

A photograph of a beach at dusk. In the foreground, a wooden utility pole stands vertically. To the left and right, streetlights are illuminated, casting a warm glow. The middle ground shows a sandy beach with some sparse vegetation. In the background, a large body of water is visible, with a dark, silhouetted shoreline under a deep blue twilight sky.

Great Lake Review

Spring
2012

The Great Lake Review

Art and Literary Magazine

The Great Lake Review has a proud history of archiving the legacy of the finest fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama and art that SUNY Oswego has to offer since 1974.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the Great Lake Review and hopefully are encouraged to create something just as wonderful as the art within these pages.

The Great Lake Review holds no boundaries and all things are accepted despite content.

There are no word or submission limits because there are no limits to the imagination.

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Spring 2012

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Elephantitis
Brittany McCan



Plači Buše

Matthew Harmer

A Voodoo smile,
the hint of white teeth
behind curled black magic whispers
that float on air, weightless and cinnamoned
like Autumn scents.

Your breath like a rising storm,
bronzed and thunder-salted clouds
that raise their dark voices, foaming
like ocean waves.

The light brush, verdant tongue
seeks your claret flesh, the hint
of citrus like sprigs of thyme,
a yearning grown like lemongrass.
The press of your hand, gentle,
a grasping crown,
chords struck that ring like chimes
of open-mouthed sweat and
resolution.

Cowabunga
Emily Turner

My eyes stare into the shadows, resting on the seemingly never changing red numbers of the clock radio. I swear it has read 6:53 for the past hour. The bunk bed shakes a little, alerting me to the fact that Stephanie is up and waiting. We are not allowed to get our baskets until 7:00. The wait is hard, but not nearly as hard as Christmas. I grab the yoyo I keep on my bed and let it dangle down to the bottom bunk, quickly snapping it back into my hand. I can easily do this move in my sleep.

“Emily, can we get up now?” Stephanie’s tiny voice barely makes it to my ears. I toss the toy away and lean over the wooden rail of the top bunk, long black hair dangling beneath me. The wooden plank digs into my stomach as I try to balance my body on it.

“Nah, not yet,” I say. Pushing with my feet I flip off the bed and land with only a little stumbling and a light thump on the carpeted floor. Stephanie creeps out from beneath the green sleeping bag she uses as a blanket. The rustling of the fabric is accompanied by the emergence of a giant mushroom. The dusky light entering the window is not enough to illuminate her features so her short frizzy hair makes her head look like a fungus. 6:54.

“What do you think we got?” She whispers.

“Socks, we always get socks.” Which is completely true. At age nine, as far as I can remember, not an Easter has passed without socks being stuffed in my basket. My neighbor Sarah gets gifts. Like last year she got a purple Skip-It and a new Nerf gun. What did I get? A package of white socks with lacy frills and hair scrunchies. Once I was surprised by a

tube of lip gloss and a bottle of glittery nail polish nestled within the pastel grass, but that does not compare to a new Nerf gun.

I drop to my hands and knees to crawl as quietly as possible to the doorway. Down the hall I can see my dad standing in the kitchen near the stove, the yellow light reflecting off his balding head. The gentle scraping of fork tines on a glass bowl is loud, cutting through the stillness of the morning. I know there is no chance of sneaking a peek this year. Usually he has finished the french toast by now and has headed into the bathroom, which allows me time to poke around in our baskets. My parents must have caught onto this practice because last year they began wrapping all of our baskets up in colored cellophane. This made it impossible to move or open them because a noise so loud and atrocious would alert my parents to the sneaking. Stephanie still believed in the Easter Bunny, but I knew better. I knew exactly who was responsible for the socks. Slowly, so as to not attract his attention, I inch my way back into the room. 6:55.

I keep moving backward until I bump up against the fake kitchen set Stephanie received for Christmas last year. It sits in the far corner of the room, along with a plastic washer and dryer she got for her birthday. They are both made of thick resin plastic and are covered in the artistic doodles of Stephanie and my younger brother Justin, along with a few of my own master pieces. I stand up and grab the washer and dryer set, pulling the light mass into the middle of the room.

“What’re you doing?”

I ignore her question and lay the hunk of plastic face down on the floor. I am not sure why I am doing this, but I want to see if I can tip the washer and dryer back and forth while standing on it. The back is

completely smooth, raised about a foot into the air by the hollow bottom. There is about ten thin inches of excess plastic on top of these boxes where the dials and knobs are. I step onto the bottom part of the domestic tool, moving my right foot behind me, closer to the thinner edge. I move my body toward that end and the whole thing tips backward, then I move my weight back. There is no sound as the makeshift balancing board connects with the carpet. 6:56.

Seeing that it is safe, I rock back and forth more rapidly, stretching out my arms for better balance. Excitement makes me giggle. I stick my butt out and bend my knees, trying to emulate a surfer. The blue carpet turns into a choppy ocean and I stand above it. The water is fine today, tepid. A breeze comes with the waves, smelling strangely like eggs and bread. Seagulls fly in the cloudless blue sky, squawking at each other. A really big wave is heading my way, and I prepare myself for it to hit. I tilt my weight toward the thin end a little more forcefully than before and pitch myself backward to catch the wave.

“Cowabunga,” I say to no one in particular. Stephanie moves closer to the edge of her bed, eyes and nose now visible in the approaching sunrise. She laughs quietly, the motion exposing her teeth. I move toward the fat side to tip forward, but during the last wave my sock covered feet slipped closer to the thin side, my balance is completely lost. The washer and dryer tilts and bucks me off. Instinctively I put both hands behind me to catch myself. On my way to the floor I watch Stephanie’s mouth quickly change from a smile to an open circle.

I land more heavily on my left side, my left arm taking almost all my weight. There is an audible crack of my bone and a loud thunk as the heavy side of the washer and dryer connects with the floor. My arm

gives out beneath me and I fall on top of it. A searing pain radiates up its length and my eyes tear up against my will. I can not remember the last time I cried, and I have never cried in front of my sister. As I concentrate on halting the tears, the pain lessens. I hear Stephanie calling my name, asking me if I am alright, but I can not respond. If I open my mouth I will scream.

Slowly I try to sit, using my right arm to push up my upper body. Goosebumps breakout over my entire body as I try to stand. Stephanie is mouthing something to me and pointing at my arm, but I can not hear her. There is an annoying ringing in my ears and my vision is misty. The red 6:58 glares at me through the wetness.

I inspect it. About midway up the forearm a small piece of jagged bone peeks though an opening in my skin. Surprisingly there is very little blood, but the bone is visible. The skin around it is bruised, turning quickly from yellowish brown to blue. With light touches I caress it, which causes jolts of pain to interrupt the numbness that is taking over my left side. An odd feeling enters me with the realization that I am touching my own bone.

Stephanie watches as I crumble to the floor, cradling my arm, crying. It did not start off soft and work its way into a tempest. No, I let out a shrill scream that probably woke the entire neighborhood as the tears I try so desperately to conceal make their journey down my cheeks. I hurt. I am scared. I cannot move my arm. This is too much for me to take and my breaths begin to quicken at an alarming rate. As my mind is overtaken by darkness I glance at the clock radio, 6:59, only one more minute.

A Groovy Scene From a Romantic Comedy
Zak Guthrie

EXT. - OUTSIDE FAST FOOD CHAIN - DAY

A hot summers day in the city. A litter covered street in front of a fast food place.

Standing in front is DIRK FRALLSON (22) in a large rubber hamburger outfit- the width of which doesn't allow for arm holes. He teeters on his feet, and looks around anxiously. He notices some passersby.

DIRK

Come in to FunHouse! Have a FunBurger! Large order of WackyFries free with a SillyWilly meal!

They ignore him, but a grinning ALANA NIERMAN (22) passes them, moving towards him. She crosses her arms when she's in front of him, clearly amused.

ALANA

Okay- I'm here. So what was so important that you couldn't havetold me over the phone? Or waited until later? I'm quite frankly embarrassed for you right now.

DIRK

It had to be now! Alana,
(beat)

I can't stop thinking about you! Please hear me out! If you just give me a chance, I can finally tell you how I feel here and now and get it over with!
So... Can you take me seriously for like, five minutes?

Alana puts her hand on the part of his bun nearest his shoulder. She looks at him with a sweet caring smile, though her lip quivers and soon she cracks up.

ALANA

No! Nope! I totally can not do that for you! But, really, keep going. I do wanna hear what you've got to say here.

Dirk takes a breathe, about to pour his heart out, when a couple of teenagers exit the restaurant. One pours soda down his neck-hole while the other grinds a handful of WackyFries into his hair. Dirk just closes his eyes and takes another deep breathe, clearly used to this.

ALANA

Stupid little motherfuckers!

Alana flips the kids off as they run, then looks at him sympathetically, and brushes some of the fries out of his hair, but still looks to be waiting for him to continue.

DIRK

Okay, I know we've been friends for forever, but I know if we gave it a shot, we'd be like-amazing together! I can just tell! Lately I've just been getting all sorts of crazy feelings! Like, for you, I mean! The complicated type of crazy feelings that smart people write poems about and shit! That's how much I feel for you right now!

Alana looks a little moved by the sincerity.

ALANA

That was absolutely terrible- all of this is awful! Absolutely awful! You are really such an idiot!

Dirk just continues to look at her with a big hopeful smile, and eyes like a baby animal.

ALANA

But I guess I must find something about this sweet too. I mean, maybe later we could at least talk ab-

A SCREAM comes from inside the restaurant and interrupts Alana. She winces and looks concerned, though Dirk just sighs.

DIRK

That's Jeremy. he must have burned his hand again- which means they'll need me on firers.

ALANA

Yeah. Like I was saying...
we'll talk about this later.

He nods and begins to try and squirm out of his costume. After an awkward moment of trying to wiggle free himself, he looks to her, even more embarrassed.

DIRK

If it wouldn't be too much trouble could you,
uh, give me a hand with this?

ALANA

I can't believe this is how I choose to spend my
lunch break. I get one break. All day.
And I come here. You're one pretty lucky loser.

DIRK

I know.

If Alana rolled her eyes any harder they'd pop out of her head, meanwhile Dirk somehow keeps his pathetic grin on his face. Alana wraps her arms around the bottom of his costume and pulls it up over him, the two of them ending up a bit too close. After a tense couple of seconds she backs away.

ALANA

Uhggg! You realize that you are drenched in sweat,
right?! Gahh! And you smell like salt and oil!
Seriously, you're bathing before we talk again!

A VOICE CALLS FOR DIRK. Alana's own expression seems softer now. She kicks his dumb costume.

ALANA

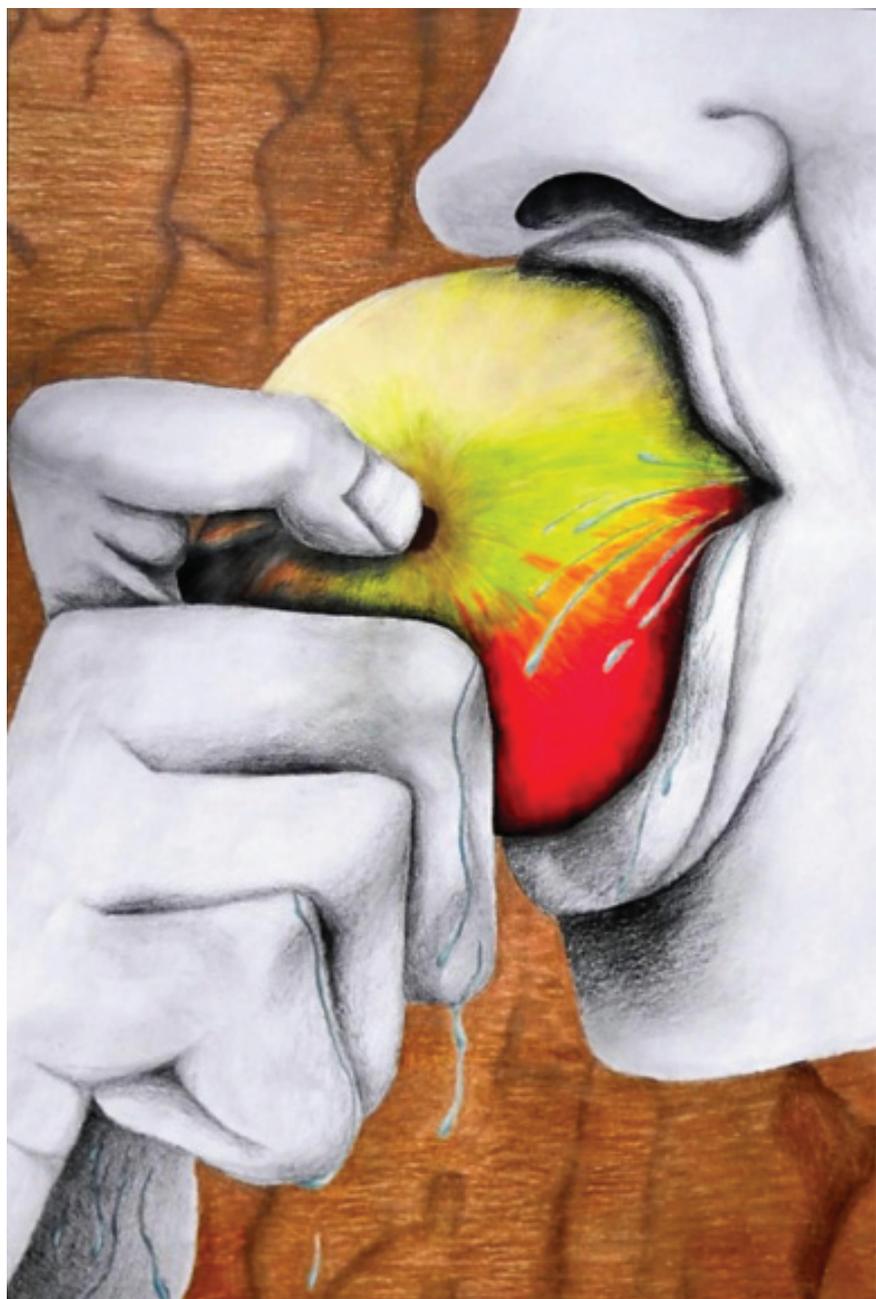
Go break a leg or whatever.
Just call me when you're out.

Alana starts to walk away and with a far off sigh. Dirk starts to back inside- then rushes right back out and calls to Alana.

DIRK

Wait! Come back! I saved you
some really kickass coupons!

Take a Bite
Lauren Jackson



Desolation

Brian Richmond

They all shuffled together, hammering and breaking rocks as they marched, linked at the feet by large iron chains. A guard in the regalia and finery of the United States Army wore a death's head visage as he looked the rows up and down behind a pair of smoked wire rims, gloved hands carefully wrapped around a rifle.

Rigby smashed another stone and kept his chords up, howling with all the others as best he could. Sweat dripped down through dust-caked hair and bloodied scalp. His skin was pale as a wound, and it carried the same stench. The red, sun-tortured flesh cracked and bled if he attempted to scratch at his scalp or one of his burly arms. Rigby pressed two dirty fingers on the edge of his nose and squeezed, allowing a dry piece of mucus to drift away.

The song kept being sung and the ground grew tougher as each man marched into the spot of the last, pounding stones with an oblivion mindset. Their uniforms were ill-fitting, horizontally striped affairs infested with lice, fleas and other itching parasitic filth. Some of the men wore black shoes, and others went barefoot, the red dust caked into the nails of their fingers and toes, hair and eyes. The powder ground itself into their lines and wrinkles of their faces, stripping of them of even the smallest identity of a former life.

The guard put two greasy sausage-shaped fingers in his mouth and blew a harsh, screechy whistle. The men stopped what they were doing to enjoy a brief respite under an unrelenting sun.

Rigby dropped to his knees and leaned back, trying to take in some cool air, a fool's prayer in the desolate wastes. He scratched at

a bushy beard, something he'd never let grow beyond a mere stubble when times were more fortuitous. The tangled hair crawled over his neck and up his cheeks. He scratched it hard and long, his nails cracked and bled and from the debris came a shower of skin flakes, scabs and disoriented vermin.

His voice was dry and harsh, like the guttural growl of a dog that'd been kicked too much. And something deep inside that was intended as a maddened scream came out as little more than a coarse whisper.

"I can't take it no more."

The man next to him down the line, a tall piece of work with a scorched scalp and empty right eye socket, flashed a gnarled smile at Rigby, who returned a yellow, broken grimace and wheezed with disdain. "Fuck you smilin' at, Slim?"

The other prisoner licked a tooth. "Nothin'. Ain't nothin' to smile at. You're breathin' in all the good air that don't smell like shit."

"What you in fer?" Rigby grinned for a moment, malice coating his words.

"Ain't a matter to you."

"Now I'll be the judge of that there thing." Rigby spat on his palms, though a dry and meager wad of phlegm and mucus was all his bitter throat could produce. "So get gabbin' or get gone, Slim."

Slim replied with a dry swallowing that strained his vocal chords with an almost obscene glee. "Rape'n'murder."

A shrill whistle blow and the men twitch and shudder before getting back to their feet and resuming their labor. The sun still high and

torturously beating down on Rigby's flesh, he kept his glare on the rapist with a look of solemn disgust and bewilderment.

"Why'd you do it, slim?"

"Seemed like it was a'good idea at da time."

"Ain't no excuse. It ain't normal human behavior to do that kinda shit." The line moved down a few feet and the men shuffled. Rigby struck the earth and Slim split a stone.

