you're hideous.

Lose weight be perfect lose weight.

Food is bad food is evil food will make you fat.

Fat is evil fat is disgusting fat is failure.

Failure is bad you must not fail.

You must be perfect you must be...

Or maybe I can't. I...you just don't get it. You think it's so easy. Okay and yeah. Sure I could have gained the weight back months ago. It was only ten pounds and after eleven months with my new therapist and recovery plan my weight is exactly the same. And after nearly seven years of treatment you would think I would have recuperated or at least maintained a healthy weight for more than a few months. But I haven't. And after five therapists, two nutritionists, three physicians and two rounds of intensive outpatient treatment you would have thought I would have made some headway, some progress, some sign of growth and change. But I haven't. And yet I have.

I only run up and down the stairs two times now after I brush my teeth or get changed. Before I did eight, then four, now two. Should I do it at all? Probably not. But the anxiousness, the jitteriness I feel in my restless limbs keeps me going. That and the fear, the fear that if I only run up and down the stairs once after showering something horrible will happen. I could gain weight. I would have to listen to the ruthless voice in my head condone me for my sluggishness, my moment of weakness. I would have to do four the next time. No it is better just to stick to two even though my dad asked me to please stop and I am supposed to be gaining weight and Andrew's friends are over and eyeing me curiously. Two is less than four. Four is less than eight. Eight is less than twelve but you were never home when I did that, were you? I saved those for the narrow gaps of time, the small windows of opportunity when I had the house to myself. Those fifteen minutes after Andrew finished his homework and went down to Jake's before Mom returned from her hour walk with Buddy; that half hour after I got home from rehearsal when Dad went

to pick up Andrew from football practice. Those evenings I could get in a round dozen plus several hundred crunches. But I don't do that anymore.

No one's home today go for a run.

Do it!

Do it!

No one's around no one will know and you'll feel so much better.

Come on just do it!!!

Last Friday I had the house to myself. I could have run up and down the stairs for hours, I could have done thousands of crunches, I could have walked the dogs all afternoon, ran all evening. But I didn't. I could have skipped my snack, dumped my juice in the sink, and starved myself until you two came home that evening. But I didn't and I don't know why.

Why did I eat my Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Lara Bar, all 220 Calories, all 11 grams of fat? Okay yes I skipped the juice and drank my Crystal Quencher sparkling water but there are 120 calories in juice and that is 100 less than the bar and 220 less if I had left the bar in the pantry. I would have gotten away with it. My mom was preoccupied with Dad and even if she happened to remember my snack because tomorrow was Saturday and I was going to get weighed and she didn't want me to lose even more weight than I likely already had, I could have told her that I did it anyway. I had done it before. I would do it again. Hell, I was going to lie about the juice and did lie about the juice to your face without blinking an eye. The trick was to believe what you said to be true. Open the portal to an alternative reality where you could store your secrets until it was okay to expose them. Lock the portal. Don't throw away the key. You'll never know when you might need it. No burden to bear, no trace of guilt. When did I become such a skilled liar? Practice. I started with the small lies, the white lies if you will; the fine's and okay's when asked how my day was and I didn't want to admit how I had spent half of lunch in the bathroom scraping excess peanut butter off my PBJ or how the teacher had to assign me to a group in history class again because I was the only student without a partner. I moved on to the meatier ones, the yeses when asked if I ate a snack or drank a Boost. Then I was sitting in therapy telling my counselor I had followed 100% of my meal plan. I was taking a sticker in IOP even though I had dumped my trail mix in the trashcan outside of Roush. My guilt diffused into the other realm. Lying you see became easier with time. Everything becomes easier with time.

But I don't do that anymore. Well, not as often as before. I think I went a whole week without lying, nearly a whole month. I'm getting bet-

ter. In therapy I told Amanda I didn't follow my meal plan, I chose not to lie. That is improvement. Isn't that progress? Today I followed my whole meal plan. Well minus the extra breakfast we added a few weeks back and the third fat at lunch Sonya added last year but technically those are all extra and doesn't extra imply in addition which should mean optional? Before I would have never ate all that food. You see I have changed. I am not the anorexic I was six years ago.

I am not the anorexic I was four months ago.

✕

BAKING SODA

Jess Campbell

Yesterday I watched my young neighbor fall under the weight of her
Fifties style baking soda volcano
Out in the backyard, grass brown from drought among the limp breath-
less leaves
She was squinting under the sun, having dropped her glasses
And crawling beneath the strain of knowing more in that moment than
The rest of the soft-knead thinkers and heavyweight devotees tried in a
lifetime
Only because she was able to embody the soft dust explosion she felt
And tasted and heard underneath
Her felt-tipped fingers
After a little too much vinegar was added

Over the long dry summer months I thought I could hear
The dying screams of the sea monkeys
She always forgot to feed
And the scratching of the ants stuck in a glass box
(They desperately tried to escape
Because the dirt was too dry and the food was too fake)
But she certainly tried,
As every dying experiment led to another new discovery and
Another kernel of knowledge that made the further alienation
Of her existence
Among her peers that much more alive,
And something I knew she would crumple under
Late alone wishing to be anything, hearing the distant
reassurances
Of the fantastic heroes in the books she poured over every night

Though I saw, for the last time before the few autumn leaves left crum-
pled and fell,
The moment when she dropped her metal tin lunch box at the bus stop
And scraped it up quickly, before it was kicked or taken
Or mocked

And I, watching silently,
Wanted to reach out in sudden but couldn't
Still sometimes haunted by the memories
Of a constant torturous school day
Of late night furtive pouring over the same fantasy novel peeking out of
her bag and of those temporary,
Always temporary, escapes



?#@*%! TRASH!!!

Katy Major

Northampton: a haven of intellectualism and seemingly incongruous urban hipness. Northampton: which Plath complained was provincial, stifling. Northampton: staggering with clusters of shops peddling locally-spun wool, vegan restaurants, and used clothing. Tie-dye winks from the windows. Old books secrete worldly musk. Dogs trot obediently alongside their serene, bespectacled owners.

Meanwhile, my mouth hangs open.

Katy Major : Midwestern. Mousy. Small. Exceedingly unhip and *especially* un-urban. Gray sweaters washed out to at least blend into the grayness of the unrelenting New England sky. Hands gripping a pungent cup of Nescafé instant coffee. Surely smelling of sweat and cheap perfume. Me.

When Molly and I met at the Haymarket Café, I distinctly perceived that I was at a disadvantage. A huge, gaping, *cavernous* disadvantage. Not only was Molly stunningly beautiful—in the unique, appropriately quirky way of these dazzling neo-hippie Massachusetts college students—but she was also the heart of New England, all fair skin and effortless intelligence. She was a vegan. She ordered a “warm rice salad.”

I stared at the menu, still in a daze from the combination of Molly and a restaurant (café) that was: a.) Not a chain, and b.) Covered from top to bottom in tasteful, beautiful local art and vibrant, seemingly exotic fabric. Everyone there wore glasses. When did glasses become stylish? And so *prevalent*?

I recognized “grilled cheese” on the menu (made with “gruyere” and “toasted ginger”) and ordered it. Everything on the menu was vegetarian, thrilling me. *Ethical! Progressive! Environmentally responsible!*

“What’s Ohio like?” Molly wanted to know.

I felt my face heat up. *Fuck*. I should have pretended that all of this was familiar to me, to avoid this. To avoid trying to describe Ohio without sounding petulant and, perhaps worse, disloyal.

“Well, um... I go to college in Columbus. It’s pretty progressive. We have a gay pride parade that’s really big...”

"Oh, okay." I could tell she had never heard of it, and knew without her uttering a word that any parade in Columbus would be far outmatched by the vibrant, massive queer community surrounding Northampton, nicknamed "Lesbianville, USA," and in close proximity to über-progressive Boston. "So, where are you from?" she asked.

Google "Akron, Ohio" sometime. The first few hits will proudly illustrate the city's proximity to the Great Lakes, its history as "the Rubber Capital of the World," and the Black Keys, the miraculous prodigy children of Akron's performing arts high school. As the list of results goes on, the information will inevitably get significantly darker. Headlines start to awaken alarm: *For Writer, 'The Hard Way' Meant Choosing to Stay in Akron, Ohio. Akron man convicted in slaying of former Ellet High School football standout. Summit Continues to Rank High for Meth Labs.*

I took a deep breath.

I thought back to the night before, when I had dined alone, at a small Italian restaurant squished into the maze of Northampton—a long stretch of winding street, a few right turns, and a flight of stairs away. I can't remember the name. It was in Italian. I liked it more than Pizza Hut, but less than Olive Garden, mostly because the menu was unfamiliar and also mostly in Italian. I had no concept of what would taste good. I pushed away uneasiness and ordered a glass of wine.

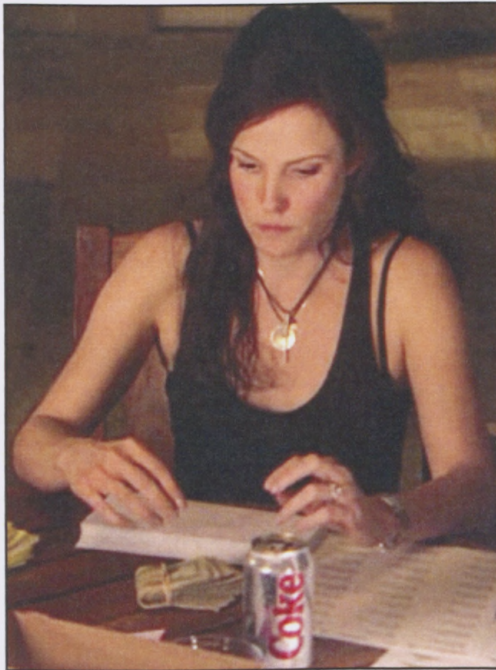
The wine was thick and sour, somehow dense with fruit still. I sucked on my teeth, hoping they wouldn't stain. *Good god.* I surveyed the glass of wine in my hand, perplexed. *This glass cost me seven dollars. Seven dollars is what I usually pay for a bottle.* The familiar glittery pink of syrup-sweet cheap moscato came to mind. I picked up my cell phone, texting my friend back as I gave the wine another tentative slurp: *You can take the girl out of Akron, but she's still a Franzia boxed wine girl.*

I can make all of the jokes about Akron's trashy, cheap side if I want—Akron has become a sitting joke, a slum in the midst of post-economic collapse and halfhearted rebuild. But the truthfully, I don't live there. I'm in Westerville, in the midst of middle-class yuppie paradise, and while it might not be as radically artistic as Northampton—Westerville is the nerdy try-hard cousin of Northampton, truth be told—it's not Akron, either. It's a high-class suburb of the cleanest and most fashionable city in the Midwest. And maybe part of me disowns that.

