

Starburst

If
 in a
 shining
 twinkling
 night, you
 find a new
 luminescence
 glowing brighter
 stronger, surer, better
 you might have found
 me

The night is never empty when I
 am here. Blackness cannot
 stay when I am present.

I am the light, the pinprick in the sky, unblinking, unmoving, eternal; outlasting
 brightening the dark moon, the planets, the sky, the galaxy
 night for I am indeed a part of the universe

Light.

That's all I am, a small, insignificant, minute bit of light. A brief dis-
 trusting myself to none but missed
 humanity, to you, to your speck
 willingness and ability
 to open your eyes,
 to gaze skyward
 heavenward
 on occasion
 to see
 me

Close your eyes and I
 will still be here. Heed
 long enough and you'll find
 brightly marking the way to the
 moon, the planets, the sky, the galaxy
 for I am indeed a part of the universe
 And I am the universe, but from
 earth, to you, I am small;

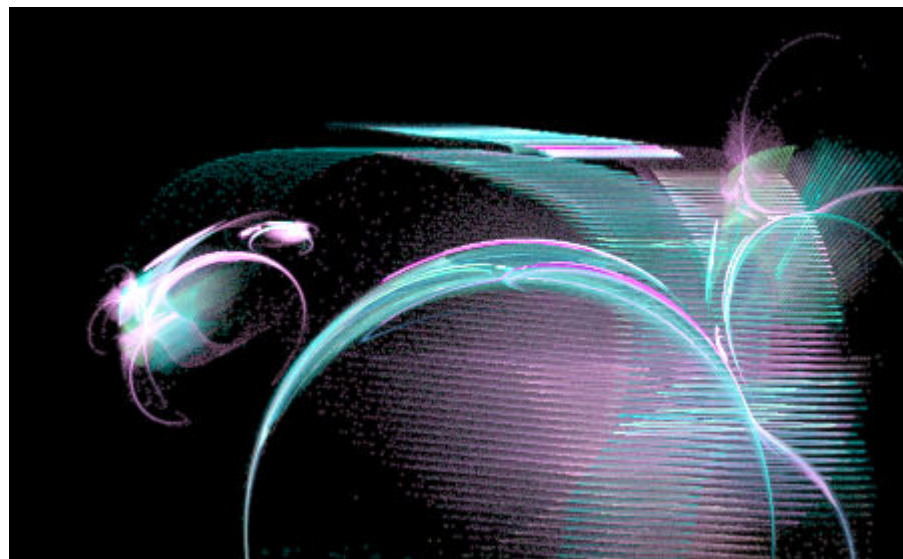
Point.

I am old, far older than you might think,
 older than even you could possibly
 imagine. Distant, immortal,
 you and yours
 by eons
 still
 A brief dis-
 turbance in an ocean of
 deep midnight blues and
 royal purples. I am not
 repellent; you welcome
 me, glowing white and
 pure. I remind you
 of everything
 you should
 be

Amelia Winchell

Tower

A magazine for the literary and visual arts



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Consumer Carnival

Spotlight On: flying pigs
 gutsy explorers wrangling for praise
 wobbling excitedly
 swimming in their greatest dreams
 modeling their merit
 for the bubbling rabbles chanting oohs and ahs.

“Step Right Up!” the top hat magician
 ringleader extraordinaire
 dressed in the american flags.
 “Buy *your* winged swine *now!*”

Next booth over,
 Musical Spiders. Then Chocolate Bunnies. Then Dancing Greyhounds.
 flashing neon vows
 orchestrated subliminal hiss
 fabricating miracles under the mammoth kitschy tents
 tasteless tricks lined with a vulgar cabaret

this festival bazaar: the disease of progress
 malignant cancer of spirit, depth, romance
 but only the dreamers are throwing tantrums

lights change, products improve, necessities multiply
 but the Consumer Carnival: unending.
 we ride the materialism merry-go-round,
 enchanted by the different angles,
 and yet never truly moving
 because we all take refuge in regularity
 and as everyone knows:
 money is the only universal constant
 in the land of green and glitter

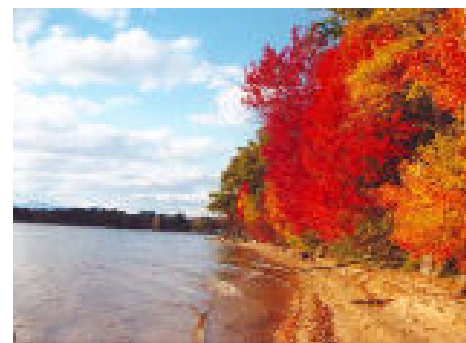
Lauren Shuffleton

The Height of Ages

Brian Barrett
 Oil on Canvas



Patience
 Brian Beaudoin
 Photograph



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Sonnet—To Nature

A response to “Sonnet—To Science” by Edgar Allen Poe

NATURE! Thou art beauty and true art
 Remaining modern in a modern age!
 Impedest thou on scientific hearts,
 Replacing wisdom with thy own dry sage?
 Their means of thought thou wishest to abate;
 Why ought they hearken to thy reprimands
 When thou demandest thy own pristine state
 At the expense of others’ dreams and plans?
 Would sweet Diana wish that mortals walk
 While she rides swift and well across the sky?
 The Dryads hoard their treasures under lock?
 The Naiads laugh and scorn and watch men die?
 For Science shares the world with laughing Elf;
 The only enmity, thou’st placed thyself.

Amelia Winchell



Blossoming

Courtney Weatherby
 Colored Pencil

people yet, those who danced, gambled, protested, and organized their Disease ridden deaths away from their minds. I began to pump in the darkness, a familiar building rhythm to be uncovered and dusted off. I swung high and low, faster and faster. I found myself unable to trace any line of logic that had led me to this point but I soared on. My feet strained forward longingly and rebellious as my head and heart hung back—regretful, cautious. All the time the snowball perched with great effort on my stomach as I prepared to kick my legs out again, its fate as undetermined as the time I would linger. I hadn’t yet decided how long I would let it melt.

Erin Driscoll

The Great Wall and River

Courtney Weatherby
 Photograph



“No, no swings down there. I was thinking of spending some time on my really old swing set, the one in the backyard.”

“Really, Ads? That-that is great. Umm...I’ll talk to you later then. And Ninja?”

“Yes Eskimo?”

“When you’re out there, let it linger, okay?”

“Of course.” I turned down the telescreen monitor, Greg’s eyes looking at me with a mixture of respect and worry. Now I was stuck. Technically I could just go downstairs, play some tennis on the cloudy tennis court and call it a night. But Greg would ask me to describe it. It’s been too long to lie from memory. He would know if I didn’t go outside and he would tell Daveny. Being tracked down virtually by concerned friends was far worse than a physical intervention. I walked slowly over to the box in the corner of my room, the one with the yearbook, and hid it from view.

Descending down the stairs, I changed my mind with every step I took, letting each electric jolt of indecision run up my spine. Making my way into the kitchen, I took a quick a detour, swinging towards the moonlit silver of the refrigerator, its hum—a deeper more deliberate tune than that of my computer—drew me forward. I opened the freezer and moved aside several long forgotten instant meals until I found it. A small, tattered box at the end of the fridge—an unfitting container for the precious gem I stored inside. A small, icy snowball circa 2025—the last winter before the Disease that would make it impossible to replace. A simple tradition, to keep memory-soaked snow in the house year round, that had become invaluable. The snow, it seemed in hindsight, tasted sweeter and rolled rounder and with more consistency of texture than the snow of previous winters. It was the middle of summer, but the snow only made me miss the green grass more. I slid off my socks with my heels, one at a time, maintaining my grip on the ball. I left them, a careless clue on the mellow tile floor. For a moment, I considered shutting off the resilient bulb, going as far as flipping the switch. But, the world outside seemed far more fearsome without its warmth. I was the only one to see Daveny, I am sure of it. Things like that, scandalous adventures outside, spread around the neighborhood fast. I would have known if there were other peepers at their windows this time of night.

The extra thick, impenetrable four-inch glass door at the back of the kitchen slid with more ease than expected and I was instantly hit with fresh air—offending and overpowering at first whiff. My left foot hung precariously over the grass and I pulled it back quickly. Grass, I decided in that moment, was like a cold pool. It was far less painful to take the plunge. With that in mind I bent my knees and jumped a full three feet forward, landing with a small thrill and a little extra leap. The wild, uncut grass surrounded my feet in a weak net, sending its cool cucumber relief throughout my body. The second hand on the watch around my wrist made ten full and vigorous laps around the face while I simply stood there. After having my fill of the grass and its calamine dew, I made my way over to the somewhat tilted and rusted swing set in the back corner of the yard, closer to Daveny’s back door than mine. I had not yet felt the ill-willed vapors of sickness crawl down my throat.

I sat lightly at first; afraid that the swing would cave in the moment I put any weight on it. *You have sat lightly long enough.* The thought floated by, barely registered, but obeyed as I settled into the seat facing Daveny and Dan’s path. I was not ready for the

The Silver Rose

When kings were restless and adorned
and roses bloomed eternally
and never carried any thorns,
there stood a castle on the sea;

its knights were soldiers of the sea,
and gallantly they rode the throes
that beat with blue ferocity
against the shore and gentle rose.

A rumor of a flower fair
that granted life eternally
swept quickly through the castle there.
The blessed bud was said to be

a solitary gift. The prayer
dwelt in a land of many woes
and many pledged to travel there
to claim the rumored Silver Rose.

Upon the surly sea-wings flew
the fervor of the restless sky,
her sails like sapphires in the new
and broken sun, and by and by

her prow secured its eager gaze
toward the land of many woes
and traveled on for forty days,
still searching for the Silver Rose.

At last, the brazen knights struck soil
and tumbled down upon the earth.
With reverence the brush recoiled
against their axes and the girth

of their great bodies, crushing where
the whispers of a thousand woes
came fluttering upon their ears
and nowhere lay the Silver Rose.

The voices grew, the whispers shrill
that tore their gallantry apart
and filled them with a frozen thrill
that chilled them to the very heart.

It rattled them right to the bone;
a clamor ‘twixt them all arose
and as they struggled, steel and stone,
they soon forgot the Silver Rose.

When brother, driven nearly mad,
struck brother with an iron fist,
and bludgeoned senselessly his friend,
there loomed a sudden silver mist

that spread like fire over the land
and terror from their mouths arose.
Their spines were twisted, and their hands
were grasping for the Silver Rose.

Fate deemed them not to die; instead,
eternal life was theirs, but form
of body, feet and hands and head,
was gone, and each became a thorn.

And so they slept in fitful pain
upon the land of many woes
to decorate the petal plain
and slake the bloodless Silver Rose.

Kara Holbert

Boy With Asthma

During the arid cold
of winter-white New Hampshire,
my house breathed the steam
of a sultry jungle morning
seeping from behind bounteous bookshelves,
shooting moist smoke through our bunk-bed bars,
dappling the round kitchen oak with beads of dew.

hissing like a fever.

In the middle of the thicket,
I lay, back against the 18th century wood,
head resting on the warmth of my heavy-breathing,
inky black Dog.
As I sweat beneath soft light,
as Dog licked her paws—

Little Brother sat in meditative position
on the evergreen couch
the monkey's mouth muzzled with a silicon plastic
that fogged and defogged with his choked breaths.
Steam shot from two slits in the nose piece
like a sneezing horse,
like an angry dragon.
I could see through the gas mask
he was not smiling.

“Don't worry,”
I said softly to him.
“Tomorrow we will run wild like the cheetah,
we will hophop like the tiny tree frog,
we will chatter like the chimp.
We will not sit still as a sloth.”

The snow fell gently past the window,
accumulating on the ground.
The moisture fell vein-like from inside the silicon,
accumulating in a pool inside Little Brother's mask.

Anna Leocha

the element I was reminded of every morning as the news flashed across my bathroom mirror while I brushed my teeth, was its well-concealed source. Megan may have had it in her genes for all we knew. So, I led the topic away on a lighter note; jokes were not appropriate for the moment, even my mother would have admitted. “Swear it on me.” It was easy, simple, less binding—but it was a swear.

“I swear it on you, now I have to go get ready.”

She hung up before I responded, intentionally I am sure. She was the sort of carefree being that would do anything necessary to remain carefree. I couldn't help but think, as I looked out my window at the short expanse of lawn before Dave's back porch, that maybe if I was to step outside all of my fears would melt away as well—washed away by the air.

The telescreen rang as I watched Daveny walk out her back door into what had rapidly become night, greeted by that Dan guy. I would not have seen her at all but for the singular over-looked porch light on the back of my house that managed to fan out across the yard and outline the overly stealthy couple in its warm buttery glow. Were they a couple? Three more rings and I pressed the answer button on the keyboard, my mind still on the figure of my best friend and her new significant other disappearing into the woods—down a path that, if memory served, would lead to the highway where I felt sure a taxi was hovering. One of the matted yellow ones that is, not the white sterile ones my father rode in when he absolutely had to go out. In a matter of minutes she would be strolling down a street, a street I could only picture in the same paper and light decorations of the last New Year's celebration I had ever been to in person. I still had a photograph of Daveny, Greg, Jose, and myself posing impatiently for the parents before dashing off down the firecracker-lit Main Street.

“Hey, Adrienne, Ads, Ninja! Ya there or what?” Greg's impatient voice boomed over the speakers, casting off my reverie.

“Oh, hey Gregory, Greg, Eskimo. How are you doing?”

“Hey, I nicknamed you because you weren't paying attention. You didn't have to shoot one back at me, I'm quite attentive,” Greg struggled to say with a straight face.

