

# CRUCIBLE



# The Crucible

The Literary Journal  
of Lock Haven University  
2005

## Editorial Staff

*Eliza Albert • Mariah Gantt • Lyndsay Jasper • Lisa Kiwak  
Jennifer Michaels • Tim Rice • Yvonne Schmidt*

## Student Literary Editors

*Julia Grove • Jessica Hammond • Susan Pogorzelski*

## Graphic Designers

*Craig Allen • Kathryn Siverd*

## Faculty Editor

*Marjorie Maddox Hafer*

## Graphic Designers' Advisor

*Philip Huber*

Archives

# The Crucible

The Library Journal  
of Lock Haven University

2005

This issue of *The Crucible* was made possible through the generous support of Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania's College of Arts and Sciences and the Student Cooperative Council, Inc.

Some of the poems and short stories were written in creative writing workshops taught by Professor Marjorie Maddox Hafer and Dr. James Lough and offered by the English department. Some of the photography in this issue was produced for classes taught by Professor Philip Huber and offered through the Art department. The cover was designed by Tyler Gentzyl.

*The Crucible* layout was designed by Kathryn Siverd and Craig Allen.

Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and encourages applications from minorities, women, veterans, and persons with disabilities. Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania is a member of the State System of Higher Education.

© 2005, *The Crucible*

## Table of Contents

<b>Roll Camera</b>	<i>Will Lahr</i>	1
<b>Blue Eternity</b>	<i>Sarah Shoop</i>	2
	<i>Kathryn Siverd</i>	4
	<i>Rachel Diefenderfer</i>	8
<b>Payable on Death</b>	<i>Jason McCarley</i>	9
	<i>John Fudrow</i>	13
	<i>Lyndsay Jasper</i>	19
<b>Time</b>	<i>Dan Chapman</i>	20
	<i>Jen Barto</i>	21
<b>This Too Shall Pass</b>	<i>Julia Grove</i>	22
	<i>Kathryn Siverd</i>	27
<b>See Who Sees You: Through the Eyes of a Tree</b>	<i>Tim Rice</i>	30
	<i>Adam Howard</i>	31
<b>Modern Plastics</b>	<i>Brian Bennett</i>	32
	<i>Kathryn Siverd</i>	33
	<i>Kathryn Siverd</i>	37

<b>There Are Times &amp; There are Chances</b>	<i>Daniella DeLuca</i>	40
<i>Adam Howard</i>		41
<b>Convergence</b>	<i>Susan Pogorzelski</i>	42
<i>Lyndsay Jasper</i>		44
<i>Ally Vogelsong</i>		48
<b>The Girl Inside</b>	<i>Emily Capp</i>	50
<i>Mitz DiMartino</i>		51
<b>Send This to God</b>	<i>Tim Rice</i>	52
<b>Two Parts to Clay</b>	<i>Rachel Book</i>	53
<b>The No-Name</b>	<i>Susan Pogorzelski</i>	54
<i>Kim Hill</i>		58
<b>Passing</b>	<i>Katherine E. Porter</i>	64
<i>John Fudrow</i>		65
<b>Domestic</b>	<i>Will Lahr</i>	66
<i>Adam Howard</i>		69
<i>Kathryn Siverd</i>		73

<b>Intervention</b>	<i>Melissa Hoobler</i>	74
<i>Ally Vogelsong</i>		75
<i>Kathryn Siverd</i>		76
<b>Taste of Blood</b>	<i>Will Lahr</i>	78
<i>Lyndsay Jasper</i>		79
<b>Volition</b>	<i>Dave Ferry</i>	80
<i>Mike Porcenaluk</i>		81
<b>Nuts Don't Fall Far</b>	<i>Julia Grove</i>	84
<i>Kim Hill</i>		87
<i>Lyndsay Jasper</i>		94
<b>Contributors' Notes</b>		95

Will Lahr: Roll Camera

The End.  
 There were holes,  
 hollow feelings  
 and brittleness,  
 the burnt edges of paper,  
 a flood of memories.  
 Recollections  
 and full collections  
 of admiration,  
 despondency,  
 tenderness,  
 suspicion,  
 contentment.  
 A smile at thoughts  
 tearing wounds  
 from gunshots.  
 Blood drips  
 to the crimson carpet,  
 overflows the floor.  
 Immense pain  
 followed  
 by morphined moments,  
 pacifism.  
 But the beginning,  
 Oh, the beginning...

## Sarah Shoop: Blue Eternity

It must have been the beginning or middle of November; I am not really sure because I no longer need to use the conventional means of expressing date or time or anything of the like, but in any case, I am guessing November because of the cool character of the sun's light at the time and the thick jacket I had been wearing. Hmm, yes, actually it must have been about that time; I remember the strain from work from the oncoming Thanksgiving season. Nothing really comes close to that season in terms of irritating grocery store employees. The monstrous trucks delivered endless supplies of canned pumpkin, hefty bags of flour and sugar, spices of every sort, and large cans of processed chicken broth. These were what my boss called the "essentials" of the holiday baking season.

I remember walking down the back room hallway in the stockroom when....

"Ellie!"

I half sighed and turned back to see what services I could provide... or whatever.

"Yes, sir?" I was heading off to break when Joseph caught me. Oh wait, I'm sorry, I mean Assistant Manager Joseph, and I would hate to call him anything else, well, to his face. I wonder if there exists a job, or if there ever has, where the boss is not on an extensive all-expenses-paid ego trip.

"Why is all this freight still back here - untouched even?" He had pointed to the large pallets behind him; the high piled boxes of goods contrasted harshly with his short and thin build.

"Well, I had already cleared out two stacks of those baking items, and I cleaned up to get to my break. I couldn't get to the others right away because you had me in the holiday candy aisle earlier this morning when I really couldn't afford to leave my own aisle." I can't really recall what made me rightfully place the blame, but I do remember, though, why it is that I am not to do such a thing.

It may be important to note at this point that I had, apparently, no desire to receive any breaks the rest of the day, at least... not after I had clearly

shown Assistant Manager Joseph exactly how much I had wanted to shelve the six ten-foot high stacks of goods. Needless to say, working just a bit of this freight can severely grind down a person's mind to a smooth, uncurdled mush, the perfect texture for any holiday cheesecake, I might add. This physical and emotional beating was only further accentuated by the large and overly opinionated women who year after year accosted me as to the whereabouts of the popcorn balls only to inform me, obviously a hopeless case for the retail world, that the item should be placed in a more convenient location.

"To where?" I recollect holding a bag of chopped walnuts with a confused grimace. I stared with utter disbelief at what I had first assumed was an innocent older lady, only to realize that she must have been some kind of marketing guru.

"By the sparkling beverages, of course. I can't remember one holiday get-together where we didn't have popcorn balls and sparkling cider to wash them down." I forced my face to straighten and evenly spaced my syllables to help her understand.

"But that's in the juice aisle." I thought I had made my point clear, but....

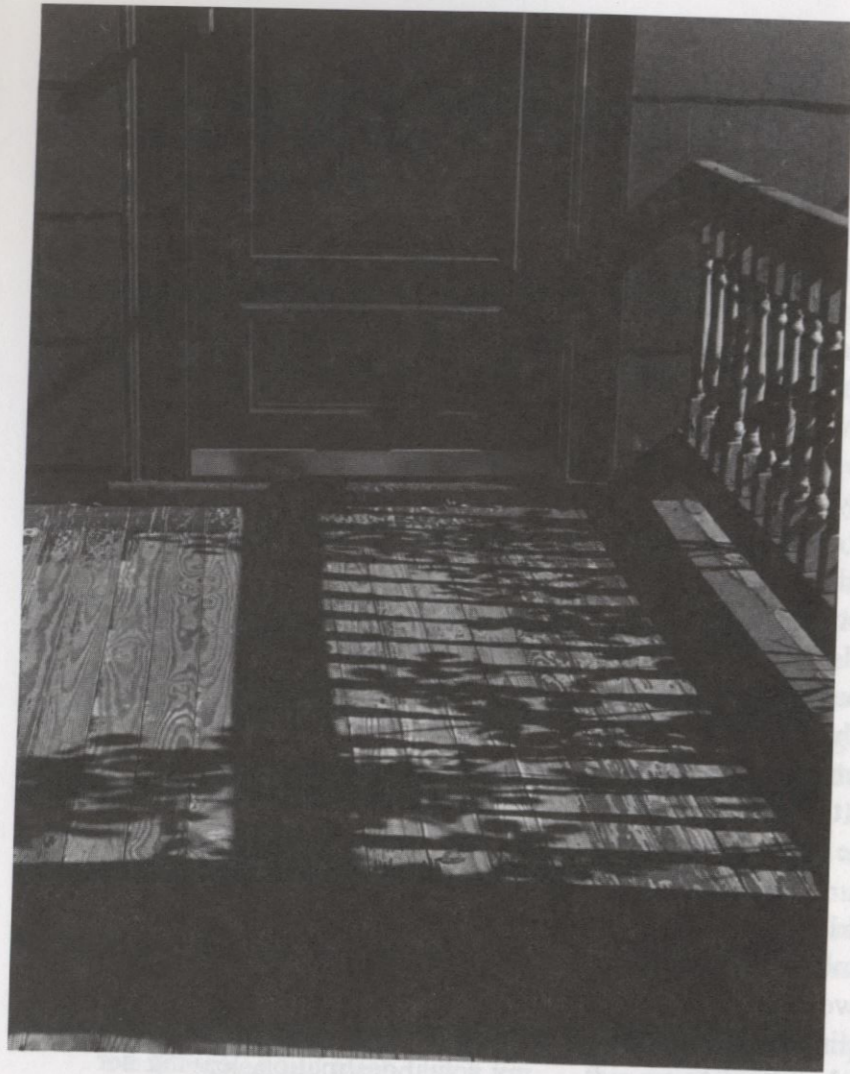
"Yes dear, that is where the sparkling beverages are. How long did you say you have worked here?"

"No, I meant that only juices are in the... ah, never mind. I'll tell my manager that we should move them." I was beyond caring about my bruised pride; I just wanted her to leave.

"Yes dear, and don't worry, you'll learn a bit about retail soon, I'm sure. Now, where did you say the popcorn balls were?"

Yes, I quite remember the stress unduly thrust upon me during that time.

In any case, it was November. My car had been suffering from what I could only assume, due to my kind of luck, was a terminal form of car cancer that caused her to sputter and stall on every block and every corner. I remember feeling quite downtrodden at that time, not that I had ever felt at all different at any other time, and having abandoned my car, about a block away from my actual destination, leaving her parked awkwardly after she had stalled, I edged closer to Michael's, trying to



obtain just the least bit of comfort from his presence. It would be well to say at this point that he was not as sympathetic to my problems and pains as I had hoped.

"Come on.... let me in," I was leaning closer to peer into the pattern window framed by a thick wooden door.

His voiced was muffled and irritated, "Just get over it. I don't feel like listening to you bitch again; I'm friggin' sick in here." He edged away from the door towards the couch in the next room. I watched him, my hand blocking the glare of the evening sun off the window, so I could see him better.

"Well, I'm dying out here. Just for five minutes....Then I'll leave, I just need you right now. I don't know how else I'll get through this...."

"For fucking Christ, Ellie, quit overreacting and go the hell home. I'm done listening to this bullshit." He had rolled over onto his side to avoid seeing me at the window.

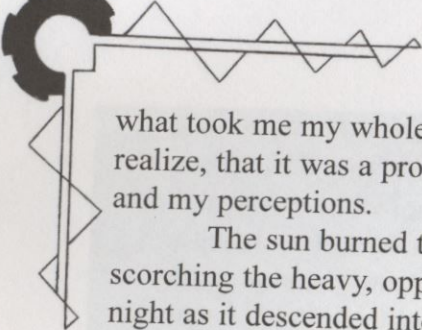
"I get it; you're sick and irritable. I'll just sit here and wait while you take a nap."

There was no response, not a single gesture letting me know he had

heard. Of course, at that time I had believed that when he woke, he would have been feeling better, and that after thoroughly apologizing for his mood and letting me know he had seen the error of his ways, he would console me.

"Yeah," I spoke softly to myself, sitting in the corner of his porch, "he'll be out. He'll make all this go away." I leaned my head back against the partition dividing the porch from the neighbors' side and stared at the ceiling. Two hooks were drilled into the underside of the roofing of the porch; obviously there for a swing. I wondered at them, trying to pass the time. I spent most of the next few hours reliving every moment of pain from the past week. I went through every word, every detail, remembering and feeling the hurt all over again while staring at those damned rusty hooks. Most of it I spent dwelling on the horrors dished out for me daily, as if there was a new piece added to the food pyramid. "So let's see, that's two pieces of toast, an egg, and no hot water for the shower. That seems about right." I tried in vain to figure out why all this shit happens to me. Of course, I never reached a true answer, which means,

Kathryn Siverd



what took me my whole life to realize, that it was a problem with me and my perceptions.

The sun burned through the sky, scorching the heavy, opposing clouds of night as it descended into the nothingness of a light-speckled black void. I could no longer feel, and I was far beyond crying, having done so the past couple hours. The world became frigid, as is common, of course.

So, I suppose that it was the cold that took hold of me, saturating every ounce of my body during those last few hours, and that had dragged me off from the sorrow and the depression straight into the warmth of death. You don't think death is warm? Well, I guess you'll see. Anyway, I know it was the cold, but I'm a romantic, so let's just say it was a broken heart or soul or whatever that finally brought me to the end of my road.

I had been sleeping when it happened; my head was tilted forward so that my chin was resting on my tear-covered bosom. I had tarried a bit, curious to see what would become of my remains. I suppose I was just an airy substance; still can't really get

a feel of that form I took. I resumed looking at the swing hooks as I waited, which wasn't very long. In eternity, hours are like drops in a sea of years.

My eyes caught sight of Michael, stumbling in a sleepy haze onto the porch in the early hours of morning. In the half-light, he could make out my corpse, and I heard a deep resentful sigh.

I suppose he had the notion that I was crying; my hair was covering the rigid features of my demise beneath it. He stubbornly looked away as if he had seen nothing, a reaction that had perfectly characterized his demeanor. I never really noticed how willful he could really be until just then.

I found it strangely funny how I could be so weak, and him so strong. Now I have the strength, the clarity, the objectivity that I've always needed. He walked in a huff to his car, heading to work, I suppose. I stayed patiently near my former self for the better part of that day, mostly studying the way the clouds moved and how strangely distant it all felt. The world is far more beautiful when you don't have death hanging over your head all the time, constantly whis-

pering into your ear that pain could exist around any corner.

When Michael finally did discover that I was no longer alive, it was late afternoon. He slowly approached my body; I could see the look of hesitant understanding spread across his face. The dark brown eyes I used to love so much became darker as the horror sunk into him. Then he, well, lost it. After a few minutes or so of assorted screaming, crying, and short angry bursts, he determinedly left with quite an even, steady pace.

Michael shortly returned to the porch with a bit of climbing rope that I had remembered was from the little shed behind his house. He twisted the blue and red chord with shaking hands into a sturdy knot, and then another one.

Michael leaned in to kiss my brow, whispering reassuring words to a body that could no longer hear. Had I still been alive, I would have been shocked at the scene before me, but once again, I now have a slightly skewed sense of being. He climbed onto the partition, fastening one knot onto one of the swing hooks, and carefully placed the other end around his neck.

By then a few people on the street in front of his house realized what was going on. In the midst of the confusion, he left the divider, breathing his last breath as the knots dug into his neck, contorting his face horribly.

I often think on the occasion; it being the last of my earthly affairs: the perpetually crying girl who died in pity and the stubborn man, swinging from a rope that was as strong as his will.





Rachel Diefenderfer

## Jason McCarley: Payable on Death

Mom used to describe herself as a murderer. And I guess if that were true, it would make me an accessory in one way or another.

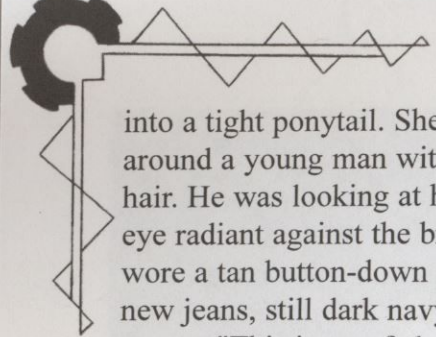
I was raised by my single mother, and for most of my youth, I had no idea who or where my father was. Whenever I asked about him, my mother would weep and tell me he was gone. He had become more myth than man in my mind. I often imagined him as a horrible drunkard who would beat my mother. I even began to hate my father. The older I got, the more afraid I was to ask my mother who he really was and reopen her wounds.

That is, until my 14th birthday when, as I was blowing out the candles of my Star-Wars decorated cake, my mother took my hand and led me down the creaking stairs to the freezing basement. She let go of me, leaving marks on my hand where hers had been. I stood at the bottom step as she slowly walked to the far corner of the basement, which was jumbled with old furniture and useless knickknacks. I had by no means been allowed to fool around

in that corner, as it was supposed to be dingy and unsafe for children, according to my mom. She slid a broken toaster oven out of the way and pulled a dirty cardboard box off the wooden shelves that lined the walls. Water stains and a thick layer of soot covered the bottom half, probably from being left on the concrete floor in years past.

She removed the flimsy top and set it in a torn wicker basket. Inside were tons of old photos. My mother dug to the bottom of the box and pulled out a faded manila envelope. She waved me over, and I walked across the chilly floor to the forbidden corner.

