

The Wake Review

Spring 2015



The Wake Review

literary magazine and club

Mission Statement: *Wake Review* is a student-run online creative journal at Wake Technical Community College which seeks to provide a forum for students of all majors, as well as faculty and alumni, to express themselves through literary and artistic means, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual or audio arts. We strive to encourage the study, composition, and appreciation of literature and art found at Wake Tech Community College and in surrounding communities.

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“I Like Green”—Sally Bitar

1st Place Poetry

I never understood why
They told me green couldn't be my favorite color.
It was wrong, frowned upon.
They told me to pick another color.

I did, I did. I picked another one every day,
But none of them made me feel the way green did.
Oh, it made me feel alive.

They said: Anything, any color, please. There's yellow, there's blue. How about red?
I cried, I did. I didn't like yellow, blue, or red.
I wanted green. It's my favorite color.

I was born in November,
With blue eyes and dark brown hair.
Amongst other things, I was born with a love for green.

I love green. I do.
I don't understand it;
Neither do you.
And you don't have to.

“Echoes”—Molly Jarman

Poetry

Living (and dying)

is a series of never-ending
echoes.

Echoes of your mother's heart,
of your fathers mistakes,
of the people who said
“we love you anyway,”

and

the ones
that didn't.

Echoes of the one you are
and the ones you fear.

Of the lines you drew
and the ones you stepped over.

But child;

do not be afraid.

The Echoes will teach you
guide you

love you

and nurture you.

So be cautious to remember;

your heart is not a trauma center

your eyes are not of glass

you are not of stardust

or shame

or burdens

or pearls.

You are thousands

of friendly echoes
reminding you
of who you were
and who you are
but not always
who you will be.
Echoes do not last
but the ears will remember.
Oh God,
your ears will remember.

“Pegacorn”—Jackie Chambliss

Poetry

P ernicious peddlers and

E ager eggheads

G ape at wonder or steal it.

A lchemists and academics

C reate false hope and metals.

O nly the

R arest of souls and of

N obels bare witness to truth and name it.

“Hummingbird”—Jessica Craig
3rd Place Art



“Fast and Free”—Threa Almontaser

1st Place Fiction

Her hand is in his. There's a restless energy inside of him. A sudden directive to move, with tempered vivacity in his soul. He follows her steps. Shadowing her in a dance as they gain speed. He looks straight ahead. She gives a lascivious grin. In a second, they explode and race the wind.

He feels his heart as he runs. It's like flying while still touching the earth. His feet splash through puddles, soaking his sneakers and pants until he feels heavy with it. He doesn't remember taking a step forward, let alone four, but he's suddenly jogging and then running.

She makes him feel six years old again. Cheeks stained with dust and scabs on his knees. He counts the rows of trees as he passes. *“Listen! I can count to ten!”* His baby brother's voice invades his mind while he runs.

One...two.

The branches dip low. He ducks his head beneath them when they tickle his cheek. His entire body becomes a pair of lungs heaving with luxurious breaths, enjoying the fresh impossible air.

Three...four.

He sprints so fast that he morphs into a bullet. His chest throbs more and more with each step. He knows he should stop.

Five...

He has to stop but--

Six...

His lungs start to sting from lack of oxygen. He turns his head a little and realizes he's let go of her hand and is ahead of her. He can't see her face. Her hair covers it in a wild tangle.

Seven...eight.

She's yelling something. Sweat runs down his eyebrows so he can't see.

Nine...

As he turns around, the world spins in slow motion with him. Bangs flop sluggishly on his forehead. Drops of sweat freeze in the air. Heavy breathing the only noise he hears. She's trying to reach out to him with her hand. He sees it double, then triple, until she looks like an eight armed Buddhist statue.

Ten!

He blinks tightly. His breath rattles before the world is back on full speed. His heart is about to stop, but he just stumbles and keeps going. Right here, right now, he is a normal boy on a normal day just running. He ambles faster than he can possibly run, breathing adrenaline instead of air. Her hand finally catches up and closes around his. Slips. He's off and away from her. Down a trail. Past a squirrel. Around some boulders. Over dirt mounds.

He has never run so hard before—so hard he thinks his heart will burst. It's only his legs and the sound of wind in his ears, mixing with the pounding of his pulse. And for the first time since the heart surgery, he prays. *God, keep going, don't let this slow it down, don't ever let it stop.* He probably looks drunk to anyone passing by, but he doesn't see anyone. They're all a blur. Everything's a blur. The surge of adrenaline is rising hot, searing him like a brand on flesh. The smell of thick, sugary pine makes him aware of each breath he takes. How each breath keeps him in the world for a few seconds longer. He dashes and jumps and as he does, the fabric of death that's clung to him for years begins to loosen from his shoulders and slip away into the wind. He runs free and fast.

Deep inside, he knows he's being reckless. He'll probably gain nothing. He'll probably get hurt. And more disturbingly—he doesn't really care. Because right now, he's strong and on the cusp of a new life and he's not ever going back.

Maybe it's the overconfidence and feeling like God. Testing fate. Tempting it, even. But suddenly, he's clutching his sides and sucking in deep, noisy breaths. He smells wet grass, honeysuckle, and pine cones. He swallows the entire forest with each inhale. He sees the outline of a body, solid and sleek. Hears a voice shouting at him from a distance, but he can't make out a single word. He can't catch the oxygen he had moments ago surrounding him. He's dry heaving into his shirt, bent over like cursive and coughing blood when he hears voices and sees faces he doesn't recognize and *oh. I'm sorry. So, so sorry.*

His pinky starts to twitch; the only part of him that's still moving. As if it has a separate little mind that realizes it's dying, too. Saliva from his open mouth runs along his jaw. Warmth suddenly seeps onto his lips as he realizes someone is doing CPR. It's Her. She gets on her knees, folds her hands over each other like a lovers embrace, and presses down hard on his chest.

Noise like steel. Piercing screams. "Call 911!" Need and memory and flesh on flesh and lips and the weight of a body on his body and weightlessness and nothingness and a storm raging outside, inside. But he is still. Quiet. And then there are shocks. Jolts he barley feels. Someone yelling, "Clear!" and all he can think is, not again not again not again. Light rain sprinkles his head and back, plastering hair to his forehead, his shirt to his skin. He smells wet pavement and that's all there is. His lungs burn like he inhaled poison. To his constant astonishment, time doesn't stop along with his heart. His aching legs are now numb. Somewhere far away he hears a cry.

She shrieks his name. Her voice goes up a pitch. It isn't rusty and familiar anymore. "I need you to open your eyes and look at me!" He manages to look at her long enough

to watch as a cloud passes over her face. For a moment, he sees a spark of dread and horror—is that defeat?—growing in her eyes. He remembers someone telling him, “*Death don't wait for when your body is rested and ready. It sneaks up on you when you're cold and exhausted and so scared you can't even see straight!*” But that's not true. He's happy and warm and free.

His eyes roll back and his lids quiver. He convulses silently. Then that stops, too, and the last thing he feels is the warmth of her lips on his. Suddenly, everything is beautiful and nothing hurts. There is a heaviness on his chest as the world melts away with her final touch. *I'm dying, he thinks, this is for real. This is it.* And then nothing.

When he stops moving, stops breathing, she shapeshifts into Van Gogh's portrait *The Scream*. Her mouth opens even though she doesn't know what words she's shouting. It's pure rage and terror and horror. Something hot wraps around her like clinging tar and she thinks, *it's my fault*. But then the pain digs deep at the body they're carrying away. Strangers' arms try to hold her back. She screams and screams and screams and screams until the universe explodes in a silent dark pop and everything shatters like glass.

“Heinrich and Elsa”—Athena Adams

Poetry

Dear Heinrich loves his Elsa
He tells everybody so
He parades her on his arm
As the people watch them go
He has a smile too fake
His eyes always far away
And farther he postpones
The date of the wedding day
Dear Heinrich takes his seat now
To which he looks at his bride
The room feels much smaller now
With everyone at his side
To Elsa he tells her dear
“Oh Elsa, your eyes delight!
So shining and radiant
Like stars that light up the night!”
Elsa, for her part, blushes
Deeply, like a blooming rose
Their love an accepted fact
Everyone around them knows
And yet from the shadows near
Whispers come crawling about
That Heinrich is not in love
And wants to find a way out
Elsa, for her part, sees this
And weeps with no one to hear
About Heinrich’s cold disdain,
His reluctance and his fear
“It is off then,” Heinrich says
As he flees into his room
Sighing with newfound relief
Of the storm that bypassed doom
Everything is over now
All effort, wasted in vain
With both Heinrich and Elsa
Not seeing the others’ pain
Dear Heinrich, dearest Elsa,
In their separate ways they go
This is an accepted fact
That everybody will know

“For The Aware”—Brittany Perloff

Poetry

They say the road
Winds, like smoke
When it twirls in the night's sky
But when your hallucinogenic sight
Meets your skewed mind,
The road isn't the one
That's winding.
But, sweet thing, you know what's crazier?
When a man tastes you and spits you out
Like some leftover tobacco.
It's then you need
Another hit.
And another.
You forget to feel
Because feelings are for the aware,
And I'm so ignorant.
Or at least they like to think I am.
Look at your precious eyes, full of innocence
You don't need this world
Like it needs me
You have more to see
Than the intimate part of a man
You have more to experience than
This crystal magic
It's white and delicious –
Black and evil all the same
It's the demon
I hope you'll never see.
So float away little angel,
And always think of me.

**“It’s Almost Like Sharecropping’: Scheduling Software and the Retail Work Force”—
Tiffany Wolf
Non-Fiction**

Just-in-time workforce scheduling is leading to social and economic instability for lower-wage workers. Employer scheduling practices can hinder a worker's ability to hold a second job, pursue additional educational opportunities, and earn adequate income to maintain themselves and their households. Scheduling software, increasingly utilized by employers to save money, requires workers to be vastly available for work shifts that fluctuate both in number of hours per shift as well as time and duration of those shifts. Not only does the software schedule workers according to staffing needs, that same software is also programmed to assign the minimum number of workers to meet anticipated consumer demand at any given time.

According to the North Carolina Department of Labor, there is no limit to the amount of hours that an employee over the age of eighteen can be required to work (North Carolina). As the Department of Labor also notes, “the employer does not have to take into consideration how the work schedule will affect an employee's personal life” (North Carolina). Employers are not required to give rest breaks or meal breaks to their employees unless they are younger than sixteen years old, and the decision on scheduling employees for any number of hours during an employee's shift rests solely and exclusively with the employer (North Carolina).

Shift preferences could easily be accommodated through the scheduling programs available today. Stephanie Luce, an Associate Professor of Labor Studies at the City University of New York (CUNY), notes that “companies often have little incentive to give workers more hours or truly engage workers preferences as a priority” (Luce and

Fujita 25). According to a study that she authored jointly with the Retail Action Project (RAP), “scheduling software has fueled the spread of just-in-time scheduling practices that adjust labor costs to daily – and sometimes hourly – store productivity” (Luce and Fujita 25). However, unions offer a way for retail workers to have meaningful input regarding scheduling and other work issues. For example, unionized Macy’s associates in New York City are able to sign-up for shifts online utilizing a Flextime scheduling program, and are guaranteed hours and shifts through this scheduling practice (Luce and Fujita 25).

Schedule unpredictability is also a factor that impacts a worker’s ability to arrange their personal responsibilities in a way to enable them to meet work requirements. Interfering with such activities such as scheduling doctor’s appointments, socializing with friends, and participating in family routines, schedule unpredictability contributes to worker stress and work-family conflict (Lambert, Fugiel, and Henly 6). According to researchers at the University of Chicago, an unpredictable work schedule also means unpredictable work earnings (Lambert, Fugiel, and Henly 6). Workers in a variety of occupations are at risk of unpredictable, unstable work hours that are generally out of their control. Researchers at the University of Chicago recently found that:

Short notice, work-hour fluctuations, and lack of schedule control are widespread. Fully 41 percent [of hourly workers overall, and] 47 percent in part-time hourly jobs report that they know when they will need to work one week or less in advance... On average, hours fluctuate by more than a full, conventional 8-hour day of work (and for hourly workers, pay) in the course of a month. (Lambert, Fugiel, and Henly 18)

In 2011, a survey of 436 employees at retailers in New York City found that the number of full and part-time workers were roughly equivalent, and of those part-time workers, only ten percent had a set schedule from week to week (Luce and Fujita 12). For the majority of stores investigated, however, “at least eighty percent of the hours remained the same every week” (Luce, Hamad, and Sipe 18). Nevertheless, Katherine Lugar, executive vice president of the Retail Industry Leaders Association, defends the retail industry’s scheduling practices, stating that “the industry’s scheduling practices [work] well and retailers [do] their best to accommodate employee needs. Happy employees provide better service” (Greenhouse).

Employees with less availability are typically assigned fewer hours; this is true for both full-time and part-time employees. Luce, Hammad, and Sipe write that:

Many retailers mandate open availability, meaning they expect the employee to be available any day and any time, but often do not schedule workers within their stated availability, or do not take advantage of their availability to give them full-time hours. Instead, they schedule workers for part-time erratic shifts. (7)

Workers who are hired as full-time workers are not guaranteed to remain at full-time status. Employees who have scheduling conflicts for any number of reasons are generally given a choice: make their availability completely open and remain at full-time status, or change their availability and drop their status to part-time, thereby guaranteeing that they will be scheduled for fewer hours in the future. Lonnie Golden, a professor of economics and labor-employment relations at Penn State University, observes the following:

For virtually all occupations, there is considerably greater schedule flexibility among part-timers. This suggests that part-time jobs have less rigid starting and ending times, and that workers seeking schedule flexibility often resort to taking part-time positions to improve their chances of getting flexible schedules, despite its often lower status and compensation. (44)

There has been a significant shift in the percentage of full-time to part-time retail positions during the last two decades. "Many major retailers went from a quotient of seventy to eighty percent full-time to at least seventy percent part-time across the industry," states Burt P. Flickinger III, managing director of the Strategic Resource Group, a retail consulting firm (Greenhouse). The "number of part-time employees who would prefer to work full-time has jumped to 3.1 million, or two-and-a-half times the 2006 number, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics" (Greenhouse). Workers in part-time jobs ask their employers for more hours, but instead of giving part-time workers additional hours, employers are more likely to hire additional workers instead (Luce and Fujita 14; Greenhouse). As Lambert, Haley-Lock, and Henly note, "when [part-time sales associates were] asked the reasons why they did not work additional hours, fully 84.8 percent reported that it was because the store manager did not have additional hours to assign them" (18). While being interviewed by the *New York Times*, Mr. Flickinger said that companies benefited from using part-timers, sharing the view that:

It's almost like sharecropping – if you have a lot of farmers with small plots of land, they work very hard to produce in that limited amount of land... Many part-time workers feel a real competition to work hard during their limited hours because they want to impress managers to give them more hours. (Greenhouse)

The 2012 joint CUNY/RAP survey found that “some managers [used] the scheduling of hours as an incentive to increase the pace of selling by sales associates, rewarding or disciplining workers with hours according to their sales” (Luce and Fujita 14). One surveyed worker explained “if you don’t sell over a certain amount... you won’t get any hours for the coming week”, and another associate at the same retailer reported “we are working for an hourly wage but we fight like we are working on a commission” (Luce and Fujita 14). As Luce and Fujita note in their report, “hours have become the new bonus. But for retail workers living paycheck to paycheck, the difference of a few hours of work can mean getting by or falling behind” (14).

After the destabilizing effects of the recent economic downturn, workers who remain employed face increasingly precarious work conditions. For example, involuntary part-time work has reached an all-time high (9.2 million) and the length of the average workweek has fallen to a record low of under 35 hours (Lambert, Haley-Lock, and Henly 16). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in June 2012, part-time workers in service jobs received average compensation of \$10.92 for each hour worked; this represented \$8.90 in wages, with a benefits package valued at an additional \$2.02. Full-time workers, on the other hand, averaged an additional fifty seven percent (57%) more in compensation, which meant that workers received \$17.18 for each hour worked; this represented \$12.25 in wages, with a benefits package valued at an additional \$4.93 (Greenhouse).

Due to the increasing amount of competition throughout the retail sector, employers are continuously looking for and analyzing ways to save money on costs to remain competitive. Margins are being squeezed due to a variety of factors, such as an increase in the number of consumers purchasing items via internet sources. According to

the United States Census Bureau, e-commerce sales accounted for 6.7 percent of total retail sales during the fourth quarter of 2014 (United States 1); this represents continual growth in online business, as the number increases at a rate of approximately fifteen percent each quarter and shows few signs of slowing (United States 2). Big-box retailers with extended hours, a majority part-time work force with no benefits, and low prices also impact the price of goods throughout the retail sector.

Scheduling software assists employers in trimming their labor costs, treating workers as commodities. Many managers view workers the same way. Nicole Rosser, a district manager for Jamba Juice, explains:

You don't want to work your team members for eight-hour shifts... By the time they get to the second half of their shift, they don't have the same energy and enthusiasm. We like to schedule people around four- to five-hour shifts so you can get the best out of them during that time.
(Greenhouse)

If workers are being scheduled for four to five hours at a time, then by definition those employees would be considered part-time. This helps employers keep labor costs to a minimum, as those workers are ineligible for employer-paid benefits.

"The software keeps tabs on when workers are available, their skills and who makes the most sales per hour. While such software is a powerful tool, management's judgment is still important," says Aron J. Ain, the chief executive of Kronos (a scheduling software company) (Greenhouse). Karen Luey, the chief financial officer for Jamba Juice, claims that the scheduling software "helped [them] take 400, 500 basis points out of [their] labor costs, or [between] four to five percentage points", which represented millions of dollars of savings (Greenhouse). Discussing his organization's experiences during the

implementation of computerized scheduling, Eric Bass, Senior Vice President of Store Operations at Belk Department Stores, states:

We saw about an eighty basis point improvement in sales [between stores that had rolled out the computerized scheduling versus the control group]... For example if the control group was running up two percent to last year... [the rolled out stores] were running up 2.8 percent to the previous year. When you start talking close to a hundred basis point lift in sales on a four billion dollar organization, that's real money going to the bank... We've [also] been able to reduce payroll savings by about five million dollars a year [sic]. (Reflexis Systems)

As employers are quick to note, saving money is a positive benefit. Using the numbers that Eric Bass provides, Belk Department stores saved \$32 million dollars just through implementation of computerized scheduling; utilizing Reflexis had a big impact in [their] organization, which was "multifaceted: everything from service, sales, associate engagement, [and] management on the sales floor" (Reflexis Systems). Bass continues, stating that his organization has "seen a huge improvement in analytics and understanding how are we spending our payroll dollars", and asking "how can we optimize that spend, and how can we get traffic on the floor when the customer is there?" (Reflexis Systems). While scheduling practices utilizing computerized programs appear to benefit the employer's bottom line, more research is needed whether it is a sound business practice long-term (Luce, Hammad, and Sipe 22).

Little attention is paid to the impact on the worker in these scenarios. Carrie Gleason, executive director of the Retail Action Project, says her organization "[sees] more and more that the burden of market fluctuation is being shifted onto the workers,

as opposed to the companies absorbing it themselves" (Greenhouse). A recent poll of economists (including Nobel Laureates and other noted persons) suggests that "a plurality of mainstream economists has accepted... the proposition that a decade of technological advancement has made the median worker no better off, and possibly worse off" (Autor 6). Workers, under pressure from employers to be "flexible" for work shifts that may or may not appear, are finding it difficult to advance economically by attending school or gaining additional employment. Flexibility is more for the employer's benefit, not the employee's. Employers need to recognize this, and make changes accordingly. Many times, workers find it a challenge to remain economically stable and look to government and private assistance to make ends meet, which has a societal cost attached. As Naoki Fujita, coauthor of the 2012 CUNY/RAP report quoted in the *New York Times*, noted in his response to that article:

Underemployment is keeping the U.S. economy from gaining steam and makes it impossible for workers to enter the middle class... [There are retailers that have] systematically fired [full-time] workers and replaced these jobs with no benefit and no commission [part-time] slots.
(Greenhouse)

In order to build the current economy, ways to improve jobs in the retail sector need to be discussed and implemented by all stakeholders involved. Those ways may include union representation and collective bargaining, legislative action, and employer action to guarantee labor standards for retail workers. Creating a culture of ambivalence by erecting barriers to sustainable hours and wages leaves workers feeling under-valued. Sadly, it does not seem at the current time as though a positive solution for the worker will

be achieved unless and until labor unions are implemented to advocate for those workers.

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“Viva la Resistance”—Gerald Guerva
Photography



“Dried Carnation”—Max Cohen
Photography



“I Am Art”—Lauren Hupp

Poetry

I am nothing.

Nothing more than

Simple fabric

To be crafted and sewn up

Just as they wish.

I am something.

Something to learn from,

Something that has wisdom

That no one listens to,

No one hears.

I am an incomplete project.

The work in progress

That knows they'll never finish

Before they're done with me.

I am art.

“Boogie”—David Kirstein

Poetry

Sky-sequins spun, emulating lights upon
Bleak bodies – the belongings of our wallflowers
Wasting away in the moonlit boom;
We had no rock without that midnight savior.
A towering, technologic table turner
A sound-shifter who would have the vinyl verdict
A vestige of funk itself;
That man of greater records spoke:
“Blossoms of the corners come out,
Tonight, it is safe to dance, so let yourself go!”
With these words came splashing sounds of freedom
Fresh alleviation to an awkward nation –
We were in no coward's haven now.
Guys and gals were groovin' and grindin'
Glidin' and slidin' to the funk-frog's croak,
And from our 'fros to our toes,
Our mix master's soul-river flowed,
Empowering celebration,
And our universal joy,
Our single electric happiness –
Boogie.

Excerpt from “The Daughter of Robin Hood” (Book One)—Christina Dietz

Fiction

Most souls who approached The Foggiest Forest immediately turned back due to the dense fog that shrouded the depths of the forest from peering eyes. The Foggiest Forest was so named because of the fog that never lifted. It constantly swirled around the tree tops and forest ground. Because of the fog, no adventurer in the world had been able to chart a map.

Except us.

We had started as four friends, abandoning the troubles that plagued us, abandoning the parents that contained us in lives we couldn't bear. We ran away, four friends, looking to make names for ourselves. We stole for ourselves, unlike the outlaws that had come before us...what we stole was ours, and we were the greatest thieves because of our wealth, but the worst people in the eyes of the authorities and our parents...especially mine.

The only place we were safe to call home was this forest and the cabin we had found hidden the heart of this great forest. We knew we were safe as soon as we entered the borders, for at one edge of the forest there was a cliff that fell off into a roaring river far below, and in the other directions there were fields that would take our enemies into other kingdoms where they had no authority. We were enemies with all but few, and I knew by now that every king and queen in the Twelve Kingdoms had the same outcome for us. If they were all allies against us, then it wasn't much protection, but it was enough, for they knew the risks of entering this forest as much as we had when we were young and scared enough to be reckless.

We had to be careful now. We were wanted in all of the kingdoms except one, and the authorities knew we targeted the rich lords and noblemen and they knew our methods. Not only that, but they had someone chasing me down that knew me better than anyone, and I was glad for it. If the man who had raised me didn't know me better than the soldiers hunting me down, I would be truly disappointed.

Not only that, but there were more than one times where we had barely scraped our swords out of an escape. We had had more than one instance where we had nearly been captured and though we had not failed all but once, we were lucky to still have our lives. But the times that I had nearly lost the people I cautiously called my friends, those were the times that haunted me at night.

The cabin that we called our home had room for all of us, but while it was still warm at night, I ordered my band of thieves to sleep outside with hopes that they wouldn't hear my screams.