Trash isn't witty or self-aware. It isn't good for you. It isn't even pretty—except in the most superficial, the most *artificial* sense. Have

you ever seen a Diet Coke commercial? Diet Coke is poison fuel, acidic chemical crap with the nutritional value of diesel, dumped full of caramel coloring in the interest of concealing its questionable contents. It is inherently self-destructive—objectively, nothing good can come of putting Diet Coke inside of your fragile human body, but there's something compelling in Diet Coke all the same. According to Diet Coke commercials currently running on television, slim brunette girls sip it as they sit artfully in lecture halls, faces lit up by their Macbooks as they take notes. A best man takes a slurp before delivering his speech at the big wedding, ice clinking elegantly. A high school teacher cracks open a can before entering her classroom, full of raucous teenage hellions. The tagline? *Diet Coke: You're on.* There for you during your most crucial moments, apparently.

That's all well and fine—but you know who else drinks Diet Coke? Nancy Botwin. From *Weeds*. Yeah. There's significance here. Sure, you can successfully deliver speeches and teach high schoolers on the confectioner's high of Diet Coke, but also know that you can run a profitable underworld drug business as well.



Diet Coke: Giving You Alternative Career Options.

Nancy Botwin, too, is a symbol of self-destruction and atypical behavior that can be—and has been—deemed trashy. Aside from her position as white suburban marijuana magnate, she engages in unprotected sex in at least two or three episodes per season, if not more; she habitually puts herself in grave physical danger, from the Mexican border to the slums of various California cities; and she even kills. Pumping herself full of Diet Coke is the tamest of her risky behaviors, yet it comes to represent more. Diet Coke becomes the summation of Nancy's risk—given the events of her daily life, she could realistically perish in any instant...so why settle for a glass of apple juice?

When given the choice, I will always choose Diet Coke. No questions asked. Maybe I would miss the metallic aftertaste, or the sharp pain in my stomach lining, the burn in the back of my throat...or maybe I would psychically mourn this one quiet form of self-annihilation.

I want to make a statement in defense of trash culture. I want to posit that there's something undeniably thrilling about consuming garbage. I want to sing praises for the hallucinogenic pleasure of watching anything with a laugh track on television. I want to dump a Bud Light Lime all over these words and set them on fire and inhale deeply.

JERRY: Listen to what you're saying. You would let your own flesh-and-blood baby child die, rather than accept an organ from someone of a different race. Is that the kind of mother you're going to be?

ERV: Yes.

JERRY: Okay.

ERV: I mean this with all the sincerity I can muster.

JERRY: I pray to God you never have a child.

Jerry Springer is the beady-eyed harbinger of glorified trash. After a stint in politics—former mayor of Cincinnati, Ohio, everyone!—he moved on to *The Jerry Springer Show*, a talk-show-cum-neo-freak-show. Springer and his producer, Richard Dominick—also well-known for *The Steve Wilkos Show*, a variant on the same concept—were among the first entertainers to modernize the voyeuristic satisfaction of the freak show by deliberately inviting guests who would be as outrageous and stereotypical as possible to talk on-air. The more controversial or ethically unsound, the better. Adulterers, cult members, and hate crime perpetrators

all took their hallowed place on Jerry's stage to confess and be subjected to America's shifty moral gaze.

Watching *The Jerry Springer Show* cannot be anything but a guilty pleasure. Watching it as a woman borders on masochistic. Some of Jerry's favorite one-liners are blatantly sexist, if not downright rapey. Trash gets muddy. Unlike self-aware parodies or even mainstream network television shows—even those guilty of social justice slip-ups—*Jerry Springer* is a haven of ignorance. There is no underlying effort, no damage control, no attention to correctness. There is only finding what is most sensational and the bare-bones process of putting it onto a sound stage and filming it.

Jerry Springer is worth forty-five million dollars. His gimmick is little more than professional disrespect—most of what he does on his shows consists of critiquing the lives of strangers and offering half-baked, uninformed advice. It is compelling, and I know it is compelling, because the lifeless blue-white light of Jerry's confessionals lights my face some nights, as I look on, fascinated and guilty and self-righteously appalled.



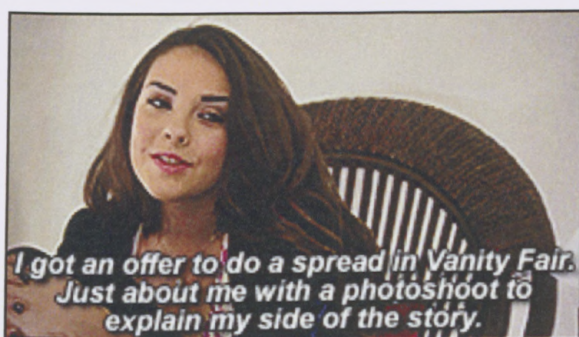
Jerry sagely looks on to receive yet another confession.

My capacity to digest trash is frankly unsettling. McDonald's French fries that should remain artificially pristine and golden in my stomach probably melt, crystalline, and seep away, given the amount of trashy television, celebrity memoirs, and poorly written horror movies that I swallow without so much as a hitch. There's something addictive about canned laughter and neon shades of color, at least to me.

My penchant for trash—the shitty, dirty, appalling litter on the face

of modern society—is most apparent when I’m with other people. I see the peculiar looks crossing my friends’ faces when I suggest a road trip to the Jersey Shore, or confess my secret desire to crouch in a grimy Akron motel for a few days, or make an astute comparison to an episode of *The Nanny*. “You just don’t seem like the type,” they hedge nervously when pressed by me. Maybe the wide eyes of a twenty-one-year-old writing major are an unsettling place to find a religious fervency to figurative garbage.

However, there are niches of popular culture where I am overwhelmingly not alone. The past year in film has offered startling proof of this with a slew of “coke films”—movies that not only feature self-destructive drug use, but sexual promiscuity, violent recklessness, and most strikingly, a blank indifference to potential consequences. For instance, *The Bling Ring* (2013) tells the true tale of a group of fame-obsessed teenagers who glibly rob celebrities in hopes of grasping their unattainable glamour. Even after being caught, the Bling Ring manages to make a tantalizing, sensational splash in the press before being hauled off to court, making away with their own fame with just a few jaw-dropping tactical moves.



*Alexis Neiers, one of the prominent members of the real-life Bling Ring, on *Pretty Wild* (2010), shortly after her arrest for burglary.*

The story so obsessed me that I watched not only the film itself, but read the journalistic written account by Nancy Jo Sales and watched the entirety of *Pretty Wild*, the reality T.V. series that chronicled a year in the lives of two of the girls implicated in the Hollywood Burglaries. I couldn’t look away. How could a trash junkie resist the pull of a reality T.V. show, sanctioned by E!—the motherland of luxuriant celebrity fluff—depicting the dramatic highs and lows of the world’s most primped and misty-eyed criminals?



This looks like a high schooler's mock-serious selfie, but it is actually Alexis Neiers' mug shot.

The Bling Ring is astounding in its depiction of the devil-may-care attitude that is actually echoed in real people. But more than that, it is unapologetically gaudy—the excessive glamour of the *Bling Ring* and the luxury items that they steal is crass. You have to wince at the abject materialism of not only a couple of clueless teenagers, but the adult celebrities whose homes they are ransacking.

Before *The Bling Ring*, there was *Spring Breakers* (2012), another self-consciously garish coke movie about four girls who will stop at nothing to escape to St. Petersburg, Florida for the archetypal spring break of one's youth. (Author's note: Harmony Korine, the film's director, is known for one other award-winning film. That film is called *Trash Humpers*.)

The most outrageous character on *Spring Breakers* is not one of these girls—all of whom snort enough coke to replace all the sands of the Floridian beaches and commit a handful of felonies over the course of the film—but Alien, a rapper and gangster played by James Franco. Alien is everything *bad for you*. He snorts coke off of drunk teenage girls on Spring Break, steals, owns an unnecessary artillery of guns, and has no qualms about gratuitous violence. When he speaks, he says nothing. Even his rapping—his main pastime outside of gang activity—only extols shallow, nihilistic pleasures. “Sprang break,” he says, grinning to expose his glittering grills. “Spraaaang break. Forever, y’all.”

Alien is trash personified. His excesses are appalling. True, they are items of luxury—but misappropriated by a Floridian gangster who deals

only in violence, with no evidence of the American ideal: the mature adult man who works tirelessly to achieve and provide for himself, eventually landing deservedly in the lap of luxury. My American middle-class upbringing screams from within when Alien waves his guns around and brags, "Look at all my shiit!"



"I got Scarface on repeat. On repeat. Constant, y'all!" Alien brags—glorified gangster violence at its finest.

Unlike *Jerry Springer* or even sitcoms like *Roseanne*, *The Bling Ring* and *Spring Breakers* are distinctive in that there is a certain self-awareness behind all of the trashiness. *Spring Breakers* is parody at its cleverest, guilefully slipping in symbols of conventional success and wealth and using the temptations of careless living to depict a subculture consisting of purely guilty pleasure. Indeed, there is a fine—but significant—distinction between a parody of American youth and a problematic depiction of American life.

Watching *Spring Breakers* doesn't arouse guilt for me, because it is so out-of-proportion. My college classmates would not consider robbing a small-town restaurant for vacation funds, no matter how self-centered and pleasure-seeking some of them might be. Parody deals in incisive exaggerations like this—to propose what *might be*.

Things get muddy—as only garbage will—when garbage is made to accurately depict reality. Sitcoms like *Roseanne* and *Full House* may not always be realistic—but they are shows designed to interpret American life as it exists—or as it existed. Shows like this perpetuate norms; they have a powerful impact on their viewers in ways that can be positive or negative. And often, the perpetuated norms are negative, and even dangerous. When I see a character on a sitcom use a racial slur or treat

other characters with blatant misogyny, I get queasy. My stomach starts to reject what I'm feeding myself.

