

Otterbein University

Digital Commons @ Otterbein

Quiz and Quill

Otterbein Journals & Magazines

Spring 2011

2011 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

Otterbein English Department

Otterbein University, englishdept@otterbein.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/quizquill>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Otterbein English Department, "2011 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine" (2011). *Quiz and Quill*. 133.

<https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/quizquill/133>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Otterbein Journals & Magazines at Digital Commons @ Otterbein. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quiz and Quill by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Otterbein. For more information, please contact digitalcommons07@otterbein.edu.

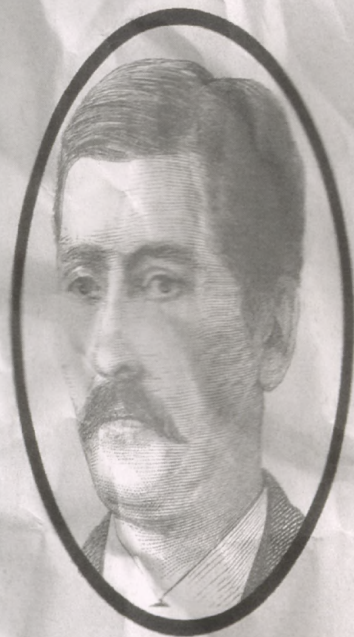
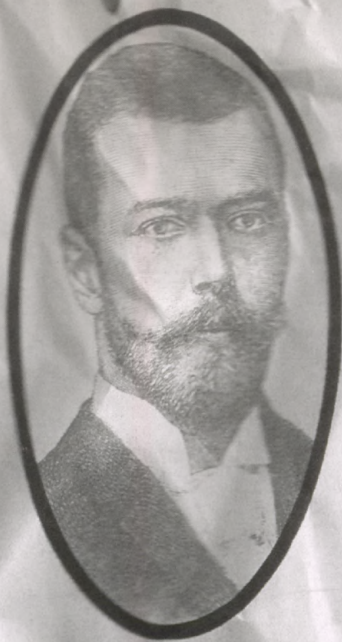
AMAZING



WORKS OF MODERN LITERATURE

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

PHILIP M. QUIZ



NICHOLAS QUILL

The piece below was discovered behind
a shelf in the Quiz & Quill office:

A Peerless Writing Magazine Was Born

Philo M. Quiz and Nicholas Quill met at Otterbein University in
1918.

A friendship that began at the Gatsby Café, a great meeting spot
on State Street, evolved into the distinguished student literary pub-
lication of 1919.

Both were promising scholars in the fledgling writing depart-
ment. Despite their later duel their eponymous publication endured.

Quill would go on to be an English professor at his alma mater.
He would become the first faculty advisor for the magazine.

Quiz lost everything in the Great Depression and moved West
with the Okies. He was last seen looking for work in the Yukon.

Despite their divergent paths, their legacy lives on in the es-
teemed pages that you are about to read.

Please enjoy,

The Management

BROUGHT TO YOU THROUGH THE DEDICATED EFFORTS OF:

Alice McCutcheon	Editor
Benjamin W. Daniels	Page Designer
Tony DeGenaro	Copyeditor
Whitney Reed	Advertising
Beth Merritt	Secretary
Shannon Lakanen	Faculty Advisor

OVERWORKED STAFF:

Heavenee Chandler, Kayla Forshey, Jessica Howells, Jeff Kintner, Shanelle Lewis, Justin McAtee, Megan Saxman, Jacqlyn Schott, Lillie Teeters

Quiz & Quill prides itself on publishing the highest quality creative work. Therefore, every precaution is taken to assure a writer's anonymity during the selection process. All identifying information is removed from the submissions and each manuscript is given a submission number. Only the advisor of Quiz & Quill knows the identities of those who submit work to magazine until after staff members' selections are finalized.

Quiz & Quill
Spring 2011
Otterbein University
Westerville, Ohio

EDITOR'S NOTE

Quiz & Quill has become a community of scholars and friends who share a common adoration and investment in the written word. Quiz & Quill was founded in 1919 by the Quiz and Quill Club, a group of seven young women all students of the college, and two professors. In 1974 the Club was dissolved, but the magazine continued as a vehicle for students who wanted to share their love of writing. This magazine lends itself to flexibility by creating an environment for multi-genre writers: a dwelling place for those who are not limited or defined by a singular genre.

Working with Quiz & Quill has truly shown me what it means to form a community of writers, to come together to achieve a common goal in celebrating the humanities. When I was nominated for Editor this year, I was more than grateful for the opportunity to lead such a talented group of writers. I began the year with several goals in mind but all revolving around a similar theme, community. When we started holding meetings outside of the classroom, becoming regulars in local coffee shops, convincing professors to let class out early for The Haiku Death Match and even interrupting a board meeting to hold an open mic, I knew that our goal of fostering community had been achieved. One of the most important things we can do as writers is to find a space for sharing, a place where writers come prepared to share their work and thus learn from one another. I hope that Quiz & Quill has become and will continue to be such a place.

My relationship with Quiz & Quill this year has been like a tree in a beautiful storm: someone once told me that when the wind blows and the tree bends, the tree actually grows taller and the tree's roots grow further into the ground, as if it has a natural instinct to hold on to the earth tighter. I have watched the staff undergo a similar process this year as we have all expanded our roots and experienced growth, each part of the storm playing a major role. After all, the music of thunder would not have the same impact without its dear companion lightning. Literature is a type of inheritance and a lasting legacy. I hope that this year's Quiz and Quill legacy; the fellowship we have fostered through trust and loyalty to one another and our common vision continues always.

It would not have been possible to produce such an excellent collection without the help of our advisor Dr. Shannon Lakanen and our amazing Quiz & Quill staff. Thank you to all who were involved in the production of this magazine. Thank you for the long afternoons and late nights that were dedicated to making this publication possible. Finally, the words 'thank you' are inadequate for the gratitude I have for my fellow leaders, Page Designer Benjamin W. Daniels and Copy Editor Tony DeGenaro.

Always,
Alice McCutcheon
Q&Q Managing Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FICTION

A Coke, A Gun and Some Money by Benjamin W. Daniels	7
Cooking on Leyte by Tony DeGenaro	8
In the Beginning by Benjamin W. Daniels	11
The Laborious Life of Harry Coles by Benjamin W. Daniels	19
The Rights of Weeds by Austin Wiggin	27
Rubbers by Sean Smith	35

POETRY

5:32 am on a Wednesday by Bess Proper	51
Aftermath of a Deadly Storm by Lillie Teeters	52
Anonymous Face by Bess Proper	53
The Difference Between Right and Rite by Boris Hinderer	54
Everybody Lies by Alyssa Jordan Mazey	55
Father's Shotgun by Justin McAtee	56
The First Man by Alice McCutcheon	57
Hats by Kylene Watts	58
The Human Fractal by Alice McCutcheon	60
In the Breath of Winter by Jacqlyn Schott	61
Just a Flood by Boris Hinderer	62
Lamentation by Liz Gyuras	63
Life Spill Out by Jacqlyn Schott	64
Moved by Kylene Watts	66
Murder by Fire by Pascal Domicone	67
Now Offered in Mango by Boris Hinderer	69
OUCH by Katie Mortimer	70
	72

MORE POETRY

73	Pineapple Nostalgia by Jessica McGill
75	Pomegranate Personified by Jacqlyn Schott
76	Rain Like Fire by Kylene Watts
77	Sacred Elements by Lillie Teeters
79	Securtity Breach, or Running on Empty pt. II by Vianca Yohn
81	Semper by Tony DeGenaro
83	Simple Joy by Cierra Sherry
84	Spring Comes to Belpre-Parkersburg Bridge by Justin McAtee
86	Ten is Too Long by Alice McCutcheon
90	There is No Euphoria in Regret by Lillie Teeters
91	Two Forbidden Words by Bess Proper
92	What Lasts of Steel by Tony DeGenaro
97	What We Learn When the Snow Melts by Jessica McGill
99	Work in Progress by Vianca Yohn
101	You Washed My Clothes by Lillie Teeters

103

NONFICTION

104	A is for Aequitas by Tony DeGenaro
107	Baltimore: A Peek into Crawford County by Kylene Watts
110	Bubbles in the Glass by Jeff Kintner
116	Nyctophobia by Emily Swank-Kavanaugh
118	Saving Little Monster by Whitney Reed

131

SCREENPLAY

132	Counting Sheep by Benjamin W. Daniels
-----	---------------------------------------

140 **AUTHORS' BIOS**

143 **CHRISTOPHER MERRILL INTERVIEW**

FICTION



A COKE, A GUN AND SOME MONEY

BY BENJAMIN W. DANIELS

Jan and Dean sat at a table in their favorite restaurant. Between them sat a half empty bottle of Coke for each of them. They were celebrating their seventh anniversary. Jan would have liked it more if it had been their wedding anniversary and not simply a celebration of how long they had been together. She wondered if Dean would ever grow up and ask her to marry him, while she pushed her entrée around her plate. She tried to muster the courage to start another conversation about where the relationship was going. She knew that this was not something that Dean wanted to discuss, but maybe it was time to shit or get off the pot.

"Dean," Jan said quietly, still staring at her plate in the hopes that she would find some answers under the steamed asparagus. "I was won ..."

"Alright, everyone shut up!" ordered a man that no one had seen enter the restaurant, but who no one could stop noticing now. Of course the large handgun he was waving about helped to keep everyone's attention. "I am here to make a withdrawal! As long as everyone plays along nobody gets hurt! Got it?!"

The restaurant was having one of its busy nights and there was plenty of money floating around. However, as is usually the case these days, it was all plastic. This was not going to make the Gunman happy.

The Gunman walked from table to table demanding the same thing, money and jewelry. He was succeeding on the jewelry front, but the money front was not paying off. He reached Jan and Dean's table and frustratedly demanded from them the same as he had from everyone else.

"Money and jewelry, now!" barked the Gunman.

Dean reached in to his inside coat pocket and produced his wallet. From it he was able to withdraw only a couple dollars. He looked meekly at the Gunman, hoping that the ordeal would be over soon.

"Come on, you got to have more?" the Gunman said almost whining. "Where is it?!" he said reaching for Dean. He began to pat Dean down with the hand that was not holding the gun. He reached Dean's coat pocket and found a lump. "So you don't have anything, huh? Hand it over," the Gunman said as he took a step back and pointed the gun at Dean.

Dean reached into his pocket and came back with a velvet box. Jan stared at Dean's hand understanding what she was sure would have happened had the Gunman not interrupted their dinner.

"So, what is this then? You were gonna ask her to marry you. I oughta let you keep the thing. Staying with him forever would prob'ly be more torture than me stealin' it," said the Gunman.

"Then you'll let him keep it," pleaded Jan.

"Yeah, right. Gimme that," he said as he grabbed the box.

"Please, it is a family heirloom. It belonged to my Grandmother. My mother just gave it to me, to give to my girlfriend," explained Dean.

"Oh, how swee ...," started the Gunman.

"What do you mean she just gave it to you? You told me your mother was dead," shouted Jan.

The Gunman and Dean stared at Jan in disbelief. What women latch onto in the direst of moments never ceased to amaze the Gunman. Dean's mind raced as he backpedaled through the last seven years of his life. He struggled to come up with the answer that would satisfy Jan.

The best he could come up with was, "Not. Now. Jan."

"Not now? Then when, Dean? I guess my friends were right; it did take a gun to the head for you to produce a ring. And this is how I find out that your mother is still alive. Why have you been lying to me for seven years, Dean?!"

"Yeah, Dean, why have you been lying to her for seven years?" joked the Gunman, who while not being the brightest bulb in bunch, was still able to deduce why Dean had told Jan that his Mother was dead.

"Well, honey it's like this. You see. Well. This was supposed to be our last dinner."

"What do you mean this was supposed to be our last dinner?" asked a still bewildered Jan.

"Yeah, Dean, what do you mean this was supposed to be your last dinner?" chided the Gunman.

"Will you please stop helping?" pleaded Dean.

"No, he doesn't have to stop helping. You brought him into this and he is only trying to help me," said Jan.

"I brought him into this. He is trying to rob everyone in this place!" shouted Dean.

"Well, now I am doing this. I like to help," said the Gunman.

"Thank you," said Jan.

"Yeah, thanks," said Dean.

"Now, how's bout you tell this lady why she thinks your Mom is dead," suggested the Gunman.

"I really don't think this is the time to," started Dean.

"This could be your last time," said the Gunman, reminding everyone about the gun.

"Oh, in that case. Jan, I do care about you," said Dean.

"But," said Jan and the Gunman.

"Well it is like this. My Mother, who is still alive, gave me an ultimatum. I had to marry a friend of the family or I would be cut off."

"What do you mean cut off?" asked Jan.

"My family is very wealthy and I am entitled to a trust fund as long as I have a wife and am working on starting a family," explained Dean.

"That does not explain why I think your Mother is dead," said Jan.

"She's right, it don't," said the Gunman.

"Thank you, I was getting to that. I have been holding my Mother off for seven years. You see I have a great time with you, Jan, excluding this moment of course. I wanted to keep having fun. So, I was going to marry the friend of the family, Marsha, and continue to spend time with you. It sounded like a good idea at the time. You were never supposed to find out about Marsha or my Mother."

"Oh, that is very reassuring Dean. If I wasn't supposed to find out about Marsha or your Mother then I suppose everything is OK," said Jan.

"Really," said Dean and the Gunman.

"No, you twits!" said Jan "I hate you Dean. I never want to see you again. I wish something very bad would happen to you."

BANG! Jan stared in disbelief at the Gunman now holding a smoking gun and standing next to a fallen Dean.

"What did you do that for?!" screamed Jan.

"You said you wanted something bad to happen to him," said the Gunman. "I think that's pretty bad, don't you?"

COOKING ON LEYTE BY TONY DEGENARO

'What is in the sand,' Hodgie once said, 'is what matters most.' For the longest time, I wondered what he had meant when he told me that, holding a handful of dirty beach sand, hands marked with the grit and soot of burned palm trees, grease, and a dozen or so cuts and markings from long days around the camp. It was October, when he told me this, already two months after the Japanese surrendered and we were still trying to convince hold out nationalists that refused to accept that the Empire had surrendered. Although the morale was high: Tojo had folded after what was rumored to be the most violent and successful bombing done by military aviation to date, it was also an anxious time. Strange that it would be almost as tense as the early days late last October, the Sixth, including myself, including Bill, and thousands of others, storming onto the beaches in Leyte.

But it wasn't that time now; now, for the most part, it was peaceful. The most drama of our days was trying to wait in line for meals. Bill, myself, and Hodgie usually just didn't wait. Bill was real good at haggling with the stiffes in the mess hall that he could walk away with some bread, or tomatoes, and could fry up some good bruschetta bread. At least, what we remembered it as. Bill spent a lot of time thinking about cooking though. It was close to Halloween, and his anniversary with his wife was coming up. I think they'd been married only a year or two before he came over in '42. Today, the biggest drama was old Bill talking a Fillipino artist into painting something nice for his wife that he had written, a poem or something. He read it to us while he was packing left-over cigarette ash into new paper, and sticking it together with honey drops; a lot of 'loves' and 'soon' littered the short thing. It made Hodgie really sad, he was older, married, had two kids even. I felt bad for them both, but, was only looking forward to getting home to see my brother, and seeing as how he was over in Europe, wasn't missing too much of anything.

It was sort of interesting how the three of us came together. Thousands, maybe more all ended up in Leyte. We ended up all over these islands. Strange that two Italian guys and a hunkie found themselves side by side; we had bad days, and worse days that started for me two years ago, and from October 17 through it all, there was us. Hodgie's big shoulders and full black beard, which he always, no matter what kind of trouble we were in, was kept well trimmed. Hodgie with his deep voice and black eyes to match, Hodgie with his favorite thing, our savior, a Browning machine gun and what seemed at merciful times like an endless bandoleer of large rounds worn over his strong chest. Or Bill, with his strong arms, but small

frame and dark everything: he was a handsome Italian man. I think that's why Hodgie and I both gravitated to him so quickly. He looked like a Frank Sinatra type, always confident and even with just his wits. He knew how to save things, although we first met it was just telling us how to catch falling tobacco from unfiltered and cheap made cigarettes and repack them with a drop of honey he kept in a vial. I don't know about Hodgie, but I always figured if he could save small stuff like that, surely he could save our lives too.

We were all in the boat, muttering quick hello's. Bill and Hodgie knew the drill but it was my first time out. There hadn't been much need for a sharpshooter because there wasn't anything to shoot from far off. Of course, that didn't really matter this time either; but it was considered a full scale effort. It was dawn, and storming. Rain was pooling on the floor of the cold grey metal on the landing crafts. The threat at first landing wasn't too great: a minesweeping unit of rangers had been through earlier, took out a few radio stations as well as many Japanese forces. And through the night we had been kept up from the constant barrage of heavy guns on the boats. Sufficed to say, once we were feet down on the sand, it was blasted and ruined. Honestly, as we moved inland, we faced as much resistance from the swamps as we did the Japanese. Less than fifty wounded in the initial strike was the word that night. It was all such low intensity that I was embarrassed when I realized coming ashore I had been crying from boat to bush once we pushed into the forest. Sometime in the afternoon, MacArthur had came ashore to speak, but Bill, Hodgie, myself and a number of guys were still pushing into the swamp. There were parts that were undercover, and parts that were wide open; I was fond of trees, tall ones with good shade. Not only could I hide underneath, obscure myself from view, but the dark of the shadow helped the sights on my Springfield catch the glare of the enemy across the field.

Our training taught us how to fight well, but not against tactics like the Japanese. More than once they had hid underneath over brush, sometimes almost completely buried in muck, waiting until they were feet from us to pop up with bayonets or rifles. I reckon that if Hodgie hadn't acted faster at one point, knocking me over and out of the way to pull out his machine gun, I'd have been skewered on the butt of a gun. I stayed real close after that.

Then night came, and soon, a daily routine had began: push deeper into the Southern valley, clear out troops, account for losses, set up a camp, sleep. November had seen the worst of the fighting, a lot of it in the night. I can't tell you how frightened I'd be, wedging myself between Bill who was keen at catching a running soldier in the middle of the flashes of light from each muzzle of each side of the fighting and raising up his gun over whatever cover we were hunched against, and Hodgie, who would usually have rigged up a sort of tripod for his Browning and watching him laugh, as round and shell, after round and shell, flew out

of the machine. "Get down kid!" he'd shout at the end of each clip, and then somehow with unblinking precision would fish another hundred rounds for the machine and would be back at it. Few times during these battles would I even pull my rifle out; it was too dark to see through the scope. Once, I had literally tripped on a BAR that had been dropped by an unfortunate soldier and was still hot and sticky with his blood, or maybe it was the fiery rain that seemed to always start falling in the thick of these battles. I ran, and shot, and ran, and I killed.

We had been moving north at this point and were pushing West towards Ormoc. Our unit got to sit that one out; we were on a baby sitting mission at the Burauen Airfields for the last week of November and beginning of December. We used this time to collect thoughts, write letters, sleep, breathe again.

During the down time we mostly spent time getting to know each other better than the guns and grit we carried on our shoulders. Hodgie's real name was Harold Wizecenski, from Detroit. His kids were Harold and Delilah, wife, Eleanor. We joked that Roosevelt would feel too bad for making a widow out of someone that shared his wife's name, and that Hodgie would surely make it off the island. Bill was in his twenties and had just been married a year or so before coming over, to a young Italian woman named Margaret, who was, if Bill's hopes were right, desperately trying to find a place of their own outside his mother-in-law's house for Bill, Marge, and their son Stevie to live when he got back. That's what I liked about these two guys: no ifs, only whens.

I never had too much to say, they called me the Middle Man sometimes because I was from Cleveland and unknowingly bridged the gap between Hodgie's home and Bill's in Youngstown, but I wasn't really from much of anywhere. My brother and I bounced around a lot, from job to job, place to place since our parents died in the late thirties, before all this mess happened. I told them I was a writer, which was true in the sense that I had someday hoped to write for the *Plain Dealer* if I could afford an apartment somewhere by Lake Erie with a view, but was quickly reminded that hard times would find us coming home. And why doubt these two? Both came from hard time towns. They also called me kid a lot, even though Bill couldn't have been more than three years older than me.

We cooked, and it was easily the best day during the campaign. A truck had been lodged in mud so all the men stuck at Burauen had to walk two or three miles into the swamp again and carry heavy loads back to the airstrip. The upshot was food, lots and lots of food. There wasn't a proper mess hall in the radio tower or any of the barracks facilities on the field, so most of it eventually went on towards Ormoc where there were better facilities and more need, but Bill, in one of his first displays of real charm during the war, talked the supply officers

into 'dropping' a few different ingredients and he made us ham and garlic bread, cooking the ham and bread in the same delicious olive oil. The entire time he told stories of the things Margaret would cook for him and Hodgie would laugh, denouncing Italian cuisine for the more direct, more potato friendly Polish cooking he was used to.

But, these good times are not oft to last during a war. I was on watch with two other young guys who both ended up dying when the first wave of Zeroes flew over. Bombs began to erupt on the hard concrete runways sending fire and deafening roars out into the warm, Pacific night. In less time than it took me to fire off the tell-all sound of the air raid horn, men were pouring out of the small barracks and shooting skyward. Another quick wave of fighter planes ripped overhead and sent rounds into the tower, onto the ground. It all happened so quickly I barely had time to duck before my two companions in the tower fell. While clutching my head to quiet the noise of it all, I noticed that at my feet was my Springfield; I had carried it up to clean and service the weapon. Almost simultaneously to pondering the usefulness of the gun to myself, the roar of a drop ship flew over and hundreds of Japanese paratroopers were slowly falling onto us. I leaned out of the shattered glass frames that had once surrounded the panoramic view of the airstrip that was now littered with dead, wounded and fighting soldiers. My aim was upwards.

For hours we fought. Someone had called in the 11th division who were several miles West towards Ormoc. When they arrived our force was spread very thin, and finding Bill and Hodgie was virtually impossible until daylight finally came around; both were uninjured and safe to my great relief. While the clean up ensued, Bill, Hodgie, a handful of others who had been right in the middle of it on the airstrip were given time to rest. It was eerie, nobody said a word. We hadn't been ambushed like this before, a loud surprise in the quiet of the night. It was the only time I had even so much as attempted any length of heroism, and everyone was quiet.

This silence carried the rest of the campaign until the war had technically ended. And now, back on the beach, waiting to draw straws to see who goes to find more holed up Japanese soldiers not willing to accept that their empire is collapsed.

"Bill, when you're done with that wanna roll me a cigarette?" Hodgie shouts over the sound of the surf, "I'm dying for a smoke."

I laugh, Hodgie isn't even done with the cigarette in his mouth. Since the airstrip, I haven't seen him without a cigarette.

"What are you laughing at kid?" He grunts in my direction; he also hasn't been in terribly good spirits for the last few years.

"Nothing Hodgie, sorry man."

"Should be." He turns and puts an arm around Bill, who is dictating his poem to the Filipino now delicately lettering the piece with quick and deliberate watercolor brush strokes.

"Hey, you two want to walk up and draw today?" I'm eager to find ourselves watching movies on the beach, or going to reeducation seminars so we can integrate into society properly instead of combing the swamp. No answer.

"I'll go myself I guess."

No answer.

*

The foxhole is small. Bill is covered in dirt, Hodgie appears to be crying with one hand over his mouth and the other on his shoulder, freshly cut open by a stray round and bleeding. There are shots coming from every direction. This is easily the largest group of hold-outs anyone has found yet, and the three of us stumbled on it.