As she pulled a solitary photo out, I was hit with a smoky stench. The bottom, left-hand corner had been burned off. In the picture, my mother, probably in high school, stood in front of a bed of red and yellow roses. She wore a blue dress, with ruffles coming out at the bottom. Her face shone brightly in the sun, reflecting dark eyes and subtle lines around her smiling mouth. A thick green ribbon, tied into a large bow, pulled her light brown hair



into a tight ponytail. She had her arm around a young man with wavy black hair. He was looking at her face, his left eye radiant against the bright glare. He wore a tan button-down shirt with brand new jeans, still dark navy.

"This is you father, Samuel. I named you after him." I stayed quiet, clueless as to what to say. "We had Biology class together in our junior year. He asked me to the summer dance, and we were as one from there on out."

After that, she would talk about him more and more, but never anything past high school and never for more than a few minutes. Before too long, her voice would crack, and she'd turn her head away from me. After a few miniature breaths, she would walk out of the room, only to come back a few minutes later with reddened eyes.

When I came home from my driver's test the day after my 16th birthday, my mother asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up.

"A great writer, like you," I answered.

She turned to me, eyes motionless. "No, you don't, Sam. I want you to be happy."

"I will be, just like you," I responded. Her shoulders slumped as she let out a bottomless sigh.

"What's the matter?"

After a minute of silence, my mother stated, very plainly, "I murdered your father."

My breaths became shorter with each jerk the car made through potholes. As we pulled into our driveway, the car seemed full of hot humid air that wanted nothing more than to seep out through the doors and windows.

She continued, getting more emotional. "I didn't actually kill him, but I may as well have. I was the reason he was in that godforsaken country."

I sat in the passenger's seat of our 1980 Ford Fairmont and listened as my mother retold her history, like she was giving confession.

She explained that they had stayed together through their graduation in '67. At the time, my mother was still a struggling journalist, trying to get an article published here and there, unable to find her place, as she said. My father passed up Michigan Tech and the University of Michigan so he could stay close to my mother. He enrolled at

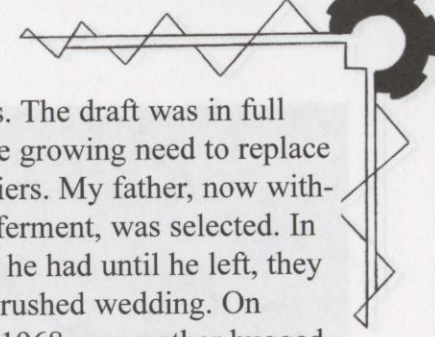
Buxton Community College, studying Mechanical Engineering.

About a year and a half later, he was making excellent grades, my mother was getting a few more articles published, and life was relatively good. It sounds cliché, but that's how she explained it. Then, she continued, "The good days died."

My mother went to the doctor for stomach cramps and came away pregnant. I reared my ugly head in the spring of '68. My parents weren't married yet, so it wasn't something they celebrated. Concerned about finances, she asked my father to put his education on hold and look for work.

He found a job at Buxton Molding, waking up early and working late so he could bring home the biggest possible paycheck. It wasn't much money, but she said he never complained. She always described him like he was a candidate for sainthood.

The Vietnam War was raging. My parents read the *Buxton Daily Chronicle*, the paper my mom would eventually work for, together every night in horror as articles about boys being brought home in boxes dominated



the front pages. The draft was in full swing, with the growing need to replace the fallen soldiers. My father, now without college deferment, was selected. In the two weeks he had until he left, they put together a rushed wedding. On October 28th, 1968, my mother hugged my father as he stepped onto the army bus and watched him roll away through a cloud of yellow smoke.

After not quite two months there, he was shot and killed by a man hiding in the deep jungle foliage.

My mother, still gripping the steering wheel, broke into tears too raw to hide. She replayed the day my father left in her mind over and over. She recited the six letters he had written her in the short eight weeks he was there. Her mind was a virtual inventory of sorrow. With painstaking detail, she described his funeral, down to the priest's connecting eyebrows and the coffin's somber smell of pine. She told me of the empty feeling in her stomach as she climbed the stone stairs outside the county hall and filled out the form to receive her spousal benefits from the government.

"Going to the bank every month,

knowing where this money was coming from...." She broke down again. "I asked *The Daily Chronicle* if I could write Samuel's obituary myself."

They agreed and were so moved by her tribute that they asked her to be their obituary writer. There were no formal deadlines or an official schedule, so the paper told her that they couldn't consider her a certified employee. She had to be considered a freelance writer, meaning she'd be paid per article published. Her monthly income consisted of government checks for my father's death and commission checks from *The Daily Chronicle* for townspeople's deaths. She made a living off of death.

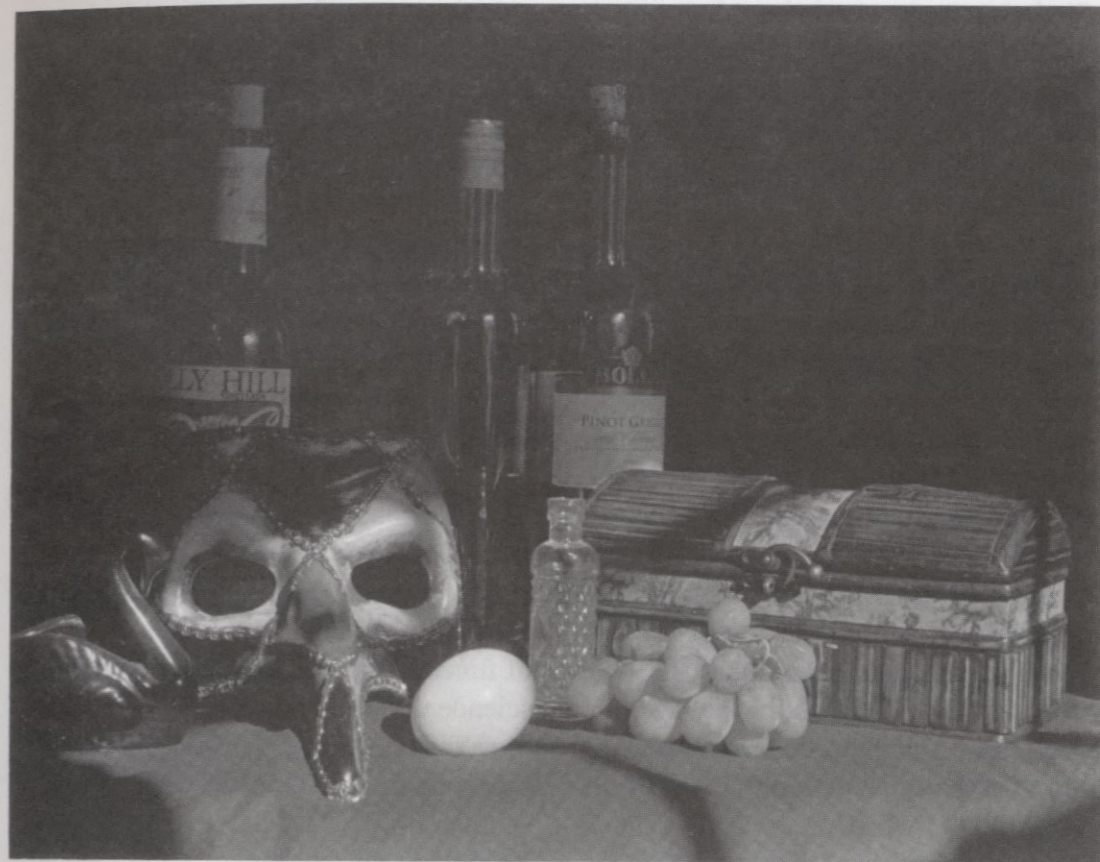
Friends of mine have begun to ask me what it was like growing up like I did. I think everyone has a natural curiosity towards death. It is one thing in life that we can't manipulate, yet we obsess over it like we have all the control. Regardless of any new life-saving medical procedures, miracle pills, or magic diets, everyone will die. It's going to happen, period.

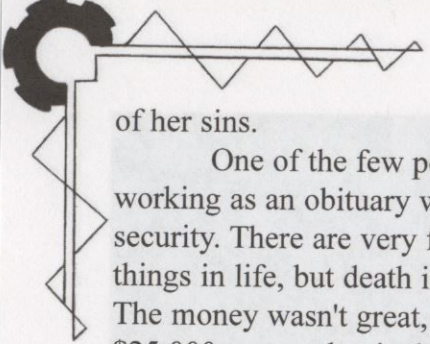
Everyone in Buxton and the surrounding cities would have died whether my mother was there or not. It's

not like we were rooting for anyone in town to go, or cheering when they did, but the cold, hard truth of it is that if there was a bad accident or a particularly nasty spread of the flu, we lived a little better for the next few weeks. While others were mourning the death of loved ones, we were shopping at the McMillian's Market for a big Sunday dinner.

It was at these dinners that I realized the extent of my mother's grief. The table setting was always beautiful. The place mats were blue-and-red checkered silk, purchased after Lionel Greene's heart attack at his granddaughter's 6th birthday party. We used our best china, courtesy of an ugly crash in the winter of '76 that killed Richard and Susan Gerhardt and their 8 year-old son, Russ.

My mother and I sat on opposite ends of the scratched table. She told me that the table was a wedding gift from my grandmother, my father's mother. I could tell by her red eyes as she came into the dining room carrying roast beef that I was sitting in the same seat my father used to sit in. I am her accessory after the fact, an ever-present reminder





of her sins.

One of the few positives about working as an obituary writer is the job security. There are very few definite things in life, but death is one of them. The money wasn't great, about \$20,000-\$25,000 a year, that included the work she did in a column she wrote weekly; the obituaries wavered depending on weather and disease, but we just made by.

My mother never felt the need for many luxuries. She wrote her obituaries in the living room on an old black typewriter, her only one since the one she had from high school had broken and was banished to the basement shelves. It was decades old, but she said it still worked like it did the day she bought it at a garage sale for two bucks. She sat at her old oak desk, given to her by her mother when she passed. A single desk lamp lit the otherwise dark room. To the left of the typewriter were neatly stacked piles of carefully written notes.

She said that she was searching for the person beneath the pretty adjectives and obligatory clichés given to her by grieving family members. A glass of

red wine sat on the opposite side, in easy range, so she could grab it without interrupting her thoughts.

My mother and I never socialized, rarely leaving the house for anywhere but McMillian's or a funeral. I accompanied her everywhere, going to funerals of people I didn't know. I would hold my mother's hand as strangers with reddened eyes thanked her for her touching words. My mother would smile slightly and tell them, with empathetic eyes, that it was the least she could do for them. They would hug for several seconds and both come out with tears streaming down their faces.

I've been such a frequent patron of funerals that I have them down to a science. Everyone may be unique, but their funerals are all the same. I know solely on the look of the face of a person entering the funeral home the immediacy of the person to the deceased. I know how long a service will take by the number of flowers sent.

I graduated from Buxton Community College in 1990 with a bachelor's degree in Journalism. Before dinner, after Harold "Happy" Lyme's suicide, my mother once again told me

to steer clear of obituary writing.

"It's not what you think it is. It's not just helping people get closure," she said.

"I know that. But I see what you do for them, and I want to do it too."

"There's too much emotion involved. I don't want it to ruin your life."

"What, like it has yours? If you're so unhappy, why do you do it?"

She looked down. "I guess closure as well. Dinner should be ready." She left the room for a minute and returned with a plate of roast beef. Her eyes were clear.

This was the last Sunday dinner we had when I still lived with her. I tried to stop by occasionally after I moved out, but I worked at the *Bluffton Valley Herald*, about two hours away. For the time being, I was writing local fluff articles about church fundraisers and school festivals. I lived alone and didn't meet many new people. I had never been able to sustain a meaningful relationship. I've sat through too many heartbreaking funerals, too many torn-apart lives, to allow myself to become so vulnerable. This isn't a conscious

decision. I've tried to open up to others, but there's an ever-present feeling of hopelessness that comes from being surrounded by death.

As much as death has done me wrong, it has tormented my mother infinitely more. She lived in a perpetual cycle of death, then grief, followed by attempted healing, which is inevitably interrupted by death, and so on. As soon as she was able to mourn someone's death, write a tribute, and move on, another shattered life awaited her.

The battle became too much for my mother two winters ago. As I sat with her at Jamie Embree's funeral, she told me that she was done fighting.

"I can't do this anymore. I'm not helping anyone," she explained.

"What are you talking about? I read Jamie's obituary, and it was beautiful," I countered.

"I'm tired, Sam. I'm tired of distracting myself from the real problem."

I continued my long tradition of following my mother's most candid emotions with awkward silence.

*The Daily Chronicle* held a retirement banquet for her, a rare occurrence for a non-salary employee. It was

held at the Buxton County Banquet Hall, a large, finely furnished room for just such occasions. The carpet was a deep red, with black spirals spaced about a foot apart from one another. There were large windows dominating every wall, with lighter red curtains letting an appropriate amount of light in. It was well attended, with many families thanking my mother for her care after their losses. They told her that they took comfort in the caring obituaries she had written.

After the editor of the paper made a speech thanking her, my mother rose from her seat, eyes red, and cleared her throat to speak. She just smiled, waved to everyone, and sat down again. I leaned over to her and put my arm around her shoulders. She turned to me, her face stiff and emotionless, and returned her gaze to the dark carpeting.

Contrary to my beliefs at the time, quitting her job and getting away from all of the death was the worst thing that could have happened to her. When you've been accustomed to death all your life, its absence leaves you empty. I can only compare it to breathing. Try to stop breathing, and you'll

understand. You can make it a little while, but nature always wins. You need breath, like she needs death.

She began to rewrite old obituaries, starting with Jamie Embree's unexpected asthma attack and working backwards. She reworded, rearranged, and relived them. In all that time, she had written over a thousand obituaries.

She had closed all the windows and pulled the curtains shut tight. A stale, warm air lingered at all times. The rooms were dimly lit with kerosene lamps and candles. Her desk was cluttered with old articles about car accidents, heart attacks, heat strokes, and other equally depressing material.

She went through about ten obituaries a day, spending her usual sixteen hours writing. She didn't leave the house anymore. I drove the two hours every few days, delivering groceries and doing chores for her. The old television was covered in a thick coat of dark dust. Visa applications and JC Penney catalogs sat in stacks on the kitchen table, out of use since I moved out.

There was an increasing distance for a couple of weeks before I noticed a real difference. She had stopped show-

ering and wore the same clothes, a handsome navy blue sweater and black sweatpants with the legs pulled up to her knees. Her gray hair was greasy and looked like a dying root system.

She was fast approaching the end of her obituaries, or chronologically, the beginning. There, waiting for her, was my father. I tried to get her to stop rewriting, but it was no use. I couldn't get her to stop anymore than I could get her to hold her breath forever.

I often recall those few stories of my father told by my mother, how he was a true caretaker at heart, and how he would have done anything for the well-being of his family, even give his life. To this day, I carry that small picture of my mother and father in my back pocket wherever I go.

I walked into the musty house, carrying a bag of rye bread and canned pickles. Setting the bag down on the floor as I passed the fridge, I walked into the living room to where my mother worked at her desk. She wasn't there. I called her once; no response. Down the hallway came the dull light from the bathroom. I took one step down the hall when I saw my mother's hairy legs on

the ground, sticking out from behind the door.

I ran into the room and met my worst fear. My mother was unconscious on the ground, lying next to a bottle of her pain pills. Without thinking, I tore out of the room to the kitchen and called the paramedics. They got there and made official what I knew the moment I saw her legs: she was dead. The man who examined her said she had mixed alcohol with the pain medication for her wrist. I informed him that this was common practice with her, but he said she just overdid it this time.

The funeral went exactly how I expected. I knew who would be there, and I knew how long it would last. Many people approached me about this unfortunate accident, and I smiled slightly and thanked them.

Afterwards, I went back to her house to get the necessary documents for the county.

There it was on her desk, right next to my father's rewritten obituary: "Emily Elizabeth Hunt (Conklin) was born May 2, 1948. She passed away from an accidental drug overdose July 17, 1999. Emily lived her life as best

she knew how, so she could once again be with her husband, Samuel Alan Hunt, a brave beautiful man who perished in the Vietnam War. She is survived by her son, Samuel Alan Hunt, Jr."

There in four short lines was her self-written obituary. It was the shortest one she had ever written. I blame myself.



Lyndsay Jasper

## Dan Chapman: Time

Morning sun gleaming, tiny rainbows reflect from dew-blanketed blades of grass grown too high in the late spring rains. Long shadows reaching for each other trying to hold on to the night just to play a little bit longer.

Nights as hot as days, humid with no breeze to cool. Sounds of life never cease, something new to find no matter what time. Scents of barbeques and tarmac fill the air; thoughts of dark green and blue refreshing ocean water fill the mind.

Mountains on fire with nature's yearly finale, leaves bursting with colors of midnight bonfires and candle-lit dinners, dancing with one another in the powerful winds that fuel the change of the coming season.

Death, cold relentless unforgiving, days as dark as nights. Ice creeping over everything in its path. Snow suffocating the life below it. Only to have Time take away its yearly fun.



## Julia Grove: This Too Shall Pass

I need a breath mint - it's as simple as that. I'm staring at the back of Dotty Pearson's perfectly quaffed blue hairdo, for yet another Sunday, and the cheap red wine has left bits of stale communion wafer pasted to the roof of my mouth. I watch as the congregation files through the aisles, fidgeting in line. The aged are bracing themselves, gripping the pews. The young children impatiently buzz around their parents' legs, and the middle-aged look around the line to see how much longer they'll have to wait.

