The Mercury
2013

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THE MERCURY

HISTORY & PROCESS
The Mercury is a student-run art and literary magazine released each April. It has been published annually since 1899 at Gettysburg College. All students of the College are invited to participate on the staff and to submit their work for possible publication. Editors are elected annually by the entire staff. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the fall and early spring semesters and are reviewed and chosen anonymously by the staff.

EVENTS
The Mercury holds a reception for staff, advisors, and contributors in honor of the magazine’s release. Throughout the year, The Mercury staff participates in several campus events such as the Activities Fair, Get Acquainted Day, and co-sponsored events with Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society. This year The Mercury hosted its first “Write Night,” an opportunity for students to read their work in a formal setting. The Mercury also sponsors production and proofreading workshops for students.

THE MERCURY PRIZE
Each year, the staff awards a monetary prize to the best piece of work published in each genre. We would like to thank The Mercury Prize judges for 2013: Alison McCabe (Fiction), Lisa Meerts (Nonfiction), Eric Kozlik (Poetry), and Gabriella Schiro (Art). The Mercury Prize-winning titles are bolded in the Table of Contents. This year’s winners are “Poseidon” by Rachel Barber (Fiction), “Shake It Out” by Christina Gallo (Nonfiction), “A Fallow Deer” by Elizabeth Elliott (Poetry), and “Empty Room” by Maddie Price (Art).

PUBLISHING
The Mercury was printed this year by The Sheridan Press in Hanover, Pennsylvania. We would like to thank The Sheridan Press, especially Kelly Freeburger, for its support this year. The production staff is also indebted to Linda Miller for all her help and advice, and to IKON for its assistance with pre-production printing. This is the fourth environmentally-friendly edition of The Mercury, and it has been printed on paper from sustainable-harvest forests with soy-based inks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The Mercury would like to pay special recognition to the President's Office, the Provost's Office, and the English Department for their contributions to The Mercury. Another note of gratitude goes to the magazine’s advisor, Kathryn Rhett, for her continual support and guidance throughout the entire process. We would like to extend a thank you as well to Ryan Teitman, who went above and beyond supporting our magazine through attending meetings, running an editing workshop for staff, and incorporating his ENG 309 (“Literary Editing and Publishing”) class into the proofreading process. A special thanks to all the students who contributed to The Mercury by sending in their work or serving as staff members. Staff readers invested a tremendous amount of time evaluating and selecting submissions, and we greatly appreciate their dedication. We believe that these combined efforts make The Mercury an eclectic publication that reflects the creative side of the student body of Gettysburg College.
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A Fallow Deer

Elizabeth Elliott

One clumsy bolt sends the fawn spilling out
Over the cliff with fine pinches of loess.
Splay-footed and suffering, she rests
On lacerated knees, a tender crus.

Close clusters of coral and barnacles shape
This cradle of beach, bowed with baked slabs.
Shredding apart in the capfuls of wind
Are the molted skins of new fiddler crabs.

Up pumps the tide, its shelly haul swilling
With bulging spiral whorls, pores drilled by worms,
Seaweed pulp, and half-bodies of jellies;
A harvest of the oldest, simplest forms.

She fusses on the sand. The water seeps
Potently; lice flee fur’s dampening trap.
Dropping pricked ears and yielding to this,
She takes a drink, and tilts to nap.
Poseidon
Rachel Barber

My voice ripped through the air, bellowing with the depth of a timpani, “I am Poseidon! King of the—”

Mud puddles. With a wave of my hand a sheet of muddy water leapt up from the curb, splashing across those filthy-spirited college boys, griming up their gelled hair and seeping into the solid white polos wrapped around their chests. My puddle sprayed their tight, athletic figures with the incense of wet dog, a more rugged cologne than I’m sure either boy was accustomed to. I could have raised my arms high in triumph (in fact, I think I did) and let loose a mighty roar ringing out with the weight of thunder in the heavens (now that I’m pretty sure I didn’t do—not this time, anyway). My sea-green eyes gleamed with the victory of vengeance as I cried out within: That’s what happens when you don’t give Poseidon spare change!

I let down my hands slowly, savoring the moment of divinity, before scratching at a glorious itch in my long, white, jungle beard. I scratched with sullied hands, stained by brown streaks from the chocolate pudding cup I’d discovered in the dumpster that morning—and it was only half-way eaten when I got there! I scoffed at the memory, a thick, shady wheeze smoking from my lungs. How had it taken the gods so many centuries to perfect pudding?

Well, whatever our pudding troubles, we still know how to jostle the mortals. I could see my pair of frat boys thrashing and cursing across the street, dispirited by bad “luck,” the modern era’s name for the remaining gods’ vast powers. “Ha!” I laughed, ignoring the stares of mortal passersby, who were wrinkling their noses—perhaps in envy of my indescribable authority, but probably at the stench of tuna fish (I had picked up a bit of a smell that morning, along with my pudding). I paid them no mind. They were only men, so far inferior in thought that they probably imagined my vengeance against the youths to be nothing more than an accident. They would watch the whole affair and recognize only an unfortunate, muddy spray kicked up by a minivan. They wouldn’t care that the van just happened to turn the corner at the same time I waved my hand, striking the puddle I had called upon to strike the boys. Mortals: they never see anything straight anymore.

I turned away from the scene of my revenge, the thick trench coat swirling about my legs like one of the old mists I once conjured on the seas, back when Philoetius, the fisherman, was scanning the waters for my pre-
cious seahorses to exterminate and I had to lose him in the…well, perhaps that’s a tale for another time.

Oh, how far the mighty have fallen! From mists and seas to mud and sewage, I had dropped in the mortal vision, and in (practically) seconds. Mortals are firmly fickle; just a couple thousand years pass and suddenly nobody cares about you anymore. How are you supposed to rule such faithless, fruitless filth when they won’t acknowledge the obvious power before their eyes? I tell you, it’s not easy being god of the sea on a ship consumed by the storm of “luck.”

My dark brown coat swung a little loose on my shoulders—as wide and imposing on me as a king’s royal robe—as I paraded down the streets of Delaware, Ohio, a red carpet of dried, withered leaves unfurling before me upon the concrete. My crown, the black knitted ski-cap, stood firm on my head. It was given to me by the last of my loyal worshippers some years before, the story of its reception transforming the dull hat into a symbol of steadfast majesty. Yes, I remembered well the days of Shirley of New York, the kind old woman standing outside St. John the Divine’s Cathedral who listened and believed as I recounted my name and rank among the heavenly beings, who, with kind eyes, took the hat she had knitted for her grandson out of its bag as an offering to the god of the sea, who…well, perhaps the whole story’s for another time. In any event, with my crown I was, as always, a regal sight—if only the passersby had eyes to see it.

Crossing from the side of the street, bordering the luxuriant green grass of Ohio Wesleyan’s university campus, I looked both ways first. I had long ago recognized that mortals no longer dropped to their knees at the mere inkling of my presence; they would run me down if I got in their way (although surely their cars, not I, would be in for some refurbishing). Patting my snarling beer belly as I strolled across the road, my eyes scanned the doors of the neat shops and businesses for a hopeful mortal to ask for change. Not that I really needed it, of course, but I still held fast to the hope that someday my servants might acknowledge me once again, offering up the same life to me that I gave them through the sea and the sewage. A quarter for the god of the oceans hardly seems too much to ask.

“Well, if it isn’t Poseidon.”

I twirled, the royal robe tossing about my shoulders but the crown clinging solidly to my hair. Behind me stood a man much younger than myself, leaning against the sidewalk’s tall, black lamppost, its blaze extinguished at the moment, unnecessary during the light of day. The young man, dressed in a pretentious navy blue suit with golden cuff links, gazed back at me with a smug, superior smile. His self-assured eyes were tempered only by the sleek darkness of his sunglasses, or else they might have burned the air with their vanity. He stood with his arms crossed, leaning
against the dreary, dead lamppost so fully that the two might have been one.

He looked most unpleasant, but how could I deny an old, once beloved friend? “Why, if it isn’t the Prince of the Air! Hermes, where have you been?”

A scoff escaped his lips, foul to my ears, but vaguely expected—how far the mighty have fallen. “New York. I observed you heading off a little while back and I thought I’d pay you a visit.” He turned his head, examining the pale street where I lived through his deep, empty shades. The university side was rather nice, with well-trimmed lawns and regally kept trees, but the side I had crossed to, where both Hermes and I now stood, had its fair share of trash on the ground and smudges on the occasional shop window. Still, I could see the life thriving along the street with the bustle of traffic—blues and reds and silvers flashed by, the metallic sheen of each car glinting with light. The mortals who whirled around us, from the whining baby in the pink stroller to the grieving man ambling by on a thick, wooden cane, surely had their own treasures of experience and stories to brighten up the dull concrete and dismal grime.

I’m not sure Hermes saw the life in it, though, because his smirk cut a little deeper into the sides of a once lovely, even heavenly face. “How far the mighty have fallen, hmm? Why ever did you come here?”

I shrugged, the weight of the great robe still bearing down on my shoulders. “They didn’t believe I was Poseidon at the shoreline. So I thought I’d try inland.”

“Ha!” A sour laughter broke free from the smirk and his eyes, whether I could see them or not, were locked unequivocally on me, soaking me up, so to speak, the muddy trench coat, stringy beard, puddinged fingers, and all. His shady gaze looked me up and down, from the warm, dark crown atop my head to the stained yellow tint of my once white sneakers. He lingered on my sneakers, I observed, and I noticed the pristine gleam of his jet-black, slip-on dress shoes. The god’s face fell for just a moment, cracks forming in the conceited shell of his smile, which dug into the bottom of his lips pitifully. But it was gone in an instant, the shady arrogance restored as he aimed a question at me: “And what happened to you?”

I let my fuzzy mouth grin, undaunted by the strike—for it was a strike. Another shrug shook my mighty shoulders. “You know how it is, Hermes. The people don’t worship me like they used to, don’t even believe I exist, no matter what I say or do.” I glanced down at the lump of beer belly hanging lightly over my pants. “And I suppose, when nobody cares for your care, you let a few things slide.” More than a few, actually. I didn’t patrol the seas like I used to, didn’t make or break ships as I once had. I let the waters turn on their own for a while. Certainly, I held on a little bit, just enough...
to keep the world afloat, but I had given the seas over more and more to chaos. I suppose, somewhere in the back of my mind, I hoped they might notice my absence.

“Hmm.” The sharply dressed god smirked. “Well, you have to face facts, Poseidon. The mortals don’t worship anything for too long. In the end, they abandon the old fancies for the new. You just have to take what you can get.” With a subtle sweep of his hand, Hermes removed the shades from his eyes, revealing at last to me the strong but, as I well knew, dying glow of his gaze. Whatever the original color of his irises, Hermes now owned golden eyes, a stunning, shining circle of gold ringing the empty blackness of either pupil. I could feel my heart falling, sinking like a downed boat, some poor ship probably wounded irreparably in an ill-conceived war. Oh yes, I could remember the sensation of a boat, a warship to the humans, but less than driftwood to me, plunging into my depths, pulled and torn first by enemies and then by the rock of my waves—really splashes, though, nothing but splashes to a god. Yet, how important to the individual! That ancient King Odysseus lost his own ship in quite the storm of mine, his life dragged out from under him with the splintering of his mighty ship, shattered by…but perhaps even that’s a story for another time.

Relishing the concern climbing up from the depths of my heart and ignoring, or accepting, the pain that came with it, I shook my grizzled head at the would-be god before me. I knew what the golden eyes meant, their shine little more than dying embers. I had seen it enough times before in my brothers and sisters to understand Hermes’s ill condition. “Oh Hermes, no…”

The self-satisfied burn of his smirk dimmed as he expounded, still superior, “Yes, Poseidon, I’m mortal. I traded in my immortality for dollars. What good is it anyway to live forever if you forever live in the dumps?” The golden eyes took me in again, self-assured at first, but finally resting on my stained white shoes, perhaps remembering the wings he had traded for wealth. Of course, he might have simply been going blind, but I doubt it considering how young he looked. He had years before death would finally swing its trap, although he’d be trudging toward it now with every step, and the golden eyes—like a plaque on a body commemorating how an immortal used to live there, a symbol of dying divinity I had seen in Zeus himself only decades before—still burned with too much fire to have achieved their dying blindness. Oh yes, his eyes would eventually darken to black, just as Zeus’s and Aphrodite’s and Hera’s and Apollo’s and all of the others’ had, but he had a fistful of healthy years before him, although it passed for nothing in the lifespan of an immortal.

Hermes shrugged off the sympathy he must have noted in my yet godly countenance. “You really should try it too, Poseidon. The mortals
worship the bill, and if you trade in your seas for treasure you’re certain to live your last years with followers abounding. You can be worshipped once again, my old friend, just as I am.” He spoke with firm and confident tones, but I saw the dismay escape his gaze before he slid the glasses back over his eyes. It’s hard, after all, for a being who lives forever to recognize he is going to die.

I sighed, a wheeze rustling my lungs like the wind rattling tattered sails. “How tempting, Hermes! I do miss the worship they owe, the attention or love you’d think I’d earned after years of tending the wild seas. But I’m not the god of gold—I am Poseidon, King of the Sea!” I lifted the arms of my old, worn coat, marking the extraordinary power within such a lowly form. “I could look as ostentatious as I want, but really, to what purpose? If I give up who I am just to catch some fickle attention, what kind of god would I be?” Clearly not one at all. But I left that last part out; this man was still one of my own…the last of my own.

“Then you’ll live alone,” he sputtered harshly, but, I believe, more from personal fear than true meanness. The high-priced shades met my gaze. “We’ve all given in, you know, all of us. There isn’t a divinity left alive but you and me. And soon enough I’ll be…” His voice never quite failed him, that slick, would-be immortal, but he had to clear his throat unceremoniously before continuing, “You’ll be alone. The only one left of your kind. And you’ll find no comfort among man, who has forgotten you already. At least I’m going out with followers yet. I won’t spend eternity alone. I’ll live my final years with admiring mortals about me, surrounding me with their warm attention and worship. You, Poseidon,” the rich mortal muttered, leaning against the post nonchalantly, but his terror reeking like a stench from his fighting words, “you’ll be all alone.”

I was the god who moved waters, churned oceans, and swept up whole beaches by the sound of my voice, but all I could do for Hermes was shrug, saddened for the both of us. “Then so be it. But you know, I’m not so confident that the mortals won’t return. They are fickle, all right, but full of potential, I think. They’ll see me someday as they once saw before. If I stand here long enough, they won’t ignore me; they can’t ignore me forever.”

Hermes scoffed, straightening up and smoothing out his overpriced jacket, “That’s a fisherman’s tale, Poseidon.” The god, the last of my equals, although not so equal anymore, turned, waving dimly at me as he set off down the street. “If you’re ever in New York you must look me up, but do it in the next fifty years or so.” For one brief moment, he turned his head my way, a dim glow of gold piercing even the shades of his glasses.

“I’m running on a rather tight schedule.”

And he strutted off.
“Good-bye, Hermes,” I called after him, watching his form dwindle and disappear into the small crowds roaming the streets of Delaware. Missing him already, I turned in the opposite direction only to be assaulted by a middle-aged woman wearing surprisingly high heels and barking orders into her cell phone. She rammed straight into me, her focus absorbed in her intense conversation with somebody neither of us could see. We both were knocked to the ground, the god of millennia carelessly pushed over by some forty-five-year-old corporate executive wedded to her cell phone. For my part, I climbed to my feet and brushed myself off, willing to let the mortal go unpunished (although these newest generations really must learn to control their cell phone use. We never had such problems at Marathon).

But some forty-five-year-old women are too important to be inconvenienced by anyone, least of all themselves. She spun on me as she rose to her feet, snapping rather like a sea turtle, “Watch where you're going!” Now this, however patient I might be, demanded a rebuke, and I proclaimed, “You crashed into me, madam, so don’t tell me to watch where I’m going. And moreover,” I puffed myself up, the trench coat robe and ski-hat crown still my predominant tokens of majesty, “I myself, whom you have spoken to so harshly, am Poseidon! King of the oceans, seas, puddles, sewage—”

“Poseidon?” The woman bayed, throwing back her head with a derisive laugh, “All right, God of Thunder, do your worst.” She didn’t wait for a demonstration, though (I suspect she didn’t actually expect one), or even for a correction (I am not the god of thunder). She just pushed on past me, still growling at her phone.

I watched her saunter off and all at once my hands were above my head, the untapped power of millennia suddenly stirring within me, collecting like dark clouds in the sky and simmering with the unrest of lightning strikes thrust through my chest. I was the god of the ocean depths, which covered most of the precious world she lived in, and she wanted me to prove myself? I could show her my power all right. I could send up a single wave to crash across the continent and a storm to billow clear through the state of Ohio until Delaware met the worst of it—brought low, bulldozed. I could call on the waves to do their worst, the seas to converge on Delaware, Ohio, to smother the far edges of the city in an overpowering flood. In an instant I could drown Delaware in the tears of an abandoned, discarded god, washing the very life from the woman’s face.

Or worse—the thought struck me, hard and cold like a stone or a slap in the face—I could let go of the rein I yet held on the waters. The very idea danced before me, twirling on a scale in my head. I could retreat entirely, not just from the coast, but from this world, just like they wanted.
I could see the future clearly: out the waters would spin, unbounded, swallowing the surface of the earth of their own accord. They would dump over the land, swirling and sloshing, crashing into every “civilization” the mortals had built. Not a man-made nor even heaven-designed structure would stand—no bird, tree, or flower would survive the blast. I could let the waters go, released from their stalwart prison. Let them do their worst.

I could do it—my hands were raised with justice and anger and power enough to accomplish the task.