"Kid, will you patch Hodgie? I'm trying to see where they are," Bill shouts with great intensity and strange calm. He is peeking over the dirt embankment with his Thompson pointed forwards. He looses a few rounds and turns back to me with his strong, brown eyes. "Patch his shoulder damn it."

"Sorry, yeah. Hodgie, can you still hear me?"

"Yeah kid, I'm not fucking dead. Put a damn patch on it so I can shoot, I'm tired of holding it back."

"Sorry." I quickly pull out the small medical kit we carry with us and find the gauze and field tape. He moves his hand and it pours out warm and fast. He grunts trying to hold back the pain and fails. He's trying too hard to pull the Browning back up and I can't get the tape fixed. Morphine or he's going to faint, I think to myself. I quickly prepare the syringe and plunge it into his unflinching shoulder and then wrap the bandage as best I can. He's going to lose this arm.

"Bill, left!" Hodgie shouts swinging the Browning into position and begins spraying the swamp with bullets. Bill turns to me and through the deafening clatter of rounds escaping the gun can hear 'fall back, get ground, cover, rifle.' I nod and crawl out the back of the foxhole, finding better position. I can already see Bill reloading another hundred bullets into Hodgie's gun. Mortars began landing near the hole. I run fast and find a good mound to perch behind, a little more elevated. I can see at least six or seven of them closing fast. I quickly load up and start taking shots as they get closer to Bill and Hodgie's foxhole.

The Browning stops firing and my heart sinks. I can see Bill animatedly shooting the Thompson off in every direction except mine and then Hodgie's giant arm pulling out a pistol and supporting fire. Another few rounds of mortar erupt and all is

silent.

I am awake, Bill is next to me. We are in a medical tent, much more spacious than the ten man tents we had to share with over 20 waiting for ships bound towards California to go home. Bill is writing another letter. Hodgie is nowhere to be seen. Again. Quiet.

*

It is February now, cold despite being in the middle of the Pacific ocean. Hodgie has been dead almost as long as the war has been over. We are still on Leyte. We are still waiting to go home. Bill and I haven't spoken since, and as he approaches me and my typewriter, I tense.

"Nice machine," he says tapping the field recorder.

"Gift from the brass," I say. "How are you?"

"Fine I suppose. I found some food, hungry?"

"Sure," I say.

We walk from the tents down to the beach, where the sand has almost returned to a pure and golden color that beach sand should be. I think of what Hodgie told me and sift a handful and watch each particle blow in different directions.

"How strange it is. How all things go, how a million little pieces can collide and collect. How strange it is to be anything at all. I can't believe we found each other and stayed together so long, Bill."

"Hodgie. Every night I see him."

"It's not your fault." But then I realize the ridiculousness of this remark. I have no idea what happened, for all I know Bill could have let down his guard for even an instant. That self imposed guilt weighs down many soldiers here. "Bill?"

"You're another one," he says carrying out the first syllable of 'another,' to almost comical effect. "I don't want to hear about it. I know what happened. I was there."

He silently stokes a fire using a mess kit and a gallon can full of tomatoes and meat. There has been nothing between us for weeks, but now, the twenty minutes it takes for his makeshift sauce goes by in an instant.

"You like spaggets?" He asks, and I quickly nod.

He stirs in the noodles and soon we are eating and a crowd of men have gathered around praising the meal.

"I don't know if we just haven't had it in a while or if it's just real good, no?" He proposes smiling. The other men seem to agree. Someone asks if he is going to see the Roy Rodgers film showing in the small theater, "No, I should see that with my son. I might come by later."

The other guys leave but I wait to help put the fire out and clean up.

"Thanks Bill," I say, and for more than just the meal.

"Listen, you said you were a writer, right?" He suddenly asks me.

"Yeah, I guess so. Why?"

"I wrote this poem for my son, but, I wanted you to read it. Could you?" He hands me a piece of paper that has clearly been the object of his most attention recently.

"Sure."

I turn the page over and read:

Twas on a Pacific battle front

One hot November day

There in an open fox hole

A dying soldier lay

His buddie sat beside him

With a slowly drooping head

Listening to the last refrain

His dying buddie said

I'm going to a better land

Where all is quiet and still

Where there is no battles to be fought

Cause the main one has been won

There are tears in both of our eyes as I finish the last line. I think of the main battle Bill is referring to. He is looking out at the ocean, mumbling about how he wants to be home, wants to have a home. I can just barely hear him whispering a prayer to Margaret. It is a soulful, heartfelt poem and I realize that we are in battles every day. While Bill is cooking on the sand in Leyte, he is a million miles away, home, telling stories to his son, kissing his wife; and all is quiet and still here.

IN THE BEGINNING

BY BENJAMIN W. DANIELS

For centuries we have speculated on the existence of other beings in the Universe. We have sent countless probes to the far reaches of our Galaxy, robot scavengers roving over the surface of alien worlds. Mars has been a main focus of our curiosity. In the latter part of the twenty first century five unmanned missions were sent to investigate the red planet. After years of deciphering the data that had been transmitted to Earth, a manned mission was conceived. Three sites were chosen from the hundreds that had been scouted by the robot rovers. Someone of unique intelligence would be needed to be the first human to examine a truly new world.

###

Dr. Mark Trevor marched proudly out of the landing craft behind the two other members of his survey team. The red sand gave way as they stepped off of the ramp. Dr. Trevor's foot sank to just below his ankle. This wouldn't normally be a concern, but just below his ankle was a bit higher in his space suit boots. It would take some practice to get used walking on the alien planet. Luckily they would spend most of their time traveling in a six wheeled rover especially designed for the terrain of Mars. Dr. Trevor had participated in many expeditions on every corner of Earth, but nothing this far from home. He was the preeminent Xeno-Archaeologist on Earth; he studied artifacts that were thought to be extraterrestrial. Now he would get to test his theories in the "field."

"Dr. Trevor, we need to get started, sir," said Lieutenant Carter, the engineer on the mission. Dr. Trevor had been assured that Carter was the best damn "mechanic" in the program.

"Sorry, Lieutenant; I've never been this far from home," answered Dr. Trevor, "It's a bit..."

"Doctor, I realize you are probably used to a more relaxed atmosphere. But here, the atmosphere is in short supply, so if we could get underway."

"You are absolutely right. Sorry, Lieutenant. Won't happen again. Lieutenant Thomas do you have the topographical map the area?" asked the Doctor.

Lieutenant Thomas was the rover operator, he was their over qualified "chauffeur", "Yes sir. We are good to go. We should do a comm check with the ship. The Captain may be getting a little worried about now."

"The Captain has nothing to worry about. We're just fine," said the Doctor.

"Sir, the Captain couldn't give a tinker's damn about us. He'll want to know how his landing craft is doing," explained Thomas.

"I see."

"Daedalus, this is landing craft Icarus. Do you read?"

The Daedalus was the experimental interplanetary spaceship the crew had used to get to Mars. Instead of it taking years to make the trip, the journey was shortened to weeks. The ship had performed admirably, despite the Captain's claim that, "the damn thing looks like it will fall the first time you throttle up." It was now in orbit high above the surface of the planet. Before the Icarus had left, the Daedalus' crew had deployed communication satellites around the planet. This was to ensure that no matter where the ship was in orbit the landing craft could still communicate with it.

"Icarus, this is Daedalus, we read you. Captain wants a sit rep."

"The landing craft performed well within specifications. Preparing to proceed in Mars Rover to first coordinates," said Lieutenant Carter. "We will report again in thirty minutes."

"Happy hunting, Icarus. Daedalus, out."

"All right, let's move."

All three men climbed into the rover and prepared for the journey to the first set of possible coordinates for dig sites. The two lieutenants knew they were just glorified babysitters and that they were just there to assist the Doctor in his work, but this was the greatest adventure either had been on.

"All right, let's find us some Martians," said Thomas.

###

"Doc, there's nothing here and its time to report in," complained Carter.

"Were you expecting a welcoming party, Lieutenant? I hate to disappoint you, but even if we find evidence of life, it will most likely be long dead. I'm not looking for little green men, just something to show me that they had been here."

"Yeah, Carter, are you looking for a sign pointing us in the right direction? I don't know much, but I am pretty sure X never marks the spot."

"Why don't you conserve your oxygen, Thomas?"

"That's real mature, Carter. You know, the Captain's not here. Who're you sucking up to?"

Dr. Trevor cleared his throat into the radio microphone, "Lieutenants, I think we should all focus on why we are here. Carter, please make the report to the ship and we will continue our investigation."

"All right, Doc. Come in Daedalus, this is Icarus."

"Icarus, this is Daedalus, we read you. We were getting worried. Three more minutes and the Captain would have launched the cavalry to come find you."

"Daedalus, everything is proceeding well. We have not encountered anything of importance. Why don't we make the next window one hour?"

"Icarus, Captain has given you one hour. Also, after the next transmission he has ordered you to return to Icarus landing craft to get some rest."

"Daedalus, tell Captain, orders received. Icarus out," Carter signed off and turned his attention to Dr. Trevor, "Doctor, we have an hour to continue searching. After which, we will return to the Icarus. Is that understood?"

"Yes Lieutenant, one hour. Then we should be on our way."

Thomas climbed behind the wheel of the rover again and sped towards the second coordinates they planned to visit. When they reached the new coordinates they unpacked the ground-penetrating radars so that they could scan under the surface for artifacts.

"What are we looking for?" asked Carter, who was still wondering why he had to be the one tromping around on Mars.

"Actually, I don't know, but I'll know it when I see it," answered Dr. Trevor.

"That's encouraging. We fly 205 million miles across the galaxy and you don't know what we're looking for."

"If I knew what it was we wouldn't have to look. I promise, Lieutenant Carter, our trip will not have been in vain," said Dr. Trevor.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Carter checked his chronometer. "We have twenty minutes until we have to make contact with the Daedalus. We will be returning to the ship to rest."

"Yes Lieutenant, we will go back."

"Dr. Trevor?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Thomas, what can I do for you?"

"I just thought that you might want to come over here and tell me if this was one of those things that you would know when you saw it."

"What did you find?"

"I got a hit on the GPR, so I cleared away some of the sand."

"You didn't disturb anything did you?" Dr. Trevor said as he stumbled towards Lieutenant Thomas.

"I just dug up some sand."

"You could have damaged the sample if you weren't careful."

"Doctor, I am only here because you needed a ride, but that doesn't mean you have to be rude."

As if he wasn't listening the Doctor said, "You found a rock."

"Is that good?"

"This is just a rock. I don't have time to look at every little thing you think is important."

"Doctor, would you like to try to explore this entire place by yourself? You may believe that you are more important than us, but you need us more than we need you."

Just then Carter reached the Doctor and Lieutenant Thomas, "I think it is time for us to call it day."

"Just because the only thing that we have found so far was a rock is no reason to give up," pleaded the Doctor.

"Doctor I guarantee you are more tired than your brain wants to believe. We are going back to Icarus and get some food and rest. Then in about ten hours we will try again. We only have one other site to try. If we don't find anything there then we will have wasted more money than any of us will make in our lifetime," Carter explained.

"I promise, Carter, we will find something, I can feel it. The rovers had to have some reason for choosing these sites, other than the fine rock that Thomas found."

"Doctor, I can't help it if I don't know what an artifact looks like. That's what we brought you along for."

"Will you two please load your gear and your butts into the rover so we can get back to the landing craft?" commanded Lieutenant Carter.

"Yes, Lieutenant," said Dr. Trevor. His mind wandered while the terrain of Mars flew by him. He thought back to when he would spend hours looking through the low powered telescope he got for his twelfth birthday. He hadn't seen his father in years and suddenly he was hearing his voice:

"You do know that one of these days you're going to have to grow up and stop looking through that damn telescope?"

"It's not a damn telescope," cried Mark.

"You do not get to talk to your father like that," he yelled, as he grabbed for Mark's collar. "Get back here."

"No. I was just looking at the moon. I wasn't doing anything wrong."

"You're never going to kiss a girl if you're always looking at some planet on a Saturday night."

"It's the moon," said Mark in a small voice.

"What'd you say? Are you correcting me? So, now you're smarter than me?"

"No sir. "

"That's right, you're not. I work hard so you can goof around out here." Mark's father grabbed the telescope, "I think you need so time away from the moon."

"No! Dad, there's a full eclipse of the moon tonight. Everyone is going to be watching it."

"Not everyone..."

"Dr. Trevor, wake up. Are you in there? We've got to get him out of this suit. Dr. Trevor wake up. We're almost to the cargo bay. Hold on." Lieutenant Thomas brought the Rover to sudden stop in the cargo bay of the Icarus. He jumped from his seat and with the help of Lieutenant Carter, dragged Dr. Trevor into the airlock that lead to the "dressing room." The hiss of air being sucked into his suit could be heard as the helmet came off. The Doctor had used up more oxygen than the Lieutenants had realized. Now he was inhaling it as fast as possible at the moment.

"My...god...what...happened?"

"You were low on oxygen and didn't tell us. We wouldn't have noticed except you started hallucinating about your dad," explained Lieutenant Thomas. "You kept saying, 'No, Dad, no'."

"I don't remember anything."

Lieutenant Thomas took Dr. Trevor to the medical area of the landing craft and put an oxygen mask over his mouth and nose, "Just try to breathe normal Doc. You'll be fine in a minute."

"Where is Lieutenant Carter?" asked Dr. Trevor.

"He's reporting to the Daedalus. He's probably getting an earful right now."

Just then Carter walked in, "Is he going to live?"

"He'll have a headache, but he'll live," answered Lieutenant Thomas.

"Thanks for the concern, Carter. I'm touched."

"Don't get too emotional; I just don't want to deal with the Captain if we lose you. Apparently, unlike us, you're not expendable."

###

After the Doctor had recovered, all three ate their rations and then spent some time in their bunks. The two Lieutenants went fast. Dr. Trevor on the other hand had a difficult time sleeping. His mind raced back to all the artifacts that he had proved had come from another planet. He never expected that he would be on the surface of Mars trying to find where they had come from. How could he dream tonight when all his dreams were coming true?

Ten short hours later the three man crew of the Icarus stirred and prepared for another tour of the red planet. Carter was the first to get up. He jumped out of bed like he was actually looking forward to looking for more rocks. He was just ready to finish with the last site so

that he could return to Daedalus and then home. Lieutenant Carter had already started his breakfast rations when Lieutenant Thomas and Dr. Trevor finally came into the mess area.

"I thought you were excited, Doctor?"

"You were right. I was more tired than my brain wanted to admit, but don't you worry. I am ready to go where no man has gone before."

"I need to check in with Daedalus and then we will head to the last site," explained Carter.

After Carter checked in, the three men suited up and climbed into the rover. They headed towards the last site that they were schedule to investigate. Dr. Trevor had made a brave boast earlier when he said he was sure they would find something. Now he sat in the rover, nervously checking his oxygen level, hoping beyond hope that he would be proven right. Their journey took them fifteen minutes. They would spend sixty minutes at the site and no more. They were under orders from the Captain.

"Doctor, I hope you find an X in the sand real soon. Break out ground penetrating radars and let's get to work."

"Don't worry Carter, we'll find something."

They slowly moved inside a circle about fifteen meters in diameter, staring at the screen waiting for some thing to register. Dr. Trevor wanted to find something and Lieutenant Thomas didn't want to look foolish again. Both would get their wish.

"Dr. Trevor I have something on the screen."

"Lieutenant Thomas, I hope that you haven't found another rock."

"I don't think this is something I could damage. This doesn't look like it belongs." Lieutenant Thomas backed carefully away from the spot where he had scanning. Dr. Trevor made his way over to see what Thomas found this time.

"You may redeem yourself Lieutenant Thomas."

"Cool."

Dr. Trevor began to move away the sand that was covering what the Lieutenant had found, "I think this a cap stone. We'll need to pull it up and see what it is protecting." Lieutenant Carter had joined Dr. Trevor and Lieutenant Thomas. They attached three cables to one side of the stone and pulled it up. Underneath they found what they had been looking for. It was a stone tablet with markings on it.

"I've seen markings like these before," said Dr. Trevor.

"Do you mean those scratches were made by someone on purpose?" asked Lieutenant Thomas.

"I can't guarantee someone, Lieutenant, but I will say something. We need to get

pictures of this tablet up to the ship so that the computer can analyze the symbols; language is not my thing.” Dr. Trevor took out a digital camera that had been modified for use in space. He walked around the tablet and took multiple pictures that he could transmit up to the Daedalus.

“Daedalus, this is Dr. Trevor can you hear me?”

“Yes Doctor, we read you.”

“Did you receive the images of the tablet yet?”

“Sorry, Doc we didn’t get anything. Are you sure you transmitted them?”

Dr. Trevor looked at the camera and then at Lieutenant Thomas, “He says that the pictures never made it. Do you think it was something I did?”

Thomas held out his hand, “Let me take a look at it.”

“Do you see what happened?”

“Yes, Doctor. You have to set it to transmit before you hit the button; you took a picture of your foot.”

Dr. Trevor looked at the ground and said, “Oh.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” said Carter.

“Daedalus, this is Lieutenant Thomas, did you receive the pictures this time?”

“Yes, they are coming through now. What would you like us to do with them?”

Dr. Trevor explained, “Input the pictures into the computer and start by comparing them against all known written language that we have on file. If you get a translation please call and let me know.”

“Affirmative, we will contact you as soon as we have any information for you. The Captain suggests you get back to Icarus double quick. You’ve already exceeded the recommended E.V.A. time, again. We’ll take over the investigation from here.”

“We read you Daedalus, Icarus out,” Carter signed out and turned to the other men on Mars, “Let’s get back to the Icarus. I don’t know about you, but I think I’ve had enough excitement for one day.”

This time Dr. Trevor made it back without running out of oxygen. The rover was stowed in the cargo bay and their E.V.A. suits in the “dressing room.” The two Lieutenants did the pre-launch checklist to prepare to head back to the Daedalus. Suddenly the radio came to life, “Icarus, this Daedalus. Do you read?”

“Daedalus, this is Icarus go ahead.”

“The Doctor is going to want to hear what we found out.”

Carter turned to Dr. Trevor’s seat, “Dr. Trevor, your attention is required. Doctor, do you hear me?”

“What? Yes, I hear you. What is it?”

“We have finished examining the tablet,” explained the voice from the Daedalus.

“What does it say?” the Doctor asked excitedly.

Carter aped the Doctor’s excitement, “Daedalus, the Doctor would really like to know what the scratches on that rock mean,”

“Icarus, we were only able to translate part of the tablet. According to the computer it resembles Cuneiform. The language has been dead for over five thousand years. What were able to translate reads:

The serpent has come... The air is leaving from our world... Will find refuge on the third planet from Sol... forcing us from paradise... Adm and Ev will carry us... New life on the planet we have named Aerth... This will be the beginning from our end... Icarus, did you receive? That is all we have been able to decipher so far.”

Dr. Trevor didn’t respond and Lieutenant Carter asked, “Doctor, did you get all that? Doctor? Dr. Trevor, are you in there?”

“Yes... Yes, I got it, thank you.”

“Daedalus, I think the Doctor is going to need a minute. We’ll contact you when he has started breathing again, Icarus out,” Lieutenant Carter turned to Dr. Trevor, “What does it mean?”

“Lieutenant, it means that we are the Martians.”

THE LABORIOUS LIFE OF HARRY COLES, PART 2

BY BENJAMIN W. DANIELS

When we last left poor Harry he had a hard day at work. Then he was forced to go to the store for female thingies for his wife. Well you should probably have already read it. It was readily available just last year. Actually it is still available. I'll wait... You're back? O.K.

...And Now the Laborious Life of Harry Coles, part 2

Harry pulled in to the driveway and ran over his son's bike for the third time. He parked the car outside the garage, because after his wife's car and the important boxes there was no room for the breadwinner's car. At least it wasn't raining. Of course it was the middle of the winter, no snow on the ground, but the cold cut through you like someone stealing your parking spot.

"How many times do I have to tell you to put your bike away?" Harry shouted, at his apparently deaf son Alex.

Alex pulled the earbud out of his right ear, looked blankly at his father and asked in his best teenage whine, "What?"

Harry repeated himself, as he often did with his not really deaf son.

"At least four times," he replied as he stuffed the earbud back into his fully functioning right ear.

Harry carried the grocery bag with the female thingies to the kitchen, where he heard Meg.

"Honey, I'm home," Harry said to Meg's back.

She turned from the sink full of dishes. "Finally. I was beginning to think you got lost." Meg dug into the bag as soon as Harry set it on the table.

"What's this?" she said, holding up the blue and green box, "You actually got the right ones."

"I like to think that I know my wife pretty well."

"Did you remember the chocolate?" asked Meg as she began rummaging through the bag again.

"Yes, I got it."

"I don't see it Harry. Where is it?" she said, looking up anxiously.

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out three Hershey's bars. "I didn't want them to get crushed by the milk or bled on by the beef."

"Thanks for the concern Harry," she said, as she snatched them from his hand and

turned back to the sink.

Harry looked around the kitchen wondering what they would feast on tonight. Nothing seemed to be simmering on the stove and the oven didn't seem to be preheating or already heated for that matter. The microwave was not creating its normal light show; Meg never remembered the no metal rule. Had Harry forgotten some important plans that Meg had put on the calendar two weeks ago? He was unsure how to broach the subject. He had just arrived triumphantly with the bounty Meg had requested, but he had hidden the chocolate from her. It was only a little joke. Perhaps she was already over it. She was already through the first bar.

"Um honey, what's for dinner?" he asked cautiously.

"We were going to have meatloaf, but I didn't have any ground beef, eggs or bread," she answered without turning away from the sink.

"So what are we having instead?"

"Alex and I had what was left of the chicken from the other night. I am not sure what you will be having."

"You couldn't wait for me? I was getting the groceries that you asked for."

"Sorry Harry, we were really hungry and didn't know when you would be home," explained Meg. "I think it was more Alex's idea than mine."

"Why didn't you call and tell me to hurry? I have a cell phone. It's how you told me about the groceries you needed in the first place."

"Getting angry is not going to help. I am sure you can find something to eat in the refrigerator. Maybe next time you won't dawdle at the store." Meg didn't take her attention away from the over grimed pan she was struggling with.

"Yes dear."

Harry did indeed find something in the refrigerator to eat. There was some bologna that Oscar Meyer had in all probability made himself. He found some cheese that he prayed had started out as blue. At least the bread was fresh.

Just as he began to take the twist tie off the bread bag Meg said, "Oh Harry, please don't use the bread. I'm going to make the meatloaf tomorrow. I need the loaf to make the recipe larger."

"Why do we need a larger meatloaf? There are only three of us."

"Tomorrow there will be six of us. Please be on time."

Harry stared at his wife. Meg put the last plate in the drying rack and emptied the sink of once sudsy water. Harry thought: you never planned on making that meatloaf tonight at all. You were going to make me make my own food all along, weren't you? Darn you, I oughta. He

thought it, he never said it. He simply stared at his dismal meal of bologna and hopefully blue cheese and ate in silence.

The night of the dinner for six came, and as Meg expected Harry was late getting home. The other three people hadn't arrived yet, but it was the principle of the thing, according to Meg. Alex was in his normal after school position, on the couch with one dirty sneaker on the back of the couch and the other on one of the cushions, watching TV, listening to his iPod and playing Nintendo DS. This boy could figure out how to hack into the school records and change his number of absences; of which his parents had no idea, but he was apparently unable to take off his shoes.

Harry contemplated trying to engage his son, but thought better of it. He continued past his son and went to the kitchen, where his wife was busy finishing her meatloaf masterpiece.

"How's dinner coming?" he asked innocently.

"You're late," she replied.