A group of dusty old ladies move in halting steps, wedged into their tiny, black orthopedic shoes that don't seem any bigger than their swollen ankles. Their white fleecy hair is so thin and teased, that you can see right through it when they move past the light of melting communion candles. As each takes the single step up to the cup, they let out bleating coughs, filled with effort, but after they get their twisted knuckles pinched around the plastic shot glasses, they knock back the Blood of Christ like true bar flies, one swift

solid motion. Not a single drop spilled onto their powdered whiskery chins.

It's the same routine every week, and they're known collectively as Betty, June, and Grace, always listed in that order, though I'm not sure which is which. They form a single line, and they quietly take their osteoporosis, arthritis, and glaucoma meekly back to their seats in the second pew.

I pick at the roof of my mouth with my tongue, trying not to make it obvious that I have the Body stuck there like stale peanut butter. The sweet wine has mixed with the aftertaste of minty toothpaste and the scent of my aftershave and leaves behind an acrid tang.

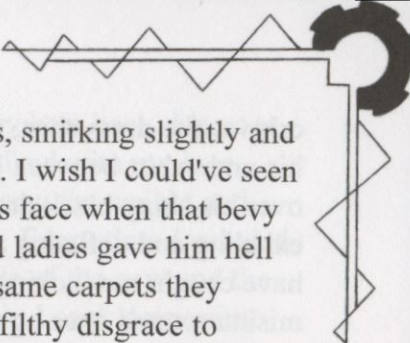
The caretaker of the church is next, Paul Haney. There's a note in the Bulletin that he's celebrating his seventieth birthday today, and that everyone is invited to stay after the service for cake and punch. Despite his apparent age, he still stands at about 6'5" with sandy hair and a ruddy complexion.

He caused quite a commotion in the congregation last spring when he

had the carpets cleaned. They had always been a dark, somber maroon, but after the Stanley Steamers rolled through, they were left with a much brighter shade of red. The Women's Quilting Circle received a bit of a shock, which is dangerous for ladies their age, brittle hips and all, when they opened the heavy oak doors on Saturday afternoon to find their once respectable maroon carpet a shade of what they would dramatically recall as "Fuchsia! A Jezebel hot pink!"

It really wasn't all that bad, but once the Quilting Circle smells a mission, it would take a momentous act of God to stop them from being "helpful." They Thanked the Lord for the lovely spring weather and threw together their Emergency Sunday Picnic Contingency Plan. The next day the service was held outside, followed by a covered dish luncheon. A collection was passed around for "The Sanctuary Refurbishment Fund," which was a great success, collecting almost double what their food drive for the children of Mozambique had raised, and the Yeager's gave them a discount on a tasteful beige twill.

I look at the tan carpet between



my scuffed shoes, smirking slightly and shaking my head. I wish I could've seen the look on Paul's face when that bevy of squawking old ladies gave him hell for cleaning the same carpets they claimed were a "filthy disgrace to God" the week before.

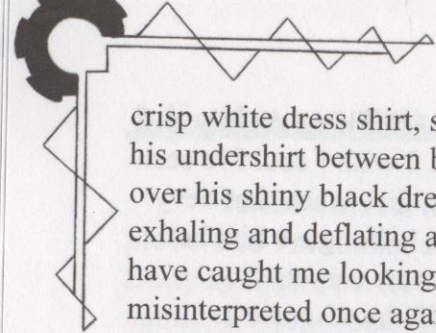
Ted Carlson's waiting in line in the aisle beside me and apparently misinterprets the thoughts behind my expression and gaze. "I know, it seems like just as soon as you get a pair broken in so they don't cramp your toes or give you a blister on the back of your heel, they're too scuffed up to wear in public."

I didn't quite get him at first. "How's that?"

"Your shoes, I mean," jabbing his finger down at them. "I tried to put that dab shoe paint on mine one time, but it wasn't the same color of black; it didn't match; looked all patchy. Wore off in a week anyway, but I'd say yours are too far gone for that." He straightened up, placing his hands on his hips, and pushing his stomach out.

I am suddenly mesmerized by his stomach, moving in and out with each breath stretching the seams of a





crisp white dress shirt, showing bits of his undershirt between buttons, pushing over his shiny black dress belt, then exhaling and deflating again. He must have caught me looking, but luckily misinterpreted once again, "You noticed! I didn't think anyone could tell." His round face was beaming. "Well, yeah I did lose some weight," patting his stomach and sucking it in a little. "The Misses has me eating Grape Nuts every morning; says it's good for my heart," punctuating his sentence by pounding on his chest.

I can't break away from his hypnotic gut, moving in and out, in and out, until a baby screams as he's being blessed. Luckily, the line's moving now; Ted smiles and I give the obligatory nod. "Yeah, you look good Ted. You'll probably outlive me," I managed a genial smile, which he returned before moving farther down the line, his stomach still slightly visible around the edges.

I look at my shoes again, trying to avoid another vapid conversation, but I'm too late; a chain of conversation has already been set in motion, and I know I am powerless to stop it. I feel a tap on

my left shoulder from the pew behind me, and before I know what's happening, Margie Reish, with her blue eye shadow and her Las Vegas slot-machine player ensemble, is two inches away from my face telling me about some shoe store.

"They just opened it Honey, so they're having great sales. Now I know you don't have a girl of your own to take care of these things, though I don't know why..." With every word, I'm treated to a nearly visible cloud of tar and generic old lady perfume smeared against my face. I try to keep from looking queasy, or smiling wide enough to get the smell of her in my mouth, her hot breath on the side of my neck, and her plastic bracelets rattling in my ear.

"Thank you Mrs. Reish. I'll keep that in mind. Oh, excuse me; I dropped my pen, thanks again." I turn back to my pew and bend over, my head between my knees, pretending to look for my imaginary pen, and really trying not to puke on the Sabbath. I close my eyes, trying to shut out Margie's flaming orange hair and Ted's overpowering gut and the suffocating air and the powdery sheep. I clench my eyes shut until

everything's silenced again.

It seems somehow cooler in the tiny shadow between the pews, my own little corner in the chaos; there's a draft running across the floor, some door or window accidentally left open. I keep my eyes closed and let the calming air move across my face, running my hand against the twill carpet.

I was among the young men enlisted to install the new carpet during that spring. We had to unscrew and remove all of the heavy pews and benches, rip out the old carpet bit by bit, try to remove as much of the old dirt, glue, and tack strips as possible, lay down the new foam padding, and pull what I privately deemed the redemption rug into place. The Quilting Circle and their recruits were on hand for most of the action to provide homemade lemonade, iced tea, and crock pots full of ox roast for sandwiches.

We worked mostly in the evening, but none of the cool spring air could find its way through the church's winding hallways and constricting lobbies. I stood one of the ornate three-seater pews on its end and reached my arms behind me, pulling the wooden

bulk of it onto my bare back. I bent at the waist and walked with my legs spread, to help carry the weight and keep my balance. Every time I exhaled under the pressure of the pew and the heat of the church, I sank deeper into the crack between the seat and the backrest, and when I went to fill my lungs again, my ribs were more compressed, unable to expand, pinned against the unyielding wood. I took short shallow breaths and labored steps. I could feel sweat running down my spine and my skin sticking and pulling against the smoothly polished wood. My hand ran across the underside of the seat that had been chipped, and I remember thinking of the Christ. The splintered wood was painful but somehow more real than the unnatural waxy finish of the wood, layered with high gloss polish and buffed every Sunday with Polyester skirts and slacks, still smelling heavily of Lemon Pledge.

I sit up too quickly, the blood rushing back to my head, and when I open my eyes, I see undulating spots of auburn move across the tall stained-glass windows, the thick, gold-tasseled curtains, and the golden crucifix at the

head of the altar. The heat returns to my cheeks, and the chatter of the congregation floods my ears. I clench my jaws, and remembering the remaining bits of wafer, I tongue my gum line. I find a tiny scratch that doesn't seem to want to heal, and I get a hint of that copper taste, like sucking on an old penny.

My head is still feeling heavy, but I make an effort to ground myself. The communion line is winding down now; Veronica Mackey and her mother Joyce are among the last. There was another scandal for you.

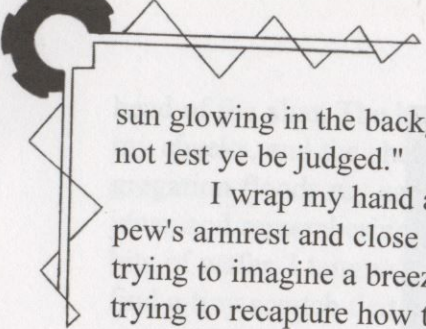
Before a year ago, Joyce had always let Veronica dress a little more...casually to church than all the other girls. When some of the other mothers' complaints and snickers grew a bit too blatant for her to ignore, Joyce had an outburst in the parking lot asking a gaggle of the offending housewives, "What the hell's it really matter what Veronica wears to church, so long as she's here? And we all know this is a small town where everyone knows everyone else's business, so don't act like you're all a bunch of damn saints yourselves! It works both ways,

ladies!"

The housewives apparently had their vindication a few Sundays after that though. At the time, Joyce was the leader for the junior high Sunday school class. One day, I guess they were talking, rather vaguely, about the consequences of premarital sex, when Veronica enthusiastically added, "If you can't wait, masturbate!" The other teenagers thought it was hilarious but tried to stifle their titters under expressions of utter abashment. After a moment of stunned, pale silence, Joyce stood up, a towering 4'10", and slapped her daughter hard across the face. The housewives all smiled cruelly as Joyce stormed her daughter out of the church, and seemed pleased to notice Veronica's face, the exact color of her burgundy dress, had a tiny white handprint burning across her cheek.

Joyce now holds her granddaughter rather laxly while Veronica takes the wine and wafer. I get a sudden image of a plaque hanging in the children's Sunday school room - a group of round-faced little cartoon boys and girls playing together, chasing butterflies through simply drawn tulips, a smiling





sun glowing in the background, "Judge not lest ye be judged."

I wrap my hand around the pew's armrest and close my eyes again, trying to imagine a breeze on my face, trying to recapture how that spring had felt again.

I carried my pew into the children's Sunday school room. Someone had left one of the high windows open, and the moonlight came spilling into the room, washing over tiny finger-paintings, transforming them into prophetic cave drawings. I set the pew down and lay down on it facing the window; a breeze rustled the heavy curtain and filled the room with the clean scent of early honeysuckle. I stared through the open window, the oblivion of the black sky, and the startling beauty of the pale moon. The cold air dried my sweat, traced the trickling lines up my back, to the base of my neck, and wound its way through my thick curling hair to my clean scalp; I remember a complete stillness, a solid silence, far from the fuchsia carpet and crock pots of ox roast.

I breathed again, once more, deeply, fully. The air was so cold it

pricked my lungs, my throat, but it was the fervent sting of life, of living, of feeling something real and whole and pure. I remember the swoon of the crisp air, the smell of the trees outside, the taste of salt on my lips, the weightless exhaustion in all my limbs, and the thought that nothing could ever be as fiercely beautiful ever again.

And a tear escapes as I open my eyes to see a congregation of the leaden-eyed, the clergyman's parting words awkwardly clanging through the crowd like nickels in an empty offering plate. People get up and leave, skirts static-cling to twisted pantyhose, children's faces already smeared with cake; men exhale the hot breath of the past two hours, and old people shake hands, holding on for a few seconds too long. I hang my head and feel what must be the final onslaught of the heat, the clatter, the acrid tang, the painful vulgarity of the necessary everyday closing around me, rising above my head so I can't breathe. I feel the choking gulps wanting to escape, wanting to weep for all the beauty in the world that is strangled in the mud, or silenced by the negligent, just wasting, wasting away... and then

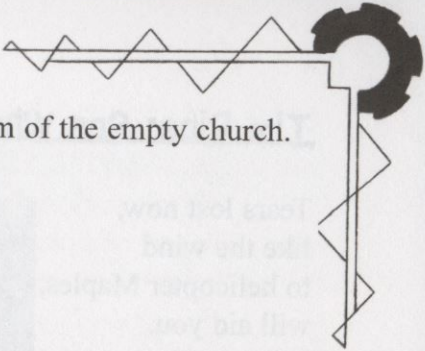
she touches me.

The cool fingers, cracked and creased with ages of use, smooth gently over my forearm, wordlessly turn my palm upwards, and rest on the white skin of my wrist. The thick blue veins on the back of her hand, tiny rivers soaking through my skin. She ignores my sweaty palms, opens my fists, and straightens out my fingers. Her skin is rough and dry, but solid and real. I can feel my fevered pulse calm beneath the light touch of her fingertips. This old woman, whom I must have sat beside for a month of Sundays and never noticed, who never said a word, she just looks at me like she knows too, like she sees it all too, and she shakes her head empathetically and smiles simply. Like that's all we have left to do is witness and smile.

She touches my burning cheek, "All you have to do is breathe; just breathe and wait. I know; I know. It'll all pass, don't you worry."

I feel like a child; her cool fingers are laced with mine, and we just sit together, waiting. She's smiling all the while, waiting and smiling, and already I feel the urge to join her, as we sit in

the pleasant calm of the empty church.



Tim Rice: See Who Sees You: Through the Eyes of a Tree

Tears lost now,  
like the wind  
to helicopter Maples,  
will aid you.

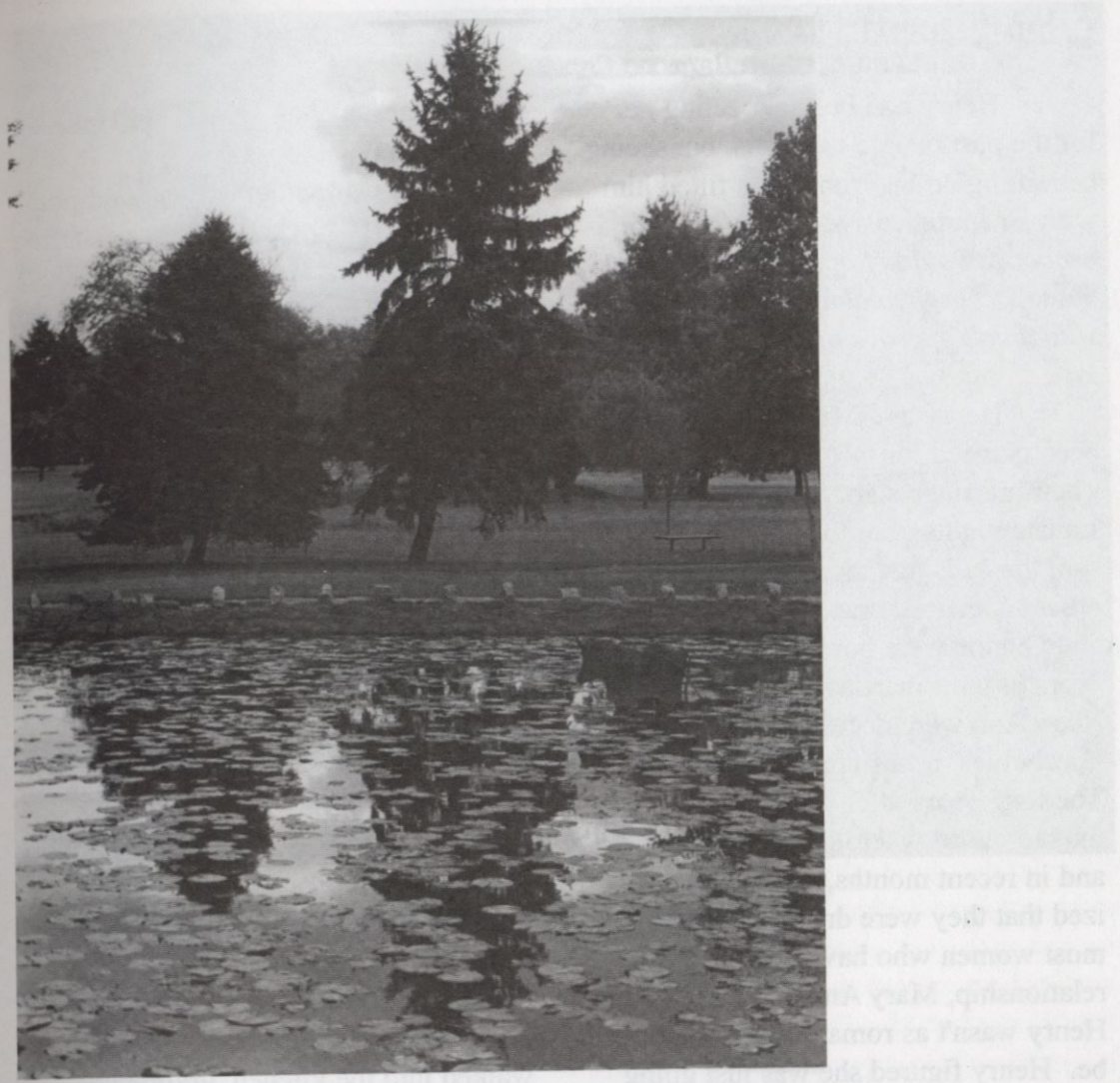
The fears of your Fall,  
like children playing chess,  
will amuse you;  
in years not yet written.

The laughs lost between the pages  
will flutter out of your juvenile Maples,  
now rooted,  
ready to multiply,

Your limbs will bend  
to dot their eyes  
and cross their hearts.

