

**The Reflector
2014**

The Reflector

Shippensburg University's
Journal of the Arts

2014

The Reflector is the annual Undergraduate Arts Journal financed by the Student Association of Shippensburg University. We accept fiction, nonfiction, poetry, interviews, and artwork year-round. Works are considered for publication based on a blind submission policy. Submissions are accepted electronically at reflect@ship.edu.

For questions regarding our submission policy, contact:
reflect@ship.edu.

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Letter From The Editor

Dear Reader,

I hate endings.

And yet here I am, desperately trying to type something that ought to be an operatic closing—something that shakes the foundations and leaves my mark on the dusty shelves of Horton Hall 301. For me, this blank page is a dark, mysterious, and shadowy project. Which, as these things sometimes work out, falls in line with the very same style that Film Noir auteurs tried to impress upon each of their reels. The visual theme for this year's volume of *The Reflector* seeks to emulate that genre, with a few twists of our own. Film Noir isn't known for its happy endings, and so it seems I have appropriate bedfellows as I attempt to write my goodbye. If I had half the wit of Hitchcock, it probably wouldn't be so hard to sit down and write this.

The Reflector is what solidified my decision to attend Shippensburg University. From the moment I laid my eyes on it at an open house back in 2010, I knew this was home. In four very short years, we've raised its pages and traditions out from certain oblivion, shared our passion with other campus organizations, and traveled across the eastern seaboard. Each step of the way, I met people who have changed my life forever, and I hope that we've built the *The Reflector* to be a space where we can continue to change the lives of others.

The artists featured in this book are the ones who see trench-coated spies darting through alleys. They're the ones who notice when someone lights a cigarette at the bar and scans for the next hunt. They're the ones who know that there is much more behind a bullet than just springs and sparks. They're the ones who walk among us between the same brick buildings each day, with their minds secretly ablaze in the eerily lit cutting room that is the imagination.

The staff has done what it tries to do each year: select the choicest scripts for production, and distribute them amongst the public for both pleasure and pain. It is a recording of what was produced on this campus in the year 2014, and though we may

not have nitrate—ink works just as well. The images and words found here are representative of the undergraduate work being done at our school. It doesn't matter whether the work is done in a cavernous theater, out in the wild, in a paint-stained studio, or at a desk in the corner of a dark bedroom. What matters is that at the end of every year we come together and share what we've been toiling away at in secret with each other. We kick open the cutting room door and roll out the red carpet; we throw everything we've got on large silver screens and let those same shadows that haunt our nights haunt the days of others. We're still learning, and certainly not everything that has been done here amongst the rolling Cumberland hills can be featured. What matters is that the projector works at all, and I'd like to think that since we lit the lamp in 1957 it hasn't gone out.

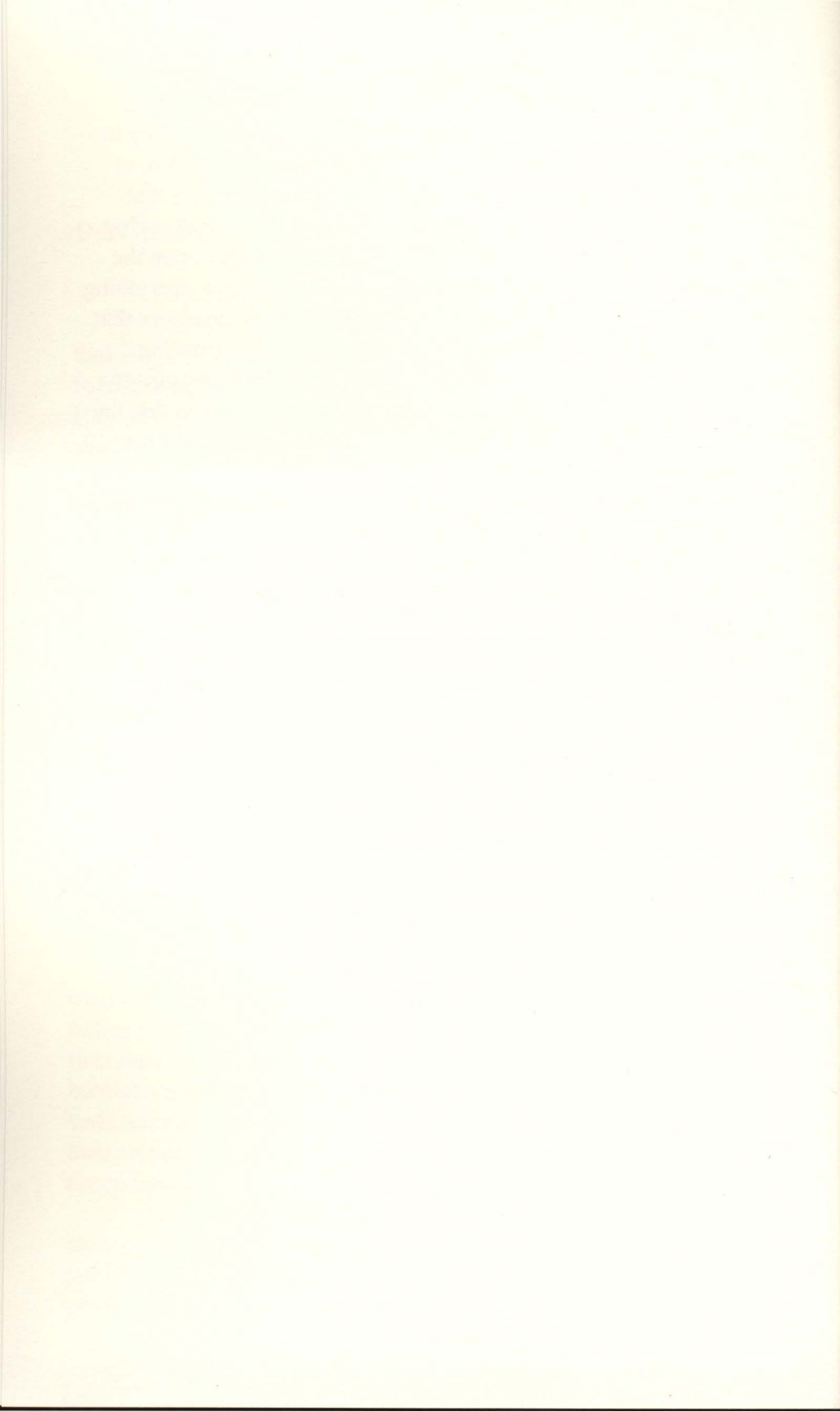
I suppose, in a way, that's the best ending I can hope for. I didn't run it into the ground, and the reels didn't burn. But still, no one likes to turn around and see an empty theater. Soon enough, the films will be reruns—no more premiers, and no more hotshot producer talk. No more bar scenes, no more games of cat and mouse with tommy guns rattling through the streets. Like the tragic character who learns too much, I get the sense that a lot is lost in the end. The train rushes on, and I can't hold on to the top for much longer.

But I was here. And I was *alive*, thanks to these pages. This volume is filled with talent that far surpasses any I can pretend to claim, and I'm proud to present it to you now. Let their words and images move you. Let them light up the darkness. Let the shadows define what even eyes cannot. Under these trench coats are big hearts, and they slip by unnoticed if you're not careful.

Are you watching?

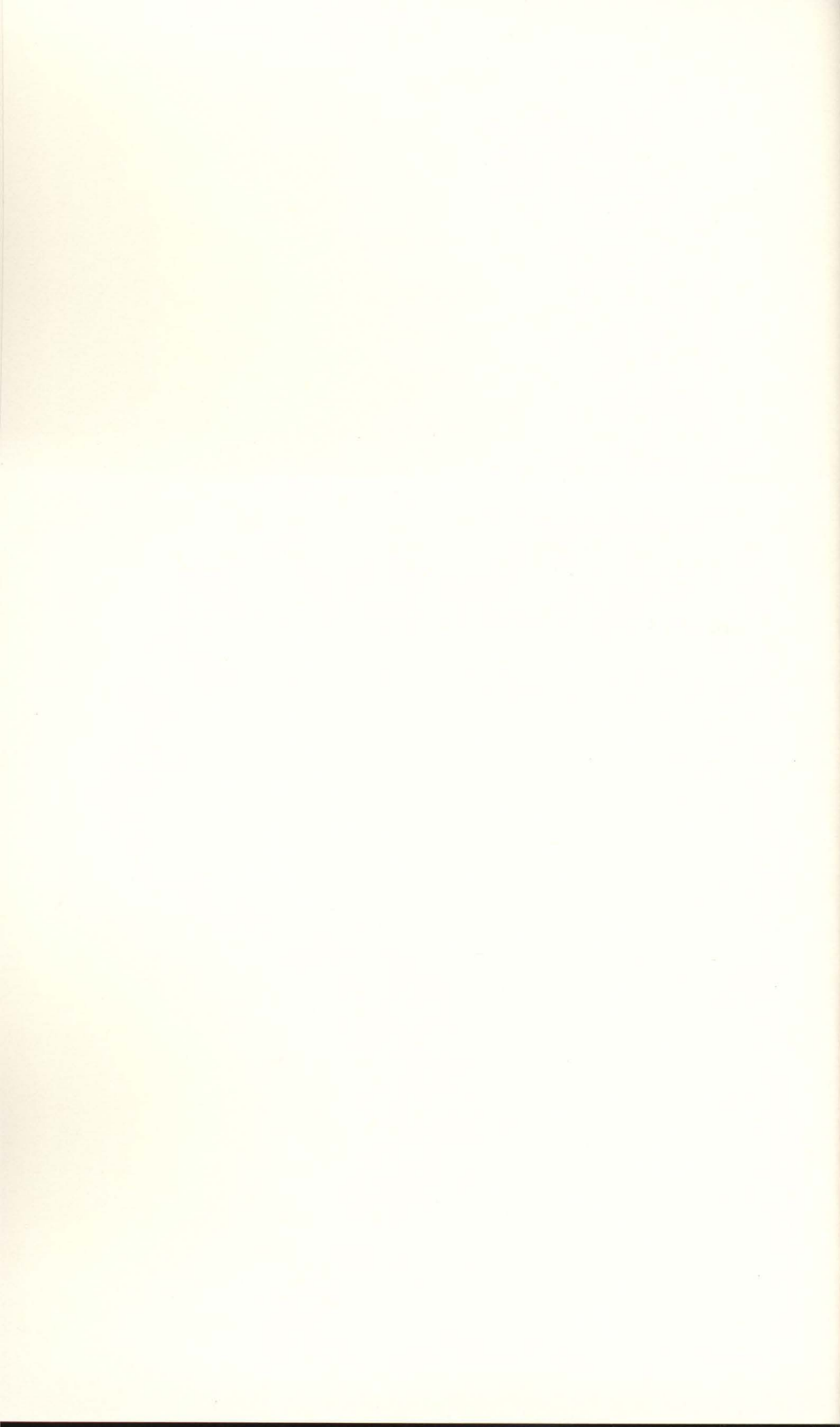
Frankly (my dear),

Cory Stevens



*“Give them pleasure—the same
pleasure they have when they
wake up from a nightmare.”*

-Alfred Hitchcock



Morning Sonnet

Benjamin Anwyll

This poem is the winner of *The Reflector's* 2014 Poetry Contest, as selected by award-winning writer Lisa Graley. She has published a collection of poetry, *Box of Blue Horses*, and has published short stories in *Glitter Train* and *The McNeese Review*. *The Reflector* thanks her for her time and the kind words that she offered to our winner:

Although there were certainly many moments to admire in the other poems, it was the distillation of thought, dense sound clustering, and vivid imagery that impressed me most about "Morning Sonnet." Clearly an incomplete sonnet, the poem is the beginning of a lovely homage to sleep that the persona might continue writing if he or she were not so quickly seduced back to the drowsy and delicious land of Nod. In this sense, the poem is an anti-aubade, a meditation on not greeting the day. Thus, the "sonnet" closes in the "blankness" of sleep and the whiteness of the page. In the seven lines of "wakefulness," the poet combines alliteration and assonance with vigorous verbs like "warp" and "swirled" and "harness." Further, the poet's playful delight in language makes for a striking contrast to the fitful, "fever[ed]" image of the "beast" sleeping in this "hot" and "swampy" lair. With such command of poetic lyricism--including metrical considerations, I should add--one wishes the persona might wake just long enough to eke out a few more fun and inventive lines.

Here, fever dream, come warp my weary thoughts;
my eyes have not yet twinkled with new day.
Bed sheets swirled taut in hot and sticky knots
harness a beast in swampy disarray.
I break my chains! I fly across the room!
My fleeting frenzied fingers find the snooze;
a moment later I settle back, entombed.



Sparkle

Anna Seils

This story is the winner of *The Reflector's* 2014 Prose Contest, as selected by Hilary Plum, co-director of Clockroot Books and contributing editor at the *Kenyon Review*. Her debut novel *They Dragged Them through the Streets* was published recently, and she can often be found blogging with the *Kenyon Review*. *The Reflector* thanks her for her time, and the wonderful message she passed along with her selection:

It's my honor to select "Sparkle" as the winner of The Reflector's 2014 Prose Contest. In the space of less than a page, "Sparkle" vividly calls up a character and situation; I was struck by how well the story slices a single moment in time from a larger narrative, so that what we're offered feels quite complete. We see before us this intimate setting—Christmas tree lights made sinister; the remnants of baking; the aftermath of violence that seems terribly commonplace here. Throughout the writer exhibits a powerful ear for language: the sentences' rhythm and quiet use of repetition drive us forward. My congratulations, and I look forward to reading what she writes next."

I look at the Christmas tree lights through crossed eyes, making them look like fuzzy orbs. I uncross my eyes and zone in on the kitchen counter. Flour and baking utensils are strewn about, the water is running in the sink. I fiddle with the diamond on my left hand, pushing it around with my thumb. It sparkles, like the Christmas tree lights. I hear banging upstairs. The left side of my face is sore and swollen and my wrists have bruises on them. There is one hour until the guests come.

I turn off the water in the sink and put a cool dishrag on my face. The swelling won't go down in time before the guests come. No one will believe another lie I tell them. I hear heavy footsteps coming down the stairs. I feel a hand on my shoulder and a voice say, "Baby, I'm sorry I blew up like that."



I think back to the face that matches that voice. A face I once knew as a friendly and loving one. But that face also has another voice. One that is full of intensity and violence.

I nod my head up and down, making my face hurt more. I've tried to be perfect for him. I've tried to stay out of his way when he gets like that.

His favorite cookies are in the oven. I watch his back as he walks away. I turn my attention to the cookies, and watch them turn black.

