



THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE


Year 2010

Article 1

1-1-2010

The Mercury 2010

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Keywords

creative writing, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, artwork, photography

Author Bio

The Mercury

The Student Art & Literary Magazine of Gettysburg College


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THE ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE
OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

2010

THE MERCURY

2010

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COVER ARTWORK

The 2010 cover artwork is by
Preston Hartwick

Cover Photograph: **Tree**

The Mercury:

History and 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 each year by the entire staff. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the fall and early spring semester 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 an Open Mic Night co-sponsored with Sigma Tau Delta.

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 2010: Rustom Davar '03 for Fiction, Colleen Hubbard '01 for Nonfiction, Freya Gibbon '07 for Poetry and Nelson Dyer '08 for Art.

The Mercury winning titles are bolded in the Table of Contents. This year's winners are Taylor Smart '13 for Nonfiction, Lindsey Parker '10 for Fiction, Ben Schell '12 for Poetry, and Andrew Maturo '11 for Art.

Publishing:

The Mercury was printed this year by The Sheridan Press in Hanover, Pennsylvania. We would like to thank them for their support this year. The production staff is deeply indebted too IKON, specifically Corey Chong and Kate Brautigam for their help and time devoted to the magazine. This is the second environmentally-friendly edition of The Mercury, and it has been printed on environmentally friendly paper from FSC Mixed Sources with Soy based inks.

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Taylor Smart

Learning to Swim

Four generations ago my father's great-grandfather built a giant mahogany grandfather clock which was to be passed from one first born son to the next. Had my mother taken this clock as a warning of time's strong hold on my dad's ancestry, she would not have laughed when, as a baby, the first thing I crawled to was not her or my father but was in fact that wooden grandfather clock. For hours I would sit and watch it; she called it the "Smart family curse", and I've yet to think of a better name. Time was our siren. Sometimes I would sit, watching the pendulum swing and the second hand spin, and I would feel my father's hand gently brush upon my shoulder; he had always understood. My dad had experienced the same curiosity as a child. A curiosity he often had to justify to my mother by telling her, "Leonardo da Vinci was always fascinated by clocks! Our son is the new da Vinci, my dear!"

It wasn't the mechanism within the clock that interested us. Clocks are fairly simple to make all you need is a weight of some sort, a couple gears, a pendulum and a good sense of time. Our fascination derived instead from the fact that as you watch a clock, you begin to notice a slight but very distinct difference in between each second. You notice every swing of the pendulum is unique. Almost if more could be done within one second than another, even though the actual duration of the swing always remains the same.

It took me exactly nine years to solve this riddle, and on that day I had once again been staring at the time, waiting for my cousins to come. My mom told me they should be showing up any minute, so I watched the clock count, in its usual slow manner, and measured the seconds; assuming the minutes they were associated with were also passing by.

I was always big for my age; everything from my foot size to my hair length was above average. My eyes often changed depending upon my mood: more green than brown when I was happy, more brown than green when I was thinking, and always black when I got angry. Like most kids I was highly energetic, and to be honest, I'm not entirely sure how I didn't die before the age of eight. At four I could start a two wheel bike – I specify start because I never properly stopped to get off. At five I moved west, to a new neighborhood complete with towering houses and many tempting, terrifying, ways to entertain a child. Here I met Bryce, who

would run with me and play tag atop the roofs of the unfinished houses. By six and a half, I was biking off ramps and catching bees in jars, and by seven I was playing with power tools. I was a pistol, but I was nothing if not patient.

My aunt and her family came fourteen minutes after I originally expected them, but as usual, tracking the clock kept my mind fairly occupied.

The dynamic of my family was rather unlike any other. When we gathered, we didn't do so to reunite or reconnect. We were already connected to each other; we were already a single unit. Small talk was therefore a foreign thing to me, purely because my family was so well versed with one another that we found no need for it. Thus, when my aunt arrived, my mom immediately grabbed her, popped in a tape she'd just recently bought, and shoved one side of the head phones in my aunt's ear, keeping the other for herself. As the two started dancing and singing to an invisible beat, my sister grabbed my older cousin Josh and left to go show him a new book of she'd found, and I stole away with his younger brother Jordan to switch into our swim suits so we could relish in the warmth of the sun and the cool of the water. I was nine and he was six, but he was my pair, just as his older brother Josh, and my sister Ashley were pairs. He and I were forever destined to sit next to each other at Christmas dinners. We were forever tied together during our families annual three legged race. We were forever tied together during our families annual three legged race, and we were forever united. He looked up to me for my age, and I looked up to him for his wisdom. And, with our ambitious young minds, the two of us were designed to change the world.

When I was eight, I wrote down in my letter to Santa that I wanted swimming instructions for Christmas. It was my dream to join the swim team later in life, and I jumped on every opportunity I had to practice; my younger cousin visiting was the perfect excuse.

We sprinted down the stairs, racing to see who could get in the water first; my younger cousin beat me by a hair, and we almost immediately began splashing each other. Our juvenile energy, of course, eventually subsided and he crawled atop a floating chair, as I began my daily practice regimen.

I've never really told anyone this; I suppose I've never thought it was relevant, but for some reason, I've never forgotten it. I remember very clearly that while I swam in my back yard pool I sometimes stumbled on a uniquely strange sensation; below the water, I felt as though I could breathe. It was a feeling purely associated with my pool; I think it had something to do with the water.

My routine always began with a quick swim to the bottom of the pool. From there, I could look up at the water's ceiling; it transformed everything. At the time I had many books about changing the world with wands and dreams, and very few pertaining to the physics of water.

Therefore, to me, this ceiling truly was a work of magic. What else could make the nose of my dog look as though it belonged to a cat? What else could transform my house into a circle and my sister into a Picasso painting? It was as if the water amplified everything you saw; enhanced it, forced you to appreciate its natural shape by distorting it and showing you its potential alternatives. I loved it.

Looking up, I saw the chair my cousin sat in and gently moved it to the shallow end. It was much harder to flip in the deep side. Another laughable scuffle between us and he reunited with the chair, as I returned to my swimming. I was doing laps now, and I felt so free. I found myself so entranced with the freedoms water gave me, as it simultaneously strips the effects of gravity and slows the pendulum of motion, that I forgot the freedoms it took away, like free oxygen. I was experiencing one of those backyard pool moments; the sensation was upon me and I knew if I were to open my mouth I would be able to breathe. I would be able to swim forever.

But the chance was stripped from me. My older cousin Josh was staring down at me and yelling something. Under the water, I couldn't make out what he said, so I surfaced and quickly realized he had a squirt gun in his hands. He shot me in the face. Not one to give up, I jumped out of the pool and grabbed a towel, not for drying off, but instead for blocking the violent shots of water. I noticed my sister Ashley sprinting out of the house; she grabbed a towel and fought by my side. The battle was a valiant one; two rather small siblings pitted against their stronger, older, somewhat pubescent cousin.

He would raise his arm and aim the gun at my sister; I would jump on him and take the blow for her. She would grab at his legs, and he would avoid with a quick sidestep he'd learned on the basketball team. It wasn't until we began using the towels to wrap him that we began advancing on. I swung my towel as hard as I could towards his face, temporarily blinding him as my sister quickly wrapped her towel around his ankles. I was so caught up in the matter; I didn't hear my mom scream. I just looked over to see her jumping in the pool and detangled myself from my cousin and ran fast as I could to join her. My mom has never been keen on swimming, so whenever she chose to jump in with us, I always capitalized on the opportunity.

I understood at that moment what people mean when they say something happened in a blur. They don't say it because they can't remember, they say it because there was too much to remember; they say it because they don't want to remember. As I watched my mother surface from the pool in drenched clothes, I observed the expression on her face and prayed that it was just distorted by the magic of the water. She looked so sad, so worried and so angry. I then looked to see what she was holding, and very slowly closed my eyes. I thought that if I didn't see anything, the moment would be frozen; that the pendulum of that second

would become weightless. And in that second, I wished that the water would change my cousin back. I wish the magic would undo itself.

My mom placed his limp body on the cement and immediately started hitting his chest. He lay unresponsive; his air had gone and I knew his time had slowed.

I don't know what convinced him to jump off his chair and swim to into the deep end. I question if it was a courageous effort to avenge the fall of his older brother, or if he had chosen to brave the bottom of the pool as I had moments earlier; but whichever reason initially drew him in, he knew how to swim. I wonder now if, as he went below the water, he felt the same sensation I had felt earlier. I wonder if he believed he could breathe. I wonder if I was the one who was supposed to swim forever. And I wonder if, by taking that fateful sunken breath, he somehow saved me.

As the paramedics arrived, I once again returned to my grandfather clock. I didn't notice that a medic had stopped to comfort me, and I didn't respond when the police asked me what happened. I just sat and counted the seconds.

I solved the riddle that day, and in the years after I spent by my cousin's side in the hospital, I perfected my understanding. Time doesn't vary, but the moments you notice within it do. You can notice every moment within a second, and that it can last an hour; or you can let the moments pass unnoticed and allow that second to be nothing more than a second. You can observe anything you want in perfect detail as time slows down for you, or you can observe nothing and let time slip away.

Lindsey Parker

Waiting Room

The alternating click of two high-heeled feet dueled with the drum solo echoing in my ears. Looking up to find the source of the rhythm, I watched as the thin cotton of a white jacket rippled at the knees of a middle-aged Asian woman. The stethoscope around her neck bounced slightly with each of her strides and an overflowing pile of maroon binders was spilling from her arms. She grabbed the pager perched on the waistband of her scrubs and suddenly broke into a strained jog, almost knocking out two nurses coming around the corner at the end of the hallway. Pulling the buds of my headphones from my ears, I turned off my iPod and dropped it into my canvas bag. Folding my arms, I slouched in the blue pleather chair and stretched my legs, crossing them at the ankles. The waiting room was an expansive area surrounded by large windows that faced one of the many parking lots bordering the building. The space was bisected by a wide hallway, the main freeway on the first floor of the hospital. TVs were mounted on the wall every couple of feet, each one playing muted versions of Regis and Kelly. I watched as Regis's lips moved, disjointed from the delayed black-and-white text appearing at the bottom of the screen. I sat forward, trailing every doctor and nurse darting down the hallway with my eyes, silently pleading for someone to tell me what was going on.

I had received the phone call at four o'clock that morning. I was at work at the time, setting up an IV for a dehydrated German Sheppard who had been brought in after an all-night episode of vomiting. I had gotten the job at Bucks County Pet ER as a veterinary technician about a year ago after having to defer my admission to Duke's graduate program in marine science indefinitely after encountering some tuition trouble. I didn't mind my job as a vet tech; despite the mediocre pay and the never-ending smell of feces and wet dog. I enjoyed working with the animals. Besides, the night shift gave me an excuse to sleep during the day when my father worked from his basement office and kept me away at night when he stumbled in at 2 AM, belting Motley Crue and cursing about the unruly condition of the front bushes.

That's why when Dr. Salisbury handed me the phone as I placed a cone around Daisy's neck, I didn't make any great effort to rush over to the hospital. While the nurse didn't get into any specifics on the phone, I figured that it had probably been a Scotch and beer combo night for my father and he was lying in one of the beds in the ER, sleeping off the hangover with the help of some IV saline. I finished bandaging Sierra's paw, carefully went through all of the medication charts, and made sure the surgery schedule

was set for tomorrow morning before Dr. Salisbury came to the back, saying that the hospital had called again asking for me. Grabbing my coat and bag from the back closet, I pulled my rusty red pick-up truck out of the parking lot and drove the ten miles to Warminster Hospital.

"What?" A large hand squeezed my shoulder firmly. I yanked my body away from the grasp, blinking and staring at a man with short salt-and-pepper hair slouching in the seat next to me. He wore the standard blue hospital scrubs, but the neon green Nikes on his feet and the red-rimmed glasses perched on his nose were far removed from hospital protocol. He sat up from his slumped position, twirling a gold ring around his pinky finger.

"Mallory? I mean, Miss Haskins?"

"It's Mallory. Can I help you?" I pushed my back against the railing of the chair, trying to create some distance between me and this doctor imposter.

"Dr. Magala." He reached his hand out toward me, revealing small tattooed letters of a language I didn't recognize on his wrist. I grabbed his hand and shook it limply, withdrawing quickly and resting my hand in my lap.

"We have your father in a bed in the back. He was brought in, oh, I'd say about two hours ago."

"So he should be about ready to go then. Two hours and an IV usually cleans him up enough. Do I need to sign some papers or something?"

"Well, unless IV saline is a new treatment for a heart attack, we're still going to need to keep him around. We actually found that a couple of his coronary arteries are blocked off. He needs bypass surgery."

"Wait. A heart attack? And he needs surgery? Now?"

"Yup. He's scheduled to go in in about thirty minutes." Dr. Magala stood up and stretched, slipping his hands in his pockets.

"Here, let me take you to pre-op to see him before we wheel him back to the OR. We can have a Q & A session on the way." He grinned, rocking back and forth on his heels.

"Oh, no, that's okay. I don't have any other questions and it'd probably just be best if I didn't see him until later. I don't want to, you know, get too upset in front of him right before he goes under."

"Are you sure? When I saw him earlier, you're all he asked about."

"No, that's okay Dr. Magala, really." I looked down and began rummaging aimlessly in my purse. I sniffled loudly a few times, hoping he would get the hint.

"Okay then. I'll be out when he's all stitched up to let you know how it went." Dr. Magala walked down the hallway, whistling some Broadway tune that sounded vaguely familiar. Suddenly, he turned around and walked back toward me.

"Hey, Mallory, I forgot to ask you. Your father said he was on a medication for his blood pressure. He couldn't remember what it was called. Do you know by any chance?"

"It's Levatol," I said, giving Dr. Magala a half-grin. He smiled back and turned on his heels to head toward the elevators.

Sitting back in my chair, I watched as a couple of nurses carried steaming cups of coffee and scones from the cafeteria toward the break rooms on their respective floors. I fidgeted endlessly, sitting up and slouching, pulling my jacket on and off, unsure of what to do with my achy body. I had spent a lot of time in the hospital as a nine-year-old, sitting next to my father in a cramped, avocado-green waiting room with a single TV and faded Time magazines. My mother, battling breast cancer, was always in for some procedure: tumor removal, chemotherapy, a double mastectomy, the works. In the end, nothing worked and I was left with my father. Unable to deal with the loss of my mother, he shipped me off to my grandmother in New Jersey while alcohol became his only coping mechanism. I stayed with my grandmother until I left to study biology at the University of Connecticut and then moved back home with my father after my grandmother passed away. By that point, at the age of fifty, my father had tried to clean up his act: he worked from home as a computer programmer and had found friends willing to handle his drinking escapades so that I didn't have to. Still, his efforts did nothing to relieve the awkwardness between us or to erase the feeling of disgust that my father provoked in my gut. We shared the same genes and the same tragedy but found little else in common between us.

Looking at my watch, I was surprised to see that three hours had passed since Dr. Magala had spoken with me. Antsy, I pulled at the lint on my sleeve. Suddenly, two chairs down from me, a loud thump through a large bag with pastel lambs dancing on the side. A baby carrier was placed on the seat stopped my plucking. A woman of petite build was perched on the edge of the chair, rummaging next to her and the gurgling sounds of a cry-in-the-making were beginning. Searching more furiously, the woman finally retrieved a purple pacifier and gave it to the whining infant. Standing up, she tried rearranging all of her belongings; three bags were piled in the chair on the other side of her while crinkled papers bloomed from the top of her handbag. As she organized, I leaned back in my seat, trying to get a glimpse of the child. Peering in, I saw a little girl with faint red curls in a light blue jumper, eyes fading as she sucked contentedly on the pacifier.

"Your baby is adorable. What's her name?" I was desperate for someone to talk to.

"Oh, thanks. Her name is Cecelia. After her great-grandmother." The woman's straight brown hair was thrown up into a messy pony tail, her bangs sticking up in all directions. I watched as she collected herself,

placing her overflowing purse on her lap and throwing her head back, taking a few deep breaths.

"Who are you here for?" I asked slowly, staring straight ahead at the blonde CNN newscaster on the screen before glancing sideways in her direction. She looked at me briefly and then stared at the floor, fumbling with the worn straps of her bag. I looked away quickly, now cringing at the intrusiveness of my question. I was focusing on a red convertible weaving in and out of the rows in the parking lot, when she cleared her throat quietly. "My husband. He has colon cancer. They're removing some tumors today."

"Oh, wow, I'm sorry." She turned her gaze from me to Cecelia, resting her hand on the infant's belly. I tried to remember how I felt when people told me how sorry they were about my mother's cancer. Squirmy, anxious, annoyed.

"Well, we knew it was likely. His mother had it, both sets of grandparents. His genes are crawling with it. I just pray that they caught it early enough this time."

Watching the woman play with Cecelia, I pictured my genes crawling with breast cancer. Desperate to lose this image and to leave my racing thoughts, I pressed on with our conversation.

"So, what do you do?"

"Me? Nothing right now. I'm taking some time off to be with Cecelia and you know, this whole thing with Todd. I used to teach fourth grade, though. How about you? What do you do?"

"Right now I work at Bucks County Pet ER. I'm a tech. The animals are great, but it's a lot of kibble and pooper scooper duty. But it's a job."

"Not what you want to be doing I take it?"

"Well, not exactly. I love marine science and I had planned on attending graduate school at Duke, but things sort of fell through financially."

"No government aid, huh? I know my niece had the same problem. She was expecting some grants or something and then they didn't come through."

"Yeah, that's what happened to me too. I applied for FAFSA and some scholarships, but came up with nothing. It was quite a blow." The woman looked at me with a sympathetic frown and I averted my eyes to the headlines scrolling across the bottom of the news program. Government funds and rejected scholarships actually had nothing to do with my absence from graduate school. I had most of the money saved, a good chunk from my grandmother when she passed and a bunch I had put away from summer jobs. It all stemmed back to my dad; he got involved with a seedy bookie at a racetrack about an hour from home a few months before my college graduation. After some initial luck, a six-month losing streak and an enraged bookie cost me all but one thousand dollars of my graduate school savings.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Don't worry, though. You'll get there. And think of the life exper..." Interrupted by Cecelia's shrieking, she stood up, grabbed the infant, and instinctively sniffed her behind. "Oh, Cecelia."

She flung the baby bag over her shoulder and prepared to make a break for the bathroom. Stopping mid-stride, she swung around to face me. "Who are you here for, anyway?"

"My father." She grinned and her eyes took on a distant appearance of nostalgia. She opened her mouth to say something, probably about how sweet it was that I was there for my dad or about her memories of her father, when she was deterred by Cecelia's wails. Turning, she ran off toward the bathroom, leaving me with the mountains of her belongings.

While Cecelia kept her mother busy in the bathroom, Dr. Magala came out to let me know that my father was out of surgery and that everything went well. He told me that he had already been moved to the ICU and gave me the room number, offering to escort me upstairs. I declined politely, gathering my things and making my way to the elevator. Arriving on the fifth floor, I walked down the hall buzzing with nurses in bright pink scrubs. I walked past the nurses' station, where the secretary sat slurping reheated leftovers. I stopped in front of room 512 and peaked in, relieved to see that my father was asleep. Walking in, I perched on the edge of the chair next to his bed and sat my bag on the floor. I listened as the heart monitor chirped and watched the slow drip of the IV, anything that kept my gaze from his still figure. I went to reach for his hand, cracked and callused, but pulled away when I heard someone walk in the door behind me.

"Hi there. You must be Mr. Haskins's daughter. I'm Barbara. I'll be taking care of your father this afternoon. Now, I'm assuming you'll be his primary caregiver once he heads home."

"Yeah, I guess that'd be me." I winced at my quick response to her question. Sure, I was always the one taking care of him. But this was going to be a whole new level of care. Feeding him, helping him get dressed, bandaging his incisions, driving him to his appointments. I clasped my hands together, staring at my ragged sneakers.

"Okay, great. At some point, I need to go over the medication list and care instructions with you. We can do it now, or I can come back later after you've had some time with him. It's up to you."

"Now's fine."

"Okay. Well, let's see. First, it's really important to keep up with his medications. Dr. Magala has put him on daily antibiotics to prevent infection, he's changed his cholesterol medication from Tricor to Lipitor, oh, and he's kept him on Levatol for his blood pressure, just increased the dose a bit. As for daily activity, your father shouldn't..."

"Can you excuse me for just a second?"

"Uh, sure."

Grabbing my purse, I walked toward the bathroom in my father's room and shut the door. Grasping the handicap railing, I made my way to the sink and clasped my hands around the icy counter. Glancing at the dark bags under my eyes, I put my bag down and rummaged around, pushing past my planner, some loose sticky notes, and my sunglasses until I found the small orange bottle with the white cap. Joseph Haskins. Levatol. Take one pill a day with food. I pushed down on the cap and twisted, spilling the pills in my shaking hands. Shoving all but one back into the small opening, I stood over the toilet and opened my fisted palm, preparing to drop and flush the little white pill as I had done everyday for the past ten months. I was the one who set my father's pills out by his dinner plate before I headed to work every night. Between all of the vitamins and medications he took, he never noticed one was missing. I had planned to flush a pill for every dollar of my graduate school money he lost to some bookie at the racetrack. I had flushed 297 so far. As 298 lay rattling in my palm, I glanced up at a poster over the toilet, which was titled "Get Heart Smart!" and featured a grinning, dancing heart pointing to a list of dos and don'ts for heart health. Retracting my palm, I reached for the open pill bottle sitting on the counter, almost knocking its contents into the sink with my unsteady fingers, and put 298 back with the others. Throwing the bottle into my purse, I collected myself and opened the bathroom door to find that Barbara had left and my father was still asleep. I flung my bag over my shoulder and ran toward the door, keeping my head down to avoid seeing my father's snoozing figure in my peripheral vision.

Walking in the next morning, I paused at the door to my father's room. I had played this morning's scenario out in my head all night; I'd walk in, my father would be asleep, and I'd sit there in silence, at least for awhile, trying to prepare topics of conversation. I shuffled hesitantly to the foot of my father's bed. Clearly, in the real-life scenario, I wasn't so fortunate.

"Mal. Hey. You look like hell kiddo."

"Uh, thanks Dad. I brought you some coffee from Benny's. I imagine the stuff here isn't very good. I asked the nurse if it was okay. She said you can have it." I offered him the red-and-white checkered cup.

"Thanks Mal," he said and took a small sip, placing it down on the tray in front of him. He picked up the spoon buried in his oatmeal, scooping some up and allowing it to dribble in a thick waterfall back into the bowl.

"I see they've already started you on a new diet. Looks delicious," I said with a smirk.

"Yeah, it's just great," he snorted, stirring the oatmeal with a few strokes before putting the spoon down. "I guess I should have seen it coming. Grandpa Bill had an attack when he was forty-two. Your Uncle Hank, fifty-three. And this beer belly probably didn't help." He grabbed at his protruding gut hidden beneath the green stripes of the hospital

gown, grinned to himself, and then smoothed at the blankets on his bed.

"Speaking of beer belly, Dad. When the hospital called me, I thought you were in here for having a bit too much to drink. Detoxing in the ER, you know, like a few months ago." I chuckled nervously to myself.

"Hm, yeah, I remember. Actually, Mal, I haven't had a drink in three weeks. My boss just assigned me this huge project for a local tax firm and I've been working pretty late on that most nights. I went to Westerfeld's the other night, had a burger and a Coke with Bill. I had to drive him home for once. I mean, Mal, three weeks is..."

"Hey there, Joe. How's it going?" Dr. Magala's familiar voice floated in from the door behind me. He came around and put his hand on my father's shoulder, holding a chart and peering at his vital signs on the small screen above the bed. Today, his sneakers were neon orange and he wore a yellow and teal striped surgical cap. "Mallory, good to see you again." He flipped through my father's chart, initialing a few of the pages. "Looks like you had a good first night, Joe. Vital signs look fine. How's the pain? On a scale from zero to ten, ten being the worst pain you've ever experienced."

"It's at about a six right now."

"Okay, I'll send Wendy in in just a second to give you another dose of pain meds. But first I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the recovery period. Some of the dos and don'ts, that sort of thing. I know Barbara started going over some of this with Mallory, but I just wanted to say a few more things. First thing is the medication. I've got all of your prescriptions right here. Oops, need to sign this one. Just follow the instructions and you'll be good to go. Now, in terms of diet. This is always a favorite topic, I know..."

I looked at my father, his face dazed from the drugs and all of the information hurtling from Dr. Magala's mouth. He glanced down and pulled at the bed sheet, nodding his head every once in awhile and squinting his eyes, trying to focus on what the doctor was saying. I watched him and thought about what he said moments ago. He blamed his genes and his diet for the heart attack that had landed him in the hospital. He blamed everyone and everything but the real source of his trouble, someone he would never suspect. Without hesitation, I reached out and laid my hand on top of his oversized fingers, stopping his relentless tugging of the sheets. He looked up at me, eyes widening from a squint, looking as if he was trying to decide if he should pull away. I gave him a half-smile, willing the tears to stay locked up behind my eyelids, raging water restrained by a dam. Staring at my face briefly, he turned to look at Dr. Magala and I followed, only catching a few words from his sermon on polyunsaturated fats and low sodium foods. My father didn't smile or give my hand a squeeze. He didn't sandwich my hand between his two burly ones. He just sat there, letting my hand rest on his. And it was more than I deserved.

Ben Schell

shells

The empty shells litter the streets we could drive with our eyes closed
crunching beneath the unprotected tissue of our rolling bodies,
we, unfamiliar with the soft flesh, so raw and sincere, are apologetic.
Sunlight sears the backs of our hands, as we create shadows for ourselves
hoping in the darkness and silent static that we can be secure again,
letting our armor harden amongst our shrouded weaknesses,
in the shade of a lynching tree hidden from the blinding delights of high noon.
Judgment comes without reason or justice, screaming daydreams
rending away our expensive tailored self-image into hand-me-downs,
memories left in family albums to fill with dust, the sharpness dulled
down to could and should, family remedies and tasteless jokes
to masque the softened skin, fattened and silken, the chronic throbbing.
A corner pricked by the tacks of affection, we ignore the faces, the smiles,
staring into the tiny bits of infinite, the emptiness that fills us too
in hair wrenching paradox that we can only be far too aware of.
Taboo and shame become things of beauty, longing for a wrong turn,
the other side of a one way street as we drive with our eyes closed.

Nathan Storey

The Gap

Shanti's coughs and moans awoke Deepak. His wife shuddered next to him, the pain causing her body to spasm periodically. She gasped and ran for the bathroom, clutching her stomach. The light flipped on in the bathroom, usually dull and flickering, but seemingly blinding at this hour. Their small bedroom was dark, except for the shadows that were now cast about the room by the light that spilled out from under the door.

A short time later, Shanti returned, moving slowly and slipped back into the bed. Deepak put a hand on her shoulder, it was clammy.

"Shanti, what is wrong?"

"My whole body hurts, Deepak. My stomach feels as if it is all twisted, and my joints ache. I don't know what is happening. This happened so suddenly."

"Will you go to the doctor tomorrow?"

"It has only just started, it will probably pass. It is only difficult for the time being." She grimaced but smiled up at him.

Deepak sighed at his wife's stubbornness. She had always insisted on being strong as long as he had known her.

"Let me know if you need anything at all."

Even though the night passed without another rushed trip to the bathroom, Deepak could feel her tossing and turning well past dawn.

The next morning, Shanti left for her job in Vasant Vihar in South Delhi, and Deepak took the car on towards the SIT program center. Deepak loved his job as the coordinator for trips, activities, host families, speakers, everything really, for a study abroad program which brought students in from colleges throughout the United States. It was a thrill for Deepak to gradually get to know them as he did his job, organizing programming and listening to them take Hindi lessons across the hall, answering their questions during breaks when they wandered in. On group trips, he would spend time with them, teaching them cricket, how to bargain and which items in the shops were cheap knock-offs. By the end of the semester, when they gave their final presentations, he had watched them grow as they adapted to their new homes. One of his favorite parts was sharing music and films with them. Deepak was a film buff, and was very selective and discerning

in his tastes of Bollywood actors. His favorite actor was Aamir Khan, who was more devoted to his craft than any other, both physically and emotionally. Even more, Deepak loved being introduced to American television shows. He had recently gotten hooked on *Lost*, but was also a fan of *Futurama* and *Big Love*, though he knew little about these Mormons it was supposed to be about.

Deepak entered the center through the large black metal doors and down the hallway to his office. It wasn't much of a hallway, being that there were two offices on the one side, and the program center classroom on the other. He was alone in the office for the time being, but soon his boss, the program director, Dr. Mary Gale or Gale-ji, as the Indian staff and the students in the program were told to address her, would make her entrance. Gale-ji was a very imposing woman, especially in India. She knew she was in charge and made sure that everyone who worked for her knew she was in charge as well. She was a woman of contradictions, though. Just walking through the program center, Deepak saw signs of this. The classroom did not have desks but large futons with decadent and brightly colored pillows, clearly an attempt to seem exotic. As if that was how Indians sat. The walls were hung with small paintings, mostly by Ravi Varma, who Gale-ji railed against for trying to cozy up to the British by Westernizing Hindu myths and deities. Yet here were at least a dozen of his paintings on her walls. Her wardrobe was similarly perplexing to Deepak and the Indian staff. She insisted on wearing (and on making the girl students wear) the traditional Indian kurta top, dupata scarf and pajama pants, yet chose the ones that were the most see-through or revealing whenever possible. And again, listening to the way she spoke to the students, Deepak always marveled at how she positioned herself as an expert on all facets of Indian life and customs, fluent in Hindi, and an authority on living in a foreign country. But then, the second she needed train tickets or a hotel or restaurant reservation, she went to Deepak. Still, in the areas that Gale-ji was studied in, she truly was brilliant, but as one student, Molly, from a few years back had said, Gale was a book person, not a people person.