What is too trashy to ingest? Where is the limit?

here is certain trash that even I will turn my nose up at. Watching the women on the *Real Housewives* shows tear each other apart tears me apart. To me, perpetuating a me-against-the-world mentality is greatly dangerous, especially when women—sometimes even women of color and other minorities—are pitted against each other. I could write a thousand words on why this feels wrong to me, but it wouldn't matter. To another person, even someone who examines pop culture in the ways that I do, *The Real Housewives* would merely toe the line, rather than leaping past, or even be thoroughly in the clear, for reasons that remain mystical to me.

Obviously, I can't afford to be superior. Other people wouldn't be caught dead watching *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, because it is a show completely lacking in intellectual stimulation, admirable writing, or inspired plot twists. The show unapologetically sells a luxuriant lifestyle of fame and wealth and little else. This is undeniable. With every episode, this is increasingly apparent to me, yet I still continue to watch, because to me, being able to watch a family grow and change together is worth it.

The line can be flexible, but only on the condition that participants in our culture are aware of the stereotypes and harmful perpetuations at play. If you treat me the way that Leonard and his friends treat Penny in *The Big Bang Theory*, there will be no laugh track. It will hurt me, and it will perpetuate already-rampant misogyny. However, perhaps watching it on television and accepting it in the greater context of the show is not so unethical. It can be hard to deal in trash without hurting yourself or the larger culture. It isn't easy, eating shit.

I wouldn't be as smart as I am today if I only dealt in trash. Without seeing incredible, intelligent films, I would lack a certain devotion to visual beauty, a certain appreciation of innovative screenwriting. Without the books taught in my literature classes, I wouldn't understand history as intricately or see the power of writing in the same way. Without carefully written music, my ears would eventually start bleeding. My unhealthy habits would catch up with me quickly. After all, you have to throw in a salad between every few boxes of pizza, right? Take a multi-vitamin? It gives you vibrancy. It gives you fresh eyes and ears with which to digest the world itself, one holy packed clay morsel.

I wouldn't write or read the way I do if I never dealt in trash. I would never have the guts to write about vast pools of black blood or crude sex or nasty words if I hadn't seen them reflected in someone else's eyes first. I would have left them curled up, little coals in my mind smothered with confusion. But I can write anything. The shit I write now is funny and fucked-up and less than sane and a little flushed with shame. It's interesting. It's new. And without immersing myself in places other than the clear, shameless reservoir of academia, I would not be this corky Akron girl in Northampton reading Sylvia Plath poems about self-annihilation and demon obsession. I don't know where I'd be. Working through the works of uncontroversial, greatly-loved Jane Austen? Writing crisp, pretty villanelles about the blooming spring flowers? Watching yet another Quentin Tarantino classic?

Of course, I can't say for sure. Maybe if I wasn't so infatuated with trash, I would be writing the most brilliant screenplay of the twenty-first century right now, incorporating all of the thematic elements that I learned about by doing extensive research instead of watching reruns of *Intervention*. Or maybe I would be a more stringent defender of human rights, ferociously boycotting everything problematic, and living a life that is ethically pure.

Trash may be unhealthy, but it isn't worthless. For me, it's a way of taking the world less seriously. It is a sculpture of cigarette butts. It is a feeble river of cheap mascara running down my cheek. It is the best-loved t-shirt that smells like sweat. It is a timely infomercial. It is the soggy plate seeping beneath a slice of pizza. It is a piece of me. It is a piece of you. It is beautiful. It is art.

I didn't know how to answer Molly. *Where are you from?* I'm from Akron. I'm from Westerville. I'm from the deepest pit of litter you can find, the one with a discarded suitcase and smell of Chinese food in it. I remembered last summer, when my high school friends and I raced across the Akron street to toss beer cans over the electric wire, laughing as they descended on us, spraying remnants of cheap beer and dirt on us. I remembered puking in a cardboard box in my friend's girlfriend's car and my gray dress sticking to me with sweat and vomit and spilled booze. I remembered sitting on the front lawn of my compact suburban house, tanning in my puny square of grass and watching my neighbor and his son play basketball a mere ten feet away. These memories don't glitter. They smell. They're cramped. They're uncomfortable. They're familiar. They're welcome. They're comforting. They're Katy Major:

Ohioan brown-haired dirty excessive pungent fascinated me.





PURGE

Cassidy Brauner

DAUGHTER

Mackenzie Thomas

Daughter.
You may not remember me
In ten years' time,
And I may be but a
Stranger
In your eyes,
But just know
That I have watched over you
And loved you from afar
For all your life
And mine.

I have watched you play
Since you were a little girl
In the tall swaying grasses
Running against the wind,
Like a bird coming out
Of winter,
Your white gown flowing,
Giving you wings
To soar among the dead.
Passing tombstone
After tombstone,
The field of graves
Strikes no fear in you

As you touch the tops of stone
And sit upon them
Like sitting in your mother's lap,
Listening to the wind
Swish, swoosh, swish,
Until your conversation ends,
Then hop down from one
And say hello to the next,
All across the cemetery field.
One day, you will discover

A small soft dirt path
Lined with tress
Whose trunks are so round
It feels like hugging
An expecting mother,
Full of presence
And warmth
And love.
With a full wind blowing
The trees will whisper
Go forward
And you will,
Pushed by the wind
And guided by the trees
Until you discover
A white cement Parthenon
Perched upon a hill
With four steps leading up,
Guarded by giant Greek columns.
The sun shines through the cracks
Welcoming you,
Willing you to come closer
And feel its embrace.
I am here for you,
Daughter,
As I rest upon this lonely hill,
Watching over you
Year after year,
Playing in the field.
Come find me, my darling -
Walk the tall swishing grasses,
Along the soft dirt path,
Among the whispering trees,
Pushed by the guiding winds,
Up the four heavenly steps,
Beyond the guarded columns,
And greet me,
Sit upon my cold stone lap,
Let the wind speak for me
And listen,
Until you are tired.

We shall say goodbye
Until the morning sun
Breaks the darkness
And welcomes a new
Beautiful day.



UNTITLED

Emily Clark

"I just wanted you to love me," he says. The light in the bathroom is giving off a sickly redish glow, it's four a.m. and I can smell curry and chlorine coming off his skin. I don't know where he's been tonight. I don't know what to say to him or how to carry him back to bed. He's looking at me like I'm his Jesus. He's probably only looking at me like that because he's so shot out of his mind.

He wratches into the toilet again, letting out the last of what his body will throw away. He gasps, spits, and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. He reaches for my shirt, tries to really grip it to make me come closer. But all that really happens is his fingers faintly brushing the fabric, not having the strength to do anything but put a little pressure on my chest. The bathroom is too hot, the only thing keeping Sam's pill ridden body cool is the tile. He needs water. His skin is too dry and his lips are cracked. I put my arm around his shoulder. He is almost all dead weight. He pulls up as much as he can, and he laughs as he realizes I'm going to have to drag him to get him into bed.

"Shhh," I say.

"Harry," he says to me, "Harry I'm so messed up." I don't reply. I keep my eyes on the red lit doorknob.

"Let's get you to bed," I say. I try to wrap his arms around me, and he tries too. It's difficult with the red tinge in my vision and his shaking body making my own grasp for stability. Finally we make it, his legs criss-crossing underneath him, he walks like an old man. I'm the only thing keeping him up. I've dragged him out to the hallway and he's dangerously close to sliding down the wallpaper.

"I'm sorry," he keeps whispering, trying desperately to not completely fall over. I think he knows that if he falls we won't be able to get him into bed and he'll fall asleep in the hallway again like before. We make it though, just barely. His top half lands in bed and slowly he uses the little strength he has reserved for this moment and crawls toward the pillows. I pull his sheets over him.

"I'll be right back," I say. He closes his eyes and nods. I go to the kitchen to get him water. I end up staring at the clock on the microwave, watching two minutes glow past, and then three. I don't know what made me stand there with a cup of water in my hand for so long. I

blink a few times, then walk back to him. He opens his eyes again when I reenter. He drinks hungrily. He licks his lips, puts the cup down, his fingers shaking furiously. He looks pathetic, and a little disgusting. He's drenched in sweat too, and he's too pale. He should take a shower. I feel exhausted just looking at him. When did I become his mother? When did I become his anything?

"Better?" I ask.

"Yes, thank you," he whispers. He looks up at me from his bed.

"Really, thank you."

"I'm not cleaning the bathroom again. Do it tomorrow when you're in better shape."

He just nods and then closes his eyes again.

"I just wanted you to love me."

I don't reply. There isn't any point. I leave and close the door behind me. It wasn't always like this. At first he was beautiful, or maybe I was just so blindly infatuated with this first new kind of love that I put him on a pedestal. It's probably true that he was always fucked, I just couldn't see it. I saw what I wanted to see.

He was already drunk when he opened his bedroom door at eleven a.m.

"Hey, Sam," I said.

He looked up and pushed his hair out of his eyes. He looked at me for a while, but it felt like he was looking at the wall more so than at me.

"Hi Harry," he replied, but it sounded like a whisper coming from a very dry throat. His lips were too pale his eyes too red.

"I'm, I'm sorry. Really. I had no idea--" I started, but he cut me off.

"Please don't. You don't need to be sorry. I should be sorry. I'm fucking stupid," Sam said in that same hollowed out whisper. He slurred his words a bit.

"Have you been drinking?" I asked. I already knew the answer but didn't want to anger him with just pointing it out.

"Yeah...I'm really really drunk.

"When did you start drinking?"

"About an hour after I kissed you and you walked away."

My ribcage fell down onto my lungs and I was fairly certain my stomach had eaten itself raw. The way he said it was just the right way to make me feel like a monster for not wanting him.

"I have to go throw up," he said.

"What, are you okay?"

"Yes, I just have to throw up. Right now."

He quickly turned his back to me and went into the bathroom. I could hear his feet pattering around on the tile. And then the sound of gagging. I went after him.

