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QUIZ & QUILL

OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE | VOL. 94 | SPRING MAGAZINE 2013

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SUBMISSION POLICY

Q&Q prides itself on publishing the highest-quality creative work. Therefore, every precaution is taken to assure writers' anonymity during the selection process. Only the advisor of Q&Q knows the identities of those who submit work to the magazine until after staff members' selections are finalized.

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LETTER from the EDITOR

DEAR READERS,

In some ways, I think it's best to let this magazine stand on its own, with no introduction at all. The pieces within are so beautifully crafted, passionate, and skillfully powerful, that they can easily be identified as great works with no commentary from myself.

However, regardless of the necessity, I want to acknowledge that the literature published in this year's *Spring Magazine* is of the highest caliber. Our staff deliberated rigorously over the submissions, and these are the standouts.

Though this magazine is not themed, there is a certain fluidity to the works that transfers from one to the next in a seamless fashion. And after a lot of contemplation, I think, perhaps, that feeling is simply soulfulness. The characters, places, times, moments, images, and emotions reach out to strike a chord, and it is my hope that they do indeed connect with you.

This year has been an unbelievable part of my life. I have to thank my staff for such amazing fortitude and stamina this year during a rebuilding phase of the magazine. This year, we had a younger staff that stepped up and became invaluable members of *Quiz & Quill*. I also want to thank all of my genre editors for their wonderful consultation, and Mike Cirelli for going above and beyond (as always) in designing and maintaining the graphic identity of *Quiz & Quill*. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Shannon Lakanen, our faculty advisor, who was such a crucial part of the success of this magazine. She was constantly challenging everyone on staff to produce the best possible literary magazine, and I believe we have done just that.

I have to admit that I am loath to say good-bye to this magazine that has been such a big part of my life for the past four years at Otterbein. But everything has to end sometime, and if it has to be done, I am happy that this can be the final chapter of my role as editor of *Quiz & Quill*. I will cherish the memories and moments of this year. I couldn't have asked for a better job.

So moving away from sad contemplation of endings, please begin going through the magazine. I hope that you enjoy reading it as much as the staff has enjoyed selecting it and creating it for you.

WHITNEY REED
managing editor

THEORIES ON EXTINCTION

JESSICA CAMPBELL

I was an obsessed baby with a fixation on nature
Exotic animals and faraway lands spilled out of my eyes
I crawled on my knees and begged for the pack to take me
Cursed the five-foot space between the houses on my street
Cried every night because of my thin-weak body and my too-big brain

At age nine I could recite the way sea turtles hatch,
I knew in what ways the Gila monster poisoned people,
I could describe the difference between leopard and cheetah,
Milk snake and coral snake,
Brachiosaurus and Brontosaurus
I could have told you
How the dinosaurs died away

I dreamt every night of a girl I read about in a yellow-backed magazine
Who sat at the top of the biggest tree in the Amazonian rain forest
To keep metal machines from chopping it down for paper
I saw her trying to justify her childhood like mine,
And she seemed worlds away, thousands of miles and hundreds of years
My idolized teenage self was embodied in her
She had to pee in a bucket for months. I remember the crane that lifted her down

At this age I saw visions of myself years in the future—
Living with and studying the gorillas,
Like Jane, who in me inspired hot envy
And hunting with the pack of lions,
Like Liza, who I watched with rose-wide eyes
I was friends with them all
Or else I was digging up ancient bones,
Dinosaurs that had never been discovered,
And I saw them in my book build nests and hunt and forage for food
I watched them climb amongst identical brown and gray rocks
I carried them over twin ridges.

I read about species of animals that had gone extinct and hid under my bed
for days
I read about forests that had been clear-cut and felt my cells vibrate
At the zoo, signs said there were about a hundred and fifty Indian Elephants left
Seventy-five Western Black Rhinoceroses
When I realized there were more kids in my elementary school alone than that
I once watched a video of a man who was friends with two tigers,
And they would wrestle in the water with him,
And he had a signal to give when they became too rough and they would
pull away
I cried hot tears of jealousy

On the first day of class,
Each nine-year-old was able to write down one thing
They wanted to learn about on a slip of paper and put it in a bowl,
And by the end of the year the teacher promised
That we will have learned about them all
I put in dinosaurs.
We never learned about dinosaurs.

Theories on extinction:
The Tyrannosaurus Rex became so insatiably hungry that it ate
Every single dinosaur, and when there were none left,
It ate itself.

FAR-AWAY FRUIT

DANIELLE GAGLIANO

Mrs. Peterson had been slowly breaking even for the past fifteen years. She had enough money, plenty really. But the chord of her life was finally struck when she was 44 (she had timidly estimated) and had been resonating at the same dull tone since her youngest daughter went off to Virginia for college. She was 52 now, with blonde hair graying rapidly, and she hadn't written a thing in over 10 years.

This did not mean that she was not a writer because Mrs. Peterson was perhaps, above all things, a list maker. Her days and nights were carefully plotted in black ink on white paper. You'd find an itinerary of her life indented into rigidly columned time-slots, each time-slot a list of lists with specific time-slots dedicated to creating them. She typed them all using Windows 97 on the first and only desktop computer she had ever purchased. Once, her son Jacob tried to talk her into getting a new computer.

"Macs are really user-friendly, Mom. Honestly I can't believe that old software even still works."

Twirling the old phone cord, she laughed over the phone self-consciously. "Thank you babe, but I just don't see any need for a change!" Discipline was a quiet little dance.

Grocery lists were her favorite to make because of the challenge they presented: always stick to the list. If she intended on purchasing feta for a new Greek salad she was "trying out" but forgot to add it to the list, she would not purchase it. And she would walk by the cinnamon scented pinecones assuring herself that if she really needed them she would remember and put them on her next list. *Fe-ta-fe-ta-fe-ta-fetafetafetafeta-fe-ta-fe-ta* she would repeat to herself on her drive home, keeping time on the steering wheel with her index fingers. And she would not forget on the next trip. When she got home, she'd start the next list. In bed she'd close her book, remove her glasses and click off the lamp. Forcing her eyes closed, she'd repeat to herself whatever she had left off the list for that day.

Once, while out at the store, she received a text from Mr. Peterson asking if she might be able to pick up some granulated sugar for his red Italian gravy. When she got home, he helped her unload the groceries eyeing them for the requested item. Not finding it he asked, "Judy, did you get the sugar?"

She shook her head beneath the rush of boxed rice that she was tiptoeing to the third shelf. He slid the box even for her.

"Why not? Didn't you get my text?"

"I'm sorry, Tom," she said as she turned around. "It wasn't on the list."

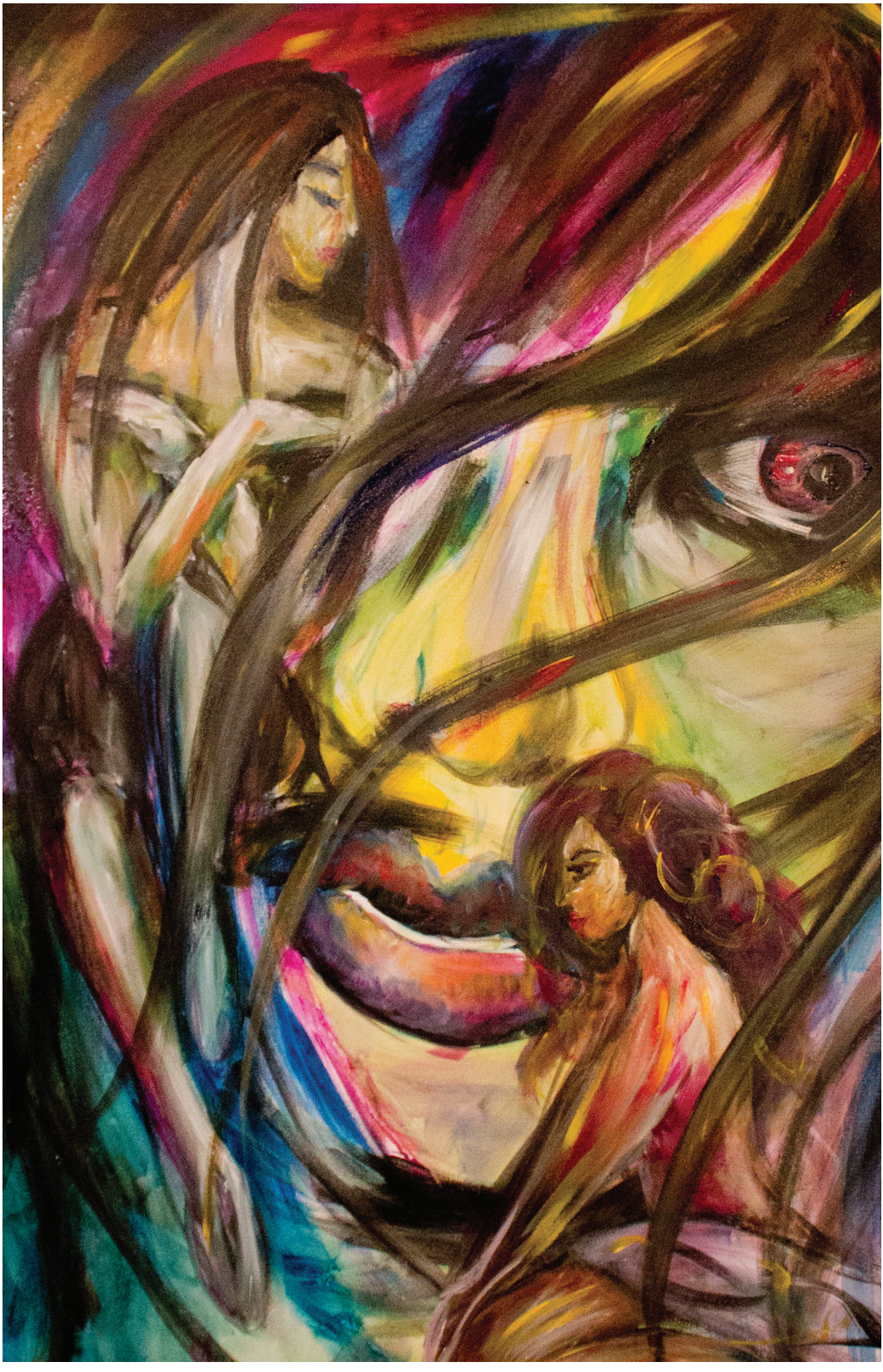
Judy and Tom were best friends but their marriage, like all marriages, lost most of its youthful glow. She stopped wearing lipstick when he no longer made her nervous and by this time in their lives she rarely applied mascara. Her wardrobe had not changed in 20 years. Sure, she had tried, but she never felt comfortable. She was comfortable in her marriage though, just as comfortable as her favorite grey sweatshirt. They lived together longer than either had lived with their siblings. So after the task of raising