A breeze blew in through the front door and down the hallway, a dry, hot, breeze. It was so hot this time of year that even the breeze was incapable of refreshing people. But this breeze was stiff, and meant one thing. She was here. Trailing behind her several steps was her husband, Guy, a Brit who was everything Gale was not. He loved sports, especially cricket, and would talk bowlers and batters all day with Deepak. Gale brushed past Deepak's office without a glance, her dupata trailing behind her. Guy poked his head in, though.

"India over Pakistan by 30 wickets! What a match!" he said.

"Tendulkar was astounding! I was sitting on the edge of my seat as he hit his second century."

"Deepak!" Gale called from her office.

"We'll talk more about this later," Guy said as he ducked out of the room and slipped into the small program center library across the hall.

Just after lunch, which Deepak savored— he was very picky about food, and his wife often criticized him for not liking traditional "Indian" food—a call came through on his office phone.

"Mr. Nakra? This is Dr. Gupta. I am at the Indira Gandhi Hospital, and your wife was brought in from her office about a half hour ago. She is stable now, but she collapsed while at work. She has been asking for you."

"Of...of course, I'll be there as soon as I can," Deepak said.

Deepak slammed the phone down and all but ran out of his office and towards Gale's. Annoyed, he realized she was in the class with the students, preparing them for a speaker to lecture them on Indian film. He backpedaled and hurried back to the door to the classroom. Putting his ear to the door, he heard that she was nearing the end of her introduction, after which she would leave the classroom.

Deepak paced for what seemed like ages, but his watch told him only a few seconds had passed. Gale slipped out the door and stopped, clearly surprised to see Deepak waiting for her. "Gale-ji, Shanti is in the hospital, they just called; I need to go."

"Deepak, you can't just leave like this without much notice, this is your job...but I suppose that an exception can be made," she said.

At the small clinic, really just a set of tiny rooms off of a cramped reception and waiting area, Deepak rushed in breathing heavily, and was almost past the front desk by the time the receptionist was able to respond and point him to the right room. She caught up with him a minute later with several clipboards of paperwork, but Deepak couldn't be interrupted by that point. He knelt by the bed where Shanti lay, too frantic to look around for a chair and fearing sitting next to her for accidentally cutting off circulation or some vital instrument. She was wrapped in a thin hospital gown and Deepak was disturbed by the tubes which spread out from her arm to the plastic IV bag hanging next to her bed. "Shanti, how are you feeling? That was a stupid question, I'm sorry."

"Deepak, you're here. The doctor was just here a few minutes ago. They're running some tests, but he won't know for sure what is wrong for a few days. It sounded like I could go home though."

"I want to hear that from him, Shanti. I'm glad you're okay, at least for now."

Deepak squeezed her hand, kissed her on the forehead, and stood, walking out the door. He moved swiftly to the receptionist's station, asked for the doctor, and returned to his wife's bedside.

Shortly the doctor entered the room carrying Shanti's charts.

"Mr. Nakra, I am Doctor Gunbir Singh." Doctor Singh was a tall Sikh Indian, and proudly wore a deep purple turban and black beard.

"We have your wife's test results back, and we're afraid that it is cancer. Now, cancer can be difficult because sometimes it can be treated, but it's hard to say whether it will or not. There are a number of options that we can discuss if you'd like."

They sat while the doctor detailed the options to treat Shanti's cancer, and after the doctor left they sat in silence, not daring to say to the other what had to be said.

"Deepak, I don't think we can afford those treatments. We just don't have the money."

"There has to be a way. I can go to Gale-ji and ask for an advance. She's been promising me incremental raises since I was hired."

"Thank you. I hope you're right."

Deepak trudged into the office the next morning, moving slowly out of exhaustion. After he had called the office and let Gale-ji know what was going on and that he would not be back at the office that day, he had stayed at the clinic as long as they would let him but eventually was told he had to go home. Begrudgingly he had left, but hadn't slept much that night, which, given the fact that his wife was still in the clinic, seemed fair. One student, Julie, was sitting in his office, waiting for him. Julie was an art major from Wesleyan University and had bonded with Deepak almost immediately over their love of the TV show *Lost*, which Deepak had managed to find pirated DVDs of in Delhi. "Deepak-ji, I'm so sorry, Gale-ji told us what happened after the lecture last night. How is Shanti doing? Is there anything we can do? We've made a card, which isn't much, I suppose, but hopefully it'll make her smile at least."

Deepak realized that he was smiling slightly in spite of himself. "Thank you, Julie. Shanti is still at the hospital, but she will be coming home soon, we think."

"I'm glad to hear that. If there's anything at all, let me know."

With that she walked out that door and back into the classroom across the hall. Deepak could vaguely hear her telling the others what had happened. He swallowed and then headed up the steps to Gale-ji's office. Her door was plain brown, the same as all the other doors in the center, but somehow it was more imposing than others. He knocked and heard a tired, impatient "Come in" emanate from the other side. As he entered the office, he saw she was in her usual position behind her desk, apparently grading papers the students had turned in about their immersion studies (sitar lessons, history walks, and the like), but Deepak suspected she had just been puttering around on the Internet, answering emails and looking at travel options for the end of the semester. She hid her procrastination well, but she was the worst Deepak had seen (besides some of the students who wrote papers the day they were due). "Deepak, how are you? How is your wife today?"

"I am afraid not well, Gale-ji. The doctor says she has cancer. I would like to ask you: we do not have enough to pay for treatment and I was hoping you would be willing to give me a raise so we can afford it. You've been promising incremental raises for five years now, since you hired me. At least an advance. Anything would help."

"I am truly sorry to hear about her condition. Cancer is such a predicament. I am afraid, though, that SIT cannot afford to give you any extra money right now. With the economy in the United States and the world the way it is, the money just isn't there. I am truly sorry. You could take a loan out from your bank perhaps? Or get another opinion? Maybe the doctor was wrong and there's a less expensive treatment out there somewhere?"

"I'm afraid the doctor was not wrong," he said tersely. "He consulted a number of his colleagues on the matter. Thank you, though, for listening to my request." Inside, Deepak was seething, but he knew that any chance to pay for the treatment rested on him for the time being, and letting out his anger and frustration would take that away from him in seconds.

As the weeks passed, Shanti, while able to return home, remained unable to go to work, finding that her body was too weak to deal with the strain of being on her feet and active all day. A month and a half after the diagnosis, the phone rang for her while she sat at home, trying to muster the energy to do some of the paperwork Deepak had picked up from her office for her to do at home. Shanti answered the phone.

"Hello?"

"Shanti, this is Suraj Oberoi."

Suraj Oberoi was her immediate superior at work. He was a thin, small man, who had gone bald at an early age, but maintained a graying moustache. He fell very squarely into the stereotype of the "Pontificating Indian Gentleman," an elder who was very eager to express his own views on political and social matters, but was incapable of listening to anyone else's opinions.

"I'm afraid I'm calling under less than positive circumstances. We were all very sorry to hear about your illness, as you know, and we certainly appreciate and respect your attempt to do work from home, but bearing in mind that you have not been able to come in to the office in over four weeks, and have not been able to do the work load you were depended on for doing, I am afraid we have no choice but to let you go."

Shanti was stunned for a moment, forgetting that she should respond. Finally, she pleaded, "Mr. Oberoi, we're already finding it difficult to pay for treatment for me. Our money combined was not enough to pay for it. If I lose my job, I don't know what we will do. Oberoi-ji, please reconsider."

"I am truly, truly sorry. This was not my decision, and I am sorry to be the one to tell you. If I were in your place though, I would consider

altering my diet. You know, it is very important to eat bitter foods; they are very good for the body and the blood. Also, you should eat cold foods; things that have cumin in them are best.”

With that, Oberoi said goodbye to Shanti, wished her the best in the future and a speedy recovery, and hung up the phone. When Deepak returned home from the program center, he found Shanti curled up on the sofa, weeping. He held her in his arms and whispered in her ear until she stopped crying.

“Deepak, I lost my job! I don’t know what we can do. I know it’s being ridiculous, but sometimes I feel like it would be easier if I just ended it. I don’t want to hurt anymore! I’m so tired of hurting. I just want to not feel anything.”

“That’s not the way, Shanti. There has to be another way. Something we haven’t thought of yet. We’ll find it, I promise you.”

“No, it’s hopeless, Deepak. Hopeless.”

“We have other options. There are always other options.” He paused. “I have an idea. Let’s go visit your parents for a weekend. That will take your mind off of things for a little bit and you won’t be as stressed. It will be relaxing. It won’t fix everything, but it will make things easier.”

“I don’t know if I can travel. I feel so weak.”

“We’ll take it easy. It won’t be bad. The fresh air could do you some good.”

“I guess. I’m really not sure about this, Deepak, but okay, if you think it’s a good idea.”

Their car bumped along the road, which though it was one of the major roads that entered Chandigarh was still filled with potholes from years of no maintenance. Shanti clutched the door handle with one hand to brace herself, while Deepak let himself rock back and forth in his seat with the motion of the car. After about four hours of driving, in which the car had not been as gentle as Deepak had hoped, leading him to yell at their driver repeatedly as he swerved around cars that he deemed were driving too slow, disregarding Deepak’s pleas, the car pulled into a small property. The ground was mostly brown from the dry weather of the season. The land was flat with low-rising hills in the distance, mostly covered by scrubs, with a few trees scattered about. As they pulled up, Shanti saw her parents walk out of the side entrance towards the driveway. They were now an older couple, gray and starting to feel the frailty of their ages. They wore traditional Indian clothing, something that Shanti had resisted as soon as she was able to. They had tried to dress her in the clothes they chose to wear and to make her attend the Sikh religious services regularly, but Shanti favored jeans and t-shirts, and had never felt particularly connected to the faith.

Her parents welcomed them into the house and though they attempted to support her as she walked, they were unable and Deepak swooped in to assist. They had set up the dining table with many of Shanti's favorite foods, all still warm and filling the air with wonderful smells. The steam from a pot of ginger tea drifted up amongst the other smells, inviting the family to sit.

Later that evening, Shanti and Deepak sat in the living area of the house with Shanti's father. He was sitting on the ground with his legs under him, a position he said ensured good digestion. They were discussing options and the future with him. "Shanti, you know what I'm going to tell you," he said. "And you're probably not going to like it, but I'm going to tell you anyway. In all this time, you've been trying to find the money to help you and heal you. But that is not the Indian way. You've spent too much time in the capital around Westerners. Money is not everything. You know now what I'm going to tell you to do, don't you?" He had a bit of a smile on his face, but it wasn't the smirk that usually crossed his face in these talks. "Go to the Golden Temple and bathe in the tank of nectar. Or, follow Deepak's family's faith if you choose. Go to Varanasi and bathe in the Ganges."

"Father-ji, the Ganges is dirty and polluted. The cremated bodies and trash have madethat section of the river septic. It would do more harm than good," Shanti said.

"But you cannot argue against the Golden Temple. It would not hurt you to try. As it is, you are just sitting back and letting the pain take you. You are giving in to the pain. You must try something, and you have run out of other options. So why not try this one. It is okay, even in this day and age, to be religious. Do not fear it, Shanti."

"But that sort of healing is only in myths and old legends. They don't actually happen."

"But they do; these miracles happen every day. You just have chosen to ignore them. Oh, but they do happen. Just give them a chance to happen to you."

Her father's words stayed with Shanti for the remainder of her visit, though she remained non-committal about what her next move would be. She was still tired and hurt, but being in her parents' home took some of the pain away and she felt better than she had in weeks. When they parted, Deepak and Shanti decided that they would not go back to Delhi, but would drive on another four hours to Amritsar, the site for the most holy place for Sikhs, the Golden Temple or Harmandir Sahib. Deepak had watched his wife sleep next to him, shaking and shivering throughout the night. He knew as he sat in bed quietly that she needed something he could not give her—he didn't have the money

to pay for the treatment, which may not have worked at this point anyway. She was probably too far along, he thought. But religion had never made sense to him. He enjoyed the spectacle of it, but had never felt that intangible feeling that his parents were so sure of. They were just interesting stories and entertaining rites and rituals. But what other choice did they have, he reasoned. And so he slipped out of the bed, grabbed his mobile and ducked out into the front yard. Unsurprisingly, Gale-ji did not pick up the phone, though she always assured the students that they could call her anytime or anywhere. It wasn't difficult to guess that this was an empty offer, once you got to know her. He left a short message on her voice mail, telling her that he would be back a couple days later than expected, as they were making a stop in Amritsar. He finished by apologizing for the abruptness of this new development, but stressed that they both felt it was necessary.

When they arrived at the Golden Temple, it was nearly noon. The sun shone brightly down on the massive water tank, a manmade lake, and Golden Temple in its center. All around the tank visitors walked slowly around to the bridge to the Temple itself, covered in plated gold, while others sat on the side of the tank listening to the unending chanting from the Adi Granth, the Sikh holy book. Still others stripped down to their underwear and walked down steps in the water to bathe and cleanse themselves. In another section of the massive complex was a kitchen which served thousands of people everyday; food that was prepared by volunteers to visitors sitting side by side on the ground, regardless of religion, caste, age, or gender.

It was on the side of the tank that Deepak and Shanti now found themselves. They sat together as they went through the kitchen, received food and ate. They walked slowly through the Golden Temple, hearing the reading from the book echo through the rooms. Deepak watched as his wife struggled to make herself step down into the water. Volunteers moved back and forth, cleaning the side to make sure it wasn't slippery. Guards walked up and down the tank to ensure that all visitors were behaving appropriately and no one was disrespecting the site.

Deepak moved to stand just behind her, and whispered into her ear. "This is not the end, Shanti. Even this is not our last hope." He didn't know what made him say these words, but he felt they were the words to say.

She turned and looked at him skeptically, confused, so he added, "What is the worst that could happen?" He took her hand, and they moved to the steps that led down into the water, and with each step, the cold water moved up her leg until she was waist-deep in the tank. She held Deepak for balance, and, looking around one last time and back to Deepak to make sure he wouldn't move, she leaned back and submerged herself in the nectar.

Eric Kozlik

Excerpts from "Out of the Woods"

Listening

Every autumn, the woods grow quiet. There is a silent exodus—from the gradual draining of chlorophyll in every leaf, to the mass absence of songbirds and piping amphibians. The vibration of every footfall on the leaf-littered turf echoes through the thinning vegetation more openly than in the warm, soft seasons, which only serves to reinforce the isolation of any single trekker. It is the anaerobic hush at the end of a long, deep exhalation. The landscape becomes predictably faded and brittle, and the crest of every ridge feels vaguely like the wind-swept spine of the world. From those high places, it is possible see into the hollows and thickets that were previously concealed, where small things once grew and were born, learning to walk and blossom by the edges of recently-dry stream beds and vernal pools. Abandoned burrows and withered stems inform us, to a certain extent, of their fates.

When I was about ten years old, my father began taking me hunting with him every autumn. Saturdays, we would wake up an hour before the sun, eat some toast, don our camouflage, and disappear into the woods for the morning. The dogs would look at us as we slipped out the cellar door, wondering why we insisted on waking so early when the weather turned chilly. In those days, we stalked the edges of woodland ponds, seeking the exhilarating flush of the mallard, or posted silently in bare stands of oak, awaiting the mythical appearance of the whitetail buck. Besides the occasional twittering of a few remaining birds, the rattling of dry leaves in the wind, and the distant shush of cars, the woods were always quiet.

Whenever I became bored or antsy, frustrated by the cold or lack of game, my father would simply tell me to "listen more closely"—to listen beyond. He said that if I listened beyond the woods, beyond the houses and the road, and beyond the hills, I would hear geese feeding in an empty corn field. He told me that if I listened past the sound of a chipmunk skittering across an old stone wall, around the barking of a dog in the distance, and over the next few ridges, I would hear a pair of bucks locking antlers. I always did this without question, and, as if in response or favor to the man who walked among the trees long before I was born, the forest stretched me, bending my hearing like a young sapling.

Whether or not the geese fed or the bucks grunted, the woods always saw fit, in their season of failure, to grant me some benevolent illusion. Thus, the duo of nature and man filled the silence with portions of each other—it was as much an act of desperation as compassion, a dance to fill the emptiness of an approaching winter.

Out of the Woods

Coming out of the woods isn't like leaving for work in the morning. You can't just grab a cup of coffee and be on your way, because once you live in the woods, make your peace with them, and derive pleasure from the mere distance of city life, the body forms knots like a good pine board—pockets of wholesome imperfection and identity that cannot be planed or sanded out by even the finest of craftsmen. Indeed, once a bond is formed between the self and the landscape, it is very much like an uprooting, like being birthed from a thicket of nagging, pulling vines. In order to enter the world of men, one must first be dislodged from the fringes of Eden that have once again seen fit to harbor a human being. And when you leave, it is completely uncomfortable for a good long time—finding burrs attached to your socks and nettles lodged snugly in your shoelaces, splinters under your fingernails and twigs in your hair. Every pebble in your boot, rubbing against the knots of the soul, is a reminder that you have betrayed something, or have been betrayed.

But what seems, all at once, to be a complete disaster must eventually end in peace. For what is betrayal if not a profession of love? It is love to the point of injury, passion to the extent of rupture, and loyalty to the degree of schism. Betrayal implies attachment, dependence, trust; and its ugly bruise covers the emotional dermis of betrayed and betrayer alike. Even as my quiet woods had left me desperately unrehearsed for the sleepless and insistent turning of the world beyond, the need for progress and unhampered communication, I was not blameless. My gradual separation was self-imposed—I plucked my roots from the rich earth one by one and left holes for the forest to fill in my wake. The long process of removing the thorns from my sleeves and the leaves from my coat pockets was acknowledgement of this, acceptance of human misgivings. Yet, in the end, the nagging subsided, bird calls faded into the background, leaves became items to be raked, and a complacent glow settled around the edge of things.

The Voice from the Whirlwind

It was after my first few months of college that I encountered the retrospective rapture of my childhood. In light of the petty and divisive crises that plagued my fellow classmates (broken heels, dented bumpers, and homework), the relative woes of my youth slowly turned

their faces to reveal shades of grace. Back home, I was not as susceptible to the guileful traps of peer pressure, the passive snares of apathy and indolence, or the demure evil of countless makeup-caked faces. I was an island of youth and competence in the calm seas of my own choosing. At the small, liberal arts college 400 miles away from my sanctuary, however, I became merely another young man from a fractured family—an everyman and a no-man, beleaguered by the cycloptic gaze of my own inward eye.

Weekends, college life revolves around drunkenness and a fervent desire to engage in acts of sexual deviance. I discovered rather quickly that, being a quiet country boy, I was not cut out for such pursuits. And so, when Friday nights rolled around and my dormitory spilled its inebriated and over-sexed contents onto the campus social scene, I often found myself alone in my room, counting and re-counting the speckled ceiling tiles until I fell asleep. In that dark room, I would conjure whirlwinds in search of a voice. I placed myself in various deserts—anger, depression, guilt—to confront God and ask Him why I had so foolishly banished myself from that place amidst the trees. With the memory of snow-covered hillsides and the smell of wood smoke impressed upon my mind in the same way that the taste of fruit must surely have remained forever sweet on the lips of Adam and Eve, I pleaded and supplicated. Always, there was no answer.

Radio Silence

The bush pilot is a unique strain of human being. He loads up his tiny plane with supplies—medicines, mail, and food—and takes to some of the largest skies in the world to deliver those life-saving wares to people who dwell in the heart of the wilderness. His plane holds only the cargo, its lone passenger, and a radio, which is the pilot's sole means of communication with the world beyond his aluminum craft. He relies on this radio without knowing what makes it work or who fashioned it, indeed without needing to know, for his duty is simply to traverse and re-traverse the aerial roads that only he can see, bearing life in his fuselage like Apollo ushering the golden sun. But if something in that small, electronic box or the invisible waves that seek its receiver becomes disrupted, he is assaulted by the soft, menacing static of radio silence. It is a defiance of habit and expectation—to send out a word, a note, a whisper, and not have that sound echoed by whomever he imagines is waiting patiently for the sound of his voice. Blame becomes useless, a knot forms in the pit of his stomach, and the silence of the wilderness assails him as he glides above its placid surface, suddenly detached from the shimmering, mechanical thread.

Radio silence is something that primitive man had no need to fear—electricity could only be seen as lightening, and formal language

was still a work in progress. He was mainly concerned with catching small, furry creatures, bashing them over the head, and eating them. When we consider this in light of the theory of evolution, however, it becomes quite clear that he was really eating manifestations of his former self—small-brained, four-legged, snouted echoes from an evolutionarily estranged epoch. He chased, clubbed, consumed, belched, and went to sleep. Primitive man was fully aware that he would receive no answer if he grunted questions into the smooth, pink recesses of a conch shell, or hollered his ape-like indignation into a hollow log. He led a relatively well-adjusted life, having no reason to long for nature because he slept in it, and no need to reminisce about his former selves, for they were in his belly.

Modern man is not so fortunate. We are, by nature, removed from nature, often forced to substitute the star-studded depths of the universe with the deep silence of inner space. Our thirst for communication further implicates us in this. For when the lines go dead, the cable man has the day off, and the streets lay deserted, we are left only with the sneaking suspicion that we've evolved too quickly, departing too indefinitely from simpler things. On those nights, we resurrect the joyful hieroglyphs that denote the happiest hours of our lives, rolling out the brain's faded papyrus and mouthing the sounds we wish to hear spoken from the past. Just as the moving shadows of leaves on the grass signify the sound of wind passing through bough, we presume that intention will mirror reality. Yet always the silence persists. And so we must desperately search the mind, the spirit, the pit of the stomach for the versions of ourselves that we've long since consumed, suffering in the quiet of approaching winter and perceiving no response from the denizens of our past lives. The pleasant hollows and breezy groves that once embraced us in our youth, we find, have been swallowed up as well, engulfed by the same muteness. What a shame it is, in the words of Loren Eiseley, "that the wooded shores that now confine us lie solely," and deep, "within ourselves."

Before Dawn

There is a time of night when dawn is more of a suggestion than a sure thing, when the visible limits of the horizon soften almost imperceptibly as the globe grinds painstakingly on its axis. Somewhere, in the corner of a dark bedroom, a young man stumbles painfully awake. He emerges breathless from dreams that are frozen in time—dreams of his youth and his woods. They overtake the pleasant darkness of sleep, expanding within the empty places from which all his former selves have vanished. The windows are framed with the frost of a winter morning that a young boy in the woods so many years ago never saw coming. He

rises groggily, blinking in the half gloom, and pulls down the shades one by one. A deep silence shadows him all the while, creeping along the cold, bare floor, crouching behind a pile of laundry, and slipping back under the covers with him when he returns to bed. It is a silence much like flying over a wilderness. For him, it is a wilderness of the mind. On such occasions, he knows, the only thing to do is to listen beyond the wind that sifts through the empty streets, between the bouts of quiet within the silence, and over the pale sliver of a moon—all the way to a secluded corner of time and space where he can be lulled back to sleep by the steady groaning of something old and wooden in the soul.

Kristyn Turner

The Strength of Wind

The sun is setting fast today and the breeze kicks off the ocean,
A chill much stronger than before. I am sitting
Stone cold, solidly wrapped in my beach blanket,
He is still in the water,
Drifting in and out with the waves.

As night quickly approaches, I am ready
To return home, return to the warm solid foundation that I know.
He enjoys the free ride of the waves as the
Wind picks up once more. I reluctantly stay,
Watching the waves crash into a mountain of rocks,
Slowly chipping away at them until they break into a helpless pile of sand.

The last warm summer day we spent together had a calm breeze,
We flew a kite.
I remember the difficulties of getting the flimsy piece of fabric to lift off,
And the challenge of holding on when the wind picked up.

I held the kite string with all my might,
I became the rock that kept the kite from drifting.
It was my job to keep it all together.
The kite came home with us that day,
Still attached to its string,
Still attached to me.

The wind still festers outside the window,
Still crashing the waves and pulling away with a strong undertow,
But I am still standing,
With only a few grains missing.

Rachel Rakoff

On Children

When six year old Paige Grady dragged me upstairs to show me her favorite teddy bear and walked up to (what I didn't realize was) her parents' bedroom door, I should have seen it coming. She triumphantly flung the door open, revealing her dad draping his tie around his neck, wearing an unbuttoned striped shirt and white briefs. Immediately, his wife (fully dressed, applying her makeup in the mirror a few feet away from him) yelped, "Oh my God!" as I stood motionless and unable to speak for a fraction of a second, before coming to and slamming the door shut. The next six hours would prove to be equally...memorable.

Because I didn't know how to disable the expensive alarm system wired throughout the house, I was forced to let the pizza delivery guy in through the garage. Within three minutes of sitting down for dinner, Paige and her two sisters, Emily (age five) and Madison (age nine) started a food fight. As a half eaten pizza crust whizzed by my right ear, I sent them upstairs with as much authority as my thirteen-year-old self could manage. An earsplitting screech drifted into the kitchen from the stairwell: Paige had Emily in a chokehold and Madison was shrieking at them to cut it out. Hours later, once they were asleep, I retreated to the living room to kill the remaining hours with TV—but only three channels were available: the Home Shopping Network (no, I don't want a collectable tea set with fairies on it), static-riddled black and white figure skating, and an Italian soap opera. Parental controls, be damned.

I never babysat again.

Before that day, I'd never babysat. Most of my friends loved babysitting, so I figured I'd give it a try. What could be so difficult? One of my close friends reassured me, saying, "Think back to when you were younger. What would you want to do? Just act like a little kid again!"

There was only one problem with this approach: growing up, while other young girls played with American Girl Dolls or dress up in their mother's clothing, I played with Thomas the Tank Engine sets and re-wrote Star Trek episodes with the boy down the street. I didn't know what to do with dolls, and got stressed out at the idea of playing "make believe" house. Interacting with young kids was like the process of speaking a foreign language: it's obvious if you're not a natural.

This includes interactions with babies. But with babies, it's not just a lack of knowing what to do, it's a failure to understand the allure of them. When shown a picture of a newborn fresh out of the womb with a newly cut umbilical cord, I generally respond with, "That's disgusting," whereas nearly every other woman dissolves to an "awww"-ing pile of mush. At family gatherings, while my relatives swarm around a new baby (whose hottest talent is to gurgle something which vaguely resembles the sound "uggaaa!") I sip my sparkling cider, develop an unnatural fixation on the various cheeses on the table and make awkward small talk with family that I see once every two and a half years. "You'll come around," my older cousin Meri said as her eight-month-old daughter, Lexie, zoomed by on her hands and knees, "When you have your own child, you'll understand."

The first time I heard this, I made the blasphemous mistake of explaining that I didn't want to have kids in the future – ever. My grandmother glared at me and reprimanded me for even thinking it; my mom (who would be cradling the new baby, lovingly gazing down at the ticking shit-bomb) would say, "Don't say that! I can't wait to be a grandmother someday." I'd sigh and return, temporarily defeated, to the cheese plate. Confronted with the same situation, my friends cry out, "You have no soul! She devil!" or insist that my "maternal instinct" just hasn't kicked in yet and laugh, promising to taunt my theoretical future kids with, "Your mommy never wanted you!"

Growing up as an only child, I never really dealt with younger kids. My mom had me when she was 40 and my dad was 33. I was raised amongst people significantly older than me; both my extended family and my suburban neighbors were primarily adults. I couldn't have cared less for children; I found them obnoxious and irritating. When I thought of babies, I had only one instant connotation: being on an airplane with a screaming, extraordinarily smelly baby a few rows ahead (despite this having only happened once or twice in a lifetime of flying).

When the neighborhood and family babies finally hit the scene, I was at least seven years old and hadn't learned the basics of "child play." Luckily for me, my mom adored children of all ages, and kept them occupied so I wouldn't have to. She'd scoop the babies up in her arms and swing them around as they flailed their arms laughing, or pretend to order a make-believe sandwich with the "older" children. I resented her ability to connect effortlessly with children of any age.

Except me. Her menopause and my adolescence collided; we argued about everything, and it resulted in constant fighting that ended in tears (on both ends). I made a promise to myself – to never have children of my own – because I refused to pass on the insanity that seemed to be hereditary. Her sadness leaked onto every memory of my youth, and I swore never to do the same. If when I got older I married a man who insisted on children, I'd compromise and adopt. But I would never pass these genes on.

I watched the way my mother looked wistfully at newborn babies and despite her protests, accused her of wishing she could trade me in for a “younger” model, and, that if that was the case, I wished to do the same. I screamed at my parents that they should have had another kid before me, someone to “break them in” – a starter child of sorts. Then the shouting stopped. “We tried,” my my mom said calmly, “twice.”

Turns out, I have two sisters, conceived within a year and a half of my birth. “Ghost siblings,” if you will, one older and one younger; both miscarried. I was technically the middle child, and the only one to survive. I wondered silently what would be different if they’d made it. One of them would have been Emma, my parents told me. Frank, if one had been a boy. I daydreamed about family vacations and going to school with my “sisters” and for a brief moment, I imagined what it would be like to feel comfortable around those younger than me. Even in these fantasies, it was still intangible. Over my teenage years, I gradually stopped wondering “what could have been” and focused more on the bewildering – why the middle child survived. I’d always imagined middle children to be naturally inclined to feel comfortable with those older and younger than them, more like a biological trait rather than one developed by an experience of growing up with others.

This has never been easy to understand: every other only child I knew hated being alone. They got along with people of any age, older or younger. Part of that applies to me: put me in a room with any number of complete strangers my age or older, and I have no problem interacting with any one of them. Put a single, small child in front of me, and my awkward level rivals that found on a middle school dance floor. When I try to talk to kids, I sound dumber than I’ve ever sounded in my entire life. I become temporarily incapable of formulating a solid, coherent sentence and more often than not, don’t know what to say at all.

There is, however, a loophole.