I watched him as he threw up everything left in his stomach. I knelt beside him and rubbed his back and pushed his soft hair off his sweating forehead. When he was finally done he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and turned to me.

"Thank you," he said quietly. He leaned against the tub. "Why are you helping me?"

"Because you're drunk. And that's what friends do."

"We aren't just roommates anymore, huh? And you aren't gonna kick me out for my gay agenda?" He laughed at himself. I turned on the sink and gave him a plastic cup filled with water.

"Of course not. Don't be ridiculous. Drink that."

He chugged the water and I turned on the shower.

"Get in, I'm gonna go make you food. You need to sober up."

"You want me to give you a strip tease but you won't kiss me?"

Sam said. He laughed again and started pulling his shirt over his head. I knew he wasn't serious but I couldn't help feeling even worse. I knew he wasn't upset with me, just upset that he was facing rejection. I felt that perhaps he had been rejected one too many times.

"You have vomit all over you. You need to shower. I'm leaving now, I'm going to go make you breakfast."

I got up from the floor and turned towards the door when Sam grabbed my arm.

"It's okay...it's really okay. I should have known you weren't into guys."

I nodded and then left. Even though what he was saying should have been true, it still felt like lying.

"Do you guys...have a history of something other than just friendship? You and the guy from last night?" I had to know. It seemed so obvious and yet I needed this clarification. What if I had somehow gotten in between that?

"Yeah, we dated. And then we just had sex a lot." He laughed, and shook his head.

"What happened?"

"He couldn't handle me, basically. He didn't like my habits."

"Drinking habits?"

Sam started to laugh.

"If you want all the specifics I'll tell you but I'm not exactly proud of them."

"That's okay...I don't wanna get too personal for you."

"It doesn't matter," Sam said. I felt like I had gone too far.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine. If I didn't want talk about him I wouldn't. There's more. I fucked it up too, you know? I wanted too much of him. He's such a good person. I was stupid."

"Do you still want to be with him?" I asked cautiously.

"No, not really. Only sometimes."

He kept doing drugs and smoking cigarettes in the house, and I couldn't bring myself to care. He always asked if he could smoke when I was in the room, and I always said yes. I knew he smoked when I was away at work because I would come home and the apartment would stink of cigarettes. I didn't even say anything about it because I liked to watch him smoke. I knew that he knew that I watched him constantly whenever he was around.

I hated that I ended up thinking about Sam after I had moved away from him the night he kneeled at my lap. I didn't want to think about him but there he was all the time. He had to know that I had been scared. He had to know that I had never kissed a boy before. He had to know how raw pretty he was. I kept my mouth shut, because I continued to be terrified of him and every time I showered and had to see myself naked I wanted to throw up at the thought of someone else seeing what I saw in the mirror.

Then came the second night I heard him puking his guts out into the bathroom. This time, it had nothing to do with me, or so there were no signs of my being the cause. We had been talking regularly, my watching his every movement, his blowing smoke rings out of his lips. But I came home from work and it was six o'clock in the evening and I heard the loud vomiting sounds as soon as I walked in the door. I dropped my keys on the counter and rushed to the bathroom. Was he actually sick or

did he drink too much? Was that even my business? I knocked on the door.

"Sam, Sam are you okay?" I waited for an answer with my ear to the door.

More retching. Then wet skin slapping around on the tile.

"I'm fine."

"Do you need anything?"

I heard a gasp, and then he started to cry. It came up in tiny gasps and then chokes. I opened the door. There was vomit all over his shirt, and he looked like he didn't even know what month it was, let alone the day or time.

"What the hell happened?"

"I took some pills. And drank half a bottle of whiskey." He spit in the direction of the toilet but it only landed on his shirt. His eyes were bloodshot.

"What the hell pills were they? Do I need to call the hospital?" I demanded.

"I don't know...it doesn't matter I puked them all up anyway."

"How the FUCK do you not know what they were?!"

"Please don't yell at me," Sam said, and it was so quiet I almost felt bad for raising my voice. Tears continued to stream down his reddened cheeks. His lips were a sick violet color. I didn't know what to do with him, but I had the deepest urge to hold him.

"Come here," I said. I picked him up and put one of his arms around me. I turned on the sink and cupped my hands together to gather water. "Rinse your mouth out."

He drank from my hands and I didn't know why but it felt like the most intimate thing I'd ever done with anyone. He spit in the sink and then cupped his own hand and shoved water into his mouth. He did this over and over until finally he nodded at me. I sat him back down on the tile and turned the shower on.

"Can you take your shirt off?" He nodded and then got one arm out of his shirt. I helped him take it off. I went to go take his pants off but when I reached for the zipper it felt so wrong and I felt like crying myself. Instead I pulled his socks off. "Get your pants," I said.

He pulled the zipper down. "Leave your boxers," I added, knowing fully well I wouldn't be able to handle him naked in front of me. This was bad enough.

Once he was undressed I helped him up and stepped into the shower with him. My clothes were soaked and heavy against my skin but I couldn't take them off. I was still wearing shoes. I didn't care. Sam

looked up at me through his wet hair sticking to his face.

"I'm glad you're home," he said. His hand came up on my chest, and the fabric of my shirt pinched the skin underneath. I stared at his fingers, and then at his face. His mouth was slightly open.

"Me too," I said. I couldn't move, and my breath was caught somewhere in my throat. I exhaled slowly. He couldn't move either.

"You need to get cleaned up," I said.

He continued to not move, but his fingers clenched around the fabric of my shirt. Then he fell onto me, his forehead against my shoulder. I swallowed hard, and closed my eyes.

"I'm so fucked up," he whispered. I could feel his mouth move against my shirt.

"That makes two of us."

He picked himself up off of my shoulder and then his wet mouth was on mine. I turned to stone against it, hot, hot stone.

Goodbye to anything but hot and hazy delusion.

Then Sam pulled away, and I was standing in the shower looking ridiculous with my shoes still on.

"Sorry," he said, while slowly falling into the sitting position. I got out of the shower and went into my own bedroom, leaving a trail of wet footprints on the floor.

I closed my door, and it slammed shut. The sound actually scared me and in all of my soaking wet clothes I sat on my bed and put my hands in my face. The skin against skin made a sick sticky sound. I knew he was still in there. In the shower. In his boxers probably trying to drown himself. I stuck my fist into my mouth to stop the scream from coming out. I knew if I left him in there, he probably would pass out. I flung my door open and marched back into the bathroom. I pushed the shower curtain out of the way.

"Get up!" I demanded. Sam just looked at me stupidly through his wet hair. He didn't know how to get up.

I grabbed both of his wrists and tugged. He fell onto me, almost knocking us both to the ground. I put him down onto the tile again and turned off the shower. I looked down at him, and was so angry at him and at myself and I didn't know why.

I put an arm around his shoulder and shoved him into the standing position. "We're getting you into bed," I said.

"Okay...I'm sorry," he sputtered.

I was basically carrying him to his bed, his legs sort of dangling underneath him, his socks sliding down the hall. I finally opened his bedroom door and laid him down on his bed. He fell onto his mattress with a thud.

The sheets were whiskey stained. I couldn't leave him like this.

"Sam, you can't sleep here. You threw up in your bed too. And it smells like whiskey."

"No, no, it's fine. Let me just sleep."

"Come on, take my bed," I said.

"I'll just get sick in there too."

I ignored his comment, and dragged him up by his elbows again. We stumbled down the hall into my bedroom. I laid him down on my bed, propped up some pillows for him.

"I've never been in your room. It's nice. It smells nice in here," Sam slurred. I brushed his wet hair out of his face.

"I'm gonna go get you water. Relax."

I left for the kitchen. On my way back I heard him coughing.

"Drink," I told him, his weak frame slumped over. He took the water and drank greedily. At least he could do that, though I was concerned he'd vomit that back up too. "Go to sleep."

A few hours later, after it had gotten dark, Sam came out of his room. He sat down next to me but didn't look at me, didn't say anything.

"Why did you do it? Take all those pills?" I asked. I turned my head slightly towards him, but couldn't look at him fully, afraid he'd run away.

"It's my mom's birthday."

"Where is she?"

"She's dead."

I couldn't register it.

"When?" was all I could think to ask, though maybe I shouldn't have said anything at all.

"Twelve years ago, I was fifteen. She had a brain aneurysm. I found her. My father told me to go upstairs into my bedroom. I sat on my bed, digging my nails into the bottom of my bed frame, squeezing my eyes shut. My Aunt came into my bedroom at some point and told me 'She's in a better place now,' and I...was so angry at her for saying that to me. I said, no, she isn't, and I think I whispered it. I might have screamed it. I don't know...I could only feel it in my chest. Maybe I didn't say anything at all."

I wished I could answer him. But I couldn't say anything.

"I'm sorry."



A DEATHLY DECEPTION

Meghan Crawford

"Lena, I don't understand. How can your dress not fit? We ordered it months ago. I thought we had it fitted. That cost a fortune. Your father will be furious," Lena's mother sighed.

"It's not that bad, Mom, really. I mean, yeah, it's a little big—

"A little big? Lena, does this look a little big to you?" She demanded, bunching up the extra fabric on Lena's black Chanel dress in her manicured hands, her face livid.

Lena diverted her gaze and quietly mumbled, "I don't know." She shuffled her bare feet, wishing she hadn't asked her mom to help her get ready for formal. Mother had an air for the dramatic. Everything had to be about her.

Her mother sighed theatrically, letting go of Lena's dress. She glanced at herself in the mirror, fixing a loose hair in her spotless up do and reapplied her lipstick, bright red. Lena tried to suppress her laughter as her mother stood with her hands on her hips, her lips pursed.

"You know I really don't have time for this Lena, not today. You know that we have the Peterson gala tonight." She glanced at her gold and diamond encrusted watch and frowned, wrinkle free of course, courtesy of Dr. Harrison's immaculate Botox work. "Damn it, it's almost five o'clock. Sorry dear, but your father and I really need to get going."

Right on cue Lena's father knocked on the door. "Lydia, it's almost five."

"I know! I'll be down in a minute, Patrick." Lena's mother droned, smoothing out her blue wrap dress that hugged her fit, aerobicizing frame. "You'll just have to wear something else, I suppose. I can't believe the dress is too big. The dressmaker must have written the measurements down wrong. Yes, that must be it." She began walking toward the door, "I have half a mind to call Barney's right now. What was the name of the girl? Cindy? Agatha?"