“Yeah-yeah, so what did you want?”

“Well, I was wondering if you wanted to have a movie night—*Fast and the Furious*. It's about these streetcar-racing thieves, back in the day when cars had wheels! I hear it's pretty good though, despite the poor picture quality. You have no idea how long it took to find it on a format newer than DVD!” I started to say yes, automatically, but a last glance out the window broke my resolve, choked the words before they reached my mouth. This was the third night, at least that was the number I surmised from her absence on the tennis scene, that Adrienne had gone out this week. Greg must have been out last night; he never showed up to help with the online chemistry project simulator. As much as I wanted to sit down on the couch, I felt suddenly that it was not an option. The glow, the warm buttery glow that is, from that one resilient bulb called to me. That light had not died, and just maybe I would come out unscarred as well.

“I'd love to Greg, I would. That sounds great, or at least...entertaining. But, tonight I think that I'm going to swing on the old swing set for awhile.”

“You have a swing set down in your basement? I mean, I knew about the tennis court—“

away with jokes, I had learned that method early from my mother. She was a pro. Never let them know what you are thinking deep, deep down. “But anyway, moving on, did you want to watch a movie tonight? Maybe play some virtual tennis? I’ve practiced a lot since last time. There is just no way you will get past my backhand.”

“No, maybe tomorrow after we finish that online test? Tonight I already have plans,” she ended quickly, as though undecided as to whether to continue or not—leaving the bait for me to pick up if I chose.

“Oh, and who may those plans be with? Not another blind date I hope? Cause, you know Daveny, you can never take off the blindfold completely online. Half the photos an internet date sends you are pictures of his buddy.”

“No, nothing like that. I am going to meet up with Dan. We’re going out dancing!”

“Out-out, as in the dangerous outdoors? Again! Dave, some day you will get caught. Think of all the tests, not to mention the sanitizer spray, that your folks would make you go through if they found out,” I couldn’t help but be pessimistic. I knew, just like every other teenager, that there was something out there that would make it all worthwhile, but I couldn’t bring myself to take the step. Too many years had gone by. I was the bird shut inside its cage too long. I feared I would not be capable of smelling the freedom that surely hung from every whiff of air outside. Or, perhaps, I was afraid that I simply would not recognize it, that it would smell exactly like the air inside.

“They never will. Mom and Dad are on some kind of virtual vacation in the basement—Aruba this time—and my brother will be fast asleep,” Daveny replied with her typical over-confidence, a trait we used to share.

“Promise you will be careful?”

“I promise.”

“Swear it?” The request came suddenly, childishly. I almost felt myself regress, like a change in the texture of my skin. Looking out my back window, across the yard to her bedroom window—second from the left—I swear I could almost see her role her eyes.

“We can’t pinky swear, shake, or even spit on it. Funny, I never thought about how three-dimensional pacts were. On what should we swear it? Common sense? Prudence?” I was grateful for her tolerance, for her ability to go with the flow. She was as skilled at riding a conversation as I was at backing away from one.

“No, an alcoholic would never swear on the bottle, would he? How about we swear it on...” my eyes searched the room, landing wide and surprised on our yearbook from the eighth-grade—my mind steered sharply towards a darker memory. “Megan. Swear it on Megan.” Megan was the first and only girl at Yetton Private who had died of the Disease, and swearing on her was the sudden impulse of a violent desperation to keep Daveny safe. My heart beat faster and I turned the privacy screen on the computer, in case Daveny decided to turn her camera on to check up on me face to face. I had never intended to make it that dark, to turn the pact into a sort of bind or incantation—invoking the dead, I had thought my eyes would find their mark on some band poster or some photo of a far off summer, something simply *missed*. She would worry now.

“Megan. That’s a tad to morbid for me, Ads. I don’t like to think about Megan.” She leaned her forehead against the glass window, squinting I am sure, trying to see me. I wanted to tell her she should, that she should think about Megan every time she walked out her back door. But I knew it wasn’t fair. The scariest aspect of the Disease,



Forever Young
Lindsay Hines
Pencil

Gravedigger

The last of the dirt fell over the tiny coffin, hiding it from view. The mourners were long gone. I had watched from the sepulchral shadows as the wealthy men in their finest black suits and their wives, with their wax society faces beginning to melt, filed along the path coated with tumbling with autumn leaves. One can always tell the affluent at burials by the tightness of their lips for they are stolen away from their gaiety and struck by the brutal mortality that affects the rest of us. Still, they would have scoffed and raised their noses if they saw me, so I lurked in the shadows until I was sure the coaches had clattered away. Then, it was safe for me to emerge and finish my duty, the last office done for the dead. I have been a gravedigger since I was 12 years old.

“Good day, Holden,” a voice said to me with a Scottish brogue far thicker than my own

I looked up to see Pastor MacGregor approaching from the church. “Hello Pastor,” I replied, pausing in my work.

His face fell looking at the stone before the grave. “Oh, the poor boy,” he said, his voice strained with sympathy. “He was only a wee child.”

I sighed and looked over the rows of graves. “They were all wee children once.”

The elderly man sighed. “My dear boy, I must admit that I have been concerned for you of late.” I shoved my hands in my pockets, fearing I knew what he meant to say. “You have not been in church for a few weeks. I would not want to lose you.”

“You’re not losing me,” I replied hastily. “It’s just... I’ve been very tired. My mother always tells me I overwork myself.”

The expression on his face visibly fell as his eyes widened, taking in all of my expression. “You have a harsh duty, and you’ve borne it for eight years, now. It shows on your face, but do not let it lead you to questioning your faith.”

“Nobody wants me there besides,” I protested, dodging the brunt of his statement. “They all whisper about the gravedigger’s boy and how he’s probably a vulgar, drunkard, Scotch barbarian like his father was.”

“Your father was a good man, Holden,” Pastor MacGregor told me.

“Then why’d somebody decide they should kill him?” I asked, my tone colder than I had meant it to be. “If you don’t want me to question my faith to the church then don’t lie to me and say that God had a good man killed and no one punished, because that doesn’t sell.”

“He was led astray,” the man replied, pleading in his tone. “I thought him lost and I prayed for his soul and, Holden, the Lord came to him. He was a changed man upon his death, changed I tell you.”

I was silent for a moment, pressing my fists deeper into my pockets. I said nothing else. I didn’t know what to believe. It was hard to throw my heart into the praise of a merciful God when my eyes were the last to look upon his dead. I could not believe that the graveyard of my toils was full of Holy Spirit when not even the crows would roost in the haggard oak trees.

“Here is your pay, Holden.” Pastor MacGregor handed me a bag of coins, small but enough. I nodded in thanks and pocketed them. He reached up to touch my shoulder and began to pray as he walked back towards the church.

Snowballs and Strangers

“Hello, I’m calling for a Miss Adrienne Staegate?” the telemarketer queried in that universal telemarketer tone, the one that transcends accent and age—unifying a world of frustrated consumers against it.

“Speaking,” I replied, allowing every ounce of acid annoyance to drip down the line unchecked.

“Ah, hello Miss Adrienne. I am calling to inform you of a great new video projector product offer that we have come out with—fresh off the drawing board—that’s how up to the minute it is! It minimizes the crease on the screen by up to 50%!”

“Well, sir, I’m afraid that—,” and then it struck me cold. This was a stranger; a living, breathing stranger. For once I picked up the phone and was not answered by the harsh echoing staccato of a robot or the trite familiarity of a friend. “What is your name, sir?” I asked my newly discovered, bona fide stranger on the other end eagerly, suddenly ecstatic.

“Hank miss, my name is Hank but anyhow, we have an entirely new line of—“

“Yes, I am sure you sell the best, though my screen minimizes the crease by 70% and has a skewed depth perception to allow my friends to look closer to me without letting the projection screen take up the entire couch.”

“Ah yes, that can be a great feature, makes the projection of your guests look more lifelike doesn’t it? I bet you feel tempted to reach out for their popcorn bucket? There is no way it can match our life-time warrantee though, eh?” Hank slipped back into his salesperson façade. I could see that it was a front; however, he would talk if I pushed. Everyone was desperate for a little small talk in these years of isolation.

“It’s really quite fabulous for movie nights. But I am not really interested in all that. Now, Hank, how is life? Wife, kids, dog—what is going on in the world of Hank?” I turned the conversation.

“Well, uh, let’s see. I have two kids, ten and thirteen. My wife left me for a richer man. I can’t afford to grow all of the plants inside; I tried to explain it to her. A sanitizer spray in the doorway is the best I can do! The way she acts you would think we were living in one of those downtown apartments with those Diseased, dancing loons!”

“Wow, Hank, buddy. That’s rough. Now tell me, do you get paid by the hour to talk?”

“You talked to a telemarketer?” Daveny questioned later that night, her hesitation signaling to me that there was something she did not quite grasp about the importance of the episode.

“Yes, Daveny, keep up!”

“Did you do that one where they ask for your parents and you put on that shaky crying voice and explain that your dear, dear parents died of the Disease, or a car crash, or a tragic lawn mowing incident?”

“No, we actually talked, for an hour.”

“Why? Adrienne, honey, have you gone insane?”

“Well, I did think that I saw Elvis for a moment this morning, but that was just Jose sending one of those joke holograms, and not really an hallucination.” Lead them



The Socratic Nemo

Brian Barrett
Oil on Canvas

Sailed

Away, bon voyage, floats the sailed Mary
mast up, ropes tied, sways with shifting limber
cracking, bottom to top, falls the great timber
the oil lantern smashing, ignites the sheep to cinder
Away, bon voyage, the sailed Mary, sunk kinder

John Greenlaw

I sighed and picked up my shovel again, continuing my work. I heard a pair of yelping barks and turned to see Dusty and Puck, our two terriers, trotting across the grounds cheerily. Puck rushed forward when he saw me while Dusty continued along leisurely, seeming to be in no hurry. I knelt down and scratched Puck's ears as his older counterpart sat on the ground next to me.

"Mother must've let you out after the funeral," I said, smiling at the two.

The two dogs trotted around, rustling up the falling leaves and sniffing in the grass as I continued my work. Once Puck nearly fell into the grave as he frolicked but I managed to grab him ere he could. Dusty sat beside the tombstone, his little tail beating upon the ground. The air became warmer as the afternoon passed with the dogs as they barked and roamed around. My eyes would have to turn away from my work every so often to make sure that they hadn't wandered off, as they were wont to do. Just as the tiny grave was filled, I noticed that a silence had fallen, even the October wind ceasing. I shuddered at the sudden stillness, uncharacteristic even for the hills of the dead, and I turned to see both Puck and Dusty seated motionless on the ground. Carefully, I scanned all around, seeing nothing, and suddenly I found myself struck motionless. Frozen in that immutable second, I saw the creature on whose behalf nature had seemed to halt.

I found my eyes transfixed on the most beautiful woman that I had ever seen. I could not guess her age, for though her flawlessly white face was full of youthful light, there was an air of experience and composure in her dark, gentle eyes that only came with years. A cataract of golden hair fluttered over her shoulders, cascading almost to her waist. With a silence that was almost eerie, she made her way forward, not making a single sound as the skirt of her long black dress floated over the dying leaves. Some force which was beyond my control did not let me even consider tearing my eyes away. I watched, hypnotized, as she halted before a grave and knelt down, turning her eyes to the tombstone, regarding it with a patient glance, as if waiting.

Suddenly, the hush that had fallen was repealed by the sound of shrill barking. I jolted and looked to see Dusty and Puck tramping through the grass with all speed towards the strange visitor. I winced and quickly hid myself, watching for the young woman's reaction. Puck began to dance around her gleefully, barking and sniffing as Dusty placed his head on her knee. I closed my eyes in a moment of mortification and then I stood up, unsure of precisely what to do.

"Come here you two!" I called to the dogs. They turned and regarded me with their furry snouts, but did not move. The young woman began to pat Dusty's head as I knelt down a little ways away and pulled Puck back by his collar. "I'm so sorry," I said, not sure if I was lying. "They're usually so well behaved."

"That's quite all right," she replied with a smile, as a cheerful breeze began again to blow. "They're adorable little things. What are their names?"

"You're petting Dusty and this rambunctious little thing is Puck," I answered and Puck tugged against my hand. She laughed, quietly, a sound that might have been akin to the ringing of church bells.

"Fitting," she replied and was silent for a moment and I hoped I knew what her next question would be. "And who might you be?"

I was silent for a moment, for she had nearly read my mind. "I'm Holden," tumbled, perhaps too eagerly from my mouth. It had been a long time since I'd ever really met someone I didn't know.

"My name is Clara," she said, holding out a hand to shake. I was surprised by the generally masculine gesture and a look of amusement flickered in her eyes. I began to stretch out my hand in return, but recoiled when I saw how dirt covered mine was compared to hers, flawlessly white. "You might not want to do that," I noted, shyly.

"Why are you covered in dirt?" she asked, surveying me briefly.

"I...I'm the caretaker and gravedigger for the cemetery," I replied, picking dirt from beneath my nails. I didn't look at her face. I expected it to fall.

"So *you're* the one I've heard all those stories about," Clara said.

I feared to ask. "What have you heard?"

"Well most of it is nonsensical untruth, so why bother with it?" was the answer. A childlike smile stretched across her face. "A lot of girls think you are very handsome, though."

Color rose in my face and Puck gave a bark, almost a laugh. "Well...I've never heard that before. Usually people tell unsavory tales about me."

Clara shrugged. "Why concern yourself if they are just tales?"