We had returned that morning from a heist. I stood, recalling the first time we had attempted a theft, and failed because I froze and we had nearly been caught...I also recalled the time that I saw my friends nearly get killed. This was before the kill on sight order had been burned, like we should have been long ago, and they had been cornered, but I stood, watching, from the rooftop above them. I was too scared to join them, but a door opened into the house whose roof I had stood on, and they escaped, and I followed. But that was the day that they had nearly been killed, and I promised them that they wouldn't find themselves in that position again. The kill-on-sight order had been burned the following day, but not even the most honest of my thieves had told me exactly what had happened.

Our failure and their near-death experiences had been my fault. Both times, I had been a coward, and as I stood by the creek, brushing the dust of a good day's thieving off of my grayish-black horse's back, I tried not to remember these old haunts that plagued my nightmares. I knew I woke screaming at night, fearing the day the thieves that were, for some odd reason, still loyal to me, discovered that I was nothing but a coward leading them into their deaths for my own gain.

When my old friend, Larkin Honeycutt came over and draped his arms across my horse's back, I jumped back. He stood on the other side of my horse. Montague was used to this treatment by Larkin, and he was content to stand still while Larkin leaned against him, his chin on Montague's back.

Larkin ran his dust-covered fingers through his brown hair. In the sunlight, I saw shades of red in his hair that caused it to be the color of red leaves in autumn. He wouldn't meet my eyes, but he stared at the creek nearby. His eyes were a mirror of the creek's silvery blue water. In the winter, his gray eyes made him look cold, and at times I believed that his heart was an icicle hanging from the roof, but then there were times where he would sit in silence as the fire burned down, and I felt that he was as warm as the fire. These warm times were few and far between. We had only been thieves for three years, but those three years had hardened him.

When his eyes snapped until they were aligned with mine, I stepped back. I knew what was coming. Besides Liam and Oliver, he was the only one brave enough to address my recklessness and chastise me for it.

"We almost failed, Lee. This hasn't happened to us since our first heist. It was your fault this time just as it was that time." He pointed his forefinger when he accused me of

this. Though it was true, to him it was only an accusation. "What happened?" he demanded.

I looked over my horse. He was clean. I had brushed off all of the dirt I could see, so I put the brush in a wooden box and led him over to the shelter we had built for the horses. There were ten stalls, but as there were only eight of us, there were only eight horses...if you could call the little one at the very end a horse. It was smaller than the rest and belonged to the street urchin the Spaniard had brought home from a heist. I didn't trust her, and I no longer trusted him for bringing home the stray.

"We escaped," I said, without turning to face Larkin as I closed the stall door behind my horse. "Thanks to Sweeney."

Larkin grabbed my arms and turned me to face him. "Lowvaine's guards *knew* we were there, Lee. That was why we left with only half of our prize."

I placed my hands on his chest and pushed him away. "Unhand me!"

He held his hands up, but he stepped closer, and I stood as tall as I could. He put his face in front of mine and demanded, "Why were they not right behind us?"

"The men we were stealing from served our heads to them on a silver platter, and if it weren't for Sweeney's habits, we wouldn't have known and we surely would have been captured. Why were we not?" I asked. I knew it was what he had asked me, but I knew if I gave the question to him in return, he would calm down. He wanted me to be angry, and now that I was, he was satisfied, and just as I predicted, he stepped back and leaned against the wall between Montague's stall and Larkin's horse's stall.

I wanted to yell, to scream, to shout, but I couldn't. I was angry at myself. If it had been anyone else's fault, I would have taken out my wrath on them, but it was my own

fault. My anger had now resurfaced, but this anger wasn't only the result of the failure, but *why* we had almost failed. Larkin didn't know anything of that.

Larkin looked down as he picked his nails with his knife. "I don't know, Lee." He was calm now. It wasn't fair that he could handle this so calmly. He picked his nails meticulously, but he stood there nonchalantly, as if he was yelled at every day and it was nothing to worry about. "What happened? You swore to us that you would never be the reason we almost got captured."

I turned to my horse and watched as he took mouthfuls of hay from the trough. "My father happened."

Larkin's knife dropped from his hands and met the floor with a clang. "He was *there?*" he breathed. "Your father was there in Lowvaine?"

"Yes," I said. There wasn't any need for him to be surprised. We had this occasional, yet rare, visit from my father. We were hard people to find, even for him. I knew my father was wherever we were, but he rarely ever came to me in person. He knew he would only receive wrath from me. "I saw him through the window of the inn as we were leaving. I think he was the reason the guards didn't come after us."

Larkin bent down and picked up his knife. "Your father follows us everywhere. It isn't unusual to see him, but for him to come to you in person when he knows how you'll respond...he usually only does that once every two months or so, because he thinks you'll have had time to change."

"But I never do." I muttered, watching his knife flip through the air. He had developed the habit in the first few months of our thievery. He only did it when he was nervous. Nervousness was a rare emotion for him. The only emotion he ever displayed was anger.

He looked up at me, eyebrow raised. "You were inside of the inn. I saw you from the window."

I sighed. He was the only person who could catch me in a lie. He knew me—my strengths, my weaknesses, my secrets...I could never decide how I felt about that. I wasn't sure whether it was a good thing or a bad thing that he knew more about me than he should...he knew me almost as well as my father, and my father and I were strangers to one another now.

Larkin smirked. "What did he say to you?"

"There wasn't time to talk," I muttered. "But he tried to tell me something..." I put my hand to my forehead and looked down, trying to remember. When I had, I looked up with a furrowed brow. "He told me there was something urgent that he wanted to tell me, and he was begging me to listen, but I told him I had to leave."

Larkin gathered a breath to speak, but he looked down without saying a word. I knew he wanted to say his name, the greatest thief of the age's name. I knew he didn't want to bring up how I was the long lost daughter of the age. Part of me wanted him to bring it up. Part of me was proud of being the long lost daughter that Robin Hood desperately wanted back in his arms. The other part of me hated how badly he wanted me to come home. Some part of me wanted to punch Larkin if he brought it up.

We began walking back to the creek where I had left my saddle, Montague's blanket and bridle, and my saddle bags.

"Well, Lee," he said. "You know what I'm thinking."

I lifted all of my belongings from the ground and threw them into Larkin's arms. He took them without protest.

"Unfortunately." I replied.

That was the thing with him. We had known each other ever since we were children growing up together in Locksley. We always knew what the other was thinking. I rather enjoyed not having to say a word to him, but I knew that if we were on different sides of things, it would be a disaster for whoever was on the wrong side.

“Robin Hood wants you home.” Larkin said quietly, even though it was unnecessary. I already knew what he was thinking. I didn't need to be reminded of the thing my father wanted most though he knew it would never happen.

“He didn't seem very desperate for my return when we first ran away.” I said, glaring at the ground as I walked away from him.

“We came straight to The Foggiest Forest. We had spent six months charting it. It would take him six years.” Larkin said.

I didn't like how arrogantly he said that, but Larkin had a tendency to be arrogant. We were excellent thieves. We had learned from our failures and it never happened again. It had been three years and our success rate had soared sky high, while our failure rate had plummeted to the ground. My father could have easily created a map of The Foggiest Forest, but he was too busy with his life to bother making others' lives easier. Well, I shouldn't necessarily have said that. He's Robin Hood—steal from the rich, give to the poor. But that wasn't him anymore.

“You look bitter,” Larkin said while we walked to the tack shed. “You're probably thinking about how he no longer steals from the rich to give to the poor.”

“How did you guess?” I muttered under my breath, giving him a sideways glance as we walked to the tack shed outside of the stable.

“When you look bitter, you're thinking about how he was busy, and it always ends in how you think he was selfish while you were at home, making his life easier unlike yours,

and then you contradict yourself because you're guilty for thinking it. So you tell yourself he's Robin Hood, he stole from the rich to give to the poor, but that's not what he does anymore." Larkin explained.

What a clever, rehearsed assumption. I almost wished he didn't know me so well.

"You know me too well."

"I've been the only one you can talk to for three years, Lee. Well, besides the twins, but they're more concerned about who was born first." Larkin said.

I snorted. "Yes, they both think they were born first when it was really Liam."

"But how do you know, Lee?" Larkin said, doing a perfect imitation of Oliver's voice. "Were you *there*?"

When that argument broke out, Oliver always demanded to know if the person that said it was Liam was there to see it with their own eyes. Of course they weren't. It annoyed me, especially, because I was a year younger than the twins. Of course I wasn't there. I hadn't even been born yet.

"No, indeed I was not and I never would have been even if I could have been." I replied.

"You don't plan on getting married and having kids, do you?" Larkin asked quietly.

I glared at him. I wondered, for a moment, if he was still imitating Oliver, but then I realized he was serious. "No, of course not!" I exclaimed, more annoyed than I was before. I looked down. "After all that I've done, no man would marry me."

There was a long silence. I kept walking, but realized Larkin was no longer by my side. I looked back to watch him adjust the pile of equipment in his hands and scurry to catch up to me.

"What were we saying?"

I was glad he wanted to change the topic. "Yes, you were reading my thoughts."

Larkin shook his head. "Oh, no, no, no. I simply know you too well," he said. "You know, Lee, your father did a wonderful job raising you alone through the grief and pain. He had to raise you, and make sure the Twelve Kingdoms ran smoothly. After all, he was one of the founders of the Twelve Kingdoms. He had given his life to the people he helped, and then when he returned he could barely enjoy life himself. You were born and then your mother died, and he had to care for an infant child while trying to handle that his beloved wife had died, when only a year before it would have been easier for them to have gone their separate ways."

I faced him. "My father was a *drunk!*" I had turned so I said it directly in his face. It may have been a mistake on my part, for we were closer to the others and this attracted more attention than necessary, but I couldn't stand silent while he justified my father's actions. In earlier years he had been a good man and a good father and a good leader, but a few months before I ran away, he turned to secrecy and drinking, and three years ago, through Larkin's advice, I had decided that I could no longer live trying to determine why he sneaked out of the house every night to drink at the pub near our village. I left, believing that my father had become a scoundrel, though he had never hurt a single person in his drunkenness. The worst that happened was him sleeping all day to do it again the next night, and then lying to me instead of telling me the truth.

I looked down. I never raised my voice...they knew that if I raised my voice at anyone, it was because I was losing control. I was surprised I hadn't been yelling more, though. I wasn't losing control. I had already lost control.

Larkin was still as calm now as he had been moments before. He stepped back, my horse's tack still securely held in his arms. "I don't think you want everyone to hear our private conversation, do you?"

I couldn't bear to look up at him. I only knew he had stepped back from watching his boots move. He hadn't jerked, like he was about to lose his grip on my equipment. I was aware that this happened every time we returned from a heist. I felt a heavy burden weighing down on my shoulders, one I could no longer carry, and every time we returned from being chased down by soldiers and guards of various kingdoms or after seeing my father, I lost control with Larkin. And only Larkin. He was the only one I knew would react calmly to my sudden temper.

I was ashamed of it. The same temper that I released on him was the same temper that I released on my father. Larkin knew as well as my father and everyone else that I felt, in that moment, that I was losing control on the situation we were in.

Larkin took a deep breath. "I forgive you," he whispered, shifting his weight from foot to foot. "I'll meet you inside."

He must have known I was thinking about something. There was a plan I had made a few months ago when the soldiers chasing us were nearly inescapable. I never thought I would take this plan seriously, but now, I realized we were no longer as safe as we thought we were. When we saw something we wanted, we approached as friends, and once we had gained our victim's trust, we struck like vipers. When we struck, we took everything. There was never one shilling left to the rich scoundrel's name when we were through with him. That was one of the many reasons why eleven out of the Twelve Kingdoms had bounties for all of our heads. Informally, we were wanted dead or alive. Formally, my thieves were wanted for life sentences.

Now that we had been running for three years, they were growing wiser...wise enough to know how to strike back.

I wasn't quite sure which kingdoms wanted who for what. I never really kept track, but I knew some of them wanted to hang Larkin. Some wanted to take Oliver and Liam prisoners and torture them. I knew they wanted something done with me, but they never openly shared whether they wanted me imprisoned for life or executed. As far as I knew, the kingdoms respected my father too much to openly admit what they wanted to do with me.

I had committed enough crimes to know that whatever they wanted to do with me, it wouldn't be pleasant and it would most likely end in death.

After all, unless the thief escaped the life of stealing, it would always end in death, no matter whether they were captured or not.

"Duality"—Marlene Proteau

Art



“For You”—Lukas Ayers

Poetry

A muse will never sing this tune.
This song, unmatched, now flows through you.
Betwixt the Sun and Moon, your grace
kisses from the cosmic face.

Like air you are on drowning mouths.
Cool and calm this tincture flows
to blow the birds in summer South.
This potion does our garden grow.

Our realms entwined when blossoms sprung,
when stars so warm in Heaven hung.
Like stone we stood on schism's edge
until we fell back in this bed.

Forge we will our mithril fates,
so separate yet so hand-in-hand.
Now we sleep, for time grows late,
on ocean's reach, the Earth our sand.

“The Art in the Argument”—Ambrosia Sharkey

2nd Place Non-Fiction

In 1963 when “Letter from Birmingham Jail” was written by Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights movement was in full swing. Segregation was still rampant, but protests, sit-ins, and the Black Nationalist movement were sweeping the nation. Martin Luther King Jr. was caught between several varying stances on the subject ranging from complacency to violent nationalism. In response to mounting pressures and criticism, he wrote “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to address these concerns and further persuade his audience to take action. The letter, though addressed to the eight clergymen who publically criticized him, was open for all to read, as his intended audience was everyone in all facets of the movement. This makes for the complex social situation that he accounts for in his rhetorical mode. At the same time, many of the people attacking his views did not understand the depth of the situation or historical parallels behind the civil rights movement, so he enlightens them through emotional appeal, logical proofs, and masterful rhetoric to make his letter “so unanswerable” (Mott 416). To make a persuading argument in his letter, King defends against or disproves completely the opposing arguments, while proving the injustice of segregation, persuading the audience to take direct non-violent action, and maintaining a tone suitable to address his widely varying audience.

In his letter, King first disproves or discredits the accusations from the eight clergymen who publically criticized him in order to establish his credibility to be a leading voice on the issue, and prove he has a right to be protesting in Birmingham. He starts by complimenting the clergymen, saying he believes they are “men of genuine good will” to create an inoffensive tone to keep his opposition reading (King 133). As Wesley T. Mott,

a Humanities professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, states in his article, King creates a humble and seemingly pacifying tone as a “calculated rhetorical stance” that “is intended to reveal the inhumanity of the clergymen’s position and hold it up to the scorn of those of us who are reading over their shoulders” (414). To the argument that he is an “outsider coming in,” King mentions his organizational ties there, and how he was asked to be there, and as if that is not reason enough, says, “I am here because injustice is here” (133). King then proceeds into biblical references, about Apostles and aiding the Macedonians, to gain sympathy for his cause from the more- religious audience of the time. King finishes illuminating the truth with parallelism, repetition, and an air of authority in the claim, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere...Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly...Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds” (133). All these strategies rally the emotions of the reader, force the reader understand the moral responsibility King has to spread his message, and annihilates the argument that he has no right to be protesting in Birmingham or anywhere else in the United States.

King also proves non-violent direct action is the best course for reform, to disprove the criticisms of the opposition and to build credit with the audience. The clergymen criticized King’s demonstrations, suggesting that negotiation was the better path. Using metaphors, imagery, and repetition King explains how they had tried to negotiate, time and time again, only to be denied or given empty promises. With these strategies, King also appeals to the audience’s emotions to gain sympathy. He lays out the logic of how non-violent direct action leads to such tension that a society has to address the issue and negotiate to show the audience the irony of the clergymen’s statement, because that was exactly his goal—to push the governing masses into negotiating. King uses Socrates

as a reference to gain respect and to subconsciously reinforce in the audience that his point is logical. He again uses more imagery: "bondage of myths...dark depths of prejudice...majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood," and parallels Socrates's and his ideas to add dramatic impact, which excites the audience to agree with him in the motivational speech-like rhythm (King 135). He also refers to the historical parallels of well renowned figures fighting for a cause, like Jesus, Amos, Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson, to establish them as the precedents for direct action. King later suggests that if non-violent direct action had not become an outlet for the anger of the oppressed to be expressed that "by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood" (King 140). This shocking statement quickly compels the audience to realize that they much prefer the non-violent means.

King disproves the argument that they should "wait" and be patient because their actions are "untimely" or that time will help solve their problems, and he calls the audience to action through his rhetorical strategies. To the proposition of giving the new administration more time to act, King responds that they "must be prodded" as much as the one before, again repeating the need for pressure or tension to create change (King 135). He refers to history and Reinhold Niebuhr to enlighten the audience to the truth that "freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed," justifying their fight for equality (King 135). King uses logic once again to disprove the "myth[s] concerning time...that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills" (King 139). "Actually time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively," King states, and then proceeds with parallelism, repetition, figurative language, and logical reasoning to invoke the audience with guilt over the idea that it is the fault of good men who stand by that evil triumphs (King 139).

Then he provides that the solution is to act now and uses the same methods to call them to action.

King uses many rhetorical strategies to emotionally manipulate and intellectually enlighten the audience into understanding their plight and sympathizing with it to persuade them to take action. To set up for the periodic sentence of abuses, he repeats the word "wait" for emphasis and then clarifies the hidden meaning behind the word, "This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never'...'justice too long delayed is justice denied'" (King 135). In his famous periodic sentence that becomes a paragraph, he uses repetition, parallelism, metaphors, detailed imagery, figurative language, and emotionally charged words to list the painful abuses they endured for centuries. The extent of the tragedies is not only an appeal for sympathy from the audience, but the paralleled clauses, repetition, and long periodic sentence give a sense of build and a feeling of waiting for years, to show why "waiting" is not an option. As Mott points out, the metaphor that follows, of the "cup of endurance" overflowing, shadows the "torrent of adverbial clauses...literally pour[ing] over the simple little cup of the main clause, moving us emotionally while convincing us intellectually that 'waiting' can no longer be expected" (King 419). King finishes with an understatement that delivers more punch than an exclamation, "I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience" (King 136). Thus, he indirectly exposes the morally gross truth of what asking them to wait implies, to keep from offending the opposition into not listening. This further helps the audience to understand the vast depths of the situation and calls them to action.

To prove the segregation laws needed to be changed and to advocate breaking those laws, King first demonstrates how they were unjust in both a moral and constitutional sense, and that one had an obligation to uphold morality even when the law failed. He repeats throughout the letter the word “freedom” in the place of desegregation to invoke the connection his audience feels to the American Revolution, the constitution, and the ideal America was founded on. This, and metaphors like, “airtight cage of poverty,” subconsciously make the audience feel the figurative physical imprisonment of inequality (King 136). King infallibly lays out a logical proof of how it is unjust in the eyes of the law and morality (King 136-37). He begins with small claims or examples that are undeniably true like there are just and unjust laws, and then he builds logical inferences from them with a Socratic-like method to guide the audience to the inevitable conclusion that segregation is unjust. As a part of this strategy, King defines what makes a law just or unjust in several different ways to build this understanding: “An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself...A law is unjust if...” (King 137). To prove that one has a moral obligation to break unjust laws and that he or she must also be willing to accept the consequences, he gives powerful religious and historical examples of breaking unjust laws for the greater moral good: Christians facing hungry lions, Socrates pursuing academic freedom, the Boston Tea Party. King uses Adolf Hitler's actions, as an example of unjust laws, like a shock of cold water to the face of the audience—awakening them to the truth of the paralleled moral crimes of racial violence and oppression and reminding them just how horrific unjust laws can be. King compels the audience to act through logical comparisons, powerful examples, and proving the

segregation laws unjust, thus convincing them change is needed and rallying more support for the movement.

There are other arguments and points made in King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," but ultimately the lasting impressions are the logical proofs and emotional testimonies of the need for justice and equality. It rings clear that waiting is not an option, and that it is everyone's moral responsibility to act when an injustice takes place, no matter where. There is no doubt as to the enormous impact of Martin Luther King Jr. in the civil rights movement. He was one of the leading persuasive voices in the call for desegregation and racial equality that built the momentum behind changing an entire country from the inside. With his graceful, calculating, and masterful rhetoric, the talent for dissecting the truth to reveal logical or moral epiphanies, and precisely powerful expressions of emotional testimonies and language, King makes his argument unanswerable and infallible.

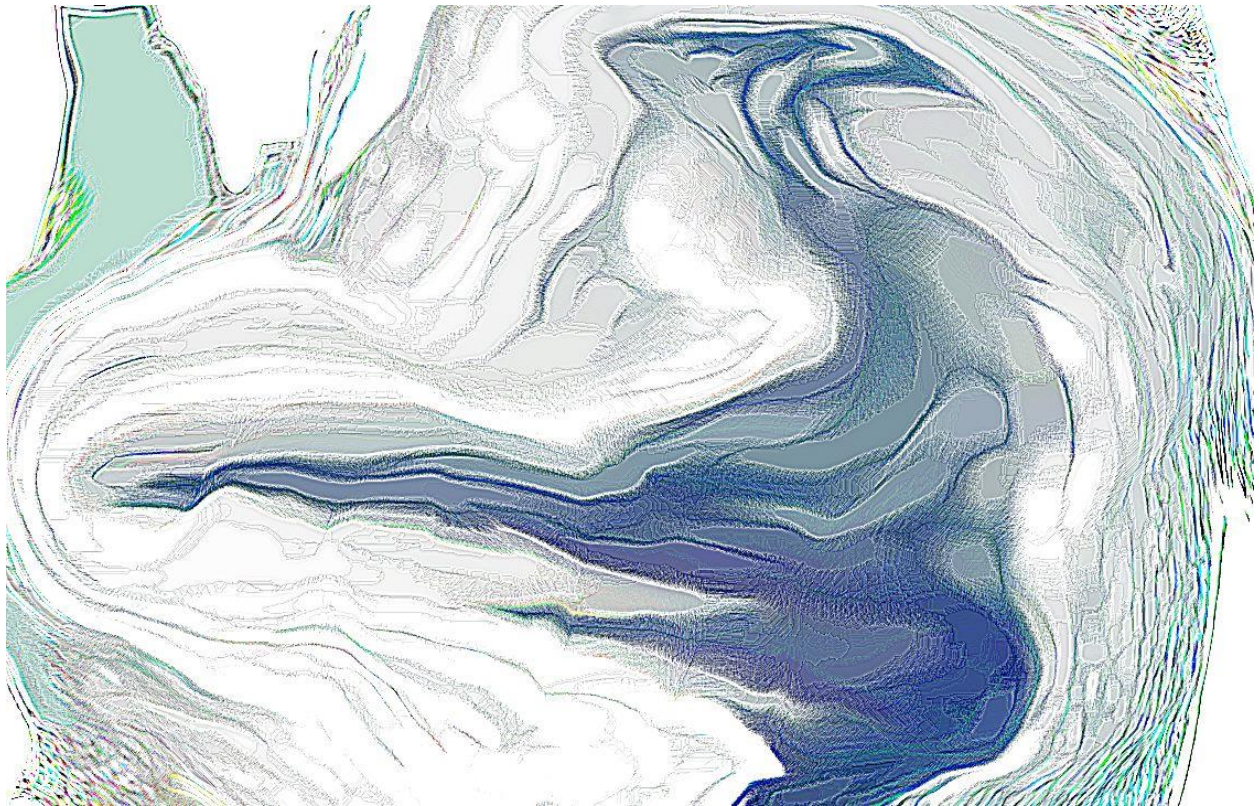
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“Side Mountain”—Laura Munoz

Art



“The Year 2022”—Saida Hussein

Fiction

Evenings like these had become very rare, sitting outside under the stars in our backyard. I often wondered what was beyond just the fence. Mike, my husband, had even lit a few candles and hung lights on the porch to set a romantic mood. We were celebrating our ten-year anniversary that evening. I had cooked steak—that was Mike's favorite. Due to the cost of meat, we rarely get to eat meat nowadays. Especially not steak, but Mike had pulled some strings, so I prepared it for tonight. We saved the good stuff for special occasions only. We enjoyed our peaceful candle-lit dinner, and the steak was the most amazing steak we had ever had.

