



Trillium 2011

Trillium

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the Glenville State College
English Department**

**Cover Photos by:
Brittany McGuire**

The 2011 Trillium is dedicated to Dr. Gayle Burkowski



*"In teaching you cannot see the fruit of a day's work.
It is invisible and remains so, maybe for twenty years."
Jacques Barzun*

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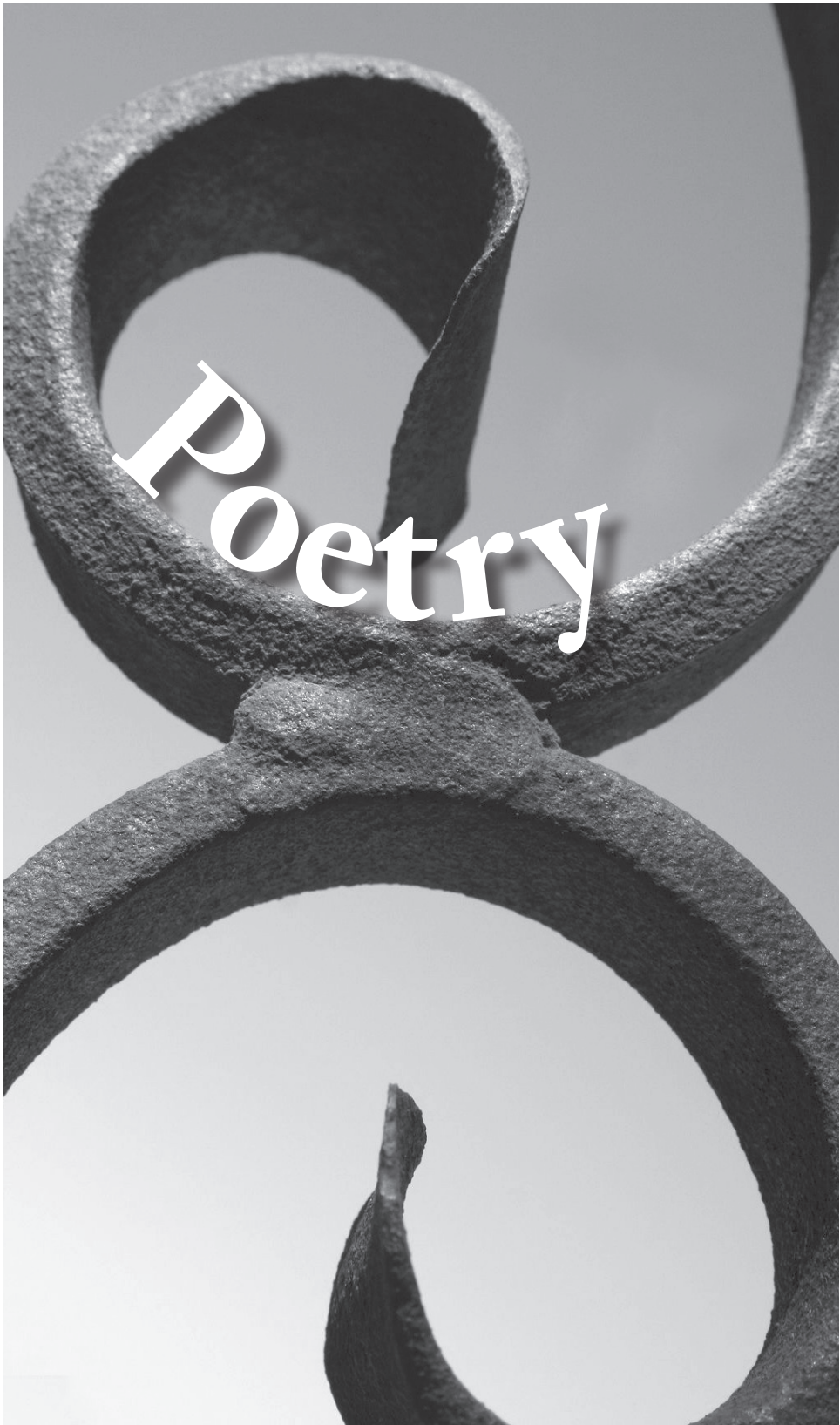
CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Editor's Notes

This year's edition of the *Trillium* could not have happened without all of the people who contributed their work. Thank you. It takes a lot of courage to put your work where other people can see it. It could also not have happened without all the hard work of the staff. Thanks to all of us as well. We hope that in reading the *Trillium* this year you realize something new about your classmates, and yourself. That all of you are capable of creating something, anything. Even if some people don't like it, it's still yours.

Happy reading everyone.

Rose Johnson
Editor



WAYNE DE ROSSET

Someone to Take Them Home (a song)

He sits through the evening with shaking hands, watching the crowd come
and go

An empty glass is loneliness, so he drinks till it's time to close

He's been coming here for such a long long time, and no one even knows
his name

He slips into the night, adrift in the dark, embracing a love he calls pain

He's just one of the world's lost and lonely people

Searching for something to call his own

His dreams lie shattered on the pavement of his life

And he's just looking for someone to take him home

She walks through the mall when she gets off work, dreading the drive
across town

Holding hands with loneliness, can't believe how the years have gone down

He comes home each night another's scent on his breath, most nights she
cries until day

In the new made sun, her life fades to, a harmony in grey

She's just one of the world's lost and lonely people

Searching for something to call her own

Her dreams lie shattered on the pavement of her life

And she's just looking for someone to take her home

Abandoned lives in a random world, sad strangers who have lost their way

Look in the eyes of loneliness, for what becomes more elusive each day

Some think it's found in a stranger's arms, in empty rooms of cheap hotels

But there's no love to make, when their faithless friends, only have some-
thing to sell

They're all of the world's lost and lonely people

Searching for something to call their own

Their dreams lie shattered on the pavement of their lives

And they're just looking for someone to take them home

JONATHAN MINTON

Archaearium

In the center of the colony, the physician is dissolving alkali and salts in a pewter bowl with the bark of the quinquina, the wood of fevers. In God's pharmacopeia, he insists, nature must keep her secrets, especially the spirits of the sanguine humor. He is keeping records of his weight and body mass with reference to drafts of oil and various grams of bread. In the margins, he has diagrammed the differences between animal and vegetable fossils. He is calling this book the Book of Political Aphorisms.

*

There is a house in the wounded man's head where everything passes from his skin and lungs, gathering as vapor. When it thickens the glass, he begs the architect to redraw the colonial maps so that the roads lead away from the poisoned breath of marshland creatures, the rotten corn, and all hidden realities of air in the darkened perimeter. When he thinks of mountains, he bleeds into his shoes.

One errant strike with the chisel, the mason insists,
could shatter the limestone brick.
To work with the grain,
he follows the traces of water,
and the ancient passage of marine animals.
The world, he says, is little more than shell.
It is easily carved.

*

The apprentice is studying slabs of undressed rock.
He will assemble them for barracks and the outer wall.
But first he must straighten the lines and smooth
the pitted surfaces. His only tools are the L-shaped measure
and his hammer. He is not yet worried how he strikes.
There are plenty of materials, he has noticed,
just lying around.

The magistrate is sending a letter to Boston. Some have been punished, it says, for running to the wilds, having returned weak of spirit and speech; and some for the satisfactions of their hungers, or having stolen in a barge and shallop, and therein to adventure in the harbors that guard the colony. Consider the scrutiny, it says, given each instance, the close regard for the makebaits, brawlers, chiderers. Consider the pillory. There are nails there for vain and false tongues, for the throats that blush in the body's own witness. All has been discovered, it says, that can be discovered, and the punishment is kept public, even when the pain is private.

*

The thief is imagining his death. Whether by bodily separation or wounding and starving, one is a symptom of spectacle, the other of technical display, and each a degree of revolt. To be broken, he concludes, upon a wheel is the perfection of industry and spirit. There is a ratio for pain and momentum. In nature, it is rounded out, even when the scale is distorted, as when an open wound is seen under a glass. The gears of any machine, no matter how refined, are ragged, and the edges catch. He is keeping this last word for himself, as if in a vault only he has entered. But has already given up the ghost. It is circling above him in the cell and whispering another word for ear in the jailer's left ear.

The philosopher is stirring the bubbles of grease in his soup. He is theorizing that a sphere is formed when one body of fluid surrounds another. The aether, he says, is pocketed with celestial bodies. We're the soapy residue, and revolution is our violent, bloody egg. But in all such pressures we witness the birth of new forms. To probe the dust and ash of burnt hay-cock is no less productive than the manufacture of fashionable hats. A fly's wing, for instance, when measured as lengths of vibrating string may yield machine applications, or filigree for the domes of brightly colored cups.

*

The student is finishing the colonial archaearium. The stories arrange as one map bleeds into another. Here, the terrain is kept clean. Here, the inland rivers thicken in nests of handwritten names: Goosebeak, Apple Island, Deerfield. In margins of the last page he has noted completion dates for the town's almshouse and southern palisade. Everything, he concludes, is a dream if you're alone.

CHRIS SUMMERS

The Road to a Friend's House is Never Long

My life seems to revolve around open windows
Releasing air, releasing life, the past life
That loved and lost, lost and loved
And sweeping in new air to clear my face,
Clear your curves,
You and every woman who passed before you in the golden gate of
My loves and my losses
Wiping the drawing board clean
For new loves
New losses
Of a different pattern, different angles
Vectors and vertices and formulas unknown
Inspiring to uncover the next person to
Open a window
And push me through.

I Made You

Without armies, enemies, friends, or fire
An artist's work lives forever
To face them down from a wall or gallery
Standing, screaming in line or stroke
"I made you"
Reminding you when you touch that
Those hands pushed against the clay
That spun to make those curves
And froze into the chill of pink marble.

You Made Me

A person is born as a lump of clay.
Well-rounded, perfect in imperfections
And then it's slung against a wheel
(Gently at first)
With painstaking care
Pushed and turned and spun
Faster and faster and faster
Hands working it, pressing it, forcing it against itself
The touch of the world that leaves its prints on you
Smearing them through your skin, into your psyche
Till the fire hits you and burns them into you
Forever and ever and ever
Until you look through yourself at the flame-scorched world and say
You made me.

CYNTHIA B. ACORD

Jesse Ray, Thanks for Nothing

There you went and stole my loot
of Indian bones and Chicory Root
I found your footsteps up under a lie,
between Wild Cat Mountains and a dead end sign
You struck a chord, it played out as odd
Finding a best friend is harder than finding God
There you had to drill holes in my bed
and tell great big lies with the nod of your head

Midnight in Winter, you're a bar stool sitter,
4 a.m. a Cocoa Beach drifter,
A back rub beggar when the time wasn't right,
and the only reason I'm alone tonight

(You're 3 a.m. on the clock on the wall
according to my plans, it's beyond our fall)

BRITTANY R. LOWE

My Angel Autistic *A Dark Metaphor*

His eyes turn white with sadness
as he begins to spread his wings.
He doesn't realize how breakable he is,
such a crippled little thing.

I know exactly what he suffers-
something demented unspoken.
It's like looking through a dirty mirror
to a world that's cracked and broken.

His blood is polluted with disintegration
forcing through his veins.
Such a sick and twisted creature,
bleeding life that can't be saved.

The only one he cannot shatter,
the only thing he cannot break,
the only spirit falling down that he's afraid to take,
the one who's not afraid
to see the end begin,
risking anything and everything
to see him feel again,

My hand reaches for his face
as he slowly turns to dust;
what a poor decaying Angel,
crumbling beneath my touch.

MEGAN LYNNETTE ROLLINS

Embarrassed

This is very personal
But I feel it needs to be addressed
For my heart's deepest desire
Has been severally repressed
Too many girls are facing this
And it's something we must discuss
For the weight of the world is crushing our hearts
And we're failing to see the beauty within us
We have so much to offer the world
But we fear we will be rejected
So we remain silent and open our hearts to no one
For we are "too much," so it's been suspected
I'm embarrassed by the depth of my desire
To be a princess like those from the books on my shelf
So I've done my very best to hide
The wonder of my feminine self

Innocence Gone

When we were all little
An age just before our teens
We all believed and dreamed
The simplest of dreams
Girls would grow up
And marry their dads
A knight in shining armor
Would come and whisk us away
And every brown cow
Produced chocolate milk
But then on a dark,
Terrible, awful day
Around the age of eleven or twelve
Reality dropped by
To smack us in the face
And strip us of our innocence
Leaving us naked to the world
Mom is already married to dad
Marrying him just became creepy
Our knight in shining armor
Was just another fool
Wrapped in tin foil
Brown cows lost their magical wonder
When we all discovered
White milk comes out of every cows udders

ZACHARY TERRY

Love's Embrace

Hold close, my love
In warm embrace
Tears like rain
Run down your face
Look in my eyes
And see the fire
Feel my love
And hearts desire
A silken touch
Upon your hand
A gentle kiss
As we stand

Love is our banner, God our rock
Never forget what lies inside
And never let go

ROSE JOHNSON

Tailor Made

A suit
black
crisp
Well made
but dirty
and wet

Belonging to
a man
pale, so pale
and tall, so tall
but dead
maybe

Crane your neck up
up
up
until it hurts
and he smiles
and it's bloody

His arms welcome
you
and them
they stretch
wide
thin
and many

He's been waiting long
so long
for you
and them
so he can live
for a moment
just one
and feel life
but it's yours so he takes it
and he smiles and it's
bloody
with you

WES REYNOLDS

You

The morning came
And the night fell
Now I'm here all alone
Wishing you were here as well.

The violence of these streets
Took you away from me
Now all I have
Is pain and memories.

The worlds getting crazy
From what I can see
Something has to change
For all our families

I'm always thinking of you
Your face is always on my mind
Tell me Lord why cant
I just turn the hands of time

Our love is in my heart
And that will never change
Because I will always be
Faithful to you

BRANDON HAYES

Powerful Love

I love you, can't you tell
I need you more than ever
Why did you leave me all alone in this cold world
I wanted to find
The meaning of life
With you
I wanted to spend
The rest of my life with you
You're my world
You're my everything
My soul mate
No one else can make me happy as you did
No one has put that smile on my face
You are my drug
You're the only one I need
To get over my addiction
I am addicted to you
My heart only belongs to you
You had my love
But you threw it away
How stupid can you be
I want to touch your face
See your beautiful eyes just one more time
And for you to be in my arms
I want to feel your love
All over me again
I want to be your King once more
I want your tender kiss to touch my lips
I want to wipe your tears
Away forever again
Please understand me
They way only you can
Be my girl, let me be your guy
Let me take care of you like I did
I miss you so much
I want you back badly
Please take me back
I'd swim the deepest ocean for you
I'd climb the highest mountain for you
I'd do anything to be with you
I'd do anything for you
I love you, Sweetie,
Please don't push my love away,

But take it deep inside you
Let us be one again
I'm nothing without you
I'm soulless
I need you
I have no life without you
You make me whole
Without you I'm only half
Fill me in
Fill my heart with your love
Not pain or heartbreak
It hurts so much not being able
To kiss you or touch your face
To hold and smell you deep inside of me
You're my eyes
Without you I can't see
You're my breath
Without you
I can't breathe
You're me and I am you
I am the shadow
Watching you at night
I'm that sunlight
That hits your hair
I'm that rain crying,
"I love you."
I'm the whistle in the wind
Saying we will be together again
You are my soul mate
We are meant for each other
So what, we had our fights
There's no fun being perfect
I know I was jealous
Only because I was afraid
Of being in the position
I am in now
I didn't want to lose you
You are my everything
Please think about my love
You still have inside for me
I know you still love me
Or you wouldn't talk to me
Follow your heart!
I am following mine
Do what your heart tells you to do
I can't stop thinking about you
Please let us be together again ...

