

# **Baily's Beads**

**Volume XVII, Number 1**  
**2012**



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## 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. 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), 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 at no cost.

## Design

*Baily's Beads* is printed on matte finish paper. Its body text is printed in eleven-point Courier New. Author names are set in eighteen-point Courier New and titles in twenty-two point Courier New. The cover page and concept were created by Ellen Goos, and the inner layout was a collaborative effort worked on by Rick Minard and the graphic design department. We used Adobe InDesign to put the magazine together. This edition had a printing run of one thousand copies and was printed by Ferguson Printing, Salamanca, NY. It is a free publication.

## Awards

### **Columbia Scholastic Press Association**

2004 Silver Medalist Certificate  
2005 Gold Medalist Certificate  
2006 Silver Medalist Certificate  
Silver Crown Certificate  
2007 Gold Medalist Certificate  
2008 Gold Medalist Certificate  
Silver Crown Certificate

### **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

### **American 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



## **Editors**

Seth Cheattle  
James Segee

## **Cover**

Ellen Goos

## **Advisor**

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Micaiah Meads  
Andrew Cauley  
Kristyn Gardner  
Brittany Thomas  
Jennifer Willemin  
Ellen Goos  
Wilson Shum  
Jarrett Clarke  
Stewart Skeel

## **Editors' Notes**

I volunteered to take on the position of editor in this edition because...well, I'm not entirely sure. Maybe I was expecting the glamor and lavish lifestyle that generally come with being on top. Maybe I wanted the authority to tell people what to do. Or maybe I just wanted a say in something, for my opinion to matter to someone. Whatever my reasons, I voluntarily signed on for any responsibilities required of an editor, despite my general lack of ambition.

The amount of work surprised me, and nearly overwhelmed me at first. However, with the aid of James, our other editor on this issue, a diligent staff of copy-editors, and Dr. Nancy McCabe pushing us along, we got through it with no more and no less trouble than is to be expected. It didn't hurt that we had the help of Rick Minard and his graphic design students with the layout and cover of the magazine, as well as the ever-helpful Bill Ferguson, who was always there to answer any questions about the publishing process. Most importantly, our thanks go out to the great writers we are featuring in this issue. The magazine wouldn't work without them, or without you, our readers, for that matter. So finally, thank you for making what we do worthwhile.

Anyway, my position as editor didn't

end up getting me the penthouse suite, or the lingerie-model girlfriends, or the Mercedes. It did, however, give me the opportunity to follow through with what was ultimately a fun (if somewhat trying) and rewarding experience with a staff of fellow grammar Nazis that was fun and easy to work with. And I suppose that's enough for me.

Seth Cheadle



After watching the editors for the previous magazine spend the week before deadline with frazzled looks on their faces and the telling signs of sleep deprivation pooled in their eyes, I had to feel a bit sorry for them. That was my first semester working on the magazine, and my responsibilities were limited, and I was able to turn in my work and leave the rest to them, those poor souls. So after watching that, I nevertheless volunteered to be an editor for the magazine the following semester. I know, I don't blame you. I question my own sanity all the time too.

However, I've found that it's just part of the fun. The stress and the workload are a little overwhelming, but I imagine seeing the end result, a final product makes it all worth it in the end. And it honestly wasn't so tough. My co-editor, Seth Cheadle, was immense in helping to keep the work divided and thusly done at high quality. Our vigilant staff of copy-editors and fearless supervisor Nancy McCabe also pushed the process along at an efficient pace. The editing was a lot of fun and we often had class-wide discussions about uses of certain words, the usefulness of different dictionaries (my cellphone vs. Andrew's hustling dictionary), and the validity of the interrobang. The sort of things that would only be funny to a group of writers.

And while things got frantic at the end, we all remained dedicated and focused on getting the magazine completed. I would like to thank Seth, Nancy, our staff, and of course the writers and readers with whom none of this would be possible. So with a contented sigh I ask you to enjoy the magazine, and would like to assure you that my sanity levels are the same as the day this process began. Whether that's a good thing or not, who knows?

James Segee

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*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 last but a few spectacular moments.*



# Basement

Stewart Skeel



I closed my eyes as I stepped off the bus, tensing up at the sight of her house. It wasn't my house. It wasn't my dad's house. It was hers, and it certainly wasn't home.

I walked as slowly as I could down the street toward the driveway. I could feel Tara watching my every move. I didn't bother trying to see which window she was watching from. She always changed, and if she spotted me looking, there would be hell to pay.

I tried not to rub my arms, even though my bare skin was freezing from the cold. I tried to ignore the snow.

I stood outside the garage, waiting for her to open the door with the remote. After what seemed like forever, the door lurched upward. As I walked by the garbage cans, I lifted the lids as quietly as possible, hoping she wouldn't hear me. As I expected, I found a bag with some of my books and action figures near the top. I put the lid back down again. I'd try and get them back again later, once I'd found a

better hiding spot.

I grabbed the dog's leash off the hook next to the door and braced myself before it. I could hear Hershey whining behind it. The poor dog hadn't been let out all day, as usual. I opened the door, and a flash of chocolate brown fur bolted past me. I grabbed Hershey before she could escape and wrestled her frail, thin frame down, clipping the leash onto her fraying collar. The second I heard the leash click, we ran to the side yard, and she scrabbled down the steps where she did her business.

When she was done, she hobbled back up the steps and nuzzled her face under my hand. She was so old, I was amazed she'd lasted this long. She'd been a rescue puppy, and she still freaked out if feet got anywhere near her. Even after changing families and homes so many times, the poor old dog still remembered the kicks that had broken her tiny bones and ribs. We walked back inside slowly, relishing the time spent out in the world. I gave her a pat on the head. At least I had school, and every weekend, if I'd kept quiet and hadn't pissed Tara off too much, I had my Dungeons & Dragons games at Kevin's house. Otherwise there was just the basement, and that was all there was for Hershey.

The garage door closed behind us, once again at Tara's behest. I could hear my half-sister, Abbey, banging her toys together upstairs.

"Stew!" Abbey yelled. "Stew! I watched Dora

today! I watched Dora! She had a turtle!"

I didn't say anything back. Abbey was adorable and crazy-smart for a three-year-old. But I didn't dare interact with her. Tara didn't allow it. I wasn't her brother. Half-brothers didn't count. As far as Tara was concerned, I was just some kid she had to put up with. Hershey ran as fast as her old legs could go and hopped up onto the battered old couch. The couch stank, was covered in holes, and had springs poking out, but damn it, it was our couch. The TV in the basement was a privilege, and it could be taken away at a moment's notice. But the couch would be too much of a hassle for Tara to get rid of. I collapsed onto the couch, avoiding the springs. Hershey wiggled over and put her head on my knee, gazing up at me. Her deep brown fur was starting to thin and turn gray. Her eyes were starting to get cloudy with cataracts. As I stroked her fur, I found myself wishing Tara would just put her to sleep. I loved Hershey, but she was so old and so tired and death would be better than waiting all day in a dark basement for me to come home so she could pee. As she got older, her ability to hold it got worse, and when she had an accident we were both held responsible. I would get bitched at and then receive a more subtle punishment later. Another article of clothing or a book ended up in the trash. I wouldn't be allowed to leave the basement to use the bathroom. Hershey wouldn't get to eat for a day. That was always the worst-being held accountable for something I

had no power over and having my dog suffer for it.

I looked over to her food bowl. It was full. Sometimes she just didn't eat. Maybe she was afraid to.

Above me, feet shuffled, voices whispered, and the door opened up, letting a stream of light down into the basement, splashing the walls with color and bringing the dirt on the couch and carpet into stark clarity.

"Get up here," Tara yelled.

I got off the couch and walked over to the stairs. I didn't dare look up.

"Your mom called today."

I stood there, unsure of what to do.

"What the hell did you tell her?" she screamed. "Huh? What the hell did you tell your mom about me? Huh? Why would she ask that?"

I hadn't told my mother anything. I didn't feel like I had the right. I had chosen to live with Dad. That his new wife had turned out to be the way she was, that was inconsequential. It had been my decision, and I didn't dare speak to anyone about it.

I stuttered before managing to get anything out. "I don't know. I have no idea what you're talking about."

"You don't know? You piece of shit. Do you think I like putting up with your shit? Don't you fucking talk about me to your mom. All that dumb bitch wants is my house. My fucking house! She wants my fucking husband and my daughter.

You tell her! You tell that bitch that he's my husband now, and she can't have my baby!"

"Fuck," Abbey whispered.

"Do you see that? That's your fault! Abbey, we don't say fuck. Only black people say fuck, and Jesus hates it."

"I didn't tell my mom anything," I said, finding the courage to speak up, just a little.

"I don't fucking care. I don't! You shut up to your mother about me. Now get up here!"

I complied. I only looked at her when I reached the top of the stairs. Her fat arms were folded across her wide chest. Her grimace did not match the sunny pink kitchen she stood in.

"Oh, tell that sand-nigger friend of yours he can't come here anymore. I don't want his greasy parents anthraxing us to death."

I didn't bother telling her that there was a difference between Middle-Eastern people and Indians, and that even if Sekhar had been from the Middle East, I doubted very much that a suburban house in Upper Saint Clair was high on Al-Qaeda's list of places to destroy.

She shoved a bag of cold McDonald's food in my hand.

"This is your dinner. We're having guests over. Don't make any noise, I don't want them to know you live here."

I took the food.

"Do you have to shit?" she asked.

"Kinda," I said.

"Do it now. I don't want you stinking up

the place when they get here.” She grabbed the food back from me and followed me through the dining room to the bathroom. I couldn’t help but glance at the family portraits and photos. They all showed three happy, smiling people: my dad, Abbey, and Tara. They looked like the perfect American family, with my dad in his suit, Abbey in her princess costume, and Tara in various warm, motherly looking sweaters. If you looked closer, though, you’d see that Tara’s eyes glimmered with a predatory coldness, like a shark’s, and my dad’s looked flat and dead.

Once I was finished with the bathroom, Tara followed me back to the stairs, shoved the food back in my hands, and slammed the door behind me. I heard the deadbolt click.

“Faggot,” she said, her voice muffled by the door.

Hours later, I watched TV as quietly as I could manage. Hershey snored next to me on the couch. The voices of Tara’s dinner guests practically drowned out everything from the small TV. I flipped through channels, unsure of what to watch. If I had any batteries, I would have listened to my portable CD player, which was always in my backpack. The CDs were borrowed from friends, and I would have rather died than let Tara get her hands on something that wasn’t mine.

Batteries were a precious commodity to me. I scrounged up as much loose change as I could until I could get a two-pack of AAs, and though I hated myself for accepting anything from anyone

else, when my friends gave me batteries of their own volition, I was grateful. Losing myself in music was incredibly freeing, and I had just discovered the wonders of punk music. There was just something so powerful about the distorted guitars, the throaty shouts of the singers, and the rumbling, careless basslines. It was like sonic escapism.

I heard my dad’s laughter, deep and rumbling, separate from the rest of the noise upstairs. It sounded hollow and fake, as though all the life and will had been sucked out of him. He’s laughing on reflex. He’s laughing because he knows that if he fucks up and makes Tara look bad, he’ll have hell to pay.

I sat there in the dark basement, wearing one of my three shirts that had yet to be thrown away, listening to people eat filet mignon in a dining room lined with family photos I was absent from. I looked at my tattered shoes and thought about how Tara bought herself new shoes and clothes each week. I brought my fingers to my glasses and thought about how I hadn’t had new glasses in at least four years, and how Tara got new contact lenses each month without fail.

I thought about the tiny space between the couch and the wall behind me where I now kept my personal effects, all nine of them, and thought about the entire house full of her shit above me.

I thought about how I had been kicked out of my bedroom and now resided in the laundry room, my small bed right next to the dryer, and

how Tara would do laundry at all hours of the night regardless of whether or not I was trying to sleep.

I thought about how we went to church every Sunday at Tara's bidding, no matter the weather, and were told to be righteous and treat each other with love. Every Sunday, we were reminded how important family was.

I thought about how no matter what I did, I was to blame for something. How every chance Tara got, she took something away. A VHS tape, a book, a blanket, a pillow, clothes, soap, food, chances to be with friends.

I sat on the filthy couch and listened to the laughter above me.

And the cheap plastic remote control broke apart in my hand.

## Arabesque

Angela Nuzzo

You stand at the edge of the stage  
on your mark with left heel centered  
90 degrees at your right foot,  
your pointe shoes curved  
unnaturally, worn at the toe,  
frayed ribbons tied tight,  
your thin legs delineated  
by long muscles full of power.  
They are locked at the knees  
and keep their form so precisely,  
it's as if they're sewn together.  
Your wispy skirt flutters  
with the air conditioning, not  
from any motion  
of the body that it hangs from.  
Graceful arms curve down  
from shoulders that seem fragile  
but hold the weight of an entire company  
and every dance it performs.  
Your slight chest rises and falls  
with a shallow steadiness,  
head poised as by a puppeteer.  
Your eyes scan the world  
of make-believe  
within the velvet curtains,

no thoughts for anything  
beyond the screen of bright light  
that blocks your view  
of the crowded theater, out there.  
Your ears tune to the beats  
of the orchestra and tendons tense  
in preparation for your first step.  
You look the picture of calmness,  
but I see the pulse fluttering  
at your neck.

## Street Druid

Norma Heberle

His face and hands look varnished,  
decorated with dirt and old scabs.  
His eyes blaze, unseeing. He shambles  
his way through traffic to oasis,  
moving one torn sneaker forward  
and pulling the other after, slanting  
himself across the street with  
a bottle for ballast.  
His body curves to protect it.  
It is the importance in his life.

Reaching a cement wall hot from the sun,  
he unfolds his rag-wrapped form and settles  
in the dirt that squirts out a dusty halo.  
Looking about his place, he sees me,  
my judgment of him showing.  
He smiles and gives salute as he nestles  
the half-full bottle in his crotch.  
My eyes do not know where to look.  
Hopeless and unnecessary as he seems,  
he has a jauntiness that shames my harsh opinion.  
I know he judges me also.

When he writes his poem, I wonder  
if I'll be any part.

## Beer Notes

Robert Thomas



Poetry scribbled  
on bar napkins  
should be left  
there.

It somehow  
loses its tone  
typed out,  
neat and  
pretentious.

No longer  
smeared with beer  
and ashes,  
it somehow  
loses sight  
of its origin,  
the simplest  
naked moment,  
the purpose behind  
its circumstance:

a truly honest  
(drunken)  
slur.

## Dawn Pour

Jack Sheridan

Down among the buckled metal  
pillars and reinforced concrete  
girders, in the rickety war-torn  
Pit of the Melt Shop,  
under the iron and brick rocking-horse  
furnaces that dump their molten steel  
into ladles as big  
as Glenwood mansions  
turned upside down,  
I come around the smoky  
corner at 7:15 and  
catch, through a wide open back  
door, a marble winter sky  
with a row of rooftops  
frozen in it, more  
forbidding than where I am.

Here, mice and skunks and pigeons  
come out of the railyard,  
out of the rigid trees  
and strict brown weeds,  
to liquid bonfires, to  
Niagaras of the earth's core  
that flush even that poker-  
faced sky, briefly.

# Between the Lines

Seth Cheattle



We talked between the lines: lines of Vicodin, lines of Valium, lines of cocaine. We talked about everything and nothing at all; the bands that were playing on the radio, our shared disapproval of the snow, which was piling up outside at an alarming rate.

It was my birthday, and the new year was just hours away. We were miles away from the city lights, and we felt free of the muffling grasps of god and law alike; we were untouchable. The place reeked of our magnificence—a sort of musk with base notes of smoke and spilt booze, and top notes of decadence and lust. We were doing everything we wanted to do, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

I heard the song "Birthday" by The Beatles crackle desperately out of a set of cheap thirty-watt speakers and everyone dropped what they were doing to sing to me. Although I did appreciate the sentiment, I was already getting bored by the party. I knew that after I had made my rounds and talked to everyone worth talking to, there was a girl waiting for me upstairs in the loft with an assortment of drugs that could probably kill an experienced junkie. We were safe, though—we were

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two experienced junkies.