We were laughing and sharing memories of our time together in college, until I remembered that I hadn't gotten us any drinks. Mike, the gentleman as he was, offered to drive into town to get us our favorite wine, but I was hesitant to let him go. It was dangerous, going outside at a time like this. Crime was recurrent and it was getting worse. Due to the high level of crime, it was against the law to buy a house with no security system installed; it didn't matter if you had housing insurance. A security system was mandatory, like seat belts were in cars. The indigenous still lived without security systems because they couldn't afford to have them. They couldn't afford anything. Those that were lucky enough would be put in government buildings where they were assigned twenty-four hour security. Those that were not so lucky made their way on the streets.

Thinking about the indigenous made me afraid to celebrate my anniversary. I knew someone out there wanted what I had, so I never went a second taking anything

for granted. I once felt what it was like to want something that someone else had, and I didn't want anyone else to ever feel that way.

"Oh, come on, honey. We can't end this night without your favorite *Clos Du Bois*," Mike insisted. It made me giggle whenever he said *Clos Du Bois* because of the way he said it with a fake French accent and a smirk. When he promised he would be quick, I begged him to stay. But he wanted everything to be perfect for just one night. He wasn't going to take no for an answer, so I let him go.

Mike had been gone for nearly twenty minutes when I looked outside the window for the fifth time. He didn't bring his cell phone with him; it was too dangerous to do so. Everyone's cell phones had receivers in them that were easily traceable by the common thief. If the thieves picked up traces of anyone entering the city at night, they would track them down and mug them. Initially these receivers had been installed by the government as a protection for everyone. That's what the government told us, at least. You were tracked and traced everywhere you went with your cell phone. It began to be too much for some people. Too much that some people had learned not to keep their cell phones on them anymore.

It had been forty-five minutes since Mike had left to go get the wine. I was now annoyed and angry at him. Why did he always have to try and make everything perfect? Why couldn't he just be happy with the steak and water? Part of me was scared that something had happened to him. Anxiously, I looked outside the window again. This time I saw a van, an unusual looking, but familiar van. It was white with a sign on it saying, "Safety For System." I recognized it immediately. This was the same company that had installed everyone's security systems. *Why were they here?* I wondered. Our system was

on and working. I tried to get a better look at the van. It was too dark for me to see anyone, if there was anyone. I grabbed the house phone and dialed the number for the security system watch control to see if there was a problem with our system. The phone kept dialing, and the automated system didn't seem to have a proper response for, "Why is there a van outside my house?!"

In frustration, I hung up. I looked outside the window again, for probably the hundredth time, and the van was still there. The lights were turned off, like someone had just left it there. I decided to turn off my lights, too. Maybe they saw me looking at them. I was pretty sure they did, but it wasn't like I could do anything about them. The automated system couldn't help me, and I was too afraid to go outside. I thought about calling the police station, but I stopped myself, remembering that there was always a cop driving around our neighborhood, checking for suspicious behavior. I decided to wait to see if he would pass by, and after a few minutes, he did. He slowed down as he got closer to the van. He knew something was wrong. The officer got out of the car and began to circle the van.

And then everything happened all at once.

It was dark in my house, and I found myself stuck by the window, staring outside in fear. I gripped the curtains, I was so terrified. The officer had finished circling the van and began to walk up the driveway to my front door. Right before the officer would have knocked, the door of the van opened swiftly. A man dressed in black with a gun ran up to the cop and shot him in the back of the head. The man proceeded to drag the officer's lifeless body into the van. Another man jumped out of the van and into the patrol car and drove away. I felt like I could have thrown up. Barely thirty seconds had gone

by. My mouth was hanging wide open. I thought I was screaming, but it was only in my head.

Did this really just happen?! I kept thinking. It happened so fast, it made me think I was delusional. I rushed to get my phone, but remembered the tracer on it. They, whoever *they* were, would immediately notice a call to the police from my phone. It was only a matter of time before they were going to get in the house. I had to come up with a plan quickly.

That's when I saw the flashing light beaming from the car pulling up, the sound of our garage door opening. *Mike!* I rushed over to the window again, and the van was gone. I didn't understand. Mike came in to find me in a panic. He flipped on the lights. I couldn't get the words out fast enough to tell him what had happened, so I just stood there quietly in shock.

"Honey, are you alright?" he asked.

I was trying to get the words out, but I was stumbling and stuttering.

"Lisa!" he cried. It's not often that I have trouble finding my words. Mike knew something was going on. "What's wrong?"

"The van," I pushed the words out, "did you see the van?"

"What van? What are you talking about?" He looked at me with a look that made me feel like I was crazy.

"Mike, there was a van outside! Two guys killed the neighborhood patrol officer!" I realized I did sound crazy. A few minutes ago, I was wondering if it really did happen, but I knew I wasn't crazy. I saw what I saw.

Mike was looking at me, trying to figure out what to say without sounding like he was questioning my sanity. "You saw a van outside the house?" he asked.

"Yes! Yes! There was a van, two guys, and they killed the officer! Did you hear me?"

By the look in his eyes, he thought I had lost it. It wasn't unheard of that people were going crazy these days, delusional, claiming they saw horrific events taking place. Those people ended up in asylums.

"Lisa, I heard what you said. I just want you to think about it. No one was out there when I drove up."

I took a hard look at Mike. I had been married to this guy for ten years; he knew I wasn't crazy.

"Okay," I said. "I just need to sit down." I took a few moments, Mike sat next to me, even put his arms around me for comfort, but I wasn't comforted at all. I didn't know what to think. *What happened out there?!* I kept asking myself. I sat there in his arms and absorbed my thoughts until I drifted sleep.

I found myself at nine am the next morning on the couch, the sun beaming on my face. I wiped the drool off my mouth and stood up. The events of the evening before hadn't reached my mind yet. I was walking towards the kitchen to make myself a cup of coffee when I heard the garage door open and our alarm system saying, "Garage door is now opened."

Mike joined me in the kitchen. He smiled and gave me a kiss on my forehead, then walked over to the kitchen sink and washed his hands. He didn't say a word, just kept looking at me with a soft smile. Then he asked, "How are you?"

It took me a minute to respond. Usually he greeted me with a 'good morning.' Something about the way he asked me how I was made me remember the events of last night. They quickly shuffled through my mind. "I'm fine," I said and raised my cup of coffee to take a sip. "How are you?" I asked.

Something was off with the way Mike was behaving. I wanted to bring it up, but I knew it would be a bad idea. He wiped his hands off with the kitchen rag and threw the rag into the laundry room across from the kitchen. "I've got a lot of work to do today," he said. He looked me right in the eyes, as if I hadn't just told him that I witnessed a murder take place outside our house last night.

"Mike..." I started to say, but he interrupted me

"Lisa, look. I know you were having quite a night last night."

"Mike, I need you to listen to me!" I pleaded.

"I just don't have time to go over this again," he replied as he walked away.

I poured the rest of my coffee down the sink. I didn't have much of an appetite for anything. When I sat down at the table, I pulled out my laptop and searched the news for any missing cops. No results showed up, so I decided to call my security system. I was put on hold, and finally a lady picked up the phone.

"My name is Sandra, thank you for calling Safety For System, how can I help you?"

"Yes, um, my name is Lisa. Could you please check our account for any recent requests?"

"Sure, what is your account number?" she asked.

I told Sandra our account number hesitantly, afraid of the answer.

“Okay, I see that you called us yesterday for a van to be sent out. It's showing here that they reported a request to change your password. Is that correct?” She asked. I stayed silent for a while—I didn't know what to say. Eventually, Sandra cleared her throat. “Mrs. Afford, are you there?” she asked.

“Thank you, Sandra,” I said nervously and hung up. Then I went straight to Mike's office, where he usually decided to bury himself in work. I didn't bother knocking on the door. When I opened the door, I saw him wiping down his gun and putting it back in the safe. He looked at me as if he expected an explanation for why I just barged into his office. “Did you change the password for the security system?” I asked.

“Lisa...” he began, but I interrupted him this time.

“Did you or did you not request a change for security system password?”

“Lisa, if you would just let me explain...” he said trying to calm me down. He tried to get me to sit down, but I was overwhelmed with disgust, so I walked out of his office.

What was he doing to us, our marriage our life together? We both had lost our parents, we only had each other. We tried for years to conceive a child—endless nights and days on fertility drugs and treatments and getting negative results again and again. It had broken our hearts, but made us stronger as a couple. Even when we had decided on adopting, only to receive the news that it was no longer legal to adopt in our district, Mike had always been by my side. Why was this happening now? Why was I feeling like I was losing him?

"Lisa," Mike said as he walked into our bedroom. I pretended like I didn't hear him come in. I just covered myself up with a blanket. "I know this is difficult for you, and as much as I would like to save you from all the harm out there, I can't. I know that now" he said.

"What do you mean, Mike? What harm are you talking about?"

"I can't talk about it here, Lisa. We need to go away for a while."

"We can't go away, you know that. There are laws about that."

"It's not safe here!"

"Just tell me what is going on! Did you change the password?"

"No, I didn't. Come on, Lisa, you know me!"

"Then who did?" I was starting to get angry now. Why wouldn't Mike, my own husband, tell me what was going on?!

"I can't talk about it now. It's too dangerous," Mike told me.

"Well, if it wasn't you who changed the password, then who was it? What about the guy who got murdered?!"

"Get a bag ready, and meet me in the car. We can make it out of town before the gate closes."

"Are you crazy?! If they find out that we're not here, they will find us and... and..."

“And what, Lisa? This place has us all brainwashed. We can't live like this not knowing what will happen to us if we leave our house. Once we're out of here, I'll tell you everything I know.” Then Mike left the room with a small bag.

I didn't know what to think. We had been abiding citizens to the New Orders for six years now. I felt like I was breaking some agreement that I had stayed committed to. Which I technically was.

I looked at the time. There were two hours and fifteen minutes before the gate closed. If we wanted any chance of getting out, it had to be now. So, I quickly grabbed a bag and threw in a few necessities and met Mike in the car. He looked at me and his eyes reassured me that he was the same ole-Mike that he had always been. The same Mike that I had met in college, who was the president of the debate club. The same Mike who graduated a year later just so he could graduate with me, and the same Mike who proposed to me at our three year anniversary on stage at our graduation with the song by Bruno Mars, “I Think I Want to Marry You.” It was like nothing was different.

The drive out of town was silent. Neither of us said a word. There were so many questions were going through my mind, and I could tell that Mike's only focus was to get us beyond city borders.

We arrived at the border control an hour before shutdown. Mike explained to the guards that he was sent by his job, The Ministry of Truth. He held a respectable position, and was allowed more leniency than the average citizen. “We'll make it back before shutdown,” he nodded to the guard and drove off.

It was an hour before sunset, and as we drove out further than I had been in years, I couldn't help but notice the beauty of the mountains and trees and rivers. It reminded

me of my childhood, before everything had changed. We drove by a deer. A deer! I hadn't seen a deer in years. I felt so alive! Why were we deprived of all of this life? This beauty? I rolled down the windows, even though it was a bit cold outside to feel the freshness of the wind.

Mike made a turn into a forest and some minutes down the path there was a little brick house. "What is this?" I asked.

"Come on, I'll show you," he told me. Mike pulled up to the house and parked. After he got out of the car, he opened my door for me and as we walked up to the house, Mike started to tell me about the house. "This land belonged to my parents before they passed away. They never officially left it to me, but no one really knows about this place but me... and now you." He opened the door with a key that was hidden behind a loose brick on the house. As we walked in, I was hit by a strong smell. I couldn't quite recognize it. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't good either. I looked around the room. Mike turned on the lights and pulled out blankets. He told me that we wouldn't be able to start a fire because the smoke from the chimney would give away our location.

"Mike, tell me what's going on. Now," I demanded. I looked at him with a serious look and that's when he told me everything.

Mike had been working for the Ministry of Truth since the New Order had taken over. They governed our entire district. In 2016, we were on the edge of World War III, although it never really happened quite the way we were made to believe. Many people fled the country, finding opportunities overseas or up north. The country known as The United States of America, separated into two sections, East and West. The West was free from most of the propaganda following the alleged World War III, and once many of the

Easterners realized that their government had been lying to them, they tried to flee to the West. This became quite a problem for the leaders of the East because they were losing control of their people. If they continued to lose their citizens, they would inevitably lose their land as well, they thought. So they founded The Ministry of Truth.

Early on, Mike had secured a position with them for the skills he possessed in technology. They offered him great incentives and we needed them at the time to financially support our fertility treatments. Mike went on to tell me that during his time working for The Ministry of Truth, he ran across documents that were classified. He didn't think much of it the first time, as he thought it would be normal to for the government to have classified documents.

One day his buddy John hadn't shown up for work. He thought John was sick, so he drove by his house on the way back home from work to check up on him. When he had arrived at John's house, an older woman in her late fifties or early sixties, opened the door, Mike introduced himself as one of John's coworkers. The woman informed him that John had been dead for nearly twenty years... John was her late husband. Mike didn't understand. He had just been at work with John a few days ago... how could he have been dead for almost twenty years? It wasn't possible.

That's what led to Mike being skeptical about his workplace. He told me that after a couple weeks, he ran across a file of medical forms related to the fertility treatment that we, along with a few other citizens, had started. That caught his attention, and he started going through file after file, discovering that people had been prescribed fake fertility drugs. In rage, he spoke to one of the coworkers about it, but the coworker told him he really had to keep his mouth shut about those things, and that if anyone had

found out that he had been digging through files he could not only get fired, but they would kill him and his wife.

“That’s why I didn’t want to believe you about the van being outside our house last night, Lisa,” he told me. “It means that someone was watching me. Us. That cop wasn’t coming to the house to make sure everything was okay... he was there to kill us. The people in that van saved our lives.”

To be continued...

“Kelly”—Darian Hines
Staff Photography



“Beauty of My Life”—Samuel Odera
Photography



Untitled—Christopher Shannon
Photography



“The American Dream: Myth or Reality?”—Erin Beason

Staff Non-Fiction

The American Dream is perhaps one of the most idolized ideals of American life. It gives one hope for the future, for their own lives, or the lives of their children. This hope may be for a better life, a life of equality, a life of freedom to be whomever and whatever one wants, a life full of choices, or perhaps just a life of acceptance and tolerance. While this dream sounds promising, it is often just what it is: a dream.

In the essay “What is the American Dream” the Library of Congress compiles a few definitions of what the American dream is. The first definition listed is from James Truslow Adams' book *The Epic of America* written in 1931. He states, “It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” Another definition listed comes from Thomas Wolfe who said of the American dream, “...to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunitythe right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him.” The Library of Congress also poses the question of the Declaration of Independence being the foundation of the American Dream with the words, “that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Each of these definitions speaks of hope, prosperity and freedom. Oftentimes, it may seem as though the American dream is an attainable reality, that America is truly the land of freedom and opportunity, that it is full of self made men who started from the bottom with everyone else. This is not reality.

While a dream may be defined as “a cherished aspiration, ambition, or ideal” by the Oxford English Dictionary, it also defines a dream as “an unrealistic or self-deluding fantasy”. The latter definition would suggest that the American dream is an unrealistic fantasy that has become somewhat of a cornerstone in American thought. While dreams and fantasies often give one something to believe in, they often lead to neglect of reality, and may even act as a blind between what is ideal and what is true. In fact, the American dream was not even founded by Americans. In the article “Five Myths About the American Dream”, Michael F. Ford, the founding director of the Xavier University's Center for the Study of the American Dream, points out that the dream originates from the Western European settlers who fled Europe for the Americas in the hopes of a better life, as well as religious freedom.

The dream of a free and equal America has not yet been achieved, and may never be achieved. From the Puritans of the early Massachusetts Bay Colony, to the deplorable institution of slavery, to the Civil Rights Movement, to the push for marriage equality, and to the racial and religious based hate crimes that occur today, equality

has not been achieved. While great strides have been made toward the ideal of equality, it has not yet been met. The Puritans and others who sought religious freedom burned or hung those who did not conform to their religious beliefs. Slavery is an excellent example of the hypocrisy of the American ideals of freedom and equality. Slaves were captured and sent against their will to the Americas only to be worked to death or condemned to a life of unequal treatment and cruelty. Choice was not a luxury awarded to slaves. Children born to slaves were born into slavery, and did not have the luxury to choose to be free or make successful lives of their own. Up until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment slavery was not even a term used in the Constitution, there were instead "free persons" and "all other persons" or even persons "held to the service of labor." From the start, slaves were valued as lesser persons (Tindall and Shi 272).

Perhaps some of the most disregarded victims of inequality from the beginning of the European settlement of America are the Native Americans. Native Americans have never truly been held as equals and even the small measures that have been taken to ensure equal treatment of Native Americans are no match for the damage that was done to these peoples. According to the article "Destroying the Native American Cultures" which is from a group of immigration articles compiled by the Library of Congress, there were once about 900,000 Native Americans who spoke roughly 300 languages, which were all but destroyed by diseases, broken treaties, violent warfare, forced removal, and forced assimilation. Not only did native peoples continually lose their home lands as well as lands promised to them, they often lost their unique cultural practices and heritage. Many were given new names, homes and a religion, which was foreign to them, thus destroying their original identities. Native Americans were not even granted citizenship until 1942 under President Calvin Coolidge ("United States Citizenship for the Native Americans").

Another group that has faced a great deal of discrimination, more by de facto segregation than du jure, is women. For centuries women were and occasionally still are thought of as the weaker sex, less able and less intelligent than their male counterparts. Women were thought to be best suited to subordination to their husbands or other male family members. Many were not allowed to pursue an education, speak publicly or own property for a number of years. In the United States, women finally gained suffrage, and stronger citizenship with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919 ("Women's History in the U.S."). While great efforts have been made towards gender equality, women are still not equal.

The American Dream of equality and freedom is simply far from reaching fruition. While most discriminatory laws have been overturned and women and men of all races can be granted citizenship, centuries of cultural bias towards men, especially white men, are not going to be easily erased from society. Racism is still rampant today. Religious persecution and discrimination occurs everyday, whether by well meaning

people or by hate groups. Native Americans are faced with a low socioeconomic status and are more susceptible to alcohol related issues than non Native Americans (Beauvais). Women make approximately 77 cents compared to every dollar a man makes (Chu and Posner). The key to reversing the effects of countless years of bias, and the key to one day achieving equality, is education both of history and of social disparities.

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Excerpt from “Zwischen”—Marie Defreitas

Staff Fiction

Although during the day it was only a few degrees warmer, it seemed to make all the difference. One night I found myself seeing things in the darkness. Shapes and figures: some human, some not. Things my mind was clearly making up. I felt like a schizophrenic patient, locked in an isolation booth with the electricity gone out. I was becoming more and more frightened every night from things that weren't even there. I'd find myself crying just so I'd get tired enough to fall asleep. I remember contemplating, would I die from the cold? From infection? From hunger? Or from insanity? Was that possible? Surely I couldn't hang on much longer.

It was our fifty seventh night in those cold, iron rooms. Now I would crawl over to where the light shone under the door to drive a small piece of stone into the ground to mark the day, then crawl back into the corner and shiver until the lanterns in the other room went out to signal it was night. I layed there in the same spot all day, shivering. Running my hands across my cold, shrunken face reminded me of my starvation. I didn't eat now, not at all. The little bits of meals piled up in the same spot for three days. I felt I was unable to move sometimes. Unable to speak. Scarlett called my name one night, but I was too weak to answer. She kept trying in vain, then resorted to simply telling me to “hang on, it's almost over.” She was stronger than I. I knew she would make it, but I wasn't too sure about myself.

“The Notes She Plays”—Lindsey Currin
Art



“More than Mass”—Savannah Gerardi

Staff Poetry

I was always told I was

Pretty for a

Fat Girl

The words always echoed in my mind

Creating it more of an insult than anything

A slap in the face

I constantly scroll through Twitter

Searching for my dose of “news”

All I can find are

“Thinspirations”

Toned

Thin

Tan

Women Preaching about how

Healthy they are

But no one ever

Tells them

They are pretty for a

Thin girl

I have always been told that the mass of my body

Determines how healthy I am

But studies have shown there is no

Correlation

Beauty and health are not only skin deep

I am so much more

More than the mass of my

Flesh

I am

the voice in my friends head telling her she is beautiful.

Even when she thinks otherwise.

I am

The comfort she needs to make it through the day.

It is hard enough for her to walk through the streets without being cat call about her thick thighs.

I am

The love that tells her she is worth so much more than the numbers that pop up on the scale below her feet

I am

So much more

Than pretty for a

Fat girl

Excerpt from “Sins of Their Fathers” (Book Three)—Christina Dietz

2nd Place Fiction

I woke up in Nikola's arms. I almost jumped out of the bed, but then I remembered we were married now. I had nearly forgotten. There was a constant pounding on the door. I thought it was his heart beating underneath my ear. Then I heard someone calling our names repeatedly. Nikola started to wake. When he did, he saw me and smiled.

“Good—”

The door flew open and Sweeney charged in, his eyes widened. It wasn't because he saw us for the first time together.

Nikola sat up. “Sweeney? Get out!”

He shook his head. “We have to leave. NOW.”

Nikola waved his hand for Sweeney to come inside. Sweeney did, and he closed the door behind him. As I watched, I saw how well-rehearsed his movements were. He turned his back to us and lowered his head, his arm against the wall.

Nikola threw the blankets back and nudged me. “Get ready.”

There wasn't much to pack, so we put on clean clothes fit for travelling.

“Tell us what's happening.” Nikola said, pulling on a clean shirt.

“Larkin stayed behind with some of his men. While we were distracted by the wedding, he attacked the ship and freed enough men to create a small army.” Sweeney said.

“Please tell me he didn't release those that are in the Knights Obscurum.” I said, tying the strings on the front of my dress. “They're all we have to use against Larkin.”

“He did free them,” Sweeney said. “That isn't the problem though. He is demanding we release Ainsley.”

Nikola buckled his sword belt. At the sound, Sweeney turned around. He looked at my wedding dress hanging neatly on a hanger on the outside of the wardrobe and sighed. “Larkin is waiting outside of the inn. He said he won't leave until he has Ainsley, and if anyone tries to leave, they will be prisoners of war.”

“Does he know about the kitchen door?” I asked.

Sweeney furrowed his brow and put his hands on his sword belt. “I didn't even know about the kitchen door.”

Nikola stepped over to me and touched my elbow. “What's this about a kitchen door?”

I glanced between them. “Well, it's safe to assume that if you two don't know about the kitchen door, Larkin doesn't either.”

We stood in silence, glancing between one another. No one wanted to mention that Larkin knew me well, almost as well, if not more so, than Nikola did. Larkin knew that I always looked for an escape route no matter where I was or what I was doing there. If he knew that, he might already know about the kitchen door, my only escape route. The risk was worth taking if it meant getting out without him knowing.

Nikola grabbed my bow and quiver from the corner of the room. "It looks like the kitchen door is our escape route, then."

I furrowed my brow. "What are you doing with my bow and quiver?"