For two summers, despite already having firmly established that I was absolutely clueless with children, I was a counselor at the same camp I attended for 8 years when I was younger. As a camper at Chimney Corners, I’d had the most wonderful counselors and hoped to give back a small piece to a new generation. I was terribly unprepared. I was a counselor to Riding Cabin, which meant that the campers took care of the camp’s horses and rode every day for an hour. The Riding Cabin (ages 11-13) was known for acquiring the weirdest of the bunch (I myself had been in the Riding Cabin) which generally provided a number of entertaining stories upon my return to school.

Every day, at 5:30 PM, we’d have “unit assembly” which meant all the cabins in a certain area of the camp got together, did a roll call, made announcements concerning that evening’s activity, and went off to dinner. At 5:30, when two of my girls, Isabelle and Hayley, weren’t at assembly, I

went back to the cabin to find them. There was Isabelle, tugging violently on one end of an enormous tree branch that was taller than me, and Hayley pulling back on the other. As the "I found it first"s flew, I took the branch away, tossed it into the woods, and sent them to unit assembly. Isabelle sat on the opposite side of the semi-circle from her cabin mates, clenching her jaw (revealing a mean, crooked underbite) and muttering to herself. Once assembly broke, she sprinted off towards the woods. I followed her, motioning for my friend and co-counselor Libby to follow me (Isabelle was rarely easy to handle alone) and we called to her to come on out.

"I won't come out unless you bring me a wolf!" Isabelle shouted out from amongst the trees. She crossed her skinny pale arms in front of her and from underneath her stick straight blonde hair, fixed her bug eyes coldly on mine. "Bring me a wolf!"

"Isabelle," Libby says as she walks towards the woods, "have you 'adopted' a wolf from the Wildlife foundation? They'll send you a picture of a wolf and -"

"- NO! I already did that and want a real wolf. NOW! I'm not going to come out!" Isabelle interrupts, and Libby stops in her tracks and whispers to me, "What did you do to her?"

"SHE TOOK AWAY MY MAGIC STICK!" Isabelle screeched. Libby looks at me in disbelief. "You did what now?"

Perhaps my first mistake was being a counselor at all.

After a few hours (and notifying Camp authorities that we needed "backup") we got Isabelle out and on her way to dinner. No matter what I did or said, she never seemed to listen. I was quietly powerless to each and every one of my campers every moment of every day, except for a small glistening hour: when I was their riding instructor.

The rules of nature shift in the riding ring: my inability to function around children morphs into an unshakable confidence. My rambunctious and sometimes spiteful campers transform into driven, eager-to-learn equestrians. Isabelle, afraid of everything save authority, struggled to master fundamental concepts; I walked alongside her, taking her step-by-step until the faintest signs of a smile crept onto her face as she had mastered a new skill. Even in the three-hour afternoon lessons with non-Riding Cabin campers, my ineptness with children simply dissipates. I taught lessons to all ages, seven to sixteen, and all levels. I connected effortlessly with each of them, often helping them through their anxieties of falling off, or being devoured by a horse, and watched as sooner or later, each girl conquered their fears or learned something new. In this dusty new world, I not only tolerated children—I enjoyed them. But once the helmets were off and the muddy boots were strewn about the cabin floor, I returned to a pathetic shell of counselor, unable to find the comfortable rhythm which every other counselor seemed to have.

No matter what I do, the connection created through horseback riding is impossible to duplicate. Riding instruction provides a gateway that none of my other passions could. I wouldn't teach photography—you can't teach someone how to have an "eye", and I wouldn't teach writing—you can't teach a voice. Riding presents somewhat of a paradox: you can't teach a rider how to truly connect to the horse, but if they have an unmistakable passion for horses or riding, it doesn't matter. It didn't matter how young or old my students were – if they wanted to learn, I wanted to help. I liked being able to finally connect to those younger than me in the ring – which, on occasion – was so great that during the day (away from the ring) I'd suddenly find myself being tackle-hugged by a girl I'd helped earlier. That made all the other awkward moments worth it.

Eventually my discomfort around children morphed, from a mild jealousy of those who were able to do what I could not (even something as simple as sitting in a room with a small child and not feeling uncomfortable), to a general dislike towards anyone drastically younger than myself. Family events are painful since most of my cousins have young children now and every event turns into a celebration of their lives. Even my high school graduation party, which I wasn't allowed to invite friends to as it was a "family only" event, turned into Gabriel and Lexie's early birthday parties complete with presents from my grandma, two cousins, and both parents. The cake was nondescript.

When introduced to a new baby, I'm forced to fake a smile and say how adorable they are. I can't tell you how many babies I've been introduced to that will, totally change the way I feel about babies because this one is just the cutest damned thing. Maybe someday my long hibernating maternal instinct will kick in, and I'll find simple joy in watching a baby laugh, or running around with kids in the park. I don't see anything when I look towards the future; I'm perfectly satisfied with being surprised. It doesn't matter to me what my friends, family, or society say. If the best laid plans go awry, I'd rather not bank on anything too specific. I've got plenty of time.

A few weeks after the nightmare at the Grady's, my mom told me to pick up the phone. "Rachel? Hi, how are you, it's Mrs. Grady. Listen, I was wondering if you were available to babysit the girls this upcoming Sunday night. They had a wonderful time with you last time." In that moment, I saw a flash of possibilities: letting Paige braid my hair, teaching Madison how to draw horses, and reading bedtime stories to Emily until she fell asleep. I saw sitting down to dinner playing silly games and laughing as we each tried to make a funny face.

"Rachel? Are you there?"

I spoke hesitantly. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Grady, but I'm actually going to work on a group project for school that night. I know a friend who could babysit instead, though."

And the images vanished as quickly as they'd come.

Mark Biciunas

The Price

"I try to remember my mother. I really do. But every time I close me eyes, I can't see anything! It hurts so much! But I don't know why!"

The bartender just looked on in utter shock at his last patron of the night. He really didn't know what to say to him.

"Look, buddy, I got no say in psycho stuff like this. But I can say that you've had enough. You want me to call a cab?"

Martin pushed back from the bar and turned.

"Nah, I can let myself out. But thanks anyway."

"Do you know where you're going?" The bartender asked.

Martin fell silent for a minute. He stood there with his eyes focused on a mirror. His face captivated him. He had never seen this face before. The bartender put down the glass he was cleaning and arched an eyebrow. Then Martin put his hand on his face and breathed in. He turned to the bartender with a smile.

"No." Then he pushed open the door and left.

Martin was alone as he walked through the streets of Boston late at night. He walked with a hunched back to deal with the cold. He knew he had walked these streets before, but he couldn't see them. Every street sign was new to him. Every building looked the same to him. He made his way through the winding streets until he came upon the Boston Commons. There he found a bench to sit after so long. He sat and watched what few people there were walk by. He just stared as they paid him no mind. Martin looked into the shadows of his mind to try to see something. There wasn't even a blur, no covered faces, not even a goddamn name. Martin wasn't even his name. Waking up in the alley next to the bar was the first thing he could remember. Some people walked by, and one of the girls saw him there.

"Martin is that you? Where have you been?" She ran to him enthusiastically, but stopped short of touching him. Suddenly she her face became embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sorry, you look like my friend Martin. But, you have black hair. He has blonde. Why am I telling you this? You don't care." She turned to return to her friends. She left Martin confused, mouthing the name "Martin" over and over. He stumbled through the doors of the bar and sat down. The bartender turned to his newest patron and asked him his name.

"Martin," he replied.

Martin began sweating the harder he tried to remember. It was like something was blocking him and the more he tried to push against it, the more it pushed back. He opened his eyes to stop the pain. But the pain continued. He was crying, but he didn't know why. Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder and spun around. A cop was standing there in the shadows. Martin jumped from the bench to his feet.

"You alright son? You're shaking. Anything wrong?"

"N... no, nothings wrong. I'm j...j...just a little rattled right now. I can't remember m...my mother."

The tears started to flow even more. The cop cocked his head at this. He didn't know what he could do. Either case, he put his left hand on his holster.

"Hey, it's alright. Just take a deep breath. Let me help you."

Martin's eyes went wide when he heard the cop. Something in his head became clear. No faces, but those words. Let me help you. They rang out like a shot in the dark. Could he have had something to do with his memory loss? Was he trying to take him back? No, not again. He already lost his memory, he won't lose anything else.

"You stay away. Not again. I won't let you take me."

The cop was at a loss. He didn't know what he did to set this man off. But he wasn't going to let this escalate any further.

"Hey, it's alright. I'm here to help. There is no reason to freak out. Just sit back down."

"No! I won't let you take me! Stay the fuck away!"

Then Martin took off into the Commons, slowly disappearing into the darkness. The cop pulled out his receiver.

"Hey control, I got a seriously disturbed man making his way through the Commons. I'm gonna try to follow him and apprehend him."

A crackled voice came through, "Do you need any assistance?"

"No, he's no threat now, but he could be. Says he doesn't remember his mother. Like I said, disturbed."

There was no response for a moment, then, "Understood."

Martin was falling over every rock and root that got in his way. His tears were flowing even more freely now. Who was this man? What did he do? Questions kept filling up his mind as he flailed around in the darkness. He stopped next to a large tree to catch his breath. He wanted so much to remember something. Something else that could help him. He covered his face to stop the crying. And in the silence, he heard something. Footsteps. Footsteps that were getting closer. Martin crouched down next to the tree with his hands over his mouth. The cop had followed him here.

"He must know something," Martin thought to himself. "That's the reason he's following me. The reason he's looking for me. God, don't let him catch me." The tears ran like a river now.

The cop was lost in the darkness. He had no idea where this man had gone. But he would find him. He won't let such a disturbed man run free. Then he heard something. A rustling to his right. He pulled his gun from its holster and walked slowly to the tree. Sweat ran down his face. He put his back to the tree and waited. He needed to hear something. But his impulse to catch this man took over. He spun around the tree to find nothing. He let out a sigh and lowered his gun. Then he heard something above him. Before he could raise his gun, Martin was on top of him. The cop fell to the ground as he tried to fight off Martin. He felt Martin's flailing hands smack him as he tried in vain to take out the cop. The cop kicked off Martin and stood up. Martin was curled up away from the cop, holding his stomach. The cop, without realizing it, walked to check the man. He stood over him. Then there was a flash.

The cop lay a few feet away from Martin. He was convulsing while holding his chest. Martin sat in total shock at what had happened. When the cop towered over him, Martin had only one option. He shot the cop. In the tussle, Martin had taken the cop's gun before he was kicked off. Martin was shaking, looking at his hands. But it wasn't because of blood that now covered them. It was the flash. In the split second that the gun went off, an illuminating light filled the area. And he saw it. His face. A face taken by shock and pain but Martin's face nonetheless. What was going on? Who are these people? Thoughts ran around in his head. Was he seeing things because of his amnesia? Or was he a part of some crazed scientist's experiment? Martin lost control and threw up. He was spinning. All he could see in his head was his face, the blood, and those words: "Let me help you."

"What's going on!?" He screamed to the darkness. Then suddenly, he felt something. He put his hand on his neck. He felt a long, cold, tube. Then further up was a hand. But he had no time to think. All the thoughts that worried him, just seemed to go away. What little he could see turned to blurs. Then darkness took him.

Some time later, Martin awoke in a bright room. He covered his eyes with his hand. After a few minutes, he could see. An empty room. An empty white room. He stood up.

"Hello! Is anyone there? Please, I beg of you, tell me what's going on! God! Somebody help me! I just want to know what's going on!"

Suddenly the wall next to him began to lift, filling the room with a blinding blue light. Martin felt himself be consumed by an intense chill. He wrapped his arms around himself and moved towards the opening. It was like walking into the aftermath of a flash-freeze, with everything in the room covered by ice. Metal wires lined the room from ceiling to floor. He followed the one closest to him, which led to a large glass tube. He rubbed away the frost that covered the glass. Inside was a woman.

She looked as though she was no more than 25 years old. Martin was speechless, but he moved to the next, which also had a woman, this woman being many years older. Martin stopped and spun around; the room was lined with these tubes. There had to be at least a dozen, and each one went back three tubes. Suddenly Martin became aware, and he ran around the room, rubbing off the frost from each casing; until he came to one marked subject two. There, in the front tube, rested himself, resting peacefully in suspended animation. The realization overwhelmed Martin causing him to vomit. As he tried to compose himself, someone else entered the room. He was at least 6'4", wearing an expensive Armani suit. Without even acknowledging Martin, he walked up to the cryotubes and put his hand on it. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply the cold air. Then, he spoke.

"You can't remember your mother, can you?" He turned and looked down at Martin, who was stunned that he knew he could not remember.

"You're not alone. Every time we test a new subject, the first thing they realize is that they cannot remember their mother. We still don't understand why. But over time we will be able to wipe that as well."

Martin looked on in horror as this man spoke with such clarity about the men and women surrounding them.

"Subject two-beta, you caused quite a problem for us. You were not scheduled for any type of active testing for quite some time. You have thrown us off our calculations and now we have some maintenance to deal with."

Martin had stopped listening to the man. The only thing he could think about was what the man had called him. Subject two-beta.

"My...my name is Martin."

The man looked at Martin with slight amazement in his eyes. He then began to laugh. A type of laugh that hurt Martin. A laugh of disbelief and humiliation. After a moment, the man composed himself and looked at Martin.

"Your name is Martin? My God, that truly is amazing. You actually have cognitive thought. Well, I was aware you had some ability to think when you killed Two-Gamma. But to think you have enough of a brain to hold onto a concept like a name. You were an excellent specimen for the project."

"Project?" Martin asked tentatively.

"I guess there's no harm in telling you. We are a branch of the government trying to create the perfect human. Trying to improve upon the design given to us by God. To make his design better. To make people immune to diseases, able to live longer, survive anything."

"S...So you have been abducting people and running tests on them without them knowing? That's terrible."

"You continue to amaze me. If I wasn't so sure of it, I would think you were real."

"I am real! I...I think, therefore I am!"

This statement greatly disturbed the man. He lifted his hand and began to rub his beard as he was thinking.

"Subject two-alpha was a philosophy professor at Boston College. The top of his field and respected by all. He would have known that phrase by Descartes. Some of his memories must have transferred over to you during the cloning. Even though we wiped both yours and Gamma's minds. Truly amazing that you are recalling that. Gamma showed no recollection of anything before we reconstructed his brain. He was sent into the world as a regular man but with a perfect immune system. We tested him against thousands of strands of different viruses. We would have had all our data, before you were released and killed Delta. Now we have to restart that whole process."

"How can you talk like that? You speak as though we are nothing to you. How can you be so calm about the loss of life?"

"Throughout the years, many lives have been lost in the pursuit of science. What are a few more in the pursuit of immortality? Your 'lives' mean nothing to me. I have my eyes focused on my goal and if I lose a few clones here and there, I won't shed any tears. But you have shown me something today. You have shown me how fast the mind can grow when placed in a new environment with no prior knowledge. So, I guess, in a way, you have done something for us. And I thank you for that."

Martin stared at this man with tearing eyes. He could not grasp the cold reality of his existence. That he, and so many others, were being manipulated like marionettes. He needed to do something, anything. Martin charged the man, hoping to catch him off guard. Martin's charge was met with a fist to the stomach. Martin fell to his knees trying to breathe. The man watched him. He knelt down in front of Martin and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry it had to come to this. But I don't care what you think. I don't care what anyone thinks. Immortality is worth any price. And soon everyone will see me for the god I am. And they will cheer and praise me."

With that the man shot Martin in the chest. Pain rushed throughout Martin's body. He felt around the entry wound, watching as the blood came flooding out of his chest. He looked up at the man as he realigned his tie. Martin tried to say something, but he had no energy left to do anything. He just watched as everything began to blur, then fade, and then everything just drifted into darkness.

His head slumped down and his arms fell to his side. The man stood for a few moments more to make sure nothing happened. When he was satisfied that Martin was dead, he turned to leave the cryo-chamber. He walked past the door and turned for one last look. Seeing Martin

slumped there, slowly freezing in the cold, gave the man a chill. But he shook that away, content with the fact that the day's mishap had been resolved. The door slid shut, leaving the subjects to remain in suspended animation until they were needed.

Hours later, the man returned to deal with Martin's body. When he entered the room, he stood shocked at the sight before him. Or rather what wasn't before him. Martin's body was gone. He swiftly walked over to the bloodstain on the floor. *A body can't just get up and walk away.* He looked around the room, and there, on Subject three-alpha's cryotube, was something written in blood. "Survive anything." The man stood aghast, but looked closer to something written above it. "Stand tall and be praised." Then, three-alpha's eyes sprung to life. Her eyes darted around the room in panic. The man looked around as more eyes began to open. Each pair of eyes darted around until settling on him. Without hesitation, he made a dash for the door. But he stopped short. There in the door stood Martin. He was covered in frozen blood. But it was the smile that disturbed the man. The man didn't know what to do; he just stood there, frozen. Martin's lips cracked as he opened them.

"Worth any price? Even God knows when to stop." With that the doors slid shut; leaving the man surrounded by those he deemed expendable. He ran to the door, slamming his fists against the metal. The sound reverberated throughout the chamber. When he had lost feeling in his hands, he turned to face the men and women whose lives were destroyed by him. He pulled his gun and pulled the trigger. But the gun had frozen, leaving him completely defenseless. He dropped the gun and fell to his knees. They took no pity on him. They dragged him, kicking and screaming to the last cryotube in the room and shoved him inside. He screamed.

"No! Don't do this to me! Don't you realize that what I was doing was for the betterment of mankind? You could bring about a new world."

"O brave new world that has such people in it. Let's start at once." The voice came from the back. Up walked Two-Alpha, with a face of such discontent. He stood over the man. He leaned in close, nearly touching his face with his own.

"It will be a new world. You just won't be leading us there."

Two-Alpha pressed down on the panel and the door began to shut. The man began to scream as everyone looked on. The hatch closed and sealed shut. The man placed his hands on the hatch, trying in vain to push it open. Then, in a flash, he was frozen. His eyes still open; his mouth gaping wide, trying to scream. The people left the door to leave. One by one, they left the chamber as they left him in the cold darkness of his own design.

Kevin Fitzpatrick

On a Sunday

Snow falling is a frozen silent rain, afraid to shout its arrival.
Light sneaks through the clouds and blinds my squinted eyes.
Starving squirrels chatter and squabble over the last acorn.
Warm sweat turns cold, ice water drip-drips down my spine.
Sterile frozen air stings my nostrils.

My cracked lips taste like blood, reminding me of home,
where there is too much iron in the water.
Winter looks like the last time a bird sings,
as its song echoes through the corridor.

John Cash sings sweeter songs in the halls of Reno, Heaven.
Tiny pieces of the clouds fall one by one,
pattering on a tin roof with deafening noise.

I bet the Aztecs had a plan in case this happened, maybe the Incas too.
The tree I cut down held it all up there.

He told me, "Life's a study of dying, and how to do it right."
The chalk of my thoughts wrote these words in a musty corner.

The rising sun brought through black curtains,
The sky rested on the top of my head as I tried to stand tall.
Father, never let the world stop spinning.

After walking between these mountains I will arrive at the place they will
bury me.

The sorry trees bow and wave,
Telling me goodbye and cracking their branches with Farewell.
Maybe I'll return to yesterday when I finally get to next week.

The motto was "Plus Ultra Plurimum,"
The best of the best.

The wind never spoke to me in English.

Julia Heilakka

Silence of a Heart

She was a sweet, slightly overweight girl with a sharp tongue when I met her. Blonde hair that had been dyed fire-engine red was pulled back, away from her blue eyes, though she had bangs that refused to stay tucked behind her ears. Her wardrobe was of a classic Goth style, but she occasionally wore blue jeans. Anyone else might have chosen to smile kindly and keep a wide berth, but I was either too young or too stupid to notice the vibes she was giving off.

"Hey, can you help me tighten this?" were the first words I said to her. We both volunteered at a horse therapy center named Equi-librium.

"Sure," she responded in a short voice, grabbing the buckles of the girth from my hands. Timmy, an albino Appaloosa, had sucked air into his lungs, so the girth that was meant to secure his saddle no longer fit around his swollen stomach. She kneed him in the barrel and pulled the buckles tight.

"Thanks," I said to her back. She was already walking away.

The summer days passed slowly and our boss constantly threw us together. On the third day, she finally introduced herself.

"I'm Jamie," she told me while we were mucking out stalls. "Want to come over sometime?"

I nodded, a little uncertain of her straightforward manner. She went right back to mucking and didn't say another word.

Lo and behold, that Saturday, I was sitting in her room. Her bedroom was the attic of her house. The walls were painted a faded yellow color. Her bed and bookshelf were both made of ash, but the little stool that supported her TV was black mahogany. A Playstation 2 sat to the right of the stool, and that was what we did until dinner – murdered scary clowns and raced fast cars.

I guess she came to trust me over dinner with her family. Conversation in earnest started over baked macaroni and cheese, green bean casserole, and Ocean Spray's Cranberry-Raspberry juice. I was overcome by the hundreds of similarities we shared. Her parents, Ingrid and Steven Pelinski, mused that we could have been twins. Yet, over dinner I felt that something wasn't right. I couldn't pinpoint my feeling's source, but something was wrong. I noticed that I felt uncomfortable around her father. It came as no surprise though. His face was fixed in an almost permanent frown, and there was 6'4" of height and three hundred

pounds of muscle behind that frown. The two glasses of red wine next to his plate didn't help either. Regardless, my visit turned into a sleep over. We collapsed in the living room around four.

Two or three months had passed, and we'd grown inseparable. Finishing each other's sentences, craving the same foods, and responding in unison was only the beginning. We had the same reactions to situations, the same laugh, and the same innate love for books. Yet, such understanding of a person also comes with the knowledge of when the entire story isn't being told. I didn't want to press her, but it was obvious that she wasn't telling me something. I found out a fragment on a Friday night a few weeks later.

I was laying on my bed, particularly enjoying one of my favorite books when I heard her car come up my driveway. She usually called before she visited, but it wouldn't have been the first time she'd forgotten. I marked my page with part of my sheet and hopped out of bed to greet her. I got to the door the same time that she did. "You should have called, I would've made cookies," an old personal joke between us, died in my throat before I could say it. She'd been crying. A lot. Her makeup had smeared all the way down her cheeks and onto the top collar of her coat. Her eyes were bloodshot, cheeks bright red. It was obvious that she'd just wiped away fresh tears.

"Jamie, what's—" I hadn't gotten any farther before she wrapped her arms around me and new tears sprung from her eyes. I stood in my foyer, stunned to silence. A million possibilities were flying through my head, each scenario becoming more and more gory, more and more horrifying. I shot a glance over to her blue Kia, looking for any sort of damage. I didn't see anything, so I ruled out the possibility that she'd been in an accident. Perhaps her parents were hurt? Dead, even? Was she pregnant?

She wasn't ready to talk, that much was evident. I guided her into my room, and eventually got her onto my bed. She wouldn't let me go, regardless of what I said, so I resigned myself to putting an arm around her. My overactive brain would have to wait.

"Jamie, is anyone hurt? Do I need to call an ambulance or something?" I asked after few minutes. If she'd walked into her house to find her parents murdered... I didn't want to think about it. She jolted her head violently and kept crying. I managed to detach her from my side with the excuse of using the bathroom. Instead, I snuck upstairs and told my parents that Jamie was here and would be spending the night.

Morning came with no sign of Jamie, spare a quick note scrawled in her handwriting that was propped against my computer screen. The note explained that she was running errands after school, and that I'd see her again later. I shrugged before ripping the letter apart. Jamie and I were very close, but it still aggravated me that she never thanked me for anything I'd done.

There were many more nights like the one I described above. They didn't always start with a tear-stained face, but they always ended with one. She'd attach herself to my shoulder and cry until my shirt was soaked through, and she didn't have any more tears to cry. Then the whimpering and night

terrors would start, and I would have to sit there, unmoving. Never before had I felt so terrible and so completely useless. There was absolutely nothing I could do except keep her company while she dealt with her demons.

After her most recent episode, she informed me that she was going to her cousin's house in Philadelphia because her mom was on a business trip. She never gave me a timeline, and I finally got a call two weeks later.

"Hello?" I said into the phone.

"Hey, Julie, it's Jamie. Are you doing anything this week?"

"No, what's up?"

"Well, my mom's out of town again and I was wondering if I could maybe spend the week at your house."

After a quick check with Mom, I told her it was fine, and she responded that she'd be on her way in about an hour.

When she got to my house, I had a surprise waiting for her. She'd always talked about how she'd wanted to dye someone's hair, so I had two boxes of black hair dye waiting to be squished into my hair. I threw a box at her when she walked into the kitchen. She laughed.

"Let's get this started. If you look like a retard, it's not my fault." She pushed her long sleeves up to her elbows and donned gloves to protect her hands. I'll be completely honest; only the years I spent learning how to be a respectful young lady kept me from gasping. She had telltale white lines from her wrists to the shirtsleeves. The lines got worse as they moved up her arm. I didn't want to think about what marred her upper arm. She caught my glance before I could look away and shook her head ever so slightly. That meant we'd talk when Mom wasn't around.

I kept a cheery mood in the kitchen, even once venturing to smear dye on her nose. In return, I got a smudge on my ear. She also managed to get some on her clothes. Once my hair was set, we went downstairs and I grabbed her one of my long sleeve shirts. That was another plus to being best friends with her—we shared the same clothing size. She pulled her shirt off and put mine on.

"Jamie, what happened to your back?" There were ugly bruises on her shoulders and sides.

"Dutch bucked me off again. It's fine Julie, don't worry about it."

That's something I never wanted to hear from her. "Fine" meant that she didn't want to talk about it; "don't worry about it" meant I shouldn't ask. What worried me more was that she was lying to me. Duchess, a Paint horse we worked with, had gone lame two weeks ago, and Jamie and I were both in charge of nursing her back to health. The fact that she'd used a lie that I could spot so easily freaked me out. But Jamie was Jamie, and she wouldn't talk to me until she was ready, no matter how much I pried. So, as usual, I shut my mouth and prayed that she would be ready to talk to me soon.

Her last visit to me was different. Her face was pale and her eyes looked forlorn, almost like she was sleeping, and a puppeteer was holding

her up by only a few strings. She walked straight into my house and collapsed onto my downstairs couch. Alarm bells were going off in my head like there was no tomorrow. I needed to find out what was wrong, and I needed to do it soon. The sense of urgency I felt almost overcame me, but I kept myself in check. Regardless of what I did or asked, Jamie would tell me when she was ready. There was no way around that.

"Julia?" she finally voiced, fifteen minutes later.

"Yeah?" I answered back.

"Thank you."

The look of alarm that crossed my face reflected only a portion of what I was feeling. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong. "For?"

A wan smile crossed her face and she leaned her head up against my shoulder and shut her eyes. "Everything."

I felt her relax against me and I listened to her sigh. It was long and drawn out, like she was releasing air out of a balloon.

"It's okay, Jamie. You know that we're—" That was as far as I got before her torso dropped into my lap.

"Jamie?" I grabbed her shoulders and pulled her up. Her head rested against her chest, and her tongue was resting between her teeth. "Jamie?!" I called again, shaking her. She fell against me and my world stopped when I shoved my fingers into her neck and felt no pulse.

"MOM! NOW!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. The urgency in my voice must have scared her, because I heard her slipped feet pounding down the stairs. "AMBULANCE!"

I couldn't take my eyes off Jamie. I got her onto the floor and started CPR on my best and closest friend. I felt tears clouding my eyes and shook them away, staying as focused as I could. I could hear my breath coming in raps. It filled my ears. Two rescue breaths, thirty pushes. Repeat. Two rescue breaths, thirty pushes. Repeat. I couldn't lose her. No. My best friend, my sister, my closest companion. She was motionless on the floor, not breathing. Her heart had stopped. I had to save her. I had to. Failure wasn't an option. I couldn't lose her.

I felt two strong arms haul me away from Jamie's body. I kicked and screamed, trying desperately to get back to her. The person behind me was strong. They kept me back and immobile, even through all of my attempts to get away. I lashed out once and instantly regretted it. I felt the stab of tranquilizers. The last thing I can recall is staring at the ceiling, watching the flash of the ambulance's lights bounce around the room.

Jamie was pronounced dead at the hospital. She'd suffered from severe internal bleeding, bruising to her abdomen, and a popped lung. She died as a result of those injuries and the CPR I administered. I learned later that performing CPR had pushed a broken rib into her lung and popped it. If I hadn't performed CPR, the EMT's probably could have saved her.

I'll never forgive myself.

Kristyn Turner

Motivationally Hypocritical

It was another typical tour for Meredith. As she walked up on stage, she passed the familiar life-sized cardboard cutout that she still remembers posing for, with her hair pulled up into a tight, professional looking bun, and her most warm-looking red pantsuit. The same phrase highlighted across the top, 'No man is a complete mystery.' Her publicist was just so creative, it sometimes boggled Meredith's mind. She peered into the audience, blinded by the spotlight shining just for her, putting her on display for the hundreds of women sitting on the edge of their seats, eyes wide with anticipation, hearts full of hope as they anxiously awaited her carefully composed speech. She knew they would desperately be listening for her words, praying they would free them from themselves. As the light beam reflected off the diamond ring on the left ring finger of a woman sitting four rows back on the right, Meredith took a half-hearted sigh and began.

Being a woman herself, Meredith understood the everyday problems of the ladies gathered around her. She grasped the concept of errands, the household chores, and while she did not have one of her own, she understood the need of tending to the family, as she had watched her mother do it for many years. Outside the regular norm of life though, Meredith had one insight these women couldn't comprehend for themselves. She could tell them what they needed to know about dealing with men. That was Meredith's specialty. They could be old, young, married, single, gay, or straight. It didn't matter. If you had a relationship problem, she had your answer; and these women, like so many before them, paid the money and traveled the miles to hear what she had to say. Meredith was a rare commodity and they all wanted a piece of her.