"And what, pray-tell, makes ya so high-n-mighty?" The rapist smirked. "Ya gonna tell me yer innocent?"

"Ain't innocent, hacked up some officers with a hatchet. Ain't nothing innocent 'bout it. But it was justified, and I ain't guilty of any of these crimes they're calling on me."

The rapist sputtered in Rigby's face, a bold and wasteful action to spoil such moisture. Splattering his cheeks with rotting tartar, congealed rations that had caked his teeth and lips, and sticky saliva, Rigby kept his face forward and continued to split rocks and move with the motion of the other prisoners. He ignored the urge to enjoy even the most faint illusion of coolness from the disrespectful display.

"Ya don't make a lick'a'sense, meat," the rapist groaned, as he cracked his neck.

Rigby split a stone. "Ain't meaning to. Ain't got no reason to make sense to ya, Slim."

"I only dids it to the one." Slim's lone eye seemed to shift and roll in its cavernous socket.

"You still did it."

The guard glanced toward the pair as he made his rounds,

keeping a careful ear on their words and phrases, trying to catch any hidden innuendo which could spell treason or rebellion. He gripped his rifle and continued marching a pace and a half slower.

“Ya think yer bettah den me?” The rapist whispered.

“I know it, but it don’t make any matter. Now shut yer flapper.”

“Yain’t bettah den me.”

“Shut it and sing.”

The song resumed and the men all crackled their vocal chords to keep up a tone rather than a tune. Any rhythm made the work feel less agonizingly endless and gave their toil more purpose. The men sometimes mumbled about the purpose of their work with bitter hatred under their tones. If they were building a railroad, where were the planks and iron pitons? If they were paving a road, why did they never walk the same area twice? The grim reality they suspected, was that their work was merely work, without purpose or productivity, other than to wrench the flesh from their bones and to cripple any faint glimmer of hope from reaching fruition.

The monotonous rhythm was broken by a shrill cry, far down the line. A fat piece of work with broken spectacles cried misery when a pick axe pierced through his left foot. The prisoners watched as the guard prepared his gun, as though contemplating vile acts towards the prisoner’s life as he skulked down the line. The fat man ripped off the sleeve of his shirt and tied a quick bandage to stop the bleeding as best as he could, though it leaked through the flimsy linen wrapping. He got back to work, singing high in a whiny and nervous tone.

Rigby watched. The guard gave the bandage a passing glance

and leaned on his gun. The other prisoners did their work, the fat man nodded with a sand-selling smile whilst gritting through his pain, the guard waited a solid twenty-three seconds before firming his grip on the fire arm and resuming his pace.

When the guard passed by Rigby, his mind was riddled with foul contemplation of hacking the man in the back with a pick-axe. To make nothing left but gore and pulp and sweet ivory liquid. To have a gun again, to have the savage fire within, fueled by desperation let him strike hard and heavy into the spine of his captor. He raised his implement, the Devil guiding his grip. But when it came down, it split only stone.

The guard continued down the line and the disgraced marshal's mind went cold as a winter night in the northern territories. He struck the stone again and worked the rest of the day in silence, letting the songs of the damned reverberate in his skull as his mind sought to illuminate on his hesitance.

When the sun had ebbed into the dusts beyond their visions, the guard blew a whistle and the men slung their tools over their shoulders and began the long march back to the camp. Some fell, but the threat of death by the guard or the unforgiving buzzards and vermin, usually made the more hopeful of them, choose to get to their feet. Two that night chose to stay on the ground and felt hot iron in the backs of their necks. They felt only the sting, much less painful than the ardors of starvation, dehydration, and overworking they'd been facing. They were free from the gang and allowed to go forward into the oblivion that awaits all of mankind's bloodied, unkempt masses.

Like a conscripted army of cowards and, they marched in

their ragged stripes. At their head, like a shining general, was the lone guardsman, gun at the ready, a look of determined yet sadistic glee on his face.

The prisoners trudged in the painted red sands, Rigby making an effort to position himself next to the fat man, the fool who had struck his own foot. Each step the fat man took the bandages would leak small drops of blood as the scab on the wound was scraped against the coarse cloth and the rough terrain. Rigby looked at the blood trail for a matter of moments while he thought up the words to say to the man.

The other prisoner, upon closer inspection, was more of a wasted frame beneath an excess of flesh. He breathed heavily as he walked, his lungs taking in as much air as possible and then exhaling, his chest rising and falling, his skin was abundant, translucent, ribs visible, and his lungs nearly so.

Rigby nudged the man as they walked and in whispered tones began to converse. “Awful shame ‘bout yer leg. You ain’t gonna get any proper aid, are you? Not here. Damn shame.”

“I’m no sodomite, and if you make such an attempt, I assure you that despite my current injury I will slip something sharp between your ribs and then we can see—“

“Easy now, nothing like that.” Rigby took a breath. “Didn’t know you got a shiv, but that’s mighty good knowledge to have. You got a name?”

“I’m not one to give knowledge in return for something as paltry as this conversation.” The fat man’s face twisted with wrinkles, as though wearing the wounds of many ages, but still he managed to look like

Hogarth's curious mutt, Trump. "You'll give me your name before you'll have mine."

"Cadmus Rigby."

"That's a city name, Cadmus. What's a city boy doing out here on the gang?"

"Bad luck and bloody hands, Mister--"

"Zeltzin. Doctor Edgar Zeltzin."

"Doctor?" Rigby smirked. "And you're mocking me for being a city boy? Well, that's some funny stuff right there. You going to get an infection."

"I'm aware. I'll lose the foot if it doesn't reopen tonight in the camp. And even then." Zeltzin took a breath and wheezed. "The grim chance of bleeding away is the most likely thing to occur."

"How long you been here?"

"Three years."

Rigby was taken aback. Zeltzin cleared his throat.

And then came the question from the disgraced marshal's lips.

"What ya in fer?"

"Some people die due to medicine. What's your excuse?"

Rigby coughed, his voice rising as he tried to discuss his sins with a modicum of self-restraint. "I ain't one to enjoy the company of... the company men. And when such carpet baggers come and try to make off with your blood and sweat, and the men at the bureau won't bother to let you do what any man ought to do..."

Rigby exhaled sharply. "Well, it's damn hard for a man to make a living when his money is signed by a company store and no the Union."

“You were swindled, Mr. Rigby?”

“I will admit, perhaps I may have been out of my wits, shooting the messenger in the very literal sense. But alcohol and rage plays a wild part in the lives of any a man who is worth his salt.”

“Well then, Mr. Rigby, I’d quantify you a touch above these others. A man must make a living, and provided you didn’t defile these bodies; I believe that’s all I really need to hear.”

Rigby nodded.

They marched on until the glimmer of camp fires blared in the distance. Their camp, their home, their hell. A wooden water silo, barely larger than one of the men, was the glorious goal of many of the prisoners. The guard stepped further from the gang and the chained men launched into a mobbing, dreadful horde toward their only ration of water in the barren wastes. Clanging irons and balls kicked up the dust as the criminal mob sprang forward with feral disposition. Cadmus thought to run, but when his eyes caught Zeltzin standing still, his mind ceased thinking of short-term survival and went back to the long term.

“Doc, you say you got a shiv? What’s say you and me break out of this hole? You ain’t a guilty man. And I ain’t that bad by comparison to these others. This camp’s filled with bandits, vagabonds, and scum.” Rigby licked his lips and breathed in the sweet twilight air. “We shank the guard, take the gun, and we keep heading south til we get down to Valverde.”

“You’re suggesting we murder a man and go seek out new lives in the Mexican frontier?”

“Would you rather die here without once again tasting them

sweet fruits of freedom? Any man can make his fortune down there if they ain't full of scruples. Now, I got some contacts down there from back when I was in the right; I keep ya alive, ya give me that knife, we get outta here, we make some scratch and part ways." Rigby let out a small whistle. "Unless yer fixed on the idea of bleeding out this night, as I've got no issue taking that shiv from yer corpse"

"You're asking me to trust you. I don't know you that well, Cadmus Rigby."

"Well, y'know I ain't a sodomite. And just so y'know I'm gonna get outta this hole one way or the other. But if yer content to die, by all means do so. The guard might throw ya to the buzzards or he might just keep ya around a few days to stink up the place. Either way, ya gonna be damn dead eventually and I got no issue pilfering your carcass for the blade. Ya might as well trust a stranger and profit with me."

Zeltzin coughed and shook his head, popping his knuckles with brutally dry, fat little fingers. He breathed in and the dust of the deserts coaxed his tongue with a bitter heat. "In a better world, or if I were a better man, I'd turn you down. But it seems when damnation awaits me at all turns and sadistic men who hold my fate, I've no other choice. You offer me the prospects of a better world, were such travails as this unfortunate circumstance can be but faint memories of brutal times."

Rigby grinned. "So, Valverde? We got ourselves a compact, Doc?"

"The compact is thus, Cadmus Rigby. You liberate me, you keep me alive; we go south, we make money, we part ways."

"Sounds like the best plan I've ever had."

Zeltzin reached into the neck hole of his shirt and produced a long piece of twine made from dry grasses and stolen bootlaces. At the end was a jagged piece of reflective glass with a handle wrapped in the laces. He kept his eyes on the guard who was busy, occupying himself with a group of men who had begun beating one another to death with a shoe to determine who would go next at the watering area. Zeltzin palmed the blade and slipped it to Rigby who wrapped the cords around his fist and slipped the edge between his fingers.

Rigby slipped off toward the guard with nary a sound, but the jangle of shackles around his ankles. The men continued to batter one another over the water until the guard put a bullet in the back of one. The guard fixed his aim at another man.

Rigby snatched at the man's hair, pulling him back to expose a stubby-smooth neck. The blade punctured through the flesh as his jabbed with reckless abandon, mutilating the guard's face and throat with a primal fervor as the prisoners looked upon the carnage in stunned silence. The blood spurted out in rapid-fire gushes, coating Rigby's red hair with a sanguine coating of the lawman's bilesome life. He shouldered the carcass on his arms forward, letting it drop and pool in its fluids, then quickly Rigby snapped up the gone. The other prisoners laughed, hooted, and hollered in twisted jubilation.

"This ain't fer you lot," Rigby sneered at them. He back-pedaled until Zeltzin was near. The doctor lifted a shovel from the ground where the water-hungry horde had discarded them and began slamming the spade's wrought iron edge downward on his chain.

Clang.

“Me and the Doc are gonna get some damn water.” Rigby took a breath.

Clang.

“You lot are gonna stay back.”

Clang.

“I swear to God, I’ll shoot. I’ll shoot each and every one of you.”

The chain-links snapped as the sparks finished flying on to the red dusted ground. Zeltzin had managed to free up his blistered ankles, as well as liberate Rigby from the tormenting irons. The prisoners were corralled and marched off under fear of death. Zeltzin drank deeply until his skin had more to it than a mere pallor. Rigby had his share, enjoyed it, and looked upon the prisoners once last time before pushing the silo over.

The criminals screamed and Rigby answered with his gun at the ready, his eye fixed behind iron sights and ready to make any man a hobbled remnant of an already tortured existence. Zeltzin looked upon the deed with disdain, but he raised not his voice.

The pair walked away from the camp, gun at the ready to shoot back. By the time the sun was beyond the horizon and the light of the stars and the bon fire was all that illuminated the bleak world of the prisoners. When the faint glimmer of the dawn came, the dusts and winds of the nighttime chill had hidden their path. In the distance of the morning, Rigby looked back upon their trail, and save for a few drops of blood; observed nothing but the jubilant cry of the carrion-hungry buzzards circling in the distance.

Dairy
Vala Kjarval



Clouds that Feel of Flesh

Lena Gluck

Dark, the clouds feel wrong,
thick as a slumped creature, the **Bells** ring like ears
louder
high pitched, louder

and below **something** crunches through the an d
bone and sunken flesh dry ble eds
the skin peels back, but palm help less
her face has already rotted away, with clotted flakes grasp ing
Swollen plague,

The eyes

are **blank** and **black** **knalb** era **kcalb** dna

It looks up

looks up

It

up

It looks

d
r
ip drip the dark fluid beautiful (ruined) body
ink and shadows drop from **the** **twisted tongue** (licks deep her limp mouth)

r

op **the legs** are long

the fingers are claws

s t r e a t c h i n g

t h e a r i n g e a r i n g

a

r r

i p

p as the taste on its oiled reaching tongue of rawwet bloodandbile

p

i

n

g

the spinal melody clickcrackcrunch of the wet toothed finger

)death was not supposed to be like **the s**

If Only only only only on ly on ly one lye one lie one lie

It was a dream mearcs em was **tl**

Abandoning Narrative
Brittany DeJohn

We tell ourselves stories in order to live. We impose our contrived narratives in a subconsciously desperate attempt to rationalize our world. We filter perception through the gauze of fairy tale. Our self-told stories are simply extensions of hope, a template by which disorder is contained in neat boxes (manufactured, of course, by the Frontal Lobe Corporation).

Before we knew that the Moon's crust was mostly a composite of oxygen, silicon, magnesium, iron, calcium, and aluminum, we decided that it must be the beaming façade of a jolly, celestial being. While being confined to terra firma, before the technology of space exploration, the Moon was a disturbing enigma. By imposing our narrative on the Moon, we were less threatened by it. We danced, in pagan form, before its lunar rays, dipping our shadowed flesh in its silver embrace. Despite a conflicting narrative, of werewolves becoming insatiable in the presence of its fullness, we were given peace. After all, what could be ominous about an orb with a human face?

Before we knew that the Anglo Saxon males were superior warriors due to repetitious training sessions and a culture of ferocity and barbarism, we decided that they must be descendant from deities. How else could they exhibit such prowess?

How else could their arms ripple with war-ripened sinew and their savagely painted faces leer with foreshadowing confidence? By imposing our narrative on the Anglo Saxons, we were more comfortable in our repeated defeat at their hands. We exited the room where war strategies and planning took place, and instead, contentedly stood at the head of feasting tables. Wine ran like blood down our jowls, and we devoured our storehouses of grain, readily accepting that there would be no tomorrow. After all, who can win against a god?

Before we knew that disease was a result of either noxious factors in the environment or an internal inability to function under slight changes, we decided that it must be the manifested vengeance of God. We had

become so delirious in our vices: envying our neighbor's big-bosomed broad, stealing the vendor's fruit while he was distracted, feeling the iron grips of hate for our fellow, and of course, never, ever, praying enough. Our sin was a disgrace. The Plague that killed 30-60% of Europe's population was a divine cleanse. By imposing our narrative on Death and Disease, we were steered into an ethical life. But what could possibly explain the death of saints? The death of monks and nuns that devoted every ounce of life and every conjured breath to the Almighty? Luckily, we had a constructed narrative for that as well! Their death was a divine instrument of instruction to those of us who were less inclined to perfect holiness. Through their martyrdom, the souls of many were saved by witnessing their graceful exit from this world.

Our narratives are becoming strained.
Their once thickly defined borders are now mere scribbles along a page.
Shaky, elementary, splotches of pencil.
Erased by our tears.
Tears for a remarkably cruel and senseless world.
Senseless,
Chaotic, World.

The young girl in red shorts and pig tails lays splayed out on the hardwood floor, starting early, creating narratives with blonde-dolls and plastic minivans. She hums an imagined tune and her intelligent eyes shine with the reflection of her glaringly bright future. Her uncle rapes her. Strips her red shorts and pulls out her pig tails. Her eyes are now dull. She no longer builds plot or thinks in terms of linear narrative. She is a catatonic corpse at age 6.

The teenage boy exits the building, swaggering proudly as he tries to restrain himself from sprinting home with the good news he's received. After a series of bad choices and getting caught up with the wrong crowd, he has finally begun to turn his life around. He is finally ready to embody manhood and abandon juvenility. As he begins to smell the wafts of his mother's cooking, rising through the dense, urban air, a stray bullet ricochets and lodges in his tender skull. His momma writhes and sobs at his funeral procession, dead at age 19.

The 2,606 people flutter around the World Trade Towers, frenziedly hectic in the caffeinated environment of 9 a.m. Copy machines whirl, memos begin to be typed, croissants are enjoyed, white-pressed shirts are stained, and the stench of fatigue abounds. Two planes slam into the joints of these people. Shredding the bodies of mothers, fathers, nieces, mentors, lovers, husbands, children. Fumigating the lungs of thousands of individuals, each with their own narrative-in-progress.

Their lifeless cadavers arabesque down 110 stories, spinning in mid-air, becoming inspiration for the narratives of the living.

Our narratives are becoming strained.

Their once thickly defined borders are now ambiguous boundary lines.

Dot-Dash-Dot, rather than continuity.

How can we continue to create narratives

When we can't even believe in them?

Fireworks
Nathan Valeska



Fool On A Bar Stool
Rob Cigliano

INT. BAR - NIGHT

DANIEL MOULSON sits alone at the crowded bar, surrounded by gleeful drinkers. He sips his dark ale with a dull look on his face.

Out of the crowd walks up JASON. His button up shirt is soaked in a mixture of sweat and alcohol. He walks up to Daniel, spilling his drink as he puts his arm around him.

JASON

Hey man! How the fuck are ya!?!?

DANIEL

I'm fine, just drinking
after this long week.

JASON

Nice man, nice.
TGIF, am I right?

DANIEL

Yeah sure.

Daniel glances forward before finishing off the rest of his beer.

JASON

Let me get your next one.

DANIEL

No, it's fine. I'll pay
for my own drinks.

Before Dan can pull out his wallet, Jason slaps a TWENTY DOLLAR BILL on the counter.