Nikola handed them to me without a word. I slung them over my shoulder. He turned me around and walked me over to Sweeney.

"Take my wife," he said. "Protect her. Keep her safe. You remember the plans."

Sweeney went to grab my arm as I was handed off to him, but I escaped and used the weapons Nikola had given me. I notched an arrow and backed away so I could shoot it at one of them.

Nikola tilted his head back. "Oh, so first you were going to steal from me, and now you're going to kill me after one night of marriage?"

"I'm not leaving you," I said. "Whatever your plans are, I won't be taken away from you."

Sweeney stepped forward. He stopped when I directed the arrow at his heart. He raised his hands in surrender. "Lee, we don't have time for this."

Nikola sat down on the bed and sighed deeply. "Lee, sweetheart, I feared something would go wrong, so I sat down with King Leon, your father, and Sweeney, and we made a plan. Only the four of us knew about it. We couldn't involve anyone else. There are so many of us, I feared the plan would go around and end up escaping the wrong mouth.

I lowered my bow, but I held the arrow to let them know I was still ready to shoot should the need arise.

Nikola rubbed his finger where his wedding ring should have been. We had been in such a hurry, there hadn't been enough time to acquire rings. "We thought we wouldn't need these plans we made, but we went through with them anyway, just in case. Last night, King Leon retired, but he never made it to his bed. He took three of my knights with him, and half of his knights, and they started the journey back to Nodnol. I had hopes that we would follow him in two days, but we will have to leave today. The other part of the plan is for Sweeney, Sir Hood, and I to split up, and we'll leave with our resources spread. Sweeney is going to take you, Pascal, and my brother, and you're going to start your journey back to the castle in Nodnol. You'll take the fastest route, and you should arrive a day after King Leon if you don't catch up with him. Your father will take Sir Patrick and Ainsley and he will take the second longest path and arrive two days after the king. I'm going to take Muriel and Phil, and we'll take the longest route to the castle. It is believed we will arrive three days from now, if not four. Sweeney, Sir Hood and I will split my knights and King Leon's knights amongst ourselves. We are to meet at King Leon's castle, and then we will begin our journey to Locksley."

"Did you think I would agree to this?" I demanded. "We're married, Nikola. We're making this journey together."

"No, we're not. We knew someone would want Ainsley back, so we put you, Muriel and Ainsley in different groups to trick our pursuers. We're going to make sure they can't

see who is who." Nikola said, shoving some of his belongings into a satchel. "And I knew you wouldn't agree to it, so I ordered Sweeney to take you by force if you argued."

The words sank in. It took me a few moments to realize that now was the time to take up arms against them, but when I realized it, it was too late, for Sweeney had thrown his arms around me.

I squirmed as much as I could and I attempted to raise my bow, but I lost the arrow that I had held so firmly in my fingers. I had control of my elbows, but Sweeney held me tighter and I soon lost that too.

Nikola wiped his eyes and came over. I watched every move he made. He bit his lip as he approached. He was a strong man, but I wondered if the thought of sending me, his wife, away was too much for him to bear. He bent down, grabbed the arrow and placed it in my quiver. When he took my face in his hands, I tried to get away from him, too, but I had nowhere to go.

"Lee, please understand, I'm not doing this for Ainsley or myself or anyone else," he said. "I don't want you to be in danger. It won't be safe for such a large group to travel back together. With Larkin right outside the front door, this is the only way to make it out safely. Please, go. I love you."

"We made our vows," I whispered shakily. I took a deep breath. If he wanted to be the strong man over this, I knew I would have to be even stronger for his sake. "We said we would take these things together, not apart."

Nikola kissed my forehead. "Just know I love you. I'll see you soon."

He turned his face away and Sweeney carried me out kicking and screaming. I fought against him as much as I could, but then Pascal ran up the steps.

"They can hear you outside," Pascal whispered urgently. "Sir Robin is watching from the window, and he said he thinks they can hear you. Stop screaming, Lee. Stop, it will be all right. I promise."

I was desperate enough to fall into my last resort. Sweeney's arms were wrapped around my midsection. This left me no choice. I fell forward and he was forced to let me drop to my knees. He should have known better. I was a thief, swift and sure, and even if I hadn't stolen anything lately, I still had to be quick. I unsheathed the knife hidden underneath my cloak and turned to face Sweeney, to dare him to do anything.

He was a trained warrior—he knew me well, too. He must have seen it coming. He pushed me back to my knees. After I collided with the floor with a thud, he stepped back, but kept his fingertips gingerly on my shoulders. "Lee," he said, with a deep breath, even though he wasn't even bothered by the struggle, "stop this, please."

Pascal knelt in front of me and placed his hands over mine, even though I still held the knife firmly. "Lee," he said, looking into my eyes. His French accent was gentle as always, but urgent. "We must go."

I looked down. "I can't leave my husband. I won't."

They didn't say anything. They hardly moved except to glance between one another. There were footsteps in the stairwell, and Papa ran up and pulled me to my feet.

He wiped away the tears that were now flooding from my eyes and pulled me into a tight hug. I knew, even though I was married now, I would always be his little girl. "My love, I knew you would hate this, but you have to go."

I wanted to know why they hadn't involved me in these plans. They probably knew I would protest entirely. I knew why they were doing this. We could fool them easily, and they wouldn't know with certainty which group had the real Ainsley. As I tried not to sob, I admired how clever this plan was, but I hated that I had to leave my husband. I had a family now, but it was now to be taken away from me after only one night.

Papa continued to hug me, and I knew at this point it was because he couldn't look me in the eyes while he spoke. He knew I wouldn't be any happier that they neglected to ask how I felt about these plans. "Nikola wanted to be sure that you reached safety quickly. When we organized plans with King Leon, he said there are three paths to return to his castle. One is the shortest, the next a medium distance, and the last, the longest way to return. We agreed that if we were attacked, it would be best to separate into groups and take these various paths. Nikola wanted you to be on the shortest path so he could have the assurance of you being safe sooner. Your husband loves you. It's hard for him to send you away, but he wants you to be safe. Please, Lee, you're making it even harder for him."

I pulled away and glanced at the door. Papa was reluctant to release me. Whether we arrived safely or not, the kingdoms were on the brink of war, and we would be in the frontlines to die. If war came, there wouldn't be very many opportunities for hugs in the future.

If I was this distraught about the plan, I couldn't imagine what Nikola was experiencing behind the door.

This had been a plan I hadn't been prepared for. We were supposed to have a quiet week. My plans had been to stay here for a few days and then begin our journey back to what really needed to be done. I had just married, and I didn't have a ring to show for it. I never imagined I would have to leave my husband the day after the wedding.

I went to the door and knocked. I wasn't sure what I had expected, but I had expected some sort of answer. And yet there was none. I put my hands on the door and leaned against it. "Nikola, please answer me."

"Boys, come on. Let's give them some privacy." Papa said. They descended the staircase. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sweeney stop and glance back. I knew our window of opportunity was quickly closing, but nothing mattered as long as I could get a proper goodbye with my husband.

"I'm not opening the door," he said from within, his voice too muffled from the wood between us for me to know if he was as emotional as I was. "I don't want you to see me now."

"Nikola, love, I—I don't want to do this, no more than you want to see me go," I said, putting my forehead against the door. I heard his head knock against the door on

the other side. Somehow in my heart, I knew that his hands were against the door on the other side, right where mine were. I didn't know how I knew, but in the depths of my soul I knew, and this knowledge sank in at such a depth that I knew it was truth. "But I'll go, all right. I understand now, and I'll understand more when it's over. Love, I'll see you again soon, and if I don't, well," I laughed, "Hell hath no fury like I'll have when you don't come to me, do you understand?"

Nikola laughed, and that was when I knew he had been crying as hard as I was. "I promise you I'll be there. You'd better run out of the king's castle to greet me."

I smiled. "If I don't shoot you first for making me leave you."

We shared a laugh. I knew it would be the last laugh we would share for a few days, but it was better than the tears we were crying.

"Before you go," Nikola whispered, "could you do something for me?"

"Whatever you ask, it shall be done." I breathed. I wasn't normally one to do whatever someone told me to do, but he was my husband, and I was his wife. I had reached the point that I would do anything for him—even if he wanted me to greet Death without cheating him. I would do it.

If it were for my husband, I would do it, not because he told me to, but because I loved him.

"Dry those tears." Nikola said.

I wiped the tears on the sleeve of my cloak.

"Smile for me, will you?" he said. "I know you'll say you can't, but don't lie to me. I can hear the smile in your voice when you speak lovely to me."

I smiled. "I didn't know you could hear the smile in my voice."

"I can hear it now. You have the most beautiful smile I've ever seen, and it was never more beautiful than when you smiled at me for the first time in the Foggiest Forest, when we had run away from our old lives. You've always had a beautiful smile, but when you smiled at me in that particular moment, it was the first time you smiled at me as you. You weren't trying to be anyone else. You weren't protecting yourself or trying to keep me from knowing who you really are. You were Lenora Hood, and you smiled at me, Nikola Windsor, and I saw you. Only you. And birds started singing, and an angelic harp started playing—no, actually I think that was just Will Scarlett," he said, and I laughed, "but that made me think of something—birds actually did start singing when you laughed with me for the first time. Your real laugh. Not the forced nervous one because you're hiding something. It's the laugh you laugh when you're being you. It's that one you laugh when you're just taking a moment to enjoy yourself. I might have mistaken angelic harps for Will Scarlett's, but I never mistook your laugh for birds singing."

I hadn't stopped smiling until I started laughing. "Nikola, I think you're very confused. You might need a physician. Perhaps I should stay a while. I can't leave you in poor health, now can I?"

I was secretly hoping there was truly something wrong with him. At least I would get to stay a little longer.

He laughed. “You would like that, wouldn't you?” He sighed deeply. “Unfortunately, I'm not confused, my love. After all, I did hear that laugh now, and the birds—I heard them. That was you, wasn't it?” he said, feigning a lighthearted excitement. “Oh, my dearest, that was your real laugh. You've only laughed—you've never listened to it. But I have, and it's the sweetest music I've ever heard. If I'm ever truly ill, I think it could be my medicine.”

These were the words of someone who was truly in love. It wasn't infatuation. It wasn't a simple fondness. It was a love so pure that it swelled in the depths of his heart until his heart burst and the only thing he could do to repair himself was pour that love out on me.

I wanted to say something in return, but there was nothing I could have said that would have compared to the love he had just shown me. Simply saying I love you wouldn't have sufficed, either. I knew he didn't want to see me, but he was about to discover he had no choice. I dropped my bow and quiver. At the sound of the clunk, he started to ask a question, but I shoved my way inside the room. I saw his wet, bloodshot eyes, but I didn't let myself focus on that.

I kissed him as soon as I reached him. He was surprised for a minute, but he didn't protest.

I heard footsteps in the hallway. I didn't want this moment to end. We deserved a proper goodbye, and if I could make it last longer, I would go back to yesterday and relive everything. I wanted to recall the joy I felt yesterday if I could avoid the sorrow that would surely come soon. If I could avoid it entirely, I would have made this moment last a lifetime.

Someone was in the hallway calling my name. I recognized Sweeney's voice. He soon uttered a sound of surprise before grabbing my arm and pulling me away.

“I'm sorry,” he said, and as he pulled me out of the arms of my husband, I knew none of us really knew who he was apologizing to. He could have been apologizing to me, or Nikola, to himself, or to God. Sweeney was responsible for tearing us apart, and a hurried apology would never suffice, even though we knew he had no other choice. However temporary this pain was to be, it was still strongly present, and Sweeney was responsible for making it come sooner.

The last I saw of Nikola was him turning away to hide his face from me. As Sweeney pulled me through the hallway, I looked back, hoping to catch a final glimpse of Nikola, but all I saw was the door closing with a gentle click.

“First Major Pastel”—Carlie Powell
Art



“The Ice Girl”—Michael Cervone

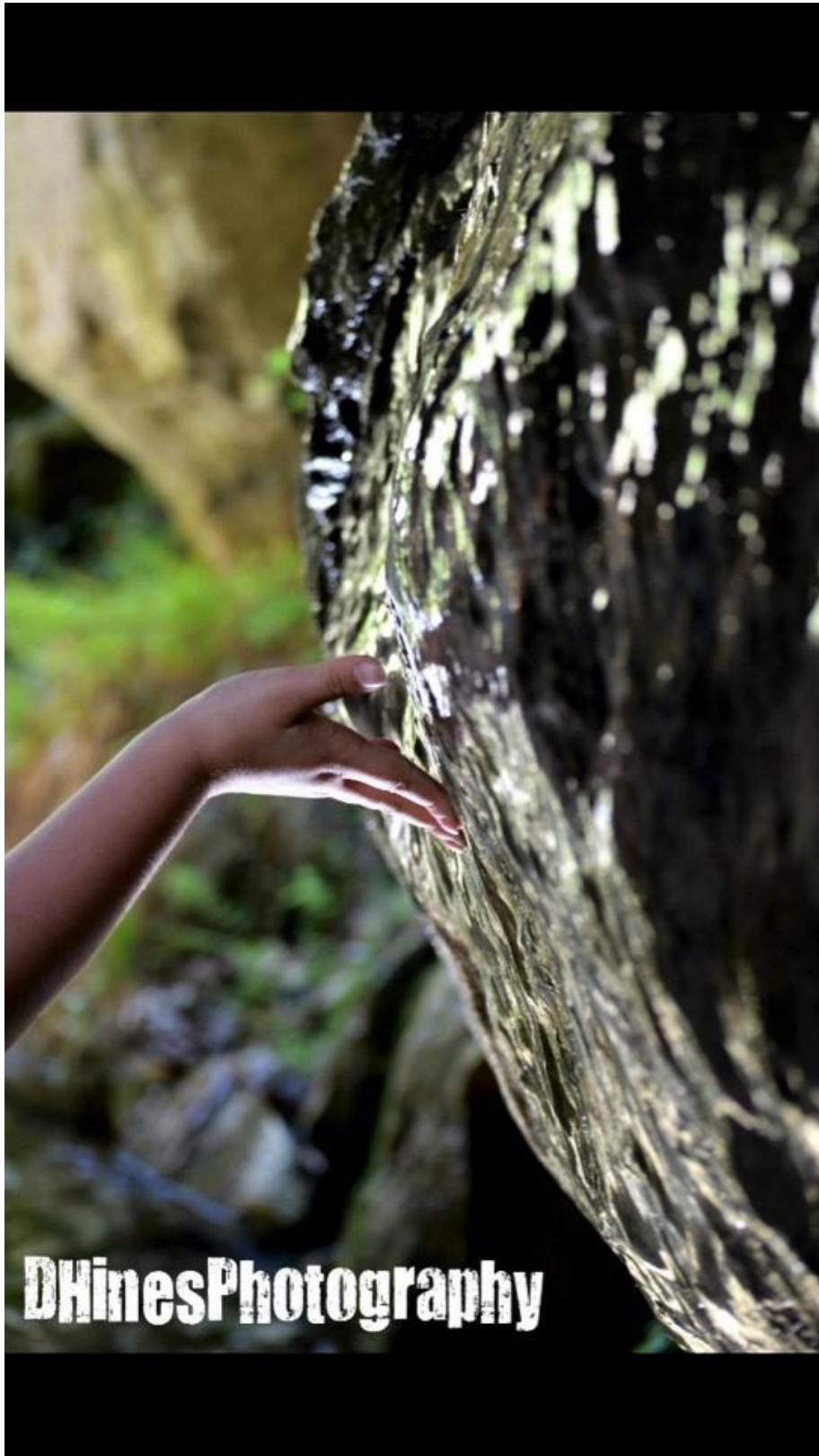
Staff Poetry

The Ice Girl
Doesn't care
About me.

The Ice Girl
Tries to
Manipulate me.

The Ice Girl
Tries to scare me
Cries to me
Lies to scare me
But
The Ice Girl
Doesn't care
About me.

“Crying Caverns”—Darian Hines
Staff Photography



“Neuse River Ambrotype”—Brandon Edwards
Photography



“Sports: Traditional and Electronic”—Carter Phillips

Non-Fiction

When someone says the word “sports,” one’s mind might go to something physical like baseball or football - not video games. However, this is no longer the case. With some of today’s games, gamers can be considered athletes as well. Competitive video games, like *Call of Duty*, *League of Legends*, and *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*, are classified as “electronic sports,” or “e-sports.” For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on American-style football and *League of Legends*: a fast-paced, competitive online game. Although traditional sports and e-sports are seen as vastly different, they are actually quite similar when examining the categories of popularity, structure, and revenue.

One area where traditional sports and e-sports are alike is in their popularity. Traditional sports as activities are something that is prevalent in every culture all around the world, whether it be participating or spectating. E-sports is a relatively new form of entertainment, but it is a rapidly growing industry. For example, *League of Legends* held its Worlds Finals tournament in the Staples Center in Los Angeles. When tickets went on sale, they sold out in under an hour (Tassi, “League of Legends Championship Proves Riot Is On Top of the World”). If one wanted to see what was going on in the realm of sports, they would probably tune the television to ESPN or a similar channel. To watch ongoing e-sports, one might go to a website such as Twitch.tv. Twitch.tv is a live streaming video platform focused on e-sports and video games. Anyone is able to stream on Twitch.tv. There, they would see all currently streaming games, as well as the “athletes” playing the game on their own time.

Where traditional sports and e-sports are similar is in the area of their structure. Sunday night football, pre-game coverage has just ended and the game is about to start, the head coach sends his starting line-up out to take the field. The crowd is cheering for their favorite teams. Announcers up in the booth give entertaining and informative information pertinent to the events happening in the game. Analysts on the sidelines write down stats, take notes, and try to find the weak and strong points of the other team.

A similar occurrence happens on starting day of the *League of Legends* Championship Series, or LCS. The LCS is a weekly event hosted by *League of Legends* developer, Riot Games. As the event starts, the coach sends his players to their spots on stage. The crowd goes wild, chanting the name of their favorite team. The shoutcasters up in the booth give out stats and commentary as the day’s games get underway. Between games of the best-of-five series, each team gets strategy plans from their coaches and their analysts to take down their opponents in the next game.

Traditional sports and e-sports make similarities in one more category: money. In 2010, Eli Manning signed a six year/\$97.50 million contract with the New York Giants (Vacchiano). Similarly, a professional *League of Legends* player in the European circuit

of the LCS, Carlos "ocelote" Rodriguez, in a recent interview revealed that his combined earnings from tournament winnings, merchandising income, salary, income from streaming, and personal sponsors totaled annually at around €700,000, which is approximately equivalent to \$950,000 (Tassi, "How This 23-year-old League of Legends Player Makes Nearly \$1M a Year").

While e-sports players do not make as much money as professional athletes, they do make quite a lot of money for the amount of physical work that they put in. Both traditional sports and e-sports also make money from sponsors. The NFL made \$1.07 billion in 2013 on sponsorships alone, with sponsors such as Gatorade, Lenovo, and FedEx ("NFL Sponsorship Revenue"). While the *League of Legends* e-sports scene is small, they have been picking up large companies as sponsorship partners, notably: Coca-Cola, Intel, and Nissan (Gaudiosi).

While on the surface, contact sports and video games do not really have all that much in common. This is not the case when popularity, structure, and revenue are taken into account. Traditional sports are wildly popular and e-sports are rapidly becoming a very popular form of entertainment. Both types of sports have similar structures, and they make their money in the same ways.

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“Waiting for the Wave”—Marlene Proteau
2nd Place Art



“Humans”—Threa Almontaser

Poetry

Arguing is a peculiar thing.

We're climbing and climbing until the stones beneath us become brittle like our hearts. One of us falls first, the other shouting red-faced before following. We drop angrily, blaming. Loud and deaf in our descent, in the darkness. At least there are words being vomited. They blast off like cannons, leaving each of us owl-eyed and gasping. At least we're glaring into each other's eyes, looking but not really seeing. At least we're trying to crash into one another as we drop. Pulling, biting, scratching...tumbling with a *plop*, just missed the pillows. A little bruised but somehow it works out, it's okay.

We landed on our bottoms. Blankets go back on the bed. We both look pretty silly.

Really silly. So I guess afterwards

maybe

there's laughter.

“Sam”—Darian Hines
Staff Photography



“The Will of a Woman”—Derek Williams

Poetry

Mother Earth awakens
at the crack of dawn,
Father Time unfazed
by her murmurous yawn.

As She readies the day,
her atmosphere aglow,
a young Sun emerges—
the Age of Woman in tow:

Penning the script
of high class reprise,
Edith Wharton receives
the Pulitzer prize.

Painting the skies
in one swift motion,
Amelia Earhart soars
across the Atlantic Ocean.

Claiming a seat
for personal content,
Rosa Parks ignites
a historic movement.

Launching herself
into the depths of space,
Mae Jemison explores
another realm with grace.

And after all these feats
Mother Earth just smiles.
Father Time ticks on,
keeping tally all the while.

A small step for Woman
is not a leap for mankind,
but an act of valor
to prove parity of the mind.

For as the world turns,
tilted to one side,
exists an imbalance
that riles Her pride.

She works twice as hard
for half the respect.
She pays her dues
but struggles to collect.

And still through it all
She fashions a way
to leave Her stamp
on each passing day.

The Will of Woman,
entrenched worldwide.
The Will of Woman,
no longer to be denied.

“May 15th”—Michael Cervone

Staff Poetry

May 15th, what have you done to me?

May 15th, you killed me, May 15th.

I feel so strange about you, May 15th.

You changed the world.

You seem to last forever.

I'll see you next year, May 15th.

“Bus Stop”—Zain Goheer

2nd Place Photography

Cover of Paper Copy



“The Bride”—Carey Shook
Staff Photography



“Inventory of Being”—Wren Dyer

2nd Place Poetry

I am Wren
I am seventeen years old
But I feel fifteen
I am a student, but against my will
I want to get a job
But my social anxiety stops me

Sometimes my eyes are blue-green
When it rains, they are the shade of the rainforest
My hair is a tangled mess
Dried out from hair dyes
But still chemically moisturized
My eyes are my best feature
Yet my ragged blond bangs hide them

I am no girlie-girl
But am not a tom-boy, either
I wear pants and leather jackets
With silk bows and flower hair pins
I have two ear piercings
But no tattoos (yet)
When I asked what I am, I reply a Goth
But I wish people would see me as cute

I am a free spirit
Trapped in a limited vessel
Put down by my own mind

Crushed by my darkened soul

I long to be happy

And to live out my dreams

But I'm drowning in depression

And dream of killing myself each day

I smile and pretend nothing is wrong

And scream internally

I protect my friends and break their harmful habits

But I always revert back to mine

I kiss their scars while making mine deeper

And cry myself to sleep, praying that they will be happier

I am barraged by headaches and many medical problems

More fragile than a flower, am I

People joke that I should be in bubble wrap

Little do they know, I have already tried

I want to be accepted

But am offended by peoples' stupidity

I sit quietly, non-existent

Wishing someone would just say, "Hi."