So that when you are downed,  
made into paper and pencil,  
you will see what's left -  
more.

Hands to climb high,  
bark for firm footings,  
minds with unseasoned souls,  
tops for touching new places...



Adam Howard

Brian Bennett: Modern Plastics  
with Apologies to Raymond Carver

Henry had been expecting her for the past couple of weeks, but seeing her sitting on his front steps filled him with an apprehensive joy. *Mary Ann probably wouldn't approve of this*, he thought, *but then again that bitch of a wife didn't approve of anything as of late.*

Henry and Mary Ann Dultry had been married for thirty-eight years. Their marriage started out with the passionate nights, the flowers for no reason, the calls just to say hi, and all that other superficial crap. Thomas, Billy, and Dianne were born in the first eight years of their marriage. Henry and Mary Ann were decent parents and had no troubles in raising their children. The long years after their children had moved out took a toll on their marriage, and in recent months, the couple realized that they were drifting apart. Like most women who have been in a long relationship, Mary Ann complained that Henry wasn't as romantic as he used to be. Henry figured she was just going insane because he never remembered being even remotely romantic. Mary

Ann suggested counseling, but Henry wouldn't have it.

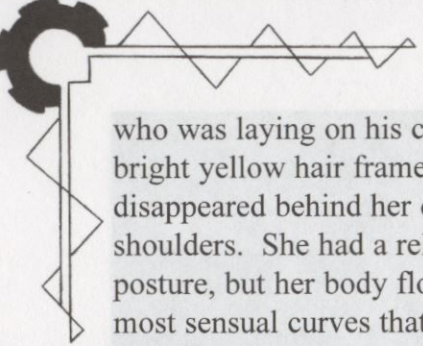
He was a simple meat-and-potatoes man. He worked the assembly line at the steel mill, was a member of the VFW, had served two tours in Nam, and wasn't about to go to some hippie counselor to talk about his "feelings." Three months had passed since Mary Ann suggested counseling, and the marriage was only getting worse. Their love life had also suffered. The couple had not made love in over two months. Henry decided to take matters into his own hands and, after that got old, he made a few phone calls to acquire the beautiful blonde that was now sitting on his front steps.

*Mary Ann is usually home on Wednesday nights. Thank God she had to go to one of her Sorority meetings tonight.* With that he carried the girl into the house and laid her down on the couch.

Henry kicked his shoes off, walked into the kitchen, grabbed himself a beer, and strutted back out to the living room to admire the young woman



Kathryn Siverd



who was laying on his couch. Her bright yellow hair framed her face and disappeared behind her delicate shoulders. She had a relatively stiff posture, but her body flowed with the most sensual curves that Henry had ever seen on a woman. Her bright blue eyes were wide open and attentive, and she seemed to be surprised at everything Henry did.

This did not bother him in the least. *It's nice to finally have someone around the house who appreciates me, and she's so quiet, no nagging, no complaining, nothing.*

Henry's manhood throbbed with desire for this young woman. He finished his beer and took the can out to the kitchen. Walking back into the room, Henry assumed position in front of the couch and started to strip. He pulled his shirt off his body in a seductive manner, grabbed one corner of the shirt with his right hand, and twirled it around in the air. Still holding on to the corner, he swung the shirt between his legs and caught the opposite end with his left hand. Henry began pulling the shirt back and forth as if he were flossing his butt crack. After a couple sec-

onds of butt flossing, Henry began twirling his shirt again and flung it across the room towards his mistress on the couch. Sadly enough, Henry's high school quarterback skills had gotten rusty, and the shirt flew across the room and took out the vase on the end table. Henry's heart was racing as he heard the vase come in contact with the floor.

"Damn vase, or vas, or whatever the hell she calls it," Henry grumbled as he walked over to assess the situation. The worn carpet was unable to cushion the fall of the vase. He bent down and examined the pieces that were strewn about the carpet. "What a cheap piece of crap; falls two feet and shatters into a million pieces. Eh, who cares, I never liked that thing sitting there anyway."

His words did little to comfort him. In his mind, he knew there would be hell to pay for breaking that vase. Henry had tried to make Mary Ann get rid of it before, but she loved the damn thing. Henry found it in a V.C. village after a raid, and each time that he looked at the vase it re-kindled images of a war that he was forever trying to forget. Mary Ann didn't understand why he didn't want it in his living room. She

thought it was so beautiful and made it a point to tell everyone how Henry got it for her. At least now, with the vase gone, he could put that part of his life behind him.

At the time, the vase was the only real concern that he had. The thought of Mary Ann finding out about his mistress didn't really concern him. As long as he only used her services when Mary Ann wasn't home, he would be fine. Even if she did find out, Henry didn't care. What was he supposed to do anyway? He was only human; he had needs too. *"If Mary Ann would be 'in the mood' more than twice a year then we wouldn't be having any problems,"* he thought.

Henry figured he would clean up the vase when he got finished. He re-assumed his position at the head of the couch and continued to strip for the girl. She laid there with the same surprised expression as she watched him fumble over the buttons to his trousers. The left pant leg came off smoothly, but the right leg got caught on his heel, and he hopped around the room trying to maintain his balance as he pulled his pants off. Instead of twirling the pants, he

simply bunched them up and tossed them next to the couch. Resting on the arm of the couch, Henry managed to lift up one leg at a time and remove his sweaty old socks. With his socks removed, he was now towering over the girl in nothing but his plaid boxers.

Henry began taking his boxers off slowly in an attempt to excite the girl. Her expression remained that of a constant state of surprise. Henry was too busy to realize that she didn't have much of a personality - not that a great personality is what someone would be looking for when they called on her. The plaid boxers slid down his legs and rested on the floor around his ankles. Henry raised his eyebrows a couple times and let out a grunt which seemed to question her approval. She was so shocked that she was unable to speak; the exact answer that Henry was looking for.

Henry held on to her waist and thrust himself in her. He immediately realized that she wasn't as good as he was told she would be. She laid there motionless as Henry continued to pound on her. Henry was getting a little frustrated with her lack of effort and the

constant squeaking noise that she was making, but before he could do anything about it, he heard the car pull into the driveway.

"Oh shit, oh shit! What the hell am I gonna do?" Henry exclaimed as he hopped off the girl and ran to the window.

Peeking around the curtains, Henry saw Mary Ann unbuckling her seatbelt. Henry yanked the girl off the couch and hid her behind the chair, which was next to the window. *Okay. Let's see, as long as she doesn't look over at this side of the room, I'll be fine*, he thought. *I'll be fine? I'm not going to be fine; I don't even have any clothes on!* He ran back across the room to grab his boxers. Come on, think Henry, think. You got to come up with something. Halfway to his boxers, Henry heard the doorknob twist. He was bent over with his hands on his boxers when the door opened.

"Henry Andrew Dultry, just what do you think you're doing?" Mary Ann questioned in a very annoyed tone.

Frozen in his footprints, Henry was too terrified to turn around. Henry's big, naked ass was staring Mrs. Dultry

right in the face. *What is SHE doing home?* was all he could think about. *What about that stupid meeting she was going to?* A faint rumble of thunder could be heard in the distance, which confirmed his worst fears. The weatherman seemed to have been wrong once again. That weatherman was always wrong. *Must be nice to have a job where you get paid to screw up all the time. I mess up one piece on the assembly line, and I almost lose my job. What is this country coming too?*

"So are you gonna put some clothes on and explain yourself, or are you gonna let me stare at that disgusting butt of yours all day?"

His wife's words startled Henry back to reality and his current predicament.

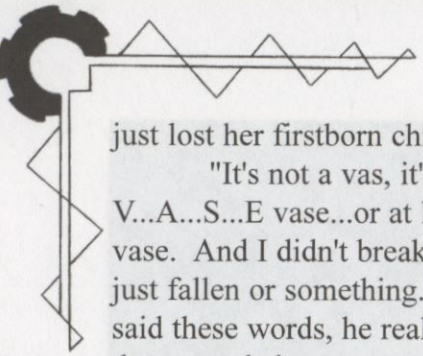
"Oh, um, well, hey, hun, what exactly are you doing home?" The shock and embarrassment of the situation was finally starting to sink in.

"My Vas! You broke my Vas!" Mrs. Dultry shrieked in horror as she ran over to her precious vas.

"How could you break my vas? I loved that vas." From the look on her face you would have thought that she



Kathryn Siverd



just lost her firstborn child.

"It's not a vas, it's a vase  
V...A...S...E vase...or at least it was a  
vase. And I didn't break it; it must have  
just fallen or something." Even as he  
said these words, he realized how stupid  
they sounded.

"So it just fell off the end table?  
Do you really expect me to believe that?  
Jesus, Henry, what has gotten into you?"  
she asked as she turned around to face  
her husband.

It wasn't until this moment that  
Mrs. Dultry even noticed the girl that  
was hiding behind the chair. Henry  
watched as his wife stormed into the  
kitchen. Finally he was able to put his  
boxers back on and get the rest of his  
clothes. Before he could go in to talk to  
her, Mary Ann came back out with a  
knife.

"What the hell are you doing?  
Put that knife away!" Henry demanded.

"I'm gonna put an end to this!"  
she exclaimed.

Mary Ann took off across the  
room towards the girl. Henry hurdled  
the couch and ran towards his mistress.  
He grabbed the girl's hand to try and  
pull her away from Mary Ann, but his

wife's grip was too strong. Mary Ann  
swung the knife down violently, but  
Henry caught her hand before any harm  
was done.

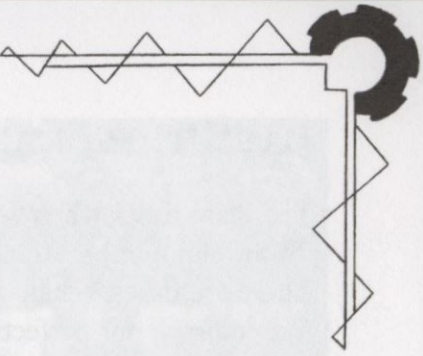
"Damn it, Henry, get out of my  
way," she erupted.

"No, I'm not going to let you do  
this!"

A fire lit up in the eyes of Henry.  
He bent his wife's wrist backward and  
heard his wife scream in pain as the  
knife fell to the ground.

"What on earth has gotten into  
you, Henry," she exclaimed as she  
smacked him across the face.

With her hands clamped around  
the girl's forearm, Mary Ann pulled  
with all her might. She was not strong  
enough to pull the girl away from  
Henry, and the slap across the face only  
enraged him. With all the strength he  
could muster, Henry jerked hard on  
the girl's hand, but Mary Ann did not let  
go. The force from the tug sent Mary  
Ann flying toward Henry. She smacked  
into him, and the two of them toppled  
over the couch and landed next to the  
broken vase. The girl, who had  
remained silent through the entire  
ordeal, followed them over the couch



and landed on the broken vase. A shard  
of the vase tore into the girl's back. A  
sudden burst of air ripped through the  
room and left the Dultry house in an  
uneasy quiet. In this manner, the issue  
was decided.



## Daniella de Luca: There Are Times & There Are Chances

There are times when we must surrender  
To the summer breeze and endless skies.  
There are times to hate our handwriting  
Yet embrace our perfections.  
There are times to put headphones on,  
And walk until the Discman runs dry.  
There are times to run away, let go.  
Times to stay put, hold on.  
And certain opportunities granted once in a lifetime.  
There are times for first kisses with a new love,  
For third and fourth chances.  
There are times when we must pretend that it matters,  
Even if it doesn't.  
There are times when we are absolutely nowhere,  
And that frightens us.  
Even though we are all here.  
Given the chance.



Adam Howard

## Susan Pogorzelski: Convergence

The itch can start anytime it pleases - anywhere it wants - without you expecting it or even wanting it. It begins as a tingling sensation, and you just know that it's going to inevitably worsen and travel up the length of your body until it begins to invade every area of visible skin. And when it begins, there is no stopping it. It reminds you of the first time you ever tested the ocean water with hesitant steps, realizing as you went further in that at any minute a wave would tumble down and you'd be overwhelmingly engulfed by bitter seawater.

Yeah. That's what it's like.

Only you can't scream or curse or drown yourself in one of those oatmeal bath remedies that you once read in your wife's women's magazine to make it go away. Not with this itch, anyway. You try to tolerate it as it lingers, try to convince yourself that as long as you ignore it, it will eventually wane, and you can go back to how you were before it ever began.

Only it won't ever go away, and you can never go back. You try to stop

the itch, but no matter what you do - no matter how hard you rub or scratch or will it to go away - it only continues to grow increasingly overwhelming. And you know that it's inevitable; you know that you can only ignore it for so long before you completely succumb, before you realize that you'll have to give in sometime....

Before you finally admit that you don't ever want to go back.

That's what it's like.

And they give you strange, knowing looks as you try to ease the sensation, but you grit your teeth and force a smile, pretending everything is perfectly normal while inside you, the itch is growing, getting worse. Soon, you begin cursing under your breath, despite your wife's warning that the kids will hear, and you furiously begin again, reminding yourself that you never really asked for it, never expected it - the itch just happened. Your wife's agitation rises as she watches you shift uncomfortably. She asks you what in the name of God you are doing, and though you try to explain, she only shakes her head

with a bemused smile on her face and walks away to pick up the toys or finish dinner or check on the kids.

That's what the itch is like; that's how it starts.

You follow your wife into the kitchen and watch her show the kids how to set the table. Forks on the left, knife and spoons on the right....

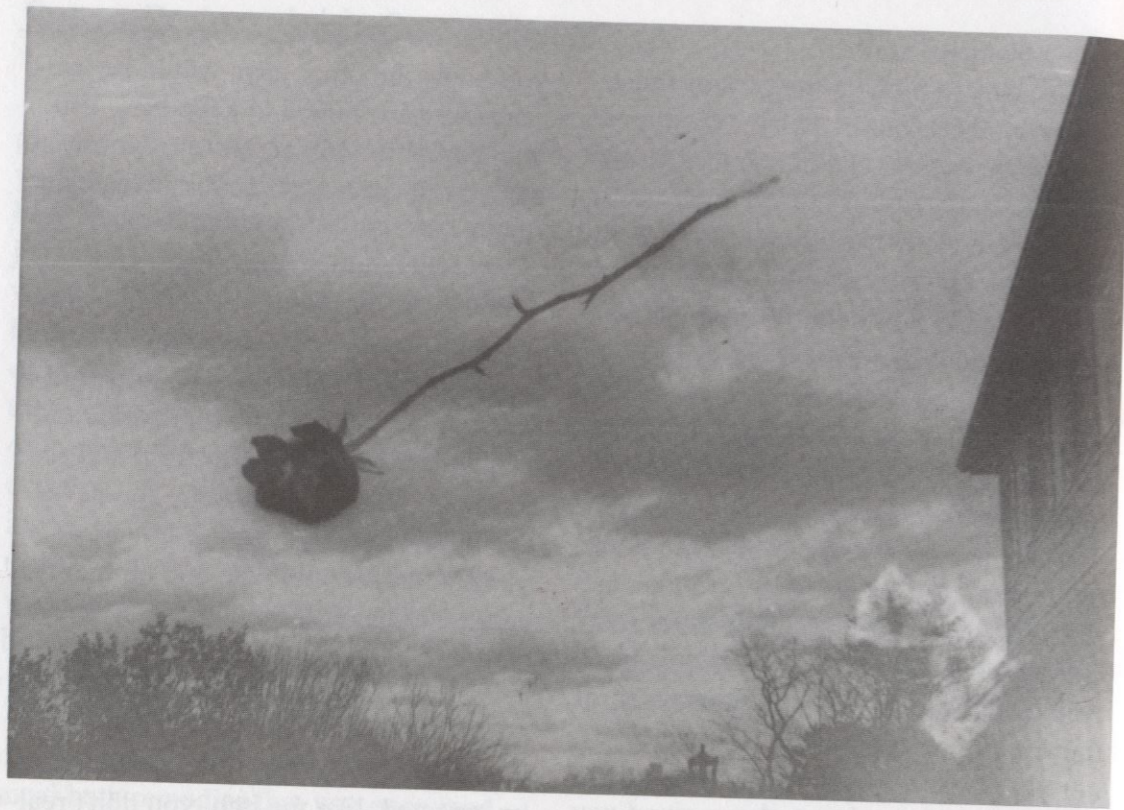
You know that she doesn't think that all of your attention is on her right now, just like she thinks that you don't look at her the same way you did those first few precious years or that you don't remember what those days were like, as if it is up to her to store all of those special moments for the both of you. Of course that's what she thinks; after all, they're supposed to be the romantics, not you.

She doesn't think that you remember particular moments here and there every time you look at her - that when she smiles, you automatically recall the first time she ever smiled at you. She doesn't believe that you remember the details or that you thought fondly of her everyday - that you still do. That when you first started dating, you never wanted to leave her

side for no special reason except that you knew the other guys would be jealous, and you wanted to keep her. You wanted her to look at you as if you were something special, something worth her time.

Protecting came after - after the first time you saw her frightened or crying, her cheeks flushed and moist, and you honestly felt for her. You thought it was the worst feeling in the world, and you would do anything to fix it and see the smile in her eyes again. You never knew how much you missed that sparkle until she blinked and all that lingered was the endless abyss of sadness clouding dark eyes.

And after that - after the "she's mine" and "I'll be her hero" routines - then came the loving. Sometimes it's unexpected; like the itch, you don't realize it's happening. You try to convince yourself that you just don't want her with anyone else; you just don't want to see her hurt. But eventually you realize that the real reason you want to always be near her is not to protect her, not because you merely enjoy her attention, but because you wouldn't know what to do without her.