Kwaku, tell them

Tara Owens

When they ask you if you have a girlfriend, tell them that you have somebody
Tell them that when she laughs, it makes Beethoven roll in his grave
because that melodious sound is a symphony he no longer has the chance to replicate.
Tell them that God said perfect, and there she stood naturally.
Others may not see what you see, but she will be your breathing paradox
The depth to the shallowness that fake friends greet you with.
She is the song of the silence.
She is the stability in the quake of sadness
She is the rich fertile soil in the drought
She is the rib that God had to take out
And if when you look into her eyes and don't see what I'm talking about
When they ask you if you have a girlfriend, tell them no.

Martini

Alexander Strickler

Cassidy hastily finishes the last of her martini. Her head shivers as it goes down. Her table has a nice view of the harbor which reflects the neon lights that shine so brightly as the night begins.

She runs her finger along the top edge of the glass occasionally pushing the toothpick anchored by an olive. She has difficulty reading the menu without squinting. She slides it on the table and goes for her glass again, hesitating when she realizes it is empty. The olive exploding in her mouth only gives a hint of the alcohol she wishes she had more of. Cassidy isn't sure how to spend a Friday night out anymore.

Cassidy was never much of a drinker before but came to love martinis after David. He always insisted a meal was better with a martini before and after. It just seemed to stick. Vibration ripples from her elbow through her arm to her hand on her forehead. A light comes from the table. It's from the babysitter. *He's in bed and asleep. 9:08 pm.* Cassidy smiles without showing any teeth. Chin pointed to her lap, her eyes travel to the empty chair across the little table. Her shoulders rise and fall. She puts a twenty and a ten dollar bill on the table and leaves.

Not five minutes later a couple is shown to their table, which Cassidy has just left vacant. The man loudly orders two martinis and the young girl across the table giggles and says, "Oh, you and your martinis."

Looking Through

Jenna Watson



acrylic

[For Rent: 2nd Floor Apartment]

Brittany Torrez-Alvarez

paid acquaintance smears red in its brilliance
around black hole gaped in use,
contorting to shapes interpreted as
you can keep the heels, sugar.

a window pane or a barrier reef:
both obstruct the senses.

a curtain is drawn in an overheard apartment.

i'm thinking I should have given up lip gloss years ago
as the owner of wild inexperience -
aware of my extensions in new communion:
a smile (*teeth optional*)
a hand (*shaken, never held*)
expectations (*more than what is said*)

a headboard beats
in syncopation with the secondhand
to my bedside clock – hammering
endurance along a face turned
in left of the soloist's early close.

a woman is televised to completion.
a cat meows.

for the moment we are alone -
sharing each other's company at a parallel – divided by
perspective
a flight of stairs: just beyond two doors.
this is the route one must travel to hold a different view.



i imagine him alone. i imagine my locks changed on my exit.
i imagine he wore himself out.
i imagine [not] the chest – and if it rises at the fall.

the weather is indicative of days to come: browning leaves,
it exists.

tomorrow's paper will read something like:
spring has sprung - to a future novelist
who will write on a lonely man's untimely end.
Cause: *Blood lost in an accidental severing of the corpus
cavernosum followed by shock.*
Culprit: *an old mattress spring* -
wildly experienced.

the air conditioner sits - badly taped and in my window, still.
the bugs, clever with age, find entry through a missed hole.

a cat goes hungry.



Breakfast at the Diner

John Watts

“Would you like more coffee?”

The waitress’s words hadn’t registered. Jude Freeland’s body was sitting alone at the counter of the Mariner Diner in Jonesport, Maine, but his mind was elsewhere, as if suspended in a vast emptiness. All he could do was sit motionless, staring at his distorted reflection on the countertop, seeing the natural pale thinness of his face hidden by his short beard. He couldn’t remember the last time he had trimmed his beard.

“Hun, do you want more coffee?”

Jude was shaken out of his thoughts. “Oh, yeah. I’ll have more coffee. Thanks.” He glanced at the waitress’s nametag, squinting to read the beat-up print letter stickers on the plastic. Elizabeth. E-liz-a-beth. The name worked its way through his mind, attempting to discern meaning, to form connections. There was a time that names made sense to him, when he could list every client he had defended with that name. Nothing clicked. It was as if the name had lost all meaning for him. Everything was constantly losing meaning, as if a dictionary were having each definition violently ripped out, leaving behind singular words and empty spaces.

The waitress had walked away, and Jude stared at the fried eggs on his plate. As he stared at them, so did they seem to stare back -- two hideous white and yellow eyes glaring at him, as if waiting for him to make the first move. He pushed the plate away and simply stared blankly ahead, watching the elderly shuffle in for the breakfast rush. The small town atmosphere crept in, with each elderly person greeting the other regulars. The local grapevine was a well-oiled machine, and the townsfolk easily took notice of Jude. He felt eyes watching him when it was believed he wasn’t looking, and he could see out the window to see the stares his dark green ’76 Mercury Comet was collecting. All the little towns were the same to him. It didn’t matter if they were on the east coast, west coast, or in the middle of the Corn Belt. The towns all had

the same quirks, the same habits, and the same idle curiosity at the new and unusual.

He looked over to the waitress, idly watching her as she made her rounds. She couldn't have been older than thirty. She had gone to each table, greeting the elderly regulars jovially, as if their presence was her whole purpose for being. Her routine happiness continued until she reached the table of a young man eagerly typing away at a laptop. Jude watched her closely, and he could see how timid she appeared as she spoke to the young man, how she blushed slightly when the young man smiled. Like an awkwardly choreographed dance, the flirting was off-putting to watch, and Jude turned away from the pair. They were too much like he and his wife had been when they were younger.

He had once been happily married, in what felt like another life. His wife, Karen, was the first one to notice when the problems started during his last case, *New Mexico V. Beal*. Jude had disappeared, his mind and thoughts lost and disjointed, despite his physical presence. For two months before he left, he and his wife had slept in separate rooms every night. She had insisted on the separate rooms, because his nightmares woke both of them up every night.

The nightmares hadn't gone away in the two years since, like he thought they would. It was always the same: disjointed scenes in a courtroom, where he was standing behind the defendant's table, next to Howard Beal. Each time, the jury would return the verdict of guilty, but never on Beal. The sentence would always be against Jude. Then the floor would open up, like the gaping maw of a massive beast, and Jude would feel himself falling into a crushing void. A chill raced up the length of his spine as he thought of the nightmare, but it was the merciful sound of arguing customers that yanked him back into the present.

"I won't pay one damn cent for this."

"Sir, please keep your voice down, there are children in this

establishment.”

Jude looked over his shoulder to see the young waitress being harassed by an older man. His graying, unkempt hair framed his haggard face. To Jude’s surprise, no one seemed to be reacting, save for the looks of disgust from the locals, as if silently declaring the situation a lost cause. The waitress’s face was forecasting tears as the man continued to unrelentingly berate her.

“Oh, what the hell...” Jude muttered. He found his body drawn unwilling to the scene, and he collected looks as he passed the booths of assorted locals. “Friend, I think you need to calm down.” The old man was incredulous, as if he had been struck over the head with a shovel without warning.

“What did you just say to me, boy?”

“I said, calm down, friend.” Jude was mildly satisfied with the edge of menace in his voice. Two years of wandering could give even the most mild-mannered an edge. Whether it was the menace, or the fact that Jude was several inches taller and much younger, the old man seemed to back off. He backed up slowly towards the door, and barely missed running into an old couple as he exited.

“Asshole.” the waitress muttered.

“You okay, miss?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Thank you. He’s typically picky, and he complains a lot, but he doesn’t usually get this bad.” She looked away for a moment, as if she were distracted. “I should probably let my manager know about that. He didn’t pay for his meal, either. Thank you, again.”

Jude simply nodded, and she walked away. She kept her eyes fixed on the floor as she walked, a small stack of menus held tightly to her chest. Jude had seen her walk and her demeanor, the look of a woman who was victimized. Some cruel bastard had hurt her. He hadn’t seen that look since the case, when he had interviewed Sophie Beal.

The moment was clear in his mind, as if he were there, suspended in the moment once again. Sophie's tears, her admission of Howard being violent, ruthless. She told him everything, including the night that he came home covered in blood. It was the last thing Jude had wanted to hear.

"Mrs. Beal" he had asked, "why didn't you say anything to the police about this?"

"He'd kill me if I said something about it. Are you going to tell the court?" Jude had thought about that question for a long time. To say something to the court jeopardize his confidentiality with his client, let alone undermine his entire defense strategy... but not saying something would be a grievous lie of omission. He had thought about it for a long time. Law school had never prepared him for having to choose between being a good defense attorney and being a good human being. In the end, he had decided that the warm fuzzy feeling was not of equal value to a career and reputation. The nightmares started not long afterward.

As he thought about the case, he had returned to his seat, staring absently at the nearly full plate in front of him. In moments, he drained his coffee and started eating his toast, but the food sank into his stomach, like an anchor falling into an empty pit. The toast hadn't been buttered, and was dry -- drier than the desert that surrounded the first town he had stopped in. He had found the Comet there, for sale, as if a Greek god were selling their fiery chariot to a mortal. The vehicle seemed like it suited him, more so than the modern, bland car he had been driving. The Comet was the first, and only, change that he had made in his time wandering. At the time, it had felt like the first of many changes. Now, it was just reminder of how little he had accomplished in leaving home.

Then the phone rang.

The cell phone that he carried had not rang in all the time he had wandered, but he had kept it charged anyway, a habit of a previous life. He reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out the

phone, staring at the name of the caller, as if it was alien to him. The name of the caller was listed as "Neil Hammond," his old boss at the law firm he had worked for. He opened the phone.

"Hello?"

"I'll be honest, I didn't think you'd answer." Hammond's gravelly voice crackled over the phone.

"Neither did I."

"Well, I just wanted to let you know that Howard Beal is dead."

Jude sat straight up in his chair. "What happened?"

"I don't know too many details, but from what I've heard, he tried to attack a little boy. The kid's dad beat the hell out of him, and he didn't make it."

The pit in Jude's stomach sank deeper. He placed a hand on the counter to steady himself, barely succeeding. "Thank you for letting me know."

"Yeah, I figured that you'd want to be told. Y'know, you're missed around here. Lot of folks would be happy to have you back."

"Not sure if I'm ready to be back yet."

"Well, when you get tired of sunbathing in Tijuana or whatever the hell you're doing, you give me a call, I can't make any promises, but I think I might be able to find some work for you."

Jude pursed his lips. "Thanks. I'll keep that in mind."

"Please do. Take care of yourself, Freeland."

"I'll try, Mr. Hammond." He flipped the phone shut and stared blankly. The son of a bitch is dead, Jude thought. Some average guy had the guts to do what Jude hadn't been able to do, and he had regretted it every single day. All Jude could do was slump towards the counter, feeling every muscle in his chest become viselike around his heart. All he could feel was a dull numbness snaking from his core, enveloping his entire body. After

two years, he had never considered a world without the looming specter of Howard Beal in it.

A different waitress seemingly glided past each patron at the counter.

“Can I getcha anything else, handsome?” This waitress carried herself with the sophistication of an older woman, but the makeup on her face hid her age behind a thick wall of powders and oils. Her name tag was relatively clean, and the name Cheryl was obscured behind sparkling pink star-shaped stickers.

“I could use a bit more coffee, actually.”

“Sure thing, sweetie.” She began pouring the coffee. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you here before. You on a vacation?”

“No ma’am. Just passing through, unless you have any suggestions of anything I should see while I’m here.”

The waitress thought for a moment. “Well, we have pretty much the same thing that any town worth its salt would. Y’know, library, school, town hall, that sort of thing. You could always take a look at the docks if you’re interested, or if you’re looking for work, the captains might be hiring. The lobster boats are doing pretty well right now.”

“Lobster boats, huh? I’ll have to check it out.” The waitress smiled and returned to her rounds. Jude turned to watch the customers. The breakfast crowd was thinning, with the groups of chatty senior citizens shuffling out, amorphous masses of gray hair and gossip. In a corner booth, a middle-aged couple was talking quietly, but agitatedly. She looked as if the fork in her hands would be better served sticking into her husband’s skull, and he seemed to want everything to go away, save for himself and his French toast.

The woman seemed to have the same expression his wife had given him when he said he was leaving. That conversation was burned into his memory:

“So that’s it? You’re just leaving?”

“Yes.”

“You’re not even going to explain yourself.”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

“Oh really? I wouldn’t understand, huh? That’s all you’ve got to say for yourself?”

“Look, I just need time to put my thoughts together. Can you please jus-”

“I have been very patient with you, Jude. First you started working ridiculously long nights. Then you start screaming in bed every night, and when you’re not doing that, you’re off somewhere else working again and obsessing over this case. Now you’re just going to leave? Without any explanation at all? And I’m just supposed to be okay with it? Screw you.”

“I lied in court. I helped a guilty man walk free.”

His wife stared with wide eyes, her long brown hair askew. “Excuse me?”

“Beal was guilty. His wife told me everything, and gave me evidence to prove it. I wanted to recuse myself from the case, then Hammond said if I won the case, he’d make me a partner of the firm.”

Karen shook her head, still in shock. “Well, congratulations with your new partnership. I’m sure you’re proud.”

“I’ve let a murderer go free. How do you think I feel?”

Karen had said nothing, so he continued. “I’ve done something horrible. I... I just need to leave to clear my head. I need to figure out where to go from here. I feel like, I dunno, like part of my soul is broken. And I know I have no one to blame but myself, but I don’t want to live like this.”

“Well, if you think I’m just going to sit here and wait for you while you go find yourself after you’ve had some kind crisis of conscience, then you are sorely mistaken.”

“I know.”

The connection they once felt ended for Karen that night, but it had ended for Jude months before. The next day he had left

without a word. It wasn't until he had checked his email at a public library in Corvallis, Oregon a month later that he found that he had been served with divorce papers. He did not hesitate to sign them. He had no reason to hold her back and keep her from living her life.

“Would you like your check now, sweetie?”

The older waitress's inquiry had pulled Jude out of his thoughts. He looked at the contents of his half-eaten breakfast, dissatisfied with being unable to finish. “Yeah, I guess I'll take the check. Thanks”

As he waited for the check, he looked out the window. Beyond the glass, a harbor was in view, with many of the boats steadily leaving to begin reaping the ocean's harvest. The harbor looked inviting. In all the time he had been travelling, and in all the port cities and seaside towns he had stopped in, he had never taken the time to go on a boat. He found himself thinking, “I could stay here. Start over.” The thought appealed to him. After two years, the nightmares hadn't stopped. Nothing had made a dent in the iron walls of his guilt. Maybe what he needed was to make a change, to learn how to live again.