Before me, suddenly, the vision flashed: I could see, somewhere in my mind’s eye, boys and girls and men and women swept up painfully in the would-be torrent, plunged into freezing water and held under by the unrestrained fist of the oceans. I could hear screams and cries of agony as Hong Kong, Calcutta, Brasilia, Nairobi, New York—everything, including Delaware—disintegrated under the grip of the waves, bashed against the rocks of this world until mere dust remained, crushed and ground into nothing. Nothing, not a soul living on, but the righteous god—and I am righteous—who allowed the devastation. The woman deserved it, even wanted it in her own way, and perhaps they all did. But I wasn’t the god to do it, any more than I would trade in my immortality for a few years of cheap praise.

I could tell that the good people of Delaware who ventured down the sidewalk that day thought I was nuts, casting odd glances at the arms that still hung above my head. Still, I paid no mind to their stares, bringing my fists down slowly and still watching that woman retreat from me in the distance. I could have taken her down then and there, or let her drown in a world of her own creation. I could have shown my true might to her and all the other mortals who insisted I wasn't there. I could allow the destruction of the entire human race with a single release of my fist.

I didn’t, though; instead, I just turned my own way, my capped head still held high, and tromped regally down the trash-littered sidewalk.
“You’re so shy.”
“You need to start talking to people.”
“You’re too quiet.”
“Does she ever talk?”
“Who haven’t we heard from today? Christina? Christina?”

“Christina? Everything okay?” I abandon my daydream and dial back the ear-damaging volume on my iPod as my roommate’s concerned face comes into view.

“Sorry. What?”
“I said is everything okay? You looked like you were thinking about the end of the world,” Emily says half-jokingly.

“Everything’s fine,” I respond too quickly. I’m starting to believe it’s the truth.

“All right. Are you interested in getting dinner soon?”
“I’m just going to have something here tonight.”
“Okay. I’m going to go meet everyone else at Servo. I’ll be back.”
“See you later,” I say as the door slams shut.

Quiet. Just the way I like it. I press play on my iPod and listen to the sounds of P!nk flowing through my headphones. Don’t let me get me. I’m my own worst enemy. It’s bad when you annoy yourself. I can relate. I’m lying on my unmade bed, staring up at the ceiling, hating myself, and counting the tiles. Fifty-three. That’s how many tiles there are and yet, I can’t stop myself from making sure. One. Two. Three. Ten. Twenty. Twenty-one. My mind wanders, and I lose count. “Shit!” I yell towards the ceiling as if the white plastic squares have personally offended me. If only that was my problem. At least now I can put a name to my “issue” as I like to call it. Thank you Internet. It’s like someone studied my life, made a list of all the ways I was fucked up, and gave it a fancy name.

*****

“That’s what’s wrong with me!” I say excitedly to myself after a late-night research session. While my roommate is researching the French Revolution, I’m looking up mental conditions. Yep, that’s completely normal. And I’m a little too happy about the results because knowing is better than
not knowing, right? You’d think that I had just won the lottery as I read the three bold words at the top of my computer screen: Social Anxiety Disorder. Excessive self-consciousness and anxiety in everyday social situations. Check. Extreme fear of being watched or judged by others, especially people you don’t know. Check. Fear that you’ll act in ways that will embarrass or humiliate yourself. Check. Avoiding social situations to a degree that limits your activities or disrupts your life. Check. Staying quiet or hiding in the background in order to escape notice and embarrassment. Check. Check. Check. This is me.

*****

My mind returns to my empty dorm room. I’ve been doing that a lot lately, spacing out. It’s one of the symptoms. I still haven’t told anyone about my findings, but I don’t need confirmation. About a year ago, I was able to gather enough courage to ask my doctor for medicine to treat part of my problem. Or I should say—to ask my doctor again. The first time turned into a scene I want to forget.

*****

“So, how is everything going? Are you having any problems?” my doctor asks me with a smile.

Okay, here we go. “I think I need some medicine for anxiety,” I say shakily. The scratching of my doctor’s pen stops suddenly as he turns to look at me with narrowed eyes.

“In what ways are you feeling anxious exactly?”

“Well...when I have to talk in front of people, I get really nervous, and my hands start shaking.” You know that’s not everything. Tell him. Tell him now. I can’t. The words are stuck in my brain. Before I can get too lost in my thoughts, I hear a strange noise coming from in front of me. It’s my doctor. Laughing.

“Everyone gets nervous about public speaking, Christina. It doesn’t mean you need medication,” he says with one last chuckle.

“Yeah, I guess not,” I say with a pasted-on smile. Damn it.

*****

Luckily, I was able to get a new doctor a few years later, and, after a couple of visits, I walked out of the office with a prescription in hand. I thought a couple of pills here and a self-help book there would make me as good as new. That didn’t work out too well. I tried two. Celexa made
me feel like my heart was going to beat right out of my chest, and Lexapro made me feel like I was walking through a fog. There’s a third sitting on my desk right now. BuSpar. I’ve had it for a month and haven’t given it a second glance until now. Now, I’m unable to look away from the glowing orange hue of the plastic. Suddenly, I jump off my bed and snatch the bottle off my desk.

“Take half a tablet by mouth twice a day,” I read aloud. Determined that this time it’s going to work, I pop open the bottle. Snapping one of the tiny pills into two, I throw one half back into the bottle and the other into my mouth. As the bitterness overtakes my senses, I march over to my refrigerator, grab a half-finished bottle of water, and swallow what I hope will be the solution to everything.

*****

I have a presentation today. In other words, it’s another of my personal doomsdays. I wake up at eight and make note that I have five hours before I actually have to start worrying. I skip breakfast, take a shower, go to my two classes, get lunch, and suddenly, four and a half hours have passed by. I return to my room—my safe haven—and obsessively go over my presentation. I could recite the damn thing from memory at this point, but I’m still not convinced. I can hear my heartbeat in my ears, and it feels like electricity is pulsing through my body. Emily is sitting on her bed, staring intently at her computer screen as she watches the latest episode of *Breaking Bad*. I go into the adjoining bathroom to try and calm down. No need to put on a show. The minute I shut the door behind me, I grip the edge of the chipped counter and close my eyes to block out the cheap blue tile surrounding me.

“Breathe,” I whisper to myself. “Nothing bad is going to happen. You’re going to get up in front of the class, talk for five minutes, and then it will all be over and life will go on.” I think I need to compose a new pep talk as soon as possible because those words don’t even put a dent in my thick skull. The measured breaths of air that I inhale and exhale are pointless. Time for method number two. I release my hold on the counter and start to jump from one leg to the other. I shake my arms around, hoping my negative thoughts will escape from my fingertips and be flung into the corner of the tiny room. No such luck and my time is up. I flush the toilet, run the water for a minute, and walk back into my room and over to my desk to gather my things. As far as my roommate is concerned, I wasn’t just freaking out in the bathroom. I sling my bag over my shoulder and I’m off to climb the wall that’s blocking my view of the rest of the week.

Okay. So maybe I should’ve looked at the time before I opened the
door to the classroom. Apparently it doesn't take ten minutes to walk from my dorm to Breidenbaugh. As I walk across the front of the room, avoiding eye contact with those already seated, I realize that maybe I should be more observant of my surroundings, because I just walked in on the end of another class. No use turning around now. I take my seat as my professor tries to ease my embarrassment.

“This is one of my students from my next class.” Oh my God. Kill me now.

“Sorry!” I say in a voice that's two octaves higher than my own. My face is so inflamed that I'm surprised my skin isn't melting onto the floor like in some science fiction movie. I press my shaky, ice cold hands to my cheeks in an effort to hide my reaction to what I deem a horrendous situation. The five guys in the front row seem to turn around simultaneously to stare as my mind berates me. I can't believe I just did that. I should have checked the time. I should have waited outside. I should have turned around. Why did I keep walking? Why did this have to happen today? Look at what I'm wearing.

All semblance of calm that I may have established has been destroyed by the detonator of humiliation that I just experienced. As my class begins, I can't focus on anything. The only hope I have is that we do our presentations at the beginning so that my heart rate can move away from the danger zone. Good news! It's time to start the presentations, and I'm first. I stand up from my seat on shaking legs and make my way to the front of the room as steadily as I can. I place my note card on the podium with my trembling hands and pray that the rest of the room can't hear the pounding of my heart. I press my hands together in a vise-like grip in front of me and begin speaking with a wavering voice. As I attempt to make eye contact with those sitting in front of me, I feel my face begin to burn and sweat rolls down my back. They're going to wonder what's wrong with me. They don't want to have anything to do with me. Why is he looking at me like that? Why is she smiling? The questions inside my head merge with the words flowing from my mouth, and, when it's all said and done, I can't remember anything from the last five minutes. I make my way back to my seat amid a smattering of applause and practically collapse into it. After ten minutes pass by, my hands have stopped shaking enough for me to begin taking my notes for the day.

*****

You would think that I would have gotten over that by now. It's been nearly a year. That's the thing about me. I can remember every bad thing that's happened to me as if it happened today—every tiny stumble,
every stuttered word, every awkward interaction, every missed opportunity. It’s like a weight I can’t get rid of that’s crushing me from the inside out. The good things are like distant memories that are blurred around the edges. You may be thinking, “Everyone gets nervous about a presentation.” True. But it’s not just that. When I have to meet someone new, my face turns blood red. When I have to walk into a room full of people, I start shaking. When I have to play the piano for a crowd, I can’t think straight. When I have to work in a group, I can’t speak. It’s as if someone has stolen my voice away from me. All is well when I’m by myself or with people I know. These times are my only means of escape out of my head. It’s like I have one personality for public and another for private. Too bad I can’t block one out while the other is in use. Then maybe I wouldn’t be lying here contemplating things I never thought would cross my mind. How do I escape this hell I’m trapped in? When will I stop hating myself and accept that this is who I am? Every year, I say, “This is it. It’s going to be different.” But it never is. I’m not an expert, but I’m pretty sure life isn’t supposed to be this hard.

*****

“...and there’s a written test on each of the eight subjects and an interview to follow. The day will then conclude with...”

Oh no. The fear immediately floods through me as the usual doubts creep into my mind. An interview. A nightmare. I see myself sitting timidly across from a group of judges towering over me. They’re questioning me as I sink further and further into my seat. I’m on trial for a crime that I didn’t commit. Uh-uh. No way. I’ve got to get out of this. I feel my legs itching to run from the room and never look back, but I force myself to stay put. By the time my agitated thoughts calm down, everyone’s packing up their things and getting ready to leave.

“...see you all on Thursday.”

It’s my freshman year of high school, and I decided to join the academic decathlon team. At my first meet, I got gold medals for overall score and music in the honors division. I had a great time, but that was because I only had to sit among a large group of people and take written exams in a few subjects. Now that we’ve made it to regionals, we have to compete in all ten categories—two of which are speech and interview. I don’t know what I was thinking when I got myself into this. My heart rate is increasing steadily as I think about everything that could possibly go wrong during my interview. I might not know the answer to one of the questions. My answers might not be what they’re looking for. I’ll make a fool out of myself. I just can’t do this. I have to leave. I have to run.
A week later, the day has arrived. I’m still in bed, hoping I can sink into my mattress and disappear until the bus has left.

“Christina, it’s time to get up. You’re going to be late,” my mom says as she pulls my shades up.

“I don’t feel good at all,” I say. “I threw up last night.” Liar.

“When?” my mom says incredulously.

“In the middle of the night.” Coward. Without another word, my mom makes her way to the bathroom next to my room.

“The sink doesn’t look dirty,” she says as she comes back into my room.

“That’s because I rinsed it.” Freak.

“Okay. Fine. Stay home. But this is the last time I’m calling that school.”

“Fine.” I bury myself under the covers and celebrate my victory. But my contentedness doesn’t last for long. Soon, a familiar, intense guilt dominates my brain. What have I done? What’s wrong with me? I ignore my nagging thoughts of self-loathing and regret as I drift into a restless sleep.

The next day, my friend and fellow teammate, Kate, calls me.

“Are you feeling better?” she says as I hold the phone to my ear in an unnecessarily tight grip.

“Yeah. Sorry I couldn’t be there. How was the meet?” I say as my façade slowly starts to crack. As I listen to my friend talk about the meet—the meet that I should have been at, the meet that I had wanted to be at—I can’t take it anymore. The guilt is just too much to keep to myself. A strangled sound makes its way past my lips and all of a sudden, I’m crying like I’ve never cried before.

“Are you okay?” I hear Kate say quietly through the phone.

“Yeah. I just...really wish...I could’ve been there.”

*****

You would never know that there is anything wrong by looking at me or at what I do. My clothes scream, “Look at me!” and my extracurricular activities say, “I love people!” Despite all of this, my brain yells, “I want to hide!” and drowns out any attempts I may make to be what I think is a normal human being. What’s normal anyway? Who decides? I don’t know, but all I know is that I want to be that person that people see at first glance. I’m not the girl who can’t walk down the street some days without being a bundle of nerves. I hate her, and I want her out of my head forever. Here’s hoping that the jagged half of the pill I swallowed last night does just that.
It’s been a week since I took that first dose. Two times a day I’ve been taking those damn pills and nothing has happened—nothing good anyway. Maybe I should stop it. Maybe I can fix myself. I can buy that Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook I saw on Amazon with the “proven, step-by-step techniques for overcoming your fear.” That has to work, right? I should stop it. You know those commercials that are in black and white and then the person takes a pill and suddenly the world is a rainbow of colors and the birds are chirping? I used to find that hilarious, but it’s not so funny to me anymore. The only problem is that the reverse has happened. Nothing seems right, and I’m balancing on the edge of a pit I don’t want to fall into. I walk outside, and I can’t wait until I make it safely back to my room. I’ve taken to perusing the same three websites on the Internet over and over again instead of doing my homework. Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, repeat. I just don’t care anymore. I’m thinking about dropping some classes. Maybe I should drop a major. English. Film. Film. English. I can’t do this anymore. I should stop it. My thoughts are racing, I can’t concentrate, and I’m beginning to think of doing things that no sane person should ever ponder. I really should stop it. I should give my scissors to my neighbor and throw my razor in the dumpster. I’ve read the same paragraph three times and still have no idea what it says. Why did I act like that today? Will I ever be able to change? I should change. Will I ever be normal? Maybe I should stop. I can’t stop. I’m sick of hiding. The bottle of pills on my desk mocks me. Stop it. I pick up the plastic cylinder and throw it as hard as I can at the blank wall in front of me. I don’t even bother to see where it lands as I throw myself onto my bed. Maybe next year.
The One That Got Away

Jeremiah Johnston

Birds blink.

Let’s face it—birds fly, and anyone who has strapped on the safety harness of a roller coaster knows what they know: wind dries out your eyes. So, a blink is the squeak of the windshield wipers after the hum of the wiper wash sprayer—but it’s not only that. A blink is the speed of a bird in flight. A blink is the final action of a card shark before playing his ace. A blink is what loses a staring contest.

A blink is a half-second too late.

I clutched the top of my lab-tape-Swiffer-duster-pole-and-folded-cloth net and cursed. Up above, on the foam-wrapped, cold-water inlet pipe, set up in the maze of other tubes in the ceiling of the animal holding room, the male Zebra finch cocked his head at me and chirped. My eyes slanted. The bird blinked.

His mate perched on a stick in the rough wire cage on top of the refrigerator watching me, waiting. I knew what she thought. I wouldn’t catch him like I caught her—filling the deep jar with bird seed, waiting until she jumped in, and slamming my green aquarium net over the top. As I struggled to hold her through the net, that’s when I found out that birds were fireballs of down, warmed from the inside, just like people. And just like people, they have a certain dignity. I picked her up in my hand, and much like a political prisoner being pushed into a cop car, she neither cried nor screamed aloud as I locked her into the cage.

Earlier that morning, I came to work to feed the animals. I could hear the finches chirping through the door like always; we had them in the animal room for safe-keeping during their mating-call-response experiment for Animal Behavior. Whenever I worked in the room—refilling the water in the feeder of the goldfish tanks, cleaning the turtles’ filter, looking for dead cockroaches in one of the five populations we kept alive (or keeping the crayfish from eating each other)—the birds always made an effort to be vocal when I looked at them, whether they jumped up in the bird cage, jumped over each other, or jumped down into the fresh tray of bird seed that I laid down. Each soft clang of the aluminum bars on the cage let me know that they were moving, an audible sign that they were alive and active in their metal home. Unlike the snakes, they didn’t bite, and unlike everything else, they didn’t smell. I used to sing them Jimmy Buffet songs, and they would whistle for an encore when I was done.
I opened the door and pushed it shut behind me, dropping my backpack, coat, hat, and laptop case on and around one of the room’s rotating stools and gave a passing nod at the bird cage that always greeted me at the door. As I bent back to my appliances, I heard the chirping but no excited clanging on the grid-work bars. That was odd. I turned to face the cage, looking at it with more scrutiny. The birds weren’t there. I walked around the cage—and then I saw it. The food tray, which had a replaceable bottom attached outside of the cage, had fallen out, spilling a thin pile of bird seed from its overturned mouth. I heard a chirp above my head. There the pair perched, choosing the hot water inlet pipe for the first time. I met both of their eyes. They cocked their heads to get a better look with one eye and blinked.

The first thing I did was pull out an old work log sheet—the kind with a blank back—and wrote a sign to post on the door: “CAUTION—FREE ZEBRA FINCHES—BE CAREFUL WHEN ENTERING.” The last thing I wanted was to be responsible for letting finches out in the Science Center; the first thing I wanted was to get them back into the cage.