"But no one is even here yet. Who is coming, by the way?"

"Friends."

"What friends?" Harry was unable to recall anyone coming over in quite a while.

"Harry, I don't have time for this right now. You'll see when they get here. Now go get ready for dinner."

Harry wandered into the TV room and hoped that he would be able to gain control of the TV. He snatched the remote from the coffee table near his son and changed the channel to the evening news.

"Hey, I was watching that," exclaimed Alex as the weather started.

"I just wanted to see the weather for tomorrow, Alex."

"Moooom. Dad won't let me watch TV"

"Harry, let Alex watch the TV; you're supposed to be getting ready for dinner anyway."

"But..." sputtered Harry.

"No buts. Go, get, ready."

Harry wasn't quite sure what he needed to do to get ready, except sit down at the table. He trudged upstairs to their bedroom and pulled out some less work like clothes. He seemed to remember Meg wearing a dress. He was sure that he would probably pick the wrong thing, but there was nothing he could do about it now. He came back down with a Teflon grin plastered on his lips when he heard the door bell ring. Showtime.

"I'll get it," called Harry, who answered the door to find out who his friends were.

Harry opened the door to find three people he was fairly certain he had never seen

before.

"Hello, may I help you?" asked Harry, his grin never fading, but becoming difficult to hold.

Meg pushed Harry away from the door and said, "Harry, let our guests in, it's freezing out there. Please come in, I'm sorry for my husband's rudeness."

Harry's three "friends" walked by and laid their coats over his outstretched hand.

"Come in. Come in. Alex, get out of the way so our guests can sit down."

"Thank you, Meg. Your house looks lovely, and what is that wonderful smell?" asked friend number one whose name Harry had not learned or did not remember. He was very confused as to which it should be.

"Oh, it's nothing. Just something I threw together for tonight," said Meg.

The group of six sat down for a dinner of meatloaf and mashed potatoes. Harry looked around the table and wondered who these people were. He paid little attention to the conversations, until talk turned to him and his wife.

"Meg, how did you and Harry meet?" asked Mollie, the first guest.

"We met while Harry was in college. I was working in a coffee shop and he would come in almost every day. He would always order the same thing, a bottomless cup of coffee."

"It was all I could afford at the time," said Harry.

"Harry, I'm trying to tell a story. Where was I? Oh yeah. He would always come in and order coffee. I probably never would have noticed him except that he was always there. He would come in after he finished his classes for the day and he would sit in a booth and scribble into a notebook until we closed. I don't know how many times I had to kick him out," explained Meg.

"I was working on my short stories. Sometimes I would get inspired and write poetry for hours," started Harry.

"Really Harry, who is telling this story: you or me?" interrupted Meg.

"Sorry, go ahead."

"Well, he would sit there with his ratty notebook and write and write. I just kept waiting for him to ask me out. I knew why he was really there. He covered his tracks with the writing, but I knew it was just an excuse to see me. I heard he would even come in on my day off. He never did get my schedule down."

I knew your schedule, thought Harry.

"Of course, when he started coming in I already had a boyfriend," continued Meg. "He was a football player for the college. He was the starting kicker."

"The kicker? Why would you go out with the kicker?" asked Joyce, the second guest.

"He was the starting kicker," said Meg, trying to defend herself.

"He always sat the bench when I went to the game," said Harry.

"When did you ever go to a game, Harry?" asked Meg scornfully.

"I wasn't always in the coffee shop. I did other things while I was in school."

"Like what Harry?" prodded Elaine, the third guest.

"Well, I can't really think of anything at this moment..."

"Then why don't you let me finish my story, Harry?" suggested Meg.

"Yes dear."

"He was the starting kicker for the football team. We were well on our way to his popping the question and then the worst thing ever happened."

"He broke up with you?" asked Mollie, the first.

"No. He got turf toe and had to quit the team. I was devastated. Then I found my knight in shining armor. I went to work after finding out that the kicker would never play again and there was Harry. He had been writing all night again. While we were closing I sat down at his table and said 'You're going to take me out for dinner tomorrow'. He said, 'Um, OK. Where would you like to go?' I said, 'Anywhere but here.' He took me to another coffee house across town and then we started going out."

"What happened to all the writing, Harry?" asked Joyce, the second.

"I think I threw it away when I was making space in the garage for some important boxes," answered Meg.

A slight look of shock crossed Harry's face. He was unaware that all his work had been tossed away without his knowledge.

"Harry started working for the DMV and stopped with all the silly writing," said Meg.

"Now, nobody in the city can get a vanity plate without Harry's OK."

"He makes all those fancy plates on the SUVs," asked Elaine, the third.

"I don't make them. I simply..."

"Now Harry, don't demean your job. Yes, he makes all those fancy plates you see around town."

"He's so clever," said Mollie, the first.

"Well, he does have some help. He uses a computer," explained Meg. "Enough of all this work talk. Is everyone ready for dessert?"

"I'm ready," said Harry.

"Now Harry, I don't think you need any dessert," said Meg, "How about everyone else? I'll start some coffee. You all go sit in the T.V. room while Harry clears the table."

After everyone had left Harry sat down in his favorite chair with the puzzle section

from the newspaper. He liked to relax with the jumbles and the crossword puzzle. Sometimes he attempted the Sudoku puzzles, but he was a man of letters. It kept his mind sharp for work. At least that's what he told Meg, who thought he spent too much time with them and not enough helping her. Twenty years can make the paper seem more appealing at times. He settled into his chair with a steaming cup of decaf. His doctor told him caffeine would keep him up. Meg agreed. The TV was on in the background, showing *A Beautiful Mind*. Harry was paying little attention to Russell Crowe; he had already seen it three times. His concentration was fixed on the folded newsprint on his lap.

I swear I am not going to bed until I finish this damn crossword, he thought to himself. He tried very nearly every day to finish the damn crossword, but most times to no avail. It wasn't that Harry was not an intelligent person, it just might have helped if he were just a bit more so. His brow furrowed as he struggled to come up with a five letter word for "a popular political assembly." He was tempted to ask his wife, but wouldn't that have defeated the purpose of the puzzle? Strengthen his brain, by himself, without any help, alone. Maybe just this one time.

"Meg honey, are you busy?" Harry called.

"No Harry, the dishes from our dinner party dinner are washing themselves. If you would help I wouldn't be busy," she replied.

"Never mind, I'll get it myself."

Harry sat quietly and hoped Meg wouldn't come in to the TV room to find out what was so important that he couldn't help with the dishes. After a couple tense moments Harry felt that it was safe to return to the puzzle. An eight letter word for "hero named for his father's wife." I swear they make these so that you have to be a genius to figure them out, he thought. He turned to the jumble on the opposite page and thought it might be easier than the damn crossword. Number One: PUTIREJ.

"Oh for the love of god," cried Harry, to no one in particular.

He stared at the page in hopes that the letters would move of their own free will. No luck. He thought about bothering Meg again and thought this time he may actually have to do some work. Not exactly what he had in mind. Harry was so deep in his own thoughts that he didn't hear the phone until the second ring.

Harry picked up the receiver, "Hello?"

"Mr. Coles?" asked the voice on the other end of the phone.

"Yes, this is he. What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Coles, we need your help," answered the voice.

"You need my help. Who are you?"

"That's not important. We have a situation that requires your special skills."

"Bobby is that you? This isn't funny. I am trying to relax at home. I'll talk to you at work tomorrow."

"Mr. Coles if you don't assist us there may not be a tomorrow."

"..."

"Sir, are you still there?"

"Yes...cough...yes. What could I possibly do that would save tomorrow?"

"First sir, if it would make you feel better, you can call me Ricky."

Harry thought for a moment, "Is that your name?"

"No sir, I just thought it might be easier to accept the situation if we were on a first name basis," explained Ricky, which in fact really was his name.

"Well, actually it doesn't, but let's continue anyway."

"OK. Do you have access to a computer Harry?"

"Yes."

"Alright, I need you to enter a website and I will guide you through what we need from you."

"I understand. Just give me a second." Harry had seen enough spy movies to know that it must be really important if they needed his help to save tomorrow.

"OK. You can give me the web address whenever you're ready," said Harry.

"Type in: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/artsandliving/crosswords/. Now when the site comes up, go to the bottom of the page and you will find a small globe in the right corner. Click on it. When a blank appears enter: 300HERM23TITAN. This code will take you to what we need your help on. Good Luck," click.

Harry stared at the "puzzle" on the screen in front of him. He didn't know what they thought he would be able to accomplish, but he wouldn't go down without a fight. At the top on the screen was a timer that was counting down. It looked as if it was at somewhere around ten hours. That meant whatever was supposed to happen, would happen at around six the next morning. At least everyone would be asleep when tomorrow didn't come. Below the timer were eight spaces. Below the spaces was a clue: "hero named for his father's wife ..."

"Harry. Harry, wake up. It is time for bed," said Meg as she shook her husband. "You're drooling on your blessed crossword."

"What...what? Oh, Meg. Time for bed?"

"Yes Harry, you managed to avoid yet another load of dishes. I have to leave some to soak for tomorrow. That meatloaf really sticks in there."

"Well at least there's going to be a tomorrow," said Harry.

"What are you talking about?" asked Meg.

"Oh, nothing, let's go to bed."

Meg looked out at the kitchen, "Harry did you remember to take out the trash?"

"I'll get it in the morning."

"You should take it now."

Harry found the overflowing can sitting next to the door. He pulled the bag, making sure to let as little as possible fall out. He carried the tied bag to the large plastic can outside next to the garage. He scanned up and the street. No one else had their trash out. Why did he have to?

As he dragged the large smelly can to the curb, he heard a noise in the darkness. He called, "Is there someone there?" No answer came so he continued to drag the can to the curb. He always forgot just how long the driveway was. Dragging a week's worth of trash didn't help. Another noise came from the darkness. This time he was sure that he saw something in the shadows at his neighbor's house. "Bill, is that you?" Again, no answer. Now he was getting a little worried. He was sure that he had heard that there was a sighting of bears, or maybe it had been Bigfoot, in his neighborhood. He snuck to the curb, what he thought was, ninja-like. He wanted to be ready to attack when the bear, or Bigfoot, showed itself. He made the rest of the journey with no incidents.

He turned to go back to the house and heard a growl from the shadows next to Bill's house. Harry froze and began to search for a weapon he could use to defend himself from a bear, or Bigfoot. He found his son's hockey stick and grabbed it up. Harry was ready for whatever may come.

He began to inch back to his house. Another growl came from Bill's house and Harry thought for a second that he may never have to simplify another word for a plate again. This brightened his mood a bit. An odd time to be happy to say the least. This brightening made him a bit braver and he went to investigate the growling beast. With the hockey stick as his only protection, he got nearer and nearer to the unearthly sound. Now he was sure that it was a bear, or maybe Bigfoot.

Just as he was on top of the beast, a security light from Bill's house shot on and Harry could plainly see the heating unit outside of Bill's house. A bear like grunt signaling that it was turning on. Heartbroken, Harry marched to his house and up to bed.

"Harry, where have you been?"

"Bigfoot," said Harry quietly.

"What?" said Meg as she rolled over, "Oh, go to bed, Harry."

THE RIGHTS OF WEEDS

BY AUSTIN WIGGIN

A quandary for the post-modern gardener of today. Those pestilent flies, the swarming mass that fills the rose garden to the brim with sharp needled spines and hollow based stems. Gross in the flowers of our beauty, weeds have long since plagued the civilized world's gardens of history.

Imagine, on the lawn, it's a Saturday morning in the middle of May. You're stretching, white robed and sandaled by the flower beds. Steaming coffee aromas fill your nose as you take your first luscious gulp of caffeinated brown. Oh, and what is this? My petunias! They're so wonderfully in bloom right now, bursting with life and fertility. Just like the Misses, or Mr., depending on your tastes, reader. I'm sure they're lying in bed, enjoying the good romp you both had last night, basking in the after glow of good love making. What. THE. FUCK. What is that green doing in all this pink? There it is. The monstrosity of snapper grass growing right in the middle of your plot! Well sir, go fuck yo shit. You pluck the little bastard out and toss his ass in the lawn. Serves him right. That'll teach the neighbor kids to throw baseballs in your yard, and it serves as a warning to all other weeds "ye who enter, death awaits." But then. Oh wait. Under the Japanese maple? Dandelions!

Well lookie here. Your just a good ol' General Custard aren't you? Dandelions? In your HQ? Might as well be Sioux warriors here for the scalpin'. Retreat, fall back, and reconsider my good reader, as you go to call the young lad down the street to help pull these guerilla fighters out of your South American forest. Picture in your head for a moment, dandelions under a Japanese maple. Not terrorist Taliban, but sunburst yellow! Under the shade of burgundy given by your umbrella, made in Japan.

Now that we've calmed you, let's consider the rights of Weeds. A weed is a carnivorous plant bastard that comes in as many types and shapes as do flowers. They're the survivors of the plant race, able to grow in any sidewalk debris highway on-ramp. Crab grass has a nice symmetry to it, right? And when the sunlight hits iron nettle the right way, it looks like all the thinnest silk has covered her thin body. Remember now, that first crab grass you pulled? The give of the roots as its little plant body screamed...frequencies your godly ears couldn't consider listening to? It's still there, on the lawn. The head on a pike as you put it, a warning to all other weeds.

And suddenly, you realize, reader, that weeds are just like the bum down the street, or the ring worm in your dog. They're just tryin' to get by you know? And hey, they take a little from people, suck a little from the intestine, but we don't kill people for that huh! And what about that capitalism thing? Aren't weeds just givin' the plant market all that they got?

I hope, reader, as you shop through the aisles of Home Depot TM (Home Depot and all other subsidiaries are property of Viacom TM TM and all such material and property or company image used in literature or film has been given clearance from department 00098192 code #3203. Section 3, clause 4 of Viacom international. WE OWN EVERYTHING) and you go to grab the pesticide packs and your fancy spray guns, that you realize what's really going on in your lawn. It's just natural selection. And look who's playing god?

Some words of advice, buddy: if your roses can't take the heat, stay outta the garden.

RUBBERS

BY SEAN SMITH

1

I snatch one of the ten or so rubber-bands hanging around my wrist, and try to avoid the way it clings to the hairs of my forearm as I pull it away. Bored, tired, and trying to get rid of the anxiety, I aim at the window inside of my car shooting it. Maybe it'd be more fun if there was a target. The sound of the rain pattering on the car roof begins to drive me insane, but I try not to think about it while I wait in the silence of my radio-deprived car. Glaring out the window I wait for the sign, which as usual is late. I shouldn't even be here, but yet in the car I sit, waiting for the signal to let me know she's overcome another conquest.

Twelve-thirty in the morning and I have to be at work by six, all for the sake of friendship. Hah, friendship, or at least that's what she calls it, I call it "the one about the passive moron."

I see the light flip on and off in the apartment upstairs, finally. Well good for her. Snatching my coat from the passenger seat, I throw it on then dart through the needles of rain and towards, "whoever-the-flavor-of-the-month-is" apartment. I stand in front of the door for a moment, letting it sink in the back of my throat growing dry, my palms moist and tingling. I swallow spit and take one more breath. It's time.

Ready for my close up, Mr. Deville.

I shove the door open, pushing hard as if I don't know that it's already unlocked. It snaps back against the wall of the apartment and almost closes on me again, but I catch it. I see her standing, her hair frazzled and clothes curled in a ball covering her chest while Mr. what's-his-face is by a couch pulling his pants up.

"Who da hell are you?" He shouts, falling over his pants leg that'd still only been half way on. She failed to mention of course that this guy was big, at least twice my size, Friggin' Sasquatch incarnate.

"Honey!" She screams. Her performance was never that good, always layered thick in the melodramatic. I look over to Sasquatch, noticing that he's getting his bearings together and standing from the couch with his pants situated. He storms over in front of me, the goliath casting a shadow like Tree Beard.

"I...I'm Stan..." I say, though frankly I can't be sure. I can't keep up with all the names she makes up for me; it's not as easy as she thinks to remember if I'm Steve, John, Ryan, Nick or

extra number 3.

"You Stan?" he starts with his tone heavy and face contorted with a disgusted look. Apparently I was right, lucky me. "Don't look like much; Lara made it out like you some kind of a problem." He says to me. I look over to Lara, who fumbles there steadily putting her clothes on behind the Sasquatch. I'm staring because I forgot my line as usual, and I'm not much for improvising.

"I knew you were sneaking out on me! Go down stairs and wait for me in the car! NOW!" I shout, I can tell that I skipped a few paces by the way her brow raises, ah well. She gives a quick nod and goes for the door, starting up with the tears as expected, it'd been the only thing in her wanting performance that she was good at. Before she makes it past the Sasquatch though, he puts a hand on her shoulder. This part, of course, is not in the script.

"She isn't going anywhere." He says, "But I think you need to get the hell out of my house." His voice is calm now, which is a bit more bothersome than when it's cracking with rage, because calm means controlled and controlled means focused, i.e. focused on kicking the crap out of me. He takes his finger while he says this and points it only centimeters away from my nose.

"The hell she isn't!" I retort rather blandly, but I can tell the Sasquatch is seeing through my wad of bull by now, not surprising since I am shaking the whole time, as if I were a child standing defiant for my lunch money. His face changes from a calm anger into this, "what can you do?" grin. I try going for Lara's arm, but I don't reach it. I only feel the pounding of flesh and bone against my nose.

Definitely not in the script.

My head jerks upward, dreadlocks shooting every which way, and the shine of his ceiling fan light catches my attention as I fall flat. I sprawl out on his ivory carpeting, hitting the floor with a feeble moan. I let the blood from my nose fall to the ground, ruining the expensive looking floor job. Take that.

"Micah!" Lara shrieks. The whole thing is unraveling now as I hear her say my real name. She rushes to the ground and cradles my head in her lap. I don't mind it so much, and I make sure to milk it for all its worth, with a few drawn out cries. You'd think I was being crucified.

"Who the hell is Micah?" Sasquatch asks; guess it isn't unraveling as fast as I thought, well at least not for him. Lara helps me to my wobbly feet, walking towards him while I teeter tottered.

I continue to drop blood to the ground, though not as profusely. And take some more of that, and that.

"I think he needs to go to the hospital, I'm sorry Derik but I can't leave him," she says. The Sasquatch finally has a name. He buys everything she says and first I brace for another blow, because he stands there with his fists shaking, struggling to break free from the captivity of reason. I take another look though and notice him let the anger subside, and only look down to her with a tragic smile, a kind of acceptance. Nice guy, maybe I'd get along with him if not for this whole thing. Lara puts a hand to his left arm, and then kisses his cheek softly, so softly it doesn't even seem like a kiss, more as if her lips just happened to graze by his cheek on a whim. It isn't anything that carried love or desire, only a closing line to a monologue of lies. She calls back to me putting one of my arms around her shoulder, with me still teetering, and we leave.

"Lift your head back; that'll help stop the bleeding," she tells me while her eyes stay on the road. We're going eighty in a fifty-five, but of course I don't mention this to her. I turn my head and look at her, though it's not really needed. I've gazed at it so much over the years I've memorized every inch. The way her hair falls slightly over her shoulders, each dimple that springs to life in that smile of hers, and god, what a smile, it is a smile that can get anything from a man, well at least from me.

"Thanks again Micah," she says after a while.

"This is getting old." I say, keeping my face away as to not see her smile. I want to at least keep an attitude for five minutes, I deserve that much. There is another silence. One minute. Thirty Seconds. Not bad, soldier.

She stretches a hand behind my head, rubbing the back of it, the way she always does. Two minutes, just keep it up.

She gives a giggle and whips her head away from the road, staring at me now. I act like I don't notice it, which is the furthest departure from the truth there is. I remember when I first met her in high school, when I first felt those eyes looking on me. They had a way of pouring into your own, revealing anything there was to you, and everything there'd never be.

Two minutes, thirty seconds. YOU. CAN. DO. THIS!

She leans over and presses her lips against my cheek, the outstretched hand that was behind my head now pulls me into it. I let my eyes close and my mouth grin wide, my face rippled with a smile filled in a moronic gleefulness.

Two minutes, twenty seconds. Pathetic.

She launches back into her seat, staring at the road as if nothing happened, you'd think she just paid a toll booth.

"You know you're my number one guy right?" She says with a grin, eyes never leaving the road.

“Yeah,” I say, but again, a nice departure from the truth. I’m more than certain that her boyfriend, Guy, is her number one guy (what kind of name is “Guy” anyway?). I have to apologize in advance, because you may find me mispronounce his name as The Douchebag, the two sounding so similar and all. You see, The Douchebag, (oops there I go), I mean “Guy” is a bland replica of any bully, jock or all around asshole you’ve ever run into in your life. You know, the guy who has your girl? That’s Guy. Guy is also a cheater, a bad one at that, it is almost like he wants to be seen with his “conquests” as I’m sure he referred to them as. Three times, maybe four, Lara told me about finding some random panties tucked under her couch or somewhere else. Some 007 right?

Then one day while we were out walking she told me how she wanted to get him back. She told me that she deserved to step out on him like it had happened to her. It’s only fair, she said. I remember thinking it’d be easier to just leave The Douchebag, maybe find someone better, no one in particular mind you, but someone that would treat her right. This of course though, remained only a thought.

She told me that it couldn’t go beyond anything physical with the theoretical conquests of her own, or else that would be “real cheating”...whatever that means. She had one problem though, she didn’t know how to leave them afterwards, how to be cruel, it was too depressing for her, and this is where I came in. Her plan was simple enough, never take them home where Guy would see, but only to lucky conquest number whatever’s place, and when it was over, give the sign so I bust in as John, Nick, or insert random bad name here, and steal her back as the jealous and bitter boyfriend. The only part I didn’t understand is why she didn’t flaunt it like Guy. Isn’t it kind of pointless otherwise?

“Want to hang out this weekend?” She asks. I stare up to the car roof as if I have to think about it, as if I haven’t already made a mental itinerary of how we could spend the day.

“Yeah that should be fine, just call me whenever.” Oh yeah, Micah Robins, epitome of the nonchalant. She pulls to a stop when we reach my apartment building.

“Mind if I use your car tomorrow? I let Guy use mine,” she says to me, with that smile.

“Uhm sure, shouldn’t be a problem.” I say, and after a brief thank you from her I get out of the car and watch her drive away.

2

Whenever you have a friend tell you that you “must get over here to see this, like seriously dude,” nine times out of ten you don’t. This was no different with Reggie.

“Man that’s friggin gross,” I say, looking at his computer screen. He sits gazing at it with a laugh. What’s playing? *Hentai*, as Reggie tells me, which roughly translates into “weird as hell

Japanese animated school girl vs. tentacle monster porn”.

Meet Reggie.

After last night with Lara I can use the male company though, even if it is Reg. I have to say that his confidence is something to be admired. I mean here we are, his mom right upstairs reading through her Bible as usual most likely, while her twenty-three-year-old degenerate of a son and his equally degenerate friend sit watching what will probably condemn them to hell three, or even four times over.

Knowing him is interesting enough, although I’m pretty sure you’ve all seen him before. He’s the guy who put a virus on that pirated program you downloaded last week, or that ass hat who loaded the last e-mail you opened with spy ware. The friend you’ve got who sends you e-mails you can’t understand, T4lk1ng L1k3 Th15? Probably Reg as well.

This isn’t a bad thing though. I mean we all have our roles to play and such. The Douchebag, Reggie, and even me. What am I, you ask? Well I’m pretty much the useless information guy, the guy who spent a year in college and even more time on the internet collecting useless tidbits of information, learning everything about nothing, as it were. Nice to meet you.