I considered her words and found them to be shockingly reasonable. For a moment I was silent unsure of what to say, but I didn't want her to leave. I met her face and my tongue seemed to have a will of its own. "I have never seen you before. Are you newly come here?"

"No," she replied. "I just usually pass unnoticed."

I was struck by disbelief of how any eye could ignore Clara and the comment nearly escaped, but I halted my avid tongue and made a more aloof statement. "Do you ever come to church?"

She nodded, her hair falling over her shoulder. "Every Sunday, but my father and I always sit in seats above everyone else's. I think I've seen you there before, but you are always out of focus."

My heart suffered another throb of embarrassment. "I have this bizarre habit of studying the faces of the people around me. Somehow I cannot help it, but I really do listen."

"You needn't defend yourself. I'm the exact same why. If I wasn't distracted, how would I have noticed you were as well?" she inquired.

A grin spread upon my face, and for a moment I tried to subdue it, but it wouldn't obey, so I let my expression betray me. "When you live next to a church all your life and are employed by the Pastor, some holy messages get a little redundant."

"So you are only the child of Scots then," she deduced.

I nodded. "My mother and father came over a year before I was born. The brogue stayed with me. Since I work so much I really only talk to my family and Pastor MacGregor, who's more Scotch than I am."

"I guess I am a rarity then," she noted, seeming cheerful about it.

I nodded. "Yes. But not an unwelcome one."

"It must be lonely working here," Clara said.

Cereal Box Masquerade

Emitted from the flashing screen

Crunch-a-tize Me Captain

You're no sailor, as the wayward captain crashes his
Boat through the wall, and out pours the horde of oat clusters
Juvenile pirate fiends on a bloodlust for sugar induced power

Mothers fear what they can't produce
But mothers support the blue-suited admiral
How many pointless deaths must the captain take
The walls of your bower crash down
Fanged with bewilderment the ship has set sail

The unspoken hero, a rabbit of sorts
Tragic and so noble a being
Chasing his dreams only to be smashed
Upon the ruin of his own desire
True ambrosia that he will never taste

War has befallen the breakfast table
Take no refuge behind mug, covet no bacon, and butter no toast
Steel yourself with jam, harden your heats with coffee a black soul,
And muffle the muffins for they will receive no pardon
The sun has risen, the sky is red, now fight, fight until brunch

And the wind blows silently over the field
With cereal box standards planted and banners wiped in the morning light
Stillness broken as the spoon rattles on the bowl
The amassed forces collide in the milk-washed wallow
A crackle of rice and the odor of coffee, with the buttered helms gleaming in the dew

Red berries litter the ground and color the landscape a crimson hue
A ring of spilt coffee varnishes the sullen hearts
Too much lost with nothing left to be found
The Quaker Oats man is weeping by the grave
Our fallen tyrant along side the floppy ear rebel

The forces retreat and return to shelve
Twilight of defeated cartoons and the madness is over
Martyred so breakfast is eaten in peace
Last of the milk drains from the bowl
Coffee grinds, the sludge reminder of a new day

An Unexpected Soulmate Across the Ionian Sea:

A Shakespearean Sonnet

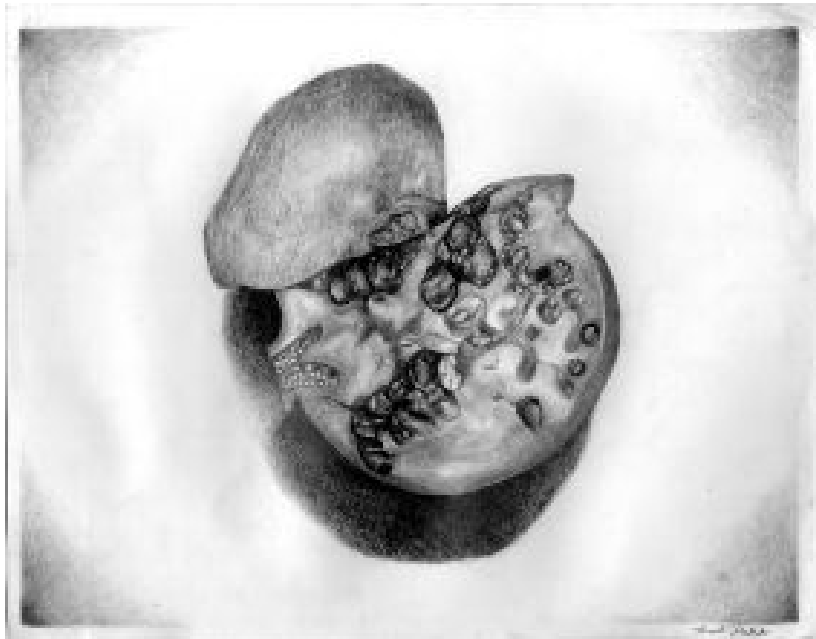
The hearty green and silvering of Greece,
its rocky mountains, scanty clad in tree
and bush and sheep in flocks of cloudy fleece,
did wrench my breastbone so cliché-edly.

Warm sun alights on goldishness and brights
against the melty greying April blue
of almost-Eastern sea, and city lights
on Athens' streets will twinkle and shine for you.

With ancient Rome behind and home ahead,
and Sunday drawing nearer, sigh by sigh,
toward journey's end I looked with sickly dread
of leaving this Elysian lullaby.

Now what remains? The strangeness of the thing:
To fall in love with rainy Grecian spring.

Marissa Linzi

PomegranateKara Holbert
Pencil

"Yes. It makes you question a lot of things about mercy and heaven. I've laid a lot of people in the ground and no angel of death has ever come to take them anywhere."

"You've put a lot of thought into this business, haven't you?"

I shrugged. "What else am I supposed to do while I work all day. I might as well be thinking."

Once again her laughter rang out. "Men who think understand better than those who listen in church." I found a small laugh of my own escaping, but it was covered by the sound of church bells chiming the hour. Clara looked up startled. "It's later than I thought," she said. "I have to return." A feeling of regret tugged at my heart. "It was nice to meet you, Holden."

"You as well, Miss Clara." I replied, holding the dogs back as she began to walk away. After a few paces, she turned about.

"It's not Miss Clara. It's just Clara." Then she wafted away through the gravestones until she disappeared onto the street. I watched her go and I could not fight the overwhelming sense of curiosity that filled me about who she was. I hoped to glean some enlightenment by reading the name on the grave before which she had knelt. But, instead, her mystery was only magnified, for the grave at which she had knelt was that of my father.

*

*

*

"Finally, you're home," my mother said worriedly as I entered the small cottage. She put her hands on my face and winced. "Oh, dear, you're freezing cold."

"I'm all right, Mother," I replied. "I was just delayed."

"Don't worry for him. He's a hearty lad," my grandfather's raspy voice said as he emerged from his bedroom leaning on his cane.

"But Father," Mother began, "you know the hours he keeps. They're more than you have ever worked in a day."

"Well, back in Scotland it wasn't so damn hard to make a living," he said, thumping his cane on the table. "There, countrymen helped each other, because it was right, but here? Bah, they'll set you on the streets as soon as look at you."

"You say that every day, Grandfather," I told him, taking my pay from my pocket. "At least every day I don't get paid."

He laughed a cheerful laugh as my mother stirred the soup that was over the fire. I put the coins in the small coffer where we kept our money as my mother finished dinner. I was silent through the entire meal, more so than usual. I saw my mother give me glances of concern, but what could I say to her? My mind could not help but wander, "Men who think understand more than those who listen in church". Clara's words kept echoing inside my head. It seemed to make too much sense to be true.

"Holden." I looked up at the sound of my name. My mother's eyes were still wide with concern. "Are you sure you are all right, dear?"

"Of course," I replied. "It was just a normal day."

I could see the hurt in her eyes as she nodded. She knew that I lying, that I was keeping something from her. But, how could I explain, when I did not even know myself? I darkly looked at the picture of my father that hung on the wall. Although there was nothing of my own visage in his face, I knew he and I were the same. I was hiding from my mother, just as he always had. Until then, I had always told myself it

The Last Paper: An Essay on Living

As a graduating senior I found myself, the other day, looking through old word documents on my computer. When a teacher would ask me to write a paper on my personal life, I would give some long elaborate story that I knew would entertain the teacher long enough for him to give me at the least a B. Most times the stories were entirely based on truths but looking through I found that I had these small lies going through them. It is not that I enjoy lying; rather I told these untruths either because these small handpicked details made for a better story or the real story just wasn't appropriate to show a teacher. Kurt Vonnegut calls this *foma* or harmless untruths.

The following is paper is an essay I bravely decided to turn in as the final for my Senior Argument and Persuasion Class. This paper included no *foma*; it was told in an honest attempt to find some balance:

Pinkerton has in each class an average of about 900 students. If we guess that half of the student body is female, each class has in it 450 girls. I'd like to state that I am not against homosexuality; I'd just like to state that it is just not for me. If we state that 15 percent of the student body is homosexual, we can cut that number down to 375. If we then state that 30 percent are in steady relationships that still leaves 262.5 women. We won't be discriminative so we'll keep that half women. Now above the age of 16 you can date within a two year range. Eligibly, I have 4.5 years, assuming that half the sophomore class is under 16, and for the sake of not going to jail we shall cut them, and anyone younger, out. 4.5 graduating classes leave us with 1181.25 girls. I'd put up with half a women, but a quarter of one, well, she'll have to go. So in the past two and half years, I've approximately met 1181 eligible girls in this school alone, and yet it seems I cannot find true happiness with one of them. It shouldn't take a boy four years of high school let downs to realize he's not happy; I need to stop searching for love to try to be happy.

There are many, many examples of why I shouldn't have needed 4 years of nameless women to realize I'm not happy. Sitting in my car with a nameless blonde on top of me, holding her bare sides underneath her shirt, her jeans tight against mine, I thought to myself of how I had asked her to prom not even a year before. I looked up at her blue eyes and her lovely smile, and I thought of how for a year and half I had tried for her, only to end up as her friend. I thought of how she had let me down when she had said yes to me asking her to prom. It is seems strange to be disappointed in her saying yes, but I can honestly say I'd have rather had a no, because 4 days later she decided she could have done better and she decided to inform me that. As she worded it, "You're just Brian, and I'm lonely and looking for something real." I thought of how to her it seemed I was never real. She later decided to inform me that she'd have rather gone with me then the guy she went with. I don't know if she thought that would be comforting for me to hear. As we sat there in my car, a part of me still desperately clinging on to her being the girl for me, as if to end the evening that had began an hour before with her statement, "I really wish you didn't like me, so we could fool around." She leaned in, as if to kiss me and, giggling, asked, "Don't you want to do this with a

myself drawn towards the seraphic figure, longing to know if it was real. I opened my mouth to speak, but there were no words that could be said. I felt unfit to speak in the presence of such a being. Clara smiled at the look upon my face.

"You are regretful that you have at last seen the angel of death you doubted?"

"I had hoped you were real, a person," I said faintly. "You were a stranger but you were there...you were someone." My voice fell away in despair.

She smiled again. "Do not worry," she told me, her hand grazing my face with a touch that felt like the fingers of a warm summer breeze. Then she turned her eyes up to the vast expanse of the sky. "He is pleased with you."

Without another word, the glow around her surged forth in a rush of effulgence. I shielded my eyes, staggering backwards. I tripped over a gravestone and fell hard upon the ground, my head colliding with the hard earth. My vision began to fade and in its last moments I saw her smile at me a final time, her face wreathed in ethereal light

They found me unconscious in the graveyard the next morning. My mind often dwells on that strange night, for it changed me greatly. It will be present with me always, for I know that there will be a time when the angel of death and I will meet again.