That was the origin of the makeshift net, the bird seed bait, the spring-loaded slamming mechanisms on the bird cage, and the wide array of aquarium nets and stools placed within running and jumping distance in case I got a lucky shot. I herded them around the room with my Swiffer-net pole, trying to push them away from the pipes in the ceiling. Then, with a Scandinavian growl, I raised my net as high as I could to swipe, swing, and swish after the fluttering of wings that beat the air faster than my net could stir it. I would stalk off to a corner, pretending to do nothing while they chirped amongst themselves. Then, with a flash of my eyes, I would begin the chase again, darting around the trash cans, salt water mix, and stainless steel sinks—jumping up off of the stools for a few aerial shots. Every dash I took reminded me how slow and cumbersome I was—my 6500 grams to their six. Compared to us, cat and mouse was child’s play. I wasn’t going to give up; I was going to catch those blinking, chirping birds.

Several hours, one roommate assist, and an accidental release of the female later, I looked up at the finches, minding their own business. I sighed and placed my Swiffer-net pole down. If they wanted to be free—for just a night—it was the least I could do. I left some food out in a tray—water, too—and, the day being a Saturday, I sent an e-mail to my boss. I exited as fast as I could, making sure the birds didn’t leave with me.

The next morning, my boss got back to me. She and the professor of the class were going to take care of it—they even had a brand-name Fischer net. I closed the screen of my laptop and looked out of the window in my room. “Good luck,” I whispered; to whom, I didn’t know.

On Monday, I came back into the room. I heard the chirp and me-
tallic thumps from the cage. Success. The female’s orange feet were perched on the plastic dowel and she chirped at me as I walked past. Even still, something wasn't right—I went back to look at the cage. The female was alone.

Maybe they had the male somewhere else. I looked up—nope, not there. With a short attention span, and a long list of homework on my mind, I grabbed a paper towel and went to the Channel catfish’s tank to scrape some algae off the inside of the glass. I crumpled up the soggy paper towel and went to the trash can to drop it in. My head snapped back at what I saw. I had found the male.

He was in a plastic bag, damp on the inside with moisture. His plumage was drenched, and his beak was frozen open in a shriek. Worst of all, his eyelids were squeezed together, tighter than a vise clamp. I asked my boss what had happened—one of them grabbed him with the net, but in the struggle, he fell into an open fish tank. It’s not a bird’s fault that it can’t hold its breath; inhaling or exhaling, air enters its lungs. Death wasn’t unusual in the animal room, but even still—I blinked.

I looked back at his mate. She perched in the cage, alone, not making a sound. She hopped down to the food tray, looked around at something that wasn’t there, and cocked her head back at me. I nodded.

I moved the stools and fish nets back to their proper places and grabbed my patched-together Swiffer net. I peeled the colored lab tape off of the rag I was using for the net’s basket and stuck what I could salvage onto the stainless steel counter. I unscrewed the body of the net, folded the cloth, and placed it back onto the shelf. The mate watched me as I worked.

I went to the paper towel rack and grabbed three white sheets. I pulled the tape up from the counter and fastened the paper towels together. I took the makeshift shawl and laid it over the plastic-bag coffin in the trash can.

I went to the log sheet and pulled out my pen. “Female finch caught; male bird,” I stopped writing.

“Escaped.”

I looked back at his mate in the bird cage. She chirped, cocked her head, and blinked at the trash can.

I nodded my head.
Forbidden Fruit

Victoria Reynolds

The forbidden fruit
is not an apple,
mimicking the ample bosom,
a red flush
right below the cheekbones.

The fruit that should be forbidden
is a pomegranate,
shaped like a
dismembered heart—
aorta cut short
into a splayed star.

To cut into it
is to separate
four chambers from each other,
and scrape them clean,
droplets of gem-like juice
into the waiting cavern
of a bowl.

Consuming the consummated
heart of the fruit
leaves only four empty chambers,
red like blood,
open and waiting to be
filled, so long after
its own blood was spilled,
slowly into your
ripened mouth,
staining the edges
of lips with lust,
a simple, single
lipstick smudge
on the collar of a shirt.
The first time he saw her, she wasn’t doing anything in particular. She was alone in the apartment, watching television. He could see her lying on the couch and browsing through the channels. It looked like she was wearing some kind of peach-colored dress. No, not a dress—it was some kind of skintight pants and shirt combination. Both were the same color, that odd peach shade. Maybe it was a leotard. . . . No, it must have been a turtleneck, but he couldn’t tell where the collar began or where the sleeves ended.

There were two other specks of color on the woman’s shirt, about halfway down her torso. From his window they looked like two tiny, red strawberries. The woman shifted position and the strawberries jiggled. She finally stood up and her dark hair spilled over her shoulders. She suddenly left his view, probably going to her kitchen or the bathroom. Carl stared at the empty room across the way and realized she had no clothes on at all.

Carl was transfixed. The woman returned to her couch. He remembered his old art teacher saying how the college-credit studios did life drawing, which was basically drawing naked people; he’d always wondered what that was like. His teacher had tried to get him to sign up for a college-credit course like that once, but the money didn’t work out. He didn’t save enough money back then, since he didn’t work at a grocery store or the mall like the rest of his classmates did. It was hard to find a job with his condition, not that he’d ever tried. His hands shook whenever he thought about the prospect of a job interview. Meeting new people and talking to them scared him.

As he thought back to his high school art class, he had an idea. He kept watching the woman watch television.

Finally, he went over to his desk and picked up his notebook and pen in one hand and his chair in the other. He dragged the chair close to the window, sat down, and started to sketch. He couldn’t see every detail, of course; their apartments weren’t that close together. He drew the supple curves of her legs. He drew the tiny strawberries. He left the face blank.

The woman on the bench across the street, though, was wearing a
lime green jacket. It was one of those shiny ones, the ones Carl had seen runners wear in commercials. The woman had tight, purple shorts too, not the dark purple like the plum he ate for lunch, but a screaming, neon purple. He could see her thin calves molded from afternoon jogging, and loose strands of her sweat-damp hair clung to each side of her face. Tiny headphones protruded from her ears and one hand was stuffed in her pocket. Carl looked at his blank notepad and started drawing with his ballpoint pen.

It was too bad he didn’t have any real art supplies. All he had was this black Bic and a college-ruled notebook. He sketched the slump of her torso and her long, extended calves. A curve here, some cross-hatching there. . . . He shaded in the places where her shadow hit the concrete. Pressing his ballpoint hard on the thin paper, he darkened the contours of her jacket and tried to blend the ink with his pinky finger.

The woman stood up. She cracked her neck, twisted her arms in a brief stretch, and continued her run. Carl sighed. He had almost finished the drawing this time, but still he hadn’t gotten to her face. Faces were where he needed the most practice. Scrawling a quick signature and putting the date at the bottom, he flipped the page over and looked around.

He spied another woman across the street, this one in a black leather jacket. She was leaning against a stop sign and chatting on her cell phone. He drew faster this time and got out a rough sketch before she hung up and walked into the Dunkin Donuts behind her.

The woman in leather reminded him of his sister, Max, who was working today at that tourist shop near Fenway, where they sold discount Red Sox tickets. Today he was supposed to turn in the Dunkin Donuts application she’d filled out for him, but he would much rather sit here.

He watched the woman in leather leave Dunkin Donuts with a plastic cup of iced coffee. She quickly glanced across the street and, in that split second, made eye contact with Carl. She pressed the button at the corner, waited for the street to clear, and began to cross the street.

Shit. What if it was Max? If she caught him sitting around and slacking one more time…

Carl hastily stuffed his notepad and pen in the worn out backpack beside him. He stood up and started walking in the opposite direction, staring straight ahead as if going towards the Bank of America on the next street over. He clumsily maneuvered around a businessman and narrowly avoided a collision with a dog-walker. He spotted a CVS coming up on his right and darted in as quickly as he could.

He stared out the big glass window as the woman in leather walked past. It wasn’t Max; this lady had lighter hair. He sighed with relief. Absent-mindedly, he walked to the shampoo section. He was pretending to browse
through conditioners when he felt a hard tap on his shoulder.

“What’s your problem?”

Carl's heart sank. There went his afternoon. Hanging his head, he slowly turned around. A pale, dark-haired girl with heavy eyeliner and a nose piercing glared at him. She was wearing a blue t-shirt with the logo from some indie band printed on the front.

“Dude, we were supposed to meet up an hour ago,” Anna joked.

“Right. Sorry,” Carl stammered, not entirely thrilled to see her.

He’d known Anna since their sophomore year in high school and they’d graduated together last May. Now the two of them hung around the city, unemployed and undereducated, while their old classmates enrolled at places like Boston University and UMass. He didn’t know why she stuck around with him. Maybe it was because they were both outcasts; neither of them had had many friends at Arbor High.

At first it was like high school never ended. The only difference was that instead of going to class during the day, they could wander around Quincy Market or catch a lunchtime movie. That, and he lived with his sister now, after his parents had ordered him to either get a job in the city or find a way to go to community college. They weren’t happy that he’d graduated high school without any plan for the “real world.” He’d moved in with Max under those conditions.

Now it was October, and he still hadn’t pursued either option to date. These days, whenever he and Anna hung out, he couldn’t help but feel uncomfortable. Today she wanted to sneak into the movies again and he wasn’t feeling up to it; last time she’d smuggled a water bottle of whiskey in her bag. Carl had finished half the bottle trying to impress her, but he puked it all up in the bathroom twenty minutes later. She’d laughed.

“Come on, let’s get going,” she said, bored. They walked out of the store.

“How’s the view from your window at home looking?” Anna continued, asking with a knowing smile. Carl considered for a moment.

“That lady’s friend was over again,” he confessed. “I mean she never keeps her blinds shut, so I can see everything, basically. It’s like she wants everyone to see or something.”

“What happened? Did they fuck?”

“No, they were just… hugging or something. But it was a weird kind of hug. They were hugging for five minutes straight before the other lady jumped away, like she knew someone was watching.”

“Well, yeah. You were watching.”

Carl’s face grew hot. “Yeah… Anyway, I thought they were going to kiss, like last time, but nothing happened after that.”

“Damn. That’s too bad. You should take photos next time,” Anna
suggested. Anna's bright green eyes suddenly got excited. “I kinda want to meet her. How funny would it be if I knocked on her door and she opened it stark naked?”

“Why would she open the door if she was naked?”
“I don't know. Why does she leave the blinds open if she's naked?”
“No idea,” Carl shrugged.

Anna was quiet for a moment, suddenly pensive. “What would happen if I left my blinds open one day and stripped in front of the window?”

Carl froze, confused. “What?”

“Well, what if I made out with a girl in front of my window?” Anna prompted.

“Why would you do that?”

Anna looked disappointed. “I wouldn’t. I was just wondering. Would you draw me, I mean?”

Carl thought for a moment, unsure of what to say. “Um, I guess. I don't know.”

A brief silence ensued. Anna looked sad, though Carl couldn’t fathom why.

“Anyway, call me when it gets good again,” Anna pushed. “I want to come see.”

“Sure,” Carl shrugged. He knew he wouldn’t call her. It was his window.

* *

In his head he called the woman in the window Viola; it was the name of a character from some Shakespeare play he'd read in high school. He thought it suited her; it was exotic and had something of a musical quality. It was an instrument after all. Kind of like a violin. Max used to play the violin, but she'd sold her instrument years ago.

After suffering through a long horror movie that afternoon with Anna, he got back to Max's apartment later than usual. He liked to get home by 5:30, which was when Viola got home from work. Ever since the first time he'd seen her, he took to keeping his desk chair permanently by the window, so he could observe and sketch at a moment's notice. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday he drew her for an hour, until Max got home from the shop.

Sometimes she wasn’t naked, but he didn’t care. He thought of these sessions as free drawing lessons, and he needed all the practice he could get. He didn’t know what for, but he liked it.

Fortunately, today Viola was running late, too. He slid into his chair and pulled open his shades just as the woman entered her room across the way, then watched her drop her purse gracefully on the floor by the coffee table before leaving his view. He guessed she was in the bedroom, or the
bathroom, or something, so he waited with his pencil hovering above the page. It would only be a thirty-minute session today, he unfortunately realized. He'd have to relish it.

* 

Her real name was Alice; she and Max were classmates at Tufts. He learned this the next day, when Max introduced them at dinner.

She was wearing blue jeans and a satiny purple shirt that rippled whenever she laughed. Alice looked different from the woman he saw from his window. She was rigid in the way she leaned back, in the way her hands stiffly rested on the table. The woman in the window was always relaxed.

Carl didn't say much to Alice that evening. He couldn't, she was sacred, like a rock star or a supermodel. Anything he said to her would have to be eloquent and well thought-out. While he thought about what he might say to impress her, he twirled his spaghetti and listened to her chat with his sister. They made fun of their professors, talked about the new Barnes & Noble store that opened downtown, and critiqued some soap opera the two of them watched. Bored, he tuned out of the conversation, and his mind turned to the sketchpad in his room. He started visualizing a color drawing of Alice he'd like to try, one featuring her in that purple top. He'd bought a set of colored pencils last week with the bit of money he had left over from graduation and was itching to try them out.

“How are your folks?” Alice asked, and Carl sat up straight. He prayed Max wouldn't bring him into the conversation.

“They’re actually coming by on Friday,” Max responded, “Just to check in on things.” She sipped her water. “Carl, make sure you’re around that day.”

“Friday?” Carl spoke up.

“Yeah, Friday.” Max rolled her eyes.

“I have plans.”

“You working?”

“No.”

“Too bad,” Max quipped. Then, her mood shifting, she gave him a sympathetic look. “Like I said, they just want to check in. Did you turn in that job application?”

Carl shrugged. “Not yet. Going to tomorrow.”

“How first thing in the morning, okay?” Max said.

“Okay.”

The rest of the conversation was as dull as when it started, although he did learn a few more things about Alice. When she wasn’t working on her masters in drama, she enjoyed photography. She also liked to drink merlot. He treasured each of these facts, but the thing he most relished in learning about her was that she worked part-time as a nude model over at
the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. He’d been drawing a professional studio model for the past few weeks and he hadn’t even realized it.

His “free art lessons” suddenly became more credible. He had the urge to draw again and decided to try doodling something in the living room. Max and Alice were still talking at the dinner table, but he cleared his plate and put it in the sink along with his silverware and empty glass of water.

He went to his room to grab his sketchpad and pencil and then walked back through the kitchen to get to the living room. Maybe he’d try doing a still life this time—

“Carl—” He heard Max call his voice. “Can you empty the dishwasher so we can refill it? I need to run the trash downstairs. It’s overflowing again.”

Tossing his sketchpad on the coffee table, he ran back into the kitchen, annoyed. He opened the white dishwasher, which was as pale and blank as each of the pages he wanted to fill in his notebook.

“Here, let me help,” Alice offered as Max exited, lugging an enormous black garbage bag.

“No, it’s fine,” Carl muttered, and he opened the drawer by the sink to start putting away silverware. Alice shrugged and went to the living room. He heard her turn on the TV and sit on the couch to wait for Max.

Their dishwasher was pretty small, so it didn’t take Carl long to finish the chore. Finally he went back into the living room, ready to start his next drawing.

His sketchpad wasn’t on the coffee table, though—Alice was holding it in her lap on the couch, flipping through the pages as if it were a magazine. His heart stopped as he thought of all the things he could say or should say in that moment. She looked up and raised one eyebrow at him.

She grabbed the remote and turned the TV on mute.

“Nice stuff,” she said to him, pointing at the page open currently. It was one of his “life drawings” of her lying on the sofa. He’d tried to include the window in that composition, and he thought he’d made it pretty realistic. Anyone who knew the outside of the building well could recognize the apartment easily. “How old are you, Carl?”

He was flustered, red-faced at the situation. “Um, eighteen.”

“Old enough for me to sue, then?” Her eyes bore into him.

“Uh—”

“Fortunately for you, I’m not the suing type.” Was she smiling? The door opened and Max walked back in, her hands empty. Alice instinctively flipped the notebook shut.

“What’s that?” Max asked, pointing at Carl’s book. Alice shook her head.
“Oh, nothing,” she responded. “Anyway, I was just talking to Carl about the job openings over at the Museum.”

“Huh?” Max slumped into the armchair. “What job openings?”

“We always need male models.” Alice smirked at Carl, who was confused. “For the undergrads and the public workshops. Pays great.”

Max looked to her brother, surprised and disbelieving. “Really? I can’t imagine him standing naked in front of a room of people.”

“You don’t always stand. Sometimes you sit or lie down, actually,” Alice clarified, winking at Carl. “Anyway, what do you say, kid? You were looking for a job, right?”

Max and Alice both stared at him, Alice smirking and holding his notebook of drawings in her right hand as if it were blackmail, while Max looked unconvinced of her proposition.

“Uh, sure, I… I guess I could do it,” he finally said.
They are stuck in endless orbit
Some have wheels, rolling in different ways,
Some are red, black—all colors
Some are fragile, some sturdy. From the Americas to
Zambia. It all culminates in this one place
Stories, waiting to be finished.
What do you pack when
You’re going on the trip of a lifetime? What souvenirs
And nirvanas can you bring back? Peter:
One of the twelve, watches each baggage
Disappear through the corral with the rest
Destination unknown, do you, yourself, ever come back?
Or are postcards all that’s left?
Families, vacationers, explorers. Whole groups exist
Touring their own worlds. Their own agendas:
Will I need sunscreen? I heard it’s bright up there.
They don’t see you. Too preoccupied with excitement
Of reuniting with their loved ones.
You don’t see them. They coalesce
Spilling across the polished floors. He trudges
Through the murmuring ocean. Peter:
The retired fisherman, surveying the depths for
Interim souls. Things to pocket here, spare change
And there, the forgotten gems of our era
Buried under waves. The unread
Novelettes floating on oscillating abundance of
Belongings. Totems that have defined our whole lives
It’s a damn mess of treasure, hidden. Peter:
The janitor mopping the excrement, keeping the
Realm pearly white as the hair on his head. And the strokes
On his face tell a harsh tale, for such a simple life. Lost,
You hand him your ticket and he has,
For such humble occupations, great authority
To send us to our final destinations. Peter:
The keeper of the sky.
The clawing smell of her cotton candy is going to make me sick. Danielle, my little sister, is looking so happy, standing in front of me on the step of the tugboat attraction. I don’t know what’s supposed to be so fun about watching these smelly, noisy, rude grown-ups shoot balls at those piles of metal at the far end of the tank. None of them seem to care the tiniest little bit that there are two young girls standing here by themselves, being battered around by their forceful shoves. And why should they? We’re not their kids, so not their responsibility.