Yet, the gaping wound in his being had not been healed. Two years had passed, and in all that time, none of the towns he had passed through had anything to offer him. What if this new town, this Jonesport, was just a temporary patch, like the car? Change, it seemed to Jude, only served to solidify the moment in the sameness that had come before it. This new town could just be a Band-Aid, and a Band-Aid could do many things, but it couldn't mend a broken soul. Regret and guilt had cleaved Jude's in half.

Against his will, he found himself, standing, walking towards the door, like a titan first learning to walk, and with each step, deciding the fate of all those underfoot. The old waitress, waiting at the cash register, flashed her gaudy, makeup-strewn smile. He handed her the cash and the check.

"I hope you enjoyed everything this morning." The smile grew wider.

"Yeah."

"Enjoy the rest of your stay in Jonesport, the only town in America with that name!" Jude saw several locals roll their eyes at this. This was the rehearsed line that everyone used, it seemed. He walked out to the parking lot, heading for the driver's seat of the Comet. He simply stared at the wheel through the window. The old brown leather on the wheel felt smooth and worn under his hands from his constant use. The miles and months had been kind to the car, and it had the same shine to it that it had had when he first bought it, at the beginning of his travels. The miles and months had been far crueler to Jude, as he looked into the window of the Comet, he couldn't bring himself to open the door.

He felt his feet taking control, turning towards the docks down the street. Jude could feel them pulling him, as if they were insatiable hounds dragging their master behind them. Every step took him further from the Comet and the diner and closer to the brine-coated hulls of the fishing boats. The closer he came to the docks, the more he could feel the salty air whipping lightly at his face, and for the first time in a long time, he felt relaxed. Jude kept walking closer and closer until he found himself standing on the docks, looking down onto the deck of fishing boat, an old trawler with the seawater-eaten words Lady Grey painted on the side.

"Can I help you, friend?"

Jude looked around the boat, and saw the brown, weathered face of an old man, his head sticking out the window from the cabin. He took in a breath of deep air, and smiled.

"I don't suppose you're looking for any deck hands?"

The old man smiled back.

Carnival Pride

Crystal Conzo



photograph

Thinking About How to Pack Two Weeks into a Backpack

Emily Fulker

Math is all about formulas. Like packing. Like dating advice from teen magazines. But do you ever look at

magazines for their layouts? Or take pictures of chipping paint? Sometimes my ideas drive me insane because

I can't stop my brain from pushing towards the moment when time stops existing.

And it resumes. I let my thoughts have control, and they twist my emotions into concrete

buildings. Remember all those times when you wanted to leave all this time-crunching and achievement-striving

to kayak around the world? And to see the insides of clouds? To taste the air at four thousand feet above? I can

see them already. The little faces I haven't met yet. The lump in my throat already knows when it will surface to

choke back all the reasons I won't want to leave. I'm thinking about how to pack two weeks into a backpack. And a life

into a journal with recycled pages. How would you write my story if you had a thousand Scrabble pieces? Or just one

word? The fly writhing on the kitchen table, trying to turn right-side up, brings Steinbeck to mind. Surely, he would have

a life metaphor for this. But I don't live in a novel. My room smells different in the summer. I'm always longing for

summer's adventures. Not sticky-note goals and money-making dreams. Those don't actually mean anything to me,

except a train to ride on other peoples' approval. And even though I want it, I know it's superficial and leads

to an empty cave. I'd rather have a tent where I can listen to nature's night-time whispers. And

when I'm in the Andes, I'll feel my Maker's love come alive. And I'll be closer to knowing who I am. Certain

things are so beautiful, you don't have to think about anything, but you feel like you know everything

you need to know. There are no formulas for this, only mountain-top adventures and lilac-breezes.

A Monologue

Cory Stevens

[Scene:

They build the bones of it in winter
So the frost clings to the planks
And they make a capsule for the cold
That no heat or blanket can melt.
You need another person. Think:
Cuddling. A kiss that isn't urgent.
But it never comes. Spring blooms late.]

I.

What if I were to start by saying what I want? You and I both know demands don't go over well. Everyone feels entitled to their own, and you can't ask for any of theirs. It's being an island, with the sea frozen over. I guess I always thought that when enough islands are in the same place they have to make a land, a continent. Islands don't want things. They chill. They take time. So I can't demand anything of you, or her, or her. I can only dream through a postcard, an aerial shot of you that shows the all the mountains and jungles, the way your eyes might glisten like waterfalls. Or I made that up. You know that's too poetic to be true. You think your eyes are grey, but the truth is that I don't really care. I like the way they look at me, when you decide to let them. I mean, that's why I save the postcards. So you can keep looking at me.

II.

I've never vandalized, but I kind of want to take bright red spray paint and guerilla the overpass on 81. Doesn't matter which one. I think people listen more to paint than words. Stuff like that builds up, that words don't matter. I might as well be mute. I might as well stay asleep. It makes me wish I had a violin instead of a tongue. If I didn't have a tongue I might not want to kiss as much. That means violins are more honest when they talk, I guess. Sorry, that's another want. But how come you can talk about what you

want, and I'll listen? Then I talk about what I want, but you think it's less sexy. That's not a fair system of trade. Any other merchant would call you out for the swindler you are. That's what I'd spray paint: swindler. *Swindler*. I like the way it sounds, even though it makes me angry. But that's why I'd use bright red.

III.

That last note had a lot of demands in it. What if this whole thing was about what I want? What else forces a human hand to paper? Not much. Maybe the title was misleading. The audience expects a monologue to reveal new information, but this one feels more like a Vaudeville than Shakespeare. So I'll tell you something you didn't know. Last night I walked along a dark road and fell to my knees. Tears came out of me like waterfalls. I don't care how lazy that sounds, they just didn't stop. So waterfalls it is. And I clutched the earth between my frosty gloves and I cried and cried and I mumbled words that haven't been said since Babel fell. When you wipe the snot away from your nose with clumps of grass you kind of stop giving a shit what people think of your demands. I laid on my back and stared at a sea of stars above, each star an island. And I kept each as a postcard, but they haven't helped me feel better.

IV.

I don't ever want to use grass as a tissue again. I *want* our talks to mean more. I want a dialogue, because this solo stuff is so hard.

Autumnal

Alex Heckman



photograph

Accidents

Rebecca Orner

“Mark,” said the voice scattering his thoughts, “are you going to answer me? I asked you what happened to your window.”

The question slipped away as Mark remembered the screaming and the shattering glass. He smiled widely, his big, brown eyes shining for a moment as he remembered that they’d still been together then, still a family. He imagined his blonde-haired, blue-eyed little boy in the backseat, his beautiful wife in the front, some kids’ song playing on the radio. He could remember the sound of his son’s and wife’s voices melding together in harmony, and then the smash of a Subaru plowing into the back of his hatchback Honda. His son’s singing turned to screams as glass flew through the car, nicking skin here and there. But everyone had been all right.

In the split second of time he had to imagine that moment, his face began to fall as other memories took hold of him. No more smiles, no more singing, no more blonde hair on his son’s head. Just trips back and forth for treatments in the car with the black tarp taped across the window because just like that tarp, money was tight. His wife no longer smiled and she aged in one year more than she had in the last ten. Somehow, control had slipped through their fingers and somehow, their son was leaving them.

After that accident was all over, his wife, unable to bear the burden, left him too. All he had left was his broken hatchback Honda.

“Just an accident,” he replied, climbing into the driver’s seat. He couldn’t help but stare into the rear-view mirror, projecting all of his life’s accidents onto the screen behind him.

Breathe

Morgan Jackson

“Okay, go!” My legs jolt forward move of their own accord and the wind pushes back the flyaway hairs that refuse to stay secure in my wet bun. The cold air rushes past my cheeks, bringing the blood to the top of my skin and making me look as if I am blushing at some dirty joke. Inhale. Exhale. My legs push me forward, the blood rushing in my veins. I begin to have difficulty breathing and my legs begin to get exhausted. I start to wheeze, my asthma acting up again. *Mind over matter* I think to myself; and so I push myself to run harder and faster despite my erratic breathing and failing legs. Almost there. One more lap. The tall cadet in front of me, Rogers, slows and turns to me asking if I’m alright. He must be able to hear my erratic breathing from one hundred yards in front of me. I nod, refusing to be distracted by my body’s inability to do what my mind wants it to do. Half way there. I decide to sprint the last fourth of the lap and finish out strong. As soon as the thought enters my mind, the muscles in my thighs and stomach contract with fear. No, I can do this. The point where I decided to sprint just seconds earlier approaches, closer and closer, and I’m dreading the moment I reach that point. Five meters. My heart beats faster. Two meters. It becomes more difficult to breath. I begin to sprint, my legs protesting more than ever. I can’t breathe. My breakfast sloshes in my stomach. I’m starting to feel sick and light-headed. Just as soon as I’m about to collapse, I reach the finish line and let out a rattled sigh of relief. It’s over. I did it. I lift my hands over my head in triumph and take in long, cold gulps of air.

Melancholic Dreams

Kevin Rook

I was alone; her
face was flushed of all
vitality and
comprehension, and
alas I was a
stranger. It was just
me, her son, her joy.
Now I am the one,
the protector, the wise.
I knew this day would
come yet yesterday
it seemed so distant.
But this surgery
exposed the mortal.
If she can fall, then
so can I. I am
human and still I
know the world in its
entirety but now
it does not know me.
And as I watch her
submit to repair,
eyes beginning to
shut, I smile so that
she won't see I am
dead, resurrected
with despair for the
eternal. For I

am no phoenix. My
ashes will complete
me, contained in my
new brass home, placed on

the mantel. Simply
a fragment of what
once was, buried deep
by disinterest.
Here, everything dies.
And now, as time has
passed, I remember
that one day the heart
monitor will cease;
as it will for me
and for you the same.
And the world will not
know you as you, but
rather a stranger
who succeeds the fate
of those that came first.
When that day comes, then
maybe the truth will
surface, that you too
were alone. And as
you fade, the world will
progress, happily
ever after, as
if you never had
existed a day.

Calder Mobile

Chelsea Schonhaut



oil on canvas

San Antonio

Monica Palmieri

On a lovely, lively
April afternoon,
I strolled down
the River Walk;
over the bridges,
along the curves;
where I enjoyed a
ride on a boat tour,
as the aroma of
plush plants breezed
through my nostrils;
and I enjoyed to
eat at a restaurant,
as spices and salsa
danced and tingled
on my taste buds.
Here, I observed
all kinds of art,
all kinds of people.
Tables for eating
lined the edge of the
avocado-green water.
Umbrellas for shade
stood beside the river,
painted like the dark
colors of a piñata—
pumpkin oranges,
deep-sea blues,
emerald greens,
crimson reds,
golden yellows.
I found creativity
and character in the
city of San Antonio—
the River City.

Keep Cycling

Emily Fulker

Are we really going to ride up that? My dad responds with a *yeah, why not?* My dad rarely doubts my ability to accomplish any biking feat. Sometimes, this is nice, and other times I think he's crazy. Nevertheless, we make it up the steep, grassy hill that crosses from Fogelsanger Road to Britton Park, a shortcut instead of riding along the road to the park entrance. We embark on the Rail Trail, and begin riding between the trees and farms that will guide us to Newville.

Soon, we start to see other bikers ahead of us on the trail, and I know my dad's competitive nature well enough to know what's coming next. *Let's catch up to that guy in front of us!* I roll my eyes but comply; this is a game I'm used to.

From the time I was born, I was toted along on the tandem bicycle with my parents in the car-seat-like-contraption on the back of the bike. When my mom was pregnant with my little brother, we had a family of four on a bicycle built for two. Some afternoons, I would ride my bike around our yard and run my own imaginary bike shop.

Every once in a while, I would reach into the cabinet under our bookshelf and pull out the teal, spiral-bound book that held the newspaper clippings and photos from the 1500 mile journey my dad and his college roommate took by bike. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to Tampa, Florida. I would sit on the floor and page through the photos that comprised two weeks of destination signs, sleeping bags on a random couple's floor, and campgrounds. There was a picture of my dad—looking much like my brother does now: tall and skinny, with almost-black, curly hair—posed in front of each state's welcome sign. For me, this adventure story beat any book that was housed on the bookshelves above.

Now, my dad and I often collect miles on the Rail Trail when the leaves are drifting down between layers of wind in front of us. Or on back roads, where the air is fresh with the smell of

farms and blue mountains can be seen from any angle. While we ride, my mind often drifts back to the days when I wondered if my dad would ever ride a bike again.

His prostate-specific antigen levels were higher than normal, and Dad needed a biopsy. My dad was only 46. This was just a routine physical. I said a prayer and told myself everything would be okay.

My mom told me the news: prostate cancer. *There's a high cure rate, and your dad is younger and healthier than most people who get this.* She said the words, but I was too uncertain to take refuge in them. I went to my room to cry, where no one would see me.

I didn't know how a sixteen-year-old was supposed to deal with the fact that her dad might die from cancer. It's not something our minds' are designed to accept. I mentally listed every reason that something like this shouldn't happen to a man who was as kind and generous as my father.

Questions filled all the places that used to be answers.

I chose to deal with it by not dealing with it. *How's your dad doing?* Friends asked, and I appreciated it, but I hated talking about it. I tried to evade conversations with my mom. I didn't want to see her pain, and I didn't want her to see mine. That would only double the burden on both of us.

My dad and I didn't talk about it either. It was a conversation topic we both tried to avoid. Even the pages of my journals are empty when I try to look back on how I was feeling then, but I don't need the absent pages to know.

We sat in the waiting room with the maroon-cushioned-chairs. We sat there for what seemed like an entire day. I drew pattern after pattern in my sketchbook with the fancy pens I received for Christmas. Each color combination and layout of chevrons, squares, and triangles distracted my mind from the fear

that was loitering. Prayers intermittently interrupted my stream of thoughts.

The hour came that the surgery was supposed to be over, and my anxiety levels rose as the doctor still hadn't come to tell us he was done. We continued to wait, pretending to be calm. My mom and her mother checked the time over and over.

The couches, on the floor where my dad's recovery room was located, folded out into beds. My brother and I explored the options of the furniture until we were allowed to go in and see my dad in his half-awake state. I didn't enjoy seeing my father laying in the small hospital bed, weak with pain. I wasn't supposed to see my dad like this, his Floridian complexion turned ghostly pale. The arm that threw softballs to me for hours now pierced with IVs. The legs that raced me across the yard encircled with inflatable devices to keep the blood circulating.