I am surrounded by rich people

But they are all empty

It pisses me off, seeing them each day

People are too self-absorbed, too stupid

And if natural selection could take its course

The population would drop dramatically

I like bats and crows

Not because they are morbid

But because they are cute and misunderstood

Like me

I hate going with the flow

Because the current drags me the other way

And I if don't have a plan

I know it will be a messed-up day

Talking to people is scary

But I force myself to do it anyway

Hoping that someone will see

The possibility of finding a friend in me

I am a rebel and an anarchist

Who is scared to break the rules

I believe in equivalent exchange and God

But claim to be an atheist

My existence is meaningless

But I still strive to find meaning

I dream of being a contortionist

And of sleeping forever

I am trapped in a life, in a body

And I just want to rip out of it

I want to die

But am too scared to let go

I want to live

But living is too painful

My tears have all dried

From years upon years of crying

And no matter how much I wish it

I get scared when I think about dying

I am Wren

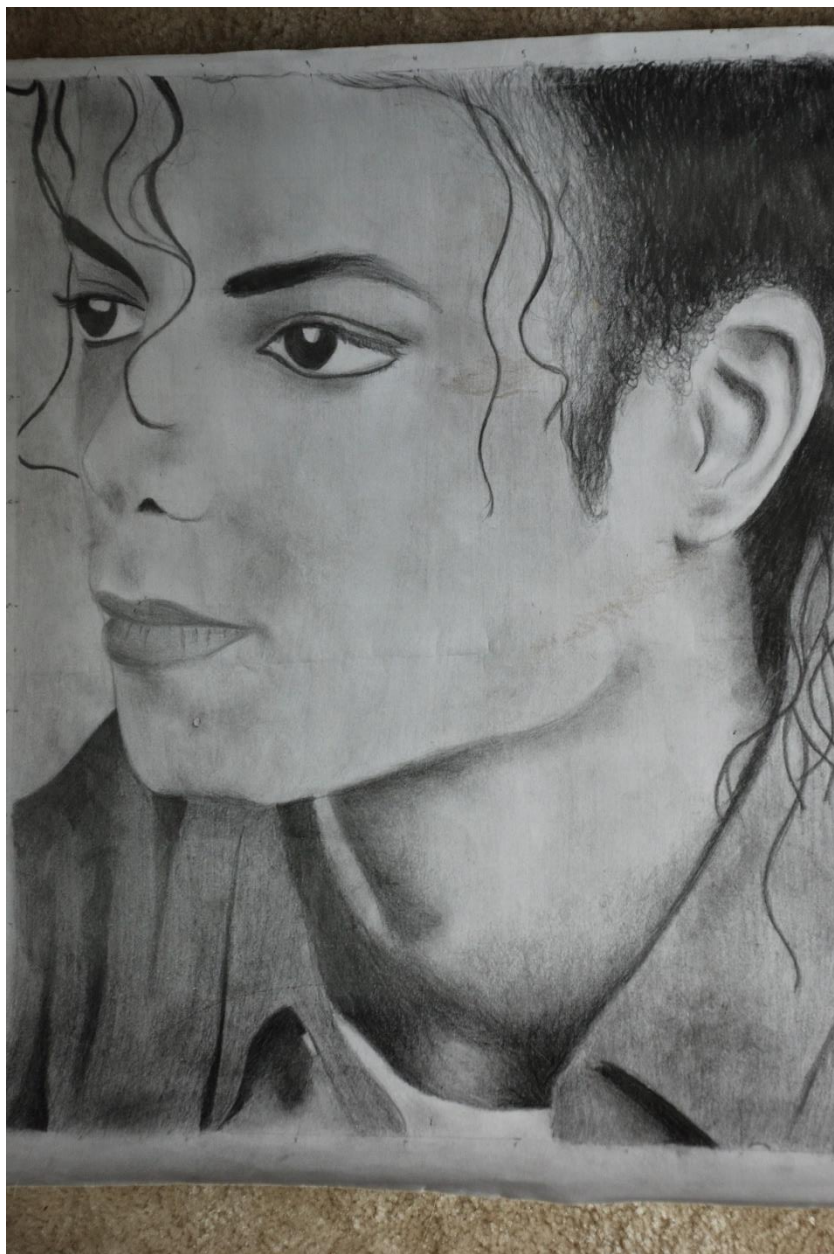
And this was my inventory of being for 2013

“Late Autumn and a Long Forgotten House”—Erin Beason
Staff Poetry

The wind rustles the oh-so-fragile leaves,
A downpour of color, red, orange and brown,
Floats through the crisp air and falls to the ground,
Leaving a little more bare those ancient trees.
The fragile decrepit house creaks at its eaves,
Windows long broken, open to all that surrounds.
In the distance I can hear wild hounds,
Caught on to the scents carried by the breeze.

The warmth of memories is all I have:
The grand staircase and brightly colored walls,
A rope swing swaying in the sunlit garden.
Those days that I long for, that could not last.
How I wish once more to dance in those halls
And swing again like I'd never fallen.

“Michael Jackson”—Marie Defreitas
Staff Art



“A Girl Worth Fighting For: Defending the Disney Princesses”—Ren Cleveland

3rd Place Non-Fiction

As a child, I was brought up on a steady diet of Disney movies. *Mulan*, *Pocahontas*, and *Ariel* were my role models and have, quite frankly, taught me values that I still carry with me to this day. Disney Princess movies have been around since 1937 and have since evolved with the times to become avid cheerleaders for girls and women alike. These Disney Princesses are positive role models for young girls because they encourage children to embrace their individuality, teach the value of internal character, and they inspire young girls to believe in the power of their dreams.

Disney Princess movies encourage young girls to embrace individualism. Many anti-Disney Princess sources target Disney Princesses as 'anti-feminist', passively waiting for their Prince Charming to come along on his white steed and sweep them off to Happily Ever After. In Chapter Two of her book, *Princess Story: Modeling the Feminine in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film*, Sarah Rothschild accuses first-age princesses of depicting passive house-wives. Rothschild uses Snow White as an example, saying that from the start of the movie Snow White openly expresses her longing to be swept away by her Prince Charming (Rothschild 54). However, Rothschild defiles her own argument in the following pages of her book by admitting that her domesticated Snow White was made in 1937, prior to the first notable feminist movement (Rothschild 56-57). Therefore, Snow White depicting the typical 1930's American housewife of the time period is no crime (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*). Rothschild continues to shoot holes through her own argument by admitting that Disney Princesses do evolve with the times and show a considerable shift in independence by the 1980's.

One of the finest examples of Disney Princesses embracing individualism can be found in *Pocahontas* (*Pocahontas*). Despite the pressure placed upon her by her village and her father to marry Kocoum, the village's most noble warrior, Pocahontas chooses to honor her true feelings rather than submit to a conventional fate. By following her heart, Pocahontas falls in love with John Smith, a man from the mysterious new colonies. Tension quickly increases between Pocahontas' tribe and the colonists. Before long, war breaks out, creating a serious divide between Pocahontas and her beloved John Smith. When John is taken prisoner and sentenced to death by Pocahontas' tribe, Pocahontas boldly displays her willingness to lay down her life along with John's in protest against the barriers of blind hatred that have arisen between their two worlds. Following Pocahontas' example of peace, Pocahontas' tribe and the colonists learn to accept one another's differences. Pocahontas' valiant display of courage and desire to follow her own path, puts an end to the war. For as Pocahontas sings earlier in the film in the song, *Colors of the Wind*, "You think the only people who are people are the people who look and think like you, but if you walk the footsteps of a stranger, you'll learn things you never knew you never knew" (*Pocahontas*).

Another display of fierce independence can be found in Disney's *Mulan*. Trapped in a male dominant culture, Mulan battles between being true to her independent mind and pleasing her family. When war breaks out in China, Mulan's ailing father is called upon to fight for his country. Fearing for her father's ability to survive war, Mulan disguises herself as a male and runs away to join the army in her father's place. Once there, Mulan is forced to conceal her true identity and claims to be her father's unheard-of-son, Ping. For the punishment for her deception would be death. Throughout her time in battle, Mulan overcomes many obstacles and, by doing so, uncovers an unwavering sense of determination within herself. When Mulan is injured saving her Captain's life, her identity as a woman is revealed. Instead of condemning her to death, the Captain spares Mulan's life in return for her act of courage. Finally, without the hindrance of any cover-ups, Mulan courageously takes leadership and saves China. In the end, she not only earns the recognition of China's Emperor, but more importantly, Mulan is free to return home with a new sense of individualism and feels driven to embrace her true identity. Mulan's strength directly contradicts the argument that Disney Princesses are 'anti-feminist'. She proves that women can do anything men can do, if not more.

Not only has the Disney Princess opposition pegged Disney Princesses as being 'anti-feminist', but the opposition has also continuously argued that the physical appearances of the Disney Princesses set a bad example for young girls and can lead to body image issues. Stephanie Hanes goes as far as to say in her article, *Little Girls or Little Women? The Disney Princess Effect*, that these "slender-wasted heroines" are bound to lead young girls down a path of self-objectification and unhealthy body image (Hanes). However, these fretful opposers are completely missing a clear lesson which is continuously highlighted in the Disney Princess films: internal character is more valuable than physical appearance.

A prime example of Disney Princess movies preaching character over physical appearance can be found in *Beauty and the Beast* (*Beauty and the Beast*). As the tale goes, there was once a handsome prince who resided in a luxurious castle. One evening an old beggar woman came to the prince's door in search of shelter. When the prince refuses to let her in because of her haggard appearance, the beggar woman transforms into a beautiful sorceress and places a curse on the prince as a punishment for his shallow judgment. The prince is to remain a horrible Beast until he can learn to love. Meanwhile in Belle's village, Gaston, the attractive but morally corrupt antagonist, intends to marry Belle because, in his own words, "Here in town there's only she, who is as beautiful as me" (*Beauty and the Beast*). Belle turns down Gaston's proposals of marriage because she recognizes his lack of internal morality and pays absolutely no mind to Gaston's physical appearance. Throughout the movie, Belle eventually falls in love with the Beast for his internal character traits and sees straight through his grizzly appearance.

Not only do the Disney Princess movies teach the value of internal character over physical appearance, but they also teach the value of character over materialism. For instance, in Disney's *Aladdin*, Princess Jasmine is constantly proposed to by a series of wealthy suitors (*Aladdin*). However, Jasmine refuses the offer of every suitor down. Princess Jasmine falls in love with Aladdin when the two first meet, despite the fact that Aladdin is poor, because Jasmine values his internal character. When Aladdin later disguises himself as a wealthy prince in attempt to win Jasmine's heart, she refuses him just like her previous suitors because she sees no value in his riches or royal status. Rather Jasmine views Aladdin's flashy charade as a lack of moral character. Only when Aladdin lets down his disguise and reveals himself as a humble beggar, Aladdin is able to win Jasmine's heart.

In addition to teaching young girls to value character over materialism, Disney Princess movies inspire young girls to believe in the power of their dreams. In a chapter from their hearty Encyclopedia, entitled *Girl Culture*, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell coin the term 'The Cinderella Fantasy.' Reid-Walsh and Claudia blamed Cinderella for her 'day-dreamer ideologies', claiming that Cinderella's constant day-dreaming is dangerous to young girls who must begin to understand the realities of life (Reid-Walsh, Mitchell 112). However, where is the danger in encouraging a young girl to dream?

Oprah Winfrey, one of the most powerful women of the present age, is quoted for saying, "I don't think of myself as a poor deprived ghetto girl who made good. I think of myself as somebody who from an early age knew I was responsible for myself and I had to make good" ("Oprah Winfrey Quotes"). Oprah's story of chasing her dreams from the bottom of the ladder to the top mirrors that of many Disney Princesses.

Take *Cinderella* for instance. After losing both of her parents, Cinderella is forced to become a slave in her own household to her psychologically abusive step mother and step sisters. However, Cinderella maintains a positive demeanor despite her unfortunate circumstances by holding tight to her dreams of a better future (*Cinderella*). In what is possibly the most iconic Disney song of all time, "A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes", Cinderella sings the words, "No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true" (*Cinderella*). In the end of the film, Cinderella's persistent dreaming succeeds in the form of a Happily Ever After. When questioned on the subject of Cinderella, Walt Disney himself even stated, "She believed in dreams, all right, but she also believed in doing something about them. When Prince Charming didn't come along, she went over to the palace and got him" (Pinsky 55).

Disney Princess movies teach girls that dreams do not come true on their own, but instead encourage the pursuit of dreams by preaching that any dream come true takes a considerable amount of hard work and persistence, often in the face of adversity.

One of the best instances of Disney Princesses actively pursuing dreams can be found in Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* (*The Princess and the Frog*). Tiana's story is a grand picture of The American Dream. Even after the death of her father, Tiana refuses to let go of her dream of owning her own restaurant. Staying true to the diligent work ethic taught to her by her late father, Tiana works multiple jobs and grueling hours in hopes of earning enough money to grow from poverty to business-owner. Even when faced with multiple financial and emotional setbacks, Tiana rejects any means of an easy way out. In a song from the movie, "When We're Human", Tiana sings the words, "I've worked hard for everything I've got and that's the way it's supposed to be... If you do your best each and every day, good things are sure to come your way. What you give is what you get" (*The Princess and the Frog*). In another song from the film, "Almost There", Tiana sings, "There've been trials and tribulations. You know I've had my share. But there ain't nothing gonna stop me now cause I'm almost there" (*The Princess and the Frog*). After facing many 'trials and tribulations', Tiana finally achieves her dreams and opens her own restaurant, thus teaching movie-goers that any dream is achievable with avid determination.

Snow White's humble fairy tale was brought to the screen by Walt Disney in 1987. Since then, Disney Princess films have not only matured with the ages, but have financially evolved into what is today an empire worth \$4 Billion dollars (Hanes). Therefore, no matter how critical Disney Princess opposers become, the success of the Disney Princess movies can not be denied. Obviously the Disney Princess films have been successful financially and in popularity, but at the root of their success lies valuable morals and life lessons that are meant to inspire young female audiences. By following positive royal role models from Pocahontas to Tiana, young girls will grow to be independent women of tomorrow who have the courage to pursue their Happily Ever After.

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“Daily Commute”—Gerald Guerva
Photography



“In My Little Home”—Jake Betancourt

Poetry

In my little home, three people
feels crowded. If my friends come, it's the kind of cramped
you enjoy.

In my little home I have faucets that run
And run, and a washer that never stops churning.

That is, when I can find them.

Sometimes I can see through my roof and count the stars

At the beach, or in the mountains –
I've even seen them from my parents' backyard.

No mortgage, just a one-time payment and it lasts
Unless it breaks down.

It might leak when it rains
But I won't live in it forever

I still live with my parents, who taught me
home is where the heart is.

My heart belongs to nature.
Home is in my tent.

“The Happily Ever After”—Carey Shook

Staff Poetry

Once upon a time,
A little girl dreamed and dreamed of falling in love and finding her Happily Ever After.
She planned her wedding at the age of six,
Even had her friends and teddy bears act them out.
Her father blamed those damned Disney movies for corrupting his little girl,
But he knew, deep down, it was because of how much he loved her mother.

When the little girl became a teenager, her perfect parents split up.
Everyone thought it'd ruin her idea of love at first sight,
Of falling in love in general.
But it didn't. If anything, it made her even more determined to find the
Man she deemed worthy enough to love.

And finally, she did find that man, the one she had been dreaming of all those years.
They did all the right things:
First dates, the “I love you's”, and moving in with each other.
And eventually, that man proposed.
And eventually, that man cheated.

The two broke up and the girl didn't get her dream wedding.
The girl was broken and hurt and didn't trust anyone ever again.
She took time off work, from life, so that she could work on herself.

As time went on, she put herself back together.
And soon enough, she did get her Happily Ever After;
She just fell in love with herself instead.

“Birth”—Threa Almontaser

Poetry

My mother stitched me together.
A weaver on her stool, I imagine her

sitting, back arched like a seahorse,
sunlight glinting off fleshy silks.

I picture her rip away a chunk
of her skin, bleed a drop of color

from her eye. Quickly snatch
a leak of her smile before pulling

out a section of her mind. Losing bits
of herself. Until finally she gets to her

soul and cuts off half of it
for me. No matter how many

times I imagine my creation, her hands
never move like they love me. Because

they don't. She loves the *idea*
of me. Molding my entire skeleton

into her liking. The only hope I have
of becoming my own person is knowing

that any masterpiece can loosen
and unravel with just a single, snagged

thread. Thinking back on my creation reminds
me of those late evenings at home. When he would

sit on the steps
with his cigar and she would

lean beside him with her holy book, the one
she thought held all the secrets in the world.

Chipped reading glasses helped her softly
breathe out its poetic language. The scent

of mint tea merged with her hand creams
until both hovered in the air beside my head.

I would stand outside the door enviously
watching them be single individuals of their

own making, listening to them grumble in a native
tongue about grown up things that I knew I would
never fully understand.

“Winter”—Marie Defreitas
Staff Photography



“Luna”—Darian Hines
Staff Photography



“The Devil’s Tramping Ground”—Tara Strickland

Fiction

“There it is!” Taylor shouts as our car approaches a trail on the side of the road. “The Devil’s Tramping Ground!”

We’ve been driving down this god-forsaken highway for what feels like three hours now. There’s not much to look at. Nothing but bare trees and a gray sky. The road is unnervingly lonely. We haven’t passed another car since we got off the highway forty-five minutes ago. The road is as straight as a Dakota highway and it elicits the same feeling of going nowhere, fast. No matter how fast I go or how many miles I cover, it feels like I am perpetually stuck in the same place.

I pull over and put my car in park. I look down at the map on my phone and then up at the trail that led into the woods on our right. “Yep, that’s it,” I reply. “You have the flashlights, right?” I ask Taylor.

“Yep!”

“Bug spray?”

“Yep!” Taylor repeats.

“Lighter?”

“Always. And my pocket knife, too!”

“Good. That’ll be useful. A little pocket knife will definitely keep Old Scratch away if he shows,” I say.

“Oh shut up, Ava. We can whittle a stick if we get bored. We’ll need a pocket knife for that. Unless you want to use your nails.”

“Ouch. No thanks.”

“Didn’t think so.”

Taylor and I get out of my car and go around back to my trunk. I open it up and let her get the backpacks and camping supplies out. I observe the area, wondering if I parked legally. There isn’t a designated parking area—it’s just a worn, pull-off spot. I hope my car will still be here in the morning...

“Are you ready?” Taylor asks enthusiastically, slamming my trunk shut.

“Um, yeah sure,” I respond slowly. I’m hesitant to actually go through with this. “Are you sure this is a good idea?”

“No. But nothing we ever do is. Like that time we broke into Dorothea Dix in the middle of the night. And the deserted battleground we went to at two AM just to hear phantom gunshots and smell rotting flesh. We never have ‘good ideas.’” She chuckles to herself as she pulls her backpack over her left shoulder. She held my backpack out to me. “Coming?”

I sigh. “I guess,” I grab my backpack, pull the right strap over my shoulder, and follow her into the woods.

This place is creepy no matter what, but being here at dusk makes it even more eerie. It isn’t dark yet, but it isn’t exactly light outside, either.

"You read up about this place last night, right?" Taylor asks. When I nod, she goes on. "I know we talked about coming here last year, but it's been a while since I read about it. What's the folklore about again? And why didn't we come last year?"

"We didn't come because I chickened out. It's a freaky place. I didn't want to come here in the daytime back then, but now I'm spending the night. You must have drugged me today or something..." I half-joke.

I remember what I read about last night online about the Tramping Ground. The trail that we're on is very obviously barren. Even though it's forty degrees out here and the middle of December, there are weeds growing outside this trail. There are trees around it, but nothing grows on this trail. As far as anyone knows, nothing ever has. And the actual 'tramping ground' we're going to get to soon is a huge circle where the same phenomenon happens. The circle is about forty feet in diameter and absolutely nothing will grow there. No one knows why. Scientists have come out here and tried to find some scientific reason for the absence of life but they've had no success. Locals here in Siler City— even people all over the country— say that the Devil himself rises up from his fiery throne at night and walks along this circle plotting his evil deeds. The website I read also said that anything put inside the circle at dusk will be violently thrown outside the circle by dawn the next day. Many professional ghost hunters have investigated this popular North Carolina site, but none have ever been able to make it through the night.

"Why are we here again?" I snap back into reality. "Do we have a death wish?"

"No! We're here because it's freaking awesome! So what are we putting in the circle?" Taylor beams.

"You, since you dragged me to this literally god-forsaken place."

"Ava, you can wait in the car all night if you want. I'll stay here alone. I have my knife. I'm good."

"No, I'm not leaving you alone with Satan. And being alone in the car is worse."

"Okay good," she responds. Then her eyes light up. "Ooh! There it is!" She starts running toward a huge, lifeless circle of dirt that lies a few meters ahead of us.

"Lovely," I say, quite unenthusiastically.

"Let's start a fire," Taylor suggests. "It's getting a little cold."

"Good idea. You figure out how to do that and I'll find some sticks to burn. And we can leave my road map in the middle of the circle overnight. Since it's a big book, the wind won't be able to blow it away."

"Cool! And we can put some rocks on top of it just in case."

"Yeah! I'm actually starting to get excited," I smile slightly.

"Finally!" Taylor shouted.

"Though it could be the anxiety caused by the fact that I am in the woods, in the dark, alone with you – another twenty-year-old – AND WAITING FOR SATAN HIMSELF. You do realize what we're doing is completely idiotic, right?"

"Yes, but you won't leave. You want to know what will happen," Taylor tells me.

"Or what won't..."

"Or what will..." she smirks.

I paused for a few seconds before saying, "You right."

After multiple attempts at starting a fire in the middle of the Tramping Ground, we finally get it going just as the sun disappears over the trees. We don't have a tent to sleep in because we're planning on staying up all night. The wind starts blowing and I begin to regret my decision to go without a tent. It'd be nice to have a shield against the wind right about now. Taylor and I are sitting as close to the fire as we can, though we have to stay a good distance from it to stay away from the ashes blowing in the wind.

Taylor jerks her head around and looks behind her. "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" I ask, curiously turning my head around, too.

"I heard howling. Not exactly like a wolf, but not like anything else, either."

"It's probably just the wind whistling through the trees."

She chuckles nervously. "Yeah, probably..."

Taylor and I try to get our mind off of the creepy sounding nature around us by roasting marshmallows. Taylor came prepared for real camping.

"So, how are you doing in English?" I ask Taylor after a long silence. We were both trying to listen for out-of-the-ordinary sounds. The marshmallows aren't soothing our nerves as much as we thought they would. I figured distracting ourselves would help.

"I'm doing okay. I hate my professor, but I'm hanging in there. He's a prick," she complained.

"Is this the same professor I had last semester?" I ask.

"Yes. I don't know how you put up with him," she scoffs. "I swear he doesn't know how to grade essays... Prick."

I open my mouth to respond but my thoughts are interrupted by a rustling in the woods closest to us. It sounds like footsteps upon dead, crisp leaves. It gets louder with each step. They're getting closer. I look over at Taylor and her eyes are wide open. Her face has been flushed with terror. The footsteps stopped right behind us. We remain completely still for about five minutes, which feels like two hours. Somehow Taylor gets up the courage to slowly open her pocket knife and throw it behind us forcefully. It lands a good distance away from us. If something is there, it's transparent.

"Turn around..." I whisper as quietly as I can.

"You turn around!" she whispers back.

"Well, if there's anything back there, it's already heard us, and we're gonna die anyway so..." I turn around in an instant and the fire is blown out simultaneously.

Everything goes black. I can't see anything behind us and we're sitting in darkness.

There's nothing to light the area except for the full moon, which is mostly hidden by the

hundreds of tree branches that surround us overhead. The temperature of the air went from feeling like thirty degrees to seventy in a matter of seconds. The wind stopped blowing in one direction and began to blow in a cyclonic rotation. Maybe the way things are thrown "violently" from the circle is via tornado.