After the birthday singing subsided, I made my way upstairs. The warped wooden stairs creaked under my feet as I walked up, echoing the steps of at least two previous generations of feet. Someone was playing an acoustic guitar to a rhythm set down by another person pounding on a set of bongos. A small crowd had formed, watching this performance while passing around pipes full of marijuana. I spotted her right away and she quickly stole my interest. She was pretty hard to miss, and even harder to lose sight of should you cast a glance. Her hair was long and black as death. Mahogany-painted eyes that seemed to have all the answers, so long as you looked deeply enough. Sometimes one of her eyes was known to wander—her left, I believe—and I would joke with her about how it was rude not to look at me with both eyes when I talked to her.

Hunched over because of the ceiling (inclined, and low toward the back), I walked over and sat down on the bed beside her.

"Happy birthday, loverboy," she said and kissed me on the cheek. This was something she called me when she was drunk, and despite my longing for it to mean something, it was just a name she called me.

"Thanks," I said, feeling my face go red. "I'm just glad I can finally buy my own cigarettes."

"Be a doll and hold my hair back?"

I pulled her hair back, and she leaned forward and put her nose to a line of white

powder. She inhaled and the line disappeared. She was quite the magician. Sitting back up, she asked me if I wanted some.

No, I didn't. "Sure. Hold my hair?"

She did the same for me, and I didn't even think to ask what exactly I was putting up my nose. It wouldn't have mattered anyway. I couldn't say no to her. After I made a line vanish into my face, I detected a taste of what I thought might be Valium, which it most likely was.

"So when are you leaving?" I asked. She was going to be moving to someplace a few hours away, and seeing her every day was going to turn into seeing her a few times a year.

"Three days! I can't wait to get the hell out of this town."

"Yeah, I bet," I said. What I meant was: "Please don't leave." She didn't pick up on my underlying meaning. She never did.

We shared silence for a moment, but my feelings were screaming to get out and find her ears, ready or not. I swallowed hard to keep them suppressed and washed them down with a beer that had become warm from being in my hand for the past twenty minutes. I didn't care.

She did another line while I held her hair. So did I. We continued to talk for a while, about the snow, about the bands. I told her that I loved her and would miss her more than she could ever know. She didn't catch that, though, due to the fact that what actually came out of my mouth was some bullshit about how underrated of a band

The Cranberries were. We talked about everything there was to talk about, except for the things that got swallowed down with warm, bitter beer between the lines.



## Misconceptions

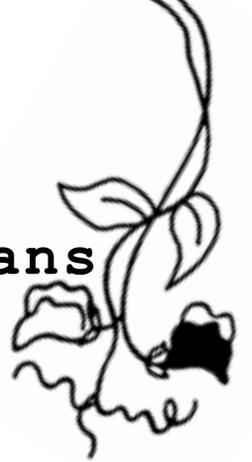
Jenna Precht1



The suckled  
sour milk on his tongue  
smells so unfamiliar  
that I fall in love.  
The warmth coming from  
your face  
makes me think you want to  
have one just like him  
with me.  
Smiling, I glance up at you  
to find  
you're looking down.  
Shifting this  
little body's weight,  
I steadily gaze down while tilting the bottle  
back.

## Rape of New Orleans

Nancy Lee Johnson



A lemon yellow sun rose in the eastern sky.  
Trade winds met over warm tropical seas,  
rippling the waters.  
Breezes skimmed the surface  
until it was time to risk the depth.  
An ill-mannered wind  
quicken'd the rhythm of the waves.  
The storm hadn't yet awakened to its full  
passion.

Momentum smoldered, grew, built to a fury.  
The raw power of the wind  
mixed with violent thunderstorms, torrential  
rains.  
The voice of the storm became a deafening,  
shrieking roar.

Warm air spiraled inward,  
moving faster and faster  
as it sought its center,  
circling, curling until it found its core.  
Holding its breath,  
it leaves air vibrating with uncomfortable  
silence

## Rape of New Orleans / Nancy Lee Johnson

before it moved on,  
leaving a boiling sea behind the eye.

Ahead to the west  
the somnolent southern coast slept,  
exposed and vulnerable.  
The first reaching fingers of the storm  
softly, gently caressed the beaches.  
It swiftly built in force until it was one  
continuous moan,  
driving higher, faster, trapped on the edges  
of barriers,  
breaking free,  
plundering, overpowering, devastating.  
The earth shuddered, shifted,  
stripped of its defenses.  
Slowly, the weakened beast moved on.

A nation wept.

And another breeze started in the east...

## Water

Ann M. Gavazzi



You plunge into my pores  
with no remorse nor care  
and a derring-do and Don Juan air.  
I stand like a rock as you do your thing  
I love I love I love.  
But no word from you,  
dripping away as I cling to you,  
leaving your trail behind on my satin skin.

Some days I lie in your hydrogen and oxygen,  
and my carbon burning, burning,  
but you just lounge there,  
barely a ripple, barely.  
You turn from steaming to cold in minutes  
and I'm left with my scum and your scum,  
with a squeezing ring around my heart and an  
anvil on my brain.  
Just leave just leave - everything's merely down  
the drain.

And when it's all over,  
I wipe it all away,  
not a memory, not a trace  
of your transparent cells and molecules,

obscured,  
dried up,  
run off run off, I see how labile you can be.  
You rise and fall with the moon on your mind  
and make a crazy idiot of me.  
Rush away rush away, you weary lover dear,  
find another rock to wear away and leave me be.

## Earth Craft

Rebecca J. Fluegel



A lowly plastic bottle,  
once a vessel of someone's  
possession, caught and held  
my gaze as I lingered,  
listening to the quiet  
trickle of water through  
the creekbed.

That lowly vessel paused,  
pirouetted and danced. Sun  
glints off its surface just  
as it began to make its way  
past me, so  
much so I could not  
let go.

Rocks and branches clutched  
darkly at the translucent  
traveler, hoping in vain to  
hold it in their grasp and  
transform it into a stationary  
object such as they, but  
it would have none of it.

Malcontent, the discarded  
traveler hurled itself full  
tilt into the swiftest part  
of the current, rushed past  
tree root, rock and shoreline,  
hurriedly making its way  
toward the creek's outer banks,  
caught up in the importance  
of it all.

A ship perilously cast adrift without  
a rudder, it bounced  
from shore to shore  
and then amid the heart  
of the icy, rushing water,  
never pausing as it crashed  
down a myriad  
of miniature waterfalls,  
cresting sudden waves,  
challenging currents while  
navigating them with the expertise  
of a seasoned sailor. I was impressed.

I stood and watched it  
bow and dip and sway  
through passages determined  
to ensnare it for whatever  
reason, but I did not follow its embattled  
struggle afoot for the open  
area around me gave way  
to rocks and rough terrain  
of such magnitude I  
could not abide.

But as it bobbed and tossed  
its way downstream, dragged  
beneath the surface only to suddenly  
reappear, I thought  
how much like that lowly traveler we all are  
as our lives are passages guided, but unruly,  
not predetermined, not predestined,  
by the current of life as it  
draws us ever onward  
through pathways that forever  
churn and swirl about us  
without the slightest notion  
as to how we will get there  
and so I could not let go,  
for I was traveling too. And I was impressed.

# Candy

Kimberlie F. Valentino

November 31, 1950 - October 5, 2010

Fat Santa came by way of Federal Express one day when the snow was falling and the sky was gray. A day when I had foolishly allowed myself a quick revisit to the bottom of my despair well. He was all wrapped up in colorful paper, and I started to get giggly before I even had the box opened. I pushed the little black button, and he began his hilarious song and dance routine. I laughed. He had arrived in the nick of time.

Today I am remembering that battery-powered fat Santa who danced around on his pedestal and shook his chubby butt to "Jingle Bells." You sent it to me as a surprise one day in November after I had told you that I hated Christmas and had hated it ever since I left California. I was lonely for my kids and just generally sad. My poor husband flat out did not know what to do with me. I told you I was making no holiday plans whatsoever and would not ever again, and I mentioned how I would routinely mutter nasty things into my turtleneck about the people on our street who were putting up their fantastical

front-yard Christmas displays.

This red-felt-clad Santa had initiated an immediate improvement in my bleak outlook. I quickly remembered my lifelong passion for all things December, especially when my children were little. I was prompted toward instant, perfect recall of the rich, long-ago memories of Burl Ives Christmas songs and sugary baking scents wafting from the kitchen. I think it's safe to say you saved my life that day.

-o-o-o-

You adorned yourself in your best dress and your best pair of shoes and then sat on a chair in your bathtub, inhaling the toxic fumes that would finally suffocate you while the radio in the living room played soft, melodious tunes. What a lonely legacy you have left behind.

You mentioned it every time we spoke. I grew to tune out that erratic part of you, thinking instead that you were being self-indulgent and overly dramatic. If only I had known how serious you were, I would have said the words I wanted to say, but was too afraid. The risky words that might have made you angry. The rational tone I would've used, forceful, sane. Unlike my high and happy voice that you usually heard. Now it's too late. Now everything is too late.

-o-o-o-

When I'm honest with myself and God, I

understand your suicide because I can still recall the late nineties when I believed I felt the same way. Almost. When all I wanted was to lie on my bed. With a pint of Smirnoff and my pack of Kools, drinking and smoking, punching holes in the unventilated air inside my rented room. I didn't care about this life or the next, just the booze in my head and the smooth way it could wash the world down the back of my throat. The volume all the way up, the television was my only earthly contact. Years later, I realized that I did not want to die, I just wanted to stop feeling the torture going on inside my head. Those were the wasted years of circling the drain. Those were the years that seem so far away now.

In December, people are always more tolerant and generous. In the grocery store, on the street, people forget all of their personal nonsense and act happy. People need people at Christmastime. I had missed these things for four long winters. When Christmas came back to me, it came brand new, and I went crazy that December trying to catch up with the baking and wrapping and greeting-card sending. Talk about an unforgettable Christmas—that one I will never forget. Thank you, Candy, for Fat Santa's timely nudge.

Now you're never going to know that here I am, already planning for December twenty-fifth, and it's only the sixteenth of October. I sing along to all the commercials promoting this sales

event or that. I wear my little red Santa hat around the house all day. The little girl in me claps and squeals in anticipation. My husband turns to look at me and shakes his thoroughly entertained head. He's happy that I am so happy. He remembers.

I guess you won't ever again remember back in 1977, the summer before I got married, when our Grandpa Brown flew me with him from Bakersfield to Oklahoma City to visit you and the rest of the cousins. You and I were walking around a long, flat lake. It was a breath-defying, humidity-soaked day when this dude drove up to us in his truck and beckoned us with a question. When we went over to see what he wanted, he didn't have any pants on and was fondling his fleshy lack of manhood. Oh dear me, we laughed our faces off the whole rest of that week.

I loved your heavy Oklahoma accent. Especially the way you called me "Kaymee" and yourself "Cane Dee." The way you said it cracked me up every time. I remember as well, with a burden of sadness, the ill-intentioned conversations we always got into about our mothers, both of us groaning and moaning about our shared misfortunes to have grown up unwanted and ignored by them. Or so that's what we said.

When we reconnected as adults, we would compare our psychic scabs, picking away at them over the telephone late into the night. All of our lives' troubles and woes could be traced back to our reproachable mothers and their mother, the stone-faced, passionless Grandma Brown. We

thoroughly ripped them apart, thrashing sinew from bone. Our vile recriminations spewed forth like molten lava. We commiserated. We cussed. After all, our memories had become our lives' scripts, our sacred tender secret. We relished the venom.

Our mothers and their unloving mother, it was like some sort of generational curse, and now it was alive inside of us, and it had become a perpetual, ferocious misery. We kneaded and massaged it during our weekly phone sessions. Two thousand miles of telephone wire heaved and swayed under our coarse recollections. Resentment. Anger. Loss. Rage. And on and on and on.

Until one exalted summer day when I would avail myself of a triumphant change of heart and visit my mother in her home back in California to find her frail and spent, snared inside her final disease. The mind-maiming Alzheimer's. I would, all of a sudden, acknowledge an absolute forgiveness toward her, an experience so spontaneous and divine I knew it to be of a spiritual nature. It was unmerited.

She had not said or done anything, yet I felt infinite mercy and an unyielding compassion toward her. It felt like I was forgiving myself. Or loving myself. Or acknowledging the lonely and fragile child inside of me. It felt like the way I had loved my mom before I decided to vilify her. The more I succumbed to this potent love toward her, the more goodness I observed in myself. It consumed me like a fever, and I

cried the whole way back to Pennsylvania while my husband manned our Honda. All of the wasted years spent thinking I had been rejected by her, the mother that I could never figure out, these memories would seize upon my heart and in a gripping fear I realized that I had very nearly allowed my mother to be buried without my being there in sincere love and respect to remember her and send her toward eternity. A terrible tragedy had been thwarted.

Once safely home, I curled up inside of myself and when I unfolded I saw my inner sanctuary. I was sweet and loveable, just as my mother had long known, even though she never used a language I could understand to communicate her knowledge of it to me. Maybe she didn't know how. How could she give me something she never had? And still, the heavenly balm of unrestrained, life-amending forgiveness rippled through my heart in rhythmic, atoning currents. I saw the futility in blaming her for everything and humbled myself before God in gratitude at this realization. In doing so, I accepted the fact that I had also aroused that very same anguish in my own two daughters, and I couldn't even remember doing it. Life had given itself back to me. The mother-and-daughter dynamic need not be so trying after all.

I never got to tell you that when I saw her again last June she looked into my eyes and in a millisecond's worth of brilliant clarity she said, "I love you. I've always loved you." And her whole house, from floor to rafter, began to

shake and tremble.

I remember talking to you about how peculiar we humans are in our attempt to hang on to the very things that hurt us the most. I told you quite plainly that the initial healing that took place in me back in California in my mother's living room was a miraculous, inspired event and that it had come to me from above. But then you grew weary and sarcastic because you didn't like it when I talked about God.

I think I know what happiness is. It is not an emotion or a feeling. It cannot be given by another, nor can it be taken away. Happiness is, simply put, a verb. It is finding and doing the true thing inside of you. It is comfort in your aloneness. It is simplicity. It is doing something kind for someone who doesn't know you. It is baking a pie from scratch or planting a garden or singing alone in your bedroom, your favorite new CD on, and dancing around naked like Stevie Nicks. It is a full-blown festival in your bones, rocking you from head to toe. Or it might be the sound of your best friend's laughter or the smell of her favorite perfume. It is finding and loving yourself intimately. It is being connected and accountable. It is the feeling of warmth and safety deep down in your belly. Like being a milk-sated kitten.

Oh yeah, and it's contagious.

Your chair will be empty come Thanksgiving and Christmas. I will never dial up your number again and hear you say my name because you saw it on the caller ID. I will never get all those

ridiculous e-mails that you liked to send. Always the cat and dog ones, as you knew I was fond of neither. You will never see your brothers who loved you or your 982 relatives and friends who adored you. You will be missed much, and I think I just felt the earth get a little colder and harder beneath my slippers.



## I Thought of a Place

James Segee



My friend asked me to write about West Texas.  
So I thought of a place  
where the noon sun spits in the faces of  
silhouettes  
and burns bare backs crisp.  
I thought of a place where rattlers talk shit  
about each other,  
and where a tumbleweed's need to wander is  
matched  
only by the weariest traveller.  
Because in West Texas, every town has a saloon,  
every traveller has a story they want to drown in  
double shots of  
emotions mixed with whiskey, and every piano  
plays "Hey Jude."

I thought of this place, and it made me taste the  
thick accent and  
the tobacco of a cowboy sporting spurs on boots  
made from  
a shit-talking rattler.  
His name's not important. Are they ever?  
What matters is that in West Texas, this cowboy  
has let his story  
unfold.