I will always love you
No matter what your decision is
But just think of the love
We had so powerful
Stronger then steel
You know how much
I truly love you
I'm giving you my heart
Please love it
Like I love you
It will always love you
No matter what you
Do to it
Because forgiveness
Is a big part of love
Sweetie I love you

DEVONIAN MAHER

Hyper

Hyper thing I hate most.
Hate it more than burnt black toast.
But it is me and what I do.
Everything I buzz right through.
I'm always speaking before I think.
I'm even fast when I blink.
I'm always in deep dutch,
Cause I always talk too much.
Running around in my mind.
You wonder why I fall behind.
I move around I move to fast.
That's why with me nothing lasts.
I took the drugs to make it better.
They made my head feel light as a feather.
I try to control it all myself.
But nothing ever seems to help.
People don't always understand.
So I try to tell them best I can.
When you describe me hyper's at the top.
It's one thing I wish would stop.
Sometimes it is slow but mostly it is fast.
I'm running towards my future and forgetting all my past.
Hyper I hate you oh so much a lot.
I wish you would go away I've given it some thought.
Hyper thing I hate most.
Hate it more than burnt black toast.

MDSL

I'll reach for yours
You reach for mine
Hand in Hand
Side By side

Let's run off towards our future
Let's leave our past behind

You walk with me
I'll walk with you
No worries shown
It's just us two

The past behind
The future front
Enjoying Life
And our good Luck

Too many stories left untold
The ones we make
The ones we know

Please stay with me
I promise you
I'll stick around
And stay with you

But let me say that
My feelings are true
The distance is real
And so are you

But I will soon complete this journey
Destroy that evil frown
I'll go and ford that fucking river
And promise I'll not drown

These words will last forever
On this paper written down
For anyone that asked
Or ever wondered how

What was transposed through this pen
That came from me
That left with them

It was this story
Of how I fell
For 4 little letters
M.D.S.L.

ELDERIED MCKINNEY

A Spot on the Shine

I don't want to be normal, plastic like paper plates,
Disposed of and perfect in every way
Flawless without a spot on the shine, and go
along with whatever, without having my own mind.
I'm not perfect and neither are you
So think for yourself and stay **TRUE!**

MICHAEL SMITH

The World Tree

 Troubled,
We stand beneath the World Tree.
 The leaves that are we
 Slowly die from the inside.
 Darkness is upon us.
 Who among us will prevail
 In our day-to-day struggles?
 Who will be our Champion?
 Our Hero?
 It seems no one will
 Take up the mantle of leadership
 To unite our clans,
 Though this is when we need it most.
 Will you bear the torch of destiny
 And lead us through the coming battle?
 For your fate depends on the outcome too.
 It seems that I will once again
 Be forced into leadership
 And the front of the battle.
 History does truly repeat itself.
 How cruel that it is always so.
So it is that the meek shall inherit the earth
 Because the cowards
 Will force leadership upon them.
 Would that there were no cowards
 And everyone was brave enough
 To stand when others fall.
 This is the true measure of a man
Not how he fairs when all is well and good,
 But how he thrives during adversity,
 And in the face of death .
 Death,
 That final of finals.
 Yet, it is not the end.
 It is only the beginning
 Of a second chance:
A chance to change that which we do not like;
 To attain our potential.
A chance to embrace the power given to us
 By our creators;
 To mold and shape that around us
 Into good and beauty.

MICHAEL SMITH

Wake Me When It's Over

It's what I've wanted, to be nothing like you
to sever what's left to steal the heart away
It drains to nothing in the wounds of the Earth
And everything is gone, but that's okay
Paradigms leap to sight, to sound out the rule of decay
Injustice, malice, all you betray
You always tell me what you want me to say
But I'm done, I'm done playing that game

Wake me when it's over
Tell me when the ride is through
Wake me when it's all gone
I can't keep acting like you
WAKE ME WHEN IT'S OVER!

You seek perfection, but it's not unlike you
To lie in wait for something you can take
The things you hold me to, are all the things inside you
That desperately you hide away
I know the truth behind the lies and deceit
My reprieve is all I need from this
My final silence is my active contribution
To a leap of faith, to wanted bliss

Wake me when it's over
Tell me when the ride is through
Wake me when it's all gone
I can't keep acting like you
WAKE ME WHEN IT'S OVER!

Careful to see everything at once, you never know
When something for someone else might go right
Underestimate me, and think that I'm nothing of worth
That's all it takes for me to strike
No point in telling me your truths, I've seen for myself
What life is about, you can't change a thing
My perspective is solid, and beyond any
Siren song that you can sing
It's all been building up to this, the old clichés say it best
It doesn't pay to persist

Wake me when it's over
Tell me when the ride is through
Wake me when it's all gone
I can't keep acting like you
WAKE ME WHEN IT'S OVER!

MELISSA R. CAMPOS

Untitled

Sure I want love.

I want a real love, where you feel like your spinning around and round and get dizzy...

The “you can't catch your breath” love

I want a love that makes your heart beat fast when you see each other.

I want a love that makes that makes you feel untouchable and ten feet tall.

I want that real love....

I want the “his and hers matching towels” love...

The “I love you” “no, I love you more” love

The “let's get married” love

The “I'll hang up when you hang up” love

The “I'll lay on the wet spot for you” love

I want that real love so bad.

But most of all. I want a purple spotted unicorn.

Some things are just more real.

Untitled

We all walk upon this earth with great trepidation, fearful that something we say or do will offend someone. Be free of these chains.

Speak with great liberation in the presence of others. Be not fearful of offending.

Remove our masks, be free of societal chains. It will be the only true way to be free.

Pleasing, doing our best to fit in

When there are those of us who are born to stand out.

Shine in your own light.

Don't let anyone create a shadow for you.

You are your own strength.

RENEE CARLOW

Angel of Mine

I stand in the rain
So my tears you can't see
But who am I trying to kid
When it's you who best knows me

This pain in my heart
The deep and strong sorrow
I miss you indescribably
Yet push through to tomorrow

I need your arms around me
To hear your gentle, tender voice
I need to see you again
But that's not a choice

I lay down quiet and still
Finally drift to sleep
Knowing in my heart you are
My soul and love are forever yours to keep

*In memory of
Reanna Yvette Sarphie
July 15, 1993 - November 15, 2010
In honor of
Michelle Barreto*

RENEE CARLOW

Inspiration

What causes inspiration in the eyes of a person?
Is it the soft words,
Of a lover late at night?
Is it the calm words,
Of a mother quieting her child's fright?

Is it in the eyes of a teacher,
Who you see every day?
Is it in the hopes and dreams,
That seem so far away?

Is it from hurt of relationships,
Had or the hope thereof?
Is it in the prayers to God,
A hope looked for from above?

It comes in so many ways,
From so many seasons.
From so many things,
For so many reasons.

So be cautious what you say,
Be careful what you do,
Because I bet someone
Is inspired by you.

RENEE CARLOW

Snowflake

I am falling like a snowflake
Just passing through
With a million decisions to make
I just flew

I started way up high
And slowly drift down
Time is passing by
And I still act like a clown

The winds push me
In every direction
I just want to find the ground
Yet have so much left to see

I want to gaze into her eyes
And feel endless affection
I want to quiet my best friend's cries
And have her feel my loving protection

I'm falling faster now
I want to stop
I want to know how
I want back up top

I think I'll take a break
Right on this tree
I'll watch every other flake
Pass by me

CLARENCE MOTLEY

My Angel

Today I fell in love with an angel
Everything about her is so divine
I'm selfish
I refuse to share her with anybody
She's all mine

Today I fell in love with an angel
I thank God for sending her from the heavens above
To her I dedicate my undying love
To keep her happy, to protect her
I will shed blood

Today I fell in love with an angel
She's the reflection of everlasting protection
When I look into her eyes I see eternal bliss
When we're together, I yearn for her close ness
When we're apart, it's everything about her that I truly miss

Today I fell in love with an angel
And that angel is you!

PATRICK BAUCUM

Peace

Picture me, but not as I seem,
When I find time to myself I go through the most extraordinary things.
I seek peace during the struggle, always on my mind.
Peace... When I can't find it nowhere else I search within myself.
You can lock a man up, but you can't take his mind, for as long
as he maintains it, he can find peace, anywhere, anyplace, anytime.

Searching

Reach out - you feel nothing but space
There's still time to change your pace.
What do you do, while the skies are still blue?
I see rain, even a storm or two.

Take heed to these signs or they will take heed to you ...
You reap what you sow, so be careful what you do!

Follow your spirit, greed must not overtake you.
Take nothing for granted
Play close attention to the seeds that you've planted.
Blue skies or great storms await you --
Destiny is in your hands. I'm only trying to save you.

I Am

Who am I, why am I, what am I to do when I don't even know my name?
I am here, yet I don't know where I am.
Does anyone even care to know who I am when I don't even
know my name and my name doesn't know me?
But, what I do know is that no-one else wants to be who I am,
for I don't know who, nor what, I am to be. In the end,
I guess I'll just have to be me, whoever I am to be.
Although many will never know me I am ... Who I am and
whatever I am to be... I am, I am, I am.

JOEL SMITH

Head Up Look Sharp Joe

If I knew where I was...
I could easily find you...

If I knew who I was I...
Would surely be able to define you...

Do you remember what you told me
When your eyes were heavy?
Or do you need me to remind you?

Work hard at sitting up straight cuz
The world will recline you
Naw baby please don't oblige me
Cuz I can't wait to decline you.

Man let me stop playing...

I better keep my head up and look
Sharp before I try to refine you.

The Duality: "Bees and Honey"

If life is breathing then...
With each breath we die.

If the truth will set you free...
Why do you lie?

If laughing keeps you young...
Why should we cry?

If I strive to be free...
How do I find myself obsessed with money?

Why does everyone hate bees,
But we all love honey?

WAYNE JOYNER

Can't See the Light at the End of the Tunnel

Do you see it, because I sure don't?
Some will, some won't
Ain't it funny how easy it is to get all caught up,
Around all these so-called soldiers that really don't know what's up.
They say if you want to know your history as to how you got caught up,
Check how that dude who threw you, the one that set you up.
Then you'll understand that the light might not shine,
But that's okay, Study yourself and you'll be just fine.
I sometimes wonder is it all worth the stay,
If all we do is lay around all day and play.
Some of us know better and know what's up,
Those are the ones that will eventually shut the politicians up.
We are the ones that are trying never to come back to this place,
The ones that watch you sit around looking into space ... hold please, "what
a disgrace"
Don't make no difference just stay on point
And try to do your best to stay out of these joints.
This is something we shouldn't have to think about,
Automatically it's just something we should want, no doubt.
Sometimes it's good to sit back and reflect,
On all the changes for some that haven't figured it out yet,
Can you see that light at the end of the tunnel?"
I say this not to be mean or cruel,
But just to say aren't we tired of being the one taken to school.
We need to stay on top and stop falling by the wayside,
Stop listening to everybody's views they're only taking you for a ride.
So if you ever do see that light, I suggest you grab hold and hold on tight,
Cause your chances are limited before it's totally out of sight.
This is directed straight for you,
The ones that don't care about the light, cause that light, it don't care about
you.

WILLIAM GRAYSON

Class of 2011

Good afternoon to you, my sisters, and my brethren
This poem is for us, the class of two thousand eleven
We've rehearsed, studied, and tested for hour after hour
But, today we cash in, because now we've got the power
We came in not stupid or ignorant, but rather a people unlearned
I stand here as a living proof that the tables have definitely turned
Turned in a direction which has made us better than we were
Time has passed so fast that most of it is remembered as a blur
From this day forward, we will represent what to many others may seem strange
To sum it up in the term of our President, I'm talking about "Change"
A change in the way that we think, speak, and act
"Change" is good, and this is a well-known fact
The change in me is something that I will continue to prove
And, it will be proven through each and every calculated move
, This degree was a trial-run, but, I guess you can call it a test
A test to see if I could succeed at something while giving it my best
My best effort at doing something productive, legal, and right
Something that would elevate me, taking me to an all new height
It's like I'm climbing a mountain, struggling to reach the top
I'm nowhere near where you want to be, and I will not stop
I will continue on my journey until I get to where I want to be in life
A pious Muslim, a loving father to my kids, and a great husband to my wife
I encourage all in attendance to never stop until you reach your goals
But, you must know that the road is bumpy with a whole lot of holes
Don't let this deter you, slow you, or keep you off of your course
Let every obstacle and set-back be your motivation and driving force
With this being said, I offer you my cheers as I begin to clap
Now, if you're ready, Class of 2011, everybody toss your cap!

WILLIAM GRAYSON

Through the Fire

You have always been right by my side
Taking over the driver's seat, down for the ride

Enduring all of the obstacles along the bumpy road
Through the rain and sleet, and even when it snowed

Through the fire, you never hesitated to lay it all on the line
During the dullest of times, you've still maintained your shine

Through the fire, you never hesitated to maintain the lead role
For your bravery, I now offer to you my heart, and my soul

Through the fire, I'm certain that we'll make the best of teams
And we will prove that this fire isn't as fierce as it seems

Through the fire, we will conquer and douse this blaze
We will live happily, together, for the rest of our days

Through the fire that we've put out, we will start one of our own
A burning desire for each other like no one else has ever known

And through the fire, we will destroy everything that gets in our path
No one or thing except God will match our love and its wrath

Through this fire, we will always be able to maintain our form
By knowing that calm and ease comes after each and every storm

PALMER STEPHENS

Innuendo

I fell in love with you that morning when you woke me without warning.
I was dreaming I was camping.
I pitched a tent, you brought the fire.

I was drowning in your deep blue pools.
Your mouth to mouth saved this fool.
I was wet and shaking.
You grabbed the log and stoked the fire higher.
Innuendo.

I'm so glad we met, that day at the vet.
You looked away and told me you liked my doggie's style.
I saw you then pet your hairless cat, then knew right then that that was
that.
The map to your heart made me stop with a start,
As we proved an inch equals a mile.
Innuendo.

I am a known cunning linguist, and my listeners sometimes get pissed
and try to tell me exactly where to go.
But, it's hard for me not to please, when you come on your knees,
and tell me that you like it.
Innuendo.

It's my hope one day that someone will pay.
Buy some tickets to come and see a show.
Because in the short time it takes to read this rhyme,
everyone will know I do it best when I do it
Innuendo.