Taylor and I stand up and try to escape, but we can't cross the boundary of the barren circle. It's like there's an invisible wall between the inside of the circle and the outside. We begin pushing against the boundary and banging on the invisible force. With each push we deliver against it, the wind blows harder and the wall seems to get stronger. We're too terrified to turn around even though we can tell by the illuminated trees in front of us that the fire has somehow been rekindled. The light we see on the trees moves higher and higher and the air around us gets hotter and hotter. The fire is growing larger than is physically possible for the amount of wood we used to burn it. The flames are reaching the tops of the trees. The limbs that are blocking the moon are ignited by the flames.

We stop fighting the wall long enough to wipe the sweat from our foreheads. As our arms slide across our heads, we hear screaming and howling that is unearthly. The sound is a high pitched screech that causes Taylor and me to crouch over and cover our ears. I look over at Taylor and notice blood running from her ear and down her arm. I start to scream at her to draw attention to the blood, but when I open my mouth I feel something in my left ear burst that causes me to instantly drop to my knees. My ear starts throbbing as I feel blood run down the side of my face. As the screaming continues, low growling joins in with it. It sounds, for lack of a better term, demonic. The deep growls are coming from right in front of us, though we can't see anything but leaves. The screeching sound continues until we can no longer hear. Despite my efforts to cover my ears, my right ear begins to bleed then everything goes silent.

I look over at Taylor and she lets out a scream I perceive to be silent. I jump to my feet and begin beating on the wall again. The wall that blocked us before finally breaks and we can get through. We run, screaming – silently, to us – and run for our lives, quite literally. We run as fast as we can and we don't dare to look back. As we run, the weeds that grew around the trail that we'd taken to the Tramping Ground come alive and begin slithering across the path, as if reaching for our feet. Taylor is successfully jumping over every root and weed that reaches in her way. The weeds are slowing me down, but I keep going. I can feel a mass of heat coming up behind me. With every step I take, it takes three. There is no out-running it.

About ten meters ahead of me, Taylor is reaching the edge of the woods. My car is in sight. I reach in my back pocket and grab my car keys. I lunge forward and throw them to Taylor. She turns and tries to reach them but they slip through her fingers. They land on the ground in front of her feet. I keep running as she scrambles to pick them up and unlock the doors. I am at the edge of the woods when the root of a tree wraps itself around my ankle. I hit the ground with incredible force, having gone from running at a high-speed to a complete halt.

“AVA!” Taylor screams, but I can barely hear the muffled sound of her voice.

I roll over so I'm lying on my back and I look up at the giant mass of fire now hovering over me. I try to scramble away but it plunges down so close to my face that I can hear my hair sizzling from the intense heat. I am paralyzed in fear. I look straight up at it, watching the flames engulf the trees above me. I hear the muffled growls of invisible wolves approaching me, surrounding me.

The mass of flames above me morphs into a shape I recognize: human. It lowers itself onto the ground at my feet. I try to move my feet away from it but I can't. I'm scared to breathe. I'm scared to even blink. The bottoms of my tennis shoes start to melt as it puts its feet up against mine. This human-shaped creature has skin that looks like lava. Its eyes are black as coal. It speaks to me in a deep, raspy, almost inconceivable tone of voice, and in a language I have never heard before, but I understand it: “Ava... I've been waiting for you...”

“Talk to Me”—Lauren Hupp

Poetry

Tell me.

Tell me everything,
Everything you want.

All your dreams,
Your nightmares,
and the daydreams in between.

Talk to me
About the fight you got in
With your best friend
At the age of five,
Or when you fell out of a tree
Playing hide and seek.

Open up
About your fears,
The things that makes your skin crawl.

Tell me about
Your need for freedom,
To escape the world you hate.

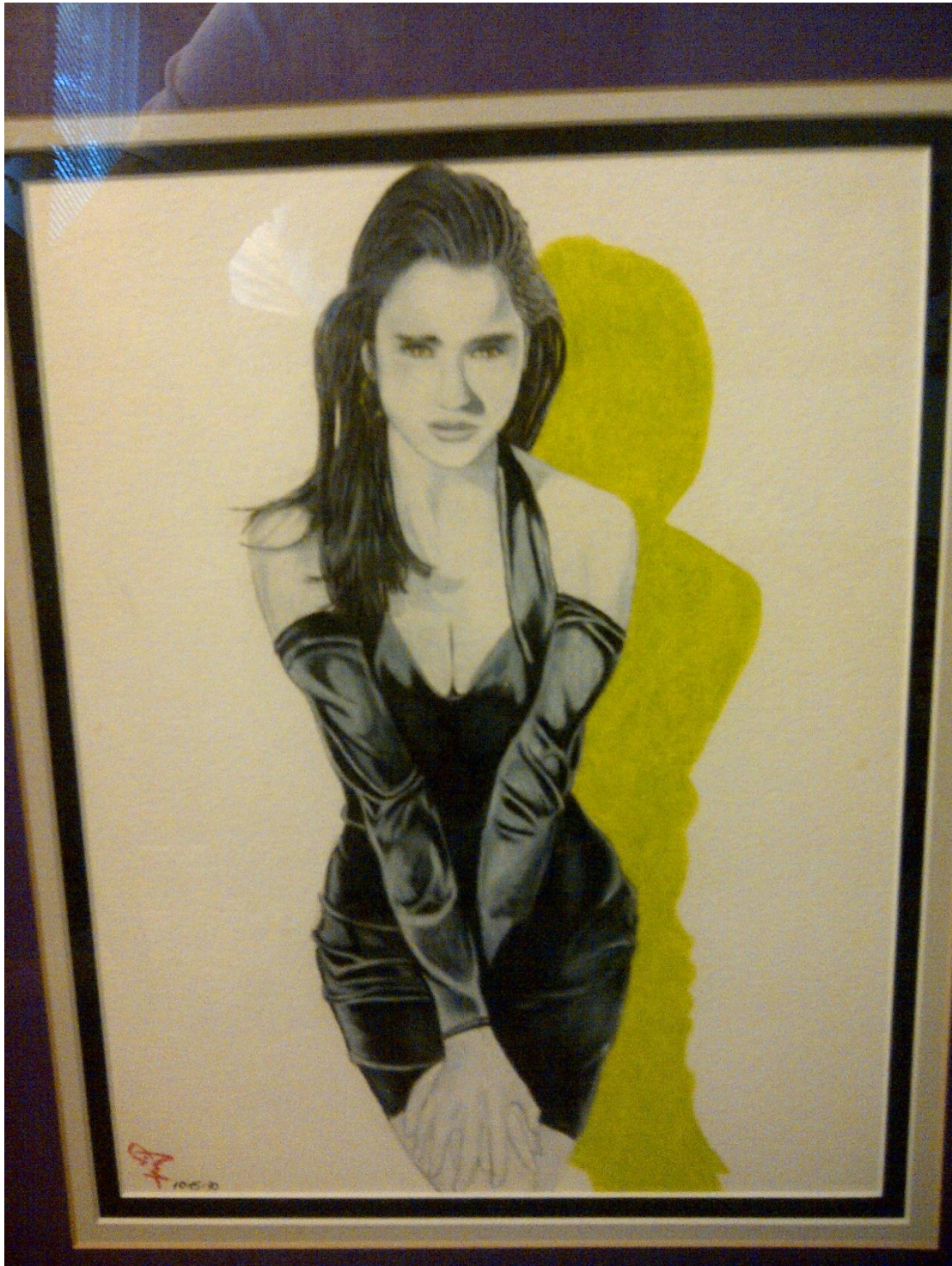
Just be honest.
I want to hear everything.

You're my love,
My soulmate,
My everything.
Don't you want to talk to me?

“Hong Kong Buildings”—Max Cohen
Photography



“Fav Drawing”—Carlie Powell
Art



Excerpt from “Never Have I Ever”—Carey Shook

Staff Fiction

It's weird to think that just eight hours ago, me and my four best friends finally graduated from high school.

It was long and it was hot. The school had already turned off the air conditioning in the gym. I guess it didn't occur to them that with over three-hundred people stuffed in the already-humid gym, that it'd be just as hot, if not hotter, than it would have been outside at the football field.

There was only a little over a hundred people in our class, so it didn't take but ten minutes to call out everyone's name. What took the longest were the speeches. It started off with our principal, then the superintendent, then to our senior class president and the salutatorian. Then we crossed the stage, grabbed our diploma, and went back to the seats, only to listen to one more speech. It was my favorite, of course, because my best friend Katie Surley was the valedictorian. Her speech was about how we couldn't have gone through high school without the support from our friends. She eyed me and the other three the entire time.

We moved the tassel over and tossed our hats. I didn't toss mine all the way, though, because I didn't want to lose mine for forever. Once we were dismissed from the chairs, the five of us caught up with each other. Katie, me, and Jen Nichols started crying a little bit. Warren Kinard and Ian Avery joined us, completing our group. We all hugged each other and Katie and I wiped each other's tears.

We did it.

Katie was right with her speech: I couldn't have finished high school without my group.

It's weird finishing something that took thirteen years with the same people you started it with. I guess that's what's cool about living in a small town your entire life. Like Ian, who I've known since the day I was born. We live across the street from each other, and our mothers are best friends. He's two days older than me.

And Katie, who I've also known since the toddler days. Her family moved to town when we were three or four, and our parents work together. They started talking and realizing that they both had girls the same age, and then playdates started happening, and that's how it's been ever since.

Warren came into the picture fourth, on the first day of kindergarten. He took the book I was pretending to read out of my hands and I started crying and then he gave it right back because he couldn't stand seeing a girl cry. To this day, he's the same way.

Jen was last to join our group. She, too, was in the same kindergarten class, but was really quiet. She really was reading those books that I was pretending to read. She stayed hidden in the corner until halfway through the year when one day our teacher told us to make a new friend. Ian was the one who approached her. He told her that he liked her glasses, because none of the other five year olds in our class had glasses then.

We've been inseparable since, despite the awkward changes and puberty and the many fights we've had in the past twelve years. Which, trust me, have been lots.

Katie, obviously, ended up being the smart one. She beat Harris, the salutatorian, by a landslide. She's heading off to University of Pennsylvania to study math. Growing up, we all knew she was a math prodigy. She was taking her math courses at the community college her sophomore year. So, no matter how odd it is that she wants to get her PhD in mathematics and teach it at a collegiate level, we're not surprised. She's always been destined for great things.

And Jen, who wants to be a journalist. She started her own blog when she was fourteen. She was trying to reach out to other teens like her who were struggling with their sexuality, but then it turned into articles about depression, suicide, eating disorders... all that rough stuff. She's been acknowledged by some pretty famous newspapers, so I won't be surprised when she gets famous herself.

Warren ended up being a really awesome guitar player. He started a band with a few guys from school, but they know that they won't make it big or anything. Instead Warren's going to some community college a few hours away to figure out how he can be a band manager. He thinks that'd be "sick" to do, or whatever.

Ian, who always played soccer growing up, is going to State to study anatomy. He wants to be a physical therapist. He decided that junior year when he hurt his ankle and had to go to PT himself. "It doesn't hurt that they make good money," he joked whenever anyone brought it up. Me and him have, like all of us, have been through everything together. But it's different with him since he lives across the street. He's my rock.

As I stared at my best friends at graduation then, and stare at them now in Warren's back yard around the fire pit, I realize how lucky I am to have grown up with them. Now, I find myself staring at Katie who's sitting on Warren's lap. They started dating a few years back, but it's still weird seeing them being all couple-y, just because they're so opposite of each other. They always say that those types of relationships are the best, though.

Suddenly Warren is lifting Katie off and he asks if any of us wants another beer.

Jen looks up from the fire with a daze. "Sure," she says, her voice soft.

"You okay?" Ian asks from behind me.

"Yeah, it's just weird is all," she answers.

"What do you mean?" I butt in.

"We're finished with high school," Jen reminds us. "We're adults. We're going to college in a few months, or working, and it's just... weird. We're not kids anymore."

"And how are we going to spend our summer?" Warren appears back with beers for Jen and himself.

"Working," I mutter.

"Reading over some stuff," Katie answers.

"You already have homework?" Warren raises an eyebrow.

She shrugs. "I'm going to an Ivy League," as if that answers everything. Which, I guess, it does.

"What about you, Avery?" Warren nods towards Ian.

He sets his own beer down on the ground next to him. "Um, I don't know. Hanging out?"

"Wow, *how* interesting," Warren snorts.

"Okay, well, what are you doing, big shot?"

Warren straightens his posture, all proud of himself. "As if y'all don't know," he laughs. "The band is going on a mini-tour around the state, remember? Sort of a last hurrah before we break up when we all go our separate ways."

"When does that start?" I ask.

He squints his eyes, as if trying to remember himself. "Not until July."

"And I leave for my summer program in two weeks, too," Katie reminds us.

I sigh majorly. At least I'll have Jen and Ian to hang out with all summer. I grab a marshmallow from the bag that's sitting in between me and Jen. "Where are the stick-things?" I ask.

Jen hands it over. "I couldn't find any others, so I took yours a while ago," she shrugs.

"It's all good," I tell her. It's only the first night of summer and we aren't even doing anything *fun*. We're just sitting in front of a fire in Warren's backyard, like we've done every other Friday night over the past few years.

I hear a clank of beer bottles behind me. I turn around to see that Katie and Warren just toasted to something. Out of curiosity, I ask, "What kind of beer is that?"

Everyone suddenly gives me a look.

“What...?”

“Why are you, Sydney Campbell, asking what kind of beer we’re drinking?” Katie asks.

I shrug. Everyone in the group knows that I don’t drink. Ever since my aunt died because of a drunk driver when I was eight, I swore I’d never drink. I don’t know the difference between tequila and vodka, or if there even is a difference. And I could care less about drinking. I don’t need it to have a good time. But it’s not like I judge my friends for drinking. They can do what they want with their lives. Every group needs a DD, anyways.

“Do you... want some?” Katie asks hesitantly.

“Definitely not,” I reply quickly. “I was just trying to make conversation. I can’t see the label clearly with the fire being our only light.”

Ian laughs. “Well, you definitely started a conversation,” he tells me, sipping his own beer. Ian only drinks every once in a while, like tonight, for example. We graduated today; it’s a special day. Just like when he turned eighteen, or sixteen, or when he got on the varsity team, or when his girlfriend dumped him earlier this year.

“I don’t get why it’s that big of a deal that I’m curious about what type of beer y’all are drinking.”

“Because you’re you,” Warren explains. “You don’t drink. So it’s weird that of all people, you’re the one asking.”

“How would I know what kind you’re drinking? I’m the one without a beer here.”

“Exactly my point!”

I stare at the fire and cross my arms. I don’t get why it’s such a big deal. It was just a question. “Sorry for always being the goody-two-shoes,” I mumble.

Everyone asks what I said, except Ian, who’s all, “You’re not a goody-two-shoes, Sydney.”

Warren snickers. Katie tries to hide a giggle. Jen doesn’t even bother to hide her smile.

I look behind me to Ian, who has a straight face on. “You really don’t think I am?” I ask.

Ian shrugs. “You just have a good head on your shoulders.”

“Hey, what are you saying about the rest of us then, asshole?” Warren snarls.

“Man, calm down,” Ian replies, and then they get into this discussion about “good” versus “bad” that I tune out.

I stare at the fire, it's red and orange and white flames moving amongst each other. It's around eleven and it's almost ninety degrees outside, but that isn't keeping me away from the heat of the fire. My hair's up in a bun and I'm wearing my favorite shorts and a thin t-shirt, and I'm so used to the humidity anyways, so I don't even notice it. What I do notice, however, is that I really am the goody-two-shoes.

I'm not sure how in over eighteen years I've never realized it, especially with the group we have. We have the jock, the nerd, the rocker, and the quiet one. Usually the quiet one is the goody-two-shoes, but Jen is just as wild as Warren can be; she's just quiet about it. Meanwhile the worst thing I've ever done is keep my school copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* after our assignments were due. And I gave it back two weeks later because I was so ashamed of myself.

“It just doesn't make any sense,” I say out loud without meaning to. I look around to see that everyone is staring at me. They probably think I have heat stroke or something.

Ian eyes me. “What doesn't make sense?” he asks. He already forgot what we were talking about just seconds ago.

“How I ended up being the goody-two-shoes of the group.”

Everyone stays quiet, not sure how to respond.

Katie clears her throat. “I was valedictorian... I'm pretty sure that makes me the goody-two-shoes, Syd.”

“Yeah, but look at you,” I wave at her. “You're on top of a guy's lap, drinking a beer. You've gone to clubs and have stayed out past curfew and disobeyed your parents and—”

“Not doing that stuff doesn't make you a goody-two-shoes,” she responds.

“It definitely does,” I spit. “I've never had alcohol, smoked anything, had sex...”

“And how often do you hear Sydney curse?” Jen adds.

“Exactly, Jen!” I say loudly. “I don't curse. I always stay in touch with my parents. I'm too afraid to leave my parents to go to college for crying out loud...”

“That's why you didn't apply to any schools?” Ian hits my arm softly.

I shrug nonchalantly. “More or less.”

“Being the good one of the group isn't a bad thing, Syd,” Jen puts her hand on my knee.

"I know it's not," I say flatly, "but I don't want to be the good one. I want to be crazy and disobey and—"

"Okay, well, we need to find a way to make that happen," Warren announces. He pushes Katie off his lap again. "What are you guys doing next week?"

We all mumble our responses. Jen and I have work, but otherwise everyone else is free.

"Okay, well, get off work."

"Warren, we can't just do that," I tell him.

"Call out. Pretend to be sick."

"I can't do that," I repeat.

Warren smirks. "Didn't you just say that you wanted to not be the goody-two-shoes?"

I purse my lips. "Yeah."

"Okay, so here's the plan. We all wanted to do something big to celebrate our graduation, right?" Warren looks at each of us carefully. Then he starts grinning. "Two words: road trip."

And of course I'm the only one to object.

"Damn, she really is the goody-two-shoes," Ian laughs.

I scrunch my face. "You just said two minutes ago that I wasn't."

"That was before you automatically say no to a road trip with your best friends."

"Yeah, seriously," Katie crosses her legs. "Let's do this!"

Warren walks around the fire pit, careful not to step on me or Jen who are sitting right next to it.

I roll my eyes. "Hypothetically, how would this road trip even happen?"

"Easy," Warren replies. "We'll each tell our parents that we're doing something important. For example, I'll just say that the tour started early."

"I can say that I'm going up to Philadelphia to settle in early before my program starts," Katie adds.

"Bingo!" he snaps his fingers at her.

"I can tell my Mom that I'm going to see my Dad," Jen says quietly. "She hates him so much that she won't even call him or anything."

We all look at Ian.

"I can..." he lingers.

"Yeah, our parents would know something is up," I tell Warren. "Our parents are best friends and we live across the street from each other. If the two of us are gone at the same time, they'll know something is up."

Warren paces.

Why is this, a stupid road trip, so important to him? To all of us? Why am I feeling the need to do this, too?

"My mom said that she'd pay for me to go somewhere for graduation. I just had to have someone go with me," I admit.

Warren smirks.

Ian rearranges himself in his chair. "Okay, sure, that'd work for you. But they'll object to me being your escort. They'll think we're together."

"You guys are eighteen. If they don't think you're fucking already then they're not being realistic," Warren shrugs.

"We aren't," Ian and I say at the same time.

"Yeah, we know that," he says, "but they don't. Hell, your moms have probably been praying that you two will end up together ever since they found out one of you was a girl and the other a boy."

Jen scrunches her face at Warren.

"Sorry," Warren tells her sincerely, but then he turns back around to me and Ian. "But am I right?"

We nod reluctantly. We've heard the spiel multiple times from each of our mothers on how *great* and *wonderful* it would be if Ian and end up dating and falling in love and getting married and all that jazz.

I turn around to face Ian. "What do you say to that? To telling our parents that we're going on a trip?"

At first, I can't read Ian's frown. But then he slowly starts smiling. "Where are we going to go?"

Warren leans down and high fives Ian for some reason. Katie grins with excitement. Even Jen is seeping with happiness.

Ian nudges my shoulder. "So, you're up for this? Up for lying to your parents for the first time?" he asks.

Everyone stares at me, most of them smiling or smirking or whatever. Warren sips his beer.

"I've got to start somewhere, right?" I can't help but grinning, too. I haven't even done anything bad yet and I'm have this weird feeling in me. I can't tell if it's excitement or giddiness or what. But I can't tell it's going to be good.

"What else are we going to do?" I ask.

Warren shrugs. "Make a list of everything you deem bad that you want to do, and the four of us will make it sure it happens."

"That's what we're here for," Katie laughs, "to get you in trouble."

"What kind of best friends would we be if we didn't?" Ian adds.

I start laughing. "So, does that mean you guys have been bad best friends all along?"

"Oh, c'mon, Syd," Warren reaches out for my hands and pulls me from the ground. The fire pops, sending sparks all around us.

"So... five of us in a cramped car..." Jen says, brushing off the sparks that landed on her arm.

"I'll get the van from the guys," Warren tells us.

"God, just make sure it's actually clean," Katie rolls her eyes. "Where are we going to go?!"

For some reason, everyone looks at me for an answer. "Uh..." and I think about it. If my intention is to do the things I've never done before, I should go to the worst vacation spot ever. And when it hits me, boy, does it hit me.

"Miami."

“Breathless”—Wren Dyer
3rd Place Photography
Cover of Bounded Copy



“One Winter Evening”—Brittany Perloff

Poetry

"Why must we pretend we are not lovers?"

She asks in anticipation
in a bittersweet voice.

To a boy,
who drowns his sorrows in a bottle of
Fiery, tart liquid.

Her question,
leaves a burning aftertaste
More so than his last sip

His heart,
cracking like
ice in water.
He slurs a response
sending shivers down her spine.

She runs from him
onto broken street
Warm tears streaming down
her flushed face.
She looks up at the stars
like they could heal
her cancerous heart
dying with every last word
his breath mutters.

Lies,
All lies,
She thinks.
And she wonders how
she saw such realness
in a boy so fake.

“Poker”—Lauren Pierce

Poetry

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Mind racing
Heart chasing
Do I raise or call

Rapid calculations
Suppressing expectations
I will risk it all

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Stomach clenching
Legs tensing
I have to think fast it's on me

Figuring my chances
Making nervous glances
I will stay while it's still free

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Counting my blessings
Can they see I am guessing?
I have a feeling in my gut

Putting all my chips in
Covering up my grin
One more opponent cut

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Hands raising
Eyes gazing
Looking at the new card

Watching others bet
I know what I would get
This choice is not hard

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Lungs breathing
Chest squeezing

I have it on the flop

Passing my deception
Masking my elation
I wait for their jaws will drop

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Shoulders slumping
Fingers thumping
I am done, and really stressed

Looking as the river's flipped
Sinking as my lead has slipped
I'm tired and just want rest

Big blind little blind pass the chip

Eye droops
Mind loops
I am ready for this to be over

Putting faith in a sensible choice
Ignoring my screaming inner voice
I guess I lost my four-leaf clover

Oh well.

“Holy Silhouette”—Darian Hines
Staff Photography



“Train Wreck”—Erin Beason

Staff Fiction

Dear Sam,

Sometimes people say that their lives are like train wrecks. They say everything is one huge mess. It is a chaotic collection of missed opportunities, mistakes and failures. Maybe that bad break up is the train wreck. Maybe it's falling behind in classes. Maybe it's just not having all the right answers. Maybe it's knowing the right answer and doing the wrong thing anyway. Or maybe...just maybe it is a combination of those. Maybe because of those, I somehow caused that train to wreck. Maybe it's my fault that you aren't here anymore. I was so stupid...so stupid to try and make us work. I was so stupid to climb that fence with you with the yellow signs all but screaming at us not to. So, terribly stupid to think that just being near you again would make everything okay. Its not okay...NOTHING IS OKAY! You're dead, Sam. You're dead, and I am still here, still stupidly wishing that this all never happened. Still stupidly wishing that just being with you would make everything okay. Why didn't you jump Sam?! WHY THE HELL DIDN'T YOU JUMP TOO?! You left me here all alone...you left me. Why did you leave me? Why didn't you take my hand when I reached for yours? Why did the train choose that moment? Why...?