Meredith spoke for a solid forty-five minutes. The same speech she always opened with. Verbatim. Men think this way, women think that way, communication is complicated, but still possible. Do not let him treat you this way, no one takes all the blame, it is never going to be perfect. Never. Blah, blah, blah, always the same. She had said it a thousand times before and would say it a thousand times again, always getting the same responses. Always an ooh or an ahh, a loud echo of 'of course!' reverberating off the back wall. She always said exactly what

they needed to hear, but how many of them would act on it? How many of them truly listened? The same thoughts went in and out of her mind as Meredith opened up the floor to her audience, the people who idolized her and hung on her every word as if they were all precious gems. Now it was their turn to cry and complain as they shared their pathetic stories and awaited her remedy.

The first handful was all the same as the ones before. Same stories, only the names and faces changed.

"He doesn't appreciate me!"

"Why doesn't he understand?"

"What am I doing wrong? How do I make him love me more?"

The typical questions got their typical answers. The women marched off the stage with a new presence of self-worth and confidence, welcomed back into the world by a roaring applause from their peers. And all of them, like clockwork, paused on the last step, turned towards Meredith, and smiled. In return, Meredith met them all with the same plastic smile she plastered on her face for every typical tour.

Story after story continued as woman after woman found her way on stage, spilling their all too familiar tales. Meredith was relieved to learn that she only had to listen to one more sob story before her long-awaited lunch break. She noticed a younger looking woman in the back left. She had medium brown hair, average height, and normal weight. She wasn't a beauty queen, but not lacking in the looks department either. She seemed like another typical woman that would normally attend one of Meredith's seminars, but she reminded Meredith of her best friend from high school so she was called up anyway. Her name was Jamie Quinn.

As Jamie took the stage, she walked on like every other woman, a slow, unsure pace with a stammer in her footsteps. Another typical woman, Meredith thought, unconfident and underappreciated. Probably single too, Meredith added to herself, as she noticed the empty and undecorated left hand approaching her. Jamie shyly made her way across the stage and took her place in the velvet red chair sitting across from Meredith's. Her eyes swiftly scanned the crowd and rested on Meredith. They were a deep green with almost a hint of hazel. They were full of fear and uncertainty, clouded with doubt. Meredith handed her the microphone and prepared herself for one more story that would be just like the rest of them.

Jamie started with a soft voice, barely audible even through the microphone. It was clear to Meredith that Jamie was instantly washed in a bright shade of red as the embarrassment of what she was about to do suddenly hit her. At least it should be a little more interesting now. This one won't talk easily, Meredith thought to herself, the story has to be pried from her. Maybe she was a good pick after all.

"I actually don't know why I'm up here," Jamie began as she squinted from the blinding stage light, "He is just a good friend. We don't have any real issues that need help."

"Is that how you truly feel?" Meredith asked. "You wouldn't have come to this seminar and walked up on this stage if you didn't believe that deep down you had something to say. This is a safe place, it is okay to open up here, these women are all your friends. We are all here to listen and to help."

"Really, it isn't a big deal. We have been very good friends for a long time, sometimes I just find myself thinking..." Jamie trailed off.

"What are you thinking? I can't help you if you don't tell me what's really on your mind. While I can assess the problem, I can't read your mind and pull it all out of thin air." Meredith egged Jamie on.

After a little pulling and prodding, Meredith finally got Jamie talking, making Meredith feel at least a little successful about the day. Once Jamie opened up, Meredith just had to sit back and listen, formulating her response as Jamie went on. Meredith started to drift out of the story and found her mind wandering back to where it always went when left unattended. Her life was hectic and these seminars always took up too much time. She found herself organizing her schedule and planning her shopping list when she realized where she was. Her seminar was dedicated to making women understand how to get what they deserve, and that included attention and appreciation. Her daydreams had to be for private time. Meredith snapped back to attention and zeroed in on Jamie. She had a job to do, no matter how routine it might be.

"...I always find myself getting lost in his eyes, imagining our lives together, just me and him. I know it probably sounds crazy, or like I am one of those obsessive women who get a crush and can't move on, but it's like I feel way down deep in my gut somewhere that we are meant to be together. It's like you've found a home away from home, and everything is just so comfortable with him. Do you know what I mean? We spend so much time together, we are always smiling and having fun, we argue sometimes but hardly ever really fight. It seems so perfect, but for some reason all the pieces can't fall into place. I want to be with him, it's all I ever think about, but I can never understand why he just doesn't make a move. Maybe he doesn't like me, maybe friends is all he will ever want to be, but maybe there is more and he is just scared to ruin what we have. I feel so confused all the time, everything is just so frustrating..." Jamie's rant continued. Now that her gates were open, the flood was an unstoppable force pouring out.

As Jamie's story went on, Meredith found herself in quite familiar territory, not because it was a story she had heard a thousand times before, but because it was one she had lived through. Jamie

spoke of the best friend that she wanted to have more with, the boy who she spent every day with but longed to spend every night with. As the detail in Jamie's story became more vivid, Meredith's mind began racing through her memory until it focused in on him, with his hair caught in the warm summer breeze and his placid blue eyes sparkling in the glow of the sun. Jamie poured out her heart and soul on that stage, crying over the love that was never returned, but holding on to the bond of friendship that she could never live without. It was as if she had hurt so much when she was around him because she could not have him, but hurt more without him there simply because he was missing. Jamie's life had become one of choosing the lesser of two great pains. Meredith knew this feeling. She understood this feeling. Meredith even understood the perspective of the man in this situation, that was her job after all. She knew exactly what she needed to say to Jamie, because not only was it her job, but also because it was the same words she told herself every morning and the same words her friends crammed into her brain every night when she called them in tears. Jamie kept going, afraid to let go of the friendship she still has with her best friend, but too scared to hold on, too damaged to decide. It was up to Meredith to give Jamie all the answers. It was Meredith's choice now.

Tell Jamie she deserves better, to make peace with their friendship and move on, or tell her to hold on to something they were both hoping was meant to be and would find a way. In any other situation, this would be a no-brainer. Meredith could take out her typical script and go to Jamie with authority. You are a person too, with feelings and emotions. You need to take care of yourself. You have been holding on for too long, you must get on living your life. You cannot wait around forever. If this were truly meant to be, there would be a way for it to work itself out in the future. You cannot make it happen. Let go and live on. Meredith had given the speech a thousand times, to wives and ex-wives, to girls in the worst relationships, and to girls looking for relationships with the worst kind of men. It was easy then to tell them how ridiculous they were being, to show them the common sense side of the world and force them into it. However, this shy, quiet, lost and confused girl that so quickly went from looking like her high school friend to being her own reflection; she was not so easy to tell. Meredith wanted to tell this poor girl that if you keep trying, if you just keep holding on and show him how wonderful you are, then he will come around. He will sit down one morning, drinking his coffee and talking to his wife and suddenly realize, this life is wrong. He will know then that you were the one for him and he will stand up, grab his car keys, and come find you. You will get him and you will live happily ever after because sometimes life can be like a fairytale.

Meredith wanted to say this more than she wanted to say anything in her entire life, but how honest would that speech be? If

Meredith gave the necessary and proper advice to Jamie, would she have to give the same advice to herself? Meredith quickly became one of the typical women in the audience, the one that listens and pines over every word she says, the one that understands the truth when it is thrown in her face, but the one who still cannot follow the right path when it is laid out in front of her. Meredith became one of the women who lost her independence.

There was not a solitary breath in the room; everyone was waiting for Meredith to speak. She looked Jamie in the eye, a hard look that Meredith had never used before during a seminar, but this wasn't a typical seminar anymore. Meredith tried to speak, she took in a much-needed breath, but the words backed up in her throat as if she was choking, like a fish out of water. Meredith saw Jamie tense up. Jamie was prepared for the straight truth and Meredith knew she had to give it to her. That was her job. Meredith removed herself from the picture. She became the host she needed to be and not the person she had so recently become. At the end of her typical speech, Meredith's face was white and unwavering. Jamie just stared. The audience erupted in an explosion of applause. Meredith had said what they all needed to hear.

Jamie finished her story as Meredith's mind was racing for a solution to her dilemma. There was no solution. Lunchtime finally arrived as Jamie descended from the stage. She did not pause on the last step and smile in Meredith's direction. Meredith did not have a plastic smile waiting for her anyway.

Both women were left alone and shaken, not knowing what was ahead of them. Would either one of them have the strength to let go or the ability to hold on? Meredith stood up and walked off stage, mustering a half smile for the women still looking up to her. Her publicist was waiting for her back off stage right and led her around to the star dressing room where a classy lunch tray waited for her. Meredith sat in the dark blue velvet chair, wide-eyed and empty. She did not eat her tuna salad. She could only bring herself to slowly unscrew the plastic water bottle sitting in front of her and sip the cool water. Meredith needed to end the seminar early; there would be no second half after lunch. She was lost and broken. His face was still flashing across her mind. Every moment they shared together was preserved perfectly for her to see, as if she could relive it all whenever she wanted.

Meredith had called him last week, but his wife answered. She said she would give him her message. That night Meredith went back to the hotel and crawled under the covers of her freshly serviced king-sized bed, crying as she waited for the phone call she knew would never come. As the minutes ticked away on the clock, she stared at the blue pinstriped suit laid out, ready and waiting for tomorrow's seminar.

Rebekah Oakes

The Quilt of Life

In the faraway Kingdom of the Skies,
There once lived a woman, old and wise.
And she was the goddess of Beauty and Strife,
For she controlled the Quilt of Life.
The father of Power, was this quilt,
But he was also the brother of Guilt.
For every thread sewn, a life it gave,
And every thread severed took life away.
The quilt started out a few lonely squares,
And grew, and grew, and grew from there,
Until it became an ugly, shapeless mass.
It was far too big, it grew too fast.
She found the ugliest section, with the most holes,
And the woman cut the threads of souls.
The squares fell away, forevermore,
And this became the very first war.
Horried by the sorrow and pain,
The woman vowed never to cut again.
The quilt grew bigger, and bigger still,
Until the whole world it did fill.
She had no choice but to snip the threads,
She cut them one at a time instead.
One by one the people fell,
And for a time all was well.
Until it grew too big once more,
But she didn't want another war.
So the old woman closed her eyes,
And selected at random who would die.
But this was even worse than war,
They weren't ugly and holey like before.
They were good and bad, young and aged,
And this new terror became a plague.

The old woman, she'd had enough,
Her job had become far too tough.
She willed herself blind, darkness unfurled,
And she turned her back on the world.
"It will be easier to kill," she said,
"If I cannot see just who is dead."
She was advised that the quilt was rotten,
So she cut the squares made of cotton.
And every person of a certain race died,
She had created genocide.
It wasn't easier because she couldn't see,
She could still hear the cries and the screams.
They cried and screamed inside her head,
Until she found her own square, cut her own thread.
The woman was gone, and will cut no more,
But the quilt was worse off than before.
The people, the squares, still fell and fell,
For the threads have learned to cut themselves.

Brian Denu

Painless

He was the first person to enter the house since the passing of its previous residents. And it was perfect.

At least that's what he thought as he pulled up to it. Even though he had been there five times before, he still couldn't get over how ideal the location was. Surrounded by forest. A half-mile from the main road. It all superceded the eerie feeling he got with each passing glance.

He stopped and exited his white sedan. There were no stars in the midnight sky, only a dark blanket expanding across the horizon. The air was humid; to the degree that one would practically drink the air rather than breathe it. But none of these unwelcome atmospheric conditions affected the man and his impending work. He moved to the rear of his car and opened the trunk, slowly, preserving the sight of its contents. And there she was.

Suspended in a drug-induced slumber, she laid still, hands bound with the finest duct tape. She was blonde, just like the others. This killer would have nothing less.

He grabbed her deceptively tanned body and carried her up to the front door. He had to put her down so that he may open it. Despite the great age that the entrance had accumulated, it would refuse to allow entry unless acted upon by a strong enough force.

The door gave up to the killer pushing against it and swung open with the expected screech. The moldy smell of age smacked the man's nostrils, making him twitch even though he knew it was coming.

This was the third girl he had taken to this house, but it was obvious that there had been more. His style and methods were too honed to be those of a murderer of two. The killer must have brought the others to a location alternative to the house.

He entered, the girl hanging over his shoulder. He took the stairs immediately to his right up to the bedrooms. One by one, the stairs squeaked on cue, each emitting a rehearsed cacophony of pitches. Half way up was a boarded up window. It was invisible, engulfed in the pure darkness that inhabited the house, combined with the lack of light outside.

Reaching the top of the flight, he went to the first bedroom on his left. The door was already ajar. The room, bed included, was lined with plastic to make cleanup a much easier chore. He threw her onto the bed, creating an irritating sound as she skid across the plastic. Beyond the

clear coating, the room was very bare, containing only the bed and a large mirror, hung carefully on the ceiling at a slight angle. The only modernity that could be seen was the man's black briefcase lying at the foot of the bed, and his lantern attached to the non-functional ceiling fan, illuminating the pale gray wallpaper that had begun to peel very long ago.

He moved towards the girl and removed her shirt, revealing the killer's blank canvas. He ogled at it, visualizing his work being done upon the virgin flesh of his new victim.

He reached for his leather case filled with all his necessary supplies. It had been the same every time. He first took out the familiar duct tape and bound the woman's limbs to each corresponding bedpost. He stopped midway through the step, and looked over his shoulder, to make sure the gaze he felt lay upon him was nonexistent.

Finishing with the binding, he reached for his two syringes. Neglecting to check for air bubbles, he inserted the first needle into her arm. She awoke, but was still hazy. She began to babble incoherently, but couldn't construct a full phrase. The second syringe did nothing to help, adding more drugs to her already impaired condition. Her body returned to its previous limpness.

But she had not been restored to her prior repose. Her eyes were very much open, and refused to blink. The drug was a paralyzing agent of some sort, leaving her very much awake. The killer then reached for his next tool.

The chrome scalpel gave off a grim glimmer as it moved into the dim light. The killer's utensil extended farther than the conventional surgical blade, custom made to his personal preference. You could feel her fear as the blade came into her view, her eyes widening with terror.

As he turned towards her, he was stopped yet again. An incomprehensible whisper manifesting out in the hall. A minor ripple of fear passed over the killer, but he disregarded it. Just another mental projection, but it sounded so real.

Pushing the thought from his mind, he continued his work. He raised the surgical blade to her lips. He said only one thing to her.

"You won't feel a thing."

Whether or not he realized it she did feel the knife carving into her bare chest. Her eyes shouted with pain. What excruciating pain it must have been. After an hour of silent screaming, his mark had been made. An elaborate design whittled deep across her abdomen, matching the sketch he had in his briefcase.

A single tear streamed down her face, but disappeared into the ocean of blood that had streamed from his work. The man moved to the side, allowing her to view herself in the mirror. Her eyes shrieked, flooding her face with tears. The drugs had begun to wear off. He turned her head and added his final wound; the number twenty-one onto the

back of her neck, specifying which kill she was. Returning her to her helpless position, he slit her throat, spilling the rationed remnants of her blood onto his canvas. Her eyes fell silent.

As her eyes went empty, and her soul escaped its mutilated shell, there was a scream, powerful and high pitched. It came from the hallway, just as the other occurrences had. He looked in the sound's direction with more intent than before. This time it was undeniable.

He stormed out into the hall, strongly hoping he had not been discovered. But as he took his first step onto the decaying rug that lined the hall, the sound stopped. Not even an echo.

His face accurately displayed his perplexed mindset. Was it all in his head?

He went back in the room, trying to rationalize what he just heard, his countenance still portraying active confusion. He looked down at the body; her eyes were closed. The confusion, now with undertones of fear, had doubled. Her eyes were definitely open when she died.

Fear of his detection fueled him now. Sweat began to form on his brow as he panicked to wrap the corpse in the plastic that it died on. His hands shook as he tried very hard not to spill her blood onto the rotting hardwood floor.

An hour passed. No further noise was made. You could tell from the speed of the cleanup that his confidence had been restored to its pre-homicide vigor. Using the resourcefulness of duct tape, he taped down the ends of the wrap as if it were some sort of synthetic burrito. He proceeded to lift the floorboards of the old room and placed the corpse underneath with the other two.

He took one last glance before the final floorboard was replaced, perhaps to relive the thrill of his skills. But the familiar confusion returned to his face. Her eyes glared at him through the plastic.

He slammed down the last board, his breathing heavy from fright. But like all the other irrational incidents, he removed it from his mind.

He killed the light from his lantern and grabbed it along with his packed briefcase. The darkness was stronger before. He looked to the hallway; its lights were on. He rushed out, and looked up to the ceiling. The light fixtures were empty. There didn't seem to be any source at all for the omnipresent glow that filled the hall. He reached for the light switch next to the bedroom door; there was none.

The shaking in his hands re-manifested, but he managed to control his panic, at least until he saw her.

His first victim stood at the end of the hall in front of a boarded up window. She stared at him with screaming eyes, causing the killer fear rather than the satisfaction he constantly craved. Her chest was cut up and her throat slit, but it wasn't his work. The design was indeed intricate, and in its center was a single word that slid an icy dagger of terror into his empty heart.

Revenge.

The killer turned and ran to the stairs but was tripped by a leg that wasn't there. Flat on the awful smelling carpet, he lifted his head, only to see his second victim standing not two inches in front of him. He sprung up in an instant, terror stimulating his cells. The second girl's inscription was identical to that of the first, a bloody declaration of vengeance upon their ruthless murderer.

He ran. A logical move. What else could he have done? But before he could set his foot on the first stair, the trio of skeletons emanated their mind splitting shrieks. Catching him completely off guard, he fell down the steps, his head bashing through the deteriorated wall at the end. He was knocked unconscious.

The lights dimmed back to nothing.

When he woke up the lights were still out. Was it all a dream?

The killer stood up, brushing the debris from the wall out of his hair. He took a step, but hesitated due to the throbbing pain in his right ankle. He took a deep breath. The air had gotten considerably colder, but he paid no attention to it, despite the extent to which it decreased.

He scrambled for the door; he had lingered for far too long. Turning the knob, he was met with more than the typical resistance. Before he could muster the strength to overcome the door, he heard the back door open...and close.

Perhaps he would be appeased with one rational explanation to this evening's events. He gave up on the front door and limped to the back, grunting in agony as he did. Standing at the threshold of the kitchen, he could tell that it was simply the chilling exhale of the wind.

But he could not be allowed the relief of rationality. Without warning, a similar breeze came from the entranceway. He turned around. All satisfaction evaporated.

The apparition was that of his most recent victim. She floated three feet off the floor, her stunning blonde hair had been reduced to wispy strands of white. The cuts on her torso spelled out the all-too-familiar phrase of "Revenge." Her eyes, previously closed, opened, releasing a powerful glow of pale green light, and a screech that shook the foundation of the olden residence. A moment later, the two previous victims rose from the floor and began to release a similar shriek, causing wreckage to fall from the ceiling and walls of the house.

The air suddenly grew very cold. His breath was visible in front of his face, illuminated by the powerful rays. Seeing that the front entrance was blocked he turned around to sprint out the back.

Now was the time.

Out of the shadows, I, the Demon, puppet master of the night's entertainment, emerged from observant hiding. It was time now for the

final act in my nine-ring circus. As the killer turned, he looked Fear in the crimson eyes that glared into his empty soul. He could do nothing but run. Neglecting his ankle, he ran through the ghosts of his victims, and plowed straight through the resilient doorway, and into freedom.

But there would be no freedom. The ghosts, still screeching their failing siren song, seemed to follow him with their sound, but he paid it no mind. He stumbled to his car, and forced down the gas as soon as the engine ignited. After a momentary skid, he fled.

The sound faded, but still rung in his ears, just as the chilling sights would stay with him. He continued to shake, both out of fear and the intense cold that miraculously eliminated the soaking humidity. His head was drawn towards the passenger seat by a force he could not begin to comprehend. His foot remained planted on the gas pedal, but his eyes were fixed on me, now occupying the seat.

Before he could speak, he blacked out.

The hospital was a happy scene compared to the house. The overly clean white tile exacerbated the vibrant light. There was no harsh moldy reek, but only the intoxicating scent of bleach and disinfectant. It was obvious that these conditions soothed the intense fear that had been placed inside the killer. His ankle was now in a cast, his neck in a brace, and his jaw wired shut. The morphine drip attached to his arm gave him the comfort he needed to forget the evening.

After all the exams were finished, he was left alone in his room to rest. As the door shut, I made sure it stayed that way.

The cold caused the killer to awaken. His eyes froze with a fear he should have been familiar with.

"You have many sins."

His eyes screamed.

"Not even Hell could give you proper punishment."

He timidly tapped the red button attached to his bed, hoping a nurse would come.

"I will be making sure your punishment will never end."

You could tell he was trying to scream.

"The first step is death. Don't worry. You won't feel a thing."

But pain was in his eyes, despite mollifying morphine. His eyes shouted pleasing screams of horror. Now he knew truly what he had been doing. Blood began to pool underneath his hospital gown. He tore it off. Twenty-one names were carved into his flesh.

His throat spilled open.

"Let's go home."

Stephen Krzyzanowski

The Night You Fall in Love

There was a night a week ago when you took her to the diner. The air had just begun to nibble with winter's cold, promising to bite soon. You wanted to get into the warmth as quickly as possible, but she told you to stop in your tracks mere yards from the chrome and glass door. You obeyed your new girlfriend unquestioningly. She was spontaneous and fun and you were not quite sure what to expect. She told you to close your eyes and they slammed shut as if your eyelids were heavy garage doors she had yanked down. At first, you had hoped she would warm you with a hug, but her footsteps lead away from you and you estimated her location to be near the intersection in front of the diner when you ceased to hear her boots meet brick. The warmth of the neon lights had to do for that moment. She returned to your side and told you to open your eyes. "What's up?" you asked.

"You'll find out," she replied. You shrugged, allowing your curiosity to slide off your shoulders so you could enjoy the rest of the night.

Now, a week later, you are about to find out "what was up," but you don't know it yet. You believe you are simply out for a walk. She leads you in the general direction of the diner by a different route. The air is now taking small bites, but offers compensation by showing you the beauty of your own breath, which you can't appreciate because it is taken away by the beauty of her breath. This soft, caring, and energetic creature possesses life. She breathes and you think she breathes solely for you, but you don't deserve it. You walk under the neon lights without a thought of the mystery begun there. It is another set of lights which will act as the bulb of realization above your head. When you see all the Christmas lights in the town center, you remember. "Is this what you were looking for last week?" you inquire.

"Yup," she replies, "but they weren't lit yet." All the lights are white and carefully arranged. The giant pine is obviously fake, betrayed by its own perfection—a flawless triangular beacon. You share an appreciation of the beauty. You love that she can see the world, both the visible and the invisible, through an artistic filter as you can.

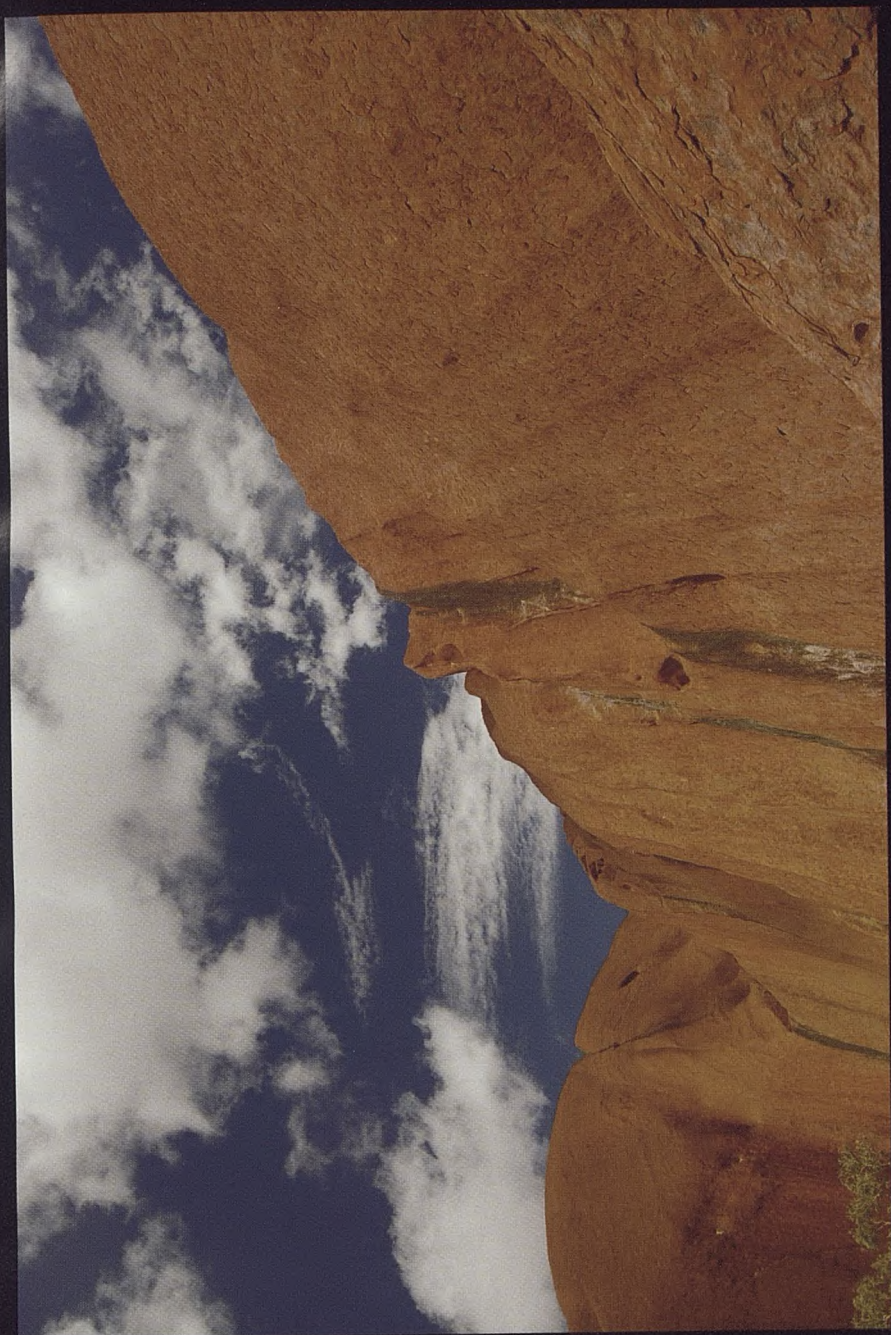
Both of your attentions are drawn to a tree in the corner of the square. It is not a pine; it is bare for the winter. How intriguing you think it is that trees wear their blankets in the hot summer and are forced to

stand naked in the cold winter. This tree's bare limbs are wrapped in a hap-hazard manner by several dozen strands of soft blue lights, a few of which are out and one of which decides to turn on and off at inconsistent intervals. You are drawn to its imperfection and its independence—its decision to don a slightly colorful holiday dress rather than the fashionable white. You sit on the bench under it and lean back so that the top of your shoulders and head are supported by the concrete base housing the tree trunk. She sits next to you and lays her head on your chest, her long blond hair occasionally reaching up to tickle your face. Her fuzzy-gloved hand finds your gloved hand inside the pocket of your favorite jacket, the black corduroy one you've had forever. A passing drunk feels it his duty to inform you that "you two look cute as hell," and proceeds to wish he could take a picture of you and put it up with the lights for all to see.

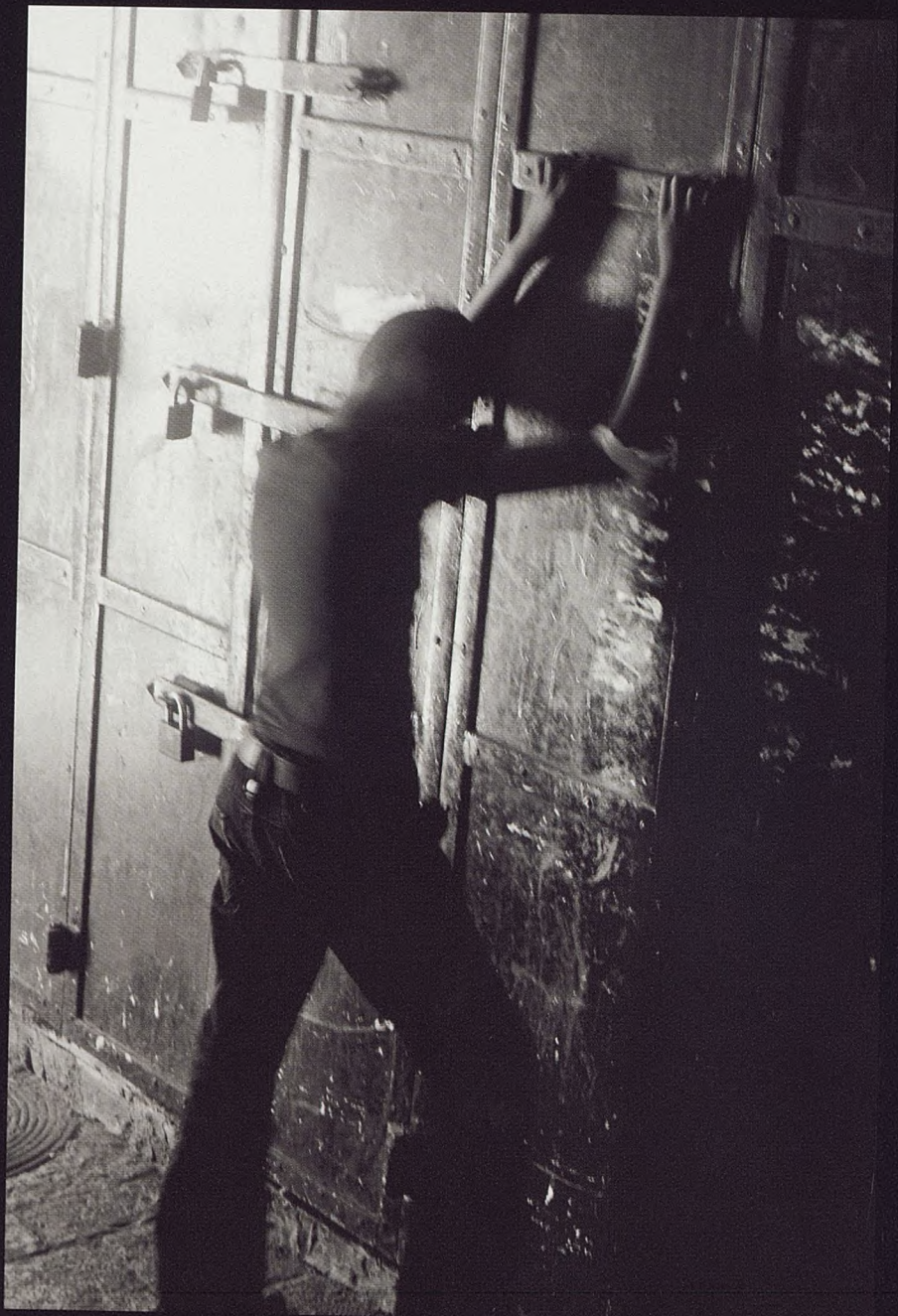
You laugh, but not so uncontrollably as to miss out on the sound of her laugh. You share an unconditional love for people, for life. You look up at the branch which hosts the temperamental light strand—a sleeve of the tree's dress which stubbornly falls off the shoulder every time it's replaced—and as you look the strand lights up. You look back down at the face now on your lap: the lines formed by her habit of smiling, the eyes which at first were shy of yours and now met them with comfort, and the golden hair, which she had straightened especially for you, lying across your legs. "Is it crazy that it's been less than two weeks and I already want to say it?" you ask.