JASON

(to the bartender)

Two Jack and Cokes, my good man.

BARTENDER

You got it.

DANIEL

I was fine with the beer you know.

JASON

Yeah, but that shit's not strong enough. You see that girl over there?

Jason throws his finger towards the other end of the bar. Daniel glances over slowly. His eyes scan the packed crowd.

DANIEL

Which one? There must be seventy girls at this bar.

JASON

The busty one with the light green top and brown hair, next to the asshole in the Yankee's hat.

DANIEL

Ok, what about her?

The bartender drops off their drinks. Jason grabs his while sliding the other over to Daniel.

JASON

Go over and talk to her, man. You gotta get out there instead of sulking down here and drinking your weight in beer.

DANIEL

Fine, I'll switch to hard liquor then if that will make you happy.

JASON

That won't. What will though is if you get your depressed ass up and go talk to her. It's been three months dude, time to move on. Just go introduce yourself.

DANIEL

You know how much I fucking hate you, don't you?

Jason laughs. He gives Daniel a little nudge to get up. Daniel gets up with a long look on his face. He slowly makes his way to the end of the bar dodging people as he goes.

He fixes his hair with his left hand while his right handholds on to his drink. He approaches her with a...

DANIEL

Hey, could I get you another drink?

She slowly looks up at him with a smile on her face.

GIRL

Surely, I'm drinking a gin and tonic.
You can sit down if you want.

DANIEL

Yeah, sure, my name's Daniel.

He extends his hand as he sits. He nearly misses the bar stool as he plants his rear end down.

RACHEL

Mine's Rachel, nice to meet you.

The bartender approaches Daniel and Rachel.

DANIEL

Yeah, I'll have a Guinness and the lady will have a gin and tonic. Just put it on my tab.

Rachel smiles at Daniel, but he doesn't notice.

DANIEL

So what brings you out to this place?

RACHEL

Not much, just having a drink after the work week.
How about you?

DANIEL

I'm here with a friend of mine.
He kind of dragged me here.

RACHEL

Oh, not your type of place?

DANIEL

Not really. I'm just here
for the alcohol.

RACHEL

Well, you came to the right place.
They have plenty of that here.

The two share a small laugh before being interrupted by a giant body builder type, GERALD. His t-shirt is tighter than the skin wrapped around his large biceps.

GERALD

Hey there good looking, the name's Gerald.
This guy bothering you?

RACHEL

No. Actually, we were just talking.

GERALD

He looks like he is. Why don't you take
a walk, short shit.

DANIEL

Well, I just bought her and myself
a drink so I sort of can't leave.

As soon as Daniel says this the bartender drops off their drinks.

GERALD

Oh, well, there you go. Now take
your pussy beer and take a walk. Me
and the lady have some talking to do.

Daniel stares at the big douche before looking down at his feet. He slowly grabs his beer and starts for the bathroom. Rachel watches him the entire way before being overshadowed by Gerald.

INT. BAR BATHROOM - NIGHT

Daniel throws the door open making it slam against the wall. He swiftly walks to the sink. Slamming his drink down he turns the faucet on. He stares deeply into the mirror before cupping his hands under the running water.

He splashes water into his face. He buries his face into a paper towel from the dispenser. He peers at the mirror through the graffiti at his reflection.

He looks down at the faucet. He looks up again at the mirror. He notices his practically full beer. Quickly he chugs the rest of the dark ale.

He leaves the the empty bottle at the sink. Stammering a bit, he exits bathroom.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Daniel walks out of the bathroom back into the thick crowd of young bar goers. He catches a glimpse of Jason conversing with a few girls. Jason catches eyes with Daniel. The two nod at each other. Jason raise his glass to Daniel. Daniel cracks an awkward smile.

He looks forward. He spots Rachel. He cringes as he spots Gerald. He cringes more when he looks at his large figure. He takes a deep breath. He approaches the two with a...

DANIEL

Hey, you know what's
fucking hysterical?

GERALD

What? The fact that you're hereright now instead
of on the other side of the bar.

DANIEL

No, not really. What I was really thinking about is how
tight your shirt is. Are you sure you bought
that in the men's department?

Gerald's face drops. He places his mixed drink down. He steps within an inch of Daniel.

GERALD

You want to say that again, you little shit?

RACHEL

Listen, there's no need to get hostile.

GERALD

Shut up. I was talking to him, not you.

Daniel looks at Rachel. She has a worried look on her face. He looks back up at Gerald then peers down at his shirt.

DANIEL

Yeah, actually. Are you sure you bought that in the men's department? I mean, is that a rose on your shirt? You have a fucking flower on your shirt? Did your Mom pick that thing out for you?

Gerald's face tenses up. He swings at Daniel, but Daniel ducks from the ferocious blow. Regaining himself, Daniel takes two shots at Gerald's mid section.

Gerald stumbles back into the bar. He grabs the nearest bottle by the neck. He cracks it on the counter, shattering the bottom half. He charges at Daniel.

Daniel ducks, dodging the sharp bottle. Gerald runs past the now shorter Daniel, crashing into a pillar. When he turns around, Daniel's fist smashes into his left cheek. Gerald spins like a top. He crashes to the ground.

Everyone looks up from the unconscious Gerald to look up at Daniel. There's an awkward silence before...

DANIEL

And that's why you shouldn't take steroids, ladies and gentlemen.

The crowd explodes in laughter and cheers. Daniel cracks a big smile. Rachel runs up to Daniel welcoming him with an embrace. She pulls out a piece of paper from her pocket placing it in Daniel's.

RACHEL

That was pretty impressive, maybe I'll see you soon.

She cracks a flirtatious smile. Daniel pulls out the paper. He looks at it while cracking a big smile.

Suddenly there's a flash. Daniel is looking up at Jason in the back of an ambulance. He sits up to reveal his new swollen right eye.

JASON

Dan...Dan...can you hear me?

DANIEL

Yeah...I can hear you.

JASON

Oh thank god. You took a nasty blow, man.
We're on the way to the hospital.

Daniel sits up. He looks around before patting himself down. Once his inspection is done he looks back at Jason.

DANIEL

What the hell happened?

JASON

You walked up to some guy and mumbled something about his tight ass or something and he knocked you out in one punch.

DANIEL

Shit.

Daniel reaches into his pocket. He pulls out a piece of paper. His eyes widen when he feels the smooth paper on his fingers. He unfolds it to reveal the large bar tab that he still owed.

JASON

Oh yeah, I grabbed that for you before we left. You gotta stop drinking those imported beers man, they're gonna bankrupt you.

Daniel sighs. He falls back on to the stretcher with the crumpled bill in his hand.

Clementine
Vala Kjarval



Trench Coat Days
Elizabeth Sauchelli

You wrap
your hand around
a lamppost on
Bridge Street.
Trench coat days
are here again.
The first scarf
I knit, gray,
unraveling at the
ends, wrapped
tightly around
your neck.
Our smiles.
How we never
thought disgust
would come.
Your lips,
thinner now,
can't handle
expression anymore.

Life, The Golden Goose
Nathan Valeska



Over Tea

Michael McCabe

Grace pulled the whistling kettle off the burner and set it aside. She had already prepared a platter with two cups, two spoons and a dish of sugar. She liked her tea pure but knew Harriet would want her usual two scoops. After a pause she poured the hot water from the bulky kettle, into a more suitable ceramic pot completing the ensemble.

Harriet sat at a small table by the window looking out at falling snow, the white landscape reflected on her face like a moonbeam. Her eyes looked enamored as if she watched each flake fall to rest but her face appeared tight with deep wrinkles abundant.

“It is slowing up a bit, dear,” she turned and looked up at Grace with a smile, “you may yet be able to go home today.”

Snow covered everything in sight and Grace could not even distinguish the road. She knew very well the old Plymouth wouldn't start up in this and, even if it would, the chances of it going anywhere were almost zero. The storm had hit so suddenly last night that she thought she might wait it out but when things became ugly she had no choice besides the guest bed.

Grace set the platter down and sat across from her, “Tea?”

“Oh good, yes. And you've brought the sugar.”

Outside the wind blew heavy, humming against the house and shaving layers of snow off of adjacent rooftops. The two women, entranced with the stark white scene, sat in silence save for soft bell tones of metal on ceramic. A little blackbird landed on a snow covered tree limb and superimposed itself on the canvas.

“He's a resilient one,” said Harriet, looking intrigued.

“Yes.”

“But, won’t he freeze?”

Grace set down her spoon, “He may freeze.”

Harriet lifted her cup to her mouth and sipped slowly, studying Grace with thin eyes through rising steam. She set down her cup. Her eyes scanned the table until finally thought emerged as speech.

“Is something wrong, dear? You are rather distant.”

Grace sighed, “Yes. I wonder when I will be able to leave.”

“Are you at all upset with what I said yesterday?” Harriet recoiled, “I meant it only, you know, to clear the air, so to speak.”

Grace ruminated, looking again to the window. She wondered how the snow could create mountains so quickly and how its coverage could be so vast yet, still so fragile that it might melt away just as quickly. Her little sister, Claire, used to lie out in the front lawn and make snow angels and wave up to Grace in the window. She was such a good little girl and loved her big sister unconditionally just as she had any of her stuffed toys.

“No, I’m glad I know.”

Satisfied, Harriet went on, “your John was a good man. He was very well liked by my father, you know.”

Grace continued to stare outside and her eyes became wide, frozen in reminiscent deep thought. Something inside her spoke softly, in a voice not entirely her own. It said, “*Good man, good man.*”

Silence loomed forcing its will upon them. They sat and watched as the blackbird danced up and down the tree limb shaking it clean of white dust, exposing it as a simple, thin brown line. Once clean, the

proud bird marched up to its tip and stood rigid, despite the bend of the limb under the bird's weight.

"You know," Harriet laughed uncomfortably, "if Johnny were here today I'll bet we would all have a good laugh over the whole thing, don't you think?"

Grace looked up with a sudden apparent change in mood and smiled. She poured some more tea into her cup refilling it.

"You're right, we really would. More?"

"My, my such a hurry. Well, yes I suppose. I'm sure we'll be stuck here another night, might as well warm up."

Grace patronized Harriet with a weak, half smile and refilled her cup. Then, Harriet helped herself to some sugar, only one scoop this time. Grace considered some sugar for a moment and shook her head at the thought.

"Thank you, dearie. This tea ought to do me some good. I feel a bit off, like I might have caught a bug."

"Oh?"

"Yes, of course it might just be that we've been cooped up in this stuffy old house so long."

"Yes," Grace turned back to the window where the blackbird stood comfortably on the limb with his beak opening and closing in a frenzy of muted song. "That must be it."

Harriet rubbed her forehead and went on, "I wish I hadn't this awful headache, though." She blew down on her tea to cool it and started to say something but cut off. She lowered her head as if the concern was a lead weight pulling her down. "I hope it's not the flu coming."

Grace, still looking outdoors, asked absently, "I wonder where he'll go tonight?"

"Who, dear?"

"The little bird. He can't just stay out on that limb all night."

Harriet said nothing, dramatically fluttering her eyelids from the heat of the tea she now lifted to her mouth. Grace thought of the dinner Harriet had put out the night before and if they had just not bothered with that bottle of Cabernet afterwards she might have beat the storm.

Sweat began to bead on Harriet's brow. She closed her eyes and exhaled laboriously. "My, I really am not well."

Grace stirred her tea, the soft chimes made by the tea cup and spoon reminded her of the wind chimes at home. Every winter she would put them up in the attic neatly wrapped up with tissue paper and placed in boxes she stacked and set near the other summer décor. She'd bring down the Christmas decorations and stockings to hang and a new feeling would spread over the house, a different one that was colder than summer's and less exuberant. Reds and greens, and wreaths made of drab, lifeless kindling replaced the fine pastels and seemed to fade all cause for conversation. Even in autumn the foliage made a last effort to dot the forest with lively colors but the effort would be futile; everything succumbs to the cold.

She loved those chimes, though. They reminded her of cool summer nights on the porch sitting in the rocker, gently rocking back and forth, listening to their soft melody while John's pipe smoke kissed the air with a mild sweetness that was oaken but not so heavy as to be out of season.

Harriet stood up and braced herself with one arm on the table and the other hand across her forehead as a thermometer. She opened her eyes wide looking like she had been stabbed in the back. She was trembling about the jaw and blurted, “Dear, Grace. I may need a doctor.”

Grace continued to stir her tea, “Do you think I might put my wind chimes out in the winter? I don’t see why they shouldn’t be.”

“Grace,” Harriet was braced on the table with both arms now, standing stiffly as if suddenly stricken with rigor mortis, “can you please stop that stirring, dear—my head.”

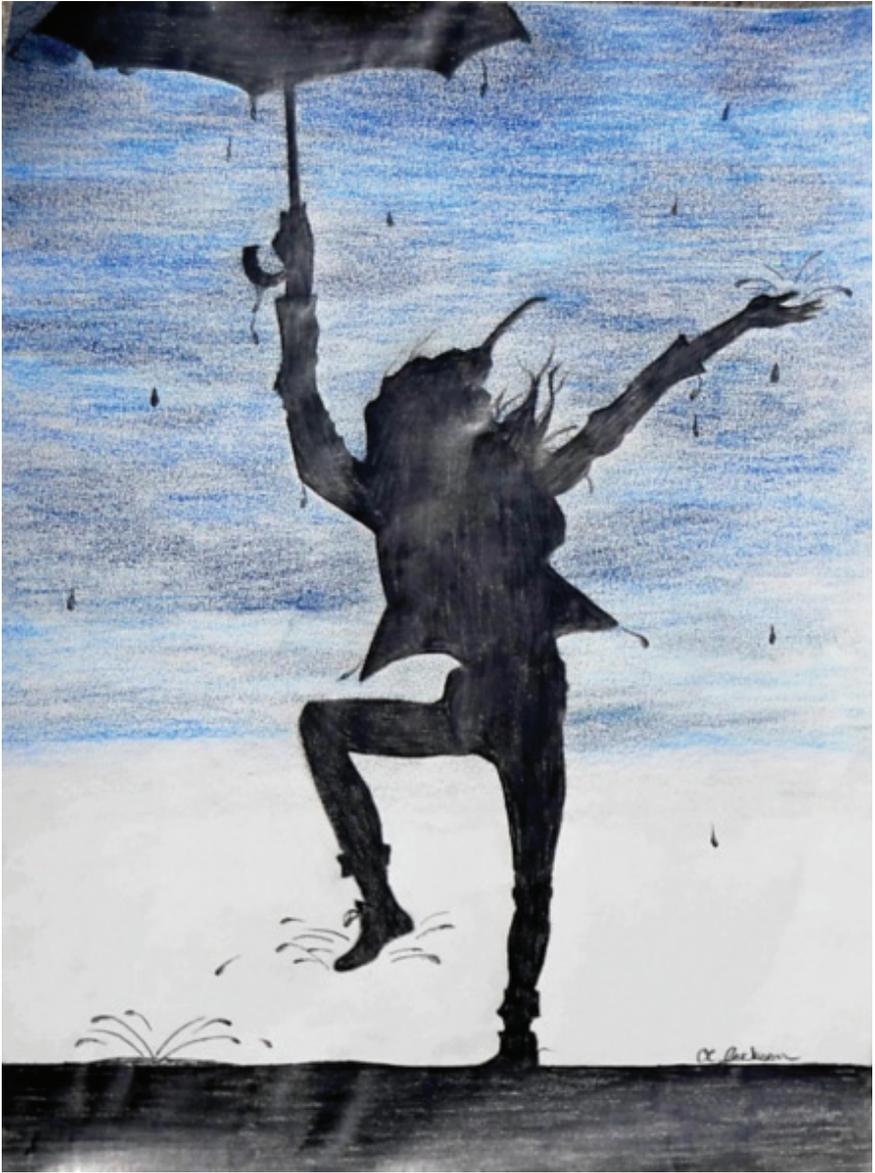
“Oh, certainly,” Grace said as she set down the spoon, “Pity, I don’t think we’ll be able to get a doctor in this mess.”

Harriet swallowed hard and looked back out at the blackbird perched calmly despite heavy gusts of wind pulling at his feathers, “You’re probably right. I’ll go lay down a while.”

She stood up as straight as a steel beam then stepped forward and reached out for the table only to catch the edge of the tea platter and fall awkwardly to the floor with a dull *thud*. The tea pot finally landed just beside her, shattering on the hard wood floor and spraying tea as far as the fine white carpet at the center of the room. The platter reverberated with the piercing metallic ring of a cymbal until at last, silence took over.

Grace casually turned and looked back out the window. The blackbird was gone and the limb bobbed up and down as a sign of his departure. Falling snow flakes began to catch the brown limb and after just a few moments it was white again.

Dancing in the Rain
Lauren Jackson



*Let me describe the many reasons why
you have no chance with this woman.*

Lena Gluck

Her eyes are so full of the horizon
they have no room for you, and her smile,
so genuine it seems artificial,
some tiny trinket to trick the child by the
creek like she thinks you are.

You can flirt, fight, love her,
try to turn her in,

if she lets you

but you can't
make her cry, nor
blush, nor plead

She learned to mimic fear observing her nightlight,
a torch, eating the night,
burning the childhood she never had
leaving her to stay in her infant stage, eternal
invincible, unattached, as she's only one
she knows to exist

On occasion you may
find her laughing a full
bellied, unashamed laugh, as if
she was some ancient god
enjoying the humor of all the ages

though looking at her, she is a woman with blonde hair
a strange gleam in her eyes, and a hundred faces.
She should have died by now.