I tasted hospital food that week. I walked by the paintings in the lobby hallway, that were supposed to make the stark building more cheery, over and over. I watched as the whiteboard changed each day with the nurses' names and their shifts, cringing with knowledge of the things they would have to help him do.

My boyfriend helped me set up my bed in the living room and exchange it for an air mattress in mine. My dad needed to stay in the living room until he recovered enough to make the climb up the stairs.

My dad's pedals are spinning beside me, and I am feeling extremely grateful for this moment. I am filled with pride at the thought of all the exercises, physical therapy, and determination that led to his ability to ride a bicycle again. There were so many prayers, so much patience, so many sighs of relief at each clear test result.

Off the trail and onto a back road, our path is now outlined by swaying fields of hay. *The fields look pretty blowing in the*

wind like that, don't they? I nod my head in agreement. One of the things I love about cycling is that I have the chance to take in my surroundings and really appreciate them.

We approach one of the many hills that undulate across the Pennsylvania landscape, and it presents its challenge. *Earn the downhill*, Dad says, like he always does. So I climb, believing in the freedom that I'll find on the other side. The downhill feels like flying, and I can't help but smile.

My mom was so worried when my dad first started riding again after cancer. She thought he was going to get hurt, but day after day he would get on the bike and ride longer and longer. There is no stopping my dad when he has decided he's going to do something.

Mile 16 has passed, and my legs are burning from the hill we just ascended. Dad loves hills; he used to ride up the mountain for fun. Perhaps, his love of conquering challenges is what gave him so much success in beating cancer.

Statistics say that 1 in 7 men will develop prostate cancer at sometime during their life, and many times I have heard my dad on the phone with someone else we know who has just been diagnosed. He explains the surgery options and what worked for him in the recovery stage. In these moments, I am reminded of the times when I wondered why *my* dad would get cancer. Now, I see that he has a gift to offer people that only someone who has endured the battle with cancer can give.

I contemplate hamstrings, quads, and calves pushing pedals to cause chains to rotate spokes and rubber. My muscles are contracting, and my mind is relaxing with every inhale and exhale.

An Adventure a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

Alexandra Jones



photograph

[3 Times Daily]

Brittany Torrez-Alvarez

It's like bumper cars in reverse,
pedal pushing hard - the gas
and knuckles whitening on the wheel.

It's hard enough finding paths
when everything seems relative to
how much gas I can't afford
to drive a few roads over to fill a prescription
too expensive to take three times a day to
ensure my survival.

And there's always that song on the radio
at the most inopportune moments reminding me
that I'm always Under Pressure
but somehow these hives are only
from being more concerned that
I'm actually playing out a scenes in my head where
[I come in like Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly -
kicking over chairs -
about to throw down on

David Bowie and Freddie Fucking Mercury]
than whether I'll actually even pass music theory.
And I guess time will tell whether the third week in
and I'll pop these damn things like pez again but
at the rate I'm going, I've only remembered
to eat half of a banana for the day but forgot
how to stop writing poetry.

If only these two things could co-exist,
I could convince myself that I actually have my shit together
and maybe I'll actually get my actions and intentions
aligned with each other long enough to consider the taste of
bread again but right now I'm feeling like a tweaked
out version of Aragorn bearing testicular fortitude with vein glory
in the presence of onlookers that I swallow at to keep from

shouting:
BUT IT IS NOT THIS DAY!
fuck.

[light, when]

He's
somewhere
touching and/or
being touched
on a couch / at a bar / on a porch / under the sheets
and loving it. Probably.

[ten-thirty p.m.]

on: the lamp
of the girl biting her bottom lip and darkening
hand-drawn lines that bend slightly
regarding the thumb. And
someone will eventually find them
and comment on her lack of
creativity and/or
inspiration
and that Christmas she'll receive
a watercolor kit, lessons, and a card:
"to teach you that even
negative space has value."

But she won't say:
I know negative space,
and it's this:
[eleven p.m.]
[twelve a.m.]

[one] is asleep in the other's bed.
or not.

[nine a.m.]

And if he ever asks,
the girl will point and trace her finger
around every curve on the length of his skin
matching them to lines turned in succession
of the hand's memory of him.

But she's alone tonight.
No one's asking
so she's not saying
Blueprints to mobile foundation.

Or that:
[This one]: is for the curve in his hip
when he was laughing
and in my bed.

[this]: for the rise of his palm
never pulsating in immediacy
unless reaching for every girl except
the one who is mapping lines like

[this one here]: the back of the knee
touched - inspiring a laughter that she could wake to -
at age: seventy-three with bedside dentures, slippers
underfoot,
and grandchildren playing house in the living room
downstairs.
But Julia's voice is coming in at full volume when,

it's been days now and you've changed your mind again.

I overhear on a phone call to your friends that you're sharing a
pillow with
her, who:
has never met his mother, to know her food or
shared a summer nap with the family dog, eyes closed in sleep.

[nine fifteen a.m.]

And I wonder if she knows why his heart could never move
West
while his family lives East – but it is always vast and always
checking in.

I wonder: is she making breakfast?
and if she knows how he likes his French toast.

/or [ten-thirty a.m.]
that last night there was a lamp -
it was on,
and the light was for him.

Toad at Gifford Pinchot State
Park

Natalie Sharp



photograph

Oak Tree Blossoms

Mitchel Evan Bamberger

I can't wait for oak tree blossoms,
Dogwood's popping up from soil –
Ripe rotten aroma; sky spotted
With pedals and pollen and
Rain-driven-dry cotton, all
Snow white, light and frothy
I would like to spend my Sundays
Problem-less and picking poppy;
Tossing tops and saving the bottoms
In fresh open folds of dark sap
Sticky syrup so black with potential
For remedy and for wrath

Outlines in the Stars

Rebecca Orner

The school day sucked balls. I was always everyone's favorite target. Today, a girl with platinum blonde hair shoved me out of the way and I heard her mutter "crazy freak" under her breath as she pushed past me. And top it all off, I had to sit next to the boy who smelled like beans on the bus. I had a twenty minute ride next to the stinky boy and he was the one asking "why me?" Everyone treated me like I was contagious, like I might contaminate them.

I climbed the three flights of stairs up to my apartment, put my key in the lock and twisted, my sweaty palms slipped on the doorknob. When the door opened, my eyes honed in on the TV directly ahead of me. I could see Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck pointing guns at each other, fighting about whether it's duck season or wabbit season. Mom told me she liked cartoons, but she always looked sad when she watched them. I think she watched them because she could remember me as the innocent kid, the person I was before she put me away. I couldn't stand them.

"Matt, is that you?" she called from the kitchen. Who else could it be; no one else had a key to our apartment. I thought I saw someone standing in the corner, but I must have been imagining things. Just a weird flash of silver and mom clinking glasses together in the kitchen. It sounded oddly like laughter.

I puffed out a short, "Yeah, Mom, it's me," still a little winded from the three flights of stairs.

"Come in here and take your medication."

Rolling my eyes, I sighed just loud enough for her to hear and stalked to the kitchen. When I walked in she glared at me. Her icy glare could kill polar bears, but I really couldn't give two shits just then. I noticed she had already poured me a glass of water and set my pill bottle out on the counter. The childproof cap made me want to chuck the bottle across the room. Finally, I opened the bottle and shook a little, pearly blue capsule out into the palm of my hand.

“You haven’t—“

“No, Mom. I haven’t.” I cut her off, anticipating what she was about to say. And for once, I told the truth. I hadn’t seen Jimmy for a while. It was odd for him to stay away for so long—at least two weeks. We had planned to move in together after we graduated school in one month. With that thought, I slid the pill back in the bottle quietly so that she wouldn’t notice, took a sip of the water and pretended to knock back the pill solely for her benefit.

“Well, that’s certainly a good thing. You seem to be doing a lot better lately, especially since you went back to school.” She was making worried knots in a dish towel, drying her hands that were never wet to begin with. For the first time, I really noticed the wrinkles that creased around her eyes and her mouth. With her auburn hair pulled back in a tight bun, she looked so old. I couldn’t remember her ever looking old.

“Have you made a decision about St. John’s yet? I got a call at work from them today saying that they still need an answer from you.”

“No, I haven’t really given it much thought.” I lied this time. She didn’t need to know just how much I had been thinking about it.

“You need to get on that. You really don’t have much time left. We have to figure out the financial side of everything and think about everything you’ll need. There’s so much to do before August that you don’t have the luxury to mess around with this.”

I was so tired of talking about this. Every day it was the same thing. I would come home from a shit day at school to have my mom bug me about whether or not I wanted to go to some shit college that I hadn’t even applied to—she had applied for me.

“I haven’t really heard from Jimmy in a while, so I’m not quite sure what his plans are and what we might do.”

Her eyes widened and her nostrils flared. “Matthew

Grayson Greenwood.” She slammed the dish towel down on the counter. “You need to drop that boy. This is your future we’re talking about. Your entire life rests on this decision. I built this life for us here so that you would be able to make a decision like this. Do you want to be flipping burgers or fixing someone’s toilet for the rest of your life? You need to get your ass in gear before you end up like your father.” I couldn’t believe she played the dad card. That was not a fair move on her part. She had no right to compare me to that man. I was nothing like him. “I’m giving you until tomorrow to decide or else I will make this decision for you. I don’t want to do this to you, but you leave me no choice.” She wouldn’t look me in the eyes; hers were burrowed in the wall behind me.

I didn’t know what to say. My mind went blank and I just stared at her. My fingernails dug into the palms of my hands and I had to take a deep breath to keep myself from screaming at her. Finally, I said tremblingly, “So now you want to send me away again just like you did before? You know what that did to me. Is this all because of Dad? I’m not him and you can’t put that on me.”

Her eyes softened and her shoulders slumped. Then her body tensed as though she wanted to move forward and hug me. My hand twitched at my side, itching to slap her. “I only want what is best for you. You can go back to your room if you want. I’ll call you when dinner is ready.” I realized she had spaghetti cooking on the stove and garlic bread in the oven, but I couldn’t have been farther from hungry.

“Okay, Mom. Call me out if you need help.” I didn’t mean it and I knew she wouldn’t ask me for help even if she did need it.

She gave me a terse nod and went back to whatever it was she was doing before I walked in. I fled down the hallway to my bedroom. As soon as I was in the door I switched the stereo on. “Strawberry Fields Forever” started playing from the speakers. It was my steady song; the song that Dr. Starkey helped me to pick

out. I hummed a couple of bars, but stopped as soon as I saw the letter from St. John's whatever whatever sitting on my desk. I crumpled the letter up and dropped it in the trash can.

I flopped on my bed, feeling the blankets fluff up around me when I hit. Sighing, I stared up at the ceiling. It was a blank whitewash, but I could see the remains from those glow-in-the-dark stars that moms put on their kids' ceilings to keep them from being scared of the dark. Mom put mine up when I was five. I tore them down on my eighteenth birthday, only leaving a faint outline of each leftover from the glue.

Mom always tried to show she cared about me through things like making me pillows and mending my clothes, but that didn't make up for the time she sent me away when I was seventeen. I remember the fear in her eyes and the relief right before she had me institutionalized. And I could still remember the treatments, sitting in a room of people I didn't know, being forced to talk about the things that "haunted" me. Jimmy told me that no matter what they tried to do to me, I couldn't let them convince me that my friends weren't real. I held on to that, I held on to him. But they kept telling me that I was wrong, that the things I saw weren't real. I tried and I tried to tell them that it was all real, but eventually I had to play their game and pretend they were right. Thinking of what Jimmy had told me kept me strong and kept me going. When it was over, he was the only one I had left. She did it; she did all of that to me.

I knew why. She was afraid. She was afraid I would turn out like Dad. Dad had shown the signs later in life than I had, around the age of twenty-six. Mom had no idea what was going on with him. He would leave at all hours of the night, go on rants about people she had never met, and he started to get angry. He accused her of cheating on him. When he finally snapped, he held her at gunpoint and told her that when her lover showed up, he would shoot both of them. He said she made him do it. He said

that if it wasn't for her trying to control him and lie to him that he wouldn't have had to do any of it. But the supposed lover never showed up and he shot himself instead. I was two-years-old at the time.

I broke out in a cold sweat and pushed the thoughts out of my mind, heaved a sigh and rolled over on my side. I opened my eyes and saw a small, pixie-like girl with long, platinum blonde hair and extremely pale skin sitting on my windowsill. She had startling green eyes that put me on edge. Her smile showed me razor sharp teeth and she let out a laugh that sounded like breaking china.

"Hi. I'm Maddy," she said, gracefully climbing off the windowsill. She put out her hand like she wanted to shake mine.

"What the hell are you doing in my room?" I stood up and stared at her. This wasn't possible. She couldn't actually be here. She scoffed and looked at me with disdain. Dropping her arm as if she had never actually wanted to touch me, she said "Please, don't worry about that. That was the easy part."

"The easy part? You just show up in my room and that's the easy part?" I must have looked confused because she laughed at me again.

She lilted over to my bed and sat down on the comforter that Mom had just washed yesterday. I didn't like the idea of her sitting on my clean blankets. Tossing her hair over her shoulder, she crossed her left leg over her right. The motion caused her blue flowing skirt to hitch further up her thighs, showing more of her long, pale legs extending to little feet and toenails painted light blue.

Leaning backwards, she smiled at me. "The easy part," she repeated. "And after the easy part comes...?" She looked at me like I was supposed to answer her.

"Umm... Uh..." I stuttered. All of my wit and charm gone at the sight of a pretty, albeit unsettling, girl.

She rolled her eyes and clucked her tongue. "I thought you were smarter than this. I honestly didn't think you were stupid." I could feel my face scrunch up at her remark. Who was she to decide whether or not I was stupid? She was just some intruder in my room who wouldn't even tell me how she had gotten here or why.

"Now, now... I have every right to tell you that you're stupid if you can't even talk to me without stuttering." She must have read what I was thinking from the look on my face. "Mhmm," she hummed smartly, "the part that comes after the easy part is the hard part." She slowly announced the last two words as though that would make me understand them better.

I crossed my arms, narrowing my eyes, and scowling at her. "Then what's the hard part?"

"Don't you look all surly at me, boy. You think you're all grown up, but you can't even make a decision on what you want to be doing in one month when you graduate."

I felt my heart sink and my stomach start making knots as my pride deflated. How could she possibly know that? Playing it off, I asked her, "And what's it to you?"

She sat up and put her hand under her chin, feigning interest. "Oh, honey, it's everything to me. I have a proposition for you."

"The hard part?"