Allie Lane



Cameron and Curtis Skipping Rocks

Courtney Weatherby
Photograph



Beach Trash Angel

Alex Newell
Photograph

Lady in the Park

a wind talker some may call her
but perhaps it is the wind, that
indeed talks to all of us, except
some are crazy enough to listen

so she sat alone in the park
in a set of ragged clothes, and
dreaded hair with feathers, tucked
neatly into the back of her dress

she begged because she starved
at least she told the passers, but
somehow she managed to spend, all
more than crumbs to the pigeons

in almost a sad way she sat beneath
a sad flickering light, blinking
to an uneasy unsteady flow, dictated
by the city transit schedule

day in until the day out she sat
and she disappeared at night, wander-
ing to a sound that was heard, familiar
rumpling the feathered necks

her scarf around her weathered skin
holding her neck straight up, stiff
and solid stature braced, keeping
her beaked nose pointed straight

cold winter nights forsake her
leaving her outdoors, outnumbered
by the bitter temperatures, the birds
reached wings towards migration

the gypsy in the park
taken by the night's breath
grasped by a talon
and migrated south

John Greenlaw

Peeps in a Microwave

Screaming fist of hell, Thor's mighty hammer may smite
cranking
crunching
tool of domestic tranquility
you spinning fool
geared toothed menace
breathed in flame ashen rust
gripping the life you're longing for

Dank cell, your foul nest
Bird of war
flap no wing, clutch no feather, lay no egg
bred for one purpose
a life eternal with one use
sulfur smell of acrid rain, thunder-clap
brass may fall

Grandma's mitt clutching clove
cracking egg shed your life
misted powder thy heavens shall sow
maelstrom flooded bay
docked ships a bearded mess

Leave the spin
a drain choked
hit the pan
butter's browning mesh
El Dorado a visit
Golden cakes your life does make

Mechanized death on steel wheel
metal hands may grip
spun asunder
walking down the hall
foot steps of doom

Breakfast awaits
spider web of man's creation
spoons better

Ode to the Mechanical Spinner/ Egg Beater (hand operated unspoon)

Ryan Brown

the machine ate my poem

it started as a good day
 a crisp morning with sun and dew
 i had just walked barefoot in the yard
 picking a dandelion or two

so then i went to the computer
 and began tick ticketing away
 words of wisdom egressed my mind
 and flew to the crystal page

happy with my work i smiled
 then i flicked a switch
 BREEP brew waangh skree
 komph kaaalick!

the printer was on now
 the poem made its trek
 through the little wires
 like a tiny speck

i didn't save
 i wasn't giving it to the machine
 but suddenly
 BAAARUUUUP!

screeewuuuuphat
 the machine ate my poem

Nick Colby



Flaming Gorge View
 Courtney Weatherby
 Photograph

A Specter's Breath

Cold world of anti-lock brakes and walking snow drifts
 mailbox mountain peaks scrape the sky
 orange shovels and wheeling behemoths
 we're skidding towards a collision of frost induced nirvana

We romp and stomp
 glacial landscape of no hindrance
 arctic explorers of lesser urgency
 a land sandwiched between grey and white

Gauntlet glove and panoply of warmth
 awkward steps of booted fiends
 from suited warmth of armor
 view a landscape through tinted glass

Gaunt figures wallow on florescent floors
 narcoleptic winter dreams
 north pole foliage
 a season without seasons

We're punching penguins
 and kicking seals
 riding back to frozen thrones
 and ice box homes

Eskimo serfs and open mike night at polar pubs
 play a round of darts with a narwhal
 and take a pint with reindeer
 Claus is passed out in the street

Winter canyons stand bleak
 salted stone and sanded soup
 an avalanche of discord
 purities wellspring a fleeting ship

Say farewell to a yeti
 glazed trees and powdered fields
 a confectioner's wasteland
 sip the chilled air from sullen ghosts

Ryan Brown

life lessons

1.
When I was little I caught butterflies every day. Sometimes I had ten or twelve, all in a tiny jar. I'd put a dandelion in the jar with them, thinking that would actually help. I'd stare at the golden shimmer on my hands and think how pretty it was. I didn't realize it wasn't just pretty to them—it was keeping them alive. And I, in turn, was killing them. I stopped catching butterflies.
2.
My friends and I would peek in at a neighbor's house through his fence, which had a loose board. We were convinced he was a werewolf. We really were. Sometimes when we were feeling dangerous we'd dare one another to run into his backyard and grab a rock—proof of our feat. One day when Harrison was running into the lair the werewolf himself came snarling out. We tore out of there, never to go back again. I don't trespass anymore.
3.
My parents told me we were moving out of California when I was nine years old. My friends and I were devastated. The realtor came and placed a for sale sign near our mailbox. Abby and I obtained white-out and covered up the phone number people who were interested in the house should call. I was lectured on destroying property that didn't belong to me. We still moved.
4.
Fluffy was my hamster and he lived in a cage in my room. I was six or seven and given the huge responsibility of caring for him by myself. I did everything right. I cleaned his cage and made sure he always had enough water. One night I peeled a whole carrot by myself and placed it in his cage for him to eat. I knew he would love it. The next day, Fluffy died. I cried at losing something I had cared for.
5.
Christmas 1996. The only thing I wanted with my whole entire seven-year-old heart was an American Girl Doll. I didn't want Samantha, even though she was the one that looked like me. I wanted the custom one with shade of Brown B2 for eyes and B3 for hair. I wanted to buy her hundreds of outfits and spoil her. Apparently my parents didn't want the same for me, as I was told this \$300+ doll was just too much for that Christmas. I cried and threw a fit and moped for weeks. Christmas morning, after all the presents had been opened, my father said he had heard something in the garage the night before and brought me in with him to look. There was my American Girl Doll. I stopped playing with her about two years later. I will never spoil my children.
6.
I was growing up. I didn't realize it until much later.

michelle noyer-granacki

**Bridge to Nothingness**Rebecca Schneebaum
Photograph**Frigid Cold**

fingers blush blue beneath ragged cloth
 eyes strain, noses drain
 complexions paled, pruned,
 cracked and sore

and the sun beams blinding bright,
 snickering madly in the sky
 as the wind erupts in fits of laughter
 ribs sore, broad face beaming

if Nature's mother roams wild
 what a sly fox she is
 as the sun smirks with pompous sarcasm
 spitefully insane

if the woman of earth controls all,
 how proud she must be
 as the wind laughs riotous
 beating us all bruised blue in the face.

Mary Benson

Turkey Pond; January

We were so quiet that night,
 the four of us licking the frozen pond with our skates,
 navigating around the intricacy of plowed trails.
 Too far out to feel the warmth of the stadium lights,
 the bluewhite moon paling our milky face,
 illuminating surrounding snow in a white fire.
 Its light wrapped around our short puffs of breath.
 The spacious smell of bitter cold New Hampshire,
 Of ice and pine, and fried food from a nearby restaurant.

I moved over the ice, in and out of thoughts
 behind the three of you.
 Knees bent, back hunched.
 No good at skating.
 I watched as your bodies dipped
 left to right
 carving a helix into the pond
 bits of ice flying off your hockey skates
 with each lifted leg.
 We didn't know what lay beneath the snow
 when we slid past the point where the trails ended,
 the powder up to our ankles,
 a sound like sugar being poured into its bowl
 every time we kicked up the delicate dust.

We glided slowly, holding hands.
 I can only envision that night in the gentle moments
 before I open my eyes from sleep.
 The great white light of remembrance.
 The moments drifting to me
 like the broken lace of a snowflake.

Anna Leocha

approaching apathy with open arms

we dove into what radicals call
 free living
 devoured
 what little was given
 but still kept our hands cupped out in front of us

in the morning,
 we sipped black coffee
 as our eyes were glued to the weather report

we never would have guessed
 that the week was sunny right on through

so we rode down to the infirmary and we screamed
 “we could all use some!”
 “give a little!”

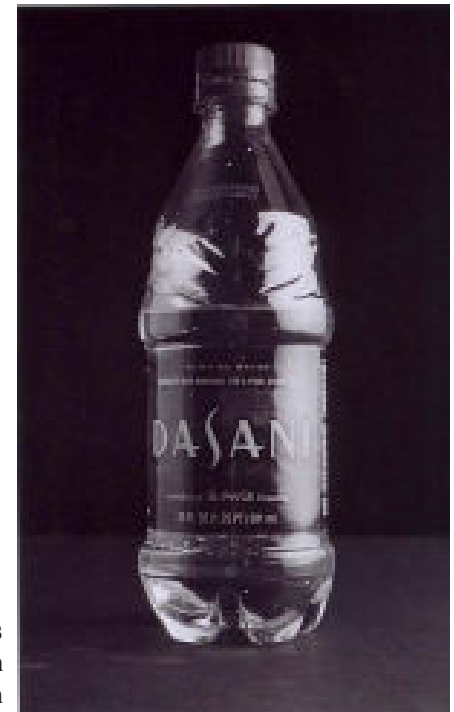
when night revealed its sinister face
 we criticized our judgment behind closed doors

 this is how it is
 we built it all from broken hope, loud mouths
 intangible dreams

we settled in our places,
 ignoring the inevitable

elliott thomas

Drinking by the Masses
 Jasmine Goodrich
 Photograph



Dream Logic

The halls were rustling with restlessness as the afternoon passed. Whispers and thoughts skittered about: *A stranger! A stranger!* The unfamiliar tap-tapping of high heels on the tile floor echoed loudly as a prim, precisely-dressed woman walked with purpose, clipboard at hand. She was on a mission; one that could possibly endanger her mental ability, her cool and calculating thought process. A few bold nightmares braved their light-terror and crept from their dark holes, growling, intending to tear her to pieces. She absently flashed a card at them, indicating that she was fully authorized to be here. The nightmares slunk back to their shadows, watching her nonetheless.

The woman clicked down the corridors, passing many battered, colorful doors that wafted music and laughter. *Artists*, she thought with contempt. So disorganized and backwards. It was a wonder that they didn't cause their host brain damage with their nonsense.

The woman reached a worn hallway, lined with ragged carpet instead of tile and lit with heavy torches. She *tsked* impatiently and duly made note of this aberration on her clipboard, her heels muffled on the carpet as she continued. About halfway down the hall she stopped at an oak door with a frosted-glass window. Peering in, she could see a shape moving about in dimmed lighting. She rapped on the glass and stood back, waiting for a response. After a few minutes, the door opened to reveal a wizened old man. He looked at the woman carefully with glimmering black eyes and harrumphed.

"Yes?" he asked irritably.

"I'm told that this is the residence of the Dream Keeper?"

"Yes it is." The woman began to speak, but the old man cut her off. "You're early. It's not dark yet. I don't like coming out in the day."

The woman ignored him. "I am Marie Dalton, representative of the left brain. I have a few questions for you. There have been complaints."

The Keeper gave her a scathing look. "Complaints of what, exactly?"

"Mr. Keeper, look around you. Your dreams are wandering about and it isn't even nightfall yet!"

The Keeper looked about at the curious dreams that were starting to gather. A few beautiful dream-children ran up to the Keeper and began begging him for sweets. He gave them a few bits of candy and absently reached down and scratched the head of a big dream-mastiff. The children squealed with delight and sat at his feet to devour their prizes. "Nobody minds," he said petulantly, a small smile creeping on to his ordinarily grumpy face.

"Those of us who run the left brain do, Mr. Keeper. This is squalid, improper, and highly unorthodox." Ms. Dalton sniffed and tried to bat away a dream-cat that was rubbing against her leg.

"Is that wrong?" the old man challenged, bristling. He picked up the cat and stroked it gently.

"To logical thought, yes."

The Keeper's inky eyes glimmered in the torchlight. "Dreams are not logical, Ms. Dalton. They never will be." As if to prove his point, the cat in his arms metamorphosed into a parakeet and began to pester the mastiff before fluttering off.

"All the same, you should keep your creatures under control."

Poet Superheroes

What are you afraid of?

you with your

RUBY EBERHARD FABER 212 USA eraser?

Are you

absolutely sure

you need that line

that word

that thought

that mark on the infinite plane of creation

Gone?

Vanished?

Withdrawn?

With nary a MISSING sign, compass, or search party?

Is it really the letter

the phrase

the sentence

you're trying to remedy?

Is it the aftermath of your creative

insanity the

disease you're struggling to cure?

the pencil's

thoughtless and

meandering mistakes you're truly repairing?

That palpitating

RUBY EBERHARD FABER 212 USA eraser:

Is it shuddering at the creations?

or the creator?

A shaking, a quaking dwells in your hand,

a hesitation nuzzles in your syllables

a sliver:

and won't be pulled out with an eraser

(not even a

RUBY EBERHARD FABER 212 USA eraser)

No, honesty demands a miracle

and like every poet-hero knows...

miracles breathe in pen.

A Hero in a Rented Apron

Today I will become a hero. I have always known this day would come, of course. I did not quite expect it to be today, but I guess these things happen. It's not as though today is any better than yesterday, or the day before. It just feels right. An act of unconcealed and glorious heroism is just around the corner, waiting for me, calling out to me, saying...

"...Excuse me? Sir? Randall?"

The plebeian demand for my attention snaps me from my deeper musings. I want to tell its master to go about his labors, remaining in his own mundane circles so I can remain in my own sublime introspection. Instead, I sigh softly to myself, readjust my logo-bearing apron so that the orange, name-proclaiming pin is slightly more obscured, and return a halfhearted "Can I help you?"

"Number six, with a medium mocha latte, light cream, please." He looks at me expectantly. He is waiting me to serve him, submitting to his demand and submitting well. I sigh and reluctantly leave my stool at the cash register, wondering how available for heroism my afternoon would be; I was not going to escape this morning drudgery. I could be saving a life, or saving the world, in the time I am using to make a breakfast croissant and a sickly sweet coffee substitute for someone else who could be using this time to create world peace or abolish nuclear crises. *Or at least neighborhood crises*, I correct myself, looking him over yet again as the noise of city sirens begin to wail in the distance. On a second glance, he is no older than I am. His brown hair and glasses reveal him to be the epitome of the mundane. His camera implies that he is a photographer, probably for the newspaper. Stay around long enough, boy, and I'll have a picture for you. Red and blue cloth peeks innocuously from his bag—some sort of costume, perhaps? But he closes his bag self-consciously as he notices me looking at it. Maybe he's a dancer. Certainly not a hero.

I carefully wrap the moon-shaped pastry and glob some milk into his cup, offering it to the counter where the peon had stood. But he is already gone, probably to gawk at whatever was bringing the official vehicles to the next street over. That could be me, rushing to the scene of the crime, only I'd do *more*. I'd be in on the action. But, alas, I'm stuck here. Maybe I'll have a croissant.

Amelia Winchell

"They aren't merely creatures. Have you never seen the darkness that creeps from the corners when night falls? Have you caught the breath of wind that passes now and again, smelling of somewhere you've never been? Or the sunlight that streams in from windows that don't exist? I cannot control these, any more than I can change into a parakeet."

"At least lock the dreams up by day, Mr. Keeper. Our side of the brain can hardly function properly, we're so swamped with nonsense mucking about in our offices. We've even installed special lights to drive them out, but they keep coming in and destroying the thought-process. I thought dreams were supposed to be frightened of the light. What have you been doing to make them come out?" Ms. Dalton accused.