She’s still enraptured by the display despite having been here for so long, so that means I’m going to be stuck here for a while yet. Turning to glance through the crowd of people boxing us in, I saw no sign of Dad or his new wife and their kids; he’s probably off pampering them. He likes them so much better even though they’re much worse than us.

An elbow slams my ribs when Danielle moves around to get a better view of the boats and shoves the cotton candy in her hand into my face. Good to know she’s having fun while I get knocked around trying to keep all the other people from crushing her. My arms are braced on the edge of the game, surrounding her in a protective ring, shaking from the strain of keeping them straight to hold off all these bigger adults. Dad will yell if anything happens to her while he left us, and I’ve had enough of that in the past two days to last me for weeks.

Just two years younger, she’s a little short, but she’s a big girl. She’s hardly at risk for being knocked over or hurt by the people around us. She’s standing here with her new sweatshirt, cotton candy, and the bear she won at a game earlier, getting to enjoy the game she wanted to see with me making sure no one bothers her. All of that stuff’s too young for me, who is supposed to be so mature at my age. I’m nine years old! How is that too old to be acting like a child?

She grabs my arm and tries to tell me a story about something that happened in the game. A shout from the drunk fat man on my left drowns out her words, forcing me to lean in to hear her, but that just makes the crowd feel they can move in closer and maybe jab their way to the front. With arms braced as securely as they can be, they bounce off the barrier around her, but only slightly, and they manage to make her standing room a bit smaller than it was a minute ago. Luckily, she doesn’t seem affected by it. Not like the girl jumping on the right who nearly fell over from tripping
over a little foot during her antics.

What I wouldn’t give to walk away to that bench I can see on the side of the game and take just five minutes to sit there watching the moon and ride’s lights sparkle on the waves, fresh air blowing around me.

While she tells her story, the little fake jewels in her ears are sparkling from all the lights on the pier. She and I got our ears pierced at one of the shops down the boardwalk earlier tonight. Danielle had seen the display of earrings out front and drew Dad’s attention to it, which, of course, made him think this would be a great idea. So, he walked us in and asked the man with the gun for two sessions. Naturally, I’d had to do it before her, so she could see it wasn’t anything to be afraid of, despite the fact she had been the one to beg for this and I hadn’t said anything of the sort.

I was walked in and placed on the counter by two constricting hands around my arms so the guy could reach me. Gold balls were picked out, tiny little tags. He put the gun to my ear, pulled the trigger, and there was a small pinch to prove it went through. Dad’s wife picked up the nearby mirror to show me how it looked.

That was a big mistake.

She tilted it at such an angle that I could see the tiny gold dot on my left earlobe. As soon as my eyes made contact with it, it was all over.

I broke down sobbing.

Several people rushed over to see what was going on. Who knows, maybe they thought some crime was being committed from the screams. Dad ran over, yanked me off the counter, out of the store, and across the boardwalk to a small bench so I could calm down while he had Danielle’s ears done. Having already put out the money, he wasn’t going to have it wasted.

As I was still a mess upon their return, the whole group had to walk from one end of the pier to the other and back before a calm began to numbingly take over. Of course, that didn’t last long once the shop was reached and again I was escorted in to get the other ear pierced. Another pinch, and it was over.

It hadn’t hurt, not once. None of the crying was about the piercing or the throbbing ears. I cried because it was unfair. Like a piece of cattle, I had been taken against my will and tagged. I was made a sacrificial offering for the example of my sister. That’s what hurt most of all: knowing that I didn’t really matter to anyone I was with, most importantly my own dad.

This was made clear with my appointment to guard duty at the game tonight, this was the entire reason my sister and I had been brought on this vacation. Our father doesn’t want to spend time with his older kids, he practically ran away from his previous marriage. He wants to use us as babysitters who can keep the younger two in line and entertain them.
while he and his wife laze around. As the two little brats are so small they need companions on the rides, Danielle and I can be left with them to race around the pier on our own. Naturally, it sounded great to her. Barely older than them, she loved the idea of having companions for every ride and getting to run around as she chose. Left on the other side of the gate, holder of the ticket book, for me it was a lot less entertaining and more of a sad reminder of my worth in this family.

People finally started to leave the game, leaving some room to move and breathe, though it's still crowded enough for it not to be safe to leave Danielle completely. When is this game going to end? It's already been going on for a good half hour, at least. Out of the corner of my eye, Dad's spotted on the other side of the boards with his new family. He's holding several toys he must have won for them from the balloon pop because they're as big as the kids and it's the one game he's really good at. Both his kids are holding some treat, faces a mess from whatever it is while their mother flits around to the several shops selling cute t-shirts with silly stuff on the front.

Why does he love them so much more? All they do is run around like a bunch of sugar-powered, untrained monkeys, making a mess of everything they touch and talking back to him. All three of them are like that. None of them care about anything other than themselves and what they want. Ungrateful about everything they're given, they dismiss it with an air of entitlement, that they deserve nothing less than all they want. It's so infuriating.

A soft object smacks into and sticks to the right side of my face. The sickening, sweet scent of the cotton candy gets ten times worse from close contact.

“Danielle, watch what you’re doing! You almost got me in the eye.”
She turns to face me. “You’re not my boss.”
“Yes, I am. Dad left me in charge of you until he gets back, remember?”

Tongue sticking out, she returns to watching the balls as they fly through the air to clang against the ships, making sure to step on my feet and knock my arms from about her. After getting beaten up by the crowd and forcibly getting my ears pierced for her, she thinks she can just turn around and yell at me like that. That is not going to happen.

A voice reaches me from off to my left. “Hey girls, there's a nice spot open down here. Come on over.” It's our Uncle Joe, holding open a spot for us right in the middle, one big enough for both me and Danielle to be right at the front of the crowd, a clear view of the whole attraction. He's a really nice guy, always doing these kinds of things for Danielle and me when we see each other.
Danielle kicks my leg as she tries to lean forward to get a better view. Clearly, she didn’t hear what he said, too absorbed in her own world to bother with anything else.

Putting my hand on her arm, I give her a small shove. "Come on, we’re moving over here.” I start moving toward Uncle Joe, leaving her to catch up when she can.

Halfway, I’m stopped by the sound of a sharp “thunk” sound and a scream from behind.

Danielle, being small, must have turned too fast or lost her footing when getting off the little step we were using to watch the game and fell. On her back in the middle of the walkway, she’s lying there with her left arm at a weird angle under her back and screeching, but not moving a muscle.

Dad rushes over to her from the other side, trying to get her to sit up and start moving, but that only makes her scream louder. He keeps trying to get her to talk, to soothe her, but all she can do is cry and make sounds. He’s getting frustrated quickly because people are staring at all this.

Seeing me behind him, he demands, “What happened?”

I look right at him.

“She tripped.”
The Rose Peddler

Victoria Reynolds

Each week, all seven days, he walked along the aisle of concrete. Whether it was winter or summer or the first hint of spring, he paced up and down the paradise in between the departing and oncoming traffic. The cars that passed must have wondered what he did—who he was, why he simply sold roses to the cars when the red light gave him enough time to stare at the drivers with his honey-rust eyes. If he was lucky, those eyes would earn him a sale.

On this particular afternoon, it seemed as if the air inside his lungs condensed and turned to steam at the same time. He was softly shuffling, staring down each passing car with the saddest grimace. If the heat was getting to him, he did not let on to his ever-changing audience. And what an audience he had—mothers in minivans, toting small children. Businessmen who were heading to and from the city in their sleek cars. Even teenagers asked for his roses as they traveled much too fast around the sharp intersection turn. It was a mundane existence. The same collection of red roses, the same bright tinfoil surrounding them, the same general surroundings—whether coated in snow, draped with a rainbow of leaves, or filled with a canopy of green—it looked the same.

Two worlds collided on this balmy afternoon (and every other after that)—one melancholy gentleman selling roses and a young anonymous stranger on top of the world. One glance was exchanged, and the sad man scampered to the vintage convertible, three bouquets in hand. The driver held out a ten and no words were exchanged. One ten for one bouquet. As simple as that. The rose seller continued on, shuffling as he did every day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, while the young man filled with promise drove off with his bouquet of roses.

It does not matter that the man who sold roses stole them off graves at night, and repackaged them in order to make a living. It does not matter that the young man purchased one bouquet every day in order to decorate his mother’s grave. It does not even matter that the young man’s mother resided in the graveyard that the elderly man ravaged. What matters is that the world we live in can survive a cataclysmic collision of opposites every day, and continue to turn as if nothing is occurring on it. Nothing at all.
Every Day I Take the Long Way Home

Jamie Garrett

Every day I take the long way home past the houses that remind me of what it means to grow up under the guise of the “small town.”

You were always the one that stuck out with your dark green shutters, shoddy porch missing floorboards, scattered nails stuck up from the depths, dusty windows that never let me see my reflection, never letting out a glimmer of light from the inside.

You were a dead building. You were a constant reminder that not everything that dies needs to be buried. Some things need to be left alone, not memorialized or sanctified, simply left alone.

Autumn crept up on both of us that year. Windswept streets blowing dust in your direction. I followed your whispered screams—Cracking wood, smashing glass—to your front steps.

Swarming about, men and machines, dismantling, destroying. Standing in silence, me, a statue, mourning the loss. They took you that day and I can never get you back.
I have recurring nightmares about
the funerals that I hold
for dead buildings in my head.
I cannot walk down Front Street
anymore without seeing you.
I always find you where the sidewalk ends.

These days my head hangs,
my feet trip over themselves.
I walk without thinking,
without noticing details and
you are the reason why.
You are the reason why
every day I took the long way home.
Do not blame me for a crime I did not commit, for it is not a crime when deathly blows are struck in self-defense. Listen to my story of unspeakable affliction, and you will marvel at my triumphs in the midst of such misfortune. You will marvel at my cleverness and ability, and you will agree that my untainted memory has kept my sanity intact. For it is not I who has wandered down the dark tunnel of delirium, it is them; they are the ones who have lost all hope of reality! Listen to my tale of woe, which I pen on a mere scrap of parchment as I crouch in this iron-barred cell, waiting out the last hours of my time, and you will pity me for the finality of my inequitable sentence. You will know the injustice of this world, delivering to the gallows the one man who has not, I tell you, has not, fallen to madness.

I awoke in that dreadful enclosure with the taste of blood and bile on my tongue, a sharp ring in my ears, and a certain suspended feeling, one that only comes from the world between dreams and reality. My mind had almost entirely escaped me and would have been lost in the thickening mist if not for a single quivering strand of reason, which shook as if in anticipation. Slowly, ever so slowly, with that comatose feeling one only gets upon leaving such a state, the strand of reason swelled to draw my wandering mind back within the secure boundaries of my human flesh.

As I came nearer to attention, I began exploring the full sensations of my body. I rested on my back and began to take in my surroundings using every aspect, save for my eyes. Those I kept sealed shut, not wanting to know the very thing that was entirely unavoidable.

I strained every muscle in my body, every nerve in my ear, and every breath I took was solely for the purpose of assessing my surroundings. Upon an initial attempt to discern just how I had come to be in this place, my memory locked its gates and would only conjure a blank void. As I racked my thoughts for an answer, I tried to ascertain my whereabouts without the use of sight. But one can only wait so long to acquire such knowledge, as fear grows quickly, like a virus, feeding off the unknown. Then—much too soon!—I could stand it no longer and my eyes flew open. Nothing. For what seemed like hours I lay there, searching the blackness for any sliver of light, when at last the faintest glimmer gave way to the terror of my predicament, leaving me completely at a loss.
My straining eyes frantically focused upon their surroundings only to shrink back and hastily shut in rejection of the images displayed. With their courage regained, they timidly continued the investigation, and I beheld above me an arch of solid granite. Rough rock walls stretched their suffocating arms toward the damp ground, welding together above, encasing me in a sarcophagus of stone. The looming edifice crushed the air above me down upon my chest and created a frightening image to my claustrophobic inclination. Shadows lengthened in the presence of a ghost-like flame and outlined the monsters that silently crept across the low-level ceiling. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a portrait of the Virgin Mary, her eyes gleaming in the ominous light, condemning me to some sin I had no knowledge of committing. Sharp grey teeth of stone extended up from the floor beside her, lengthening down from above. In the midst of the shadows my eyes strained to make out the full extensions of my chamber. Darkness enveloped the rock just beyond my trembling feet, and the tooth-filled walls faded around a narrow corner, leading their hunt for flesh away from my misery. And I—oh, what terror was I in!—found myself strapped down against dank, splintering wood, my bare body deprived of any shred of warmth that clothing would have offered. Coarse ropes coiled around each quaking wrist and ankle, attached to moveable anchors at head and foot, stretching each appendage to its full expanse. They were positioned—yes, I admit, quite cleverly—to render any victim completely and miserably inert in the smothering chamber.

Frozen as I was, immersed in the treacherous sound of silence, I became entirely petrified when a sharp click resounded suddenly from below me, splitting the silence. My memory does not falter in recalling my sensations upon hearing that dreadful sound. The bristly cords about my fragile wrists and ankles seemed to move as one, and in a sudden motion following the click they gave a sharp tug and stretched me lengthwise, but by only a very small amount, so small as to not cause pain at first, only discomfort. My limbs were stiff from the hours I had lain motionless in the cave; however, they had not yet succumbed to the rigidity of arthritis, and this I was able to bear. The gears of my mind whirred around, trying to make sense of my quandary. There had to be some reason I was here, some explanation for such misfortune! It sounded again—not more than a minute had passed—a single click emanating from beneath. And again came the minuscule tightening of my bonds, accompanied by the stinging stretch of all four appendages. A minute later came a third click. Suddenly it was all so dreadfully clear, and I plunged perilously into terror.

The seed of an idea had taken root in the innermost recesses of my mind. As if embodied by the power of Zeus, it grew and swelled to encompass every breath of a thought. Its permeating tendrils gripped me with
such fear that, had my binds released at that very moment, I would have remained motionless. With my mind trapped in panic, I struggled to compose rational thoughts, to find a way to survive. I knew this machine and what would become of me in the subsequent days. Such a cruel device was designed for the sole purpose of delivering a slow and excruciating death. Minute by minute, tear by tear, each limb would be ripped from its socket, taking hours to fully detach flesh and bone. The victim of such a demonic device as this would experience a most agonizing execution. The apparatus caused one to retain awareness throughout the torture, only falling unconscious after a sufficient loss of blood. Was this to be my demise? The very thought left me in despair. How was I to escape with no friend but the surrounding darkness?

Click. That sound became my master as I passed many long, dreary hours inside the stone enclosure, under the unnerving gaze of the Virgin. She watched with scrutiny as I drew nearer to my doom. A short while after the beginnings of my desolation, another noise came to accompany the first. This tormentor was a slow creak that pierced the silence, each decibel hurled back at me by the walls of the granite tomb. Seconds following each painful click, the contraption would emit a creak as the board upon which I lay shifted underneath me. Constricting binds dug into my flesh and secured my body as the wooden slab tilted backwards, only a few centimeters, to lower my sweat-drenched head and raise my shuddering legs toward the looming ceiling above.

Oh, I dreaded the moment when my toes would make contact with the slimy coldness. Would the machine simply cease tilting or crush my appendages between wood and rock? I could not lie there and wait for the outcome, like a blind cow on the march to slaughter. I devoted myself to the search for a way out, each click and each creak hastening the hunt. My desperate eyes pierced the gloom and scoured for a clue to liberation, only to encounter smooth walls and floors devoid of any tool or weapon. Panic rose in my throat, further constricting the airways already gasping for breath in my narrow chamber. With each passing minute, each click and each creak, my head lowered, blood straining to maintain its steady flow as gravity took hold. My feet continued to close the distance to the ceiling, and my limbs—my poor limbs—were subject to perpetual pulling, my muscles lengthened beyond what I thought possible. Another click, another creak, and I was sufficiently tilted to see the source of the dim light: a single burning lantern amongst the haunting shadows behind my head.

As I lay there, time brought more stretching and tilting until my hands were very near to the ground. Blood began collecting in my head and fingertips as gravity slowed the blood's ascent through my veins.
Throbbing temples and my aching head clouded my mind and dulled every sense but pain. Under the condemning gaze of the Virgin my left arm was fully and excruciatingly removed from its socket by the vicious ropes and my hips were stretched even further with the force of my weight pulling me down. I gasped for air, but my lungs, performing minimally in my elongated position, only inhaled smothering vapors devoid of precious oxygen. I closed my eyes in an attempt to block out my suffering and was lost in a void of terror for events that would soon come.

From within my mental oblivion I heard boot-clad footsteps marching along the passageway leading to my chamber and opened my eyes for further investigation. Suddenly there appeared in the corner of my vision a large, hooded figure clasping a gleaming knife as long as my forearm. I howled in terror and thrashed against my bonds until the figure bent down to clamp a cold hand against my mouth, muffling the cries for help. Terror raged inside me as the glint of steel neared my right wrist—this man had come to sever my hand! I twisted my arm away from danger as silver sliced through where my flesh had been and watched as the figure brought the deadly weapon near my other hand. The very thought of the impending pain filled me with paralyzing alarm, and from its depths arose a moment of clarity, showing me the way out of this mess. Coherent thoughts pried open my muzzled jaws and allowed me to seize the man's hand with my teeth and bite down with strength only given by the will to survive. Warm blood gushed on my tongue but still I held my grip, determined to delay this phantom's deadly plans. Bone met bone, and the figure unleashed a terrifying scream as if to wake the dead from their tombs as the sound of the steel clattering to the floor reached my grateful ears. I released my hold and the cloaked frame jerked back toward the corner beneath the portrait, knocking his head on a granite tooth protruding from the wall and slumping to the floor, stunned. As he fell, I snatched the knife from the ground beside my head, barely noticing that my wrist was no longer fixed by rope.