Visual Art



MARY DICKEY

Untitled Photograph (1)



MARY DICKEY

Untitled Photograph (2)



MARY DICKEY

Untitled Photograph (3)



DUSTIN CRUTCHFIELD

Autumn Fence



BRIANNA KLEMA

Untitled Drawing (1)



BRIANNA KLEMA

Untitled Drawing (2)



MEGAN LYNNETTE ROLLINS

Duality



MEGAN LYNNETTE ROLLINS

Look Mom, No Hands



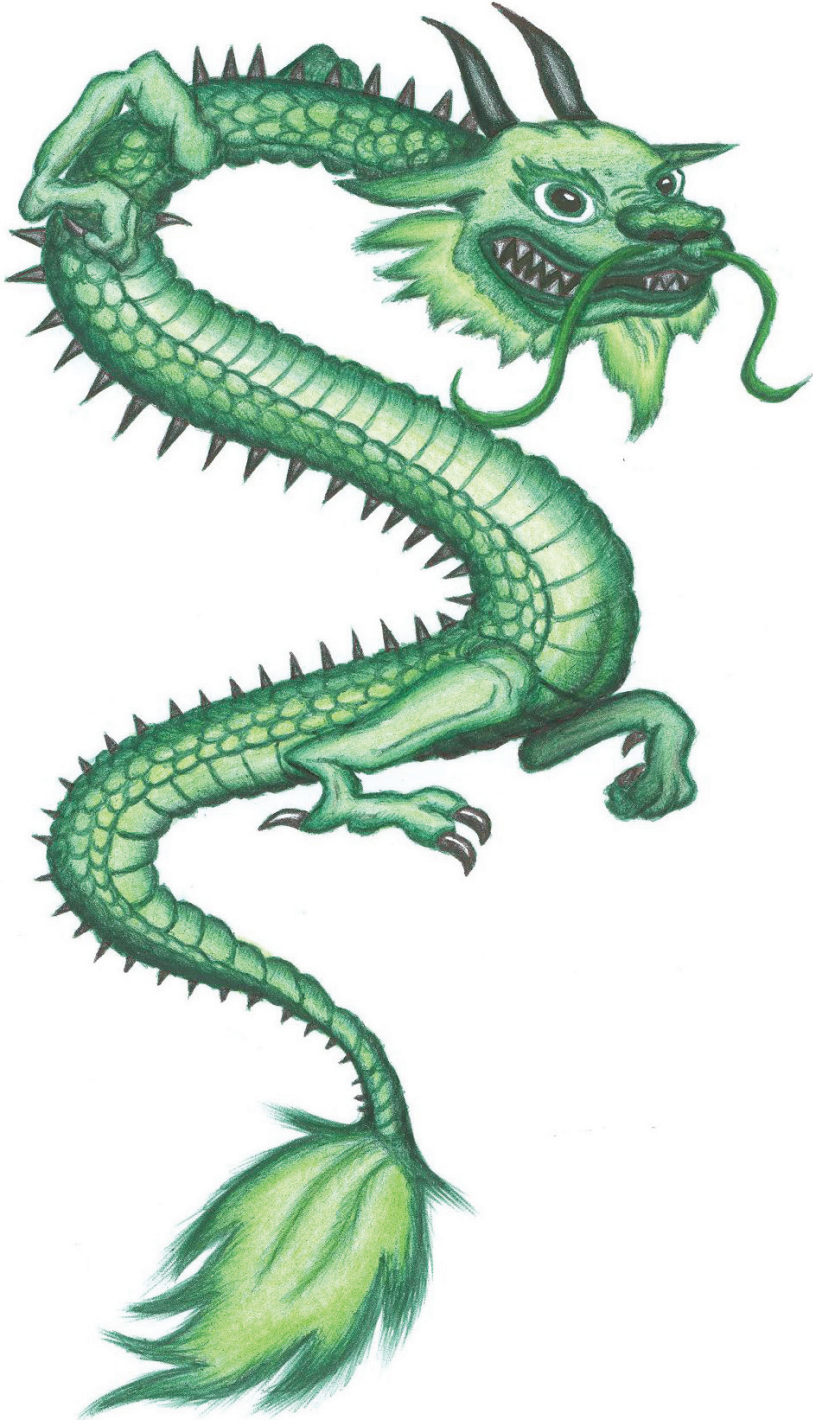
MEGAN LYNNETTE ROLLINS

Frozen



MIKE SMITH

Dragon



ROSE JOHNSON

Untitled Photograph (1)



ROSE JOHNSON

Untitled Photograph (2)



ROSE JOHNSON

Untitled Photograph (3)



CLAYTON WATTS

Gangsta Picture



MARY SKIDMORE

Untitled Photograph (1)



MARY SKIDMORE

Untitled Photograph (2)



MARY SKIDMORE

Untitled Photograph (3)



SARA WISE

Untitled Photograph (1)



SARA WISE

Untitled Photograph (2)



SARA WISE

Untitled Photograph (3)



SARAH NORMANT

Visual Dreamer



SARAH NORMANT

Moonlight Love

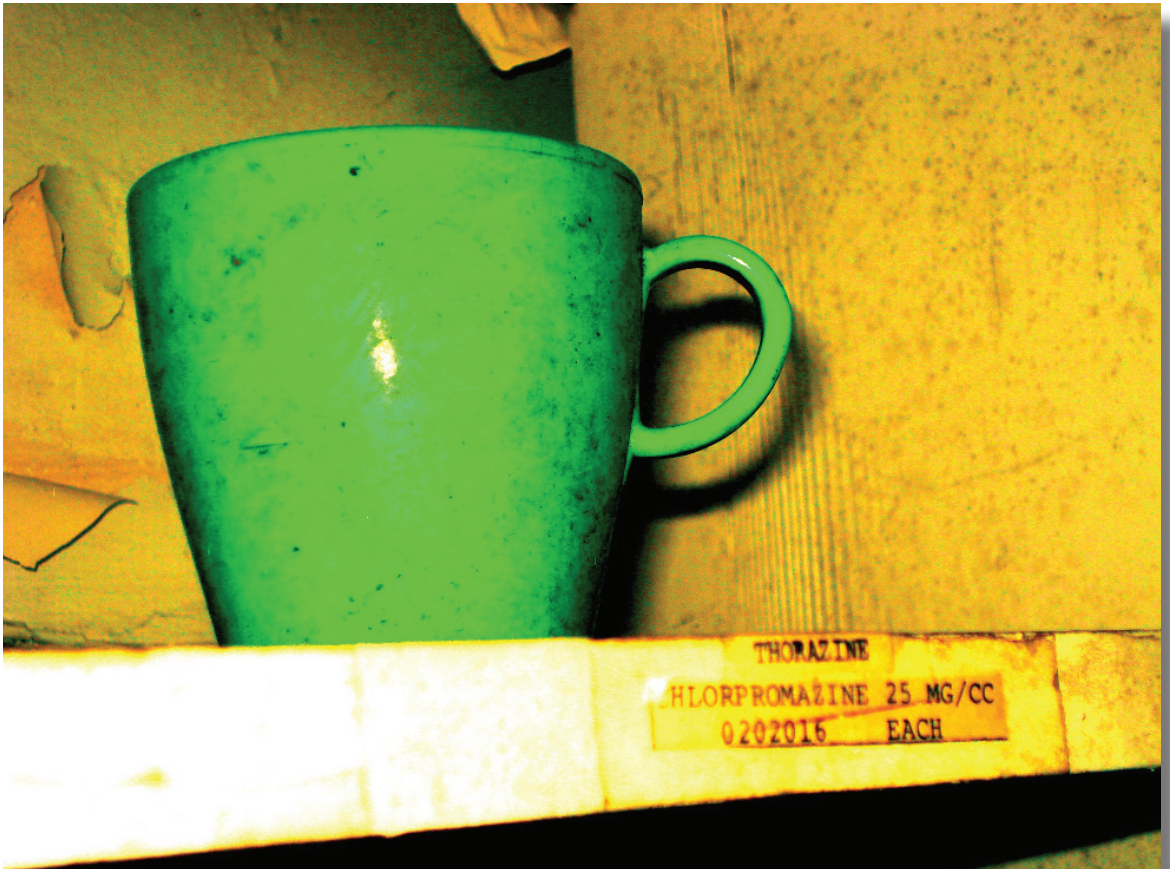


WHITNEY STALNAKER

Untitled Photograph (1)



WHITNEY STALNAKER
Untitled Photograph (2)



WHITNEY STALNAKER

Untitled Photograph (3)



JADE NICHOLS

Untitled Photograph (1)



JADE NICHOLS

Untitled Photograph (2)



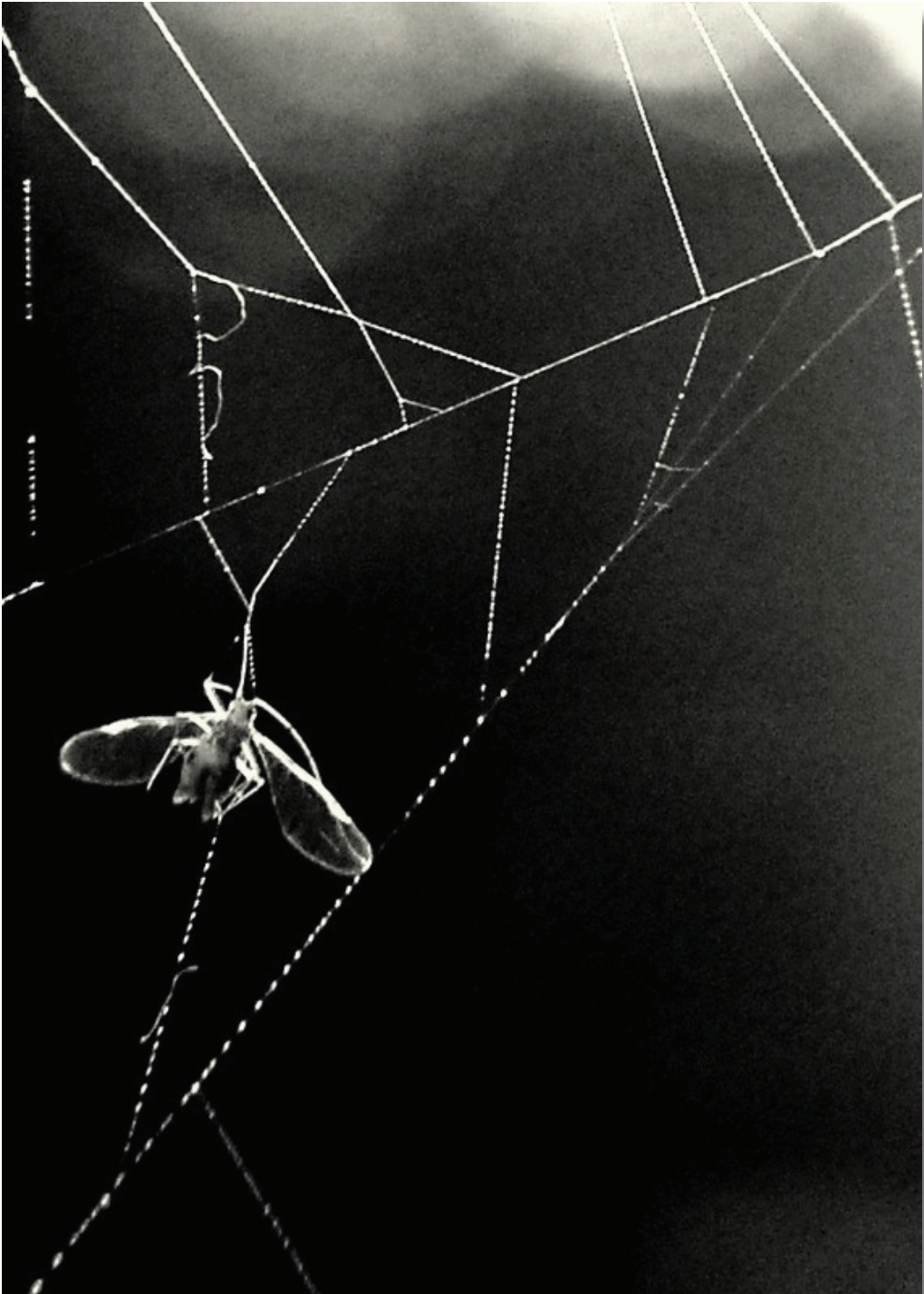
JADE NICHOLS

Untitled Photograph (3)



BRITTANY MCGUIRE

Untitled Photograph (1)



BRITTANY MCGUIRE

Untitled Photograph (2)



BRITTANY MCGUIRE

Untitled Photograph (3)





CHASE BALLARD

Waiting

The moon is full, casting down its glow to all those brave enough to walk the streets of the dark city. All was quiet and deserted, only the wind howled to the wardens of the nights' own solace. The concrete is pitted and worn with the footsteps of a thousand tales retold in new ways with every generation. A storm drain drinks up the wash-out from the storm and any remnants of the brief rain is forgotten, remembered only by those who had seen it before.

A streetlight shown down on a corner, red and blue, and a man stood as if deciding, which would be his fate. Is he waiting? He is young and worn by sleepless days and relentless nights. In his coat is his only source of warmth, a bottle and a peace of iron. He waits perhaps on a man, someone from his past. An old score to settle with an old friend, like the pagan warriors of old, a duel at dawn? Maybe it's a woman, the kind you just can't walk away from, trouble right from the start. A ticking time bomb just waiting for a guy to stumble into the pin. Or was she the spider, all web and lies endlessly stitching and sewing her patterns of guilt and deceit over a broken past. Is she running or maybe she is just the fly, an innocent irresistible lure.

But who is he this man of blue and red, is it reckoning or duty that drives him? A soft click trails its way down the darkened street. Only one light dares to glow at this late hour, it saunters out of the darkness, a ghost of the mourning star, with the agonizing slowness only a woman is capable of. Her dress is expensive, the kind worn only to weddings and funerals.

"You look good... hot date?" the man asks, his voice thin and strained. Yet the shadows still draw him, perhaps she is not the one, just one in a million of the dark city. Or is it the one that followed her that the man stands so quietly for, waiting and straining for the deafening roar of a steel hammer?

"Waiting for him right now," she speaks with a slow seductive voice and smiles. Is it the grin of a wolf or the grin of a fox? The void between them is endless, yet the emptiness serves to bind them, a blackened sun to spiral down. She reaches into her bag quietly rummaging. He tenses, while a hand strays into his coat.

"Must be one hell of a guy to have a girl like you waiting on him at this time of night."

She sighs and pulls out a cigarette, he pauses lost in thought and offers her his lighter.

“One of a kind,” she breathed deeply from the night air, the cigarette forgotten, “not another man like him in the whole parish.”

“Can’t say I’m not a little jealous.” He looks at her for the first time, relaxing against the lamp post. The man closes his eyes and sighs. It’s the sigh of a man sentenced to death so long expected, or maybe it’s sentenced to life so long awaited.

“I know it’s you... the clothes and that getup won’t hide your scent. Not from me and not from them,” he stares at her, the dark lines and shadows deepening as he steps into the light.

“Maybe... but it’s my life and I’m going to live it the way I choose.” The cigarettes almost gone now, a line of ash sits below on the stones. She looks down at it in silence, as if mulling over whether to take the final drag or just let it burn away. “I won’t let you or him rule me anymore.” She flicks the butt into the drain, eyes set firmly with her decision.

“They’ll hunt you down, the Gray Dragon is not a forgiving man, and neither is his new mistress.”

“Goodbye Taggart,” she whispers to the night. He looks away, into the shadows again. He hears the soft click of her heels as she walks away again. She won’t get four blocks, he knows it and she knows it but those four blocks of freedom are worth any hell the syndicate could put her through. Regret, she’d have none of that. Her damned pride would always get in the way. But did he have any regrets? The man under the lamplight could have followed after her; he could have gone away with her casting all to the wayside for the irrepressible freedom she was always wistfully sighing about.

A soft clicking noise rang against the stone behind him, the sound of high heels and asphalt, the sound of a pretty girl waiting impatiently for you to make your move, the sound of time ticking away like falling stones. The man cast a tentative glance behind him.

A deafening roar fills the night as fire erupts from the storm-drain, moments pass in ringing silence. The man doesn’t move.

He stands in the lamplight of the Old-Parish like a dog that’s forgotten its only good trick. A faint casting of plastik and burnt flesh taints the air, wafting up with exhaust of the sidewalks.

The man takes a step, not looking back.

KEVIN PAUL GIORDANO

The Girl Whose Mother Became Her

Once there was a girl whose mother became her.

It happened one day, just an ordinary day, when the mother walked into their house with a bag of groceries. Her name was Florida, and she had long wavy brown hair and always wore a red suit jacket and black slacks. She had a set of keys that had many things dangling from them, like a rubber emblem from the local bank, and a mini Dr. Seuss plastic doll, and a yellow metal whistle for the dog, and a long silver chain to hang on things. She never had trouble taking her keys out of the front door after she unlocked it but on this particular day, for no reason at all that can be discerned, she had trouble getting the key out of the door, so much trouble that the keys made a jangling sound and the dog, Manfred, came pounding down the stairs barking and wagging its tail. Fortunately, she got the key out of the lock before Manfred could run out, not that he would because he was a faithful Golden Retriever that had been in the family for seven years. So Florida closed the door hard and called out, "Marta? I'm home. Come down here." Marta was Florida's daughter.

Meanwhile, Marta was up in her room putting her hair up with a pencil and then spraying it so it would hold, pointing it different directions and with frayed frizzy ends that she scrunched her face at. She wore a gray boy's T-shirt and white-and-pink panties, and she was all of 13 years old, and hated everything. When she heard her mother's voice she shifted weight from one leg to the other and tilted her head to the other side and rolled her eyes to the side as if there was a song on that made her want to do all this, when really in fact, she was disgruntled and annoyed that her mother was home. Marta came down the stairs looking just the same except she threw on a pair of gray sweatpants. Florida looked up the stairs and carrying dry cleaning, she waved her daughter into the kitchen.