She is shy, she is bold,
she is interested and cold, and
she is so convincing, persuasive
her lies pure and pearly
and smooth as the moonstone
she keeps around her throat on a chain

How could you keep from a
woman like that? Even when
you try, everything is drawn back
to her, long fingertips
drawing in treasures like evening bugs
swarming in for the beauty and light
and falling dead in front of her

much like you will do
if you watch her for too long

This woman will
kill you without guilt
because she can't understand its value.

She steals pretty things, like jewelry, pills,
embroidered cloth, old leather bound books, exotic fruits from the stand,
knives,
instruments, songs, and every emotion that crosses your face.
With each she wonders at what she's found

So look away from the
woman who will hate you
without emotion, because she
has seen others hate, will
love you without affection
because she has observed love
like a medic observes a wound
like a sailor observes a rope



Paper Hearts Should Only Leave Paper Cuts

Kate Raffte

Annie carefully carved scissors through blood red construction paper, doing her best to stay on the jet-black line her mother had carefully drawn for her.

She smeared a thin layer of glue onto the back of a doily, being sure not to leave any air bubbles as she pressed it to the red paper.

Annie drizzled white paste around the edge, never once faltering off the curving course. Silver glitter streamed from her cupped hand, bonding to the glue like fresh snow on frozen soil.

She used a pink pencil to etch the words from her heart onto the crisp white slate of the doily. Her eyes bore into her finished work for a moment before she left her chair and turned out the lights, letting her handiwork dry alone in the dark.

The next day she arose fifteen minutes early and coerced her mother into driving her to school.

Annie entered the empty classroom with damp palms. She made her way to Richie's desk on trembling legs and gently nestled the paper between his homework folder and math book.

Minutes later, the room filled with children. Annie eyed him as he plopped down at his desk and pulled his folder out. With it came the Valentine. After staring at it for several seconds, he burst out laughing.

"Annie Miller is the grossest girl I know!" Richie said. The class burst into hysterical agreement.

Annie Miller's six-year-old-heart broke into pieces so small, her craft glue couldn't fuse them back together.

A Hero's Confession
Lena Gluck

Honestly,
this odyssey
exhausted me.

Mask
Vala Kjarval



The Chase
Thomas Kline

FADE IN:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A fan blade spins slowly in the small, dank room. The few lights within the room flicker off and on, off and on in different patterns.

A small table sits in the middle of the room with four chairs, two on each side. Three of the chairs are being occupied: two on the right, one on the left.

The two men on the right, DETECTIVES GEORGE BLONSKY and DANNY O'CONNELL, sit back in their chairs with smirks on their faces.

On the left, a man with long, unkempt black hair and a bushy, poorly maintained mustache sits with his back hunched over.

An open folder on the table with the man's mugshot displays the name TERRANCE ROTTWEILER.

Below the photo is a sheet containing a laundry list of convictions and arrests, the most recent being attempted murder.

Blonsky and O'Connell stand and start to walk toward the door, as OFFICER JERRY PEARSON approaches Rottweiler, handcuffs at the ready. The criminal eyes the officer's sidearm, a Beretta 92 FS.

Just as O'Connell and Blonsky are about to exit the room, they hear a crash from behind them.

They turn around to see Rottweiler holding Pearson's gun at its owner's head.

The two detectives instinctively draw their weapons, but hesitate as Rottweiler shakes the gun and presses it against Pearson's temple, taunting them.

Holding his gun out, Rottweiler signals for the two officers to step aside, as he drags Pearson out of the room.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

BANG! Rottweiler fires his gun once into the air, causing OFFICE WORKERS in the lobby to panic. He drags Pearson to the door, gun still pointed outward.

Having reached the door, Rottweiler beats Pearson upside his head with the handle of the Beretta before running outside. Blonsky and O'Connell give chase.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Rottweiler hauls ass through the crowded city street, attempting to conceal himself within the mass of INNOCENT BYSTANDERS.

Blonsky sprints toward him, draws his gun, and takes aim. He can't get a clear shot, as Rottweiler manages to hide himself within the crowd.

He fires into the air, to no avail. Pandemonium ensues, with PEDESTRIANS flooding the streets, further concealing the fleeing criminal.

Spotting a car nearby, Blonsky runs to it, shows the driver his badge, and commandeers the vehicle.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Blonsky speeds through the streets, looking for an alternate route to catch Rottweiler. He spots Rottweiler running into an alleyway, and gives pursuit, sharply turning into a small street nearby.

As Blonsky drives down the street, he carefully searches for Rottweiler.

He catches a glimpse of a MAN running down the alley on his left, turns, and drives toward him, hoping to cut Rottweiler off.

Stopping the car, Blonsky opens the door, exits the car, and starts running.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Blonsky dashes down the alley, once again taking aim at Rottweiler. He fires once, twice, missing both shots. He starts running again, but is blocked by a truck that pulls into the street just as Blonsky leaves the alley.

Blonsky runs back to the car, gets in and starts driving down the next alley down from the one he's currently on.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Blonsky floors it, drifting into the crowded morning rush hour traffic at a nearby intersection.

Turning into yet another alleyway, Blonsky spots Rottweiler running into a small street on his right.

Blonsky drives to the end of the alleyway, turns left, and speeds down the street again.

Reaching another intersection, Blonsky turns left once again, speeding into another small street.

Spotting Rottweiler running towards him, Blonsky stops the car abruptly, opens the door, and draws his gun.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rottweiler stops, turns, and runs the other way, firing his gun back at Blonsky.

Running back into the street and down another alley, he once again disappears. Blonsky gives chase.

Spotting Rottweiler go into a different alley, Blonsky sprints down the street, and runs across, chasing Rottweiler.

Rottweiler continues to run until he finds a fence in the middle of the alley.

Stopping, Rottweiler looks around for an alternate exit, but fails. He quickly climbs the fence and continues running.

Meanwhile, Blonsky, not far behind, comes to the fence and stops. Seeing Rottweiler run down the street, he climbs the fence, but by the time he jumps down to the other side, Rottweiler is far ahead of him.

Blonsky continues after him, though his pace slows due to exhaustion.

Just as all hope seems lost, Blonsky hears sirens and sees flashing lights ahead of him.

He looks up to see a number of police cars crowding the street ahead.

O'Connell and a SQUAD OF OFFICERS step out of the cars, each taking aim at Rottweiler.

Cut off from his path, Rottweiler turns around again, but stops when he sees Blonsky slowly running toward him, gun drawn, with a direct bead on his forehead, right between the eyes.

Throwing his gun to the ground and placing his hands in the air, Rottweiler is tackled to the ground by a trio of officers.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - MINUTES LATER

Rottweiler, now in handcuffs, is walked over to a police car and forced inside.

Blonsky walks over to Pearson's gun, which is lying on the ground. Kneeling down, he picks it up.

O'Connell walks over to Blonsky, smiling and extending his hand to Blonsky for a handshake.

Blonsky stands and accepts the handshake, smiling.

FADE OUT.

Haiku

Zak Guthrie

ON GRATITUDE

Very nice backrub!
Thanks, Christina Applegate.
I'll call you sometime.

ON TECHNOLOGY

Running for our lives!
Sex robots invading earth,
INSERTING HARDDRIVE

ON THE ART OF CINEMA

Why should I watch this?
Does it have naked ladies?
If not, it's garbage.

ON TRENDS

Hipster murderer,
Killing before it was cool,
Blood on those thick frames

ON URGENCY

I'm trapped in a fire!
My head and face are burning!
No time for haikus!

Time, the Blank Constant
Nathan Valeska



Moving Memorial
Zach Jennings

I never knew Marge Tuttle as well as I'd wanted.

I wasn't quite old enough to drive when she and her car went through the weak guardrail and sideways into a tree.

I'd always watched her leave the parking lot every day after school. She never cared about the speed bump. Her hair blew everywhere with her windows down.

The left strap of my backpack had been broken for some time and it was always a pain to carry. The weight of so many books day after day crushed my shoulder during my mile-long walk home. Crushed my chance of ever catching up to Marge. I didn't know what fear of loss felt like, just the feeling of never having it.

That curve in the road is known as Tuttle's Curve. The wooden cross jammed into the ground just outside the guardrail is its ornament. The white paint has faded and the wreath hanging on it lost all luster long ago.

Someone, her sister I think, used to trim the weeds around the cross, making it show up clear as day when I approached the corner. She did it so much she started coming to school with awful sunburns. But the grass started growing untamed a few years ago. Maybe her sister died, or stopped trying, or moved, or moved on.

One time, I got so distracted staring at it, reading the words "Never Forgotten" down the length of the cross, that I almost went off the road myself.

I've had my own moving memorial service for Marge Tuttle twice a day, five days a week, for almost 30 years now. I can't read the painted letters anymore. I wonder about someone driving by it for the first time. How could they forget if they never knew? How could they miss her if they never had her?

Of course I never knew, never had her, and I can't forget.

You are sprawled out on the love seat waiting for the fan to blow on you again. Sweat drips down your back and you silently curse June's hot weather. Your cat, who had been lying on the back of the love seat, heaves himself up, jumps down, and waddles over to his food dish. He howls suddenly. Crap, you think. You know what that specific howl means. Puke time. You roll off the couch and walk over to the kitchen. Your cat's already heaving. His massive body rolls, spasms, and jiggles. It's a sight you're used to since he has the tendency to over eat. What comes up this time you are not used to however. The puke is foamy, liquid, and greenish. It's usually hard and chunky, like the dry food he eats. He lies down next to it on the brown tiles and just breathes. A reaction you know is also not normal. You reach over pet his head and then go get the paper towels. It must be the hot weather, you decide.

A couple days go by and you notice Bug has stopped eating. You aren't sure what to make of it. You remember his weird throw up and wonder if something is wrong. When he becomes extremely lethargic and stops responding to people petting him you begin to worry and make an appointment with the vet. He barely squirms when you haul him into the cage but still yowls angrily the entire car ride over.

Once at the vet he is taken in quickly. You pick the hefty twenty-two pound white cat up, and put him on the table. The vet you get is female and skinny with a tiny accent of some sort. When she starts feeling Bug's neck he puffs up, which makes him look like a giant cotton ball. You can't help but smile at that. It's the worst he will do besides yowl. You only ever heard him growl once in your life and he has

never hissed. He is pretty even tempered. The vet moves on to feeling around his stomach area for any swollen organs. When she is done with that she sticks a thermometer up his butt. He has the most violated look in his green eyes. She checks his teeth which are in horrible shape. You and your mom don't agree in shelling out a hundred dollars on cleaning your pet's teeth. Lastly she takes his blood. When she is done he just lies down like he has no energy to protest. It isn't like him.

"Right now he looks pretty good aside from his teeth. The blood work will take about an hour so why don't you bring him home and I'll call you if I find anything wrong. Give him wet food for now because it won't hurt his teeth as much and that might be why he's not eating," she says, while leaning back against the table

"Ok, thanks," you respond. You put the cat back into his cage and carry him out into the front room. You pay his bill at the center island, buy some cat food from them, and drive home. Later you get a phone call from the vet, which you have to jump out of the shower to answer.

"You need to bring the cat in right now for hospitalization," she tells you. "His kidney levels are astronomical."

"What does that mean?" you ask, clutching your towel tighter around you.

"When we tested his blood we found abnormalities with two elements in his kidneys. One is called Blood Urea Nitrogen or BUN, the other is Creatinine. Both of these are waste products excreted through the kidneys that we can measure. Basically the normal range in a cat for BUN is 14-36. Your cat's level is at 200. The normal range for Creatinine is between point six and two point four. Your cat is at 20. He needs to

come in and stay so we can get those numbers down.”

“How expensive is that going to be?” you ask unable to even comprehend fully what you’re hearing. You faintly notice that you are dripping water all over the floor.

“It will be around fifty dollars a night, plus an extra 40 for another blood test at the end of his stay and extra for food.”

“What if I can’t afford that?” You are calculating numbers in your head and thinking about how much money you have in the bank. You’ve been saving some money for when you get out of college but you didn’t have that much.

“Then you should consider putting him down because without it he will die,” the vet pauses. “His kidneys are failing.”

“I’ll call you back shortly and let you know.” You hang up, call your mother and tell her you need to pull your emergency money out of her lockbox because Bug is going to the hospital. He is there five days and his numbers still don’t get down to the normal levels but you run out of money. They tell you he will have to come in every week for fluids which helps slow down the process of his numbers going back up.

Almost ten years ago your sister Corinne’s high school friend had a cat that kept having kittens. She had a new litter and you wanted to see them. You wanted a kitten so badly and you knew your mom was caving. Corinne was going to see them and agreed to take you with her.

Her friend lived in a ghetto apartment area, or as ghetto as a suburban apartment complex can get. The buildings were in ratty shape and the kids there ran wild. It was a short walk from your own house and

you made it on a chilly day at the end of March. You stayed as close to your sister as you could, thinking up horrible scenarios of what could possibly happen to you in the complex. Some crazy old lady might chase you down the street, or a bunch of kids might try and beat you up...

Eventually you made it to the townhouse. You were so relieved. Corinne knocked on the door and her friend Mary opened it. She was a skinny girl with a nest of curly dark red hair. They talked for a couple minutes, while you shifted your feet back and forth getting impatient. Mary walked back inside and came out with a kitten no bigger than a mouse. She placed it in the palm of your hand.

You stared at him in awe. You had never seen a cat that small before. He was a tiny ball of white with a massive black spot of fur on his forehead that looked like an ink blot on a piece of paper. His tail was thin as a needle and shorter than the length of your finger. He looked up at you with big green eyes and started mewling. It was such a soft sound you could barely hear it. It's almost as if he knew you were his mama.

You wish you could say you felt the same, that it was love at first sight, and you knew he was the one for you, but it wasn't so. There were a couple of other kittens you liked better. They were pure white and very playful. They climbed up your back and sat on your shoulder. You told Corinne you wanted one of those.

A couple months later when the kittens were old enough to leave their mother Corinne told you her friend was keeping the white ones but that you could have the almost white one you had held. Your mom drove you to pick him up. On the way home you carried him wrapped in a knitted green baby blanket. "Better almost white than nothing," you thought.

You kept him in the blue half bathroom downstairs off the foyer. Your dad had put up a screen door to keep the kitten separated from the older cat, who didn't like other animals in his territory. Bug thought of the screen door as an obstacle that he was determined to get around. If you left him and went into the family room where he could still see you he'd try and come too. He backed up, took a running leap and launched himself at the screen door. Once attached to the door he'd try to climb over it even though it was impossible. Soon he would realize he couldn't get down. Stuck on the door he'd start screaming. When you ran back in the foyer and found him you laughed. You couldn't help it; he looked so distraught. You opened the door and gently pulled him off then cradled him to your chest and sat down. You placed him in your lap and started rubbing him. He purred and curled up and went to sleep. After multiple occurrences of this event you finally admitted your kitten wasn't the brightest crayon in the crayon box.

You have a long weekend off from college in September and decide you want to go home. As you walk through the door, dragging your laundry basket and computer case behind you, Bug runs up and sniffs you. Putting your stuff down, you lean over to pet him but he jerks away. He sticks his nose in the air and walks away. You laugh. Bug does this every time you come home from college. He's mad at you for leaving so he denies you. You shut the door and cart your stuff into the living room. Sitting down on the love seat you stretch and then wait. Not even five minutes go by this time before you see a white head peer around the side of the couch. A soft meow spurts out of his mouth. Then

he comes over and jumps up onto your lap, lies down, and purrs like a freight train. You pet him and kiss his head, but can't help wonder how many more times you're going to be able to come home to him. Corinne has been sending you pictures and videos of him every day while you've been at college. He's been acting so normal lately; it's hard to believe he's slowly dying.

About a year after you got Bug he was still a tiny thing. He had been allowed out of the bathroom by then. It was your birthday and you were getting pizza for dinner. You also were allowed to stay home from school as was tradition. You hunted up your baby and yanked him out from under the bed. Corinne started calling him Little Bug recently. It was so much better than Spot which is what his original owners had named him. Corinne thought he looked like a bug sometimes which was true. You carried him down into the family room and laid him on his back between your legs. He gave you his you're ridiculous look then closed his eyes and slept like that. You thought it was the cutest thing. You picked him up brought him close to your face and made kissing noises at him. He opened his eyes again and licked you square on the lips. You laid him down on your laugh again and smiled. He kissed you because it was your birthday you had decided.

It's in middle of January. You've been on Christmas break from college since December. You crawl out of bed and slip on your slippers. The hardwood is freezing but necessary given the way your cat sheds. You are about to go downstairs when your phone rings. You answer it. It's your mom.

“Hey honey, what are you doing?” she asks. She always gets bored at work and calls you or one of your other sisters.

“I just got up,” you answer. You walk down the stairs and look for your cat. He’s sleeping on a blanket in the chair. You go over and pet him.

“Bug didn’t eat this morning,” your mom tells you.

You stop petting him for a second and just breath. You feel your stomach churn. It’s the call you’ve been waiting for, the one you’ve been dreading for the past six months. “He didn’t eat any of it?” you manage to say.

“He ate a couple bits but that’s about it.”

“Ok well we can try again tomorrow. Maybe he just doesn’t feel well.” You are praying internally that it doesn’t have anything to do with his kidneys but you know. For the next few days anything he eats he throws right back up. He’s not drinking much water if any. He barely moves all day and when you pet him he doesn’t even lift his head. The only thing that can make him purr is sleeping in your bed while you pet him. You can’t stand seeing him like this, knowing he’s starving.