"Haven't you met the people that are dreamt about every night, then forgotten the next morning? Those aren't the strong dreams; they fade away in the day. These dreams here, the ones that are wandering, are the select few that are brave enough to stay out during the day. The host remembers them. They're thought about, and therefore strengthened, by our host. I can't lock them up any more than you could nail your shadow to the wall."

"But you could try," Ms. Dalton insisted.

The Keeper rolled his eyes and sat down to be at eye-level with the mastiff. "She's worse than that Zoloff lady, isn't she?" he muttered as he patted the dog. "Have a seat." Ms. Dalton looked at the various dreams clamoring to be near the Keeper, the animals, the small children, and the things that had no name and had never been seen in real life before, and declined.

"That is something else we wished to talk to you about. The representatives from the antidepressants wouldn't have had to talk to you about your nightmare control if you had kept track of them in the first place."

The Keeper looked affronted. "I had no idea they were breeding like that. I have kept them restrained by night, if it pleases you. I only let them out in shifts by day to counteract too many daydreams. If our host daydreamed all the time, he would never get anything done."

"He never gets anything done anyway, always lying about and writing his stories."

"That was uncalled for," the Keeper said sharply. "We are not here to slander the way our host decides to work. I have already said that the nightmares are under control. What more could you want?"

"That's one issue taken care of, but we still have a few requests." She unclipped a sheet from her clipboard and handed it to him. The Keeper took it and read it, his white eyebrows rising further and further up his brow until they reached his shocking white hairline. His eyes took on the look of thunder.

"What does it mean, keep my dreams restrained by day?" he growled. The children looked at the Keeper in fear, then cuddled close to him. The various animals whined, hooted, and whinnied, while the stray nightmare growled unpleasantly. A strange-looking creature that seemed to have been built without bones did something that can only be described as "glick."

"Exactly what it means," Ms. Dalton said, unfazed.

"Young lady, don't you know our noble host is a writer? If I shut them up during the day, he loses his ideas. He stops writing."

“He can contribute his thought to the more orderly things. Our logic department is very good, or would be if all of the energy wasn’t being drained by your dreams and the rest of this right brain,” she said with barely veiled contempt.

“Do you even know how dreams work? I’ve already told you, they can’t be shut away. I wouldn’t do it even if I could.”

“They’re not even real!” Ms. Dalton snapped, finally reaching the end of her patience. She swung out with a perfectly manicured hand at the nearest dream, a barn owl perched on a burnt-out torch, and her hand passed right through its head with a fizzing sound. The owl hooted at her dolefully and took off with a sweep of its wings. “I can’t even touch them!”

“But I can. They’re real to me.”

“But not to me. Dreams are unnecessary,” she said, calming herself.

“Come now. Even the most logical person has dreams. That’s what gives them their drive to keep going. If you don’t have dreams, you don’t have life.”

“The dreams would still be there, but simply not by day.”

“Our host would suffer,” the Keeper said sharply. “You don’t know how it feels to be completely cut off from your source of inspiration.”

“I don’t need inspiration.”

“Why are you here, then? Why do you do what you do?”

“It’s what I’ve always done,” Ms. Dalton said, her face expressionless.

“You don’t get tired of this?”

“No.”

“You don’t ever want to stop?”

“No.”

“You don’t ever wonder what else you could be doing?”

“...No.”

“Hesitation? What do you wonder, I wonder?”

“Nothing. I don’t wonder about anything.”

“Shame. It would do you a world of good.”

Ms. Dalton thought about the various representatives that had come back from talking to the Dream Keeper. There had been Mr. Faraday, who had been transferred to Memory Filing from his position in Calculation because he was becoming inattentive—doodling in the margins of his numbers—and there was also Mr. Franklin of the Sciences, now working as a Sweeper to pick up bits of information that had been dropped by the wayside. Ms. Angstrom of Mathematics had been banished to the right brain for her newfound love for art: no doubt the Keeper had done that as well. The chairman of the left brain had grown so fed up with the Dream Keeper that he had sent Ms. Dalton, head of Reasoning, to sort him out. “Mr. Keeper, I know what you’re trying to do. It won’t work.”

“What am I doing?” The grumpy face tried to assume a look of confusion, although amusement was struggling with it to take the seat of power.

“You’re doing what you’ve done to all the other representatives: you’re trying to sway me to the right side.”

“I? I had nothing to do with those others. I merely presented my arguments to them, and they saw the light.”

They’re Doing It with Jerry Garcia’s Body

sarcastic skeletal Uncle Sam broke free from
the gulag when his old Lady Liberty
torched the cell wall until the fat cop
sweated mercilessly in the sweltering
desert heat.
that jam band of clarion voice so ignored by their fans
who smoked pot instead of listening
a hippie is a failed idealist
an activist too stoned to act
so instead they dance and clap
and clap and dance to the gospel music
of reefer culture. such positive energy
wasted in a
self-indulgent *ME*-fest of drugs
and consequence-free-fornication
bony Uncle Sam rides off into the desert
where the blasting sun and scouring sands
will bleach his dirty bones white.
don’t worry: your greatest fans will remember
a man your ghost wouldn’t recognize.

Craig MacPherson



Speak Free
Nico Pricone
Photograph

Euphemism

The dagger on the tip of my tongue
bursts out into the air around me.
going,
 going,
 going,
 gone.

No way to retrieve it,
the deed has been done:
these verbal sticks and stones.

What could I have said?
Was it a piece of *crud*,
perhaps something far worse?

Did I somehow manage to call out "*witch*,"
or spurt out "*screw you*"?
Did I say "*Darn you to heck*"?
I've almost covered then all.

Who would imagine that a small sound wave
could cause such a vile atmosphere
to appear out from the ether?
Did I cuss or swear or curse?
Tongues sharpen from too much use,
but why must these words make them crude?

I can't say it,
because it rhymes with *snap*.
I will not dare you to scream "*dumbbutt*,"
but wouldn't you do the same?
Such a wide selection here
of words that ought to be banned!

Censor this and block out that,
not like we'll guess anyway.
Protect us all from these obscene weapons
because we can't cover our own virgin ears.

Ian Lonergan

"What are your arguments, pray?"

The Keeper settled himself among the dreams comfortably before he began. "I am no slob, Ms. Dalton, understand that right now. I do not release my dreams like Van Gogh's mind did, for he went mad with his creativity. No, this place is surprisingly well kept for a writer's mind. What you don't understand is this: our host needs the left and right brain to cooperate in order to write proficiently. Right now, his plots are full of holes, though his word choice is phenomenal. If you logical left-brainers would work with us, and not against us, you would be able to exercise your abilities and I would call back the dreams from your side of the brain. They're only trying to get you to cooperate. Can't you understand them?"

Ms. Dalton thought about this for a moment, about the various dreams that had taken residence in the left brain, and how they grunted and squealed and hissed at everyone in earnest. Even the human dreams spoke a completely different language. "No. Of course not."

The Keeper gave her a shrewd look. "Would you like to?" In his voice, Ms. Dalton could hear something very strange. It was an undertone to his words, eerie, ethereal; a kind of strange music that made the air sizzle before fading abruptly. Something inside of her was unlocked, some dark place that had been there all the time. It was a place that was discontent with logic and reasoning, something that suggested that blocking out dreams was not good.

"Yes," she found herself saying. "I would like to very much."

Something twinkled deep in the Keeper's liquid eyes. "Good. I shall teach you how to speak slowly. I taught the others all at once, and they couldn't handle it very well. They did not retain enough of their former logic to negotiate with those who had not learned yet. But I think you will be the one to change it." The Keeper stood carefully and reached out towards her forehead with gnarled fingers, gently brushing her skin with the tips of his knuckles. The strange music she had heard began again, only this time it didn't stop. It was soaring, sweeping, and joyful, and made her gasp in delight, something the old Ms. Dalton would never have held with.

"What is this?" she breathed. The music buzzed along freely, a barely-audible murmur in her ears.

"You are hearing the language of dreams, my dear. It will take you some time to learn what it means, but you will learn. I will teach you. Now, go back to the left brain and tell them what you have learned. Use your reasoning skills. It will take a long time, but soon everyone will be able to understand the language of the dreams."

"What happens after that?" Ms. Dalton asked.

"After that," the Keeper said, "comes wisdom."

"I was always told that wisdom came from experience."

"That is the logical way of thinking of it. Dreams, Ms. Dalton, are not logical. They never will be." The Keeper smiled at her for the first time. "Go on then."

As Ms. Dalton walked out, she reached over and patted the dream-mastiff on the head, her fingers now thoroughly convinced of the dog's reality as she felt the thick fur beneath her fingers.

Samantha Claussen

UFO Sightings Over Creek Hill

“Hush,” said sister Abigail, “look
to the sunless sky, the shaking
lights over the land, sentinels
bursting over the old church bells
while the world lies breathless and blank.”

Canvases, vividly crooked
colors, reflecting riverbanks
were blistering the fragile hills.
“Hush,” said sister.

We watched the strange ribbons breaking
across windmills, over the brook,
shivering bride behind the veil
waltzed for a few moments, then fell,
splintering over the hummocks.
“Hush,” said sister.

Kara Holbert

Side View Mirror
Ashley Smith
Photograph



Dark Sunset
Ashley Smith
Photograph



Weatherman

the weatherman sits in the coffee shop
he sips his mocha latte so quietly
perfection
he looks down in his cup and notices the colors
the light brown had not yet mixed with the white milk
swirls are formed in his Styrofoam cup
camel brown like a film he watched in eighth grade
about camels and their way of life
he bites his plastic straw and glances out the bay window
onto Lexington avenue
radio towers disguised as pine trees
central park is so less of what is was twenty years ago, he thinks
a man is wearing a frayed baseball cap
of a team he most likely doesn't follow
but instead hears game highlights playing on the cab radio on his way home
a small child plays with Legos
the weatherman smiles, mentally telling the tiny girl
enjoy your youth at the moment you have it
the child stacks the blocks high, not caring about color
when she grows up color will become an issue
an antique wagon rolls by
it's splintered with age and weariness
small objects hang by its nails
a model ship, spinning tops, hand turned corn suckers
a teddy bear with an empty face
the weatherman moves back to his coffee
“there's no need to predict today,” he says

Kayla Dantos

Upholstered Apathy

upright uptight proper rigid
 frigid beauty
 not a stitch out of place or time
 any characteristic wear
 no scent or residue
 silky sterile

it speaks to the shyness
 walks you forward
 sits you down
 a magnet that only lets you walk so
 far
 until
 Snap! you are back

it gives off no warmth
 drafty fixture at the dinner party
 the rock you were assigned
 when you refused to
 Dance

keeps you in that corner
 laughing highly
 plate of tiramisu on your lap
 (brownies were not meant for this
 throne)
 close enough to listen and
 near enough to comment but
 too far away to Care

the night grows icy
 offers no more comfort than
 your little black stilettos
 it is too late to tango
 feel the heat on that floor
 whomever would you ask?
 in a room full of strangers

no pumpkin waits when the clock
 strikes twelve

sitter stays seated
 prisoner
 until see you soon
 and good night kisses
 take the chair away

placed in an unused room
 hidden from daylight
 never to be read napped lived on
 seen
 until another dinner party
 next captive in a cocktail dress

Erin Driscoll



Chair Alone
 Nico Pricone
 Photograph

Her Majesty the Moon

I take no stock in poets
 who sing praises of the Moon,
 lavishing that insipid orb with
 lofty honors and titles,
 placing her on a pedestal
 high above the spinning Earth.
 She deserves not that glory.

The Moon is a pale-faced coward,
 a jealous, feral being who
 steals the glamour of the Sun, then
 gloats in the sky over the distant stars,
 pretending to outshine them
 while sitting snug in the sky with
 Infinity's distance between herself and
 any retribution from her glittering neighbors.

But oh, for all her pomp and boasting,
 she is shackled beneath the drab shawl of
 Darkness the night drags forth.
 The stolen glow is too weak to illuminate
 the shadow-clogged corners of the evening.
 She is too selfish to relinquish the hold on
 her scintillating, ill-gotten gains,
 forcing Man to wander blind-eyed
 through the dead of darkest night.

And see how she flees! Running terrified,
 deathly afraid of the very star she has
 robbed of his glitter and glory.
 So frightened that she cannot bear to
 share the same sky with him,
 hiding her face beneath the horizon.
 Such a whimpering, pathetic beast,
 for all her flamboyant grandiosity,
 this braggart with no strength in her to
 defend her fictitious tales.
 A liar, a coward, a flirt and a thief,
 such is the ruler of night skies,
 the most esteemed, Miss Luna Divine.

A. T. Grande



Fairy Tale Cottage
Rebecca Schneebaum
Photograph

The Fairy Snare

A mislaid thought, a silent prayer
A sharp wind blows, a mystic air
Begin your search, look here or there
If you're to catch a fairy

A ring of stone, a magic old
Through daisies, poppies, toadstools gold
They would entice you to their fold
Who seeks to catch a fairy

Perhaps a net of spider thread
Or set a baited box instead
In mossy hollows by the shed
In which you'd catch a fairy

Prepare a meal of walnuts cold
Some morning dew straight from the wold
A lily-bed, yet to unfold
For when you catch your fairy

Now watch yourself, don't be misled
The fairy could catch you instead
And lead you to your early bed
If you don't catch your fairy

Should you forget your dream, beware
It will not die, but live elsewhere
It will return, again ensnare—
And you will catch your fairy

Amelia Winchell

The Hungry Ghost

Bored on my living room couch
a ghost of hunger penetrates through my skin
vision *hazy*
stomach knocking on my insides to open the door
signaling

shrieking at me

to do something
to find something

like a rabid animal
I swear at the ones who are deeply satisfied
foaming at the mouth I search endlessly for the
antidote
that will calm the ghost that haunts me

I open the dark abyss containing my food
and light the boxes and packages that have been forgotten
I search through the former animals that call to me
each one whispering
trying to entice me like an unopened gift
then through the blinds of darkness
it finds me

in the corner I pull back a package too shy to come forward itself
I open the package, the ghost howls at the sight
simple ingredients for a weapon so strong
eggs, water, oil
they fight the ghost inside me

after heat and time has its way with the creation
completion sings a sweet song to me
transformation
edible and aromatic
and my savior
for it will purge my enemy

I glance at it with skepticism
ready to obliterate the phantom
the claws that ravish the food send it through me
bring an early grave to the specter
peace
thanks to banana bread

Mark Powell

Bruce went home that afternoon to a message on his answering machine. He pressed play, and the automated voice rang out, “One new message. Two old messages.”