Lena ignored her mother, staring up at the ceiling, arms crossed against her chest.

Lena's mother faltered and walked back over to the bed. "Lena, I know it seems like the end of the world but it isn't. You have a whole rack of dresses in your closet. You'll just have to wear one of those." She smiled knowingly at Lena and walked over to the door. "Have fun with Chad." She added as she closed the door behind her.

Corey. Lena rolled her eyes. At least she'd known it started with a 'C', that was something. She got off the bed, slipping out of the black Chanel so she was only in her lacy green underwear and began filtering through her closet, trying on replacement dresses.

I have nothing to wear! Lena groaned, tossing a red Vera Wang into the mounting pile of reject dresses. Not one of her 23 dresses fit. They hung like potato sacks on her boyish frame. Lena glanced at her phone. 5:30! *How was it already 5:30?!* Corey would be here in a half hour. Filtering frantically through her closet, Lena paused at a jade-green Valentino. She slipped the dress on and took a glance in the mirror. Her eyes narrowed in on her practically non-existent breasts. Push up, my ass. She was as flat as a month old can of Diet Coke. Lena sighed, shrugging her shoulders. She looked like a five-year-old playing dress up, not a seventeen-year-old headed on her first date.

Well, sort of. Technically it wasn't a date. She was sure Corey had only asked her so that she wouldn't be the only one without a date. Or maybe Blair had put him up to it? Hadn't Blair dated him for like two weeks last spring or maybe that was Chase Potter? Whatever, it was too hard to keep track. Blair went through BF's faster than her mother went through Olay anti-aging cream. Corey Fields was good looking, if you went for the blonde, bronzed, David-esque bodied type. You know, the guy who looked like he should be posing for Calvin Klein, not sitting in front of you in AP English. He played forward for Bay View's soccer team, catcher for baseball. He was ranked second in their class, behind her. Lena smirked. Take that, Corey Fields. Ugh, why had she even agreed to go with him? It was probably just a setup or worse. Corey was such a player, at least according to the third floor girl's bathroom. Of course that didn't stop them all from obsessing over him. Pssh. He wasn't all that. Okay, maybe he was. But he knew it. He knew how to work those blonde curls, those adorable dimples. He could have any girl at Bay View, any girl in Washington and he was going out with her, Lena Mitchell. She shook her head cynically. It had to be a setup. Maybe he owed Blair? Or, Lena shuddered at the thought; it could be a joke, a cruel, cruel joke. No. It wasn't a date. Lena's phone buzzed with a text from Blair. They were on their way and had already cracked open a bottle of champagne. Lena furrowed her brow anxiously. Champagne? Great. Just great. As if she wasn't nervous enough. Fuck them. Fuck Blair with her perfectly petite, I-can-eat-what-ever-I-want-and-never-gain-a-pound body. She pulled out her phone and expertly googled for calories in champagne: ninety-one. Ninety-one?! It was 5:40. She had twenty minutes. That was plenty of time. Lena lay down quickly on her closet carpet, getting into a crunch position and

began. One. Two. Three. Four. Lena pushed and crunched. Harder. Harder. Push it. Push it. Ninety-one calories. Ninety-one. Lena repeated the mantra over and over. She pictured herself dancing in the Valentino, arms jiggling. The champagne, the ninety-one calories! Flab. Fat. Lena crunched harder, squeezing her worn abdomen, sucking in her stomach, determined to rid it of every ounce of fat. She gritted her teeth, trying to ignore the fact that her curlers were digging into her scalp, carving, and indenting themselves into her flesh. Fuck. Lena squeezed her eyes shut, blocking out the discomfort. 210. 220. 5:52. Lena grunted. Her stomach pierced, throbbed in pain but she kept pushing. 250. 280. 5:59. A honk sounded from the driveway below. Reluctantly, Lena forced herself to stop. She pulled the curlers out of her auburn hair and touched up her makeup, attempting to cover up her red, flushed cheeks. She applied deodorant and spritzed herself with her perfume before hurrying down the stairs. Okay, she could do this. It was just one night. Taking a deep breath, Lena headed out the front door, waving timidly at Corey who was leaning against the limousine door, waiting for her, looking like a taller James Dean. Lena's heart fluttered, she couldn't help it. God he was gorgeous. Fuck him.

"Hey Lena, want a glass?" Blair asked loudly as champagne was passed around. She wore a tight, low-cut black lace dress that barely covered her bony ass. Her cleavage was pouring out like a cheap bottle of white wine. Lena hesitated. Ninety-one calories. Arm flab. No! Lena shook her head. "That's okay. I just brushed my teeth...And hate the taste of mint and champagne you know? Yuck!" Lena laughed nervously.

"Whatevs! More for me!" Blair cried, slipping off of Chase's lap. Lena sighed, relieved. She could do this. Of course there'd be food at the party—

"Hey Lennie, you look pretty," Corey said politely.

"Huh?" Lena asked distracted, watching bitterly as Blair chugged the bottle of champagne to the cheers of her peers. Bitch. "What was that?"

"Uh, nothing..." Corey muttered turning to talk to Regina. Lena glared. She knew it was a setup, a game. Hell, Corey couldn't even be bothered to talk to her for more than a minute before moving on to the next available girl.

As the limo reached Bay View High Lena's hands began shaking uncontrollably. Bile rose in the back of her throat. She took a deep breath, forcing it back down. She could do this.

"Lena, are you ready to go?" Corey asked gently, extending his arm. Sure now he wanted to be a gentleman. "Huh? Oh right." Lena tripped over her black stilettos, falling into Corey's arms, his firm, muscular arms.

She blushed sheepishly, straightening herself up and taking Corey's hand.

As they entered the gym Lena froze, her eyes widening as she took in the endless array of food lining the back wall. There were finger sandwiches, shrimp cocktail, chips and dip. Bay View had really gone all out. Lena stiffened as she caught a whiff of the sweet, creamy aroma of chocolate brownies, bunching her hands into fists.

A gentle squeeze of the hand startled Lena. "Hey... uh, Lena would you like to dance?" Corey murmured. He sure was smooth. Lena nodded; anything to distract her. Heading onto the dance floor Lena caught a glimpse of a beautiful blonde Amazon and tightened her grip on Corey's firm bicep. She watched enviously as the Amazon devoured a delectable danish, licking the icing greedily. Lena's mouth watered, her stomach rumbling softly. She could never eat like that. Not if she didn't want to spend her entire Sunday on the Elliptical machine. Fuck her.

"Lena? Lena?" Corey asked concerned. Lena turned her head back to Corey who had his arms wrapped around her. They were awkwardly swaying back and forth to "Blue Moon". "So what do you think I should do?" Lena looked at him perplexedly. Corey reddened. "You know for the Shakespeare project? *Hamlet* or *King Lear*? I... uh... did you hear anything I said?"

Lena blushed and mumbled something incoherent as the song ended, turning and walking quickly over to their table. She was such a freak. Just a couple more hours to go. She started picking nervously at her nails. Her mother hated that; it wasn't ladylike. Whatever, it wasn't like she was biting on them. That was disgusting. She was simply ripping at her stubby nails, tearing the skin below the nail. There was a difference.

"Hey Lena, you want one?" Corey offered her a pastry. Lena shook her head no. He held up a brownie. Again she shook her head no. He held up a sandwich, his face solemn. "Now don't tell me you have celiac's because this bread, it's gluten-free."

Lena laughed. "No thanks. I'm just not hungry."

Corey shrugged, "Suit yourself." He shoved a whole brownie into his mouth.

"That's disgusting! I'll be back; I just need to use the ladies room." Lena went to stand up but was overcome by a spell of dizziness. What the hell? She wobbled, Corey swooping in to prevent her from falling to the floor.

"Are you okay? When was the last time you ate? Here, eat something." Corey pushed his plate toward her.

Lena shook her head. "No really Corey, I'm okay. I just tripped." She said

airily.

Corey frowned and pushed the plate closer. "Lena look, I'm not trying to butt in or anything but you should really eat something. When was the last time you ate?" he asked, concerned.

Why do you care? Lena thought. Whatever. She shrugged her shoulders, trying to act nonchalant.

"Look, how about a piece of shrimp?" He wiggled one in front of her face. She looked at him questionably. "It'd just make me feel better, okay?"

Lena sighed, her mind racing frantically. He wasn't going to give in so easily. It was just one shrimp, one little, fat, plump shrimp. Lena's brow furrowed as she quickly tried to discern the number of calories. Was it raw or boiled? It depended on the serving size. The piece was probably a large. What was his problem anyway? Did he think it was funny, messing with her?

"Um, sure. I mean it's just shrimp, right?" She laughed hastily. Lena reached forward and grabbed a piece of shrimp from Corey's plate. She paused, staring at the pinkish hue, her hands shaking uncontrollably. Slowly she ripped off a sliver of the shrimp. Trembling, Lena placed the sliver in her mouth, chewing slowly. Lena gagged, revolted. It tasted nasty, awful. Like rubber. She swallowed slowly, attempting a fake smile. "Thanks, you're right, I guess I needed to eat something. Look, I really do need to use the restroom though. I'll be right back!" she smiled sheepishly before heading off to the bathroom.

Once out of the gym Lena hurried to the bathroom, racing into the closest stall. She pulled back her hair and kneeled on the floor in front of the toilet. She pushed her spindly index finger down her throat, picturing the sliver of shrimp. Nothing. She pushed her finger down further. Slowly, bile rose up her mouth. She leaned further forward, splattering yellow-orange vomit all over the white porcelain toilet. Wiping her mouth Lena smiled genuinely, flushing away the remnants of her 11-calorie moment of weakness.

With a spring in her step Lena headed back into the school gym. She spotted Corey, still sitting at their table.

"Hi." Lena said shyly, taking a seat next to Corey. He leaned back in his chair eyeing her uncertainly.

Lena faltered. "Look, Corey. I'm sorry about that. You know if I seemed a bit weird? I just... I guess... Look; I don't know why I freaked out like that back there. I'm not usually like that. I..." Lena broke off, shaking her head. "I'm sorry." She added quietly, beginning to pick at her chewed-down cuticles.