MRS. PETERSON WAS PERHAPS, ABOVE ALL THINGS, A LIST MAKER. HER DAYS AND NIGHTS WERE CAREFULLY PLOTTED IN BLACK INK ON WHITE PAPER.

three children, sex seemed almost incestuous. They respected one another. Their friendship sustained them. What more could she ask for or need? Still, when she would lie there staring at the eggshell white ceiling, repeating, *o-j-with-pulp* or *kitch-en-light-bulb* or *dry-wine-for-Fri-day* she could see the two of them sitting on the roof, Tom in cut-off jean shorts, smoking a joint, drinking beer from a can and herself laughing madly at his attempts to coax her into "making love closer to the sun." She could see her own smile, she could hear it. But its sound was distant, like a language she had known but at some point forgotten. And by morning the smoke, slate and smile dissipated, greying into the mist of other vaguely recollected dreams.

* * *

Born into Catholicism, Judy was a religious woman by default. At the encouragement of Tom she had recently joined the WWW (Women Welcoming Women) of St. Aloysius Parish Church. These ladies were interested in the "social aspects" of a good catholic life. Each week the ladies of the WWW hosted a meal "in order to familiarize the newcomers with *our world* and to bring us all closer to our faith and each other." Its head Patti Duncan was suspected to be the richest woman in the parish and had a butt so queerly bulbous that it was difficult to look away. Her voice and mannerisms were equally offensive and she took no care in humility or grace.



When it was her turn to host she hired fine Italian catering and gift-wrapped homemade cannoli with deep purple ribbon and a dangling crucifix charm.

But the research and assessment part of the "pot luck" welcome dinners had worn off. They had visited every house, broken out their oldest family recipes and finest embroidered napkins. They had all agreed that these little gatherings would not be "fancy," although no one had mentioned anything about decadence. No one had *ever* suspected that they might get bored. And so Patti Duncan called a meeting where she began: "Ladies, thank you all so much for being here. I know we're all so busy with our husbands (laugh) and kids—and I just have to let you know how proud I am of Patrick. Yesterday Richard and I were informed that he got Fastest Multiplier in that online math game they've been playing. We are so proud of him."

With echoed *awwws*, the ladies of the WWW supported their tilted heads with tiny claps. Judy thought of the scented pine-cones.

"Yes, yes, thank you all so much but really we should get to the business at hand. I'd like to congratulate all of us. I just know that we have done a wonderful job welcoming the new ladies into the parish these past few months …"

Judy observed the lip-sticked and powdered smiling faces. She drifted to the potluck she had hosted. She had forgotten to add to her list *baking powder,* and the frump of her face had mirrored the flat cake as she presented it to the ladies of the WWW. Her memory worked in a nauseating wide-angle pan of the room as she'd endured the ladies' reactions: rolling eyes, a scrunched up nose and one devilish smirk that belonged to Patti

DISPOSITION

CASSIDY BRAUNER

Duncan. She knew that they did not like her. She attributed it to her faded clothes or that she wore her children's college sweatshirts instead of printed silk blouses and magenta pantsuits. Maybe it was her mismatched placemats or her laughter that wasn't ever quite loud or eager enough. The women of the WWW were not disappointed because they had all expected her to fail. Patti Duncan seemed pleased.

"Restaurants! Ladies, we're going out on the town!"

Patti's solution to the shortcomings and low retention rate of the previous potlucks jolted Judy from her abstraction, and she kicked her ice water across the geometry of Patti's expensive designer rug. The ladies of the WWW all turned to Judy and stared.

* * *

Their first meal "on the town" would be at Puerto Del Sol, a small locally-owned Mexican restaurant in the city's historic downtown district. Judy arrived first and contemplated whether she should pick a table out on the patio or inside. It was a cool and sunny Sunday and the patio was buzzing with life. An inlaid stone fountain bore a bright and puffy-cheeked sun, water spitting playfully from its wide smile. A young girl in a fuchsia and yellow sundress ran her sandaled feet to the edge of the cobalt tiled pool, coins clenched tightly in her fists, her carrot curls bouncing wildly. Judy drew three tables together and a shy waiter delivered a basket of chips with salsa. She ordered tea, unsweetened, and because she could never be sure just *how* spicy a spicy food would be, Judy ate the chips dry.

When the other ladies of the WWW arrived they were hesitant to sit down. Squawking like lost geese, they hovered over the table until Patti Duncan arrived and announced that they would have their meal inside. "Flies," she said as she swatted at her fashioned excuse.

Inside, Judy's heather grey sweatpants met the burnt orange padded leather of an engraved wooden chair. One leg was shorter than the others and each time she reached for the basket of chips her chair jolted forward. She stopped after she knocked over Beth Juno's Diet Coke and Patti shot her an equally icy look. *I've probably had enough anyway*, she thought as she rushed to the waiters' station to ask for napkins or a towel. When she got back the ladies of the WWW were all giggles and ordering:

"I'll have the *Sangria Dos* with extra salt."

"Oh Patti, that sounds great. I'll take one of those too."

"We're both getting the strawberry peach with an extra shot and lime."

Then the waiter turned to Judy.

"Would you like one, *Señora*?" the waiter's green eyes inquired.

"Umm. Yes. I'll have one thank you. A small."

Patti jumped in, "One what, Judy? There are different kinds."

Judy flushed, "Just a regular one? I think ..."

Patti smacked her menu closed, "I'm sorry. She'll have the house margarita, frozen."

The green-eyed waiter winked at Judy, scribbled down the order and promised to be back with the margaritas soon.

"Sorry, thank you," Judy tried to express, but Patti had already moved on to the topic of the next week's bulletin.

* * *

The drink orders arrived: giant glass bulbs glowing with electric colors passed over the table and through the hands of the ladies of the WWW. Pinks swirled into reds, anti-freeze blues buoyed floral umbrellas. The lips of the glasses pursed with strawberries and lime, chunks of salt-like glittering confetti, garnished with raspberries or mint. They soared over the table blazing tails of color like tropical comets. And only Judy seemed to notice.

Her humble house margarita was placed a little to the left of her. She stared at it: *salt-slush-green-glass-cac-tus-stem*. She grabbed it and sipped. Her eyes widened. Her mouth watered. She finished it and ordered another. She thought she could see the tangy ice crystals glowing green and traveling through her veins, radiating from her fingertips. She did not speak for the rest of the meeting, but more importantly, Judy did not even listen.

* * *

She was assigned the task of making cookies for the next meeting. "Do you think you can handle that, Judy?" Patti had asked. *And what if I had said no*, Judy thought as she sat typing her list. She stared at it: oatmeal, sugar, butter, raisins, eggs. She did not want to make cookies for the ladies of the WWW, but her world existed between these two margins so she clicked print and left for the store.

Judy passed through the alcohol and mixer section on her way to the checkout line. She veered left down an aisle that got progressively more colorful. She stopped at the margarita section. Greens, yellows, blues, pinks. Sun swept beaches, parrots donning sunglasses and brilliant tropical flowers adorned the plastic bottles. Judy looked at her list and then at her buggy. She stared at the bottles and they stared back. *Stick to the list,* she thought just as another part of her shouted, *Puerta Del Sol!*

Judy sat at a small round table next to the stone fountain, entranced by the steady splash of the spitting sun and the flash of reflecting pennies below. The fountain was lit for the evening now and the pale blue water reminded her of the jacuzzi that Tom and his roommates in college had all pitched in to buy. Were any of them now still collaborating in order to get girls in their bathing suits?

"Ahhhhh! *Señorita*! Good to see you again!' Startled, Judy blushed at the same green-eyed waiter. "Will the ladies be joining you this evening?"

"Oh no. No ... I don't think so," she replied, confused as if she couldn't

remember how exactly she ended up on the patio.

"Okay. Okay. House margarita for you?"

Judy let out a deep sigh, "I was thinking I might try the pink and red one?"

"Ho ho!" He laughed, "Living dangerously tonight!" Judy looked a little embarrassed. He winked and added, "Nooo, I'm just playing. The *Sangria Dos* for you, *Señorita*."