There was a pause, and then the police chief’s gruff voice came in, “Hello, Mr. Gordon. This is Police Chief Wharton. I just thought I’d let you know that I checked up on your alibi this afternoon. It seems you were gone before the murder happened. For now, you’re on the clear. We’ll be checking up on fingerprints and all that in the next couple of days. If there’s anything you need or want to tell us, you have the number.”

He didn’t like the way the police chief said “for now,” as if he intended on finding the evidence necessary to charge him with the murder. Bruce knew some of this stuff, though. He’d taken a law course in his senior year of college, which was only a few years ago. He knew that Wharton couldn’t get a search warrant without plausible cause, and for now he had none. So he had time to clean up his car. Bruce had an alibi now. And even though he had left the murder weapon and hadn’t cleaned anything up, he knew he had been wearing gloves that night. No fingers touching anything meant there wouldn’t be any fingerprints. Things were looking good.

He smiled to himself and grabbed his keys. Then he thought better, put them back down, and decided to walk. His apartment wasn’t too far from the store. He wanted a bottle of something. It was a celebration of sorts. *I pulled it off. What a fucked up world.*

He descended the stairs of his apartment building quickly, excited by his minor victory over the world. He opened the front door, and began crossing the street. He glanced to his left for a second, and saw a bus barreling toward him. His smile faltered, and he stopped in his tracks. Sadly enough, the bus didn’t do the same.

Tiffany Knapp

Capital Capitol
Abby Hargreaves
Photograph



Limiting the Impossible

Thriving among the uncharted realms of creativity,
now She vanishes,
vanquished not by shining swords of chivalry
but fettered by logic,
trapped among tracks of not handsome chargers but iron horses,
bound not by spells but science
depending not upon seers, sages nor shamans
forced to resort to curling up around unconscious dreams
enduring
only through rare visionaries.

Once upon a time, gone forever from this world
She was treasured—
espied in both celestial spheres and cosmos
wingèd phoenixes and soaring Pegasus,
screeching Rukhs or chimaeras,
a gryphon’s shriek
resounding
across the atmosphere;
in the abysses of the primeval oceans lay
krakens and leviathans, sirens’
captivating
songs of enchantment, Nereids or mermaids
eternally
pining to rescue sailors from a watery doom.

Gossamer wings of fairy-folk
whisper
among the wind as they tend fragrant flowers,
satyrs’ mournful pipes wafting on the breeze,
dryads dancing in the fallow fields
companions to wandering unicorns seeking
nonexistent sanctuaries
Flaming dragons find crystal caverns
too late
realizing that tourists spelunk in their new territories.

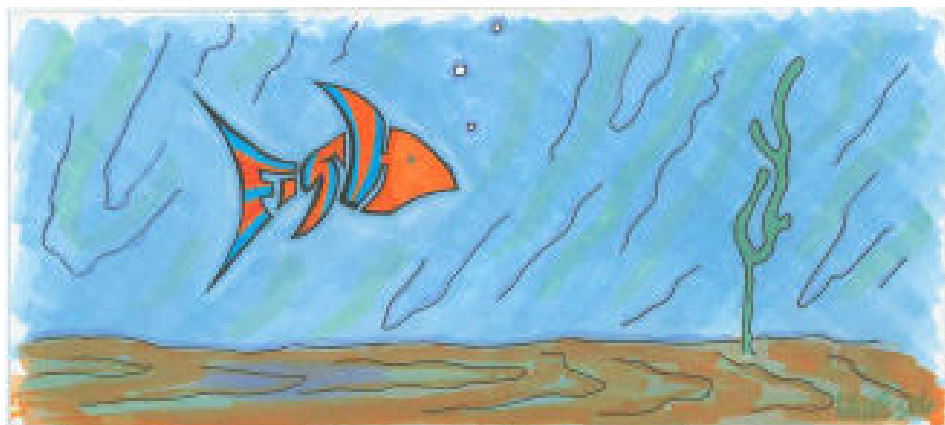
Flying carpets cannot contend with
helicopters, and djinn granting miraculous
wishes
found lacking compared to tortuous televisions
Titania and Oberon rule not an immense forest but a grove,
Psyche and Eros decline to appear fearing they too
take second place to idols of objects
Monkey King can defeat the armies of the Jade Emperor
but even he cannot compete with capitalism
Selene turns her face away in shame,
unable to flee from invaders with flags
and the perpetual battle between devas and rakshasas
falls before the blighting ingenuity of man
who impudently theorizes they ne'er existed
for science refutes believable
improbabilities
proving stars are not pinpricks in the blanket that is the sky
nor immortalized heroes set there by the gods.

Invisible, She walks among us
hidden in the imagination of every child
surfacing in myths and stories still told
chinks in the chains of logic which bind her
for placing limits upon the impossible is
not allowed as long as She survives:
MAGIC.

Courtney Weatherby

Fish

Lindsay Hines
Marker



away I'll give Kyle a call.

As the officer drove away from the front of the office building, Bruce waved and smiled until he was out of sight. Then he took out his cell phone and called Kyle before the police chief would have a chance to do so himself. "Hello?"

"Hi, Kyle."

"Bruce? Dude, where were you last night?" *Shit*, he thought. *Last night was poker night.*

"Actually, that's what I called about. I totally spaced about it, and went to some club last night down town. I-"

"Down town? What the hell were you doing there?"

"I was getting to that." He was climbing the stairs to his floor of the building, so he only had a minute left to explain everything without someone else hearing. "I went to The Blue Moon. You know, that new place off Crescent Street?"

"Yeah, I know it."

"Well, I picked up this girl there. We left together, but five minutes later we got into an argument and she walked off onto West Boulevard."

"And?"

"Well, she was found dead this morning."

"What?" Kyle practically spit the word into the receiver.

"Yeah, I know. I don't have a story for last night, but I'm telling you, man, I didn't do it. She walked off, and I went back to the damn club to get my car and go home. The thing is, though, I was flat ass drunk. I didn't want to tell the chief of police that I-

"Wait. The police chief?"

"Yeah. I was the last person she was seen with, so he was questioning me this morning. But listen man, I need your help." He paused, waiting for a response.

"Dude, this is way out of my league," Kyle replied nervously.

"I don't need you to do anything hard. The cop asked how I got home because there was something fishy about where she died and where she went after I saw her. Dude, I didn't want to tell him that I drove home drunk last night. So I told him that you came and picked me up. He's probably going to call you. I just need you to tell him that you picked me up last night around 12:30. And that you drove me to get my car this morning before work." Lying to his friend was easier than he had expected it to be.

"All right, man. But you owe me one."

"Big time." Bruce had reached the landing to his floor and was about to open the door into his wing of the building. *Free and clear.*

"Man, before you go..." Kyle's voice was timid.

"Yeah?" He put his hand on the door knob, nervous about his friend's tone.

"Did you do it? Kill her, I mean." There was a silent pause.

"No, man! I already told you that." He tried to sound surprised by the accusation.

"All right then. I better see you next Thursday." All doubt was gone from his voice.

"Yeah, of course. Thanks, man." There was a click, and Bruce pocketed his cell phone again.

“Yes. Is there a problem?” The Chief eyed him suspiciously.

“No. It’s just that I *am* at work. And I *am* the manager of this section of the company. It would be a bad example for me to leave.” It sounded like a weak excuse in his mind, and the words faltered even more once they had left his lips.

“Would it not be a bad example to refuse to assist a police investigation?” The cop had him there.

He didn’t like this guy. He was persistent, the way police should actually be. He had never once met a decent cop. Now that he had, he knew why the justice area of the country was screwed. There weren’t enough of them. But he didn’t like this guy one bit. If anyone were to get to the bottom of this case, it would be him. *And where the hell would that leave me? Prison? I don’t think so. I can outwit this guy.*

At the dance club, Bruce showed the officer what he pretended to remember. He actually walked down Park Street, on the opposite side of the club from where he’d really gone, and showed the officer that she had left him walking south onto West Boulevard. He didn’t want someone else to take the blame, but he most definitely didn’t want the alley on Crescent Street to be under investigation. In his inebriated state the night before, he had completely forgotten to clean up the murder scene.

“Well, that’s funny,” the Chief of Police commented. “We found her murder scene over there on Crescent. She lived here on West.”

“That is strange,” Bruce replied, staring right back at the accusatory glare. *Shit.*

“Do you know why she would walk all the way over to Crescent when she lived on West?” Wharton inquired, not trying to hide the accusation he was making.

“No. Maybe she was meeting someone else. After all, I had just met her only an hour before we left. I don’t know much outside of her name.”

“Maybe.” The officer didn’t seem convinced.

There was silence between them as they walked back over to the club.

“How did you get home last night?” Wharton asked.

The question startled Bruce. He’d thought he was done there. “I called one of my friends to pick me up. I was too drunk to drive. It’s a good thing his number was on my recent calls list; otherwise I wouldn’t have thought to give him a ring.”

“Do you mind giving me the name and number?” he asked casually. “It’s just standard procedure. Check up on alibis and what not.” Wharton forced a smile.

“Sure, no problem.” He took out his cell phone from his jacket pocket, scrolled through the contacts list, and read off the number. “His name’s Kyle Papal. The number’s 658-4892.”

“Thanks. And out of curiosity, where is your car now?”

“At the office,” Bruce answered, confused. It took a second to realize that, according to his story, it should still be in the parking lot by the club.

“How’d you get to it this morning, if you left your car here?”

“Oh, right. My friend drove me over here this morning so I could drive it into work. Same guy that picked me up last night.”

“All right. I’ll drive you back to your office and I’ll call you if anything else comes up.”

The drive back was very quiet. This officer was pretty sure Bruce was the murderer, but at this point he couldn’t prove it. *I just need to keep things like that. Once he drives*

Splish Splash

Sailing into the soaking spray,
The waves thrash and wrestle the boat,
Pummeling it endlessly.

Caught in the chaotic cross-tide,
The boat is drawn towards the whirlpool
With a deadly attraction.

Slowly circling the center, seduced,
Dragged in an ever-tightening circle,
Revolving with exponential speed.

Finally falling to its fate forever
Like an animal in quicksand
That has given up all hope of freedom.

Eagerly edging to the end,
The waters add another casualty
To their endless list of residents.

Without warning the whirlpool wanes.
Gargling with exhaustion from the battle,
The turbulent seas are smothered.

Below, the boat begins to rise.
The hull pierces the surface once more
And stands motionless in the waves.

Landing lightly and lodging itself,
The boat comes to rest, sturdy on an object,
As all remaining water runs out around it.

Glinting with grizzly gaping holes,
The drain holds the little boat atop it
Where its young captain has forgotten it.

Brian Beaudoin



Bridge

Alex Newell
Photograph

Karma

He took a step back, focusing on the weapon in his hand. There was a smear of red on the end, not too much since it hadn't pierced skin, but enough to stain the side. *Well, that complicates things*, he thought. He concentrated on the feeling that was prickling throughout his body. It felt good; a sense of power, a sense of control. He liked it. Dropping the weapon he looked at the bloody blonde on the ground before him and knew what he had to do. It was almost instinctual.

As he dragged the body to his car and drove toward a secluded area on the river, he tried to remember exactly what had happened. He had been in a back alley somewhere downtown, outside one of the popular dance clubs in the bad part of the area. He'd met this girl. She was almost as drunk as he was. Almost. They'd argued. At least he thought they had. She'd hit him for something...maybe he'd been too forward? And he lashed out with whatever had been nearby. Something heavy, about eighteen inches long. He couldn't remember what it was. But he'd hit her hard on the head and she'd fallen to the ground. And he vaguely remembered kicking her a few times before she died, too. He was unbelievably calm as he dumped her in the river. Not even the sickening splash of her lifeless body in the water fazed him. He felt powerful, alive, energized. He drove back to his house with a smile and without incident.

The next morning, though, paranoia set in. As he walked down the familiar, busy city street, he avoided contact with anyone he passed. *Oh God, they know. They have to know. Can't the police find fingerprints or DNA or something? They're going to find me. Lock me up for good. What the hell have I done this time? I was drunk...I didn't know what I was doing. Maybe I'll get less time for that?*

But the beautiful blonde, lovely lifeguard is too busy...
flirting
to notice this little boy.

He realizes that nobody will ever notice.
And yet,
he still thrashes.

He goes out
starts his car
heads out to face the world

always knowing that
There is this little baby boy
drowning in the deep end,
and no matter how hard he thrashes
how hard he tries
nobody,
nobody,
will ever notice

and yet he's still fighting to stay up...