Florida had been divorced three years and Marta saw her father, Guido, on the weekends. He was not her real father; he was her stepfather whom Florida had once dated, but he sufficed as an older man for Marta to go see and feel as though she had a father. The whereabouts of Marta's real father are entirely unknown by me, as well as Florida and Marta.

With Marta in the kitchen, Florida prepared to tell her what she needed to tell her. There was not any build up and there was no preliminary discussion. Florida had something to say and she was just going to say it.

Marta slid onto a metal stool next to the island in the kitchen, which had the sink and a stove and room for a cutting board and above which were pots and pans hanging on silver rack.

"Honey," Florida said. "Mommy is going for a ride."

"Yeah," Marta said, in lackluster tone while she examined her split ends.

"Mommy is going for a ride and not coming back," Florida repeated and added some more information.

“Okay. So what do you want me to do?”

“Just stay here. Do nothing.”

Marta rolled her eyes, twisted on the metal chair and said, “Is that it then?”

“Yes, that’s it.”

Marta slid off the chair and pounded her naked feet on the hard wood floors and pounded all the way up the stairs.

After Marta left the kitchen, Florida stood for a moment with a satisfied and deviously happy smile. She then burst into a semblance of joy and bounced on her feet like a cheerleader.

A few minutes later Florida made her way up the stairs dressed in black riding boots, a riding jacket, tight white leotard pants, and holding a jockey’s whip. She was planning to go horseback riding, English style. She was enormously pleased with herself. In fact, she had never been so happy. Not even her wedding day seven years before. Life, it seemed, had reached its peak.

“How do I look?” Florida said, standing in the doorway of her daughter’s room. Marta was standing just the same, in front of the mirror, arranging her hair up. The girl scrunched her face and opened her mouth, exposing a yellowish set of braces and then said, “What is that?”

“A horse riding outfit.”

“Is that what you meant by going for a ride.”

“Yes. I’m going horseback riding.”

Marta was about to ask another question but then shook her head and said, “Never mind.”

“Don’t you like it?” Florida asked.

“Yeah, mom,” Marta said.

Slightly saddened, Florida turned back down the hallway and walked straight toward a ceramic white vase with flowers in it and whipped the vase hard. It cracked the vase, water spilled out, and then it fell to the floor with a crash. Marta came running out to look. She let out a gasp and looked askance at her mother. Florida only turned around and smiled, her lips glistening with freshly applied red lipstick.

That next morning at dawn, Florida was horseback riding. She galloped along with perfect technique down a long stretch of land in a town somewhere in Ohio. (I don’t know exactly the name of the town nor do I know exactly where in Ohio, nor do I know how she got from Virginia, where she and her daughter lived, to Ohio, but Ohio it was.) And she galloped along wearing a blue blazer riding jacket and a black helmet and white britches and black boots and holding a whip. She wore the biggest prettiest smile and it was as though she reversed her age, because she looked ten years younger.

The galloping and moving with the horse was something altogether new and unusual for her, but she went with it like a pro. At the far side of the path where she was galloping stood a man in a gray pair of overalls that were covered in grease and oil. He was wiping his hands as he watched her gallop.

He had just come from the bottom of a car that he was working on, in his ramshackle rundown backyard, and the car was a 1950s white Ford that he was restoring and trying to get back on the road. "Sarah," he yelled. "Sarah. Pull on the reins," he called to Florida. Florida had told the man her name was Sarah, which was her real first name, her middle name being Florida. She had given up her first name for her first husband because he liked calling her Florida, but now that she was divorced and free, she could go back to her real name. And so the man called her that, Sarah. And he said, "If you want to make him turn, pull the reins." And for certain Florida would have to make the horse turn because she was getting close to the end of the farm and the flat land and coming to the edge of a forest, or at least lots of trees. As Florida approached the edge of the farm, and it being late fall and the trees being naked, Florida could see inside the forest and she saw a giant black shadow, like a giant black ghost, hovering in the trees. It was so striking that she pulled on the horse's reins and came to a complete stop. The black shadow with clear white slits for eyes and a giant mouth that licked and was hungry was obviously waiting for her. "Is it a bear," she said to herself aloud. "It must be a bear." She turned around and yelled as loud as she could to the man in the overalls who was at least a hundred yards away. "There's a bear in the woods!"

The man in the overalls, Oliver, waved her on to keep going. "Keep going," as if he didn't hear what she said.

"Keep going?" she asked worriedly.

"Yes, keep going. It's fine. It's alright."

She didn't think it was alright. There was a giant black thing in the woods licking its lips at her, how could that be fine. But she trusted the mechanic, who called himself Henry, but whose name she was Oliver because that was the name she wrote the check out to pay him for his teaching her how to ride and lending her his farmland to ride on. She went forward slowly into the woods, still sitting on horseback and holding the reins loosely in her hands.

So Florida approached cautiously but steadily. It seemed to her that it was part of going horseback riding, to walk in the woods, and that she could not miss the opportunity. But something enormously strange began to happen as she approached the edge of the farm and the start of the woods. The horse, which was a white horse with a somewhat black freckled face, started to walk in place. It took Florida almost a minute or so to notice it, that the horse was doing this, because although she was giving the horse a little nudge in the rump and tossing the reins up and down gently to let the horse know to keep moving, the horse, though still moving, was not advancing. When Florida noticed this, that they were just treading water so to speak and not moving forward, she looked at the horse and thought, this can't be happening. The horse is walking in place. She let out a little laugh because she didn't think a thing was possible, for a horse to walk in place, almost like a soldier. She promptly got off the horse and when she did, she noticed the horse stopped pacing in place and stood still and shook its head as if happy with the results. "Clearly," Florida said, "you didn't want to go into those woods."

She looked the horse dead in its left eye as she said this and then stroked its nose. She calmed him down and looked again into the woods. The big black ghost or creature or bear, or whatever exactly it was, then started to recede into the forest. "He must know we're not going in," Florida said. The horse threw up its head high as if in agreement. "You're a smart horse," she said. Then she looked back toward the farm and toward where the mechanic was and she saw that he was back to work on the car and jacking it up, and she also noticed that the sun had gone down and it was getting dark. She petted the horse's nose as she did this and then decided to walk back, holding the horse's reins in hand.

She walked back slowly, straight through the main acreage of the farm and not on the oval where the horse ran earlier. She walked straight ahead.

I don't know where Florida ended up after that because it seems that the closer she got to the house where the mechanic was working on the car, the more she turned into a beautiful woman who was wearing a near see through white robe and there was fog around and it was as if she were no longer in Ohio or even in this world but another altogether. And the horse didn't even seem to be the same horse. It was now brown. Perhaps this was Florida's own dream of herself and the escape that she sought. Perhaps we won't know.

As for Florida's daughter, Marta, she continued to fix her hair every afternoon in front of the mirror but from time to time and as she grew older, she came to spend her time dreaming of going horseback riding.

CYNTHIA B. ACORD

Another Five Pill Morning

The street became a clogged artery, people clustered together, and looking up. For as long as I can remember about the ordeal, a whole seven minutes, I wanted him to jump. People previously scattering across pavement, rushing, hurriedly trying to make it to a deadline someone had set for them, had come to a stop, as if the few moments they spent being nosey would somehow be mistaken for genuine care and make a miserable stranger think this world really does give a damn about him. I suppose he was tired of deadlines, tired of rules, tired of life, tired of the loudness. When no one else was looking I swear he looked right at me, from the 23 story distance between us, I saw him psychologically throw up his hands and proclaim, "I'm done."

He was no longer a cross-legged boy on Christmas morning. He would never again wear a hero's cape at the end of another October. A pony faster than all his friends was no longer top priority for him. Fishing trips had become a lost art. Nothing mattered because nothing matters.

His navy blue tie wagged like the devil's tongue licking his pitiful face, encouraging his conscious with each shred of the powerful wind. Dirty vagrants, druggies would have snatched anything on his body worth another bottle, another high right after impact, so he chose to leave his gold band for the medical examiner who would chalk up his unfortunate death as "a shame" and leave him toe tagged and bagged in the cooler for the following day so his wife wouldn't bitch at his missing dinner ... again. His wedding ring no doubt was nestled somewhere in his belly, amidst alcohol and the remnants of another five pill morning. He was nearly set.

As his breathing became shallow and his thoughts raced to the finish, we, the crowd below, with the exception of myself, became more obnoxious. People were yelling at this man, telling him he had more to live for. They told him nothing could ever be that bad. They kept cell phones clutched to their ears and mouths ready to report to a friend or family member the moment he stepped off the ledge. Then they could pretend to feel sorry for him. Then they would praise themselves for having such a normal family; no one they know would ever do this. They would have only seconds to give the full details before his teeth littered the pavement and they asked themselves why in the hell they watched a man take his own life.

The point is, they were loud and obnoxious. The spectators of a middle aged man's failed life were unbearably loud. Children crying, grown women gasping, men whispering under their breaths, begging, pleading, bargaining, asking, praying, forgiving, forgetting, vowing different approaches on life, it really became unbearable. Why does everyone have to be so damn loud? I found myself frustrated with the man on the building. I looked at him and silently asked him to jump, please jump, so everyone will be quiet.

MEGAN LYNNETTE ROLLINS

The Stranger on My Doorstep

It had been a little over a month since we parted ways. When I said goodbye I meant it and she said nothing in return. She just stood there in silence, arms folded, eyebrows raised, face puckered into a bitter scowl. After everything we'd been through, this time she wasn't coming with me. I got in the car, alone, left her there, in the sleazy ditch on the side of the road, and never looked back. Losing someone like that is both dreadful and liberating.

Today was the first day that I was really allowed to be myself, by myself; re-learning how to live is like telling the same story twice, only giving it a better ending than before. I had made plans to sit in the sun and start a journal. Since signing on for reclamation I've discovered that my plans should be highly modifiable.

As soon as I felt ready for my tiny adventure, my breathing quickened like I was being chased causing my heart to flutter, where butterflies ought not to be. I thought it best maybe to sit in the shade instead, and I needn't look any further than what darkened my door.

We just stared at each other for a while. I felt a little foolish for my gawking—by no means am I a perfect hostess. My tears came hot and greeting but my body was hesitant; what progress one can make after such a bleak summer! New patterns laid in my mind were keeping me sharp and aware of falling. But gravity reasoned that I fall in such a way that was to turn the knob and open the door against my better judgment. I resembled her still—or did she resemble me?

My eyes were swimming pools of sorrow and confusion, boiling with a soul, liquefied and leaking. I was not so deeply removed from my place holding open the door to fail to take account of her demeanor. Though, if I were her, I wouldn't have been happy to see me either. For seven years I gave her a place to thrive. I let her suck the life out of me until nothing was left except for the ache of despair; pain replaced being able to function. She was never present for the multiple trips to the emergency room; she lingered at home, waiting for my return, waiting to start all over again. Now I was the one issuing the neglect. I was trying to purge my life of her instead of my own life from me. But she had been my life, hadn't she? Just why hadn't she stayed gone?

She walked back.

Part of me couldn't believe that I was letting her in the house: the same house where I had removed all of her I could find. Part of her wasn't gone. Part of her was still me. Her appearance struck me as frightening. Struck

me like a hard blow to the chest. Stung like an open wound, but the wounds were now scars—scars on my heart and all the other soft tissues of my body, the erosion of my teeth, the thinning of my hair—and they are all mine!

I offered to her to sit down, but not on the nice couch. I had her sit on a chair in the kitchen, plain wood, much like my mother did to me when I was five and would come into her clean house covered head-to-toe in grass and dirt. The raging tide of adolescence would have been a welcomed sight, had I known what it was. I am ashamed that I cannot remember where I left that five year old little girl. Or the girl of eight, nine, and ten; I only remember the girl of eleven, who made a secret friend, one who claimed faithfulness to an end. I didn't much pay attention to the diction of her words; only thought it might be wonderful not to be so alone. She separated the continents of the world and all the societies within them.

She was bent on being here, but what had taken her so long to crawl back? I shuddered with the possibility of allowing myself to imagine what she had been doing all this time. Without me she sat there emaciated. Avoiding the questions I had, I pulled a mug from the cabinet to make tea. Ignoring her had never worked before, never made things easier, made her stand up from her chair and come to embrace me once more. I rolled my shoulders and sneezed; repelling her accidentally with the weakened immune system she gifted me with last year. She stiffened and retracted, mellowing beside the island bar overlooking the dining room. Without her breathing down my neck I hunted for a vitamin C, housed in the same cabinet I had turned to a month ago, nestled beside the same purgative that I emptied in the same manner daddy changed the oil in the car. I realized then that the bottle was hollow, it was gone, it was a shell, a warning not to pull the zipper on my heart and stuff her back inside.

“What have you done to me,” she murmured under her breath, a breath so deep it expanded in her lungs allowing me to count all of her cervical and thoracic vertebra.

I threw my tea bag away. The day I met her, she was beautiful, a Miss America type; strong and full of wisdom with a smile. I did not see that day, what I saw before me then, the deformed ideal I beheld, retractable claws out to play.

“I got rid of you.”

“How dare you,” she stood shouting, arms gesticulating obvious irritation, “and after all we've been through!”

All that you put me through.

“I heard that,” she screamed.

I considered her claim. Here she was, in a rather unwelcomed manner and to top it off she was sitting in my kitchen, showing that she still had the gall to speak to me. Or maybe she was trying to prove that I was, and still am, a very weak human being. I stirred honey into my tea. The two of us together, what a stark contrast there was, and yet we were the same person.

“I’ve been through Hell,” she stated, demonic in her tone, a serpent-like hiss that prodded its way outward from her lips like the tines on a fork, “I hope all of that goes to your thighs!” Sipping carefully I wondered if it had been a literal hell. Now that was something I could believe; I mean, it was what she deserved, or at least it was her address. I would come near saying that whatever hell she went through was simply the hell she raised herself. Beauty transferred itself to my ability to think on my own.

“Shut-up!”

Forehead wrinkled, which I mentioned wasn’t very becoming, and lower lip quivering she stood as if to receive my tongue lashing. How was it that I’d allowed her to anastomose into the world that only I occupied? With my back turned, I left the room, made a left down the hallway. With my back turned she lurched forward and grabbed me.

And then I broke.

“Leave me alone,” I cried. It was a battle of bone against ... my flesh, my muscle. I jerked free and heard the snapping sound that only bone makes. Tears welled in my eyes once more. The fragile body of my torment dissolved as like salt to water and was seen no more.

I bolted from the house, bare feet tearing up the lawn as I darted for the swing-set. There heartache became aqueous as it streamed down my face. Into my mouth came a drop with a plaintive taste, a taste of brine, one of the bitterest reminders of my destructive allegiance.

MELISSA GISH AND ADRIAN PATTERSON

Teeth

The old man lived near town. Folks saw him at Kerr's Grocery maybe once a month. He always bought cabbage—lots of cabbage. He smelled like boiled cabbage. He came into town riding a big tricycle. It had a basket wired onto the back that was lined with oiled cardboard and rags. When he bought cabbage, the old man would wrap the heads individually in the rags, like he was packing china cups. Sometimes a javelina followed him into town. It would sit next to the tricycle while the old man was in the store. When he was a boy, Jimmy Rickerson and some other kids once approached the javelina and tried to coax it with some beef jerky. The pig stood up, grunting. At first the kids thought it would take their offering; instead it lunged at Jimmy, teeth bared and head swinging. Jimmy stumbled and fell to the ground, beef jerky clenched in a scraped fist. The pig stopped short, huffing. The other kids didn't wait around to see what would happen next; they ran away. Jimmy remained frozen as the javelina stepped up to his face. The boy could smell the pig's breath and held his own, waiting for the pig's enormous teeth to sink into his cheek or his chin or his eyeball. He imagined going to school with a missing eyeball. Would they make him wear dark glasses? Would they make him wear a patch over the empty socket? He clenched his eyes shut, and for a long time he sat on the ground next to the huffing javelina. And then he heard the tinkling of a bell as the front door of Kerr's swung open. Jimmy unlocked one eyelid and watched as the old man pulled four cabbages, one by one, from a plastic bag, wrapping each of the giant green gems in a dirty rag and packing it into the basket on the back of the tricycle. The whole time Jimmy felt the javelina's breath on his face. He opened his other eye and, peeking sideways, again saw the teeth: longer than his longest finger, they glistened like those of a grizzly bear, a great white shark, a tyrannosaurus rex—all of the ferocious animals that Jimmy had ever seen in books or on TV—and the boy stared at these teeth mere inches from his face. Then the old man mounted his tricycle and began to peddle away. The javelina leaned toward Jimmy for a moment, a slender string of drool dangling from its lower lip—and then it snatched the beef jerky from Jimmy's hand and turned away to follow the old man down the street. These days, every now and then, Jimmy's kids ask him to tell this story, and when he does, they remember to carry beef jerky—just in case.