## My Stages of Mothering

Cecelia Prosser



My desire for dolls never fully blossomed,  
but she came in a vinyl case  
with all the usual boring pieces but three,  
her pet dog with a bowl and collar.

My girls are like separated Oreos,  
one a poet of verse and fashion expert,  
the other a champion of the sea and  
sweatpants goddess, both gems.

My grandchildren come to me through mediums,  
but my children won't let them be.  
So I name them and arrange their features  
like a Mr. Potato Head toy.

My promises through thoughts manifested,  
so they sent her in a snowstorm with angels.  
One frostbit ear and amputated paw later,  
my duty done, she purrs while kneading my belly.

## The Comet

Richille Denora



The general effect  
was a very high, wide,  
and luminous evening sky.  
The great comet  
was now green-white and wonderful for all  
who had eyes to see.  
In the west, the afterglow of the sunset faded,  
and the comet rose eastward.  
The moon had still to rise.  
By this time the comet  
had begun to assume  
a cloud-like form.  
At first it had been  
an almost telescopic speck.  
It brightened to the dimensions  
of the greatest star in the heavens  
until it had equaled and surpassed the moon.  
Now it was the most splendid thing  
this sky of Earth has ever held.

## Silk and Macrame

Les Buhite



### Silk

Across that dreadful, final, fateful year,  
the most sublime quintessence of Our Daily  
Meditation came when She would gra-  
ciously pronounce my virtues, then a fear-  
ful list of Things I Must Do Better, this  
in prelude to Her most inspired reflec-  
tions on the Sordid State of Our Defec-  
tive Co-Dependency. By way of dis-  
pensing all Her blessings, She would say:  
"You're too good for Me." This I denied.  
She was unmoved, till she moved out. I sighed  
and pondered those odd words through many days  
and finally said, "Well, perhaps you're right,"  
and then my broken heart was filled with light.

### Macrame

Old leather, sinew-stitched rawhide, that's what  
I sense-tanned and worn-when I recall  
you and me and us and them and all  
that we attempted, we endured, in part  
and whole. Funny now to contemplate,

not that we never begged forgiveness, but that we had need across the years, in retrospect, to forgive. Those sinews, plaited, braided, tangled, stretched by the hard edges, the hard work, sleepless nights; we, not gentle tutors to each other, and what did not kill us made us friends. No pledges needed now, past burdens fall away. No fabric left, more like macrame.



## The Land of Lost Things

Jack Eggleston



As Burrito, Silver, and I raced up our first Idahoan road, we came face to face with a gigantic house-sized tractor, an industrial beast with an arsenal of assorted sinister-looking medieval torture devices dangling from its sides. We came upon the tractor, the death machine, driving down the center of the fucking interstate.

Normal people would say, "Hey, maybe this device isn't appropriate for highway travel. I mean, aside from the three thousand separate weapons of death and dismemberment that protrude from the sides of my ginormous fucking tank, the top speed of said tank is a whopping eight miles per hour."

We'd come up on it doing about seventy and almost ran right into its nineteen thousand distinct options for impalement, decapitation, and all-around jubilation. As we passed, visions of Mad Max movies flashed before my eyes and then faded and we moved on toward our destination. This was Idaho.

Silver was driving. He seemed the only one unmoved by our little dance with the fates,

though little could be told from his face, which was covered by large reflective aviator sunglasses and shaggy black hair hanging just over his brow. Despite the air conditioning, a fresh drop of sweat clung to his overgrown sideburns that even Elvis Presley would have envied. A cloud of blue-tinted cigarette smoke hung around his head and the sun glimmered down onto his hairy barrel chest.

How I came to be in a small, dirty, high-gloss black Subaru with men named Burrito and Silver, barely escaping death at the hands of a treacherous road troll is all a matter of circumstance.

Two months before stepping foot in Idaho, I had found myself buried beneath a rotting compost heap of delusions and fantasies that were suffocating me with a slow, vindictive tenacity that can only come from a complete decay of the soul. Burrito had shown up back in Warren from an extended trip out to Bellingham, Washington. A friend of mine who'd met his wife in Bellingham had convinced me that I could make oodles upon oodles of money playing guitar on the street. He'd shown me pictures of street performers in Seattle with guitar cases overflowing with cash and had told stories of the West Coast that were as dreamlike as any of Grimm's Fairytales. It didn't take much, as desperate as I was, to become certain that my friends had found in Bellingham, Washington the hobo wonderland from the folk song "Big Rock Candy Mountain." It was only natural that I would oblige when Burrito

asked if I would like to join him on his return to Washington. Now I was being taken to a place that was anything but the dreamlike world I'd been promised. Our destination, temporarily anyway, was Cottonwood, Idaho.

Idaho was just supposed to be a short side-journey so we could visit some of Silver's friends on our way to Wonderland. It was supposed to be a break from the road. It was supposed to be a rest stop along the roadmap to salvation. It was supposed to be a lot of things. Unfortunately, rather than relaxed and rejuvenated, I found myself befuddled and depressed, barely escaping the clutches of death and uncontrollably drawn to a town I already despised.

Cottonwood is located in the central panhandle of the state. Cottonwood has a population of one thousand and twenty-eight. During my five-day stay, Cottonwood was like sitting in a lawn chair on the surface of the sun and cooking hotdogs over a fire fueled by an exploding jet engine. I certainly never expected such heat when I arrive in the air-conditioned car, the sky hanging so low I could imagine reaching my hand out the window and grabbing one of the puffy clouds just above our heads.

At this altitude and in this vast emptiness, I would have expected a more temperate climate even in the middle of July. I have a theory to explain Cottonwood's obscenely unnatural summer climate, though. I think Idaho is an anomalous magnet of everything that is

lost in the world, heat included. So all the heat lost from the shoddy roof job those carpenters did last summer didn't go to waste. It was magnetically drawn through a vortex to make sure that during my stay in Cottonwood, the temperature at all times was at least ten-thousand degrees hotter than the fucking sun. This was Idaho.

Our attempt to find Cottonwood brought us to another tractor, a blue one that was not even remotely as ominous as the last. This tractor would probably have shat itself if ever confronted by the other. The driver was an old gray-haired man in overalls who looked at the three of us suspiciously—no doubt fearful that we were going to feed his livestock ecstasy and lull his daughters into heinous acts of depravity. A fear that was clearly justified.

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I looked up toward the front seat. Burrito had taken his shirt off and wrapped a bandana around his head, making him look like a pirate. Somehow, like Silver, he was also sweating regardless of the air conditioning. Burrito strikes me as a smaller, more awkward rendition of what the old Germanic gods might have looked like. During the winter months he resembled his ancestors—dark-haired, wiry, and gruff. During the summer, with his awkward twitching mannerisms and hyperactive personality and a sun-sheened

deep amber skin tone, he looked more like an Arab Tourette's sufferer high on mescaline.

We were used to the kinds of looks Old Farmer Joe gave and he seemed nice enough, so he gained our trust quickly—mainly for lack of options since we hadn't seen anyone else in hours. He told us to turn left on the next road and follow it to the end. We assumed that Old Farmer Joe, who saw fit to drive his tractor down the road like it was a Mercedes on Sunday, wasn't senile or insane and that he knew what he was talking about—he just had, like many people in the boondocks of Idaho, a propensity for driving farm machinery as a means of transportation.

We pulled onto Meadow Creek Road from a three-way intersection. It was just a random side road off our route. We reached the end to find another three-way intersection. At this end, Meadow Creek Road was just a random side road off of none other than...Meadow Creek Road.

After suffering simultaneous mental breakdowns, we did the only logical thing. We stepped out of the car and took humorous pictures of each other looking completely confused and standing in front of the street sign for the intersection of Meadow Creek Road and Meadow Creek Road. We then applied the time management skills we'd all learned as successful college dropouts by forwarding these photos via text message to as many people as we possibly could. Finally, after about twenty minutes, we decided it was time to look at the map and figure out where in the hell we were and how the hell to get

out of there. I should stress that I had never driven at that point in my life. So when I say we decided to look at the maps, I mean that I sat on the ground smoking cigarettes and cursing Idaho while the other two did all of the work.

Burrito began referring to Cottonwood and the surrounding areas as "the Nexus," a name that I found rather suiting. I discovered the unbearable heat that is akin to lying down on a pile of hot coals and having eight sumo wrestlers, fresh out of practice, spoon on top of you. And it was at this point that I discovered the low, constantly-blowing wind that, though it makes the grassy fields look beautiful from the vantage point of the glass and steel of a well-kept automobile, is a slowly-building nuisance out in the open.

The wind in Idaho, at least during my stay, wouldn't end no matter how I yelled. It was like every lost breath in the world had gathered onto the mountaintops surrounding Cottonwood to dance together, blowing a constant sad waltz of dust and pollen until the end of time. It was the most depressing summer breeze I've ever felt.

After I weathered the elements long enough and the others thought they had figured out where we were going, I climbed back into the safety of our blessed air-conditioned chariot and we pushed on. As it turned out, Cottonwood was just over the hill. The old farmer dude had been right after all, though his directions would only have worked had we completely ignored traffic laws, basic reason, and the off-road limitations of the

ten-year-old Subaru and attempted to continue straight over the grassy hilltop and on to our destination.

When we entered the outskirts of Cottonwood, our skin had the same gleam that Burrito's Subaru had had when he'd driven it off the lot. Our five-o'clock shadows had grown into smelly rainforests, and our breath smelled like we'd been eating dogshit sandwiches for three days straight. I wanted a shower, some Mentadent, a lobotomy, and possibly a cauterization or complete removal of my scent glands.

The little alcove that I had begun building in the back seat, which was quickly and miraculously forming to my six-foot-two Irish build, was starting to smell like a wet dog that had just humped a laundry bag full of gym socks. I tried to cover up the smell with patchouli. Unfortunately all the patchouli did was add an earthy aroma, which was infinitely more heinous. By the time we reached Cottonwood, I was contemplating jumping out of the speeding car regardless of the harm it might inflict upon my person.

We all longingly awaited the amenities that are provided by civilization. What we found was an empty locked apartment in what I thought was an abandoned building. We searched in earnest for about six minutes, which resulted in our being kicked out of a bar by a huge bald dude in denim overalls whom I imagined to be named Ronnie James Theobald the Third.

The bar was decorated like much of

## The Land of Lost... / Jack Eggleston

Cottonwood, which was decorated like every other small rural town, lots of wood paneling, poor reproductions of outdoor landscapes, and neon signs advertising Pabst Blue Ribbon and Coors Light. I was decorated with beaded dreadlocks dangling down past the shoulders of my black and red communist T-shirt and tattoos of characters from Alice in Wonderland on my forearm. My jeans had been ripped and patched and ripped and patched and ripped and patched again. I hadn't shaved in what seemed a lifetime, and a cigarette hung constantly from my lips like it was just another appendage. As I stepped through the doors of that bar, a song from childhood rang in the back of my mind: "One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong."

After our earnest but fruitless six-minute search, Silver got a phone call and led us back to the building that I mistakenly thought to be abandoned. He led us up a poorly-lit stairwell, through a poorly-lit hallway and to the very same apartment door we'd been at six minutes earlier. We were led into a shitty apartment with wood-paneled walls and an ugly brown carpet that had been ugly and brown since the early seventies, when ugly and brown were somehow considered the height of style. The slum stank of stale beer and cigarettes, and it was filled not with long-haired revolutionary weirdoes or gutter-punk junkies in rags; no, it was filled with drunken rednecks who got hours of entertainment out of punching each other in the genitals. It took all of ten

## Baily's Beads 2012

minutes to feel like I was reentering the fifth grade.

The night started slowly. In the early hours, we sat around the tiny kitchen smoking cigarettes and listening to Silver and Burrito catch up with their friends. The Idahoans explained in detail how they had gotten ahold of some Novocaine and had taken to refining it in very much the same manner that one refines cocaine into crack. The smoking of Novocaine leads to nothing more than numbing your mouth for a while, but they seemed to enjoy smoking it. We told them about how we'd gotten lost and almost maimed in Idaho. After a little while, everyone decided to get drunk. I don't drink. I was the only one not in favor of this decision. I was voted down. I spent most of the night alone.

There were several musical instruments in the house and Burrito had constructed a washtub bass, so several of us sat in one of the small, wood-paneled, ugly brown rooms and played music. It was poorly-played bluegrass, I couldn't hear my guitar or Burrito's bass. I couldn't take my eyes off of the oversized gardening gloves that Burrito wore to strum the quarter-inch steel cord of his washtub bass. The makeshift turn-of-the-century instrument and the giant gloves made him look like a dirty caricature of Mickey Mouse in an old black-and-white steamboat cartoon. Playing was humorous and depressing. It was a release from the tumult of the road, and I welcomed it. Eventually everyone did get belligerent, at which

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point I retreated to an ugly secondhand couch and played guitar alone and tried to look cool. A girl approached me and told me that I sounded like Jack Johnson. I immediately quit playing and gave up all aspirations of becoming an iconic folk singer.

After a miserable night, I decided I needed to connect with home. I collected my cell phone and a pack of cigarettes and headed out to the parking lot behind the decrepit apartment building. The second I stepped through the doors I was hit with a low, constant wind which made it almost impossible to light my Camel.

The next day, like all the others, mimicked its predecessor. It was like all of the directions people lose had gathered on the treetops of Idaho, causing Cottonwood to be unsure of what direction to take each day and thus it just does what it did the day before, which of course is exactly the same thing it has done every day previously for God only knows how long. So, just like the day previous, I was dragged around by Silver and Burrito, trying to convince some rednecks that driving drunk was a bad idea, and finally fell asleep alone listening to the deafening moans coming from the surround sound system in the room next to me.

For five days, this was my life.

The time finally came when my captors allowed me to leave. We packed up our bags and shoved them into the car and I thanked the heavens that there was finally a light at the end of the tunnel. I pulled back my hair and climbed

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into my alcove.

Outside of town, lost in the vast expanse of rolling grassy fields, we came around a corner where a short length of barbed-wire fencing was decaying under an old wagon wheel. Grass shoots and some sort of thorny bush were growing out from the center of it all. It was extremely picturesque, and as we drove by, I unsuccessfully tried to capture it in photographs. It was the kind of image I expect to find in the kitchen of a rustic-looking house, framed by rough-cut wood, and hanging on a yellow wall just above a small vase of daffodils on a wrought-iron shelf. It is the one image of Idaho, cliché and completely unimaginative as it may be, that I have kept.

I'd discovered the weird world of Cottonwood in five inexplicably long days. I say inexplicably long because, upon crossing the state borders, time seemed to cease completely. I felt like I had entered an alternate universe in which Father Time is not a kind old gray-bearded man, but instead a sadist in leather chaps and spurs.

If I am right, and Idaho is a lodestone for the lost, included in the dossier of the misplaced is all of the lost seconds, minutes, weeks, months, and years of the people of this world. All of the long, arduous hours spent doing menial labor for minimal pay end up in the trenches and valleys of Idaho. All of the minutes, hours, days and years that children are forced into punishment to spend sitting in the corner or cleaning their rooms are gracefully

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whisked away to the glorious mountains of the Gem State. All of those long, boring, wasted lives of doing meaningless things like watching television, playing video games, or pursuing a career in writing end up right there in Idaho. All of those years I spent chasing fantasies and delusions are now sitting stagnant in the grass and the dust and the undying breeze of Idaho, waiting to be released.

I watched with introverted elation as we passed a sign that said Welcome to Washington, The Evergreen State. I looked at the clock, lit up a cigarette, and prepared for a long drive through the mountains where I could hopefully be free of civilization for a while. I laid my head back on the window and took in the music and the sounds of rolling tires on pavement. I was moving again.

