

# *Baily's Beads*

***Volume XVIII***

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University of Pittsburgh at Bradford  
300 Campus Drive  
Bradford, PA 16701

## ***Design***

This issue of Baily's Beads is printed on matte finish paper. The body text is printed in thirteen-point Bodoni MT. Titles are printed in twenty-point Bodoni MT Bold, and authors' names are printed in eighteen-point Bodoni MT Italic. Accents are printed in various sizes of Brush Script MT. The cover was drawn by Jennifer Trippett, with some suggestions from our design team, including Seth Cheatle, Jennifer Willemin, and Shauna Kelsey. The inner design and layout was created by Seth Cheatle and Jennifer Willemin. Aside from a splash of color on the cover, the magazine is black and white with some shades of gray. We were interested in a film-noir-inspired design, so we tried to experiment as much as possible with the play between light and dark. The issue was produced using Adobe InDesign. It had a print run of one thousand, and was printed by Ferguson Printing in Salamanca, NY. This is a free publication.

## ***Correction From 2012 Issue***

In our last issue, we credited the design of the cover to Ellen Goos. After printing, we were informed that the cover was actually designed by Jennifer Willemin, with assistance from Ellen Goos. The design was then modified by Professor Rick Minard and Jennifer Trippett. We just wanted to accurately credit all contributors for a great cover and apologize for the mistake.

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### *Columbia Scholastic Press Association*

2004 Silver Medalist  
2005 Gold Medalist  
2005 Silver Crown Award  
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2007 Gold Medalist  
2007 Silver Crown Award  
2008 Gold Medalist  
2011 Gold Medalist

### *American Scholastic Press Association*

2004 First Place with special merit  
2005 First Place with special merit  
2006 First Place  
2007 First Place  
2008 First Place with special merit  
2010 First Place with special merit  
2010 Best College Magazine Award  
2011 First Place with special merit  
2011 Best College Magazine Award

### *Associated Collegiate Press*

2001 First Class with 3 marks of distinction  
2003 First Class with 2 marks of distinction  
2004 First Class with 3 marks of distinction  
2010 First Class with 2 marks of distinction

## ***Submission Guidelines***

If you would like to submit to the next edition of *Baily's Beads*, we accept poetry, fiction, plays, translations, and creative nonfiction (including memoirs, essays, and commentaries).

Please submit your work with a cover sheet containing your name and contact information (phone number, address, e-mail address).

We ask that your name appear nowhere in the piece of writing itself, so that we may judge anonymously and fairly. All pieces are judged anonymously and no staff members are allowed to vote on their own work.

Please keep a copy of your work. Double space prose pieces, single space poetry. Entries can be sent electronically to [bailys@pitt.edu](mailto:bailys@pitt.edu) (which is the preferable means of submission), dropped off in the Communications and Arts office in Blaisdell Hall, or mailed to us at 300 Campus Drive, Bradford, PA 16701. We accept submissions year-round.

## ***Editor's Note***

Another issue down. Here I am for a second year, wondering what I was thinking when I accepted this position and all its responsibilities. Sure, it is rewarding and fun in its way, but it is also a lot of work that I'm generally far too lazy to do. I know by now that being editor on this book will not get me the power, the money, or the women. I also know that my course load would have been substantially less stressful if it weren't for this issue. However, this work has been as rewarding (if not more so) as any I have done in other classes. It may have been a bit much for me to handle at first without the help of James (my co-editor on the last issue, who has been in London having more fun than any of us), but the rest of the staff was eager to help me out, as always.

Joking aside, this was a fun issue to work on. We were a bit worried at first, with so many new and inexperienced members on the staff, but all of them stepped up as needed and this magazine wouldn't have happened without them. It also probably wouldn't have happened without Dr. Nancy McCabe, who kept us all focused on the task at hand when none of us feel like working. We would surely be lost without Bill Ferguson, our printer, who was always there to explain bleeds, margins, and any other stuff we underestimate the significance of. I also want to thank Rick Minard, the visiting assistant professor of art here at Pitt-Bradford, who worked tirelessly to get us a cover for this issue. Ultimately we did not use any of the ones he presented us with, but it was his

efforts that got us on track toward what we actually ended up using. But that is a story all its own.

The design of this issue, including the cover, has gone through a handful of changes since we started the issue. I had the idea that I wanted to do a film-noir inspired cover and layout, and the staff jumped right on board. It seemed to fit with the dark and creepy nature of a great deal of the submissions we received, only a fraction of which actually made it in ultimately. Still, much of the work featured in this issue explores personal darkness and the constant search for light that is life. As such, the conventions of film noir seemed to mesh well, given the genre's tendency to explore the relationship of light and darkness on screen. I want to thank all of those involved in layout and design, especially Jennifer Trippett, the artist who drew the cover, for her patience with my nagging about making this part darker, and what if we did this instead, and so on.

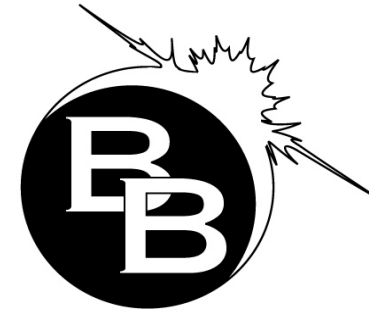
I also want to thank Jeff Guterman and the Division of Communication and the Arts at Pitt-Bradford, on behalf of everyone involved, for the funding necessary to make *Baily's Beads* possible. We couldn't have done it without your support.

Lastly, and most importantly, I want to thank all the writers who submitted their work to *Baily's Beads* as well as the readers who make the process worthwhile. It is because of you that this magazine exists. I think there is a lot of great writing in this issue, and I thank every last one of you for it. Keep doing what you're doing, and I hope to see you all again in future issues.

Given the ratio of work by staff members to work by non-staff members in this issue, it seems necessary to make a few points about our process, just to be clear. The selection process is anonymous, and none of the staff members know who the author of any given piece is, unless it is their own work. In that case, the staff member is not included in the voting on his or her own work. It is very important to us to be as objective as possible. I just wanted to clear that up in case there were any suspicions of conspiracy.

Thanks again to everyone involved. Despite all the work, I had a lot of fun working with you all on the issue. My metaphorical hat is off to all of you.

*Seth Cheattle*



*Baily's Beads* are the highest points of light that appear around the edge of the moon at the solar eclipse. The beads are created by sunlight passing through the moon's valleys. The last bead is the brightest, resembling a diamond on a brilliant ring. This phenomenon lasts but a few spectacular moments.

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# **Do You Know Where Your Children Are?**

*Andrew Cauley*

An arm full of meth  
landed him in Biloxi jail.  
Your schoolbus driver.



# 111911

*Jennifer Willemin*

new york city, lower east side  
living between rooftops and liquor stores  
at sunrise you race to the east river  
chai tea in hand

straddling state lines  
you sing your protest  
living at class war camps  
with other commies and anarchists

held overnight by nypd  
released in photographs by rolling stone  
november nineteenth

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# Twelve Feet Deep

*Shauna Kelsey*

I just stood there staring down my certain doom.

My toes curled, making squelching-sucking noises in the wet nylon. The sun reflected off the water, which was dark with stirred silt. Any sort of monster could be lurking in that abyss, but monsters weren't what worried me.

There was an aroma of wet soil, plants, and crawdads. Crawdad was a peculiar scent, one more tasted than smelled, unpleasant to some, but to me it felt pure and clean and good. It smelled like summer. But even the little tastes of warm sunshine couldn't distract me from what lay ahead.

By all rights, I should have been roasting in the heavy Arkansas heat, but I felt chilled to the core. My stomach twisted itself into a knot and settled in my throat, making it quite impossible to swallow. Surely everyone could see how I was shaking.

I shifted my grip, feeling the rough rope itch and bite into the palms of my hands. I must have been perched up on the bank for hours, which was probably why everyone was staring at me so impatiently. I tried not to cry.

I squeezed my eyes shut, twisted the gnarled rope in my fists, and leapt into air. For a moment I was flying. The wind tossed back my tangled blond hair, and I imagined myself on the playground again, daring others to swing

higher and higher. I would lean back in the seat and stare up, making the blue sky my world. I believed those few seconds before launching myself out of the swing and into the air were what it would feel like to be free. I wished I was at the playground now.

I let go of the rope as it started to swing back, and I started to fall, finally being consumed by the abyss. Water closed over my head, and I sank helplessly.

“Twelve feet deep,” Armagh had said. He had to be right. He was older and nearly six feet tall. I wasn't sure, but twelve feet seemed to be at least three of me.

Panic rendered my prowess at the doggy paddle useless, and I flailed. Why did I always say yes? Was no so difficult? I kicked and clawed at the water as if I could fight my way free. Clumsy, unsynchronized strokes. Soon the muddy water cleared. I could see the sun.

My head broke the surface of the water, and I struck out until I could wrap my arms around the branch of a felled tree that acted as a bridge across the creek. I pressed my face into the bark, feeling its roughness against my cheek. I was alive and surrounded by sweet, blessed air that I gulped down like Thanksgiving dinner. My heart was fluttering so fast it hurt. As soon as the strength returned to my limbs, I pulled myself up to sit on the trunk of the tree.

Valerie was lounging there. I didn't remember her going into the water once since we'd been there. But she was a cheerleader and smelled nice, and it seemed to be her right to lounge there while we subjects flopped about in the mud. She seemed somehow special in a way I didn't

understand. At her house, her room was full of pretty pink and glittery things that I envied. She even had her own bed. She was a creature of a different nature from me or my cousins. She also happened to be the closest neighbor for four miles, which made us friends by default.

I wanted to be her.

Her hair was dyed a shade of blond that made my sun-bleached hair seem like hay. She was free to bask in the sun, and I don't believe she had ever had to haul sacks of feed or work until her hands were calloused. Her mother had even talked me into doing the manual work for Valerie's lamb that she showed at 4-H. Why couldn't I ever say no?

I hated that lamb, but I badly wanted to be able to have one. To be able to have trophies, my own bed, and clothes that had been bought just for me. I wanted her pretty things. She always knew how to say no—usually very loudly at her mother in a way that made me flinch.

Valerie was also the only one to notice my gasping struggle. Mom and Aunt Tammy were drinking beers with Valerie's mother, and none of the adults had so much as looked up during the splashing. Valerie looked at me for a moment, and upon seeing that the drama was over, she shifted her shoulders and relaxed once again like a cat in the sunshine.

I finally stood and walked carefully past Valerie and along the bank upstream to the little pool I had been swimming in before Armagh asked me if I wanted to swing. Never again. I would tell him *no* next time for sure.

I waded in, feeling the water swish through my shoes

and dance between my toes before it swept out again. My grandmother had gotten the shoes for me earlier in the summer when I had stayed with her. I could run over rocks in bare feet, and it felt like a special luxury to have the option not to. I loved the black-and-pink-mesh material, I loved the squishy sounds they made when I walked, and I even loved the little hole that was unraveling where pink met black. I nudged my toe against it like worrying a bad tooth and somehow that felt good too. I kicked and splashed the water in an arc, watching it come down like fat crystals.

I played by myself. There were my cousins Armaghn and Chrissy to play with—but they would only splash and pull me underwater. I was too gun-shy now, so I made sure to be well away from them as I scooted about. If I stretched out and paddled, I was a mermaid. I could picture my jewel-toned tail and wonderful long hair that was much prettier than stupid Valerie's. I wouldn't be scared of anything, and I wouldn't have to say no to the rope. Twelve feet of water was nothing to a regal mermaid.

I was mired in deep mermaid troubles and chasing mudbugs when I heard my name. I sat up and looked around. Mom was packing up the truck to go home, and her back was to me. Chrissy was floating by on a raft, and Valerie had rolled over onto her stomach to warm her back. Then I saw Armaghn looking straight at me, his dark hair plastered against his skull. He was holding The Rope.

"C'mon. You wanna go last?" He looked at me expectantly.

Suddenly I couldn't feel the sun anymore. I wasn't

a mermaid, I wasn't even Valerie, and I certainly wasn't brave. I nodded hesitantly, though all I could think was "no."

Armaghn pulled me up onto the bank and gave me the rope before he splashed into the creek to swim over and grab a soda. Please come back, I thought.

I looked down at the water again, the swirling dirt like circular maws gnashing their teeth. Everyone was packing up. This would be the last time. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and jumped.

As soon as I felt the cold shroud of water, I kicked out. I thrashed and clawed, and I could feel that I was moving much faster than usual. This wasn't going to be so bad. Any moment now, I would pull myself out and never jump again. I kept swimming, my eyes squeezed shut. Any moment now—

My face hit the creek bed and I jerked my head back from the unexpected pile of rocks. My eyes opened and were immediately assaulted by dirt and grit. Panic consumed me, and I kicked wildly. I screamed, but the sound was swallowed by my tomb. Twelve feet deep and I was at the bottom. I twisted, kicking again and again until my feet found purchase and I struck off of the rocks. There were no more thoughts. Dizzying primal instincts kept me moving. Just as the darkness was creeping into my vision, my head broke the surface. I got half a breath in before I dipped back down. I kicked and reached out, trying desperately to reach the tree. I bobbed up and there was Valerie's concerned face. I heard Mom yelling. Maybe it was all going to be okay now.

“She’s drowning!” Valerie shouted.

It took me a moment to translate what my mom had said. She was yelling, angry. They were ready to go now, and I had best get out of the damn water. Mom watched for a moment as I splashed. Seconds later, I started to sink again. The rippling effect of the water on my vision was almost dreamlike.

My mother remained unconcerned, making her lawn chair collapse with one sharp gesture. “Well, hurry the fuck up!” she said and turned her back to me.

I was sinking deeper again. My legs were too heavy to move. I told myself to splash my arms back up again, but they remained stubbornly immobile. We couldn’t afford a funeral. Mom was going to be so mad at me.

Then I felt a hand around my wrist and with a jerk I was suddenly rushing back up to life again. Valerie had me and was pulling me up to the tree. I coughed up water and sobbed, folding over the tree trunk like a wet towel. Distantly, I heard my mom yelling at me and the truck starting.

She was leaving. I couldn’t move. I could barely breathe.

I watched my left shoe float away downstream, only then realizing it wasn’t on my foot. It was twirling peacefully, steadily filling with water that was bringing it down to the depths. Unlike me, it didn’t splash or scream. It was a dignified captain going down with the ship, and my heart twisted to see it go.

## Twenty-four Hours

*Carol Newman*

In Alaska, it is four in the morning.  
In one hour, our son will rise from his bed,  
brew coffee, and feed his dog and two cats.  
While he sips, his truck will rumble  
itself warm, exhaust fogging the frigid air.

In Florida, another son leaves for his job at eight,  
his skin tan against white scrubs. Impatient, he drives  
too fast on flat roads. His sunglasses reflect ubiquitous  
orange groves, sugarcane fields, and pawn shops.  
He looks at his watch and drives a little faster.

In Arizona, our daughter runs Sabino Canyon  
at six A.M., the sun just beginning to climb  
the Catalinas. At home, her cats line the back of  
the couch. The dogs sprawl, facing the windows.  
Anxious, they wait for her return.

For us, here in Pennsylvania, time is relentless.  
We focus on separate hours, not the days that  
pile up into years. Somewhere in the ridges of time  
are two little boys in yellow jackets who wait  
for a school bus, and a little girl who never walks  
if she can run.

## Zichte

*Kristyn Grieb*

My toxins,  
rolled in their thin  
white paper,  
plague  
me with a chemical  
stench,  
forcing my fans  
to expose  
my presence.

I am either  
an object  
of obsession  
or a disgraceful  
habit.

I could be  
your first thought  
as sleepy eyes peel  
open,  
successfully starting  
another shameful day.

I could be  
your bedtime story,  
a sense of comfort

and relaxation.  
Worries,  
dark like my embers,  
float away  
with whistling wind.

I could be  
your freedom,  
an escape  
when tempers flare,  
eyes burning red,  
but in times  
like these,  
I do not respectfully die.  
I am abused,  
violated,  
until calmness  
finds you again.

I ignite flame  
on a dark night  
as the lonely scream  
their silence.

I am a chaos  
of poisons,  
creeping  
into fleshy  
lungs,  
lurking slowly,

destroying,  
painting a thousand  
coats of black.

## Phantom

*Seth Cheadle*

In a bar that still allows smoking,  
he pushes his way through the clouds  
and all the happy people  
in search of a stool.

After a drink and a cigarette,  
he stands and walks to the back  
where the DJ is set up for karaoke.  
And he sings.

His voice pours out of the speakers,  
crawling across the room,  
dripping honey and whiskey and sorrow,  
the words like little pieces of himself leaving one by one.

When the song is over, he has another shot  
and makes his way back to the door.  
He hangs his head as he walks out.  
His absence goes largely unnoticed.