You’re back at the vet’s again. The wooden benches for customers, the tile floor, which you assume is supposed to be a burgundy color, the center island jutting out into the room, and multiple plain off white doors that lead to examination rooms, have become a familiar sight. Your two older sisters and mother are with you this time. Your little sister didn’t feel like coming; not her cat, not her problem. Your dad couldn’t make it because he’s working, like always.

Amy, the oldest, came straight from work. She sits down next to the cage. She's frowning and messing with her purse. The cat starts meowing angrily. You open the front panel.

"Hey Amy, stick your hand in there and pet him. It makes him feel better to know he's not alone," you instruct. She does.

Your second oldest sister Corinne stands to the left of Amy and keeps quiet. She was home with you today as she has been every day while you've been on vacation. Your mom, who looks like you and Amy, goes up to the counter to pay and make arrangements for afterwards. You aren't working while on winter break from college so you can't afford to pay, but you'll pay her back. When she's done she comes back and rubs your shoulders.

You are determined not to cry in the waiting room. You know there are other people here but you hardly notice them. Just knowing they are there though keeps your eyes dry. You hate crying in front of strangers. Bug's not yowling any more. You sit down on the other side of the big white cage and rest your arms on top of it. You mentally reassure yourself you are doing the right thing. He's suffering; this is for the best. Knowing it doesn't stop you from wanting to bawl though.

"Spot," A vet calls out from one of the doors. She is different from the one you saw six months ago in June. She's shorter and her hair isn't as long. It is a similar dirty blonde color though.

You close the cat door, pick up the cage, and lug it into the examination room. A short wooden bench is up against one of the side walls. There are other doors leading to other rooms. A large metallic table takes up most of the room. There is a tissue box on the wooden bench.

You stare at it for a moment. It might as well be sneering “You’re going to need me.” The worst part is you know you will.

You put the cage on the metal table and open the door. The cat doesn’t move as you knew he wouldn’t. He hates being in the cage but he’d rather be in it than facing the vet. You grab the back of the cage and tip it forward, then grab the blanket he’s lying on and drag it out. Halfway out of the cage Bug realizes what’s happening and stands up, whips around and tries to run back in. You grab him around the middle and drag him back out. Then you quickly put the cage on the floor so he can’t see it. His white hairs cling to your clothes but it doesn’t bother you. In fact, you wish he’d shed on you more so you’d have more to hold on to. You’d gladly rub his hair over all the clothes you own if you could have more years with him.

You rearrange the fleece blanket you brought. Bug loves fleece; you can always find him curled up in one on the couch. He had been sleeping on this one all day. It’s blue with brown and black flowers on it. Once you get it spread out you maneuver Bug so he’s on it all the way. He’s staring at you expressionlessly. You kiss his head and pet him reassuringly.

“It’s ok baby,” you whisper to him. “You’re going to feel all better soon. You are just going to fall asleep.” You can’t seem to hold back your tears anymore. You notice Corinne is crying in the corner as well. Your mom comes over and starts rubbing your shoulders again and Amy comes and pets the cat too.

The vet, who had been standing quietly by the door, steps forward. She smiles gently.

"I'm so sorry guys," she says. "What we are going to do is try to stick the needle in his back leg. If we can't find the vein we will have to shave some of the hairs there and then do it again. Some things I should warn you about so you are not surprised later. Sometimes after the cat dies you will still be able to see his chest rising and falling. This is called Agonal Breathing and he won't really be breathing. It's just a physiological effect of the muscles relaxing. Also he may empty his bowels and bladder when he dies because the muscles there relax too. Do you have any questions?" She doesn't move when she talks. Just stands there like a statue.

"I read on the internet that you can give him a sedative first to help keep him calm," Corinne says from her spot by the wall.

"Yeah we can do that. Let me go get it and I'll be right back." She leaves through the side door and comes back a minute later with the shot. We move away from the table while she gives him the sedative. When she's done she turns around. "That should take a few minutes to kick in. I'll leave you guys alone with him until it's time."

You and your sisters swarm around him and pet him and croon sweet nothings at him. Your mom is still rubbing your shoulders, the strong beam of support she's always been. You can see Bug start to zone out. His pupils dilate, and his head slowly falls down to his paws as if he doesn't have the energy to support it anymore.

You remember Bug in these moments.

Bug the mighty bee hunter. When he was little he thought of bees as a toy, and when he heard them buzzing he'd lift his head and

watch. Then he'd chase them. He ran into walls, jumped into screens, leaped into the air, and finally caught and ate them. One summer he was chasing a bee around the dining room, leaping into the air and swatting it with his paws. During this process the bee stung him and disappeared. Bug laid down on the floor and licked his paw for a bit. He left the bees alone after that.

Bug the menace. Bug decided that Gray, the older cat, and his humans would be excellent playmates. He chased Gray around the house attacking his tail. He would jump off the living room furniture and land on Gray. He'd push Grey away from his food and eat it instead. He would lie on the stairs and when someone came around the corner he'd swat at them with his paws. When your mom went over to pet him in the mornings he'd nip her fingers when she wasn't paying attention. He was a little bit of a bully.

Bug, master of the plastic bags. Every time your mother came home from the grocery store she would sort the food. She put away everything for the fridge first and put all the stuff that went in the pantry in a pile. She would throw the plastic bags into a pile on the floor as she emptied them. Bug would creep into the kitchen and pounce onto the closest bag. After he chewed on it for a moment he would then pounce on another and another and so on. When your mom started picking up the bags he would plop down on one so she couldn't get it. She let him have until he got bored and left it alone, then she'd put it with the others.

The vet comes back in followed by his favorite nurse. She has been the one looking at him every week and giving him fluids. She's

older, probably late forties judging by the wrinkles and lines on her face. She's a sweet and has always been optimistic about Bug's condition. She hurries over to Bug and starts petting him. She helps the vet maneuver him onto his side and smiles sadly at you.

He's sprawled out now, giving the vet easy access to his leg. She tries to get the needle into his vein but can't find it. She walks over to a table with a bunch of random vet supplies on it and grabs a razor. She comes back and shaves off some of the hair on his leg and tries again.

"I'm so sorry buddy," she says softly as she slips the needle in.

You see the Bug's breathing slow down and you think about how lucky you are to have had him in your life. He has been a good friend. He loves you unconditionally and trusts you to take care of him. In his last days you were the only one who could bring him happiness, and you will hold on to that always.

The vet listens to his heart when you can't see him breathing anymore. His eyes are still open.

"He's dead," she announces. She cuts off some locks of his hair and gives them to each of you. Then she brings you out the back door so you don't have to walk through the waiting room.

When you get home you walk through the door. Your cat doesn't come to sniff and greet you. His head doesn't peer around the couch five minutes later. He doesn't jump up on the love seat and lay in your lap. You feel as empty as the house seems without him.

Washed
Vala Kjarval



Villains Beware
Jackie Raineri

The view was magnificent from the top of the tallest building. He could see the mountains in the distance, the white caps almost fading in with the clouds behind. The wind was blowing him forcefully, but he stood his ground at the edge, hands on his hips, cape flying behind him.

He stood there until dusk, when the first stars appeared in the sky and villains became apparent against the city lights. He could see the streetwalkers taking cards or those vending from the streets handing out the cards for great shows, great women, something no person should miss—these great strip clubs of Las Vegas.

He believed that villains would no longer walk the streets when they realized he existed, but he was no superhero. He was just a regular guy in a costume—one that seemed as fake as all the shows in Vegas. But he would soon show those lousy villains that there was justice in the world. He would become the next Batman.

Dusk became dark, and now it was his time. He pulled his cape close to his body as he jumped face first toward to dooming ground. How many people had jumped from this building thinking they could fly? He wondered, as the pavement became too close and he spread his arms, hoping the cape would work.

Exhibit Poster
Mia Cruz



Revived
Emily Griffin

You suggest that we take a walk through the cemetery. We've been driving around aimlessly all night and it's a little past twelve. We've run out of things to talk about and places to go, so I agree against my better judgment. Even in the daytime I get slightly nervous walking through graveyards, it's the feeling of being watched accompanied by that solemn silence that gets me.

You park your car in a shadowy spot by the train station. A train beeps loudly as I open my door; it jerks and squeals away, slowly heading for Grand Central. It's June and we graduated high school a few days ago. We walk up the street toward the graveyard shoulder to shoulder; you're standing closer to me than you normally would but I don't think I mind. I ended it with you six months ago, trying to break the news to you easily, not wanting to be too harsh or truthful. We were together for more than three years, so cutting things off with you was difficult, something that I'd never want to go through again. I hope we can somehow salvage a friendship out of the mess we created, so as we walk up the path a little too close to each other that's what I tell myself, we're just trying to be friends again, that's all. We've spent cautious time together these past few weeks, driving around, playing Frisbee, grabbing a bite, trying to do things that friends would do. It's been half a year since we were together, that has to be enough time spent apart. As we're walking toward the graveyard gates though, I can't help but wonder why I'm alone with you at midnight staring in at headstones.

The first thing I notice is that there aren't any lights in the

cemetery. The orange glow of street lamps only illuminates the stone entrance; I stare deeper past the gates but I can only see vague outlines of the rows of grave markers. I can feel my heartbeat quicken and I'm immediately nervous and shaky but I follow you in regardless.

"It's so dark" I whisper softly, as if the bodies of the dead will wake if I'm too loud.

"Scared yet?" you ask mockingly; I can see a mischievous glint in your eyes that reminds me of when we were together. I respond with a reluctant smile and keep walking. The moon is only a crescent tonight and as we walk deeper I notice how it casts glittery light across the sea of markers ahead of us. There are sculptures of sorrowful angels watching over the yards of graves, and in the barley-there light of the moon they're almost coming to life, watching our descent into the heart of the place.

I suddenly see a pale figure walking ahead of us. I can barely make it out. Further up the curve of the path I swear there's a human form bobbing away quickly, a pale blur in the moonlight. I grab your hand without thinking, it's hot against my clammy skin and almost as soon as I touch your palm I let go. You look at me with a wild hope in your eyes and in this moment I know you planned it all, this whole adventure has been thought out. When I turn back the distant form has disappeared, and I can't even be positive I saw anything in the first place. This trip isn't fun anymore and I beg you to let us leave.

"I'm serious, let's get out of here! This was a ridiculous idea anyways." You laugh at me but agree and we quickly walk out, climbing the steady incline as fast as possible. All the while I'm glancing nervously

over my shoulder, making sure we're not being followed by I don't know what.

We make it back to your car and sit on the trunk, the warm metal heats my legs. Sitting there wordlessly, we look up into the sky. I'm surprised by how many stars are out tonight, and how bright they are even through the lights of the city. I notice after a while that you're looking at me instead of the stars, and I turn my head to meet your gaze.

You move one of your tanned hands onto my leg, and the contrast is harsh against my pale skin. I should make you move your hand away, I should tell you that I just want to stay friends, but I don't. I let you rest your hand on my leg and when you move your other hand to find the bare skin of my back I let you do that too. You kiss me on the back of your car and I let you, maybe I even want you to. I don't know anymore. Your fingers dig into me. I've forgotten how strong you are and I wince a little, but I still don't pull away. Our relationship should be dead, but as you dig your sharp nails into my sides I can feel it being revived, and I let it happen.

Nostalgia
Vala Kjarval



Primate

Lena Gluck

So one day I do this research paper
for an introductory level course,
nothing big, I mean it
doesn't even cover real topics or anything
only it's got a million things
that would interest your ears right off.
Anyway, my assignment was to look into
primates and how we treat 'em, which
as it turns out, isn't as pretty as the
packaged placebo and plastic covers over pink
polish that we get out of it. So

I have some folks read my
words, and they're all upset,
rambling and grumbling, and making
promises and threats and none
of it comes to nothing until one
night a guy comes up all crazy
with a plan he got from a
god damned internet chat room
he brings this guy who doesn't
even eat normal, so you know he's hard core,
I mean, you gotta figure, so he finds
this old gray research building and one guy
starts talking about how he
only likes science when it offends his mom,
which we thought was pretty funny, but it was
cold and our jackets weren't dark, and everyone was all worried.

The security was nothing a monkey couldn't handle, though, which I said,
but
then an argument broke out
over if it was so easy, then why
didn't they get themselves out, huh?
And if they were too stupid then why were we doing this anyway? One
guy says that chimps aren't monkeys, they're apes, and we're both
primates and ethics shouldn't
even be based on intelligence, and then this girl from my Ethics class
starts arguing classic theories, and everyone got in a fuss until
a chimpanzee signed to us that she was in pain, SAD, CRY, and
missed her brother, and wanted some SWEET FRUIT, and

wanted to know our names, WHO YOU? and if we brought a snack,
FOOD?
that we seemed NICE, and did we have TOYS? BLANKETS?

only none of us spoke American Sign Language, so
it didn't mean so much, but we were all in awe
watching her watch us, until some lights came on
and someone says we should get the hell out, and I
ask, aren't we here to bring the chimp with us? But everybody
is already heading out the metal door, and Ethics girl
starts explaining that throughout history it's been up
to the abused to earn their own rights, and another
guy justifies it all by noting that saving one won't save
them all, and the cops were probably coming, so we
sure as shit couldn't help any chimp if we were in jail.
The hard core one got annoyed, talking about how
we would probably be tried as terrorists or something, but

I wasn't listening to any of them anyway, because
the chimp behind the thick bars of the cage was
signing BYE as we ran like humans,
and I figured she must be thinking
that we live up to our reputation:
we were those monkeys... those primates, who were smart
enough to know how to free ourselves, but
too stupid to free anyone else

and with that thought bouncing the walls
of my skull, I figured I had better get down
the stairwell. I wanted to head back home,
where I could print out my paper, and
never look at it again.

Harpa
Vala Kjarval



Your Fated Family Reunion

Kate Raffte

You have the type of family that gathers at least once a month. Everyone is greeted and dismissed with bear hugs and sloppy kisses on the cheek. You play ball with your cousins, gossip with your aunts, and burp with your uncles. This day, however, is the day of your mother's family reunion. You go into this with the realization that you probably won't know at least half of the people there. When you get there, you and your brother stick by your mom's side like newborn puppies.

As you walk onto the yellowing grass of a small backyard, you size up the guests who have already arrived. So far, only about six people look vaguely familiar. A group of men are struggling to erect a hunter green canvas tent while a cluster of women stand next to them, chirping out directions that don't seem to help. Mismatched plastic lawn chairs are clustered in a big circle around several wooden tables. You wonder when the hors d'oeuvres will be served because you are starving.

You turn to your brother who looks about as awkward as you feel. He's only four years, six months, two days, and 16 hours younger (give or take), and he still looks painfully uncomfortable in his own skin. He towers over you like a gorilla, arms dangling at his sides, then crossed in front of him, then back at his sides, then fiddling with his ear. Your mother encourages Gorilla Arms to help the men set the tent up before the inevitable rain soaks the soil. His clumsiness is too painful to watch, so you respectfully look away.

Your mother pulls you by the arm like a helpless seven-year-old and introduces you to her assortment of cousins. You hear the same

phrases over and over.

“Is that really you?”

“My, how you’ve grown!”

“I remember when you were this tall!”

Yes, it’s really me. I know; I was planning on being three foot four my entire life. And I remember when you had more hair and less wrinkles.

You don’t say these things out loud, or else your mother would lay into you about your newly acquired rudeness and how college has changed you. It’s August and you’re already sick of that talk. More of your relatives show up and you sigh with relief for the fact that you actually know them. You settle down in the circle of chairs next to your bird-like aunt and chat to her about your shitty nine-dollar-an-hour cashier job and other unimportant undergraduate woes. Someone brings out platters of food and you dig in, but in a very lady-like manner so as not to embarrass your refined mother.

Some distant relative offers you a glass of wine. Hell fucking yeah is your immediate thought, but your eyes flick to your mother. Her judgmental gaze bores into your skull, her mouth a tight, straight line. You think back to the time she had to pick you up from the hospital the first weekend of your freshman year when you poisoned your used-to-be thin body with three wine coolers. You politely nod.

When the relative brings out the glass, you hold it under Gorilla Arms’ nose and lament over the fact that he still has to wait four more years, taking a long, sweet gulp. Sucker. He reverts to his usual defense tactics and calls you an imbecile while punching your shoulder. It hurts

more than you're willing to admit, but you shake it off and tell him to up his reps at the gym next time. You receive another painful punch.

Your high school gym teacher joins the group out back. He married your mother's cousin years ago, but you always get weirded out seeing him away from glossy gymnasium floors and blue tumbling mats. He asks you how college is going and you sip your wine, telling him you're going to school to be a lawyer and he raises his eyebrows, clearly impressed. You leave before he can ask any questions that may blow your cover.

You drag Gorilla Arms with you to refill your wine glass and so he can sip on some Hawaiian Punch. The kitchen is littered in eleven different shades of beige and you promise yourself you'll never get pulled into buying tubs of paint called Burning Oak or Tantalizing Tan. You try to get your brother to chug a beer when no one is looking, but he's a sissy and wimps out. This is for the time you went through my phone, even though you wouldn't get me texting, MOM you think as you pour your glass to the brim.

You find some more of your cousins through the threshold and in the garage. You and Gorilla Arms harass one of the more annoying cousins who is bear-hugging her backpack. She refuses to tell anyone what's in it and you decide it is full of either explosives or porn. Ultimately, you and Gorilla Arms chase her around and steal it, only to find it's full of library books. How sweet. Suddenly, you realize your glass has magically emptied itself.