## Leonid

Angela Nuzzo



I breathe deep into my lungs  
the darkness that surrounds me,  
the cold air that burns my cheeks  
and fiercely stings my eyes.  
I look past the rims of my foggy glasses,  
over the rooftop, and tree line, and far  
into the sky.  
I am nothing to the millions of stars  
flung wide across the heavens,  
insignificant to the meteors  
that are falling out of space.  
But I watch each silent shimmer,  
every streak and burst of light,  
with a humble sort of wonder  
and the thought that it's all for me.

# Fortune Telling

Amanda Kleps



Neither the cubicle of steel blue  
nor the glaring, impatient monitor  
hold my attention very long—  
sealed windows to the world below  
beckon opportunity through vicarious escape.

So I choose him,  
stout and smooth-headed  
like a heavy rock  
purchased for a garden path—  
unremarkable occupant, but there if needed.

Over a slackened shoe  
he stumbles out of invisibility.  
The blemishless briefcase  
spills papers gone awry,  
the anguish so palpable, I know his story.

Now late for that meeting  
with a cold, disembodied head honcho,  
it was his last chance—  
tardiness, tequila breath, unacceptable.  
He's fired, insignificant enough to vanish.  
Backspace.

## Baily's Beads 2012

Directionless, jobless, hopeless,  
the dark sour scent of succor,  
liquor, that familiar old friend,  
dissolves frail bonds, frayed bonds.  
Happy marriages are slippery like gin-soaked  
olives.

I cannot leave him like this.  
Must my maudlin mind  
tarnish every shining soap bubble?  
If you love him, and briefly I have,  
offer a ladder to a fairy tale, redeem the  
prince.

So (I decide) he puts it down finally,  
inner strength so enticingly rare,  
shines the briefcase, with its scuffed character  
seeks and finds new love, money, and purpose,  
and thus dies old, happy, wiser within progeny's  
embrace. Save.

Merely fifteen seconds to plot  
his whole life, now certain in my memory,  
his fate, my amusement, temporarily.  
I dabble in tea leaves.  
He moves out of the frame, and I find my next  
charge.

## Brut Cologne

Stewart Skeel



Brut smells acrid, like fear,  
like helplessness, like scissors  
held by a wrinkled man not  
seeing where his hands drift,  
cutting too close to tiny ears.  
It smells like soft skin, cold metal,  
sharp pain, and the revelation  
that the insides of children run red.

## Spring Forward, Fall Behind

Robert Thomas



Hiking from camp alone,  
I find a spot  
to sit and meditate,  
dropping tobacco to the four winds,  
contemplating my walk  
and the beauty in  
the only sound I heard  
the crunch of my footsteps  
on this Utah canyon floor.  
And the fact  
that it took millions of years  
to create this,  
and just a day's drive  
for me to get here,  
makes me question my journey,  
all the other rewards  
invisible along the way,  
cached beyond our windshield.

Climbing high  
above the canyon wall,  
again I sit  
and smoke tobacco.  
I am on a huge boulder,

**Spring Forward... / Robert Thomas**

thirty feet in width,  
fifteen feet across.  
It rests itself  
on one thin hold  
to the side of this cliff.  
I know  
that one day  
it will lose its grip  
and plummet  
to the canyon floor.  
A feeling surges through me  
that perhaps this is the day  
(provoked by 140 pounds added weight)  
and though I know it is my imagination,  
I swear I feel it shift beneath  
as a cool breeze captures me  
on its wing,  
staying my fall.

**Epitaph**

Jack Sheridan

When you reach your hand  
into the dark  
room, half in, half  
out yourself (like one  
entering the night  
woods)—fumbling, breathless,  
finding (finally the creek  
bed)—just before you  
flick the light  
switch, pause  
and think of me.



# 10 Days

Tara Zak



They warned me that it would be a long, rocky road, that she would most likely struggle. *About ten days*, they said. Ten tough days and she'd be good as new, better. How could they have forgotten to tell me that the days felt so long? Very long. And the nights even longer? Much longer. How is it that they failed to mention that sometimes there just wasn't the right-flavored water or soup? That even if something finally sounded appetizing, the body might still disagree with the mind? Why didn't they explain that, regardless of whether the pillows were perfectly fluffed, no matter if Lucy the stuffed horse was placed in the perfect position on the mattress, that it just as easily could have been a bed of nails? And why on earth had no one ever even hinted that I could feel just as miserable as the patient, maybe worse?

It had been a drizzly Tuesday morning. We ran in, her little head covered by her favorite Dora umbrella. The room was just as dreary as the outdoors—greenish gray walls, stark white sheets. The place smelled of bleach and antiseptic. The doctor was all smiles. The nurse brought horse stickers for her gas mask. They wheeled her away

## Baily's Beads 2012

and she smiled and waved at me.

Her lips were dry when she came out. Her stare vacant. She ate a cherry Popsicle and her lips looked red again. She threw up and finally cried. Her hand felt cold when I reached to hold it. Blood was dried on the back of it. She crawled into my lap while they changed her bedding. More stark white sheets. I wanted to take her home where she'd be more comfortable.

The rain pounded against the windshield, the thumping and swiping of the wipers breaking the silence. She leaned against the window, the seatbelt serving as a makeshift sling for her limp body. She wiped the pink drool from the side of her mouth as I extracted her awkwardly from the booster seat.

The stairs felt steep beneath our combined weight. Her room was cool. The light blue walls looked silver. Her ragamuffin dolls greeted us with their sewn-on smiles. She fell to the bed and moaned. I stretched my stiff back and peered out at the dark clouds. The rain was sheeting against the windows. I pulled down the blinds and closed the drapes. The room went black. She closed her eyes and slept.

Her breath was raspy. The mucus and phlegm, blood and spit gargled in the back of her throat. She jerked and started. Her eyebrows furrowed in pain.

If I squinted, the pasted-on glow-in-the-dark stars that dotted the ceiling seemed a great distance away. The mattress beneath me was firm. That's good for kids, they say, supportive of

their growing bodies. A moan, then a sigh. She tossed and turned, finally rolling over. Her legs kicked their way out from under the big-girl coverlet she'd picked out. The matching flowered sheet set draped beneath me on the trundle.

Her hair was matted to the side of her face. Her quick breaths warmed my cheek as I leaned over her. They were shallow now. I reclined once more onto the hard mattress. The stars on the ceiling and I were fading fast. Sleep came easily that night but ended too soon.

The hotness of her forehead startled me. Her cries were deafening. She was inconsolable. The unexpected taste of grapes sent her wailing once more in the middle of the night. The green numbers of the alarm clock gave away the outline of her outstretched arm. She motioned for the cup of water on the nightstand. She reverted to infancy in her pain. I held the cup to her lips. She sipped barely enough to wet them. She grabbed at her throat and fell back onto her pillow. Soon the whimpering stopped. The room fell silent once more.

Days felt like marathons of coloring crusades and craft classes. No Popsicle stick left unglued, no pipe cleaner unbent. Dora taught us both the words for red rojo, and green verde. By day five we'd discovered together the answers to all of Blue's mysteries.

The staleness of the air in the second story room grew noxious. The kitchen became a refuge. Empty cans of Campbell's Soup stood neatly at attention. Purple Popsicles lay lonely

on the top shelf of the freezer. A faint ray of steely light shone in the window above the sink. The rain kept coming.

As I dragged myself dutifully back toward the staircase, the office caught my eye. It looked deserted. A film of dust sheeted the computer, the printer, the desktop. The high back chair was still neatly tucked beneath the espresso colored behemoth. Stacks of unread magazines, and piles of perfectly sealed envelopes beckoned for attention. Her cry shattered the air, pulling me from my thoughts. I darted back up the stairs, ice pack in hand.

Her blue eyes flooded with silent tears, the ice pack formed perfectly to the small indent under her chin. She gasped for tiny breaths of air. Calm down, breathe, I kept telling her. She leaned away, making it impossible for me to stroke her hair. I tucked my own behind my ears and rubbed both hands beneath my eyes. When would sleep come again? Eight nights felt like an eternity now. The days are not any shorter.

The sheets felt scratchy. Her sweaty head and foul breath tainted the air. The rain pooled on the windowsill, forcing me to close it. Those couple of minutes were not enough to clear the air. Flannel pajama pants stuck to the backs of my knees. The smell of lilacs gone from my hair, mint no longer tingling my tongue. My face felt oily, my hair too. I thought I remembered a drop of chocolate ice cream falling to my shirt. Was that yesterday or the day before? The butterfly clings seemed too much for her walls now, too

busy. The knickknacks up high on the shelf seemed overcrowded. Why couldn't she stop snoring? How many naps was she going to need in a day? Was it the creak in the floorboards that gave away my attempts at escape?

Nine days in. She sat up erect in bed, pointed to the box of tissues, spit another blood-streaked pile of goo into the Kleenex, and handed it to me. The pink garbage can wouldn't accept another deposit. The floor soon became littered. Another grunt and point toward the basket of stuffed animals. The orange monkey? No. The yellow dog? She shook her head. The pink teddy bear? Her face flushed with frustration. Damn it, speak! I wanted to scream. When would her words come back? How did people communicate like this? Finally, she reached out. The zebra Webkinz. She tucked it under the sheet beside her and laid back down. Within minutes the gargling persisted. I lay awake, infuriated with the whole process. No words. No help from anyone. Pointing. Grunting. Screaming. Crying. Her pain, my frustration.

My chest grew heavy. My head began to pound. My ears rang, my nose ran. Tears rolled down one cheek, then the other. I wrestled over into the fetal position, clasping my hands together. Please Lord, help her to heal. Please help me to be patient and kind. And above all, please let us sleep.

I prayed the same prayer over and over, my eyes tightly sealed. My grip let loose only to wipe my eyes and nose. I wept beside her there,

quietly, for what felt like forever. Why had no one told me it would be this difficult? So very frustrating. My mind was taxed, my spirit all but extinguished. There was nothing I could do to fix this.

A small arm flopped heavily onto my shoulder. I rolled over to meet her gaze but her eyes were closed. The vile smell coming from her open mouth made me draw in quickly, pierce my own lips shut, and hold my breath. I took her hand. It felt warm in mine. I reached for her forehead. It was cool. I laid there, still. Her touch felt comforting, sage. I dozed off finally to join her in dreamland.

*Her eyes were bright. Her golden hair flouncy. She bounded across the bright green grass and jumped in my arms. We toppled to the ground giggling, smelling the Sweet William that lined the back yard. The sun felt warm on our faces. I could almost see her freckles develop. She tried counting mine. A random daisy plucked from the ground was tucked behind her ear. She squealed with delight as the swing took her higher, higher, higher. She was soaring and so was I. This was love, complete and utter.*

*She was a toddler then, waddling her way across the hardwood floor. She wriggled her toes on the cushiony carpet, plopped down to run her plump little fingers across it. The orange tiger cat tickled her chin with its tail and she screeched with delight. The smell of baby powder and teething gel wafted up to greet me as I stretched out my arms to pull her to me.*

Without notice the pixels broke apart. The dark came rushing back in. The heat and stench of the room brought me to. Her silent shuddering cut loose, and the night was filled with sound, too much of it. I was overwhelmed. I couldn't get my bearings. I jolted out of bed and hovered above her. She had her face covered with one hand, her throat clutched in the other. I grabbed the water from the bedside table. I pulled at the Kleenex till four or five filled my hand. Instinctively I poured a dose of pain medicine and offered it to her. She slammed herself back down onto the mattress with a thud. The crying stopped. Her dreams lured her back to that other world and I was left awake, alarmed, alert.

The rest of the night was blank, a barren picture without subject. There were no more dreams, no tossing or turning. I woke up the morning of day ten in the same position as when I finally passed out, my back stiff, my neck sore. The neighbors had left on the light that hovered above their overhead garage door. The orange-yellow glow tried sneaking through the cracks between the pink drapes and the outside wall. She rustled beneath the covers. I could just make out her profile. She parted her dry, cracked lips and in a soft, raspy voice she whispered, "Mommy, I'm hungry for pizza."

## Fool's Gold

Ann M. Gavazzi



The cool air stuck to my nostrils  
on a clear frosty January day  
as I opened the door to the GC Murphy's.  
The antique register cranked out prices and  
receipts  
for customers staring out windows.

I heard the squish of my mushy boots  
slopping the floor with cold weather sludge.  
My friend Julie poked me in the back like a  
guard leading me to my cellblock, hissing, go on  
go on  
but I felt safe in my thick tomato-red coat.

As I ambled over to the candy bins,  
my eyes darted back and forth,  
my heart in time with the metronome on my piano.  
A trickle of sweat ran down the side of my face  
like a scar a mar a stigmata fermata.  
I was going to burn in hell.

I glanced around one more time.

Ever so delicately, I burrowed my hand into the

Brach's candy bin and pulled out a shiny caramel.  
I tucked the gooey gold into my pocket,  
proud of my defiance, boldness, and newly formed  
alliance.

Testing my courage and shaking the tremors from  
my hands,  
I fled to the back of the store.  
Come let's go, gasped my friend, grabbing my  
sleeve.  
Okay, just wait, I retorted, shrugging her off,  
my throat closing, closing, cutting off my air.

The golden cube pressed me down—  
a hundred pounds of good Catholic-school guilt  
weighing down my pocket  
along with old pennies, lint, and a stick of gum.

Passing the tanks of fish moving as one,  
I gazed at a black goldfish amid a palette of  
gold.  
I tapped the side of another tank, silver streaks  
flew in twenty directions,  
and I went north toward the door  
blocked with customers puffing and stomping their  
boots from the winter sludge.

I whizzed past my friend,  
glanced at the clerk,  
the thorn in my pocket making me bleed.  
I opened my hand, tossed the fool's gold into the  
bin,  
and walked out the door.

## The English Gardener

Norma Heberle

Worked every day he did,  
digging in the gardens, hoeing  
the weeds, tidying the hedgerows,  
each season planting anew the bulbs  
that made the village green a picture.  
Flower patches in the yards  
of each home made the border.

A humble man of grit and common  
sense, dependable, and if he sometimes  
stopped to have a pint or two, no one  
would remark it or begrudge him  
the rest and the company.

Living alone as old men often do,  
it was a full day gone before his  
absence caused concern. Found  
in his chair, pipe still clutched in  
work-stained hands, he looked  
somewhat bemused, at a loss  
without his spade or shovel.

The whole town came to hear  
the vicar say his piece, to watch

the old man settled in the soil  
where he was so at home.

They all brought food to  
the funeral tea. The town did  
him right and it was the highest  
accolade to hear it said,  
"They buried him with ham."



## Up and Down

Robert Thomas

And mostly I feel sorry  
for my son.  
He doesn't understand  
why his mom and me  
are not talking,  
are sleeping in separate beds,  
why she's downstairs  
watching the tube,  
and me upstairs  
reading a book of poetry.  
And Stephen,  
eight years old,  
runs back and forth,  
up and down,  
to share his love  
with both of us  
and make sure  
we don't forget  
to share our love  
with him.  
And he asks me  
why at midnight  
I still have my shoes on,  
and I don't have the heart



to tell him,  
so I take them  
off.



## The Waves

Angela Nuzzo

The wind blows  
and the tall grass flows  
like the waves of an ocean  
I have never seen.  
The feathery heads  
that look like wheat  
or barley glitter  
in the sunlight.  
They finger the hot air  
as if grasping for something,  
a tiny particle, an atom,  
a sigh of new awareness.  
The quiet of the field  
is uninterrupted,  
not even by a cricket  
or a faraway dog.  
The heat of the day  
glimmers like a phantom  
over the green and brown tide.  
High overhead  
a shadow is circling,  
gliding on the current,  
dipping its wings,  
silence, whispering all around.



The bird falls to the treetops,  
drops fast to the right,  
grabs up the mouse  
without making a sound  
and flies out  
beyond the waves.

## Nolo Contendre

Andrew Marsh



The Champ was out back jabbing at fireflies. It was a good night and the moon was new; in full-fledged darkness he waited for their innards to glow.

Jabbing was a fond pastime of his, born from the thrift-shop psyche of a disadvantaged youth from the bad part of town. Back then he'd jab at almost anything—falling leaves, street signs, birthday balloons—just to pass the time.