And although she already has all of this figured out for herself, you're still trying to convince yourself that it's only because...All the excuses you can think of begin with "only because." You're only asking her out on a date because.... You're only holding her hand because.... You only want to be with her because....

Because you love her.

You once asked her, out of pure curiosity, what it was she fell in love with. She replied that it had been your smile, earning her the very expression that she was referring to - the wide grin filled with a light that brightened whenever she was around.... or so she said. She had returned the question, her eyes eagerly awaiting your answer. And you took her hand and pressed your lips against her small fingers and answered honestly, "everything."

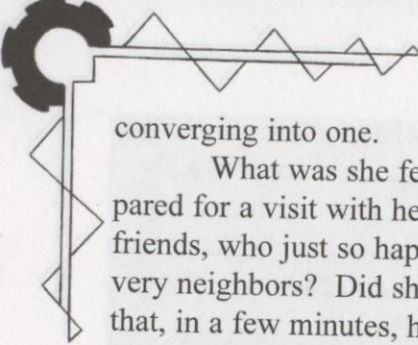
She looks up and catches you watching her. Her expression is full of question, but there is a softhearted smile lingering on her lips. You wink at her, and she raises her eyebrows in surprise and throws her head back with a pleasant laugh, causing your daughter to glance curiously between the both of

you, wondering what the secret is. You repeat the action in her direction, a sly smile on your face, and a grin quickly spreads across her chubby cheeks as she giggles behind her child's hand. Her twin brother rolls his eyes, and you know exactly what he's thinking; it's the same thought that every boy has when they're six -

Girls.

You nod inwardly, sympathetic to his sentiments, and lean forward to ruffle his thick blonde hair before retrieving the plates from your wife's hands. You know that your son will change, just as you had; you know that he will get older and fall in love. Despite the desperate efforts to keep it from happening, the itch will get to him too, and soon he and his wife will be sharing thoughts in silence - through only a smile, a nod, a wink....

You and your wife share the same memory, that sacred, singular moment that changed it all for you. You were both there; you recall the same events, but your thoughts of the future, the ignorant expectations of that day, and certainly those first few feelings weren't the same; two distinct memories



converging into one.

What was she feeling as she prepared for a visit with her parents' friends, who just so happened to be your very neighbors? Did she have any idea that, in a few minutes, her life would be changed; that you would be entering into each other's existence? You certainly didn't, but by God, you'll be forever grateful for it.

And what was running through her mind when she followed her parents out of the car and up the newly paved drive? What did she think when she saw you for the first time, out in the flattened wheat field behind the houses, driving the battered golf cart that you and your brother proudly beat the shit out of when you were barely fourteen?

Was that curiosity or pleasure in her eyes as you rolled up beside her, pumping the brakes and offering a friendly smile? Was it then? Was that the smile that had captured her; was it then that she fell in love with you?

Or was it the casual banter that escalated after you were introduced, or the long conversations you had, sitting on the backyard lounge chairs when you met for frequent visits? It was that

same summer; you're sure of it.

Maybe it was the night you stayed for dinner at her house, spending the evening on the couch, gossiping and teasing each other before she drove you home. That mellow night, the one that found you laughing at her dog as he drooled and gazed at the ice cream snacks that taunted him from the coffee table, had cemented your relationship. It was then that you realized that you could sit like that forever and never be restless, as long as you were with her.

Eyes met often, and smiles substituted for conversation. Awkward silences were replaced by ripping wrappers, the throaty acceptance of a very grateful canine, and the giggles and subsequent playful shoves as you were scolded.

Does she remember that night, you wonder? Does she remember the comfortable ambiance created by the nearness of each other and entertainment of a panting dog? Does she remember the rare clarity of the sky, the brilliance of the stars, as she reluctantly drove you home? You do. You were in awe of it.

And you were in awe of her.

You were never one for analyzing every little part of life. Who the hell cared if the moon felt so near that all you had to do was reach out, if the song playing in the car repeated itself over and over because it was the only one you had recorded for her on that particular tape? What did it matter that you had the windows down because the heat had been close to suffocating and the speed of the car provided just enough relief? Would it really be that important that you noticed the slight caress of the breeze on her dark hair or the smile that reached her eyes as she stole a moment just to look at you?

Yeah. It mattered, you admit. Every single detail mattered. Because that was one of the many moments that you wanted to remember forever, one of the moments that changed you, changed your life. It was one of the moments that you fight to keep, that make you prepare for a full-out rumble with both Time and Memory. You have to be the winner.

But you won't be.

Despite your desperate desire to capture the familiar notes of the unending song and the secret smiles that had

passed between you and her, it all changes, and you lose those details, those strong, vivid feelings. Time passes; memory takes over. You still remember the basics of what had happened, you still remember how you had felt, but that actual feeling is gone, passed. Though you want to run it through your mind over and over again, the image fades. And though you're disappointed that you can't hold onto that feeling, you realize, in the end, that it doesn't really matter. You know it happened; you had shared that special moment. Besides, you have all you'll ever need.

You have her.

The kids are in the midst of a very serious discussion regarding the afternoon's episode of *Sponge Bob Squarepants* that your daughter had missed due to her ballet lesson. She's propped up on her knees, elbows on the table, chin in her hand, watching her brother animatedly recount the events. From what you hear of his narration, you realize your son is repeating the show practically verbatim; your daughter is enthralled.

By the stove, your wife is testing



Ally Vogel song

the spaghetti to make sure that it's ready. You remind her of the time her lively grandma tossed a whole plateful of noodles in the air to see if they would stick to the ceiling.

None had survived.

Your wife laughs at the memory as you step closer to her and tenderly turn her around, searching her eyes for thoughts, words, emotions, hoping that she'll see the love in your own hazel depths. It's not the passionate love that would, in any other case, lead you both to the upper quarters of the house that you want her to see. You want to show her the love that everyone talks about, the love you thought your mom made up to teach you to respect girls, rather than chase them around the yard with squirt guns.

This is the one that grows with age and wisdom and togetherness, the one that you seem to recognize only in the elderly, their letters preserving their love story. You want her to know that what you're feeling encompasses all of this, and you are wholeheartedly ready to recognize the itch for what it is. You're no longer searching for relief because you're no longer trying to

escape it. The sensation has become little more than a memory as she stands in your arms, watching and waiting.

You reach for her hand, still tiny and unchanged except for the simple promise of forever adorning her fourth finger. The question is back in her eyes again, but her fingers fold naturally around yours. As you lean down for a light kiss, you remember that same night in the car - that night when the sky was so clear and you held her hand while you said your goodbyes; that night when you kissed her and bolted from the car, only to look back and share an affectionate smile, the same one you're offering each other now.

She steps away and gazes at you, making you feel once again that you're worth all of her love. The kids call out, asking when dinner will be ready so that they can hurry up and play outside before it turns dark. Your wife turns back to the pasta, which has threatened to turn to mush given a few more minutes, and you step beside her and stir the thick sauce. You offer each other a sidelong glance, sharing unspoken thoughts. You wink; she grins.

That's what it's like.

## Emily Capp: The Girl Inside

I look out the window at all the pretty girls. They saunter down the road before and after school in their short skirts, high boots, and bouncy hair. They are accompanied by jocks, burly upperclassmen, and the occasional random Emo-rocker stud. How I long to be one of those beautiful girls.

I notice how they swagger their hips to and fro, catching the eyes of all passersby. Rarely does someone miss a double or triple take of their perky breasts and firm backsides. They may be young high school women, but they are of the female species, and no man misses his opportunity to ogle.

Wistfully, I gaze at them as they stroll arm in arm with each other. Girls are the only sex that can get away with such an affectionate act. They peck each other on the cheek, hug hello and goodbye, and complement each other on their fine assets. Usually the pretty girls only can get away with it. I notice the uglier females staring at the other ideal girls. They emulate their actions, but often fail. They get categorized as a dike. Pretty girls get all the perks.

I want their clothes, I want their bodies, I want their beauty, and I want to be them. However, I can never be them. I sit in my room longing to be what I am not. My dad calls me down, "The game is on! Get down here before the pizza gets cold!"

I stare and look at my walls. The posters of sports teams, the blue walls, the plaid comforter, and my drum set in the corner. This room reeks of masculinity. I trot downstairs to put on my face of normalcy and conformity and enter into where my dad is lounging on his Lay-Z-Boy, as I fulfill my father's ideal image of what I should be. I sigh and then perk up, realizing I cannot be the impossible, "What did I miss?"



Mitz DiMartino

## Tim Rice: Send This to God

I'm sure she lives in Montana,  
I hear the Big Sky is her style,  
or maybe she's away for a while,  
wouldn't surprise me to catch her  
running around with the Man on the Moon,  
maybe strolling the woods with Mother Nature.  
O, when you find her  
(God speed it come soon),  
slip this under her door:

Dear God, I'm waiting.

## Two Parts to Clay



Rachel Book

## Susan Pogorzelski: The No-Name

The No-Name was just one of the countless bars that invaded West 73rd street, but it was the only one that had managed to remain in business for a solid twenty years. Rowdy students from the nearby university, already on the verge of intoxication, thanks to the club a few doors down, would crowd the dance floor on the weekends, and a line of barstools anticipated the few lone men and women who wanted to escape from their own realities into their Jack Daniels or choice liquor. The weekdays found those at the No-Name greeting the regulars with a welcoming smile before settling in for a calm night of familiar conversation. Elizabeth McCléan had quickly and willingly become one of those regulars.

There was something comforting about the No-Name and the strangers who were suddenly no longer strangers to her. Comforting chats with the bartender promptly became routine, and the warm reception upon stepping through the entryway filled the void of acceptance inside of her. Elizabeth had never imagined herself frequenting a

bar during the weekdays, and the thought of being labeled as a regular seemed worlds apart from her respected title at the firm. She had always thought that bars were run-down joints for men to meet their whisky and women to heave the weight of their sorrows onto the shoulders of a sympathetic bartender. But the No-Name...the No-Name had turned out to be something else.

It reminded her of a place where men gathered with their friends for a beer and a ballgame while their wives met with their girlfriends elsewhere for a rare night of dinner and a movie. Over the years, Elizabeth had learned, its owners had refused to enhance its look with the now trendy neon lights and steel countertops that the bars down the road had succumbed to. The same wooden bar whose counter had served as a resting place for beer bottles was fixed in its original location, while an old-fashioned jukebox sat idly near the round tables in the main room. The owner's unwillingness to change resulted in the No-Name acquiring a certain

type of quaint charm that Elizabeth found hard to resist. She never could remember why she walked through the worn doorway of the bar that first time, and she still couldn't find a good excuse for why she kept coming back.

The lonely apartment waiting for her only a few blocks away didn't seem as appealing as the homely atmosphere and easy conversation that the No-Name provided. Who did she have to go home to, anyway? Her younger brother was living back home with her parents - her sole regret about moving to the city - and her sister was studying hours away. So now there was only a cat, who had decided long ago that leaping down the rusted fire escape to prey on God knows what in the vacant alleyway was better than being stuck with a collection of stuffed animals waiting to be thrown off the bed as soon as their owner decided that it was time she get some sleep.

And what would she do once she was there, anyway? After slipping out of her heels and standard business suit, she could finally relax in her slippers and sweats and what - watch sitcoms all night? Attempt to make tomato soup,

only to have the burner up so high that it would eventually boil over? She was considered a brilliant architect, but creating anything involving food was not her forte. So, like clockwork, Ellie would leave the formality of the office and eagerly head to her other home. At J & W Architecture, she was known as Elizabeth McCléan, a rising name among contractors and executives alike. But here.... Here she was just Ellie.

"You should have been here this weekend." The aging bartender barely turned his attention away from the ballgame that was already in full swing on the nearby television set as Ellie stepped from the chaos of the sidewalk into the empty bar.

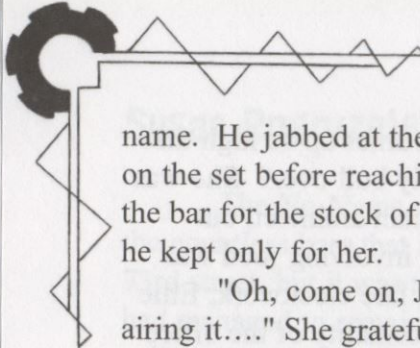
"I'm never here on the weekends."

"So I've noticed. And just why is that?"

"I prefer to hassle you on your slow days." Her smile portrayed her natural charm as she took a seat and glanced at the TV. "Yankees lost. Do you have my pretzels?"

The bartender grumbled as Ellie strained to look behind the counter for the tin marked specifically with her





name. He jabbed at the power button on the set before reaching underneath the bar for the stock of pretzel rods that he kept only for her.

"Oh, come on, Joe - they're repairing it...." She gratefully accepted the tin from his outstretched hands and broke one in half, its remnants dusting the wood in a fresh layer of pretzel debris. "Just because you didn't like the outcome the first time around...."

The heavily built man with gray hair and mustache eyed her. Had it been anyone else on the opposite end of that stare, man or woman, they would have cowered, unsettled by the brusque looking man. Not Elizabeth McCléan. She dealt with fierce businessmen everyday; she knew when it was a mere ruse meant to intimidate her, just as she knew that Joe had a fatherly soft spot for her. Now, she met his glare with a smile and continued to munch on her pretzels.

"JD, Elizabeth," he said at last with a forced sigh of annoyance. "You know my name, so why don't you use it? And why don't you get a normal dinner for once?"

"Because Joe *is* your name.

Besides, you just want people to call you that so they think you're gruff, which we both know you're not." Ellie sealed the container and handed it over. "And I did get dinner. It's on its way...Joe." She glanced up at him with a bold smirk on her young face. Joe heaved a sigh and turned around, but it was too late - Ellie had seen the formation of a smile.

"Why don't you ever go home after work? Don't you think that cat of yours will be missing you by now?" His back was still turned towards her as he began to fill plastic bowls with the requisite peanuts and mini-pretzels.

"You mean my very own Houdini? She's probably wandering 42nd street by now." Her head rose and dark eyes narrowed in serious thought, her lips ready as she ventured into another musing.

"You know, it was her choice to turn up on my fire escape and her choice to keep coming back. She should have known that I'd take her in eventually, but every time I start to think she'll settle down with me, off she goes. A word of advice, Joe..." she waited expectantly for him to turn

around. "Never get too attached."

"Maybe your cat's just fickle."

Ellie's grin spread across her face, a gentle laugh not following too far behind. The cool draft of the evening air caused them both to shift their attention to the open door, where an Asian teenager waited with a paper bag adorned with Chinese lettering. Ellie excitedly stepped down from her stool, purse in hand, and greeted the boy.

From behind the counter, Joe eyed the package wearily as she returned with her delivery. "Chinese food now?" he asked in disbelief as he viewed the contents that she was spreading out before them. It had become customary for Ellie to have food delivered to the bar, and though Joe didn't mind in the least, he enjoyed the ritual of badgering her. Tonight was to be no exception.

"You brought Chinese food into my bar?"

"It was either this or you cooking for me. I figured you'd want a break." She retrieved the complimentary wooden chopsticks from the bag and scooped up her lo mien in one fluid,

practiced motion. Joe shook his head in mock disgust.

"I thought you had to have courtesy in your profession," he filled a clean glass with fresh water and positioned a lemon slice on the rim before setting it down in front of her.

"That's at work, where I'm dealing with clients who are constantly changing their minds about the plans while requests for new projects are flooding my inbox. This," she continued, "is Chinese food at your bar. There's a difference."

"Food not cooked on my grill is food not allowed in my bar." He crossed his arms and leaned against the back wall as he frowned at her. She paused from her dinner and looked up at him innocently. A moment passed in silence as they held each other's stare. She held up her chopsticks, lo mien dangling off the sides.

"Do you want some?"

The evening was just beginning to settle into night as more regulars wandered in and ordered their drinks, as they had been doing for months or even years. The Chinese food was gone, and Ellie and Joe were left to converse with



the customers they were acquainted with. The room dimmed as the dull sky offered up less light through the front windows, and the jukebox whirled into action as it changed discs before belting out old tunes.

As was usual for the start of a new week, business lulled around a quarter to eight. A sole couple sat shoulder to shoulder at a round table beneath the faint lighting near the back of the room, occasionally reaching for the other's hand while sipping their cocktails. A man was situated at the opposite end of the bar, hand clinging possessively to a frosty mug as he concentrated on the remainder of the old game. Joe had gone into the kitchen to prepare an order for the couple, leaving Ellie to sip her water as she waited patiently, eyes skimming over the bottles of liquor that lined the shelves on the wall behind the bar.

A familiar draft tickled Ellie's bare legs as another customer silently announced his entrance. The deep chuckle that followed caused her to turn around, knowing instantly to whom it belonged.

"What are you so cheerful

about?" she inquired as her friend, still in his business attire, seated himself next to her at the counter. He nodded towards the empty container whose contents had been consumed less than a half an hour before.

"Chinese food this time? What'd Joe have to say?"

"It's JD, Andrew!" Before Ellie could get a chance to answer, Joe emerged from the kitchen, exasperated at overhearing the dreaded name passing the lips of yet another customer. "Ellie, pretty soon everyone's gonna be calling me Joe. Three months you've known him, and you've already got Andrew corrupted."

"Aw, don't be so sore, Joe. It could be worse, you know." The older man grumbled something under his breath; Ellie and Andrew simultaneously leaned forward to catch his words.