Brian Barrett

Glistening Waters

Kyle Rees
Photograph





Yellow

Lindsay Hines
Ink and Marker

Iris

“Blasphemer!” Broken screeches swelled over the village throngs. “She hath the tongue of Satan!” Like a wounded bird she walked, liquid steps broken over cold cobblestone, raven hair wisping with the dust, fathomless blue eyes darting listlessly from one tarnished citizen to the next. Her eyes were the object of every stare: sapphire orbs without pupils, glazed with the look of one blind. She grasped the side of the town scaffold and stood with her hands spread firmly over its steps. Why had the crowd thrust her here, to the faded gallows long bereft of use? Perhaps, she reasoned, inevitability guided them, commemorating the severance of her final ties to society. All was darkness and crimson, crimson...

The midwives had shaken their heads and muttered of evil omens on the day of her birth. They knew – as everyone knew – about Blind Biggam’s dream and the prophesy. Biggam had always been sightless, locked in a void of black, but one night as he lay in his trundle-bed, visions came pouring into his brain in bursts of color and light. He had seen a pair of great eyes, spheres of pure blue, roving through the village streets and scanning every man, woman, and child. The townsfolk did not look as if they were made of flesh and blood, but were instead walking embodiments of yellow, green, amethyst, gold... each one of them radiating a specific color from every pore. Then Biggam heard a strong voice cry out: “See that thou art watchful of the wearer of the eyes, for she may look upon the souls of men and judge them according to their hearts.” Biggam had woken as blind as before, and a soon-to-be-renowned prophet.

And so when the child was born, staring serenely into the sky, the townsfolk wondered at their strange fortune. Priests fumbled for heavenly answers and children

In My Experience

I’ve never been to Hell
But have looked through the window glass
And envied its warm fires
On bitter winter nights I pass
Sinners fill smoky rooms
Drinking red wine with silky class

I’ve never seen Heaven
Only the queues which form outside
Stripped clean of everything
But their sustaining sense of pride
I’ve thought to stand with them
Yet couldn’t match their righteous stride

I’ve never met the Lord
Though I saw his car upon the road
No celestial limo
A Chevy with a heavy load
He stopped for me to cross
When no other even slowed

I’ve never known Satan
Just seen him in the magazines
In thousand dollar shoes
A triumphant ignorant screen
Glazing over his eyes
As he passes the ghetto scenes

I’ve never thought of Death
Though surely he has leered at me
I’ll know him when he comes
As all the colors fast will flee
Then I will shake his hand
And thank him for mortality

Allie Lane

Spirit War
Kara Holbert
Pen and Ink



gathered by her crib, gazing with open mouths at the “blue devil” born in a pauper’s den. It was a full four months before her parents gave her a proper name, Iris, and began to treat her as a normal babe, cooing over her and murmuring little nonsenses into her ear. “Sleep while the world lies waiting,” they sang. “The winter has come of its own accord.”

She remained silent as she aged. Often during her seventh year, she would walk to the village square and watch the other children wriggle and scream and laugh in the midday sun. Sometimes she would dance with them, stepping, dipping, rising softly like a river babbling over smooth stones as her companions ambled at her heels. On her eighth birthday, she opened her mouth and spoke for the first time. “Meredith was the color of a rose today, a pretty pink rose, and the color was glowing out of her fingers and toes, she was so beautiful.” It was a month before she chose to speak again, this time describing a small boy yellow as sulfur and brighter than the sun. Her parents marveled.

One, two, three, four, five. She felt each stair of the scaffold and pulled herself up. Behind her, the crowd heaved and groaned and spewed with one voice, rage bubbling over the bobbing heads. “Meredith...” she said quietly, looking back. There were no roses, no rays of magenta to be found; no echoes of an unblemished youth remained to assuage the tumultuous beating of her heart. “Have they taken you?” Iris whispered. “Have they melted into you, even you?” A shadow flung a stone that caught her elbow with a crack. Without wincing, she smoothed her pale skirts and stood upon the platform.

She had worn white on the day of Eva Clydesdale’s wedding. Everyone had discouraged the outfit, scolding that the bride was to be the only snow-colored dove in a room filled with pigeons. But she had worn it anyway, tying its simple sash around her waist wordlessly. She sat in the balcony alone, watching the ceremony unfold, and at first she could scarcely keep her eyes off the joyful bride and groom. But when Father Paul clasped Eva’s delicate hand and placed it in Tom Clydesdale’s flat, broad palm, Iris gripped the balcony rails until her knuckles shone white.

“I now pronounce you...” The calm voice of the priest quivered and broke in mid-sentence. For a moment he simply stood at the altar, gaze locked into Eva’s face. Iris opened her mouth but said nothing. “...Hus... husband and wife.” Father Paul recovered himself with a smooth grin, and the church-bells blared with the evening pomp.

It had been a marvelous reception. Guests munched on sweet apples and sponge cakes as they twirled to the hums of the string quartet. Iris sat on a small wooden chair in the corner, watching the children ripple and dodge between the legs and skirts of their parents. Harold Quinn, a stocky boy of twelve, strode lightly to her side and offered her a dance. Although a full year older than he and twice his height, she accepted graciously, and the two glided over the floor like a pair of old friends. As the song fluttered to a close, Iris suddenly drew him near her face and whispered, “Harry, the bride. Where has the bride gone to?”

Surprised, Harold glanced around the room and muttered, "She must have gone off with Tom."

Iris's eyes grew bright. "No, no...she is with the priest. She is with Father Paul upstairs."

"What, *alone*?" Harry took a step back. "What on earth do you mean by that, Iris? How could you even *say* that?" He grabbed her shoulders. "You must promise never to tell the elders. Father is a holy man. They would paddle you raw, you know."

Iris did not reply. She merely strolled to the bottom of the staircase, white cotton rustling at her heels. It was a full three minutes before she moved from the spot and faced Harold again. "Harry, you are green tonight," she said softly. "Bright green, like a lime. You look very nice."

The bride appeared at the top of the stair and hurried down, cheeks flushed and hair in disarray. The guests welcomed her below.

Iris couldn't catch a glimpse of Eva within the multitude, but she knew exactly where the pallid woman stood. Near the far end of the crowd rested the wiry body, bent wearily as the setting sun lashed her back. Had the mob's dull roar not drowned out all other sounds, Iris could have sworn she heard the jingle of gold coins in the deep pockets of Eva's frock.

They had found Tom Clydesdale in the cow-barn, stabbed once through the leg and twice in the chest. Blood pooled in soiled splotches across his navy suit and faded tie. "Two weeks a married man!" housewives whispered mournfully to one another. A few townsmen circled the body, stroking their chins and heaving great sighs, before bringing in a makeshift-stretcher and bearing the corpse away. The tension was terrible as everyone waited for Eva to arrive.

And what a beautiful, horrible sight she was, striding into the barn, eyes cold and sharp as steel. She had cast aside her mottled cloak and brown mittens and now, face empty as a ghost, she stood before all dressed in a magnificent gown of pure white. Once again she had donned her wedding dress, its edges dragging in the mud as she glided forward. There was a faint air of triumph that reddened her hollow cheeks and brittle skin. The crowd gaped in silence.

Without warning, a clear voice rang out from the eastern corner of the barn. "Eva, scarlet Eva, where is your priest? Eva, your dress is covered in scarlet."

The townfolk shifted their attention and momentarily fixed their stares on Iris. "The priest?" a man called out. "Shame for mentioning a holy man so carelessly!"

Iris's eyes shone. "It was Father Paul, for look! I see him now, approaching us, and he is scarlet like his lover!"

A throb of horror shook the crowd. Eva grew paler than she had ever been. "Lies!" she spat out. "It could not have been the Father."

"It was the town drunkard!" a man's voice filled the barn. "It was old Barnaby, for he is absent here and has run away to smother his guilt!"

"Yes, Barnaby, for he owes me three weeks' pay!" came another voice.

"Surely this Iris is a witch," cried the third. "To accuse two of our purest citizens of such unspeakable horrors when a drunk, hated by all, roams the streets alone!"

I turned my back on those black shores
And looked upon the land.
To my undying horror, there
Hung bones above the sand!

Those bones were bleached a snowy white
They clattered in the breeze.
The sockets stared and skull-heads grinned.
They dangled in the trees.

The nooses were of common rope
From wreckage of old ships.
They'd hanged themselves, that I was sure,
With screams upon their lips.

I wandered by the sea by night
And huddled on the beach.
The spirits circled restlessly
And murmured in strange speech.

By day, I slept inside my cave:
I'd come to fear the night.
I spent each moment in the dark
By praying for the light.

And so I lived my life alone
On this haunted island.
I slept by day and hid by night
For years upon the strand.

I dared not touch the hanging bones
That rattled with unrest.
I scavenged not the ropes from them
For fear of woes redressed.

I do not know my age at all,
My face is grey and worn.
I am no more than wraith myself
In tattered garments, torn.

Some rope washed up the other day.
I knotted it with skill.
A lovely noose it makes for me
And wear it yet I will.

Tomorrow I will join these men
And seek for my respite.
I can no longer linger here—
A spirit of the night.

Sea Bird

Dan Maxton
Photograph

Samantha Claussen



Spirit of the Night

Some years ago in days now lost
 A ship set sail to find
 The way across the endless sea
 And passed from thought and mind.

Now I was with that crew the day
 The storm rolled in so fast
 I can yet see the waves crash down
 And snap the tow'ring mast.

She ran aground a reef that night
 Which tore the hull asunder.
 Our ship then foundered on the rocks
 And gave a groan like thunder.

I clung to floating wreckage, and
 Was washed away by waves.
 I choked on sea-foam, salty spray
 And prayed that I'd be saved.

I drifted endless hours, near-dead,
 Succumbing to the chill
 When fate took pity upon me
 And let the waves grow still.

The current swept along until
 I drifted to some shore.
 The sand was black and smelled quite foul.
 I slept and knew no more.

When I awoke 'neath glitt'ring stars
 I found myself alone.
 The breeze was cold and froze my soul
 And pierced right to the bone.

The trees offshore were leafless yet
 And swayed with blasting gale.
 A strange, sad wail rang in the dark
 My courage then did fail.

I ran for cover, shivering,
 And knelt beneath the trees.
 Cold droplets slithered down my back.
 My blood began to freeze.

A ghostly shape did flutter by
 With fingers long and thin.
 Its face was lean and pale as Death,
 And blood dripped down its chin.

More spirits came to circle me
 And dance on glinting sand.
 They called to me in deep despair
 And reached out for my hand.

I gave a cry and ran away
 And dashed into the wood.
 The spirits followed, flying fast,
 Much faster than I could.

Their pearly eyes were keen at night
 They watched me as I fled.
 Transparent beasts they surely were,
 The ranks of those long-dead.

I crawled into a dripping cave
 And crouched against the wall.
 I waited for the sun to rise
 (If it would rise at all.)

But rise it did to my relief,
 And chased away the gloom.
 Those golden beams with fire hung
 Had saved me from my doom.

I crept from my dark place with hope
 And went back to the sea.
 I looked in vain for passing ships—
 But none that I could see.

Without further hesitation, the crowd marched out into the road and sought the ancient Barnaby with thoughts of just revenge.

Iris listened as the church bells pealed with muffled consistency over the shouts of the street. The faded chapel stood against the blazing sky, reflecting the orange and gold of sunset. Slowly she drank in its regal announcement of the sixth hour.

Tom's memorial service had been flooded with mourners eager to catch a glimpse of the remorseless bride. Eva sat at the front, wearing a brilliant silk gown and a high hat decorated with roses and lace. She could afford such fancies now that Tom's inheritance, bestowed on him as a child by his rich grandmother, had passed to her. As the organ resounded its beginning requiem, she fanned her pale neck and glanced at Father Paul.

The priest began the ceremony, droning half-carelessly of Tom's righteous spirit and gallant soul. By the time Iris burst into the room, dress torn and hair uncombed, Paul had nearly reached his conclusion.

"You would disgrace his name," she cried, "with false adoration and regret? You are not a man of God, but an adulterer and a murderer! Fall on your face now and repent before the congregation!"

The color drained from the priest's face. "What have I done that Satan should send his little messenger of lies to me? The girl is of black magic; she is a devil!"

"I am the Voice," Iris replied in a clear tone. "Hear me now, for Tom is mute in death, but I may still speak."

"Surely, she is not of sound mind," Eva said wildly. "And I should not be surprised to find that she had a hand in the murder of my husband."

The mourners sounded their agreement.

"Who are we but murderers of truth?" Iris shook as she spoke. "For I tell you now, there is not one man here who does not reek of scarlet. And you must all repent for your ignorance, or die!"

The crowd roared in disbelief. "This girl is a blasphemer!" Father Paul shouted above the din, seeing his advantage. "She should be exiled! What has she given us but trouble since the day she was born? Those eyes are the eyes of one bewitched by evil spirits!"

Blindly the congregation rose to its feet and hurled itself toward the trembling girl.

It was her fourteenth birthday, she thought, as she stood on the scaffold. Fourteen years, and now it was to end.

The crowd surged. The church bells were silent. A sea of crimson lay ahead of her, bathing the town in red light, and the vast emptiness of the unsettled world lay behind her. More stones came, but she did not feel them. She merely turned and began to walk away, descending the far end of the scaffold and striding into the distance.

And they cast her out, and she was never seen or heard from again.