JAMIE STANLEY

Not Here

I have never looked forward to the holidays. My family hasn't gathered in one set place for years. It was always community centers or parks, or houses of aunts and uncles whose names are foreign and forgettable to me. We would never stay long, not even for a full meal. Dinners weren't a family thing, even on Christmas. The entire experience of a family gathering is shallow and brief at best. Especially now. Hands are touched, faces close together and whispering as if we were afraid to be heard. My aunt's face, its texture tough and lined with decades of worry, tight with apprehension at the sight of us, always leaning in cautiously, her small voice lilting with an accent I can no longer place: "It must be difficult." They all make this assumption.

It was difficult, at first. Mom couldn't take it in those long, speechless weeks afterwards. She began to drink heavily, her eyes bleary and half-closed to reality, her gait awkward and off-balance. An odor not unlike a pub floor hung around her shoulders like a cape. It's how I know her now. Her long pianist fingers, calloused and dirty, curl their way around mine as she shifts her weight from one foot to the other. She looks sidelong at my aunt and nods mutely. I squeeze her hand, but I doubt she could feel it. I'm glad I drove.

I stand with my mother, listening to the hushed voices, the cacophony of forks and knives hitting good china, the sound of a new cousin crying from another room. Eventually, someone takes it upon themselves to find out the source of her discomfort. I don't investigate. We're only here for a moment. My sister has a paper plate of food wrapped in Saran Wrap; we never stay very long, so we grab enough to be polite. We are always invited but never really welcome. Not after what happened to Dad. I feel that they blame us for what happened, that we drove him to do what he had done.

Sometimes, I agree.

My father was a genius. I will always remember how focused he was on his projects; his drive was tangible, palpable, his state of being always there. I could always feel his presence a few rooms away: strikingly masculine and fierce, but never intimidating; noticeable, but never overpowering. I still feel his absence acutely. The loss of my father is more extensive than he was. It was as if my father had collapsed on himself, like a dying star, and what he was became dense, unfathomably heavy... and hungry. His absence draws everything into its blackened maw, crushing whatever it can get into pin-points. Devoured by non-existence. I hold my hand over my stomach, feeling that awful absence once again, feeling it crush. My mother hiccups. It's time to go.

My sister helps my mother into the backseat, putting her plate of food on her lap. She instructs her to not crush it. I am not sure if Mom heard her. We pull out of the driveway, into the icy street. The car is silent.

“It was that thing,” Mom says after a while.

“What thing?” I ask, carefully boarding the onramp. When it is safe, I glance at my mother’s pale, drawn face. She stares out of the window.

“Dad.”

“He’s dead, Mom.” I watch a truck pass us, wondering where he was going in such a hurry.

“I know. I’m not stupid. I’m not saying it was a ghost or anything. That’s ridiculous. Just...his...Not-Here.” I couldn’t call that awful feeling anything more fitting. She seems to collapse on herself, and for a moment, I wonder if she’s finally being consumed by that thing...that previously nameless thing that is and isn’t. She sighs and lights a cigarette before cracking the window, her eyes already far away again.

“The food is going to smell like smoke, Mom,” my sister complains.

We settle into the living room, the television softly moaning, words crashing and slurring together about a train wreck somewhere in the Midwest. The anchor’s face looks inhuman, buried beneath layers of television makeup, melting under studio lights, becoming a monster mask. His eyes move subtly, reading from a teleprompter. I hate watching the news. Mom pours a drink and sits opposite of the empty recliner.

That was my father’s chair. There’s something sitting in it. Or, rather, nothing sitting in it—that’s the problem. It’s the Not-Here. The empty space mocks me and I feel nauseous, my teeth bearing, my hand clenching into a fist at my midsection. Mom drinks and smokes, eyes glued to the screen, murmuring softly to herself about those poor people who died in the wreck.

Fuck those people. I can’t summon any sympathy for anyone but myself at this moment. Dad is gone, and his Not-Here won’t get out of that chair.

Later in the week, I take the chair out into the backyard and burn it. It helps that there is no place for the Not-Here to sit.

Eventually, the Not-Here will die, like Dad, finally exhausting its resources, and it will come to be the Was-Here. A Was-Here is better than a Not-Here, because it’s not just an empty space: it was a space where something used to be. A Was-Here is filled with happy, fond memories; you knew something existed there before, like moving a book from the shelf. There is space left behind for you to slide the book back. You know that person existed—Dad existed, he was here instead of just not here. He exists still, just not where he existed before. Something can be put in that space.

Someday, I will look at where my father used to be and smile. He had a space where he could slide back in. It will be his Was-Here. We may eventually fill that space with something else, instead of having it taken up with Not-Here. He was here, but now there is something else: good memories, love...maybe something else.

He was here.

GARY Z. MORRIS

The Hunt

The boy awoke early in the morning. He was with his grandfather and was excited to be on his first hunting trip. He was actually going to hold a real gun, maybe even kill a deer. The boy's grandfather had been hunting since he was a boy and had taught his sons how to hunt when they were young. Now he was going to teach his grandson how to use a gun and kill an animal. It was a windy and chilly morning, the air was damp, and the sky was still dark. At the camp site there were still coals burning where the previous night's supper had been cooked, deer steaks.

They left camp before the sun cast its first ray and worked their way through tall grass and thick brush. It was so quiet all the boy could hear was the rapid beat of his heart and the rustle of the grass as they walked through it. The early morning moon cast shadows on trees and brush, shadows that looked like animals stalking the boy and his grandfather as they walked deeper into the woods. As they walked the boy proudly carried a 0.22 rifle; not strong enough to kill a large animal at long distance but good enough to kill something small up close. When they reached the blind in which they would hide and wait for a deer to walk by, they climbed in, sat down, and waited. They sat and waited until the sun reached the highest point of the day. Not one deer went by in all that eternal time, time during which the boy had sat quietly, looking at the brush and trees around them, hoping for a deer to come by, wondering when it would happen. The boy and his grandfather went back to camp to get lunch and returned to the blind in the early afternoon. They sat there until it started getting dark again; dusk started casting new shadows, robbing them of any hope for a kill.

Then it happened. They saw a deer standing in the open. It was too far for the boy's rifle. The grandfather had to use his rifle with its telescopic scope. The grandfather aimed, released the rifle's safety, held steady, squeezed slowly, and fired a single shot. The rifle's sound rang throughout the entire valley, briefly deafening the boy. The deer dropped on the spot. The boy was so excited to see the dead deer he ran all the way to it, leaving his grandfather behind. There in the grass lay the deer on its side, bleeding from the bullet wound, not moving. It was a beautiful animal. The first deer the boy had seen up-close. Its fur was golden brown and shined in the last rays of the day. Its underside was covered in cotton-white fur from neck to tail.

The deer's eyes were the most beautiful and innocent eyes the boy had ever seen. When the boy moved closer to touch the deer's fur coat, the deer budged and started its struggle against death. The boy's grandfather stepped up to the deer and cut its throat with a single stroke of his sharp knife. The deer started bleeding pure, clean, red blood from its throat onto the green grass and stopped struggling.

“It is too skinny; somebody shot off its jaw; it couldn’t eat,” said the grandfather. They both turned from the deer and walked back to camp under the dark sky; the boy fell behind, almost dragging his gun.

* * * * *

The boy, now a man and a father, was excited to be taking his son hunting. They had both, father and son, shared ideas about how they would shoot the deer, how many deer they would shoot, and how much meat they would get from each deer. The father now had a rifle, with a telescopic scope, powerful enough to bring down a deer at a fair distance. For two weeks they followed the same routine: each day they awoke early in the morning, went hunting, and stayed out until the sky turned red as the sun set behind the hills. Each day they returned home empty handed. For two weeks the father and his son had walked through snow, rain, mud, and over steep slopes covered in rock and gravel looking for the perfect shot. Each time they saw a deer, it was either too far, between trees, or running away before they could ready their rifle. The son was getting impatient; he wanted to shoot a deer. He wanted to be able to tell his friends about the deer he and his father had shot and have a good story to go with the meal prepared from the deer’s meat. The father had told his son his story, the story of hunting with his grandfather when he was a boy, of the starving deer with its jaw shot off that his grandfather had killed. But the son did not think about this story, he only thought about shooting a deer.

On the last day of the season the father and his son were returning from yet another day without a deer when the father suggested to his son that they check one last spot. The son, though disheartened, was still eager for the hunt to continue, so he agreed. As they reached the spot the father saw deer. He grabbed the rifle and loaded it as they quietly approached the herd. They got as close as they dared without startling them. The father counted at least four deer. The son eagerly pointed them out, anticipating the shot, the kill, the story, and the victory after waiting so long. It would be a long uphill shot into a wooded area. The father’s shaking hands took one quick shot and missed. He could sense his son’s disappointment. He reloaded and prepared to take another shot. This time, remembering his grandfather, he carefully aimed, released the rifle’s safety, held steady, squeezed slowly, and fired another shot. The deer lurched upright before rolling down the hill. The father was excited; he felt the adrenalin rushing through his body and his ears ringing from the rifle’s loud shot. He turned to his son, anticipating the elation, the joy they could now share having shot their first deer together. But when the father turned he found his son’s face pale and expressionless, with tears welling in his eyes. The father, no longer thinking about the deer, put down his rifle and walked over to his son. The son said “I heard it bray, it was standing one moment and the next it was braying as it tumbled to its death. I will never hunt again.” As the father hugged his son he remembered once as a boy thinking those same exact words. He now looked forward to the day when his son would take his own child hunting for deer.

KEVIN MORRIS
Edited by his proud father (Gary Morris)

The Cult

I

My name is Alex Gaksi. I was a cop for a number of years but now I'm a private investigator, a gumshoe. I've been in the private eye business a few years, ever since I got tired of politics and left the force. Normally I only take cases that involve spying on cheating spouses, taking pictures catching them in the act, and handing the pictures to their spouses. It feels wrong, but its easy work that pays the bills. However, recently a woman entered my office and offered me a case of a different nature. As she walked into my office I noticed that she looked tired and distressed. It was obvious that she had not slept well in many nights; also her clothes did not fit her, they were too loose fitting, suggesting that she had lost a lot of weight in a very short period of time, likely due to stress. She had large, tired, innocent, lovely hazel-green eyes that were screaming for help. I knew I was in trouble the moment I looked into her lovely eyes, that I would be unable to turn down her case, no matter what its nature was.

She told me she was looking for her three brothers. They had been missing for several weeks. She had gone to the cops, but after hearing her story the cops told her that they were overbooked with cases and it would be some time before they would be able to investigate another missing person case. They suggested she contact me. Bullshit! I knew the cops had the manpower to follow up on a missing person case; there was something else about this case the cops did not want to touch. I was now starting to get interested in this case...and this dame.

The last time the sister had heard from her brothers was during a phone call two weeks earlier which, according to her what her brothers had said, been placed from a tiny lake-town. She never learned the name of the town, she hadn't thought to ask. I decided to accept her case. How could I decline? Between the cops turning it down for no good reason and having the image of the woman's eyes burned into my mind, I had no choice but to accept. Besides, looking for three brothers gone missing during the holiday season was better than following around spouses all day, taking pictures of them cheating, and then sleeping with their angry wives after showing them the pictures. This case felt right, it was a welcome change. "Merry Christmas Alex" I said to myself as I accepted the case, and received a grateful hug and kiss on the cheek from the dame.

II

The sister gave me as much information about the brothers' trip as she could remember. The brothers had been on their way to her house for the holidays when they placed the phone call from a lake-town. I studied my maps and

discovered there was only one town along the route that was next to a lake. I figured this town must have been the place where the brothers placed the call. The town's name was forgettable; it appeared on my map only as North Lake Town. I went to the city library, to the newspaper archives. I went through newspaper going back ten years looking up anything I could find about this remote place. I found several articles that mentioned a cult rumored to inhabit an isolated island close to North Lake Town, but my maps showed no island on the lake and the lake appeared to be massive, spanning many, many miles. I also found some articles that made mention of a legendary monster that inhabited the lake. Needless to say there were numerous people reported to have gone missing from North Lake Town. Interestingly, I could find no reports of the missing people ever turning up, a detail I felt best kept to myself for now. I followed up my research by talking to some of my old pals on the force. Initially they were all happy to see me, but when I mentioned The Cult of North Lake Town, they appeared to lose all interest in talking to me and remembered something urgent they needed to tend to at that exact moment. Bastards! I knew there was something about this case the cops did not want to get involved with, and it seemed that this cult was it.

I finally contacted a friend on the force that owed me a few favors and asked him about the Cult of North Lake Town. He told me that a cult had been implicated in the disappearance of several people that had been passing through North Lake Town. However, no people or bodies ever turned up and there was no evidence of foul play, no witnesses, nothing beyond the individuals gone missing from North Lake Town, so criminal investigations could never be initiated. He gave me the official police file on the missing people. It was a thin file...very, very thin, with little mention of the cult. My contact warned me against going any further with this case. He suggested that I drop it and go back to my old cases. He ended our conversation by telling me that we were now even, he owed me no more favors. With this I decided it would be best if I went to North Lake Town and probed a little further into this case. I kept seeing hazel-green eyes looking back at me, urging me on.

III

I now find myself in North Lake Town. It is a dark, blustery day. The sky is dark and angry, like it is about to unleash God's fury on North Lake Town and there is no ark in sight. I can't shake the feeling that I am screwed. North Lake Town is a very small, remote town, if you can call it that. It borders the lakeshore and is the closest thing to civilization for hundreds of miles of uninhabited country. The town is nestled in a valley, surrounded by a forest of old, tall pine trees that stretch out as far as the eye can see. North Lake Town stands in stark contrast to the beautiful countryside surrounding it. It consists of a single road (which I drove on to get here) lined with a few buildings including a diner, a bar, a derelict church, and a gas station with an auto shop attached to it. If you blink while driving through, you might miss it. The whole town is rundown and neglected. The paint is peel-

ing from the buildings and their wood looks as if rotting or rotted through. All of the buildings appear covered with vines, making the town look like a postcard picture of the Amazon Rainforest, but oddly the vines only cover the town buildings, not the surrounding trees. “What spirit possesses this place? What kind of bugs might be found inhabiting a place like this?” The few cars I see in the town are rusted to the point that they will fall apart at the hinges and joints if touched. The entire town gives me the creeps. Something does not feel right about it.

I park near the diner, the first building I come to as I drive into town. As I enter the diner and sit at the counter I hear thunder rumbling, shaking the building and its content. I do not like being in this town and the approaching storm does not help me ignore the ominous feeling building up in me. I hope the waitress behind the counter knows something that will help me find the brothers and get out of here as soon as possible. The waitress has a beautiful face, jet-black hair, probably dyed, dark eyes, and she looks young. But there is something about her that gives me the impression she is much older than she looks.

“What can I get for you handsome?” she asks.

“My name is Alex, I am a PI from the city and I’m interested in knowing if you’ve seen any of these men,” I reply as I pull out a picture of the three brothers.

“As a matter of fact I have. They stopped in here a couple of weeks ago. Their car had broken down and they wanted to know where they could get it fixed. I told them there was a mechanic shop in town down the road. They asked what they could do while they waited for it to be fixed. I suggested fishing as long as they weren’t afraid of the lake monster, and that the priest could house them while they waited,” she replied, chuckling at her comment about the lake monster I presume.