"What can I get you to drink, Andrew?" The man pointedly ignored them and avoided more talk of the subject.

"Just regular water, thanks."

"Just water...you two are going to run me out of business."

"It's always just water for me,

Joe." The man nodded at her, his eyes clouding over in brief sympathy at the hidden knowledge. "Besides," Ellie continued, "it's the company that I come for." She gave the two men a wink and smirked as she held up her clear glass in a mock toast.

"Not to mention your own personal restaurant," the bartender added. "Don't you have an apartment to go to?" His voice was gruff, but the twitch in his mustache confirmed that he was teasing her. She groaned and muttered something inaudible to the two gentlemen.

"I think," Andrew began as he shifted on his stool to gain her full attention, his dark eyes holding a warm glimmer, "I think that it's about time someone took you out to a real dinner."

"You know, I'm constantly proposing the same idea to Joe, but so far he has refused my offer." The woman shrugged nonchalantly as she feigned hurt at the rejection, pretending to concentrate on the glass she was cradling.

"Baloney," was Joe's reply as Andrew grinned. The young man's smile was endearing and sincere as he focused his full attention back on Ellie.

"When was the last time you actually went out on a date?"

Ellie sat up in indignation at Andrew's query. "I'm constantly going out. Just because I stop by to have a pleasant conversation with friends every week does not imply that I have no social life."

"Business luncheons don't count."

Ellie made a face at Joe that made her seem younger than her 29 years while Andrew laughed heartily, his expression displaying his sincerity.

"Well, what do you say, Ellie? Can I entice you to join me for a real dinner, so we can give poor Joe a break?"

Ellie's smile brightened her face as she turned to continue her teasing.

"See, Joe, it wouldn't be that hard to -"

She was abruptly cut off by the familiar, muffled ring of her cell phone. Ellie frowned as she reached for her purse and extracted the device, wondering why the office would be calling her so late. Her expression deepened in surprise and concern as she read who the call was from before answering.

"Ellie?"

"Chris?" she asked to make certain that it was the familiar voice of her younger brother.

"Yeah, it's me," he assured her. "How's it going?"

Ellie's brows furrowed in confusion as she tried to grasp the meaning of the call.

"What's wrong? It's not Wednesday, is it?" She glanced up at Andrew and Joe, who shook their heads in confirmation that it was indeed the beginning of the week.

"Nothing's wrong," the voice on the other end of the line continued. "I just wanted to call and say hi."

Ellie parted her lips to speak, but her puzzlement left her nearly speechless. Months ago, she had promised her fourteen-year-old brother that they would keep in contact once she moved to the city. To fulfill that promise, the two had designated Wednesday evenings as the time to call and catch up on the happenings of the week. As far as Ellie was aware of, Wednesday was still two days away.

"Tell me what's going on," Ellie demanded as any sense of joviality quickly vanished, returning almost

instantaneously to the role of caretaker for the teenager.

She met Joe's gaze, who, noting the change in her demeanor, motioned to a secluded table away from the bar for privacy. Ellie nodded in acknowledgement and slid off of the stool, walking away from the hushed voices of her companions.

"Chris..." Her voice trailed off as she encouraged her brother to speak. There was a heavy sigh on the other end.

"Mom got fired today. She said she quit 'cause she wasn't getting paid enough, but she hasn't gone to work in a week. She's getting really bad, Ellie. She doesn't even bother to hide the empty bottles anymore."

The troubled expression that had imprinted itself on her usually sunny face was apparent even from across the room. The woman closed her eyes and rested her head in her free hand, her shoulders slumping as he recounted the events that had taken place at their home. This was why she had escaped to the city - away from the ever-steady supply of liquor, away from the discomfiting smell of scotch, and away from

the confinement that caused her fear of suffocation.

"And Ellie?" His voice cracked, and she could detect the vulnerability in his tone at once.

"Yeah, Chris," her own voice betrayed the defeat that she felt as she assured him that she hadn't left him.

"Dad walked out again."

Any semblance of the poised architect who knew how to reconstruct building blueprints in order to satisfy her clients and assure them of the structure's stability was gone. It took only one sentence for her world to crumble once again; it took just four words to turn her back into the only true guardian her brother had ever known; it took merely a matter of an instant to realize that, for once, she couldn't put the pieces of her broken family back together again.

"Does Becky know?"

"She knows," Chris replied.

"But she's preparing for her final exam in social work and can't come home."

Ellie lifted her gaze towards the ceiling as she grasped the irony of her only sister's career choice. Her eyes flicked over to the bar where she had

left Joe and Andrew. The two were still talking quietly, but every few seconds their worried faces would turn towards her with interest. Ellie returned to the phone conversation, having suddenly made up her mind.

"Chris, I want you to come stay with me."

There was a silent pause on the other end. A moment later, her brother spoke up, his voice even and determined.

"I can't move, El."

"Chris, if you're worried about school, we can figure something out...."

"No," Chris interrupted. "It's not school that I'm worried about."

Suddenly, Ellie understood everything her brother was implying. Despite it all, Ellie had always felt responsible for taking care of her mother. Now, the burden had regretfully been placed on her brother's shoulders. She nodded her head and lowered her eyes, reluctantly complying.

"Then at least come up for the weekend."

"I'll come up," he agreed. The relief in both of their voices was evident. Ellie exhaled and straightened in

the chair.

"I'll call you tomorrow, kiddo."

"Yeah," the teenager acknowledged. "Hey, El?" There was an awkward pause again; she had the feeling that there was something more he wanted to say. "I'll see you this weekend."

Ellie smiled to herself as her brother expressed his gratitude in the only way he knew how.

"You bet."

When she stood from the table, it was apparent that her gaiety had vanished; her shoulders slumped slightly and her steps were slower. As she approached the bar, she forced her troubled frown to turn upwards into some semblance of a smile.

"We may need a rain check for that dinner," she told Andrew as she slid back into her original seat beside him. One hand impulsively reached out to clutch the glass that now held only a discarded lemon resting on melting ice. The two men watched in silent concern as she stared at the fragile object.

"Joe," she asked quietly, looking up at last, "could I have some water?"

Katherine E. Porter: Passing

In a breath and a shock,  
It fell in two,  
And I fell in, too, to a lock  
Unwittingly styled, lost in breath,  
No time, for the Sandman stocks

Tick, tick, tick-tock.  
A dime, the misfortune of time,  
Crawling and bawling, the passing clock  
It pulses away, in a dependent design  
As visions pulse and parades stalk

Breathless the night, I'm lost  
Unfamiliar with the passing visionary  
quest

I've been paying rent, this body upped  
the cost,

As it shook and shivered, deadly cold,  
No more horizons, they're bought and  
sold

Painting brains and blood on the wall,  
It's too soon - too soon -  
And I'd hope to presume  
The stalking, too, ceases while talking  
increases

And all memory makes sense with the  
night

Tight. Kept in a prison of thought and  
time,

It's this life, riddled and shocked  
Tied down, tighter still,  
Chained, hardened, locked  
Throw away the key, then blame it on  
me

Say I didn't know when to stop,  
Put myself back in line,  
Just pretend it's all fine;  
Swiss-watch, bottle of scotch balancing  
on top of your breath,  
As you catch me gasping for air,  
If only in passing.



John Fudrow

## Will Lahr: Domestic

You haven't demonstrated the ability to do what I need you to do. You haven't been able to grasp what's going on beneath the words that I've said to you so far. That's not really the issue here. I could go on and on about inadequacies; both yours and mine. Yes, you have them and they are plenty. So do I. But since one of yours seems to be a problem with listening, tune your ears in to this.

I'm just going to tell you. I'm just going to say it in language that you can hear without trying, so that you don't have to really listen to pick up what I'm saying. There are no subtleties here.

I'm going to tell you what's going on here. No more guess work. I'm going to lay it all out for you as far back as I feel has had any bearing on who I've become. If you understand, just nod. If you get tired of what I'm telling you, keep nodding. I think we're to the point that you just need to sit there and be quiet. Just keep your mouth shut. When I finish, keep keeping your mouth shut.

Silence does not give you license to talk. It isn't your turn. We don't take turns anymore. We tried that and you couldn't shut your face long enough to realize that I had left the room. You're so damn self-absorbed.

I'm going to need you to use your imagination, so dust it off, clean it up, oil the cogs and gears of your brain, and meet me back here. I need you to put yourself in my shoes. Look through my eyes, see what I've seen.

Stop looking at the table, stop looking down and look at my eyes. Remember, all you have to do is hear, imagine, and nod. It's that simple. Three easy steps to understanding. What's on the table does not have a bearing on your understanding. What's under the table, what's under the table is important.

Under the table is an eight-year-old boy. Hiding under there. Looking out past the gold-painted, metal legs of the chairs, the kind of chairs that have webbing for a back and for a seat, and the webbing is framed by compressed sawdust and glue that's been covered

with veneer so that it looks like oak. The same kind of chairs they rent on a week-to-week payment plan to low income families who can't afford to buy furniture outright and end up paying double in the long run. The little boy is looking out through all of this.

He hasn't been watching long. Mostly he's been hiding under there. He's been hiding from the noise. All the screaming in the house. It started with his dad and his brother. Something about wrestling and his brother's grades. When his dad cracked the older brother with a closed fist, that's when the eight-year-old scurried under the table.

Don't forget to nod; the nodding is very important to me. That's how I know you're hearing me. This is what we call communicating.

At some point his mother swooped in. You know, to save the older brother from the evil father. The boy doesn't know when. He had his eyes shut. He had his ears covered.

When you cover your ears, if you cup them just right, it's like putting your ear to a seashell only without the rolling sounds. It's the constant roar of a pissed off ocean.

He's scared, and maybe a little bit angry that he's so small and can't make any of this stop. So, he's under the table, beneath the glass and the table cloth, and the plates and cups and forks, knives and spoons. He's under the table and the glass and all of the place settings for dinner, which is what his mom was doing the last time he saw her before he closed his eyes.

When you close your eyes in a well-lit room, the light coming through your eyelids makes everything red. Not that there's anything to see behind your eyelids, but even the things you imagine are red, brick red.

You don't believe me? Try it. Just close your eyes and look towards the light.

See, brick red.

Now I'm going to need you to open your eyes again.

Remember to nod when I'm talking. Show me that you understand.

This boy is looking out now. He doesn't know where his brother is. He knows that he's still under the table, but it doesn't seem that his parents do.

They are in the kitchen now. He's looking out because the shouting

has stopped. He has uncovered his ears, and he hears only his mother's voice. His mom and dad are sitting on the floor in the kitchen. He can see their feet jutting out past the island where dinner is laid out buffet style. The food smells good, but something is overcooked, burnt.

It's the biscuits.

Mom always burns the biscuits. It's like the timer on the oven doesn't work. Only it does work. Everybody hears it when it goes off. Everybody but mom. She must tune out everything around her. She never hears it.

His mom, she's sitting with her shins flat to the floor the way you see Asian people sit in the movies, and every once in a while she rocks backwards, and he can see her back and some sauce from cooking dinner is slopped onto the side of her shirt.

He can only see one of his dad's feet. But he knows his dad is there because it's his dad's shoe, and his mom is still talking like she does when his parents are fighting. She's using the words he always gets slapped for saying, the words that get you a writing assignment or detention or in some type

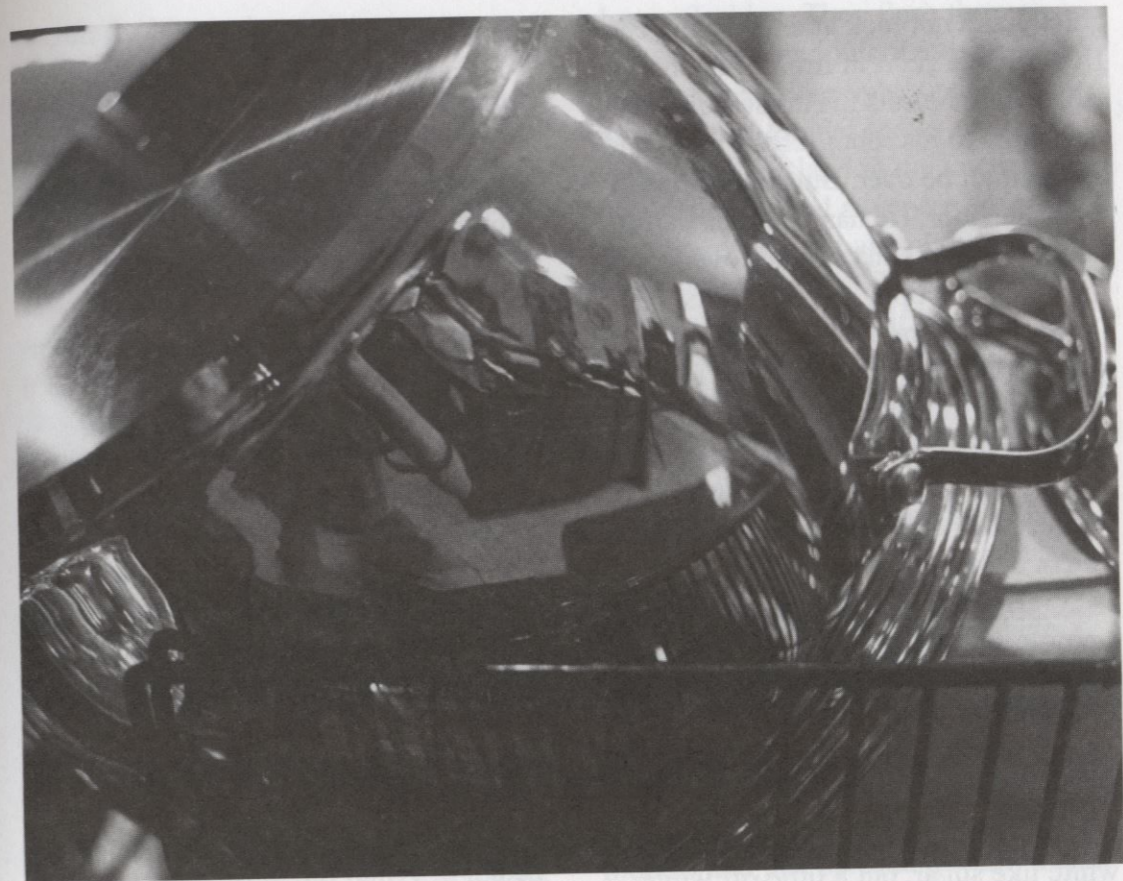
of trouble when you use them at school. And she's crying while she talks.

Remember to nod when I'm talking.

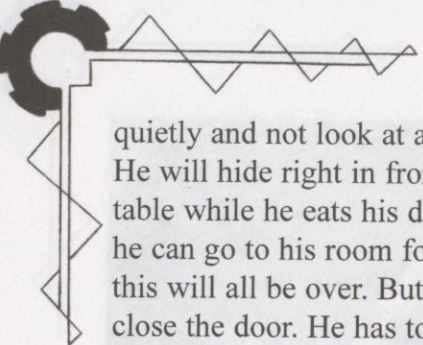
The boy, he knows it's about over. This is how fights end. This is what always happens. It has always happened and will continue to happen. But he knows that it's done for the night and that he can come out from under the table.

He pushes one of the chairs out slowly so that it doesn't make any noise when it slides across the floor. The metal of the legs is cold. Cold like the winter. Cold like outside. When he looks up, after concentrating so hard on moving the chair without making any noise, when he looks up, he sees that the front door is hanging open and that's why the chair is cold.

The little boy isn't stupid. He knows that the littlest thing could set his father off again. The front door hanging open could start it all over again. And he's doesn't want that. He's tired of being scared. He's hungry; he can smell the food, the burnt edges of the biscuits. He wants to sit at the table and pretend none of this ever happened. Just sit



Adam Howard



quietly and not look at anyone and eat. He will hide right in front of them at the table while he eats his dinner and then he can go to his room for the night and this will all be over. But first he has to close the door. He has to do his part to make sure it doesn't start all over again.

On his tippy-toes he starts towards the door. Because that's how you walk when you don't want to make any noise. At least that's what kids think. You should really roll your feet heel to toe, but he doesn't know that because he's only eight, and when you're eight you tippy-toe.

He takes five steps, five tiny little tippy-toe steps, and he hears his brother outside. "Andy?" he says. "Andy, come in and shut the door."

Andy steps into the doorway. He has the phone in his right hand. It's a cordless phone, and it's white. Not pure white like sugar, but a little off white like the walls in this room. Maybe it's beige, but the color of the phone isn't important.

"Come out here!" Andy whispers loudly, as if a whisper at 80 decibels is still a whisper and nobody else can hear it. "Come out here! The police are on

their way!"

His mother's voice gets loud, "Police?"

A domestic disturbance call has a slower response time than a call for shoplifting or loitering or littering. Nobody wants to be in the middle of a fight between a married couple. Not even the police know what will happen when one of two lovers, or both, feels betrayed. They take their time. And when they do show up, they come in pairs, always. They don't play their sirens. Unless there is a visible threat, they don't even turn on their flashing red lights.

The mother's voice, when it got loud, the little boy, the eight year old boy who had been hiding under the table. The boy that wanted to avoid more fighting. The one who was going to close the front door. He turned to look.

As he turned, his brother Andy shouted, "Don't!"

Remember to nod.