Dear Sam,

It has been a week since you left me. Seven days since I last saw that crooked smirk and those laughing eyes of yours as you looked up at me when you tried to give me a boost onto the fence. You said something rude about how maybe if I worked out a little more I could get myself up. I kicked you and you just smirked at me.

Why didn't I fall and break my ankle? Why didn't I try harder to convince you that it was a bad idea Sam? Maybe if both had happened you would still be here. Would you be here Sam? Would you still be here with me? Why did this happen to us? I know we weren't perfect. We fought, and we fought hard, but I loved you just as hard as we fought. Why didn't you fight to stay with me? Why did you leave? We were supposed to grow old together Sam, and now what do I do?

Dear Sam,

Twelve days. It's been twelve days. It's been twelve days of endless noise. It's never quiet here. There is no escape from the whirrs of the monitors. The constant beeps from this machine or that one, or maybe both. And the clicking of the ventilator rising and falling and rising and falling. There are always footsteps, sometimes slow sometimes fast. The steps are slower right now; it must be near shift change. In the next room all sorts of alerts start going off and those slow steps turn into running. I wish it were me in that next room. Maybe if it were me, I could see you again. Maybe if I hadn't jumped off the tracks I wouldn't be here wondering what if...

The noises from the next room stopped a few minutes ago, but this world is far from quiet. Just as the noises never stop, this place never sleeps. All I want to do is sleep Sam, sleep like we did on that tiny twin mattress of yours at your parents' house. It creaked when all I did was blink, and the poster of that half naked girl stared at me all night, but it was still one of my favorite nights with you. I'd give anything for you to lay here with me right now. Anything for one more of your sweet, slow kisses.

Dear Sam,

Today marks two weeks since the accident. Accident is a stupid word. I hate it. I wish people would stop using it to talk about what happened. I'm starting to think you did it on purpose. You told me you wanted to get some shots of the trestle for your portfolio, and thought I'd make a great model. Dragging me up to the tracks and making me climb that fence. It was all just to watch you die wasn't it? What kind of idiot follows another idiot onto active train tracks? What kind of idiot doesn't jump when they feel the vibrations of a train coming or when they see the train coming for them? One that wanted to die, that's the kind of idiot.

Two weeks ago, I hated you for leaving. And I didn't understand wanting to die. I still don't understand why you wanted to die. But I think I understand the want of dying. Being here makes me want to die. I can feel all the death that's happening around me, everyone here is dying. It might be in fifteen minutes, or two days, or maybe a couple months, but everyone dies here. I can feel myself dying; the weight of everything that

happened is crushing me. Everyday now is just another stone in my pocket, weighing me down bit by bit as I drown. You've left me here drowning, Sam. I am drowning...

Dear Sam,

I don't think I can do this anymore. It has been four weeks now and I can't just lay here waiting to wake up. I can't just lay here in this in between. Here, I am always awake without waking, and sleeping without sleep. I can't sit here and watch everyone else I care about die because they are waiting for me to wake up. I don't know what to do Sam. I'm so tired of this.

Maybe I should have stayed with you up on that train trestle. Maybe you were trying to tell me to stay. Is that why you took me up there with you? Did you want me to stay with you? I wish you would just answer me sometimes. At least I can count on getting silence from you in this world of endless commotion. I've been here so long Sam. I barely remember what anything outside sounds like. Except the train, its thudding, and the squeal of metal on metal as it tried to stop. And the air whooshing past me as I jumped and you stayed behind.

I should have known the moment you looked back at me when you saw the train coming. I should have known then that you weren't going to jump with me. You never were. I wish you had told me what was wrong. I wish I could have seen what you were hiding.

The Blacksburg Times

November 10, 2014

On October 8th, two teens were struck by a train while trespassing on a trestle more than 200 feet above a rushing river. One teen, Sam McCollum was killed instantly. The second teen, Amy Sanders, appeared to have jumped from the trestle into the river below. Sanders was airlifted to a local hospital where she slipped into a coma due to brain trauma. After a long and trying few weeks for both Sanders and her family, she passed away yesterday afternoon. It is unclear why the two were on the trestle in the first place. It has been suggested that both shared a love of photography and may have been using the trestle as inspiration. Both families of the deceased wish to spread awareness about the danger of trespassing onto active train tracks in the hopes of preventing the tragic incident that befell their children from happening to others.

“Alvarez”—Lindsey Currin
Art



“Days”—Jake Betancourt

Poetry

Some evenings I walk through the city haze. Cold and foggy short winter days.

Watching people smile as they weave through the maze
of people lining the sidewalks waiting to get into clubs and bars.

Street performers all playing their guitars.

And I think of you.

I think of the tiny railroad tracks of your fingers interlaced with mine.

I think of how your hearts would fog my windows. That the windows were windows on
my heart.

I never thought I'd miss you breathing,
Turns out that was the best part.

Maybe if I was lost on a walk too long,
a clumsy attempt at a foggy start.

How to erase your condensation,
finger sculptures, from a surface on which they will never depart?

“Heather & Alex”—Carey Shook
Staff Photography



“Cardinalidae”—Marie Defreitas
Staff Art



“Puking Up Sunday”—Ren Cleveland

Poetry

Sunday you consume
a massive dinner because
it's the first real food you've faced since
Wednesday.

You puke up Sunday on Monday,
reflecting on your life a year ago
and realizing you belonged
to a culture that frets about
prom dates and spring musicals.

Tuesday you answer the phone to
“I've got a funny story:”
then she proceeds to recount
her not so ‘funny’
pregnancy scare.

Late Wednesday night
you pick at Chinese food
while watching Silence of the Lambs
which feels sickeningly
ironic.

So you're exhausted in English
on Thursday when you turn around to see
Jeremy come in late
but it can't be because
Jeremy hung himself
last Fall.

Slightly unhinged on Friday,
you remember your parents
nearly aborted you
to save you from being
a vegetable.

Come Saturday, you are,
a vegetable,
because it's all you'll eat
so you can face your
emaciated twin in the mirror
without puking.

And now you find yourself on Sunday
in the dark,
desperately praying
for your own exorcism.
Clutching your flashlight to your chest,
after watching the sun disappear
behind the hills of your
childhood.

“Wednesday Night Racing on the Chesapeake Bay”—Dana Culbertson
Photography



“It’s Okay to be Depressed”—Carey Shook

Staff Non-Fiction

Kevin Breel, a nineteen-year-old comic from Vancouver, Canada, has been living a double life for over six years. Breel delivered a lecture called “Confessions of a Depressed Comic” at the TED Youth Conference in Vancouver, Canada describing his relationship with depression. Breel has struggled with depression for the past five years. He almost attempted suicide but decided against it when he realized the truth about depression: it is okay, it is normal.

Current research supports Breel's idea worth spreading that Americans need to be more aware of the severity of depression and suicide.

In his lecture, Breel notes that people confuse depression with sadness. People think that because one thing goes wrong and they are sad for a few days, they are depressed. Real depression is being sad when everything in life is going right. People often confuse them because of how uninformed Americans are due to the fact that the news and social media ignore the topic of suicide. The only way one hears about it is when it is too late—when someone one knows has succeeded or attempted to kill themselves.

One reason that so many attempt suicide is because those who are suicidal are scared of how everyone will view them. “Unfortunately, we live in a world where if you break your arm, everyone runs over to sign your cast, but if you tell people you're depressed, everyone runs the other way,” Breel suggests. “We are so accepting of any body part breaking down other than our brains. We pretend it's not there and hope it'll fix itself. It's pure ignorance, and that ignorance has created depression.” Adolescents tend to portray themselves falsely through social media but hide from the fact that they are experiencing a whole different set of issues than they outwardly portray. Teens believe that if they go on ignoring their real thoughts and feelings, the depression will disappear. The more that they ignore their depression, the more ignorant they become. Ignorance prevents those who are depressed from getting the treatment that they need, and also prevents Americans of all ages from understanding the severity of depression.

Shocking statistics supports Breel's assertion that depression runs rampant in American society. Every year almost 39,000 Americans die because of suicide and 1,000,000 attempt suicide. In 2010, 464,995 people visited hospitals for failed suicide attempts and self-harm injuries (AFSP). Every 13.7 minutes, someone kills themselves. 1 in 65,000 children ages 10 to 14 commit suicide each year. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for ages 15 to 24. There is 1 suicide for every 25 attempts (SAVE).

Suicide is the most drastic effect of depression. Suicide, defined by the CDC, is when people direct violence at themselves with the intent to end their lives, and they die as a result. An attempt is when people harm themselves with intent to end their lives, but do not die (CDC). There could be many causes as to why one is suicidal:

depression, abuse, self-harm, eating disorders, and bullying. Over 90% of those who kill themselves had a mental illness at their time of death, the most common illness being depression ("Suicide Causes"). There is no one specific cause, though. For instance, if one is being bullied, that could cause him or her to become depressed, which could then cause suicidal thoughts.

Depression can easily lead to self-harm and suicide in adolescents. In 2011, 15.8% of those in grades 9-12 have admitted that they seriously considered attempting suicide. 12.8% of students said they have planned how they would attempt suicide. 7.8% of students said they have attempted suicide at least once in the past twelve months. 15% of students said that they are depressed or suicidal because of bullying (CDC). Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children. Bullying includes threats, rumors, and physical, verbal, and cyber attacks ("What Is Bullying"). Justina Donnelly was victim of cyber-bullying in high school. "I got called a whore [on formspring.me] a lot. People would pick on my looks and weight. It was just disgusting," Donnelly explains.

I was clean [from self-harm] for three years then. Surprisingly, I was able to handle all of it really well. I had gained a lot of self confidence before it started, so I kind of brushed most of it off. Sometimes it made me really angry and upset, but never that upset. I believe that if it were at any other point in my life before that, however, I would have [relapsed].

Donnelly ended up deleting her formspring account to end the bullying (Donnelly). When asked about how her bullying experiences influence the way she wishes to raise her six month-old daughter, Donnelly notes:

As a parent, I can say that every single child is absolutely perfect and beautiful in their mother's eyes. For someone to sit here and talk down to our perfect children enough to make them kill themselves, to make them starve themselves, it's disgusting. No one stops to think about it. No one considers how much that person means to someone. And they [the bully] just keep pushing their [the child's] buttons until they can't take it anymore. And then it's over. You can't bring a life back. That is someone's baby, and for someone to take your baby away is every parent's worst nightmare (Donnelly).

It is up to the next generation to put an end to bullying. Parents need to have their children grow up to care for one another, not to beat them up and make fun of them. If children and teens continue to bully, the suicide rate will only rise as years come and go.

Some parents believe that when their children say they are being bullied, or that they are depressed or suicidal, they assume their child is being melodramatic or "just going through a phase." It is imperative that parents have open communication and be aware of their child's mental state. They also need to be aware of the warning signs, such as changes in sleeping and eating habits, loss of interest in activities they used to love, acting out, skipping school or work, giving away possessions, and mentioning

suicide in any way that could make one think they want to kill themselves ("About Teen Suicide"). Just being aware of the signs and noticing that their child has one of them may save a life.

Kate Ashbrook's mother was aware of the signs her daughter had. For the past four years, Ashbrook has been suffering from anorexia and has been seeing a therapist for two years (Ashbrook). "I personally didn't realize that I needed to get help. My mom was the one who brought me, but now I've realized that it was really for the best and I'm thankful that she did bring me," Ashbrook admits. Ashbrook embodies the stigma Breel states regarding the 'broken arm' metaphor. America is so clueless about mental disorders that even those in need of the most help, like Ashbrook, do not realize it.

One way Americans can become less ignorant and help those who have suicidal thoughts know that it is okay to get help is to have suicide prevention talks in schools starting as early as middle school. This could be in the form of a chapter in health classes, an assembly, or even a club. The prevention talks should have four key points: case-finding potentially suicidal students; informing those students about resources; developing behavior skills; and providing education on coping strategies and mental health systems ("Shaffer"). Gillian Fortier, a senior in high school with possible hopes of being a psychologist, acts as a therapist for three of her friends. "Usually I just try to remind them how loved they are, and why they're worth it," Fortier points out. "My biggest fear, far bigger than anything else, is that someone I love is going to kill themselves. That's why I'll always try to do anything I can [to help]" (Fortier). Schools would benefit immensely simply by being more aware of the issue of depression and suicide.

Schools, and the staff within them, need to be more aware of depression and suicide. Teachers in particular, because of the close relationships they can cultivate with students, should be educated in warning signs of depression, trouble at home, suicide, and other potentially harmful- even deadly- issues. Once teachers start to understand the true issues, they can find out how to better help their students. It should also be easier for students to access help, such as their counselors, besides just for questions about course load or applying to college. Some students don't even realize that they can go to their counselors for help! Schools need to be a safe place for students (Fortier).

If schools had support groups, peer-counseling, and even rallies, those who are suffering would be closer to admitting that they need help. All one needs is for someone, whether it is a friend, teacher, or faculty member, to let the depressed student know that it is okay to feel this way before the student feels okay to open up.

Several programs, hotlines, and organizations dedicated to the prevention of suicide and self-harm. One of the most recognizable organizations is To Write Love on Her Arms. "TWLOA is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and

recovery. The vision is hope, and hope is real. You are not alone, and this is not the end of your story," explains TWLOHA. TWLOA began in 2006 when founder Jamie Tworkowski posted a story about a friend struggling with addiction and self-harm. TWLOA has summer interns and a street team who go around the world to raise awareness. They also help fund clubs and organizations in high schools and colleges around the world. Since 2006, there are over 1.5 million combined followers on Facebook and Twitter. Social media networking is a great way for hotlines to reach those who are in need of help. With commenting on their Facebook fanpage or replying back on Twitter, one can easily befriend one another and spread the vision that To Write Love on Her Arms is trying to spread.

What Americans need to do in order to lower the suicide rate is to make everyone aware. We need to have prevention talks in schools, we need to hear about it on the news, and we need to be able to talk about it more. We cannot be afraid of depression, and we cannot make anyone feel badly because of the way they feel. We need to stop ignoring the facts: people are going to be depressed, and we need to be there for them. We need to prevent bullying and abuse. We need to help those who have eating disorders and struggle from self-harm. We need them to know that it is okay and that we are here and happy to help.

I have a friend that I have known since freshman year of high school. We were always really close, closer than most guy-girl friendships without any romantic feelings. One day after a club meeting sophomore year, I found him crying in the hallway. That was when he told me everything: everyone he knows, besides me, had been bullying him. His band mates, classmates, club leaders, sister, parents, and even teachers. He told me that he knew that he was depressed and should tell someone, but he was embarrassed—he thought that everyone would find out and have even more reason to make fun of him. He made me swear not to tell anybody, and I did. Three years later, now a freshman in college, he is still being bullied in marching band and by his suitemates at NC State University. He has been getting more depressed over the years, even to the point where he started acting out—partying, skipping classes. On October 17 at 11:43 PM, he sent me a long text with instructions for his funeral and what to tell people. I called his roommate and told him to find him, to get his dorm advisor, to get everyone, and then I called his parents on the drive up. When I got to campus, I found him on the roof of his dorm, ready to jump. Over a month later, he is still in the psych ward at the hospital, and he will be there until at least the New Year. This all started because of bullying.

A week or so after the incident, word got out about his condition. His suitemates, members of the robotics club from three years ago, and even the physics teacher who called him names for three years straight called, texted, messaged me, asking me if it was their fault. Of course I said it was not, but it was, and the fact that they knew it was is horrifying. It is more proof that these bullies need to be stopped before their victims kill themselves.

For the past five years, I myself have struggled with depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. At first I was so scared to tell anyone because I thought I would be judged. I was scared of what people would say about me, the rumors my peers would start. Since then, I have realized that it is okay to be depressed. I know that talking to a therapist because you hurt yourself or want to kill yourself does not make you crazy. It means you are strong. It means that you are a survivor. I promise to anyone who feels depressed or suicidal that you are not alone. Go against the odds and get help; talk to someone. Become someone who has been helped and can now say, "I used to want to kill myself, but now I don't. I'm happy now. I survived." Your life is worth something; I promise.

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“Wrecked”—Brandon Lopez
Photography



“Honesty”—Derek Williams

Poetry

To Love and to Live
is a man's true purpose.
His heart reigns foremost,
but emotion skirts the surface.

Desire to please Her
fuels a fire within.
A ravenous flame
eager to engulf Her skin.

And so required is he
to unchain his heart,
the wet strokes of his tongue
expressing Love as Art.

And while his Love runs
wild through his veins,
his instinct to Live
begs control of the reigns.

But the bounds of Love
tame the wildest of steeds
and his desire to roam
yields to fundamental needs:

A Love that's constant
to steady his head.
A woman that's loyal
and worthy to wed.

A relationship that's real
and cannot be replaced.
A connection so deep
it outlasts Time and Space.

These things and more
ground a man in reality.
And securing his heart
becomes a mere formality.

Love and spontaneity
ignite the romantic incense.
But Faith and Honesty
keep the flames intense.

“Rose Bush”—Marie Defreitas
Staff Photography



“Cheerio’s”—Threa Almontaser

3rd Place Fiction

The sun is too fucking bright and early. I find myself wondering whether my head exploded—or whether that's preferable. As I slowly drag myself out of bed, a thousand creaky knobs go off in my body. They seem audible to the entirety of New York. I wish I can simply oil them back to their soundless state. The usual ritual ensues: stubbed toe on the nightstand, soap that blinds my left eye, a popped pant button from the protruding melon I claim as a belly, toast blacker than city smog.

Outside, the oxygen is so thick I can almost unzip it and disappear inside. Drizzling rain pitter patters on my balding head, mocking me. I'm instantly engulfed with the nauseating smell of car engines and cigarette butts. Not four steps out the door and a sunny cab whizzes by, along with a puddle of sewer muck. I'm drenched in my misery.

I aggressively butterfly stroke through the stream of bustling tourists and fellow businessman, nearly missing a Chinatown native that starts calling me and all my ancestors so many foul names that I don't know whether to duck out of sight or start memorizing the most impressive ones. Inside The Four Walls of Hell skyscraper, I stagger to the card-punch station. God damn it all. Late again. Tom will give me hell for this when he spots me. I gape unblinkingly at the fluorescent lights and listen to the *tick tick* of keyboards in cramped cubicles before calmly turning and walking out the door, like a rehearsed exit from a play. The nearest coffee shop is just two blocks down. In my mindless hurry, I feel a squelch and look down to see more shit added to my day. Literally.

Wiping it off as best I can, I enter the shop. People automatically veer away from me with cringed nostrils. I can feel the humiliation dripping off my fingernails, my hair,

my teeth. My heart beats frantically and my palms are sweating enough to fill the Hudson. Giving a strained smile at the barista, she grimaces in exchange. I hear blood as it Olympic races towards my ears. The ping of the register, shriek of a child, slurping of liquids all vanish. Out the door I go again, in no specific direction. I just keep moving. *What are you heading towards? Where the fuck are you going? Where? Where?* I repeat in my head over and over and over and

I don't plan on losing a shoe during my frantic escape, or to end up in the middle of Alley No-One-Will-Ever-Drive-This-Far, but that's where I am. *So this is karma*, I think. As I'm wondering how I can extract revenge on an otherworldly notion of life, a hobo teleports beside me. I startle. He hauls a grimy and torn canvas bag with his life's fragments inside. I don't really trust the ancient, shaggy man. You never know what some of these old people will do. I can't help feeling a tinge of dismay that I might possibly be found dead in a suit I never liked.

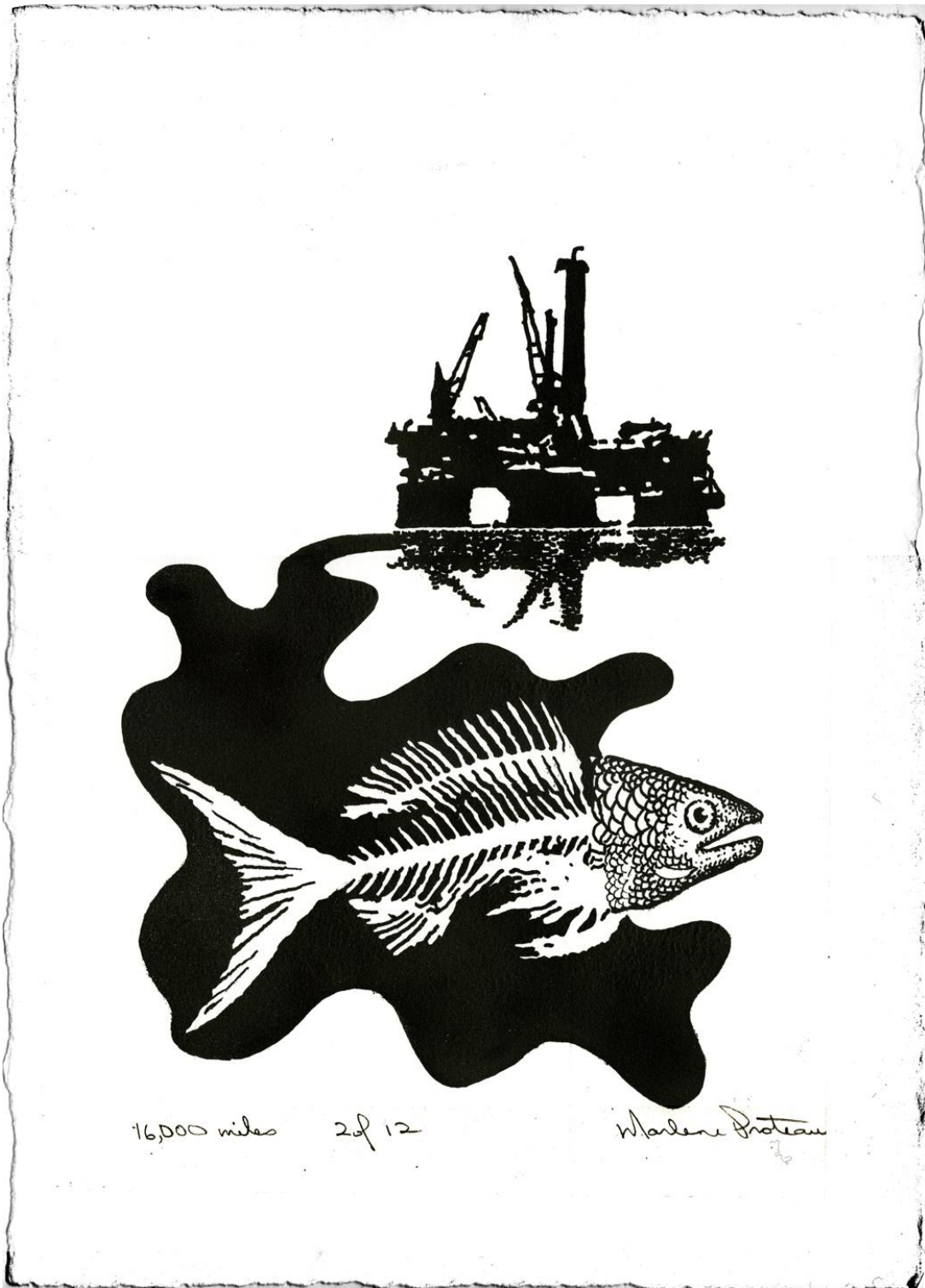
He speaks first. Calls me 'brother.' That's all he croaks before floating aimlessly away, leaving me feeling angry and cold and stupid with only one shoe. I feel alone. But one always is, I suppose. The cool air is heavy against my bare toe from the dime-sized rip in my sock. As if it's holding on to a torrent of heavy raindrops that are reluctant to fall. Something suddenly squeezes out of me like a scream, but deeper. I roar at the sky, back arched like a scared cat. Spittle merges with sweat. Both arms spin wildly as they attempt to lift my body into flight. I yawp at the endless grey above me again and again until my throat feels like it swallowed a volcano. I am a man possessed.