He returned with the drink and a basket of chips with salsa. It was even more beautiful than she remembered. The swirl of red in the pink slush was hypnotic. She almost wished she didn't have to disturb it.

"Anything else for you?"

"I don't think so. But," she looked up from her drink, "is the salsa very hot?"

"We have others that are hotter. I think you can handle this one, *Señorita*," he smiled as he grabbed her menu and walked away.

That night Judy's lists were interrupted by dancing. Although she lay still in her bed sleeping, she could see herself, her body a black silhouette, the tangy crystals circulating through it; a glowing and vibrating radiation that cooled her and shook her all over. She danced through the aisles of the grocery store, tossing into her cart whatever she desired. She danced with Tom on the roof, laughing as she pulled off his t-shirt. *Closer to the sun.* She played herself in her mind like a Keith Haring figure, although Judy did not know who Keith Haring was.

The next morning Judy got up and made the cookies as planned. She placed them on the kitchen counter, arranged neatly on a tray and wrapped in cellophane. Next to it, she left a handwritten note:

Happy Sunday Tom!

I don't think I'll be meeting with the ladies of the WWW anymore. Please take these cookies to the guys this afternoon—consider it an early birthday present. See you after poker and try to win something this time!

-Judy

She then went to her closet and pulled out her favorite old cotton sundress—a faint yellow plaid with blue daisies. She zipped it up and looked in the mirror. *A classic cut,* she thought, pleased that her favorite dress still fit and looked age-appropriate. She pulled her hair from her ponytail, applied a little mascara and left her house for Puerta Del Sol.

Judy smiled as she saw the green-eyed boy approaching. "*Señorita*! You look lovely today—yes. Back for another margarita?"

Judy laughed, "Oh no, not today. But I was wondering—I don't see it on the menu but is it possible to sample all of your salsas?"

"Hey! Of course, for one of our best customers. Anything else?"

"No, I'll probably just need a couple waters." They both laughed as she handed him the menu.

"I'll keep the refills coming!"

It was early still and the Sunday lunch crowd hadn't yet appeared. She sat alone on the patio, at a table that she could now consider hers. She had made a game of trying to throw pennies into the mouth of the smiling sun. She hadn't yet thought of a gift for Tom's birthday that Tuesday. The waiter arrived with a basket of warm golden tortilla chips on a platter surrounded by six salsas in varying shades of vegetable. Pointing, he ranked them from least to most spicy and left it on the table. Judy pulled a pen from her purse and on a napkin wrote: *lipstick*. Then in parentheses she added, *the color of far-away fruit*. Satisfied, she spun the platter, took a deep breath, and reached for another chip.

TOILETTES

NOT TOO EARLY TO TELL

AMELIA CHRISTMAS GRAMLING

She will be a little girl who can make adults uneasy.
thick lipped, sharp toothed hot headed and
laughing
never from the throat
but from the belly
deep.
She was born a little diagonally
stubborn like her father and forever
mistrustful of cold weather
like her mother
December.
Came into the world
eyes clenched and fists cocked
she always knew this day was coming.
Like a man who spends night after night with nothing but a sign and a plea
a prayer
as thread bare as the socks that haven't eased his feet in over a year.
"Save yourself sinner for the end is near."
She'll never be as vindicated as she is weary
no amount of rockabye cradles or furtive tongues
will ever make as much sense
as Mama's belly
Though it will take her a
lifetime
to remember again.

RUELLE DU JOUR

ANDREW BEERS

MOGEN DAVID FOR BREAKFAST

CLAIRE PARSON

I remember waking up in that strange little house situated on the side of a mountain in Bluefield, West Virginia. I am always uncomfortable as a guest in a home, never knowing exactly when it is appropriate to walk out of your room in the morning and greet your host. Is it too early? Is it too late? Did they get up early for privacy? I listened to the three male voices blending comfortably and decided I couldn't really sit on the bed in that little room all day. The room was depressing me and had a suffocating feel. The faded wallpaper complemented the uneven floorboards. The corners of the room crookedly trapped the secrets of past generations in its scarred, mis-mitered shadows. I checked myself in the mirror. I opened the door and came out.

The three men were sitting at the same scarred Formica table surrounded by the four mismatched wood chairs (where the previous night they had shared shots of George's Maker's Mark while I sat sipping my beer). I enjoyed listening to their boyhood reminisces; twanging West Virginia voices rose as the bourbon supply depleted, and lowered as the joint was passed between them when the evening grew late. They were George's friends. Friends who called him "Bernie," a shortening of his middle name Bernard, and another reason I was feeling excluded. George lived in one world with me; Bernie lived in another world when he returned to his childhood home.

I squeezed behind Turtle to reach the percolator sitting on the counter behind him. Turtle was slumped while his hair was standing straight up. He was wrapped in a plaid flannel robe that was older than he was, his boney knee poking out beside the metal table leg.

He sat at the small sharp-sided table, gripping a jelly jar stamped with the image of Wile E. Coyote. Sitting to the right of his Looney Tunes character collector glass was an overflowing ashtray and an open pack of Camel non-filters. One crumpled smoke sat, struggling to stay lit, strangled among its bent, flat-headed peers. Slightly behind the pack of cigarettes was a bottle I had until then only seen on the bottom shelf of the neighborhood gas station. I tried to hold my composure as I poured a cup of coffee and saw the small opened bottle of Mogen David flanking Turtle's coffee mug. "Morning has broken: the breakfast of champions," I told myself, looking into the depths of my coffee as if it would send me an answer to my unspoken question, "What have I gotten myself into?" It was a mantra I would ask for most of the following five years of my marriage to George Huff.

My marriage to George was a disaster; they should give the transcript of

my marriage to those wide-eyed lovebirds applying for marriage licenses—much heartbreak would be avoided, many a lawyer would have to find a new profession. Shortly after meeting my first husband, he told me he was an orphan and most of his history. George's parents were both dead, and he had no immediate family. His mother had died in a house fire one Christmas Day. She was visiting his home for the holidays. The cause of the fire was never determined. The insurance company implied it was the Christmas tree, although a neighbor said he witnessed the tree going up in flames after he saw the smoke. George said the news media made it to his house before the fire truck and emergency vehicles. He had to be pulled off the reporter by a neighbor; the neighbor thought he was going to beat the reporter to death. I had heard the details of this story after we were married. I didn't know him then, I had met him two or three years later.

His father died of brain cancer when George was an adolescent. He watched his father battle cancer for most of his childhood. Stubbornly, his

"MORNING HAS BROKEN: THE BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS," I TOLD MYSELF, LOOKING INTO THE DEPTHS OF MY COFFEE.

father outlived the doctor who diagnosed his brain tumor. George experienced most of his youth watching his mother face uncertainty and fear. Cue the violins: my heart opened and George walked in. My childhood experience was the exact opposite of George's. I lived a happy, almost ideal childhood full of family. I had enough of everything to share. I was twenty-four, he was twenty-nine—two years after we met, we married.

I was married in my parents' backyard. The wedding was perfect: simple, sunny in the yard where I'd climbed trees and played hide-and-seek. If the marriage was not all I had dreamed of, the wedding was all I had ever wanted. Our vows were spoken with friends and relatives on my parents' patio. I remember the shadows of leaves dancing on the white limestone as I looked at my feet while the minister asked: "Do you, Claire?" The sun was shining, the beer was cold, and after the cake was cut, our guests broke out guitars and harmonicas and everyone sang.

There is a photograph of me on my dad's arm the day of the wedding and I know exactly what I was thinking at that moment: *this is a mistake, I should run.* I didn't—more's the pity. That doubt and uncertainty was not based on simple wedding day jitters. Differences that would not be ignored by the woman I am today were arrogantly brushed aside by the 24-year-old girl I used to be. There were abuse (emotional and physical), lies, and adultery all to be survived. George was the first to teach me fear and doubt. I taught myself how to cover bruises, make excuses and how to withdraw into myself. I also learned that defiantly standing toe-to-toe with a 6'2" male was not always the best course of action for a 107-pound female. That lesson took me a little longer to learn than the others. Sometimes he was subtle with his disapproval, other times as unpredictable and unmanageable as tread-bare tires on black ice. One of his favorite taunts (hinting at some unnamed shortcoming of mine) was to tell me, "I made a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Silently I responded, "I am no swine and you are no seamstress." I fought back the smile the unspoken retort tried to conjure across my face. George did not like to be made fun of, even though he gave me ample unanswered opportunities to do so.

I had, however, experienced my own victorious moments in this matrimonial melee. Early in the marriage, George left a laundry list of my shortcomings as a housewife and I countered by removing the note, correcting the spelling and the grammar in red pen, and tacking it back to the refrigerator where he had left it. We never spoke of it. He rarely left a note addressed to me again, other than a simple scribble of, "Ran to the store—back soon." I wish I had kept the note. I would fold it up all neatly and tuck it away within my pocket, carrying it with me everywhere like a sacred talisman from another life. I survived the marriage as best I could: a bit battered, a lot more cynical, but wiser and stronger.