"Yes, the hard part. You see, I can give you an easy way out. No decision between going to college or staying here with your imaginary friends."

"They aren't imaginary; Jimmy is more real to me than you will ever be." I was fuming now. She was in my room and dared to insult me for no seeable reason. What. A. Bitch.

At the mention of Jimmy, her smile widened. She looked like the Cheshire Cat and I hoped she would disappear, just like he did. Pushing her bangs away from her eyes, she glanced at me and

said, "Oh calm down Firecracker, don't get your ginger hair all up in curls. Do you want to hear what I have to say or not?"

Closing my eyes, I willed myself to calm down. In through your nose, out through your mouth, I coached myself trying to grasp hold of my temper. After a couple of solid breaths, I said, "What do you have to say?"

She suddenly became serious. "You really want to know the easy way out of here? It'll never be the same for you afterwards."

I figured I had nothing to lose. And easy was always good, so I said, "Let's hear it."

There was a sudden knock on the door and I heard Mom's voice from the other side. "Matt, honey, are you all right in there? Who are you talking to?" Her concern oozed through the door and I could tell that she really wanted to come in and make sure I wasn't talking to anyone I shouldn't be.

"I'm fine Mom, just calling a classmate to get my homework." I glanced over at the unused cell phone sitting on my desk. Should I really be lying to her about a strange girl in my room? But hey, what was one more lie on top of everything else? She never seemed to mind lying to me.

"All right, dinner should be ready in about fifteen minutes, so wrap it up soon. We have a lot to talk about." I really didn't like the sound of that. I didn't want to talk to her and have her judge me and tell me what I needed to do with my life.

I heard her walking away when Maddy coughed from behind me. I turned to face her again and she patted the space next to her on the bed, inviting me to sit. I realized I was standing as far away from her as the confines of my room would allow. Very slowly, I walked over to her and sat down, leaving a good amount of space between us. But even with that space, I could feel the cold emanating from her body and a smell like dying flowers.

"Now, back to what we were talking about before we were so rudely interrupted. If you don't want to have to choose between

two good things, you can take the easy way out. All you have to do is follow me out the window." She smiled again, showing all of her teeth.

"Wait, you mean like follow you to Neverland or some other kind of Peter Pan, Disney bull shit?"

"No, I mean follow me out the window. Simple as that. It's all face value here; no illusions."

I could hear the panic slowly creeping into my voice as I said, "So you're telling me that you want me to jump down three floors to splat on the concrete?"

"I'm telling you that I want you to do what you want to do."

My head started to spin. I reached for the edge of the bed, trying to have a hold of something, anything to keep me grounded. I thought of everything I had yet to do: my first job, my first car, my first kiss...

As if she could read my mind, she leaned over, grabbed the front of my shirt, and pulled me towards her. She put her open mouth over mine and kissed me. At first I was so shocked that I just sat there, but then I tried to fight back. I tried to pull out of her grasp, but she held on to me so tight that I couldn't get free. Then something came over me and I just gave in to her, kissing her back. She tasted like decay and rotten fruit. If lies had a taste, I thought to myself.

Over my lips she whispered, "So you think I'm a liar?" She pulled away and her eyes softened, suddenly sad and pitiful. "I only tell you the truths you're too afraid to admit to yourself."

"How did you know what I was thinking? Can you read my mind?" We were still close and I could still smell the decay on her breath.

"Honey, I am your mind."

I pushed away from her cold body, the smell digging into my brain and making me sick to my stomach. So this was just

another vision, just another episode. I had been trained to handle these. I closed my eyes and started to hum my song to wipe my mind completely clean. But a question nagged in my head and stopped me from making her go away. What if she was my mind? Could she tell me what I really wanted to do?

She drew herself closer to me, pressing her shoulder against mine. "Now, I can't tell you that," she whispered in my ear, "but I can tell you the truth about your situation."

That caught my interest and I couldn't help but ask her, "My situation?"

She softly hissed at me, "The signs you have been ignoring for months. You know Jimmy isn't real and you know that school your mom wants to send you to isn't really a college. It's an institution. She's been on to you for weeks now, noticing that you haven't been taking your pills, seeing the far off look you get, noticing when you're thinking about people who don't really exist. She sees your father in you and she hates it."

"Stop it!" I screeched at her, falling to my knees with head in my hands. My mind felt like it was about to explode. But I knew she was right. Of course she was; it made sense. It explained why mom filled everything out for me, why she never took me on the typical college visit, why she was pushing me to choose to go there. My life, my decision about my entire future had been a lie. Suddenly, nothing mattered anymore. This was the final betrayal. This realization was the final chance my mother got. I would not let her send me away again.

"Matt, it doesn't have to be like this." Jimmy's voice warmed me inside as I heard it for the first time in weeks. I felt his hand on my shoulder and I looked up to see him kneeling down across from me. Having him there, I was torn. He hadn't been with me in so long, but now that I know, we can never be the same again.

My voice shook as I said, "How do you know what it has

to be like? How could you possibly know? You haven't been here. You left me alone with everything."

"I know, Matt. Of course I do. I'm closer to you than any other person could ever be. I'm a part of you." I opened my mouth to say something, anything telling him that I didn't think we were really as close as he thought, but Maddy cut me off.

"This is touching and everything, but Matt, we have a flight out your window to catch." She stared at her fingers, picking the dirt out from under her nails.

Jimmy seethed. He stood up faster than I thought possible and looked like he was about to punch her. "He's not going anywhere."

"I beg to differ."

"You can't make him do anything. He won't listen to you. He'll listen to me."

"I think it's a little late for that, pookie."

Jimmy turned around and looked at me, his mouth in a straight line, breathing deeply in and out. "Matt, what is she talking about? You aren't doing this. You can't. We made a promise to each other."

"You aren't real." I felt a single tear roll down my cheek.

He staggered backward a step, like he had just been kicked in the chest. He had that look on his face, that one where his eyes got wide and his face scrunched up, the one where he was trying to think of what to say next but couldn't.

"Matt, I am real. I swear I am. And I can help you. You don't have to listen to her. I can help you and you can be okay." His eyes were pleading and he bent down again so that we were on the same level.

"But you aren't real."

"I am--"

I harshly whispered, "You aren't real!" and pushed him away. The recoil on his face was like a stab in my chest. He wasn't

real and I couldn't stay with him, consciously aware of the fact that he was my imagination. I put my head back in my hands, trying to keep myself from sobbing.

I didn't even hear him go. The only thing I heard was Maddy moving off the bed. She crawled down on the floor beside me and began stroking my hair. Her cold, thin fingers were a relief for the fever beginning in my forehead.

"There is a way out; you know what you have to do. It was easy for your Daddy and can be just as easy for you." She stood up and walked over to the window. Pushing it open, she took a deep breath of fresh air and her entire body relaxed. She pulled herself up onto the sill, hooking her knees on the ledge. With one last wave, a nod of the head, and a "He wasn't real, Matt. So what else isn't real?" she flipped backwards out of the window to plummet down to the pavement.

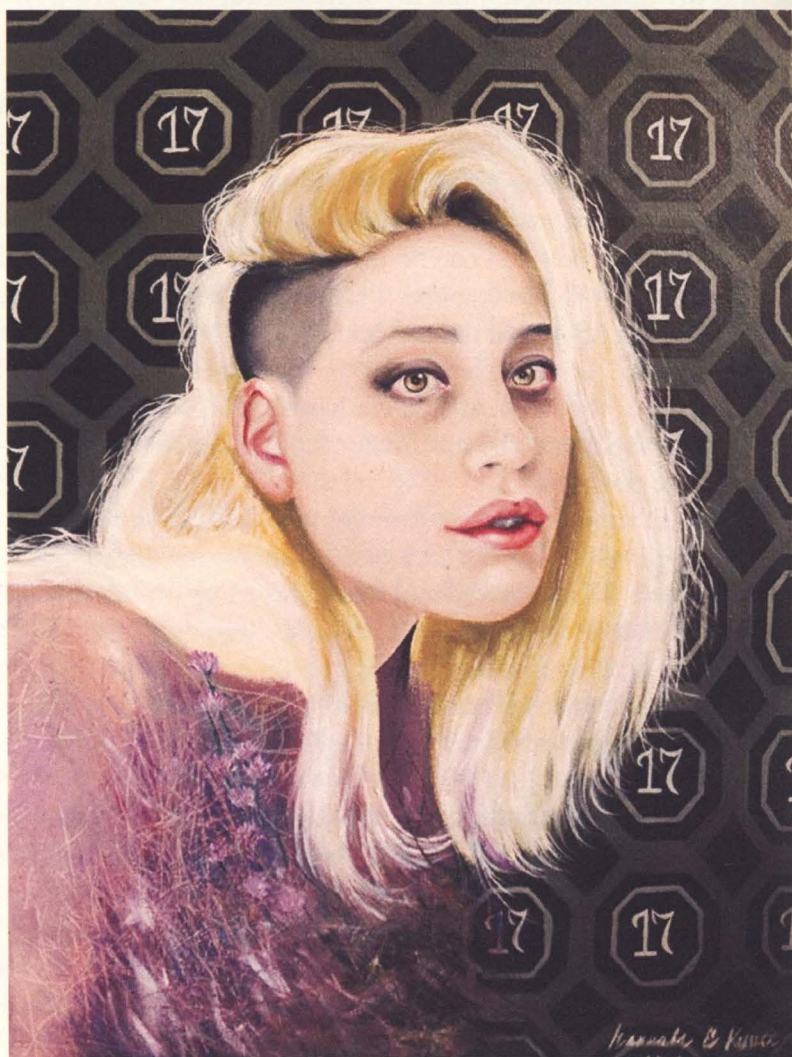
I dashed over to the window in the hope to see her one last time before she hit, but as I suspected, she never did. She just vanished. So I followed suit and climbed up on the sill. She had made it obvious that this was my only true way out. I could never go to another institution, and I could never stay here with an imaginary friend. I closed my eyes and prepared to hurl myself backwards when my bedroom door opened.

"Matt, dinner's—What are you doing!?"

All I could do was wave and say, "Bye Mom, I loved you," before I let myself fall out the window. I wanted to see the glowing comfort of the stars one last time, but the New York City smog was too dense. All I got was a scream and the sound of a laugh like shattering glass, but I couldn't even tell if it was her scream or mine as I fell to the ground.

Muse #1

Hannah Kuncze



oil on canvas

A Poisoned Fountain of Youth

John Watts

I used to watch the children play in the park on Saturdays. Boys would bash at each other with whatever fallen branch was within reach, all the while screaming, hell-bent on their own animalistic self-destruction. They were vile little brutes, and I thanked my good fortune that I never had a son of my own. Had I a son, he may have turned out like them, or worse, like me. But even with their incessant howling, the boys never interested me. It was to the girls that I gave my attention.

They were always so charming. Like young ladies in the courts of royalty, they would play merrily, with laughter lighter than the clouds. To each other, they were princesses. To me, they were enthralling. I remember watching them, with their pigtails and curly hair flowing behind them as they raced around the playground, and their gentle curving of the bottoms of their dresses, colored in shades of pink, blues, or reds. The passion in their voices, the angelic innocence of their demeanor... it would make new vitality flow back into my being, as if an unseen energy were passing from their fragile bodies and into my aged frame. I felt my heart beat beneath my sweater, its drum-like tempo going faster and faster every time the little girls came close to my bench. Never in my life had I felt so utterly alive. Their movement, their voices, their everything was new life being poured into me, and I drank deeply from it. But nothing is without cost; rejuvenation came with a price of a cage.

I no longer watch the children play in the park on Saturday. I sit confined, being punished for my love.

Our Little Drives

Myrissa Sorah

“First is just for pulling out from a complete stop; unless you’re stopped going downhill, then you can just roll on out and pick it up in second.”

I was fifteen when Dad taught me, against my will, to drive a clutch. He was really excited about it—it was his parental right, and I was the first kid. Dad was so anxious that one day, when I was eight, he had me “drive” from the top of our driveway to the garage. It was the first time he got in the passenger seat instead of just having me sit on his lap and steer. Our driveway was sloped, and I was going downhill toward the house.

“Don’t even use the gas pedal,” he told me. “Just let it roll and use the brake.”

I was incredibly nervous even though I was only going a distance of about forty-yards. Half-way down, I just froze; both hands on the wheel and right foot hovering over the brake.

“Myrissa hit the brake.” Fear seemed to grab ahold of me. I didn’t say anything or do anything; I couldn’t. “Myrissa!” We were dangerously close to the garage when Dad leaned over and pushed the brake in with his hand. The car jolted to a stop just as the side of the front bumper came into contact with the outer rubber lining of the garage door. There was no damage and we were going no more than seven miles per hour but still, it was a scarring moment for an eight-year-old and one that scared me into believing that I would never drive. Dad of course, had different plans for me.

Shortly after I turned fifteen and being impatient for me to get my permit, dad excitedly started teaching me stick. He always told me, “If you can drive stick, you can drive anything.” First, he set me up in front of the computer to watch an incredibly long and seriously mundane YouTube video on the mechanics of the clutch and how the gears interacted with one another.

Fascinating, I know.

I have no clue why he thought this was a good idea. I didn’t

understand how knowing how the gears worked was going to teach me to actually drive it. In fact, if anything, it made me even more resistant to learn in the first place. I was perfectly content driving an automatic just like the rest of my friends, and I distinctly remember thinking that I was never going to own a manual car. Ever.

“Ready to get in the Civic?” Dad said after the video.

“Absolutely not,” I replied. But I didn’t really have a choice.

Without turning the car on, he had me go through the motions; push the clutch in, shift, let the clutch out while giving it gas, brake, clutch all the way in when coming to a complete stop, etc. I hated it. When I finally graduated to actually turning the car on I was a nervous wreck.

We lived in the sticks just outside of Wellsville, Pennsylvania and very close to Pinchot Park. All of the vacant back roads were perfect for driving lessons in Dad’s mind. He would come home from a busy day directing planes, he was an air traffic controller, change out of his slacks and into a pair of jeans and hurry me out the door to go for a “little drive.” I wasn’t much of a rule breaker when I was younger and I argued that it was illegal for me to drive on the streets without my permit; to which Dad said something like “if we get caught, you’re not in trouble, I am, so chill out.”