Someone whose name you think you know is in the kitchen checking the oven and you make small talk with her, complimenting how

nice it smells while impatiently waiting for her to leave so you can fill up. You're of age, but your mother likes to count how many drinks you've had and you don't need anyone spying on you. She leaves and you quickly pour some more, thinking and here's for the time you called me a hussy in eighth grade for wearing a mini skirt, MOM. You only spill a little bit on the table, but contemplate not cleaning up your mess. You cave, covering your ass in case karma really does exist.

You check your phone and almost piss yourself with excitement that your new man has texted you. You aren't dating yet. He's an intelligent guy and always one-ups you with his wit and confidence, but that's one of the reasons you like him so much. You think back to the time earlier in the summer when you told your mom about your crush on him. You two were lounging on your bed together when she told you no one wants the cow if they can get the milk for free. You didn't even tell her about giving out any milk.

You mosey around the party, trying to locate your mother to tell her the good news. When you find her sitting with a group of cousins, you change your path. You're not in the mood to talk to them about Ukrainian cooking, but your mother sees you and walks over.

"How's my Datsie?" she asks.

I tell her I'm fine and clue her in about the man situation. She helps you think of something smart to say back to his latest text, but you find yourself modifying her G-rated response.

"I'll have to meet him," she says. "Maybe this one will stick around."

You will never cease to be amazed by her ability to subtly

put you down with a smile on her face and you wonder if she does it intentionally. You decide not to call her out on it this time. She returns to her table of cousins.

After sending back a witty response to Smart Ass, you realize that you're going to actually piss yourself if you don't find the bathroom within the next forty three seconds.

Once you locate the toilet and lock the door, you realize you made the unfortunate decision to wear a halter-top romper. As you struggle to untie the strings that are knotted behind your neck, you do the pee-pee dance trying to hold it in for another minute or so. Finally, you get it untied— sweet release. It takes you longer to tie it all back up than it does to finish off your glass.

You inspect your reflection in the mirror as you wash your hands. You look good today and you know it. You snap a quick picture on your phone, contemplating whether or not to send it to Smart Ass. You didn't exactly pull off the coy look you were going for, but its good enough and you send it out into cyber space. Of course you check your phone every seven seconds after that, wondering if your picture is pitching a tent in his shorts.

You strike up a conversation with your non-conformist aunt while inspecting her gray hairs. You wonder why she hasn't dyed it yet, and then it occurs to you that hair dye must be too ostentatious for her. She won't even let her children wear deodorant.

You take a long, slow sip from your glass and ignore the fact that some sloshed over the rim and onto your hand. Aunt Judgment gives you a very stern glance and you mentally give her the finger and excuse

yourself. More wine enters the dark recesses of your stomach.

You spot your mom's blonde head at one of the plastic chair clusters and run over and hug her. She is surprised by your strange display of affection and awkwardly pats the side of your head. Staring at the sloshing glass of wine in your hand, she quietly asks you how many you've had since the last time she saw you.

"Not enough," you say.

She gravely says your name—your full name—as if it's a question. You mimic her humorless gaze and say hers too—middle name and all—and she reaches for your glass. You run off before she can admonish you like a child. You'd rather lose your dignity in a more amusing fashion.

You find Gorilla Arms in the front yard with the cousin with the library books. Someone has set up the game ladder ball and you two decide to play. Library Books wants to be your partner, but you tell her she must be this tall to play and you hold your hand just inches above her head.

Your brother finds two people to play against while you go inside to get more wine. Unfortunately, the bottle is now empty, so you sneakily uncork another, pretending to be looking at family portraits that litter the walls whenever someone passes through. After you pour another glass, you take a big gulp, and top it off, thinking and this, dear mother, is for the time you gave me a 10 o'clock curfew when I was 18 and rattled my bones when I came home at 10:08.

You notice your equilibrium is a bit off as your shoulder comes in contact with the side of the garage. You stealthily peek over your shoulder to see if anyone notices. Of course Aunt Judgment does and

you lock eyes with her steely gaze. You do the move from Meet the Parents, pointing to your eyes, and then pointing to your aunt's. She doesn't think its funny, but you laugh like you're paid the big bucks to be your own audience.

Of course your brother has picked your old gym teacher's kids to play against. You grumble under your breath and spill a little more wine as you grab your team's balls and toss them at the ladder. You two lose, mostly because of you, and your brother calls you a drunken imbecile. Good one, bro. You yell something rude over your shoulder at the two blonde brats who are dancing around in circles because they showed you up in ladder ball.

You go in search of the bathroom again. It has become increasingly more difficult to maneuver your romper and the strings. As you pee, you check your phone. One new message. It's Smart Ass and he definitely approves of your last picture. He has rebutted with one of his own looking cute as a cucumber. You make your best cross-eyed fishy face in the mirror and snap off another picture, sending it without a second thought. You feel like you're in eighth grade with all the mirror pictures, but it amuses you. You remember a time in high school when your mother warned you against sending risky pictures. You reminded her you actually needed a cell phone in order to do that. She didn't get your joke.

You find your numbskull brother talking to a portly cousin and you ignorantly chime in on their conversation about law school. They stare at you briefly, and you notice that your voice sounds much louder than anyone else's. That's probably just because your ears are really

close to your mouth, but you shut up. You plop down into a chair next to Library Books and drift in and out of consciousness as she rambles about something uninteresting. You tell her she was adopted and stand up. She says she knows, and you stumble away, thinking this time you should probably get a glass of water. You look for Gorilla Arms so he can do it for you, but give up after several seconds. You can do this all by yourself.

As you trip over the threshold and into the kitchen, you fumble around, trying to locate a glass. Your great-second-aunt-twice-removed-through-marriage offers you some help. She retrieves a sizable plastic cup out of a cupboard you swear you already checked and fills it with ice water. You gratefully gulp it down and set it on the counter, staring at her wordlessly until she fills it again.

You hold it with both hands and retreat out to the crowded backyard to tell your mother it's time to go home. She takes one look at you and shakes her head. You shake yours back. She grabs your arm. You grab hers. She sighs, pulling her keys out of her purse and saying her goodbyes. You don't bother with politeness.

You climb into the back of the Jeep, not even bothering to fight Gorilla Arms for shotgun. You ask him where he's been all your life and he shoots you a quizzical glance, telling you to sober up before mother bursts a gasket. As your mom pulls away, waving from the front seat as your relatives turn into ants in the distance, you pull out your phone and scroll through your contacts before you find Smart Ass. You don't give a second thought before you hit the green button.

He answers after an acceptable amount of rings and you

appreciate the smile in his voice. You slur some words into the mouthpiece about having a stinking great time. He laughs, asking you how many glasses of wine you've had. You tell him nine or maybe four, or sixteen, or maybe you just had grape juice. He tells you you're cute and you say shucks.

You sing him your own off-key version of Augustana's Boston, informing him about your family vacation to Boston the next day. That's the first time you realize you'll have to deal with your mother for a solid nine-hour car ride. She turns around, yelling at you to leave the poor boy alone before he changes his mind about you.

Finally, you return home and your sandal catches the edge of the sidewalk as you walk up to the front porch. You look behind you. Red car in driveway. Shit. Dad's home. You think of the time freshman year how he found out you drank and didn't speak to you for several months. You were only 18 then, but you've been smart enough to steer clear from alcohol in his presence. You already know he's going to take your mother's side, as always, and rip you a new one.

You try to pull yourself together, taking slow, deliberate steps, making sure you walk in a straight line and don't bump into walls. They can be tricky. You suddenly can't remember how you possibly became this inebriated. Who makes wine that tastes like white grape juice? You fucking love white grape juice.

As soon as you walk into the living room, you know your dad can smell the wine on your breath. You slap a big goofy grin on your face and run over to give him a hug. Dad, you yell. I love you! He shakes his head and shoots your mother a glance. She answers his silent gestures with,

Too much wine.

“I have not had too much wine,” you say, just a bit too loudly.

Your mother tells you to lower your voice and you tell her God wouldn't have given you the ability to yell if he didn't want you to use it. Your dad snorts and turns it into a fake cough after a swift elbow to the ribs from your mother. You're surprised to find he thinks your uncharacteristic drunkenness is amusing, but he knows better than to oppose his wife. You leave the living room in search of blueberries.

Once you locate the blueberries and a tall glass of water, you retreat up to your room and call the poor man once again. He is amused as he informs you it is only eight o'clock. He requests that you give him a few hours to get on your level and promises he'll call back. You call him back six times within the next half hour and Gorilla Arms takes your phone after having listened in on too many painful phone calls. You try to get it back, but your arms feel like rice pudding. You grow bored alone and phone-less and you venture back downstairs, tip toeing down each step as you listen for your mother's voice.

You find your father sitting in his chair in the living room watching television. You stand in front of him, blabbering and blocking his view. He points the remote at you while pressing mute, but you keep chattering on. You inform him that Smart Ass is visiting next weekend and you attempt to make him pinky promise he won't embarrass you. He acts horrified that you would even think he would do that. You remind him about the time he repeatedly stroked a fake chicken in front of a boy. And the time he wore your mother's clip on hoop earring through his nose in front of a boy. And the time he answered the door with a meat cleaver in

his right hand in front of a boy.

“And those things are embarrassing?” he asks.

Your brother comes into the living room holding your phone, a goofy grin on his face. You yell at him to give it back and he assures you all he did was take your man’s number. You ask him why and he simply says: damage control. Your father shakes his head, which is now in his hand, shoulders bouncing up and down. You decide it is time for bed. This is the first time you realize your mother is alone in her room, probably watching television and fuming. You ask Gorilla Arms to follow you upstairs to make sure you don’t fall.

“Why would you fall?”

“Because I’m holding blueberries and water.”

He still won’t help. You manage to make it up the fourteen steps in less than six minutes flat. Once you reach your room, you realize your water glass, which was full once you started your ascent, is now empty.

Your brother wakes you up at eight AM sharp for breakfast. You groan and hold your head as you piece together the previous day. Your parents are going to kill you. Your mom loves to hold off on her confrontations, which gives her time to stew and come up with snarky comments that slash you. You slowly pull on your sweatshirt and slippers, enjoying your last several seconds of freedom. As you trudge down the stairs, you say a silent prayer. You slip into your chair at the kitchen table and your mother vehemently asks how hung-over you are.

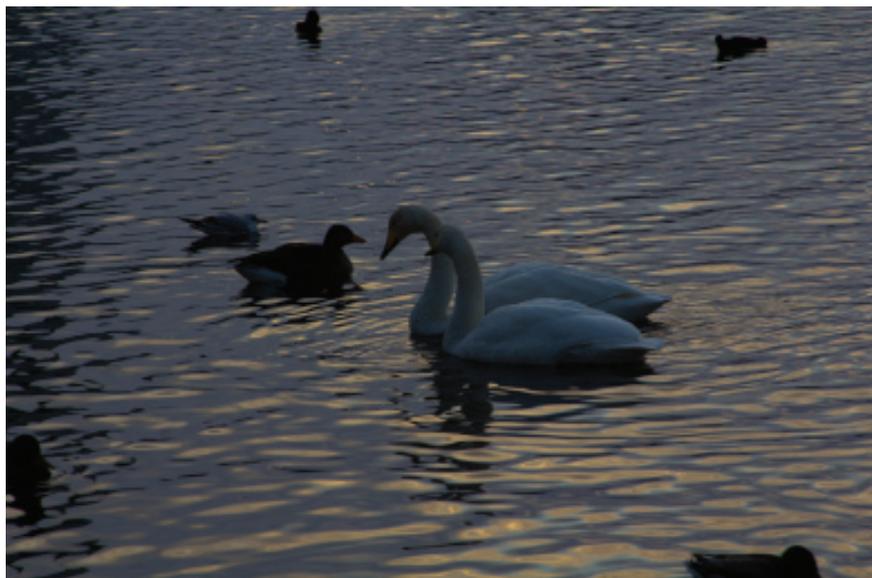
You don’t even get a chance to answer her before your father comes over, squishes your cheeks between his palms, and plants a big, uncharacteristic kiss on your forehead. You throw your arms over

his shoulders, making sure to lock eyes with your mother, giving her a how-do-you-like-them-apples smile.

Of course you knew your mother was going to spout out an offensive and abrasive lecture the entire way to Boston. You didn't know then, however, that the vacation would push you two together and that you would bond over buffalo chicken macaroni and cheese. You didn't know she'd buy you the jade bracelet from the little shop in China Town that you would go on to wear each following day. You didn't know your heart would fondly fill up when she donned her bright yellow poncho during the ghost tour. You didn't know she'd give you that tragic look as she kissed your forehead after you made it squish with wrinkles, just the way she likes it, right before you left for college.

And you didn't know then that no matter how many times you disappoint her, no matter how much she makes you cry, no matter how much you break each other's hearts, she'll always be the one to sew yours back up.

Tjörnin, Reykjavík
Vala Kjarval



Good Fortune

Emma Kinna

Abby Rush couldn't believe she'd ended up driving her ex to a funeral.

Scratch that.

Abby Rush couldn't believe she'd ended up driving her ex to a funeral that wasn't his own.

It had already been a difficult morning. She'd had a hell of a time finding anything black in her closet and finally had to borrow a blouse from her mother.

She was on the phone as she ruffled through her jewelry box, looking for any black or silver accessories.

"Phyllis," she said, "I am a wreck. I'm going to my first funeral alone and I'm not even wearing my own black!"

"Can't your sister go with you?"

Abby shook her head, then realized Phyllis couldn't see her. "Erica's in summer school, only it's summer school for smart kids."

"Like science camp?"

"I guess. Anyway, I have miraculously found black earrings, so I'm gonna let you go and head out to lose my funeral virginity."

"I'd go with you if I could." Phyllis and Abby were college friends and their hometowns were hours apart. "And I'm really sorry, Abby."

"It's okay," Abby said honestly. "I really didn't know him too well after graduation." Suddenly, Abby's call-waiting beeped. "I'll talk to you later." Without looking at the number, Abby answered.

And that was her big mistake.

"Hello?"

"I'm surprised you picked up."

It only took a second for Brian's voice to register. She didn't bother saying she hadn't seen the number. "What do you want?" There was no hiding the disgust in her voice.

"Did you hear about Gary?"

"Yeah, I'm on my way to the funeral."

"Did you even know him?"

"I had some classes with him. I want to pay my respects."

"Yeah, I do too."

"I guess—" I'll see you there, Abby would have said.

But Brian interrupted her. "Could I get a ride with you?"

Abby closed her eyes. "Brian."

"I don't want to go alone."

Effortlessly, Abby's mind rattled off all the reasons that this was a bad idea. Sociopathic, manipulative, idiotic, bad in bed...well, the last

one was a lie. In the end, the truth was that Abby didn't want to go alone, either.

And that was how she'd ended up in the same car, and later the same church, as Brian F. Coddard.

"I can't believe it, you know? People our age aren't supposed to die," Brian said. "Was he even 20 yet?"

Abby swallowed. "I don't know. But I mean, he chose his way out."

"What?"

"It was a suicide, wasn't it?"

"It was an accident! He got hit by a car."

Abby pulled into the church parking lot, but couldn't find a spot. "Brian, he got hit by a car because he stepped out into traffic."

"I think that's bullshit. He was probably just crossing the street, it could happen to anyone."

"It wasn't nighttime, he couldn't have not see the cars coming." There weren't a whole lot of busy streets in Abby's town.

"You didn't know Gary as well as I did," Brian said.

Abby stiffened. "You haven't even talked to him since you started working."

"That's not true."

Abby parked in an alley. "Okay," she said. She'd learned long ago not to let herself argue with Brian. They walked toward the church.

"But it really puts things in perspective, doesn't it?" Brian continued. "How fast it can happen, how short life is. How important it is to live without regrets."

Abby grunted in response.

"And let the little things go," he added. He put a hand on her shoulder. "It's so important to take advantage of the good things in life. The fun things."

Abby slapped his hand away. "Don't you touch me! And don't you dare use poor Gary's death as an excuse to try and get laid, you self-entitled prick!" Abby stalked off. "And forget trying to get a ride home from me."

"Are you serious? I didn't even do anything!" Brian called.

"You didn't have to." Abby walked as fast as she could, grateful for her long legs, and soon the front steps of the church came into view. Suddenly, she stopped.

"Alia?!"

"Abby!" Abby's best high school friend ran to her and they hugged. "I'm so glad to see you!"

"I didn't realize you'd be here! I thought you were out of town already."

Alia shook her head. "I stayed behind at the last minute. I felt too horrible not showing up. Maybe I shouldn't have, though."

"Why not?"

"Well—" Alia stopped, wrinkling her nose. "What's he doing here?"

Abby turned to see Brian Coddard steadily approaching.

"Ugh." She rolled her eyes and nudged Alia forward into the church. "Don't even ask."

They got inside and two old women handed them programs.

"What's this?" Abby wondered.

"Are you wearing skull earrings?" Alia whispered as they sat down.

Abby touched one ear self-consciously. "They were the only black ones I had."

"Wearing black to a funeral isn't the law."

"Nobody'll notice," said Abby. She opened the pamphlet in her hand. "Man, that's a lot of Bible verses."

Alia nodded solemnly. "His family's pretty religious. In fact what I was going to say out there was that I guess they're doing a full church service for him, with hymns and everything."

"Oh." Abby gulped. "I've never been to a church service."

"And you think I have?!" Alia was Jewish.