Corey softened, leaning forward. "Lena, I'm sorry too. I... I don't know

what came over me either. I mean I just wanted to help but I think I came off too strong." He diverted his gaze. "I mean, you trip over your shoes and I try to tell you to eat something? You probably think *I'm* the freak." Lena looked up at Corey's crestfallen expression. "No I don't. But I totally wrecked your night. I'm so sorry. I'm a terrible date—" "Date?" Corey cocked his brow, his playfulness returning. Lena flushed. Oh God. She was such a dweeb. "Nah, its cool," he said quickly after seeing the horrified look on her face. "I was hoping it was a date. I, uh, told my friends that anyway. Is that okay?" Lena smiled and nodded. Okay, so maybe she'd been wrong about tonight and Corey. "Do you want to dance?" He stood up extending his arm. Hesitating slightly, Lena smiled then took it.

"Hey Lena, look a deer!" Corey panted, speeding up as he rounded the corner at the end of the trail. He raced past the large sign that read Everwood State Park, grinning impishly. "Where?" Lena looked around eagerly, being sure not to slow her step. "Wait... there's no— Hey! Corey? Corey? Where'd you go?" Lena caught sight of him as he made a beeline for the parking lot. Slightly perturbed, Lena sprinted after him across the lot and down to the pond half laughing, half wheezing as she tried to catch him. The last few weeks with Corey had been amazing, like out of a dream. She'd never thought she could be this happy or that someone like Corey would ever be interested in her. She came to a sudden stop at the large oak tree next to the pond where Corey was spreading a red flannel blanket on the lush grass. Winded, she bent over, trying to catch her breath. He flashed her a sweet, dimpled grin and patted the spot next to him. Lena smiled, starting toward him when Corey pulled out a little wicker picnic basket. He began pulling out Tupperware containers, cups and plates. Lena froze at the edge of the picnic, her mind raced. What was that? What was this? Corey called for her, eagerly waving her over. Lena remained still, astounded, frantically trying to think of a way out. "What... um... what is... what is this?" Lena managed to sputter, her eyes narrowed in thin slits. Corey walked over to where she stood a hundred feet from the tree and took her trembling hands. "It's a picnic lunch— well dinner I guess..." he said, letting go of her hands as he saw the expression on her face. "I... uh, thought you'd like it." He tousled his golden curls nervously.

Lena caught the hurt in his voice and softened, attempting a weak smile. "It's not that I don't like it... I... I'm just surprised. I mean, I thought we were just running. Wasn't that the plan? I didn't think you'd bring dinner. I mean, I already ate." Lena added quickly, automatically.

Corey frowned, confused. "What do you mean you already ate? We've spent the whole day together and you haven't eaten a thing—

"Well I had a big breakfast!" Lena interjected.

"Plus we've been running for a good seven, eight miles and it's dinner-time." Corey continued ignoring her. "I'm starved, aren't you? Come on, you should eat something baby." He reached out for her arm.

Lena slapped his hand away. "Don't tell me what to do!" she scoffed defensively, hugging herself as a light breeze passed through the crisp, autumn air. "I said I wasn't hungry—"

"No you said you'd already ate—"

"Whatever!" Lena snapped back. "Sorry I'm not hungry. Sorry I already ate. Sorry I don't want to eat your stupid picnic!"

"Stupid picnic?" Corey cried. "Damn it, Lena. I was trying to be romantic, but why bother?" He threw the picnic basket aside, his eyes blazing. "You say you already ate. You say you're not hungry. Next you'll say you had a big lunch or you have dinner waiting for you at home—"

"Well I do. I mean my parents will be expecting me—"

"It's always the same game with you." Corey continued ignoring her. "The same fucking excuses. God forbid you actually think of someone else for once, besides yourself."

What the hell? Lena watched Corey with her mouth agape. "What are you talking about?" Lena paused, confused. "What game?" She reached for Corey's hand. He batted it away.

"You know, you're just like her." Corey observed, sitting down on the blanket.

"Like who? What are you talking about?" Lena demanded, taking a seat next to him. "What is with you anyway? Is this all because I won't eat your picnic? I told you, I'm just not hungry."

"You're not hungry," Corey echoed hollowly, shaking his head. "If I had a dollar for every time she said that."

"WHO?!" Lena pressed impatiently, her eyes narrowed. "Who are you talking about?"

"My sister!" Corey cried callously. "Cady, my fucking anorexic sister always had a million excuses for why she couldn't eat, why she shouldn't eat. What good it did her." He shook his head wearily. "I don't even know how it started. Cady's five years older than me so after her freshmen year of college, right before we started high school, she comes home

from school for the summer, right? I could barely even recognize her, my own sister. She looked like a fucking skeleton, all skin and bones. She wouldn't go get milkshakes with me at Flannery's anymore, our weekly summer tradition. All she wanted to do was keep working out, every day, nonstop. At night I could hear her grunting, counting as she did crunches at three o'clock in the morning." Corey said judgmentally. Lena blushed. "My parents eventually sent her off to rehab, what good that did her. She came back all perky and determined to be healthy. She said she'd taken dieting too far and it wouldn't happen again." Corey rolled his eyes. "Long story short, right now Cady's locked up on her fourth round of rehab where some overpaid doctors force feed her through a tube." He paused. "So there. Are you happy now? Did I answer your question?" he asked scathingly, glaring at Lena.

Lena froze at his piercing glare, momentarily rendered speechless. "I, uh, I... I'm so sorry Corey," she began.

"The worst part is she doesn't even care. My parents argued all the time over how to help her. Now they're getting a divorce," he said bitterly. "And I have to work my ass off at baseball this spring to try to get a scholarship, otherwise I can kiss college goodbye thanks to Cady's stupid medical bills. But oh no, as long as she's a fucking size zero, as long as she keeps losing weight, that's all she cares about." Corey spat. "I wish she were dead," he added heartlessly.

"Corey, you don't mean that..." Lena said quietly, fidgeting with a loose string on the blanket. "And thanks for sharing, but you know I'm not... I mean, I don't have an eating disorder," Lena whispered.

Corey glared at her coldly. "That's what Cady said."

"Well, I'm not! I'm not anorexic. I'm not your sister, Corey!" Lena exclaimed. "Look, I'm really sorry about what happened to your sister, I really am. But I don't have a disorder."

"You don't have a disorder," Corey repeated scornfully. "Okay. Prove it!" "Prove it?" Lena watched horrified as Corey reached for a Tupperware container.

"Yeah, eat this. It's a chicken salad. If you eat it I'll get off your back. Go on. You haven't eaten all day. I'll have one too." He pulled out an identical container and handed her a fork, his expression grim.

Lena remained still. What was he doing? Her hands began to shake, her heart racing as Corey prodded the salad toward her.

"Well go on, eat. I mean you said you don't have a disorder. So what's the problem?"

Lena glared acidly at him. Fuck you. He smiled back, knowingly, smugly, as if saying *I told you so*. It only aggravated her further. She'd show him.

He wanted her to eat? Fine. She could eat his pathetic salad. She made a face at Corey. Douchebag. Lena hesitated and then stabbed indignantly at the container with her fork, grabbing hold of a forkful of lettuce dripping with dressing. Disgusting. Fucking disgusting. Frantically, Lena tried to calculate the number of calories. Well, that all depended on whether it was lite or regular. Lena glanced loathingly at Corey who watched her expectantly. Regular, definitely regular. One hundred forty-five, Lena estimated. One hundred forty-five calories! She could— Lena dropped the fork.

"That's what I figured." Corey said coldly. "Can't even eat a piece of lettuce without freaking out."

"You're such an asshole, Corey. I said I'm not hungry." Lena shoved the salad aside, crossing her arms in indignation. "You know you can't tell me what to do." She snapped back.

"Damn it!" Corey cried, throwing the salad container at the oak tree. It split in two, splattering the bark with lettuce and Ranch dressing. Lena shuddered, slowly inching herself away from Corey. Corey shook his head, flexing his fingers into fists. "I'm such an idiot. I knew what I was getting into when I saw you at the dance. I should have quit while I was ahead. But no, I really liked you and I thought, *maybe she's different, maybe she's not like Cady*. You ate the shrimp." He paused, looked at Lena and laughed coldly. "Of course, the bathroom. Damn I really must be naïve. What'd you do, throw it up?" Corey shook his head. "Lena, I'm sorry, but this just isn't working for me."

Lena said nothing, holding back the tears threatening to come forth. There was nothing to say.

"I'm sorry but, this. You. Me. I can't do it. I won't go through this again." He stood up and began gathering up the uneaten picnic, wiping the tree clean.

Lena shook her head incredulously. "So you're breaking up with me? I knew I shouldn't have trusted you. The other girls were right about you," Lena spat.

"Lena." Corey began, reaching for her hand.

"Fuck off, Corey!" she cried pushing his hand away. She jumped up and started running toward the parking lot.

"Lena, wait." Corey sprinted after her. He caught up to her, forcing her to a standstill.

"Let. Go. Of. Me!" Lena said, her teeth gritted as she attempted to wiggle herself free from Corey's grasp. "What do you want Corey, huh? You broke up with me. What else do you have to say?" She stood defiantly with her hands on her hips, chin up, trying to hold back her tears.

Corey shook his head. "I dunno, Lena. I guess there's nothing to say." Lena stood watching as he walked to his red Pathfinder and slammed the door shut.

"That a boy." Lena's father cried approvingly, clapping loudly as he watched a baseball game. Oh, not just any baseball game. The World Series. Apparently it was a big deal. Her father had actually come home early from work to watch it. He leaned forward to high-five Lena. Lena stared. Oh, someone hit the ball. Congratulations. She rolled her eyes. He dropped his hand and turned back to the game shaking his head. Lena returned to her battered copy of *Wuthering Heights*.

"Hey Lena, can you get that?" her father asked glued to the game as the doorbell rang.

"Whatever." Lena said. Don't want you to miss a minute of the gripping action.

"What are you doing here?" she asked angrily, as she opened the door and found Corey standing on the porch. He looked terrible. His eyes were puffy. Had he been crying?

She wrinkled her nose at the pungent, musky stench coming from him. She took another glance at his eyes: red and glassy and slapped him across the face.