# Living Yet Dead

*Kateri Hall*

*January 10, One Week after Death: Julie*

Leaning against the balcony rail, I strained my neck to watch the young couple kissing, despite knowing I shouldn't, despite knowing letting myself think of Jonathan caused me nothing but mind-rending pain. I took another drag from my cigarette before finally tearing my gaze from the couple below. They looked so happy, so lost in their love that the harsh reality of life was only a distant threat to them. When was the last time John and I were like that? Definitely not in the last year of his life, I thought. With each day of that year I'd seen the man I loved grow increasingly distant, withdrawn, and depressed.

Pulling my fuzzy blue sweater tighter around me, I took one more hit of my cigarette before tossing it into the water-filled tin can that served as an ashtray. The air had grown chilly as the sun disappeared behind the hills, and my balcony was no longer a place of comfort. After sliding the glass door closed behind me, I swiftly grabbed my hoodie off the rocking chair and yanked it over my head. I already felt cold and numb inside. The last thing I wanted was to feel that way outside, too. I stood in the middle of the room, uncertain what to do next.

Finish packing his belongings away, I thought as my eyes caught sight of his baseball cap resting on top of the dresser. Walking slowly and reverently toward it, I

cautiously picked it up. Turning it over, I pressed it to my face and breathed in his scent. Sweat, Old Spice deodorant, and his generic cologne enveloped my senses, bringing back images of the last time I'd seen him alive.

We had been arguing about him getting another job. He had said he couldn't work, and I'd called him a liar. "Why can't you just be at least a little understanding?" he had yelled at me before storming out of our apartment.

Clutching the hat to my chest, I fell to the floor and began sobbing, remembering the day two years ago when I had given him the hat. We had just returned from our honeymoon and were so happy. How did things go so wrong?

"The baseball game is on," I shouted, sticking my head out the sliding glass door and smiling at my husband.

"Shit," he exclaimed, hastily taking one last hit of his cigarette before rushing inside. Closing the door, he took me in his arms and kissed me deeply. "How did I get so lucky to find a woman who loves the Pirates as much as I do?" he said with a laugh.

Smiling in response, I gave him one last peck before grabbing the remote and cranking the volume up. I watched John settle onto the bed, the mandatory bowl of popcorn I had prepared resting in his lap, before heading to the closet.

"What you looking for, baby?" he asked, puzzlement filling his voice at the sight of his wife actually missing a second of the championship series game.

Ignoring him, I emerged with a shoebox and

scampered to the bed. I plopped down beside him and replaced the bowl of popcorn with the shoebox.

“What’s this?” he asked, watching the first pitch of the game and idly reaching for the bowl of popcorn I now held.

“Open it, dummy,” I said, waiting eagerly to see the look of joy I knew would soon appear on his face.

Sighing, he lifted the lid and rooted through the black and gold tissue paper before finding his gift. “Oh my fucking god, babe!” he shouted, yanking the cap out of the box and placing it worshipfully on his head.

I smiled and admired the Pirates Division Champs hat I had managed to buy before the Champs Sporting Goods sold out.

“Babe,” he whispered as he pulled me to him. He kissed first my forehead, then my nose, and lastly my lips, just as he had when we had first started dating as teenagers ten years before. I heard him whisper, “I love you,” but the words were not important. We already knew we loved each other so much we’d rather die than be apart.

Now, all I could think about was what had been going through his mind the night he jumped. I imagined him standing on the railing of the bridge and gazing down at the water so far below. I visualized him crying softly, wishing his wife could have only listened to him. “I’m so sorry, honey,” I whispered, holding the now damp hat against my face and longing to join my husband on the other side.

*January 10, One Week after Death: Liam*

I’m supposed to feel guilty, I should feel depressed, and I’m expected to be completely falling apart. But I’m not and, surprisingly, that has my friends even more concerned. I didn’t shed a single tear at my wife’s funeral. While my friends and family hovered around me, tears flowing down their faces like waterfalls, I stood calm and stoic. When my best friend, Jeff, embraced me and whispered, “It’s okay to cry,” I merely nodded, unsure how to tell him that I couldn’t cry if I wanted to. No. Not when she took her own life, not when she decided to ruin my life.

I tried to go into work today, but my boss sent me home. “A week is way too soon to come back, Liam. Go home. Relax. Mourn your wife for a few weeks before you even think about showing back up in this bar,” she said, hugging me tightly. I wanted to tell her that I couldn’t mourn my wife, but the look of compassion on her face silenced me.

With nothing else to do, I packed her belongings away all day. Any pictures with her in them, her clothes, jewelry, books, office supplies, and anything of mine that reminded me of her. I would give the majority of it to her brother.

Picking up the last picture of us that remained unpacked, I gazed at her big smile. It’s strange how people always look so happy in photos. Photos don’t tell the real story, though. They don’t tell that she was hospitalized twice for attempting suicide. Or that she received counseling four times a week. Or that I was secretly talking to a divorce lawyer. No, pictures made the whole



world seem bright and perfect. What a load of bullshit, I thought.

I stared at Wendy for a few more moments before flinging the picture frame at the wall. The glass shattered, sprinkling the floor with shards. I knew I'd have to clean it up later, but it felt so good to unleash my rage that the mess was worth it. "You crazy bitch," I screamed, my hands beginning to shake. I felt a wave of pain rising up within me, and I went swiftly into the bedroom. Reaching into the top drawer of my nightstand, I pulled out my baggie of coke. After being clean for two years, I'd gone out and bought an eight ball of coke an hour after the authorities had removed Wendy's body from the apartment.

After snorting four lines, I felt the pain consumed by a familiar fury. I was tired of being in this fucking apartment. I wanted booze, I wanted sex, and I wanted anything that would take me away from my ruined life. I grabbed my leather jacket, wallet, and keys and ventured out my door. There was a strip club just south of downtown where I knew the image of my dead wife would vanish.

#### *April 8: Julie*

Why is it that the more miserable you are, the slower time seems to pass? I remembered when John and I started dating, how a night of passion felt like only a few minutes. Now, missing my husband with every single breath, every second felt like years. I used to dread going to work each

day. I loathed working one job I hated, clocking out, and going to another job I detested even more. Yet, I literally lived for my jobs now. They were what forced me out of bed each morning, compelled me to take a shower and put on clean clothes, and urged me to pretend for fifteen hours a day that I was not completely broken.

"Have a great day," I said with a smile to each customer that came through my checkout line. They all smiled back and wished me the same. My smile grew wider, as if they had just made my day even more wonderful than it already was. Not one of them could see the pain that coursed through my veins; not one of them could sense the sorrow gnawing on my heart. Knowing I had deceived so many people gave me the hope that maybe someday I'd be able to deceive myself as well.

My best friend, Jenna, stopped by to see me last night, bringing with her a heaping pile of wasted good intentions. "I'm very concerned about you, Jay," she said, and I winced at the nickname that only she and my husband used for me. "You don't call me anymore. You don't ever want to hang out."

"I'm sorry," I replied flatly, unable to force sincerity into my voice even to placate her. I reached for my pack of cigarettes that should've been on the small coffee table only to be reminded that they weren't there. Quitting smoking really sucks, I thought, though I was somewhat relieved to finally have done it. I had wanted to quit for years but couldn't talk John into quitting with me. Now I had no excuse not to.

"It's not good for you to stay shut up in this dark, dirty apartment," she continued, and I could tell by her enthusiastic gesturing that she was only just getting started. "And another thing," she exclaimed, reaching into her mammoth purse and retrieving a stack of pamphlets. "You need to read these."

This was characteristic of Jenna. She didn't ask you to do something, or suggest you do it, she commanded you to do it. "Why?" I snapped, glancing at the various titles. *Grieving a Loved One*, *The Grief Process*, *The Do's and Don't's of Grieving*, *Suicide: How to Recover*, and *It's Not Your Fault: A Guide to Overcoming a Loved One's Suicide*, were only a fraction of what she brought.

"Because this is ridiculous. You've made no progress and if you don't do something you're going to end up just like John, and—" I struck her face with my full strength, silencing her.

"Get the fuck out," I screamed, snatching her stack of pamphlets and walking to the door. I flung it open, threw the stack out, and waited for her to follow. She ducked quickly out the door, mumbling something about how I needed to be committed.

I smiled at the memory of the fury on her face. I used to value her friendship, but I now find myself incapable of valuing anything. When I turned on the news, all they talked about was death, pain, suffering, and destruction. A little boy's body had been found decapitated in the river, the newsman said as I climbed into my painfully empty bed and settled in for another night of

nightmares. Before John's death, I would have burst into tears upon hearing of the little boy's death. Now, I merely turned up the volume so I could hear the story better. It was as if I didn't have a soul anymore. Maybe it died with John, I thought as I fought to keep my eyes open.

#### *April 8: Liam*

I woke up and rolled over in bed, reaching for my wife, who I was certain was lying awake crying as always. Not finding her, not finding the sobbing, helpless woman I had to care for, I felt relieved. It took me a moment to remember that I never had to worry about finding her again. Sighing, I sat up slowly, the effects of a massive drinking binge readily apparent. Nausea overwhelmed me, and I ran for the bathroom. Grabbing the doorknob and finding it locked, I slammed my fists against the door.

"Just a second, baby," a female voice called from inside. Without even having time to wonder who the woman was or why the hell she was in my bathroom, I leaned forward and felt the vomit surge its way up my throat. The ugly baby blue carpet my wife had picked out was splashed with orange puke full of floating chunks of what looked like sausage. Great, I thought, imagining myself on my hands and knees with a scrub brush later.

"Wow," the woman, or rather girl, said as she opened the bathroom door and saw the pile of orange sludge. "You should've said something. I would've unlocked it to let you puke." She shook her head and stepped carefully around the mess before prancing to the bed. "You want to fuck some more?" she asked, as if I actually had any idea who

she was. As if she didn't look all of eighteen. As if I wasn't old enough to be her father.

"Umm—" I began, trying to decide if I should pretend to recall last night or acknowledge that I'd blacked out. "I don't really remember much from last night."

"Really?" the girl asked, twirling her tongue ring around in her mouth and slowly working her skintight pants down.

Jesus Christ, I thought, struggling to suppress the arousal growing in my boxers. "Yeah. I remember driving to the bar and then I'm waking up this—" I glanced at the clock on my nightstand, "—this morning."

"Oh," she replied, not really listening to me, as she finally wriggled out of her pants.

"Look, can you please just get dressed and leave?" I snapped. Seeing her thin, shockingly pale, nude body was suddenly sickening to me.

"Why?" she whimpered as she slowly pulled her tank top off. Her young face was contorted into a frown, her curly blond hair framing her face in a disturbingly familiar way.

"Because you look like my dead fucking wife," I shouted, horrified, but unable to deny the resemblance.

The girl's face flashed from confused to angry to resigned. She simply shrugged her shoulders and squirmed back into her clothes. "You're really weird, man. Last night you begged me to fuck you because I looked like that dead bitch. Now you're kicking me out? You better at least pay me what we agreed on." By now she was fully clothed and rooting around under the bed for something.

"Get out," I repeated, the flatness in my voice hiding the growing rage.

"Pay me, then," she snapped, finally standing up, having retrieved her purse from underneath the bed.

"Get. Out," I whispered, infusing the last word with all of the hate I had harbored towards my wife in our twenty-year marriage. My hands turned themselves into tight fists, silently pleading for this ghost of my dead wife to disagree with me once more.

"Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you," the girl shrieked at me as she swiftly made her way out of my apartment. I followed her hoping she'd stop and confront me. Wendy had thrived at provoking me, knowing I could never hit her. But this blond hooker was not my wife. I would gladly pound her brains into the baby blue carpet.

### *June 13: Julie*

I bought a gun. I called a friend of a friend who knew a guy who dealt in illegal firearm sales, and the next day I was the ecstatic owner of a pistol. My friend had asked me what I so urgently needed a gun for. He didn't know that my husband was dead, didn't know that I wanted to join him. All he knew was the lie I told him: "My ex-boyfriend left threatening voice messages, and I want a way to protect myself." I have always hated lying, but somehow that lie didn't feel the same as the many I had told about John. He had the flu, he'd come down with mono, he was remodeling our house, or he wanted to make it but had to help his sister. So many lies just to conceal the reality that my husband was crazy. Looking back,

I couldn't help but wonder if the lies were more for my benefit than for others.

I sat on my bed and lifted the gun out of my nightstand drawer where I had stashed it. Again, I was surprised at its weight and the coldness of the metal against my hands. I wonder who I should bother saying goodbye to, I thought. I knew I wanted to call Jenna. I wanted to tell her that I loved her more than I loved anyone—except John. Yet I had refused to talk to her since she'd brought those goddamn pamphlets to my house, and it didn't seem right to call her now after being so cruel. That left only one other person who would be bothered by my death: my mother.

Just thinking of the hateful old woman prompted me to tense with rage. I tried to forget her behavior at John's funeral, but the memory rushed forward and hit me harder than she ever had when I was a child.

"I told you this would end badly. These kinds of flings always do," she said, approaching me as I rested my head against John's casket and sobbed.

I feebly lifted my head and glared at my mother before looking around the room. Everyone else was clustered at the back of the room, talking quietly in small groups. None of John's family was here to save me from my insane mother this time. "Go away, Mom. Go home," I whispered, walking over to a small table in the corner and yanking out a handful of tissues. I swiped them across my face, for once not caring if my eye makeup was disturbed.

"I told you since you two were kids that this mixing

of the races thing will bring everyone trouble. Now that nig—"

Before she could finish uttering that disgusting word, I was upon her, knocking her to the pink carpet. "You stupid, drunk, racist bitch!" I shrieked, my fist connecting with her wrinkled face repeatedly. "You think the fact that I'm white and he's black has a freaking thing to do with his death? Are you nuts?" I felt her nose crack underneath my fist but couldn't force myself to stop. It felt far too good to see her in pain instead of watching her cause me pain.

"Julie Barbara Davis," John's mother shouted as her strong, dark arms yanked me off my mother. "You are a bigger person than to be hitting on your mother." I brushed past her, fixated on getting away. Away from my evil mother, away from the body of the man I loved.

If I don't call her I'll be just as selfish as she is, I thought, putting the gun down on the bed and retrieving my cell phone from the nightstand. It rang four times before clicking over to voicemail. "This is Barbara. Leave a message or not. I don't care either way." She never could put the bottle down long enough to answer the damn phone, I thought as I waited for the beep.

"Mom, I love you," I whispered, before hanging up, feeling faintly ill at saying the three words I had promised never to say to the woman who was supposed to be my mother. "John," I whispered, setting my cell phone on the bed and picking up the gun. It felt even heavier in my weak grip. I hate guns, I thought, the irony of my impending suicide forcing a smile onto my face. "John." I shoved

the barrel into my mouth, squeezed my eyes shut, and prepared myself to die.

The phone rang. Taking the gun out of my mouth, I glanced at the number. I didn't recognize it. Ignore it. Just pull the damn trigger, I thought. But something, I don't know what, compelled me to answer it. "What?" I snapped, furious at having my last moments interrupted, yet relieved at the delay.

"I'd like to place an order for delivery," a man's voice said, confusion oozing its way across the phone line.

Jesus Christ, I thought, smiling despite my anger. My phone number was only one digit different from Pizza Hut's, and I couldn't even count how many times people had demanded I deliver them a stuffed-crust pizza and wings. "You have the wrong number, idiot," I laughed. And it felt amazingly good.

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry lady," he stammered, and I visualized his face growing red as he hung up the phone. I sat there, staring at my phone and laughing hysterically. I tried to stifle my glee, but once an inkling of happiness was released it refused to be muzzled. I laughed hard, so hard that eventually my laughter turned to tears. I laughed and cried myself to sleep that night, and for the first time since John's depression started, I did not want to die.

### *June 13: Liam*

Imagine living your life as a slave to someone else; that was what my marriage was. Every waking moment, my energy was spent on Wendy. I couldn't take the job as a *sous-chef* at Larry's Crab Palace because it would require

too much time away from home, too much time away from catering to her. I couldn't go out for a few beers on a Friday night because she'd get lonely and cut herself while I was gone. I couldn't visit my family because they'd see that I was married to a crazy woman. My life with Wendy consisted of everything I could not do and the one thing I could do: hold her when she cried herself to sleep every night.

My friends begged me to divorce her, to put her away in an institution where she belonged. But I had loved her once. And maybe I held out hope that someday she would emerge from her zombie-like state and be the young woman I'd taken to prom. Yet when she attempted suicide for the second time, I knew that my friends had been right. Had she not hung herself, I would have told her about the divorce the next day. I was finally free of her, and yet her memory wouldn't stop clinging to me.

Every time I went out to a bar or strip club, the only girls that I wanted were the half-starved blonds with clear blue eyes. All I wanted to do was rid myself of my wife forever, yet I couldn't get off unless I was screwing a girl who looked like her. I unlocked the door to my apartment, my arms filled with brown paper bags. I had decided I was going to have a party and I'd invited my three closest friends: Grey Goose, Jack Daniels, and Captain Morgan. If I couldn't escape my wife when I got drunk and fucked, then I figured the drunken part alone might work.