But then he'd grown up, started jabbing at men, and got to be champion. He bought a big house in seclusion even though nobody paid much attention to who the champion was in those days. It seemed that the great pugilist kings of the past had fallen from grace in the hearts and minds of the common man. But the people's caprice notwithstanding, now the Champ stood still and self-possessed in the backyard of seclusion, alone but for the night sounds and the hundred tiny rivals who had just begun to reveal themselves.

He hit one good, the front of his glove smeared with luminous bug guts. What had once been a child's game played in empty city lots was now a cornerstone of his workout—he said fuck the

fixed bag, the running five miles to nowhere fast. His old trainer, Claudio, had found the practice futile, called it foolishness in the dark. Claudio could train a flea now for all he cared. The Champ had had him fired about a month ago.

Another flash of light, another insect knocked down dead, and the Champ wondered how futile the practice could be if he was winning. Martin Coolidge, his manager, would have agreed. Not only because he always agreed—even when the Champ was just speaking rhetorically—but because he also thought “Jabbing at Fireflies” was something that would sound good in, or even as the title of, a book about the life and times of the Champ. In fact, Martin, who considered himself a writer in his free time and had even written a sentence or two of many great novels, had thought about writing that book. After the Champ delivered a few more fireflies to a grassy heaven, he heard the manager’s car start to come down the long driveway, so he declared himself winner by decision.

Martin parked the car and came around back, claiming “good news.” The Champ took off his gloves and slung them over the rail of the deck, which was suddenly lit by floodlight. The news was that Martin had found the Champ a new trainer, one famous for integrating Zen philosophies into his practice of the sport. Unfortunately for the Champ, the trainer was also famous for spending all of his money to settle a series of sexual harassment lawsuits a couple of years ago and was now charging ridiculous amounts of money for his

services. And, also unfortunately for the Champ, he wasn’t making much of his own money these days because he wasn’t fighting any fights, since it seemed to be that nobody knew he was champ. He told Martin that his good news blew goats and said not to come back until he had booked him a fight. As the Champ started walking away, the flustered manager tried explaining to him about cycles and the momentary trouble of finding worthy opponents, with the old foes all retiring and the up-and-comers in such short supply—“a gaggle of misfits and dunderheads,” he called them. But the Champ cut him off. He said he didn’t want to hear it. He said he’d fight anything—a brain-dead gorilla!—if he had to. He said he’d even take on the second coming of Christ! if it would get him back into the ring.

Then he went back inside, locking the sliding glass doors behind him. He stared for a moment through his own dim reflection back at Martin: a moldy, sagging peach of defeat with the face of the world’s most forlorn basset hound puppy.

\*

Early the next morning, the Champ heard knocking. So he put on his title belt over his pajamas then went downstairs to see who it was.

At the door were a couple of fresh-shaven young men who called themselves Latter-day Saints. The Champ had never met a saint before. One of them asked him, “Are you a religious man?”

While the Champ supposed he believed in God, he tended to forget all about Him whenever

no one was around to remind him, so he decided to change the subject. Summoning up some quick-drawn confidence, the Champ said, "Enough talk. Which of you choir boys has what it takes to take on the Champ?"

The saints glanced at each other confusedly because, much like everybody else, they had no idea who the Champ was in those days either. They ignored the question and in a roundabout manner explained to the Champ the reason for their existence on this earth.

The Champ said it sounded like interesting work. He asked if they were hiring. The saints said they'd get back to him on that, wished him a nice day, and then left.

The Champ went back inside. He ate a breakfast of half a grapefruit and had a revelation. His first move was to call his manager's secretary to tell her to tell him that he was fired. (Initially disheartened by the news, Martin would fall into deep depression. But after a rather constructive therapy session with his shrink, he would come to see the firing as an opportunity to jump-start his writing career. With an enthusiasm yet unknown to the world, he wrote a fine first sentence.) Then the Champ set out to spread the word. Chock-full of newfound ambition, he laced up his gloves, changed into his trademark blue trunks, then grabbed his lucky mouthpiece and walked out the front door of seclusion.

The Champ's nearest neighbor lived a ten-minute walk down the quiet country road. The

Champ went up to the house and started knocking, but no one answered. Thinking maybe his gloves were muffling the sound, he knocked harder. Then just a moment later, a grey-haired old man opened the door and asked what he was selling.

The Champ took out his lucky mouthpiece. "You couldn't afford what I'm selling," he said. Because what the Champ was selling was a world of pain. But the old man said, "So who is the champ these days, incidentally?" and the Champ got mad for real and left.

At the next house, just across a slow stream of bituminous pitch, a menopausica housemaid came to the door.

"I'm the biggest, baddest mo-fo this side of Mexico!" The Champ said. He said, "I'm so bad they named a sea monster after me!"

He had more to say, but the housemaid exclaimed something awful-sounding in Spanish and slammed the door in his face.

The next house wasn't a house at all, but a gas station at the edge of town. The Champ sized up the wooden Indian that stood guard out front and hit him with a quick right hook. Then he went inside and bought himself a jumbo-sized bag of Party Mix. He decided that he'd taken enough initiative for one day, so he opened the bag and walked home eating pretzel after Cheeto after corn chip.

\*

Over the next few weeks, the Champ continued his door-to-door campaign, but with no success. He traveled many places; he discovered

far-off lands. He met some new and interesting peoples and saw some strange and wonderful things. But wherever he went, it was nolo contendre. So he decided to expand his approach.

First, he took out an ad in the daily paper—"Win a Chance to Fight the Champ." When that didn't work, he went down to the local television station and purchased a thirty-second ad spot. Unfortunately, the spot always appeared very late at night and only in the regional market.

The salesman at the station had guaranteed him that the spot would produce results. He'd assured the Champ that regional advertising was the way to go, the wave of the future, and all that. He'd even read him some figures and drawn him up some charts by using specialized computer software. All of this clearly indicated that regional advertising was indeed the way to go.

And at first, the Champ had been hopeful, even though most of the people who'd responded to the ads thought he was selling boxing gear, not pain. Then he started getting calls from amateur boxers who were looking to hire trainers. But the Champ told them he was a fighter, not a faker. A performer, not a pretender. He was the real deal. He practiced what he preached. After a while the calls got tiring, and he would sometimes become irate over the phone.

For the first time in his life, the Champ was at a loss. Despite his quick wit, superlative charisma, and always-entertaining antics, nobody knew who the Champ was or even seemed to care

all that much. While Ali had had his captivated crowds, his endless cast of rivals—the Listons, the Fraziers, the Formans—while Tyson had once seemed fit to take on the world, and then eat its children for breakfast, the Champ these days was boxing nothing but shadows that could fall in the last round and not make a sound because, unfortunately, nobody would be there to see. Gone was the hoopla. Gone was the hype. The Champ, bloody and detached, was being backed against the ropes in a daze, his men in the corner shrinking from the edge of the folding periphery. And now all he could do was sit and wait for the distant ringing of the bell; it was almost as if, for the very first time, it was he for whom it chimed—that dreaded standing eight.

But the Champ wasn't about to go down without a fight. He blamed the man—not the man, but one man in particular—the salesman at the station for the ultimate failure of his campaign. So he decided to go down to the station, pay the man a little visit, and see if he couldn't make him make his guarantee a money-back one.

When he got to the station, the Champ walked right up to the secretary's desk. She was busy on the phone and pointed the Champ toward an open chair in the lobby. But the Champ wasn't about to wait for no secretary. He went straight back to the salesman's office without even bothering to knock.

The salesman stood up from his chair. He asked the Champ who the hell he was and what the hell he thought he was doing.

"You said the ad would produce results," said the Champ. "The way to go, the wave of the future and all that." He said, "Now I say you better give me my money back or else. And I guarantee you won't like the results I'll produce out of you if you don't."

The salesman was having a bad life and was sick of having to deal with complaints from people he'd sold shitty spots to. So he took a swing at the Champ, not knowing he was the Champ. He missed. The Champ swung back and didn't miss. He hit the salesman square in the side of the head.

The salesman fell straight to the ground and started leaking blood from his mouth. His blood leaked onto the floor where it formed a little puddle that slowly grew into a bigger puddle until he died.

The secretary saw the whole thing happen. She got scared and called security. Security came and saw the blood and called the cops. The cops came and arrested the Champ, then took him off to Central Booking. They printed him, pictured him, then took him to the county jail where he was held on charges of manslaughter. In the first degree.

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The Champ had to put up the house in seclusion to pay for bail. And since he'd fired his lawyer some years ago for not finding a loophole in the city's loophole ordinance back when he was remodeling the house in seclusion and had wanted to build a bastion off the east

wing, he had had to call his old manager Martin to ask him for help with getting out of jail. The manager also offered to help him find a good lawyer, but the Champ said he just wanted to be left alone.

When the local papers found out that the Heavyweight Champion of the World was living in the area and had killed a man, they started running front-page stories about the incident. Then, the national media picked up on the story as well. Soon papers from all across the country, and even some of the bigger ones from the more prominent of foreign countries started to regularly cover it. And then the news shows and the talk shows and the fake news shows and the entertainment news shows and the entertainment/news shows and the entertainment/news shows disguised as regular news shows and the sporting news shows and then the prime-time investigative specials all started reporting on the Case of the Champ and His (Alleged) Deadly Fit of Rage. Suddenly, everybody knew who the Champ was and was talking about him, even if they'd never kicked a boxing ball in their lives.

The Champ's days in seclusion came to an end as the people soon discovered where he lived. Reporters started to swarm the house, hoping to get that exclusive interview. Photographers started to make their homes there among the trees, snapping exclusive photo after exclusive photo until there was nothing left to exclusively photograph. Then came the angry mobs of picketers with their signs and their slogans decrying the

enemy culture of pervasive violence. Alongside them were the angry mobs of supporters with their signs and their slogans decrying the enemy angry mobs of picketers, and they all quit their day jobs and set up camps around the edge of the property—angrily—so that the reporters might have something to report on, and so the photographers might have something more to exclusively photograph. Defense lawyers from the big cities started to call the Champ on the phone, offering to represent him at extremely reduced prices or, in some cases, for free. But the Champ just wanted to forget that the whole thing had ever happened. He mentioned this to one of the big city lawyers over the phone once. It was attorney Fredrick T. Goodfellow, popularly known as Freddy T. Attorney—Freddy T. for short—the attorney who was famous for using a lyrical prose style of argument in the courtroom. The lawyer told the Champ not to worry, that he too had never lost a fight. He assured the Champ that he would forget the whole thing had happened after Freddy T. was through with the case. He said, as a gift to the Champ, he would even offer his services pro bono publico.

The Champ asked him, "Does that mean for free?"

The lawyer said, "Not only for free." He said, "But also for the public good."

The Champ said, "So what are you saying, that we're going to help people?"

The lawyer said, "That is indeed what I am saying." He said, "So what do you say? Do we

have ourselves a deal?"

The Champ agreed. It sounded good to him.

\*

The Champ refused to leave his house at all before the trial so he didn't have to deal with the media. He wouldn't even go into the backyard for fear of the overhead newscopters and the untold crazies who were camped out in the woods behind the house. Freddy T. agreed to hold their defense conferences there, at the house no longer in seclusion, in order to appease the jitter-bugged champ. Sometimes he would even bring the Champ groceries.

They held their meetings in the living room in front of the television, because that was where the Champ was most comfortable. Usually, Freddy T. sat beside the Champ on the couch and casually asked him this or that question while the Champ watched daytime TV. Then one day, while the Champ was watching some people on the news shows telling nothing but lies about him, the attorney stood up and said, "All right." He said, "Now we've got important matters to discuss."

The Champ put the television on mute.

Freddy T. said that, first of all, the trial would be televised and that there was nothing he could do about it. He suggested that the Champ try to look his best on the day of the trial and maybe even wear his title belt. He said, "We need the jury to think of you as someone special."

He told the Champ that his main argument would be that the Champ didn't actually kill the salesman, but that the salesman had, in

effect, killed himself. He called it suicide by provocation. He said, "Anyone would have to be suicidal to try to take on a man of your size." He added, "The Heavyweight Champion of the World."

He said he'd found all sorts of evidence to suggest that the salesman had been suicidal—a failed marriage, an old script for anti-depressants, a long family history of depression, witness testimony to a glum disposition. But most damning, he said, were the two separate police reports he'd uncovered from a time when the salesman had gotten drunk and tried to off himself by jumping from the same bridge twice in one night. Freddy T. said, "But the bridge was too short, and he didn't even break a bone, the fool."

Freddy asked the Champ if he had any questions. The Champ thought about it for a second, then looked up at the television as if it might help him think. But instead, he was taken aback by the sight of his cousin Jeffrey up there, smiling away on the TV screen.

He said, "What's Jeffro doing up there?" to no one in particular, excited to see the cousin he hadn't seen since he'd gotten to be champ. He turned up the volume.

Cousin Jeffro was talking to the host of a news show about when he and the Champ were kids. He told the host that the Champ had been so mean back then that one time he tried to cook a kitten in the microwave. Jeffro said, still smiling, "But good thing I was there to stop him or that

little guy'd have been zapped to hell, for sure."

The Champ stood up and started yelling at the screen. He said, "That's a damn lie, Jeffro! And you know it!"

Freddy T. told him, "That's definite slander." Then he pulled a small tape recorder out of his pocket. Into it, he said, "Remember to file petition to disqualify all jury prospects who have cats, have had cats, are thinking about getting a cat, or have family members who have, have had, or might one day have cats."

After Cousin Jeffro, the host interviewed an older woman named Miss Stevens who had been the Champ's third-grade English teacher. A caption appearing on the bottom of the screen said that the school she taught at had recently been shut down due to lack of funding. Miss Stevens told the host about a violent short story that the Champ had written once for a class assignment. She said, "If I remember right, it was something about a little boy who ate a magic potato chip that turned him into an evil gorilla with giant fists and a cape who flew to the North Pole to beat up Santa Claus because the poor man had forgotten to give him anything for Christmas one year."

The Champ said, "How could you, Miss Stevens?" He said, "I thought you said you liked my story." He told Freddy T. how she'd even given him a smiley-face sticker for it. Freddy T. said into his little tape recorder, "Third grade English teachers are definitely out of the pool."

Next, the host interviewed the Champ's old

trainer, Claudio. Claudio talked about how the Champ liked to go around killing defenseless insects just for fun. After hearing this, the Champ turned around and punched a table lamp, which fell to the floor and shattered into a hundred tiny pieces.

Freddy T. said, "Great!" He said, "Now we'll have the Equal Rights for Insects crowd to deal with!" And to his future self he noted, "Remember to never piss off the Champ."

The Champ sat back down on the couch. Freddy T. got up and said he'd be back in a couple of days. He said he'd call if anything else came up before then. The news show had since gone to commercial, and the Champ was about to turn off the TV. But then the show came back on, and there, on the screen, was his old manager, Martin.

The first thing the host asked Martin was to describe, in detail, the evil-most thing he'd ever known the Champ to do. But Martin said that everyone had gotten the Champ all wrong. He said that, while boxing was by its very nature a very violent sport, the Champ always fought by the rules. Martin conceded that, "sure," the Champ may have bad-mouthed his opponents before some fights, it was just for show. And when the matches were over and the crowds had filed out, he would always treat them with the utmost respect. Martin also said that the Champ was fun-loving and good with kids. He said it was plain bad luck that the Champ was in the predicament he was in. And if circumstances had been different, the Champ would

have been known worldwide as one of the greats in his field. Martin said, "But nobody seems to be paying much attention anymore, and they wouldn't know a great thing if they saw it." He said, "We'd rather make kings of fools and fools of kings before admitting that we are the ignorant ones."

The host said, "Great soundbyte, did you come up with it yourself?"

Martin said, "Did you like it?" and mentioned that he'd been doing a little bit of writing lately.