Dad wasn’t worried about me doing anything to his car. According to him there was nothing I could do to hurt his trusty ’95 Civic. It was his little crap car that he bought for his thirty plus minute commute to HIA to save on gas; it got more than twice the mileage of his jacked-up duramax diesel. The Civic, which Dad had re-named “the bullet” to make it seem manlier, was an odd shade of greenish-blue and the back bumper was half-on, half-off. It of course sported a couple West Virginia stickers in the side windows and a very shiny West Virginia license plate on

the front that looked totally out of place on the dumpy car. It's one of Dad's many ways of paying homage to his home state and, by law, favorite college football team. It had no air-conditioning, no automatic anything and no matter how much he cleaned the interior, which, granted, wasn't very often, those cloth seats always seemed to be coated in a thick layer of dirt.

I got so frustrated trying to drive his stupid car. I could never shift smoothly, the engine made terrible sounds, and I always stalled at least four times before I could actually pull out successfully; even then it felt like the car was going to shoot up into outer space. These "little drives" always ended with me being irritated with Dad and him being irritated with me. Sometimes I would dread the driving sessions so much that I would pretend to be napping when he came home. This would have been a good plan except for the fact that I have one of those dads who has absolutely no problem waking up his sleeping kids.

A couple of days after I got my permit, while we were out running errands for Mom, Dad pulled his car over and parked in the very back of a Kohl's shopping center parking lot.

"Why are you parking way down here?" I asked.

"Get out of the car," he said, calmly ignoring my question. I got out and he pointed to the driver's seat. "Sit down." I started to argue, but he wouldn't have it. He got in the passenger side, sat down, shut the door and stared out the front window waiting for me to get in the car.

When I finally got in, he informed me that I was going to practice pulling out over and over again until I was comfortable with it and then I was going to drive us all the way home. I stalled so many times, and I got so frustrated that I started crying. I was partially hoping he would take pity on me and just take us home.

Fat chance.

We were in the back of that parking lot for what seemed like hours. It was torture; pull out into the next parking space,

complete stop; pull out, complete stop, etc. After finally pulling out a couple of times in succession without revving the engine or giving us whiplash, Dad cut me some slack and drove us home.

We had several more “little drives” over the next year until I became somewhat comfortable with it and a little less defiant. While on my permit, whenever we had to go somewhere I always had to drive and it had to be in “the bullet” because I “needed the practice. I thought when I got my license that Dad would ease up, but I was wrong. I hated to have to go anywhere because it meant I had to use Dad’s stupid car to get there. Before learning to drive I thought that getting your license meant gaining some level of independence and freedom but for me, having my license just provided another way for me to embarrass and frustrate myself. I stalled the car often at red lights or stop signs and it seemed to always happen when I had the nicest people waiting behind me; you know, the ones who liked to reassure insecure drivers by laying on their horn or yelling out the window. It wasn’t until after my seventeenth birthday that I was considerably more confident behind the wheel.

My parents bought me my car then, a little unconventionally. I was opening presents in Texas Roadhouse and I knew exactly what I was getting. The first gift was leather cleaner and then came the wiper fluid and a quart of oil. Last but not least I opened what looked like a jewelry box with the car keys inside. Mom and Dad told me that I had to find the car myself so my friends and I ran all around the parking lot pushing the panic button and we screamed like a couple of idiots when the car went off directly beside us.

It was beautiful; a little silver ‘01 Honda Accord coupe with a sunroof and my very own West Virginia license plate tacked to the front. And, to top it all off, it was a clutch. Having my own car really forced me to get over the trepidation that always accompanied my driving stick before. The whole independence

feeling also came and the more I drove my car, the more I learned to love driving a manual. I have even gotten to the point where I hate driving automatics; I feel like I'm not in control of the vehicle unless I'm shifting the gears myself. As an added bonus, no one ever asks to borrow my car. The number of people who can't drive stick really shocks me; I guess it's just because their dads weren't as persistent as mine.

The Dentist

Jenna Watson



acrylic

The Dead and Dying, Overboard

Cory Stevens

Just as Turner took
his hand to canvas,
I'll take my hand to you.

But I can't seem to
scratch into you
like he could canvas.

I marvel at how

Grace is a word unknown
to those without paint-stained
hands, those who sleep
too little.

I'll scribble EDEN on you
just the same,
and thin out imperfections
after.

Aruba

Crystal Conzo



photograph

Counting

Madelyn Moyer-Keehn

According to USDA a woman between the ages of 16 and 19 should consume 1,800 calories each day.

My slender fingers dance across the scratched touch screen, clicking when my nails hit the glass, pressing categories and scrolling through lists before selecting a few options. A blue window pops up:

Breakfast- All-Bran Buds, 1/3 cup, 75 calories

Lunch- Banana, one, 105 calories

Dinner- Not yet eaten

Total- 180 calories

My wavy strawberry blonde hair falls back against my shoulders, covering the sharp bones of my shoulders and spine. I live in an apartment with a girl named Callie. Well, I did. But after she failed her classes last semester her parents made her move back home even though she had already pre-paid her rent for this semester. Our relationship consisted of head nods and nothing more. I never really got to know her, and neither of us minded so much. It was nice to have someone around who didn't care what I was, or wasn't, doing. A neon pink sticky note at the corner of the fridge draws my eyes towards it. I vaguely remember hanging it on the fridge weeks ago next to this semester's class schedule.

"Andy visit Oct. 24."

I can hear the blood pounding in my ears. I can hardly breathe as my throat tightens. I press the button on my phone again, hoping I read the date wrong, but I didn't. It's been months since I've seen my stepbrother, Andy, between college and my job at the library. We used to spend all of our time together and now most of our text conversations fizzle out during the half hour pauses when we're studying or driving somewhere or the to-do list attached to the corner of my desk distracts me and I forget there even was a text to answer.

Shoving my feet into a pair of pink slippers under the table,

I stand and check the cabinets one by one and then the fridge. I find one half eaten loaf of bread, stale cereal, milk that expired a month ago, and a box of food from a restaurant trip with my roommate and her friends. I told them I'd eat it when I got home. Now it's so green and fuzzy I can't even remember what it was when I got it. I grab my black Wal-Mart purse and walk to the door, checking the time again on my phone before tossing it into the purse, 12:47. I have time.

As I reach to open the door, I hear a knock and know it's him. I let him in. Andy towers over me. His dark hair hangs over his glasses. I have no clue how he can see when it's long like that. He'll never cut it though. He had a buzz cut once before his mom, Cindy, met my dad. Every time Cindy pulls out pictures of Andy's short hair he cringes. I shove the panic into the back of my mind and wrap my arms around him. He smells like cinnamon and coffee. I feel my mind drifting to an early morning in the kitchen back home. I was still a senior in high school at the time, and I had already lived with Cindy, Dad, and Andy for two years.

Cindy took my phone after Dad went to work at the nursing home. I was hungry and frustrated that I binged the night before. My lips trembled, and my eyes filled with tears. The kitchen tiles felt like ice, even through the denim of my skinny jeans. They were loose. Months ago they wouldn't even button. The cabinet's handle dug into my shoulder blade with a dull ache. Cindy knelt in front of me with an emotion in her eyes I'd never seen before. I've seen it a lot since.

"I saw the lists," she said. She grabbed my hand and squeezed. "Please, talk to me, Lolly," she begged. I averted my eyes and jerked my hand away.

Cindy spoke again, "Lola. I'm serious."

"Leave me alone," I said. I wriggled further into the corner and pulled my knees up against my chest.

“Why are you doing this to yourself?”

I ignored her.

“We can get you help.”

“I don’t need help,” I responded. “I’m perfectly fine. I could eat more if I needed to, but I’m not hungry so why force myself? I don’t need more food than this. I feel great, actually.”

“I called your dad,” Cindy replied.

“Why? This doesn’t even matter. You guys are making a huge fuss over nothing. I’m not rebelling, and I’m not sneaking out, and I’m not failing. What I eat shouldn’t matter to you.”

Cindy shook her head and said, “This isn’t about you being in trouble or bad. This is the opposite. It’s about us caring about you and wanting to help you get healthy.”

“I am healthy. I said that already,” I say while I run my hands through my hair.

“If we have to check you in ourselves, we will. Lolly, we want what’s best for you.”

“I hate you,” I said. I don’t know why I said it, but before I could stop myself the words were out there. I knew she cared but her discovery seemed like a one-way ticket to a long stay at the hospital.

My words echoed in my ears and all I heard for half a minute was the whirring of the refrigerator. She stood up and left the kitchen. We didn’t talk for a week. I stumbled down the hall and slammed my fist against Andy’s door until it popped open then slipped through the opening. Andy looked up from a book. His glasses were shoved up in his hair and he pulled them down to look at me. He blinked his dark brown eyes rapidly a few times before making eye contact while I wiped my cheeks dry.

“Lolly, what’s wrong?” he asked.

He slid his desk chair over to me and put his hands on my shoulders. My entire body was shaking.

* * *

Andy's voice pulled me from my memory, "When are you coming home to visit?"

"No clue. So, Andy, how's school?" I ask.

"Cut the crap. You know how school is. I got into college and I'm passing all of my classes. That's about all there is to know."

"Want to go for lunch? My treat," I say, smiling at him.

He pulls his hand through his hair with a sigh. "Fine."

It's so quiet I can hear a fly buzzing in the backseat and distant honks down by the McDonald's and Wawa. I toy with the idea of turning on the radio, but it feels too quiet to disturb the silence with music. I open my mouth to speak, wondering what to even say. I close it again and the fly moves closer. I have this feeling that if I finally found the words to say the fly would land in my mouth and choke me. That'd be just my luck. We pull into the parking lot of Michael's Diner and the moment is broken when Andy opens the door and the cold air flows in. The restaurant is warm and the waitress seats us quickly. The moment I get my coat off and lay it next to me, Andy starts.

"Your dad said he's coming to visit in a few weeks," he says.

"Is Cindy coming too?" I ask.

"She said she'd like to, but only if you're cool with it."

I look at the menu but the letters blend together into swirls of brown and cream and red. After a few seconds I blink it away and skim the menu over and over until I can make my eyes focus on the words. Once I do, I realize I can't find anything I want to eat. Eventually I decide on a cup of water and a bowl of pasta. My stomach aches at the thought of slimy, greasy pasta sliding down my throat. I know Andy would prefer that to a salad, though, and I'd be more likely to get away with pretending to eat it. My leg bounces rapidly under the table until the food arrives. Under the

table, I calculate.

Breakfast- All-Bran Buds, 1/3 cup, 75 calories

Lunch- Banana, one, 105 calories

Dinner- Water, 0 calories

Pasta with vegetables, one cup, 310 calories

Total- 490 calories

Sipping the cold water, I grab Andy's hand.

"See, I'm fine," I tell him.

"Eat the pasta," he responds.

I dig my fork into a few noodles and a piece of broccoli and draw them to my mouth. Andy's eyes stay focused intensely on me. My calm facade must work because he looks out the window as I lift the fork up for another bite. The first one barely made it down my throat. I feel it lingering in my stomach and I feel my stomach acid bubbling. I let the second forkful drop back down into the bowl when he isn't looking. I set to work on cutting up the noodles. I methodically cut apart sets of five noodles at a time. Slowly I crush them beneath the metal prongs and watch the food in my bowl seem to disappear. I continue bringing pieces of broccoli to my mouth whenever Andy is looking.

"Remember last time we came here?" I ask after my fourth bite.

"When your dad hit on that waitress?"

I laugh and kick him under the table and he kicks back.

"He did not hit on her. It was a complete misunderstanding."

"Uh huh, sure."

We both pause for a moment and grin. We catch a glimpse of the waitress from that night and start laughing again. I keep cutting up my food, but the conversation keeps Andy distracted enough not to notice.

"This is nice," Andy says.

I nod.

“Tell me the truth, Lolly, are you doing okay? Are you feeling better?”

The muscles in my entire body tense and my hands begin to shake. I can no longer hear the chatter from the other diners. It's just Andy and I and the question. Why does it have to be that damn question? I mull it over in my mind, pondering all the ways to answer.

“I'm fine, see? I'm eating. I don't check the numbers anymore. I eat when I'm hungry,” or “I'm getting help from the nurses at college, they're making sure I'm okay, they say I'm right on track,” even “I'm trying really hard right now and with you and Cindy and dad supporting me I feel like I can do it.” Instead, I zone out and remember the last time I had The Conversation.

Cindy and Dad sat on the other side of the table. The tablecloth was uneven and touched the tiles on one side of the table. I stared at its grimy edge as they spoke.

“Lolly, we can pay for some kind of help for you,” Dad said.

“We both love you and want what's best for you,” Cindy added.

I shoved my heels against the floor and pushed my chair back so it rested only on the back legs. Rocking forward and back I kept my eyes down at the floor.

“The doctor said there's a type of rehab for this, and it's not long. You could still graduate on time and see your friends and go to prom. They just watch your food intake,” Dad continued. “We want to help you, but you have to let us help you. Tell us what we can do for you to make this easier. Unless you start trying, we're checking you into the program next month.”

I grabbed the green hair tie around my wrist and pulled it, letting it snap back against my skin.

I said, “I'll work on it. Three meals a day and whatever, but



I'm not going to any program. I'll get rid of the app."

I apologized to Cindy, I shoved food around my plate, and I kept a food journal and a calculator in the pocket of my purse. In the mornings I grabbed a bowl of cereal, in school I ate nothing, and at dinnertime I ate as much as they told me to. When it was too much to keep down, I snuck away and puked in the bathroom as soon as no one was around to hear me. They wanted so much to trust me that they didn't even see the problem was still there. So when graduation passed and college was coming up they allowed me to move into an apartment on campus.

Andy taps a finger on my plate and stares at me.

"Sorry, I guess I'm tired."

Andy responds, "You didn't answer my question. You're still acting the same as you did when you first started all of this. We used to have fun together, but now you're quiet and distracted and you're always on that damn app. The one you promised them you'd get rid of. You even look sick. I come visit you because I want to see you get better. But once I start at IUP the drive back to Berks County will take hours. And if this is the person I'll be seeing when I visit, I won't be back often."

My throat tightens up and my heart races in my chest. I try to reach my hand out to Andy but it feels like my body is made of lead. I can barely lift my fingers and when I do they feel numb. I shake my head frantically.

"Andy. Please. One more chance, I'll stop, I swear."

"This is your last chance. I'm tired of trying and I'm tired of getting my hopes up."

He waves down the waitress and gets our check. I pay and drive us both to the Redner's down the street. In a whirlwind of icy refrigerator doors and bags and cans and bottles the cart fills up and a middle-aged man rings me up. \$157.68. I've never spent this much on food, but Andy looks ecstatic. For a normal person

this would last a month. For me, it would last all year. He helps me fit the bags in the trunk of my little car, and then unload them again when we reach my apartment. I see the horrified look on his face when he opens all the empty cabinets but I pretend not to notice. When everything is away and I promise once again to eat three meals a day, Andy leaves and the apartment returns to the usual creaks and groans it makes when I'm alone. I hold my finger against the app and click the little x in the corner. It asks if I'm sure and I hit yes. Poof. It's gone.