A few hours later, as I was puking up my intestines into the toilet, I started to wonder if maybe I was more Wendy's slave now than when she'd been alive.

# A World Worth Seeing

*Courtney Gorrell*

Green covers  
eyes that wish to seek  
an unknown world.  
Hold your breath,  
dive in deep.  
Feel your lungs expand.  
The tight muscles in  
your stomach are flexing as  
you bend, you float, as  
light shines bright  
above your head.  
Circular air pockets  
burst and pop.  
New ones form  
until you can't breathe, then  
shoot toward the surface  
of blinding light.  
Like a fish out of water,  
leave that world  
behind, only  
to discover  
this world makes  
mind think,  
body move,  
heart flutter  
with the beats

of the water.  
A place and  
a world worth seeing.

## Tangerines

*Gabri-EL Dawkins*

Blazing down the slick roads at night  
in my mom's new Pontiac,  
my fingers stiffen over the wheel,  
makeup smudging my eyes,  
the distant sky like a river of black,  
pooling in my pupils.  
A quick glance in my rearview mirror,  
the flash of my signal,  
I am safe to pull over.  
I wipe my eyes.  
They're glossy like cellophane;  
my lips cracked like the back of a carp.  
I spot a dying cigarette beside a piece of broken glass.  
I watch as its thin smoke wisps around in the air,  
what little life left being sucked out.  
I pick up the glass,  
lean against the hood,  
waiting,  
savoring the thought of a sliver of blood,  
sweet and sour like a tangerine.

## Little Voices

*Shauna Kelsey*

I stare at the screen,  
faithful cursor blinking,  
waiting,  
tapping his foot impatiently.  
There is nothing but  
white space before me.  
White space between my ears.  
The little voices who whisper secrets  
tell me their stories.  
Whispers are suspiciously silent.  
The absence is like white noise—without all the comfort of  
sound.  
Any sound.  
He speaks, I only see his mouth move.  
The little voices will tell me just how he moves,  
gestures, turns, and fidgets.  
Whispers put color in reality.  
It's too quiet.  
The little voices are out to lunch.

## Dad, the Blur

*Clarice Rutledge*

Chairs flew and pictures crashed around Kari and me as we stood like cold statuettes in the archway of our dining room.

“Take your sister and go to your room,” Mom yelled, her face smothered with worry and anger and fear.

We were two bystanders in the thick of a never-ending domestic war. I watched as my mom crawled, grabbed, clawed, and flailed around the room trying to dodge my father. She managed to fight back enough to snag his chin with a quick jab-cross combo, knocking his head from side to side. But he ate every blow she threw. His counterattack was quick and easy as he got behind my mom and wrapped both arms around her neck, buckling her to the ground.

“Don’t move,” he barked without loosening his vise on Mom’s throat.

She was kicking on the floor and ripping at his arms in attempts to relieve his unwavering dominance just so she could draw in a breath. He looked up at Kari bawling and screaming in confusion as her tears stained the collar of her pink and white nightshirt. Then he looked at me. The gaze of his pale-whites forced its way into my clouded eyes. I stared back, not expecting to see sadness on his face—but there it was. His eyes turned to glass and filled with pain. He gave me a stern look before he reiterated, “Stay there.”

So we stood.

I don’t know what happened after that. After seeing my mom fight for oxygen in my dining room, her face colored crimson, and seeing the dark fury in his once loving eyes. After seeing what little family we had left tainted. It was all a blur, a blackout.

I fell asleep that night determined to make my family’s reality a nightmare. This was nothing but a bad dream, some cruel trick my mind was playing on me. As I lay in my dream, I felt something brush my leg. I woke startled by the two police officers lifting my comforter and shining burning flashlights through my sheets. I could feel the light as it travelled over my legs and under my covers, and I knew I wasn’t dreaming.

“He’s not in the kids’ room,” one officer spoke into his radio.

They didn’t say anything to Kari or me. No questions or anything.

“Kari, we have to find Mommy and Daddy,” I said as I grabbed her hand. “They can tell us why the cops are here.”

Kari always had this way that she looked at me. It was like she believed in everything I said and did. I fixed my nightshirt as I got out of the bed. It was my favorite thing to wear to sleep. There were two teddy bears on the front of it frolicking under arched rainbows. One bear was taller than the other, and I liked to imagine that they were sisters like me and Kari. Kari wore the same nightshirt; it was in her little-sister nature to wear what I did. She grabbed her stuffed bunny, and we darted out of the room.



The sounds of our quickening footsteps running down the stairs rumbled over every officer's radio in the house, and our twisted pigtails slapped against our necks as we raced. I hoped that when we got to my mom she would be unharmed. I hoped that she would be sitting beside my father and they would say we had a burglar in the house. I still hoped for a bad dream.

I got to the living room and didn't see anyone. It was onyx black downstairs, so I rubbed my eyes to help them adjust. The chairs and frames my parents had thrown around the house some hours earlier were still in their damaged positions on the floor in the dining room.

"Sit here on the steps while I find Mommy and Daddy," I told Kari.

"Sissy, I'm afraid of the dark," Kari said. "And the boogie man."

I went to the nearest end table and flicked the light on. Kari sat on the steps and began playing with her bunny as I walked into the dining room.

I was consumed by darkness again when I walked into the next room. Even though our family treasures lay ruined on the floor, I was careful to not step on anything. I tiptoed over the family photo we had taken just a month ago. We were all dressed in red, black, and white—three perfect colors mom thought would complement each of our skin tones. Born to a Syrian and Native American mother and a black father, Mom had the fairest skin a black woman could have, like cream accompanied by warm olive shades and blushed red. My father's skin was a deep chocolate color and sporadically highlighted by yellow undertones.

Kari and I stole color from my father, giving us amber complexions with his tints of yellow. We took Mom's tinges of red too. My parents stood behind Kari and me in the picture, our father barely taller than Mom. All of us had stretched smiles over our faces, and none of them seemed forced. In that portrait, we were the perfect family—the perfect lie.

The officers continued milling around our house, scuffling through the rooms and talking into their radios, tearing me from the portrait's beautiful fallacy and placing me back in reality. I walked forward into the kitchen, which was just off of the dining room, to continue my search.

"Mom?" I said as I poked my head in. I almost whispered it. "Dad?" Nothing.

I turned around and headed back toward the living room. Before I could get there, I was rattled by a dark figure. I wobbled backward, almost stepping on an overturned chair. From there, I didn't move. I didn't scream. I was like one of those actors in a horror film you yell at, "Move, stupid." But I was frozen. My eyes moved from the foot of the silhouette to its torso then to its head. I stood fixated on my father's pale-whites staring down at me. He was cemented to the wall, standing as still as a boulder. He looked like he did every time we played our game of high-speed chase. I would storm after him all around the house, sprinting as fast as my feet would take me, driving Mom crazy in the process. We'd run the loop from the dining room to the kitchen to the breakfast room. Dining room, kitchen, breakfast room. Dining room, kitchen, breakfast room. Until I was eventually running

alone. Without realizing it, I had run right past my father several times. He would hug himself against the wall so tightly that I wouldn't see him. I wondered if he had had the same fun playing our game with the police.

I wanted to know what was going on, why the cops were in our home, and where Mom was. I fixed my lips to whisper his name, but he slowly moved his index finger toward his face and pressed it against his lips. Then I saw my father lunge into the breakfast room and out the back door—a blur in the ink black of night, taking any possibility of an explanation with him. I wished I could race after him in a game of high-speed chase, but I abandoned the notion and turned around.

Walking back into the living room, I was relieved to see my mom and sister together. Kari, still holding her teddy bear, clung to my mom's chest while my mom held her. Mom looked to me as she always had. Her warm skin seemed intact and her long chestnut locks hung past her shoulders.

"Reece, baby, I was just coming to look for you," Mom said. "What were you doing in there? Are you okay?"

"Mommy, why are the cops here?"

"Mommy will tell you later. I want you to go get some pants on under your nightgown and come back with a pair for your sister."

I dashed up the stairs and did as she said. I came back down to see my mom in her coat. Her buttons were fastened in the wrong slots, and she was hastily helping Kari put her jacket on. Mine was sitting on the couch.

"Where are we going, Mommy?"

"We're going to Cousin Sylvia's house for a sleepover," she said with a forced smile. "Put your coat on, ladybug. It's chilly out."

"Is Daddy coming?"

"No, baby. He's not coming."

"Do you know where he is?"

She shook her head and helped Kari into the pants I brought for her. I wanted to tell her that I knew. How he silently promised me to secrecy, and how I watched him disappear through our back door. But I moved toward the couch to put on my coat instead.

"Grab Mommy's hand," my mom said, extending her arms. With Kari on her left and me on her right, my mom led us outside, took us to a squad car, and fastened the seat belts.

"I'll be right back, okay? Mommy's going to go talk to the police officer."

My mind boiled with curiosity about where my father could be. I looked up and down the brick road, my eyes painting the street in hopes that I would see some sign of him. Any movement. A shadow. A footprint. Saline drowned my eyes until they could no longer contain the tears, letting the drops trickle down my round cheeks. I wiped my face angrily and waited for my mom.

Waking up the next day, I felt life moving in slow motion. Cousin Sylvia made breakfast early so her daughter, Jocelyn, and I could have a meal before school. Mechanically, I ate, got dressed, and waited for Cousin Sylvia to drive us to school. Cousin Sylvia was an awfully small woman, extremely petite and thin. She wore glasses

thick enough to burn holes in paper with help from the sun and had an overbite that caused her top lip to lay in an odd way. Her lip always poked out. It wasn't uncommon for it to stick to her top row of teeth in mid-conversation, suctioning to the enamel as she tried to talk. Cousin Sylvia would slip her tongue in between her teeth and lip to separate them, only for her lip to reattach in the next breath. She didn't usually say too much to me. Today was a different story.

"You girls are going to have a good day at school today," she said. "Right, Reece?" She looked back at me through her rearview mirror. I looked out the window at the trees we whizzed past, turning them to blurs of brown and green. I wasn't looking forward to school that day. All I wanted was to be home. I hadn't even wanted to stay at Cousin Sylvia's the night before.

"Why can't we go home?" I asked my mom when we got to our cousin's house. "I want to sleep in my own bed."

"We can't go home tonight," Mom said. "We'll go back in a few days." Her to-do list didn't consist of being home when my father returned to the house.

"You have a play coming up, Reece," Cousin Sylvia said as we pulled into George Washington Elementary School. "Are you excited? Me, Mommy, and Joey can't wait to see you on stage." She parked the car in front of the school's main entrance.

I nodded, keeping my gaze focused out of the car window and clutching my Disney princess backpack.

"Well, you girls have a good day. See you in a bit." School that day was typical. Roll call. Weather.

Patterns. Lunch. Recess. ABCs. Story time. My routine kindergarten schedule was interrupted when my teacher approached me some time between recess and story time.

"Reece, can you step into the hall, please," Mrs. Carroll said. "There's someone waiting for you." Mrs. Carroll was a tall, fair-skinned woman. She wore her brunette hair down almost every day and styled herself in long denim skirts and colorful shirts, usually with apples on them. If she wore one without apples, she always made up for it by wearing a wooden apple pin on the breast of her denim vest she draped over the tops of her shirts.

Without saying anything, I went to the hall and found my father standing there smiling. His smile was awkward that day. He smiled almost as if it hurt him. Knowing what he was up against, my father had hoped the strained smile would be enough to pacify me for the moment. He bent down on one knee, keeping the white of his teeth exposed.

"How are you, babe?" he asked. He grabbed my hands and held them as I locked eyes with his pale-whites.

"Fine, Daddy. Are you coming home when we go home?" I blurted out. My face was marked with desperation. He noticed and turned his head, staring down the empty hall.

"Probably not," he said, finally looking back to me. "Me and Mommy aren't getting along right now. She did a bad thing and called the cops on Daddy, and now I can't come home for a while."

I leapt into his arms almost too quickly for him to catch me. My arms stretched to capacity to wrap around

him, and my face pressed against his chest. The tears on my full cheeks specked his white T-shirt as he embraced me tightly. I felt love in his firm grip.

“Don’t cry, babe,” he said. “This isn’t your fault.” He pulled me away to look me in the eyes one more time. “I don’t want you blaming yourself, you hear me? Daddy will still come see you, okay? As long as Mommy lets me, I will. I promise.”

All I could manage was a whimper and a nod. My father kissed my forehead and stood up. “Okay, you’ve got to go back to class now, babe,” he said, wiping my face clear of any trace of a tear. “I love you.”

“I love you too, Daddy,” I said. He kissed me one last time before I went back into the classroom.

He watched and waited as I went back inside. Mrs. Carroll closed the door behind me. I turned around and gave him one final wave goodbye. He smiled and returned the gesture. His smile was happy now, just like he looked in our family photo. Then he was gone. As quickly and unsuspectingly as he’d come, he left—a blur. Usually the blurs in life are kind, like unoffending tumbleweeds floating through our lives. This blur was nothing like that. This stealthy tumbleweed followed me with dangerous closeness.

## The S.S. Arbitratus

*Shane Phillips*

We played five-card poker and drank  
cheap bourbon on ice with the remaining crew,  
watching the water soak and rust  
the legs of our foldout chairs.  
The water was over our buckles before  
we knew it and continued its rise without relent.  
But the bourbon was good, and many stayed.

The rest scattered like rats from the sinking ship:  
a mass exodus from the familiar,  
into a world we had only seen through portholes.  
We were lucky that the ship was our home,  
that we knew each tile and crumb so well,  
every shadow and paint chip so familiar and pleasant.  
Many bore the question, why leave at all?  
But the ship was going down, and there was only that.

When we reached the bow and looked long into  
the deafening sea, we abandoned our comforts  
and laid waste to what might be.  
Some closed their eyes but others did not,  
some were pushed and others fell of free will,  
and some held so tight to the rail,  
so ridged and unyielding,  
that it seemed silly for them to go with us.

## Haiku IV

*Jennifer Willemin*

White Sunday orchids  
glisten with wet morning dew.  
Springtime winds *commence*.

## A Car Ride's Daydream

*Cecelia Prosser*

As a game he counted them  
from the back seat of the Ford wagon.

Lone gray metal horses, ever-pumping  
the boring mission of their existence.

Yet when up close they hypnotize  
with an rhythmic electrical hum.

Nodding off, he envisioned a silver-steeled dragon  
beating her wings as she takes flight.

Her scales so polished they sparkle blue-silver,  
tongue red with flames, nostrils black with smoke.

The spewed petroleum waste is foul—strong,  
becoming the dragon's true smell and blood.

Rushing fiercely into battle, skimming treetops,  
watching the prey that dots the undergrowth.

Too late, too close, he realizes the sharp, birdlike nails  
are for him, to pull, tear, claw, and rip.

With a slamming car door, he's brought back to reality,  
too soon awakened to realize his outcome.

## Creek

*Micaiah Meads*

In their natural habitat,  
sun reflects off the water  
beside grass and patches of dirt.  
Methodically I climb down the rugged hill.  
Poor method,  
I tumble,  
clothes turned to camouflage,  
face masked with dirt.  
The creek hugs me and breaks my fall.  
Tiny fish scatter like school just let out.

## Anorectic

*Kelly Schucker*

I stand in the college dining hall and look around me. Against my will, numbers immediately dance, gracefully shimmering, waltzing within my head. Orange juice, 112. Apple, 50. Bagel, 150. Vegetable lasagna, 420. Muffin, 112. Cheerios, 110. Taco shell, 35. Oatmeal raisin cookie, 59. Pizza, 188. These numbers will never leave me. Two and a half years into recovery and the caloric and nutritional content of any food that has ever been a consistent part of my diet is something I'm disconsolately knowledgeable of, despite interminable desires to forget.



Eating disorders don't exist in real life. They exist on TV. In magazines. Online. They happen to a friend of a cousin's father's aunt's child's peer. They are a thing to gossip about in hushed voices with crude tones when you see someone on the street that's just a little too thin for it to be considered natural while you struggle to make your stare not quite so conspicuous.

Anorexia doesn't happen to people that you know. It may happen to your closest friend from pre-K, your brother, a cousin. But not to people you know. Because eating disorders change people. When your best friend becomes anorectic, you merely know who she used to be

before and who she pretends to be now. You have no idea who she really is.

For years, no one knew I skipped breakfast. And lunch. And I played with the food on my dinner plate until I learned it was easier to cause a screaming match with my overworked mother, who would send me to my room before dinner commenced.

So no one really knew when I decided I was finally sick of being ill, tired of being fatigued and weary. I'd had enough insomniac nights where I'd listen to depressing music and look at my nude body in the mirror, feeling my bones, sticking out my stomach and then sucking it in until my lungs ached. I'd had enough of the anguish of fasting for too many hours, then ruining the effort with a twenty-minute binge, only to suffer the rest of the night with a distended abdomen and intensifying cramps from the laxatives. I'd had enough of scales and more scales and mirrors and clothes both too loose and too tight simultaneously. After over four years of silently struggling with my anorexia and bulimia, I realized that being sick can become sickening.