She replies only with a smile, refusing to part her lips perhaps fearing some of the joy will escape if she does. She manages an ecstatic shaking of the head while keeping her eyes on you. "I love you," you say for the first time. You are naked in your winter coat, jeans, and sneakers under the naked tree in its dress.

The next time you drive through the town square at night you will realize that your special tree is not lit. And again and again the next time you drive and the next. You will feel it was as if the tree was lit solely for you and her. Solely for that evening, that moment. Solely for those words.



Andrew Maturo
Ascent
Digital Photograph



Preston Hartwick
Children of the Occupation
Digital Photograph



Josiah Adlon
Chullo
Collage



Andrew Maturo
Stranger than Fiction
Digital Photograph



Sara Tower
Windhorse
Digital Photograph



Sneha Shrestha

Warung di Singaraja , Bali

Digital Photograph



Josiah Adlon
Dethroned
Plaster and Spray Paint



Hannah Sawyer

Flight

Digital Photograph



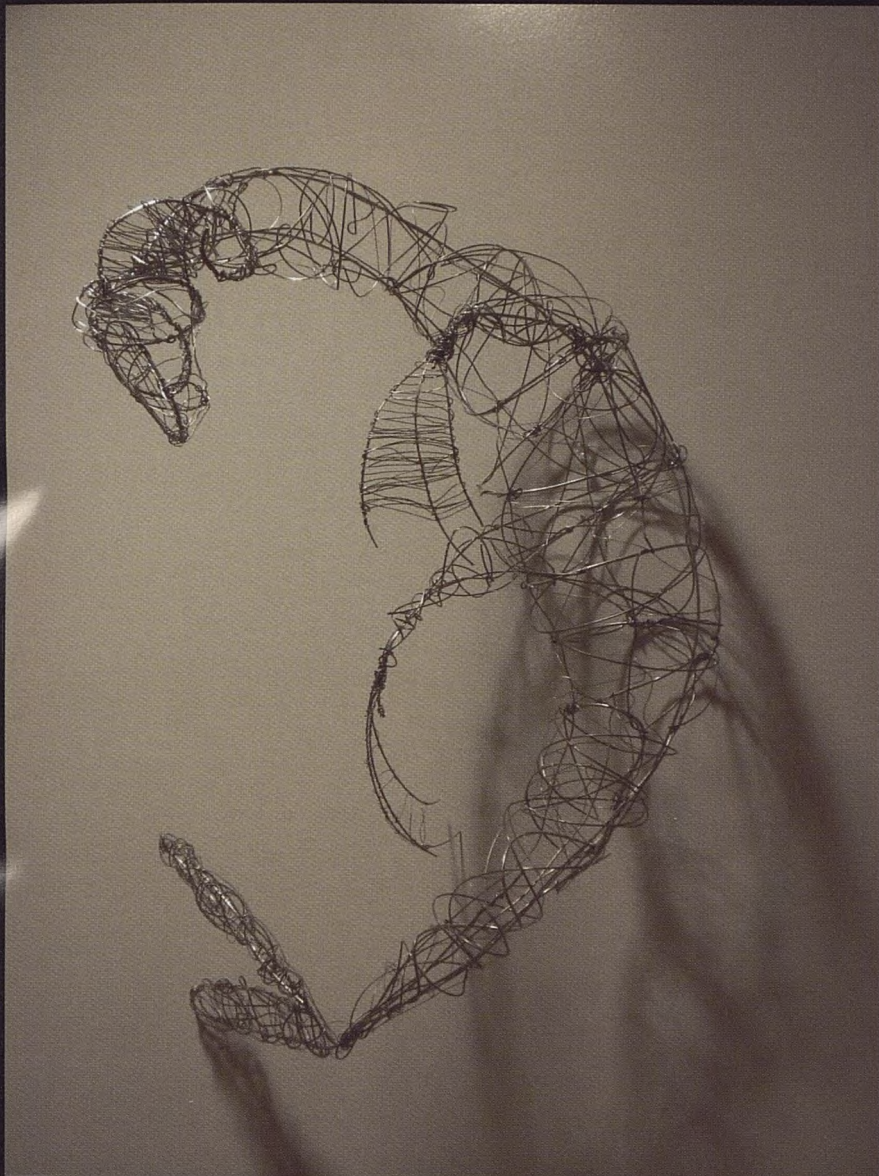
Rachel Rakoff

Paul

Film Photograph



Meredith MacLauchlan
Mont Tremblant
Digital Photograph



Kristine Kopia
Capricorn
Wire Sculpture



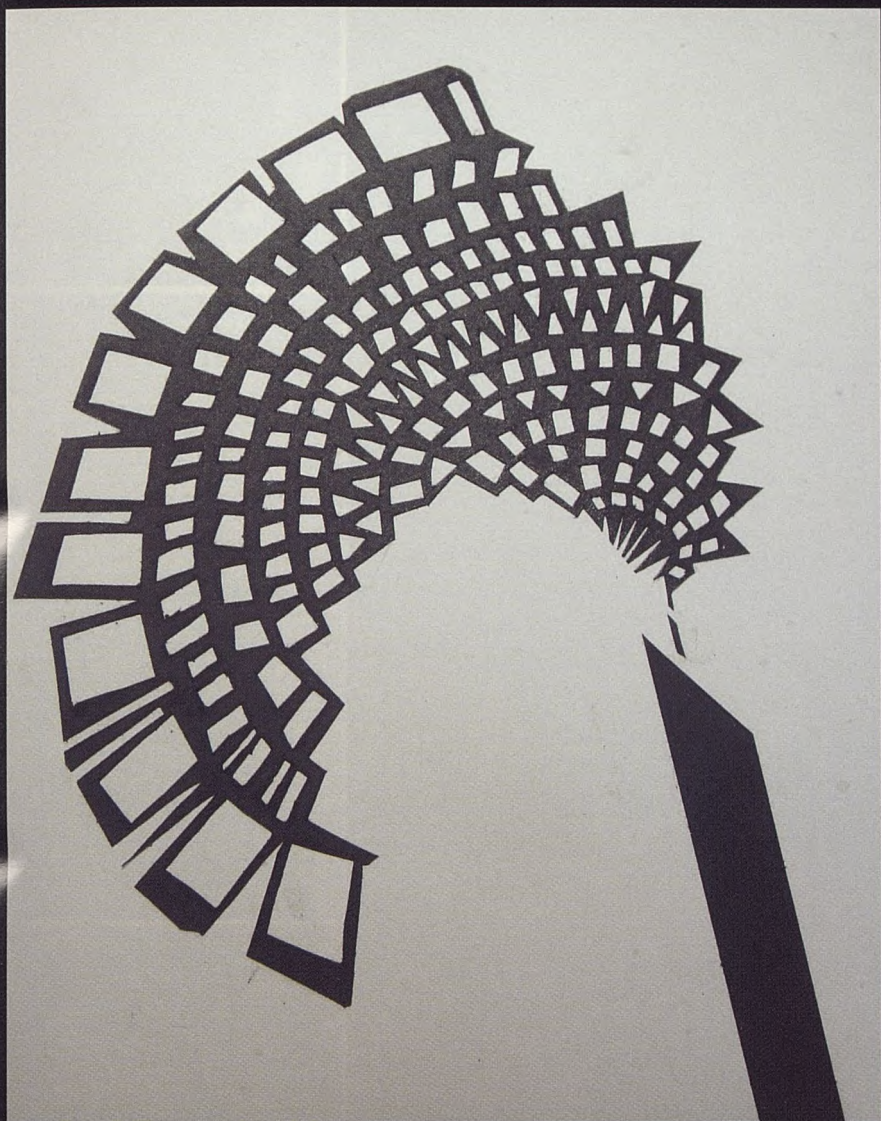
Sara Levin
See Through
Digital Photograph



Preston Hartwick
Everything Falls Apart
Clay Sculpture



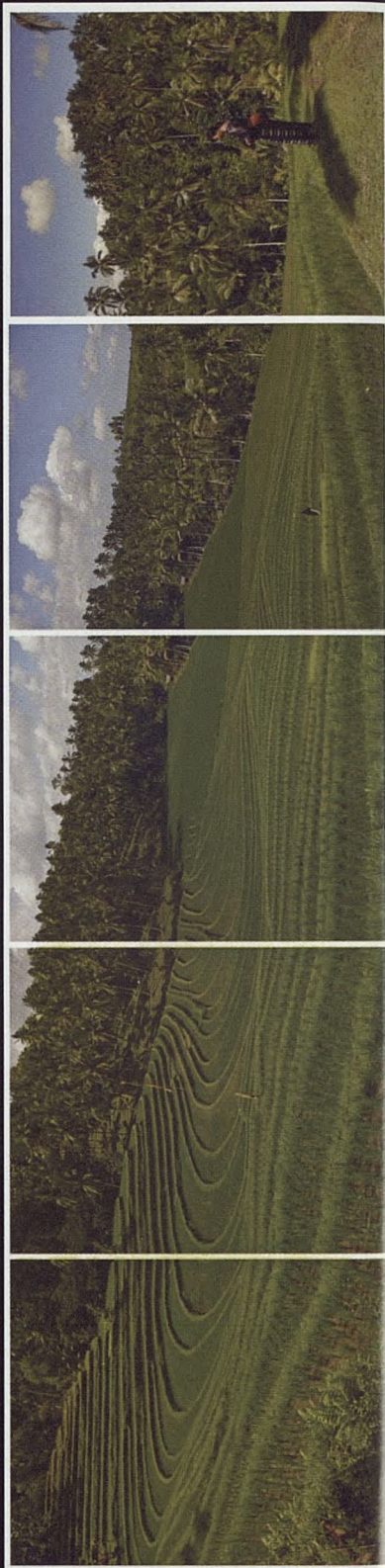
Sara Tower
Stories of Nepal
Digital Photograph



Evan Petrack
Making Connections
Painting

Sneha Shrestha

Di sawah-sawah di Tabanan, Bali
Digital Photograph



Libby Conroy

Tidings

"There you go, Doris, there you are." Anna wheels the elderly woman into room 208-B, and secures her in front of the television set. It is Doris's routine to catch up on the global news prior to her weekly checkup. Suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, Doris hopes to keep up with current events as long as she can. She actively follows the current American-Iraqi war, as her son constantly reminds her that the outcome of this war will determine the world's fate.

The thought of her son, James, saddens Doris. Fighting in Iraq, his life is in constant danger. Doris only hears from him once a week, at best, and resorts to praying nightly for his safety and for God to spare his life. Her son's bravery always overwhelmed Doris; from the time he was a small boy James was determined to conquer the world. Doris chuckles at the memories of her eight-year-old boy racing to ride the largest rollercoaster, swallowing a cockroach on a dare at age thirteen, and at seventeen punching his future father-in-law in his girlfriend's honor. That night, specifically, was unforgettable.

Doris was alone in the kitchen, washing dishes from last night's dinner that she never got to, and heard her son's car rattle up to the driveway. She looked up, alarmed at his early return, to see her son's strapping figure stomping away from Taylor, his fiery girlfriend. She was screaming, tears flowing freely from both eyes, and rushed towards James.

"WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, JAMES? I KNOW HE'S UNREASONABLE BUT HE'S MY FATHER, FOR GOD'S SAKE!" Taylor broke into a run to keep up with James, who was clearly determined to make it to the front door without his girlfriend. He spun around to face Taylor, his face the identical color of his girlfriend's flaming red hair.

"The last thing I want to do right now...is talk about this with you. You're welcome to stay, but please. I am not discussing this."

Doris was frightened at the powerful control her son's voice possessed. She never heard him speak with such jurisdiction. The front door opened, and James trudged straight to the staircase leading to his bedroom. Taylor came inside shortly after, and sat forcefully in a kitchen chair. Her whole body was rigid with anger.

Nervously, Doris asked, "Taylor, dear, it might be none of my business, but—"

"HE PUNCHED MY FATHER, Mrs. Theilker! Completely leveled him to the ground!

"My mother is taking him to the hospital now. She thinks his nose is broken!" Taylor's voice shook with rage.

"Taylor, you know James as I do, he's not an aggressive person. What on earth possessed him to do such a thing?"

"Well, I think he would like to tell you himself." At these words, Taylor's voice cracked and she lost control. Her body was no longer shaking with anger, but instead she was shuddering from wracking sobs. Doris sped over to the girl, and attempted to calm her.

"There, there. Just tell me what happened, I promise it'll make you feel better. James will be punished, either way, but I need to know the full—"

"We're getting married, Mrs. Theilker! My dad called me a whore and told James that he would rather die than see his daughter marry a commoner!"

Doris felt faint. She clutched the edges of the table to steady herself, and slowly stood up, making her way upstairs. The talk with her son was a fit of hysterics, but in the end, he left home to marry his high school sweetheart.

That day began the divide of their relationship. Raising James singlehandedly, he was very much her best friend and her reason for living. Yet losing James to Taylor at such an early age strained that bond—especially since Doris was not overly fond of James's wife. To this day, Taylor has yet to help Doris with her hospital visits or doctor's bills. Which is why, deep down, Doris resents her son for leaving her to suffer. She can't help but feel abandoned. The doctors aren't sure of how long her memory will last, and Doris almost wishes that it already disappeared. At least then she will no longer anticipate her inevitable mental collapse.

"Okay?" Doris watches the young blonde leave the room, and frowns at her own unavoidable loneliness. At Anna's departure, Doris glances around the room at the familiar faded floral wallpaper and the setting sun behind the dingy blinds. Ruled shadows are casted on the opposite wall, littered with framed embroidery sewn by local volunteers. Doris closes her eyes, attempting to permanently set this image in her mind. It was completely possible that by next week, she will be looking at this room as if she never saw it before. Doris shakes her gray haired head, changing the subject of her thoughts.

Wheeling herself forward, Doris finds the remote tucked next to the dusty aged television. Doris's shaky sun spotted hands aim the remote, and click on channel 40, World News with Ian Casidy.

Doris adores Ian, for he possesses the rare ability to deliver the news wittily and for the fairly. She smiles once he appears on the screen with perfectly combed bronze hair and brilliantly blue eyes. He is the epitome of a classical handsome man.

Good day. I am Ian Casidy with the top stories in world news. Tonight, June 4, 2008, we will be covering several stories including the ever-present energy crisis update, Japan's newest advancement in robotics, and the highlights of the Presidential Address last night. However, I would like to turn it over to Marie for coverage of today's breaking news story. Marie?

Thanks, Ian. I'm standing here in the outskirts of the Iraqi city, Mosul, which, as you can see, have just experienced extremely devastating suicide bombings as little as fifteen minutes ago. It is speculated that several members of the radical Muslim group, Ansar al-Islam, are responsible for destroying a major portion of the city, killing eleven American soldiers and leveling three tenement buildings. The causality of Iraqi citizens is currently 164, but more bodies are continually being discovered. It is unclear as to who specifically is accountable for today's horrific events...

Farrah doesn't completely understand English, but she knows precisely what the woman is reporting. She can see the terrified expression beneath her professional mask; the reporter is clearly nervous to be in this city. In her city. Farrah creeps further back into the shadows and smoke as the camera crew files past her, zooming closer to capture the city square's inconceivable damage. Hundreds of wounded Iraqis are frantically scurrying throughout the city, bleeding or even partially aflame. Several buildings completely fell to the ground, causing soot to blind Farrah from nearly everything. To these foreign camera men, this is just another opportunity to capture human race at its finest. But to Farrah, these are her people. She hugs the laundry, still wet from washing, closer to her fragile body. This laundry is the only reason Farrah isn't partially dead. Retrieving the wash from Miss Aban saved the girl's life.

"And all our wishes go to the Iraqi people and the American soldiers that died. Back to you Ian." Farrah watches the light-haired woman's expression collapse as soon as the cameras turn off. She is no longer collected, but instead Farrah witnesses the anguish in the woman's eyes. Death's overwhelming intimacy seeped into her skin. One of the crewmembers tucks the frail woman under his arm, and escorts her back into the news van, leaving Farrah alone in the alley. After an ash filled deep breath, Farrah collects herself and stepped back into her living hell. She can only hide for so long.

In that moment, all Farrah's senses fail her. Unbearable heat slap Farrah in the face; she is blinded from the hot and dusty air. Her chocolate eyes begin stinging and watering in protest at every attempt to see. Children and adults' desperate screams fill Farrah's ears, ringing and pulsing with each tumultuous echo. She continues in a zombie-like daze, stepping over her neighbors' dead bodies and passing through pieces of friends' homes. Nothing is real, nothing is real. Through the dense smoke, Farrah recognizes the street corner where her apartment building once stood. Instead lies rubble and fire. She recognizes her classmate, Leyla, being extracted from the rock by the Americans, soaking with blood and blisters. Farrah's family is nowhere to be found.

"UMMI!" Farrah coughs as she swallows ash, but continues to scream for her mother. "UMMI?" She begins to blindly run around the perimeter of the ruins, searching for her family she left only thirty minutes ago. "ABBI!?" Her pace quickens as she frantically shrieks for her parents. The dozens of deceased and dying blur together; Farrah is uncontrollably sprinting away from the sight, screaming and crying hysterically.

"Whoa, come here, sweetheart." Farrah collides with one of the Americans, knocking herself flat on her back. She instantly recoils at the sight of him, scraping back against the rough ground. The man is taller than any she saw before, and his machinegun threateningly jets out from underneath the bulk of his arm. He, like Farrah, is covered in a thick coat of dirt and blood. The mere size of the man is intimidating, and Farrah continues to squirm against the gravel. She feels skin scrape and begins to bleed through her clothes, cutting her elbows and hands. The unfamiliar man scoops Farrah off the ground, regardless of her protests. He brushes the soot off her petit frame, and tries to explain to Farrah that he means her no harm. However, Farrah is unable to see past the soldier's daunting gun. Noticing Farrah's obvious discomfort, James removes his gun, and put it to the ground. It is only then that Farrah notices the man's eyes. Against the filthy skin, his eyes seem to shine out of his face. She recognizes his expression: exhaustion and gentleness. Perhaps, Farrah thinks, this man knows where my family is.

Through a muffled Arabic-English mix, Farrah learns the man's name is James, and she roughly explains that she lost her family, who lives in one of the leveled buildings. James shakes his head, and points to a temporary shelter barely visible through the dusty air. The Iraqi girl and the American soldier walk side by side, making their way to the shelter.

Inside the tent-like room, dozens of children—newly orphaned—are gathered together crying, others are still from shock and disbelief.

Several adults are being treated for minor injuries at a small medical station. Farrah glances around the room but doesn't recognize a single face. In the corner stands an old television set, showing the devastating replay of her home and several others crash to the ground. Farrah's hand slips from James's as she joins the handful of people brave enough to watch. Maybe, in the replay, she will see her parents or where they sought refuge. However, the only face she identifies is James's. Farrah sees the same kind eyes and the obscenely strong figure on the other side of the television screen. She reads the news story's Arabic subtitles explaining what the American news anchor is recounting:

Today we witnessed that even in life's most horrific and dehumanizing moments, heroes are revealed. The Mosul suicide bombings have left the city in utter ruin—casualties have reached 230, and twenty American soldiers have been killed. However, the numbers would have been much higher if not for American soldier James Theilker who bravely saved 37 Iraqis from the flame and rock, and three of his fellow soldiers. He risked his own life entering the burning buildings, yet managed to extract twelve different families before the building collapsed. James will be receiving an honorary award by the mayor of Collinsville, Connecticut, tomorrow evening, to be accepted by his wife, Taylor, and his newborn son. We send the soldiers our hope and prayers on this terrifying and dangerous day. Mark?

Taylor turns her eyes away from the television, and focuses on James's empty leather armchair. Two years from yesterday he has been gone, stationed first in Iran and later moved to Iraq. "Maintaining the peace," James tells Taylor in his letters and the rare times they would speak on the phone, he is simply based in the Middle East to "maintain the peace." Taylor doesn't buy it; she knows James is in danger 100% of the time. Night and day, she worries for her husband's safety. It is unbearable. She watches him rush into burning buildings covered in ash, his weapon strapped loyally to his side. Sure, he is a hero, but Taylor doesn't care if he rescues three thousand people. He has yet to rescue her. Or Peter.

It is as if he heard his mother's thoughts. Two doors over, Taylor hears the hunger cries of her newborn son. The son James was home long enough to conceive, but not long enough to care for. He couldn't even get a leave of absence for the birth. Taylor's cascading red hair brushes over her shoulders as she reached in the crib for her son. Peter coos at the familiar sight of his mother, and instantly begins sucking the air, searching for food. Taylor takes her son into her bedroom, so she can lie down as she nurses.

"Hey, babe. I was going to get Peter, but you seemed to have gotten to him first." Chris instantly recognizes the expression on his childhood friend's face. "What's wrong?"

"I just saw James on the news. You didn't tell me there was an honorary ceremony tomorrow. And I'm accepting the award?" Taylor's blue eyes lock on Chris's anxious expression.

"Ah, yes. I was wondering when I should break that news to you. Well, you can understand why I was hesitant to—"

"You know I don't want to accept his award, Chris, let alone on television. Especially not from you! People have already begun to talk. Do you know how awful it would look if people found out? And let's be honest here, it's only a matter of time." Peter begins to wail at his mother's yells. Taylor calms the child, and he blissfully begins nursing again.

"You know I agree with you, Tay, I just wish I knew what to do to make this easier for you." Chris covers his face in his hands, unable to look at the angry expression on Taylor's face.

"God, I'm sorry Chris. You know how much I've appreciated you this past year. I wouldn't have been able to raise Peter alone, nor would I have remained sane. As guilty as I feel, I can't help but to be thankful for you being here." At these words, Taylor leans into Chris's open arms, completely surrendering herself to his embrace.

She realizes she is the stereotypical cheating soldier's wife: lonely, afraid, desperate, Taylor even has the impossibly needy newborn. She used to judge the woman she knew who carry on affairs while their husbands are fighting overseas; she believed them to be weak and selfish. Yet now, she can't imagine life without Chris's consistent support.

"The ceremony is at 9:00 tomorrow, I don't expect you to be there. But what should your excuse be? Peter's sick? You're sick? Remembering him is too—"

"Just don't say anything." Taylor says resiliently.

"Tay, the news anchor just said they expect you to accept the award. I guess that's what James figured would be appropriate. There has to be a reason why you're not there."

"Fine, Jesus, just say I'm out of town." Taylor stares at the pouring rain outside her window, attempting to harness the thousands of thoughts buzzing in her head. Peter begins to coo, and his mother feels him relax as he drifts back to sleep. It is remarkable how much he already resembles his father. His eyes, nose, hair, high cheekbones—the only feature Peter shares with Taylor is his ivory complexion.

"Taylor, I know you don't want to talk about this now...but truthfully you never want to talk about this. I just want to know what you expect me to do in three months."

"I don't know." Taylor doesn't look up from her son's face.

"Well, I think it's fair if you gave me some sort of idea. I mean," Chris's voice begins to shake, "am I supposed to act like this didn't happen when he comes home? Do you really expect me to just, just disappear? Or are you going to tell him the truth and...and live with me?"

"I don't know, Chris. Not yet." A tear rolls down Taylor's face, softly splattering on her son's cheek. Chris leans over and gently wipes it away. "I'm exhausted, Chris. I'm going to put Peter down and go to bed." Taylor stands, hugging Peter close to her petite frame. Once she settles him back into his crib, Taylor returns to her bedroom, where to her approval, Chris is facing the opposite direction, pretending to be asleep. The thought of leaving her husband for Chris terrifies Taylor, and truthfully she doesn't believe herself capable of it. Her only regret will be breaking Chris's, her best friend's, heart.

The next morning comes too quickly. Taylor barely slept; every hour Peter woke up hungry or in need of a diaper change. Taylor fell back asleep once Chris had left, and woke to Peter's cries yet again, just in time to watch the memorial service on the news. She sees Chris outside of their brick city hall, professionally dressed and collected. He is holding a certificate and a badge, and presenting them to Taylor's mother-in-law, whom Taylor is surprised to see is in a wheelchair. True, Taylor doesn't hear from Doris often, yet Taylor can't imagine why her mother-in-law is now in a wheelchair. Unless she had fallen again.

Taylor falls into a daze, recollecting the first incident that required Doris's first visit to the hospital in Queens. She slipped on a patch of ice and shattered her right knee carrying groceries back to the house. When James brought her to the hospital, Doris couldn't recall where she had fallen. James insisted that they run some tests, since his grandmother had had Alzheimer's disease before she died. The tests were conclusive—and Doris has been struggling with a moderate case of Alzheimer's for the past two years. James told her recently that Doris is getting worse, and her doctor's are prescribing her with a stronger medication.

Taylor does feel guilty at the lack of relationship, however Taylor will never forgive Doris for cutting James off financially, forcing her husband to put himself through college and create a life for the two from scratch.

Taylor refocuses her attention on the television screen, seeing Chris and Doris shaking hands. Chris's chiseled face stretches into a smile as he begins the ceremony.

I'm incredibly honored to present this Medal of Honor to Doris Theilker, Collinsville's own James Theilker's mother. James

has displayed an extraordinary amount of courage and selflessness in the past twenty-four hours, rescuing the lives of thirty-seven Iraqis and three soldiers during the aftermath of the Mosul suicide bombing. In order to praise his bravery, I will hereby grant this medal to Mrs. Theilker, who I'm sure is equally as proud of her son as St. Louis is. All of our prayers are with James and his family. To my left we have began a town-wide card to...

Ryan hears his brother's voice trail off as he enters the kitchen. It is always amusing to see his brother on television, as Ryan is always thought to be the one gifted with public speaking skills. He makes a mental note to call Chris later this afternoon, and reaches in the refrigerator for the leftover lasagna.

"RYAN! YOU FORGOT TO TAKE THE TRASH OUT!"

Shit, I'm in for it now. Catherine storms in the kitchen with a full trash bag in her hand, fury blazing in her eyes.

"HOW MANY TIMES DID I ASK YOU TO TAKE IT OUT? WHY DO YOU NEVER LISTEN TO ME?" She raises a pointed finger in Ryan's face, and narrows her already naturally beady eyes. He reaches for the bag and snatches it out of his enraged wife's hand.

"Okay, okay, calm down, I'm taking it out now. I got caught up watching Chris on the news."

When Ryan returns, Catherine is on the phone, an extremely severe expression on her face. She shakes her head, tears welling up in her eyes. "Okay," She says softly, "I'll tell him, of course. Goodbye." Turning to her husband, Catherine whispers, "Ryan, that was your boss. He wants you to go into the office this afternoon. You're—you're most likely going to be sent to Mosul later this week." A tear rolls down her tanned cheek.

"Yes. But you know how I worry about you when you travel. Especially in this dangerous—"

"You don't have to worry, going to foreign countries is the best part of my job, you know that. It's why I picked an international company; it's part of the job description."

Catherine sighs and sits down at the kitchen table, resting her head in her trembling hands.

"You need to promise me you'll stick to more domesticated social work when we decide to have children." Catherine mutters, barely audible.

"You know I will, I already told you that thousands of times. Who knows, Cath, this might be my last trip." With those words, Ryan kisses his wife's forehead and makes his way to the bedroom. As he changes and put his belongings together for work, he imagines the immense damage in Iraq and begins to mentally prepare himself for

what was to come. Ryan loves his job, he does, yet at times he can't help but feel overwhelmed by other's pain and suffering. He deals with it like any other does—removing emotion from the situation as best he can, and attempting to separate his work from his personal life.

At the office, Ryan is indeed told to pack his things, for the day after tomorrow he will be flying to Iraq. His boss, Mike Simmerman, is a fair man, and agrees to let him work with the Iraqi orphans at Ryan's request. Ryan favors working with the children, for he believes that in times of crisis, they are the ones who suffer the most.