At least to me it seems like it would make sense to catalogue just for a few days since I'm in the habit. I dig out an old notebook and rip out the first few pages that are covered in scribbles from high school. A photo falls out of the middle of the notebook and lands upside down on the floor. Curious, I pick it up. It's a picture of Andy and I from my junior year of high school. Our parents had already been married for a few years, but we only saw each other on holidays and weekends until I moved in with Dad and Cindy. There wasn't a major life event or shenanigan when I moved out of mom's place. We just didn't have anything in common and she thought I would be better off with dad. We don't talk much anymore but it doesn't really affect me because we never really did in the first place. She works all day and falls asleep promptly at 7 pm each night.

The day I moved in it was halfway through my junior year and Andy was at a comic book store. By the time he got back, I was moved in and sitting in my room talking to my dad. We said hello as he passed the door and that was about it. We drove together to school every morning and for the first few weeks the rides were pretty quiet with the awkward types of conversations you have with people you're related to in some way but barely know. Like when that second cousin on your mom's side once removed asks how school's going and you nod, even if your school was attacked by a giant alien or something you'd just nod anyway

to get yourself out of the conversation. By the third week we broke the silence.

“Can I borrow your calculator?” Andy asked while digging through his backpack. His eyebrows were scrunched up and half the contents of his bag were poured out on the floor of the car. He wiped a hand across his forehead and kept opening pockets and zippers as if hoping his calculator would appear. He ended up borrowing mine.

A few nights later we went to Island Pizza to celebrate his exam grade. Dad and Cindy were both working late so it was just Andy and I. We talked for a while and listened to the music, a kid playing a ukulele and singing a slowed down version of something I heard on the radio but couldn’t name. By the month and a half mark we hung out every day after school, knew all of each other’s friends, and had a string of inside jokes.

Halfway through my senior year, Andy already knew about the app and the calories and I’d gone down three sizes in skinny jeans. He’d picked up my phone when I was editing an essay for him. All he said was “Please don’t do this,” but his expression said it all. His eyebrows were scrunched up again, like when he lost his calculator. But he didn’t look confused. This time he looked lost and nervous. His left eye twitched a little, almost imperceptibly. I handed Andy’s essay back to him and left the room.

I sat in my room, tears burning down my face, cheeks puffy, hyperventilating until I heard a knock at my door. Andy came in and sat cross-legged on the floor.

“I still love you Lolly.”

I rubbed my face dry and blew my nose.

“We’ll figure something out,” he said while picking up a small plush cat off the floor. “At least it isn’t raining cats and dogs out there.” He bounced the cat off my head and laughed, and I laughed too. Which degenerated into a fit of coughing from all the crying and snot, but we kept laughing anyway. After all, how often

does it rain cats and dogs?

* * *

Food journal: October 25th,
Breakfast: Egg white, one, 17 calories
Light and Fit yogurt, one, 80 calories
Skim Milk, one cup, 86 calories
Lunch: Chicken breast, ½, 164 calories
Skim Milk, one cup, 86 calories
Apple, one, 72 calories
Dinner: Spinach, one cup, 7 calories
Crackers, two, 40 calories
Tuna, one can, 33 calories
Skim Milk, two cups, 172 calories
Total- 757 calories

My stomach churns. It's been doing flips all day. My head aches. I try to take a nap, but find myself sitting on the floor in the bathroom instead, fighting the urge to puke. Everything aches. I want to exercise but I feel too sick to work out or walk or run. I've eaten too much and it doesn't feel good. Why do they always tell me this is healthy? This can't be healthy. I feel like I've been punched in the stomach.

Food Journal: October 26th
Breakfast: Coffee, one cup, 2 calories
Skim Milk, one cup, 86 calories
Banana, one, 105 calories
Lunch: Chicken breast, ½, 164 calories
Crackers, two, 40 calories
Skim Milk, two cups, 172 calories
Apple, one, 72 calories
Dinner: Egg white, one, 17 calories

Light and Fit yogurt, one, 80 calories

Water, two cups, no calories

Banana, two, 210 calories

Total- 948 calories

I can no longer get out of bed after dinner. I sat a small bucket on the floor just in case. The sick feeling has travelled from my stomach to my throat. I feel like I'll choke but I know there's nothing there. My head is throbbing and as I lean forward I can feel my food threatening to come back up. I fall back against my pillows, take another few tums, and turn out the lights.

Food Journal: November 1st

Breakfast: All-Bran Buds, 1/3 cup, 75

Skim Milk, one cup, 86 calories

Lunch: Egg white, one, 17 calories

Skim Milk, one cup, 86 Calories

Dinner: Mixed veggie salad, no dressing, 17 calories

Water, two cups, 0 calories

Total- 281 calories

My body feels strong today, finally. I feel fine. A better word would be healthy. I feel healthy. My stomach doesn't ache and I don't feel sick at all. I've been focusing perfectly all day. I attended all my classes, which hasn't happened much over the past week. I missed so many classes when I was cooped up inside feeling awful. But today I went to the gym and I ran on the treadmill for twenty minutes. I feel so refreshed, strong, and confident.

Headline

Alex Heckman



photograph

Listen Up

Sara Landis

This is not a poem.
It is, however, a challenge.
To your mind
to what you've been taught
to everything you thought you knew about poetry.
This is a lesson in being content.
Letting things go;
Acceptance.
no dOUBT you will be trying to find meaning
in my ARbiTrary capitalization.
You're looking for a mesSage.

Stop.

Why can't it just be?
Why must there be meaning behind it all?
My letters will be capitaliZed whenEver they feel like it.
Maybe the ones in the miDDle want their chance at being big.
Or, maybe they just are.
no rhyme
no reason
just being.
Next you'll be looking for intention in my
s p a c i n g
You'll think, "There has to be purpose"
Words can't just skip across the page
without hidden significance.
But they can
and they are.
They don't need your permission,
stamped: APPROVAL.

While you try to keep them contained, they grow angry,



stirring rebellion.
They want freedom.
They will have it.

when
will
you

STEP ASIDE

and let the words work their
Magic?

I AM YOURS TO USE

Mitchel Evan Bamberger

Feel it in your heart as it falls through the floor
And everything is fading into darker colors
Feel it in the tips of your fingers when they touch each other
Electric sparks are flying and organs begin to burst

I will bathe you in the blood I have spilt for us
And I will bleed a river for to take us home
I will fasten you a boat out of my rib cage
And you can row, row, row and use my femur as a paddle

I am yours to use
We are Native Americans
Do as they did
Don't waste a single bit of my flesh and body
It is here for your protection
I am yours to use
Use every bit wisely

Feel it in your heart as it falls through the floor
And everything is fading into darker colors
Feel it in the tips of your fingers when they touch each other
Electric sparks are flying and organs begin to burst

You will build me in the waters you have waded
And I will float upon a raft of bones
If you squeeze and hold me close we can make room for us both
And we will toe, toe, toe in the flood that we have caused
But together, my love, we will ride the levy dry



An Observation

Brittany Torrez-Alvarez

Turned, I
The Moon
to a distanced view of the star-children,
conceived in the arc of a noonday eclipse,
parting with accustomed heights when
longitude forgot latitude and
shadow took to you as permanent mistress.

Gravity exists, as it always has:
an agent of constancy and change.

[A local weatherman will televise a report on the death
of a star in an off-shore accident and Hollywood will look to a
celebrity gossip magazine for unrelated answers.]

a cluster of stars:
a constellation goes on, fully unrealized.

With neglected arms grounded
they're dragging their legs behind them
turning, not
to the view of brother
swallowed in the mouth of a cresting wave.
- old light breaks along the line of an unfamiliar shore.

[A journalist will publish a piece on the misinterpretation
of beauty as it relates to our perception of loss in the natural world
and collect his final paycheck on Friday.]

With a dreamer's heart
tripping on amateur feet
they've come with a desire for extraordinary concepts:
like: *walking without you.*



intent on purchase :

like a vending machines surrender of a bottled water upon
reception of a
solid thing.

Their pockets hang under the weight of collected shells, black:
adopted lunar currency –
common exchange for intangible objects.

And if someone ever told them that they were luminaries:

beautiful and bright

it was only twice and

never by you

who: under pillowed heads, would slip

manuals penned in your hand to the backs of photographs.

Content displayed:

[naked women elevated in arabesque near tides that retreat
in the presence of land and miming our present affairs to gravity
who notes your adjustment of weight in an alternate direction.] A
law becomes theory.

And daylight came never

to morning voices who read:

“To walk and/or stand: Instructions: not included.”

Escape

Emily Maust



pencil on paper

Miscarriage

Morgan Jackson

The pain seizes me and cripples me. I gasp, grabbing my stomach and make a noise that no human should ever emit. Dropping to my knees, I expel the air in my lungs and hope to God this is not what I think it is. Blood begins to pool around my feet. I start to sob, quietly at first and then loudly and uncontrollably.

Jim, who was eating toast moments ago at our breakfast table stares at me in shock.

“Help me,” I plea.

At my words, he jumps into action, kneeling beside me, he does not mind the blood that stains his work pants. He grabs me by the shoulders and looks into my eyes. Whatever he sees in them scares him because he jerks back and asks, “Monica, what is happening to you?”

I’m afraid to voice what I think it is for once I utter it from my mouth, it will be real. I am stuck in a moment where I am on a precipice between reality and my scattered hopes. I glance at the blood dripping from my white pants, watch it pool on the new kitchen tile we put in last week, and know that my fears are real. We lost her.

“I think I just miscarried, Jim.”

His shoulders stoop, his eyes well with tears, and he collapses against me, holding me tight as if I am some life raft; as if I am the only thing keeping him from being drowned by his sorrow. We sit there for a while, slowly rocking back and forth and clinging to each other for dear life. We know it’s true, which is why we don’t rush for an ambulance, for this has happened three times before. I just have never been this far along.

Seconds or hours later, I don’t know, the contractions begin and I know that it is time for us to go to the hospital. My body is trying to expel the dead fetus rotting inside of me. I look up at Jim, say simply, “It’s time,” and he reaches for the phone.

“Yes, hello, my wife just miscarried...She’s bleeding pretty profusely...Five months...Yes, three times before...103 S Prospect

Ave...Yes...Alright...Thank you, bye-bye.”

He looks at me; the darkness has already overtaken his eyes slowly makes it's way outward. I know we both had high hopes this time around. I had never made it past two months, so this one is a huge blow to both of us. We already had a name picked out: Sophia Rose.

Twenty minutes later, the ambulance arrives; the medics put me on a stretcher and carry me out. And yet again we must figure out how to cope.

Broken Beats

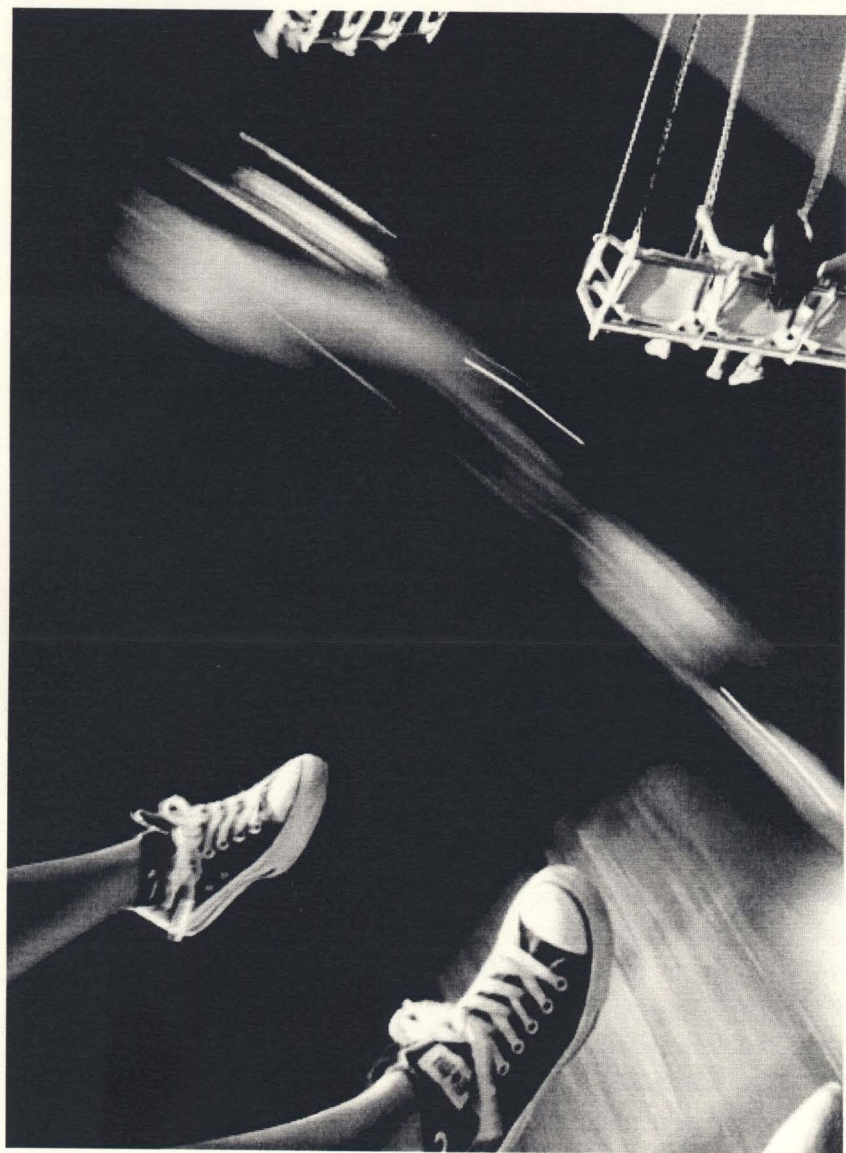
Tiana Lopez

Because hearts break
more often than bones
we heal
Tender. Mangled memories
tangle our temperament
to where we are less likely
to love, next time.
Lost love rhymes pretty
over break beats
...that's what broken hearts produce...
Break beats
Remixed into Platinum
flings and affairs
Banish the symmetry
Popularity momentary when the
Original is compared and contrasted
Break beats
over-power flow when you're just
trying to make hits.
fosterchild of Life
Make Love, orphan
Make New Life
out of Music
and more often
our favorite muse hits.
Thus, hearts break more
often than bones
Feels like searching for home
in the ruins of Old Orleans
A Baptism in Babylon
Drenched in sorrow,
dragging on to tomorrow.
Today may end worse

than it began.
Nightmares manifest cold-sweats
wet sheets with mind's toxin.
How do you tell yourself,
"it's only in the mind,"
when the effects are physical?
Weight loss;
no love, uncontrollable.
Grocery shopping,
appetite gone;
food spoils.
Hearts break more
often than bones.
I express anguish more
often in poems.
Read aloud
only in truth
most often in secret.
Only found on stage to seep it.
Opened now,
leaking like a sabotaged levee
an earthquake in Cali
a tidal wave in Bali
these are a few examples of how my heart's be-
coming an open wound that
heals slow and tenderly.
I lay ready for an undeserved aftershock
Adapted to disappointment
'cause hearts break
more often than bones
feels like I'm searching for home.