But I cannot tell you with any sincerity that I hated my eating disorder. To say such a thing is to completely simplify four years of a mental disorder that both tormented and satiated me. I loved her; she was that reliable best friend/best enemy that you don't want to associate with but cannot imagine living without.

Because secrets are oppressive and exciting at the same time. I enjoyed fasting and knowing that no one else knew just how long it had been since I last ate. I enjoyed

writing everything down, taking constant notes—the food I ate, the full nutritional content, when I ate and how much. I wrote stories about flitting little girls that were too thin to be brushed by the blowing wind, too weightless to leave footprints in the snow. Beautiful romance stories. I wrote love poems to ketosis.

My eating disorder was my mistress. She snuck into my room every night and made love to my protruding bones, drawing invisible plastic surgery lines with her tongue wherever the fat was too apparent (stomach, thighs, upper arms), seducing me with her harsh, frigid touch, forcing goose bumps to rise on my fragile paper skin.

To me, anorexia meant not to take in very little food but to take in everything else in great abundance; while fasting, my senses were overloaded by the glorious world around me. I felt like a philosopher, an observer, a faithful learner, the ideal writer with my mind sharp.

But I had to leave her. I had to give her up because sometimes the things you love are the things that hurt you most.

Anorexia doesn't happen to people you know. I've never known anyone who had anorexia, even though I suffered from several types of eating disorders commingling for a handful of years. I didn't know myself when I was anorectic; I knew my excuses, I knew my obsessions, my fears. But I lost myself.

I lie naked in bed atop the duvet, cold. I am always cold. The lights are on. My lover looks at me with warm

eyes and, when she touches me, my skin blushes at the contact. She leaves my lips softly sizzling with each kiss. She ignites me. I am nervous but I am not afraid; there is nothing to fear. She makes me feel comfortable and safe in a way that no other person ever has and in a way that anorexia surely never could.

Even after three years of recovery from my eating disorder, I struggle. By the day. By the hour sometimes. But she helps me through it.

## Visitation

*Kristyn Grieb*

As I lay my head down  
after our nightly phone call  
that only ends in an ache  
for fifteen more minutes of you,  
I half-smile at the thought  
of your eager hands  
scribbling that letter.

The positivity in your voice  
is certainly strained by now.  
It's almost been ninety days  
and time has slowed to a near halt.

Still, every Tuesday and Saturday  
I wait with butterflies and sweaty palms  
to speak through a fuzzy telephone  
and quarter-inch glass.

Anything for love.

Your face is always stretched with a smile  
that belongs on cartoon characters  
when they see their crush  
and their eyes turn into hearts.  
My cheeks turn to a cabernet hue,  
and my eyes could light that dungeon



with just one glance.

Even the dumbest of criminals  
can see the chemistry.

With tilted heads  
and our lower lips half-bitten,  
we place our hands  
on the glass to say goodbye,  
for now.

Another movie-script moment  
in our far too realistic lives.

## **Familiar to Him**

*Courtney Gorrell*

Some nights, I sleep with  
my dress on,  
the pale white lace embraces the sea-green  
silk, shiny and all  
too familiar to him.

Is he  
serious?  
Staring, gaping,  
acting as if I would choose him again, thinking all about  
my dress, which is all  
too familiar to him.

He plays the game, a  
boyish play  
for a player, a game  
that he must conquer,  
the glittered sequins, the  
fresh scent of my perfume upon  
the tightening fabric,  
and still  
too familiar to him.  
I don't believe in his  
arrogant, seductive quarters. Not in  
the least.  
But he loves me,

more than any girl,

a line I've heard one  
time too many,  
until he  
wants something  
better, a dress, all  
too familiar to him.

I refuse him his desire for the dress,  
for the body which it holds.

Some nights, I sleep  
with my dress on, a gown  
made for his princess, he said,  
and I know it is all too  
familiar to him.

## Flakes

*Lisa J. Chapman*

The flurry of flakes descending willy-nilly  
set upon a course that changes abruptly,  
blown by a weightless current affecting a negligible mass,  
but like bees to a hive arrive eventually,  
settle and stop with the others,  
rest in vast numbers no longer singularly visible.

Wonderfully unique, each flake,  
ragged and torn-looking they come,  
cotton fluffs, no aerodynamic advantage,  
no mechanical design to exploit the atmosphere,  
just a freezing formation on high before the natal fall,  
a solitary journey among many, swirling, floating . . .

This afternoon's snowfall is not unlike many this long winter.  
Over months the accumulations have grown to mounds,  
banks of inert flakes compressed to rigid blocks near ice,  
no motion, just stillness waiting to receive their falling  
brothers.

No more random flight, descent, fierce dislocation,  
just rest among many until spring displacement transforms.

## Alaska Haibun

*Carol Newman*

Here, skinny pine trees bristle the landscape, roots anchored in blue permafrost. Moose, heads heavy with antlers, amble across city sidewalks, disappear, in the mist like apparitions. In the shadow of the pipeline, grizzlies linger, wade for salmon. Their fur, streaked blond like Hollywood starlets', ruffles in the wind. Aurora Borealis spangles the sky, crackles, swishes with energy. Windows silvered with summer tin foil pick up the glint of daytime headlights. Fire flowers ignite snow-capped mountains, blaze against grass, brown and brittle. Glaciers slide over land, white roads curving toward Russia. In a two-month summer, forget-me-nots splash blue on green grass while wolves scavenge remote tourist rest stops. By late August, the air is edged clean like a knife blade, heavy with frost and crystals, smells like snow. On the North Slope, 30,000 caribou, hooves sledge-hammering the earth, shift in undulating waves, and Dall sheep cling like bits of lint to rock faces.

Winter glaciers melt,  
pieces break off, bump the earth,  
the world floats away.

## Waking Up from a Daydreaming Nightmare

*Kateri Hall*

*P*ain. "I can't stop," he gasped. "I've always wanted to do this. I've always wanted to fuck a black girl." As he uttered those horrific words, I looked up and out the car window, seeing the outlines of the forest surrounding us, and longed to let go. I desperately wished I could leave my body in this miserable, filthy car and drift away among the trees. Pain. Pain forced me back into reality. So much pain it felt like I was being swallowed whole. My shouts of protest turned into hysterical shrieks, and I was certain that someone would hear me. Until I remembered the forest, until I recollected, through a haze of drugs and alcohol, the drive down the long dirt road into this desolate place. No one could hear me. No one would come to help me. I knew I was going to die. Pain. Instead of just demanding that he stop, I started to beg him to. I promised not to tell anyone, I promised to give him money and drugs. Anything if he would only stop. Finally, his expression turned from euphoria to rage. He took both of my wrists in one hand and clamped the other one firmly over my mouth. I couldn't beg. I couldn't tell him no. I couldn't do anything but lie there and feel the pain.

"Hall!" Ms. Fatima's enraged howl rescued me from my own personal hell. "It's mail time. You got a letter." She

stood over me, her hair elegantly pulled back into a bun which stood in sharp contrast to her too-dark lipstick and tacky checkered shirt.

“Right,” I said, as if I knew what was happening, as if I had not just finished having a waking nightmare. I pulled myself back into the present, back into the reality of my three-month drug and alcohol rehab stay.

“Here you go. And stop daydreaming during orientation workshop,” she grumbled as I took the letter, which I knew must be from my dad. No one else bothered to acknowledge that I still existed since I’d gone into rehab. I had been at Gaudenzia Crossroads Drug and Alcohol Rehab Center since the morning of May 7, and after two weeks here I still had not received one letter from any of my so-called friends. I carried the letter back to my seat, but despite my usual excitement at getting mail, I left it unopened.

Daydreaming, I thought with a sad laugh. Nobody daydreams about being raped. My hands curled into tight fists, and I felt my heart begin to pound. I tried to think of something else to keep my mind from finding its way back to that horrid night. Yet it seemed the harder I struggled not to think about it, the more I did. Bill’s face appeared before my eyes as vividly as if it was May 5 again and I was sitting in that cruddy little bar.

Booze, with its sickly sweet yet bitter scent, forced its way down my throat, even when I knew my mind was already far gone. Cigarette smoke filled my lungs, and I tried to pretend that being so high, so incredibly broken,

was fun.

“Don’t look so pissed off, sweetie,” a dark-haired man said as he flopped onto the barstool beside me. Rolling my eyes, I tried to think up a clever way to say “get lost,” but found that the shots only added to what the drugs had done: they reduced my brain to barely functional. “Why?” I finally replied after several seconds, glancing over my shoulder to see where Ivan, my drinking buddy, had gone.

“Because it’s fucking Cinco de Mayo! Have a shot of tequila on me, sweetie,” the dark-haired man shouted, throwing his arm across my shoulder and motioning the bartender over. I thought about objecting to his offer, but figured that I was already so far gone that one more shot wouldn’t hurt. Ivan will make sure I get home safe, I thought, completely trusting the man I had only met the other night. Jeremy, my best friend, had introduced me to Ivan, and I figured if Jer approved of Ivan then Ivan must be all right.

“Thanks,” I slurred as the man handed me my shot. He raised his and we toasted, grinning stupidly at each other like only the drunk and high could.

“I’m Bill,” he shouted over the music and the conversations of the dozens of people packed into tiny Bunyan’s Bar.

“Kateri,” I said, smiling at him and looking around nervously for Ivan. If that bastard had left me here...

“Billy!” Ivan screamed as he came bounding out of the crowd. I watched as the two men high-fived each other and could not help but be annoyed by the fact that everyone seemed to know everybody in this town.

The three of us hung out at the bar until closing time. I felt someone shaking me, opened my eyes, and realized that I had nodded out on the barstool. "Bill is going to give you a ride home," Ivan said as the two men helped me up.

"But," I mumbled, slightly alarmed.

"My girlfriend called, and I have to get home now. I don't have time to drop you off. But Bill's good people. He'll get you home, babe." Ivan gave me a peck on the cheek and then handed me over to Bill. Unable to think of how else I would get home, I allowed Bill to half drag, half carry me to his car.

"So what did you do tonight to get yourself so messed up, kiddo?" he asked as he pulled out into the near-empty streets.

"I did some klonopins and xanies. I would've been all right if I hadn't drank so much on top of it all," I mumbled, struggling to stay conscious and not even caring that he'd called me kiddo. He had been using the word most of the night since he'd found out I was only twenty-one. He deemed himself so much more mature at thirty-five and drunkenly boasted about it.

"Nice," he said with a chuckle. "You want to go somewhere and do some coke?" He cursed under his breath at catching a red light.

"Coke? Yeah, sure," I slurred, fighting as hard as I could to stay awake. I needed to ask him where he planned to go and if he wanted any money in return. Unfortunately, I lost my struggle and nodded out once more.

"Are you all right, Hall?" Ms. Fatima shouted from her perch in the front right corner of the room. She sat there on her stool, watching the other clients and me work on the various assigned worksheets. She seemed to be trying to think up reasons to reprimand us. Orientation workshop was a glorified study hall. Those clients that were not off orientation phase worked on the assigned work for that phase and those that were already off sat around and tried to look busy.

I stared at her blankly, feeling nauseous, dizzy, terrified. I attempted to catch my breath but succeeded only in gasping for air. Closing my eyes, I tried to reassure myself that I was in a safe place, that he couldn't hurt me anymore, but all I could see, hear, smell, and feel was Bill. I saw his goatee and the look of determination in his eyes, I heard the deep tone of his voice, I smelled the metallic stench of my own blood, and I felt a shadow of the pain.

"Do you want me to help you to the nurses' station?" Ms. Fatima asked gently, resting her hand on my shoulder to get my attention.

I instantly recoiled from her touch, my eyes opening in terror. Despite the absurdity of it, I fully expected to see Bill leaning over me. Relieved, shocked, and confused at Fatima's mild demeanor, I nodded.

As we walked down the long corridor to the nurses' station, I forced myself to focus on Fatima's back. I made myself memorize the ridiculous green-and-pink-checkered pattern that was splayed across the back of her red shirt. Green, pink, green, pink, green, pink. I will not go back to that horrible place, I silently commanded my mind. Yet my

mind would not be ordered about.

Nothing. No street lights, no houses, no cars.

Nothing. Nothing but my fear and the blackness out the window and the suddenly ominous man beside me.

I woke up and saw the town disappearing behind us as we turned onto a dirt road. I felt a rush of panic as I struggled to remember where I was and who I was with.

“You’re awake, kiddo. Good. We’ll be there before you know it.”

I knew I should have asked where *there* was, but the pull of the drugs and alcohol forced me back out of reality.

When I awoke again, it was to Bill shaking me by the shoulders. “Finally, you’re up. I was starting to worry,” he said with a laugh.

Confused, I looked out the window and saw nothing but woods around us. “Are we going to do the stuff already?” I asked, wishing I had just said no to begin with.

Bill just looked at me and laughed before hitting a button that slid the front bench seat back, creating more room in front. Before I could ask him what he was doing or what was so funny he was grabbing my legs and yanking me toward him.

“So what’s bothering you?” Nurse Peg asked, staring intently at me.

“Umm,” I mumbled, struck by the idiocy of agreeing to go see the nurse without any idea as to what to tell her. Certainly not the truth. No one could ever know what had happened that night. If I told her, I was sure she

would look at me like the stupid, pathetic, dirty druggie that I knew myself to be.

“*Umm* isn’t an answer,” she said with a chuckle before seeming to realize the seriousness of whatever secret I guarded. “I get the feeling that what’s bothering you isn’t physical,” she stated, gently reaching out to take my hand.

Cringing, I crossed my arms across my chest to protect myself from her touch. “I can’t tell you. Or anyone,” I whispered, straining to keep my voice even.

“Why? You should know I’m not going to judge you.” Her eyes sought to meet mine, but I focused on the white floor tiles, boring my gaze into them. I could feel my heart begin to race, my breath begin to quicken as if I were running, and I knew I was going to see Bill yet again. Why so many times today? I wondered, angry that the flashbacks were getting worse as time went on instead of better.

Pain. Pain choked off all other feelings; pain radiated from my crotch yet filled my entire body. Blood. So much of it that I thought he must have stabbed me. But no. I felt the blood soaking my skirt and the back of my shirt and realized it was from my crotch. Pain and the stench of my own blood wrapped around me, creating a cocoon of hell.

One last unimaginable burst of pain and then he was finally finished. His left hand released my wrist, his right my mouth. He is going to kill me now, I thought, and began to shriek again in hope that someone would save me. His hand lashed across my face, and I tasted blood. As he

started to yell at me, I closed my eyes and accepted death. It won't be so bad, I thought. At least this night will be over. At least I won't have to hurt anymore.

"You had this coming all night and you fucking know it," he shouted, placing me back into a sitting position. He returned the seat to its original position, zipped up his pants, and started the car. "This is your fault for being such a fucking tease. You understand me, kiddo?"

It's my fault? I thought, trying to process the horrific revelation. "I understand. Are you going to take me home now? Please."

"Yeah. But you start any more of that screaming bullshit and we're going to have some serious problems. Okay?" His voice had contorted from kindness into something deadly and ugly.

"Okay," I whispered, allowing myself to pass out again and almost hoping that I would not wake up.

"Wake the fuck up, bitch!"

He was shaking me violently and screaming in my face. I felt beads of spit splatter onto my cheek and longed to wipe them off but found my body limp and useless. "This your house?" he asked, grabbing me by my hair and yanking me up to see out the window.

I tried to focus on the house but it was merely a blur. My eyelids grew heavy, and I began to panic at the thought of passing out again. Focus, I commanded myself. Through my dizzy, blurry perception of the world, I recognized a blurb of red on the porch. My brother's stupid bike, I thought with relief. "Yeah," I groaned as I willed myself to stand up, open the door, and get out of his car before

he changed his mind and decided to take me back to the woods.

"Good," he growled, and climbed out of the car. In a moment, he was opening my door and yanking me out. "Can you walk?" he asked, releasing his hold on my waist for a brief moment. Despite my desperate plea for my body to stay standing, I felt myself falling toward the brick-paved street before Bill's hands were upon me again. "Guess not," he grumbled as he dragged me to the front porch. "Open the door," he whispered, apparently recalling that I lived with my dad and siblings.

"No," I slurred, terrified of what he would do if I granted him access to my house.

"I'm not going to rob you. I'm just going to help you get cleaned off and into bed," he said, his grip on me tightening.

"Oww," I whimpered. "I can't let you in. I can get myself in bed. Please just leave." All I wanted was to be safe in my own home with him gone.

"Fine," he snapped, releasing his hold on me and bolting down the stairs. I collapsed on the porch and lay there until I could no longer hear the sound of his car.