With one eye on the perpetrator I struggled to hack through the bindings wrapped around my limbs. The last bind on my right ankle refused to give, but my efforts made it loose enough to let my foot slip through. I slid backwards off the wooden board to the floor as blood rushed to my toes after hours of elevation. I did not have long to relish my liberation, however, for the hooded man was advancing once more. As I hunched over and tried to force my numb legs beneath me, I clutched my weapon in fear. My ears recognized pleading sounds, but his words were so jumbled it seemed as though he were an animal trying to speak. I did not have time to pause and unscramble the meaning of these sounds; my sole concern was to prevent further harm to myself. The shadow walked
toward me, one hand inside his cloak, screaming some incoherent thought, the human eyes ravenous as if possessed by an evil spirit. It would be impossible to reason with such a creature and I knew what must be done to save myself from whatever horrible fate this man had planned for me. As he looked to the cloak and began drawing an arm from beneath the dark fabric, no doubt to extract another weapon, panic clutched me once more. Knowing I only had the strength for a single lunge, I cleverly waited crouched on the floor for the perfect moment to strike. When he was an arm's length away, I rolled toward the hooded figure and kneeled to thrust the knife up into his chest. A low groan of defeat escaped my attacker's lips as he fell to the ground, tormenting me no more.

With the deed done, I recovered the knife, wrapped my bare body in his blood-stained cloak, and turned to exit the chamber, feeling Her eyes boring into my back. At last I would be free from the torture of this place! Excitement to see daylight again, to smell the fresh air, and to feel the wind on my face gave new life to my aching legs. My pace quickened, and I cradled my injured arm as I traveled faster and faster, following the dimly lit granite paths, searching for the exit. I rounded a hundredth corner and my heart leapt at the sight of pure sunlight streaming through the cave mouth. I faintly heard shouts of men speaking in the same garbled language as the man who first approached me, growing closer and closer, their boots stomping against the ground behind me, but it was all drowned in the beautiful color of golden sun. Just steps from the exit, I felt something long and hard collide with my back, knocking the knife from my blood-caked hand and crashing my face into the dirt. Rough shouts sounded from above, and strong hands and feet held my body down as those same rough and bloody ropes, which had held me so captive before, were coiled around my squirming hands. I desperately stared into the light outside, feeling the air of freedom waft over me, when a fist smashed against my head and sent me shrinking into a void of blackness.
Mallory on Everest

Elizabeth Elliott

Mallory, in his last distress,
Recedes into the scree.
Arms stretch up to halt his progress
Ineffectively.

Rock, raw cold, and aggregate smother;
Shortage of breath makes tight the brain.
One leg crossed over the broken other
Signs the final language, pain.

His open back, now flayed and rough,
Draws whiteness from the sun.
Good pickings for the alpine chough,
Fat on the summit when it’s done.

Debris remains: things used to live
Diffused in angled glare,
Nailed boots, equipment primitive,
Bottles drained of English air.
“Matt! Wake up! Matt!”

I got out of bed quickly when my mother called. I wasn’t sure what I was expecting and wasn’t entirely sure what was really going on. I remember the distance from my bedroom to my parents’ bedroom seemed to stretch to an agonizing length that did little but give my fears time to arrange themselves in the room ahead.

I turned the corner and in a picturesque moment I saw my father’s corpse lying on the bed, framed in the indifferent light of a May morning. This moment shattered once I stepped forward and leapt onto the bed. It didn’t take long to notice that he was dead. As soon as I got close enough, I saw a dried trail of blood stained from the left corner of his lip down to his neck. The blood traveled far enough down to seep into the collar of his gray t-shirt. The last image of him wasn’t exactly a flattering one: my pot-bellied father, pale, stiff, and cold, in a pair of white briefs and a bloodstained shirt. It wasn’t what I wanted, but it was what was given to me.

“Dad!” I shouted shakily, but I felt numb. “Dad, get up!” I screamed louder and grabbed his shoulders to shake him. In my mind, I knew it was useless, but I didn’t have anything else I could do. My hand reached down to touch his cheek, and I was shocked by just how cold it was.

“Matt, you know CPR, do it! I’m calling the police!” My mother howled and picked up the simple white telephone that rested on the nightstand near her side of the bed. My head whipped around to receive her command. I briefly watched her frantic, panicking body move erratically. For some reason, I couldn’t be the same way. I almost envied her. I looked back down at my dad.

I remember his face. It’s hard to forget. People always tell you how some people look happy, sad, or frightened when they die, that some emotion lingers with their body. Don’t let anybody convince you that that’s the truth. I didn’t see a damn thing in my father’s face. I saw a ghastly white doppelganger. I saw one of his cheeks filled with blood that had stopped moving while the other side had a dead yellow tint to it. I saw the dried blood on his chin and his wispy brown hair flowing in all different directions; that’s the only thing that really reminded me of him. The rest was just a cruel token that the Grim Reaper had left behind for us.

A dead body has something different about it; my mom slept the whole night beside his corpse without noticing. How could she have real-
ized? Sleep is the cousin of death and they’re eerily identical. The only glaring blemish on the face of death is the lifelessness portrayed by a body not breathing. I placed my left hand flat on his chest and interlocked it with the fingers of my right hand on top. I pressed down like I had been taught. My hands moved with the rhythm of a beating heart, begging for his body to emulate it. I pressed harder now but kept a steady rhythm. I had never done this on an actual human being before, but from my learning I knew what came next was fairly common. I pushed down and up, over and over, until his body hissed at me to leave it be. With each thrust, his ribs and sternum cracked under the pressure of my hands. The dead, weak bones inside his body fractured. It moaned, begging to be free of my bothersome attempts to revive it. I obeyed, unable to continue this useless ritual that did little more than desecrate the body of my father.

“Keep going!” my mother screamed at me. “Come on!” she belted out, as if the louder and more shrill she became the further away she could get from this horrible mess watching her only son feverishly pounding into the chest of her soulmate. I worked like a miner trapped beneath a massive sheet of rock. I worked like my life depended on it, when the only person who really felt better from what I was doing was my helpless mother. I worked for as long as I could before I finally accepted to be crushed by the weight.

“It’s not going to work!” I roared back at her, sitting on top of my father’s body. I saw the pain and confusion in her face. A face that is usually so full of love and joy was now twisted with the frustrating confusion of grief. I felt my voice soften. “He’s been dead for hours,” I said calmly and looked back down at my father’s bloodstained face. I heard my mother put the phone down and scream.

“Oh my God, he’s dead!” That about summed it up. I remember the way her voice cracked and rose as the word “dead” came from her lips. She ran out of the room. I looked down at Dad, but no tears came. My father and I sat there on his bed like we had countless nights. It was just like old times. We sat there in silence underneath the white and green canopy bed while I would try to get inside my father’s mind. I got off of him slowly and stood beside the bed looking down at the body. It wasn’t until then I had realized his right leg was hanging off of the bed. Did he try to get up? Was he getting back into bed when it happened? My mother and I talked about it, and concluded that he was getting back into bed after a typical, late night bathroom break, and before he could get underneath the blankets, it ended. Maybe we only convinced ourselves of that. Maybe he did try to get out and call for help. Maybe he was scared. Maybe he knew it was coming. Maybe he didn’t. I try not to think about it. What difference would it make anyway?
I must’ve been awake when my father died. I was up late that night; I remember I was talking to my girlfriend. I was totally unaware of the events unfolding down the hallway. If I had just walked down the hall, like I did every once in a while, maybe I would’ve had a chance to save him. Maybe breaking my father’s chest plate like an ape would’ve amounted to something then. Maybe it wouldn’t. I try not to think about it. What difference would it make, anyway?

Every story like this has a profound, heartwarming memory. This one does not. The day before my father died was just like any other day. We walked through the house without saying much to one another, him trudging around in briefs and a striped rugby shirt, myself in a t-shirt and shorts. We sat in separate rooms, ate in separate rooms, and went to sleep in separate rooms. We were in separate rooms too often.

After briefly dealing with the police that had arrived, I walked back up to the bedroom slowly, but steadily, forward. I felt the hallway to be much shorter this time around. As I turned the corner into my mother’s bedroom, I saw the body underneath the blankets now, with the blood wiped off of his face. I guess my mother couldn’t handle seeing her only love like that. I came around beside him and knelt down. My head fell down onto his stomach and I looked up at him. That was when the tears started to come. It was no gushing geyser or desperate deluge, just a few drops that landed on the blanket covering his body. I stood there for a long time. I would’ve remained there until every last bit of his body decomposed; I would’ve stood there until I died next to him, but I didn’t get the chance. The EMTs entered abruptly; one quickly apologized when he saw me in there and promptly moved a few feet out of the room to give me privacy. It was at this point that I realized this would be the last time I would ever see my father again; from this point forward, I would only see pictures, videos, lifeless reruns of his life that had ended so suddenly. I couldn’t hold it in. I started to cry for the first time in a long time. The tears left me, but it didn’t feel like enough. I wish I could’ve given more tears, more screaming, and more anguish, as if to show his lifeless body how much I would miss him. It was no use. After I quietly told my father that I loved him and said goodbye, I left the room. That was it. My father was nothing except a pile of ashes now.

The last thing that came out of my father’s mouth was not love. There were no words of wisdom or gentle goodbyes. The last thing that left his mouth was not hate. There was no violence or fevered tantrum. The last thing that left my father’s mouth was a few droplets of blood and a final breath that carried him away to wherever one ends up when their time is over. I knew my father was afraid to die. I knew he, like myself, was an
atheist. I don’t know where he is now, but I know he’s gone forever. I won’t waste my time trying to convince myself otherwise.

I’m expected to say how appreciative I have become since then, how I’ve never taken a day for granted. I’m expected to say how I’ve found God, and that I believe that my father will guide me into heaven. I can’t do that, though. The truth is, I’ve become cold, colder than the corpse of my father in that early morning. The truth is, I don’t want God. I never did, and I especially don’t anymore. The truth is, I think I might be better off this way. I may never be truly happy if I keep on like this, but I’d rather live a sad truth than a wonderful lie.

My father didn’t live to see me turn twenty years old. He didn’t live to see me marry a woman I love, or feel the touch of his grandkids. My father will never ever know what type of man I will become. He will never know the pain or joy I feel, the heartbreak or elation. He’s nothing now, and I’ve accepted that. I don’t know what the hardest part about all of this is. There are too many things to mention.

This is the last memory of my father. My life began and ended at that moment. I can’t count how many times I told my father I loved him, but I can tell you that it wasn’t enough; I’m left with these words forever stuck inside of me. I’m left with heartache and days thinly veiled with assertions that I’m doing just fine. I’m left with nightmares and dreams that give me no comfort. I’m left with bruises worth their weight in gold and memories worth their weight in ashes.
Empire

Brendan Raleigh

A shipwreck, the farmhouse
Stands alone, disturbingly undisturbed.
Without a soul to regale with
Embellished tales of fruitful harvests
And good-humored gatherings.
Even after all, blind to its failure,
Busy hoping to fend off reality
With the blunted blade of deception.
Proof of its lies lie throughout
And within its forlorn fields;
Its fences rotting and unkempt,
Ragweed creeping like a cautious general
Across the blood-soaked battleground;
Family photos damaged and defiled
By carelessness, haste, and hate.
Its silos, soulless silhouettes
Sitting atop the misty, sullen hilltops.
And yet, its foundation stands,
A tribute to and reminder of
The desolation of a fallen empire:
Blessed with fortune, cursed with pride.
“Why do we tune?” he asks. Silence fills the room, each player in the ensemble holding their rest. “Anybody?” More silence. “No? It’s because we care.” Ross, wearing his classic Viking helmet, shuffles across the room to a tune that only he can hear. He throws us a follow-up question: “Anyone know who said that?” “Hendrix,” I respond. “It’s Mr. Jimi Hendrix—Yes! Very good.” The routine continues as a freshman braves his horn. “Wicked shawp,” says Ross.

Ross Adams lives in an alien world that everyone wants to be a part of, whether it’s the music he hears that we don’t, the music he can play that we can’t, or the impressive level of chill that he has cultivated over his career. Since studying at Berklee College of Music (’70), he has been a presence on the Boston music scene. Ross understands the music language inside and out: from arrangements to composition, from performing to recording, this man lives music. Most respected men are said to be the ones you want to have a beer with, but Ross is the type you’d want to jam with. He is a bodhisattva of sorts, and he has lines of people waiting for him to lead them to music-nirvana.

Each player sounds a hopeful note trying to match that of the piano and please the music god. He adjusts each horn by microscopic increments till the entire band meets his high standards. From a manila folder stuffed with an enormous stack of manuscripts, he pulls out his master chart. Another note on Ross: he refuses to recognize the charts by their actual name. “Take out Hey Halsey.” A chuckle ripples throughout the band (Halsey is our trumpet player) as they rummage through their folders.

Ross’s office, a music history exhibition, is filled with old amplifiers, guitars, posters, music magazines, and recording technology. Cautiously, I plot out a piece of land to sit on, finally finding a place equidistant from the tottering columns of music and the litter of instruments. He reclines in his swivel chair, seamlessly blending in with the antique-filled room, a history book left open. I ask about the chapter on childhood. “Terrible. Horrible,” he responds immediately. Ross grew up in Jackson Heights in Queens, New York in a house full of Holocaust survivors. They were “flipped out, fear-based people,” and yet somehow, the man who sits before me is the defini-
tion of relaxed. Perhaps Ross was adopted, or maybe the man was destined for something far greater.

Two saxes bicker in the front row as Ross snaps his fingers, locking in on his tempo. The clock keeps ticking as time slips through his fingers. Ross, however, remains patient; sound comes after silence. He toots the white gym whistle, directing the traffic of voices towards the music. Then he counts off, “A-one, a-two, a-you-know-what-to-do.” A cacophony of harmonies floods the room; such a small space isn’t built to contain such vibrations.

“It picked me; I didn’t pick it,” is the classic response all musicians give, but Ross claims he’s wanted to play music his whole life, “basically ever since I was born.” The amusing image comes to mind of a baby holding a guitar twice its size. That was Ross.

“How did you know?” I ask.

“Well, I had an affinity for playing the guitar, and I practiced all the time without being told; that’s how you know,” he says. So, in high school, he began studying under Sal Salvador, studying the art of the jazz guitar inside and out. Thus began a legend.

Substituting for our flu-struck guitarist, Ross begins his solo. His fingers churn, producing the smooth sounds of America; it is buttery. With the brass supporting Ross, I respond with four measures of light flourishes on the snare, cymbal scratches and syncopation. We continue the call-and-response called “trading fours,” where the soloist holds a sort of conversation with the drummer; I present a counter argument to each argument.

“Role models?” he asks, “What kind of role models? Like musical role models?”

“Anyone inspiring really,” I suggest.

“Well there was this guy, George Bien, B-I-E-N, who was a monster, player inspired me to play hard.”

I shrug.

“And, of course, there were the recordings. You know, Wes Montgomery and people like that.”

“Ah.”

“My father was a rather prejudiced type of person, and I was listening to all of this ‘black music,’ Art Blakey and Miles Davis.”

“No good?”

“No. I was this white Jewish guy listening to Wes and my father was not very happy about that. My father wasn’t very happy about anything.”

“And you still did it anyways?”

“You know one good thing he gave me was a work ethic. He was a hardworking guy. The only…the only…” Ross trails off in a nervous chuckle. He recomposes himself. “The only guidance he ever gave me was this: he
said ‘pick a profession that you love, and being paid for it is even better.’ So I said ‘all right, maybe I’ll be a musician’ and he freaked out.”

Nineteen sixty-six swings around and with “the blessing” of his father, Ross leaves New York to study at Berklee School of Music in Boston, the only school that offered guitar studies. “It was the only school I could apply to, so I went.” Ross was on the soul train of fate.

His father provided Ross with a stipend each year until he was a senior in college. “Just remember,” Ross mimics, in a nasally tone, “when you’re a senior in college, that’s it. No more money.” But by junior year, Ross had already begun working. He was a student by day and player by night: recording, playing in pit bands, jazz clubs; you name it, Ross did it. “Back then, every street in Boston had at least two bars on it that hired at least one band apiece. So there was plenty of work. There was tons of work and you could be working all the time. I was,” Ross recalls. In the next forty years of his career, Ross would never celebrate New Year’s without playing in a gig.

_Bwaaaahh._ The horn wails and Ross closes his eyes, deep in concentration. The band struggles to match the sound he has envisioned: the notes have color and shape; each sound has life and energy. My heart races to synchronize with the pulse of the band. The bass thumps to my kick drum; my right foot leads the waltz. The trombone misses his entrance, disturbing Ross’s dream. 

“Hold it! Hold it!” The band falls apart and dissipates, the notes scatter all over the floor. “Guys, we have to practice our parts; that’s a B-flat on measure thirty-seven. Let’s take it again, from the top.”

Practice is everything when it comes to mastering an instrument. Portraits of music icons like Jimi hang above us as Ross recounts the thousands of other Rosses he had met in his lifetime. He throws in a plethora of big jazz names, band mates, and teachers like Carl Rowan, Victor Babelov, and “that guy named Horowitz,” all of whom were an inspiration for him.

The one thing they had in common: “They’re all crazy people,” who practiced ten hours daily. After Berklee, he continued to study jazz with Charlie Minakis, guitar virtuoso. “You could practice twelve hours a day between lessons after seeing Charlie, come back the next week, and you still wouldn’t have covered everything he gave you.”