There's no sauce on the island with all the other food. There's no gravy either. There's nothing to drink anywhere that he can see. There's no

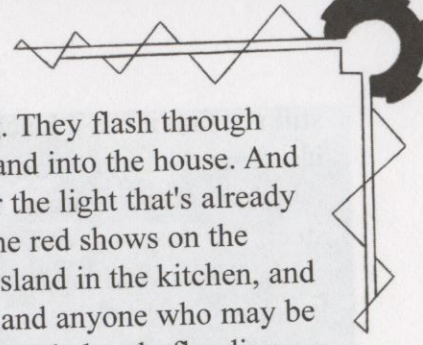
reason for his mother to have sauce or anything else on her shirt. And there's no knife to cut the ham with on the island either, but there is one in his mother's hand.

When you look through your tears, when your eyes have tears in them and you try to look out at the world, everything is blurred. Things are a little off. The light coming through the tears distorts everything just a bit. Colors though, they remain true.

On the floor, with his back against the kitchen cabinet and his left leg folded to the side and under his right in the pattern of the number four, was what for an instant appeared to be his father, but then became blurry. He had something red on his shirt, not brick red like the backs of your eyelids, but crimson. The color was true, like raspberry cool-aid, or ketchup, but just a little darker. Things were too blurry to tell for certain what it was.

Nod.

When the police arrive at the scene of a murder-in-progress, the response time is less than five minutes. They still come in pairs, but the siren is always blaring, and the red lights are



always flashing. They flash through every window and into the house. And they overpower the light that's already inside so that the red shows on the walls, and the island in the kitchen, and the cupboards, and anyone who may be lying there with red already flooding them, or sitting there flat on their shins the way Asian people sit in the movies with something splattered over them. The red lights hit everything and everyone. They make everyone look guilty as sin.

Do you understand now? Now that we've communicated, do you get me? Do you understand where we are? You realize why you're sitting there across the table from me keeping your mouth shut for the first time in years? Now you must realize that if people don't shut up, if they don't stop thinking they know everything and shut their mouths and just listen and learn, then someone will always make them listen; someone will teach them. That's what my dad did, and that's what my mom did, and that's what I'm doing.

The knife on the table in front of you is probably looking blurry to you right about now. Through the tears, you



still see that it has a black handle and it's silver. Not quite like the precious metal silver, but shinier, like stainless steel.

When stabbing someone, always be sure to thrust in, twist the blade to the side, and slash out. This will cause more internal damage and also keep the wound from clotting no matter how much pressure is applied. You will get some blood slopped on your shirt though. And the red will make you look guilty as sin.



Kathryn Siverd

## Melissa Hoobler: Intervention

Lizzie woke up with a throbbing pain in her head and what she was certain was a large, parasitic mass eating away at the inside of her stomach. Wishing the room would stop spinning, she rolled over and closed her eyes. Reaching out her arm, she ran her hand softly over the slight indent next to her in bed. The surprise that she was alone was enough to shock her back into reality. Cursing tequila, she managed to drag herself out of bed. The room was pitch-black, which felt entirely strange. It had to be daylight by now....

She stumbled around the room in blindness, groping the walls in search of a light switch. At last, the light flicked on. She squinted around a room that looked very foreign to her at the moment. Clothes were strewn about everywhere; bottles of make-up were tipped over. There were posters partially ripped off the walls. "Ugh. When did I become such a damn slob?" she muttered to herself. It was then she noticed the blank blinking red dots coming from her alarm clock on the dresser. She realized the power must have gone off at

some point during the night.

The window revealed a nightmarish scene outside. It was dark; the sky was an angry grey, and the rain looked like it was pouring down in gallons. It appeared to have been very windy at some point; there were branches recklessly thrown about in neighboring yards, and a few mail boxes had gotten blown over. This sight, along with that of the bare trees, made her shiver. It looked like something out of a really bad horror flick. He had gotten Adam, and now the axe wielding ex-con was going to jump out of nowhere and grab her. Lizzie eyed her closet suspiciously. Even though it was a silly notion, she decided to call Adam...just in case. Besides, any insight into what actually happened the previous evening would be tremendous. A feeling of dread washed over her as she dialed the number.

"Voicemail. Wonderful."

She hung up right away, afraid to leave a message. In her mind, this could only mean one of three things: He, too, was still recovering from last



She stood at the window in disbelief for some time. At the sound of voices coming closer to her, she snapped out of it and spun around. Her mother was standing there, along with Adam, her grandmother, her sisters, children, and so many

Ally Vogelsong



night's events, he wasn't talking to her...again, OR her psycho ex-con theory was, in fact, correct. She sighed, knowing, it was most likely the second one. She felt sick to her stomach, submerged in guilt. All the endless promises she had made about no more bad nights....It was then she felt a twinge of pain in her hand. She looked down and gasped in complete and utter amazement. There were jagged little cuts covering the back and on her palm, along with some deeper ones on her knuckles. How had she not noticed this? Or, more importantly, how had she managed to do this?

As she trudged slowly down the steps, her question was abruptly answered. The window at the end of the landing had been completely shattered. There were broken shards of glass everywhere.

"No...No...No way."

She stared at the window in disbelief for some time. At the sound of voices coming closer to her, she snapped out of it and spun around. Her mother was standing there, along with Adam, her grandmother, her sisters, Ellie, Holly from work, and so many

other familiar faces. She knew what was coming. She glanced around wildly for some sort of escape but was frozen in the spot. Her mother looked at her with a very stern expression. "Elizabeth, we need to talk. There are some things we all would like you to hear." As the words of her family and friends slowly began to sink in, Lizzie sank down in surrender.

## Will Lahr: Taste of Blood

Let me teach you  
the taste of blood  
red loss  
that flows forth from my mouth.  
I cannot express  
angst and anguish  
choking away the air  
as you tug and tear my emotion  
out through my throat.

Let me show you  
what it means to bleed  
the love and longing  
of the human heart.  
I spend hours  
attempting to explain  
lacking and loneliness  
awakening me into darkness.

I do not expect  
that you could possibly perceive  
the purity in my pain,  
or that if you could,  
you would wipe away the blood,  
that trickles from the corners of my  
mouth,  
with one of your soft-skinned hands.

Allow me to ask you  
to teach me  
how to know numbness  
by washing away the knowledge  
of how I have bled for you.



Lyndsay Jasper

## Dave Ferry: Volition

"Johnny, what's that under your nose? Is that blood? Have you been in a fight?"

Johnny had been hoping just to walk upstairs and relax, as he always did, and maybe watch some late afternoon cartoons. However, today he found himself locked in place by his mother's eyes. She caught Johnny in her tractor beam, and he was prepared to be fired upon. He could see the inner workings of her brain. First, she would interrogate him until he admitted the name of his assailant. Then, he would be forced to sit on the couch while she called up the mother of the boy, the principal, and maybe even a good lawyer. It's amazing what a mother will do to protect her offspring. Johnny, still locked in her gaze, took a deep breath and began to understand what he must now do.

His mother would probably understand this better than his father would. He was a strict and stubborn man with little joy in his life. Aside from the occasional poker game with his friends, Johnny's father was a lonely,

bitter man. It was only a week before that Johnny had overheard his father on the phone, complaining about how he never left the house except for work and only had friends when they could win money from him. Johnny's mother at least enjoyed herself occasionally, but she would much rather uphold the law of the house that had been set forth by Johnny's father. With no siblings and no pets, Johnny had a hard time keeping himself out of trouble since every move, every grade, and every comment was put under hard scrutiny. When there is only one child, it makes it hard to place the blame anywhere else. "Who broke the vase?" Well, the answer was obvious. It was hard to believe that these parents were former hippies back in their youths with the amount of strict punishment Johnny endured.

Johnny could picture it all in his head, his mother would yell and possibly cry. She would condemn him to his room while she went over all the things she did wrong in Johnny's upbringing. His father would storm about the house,



Mike PorcenaLuk

belligerently yelling about how it's just plain wrong and how he couldn't accept it. "Hell, he might even disown me," Johnny thought to himself.

"Where would I go?" Johnny began to wonder about what disowning would entail. He pictured a life on the street, using newspaper and a bucket of some unknown substance to wash windows, praying for a buck or two from the unhappy recipient of his services. One day a man in some expensive European car would drive up and spit on him after he finished smearing black ink all over his fresh, clean windshield. Perhaps he would travel from town to town on the train, with all his belongings in a handkerchief tied on a stick, like in the cartoons. He would belong to a community of hobos that would not know of him as the banished kid, but as the lovable little scamp that danced for quarters. Or better still, he would be noticed by a more accepting family and taken in, loved and cherished as if he were their own. Eyeing up his weak, tattered body lying on the ground, they would pick him up and carry him into a stretch limousine, all black, with leather interior. He tossed the idea

aside, thinking, "Hah, right, sweet loving families and millionaires love street vermin...."

"Well? Do you have an answer young man? Who did this to you?" Somehow her stare widened, and he felt enveloped inside those dark brown daggers she called eyes.

Who could he blame this on? That person would hate him for the rest of his life, but it's better than the truth. It was, in fact, the only sensible way out. If he pegged someone else to be his assailant, then the truth would never have to be known, and he could stay at home until the next time this situation arose.

That's when it struck him. The next time? That was more than he wanted to think about. What if this happened again? Also, if it does happen again, can he get away with the same excuse? Johnny sadly realized that this was a charade that couldn't continue. He would have to admit it someday, and why not get it over with now?

His mouth slowly opened, prepared to admit all to his mother's enflamed gaze. He felt as though he were pushing cobwebs out his throat;

his tongue searched for some kind of moisture but found nothing but sawdust and sand in the deepest recesses of his mouth. He took a deep breath, and in a moment of weakness, he muttered, "Leroy hit me."

His mother disappeared to the phone and began searching the school directory for Leroy's number. The unfortunate thing about a small town is that every mother knows every child. She knew exactly where to look and exactly what she was going to say. Leroy was as good as dead. "Perhaps he will be disowned," Johnny thought to himself, "and then when I get disowned, Leroy and I can meet up and have some crazy adventure... if he doesn't hate me still."

Johnny thought about what he just did. It was not only a lie to his mom, but he was about to risk his life in school with the other children. Leroy wouldn't take this without retribution. If Johnny said he punched him, then Leroy would make sure that Johnny was punched. Why get in trouble for something he didn't actually do?

"Crap, crap, crap..." Johnny started to think out loud, "I can't go

through with this. I need to just get this over with and... and..." He couldn't bring the words to his mouth, but he knew what he had to do.

Johnny managed to stop his mom just before she pushed the final button. One more move and the bomb would have been dropped on Hiroshima. "Leroy didn't hit me." He had been hiding this for too long. It was time to admit what he truly was. "I wasn't hit by anybody." His parents may never forgive him, but they would have to accept his choices in life, and if they couldn't love him for who he was, then he would just have to find a way to make them accept him. "This isn't blood." For the first time, Johnny looked at his mom with determined eyes. "It's sauce from a meatball sub I had at lunch." The time had come.

"Mom, I'm not a vegetarian."

## Julia Grove: Nuts Don't Fall Far

"Get out of there! Get out; I already told you you can't stay here; now get out! Just because I feed you doesn't mean that I want to share my house with your furry behind! I'm sorry, but you can't stay here. Get out!"

It's 3:00am, and my Grandma Lily is arguing with the wall. She's standing at the foot of my bed, in her absurd leopard print nightshirt and purple sweatpants, with her graying red hair pulled up in a bun, sloping rakishly to one side, and having an animated conversation with the wall.

"Making a nice little home for yourself in there, are ya! The nerve; you sat outside my window, looking in with your big brown eyes and long lashes, and I actually pitied you. I supported you all winter, gave you popcorn and apple peelings, and this is how you repay me! You hairy little ingrate!"

My immediate thought is to call my mother, or some kind of mental health services. But as I sit fretfully listening to my Grandma's ravings, I realize what must have happened: one of the squirrels she had been feeding all

winter had apparently managed to finagle himself between the wooden studs of the wall.

She then apparently decides to try to outsmart the furry intruder. She begins tapping, and then pounding her fists on the wall, mimicking approaching footsteps, "Here I come! You better get out of there; I'm coming to get you!"

"Umm, Grandma, I really don't think that's gonna work."

She breaks her intense gaze with the wall just long enough to absent-mindedly acknowledge my presence, "Oh sorry, sweetheart. I didn't want to wake...."

She's cut off by another sporadic fit of scratching from within the wall, and not to be outdone, Grandma launches back into her original tirade.

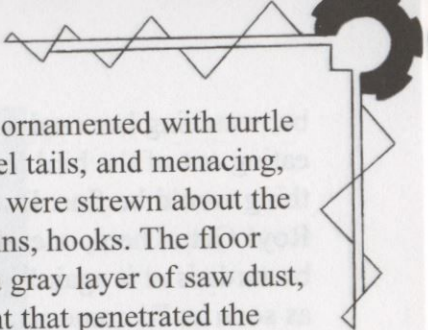
For some bizarre, cosmic reason, the women in my family have been tormented by squirrels for at least the past four generations; I am still traumatized from my own childhood squirrel encounter.

I have two younger brothers, and as a child I had always boasted that I

wasn't afraid to go into the dreaded shed where our great grandfather, our Pap, tinkered all day. When my brothers were very little, such false bravado was always enough to earn me a few precious moments of revered awe. They grew older, however, and one day I was dismayed to discover that they had learned how to retort with the always gut-wrenching, "Prove it!" And then, even worse, they learned how to organize, and found that the two of them could easily overpower one of me.

It was shortly after this epiphany that I found myself quite literally thrown into a situation for which I was not prepared. The dare was that I could not stay in the shed for three minutes. I tried to brush it off by laughing haughtily and saying, "I don't have to prove anything to you little snot noses!" The boys apparently had something to prove to me, however, and did so by tossing me promptly into the shed and holding the door shut.

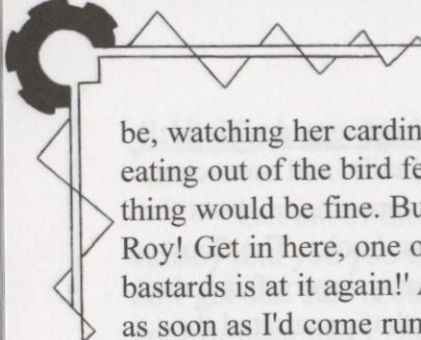
Pap was a trapper, and the marks of his trade were spread thickly around his smoky little shed. Deer, fox, and raccoon hides were stretched tautly across the walls; the main beam in the center



of the room was ornamented with turtle shells and squirrel tails, and menacing, heavy, iron tools were strewn about the room: traps, chains, hooks. The floor was covered in a gray layer of saw dust, and the only light that penetrated the warm greasy air came in through the small window above the door behind me.

He was diligently working on something at a high table in the middle of the room, and it took a moment for him to realize I was there, "Oh hi, Pumpkin. You're always so darned quiet I never know who's in the room with me. Your Grammy sent you up for these?" I had always thought that Pap had been a handsome man, and at 83 he still had the toughest looking biceps I had ever seen. "She's been nagging me about 'em all winter; I suppose it's time I did something.... she said she'd stop feedin' me if I didn't." He had said this with a wink and a gentle smile that forced me to ignore the glassy stares of the animals around me and timidly edge towards him.

"Yep, I think these little buggers just about drove your Grammy out of her head. She'd sit there, peaceful as can



be, watching her cardinals and blue jays eating out of the bird feeder, and everything would be fine. But then, 'Roy, Roy! Get in here, one of those furry bastards is at it again!' And every time, as soon as I'd come running back to the window, they'd be gone and her bird-feeder would be swinging back and forth, spilling seeds out. I never did catch one of 'em getting in there, but she swore they did, so I gathered her up some just to calm her down a bit. You know how your Grammy gets when she's mad; she's a small woman but a mighty force to be reckoned with, Pumpkin!"

With that he picked me up and set me on the stool beside him, where I finally saw what he was working on, "I'd rather give her a few dead squirrels to vent her anger on than be the whipping boy myself," he winked again, but it had lost all of its sparkle, for I then found myself, all too literally, eye to eye with four dead squirrels. Their little pink bodies were curled up on the scarred wooden bench top. Their skins, tails, and other pieces I did not want to look at, were pushed to the one side of the table.

"Here. We're gonna have these for dinner; you run 'em down to your Grammy, and I'll give you a squirrel tail." Before I knew what had happened, my well-meaning great grandfather had stuck two greasy squirrel corpses in each of my small hands and one of the revolting tails into my braid. Each time he patted my head, its amputated stump scratched the nape of my neck.

He spun me around, kissed my cheek, swung the door open, and sent me back into the harsh daylight. It wasn't until then, with my brothers' pale faces gaping up at me, that the gruesome reality of my current circumstance was fully upon me. I would never give my brothers the satisfaction of seeing me cry... or vomit; I would never admit defeat. Instead of this, I bit my bottom lip, stuck out my chin, and walked past my awestruck, and perhaps slightly revolted, siblings. I pictured my squirrel tail flowing behind me like a warrior maiden's bloody headdress. The sacrificial squirrels were held out in front of me, but neither of the boys had dared to raise their eyes to them.

Any resemblance of dignity had been shattered at dinner that evening,





however, when I saw how voraciously and eagerly my great grandmother Anna had sopped up the remaining bits of meat and juices with her crust of bread, and I ran gagging out of the room.

Now, as I sit and listen to my Grandma Lily trying to use reverse psychology on a squirrel - "Go ahead, stay in there as long as you like! Get real nice and cozy!" - I'm beginning to wonder if there is a genetic predisposition to rodent fixation.