"If somebody hurt you, it doesn't help to keep it bottled up inside," Nurse Peg said, her dark eyebrows furrowing in concern.

What good would it do to tell anyone? I thought angrily. Instead of acknowledging that she had spoken, I simply glared at her. I studied the dark, aging skin of her face; I focused on her heavy purple eye shadow that

matched the purple scrubs she perpetually wore. She lived in a world of normalcy, of happiness. Her world had never revolved around drugs and all the terrible things a woman will do to get them.

“Whatever happened isn’t your fault,” she whispered.

“And how would you know?” I snapped, instantly furious that she would pretend to understand me.

“You were raped, weren’t you?” she asked, her voice so quiet I struggled to hear it. “That’s why you’ve been cutting yourself so frequently and isolating from the other clients.”

I thought about denying it. I thought about telling her to go fuck herself and getting up and walking out the front door of the rehab. Then I thought about Bill and began to cry. I cried harder and longer than I had since my friend Greg had died of an overdose earlier that year. Tears soaked my face, my neck, my shirt. I felt Nurse Peg’s hand on my knee, and I clasped it tightly, resting my face against it and allowing myself to release my inner torment.

“It’s my fault,” I said, after what felt like an eternity of tears. I had moved my chair closer to Nurse Peg’s and held her hand with an iron-like grasp. My other hand clutched a wad of tissues that I had used to wipe my face.

“Why would you think that?” she asked, her voice tense.

Taking a deep breath, I gave her a summary of one of the worst nights of my life. “I put myself in that situation because I was stupid and worried more about

drugs than my own safety,” I said, suppressing another barrage of sobs.

She sighed and shook her head before replying, “Just because you made some bad choices does not give any man the right to do that.”

“Yeah, but he was right. I flirted with him. I was dressed like a slut,” I began to list the reasons why I had inadvertently led Bill on, but she abruptly cut me off.

“Bullshit,” she snapped, her hand lifting my chin so I was forced to look into her brown eyes. “I don’t care if you were running around the bar naked. It is not an invitation to be raped.”

“You just don’t understand,” I said, yanking my hand free.

Nurse Peg took a sharp intake of breath and sat up a little straighter before calmly replying, “I was raped, too.”

“What?” All of my hostile feelings crawled into a deep hole and died upon hearing those words.

“It happened years ago when I was still an active alcoholic. I made some awful decisions because I was drunk and a man took advantage of me.” She paused, taking my reluctant hand in her own. “Do you think it was my fault that that asshole raped me?”

I opened and closed my mouth, my mind drifting from one answer to the next. Finally, swallowing a difficult truth, I replied, “I don’t think it was your fault. It was his fault.”

“So, if it wasn’t my fault, how can it be your fault?” she asked, voicing what my mind was already attempting to comprehend. “And for that matter, you can’t honestly



believe that he really couldn't stop himself. He could stop; he chose not to. He targeted you because you were a vulnerable, black female, and he was a disgusting pig."

"It wasn't my fault," I stated, though the idea felt far more like a question than an actual truth. Nurse Peg smiled cautiously, pulling me toward her into an embrace. My arms stayed locked at my sides for a moment before surrendering to the comfort.

## Songbird

*Jennifer Willemin*

I.

My darling musician boy,  
you reside somewhere in the Steel City's boondocks—  
lingering in corridors,  
no doubt,  
having a much better time,  
immersed in dim city lights,  
smoking leftover cigarettes  
with some beautiful girl  
you have no real feelings for.

II.

I'm progressively rotting on the inside,  
while you feel nothing short of wondrous.  
Yet, when winter comes around,  
the dust on our picture frames  
and frost on the window ledge  
will be the only things protecting you.

## Sedona, Arizona Haibun

*Bonnie McMillen*

Red and mauve rocks, golden cactus flowers, brown-burnished rocks, dusty roadways, touristy stores, cold, frosty glasses of iced tea with yellow lemons on the side. Pink jeeps giving tours amid waves of heat in the air. Flowers of red, yellow, and orange along the streets with green-leaf borders. Wildflowers along the roadways with tiny, orange blossoms, Snoopy Rock, Teapot Rock reflecting a mauve redness in the sun, winding roads, switchbacks, snaking up the mountains. Trees misshapen from the wind, blown too far east. Juniper pines with little light blue berries, their growth stunted by the heat and lack of water. Dry air sucks moisture out of everything, including the people. A clean smell lingers, pines, a Juniper Gin smell. Heat, everything is hot. Rocks feel rough, harsh, coarse, sandy to the touch. All is quiet except for the animal sounds, a bird screeching, a horse's whinny. A magical place with vortexes not explained by science and caves of cliff dwellers who lived thousands of years ago in the Verde Valley.

Mauve red golden rocks  
Teapot Rock piercing blue sky  
time without ending

## Questions for Your Empty Days

*Kristyn Grieb*

Did your disease  
produce a thought  
that infected your brain,  
leaving only enough room  
for the pleasure  
your heart pounded for?

What did it feel like  
when the pain settled  
and reality attacked  
from every angle?

Did my face appear  
when you closed your eyes,  
or only scattered pills  
with stamped numbers  
and bright-colored coatings?

Did you quarantine  
your heart  
when you admitted  
the truth,  
or is that the next  
part of your body  
you'll use  
as an excuse?

How badly does it sting  
to have your freedom  
ripped away?  
Is round two worse,  
or does it ache  
about the same?

## **Ignorant**

*Micaiah Meads*

I lie down, blood flows south.  
Any beast can be tamed, right?  
Soaked in the sweat of superficial desire,  
she lies peacefully,  
seemingly unaware of the déjà vu.  
Opposite motives bring us closer together.  
The body knows what the mind doesn't,  
the mind knows what the body doesn't.

## Vertigo

*Carol Newman*

When I am dizzy with anger,  
the world in disarray,  
he retaliates, flies off  
the proverbial handle, screams  
fuck fuck fuck fuck until  
I can see the act itself  
as if from a great height.  
That twining of bodies,  
the urgency, the surrender,  
and the slippery, mindless descent  
into the cool orgasmic waters  
of acceptance.

## Losing Saturday Morning

*Clarice Rutledge*

I had hoped for a warmer greeting when I walked into the clinic. Instead, greyish blue walls like clouded rainy skies and stainless steel chairs, some with torn seat pads, filled the room, and I felt cold. A shiver struck like lightning through my spine and reminded me that this was real, not the dream I was trying to force it to be. When I walked through the doors, I wanted my apprehension to disappear. I hoped for a sudden reckoning that what I was about to do was just. I had hoped for a warmer greeting.

My yellow palms were reddish and sweaty from clenching my fists, one around the strap of my purse, the other at my side. My mother and I walked over to the glass window where a woman in blue pants and white scrubs sat smiling. My footsteps felt like lead in water. I didn't return the favor of smiling back at the woman. A quarter of a smile would have to suffice.

"Hi, my name is Reece," I said in the most pleasant voice I could offer her. "I have an 8 A.M. appointment scheduled for today."

The woman turned to her computer to search for my appointment, and her expression changed. Now she knew why I had come to this place with the rainy-sky walls. She looked at me with sympathetic eyes that told me how familiar she was with my situation because girls like me must be in and out of here all the time, alone or with their

mothers. But she didn't know me, and she didn't know my situation. And I despised her for assuming she did.

Her bulky pants rustled as she walked to grab a clipboard and pen. She then became a drill sergeant and rattled off a list of things she wanted me to do. *I need you to fill out these forms*, she told me. *Sign them when you're done. Take this cup with you to the ladies room. Fill it up to the line and leave it in the small window of the bathroom wall for our medical assistant before filling out the forms.* Her voice carried a rare niceness despite the routine way she delivered the orders, but her pity was the last thing I wanted.

My mother went to sit down in the waiting room as I straddled the toilet, trying to make myself fill the cup to the line. My nerves had caused multiple bathroom visits already that morning. I finished, rinsed the cup, and put it in the little window before washing and drying my hands. I avoided looking in the mirror as I left to fill out the forms.

My feet dragged me to a seat next to Mom's. Her cream face was flushed and pale. She sat with her hands resting on her lap and her head facing forward, never wandering. I knew she was reciting a thousand and one prayers a minute in her head. She turned to look at me and I could tell she wanted to smile, to be pleasant, but couldn't.

"Here, Reece." She handed me the clipboard. "You have to fill these out. They gave you damn near ten forms." Mom just wanted this to all be over. Then she could recapture a sense of normalcy, and she would feel better. The sooner it was over, the faster Mom could go back to work and not tell her co-workers that she was expecting

a grandchild at age thirty-six. The sooner the better. Whoever came up with that phrase couldn't have been more wrong.

I began the process of telling my medical life story through checkboxes and fill-in-the-blanks. One form asked questions like *Was it your choice to terminate your pregnancy?* No. *Did you seek our services on your own free will?* No. *Is anyone pressuring you to be here?* Yes. I penned three shaky checkmarks, two *Yeses* and a *No* respectively, as my mother glared over my shoulder. I signed and dated, dated and signed, then initialed twice before I took the clipboard back to the window. The lady smiled at me again, and I managed a half-smile this time. On my way back to the cold chair, a couple walked into the clinic. They held hands and had bright eyes and wore broad smiles on their faces. The woman behind the window greeted them the same way as she had my mother and me. Her expression was unchanged as she looked up their appointment and told them to have a seat.

Their ring fingers shone with wedding jewels. The man helped the waddling woman to her seat and kissed her forehead lightly. She was consumed by the mass on her abdomen, which turned her walk into a hobble and scooped her back a little inward as she bent backward to support it. Her maroon sweater was oversized, but you could still see where the cotton material outlined the point of her bellybutton. The father rubbed his wife's round midsection and placed another kiss on her cheek. The mother's skin radiated with joy and excitement, and the couple shared a smile. The father yawned, his eyes heavy with 5 A.M.

shifts and overtime. He reached for the mother's right hand while she read a baby names book. He shut his eyelids and leaned back to nap, never letting go of her hand. And I thought, what a lucky soon-to-be kid. Their baby was a girl, no doubt. It would be unfair for a daughter not to have a father as seemingly loving, dedicated, and as tirelessly hardworking as him. What a lucky little girl, I thought. Because she had every opportunity to not be me.

If I had to guess, my dad was somewhere sixty-seven miles away selling a gram of marijuana and driving a Cadillac. He was in a bar smoking Garcia Vegas and talking up some just-for-one-night woman, or somewhere having poker night with the guys and sipping beer, bags of weed sitting next to the deck of cards. My dad had left a hole in my heart when he left and I never knew I was trying to fill it, cement it so it would never be torn again. Boys at school had no problem taking advantage of my vulnerability, the bastards. They could smell my ignorance, see my exposure from two cities away. Mom always warned me that the boys would come.

"They'll tell you what you want to hear to get what they want from you," she would say. "Your body is a temple. Just enjoy being young and being you."

It seemed that from the time I was old enough to comprehend the English language, Mom had been telling me that my body was a temple. It took me some time to understand what she meant and even longer to turn the words into action. While part of me listened to my mother—I never let a man hit me, call me any kind of bitch, or spit in my direction—the other part of me wished

I had an example to learn from. I knew well what a guy was not supposed to do, but not enough of what he was supposed to do. I learned a little from the movies. Court a woman, take her out. Open doors and pull out chairs. Walk her to her front porch, and kiss her hand before saying goodnight. But even I knew life couldn't be like the movies.

I sat in the waiting room wanting nothing more than to make my Saturday morning into a motion picture, a series of strange events and extreme consequences some guy concocted that no one took too seriously because life was never like the movies.



I had almost forgotten about my own feelings throughout this situation—probably because my mom had chosen to focus on her own and forget about me when she'd gone over my head and made the appointment. *I'm not going*, I had told her. *You didn't even ask me*. Mom paused for a while before she responded. The length of the silence between us was as long as the Grand Canyon and as thick as molasses.

"Reece, this is your life." She finally spoke. "You're willing to throw your life away for this fool? You need to get a grip."

She meant to say it was her life I was throwing away. Mom had dreams for me. Big dreams that involved college degrees and financial stability, two things she had yet to obtain. After she dedicated her life to motherhood at nineteen years old, I was her only chance to do things right,

to live life how she wished she could have.

Mark was the fool Mom thought I was laying down my life for, and she reminded me of her disapproval of my relationship every day. What can he do for you? she would say. You should be having fun and going on dates. You're too young to be tied down.

My stomach and my heart were doing somersaults as I gulped a deep breath and said, "I'm not going." This time my words were firm, even though I didn't think I'd be able to say it twice.

Mark was supportive of whatever decision I made, and I thought I had made one. Little did we know, a few threats from Mom, and the decision would be made for me.

She hung up.

But not before she told me I would be living on my own if I didn't attend my appointment.



Sitting next to my mother that Saturday morning, I wished I had stood by what I'd told her. I wanted to run away from the depressing stone-colored walls that bound me. Some decorator had tried to bring life to the walls with small pastel flower paintings and plaques with words of wisdom. *How you think about a problem is more important than the problem itself, so always think positively. Dare to live the life you have dreamed for yourself. Go forward and make your dreams come true.* These wise words had no bearing on those of us who sat on the icy chairs that bit your butt and back on contact—not on me, at least. I wondered if

I would have been bothered either way, whether the walls were bright and inviting or not. Splashing color across the walls would be pretending that this place wasn't the holder of mountainous anxiety and overwhelming pressure. Acting like rocks weren't weighing down my throat, making every swallow painful. Pretending this was a happy occasion, a birthday party, a 4.0 GPA, a high school graduation, the welcoming of a baby—

"Ms. Rutledge," a different woman in blue pants and white scrubs called. "Come with me, please." I left my purse with my mother and trudged behind the woman in blue.

The woman instructed me to lie on a bed that looked like a conveyor belt made of metal, a ripped pink cushion and white tissue paper. There was a sonogram machine to my left and monitors on my right. I watched as the woman milled around the room picking up this and putting that back. She pulled a glove over her fingers and let it smack onto her hand before she shuffled over to the machine.

"This is ultrasound gel," she said as she opened a tube and lifted my shirt, exposing my stomach. "It's a little cold at first."

She was right. I flinched as she squeezed the tube and piled cool gel onto my abdomen. Her gloved hand commanded the wand she probed my stomach with. She looked intently at the screen, searching for what my belly held, and so did I. Despite why I had come, an undying desire to see what lived inside of me festered, and the screen lured my eyes like nails to magnets. It was my only chance.

When the woman finally stopped searching, she told me what she saw.

“There’s your baby’s head.” She pointed. “And there are the arms. See?”

“Kind of.” I squinted. I tried to decipher what she saw, but couldn’t.

“You’re eight weeks along.”

I didn’t know what to say. For eight weeks I had unknowingly been an expecting mother. I’d roamed my high school’s halls and lounged around my house fooling everyone, myself included. The woman gave me more instructions, but her words came across muffled, almost muted, and I heard nothing. My eyes stayed fixed on the monitor with the picture of what had taken two months to grow inside my stomach.

“Ms. Rutledge?” I snapped out of my trance. “You can follow me to the next waiting room.”

Walking into the room, I was greeted by my mom, already sitting and waiting for me. This room was considerably smaller than the first, and with no table to set our purses on, Mom held them both tightly to her lap. She was busying herself with her cell phone and magazines and watching whatever movie played on the twenty-inch television in the corner, all at the same time. Her eyes darted in my direction when I walked through the door.

“What did they say?” she asked.

“I’m two months pregnant.”

“Did they say anything about the wait?” I shook my head.

“I saw what it looks like. They did an ultrasound.”

My mother was quiet. She looked at me like she wanted to say something, but couldn’t. Like she had used up all her life’s words and had no more she could say. It would have been enough to ask how I was doing and if I was okay. But she couldn’t manage that, and anger surged through my chest and pain devoured my eyes. I shut them before she could see my tears and fell asleep.



“Reece, you have to go. She’s calling you.” My mother shook me awake and pointed to another assistant in white scrubs and blue pants.

“You can come with me, Ms. Rutledge,” said the assistant. “Our doctor is preparing for your procedure.”

She brought me to a room with white walls and white floors. I was beginning to think that they had designed this place to make you crazy.

“Take your bottoms off and put this robe on backwards,” she said. More instructions. “Then you can lie down on the bed and cover yourself with this.” She handed me a blanket. It too was white, no surprise there. “The anesthesiologist will be with you shortly.” She left and quietly shut the door behind her.

I never thought I’d be here. Being here made me something like my father. Mom used to tell me how Dad acted when she told him I was in her stomach. *It’s not mine, he had told her. I don’t want it. I’m not taking care of it. I’m only eighteen, I can’t be a father, get rid of it.*

“I told your father I was keeping my baby, whether



he wanted me to or not," she had said. "And God gave me you."