“Reggie, what are you watching down there?” Reggie’s mom yells down, hear a girl’s voice screaming from his computer.

“Oh, just this TV preacher guy, a girl got the Holy Spirit and began with all that screaming and stuff.” He yells back up to her.

“Ohhh, well I won’t bother you then.” She yells back down to us before we heard her trotting off to her room.

“So what do you want to do tonight?” Reg asks, closing out the video and saving my eyes from further torture.

“Dunno, I have to work another shift later tonight, so I can’t be out long. Can you drive wherever we go though? Lara has my car.” His overbearing sigh lets me know exactly what he’ll say next.

“Seriously man, I don’t get the deal with you two.” He says, moving his cursor around his desktop lazily.

“We’re friends.” I say to him.

“I just don’t get it is all. You’re like, doing all the boyfriend work without any of the perks.” I didn’t think he’d understand, but then again I rarely did either. I think I say friendship because it’s the closest thing I can think of. It often seems more than that though; she is under my skin, an addiction.

“I mean the only reason you have a girl for a friend is, well I can’t really think of a

reason.”

He loves laying his sage advice on me, seeing as even he is doing better than me, having a girlfriend and all; while me? I have a friend.

“I’ve slept with her,” I say with a smirk. He rolls his eyes, taking his boney arms and crossing them, because it’s a story I’ve told him before, and no, it’s not as interesting as it sounds. It was after one of her many spats with The Douchebag that she found her way to my front door. It was three in the morning and her face was covered in ruined makeup and tears. She hugged me tightly and pressed her eyes, starting to tear up again onto my shirt as soon as I opened the door; my broken Aphrodite.

We went to my room and just laid there on the bed. She pouring tears and black gobs of makeup on my shirt, me holding her with my lips pressed against the top of her head, her blue-dyed hair messed and laying upward in my face. We stayed like that the whole night. Sleeping.

“I think you need to just get rid of the skank.” Reggie says with an unflinching, unfeeling tone, staring absently at his screen saver.

“Don’t talk about her like that!” I belt out, a little more aggravated than expected. I’m worried I’ll offend him at first until he finally chuckles.

“God man, you’re so whipped,” he says after the laugh. I laugh a little and jokingly snap a rubber band against his arm.

3

A policeman’s patrol car is parked outside the bank for the entire hour or so that I’m inside working as the oh so glorified night janitor at Grand Savings and Loan. You’d think that after I’d been coming here, cleaning this place for about a year or so, ol’ Harold would ease up, find something else to do, but nah, seeing as I’m such a danger to society he can’t help but watch me. I even approached him once a while back, figuring we could get past the whole young black guy and old white cop thing. I tried to explain that I’d be there every night to clean but Harold, or “Officer Harold” as he introduced himself, let me know he wasn’t going to fall for it. What a sleuth. It’s not like I could ever steal anything from the place anyway: my keys don’t open any safes or anything valuable. Though admittedly I found myself picking up the rubber-bands tellers would leave flopped out across the floor, which was pretty much how my arm became immersed in them. Never know when a good rubber band will come in handy.

When I called Lara on Saturday she seemed so distracted I almost declined the invitation to hang out all together, but she insisted, and far be it from me to deny someone

such as herself my valuable company. We decided on Whitlow Woods. I'd lost count of the amount of times she'd taken me here. It's not as romantic as it is on paper though. Bugs, mildew, and the rotting smell of god knows what, clenches at what life is left, what this place hadn't already sapped.

Usually she'd be chattering my ear off, mostly about Guy, but not today. She stays silent as she walks beside me, her arms crossed and cradled as if a baby lay in her arms. Her jade eyes won't peel away from the ground, watching her own feet lazily kick up dust.

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

"Yeah...well- no," she says.

"What is it?"

"Guy and I had a fight is all," she whimpers out, as if she isn't expecting me to dig deeper.

"Ahh," I let out with my eyebrows raised high, the sound came without even thinking.

"And what's that suppose to mean?" She whips her head around to me saying, her eyes narrow and fixed as a scorpion.

"Nothin', it's just don't you get exhausted with all this?" I know I do. She brings her eyes up meeting mine, looking at me, for once. She gives a shrug after a while and continues walking on.

"I guess I do, but it comes with the package you know, all this stuff."

No. I don't know. I don't know about stuff that leads you to using your "friend" to break up screw sections with men you meet just to get even with The Douchebag, a guy who doesn't have any idea of the lesson he's being taught. I don't know about being a fucking petulant child trying to get even.

"I guess," I say lazily, she wraps her arm under mine and we keep walking. I hate it when Reggie's right.

She plays with the rubber bands hanging around my arm, pulling them and letting them snap on my forearm. It hurts a lot more than I let on, but hiding the pain is never that hard to do when it came to Lara.

When we come back to the start of the trail I notice just how dark it's become, not yet night as the sun has only recently slipped by. When we reach my car I reach for her door handle, but before I pull I am distracted by the clomping sound of boots from behind me. When I turn around I am met with the same show of decency that the Sasquatch had given me a few nights earlier, but this time I can't see who is on the other side of the friendly hello.

"You're fucking dead, you hear me, you little piece of shit!" I know the voice of course. The Douchebag. I can barely make him out through the black of night, but the daunting

shadow of Abercrombie and Fitch and looming scent of "Bod" body spray helps me deduct his identity. As I continue to pummel his fists with my face I wait, with no avail for my goddess to save me, to stop him, but through a hazy cloud of red and black I just see Lara standing there with her hands tightly clasped in front of her face. I know I'll be out cold if he keeps going, so I stretch my arms out and the first thing I feel I grab. Pulling tight I feel the greasy patch of hair from Guy's head in my hand. He stumbles back a step or two and I know it has to sting from how he makes it look. Big baby.

"What the hell's tha' matter with you?!" I screech out. Lara stays there with her hands over her mouth. Her expression almost has me; the jittering shoulders and sudden traumatic loss of words are a nice touch, but I see a little ways through it. As usual her performance is lacking.

"I found out about you two, she told me! I knew it, I knew you had something for her, but I never thought she'd do something with you." He keeps approaching me, closer and closer while he says this, but I can barely see him, everything around me has become dull and smudged out, like a canvas distorted by water. He tackles me into the car, but funnily enough I am worried more about the dent it'd leave. She steps in between the two of us, pushing Guy off of me and trying to calm him down which eventually works. Her face is stricken with worry as she touches Guy's face gently, caressing it as it's now been disfigured by a few beads of sweat. She takes a moment before walking over to me putting a hand to my side, kissing my bruised cheek, or rather brushing her lips softly against it.

"I'm sorry Micah, but I can't leave him, and we can't be together."

4

So there's this story about a scorpion and a frog, stop me if you've heard it. The scorpion is bum on its luck, and could use a lift across the river, so the scorpion decides to take its cuddle-bitch of a friend, who just happens to be a very river-capable frog on a walk to said river. The scorpion asks the frog for a ride across, but the frog (not being a friggin moron) questions how he can be sure that the scorpion won't sting it if it lets it on its back, or you know, gives false information leading its boyfriend to rearrange its face. The scorpion, well she says that if she stings the little froggy they'll both drown. So the frog reluctantly agrees to help this scorpion, and hey! What do you know? The scorpion screws the frog over and stings it on the back halfway across. When the frog asks why it did that, since they'll both drown now, the scorpion replies "Because I'm a scorpion; it's in my nature."

Fucking scorpions.

It's been weeks since I've seen or heard from Lara, and I wish I could say I don't care,

but I do; I want to talk to her again. I pretty much gathered on my own what Guy was told and I imagine the conversation went something like this...

"blah blah blah blah blah, I don't need you anyway, I've got other women."

And to this Lara undoubtedly replied,

"bloo bloo bloo bloo, well you're not the only one who knows how to have a good time."

Guy, after taking a moment to catch up (despite the towering level of intellect junior college had given him) to what she meant would finally say,

"BLAH BLAH BLAH, you're full of it." And of course since Lara's ingenious plan lacked any evidence of misdoings, and since it's not like she kept in touch with her own conquests she did what she does best, created someone. This time though I couldn't fake some Stan, Ryan, Nick or whoever, because unlike the others before, Guy knew my face, hell, I'd been over a million times to "hang out" with his girlfriend. The ironic thing about this all though is I'm the one who catches what the other guys, who actually got something out of this whole deal, deserve. I know what you're thinking, or at least I hope it's what you're thinking, "With Lara out of the picture, who does our plucky hero have to talk to about all these tribulations?" Well don't you fret true believer, the ever sympathetic Reggie is on the case.

"Good riddance," Reggie says. We are standing in the center of the Wal-Mart electronics department. By night it was Reggie, but during the hours of 8 a.m. through 5 p.m. Monday through Friday he is Reginald McArthur – Electronics Department Manager of Wal-Mart, Youngstown, OH district.

"I think she was just scared, she knew I'd get it." I say, barely believing the words as they leave my mouth.

"Ugh. You just never learn do you? Maybe it'd finally get through if you had a different perspective on the whole thing...yeah...oh hey, hold on a second, man," he says to me and looks past my shoulder to an approaching customer. I step out of the way of the older woman, who is hunched over with a sweet smile as she reaches the counter Reggie stands at.

"Welcome to Wal-Mart. How can I help you today?" He doesn't even try to feign enthusiasm.

"Do you all have those music phones? I wanted one for my granddaughter," she says with a smile, I am half expecting her to whip out some fresh chocolate chip cookies for us fine young chaps. Reggie only glares at her.

"Sure, do me a favor first though and give me back my social security. I scratch your back, you scratch mine and all that."

Ladies and Gentlemen: I give you Reggie, Avatar of courtesies.

The woman's face twitches in horror, rightfully so. Reggie stares her down letting her

know he wasn't joking. She only mutters something out beneath her breath before leaving him. He turns his head back to me as if nothing has happened.

"Anyway I was saying I think I can help you out man." He reaches into his pocket pulling out a pill bottle, and glancing around trying his best to look "cool" as it were. I raise a brow when he pops the top off and digs down to pull one free with his finger.

"What's this?" I ask. He smiles at me as if to say, "Oh, I'll tell you what it is."

"My friend, this is confidence, pure and simple. I know a guy who knows a guy. He told me that this could help you with your little drama."

I neglect getting angry that Reggie had been probably laughing his ass off behind my back about Lara to the pharmaceutical manager but I let it go (I imagine when Reggie who has as much connections as, well, a guy who sits in his basement all day, states he knows a guy who knows a guy who knows a guy, he of course means that he knows the pharmaceutical manager).

"Whatever man," I shrug, but he shoves them into my jacket pocket. I don't fight it, partly because I could care less, and partly because I kind of believe him.

"I know you'll try it man..." he says, I give him another shrug and leave him to the chaotic world of retail.

Of course I know he is right, because I am desperate, because I am curious, and because I am feeling like a moron, I will in fact try it, try his bullshit. I don't do it until I am at work that night, taking the one, (as specified by my would-be dealer) with a gulp of water. I don't feel anything at first, just as I'd expected, but that changes when the rubber-bands around my hand start to dance on their own, reciting my fourth grade school play to me. Thanks Reggie.

The first thing I decide to do, of course, is try to get my head together. I don't know what it is but I do know it makes me feel good, makes me feel like I can do anything, which is precisely what I do.

Ol' Harold, the policeman probably wouldn't approve, though it would have been the scapegoat he needs to finally hang me out to dry as the old movies say. What he wouldn't approve of is the first thing I do after I start to enjoy the effects of whatever Reggie gave me was, which includes urinating through the open window of Harold's car. Maybe he wasn't so wrong about me after all. I look around to make sure he's still in the gas station when I'm doing it. I may be a drugged up moron, but even this isn't enough to get me to take a whiz on Harold's car in front of him. When he rushes out I'm already in my car in driving away, but just enough in range to see his ghostly pale expression to the whole thing.

Of course, the next logical step is to see Lara while this is still in my system, while I still feel alive. Carpe diem and all that right? I don't know how fast I am going but it's never fast

enough. I'm surprised I don't get pulled over while I'm cutting across the highway, switching lanes and pissing off every Ohio driver who is on the road.

When I reach Lara and Guy's apartment I try and gather what I should say, but it doesn't seem to stick while it's there. It always slips away every step closer I get to the door, and then I'm in front of it, in front of the scorpion's lair.

Pounding hard on the door I hear foot steps approaching it. Thank god she doesn't have a peep hole. When it opens Lara is on the other side, wearing an oversized T-Shirt, probably the Douchebag's, and black sweat pants, and she looks less than pleased to see me. For a bit I stand there staring her up and down, as if it's the first time I've ever laid eyes on her or something, as if I haven't already known about every curve there is to her; as if I've never seen a goddess.

"What the hell are you doing here? I thought you'd catch on by now." She sounds so cold, so bitter, I wonder if it is the drugs talking, so I disregard it, acting as if she's just confessed her undying love for me. I lean in and kiss her, her breath tastes like Mountain Dew and menthol cigarettes but I don't mind so much. She leans back breaking away from it and her hand comes across my face stinging like a piss warm beer.

"Did you hear me?" she yells, and I hear another set of footsteps coming from the other room. I know it's Guy before I even see him, his Abercrombie and Fitch toothbrush hanging from his Abercrombie and Fitch mouth and eyes fixed on me as he stomps towards us.

He shoves Lara out of the way and begins yelling, but I can't understand what he is saying through the white foam and brush in his mouth. It is getting pretty irritating though, and I glance to the rubber-bands still dancing, begging to get free; who am I to disobey a rubber-band? I take one from my arm and pull the elastic band back with my sights aimed right towards Guy's eye.

You never know when a good rubber-band will come in handy.

There's blood, more than there should have been; it is a rubber-band for god's sake. Lara sees him flailing about, holding something in his hand, panicking.

Holding an eye.

It's about then that whatever the hell is in my system starts subsiding, because I remember my voice screeching, the rubber-bands no longer dancing, and the play coming to a halt. I hear Lara screaming at me, but I don't get the words. I'm too wrapped up in the sight of Guy, his eye dangling there in his hand. I finally get up and hurry to aid Guy, though he jerks away from me at first, can't blame him really. I finally convince Lara to help me drag him to the car, though I feel her glaring at me the entire time, like the eyes of Ares cast upon me.

In my car Lara is driving, looking in the backseat at Guy who is, undoubtedly, still

flailing about and cursing us to hell and back. Lara screams at me, I take a few moments to respond, everything is moving so fast, just a few minutes it seems like I was standing on the car of a cop relieving myself. I try to explain that I wasn't myself, that I couldn't be blamed. She only grows angrier, and now disappointed it seems. My eyes veering on and off the road, and with each word I speak her eyes seem to grow angrier and fiercer.

I feel a hand from behind grasp at my neck. It's Guy, ringing the holy hell out of it, his other hand still cradling his dangling eye. What happens next is purely a defensive action, one that I don't think I should be blamed or condemned for. I take hold of another rubber band and snap it back without looking at him; it smacks him dead in the empty socket. What are the odds?

He passes out somewhere along the way, and I begin to breathe again.

When we finally reach the hospital, I stay in the car as Lara finds help to get Guy out the car. I sit there, watching him breathe, watching what I've done. A nurse races out with a doctor pushing a wheelchair; even they take a second to digest what they see; we have to have made their night. Watching them mumble in medical code I wonder what could be done, if what I did was irreversible.

Lara is running out now, tears rolling down her quivering face. When they finally carry him away finally she follows, until I call out to her.

"Lara..." I say, wishing I knew what I had to follow with. She stays silent and snaps her gaze back over to me.

Ten seconds. Say something before she leaves.

"I didn't mean to- I just wanted to talk to you," I say, but it doesn't help. It isn't something to say to help though; I think it is just something to say. She still burns me with that discombobulating stare, saying nothing for a moment either.

She screams at me, but I can barely hear her over the racing thoughts in my mind. I'm pretty sure though that it's not "I love you." She rushes into the hospital, leaving me in the car, shaking.

It's Guy's fault for banning me from seeing Lara. It's Lara's fault for staying with that Douchebag, it's Reggie's fault for taking advantage of my weakness...it's all their faults. I think, trying to convince myself I am still the good guy, that I am still the hero.

I decide to call Reggie, and get any information I can on what the hell he gave me. When he answers I'm none too friendly.

"Whoa slow down now." He says over the phone, I can hear him playing a video game in the background.

"What the hell did you give me?!" I scream. A few nurses on break outside stare

blankly over at me.

I tell him what happened, the rubber-bands, both of them, even the parts about old Harold's car. He grows silent for a little while and I hear the game stop.

"What the hell is the matter with you!?" He screams. I've had enough of other people's screaming by this time.

"This is your fault! For giving me whatever the hell that was!" I'm shaking again.

"Listen...I just thought I'd try something to help you out man! I didn't expect you to go all psycho or anything! You just needed to believe in yourself, so I thought if you'd think something else was doing it for you, you'd be cool." I'm not getting what he means in the least.

"What the hell are you talking about?" So I ask. And he tells me. I don't believe it the first time he says it so I ask him to repeat himself, but the second time it isn't so nicely of course.

"I said that I only gave you some Gingko Biloba, you freak. You know that stuff people use for memory or whatever? I wouldn't just give you some random drugs you fucking idiot." He belts out before hanging up the phone. Thanks Reggie.

I want to cry, and vomit, and roll over and die all at once. It was all me and I had nowhere to hide, no one to blame but the guy sitting in the passenger seat with rubber bands racked up his arm. Sitting here I begin to understand just how alone I am. Everyone's got something to hide except for me and my rubbers. I bite my lip and take one from around my arm; it's tangled with hairs as it comes loose. I play with it at first while I sit blankly; not knowing what I am going to do with it, hoping partly that it will start dancing for me again. It doesn't though; it only stretches and closes at my command. I laugh a little under my breath before stretching it as far as I can pointing out the window, keeping it eye level to choose carefully what I can aim at next, just what the hell I can completely irreversibly fuck up next. I stare to the street light and pull it upward, hoping to strike lightning twice in one night. The band snaps from my front finger, pulling back towards me as I lose my grip on it, extracting justice as it crashes into my left eye. I feel the drip of blood as I flail wildly in the confines of the lonely car, even more so than Guy did while screaming for bloody Mariah. But no one hears my call.

POETRY



5:32 AM ON A WEDNESDAY BY BESS PROPER

Just another sleepless night,
thoughts racing and rushing and running in circles;
an invisible magnet tugging at my iron heartstrings.
I succumb to my self-inflicted insomnia,
gravity holds me down in my twin-sized bed
but my imagination cannot be constrained
by such trivial forces, and I follow its lead;
painting my own reality on a midnight canvas.

Just another starless night,
but if it is quiet enough,
I can almost feel infinity.

AFTERMATH OF A DEADLY STORM

BY LILLIE TEETERS

she drops a rock into the gully
and watches it fall into a camouflage river
currents rage
as mud and tree branches
mix with river water and rain

her legs dangle from the edge
bobby socks cling to tiny ankles
and with barely a whisper
she curses God
and the words
worm their way
through coffee curls
that encircle her face

spirits surround her
singing songs
of comfort and peace
but she waves them away
and they scatter
like a sack of white marbles
dropped to the floor
soon to be gobbled up
and submerged
in the flooding waters

ANONYMOUS FACE

BY BESS PROPER

You part your lips and breathe life into me,
the only thing that keeps me going
but before I know it your gaze turns cold,
your fingers to daggers that scratch my itch
until my skin breaks open a waterfall of crimson.
You are my addiction,
your false love my religion,
yet you remain nameless – the next in line.
Without you, I'm nothing,
though your apathy eclipses my fragile optimism.
Your face changes
more frequently than the seasons,
the only similarity the hole you fill.
You are just a name to me,
but I am just a face.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND RITE BY BORIS HINDERER

*Oh Lord Jesus Christ, most merciful, Lord of Earth we ask that you
receive this child into your arms...*

-Last Rites

More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones.

- Capote

Who can hold the hands of the unpredictable
among these slate walls
lined with the palimpsests of caged men?
Runaway slaves to memory.

Disinfectant taints the air
trying to conceal the confusion, the shame, the rage
that the polished stone floor tries to turn away from.
Like the rest, the walls only stare at their feet. Shrug.

Death sounds like black shoes clipping on polished concrete
but when he hears it he only feels nervous. His one reaction
is to stare blankly down the fluorescent lit halls of the damned.

Safety outside and an end to the possibility of right.
This place hates possibilities –
here water is parceled out to men drowning in deserts.
Spiritual band-aids without even the cartoon character comforts.
Rites of finality become
a delay between the waiting. A creator's kiss to make better
but not to be better.

A conman dealing in dignity. A gatekeeper to imagined atonement.
This is the last and softest space on the board.
I've caged myself alongside the condemned.
Is this how a grave robber feels when shown compassion?

EVERYBODY LIES

BY ALYSSA JORDAN MAZEY

Beneath the skin
the same words flow
coiled in quiet, they wait
spilling out of you in just the right design.
As it falls upon my skin
doubt races to fill in the blanks
and soon a web has been spun.
With you at the center and
me, entangled within.
You are not the worst, no-
the worst of it is the nagging feeling
that I've seen this all before...

FATHER'S SHOTGUN BY JUSTIN MCATEE

Old Friend,
after the funeral,
cleaning through the disbelief,
I find you in his closet.
Your coarse fibers mold to my palm.
Just like him, you have not changed.
The cold of your steel commands the hairs on my arms to rise, and
my fingers,
gone white from turning too many pages
in the frozen ivory towers of another world, are
vaporous like my breath
in the skeleton forest
where the deer lies bleeding through the snow.
My child's eyes have forgotten
the warmth of the kill, and how
the creases of Father's shoulders on the hanging briars
make a sanctuary, a temple, a secret shrine,
for which a morning so sacred as this one
demands a renewal of blood.
As I crouch through the dead timber,
retracing in moments what I spent years forgetting—
these impressions beneath the snow—
my fingers ache and feel your weight anew,
poisoned marrow stained black as coal,
erupting ants, emissions from youth's sinful thrall.

THE FIRST MAN

BY ALICE MCCUTCHEON

Beauty rests in my presence.
I smell it on your blankets,
it feels like shadows sneaking down long hallways
of lightly colored carpets,
It reflects in your eyes when the sun shines through them,
like glass, glowing, and glittering, with the grit of sand.

I trace your letters with my fingers
recycled paper woven with golden rod and dandelion seeds,
letter A straight with curved ends
like your hair in last year's sunset
refracted light dancing from the fibers
a natural sheen like the lake water in August,
the same shining light I saw with my eyes closed
in November,
when lips smaller than my own
pressed their curious shape on my heart.

Celtic knots sing cliché songs
at night in the wooden amphitheatre
you thought the acoustics would
assist your trembling voice.

A fish swims around my legs
reminding me to keep Your
Name.
For years I collected names
before I knew Yours.

Admiring their unique shapes
and sounds.

Each holds plural meanings
of its own—a history—
a story—a desire.

Your desire pulled me back,
determination unmatched in your
moment of deterioration.
Boy, you have been missing limbs
for quite sometime,
my eyes slowly erasing you,
my heart pleading to keep you whole—
perfect as I first saw you.
Pure. Whole. Perfect.

If I could have known you were so fragmented,
pulled together by gravity alone,
like the splinters gathered together to make
the planks beneath my feet.
If only I had known it would take
one swift swing of the axe
to destroy you and slice you
into mere sheets of paper.

Chop you up into fire wood
and watch you light your own
match.

I wouldn't have let my soul
dance with yours.
If only I had known.