My mother nearly lost her sanity to squirrels last winter. For a solid week, squirrels had gotten into the crawlspace above her bedroom, and I had heard about her "daily mocking" each afternoon.

"Every morning! Every morning he just sits out there on that branch! Mocking me! Did you hear him? He kept me up all night running back and forth across the ceiling, and then when I go to drink my coffee, trying to enjoy some scrap of my morning, he crawls right out onto that dead branch." She was hovering over me as I poured out my bowl of Lucky Charms, and standing a little too close to be safely flailing her arms so passionately.

"He perches his fat butt right on the tip of that branch. You know the one that points right at the big window?" She flung her finger accusingly at the window but didn't wait for my response. "He scampers on up, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed with his fat little cheeks, contented and well-rested, and he just stares at me. Stares at me and laughs!" Perhaps I should have been more concerned at that point, but I had realized long ago that a certain level of crazy is normal for my family, and really, what's a little ridiculing by a rodent.

She then imitated what I assumed to be her squirrel voice: "Did ya get enough sleep, Georgia, huh? Did ya?" For a moment, she had glared at some imaginary squirrel phantom and began strangling the blue-checked dishtowel in her hands until her knuckles turned white. The bags under her eyes were barely noticeable then, with the thinly restrained fury lurking just beneath their surface. "I'm not a violent woman, you know that, but he sits out there and mocks me every morning. I need my sleep and my coffee.... Furry bastard."

"Mom!" I had never even heard

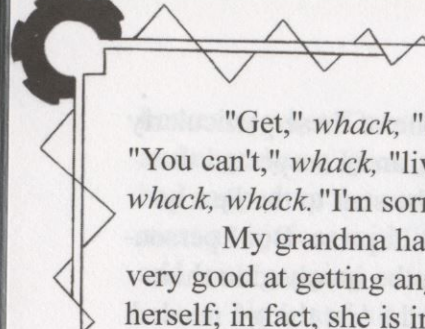
my mother say so much as "shit." Mom was the one who had raised me to think that even "crap" was a dirty word.

I have always known, and I am still very conscious of the fact, that there are few simple things that are absolutely vital to my mother's survival. If we appease Mom with routine sacrifices, she remains docile and, simply put, the sweetest woman anyone could hope to meet. If, however, some ignorant simpleton stumbles between her and whatever her current craving mandates, there's no telling what carnage may result. She really is a kind, considerate, and infinitely peaceful woman if she's had a good book to read, a solid night's sleep, a hit of chocolate, a morning cup of coffee, and an observed silence before 7:30 am. If, however, she is missing one of those ever-important factors, one look from that woman - in her innocent looking flannel nightgown, with her one eye all squinty and her hair in some phenomenal stage of disarray - just one look and the slain victim would have sworn he had just encountered the twenty-first century's Appalachian Medusa.

These intruder squirrels had put

my mother into one of these particularly dangerous moods, and I suspected that they would soon be sent to the Pearly Gates, via the .22 Express. But I personally didn't want to be involved in their murder. I figured the last thing I needed was squirrel blood on my hands, or a little rodent ghost popping up for a hand-out anytime I cracked open a jar of Planter's, so I went to my room. The squirrels did, however, have to face the wrath of my mother. They had ruined her sleep, tainted her morning cup of coffee, and provoked her at an ungodly hour of the day. I knew that if I had committed these same atrocities, I would have to face pistols at dawn, and I hadn't expected the squirrels to be given any leniency either.

Grandma's now screaming as loud as her asthmatic lungs will allow, but even to me, it sounds more like a polite suggestion than the adamant command she had intended. She must get the same impression, because, to punctuate her fury, she picks up what she calls her cudgel, not a cane, and begins rapping on the wall where the incessant scratching has been emanating from all night.



"Get," *whack*, "out!" *whack*.  
"You can't," *whack*, "live in my wall"  
*whack, whack*. "I'm sorry!"

My grandma had never been very good at getting angry or asserting herself; in fact, she is infinitely passive. When she was younger, her gaggle of seven children, with my mother as the ring leader, would form a bevy of discontent around Grandma's legs. Instead of simply swatting her children away, however, she would wage psychological warfare: she would cocoon herself in an afghan and read a novel from within its cozy depths; while outside, her children would poke and yammer at the blanket-ed mass before eventually admitting defeat and finding other ways to entertain themselves.

This, however, was apparently the third night in a row that the squirrel had holed up in the wall, scratching and screeching around, and Grandma's legendary, or perhaps even infamous, tolerance was wearing thin. My grandma was finally able to get a place of her own, after 63 years, and now she finally has something that belongs to her. She finally has something that belongs to her, and this vagabond rodent thinks he

can just take advantage of her kindness and park himself in her walls, keeping her awake night after night.

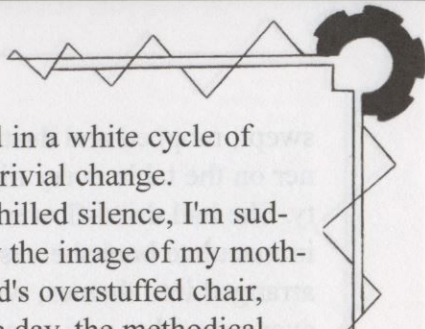
As she catches her breath, she seems to realize the same thing. She shakes her head and under her breath, she says she can't believe she actually apologized to the squirrel for yelling and for trying to evict him. She sets her jaw and renews her efforts with added fury. "This is my house!" *whack whack*, "You can't stay here!"

She had married each of her three husbands out of necessity: she needed out of her parent's house; she needed and wanted children; she needed a roof over her head. God knows she had to make sacrifices for her family by marrying and divorcing and remarrying. She had made sacrifices, and she had always been forced to share. Even I realized how she was beginning to feel about her life: there was always someone else's presence looming within the walls of her house, and now...now this was hers! This was her home, and she wasn't going to share or scrape by or sacrifice anymore.

"Do you hear me? This is mine, and I order you to get out!"

She waits to hear any scratching that would serve as a reply, staring at the area of the wall most likely to be housing the vagrant squirrel. Silence.... they both seem to hold their breath and wait for the other. I can't help but think of the "Tell Tale Heart": my crazed grandmother staring into the empty dark, holding her breath, waiting for any sound of life, and the squirrel, snug between the walls with his tail erect, frozen by the eerie silence, waiting for his predator to somehow burst through his newly found sanctuary. Still, silence. It's an old fashioned Mexican stand off, in January.

The gentle plinking of the snow-fall against the black window, the bubbling of her home-made wine fermenting in the dark, a late night plow truck pushing its way up the hill, and for the first time, I imagine how it must have been for my mother. I see Mom sitting in front of the large living-room windows that look onto the gray woods and sparse backyard, constantly blanketed in a silencing sheet of snow. Some of it would melt during the day, but then it would snow again, always just enough to replace what had melted, keeping her



world blanketed in a white cycle of false hope and trivial change.

In this chilled silence, I'm suddenly pained by the image of my mother, sitting in Dad's overstuffed chair, alone during the day, the methodical ticking of the small silver clock on the end-table beside her growing louder and louder. Then the clock in the kitchen would chime in a half-second off, one tick just slightly behind the other, as she had often mentioned to no one in particular.

I picture her sitting there and looking at the suffocating layer of snow, which she still hates so much, and hearing the discordant ticking of the clocks and being so tired from the white walls and lack of sleep. And I picture one of those squirrels looking in the window at her and gloating. Just sitting out there and gloating, grinning his squirrely little smile, and I remember the intensity of my mother's white knuckles as she twisted the dish towel in her hands.

In this brief second, I follow my mother in my mind, from room to room, as she had spent all autumn trying to make the house a home for all of us: she packed and unpacked, scrubbed and

swept, mopped and dusted, and had dinner on the table every night by five-thirty. She had dried-flowers in every room, immaculate bookshelves subtly arranged into themes, which no one else ever seemed to notice, and dishes of similarly scented potpourri for adjoining rooms. And then everything was perfect... perfect. And then, she had nothing to do, nothing to do while Dad was at work and I was away at college. In my mind, I sit with her as she watches *The View* or *The Price is Right* at 11:00 and drinks her coffee with milk and two sweeteners. And safe in my bed at my grandmother's, I swallow the cold air and let it burn my lungs and shock my heart, as I watch how my mother silently faced the relentless snow, and the unforgiving ticking of the clocks, and the mundane ferocity of the day.

And I'm even more amazed at the memory of my mother's kind face beaming up at me on the day of the would-be squirrel slaughter. I had heard gunshots volleying around our house for almost a half an hour, and Mom had been shouting like she was succeeding. I knew there couldn't have been that many squirrels within ten miles of our

house, however, and even if there were, there was no way she could have hit them with her aim. I waited until the firing was done and furtively poked my head out the backdoor. I had expected to find my mother knee deep in squirrel carcasses, but instead she was the picture of serenity: rocking in her wicker chair, using an empty Hershey's wrapper as a coaster, gazing intently upon the clumps of branches cluttering the yard, and patting the rifle in her lap.

I wasn't quite sure what to say, but when she saw how baffled I was, she explained. "Well, I couldn't get to the branches that the squirrels were using to get onto the roof, so I just shot 'em off so they couldn't get up there anymore." She took another sip of her coffee; her kind, loving face was restored, not a hint of squirrel frenzy. "What'd ya think I was gonna do, Pumpkin?"

I smile and watch my grandma as she waits for the squirrel on the other side of the dry wall to make his move, but still, all is silent. As she turns and looks at me fully, I recognize with perfect clarity that the women in my family are all crazy, some certifiably so, but

they're resilient and loving and most importantly, they're mine, and I'm infinitely proud of all the batty old broads.

"There, I think that did it," but just as she looks at me and the triumphant grin flits across her face, the squirrel simultaneously begins his gloating with even bolder scratching, tearing, and pounding. Indignantly, Grandma turns to me, "I can just see him in there rolling his nuts around!" Even at three in the morning, there are some things that are just too hilarious to hear come out of your sweet Grandma's mouth, and we both realize this, as she strikes the wall with her cane one last time and grins with a deep sense of satisfaction.



Lyndsay Jasper

## Contributors' Notes

Jen Barto is a Lock Haven University student.

Brian Bennett is a junior majoring in Criminal Justice. He enjoys hiking and being outdoors.

Rachel Book comes to us from Port Royal Pennsylvania, and much of her work shows the images and experiences from this small community. From Lock Haven University, she received her B.F.A. in three-dimensional design with a specialization in pottery. As an artist, she embraces many other fine arts, such as photography, jewelry, drawing, and crocheting. Rachel is currently pursuing art education courses, but her goal is receiving her M.F.A. in pottery and having a shop of her own ceramic vessels.

Emily Capp is a sophomore and is majoring in English with an emphasis on writing. She is from Camp Hill, Pennsylvania - located near Harrisburg. Emily participates in English Club, *The Eagle Eye*, dance, RHA, and the frisbee club. She has always enjoyed writing and has aspired to be an author since first grade. The future may hold many mysteries for this redhead, but her career goals include magazine editing, writing, teaching, and research abroad. Next semester, Emily will be abroad in Scotland studying, and who knows what new ideas will stir in her mind?

Daniel Chapman was born and raised in the Lock Haven area, and he is 23 years old. Daniel is a freshman who, much like other freshman, is not really sure what direction he wants his life to take. He likes it that way: the uncertainty of life makes it that much more interesting to him.

Daniella De Luca, a sophomore journalism major at LHU, has had many of her

works published, and this is her second submission in *The Crucible*. She strives to take events in her life and relate them to her writing because she feels that it helps others relate to her work. She has held a number of positions on *The Eagle Eye* student newspaper staff since her freshman year, working her way up each semester from staff reporter to opinion editor to co-features editor. Daniella is also a co-host for a radio show with WLHU and the weather girl for *Havenscope*, the campus TV station.

**Rachel Diefenderfer** is a Lock Haven University student.

**Mitz DiMartino** is a Lock Haven University student.

**Dave Ferry** was a theater major at Lock Haven University. He left in search of fame and glory (or steady work) and that ever-elusive happiness. He plans to pursue acting and improvisation while also working on writing whatever he feels the need to write. He is also adept at breathing.

**John Fudrow** is a senior art major working on his BFA degree in Studio Arts with a concentration in painting. He hopes to pursue an MFA in painting and continue making paintings while teaching the arts at the college level either, here in the states or abroad. Much of John's work contains an element of tension or a feeling of discomfort. He intentionally attempts to cause this conflict of attraction and aversion in the viewer to allow a much more dramatic visual dialogue to occur. Any inquiries about John's work or for more images from his portfolio, please contact him at [jfudrow@lhup.edu](mailto:jfudrow@lhup.edu).

**Julia Grove** is a senior Secondary Education-English major. She is an avid free-base jumper and a novice snake charmer. If her career plans to mold the minds of Pennsylvania's youth fall through, she hopes to find a job in Ireland making the big bucks while reading books and sipping cocoa in her pajamas. Hey, there's a market

for everything, right?

**Kimberly Hill** graduated from Lock Haven University in December with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Mass Communications, with her emphasis in Advertising and Public Relations. She hopes to continue with her photography and incorporate it into her future work.

**Melissa Hoobler** is an English Writing senior originally from Sayre, Pennsylvania. After graduation, Melissa hopes to go on to earn a Masters Degree in Library Science.

**Adam Howard** is a Journalism and Mass Communications major with an emphasis in Photojournalism. He has been taking photographs for about seven years now and enjoys capturing those "hard-to-get" shots. Adam would like to work for a magazine, like *National Geographic*, in the near future.

**Lyndsay Jasper** is a sophomore here at Lock Haven University, majoring in Secondary Education and English. This past semester was her first semester being involved with *The Crucible*, and she is glad that some of her photographs were chosen to be in this edition. Photography is one of Lyndsay's favorite hobbies, and she has won a few first and second place awards at different shows. Some of her hobbies, besides photography, include snowboarding, playing soccer, spending time with friends and family, writing, and working out. Besides being a member of *The Crucible*, Lyndsay is a tutor at the Writing Center here at LHU and a member of the S.E.S.P.S.E.A.

**William Lahr** is a senior Secondary Education major whose area of concentration is in English. He will graduate in December of 2004. His favorite author is Chuck Palahniuk, and he also enjoys the works of Charles Bukowski. Will spends much of his time reading and writing. When he isn't into a book or jotting thoughts down on

paper, he enjoys cruising around in his red Trans Am and smoking cigarettes while wearing his acid-washed jeans and his Wrangler jean jacket.

**Jason McCarley** is a graduate of Lock Haven University. His story "Payable on Death," was written in Professor Maddox-Hafer's Spring 2004 Fiction Workshop.

**Susan Pogorzelski** is a junior majoring in English with a concentration in Writing. For the past two years, she has had the pleasure of being a Writing Center tutor, an opportunity that allows her to share her love of writing while teaching and learning. Upon a planned 2006 graduation, Susan intends to take her passion for creative writing to graduate school where she can become a member of the editing and publishing world.

**Mike Porcenaluk** is a junior Journalism major from Pleasantville, PA. He is currently pursuing a future career in Photojournalism and Fine Art Photography. He enjoys taking everyday surroundings and presenting them in stoic and respected compositions. Automobiles and architecture are common subjects in his work.

**Katherine Porter** was born and raised in a small town called Brockport, located in upstate New York, where she lives with her two brothers, mother, and father. Her interests include music, baking, reading, and Harry Potter, but her passions are politics and writing. With a dual major of International Politics and English, she hopes to create a more harmonious world in which future generations might prosper and thrive. Though she is well versed, if one were to ask her for some wisdom to live by, she would be forced to copy off of Dr. Seuss, who said, "Be who you are and say what you feel; because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."

**Tim Rice** is a senior at LHU, a second year English club member, a repeat *Crucible* contributor, an English Education major, a devoted Chicago Cubs fan, a regionally

required Pittsburg Steelers fan, a Democrat, a slacker, a procrastinator, a bad speller, a decent tennis player, a recreational soccer player, a music lover, a light sleeper, a sometime heavy drinker, a routinely former smoker, a liberal, a *Late Show with David Letterman* watcher, a clock checker, a pack rat, an aspiring poker player, a Rubik's Cube conqueror, a digital photographer, and sometimes a huge tool. Tim's favorite meal is veal parmigiana; he feels terribly about that. He's tried a million times to come up with some kind of justification for eating such a cruel feast, but he has finally decided that he'll do other good things for the world to make up for it. Tim now picks up litter and never swears around children or old people. He thanks the English Department and everyone involved with *The Crucible*.

**Sarah Elizabeth Shoop**'s mother instilled in her the joy of reading, and her father the hope for a lifetime of learning. Between the two of them, Sarah can identify from whence every ounce of enthusiasm for the world of academia came to live in her. Her favorite author has always been Isaac Asimov, a love, no doubt, that was fostered by her father's bookcase, which features many of Asimov's works. Sarah is planning on becoming a high school English teacher after graduation. She hopes that someday she may pass on her own love of learning to her students.

**Kathryn Siverd** is a senior, graduating in May of 2005, with a B.F.A. in Studio Art with a concentration in Graphics and Online Design. Upon graduation, she will return to her home state of Maryland where she hopes to continue her education to earn a M.B.A. so that she can one day be in business for herself.

**Ally Vogelsong** is a Lock Haven University student.

STEVENS LIBRARY LOCK HAVEN UNIV.



3 3301 00507 3534

Literary Journal of Lock Haven University

Annual 2005