My dad wasn't by my mother's side during her labor. He didn't hear my first cry or compare bodily features with my mom. The "she has my eyes and your big feet" debate never took place. I vowed that if faced with the same circumstance, I would make the decision my mother did, and I wouldn't be like my father. I sat in the white room telling this story to my unborn child. I apologized for not being strong enough to stand by my word. I apologized for being like my father.

"I love you," I spoke down to my stomach. And I couldn't stop the tears from falling even though I knew crying wouldn't fix this.

The door opened and a woman in all white came in. She had long curly blonde hair and she smiled as she closed the door. Everyone there was too happy for such an occasion, I felt.

"Hi, Reece, my name is Debbie and I'm the anesthesiologist," she said as she rubbed my hand with alcohol and found the perfect vein. "This is just going to be a little pinch," she said, sticking the IV in. I didn't flinch.

"Put your legs in the leg rests and slowly count backward from twenty," she told me.

I placed my legs in the rests without saying a word, and as I sat back, I caught sight of the clock hanging on the wall. 11:50 A.M. I closed my eyes, and began counting. And I knew that when I woke up I would have to learn how to love Saturday mornings again.

## Rebirth

*Gabri-EL Dawkins*

The bones of those acquainted  
with death's old shadow  
feel heavy as sin.

They turn to dust,  
weary  
dust,  
those bones  
lying over everything:  
abandoned pews,  
snuffed candles,  
sagging roof,  
broken windows.

Those sills  
still hold  
broken shards  
of the steeple.  
The Virgin Mary,  
still stained,  
still intact,  
plants hope into the ground.

Hope,  
from which grows  
through warmed earth

a freshly watered stem,  
a new bud,  
a new breath,

new life  
begin again.

## Youth

*Courtney Gorrell*

Two rainbows there in the sky: dark clouds pass,  
green grass glows, wet from rain,  
puddles on our red back porch.

Soft golden-yellow light shines through darkened sky,  
still blue.

These rainbows are like birds  
angled in the sky.

The yellow, blue, green, and red,  
mixing together.

It's a prism-like shape, an illusion it seems,  
but when you stare, you only want to believe it's real.

We look forward to summer  
bright and new, fresh, beautiful  
like two rainbows.

Dark clouds turn bright.

It's sprinkling again.

"Hey, do you want to dance in the rain?"

"Step in the water, I dare you."

No lightning or thunder. Just the smell of grass and rain.

No shoes required.

Just as soon

as the rain begins, it ends.

Like the summer will eventually fade out  
into the cold crispness of fall.  
And then there are those rainbows, fading out,  
disappearing as if they never existed.  
Invisible, waiting to come again,  
just like the rain and summer.

## **Icarus**

*Micaiah Meads*

This island isn't my home.  
It's a prison,  
all I have ever known but  
never wanted,  
surrounded by the sea.  
No escape.

Air leads to flight,  
sky, so inviting.  
Borrow an idea from the birds.  
Gather wax, sticks, feathers.

Leap from the cliff.  
The wind sings.  
Keep steady wings  
with turbulent winds  
carried higher.

Searing heat softens wax,  
wings become undone,  
splitting at the seams,  
taken by the sea.

## Rouge á Lévres #36

*Jennifer Willemmin*

Each night I am sleeping with ghosts,  
watching candlelight form prisms on the wall,  
singing myself whiskey lullabies  
orchestrated by lavender breezes  
that linger over iron posts  
and black satin sheets.  
Mascara bleeds onto your pillowcase,  
red lipstick stains your collar.  
Smoke lingers, darkness falls.  
Then we return to being nothing at all.

## Retrospection

*Carol Newman*

*For Salvador Miranda, Franciscan d. 2006*

Men in black uniforms march through garbage,  
boots incongruously shiny, past bodies piled  
like driftwood ten-feet high, rotting  
in the sunlight. Birds swoop down in droves,  
flutter back up into the sky, a terrible dance,  
beautiful and synchronized.

Salvador from San Salvador in El Salvador.  
We made a joke of it. I typed his papers,  
added articles, explained American idioms,  
the differences in syntax. He told me his story,  
glasses flashing under fluorescent lights.  
*A los diez años, sabía de la muerte y de La Matanzo.*

Outside my window, blue jays and cardinals  
scabble for seeds while smaller birds flutter  
to the ground, sift through empty hulls.  
Territorial disputes are settled by raucous  
grackles, ruthless little soldiers,  
shiny black feathers shot with gold.

In the early morning sunlight, blue glass bottles  
and crystal prisms spin rainbows on my kitchen  
walls. The cat, on the table again, flicks her tail,

chatters and watches birds through glittering glass. Her white hair drifts to the floor.

## A Night of Decision

*Kateri Hall*

Sitting on the cold, hard tiles of the bathroom floor and sobbing into my hands, I wondered how I was going to continue living. I pondered how I could possibly survive a month in a drug and alcohol rehab center full of people newly released from prison and jail. I questioned why I had even come here to get clean when it would have been much easier to have overdosed like I'd planned. I'd been at Gaudenzia Crossroads for not even a day, and already I longed for the comfort of my drugs.

"I can't do this," I whispered. Drugs and death would be so much easier than facing my pain. It was a pain that ran deep, the seed having been planted when I was just a small child. As I grew older the seed had grown into a sprout and the sprout grew into a flower. An ugly, black, gnarled, withered flower that was consuming my soul.

"You could leave," I sobbed quietly to myself. And I knew it was true. Unlike the majority of the clients here, I was here voluntarily and not because the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections or a probation officer said so. I could walk to the nurse's station, tell her I was leaving, get my stuff, and just go. I could walk across the street and be able to score in a half hour at most. I would be high and the horrible truth would be forgotten, at least for a little while.

"How do you expect me to do this, God?" I

demanded, feeling that if he wanted me to stay here, he better damn well help me through it.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I screamed in frustration and slammed my head back against the wall. Waves of pain shot through my head, soothing my anguish. For the first time since I had arrived at rehab, I was able to think clearly. Unfortunately, that meant remembering the real reasons why I was here.

A few weeks after my mom had died, my dad announced that my family was moving to West Virginia and that he wanted me to move with them to escape the painful memories that filled the town of Oxford, Pennsylvania. Being eighteen years old, I decided to use my "adult" status to declare my freedom: I fervently refused to go. Instead, I called my boyfriend to come pick me up so I could move in with him.

"Why don't you just give West Virginia a chance?" my dad asked. "You could always move back if you don't like it." His voice was gentle and level. He was trying to reason with an unreasonably high teenage girl, not realizing that it was a lost cause.

"No. I'm an adult now, and I don't have to listen to your bullshit anymore. You have never been any kind of a father to me, so why start now," I shrieked as I ran around my room and flung clothing into the black garbage bag on my bed.

"You don't mean that," my dad began but I swiftly interrupted him.

"Yes, I do. You have done nothing but ruin my life for eighteen years." Having finished packing, I grabbed my

bag, shoved past my dad, who was standing in the doorway, and headed down the stairs. I heard him open and then slam shut his bedroom door, but I couldn't be bothered to care how I had hurt him because my boyfriend had to meet his dealer to score some more oxies, vics, and, if he was lucky, some coke. There was no way I was going to allow us to miss any opportunity to try coke when neither of us ever had before.

About fifteen minutes later, just as I was finally ready to make my escape to "freedom," my sister appeared in my path.

"Why are you acting like a bitch?" she screamed at me as I slung a garbage bag of clothes over my shoulder. My boyfriend had loaded the rest of my belongings into his pickup truck already and was outside waiting. I heard the horn honk as I hurried towards the back door.

"Why don't you just stay here tonight and talk this out?" my sister pleaded. She was the only one still downstairs; she was the only one that hadn't fled to their bedrooms after my furious tirade.

"Please, Kateri. We need you. I need you."

I don't know what made me turn around in the doorway and attack my sister with such vehemence. Maybe I was just looking for someone to hurt as much as I did at that moment. "I don't give a fuck what they need. You guys are leaving me, not the other way around. And as for *you* needing me, that's even more ridiculous. We all wish you had died and not Mom." With that I went out the door and slammed it behind me. I didn't speak to or see my sister for more than two-and-a-half years after that night.

“Are you okay?” a voice said above me. My eyes snapped open to see one of my roommates standing over me. She was a hefty Hispanic girl with her head shaved so closely her hair was almost nonexistent.

“I’m fine. Just want to be alone, please,” I snapped, wiping the tears from my face in embarrassment.

“It gets better,” she said before leaving me to my tortured thoughts.

If only those were the worse things I did, I thought bitterly. I was no longer leaning against the wall but lying on the floor and curled into a fetal position. Self-hatred surged through me at the shameful lifestyle I had been living. *I want to get high, I want to get high, I want to get high.* The thought raced through my head in a never-ending cycle fueled by the pains of withdrawal and the agony of guilt. My life isn’t worth saving. No one will miss me when I’m gone, I thought, having made my decision to leave the rehab. I slowly lifted myself back up into a sitting position and reached above my head to yank some paper towels out of the dispenser. I began wiping my tears away as I steeled myself for ending my life.

As I stood up and began to walk back to my room to pack my clothes, my dad’s face forced its way to the forefront of my thoughts. I remembered the day he came to help me move to Titusville. It was the first time I had seen him in two-and-a-half years. When I called to tell him I wanted to come home, I expected him to tell me to go to hell.

“I want to move back in with you, Dad,” I said,

my voice strained with the fear I felt. He had no reason to care about me, no reason to still love me, and definitely no reason to want me back in his life.

There were several seconds of silence on the other line, and I wondered if he had hung up. “Dad?” I asked, tears threatening to burst forth.

“I’m here,” he said, his voice sounding funny. “We’re living in Titusville, PA now. And—and I would be so happy to have you back. I—I’ve missed you.” I heard him sniffle and realized that he was crying.

“Dad, I’ve missed you, too,” I said, my efforts to hold back my tears abandoned. I sobbed openly into the phone while my dad assured me that everything was going to be okay. When I had finally composed myself somewhat, I cautiously asked the question that was screaming to be asked. “How can you want me back after everything I’ve done? Aren’t you ashamed of me?”

I heard a sharp intake of breath, followed by a few moments of heart-wrenching sobbing. “It doesn’t matter what you’ve said and done. It’s in the past. You’re my daughter, and I will love you no matter what.”

Oh my god, I thought as my tears started all over again. “I love you, too.”

“It gets better, Hall,” my roommate said again as I walked into our room. My four other roommates were already asleep. I walked over to my bunk and dresser, intending to gather up my clothing and pictures. But as I stood there staring down at the photograph of my dad, mom, and three younger siblings, I couldn’t make

myself move. Just open the drawers and throw the shit in the garbage bag, I thought, my addict brain urging me forward. There's no way your dad still loves you now, my addiction assured me. As I recalled everything I had done to my family, my addiction's assertions only gained more strength.

I used to look down on other addicts for the terrible things they did; I used to promise myself I would never be as bad as they were. Yet, it wasn't very long before I did most of the things I said I would never do. From age eighteen to twenty, I stole from all of my friends in the Oxford area and not just money, but personal belongings, too. I would sell them at pawnshops to get money for drugs when all else failed. But still, I thought I was better than other addicts because I didn't steal from my family. I simply chose to disregard the fact that I couldn't steal from them because they were hundreds of miles away, and I refused to even pick up the phone to talk to them.

It wasn't until I was around twenty years old and had temporarily gotten clean that I worked up the courage to call my dad and blessedly learned he still loved me. Within a week of the phone conversation, I was in Titusville with my family. For a while, the addict in me remained dormant. I spent two months living with my family before moving across town to live with my new fiancé. When the engagement ended after only two months, all it took was meeting a new charming, sexy, and manipulative man, who did drugs, to get me right back into the hell of active addiction. Shortly after that, I was

stealing from my new friends and then my family.

I remember one night I was short on cash and in desperate need of a high. Waiting until my family was asleep, I snuck down stairs and began rooting through my youngest brother's belongings until I found what I was looking for: the money he had been given for his birthday. Yes, I thought in relief. I took it, feeling awful, but not really caring. I cared too much about the high.

Your dad hates you, my addiction insisted. Yet, looking at my dad's big smile in the photo taken on my eighteenth birthday, I wondered if my addiction might be wrong.

"It doesn't matter what you've said and done. It's in the past. You're my daughter and I will love you no matter what."

My dad's words from the year before squashed the insidious voice of addiction and brought me back to what little sense I had left. I may be a horrible person, but if I kill myself tonight, my dad would miss me. As crazy and stupid as it would be for him to miss a piece of trash like me, I know he would, I realized.

"Damn it," I muttered and sank to the floor in front of my dresser, whimpering pathetically. Seeing my distress, my roommate came over and plopped down on the floor beside me.

"It'll be okay, girlfriend," she whispered, pulling me to her body in a tight embrace. "I know it hurts now, but it don't hurt this bad forever." She held me tight like a mother holds her child, and I cried myself to sleep in her



arms that night.

As it turned out, I didn't just make it through that night at Gaudenzia Rehab center, but three long months. I was a client there from May 2010 until July 2010; I've been clean since May 2010. My time there was difficult and taxing, but life-changing. I would not be who I am today had I not endured my time there; I would not be alive today had it not changed me. My relationship with my father has improved immensely since rehab. I realized how much my dad meant to me and how much he truly loved me. My relationship with my sister continues to be strained, but we are making slow and steady progress to regaining the bond we had prior to my drug use. My brothers and I have fully reconciled and enjoy spending time with each other when our busy schedules allow. I am continually thankful that I was able to regain all that my addiction stole from me: my family, pride, dignity, self-respect, and self-esteem.

## F6

*Jason Fetterman*

High winds raging hard.  
Trailers rain from the dark sky.  
Relocation done.

## Talk Dirty to Me

*Kristyn Grieb*

If I didn't love you,  
you would know.

My eyes would not wander  
up your legs,  
slowly, succulently  
forming thoughts of potential  
raunchy memories,  
racing through my rapid  
hormone stream  
faster than my bleeding heart  
is bandaged by your boyish charm.

I have never spoken to you.  
But one good cum  
and you will drift from me  
like bacteria in the sea;  
once clenching with anticipation,  
now floating further away  
with the current,  
ripping the possible love  
out of our lavish lust,  
leaving awkward meetings  
or passionate fucks.  
I wonder what you feel like  
in the morning

after emotions  
exploded into actions  
and a part of myself was you,  
momentarily.

I see myself with your arms  
around my cocoon-shaped body,  
commitment and safety  
screaming in my dreams,  
defending me.

But dare I dream,  
for you could never handle me.

## **A Breath**

*Andrew Cauley*

A pile of bones and flesh, we lie in pools of sweat,  
the steaming breath of our bodies,  
spent.

The colors move bright and dark, our  
bodies becoming  
apparitions in the moonlight  
that's pouring like water through the blinds,  
an uninvited friend who is  
always welcome.

You tell me  
I'm  
the best  
you've ever had.

I smile  
and  
gasp  
for enough  
hot air  
to fill a sentence.

“It was pretty fucking good, wasn't it?”

## **Here's The Thing about Zombies**

*Courtney Gorrell*

The thing about zombies is,  
they would love to suck your face.  
Literally.

If they spoke, they'd  
yell, “Sit still! Put the gun down!”  
Then attack, eat you.

The thing about zombies,  
they'd creep, stalk,  
watch your every move.

You better run fast.  
They'd devour everything except  
your shoes.

The thing about zombies,  
they don't care about  
your boyfriend cheating,  
your mom's pregnancy at fifty-eight.

Unless eating's involved,  
insufferable whining about everything  
matters not.

(P.S. I hope they eat you first.)

The thing about zombies,  
they drool, they spit  
black ooze,  
puking is possible.

(P.P.S. I hope one pukes on you, wench.)

The thing about zombies,  
they don't care to communicate,  
they prefer to grunt.

A moan means,  
“What the hay?” a result  
of them tearing open your chest,  
your ribs.

Sickening?

I know, but  
here's the true thing about zombies—  
they'd think you a  
toxin  
but eat you anyway.

If this happened,  
I'd smile, laugh until I almost  
peed myself, and say,

“Here's the real thing about zombies,  
they are obviously smart. I mean,  
they're eating your brains.”

## The Minnie V. *Dick Marcott*

The buzzer jarred me awake. It came from the sound-powered phone that hung on the bulkhead only a foot from my head. The loud grating tone was overkill. When at sea, I never slipped beyond the first stage of sleep. I don't know any commanding officer who does. The CG 95312 was my first command; I was twenty-four, the only officer assigned to the 95-foot patrol boat in Norfolk, VA, a busy port with lots of Search and Rescue (SAR) action. We were underway near the entrance of the Chesapeake Bay on our second day of a routine Harbor Entrance Patrol (HEP). I grabbed for the receiver in less than two seconds.

“Captain!” An automatic response, I was already fully awake and alert.

“Captain, this is Barker on the bridge. The *Cherokee* has lost her tow! She's about five miles northwest. She says there are five men in the water. I just changed course to head to her.” The routine HEP patrol was about to end. “Very well, I'm on the way. What speed are you making?”