HATS

BY KYLENE WATTS

I saw Abraham Lincoln's
coffin float past me on
a carriage and realized the loss
of a country. Each white
horse was tainted with
color. Brown at first,
then grey, then black, then
gold. Each change of
the horses' hide
ate happiness, killed loveliness,
and let starvation cooperate.
The carriage
bobbed over rocks bumping
the passenger back
to life, but only through
the knees of skinned
trees. People on
the streets beat their breasts,
drumming sorrow from
ugliness to be
uplifted with the dead
king.

THE HUMAN FRACTAL

BY ALICE MCCUTCHEON

White specs float on
weightless—
Sifting through a golden beam of light
falling from a lonesome window sill
trickling slowly like a wasted wave—
an expanding ripple on a disturbed pond.

I am one of Those.
A single, white, spec
floating on.

I do not blend easily with the pixels that
surround me.
My form similar
but my noise is louder,
edges blurring untraceable
my shape thicker,
hard to hold,
color brighter,
too much for eyes.

Their hands reach out with good intention,
to mold me,
wishing me as pliable as clay,
though I am not MAN MADE.
My shape is hard to make.

The disturbed pond—
my waves continue
fractals of one another
quite like humans,
taking from and breaking each other.

IN THE BREATH OF WINTER

BY JACQLYN SCHOTT

Like a silent movie with only subtitles,
I can picture the last time I saw you.
You were wearing a red scarf,
the particular shade is absent in my mind,
but I know it was red.

Red like our cheeks from the stinging cold,
red like our lips from our fast kiss
under the mistletoe hung outside on the doorframe.
I can read the longing in your body to linger
here a while longer, I can hear the unspoken pleas
in the breath you expel into the night,
the color of the snow which hugs the frozen ground.

Joining yours, my silent words steal into the night
to tangle with the stars above.

Stay.

Please.

Don't leave me.

Stay in our perfect world of red winter
until our hearts stop.

Love me one more day, one more winter day.
Our chilled hands release for you to walk away
and out of our snow globe,
leaving me here to remember only red,
and silent words left unsaid.

JUST A FLOOD BY BORIS HINDERER

I remember the old covered bridge down past Black's Hollow.
It was stolen by a flood. Not the flood or The Great Flood,
just a flood. A trestle was left in our yard – a great sludge-darkened piece
of twisted wood. It left a scar where the grass grew poorly for years.

I once thought about that bridge while sitting on the coast of Maine,
atop the largest rock in sight. The newspaper that morning had mentioned
the anniversary of two brothers who had been swept off the rocks and killed
exactly one year before. At that moment I was the rock, their memories – only water.

These days I get so confused. I try to keep careful count
of the number of times I've believed my own lies – beautiful as they are.
A streetlight outside my window bleeds its light through my blinds.
If I press myself against the wall, none of it will touch my skin.

I can't trick myself into becoming the rock anymore. Instead all I can dream about is its fangs
hammering our skulls, and my older brother's fingertips brushing my face.
It's horribly cold just outside the light. Especially when you've been twisted
like an old bridge trestle submerged too long in that violent water.

This darkness has a reverence to it and I bow my head as the rain
streams down the window. It feels so unhealthy to realize
that I'm always standing here alone,
meditating on bridges and loss.

LAMENTATION

BY LIZ GYURAS

I.

A gentle hum of forgotten melody.
Clear blue eyes, quivering windblown flowers,
Following the life of
A soft touch like
Air released into a smiling other world.
It is done.
I cry.

II.

I remember it all.
The curlers wound in your hair while we played in your make-up
Lipstick happy,
The sound of your jewelry glittering playfully in the light,
Your beautiful clothing as we pressed into your warm body,
Immersed in Chanel Number 5.
Forever.

I remember it all.
The long hugs and endless kisses,
Smooth skin from lotions
While we sang and rhymed,
And you told stories with your laughter,
Imprinted upon my contented heart,
Until we fell asleep,
Sweet cherubim.
Next morning we had
Oatmeal, never pancakes.
Blissful eternity.
I remember it all.
The torrent of medications and treatments rushing through you,
Rushed through hospitals and surgeries,

Doctor after doctor after doctor,
The hallucinations of demons and angels at your beside,
Who met you with blindness, amputations,
And the smell of rage, frustration, and pain.
No more, you said.

I remember it all.
Your slow courageous death,
Perfect and beautiful creature
Trapped in the claws of some great inescapable reckoning,
Smiling,
And I was there, afraid, holding your hand.
To think I once believed that I could keep you forever.

III.
Mourning is a process
Like writing a paper
Or doing dishes
Or buying groceries
Or learning a foreign language
Or falling in love.
Mourning is a process.

And we mourn
The loss
Of childhood,
Of innocence,
Of friendship,
Of life,
Of possibilities,
Of all that is good,
Of all that is known.

To mourn is to unthinkingly embrace life.
I will not be ashamed.
I remember it all.

LIFE SPILL OUT

BY JACQLYN SCHOTT

She is here again,
the woman dressed in draping snow,
the mountain's pass beneath her neck
plunges to bare her skin,
the color of parchment.

I don't know her face,
only the desperate, delicate grip
she places around my stem,
fingers ghosting my curves
as my blood ripples still as death
upon the Rorschached table cloth
whose redness seems like
smoke, silk, and splatter.

She's waiting for something,
something further than her world
of white and red.

Shadow caresses
her cheek and exposes the throat
of this faceless specter whose very lips
turn down, anchoring her invisible gaze
to look beyond the frame,
waiting for life to spill out.

**MOVED
BY KYLENE WATTS**

Bendable steel is the skeleton for
green vinyl stalks and yellow
petals that protect the

orangish iris—fringe for
the brown dilated pupil. Fringe
for newly open puppy

eyes, already tired and sagging
from birth. The leaves are
convincible; each green, each veined,

each trying so hard to
expel water into razor-edged tears.
These sunflowers sit—unkempt, sit

convincing no one of their worth.
Fake flowers are still fake
even with soul.

White-out painted
jagged teeth—almost too perfect—line the
edges of a dead tree meant for one thing:

storage. This TV stand
was once where a
little boy

untied a pile of books
and erased wrong answers
in his

geometry notebook.
This TV stand's only crime was
stealing the love carved

into it by
M + T. A divorce
ever so painful for them, not

their dead children or
suicidal canine companion.
This TV stand has a rose

carved by an angry
rebel of a sixteen year old.
Carved by weed and in response

to an art class not satisfying enough.
Crayola is the company that made
the markers that

filled in the red, but the stem was
left to green for itself.
The empty bookshelf on

top of the TV stand is not
hungry, but delighted
to be out from under the bed

and moved into a new place
with yellow white
optimism and enough space to
learn to breathe.

MURDER BY FIRE BY PASCAL DOMICONE

A whimpering flame gasps for air in the middle of the woman's chest,
And the final stack of smoke escapes through her mouth.
Frantic, the man forces his recycled air into her furnace.
By now, the hope is even dimmer than her quickly suffocating fire.

This flame is now more of a candle as the gnashing teeth of the snow drools on his face,
And clamps his jaw shut.
His body shouldn't be this frigid, for his fire rages like a freshly fueled hearth.
Without the supply of oxygen, her candle has become a half-burnt match.

It finally erupts abruptly;
A sprinter grasping for its last few inches.

Though her eyes have been shut since her temple led the flight through the glass,
He can tell.
This man, who appeared like an angel cast directly from heaven, can feel it.

His eyes can only make out blurs,
And his young hands understand as this woman,
His sister,
Slips away to finally meet their father.

Weighted by a conscience telling him he did this to her,
He stumbles back to his car.

Hoping to flood his now scalding flame,
He looks on the passenger side floor.
The dirt brown bag, having been recently drained, offers no more fuel.

His ball-bearing neck is rusted by the snow and creaks, like a rusted gate.
A gate that hides a woman's bent neck holding a rosary,

And a body draped in black and white that will never remember its first kiss.

NOW OFFERED IN MANGO

BY BORIS HINDERER

Some people envy,
envy the guy with the drunk girl hanging on his every word,
your friend who has a better plan – who has a plan,
the girl who's brilliant, who just gets it.

Envy the crusaders
ignorant violent men
willing to cross the known world
fucking intoxicated on zeal and passion.

These people terrify me
and they should.
Just the filthy act – knowing,
knowing. Those bastards.

There I am calling names.
Passing out invitations –
handwritten of course
printed on only the best paper

to the most outrageous fire
that my lonely body ever saw.
It's a party. A god damn celebration.
And I am full of pity.

Not for them.
Oh no, never for them,
those who so perfectly often
misplace their word for apathy.

My pity is the sort one feels
for grave robbers
and sound eaters
and those who won't ever partake of my delusions.

And I swear
that if this was a horror film
some of you, you
wouldn't make it because of me.

OUCH

BY KATIE MORTIMER

Black and white,
Red and blue.
Stars are bright,
Barbs are too.

OUCH!
The paper cuts
me.

PINEAPPLE NOSTALGIA

BY JESSICA MCGILL

Sunbeams in citrus form
My treasure chests, an oyster
Like a snowball building
Green compiling on green to find form
I miss you so
As I eat the offering you devour
Far away, hopefully, thinking of me
The first day I tasted sweetness
was the day she handed me a knife
Told me to push away, not pull towards
She did the shearing, the primping, the needling
But I cut off the head
And put it with our flowers on the table
A centerpiece of carnage
Do pineapples tell stories?
If they do and dared to speak
Would they tell of putting up walls
of hard brown exteriors riddled with spikes 4162537
More for show than anything else
Hiding the delicate flesh of fruit's vulnerability
Deep within where it can be protected
I've lost my focal point
Is this about me or the pineapple?
I can honestly say I've forgotten
Since the first Thanksgiving they've haunted us
trying to regain what they've lost
like transcendentalists they're all brains
and no bodies to back their cause

Flesh sacrificed to the knowledge
that we relish their deaths
Like the Queen of Sheba with grapes aplenty
you handfed me yellow slices on your couch
too weak to stand, but only pretending arms were limp
Just so you could set sweetness on my tongue
by your own treasured hand
Today I learned there's a pineapple activist
And I wasn't so much shocked as distressed
that someone had beaten me to my true calling
You once held a child in your hand
And sent me picture proof it was real
Your hand is so much bigger than mine
But the baby didn't fill it
Like my hand tries to butt fails
My fingers spread to be as large
As miniature leaves fanned forward
Pretending they're my fingers
And that you're not 3000 miles away ...

POMEGRANATE PERSONIFIED

BY JACQYLN SCHOTT

The sun sets over a sea of glistening rubies,
its beauty melting into the white line of horizon.
The world is an oyster of precious things;
the rubies carry the weight of pearls.
Look how Persephone wades in the sweet,
red water which seeps into her skin,
to press her wet fingers to her colorless mouth,
now the color of the boldened sky.
She plucks one, two, six gems from the water
like she would the petals off a sand dollar
and she swallows them whole.
She knows not the forbidden weight cradled in
her belly,
for there is no serpent in this tale save Death,
only her reddened skin and her beating heart
which is full of stacking seeds.

RAIN LIKE FIRE

BY KYLENE WATTS

A reaction to "A Little Night Music" by Dorothea Tanning

Just look at you,
weightless, your hair ripples above
like the fire in the ocean's lantern.
The sun has fallen to your side
and even if this ocean is
lit with water—the sun's
crooked feathers burn
beside you. Don't be afraid
to be caught naked in front of
she who loves you. She waits,
eyes closed to radiating waves
of light and powdered shadow.
She waits, trusting the ocean
to keep her balance. She leans
against a current—waiting for
the cracks in your walls to
be broken by you—the daughter
of oceaned sun.

SACRED ELEMENTS BY LILLIE TEETERS

July rain greets me from Ohio's sky;
Creator's messenger.
Rain so wet, it is dry.
Musty smells of earth swirl
As water joins my skin.
My eyes blink to become familiar with the green wet woods.
Sheets of rain create water spectacles through which I peer.
Water runs like a river over my lips, tastes like freshness.
I hear the drum of drops upon leaves in endless percussion.
Rain on my face sounds like silence ...
Pushes me to keep searching.

Tenskwatawa and his brother wade here.
They call it Slick Rock.

I no longer hear the Thunder Drum; its beat has transcended me ...
Though I stand here in the rain at McCoullough Creek,
I am not here.

I am one with mud, leaf and snake.
The mountain lion whispers secrets at night and I understand them.
The minnow appears to stop swimming when the sun goes down,
But I know she is beneath flat quarry rocks ...
Waiting.

Lazy cup of summer dips deep into wet pockets seeking freedom.
I search the sky for my own roots
and discover that I cannot put a limit on the possibilities.

I decide this while standing upside down
on the lowest branch of an oak tree.

I walk in rain, feel her soaking wet hands wrench water onto my forehead,
Yet I am dry.

I give thanks.
The trees sit on the ground with me.
We sing.

SECURITY BREACH, OR RUNNING ON EMPTY PT. II

BY VIANCA YOHN

It started as a joke,
a test to see what it would take
to meet your expectations

It turned into a purge,
and I became too invested
my fingers bled
and the suitcase stayed shut
but I passed your test,
I met your expectations

Now I don't know
if the joke's still on you
or if I'm actually
more lost
than I initially thought I was

Maybe I got the damn suitcase open after all
but it didn't happen like I thought it would
it feels more like I'm looking at an x-ray
of the suitcase, that is –
and what you see
and what I see
aren't the same

where you see stars and nebulas, the universe
I see contraband –
a vibrator wrapped in dirty socks
a bottle of downers
and maybe some frilly undies
no one else was ever supposed to see

I guess I can live with this
especially since you'll never know

the joke's on me

The joke's on me,
and that's okay

SEMPER BY TONY DEGENARO

Even though I failed Latin in high school,
I still remember one or two words:
Semper, oddly, which means always.
Always the one word of a forgotten language
that I will always forget.

The other word, and this one, I remember perhaps by design,
was the obvious to translate: *poeta*.
A declaration of self, label of purpose,
it meant more to say who I was in this ancient tongue,
the language of scholars, the language of the church,
my church.

It is interesting to me now that this arcane and
academic language even has the word for a poet:
how could they bend, color, shape and manipulate worlds,
create and spin images out of the text of old Rome
without feeling the strict constraints of old Latin?
How could they invent without breaking the bounds
of structure?

I thought of my church, during the same years
I was struggling through its language, I saw the
marble pillar chained down by its dogma and couldn't
see past the rusty wounds made by the shackles that held it back;
that kept me from seeing the premise on which this pillar was built:

a beautiful and liberating idea, a life giving and redemptive purpose,
forgiveness and salvation.

But I chose to distance myself from it;
switched to studying the romance languages and neglected the fact
that Latin was the parent of these new words.

I was wrong though, to ignore and to walk away.
As I think now, removed from my ignorant and unwilling self,
I can see these wonders that are hidden just below the texts, the rules,
within the boundaries, I can see nothing but unmeasurable moments of
perfection. I begin to realize that Latin wasn't so stiff as to disallow poetry, that,
in fact, there is poetry everywhere in everything.

Including each Scripture, each verse.

To each and every one of them, I say yes.
Always.

SIMPLE JOY

BY CIERRA SHERRY

There we were surrounded by nature and the busy sounds of the world. But we heard nothing. Each engulfed in a different world, in our own bubbles of imagination. But we were still connected. You lay on your side, with me leaning against your propped up leg. You always know how to make me comfortable. The light, half shaded, shown beautiful in the sky. Under the huge canopy of leaves and the invisible life in the bark, life was simple. Every stress gone and time dissolved.

SPRING COMES TO THE BELPRE-PARKERSBURG BRIDGE

BY JUSTIN MCATEE

Your rusted arms
ferry our snoring school bus
over the river of lead. The boy
in front of me
nods into the corner of
his flecked window slit,
blinks twice, and
bears witness to
the scratching fingers
of a driftwood snag
being pulled
under a barge.

By dawn a pale sun creeps
from behind the smokestacks on Rte. 7
to rinse your shadow from the trailer park
and melt the ice
in a dog's dish. Winter's final night
has coughed up
enough snow
to smother the face
of the bald front yard
behind us where
another child
plays hooky with a plastic sled.

In March nothing
is clean for long,
and what does not melt
will be coated
in the day's exhaust,
like the sun, splintering
behind the teeth of
the fire belcher's jaw.

The scene of the accident has been swept clear
of all signs except some glass shards,
glistening like the waterless eyes of
the single fatality who tonight
sleeps behind a steel door.
I will dream for him
of the darkness beneath your shuddering arms
and of the flowers sprouting
under the trailer
as spring arrives unannounced,
smothered by the rush hour traffic, and
all of this is
perfectly still.

###

TEN IS TOO LONG

BY ALICE MCCUTCHEON

I opened my eyes slowly,
took a deep breath.

What did they warn me not to do
upon waking?

Whatever you do,
Do NOT inhale deeply when you wake up.

Inhale, exhale.
Deep red blood came rushing forward onto my mouth and hands.

My parents watched in horror.
Nurse at my bedside mumbling, told you so.

I could taste the room,
and smelled as if it was the first time.

I could smell everything,
smells so pungent, tastes so sterile.

Gauze, rubbing alcohol, the copper taste of my own blood,
then a very odd stench of burnt flesh and hot plastic.

I was smelling the stitches inside my nose,
I was tasting the chalky pain medicine mixed with blood.

The light was unnaturally bright and sickening,
reflecting off squeaky tennis shoes on white linoleum.

Fluorescent chaos, blinding white fury;
this much light could power a city.

I am lying back on the crunchy, doctor's office bed.
Dad stares out the window pretending as if he is not avoiding my face,
I know the truth.
I know he cannot tolerate watching me wince in pain.

The Doctor enters the room.
I fear his instruments.
The long clear tube with the black suction hose attached,
scissors with blunt tips for inserting under bandages,
cotton balls, wooden tongue depressors and the awful stacks of gauze.

Dad talks with the doctor,
I read his framed accomplishments with focus, trying to distract myself.
My eyes go back to the instruments:
Shiny, metallic torture devices.
Don't worry, he says as he sits between my gaze and the cart of fear.

My heart slows, I breathe deep and look to my father for solace.
Shoulders drop, fists release their grip.
Momentary calm is stolen from me
when I see my fear in Dad's eyes.
Nothing is worse than seeing him wince in pain.
I am reminded that my pain is his and his mine.
Fear creeps back up my spine,
I turn to the doctor.

He explains, I will simply insert this tube in the nose.
It will be over before you can count to ten.
Ten is too long. Ten is much too long.
Dad is pretending again with one eye glued on the window,
one on the doctor.

Lean back, insert tube, all is well.
Until he flips that switch.

BOOM, boom, BOOM, boom.
My heart is trying to climb out of my mouth.
WHIIIIIIIIIRRRRRRHHHH.
What did those tiny words above that switch say ...
SUCTION!

A squeal escapes my lungs and before I know the sound belongs to me,
the suction is on full force,
I imagine,
it is breaking my bones, swallowing my brains
until I see blood.

Blood is too much for Dad.
Ten is too long for blood.
Bloody scenes flash in his memory;
my birth when he had to assist the doctors and draw mom's blood,
when I fell off Carol's bike, two scraped knees,
caught that softball in my mouth, they are not soft after all,
broke my leg playing soccer, totaled my car,
tripped over the lawn mower in my bikini.

A nurse for thirty years, my father is strong, steady,
his stomach is not squeamish.
My blood is too much for Dad because it is made of His.

I am convinced I am blind,
I cannot see, I am paralyzed by fear
consumed by my imagination.
Convinced the Doctor broke my nose
off of my face and shoveled out my brains.

Fear holds my eyes closed like a tightly tied blindfold.
I closed them when I saw the blood in the suction tube,
I don't know if I will ever be brave enough to open them.
Dad's hand clasps mine, so tight.

With eyes closed, I see the nurse approaching with vials.
She looks like a vampire, pale with large teeth.
I am seven, she has come to take my blood.
Vial after vial she fills them.
I know she is not a vampire,
but why else would she take so much blood?

They never did find anything in that blood,
they never solved my mystery diagnosis.
With eyes closed, I feel Dad's grip tighten,
the tube is being removed.
Ten was far too long, Doctor.

My eyes stay shut until they are opened by Dad's voice,
he's asking the Doctor if that much blood is normal,
words form in my mouth before I know I'm talking
"OF COURSE IT'S NOT NORMAL."
The Doctor is laughing with Dad,
"procedures are part of the everyday, but no medical training
in the world can prepare you for procedures on your own children."

My blood is too much for Dad because
he recognizes it as his own.

THERE IS NO EUPHORIA IN REGRET

BY LILLIE TEETERS

Sliced wet tears march in procession
down his parched face as rage engulfs ...
no choosing to do,
only one response to his fourteen-year-old emotions.

He learned to stand strong, young and black in the ghetto,
motherless ...
twice,
casting long grown shadows
and lifting fists
to answer calls of injustice.

"I ain't gonna go out like a punk," he says,
tears blinding him to anything but fury.

Injustice swarms like bees;
a black and yellow maelstrom that swallows him up.

There is no vindication.
I cannot be released from this blame.
He did not choose me to be his mom,
but I was,
Am.

I have failed my son.

I weep and wave the white flag,
guilt dots my eyes with fiery drops that sting my face.
His path lay before him
and it is his to create or destroy.

My dreams of being as constant for him as the ocean's tide
are somewhere edging toward
the land of the lost.

TWO FORBIDDEN WORDS BY BESS PROPER

The rest of our lives will be the funeral for what might have been;
the multitudes of choices we made —
if every action has an equal and opposite reaction,
where did we go so wrong?
Somewhere indistinguishable along the line, things went stale;
I don't know where to place the blame.
Was I too worried? Was I too devoted?
We made the bed where we each lie alone;
watching you move on
brings on waves of nostalgia that I can't fight.
There was no doubt in our minds, the course of action was set.
Unfathomable the curve we crafted in the road.
How did we get here?
Like two drunks stumbling, blacked out,
the path is unclear.
And it all comes down to the two little words
my mother forbade me to ever say:
What if?

WHAT LASTS OF STEEL

BY TONY DEGENARO

For William & Margaret

1797

The Connecticut Western Reserve gave you up
to a rich man from New York City, put a price
on ambition and untamed and wild rolling pastures,
forests, and the creek, oh the creek.

Young was this land.

He found this gem, established its setting,
and then established her first mills,
lassoing the mighty Mill Creek.

It would take several decades, not too long,
for the breathing stone life of Youngstown
before railroads were introduced to Mahoning County,
a key fueling point in trade routes to Cleveland.

They tore into her heart,
calling this economic growth.

1907

Off the boat, they sang something of an immigrant's
song:

The Atlantic,
a shimmering satin blanket
to glide over ecstatic,
of mine old lands quit
To build a house and home,
to bear the fruits of children

olive orchards, Florence gone,
in this new land I begin.

And this echoed
in a hundred different languages along Mill Creek,
where each night and morning thousands would work.
Forging new lives, mechanical, imprinting a new identity
to the Steel Town.

1947

He drove a truck and raised my grandfather.
Up and down Belmont Avenue each morning,
on walks devising ways to please his young Italian bride,
he would stop to collect trash in the street:
leaving behind a legacy of mangled watch fobs,
buttons, odds and ends, little treats for his son.

But on this morning,
the truck is vacant as is his recliner. No nicotine
breezes through the open windows,
mingling with the white curtains, staining them
forever yellow.

Instead, tomatoes cooking down with meat,
burning inside the turn of the century skillet,
sends a tingling scorched scent making crying
eyes water even more,
while a letter tattered with selective secrecy
unfolds on the small kitchen table.