The Champ turned off the TV and pondered what his great mistake had been. Then he tried to think of something he'd done in the past few months that hadn't been a mistake. He sat in silence for a while until he decided to get up and call his poor old mother, who was living in a nursing home in Jersey somewhere.

\*

The Champ put up his gloves, traded in his trademark blue trunks for a suit and tie at the Barter King at the mall, and bought a new belt, the kind that just anyone can buy, skinny and made of imitation leather. It was the morning of the trial and the first time he'd left the house in over a month. The reporters and various assemblers had all slipped away in the night to make their way to the courthouse, so the Champ had been able to escape without being confronted or followed. And in that idle after-dawn, the Champ had all but had the mall to himself.

After the mall, he went to the park for

a while, and then to the Pancake House to take advantage of their daily special for perhaps the last time—to eat all that he could eat. He could usually eat about twelve of their buttermilk pancakes, but on that day he barely finished half that. Then he went back home for a short workout and a shower. He put on his new suit, then sat on the couch to wait quietly. A car came to pick him up after an hour of just sitting.

It took about another hour to reach the county seat. As the car neared the courthouse, the Champ thought for a moment that a street festival must have been going on.

They came from all over the world to bear witness to the famous proceedings. There were news vans parked along the streets from every major network. On the front lines were the reporters, the cameramen, the commentators, the paparazzo. Then there were the protesters, the well-wishers, the lookers-on, the popcorn venders. There were street performers, code-enforcers, special-interest groups, some guys selling T-shirts. There were police officers, traffic helicopters, city workers, a few lost-looking immigrants who'd been given the wrong date for their citizenship exams at the courthouse. Some of the out-of-towners had set up tents and brought sleeping bags for what all the experts had predicted would be an epic trial, lasting weeks or even months.

The Champ's car drove slowly past the crowds down a section of road that had been kept clear for his arrival. The driver parked in front

of the courthouse steps, then got out to open the Champ's door for him. But before he could, the Champ was already out and on his way up the steps. The crowd roared and cameras flashed. The Champ was about as far from seclusion as a man could possibly get.

Freddy T. met him halfway down the steps. He patted the Champ on the back and told him that there was absolutely nothing to worry about. Some police officers at the entrance of the courthouse then escorted the two through the building and into the courtroom. There, they were greeted by swelling chatter and more flashes. They took their seats at the defense table, where a world of eyes enjoyed an unobstructed view.

After the initial formality of having everybody sit and wait for a while, the twelve jurors entered the jury box. Then the bailiff asked the court to rise for the arrival of the judge. Once he took his seat at the bench there were some more formalities and announcements of things, and finally a calling of court into session.

The judge asked the defense to rise. He read the charges, then the summary charges, most of which the Champ had never heard before because Freddy T. had never bothered to tell him. Altogether there were seven charges, all stemming from that one fluid motion, that one tragic jab. Then the judge asked the defendant how it was he wished to plead.

The Champ's gaze was fixed and low to the ground, as if his ultimate judgment would come to

pass through a particular spot on the floor. And it was to that particular spot that he chose to speak. So, to the disbelief of a world of all-ears, most of whom were listening from beneath the eaves, the Champ pled his plea. And it was nolo contendere.

The Champ's attorney was livid. Forgetting his usual courtroom eloquence, he berated his client, he accused the prosecutor and staff attorney of some sort of secret malfeasance, and he demanded that the judge dismiss the plea and suspend the trial. But when all was said and done, the judge would accept the plea and remand the Champ into custody until sentencing, and attorney Fredrick T. Goodfellow would be long gone to some tropical island somewhere in the South Pacific.

One reporter, the one famous for his hard-hitting exposés as well as for his heart-warming mustache, had this to say after the abrupt ending to the trial: "It was indeed a sad day for trials-of-the-century enthusiasts. We filed out of the courtroom feeling lost, confused, disappointed and, quite frankly, a little bit hurt. Never, in all my years reporting on trials of centuries, have I seen a trial of a century quite like this one."

\*

The Champ was eventually sentenced to eight to fifteen years. Just before announcing his decision, the judge made a statement. He said, "It is my opinion that a man in the defendant's position—the Heavyweight Champion of the World—

should know the potential of his own strength." He said, "And it is my belief that a better man would know the power of restraint."

\*

When he first got to jail, the Champ was kept in isolation because the guards were afraid that his newfound celebrity would make him a target for some of the other inmates. But when the guards came by his cell, sometimes they joked that it was the other inmates' safety that they were really worried about. The Champ came to dread the sound of their laughter, partly because he didn't think it was a very good joke, but also because he'd come to find that he really didn't like living in isolation. He felt that isolation was a different thing than seclusion altogether. In isolation he had no one to hide from but himself, his age-old rival. His only rival.

In isolation he had nothing. No TV, no space to do his workouts, nothing to read but an old mystery novel that had been left in his cell to level out the legs of his cot. The Champ spent most of his time trying to figure out how prisoners in movies fashioned nooses from their bedsheets. His new hobby reminded him of a game he used to play as a disadvantaged youth from the bad part of town, where he would tie the one end of his bedsheet around his neck like a cape and then run back and forth across the tiny, empty apartment trying to pick up enough speed to get the other end to lift up into the air. The game was called Superman. When he was fast enough, he could get the cape to stay like that, floating on

air, for at least one or two trips around the earth.

Sometime after the first few months in isolation, it was determined by the guards that nobody knew who the Champ was anymore. This meant that the Champ could be introduced into the general population. He was placed with a cellmate named Muhammad Abdullah Rashalamanaanaman, who claimed to be falsely imprisoned for killing a bald eagle. The cellmate was mostly quiet and would only speak when spoken to, it seemed. But then one day he asked the Champ a question. He asked him if he was a religious man.

The Champ told him only that he supposed he believed in God. But this really got him to start thinking about Him. And with nothing better to do than to think, the Champ thought he might take a shot at finding religion. While it seemed strange to be looking for God in such a place built of brick and mortar and sin, he supposed there was a first time for everything.

Muhammad let him borrow a book that he told him might help him in his quest. It was called the Quran. The Champ read it and learned that He was all around. Then the Champ got permission to start using the prison library, which was just an old janitor's closet packed with dust and unsteady stacks of this-and-that books. The first one the Champ checked out was the Book of Mormon. The Champ read it and learned that God is not just some Great Spirit in the clouds, but that He also has a living, breathing body, which apparently resides on some faraway planet

somewhere. Or something like that. Actually, the Champ didn't quite get it. During another trip to the library, he found a copy of the book written by the famous boxing trainer who practiced Zen philosophies. It was called "Float Like a Butterfly, To Sting is the Bee." The Champ read it and learned that the reason man must fight was so that he didn't have to face himself in that ring called life. And to be a true champion, one must first win the battle within.

With nothing but time, the Champ was finding all sorts of religion in that small, gray cell. He wondered how many religions there were in the world, and if he couldn't one day find them all. He asked his cellmate how many religions he thought there were in the world, and Muhammad responded, "One." The Champ told him he was sure going to miss his conversation once he was gone. The framed eagle-killer was soon to be released.

When Muhammad's time was up, the Champ was left alone once again. But it wasn't so bad now that he had his religions. He'd found that the more religions he'd find, the better he'd feel. Still, he thought it would be nice to have someone to talk to every now and then.

Then one day, one of the guards came by his cell and told him that a visitor had come to see him. The Champ was surprised; he hadn't even realized it was visiting day, since he'd yet to have any visitors. The rare seed of anticipation, these days usually reserved for new-book-days only, grew in him as the guard let him out of his cell, then led him down the hallway and into the

visitation room. From there, the Champ took his seat before the plexiglass window, face to newly-bearded face with his old manager, Martin.

The Champ greeted Martin warmly for the first time in forever. He even commented on Martin's new tweed jacket, and asked him how things were going. Martin told him that he'd finally finished writing his book. He said he'd decided to call it *Jabbing at Fireflies: The Life and the Times of the Champ*, and that it had even garnered interest from a few major publishers. But first, Martin wanted to make sure to come see the Champ, to see if he'd give him his blessing.

The Champ said, "You've been writing a book?"

Martin kind of cringed. He said, "Yes, well, kind of." He said, "On and off for a couple of years or so."

The Champ told Martin he'd always wanted to have a book be about him.

Martin was just about to ask the Champ if he'd sign some papers when the Champ said, "Wait."

He said he'd had an idea, and that he had to stop to think about it for a second. A while ago, once he'd found religion and all, he'd realized that he should really start trying to do some good for people. But for real this time. And up until now, he was really having trouble figuring out what good someone could do from a jail cell. So he told Martin he could publish the book, but only if Martin made sure all the proceeds went towards funding after school boxing

programs for inner-city youth.

Martin stumbled over words trying to explain to the Champ that while not wanting to sound greedy or desperate, he was pretty well in debt after borrowing so much money completing the research for the book. But the Champ didn't want to hear it—mostly because he didn't know what Martin was getting at. He said, "Think of the children, Marto." He said, "Think of the children."

And that was that. Visiting hour had come to an end. The Champ was led back to his cell, content in knowing the potential of his newfound power to do good. Once the guard had shut the cell door behind him, he slid his cot into the corner, went into the middle of the room, and started to practice fancy footwork. And even though no one was around to hear him, he raised his fist and said, "I am the greatest." He took a jab into thin air, its hidden wisps of flesh, gut, and bone. Alone, but for the dead in his wake.

## Made of Honor

Amanda Kleps



I secured her grandmother's pearls  
to the handle of her bouquet while  
the smug and insincere pastor  
led a prayer to a god  
I don't believe in.

"Let her be a good mother and wife,  
keep her humble and mindful,"  
he intoned to please a patriarchal ideology.  
"May they be partners,  
give her your strength!"  
My plea to a fairer version of God.  
Mumble aloud, "Amen." For her sake.

I could not meet her stare.  
We waited for the aisle cue.  
My chosen-sister.  
She who had led us into moonlight.  
Bare feet whisper to damp grass,  
dramatic cloaks of adored bedsheets,  
circles of salt, more about our own strength  
than religious stance, awe of life and nature.  
She discarded her cloak when he offered a ring.

## Baily's Beads 2012

Slumber parties where our eyes did not close, and  
even where we paid our own rent  
the tradition was eternal. Reheating  
old croissants, older coffee, oldest memories.  
Not really stale, too well preserved.  
Maybe foreseen bunting will join us, or  
perhaps the coffee has been discarded, too.

They take communion after vows,  
husband then wife. Pecking order,  
why not ladies first? I ponder  
the weight of our bouquets together.  
This is tiring, though I've never held  
so many roses in all my life. Perfect.  
Wait! There is a sly, subtle wink.  
She plays their game, she infiltrates from within,  
not gone, though bound. Feisty spy!  
Our naked feet will see the moon again.

# A Morning With My Thoughts

Cecelia Prosser



As I sit here reading *How to Write Poetry*, my self-assigned assignment for this week-long fishing trip, I dunk my chocolate chip cookie breakfast in my hot decaf.

Finishing the chapter, I give in to this paper lying on my lap and prop my feet up on the bench, warning them not to fall asleep.

I can hear them on the dock talking, far down by the water's edge, hurriedly making excited sounds as they prepare to launch.

Watching, I see them releasing the ropes and silently moving by troller power till they are safely free from the old piecemeal dock with missing slats.

As I hear the outstanding roar of their boat take off, I can't help looking up and watching them slowly disappear from my sight. The sound lulls my eyes closed.

## Baily's Beads 2012

I wake, still sitting on his camo lawn chair, to a cramp that demands my attention. After giving it the customary curses, I notice my coffee is cold, and my breakfast is gone.

Glancing out at this Black Lake, a moving body of glass with shades of gray accents, I watch a lone boy in a white hoodie fish from the neighboring dock, silhouetted in the rising orange sun, looking like the last man on Earth or the only man on the moon.

The clip-clop of an Amish buggy out on the road adds to the sounds of the lapping water, while the birds make their usual morning racket, causing me to think how noisy peace and quiet can be.

A chipmunk peers in where someone has left the screen door ajar. I wait, unmoving, as he scampers closer toward the last crumbs of my breakfast: the thief, who I'm sure visited earlier, coming back to the scene of his cookie caper.

## Toward Nightfall

Jack Sheridan



Toward nightfall in the blue sky  
a thin crescent moon cocks itself  
like a sickle getting sharper  
and sharper and sharper as the sky  
blues and blues toward nightfall.

## On War & Paranoia

Robert Thomas



There is this one  
particularly  
smart mouse  
in my house.

Three days in a row  
I awoke to find  
the mouse-trap sprung,  
its bounty gone,  
and no dead mouse.

Ah-ha, I thought,  
I'll poison the little shit,  
d-CON  
advanced formula,  
methodically washing my hands  
after opening the nuclear box  
and stashing it out of sight  
from me or my dog.

The next morning I awoke  
to find little green pellets  
of poison  
carefully sprinkled

in a cooking pot  
left in the kitchen sink  
and in my dog's dinner bowl.

Now this is one  
particularly  
conniving mouse.

So I'm sitting here  
pondering all of this,  
loaded rifle at my side,  
and my dog,  
he gives me this look  
like  
"you okay?"

## The Cop and The Gypsy

Jack Eggleston

There's a guy over there, across from the pita place, sitting on the big, round, ugly brick plant enclosure in the middle of the market square. He's old or maybe just a meth addict who has aged poorly. He has Tourette's syndrome and keeps howling out BAH! BAH! BAH! with uncontrolled fervor. He's a gypsy, or at least of gypsy decent; his thick black hair, shaggy and matted, hangs just to the brow of his wrinkled and kneaded forehead. His light molasses-colored skin is covered with tattoos, every visible inch save for his face, tattoos of goblins and moons and stars and other cartoonish renditions of mythical beings like a corrupted caricature of a spiritualist painting.

Five minutes ago, he dropped an empty red hiking ruck and a thirty pack of Coors Light next to me. He started pacing up and down the street, taking drags off a little shiny metal pipe full of reefer and openly advertising to random strangers that he had some good stuff to sell. The whole time, random bursts of BAH! BAH! BAH! exploded from his mouth. I heard him yell at someone and then he wandered over to the brick plant

## The Cop and The Gypsy / Jack Eggleston

enclosure where he's sitting now, an enclosure which seems to only enclose dead bushes. Leaning back against a gigantic red pot that is easily the size of a clown car and contains little more than a random dead bush and some garbage and cigarette butts, I listen to a babbling conversation that another, less hostile, homeless man is having, possibly with himself, though just as likely with me. "You gotta understand," he says in a nondescript accent, though he looks South American, possibly Brazilian, "they closing the damned borders." The lyrics to "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves" are echoing in the recesses of my bobbing, opiate addled brain while I sit here strumming my guitar, the local jester scrounging for the spare change of random passing strangers. It's a dream come true. I'm a homeless street performer splitting my time between a couple of flophouses, an organic farm, and the dirty sidewalks of Bellingham, Washington. "It's the government," the hobo rattles. I have no clue what he is talking about and begin searching through cigarette butts snuffed out in the big, red, clown-car pot, hoping to find one that is still remotely smokable. The soil is littered with candy wrappers, paper scraps, and cigarette butts. They told me the West Coast was supposed to be progressive. "Closing them off," the hobo keeps babbling. "Closing them off to foreigners, lest you got passport." Score! There's an almost completely unsmoked

## Baily's Beads 2012

cigarette pressed into the dirt. It has a little bit of lipstick on it, but I wipe it off on my jeans and light up the long dirty thing. Ah sweet nicotine coursing through my veins, never mind that smell of burnt plastic, this is almost a complete cigarette, something I'm likely to find only once a week. "You know how much passport costs?" Like a magic trick, he pulls an incense stick out of thin air and drops it into my guitar case. Where the hell did he get an incense stick? Here comes a cop, his suit crisp and clean, a harsh contrast to my stained and tattered patchwork jeans and brown archaic-looking rope sandals. Gotta act natural. I take a drag off my recycled cigarette and slowly turn my head in the other direction, pretending to admire the garbage can to my right like it was a Picasso. The Passport Man just noticed the cop. Off he goes, his clothes dirty, dark, and ragged, a harsh contrast to the bright, hip looking clothing store I just realized I was sitting in front of. It's a boutique shop, the kind where rich women spend hundreds of dollars to resemble homeless Bohemians. I get the impression that the closest any of these women would be willing to get to the real-deal Bohemian lifestyle is sneering at me as they walk by in their three-hundred-dollar jeans that look suspiciously like mine only a bit more sterile looking. I somehow doubt that this store carries the hunger, dirt stains, and rancid smell of living the free-spirited Bohemian life. You

## The Cop and The Gypsy / Jack Eggleston

only find those in the supermarket of poor choices and the strip mall of mistakes.