Ryan returns home in high spirits, excited to know that in a couple days he will be bettering the lives of hundreds. However, his wife's mood hadn't changed. She has an extreme fear of losing Ryan—to the point that he often feels suffocated. Catherine is in bed by the time Ryan comes home, a puddle of tears collected on her pillow. Ryan smiles, shaking his head at the pathetic yet endearing image of his overdramatic wife.

"Cath—Don't worry. Even if I am sent to Mosul I will only be gone a month or so. They probably need me to sort through the newly orphaned children and help find them foster families. That's what Mike said on the phone, right?" She is a lunatic, as his buddies often remind him, but Ryan loves her immensely. He falls asleep curled up next to his wife, breathing in her scent, remembering every detail of her before he must leave. *She never understands how much I miss her while I'm gone.* Hugging Catherine, Ryan falls sound asleep.

"RYAN, wake up!" Ryan rolls over to his other side, swatting Catherine away. He feels like he had only been asleep for a couple minutes. "RYAN! Your brother is on the phone! Wake up!"

"God," Ryan mumbles, "what time is it?" He reaches for the telephone.

"One thirty." His wife responds back promptly. She leaves the bedroom, and Ryan hears her turn on the television in the living room. He turns his attention to the phone in his hand.

"Chris? What the hell is the matter?"

"Ryan, turn on the news now. This is bad."

"What?! What happened?"

"I've got to go, but seriously, Catherine should already have it on knowing her. Just go watch the news." Ryan hears the dial tone following his brother's panicking voice.

Flinging himself out of bed, Ryan rushes to the living room to see his wife in tears yet again. He sits next to her on the sofa transfixed on the screen.

...It seems that these bombings may be linked, as the radical Muslim group, Ansar al-Islam, may have also planned the second

attack in Queens, New York, to further insinuate terror on the United States. The president is set to address the horrific occurrence tomorrow at noon, followed by a more detailed coverage of tonight's tragedy. Kyle?

Thanks, Laura. For those of you who've just turned on the news, what you're witnessing now is the aftermath of a substantial suicide bombing in Queens. The specifics are unclear, as we continue to gather further information. Recent reports reveal that the Queens Hospital Center has been destroyed. Why exactly this building was bombed is unclear, and the exact location of the bomb has yet to be determined. Officials suspect that the bomb was prematurely detonated, as the intended location is hypothesized to be the Empire State Building. The casualties are devastating, as no survivors have been discovered in the building thus far. Police officers and fireman have been working relentlessly since midnight to put out fires, secure the scene, and uncover survivors. Our thoughts and prayers are with all of those in the Queens area.

Susi Ramazani

The Bay

We stopped by the bay, whispered silence on your lips
Darkness echoed from your distant core
You touched my neck and then my hips

My cotton sundress, the sickening rips
The garments underneath you tore
We stopped by the bay, whispered silence on your lips

I lay there mangled, unexpected scripts
Weak and broken, arms and muscle sore
You touched my neck and then my hips

Wind on my violated skin whips
Resonating screams from Satan's roar
We stopped by the bay, whispered silence on your lips

Hateful vengeance, unfurled rage grips
Resounding anger bore
You touched my neck and then my hips

In the deafening calm, salty liquid drips
Hellish demons rape me by the score
We stopped by the bay, whispered silence on your lips
You touched my neck and then my hips

Devan Grote

Gone

Alzheimer's disease slowly eats at the mental and physical abilities of its victims. One day you may realize you've lost your car keys for the third time that week, or you've forgotten the name of a new golf partner from your round that morning. Suddenly, when you sit down to balance your checkbook, the scribbles on the ledger are meaningless. You forget the way to the grocery store that you've frequented for twenty years. On Sunday, you have no recollection of a wedding you attended Saturday, and you search the deepest crevasses of your mind to recall who the child is that is sitting on your lap calling you grandpa, grandma, daddy, or even mommy. Eventually, dates become meaningless. Days become timeless. Faces become nameless. You lose your ability to hold a conversation, navigate through the house you built with your own hands, turn on the stove you've stood at every night, recognize your spouse of fifty years, smile at the group of people surrounding your bed, or even swallow the food they place before you. Finally, you lose your heart. Not the heart you gave away to your husband on your wedding day or the heart you exerted while doing something you loved; that heart faded months ago. You lose the heart that pumps blood through your veins and sustains life. That is when Alzheimer's concludes its course - when the vacant shell that remains finally withers into dust.

According to the Alzheimer's Association's 2009 Facts and Figures publication, for an estimated 5.3 million Americans, Alzheimer's disease is an unfortunate part of life. Yet, this mysterious disease, the most common form of dementia, remains shrouded in improvable theories, dangerous studies, and endless "ifs" and "maybes."

On a dreary, crisp November day, I visited Mount Macrina Manor nursing home, only minutes from my house, in Uniontown, PA. The Catholic based facility contains 120 patients in need of professional care for various health issues, including Alzheimer's. Mount Macrina houses two highly developed Alzheimer's units, and is familiar to me since I spent many of my fall afternoons last year sitting on its front porch with my grandfather, a past patient.

Accompanying me on the visit was Michelle Hauser, the former Nurse Manager of the Alzheimer's units at Mount Macrina. Hauser wore a purple corduroy jacket and dark washed jeans as we walked through

the front doors. Her husky stature stood a head taller than my own, her deep burgundy hair bounced in a perfectly styled bob, and her vivacious voice carried through the halls letting ex-co-workers and patients know of her presence immediately. Though she stepped down from her position for personal reasons, there was no denying Hauser was the ideal tour guide. It seemed that she knew each patient's name and life story, as if her mind compensated for the loss of each of theirs.

Our first stop was the Hearth 1 unit; the locked-down Alzheimer's ward, which houses patients who are still mobile, and therefore considered likely escape risks. Opposed to the Hearth 1 unit, the Hearth 2 unit upstairs houses patients who are in more advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease, and who are in no way risks for escaping since they are immobile and often unresponsive. But in Hearth 1, many tend to wander off without the knowledge of where they are heading or why, only to be stopped by the keypad secured doors. The few nuns who lived in Hearth 1 seemed to be the exceptions, having well-conditioned plots behind their getaways. As Hauser keyed in the security combination to open the doors, she recalled how they would dress in their classic black and white habits and wait for a naive visitor to pass by their room.

"They would simply ask the visitor to help them with the door or onto the elevator. Who's not going to listen to a nun? We always had to keep an eye on them," she said as the doors swung open.

As we walked slowly through the homey hallways lined with rich carpeting, soft lighting, and warm colors, Hauser explained the philosophy that embodied the unit.

"We use the Woodside Philosophy, which allows patients to be as independent as possible. If they want to sleep during the day and walk around at night, wondering in and out of rooms, they can. Even if they decide to sleep in someone else's bed, we'll try to redirect them, but the last thing we want to do is bring them back to reality. Our main concern is safety, but we also work to keep the agitation level down," Hauser explained.

Perhaps the most devastating phase of Alzheimer's is the early stages, when you can see your mind slowly leaving your body. You have no control over your own deterioration, but you get a front seat pass to watch the process every minute of the day. Maybe a sense of relief, or else a lack of despair, arrives when the disease progresses to a point that alters reality. You no longer have to watch as your memories walk out on you, taking your independence, intellect, and identity along with them. You can't grieve for what you've lost, if you don't know who you are. Worse than living in a world without purpose, without time, without memories or love, would be the act of re-enter the plentiful life you once lived and realizing, for just a moment, that you are no longer a coherent part of it.

Avoiding reality and minimizing agitation levels is especially important for those afflicted by Sundowner's Syndrome. From dinnertime until around nine o'clock, "the Sundowners" face an increased amount of confusion and agitation. Though scientists have yet to understand the causes of Sundowner's Syndrome, popular theories suggest it could result from sensory stimulation overload and fatigue that comes with the end of the day or a possible hormonal imbalance that occurs at night.

In between Hauser's conversations with staff members on duty, she told me stories of just how far the nurses go to play along with the patients' distorted worlds. For the woman who worked in a clothing store her whole life, they supplied catalogues, hangers, and sales receipts. For the aging hairdresser, they gathered varieties of wigs and beauty supplies. Then there was Joe.

A life-long coal miner in the local mines, the only memory that remained engrained in Joe's deteriorating mind was his countless years spent working the night shift. Each evening, while most other patients lay in bed, Joe woke up and began his day just as he always had. Before leaving his room, he strapped on his black leather miner's belt and adjusted his heavy, nicked-up miner's helmet, both of which the nurses provided. Before officially beginning his nightshift, Joe stopped by the nurse's station to pick up his lunch bucket, packed every evening by the staff.

During the proceeding night and early morning hours, Joe roamed the dimmed hallways as he would the tunnels of an abandoned mineshaft. With his cognitive abilities so depleted, yet small hints of his past life so vivid, he spent the time eating lunch from his bucket and relieving himself behind an artificial tree tucked in the corner.

The nurses did nothing more than kept watch of his feeble step and made sure there was a small garbage can behind that particular artificial tree. As the first signs of sun lightened the sky, Joe was content; he was peaceful in doing what he knew. As other patients began another timeless day, Joe returned to his room, removed his helmet and belt, and ended yet another nightshift.

I strayed from the congregation that Hauser attracted at the nurses' station and walked down the hall of the Hearth 1 Ward alone. The wooden framed shadow boxes mounted just below each patient's name on the outside of the rooms attracted my attention. Katharine's held a picture of herself in a wheelchair playing bingo and another of her grandkids surrounding her as she lay in bed. Edith's had small ceramic angels throughout the box, along with a picture of her and her husband in the nursing home's living room. One after another, the shadow boxes contained the lives of the names they accompanied, as if they somehow trapped each patient's fleeting memories in a polished, glass-incased box just as Hauser trapped them in her mind.

Pearl's box was scattered with black and white photographs. In one, she stood in an open field with tall stocks of wheat blowing to the left in perfect unison. She had a sundress on and a young man with suspenders wrapped around her.

Catching up with me from behind, Hauser noticed me staring inside each box. "Aren't they wonderful? They help the patients find their rooms on their own," she remarked. "When they forget their name or how to read it, all they have to do is look for their picture. We found that Pearl only recognizes herself in the past, so we used photos from her younger days."

Curiously enough, as we walked past each room, I noticed not a soul was inside. As we rounded the corner at the end of the hall, the living area came into view. Eighteen women and two men sat among the scattered couches and chairs as a small grey haired man with a red bow tie set up his keyboard.

"Oh, this is great," Hauser said quietly now that the residents surrounded us. "Some days they don't even know their names, but when this man comes in and plays polkas, you can see them mouthing the words and singing along. They remember lyrics and even prayers if they learned them when they were young."

It was true. As the one-man-band began his show, the previously silent and empty figures gently tapped their feet, bobbed their heads, or sang along with every other word of "Roll Out the Barrel." One of the most astounding effects in many cases of Alzheimer's disease is the ability to retain sporadic memories from the past, while being unable to form new ones. Deterioration of brain cells begins in the hippocampus, where new memories form, but cells in other parts of the brain that store old memories could remain untouched for years.

Due to autopsies conducted on the brains of Alzheimer's patients, scientists have been able to analyze the overall damage. Each of the 100 billion nerve cells in the brain, commonly known as neurons, contain long branching arms, which connect with each other like a canopy of limbs on the ceiling of a forest. Each connection, called a synapse, makes it possible for information to travel throughout the brain. The 100 trillion synapses in the human mind allow people to do everything from blinking their eyes to learning a foreign language. With Alzheimer's patients, the number of synapses slowly declines, causing a failure in transferring information, and eventually the death of neurons.

While all humans experience a loss of neurons as they grow older - often the cause of a grandmother's relentless disappearing glasses - Alzheimer's patients lose an excessive amount. Though the deterioration begins in the hippocampus, the death of brain cells spreads to other parts of the brain, leading to impairments such as loss of speech, depth perception, or temperature judgment. The course and speed in which the

disease travels after leaving the hippocampus, however, is different for each victim. Some may lose their ability to navigate through a room, while others need to constantly pace. Some may live with Alzheimer's for twenty years, while others pass away within three (Alzheimer's Association).

Though scientists understand most of the fundamentals of Alzheimer's disease, now the sixth leading cause of death in America, they are missing the key to advancement: the cause of the deterioration of neurons (2009 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures).

I noticed immediately as I entered the living room full of patients that the overwhelming majority were women. Studies, however, proved that gender is not a factor. The fact that women live longer than men is the sole contributor to the disproportion.

In most cases, two men surrounded by a room full of women would have considered themselves lucky or else ran in terror, but neither moved from their seats. It was clear by the lack of conversation and simply the hollow look in their eyes that they didn't know anyone else in the room. Though most patients remain in the ward for years and see each other every day, their short-term memory, in charge of remembering new faces, failed long ago.

Almost as perplexing as the disease itself, I wondered what drove the nurses in the ward to continue coming to work every day. The patients would never remember their good deeds from one day to the next. For years, they cared for the same people; growing to know their families, their unique habits, their mood swings, and their remaining hints of joy. Yet, the relationship, no matter how strong, would always be one-sided. The nurses very rarely became anything more than strangers. There was no hope of reversing someone's diagnosis, or even helping them return home after time. So, what was it that kept them going? When I posed the question to Hauser, there was no hesitation. "I loved them. They were such productive people at one point, and they constantly made me laugh. All you could do was smile and laugh."

Silver walkers scattered the living room like vehicles in a used car lot. The woman they called "Mama," whose only memory was breast-feeding her children, sat rocking a baby doll against her chest. It wasn't until I spotted a silent woman seated across the room that I softened my gaze. Legs neatly crossed, she wore matching pastel pants and a sweater set with embroidered flowers, something only the kindest of grandmothers could wear. Her perfectly primped perm was rounded and grayed like the silver frames of her thin glasses. Her body appeared able and her face displayed the wrinkles of a woman just entering her seventies; one that should be cooking at the church fish fry, playing bridge with the ladies, or preparing a Sunday meal for her family. But she was empty. Through the lens of her glasses, her eyes gave way to a deep void.

Where do these people go? They no longer live inside of themselves. They leave their bodies, the way a snail leaves a conch shell. Do they live their days lost in the haze of a never-ending cloud, with one foot in this world and one foot in another, in a state of coma, unaware of their own body's movement? Maybe God prematurely carries their minds to heaven, where all worries and illness vanish, and allows them to watch from above until their bodies break down and eventually join them in paradise. That's what I choose to believe for my own sake.

Though researchers continue to study possible causes ranging from head trauma to a lack of education, in truth, the only known risk factors are heredity and old age. Most cases develop in people over the age of 65; however, five percent of victims develop a rare hereditary form called "younger-onset" Alzheimer's, which can afflict a person as young as thirty years old. Though researchers know the gene APOE-e4 increases the risk of "younger-onset" Alzheimer's, they are clueless as to ways to alleviate the danger. The current state of Alzheimer's research seems to be nothing more than medical experts watching a burning building collapse, without the means or knowledge to stop it (Alzheimer's Association).

Due to the second blatant risk factor, old age, advancing medicine in the past few decades has proven to be bittersweet. While leading causes of death, such as heart disease, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and stroke decreased between the years of 2000 and 2005, Alzheimer's disease increased by forty percent (2009 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures). With each passing year beyond the age of 65, the risk of developing the disease skyrockets. If I were given the ultimatum, though no one ever is, to live to an old age or preserve my knowledge, my memories, and my sense of self, then let me die early. Let me die fully intact, with both feet in this world and ready to enter the next. I tense with fear at the thought that I could wake one day to realize that my forgetfulness is larger than the everyday mistake; that before long I'll be nothing but a hollow structure of skin and bones, no longer myself, yet for some dismal reason, still alive.

As people continue to live longer lives and advancements in Alzheimer's research remain nonexistent, alarming predictions appear. With the aging of the 78 million baby boomers in America, Alzheimer's disease promises to reach an all time high. Over 10 million baby boomers can expect to develop Alzheimer's, tripling the current number of victims (2009 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures).

The frightening facts show why in the last decade clinical studies and research funding have increased rapidly. Not only has the growing support come from threatening statistics, but also from the growing number of people affected indirectly, yet very deeply, by the disease. For each of the millions of sufferers of Alzheimer's disease, a family watches the slow death of their loved one's body and spirit.

Two summers ago, my grandpa and I sat quietly on the brown flowered couch in my grandparents' living room. We were silent but provided needed company for each other. There was nothing to talk about, or perhaps nothing he could talk about. He was always a quiet man, who taught me to refrain from meaningless speech, but when he talked, and especially when he yelled, people listened. Lately though, Alzheimer's had stolen his words. Harder to handle than the knowledge that I would never hold a conversation with him again was the look on his face when he began a sentence only to realize he no longer knew the words to complete it.

"Where...where's my...my...my...where's my..." He'd drop his eyes and shake his head in fear and defeat. Whatever he was looking for wasn't worth the struggle. He was too proud of a man to accept the helplessness that had slowly overtaken his mind in the last three years.

Every so often, he would turn his head towards mine and smile, but his eyes were different – they were vacant. They searched my face, gently, calmly.

"Who are you?" he'd ask, not coarsely, simply curiously.

"I'm your granddaughter, Pap." And I'd remind myself to smile.

Where did you go? I'm the one you took for rides on the tractors every day after lunch. I'm the one you used to sing to if no one else was around. I'm the one you always yelled at for running barefoot around the yard.

"You're...my granddaughter?" A smile would come over his face as he'd stand and kiss me on the cheek. I could feel his rough, boney hands, deformed from seventy years of farming and countless year of arthritis, touch the ridge of my back. His thin, straight hair, which always assured me of blood relations to my curly haired family, would touch my equally straight bangs. We'd sit back down, and he'd continue to stare at me with the same gaze I imagined he gave me when he held me in the hospital after I was born. Twenty years later, he saw his granddaughter, once again, for the first time.

Little did I know that within a month, my Pap would walk through the doors of Mount Macrina Manor with his suitcase in hand. Within three weeks, he'd be bedridden and forget how to swallow his food. Then, three days later, only 72 hours, Alzheimer's would finish its course. It would take his heart, not the one that belonged to my grandma for the last 62 years (she still has that one), but the one that keeps him from waking up at four o'clock every morning to work in his fields; the one that keeps me from kissing him on the cheek every time I say goodbye. Like everything else, it was gone.

Erica Johnson

Bare

I remember. I do.

Although sometimes I think that maybe I have just contrived a few stories,
strung them together,
and now dutifully call them my past.

I unravel like a knit sweater caught on a nail when you touch me,
soft threaded color unheld together.

I wish I could erase you from my bones,
create a new story, and put it where you used to be.

The way you speak, the words you choose, fall beautifully on the air,
like an old song on the radio without it's melody.

It's the wish, the hope
and the tug, the pull

all tumbling and tearing apart the gnawing pulse of want.

But in the end it's the emptiness of knowing that wanting you depends on
the heat of you wanting me.

The convenience of availability,
the cleavage that spills over the seams of fabric of my old yellow shirt,
and that's all it takes to spark an interest inside of you.

We act like we give, but really we just take in our own way.

The flip of fate, urged on by the touch of a hand and a few choice words,
and I'm yours.

James Z. Taylor III

Picking Sides

Is it solipsism that asks if the world is the structure of our thoughts? I would like to ask someone who I think would know, but who knows; there is no point in knowing. More importantly, my teeth hurt, and I imagine everyone's teeth hurt, because we all share the same bathroom, and it doesn't look like their brushes are getting any more use than mine.

I'd like to tell a story, but there are no honest stories to tell. Anything I say, think, at a deeper level, will be upended by my own thoughts and innermost desires. Even the most pure thought on the nature of being will be destroyed by my own desires to exist, or at times, not exist. Am I alive?

The man across from me, my friend Alex, sips his water and recoils. He fingers his teeth. We are sharing a bag of M&M's; they are delicious and beautiful. Every single one is measured and colored; they do not deviate except in the ways planned for them to deviate. His favorites are blue; I eat handfuls and don't consider it. I think it's beautiful, creating preference from nothing.

In another example, he likes simple porn. He took me to a strip club where I stood, pretty tired, against a rack of sex toys. It was quiet, and so the bouncer, also the cashier, and the one stripper on duty, I suppose on duty is the phrase, tried to chat with me. Could I ask them about solipsism, but look! Please look. This is previous to my comment about solipsism, this event, so look, look, I am altering it! I am altering the way the stripper smiles while my stomach bulges from my coat now; now her eyes are full of pity and regret, where once they were full of hope and idealism. She once was confident in herself; she once was content in every choice she made in life. I have changed her, and I will never see her again. I will never see her and her pride, dancing; I will never see her pull Alex into the back room as he begins to pull more dollars from the secret pocket he cut into his coat. I will now see a girl I once knew in high school, now down on her luck, earning money just to survive, where once there was just a woman.

That girl makes more than I do, I am sure of it, and now I can feel myself beginning to hate her for everything, for that longing to be out of her own situation.

"You had the chance," I would say, "Why wouldn't you take it?" wanting to know every detail of her life, why she would give up those perfect grades and now I realize I know nothing about her and somehow

I want her dead and out of my life forever, but really, I mean, she is. I would be the questioner who would save her, if it ran on in my head.

Alex eats more M&Ms. He drums his fingers. The doctors say he's got some sort of disease, some lesser form of OCD. When Alex was a kid, he'd drink beer in the shower and spit it up, mostly darker lagers, and then he'd yell that he was throwing up. His mom would come running in because his dad worked early. In a few years his dad would be dead, and he'd spit that beer everywhere and as his mom ran in he'd throw the bottle into the trash and cram his fingers down his throat so he'd vomit in front of her. She and his not dead father drank enough where the alcohol smell was residual and gave just the right hue to the watery morning spew on the floor to make it look like he was sick and coughing up mucus or his liver or something.

It got him out of class a lot of times, so he was real happy with himself. I think I'm telling that that truthfully. I mean, somewhere deep, he probably wasn't happy with himself for doing that, especially because when his dad died the amount of beer bottles stayed the same, you know, so it wasn't probably that hard to fool Mrs. Liebowitz anyway. I'm just assuming that part, so I make it aware and subject to interpretation as either being a facet of the truth or my own imagination, so when it is dissected later there is some question of validity of the narrator and of the mother and her child.

Alex said once to me that he believed those mornings were the closest things to birth he'd ever experience again. He said he'd be covered in bodily fluids, there'd be the smell of alcohol, though in birth he supposed it'd be isopropyl, in a white room with his mother crying and not together enough to take care of him and the doctor standing there smiling at the good fortune of the mother for caring despite the massive amount of drugs pumped into her. Doctor was his word; I would probably just say father if it was my past, but then again, it wasn't.

I don't feel like anything I'm saying is too revelatory. I can give revelatory. I mean, about myself. Alex is a scapegoat for my own feelings. My father used to sit at restaurants and take pills out of his jacket and joke about them. See, in this context, it sounds mean. It wasn't. It was terrific. He'd take out this handful of pills, and he'd say to us, in order of who was killing him the fastest, "This one's for you, and this one's for you," moving down the line of us sitting around a table. When he had more pills than we numbered, he would point at the waitress if she couldn't do her job, or he'd point at someone gorging himself, or he'd point at someone is what it boils down to, someone he just felt like he should point to. Then he'd swallow all the pills at once. They were medicine. They helped him.

Alex and my dad get along great. They love each other, I think. I wish they could just be together; that's not wrong. It's just Alex would enjoy it. I think my dad would. I grew up thinking my dad was gay. I am altering that; I can already know I am altering that. I grew up constantly realizing I thought my dad was gay, which is wholly different than realizing my dad is

gay. When I'm just realizing my own thoughts, it is simply me picking and choosing moments from the past to synthesize into a conclusion. Were I to wake up one day, and think to myself, I bet dad would hate that porn store and would want to talk to that stripper, and then to realize, oh, it's because he's homosexual, well that'd just be a realization. Here, you know, I'm cherry picking. I'm trying to support my own thoughts.

It's the way he never kissed Mom the way I would kiss a girl, the way I never had to knock before entering their room, the way Steve Markowitz still always sends a Christmas card and he doesn't have any kids and all his wives keep leaving him. Those moments may have happened, but that doesn't mean anything. He kept straight porn at the house too. He fucked his secretary, and he fucked his boss to get her to fire the secretary, and then well he got promoted somehow and he fired his old boss. I mean, that's manipulative and kind of a primal-sexual-dominance type thing, isn't it? I mean, I'm straight, but I don't think it's wrong to say that sometimes it's cruel to be straight, if I'm assuming a dominant role only out of biological necessity. I don't really know what that means, but I mean, isn't it dominant to be straight?

Mostly though, I wish my dad and Alex would be together, if only so I could have a brother I like, and so my dad would be happy. He loves my mom, I am sure and without any thought of that, and I love my mom, it's just they've lost that part of their relationship. I want him with Alex. He loves Alex and Alex likes him. Neither is homosexual though, and I suppose that's the sticking point.

I don't mean to display sexual undercurrents of thought. We're all sexual, high school psychology told me that, but it's hard to say sometimes. It comes back to that solipsism question, of whether I have the correct definition. If this world is a, I suppose the word is solipsistic, if this world is a solipsistic world created in my own head, does the definition even matter? Let's say I spend my whole life asking others about their knowledge of solipsism and let's say it turns out when I die this whole world was my creation. Does it even matter then? I mean, it'd be ironic I guess. My father used to tell me that ironic meant whatever happened in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. I think it's a correct definition.

More importantly, my teeth hurt, as I said they would. I drink some water to wash away the coating of M&M shells and chocolate, but it only irritates the nerves and gums; one day my mouth will glow red like the shells I have been eating, and on that day I will pay a dentist to carve my mouth open and replace it with fake teeth and coat the gums in fake enamel while in a fake sleep. I might even mention it all to him, those feelings, and my dentist, he's a good dentist, he'd say, "Well the bill should bring you back to reality", and I'd smile real wide.

Alex is leaving me, but I really mean leaving the table. He will leave one day. Is this correct, is this fate? Is there fate in solipsism? It's just such a

question. Alex proposed this scenario to me one day about the nature of that line of thinking:

"See, we'll buy a gun. We'll buy two guns, cause I mean, it'd be nice if we both had a gun. We could go shooting, go hunting or something. I mean, shit, we'd have guns. We got the money right? So I'd give you a gun, and you'd go on in the bathroom, and you'd start thinking, this won't hurt. This won't hurt at all. And outside I'll be thinking he's going to start screaming. And you know, you'll just like, you'll shoot your foot. I mean, we'll keep the police on speed dial, and I mean, suicide attempt, at worst, means some nice pills. We could have pill parties and shit. Best case scenario, you're an idiot with a hunting story.

"I just mean, like, we got to snap you out of this. We're literally going to blow that line of thinking away. Then you'll go on about some subconscious idea like, well, in your physics it hurts to get shot in the foot, and I suggest this because I am a creation of your world, and so by suggesting this I am your inner most desire to blow yourself away. So it won't matter. But like, think about it. Every time you mention that word, you'll feel all the shattered bones in your foot rattling, and it won't matter. You still fucked yourself over even if you made the world. So what's the point in thinking everything will be great if you start thinking positive?"

I bought a gun, after that, just to own a gun. I've started tape recording conversations so I don't lose track of them. That was the first one I taped. It is a transcript, with spelling and grammar assumed and a drunken slur removed. It makes a lot of sense, even with these edits brought into play. He's wrong, you know, the only way to know is to die. The only way to know anything about life is to die, I think, because you're nothing or you're something, and either way, at least you know the answers as part of the eternal being of the universe, or you just kind of don't care because you're nothing.

So it doesn't matter, please look, it just doesn't matter. I am self-contained; I have moved very few muscles in this attempt to tell you an honest story. I feel like every single thought here is a past-life. I will never hold the same thoughts and situations again. If there is any argument for solipsism, it is only on the basis that every moment is new, and so a world is created by the self because the self is ever-changing and ever-moving.

Were I to write a suicide note, I would tell my dad I love him, and to take care of Alex. I would write Alex that I love him, and to take care of dad. I'd tell mom she did a good job. I'd tell my siblings that I tried, and I'm sorry it doesn't look like it. I would scratch out a quote from someone so it looked like I had been thinking about this for a while but I didn't want it to look tacky to have a quote from or somebody tacked onto the bottom. I would sign my name, and, for flare, I would literally pin it to my skin. It'd be terrific. It'd be like the Christmas cards I never know how to write, except it'd be honest. I'd need to write it on cardstock too. Definitely cardstock.

I probably wouldn't end up killing myself though. I'd probably just be standing in the shower with a note pinned to my chest, looking like a jackass. That's the best I could hope for. It would prove something though; it'd prove I had control over my world, even if it wasn't mine. It'd end all the undercurrents. I'd just sit there thinking clearly.

One day I was in the shower, and I tried to play Alex's game. I was drinking some dark Octoberfest brew because it's pretty calming to drink in the shower, and I thought, let's try it. So I swallowed up a good mouthful and I spit it everywhere, and I threw the beer in the trash and it spit everywhere, and I started yelling for Alex with my index finger trying to tickle my epiglottis. I did it wrong though, and I forgot to leave the door unlocked, so here I am naked and choking on vomit while Alex is pounding, and I am gagging, and I fall. I fall heavy to the floor.

The pounding got worse, because now my head, internally, was joining Alex's hand in striking. Is this the correct memory? Maybe he was just pounding harder and I knew, or I thought then and I measured later to know, that if he kicked the door in the bottom would slice my face wide open. I puked under the door, and the pounding stopped. It was quiet for a moment. Alex started laughing real loud. He just wouldn't stop laughing, and it made me laugh, and I started gagging again but it was worth it. He just yelled some curses and left me lay for a while.

I could see my dad doing that, and I guess that is when I decided my dad would be perfect for him. I could see him doing that pretty easy. He'd get a kick out of it at least. It's not to say my dad's cruel, but he'd realize a trick like that and wait for my laughter before cursing me out. I don't remember if Alex waited. I said he waited, but I don't remember. I hope he did; I believe he did. I don't know though. I don't know anything.