We watched a Roy Rogers film; Stevie should have been with me;
I cooked spagettis for the other men, that's your job when I come home

were a few excerpts the Army deemed unthreatening
to national security. He signed it Will, or William, or Bill
but definitely with love,

and softly singing Pacific poetry, begging God
that to Margaret, he would come home soon,
to Briar Hill, to the weeping willow in the front yard on
Crumrine Street, to Youngstown,

this was the same yearning of every man far gone,
to go back:
to the places where our families all begin.

1977

A diary entry reads heartbreak,
a love letter to Jenny, oh sweet Jenny and why
did you have to leave us on such a warm September day.
The sky seemed black, although the coal smoke would
no longer rise,
but instead settle, and choked, quietly falling like
filthy snow.

All the joy seen at the end of the world's end,
now post traumatic soldiers finding they cannot
forge sense out of steel, of what they had seen and done,
their jobs were gone, their livelihoods again over.
It was called Black Monday.

A second and third generation of immigrant Americans
were born into this, bearing hands into the old dirt
once a commodity of the New World,
now a blemish.

From the Italian neighborhoods the explosion could be heard,
as they tore out Jenny's heart and set it on fire.
No stockpile of dynamite could crush her spirit, but
as the earth shook, surely an adolescent with a family of his own,
wondered why William and Margaret never left,
and if he and his wife would follow suit,
or settle.

But still, the Mill Creek, useless, no longer fueling
blast furnaces and powering an entire city's economy,
still she only idled on,

wiping and washing away the coal-stained crying faces.

2000

The turn of the century,
a momentary lapse in wisdom does offer Youngstown
great optimism. Beyond the river run all the way to eternity,
William and Margaret are smiling
as the post-steel image of their city is forever burned
into popular culture, and their children, and their children's children
and the children of us all smell roses in Mill Creek Park,
the most beautiful graveyard of where over two hundred years
of recession and ambition and steel are laid to waste,
mindless to the lonely way in which this city rose and fell,
from the budding root of an New England businessman
supported on the backs and shoulders of outsiders,
and eventually just collapsed into the river.

The leaves just starting to turn orange, yellow, the colors of fire,
remind us that all ends, all fades.

And yet, Steel Town still rolls within the hills of
Mahoning Valley, a bustling moment of Appalachia
that like so many before raised me.

I look at my great grandparents' legacy:
both buried underneath Young's land, side by side,
and like the piece of gold on a chain near my writing desk,

eternally lasting.

WHAT WE LEARN WHEN THE SNOW MELTS

BY JESSICA MCGILL

Buildings are just places
to be, but is that all?
They own and limit us
like a parent, protective,
make us restless and break,
put our worried in a physical shell.
The first time I met you
was in winter. Snow
glittered all around us,
patches of it sodden
and trampled but still
beautiful. You reached
to brush it from my hair
and I let you, only
to find it had melted
inside of me where
it belonged.
Out by the creek
behind my house and
down a ways I sighed,
back pressed to bark,
as you, for the first time
kissed me! And though
we were hidden from
view I felt eyes on me
not yours, but the world's
because Earth was watching

me fall to pieces in the undertow
I was so exposed to her
or it is a him?

Why do we run from one
place to another? Why
do we cling to others for strength?
Nations are just ways of binding
us to the geography, even if nature
doesn't want to be shackled.
I wouldn't blame it for resenting
us and our maps, our houses.
We build them on her face
and expect her to love us
but that's not in her nature.
Our maps don't define
what's still living and changing.
Why autopsy what still can breathe?
Is there a purpose besides: snow,
your lips, a tree, this kiss, and
my feeling of exposure? Is there
more than existence, to
just selfishly be?
This has melted inside me
where it shall remain
always.

WORK IN PROGRESS

BY VIANCA YOHN

Our first orgasm
woke us from a dream
in which we were being raped.
There were colors,
shapes,
explosions,
static –

and then we awoke
to a throbbing ... something.
It wasn't pain,
but it wasn't pleasure, either.

She refused to forgive me.
She hated me for what I did to her,
even though I insisted
that it was only a dream.
It wasn't my fault;
I didn't mean to.

But she refused to make eye contact,
wouldn't talk to me. She was pissed.
And after a while,
so was I.

Years passed in silence.

The main principle of Buddhism
is that everything is defined by nothingness:
a wheel is not a wheel if there is no empty space.
Neither is a house a house, or a vase a vase.
Neither, as it turns out, was she herself.

But I hated that emptiness. I hated
that I relied on her to make me me
and that she relied on me to make her her
and that she got to be the emptiness
and I the form, the wheel, the stuff

I hated that I hated her
and I hated that she hated me
and I hated that we were,
in fact,
the one and the same,
and that all I was really hating
was myself.

But years continued passing,
and we continued to ignore each other,
until

I met Someone,

and She tore me open,
plunged in deep,
pulled hers and mine along,

and we were whole –
the hub and the axle and the rim and the emptiness.

Now I'm really awake
And starting over,
one more turn of the wheel.

YOU WASHED MY CLOTHES

BY LILLIE TEETERS

Smattering scents circle,
then suspend in my stratosphere,
freeze-framing patchwork pictures of you
that collage inside my inebriated brain.

Nostrils inhale you,
take you inside me ...
I am woozy!

Miles away,
you irrefutably
enter my personal universe.

Our energies entwine without corporeal
amalgamation,
yet still you invigorate me ...
a roborant
sans the side effects.

Even across town
you make me
incarnadine.

I succumb.

NONFICTION



A IS FOR AEQUITAS

BY TONY DEGENARO

I've always wondered why our Founding Fathers lent the ideals on which our country was founded to the form of personified women. Lady Liberty is an obvious choice; majestically cloaked in fading copper, clutching her torch and lighting the way in true motherly fashion for nervous guests and hopefuls to enjoy the freedom of America. Others, however, are more impressive. All around our nation's capitol, women cast in marble and stone gleam in the sunlight, perhaps standing guard over families of ducks in pools of water, or some reflective garden buried in the hustle of Washington DC. There is one woman, however, one solitary piece of iconography that I cannot overlook: Lady Justice.

She is the Roman Goddess of equality, no easy task for this woman to bear. It seems, and I realize the unintentional pun here, unfair to put the burden of unbiased on her. To further elaborate on her struggle, she is blinded in some forms by a cloak. In others more extreme she is eyeless; in the American reproduction that stands by the Supreme Courthouse, she is simply blindfolded. But still, she cannot see; she is robbed of one of the most beautiful gifts humanity is given. Justice cannot see over the Mall, look at the Capitol Rotunda lit up at night, a shimmering globe of yellow light bouncing off stately marble; she cannot reflect on the obelisk of Washington nor see Lincoln's reflection at the west end of the city. These sights are left to assumption. The implication is that she cannot misjudge nor discriminate as to meet fairness. And yet, how can any judgement of the world be made without having looked upon it?

In her hands, she holds a sword and a scale: the double edged weapon, a symbol of the nature of reason and justice, and the scale which weighs the support and opposition of each case she must hear. I want, just once, to see Lady Justice setting down her tools and hold flowers, to embrace the childlike curiosity of the world. To peek from under the blindfold and see the setting sun, for her, must be overwhelming. And if once, just once, she looked at the world, the city, what would she think?

This place is a playground, full of grass, and flowers, and beautiful things.

In New York, Lady Liberty must stand as a sentinel, and yet, I am not bothered by this. The task of constantly watching the seas and New York skyline seems charming, an enchanted task. Every morning she will see loves play out, lives develop and the sun rise and set behind the city. When I think of Justice's task, I see no redeeming qualities. She cannot celebrate the minutia of Washington DC, the footfalls on marble, the squirrels climbing on American icons, the crowds that gather at her feet to gaze at her beautiful form.

Or, perhaps, I am so affectionate to Justice because of the undertaking she symbolizes. When I was ten, my mother took on the blindfold, and swore the oath. At the time, it was exciting, liberating. Although I had no concept of what aspirations and goals were, I knew that my once attorney mother had achieved something that perhaps when she was my age, she had never even dreamed of being able to. So we were proud: Mom became Judge and we became unpaid campaign advisors. Like I said, it was exciting: our family got to see a great deal of the state, parts of the rural country, sprawling fields and farms, cities large and small, and every county fair in her eight county district.

But I saw what it became, the blindness and moral folding she had to do in order to fulfill her oath. No longer could she uphold her faith and work ethic with the same child-like devotion to both: now there were choices, tough ones. And although legally, she could not share them with me, several times, Mom has, in a very un-Catholic way, affirmed a death sentence. There is no word for what this crippling submission must feel like, faith to God, or an honor and oath to state? According to the blind scale of Justice, the state was, in fact, correct in the condemnation of these men. Surely the feeling after submitting the documents circulating around the Court of Appeals that would inevitably end that and those men's lives must have been, at the least, heart-breaking and soul-crushing. Was this why Justice wore her rags and covered her eyes? To hide the down trodden cast of shame she wore?

I have no doubts that my mother did not sacrifice her faith for ethics. I do know that she never threw away her faith in me. I consider my freshman year of high school, a new chance to succeed academically. I, like her but for different reasons, studied Latin, the language of the law. Our knowledge on the subject varied drastically: she knew words like *aequitas*, justice; I knew modern idioms like *semper ubi sub ubi*, "always where under where." I replay several events where we would study, days of long work for her, and short effort for me at school. She would be wearing beautiful clothes, business looking skirts and jackets, I would have on ripped jeans and a Pink Floyd t-shirt. I imagine sessions of flipping flash cards, "*agricola, farmer, fortuna, luck, aqua, water,*" but they dissolve into sarcastic and condescending episodes of a Roman Empire era Sesame Street program: "A is for *aequitas*."

The further from the language of the law I drifted, the further from her I went as well. There became a disconnect that no Latin to English dictionary could solve. During her second election I was hardly a presence, hardly a smiling face with a re-election shirt on, shaking hands and handing Tootsie Rolls to the people of Ohio. She won, and at her swearing in, I was more concerned with leaving than understanding that Mom was giving her life to this great abstract idea. With her hand on the Bible, she swore again to uphold the justice that so many generations ago, we fought for. As I reflect, I realize the cruelty I exhibited as a son: kicking the

blind and exploiting her. I was gone. It would take years to repair this rift created between us. But now, I can only admire her and the faith she has placed in me. With childlike innocence, I am forgiven and taken back into my mother's arms.

Her devotion to motherhood is parallel to Justice's devotion to the state. Her only religion is the system, her only faith lies in the judiciary. So in a way, my mother is superior to the highest law in the land: she has not forgone her faith, or her family. And that is why, I think, Lady Justice high atop her marble perch, is so oft to stop me dead in DC walking traffic. I see Mom as an agent of Justice, one of her servants to the blindfold and scale, and I admire all she has given for both our nation, and our family. She can tolerate the unbelievable strain that Justice asks her to, because, she understands motherhood, she knows sacrifice.

It is a beautiful thing when I think of my mother as a little girl, holding hands with curiosity and wonder, smelling flowers and giggling when butterflies leap out of the shrubs. I can only hope Lady Justice, all marble and love, when she closes her eyes, can see the same things I know my mother does. Because it will clear her soul enough to feel the just weight of the scales.

BALTIMORE: A PEEK INTO CRAWFORD COUNTY

BY KYLENE WATTS

I'd forgotten how much I love old, decrepit—everything until I went to Baltimore, Maryland. The dilapidated things I grew up around were weathered barns and partially burned down farmhouses that smelled of cremation and mildew because for some reason it always rained after a fire. Baltimore was very different. It didn't have any rusted silos or abandoned trains in a field of wheat—that last one is just a pretty image, we never had any abandoned trains in fields of wheat either, just cornfields, but when I thought up the image I wanted to share it; I digress.

It was 8:30 in the morning and I walked along the streets of the city. The sun was warm against my skin—pale then, later to be a bright shade of red; flushed of sunburn. I carried a camera trying my best to be “cool” about taking photos, but there's no way I could have taken photographs without people knowing that “I'm not in Kansas anymore.” The city fascinated me more than I thought could be possible, but now that I am away from the fastened awe of the day I realize that I reacted a similar way the first time I came to Columbus, Ohio. In high school when I first stepped out of that yellow school bus to look at the giant buildings, goose bumps traced my arms, forcing the little hairs to stand at attention and welcome the sight. I had a disposable camera and I was there to see a French play for—big surprise—my freshman year French class. I tripped the shutter on the camera and never took my eyes off the towering buildings. Down the sidewalk we went, trying to find the right entrance for this play—the play turned out to be a bunch of Spanish speaking people putting on a half-French/half-English speaking play. Strange. I tripped over myself as we came to a collective stop and turned to enter a building. I was sad that we had to go indoors to wait for the start of the play.

I grew up in the same part of middle of nowhere, Ohio: Crawford County. It's the ugliest place, but I guess it's home. Crawford County is country land. The biggest “city” we have in Crawford is actually a large town made up of a little over 10,000 people (this is probably also counting the township which extends much farther than the town). There's nothing great about Bucyrus—the city I just referred to—it has more banks than people with money, a couple of bars for those people who barely have money, some really shady looking houses, and drug dealers who live next to houses that hold working class families. In Bucyrus if you have a job you're lucky, if you're on welfare you'll never get off—most people, like my jackass uncle, never get off or want to get off of welfare. Every first of the month the town actually looks like it's alive, but that doesn't mean the people who are out and about look alive. A lot of the people

I see when I go home look depressed and unemployed—there's a reason for that, Crawford County ranked number one in unemployment rate in 2009. Every time I go home I feel like I'm being sucked into a black hole—like the county does not want me to be happy because it doesn't want anyone to be happy. A long time ago I resolved that I needed to leave that place, and so far I have (Otterbein College is far enough away). I refuse to have my soul sucked clean. Otterbein is in Westerville, Ohio—a suburb of Columbus—and the cleanest place I have ever seen. The buildings are well-kept and the people look happy. There are always people on State Street during the day, and at night it seems everyone is at Old Bag—the local pub. I'm usually not there, but when I walk on State Street the bar looks so full of happy people. This *Leave it to Beaver* town made me forget how truly artistic dilapidated things look.

Baltimore awakened the tired me. It let me be artistic again—it let me take photographs and enjoy my surroundings instead of feeling oppressed by deadlines, sleep, and routine life. I woke up refreshed earlier than I have since the start of 2009. It is very rare for me to wake up at 6:00 in the morning and realize that I do not really need any more sleep. For this weekend trip I was awake and alert and ready to take on the big city. On my morning walk I ended up in a very shady area of town—an area that looked broken, but felt healthy and alive to me. I don't know why this decrepit area was healthier to me than the dying Crawford County, but there was something about the buildings and the construction and the small amount of people walking around that felt healthy (there weren't that many people because it was between 8:00 AM and 9:00 AM and Baltimore didn't really wake up until 10:00 AM). I crossed a road and decided to turn down another street—turning back towards the hostel because I wasn't getting to where I thought I was going (the Inner Harbor), and I thought that if I turned around and found the hostel I might be able to try the search again from a semi-familiar spot. Huge metal doors hid the closed shops, but signs hovering above them gave away their stations. Each of the doors on this street were decorated in blue and pink graffiti, thin-like cursive and swirling names and aliases on the metal drop door. After snapping a couple of photographs I looked across the street and—my heart felt like it stopped. My breath was caught in my throat and my eyes were wide in fascination and admiration. The building across the street was being torn down. Each little fiber was exposed and every material used to construct the building was in pieces, in crumbs. A little machine sat at the building's base—evidence that eventually the mess would be scooped up and taken somewhere, maybe dumped in a landfill: left lonely. Instantly I held the camera in front of me and snapped photographs. A man passed by and looked very interested in the spot that I too was interested in, maybe this building was just being torn down or maybe he was trying to locate the exact spot that I found so damn fascinating. I changed my view a little bit to see the buildings that neighbor it; one is a new glass building, and next

to that looked very sculpted and very old. The difference made me gasp once more and when I realized once again that I had a mission—to find Inner Harbor—I decided to lower the camera in my hand.

Eventually I did make it to Inner Harbor and as soon as I saw it I knew I wouldn't be happy with the results. I knew that it reeked of tourist and of fake and of new and even of suppressed life. Inner Harbor wasn't allowed to be ugly or old. It had to be mostly new, and—for lack of a better word—touristy. I hadn't even crossed the street to enter Inner Harbor and I longed for the life of the city. I longed for dying buildings and homeless people. I longed for those who waited to catch the bus to the grocery store. In that instant I knew I wouldn't enjoy the rest of the day if it was spent in the Inner Harbor. I stayed for a few hours anyway, relaxing in the park and riding the water taxi. I couldn't really get into the sights. I felt saddened and I mourned for what Inner Harbor will never be: real. It will have local traffic, but never be the healthy part of the city that cracks and ages, then dies and becomes reborn with new buildings and the love that only comes from a harsh neighborhood where you have to stick together to be happy and get through the hard times.

I think the healthiest part of this city was the several blocks that looked dilapidated. Now I realize that maybe it was beautiful to me because life needs the ugly and decrepit, and sometimes those are the most beautiful moments we can share with each other. If we were perfect like the Inner Harbor there would be no real human contact; no reason to clutch each other when we cry. No reason to promise each other; no reason to hope because everything is perfect. Community and love comes from death and sorrow. Maybe when I go back to Crawford County for a visit, I will be able to look beyond the sorrow, and beyond the ugliness to see what I saw in Baltimore: life worth living.

BUBBLES IN THE GLASS

BY JEFF KINTNER

Instead of slowly sinking I dive in headfirst,
but my wit falls short
working my tongue in frustration, cause there's nothing new

If I could do what I didn't know; without all the work
being born with talent gets you halfway there; but I ain't got what's left.

I need to start looking up at the blue sky
to listen to something that doesn't clink in a glass
realize that I have so much more than I know
show myself it's not one big cliché

plastic smiles and dark cigarettes
kill me more than the strings 'tached to dying marionettes
I lack the subtlety to hit that B
the bubbles in my glass, imperfections in my past

Eh, it's a first draft — an Idea more than an actual product. The last part is more or less just lines I had that I liked so I lumped them together; they might end up getting used in something else later. The last line though, the 'bubbles in my glass' one, especially strikes a chord with me.

My oldest brother Eric blows glass as a hobby. One year for Christmas he gave us all bowls and glasses he made in the shop at school. He gave me an asymmetrical blue glass that has a sharp edge on the bottom from where he pulled out the pipe. I've cut my pinky on it a couple times- mainly because when I drink out of it I run my finger along it like I tongue the canker sores in my mouth. It's also riddled with bubbles that I'm sure signify some imperfections in either the materials or in the way it was made. I love this glass, it's perfect.

It has just enough room for three ice cubes after a can of pop — it seems weird to mention, but this is crucial for me- I have a habit of putting in too many, which leaves me with a watered down Mt. Dew. With its size I can only fit what I need. Plus, it conveniently holds

just enough milk after a shot of Kahlúa and vodka to make a killer White Russian. Studying the glass is a disorienting experience because of the lopsided way it sits on the table, the rim of the glass isn't parallel with the surface of my drink. It's also not really worth mentioning that at the time this was made for me, blue was my favorite color. Since then, it's changed to a dark green and I haven't looked back, which may or may not represent my continual decent into becoming a jaded asshole.

I idolized my two brothers growing up. I copied everything they did, repeated everything they said. I followed Mark and Eric and their friends like a lost puppy to try to make them think I was cool. I spiked my hair the first day of sixth grade because they were into punk music, I hated everything popular because I assumed that the cool thing was to do (I'd find out years later that I wasn't too far off), I was excited to wear their hand-me-downs. Hell, I still wear them.

Before I knew what it meant I drew a swastika on top of a Christmas tree thinking it was something similar to a pentagram (I'd seen similar reactions to both symbols. I was attempting rebellion by copying and pasting overused tropes in an effort to get noticed by my brother). It was an early attempt at irony before I knew what that was either, and it ended in Mark ripping the paper into quarters, sitting me down and telling me to never make jokes about something I didn't understand.

They've always been my heroes and role models. Through their actions they've shown me what I should do, what I should probably avoid and how to get around what I should do. These days, Eric is living in DC and he's having a really rough time. He got out of the graduate program at American University with some kind of history degree and has difficulty finding a job in his field. He's barely scraping by with a job at a Trader Joe's. He, like me, loses sight of his goals once it starts raining and is easily overcome by an ever-mounting sense of paranoia.

I stare at the bubbles, the tiny flaws in this perfect glass. And I wonder in some drunken transcendental-minded state: What do they represent? Are they indicative of the paths my brothers tread that I may or may not be following? Or of wanting so badly to be my brothers that to this day I struggle with attempting to be my own person?

An identity is so hard to come by these days. Like I just said, I'm still trying to find mine. I don't want to be labeled as anything. I just want to be myself, but that's nearly impossible when it's what everyone else is doing. If everyone tries to run in a different direction, it's guaranteed you're going to be running the same way as a few other people, and the fact remains that you're running away just like everyone else. America loves an underdog, and that's exactly what we're making ourselves out to be. We make jokes about being huge dorks because we've read every Harry Potter book, or we try to outwit each other in

remembering TV shows from our adolescent years. When my friends and I get into arguments about *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and *Dragon Ball Z*, we might as well be yelling “No, I’M the bigger nerd!” at each other. We’re actively trying to alienate ourselves (but not too much) so we look like a (anti)hero in a Wes Anderson movie.

No matter what I do I end up either getting told what I am or my conscience forces me to second-guess myself. Is this band really what I think they are? Are those people really who I think they are? Am I who they think I am? Should I like this? Fuck it, either I like it or I don’t. I don’t have to worry what other people think if I don’t like it. But they’re gonna say I’m a hipster if I don’t. I wonder if my brothers would like this. No. I’m my own person. I’m not just a mixture of Eric and Mark! “Uh, yeah. Matt and Kim are okay I guess. I mean — I like what I’ve heard.”

That happens too often for me to admit. Sometimes I think I’m slowly declining into nihilism out of lack of a better option. Then I realize I’m getting swallowed in an asshole of self-pity and that’s the last thing I want to do, even though that’s what I’m doing now — like I’m ass-deep in a Salinger novel or something. I was the epitome of ‘I hate everything that’s popular because it’s popular’ back in Jr. high and most of high school, mainly because I thought it made me cool. Suffice to say, it didn’t — a locker room scene from 6th grade gym comes to mind. A mule of a child, Donnie DeMarco is standing on the half wall separating us from the mold and piss infested showers we were too afraid to use. I tell him to get down before his fat ass falls and cracks the cement floor. He whips back at me “At least I don’t wear hand-me-downs that were bought at Salvation Army!” The retort and resulting laughter were so immediate, that I knew it wasn’t something he just pulled out of the air — he was too dull to make an observation like that on the spot. It had to have been something people were making jokes about behind my back. It was the first time I had to ask myself ‘Why am I copying my brothers? Do I ever do anything for myself?’ and I wouldn’t even try to answer that for years.

Donnie went prematurely bald sophomore year, and his family went bankrupt soon after that. Last time I saw him he was mowing lawns. Not working for a landscaping company — he was going door to door asking people if they wanted their lawns mowed for a couple bucks an hour, because he has no life skills. Who knew you were supposed to learn things in high school other than how to be a mediocre fullback? Who’s laughing now? Definitely not the guy mowing lawns and being bald.

During my junior year I finally attempted to answer those questions that I was forced to face in that locker room. I realized I was being a closed-minded little shit, hating on popular culture because I thought I was too cool for it. Luckily, I grew out of it. For the most part. But then I realize I was hipster before it was cool — so I make jokes about it while I nervously

chuckle to try and distance myself from it. I still hate a lot of pop culture, but to be fair, a lot of it is worth hating. I don't get why people force 'culture' down their gaping maw for the sake of inclusion.