"What was that for?" he slurred, staggering backward.

"You're stoned!" she whispered, "Ugh, and drunk." She started pushing him off the porch. "Are you crazy? My parents are home. They'll go nuts if they see you. Why are you here, anyway? You broke up with me, remember?"

"She's dead." Corey cried, pulling out a silver flask and taking a swig. Lena wrestled the flask from his hands, turning to dump the liquor into the rose bushes. "Who's dead?" she asked, already knowing the answer, the reason why he'd come here of all places.

"Cady. She's gone, Lena. It's all my fault." He put his head in his hands. "I wanted her to die. I actually wished my own sister would die." He sobbed shamelessly.

"Oh Corey I'm so sorry. I..." Lena didn't know what to say as she awkwardly patted him on the back. "But look, let's drive you home. If my parents saw you—"

"Your parents?" Corey asked, dazed.

"Yeah," Lena whispered, annoyed. Sure he was drunk, had every right to be, but did he have to act like such a moron? "They're right inside— what

they hell are you doing?"

Corey pushed her aside and walked right into the house. "Mr. Lena's Dad? Mrs. Lena's Dad?" he called drunkenly.

"Shh," Lena tried to cover his mouth. "What are you doing? Are you trying to get me killed?" she whispered incredulously.

"No, I'm trying to stop you from killing yourself," he said soberly.

Lena rolled her eyes exasperatedly. "Please, Corey, enough with the whole knight in shining armor thing. It's getting kind of old. I told you I don't have anorexia!"

"Shut up, Lena," Corey said. "I'm here to help you, whether you want me to or not. I care about you. Heck, I think I might even love you. And I'm not going to let you die." He pushed her aside, heading into the den. "Mr. Mitchell?" he called, having remembered Lena's surname.

"Yes?" Lena's father stood up alarmed, muting the television. "What do you want? Who are you?" His eyes narrowed as he took in Corey's disheveled appearance. Lena cringed.

"I'm a friend of Lena's from school. Is Mrs. Mitchell here? I'd really like to talk to both of you. Corey Fields," he added, sticking out his hand for Lena's father to shake.

Mr. Mitchell glared at Corey's proffered hand and turned to Lena. "Lena what's this about?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's nothing Daddy. I'm really sorry about this. He'll be leaving now."

Lena glared pointedly at Corey. "You can leave now, Corey." She folded her arms across her chest in finality.

Mr. Mitchell glanced at Lena and then Corey. "I think you should be going now, Corey, is it?"

"Yes, sir. But, please Mr. Mitchell. If you'd just get Mrs. Mitchell. This is urgent." He paused when Mr. Mitchell stayed still and added, "It's about Lena."

"What about Lena?" his eyes narrowed into slits. "What did you do to her?"

"Uh, nothing," Corey said hastily, "Nothing. I'm just worried about her. She's... look sir, is your wife here? I'd really like to talk to both of you."

Mr. Mitchell shrugged his shoulders. "Fine. Hey Lydia? Lydia come in here please!" Lena's father yelled into the kitchen.

Lena's mother came in distractedly, phone in one hand, take out menu in the other. "What is it, Patrick? I was just about to order dinner. Did you want anything, Lena? Oh, hello," she paused, catching sight of Corey.

"Who is this? What's going on, dear?" she asked puzzled.

"Corey Fields, ma'am," Corey replied, offering his hand to shake. "I'm a friend of Lena's—" Lena scoffed. Friend. What did he think he was doing?

"He said he has to tell us something about Lena. Some strange boy walks into my house, claiming he knows something about my daughter that I don't..." Mr. Mitchell looked up horrified. "Don't tell me you're pregnant. Boy, if she's pregnant I'll beat your ass you can count on that—" "Dad!" Lena cried, embarrassed. "I'm not pregnant. Jeez." Could this get any worse?

"Oh right." He blushed and sat down in his La-Z-Boy. "Then what's going on?"

"Lena has anorexia." Corey said quickly.

"Excuse me?" Mr. Mitchell replied startled. "What?"

"An—"

"Nothing Dad. I think you should go now Corey." Lena said acidly. "Sorry Dad, Mom."

"She's lost a lot of weight. You have to know that. I mean look at her." Corey exclaimed, pointing at Lena's small frame. "She refused to eat around me and I bet she does the same here—"

"He's drunk." Lena shouted. "He doesn't know what he's talking about. I mean Mom, Daddy, do you really think I'd starve myself to death?" she laughed nervously.

"She's lying!" Corey cried.

"Lying? Boy you sure have a lot of nerve!" Lena's father boomed, standing up. "You come in here drunk and high as the Space Needle and you insult my daughter? My Lena?"

Lena smiled smugly at Corey. He looked back, his eyes crazed with determination. "No sir, I... that's not your daughter. I mean, well, technically yes, that's Lena, but she's been overtaken by the anorexia. Can't you see it? She has you fooled. Mrs. Mitchell?" he turned to look at her. "You had to have noticed she was losing weight, that she was refusing to eat." She met his gaze coldly. "Are you suggesting that I am a bad mother?"

"What? No, of course not. I just meant surely you--"

"I think it's time for you to leave now Corey," Lena's mother said curtly, her lips pursed. Lena's father nodded in accord.

"She'll die!" Corey cried desperately. "Just like my sister, Cady. My parents were like you guys in the beginning. They didn't want to see it. But please, Mrs. Mitchell, Mr. Mitchell."

Lena's mother faltered, sinking back into the couch. Her eyes widened in horror. "The dress?" she whispered. "It wasn't a mis-measurement, was it?" she turned to look at Lena. "Was it?"

"Mom, I... he's drunk!" Lena retorted. She glared at Corey. "Mom, come on, please." She reached for her mother's hand. "Mom?" Her mother burst into tears. "Dad? Daddy? You believe me, right?" she cried desper-

ately, turning to look at her father.

His face was ashen. "I don't know what to believe anymore. Lydia?"

Lena's mother stifled her sobs. "Patrick, I think he's right. I... I can't believe I overlooked this. I'm a horrible mother!" she cried dramatically.

Corey walked over and sat down next to her. "Mrs. Mitchell, you're not a bad mother." He said comfortingly. "She's sick, Mrs. Mitchell. You're sick, Lena."

You're sick Lena. Corey's words echoed in Lena's mind as she sat in the backseat of her father's Escalade. Sick? Please. Her Grandpa Reho had been sick when he died from stomach cancer. Cancer was an illness. She was just trying to get in shape, lose some unwanted poundage. Since when was that an illness? Corey needed to get over his whole white knight syndrome. Yeah that sucked what happened to his sister. She probably really had an eating disorder or whatever. But she wasn't Cady Fields. She hadn't talked to Corey since he'd showed up at her house a week ago to "out" her to her parents. God he'd made such a mess of everything. Her parents had been on high alert since Corey's revelation. They wouldn't let her workout, not even a quick jog. God forbid her weak, wittle heart give out. Lena glared at the back of her mom's head. Of course it was okay for *her* to go to her personal trainer six times a week. Probably didn't want Lena to be thinner than her, the shallow bitch. Her mom had called practically every doctor and therapist in the state, trying to find the best *facility* for Lena. Of course they'd take the rehab route. Anyway to avoid parenting. And now they were forcing her to go to this ridiculous doctor's appointment. She wasn't sick. She was perfectly healthy. Lena scoffed jadedly, kicking the back of her father's chair a few times. Traitor. The car slowed to a stop as they reached their destination. An hour and nineteen minute drive. They'd spent over an hour driving to the stupid Children's hospital in Seattle.

Lena sat bitterly in the bright sunny-fucking yellow waiting room, glaring at a mousy looking boy picking his nose across from her. It's called a tissue, ever hear of one? God people were so disgusting. This was a colossal waste of time. She had a psych paper due on Monday. Lena shot mutinous glances at her parents who were huddled in the corner of the room in deep discussion. Probably busy picking out what fattening farm they'd send her to.

"Mitchell?" A young, thin blonde nurse stood in the doorway. Lena glared at her. Oh sure it's okay for her to be a double zero.

"Reason for visit?" she droned once in the observation room.

Lena folded her arms. "Ask them," she replied acidly, jabbing a finger in her parents' direction.

Mrs. Mitchell explained Lena's symptoms, at least what they'd observed. They? Please. Trust her mother to play the attentive, concerned parent. If it hadn't been for Corey, they never would have even noticed. Lena rolled her eyes as her mother went on about how she refused to eat, exercised religiously and changed drastically in appearance and attitude. Her mom was so overdramatic. So what, she'd lost a few pounds. Since when was that a disease? Losing weight was a good thing.

Lena was interrupted by the doctor's entrance, Dr. Sue Thompson. She was frumpy to say the least. Her white doctor coat was two sizes too small. She wore a bright, cheery expression on her face. She had to be high on something, no one smiled like that unless they were on drugs or had just had sex. Lena glanced at the doctor's lip hair. Unlikely. Dr. Thompson listened patiently as both Lena's parents explained the situation, scribbling feverishly in a little black notebook. What did they even write in those things? She was probably drawing fucking rainbows and unicorns.

When they finished she cleared her throat and turned to Lena. "Lena?" she said in a piercingly chipper voice.

Lena stared stonily at her. "Yeah?"

"Lena," Dr. Thompson continued, "I've heard your parents' thoughts. Now I'm asking for yours. Do you think you have a problem?"

"No." She answered briskly, turning to look at her phone. Blair wanted to hang out.

"You don't think you have a problem? You think it's perfectly normal to starve yourself and exercise to the point of obsession? You think that's okay?" Dr. Thompson pressed.

"Yes." Lena replied cheekily. "I don't have a problem, *Doctor* Thompson. So what, I lost a few pounds. Since when did that become an illness?" she taunted.

The doctor frowned, shaking her head in concern. "Lena, this is about more than your weight loss. The problem is that you think you need to lose weight, that you have to. You're afraid to eat. You are addicted to exercise. You have anorexia-nervosa, Lena." She looked down at her papers then turned to Lena's parents. "She is at a critical weight, meaning that I am required to recommend hospitalization. Her blood pressure is dangerously low. She's slowly killing herself. But with a weight this low, her heart could give way at any moment. There's no telling when. Do you want to die Lena?"