I remember the day the end of the marriage finally came. The end came

DELICACY

KARA MILLS

in the summer as had the beginning five years previously. I was in the kitchen and the sun was shining through the sliding glass door. My coffee mug was on the counter next to the stove. My cast iron skillet was on a medium flame with two eggs frying. An open carton of eggs was on the counter top. I was in my bare feet on the red brick of the kitchen floor, usually too cool to go barefoot. George came down the stairs and into the kitchen. He poured himself a cup of coffee. I was busy cooking eggs so I didn't turn around. You have to keep your eyes on eggs. George came around behind me, stood to the side of the stove, looked at the eggs in the skillet and as calmly as you please said, "I want a divorce." Just as calmly, I moved the skillet from the flame to the back burner. I turned the burner off and began walking up the stairs, heading for the bedroom. In the bedroom, I walked to the foot of the king-size waterbed, opened the door in the pedestal, brought out a suitcase, and threw it on the bed. The waterbed wobbled, the suitcase bobbed up and down. I stared at it for a while then unzipped it. I calmly walked over to the dresser, took out my clothes and threw them in a suitcase. I remember thinking how lucky I was that it was summer: I could pack a lot of clothes in. I remember thinking my sweaters would never have fit. I remember feeling a conflict of relief and panic rising up inside me. I stared at the suitcase for a while, zipped it shut and headed back downstairs.

I met George halfway down the staircase. We looked at each other and finally he said, "I didn't mean you had to leave." I remember thinking, "God, you ass, what do you think you do after being told such a thing?" I remained silent. I just looked at him with amazement. I passed him on the stairs, hugging my side of the stairway not wanting to brush against him. I remember I picked up my purse off the small table in the living room, wondering who was going to get that nice little antique. I headed out the door. In the driveway I opened the door to my car. Internally I said a brief prayer of thanks that my car was parked behind George's Blazer in the driveway. It would have ruined my exit to ask him to move his truck. I remember for a few moments I sat in the drive smoking a cigarette and trying to figure out what to do next. This was it, it was done. I would have to go home. I would return to the same home where I had been married in the backyard almost five years earlier.

True family welcomes you back with open arms. Mom, in true Eleanor form, refused to use his name again, wiped his name out of family history like an eraser over a black mark on a shiny whiteboard; even my sisters refrained from saying, "I told you so." Home—where no one drank Mogen David for breakfast or had two names, and everything had soft rounded edges and words bounced around freely without fear of being broken.

Q&Q

FIVE YEARS' TIME

MEG FREADO

For my mother.

To the man who answers her phone now.
Thank you.
For letting me habitually run my fingers over the keypad.
For letting me listen to the ring I knew she couldn't answer.
For changing your voicemail so I could pretend.
And on the day you first answered, asking me why I kept calling.
"My mom died." You were the first time I said it out loud.
"How old are you?"
"17."
And you were quiet.
Thank you for being quiet. And for staying on the phone.
I hope your practice is going well.

To the last coat of hers hanging in the closet.
The one with coins in the pockets.
Beige and waterproof with snaps at the front.
The collar still smelled like cigarettes and Liz Claiborne.
Or I might have just wanted it to.
Tucked in the collarbone of the house,
it was still warm from you.
I slipped my hands in the side compartments
a few weeks ago and wondered what you bought
that gave you 48 cents in change.
I wondered if your skin's cells had collected along the seams
and thought this might be the last time I could touch you.

To last night and the people it gathered.
To the prayers and the decorations
and the drinks and the laughing
and letting this be ok because it really is ok.
To five years worth of hands that have held me up
with mangrove rooted fingers twisted into mine.
And to the quiet of the afterwards,
when I let the sadness rub my back,
a boy ran his hand down my cheek,
and whispered, "You are loved."

ODE TO 1 JOHN 5:21

AUTHOR'S NAME

Work for thousands of years
in a desert
fashioning personal statues out of
stone hauled with grunting; mortar mixed with
blood and bile.
Holy, holy, holy!
Violent prayers offered to
crumbling, crude idols.
Empty cries hit their faces and fall
to a thirsty, dry doom.
But backs must have been turned,
no one sensed their lack of animation, only
selfish hunger.
Twirling, frenzied; traveling from figure to figure
licking their hard cheeks.
In cuts on the flesh of tongues,
infection is inevitable,
but what is painful worship in the wake of
severe devotion?
Faces draw close
to the vice gods of the world,
hearts open to the devil, unknowingly
begging for hell.

But then comes mercy; undesired, undeserved,
and the wave washes through.
Fight for a handle on things,
throw fists up to the Almighty;
surrender seems an impossibility.
But finally, somehow, muscles relax.
Moisture is peace, after all.
Isn't it?
Parched sand; now a river bed.
Cracked sin from an inadequate sun
is blessed with balm.
The taste of living water destroys the presence of sweat
and sin.
But the falseness,
the deities,
the manufactured,
have toppled.
On forgiven, despairing knees at the base of
mindless rubble,
there is a blade of grass.
Look up.

SHADOW POEM

ALYSSA MAZEY

my shadow loved you before she met you
in your days of sketching mottled heroes
when words were skinnier
and skin was thinner
and shame was waiting to be born.
every syllable you grace upon
my grasping branches
I nourish
until it blossoms
creases in the flower
like the creases in your shirt
where my pale fingers
do not cling.
Praying twigs encircle where my
roots disappear
hoping to bridge the miles
and feet
and inches and years
to where you are to lie down to before she met you.

CITYSCAPE

KARA MILLS

PORCHES AND CIGARS

LINDSEY ROWLAND

(*Lillian walks out onto her front porch and sits on an old porch swing. She is dressed nicely. She pulls out a thin cigar and, after a little bit of struggle, lights it and takes a puff.*)

LILLIAN

When a whole lot falls away and emotions are stripped bare and friends have all gone, together, away in the pursuit of pleasure, all one can really do is escape to the front porch, as swiftly as possible with nothing but a lighter, a cigar, a bit of cleavage that no one will see, and one big existential crisis.

(A puff.)

One ponders love and loss of love and whether or not love ever existed and whether or not it will ever exist again. A wrestling match ensues with God, full of inward begging, on hands and knees, for a place to call home.

(A beat as she knocks the ashes from her cigar.)

"Just a while longer, I'm still working," he whispers to eye rolls that are known to be sinful, but can't be helped.

(Another beat. She looks off stage left, as if she is watching something.)

Groups pass and one becomes nothing more than a shadow to them. They all giggle, in the company of one another; and tears sting the eyes because sometimes life is really just plain painful. Everyone has someone, except the dark figure on the porch, who has no one.

(A puff.)

How very thematic, how very dramatically interesting this scene could be! And then it is realized that there have already been a trillion scenes just like this one, so it is nothing special or beautiful or even tragic.

(She looks down at her cigar.)

One looks down at the right hand holding the cigar, and looks at the smoke that emerges from a hard set jaw, and wonders what it would take to turn a lizard into a real dragon.

The interior of the cigar glows red. Hidden just beneath the burning paper is a secret that is so desirable, so lovely, and so seemingly accessible. So one smokes and pines and searches until there is nothing left but a butt to be stubbed out.

(One last puff before she leans down and puts it out on the floor.)

Always so close to the secret, never hearing the actual answer.
There's nothing left to do but go inside. Nothing was solved, and in the pursuit, one has lost the last, pathetic friend.

(She looks at what's left of her cigar, sticks it in her pocket, and goes back inside. Blackout.)

THE RUM PUNCH IS IN THE REFRIGERATOR

DANIELLE GAGLIANO

my little sister and i
were always late for school
but it wasn't until high school
that it was either of our faults
although in those early years
if you had to blame one of us
it would probably be me because
you know
I'm older and stuff

for example
one morning
maybe a Tuesday
I woke up and dressed myself
navy blend of undershorts
paper thin tagless tee
on top of which I buttoned up
a scratchy peter pan collar
though that's as far as I got
leaving my plaid jumper hanging
from my polka-dot coat rack
its pleats smelling somehow already
of catty seven-year-olds
and a dry playground's pebble dust
beneath which sat
my stubborn saddle-oxfords

maybe not today …

i walked through the blue and white
of our linoleum kitchen
to my mother's bedroom
thinking how exactly to mix
a half genuine attempt
to wake her
with less of one
I could never shake her hard
that would definitely upset her
but with too little determination
I would be in danger
possibly accused
of not even trying
to wake my mother
so that she could bring the two of us to school

mommmm
mom
you gotta wake up
gently
I placed all fingers but thumbs
on her bedside shoulder
and still gently shook
mommmm …
eyes blinking
rolling wildly
she turned her head towards me and said
"The rum punch is in the refrigerator."

so back through the linoleum
to our sun-warmed morning carpet
I returned to our room
and said
chelle
let's watch *Pocahontas*
or *The Rescuers Down Under*
so we watched both
sitting and twirling our rock collections
sliding down the miniature slides of our Polly Pockets
until the late afternoon
when my mother came in
in her old baggy sleep shirt
furious
because we had missed most of school
spanking us with a wooden bread paddle
she made us count our licks out loud
as we clenched our stinging cheeks
bent over the pastel geometrics of the
bottom bunk

and me thinking then
just as clearly as I know now
that it was worth it
it was worth it

it was worth it

SALT LAND

JESSICA MCGILL

Your womb is barren, desolate,
like the land where even vultures die
and are swallowed by the starving sand
I want to peel back layers,
take the mud and dust and steel
but underneath you're granite, there's no flesh
You never lived except as salt
and I knew a sky of concrete never loved or blue or sunset red
but you know blood, I know you do
somewhere deep down in your core so cold
you must know this, if nothing else
What do you ask me with lips so tight
and throat filled with waste: I can't interpret
your empty tracks are words but I don't know them, not yet
but you can't teach me with no voice
and I'm still trying to learn
Your words I cannot hear
but I feel the weight of sidewalks crushing down,
the floor will fall away and swallow me if I lie down,
I cannot live in you, but I can try