I don't identify in the least with my generation's choice of entertainment, especially in music. My tastes lie in the decades preceding my formative years. Bad Religion is my misanthropic demeanor, The Suicide Machines are my inconsistent moods. Five Iron Frenzy is my desire to be a part of something greater, The Doors are my constant daydream. Operation Ivy breaks the synapses off from my brain, while The Dead Kennedys are my twitching nerves. Weezer's blue album is my melancholy hope and Civ reminds me to Set Your Goals.

God damn it, I'm doing it again. I'm trying to define myself by the products I consume. Unconsciously nestling myself into a category where I don't have to be introspective, I can just slap on a label and stop thinking. Kurt Vonnegut said it best in *Cat's Cradle*; he introduced the concept of a Granfalloon* — a group of people who claim to have a shared identity but in reality have no actual relationship with one another.

Take punks for example. One thing I hate about punk is that it, like most other granfalloons, comes with a uniform. Punk is just as much of a mold as anything else. And it takes a lot more time out of your morning to gel your hair into a Mohawk than it does to tie a Windsor knot. I love the hyper focused anger it stood for (even if it didn't amount to much) and I hate the brooding angst it's become. I died a little bit when pop punk hit the scene. I wish Travis Barker had died in that plane crash. Green Day can walk off a cliff and hopefully their entire followship will blindly take that last step.

This generation's culture is lost. The counterculture has become part of the popular culture, alternative is the norm. Radiohead is the closing credit music for a certain young adult book-turned-movie you can find in the 'Paranormal Teen Romance' section of Barnes & Noble.

Grunge was the start of it. It was the first corporate-sponsored counterculture. We grew up in the '90's watching Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Blind Melon and Green Day telling us to fight the power by watching MTV (I'd like to point out the inherent racism in this essay — I use 'we' like it's all inclusive, and then only talk about bands suburban white kids thought were cool). Then the millennium hit and everything went from plaid and torn to platinum and shiny. It was our

* Quoting someone is so much easier than actually coming up with something original to say. In all honesty, everything I'm saying can be summed up into two quotes. The aforementioned Vonnegut, and George Carlin: "My main operating principle: Don't take any shit from the zeitgeist." I'm not even sure if it was worthwhile to write this, considering it's a text that can't survive me. It's too referential, too ephemeral. Fifty years after I die will anyone know the connotations of *Jersey Shore*, 4chan or a *Salinger novel*? Maybe my time would have been better spent removing the skin from a toy balloon.

turn. It was time for us to grow up, to dive headfirst into puberty and wade through the jungle of our formative years, to break from the cocoon of adolescence like our parents did by blaring music, dropping acid and protesting the against the power.

But nothing happened.

There was nothing to rebel against. The people we were supposed to be rebelling against were telling us to do just that (whether it was a malicious dare or just a marketing ploy has yet to be seen). Hot Topic told us that the only way to not sell out was by buying Invader Zim wristbands and Hello Kitty purses. Billy Joe Armstrong turned 35, and he was still singing the same anti-corporate sing-alongs he had been ten years ago, but we finally recognized it for the shill it really was. The highest grossing movies were remakes, sequels and adaptations. So we did the same. We looked back at the people we looked up to in the '90's (for me, my brothers) and tried to emulate them. All we wanted to do was be different. We wanted to define ourselves, but all we knew was rebellion against something that was no longer worth rebelling against; because it was the rebellion. Shit, you can buy rebellion at the Gap for \$30 in the form of a Che Guevara t-shirt.

I think this whole mess might come from a repression of emotions. I don't mean to get all Freudian — please, stop me if I relate everything to sex or try to suggest you relax with a healthy dose of cocaine. Forgive me, I don't precisely mean repressed — we haven't kept them bottled up or anything. It's more like we've been denied a crucial moment in human development. That hormonally-fueled time in your life when you might be questioning the reason behind it all in an existential crisis; or you might be questioning the validity of authority-any authority. Your parents, government, god, you name it. Every human at some point must come to terms with some form of teenage angst. Everyone deals with this almost inarticulate dread differently — some find comfort in religion, while others find answers in a lack thereof.

One of the inherent tragedies of teenage angst is not having the skill to express one of the two most potent emotions you will ever feel in your life (In case you're wondering, the other is love — but unlike love, teenage angst is unmistakable). The other tragedy is the fact that this extremely personal emotion is an almost universal thing in the first world. You sit there full of your youthful piss and vinegar, head full of clouded, dark emotions. You don't really know how to sort it all out, but you know you just want to lock yourself in solitary confinement, where you can question everything in a place where no interlocutors can find you. You can bask in thoughts you've never had before — your mind is opening up to worlds of critical possibilities! But, so is most everyone else. And everyone who isn't is making fun of you because you think no one understands you. In one of the most vulnerable times in your life,

you either have the rug pulled out from under you or look around and feel self-conscious that your developing opinion is unoriginal and overrated.

And that's where my generation and I come from. Feeling spurned by the outside world for our introspective dispositions, we sneer back. We try to flip everything on its ass by being ironic. Then we attempt to distance ourselves with a thinly — veiled ennui. I don't like admitting to my hipsterdom, but I'm realistic. It saddens me to say it's going to be our generation's defining feature. And if you count yourself outside of it, think again. If you've ever told a bad or awkward joke for the sake of telling a bad or awkward joke; if you've ever watched an episode of *Jersey Shore* (especially if you 'only watch it because it's so bad'); if you've ever watched something truly vile and disgusting on the internet and laughed about it—say, something involving two girls and a cup, pain Olympics, or anything on 4chan— you can count yourself among our numbers.

NYCTOPHOBIA

BY EMILY SWANK-KAVANAUGH

1. 7 looks at clock, runs hands over face. 7 is awake at 3:53 a.m., lying in the dark.
2. 7 can see through a small crack in the window, the strike of white lightening. 7 is awake now from a nightmare that seemed too real to still be breathing.
3. 7 is scared of storms, scared of nightmares. 7 is scared of being alone, of being in the dark.
4. 7 sits up in bed, flexes hand. Fingers twitch, and a tightening pain takes over and fills the spaces between the bruised and broken fingers.
5. 7 lays back down under a blanket made by 11. Made by someone who matters very much to 7. 11 said that this blanket would protect 7. 11 made the blanket very warm for nights when the rain wouldn't stop. 11 made the blanket big enough so 7 could hide within it – from nightmares, from storms, from the dark, from being alone.
6. 7 notices while hidden in the blanket, that it still smells of 11.
7. Flexes hand, fingers twitch. Bruised and broken.
8. 7 hasn't heard the thunder or lightning. 7 breathes under the blanket and feels how warm and comfortable this environment has become in such a short amount of time. 7 relaxes, and is protected.
9. The blanket moves. 7 feels 11 begin to breathe, slow and soft. 7 tries to match 11, to breathe with 11.
10. 11 doesn't know 7 is scared. 11 doesn't know 7 gets scared. 11 puts hand on 7's arm. It feels small next to 7.
11. Flexes hand, fingers twitch. Bruised and broken.
12. The rain outside taps on the windowpane, and it becomes less of something to fear, and more of something safe. Since 7 has been awake, it is the first time 7 feels secure.
13. 7 wants to speak to 11. 7 wants to say, "I'm not fearless. I'm not strong." But 11 sleeps. 11 doesn't know. 11 sleeps.
14. Flexes hand, fingers twitch. Bruised and broken.
15. 7 wants to speak to 11. 7 wants to say, "All this was a big mistake. I should've said no. I should've turned around. I could've been a hero." But 11 sleeps. 11 doesn't know. 11 sleeps.
16. 7 wants to speak to 11. 7 wants to say, "The day you cried was because you were scared of what would happen. The day you cried shattered my heart and I'm so incredibly sorry I couldn't do anything about your tears." 11 doesn't know, because 11 sleeps.

17. Never before, and never since, has 7 seen 11 cry.
18. 7 can smell 11, and begins to feel safe. 7 understands that it is important 11 never knows fear, never hurts.
19. 11 breathes on the neck of 7. 7 gets a tingling chill from the heat as the rain outside continues to tap on the window.
20. 7 is still scared of the rain, of the tapping on the window. 7 fears anything that could come in and disrupt the deafening silence under this blanket.
21. Flexes hand, fingers twitch. Bruised and broken.
22. 7 fears 11. 7 is scared of what 11 is capable of.
23. 11 sleeps. 7 relaxes, feels the warmth of 11, and begins to breathe heavy, and 7 knows it's okay to trust 11 to be there for 7 if 7 sleeps.
24. 11 sleeps. Bruised.
25. 7 sleeps. Broken.
26. Outside this blanket, the rain begins to fall harder against the ground. The wind pushes the millions of single, small drops against the glass. Against the separation of sound and silence. Of storm and safety.
27. Flexes hand, fingers twitch. Bruised and broken.
28. 7 awakes again, full of fear. Ignores the breath of 11. Moves blanket, and the voice of 7 cuts through the air, breaking the sound barrier. 7 admits fear. 7 is vulnerable and 7 reaches out for 11.
29. 7 looks at clock, runs hands over face. 7 is awake at 4:22 a.m. When 7 reaches, 7 feels a cold mattress and no pillow underneath the blanket. When 7 reaches, there is nothing. When 7 admits fear, 7 is alone. 7 lowers head, and in bruised, broken hands feel the weight of thoughts heavy between damp palms and unsteady fingers. At 4:22 a.m., 7 cries.

SAVING LITTLE MONSTER

BY WHITNEY REED

Sex changes everything. And it was on a spring, kindergarten day, when sex put my life on an unforgettable course. We had a special lunch table for the kindergartners. I was finishing my grape juice when I heard a fellow kindergartner talking to one of my friends down the table. "Yeah," Dane uttered excitedly, "I had sex with Whitney Reed." I was a six-year-old. I had no idea what sex was other than bad. And hearing it said out loud sounded really bad. So I did what any self-respecting child would do in this situation. I tattled on him. I might not have known what he meant, but Mrs. Smith sure did. He was whipped from the table and before I knew it, we were in the principal's office.

Thinking back I remember him confessing that he thought sex was something people did when they loved each other. It turns out, Dane had developed a crush on me and he had wanted other people to think that I liked him too. If I was a sensible person, I might have understood. I definitely would have listened to him. But as it was, I was just a kid with a heated face, embarrassed to death in front of all her friends. And the cause of my embarrassment was sitting shamefaced before me. I replied with the perfunctory forgiveness, but deep within, I didn't forgive him for what he'd done.

Dane was a bit of an outsider, not a reject, but not on the inner circle either. He was given a three-day suspension for the sex incident and to my dismay he returned with his love for me still intact. And from the day he returned, I was never the same. I became evil.

Now I never planned his death or physically hurt him. I was much worse than any of that. I tore him down mentally day after day. I used his love for me as a weapon against him. I turned that love into a weakness. And some days I wonder why I did that. . . why I hated him so much for loving me . . . why I punished him so badly.

I would like to consider myself a nice person today. Some people must agree because they always laugh like I'm joking when I tell them I used to be a little monster. I rarely tell them I'm not joking. And sometimes that half-hearted attempt at honesty eases my guilt. If I do tell some of the stories from my elementary years, I put a humorous spin on the tales. They hardly ever fail to draw a laugh and I don't have to embellish any of them. But they could be told in a different light as well.

Mr. Kulp was the elementary art teacher. He wasn't a big fan of kids (I always wonder why people like this become teachers), and as long as we were relatively quiet and well behaved we could do whatever we felt like. We rarely felt like art. There was one person though that

grated on Mr. Kulp's nerves. People like to assume that teachers never have bad days or that they are immune to favoritism and the opposite—these people seem to have forgotten the fact that teachers are human. And Dane was the sign of Mr. Kulp's humanity. Given the slightest opportunity, Mr. Kulp would punish Dane as severely as possible. It was an instant dislike that reverberated as the years passed.

What kind of a person would I have been had I let such an opportunity pass? A good one. However, no matter what I am now, I was not a good kid. I used every chance I had to get Dane into trouble. Art class was a haven for my machinations.

Despite having absolutely no idea how to teach an art class, Mr. Kulp was a stickler for his rules. One of his many rules was that only seats with paper in front of them could be used. My friend James and I usually sat together. Steven—our other friend—would also hang out with us. Unfortunately one day I got to art class late. I walked in to find Dane at my usual seat. With only three pieces of paper at the table, it was not a good situation.

I walked up to the table and tapped Dane on the shoulder. "You're sitting in my seat," I informed him quite haughtily.

"I'll move if you sit with me," he offered, puppy dog eyes gleaming.

I snorted and rolled my eyes. "Just give me the seat Dane—you don't want to get in trouble again, do you? You've already got, what, 8 days of recess detention?"

"No." The answer was quiet and filled with subtle power. "No I'm not going to move until you go with me."

"Oh just move, Dane," James broke in, glaring at him. "That seat's reserved for Whitney. Stop being stupid. Move."

"No! No I won't!"

So I sat at the paperless chair beside Steven until as luck would have it, Dane broke his colored pencil. Once he left to correct the damage I lurched for his seat. By the time the pencil sharpener was whirring into action, I had dumped his artwork onto the empty table and was drawing over his springtime waterfall.

Naturally all hell broke loose when the pencil was sharp.

"You're in my seat!" He yelled in frustration. His plans always seemed to go horribly wrong. . .

"Other way around, Dane," I muttered as I pretended to be involved in adding a rainbow to his waterfall.

"Are you callin' her a liar?" Steven asked in a twangy southern drawl. If there was one thing that Steven couldn't stand, it was people being called liars. It didn't really matter to him whether the accusation was true or not, just whether it was made.

"Yeah, and you're a liar too if you think I wasn't in that seat," Dane sputtered and pointed a shaky finger at him.

In a lethal spring, Steven had Dane by the shirt collar and lifted above the ground. "Do you want to settle this after school behind the dumpsters?"

Slightly breathless Dane agreed and added that Steven would in fact be going down.

As Steven released Dane, Mr. Kulp appeared on the scene. He had a habit of waiting to see if the problem disappeared before he involved himself in discipline issues.

"What's the problem here?"

"She stole my seat!" Dane blurted out, all love for me forgotten in the heat of the moment and his foiled plans.

"Is this true, Ms. Reed?"

I opened my eyes widely.

"No, Mr. Kulp. He tried to take it from me, but I was always sitting here."

"I was there!"

Mr. Kulp turned to Dane. "Now Dane, use your brain. Who am I going to believe, her or you?"

After the detention had been imparted and Dane's head was hanging dejectedly, I felt a rush of indignant anger sweep over me again. I couldn't help one last parting shot.

"Mr. Kulp?"

"Yes?"

"Dane told Steven that he's going to try to beat him up after school today."

"Dane, did you say that?"

Shock stood stark on his face. "Well...yes, but—"

"No buts, this school has a no violence policy. Follow me."

As Dane was led away I smiled in complete happiness, settled into my plastic chair, and picked up the purple. The rainbow was looking a little red.

Now, moral of this story? I could be evil, evil, evil. Had anyone else taken my chair I certainly wouldn't have behaved in the same manner. In a way I think I was able to do this to Dane because I knew I could act however I wanted and he would still come back to me. It's a really disturbing thought, but we always do hurt the ones we love the most because we know they'll always love us no matter what. If there was one thing I knew about Dane, it was that despite his excitable temper, he would be back...he always came back.

Was that the only reason that I was cruel to Dane? To test his limits? It's fairly difficult for me to evaluate my elementary mind but I don't believe that was the only reason.

There were times I'll admit that I felt a sense of guilt, a sensation of inherent wrongness of my actions. These sensations, like all others, passed.

Sure enough, Dane returned to me. We were working on spring time pictures and I had the black crayon. Somehow the black crayon is always in demand and I controlled it. It was a power trip. I colored carefully within the lines as Dane nudged my arm and sent the black line into the light colored rainbow. He didn't notice his blunder.

"Hey, can I have the black," he asked, grabbing for it.

"No!" I snatched it away, my anger at the picture being disturbed welling inside of me. It was ruined. There was no saving it and class was ending. He ruined everything because he just wouldn't leave me alone.

Pouting, he turned and began scribbling furiously with a green crayon. He was wearing one of those button down dress shirts, and his collar was stiff and gaped at the nape of his neck.

He leaned back on two chair legs. Working purely on instinct and a good idea I didn't have time to evaluate, I took aim. By some miracle (or perhaps the opposite) that black crayon hit the target and disappeared down the back of his shirt. With a yelp, he tipped over and hit the ground with a huge crash. The sound was enormous inside the quiet classroom.

Mr. Kulp rushed over and stared down at Dane, who was still lying on the ground.

"What's going on here, Dane? Were you trying to disrupt the class? Cause trouble?" He blustered angrily.

Dane was lying in a stunned shock and only managed to repeat, "She, she, she..." over and over, but never motioned at me.

The guilt surfaced and I spoke up. "Mr. Kulp, you see Dane asked for the crayon and I tossed it to him, but I guess he wasn't paying attention and it went down his shirt. He got startled and fell." I felt pretty proud of this answer. There was not a lying word in the whole statement. I could have hung him out to dry, but I was covering for him. That tiny spike of guilt scared me and so I tried to help him, calm Mr. Kulp down. Of course I couldn't incriminate myself, but I was willing to help him get out of the hole I had pushed him into . . . this one time.

"Well, I guess if that is the case—"

"Wait that's not true!" It wasn't Dane that spoke up but my friend James. He had witnessed the whole incident.

"Dane told us that he really wanted to disrupt the class so he decided to crash his chair to the ground. Whitney was just trying to be nice and protect him."

Mr. Kulp looked at me. "Is this true?"

I stared down at the ruined rainbow for a moment.

And then I nodded.

"Double detention Dane," Mr. Kulp said, returning to his desk.

Dane still lay on the floor in desperation saying, "But, but she—but I—but she—but, but—"

He quieted and spent the day in from recess.

I've spent time thinking about that moment. I had almost lost my nerve, but why? The guilt had occasionally tapped me on the shoulder, but it had never almost caused me to lose a prime opportunity to tear down Dane. The only answer I can come up with is that everyone doubts themselves at points in their lives...the good people...and the bad ones especially. Perhaps I just had a momentary lapse in my drive, maybe I was doubting myself a tiny bit. James' comments had clearly propelled me out of whatever reservations I was facing internally.

He still continued to love me. The ferocity with which he clung to this love could only be compared to obsession. And the deeper he fell for me, the harder I became with my treatment of him. By the time of the art class incident it had been five years since the sex incident. Could it have been possible that I had held that grudge for so long? Was it something more? No matter how awful I treated him, he always came back for more, sitting beside me, asking me to eat lunch with him, and later to dances and on dates.

I wasn't always targeting Dane for trouble. Some days we lived in a peaceful existence. It wasn't a continuous battle. I can remember one afternoon recess in particular. We were swinging on the playground and we talked about our favorite Disney movies. It was a quiet kind of companionship and I was constantly waiting for him to do or say something aggressive that would ruin the moment. I suppose I should say it would have been peaceful if I hadn't been anticipating a love attack.

On off days I wouldn't mind his attention. I certainly didn't welcome it, but I was more indifferent than angered by it. But on others, the monster within escaped and I let it do all it wished. And as reluctant to admit it as I am, it usually just felt good. Sure there were the hinting pricks of wrongness, but they weren't strong enough to derail the pleasure I got from being bad. It felt freeing to be able to release all of my frustrations and anxieties and problems.

Adults know how to shoulder their disappointments and bad days. They have had plenty of practice. But kids? Kids are filled with this storm of emotion. Young children always seem to feel things more strongly, vividly. Adults have more tempered feelings. Either they are watered down by life experience, or they are just more easily repressed. So not only do kids have this raging emotion, they also haven't learned the right outlets for the emotions.

I was a tension storm looking for a place for my lightning to touch down. Dane might as well have been a swimmer with a metal rod.

I'm not excusing my actions. They were wrong. No matter how good it made me feel, Dane never deserved to be rejected cruelly again and again. He never deserved the mean jokes or insults. But just like the storm and the swimmer, it was regrettable and inevitable that Dane would be struck time and again. I'm not saying I only used Dane as an outlet for my frustrations. I'm just saying it is one possibility of an angle. The more I look at our ragged relationship throughout the years, the more I considered the complexity of it. I no longer think my actions were in fact one dimensional. I believe there were several reasons for my disgraceful behavior.

In fact, nothing about our years together was simple. As much as I tried to hate Dane, he became a staple in my life. He would ask me questions about the current book I was reading and clap extra hard at assemblies when my name was called. I didn't like the fact that he was giving me attention, but I think it was more the fact that it was Dane giving me the attention than the actions themselves.

He occasionally bought me gifts, too. I remember a hardback copy of *Danger Along the Ohio*, which he knew I loved when we read it in class. I used to have it, but when I looked for it a couple of years ago it was gone. I still have the diamond angel pennant. I received these gifts in reluctant embarrassment.

From the first grade on, I was boy crazy. Ever since that defining year I have been consumed by my desire to date. It's ironic, I suppose, that Dane's had that same exact desire, only he felt it for me. I wanted to date, but Dane was not a contender for my checklist. I wanted everything he was offering, I just didn't want him to be the one behind the gestures.

My one big dream was my first kiss. So when the sixth grade went on a group-building camp out with a dance I saw my big chance. I was so excited and in such a good mood that night at the dance that I agreed to slow dance with Dane. I agreed because I wanted to dance with my crush Quentin, but I was too afraid to ask him. So I watched him dancing with other girls until Dane asked me to dance. Maybe I would work up the nerve, I told myself. But in my heart I knew I would spend the night watching and wishing it was different.

Before the dance ended, Dane told me he needed to tell me something. I leaned down (he was several inches shorter than me — which I hated) to hear over the bass-thumping music and felt a smacking kiss on the side of my face. Shocked I reacted in protection mode and slapped his face.

"I can't believe you," I said angrily, and then took off, bee-lining for the girls' restroom on the other side of camp.

I cried in that bathroom for a good half hour. I was so upset because once again Dane had managed to screw up everything. I had been saving my first kiss and he had ruined it. I could never get it back. He was just so selfish. My hands were icy and I felt like I was in shock. Everything was ruined because of him.

Finally I ventured back to the dance and found Dane right outside the dance hall. He was rhythmically beating his head against the building wall repeating the phrase, "I'm so stupid." Bang.

Because of assigned seating we were forced to ride together on the bus ride home the next morning. My eyes were swollen and I'm sure his head was too.

"Why are smart people such jerks," he muttered angrily as we hit into each other on a curve in the road.

I scoffed. "What do you mean Dane? You're a jerk?"

Later I managed to convince myself that it truly didn't count because it wasn't full on the lips. But I never thought about what Dane was going through, how he was handling the rejection. I hadn't cared. Now I do, but there's not too much you can do with regrets.

If you thought this incident would be enough to put Dane off me for good, think again. We passed on to Junior high school and he persisted in propositioning me. I had a sharper tongue and quicker mind than ever before.

One day with Homecoming rapidly approaching, Dane sighed next to me in the bus seat. I had started riding the bus in Junior High and we lived along the same road. By this time I actively encouraged Dane to seek me out for the express purpose of turning him down. It was a self esteem booster along with an outlet for stress.

"I really want to ask you to the dance," he sighed again.

I smiled welcomingly. "Well, why don't you?" I encouraged sweetly.

He shook his head. "You'll just turn me down."

I smiled again. "You'll never know until you try."

With a face renewed by hope, he asked me.

And my monster began laughing and so did I.

I felt this awful sensation of being trapped within my own body and being unable to stop it. It was a claustrophobic sensation that scared me. I couldn't stop myself from being mean. Looking at his downtrodden expression, I realized that I didn't want to hurt him anymore. I didn't even know why I was doing it, let alone how to stop it.