Lena rolled her eyes. *Heart failure?* Please. She didn't know who was more dramatic, her mother or Dr. Thompson. She was fine. "I feel fine. My

heart's great, really."

Dr. Thompson smiled bitterly. "You're not fine. You're sick, Lena."

The words echoed in Lena's head. *You're sick. You're sick.* She thought of Corey, that infamous night at the park. She hadn't even been able to eat a salad, a salad for Christ's sake. Lena shook her head. No. It couldn't be true. This couldn't be happening to her. She was Lena Mitchell, number one in her class at Bay View High. She was Lena Mitchell, the goody-goody, the teacher's pet. She was... Lena gasped, as the thought dawned on her, as the clouds cleared and clarity hit. She was Cady Fields.



YOUR MAMA WARNED YOU AGAINST AMBIENT LIGHT

Amelia Gramling

4:43AM, a moment of lying
there, the murmur begins,
lid-less, I'm
blinking back sun-speckled imprints of
tobacco high seas, the river frost-bit and
Barren rolling in and under wreathes
after wreathes of
coal miner-horizon-blue the grass Kentucky greened, it's all the sudden:
more suns than words I yet speak, what looks to be the whole, the every-
thing
spools before me, I mean the whole wide all of it
but for
two-sets of stubby toes, the center of the cosmos steady between them,
spins
I'm most afraid of floating
away into the way too late, hey, don't-look-up-just white noise
above my head
I look up
thumb-prints spangle sky-wide
meteors blast the nighttime
hinge-less, our mouths butterfly-kissed fall
open, say
"ahhhh,"
eras and eons drip from splintered
veins bled forever-wet
so, now I get it,
the whole, the everything's cracked
many times before and since and so much worse
than this

what is this
piece of a dream, a little girl's caught and strung-round-her-finger-fire fly,

a self I imagine

I unjar a little and a little more with every heart beat and second scattered
all the wiser wind maybe
known, maybe not, maybe mine, maybe borrowed off my dad, my brother,
a story I stole or told myself until I swallowed whole, doesn't matter.
Under the bleach of morning, either or, all. Don't keep.

Count sheep, keep time, the two-step-basic, breathe.

The stars of 4:43AM stretch the millennial calcium-rim no different than
the morning Cortez first penned Montezuma's manhood abreast king
Charles' sea, no different than the emperor's fever wrung kiss-me-quick
death of days later, no different from the center

God's-splint

guiding

half the hemisphere to devour

the other

what's to hinder the heavens from hinting their hand in the end of a moment
there or

here, just once,

(but who could see them to say now or ever from any street this deeply
suburbed or far East)

Some girls' prayers drift newly winged on the promise of coming dawn
(but who was taught to reach further than vessel or ceiling vent to pluck
one or any for you or from me)

someone somewhere may be answering a question too big for them like
"what is a man?" But how could I hear them,

behind the inescapable hum,

the fly-paper glass,

doesn't keep from me,

here, the never-wrestful

murmur of the

street

Eastern-Time, Westerville Ohio, my sheets dirty pink, 4:43 AM, 2014
this moment of lying,

mine,

looks the same in every West-wind-ward bed I've ever pressed,
or been pressed in

to paintbrush-to-tongue-to-tip-to-lick the color

bleeding through the window-glass now and every night before or since
I can imagine easy and exactly

as I do from my back, here, as if the shade alone could blur the dark

un-reasoned,
as if the next bend will bear a question, followed by
a kitten-heeled stranger, a mother who is not mine, a furrowed brow to
make meaningful-or-less
a face I haven't dreamt of yet, who
might mechanically collect and stamp my work, my word, E as-in-excep-
tional, E
for the ease with which I lie
here, tell me
how are you sleeping?

wouldn't you rather hear tell of the color, so much and so many
blank stares naming& naming over
I've spent and still am spent
to-beg-the-morning-come-quick-to night, I christen
this ambient ceiling,
the tender
river-sided, spoiled ground
up from the belly cut
California-top heavy
Clementine, plus
a touch of,
the tar-brush of Crayola's
Red-Tide rust, (belly after belly, spat-up and shadowed the shallow
crashing again and against my and Magnolia's bare feet some young
November, Myrtle Beach)
see?

easy
when your eyes as mine ache under
48 hours of pent up (who are you fooling here, think now, to whose ear
do you sweet, it's much more akin to
twenty-plus years
of) stubbornness
to keep them open if
unseeing
it's the hum
that nettles not
distinct from the refrain Mama might someday canvas, left unpainted
yet Light-As-Seen-Through-46-West-Home-Street-Lamp-Tin-bent blinds

brutally slatted patches of
slasher-perfect blood patterns, CSI
Las Vegas, Miami, Hawaii
the first guy (have you noticed how often his name is Rick? Or Evan?
Innocuous? Forgotten)
if I've learned anything from TNT it's if a girl is dead
Rick did it
with weapon-ized passion we name for
(see evil, see congenital, see-no, see bone)
love, I believe, not-quite
broken he leaves her heart whole; pockets its beats to his breast to bear
far from
here,
a ledgeless window-box of white linen and industrial stink
and many years of by-god-or-by-gun,
cigarette won
forgive me
who could I am wondering?
My dad, who is kind, probably, my dad who was once angry and young
and who somewhere far from here also asked questions too big for him,
like "what is a man?" my father
who will April-come calmly slip under-the-knife-drip to quiet some leaky
tenderness,
(see heart-sick, see congenital, see my ear to his chest) do you hear that,
there, yes -- a murmur

two things my mama told me:
to produce enough melatonin to live a life more full and even, than hers
was or ever will be, she says
I have to be willing to sleep above the neck in-as-near-to-cave dark, as
the moon relents
she learned this, of ambient light, a toxin never fully pinned-to silently
breed breast cancer,
three stillborn's worth, at least, of blood they bled from her, tests after test
empty
tattooing strings of bruiseless blues along her inner-elbow seams,
the second goes something like you will not wake tomorrow born into the
woman you want to be, the chemo didn't take
her,
even the second go, she rallied from the moment of lying, from her back,
here
but one day and then the other

long after the earth will steady her body against its collar-bone hollow,
before the heavens split them open-mouthed,
the sea-worthy knew her (and will a gain) from the way only one tide
rocked them, the horizon
blue she didn't choose, the
heart-murmur, we only follow
a moment
home







R.I.P. GREEN WALLPAPER

Cassidy Brauner

Josh Brandon

I'm homo I'm a sinner
I'm Hebrew I'm Jesus
I'm prophetic I'm stupid
I sleep until the day is dead -

I sleep on beds of
surreptitious nightmares where
hands
reach up night shorts
into depths of a body
that no longer belong to me -
until spiders scar the walls
near my padded cell
with inching marks showing
the days I've survived hell.

I'm forgetful I'm an asshole
I'm man I'm a bitch
I'm woman I'm a joke
I pick the skin near my nail beds until it bleeds,

But my mother only grieves
in small increments of time
while she flounders in a world
that repeats the same nonsense to her
until her aching bones
become withered
and dismantled -
until the day she turns to dust
and folds into a capsule
of the earth that bore her.



REMEMBERING THE SEA

Katy Major

There are less dreams spinning in my head every day, but I can't forget the sensation of tautened white waves licking my feet in a salty kiss that has never washed off—my god, the sound had me glowing, a skinned grey rock baking in the rays bouncing off—
as soon as the car—I remember it red, it wasn't red—pulled alongside South Myrtle—glowing white rocks glinting in front of pillared castles, art-deco, I think—I was by the ocean, my feet skating on the surf, though I hadn't left the car my eyes joined the enormous yawning navy of one of the mothers of the earth itself, the stuff beneath our feet—
we raced up like a twenty-something, we took pictures that filled our phones, we couldn't capture enough pieces—
(I treasured every grain of it between my toes, the fragments cooling in the cells of my skin)

the condo's porch is the locus. Stub after cigarette stub pile me in a mound of sulfuric ash, the sweat drips. I practically refuse to go inside, neglecting the cooking, slathering on tanning oil, lighting another cigarette. Brown feet propped up on the beaten wood railing. Crammed into a plastic chair—the hiss of my skin against the hot plastic—against a sea-whipped wall, limbs dangling all over the table.

the salt-splattered copy of *The World According to Garp* sticking to my legs, damp with surf *In this dirty-minded world you are either somebody's wife or somebody's whore* Hair crisping in the sun and wind, straw-like peering through smudged wet smeary sunglasses, sweat frosting the insides. the constant roar, insatiable, all-consuming. omnipotent.

God Eye

waking up at 5am on musty carpet freezing in the air conditioner's blast remembering the sea the sea the sea outside. listening carefully to the silence, searching for the season. flinging off my bedclothes, shoving shorts on, dashing out to walk for several miles without realizing it, smiling at babies growing red-faced in the golden morning sunshine sea-worn old men settling in creakily with scorched wives in visors, me young and tawny wondering

who would I meet if I spent every day here

and entertaining the idea of a North Myrtle beach shack a desk by a

window a roar escaping through the cracks laptop flipped open identical brown feet silhouetted against the gray expanse. a storm physically jolting me.

mornings before the gray and below the gray
lips parted, reverence lost in the spaces between where I feel and where I speak

almost stumbling on a sea turtle, head glistening, my hand over my mouth, his eyes quick and dark, my feet tripping back in caution for his alien life before my eyes we survey each other, and I wish I could join him in the depths of his existence

because by that time I knew that being born a human girl was the strangest thing that could have happened to someone like me
could you possibly believe in mermaids if I proved to you that there is more life drawn to the ocean than even the crabs and the guppies and the shark and that even our tangential forays into the crashing cannot compare to the lives that must exist

I saw it that day when we were hidden in the weeds smoking pot and a sand storm hit, and suddenly the entire world was minute flecks of oceanic life and salt-smell and stinging shards of sea shells, a glimpse of what lies beyond human existence

I thought I had been consumed, never to return, eyes locked before me in astonishment, before Kenny grabbed my hand and dragged me away

I made my mark in the wet sand with my feet and hands blew the waves a kiss goodbye pressed my face to the boiling ground breathed the heavy air felt my final light-headed moments of bliss

I left my praises in the sun streaks written gold