I inquire about the highs and lows of the sixties and seventies and upon hearing the word “regret,” Ross grows very solemn.

“You ever heard of Tony Williams?” he asks. I shake my head.

“No? Well Tony Williams was a vicious jazz drummer who played with guys like Miles Davis, Ron Carter, and Wayne Shorter,” he stops himself. “Tony Williams was separated from his mother too early.”
“Why’s that?” I ask, and Ross exhales and recounts a harsh reality:
“When you’re on the road for nineteen plus hours with nothing to
do but twiddle your thumbs and get to the next venue, if you’re not disci-
plined you get lost. There’s a numbness and a boredom that can come over
time if you don’t have spiritual practices or you’re emotionally unhealthy;
that’s where the Amy Winehouses in the world come in.”

The silence sinks in for an uncomfortably long time. Finally, I ven-
ture, a man on the wire.
“How’d you stay straight-edged?”
“I learned my lessons the hard way, ” Ross sighs. “After a while it
was obvious, you know what to do. I wanted to get ahead. It’s a straight and
narrow.”

The tenor sax begins his solo and a sweet nostalgic aura washes
over the chaos. Ross lowers his head with his eyes closed, and whispers the
unheard words that the melody traces across the empty space. I wonder
what kind of insight that forty years of music can bring to your ears and
out your mouth. He speaks a completely different language. I close my own
eyes and attempt to listen. I listen to the melody, the supporting harmonies,
and search for the hidden messages that the composers of the past tran-
scribed. I find nothing and Ross grows very distant.

“I have this cousin,” begins Ross, as he completes a spin maneuver
with his swivel chair, “seventeen years older than me.” He snickers. “He’d
tell me I was the ugliest baby, but that’s not the point.” His cousin was a
classical guy. “Season tickets to the philharmonic, a big deal.” This cousin
held a conservative view on music and concerned himself with only one
thing. “I’d occasionally show him the stuff I listen to, stuff that’s more out
there, and he’d ask me, ‘Where’s the melody?’ but that wasn’t all there was
to it.”

I nod, pretending to understand.
“He’s an intellectual, whereas I’m more of a street guy. I’m more
funk. Funk is a feeling, so I can relate.”

“Funk is a feeling?” I question his diction.
Ross presses on, “It’s not just the notes; there’s something behind
the notes. Music says things to people that words can’t. There’s something
else going on with it, and I think you’ll understand this too.”

Finally, I surrender and ask the big question: “So, what is it? What’s
the point?”
Ross smiles; he lets the question burn in my mind for some time
before responding.
“What are we trying to do? We’re trying to connect emotionally, or
even spiritually, with each other,” he says.

The truth sinks in slowly, and I try to reason through what I’m
hearing. Surely Ross is messing with me. Ross recalls a concert where Ste-
vie Wonder asks the famous question, “Are you with me?”

“Whether you’re in Symphony Hall, or whether you’re in a bar
someplace, listening to a great band; are we connecting? That’s what it’s
about, man. You feel the energy.”

That’s what it’s all about: the words behind the notes, the foreign
language I’ve been trying to decipher. Music goes way beyond listening or
playing; it is the people.

Ross allows me to sit in contemplation for a short time before con-
tinuing.

“Good music is of the moment,” he says.

“Just the present?” I ask.

“You can’t be anyplace else. Of the moment is the whole game.”

I struggle with this. “What about the past? Where would we be
without Beethoven, Mozart, the classics?”

“Well, that’s exactly it,” he says. “You are taking things from the past
that you connect to and those educate you to do things in the spirit of the
moment.”

I am still skeptical, like a child clinging to Santa Claus.

“The issue is,” Ross persists, “we as humans have a hard time being
of the moment because that means you have to let go of the past and that
the future hasn’t occurred yet; of the moment is not going any place, but be
here right now.”


“You’re not going anywhere, and yet you get someplace.”

The words finally settle in my mind. The fruit falls from the tree.

Colors and harmonies ripple throughout the room, disturbing the
ocean of silence, as the melody soars above the tide. My hands move by
themselves, reacting and cooperating with the band, an organ in the body
of music. The tune is lost in crashing waves, but in it, I find meaning. Ross,
his eyes clenched, holds his hands up, reaching, trying to grasp this one
moment. Melody resonates; she is ascending to the heavens. We sustain the
final chord, lost and found in this one moment of pure harmony: connec-
tion. His hands drop. “That’s enough for today.” I open my eyes.
The Ride Home

Liz Williams

Julie took the window seat, picking up the skirt of her chiffon dress as she sat, and turned a cold shoulder to her husband. They looked out of place on the train, Archer dressed in a black suit and tie and Julie in an evening gown, but neither one had wanted to try driving through downtown Boston on a Saturday night. It was raining outside and Julie had held her handbag over her head as they made their way from the restaurant to the train station, ignoring Archer's offer of their umbrella. She could see in the window reflection that the ends of her hair had started to curl in the moisture. Even though they were seated next to one another, Julie had no intention of speaking to her husband. She glared out her window, squinting into the darkness that lay just beyond the reflections of the passengers in the train.

“Hey,” said Archer, nudging her with his knee. “Can we talk about this?”

Julie's legs pulled away at his touch, and she shifted more pointedly into the corner, refusing to face him. He had ruined the evening. The dinner had been wonderful at first—all of Archer's company was in attendance and a tuxedoed waitstaff set before them shrimp cocktails, watercress salads, and filet mignon. At their table sat Jim and Don and their wives, who were fond of gossiping and shopping and sported diamonds that dangled from their necks and ears. Julie had little in common with them, but she enjoyed their company all the same. They were always placed at the same table and Julie got a kick out of their meaningless chatter about the latest shoe fashions and which restaurants could offer the best glass of wine.

She looked forward to the annual company dinner and selected her outfit weeks in advance. It was often the only chance she had all year to dress up for a formal event. A four-course dinner would be followed by speeches from the company executives and then a few hours of dancing at the end. The dancing was her favorite part of the evening and she could not wait to show off her beautiful new gown to the other wives in attendance. Archer would hold her close and the look in his eyes would remind her how proud he was to be her husband. But she didn’t get the chance to twirl and float across the dance floor this year. No, Archer had ruined it all.

The train pulled out of the station and the lights on buildings outside began to trickle by. Julie had insisted to Archer that they cut out early, skipping the dancing altogether, and she showered her apologies on those
at their table as they left the glittering hall. She had no desire to dance. It was just past ten o’clock; her kids would be sound asleep in bed when they got home and she would have to make up an excuse to give the babysitter as to why they were home early. She would talk to Archer then, in the privacy of their bedroom where no one would be around to witness her tears and anger.

“Surprise!” he had whispered, leaning over to her ear as the room erupted in applause around them. The CEO had just announced Archer had been promoted to Head of Finance and would be relocating to the company’s headquarters in Washington, D.C.

“You must be so excited!” the faces beaming around her exclaimed. Jim and Don smiled at her knowingly and their wives babbled on and on about the shopping district in Georgetown.

“Oh, it’s glorious!” said Jim’s wife, reaching over her husband to touch Julie’s arm. Her thick eyelashes, laden with mascara, bounced up and down in front of Julie, with a fleck of glitter stuck to one of the lids. Julie could not have cared less about shopping. Her cheeks soon ached from forced smiles and giddy profusions of “thank you” to her husband’s co-workers. She waited patiently for the first opportunity to leave the hall.

“Jules, I thought you’d be happy!” said Archer, a little too loudly. His voice cut through the quiet hum of the train. Julie checked the reflection in her window to see if any of the passengers had taken note of his words. Across the aisle from them, a boy who looked to be in his twenties with dark spiky hair and wearing a lime green t-shirt, rocked along to music coming from oversized headphones. In front of him she could make out the profiles of two middle-aged women looking at some sort of electronic device in one of their hands—a phone or an iPad, perhaps. Everyone else in view was either resting their eyes or sleeping.

She could see a slice of Archer’s face, soft and pleading, with his dark brown eyes trained on the back of her head. He looked pathetic, a big, sad man trying to reconcile with his offended wife—such a contrast from the man who addressed his company from a podium two hours before with an aura of confidence and charisma she usually found so attractive.

“You should have asked me,” she said, without turning to face him. “I wanted to surprise you. You always talked about moving somewhere warmer.”

She watched his expression in the reflection. It was true, she had mentioned wanting to move further south. She had grown up in southern Pennsylvania and had never really gotten used to the cold of the northeast. In all fairness, she would have loved to move to Washington, D.C. She could have used a change of scenery and would be sure to find work there. But he hadn’t asked her.
“I’m happy here,” she said, turning to meet his eyes for the first time since dinner. “I have a great job, my friends are all here, the kids are in a good school. What makes you think I’d want to just pick up and leave everything? Did you even stop to think how I would feel about this?”

One of the middle-aged women cast a casual glance toward them. Julie turned back to the window. The conversation would have to wait.

“I’m sorry,” said Archer. “I should have asked you.”

She crossed her arms over her chest and watched the lights go by outside. Soon the train slowed as it approached the next station. Julie could see the platform teeming with men and women in red and white jerseys, some with faces painted, others sporting green or navy blue baseball caps. The doors opened and a mass of people crowded the train, chanting “Pa-pi! Pa-pi!” Julie craned her neck above the seats to watch them shuffle down the aisle with arms raised and faces jovial.

“Those damned Yankees better be on a bus home right now, crying to their mommas,” one yelled to his friend. “Big Papi showed ‘em where it’s at. Hit that baby outta the park!”

She looked to Archer to gauge his reaction. He moved his knees just slightly toward her to avoid the throng of people passing by.

“You catch the game?” a man said, leaning down to push his face into Archer’s. Julie recoiled from the smell of cheap beer and cigarettes on his breath.

“No,” said Archer, not looking up.

“We POUNDED them!” He shot up at the word “pounded” and beat a fist into his hand to demonstrate. “12-3!” he called over his shoulder, continuing down the aisle.

Archer turned to Julie and rolled his eyes. She did not react. The rowdy group filled the aisle with their chants and shouting. Julie ran a hand through her damp hair and turned back to the window. She was in no mood to deal with inebriated baseball fans. In the window reflection, she watched as one of the men leaned backwards and belted into the aisle, “Suh-whelleeet Caroline!” to which those around him chimed in, “Bah bah bah!” with fists raised to the air. Their voices carried through the once-quiet train as they shouted along to the words of the song. Julie barely resisted the urge to whip around and yell at them to shut up. She had been through enough for one night, and could not take much more. Toward the front of the car, groggy faces turned around to view the source of the noise.

A man in a Youkilis jersey came down the aisle chanting, “Let’s go Red Sox! Yankees suu-uuck!” with hands swaying above him as he walked. Just as he was about to pass Archer and Julie, the man stopped and cast a nasty glare at Julie, who had turned away from the window to frown at him as he passed. “What are you all dressed up for, pretty? Coming from some
swanky party? Yeah? Think you’re better than the rest of us?”

“I’m not the one drunk on a train,” she retorted, and the sharp words surprised even her. Archer, caught off guard by her reaction, turned, and she knew he was silently pleading with her not to say anything more. But the damage had been done and the man’s cheeks colored with rage.

“OhHHH!” he bellowed, tossing back his head and exposing just a sliver of his thick beer belly. “Got ourselves a smartie here! Bet you can’t wait to get rid of this one, huh?” He stuck his face in Archer’s and jutted his chin out toward Julie. Her pulse quickened as his thick-bearded face hovered in front of Archer and she realized the situation could get ugly fast if they were not careful. Just as she was about to apologize and try to smooth things over, Archer cut in.

“Actually it’s just the opposite,” he said, facing the man for the first time. His voice was calm and steady. “She’s one in a million.”

Something in the evenness of his tone told her he was serious, and she wanted to believe that he was.

“Screw that,” said the man with a snort, and he continued down the aisle, cursing as he went. Julie relaxed. One in a million. The sporadic shouting behind them continued and one of the middle-aged women turned around to glare at the noisy men. Her face twisted into a frown that clashed with her wool pink sweater and she let out a violent “Shhhh!”

“Oh, shut up, y’old lady!” one of the men responded.

A collective gasp came from the front of the train as horrified passengers turned to see who had shouted the insult at the poor woman. Julie looked at Archer and barely suppressed a laugh. It was not so much the exchange that she found funny, but the situation as a whole. She never could have guessed the evening would end up the way it did. While Jim and Don and all the other coworkers and their wives danced the night away, she and Archer were stuck on a train surrounded by a horde of drunk baseball fans. And maybe that was exactly what they needed—a complete change of plans, something unexpected and uncomfortable to get them to think about their life together in a different light. Archer squeezed Julie’s hand and she pressed her hand into his.

“I don’t have to take it,” he said. “I can call my boss up tomorrow and tell him it’s all off. I don’t want to do this if you’re not happy.”

Archer started to apologize again, but his words were muffled by another round of shouting from behind. Julie laced her fingers through Archer’s and studied his full brown eyes.

“Let’s go to Washington,” she said.
On the nights when my limbs are too heavy to dance

Taylor Andrews

There is a busy street outside my window, the cars pushing near and then away—steady, a metal wave. Where are you going? Their headlights swim against my wall, late-afternoon sun softening every sharp edge, like I’m underwater, everything blends and the only sounds are the quiet rush and swell. I want to run barefoot in the street, stop them, stand at their windows in my long shirt, unwashed hair and all, say where are you going? Can I open this door, climb into your backseat and go there as well? We’ll eat cold mashed potatoes in your kitchen, sit in strict wooden chairs on frigid yellow tile floors. I can make the coffee. You keep driving.

Where are you going?

There are people passing by my window in groups of two’s and three’s laughing; they are blissful—I am trying not to breathe. The world slows, my heartbeat its only motion, I stretch a small hand towards the door. I am sure this hand could fit in yours.
You ignore it, walk on.
Your shadows blend with the
light of the retreating sun, how
silently it leaves me here.
Where are you going?
Maybe I could slide on boots
and come with you, walk to
the fields and lie there in
the embrace of the ghosts that
fill this place. You can tell me
all about your day.
Swiftly, surely,
you walk away.

Where are you going?

Meanwhile I am
sunken in half sleep and
steeping in the skin smell
of my pillow, listening to the
Earth's slow creak as it
pirouettes with the stars.
It does not notice how alone it is,
how far away the song.
It dances on.
Your Life as a Minority at Gettysburg College

Margaret J. Johnson

You grow up in a city that is predominately people of color. You are happy in this place because you fit in and are not judged. Yet sometimes the fairer-skinned people of color are put on a pedestal. Even though your mother is also fair-skinned, you hear her saying that the Puerto Ricans are always rude to her at work. You hear her saying that the Dominicans never want to hire her, but are quick to hire another Dominican if he or she applies for that same job. You like where you live because you know that everyone knows what it feels like to be a minority.

You graduate from a high school that is also mostly people of color. You finally get accepted to a college and even though it was not your first choice, you are elated. You arrive on campus on a hot mid-August morning and all you see are white people. Talk about culture shock. Let’s see how many dark faces you can count, 1...2...is that it?

After being at this school for a few weeks, you begin to think about transferring to a college that is more “diverse,” whatever that means. Every weekend you hear the girls in your hall yelling about how they cannot wait to go fratting. They are excited to dress up, dance with guys, drink, and hook-up. You and a group of your friends (black friends, to be exact) decide to go fratting. You walk into the frat and the first comment a brother says to you is, “Oooo, we have some dancers in here today!” Apparently, all black people can dance. You are there for about an hour and still no guy has asked you or your friends to dance. You wonder why. Is it what you are wearing? Is it because you are black? Are they intimidated by you? If not, then why do they always dance with the white girls and not with you? You remember a friend telling you that they are intimidated and are not used to being around black people. You understand that many of them went to a boarding school and have not been around a lot of black people, but honestly, what is there to be afraid of? What could you possibly do to harm them? If the guys think you are not attracted to them, they are wrong. Skin color should not determine your interest in a person; and it doesn’t.

You decide to go fratting again, to give it another try. You and your friends walk into a different frat and the first thing you hear is “Look, the black girls are here.” Not again, you say in your head. Does someone always
have to make a comment every time you and your friends walk into a frat?! The music is not that good anyway. You like listening to all types of music, but you cannot dance to all types of music. All they play here is techno and hard rock. They play songs like “Around the World” by Daft Punk. How are you supposed to dance to this? All the drunk brothers are jumping up and down and spilling beer on you and your friends so you decide to leave.

You and your classmates are asked to write a group laboratory report in your Biology 112 lab. When it is time to work on the project, your group members do not want to hear what you have to say; instead, they talk over you. You make a suggestion about how to write the results section of the lab and they act like they do not hear you. You ask a question and they all look down or they say, “I don't know.” You tell one of the girls that she wrote the works cited section the wrong way and she says, “What are you talking about? This is how I write it in my chemistry class.” But this is not a chemistry class, stupid, you say in your head. You ask her to send you the works cited section so that you can do it the right way and she says that there is no point. This girl is getting on your last nerve. You ask your roommate, who is also part of your group, to send you the section so that you can edit it. A few weeks later when the lab results come back, you get an A on the works cited section and a 91 on the lab. Do they think you are stupid because you are black? If yes, then how did you get into this school? If you speak up and defend yourself, they will say that you are “ghetto,” whatever that means. If you do not speak up, then this will happen again and again. You are in a double-bind and there is no way out.