“I'm bringing numbers 3 and 4 on line now, engines 1 and 2 are running fine, Captain, coming up to 15 knots.”

“Very well.” I had just hit the sack an hour ago, leaving First Class Quartermaster Barker on the bridge. He was an experienced underway Officer of the Deck (OOD) and I had confidence in him.

My feet had barely hit the deck when I heard the familiar startup whine of the two Cummins V12s that roared to life just like the big rig truck engines that they

were. Sitting on the side of my small bunk, I grabbed my pants, always at the ready within arm's reach on the chair. As I threw on my shirt, I quickly became aware that the bay had really kicked up since I had gone to bed. The weather report had not been good, but a squall line had moved in more quickly than anticipated. This damned snap-rolling 95 would get the best of me yet. She was sure living up to her reputation for giving you a bouncing ride. Grasping parts of bolted down cabin furniture to maintain balance in the near dark glow of the red night-light, I plowed into my shoes, grabbed my foul weather jacket, and bolted for the bridge.

"Captain's on the bridge!" shouted the young seaman on the helm, feet wide apart to keep his balance, struggling a bit to stay on course as the increased speed now had us porpoising into swells while yawing five degrees to each side. It was like the Chesapeake Bay wanted to deter us from our mission.

"Ever been a bronc rider?" I kidded as I moved behind the helmsman to check the compass.

"No, Sir."

"Well, you are now. Just hang on, you're doing fine." I made a mental note that this young, fairly new seaman was pretty sharp. "Where's the OOD?"

"Starboard wing, Sir."

As soon as I stepped outside, I knew this was not going to be an easy night. The swells were running about 5 feet and the deeply overcast night sky merged into an inky sea ensuring damned near total darkness. With no visible horizon, it was like walking into another dimension

of blackness interrupted only by random blinking buoy lights as they bobbed into and out of sight in the swells. I knew it was going to take me a few minutes to get my night vision. Had I come out of a white light, it could have taken twenty.

"What's up, Barker?"

"Sir, the *Minnie V.* is a 57-foot fishing vessel out of New Jersey with five men on board. She was 45 miles northeast of Chesapeake Light Ship yesterday afternoon when she lost power and called for help. The 95-footer out of Chincoteague, Virginia responded and took her in tow at seventeen-thirty. The *Cherokee* relieved the 83 at twenty-hundred last night."

I glanced at the chart house clock. It was almost oh-two-hundred. "So, what happened?"

"I saw the *Cherokee* steaming in toward the entrance to Thimble Shoal Channel showing towing lights, and I couldn't see a tow," Barker continued, showing a flash of humor despite the seriousness of the situation. "Their Quartermaster and I are good buddies, and we often practice flashing light when we're in port together at Berkley Base. I hopped on the light, thinking I'd pull his chain about showing the wrong running lights and flashed, 'Where is your tow?' The *Cherokee* answered immediately with an urgent voice message that they needed our help. They didn't even know about it until I signaled them. They're guessing the tow sank with five men on board."

The *Cherokee*, a 205-foot oceangoing tug that the Coast Guard inherited from the Navy, had a stellar history that went back to WWII when assigned to the North

Africa invasion task force. Despite her age, she had been well-maintained over the years and was more than up to the task. She was lowering her small powerboat now and was scanning the dark bay waters with her large searchlight.

“Sound the general alarm, Barker,” I ordered. “All hands to Search and Rescue stations.” The klaxon pitch of the general alarm quickly brought everyone on deck. Despite the ungodly hour the fifteen-man crew, stumbling to gain equilibrium on the pitching deck and groping for their clothes, were at their stations—manned and ready—in four minutes. There were extra men on the bridge, a deck force had dropped a scramble net over each side, several men were there to help survivors, the searchlight was manned, and the engine room crew was at full force. The SAR and man overboard drills we routinely held were paying off.

“It’s going to be hell seeing anyone in this sea, Skipper,” the Chief Boatswain Mate yelled over the howl of the wind. “It’s bad enough seeing anything as small as a bobbing head in daylight with good weather, let alone in crap like this.”

Chief Miller was right. The waves were now 5 to 6 feet, the passing squall blowing rain in our faces. Trying to see anything in the narrow searchlight beam was like looking for the edge of the road at night in a blinding snowstorm through your car’s high beams. It was going to take an ordained stroke of luck to save any of these guys. “Chief, make sure everyone is really concentrating out there. With these water temperatures, any survivors

will be exhausted, if not unconscious, in a little over thirty minutes, and they’ve already been there awhile.”

Then the bow lookout bellowed, “Target in the water, two points off the port bow, 50 yards.” He had caught a glimpse of a small object as the narrow searchlight beam swept over it. Our cook, who was manning the searchlight, quickly followed the lookout’s outstretched arm, scanning slowly, as we headed in that direction. Suddenly, the light caught the object as it bobbed in and out of sight.

“I’ve got the Conn,” I shouted. I was taking control of the ship’s movements.

“Captain’s got the Conn,” echoed an unknown voice from the bridge.

“Barker, take the helm! Come left to the target! Helmsman, go down to the main deck and give a hand.”

“Aye, aye, Sir. I’ve got the helm,” Barker instantly responded as he grasped the wheel from the helmsman.

“Aye, aye, Sir.” The helmsman took off, bouncing off the bulkheads and grasping for his balance as he made his way down the short, wet ladder to the main deck. We were heading directly for it now, and I could just make out what looked like a small wooden nail keg.

“All ahead one-third, come right ten degrees.” Instantly reacting to reduced speed, I could feel the increased tension in the young crew and see it in their faces. Ignoring their own plight on a wet deck, soaking wet, they went about their jobs. Everybody wanted to get this one right.

“Ahead one-third, right ten degrees,” Barker

repeated. "Steady course 290."

"Barker, if you can see that keg now, approach slow and see if you can come alongside, but keep it at least 10 yards off to port."

"Aye, aye, Sir. I've got it."

As we neared the bobbing keg at a slower speed, we sloughed into the trough of the waves. The broadside swell gave us much greater roll, but the good news was the rescue team was now in the lee of the deckhouse, reducing the wind and rain in their face. With barely enough speed to maintain steerageway, we were taking twenty-five degree rolls while being lifted up and down as each swell passed beneath us. An excited report from the bow lookout rose through the sound of the wind in the ships rigging, "Captain, there's a man holding on the back of that keg!" Damn, what a break! We were already set up on a good approach. I ordered Barker to keep her so and the deck force to get some liferings to him.

Still struggling just to stand in the wet, slick 3-foot space between the rail and the deckhouse, the deck crew was at the ready. As we approached, I saw two orange liferings sail into and out of the searchlight beam, over the keg with the trailing lines, landing right across the keg and the man's arms and shoulders. Two perfect throws! He didn't move! As we slipped by, now having drifted to within 20 feet of him, the deck force desperately pleaded across the dark foreboding frothy water gap to grab the lines. "For God's sakes, man, take the line, take the line!"

The chief ran to the bridge. "Captain, he's scared to death. Says he can't swim, and he just knows he'll drown.

I can see it in his eyes, Captain, he's never going to let go of that keg. We're going to have to get close enough to help him onto the scramble net." The net, made of sturdy manila line woven into a grid with a heavy wooden four-by-four to hold the bottom down, was already in place.

"Right full rudder, all ahead two-thirds."

"Aye, aye, Sir, right full, all ahead two-thirds."

Barker responded like the professional he was. As we came about, the net four-by-four was pounding against the side of the ship like an out-of-control pendulum swinging in and out from the ship's side with each roll. As we knifed through the swell and waves, our flared bow ensured that the now violent pitch would flood the deck with a soaking spray right up to the bridge ports with each diving plunge.

"We've got to go around again, Barker. Make it quick," I ordered. "Chief, keep that searchlight on him and everyone pointing as we come about. If we lose him now, he's done for."

I made a quick check of the chart and the radar. We were drifting closer to Thimble Shoal Channel. Thank God the radar screen was clear. At least for the moment we were alone, except for the *Cherokee* and her small boat who were busy with their own search. If these men drifted into the channel, they were going to be in great danger of being run over by an incoming freighter who would never see them. I had to plan the second approach very carefully. I knew I'd only have one more chance.

As we came about, Barker slowed to one-third and centered up on the keg. The approach was good, but we were going to be lying in the trough again and I'd have to

let the boat drift down and put the man and the keg right alongside. That worried me. The worst place you could be with a violently moving ship was right alongside. With the quick roll and pitch of the 105-ton ship, it was clearly possible to harm (if not kill) him if we couldn't quickly get him onto the net. I did not want to put Barker in the position of making the final approach. "I'll take the helm, Barker. You stand right on that port wing and let me know how we're doing."

"Aye, aye. Captain's got the helm."

The approach was going to work. I rang up all stop, then back one-third to stop the ship right alongside the fisherman and his keg, about 20 feet away, still rolling a lot, dead in the water. The wind and swell moved us closer, the man clearly hanging on for dear life. I could no longer see him below the deck line.

Barker, keeping a great eye, continued a running commentary. "He's right alongside now, Captain. He could grab the net, but he's still afraid to let go of that keg. He's right against the ship!"

Suddenly our most experienced deckhand, Seaman Francesco Lucchese who everyone called Casey, leaped over the rail and onto the landing net. Grasping the net with one hand and leaning out as far as he could stretch, Casey grabbed the man's thick woolen shoulder. While he held tightly, other men tried to get a line down to him with no success. The man, still fighting to cling to his keg, his strength giving out in the cold, was gasping to expel the swallowed cold, putrid seawater.

Casey, along with the fisherman precariously in his

grasp, was getting forced 2 feet under the water every time we rolled to port. "He's too heavy!" Casey struggled while gasping to take a big breath, shaking the stinging saltwater from his eyes as both men were lifted above the surface on the starboard roll.

The chief had plan Bravo. "Get that mooring line on the forward deck. Now! Move!"

Seaman Guthrie, not long out of boot camp, jumped at the chief's order and ventured forward. As soon as he stepped out of the lee of the pilot house, he was caught by a gust from the north that I thought was going to sweep him off his feet. Turning to face into the wet wind, weirdly shaping his upper body like a spoon, he leaned into the wind, defying nature at a Charlie Chaplin angle to the deck. In crablike steps, Guthrie inched sideways until he could snatch the mooring line. Then, wide-eyed with his first seagoing adventure, he practically leaped back to the chief, mooring line in tow.

"Give me the eye," the chief cried, reaching for the line while grabbing Guthrie to keep him from tumbling on the slick deck. He passed Casey the large eye, permanently spliced into the 3-inch nylon line, normally used to slip over a bollard on the pier when mooring the ship in port. "We need to make a horse-collar sling, Casey. See if you can get this over his head and under both arms," the chief bellowed over the persistent howl of wind and the banging four-by-four.

Somehow, with whatever strength Casey had left, he managed to get the sling in place and convince the man to let go of his keg. "Okay. Great! Now heave around and get



him on deck,” the chief ordered as he joined the other three deckhands trying to pull this hulk aboard. Barker was faithfully giving me a blow-by-blow, with all the excitement of a boxing ring announcer, but there was little I could do now but hold a steady heading and pray for slow shallow rolls.

Nothing moved. The rescue team couldn't budge him. Fatigue set in as they fought against the fisherman's weight while struggling to keep their own footing. “Get Kirsh up here—quick,” the chief screamed. Kirsh, our electrician, was at his SAR station in the engine room. Big enough to make any NFL defensive line coach drool, Kirsh looked like a Kodiak bear crawling out of the warm engine room den. He didn't need to be briefed on his function. As he jumped onto the front end of the line, his size and strength gave everyone hope again.

The chief wasted no time. “Every time we roll to port, the line goes a little slack. When that happens, heave around quickly. I'm going to take a stopping turn around the bit when we start back to starboard so we can hold what we got. We've just got to inch him in.” Roll by roll, slack by taut, inch by inch, they moved this giant up the cargo net until Kirsh could reach him. Between Kirsh and Casey they managed to roll him over the gunwale and onto the deck.

Kirsh, gasping for breath, sounding like a runaway steam engine, dripping wet, knelt over the beached whale of a coughing, spitting, but smiling fisherman. Between gulping pants, Kirsh choked out, “Goddamn man, I'm big,

but just for the record—how much do you weigh?”

The fisherman tried to raise a hand to shake Kirsh's and smiled, “Three-hundred twenty-four pounds, if you don't count all my wet foul-weather gear.”

Clifford Wescott was a lucky man, as was the rest of the crew of the *Minnie V.*, rescued by the *Cherokee*, now all safe and together in the Norfolk Public Health Hospital. As reported the next morning in the *Virginian Pilot*, the Captain of the *Minnie V.* said, “Once we started to take on water, we sank in two-and-a-half minutes.”

They had all struggled but survived in the cold and stormy Chesapeake for thirty-five minutes.

To fish again another day, I'm sure.

## **I Scream**

*Bonnie McMillen*

Flying high  
flapping wings  
flapping sheets  
spread wings  
spread eagle  
breathing  
floating  
diving down into unconsciousness?  
Falling back  
down the dark well of ether.  
Lost memories  
crying out in the night  
don't leave me  
I'll be good.  
Fear, terror  
flying away  
away from the odors  
into soft blue air.  
Pain, soreness  
cold steel needle  
sharp arrow through  
my heart.  
Strength returns.  
Comfort.  
Flying home to  
ice cream.

## **Dreams in Late May**

*Jennifer Willemin*

At night,  
I drift into worlds of crumbling estates  
haunted by lonely ghosts of young boys.  
Roses and lilacs climb white cement walls,  
then branch into windows of broken stained glass.  
Rooms are filled with lace and velveteen couches  
in the deepest shades of red and blue.  
Winter breezes consume dining halls,  
surrounded by large white columns and ghoulish butlers  
strayed from their serving quarters.  
My eyes open—  
I'm gone.

## Void Transaction

*Seth Cheadle*

She looks good tonight.  
She looks good every night.  
It's the way her crimson hair  
flirts with the smooth, alabaster skin  
of her shoulders, exposed to the September breeze.

It's the way she walks, as though  
every step is a gift from her to the pavement.  
Her nylon-encased legs go upward for miles,  
toward a place I think may be heaven.

It's the curve of her waist, her hips swaying  
to a rhythm only I can hear. She winks knowingly  
as I watch her through the glass,  
speechless.

For a moment, our eyes have a conversation  
whose words lips can form no equal.  
As the glass begins to fog, I turn the wheel,  
press the pedal down, and sigh.  
I'll try again next payday.

## Words that Rhyme with Orange

*Lance Maybury*

*for Lisa*

Shortly after we got together,  
linguistics became exciting again.  
That's when one hundred and twenty-three  
new words were discovered.  
They all rhymed with orange.

One for the squonk you make  
when you blow your nose,  
three for how much I adore it.  
Seven new ways for me  
to say, "You're right."

Twelve words portray  
how I feel in your arms.  
Nineteen appropriately express  
gratitude, my appreciation  
for everything you do.

Thirty-four different ways  
of saying, "I'm really sorry,  
and I hope you can forgive me,"  
with more to be uncovered.

To date they've found the three-word phrase

“I love you” can be succinctly expressed  
by any one of forty-seven words  
based on which feeling and mood  
is to be conveyed.

Every feeling you create in me  
is a word that rhymes with orange.  
Not one of which  
I’ve learned to pronounce yet.

## Cactus Flower

*Carol Newman*

Richard always asked Alice what she wanted for her birthday, or Christmas, or any of the other holidays that traditionally required gifts, but he never actually bought her a gift. It had become a ritual: he would ask and she would tell him something, then he would tell her to go ahead and get it for herself.

“What do you want for your birthday?” Richard asked her.

Alice was clearing the table, waiting for him to move out of her way so she could finish. Richard had rinsed his own dishes, crowding in between the dishwasher and the sink, elaborately running water over his plate and cup, leaving them on the counter in a puddle of water.

“I’d like one of those baskets with the tapestry fabric covering the top,” she told him as she put the dishes in the dishwasher and wiped the water off the counter. “I could leave it in the living room to stow all my projects. We just passed them in Kirkland’s yesterday.”

“Why didn’t you just get it yesterday?” he asked. Already, he was reaching for the paper that he had read earlier that day, settling himself in his chair where within minutes she knew he’d be asleep.

“When you asked me, it just popped into my head that that’s what I’d like. Don’t you have to go to the mall tomorrow to pick up your new golf clubs? You could pick it

up then.”

“I might not have time. I’ll probably forget.”

Richard shook the paper out and disappeared behind it.

“Why don’t you just buy it for yourself? Or anything you’d like.”

By the time Alice got home the next day, she had forgotten all about her birthday. Richard was downstairs in the family room trying out his new putter.

“You picked up your new golf clubs, I see.”

“Yeah, look at this.” He putted the ball with a sharp tap. As it rolled across the floor, the cat batted it under the couch. Richard got down on the floor and used the putter to snag the ball back out.