How do we become so trapped in our own motions that we lose control of them? I certainly didn't want to be a bad person, but it was a hard habit to quit. Every attempt at being nice to Dane was like an addict trying to refuse heroin. The harder I tried to be a better person

the worse it was. The longer I held back the harder it came in the end.

Another bus ride, another failed attempt. We were talking about the movies.

"Do you like scary movies?" He asked casually.

"Yeah, I do, but I don't like the gore." There, I thought, that's polite enough.

"I like *Jeepers Creepers*."

"Oh, me too! I saw it on USA the other day. It was good."

We talked for a few more minutes and then—

"Would you go see a movie with me?"

Silence. I had tried to be nice to him. I had thought I was doing well up until this point.

"Why would you ask me that?"

He told me it was because he liked me. A lot.

"I can't believe you would think I would say yes, Dane. How many times do I have to spell it out for you? Probably a lot of times considering your grade on that last spelling test. N.O. I will not go out with you. I don't like you, never have, never will. Plus you're so short. The answer will never be yes. I can't believe you're so stupid."

It was official. My shoulder angel had been abducted and duck taped by the devil to my left. And he was angry at being resisted.

Looking back, Dane had a strength and resilience that I didn't possess. He persisted in pursuing me. I would have given up. And eventually he did too.

Just as I was getting a handle on my own actions—just as I was becoming in control of my vindictive behavior, Dane stopped loving me.

I'm not sure if he stopped loving me altogether. In the least, he gave up the hope that I would ever feel the same way. He went away to an early-career extension school of our high school and I remained at the main school.

Throughout those three years I no longer needed to vent on Dane. I had created my own method of neutralizing my lightning. I had worked it out. I turned into the nice, responsible person that I had always professed to be. I became my image. I was nice to everyone in the high school, including the rejects and loners. People commented on the fact that I was so friendly and open—that I never had drama. I had managed to turn my caustic comments into witty repartee. I no longer insulted as a stress relief. As a result of this new skill of taming my lightning and emotions and stress, I flourished. However, if there was one blemish on my world, it was my single status. I'd never dated, never been involved with anyone. In fact, my camp kiss with Dane was the closest thing I had to romance.

If I blossomed into my late teen years, Dane wilted. He became everything that the teachers had always been led to believe he was. He rebelled against the teachers and fought

with kids. He dated serially and cheated consistently on his girlfriends. He started drinking and barely graduated from high school. He went on to college but ended up dropping out before his freshman year was complete. He now works at a Dairy Queen in our hometown.

I was talking about this with a guy that graduated with both of us and knew our situation while I was in my freshman year of college. We were nearing the end of our conversation and Billy paused, "You know," he finally said, "I bet you could have changed his life if you would have just dated him."

That thought rang again and again on repeat for days. I had gone for so long being a good person it was shocking to think about the past. I am sure reformed people look back on their past lives and are just as ashamed as I was.

I could have dated Dane. It wouldn't have been a hardship on my part; I was looking for a boyfriend after all. And I know what Billy was saying. He was thinking that by dating me Dane would have gotten a better work ethic and not developed such a dark social life. But I think it goes deeper than that. Maybe I did influence his life. Maybe I caused his actions later on. Maybe I drove him to them. Billy thought that I might have been some angelic saving grace, but maybe I had really been the monster bringing out the worst.

It's a heavy thought. I could have changed someone's life for the better. I had that power. It is a horrifying discovery, one that you would rather not share. One that people wouldn't believe now even if you swore to them. And so it stayed within me. Until now.

Life isn't just a take without a give. It sometimes hands you something new whether you need it or not. My senior prom: I went alone, Dane's date dumped him on the dance floor for another guy (I suppose that was to be expected considering both Dane and his date were in relationships with other people at the time. Once a serial cheater, always a serial cheater in my experience.). Towards the end of the dance, he approached me. I noticed that he really hadn't turned out bad looking. He was actually several inches taller than me; it had been so gradual I hadn't noticed at all.

He asked me why I wasn't dancing. I knew the answer why, I was too afraid of rejection. Rightly so, I believe—I knew how harsh it could be from the other side of the fence. When I said I didn't have a date, he looked at me with that tell-me-about-it look. I suppose he didn't have it any better than I did. I told him that I didn't dance and he gave me this other look—a searching one. So we talked. We talked about Lowell Elementary and then laughed about the stories even though we both knew that they weren't funny at all. I was startled by just how easy our conversation was, it was astonishingly close to...chemistry. He asked me to show him the book I had brought with me. He knew I had one. He knew a lot about me. I remembered our old conversations, the way he would pay attention to me. I knew a lot about him too. I

hadn't realized that I had been keeping track of him unconsciously until I started asking him questions knowing the answers. I told him that I was sorry and how badly I felt about the way I had treated him. He reassured me that it was all over and done with.

I thought we were done talking when he asked me why I wasn't dancing.

"I'm not a dancer. I don't dance at all," I told him honestly.

He raised one eyebrow and gave me a knowing look.

"You were always like that," he said. "C'mon, do you really want to miss your prom because you were afraid to go be crazy with everyone else? Don't be the wallflower. Just—just do it. I know you want to. And I know that you'll regret this in the future. You'll look back and regret missing this opportunity. Come on, dance with me."

He held out one hand.

I stared at him and realized for the first time just how close we were. No matter how badly connected we were, we were connected. We had been together through a lot. How many days had he spent tagging along with me? How many days had I studied him, trying to figure out why he wouldn't stop? No one knew me better than he did. And no one knew him better than I.

I stared at him and I felt suddenly like screaming in horror and laughing at the same time. I was in love with Dane. After all that time, after all the rejection...I was finally seeing him. I was frozen. How swiftly fate can pay you back for all that you've done. It was the ultimate last laugh and the music wasn't out-pounding my heart at that moment.

He was holding out his hand to me.

After all I had done to him.

One of my friends came up then and asked me to join them in a group photo. I went with her, excusing myself from Dane, shrugging with that what-can-you-do shrug. He smiled and said it was nice talking anyway.

I went with her because I wanted to go with him. Because I knew that I wouldn't be able to help myself, because it would have changed everything.

I went with her because he was trying to save me from ruining my prom. I wanted to take his hand more than anything because I wanted some saving and turned him down because I didn't deserve to be saved anymore than I already had been.

I went with her because the right someone was finally doing all the right things and I didn't deserve him.

I might have ruined his life, but he may have saved mine. He was a virtual punching bag for my turbulent young emotions. He had offered himself time and again. He had boosted my ego when I needed it. He had never fought back. He had loved me and even though I

didn't appreciate it at the time, I had had it. I had a friend who I knew would never leave me. I couldn't have become the person that I am today without him. We shaped each other.

Why did I make Dane miserable? Was it because I needed to vent on someone, have a scapegoat? Was he just a reliable lightning rod? Was it to test him? Or was it something more? Was I just being the wallflower that he claimed I had always been? Was I just afraid of being in a relationship with not just him, but anybody? Did he just scare me by inviting me to try something new? Would I have dated anyone? Or would I have rejected them all just like Dane?

In a way, child Dane had held out his hand to me in the exact same way that adult Dane had. The only difference was that I was now older and I could better contain my fear. I politely declined the invitation this time instead of lashing out. I had developed skills in that area.

We impacted each other irrevocably.

He has a Facebook page now. We're friends, but I have never written on his wall. We went in different directions after high school. I'm away at college, he's working at a Dairy Queen.

My grandparents got ice cream a couple of Sundays ago, and he recognized them and sat at their booth for a few minutes.

My grandma told me that he had immediately known her and asked her how I was doing. She told him I was working on a book and apparently he wasn't surprised.

"I'm not surprised," he had told her. "Doesn't surprise me a bit. Whitney's always been a great writer. She's going to be famous some day."

And words like those hurt me. I think about how much I don't deserve his loyalty.

My grandma told me that he had been really excited that I was coming home soon. He hoped we would see each other again some day soon.

My grandpa had told me he didn't know who the hell the Dairy Queen worker was, but if he kept taking breaks like that he was going to get fired.

I have never even been out on a date and I'm nearly twenty years old. *Never Been Kissed* is the name of a popular movie, but it is also the title of my life. I wonder if this is punishment for rejecting the one true offer I had.

Dane has a Facebook page.

Some days I think about telling him my true feelings. Some days I almost work up the nerve.

Some days I think about writing him a message. I wonder if I would revert back to my old ways or if I am finally ready to say yes.

After all, I might have ruined his life, but he may have saved mine and how do you fit that into a Facebook text box?

I think I'm finally ready to go for it and stop being afraid.

I think I might say yes to him.

But I'm afraid I never will.

Because saying yes to Dane would change everything.

And maybe I don't deserve everything to change.

SCREENPLAY



COUNTING SHEEP

BY BENJAMIN W. DANIELS

INT. ACACIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ACACIA, an 8 year old girl, is seen brushing her teeth, and getting ready for bed

When she is done she climbs into her bed and lays staring at the ceiling.

The lights are still on the room.

OWEN, Acacia's Grandfather, walks in.

OWEN

(To Acacia.)

Milish, it's time for bed.

Acacia

(Looking very tired)

I'm not ready to sleep yet.

OWEN

(Trying to reason with her.)

But it's late and you should already be asleep.

Acacia

I need a story (Acacia moves restlessly in the bed).

OWEN

Aren't you too old for a bedtime story?

ACACIA

I don't think so.

OWEN

(Heading to the bookshelf)

All right. All right. (He holds a book up for her to see.)
How about "Good Night Moon"?

Acacia

(Sitting up.)

Nooo. I'm too old for that one.

OWEN

How about "The Very Hungry Caterpillar"?

Acacia

(Exasperated.)

Nooo. Grampa I'm eight.

OWEN

(Trying not sound exasperated.)

Then what?

ACACIA

Mommy told me that you used to make up stories for her. Could you tell me one of those?

OWEN

She did, huh?

ACACIA

(Quietly.)

Yes. (Looks up at Owen.) Could you tell me one of those stories?

OWEN

Like what?

ACACIA

(Puts her finger to her lips as though she is thinking very hard.)

Hooow 'bout where dreams come from?

OWEN

(Looking amused.)

I think I can do that.

Owen moves away from the bookshelf and sits on the edge of the bed.

OWEN (CONT'D)

All right. (Looks up to the ceiling as if he will find the answer there.) Where do dreams come from?

Bedroom fades and is replaced by a rustic scene.

Owen's voice can be heard over the scene.

CUT TO FARM

EXT. THE CIRCLE D RANCH - DAWN

The whole of the ranch can be seen from far away.

As the scene comes closer different parts can be made out.

Owen's story is heard as narration.

OWEN

(As a voice over)

Making dreams starts very early in the day.

Acacia

Really?

OWEN

Yes, it does. Would I lie to you?

Acacia

I guess not.

OWEN

Now are you going to let me tell the story?

Acacia

(Laying down under the blankets.)

Yes, Grampa.

OWEN

OK. Very early in the morning Eli E. Hioh and his sons get up and start their day. They've got a lot of sheep they need to take care of.

The sheep pens can be seen with an innumerable amount of sheep milling around doing sheep things.

CUT BACK TO THE
BEDROOM

INT . BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom.

Acacia

(Sits up and rests on her elbow.)

Sheep? What's that got to do with dreams?

OWEN

If you let me finish you will find out.

CUT TO FARM

EXT. FARM - DAY

The ranch and the sheep.

OWEN (CONT'D)

These sheep are very important. Has anyone ever told you that you can count sheep when you can't sleep?

Acacia

(Lays back down.)

Yeah, I guess so.

Show sheep jumping over some fences as if they were being counted.

OWEN

Well, those are the very sheep from the Circle D Ranch.
That's where Eli and his sons work.

Acacia

Wooooow.

OWEN

Yes, it is very impressive. Now, they are not only the
sheep that jump so that you can count'em. They have
another very important purpose.

CUT TO THE
BEDROOM

INT. ACACIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Acacia's bedroom

Acacia

(Very excited)

What?!

OWEN

Maybe we should finish the story tomorrow night. I
think you are getting too excited.

Acacia

(Laying down under the covers)

No, no. I'm not too excited. Pleeeeeease tell the story.

OWEN

OK.

CUT TO THE FARM

EXT. FARM - MORNING

The farm.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Now, every day there is an important job that Eli and his sons must do.

Show the four going into the barn with a few sheep following them in.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Everyday the sheep must be shorn.

Show the sheep being shorn.

Acacia

What?

OWEN

You know how I have to shave in the morning so I'm not all scratchy.

Acacia

Yeah.

OWEN

Well, they have to do that for the sheep too. Normally sheep would only get shorn once or twice a year, but as I said these sheep are special. After they are shorn their hair grows back in a couple of days. If it grew back any faster, Eli and his sons might not be able to keep up. Now after the wool has been cut off it has to be made into yarn.

Acacia

(Sleepily.)

What's the yarn for?

OWEN

I'll tell you.

Move to a different part of the barn.

A young boy is standing in front of a large tub of soapy hot water.

OWEN (CONT'D)

First they have to clean the wool to get the, uh, dirt out of it. They use soapy water and combs.

Move to another son combing the wool to get it fluffy.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Then they take the wool off of the combs and they put it on a spinning wheel. This twists it into yarn.

CUT TO BEDROOM

INT. ACACIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Back to the bedroom and Acacia

Acacia

(Sleepily.)

That still doesn't tell me where dreams come from.

OWEN

Well I'm not done yet.

Acacia

Oh.

CUT TO FARM

EXT. FARM - MORNING

The farm

OWEN

Now, after the yarn has been made, the roll it up into great big balls. The kind that a only a lion would be big enough to play with. Then the weavers drive their wagons to the ranch and buy the yarn from them.

Move to the workshop which is a simple small room with 1 loom in it.

Near the loom is a a cutting station.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Then the Weavers take the yarn and put it on a giant loom. That is where they weave the yarn into dreams for everyone on the planet. Then they are cut and sorted into bins. The bins are taken to the aviary where Keeper attaches them to Wupakins, the birds that bring the dreams to the real world.

CUT TO BEDROOM

INT. ACACIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Back into the bedroom where Owen is sitting on the bed.

OWEN (CONT'D)

(Starting to look down)

And that is where dreams come from. What do you think?

Acacia

Zzzz.

OWEN

(Gets up slowly and heads to the door.)

Good night Milish.

Camera moves into Acacia's head, dream.

AUTHORS' BIOS

- **Meghan Crawford** is a freshman History and Creative Writing double major. She has been writing short stories and novels from a young age. It is her hope to pursue her career as a historian and writer. Meghan is a graduate of St. Francis DeSales High School in Columbus, Ohio.
- Finishing college for **Benjamin W. Daniels** was kind of like pushing over a refrigerator. It's hard to do and you have to rock it two or three times before it's over.
- **Tony DeGenaro** is a third year English student and twenty year poet and essayist. He is the current reigning Haiku Death Match champion. Always, thanks to the characters real enough to create the fiction, and beautiful enough to create the poetry.
- **Pascal Alberto Domicone** is a sophomore double major in Theatre and English with a Concentration in Creative Writing. On campus, he is the BA Representative for Cap and Dagger, a Student Senator, the Book Keeper of the Inter-Fraternal Council, as well as the Secretary, Co-Historian, and Rocking Chair of Pi Beta Sigma.
- **Elizabeth Eileen Gyuras** is a senior English literary studies major originally from Tiffin, Ohio. She adores her friends and family and her role model is her grandmother, Sandra Gyuras, who passed recently. Ms. Gyuras believes that laughter, dark chocolate, reading, and high heels are essential to good health.
- **Boris Hinderer** is a junior from Springfield, Ohio and studies creative writing and psychology here at Otterbein. When not writing, he enjoys living in squalor with his roommates and making self-deprecating jokes about writing.
- **Jeff Kintner** is the pseudonym of Otterbein's own Jeff Kintner. He enjoys being just charismatic enough to fool people into thinking he's intelligent. His favorite books include the novelization of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Thesaurus*. He would like to thank Michael Sikora, JT Hillier, and Christine Horvath for conversation and inspiration.
- **Alyssa Jordan Mazey** is an artist. She is a sophomore majoring in Creative Writing and in Photography. She loves reading, writing, art in general, hanging out with her dog, and experiencing the world with friends. In her life, she hopes to travel, join the Peace Corps, and, eventually, teach.

- **Justin McAtee**, a junior, is majoring in Creative Writing, Literary Studies, and Psychology. After graduation, he hopes to enter an MFA or PhD program in Creative Writing, with little or no plans beyond.
- A double major in Creative Writing and Psychology, **Alice McCutcheon** has strived towards an interdisciplinary approach combining her love of Psychology, Literature, Creative writing and the arts with a special focus in photography. Alice says to be a great writer, we must write as we pray, continuously.
- **Jessica McGill** is a sophomore creative writing major and art minor. She hails from a small town that, on a map, appears to be a corn field. She is terrified of emus, collects teapots, and loves puddle jumping. She once thought her middle name ended in 'e', which it doesn't.
- **Katie Mortimer** has long been absorbed in the world of writing. She wrote her first novel, *Angel's Christmas Wish*, when she was only nine years old. She continues to create new stories, hoping to lend imagination, creativity, and perspective to the world around her.
- **Bess Proper** is a senior Creative Writing major, and is in the middle of a mid life crisis due to the reality of being forced to graduate. She has many big plans for the real world but this space would be wasted in telling you what they are because all said plans are subject to abrupt and drastic change. The only thing that's certain is that she must not return to the 330.
- **Whitney Reed** is a sophomore English major who enjoys the general prerequisites for being an English major ... reading and writing. She loves looking for the fun and interesting in stories that might be construed as 'boring' or 'predictable,' and always tries to have a sense of humor about her own writing.
- **Jacqlyn Schott** is a sophomore Literary Studies and Creative Writing major from Fairfield, OH. She is also one of the few, the proud, the WGS (aka SWAG) majors here at Otterbein. In her spare time she loves to read like the English major she is, sing in Otterbein's choirs, and watch the Food Network. She is also a part of Freezone and *Kate*: Otterbein's feminist journal.
- **Cierra Sherry** is a junior/senior studying to be a Pre-K through 3rd grade special needs teacher. She has always loved poetry but did not truly start writing it until her freshman year at Otterbein. Her poetry is inspired by her life, her friends, and books that she reads.

- **Sean Smith** is a English studies major with a focus in creative writing at Otterbein University. He hosts the writers group in columbus, "The Columbus House of Scribes" which is maintained through www.meetup.com. He currently hopes to finish his first novel soon as well as self-publish his first collection of short stories by Autumn 2011.
- **Emily Swank** likes pina coladas and getting caught in the rain. Actually, she's a literary studies and creative writing major who constantly stays under the influence of song lyrics, Brett Easton Ellis, and Chuck Palahniuk, for better or for worse. Stay calm, and write on.
- **Lillie Teeters** is a senior at Otterbein University. She plans to graduate in May 2012 with a Bachelor's Degree in English with a creative writing concentration.
- **Kylene Watts** is a senior writing major. Her life is chaotic, but she thrives off of the chaos. She uses it to create. She hopes that you enjoy her work and if you do not she hopes that you will let her know how it can be better.
- **Austin Wiggin**, 21, was born in some distant X-Y quadrant but worm holed his way through space time in a flight mechanism called the womb to end up in Cincinnati, Ohio. He plotted land in Westerville, in the back yard of 25 Winter Street. His house is full of mad Berber thieves and that's how he likes it. Austin's greatest achievement in life was getting into the Diamond league of StarCraft 2. He hopes you like his poetry and prose.
- **Vianca Yohn** is a junior majoring in English literary studies and creative writing. She likes Southern comfort food, Korean food, and fast food, but not all three at the same time – that would be ridiculous. She also likes coffee, cats, and sleeping. But again, not at the same time.

CHRISTOPHER MERRILL: WHERE TO WRITE?

BY ALICE MCCUTCHEON & TONY DEGENARO

At first glance, you wouldn't expect Christopher Merrill to be the author of four collections of poetry and four books of nonfiction; at second glance you wouldn't believe that before coming to Otterbein he'd spent two weeks touring seven countries. Even as we sit down with him for an interview, he is sorting out travel arrangements for his upcoming trip to Nepal. He pauses planning to begin a conversation that will last over an hour.

He talks about the complications of being a traveling writer; "I was just trying to figure out on my Blackberry where I'm going next week. I have a visa waiting at the Pakistani Embassy and they haven't granted it to me yet." One of Merrill's collections of travel essays, a book entitled *Only the Nails Remain*, chronicles his journeys in Eastern Europe during the Balkan Wars. I suggest that these dangers are included in the complications he mentioned earlier. "It's not just a matter of visas falling through or flights being cancelled," he explained, "but showing up in places that are complicated in political terms, sometimes in war zones. So I have found that the key thing is to try to keep my cool wherever I am going and try to keep my eyes open as much as possible to see if I can register most of what's going on. And then I come home with notebooks filled with impressions."

Dr. Terry Hermesen requires students to keep a writer's notebook in his poetry and creative writing classes, and students sometimes find it to be challenging. We ask what Merrill thinks about keeping a notebook. He tells us the notebook forces the writer to pay attention to the details of the experience, which he regards as more important than the feelings. He recalls a demonstration in Bahrain saying, "If I have the details, as I dream my way back into the scene, I'll remember what I felt and what it might mean. The physical details, the sounds, the smells, what the girls were wearing when they were protesting, the woman I saw giving a lecture on politics to men, things like that. I know if I write down two lines, I'm back in there, and more will come to me as I write about it."

In her essay "On Keeping A Notebook" Joan Didion focuses on capturing the details in a similar fashion to the advice Merrill gives us,

"See enough and write it down, I tell myself, and then some morning when the world seems drained of wonder, some day when I am only going through the motions of doing what I am supposed to do, which is write – on that bankrupt morning I will simply open my notebook and there it will all be, a forgotten account with accumulated interest, paid passage back to the world out there ..."

As the interview continues we talk more about travel, and Merrill again reflective of Didion, is sure to stress the tremendous importance of the details. Our conversation digresses from cross genre writing, to poetry of place. Alice suggests the importance of writing in and of a particular place and asks Merrill how he finds a place and time to write. Laughing he replies, "That's the sixty-four thousand dollar question," implicating the problematic nature of writing on the go. He continues explaining that finding a place to write when traveling is difficult, but not impossible, and the process always begins with the notebook. As we finish exploring the nature of writing and travel, we end on foreign foods and which cuisines were best (Chris and Tony both agree Middle Eastern is the way to go). At the conclusion of our interview we discuss how a writer might try on different voices through the use of different genre's, Merrill very knowingly told us:

"It is important to remember that, because of the ways in which the creative writing academic discipline has developed in this country there is a great amount of specialization, which is not apparent in most circles. So what Dr. Terry Hermsen is doing is going against the grain in a really useful way. I started out as a poet and a short story writer, got accepted to Columbia for short fiction and wanted to work with the poets but couldn't, and thought that was a joke. But the fact is, insofar as you can find a program that encourages that, you should pursue it because you may start in one genre but end in another. The principles usually apply across the board, but if you're not in the habit of hearing poems and writing poems, you won't be writing poems. Read widely; find the space to write across genres. The key is to figure out who you are and how you do what you do. That's where my interests lie; they go from one thing to the next...that's another way to go about writing. Try to keep your possibilities open: you never know where your passions will take you. If you've got it in mind that you can only do this, then something will come down the pike and say, why don't you try that? That might have real energy."



The last known image of Philo A. Quiz.



Field Marshal Quill after returning from the War