You are in your room talking to friends on Facebook when one of your friends bangs on the door. You open it and see that she is infuriated. “What's the matter?” you say. She tells you that she went upstairs to help a friend with his physics homework and his roommate said that she says “ask” like a Southern darky. What the hell does that mean? You become angry, too. Your friend tells you that he said he has the right to say this because he is from Georgia. So being from the South gives him a good reason to be racist, right? You and your friend are from New York City and you have a New York accent. Most people from Britain have an English accent and most people from Africa have an African accent. You tell your friend not to be mad because, obviously, he is ignorant and does not know what he is talking about but she decides to bring it up at the next eRace meeting, which is a weekly discussion about race on campus. Sometimes you feel like there is no point in getting angry anymore because nothing will be done, especially in this school where the majority is Caucasian. This school, and other institutions, do things that favor the majority. For example, the music being played in the frat houses favor the majority of the school, which are the Caucasians. If most minorities on campus do not like
the music, then why will they go fratting?

A week later, you and your sophomore friend decide to have breakfast together. You ask her what her plans are for the weekend and she says she has nothing planned. You ask her about sophomore housing and she gives you some advice on the best housing and how to get in next year. She tells me that even though she likes living in the College Apartments she was called the “N-Word” twice by the people that lived near the campus. But she is not even dark-skinned! Unbelievable! Is everyone racist around here?

You experienced culture shock during your first semester. You are now in your second semester and learning to adjust. You decide to be more open-minded about getting to know new people; everyone here is not an ignorant racist. You have made some really good friends so far. You have three more years in this school, so you better make the best of it or it will be a miserable three years. It is your choice.
Epitaph for Elise

Victoria Reynolds

I have never been more aware of how dense the earth is than when I am standing six feet above you, unable to reach you no matter how I try.
Empty Room
Digital Photography

Maddie Price
Curiosity
Digital Photography
Nate Fitch
Emily
Ink on Paper

Chelsea Anspach
Purple Eva
Watercolor

Chelsea Anspach
Untitled
Watercolor
Silvia Chon
Drum Point
Watercolor

Chelsea Anspach
Hazard Tsunami
Lineoleum Print
Lisa Del Padre
Tulips
Digital Photography
Maddie Price
Untitled
White Pencil on Black Board

Silvia Chon
Lincoln
Pen and Ink

Megan Zagorski
Pollen
Digital Photography
Maddie Price
Past and Personal
Video Performance Stills

Jarret Wasko
London
Acrylic Paint over Collage
Taylor Andrews
On a Tree
Pre-printed Woodcut and Sharpie
Lisa Del Padre
I’ll need some gin
For what I saw
Diminished in
The wash of straw:

A spray of ants,
Fresh fluff of mold,
And rheumy glance
Tucked in the gold.
Everyone knows who I am. They wish they didn’t. But they all know. My face was plastered across every front page, every television screen.

“Teen Girl Kills Best Friend.”

It’s a lie. And they know it’s a lie now, but it’s too late for me. Everyone gets their fifteen minutes of fame. There’s the “Star Wars Kid” and the “Talking Twins” and the “Laughing Baby.” And now there is the “Teen Girl Who Killed Her Best Friend.” And that is all I will ever be.

They found me innocent. Twelve people who had never seen me before believed me when I told them I loved her more than I loved my own life. I want to tell everyone who looks at me that way that I was found innocent. Those are the rules—I went to court and I was innocent until proven guilty, and they couldn’t prove anything.

I told my parents I wanted to return to school and have things go back to normal. Like that was ever going to happen. So now I spend most of the day hiding in the art wing. I don’t really paint, but I sit in front of a canvas and hold a paintbrush. If anyone walks past, they only glance. They can’t see my face from the doorway and they just assume I’m an artist. No one asks questions. I’ve noticed that about people. They like things nice and simple. Girl + art room = artist. Girl + courtroom = killer.

“Hey,” someone says. I turn to look at the boy standing in the doorway but I don’t say anything. I don’t know what to say. No one has ever come in here before. “What are you doing here?”

It takes me longer than it should to come up with an answer. No one has ever bothered to ask me what I was doing. No one has ever bothered to ask me anything. I wave my hand toward the canvas. “Painting. Duh.”

He laughs quickly, in a way that isn’t really a laugh, and puts his backpack on the ground before walking toward me. “I doubt it,” he says.

“Yeah? Why’s that? You think the killer girl can’t get any enjoyment out of art?” I snap. It’s easier to be rude than to be polite. People expect you to be rude when you’re a killer. They expect you to have no respect for authority, to cut class, to wear all black, and to dye your hair. I’m just trying to make things easier for them.

I learned once in psychology that when people are very young, they create little folders in their brains called schemas. They learn the charac-
teristics of a table and make a folder for it so that every time they see a piece of furniture, they can analyze its characteristics and decide whether it belongs in the table folder or not. This all happens in milliseconds. When presented with something they’ve never seen before, people don’t know how to categorize it. Their brains freeze up. They keep searching through their folders to find one that fits the characteristics they see, but they can’t find it. This makes them uncomfortable. I don’t fit into most people’s schemas. I don’t belong with their idea of a killer. I used to try to prove them wrong, to be the exact opposite of a killer, but it only made them more confused. I’m doing them a favor this way.

The boy laughs again, but this time it’s a proper laugh. He’s actually amused. My heart starts to speed up, and I’m not sure why, but suddenly I’m scared. He’s laughing. Why is he laughing?

“I didn’t say that. But I doubt you’re painting that picture.”

“Why?” I demand, and this time I stand up and cross my arms. When I raise my voice at other people, they cower and start to apologize or run away. They are scared that the killer girl is going to snap and kill them like she killed Jessica.

“Because it’s mine.”

He takes the paintbrush out of my hand. The clean, dry paintbrush. I don’t know what to say to him. I need a comeback. I need to say something. “Oh…” He laughs at me again and now I really am angry. I push past him and grab my backpack. I need to go to Chemistry anyway. Playing hooky is one thing, but failing a class and having to repeat a grade would be unbearable.

“What do you like it?” he asks as I leave the room, but I don’t answer him. Idiot. I’m an idiot. Of course it was someone’s painting. It’s always someone’s painting. Did I think it just magically changed overnight while I wasn’t there?

§

My mom hung the rainbow Christmas lights on my wall. She said the room needed cheering up, but it wasn’t the room she was trying to make smile. At night, with all of the other lights turned off, the red bulbs overpower the other colors and the whole room is lit with a hazy red glow. Like hell. Like the dress Jessica wore to soph hop. Like blood.

That night, I lie in my bed and, for the first time in months, I don’t think about blood. I don’t think about the pictures they shoved under my nose, telling me to look at them, look at them, see what you did. Instead, I think about the boy. I think about feeling like an idiot and saying nothing. If you say nothing in court, they think you’re guilty. If you say you’re
innocent, they think you’re guilty too. Really, there’s no winning. Not really. Even when they let you go, everyone thinks you’re guilty. Your best friend’s parents look at you like they’ve never seen you before. But I don’t think about that tonight. I think about needing a comeback. I used to love to banter, but I’ve gotten so out of practice it takes me two hours to finally come up with a clever response.

The next day, I walk to the art room, but he isn’t there. Of course not—I spent three weeks there and never saw him. His free period must coincide with my chemistry class. I really shouldn’t miss chem again, but I can’t let him think he got to me. I can’t let him know that I hide in front of his painting and stare at it and wish I could disappear into that landscape and never return.

I wait in the art room until he comes in.
“You again,” he says, and he smiles like we’re friends. He should know better. My friends end up dead.

I open my mouth to spin my clever excuse, but before I can start to speak he says, “You never answered my question.”
“What question?”
“Do you like it?” He jerks his head toward the painting, and for a second I am tempted to leave again, or else tell him it’s terrible. But I don’t. I stand in front of it and really study it: the branches, the color of the leaves on the ground, the shadows.
“It needs a person,” I tell him finally. Me. It needs me, hidden from prying eyes in the shadows of the trees. No one would bother me there. No one would expect anything from me. They wouldn’t think they know me just because they read a newspaper article about me ages ago.
“It’s supposed to be a landscape,” he says.
I shrug. I don’t care what he thinks of my critique. If I care about what everyone thinks of me, I’ll go insane.
“Am I supposed to paint you?” he asks.
I shake my head and head for the door. He doesn’t get it.
“Wait, I’m sorry. That was rude. Thanks for telling me. Most people just say it’s good and move on.”
“I’m not most people. I’m sure you know that.”
“Yeah, yeah, I know.”

We stay there, motionless. I don’t want to ask him his name, but I know I can’t keep calling him “boy” in my head. After a few moments, he solves the problem for me by saying, “I’m James, by the way.”

I open my mouth to tell him I’m Emma, but realize I don’t have to. I try to find a response, but nothing comes to mind. Finally I say, “I need to go to class.”

He nods. And just like yesterday, he calls me as I’m leaving the
I shrug like it isn’t a big deal. Yeah, so? It becomes a routine, sitting in the art room with him, watching as he adds detail and highlights to his forest. For the first few days, we don’t speak much, but that soon changes.

“So my teacher told me this looks too much like a postcard. What does that even mean?” he asks me one day, staring critically at his landscape. He doesn’t sound too upset about it. I don’t look up from my math homework, but I reply anyway.

“I’m not the artist. Maybe you should make the sky red or something.” He laughs. I don’t know why he finds everything I say so amusing, but it’s sort of nice to spend time with someone who isn’t afraid to be alone in the same room with me.

The door opens, letting in the sounds of the hallway. James and I both look up, startled. No one has ever come in here during lunch before. A girl I recognize but don’t actually know walks in, her eyes entirely focused on James and her mouth open to talk before she’s even fully in the room.

“Hey, James, have you seen the—” She stops suddenly when she catches sight of me. She stares at me, then at James, then back again, completely unable to comprehend what she is seeing.

“Seen what?” he prompts her. I glare at her until she pulls her gaze away from me.

“Nothing, never mind. It’s not important.”

She turns to leave but I call her back in. I am so sick of everyone running away from me. “Don’t leave on my account. Go on, ask him. I’m not stopping you.” She mouths an incoherent sentence and flees. I watch her go, out the door, down the hallway, speedily walking away. Of course. What did I expect? Just because James talks to me when we’re alone in the art room doesn’t mean I’ve suddenly become normal. From behind me, I hear him sigh softly.

“I’m sorry. Look, don’t worry about her, okay? Who cares, right?”

Right. Who cares what they think? I can’t bring myself to turn around and settle back down in my seat. James comes to stand behind me, and puts his hand on my shoulder so gently I can barely feel it, like he isn’t sure he should be touching me. Apart from my parents, no one has dared to touch me since the trial.

“I didn’t kill her,” I say finally, after the silence has gone on for too
long.

“I never said you did.”

He hadn’t. But I don’t know why. I step away from him and sit down on one of the stools. He doesn’t start painting again.

I can’t stop thinking about the trial. They told me she was dead and accused me all in one breath. I never got to mourn her. My lawyer kept telling me, “Focus, Emma. We need to convince them you’re innocent. We need a strategy.” How could I focus? My best friend was dead. She’s dead. There will be no more laughter, no more sleepovers. No late night texts about homework or morning talks about our favorite TV shows.

I don’t look at him. I can’t. I stare at the paints on the table. I’m overcome with a powerful desire to grab the red paint and smear it over his landscape. To spread it over my skin and stain my clothes with it, with red, with Jessica’s blood. It’s a stupid thought. A crazy thought. But knowing that doesn’t make it any easier to ignore.

“Look,” he says, almost too loudly. “I’m finished.” He grabs his easel and pulls it closer to me. I look. The landscape is beautiful. He’s added highlighting to the trees. The sunlight cuts through the dark shadows and makes the tips of the branches glow.

“You didn’t listen to my advice,” I say, so I don’t have to tell him that it makes me want to cry.

“Yes, I did.”

I look again, but there is no one in the woods that I can see. “Then where’s the girl?”

He is quiet for a moment. “She’s hiding. She’s too scared to come out.” Suddenly, I don’t think we’re talking about the picture anymore. I don’t know what to say to his reply, and I’m really not in the mood to talk about my inner feelings, so I deflect.

“That’s a cop-out if I ever heard one.”

He laughs.

“But really, though,” I tell him, and I try to make my voice sound sincere, “it’s good.”

He smiles. “Thanks. I think I’ll enter it into the competition.”

“What if I’d said it was terrible?”

He laughs, and then suddenly his face gets serious. “That’s my favorite thing about canvas. You can make as many mistakes as you want, completely ruin it, and then you can repaint it and start again, and it’s like none of it ever happened.”

Now I know he’s trying to tell me something. He takes the brush and paints a white line down my arm.

“People aren’t like that,” I tell him.

He sighs. “No, they are not. That’s why I’m a painter and not a psy-
The paint feels good at first, but as it dries it becomes itchy and starts to flake off. “I should go to class,” I say finally. He looks up and nods. “Thanks for trying,” I offer, since I can’t say anything else.

When I’m at the door, he calls me back again. I think he likes the drama of almost letting me go, only to catch me before I do. “Emma? You know, sometimes, if the colors are dark, the canvas needs a second coat before you can paint on it again.”

We look at each other for a moment. I smile slightly, and the gesture feels both strange and familiar. “See you tomorrow.”
The first insult I ever remember receiving came from my grandfather. His name was Ray, and he was a tall Polish man from Wisconsin. Chest hair would peek out of the top of his polo shirts, and, if he hadn’t shaved his face that day, he would greet me with a “whisker rub” and scratch his stubble against my cheek. He had steel-blue eyes and a straightforward nature. Ray had been a colonel in the Air Force and had received many awards for putting himself at risk of death while flying bombers over Southeast Asia during World War II. He never talked about the war really, but after he died, I discovered pictures of him in his uniform with his plane and crew. He’s now buried in Arlington National Cemetery with my grandmother, Ruth.

Growing up, I lived only two blocks from my grandparents’ house. They had a big, white, one-story house with a pool and orange and banana trees in the backyard. I spent a lot of time at their house throughout my childhood. Without fail, they had cocktails every night before dinner, and my parents were often invited over to join them. I would graze on the snack mixes they put out on the coffee table and play with my grandmother’s “pocketbooks” or with a box of worn wooden blocks in the corner of the living room. Once in a while, I would spend the night at their house, and they would always march me to bed in a military fashion, chanting “Hup, two, three, four. Hup, two, three, four.” The next day, my grandfather would usually make me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He had a penchant for crunchy peanut butter, which was different from the creamy kind I was used to at home but, because of him, I prefer the chunky kind to this day. He also loved crossword puzzles and would work on them with me, hoping I would grow to love them like he did.

My grandfather wasn’t a warm and fuzzy kind of man, though. He wasn’t affectionate or emotionally available, really. When I was four, I made the unfortunate but common mistake of cutting my own hair. My mother was out of the room, and somehow I got a hold of a pair of scissors and chopped off the front portion of my hair. To effectively fix this toddler-crafted haircut, thick bangs had to be cut across my forehead. It was not my best look, and even at four I was embarrassed. After visiting the hairdresser, we went over to my grandparents’ house. I remember my grandfather was sitting in his big, dark blue reclining armchair, and when he saw me, he immediately said, “Your hair looks ugly.” His words stung,
and even now, when I remember that moment, a dull pang reverberates in my chest. But every time I reach for the jar of peanut butter in the fridge or see the crossword puzzle in the newspaper, I am flooded with happy memories and a yearning for my stern, hairy, colonel grandfather.
Autumn Trees

Riley Park

A sighing exultation dimmed auburn
By ripened harvest eve. Chaste Summer ends!
The jealous greens of sun-dressed nymphs at play
Are calmed to August ease. The curtained Night,
Endowed with warming charm, entices soft
To oak-enchantèd maids: “Sleep not, my doves,
But be with me in earthen fondness sweet—
A titian thirst no spring will ever quench.”
With trembling blush, the sylvan maids let fall
Their vernal gowns. In flushed expectancy
They seem to float upon the earth. No rush
Does force the doffing faster. Merciful
And tender in their bare beatific form
The wooded sylphs gaze out with ardency.
A whisper, long and urged by sight’s delight,
Runs airy hands across now star-strewn skins
That shudder at the twilight touch. Firm arms,
As strong and fair as Modron’s kiss, stretch out
In dusk-spiced pleasure towards the firmament.
So caught were they in saccharine embrace
That seasons slowed to watch the unveiled dance
Of theirs, this whist moaned song of passions dark.

Let drift at hungered touch fly just-worn clothes
Upon the ground, as snow sent soft from sky,
And still do drop with many colored grace
In warly envied sheets. A blanket made
Of earthly woven garments lies about;
A patterned floor of once adorning cloth,
Quick-shed in hushed impassioned play, rests lush
Around my feet. In dawn dressed ember grey
The tired carpet hardly stirs at breaths
Of these deciduous youths now spent, asleep.
I step out on this sea—a watcher on
The honeyed waves dispersing into dusk—
And there amongst the scattered cloth of Fall
I find I have been lost. That skin-born scent
Of lingered lusts since softened by the stars
Intoxicates my sense of self and leaves
All spread, as in an open field, quite bare.
Out from the folds of gentle sleepers’ minds,
Set dreaming long of chills that swift will come
And overtake the staying Summer’s grace,
Cool airs sound silence taken deep from those
Who wait for Winter’s cloaking comfort here.

A time of seasoned, dancing change has come
And gone upon the wind: a thing, a joy,
A beauty now for ever which I hold
As dear to me as Memory or Love.
Cannot a man in earnest gain such calm
As those who dream tonight in shy embrace?
They lie as ash when laughing fire’s left
To find its way back to the Sun. What a scene
They make! What secret they must share to gain
Such soothing respite from the frenzied throes
Of Life’s adversities? What must I do
To join in this romantic play and ease?
Despite—or though, perhaps in spite of—dawn
These faery courtesans seem not to stir
Or break from this great envied spell of Night.
While Helios cracks stiff his brightened whip
Across the backs of the horizon’s steeds
And all the Anemoi begin their waltz
Of winds, the Fae but simper and do stand
With shivers not of cold. They sigh and sing
For Night’s return, when after work of Day
They turn to whispered passion play again.