UNHARNESSED

AUTHOR'S NAME

I once thought I could live as a cephalopod.
Camouflaged in the reefs of a bookshelf
on days I felt like staying a secret.
I would absorb the light from everything around me
and illuminate it back in patterns.
My head, ballooned to two-thirds the size of my body
would be full with every word I've ever fallen in love with.
I would collect them like stamps.
I once thought about having eight arms.
    Four would be for something practical
    Drinking coffee or holding a pen.
    Two would learn how to knit.
    I would leave one free for the just in cases
And another to hold my ink pouch,
A grenade made of commas, a machine-gunned ellipses,
kept slung over my shoulder to keep guard.
It could be easy to be an octopus or squid,
to squeeze myself into the crooks of your bones,
or propel us to a different city.
But I could never survive as a cephalopod.
Because each one has three hearts

and that's two too many
when I can barely get a handle on this one.
It's not the loving more that scares me.
I could even bear sparing one broken.
It is the days of rogue palpitations
and hopscotch skipped beats that
might be too much for my ribs to contain.
It is the moments of fleeting insanity
when I think my lungs have formed a black hole,
when I grasp for breaths like cat toys,
it's a trick.
My eyes see fireflies,
my nail beds flood with sweat.
My stomach feels like a trampoline,
My knees are made of *pudding cups
There's a chance I might throw up the last Wednesday.
I spin.
It is the days I spend hanging on the edge of myself
with a single heart that is already too much that scares me.
So a cephalopod life will just have to wait
until I bridle the muscle that swallows me whole.

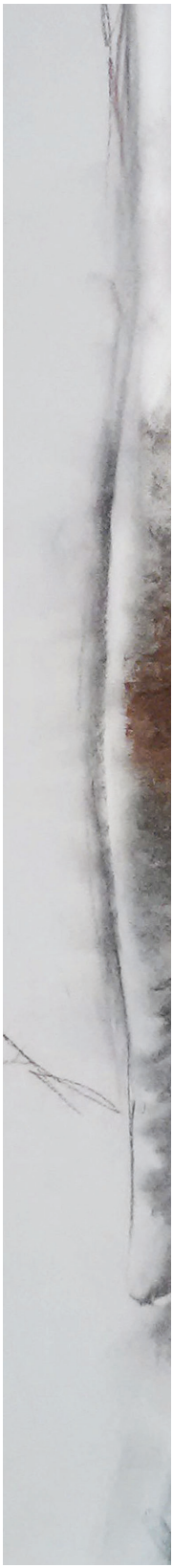
ROLLING PAPERS

JESSICA BRYANT

Kali and I spent warm days climbing out of the fourth floor window, balancing coffee cups and conversations to find seats on the edge of a steel-rod fire escape. Rolling papers in one hand, Bali Shag in the other, tears or laughter or silence, it didn't matter, we were young and we were poor but the breeze felt nice.

I don't know who goes on the fire escape anymore, if anyone, but it isn't us. And we won't be leaning out the window this winter to get in a few drags of a cigarette before Deen comes out of his bedroom yelling. And we won't be laughing when he slams his door, as we throw on coats and a pair of gloves to run downstairs.

The name has changed from Sarafa to Kamizaka on the doorbell and I can't get further than the entryway anymore. And no one seems to care. That's the thing about New York: I can look up to an empty fire escape, I can think of the hours I spent waiting for Deen to be done meditating or the conversation I had with Kali about her life as a woman of color and I can know how naive I used to be and how ignorant I may still be. I can have more than one crisis as I contemplate why I left the city and think about how much I've changed and wonder if I like that, but New York won't notice today. She has new tenants in Sunset Park and new art on her walls. The



BOB ... AND TOP HAT

CHELSEA MUSSELMAN

old handmade shelf that held a set of tiny ceramic figurines and a screen-printed tapestry are no longer there, and the bikes we leaned against the wall are scattered around the city or the country or in a used bike shop, and she has other things to worry about. Over 8 million people need to be cared for, and there is a homeless man on the stairs of the subway station just south of Bond Street who draws sketches for meager means.

Or there was. I'm not sure if he's still there, but I gave him a box of graphite pencils, Copic pens, and a sketchbook for Christmas once. And there is a woman who hangs out near Prospect Park, Willa Mae, and she needs rehabilitation but can't afford it, and she always smiles and loves having her picture taken. She will tell you her story if you're willing to listen, but you may not want to, because it will bring you to tears if you let it. There are gangs in areas no one would expect, and a member of one who warned me about walking alone so late. I've never felt so protected as the night he wrote down his name and told me to use it if necessary. New York has people who still live there to watch over, and she may give my nostalgia no second thought, though she is always on my mind.

THE BARTENDERS DON'T KNOW MY NAME NOW AND TOBACCO IS $4.00 MORE THAN IT USED TO BE.

Because she still feels right in a way I haven't found since leaving. I live in Columbus, Ohio, now, but it has never felt permanent or necessary in the way New York did. I try not to live in the past but when I go back to her streets, and when I feel the rush of a crowded subway or when I pass a girl outside of her parents' brownstone selling handmade jewelry, I smile and I relax. I relax into a feeling of being home. I go back to my favorite coffee shop and order a cup of chai. I know which bars play good music, which ones have jukeboxes, and which ones to go to when you don't want a crowd. I know that Yaffa Cafe is ten blocks away from the nearest subway station but it's open 24 hours and has a great patio. I give directions to strangers and I still know the subway like the back of my hand. But the M is now on the NQR line and I don't know the specifics of the weekend or evening maintenance.

All I can do is cup my hands around my eyes and stare into the building where I once lived. My reflection stares back at me, mocking my exclusion and proving my outsider status. The bartenders don't know my name now and tobacco is $4.00 more than it used to be. I wasn't there when New York flooded. I waited for emails on a leather couch in a well-heated apartment

to hear that everyone was okay. I couldn't visit DJ and her family on Staten Island when I heard how bad it was and we couldn't play hand ball and smoke a joint to forget about it. Everyone asked me how my friends were, and I had to tell them that only a few still lived there. I can try to convince myself that New York is still mine but then I have to slide a card to open my hotel room door.

The times weren't always easy, more than often than not, they were harder than I like to remember. But they were times, marked by a failure to pay rent or losing a job, by a walk to Times Square after the ball dropped, staring in awe at its emptiness and the quick cleaning of trash. It is marked by a beer on Jill's rooftop, by the sales of property to pay bills, by evening bicycle rides in Central Park or painting on a balcony or listening to noise-canceling headphones on a subway. I have a home three times the size of anything I once had, and I have access to education in a way I would have once killed for. I work half as hard and afford twice as much, but the years aren't marked by anything but a calendar now.

People stared at me, eyes questioning in Sunset Park as I carried my camera up and down the streets. I no longer walked with the confidence of being part of their neighborhood and it showed. I was confused at first about which apartment belonged to me and I had to work hard to recall memories in order to place which floor I once lived on. I don't even roll my own cigarettes anymore; I have the money to buy them in packs now.

My mouth turns up and I feel a slight smile taking shape every time I think about that fire escape in Brooklyn. I don't pay attention to the breeze anymore. I am too ambitious to care about the weather and there is no need to crawl through a window when my back door opens into my backyard.

Q&Q

SOUND - LESS

AMELIA CHRISTMAS GRAMLING

I am of the quiet greedy eyed girls
on Sundays a sleepy sinner
the Sabbath.
I imagine I can feel myself decay
enfolding into what the moths have not yet eaten—
congealed cereal bowls and a safety pin,
picking from my teeth the remnants of half-chewed
hymns.
tongue too swollen
to swallow them
much less sing.
when I was little I never dreamed of sprouting wings.
I already didn't feel tethered to this place
unhinged.
it took me years to realize not every eight-year-old's toes dig in to the soil
when standing still.
dare to breathe,
or cry,
or quake,
no fear of floating away.
the closest I wanted to get to God was in a bed my father built
high enough to graze the cracked plaster in bare feet
most nights were sleep
less
strawberry sheets
bleary dream-like
and lumpy smiles
Shame
stained my chest salty
from every prayer I couldn't speak.
distended
womb of un-birth-able words.
overflowing
instead of curses, I carved prayers into the walls,
and when it wasn't enough, it was never enough,
I carved them into my palms—
a language only recognized by jagged fingernails.
or rust.
I am a temple of scars.

and if salvation is salvaging the precious at the expense of the vile
then You can keep Heaven dimpled and rosy cheeked
without me.
allow me to keep this imperfect skin
for I have earned it.
wrinkled and razor-burned and wrecked and flecked with grit
engulfed in my sins
for some of us are not
meant
to always sleep
soundlessly.

FISH BOWL JENNIFER HALL

PROZAC

SYDNEY TAMMARINE

I remember with ferocious and frightening clarity a room, walls painted with sweat and the soft, drooping body of a shrink melting into her padded rolling chair. I remember the floral patterns suffocating me, the couch swallowing me into a mold worn by an endless stream of hallucinators, rationalizers, and self-destructors. I could smell their breath, sour with confessions. I remember the shrink didn't open her mouth and didn't move, didn't fucking move, except to nod and hand my mother a piece of paper with my name scribbled at the top and my fate at the bottom.