"But you go to Temple," said Abby. "That's gotta be similar."

They watched as more and more people, many of them familiar faces from high school, filled the church. Abby craned her neck to see Brian sitting in the back.

Soon a pastor with a graying beard came to the podium in front of them.

"My friends, we are gathered here to honor the life of our beloved brother, Garrett Sharp, with the hopes that his soul has been happily reunited with God. Let us pray."

As voices rose around her, Abby reached into the purse she'd brought and pulled out a bag of M+M's. She opened it carefully.

"Lord hear our prayer," said the pastor as she popped the first one into her mouth.

Alia nudged her. "Really?"

"What?" Abby whispered.

"This isn't the movie theatre."

Abby shrugged. "I'm just an observer. Gary wouldn't mind."

"Amen," said the pastor.

Alia held out her hand. "Can I have some?"

After the funeral service there was a short time for talking and

snacks in the back of the church. To Abby and Alia's disgust, Brian approached them.

"What a farce," he said.

"They're just worried for his soul," said Alia.

"So suicide's a no-no for Christians?" Abby asked.

Alia's eyebrows shot up. "It was a suicide then?"

"No!" Brian insisted. "It was not."

"Hey guys." The three turned to see Bauer, another friend from high school. Bauer had become a town fixture. He'd skipped on college and now worked at least 3 local jobs. The running joke Abby and Alia made was that immigrants didn't steal jobs— Bauer did.

Now Bauer turned to Brian. Bauer had skipped on college to work, but Brian had dropped out of college to work. Somehow, this made the two natural enemies. "So what, you think it was murder?"

"Of course not. I think it was an accident."

"Pff. Gary wasn't an idiot." Bauer walked off.

"The guy can never say 'bye' or 'see ya' or anything," Brian complained. "Guess he just can't be bothered."

Abby nudged Alia. "You drive here?"

Alia shook her head. "Walked."

"Let's drop off this one," Abby nodded to Brian, "and go to the Diner."

"This one?" Brian demanded.

"You're lucky you're getting a ride home," Abby said.

The Diner was Abby's comfort food sanctuary. It was about 20 minutes outside of town in the middle of nowhere, and it was where Alia and Abby went to have serious conversations.

"Gee, thanks for inviting me," Brian said when they pulled up at his house.

"Bye, Brian," Alia said loudly.

"Bye," he replied, and left.

Abby took a deep breath, remembering a time when she couldn't look at his house without becoming enraged. "I can't believe I gave him a ride," she muttered.

"That's all it was though, right?" Alia asked apprehensively.

"Yes."

"Because Brian's not gonna—"

"Alia, believe me, if I never see Brian F. Coddard again it'll be too soon." She shifted in her seat. "Just thinking about him makes me itch."

"Did you ever get tested?"

Abby shot her a look.

"Hey, none of us know what kind of stuff Brian F. Coddard has stuck his dick into. Maybe it was just the two girls he cheated on you with, but maybe not."

Abby groaned. She and Alia had dubbed him "Brian F. Coddard" just after the break-up, when Alia decided his middle name was Fuck-face. "I try not to think about it. And it's not like I'm screwing anyone."

"But you will."

"I don't know, Alia. Sometimes I worry it'll never happen again."

"Don't give me that. You know it will." Alia lowered the passenger seat mirror and began putting her hair up. "And when it does, do you really want to have to preface it by saying, 'Look, I might have something?'"

Abby snorted. "Yeah, 'I might have something, so if you see any warts while you're down there feel free to stop.'"

"Gross," said Alia. "But really, Abby. Doesn't it ever worry you?"

Abby was silent, and eventually Alia changed the subject.

When they finally pulled into the Diner, the girls noticed a tiny yellow-and-blue striped tent next to the parking lot. Fortunes, \$2, read a sign out front.

"You wanna?" Abby asked.

Alia shrugged. "Why not?"

The fortune teller wore a black, shiny suit, and had bright blue eyes lined heavily with kohl and blue eyeshadow. It took Abby a moment to realize that she couldn't quite tell whether it was a woman or not. There was dark lipstick, slicked-back black hair, and pale, flawless skin along with broad shoulders and a flat torso.

"Would you like to hear your future?" The voice was definitely a male's, deep and smooth.

Abby nodded.

"Please sit, both of you." They sat across from him at a small table.

"I am Khan," he said. "What is it you would like to know?"

"When she's gonna have sex again," Alia said.

Abby rolled her eyes.

"I can tell you when you'll die," Khan offered.

"And how?" Abby asked.

"Yes," said Khan without hesitation.

"I don't—" Alia began.

"Okay." Abby handed Khan the 2 dollars. "Since death seems to be our theme of the day. Tell me."

"You'll die at the end of your life." Khan smiled. "For you, I sense it will be rather young. You'll be 33."

"How?"

"A skydiving accident."

"Wow," said Alia, sounding impressed.

"But don't worry," Khan assured her. "It will be on your honeymoon. You'll have had the happiest day of all, and the night before

you die, you'll have had the best sex of your life."

Abby considered. "Huh. I thought it'd be a car accident."

Khan shook his head. "Definitely not."

"Well all right, I'll take it."

"You'll die like that, or not at all," Khan added.

Abby frowned, but now Khan turned to Alia, who was apparently destined to die at 105, a happy old great-great-grandmother.

"Well now I feel like I got gypped," said Abby.

Khan shrugged. "It's the way of the future. I can only relate it to others, I don't know how to change it." He gestured to a small pile of cards at their end of the table. "Please," he said, "take one. Go, and be at peace."

Abby took a card.

Martin Clank, it read. Fortune-teller, poet, performing and graphic artist.

"See you, Abby," he called as they left.

Abby turned, but they were already out of the tent.

"You know him?" Alia asked.

"No! And I never told him my name."

"Maybe he's a real psychic."

Abby shook her head. "He must have recognized me from somewhere."

"You do stand out. It's the hair," said Alia. Abby's hair was big, thick and wavy. Alia liked to refer to it as '80s hair.

In the Diner, they ordered cheesefries and rehashed the details of the funeral, the phonecall from Brian, and, for the fiftieth time, the details of Abby and Brian's break-up.

"I'm so bored with him," Abby said when they were getting ready to leave.

"Me too," Alia admitted.

Just then, who walked into the Diner but Bauer.

"Hey," Abby said, "what are you doing here?"

Bauer nodded to the kitchen. "Some of us have jobs."

Abby nodded. "I'm avoiding that for as long as possible."

"No way to avoid jobs without avoiding money," said Bauer, pulling on an apron. "Have a good night, Rush."

"Night." Abby paused and stared at him. "I thought you didn't say bye-type stuff."

"Only because it pisses people off. But you never seem to care." Alia smirked at them on her way to the door.

Abby shrugged and followed. She liked to think she didn't care about much.

Circus Rattle
Nathan Valeska



The River Stone
Matthew Harmer

The day started as usual, with Émile and me gathering stones to throw at the dogs on the edge of the village. Believe it or not, we were encouraged to do this; otherwise, the dogs would attack the chickens people kept in their gardens. Mother and I had four ourselves, and I'd started my little campaign when one of our hens had been eaten. Once we had a good armful, we made our way down through the village square, past the two Panzer tanks, and out into the hedgerows. As we passed through the gate, the Oberleutnant gave us a patronizing salute, then began barking out orders to his soldiers.

We found three dogs right away that morning, tearing at a freshly-caught meal in the roots of a large Elm tree. Émile picked out a behemoth of a stone, and flung it weakly at the pack. It landed a few feet short. The dogs ignored it. I picked out a small river stone, smooth and round and no bigger than a pocketwatch. Winding up, I threw with all my might. It landed square between the eyes of the wolfish one; he dropped to his side, stunned, then leapt up and bolted away, yelping sorrowfully. The other two dogs followed as quickly as they could run. Émile went to investigate their catch, but since I wasn't keen to see what they'd been eating, I lingered, picking up the rocks I'd thrown. And that's when I heard something moving behind the hedgerow.

Curious, I began climbing the ancient roots that held the high mound together. I expected to catch a glimpse of a rabbit or badger, but instead, as I peeked over the top of the hedgerow, I found myself looking down the barrel of a rifle. A pair of strong hands dragged me over the top. There were dozens of soldiers there in uniforms I didn't recognize. All around the field were dozens of boxes and silk parachutes.

"Do you live in Ste. Pierre de la Roche, boy?" he asked. His dialect told me they were Canadian. I nodded.

"Good," the soldier said, "how many Germans are in your village?"

"A dozen, maybe, with two tanks. Panzers." We had been lucky; the Germans had overrun Paris well before coming to St. Pierre. The destruction hadn't reached us, so the Vichy government had simply allotted a tank squadron to occupy our village for the past four years.

The soldier began waving for a portly man with a large box who came running. The box was marked in English: Anti-tank mines. He put a

finger to his lips, then lowered me over the top of the hedgerow. Émile watched in horror as the men began setting up for battle, digging into the hedgerows and pointing their guns down the central path. I crossed the road to where Émile was standing by the dogs' meal: a German soldier, one I knew was named Hauptmann. His throat had been slashed, and the dogs had been chewing at his wound. I silently made my way back home, Émile a few steps behind. My hand was clenched around the smooth river stone in my pocket.

At the gate, the Oberleutnant stopped me. He looked angry.

"You have been out hunting dogs, yes?" he asked. I nodded, grasping the stone tightly. Luckily he had let Émile by without a second glance; he had been on the verge of tears. "Good. Perhaps you have seen the soldier Hauptmann?" Of course I had; he was lying dead three kilometres from here. But I shook my head. "You are sure?" he asked, his voice cold and threatening.

"Just a few mangy dogs, mein Herr." He considered me for a moment, a long moment, then turned abruptly and walked away.

Later that afternoon, the tanks suddenly rolled out of the village; there was a series of distant explosions, so my mother and I went down into the cellar. I turned on the radio, hoping to hear the childrens' hour broadcast, but it had been pre-empted; instead, a French newscaster was announcing the day's events. For hours we waited, listening to the broadcast. Then around midnight there was a knock on our cellar door. It was the soldier I'd met earlier, his face and hands blackened by the day's fighting. Our village had been liberated, and by morning, the Canadians were the ones in the village square.

Right Way
Vala Kjarval



Miller's High Life
Amber Hickman

You visit your Doctor every Happy Hour
and sit at the corner of the long, worn out,
wooden squared table surrounding him and
your medicine you order, which he serves you
in a rocks glass on ice.

Silently you drink – and think – about
what ails these other patients, who sit
in booths with their liquid pharmaceuticals,
stagnant on those hospital beds
while the nurses bring more to ease
their pain.

You watch the nurses (in their tight
jeans or mini-skirts, tank tops and low cut
shirts), come to the Doc with the patient's
self-prescribed orders he is forced to fill.

Watching these people kill themselves, resting
their heads on those beds, is so daunting.
You talk to your Doctor and give him
your self-diagnosis. He prescribes a homemade
remedy - on the house.

The clock says two a.m., you've over medicated.
It's time you check yourself out.

Scuffs

Christopher Daniels

March 2010

I stood in the threshold of the kitchen, looking down at my feet on the white vinyl tiles. There was a black scuff mark right beside the blue shag rug that our mom put over the tiny entrance between the living room and the kitchen. I ran my socked foot over it—knowing it would never come out—not even with hours of scrubbing away at it with a sponge or bristles. It seemed to be a sign of the past, a mark that would always be there. I could look down at that scuff and always remember that this was the place where I grew up and became a man. I looked down at it in that moment and knew I would only be reminded of the bodies all huddled around my mother while she wept into her trembling hands.

“You need help, Katie,” my father said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

She shoved it away.

“I know. I know I do.”

I looked briefly up at my dad, who over the past few years had lost most of his already sparse hair. I darted my eyes back and forth between my older brother, my uncle, my nana, and then my mother sitting in a chair while everyone stood around her. She dyed her hair more frequently to the same auburn color she used to have in her youth.

When did they get so old?

“Would you boys like to say anything?” my father asked me and my brother.

I locked eyes with my father, saw the pleading look of his that I

both pitied and hated.

We're losing her, it said. God help me, we're losing her.

Life is like any good road trip: there is a Point A and a Point B, there is the map that is marked with your desired route of travel, and there are the off-the-path roads that lead into an unknown destination. It is within these "unexpected pauses" off our desired route of travel that truly test our strengths of character and will. Ultimately, one must decide if it's worth it to continue on to an uncertain future, or to turn back around and head home.

There are no Google maps in life, no one can tell you how to proceed. We all have to figure it out on our own, even if we don't know how.

August 2005

On the car ride home from Cortland, my father put his hand on my mother's shoulder as she wiped away the tears with a tissue; her black mascara ran down her face. He leaned over and kissed her cheek. I lowered the volume to my iPod so I could listen to what they were saying.

"It's going to be alright, honey. We'll call him when we get home."

"But that's over two hours from now," she sobbed.

"He'll be OK. This is just a part of life, dear."

"I know, Stan." She turned to look out the window at the passing trees whizzing by in a blur. "I just miss him already."

When my mom woke up on that first morning without her eldest

son asleep in his room, it was jarring to say the least. After 18 years with DJ living at home and waking up to mom's breakfast, it all stopped abruptly when he moved away to dorm at Cortland. With only me left living at home, age 15, she was not used to the sudden silence. She had nothing to vacuum by the foot of the second floor steps when DJ would leave a mess of empty Gusher's wrappers and strings from the bottom of his frayed blue jeans. She had nothing to yell upstairs about to DJ's closed door when his textbooks were littered about the living room. No one to run away from when he would try to tickle her sensitive legs under the florescent lights of the kitchen.

My dad had no one to talk sports stats to, and no one to discuss current economic and political news with. He worked hard at his construction work when he wasn't on unemployment during the day, then immersed himself in his comedies and legal shows at night to help cope with the absence of his first born. The only words he uttered from the couch were shushes to my mom when she tried to strike up a conversation during a program.

Family dinners became an odd commodity in those first few months, and eventually all family communication faltered and died off. No one could have known how hard my mom was taking it, not really. She never opened up to anyone; she never felt comfortable enough.

No one could have stopped the shockwave that came one day when my dad checked their credit score and bank account statements. I couldn't help but blame myself. Maybe if I was there more. Maybe if I'd heard the way my mom dragged her feet around the house.

My dad's coffee brown hair went from receding to a reverse V.

My mom's face—once beautiful with rosy cheeks and an uncanny knack to smile in the face of any adversity—fought to put on a show for those around her. Crow's feet that once weren't there now were visible from across the room. My parents liked to tell themselves it wouldn't always be this way, that the void would fill itself in time, but wishes were left unanswered.

I should've seen the orange under construction signs in those first few months, telling me that unpaved roads and dangerous weather lay ahead. I ignored the signs. I took my detour.

January 2011

It happened before, and listening to the voicemail from the third ignored call, I was sure it would happen well after this. I looked behind me to make sure my college roommate wasn't randomly sitting behind me like a ninja, as he always used to sneak in when I was unaware and blasting music through my headphones. I looked up at my bare walls, absent of life and color; not a single poster. I used to love decorating the walls, but now I never get too comfortable in my surroundings. A small price to pay when you hide your emotions deep down from the world, afraid you'll get hurt. Never letting anyone in.

I used to be really open to my friends, but now I realize I've taken after my mother. I never divulge anything personal about my life to anyone I meet—not even my best friends. The way I see it, it's no one's business but my own. I hate the look in people's eyes: the one filled with pity where they try to think of something to say but never quite can. I despise it. Loathe it. 'Am embarrassed by it.

Silence is safe. Silence is bliss. Silence is lonely.

My heart skipped around in my chest like hopscotch, but I expected what was on the voicemail. The feminine voice was soft and fluttery, with a hint of agitation and worry. I felt like a piece of shit. I thought she was going to be the one, but I knew she wasn't. They never are "the one."

"...I really wish you would talk to me. Tell me what I did..."

You fell for me. I told you not to do that, not to get too close. Couldn't you read my thoughts?

"...Please call me, Chris. I had another fight with my dad."

I listened to the message, and when it was over, played it again just so I could hate myself even more. The way I figured it back then, if I could hate myself, maybe I wasn't the biggest asshole on the face of the planet. Maybe if I felt something, I could still change.

I had always wanted that type of love only seen in cheesy dime store romance novels and Hollywood comedies. I had always imagined I would grow up on the lake, have a boat house and a white picket fence surrounding our small patch of land. A tire swing; a porch swing; a chimney; two or three kids; a dog to have around on days when I would shut myself up in my writing office to work on my next novel; a daughter whom I would spoil silly and have her be "daddy's little Princess." I used to tell myself that I just hadn't met "her" yet. Maybe that was true, but deep down I knew that it was my parents I didn't want to become.

She was better without me in her life.

"...I love you," the voicemail ended.

March 2010

“Boys?” my father pleaded again with his brown eyes.

My brother shifted his feet uncomfortably, dressed in his Aeropostale sweats and Abercrombie sleeveless gym shirt. His biceps flexed as he pushed himself off the kitchen counter that wrapped around the walls to stand straight up. He cleared his throat and ran his hands through his receding hairline he got from our father. I saw his left arm twitch for a moment, but a moment was all it took. Even my brother, known for being athletic and popular and strong, had a weak spot. I looked down at the scuff mark on the kitchen vinyl and covered it with my foot.

“We love you, Mom,” my brother choked out in a voice that scared me. He sounded quiet and distant, which he never was. His voice was always booming and obnoxious, but never had I heard my brother sound so feeble before.