Time passes. I don't know how much. Calling it a day, I hobble home. Break a window to get inside because I misplaced my key (again). Practically crawl over rough carpet before falling to my knees, tossing up my arms in a wordless hallelujah. Dinosaur

noises escape the melon attached to my body. A bowl of Cheerios seems fitting in this moment. I take it to the La-Z-Boy recliner and chuck my body on top of it. I let it swallow me down its leathery throat. I sigh heavily before taking my first soggy bite, giddy with an unexpected, exhilarated pleasure.

But of course, coughs and gags shortly follow the unforgivable stale taste of expiration. I glare down at the O's that are silently laughing back at me.

"16000 Miles"—Marlene Proteau
1st Place Art



“Sugar Magnoli”—Tina Edge

1st Place Non-Fiction

On January 15, 2001, I received a call from my grandmother at around 6 a.m. “Tina, I didn’t know if you had heard already, but I just heard and had to call and tell you. I’m sorry honey, but Gina Grant was killed in a car crash last night. She hydroplaned and hit a semi-truck head-on. She died instantly.”

Every time I think about that call, I relive each second of my reaction and return to every raw emotion. The grief is the same with every memory of that moment. Sometimes the memories come in waves for weeks at a time. Other times, they erupt at awkward times, like while I’m folding clothes or sitting in traffic. The only way to find peace is to recall our history as best friends, all of it.

She was Gina Grant and I was Tina Edge. Our last names were one syllable words. In my small town there had been an unspoken rule that people with one-syllable last names would always be called by their first *and* last name. It had never been, “Gina and Tina are going to the game;” it was, “Gina Grant and Tina Edge are going to the game.” We loved that. We enjoyed being a match, paired by name. That small, weird commonality, all by itself, connected us forever.

I met Gina Grant in art class while in high school. We never really spoke to one another during class. We preferred communicating indirectly (another character flaw we immediately picked up in each other). We would crack jokes and bounce words off one another. She was my smoke-break partner. We liked being some of the few girls that smoked “cowboy killers,” Marlboro reds. We never exchanged numbers back then. We never hung out. We liked

one another a lot though, another unspoken fact.

At the onset of adulthood I lived by myself in a tiny, one-room house. I had been sitting there one afternoon when Gina Grant pulled up in her Z-28. The sight of that car around town had always been cool, with its black body and gold ground effects. I hadn’t seen her in six months and had no idea of what she could possibly be in need of. I opened the door and greeted her. She invited herself in and then promptly said, “I couldn’t remember if we were friends in school, but I always liked you. Do you want to be my friend?” And that was Gina Grant.

Gina Grant was gorgeous! I don’t mean pretty, and I don’t mean beautiful. She was astonishingly gorgeous. Her hair was shoulder-length and blond, but sometimes red and sometimes green. Her smile was large and showy, a great attribute when you have perfect teeth. Her almond eyes held irises that looked like kaleidoscopes. Around the center of her pupils her eyes were bright yellow. The color slowly faded to a hazel green-brown. Where those colors combined, flecks of red, blue, and purple would sparkle. She had a bright face that was always decorated with a genuine grin. Her frame was a

perfect size. She could wear anything and often did. Her staple outerwear incorporated hats, Birkenstocks with socks, and a thigh-length, oversized, patchwork jacket. She loved jewelry and would shove as many rings on her fingers as she could. She ran a contest between her ears to see which one could fit more piercings than the other. That said, when she dressed up she was a knockout. She had the ability to brighten black. She could make a dress from The Salvation Army, her frequent shopping mall, a fashion statement that was fit for a princess. I adored her looks and so did everyone else.

I battled with depression for many years, and Gina Grant taught me how to smile through the storms. I was usually sad, or angry, or unsettled back then, but Gina Grant kept me grounded. She would do anything to brighten my mood. Once, she showed up wearing a dress she made out of aluminum foil and asked if I would ride with her to Greenville. Of course, I

went. And where was it she wanted to take me? The Happy Store. The Happy Store was a gas station that displayed a huge smiley face on its sign. Every time we ventured to Greenville, we stopped there, but on special occasions we would make trips with the Happy Store as our sole destination. After all, the Happy Store was where happiness could be purchased.

Gina Grant was an artist. She made art out of everything. She'd use cigarette butts, pennies, and shoe laces. There was no limit to her talents. She could always make something from nothing. Once, she picked up trash from a parking lot and made a "trash collage." Old gum, crust from a slice of pizza, and an empty drink cup made parts of it. I still have several pictures of some of her creations.

She loved coming up with her own quotes. She also enjoyed rhymes and repetitions. Gina Grant had a sincere hope that some of her quotes would become famous. The easier they were to understand, the more she promoted them. My favorite quote she derived, after several hours of conversing about all things logically ridiculous, was "Numbers are not real and rutabagas are hard to cut." It ended up being her claim to fame in our little bubble of cohorts. Her car would sound, "The door is ajar," in a feminine, robotic voice. She responded, "The door is not a jar! A jar is not a door! A door is a door! A jar is a jar, stupid car!" Every single time she entered the car she would say that, and I never tired of it. Many times I even participated in the harassment.

I left for the Air Force after experiencing the dullness of every-day life as a single, working girl in a tiny town. Gina Grant was not impressed but later spoke to a recruiter in an effort to join me on my adventures. Luckily for the Air Force, her slight scoliosis prevented her from enlisting. The military didn't have enough defense weapons to protect them from her antics anyway. I promised things wouldn't change. I promised we would still be roommates in the future. I promised we would still go into business together one day, an ongoing dream we

shared. It was to be named Psychedelic Pets; a record store and pet adoption center in one. My final night as a civilian included a Peter, Paul, and Mary concert. The last

song they played was "Leaving on a Jet Plane." We sat in the grass, our arms around one another, and sang the lyrics as we cried.

After graduating from boot camp, I received letters from Gina Grant. They were full of more quotes and hilarious ideas, but something had changed. She became worried and was very lonely. One letter was full of anger. She was mad I had left her by herself. Her world had changed. When would I return? When would I call? When would I write? I always had excuses. I was excited and in a new environment with new friends. It was expensive to call long distance. When I did call, she wasn't home. My visits home would always include some time with her, but we both had changed. I felt distant from her and for a couple of years we barely spoke.

The last time I saw her was October, 1999. I had gotten married, and my husband had never met her. Gina Grant and I made plans to go out, and we decided to get ready together like we used to. We had the best time. We debated over the little things, like whether to wear hats or not. It took much time to decide whether to wear mismatched shoes or not. Childish and sophomoric ideas amused us. We tried on pair after pair and laughed with our full stomachs at the silliness of all things we considered. We stood in that tiny bathroom for hours and caught up on all the little things we had gone through over the years. The major items had been discussed during our years apart, but the details had always been lacking. I had missed that. We would let time stop briefly, as we were trying a new eye shadow or putting on blush, just to let one another know that we still were the best of friends. We had a moment of blissful reconnection, where all the woes were swept away. We transcended in time, back to our wacky years. I wore, by tradition, a pair of her black, Calvin Klein jeans and proclaimed a truth, "Gina Grant's jeans

always make me look skinny!"

A bunch of Gina Grant's friends met up with us: her new boyfriend, her new girl friends, and several acquaintances. We had a wonderful time listening to new tunes and discovering we were still passionate over the same old songs. We found it glorious that, even with the distance between us, our musical tastes were still tightly meshed. We discussed new, underground songs we adored, songs no other friends would connect with us on. That revelation served to re-tie our souls together. I had been an indie music junky before meeting Gina Grant, and had introduced her to The Sugarcubes, The Sundays, and Rickie Lee Jones. In turn, she taught me the spiritual benefits of listening to Bob Marley. My ears were virgins to rockabilly and folk until Gina Grant forced Grateful Dead cassettes on me. Janis Joplin's voice nagged my eardrums until Gina Grant declared, "But that's my mama!!!" Indeed, my musical tastes were forever changed as her input had increased.

The night was wrapping up and I was exhausted. My husband had enjoyed himself but asked if I was ready to go home. I spoke the word "no" but nodded instead. I didn't want to walk away from that moment. I had longed to get back to where we

had been in our friendship so many years before. I had achieved my goal, and I was afraid to lose it again; nonetheless, the night was turning into day, and it was time to go. I returned to the group and gave my regards. I hugged Gina Grant tightly. That awkward moment in a hug, where you've hugged for too long but don't want to let go, came upon us. We suddenly both grasped even tighter, holding our breath to squeeze together as snugly as possible. We were happy again, gleeful.

I said my goodbyes and began to walk away, and before our eyes unlocked I heard a voice. All sounds were muted. My body was still in active motion of turning away. The voice. I knew I heard it. I did hear it. The voice simply said, in a matter-of-fact way, "This is your final goodbye. You will never see her or talk to her again." My husband had my hand. He was fully turned toward the door. I snapped my hand back. I was jolted. I wanted to scream. I didn't understand. Was my brain talking to me? Was it my heart? Perhaps it was the fear of

losing our familiar friendship again. No. I knew I heard it. It had been an audible voice but somehow without sound - a silent whisper. I stood still. Gina Grant and her group were walking away toward one end of the bar, and my husband was walking away toward the opposite end. She never looked back at me. I wanted to frantically run up to her and tell her what I had just heard. I wanted her to tell me I was just being weird, overdramatic, or even drunk. I wanted to talk to her again. Talking to her again would prove the voice to be a liar. That didn't happen though. I took three steps toward her, but her exit was real. My husband demanded, "It's time to go." We left. I was inconsolable on the drive home. My husband didn't understand my sudden sadness. As he drove to my parents' house, where we were staying, I tried explaining through my tears, "She's gone. I heard a voice. She's gone forever. I'll never see her again. That was it." I dropped my cheek against the car window and peered at the wee-hour morning stars, and ran my finger down the tears that slid down the glass. I heard the voice, but no one else had.

The next day I told my mother of the events. I explained the voice to her and what it had spoken. She didn't know the best way to respond but sensed my bewilderment. My husband and I had to head back to Florida. We had made arrangements the previous evening to see Gina Grant before we left. I had to return her jeans and shoes. I called before leaving but she hadn't answered. We went to her home, where we were scheduled to see her, but loud knocking had not caused a response. After several minutes I resolved to leave her items at the door, unable to give one last goodbye before returning home.

Over the next year and three months, my attempts to get in touch with her were unsuccessful. I heard that she had moved two weeks after that visit. She left her boyfriend for another guy. I called her mother's number, but it had been disconnected. I went to North

Carolina and left a letter at her mother's house, begging for someone to call me. I called so many people I finally found her old boyfriend. He was worried about her, as he had heard rumors she was not doing well. He had no way of contacting her. Calling her employer offered no hope. She had quit her job and no one knew what she was doing for employment. I called her aunt, who was my grandmother's hairdresser, and she had lost touch with her as well. I resolved to give up the hunt in September, 2000. Three months later was when I received the call. When you die, suddenly everyone knows where you were, what you were doing, and who you were with.

The story I was given was that Gina Grant had recently married the new guy, but their relationship was dysfunctional. They had gotten into an argument, and she was driving to her mother's house to spend the night. It was nighttime and raining. She was arguing with her husband on the cell phone when she hydroplaned and lost control of her car. That's when the void in the universe occurred. That was the moment that silence became deafening.

My marriage had also been in a deep valley at the time of her death. My lonely drive to North Carolina was riddled with thoughts of suicide. My marriage was in turmoil, I had lost my best friend, so I feared what would be next. I looked for trees to slam into. I searched for a very large one, one that could do the job. To hit a smaller one may have just left me as a vegetable, and I had no wishes to be a burden to anyone. I finally just allowed myself to modify my grief in order to make it through the journey. My sadness turned to anger on I-95 North, somewhere between Ridgeland and Walterboro, SC.

When I arrived in town I went straight to her mother's home. Her mother was aloof and told me she had made the decision to have an opened casket at the viewing. I asked if I could sit in Gina Grant's bedroom for a moment. The room was empty, ransacked by her new supposed-friends. They had pillaged all the items that made her unique. The lamps she made were gone.

Her art was missing. Every stitch of clothing had been taken. Her bedroom had been made lifeless. I wanted to cry, but I was angry at her mother's lack of consideration. I felt I had been robbed of one final connection. I couldn't help but to believe that, in Gina Grant's last months, she was surrounded by selfish people. I had no proof of such, but it had been obvious to me that I had been the only friend who had known what a sanctuary Gina Grant's room had been to her. I was upset that her mother seemed to lack any desire to hold on to the only pieces of Gina Grant's existence that remained. I held my words though, out of respect. Before leaving, her mother said, "You know, I think she finally got right with the Lord a few days before the accident." I had no mind to discuss such a topic and quickly left. I understood the loss affected her differently than it affected me. My anger subsided and mourning returned.

That night I went to the wake. I peered into the casket only to find, what appeared to be, an 80 year old woman with a tight, short perm. She was not recognized as the Gina Grant I had known. I thought I was looking at a stranger. I searched for clues to

prove to myself that the person in the casket was my best friend, but her mother had instructed the mortician to cover all of her tattoos with thick makeup. A wig was placed so her hair would look normal. Gina Grant would be laid to rest in an ice-blue, lacy dress and had eye shadow to match. A picture of her was next to the coffin. I guessed that it served as identification for the person who lay in it. It occurred to me that her mother had tried to erase who Gina Grant really was. She had been ashamed of her daughter's nonconformity to societal norms during her life. She tried to eradicate the evidence at her death. I became infuriated.

During the service, a preacher announced that all in the congregation should withhold their judgment of Gina Grant. I wanted to spit in his face for judging her himself. The music her mother picked out was that god-awful "In the Arms of an Angel" by Sarah McLachlan. It began with the demeaning words, "Spend all your life waiting on that second chance...." What? Gina

Grant had not been waiting for second chances, and she could not stand Sarah McLachlan! She

had lived her life as she wanted to, how she wanted to, and with her own set of rules. I wanted to stand up and scream, "My god! Did anyone in this room actually know Gina Grant, besides me?" The compilation of music should have included The Grateful Dead, The Spin Doctors, Bob, and some Joplin. No wonder she had felt the need to substitute Janis Joplin for her own mother.

If anyone had a clue about her real character, they would've played the song I had always dedicated to her, one that honored her spirit, "Sugar Magnolia, blossoms blooming, head's all empty and I don't care. Saw my baby down by the river, knew she'd have to come up soon for air... she's got everything delightful, she's got everything I need, takes the wheel when I'm seein' double, pays my ticket when I speed." If anyone had bothered to think about what Gina Grant would've wanted in a funeral they would've asked me, for I knew what she would've wanted. No one else did, not her new husband, nor her new friends, not even her own mother. As if her death wasn't traumatic enough, her wake, quite literally, functioned as the final nail in her coffin.

I returned to Florida to my dysfunctional marriage, to a state I hated, surrounded by a culture and people I loathed. I was done. I had enough of all things dreary and dead. I wanted a pulse in anything. I needed something to make sense in my life. Gina Grant's funeral had left me hopeless with humanity. It gouged the meat of my heart, and there was nothing left to make me smile. Any light that was left in my world was fluorescent; stagnant, and stale, and fake.

I began asking the large questions. Where did Gina Grant go? Surely that entity that deemed himself "The Almighty" would not have made such a contribution to this earth only to remove that purity of spirit, as if it never was. What would have been the point? Gina Grant wasn't just blood, tissue, and bones. She wasn't just clusters of

molecules and DNA. She was light. She was spirit. She was hope. She was freedom. She was all of those intangible parts

that make a mystery, yet inexplicably real.

My mind was inundated with either hostile thoughts against that god, or wonderments of his incredible ability to add Gina Grant's spirit to that fleshy sack of bones and body. I began thinking of the voice, and how it had spoken a fact to me. I had received that whisper back then, from some unknown source, about the future. I couldn't lie to myself about it. I had proof and I wasn't crazy. My mother and husband served as witnesses, and what the voice told me ultimately came to pass. It had been a truth-speaking voice, but where had it originated from? Why had it spoken to me?

I tried not to think about it anymore. I had tired of trying to figure it out. I had tired of everything. My life had been sputtering and spewing. I lacked the desire to go to work. I lacked the desire to watch TV. I became sleepless. I no longer wanted to be married, but didn't have the desire to get a divorce either. I had just wanted light back in my life, a real one. I wanted some joy. I wanted some nonsense, some ridiculousness back in my life. I wanted something that wasn't so serious. I wanted laughter and dreams. I wanted my best friend back.

Months passed. I decided to separate from my husband. I blamed him for my constant sadness and unhappiness with the universe. As I drove away from our home, I drowned in my tears. I felt lost and had reached hopelessness, yet again. I didn't know anything anymore. I wondered if I was doing the right thing, but then questioned who was to judge between right and wrong, anyway. Was that being who took my best friend away, was *He* going to judge me? Did *He* judge Gina Grant? If *He* had, *He* better have done fairly. I could barely handle the waves of thoughts. They felt as though they were crashing into my heart. I believed the pressure would kill me. My questions were far too big for simple answers, and I was tormented.

I felt out of control and pulled to the side of the road. It was night and raining. I had been sobbing and couldn't see, my eyes swollen from the teary trauma. I wondered why Gina

Grant was taken. I wondered who took her soul. I had never believed in the soul until her death, and upon believing I wanted to know who was in charge of taking care of it. The more I thought about the loss of her zest and her ability to pull me out of deep pits, the more I reached in my mind, looking for Gina Grant's enlightenment. Gina Grant was gone, though. There was nothing left for me to even pinch.

I pondered everything at escalating speeds, and my mind rifled through the files of my life. I needed to escape. I needed to pull the breaks on the chaos in my head. I screamed. I screamed, and sobbed, and pounded away at everything within reach of

that driver's seat. Then, as silently as before, I heard the voice. Upon hearing it, every millisecond of my existence came to the forefront of my mind, and I was able to capture each piece with stark clarity. I had not forgotten the stoic and solemn sound of the voice. It had proven itself to be truthful, so I didn't question it. I listened and was attentive to what it had to say. That time the voice spoke, it spoke to me about love.

When someone you love dies, there is nothing physically left of them to sustain you. You no longer have their face, their voice, or their smile. You can't hear their laughter anymore. Their anecdotes and jokes are no longer available to brighten your day. There is nothing left of their earthly body, but the love associated with them still exists. Love is all that's left to own, or to take part in. You are unable to experience the breadth of love, and the tangibility of it, until the vessel that housed the soul turns to dust. Death is where love is isolated. Death is where love stands alone.

Love is not a feeling, it's an entity. It's not just some emotion that's created by neurons firing in the brain. Love is not explained by science. Love just is. It cannot be limited to a unit of measure, because all amounts, whether significant or small, would be of equal value. If the stimulus that causes love is removed, love is still there. Love is held without touching it, and it

touches you without feeling it. Though it is invisible, you know it surrounds you. Its existence can't be proven, yet it exists. It defies death. It never dies. It conquers death. It is eternal.

That voice provided me with a pathway that led to today. Today, I still have specific questions about Gina Grant's death. I know most of them may never be answered; however, I've discovered a significant reason for her creation. It was necessary for my salvation that she should exist, for her earthly being had helped me create an image of my God. Once she was withdrawn from life, I sought the source of her existence. I found her within the peaceful realm of love. Within that realm, I realized her true image and, because of Gina Grant, I discovered the true God.

“Dancing on the Beach”—Max Cohen
1st Place Photography



“Reminiscent of Roses”—Ren Cleveland

3rd Place Poetry

How empty this house gets at night.

Of course, it's awful quiet during the day, too
but then there's a chance the phone might ring
or Mrs. Belle'd come knocking for a cup of sugar
or Brian'd come to change the batteries in the smoke detectors.

But at night,
the house grows bigger.
Or perhaps I'm the one that gets smaller.
Who knows?

There goes the grandfather clock.
Eight?
Nine.

Jeff's boys are getting so big.
And they both look just like Jeff did.
Green eyes,
blonde hair,
that cheeky grin.
And if they have even a drop of the vinegar he had in him,
boy is Jeff in trouble!

Jeff's turned out to be some father.
You'd be so proud, Tom.

Mary's engaged.
To an oil-driller from North Dakota.
Real sweet boy, real *smart* boy.
He bought her a diamond ring and a Jack Russell terrier.
The wedding's in May.

A spring wedding,
just like ours, Tom.
Remember?

Remember how on our very first date,
you looked me over from across the table and said,
“Nancy English, I'm going to marry you.”

Ha!

Boy, I thought you were out of your mind!

Plumb crazy!

If I could've only seen us now,
Fifty-six years later.

We had a good run.

Remember our little house on Swan Lane?
That house could fit in this house's living room!
But it suited us just fine.

Such memories in that house.
All the Christmases, birthdays, dogs...
It all seems so long ago.

And do you remember our rose bush, Tom?
The one you got me for my birthday that year?
Or was it our anniversary?

Either way, it was beautiful.
The reddest roses I ever saw!
How I wish it would've survived the hurricane.

We could've dug it up and brought it here.
We'd put it right out front!
And buy it a great white trellis.

And we'd sit on the porch each morning
to sip our coffee
and watch our roses grow.
And you'd smile your cheeky smile
and hold me a little closer and say,
"Look at how beautiful our roses are this morning."

That'd really be something. Wouldn't it, Tom?

And before we'd know it,
our rose bush would climb right off that trellis,
and grow clear up to the sky!
Straight up to the heavens!

And God would look down and say,
"Well, if those aren't the reddest roses I've ever seen!"

And you and I would politely nod,
sip our coffee,
and smile.

Just us two.
I can see us now.

Oh, the grandfather clock again.
Eight.
Nine?
Ten.

Ten o'clock, already?
Where does the time go?

I suppose it's time for me to turn in.
I do so enjoy our chats.

I miss you, Tom.
I love you.

This is when you'd kiss my forehead and whisper,
"Goodnight, my sweet little ole magnolia blossom."

Goodnight, Tom.

The Wake Review

literary magazine and club

The 2014-2015 Wake Review Staff



Outer Circle (L-R): Erin Beason, Sarah Peterson, Mandy Kelly, Dean Furbish, Taylor Maloch, Bry Coulter.

Inner Circle (L-R): Front—Carey Shook; Middle—Terrell Goldston, Lauren Rone; Back—Michael Cervone, Darian Hines, Marie Defreitas.

Not Pictured: Elizabeth Welch, Jared Elledge, Savannah Gerardi, Kristin Horton (Fall 2014 Non-Fiction Editor), Hannah Koch (Fall 2014 Staff).

The Wake Review

All Editions

The *Wake Review* was originally a publication for Wake Tech's professors and staff back in the 1990s. After a long hiatus, professors Mrs. Mandy Kelly, Ms. Elizabeth Welch, and Dr. Dean Furbish thought that Wake Tech needed a publication for students to release their creativity. In 2013, the *Wake Review* became a club again, and published its first edition in the spring of 2014.



All paper copies of the *Wake Review* are available at any advisor's office (listed on the website). The bounded copy was printed specifically for the club's library and for staff, however one can purchase a copy by request—contact Carey Shook (contact info listed on the website).