The lonely blinks of Moon keep company
With me in this, this passing time. In all
The moments spent observing, I do not
Believe my heart will ever truly leave
This treasured, hallowed place. What once was me
Is gone: ‘twas carried off with Night’s first charm
And left still dancing in the dark. This mind
Is like a hand I have not shook, but warms
As if it were a friend’s. These sentiments,
These aches of soul, are foreign-made to me
As if an unshaped spirit placed them in.
A burning, raw, and barely understood
New longing passes into me. I am
Of wood: with water flowing strong within,
With branches spread to shadowed heights at dark
And curling lips to drink the light’s relief.
And there you stand as beauty, and I know—
But never can with words quite capture whole—
That in your painted red and evergreen,
With smiles only sylphs could know to make,
You truly stand apart from all the rest.
I am now tailor-made: an autumn leaf.
A Painful “Yet to Be”

Joshua Granberry

I imagine us sitting in a restaurant, like T.G.I. Friday’s or Ruby Tuesday, something subtle, yet surrounded by random pockets of people. I don’t want it to be all quiet or dramatic; I’m just more comfortable when there’s background noise to turn attention to now and again. I order a beer, just to show that I’ve grown up in some manly or prideful “I-can-hold-my-own” kind of way. I’ve already let her know that I’ve had something to talk to her about, but I wanted it to be just the two of us. I don’t care much for what my stepfather or stepbrother will think afterward. I should, but I don’t. I figure I’ll start with my mother by saying:

“I’ve been hiding something from you for some time now…”
Did I say I didn’t want this to be overly dramatic?
“Don’t think I intended this to hurt you in any way, but I did what I had to do at the time. I love you no less because of it, but have grown to understand and appreciate things without harkening back to painful memories. Give me the time I need to speak, and I’ll reciprocate with everything you’d like to know. Can I please have that?”

“Josh, I’m not quite sure I understand what’s going on right now.”
“Me neither, Mom, but please bear with me. I’ve been in contact with Robert. I’ve seen him recently, and plan on seeing him again…”

The past few Christmases haven’t been my favorite; the time before last when my mother and stepfather nearly split, my brother and I spent almost the entirety of our vacations at our aunt’s house. Family dinners and time together were infrequent then, and prompted me to reevaluate the stability of my family unit. I came to some startling conclusions, some of which I still wrestle with to this day. But given this “god-awful” experience, I think it’s no wonder that I wouldn’t spend my following winter vacation at my new friend Stephen’s house, where smoking and drinking would be plentiful, and my mind could be left to contemplate other, less troubling scenarios. During my time there, I went home for four days: the day before Christmas Eve through the day after Christmas. The rest of the time was spent away from home, away from the constant stresses, failures, and fighting that ensued any other time. So, when Stephen prompted me with a proposition to road trip to Houston to deliver his, what he termed, “quasi-girlfriend’s” belongings, I couldn’t resist. Time spent away from home was one thing, but getting lost on the wide-open road, without really a clue of
where we were, well, that's something in a class totally of its own.

The decision to road trip to the Lone Star State was not without stresses, however. Though Christmas supported me financially for the duration of break, it was not enough to both road trip and purchase textbooks for the coming semester. I didn't want to miss this opportunity to adventure with my friend, but I also wanted to learn a thing or two in the coming months at school. So, I compromised. I compromised in a way that has snowballed into something much greater than I had intended.

I decided that, while in Houston, I'd get a hold of my father and ask him for textbook money. After all, I had seen the man only a few times in my entire twenty-plus years of existence. And according to my mother, he owed a small fortune in child support payments. I really didn't feel bad asking. In all actuality, I drove a somewhat sadistic pleasure from the idea. I'd simply visit, say hello, take the check, and leave. He'd hear nothing back from me, nor I from him. I felt bad in some way, but he owed me anyway, right? I called him the night before we left, gave some bullshit excuse of an answer to the question of why I had ignored him after my high school graduation, and established a meeting time with which to secure the deal. I told my Mom where we would be going, how long we would stay, etc., but I very intentionally left out the details concerning my father. She had her own stresses, and this was my vacation. Plus, it's not like I loved the guy. He'd left us from what I understood. He never called or attempted to make amends for his past actions leading to my mother and him splitting. He owed this to me. And did I feel bad about lying at the time? No, because I wasn't doing it out of compassion for the guy; I needed money for school, plain and simple.

* My heart was beating as if I were experiencing a mild panic attack. It was surprisingly busy in the hotel lobby at 7:30 on a Wednesday night, so I hoped he'd find me as opposed to me seeking him out. I had only sat down when he came from the entranceway and approached me. I could tell he was my father. Something in his face just made me see so much of myself in him; I could not only see a physical resemblance (one that I had been longing for), but also a stoic sense of mind, where overt emotional response was sacrificed in place of a balanced and accepting worldview. He was a calm man of average height, leathered and tanned skin, and severely balding. But given his line of work as a heavy haul truck driver and age, he looked great, everything except his face, which seemed so much more worn, worn in a never-coming-to-terms-with-the-past kind of way. It was noticeable, yet comforting at the same time. I could tell he had been wrestling with his past, and it was constantly on his mind.
When he came up, he fidgeted, looked at the floor, and stuck out his hand, saying, “I don’t really know how to do this… How’re ya doing?” “Fine,” I said, shaking his hand. “How have you been?” “Nervous as all hell! I couldn’t sleep last night, I was shaking on the drive over here… It’s really good to see you.” “You too.” I actually meant it. For some reason, in that brief moment of initial interaction, I felt like I had known the man my whole life. Not in deed or memory, but in a very strange, you-think-like-I-do way, as if I had known him in a past life. It is a strange feeling to know that you are intimately tied to another individual, even though you have never seen that person before.

He introduced me to his wife and stepdaughters, and my half-brother, whom I met for the first time that night. The same feeling I had with my dad just right inside the hotel lobby reappeared again when I saw my half-brother. It felt amazing and depressing all at the same time; I had never had this off-the-bat appreciation for someone before. It was an unnerving mood to have, but at the same time very comforting; I had reunited with a family I had never known. Before, I had wanted nothing to do with them; I thought they had betrayed me, that I had been a mistake on behalf of my father. In seeing them, I could tell this was definitely not the case. After some mild catching up at a local restaurant, I caught myself not wanting to leave.

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During the four days spent in Houston, I spent nearly all my time with my father: going out to eat, hanging in his garage putting back beers and cigarettes, talking of my baby youth as if at one point in time there were no animosities between my mother and him. When he was at work, I spent what time I could getting to know my half-brother, and my “step-mother,” who, before, I thought ruined my first family, but who I quickly discovered was herself a struggling mom, just like the one I had left behind in Pennsylvania. What was supposed to take an hour at most became an emotionally rewarding visit, one that reconnected and reestablished lost ties and relations. At the same time, however, I was conflicted with what I would tell my mother. Sure, I was fine beforehand lying to her about my visit with my father; she would have approved of me going merely for the money, since he “owed” it to us anyway. But things had changed now that my visit was more than expected, one where the money became overshadowed by a giddy feeling of being like a kid again in the arms of my father. What was so unnerving to me was not the lie that had been told, but her impending misunderstanding of the situation. I’m sure, given the past couple of years, that she knows I am dissatisfied with the way things have turned out with our family.
And maybe, subconsciously, I sought out this chance to reunite with my father in order to supplement the downhill trend my family’s stability has taken. But the thing that pained me the most is having my mother, the woman who cared for me all my life, who was my shoulder for so long, and I hers, the one who took care of me and held on strong when everything else seemed to crumble, know that I lied to her, and visited another family from which she had distanced herself as much as humanly possible.

My mother is a beautiful woman, and has cared for me more than any other individual to have walked or will ever walk this planet. Yet, her inability to leave the past in the past has always been a downfall for her, and has been the cause of many conflicts between her and everyone else she has come into contact with. While I don’t want to hurt her by being with the man that had betrayed her trust, I still can forgive past wrongs, which I’ve realized never really involved me to begin with. That is the point I’m afraid my mother will miss…

When these thoughts of eventually confronting her came to mind, I immediately felt sick to my stomach. Had I betrayed the only person who has unflinchingly cared for me my entire life? Eventually, I would hope, she would come to terms with what I had done, and why I had done it. Eventually. The initial shock and sense of betrayal she is bound to feel had scared me away from telling her for almost a year. To complicate matters, I have recently flown to visit my father in North Carolina for a weekend. Another enlightening and memorable visit, another stomach ache and restless month of worried attempts at sleeping.

I have had family members die, friends lost in the shuffle of life and petty drama, and now have a grandfather suffering from cancer. These are all things I think about. But the most painful, most wrenching thought I can have now is the image of me confronting my mother about my secret dealings with my father, her ex-husband, the man who broke her trust and failed to support his child. In my eyes, they were a young couple that fucked up. Plain and simple. But no one ever really feels good about betraying the trust of someone dearly close to them. I know my mother will understand what I did in time. But with each passing day it becomes harder and harder to approach her, to get the setting and timing just right so I can ease this on her already hefty plate of worries and concerns. My hope is that I can continue with my double life with both my parents having full knowledge of it. My fear is that I will be resented and seen in a much different light by my mother. If I lost her and her trust, would it have really been worth it? This is a pain that has yet to be…
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Taylor Andrews** is a sophomore English with a Writing Concentration and Studio Art double major from Buffalo, New York. She participates in Shots in the Dark Improv, Gettysburg College theater productions, and works at the Musselman Library and in Residence Life.

**Chelsea Anspach** is a senior Studio Art major and Art History minor from Solomons, Maryland. She is currently Vice President of the International Club and can be found shelving books in the Library or working the Help Desk at the Digital Center. Creating art is an essential part of her life, and she hopes to continue to do so.

**Rachel Barber** is a junior majoring in Music and English with a Writing Concentration. She plays the French horn in the Wind Symphony and Symphony Orchestra on campus and currently serves as the secretary for the Newman Association. She particularly enjoys worship and community service, and is a member of the Fishkill United Methodist Church in her hometown, Fishkill, New York.

**Silvia Chon** is a first-year Biology major from Horsham, Pennsylvania.

**Lisa Del Padre** is a junior and a double major in Studio Art and Theatre. She enjoys the creation and process of three-dimensional pieces, and is also thrilled to have a piece of her printmaking work published this year. She works in the Kline Theatre’s costume shop and is involved in DiscipleMakers Christian Fellowship, Owl & Nightingale Players, and SMuT, and is currently working to revive the Art Society club on campus. Lisa is from Mission Viejo, California.

**Elizabeth Elliott**, of Timonium, Maryland, is a senior History major with minors in Writing and Civil War Era Studies. Her campus involvements include The Forum, GBurg TV, and Poetry Circle. The three things she enjoys most are dreaming about England, making late night trips to Garryowen, and being an all-around goofball.

**Nate Fitch** is a sophomore double major in Philosophy and Studio Art. A member of Alpha Phi Omega, Gettysburg Funk Ultimate Frisbee team, and Student Alumni Association, Nate is particularly passionate about both digital and film photography.

**Emily Francisco** is a junior double major in Art History and English with a Writing Concentration and is minoring in Studio Art. A founding member of Gettysburg College’s first Poetry Circle, Emily is also involved with The Forum, Alpha Phi Omega, and Dance Ensemble. In her spare time she works on her portfolio for Emagine Design, her freelance graphic design business.

**Christina Gallo** is a senior English and Film Studies double major from Montoursville, Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Bullets Marching Band, Sigma Alpha Iota, and Alpha Phi Omega. She really enjoys reading and watching things and sometimes...
writes things, too. She likes finding beauty in the everyday and believes that the song was right—all you need is love. She often wishes that her life was a musical, but until that happens, she'll settle for the occasional sing-along with friends.

Jamie Garrett is a bear.

Josh Granberry is a senior Philosophy major and Peace and Justice Studies minor from York Haven, Pennsylvania.

Matt Haines is a junior with a major in Political Science and a minor in Philosophy from Marlboro, New Jersey. He is currently involved in making rap music while writing creatively on the side. He played lacrosse in high school and briefly at Gettysburg and Hofstra and cites Albert Camus as a major influence.

Margaret (Jenn) Johnson is a sophomore Health Sciences major and Women, Gender, and Sexuality minor from New York City. She is the president and director of the Gettysburg Gospel Choir and the secretary and pictorian for the Diversity Peer Educators. She strives to be a nurse practitioner that specializes in women's and children's health. She loves being involved on campus and getting to know students from various backgrounds. She is very excited to be going to Nicaragua and Kenya this year through the Center for Public Service. She loves fashion, photography, and life.

Jeremiah Johnston became a science major because he wanted to gain superpowers in a lab accident. As a senior Biochemistry and Molecular Biology major, he has instead spent most of his time in lab breeding sea urchins, melanoma, fruit flies, bread mold, and the occasional carbon-carbon bond. In fact, the only science-related accident he has had was in the Animal Holding room of McCreary Hall: a Madagascar hissing cockroach once drew blood from his thumb with a well-placed, barbed cone of chitin. When he is not living in the Science Center, Jeremiah lives in Goose Creek, South Carolina, a land of salt marshes and giant mosquitoes where accidents, although rarely granting super-powers, generally involve fireworks—and scarred retinas.

Stephen Lin is a first-year tentative Environmental Studies and German double major from Concord, Massachusetts. He is currently a German PLA. He plays in the Jazz Band and on the ultimate team.

Kira Mason is a first-year from Glastonbury, Connecticut. She is a double major in Psychology and Studio Art, and plans to minor in Spanish. She loves the arts and is a member of the Dance Ensemble and B.O.M.B. Squad on campus.

Kris McCormick is a sophomore English and Theatre Arts double major from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She currently serves as the fiction section editor of The Mercury and looks forward to future years on the staff. She's honored to have been published in this year's magazine. A personal message: Good luck to all the writers out there. You've got what it takes to make it into this magazine too! I'd love to read your work, so don't be shy and send it to us. You've got nothing to lose and so much to gain.
Meghan O’Grady is a sophomore French major from Fort Washington, Pennsylvania. She likes traveling, baking, and long walks on the beach. Her favorite novel is *The Scorpio Races* by Maggie Stiefvater.

Riley Park “Riley Gryc was here.”

Maddie Price is a sophomore Environmental Studies major and Theatre Arts/Educational Studies double minor from Lawrenceville, New Jersey. She is involved in GECO, Jazz Appreciation Society, Biosphere, and Owl & Nightingale Players. Other than photography, she enjoys the outdoors, traveling, baking cupcakes, and quoting Harry Potter.

Brendan Raleigh is a first-year English major from Middletown, Maryland. He is currently a staff writer for *The Gettysburgian*, writing articles for the paper’s News section. Some of his favorite writers include Lord Byron, Oscar Wilde, and Joe Dunthorne.

Victoria Reynolds is a sophomore at Gettysburg College. She is an English with a Writing Concentration major and an Italian minor from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Sarah Turner is a senior English major, Anthropology minor from Indialantic, Florida. She is a Writing Center tutor and is a member of the English Honors Society—Sigma Tau Delta. She loves to dance and participates in both Dance Ensemble and B.O.M.B. Squad.

Jarret Wasko grew up in White Oak, Pennsylvania. After a year of interdisciplinary study at the Cook Honors College at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, he was accepted upon exhibition-based review in 2011 into its College of Fine Arts Bachelor of Fine Arts program in Studio Art to concentrate in sculpture and drawing. Pursuing additional studies in history, art history and entrepreneurship in the fine arts, he expects to graduate in 2014. In 2012, Wasko was one of four students accepted to the Civil War Era Studies Department’s Gettysburg semester program. With experience in drawing, painting, printmaking, fibers, 35mm photography, sculpture, metalworking and woodworking, he has exhibited and instructed art since 2008 at galleries, independent firms, and museums in the Pittsburgh, Greensburg, and Indiana areas.

Liz Williams is a senior English major with a Writing Concentration. She is from Clinton, New York and is especially fond of bagels, jazz music, and the Boston Red Sox. On campus, she plays the flute, writes articles for the college website, and does community service with Alpha Phi Omega.

Megan Zagorski is a first-year Lincoln scholar from Beaver, Pennsylvania. While her major is currently undecided, she is considering a double major in Anthropology and Spanish/LAS. Currently, she is a member of GECO, GRAB, and is a tutor/mentor for migrant high school students. In her spare time she enjoys drawing, hiking and bird
Gabriella Schiro graduated from Gettysburg College Class of 2012 with a major in Studio Art. She currently works in Washington, D.C. for International Arts & Artists, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding and exposure to the arts internationally.

Eric Kozlik is a second year MFA student studying poetry at the University of Maryland. Reading a poem, in his opinion, is the act of entering another’s mind with the image, moving through the world with the line break, and feeling with the sound. When this happens, the poet and the reader part ways vibrating at the same frequency, which we recognize as beauty. He is a 2011 graduate of Gettysburg College.

Lisa Meerts graduated from Gettysburg College in 2004, after which she tromped around the American Southwest, first studying horsemanship, then working as a journalist, and finally leading backpacking trips. For two years she sat around a campfire each night and listened to people recount their life stories, an experience that called her to back to storytelling. She is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in nonfiction at the University of New Hampshire, and will spend the coming summer in Uganda conducting research for her thesis, a narrative about the conflict between people and the environment in the “pearl of Africa.”

Alison McCabe graduated from Gettysburg College, class of 2008, with an Individualized Major in Creative Writing and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. In 2009 she was awarded the Milton O. Riepe Fellowship from the University of Arizona, where she received her MFA in 2010 and currently teaches English and Creative Writing. Her writing has been honored as a finalist in Glimmer Train’s Short Story Award for New Writers, the SLS Unified Literary Contest, and LA’s New Short Fiction Emerging Voices series. She is assistant fiction editor for Cutthroat Magazine.