I am unsure of my need to be medicated at seven years old. I am unconvinced that my response to the split family of my childhood was inappropriate. But I was not consulted in my diagnosis. Neither was I consulted in my parents' decision to feed me 5,000 pills—ages seven to twenty—one dose a day, or two. When I moved out, I found the only person I had to consult was myself—and I decided that the Prozac would not follow me any further.

I quit in part because the numbness was unbearable: the person I could be but was not had begun to vibrate, a million tiny pinpricks, starting in my fingertips and stretching to every cell of my body.

In a few weeks, or a month, my days became punctuated. Choppy. Sharp. My fingernails were brittle, the nobs of my spine cracked, and I shattered at the smallest of abrasions. Nights were light-years long and circular, like writing a dream about a world that disappeared each time my eyes closed. They tasted like Gary Jules' "Mad World" on repeat; they felt like a breakthrough (or perhaps a systematic breakdown) regarding creativity, religion, and sometimes love—if I could only slow down long enough to explain it.

I missed classes because I was busy turning circles in the rain, or in my mind. By my third month substance-free, I had failed two gen-ed courses, stopped answering my family's phone calls, written and burned over 100 pages of my best poetry. I grew so angry simultaneously suffering its absence and resenting my own dependency that I cut its name into my arm, like a lover, and it made me feel strong to know that I would live on carrying this scar.

In the midst of the fourth month, on the floor of our dingy white apartment, messy with crumpled poetry and sketches and things I loved, I cut the month's cable bill into a haiku:

Your **questions** are in

a N *unmonitored mailbox*

With value **statements.**

"I don't get it," my boyfriend kept saying. I crushed the words together beneath my palm as he watched me blankly. "I want to understand," he said, as if it was a consolation. "I just don't get you anymore." His gentle eyes showed me what would come in the years between us if this was all I could give to him. A cigarette glowed between his fingers, the scissors still clenched in mine.

I dug the Prozac out from under the sink.

I could feel the pills rip away my desires, like heavy jeans stripped from damp thighs. I felt foggy, like time in a black and white movie. I felt static in my lungs. Disjointed thoughts clogged my ears—they sounded like the ocean, if I turned a certain way. My writing was terrible: always a little out of focus, a little too vague. I built lines around words like "sutures" and "string theory;" I was grasping at something I only remembered remembering. I was trying to tie it all together with fingertips so numb, I felt their absence in my heaving chest.

I did not write fiction. I did not read beyond the pages that were assigned. I did not feel the chill of summer mornings or the heat of snowflakes on a red-chapped cheek. I did not watch the sunset and I did not let the dishes pile up. I did not run my tongue down anyone's spine to feel him shiver. I did not create anything of substance.

I slept and I did not dream.

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 a flair 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 updo, 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 across 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. Hey 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 half an 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 out 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 BFs faster than her mother went through Olay anti-aging cream. Corey Fields was good looking, well 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-whatever-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 I 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.

SHE WATCHED ENVIOUSLY AS THE AMAZON DEVOURED A DELECTABLE DANISH, LICKING THE ICING GREEDILY. LENA'S MOUTH WATERED.

"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 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

FALLEN FRUIT

CHEYENNE IVY

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 racing. 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 its dinnertime." 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.

"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—"

"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.

DOC SAID ALL I NEEDED WAS GLASSES

CHELSEA MUSSELMAN

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 judgingly. 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."

"YOU'RE SUCH AN ASSHOLE, COREY. I SAID I'M NOT HUNGRY." LENA SHOVED THE SALAD ASIDE ... "YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO."

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 gritting 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.

* * *

"Attaboy," Lena's father cried approvingly, clapping loudly as he watched a baseball game. Oh, not 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. Ooh, 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 the 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 dishevelled 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 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 desperately, 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 shown 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. Any way 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 seat 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 had 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's 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 of 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.

Jennifer Hall
12-5-12

PRIVATE PENANCE

WHITNEY REED

A naked nerve exposed—
first thing's first—shut out the air,
shut out everything, even that thing.
Especially that thing.

The pitfall of regret never full,
broken hands never scraping bottom, but always
plowing through fresh dirt, producing fresh sins.

Keep going, even knowing your pit is now deeper.
Doesn't dispel the depth of your own despair,
because once the ground is broken it will heal, but seal scarred.

Pain is always personal.

DANCER 1

JENNIFER HALL

IS IT PLAYING IF YOU'RE NOT HAVING ANY FUN?

KATY MAJOR

Andrea Gibson said that a casket is a ladder.
I say, "How do I climb?"

It's not that I want to die, more that I've run out of options.

It's slowly dawning on me that I can never achieve what I had dreamed of achieving
the simple but impossible dream of gifting happiness
filling in a hole that I didn't make.

When my brother died, we didn't put him in a casket.
I never saw ~~him~~ what used to be him.
We cremated him, put his ashes in a cardboard box—not out of disrespect, but out of necessity
because my grieving parents had not the money that must be given in exchange for unwelcome death
(calling hours, memorial service, laminated obituary, programs, and of course,

the vessel).

They were all lacquered and shining disconcertingly,
some engraved with images of nature or words of prayer.

I said, "Think of the environment," nudging my mom and pointing at the biodegradable cardboard

vessel.

They dumped him in and my hollow-eyed parents handed them a check.
It wasn't the first time I had felt rage bubbling up in my stomach as the sickly sweet smell of flowers sent and forgotten burned my nostrils.
During the next few days I would come to know that rage, and invite it in to stay.
Greeting it, like an old friend, saying,

Why, I haven't seen you since Victoria died—

—fill my fingers and help me to create.

It was the year I graduated high school
the year when every friend of mine was thinking of life, of future,
but at home, no one thought of anything but death.
Baby pictures came back out, tokens from a blessed past, because in them,
Colin was alive and well and gurgling with baby-laughter.
Unscathed
still.

I have never been one for watching suffering.
I used to cry at the news.
The news was nothing compared to my mother's wailing
or my father's unexpected DUI …

(… hidden bottles everywhere. In my closet I found a stack of cardboard boxes that once contained beer but now contained nothing but lingering shame and empty cans. I gasped and slammed the door.)

I have been fighting to fix it.
It seems increasingly futile.

Every time I have one parent happy, one problem solved,

(perhaps one less stab of pain in my stomach when I eat
one less day of shut-eyed denial in the bed in my dorm room, feigning illness)

I get a phone call, a terse email, that sends me spiraling again.

When will I learn, *I can't fix it?*

That's what everybody wants to know.
"That's not your job." (Always smug in the knowledge of their *rightness*.)
Don't tell me what I do.
My job *is* making the world once again jewel-toned and miraculous for my jaded loved ones.
My job is to keep them around
because for my brother, I could not.

I am getting tired.

Starting to envy his *rest*.

Starting to feel my toes craving soil.

Starting to long for

submersion.

Starting to think about Gibson and her ladder
And Dickinson's days of lying on the floor,
eyes slammed shut,
feigning death
tempting death.

Playing with my life.

ARE THERE HYMNS FOR AGNOSTICS?

SYDNEY TAMMARINE

T e n t h o u s a n d e i g h t y - t h r e e m i n u t e s
before your insides started leaking,
a lamppost called to me in the parking lot.

I dropped your Christmas present at his bleeding feet and etched
[this will only hurt a bit, a little sting] the date into his side:

It's 3:57 on December 24.
Where is your first love now?

playing off Technicolor value statements,
or a verse I was too young to understand.

And still, now, I am too young
to understand how my own words can make me happy and sad
happy and sad,
whispering my confessions through rolled-up windows.

Happy, the way your eyes never closed, and sad the way they asked me:
Do I want to take you home?
and I told them,
It's 4:47 on December 31st
and I need to know, Where is my first love now?

HOW-TO (THE KNOW HOW)

DANIELLE GAGLIANO

Step 1: Wake up late with blood dripping down your leg and not enough time to think.

Step 2: Sob. Uncontrollably. Even as you spend precious time/money buying cigarettes.

Step 3: Somehow manage to be only 15 minutes late for your appointment.

Step 4: Talk. Uncontrollably.

Step 5: Skip class. There were only 8 dry days in April.

Step 6: Spencer.

Step 7: Spicy Icee (bring your whisky to the gas station).

Step 8: Spliff (bring your weed to your tobacco).

Step 9: Walk.

Step 10: Observe: Lonely, Magnificent tulip.

Step 11: Wisteria, purple houses too.

Step 12: Trees, trails, dirt, mud.

Step 13: River.

Step 14: "I wonder what would happen if we had sex right here."
"We'd probably make a lot of homeless people happy."

Step 15: Laugh. Uncontrollably.

CHURCH-GOING

JESSICA BRYANT

The white sign with black-blocked letters is too familiar, with its heavy-handed broadcast of the scripture that will be the focus of this Sunday's sermon. The sparsely graveled parking lot is already filling up with middle-class cars, and it's only the early service. Later it will be overflowing with empty hellos and handshakes. Dressed in a suit and tie, I arrive in the back-seat of my grandparents' beige Buick. I am there because my grandfather is dying and because it helps my grandmother to believe I am not an atheist.

I walk to the door among high heels clattering on the asphalt, women in skirts, their long hair pulled back, men in iron-pressed shirts with smug smiles, and children on their best behavior.

I am not one of them.