The scent of the Passport Man's incense stick wafts up and lingers around my head, filling my nose with scents of back-alley head shops. Where the hell did he get the incense from? I wonder if he can make a fucking Big Mac appear.

I take another drag from my secondhand cigarette and look to the ground, trying to avoid the eyes of the approaching police officer. I think I'm sitting in the flattened and blackened remnants of someone's Juicy Fruit. I can hear the clop, clop, clop of the cop's standard-issue glossy size nines getting louder with each step. I take another drag, the final embers burning my fingers because I have become unsure of what to do with the butt now that there is an authority figure present, so I opt to continue puffing on it like the fool that I am, singeing the tips of my fingers.

"Good afternoon gentlemen," the officer says, stopping in front of the red hiking backpack and case of beer, wholly disregarding the sizzling cigarette butt in my hand.

Good afternoon? What time is it? Gentlemen? What the fuck does he mean?

"How's it going?" a voice replies from my side. What? Joel? How long has he been there?

I turn my floating anesthetized head and stare at him cockeyed, his gruff, dense brown beard bobbing up and down as he talks to the cop. I see only the thin slit of his mouth, making him look like one of Jim Henson's Muppets. That's

## Baily's Beads 2012

Joel, my own personal undertaker, who tacked the final nails in the coffin of helping me to convince myself that coming out here was a good idea.

Is that who the Passport Man was talking to? Maybe I should get some more sleep. Maybe I shouldn't have eaten those pills this morning. BAH! BAH! BAH!

It rings out across the market square, a bellowing call of travesty emanating from the brick enclosure.

BAH! BAH! BAH!

It rings out like the battle cry of a beast in heat, laying down a challenge to the alpha male. BAH! BAH! BAH!

It rings out like the weather-worn howl of something broken at the meager depth of the very soul itself - deep, gravelly, whiskey-worn, like the ghost of Tom Waits screaming disjointed songs of pain through the wind.

I turn my head in the direction of the guttural yelp. The gypsy is staring down the cop, who is holding the backpack and the case of beer in the air triumphantly. He is smiling back at the gypsy, a broad, accomplished smile. His cropped blond hair, poking out from under the brim of his hat, flutters slightly in the wind as if a movie technician has turned on one of those giant fans to enhance the overall mood of triumph. He looks angelic.

A horrid cramp arises in my stomach, the result of too little food and too many opiates. Bellingham is the only place on Earth, it seems, that I can find a universe of good, strong drugs

## The Cop and The Gypsy / Jack Eggleston

completely free of charge and yet cannot for the life of me find a fucking meal for the cost of a couple of strangers' spare change.

I watch as the cop lowers the backpack and beer and finds a comfortable position, leaning like James Dean against one of the concrete window frames of the Bohemian clothing store. His clothes are perfectly pressed and cleaned, his hat sits perfectly on top of his blond crew cut, his face is so expertly shaven his cheeks look like those of a prepubescent boy, he is the essence of the all-American man.

I can see my own reflection in the window to his left. My dreadlocks hang disheveled out of a dirty red bandana. Some of the patches on my jeans have ripped again, exposing my pale flesh to the elements. There are dark, deep purplish grey rings around the hollow crevices where I thought my eyes were. They are offset by the reds and browns of my scruffy beard. My shirt is stained and has some holes in it. My tattoos, bright and colorful though not nearly as plentiful as the gypsy's, stand out against my Casper-white skin. I am not the essence of the all-American man. I cannot be even mistaken for some crazed mental patient's twisted parody of the all-American man. The cop looks down toward Joel and smiles. I think I vaguely remember coming down here with him. When was that? The cop looks down toward Joel and smiles. The cop looks kindhearted. It may be the pills. The cop looks down toward Joel and smiles and says, "Hey, listen guys." His voice is calm and kind

## Baily's Beads 2012

without the normal tinge of authoritarian arrogance and condescension. "We don't care if you guys sit out here and play your guitars." He is smiling like a carefree country child enjoying a warm day out in a big city. He pauses and tilts his head back, catching another perfect breeze in his cropped golden hair, there is an aura around him, he is glowing. I can see it. Is it just the pills? Jesus, I feel like shit. I could really go for one of those pitas.

"Hey buddy!" the cop yells, his voice bordering on agitation while Joel taps me on the arm.

"Huh?" I mumble almost inaudibly.

"I said I don't care if you guys play your music here, but we've got a city ordinance about sitting on the sidewalks. Essentially," he says, his voice shifting back to its previous calm tone, "you want to panhandle, you've got to be standing. You have to do a little work."

His smile returns.

I climb to my feet and attempt to say, "okay, can do, thanks." But the opiates decide to choose this moment to disable the chemical connection between my brain and my mouth and I instead mutter something about locating my lonesome purple tank while smiling foolishly like the village moron that I've become. The cop looks at me quizzically, seemingly unconcerned about the bumbling nincompoop standing in front of him talking in tongues and searing the flesh of his fingers with the smoldering butt of a lipstick-covered cigarette that smells like burnt plastic. "Looks like the old man is going to keep me here

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for a while," the cop says, gesturing over to the gypsy who is pacing back and forth, staring at the cop, a look of deep thought on his dark, wrinkled face. "Why don't you play me a song," the cop says. Not a question.

Clearly you paid no attention to my current communication abilities, mister police man. I'm just one shade shy of a full frontal lobotomy. I don't remember how I got here. I can't even talk, how the fuck do you expect me to play guitar and sing a song?

*BAH! BAH! BAH!*

The gypsy man has come out of a CVS, his sweatshirt slung over his shoulder, a deviant and defiant look on his face. In his left hand is another pack of Coors Light. In his right hand is an opening from which he is gulping. Where the hell am I? Is this really happening? This is like a retarded Western.

The cop stands like the Buddha, unmoved with a happy little smirk on his face, like nothing could touch him. He is glowing again, golden, warm, effervescent, like July in the Allegheny mountains just after sunrise. Christ my stomach hurts. I feel like a fucking leprechaun is doing a jig on my bowels. I should get better sleep, but concrete floors make for poor fucking nests.

Here comes the Passport Man again. He's got another incense stick, and he's carrying it like a magic wand. His skin is dark, his hair is dark, his clothes are dark. Did he change his clothes? He looks cleaner.

## Baily's Beads 2012

The police officer directs his gaze to me, or more likely someone behind me, probably a beautiful woman in three-hundred-dollar jeans that doesn't smell like a nursing home dumpster. He is smiling benevolently.

Hope he doesn't think I'm high. I asked him to locate my lonesome purple tank? If he doesn't know I'm screwed up, he is the most obtuse man alive.

*BAH! BAH! BAH!*

A crowd of teenagers has gathered around the gypsy, joining in his showdown with the law. The crowd is impressive, but what impresses me more is that the gypsy's howl drowns out Joel's guitar, which is very loud at the moment.

A woman drops thirty cents into my guitar case. She is older, cleaner, beautiful. She's dressed in a gray suit, the kind with a skirt and shoulder pads. Her hair is dark brown, like mine, only not knotted up and matted. It hangs to the middle of her back and sways with each high-heeled step she takes. Light shines through the bits of her tasseled hair like light through the window of an old country house in the middle of a pine glade. She glows too, like the cop. Maybe it's the opiates. Maybe it's the hunger. I don't know anymore.

I sit on the edge of the big red clown-car pot, it's extremely smooth and polished so I keep sliding down. I hook the back of my upper thighs over the rim, which is thin and cuts into my legs. Joel hands me a cigarette, a new cigarette fresh from a pack, rather than a pile of butts,

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dirt, and garbage. Wish I'd realized he was here before I puffed down the burnt plastic smoke. The cop and the gypsy are still staring each other down, one patient, the other equally as stubborn. Joel is talking to the Passport Man.

"You remember what I was talking you?" He says in his choppy impersonation of English. His face is shiny with sweat. There are sweat stains around his armpits. Apparently eighty is a heat wave in Bellingham. He doesn't look any cleaner than before, at least not this close.

"Yeah," says Joel, "about the American borders requiring everyone to have a passport to get through." He talks with fervent elation. He seems to eat this stuff up. Joel has always been a natural at talking with people. I have always been a natural at being cold and uncomfortable with people.

The smell of the magically appearing incense stick is still wafting around us, mixing with the scent of magic incense stick number two to pulverize my senses and create the beginnings of what will surely be a throbbing headache -- or maybe I'm starting to come down. Maybe the opiates are quitting for the day, giving up their full frontal assault on my emotions, removing the tranquil fluid numb that has been in control of my body for most of the day. My eyes feel heavy, my stomach is crying.

The crowd around the gypsy has gotten rather magnificent. There must be twenty or so kids hanging around him, kids ranging from what look to be all walks of life. There's a Mexican

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girl in basketball shorts and a hockey jersey, a young punk kid with spiky black hair and bondage pants, a couple of older kids looking to be in their very early twenties, smoking cigarettes and sitting cross-armed, like the gypsy's own personal bodyguards. They're big, shorter than me (though most people are), but bulkier, much bigger than the cop. They all have the common thread, whether it's the white gangster kid with the gold chain or the young punk rocker, of being a glimpse into the gypsy's past, the rebellion, the defiance, the hostility, the loneliness.

The cop is still smiling benevolently, leaning calm and cool, against the wall of the boutique where someone is spending more money on a single pair of jeans than I'll see this month.

I look down at my guitar case. I've got a buck thirty-five in various denominations, a bottle cap from some local microbrewery, and an incense stick that is doing more damage than good. Joel has got ninety-three cents, a scrap of paper, and an empty crumpled cigarette pack.

The market square is full. I don't see any cars, just people. Most of them are wearing clean clothes and avoiding our corner. Most of them are carrying bags filled with goods: clothes, food, magazines. Most of them are on lunch break and heading back to their cars, doing their best to ignore the loud gypsy and the beggars playing guitar. Most of them won't walk six miles tonight to find a concrete floor in a dirty flophouse to fall asleep on. Most of them won't stay up late into the night, waiting for everyone to pass out

## The Cop and The Gypsy / Jack Eggleston

so they can raid the bare-bones pantry and eat today. Most of them have lives and families that haven't thrown them away and friends who don't steal from them and cheat them every chance they get. Most of them won't spend tomorrow foraging for the scraps of better people just to survive another day.

"I'm getting tired," Joel says to me. "I think it's time to call it a day."

I look at him. He looks worn from a day off of work strumming his guitar with a friend. He'll go home from here with his wife, have a meal, watch his kid for a little while, and tomorrow he'll go back to his normal life. I won't.

I look at the cop. He'll go home and eat supper with his family, maybe watch some cable, and fall asleep tonight in a comfortable bed next to someone who thinks he's the entire world. I won't.

I look at the Passport Man. He's found some other sap to confide his woes in. He'll scrounge just like me, probably find a floor to sleep on just like me, and probably eat a stolen meal just like me.

I look at the old, weathered gypsy with his army of underage minions. He'll sell some dope, probably to some kids. Then he'll get blind-stinking drunk before finding some place to pass out, like in the doorway of a local business or under a bridge. He'll hide from those problems, maybe spend a night sleeping in jail or getting horrendously beaten by some young frat brothers as part of their rush week initiation. He may

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even get some time in the hospital where they'll give him full meals and good, strong, clinical strength morphine. He'll wake up tomorrow and do it all again. Eventually, when his body has had enough, he'll die, miserable and alone, just like I will someday.

"Hey buddy, you wanna split this up?" Joel asks me as I sit staring at the pitiful wage we've made. It's not even enough for a bag of chips.

"You take it," I say. "You got a kid to feed." Whose life has far more substance than the fucked up mess that I've made of my existence.

He looks at me, unsure, and then says okay. A bit of perspiration drips down the side of his forehead, past the cleft of his left eye. He smiles and tells me we need to do it again the next day he's available. I notice the tattooed wedding ring that looks like water rushing around his finger and think about how much I would like a shower to clean away all the grit of my life, to cleanse the past from my fingernails and the ache from my chest.

We pick up our guitars. Joel gets into his wife's maroon minivan, a gift from Joel's parents on their wedding day. He waves and drives off to some place that I've never been. He calls it home. I walk off in another direction, glancing at my reflection in the windows of the restaurants and markets and boutiques, drifting in and out of reality. I imagine a life where I look out from the other side of the window, where I get to turn my head away and ignore the street kid who is

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probably going to pawn off that guitar of his,  
the last thing he owns, for a little bit of food  
and something that will put him to rest. I look  
through those windows and dream.

I find an ashtray and start searching  
through it. A man yells at me and shoos me away,  
but not before I get a couple of ripe butts to  
smoke. I find a bench by one of the bay fronts and  
watch the sun setting in terrific pastels, oranges  
and yellows and purples that make the sky look  
like Technicolor lava bursts. I wonder where I'm  
going to sleep tonight. I wonder if I'm going to  
eat tonight.



## Traveling

Norma Heberle

She opens eyes that don't see me.  
Her bones barely raise her covers.  
I stay here and wait.  
Death leans against her wall,  
in no hurry.

The sleeve of her life unravels  
and I grieve: I run away when  
there is no more reason to stay.

It is not travel that I seek,  
but a place to mourn,  
and so I cry  
on the shoulder of the road.

## Orchard Disking

Jack Sheridan



When I was five I rode the wobbly  
fender of the roaring Case  
tractor through the rocking apple  
orchard, my father at the helm  
like Ahab on the choppy seas.  
Behind us came the dancing disk,  
the fieldstones squealing in its razored  
wheels like prodded pigs, like  
squawking ducks, the August dust  
lacing the leaves like cinnamon.

I clung to metal for my life,  
my dimpled fists, my small bones  
tingling in that prodigious din.

My stern father stood above me,  
weaving our heads through the middle  
branches, through apples hard as pebbles  
on our cheeks. The two of us  
ducked a low limb at the last  
minute, our foreheads touching, our eyes  
locking once and for all, pulling  
away, our laughter lost in the loud,  
wet leaves, like waves.

## Listening

Jenna Precht1



My nose stings at  
The overflowing garbage and  
white stains on your thin  
wrinkled sheets. Before  
I thought you said  
"I love you." After,  
I asked, "What?"  
"I said, does it feel good?"  
I have learned the meaning of  
only hearing what  
you want to.

## Citrus, Cigarettes, and Warhol

Jack Sheridan



When I was five I rode the wobbly  
fender of the roaring Case  
tractor through the rocking apple  
orchard, my father at the helm  
like Ahab on the choppy seas.  
Behind us came the dancing disk,  
the fieldstones squealing in its razored  
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minute, our foreheads touching, our eyes  
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away, our laughter lost in the loud,  
wet leaves, like waves.

## From the Other Side of the Counter

James Segee

Maybe if you could clone yourself—about  
five or six times—and train each of them how to  
deal with obnoxious customers and people without  
patience, maybe you wouldn't think this Friday  
night to be an approximation of hell. You're  
waiting tables at a busy restaurant. You're  
incredibly short-staffed. Where usually there  
are four wait-staff and two buspeople, you've  
got three and one, respectively. You'd think  
the customers would realize that you're short-  
staffed and not en masse come out to eat on that  
night, but they don't care. Out they come in  
droves. Frantically, you try to keep up with the  
lightning pace of the evening.