“Did they go fishing?”

“I don’t know, the boat they borrowed was never tied back to the pier.” She points in the direction of a dilapidated pier at the lake’s edge.

“Do you think they could have drowned?”

“Possibly, but it’s more likely that they found the island and...” she remarks with the end of her sentence dying off.

“And?”

“Nothing. If you’re looking for them you might find them on the island.”

“What island?”

“I don’t know for sure, I have just heard locals talking about an island on the lake where people go, but from which they never return. I don’t know if it is true or just stories. Honestly I am new around here. I have only been here for about three weeks. The last waitress is said to just have up and left and now I understand why. This place is weird. There is nothing to do here; I don’t know what people do here all day or where they go. The town seems empty most of the time. I was just passing through, hitchhiking. When I stopped here to get something to eat, the priest saw me standing on the side of the road and told me about this diner job. Honestly I needed a job and a place to stay, so I took it. But this place creeps me out. There are also very few young men in town. Those men you are looking for were a welcome sight, believe me, so are you for that matter, and then they just disappeared. How much fun is that? Here I am in the middle of nowhere without anything to do, that creepy priest, and the old mechanic? I plan on leaving this town as soon as I get my paycheck and find a ride out of here. How about it, can you drive me out of town when you go?”

“I may be in town a few days, but if you are ready to go when I am leaving I can drop you off in the city, which is where I came from. Does anyone in town have a boat I can borrow?”

“Yeah, the old priest I mentioned. He lives in the church down the road. That’s where you’ll find him. The diner closes in a little while; do you want me to come with you? This place is dead; you are the first customer I have had all day, and I have nothing better to do.”

“No thank you, I will look around on my own. I may need to spend the night in town, is there a motel around here?”

“Nope.”

“Where are you staying?”

“In the church. I think there may be a few empty cells left in the basement of the church, ask the priest when you talk to him about the boat.”

“Cells?” I think to myself. I thank her for her time and decide to check on the brother’s car to see if any clues surface. It starts to pour hard cold rain as I leave the diner, so hard that I would have been soaked to the skin in a matter of minutes if I hadn’t pulled my trench coat tight about me and my fedora down over my eyes. I walk through the rain towards the auto shop thinking about the conversation I just had with the waitress. She seemed spooked and hesitant to talk about the island. Did she know more than she was telling me?

When I arrive at the auto shop I walk up to the mechanic, show him the picture of the brothers, and ask him which car was theirs. He points to a car sitting behind the closed doors of the garage, but tells me in a voice too

high-pitched for a man his age, that we could not enter the garage because he misplaced the key. "Bullshit he lost the key!" I think to myself. I thank him and meander under the cover of the gas station toward the church, taking my time as I pass the garage. I can see through a crack in the garage doors that the license plate has been removed and that there is a light blue scratch along the front left bumper. Is this paint from another car? Did a car bump and scrape the brother's car leaving only the paint as evidence?

I take note of these things, wondering why a license plate would be removed when the car was just supposed to have some work done. What happened here? What kind of car trouble did they have? Did they really have car trouble? Did they get run off the road and stranded in town? Did they see something they were not supposed to see and get run off the road as they left town? Did the brothers eat at the diner and call their sister from the diner's public phone before driving on or after the accident? Why hadn't they made mention to their sister they had car trouble? Did they not want her to worry or was it something ominous? If so, who did it and why? With these questions burning in my mind I continued through the rain toward the church to find the priest. The thunder and lightning are now very near and the sky is so dark it appears to be midnight instead of early afternoon, like my cheap watch tells me.

When I find the priest I am shocked by his appearance. He wears a brown habit and has a huge, crooked nose that leans to the left side of his face. Has it been broken in too many bar fights? One of his eyes is bigger than the other eye and they both have a crazy look about them, a look found in men that have seen something terrifyingly horrible they cannot forget. His hair is brown, but sparse on top, growing in every which direction, it could use a comb. He walks with a hunch and he gives an impression of evil, not the look I expect of someone who is supposed to be pious.

"Afternoon, I was told that you could lend me a boat," I inquire.

"What ye be needing it for?" He says with a weird accent in a high-pitched voice.

"I'm a private eye investigating the disappearance of three men. They were last seen talking to you about borrowing a boat to go fishing out on the lake while their car was being repaired. This was about two weeks ago, do you remember anything?"

"Aye, I'll lend ye me boat but there'd be no way I'd get into that diseased water with that accursed beast swimming around. Besides, nobody that goes out ever comes back, including those three fellows ye looking for. Whether the beast got em' or those strange people on that island did, I've no idea," he says with a creepy tone and a laugh at the end.

"Strange people? Island? Accursed beast?" I mumbled to myself, making the

priest look my way with his strange eyes. I assume by “strange people” he means the cult, but is there really some beast? A Nessie? All of this talk of a cult and a beast starts getting to me, sending a chill down my spine.

“Aye, there are people on an island in the middle of the lake that work mischief, performing unholy acts and ungodly rituals. The island is hidden in a shroud of mist or fog that never seems to go away. Don’t go looking for the island, if ye find it ye will never come back and then ye will not need that cell ye were about to ask me for.” This statement sends another shiver down my spine. How did he know I was going to ask about a cell?

IV

The rain subsided as I set off hoping that there were no beasts in the pitch-black water below me, and that he was lying about the reputation of these “strange people”. I row for what feels like an eternity. A thick fog settles over the lake and the temperature suddenly drops sending yet another chill down my spine. I finally see an island. On the island I see the silhouette of an old medieval mansion struck by the setting sun. The entire structure is made of stone, with several towers branching off the sides, and numerous huge windows are evident throughout the manor.

I dock the boat near some brush and cover it as best I can. I have not sauntered more than ten feet from the boat when I notice something odd on the ground. Bones! All over the ground are blood-covered bones that give off a foul smell! Some still have the skin and meat on them! Flies buzz around the bones, as if a fly party is in full swing, a party I do not want an invitation to. Sea gulls and ravens circle above the shoreline and flocks of them seem to also be feasting off of the bones that cover the beach. The worst part is that the skulls and bones appear to be human! I suddenly am very happy I had brought my Smith & Wesson 0.357 magnum with me. I leave the beach behind and reach a large shed that sits adjacent to the manor. I cautiously open the door, peer inside, and creep in. What I see disgusts me. Surgeon tools lay around covered in bloodstains and a naked man lies strapped to a table in the middle of the room. He has cuts all over him, with chunks of flesh missing and a blood-covered cloth sits where his genitals should have been. The man is shivering as I run over to him. It is one of the brothers I have been looking for! He has the same bewildered look in his eyes that I saw in the priest’s eyes and he is glancing all around him as if he is afraid something or someone will come out of nowhere to grab him, but he is not startled by my sudden appearance. Instead, he looks at me and begins to mumble.

“You must get away, run, they won’t kill you, they’ll eat you alive. Kill me, please spare me,” he cries, he whimpers.

I put my finger to his lips and ask him, “Who? Who’s going to do this?” I hear footsteps outside the shed before he can answer leading me to frantically glance around for a hiding spot. I see a tool bench! It is my best chance. I dash for it and hide while peering out from behind it.

The door opens, and two figures walk in dressed in scarlet red hooded robes that shadow their faces. The man begins to scream and struggle. "No, no, leave me alone, I won't end up like the others." The two figures just laugh, high-pitched evil laughs, and take him off the table.

"He is wanted in the dining room immediately," one of the hooded figures hisses.

The other one just nods as they drag off the screaming man who appears so weak he cannot overtake the two individuals, in spite of the fact that he is almost twice their size. I get up and follow them from a distance. The sun has now set and if not for the lights emitting from the house and the full moon, it would be pitch black. They drag the brother up some stairs and into the mansion. I sneak around, looking through windows I can reach. I find one window that opens up to a room with a circle of individuals standing around an enormous round table. Each of them is wearing scarlet red hooded robes. Each holds huge serving forks and enormous knives. These knives are the type a butcher uses to cut big slabs of meat off of heifers. I see the two individuals drag the brother into the room and watch as they strap him to the table! His eyes are huge with fright and he begins to scream and cry to no avail. Someone enters from another door wearing purple hooded robes and declares, "You may dine now". All the figures removed their hoods. Each one of them is a woman! When the woman in the purple robes removes her hood her face looks familiar. She has jet-black hair...she's the waitress! I don't need to watch anymore. I know exactly what is going to happen to the brother. I now understand it has all been a conspiracy to get me onto the island, I have been played from the moment I entered the town. The waitress, the priest, and the car mechanic, "played me like a cheap fiddle". They knew that I, being a PI, would be curious and come out the island; they probably know I am on the island right now. I do not have much time before they find me.

I decide it is best if I find the two other brothers and get them off of the island. I look around the mansion to find an alternate way in. There is a flight of stairs along the side of the house that lead down to what I guess is the cellar. I creep down slowly and keep my eyes and ears open. As I descend the steps I smell, sense, and taste fear and death in the cold, damp air. When I get to the bottom I find a door and open it slowly hoping that no one hears it creak. Inside I find jail cells lining a hallway that extends for about one hundred feet. In each one of the cells is a man! Some of the men have their hands chained to the ceiling and are hanging helplessly. Others are curled up in the corners of their cells. As I walk along, I notice all of the prisoners appear to be improperly fed and in need of new clothing because the ones that they are wearing are now in rags. It is hard to see the faces of the prisoners because the only light in the room comes from behind a gigantic door at the end of the hall. Suddenly, a man in one of the cells walks forward and grabs onto the cell bars and calls me over. He is a skinny elderly baldheaded man in need of a shave.

“You should run while you have the chance before they capture you,” he said in a surprisingly calm voice.

“I can’t leave until I figure out what happened to the three...two men I’m looking for,” I whisper as I hold up the picture of the brothers, and point to the two that might still be alive.

“I saw one of them get dragged away, I’d say about a week or so ago, but the other two are still down here, I believe at the end of this hall,” he says with a glum look.

“I would try and get you out of here but I have no lock pick, and shooting the lock would be too loud, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay; they probably won’t take me, they need me. I am related to somebody important on the force. If they eat me then they will need to find somebody else to use as leverage against them.”

“You mean to tell me that the force knows about this and just turns a blind eye?” I ask incredulously.

“They know. The force supplies the cult with mostly criminals, but sometimes the women get lucky and come across innocent men, like the brothers you are looking for and they have a special feast with them.”

This last comment disturbs me. “Thank you, old man, I will be back for you,” I whisper as I turn in the direction he pointed in and continue looking for the brothers. As I reach the end of the hallway a door opens. I look up and see a cult member who also sees me and yells “intruder sisters, intruder, Alex is here!”

I do not have enough bullets to fend off all of the cult members, so I break into a sprint fleeing for my life in the direction of the beach and the boat. I am maybe 50 meters from the water’s edge when I hear the sounds of footsteps behind me. I turn my head for a moment and see a cluster of robed figures chasing me. I quicken my pace, reach the boat, quickly cast off and row as fast as I can in the direction I think takes me back to main land. I stare back at the island and see the figures just standing there, watching as I row away.

It is nearly sunrise when I reach mainland and dock at the pier I had observed from the diner, what now seems an eternity ago. The priest is standing on the pier throwing a large bag into the water. I hope that it is full of garbage as I run up and grab him. “There are cannibals on that island and, and...” I gasp and pause trying to catch my breath. “They ate one of the men I was looking for! Oh my god, it was horrific!” I exclaim in terror.

“Aye, I told you not to go, I’m surprised ye even made it back alive. Nobody

else has ever returned after looking for their missing,” he says in his disturbing high-pitched voice, followed by a smile.

“We need to call the cops,” I exclaim in an even more frantic voice.

“Follow me, there’s a phone in the church,” with an even more wicked smile. He leads me to the small church and to his cell phone on which I quickly dial the operator.

V

My name is Jane and I am an operator. Yesterday I received a call I have not forgotten. Normally the phone rings nonstop, but not yesterday. It was so silent in the operator’s room that when the phone rang it broke the dull silence that hung in the air of the operator’s room with a start:

“Operator, how may I help you?” I asked politely

“This is an 11-99, I repeat this is an 11-99!” the person on the other line said, and then it sounded as if the phone hit something.

“Why did ye have to go looking for the island? I warned ye, didn’t I?”

“Hello is anybody there?” I asked.

I then heard a man’s cry for help followed by what sounded like a struggle and the scuffling of feet. Then someone spoke out loud “Aye and now ye shall tell no one of your escapades on that island.” A gunshot rang out followed by a blood-curdling scream.

“Hello is anybody there,” I asked again. I was scared for the caller.

“Aye, it was me kid playing around, no needs worry yourself ma’am,” said a man with high-pitched voice and an odd accent, and with that the line went dead.

Since the call only lasted a minute I was unable to pass it onto the police and since the caller gave no address I was unable to follow up on it. But I filed a report for a reported 11-99, which means “officer needs help”. A police officer came by the operator room shortly after I filed the report with my supervisor and picked up all related documentation, including our stations copies. He said it was standard protocol to do this. It did seem odd that he would take our copies, but how can I question those cute men in blue? I have not heard anything else about the call since the officer’s visit.

I now find myself staring at a picture of my three brothers. I take a deep breath and mutter under my breath, “I hope they’re all right”. My three brothers have now been missing for three weeks. I last heard from them when they called me from a small town. I don’t know the location of this

town, but they had stopped there to take a break from the long drive to my house from our parent's house. They were visiting me for their holiday break. However, they didn't show or call again. Nobody in our family has heard from them since. In my concern I hired a private investigator to find them. I haven't heard from him in a while either. I finally decide to go to my parents' house for consolation and I leave Alex a message on his office answering machine letting him know this, also leaving him my parent's contact information.

VI

Tree. Tree. Tree. Tree. Tree. Tree. Tree. That's all I have seen for the past five hours since taking my turn on that dark country road. I now suspect I have taken a wrong turn. There are no towns, no other cars, just trees. And of course since I am now in the middle of nowhere I need gas at this exact moment. Thankfully I zoomed by a sign advertising a town and a gas station in five miles. I finally drive into a town which is nestled in a pine valley surrounded by a beautiful tree line with a shadow cast down on the town by the setting sun. In the middle of the valley sits the ugliest and most rundown town I have ever seen in my life. It shouldn't even be marked as a town due to its meager size and single road (which I'd driven in on). The only buildings in the town are a diner, a bar, a church, and the gas station I'd been looking for.

I pull into the gas station and fill up the gas tank, but when I go to pay I notice something strange in the garage, a car that resembles my brothers' car! I slowly walk over to take a look at the license plate and the inside of the car. However the car has no license plate, and only a light blue scratch along the left bumper. The last time I had seen their car, it had not had that scratch, and without the license plate I have no way of knowing if it is their car.

I proceed to pay for the gas, and ask the attendant if he knows whose car is in the garage with the blue scratch along the side. He only grunts signaling that he has no idea and that he does not care to talk. I leave the gas station and continue on my trip to my parent's house wondering if this could be the town my brothers stopped in to call me from.

I drive away from the dismal town in silence through the pitch-dark black that engulfs country-roads at night when in absence of streetlights. "Thank goodness for high beams" I think to myself as I leave the town behind me. A few miles out of town I notice what appears to be a strange animal in the middle of the road. As I slow the car I notice that the animal is a man; a naked man holding himself in an upright fetal position while sitting in the middle of the road. I coast to a stop and get out cautiously, leaving my headlights on.

"Sir, are you alright?" I yell as I get out of the car and walk over to

him. He does not reply. "Sir, are you alright? I repeat. As I slowly continue to approach him he slowly looks up at me, and as he does I see his face and recognize him, it is Alex. But he is not in the same physical condition I left him in when we last met a week earlier. His right eye is swollen to the size of a golf ball, so that one of his eyes appears bigger than the other, and both eyes have a crazy look about them; a look, I have heard men get when they have seen something so terrifyingly horrible they cannot forget it. His face looks feverish with a gash along it side. His abdomen is covered in blood from what looks like a bullet wound that looks scarlet red, infected and pustulant, with feces emanating from the wound. The rest of his body is bruised and battered as well. He clearly has been shot and physically abused. Who did this to him? What happened? How did he get away? Strangely, his hair is wet even though it has not rained in this region for several days. Did he come from the lake?" "Are you okay?" I ask again.