Deafening

Guess it just hits me kind of hard,
 a passenger in this
 crippled unmarked car,
 I'm biting my lip and feeling
 Numb, walking around in a thick fog of frost
 this December—
 another cold one without you,
 lacking the warmth of any answers or endings;
 my hands are shaking with a chilly kind of uncertainty.
 But I could still close my eyes and
 understand that I
 Understand Nothing...
 How are we still breathing?
 and blinking and sleeping at night
 drinking and flailing our limbs...
 Not dying, yet,
 although I have an idea that we're
 Pretty damn close to it.
 A man on the bus with tired eyes and a knowing grin
 once told me
 to pay attention
 To my most intangible dreams—
 the Subconscious Surrealism that passes beneath my eyelids...
 I wake up gasping in the night and
 Start in on thinking
 That pretty close to dying
 Lies the line of truly living.

Kate Rever



Laundromat
 Lindsay Hines
 Colored Pencil

Little India

we might live in a hypocritical country
 but i'd rather live here than anywhere else in the world
 i guess this all started when we went to Little India.
 India doesn't belong in the middle of a flailing
 Massachusetts industrial town.
 and Brian and i went to meet his friends
 but were both aching to crawl back under the warm covers
 and go back to bed
 but we couldn't complain
 we were chastised for being "uncultured"
 so we gave in and ordered Nan.
 this was normal bread—the only thing i ate all night
 what we ordered next cost about fifteen dollars
 and i couldn't even identify it
 the curry—in my hair, in my pores
 i couldn't get the smell out of my nose
 the spices section of a supermarket
 had thrown up all over my plate
 and i looked around at these college freshmen
 hailing from the "big city," some of them
 and inwardly, to myself—and later outwardly to Brian
 i laughed quietly that they needed to eat Indian food
 to make themselves feel culturally important.
 Brian and i received our \$12.50 bowl of goop
 as we pretended to feed it to each other but really pushed it around our plates
 our bond deepened. we understood each other.
 we left money for the bill and left to bask in our togetherness
 and how even after five months at college
 these pretentious "city kids" couldn't change my Brian.
 he apologized for making us go
 and about fifteen minutes later, over a whopper and fries
 we joked that the curry smell would never go away
 and i knew the beauty of culture
 was that I could dip French fries in ranch sauce
 and lick grease and salt from my fingers
 and still look brilliant
 holding a debate with my boyfriend
 about the European educational system.
 that was about as pretentious as i would ever be.
 because even though sometimes you are what you eat
 all the Indian food in the world
 (perhaps only in Waltham, Massachusetts)
 won't change that you're an American.

michelle noyer-granacki

on the internal conflict of william t. sherman:

thus saith the lord of hosts,
 Georgia became Judah
 and Babylon:
 Lincoln himself knew the way
 from home.
 and shall it be destroyed?
 in astonishment, hissing
 as Carthage took siege and
 flame from Rome?

if yes,
 then moreover, take mirth
 and let Savannah reap
 the fate of Mexico:
 (eternal war speaks of fire
 and the south reeks pitch)

thus saith the lord of hosts
 as Tecumseh took march to sea:
 behold, I am god!
 follow my trail
 of salt and ash.

Ryan LaLiberty



Daemon's Conscience
 Brian Barrett
 Pencil

What One Can Learn by Visiting Tourist Traps

We find, like tourists looking for a stop,
 A row of masks, a simple vendor's pride,
 With brilliant colors odd in this small shop;
 Their craftsmanship could never be denied.

Not made for subtlety or subterfuge,
 The coverings can only serve to hide
 What's obviously there. A cake of rouge
 To well eclipse the grime suppressed inside.

You try one on, a gray one, like the sea,
 And hide beneath the feathers' pearly sheen.
 The image strikes me with sick irony—
 The best façade that I have ever seen.

Returning this mask to its vast array,
 I know full well your mask is here to stay.

Amelia Winchell

**An Experience of Two and a Half Days in Italy:
 A Petrarchan Sonnet**

The plane arrived at last with twenty-one
 unsleeping Yankee trav'lers having just
 watched *Transamerica* or other such;
 then later, hotel beds with dinner done.
 Pompeii and Rome was sorely trudging fun—
 we woke before the dawn and walked till dusk;
 then dozed through boring tour-speak on the bus,
 in sweaty skin baked by Etruscan sun.

And yet, through all discomfort, lack of sleep,
 and hunger, the Italian countryside
 held my attention so that I would keep
 my forehead pressed on glass the whole bus ride,
 consumed in greenleaved groves of Haikus deep,
 till Tuesday night with sad and sweet goodbyes.

Marissa Linzi



Breakthrough
Kara Holbert
Pencil

The clanging of keys and the coarse grinding of gears brought both the prisoner's and the guard's head to the left. The woman identified three men coming down the hallway, their boots thumping in time to some pulse mutually agreed upon. She sighed once more, feeling her thirty-five years acutely, and stood.

Her guard also stood, finally turning so the woman could see his face. It was a nice face, a little plain, but it definitely had some character. He had brown hair and blue eyes bespeaking an Anglo heritage. There were fine lines around his eyes and mouth, smile lines. The woman was glad that his was the last face she would remember.

The guard opened the door, slowly pushing the heavy iron and titanium back so the prisoner could pass through. She presented him her back so he could cuff her hands. The cold metal of the handcuffs were a welcome sensation, and one she had come to know well. The five of them, the prisoner, her guard, and the three newcomers, walked down the hallway.

As the woman reached her door leading to her death, one of the new guards reached out to remove her head cloth. The woman instinctively drew back, but her guard grabbed the other man's arm and shook his head. Looking from the guard to the prisoner, the new man slowly lowered his hand and motioned for the woman to precede him through the door.

The woman grasped the doorframe, bowing her head in one final prayer to God before she joined him. When she lifted her head and started to enter her death chamber, the prisoner heard her guard call out to her softly.

"Rivka?"

The woman turned to look at him over her shoulder, nodded awkwardly, and allowed him to continue.

"Are you afraid to die?"

The woman raised her eyes toward God, smiled a secret smile, and turned back to the guard. She shook her head, that strange grin still lighting her features.

"No," she said slowly. "Happiest day of my life."

Kit Richards

“The first man I ever killed was my husband. He was worse than my father, always beating me until I couldn’t see straight. The only time he ever laid off was when I was pregnant. But afterwards, when she died, he started hitting me again.”

The woman stopped, sighed briefly over a loss she had long come to accept, and continued.

“My little girl died when she was two. I didn’t know her that long, but I guess I still miss her. My husband started drinking after that and beat me harder. Six months after the baby died, I cut my husband’s throat with one of my best cooking knives. I faked my own death, cutting my arm and making a trail of blood through the apartment, and messed up the house so they would think I was kidnapped. I took the knife with me so they wouldn’t find my prints on it. It worked, too. I was never caught, and I never went back.”

The guard shifted in his chair again, his stiff uniform crackling dryly. The woman could see the outline of his arm through the bars, as if he had leaned slightly toward the sound of her voice.

“I lived on the streets after that, stealing my food, taking care of myself. A woman found me in the abandoned warehouse where I lived. I didn’t know it, but she had been watching me carefully for two weeks, saw that I was an excellent thief, and asked me if I wanted to work with her. Of course I said yes, of course, even though I didn’t know her from Eve. She was one of the greatest assassins that ever lived, taught me everything I know. She died before the police could catch her.”

The shadow of the guard’s arm abruptly left the bars, and the woman knew he was displeased with this last comment. She shrugged, moving on through her story.

“I started to kill for money, not really caring who my targets were. I was good, real good. The Employer began putting me on big people, diplomats, businessmen, even the Prince of Denmark. Yeah, that was me.”

She chuckled as she heard the guard shuffle angrily outside her cell. It gratified her that he was at last listening to her story, and not even pretending to be indifferent.

“But then I got so good that I started to stop and think about the people I had killed. Some were bad men, cruel and abusive. I didn’t care about them. But they were people who were simply the enemies of the Employer, and not bad at all. They had families and homes. Their ghosts still haunt me, demanding that I join them, angry that I cut their lives short. I dream about them all the time.”

The woman stopped once more, considering the people she would meet when she died. She didn’t think it would be a happy reunion, but it made her glad that she could talk to these poor people, face to face, and not feel guilty anymore. It was her guilt, more than anything, that made living so hard.

The guard coughed, indicating to the woman that he was still there and listening. Less cheerful than she had been, the prisoner continued.

“I volunteered for this last job because no one else wanted it. Everyone in the Organization knew that whoever hit this target would be caught. I guess I got tired of my work, I don’t really have anything left to do. I swear I didn’t have anything against this guy, I even voted for him! But the Employer didn’t like the President, so I killed him. I’m just happy that now I can see my daughter again and apologize to the people I’ve murdered.”

An Afternoon with a Library

Sitting in silence and a reading of Chaucer
marrowed hands turning pages
in this vaulted mausoleum of wandering thoughts
folded contents grow a bitter lime

A vagabond of sorts, a life in a pack
traveling companion resting by my feet
sleep now, for we move shortly
backpack messiah pounding pavement preaching known sense

Stomping thunder from the canyon’s guardian
snaps my wondering mind clear to present
to behold a wheat haired sylvan queen of study
Kool-Aid blue eyes and simple grace

The antithesis of what sits across from her
crazed eyed Gaul with unkempt hair
blood caked nostrils and coughing clear the mucus from its lungs
a horrid sight soon to retreat to the mountains from whence it came

Quick darting glances steal a look
a gaze too long and a fate of stone from this fair-faced Medusa
look past the sun and into the ether
to snatch a glimmer of moon’s fading light

Shouting silence and hollow steps end the moment
gliding turkey-necked wizards and shambling ghouls
clinging to damp crevasses, peeling pages
and unspoken spoken words

Taken aback and the paths are calling
the road is life and so forth
to speak to her would be folly, so move to leave
memory, like morning mist, and the treads hit the salted Earth

Ryan Brown



Lamplight in Jerusalem
Kara Holbert
Oil Pastel

God's Chosen

The woman knew that her guard was ignoring her, totally disregarding her every attempt to lure him into conversation, and yet she continued her efforts to engage him as valiantly as the honest woman she wasn't. She had abandoned her first tact of lighthearted flirtation a half hour ago, feeling foolish that the guard hadn't so much as turned around to acknowledged her. The woman had also tried a few of her funniest jokes in the hopes that her sentry would at least crack a smile. He hadn't. Now the woman felt a little defeated, an emotion she hadn't experienced in a long time. She traced the stripes on her thin mattress and said simply, "I'm Rivka."

This, once again, elicited no response from her soundless guard. The prisoner carried on anyway.

"Rivka is really my name, you know. My true name, the one my parents gave me. I bet you never thought that convicts could have parents."

The guard shifted in his seat, a sign that he was at least aware of her presence. The woman gained some optimism from this and launched into full speech.

"I did have parents, but they're long-dead now. My father wanted to name me Rachel, but Mama insisted on Rivka. It means 'one who traps' in Hebrew, you know. Kind of appropriate, don't you think?"

She paused, allowing a moment for the guard to answer her inquiry, if he so desired. He didn't.

"Anyway, Papa was a real bastard. He kinda beat on my mother, a lot, and on me and my sisters. We were orthodox, so we always had to be proper Jewish girls. I

didn't know until I was fourteen that it wasn't normal to keep my head covered all the time and pray twice a day. I was rebellious, being the youngest, and found ways to hide so Papa couldn't find me, and to steal food when he made us fast. I guess he prepared me for my line of work."

The guard grunted, a guttural sound from somewhere in the back of his throat that clearly indicated how he felt about her profession.

"Yeah," she replied to this primitive noise, "I know you must hate me and what I do. It's alright, though, I've hated myself for a long time. After hurting as many people as I have over the years, it's hard not to start hating yourself."

The prisoner was quiet for a moment, thinking solemnly of her self-loathing. She plucked at the cheap fabric of her orange jumpsuit with one hand and rapped the knuckles of the second absentmindedly against the sweaty, iron frame of her cot. The drab walls of the woman's tiny, windowless cell echoed her metallic cadence back and forth, expressing to the guard her pensive mood. She sighed and continued her speech.

"When they arrested me, they took away all of my clothes, just stripped me down naked. All through the trial and my time in prison I've had to wear this horrible thing." She gestured toward her jumpsuit, not caring that the guard wasn't facing her. "I have always kept my head covered, in deference to God and everything, but I've been unable to since I came here. For eighteen months I've been offending the Lord... well, more than usual anyway."

She paused, hoping her guard would take the hint. He continued to sit, his boots shuffling lightly against the gritty floorboards, stoically ignoring the criminal behind him.

They were both quiet for a while, the prisoner because she had nothing left to speak of, and the guard because he never had anything to say in the first place. After fifteen minutes of absolute silence from both parties, the guard stood up abruptly and walked over to the guard station down the hall. The woman couldn't find it within herself to disregard this change in his behavior and vainly tried to crane her neck to see where he had gone. When she heard the guard's heavy footsteps thudding rhythmically back down the hall, she flopped back down on her cot, giving a remarkably good impression of someone who simply didn't care.

The guard, when he returned to the prisoner's cell, walked directly up to the bars and threw something on the floor in front of the narrow cot. The woman raised her head and saw that her sentry had given her an orange lump of something. Always curious by nature, the woman picked up what turned out to be a scrap of cloth, as carrotly and ugly as the jumpsuit she wore.

"For your head," came a voice through the bars.

The woman was astonished to realize that it was her guard who had spoken thus. His voice was gruff, alerting her to the fact that he really hadn't wanted to speak to her. She smiled, satisfied that she had at least extracted this small response, and tied the fabric over her straggling hair.

It was two hours and one last meal later before the woman spoke to her guard again. She had been thinking of her past as she chewed on the food she had ordered, and of how she had come to be in her present position. She answered her own indirect questions out loud to the guard.