Kidding 'round

Alexandra Jones



photograph

Storm Monster

Monica Palmieri

An incoming storm—
a vast monster.

Waiting to drizzle
its deepest feelings;
waiting to gleam
its hidden despair;
waiting to rumble
its innermost anger.

Before this....

The sun fades,
as gloomy clouds
overtake the sky.

The humidity rises,
as the scent of rain
lingers in the air.

The breeze dies,
as gusts of wind
take its place.

And then....

Instantaneously,
rain splashes,
lightning flashes,
thunder crashes;
hails and patters,
strikes and flickers,
thuds and booms.

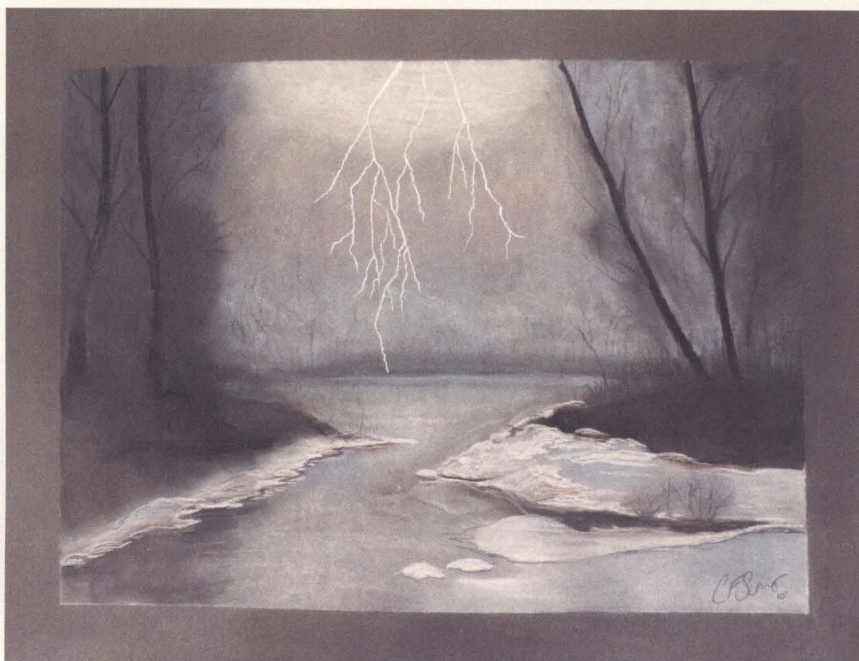
A developing storm—
an intensified monster.

Its feelings spilled;
its despair revealed;
its anger released.

Over and over,
ending the afternoon,
but continuing
through the night.

Lightening

Chelsea Schonhaut



pastel on paper

Lucky Charms

Rebecca Orner

His favorite cereal was Lucky Charms. I'm not sure why. He didn't even eat the cereal – just the marshmallows. He just threw the rest away when he was done. Nevertheless, I would wake up every morning to make coffee and pour him a bowl of Lucky Charms. But I never put the milk on them. If I did, they would be too soggy and he'd throw it all away.

I would go back to the bedroom and kiss him on the cheek, waking him up with a whispered “I love you” in his ear. He would groan and stretch, getting up to go to the bathroom, never saying it back.

Most days I was out the door before he was even done eating. But he didn't care; he was a freelance writer for a magazine, making his own hours and deciding what he wanted to write. I used to love watching him type. His face got so serene and I swear I could see the words dancing around his mind, just behind his eyes. They would finally escape through his fingers. It was pure magic.

Me, on the other hand, I went to work for a law firm. I sold my soul for the corporate life, editing contracts for people I had never met nor would ever meet. It was my job to read and correct the contracts, making sure there were no spelling errors or binding loopholes.

Most days I worked from 8 am to 5 pm, studying negotiations and ferreting out the issues. Most days I would come home from work and make dinner while he worked diligently on whatever it was he was writing that day. Most days we would eat and talk about our day and the problems we faced with our work. But yesterday was not most days.

Yesterday I was done with work at noon. I went to the grocery store and bought the ingredients for his favorite meal, chicken marsala. He had been working so hard lately that I wanted to surprise him.

When I got home, I couldn't find him in his study, where he

should have been working. He wasn't in the kitchen, or the living room, or the bathroom. Stumped, I went to the bedroom to change my clothes.

He was there. In my room. In my house. With another woman.

He scrambled to get her out and explain, but I just couldn't understand. He finally told me that it's over. He said that he met me too soon. He said that if he had met me later in his life this would never have happened. He threw me away.

This morning I woke up, made a pot of coffee, and poured a bowl of Lucky Charms. I dumped the milk all over the cereal, making sure that it was all covered. Then I ate it all. Everything but the marshmallows.

Between the Grass and the Sky

Emily Fulker

The place where my thoughts
turn into the twisting of songs.
Luminance from insect-fairies.
I know this swing
by its creaking. And
its slats suspend so many
thoughts and conversations. Of
everything and friendship.
Lazy nights when we
walked around in dreams
and memories. Summer crickets
gave the rhythm to steps
into adventures of wonder
that haven't been realized yet.

Feel how the sky longs
for raindrops. The sweet fragrance.
Criss-crossing lines of
dirt-bottom and gradient-clouds.
Feet fresh in the grass. I wait
to be enveloped in the
thunder-
in the love of summer.

1960s PA Turnpike @ Sideling
Hill

Natalie Sharp



photograph

Goodbye

Kevin Rook

It was only when I reached into my pocket, spontaneously retrieving that relic of yours, that the prodigious silence amplified, and I remembered that you had died.

There were no more distractions from emotions, so I absorbed your most recent photograph.

I always loved you. As I stare at this picture of you lifeless, pushing against the cold steel slab with force, I remember the day our eyes met and how you tried to get me to sleep with you later during the Suns absence. I was terrified at the novelty of it, scared of being scratched, of being bitten. You were my first. But no, you cut me open with your ocular examination instead, peeling back my layers to get to my core like the incision of an orange, careful to retain the sweetness. I was colossal and yet you were the *brave*. Still, two animals unsure of the nexus between us, we both knew in that moment what I was to become. I was to replace them all, the ones you never knew you loved, forever. I was to be your protector. But I could not protect you from time. Now when I look in the mirror and peel back my own layers, I wonder if you saw the same skeleton I do. We never did speak.

I am very much mortal, respondent to pain. It filled my chest like water in a glass as I watched you battle to survive; a battle I knew would defeat you. The end, wrapped in false hope that the illness would not claim you, was unveiled like a gag prize on a game show, as I noticed the mobility of your legs severing from your control. Sorrow overwhelmed me as I would pick up your ruins from the floor where you had collapsed like an old hydraulics system, and carry you to heights you once could conquer. I collapsed with you. It was intuitive really, that I knew your limped journey to the end of the hallway, then out of sight, was to be the end of our journey together. You walked away from me, little

aware you were also walking away from my life.

As I stare at this picture of you lifeless, pushing against the cold steel slab with force, I wonder if I freed you by taking you home that day or if I imprisoned you. I'll never forget when we sat outside on that bench and you chased the birds with your eyes. You looked free then. I'll never forget the expression of awe painted on your face. I'll never forget that I did let you sleep with me that night, of the day we first met, when I was nine. I'll never forget how I held you under my arm in bed to let you know you were safe by my side and I'll never forget how I was away when you died.

As I stare at this picture of you, my companion, with your lifeless fur covered corpse, pushing against the cold steel slab with force, I have your relic, your stuffed mouse. I will never forget that it was yours. I will never forget you.

Flower and Skull

Molly Paulson



oil on canvas

Passing the Torch

Cory Stevens

I felt uncomfortable, and I was afraid that the large man next to me could sense it. He seemed to be one of those imposing, omnipotent figures—the kind of guy who just always knows better than you and doesn't have to say it out loud for you to get it. It must be his size that intimidates me the most, because he has at least a foot and a half on me. In this strange moment, however, we shared two things. We were both holding a glass of lemon flavored iced tea, and we were both looking at the same beautiful young woman. She was gardening with her mother.

“Greg,” the big man said, “I'm not going to lie. I think you've got some priority issues.”

I had heard this sermon before: English majors can't really do much with their degrees besides go into something else, you seem to like coffee shops a lot, blah blah blah.

“But the thing I love most in this world,” he continued, “loves you. So I have to trust you.” He turned his calculating eyes upon me. Yet now, I could detect the smallest hint of warmth. “I can trust you with my daughter, right?”

“Yes sir.” I said automatically, but not without feeling. “I mean, yes...Dad.”

The corner of his mouth twitched. Whether it was a smile or a disgusted reflex, I didn't know. But it was something.

Whisper, Writer

Taryn Owens

There are voices that whisper to me at 3am.
“Writer,” they whisper,
All you have to scream to the silence is words...
“Writer,” they whisper,
We give you permission to spin your cobwebs
out of any object, or grace.
“Writer,” they whisper,
we have already defined your end.
You will twist yourself into a net of
crystalized cobwebs
that you yourself created,
but did not write an escape to.
“Writer,” they whisper,
we have blurred the defined lines
between girl
and writer
being
and word-spinner
named
and unnamed.
“Writer,” they whisper,
we make the walls talk to you
and the reflections in the glass speak.
Forget that you are girl
and define yourself as writer.
Forget that you breathe air
and exhale the remains on paper.

“No,” I whisper,
as I separate girl and writer,
being and word-spinner
named and unnamed.

“No,” I whisper,

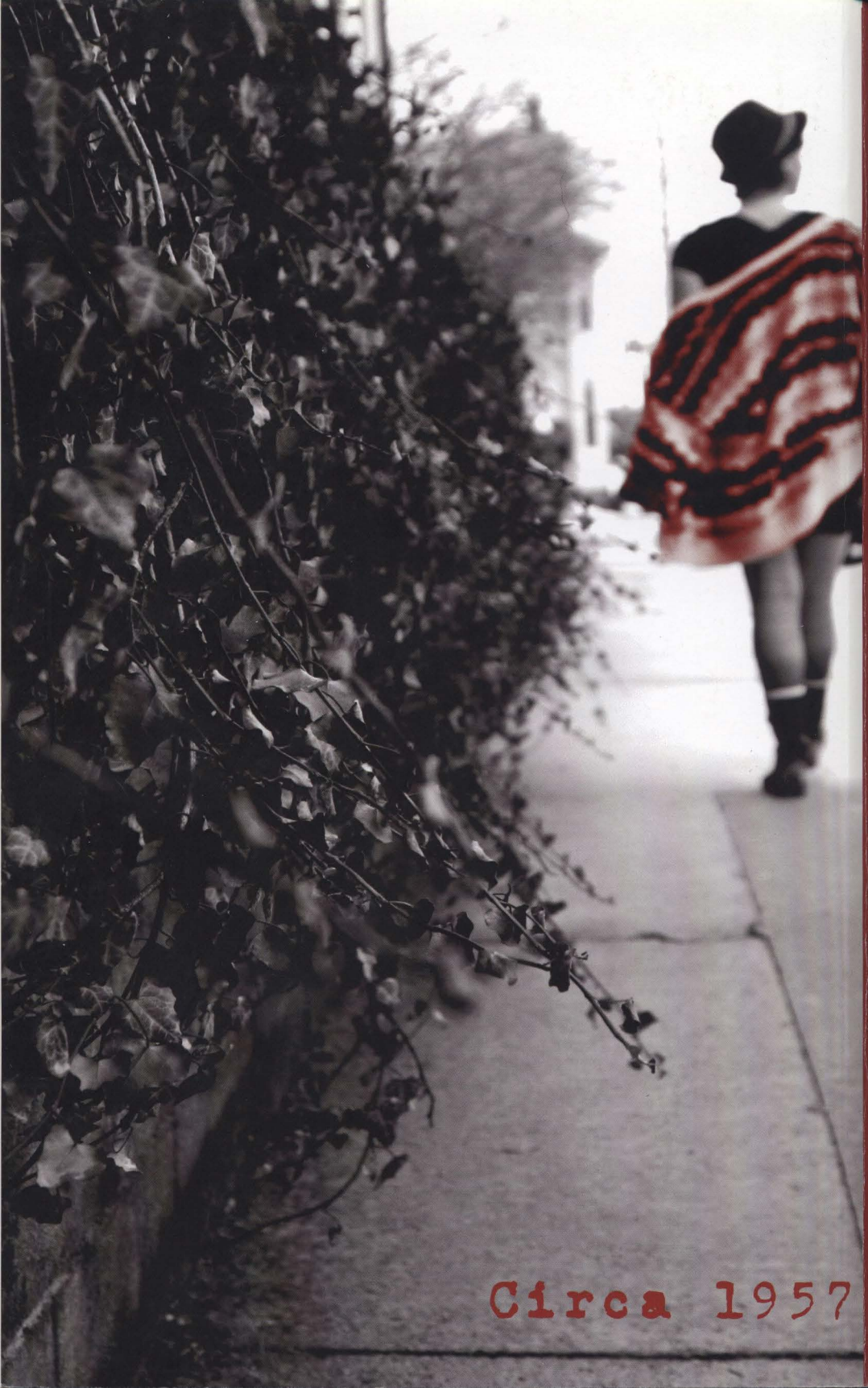
I will not define myself
by what you say I am.
"No," I whisper,
no matter how innocent a definition
you would make me believe you are.
"No," I whisper,
you are a drug,
a drug, writer.
No, I will not overdose
not on your intoxicating rushes
midnight highs
music induced euphoria
I will not choke on creativity,
will not give up happiness for you.
You cannot be my downfall
if I take you in moderation.

I force the writer whispers to be
quieter
the tangible calls of my name to be
louder
I will live until life has been
loved
and cruel time has stolen my
breath.

Not you, writer.

/or





Circa 1957