I used to play ball as the only white girl on a field in a "bad" area of the Bronx. I walked three blocks at dusk from the subway with catcher's gear on my shoulder to a field where the fence was rusted and graffiti decorated the dugouts. I played a game and my skin color meant nothing more than easy jokes, told with a smile and wink. After the game, I walked three blocks back to the subway well after dark past run-down apartment buildings with people on nearly every stoop, most of whom waved and, seeing me covered in dirt, asked me who won. My mother told me I should be scared, but she didn't know what scared me.

"Welcome," says whatever father of three and dutiful husband has decided to take rein of the greeting. Seth, it says, written with a black permanent marker on a white sticker nametag. He continues to cast glances my way as he and my grandparents engage in a conversation about the Ukraine. It seems they know each other well. I remember later that I had heard his name before, and realize he was the young man who had spent several years assisting my grandparents in their missions overseas. I am aware at that moment why I am not introduced.

My grandfather shuffles his feet along the carpeted floor that leads to the coat corridor as my grandmother tugs on the back of his shirt to keep his balance. My grandfather has a disease called Lewy Body. My grandmother has told me exactly what this disease is and how it functions, but I have done no research myself. I don't feel like I have to because I know that he can't read the work that he once published, and that he sometimes uses a walker. He can barely put together a sentence and he confuses a light switch for a doorknob. I know that I cry every time I leave his house and that I try to remember, but never can, the winter we built a snowman together. I am glad I have photographs. And I know I made him

laugh once last week, and I know he can't be cured. And I know it keeps getting worse. And I know he knows that too.

We were on High Street at the Blue Danube, where they serve cheap food and alcohol to yuppies and college students too hip to stay on campus. I try to breathe life into my grandparents by taking them to places youthful and spirited. After we ate grilled cheese sandwiches and vegetable lasagna, a homeless man asked my grandfather for money when he heard the change rattling in his pocket. His change is always rattling because he can't control his movements anymore and his hands are never still. After a small struggle, he pulled out all the coins he had, trembling as he turned it over. The man took it and then asked if my grandfather could spare another dollar. As he worked to find the words to form a sentence, I lost my composure as I watched the pathetic scene unravel. I told the man that we didn't have another fucking dollar, that my grandfather gave him all he had, and that he should walk away please and leave him alone. I truly am an advocate for the homeless, but not on this occasion. My grandparents laughed and my grandfather talked about it for weeks, chuckling every time at his granddaughter's quick defense to a helpless man.

I DON'T MIND BEING CALLED A BOY; I WISH THEY COULD KNOW THAT. I WISH THEY WOULD STILL SPEAK TO ME, WHO KNOWS WHAT WE COULD LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.

My grandparents hang their coats, I don't hang mine; my cigarettes are in my pocket and I foresee a "bathroom break" in my future. One part of this church that I love is the back entrance bathroom. It is a single person stall but it has a tan enclosure around the toilet itself, which I have always found odd. On a marble sink there is lotion, perfume, scented soap and toiletries; after a step outside, it is easy to rid myself from any leftover stench.

As we walk toward the sanctuary, several poorly styled, cookie-cutter Mennonites are armed and ready with sentences starting in "God Bless." The women wish my grandmother well, expressing their concern with whispers in her ear about all she is "going through" whilst the men engage my grandfather in talk as if he is a child. My presence is rarely acknowledged and once it is, my grandmother looks down when she says the word "granddaughter." Maybe she is praying for me, telling a joke only I can hear, the truth of her embarrassment obvious.

Church is one of the only places I have seen my grandmother show shame of me. She has been more of a mother to me than anyone could and I have found myself often crying into a telephone with her on the receiving

end. I convince myself she is allowed this shame, this one setting to show what she may always feel. And I convince myself she does not always feel this way. I may never know the truth, and I'm not sure that I care to. She is a near-perfect woman, but no one is flawless. Her instinct to care what others think only makes her more human, and I find myself often wishing I could see this in her more. She is always strong, stoic, holding herself together as her husband falls apart. I know it must be hard to put on such a show, and if this is a crack in her facade, then I choose to believe she deserves it.

I rub her back and tell her I will meet her inside the sanctuary. Alone, I can wander as a visitor receiving questioning looks but at least with no expectations. I meander to a long plastic table that is made to look like wood, the kind of table that has foldable legs. Large thermoses filled with coffee are standing on top, and this is the other part of church I can tolerate. I fill a cup for myself and walk to the place where cream and sugar stand; no soy options here. "Hello, young man. How are you this morning?" says an older guy with bright white hair. I smile, "I'm doing well." He walks off quickly, coughing an apology. I laugh to myself because most people cough an apology after this mistake, too nervous to look me in the eye and too scared to carry on in conversation. I don't mind being called a boy; I wish they could know that. I wish they would still speak to me, who knows what we could learn from one another.

I make my coffee light and sweet, stirring slowly to embrace the last few moments I have on the outside.

I hear the piano whisper and know the service is about to begin.

My grandmother was different when I was a kid; young, beautiful and unworn. Soft silver highlights were only beginning to peek through her long, dark hair. Her skin was smooth and easy, only one or two lines beginning to illustrate their muse. She is half Native American, and her dark skin aged well. She always had a smile on her face and time to sit down with a puzzle. And my grandfather used to be alive, playing a guitar or a bongo drum, talking about Beethoven or Bach. He insisted I eat the European way, fork in one hand, knife in the other, for the duration of every meal. He carved me a flute out of wood once and engraved my name in it. His students at Ohio Northern loved him and I saw the tiny elevators they made when I went to his lab one time. He was well-published and awarded. He was brilliant. He was strict and unforgiving. He was always there.

They were both always there and back then I used to believe in something.

Reluctantly I begin the short jaunt to join my grandparents. I hike up the six maroon-curtained stairs and situate myself into a velvet-backed pew between the two people I am most afraid to lose. The music fades and I think about the drag I will take later and the feeling of smoke as it hits the back of my throat. I let out a deep breath as I bow my head in a feigned prayer.

Q&Q

O' TANNENBAUM: AN APPALACHIAN CHRISTMAS

ANDREW MILLER

I remember how I couldn't do anything about it. The truck was turning round and round across the icy road, finally settling with a clunk into a snow-filled ditch, lights pointing slightly skyward, as if preparing for takeoff.

This is the worst Christmas ever, I thought, the blue and red flashing lights of the police cruiser setting the night aglow, but not with holiday cheer.

Dad was slumped over in the passenger seat, my dog licking his still, sullen face—a Thermos emptying its contents onto the floorboards.

Even before hearing the officer's voice yelling, "Put your hands on your head—NOW!" I was already pushing my way-too-big Santa hat off, its jingle bells soon to be replaced by the clink-clink-clink of shiny new handcuffs. *Merry Christmas, indeed.*

As the officer walked me toward the cruiser, I could see where the Christmas tree had struck after ejecting itself from the pickup truck bed, pieces of garland still embedded in the cruiser's grill.

Turning his head toward his shoulder-mounted radio, he called for an ambulance for my dad before turning back to me and saying, "Would've been a whole lot easier if you hadn't tried runnin'. What'd you do to that old man anyway?"

I thought about replying but couldn't. Not because I didn't want to incriminate myself—it was too late for that—but because I just wasn't able to wrap my head around how I'd even gotten here.

Police chase, flying Christmas tree, dead father. How do you explain that?

My mind raced trying to make sense of it all before locking in on the memory of the first time Dad took me along to pick out a Christmas tree. I must've been about seven years old when he stumbled into my room, smelling full of holiday cheer and humming "O' Tannenbaum."

"Alright Timmy," Dad said, his blue collar drawl even more pronounced when he was drunk. "We got the most import'nt job of the holiday, pickin' out jus' the right Christmas tree."

For most kids picking out a Christmas tree was already a tiresome ordeal by age seven, the novelty worn off. Not for me, however. This was an important tradition in our family and it took this long before I could be trusted to participate—or so said Dad. Mom just nodded and agreed.

And I knew it must be important if it meant Dad taking a break from his other favorite holiday tradition—sitting down to his favorite cocktail, a shot of Jameson chased with a beer. Well, maybe that was really an everyday tradition.

Strapping on our snow boots and jackets, mittens and toques, Dad grabbed his two-man crosscut saw and off we headed in his old blue Ford pickup, my hound dog Rascal excitedly pacing around in the truck bed.

Pulling away from the drive I had a grand idea that we'd go to one of those U-Cut places with a log fire burning, the smell of roasting nuts in the air, and hot cider being passed around. Of course that dream evaporated as soon as Dad opened his mouth.

"We're going out the backside of Schooley's farm, boy. They's some good fir trees back there," Dad said, taking sips of Irish coffee out of his red-plaid Thermos. "Last year old Schooley was out there in a deer blind, almost filled me with some buckshot. Had to make a run for it and I lost a glove. It must've been too close to dusk. This late though, he'll be back in the farm house; all the deer are asleep so we'll be alright."

The thought of outsmarting the Schooleys seemed good to me, even better than some hot cider, and I let Dad know it.

"Mike and James are always givin' me trouble at school. They think they're so smart, but I don't let it bother me much," I said. "Can't wait to hear them complainin' 'bout another one of their trees missin' this year. I heard talk about you last year but I didn't know 'twas you till jus' now. They even brought in yer glove to see if it blong'd somebody at school."

And that was about the sum of it back then, beating the Schooleys at the Christmas tree game. They had a few hundred acres of Christmas trees growin' so it wasn't really theft so much as it was just thinning out the undergrowth. We didn't need a big tree, so that's how we justified it.