Alex says he leaves when I'm down on myself. He says it'll give me time to reflect on my misfortune until I don't want to reflect anymore. I wish he'd stay. I wish to God he'd stay. I wish to Me he'd stay.

It doesn't stop, when I think about it. It just doesn't stop. I wish my head would stop. I am still immobile. I cannot get up. My dad said I'm too young for these thoughts. I believe in him wholeheartedly.

Megan Hilands

Confessions of Pre-Teen Girl Trapped in Her Own Body

The day one of my female classmates made a comment about my weight is the same day that I stopped eating. What I now know was a petty half-truth spawned possibly out of jealousy, and definitely to make my classmate feel better about her own changing pubescent body, changed my life. I listened and believed her. For all of humanity's almost animalistic desire to live, I used to firmly believe that life was not worth living.

As usual, my mother cooked a delicious dinner that fatal night after school. My mom is an excellent cook, and the meal looked and smelled simply mouth-watering. Succulent jumbo shrimp with oven baked garlic potatoes and crisp steamed green beans. Sadly, I could not muster an appetite. As I simply toyed with my food, a perplexed and concerned look appeared on my mother's face.

"I thought shrimp was your favorite, Megan?" she questioned.

A lump bulged in my throat, and I coughed to clear it. I would hate to disappoint my mom by allowing her to think that I didn't like her dinner. "It is," I curtly replied. "I'm just not feeling well tonight."

"Okay. Why don't you lie down?" she suggested. "I'll clean up here." She seemed a little worried as she rose from her chair to collect my dishes. I slugged from the table to the stairs and then to my room. As soon as my body hit my bed, I began to cry. I fell asleep slowly, my stomach aching and my head pounding.

The next morning, I woke up early to pack my own lunch. My mom usually packed my lunch for me so that I could sleep in a little later, but she was ignorant of my new diet. My mom loved me, and I know that she only wanted to help me out, but it seemed like such a shame to waste food. Children in Africa were starving after all. The more I thought about it, the more the food culture of the United States really disgusted me. The gluttonous, self-indulgent Americans consumed far too many calories, which rendered them fat, unhealthy creatures. I was disappointed in my country and felt fairly certain that its citizens could learn a lesson from the African children. If they went to bed hungry, why was it so awful for us to do the same thing?

I opened the fridge to search for something healthy. I knew that if I stopped eating entirely I would die, but I needed to eat as little as possible in order to lose weight quickly. I felt huge, disgusting, and fat, and I despised myself. That was my motivation against eating more than the most meager of portions, despite the sharp pangs of hunger. After searching for a few moments, I found a bag of pre-cut lettuce. I measured out a serving and placed it in a small plastic Tupperware container, then added five cherry tomatoes to my salad. No fatty dressing, croutons glazed with lard and butter, or greasy globules of gooey cheese would tarnish my vegetables. I sadistically giggled a little. "Lunch is served," I thought. For good measure, I also packed myself a Capri-Sun. That tiny pouch of juice had 100 calories, but the sugar would give me enough energy to get through the day. It was my one indulgence.

The meager meal that I had packed that day soon became my standard lunch du jour. My other meals were equally miniscule. Every day I would rise early, chug three glasses of water, and sip sixteen ounces of strong coffee sweetened only with aspartame. My breakfast consisted solely of liquid and contained zero calories. It offered me little nourishment or satisfaction, but oddly enough, I had already begun to enjoy the ever present gut wrenching pangs of hunger. They made me feel like I was accomplishing something.

I consumed the bulk of my calories daily during the evening meal. Dinner was the one time of the day I had to eat in front of my parents, who closely monitored every bite tiny bit I grudgingly forked and raised to my lips. My mom stopped thinking that I had merely caught a bad bout of the stomach flu after I dropped my second jean size. She didn't know what to think. Or how to help me. She blamed herself most days.

I was glad that my parents watched me eat dinner instead of breakfast. I liked to go to bed with my stomach fuller than it was when I woke up. Hunger pangs are not conducive to sleeping, and I abhorred lying alone in bed with only my cruelly sardonic mind to keep me company. The African children probably did not loathe themselves as I did. They probably slept like babies.

I ate less than 500 calories a day. Probably just enough to keep my body alive. I was possessed. Who knows? Perhaps an exorcism would have saved me. I had no control over what other people thought of me, but I did have control over this one aspect of my life. My self-confidence continued to plummet each day. Even though I did lose weight very rapidly, I increasingly felt that I did not deserve to eat. You are fat became both my mantra and the rule by which I lived my life.

The thoughts of eating and of food disgusted and nauseated me. Instead of a half-melted chocolate ice cream cone kissing my lips, I now felt the foul, acrid burn of bile at the back of my throat. I felt like a prisoner in my own body, with no greater desire than the wish to escape the constant

pang of self loathing that gnawed at my chest. A few weeks passed, and I became wildly obsessed with the number that appeared in red blockish numbers on my white bathroom scale. I had already lost fifteen pounds, but it was not nearly enough. It never would be.

When I was in elementary school, I remember watching a Lifetime movie with my mom based on a true story about two girls with severe eating disorders, one of whom died from the illness. "This is painful," she told me, "but I want you to see this. I want you to know that starving yourself is never an option. I will always love you no matter what your weight is." My mom has struggled with her weight for her whole life. Kids made fun of her for her weight too but to a much greater extent. The seemingly innocent and cherubic faces of children do not fool me. I know that kids can in many ways be just as cruel and as vicious as adults. I snapped under one little seemingly insignificant comment, but my mother endured years of what one could veritably call severe emotional torture.

One adult, however, also joined in the teasing. My mom's sixth grade teacher gave her the eloquent moniker "Tank," and even though my mom is an intelligent woman, she became so miserable, dejected, and forlorn that she utterly gave up and received a "D" in the class. Life does have its little ironies though. This teacher died young, and my mother is not sorry. Somehow, even though my mom is probably just as self-conscious as I am, she never developed an eating disorder. For this, my mother is my hero.

The days that I suffered from anorexia were ritually dictated. Besides the possibly obvious ritual of weighing myself five times a day, I also completed fifty sit-ups each day after school to help reduce what I thought looked like a beer belly or a baby bump. I ran on my treadmill and actually enjoyed the pain that it caused me. Realistically, I could barely run at all, and even though I later was an avid long-distance runner in high school, five minutes at a relatively slow pace was anguishing. Sometimes I was utterly unable to jog for three whole minutes without needing to rest, as my body simply could not endure any more stress in addition to the meticulously rationed starvation diet that I had subjected it to.

After my daily self-mandated workout, I would crave the soothing aromas of a hot steamy shower. I always made the water scalding hot and washed myself with the sweet scent of warm vanilla sugar body wash. Afterwards I felt gloriously clean and relaxed, even though large clumps of wet brown hair usually littered the white linoleum floor after I had toweled off. I dressed in my now oversized clothing while I berated the image I saw in the mirror. The girl staring back at me was disgustingly thin. Her hipbones violently jutted out of bruised purple skin, and her entire rib cage was so pronounced that it seemed to stretch the sallow, alabaster skin on her midriff. She looked sickly, sunken, and in urgent need of medical attention. I, however, falsely believed that she was morbidly obese.

What many people do not understand about eating disorders is

that they are mental illnesses. While my parents tried very diligently to help me fight my battle against anorexia, there was little that they could do aside from physically force-feeding me. Doctors also logically tried to explain to me that I was wreaking utter havoc on my body by starving it, but I was neither ready nor willing to listen to them. The war I waged took place inside my head and was at this point little affected by outside influences. I had to help myself first.

I relentlessly wished that I could escape into another world, where perhaps I would not feel the pain and guilt of looking into my mother's grieving face each day. I often wished that I was never born and believed that the world would be far better off without me. I could no longer stand peering into my mom's loving brown eyes, red rimmed with tears, which pleaded with me to stop. I was wasting away. If mom was not such a gentle, caring, and compassionate person, I cannot honestly say that I would have made it through the ordeal with any shred of sanity.

It took months to finally realize I was utterly out of control and in urgent need of medical attention. After the routine trips to doctor's office, I found a psychiatrist who seemed to understand me. She was a tall, blond woman with round glasses, rosy cheeks, and an overall soft, gentle, and grandmotherly demeanor. She always offered me chocolate, but I never took any. My mom never did either. Her name was Carole, and she didn't impose on me by asking harsh questions. She didn't judge me or treat me like I had a problem. She was just what I needed.

As one may expect given the severity of my illness, it took years to repair my body. I slowly incorporated larger amounts of calories into my diet, because after starving myself for so long, my body had lost the ability to metabolize normal amounts of food. If I ate too much too quickly, I would gain weight too rapidly, which was not only unhealthy but also hinder my progress.

My eating disorder stunted my growth. I'm 5'1," the same height I have been since I was eleven years old. My mother and father are 5'9" and 5'10," and my twelve-year-old brother is five inches taller than me. Sometimes I still wonder what it would be like to be tall. Especially when people assume I'm only about fourteen. An old man at Starbucks once admonished me for ordering a venti macchiato. He told me that I should be drinking milk. He did not even apologize when I told him I was a college student. Like I was going to pull an all-nighter during finals week on milk.

My battle with anorexia still plagues me. Twice I relapsed—once during the summer before my freshman year of high school and once during my junior year of high school. Sometimes when I look in the mirror I still see the little twelve-year-old girl with a tiny frame and sallow cheeks. Perfect alabaster skin because she faithfully uses Noxema every night. Rich chestnut colored hair that shines with red tints in the sunshine. Bright blue eyes full of promise but haunted by invisible demons. Maybe the exorcism would have been a good idea after all.

Candise Henson

Josh

my soul sings in his direction
a man with passion
a rarity
even here, in this swollen academia,
where so many men pretentiously puff cigarettes
talking of political follies and existentialism.
he is apart.
not silly, not important to the outside.
he is understated.
behind that small man is a universe of thought
whirling, sweeping my soul through his vast Space.
I want to curl beneath a blanket of his neural stars
and sleep basked in his planetary cortex,
spinning below a multitude of matter,
licking inspiration from his Milky Way dreams,
safely. As the peacocks strut by
and invite me for a night of fake orgasms and meager efforts,
I'll dip my head in supposed shyness
and say, another day.
I'd rather lie in that caramello mind.

Hannah Sawyer

War's End

Her hands moved quickly from task to task. Brusquely, she fluffed the pillows behind his head and deftly changed the bandage on his left arm. She skimmed the charts, felt for his pulse, took his temperature, and refilled the glass of water next to his bed. Only when she rearranged the covers did Edith drop her professional facade, allowing her fingers to linger longer than a nurse's should around his legs, dragging them slowly across his body while she pulled the sheets up, and letting them come to rest lightly on his chest. John made no response; he seemed to take no notice of the touch. She made the pretense of picking an imaginary piece of lint off his shirt and then withdrew her hand. The anemic lighting in the hospital really didn't do justice to the large diamond on her ring finger; the cold practicality of surgical instruments implied that jewelry was frivolous in comparison.

"We've had a letter from your parents today," she told him, compensating with a light tone which masked her unsettled thoughts. "Would you like me to read it to you?"

She held out the envelope to him. Her engagement ring overwhelmed her delicate hand and stood out like ice against the snowy starkness of the paper. The band never seemed to sit straight on her finger anymore. War had made them all, even the nurses, a little thinner. It was hard to eat when they didn't know where their next meal was coming from, and Edith had lost some of the sumptuous curves that she had had when she first followed John to Europe. He turned the envelope over in his hands reflectively, and when he spoke, the coldness of his tone was biting.

"You already opened it?"

Contempt was John's constant bedfellow as he lay immobilized in the hospital wing, and it awoke during even the briefest of their conversations. Victory had been proclaimed in Europe weeks ago, and John's war had been over for much longer, ever since he had been shot on the Western front, but he continued to search for the enemy. Finding no army, he trained his scope on Edith.

"Yes, I opened it. I didn't know when you'd..."

"Who was the letter addressed to? Was it addressed to you or to

me?" John interrupted in a tone so low that his words crawled across the floor to Edith.

"You."

"Then why did you open it?"

"I just didn't know when you'd feel up to reading it," she said quietly.

"I got shot in the arm, not the god damn eyes Edith! I can still read a letter from my own parents." Silently she gave him the letter. She leaned back and closed her eyes, hiding the tears which threatened to break through her carefully constructed dam of self-restraint.

Europe. It was where she had come to offer her services as a nurse to the Allies, to fulfill her civil duty, and to defeat the Nazi killing machine that was steamrolling across the continent. At least that's why she told everyone she was going. It sounded so good that she had almost managed to convince herself, but really, she knew that she had come to keep an eye on John. As the daughter of an influential military man, Edith had pulled strings, transferring from hospital to hospital, following the movement and advances of his regiment, crossing country lines, military fronts, all the while blurring the constructs of her own motivation. Now she and the other nurses were just biding their time, waiting for John and the other patients to get well enough to be transferred home.

Were they an endearing story of devoted adoration? That's what most people seemed to think of it as, and their perception helped Edith get what she wanted. Even hardened generals thought it was romantic. The story of the young couple warmed their hearts in the desolate landscape of war, and they would readily grant her requests. Of course Edith did it for romance, or that was one of the reasons. She and John were in love. That's what everyone told them: how beautiful they looked together, how happy they were, how much in love they must be, and Edith believed they must be right.

But it was more than that; she followed John because it was what she had always done. She had grown up trailing behind him through the neighborhood, unsure of how to express her girlish feelings and settling on nicknames and swift kicks as sufficient ways to show her affection. Later, when they had started dating, she rode to his high school football games with his parents, and when she got in to Sarah Lawrence and he chose Dartmouth, she found a smaller women's college nearby, so that they wouldn't have to feel the pangs of separation. After all this time, she couldn't recognize herself without him; life without John was something she couldn't fathom because she had never experienced it.

"I'll have to find a jeweler to readjust this band," she murmured to herself, moments later. She got up from his bedside, leaving John to the letter, securing her mask of confidence once again.

How beautiful their story must appear, she thought to herself, as she drifted amongst the legions of hospital beds. A young woman follows her childhood sweetheart into the greatest military conflict the world has ever seen and, when he gets hit, spends her days nursing him back to health so that she can bring him home to his parents, a whole man. The tears it would bring when someone told it at their wedding as Edith blushed prettily and John took her hand under the table. Old couples would glance knowingly at each other and smile.

"How's John doing?" asked Nurse Kelly later that night. The matronly ward director was fond of telling people that she'd pretty much heard it all, but when it came to those two kids, well there wasn't another love story quite like theirs.

"Oh his arm seems to be coming along quite nicely. The infection looks to be going down, and I don't think there will be any need to operate. But what I'd like to know," Edith continued, "is if there's anyone around here that could resize my wedding band. It's really becoming quite loose."

"Ha!" Nurse Kelly barked. "Girl, this hospital is parked on an entire continent of war torn countries that have been blasted, shot at, burned and blown up for years and all you want to do is find the neighborhood jewelers? Do you know where we are? We're on the western front. Hell, the Germans were so poor even before the war started that most of them have never even seen a wedding band!"

Edith looked down at her lap and twisted the pretty ring around her finger.

"I'll tell you what sweetie," said Nurse Kelly, softening a little. "Pretty soon, you might be able to go to the jeweler that you bought it from and have them fix it."

She lowered her voice and leaned in conspiratorially, "Word is that we might not be waiting for everyone to get better. We might be clearing out of here soon, damn soon in fact. The brass wants to get everyone home and out of Europe. Apparently, if Japan doesn't fall soon, command is prepared to do some real big, real drastic, and if they can help it, they don't want no Americans in other countries when it happens. That's how damn big it's gonna be, so big they don't know how the foreigners are gonna react." For the first time in weeks, a genuine smile wove its way across Edith's face. Nurse Kelly's words came as a welcome surprise. Edith wasn't even sure what home meant anymore, except that it sounded too good to be true. She slipped her loose ring off her finger and tucked it into her pocket for safe keeping.

Nurse Kelly was right about the brass moving everyone out. A few days later, the staff was told they had less than a week to close up the hospital before they would be moved to different bases in Western Europe for processing, discharge, and shipment home. Relief was an

understatement. It was as if Edith was being set free after years of wrongful imprisonment. Nothing that could take her away fast enough from the lightless cell of her existence at the hospital. She had come to hate tending to the half-human husks of men that flooded the wards. It was more like some sort of sick form of torture than nursing or healing.

At first, it hadn't been so bad, there hadn't been that many of them, and she had enjoyed flirting with the young officers on the mend who told her not to worry, now that America had joined the war, it would be over soon. We'd show those Nazi bastards what they deserved. But as the war had dragged on, the men had become more and more grim. They came with psychological wounds that were as devastating as the physical wounds which had torn apart half their body. None of them reassured her or smiled anymore, they didn't even look at her. She might as well of been talking to a wall when she tried to awaken them from their blank, staring, stupor. One of her patients had been a prisoner of war. The only sounds he made were the screams that still woke Edith at night. He had died four days later without ever uttering an actual word. She wanted to bury those memories beneath her packing and zip them up in a suitcase she would never have to open again. It would be good for John to leave. All he needed was to be home to begin truly healing. That's when he'd become himself again, he wasn't like those other men in the ward, the ones who had never lost that hard, glassy look in their eyes. They would both move on.

She had thanked God when she had seen John carried in a few days after he'd been hit. She'd requested that they move him to her hospital. His arm was shattered and heavily bandaged, but his angelic face had been left untouched; his wound would heal into simply a noble reminder of his heroic acts against the Nazi's. In fact, Edith thought she might have been a little embarrassed if he had gone back completely intact. Now people wouldn't dare question his bravery, it would be displayed in the spider web of scars that would inevitably criss-cross his arm, or even in the empty pin tucked sleeve of his sharp officer's uniform. The doctors said they still didn't know if they'd be able to save his arm. Edith hoped they'd be able to, and she'd surely done her best to take care of him as she nursed him back to health. It would be hard for John to hold her while they danced if he only had one arm, and they had to dance. Everyone danced at their wedding. She finished packing her suitcase and zipped up John's bag, ready to begin the journey home.

"Where's your ring?" John asked later when they were packed into the back of the Taxi. They were the first words he had spoken to her all day and his tone spoke only of accusation.

"Oh, it's in my pocket," she replied. "It was loose, and I was worried it might fall off. I can put it back on."

"Don't bother," he mumbled, and turned to look out the window. Moments later, he couldn't hide the shudder which coursed electrically through him as they drove by a skeletally thin mother, sitting on the steps of the burned remnants of a collapsed shack, with a baby in her lap.

Edith watched his attempt to master himself again as she leaned her forehead against the cool glass of the taxi window, letting it seep in and slow the throbbing of her head. It was an action she would repeat many times as John reacted to other sights like that one which ran past the train and bus windows during their trip home. Once she tried to comfort him and he shoved her against a wall. He held her there with his face seemingly a centimeter away from hers, his fetid breath assaulting her nose, before releasing her and walking her away. Watching him go, Edith had noted his wild appearance, disheveled hair, crumpled shirt, and wondered when he had last taken a shower.

"Don't you think a fall ceremony would be nice?" She chatted as they got on the subway, nearly two months later. "I realize that it's late in the summer, but I think that we could pull something together by early October. Just something small, I really don't want to wait another year."

Coming back from Europe had taken longer than they had thought. Something had gotten mixed up with their passports or John's discharge papers, it was hard to remember which, and it didn't matter now. Her relationship with John was her sole concern. With every day that passed, he had become more and more unreachable. She could feel his mind becoming as desolate and barren as the frozen tundra. Edith was convinced that something as beautiful and normal as marriage was now the only thing that might melt the glacier threatening to engulf his heart.

John ignored her comments while they made their way to the subway, crowded with sweaty passengers. The people pressed against her and she felt like she might drown amidst the foreign mass. As their bodies engulfed her, she couldn't help but be reminded that this was more human contact that she had felt in months. John had avoided her touch like the plague ever since they had left the hospital. Edith's desire to get off the car and into her parents' house flooded her senses. In the cool comfort of their familiar living room, they would truly be home and she and John would be able to begin to put the pieces back together again. Once he was surrounded by reminders of their old lives, she was sure he'd let go of whatever evil had been growing in him and their old feelings for each other would resurface.

"This is our stop," he said, and began to gather their things.

Edith stood up and smoothed her skirt. The doors opened. "So what do you think?" she said.

The words formed in her mouth but never made it to John's ears. Her voice was lost in the din as they stepped out into a chaotic scene orchestrated by confusion. Shouts of joy dropped like bombs, breaking through Edith's quiet inner turmoil. For the first time in months, she was ripped from her own unpleasant reverie by the scenes of senseless happiness. Strangers rushed by her and the broad smiles on her face made her yearn to be a part of the celebration. She could feel the bubbling ecstasy of the moment catching her up in its tidal swell, and she was drawn to the feeling of the mob's euphoria like an addict long deprived of a drug.

"What's going on?" yelled Edith to a man sprinting by.

"It's over! Japan surrendered! The War's over!"

She turned to John with bliss in her eyes. It was over, they were released. The tension drained from her soul like water breaking through a dam. Arms outstretched, she was ready to embrace him, and to celebrate their new found freedom, but when she reached out to take his hand, the malice flashing in his eyes made her stop dead.

"Well thank God," he said. "Thank fucking God. Now we can await our day of judgment in comfort."

"John, what are you talking about?"

"You don't get it do you? I could only wish for your damn blissful ignorance. It will be a lot easier for you to ignore the fires of hell when they start to burn your feet." He spat on the ground in front of her and then grabbed her hands with an animalistic snarl.

"John you're hurting me."

"Don't think for one second that your hands aren't covered in their blood either. There's no such thing as innocence anymore. We slaughtered it in Europe."

"Let go of me," she yelled, the pitch of her voice beginning to rise to that of a scream, but John only tightened his grip.

"Every time I killed one of them, I ended more than one life. His friend who had to hold him while he bled out, his girl by the fire for him to come home, the child he never got a chance to have. Their lives were all over too when I pulled the trigger, when me and the rest of the world validated this insanity. Future? What future are they gonna have? The ones who got left on the fields are the lucky ones. They're not gonna be around to see the force of evil we set free wreck itself on our world. It would have been fucking humane of me to go around and put a bullet in their heads too. And you fuckers have the audacity to celebrate it. You're fuckin' right its over." With that he dropped her hand, and stared into her eyes. Edith searched for the man she knew in the two pools of oblique darkness. Before she could find him, John turned and walked away.

Edith stood there, her feet melting in to the pavement, keeping her there in agony while she watched a part of her identity head up

the steps and into oblivion. A moment later she broke free and rushed frantically up the steps. She could barely see his blond curly head bobbing like a buoy above the sea of faces. As long as she could keep track of him, she'd be able to catch up, to make him stop and talk this all out. The excitement of the moment, it had done something to him, unhinged him in some way. He was maybe a little more damaged than she originally thought but he wasn't broken. Her mind screamed that she could fix this, but she could feel the hollowness of her own words even as she thought them.

Edith started to break into a sprint when strong arms caught her from behind. Dipped over an arm in a disorienting wash of blue, she fought rabidly against the momentum, as the landscape seemed to invert itself. She struggled to keep sight of John's stony face, the only constant landmark left in her world, before she was kissed hard by salty, wet, unknown lips.

Somewhere deep in the back of her mind, she heard the whirl of a photographer's lens as it captured the moment, and she thought wildly, 'No! Not Now!' This wasn't how it was supposed to be! She was in her still in her white nurse's uniform, not the elegant wedding dress of her dreams. They weren't at an alter, surrounded by friends and family; they were in Times Square, pressed on all sides by screaming strangers and he wasn't John. He was just some giddy man in a navy sailor's suit, and his kiss was the death knell of her dreams. His mouth left hers, and he slowly let her go, beaming down at her. The absurdity of the situation racked her mind. She pushed past him violently, but John was nowhere in sight.

Dizzily she turned round and round but thousands of happy faces wet with tears of joy clouded her view like tear gas seeping from the trenches. Her eyes remained dry, protected by a wall of numbness. Confetti exploded above her head and rained down upon her like rubble. The brightly colored pieces taunted her with their uncanny resemblance to the torn up pieces of her once vibrant existence. Their end was already decided. They would be swept off the streets and dumped into the trash, but any future she had imagined was quickly being erased as if by the hands of God, or as definitively as the decimation of a tank. The black hole of uncertainty which was rapidly gathering up the threads of Edith's life was making waves of nausea wash over her.

Sprinting past a store front window, she caught sight of her own face. Staring in to the eyes of the enemy, her own reflection gazed back. Slowly, she began her death march towards that window; she was an army facing certain defeat. Happiness, love, and the warmth of life fled around her. She didn't even try to stop their retreat, knowing that this was only the beginning of the empty existence that was to come. She

had seen that dead stare before, it had been in the eyes of the men she treated, the living corpses that lay as evenly spaced as the cracks in a sidewalk in the hospital beds along the rows of her ward. The darkness had already reached the windows of her soul.

"How quickly it moves," she noted with a twisted calmness. Trapped in her ironic moment of clarity, she felt like she finally understood him, not only John, but the man whose screams had murdered the quiet of the hospital, and every soldier who had watched any hope for normalcy blasted to abeyance by the automated killing machines of war. It was over, and Edith was completely and utterly alone.

She turned away from the window in time to observe a photographer scurrying towards a payphone, clutching his pictorial gold. A haunting smile cut across her face, stopping far from her eyes. Edith let her body be swallowed up in the sea of celebration around her. As the crowds pushed her away, she yelled out to him with perverse laughter, "Call it War's End," before being swept away as she surrendered to the hollowness.

Kathleen Flynn

Bits & Pieces

I've been told I have a great deal in common with my grandmother. I've got her cheekbones and, most importantly, her stubbornness. My grandma was one of the most stubborn and independent women I've ever known. From the time of my grandfather's death up until five years ago, she lived alone in a house in Queens. She walked to Mass, to bridge, and to the library by herself for over forty years.

When I was little, my grandma and my mother were largely responsible for my love of reading. My mom was, and still is, an elementary school teacher, so we read Cam Jansen books instead of watching Nickelodeon. But my grandma would take me to the Bellerose Library, and because it was with her, it was almost like entering an exotic and enchanted world. For some reason, just getting a book from a different library added a thrill to the entire experience. When I was younger, we would pick books with the brightest colors, the most elaborate illustrations, and, of course, a fairy tale plot. With every trip to that library, whose very name evoked two Disney Princesses in particular (Briar Rose and Belle), I would be convinced that this was someplace magical. It didn't hurt that an Indian furniture store was next door, its windows filled with golden Hindu gods and garish carpets.

As I grew older, I started to pick books from her bedroom. I found worn out copies of *Jane Eyre* and shortened, illustrated adaptations of other classics among the novels on her shelves. My mother had read that copy of *Jane Eyre* years before and the pages were musty and butterfly wing-thin. The spine was broken, revealing the vertebrae holding the book together. It hardly looked priceless, but I was heartbroken when the last pages documenting Mr. Rochester's regained sight finally separated from the rest of the book.

My grandmother also taught me how to sew, and we'd sit together, she in her overstuffed lazy boy and me at her feet. I'd always be in charge of threading the needle. It was a difficult task, and I'd often sit for several minutes, tongue pressed against my teeth, as I worked to slip a piece of fine thread through a microscopic hole.

"I need someone to do this for me," she'd say. "It's my old eyes, you see."

And she'd wink at me.

Eventually, I became somewhat good at sewing, and my stitches became neat and fine instead of a tangled mess. After tackling a few felt Christmas ornaments, I made her a quilt pillow. It was my greatest achievement; it had a square of every tacky Christmas fabric I could find. There were smiling Christmas trees, one white box speckled with holly and multiple sections of my fabric featuring dancing bears in Santa hats. It was the most grotesque, Frankenstein-like quilted pillow ever but my grandmother loved it.

It got to the point where my grandmother helped me to make clothes for my Barbies. Before this, I only played with the Disney Mattel dolls, pairing up Cinderella with my brother's G.I. Joe since guy dolls were scarce. Once I could make my own dresses, I started buying my own dolls and making them into the characters out of the books I'd read. My grandma always got the final say in what fabrics I would eventually use. The one I remember best was sky blue with silver, sparkling swirls. I went home and made my own Cinderella dress. The sleeves were lopsided and the bodice incredibly tight, but I like to think G.I. Joe appreciated it.

This all came to an abrupt end after one trip to the eye doctor. My grandmother had been having difficulty seeing while driving, a situation that was not exactly ideal for innocent bystanders or other cars. My dad took "Mother Magoo," as he fondly called her, to the doctor to see whether or not she needed a stronger prescription for her glasses. He dropped her off and proceeded to take a nap in the driver's seat. Mother Magoo then lived up to her name. After a series of tests, the doctor sent her home to wait for the results. She stood at the entrance of the parking lot looking for our mammoth blue van. Strangely, she couldn't make it out and walked up and down the rows of cars, searching for my father. She passed him several times before he finally woke up and called out to her.

The results came back a day later. The optometrist informed my grandmother that she had a form of wet macular degeneration. According to the doctor, she was slowly losing her eyesight as blood vessels multiplied excessively in the choriocapillaries through the Bruch's membrane on her retinas. As the blood vessels grew, bleeding, leaking and scarring would lead to rapid vision loss since they hadn't caught it early enough. I didn't understand the disease at the time and my mom had to explain it to me in less scientific terms. According to her, the eyes were almost like a movie theater. Parts of the eye were like the projector while others, specifically the retina, were like the screen. The screen of my grandmother's eyes was deteriorating, its surface slowly going blank and dark as blood vessels swarmed like creeping ivy on a brick wall. There was no treatment for the disease at the time and surgery was the only option. Given her age, however, the doctors were reluctant to take that drastic step.