He only stares at me with a blank look on his face, as if he has never seen another human being before. He seems lost in a trance some place far, far away. I move closer to him, as I do the stench of shit slaps me in the face, makes me gag, causing me to turn my face into the light streaming from the car, revealing my face in the darkness. Alex suddenly becomes animated, while his face expresses pain and anguish, contorting as he looks at me; he squirms on the ground and begins to scream "leave me alone, get away, get away, I'm not a meal!" he yells. I am so surprised and alarmed by this reaction I leap back, stumbling to the ground.

"I'm not going to hurt you, I'm the women that hired you Alex; to find her brothers," I scream over his yells. I repeat this statement as he goes comatose once again, lying on the ground coiling back into the fetal position. Then suddenly he looks up into my eyes and whispers to himself "those hazel-green eyes. I never forgot those hazel-green eyes." Then he says louder to me "two of your brothers are still alive on the island. They're alive! For how much longer is not certain. That son of bitch priest is dead. Do not trust the woman!" His voice trails off and as it does he says, "Merry Christmas Alex." With that he curls up on the ground in the middle of the road and stops breathing as a look of peace overcomes his disfigured face.

THE END
(Maybe to be continued...)

KEVAN WORKS

My Favorite Pet

My Ladybug and I go everywhere together. Although she's a Pentagon funded hybrid with a micro electromechanical system. She's just as faithful as a Cocker Spaniel. People like myself often require a challenge, with material existence to sustain them. She surely peaks my interest and brings joy to my children's faces and everyone my Ladybug touches.

She's 24, 36, 26 with all the extras a man like me could want . Twenty-four parts of radio antennas that help steer her in the right direction. Thirty-six parts of electrodes that make her remote-controlled body skillful at involuntary but organized effects accomplishing a multitude of essential tasks. And 26 parts of nanotechnology which is something of a financial problem when you work for food service. But slip a hack virus into NASA's mainframe and yada-yada-yada, blah-blah-blah, you're generously well-funded.

Cyborging her was fairly enjoyable and rationally simple, so to speak. Merely implant the equipment during the pupal stage so that she emerges embedded with electrodes ready to be wired. Add water, and sugar. Slap on some wings. Shake, don't stir ... and blam. A nano-air, solar powered "thingy" every man should have and want, but probably can't afford. Their life span makes all the expense difficult to justify, unfortunately, she died at a family reunion picnic. My Ladybug landed on the children's table. Little Janice, five years old, smashed her with a fly swatter. Sad, but true. What can you do?

My Happy Place

I took her for granted, as well as my existence, and now I'm here, in the most desolate, depressing condition I have ever been. It's hard to cope in this place of steel and concrete with its grays decaying to the left of me, its' whites peeling to the right. Combined, the choices that create this world with eyes wide open bury me into a hopeless cavity, until I close my eyes and I'm there ... in my happy place.

I picture myself in my mind's eye, with her-my choice, and my children. We're someplace where she likes to go and the kids follow because they love whatever decision we both make together. She loves warm sunny places ... Australia; I think we'll go there. I picture it's always warm, never been though and neither have they.

She's passionate about the water, its waves, but doesn't swim. So, we're there, at the beach watching the children play. It's sunny, music's serenading us-I picture jazz, something soothing. The kids don't mind and won't even remember the melody, only the mood as I picture them eating their favorite

ice cream.

It's peaceful and comfortable there, when I close my eyes and picture me with them. Almost relaxing like the quiet patters of soft, gentle summer rain drops on her face when she smiles. The sun is still shining-it's beautiful! I know I could do this at any time but only dare, just before I sleep. Or in the better part of a stressful day, when I need to revive myself like now. Maybe after my time is done we'll go there, and at that period, I'll have my eyes wide open. It would be a happy place, all the way round.

LOGAN C. CARPENTER

Death

Death is a dark, dark force. It hides in the dark world in forms that can take lives. Guns, cars, and the ill are all forms of Death. He is the force that can stab us in the back with his knife. He is the force that runs us down with cars in all forms. Death is a force that has no age, and but knows it's age.

We try to flee from Him, Death, but he is a force who knows no rest. He cooks his dark meals from the time we leave the womb. His meals can have guns. His meals can have the ill. All of Death's meals are as old as time.

Death drinks its wine that is made from the blood that leaks from his meals. His wine has the salt of tears from those who still live, and a sweet foul smell of blind rage of those who lost a joy too close.

The dark, black cloak that He, Death, wears to work is sewn from the souls of the damned and the cloak is sewn to hold the souls of the dead. His cloak hides him from those who live and makes him seen to the dead and the ill close to death. The more souls he takes, darker the cloak appears.

Death works for both the sides of light and dark. For light, he takes the souls to be judged. For the dark Death takes the damned to hell to rot for their crimes. Death is not good or bad, he just works for those with just cause.

The world fears Him, Death, with a hint of love.

The world loves Him, Death, with a hint of hate.

Damned he may be, but his force keeps the world in place.

RENEE CARLOW

The Best Night Ever!

“O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name; Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, And I’ll no longer be a Capulet.”

“Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?” whispered Renee playfully. Andy gently shoved Renee towards the edge of the bed.

“If you’re going to sit there and pick on me, then I’m just going to stop reading,” said Andy scornfully.

“Awww, Baby. You know I’m not picking on you. I was just finishing the next part for you,” said Renee with a smirk. Andy gently and calmly set her book down in her lap and looked at her best friend with a very straight face. Renee smiled, lifted herself up to a sitting position on the bed, grinned and tackled Andy on to her back. Holding Andy’s hands above her head Renee softly kissed her neck and looked into her eyes.

“You know ... You totally have Juliet beat” said Renee in a gently whisper.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you have her beat. I’d choose you over her any day. You’re the most amazing girl I have ever met. Everything about you has a grace to it. Everything you say has a soft ring that follows. You’re the most gorgeous, smart, charming and sweet person I could have ever dreamed of.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Yes. You are.”

“No.”

“Ummmmm ... Yes. You can give up now ‘cuz you aren’t going to win this time,” said Renee with a small smirk.

“Fine, but I love you more.”

“Oh, come on now. That was cheap.”

Andy scrunched up her face and stuck her tongue out.

“You know what?” said Renee softly. “This is what I have to say to that.” Renee leaned down and softly bit her tongue. Andy pulled her tongue back

in her mouth and looked up into Renee's eyes. Renee leaned down, softly kissed her, and whispered "Yo quiero tu muy mucho mi bebe," and kissed her ear.

"Te amo tambien," said Andy softly back.

Renee smiled and rolled onto the bed beside Andy. From the beginning of their friendship Renee realized there was something truly amazing about her now best friend. She softly reached over to Andy's face and brushed a lock of hair back behind her ear and laid her hand along her soft jaw line. Andy reached her hand up and laid it on top of Renee's and smiled. Renee scooted up to the top of the bed and pulled Andy into her arms, with her back to her chest. Andy cuddled into her protector and kissed her hand. With a smile, Renee kissed Andy's head and listened to her soft breathing. Renee's mind was filled with a sense of calmness and comfort by Andy's intoxicating presence. She laid there and thought back to the first couple of times that they had talked and smiled.

Before Andy came into Renee's life, she didn't know what true love was. Renee was going into her second shot at freshman year of college at a new school. Andy was in her freshman year of high school. The two talked sporadically online until they exchanged cell phone numbers. The more the two talked, the deeper their feelings grew. Every time Renee's phone lit up with Andy's number, Renee could feel butterflies in her stomach and a rush of excitement. She thought she knew what it meant to love someone, but even though she didn't completely understand the strange new friendship she and Andy shared, she knew she was in love with Andy. Renee could sit up for hours each night and just think about her sexy voice and beautiful face. Renee wasn't in love with the physical aspects of her alone. It was the entire combination of her personality, charm, smile, optimism, and every other aspect that made her. Although not sure when she realized it, Renee knew this truly mesmerizing young woman was who she wanted to be with for the rest of her life.

The alarm went off at 9:00 the next morning. Andy reached over and turned it off. Pretending to still be asleep Renee lay perfectly still. Andy rolled over to face her and gently nudged her arm.

"Hey! It's time to get up. You have to go to class," she whispered softly in Renee's ear. Rolling onto her side, Renee took the blanket with her to get away from the sound. Andy leaned over Renee's side and spoke again. "You need to get up. You're going to be late."

Renee smirked, threw the cover off her arm, grabbed Andy by the waist and rolled her over the top of herself so she was once again laying under the covers with Renee. Andy looked at Renee, scrunched up her face and stuck her tongue out.

“I knew you were awake,” said Andy with what was supposed to be a grumpy face, but Renee laughed and kissed her forehead.

“You know you can’t be grumpy with me. Oh, and by the way ... That face isn’t a grumpy or intimidating face at all. It’s really cute,” said Renee jumping over top of her to get off the bed.

Normal morning routine would be for the both of them to get dressed and walk to class, but since it was winter time there were only select classes still going on. Renee’s classes never let up. She even had summer classes except for about a month.

“I don’t want to go to class and leave you all alone and curled up in that big bed all by yourself,” Renee whined.

“You have to go to class. I’ll be right here when you get back,” she teased.

“Yeah, but three hours is too long not to see you.”

“I promise I will be right here. Now go or you’re going to be late.”

Renee kisses her forehead and walked to the door. Looking back into the room from the doorway she saw her whole reason for living all cuddled up in bed and looking like the most beautiful creation ever made.

“Hey!” Renee said softly.

“Yeah?”

“Yo quiero tu mi amor.”

“Te amo tambien,” she replied with a heart melting smile.

Renee walked out of the house and to the car. The pure white blanket of snow that now covered the ground didn’t bother Renee at all as she brushed the snow off the driver’s door of the car. Renee loved the calm and cool weather during early January. As she got in the car and drove to class, she remembered she had to finish her plans for the evening. Renee picked up her cell phone and dialed the house.

“Hey babe,” answered Andy.

“Did you miss me?” Renee teased.

“Of course I did.”

“I had a question for you. What do you have going on tonight?”

“Uhhh. Nothing? Why?”

“Because we have plans tonight.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes. Really. And this is one of those times that there isn’t a dance and I’d like you to wear a dress,” said Renee smiling.

“Whhyyy?” Andy whined.

“Because I love you and you will see later. Please?”

“Fine.”

“Hey! Don’t be all grumpy.”

“I’m not.”

“Alright. Be ready to go by five.”

“Don’t you have to come back here and get ready?”

“Nope. I’m all set.”

“Ok. I love you.”

“Te amo tambien mi guapa amor!”

Renee hung up the phone with a huge smile. She ran all of the plans through her head again. This evening would finally be one of the happiest of her entire life. Renee pulled into the parking lot of her school and sat there for a few minutes. Nothing Renee had ever done in her life felt as right as wanting to be with Andy. She didn’t intend on letting that go, ever. Renee stepped out of the car and briskly walked to class.

Back at home Andy was still laying in bed. There really was no point being up yet. She already missed Renee just as much as Renee already missed her. Not sure what to do with her free time until Renee came home, Andy rolled over and buried her face back in her pillow.

By 3:30 Renee was finally getting out of classes. She had managed to sit through three classes, take twelve pages of notes and a quiz and still wasn’t paying much attention to her classes today. She had a couple stops to make before she headed to the house. First she had to go to the jeweler and then to the florist. Her errands only took an hour and she was walking through the front door at 4:35 p.m. Renee tossed the mail on the counter and went

toward the bedroom to try to find Andy. Andy was sitting on the bed in a royal blue dress, putting her hair up when Renee walked in. Renee quietly leaned behind her and wrapped her arms gently around Andy's waist.

"Whoever you're with has to be careful," Renee teased.

"Why?"

"Because with someone as gorgeous as you, there have to be some big bad bodyguards around somewhere to keep people away from you," Renee joked.

"Not really," Andy smiled.

"Yeah, that was really lame but I get brownie points for later right?" Renee grinned.

"Yeah. We'll see about that."

"Anyhow ... Hello my beautiful girl!" Renee kissed her cheek and then ran from the room.

Andy stood there, her hands still up fixing her hair. Renee ran back into the room and smiled.

"What are you up to?" asked Andy curiously.

"I have something for you." Renee brought her hands in front of her and smiled. Andy's eyes slightly lit up seeing the bouquet of flowers. There were deep red roses, a few white roses, and some other bright flowers in with them.

"Awwww," Andy smiled and hugged Renee.

"Do you like them?"

"Yes. I do very much."

"Good. Because if you didn't I'd have to go get some you did."

Andy kissed Renee softly. Renee hugged her close.

"Alrighty. You ready to go?" Renee asked.

"Almost."

"Good 'cuz I need to go change real quick," Renee smiled and winked at

Andy.

Renee had never been real fond of dresses, but tonight was special. She ran to the car, opened the trunk and took out a dark red halter top gown. Running back into the house, Renee avoided the bedroom so she could surprise Andy. She ran into the bathroom, slipped the dress on and slowly eased out. Renee timed it so she just slipped into the room before Andy was about to turn around.

“You ready yet?” she whispered in her ear.

“I am, but are you?” Andy teased.

Renee spun Andy around so she could see the dress.

“Oh wow! That looks sexy,” said Andy softly.

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever,” said Renee smiling playfully.

“It does babe,” she insisted.

“Okay. Well your opinion is all that counts then,” said Renee with a grin.

“Alrighty then. Ready now?” asked Renee anxiously.

“Yes.”

Renee took her by the hand and led her through the house to the front door. She opened the car door and let Andy get in. Renee got into her side and looked over at Andy.

“What?” Andy asked quietly.

“Have I told you how absolutely gorgeous you are?”

Andy blushed and faced the front of the car to try to stop from constantly smiling but it didn't work. Renee started the car and drove toward the restaurant. After driving for about an hour and forty five minutes they made it to the restaurant. Andy looked shocked when a doorman opened the car door. She glanced at Renee then got out. Renee got out and walked to the other side of the car and took Andy by the arm.

“What's that look for?” Renee asked smiling.

Andy was at a slight loss for words. She was wondering where in the hell they were that had valet parking and doormen. Renee leaned over, kissed her temple and walked up to the hostess.

“We have a reservation for two under Enchautegui, please,” Renee said politely.

The two were led to a private, back booth table. They were handed menus and asked for their drink orders. Andy looked around curiously. Renee smiled and kissed her ear.

“What do you think babe?”

“Why are we here?”

“I’ll tell you in a little bit,” said Renee smiling.

The two ordered their food and ate. Renee made sure the conversation was extremely random as always. She didn’t want Andy to have any idea what they were doing there. She couldn’t stop smiling because she was excited and knew that Andy was very curious by this point. Renee took Andy by the hand and looked at her.

“Okay. Are you ready to know why we’re here?” she asked smiling ear to ear.

“Yes.”

Renee reached beside her, pulled a necklace out of a jewelry box. Andy’s eyes lit up with excitement.

“I wanted to plan this in a very special way. I would like to ask you Andreanna Marie Enchautegui, to be my girlfriend,” Renee said smiling.

“Yes. Of course I will baby,” answered Andy happily.

Renee reached around Andy’s neck and put the necklace on her.

“Do you like it?”

“I love it babe,” she said with a kiss to Renee’s cheek.

Renee smiled, got up and offered Andy her hand. They left together and drove back to the house. As they got inside Renee smiled and turned to Andy.

“Hey. Look!” Renee reached just inside her collar and pulled out a chain. On the chain was similar pendant to Andy’s. It was a little heart shaped pendant with Andreanna’s name engraved and her birthstone laid in it. Andy reached for her own necklace and realized hers was engraved with Renee’s name and her birthstone as well. She let it fall softly to her chest and walked over to

Renee. Renee softly wrapped her arms around Andy's waist. Andy leaned up, kissed Renee and smiled.