It scared the shit out of me.

“Chris and I are here for you. We just want you to get help.” He looked at me. “Right, Chris?”

I looked up, my face turned flush and my vision blurred. Everyone looked to me for some words to comfort mom, but my voice caught in my throat. She never looked back at me once. I didn’t want her to. I didn’t want to see the gloss over her eyes. I didn’t want to be there as the room spun around me. I didn’t want to be a part of the ambush any longer.

Our dad had pinned us an hour before she came home and told us we were going to all talk to her until we got through. You always saw

it in movies: the friends and family talk about their feelings until the star of the attraction broke down crying and admitted they were going to get help. In the movies it is glorified. In real life, it is raw and gritty. No one says much; no one wants to. As the star, my mom didn't look at anyone.

Not once.

It had started harmless: my uncle and nana coming over for dinner. But before she knew it, we had all huddled around her like lions around prey. When I walked in the kitchen, I saw the terrified look on mom's face when she realized we were there for her intervention. She tried to walk away and push past us, but our dad forced her to sit down. She begged and pleaded to be let go, making excuses to run down the street to buy some milk for dinner.

The vision of her retreating to the chair, her emerald eyes staring blankly off into some distant world where she felt safe, haunts me.

When she spoke—which was rare during those twenty minutes—she sounded far off, like she was listening to the sounds of the slot machines CLICK and CHING and BING in her head. I sucked in a deep breath and forced myself not to tear up. I couldn't let them see me in such a vulnerable state. I wouldn't let it get to me. Couldn't. I had to stay strong. I had to—

My brother widened his eyes at me. "Chris?"

May 2005

"Mom!" I yelled under the weight of my brother as he sat on my chest, pinning my arms behind my head. "DJ won't get off me!"

My brother laughed and squeezed my arms harder behind my

shoulder blades while I struggled to get free. It was a feeble attempt. He could bench press 300 lbs, whereas I could barely lift 105. My brother was strong when he was 18, and at 15 I looked up to him for it.

Our mother flew down the stairs with the wooden spoon in hand—an inside joke between us. She'd never use it, but loved to threaten the possibility. "DJ, get off your brother before you hurt him."

"Yo, EXCUSE me!" he beamed.

He quickly jumped up and ran for our mom, running his nails up her thighs until she jumped up and slammed her head into one of the white walls of the living room.

"DJ!" she pleaded. "No. Stop." She rubbed her head.

"What's wrong? Are you ticklish?"

He grinned wide from ear to ear and touched her legs again.

Our mom jumped up and ran for the stairs before my brother wrapped his arms around her waist. We laughed as she called out to our father who came down the stairs and went for my brother. My mom got free and lunged for the steps, hopping up two at a time when my dad got DJ in a headlock.

"Who's the bitch now?" he said.

"Yo, get outta here!" my brother said as he pushed our dad off him. He laughed and flexed his muscles at us. My brother shook his head and waved him away. "Alright, guy. I will pop your face like a FRICKIN' pimple."

It was a constant macho battle between them, and I usually stood back and remained silent, wondering who would have the last laugh. I saw my mom poke her head in from the top step, and my dad

walked over to her and planted a kiss on her lips.

“No one touches my baby,” he cooed.

“Yeah, this just got weird,” my brother laughed.

Our mom kissed our father back. “Dinner will be ready in ten minutes.”

“Yeah,” our dad agreed, turning to face us. “Just remember, this is Papa Bear’s house. You can’t touch my girl.”

“OK, dad. You’re done,” my brother rolled his eyes.

I shook my head and headed for the stairs, preparing to help my mother set up the table for dinner.

September 2005

“Did you want to watch a movie?” my mother asked me from the threshold of my door.

I was halfway through IT by Stephen King. I tried to remain focused, but kept rereading the same sentence over and over. I didn’t look up when I answered. “No.”

She took a deep breath. “Do you want to go shopping with me? Your father is watching his shows. I will buy you a movie.”

“I’m reading.”

“We can go through the drive-thru of Mighty Taco.”

“Mom!” I shouted. “I’m reading. Leave me alone. God.”

I heard her breathe out through her nose before closing the door. I looked up from my book and cursed under my breath before opening it back up.

October 2005

My brother's room at the foot of the stairs, adjacent to mine, stood propped open during the long months that passed after he moved out. The white carpet was vacuumed twice, sometimes three times a day. Clothes from Guess and Express that were once thrown into heaping bundles on the floor were now folded and laid out on the bed for a time. It wasn't long before even those were shoved into drawers and closets that had no free space left in them. Near-empty bottles of Grey Goose, Captain Morgan, Jack Daniels, SoCo, and many others stood on top of the tallest maple dresser by the window. The caps remained sealed tight, keeping a single drop left in each one safe from air contamination (he always left a drop at the bottom of each bottle). Dust was not allowed to collect on the smooth, glassy surfaces. Everything had to be cleaned daily. All 40 + of them.

I would often go and sit down at the foot of his bed. I would look around after school when my mom and dad were at work and wonder what was different about the room. I would rifle through old drawers and half empty Trojan condom boxes, occasionally stealing one or two I knew I would never use.

I would look at the old CD's stuffed under the bed that had not been touched in years, some over a decade. Lit, Staind, Rage Against the Machine, even N'Sync. Sitting down on the ocean blue and manilla striped linen sheets, I would lay back and stare up at the ceiling. Just a sophomore in high school, I would wonder what DJ was doing at that exact moment, and if he knew I was snooping around. You can always tell when someone's been through your room after long absences.

Absences where everything lays still and untouched.

Loneliness is louder than the ringing of a jackpot.

February 2007

I pressed my ear to the cool oak door to my bedroom in the dark. I looked at my alarm clock: 4:27. I had to wake up for school in less than two hours. Slumping down to my knees, I exhaled through my mouth, my heart about to go into cardiac arrest. Their voices rose up the stairwell from the kitchen in faint murmurs, but I could hear every word.

“I can’t do this, Katie,” my father said. “I don’t want to live like this anymore.”

“I know, and you’re right,” my mom said. “You shouldn’t have to.”

“My blood pressure is through the roof. I’m making myself physically sick wondering where you are all hours of the night.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Do you want to be a part of this family? Do you want to leave us?”

“Lower your voice before you wake Chris up.”

“You think he doesn’t know? Do you really thi—”

“I get you! Jesus, you’re like broken record. I got you all the other times, Stan. You don’t have to keep reminding me.”

“Apparently I do.”

“If you want me to leave just say the word and I will be gone.”

“Jesus, Katie. I love you. But you’ve put me on pills now. I want my wife back. I want the girl I fell in love with from high school back. Where did she go?”

“Enough, Stan. Please,” I heard her snuffle.

“You need help, honey. Just talk to someone.”

“Fuck you,” she whispered.

I heard feet shuffling downstairs before the front door opened and slammed closed. My dad took a deep breath from somewhere in the front hallway, and I leaned back from the door and tucked my knees into my chest. I looked at my clock and knew I would never get to fall asleep again before the alarm went off.

I climbed under my sheets and looked up at my ceiling, enjoying the calming silence. I wished I had someone to roll over on my side for and wrap my arms around. Someone I could run away with.

When my alarm went off at 6:00, I was still looking up into the darkness.

I used to think that I was doomed to end up like my parents: stuck on a dead end road that led nowhere. Careening off a cliff they couldn't avoid. On mornings when I would see through the crack of my father's bedroom door the sight of the Omron blood pressure monitor wrapped around his pale arm, I would feel the breath drop out of my lungs. Seeing my parents so vulnerable and weak did something to me in high school. It put up a wall of protection around my feelings and emotions and shut them off from the outside world.

December 2011

“Are you fucking kidding me?” her voice pierced my ear from the phone.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"We made plans to go to Buffalo for New Years since Thanksgiving. And now you're all-of-a-sudden not in the mood?"

"Please don't be mad."

"I was looking so forward to tonight. I figured, you know, we've never had a first kiss yet, so maybe as the ball drops, you know?"

"I don't know what you want me to say. It's just...all moving faster than I thought it would. I really do like you. But..."

It was silent on her end of the phone for a while before she spoke again, the last time I would hear her voice. "You think you're a good guy, Chris. You play this card where people can feel safe to let their guard down, then you go and do shit like this. You're not a nice guy. You're just like all the other assholes. You're selfish, and now I have to go to Buffalo by myself. Awesome."

"I never meant to hurt you."

Another awkward silence.

"Too late for that. Fuckin' asshole."

She hung up with a deafening CLICK.

March 2010

I opened my mouth to let out a squeak, but then clenched my teeth together. She still didn't look back at me. I knew then that she just wanted to leave and forget she had ever come home. My father and brother looked to me. My uncle and nana glanced at me. I wanted to tell her she needed help, she needed to see someone. I didn't want my parents to get a divorce. I didn't want to grow up in a broken home.

I wanted the mother I had always known and loved back. I wanted my innocence back. I wanted to be able to find love without the fear of becoming my parents—living in a failing marriage that they forced themselves to go through for DJ and I. All of these things begged to be said from my trembling lips.

My dad cocked his head, waiting for me to give mom some words of comfort and solace. A thousand and more flashed through my head, but I couldn't say a single one.

“Yeah,” I uttered.

I saw the back of her head twitch. For an instant I thought she wanted to turn back to me, to hold my gaze in hers and tell me through her emerald eyes that she was sorry, that she never wanted to hurt us. I would've believed her. I would've ran over and hugged her, told her that we'll get through this.

But instead I walked out of the kitchen, taking one last look at the black scuff on the tile and hopped up the stairs to my room. I regretted leaving even before I jumped the last step and shut the door. I fell backwards on my sheets and closed my eyes, listening to the blood pump in my ears.

I put on my ipod and listened to music, attempting to drown out the thoughts in my head and hope that when the song was over, I would wake up from some horrible dream.

One day was all it took to erase any trace of my savings. In reality, it had been on a decline for months, probably years before I noticed. My mother—cosigner of all my bank accounts—did most of the

banking. She had been stealing the statements when they were mailed to the house before I could look at them.

My piggy bank—one my mother had bought for me when I was four months old—had been broken into when I was 21 and returned from school for winter break. Around \$300 dollars was taken. It still remains empty.

Over \$400 went missing from my emergency money that I hid in my room when I was 17. Never to be seen again.

My savings account I'd had since I was a baby had been dwindled down to \$295.13 when I was 19. It used to be a little under \$10,000. Never to be seen again.

My CD that was linked to my accounts had well over \$10,000. Whereabouts unknown.

My dad still doesn't know. I've never told anyone.

Over the past three years I've gotten my savings up to a little over \$3,000. My mom's name is no longer associated with any accounts I own.

When my mom drove through the city streets late at night on that Wednesday afternoon of 2005, she did not think how far the consequences of her actions would reach. She gave her green Buick LeSabre—the same one she used to drive me to the movies in with my friends when we were 13—to the valet at the Seneca Niagara Casino and stepped inside to the slot machines. Her drug of choice.

My dad watched over six TV shows a night. It kept his mind off of where mom was on nights she never came home. A ritualistic shot of

whiskey to help him fall asleep.

She listened to the CLICK, CLACK, and BING of the slots; watched the swirling and blinking lights pop around her. She inhaled the stale smoke of cigars and cigarettes and wouldn't leave until her checks were entirely spent. She wanted to distract her mind from the empty house, the quiet house, the sad house on Colonial Drive. She didn't want to get in as deep as she did.

A few hundred here, a few hundred there. Just enough to keep busy until her son came home for Thanksgiving. Then it was a few hundred more to try to win back what she had lost.

10:00 PM became 12:00 AM. 12:00 AM became 3:00 AM. Empty checks became maxed credit cards. Maxed credit cards become a second mortgage. She couldn't control herself. It all got out of hand too fast for her to notice.

We nearly lost our house in the aftermath.

We've all had to make sacrifices to adjust to the debt we're in.
That we're still in.

June 2011

Dad sat me down once to have a talk. His eyes were glazed over and bloodshot, trying not to breakdown. It was the first time I'd ever seen my father cry.

He said, "It's like any other addiction, it just infects their brain. They don't think like you or me do. They can't control what they're doing. Your mother never meant to do what she did, and as angry as I was, as

angry as I still 'am...the past is the past. I could've told her to leave, but I still love her. I look into her eyes and I still see the woman I fell in love with."

I nodded my head, not daring to open my mouth, not sure what to say. My dad wiped away tears in his eyes and looked up at the ceiling. "What happens next?" I asked.

We locked eyes, both our irises matched; the brown from my father. "We move forward. We find a way to get past this and rebuild what's broken."

I nodded, trembling in the computer chair by my desk. I clicked my tongue inside my dry mouth, having trouble swallowing my saliva. He sat down on the edge of the pea green cotton comforter of the bed and looked down at his intertwined calloused hands in his lap. Those hands that drilled holes into beams and sheet metal. Those hands that always knew where to look for the socket wrench and flathead screwdriver. Those hands could barely steady themselves in those moments in my room when I was 20. He was a different man than the one who used to play catch with me in the front yard on warm August days when my brother and I were kids.

When did you get so old?

"I don't know if your mother can ever forgive herself. Hell, I don't know if I can. But that's what life is, son. Trial and error. We'll find a way to get through this. All of us."

He grimaced a smile and got up from the bed. He was about to walk out when I grabbed his arm. A chill jolted up my spine. It was the first time we really connected: father and son. It was in that moment

that I knew nothing would ever be the same. I used to think seeing a grown man cry was a sign of weakness, but I realized then that my father was the strongest man I'd ever known. I was proud to be his son in that moment.

“Will you get a divorce?”

He thought about it for a moment, my blood pumped through my veins like the anticipation of going all-in before the flop. We were suspended in a moment where time was stopped. It was a beautiful, quiet moment.

“I don't know what the future holds, Chris. All I know is that somewhere out there is the girl I fell in love with. And no matter what happens, I will never give up on that girl.”

March 2012

I walked in the front door at night, coming back from the gym, and saw my mother run out of the kitchen to the foot of the stairs. She was panting and flailing her arms in the air as my dad leaned against a wall in the front hallway. DJ ran out of the kitchen, extending his arms to her sensitive legs.

“No, DJ! No!” she screamed. “Stan!”

My dad laughed and held up his arms. “Damn it, this is Papa Bear's house, and I say that anything goes. And damn it, my word is law.”

“You're no help,” she said.

“Yo, Chris! Get her on your side and I'll get her on the other.”

I looked at all three of them and took off my shoes while I spoke.

“You see, I was thinking we could mess with dad instead.”

DJ looked behind him to my father who stopped laughing immediately. “Boys, you know I have a bad back. Don’t mess with me.”

“Nice, dear,” she sighed.

We all chased each other around the house for a few minutes before I gave up to mix my protein shake. My mom came up to me in my room when I was listening to some music.

“I’m heading out, did you want anything?”

“Yeah, I’m feeling some Mighty Taco. Can you pick me up six of them?”

She nodded as I reached into my pocket to grab my wallet. She saw me pull it out to rifle for money when she shook her head.

“No. It’s on me.”

“It’s fine, Mom. They aren’t that expensive.”

She looked at me with her emerald eyes and stood silent for a moment. “Please let me buy them for you.”

We locked eyes, and in hers I saw all the pain and regret she held in over the past 7 years. I looked down at the money in my hands and put the wallet back into my pocket. I looked up at her and she smiled at me.

“OK, free Mighty sounds good to me,” I joked. “Love you, Mom.”

“I love you too.”

She nodded and closed the door behind her as she left. I turned my music back up and flopped down on my bed, staring up at my ceiling. I took a deep breath and held it in my chest before exhaling through my nose.

Sometimes the roads we take aren't easy, but we have to keep chugging along to get to our Point B. Like my father said: baby steps. We rebuild what is broken and keep on moving forward.

I turned up the volume on my iPod and closed my eyes.

Sometimes all we can do is just start over from scratch.

It's OK to embrace the scuffs—the marks that define where we've been and who we'll become.

I looked over on my dresser and saw some loose change and swung my feet onto the carpet to grab them. I walked over to my busted piggy bank and looked into the hollow space. I counted the change I held in my hand: 57¢. I dropped the change into the tiny slit at the top and listened as it CLANGED inside the plastic. With a deep breath, I smiled.

“Baby steps.”

Rt. 14
Vala Kjarval



Mother of the Dissapeared

Matthew Harmer

It was summer in Córdoba, thankfully, so I came to stay the season at a friend's apartment. I didn't hate winter in the Hamptons, I wanted warmth and sun, and Córdoba had plenty of both. Since my friend was in Lake Placid for the Olympics, I had the place to myself. Most afternoons I spent on the balcony napping as I listened to the sounds of the plaza below.

One morning in the market, I tried to convince a pretty young vendor to come upstairs and cook for me. Over her shoulder, I spied an older woman in a white shawl. She was standing silently in the plaza, holding a placard with a photograph of a young man blown up to poster size. I tried focusing my attention back on the vendor, but by the time she promised to visit that afternoon, curiosity had the better of me. I made my way toward the woman, trying to read the hand-scrawled Spanish I couldn't make out. But just as I was on the edge of understanding, two soldiers grabbed her at the elbows and took her away.

I spent that afternoon making love to the vendor, the sun-drunk, hazy kind that Argentinians take for granted. Lying naked on the warm stones of the balcony floor, I asked her, "Who was that woman in the square today?" She shook her head and said remorsefully, "There was no woman," and I suddenly felt as if a moment had passed me by.

Reykjavík
Vala Kjarval



Women

Nice

People