The reason why she was unable to find my father's car was finally understood. The doctor informed the family that people with macular degeneration have a difficult time discerning colors. Even if our car was distinctive in its shape and size, she wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between a navy blue van from a violent purple one. She was also considered legally blind and shouldn't have been behind the wheel of a car, a thought that horrified my mother since my grandmother frequently picked us up from school in her old car. The doctor also revealed that her central vision would start to fade as shapes and lines began to morph and coalesce together. Without central vision, the doctor said, it would not be possible to read.

My grandmother's hobbies quickly narrowed down to simply walking. There was no more sewing, no more reading. My mom—tried desperately to come up with alternatives. She found incredible magnifying glasses equipped with lights on the end that were supposed to make reading easier for people with poor eyesight. But my grandmother never fully took to the technology and stubbornly walked to the library to take out the large print books even though she could barely make out the letters. She also continued to wear her watch around her knobby wrist even though the numbers could have been written in Egyptian hieroglyphs for all the sense she could make of them. But that watch stayed, the loose threads fraying with time as hours backed up.

After the diagnosis, my grandmother quickly stopped being the person I idealized. It's difficult to admit that that one physical flaw changed everything. If she asked me what I was reading, I'd immediately press my face closer to the novel and mutter something along the lines of, "It's just a book." I hope that most of this bratty behavior was the result of teenage angst; I've grown out of refusing to let her know even the title of what I was reading, but I still dread visiting her in the nursing home.

After her fall five years ago, there was a swift progression from an assisted living facility to nursing home with trips to the hospital interspersed between them. At the same time, her personal possessions have steadily decreased in number since she had less personal space in each place. Before moving into the first assisted living place, my grandma had a bit of reputation of being a pack rat. Her basement was a treasure trove of plastic bags and other vintage junk from the 1950s. When we went through the house to pack things away, I remember standing by the bookshelf, my finger brushing against the stiff spines. There was my uncle's copy of *Catch 22*; there was a copy of an Irish anthology of murder mysteries. Those two books now sit in my room, the molting grandparents of newer fiction.

Today, my grandmother's personal possessions are limited to those on the nightstand next to her bed. Her wedding picture rests next to a collection of photographs of her grandchildren. Yet, she can barely

make out the faces of the people who visit her let alone the grainy black and white wedding picture. There's a television in the room as well, but it's never on unless my father watches Fox News while my mom spoon feeds pulverized peas and something generously called ham to her mother. My grandmother often looks at her watch which has long since stopped working, the hands frozen under glass that slowly grows more opaque as time passes. My sister visits my grandmother frequently, but I avoid the nursing home with its powerful smell of Lysol, that houses a woman that I can no longer recognize as my grandmother.

Macular degeneration is genetic; it's highly possible that I might inherit that along with my grandmother's cheekbones and hands. The life-time risk of developing late-stage macular degeneration is fifty percent for people with a relative with the disease. Perhaps, this could explain my reluctance to visit her. The idea of my world slowly darkening and becoming filled with shadows instead of color horrifies me. On certain websites describing macular degeneration, they show simulations of what it is like to look at the world through degenerating eyes. That world is filled with inkblots and abstract shades of gray. As an avid people watcher, it's not a universe I want to inhabit. I like shapes, clearly defined and sharply contrasted against each other. Gray isn't acceptable either; I need to see the ruby and gilded leaves in autumn, the velvet navy background of the night sky. Touch may be nice, music lovely, but sight is essential to me.

The leather of my grandmother's watch has worn through; the pages of the books she gave me are now nearly transparent. Yet the foundation she gave me still holds strong, permanent as her genes stamped on my cheekbones.

Hannah Kane

Jorge Luis Borges

He could feel death stalking him.

It dripped from his pen dipped in the rheumy river where he made his dreary scene.

His ink was blue, his eyes were wide,

Slashed by the tiger's golden claw so death might prowl past,

But the river sang strong and filled his pensive pen,

Bringing death out from his shadowed hide away,

Daylight shed on troubling truths

So man might see what he might not.

Death, a blue-ish haze.

Death had followed him since the word was but a spark in his crystal eye,

Which he crushed to a thousand shards of light to halt the rising tides.

But a grain of sand can't stop a flood,

And the blood of poets past racing to refill his spirited pen kept the waters wavering high,

Waves slamming Death's skull to reveal its azure sheen.

The broken eyes looked on, to speak up and write out.

Death had come to him a thousand times before,

And will come a thousand times again,

To the man with splintered soul,

One thousand selves in one solitary shell,

Each clamoring to sing the others' happenstance tale.

The endless streams of chance which Death can never dam

Forces him to hang up his scythe as the unstoppable stream meets the river of dreams to fill the bottomless pen,

And so the scene begins again

Take.

Lindsey Parker

Baltimore Bullet

A single shot provokes him and his body arches,
a keystone bridge spanning a chlorine sea.
The muted mumble of the water fills his ears,
protesting against the forceful slither of his body.
His head bobs with a percussionist's precision,
the pulse of adrenaline like the drumstick to a snare.

Straight-edge palms slice through the surface,
every stroke swatting numbers from the clock.
His fingers pursue the tiled expanse before him,
a hand searching for a light switch in the dark.
His eyes, freed from their suction-cup cages,
scan for his name stacked atop his competition.

Sliding his body from the water's grip,
the medium of his craft drips from waving arms.
Thousands of left hands meet their right,
cymbals colliding in an amateur ensemble.
He stands at attention between second and third,
a high-rise flanked by two five-story walkups.

A bend at the neck cues silence in the stands,
a starred and striped classic rising overhead.
Another gold trophy swings from cherry ribbon,
a pendulum escaped from a grandfather clock.
His right hand rests over his internal tympani,
his head angled toward the anthem in its final encore.

Tainted smoke fills champion lungs,
a single hit captured by a sidelong flash.
His quick gulp of earthy air plastered on glossy pages,
the wanted ad for a new generation.
An international eye watches his adolescent slip,
Hercules's graceless plummet from lofty Olympus.

Maggie Mintus

A Diluted Sort of Pink

**Removed by the Request of the
Author**

**Removed by the Request of the
Author**

**Removed by the Request of the
Author**

Removed by the Request of the Author

Libby Conroy

A Life Picked Apart

First, you need to understand that she haunts me. I can't escape her face, her flowery smell, or her pain. She follows me everywhere, as she should, since I was the one who murdered her. I suppose I'll start at the end...

It was only four o'clock, yet darkness already had fallen. I could barely distinguish the faces in the crowd; their black garments and veils blended into the shadows. As the coffin was set into the earth, Ma lost control. She fell into Da, her body shaking with each sob. I restlessly rocked back and forth on the balls of my feet, eyes fixated on the ground below. Frantically, I bit my nails, spitting the shards only inches away from the coffin. Da placed his hand on my shoulder, attempting to quiet and restrain me. Both of us knew I could not be comforted. The bagpipes carried a tune of sorrow, echoing through the empty hills of Boyle, dedicated to my sister. The coffin was in the ground, and the reality of the situation had slapped us in the face: although inside the coffin contained no body, we would never see Caitlin again.

My sister's funeral seems like ages ago, yet time never heals an eternal wound. Ma cried each night for years, and Da never recovered. He died not the humorous man I once knew but solemn and distant. I can't help but to wonder how my life would have been different if Caitlin were still here, if I wasn't sick that day and walked to school with her. I've been told repeatedly that it wasn't my fault—but it's only natural to disagree. No one else was there that day. No one else knew what happened. The truth is undeniable: she would still be alive if I didn't catch the flu. She wouldn't have disappeared if I were near.

It was December 16, 1913. I was in bed with what Ma claimed to be "jus' a bit o' the common cold". I remember feeling as if I was going to die. My body was shaking with the chills, yet my fever was causing me to sweat out every pore. I could neither swallow nor breathe easily, and my cough rattled painfully through my lungs. Although Ma seemed cheery enough, I saw through her optimistic mask. I was deathly ill, and not even the doctors thought I would come out of it alive. "I suppose ye won't be going to school today," Ma decided, as if it wasn't obvious already. "Jus' rest yer head, Alice. Caitlin can manage alone today. Lord knows I was going to the mill an' back when I was 'er age."

Ma was right; Caitlin was nine by then. She should have been fully able to care for herself, and a simple three-mile walk to school was tolerable. Yet something didn't sit well with me; Caitlin had yet to prove herself independent. She was the most docile and naïve child I've ever known. Caitlin would catch spiders and cockroaches, and set them free. She couldn't bear to kill them, for she believed that they had feelings too. In school, she would be the last one to leave, always helping Mrs. Murphy with the chalk board and grading papers. "Ma," I began to protest. "I can take 'er. I'll jus' walk 'er ter school and come straight—"

"No! Ye know jus' as well as I that yer not strong enough ter leave yer bed. If Da and I didn't 'av ter leave for work, we would take 'er. She'll be fine, Alice. She needs ter grow up eventually." With that, Ma rewet my damp cloth, placed it on my forehead, and left my room. Before I could fall asleep, I heard a voice, almost a whisper, call my name.

"Ally? Are ye okay?" I relentlessly opened my eyes, and attempted to focus on the pale blonde girl bending over my bedside.

"Caitlin. I'm fine." The words sounded strange as I said them. My throat seemed to be in protest of my speaking, each word tasted like fire. "An' you'll be fine, Cait. Mind, you've walked ter school 'undreds of times, I know ye know the way. Don't forget yer gloves an' hat, it's bitter cold outside."

Caitlin held my clammy hand and smiled. "I'll say hello ter Ms. Murphy for ye." She kissed my cheek's burning skin and left. She shut the door of my room, and walked out of my life. I closed my eyes allowing my mind to travel far beyond my home in Boyle. The fever produced a nightmare, yet it was better than the reality I would awake to. I was running from a monster—no, a lion—and next I know, my fear melted away, and was replaced with anger. I faced the lion, grabbed its mane, and snapped its neck. But it was no longer a lion...I was holding a dead kitten in my hands...

"What do yer mean she wasn't in school? Well, aye, everyone knows that Alice is under the weather, but Caitlin? She should 'av been 'ome hours ago!" Ma's voice exploded with anger yet trembled with panic. Even from my state of deliria, I could sense the atmosphere growing thick with alarm. As I attempted to sit up from my bed, Ma swung my bedroom door open; the wind from it knocked me back in bed. "ALICE MARY," Ma screamed. My head, already aching, began to throb. "Where is yer sister?!" Where is Caitlin?!"

"I dunno, Ma. She left hours ago. I thought she went ter—"

"She never made it ter school, Alice. She is far ter young ter 'av walked alone." As tears formed in my eyes, Ma fled from my room. She was right—Caitlin still needed me, and I hadn't been there. I was too weak to take care of my own baby sister, and my parents clearly agreed.

Almost exactly twelve hours later, I found myself wrapped in five different layers of clothing, standing in the harsh of winter. My

body was in the ultimate protest; the fever was causing me to sweat through my ratted clothes, which then froze to my body from the cold. My heart was heavy with dread. Each neighbor I visited only verified the truth: Caitlin was missing and no one had seen her disappear. My gloved hand knocked on the door a second time. I was standing outside of home belonging to a man that was new to Boyle. No one knew much about him, besides the fact that he lived alone and rarely interacted with others. He herded sheep for a living, and, since hermit-like behavior was common of most shepherds in town, no one thought twice.

His lawn was littered with rubbish—bits of metal, cloth, baby dolls, books, children's toys—each half frozen to the ground. The house itself was falling apart. The paint had already peeled off most of the wood, the shutters were swinging from their hinges, and the roof seemed to be caving in. As a matter of fact, I have no idea how it was holding the snow gained in the last night's fall. After several minutes, the door remained unanswered. Feeling defeated, I turned around and began to walk away from the home's stoop. I felt a hand grab my arm.

"Can I help ye, miss?" I turned to see a decrepit old man, just as withered as the house he lived in. His hand's skin had aged to the point where it appeared as a leather glove, sagging like it might fall off. His facial features were sunken in; his eyes drooped like a hound dog's. The most frightening quality of this man was not seen by the eye, but experienced through the nose. Mr. Picket reeked of death, even more so than the average eighty year old man. Decay and stale bread, I thought to myself, the perfect description for his scent.

Mr. Picket stared expectantly at my blank expression. "Ello," I began breathlessly, "I live across the road, and...well, me sister went missing yesterday. 'Av ye seen 'er?" Mr. Picket's saggy face stretched oddly into a grin.

"Nay, I 'av not seen her, Caitlin. Ye best be off, ye look ill and it's mighty cold outside." He finally let go of my arm, breaking under his surprisingly firm grasp. I frantically scurried away, running as fast as I could back to my home. Ma has always said not to be judgmental, for you never know the true story behind anyone. Judgments or not, Mr. Picket left an unnerving feeling in my bones, a feeling which demanded further examination.

After my excursion with Mr. Picket, I only became sicker. The doctor blamed Ma and Da for this, stating that I was on the road to recovery before I went out in the cold. They both nodded absently, neither retaining his lecture. I was strictly ordered to bed rest, and I could barely manage that. Emotionally and physically, I began to shut down. As each day passed, the hope of finding Caitlin alive diminished. No one saw her leave our home. No one saw her walk to school. It was as she had dropped off the face of the Earth, as she left absolutely no trace behind.

Consciousness became a state of torment. I would weave through dreams and hallucinations, only to wake to reality's nightmare: an empty cold house and a permanent feeling of remorse. Ma and Da silently left for work each morning, abandoning me in my sickbed. Because my eyes were too raw to read my storybooks, the window opposite my bed became my sole source of entertainment. I watched Mr. and Mrs. Malloy habitually send their young children to school day after day. My eyes followed John and Maggie, observing as they walked past Mr. Picket's shabby home. I saw John place a hand on his younger sister's shoulder, gently pushing her forward. Their pace quickened past the house, and for an obvious reason: Mr. Picket stood frozen, watching sinisterly as the two scurried past.

Thoughts flooded my half-coherent mind. Something was off—Mr. Picket was hiding something. I slowly emerged out of bed, supporting my weight on the bedposts. My eyes never left the window. Mr. Picket continued to stare at John and Maggie, with an expression of complete calculation. He had the look my old cat used to get, right before he pounced on his prey. Mr. Picket sneered to himself, and turned back inside. My hands were pressed against the window, and my body was shaking not from the sickness, but from fear. The back of Mr. Picket's coat was stained with two brown handprints, a color eerily resembling dried blood.

I rushed down the stairs, disregarding the doctor's order of bed rest. Throwing on my coat, I burst through the front door, and proceeded to head across the street. I had a gut feeling that she'd be there, behind the rotted wooden door would reveal Caitlin. Panic and anticipation took over my emotions; I had no plan, and no idea how I ended up opening his front door. Fear—what I should have felt—was not an option. I had to fix the family I had broken. Or at least try.

The inside of the home was in ruin, even more so than the exterior. I peered around the corner, only to see an empty kitchen. The floor was trashed with bits of moldy food, explaining the putrid smell. I continued through the house, trying not to notice the remains of rodents scattered about the house. Each step taken left me feeling even more terrified. Although I could feel Caitlin coming closer, I also felt the fear of uncertainty to how I would find her.

I gravitated towards a set of stairs leading to what only could be the basement. Down, down, down, I traveled, until the breath in front of my face was all I could see. Darkness consumed the chamber-like room, completely blinding me from what it contained. My feet slipped on the ground; ice was covering the majority of the floor. Sliding across the room, I held out my hand until I made contact with a wall, damp and frigid. I could hear my heart's beat, and feel its vibrations through my body. What was I doing in this basement, and more importantly, where

was Mr. Picket? Scaling the wall, I continued around the perimeter of the room, hoping to find some sort of indicator to if Caitlin was here. A familiar stench crept up my nose, the same smell that followed Mr. Picket. Rancid and horrible, I began to follow the odor, until it became unbearable.

I was about to give up my search until I crashed into something hanging. It began to swing back and forth, causing the hook it was dangled from to piercingly shriek. Footsteps boomed from the floorboards upstairs. Mr. Picket was coming. I tried to silence the noise, grabbing the object violently swaying. My fingers sunk into icy flesh, ripe with decay. I didn't have time to panic, let alone think about what—or who—could be on the hook; the footsteps were approaching the stairwell. As I ran through the basement, I collided with several swinging bodies, each causing their own racket swinging from the rusty hooks. My body would convulse each time I would make contact, as I felt skin against skin. Life against death. Warmth against the frozen cold. I could barely distinguish the footsteps from my own heartbeat, each pounding in my ears.

I came to a corner, completely trapped. Frantically, I felt around, looking for any sort of weapon or tool I could arm myself with. Cobwebs and dust were all I felt—yet almost miraculously, my hands closed around a heavy wooden stake. It was a pickaxe. Mr. Picket was fully in the basement now, holding a lantern illuminating the room. From the little light, I could make out exactly what I was standing in. Naked bodies were dangling from hooks, each preserved from the freezing temperature. Their hair held bits of ice and frost, and their skin was each tinted blue. Not one face had their eyes closed. Each was looking straight at me, wide-eyed, as if they were pleading for help. The hooks pierced directly though their chests, but the bits of blood that would have oozed though had been wiped away. I tightly closed my eyes, unwilling to see anything more as my stomach churned. I doubled over to vomit, but tried not to. Any sound would give my hiding spot away.

Mr. Picket's wheezing voice issued a laugh, malice and evil, causing the room to become even colder. Although he couldn't see me in the corner, he could sense my presence. I shuffled back into the shadows, my knuckles turning white against the axe. The further he came into the room, the more bodies I saw. Eventually, Mr. Picket stood in the center, so his lantern shone throughout the chamber. There must have been about twenty bodies—almost all children—hanging from the ceiling like cattle. I felt myself becoming sick, paralyzed with fear; I was standing in the middle of a human slaughterhouse, with a cold-blooded killer.

"Alice," he hissed, "I know yer in 'ere. Come out, Alice. I'll show ye yer sister." He began to laugh again, as if he knew that there was no escape. The element of surprise, I knew, was my only advantage. He

didn't know where I was, and had no idea to what I carried. "Look, stupid lassie. Ye can hide, but in the end, look what you'll become." He held up his lantern to a body hanging in the center. Caitlin. Her green eyes looked right at me, as if begging for avenge. Anger, disgust, and hatred filled my body, completely overruling my fear. Her pale naked skin reflected the light, lighting a path connecting Mr. Picket and me. I charged. The pickaxe was no longer heavy in my hands and was effortless to lift over my shoulder. I plunged the blade into his chest, and didn't even have time to register the look of shock on his face. He fell. His body crashed into the stone floor, and his head cracked wide open. Blood gushed out of the calculated mind that murdered my sister. I swung the axe again and again, piercing his chest, legs, stomach, face. His metallic blood drowned my bare feet, as it seeped through every pore. Eventually, my arms couldn't move anymore. They hung limp from my frail body, covered in a murdered man's blood. Mr. Picket was now unrecognizable. His features were destroyed, and organs protruded from their dwelling.

The axe clattered to the stone floor, splattering blood as it dropped. Looking at the mess I created, I stepped away from the body and vomited. I vomited my pain, my guilt, and my fear. My body was now physically as empty as I felt. I searched for Caitlin in the pitch black; Mr. Picket's lantern shattered when he fell. Fumbling from body to body, I finally felt my Caitlin. I would recognize her whisper thin frame anywhere. She was too high up to remove. I tried time and time again. My feeble attempts to detach her would only tear at the flesh in her chest. The sound of ripping skin was the last I remembered...

I awoke three days later. My body had collapsed from a mixture of sickness, exhaustion, and obvious emotional stress. The haunting images never came close to fading from my memory; it was impossible to move on with life. I would close my eyes, and see blood, death, and my sister's limp body. Ghosts haunted not only my nightmares but crept into my conscious mind. During dinner, I would scream, for chicken soup would have turned into blood. I would faint during Mass because I would see Caitlin's body nailed to the cross. Four years after Caitlin's death, my parents checked me into Galway's Insane Asylum. I don't blame them; I know I'm crazy. You see, a part of me is glad I lost my mind. I deserve to be punished for the extensive grief and death I created.

About the Contributors

Josiah Adlon has spent most of his life living in western Maryland. He is a sophomore studio art major and plans on going to graduate school so that he can teach art on the collegiate level. His first piece was his final project in Introduction to Sculpture. It is supposed to be the pierced skull of an important figure found buried within a stone. "Chullo" is a collage of magazine cut outs, an assignment for Basic Design 2D.

Mark Biciunas is a sophomore, majoring in English with a Writing Concentration. He works as a staff writer for *The Gettysburgian* in the entertainment section, writing reviews for films and events. He works on CAB and for Habitat for Humanity.

Libby Conroy is a sophomore from Ridgefield, Connecticut with a double major in English with a Writing Concentration and Management. As the current fiction editor for *The Mercury*, she eventually hopes to pursue a career in creative writing or editing. She is also a sister of Chi Omega sorority.

Brian Denu is a first-year student at Gettysburg College. He is a Music major as of now and will most likely be declaring a minor in Physics as well. He plays clarinet in the Wind Symphony, Symphony Band, and Woodwind Quartet in the Sunderman Conservatory of music, and also participated in Marching Band during the fall. In his free time, Brian finds time to write short stories of varying themes and can also be found trimming his bonsai tree, listening to music, making various props/costumes out of cardboard, or talking about himself in the third person.

Kevin Fitzpatrick is a senior English major with a concentration in Writing. His favorite authors are Jack Kerouac and J.D. Salinger, and his poetic influences range from T.S. Eliot to more current poets like Kevin Prufer and C.K. Williams. "On a Sunday" is written in the framework of Jim Simmerman's 'twenty little poetry projects.'

Kathleen Flynn is a junior pursuing an English major with a Writing Concentration and really hopes this will help her get a

job when she graduates next year. Among her favorite hobbies are reading and daydreaming about going to the places she reads about. Kathleen also spends a great deal of time lost, but this is not a hobby, merely the side-effect of spontaneous and poorly planned travel arrangements. But how else can you have adventures?

Devan Grote is a junior English major with a Writing concentration and business minor. Born and raised in southwestern PA, she believes in faith, family, food, and Friday nights with friends - and that a little alliteration and a good book never hurt.

Preston Hartwick, a sophomore, grew up in the urban jungle of Hong Kong, but his Cantonese skills are still limited to ordering noodles, directing taxi drivers, and trash-talking on the soccer pitch. His travels inspire his art and writing. He plans to study Human Rights and Environmental Justice in the Middle East region.

Julia Heilakka is a member of the class of 2013 from East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. She has yet to declare a major, though she is considering music, language, or the sciences. Julia has been writing short stories and books since eighth grade and has fallen in love with the art of writing. In her free time, she enjoys reading and horseback riding.

Candise Henson is a sophomore studying English and Education. Her ambition is to be an author, book editor, and 50s-style housewife. She hates writing poetry. Her literary heroes include King, Plath, Jewel, Rowling, and Eliot. She would love to marry either Joss Whedon or Ray Bradbury.

Megan Hilands, a sophomore double major in Music and English with Writing Concentration, is from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She is a violinist involved in Sunderman Strings and the Gettysburg College Symphony Orchestra. In addition to her musical activities, Megan is also a tutor at the Writing Center and a member of Sigma Tau Delta.

Erica Johnson is a sophomore at Gettysburg College. She is majoring in both English and Spanish. During breaks, she lives in Wheaton, Illinois. Her favorite activities include reading, sleeping,

writing, and eating deep dish pizza. "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve it through not dying." Woody Allen.

Hannah Kane is a senior Psychology and Spanish major at Gettysburg College. She is a Program Coordinator for the Center for Public Service, a research assistant in the psychology department, and active in Amnesty International. She's passionate about promoting social justice in all aspects of life!

Kristine Kopia is a senior with a dual major in Environmental Science and Studio Art and is planning on going to graduate school for green architecture/landscape design. The piece "Capricorn" is a wire sculpture made in her 3D Design class during the fall semester of 2009.

Eric Kozlik is a large brute of a man with a thirty-two inch waist and a penchant for puns. He was reared in a caboose and schooled by fish. When he isn't off wrestling bears for charity or lobbying for Manifest Destiny, he can be found in the Science Center, since that is where he will be locked up his entire senior year. He is beginning to think that an English major might have been the way to go after all.

Steve Krzyzanowski is a sophomore Theatre Major who enjoys life.

Sara Levin is a senior Biology major. She loves to travel and particularly enjoys photographing her journeys. She hopes to return to Antarctica one day to take more fantastic pictures of penguins and icebergs.

Meredith MacLauchlan is a First Year who is currently undecided but considering art as a possible major. Sports and photography have always been her passions and she has become interested in other forms of art in the past few years as well. Her picture, which was taken using digital photography, is overlooking a lake in Mont Tremblant, Canada.

Andrew Maturo is a junior and a double major in Mathematics and Acoustics. He loves playing music, cooking and photography.

He has no idea what his life has in store for him post-college. That's tomorrow's problem.

Maggie Mintus is a senior Biology major with Chemistry and Neuroscience minors. She is currently attempting to figure out what to do after Gettysburg now that people expect her to act like a grown-up. She hopes her tendency to scribble randomly when avoiding lab papers brings you some sort of entertainment.

Rebekah Oakes is member of the Class of 2013 and a History major. She enjoys giggling, long walks under the starry skies, and really old things. She hopes to one day become a professor, and write the history books instead of reading them.

Lindsey Parker is a senior Biology major and chemistry minor from Parkton, Maryland. On campus, she is the secretary for both Habitat for Humanity and the Pre-Health Professions club. Lindsey enjoys baking, watching movies, and drinking coffee of any variety. After graduation, she will be attending the Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University in Philadelphia.

Evan Petrack is a current freshman at Gettysburg College. While still undeclared, he is most likely going to be an Environmental Studies major. He's involved with a few things on campus, mostly to stop him from actually doing his homework.

Rachel Rakoff is a senior English with Writing concentration major and a Civil War Era Studies minor from Newton, Massachusetts. She enjoys spontaneous road trips, the beach, photography, and wasting hours of her life in the darkroom.

Susi Ramazani is a junior Biology and pre-med major planning on becoming a pediatrician working in developing countries in the near future. After graduating from Gettysburg College, she plans on attending medical school and to eventually join Doctors Without Borders. She is originally from Burlington, Vermont.

Hannah Sawyer loves being active, the outdoors, college basketball, pick-up soccer, traveling, interesting people, great stories, classic adventures and sketchy shenanigans, her home state

of Maine, chocolate, her dog and her car. Her friends add flavor to her day and help her get home at night. Her parents and brother are simply her favorite people.

Benjamin Schell is a sophomore from Wilmington, Delaware.

Sneha Shrestha is an international student from Nepal and a Globalization Studies Major focusing on NGOs and culture in developing Asia. She enjoys traveling, everything creative and any place she can color outside the lines. She has studied abroad in Geneva and Bali, Indonesia as well as backpacking through Europe. She enjoys painting and photography.

Taylor Smart is an International Affairs and Economics double major. Although he realizes it sounds incredibly profound (people's reactions to his majors entertain him), but the truth is much less complex because he is unsure about what he will do after graduation. For his story, his cousin was both curious and cheerful and he wanted his personality to come through as he retold his story.

Nathan Storey is an Anthropology major in the class of 2010. He has had the fortunate opportunity to work as an editor in the Mercury staff all four years at Gettysburg, and it has been a great pleasure to act as co-editor-in-chief with Jen Bray this year. He is also the Co-Editor-In-Chief of The Forum, the college's independent online news source. He hopes to continue to study and work abroad after college.

James Z. Taylor III is a sophomore, majoring in Economics and hopefully English. His story was originally written for English 308: Experiment and Tradition.

Sara Tower is a granola-eating, plaid-wearing, farm-frolicking sophomore attempting to be as unconventional as possible in working her way through a Globalization and Environmental Studies major. She never follows all the directions on the recipe and gets at least three-days wear out of each pair of socks. She dreams of one day opening a goat dairy and surviving on ice cream and cheese. And asparagus. And maybe some mushrooms, too.

Kristyn Turner is a sophomore at Gettysburg College and is majoring in English with Writing concentration and a Music minor. She is from Seekonk, Massachusetts and originally came to Gettysburg to pursue a history major. She became an English major after taking a class on the history of the English language with Professor Fee and has been loving every minute. She greatly enjoys writing and playing the oboe in the Wind Symphony on the Sunderman Conservatory of Music. She also participates in the colorguard and on the Bullets Dance Team. She is hoping to combine her music and English studies to work in publishing and write songs someday.

About the Judges

Nelson Dyer is a graduate of the class of '08 with a major in Studio Art. His focus was sculpture, particularly in metal. Currently he is pursuing a second degree in biology before applying to dental school. He is grateful for his education from Gettysburg which he applies on a daily basis and has aided him with academic success in his current track.

Freya Gibbon is a 2007 Gettysburg College graduate with a bachelors in Environmental Studies and a minor in writing. She served an internship with the Gettysburg Review literary magazine during her undergraduate career. She has been awarded a teaching fellowship to begin her MFA in September 2010 at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

Colleen Hubbard edited The Mercury in 2001. She is currently a Henry Hoyns Fellow in the MFA program at the University of Virginia.

Rustom Davar was a regular contributor to The Mercury while at Gettysburg (1999-2003). He has an MA and an MFA from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University (specializing in Fiction), and now lives in London where he works as a freelance writer, editor and journalist.

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A special thanks to all 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 their efforts make *The Mercury* an eclectic publication that reflects the creative side of the student body of Gettysburg College.

Finally, a very special thank you to everyone at Ikon, specifically Corey Chong, for helping *The Mercury* go green for the second time. This year's publication has been printed in its entirety on paper from sustainable – harvest forests with biodegradable ink. We believe this change reflects the increased global awareness of the campus community.



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