I love you so much Andreanna and I am never letting you go. I promise to protect you, to keep you happy, and to love you until the day my heart stops beating. You are my whole reason for caring and my whole world. I only pray I can make you nearly as happy as you make me every single day. I love hearing your voice and can't wait until I can come home to your smiling and gorgeous face. I love you with all of my heart and soul.

ZACH SCMIDT

dark as the wine, we drink

Sunlight dappled the ground, diffracted through the leaves of Kirkwood's conspicuous Dutch Elm. As the redolent, ochre day melted into the crystalline clarity of night, we tripped over the Hughes Bridge into childhood; each of us coming back from different corners of the globe, from studying-abroad for Raj, Pomona College for Jules. We were coming back to eternal nights of street-tag and warm Kool-Aid; as we grew older, month's old "new" movies and stale popcorn at the Lincoln.

Before making the sights, Jules insisted on seeing my mom, who considered both she and Raj her own. I waited on our stoop, the old plotting ground, as they embraced mother-hen and oatmeal cookies. She reminded them of their transgressions, "Four years, and you come to see me as an afterthought. Probably off to drink and carouse, Rajie? Jules, I told you to stay away from these two." Raj assured her that this was all true, tossed two cookies over and jumped to the bottom step; Jules parted with one last hug and cookie. Heading west, we made our way down Warner Street.

The Lincoln floated across our eyes as we rounded Tennyson Square onto 54th, but fond memories could not block the seedy underbelly of St. Louis from peeling back the cataract. A dive bar festered inside the hollowed shell of our theater. Outside, an oddly shaped, grimy hot-dog stand sat nearest the neon martini's glow. Jules cleared her throat, "Back to your place?"

"Rajie! Is that you?" A classmate from high school waved heartily by the stand.

A visibly drunken man supporting himself on the waver shouted, "Hey! It's Batman!"

We took the scene in, confused, until Raj pointed at my chest.

"Looks like it's you."

"Aha, I see..."

"The Dark Knight," the drunk continued.

"Right," I acknowledged.

"The Caped Crusader!" he bellowed, stepping into the street.

"Fuck off."

"Hey, come on, Batman, The Dark Knight, come on!" He slurred, to the laughter of my friends.

Raj shouted to the waver, "Does he even know his name?"

A group was forming, staring intently. All eyes were on the tottering drunk.

"Bruce Wayne. But I won't tell!"

"He's either deaf or has confused this rhetorical conversation."

I parted with, "Take it easy, Christian Bale."

He was infuriated, "Fuck you man! I'm going to kick your ass!"

The waver grabbed him roughly and shoved him towards the bar. Raj patted me on the back, "Not like it used to be." Our group treaded wearily back across Tennyson to my stoop. Raj produced cheap wine, which we heartily passed around as our conversation passed from catching-up to reminiscence. In time we fell silent; the night was somehow stale, jejune. Jules rolled a loose pebble under her sneaker before absent-mindedly kicking it away. A little after two, Raj and Jules embraced me and treaded away to the end of Warner, parting with a hug.

Batman

It was a dark and stormy night. Wait, no it wasn't. It was a warm June evening. My friends and I were hanging out at the jamming space they rented downtown, drinking straight vodka. Grey Goose, so pretty smooth. It was 11:30, and we were all kinds of messed up. Sitting outside, "getting some air", we decided that what would make our night complete was hot-dogs.

Now, our town is such that the local night club has a hot dog stand outside, and boy, do they make a dog. It was only a few blocks from the jam spot, so we decided to go, drinks and all. We show up at the stand, drinking vodka out of a cocktail glass, in the middle of downtown, devil-may-care. My friend runs into a group of people he knows; one of them has on a Batman t-shirt. Now, obviously, social convention dictates that this man must not be introduced to me, but simply be called 'Batman' for the rest of the night.

"Hey! It's Batman!" I exclaimed.

"Haha, yeah..." He replied, half-heartedly.

"The Dark Knight!" I continued.

"All right man." He grudgingly returned.

“The Caped Crusader!” I shouted, drunkenly.

“Fuck off, dude! I’m not Batman!” Batman shouted, angrily.

“Hey, come on, Christian Bale-Batman, The Dark Knight, come on!” I slurred, to the laughter of the crowd.

“Fuck...I’m gonna punch ... Dude, do you even know my real name?” He demanded.

The group watched the confrontation, intently. All eyes were on us.

“Of course I do.” I declared, “It’s Bruce Wayne. But I won’t tell anyone!”

Batman was enraged. “Fuck you man! I’m going to kick your ass!”

Batman’s group, who I can only assume were also members of the Justice League, grabbed him and started to drag him away. “Hey!” I called after him, “You are NOT the hero Gotham deserves!” Batman tried to free himself from his crime-fighting team to come after me once more. Luckily, they were able to drag him into the night. I was safe from that deranged super-hero millionaire. After that night, I never saw Batman again.

JANOME LEWIS

Love

Love is in everything. Everything is in Love. Without Love all is lost and everything is meaningless. One might say it's pointless, and you're chasing after the wind. Love is powerful and wonderful at the same time. The contrast being in the two different paradoxical viewpoints. At one moment Love is the center of all actions, and at another it seems to be so distant that it's hard to experience. Does Love become fiction?

Maybe Love is only a sensory perception and it doesn't exist as something tangible in reality? It seems too deep and wide to describe and too strong and intense to hide. Am I a victim of my own pride to disregard my true feelings inside? There is a lot I think to speak, but such things make me weak.

Maybe Love is a deception? Only felt at a time of promiscuous erotic affections. My mind can't believe or imagine how this can be. Only to leave myself more confused than ever; I told myself that Love would last forever. Never will I leave you or be without you and my intention is always true.

Whatever Love is I've realized that it is what it is. I can neither add to it nor take away from it. The more I try to understand it; the more I'm engulfed into a mystery that may never be solved. Inside and outside around and around everyone may hope that true love will be found.

In my final days my eyes are in a teary haze. Looking back at my life I never had a wife. I said it was stifling; others said I was trifling. Being in my own zone is a cover up for being alone. Really I'm in self-pity when I dig down to the nitty gritty. Trapped by a façade, as if there were no God.

My illusion grew as surely as the sky is blue. Next thing I know I'm below the lowest of the low. Beneath the earth; better described as in the dirt. I can't return; even though, the lesson was learned, do I burn with defeat, no more time boundaries; there is no next week.

Learning to live with my mistakes that cost the highest stakes. Why didn't I have a significant other, a person who would stick closer than a brother? I was living a lie now I'm buried alive. The most puzzling thing is that my Love still survives.

ELDERIED MCKINNEY

Who loves me?

Outside a Detroit, Michigan playground during a fight between three people: Donald, David, and Jason. One of the young men is hold a gun to the other's head and his friend is begging him to put the weapon down.

Donald: Man put the gun down. David it's not worth it.

Jason: Man you don't have the guts so put the gun down or give it to me so I can show you what to do with it.

Donald: I know you don't like this man but you don't have to stoop to his level, please dude, don't do this.

David: Donald shut up ok? Because I'm not like you, I can't let him live. I don't have a future like you bra.

Jason: You right. Your life sucks like mine. Dude, just shoot me, and put an end to me.

Donald: Dude, shut up you little crap. Look David, don't listen to that homo. You do have a future; you can live a life better than you do. Just let this biscuit head go and we can work on your future and get you into college.

David: No way bra, I can't let him live. He shot my friend and tried to kill me.

Donald: Look David, I'm not perfect either but shooting him is not going to bring back Tim. Just let the cops deal with the trash while you and I deal with our future dude.

David: Man I would if it was that easy, but I can't go back to school, nor can I believe in the pigs (cops) to do their jobs. Besides, all I know how to do is sell drugs and kill people that don't obey me.

Donald: That's bullshit because you can learn how just like you learned how to get people to respect you man. I mean if I can get out of this way of life and make it, you can also. All you have to do is try.

David: Sorry Donald but I can't and won't be like people like you. I just have different goals and a different way of life than you do man.

David fires the gun twice and shoots Jason dead.

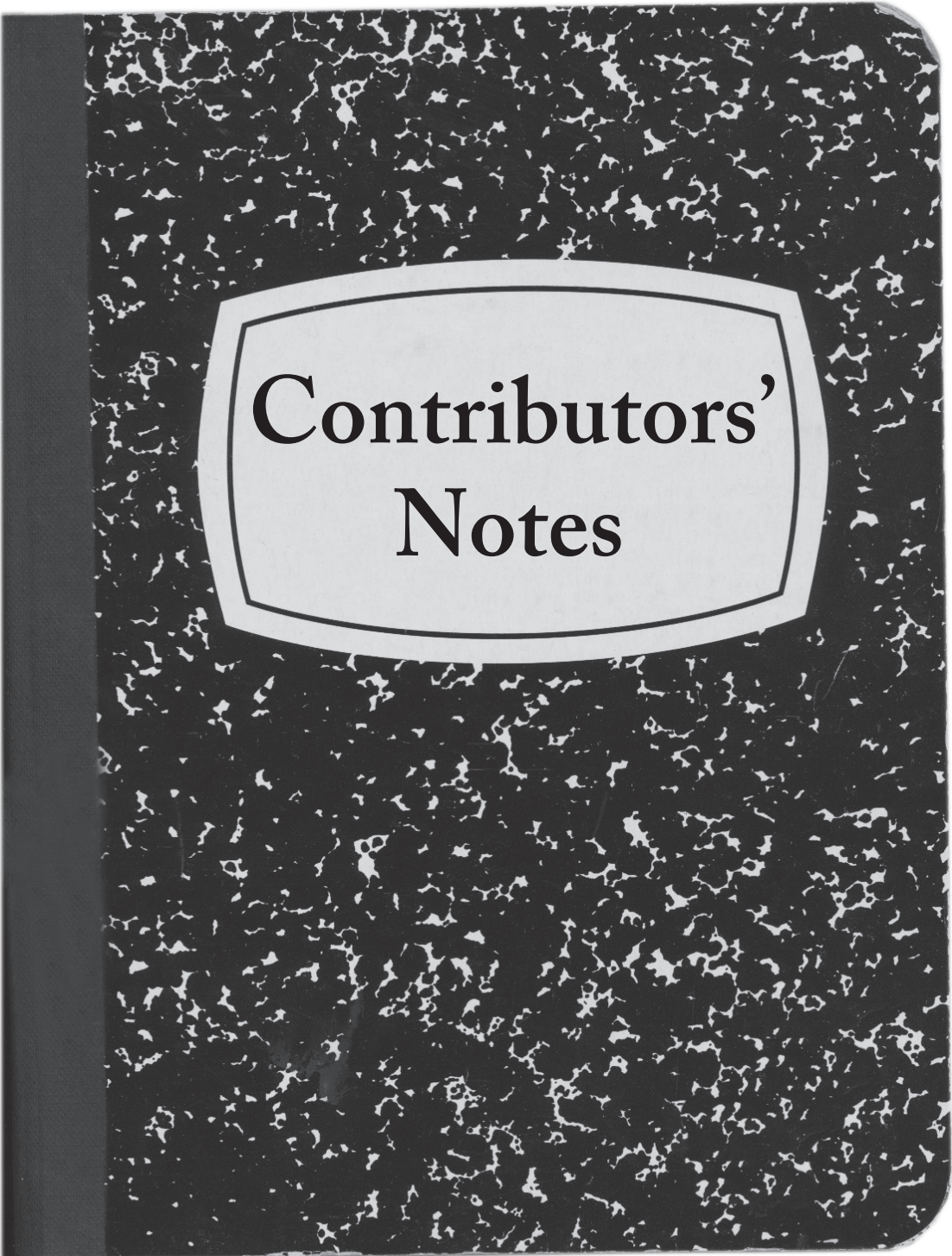
Donald: Sorry too friend. Sorry that I couldn't save you from gang life and from being a victim of poverty. Even though your choice was to kill people and sell drugs to help pay for rent and take care of your family, I believe that if you had more people like me in your life bro, you would have chosen another path in life.

GEONVAUNEY DUNBAR

Untitled

I recently realized that each and every feeling I've experienced has created different kinds of thoughts in me. Often times, these thoughts are what become my opinions/views per se.

If such is the case for some of us, or all of us, then please allow me to go on. Maybe, and just maybe, it would be reasonable to say that we are like different kinds of instruments in a band. For example, the piano, drums, keyboard, and etc. We are instruments of different vibrations, and that would explain our differences in opinions/views. Just as instruments of a band are of different vibrations, but together, they are capable of making wonderful music, so can we. "True harmony" is wonderful music.

The image shows the front cover of a notebook. The cover has a black and white marbled pattern. In the center, there is a light-colored, rounded rectangular label with a double-line border. The text on the label is in a serif font, arranged in two lines: "Contributors'" on the top line and "Notes" on the bottom line. The notebook has rounded corners on the right side and a dark grey spine on the left side.

**Contributors'
Notes**

Cynthia-Brooke Acord adores Nan, painting, reading, and Florida. Every day she thanks God for her family, her mistakes, and good guys with four-wheel drives; because without all of these things, she fears she might still be stuck on some of life's back roads.

Chase Ballard is a recent graduate of Glenville State College. He doesn't write often but finds that when he does his stories often take on a life of their own. He often finds them under his bed, waiting for him. With teeth.

Patrick Baucum is from Washington, DC and is interested in investing and real estate. He would like to help provide housing to low income families.

Melissa Campos is an English education major. She lives in Arnoldsburg, West Virginia with her dogs and her other half, Rick.

Renee Carlow is a sophomore at Glenville State College studying Secondary English Education. She loves to write poems, short stories, and just about anything in her free time.

Dustin Crutchfield is a four-time Layout Editor for the *Trillium*. Dustin's photograph *Autumn Fence* is his first submission to the publication. He graduated from Glenville State College in 2009. Dustin calls Burnsville, West Virginia his hometown.

Kevin Paul Giordano's fiction has appeared in *The Fanzine*, and his nonfiction has appeared in *The New York Times*. He splits his time between Glenville, West Virginia, and New York City.

Melissa Gish teaches in the English Department. She and her husband, Adrian Patterson, recently moved from New Mexico to Glenville to escape the heat and javelinas.

Wilson Grayson is from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and is seeking a degree in business. He loves spending as much time as possible with his wife and children.

Brandon Hayes is from Elkview, West Virginia and his major is Natural Resource Management. He hopes to publish a book of his poems sometime in the future.

Rose Johnson is a junior at Glenville State College. Along with editing the *Trillium* this year she enjoys being active in theater and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Guild.

Wayne Joyner hopes his recent work will be the start of something, since it was his first attempt at being poetic. He also wrote it for his son and daughter.

Jonathan Minton is an assistant professor of English at Glenville State College.

Gary Z. Morris moved to Glenville, West Virginia with his wife, Athena, and three children Kevin, Sebastian, and Isabel in 2008, to teach in biology in the Glenville State College Science and Math department. His first time hunting as an adult was in the fall of 2009. He is now hooked.

Kevin Morris is the son of Gary Morris and is currently a freshman at Marshall University majoring in anthropology. His story was inspired by a class assignment involving a picture of a castle.

Clarence Motley is from Roanoke, Virginia. He is getting his BA in business, enjoys listening to music, and talking to friends. He has a 12 year old son.

Megan Lynnette Rollins is a sophomore English major at Glenville State College and resident assistant at Pioneer Village. Rollins aspires to be a teacher and author you won't forget.

Joel Smith is a native of Washington, DC. He submitted his two poems with the sole purpose of making his daughter Kyla Joelle Smith smile.

Whitney Stalnaker is from Normantown, West Virginia and this is her second year contributing to the *Trillium*. The three photos she submitted were taken at the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum in Weston, West Virginia.

Jamie Stanley has finally found the Was Here.

Chris Summers is a senior English Education 5-Adult major from Barboursville, West Virginia, and was editor of the *Trillium* in 2009 and 2010. He would like to thank his long-suffering professors in the Glenville State College English Department for their patient guidance over the last four years.



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