Your hostess yells, "There's six at table  
four!"

"Did you get a drink order?" you respond.

"Yeah, two Pepsis, a lemonade, a small root  
beer, a small chocolate milk, and an ultra!"

"Damn," you mutter to yourself as you  
realize all the running you've got to do inside  
the wait station just to get all those drinks  
ready. As you're filling the drinks, you get  
another table of three. You don't know it yet,

but in this party of three is the most despicable person alive. She is a hateful, malevolent villain that you will learn to loathe. You take the drinks to table six while the villain sits and waits, preparing best for how to make your life awful. After you finish getting table six's order, you hear the kitchen shouting your number twice.

"Eight! Eight, please!"

Two food orders are up in the window for your other tables. You've got to hurry.

Thinking quickly, you decide to get the new table's drink order. Unsuspectingly, you greet them and ask what they want. A water. A diet. And then we come to the villain, who puts on an evil smile that makes you so angry you could vomit.

"A hot fudge milkshake."

That demon.

Quickly, you hang up table six's order while someone asks you about a salad you were supposed to make for delivery—you didn't. You wipe the sweat from your stressed brow before taking the time to get tables one and two their food, and of course they both need refills because no one can ever take their goddamned time on their sodas. Finally you can start on this milkshake. You've got to go all the way back to the freezer for the ice cream, but while you're doing that you have to warm up the hot fudge for a minute, getting the stuff all over your hands in the process and making them uncomfortably sticky. Who orders a hot fudge milkshake anyway? Talk about asinine. You get the ice cream ready

and start scooping it, which is difficult because of how cold they keep the freezer. Three scoops of delicious vanilla ice cream, a few seconds of pouring cold milk, and then the goopy hot fudge. No matter how strapped for time you are, you use the spoon to get yourself a taste of the chocolatey goodness before putting the shake on the machine to be mixed. While it's mixing, you get your other drinks, and finally you can get them all out to their table where the villain sits, smiling as if she weren't some kind of horrible monster.

You think it can't get worse as you set the drinks down and pass them out, Villain eyeing hers like she were a hungry velociraptor and the milkshake was her prey. You think it can't get worse, but it's just getting started. Water and Diet both order reasonable, straightforward meals, but Villain here, this one's special.

"Well, first I want a shrimp cocktail..." leaves her mouth, and at that moment you've got to show an impressive level of restraint to refrain from screaming. You smile through your seething hatred and finish taking her order before hanging it up with a look of disgust on your face as you set about getting that shrimp cocktail.

It's back to the freezer once more. Not only do you have to get the shrimp from out back, you've got to thaw it out and get the plate set up for it as well. Four pieces of jumbo shrimp are put into a glass that you accidentally burn your finger on while filling it up with scalding hot water. Your rage level rises while you

absentmindedly consider the various sharp objects you'd like to throw at the villain. After the shrimp has thawed, you've got to get a cup filled with the right amount of ice and water to chill it in. While you're frantically trying to take care of your other tables and set up the plate for it, the shrimp sits in its ice-water recliner and just chills out. If you had any time to consider this, you might be a bit jealous.

Eventually you finish up the business with the shrimp cocktail and get it out to the villain, who greedily devours it like a starved kitten. A villainous starved kitten. You're eager to check on your other tables, but of course Villain has sucked down her milkshake because clearly her arteries weren't clogged enough already. Now she wants a glass of water. How about a glass of "Shut up and leave me alone" instead?

You deliver the water and think that maybe you just might ignore Villain's table for the rest of the night while you're handling your other tables. More people shuffle their way in through the front door, and very quickly, your section fills up. You answer the phone and begin taking a delivery order for some very old man who can understand you about as well as you can hear him, which is not at all. As that's going on you watch your pretty blond-haired hostess sadistically lead another table of seven into your section. You approximate to the best of your abilities what the old man on the phone wants and hang up—only for the phone to ring again

immediately after you've set it back on the hook. Your heart rate rises just a bit more, and you quickly put the person on hold so that you can go hang up the delivery order. The pace quickens to a blur and you struggle to keep up.

You're taking drink orders, bringing out food, and making desserts for people, all seemingly at the same time. You answer the phone a few more times in between getting some tickets together. Eventually you're able to get Villain's table their food and you leave before she's even able to say a word because you really think that your head will just explode once the answer comes. In the midst of this, you bring some lady her side salad, and you got the wrong dressing, which she makes an unrealistically big deal out of, considering it takes about twenty seconds to make a new salad. People don't stop coming in. You've now got two tables in the bar. This is added to your already full section. The phone keeps ringing. Food is in the window. You've got desserts to make. You don't know how much more of this you can take.

But you get through it. Eventually it slows down—it always does. A few of your tables leave and aren't immediately replaced with new ones. Villain's table has finished eating without any more incidents, and finally they will be out of your hair.

Inevitably, Villain wants her check separate, which inspires Diet and Water to ask for split checks as well. You grin and bear one more annoyance and bring their separated checks

back to them. Finally you're able to be rid of this absolute nuisance. "Have a nice evening," you say while the back of your mind screams obscenities. And then it happens.

"Actually, do you think I could order one of those hot fudge milkshakes to take home for my husband?"

Though the cruel villain doesn't notice it, your eye twitches slightly.

--

It's Monday now, and by some miracle you were able to refrain from strangling the villain right there on the spot. Thankfully, the rest of your weekend was cathartic enough to make you forget most of Friday night's horror show. You're going about your daily business, which brings you to the pharmacy because you have to pick up your mother's prescription. You walk into the building and notice that the place is packed. There's a line of about six people at the counter. What a surprise, nothing's easy. Fortunately, you don't have anywhere important to be, so the time wasted here won't be too costly. You let your mind start to drift for a moment before something catches your eye. The clerk behind the desk here looks very familiar. That hateful smile. Those obnoxious eyes. That malevolent-nose? In any case, her face is familiar because it's one that you wanted to take a picture of solely for the purpose of lining your dart board.

The wheels in your head start moving, and you're deciding just how you're going to enact your revenge. Should you be as difficult

as possible? What phantom complaint could you concoct in order to make Villain's life difficult? You don't quite know yet, but it's going to be diabolical, the kind of shit that Magneto or The Joker would approve of. And Villain will regret every sip of that goddamned milkshake before you're through.

You watch as Villain takes phone calls, because she's the only one behind the counter. The customer she's currently dealing with is looking at her impatiently as she puts the person on the phone on hold. He starts to argue with her about something, and she looks a tad flustered. You ignore this because you've got vengeance to plan. Should you accuse her of giving your mother the wrong medication and sending her to the hospital? No, that won't work. What could you possibly do to make her life even a quarter as miserable as she made yours on Friday night? It's then that you notice a large fishbowl full of gum packets sitting on the desk. Those would be a right pain to pick up, wouldn't they? Perfect.

The grumpy man at the front of the line gets whatever he's here for and leaves in a huff, accidentally bumping into you without apologizing on the way out. You consider telling him to watch where he's going, but decline. You're too thrilled with your plan to release anger on anyone but the villain, who is hurriedly taking the phone call that she had on hold. You wonder if she's short-staffed or something, because it's obviously too busy for her to handle all of this by herself. This reminds you of how you

were short-staffed on Friday and anger enters your mind once more, as the bowl of gum finally becomes within reach. Patiently, you wait for an opportune moment. Villain starts discussing something with the woman in front of you, neither of them paying any attention your way. Carefully, slowly, precisely you reach. You push. SMASH!

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry, my hand slipped!" You put on your best look of abject horror while inside you're guffawing as Villain's face gets red, and she worriedly assures you it's okay before getting a broom to sweep up the glass. Before she starts sweeping, she takes care of the woman in front of you and the phone rings again, so she puts that person on hold. You decide that she isn't off the hook yet, and tell her you need to get your prescription and that you're tired of waiting. She smiles and goes to get it for you. Her smile only makes you angrier. Why isn't she in tears yet? She comes back with the medicine and pauses for a second, a flash of recognition sweeping across her troubled features.

"Do I know you?" Ah, here it is. The realization that she made your life hell this weekend. Here comes the tear-filled apology. An exercise in futility, lady! Like the One Republic song, it's too late to apologize!

"Yes, you waited on my friends and me the other night! You were just the best waiter I've ever seen. You were so busy, but you still managed to get us everything we wanted! I was so impressed!"

It's at this moment that you stop to think.

You begin to remember the \$12 tip that Villain's table left you. Slowly the wheels start to turn, and you begin to realize how terrible you've been. And then it happens. This is the moment that was destined: your betrayal. You accept the woman not as the villain that you thought she was, but as a kindred spirit who is here at her job hard at work, same as you were at yours. In that moment you take pity on the cruel villain. Forgetting the milkshake travesty, forgetting the terribleness of the shrimp cocktail, you allow yourself to forget your hatred.

"Yeah, I think I remember you. You got a milkshake, right? Actually, let me help you clean up back there."

She affirms what she ate and insists on cleaning up the mess by herself, telling you that it's really no problem. You get your medicine as she's dealing with the customer she put on hold, and you are on your way. You're deciding now that there's no point in revenge, because as long as you view people the same way no matter what side of the counter you're on, you'll never think of someone as a villain. You're mulling this over when the lady formerly known as Villain shouts to you.

"By the way, we'll see you again this Friday! My friends and I are coming back! Oooh, I can almost taste another hot fudge milkshake."

Then again...

# Piano Player

Ann M. Gavazzi



Baily's Beads 2012

spinning webs of notes  
on the smoke-spiraled air.

sway, sway  
hand to thigh  
fingers to neck  
flash of the eye  
flick of the hip  
hand and wrist twist  
poised over keys  
line line  
hip to thigh  
downcast eyes  
elegant twines of  
frowning lines  
etching the face  
huddled over the piano  
sunken eyes  
strawberry lips  
jumbling pinkied fingertips  
pouting words  
hang in the air  
twining through her dirty blond hair  
foot to heel  
s curve, parabola  
daddy longlegs  
spiderleg arms

## Kilkenny Castle

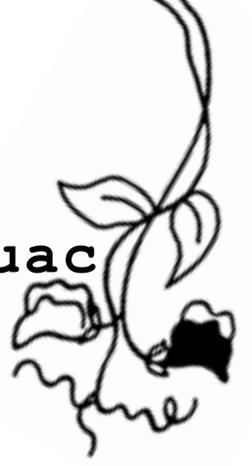
Angela Nuzzo



Across the gray-dawn moor  
and up the winding path  
toward the top of the rock-strewn precipice,  
you'll find me at Kilkenny Castle.  
I walk the land of my forefathers,  
keeping watch for some kind of sign.  
The wind moans through the empty windows  
that once were covered by hand-loomed tapestries.  
Grass grows over the front walkway  
that used to welcome the hooves of horses  
ridden many days by kings and scholars.  
The entrance is a blackened hole,  
where once the door held the family crest  
and opened to generations.  
I roam the silent hallways, hearing echoes  
of the laughter of every child who ever lived  
here.  
I stand on the parapet that  
held our waving banners centuries ago,  
but is now overgrown with moss and ivy.  
Looking out across the gray setting sun,  
I wait for a sign that someone  
has remembered me, hoping, hoping,  
that they'll soon be coming home.

## Thinking of Kerouac

Robert Thomas



The V-8 rumbles  
down the street  
on a comeback trail,  
gas prices higher than ever  
and every cylinder  
speaks to me  
  
boom budda budda  
boom budda budda  
boom budda budda  
  
as it idles past  
the truth  
I call  
my living room window,  
it fades,  
a long distant symphony  
fades  
in the rambling future mix  
beyond this avenue,  
fades  
until I hear one final throttle  
from the stop sign  
at the end of the block

then turns right,  
I imagine,  
toward places  
I have never been.

## Across the Hall

Jessica Hamilton



"You can go. Really. It's okay."

"I feel bad leaving you," he whispers. He knows that I want to go home, but I have to wait for the doctor's okay in the morning.

"It's all right," I say. I smile, trying to put him at ease.

"Are you sure? I'll stay. I don't want to leave."

"No, no, you'll be stiff sleeping in that chair. Just go home, get some rest, and come back in the morning." I try to sound convincing. I don't want him to sit over me all night long, fretting. I already feel like a burden.

"I can stay until you fall asleep."

"I can barely keep my eyes open now." That much is true. I feel that I might actually sleep tonight.

He stands there, looking punished. "Love you."

"I love you too. I'm going home tomorrow, so just stop with the look."

~

## Baily's Beads 2012

I really scared him this time. The IV scares him. It scares me too. I think even the ER nurse was a bit startled, and they see this kind of stuff all the time, right?

It's hard to explain. The doctor calls them "suicide headaches." I see why. It feels like an angry badger is trying to chew its way out of my skull from the inside. I only get them once a year or so. This one was by far the worst yet.

The doctor will be back in the morning. He's going to send me home, but I know what he will say first. It's genetic. My mom gets them too. And he'll say I need to slow down, to stop stressing. He'll say I'm a Type A. My husband calls me a Type A+.

~

After my husband leaves, I am wide awake. I can't get comfortable in this bed. Every time I move, my too-big sack-gown rides up and bunches around my waist. I can't sleep in this strange bed, this strange place, with my butt hanging out. I am also afraid to bend my arm. I've never stayed overnight in the hospital, and I've never slept with an IV in my arm. The tube is long, and cold, draped across my body because I'm left-handed, but the bathroom is on the right. Tim, the soft-spoken male nurse didn't want to hinder my good arm.

The nice paramedic, Rick or Rich, put it in when I was admitted. I couldn't watch. I hate needles. Then he gave me a big shot of Morphine-

ish stuff. That made the angry badger in my head go away. It made everything go away. It felt like a cool breeze on a hot summer day. I can see why people become addicted to the stuff. For about half an hour, I felt weightless, like an astronaut must feel, floating high above the world.

I try to sleep on my back, all straight like a board. That isn't going to work. It didn't work last night.

But it's not the bed, or the gown, or the IV that keeps me awake. It's the sounds of the hospital that intensify at night. In particular, it's the sounds coming from across the hall. There's the low, pulsing beep of the heart monitor and the sucking and blowing of the accordion-looking apparatus. It's the sound of the woman, small and helpless and melting beneath her sheet, dying.

No one tells me she is dying. No one has to. You can see it on the face of every person who comes out of the room. And all night long, after her haggard husband leaves, she moans, "Help." It's a quiet pleading. If the nurses can hear her, they are pretending not to. They can't do anything to make her feel better.

I lie in my bed wide-eyed and alert, and wonder if she is even talking to them or pleading to a higher power. I lay there, stiff and straight, and stare out the window. There's a big boulder of ice perched on the roof ledge. It glitters in the light and looks like the ball that Dick Clark drops on New Year's Eve. I don't

## Basement / Stewart Skeel

know how long I've been watching the ice ball and listening. With the door closed, it is pitch dark in the room. The glittering ball is the only thing to see.

When Tim comes in to change my fluids, florescent light pours into the room and I see that it is 4 A.M. I tell him I'm ready to pee. For some reason he's been waiting for it.

The woman across the hall is still pleading quietly. The ball has not dropped. I am never going to sleep here. Not with Death pacing in soft-soled white sneakers in the hallway.

I turn on the TV, hoping it will be distracting. If I don't get some sleep, the stressed-out badger will come back, and the doctor will make me stay another night. I don't want that to happen.

Malcolm in the Middle is the only thing on at 4 A.M. It's background noise, but I can still hear the woman across the hall. At least, I think I can still hear her. Maybe I'm just hearing the echoing in my head from listening to her earlier. "Help." It's the only thing she's said for days. "Help." Until her husband comes back, like mine will, to hold her hand all day. "Help."

I shut off Malcolm. The New Year's Eve ball is big and twinkling and threatening. But it's not going to drop. It's not time yet. Across the hall, it's not time yet. But it's close. The countdown is on. I will walk out of here tomorrow. I will sleep in my own bed. This room will be empty, and so may be the one across the hall.