By the time I was thirteen I was in charge of driving the Ford out to the farm. Then, by sixteen, it was pretty much up to me to fell the tree and drag it out to the truck. Dad's diabetes took his foot, eyesight and most of his strength; still, there he'd sit in the passenger seat, a much older looking Rascal on his lap, that dirty old Thermos still in his hand.

That was the last year with Mom.

"Sick and tired of feeling sick and tired," she'd say. "Dealing with Dad's drinking and his slow-motion suicide."

She left us in the spring, taking anything of sentimental value along with her—there wasn't much of any other sort of value in our house anyhow.

"Yer mother's gone," Dad said, barely sitting up from his La-Z-Boy recliner, as if she'd just run out for some milk. "Get me a beer outta the fridge, and my insulin shot."

Jennifer Hall
12-5-12

She didn't go far though, just the next town over. Moved in with a local bank teller named Phil.

"Timothy, uh, Phil thinks you remind him too much of yer dad, probbly best you just take care of him—won't be long anyhow—instead of coming to visit," Mom said to me. That was the first and last time I spoke to her after she left us.

That next winter, when I was seventeen, Dad made a special point about which Christmas tree we were going to pick for the house.

"Tim. It's time for the tree," he started, wheezing a little as he put out another cigarette. "Your mother took all the decorations. She took my heart. And she broke a promise. She's not been very good this year and Santa's got 'er on his naughty list."

"Dad, Santa's not real."

"Look here, Timmy, Santa may not be real but sure as hell you and I are. All these years we've been doing a little part of Santa's job, taking trees out of those smarty-pants Schooleys' farm, think they better'n everyone else, lookin' down they nose at me and you. They were on the naughty list too an' we're collectin' retribution. Well this year it's yer mother and that richy-rich Phil's turn. Our decorations are on that tree they got there in the front yard of his house. We're takin' it back."

"Are you kiddin'?"

"Do I look like I'm kiddin'?! No I ain't kiddin'! We're going over there tonight, we're going over with the truck and the dog and my saw that's all sharpened up. We're gonna let that woman know she's on my naughty list," Dad's voice grew dark, but I let it in because I was feeling just as hurt and lonely.

AFRICAN BIRDS

JENNIFER HALL

After a few beers for courage, we pulled up to Phil's house about 1:30 a.m. There she stood, that tree in all God's glory, about five feet tall and about ten feet from the front door, ringed with the multicolored lights, garland and the shiny ornaments of my youth.

For the first time in years Dad took the saw to the tree before I could even grab hold of the other end. The trunk was several inches thick but his sharpened, cross-cut-teeth, biting the wood in long smooth strokes, brought down that tree within two minutes of his feverish sawing.

"Timber!" he yelled, as if he'd forgotten we weren't out in the back forty. A motion light popped on as I dragged the tree across the snow and hoisted it onto the truck, a trail of dislodged ornaments left in the wake.

I thought I saw the neighbor's light flick on, but the silence of the truck cab distracted me.

When we'd taken a tree from the Schooleys' there was always a deep, hearty laugh filling the truck. Not this time.

I glanced over at Dad. He was white as a sheet with just a faint breath coming from his mouth, his eyes a little glossier than normal. Rascal started licking his face, something Dad hated, but he didn't even try pushing him away.

"Go," Dad breathed the word out, just barely audible to me.

The rear tires spun a bit on the slick road before finding traction. The shine of picking out Christmas trees had finally worn off for me too as I tried to get Dad home, back in his recliner, back to his whiskey and beer, back to normal. We hadn't made it a block before hearing the whoop-whoop of a police car.

"Go," Dad said again, this time with slightly more conviction.

"Never trust the cops. They're a bunch of thugs that betrayed their own class," Dad would say.

Now, though, the cops were the choice between getting Dad to the hospital and possibly arrested, or else reclaiming this little piece of ourselves that Mom took when she left.

"What should I do, Dad?" I asked.

"Go," he said one final time.

I floored it, the rear-wheel-drive pickup immediately breaking loose on the ice, sending us spinning out of control, setting the kidnapped Christmas tree free, taking my childhood along with it.

Q&Q

FRAGMENTED

SYDNEY TAMMARINE

There is a
stripclub sharing the parking lot
of my neighborhood church
and my sentence fragments live there.

At night, sometimes, I drive
the long way
and press that button with the circling arrows and
remember
I am breathing the same air over, and over, and in, and out,
remember how

his car has always been
his tires have always been
the parking lot where I was six and waiting for my father.

PAPA'S FARM

CLAIRE PARSON

Rio Grande, Gallia County

Mr. Bailey showed up
The early winter of '43
Sportin' a fancy hat to talk to Pa
Came from FSA, Office of War
If you can imagine that!

Drove up in a four-door car with government plates
Should have seen him
Standin' in the middle of that good fer nothing field
Barren of anything worthwhile
Except hideouts for gravel and groundhogs

Two men facing each other Negative to Positive
Pa in his overalls, his ball cap back, forehead down
Mr. Bailey in that suit and tie—his smooth, sleek hat tipped low
Dressed like Hattie Elliot's blue ribbon rooster at the Gallia County Fair
All slick and shiny with his hands in his pockets and his hips juttin' out

Might as well a been a diamond winkin'
In the middle of those dusty acres
There he stood in front of that forlorn front porch
Boards leaning nearly as low as Papa's shoulders
Papa was considerin' something alright

Takin' it all in
Couldn't tell if it were good news or bad
Not from where we peeked out
Hidin' behind those yellowed curtains
Themselves too tired to wave in any breeze

Truth was tha' whole farm was tired
Worn out from failure
An unwilling accomplice
Of Papa's unfilled dreams
That's what Mamma said anyway

Mamma stopped singing sweet songs long ago
Standing at the sink, stacking up chipped dishes
I remember though, young as I am
Papa'd walk up behind her and squeeze her round the waist
Making Baby Reed and I laugh and feel all good inside

Mamma said
Only thing that could grow
On this worthless scrub of land
Was babies,
But they were a fine crop

There we were, her little shoots peeking out that window
Cool air already sneakin' in that single pane
Past glass smeared by history
Barely buffeted by those lazy cotton curtains
No match for Midwest winds

Sometimes out here it'd get so quiet at night
You could hear that wind whistle through the seams in the sill
A slow, soft symphony to a summer long gone
Steady,
Like Papa's determination

"Not afraid of hard work" Papa's Papa would say,
And "that's half the battle won …"
Mamma shoos us away
Preaches again about the "danger of eavesdropping"
I can tell though Mamma is just as interested

What did that bright and shiny Mr. Bailey come to say?
Mama thought I wouldn't notice her sneak that curtain back
Head tilted for a better view after she made us scoot
I heard tell later Papa's going off to college
If you can imagine that!

Can't picture them long legs tucked under a school desk
Like holdin' a grasshopper in the palm of your hand!
Farm Labor School they called it,
Hah! Papa knows nothin' but labor, I'm thinkin'
But I mind myself and keep quiet

I heard tell
Everything's a changin'
I am ready, I've been waitin'
On this empty scrub of land
Without a pine to dot the landscape to deter it's blow

PLANT COLOR STUDY 1

CHELSEA MUSSELMAN

ADVICE TO THE STORM CHASER

MEG FREADO

To the thundercloud romantic,
the pursuer of lightning,
to those enamored with a force of nature:

Turn off the weather channel.
Stand in the path of a hurricane
to kiss him at his arrival.
Dress in a ball gown of satellites and radars
beneath the chandelier of a cumulonimbus.
Root yourself to the eye of the storm.
When he finally touches shore,
flickering lights and flooding basements,
he will never fail to reach for your hand.

Do not lock the cellar doors.
Let yourself be cradled by a tornado.
Caressed by the fingers of twisted winds,
cared for in the contortion of his uncertainty.
Watch his syncopated dance across the horizon
at the risk and the want of enduring every squall.

Do not be afraid to bear hug an earthquake.
When the pressure builds, you feel the tremors
and his tectonic plates will give way,
do not become buried.
In lieu of retreat
find a way to surf the rough veneer
of the tsunami that follows.
Sit in the silent embrace of his aftermath.
He will dissipate and come home.

Laugh in the midst of a silver frost,
freeze the waltz you shared in the middle of Penn Station,
the argument you had about your birthday,
the first time he told you he loved you,
the first time you believed that he did.
Collect every super-cooled water droplet of memory on your tongue.

Accept every crash of thunder wrapped with a shiny new ribbon of caution tape.
You won't need all the canned food or the bolted windows.
The first flight out of town will give you no solace.
Graciously receive the heat of a solar flare as his greatest compliment.
Allow his dust cloud to spread over the sand dunes of your hips.

Do not banish yourself to calmer winters.
Wear the power of his passion as your favorite necklace.
You cannot pick and choose which of his nature you prefer,
because if you're going to chase his storm, you have to chase them all.

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ON THE COVER
FISH BOWL BY JENNIFER HALL

A round of applause for Jennifer Hall's *Fish Bowl*, the first-place winner of Quiz & Quill's campuswide cover contest. Hall said she based the piece on a still-life arrangement she set up in her dorm. "The piece was a study based on light," the freshman art major said. "In other words, the subject matter is not a fish bowl and flowers, but rather it is a drawing of the light that defines these figures." She used Conté crayon, willow vine charcoal and colored pencil for the piece, which was completed for her fall Drawing I class with Professor Nicholas Hill.