“I can see Phoebe is going to enjoy your putting practice,” she said as she hung up her coat and started up the stairs to start dinner.

“Ah, Alice, I stopped by Kirkland’s today to pick up that basket you said you wanted.”

“You did?” Standing on the stairs, she felt her face flush with pleasure and surprise.

“Yeah, I did, but those baskets cost forty dollars and I knew you wouldn’t want me to spend that kind of money.”

Later, Alice couldn’t remember if she made the decision right then to get a tattoo, or if it was several hours later when she woke up from a nightmare in which Richard was using his putter to batter the cat.

Most of Alice’s students had tattoos: barbed wire curling around ankles and biceps, palm trees curving above toes, roses disappearing down into cleavage, eagles poised

above buttocks, and whole sleeves of garish unidentifiable creatures covering arms and crawling up young calves.

She had asked some of the students why they got their specific tattoos. Some explained that it was to commemorate a particularly deep friendship or love, or to mark a special event; some said it was an outward expression of a private experience. Many said that they felt they were making a statement of rebellion, or individuality; never mind that nearly everyone in this generation had them. Some admitted they had just been drunk or high. All considered them body art and, in most cases, flaunted them.



Deciding on a tattoo establishment was a lot harder than Alice had thought it would be. For one thing, there were a lot more of them to pick from than she had expected. Every town seemed to have at least two or three. Closest was an establishment called *Rat Tats* she passed on the way to work every day. However, it was easy enough to eliminate with its dirty windows and spray-painted messages in uneven and often misspelled script. As an English teacher, she just couldn’t trust anyone who couldn’t spell.

Finally, she picked a place in the next town that had, down in the corner of the front window, an 11 x 14 inch photograph of a young girl, her entire back delicately and carefully etched with wings. Like turning yourself into an angel, Alice thought.

The shop was on a tree-lined side street on the first floor of a brick building; upstairs was a dentist and a podiatrist. A sign that almost completely covered the glass in the front door announced that it was *The Ror Schach*. The door opened into a small room with several black vinyl straight-back chairs ranged against two walls. There was no one else in the room, but Alice could hear a hum like a dentist's drill coming from the door right across from the chairs.

"I'll be there in a sec," someone yelled. "Grab a chair."

Alice sat down in one of the chairs holding her purse on her knees, peeking inside to reassure herself that the roll of bills that she had taken out of the ATM that morning was still there. She figured they didn't do checks or debit cards, and Visa might question the purchase of a tattoo as they had when she had ordered the *IRA Handbook of Guerrilla Warfare* when researching her Irish heritage.

On the walls were posters of hundreds of tattoo designs, most of them multicolor, some covering huge expanses of skin. Until then, it hadn't occurred to Alice that she'd have to decide what she wanted as a tattoo—and where. A heavy three-ring binder on the table beside her was filled with smaller illustrations encased in protective plastic sleeves.

"Hey lady, I think you're looking for one of the offices upstairs."

Alice didn't like to be called *lady*. It wasn't as bad as *ma'am*, but it carried the same implication. She looked up to see a fat snake wrapping itself around a skinny arm.

The arm was connected to a man in a purple tank top with a black and white bandana covering his head. His ears, encrusted with hoops, stuck out on either side. Across his left eyebrow he wore three silver hoops. A silver rod protruded from his upper lip, bumping against his teeth with a faint click when he talked. Alice couldn't decide if the creature on his other arm was a dragon or some other kind of mythical monster. Something also seemed to be stuck to his tongue, but out of politeness she tried not to look at it.

She snapped the book shut and used her English teacher voice. "Isn't this where one gets tattoos?" She never said *one* in normal speech, but the situation seemed to require it.

"Yeah, but..."

"Well, that's what I'm here for." She had worn her knee-high boots with a three-inch heel that Isaac Mizrahi had said were perfect for women of any age as long as they didn't do both a lip and an eye with their makeup. When she stood up she was a good two inches taller than he was. Oddly, the tattoos had made him look bigger.

"You mean you want a tattoo?"

"That's exactly what I mean," she said.

He had no way of knowing, of course, but Alice seldom said anything she didn't mean. Looking closer at him, she could see that he was older than she had at first thought, very thin with knotted muscles in his arms.

"I'm Alice Bisbey. I'm interested in getting a tattoo, but I'll need some information first, of course."

"What do you need to know?" The rod clicked

against his teeth again.

“Are you licensed? Do you have some kind of documentation that validates that you’re qualified to do this?” Alice was getting a little nervous. What if she had picked the wrong place? She concentrated hard on the image of the angel wings. Sometimes it helped to visualize.

He lifted up his arm, and the snake seemed to point across the room to a certificate hanging on the wall in a shiny green frame. She hadn’t noticed it in among all the posters. The certificate stated that one Andrew Allan Ambrose was certified by the state of New York to perform tattoo artistry. Alice wondered briefly what expectations Andrew Allan Ambrose’s parents had had when they named him and if tattoo artist was among their hopes and dreams for their son.

For a moment, Alice thought about how Richard might react. She remembered he hadn’t liked it that time she’d straightened her hair. “It doesn’t even look like you,” he’d said, completely missing the point.

He had never said he didn’t like tattoos, so she didn’t have a point of reference. In fact, she didn’t think they had ever had a conversation about tattoos at all. And he had told her to get herself anything she wanted for her birthday, hadn’t he?

“Do you have a particular tat in mind? There was that click again, especially on the *P*, *T*, and *M* words.

“Tat?”

“Tattoo. You said you wanted to get a tattoo.”

“Yes.” It threw Alice for a minute that she had missed the shortened terminology. She liked to think that

her contact with college students kept her up on such things.

Nothing in the three-ring binder had appealed to her, but one page of desert scenes, sand and sky and cartoon-like cacti with cowboy hats perched at the top had caught her eye. Alice was reminded of her first trip to the Southwest and the untouchable beauty and majesty of the saguaro against the sky.

“I want a cactus, a saguaro with one tiny flower, not one of those cartoon-like cacti, but a real one.”

He disappeared for a second inside the room across from the chairs. He came back out carrying a sketch pad and a drawing pencil. “I’ll have to make a stencil for a saguaro,” he told her. Leaning his leg on a chair, he propped the pad on his knee and quickly sketched a saguaro cactus with three arms and one flower on the lower arm to the right.

Alice liked that he hadn’t put the flower dead center on the middle arm. Yes, she thought, I can see why they call it tattoo artistry. It was important to Alice that words meant what they said.

“It’s perfect.” It was, too, tiny and delicate.

“So. Color. Green, of course. What color do you want the flower? Or did you have something psychedelic in mind?”

“Psychedelic?”

“Like, so it will stand out better.”

“No, I want it green, of course, not too bright, and I want a pale yellow flower, I think.” Alice wasn’t exactly sure what color saguaro flowers were, but pale yellow

seemed a safe choice. "And make sure it has needles on it." It wouldn't be a cactus without needles. A few deft strokes and the cactus became prickly.

"Now. As to location. Some body parts are more sensitive than others so I'll just have to warn you about that." Andrew Allan Ambrose looked uncomfortable.

"My calf," Alice blurted. "I want it on my calf." Until then she hadn't thought about it, but in that moment Alice knew that she wanted the tattoo where it would show—at least sometimes.



Even without her boots, Alice felt tall.

She had to remove the right boot for the tattoo, of course, and afterwards it made sense to take both of them off to walk to her car. The bottoms of her feet, unaccustomed to going bare, were sensitive to the tiny stones that littered the sidewalk, but Alice didn't mind. She felt in some new way pleasantly connected to the earth. As she drove home, she kept sneaking glances down at her right calf where a small bandage covered the tattoo.

Alice remembered another birthday when she had gotten tickets for a Bob Dylan concert. Her friend Barbara had gone with them, sitting two rows back. Alice had been enthralled, had tried to lose herself in the music, but the acoustics were bad and all around them people were leaving early. Richard and Barbara complained and wanted to leave, too, beat the traffic. Alice had tried to hold out and kept telling them that they couldn't leave until Dylan left

the stage. But finally they had worn her down, and with a sinking sense of betrayal she had followed them out the door. All the way across the parking lot, Alice could hear the music, clearer out in the cold night air, and she regretted that she had given in, that she wasn't strong enough to just dig in her heels and do what she wanted instead of what others wanted her to do.

Now, it was as if this tattoo made up for those moments in her life when she had let logic and sense override impulse. In some odd way, she felt newly empowered.



At home, Richard flipped back and forth between channels: golf and ESPN. Without looking up, he asked, "did you walk with Barbara?" On Friday mornings, Alice usually walked with Barbara. Not this Friday.

"No, Richard. I drove to Webster and got a tattoo."

"How's she doing?"

"It's a cactus," Alice told him as she walked barefoot up the stairs carrying her boots. Upstairs, she slid into her flip-flops and pulled the protective covering off of her calf. The cactus was positioned purposely to show at the very outside edge of her calf a few inches above the ankle. She sat down in the chair and crossed her legs, angling her foot this way and that. It really was beautiful.





Later that week, when Barbara picked her up for a meeting, Alice waited only until they got to the first red light before she asked, “Barbara, what do you think of tattoos?”

“Tramp stamps; I call them tramp stamps. I told my niece it’s okay to experiment with social drugs and even to sleep around like your mother, I expect some of that, but you get a tattoo, the money stops. They’re tramp stamps, and I won’t have it. That’s where I draw the line.”

Alice was used to Barbara’s strong opinions. In fact, Barbara’s total self-assurance was one of the things she liked most about her. Alice, in spite of her outward poise, had never had that kind of confidence.

“Why do you find them so objectionable?”

“For one thing, they’re permanent.” That was probably true; Alice wasn’t sure. “They just scream, ‘look at me, I’m a tramp,’ in a public, exhibitionist way.”

“I got a tattoo. On my calf,” Alice said. Alice watched Barbara closely to gauge her reaction. At the same time, she felt a perverse thrill at having already elicited such a response.

“I thought you just said you got a tattoo,” Barbara said laughing. “What did you actually say?”

“That is what I said. I got a tattoo.”

“Are you serious?” In the glow of the streetlights, Barbara’s face was hard with disapproval and something else. Distaste? Disgust? “Alice, I can’t believe you would do something so trashy. You have always been the epitome of class and now you go and do something like this? This is a side of you I’ve never seen. I’m very disappointed in you.”

Alice realized then that Barbara, like most people, had no valid reason at all for her feelings beyond archaic societal objections. “I can’t quite explain it,” Alice told her, “but now I understand why so many people are getting tattooed.”

Barbara didn’t look convinced. She continued to drive, both hands on the steering wheel, eyes facing straight ahead. “Now right there, you said it yourself, you can’t explain it. See what I mean? This constitutes irrational behavior.”

Alice thought about it for a few minutes. “Okay, it’s irrational behavior. I’ll agree with that. But, can’t you understand? I’ve never behaved irrationally or impulsively in my life, and now that I have, I feel— well, liberated somehow.”

Alice looked over to see if Barbara would stop her, then she continued. “Remember when you told me about growing marijuana in your bedroom, and how your brother told you to get rid of it before your dad saw it?”

“Yes, I did tell you that, but that’s hardly a comparison. I was in college.” Barbara brought her hand down hard on the steering wheel as if to emphasize the word college. “I was twenty years old. You’re what, fifty-three?”

“Fifty-four, it’s my birthday, remember? And thank you for reminding me.”

“Well?”

“I’ve heard you talk about all the things you did, how you smoked pot all the way through college, how you never took things as seriously as you should have.

How that's the only thing that kept you from graduating summa, and yet, you tell those stories as if you're proud of all those acts of rebellion."

"I was young and that's what people do when they're young." Barbara hit the steering wheel again.

Suddenly, Alice didn't care what Barbara, or anyone else for that matter, thought. This was her tattoo. For the first time in her life, she had made a decision that affected only her, based only on what she had wanted in one wild moment. It felt good. It felt great. It was downright exhilarating.



Alice got home a few minutes early and, as usual, Richard was watching television, holding the remote at arm's length to change channels.

"How was your day?" he asked without looking her way.

"It was fine," she said as she sat down on the sofa next to his chair.

"Look," she said as she kicked off her shoe and placed her foot up on his recliner. "Look at my tattoo." Richard finally tore his eyes away from the television and glanced at Alice's leg.

"What is it?"

"It's a tattoo. I told you, I got a tattoo. For my birthday. Last week. I told you." Alice spoke as to a child.

"What do you mean?" Richard looked puzzled, as if he still hadn't heard her, though by now he seemed to

be looking right at the tattoo. "For your birthday? I told you, get whatever you want." His eyes slid back to the television. "This guy is only twenty-four years old and he's already made a million dollars playing golf."

"Imagine that," she said.

## ***Contributors' Notes***

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***Lisa J. Chapman*** is a semi-retired woman who has returned to McKean County where she was born and raised many years ago. She dabbles in a myriad of interests and watches birds quite seriously.

***Seth Cheatle*** is a senior English major with a minor in writing. He has served as editor of this magazine for two years. After graduation, he plans to travel the world gathering experience for the novel he'll probably never write.

***Gabri-EL Dawkins***, from Charleston, SC, has been writing fiction since she first learned to write and poetry since her second year of middle school. Her favorite genre of writing is fiction, although, she has grown to enjoy poetry a great deal since her second semester at Pitt-Bradford.

***Jason Fetterman*** is from Bradford, PA. He is a junior majoring in writing. His dream job is to be a screenwriter.

***Courtney Gorrell***, from Gifford, PA, is a creative writing

student at Pitt-Bradford. When she is not writing, you will find her reading, listening to a variety of music genres, watching her favorite television show, *Psych*, and having pleasant conversations with her dogs and cats.

***Kristyn Grieb*** is originally from Tampa, FL. She is a writing major with a minor in anthropology. She hopes to become a professor of creative writing at a university in a city. Her favorite hobbies include writing poetry and being on the water.

***Kateri Hall*** is a creative writing major from Titusville, PA. She has applied to creative writing MFA programs at Stonecoast University and Wilkes University. When she is not writing or reading, she can be found four-wheeling in the woods or cuddling with her two slightly overweight cats.

***Shauna Kelsey*** is a mother, wife, writing major, and procrastinator. She aspires to be a writer of young adult fiction but admits she should probably daydream less and write more.

***Dick Marcott***, a retired Coast Guard captain, was encouraged by his daughter, Kimberly, to start writing his sea stories down for his grandchildren. Emboldened by Dr. McCabe's writing course last year, he submitted "The Minnie V" for this issue of *Baily's Beads*. It is only one of the stories in his memoir, *The View From The Rigging*, a work-in-progress.

*Lance Maybury*, a 2007 graduate of Pitt-Bradford, was also the 2007 editor of *Baily's Beads* and the recipient of the Robert C. Laing award for Creative Writing.

*Bonnie McMillen* is a native of Bradford, PA. She enrolled in an Introduction to Fiction course at Pitt-Bradford a few years ago and fell in love with writing.

*Micaiah Meads* discovered his passion for writing at the age of fifteen. He enjoys writing poetry, short stories, and sports articles. He is currently a senior writing major at Pitt-Bradford. He aspires to become a sports journalist and analyst.

*Carol Newman* teaches intro classes in poetry and fiction writing at Pitt-Bradford. At the 2012 Chautauqua Literary Arts Awards she was the recipient of the Hauser Award for Fiction as well as second place winner for her poem "Retrospection," which can be found in this issue. She is a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a writer, a teacher, a reader, a runner, a gardener, and a collector—in that order.

*Shane Phillips* is a devastatingly handsome substitute teacher who currently lives in Lynchburg, VA. He graduated in 2010 with a B.S. in elementary education and a B.A. in writing. Before settling in the hills of Virginia, he lived in Savannah, GA, and Jacksonville, FL. In his two years spent bouncing along the eastern seaboard, he held a great many jobs, none of which paid very well.

*Cecelia Prosser* has lived most of her life in Ormsby, PA, having graduated from Smethport High in 1973. Her oldest daughter is her teacher and critic. Cecelia retired in 2007 and enjoys writing poetry, quilting, canning, oil painting, and working with watercolors. In the fall, you can catch her selling her decorative ice skates at the local farmers' market. Her latest project is learning to work with pastels.

*Clarice Rutledge* is a gym rat who enjoys great literature. She graduated from Pitt-Bradford with a degree in writing and public relations in December 2012. Clarice currently lives with her mom and younger sister in Monroeville, PA.

*Kelly Schucker* is a former Pitt-Bradford student who is currently studying English and psychology at the University of Buffalo. Her passions are writing and her adorable pet rabbits.

*Jennifer Willemin* is a writing major with a minor in public relations. She works at Coach and models when she is not in school. Jennifer enjoys laying out on a sunny day with a book and a glass of wine. She also loves her cats and wears too much black. Her dream is to refurbish a Victorian home or city apartment and document her travels through writing and photography.



